2023 edition students' collective blogs

- Santa Marta and its surroundings
- Linguistic Landscape of Sant’Elena, Venice
- Venice embodied
Maggiore, a canal, and residential buildings of Santa Marta on which there is graffiti. Fig 6. View from the Ponte di Pietra of (left to right) the Casa Circondariale Santa Maria and standardisation (Bakhtin, 2018). Agent ‘correcting’ the spelling of guinzagli and adding an accent to build up of polyphony in the form of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, with another establishmentarian street art within Santa Marta. Interestingly, we also see a activism. The prison on the periphery has added fuel to the fire of anti-es boundaries.

Despite technically not being within Santa Marta, the prison can be seen is totally seen, without ever seeing” (an idea which perhaps inspired the make-up of polyphony, we were able to discern distinct physical and convergence of various voices in a layered fashion, conveying that emerges when multiple voices coexist and interact” understood as a musical metaphor for the complexity of interconnection of opposing forces within a society. It encompasses the dynamic ‘interplay between order and chaos, stability and change’ (Prigogine, I. & Stengers, it seems likely that they have internalised and mimicked what they have seen in their environment. In the juxtaposition of the direct environment and the temporal congruence in moving in and through the demarcated landscape. Contrary to its stereotyped structure, the signage links specifically to its location and fences (fig. 4), while in other cases, they were intangible, evoking a sense of invisible boundaries (fig. 3) link with others of their kind through the use of icons such as the city crest (fig. 8), and standardised symbols, for example caution signs or bareings. While the graffiti ‘scream’ their message in an unmissable manner even from a great distance, the font of the official signage, not bigger just as present as, but perhaps less striking than, the unofficial self-expressions of the graffiti in Santa Marta are the signs and signage placed-

A plethora of examples of these tangible and intangible expressions which were visible ‘from the ground up’ as we moved through the streets of Santa Marta, in some cases seemingly referring to it. In passing the prison and seeing old railway tracks on the western edge of Santa Marta. Here, we also and residential areas again came to light when we encountered the signage at the construction site and the signs ‘no grandi navi’ in the Calle Longhi. The place of graffiti is thus often clearly marked - a visible expression of a community. The graffiti surrounding it, we were able to make sense of the linguis- tic landscape also included graffiti inspired by its peripheries, such as field work was on Santa Marta, but we quickly realised that its linguis-

...and both 19th century and modern residential areas. The focus of the fieldwork was on Santa Marta, but we quickly realised that its linguis-...
Introduction: Framing Sant’Elena (Geography and History)

Sant’Elena is a neighbourhood of Venice’s lagoon city, located at its eastern end, behind the Biennale. Precisely because of its marginal, and somewhat hidden, geographical position - certainly far from mass tourism flows - a recent article in The Guardian describes it as ‘a secret island’, a ‘world apart’ (2022). Sant’Elena actually has something very different from the city centre. First of all, whichever way you get there - from the bridges that connect it to the Biennale or from the vaporetto stop - you immediately find yourself in the large tree-lined park that surrounds half the island: a rarity in the lagoon. The atmosphere is very peaceful. People walk slowly, there are many old people and children, it is a residential area, with very few shops, bars and restaurants. There seems to be no trace of the tourist crowds and the thousands of souvenirs. There is a lot of calm in Sant’Elena. And the scent of a slow daily life.

The most peculiar thing about this island, however, is its ‘youth’: until the 1920s there was nothing here, just sandbanks and a church, built around a chapel dating back to the 11th century. The idea of building the island took hold as early as the end of the 19th century, but the political decision to start work did not come until 1919, in a post-World War I historical context in which the housing issue had become central. The thorniest issue for Venice in those years was deciding whether to expand on the mainland, towards Mestre, or to build on the non-anthropised spaces of the lagoon, or to transform the existing
city. The mainland option prevailed for the modern part of the city\(^1\), while the historic part was to retain its 'Venetian character' - thus inaugurating the path of architectural conservatism and urban museification that continues to this day.

In this context, the building of the island of Sant'Elena is configured as the largest urban intervention in historic insular Venice. The urban plan re-proposed the 'Venetian character' in a project that was born with a primarily residential purpose. Indeed, the construction of the neighbourhood is entrusted to the former local social housing institute - an institute that still exists today, albeit under a new form and name.\(^2\)

Before diving into the Linguistic Landscape of this neighbourhood, one more important piece of information about Sant'Elena must be mentioned. This is also where the city's football stadium is located, also built at the beginning of the 20th century in front of the church, on an old 'field' where football was already sometimes played. Today, the stadium still hosts Venezia FC matches, and it is the second oldest functioning stadium in Italy. However, to be strictly accurate, the stadium and the Church, as well as the adjacent Naval Military School, are detached from the residential part of Sant'Elena. The LL analysis presented in the next sections focuses only on the residential block of the neighbourhood, which - as we shall see - is also influenced by football.

**LL Fieldwork**

*Street Signs*

The history of Sant'Elena is intimately linked to one of the first aspects of the local Linguistic Landscape that can be noticed: street names. Since the construction of the island is recent and began in the aftermath of the First World War, the toponymy of the neighbourhood reflects this historical period, unlike the toponymy of historic Venice, which refers to a much older past and local dialect. In Sant’Elena the choice of street names followed the same logic of the architectural style. It had to be a good equilibrium between tradition and modernity, while being painted onto the walls of the houses as in the city centre. Therefore, in the little island we find street names similar to central Venice - often in Venetian dialect - but we also find, and this is the peculiarity, street names in Italian that refer to recent twentieth-century history.

The latter especially commemorate Italy’s role in World War I, by referring to war heroes and battles. The name of the long avenue next to the park, Viale IV Novembre\(^3\) – with the number written as a Roman numeral on the sign – references Italy’s National Unity and Armed Forces Day, a holiday that commemorates the Italian victory in 1918. Viale IV Novembre is cornered by Viale XXIV Maggio, a street which name refers to May 24\(^{th}\) 1915, the day that Italy joined World War I after 15 months of neutrality. These two connected streets honour both the first and last day of Italy’s participation in the war. Other street names refer to Italian war heroes like general Chinotto and Cantore, who passed away during the war.

\(^1\) The decision to build Porto Marghera, Venice's industrial zone on the mainland, dates back to the same period.

\(^2\) The case of the local housing institute (ex IACP, today ATER) as a real construction company has made Sant'Elena an exemplary case, unprecedented on a national scale, but also, arguably, at the origin of specific legislative measures enacted within the framework of Keynesian housing policies of the lagoon city (Besi de Battisti, 2018).

\(^3\) This is also the only “avenue” (viale) in the whole Venice lagoon city, since all the other streets are named *calli* or *via* (via Garibaldi).
**Stickers and Graffiti**

In Sant’Elena we discovered particular areas in which there was a lot of layering regarding graffiti and stickers. Certain places seemed to be central points for stickers and graffiti. For example, on many lampposts we found a multitude of different stickers, likely placed by locals and tourists. One sticker advertises a local radio station, another advertises a Belgian YouTube channel, and another is from Florida. Therefore, we see how the LL is affected by visitors to Sant’Elena as well as the locals. There was one sticker which read ‘If you don’t understand, never mind’ with ‘Gomiti Alti’ below, the art separating the writing showing a person standing on the bridge overlooking the stadium holding an orange and green striped scarf. We speculated that this sticker could be evidence of support for the union of the Venezia and Mestre football clubs, with ‘Gomiti Alti’ being a phrase of celebration.

In terms of graffiti and wall writings, there were areas in which we saw a lot of layering, one particular area was under an arch, one wall covered in unidentifiable writing and doodles and tagging, the other side which had been white-washed. Perhaps there had been too much writing there and it was cleared to start anew? We also found evidence of street art as well alongside this.

**LGBTQ+ LL**

This year (24 June 2023) was the first Pride event in Venice after 9 years, which perhaps explains the lack of evidence for the celebration of Pride and LGBTQ+ in Sant’Elena, let alone Venice as a whole. We found a singular sticker with the pride flag on it on a wall in Sant’Elena, compared to the various flyers we saw in another area of Venice. While it remains unclear as to who placed the sticker—we could speculate on it having been placed by a local as Sant’Elena is less of a tourist area—it could be seen as the celebration of Pride returning to Venice and could signify this as being unique to the area and city of Venice as a whole.

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Children’s Spaces

When observing the abundance of graffiti in Sant’Elena, we inferred that children were influencing the linguistic landscape. There was evidence through handprints, drawings of stick figures, and a cluster of writings which told us of childlike tokens of love (eg. “A+V=❤”). Hence, Sant’Elena—unlike other areas of Venice where people aren’t allowed to mark the walls due to the strict rules of conduct—opens itself up to allow children the freedom to play and be creative, they themselves making their own mark on the linguistic landscape. Further evidence of Sant’Elena being a neighbourhood more welcoming to children were the toys we saw on a washing line.

Wall of Biennale

On the back wall of the Biennale, we found a collection of posters, that looked like constructed collages of, among other things, Google Maps-pictures and desktop screenshots. A brief interview with the
guards proved that the posters were not related to the Biennale, instead they may have been put there by a local street artist or the students of the Art Academy.

*Photos from Sant' Elena, 27th June 2023.*

We speculated that the posters could have been a form of commentary (perhaps on surveillance around Venice and increasing digitisation), with the locals not liking the cameras installed around Sant’Elena as it may make them feel like they were being watched.

**Football**

The proximity to the stadium invites football fans to transform Sant' Elena’s linguistic landscape which is indicated by the many signs that pertain to football culture. Stickers are one of the most prevalent football-related signs of this area and often carry logos or names of specific football clubs (see Fig. 1). Football fans interact with the linguistic landscape, for instance, by leaving stickers of their favourite football clubs, indicating rivalries, and showcasing political ideologies. Looking at the interactional aspects of linguistic landscaping thus opens up the possibility of adopting a multimodal perspective, highlighting that individuals interact with each other, material objects and the space. Removing stickers, editing written inscriptions, creating layers of signs or painting over certain messages accordingly represent activities that transform the linguistic landscape and reflect the interplay of multiple semiotic systems, channels and modalities (Norris 2004: 1).

*Figure 1: Stickers showing different football clubs (Venice, Sant'Elena, 28 June 2023)*
At the same time, the football-related signs of Sant'Elena often involve patriotic identification. This holds specifically true for the various football club stickers through which football fans indicate their affinity to local football clubs from Italy (e.g., Venezia Mestre Football Club, Milan Club Spagna), Germany (e.g., FC St. Pauli, Hertha BSC, 1. FC Köln, 1. FC Nürnberg), the UK (e.g., FC Brentford), Poland (Pogoń Szczecin) and Russia (Spartak Moscow), to mention but a few. These stickers establish a connection between identity and place by expressing a sense of belonging that often touches on the themes of nationalism and patriotism. As football is closely tied to national pride and patriotism, it does not come as a surprise that a considerable number of stickers throughout Sant'Elena are linked to football hooliganism and the football Ultras (see Fig. 2). The Ultra movement refers to “a portion of a club’s fanbase which usually consists of some of the most extreme and passionate supporters” who often locate themselves to the far-right of the political spectrum (Goal, 2021).

Apart from stickers that signal group membership by specifying the name of a particular Ultra group, some of the Ultras- and Hooligans-related signs we encountered in Sant'Elena consisted of stickers, written inscriptions and graffities that transport “neo-fascist ideologies, symbols and mindsets, with racism deeply rooted” (Goal, 2021). An example of this is the written inscription “Venedig uber alles” [“Venice over everything’] in Figure 3, which draws a parallel to the first stanza of the Deutschlandlied that is closely associated with the Nazi regime and right-wing extremists. Such inscriptions form part of a translanguaging space where right-wing rhetoric reinforces certain political ideologies while establishing a connection to Venice as a place and football club.
The Ultra group of Venezia FC today is not actually considered an explicitly extreme right-wing fan club - as many other Italian teams are. The history of the Ultras of Venezia is rather fractious, and in the past has had both extreme right-wing and left-wing people flanking the stadium. After various discussions and unpleasant episodes within the most excited supporters of Venezia FC, since 2011 the supporters have been organised by the 'Curva Sud Venezia Mestre' (CSVM), a group that defines itself as apolitical - precisely to eliminate the politics that had torn and disintegrated the Venetian fans in recent years. This does not detract from the fact that several sub-groups still coexist in the Venetian fans - both in political and football terms between unionists vs. separatists - and proof of this is how the LL of Sant'Elena reflects the various souls and positions.

From the examples presented, it becomes clear that translanguaging and multimodality offer valuable perspectives to the field of linguistic landscaping. This viewpoint acknowledges that Sant'Elena’s linguistic landscape is not only affected by different languages but also by space, modalities (e.g., acoustic, visual, or tactile) and channels (e.g., hands, smartphones, textiles, etc.). Especially visual elements like colours, patterns, images, or shapes are crucial components that influence the linguistic landscape. Colour also plays an important role in the expression and identity of football fandom as the colours of a football team often forge strong connections between a football club and a particular location. The indexical uses of colour are not only limited to football club stickers; they also appear in written inscriptions, as demonstrated in Figure 4, stating “Neroverdi e basta” [“black-green and that’s it”]. Interestingly, it is plausible to assume that the written inscription was created by the same individual responsible for Figure 3, based on their close proximity, as well as the similar writing style, colour and font.

Given that “[b]oth translanguaging and multimodality aim for a flow between language and the spaces wherein it operates” (Alberto Mora et al. 2022: 273), Sant'Elena’s linguistic landscape can be viewed as a multimodal translanguaging space (Wei 2018) where people engage in social activities. While the

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5 Compare this blog article (in Italian) for a detailed historical examination of Venetian fans from the 1970s to the present day: https://www.pianetaempoli.it/curva-ospiti-tifosi-del-venezia-3/

6 mentioning the team colours of the Venetian team, in reference to the merge with the team from Mestre. The two teams merged in 1987 and the team colours changed from neroverde (green-black) to arancioneroverde (orange-black-green).
stadium establishes an overall discourse framework for football fans such as Ultras, it is merely “[…] the final stage of a process of socialising the group life that went on elsewhere – city district, bars, groups of friends, youth centres, political groups […]” (Roversi & Balestri 2000: 188). Exploring these diverse spaces provides valuable insights into the linguistic landscape and its interactants.

People from Sant’Elena and their perspective

If the football theme pervades an important part of the Linguistic Landscape of Sant’Elena, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, on the other hand, show much indifference to the local team and sometimes annoyance and complaints about the stadium near which they live. This view of the locals should not be regarded as statistically representative of the neighbourhood's population. However, none of the dozen people we interviewed in this regard expressed a positive judgement or sentiment in this regard. The only person interviewed who is happy with the Sant’Elena’s stadium is the owner of the island’s main cafe, but for purely economic reasons: that is where the fans gather in the hours before the game. Older interviewees mostly complain about the abrupt interruption of the island’s calm every other Sunday during championship time: shouts, crowds, police, and boats suddenly invade the neighbourhood. Younger, middle-aged people, on the other hand, complain also about the surveillance of the island that the stadium imposes: for security reasons and because of sad, violent, episodes between football fans, modern cameras have been placed all over the island. This entails, consequently, general surveillance of all inhabitants, as the cameras are always in operation.

Apart from the local views on the stadium, which tell a different story from what appears at first glance from the linguistic landscape, the inhabitants surveyed say they are happy to live there: there is greenery, everyone knows each other, life is repetitive in a beautiful way. On the one hand, nostalgic comments emerged related to the depopulation of the neighbourhood of historical inhabitants - but also of the whole of Venice, due to the tourist-economic monoculture and the precarious work it entails - and to the closure of most of the basic shops, due to competition from supermarkets, so that nowadays it is necessary to travel to the nearby island of Lido or to the city centre to do one's daily shopping. However, in the end, what emerges the most is the inhabitants' satisfaction at living in a neighbourhood that, precisely because of its marginal geography and almost closed in on itself, makes Sant’Elena a village: 'it’s a village... we greet each other, we talk, we see each other every day'⁷ (interview).

Environment, materials and agents

The embodied experience of being in Sant’Elena is determined by the materiality of the environment that allows for certain types of mobility and becoming (Ingold, 2010). On and around the wide street that stretches 800m through Sant’Elena a lot of activity is happening. The road is smooth and broad, with red benches placed on each side, surrounded by trees planted in line with one another. Small shops and cafés can be found on the urban side, and sport facilities and playgrounds on the greener side facing the water. This environment allows for certain types of mobility that might not be possible in other places in Venice. From our observations we found that the road was used for diverse mobilisation, such as children’s bikes, electric wheelchairs and walkers, skateboards, prams, bouncing balls, dog toys, roller skaters and the walking or running feet of humans, dogs, cats, and pigeons. Biking is prohibited in most parts of Venice, and getting across touristic bridges in a wheelchair would be a nightmare, but Sant’Elena’s material environment permits these forms of movements. The benches were often occupied by elderly people, creating local meeting points. Another way of human connection in

⁷ Original in Italian: "E’ un paese... ci si saluta, si parla, ci si rivede ogni giorno".
Sant’Elena could be through dogs’ interactions. The many dogs running around in the park makes possible the interaction between dogs themselves and their owners to form relationships to other owners. But not all human-animal assemblages consist of joyful interactions (Tsing, 2015, 22). As we sat down at the bar to talk through our discoveries, numerous pigeons became quite intrusive, flying from table to table as they were continuously being chased away. Sant’Elena’s trees serve as excellent nesting spots, and the few bars and restaurants make the pigeons all flock together on the same feeding ground. Other agents that had found their home in Sant’Elena were the many mosquitoes, in the comfort of the shade and humidity from the trees, feeding from the many bodies that were moving or sitting on the ground.

Sant’Elena, 29 June 2023

Missing?

After our observations, we found a number of things missing from Sant’Elena. Sant’Elena lacked the noise and number of tourists found in the historic centre. There was also the absence of supermarkets and tourist shops, which gave a true quiet neighbourhood feel to the area. As well, compared with other areas which were selected to be part of the research project, there was a lack of political graffiti/writings on the walls of Sant’Elena.

Concluding remarks: LL of Affect

To gain a comprehensive understanding of different types of LLs, present in the area, we considered an understudied aspect in the field of research: affect in LL (Wee, 2016; Yao, 2020). Affect in LL points to the emotive or evocative function of the signs within a defined space. We identified three prominent affective dimensions of LL at Sant’Elena: football team fan culture, commemoration of war places/hero’s, and expression of love on the wall. These affective dimensions serve as significant indicators of the deep-rooted positive attachment local residents have with Sant’Elena. The rich tapestry of signs and symbols present in the LL reflects a powerful medium through which emotions, identities, and shared values connected with the place are conveyed and reinforced.
List of References


Venice embodied

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Introduction

This blog is a result of an interdisciplinary ethnographic research conducted by students from different disciplines and universities. Since none of us has ever conducted research on LL (linguistic landscapes) before, we consider our findings as initial//tentative observations rather than as comprehensive research data.

Approach and methodology

Data was gathered during five days of stay in Venice from 26 – 30 June 2023. We were assigned to a small area in the center of the main island of Venice, which extends rectangularly around the Campo Bandiera e Moro and is framed by various canals.

Map of the main island of Venice (retrieved from Google Maps on June 29, 2023)

We collected around 130 pictures of LL in the stipulated area of which we chose only a selected number in this blog to illustrate our results. Most of the captured elements were written landscapes on walls, electricity boxes or bridges, stickers on doors, pipes or the like, official signs such as street names and information signs. However, we also paid attention to soundscapes and smells, which in a broader perspective all fall into
the realm of semiotic data (see for example Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

Taking pictures as part of a multimodal research (June 28, 2023, Venice)

Initially, we considered different approaches to data collection, e.g. examining specific looking at particular elements of the LL such as street names or graffiti, or examining a specific theme in the existing LL. However, we decided to collect data without a pre-determined focus in order to keep our observations open and avoid being too heavily affected by our preconceptions. The topics we eventually chose to look at in more detail evolved during our discovery and were influenced by our individual interests and areas of study, which ultimately allowed us to look at the same LL from different perspectives.

In addition to photos, we relied on data from social media and observation as an ethnographic research method. We also consulted three people on the street who helped us interpret some of the data. In a normal research setting, we would have tried to include interviews in our research, which would allow for different voices and perspectives on how to interpret the LL. However, given our language barrier, lack of
time and the palpable reluctance of many people to interact with tourists (which we were probably classified as by others), we did not feel too comfortable approaching many people.

**Unintelligibility of language and codes**

One of our first observations was that many elements of LL we came across were incomprehensible to us. In some inscriptions we could at least recognize individual letters of the Latin alphabet, but their meaning remained unknown. In contrast to institutionally initiated signs such as street names or street signs, many signs of LL initiated by individuals do not seem to have been intended for the public and remain comprehensible only to insiders, if even to them.
In this respect, research on LL is challenging because data cannot always be decoded, and the interpretation of signs also depends on the reader's general knowledge and meaning-making. A question that preoccupied us we remained with throughout our research was therefore:

*How do we deal with the unintelligible aspects of a semiotic landscape?*
Examining the tension between residential and touristic elements in the linguistic landscape

Venice is an immensely popular tourist destination, drawing masses of people from all over the world. In recent years, overtourism (defined by UNWTO as “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experiences in a negative way”) (2018: 4) has increasingly caused locals to choose to leave the city (Hospers, 2019: 20). This section considers to what extent the tension between tourism and local communities is embodied in the linguistic landscape of our assigned area.

We found various linguistic landscape elements that indicate that locals reside there permanently. Examples include a post box filled with administrative letters in Italian and washing lines with clothes, towels, and bed sheets drying in the sun. The residential atmosphere is also supported by the soundscape: generally, the area is quiet, the silence only interrupted by domestic sounds coming from houses. For example, we identified the sound of vacuum cleaner, a film being watched, a radio and a conversation in Italian.
However, the linguistic landscape also contained aspects that suggest the presence of tourism in this area. For example, we found an art studio that specialises in watercolour paintings of Venice and its canals, whose target market one would assume is tourists. The use of languages other than Italian also indicates a foreign element, such as an English translation on a door to give instructions and a sign in English by a postcard stand.
Certain inscriptions also denote the kind of romantic approach to a city that tends to be associated with visitors. For example, one inscription reads, “My heart is buried in Venice, waiting for someone to take it home”; while another is a quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s Le Petit Prince in French: “Ce qui est important est invisible aux yeux et ne se voit qu’avec le coeur” (translation: “that which is important is invisible to the eyes and can only be seen with the heart”).

Inscriptions that indicate a visitors’ approach to Venice (June 29, 2023, Venice)

While language can be a useful tool to distinguish whether a sign/inscription designates a local or a foreign presence, this poster that encourages and advertises a recycling service challenges the assumption that all non-Italian signs are necessarily directed at tourists. The formal poster is layered over an already existing informal linguistic landscape of stickers. Interestingly, the poster is in English, even though one would imagine that recycling would be an issue that concerns residents instead of tourists that stay in the city only for a short period of time. Moreover, the awkward use of the English language, such as the phrases “Help us recycling” and “We effect”, suggests that the poster was created by someone whose mother tongue is not English.
The only sign that we found in the linguistic landscape of our assigned area that explicitly addresses the tension between Venice as a tourist attraction and Venice as a city where people and communities reside permanently was a red sign reading #SOSVenezia outside a fruit and vegetable shop.
Research revealed that it references a campaign launched in 2021 against the mass tourist industry in Venice. The campaign’s webpage reads:

The Region, Municipality and Metropolitan City use Venice as an international showcase for big events or as a brand to exploit, but they have done little or nothing to respond to the daily needs of those who live here (SOS VENEZIA, 2021).

The webpage also mentions certain unsolved problems such as the unavailability of housing and job opportunities. We consulted social media – specifically Instagram – for more examples of the #SOSVenezia movement, and found pictures of the hashtag on banners or signs across the city, a caption alongside the hashtag that reads ‘A tiny bit of life in a dying city’ (the use of ‘dying city’ resembles the sense of urgency evoked by the abbreviation ‘SOS’); while the image of a pigeon eating from a KFC bucket alongside a Pepsi can, simply captioned #SOSVenezia suggests that these American enterprises symbolise an intrusive, unwanted foreign element to the city.

Screenshots of posts on Instagram that reference the #SOSVenezia movement (retrieved June 29, 2023)

To return to the sign in the shop window, it is important to note that it is accompanied by a black and white photograph of that shop, clearly taken years ago. This image
suggests that the shop has existed for years, and that it is an authentic, precious institution that may be in danger because of the tourism industry.

It is clear that the tension between the local and the touristic, a well-known aspect of Venetian life, is embodied in the linguistic landscape in our designated area. To conclude this theme, we highlight two questions that our observations evoked:

- Being aware that locals are often hostile to mass tourism, as it is considered as a danger to permanent communities and their way of life in the city, how does one interact with residents in a way that disrupts them as little as possible? This is especially pertinent if one does not speak Italian, as was the case for most of our group.
- What is the position of the researcher when conducting linguistic landscape research? In other words, as researchers in Venice, we were clearly outsiders; yet we did not visit the city as tourists. When considering the tension between local and foreign/touristic elements in the city, how does one then define or classify one’s own role?

**Unity within chaos**

As one can zoom in and out on linguistic signs and symbols, it is of importance to consider different scopes of focus to find meaning and add to an understanding of a certain space. The linguistic landscape of the *Laboratorio Occupato Morion* gives an interesting insight at LL practices on a micro level. Particularly in the case of the *laboratorio*, a door filled with stickers drew our attention:
As seen on the photo, the stickers are placed all over the place, in no specific pattern or order; they seem to be randomly placed, put on top of others, exposing an array of different ideas and messages. We find stickers an interesting subject within the LL field, as the aspect of language is accompanied with the visual, a ‘universal language’, which creates a complementary meaning to the words, and thus reshapes the interpretation of LL signs and symbols.

On a macro level, the ‘stickerscape’ on the door can seem like a pool of chaos, but upon zooming in, one can consider a certain unity in the chaos: the stickers all speak leftist-Marxist messages against the establishment, police, fascism, racism etc. Interesting is also the variety of languages in which the same activist and socially engaging messages are spread; apart from Italian, there are also stickers in German, English, Dutch, even Russian. Zooming out again, this ‘stickerscape’ embodies a glocal array of people from different countries coming together with the same
ideological ideas and adding to the LL of Venice as a cosmopolitan space. For us, this is what Gorter & Cenoz state when saying that ‘the ambiance of a neighbourhood can be experienced and seen as a unity, even if geographic, social or language borders are not clearly demarcated’ (Gorter & Cenoz, 2015: 69).

**Stickers as mobile signs**

Another subject considering the LL landscape of the stickerswall at the laboratorio is that of the difference between static and mobile signs, as quoted by Gorter: ‘to date, most LL studies have focused on static signs, but those digital screens intermingle with fixed signage and are a challenge for studies of “language” in public space’ (Gorter, 2021). The idea of static signs made us think about the structurality of stickers in LL and the idea of layering (Auer, 2010); stickers have a mobile character as the stickers can be put somewhere, but also removed, replaced or put somewhere else. Stickers (as well as graffiti) in this respect can be seen as ‘mobile signs’ as opposed to ‘static signs’ such as street names or information boards that remain mostly unchanged at their place m. Mobile signs change over time and are linked to changing socio-political contexts. As such, a ‘stickerscape’ is a sort of comic book, layering all kinds of stories for the public to discover and make sense of. When stickers are removed and replaced, a new story is constructed, layered above old narratives. The authorship also changes with this, leaving the question of agency; who was the ‘first’ one to place a certain sticker on an object? Which discourse flows out of this ‘initial agent’ and which narrative becomes dominant over time? Or how about stickerscapes where numerous narratives are competing with each other? Out of this flows my personal conclusion regarding stickers within LL landscapes: ‘The place where stickers are put acts as a “static carrier” of “mobile messages”, over time constructing a fluid identity of a social space.’
The Intersection of Religion and Popular Culture in the Urban Landscape

Figure 1. Own photograph of street shrine located in a residential street within a small area in the centre of the main island of Venice, which extends rectangularly around the Campo Bandiera e Moro. Venice, July 2023.

Investigating the relationship between religion and public space within the linguistic landscape of our assigned area was interesting. We discovered a street shrine located in a residential area of the district (Fig.1). Its design was highly ornate, decorated with gold detailing, a variety of flowers and religious figures (Fig.2). We noticed many roadside shrines within the Italian urban landscape erected in varied places. Each votive shrine required its historic value from its relationship with the surrounding landscape, reinscribed with new meaning through time as new things had been added or taken away. In this sense, there was some ephemerality attached to them, decorated with varying additions and new inscriptions. Each seemed to play a large role in articulating its surrounding space and uses, representing local forms of religious worship.

We were interested in the distinct atmosphere constructed by the position of the shrine within the urban space we were investigating. The area was peaceful, almost eerily quiet, and seemed far from the tourist occupied streets experienced within other quarters. Instead, only the unmelodious drone of a residence’s television could be heard and the distant murmurings of neighbouring streets. The presence of the shrine seemed to orchestrate a distinct soundscape, affecting public performance. We noticed our group moved slowly and quietly within the surrounding area of the shrine, gazing up at its surveying figures. This could link to Lefebvre’s ideas outlining how space is not neutral. Through walking and operating within a space we construct meaning.
Following research, we discovered more about the ubiquitous nature of street shrines and their spatial function, highlighting the “pervasive and rooted character of popular beliefs” in Venetian culture. Fabrizio Nevola’s work explores street shrines as unique forms of surveillance within public spaces. We identified this function in the area we explored, as the shrine seemed to ‘monitor’ the residential area. Edward Muir discussed the ‘Virgin on the street corner’ within a category of social language in which ‘holiness tended to adhere to a specific object or place’. We identified how the street shrine seemed to have a similar effect to CCTV within the area, constructing a “heightened sense of place” and maintaining the peaceful sanctity of the street. Its religious figure provided ‘eyes on the street’ passers-by were perhaps subconsciously influenced by.

Directly opposite the shrine was an outside table, assumedly belonging to a local resident (Fig.1). We were intrigued and somewhat amused to discover a magazine beside the shrine outlining the latest gossip and popular culture (Fig.2). On its cover were many famous figures ranging from Pope Francis to Italian pop star Luigi Strangis. The magazine was written in Italian, suggesting it belonged to a local resident. It revealed how “people inhabit, appropriate and perform their embodied, emplaced and mobile selves against the backdrop of the semiotic landscape”. It exemplified a mobile form of linguistic landscape which we thought was interesting in relation to the street shrine fixed on the wall. We were intrigued by the juxtaposition between the religious shrine and commodity culture presented by the magazine. Both explored religion for different purpose, revealing the intersection of popular culture and religion. Pope Francis presented as a celebrity figure on the magazine cover seemed to represent religion as some popularised form of consumption.

**Figure 2.** Own close-up photographs of located street shrine and magazine. Venice, July 2023.
Group research helped me to appreciate how linguistic landscapes are dynamic and in constant flux, defined by changing ideologies, public performances and multimodal forms of communication. Therefore, meaning attached to a particular space is ever changing and involves the constant negotiation of contesting identities. This is evidenced by this specific investigation into street shrines and their place in the public environment. We have realised the importance of documenting the multimodality of a linguistic landscape and investigating an urban space with an open, multidisciplinary approach.

**Action and reaction**

![Image of stickers on a pole and a graffiti artist]

We were drawn to these specific stickers saying ‘Spacer, Namer, Juice, Cozek, Captek’ everywhere. So we had a look on the internet and found out that they represent different generations of graffiti artists with the same ambition of finding new forms for a dialogue within a city through visual communication. This ambition arose due to the destruction of graffiti in Moscow in a violent way. At that point they felt they had to invent other ways of communicating then graffiti. They chose the stickers. Their eventual goal is to create a collective.
Being able to talk to all kinds of people was through a language that they understand. And the language that everyone understands are simplified constructions. People started noticing them on the streets and they started questioning what they saw and what's behind the words, just like us. And they kept seeing these stickers in other cities, which creates an immediate sense of association.

Besides stickers, they also placed the constructions on clothes. But they don’t see themselves as a clothing brand. It’s rather something they want to update every two months and continuing to create a new story.

This phenomenon can be seen as invading Venice and using it as a tool to raise awareness on a question that has nothing to do with Venice itself and its specific culture.
References


