

# Difendiamo il battello dei sogni (english version)

For the past fifteen years, the grandfather of all Vaporettos has been moored between fishing boats in Rio Palada. The Vaporetto ACTV, dated 1935, was one of the first ten Vaporettos constructed and is remarkably similar to those currently in service on the Grand Canal some seventy-five years later. For many years, the boat has been inhabited by a family of Danes who found it abandoned along the River Po in a state of disrepair. The family purchased the boat from its previous owner, then set about restoring it to make it livable. They succeeded. Michael Kiersgaard, the Danish carpenter who skillfully renovated the boat has given new life to an icon of Venice's cultural and historical heritage just as he has returned it home.

## European Tradition

Throughout the rivers of France, Denmark, Holland, Germany, and England, you will find retrofitted boats serving as homes, restaurants, museums, printers, even offices. In each case, these boats have been regulated: they are assigned specific numbers, their measurements are carefully monitored, all excesses are restricted. This is as it should be. Twenty years ago, Michael and his wife Anna respectfully requested permission for the building permits required for the renovation of their Vaporetto. They requested an allocation of a body of water for mooring (granted year to year), connections to electricity and water (granted), and a serial number from the proper authorities (given): they have been dutifully law-abiding at every turn. Nevertheless, the regulatory gaps allowing for the Kiersgaard's unusual home in Venice have resulted in a legal flood. Recently, and after all this time, the Kiersgaards find themselves targeted with building violations; which is strange given that the Vaporetto, though a dwelling, is a boat, not a building. Furthermore, this is a unique boat on which most of us have probably spent a bit of time at some point during its fifty years of honorable service. It seems to us that this historical artifact should not be judged by the same criteria that governs the construction of the latest grocery store in Maghera. The subsequent 'building demolition request' is even less appropriate.

## Our Hope

We hope that the Commune might change its perspective once again to uphold tradition: to repeal the building violations, retract the demolition order and recognize the right-of-abode in the manner to which this family has already been accustomed. It is sensible to regulate the waterways and buildings and to restrict excess; but in the process should we destroy an icon of our cultural heritage and simultaneously prevent a lifestyle rich in tradition and recognized worldwide?

Michael and Anna's historic Vaporetto is now an inseparable part of the landscape of Giudecca and should be protected like any other confirmed significant historical and cultural



landmark. In fact, the boat is not a landmark, but a watermark, verifying its own authenticity.

Venice is faced with so many architecturally questionable innovations that challenge the viability of its future; perhaps we can take a lesson from Mike and Anna and their beautiful old Vaporetto as a nod to one solution - the vibrancy of Venice's current heterogeneity to strengthen the viability of its communities. This boat and the people who restored it, live on it, and love it, act as a template for cultural diversity as cultural enrichment and, still, they manage to pay an homage to Venetian tradition.

We wish to defend this dream: the dream of a different life - a life less commodified, a life lived on the water, which is a model for and a prelude to the relational dynamics we must forge to make our lives in Venice more interesting, more horizontal - in short, more worth living. When we Venetians witness Kiersgaard's life on their boat, we are constantly reminded of the real relationship between our city and its water - which is, even with our challenges, luckily still light-years away from the dull suburbias encountered everywhere else that seem to lay to rest the human imagination.

We invite the mayor, the technicians of the municipality, the civil lawyers, to head to Palada one of these fine spring days at six in the evening in order to observe the true value of this artful boat - alive and brought to life within the city that surrounds and completes its presence.

We are convinced that any solution involving the removal of the vessel would be disheartening, not only to its current occupants, but to the citizenry which is currently in steadfast opposition to any such measures.

If you are a friend of this vessel of dreams, please join us in sending an email with your name, last name and two lines of text (which will remain in logbook of the vessel) to: [sepoina@gmail.com](mailto:sepoina@gmail.com)

Gli amici del battello dei sogni.  
(translated by: Tianna Kennedy)