

ISTITUTO VENETO
DI SCIENZE, LETTERE
ED ARTI

CORILA

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND SAFEGUARDING OF VENICE

Corila Research
Program 2001 results



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Edit by
PIERPAOLO CAMPOSTRINI

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AMBITIOUS GOALS

PIERPAOLO CAMPOSTRINI
director of CORILA

I am particularly glad and honoured to introduce this volume, in which the efforts of the first year of CORILA's Research Programme are presented. The volume collects the memories presented in the First Annual Meeting of the CORILA's Research Programme, held in Venice, Isola di San Servolo, in the premises of the VIU-Venice International University, on 4-5 April 2002.

The aim of CORILA's Research Programme 2000-2004, made of four Areas (Economics, Architecture and Cultural Heritage, Environmental Processes, Data Management and Distribution) and ten Research Lines, is distinctly ambitious for several reasons, which will be outlined below.

First of all, Venice: the destiny of this unique city has always received so much attention, especially after the large floods which occurred in 1966, given the enormous damage to humanity of its possible and definitive loss. The Italian Government, national and international organizations, both public and private, have raised and spent a huge amount of money on "saving" the cultural heritage of Venice. Many scientific and technical institutions have contributed to the production of millions of pages of reports, studies and plans.

In this framework, can it be possible to discover and describe something really new and significant, as any scientific project aims to do? Moreover, will research results ever be considered useful by the Public Administrations entrusted with management of the lagoon and the city itself?

Secondly, the breadth of the Program is noteworthy. From Architecture to Economics, encompassing Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Engineering and much more. Which path could link such a heterogeneous group of disciplines and what kind of inter-disciplinary integration between them is really achievable?

Thirdly, the Program organization is characterised by complexity. The Call for Proposals leads to the selection of the best research projects. Today, the Program involves 70 different institutions, of which 18 from abroad, and over 300 researchers. Twenty-seven contract letters have been signed; every semester, the individual research groups submit administrative and scientific reports and receive the expense reimbursements. CORILA's core staff is in close contact with researcher groups to monitor and assist in achieving project goals. Will inevitable management issues overcome scientific quality? Will scientific results be deemed worth the money spent?

Last, but not least: in the light of recent history, the fragmented Italian scientific panorama, is it really possible to co-ordinate the number of research institutions participating, especially with regard to this delicate theme?

I cannot claim that this volume contains definitive answers to all of these questions, however its publication does represent a substantial step in the right direction. Despite all the difficulties, the more than 700 pages of this book are testimony to the enormous effort expended by our scientific community and are making us optimistic about the complete fulfilment of the goals.

The Call for Proposals issued in 2000 contained very specific questions to be addressed by the researches. They were important and difficult, being the distillation of discussions and interaction with national and local Public Administrations: the complexity of the issues at stake calls for further understanding, deeper knowledge and greater evidence, which gives rise to other questions, in an endless spiral.

However, environmental management issues cannot wait for complete elucidation of all Nature's secrets, and this is especially true in the case of the Lagoon of Venice: the very existence and state of the Venice lagoon is due more to human interventions during the past centuries, when scientific knowledge and monitoring capabilities were far more limited than at present. Current knowledge, in most cases, is sufficient to be able to decide appropriate management actions, but their effects must be monitored, in order to be able to make adjustments over time. Furthermore, there is now greater awareness that any single intervention should be considered in an integrated framework and that only a systemic approach is able to evaluate the correctness of actions on and in the environment.

We believe that the scientific community can play an essential role in the Venice Safeguarding, not only for its unique capability of answering to some particular issues, but also for the wider vision which is able to consider, developing sustainable, knowledge-based scenarios for the future.

CORILA's project is making a difference respect to previous research experiences, supporting a real co-ordination of the different research lines. The CORILA's Scientific Committee is performing a careful itinere evaluation of the research results and the CORILA's staff is working day-by-day jointly with the research groups, asking the researchers for adapting their usual way of working and sometimes also their language: they are experimenting more integration, more data sharing, more open discussions. Of course, the co-operation of any single researcher is essential and valuable. In fact, this way is more demanding, but it will produce, in medium terms, more satisfaction and superior scientific results.

CORILA's research is specifically geared to better understand the functioning of the lagoon's systems, natural and man-made, both ecologically and in a socio-economic context, linking different disciplines and filling in the gaps in the existing knowledge, at least as regards the Administrations' most urgent needs.

The complete picture will appear at the end of the Research Project, in early 2004. What are presented here are preliminary results, in some cases waiting for corroboration or further elaborations. We have considered it important, however, to offer this publication to a wider scientific community, despite the provisional nature of some of the articles, in order to stimulate discussion, comments and suggestions, which might be useful to consider in the last part of the program.

More and updated information on the CORILA research activities can be browsed on the web site www.corila.it.

I must sincerely thank all the researchers, staff at CORILA and other collaborators involved in the work outlined in this publication, and especially the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Arti e Lettere for their assistance in producing the volume and Dr. Cristina Zago for her tireless efforts in editing it.