

An Aqua-Emerald Archipelago Park for Venice

Farrow Partners Architects (2020). Venice: The Death and Life of the Great Italian City, A Way Forward.

By Tim Beatley

Venice, Italy, is a city in the midst of considerable turmoil and change. Sea level rise and a growing risk of flooding, alongside a continual decline in its permanent population and an onslaught of daily tourists (more than 20 million now a year), bode ill for this ancient city of the sea. Still it remains a beautiful and profoundly natureful city, one that has the potential to help us model and visualize how the future could be (car-free while water and nature-dependent). Visionary Toronto architect Tye Farrow, along with other colleagues, has recently laid out a bold idea for its future that aims to address these challenges. Envisioned is a 32-kilometer long “aqua-emerald archipelago park” that would encircle the city; a linear string of parks, some existing and some to be constructed.

In a provocative report (and plan), *Venice: the Death and Life of the Great Italian City, A Way Forward*, Farrow lays out this transformative vision of a “de-central” park that would serve the multiple functions of flood control, recreation, food production, and new connections to nature. Its role as a storm barrier contrasts importantly with the multibillion dollar, and only recently functional, MOSES flood gates, that is described

in the report as a “single use infrastructure solution” (Farrow 2020 at 28). What is imagined here is “[a] set of islands with distinct, diverse, and memorable characteristics and experiences that celebrate nature, growing, change of seasons and the growing and harvesting of food in the form of an ‘edible park’” (Farrow 2020 at 48). The linear park is designed to be “porous,” allowing movement in and out by boats and pedestrian bridges that connect the islands, which serve as a barrier for storms (lowering the water levels by an estimated meter and a half!) but also guarding against the wake of cruise ships. A process of island building is illustrated in the report, utilizing hollow dredge-filled honeycomb structures with locks installed between them.

Farrow divides the park into four segments, each defined by the qualities of a season of the year. The southern segment, for instance, “takes on the characteristics of summer,” and imagines a park that includes “boardwalks, filtered swimming pools, fishing areas, lagoon promenade, boating, water bike and canoe rental areas, winter skating park [the summer segment of the park is still to be used and enjoyed in winter!], coves for water concerts and movies” (Farrow 2020 at 80).

Expansive “agri-pavillions” are imagined in each segment, with illustrative and beautiful renderings showing what might be possible; essentially serving as glasshouses for food production and for aquaculture.

The result is a vision of a circular waterfront park that is “biophilic and hortaphilic” and also lays a foundation for a future economy for the city, as well as perhaps a venue to which to steer and siphon some of the place-damaging tourism taking place in the historic core.

The benefits and rationale for such a bold project are clearly stated in this report as well as a sense of where and how this project would unfold. It is an idea at this point, not a plan, though a well-developed one, and one worthy of serious discussion.

Images from Farrow
Above: City with Proposed Park
Below (Clockwise): Spring, Summer,
Autumn and Winter Archipelago

