The topic I have been asked to talk about this evening is that of Venice in the 21st Century: in order to do that, I felt it useful to look at what the place looks like today, before trying to see how it might - or indeed should - evolve in the future.

Venice today is a relatively small city; the total population of the Comune is around 270,000 (269,810 on 30-06-2012). The historical centre - the ‘Fish’ as it is known from its shape – has about 60,000 (58,606 on 30-06-12) inhabitants. The outer islands about 29,000 (29,513 on 30-06-2012). It’s an ageing population: the mean age is 44.5 years, above the nationwide median of 43.1. Then there are the non-resident Venetians, both Italian and foreign (many of you in this room probably belong to this group): some come occasionally and use their Venice dwellings as second homes, others live there permanently: between ten and fifteen thousand. Finally, there are the daily commuters and students, up to 62,000 people. All in all, about 160,000 people come to Venice in addition to the residents, more than doubling its permanent population.

That is before the numbers of tourists are factored in. In 2011 there were over 21 million visitors, of which more than nine million spent at least one night in the city. In peak periods the numbers exceed 50,000 per day; over 100,000 came to watch the series of the America Cup yacht races this Spring.
The exact numbers can of course be debated but they provide a valid benchmark. From which it appears that a **resident population of less than 100,000 is confronted by a much larger outside pressure**. What this means in terms not only of physical infrastructure, but of overall liveability, is there for all to see. The city bursts at the seams at one end, and lacks sadly in numbers at the other. The difference is in timing, function, and in long term vision versus short term gain.

It was not always like this. The population of Venice in the heyday of the Republic periodically approached 200,000, before plague struck enforcing an effective population control. During the Austrian occupation and all the way up until the sixties the population was a little under 150,000; the diaspora started in the years immediately following. Inadequate housing, the attraction of the mainland both in terms of job opportunities and of humidity free lodgings, a certain solipsistic attitude on the part of the Venetian elite to look with disdain at its problems, while living in the memory of faded grandeur, the relative lack of attention on the part of the central government (Venice has traditionally been left-leaning in politics, and this did not always go down well in Rome), all played a part in driving people towards the smaller villages and towns on the mainland. This in turn accelerated the departure of many economic activities, which followed their workers to cheaper and more efficient premises. The epitome of this was the move of Assicurazioni Generali the insurance company from Venice to suburban Mogliano: something which never should have happened. Assicurazioni Generali was an important part of the history of Venice and the symbol of an economic might which extended throughout Central and Eastern Europe; it should have been opposed first of all by the city itself and the passive attitude with which it was accepted should have been remedied by the Venetians themselves. But they were listless.

This decadence was compounded by other factors, quintessentially Venetian. The **Veneto region** had for a long time been **the little regarded periphery of Venice** and
its cities viewed as provincial outposts by the ‘Dominante’, the actual city of Venice. But things were changing; the Veneto region was fast changing from being the backwater that provided menial workers and domestic staff to the rest of the country, to becoming one of the most advanced industrial regions of Europe. The time had come for the former subjects to take their revenge. And they did; as Treviso, Verona, Padova flourished, Venice remained mired in its problems.

And then, there were the appalling living conditions endured for many years by a large part of the population in the historical centre. Forget the Palazzi and the Grand Canal; for those living in normal housing in Cannaregio, Castello and so on, conditions were not very different from a century or two ago. The flood brought this to the fore: one needs just to look at some of the photographs taken in 1966, to sympathize with those who wanted to move. They did so with broken hearts and hoping that someday they might come back. But they did not; on the contrary others followed them.

Can this be reversed, or should it?

If Venice is to remain a living city and not a playground catering to diverse and not always exalted tastes, then there is no doubt in my mind that no effort should be spared and, more than that, that the possibilities exist.

The example of ‘Colonial Williamsburg’ is a vivid reminder of what could easily happen. Some Venetians, those who already play a phony comedy for unsuspecting tourists (some of which are led to believe that the ultraneapolitan “o sole mio” sung by gondoliers lined up ten gondolas abreast, is a traditional Venetian melody) might even welcome it - but this would be a disaster not only for the city. We all owe it to ourselves to understand the true meaning of beauty and the necessity to place it in a context which enables it to be a continuing gift, and not an ossified structure.
Venice will always need its tourists – after all, taking advantage of foreigners has always been a constituent part of its weltanschaung – they represent an important source of income and will continue to do so. 74.2% of the city economic activities are in the services sector, and 45% are directly related to tourism. Tourism however should be seen as a resource and not become a stranglehold. The city must retain, and regain whenever possible, its functions as the hub, as well as the administrative capital, of one of the most prosperous regions in Europe; as the main focus of attraction for those countries of Central and South Eastern Europe which represented, historically, one of its areas of influence that the end of the Cold War has brought to the fore one more; as a university city and as a centre for advanced technology and research. All this will interact positively with the role it already plays, as one of the great world centres of art, artistic performance and research (not only the Biennale but also over 70 museums and galleries, both private and public) and a place to which anyone with even a passing attraction for beauty and civility is naturally attracted.

To achieve this, it has to be made liveable. Not just for tourists, but for ordinary people as well.

Many things have already been done. The special legislation enacted by the Italian government after the 1966 floods – the legge speciale - has changed the face of the city, most of the buildings have been restored and the memory of the conditions of housing at the time of the floods I mentioned earlier, has faded fast. It has become far more liveable in physical terms than was the case ever before. Housing has become once again of an acceptable standard, but it is no longer cheap.
The *acqua alta* is a growing problem – just last week high tides above 140 cm continued for more than two days, something that had not happened for quite some time and the upward trend is irresistible; in the period 1921-30 there were 2 *acqua alta* above 110cm, in 1951-60 there were 18, in 1971-80 there were 31, in 1991-2000 there were 45 and in 2001-10 they reached 64. The mobile locks – the MOSE – which should solve the problem once and for all are in the final stages of construction: the first barriers will start working in 2013 and the system will be in place by 2016, by which date it will provide protection from high tides up to 3 metres. I do not intend to go over the many debates and violent clashes that accompanied this project since its inception; I would risk boring you and I would be anyway in a conflict of interest, since I sit on the board of one of the companies involved in its construction. I will limit myself to saying that the question is no longer whether the MOSE should or should not be built, because it is there already. The total investment amounts to 5.5 billion euros entirely funded by the Italian government, and the work is 75% completed. It is a unique engineering marvel, part of a complex system which starts from the barriers themselves, but extends to the reconstruction of the *barene* and the rising of the *fondamenta*. By the time the barriers are functioning, the city will be protected from high tides above 130 cm. Some areas will remain unprotected; my own house will be among them, unfortunately, and so will Piazza San Marco which is under one metre above median sea level. The level of 130 cm has been decided in order to take into account both the need to protect the city, and to limit the time in which the barriers will be up so as to avoid damage to the traditional fishing activities and to shipping; it is a flexible system and the working characteristics could be adapted to changing conditions. But the city will be able to breathe. More than that, the MOSE will become one of the city’s tourist attractions, and a symbol of its ability to incorporate change while retaining its identity. The lagoon is almost entirely a man made creation, and the Serenissima constantly intervened in its ecosystem to safeguard Venice. The MOSE
has done the same thing and, for this century at least, Venice will be spared from an otherwise serious risk of devastation.

**We need more inhabitants….**

The continuing exodus of administrative offices to the mainland will have to be managed more effectively. Mestre and Venice have traditionally existed as separate entities, but the *future of Venice lies in greater integration with its ‘other half’* on the mainland, which is anyway inhabited mostly by former residents of the ‘Fish’. The tramway currently being completed will play an extremely important role in overcoming the physical separation, and will interconnect the two areas like never before. It will make it possible to work in Mestre and live in Venice and, conversely, will decrease the pressure for moving ever more activities onto the mainland. The *separation* of the two parts of Venice has for long been a trademark of debates about the city Venice and *I myself believed in it. I realize that I was wrong* and that integrating the two will not work to the detriment of Venice. Quite the contrary.

**Housing is plentiful, but expensive.** The liberalization of building regulations by one of the Mayors has brought about a surge in B&B accommodation, with property prices rising way above the reach of large sections of the Venetian population, and especially of the young and those on lower incomes. But the city remains heavily underpopulated and the problem is not in the quantity, but in the affordability of housing. The total stock of housing in the historical city is 49,905 units – out of 137,810 for the entire Comune - but only 28% of house purchases were for primary residential use in 2011.

**Venice in Peril broke important new ground** with its landmark ‘San Giobbe’ project at the Macelli some years ago, which proved that restoring houses in the city is not necessarily more expensive than building anew, *I hope it will continue to
advocate a policy along these lines, helping create a wave of public opinion that will convince the Comune to allocate a growing portion of its stock of 10,299 residential units to the active resident working population, at affordable prices. It does not do enough at the moment and it could do with some prodding from the outside. If from international public opinion, all the better.

The same applies to the student population. The two universities have a total student population of around 28,000, and a little more than 5,000 live in Venice on a regular basis, often at the mercy of greedy landlords. Plans have been made – and regularly shelved – to create campus-like facilities in the historical centre, and it is high time that they saw the light of day: just doubling the present resident student population within the ‘Fish’ would help change the face of the city, and bring more life into it. The B&Bs have encouraged more people to spend the night in town, but tourists are a passing presence and what is really needed is a vibrant resident community: students are ideal for this purpose. Also, the example of those foreign universities – Warwick being the most successful – that have established a presence in Venice should be further encouraged. At present, they tend to operate in a sort of vacuum in respect of the city, and this needs to be remedied. There should be a real interaction and we must not continue with the present situation in which institutions of an often high calibre exist in substantial isolation from each other, and from Venice, from which they absorb the physical beauty and give little in return, because little is asked of them. Some work has begun in this respect but a lot more needs to be done.

The diminishing population causes an even faster atrophying of the service sector; every day a grocery shop, a tailor, a bookshop risks closing down to make room for a shop selling Murano glass made in China or masks for a carnival which in the mind of some tourists is supposed to last for whole year. And to think that this was the most Venetian of festas, when scores were settled and social differences obliterated for a few weeks. But this is not necessarily irreversible.
We should aim at bringing back into the city a broader range of residents, both in professional-occupational and in economic terms. We should in particular attract one of the many international organizations operating in Europe to set up a branch in Venice: we have a few already, but they are of a size far below what is needed. A hundred to a hundred and fifty officials together with dependents and family, would create a mass of over one and a half thousand highly paid individuals: enough to restore demand and bring back many activities into the city. Why an international organization? Because such bodies are generally made of people who are not only high-income, but are culturally more aware and appreciative of the quality of life in a city like Venice, and less concerned by its shortcomings. Information about the real possibilities offered by Venice is often lacking, and here again international public opinion can play a crucial role in stimulating attention.

An international organization would encourage other forms of presence in the city, further underlying the role of Venice as a natural magnet of interest: it would help, in particular, to revitalize the plan to create a host of start-up industries in high technology; the ‘Vega’ project which started with great expectations but is still waiting for its magic moment. Such a movement would also help a growing number of former residents to return, attracted by the facilities newly available also to them, from schooling to leisure,

All these are areas where the international committees could play a very important role in supporting such a move, and helping mobilize international attention to the opportunities available.

I wish to restate a point, that many Venetians often tend to overlook. The city offers a high standard of living which is unparalleled; not just because of its beauty, the lack of automobile traffic, wealth of cultural artefacts, etc. This in itself is quite a lot, but to this one should add a first class transport infrastructure, both urban and
long distance (you can set your watch by the ‘vaporetti’ timetable), an intercontinental airport – the third largest in Italy with over 7.5 million passengers in 2011 – half an hour away; the railway station in town and the autostrade network the same. The city can be wired more easily than elsewhere since cables can be laid underwater without expensive excavations. Ample office space often – but not only – of a huge artistic and historic interest.

There is another development underway, that can greatly influence the future of Venice. The Monti government has decided to cut the number of Italian provinces from over ninety to fifty four, in order to give a much needed fillip to local governance and reduce red tape. Ten cities have been declared ‘metropolitan cities’ and been given the responsibilities and powers of the former provinces in which they are located. Venice is one of them: it will absorb the territory of the province of Venice and a debate is underway about extending the metropolitan city to the province of Padova and possibly of Treviso. Even in its present form, the metropolitan city of Venice will be around one million strong, but that is not in my mind the main point. Venice will once again become by definition the capital of a rich and vibrant region, and the functions connected to this role should be brought also physically back into the city. It is an exciting opportunity, and one which the city should absolutely not miss, because in it lie the seeds of a real renewal.

You might object, at this point, that I have not spoken much of conservation, of its fragile ecosystem, of the need to protect its heritage from further decay and massive exploitation, of the continuing debate between the imperatives of conservation and renewal.

I have decided not to do so, because you are all well aware of these problems – you would not be here otherwise – and because it is thanks to your collective action that it has been possible to undertake many projects. Apart from the significant number of
restorations directly funded by you, you have been and remain crucial in keeping the attention of the world public opinion focussed on Venice, in order to help her to steer clear as much as possible from excesses of all kinds. I have spoken of other things, which I believe to be crucial to the survival of the city as a living entity – a city which is of course also a monument, but is not and should not be only a monument – and the message I would like to try to convey is that the way to restore Venice, to keep it from sinking also metaphorically, is to do it while preserving its inhabitants as well; to help, in other words, to keep it going as a real living place, and offset the nihilistic tendency to let things decay beyond recuperation. It is often said – only half jokingly – that the main problem of Venice is with the Venetians: in their spleen they consume themselves in endless debate while casting a fleeting eye on the destruction surrounding them, in the belief that the rest of the world is actually gratified by the ‘gusto della ruina’ which they willingly offer. An exaggerated picture, of course, but I would really like to see a Committee like ViP say loud and clear that restoring churches and tabernacles is well and good, but fundamentally vain if there are no faithful to make use of those churches and tabernacles, and that both need to be kept alive.

ViP has broken important ground in this respect and I do hope it will continue to do so. Venice belongs to us all, but putting life back into it could prove too challenging a task for its inhabitants alone, without the pressure and support of international public opinion. We need your support, just as we needed it in 1966 when everything seemed doomed. It was not doomed then and it will not be now, if we confront the challenges together.

Having said this, you probably expected me to talk about some of the issues which have occupied the headlines over the last few months. From the hoardings on public buildings, to the large cruise ships coming through the Giudecca canal, to the ‘Ville
Lumiere’ sponsored by Pierre Cardin. I will say a few words now and will also gladly answer questions.

The hoardings are a very unpleasant necessity, but without them there would be no major restoration of monuments. In London you are able to turn Admiralty Arch into a hotel to raise money. In Italy the culture is different and selling heritage sites is not allowed, let alone popular. The recent economic crisis has brought about a major series of cuts in both our countries but in Italy – which has a larger share of the world heritage sites – they have been particularly painful. Restraint has to be used, but the need to find sufficient resources to conserve and restore is paramount, whether we like it or not. There are different alternatives that can be sought and we are all trying to do our best. Yelling abuse at the top of ones head does not help, however, and may in fact irritate to the point of being self defeating.

The big ships must be removed from the Giudecca canal. This I, and not only I, firmly believe. The evidence about the damage created is controversial, and the possibilities of a second accident like the one off the island of Giglio are remote. But this is no answer; the ships must go because they are incompatible with the fragile system of the city.

They must go but they cannot disappear, because they provide important job opportunities for a city and a territory starved of employment possibilities. Some figures may help in placing the issues in context:

The number of cruise passengers in 2011 was 1,786,416, from 654 ships. Up from a total of 337,475 passengers in 2000.

Employment derived from the cruise traffic, according to the Port Authority, is of 5,470 direct jobs with a total income of 148 million euros, with a further 1,600
employed in services to the ship and passengers, and 2,600 hundred in bunkering and similar. The quota of tourist income derived from the cruise ships is 363 million euros plus 1,270 jobs.

Cruise passengers spend an average of 107 euros per capita in Venice during their stay. Many spend the night in the city so their expenditure increases accordingly.

These figures have been hotly contested in Venice and some believe them to be at least partly unrealistic. The cost in terms of pollution, increased danger of damage to delicate structures and so on, is also not part of such calculations. They do point, however, to the fact that the cruises provide a not insignificant contribution to the city economy and guarantee a considerable number of jobs. The ships must go, but the needs of the population must be taken into account, both in terms of the quality of life and in terms of economic sustainability for what is, after, all an important lifeline for Venice. This being said, jobs can be saved, and maybe even increased, if the ships are moved elsewhere.

There are three alternatives being studied right now, all of which see the large ships (there are seven of them) coming into the lagoon not through the Lido entrance as is the case now, but through the Malamocco entrance to the south.

The more ambitious scheme calls for the creation of an offshore port a mile or so outside the Malamocco entrance. It would eliminate all heavy shipping traffic – both oil based, commercial and passenger – from the lagoon; goods and passengers would be ferried into town by smaller feeder boats. It is expensive and the funding is uncertain but, apart from this, the main issue is that it would necessarily be a long term project, and the ships need to be moved now.
The second alternative calls for **widening an existing canal – the canal of Contorta** – to allow ships to use the main Malamocco canal and then veer off to reach the port of Venice from behind, rather than sailing through the city. There are environmental issues connected to the digging of the canal, and some claim that this solution would create unmanageable pressure on the main Malamocco canal, which is used by freighters and tankers to reach the port of Marghera. This is the solution proffered by the port authority, because it would allow it to continue using the facilities of the Venice port terminal, which have recently been expanded and represent, according to the Port Authority, an investment of 400 million euros.

The third option calls for **all ships** to use only the Malamocco canal, and **moor at the Marghera port**. As a first step, the cruise ships would share the port with the freight traffic, but there is a plan to create a separate cruise ship harbour at the end of Marghera, where a derelict oil refinery is awaiting demolition. The overall investment would be in the region of 600 million euros. **The Marghera solution is to my mind by far the preferable one**, especially if the new port were to be built, and is **bitterly opposed by the port authority**.

Of the many objections made by Paolo Costa, the Chairman of the Venice Port Authority, the one concerning the extra costs related to the abandonment of the facilities at the Venice port terminal, I find the least convincing. The terminal is modern and the infrastructure is first class; it could be **easily turned into the Conference centre Venice sadly lacks**, which would allow it to manage more effectively the convention-based high end tourist flows that currently have difficulty finding adequate facilities in the city.

‘**Ville Lumiere’ is the dream of Pierre Cardin** who, having reached the age of ninety, wants to make a gift to his home region that will keep his memory alive. He is prepared to invest one billion euros in the project. For a city constantly hard up for
money, this is no mean sum to discard offhand. The project itself is not especially beautiful and could be changed in many respects. It may create problems for the airport, but this is in the process of being solved. The main issue to my mind is tied to the concrete plans for the area where Cardin’s dream might take shape. The Marghera area has been derelict for some time: the many plans to turn it once again into a logistical and industrial platform for the Italian north-east, with Venice and its port at its critical junction, have so far trailed unhappily in search of solutions and funding. ‘Ville Lumiere’ could – just could – provide a kick start to a sorely needed restructuring of the entire area, which would give Venice a renewed industrial dimension and place it at the centre of some of Europe’s busiest rail and road traffic corridors. If this were the case, ‘Ville Lumiere’ would indeed be a great idea; if not, the plan should be looked at more carefully. But don’t be fooled by some of the photos you have seen here and there in the press. At more than nine km distance it will not be a black blot on the Venice skyline.

Themes in conclusion
- A modern yet timeless city
- An administrative capital for a vibrant region and a world class hub for international activities
- The ability to set conservation in the context of modernity and adequate living conditions;
- Not an impossible job
- Don’t just observe from afar, be part of the local scene.