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Review: The Venice Arsenal, Between History, Heritage and Re-Use
Edited by: Luca Zan
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To be released in 2023, *The Venice Arsenal* is a series of essays, interwoven by Luca Zan with his own work, representing a comprehensive overview of the many uses of the Venice arsenal complex over the centuries. The collected works share equal appeal both for those knowledgeable about the intricacies of Venetian land and water rights surrounding the former ship building complex and for those who simply wish to learn more about a limited access area just outside the tourist districts of Venice. Zan's own writings serve to frame the works of nine additional authors who lend their expertise to the never-ending discussion of what to do with this segment of land and sea.

This book focuses on several major themes: illuminating the rich history of the Arsenal, revealing the indelible contributions by the leadership and management of this industrial complex prior to what is known today as organizational theory, untangling the past century (or more) of disputes surrounding future use plans for the complex and capturing the cultural value of this hallowed ground for public access and edification. While Zan does his best to simplify the politics created by many governmental and civic bodies with a stake in potential outcomes, at times this book is confusing. Luckily the element of storytelling embedded within the historical nature of several essays (Chapters 2, 6,

& 12) leaves the reader wanting to persevere to glean indications of how the complex may be repurposed for future generations.

The Arsenal complex, an industrial heritage location, that shares a brotherhood with other medieval (or even premedieval) industrial heritage sites focused on ship building within Europe, is ripe for preservation- all authors agree. Unique in the fact that over the centuries it has enjoyed almost constant occupation (even if not for the purposes of ship building) and therefore has been spared the worst of possible decay, its future is now in peril due to the unending indecision and paralysis created by future use planning. While several essays valiantly try to lay bare the complications (Chapters 4, 8, 9 & 11), often their work is muddled by a constant stream of acronyms, stakeholder names, detailed reports and references to many previous plans. Even though Zan supplies the reader with an index and detailed notes, admittedly it is a tough slog at times, but the reader is able to keep focused on the dire need to move forward with this project to protect the complex for future generations.

While the politics, the unending sea of acronyms, the intrigue surrounding museum plans (that mystifyingly appear and disappear over the course of a decade) are interesting, two of the themes explored in the book are unusual and worthy of attention: understanding the Arsenal as an industrial heritage site and as an overlooked contributor to the foundations of the field currently known as organizational theory. While each essay touches on one or both of these themes, it is Zan's work that teases out these two ideas and makes them palatable for the reader.

While European readers may be more familiar with the concept of industrial heritage sites, American readers most likely are not. More typically, American readers are apt to contextualize their historical industrial locations as museums unto themselves and often not a part of a larger human heritage. By framing the Arsenal complex as an industrial heritage site that links to other ship building facilities around the globe, Zan is able to help some American readers understand the magnitude of the contributions of this complex. Without this understanding, the typical US reader will simply categorize the Arsenal complex as the location for the music, art and film festivals that have entertained them as part of the Venice Biennale festival.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, Zan explores the contributions of the Arsenal complex within the confines of organizational theory. While he does not term this examination as such, he postulates that the leadership and management needed to create, build and sustain such a site over many centuries must be captured for historical study (and recognition) within the domain of organizational studies. Zan implores the reader to recognize the intangible contributions of those who lead legions of men to build ships, and indeed, this entire complex. Zan examines the leadership and management of the Arsenal as an integral part of its industrial heritage. To frame the Arsenal within this context is powerful and unusual both within the field of advocacy for cultural heritage use sites and within the field of organizational theory.

However, Zan's exploration of the Arsenal as a historical organizational contributor falls a bit short of strong advocacy for his position. Zan brings the

reader's attention to the contributions of those who lead and managed the site over centuries, but he stops short of analyzing the dysfunctional organizational politics around the last century and current discussions. To frame the earlier contributions of the Arsenal as foundational to the field of organizational theory is bold, but to ignore the present dissent and dysfunction is disappointing. Zan hints at this irony (and total lack of current organizational leadership) in the Epilogue in his closing words.

This book marries several fields of study- preservation of historical industrial heritage sites, cultural policy and organizational theory and history. Using the Venice Arsenal as a backdrop for this discussion, this collection of essays contextualizes the struggle that every reader can understand on a personal scale: *How do we honor the past and provide for the future?* By examining the long traditions and the quagmire supporting current and future use debates, this book gives multiple entry points into the discussion. And best of all- the reader leaves the book invested in the outcome of future planning for the Venice Arsenal complex.

Background Statement:

Dr. Jennifer Green-Flint practices organizational change, systems thinking and strategic planning facilitation in the both the for-profit and not-for-profit arenas. Her doctorate in Organizational Leadership supports her diverse interests. As a former ballerina turned higher education arts administrator and consultant, Jennifer now works with organizations in transition. She conducts organizational diagnostics, financial and governance reviews, board and staff development and executive leadership coaching for organizations who are experiencing leadership, financial, governance and/or mission transitions. Currently Dr. Green-Flint serves at Shenandoah University as Assistant Dean for Administration at Shenandoah Conservatory among other roles within the University community.