



Keynote: A City Built With Water: elemental co-creativity in the Venetian lagoon

Veronica Strang – Oxford University

This lecture presents some preliminary findings from a research project conducted at Ca' Foscari's New Institute (NICHE) in 2023, focused on Venice's social and material relationships with water. This research aims to challenge anthropocentric positionality in relation to the environment, and to explore non-human agency and the co-creative role that the sea and freshwater bodies, the surrounding lagoonscape, and their non-human communities, play in the lives of Venetian residents.

Drawing on a range of disciplinary perspectives, human-water relationships are considered systematically at different temporal and spatial scales. The research situates short-term events, such as floods and algal blooms, within the long-term historical developments that have led to the city's current hydro-dynamics. Spatially, the research examines the ways that water acts upon the city and its inhabitants, from microscopic chemical and biological interactions, to broader lagoon dynamics and the large-scale influence of climate change and rising sea levels. It considers how communities in Venice engage with water and its materialities at these different scales.

A further, complementary, aim of this work is to propose a methodical approach that demonstrates the advantages of interdisciplinarity in tackling the multiple spatial and temporal scales encompassed in human-environmental relationships. It suggests that collaborative interdisciplinary exchanges can provide essential 'cross-sectionality' in enabling scholars to locate specific research questions in a coherent explanatory context. Finally, it considers how this approach can be applied in policy and practice to support more sustainable relations with water.