

Introduction to the Conservation of Venice's Built Heritage

MIEKE VAN MOLLE

BACKGROUND

Venice has developed over the centuries into one of the most remarkable cultural patrimonies in the world due to a series of unique historical, geographical, social and political circumstances. The historic city of Venice, together with its Lagoon, has been inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1987 as an extraordinary architectural masterpiece. The big flood of 1966, which put in evidence the dramatic conservation problems of Venice's historic and artistic heritage, gave rise to a significant international campaign launched by UNESCO collecting and channeling contributions of many private organizations to restore and preserve the buildings of Venice and its art treasures in close collaboration with the local authorities. Over the past 40 years many research and conservation projects have been set up in Venice, functioning as a pilot laboratory for conservation practice, scientific research, experimentation and evaluation of stone conservation treatments.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND CONTENT

The course aims at providing participants with an understanding of the Built Heritage of Venice, its historical development, construction techniques and building materials and at gaining insight in the related conservation problems. Students are first introduced to the particular conservation problems of the city of Venice and its Lagoon environment. The course then addresses the historical growth and architectural development of Venice, its specific construction techniques and its great variety of stone materials, originating from all over the Mediterranean. It subsequently focuses on the conservation process, including the diagnostic survey, the different decay mechanisms and finally offering an overview of the conservation treatment.

The course includes a series of guided walking tours and diversified site visits which will illustrate and complement class lectures. In addition, participants will conduct a diagnostic field work on the façade of a historical building in Venice consisting in a visual condition survey for conservation of the façade where they will be requested to observe, discuss, describe and document the different constituent materials, their various forms of decay and the related distribution pattern, integrated with historical information on the monument.

REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to attend and actively participate in all course activities and to be flexible for possible required changes - especially related to site visits - in the scheduled program. Students should complete all assigned readings before the related class meetings so as to engage with the topic.

GRADING

Grading will include active class participation (25%), a written and documented research paper to be completed at mid-term (25%), as well as a documented end-term research (written paper 25% and oral presentation 25%). Detailed information will be given during the course. It is important that students bring their camera for documentation.