



UNESCO

Agenda Item:

**Protection of Venice against rising sea
levels**

BOARD MEMBERS

CEREN CINDIOĞLU GULSUM DARK

BATU GOZETEN

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

- 1. Letter From the Secretary General**
- 2. Letter From the Board Members**
- 3. Introduction to the Committee**
- 4. Introduction to the Agenda Item : Protection of Venice against rising sea levels**
 - 5. Historical background**
 - 5.1. Venice's geography & hydrology**
 - 5.2. Historical Background of Floods in Venice (1966 Flood)**
 - 5.3 Unesco's Previous Statements and Actions Regarding the Rising Sea Levels in Venice**
- 6. Future of Venice: Predicted Social, Cultural and Economic Impacts**
 - 6.1. Predicted Sea Level Rise and Flooding Scenarios**
 - 6.2. Population Displacement and Social Consequences**
 - 6.3. Cultural Heritage At Risk**
 - 6.4. Environmental and Economic Implications**
- 7. The MOSE Project**
 - 7.1. What is The MOSE Project?**
 - 7.2. UNESCO's Perspective on MOSE**
 - 7.3. Achievements and Successful Operations**
 - 7.4. Criticism and Limitations of MOSE**
- 8. Terminology**
- 9. Questions To Be Answered**
- 10. Further Reading**

1. Letter from the Secretary General

Dear Participants,

As the Secretary-General, it is a pleasure for me to welcome you all to the first official session of OFBALJMUN, on behalf of the whole academic and organization team.

OFBALJMUN'26 is organized to see future diplomats, decision makers, and students who are committed to defend what they believe in. In this conference, you will gain a solid understanding of the fundamentals of diplomacy while fostering a solution-oriented mindset.

Through engaging discussions, you will develop the skills needed to effectively tackle complex diplomatic challenges and generate innovative solutions.

All of the committees in our conference are selected considering the real-life topics that require urgent solutions. Each of them are going to be places where you can experience real-life diplomacy but, at the same time, also helping personal growth. Besides the academic experience, you will also have the chance to learn from your mistakes and make new memories, connections, and, most importantly, friendships that are hopefully going to last longer than the upcoming two days of diplomacy, debate, empathy and understanding.

We can not wait for you to join us on this journey, and inspire you to be the best version of yourself.

Sincerely,

Yusuf Altuğ Lokman

Secretary-General of OFBALJMUN'26

2. Letter from the Board Members

Dear Delegates,

We would very much like to welcome you all to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Committee, and we are especially excited to meet each and every one of you.

Our goal is to simulate a debate in the diplomatic atmosphere of the United Nations. Hence, we are expected to abide by the rules of procedure and diplomatic etiquette. It is advised for each delegate to comprehensively study the rules of procedure.

As the representatives of your nations at the UNESCO Committee, you are expected to study and understand the following sections of this guide and conduct further elaborate research on the position and interests that might be relevant to the nations you represent for engaging in an abundant debate.

We are thrilled to see your contributions and insights during the sessions and hope you enjoy this committee and conference.

Best Regards,
Ceren Cindioğlu
Gülsüm Dark
Batu Gözeten

3. Introduction to the Committee

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It aims to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture.

UNESCO's programmes support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.

UNESCO develops educational tools to help people live as global citizens free of hate and intolerance. UNESCO works so that each child and citizen has access to quality education. By promoting cultural heritage and the equal dignity of all cultures, UNESCO strengthens bonds among nations. UNESCO fosters scientific programmes and policies as platforms for development and cooperation. UNESCO stands up for freedom of expression, as a fundamental right and a key condition for democracy and development. Serving as a factory of ideas, UNESCO helps countries adopt international standards and manages programmes that create ideas and knowledge sharing.

4. Introduction to Agenda Item : Protection of Venice against rising sea levels

The protection of Venice against rising sea levels is an important issue connected to climate change. Venice is a famous city located in Italy, known for its history, culture, and unique structure as it is built on water. However this also makes the city very weak against environmental problems. One of the main causes of this issue is climate change. As the Earth

gets warmer, ice in places like the arctic melts, and sea levels rise. This creates serious problems for cities near the coast like Venice. Since Venice is very low, even just a small bit of increase in sea level can cause flooding.

In Venice, floods called acqua alta happen more often than before. These floods damage buildings, streets and important historical sites. Over time, this harms the city's cultural value. Another problem is that the ground under Venice is slowly sinking, which makes the flood even worse. This issue is important for UNESCO (The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural organization) because Venice is a World Heritage Site. This means that it is valuable not only for Italy, but for the whole world. Protecting Venice is important to make sure future generations can still learn from and experience its culture.

Lastly, this agenda item focuses on finding ways to protect Venice from rising sea levels while also dealing with the larger problem of climate change. It also shows how other cities around the world may face similar problems in the future.

5. Historical background

5.1. Venice's geography & hydrology

The UNESCO World Heritage property includes the city of Venice and its lagoon. It's in the Veneto Region of Northeast Italy. Venice was founded in the 5th century AD and spread over 118 small islands. In the middle of the lagoon, Venice became one of the most important capitals in the medieval world. The land changed and canals were made, such as the Giudecca Canal, St Mark's Canal and the Great Canal. There were also many small canals which are the main roads of a city on water.

5.2. Historical Background of Floods in Venice (1966 Flood)

In November 1966, Venice experienced one of the worst floods in its history. On 4 November, the water level reached 194 cm above sea level, which was the highest ever recorded. Almost 80% of the city was underwater, including many historic areas.

The flood happened because of strong winds, heavy rain, and a very high tide at the same time. Strong scirocco winds pushed seawater into the lagoon, while rivers around Venice also overflowed due to rain. This combination caused the water to rise very quickly.

The flood caused serious damage to historic buildings, churches, and artworks. Many important books and manuscripts in libraries were harmed by saltwater. Venice was not prepared for such a disaster, and warning systems at the time were not advanced enough.

After the flood, the international community helped Venice recover. The disaster showed how vulnerable the city is to flooding. It also led to new laws and long-term protection plans, including the MOSE barrier system, which was later built to protect Venice from future high water events.

5.3. Unesco's Previous Statements and Actions Regarding the Rising Sea

UNESCO has a long history of protecting Venice from the rising sea levels. After the major flood in 1966, they released an important report in 1969 to help to manage the city's safety. In May 2011, UNESCO organized a special workshop with international experts to study the effects of climate change. They found that sea levels would keep rising during this century and could harm the lagoon's ecosystem. At that time, they discussed the "MOSE" mobile gates, which were being built to stop floods but could also cause environmental risks if they were closed too often. UNESCO's main goal was to help local leaders create a sustainable plan for the future of this World Heritage site.

In July 2023, UNESCO's warnings became even more urgent. They recommended that Venice should be added to the "World Heritage in Danger" list. According to UNESCO, the city faces "irreversible damage" from rising sea levels caused by climate change and also from too many tourists. Although the MOSE gates have been used since 2020 to prevent floods, UNESCO experts believe that the current measures are still not enough to save the city. They are calling for the Italian government to take more serious steps to protect Venice's history and environment before it is too late.

6. Future of Venice: Predicted Social, Cultural and Economic Impacts

The future of Venice is not very clear because of the effects of overtourism. If this continues, the city may face serious social, cultural and economic problems.

The future of Venice is uncertain because there are too many tourists. Most of the local people are leaving the city because most houses are used for tourists and living is too expensive. Soon, Venice might be a city of tourists, with few locals. Traditions and jobs are disappearing. Venice is changing to suit tourists. If nothing is done, Venice might become a "tourism city," a city for tourists only.

6.1. Predicted Sea Level Rise and Flooding Scenarios

Venice is in danger because the sea level is slowly rising. This means that land is also sinking and floods can happen more often and stronger than before. Scientists believe that by the year 2150, big parts of Venice could be underwater if the sea level continues to rise. These floods can damage houses, streets, and historical buildings, and make daily life difficult for people. They can also affect tourism and the local economy. Because of this, it is very important for people to plan ahead and find ways to protect the city from future flooding. They can also stop transportation and daily activities, so people may have trouble going to work or school. Shops and businesses may close during floods, and this can cause money loss. Over time, frequent

flooding can damage buildings and make repair costs higher. It can also be dangerous for people living in the city. If this problem continues, more people may leave Venice, and the city can lose both its people and its economy.

6.2. Population Displacement and Social Consequences

In Venice, many people are leaving the city because of high living costs, too much tourism, and frequent flooding. It is becoming harder for local people to find affordable homes and live a normal life. Many houses are used for tourists instead of local families, which makes the problem worse. Because of this, the population of Venice is slowly decreasing every year.

When people leave, communities become weaker and social life is affected. People know each other less, and traditional community life starts to disappear. Schools, small shops, and local services may close because there are fewer people living in the city. This makes daily life even more difficult for the remaining residents.

Another problem is that the population is getting older, as many young people move to other cities for better opportunities. This creates an imbalance in society and reduces the city's energy and development. If this situation continues, Venice may lose its local identity and become a place mostly filled with tourists instead of a real, living community.

6.3. Cultural Heritage At Risk

Venice's cultural heritage is in danger because of overtourism and environmental problems. The city is famous for its history and architecture. But these are slowly being affected by too many visitors and changing conditions.

One major problem is the damage to historical buildings. Millions of tourists walk through the city every year, which causes physical wear on streets, bridges, and famous places like St. Mark's Basilica and Doge's Palace.

Another important issue is the loss of traditional culture. Venice is known for crafts like Murano glass and handmade masks, but these are slowly disappearing. For example, the island of Murano is famous for glass-making, yet many workshops are closing because of high costs and lower local demand. Similarly, traditional Venetian masks, once made by local artisans, are now often replaced by cheap, mass-produced souvenirs.

If these problems continue, Venice may lose its unique cultural identity. Instead of being a living cultural city, it could become a place where culture is only shown to tourists, not truly lived by its people.

6.4. Environmental and Economic Implications

Venice has many problems with the environment and the economy because of tourism and climate change. The city has many canals, and boats and cruise ships make the water dirty.

This pollution can hurt fish, birds, and other animals that live in the lagoon. Floods also damage streets, houses, and old buildings. Repairing them costs a lot of money, and sometimes parts of the city have to be closed for safety.

Venice depends a lot on tourism. Tourists bring money, but many jobs only last a short time and pay low salaries. Local people do not always benefit from tourism. Traditional jobs like fishing, glass-making, and crafts are getting weaker because they cost too much and fewer people work in these trades. Big cruise ships can also cause waves that damage buildings and canals. If these problems continue, Venice could face serious environmental damage

and money problems at the same time. People need to find ways to protect the city and support local jobs and traditions.

7. The MOSE Project

7.1. What is the MOSE Project?

The MOSE Project is a large engineering project system built to protect Venice from flooding caused by rising sea levels. It was developed by the Italian government as a response to the increasing number of floods in the city. The name ‘‘MOSE’’ stands for Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico (Experimental Electromechanical Module).

The main goal of the MOSE Project is to reduce the impact of acqua alta (seasonal floods) and protect Venice’s buildings, people and cultural heritage. It is especially important because flooding has become more frequent due to climate change and rising sea levels in recent years. By blocking the water during high tides, the system helps reduce damage to buildings and important cultural sites. In general, The MOSE Project is an important step in protecting Venice, but it is not a complete solution to the problem of rising sea levels.

7.2. UNESCO’s Perspective on MOSE

UNESCO recognizes the importance of protecting Venice from flooding, especially because it’s a World Heritage Site. UNESCO supports efforts to reduce the damage caused by rising sea levels and frequent floods. However, it also believes that solutions like the MOSE Project should be carefully managed. UNESCO has expressed concern that large engineering projects may have negative effects on the natural environment of the Venetian Lagoon. For example, changing the natural flow of the water could harm the ecosystem and affect marine life.

Because of this, UNESCO emphasizes the importance of balancing protection with environmental sustainability.

In addition, UNESCO has warned that Venice still faces serious risks despite the MOSE system. The organization has suggested that more long-term and sustainable solutions are needed, especially as climate change continues to raise sea levels. UNESCO has also

considered placing Venice on the ‘‘World Heritage in Danger’’ list due to ongoing threats such as tourism, environmental damage and climate change. This shows that while MOSE is an important project, it is not enough on its own.

Overall, UNESCO supports protecting Venice but stresses that solutions should not only focus on short-term protection. Instead, they should protect the environment and ensure the long-term protection of the city.

7.3. Achievements and Successful Operations

The MOSE project has already shown some important results in protecting Venice from high tides and flooding. One of the biggest achievements was its first full activation in October 2020, when the system successfully blocked a high tide and prevented major flooding in the city. This was an important moment because it was the first time the barriers were used in a real emergency situation, not just as a test. Since then, MOSE has been activated several times during high water events, helping reduce damage in Venice’s most vulnerable areas.

Another success of the system is that it has protected key parts of the city, including areas like St. Mark’s Square, which is often heavily affected during aqua alta. In several cases, when the barriers were raised, water levels inside the lagoon stayed much lower than outside, showing that the system can effectively reduce flooding risk.

The project has also helped Venice deal with more frequent extreme weather events caused by climate change. In recent years, floods that would normally have caused serious damage have been reduced or completely prevented when MOSE was activated in time. This has given the city more protection during dangerous storm conditions. Although the system is still being improved and is not a complete long-term solution, MOSE has already proven that it can work in real situations and reduce flood damage in Venice.

7.4. Criticism and Limitations of MOSE

Even though the MOSE Project has helped protect Venice from flooding, it also has several criticisms and limitations. One of the main problems is the high cost of the project. MOSE has cost billions of euros, and there are concerns about long-term maintenance costs as well. Some experts argue that this money could also have been used for other climate adaptation solutions in Venice. Another limitation is that MOSE is not a permanent solution. The barriers only work during specific high tide events, and if sea levels continue to rise, the system may need to be used more often. This could create technical and operational challenges in the future. There have also been concerns about environmental impacts. Some scientists worry that repeatedly closing the lagoon could affect water circulation, sediment movement and marine ecosystems. This could harm the natural balance of the Venetian Lagoon over time.

Additionally, delays and corruption scandals during the construction phase have raised questions about project management and efficiency. These issues have affected public trust in the project.

8. Terminology

Heritage: Historical sites, traditions, and culture that holds great importance to a country and must be protected for the future.

Rising Sea Levels: The increase in the ocean's height caused by climate change and melting ice, which threatens coastal cities.

Regional: Relating to a specific part of the world or a group of nearby countries (for example, the Mediterranean region).

Lagoon: A shallow area of salt water separated from the deep sea by a piece of land or a barrier.

Carbon Footprint: The total amount of pollution (CO₂) produced by human activities, such as traveling by plane or using electricity.

Sinking: The process of land or buildings slowly going lower into the ground or water over time.

Gate: A strong, movable structure used to block or control the flow of water to prevent flooding in the city.

Overtourism: When a place has too many visitors, which causes problems for the environment and the people living there.

Canals: Narrow waterways built for boats to travel through a city, serving as "water roads."

Locals: The citizens who live and work in a place permanently, rather than just visiting for a holiday.

Flooding: When a large amount of water covers an area that is usually dry, often causing damage to buildings, streets, and historical sites.

Acqua Alta (High Tide): The Italian term for the regular high tides in Venice that cause temporary flooding in the lowest parts of the city.

Preservation: The act of keeping something in its original state and protecting it from being destroyed or changed.

9. Questions To Be Answered

- Can the tourism restrictions implemented in Venice (such as entry fees and visitor caps) serve as a global model for protecting other endangered UNESCO World Heritage sites?
- How would the potential closure or limited accessibility of Venice due to rising sea levels impact the regional and global tourism economy?
- How should member states balance the use of heavy engineering solutions (like the MOSE barrier) with the need to protect the natural lagoon ecosystem?
- Should the financial burden of protecting "Universal Value" sites like Venice fall solely on Italy or is there a need for a permanent global heritage fund?
- How should the threats facing Venice influence the long-term tourism and preservation strategies of other coastal heritage sites, such as Alexandria or Amsterdam?
- What digital or physical methods can be used to educate international tourists about the environmental sensitivity of the heritage sites they visit?
- In what ways can UNESCO encourage "low-carbon footprint" tourism in coastal cities that are highly vulnerable to climate change?

10. Further Reading

- https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/organisation/unesco-united-nations-educational-scientific-cultural-organization_en#:~:text=12%20Apr%202024-,UNESCO%20%2D%20United%20Nations%20Educational%2C%20Scientific%20and%20Cultural%20Organization,Education%2C%20the%20Sciences%20and%20Culture
- <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/394>

- <https://www.ecowatch.com/venice-unesco-endangered.html><https://www.venicetraveltips.com/overtourism-impacts-venice>
- <https://www.sustainabletourismalliance.net/impacts/positive-and-negative-impacts-of-tourism-in-venice-managing-overtourism>
- <https://www.comune.venezia.it/>
- <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/24/6937>
- <https://www.travelandculturesalon.com/blog/venice-fight-against-over-tourism>
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66362971.amp>
- https://gropedia.com/page/1966_venice_flood
- <https://science.nasa.gov/earth/earth-observatory/parting-the-sea-to-save-venice-83394/>
- <https://www.veniceinsiderguide.com/mose-venice/>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MOSE?>
- <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2611/>

- <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1824/>
- <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2020/10/mose-flood-barrier-defence-venice-italy-climate-change/>
- <https://science.nasa.gov/earth/earth-observatory/venice-holds-back-the-adriatic-sea-149151/>
- <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2020/10/mose-flood-barrier-defence-venice-italy-climate-change/>