CONSERVATION OF VENICE AND ITS BUILT HERITAGE
(Materials & techniques, decay and conservation)

Columbia Venice Summer Program 2020

INSTRUCTOR
Mieke Van Molle

COURSE SCHEDULE
Wednesday mornings and Fridays whole day
*lecture hours may to some extent vary related to site visits*

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 is since 1987 inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as an extraordinary architectural masterpiece, comprising diverse architectural styles and historical stratifications but preserving a coherent unit.

After the big flood of ‘66 which put in evidence the dramatic conservation problems of the city and its architectural and artistic heritage, Venice has acted as an international field laboratory for the conservation of historical monuments, which contributed to the development of modern conservation methodology as multidisciplinary activity. Since several years Venice has become also a global symbol of climate change risk, recently emphasized by the disastrous flooding of last November.

The fragile state of conservation of the historic City and its Lagoon, closely monitored by the UNESCO World Heritage Center, is now also threatened by excessive tourist pressure, extensive water traffic and large-scale infrastructure projects, whereby the site risks to be inscribed on the list of World Heritage in Danger.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND CONTENT
The course aims at raising awareness about the importance of conservation and maintenance by conveying methods & principles through the particular example of Venice, where many conservation problems are concentrated and intensified due to its location in an aggressive lagoon environment and the proximity of the large industrial area of Marghera. The safeguarding of Venice will also be seen under the perspective of the fragile modern urban community beyond the mere physical survival of the city.

The program is structured in a progressive learning process, providing participants with an understanding of the Built Heritage of Venice, its historical development, construction techniques and building materials, aimed 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 large variety of stone materials, originating from all over the Mediterranean. It subsequently focuses on the multidisciplinary conservation process, including the diagnostic survey, the different decay mechanisms and finally offering an overview of the conservation treatment.
The city of Venice gives plenty opportunity for practical learning, where class lectures are directly illustrated on site through walking tours, on-site observations, as well as visits to conservation projects and laboratories. The students will furthermore have the opportunity to conduct a diagnostic group research, consisting in a condition survey of a historical building, stimulating interrelated research of historical findings and on-site examination, thus putting in practice the diagnostic conservation methodology in a real context. Each student will also carry out a small research assignment in support of Save Venice’s efforts towards the preservation and restoration of the historic artistic heritage of Venice.

Course requirements and grading
Students are required to attend and actively participate in all course activities, which are key to the success of this course. Students should complete all assigned readings before class so as to engage with the topic & effectively contribute to class discussions. They are expected to draw also on the distributed source materials for their research papers and should satisfactorily complete all assignments.

Students should be flexible for possible required changes in the scheduled program, especially related to site visits. It is important to bring your camera for documentation as well as closed comfortable shoes with rubber soles (e.g. sneakers) for possible visits to ongoing conservation worksites.

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.

Academic Honesty
Please read and carefully review Columbia’s University’s Undergraduate Guide to Academic Integrity at www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity. Academic integrity is expected of all students and plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Offenses will result in a failing grade and will be referred to the Dean’s Office.

TENTATIVE CURRICULUM AND READINGS

Useful reference material:
- Overview of architectural history and styles with proper terminology:
- Glossary of architectural terms and Venetian words:
- Biographical notes on the architects of Venice:
- Short bibliography on Venetian architecture, outdoor sculpture and restorations
WEEK 1
Wednesday, June 10

Introduction to Conservation in Venice
Teaching method: PPT presentation
Readings:

Friday, June 12

Venetian Perspectives: Historical Development of Venice and its Architecture
Guest lecturer: Paola Modesti, Architectural Historian, Università degli Studi di Trieste & Venice International University
Teaching method: PPT presentation + walking tour
Readings:

WEEK 2
Wednesday, June 17

Characteristics of Venetian Construction Techniques
Teaching method: PPT presentation
Readings:

Friday, June 19

Conservation vs Restoration
Historical restoration interventions & current conservation and maintenance approach
Examples of St. Mark’s Basilica and the Doge’s Palace
Readings:
WEEK 3

Wednesday, June 24

Overview of Stone Deterioration Processes
Teaching method: PPT presentation
Readings:

Friday, June 26

The Stones of Venice and their Decay
Visit to the LAMA Laboratory for the Analysis of Ancient Materials, Università IUAV di Venezia
Visit to St. Mark’s Square and Basilica
Guest lecturer: Lorenzo Lazzarini, Petrographer, Università IUAV di Venezia
Teaching method: Lecture & visits
Readings:

WEEK 4

Wednesday, July 1

Visit to a conservation project/worksite - depending on availability and authorization
Related readings to be defined

Friday, July 3

The Diagnostic Process and Morphology of Stone Decay
Teaching method: PPT presentation
Readings:

Diagnostic Group Research on a historical building
Readings & documentation will be distributed during the course
WEEK 5

Wednesday, July 8

Overview of Stone Conservation Practice / Materials & Methods

Teaching method: PPT presentation

Readings:

Friday, July 10

Visit to a conservation project/worksite - depending on availability and authorization

Related readings to be defined

Diagnostic Group Research on a historical building

Readings & documentation will be distributed during the course

WEEK 6

Wednesday, July 15

Lecture to be defined

Friday, July 17

Participants’ Presentations on the findings of their Diagnostic Group Research

MvM, January 2020