VIU summer SCHOOL

Linguistic Landscapes: Using Signs and Symbols to Translate Cities

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2023 edition students' collective blogs

- Santa Marta and its surroundings
- Linguistic Landscape of Sant'Elena, Venice
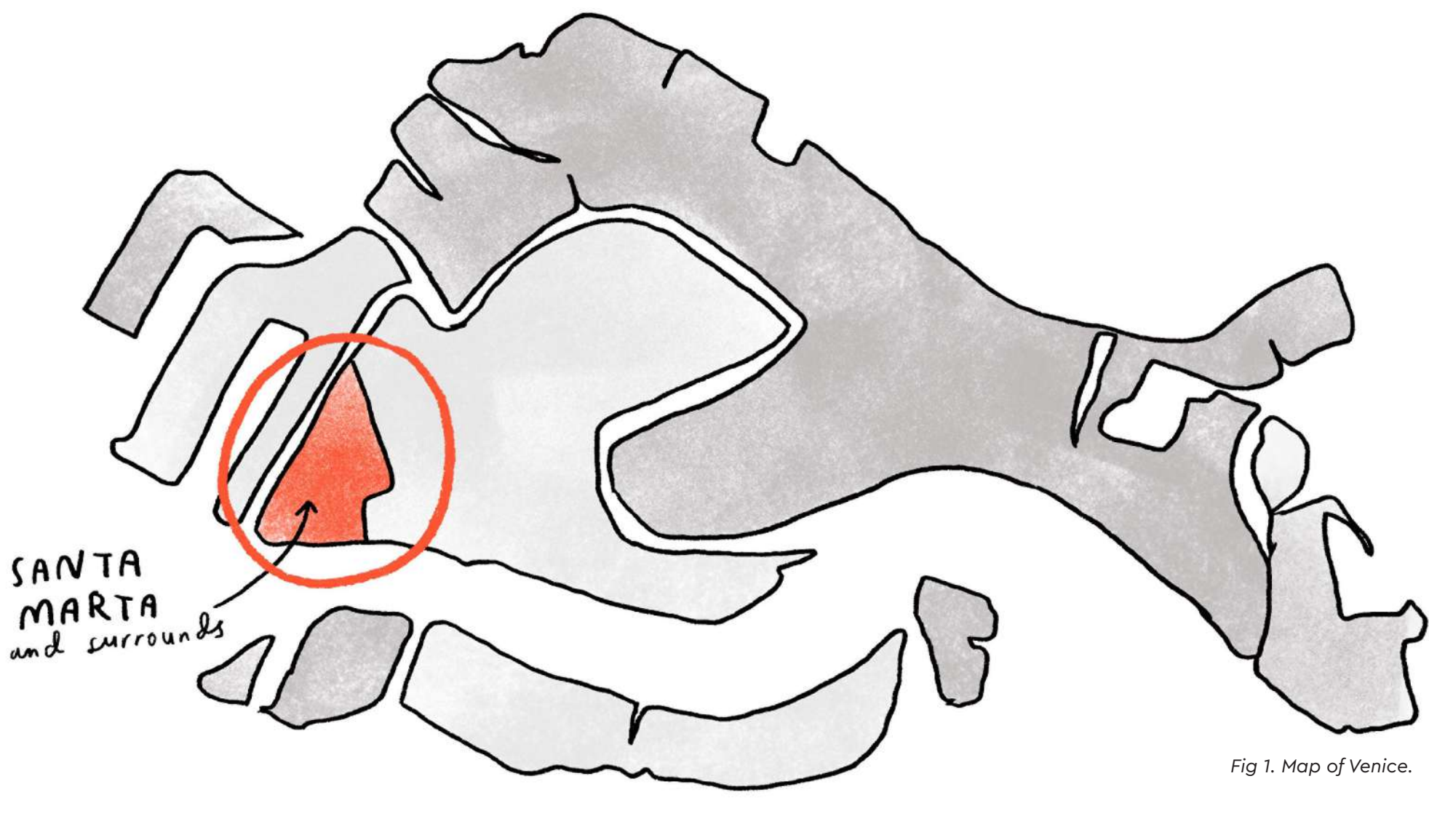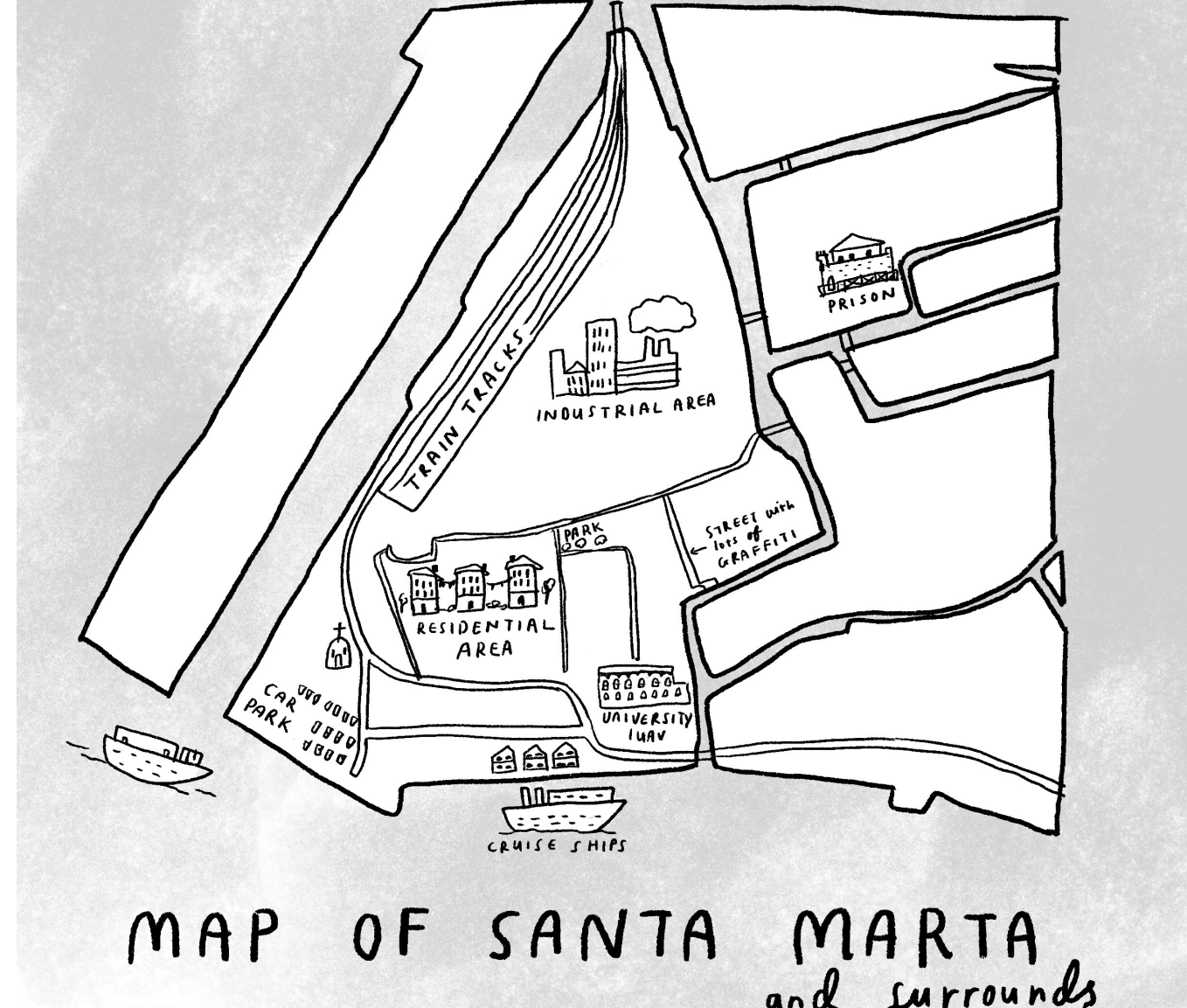- Venice embodied

Fig 1. Map of Venice.

SANTA MARTA
and its surroundings

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MAP OF SANTA MARTA
and surrounds

Fig 2. Map of Santa Marta and surrounding.

Our fieldwork was conducted in and around the neighbourhood of Santa Marta in Venice on 28th June 2023. Santa Marta, which is located in the southwestern part of Venice, is home to an eclectic mix of old and new, industrial and residential, nationalised and personal, public and private, which can be seen in the Port of Venice Authority, the 16th century Santa Marta church, the IUAV University of Venice, and both 19th century and modern residential areas. The focus of the field work was on Santa Marta, but we quickly realised that its linguistic landscape also included graffiti inspired by its peripheries, such as the Casa Circondariale Santa Maria Maggiore prison located across the canal demarcating Santa Marta and its neighbours. We thus decided to include the influence of the peripheries in our analysis as well.

To conduct the fieldwork, we went to Santa Marta ourselves in order to explore. We first encountered the Venice Port Authority, a public body in charge of planning and controlling port operations (http://www.veniceandlagoon.net). On one side, there was a moored cruise ship opposite a row of warehouses being renovated. Due to the nature of the port and its industry, there was a large presence of official signs in both Italian and English. Further on, we discovered the University of Venice (IUAV) with signs in Venetian in addition to Italian and English. Close to the IUAV, is the centrally located residential area in the heart of Santa Marta. Noticeably, and perhaps poignantly, the majority of the signs in this neighbourhood were written in Venetian or Italian. Nonetheless, the layering of industry and residential areas again came to light when we encountered the old railway tracks on the western edge of Santa Marta. Here, we also interestingly saw cars and bicycles, which are actually prohibited in the historical centre of Venice. On leaving Santa Marta, we came across the aforementioned prison. In passing the prison and seeing the graffiti surrounding it, we were able to make sense of the linguistic landscape of Santa Marta in light of the graffiti seen to have been referring to it.

After assessing Santa Marta and its surrounding areas, we identified two key themes that served as a theoretical framework for analysing the gathered data. These theoretical underpinnings are duality and polyphony. According to Rappaport (1999), duality refers to the coexistence and interconnectedness of opposing forces within a society. It encompasses the dynamic "interplay between order and chaos, stability and change" (Prigogine, I. & Stengers, I. 1984). This notion of duality was particularly evident in Santa Marta, where we observed the juxtaposition of old and new, nationalized and personal, public and private, as well as physical and imagined spaces. These dualities within Santa Marta became a polyphony which "can be understood as a musical metaphor for the complexity of human voices and perspectives, highlighting the richness that emerges when multiple voices coexist and interact" (Bakhtin, 1984). In Santa Marta, the graffiti found on the walls exemplified this polyphony, as it represented the convergence of various voices in a layered fashion, conveying the spirit of the area and its people.

By analysing Santa Marta through the lens of duality and polyphony, we were able to discern distinct physical and imagined borders within the community. These borders were sometimes tangible, manifested through barricades and fences (fig. 4), while in other cases, they were intangible, evoking a sense of invisible boundaries (fig. 3) that we, as outsiders, hesitated to cross in order to respect the personal space of the inhabitants.

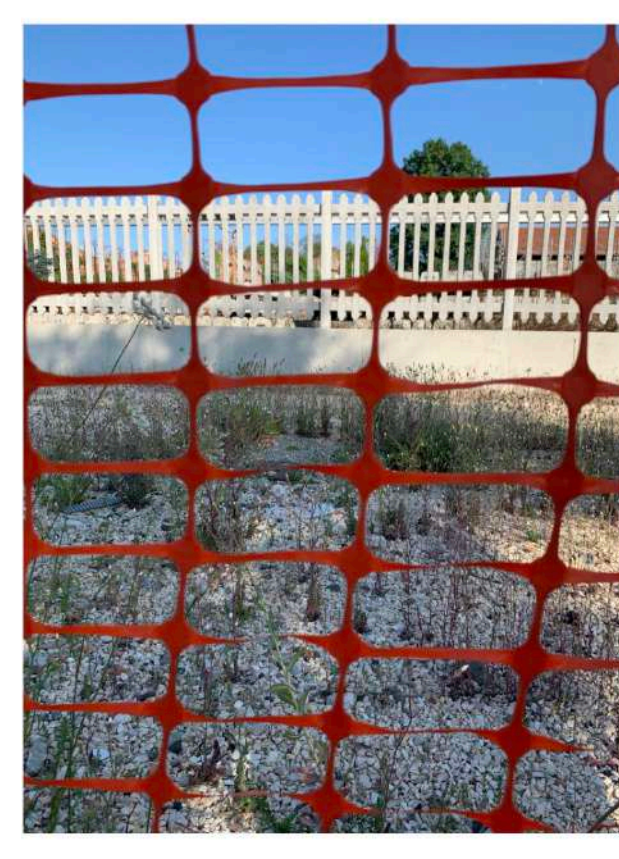Fig 3. Photo of a residential area in Santa (28.6.23).

Fig 4. Fences and barricades in Santa Marta (28.6.23).

Breaking Boundaries

Some of the graffiti we saw challenged notions of physical and metaphysical boundaries. Found within the geographical confines of Santa Marta, the graffiti explicitly embodied sentiment evoked by the Casa Circondariale Santa Maria Maggiore prison located on its physical periphery. Despite technically not being within Santa Marta, the prison can be seen from Santa Marta's residential areas, separated only by the water of the canal. Creating a Foucauldian sensation of the Panopticon in which "one is totally seen, without ever seeing" (an idea which perhaps inspired the eyes painted on some of the walls of Santa Marta (fig. 5), the inmates can see the graffito (fig. 6) stating "Il carcere uccide", written on one of the residential buildings (Foucault, 2012). The person who must have written this graffito might also have been able to see them. The graffiti thus dares to trespass over both institutionalized physical and metaphysical boundaries.

The transgression of institutionalisation and state-imposed physical boundaries is taken further in the graffito seen in fig. 7: "Senza gabbie né guin[z]aagli libertà per tutt*". With the σ in tutto marked with a symbol of anarchism, we can infer that the artist is using this graffito as an act of activism. The prison on the periphery has added fuel to the fire of anti-establishmentarian street art within Santa Marta. Interestingly, we also see a build up of polyphony in the form of Bakhtin's heteroglossia, with another agent 'correcting' the spelling of guinzagli and adding an accent to the a of libertà. For every rebel, there is a killjoy. Nonetheless, the graffiti as a "low genre... vis-à-vis the linguistic centre of the verbal-ideological life of the nation" seen in response to or inspired by the prison, transgress boundaries to create a heteroglossia opposed to state-imposed borders and standardisation (Bakhtin, 2018).

Fig 5. Graffiti and street art on Calle Nuova Teresa (28.6.23).

Fig 6. View from the Ponte di Pietra of (left to right) the Casa Circondariale Santa Maria Maggiore, a canal, and residential buildings of Santa Marta on which there is graffiti (28.6.23).

Fig 7. Graffiti on Calle Nuova Teresa stating "Senza gabbie né guinazgli [sic] libertà per tutt* [sic]." (28.6.23).

Stereotyped singularities

Just as persistent as, but perhaps less striking than, the unofficial self-expressions of the graffiti in Santa Marta are the signs and signage placed by an institutional authority. In a polyphonic contrast to the sometimes colourful designed letters which can often spread up to several square metres over the walls of residential buildings and along walkways and passages, the 'official voice' embeds itself almost modestly in its surroundings. While the graffiti 'scream' their message in an unmissable manner even from a great distance, the font of the official signage, not bigger than some centimetres, requests a physical 'moving closer' to enable reading. On well-defined boards cut out of hard, resistant plastic or metal plates, the words and pictures are arranged in a systematic way that seems to show no sign of individual imprint. Digitally reproducible, they 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 bare corporate design schemes.

What at first seems a stereotype, reveals at a closer look a subtle but strong connection, highly reflective of its spatial and also temporal situation. The restrictive sign (fig. 9) transmits not only rules of conduct but provides information about the different types of dangers one could encounter in moving in and through the demarcated landscape. Contrary to its stereotyped structure, the signage links specifically to its location and situation. Its position on the fence is locally fixed, the edges of the signboard define the boundaries of the 'tent' itself. Despite this clear margin the 'text' exceeds its physical surface in referring to its surroundings. In the juxtaposition of the direct environment and the temporal congruence with the act of construction, the signage becomes more than a plastic board with pictures and words on it. The alignment of landscape and 'text' form a unique conjunction that augments the meaning of both elements.

Fig 8. Regulations for Dogs, Fondamenta Santa Marta (28.6.23).

Fig 9. Warning Sign at Construction Site, Fondamenta Santa Marta (28.6.23).

Child's play

Nestled amongst a linguistic landscape so heavily dominated by political graffiti and institutionalized signage, we also found signs of residential life, symbolising a strong juxtaposition between the private and the public. This first manifested itself in signs created with children in mind, such as highly decorated posters advertising babysitting services, and signs for a 'Bibliobus' stop (fig. 10). The Bibliobus is a mobile library which passes through Santa Marta every two weeks, coordinated by the Rete Biblioteche Venezia (www.comune.venezia.it/it/content/bibliobus). The logo featured on the stop sign was selected by citizens of Venice through competitions held on the Municipality of Venice's Facebook pages. Through this initiative we can see a collaboration between the public and the private in the construction of the linguistic landscape, via an invitation on the part of an institution to the community. Signs such as these are evidence of a linguistic landscape cultivated for children, with their needs and wellbeing in mind.

However, as we explored further it became apparent that children do not only passively influence the linguistic landscape but are also themselves active agents in its construction. Walking through a small playground and an alley full of graffiti, we found chalk drawings presumably made by local children. What was particularly interesting was the way in which these drawings interacted with the linguistic landscape around them. As can be seen from (fig. 11), the wall in which we found the chalk drawings had previously been painted over to hide past graffiti. This heteroglossic layering acts as a sign of temporality, demonstrating how the linguistic landscape changes and evolves over time. This, and the incredibly intricate piece of political graffiti directly opposite the chalk drawings (fig. 12), suggests an act of imitation on the part of the children. It seems likely that they have internalised and mimicked what they have seen in their surroundings, in turn interacting with and shaping them.

In conclusion, we can say that Santa Marta is a neighbourhood rich in contrast and expression. There exists an evident duality between old and new, industrial and residential, nationalised and personal, public and private which is embodied in both physical and imagined spaces where the polyphony of graffiti and official signage represent heteroglossic layers of the local area and its peripheries.

A plethora of examples of these tangible and intangible borders were seen within the confines of Santa Marta, in graffiti inspired by the Casa Circondariale Santa Maria Maggiore prison situated 'outside' the neighbourhood but only separated by water, the official institutional signage, and clear evidence of the private sphere in posters and graffiti either oriented towards or made by children.

During this research we deciphered the means to find rich abundance of expression within the linguistic landscape of Santa Marta and its peripheries, there is much more to conduct. Further research could focus on the duality of old and young, as seen in the university and residential areas, not to mention the tension between tourism and local inhabitants, which was already noticeable in the dominating presence of cruise ships close to the Venice Port Authority in juxtaposition with the omnipresent "No grandi navi" graffiti within Santa Marta (fig. 13). A distinct neighbourhood perceptibly different to other parts of Venice, Santa Marta is overflowing with intertwining voices weaving themselves into the polyphony of its own linguistic landscape that it presents to those who are willing to look closely enough.

Fig 10. Stop sign for the bibliobus in Campiello Longhi (28.6.23).

Fig 11. Chalk drawings in Calle Nuova Teresa (28.6.23).

Fig 12. Street art in Calle Nuova Teresa (28.6.23).

Fig 13. Sign 'no grandi navi' in Calle Longhi (28.6.23)

Linguistic Landscape of Sant'Elena, Venice

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Early morning in Sant'Elena, 30 June 2023

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 24th 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.

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[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).

Photos from Sant'Elena, 29th June 2023.

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.

Photos from Sant'Elena, 28th June 2023.

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.[4] 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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[4] Source: https://youtu.be/8A-j790vH-w

First photo from Sant'Elena, 29th June 2023. Second photo from an area outside of Sant'Elena, on Via Giuseppe Garibaldi, 27th June 2023.

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.

Photos from Sant'Elena, 28th-29th June 2023.

Photo from Sant'Elena, 29th June 2023.

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).

Figure 2: Ultra group logos (Venice, Sant'Elena, 28 June 2023)

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.

Figure 3: Written inscription: «Venedig uber alles» (Venice, Sant'Elena, 27 June 2023)

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.[5] 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"][6]. 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.

Figure 4: Reference to football team colours: «Neroverdi e basta» (Venice, Sant'Elena, 28 June 2023)

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-i-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

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[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.

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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

Letters and graffiti on a wooden window (June 28, 2023, Venice)

Letters in the door frame of a house entrance (June 28, 2023, Venice)

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?

Overpainted letters on a wall (June 28, 2023, Venice)

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.

Washing lines and post box indicating the presence of locals (June 28, 2023, Venice)

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.

An art studio, and signs in English indicate the presence of tourism (June 28, 2023, Venice)

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.

English poster that encourages recycling in a neighbourhood (June 28, 2023, Venice)

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.


#SOSVenezia sign (June 28, 2023, Venice)

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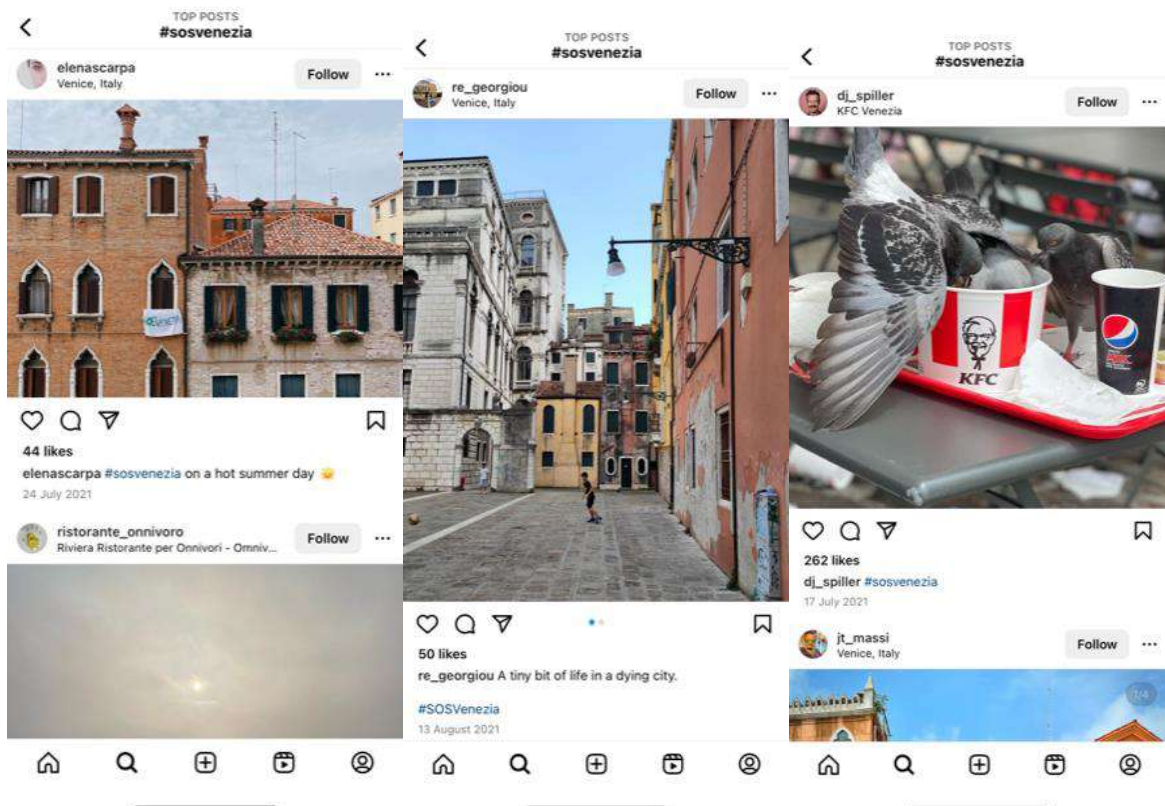
Screenshots of posts on Instagram that reference the #SOSVenezia movement (retrieved June 29, 2023)

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 activistic 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.'

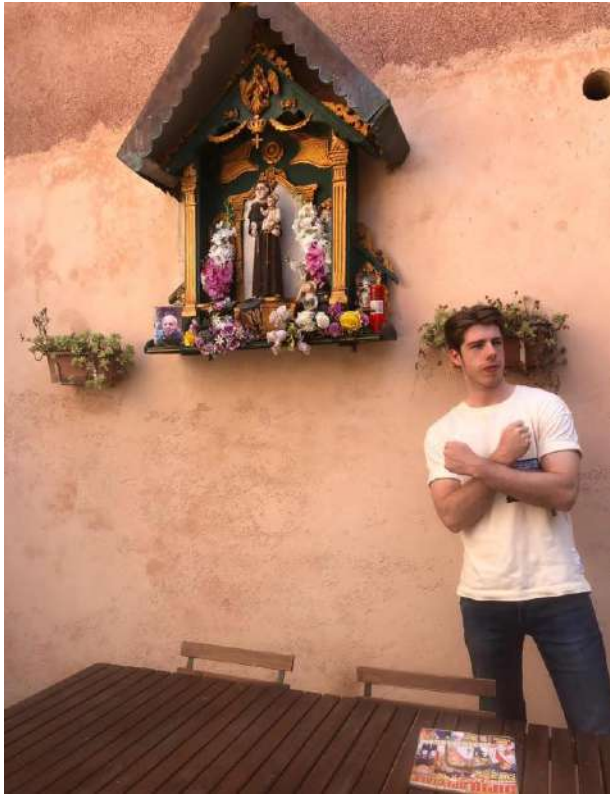# The Intersection of Religion and Popular Culture in the Urban Landscape

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.
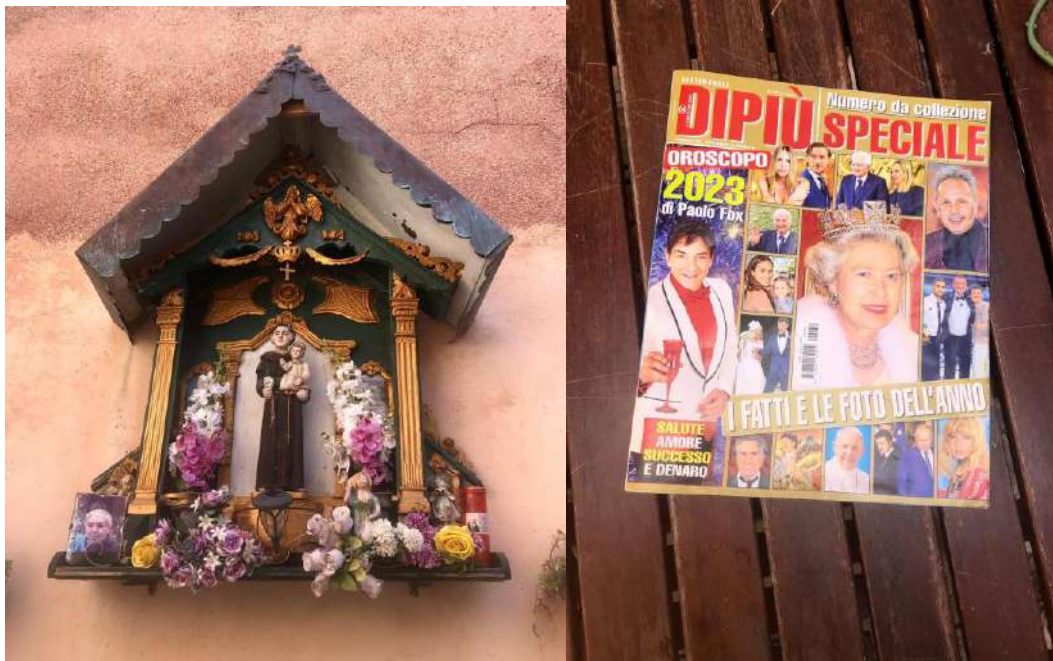
Figure 2. *Own close-up photographs of located street shrine and magazine.* Venice, July 2023.

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.

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

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.

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