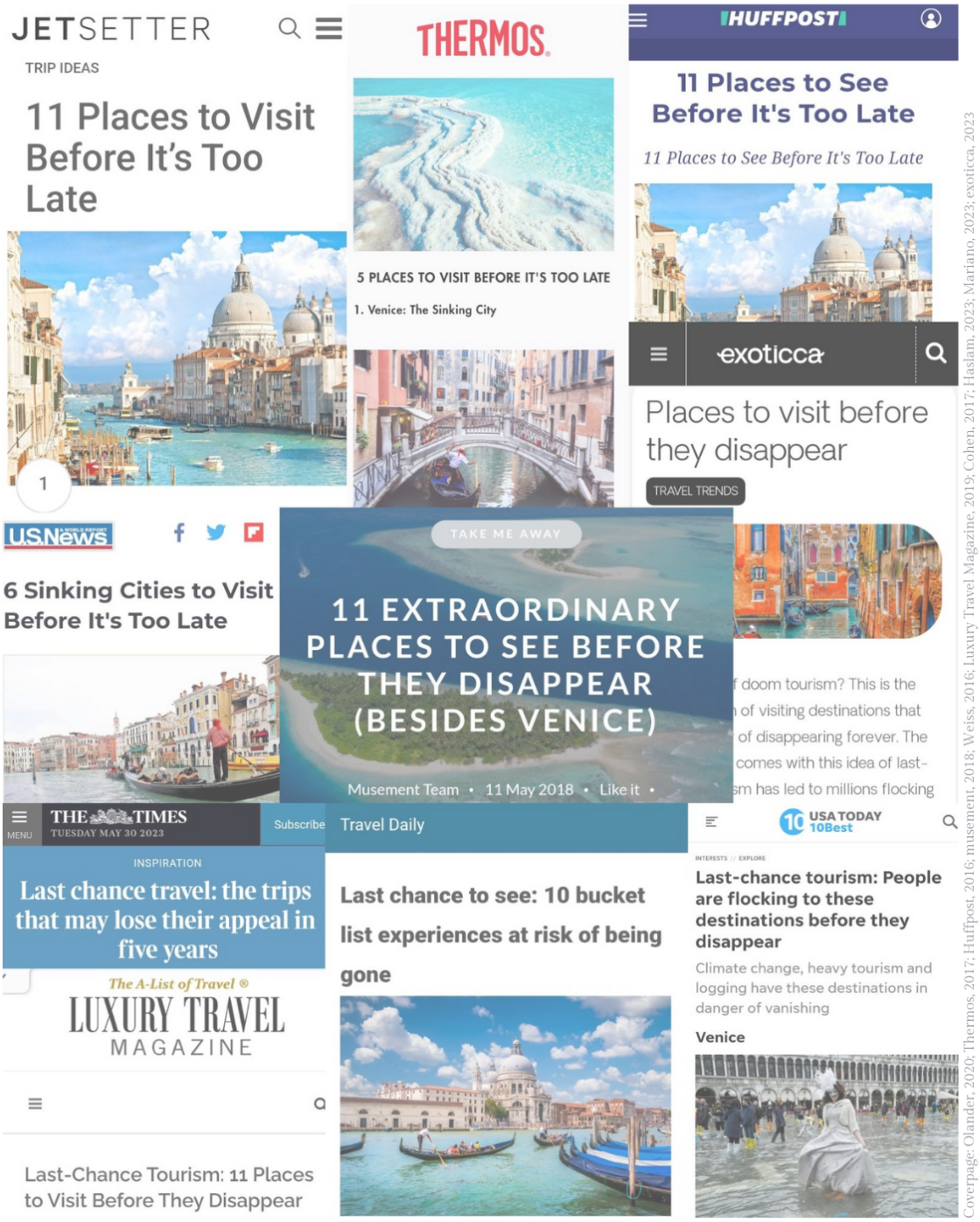
LAST CHANCE TO WHAT?

Exploring Local Perceptions of Last-Chance Tourism



Coverpage: Olander, 2020; Thermos, 2017; Huffpost, 2016; musement, 2018; Weiss, 2016; Luxury Travel Magazine, 2019; Cohen, 2017; Haslam, 2023; Mariano, 2023; exoticca, 2023

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Abstract

This thesis explores the local perceptions of last-chance tourism (LCT) in the context of sustainable tourism development in the city of Venice and its islands. LCT refers to a travel trend where tourists seek out destinations that are at risk of disappearing due to climate change. The research addresses several gaps in the existing literature, including the lack of research on local perceptions and the sustainability of LCT, as well as theoretical underpinnings. Furthermore, this thesis offers an alternative to the widely researched nature-based LCT destinations by conducting a case study on a cultural destination. This thesis utilises a case study approach by conducting fieldwork in Venice. Primary data was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews with locals in Venice to gain insights into their understandings of sustainable tourism development, risk perceptions, and perceptions of LCT. To support the primary data, field observations and desk research on tourism in Venice, media portrayal of Venice as an LCT destination, as well as the tourism management strategies, were applied to the research. The findings reveal that the local population in Venice considers the current tourism situation unsustainable, with a focus on economic sustainability overshadowing environmental and socio-cultural sustainability. Respect is identified as a key driver of sustainable tourism development, emphasising the need for tourism that respects the environment, the economy, and the local culture. Regarding LCT, the local perceptions vary; while some locals perceive LCT as an environmental risk due to its contribution to climate change and the strain on the city's carrying capacity, others see the cultural threats, such as gentrification and touristification, and disrespectful behaviour from tourists as more significant issues. Moreover, some locals do not view LCT as threatening but rather understand and empathise with tourists wanting to experience it while they still have a chance. The study concludes that the local perceptions of LCT in Venice are complex and contested. It challenges the notion that LCT destinations are solely climate-change-related and highlights the importance of cultural loss as a driving force behind the urgency of LCT destinations. The findings contribute to the understanding of LCT by providing insights from a local perspective and shedding light on the sustainability of tourism development in Venice.

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List of Abbreviations

DMOs ..... *Destination Management Organisations*
GHG ..... *Greenhouse gas emissions*
LCT ..... *Last-Chance Tourism*
SARF ..... *Social Amplification of Risk*
SET ..... *Social exchange theory*
TBL ..... *Triple Bottom Line*

1. Introduction

Climate change has been affecting natural attractions on a global level, such as the Great Barrier Reef, the Arctic, and the Maldives, leading to their slow deterioration and eventual disappearance (Agnew & Viner, 2001; Johnston, 2006). Since these destinations' vanishing seems inevitable if global warming cannot be stopped, tourists seek out these places to see them before it might be too late (Lemelin et al., 2010). This phenomenon is called last-chance tourism (LCT). In early research, LCT is defined as "a niche tourism market where tourists explicitly seek vanishing landscapes or seascapes, and/or disappearing natural and/or social heritage" (Lemelin et al., 2010, p. 478), meaning tourists increasingly visit destinations severely impacted by climate change and are, thus, at risk of disappearing sooner. Furthermore, such destinations are primarily located in remote polar areas like the Arctic, which are often the most affected by climate change. Thus, LCT tourists embark on long journeys to travel to these distant destinations and see them before it is too late (Dawson et al., 2011).

This travel trend can, however, be detrimental to LCT destinations and their local populations, as research has proposed that LCT creates a vicious circle. By travelling to these locations, the LCT tourists often need to take long-haul flights, which essentially contribute to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). Then, these emissions created through LCT travel are one of the main contributors to the disappearance of LCT destinations (Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017). In other words, LCT tourists contribute to the deterioration of these destinations and unintentionally speed up the vanishing process. Thus, the sustainability of LCT and whether such a travel trend should even be promoted has been questioned by literature (Dawson et al., 2011; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Hindley & Font, 2018; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Woosnam et al., 2022).

1.1. Motivation and research gap

Since LCT is a relatively new research field, its extant literature remains manageable. Thus far, primarily nature-based destinations induced by climate change, such as the Arctic, the Maldives, and the Great Barrier Reef, have been researched (Lemelin et al., 2010; Dawson et al., 2011; Groulx et al., 2016; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Groulx et al., 2019; Wu et

al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020; Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Lai, 2021). In addition, due to its novelty, LCT has primarily emphasised the study of tourist motivations (Groulx et al., 2016; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Groulx et al., 2019; Denley et al., 2020; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Wu et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020) instead of investigating the phenomenon from different perspectives, such as destination management organisations (DMOs) or the local population at an LCT destination. These studies have also been primarily quantitative, leading to a lack of qualitative research in LCT literature. As the local population's perspective on the tourism situation facilitates understanding whether they support tourism, which is necessary for its further development (Nkemngu, 2015; Nunkoo, 2016), we are interested in examining the local perceptions of LCT. Even though data on perceptions is typically collected through quantitative methods (Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010), we aim to gain more profound and detailed findings that have the potential to broaden the understanding of LCT in literature through qualitative research.

In addition to the paucity of research on local perceptions in LCT literature, a discussion of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development (STD) is lacking (Lemelin et al., 2010). Detailed information on sustainable tourism development and LCT can be obtained from the locals' perspective (Nunkoo, 2016). Considering that the sustainability of LCT is questioned in LCT research (Dawson et al., 2011; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Hindley & Font, 2018; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Woosnam et al., 2022), we seek to illuminate the local perspective on the sustainability of the tourism development of an LCT destination, as this perspective may differ from tourists and other tourism stakeholders. Since it is necessary to consider all three dimensions equally to achieve sustainable tourism development (Blewitt, 2015), we aim to examine the local perceptions of all three pillars of sustainable tourism development to provide the literature with significant knowledge, specifically in the context of LCT.

Besides a lack of research on local perceptions and sustainability of LCT, previous studies have primarily focused on nature-based destinations (Lemelin et al., 2010; Dawson et al., 2011; Groulx et al., 2016; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Groulx et al., 2019; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Wu et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020; Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Lai, 2021) and lacked theoretical underpinnings (Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Lai, 2021; Woosnam et al., 2022). Therefore, we also aim to address these research gaps by conducting a case study on Venice, a destination known for its culture rather than nature, and establishing a theoretical

framework applied throughout the analysis. Relevant research on tourism in Venice has been scarce since 2019, as most of it is in Italian or non-peer-reviewed. In addition, while there is an emphasis on overtourism (Kryczka, 2019; Bertocchi et al., 2020; Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018; Cristiano & Gonella, 2020), there are only a few articles on sustainable tourism development (Kryczka, 2019; Scarpi, Confente, & Russo, 2022; Cristiano & Gonella, 2020; Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019) and none on local perceptions regarding LCT. Thus, we also contribute to the literature on tourism in Venice by exploring local perceptions of LCT in Venice.

Considering the various above-outlined research gaps, our motivation for this thesis is to provide further context and theoretical underpinnings to the concept of LCT. As a rising tourism trend that does not seem to end in the near future, especially considering climate change will continue to worsen (UNFCCC, 2022), further research to understand the phenomenon of LCT is required.

1.2. Research question and objectives

To fill the existing research gaps identified in the previous chapter, this thesis aims to answer the following research question:

What are the local perceptions of "last-chance tourism" in the context of sustainable tourism development in the city of Venice and its islands?

The objective of this research is to explore the possible variation in local perceptions of the phenomenon of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development in Venice. We seek to answer this research question through a case study approach, as case studies allow for exploring a specific topic in greater detail (Tellis, 1997). As we examine the local perceptions of "last-chance tourism" in a particular context in a specific destination, we deem it an adequate research approach to answer this research question. The objective of the research is to explore how the locals perceive LCT through interviews with the local population in Venice. For this, we conduct fieldwork in Venice and complement the data from the interviews with field observations and desk research to provide supporting material for the data and, thus, richer and more in-depth findings. We recognise the predicament that our travelling to Venice for research purposes also contributes to the vicious circle tied to LCT, more of which

we contemplate later in this thesis. Nevertheless, conducting fieldwork is necessary to fully understand and gain in-depth insights into the local perspective of LCT.

We chose Venice for our case study approach, as it is repeatedly included on lists of disappearing travel destinations (Haslam, 2023; Cohen, 2017; Olander, 2020; Seema, 2021; Huber, 2018), stating that Venice is suffering from both rising sea levels and the sinking of the city itself (Cohen, 2017). However, it is also facing another pressing issue: overtourism. Considered the *poster child* or *worst-case scenario* of overtourism (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019), Venice is experiencing nearly limitless tourist numbers that put pressure on the city's carrying capacity and heavily impact the quality of life of the Venetians, resulting in the local population moving away to the mainland (Salerno, 2022; Salerno & Russo, 2022). For instance, Bertocchi and Visentin (2019) conducted research on overtourism in Venice, concluding the city is "more hospitable to tourists than to its residents" (p. 4). Thus, Venice is a highly relevant case study for this thesis due to its struggles with overtourism, sustainable tourism development, and the looming disappearance of the city that has the potential to lead to even more tourists visiting.

To clarify the research question, the term *last-chance tourism* is placed inside quotation marks, as it is unclear whether the local population knows about the phenomenon or regards Venice as an LCT destination. Still, throughout this thesis, LCT will not be placed inside quotation marks to improve readability. Additionally, while the research question presents the case study as *the city of Venice and its islands*, for the sake of simplicity, we will use the words *Venice, city,* or *historic centre* when referring to Venice and its surrounding islands in the lagoon.

Moreover, as we examine the local perceptions of LCT, we deem it necessary to elaborate on what we consider *local*. We regard the locals of Venice to be people born and raised in Venice, and those who migrated to the city later in their lives. Our conceptualisation of local includes the surrounding islands of Venice, as they fall under the city's administration (Città di Venezia, 2023).To systematically answer the main research question, we draw on the sub-questions below:

> *What is the local understanding of sustainable tourism development in the city of Venice and its islands?*

What are the local risk perceptions of "last-chance tourism" in the city of Venice and its islands?

First, we explore and gain knowledge on how the locals in Venice understand sustainable tourism development. Second, we deem it necessary to examine the risk perceptions of the locals in Venice to understand their perceptions of LCT, as the phenomenon is tied to a certain level of risk referring to the disappearance of destinations due to climate change (Dawson et al., 2011). At last, based on the findings of these two sub-questions, we are able to analyse the local perceptions of LCT and discuss the implications in a theoretical and practical context.

2. Introducing the case study

This chapter provides an overview of Venice, the case study of this thesis. We outline Venice as a destination, the gentrification and touristification processes of the city, the tourism management and strategies in place, and the media's portrayal of Venice.

2.1. Venice as a destination

The city of Venice and its lagoon have an extensive history regarding culture, architecture, and the environment. Venice was founded in the fifth century when populations from the mainland in North-Eastern Italy took refuge from the Lombard barbarians on the lagoon's islands. These islands became permanent settlements with fisherman villages and towns. Five hundred years later, Venice turned into a significant maritime power (UNESCO, 2023b). In addition, the city offered an essential European seaport in medieval times, providing a commercial and cultural link between Asia and Europe (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). In the 18th century, Venice became a republic and was referred to as the Venetian Empire due to its dominance in the Mediterranean Sea. The Venetian Republic ended after the Napoleonic wars and became part of Italy following a short-lived Austrian rule (Italia, 2022).

Located northwest of the Adriatic Sea, on the archipelago in the Laguna Veneta *(s. Picture 1)*, Venice is the capital of the Venezia province and the Veneto region today. The administrative city of Venice comprises the historic centre, the surrounding islands in the lagoon, and the mainland with its urban and industrial areas (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). Through significant human intervention, the historic centre displays great hydraulic works and medieval architecture, connecting 118 islands with over 400 bridges divided by canals working

as waterways for gondolas and motorboats (UNESCO, 2023b; Italia, 2023; Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023).

Picture 1: Aerial picture of Venice and its islands (NASA earth observatory, 2013)

The city's unique location increases its vulnerability and proneness to environmental changes, such as rising sea levels and lowering land levels due to climate change (UNESCO, 2023b; Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). A common occurrence and frequently a surprise for tourists in Venice is the *acqua alta* (high water), where the water in the lagoon rises and floods the city when high tides and winds from the south and the east align (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). Since the *acqua alta* threatens Venice's culture, environment, and landscape and is one of the leading causes of the city's deterioration, a mobile floodgate system, *MOSE*, has been installed to separate the lagoon from the sea at times of high tides (UNESCO, 2023b). Regardless, this only prevents flooding because of the *acqua alta* and not from overall rising water levels (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023).

Venice is well-known for its extraordinary architecture and rich cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2023b). Since 1987 the entire city and the lagoon with the surrounding islands have been UNESCO World Heritage property, calling Venice a "unique artistic achievement" due to its infrastructure and high concentration of artistic masterpieces (UNESCO, 2023b; Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). Because of its environmental, architectural, and historical uniqueness, Venice is also known under the name *la Serenissima*, which stands for *the most serene* or *sublime*, as tourists are being "transported into another world, one whose atmosphere and beauty remain incomparable" (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). Besides paintings, ancient buildings, and gondolas that are often seen as the symbol of Venice, the

Carnival and the Biennale – an annual international cultural exhibition – attract millions of tourists every year (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023; Venezia Unica, 2023c).

Tourism became the primary industry of Venice's economy at the end of the 18th century, with tourist shops for souvenirs and carnival masks lining the narrow streets of Venice. Thus, the local population primarily works in the tourism industry today (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). Since authorities encourage and promote this industry, annual tourist numbers have increased exponentially, leading to overtourism (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). The UNWTO (2018) defines overtourism as "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experiences in a negative way." (p. 4). This creates several problems for Venice regarding the pressure on the city's infrastructure and rising living costs, contributing to declining resident numbers and leading to the city's gentrification (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023).

In addition, residential houses are replaced by accommodations for tourists, which threatens the cultural heritage and identity of the city (UNESCO, 2023b). Thus, residents of the historic centre tend to move to the mainland with better social amenities, lower costs of living, and fewer demands from the tourist industry (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). This leaves the core of the city with only a small population, contributing to the transformation "into a museum city – a glorious spectacle whose architectural and artistic heritage is preserved, as it should be, but whose daily life is almost a parody of the vital unity of commerce, piety, politics, and ritual that was the pride of *la serenissima*" (Cessi, Cosgrove, & Foot, 2023). Increases in and emphasis on touristic activity leading to the loss of the local population is also called touristification (Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2019).

2.2. Gentrification and touristification of Venice

According to Salerno (2022), historically, there have been three main phases of displacing working-class Venetians to Venice's mainland areas, commonly referred to as *exodus*. The first phase is called *small exodus* and took place between World War I and World War II when 12,000 residents of the poorest classes and antifascists moved to the mainland. The next phase is the *exodus peak* in the 1950s and 1960s. In this period, 84,000 residents were forced to move due to critical housing conditions and evictions. While the number of residents steadily decreased, tourists continuously increased in the middle of the 20th century. Finally, in 1973, special legislation to publicly fund private restorations had the opposite effect and

led to increased rents and property values, forcing residents to move away from the historic centre of Venice. The latest exodus, which is currently happening, is connected to tourist accommodations and, more generally, the touristification of Venice (Salerno, 2022).

Considering these gentrification and touristification processes, the local population in the historic centre of Venice has dropped below 50,000 in 2022, reaching an all-time low (Giuffrida, 2022). However, while the number of locals dropped significantly over the years, the number of tourists keeps increasing. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist numbers had gradually been rising, with 5.5 million arrivals in 2019 and an average stay of 2.34 days (City of Venice, 2021). In addition, the tourist-to-resident ratio reached 2:1 before the pandemic (Cristiano & Gonella, 2020). In 2020, the number of arrivals fell severely but quickly grew again the following year with 2.1 million arrivals, of which more than 70% visited the historic centre. In contrast, the average length of stay has increased to 2.7 days (City of Venice, 2021).

2.3. Tourism management and strategies in Venice

The structure of the stakeholders involved in Venice's tourism management appears complex, and it is evident that various organisations play a role in the destination's tourism development *(s. Figure 1)*. In this chapter, we introduce and focus on the different tourism management strategies communicated to tourists by several stakeholders involved.

Figure 1: Tourism Management Stakeholders

Departing from the local level, while the city of Venice does not have an official DMO, the official City of Venice tourist and travel information *Venezia Unica* plays the role of a DMO-like organisation. *Venezia Unica* operates below *Città di Venezia*, the municipality council of Venice, which communicates to tourists the same strategies and campaigns as *Venezia Unica*. The organisations view sustainable tourism as "not altering the natural and artistic environment, and not obstructing the development of other social and economic activities in harmony with the daily life of residents" (Venezia Unica, 2023a). The organisations' most recent campaign to improve the sustainability of tourism in Venice is the awareness campaign *#EnjoyRespectVenezia*, which launched in 2017 *(s. Picture 2)* (Carnevale di Venezia, 2017). Through the campaign, the city's administration aims to guide its visitors to behave responsibly and respectfully towards the city and its residents (Città di Venezia, 2019).

Another campaign led by *Città di Venezia* is their *Detourism* campaign with the slogan *"Travel Venice Like a Local" (s. Picture 3).* The campaign aims to promote slow tourism and encourage travellers to explore Venice outside the tourist hotspots. This is communicated through a newsletter, a web magazine, and social media platforms specifically dedicated to the campaign (Venezia Unica, 2023b). While no certain information could be found regarding when the campaign first launched, one of their main promotion channels – the campaign's Instagram platform, *@detourismvenezia,* was created back in 2015, and their first web magazine, *Detourism,* was published the year before (@detourismvenezia, 2023; City of Venice, 2016).

Picture 3: #EnjoyRespectVenezia campaign (Venezia Unica, 2023a)

Picture 2: Detourism campaign (City of Venice, 2016)

More recently, the strategy to battle the urgent overtourism situation that has caught the media's attention is implementing a booking system for tourists, where every tourist has to pre-book and pay an entrance fee to enter the city (Hughes, 2022; Hughes, 2023; Brady, 2022; Borghese, Buckley, & O'Hare, 2022). The strategy was initially planned to be implemented by the summer season of 2022 (Celin, 2023), after which it was reportedly postponed to January 2023 (Hughes, 2023). However, to date, the city has not been able to follow through with the plan. In addition, no official information about the initiative can be found on the official websites of the city.

While the entrance fee initiative is still pending, another additional charge has already been implemented; Venice has introduced a tourist tax for overnight stays ranging from one to five euros per person per night. The earnings from the tourist tax are then used to maintain and recover Venice's cultural and environmental heritage and provide a better quality of public services, events, and hospitality for tourists (Venezia Unica, 2023d).

While *Città di Venezia* and *Venezia Unica* communicate their sustainability strategies on their websites, the effectiveness and legitimacy of these efforts are questioned by another stakeholder, *Venezia Autentica. Venezia Autentica* is a social enterprise founded in 2017 that claims to be "the only company trying to make tourism better" (Venezia Autentica, 2023) Moreover, their mission is to move forward from the current, unsustainable form of tourism into responsible tourism, which would be a "true win-win" for both the locals and the tourists (Venezia Autentica, 2023).

Beyond the local tourism management level, Venice is promoted through *ENIT*, Italy's national tourism board run by the *Ministry of Tourism*, and *Visit Italy* and *Visit Venezia*, a promotion agency part of *Marketing Italia Srl* (ENIT, 2023b; Visit Italy, 2023). Unlike the previously introduced stakeholders, both organisations are for promotional purposes only, with the national tourism board describing the organisation as an "economic public entity" (ENIT, 2023a). *ENIT* presents a variety of tourism campaigns on its website, one of the most recent ones being "This is Italy", presenting Venice as one of the "protagonists" alongside other Italian "capitals of culture" (ENIT, 2023c). Moreover, the *Ministry of Tourism* published a strategic plan for Italy's tourism development, stating that policies to manage tourism flows in Venice sustainably and a project to monitor and preserve the city's cultural heritage will be implemented (MiBACT, 2017).

Due to Venice's status as a World Heritage Site, another macro-level player in the city's tourism field is *UNESCO*; to maintain the status, Venice has to comply with the protection and management requirements the organisation has laid in their Code of the Cultural and Landscape Heritage (UNESCO, 2023b). To oversee the state of conservation, *UNESCO* produces reports that enlist the factors affecting the property. According to the previous reports, *Management systems*, *Management plan,* and *Governance* have surfaced as problematic factors. *UNESCO* elaborates there have been "challenges in co-ordination between the multiple government and non-government institutions involved in conservation, tourism, management and regulation" (UNESCO, 2021). This implies that while several different stakeholders introduced various management and strategic plans, the current state of tourism management is not necessarily effective.

2.4. Media portrayal of Venice

Since Venice is considered a prime example of overtourism (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019), there tend to be numerous news articles about the city and its tourism situation. These articles typically report on the city struggling with crowds of tourists pushing through narrow streets (Loguercio, 2023). For instance, one article states, "If you want to avoid large crowds, maybe this isn't the best destination for a relaxing experience – and it's been considered an overrated destination for 2023." (Miliani, 2023). In addition, articles refer to how it has pushed locals to move away from the city because of the high living costs created through overtourism (Loguercio, 2023; Burdeau, 2022). One article talks about the locals living in Venice and how they have to deal with tourists daily, indicating that they are not happy with tourism and how it is managed in the city (Burdeau, 2022). Another article adds that the abnormality of overtourism has become the locals' new normal (Newman, 2009). Furthermore, the touristification of Venice has been denounced since the once "romantic city" has been transformed into a "kitsch-filled tourist trap" (Newman, 2009; Goodell, 2019).

Several news sites address the environmental issues that impact Venice, specifically climate change, rising water levels, and the city's sinking (Miliani, 2023). They call instances of flooding or droughts *shocking* and write that extreme weather conditions paired with overtourism make it more challenging to visit Venice (Miliani, 2023). For example, news sites worldwide reported that Venice's canals had run dry in early 2023 (The Guardian, 2023; Verdú, 2023). One article refers to the climate crisis in the city as "the tragedy of Venice", stating that greed

and incompetence in the city have led to its mismanagement (Goodell, 2019). They add that for Venice to survive, the city needs to completely disconnect the lagoon from the sea, which "will kill life in the lagoon and turn the city into a Disneyland-like theme park entirely cut off from nature […] a sad fate for a glorious and historic place like Venice, but that's what we're doing to our world" (Goodell, 2019). One article from National Geographic (Newman, 2009) poetically describes the complexity surrounding Venice's climate crisis: "Kisses end. Dreams vanish, and sometimes cities too. We long for the perfect ending, but the curtain falls along with our hearts. Beauty is so difficult."

Even though news sites report on climate change, they frequently indicate that tourists desire to visit Venice before it sinks below the water (Miliani, 2023). Furthermore, some news sites emphasise the attractiveness of Venice and why tourists should visit the city, calling Venice one of the most iconic places in Italy, remaining attractive and charming, and thus being on everyone's bucket list (Miliani, 2023). Hence, multiple articles consider Venice a bucket-list destination that tourists visit before it disappears (Haslam, 2023; Fodor's Travel, 2022; Brown, 2018). In addition, reports provide reasons why tourists should travel to Venice, with one opening that "Venice needs little introduction" and that "you should visit at least once in your lifetime" (Wright, 2022), while another urges tourists to value their time in Venice "because Venice will never look like this again" (Sowden, 2018). Thus, Venice can be found on several forms of media that provide lists of places that are severely affected by climate change and should be visited before it is too late (Haslam, 2023; Cohen, 2017; Olander, 2020; Seema, 2021; Huber, 2018).

In contrast, other articles refer to Venice as the prime example of how its vulnerability to climate change can result in increased tourist numbers, leading to a *see it before it sinks* mentality (Kemp, 2022; Haugen, 2019). While some articles offer suggestions on how to travel sustainably to LCT destinations such as Venice (Angermann, 2022; Brown, 2018), other authors condemn LCT and people travelling to Venice for such reasons (Thomas, 2020; Haugen, 2019). The city even made it on *Fodor's No List* for 2023, which advises tourists against visiting destinations for various reasons such as overtourism and climate change (Fodor's Travel, 2022).

After having outlined the media portrayal of Venice, we have set the scene for our case study and provided context for this thesis.

3. Literature review

This chapter outlines extant literature on sustainable tourism development, last-chance tourism, local community perceptions of tourism development, risk perceptions, and tourism in Venice.

3.1. Sustainable tourism development

With the rapid growth of the tourism industry on a global level, predominantly because of the onset of globalisation and the interconnection of countries (Song, Li, & Cao, 2018), tourism destinations have frequently emphasised economic growth and benefits over socio-cultural development and environmental preservation (Dwyer, 2018; Joppe, 2018; Becken & Kaur, 2022). Some scholars like Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) even call this development in the global tourism industry an addiction to economic growth and profit. The consequences of such a profit-driven industry can lead to environmental degradation and increased inequalities (Sheldon, 2022). In addition, destinations dependent on the tourism industry are highly vulnerable to externalities, such as pandemics and disasters, which can lead to a severe drop in tourist numbers and reduced to no income for those working in the industry (Sun et al., 2022).

Considering these adverse impacts of not simply tourism but all human action, the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) published the Brundtland Report called *Our Common Future*, where the concept of sustainable development was first introduced. This concept refers to the "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (WCED, 1987, p. 16). Sustainable development comprises three interconnected dimensions or pillars – economic, environmental, and social (equity) –that should be considered equally (Blewitt, 2015).

In the same year, Krippendorf (1987) published a book calling for a more sustainable approach to tourism by identifying common goals and benefits for tourists and locals alike (Kryczka, 2019). The UN World Tourism Organization followed suit and defined sustainable tourism development as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities" (UNWTO, 2023). While economic sustainability in tourism aims to achieve

long-term economic growth and ensure community benefits such as employment opportunities, the environmental dimension refers to the optimal use of natural resources and natural heritage conservation. Sustainable tourism's last dimension comprises social and cultural sustainability, including preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage, social services for residents, and respecting the destination's authenticity (UNWTO, 2023).

Recent criticism of sustainable tourism highlights that while the tourism industry seems to have shifted away from focusing on economic growth, it emphasises damage control and efficiency instead of sustainably developing a destination (Becken & Kaur, 2022; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). Moreover, Hall (2019) states that "the managerial approach advocated by the UNWTO and others is rooted in the political and economic context of capitalistic resource extraction by which success means failure, i.e. continued growth in tourism leads to grossly uneven development." (p. 1055). This raises the question of whether sustainable tourism is more concerned about sustaining tourism than developing it sustainably (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

Streimikiene et al. (2021) argue that organisations and tourists need to be educated systematically for sustainable tourism to become a social norm, whereas some scholars call for a transition towards diverse economies rooted in community and environmental values (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021). For instance, Joppe (2018) presents the need "for bold new approaches to tourism development from a volume-oriented, mass phenomenon where competition is too often based on price to a model based on value, meaningful experiences and where the host community and the environment derive many of the net benefits." (p. 203). Similarly, Sheldon (2022) considers a diverse economy based on values, emphasising the greater good of the community and the environment.

3.2. Last-chance tourism

The recent travel trend of LCT, also referred to as *doom tourism* or *disappearing tourism* (Lemelin et al., 2010), has primarily been promoted by media coverage of vanishing destinations, species, or landscapes, conveying a sense of urgency to visit before it is too late (Denley et al., 2020; Groulx et al., 2019). Commonly defined by Lemelin et al. (2010) as "a niche tourism market where tourists explicitly seek vanishing landscapes or seascapes, and/or disappearing natural and/or social heritage" (p. 478), the concept of LCT was introduced in

the 1990s by media. One of the first examples was a documentary, where the hosts visited destinations with the intention of seeing endangered species before their extinction (Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017). Early LCT literature focused on destinations in polar regions, as they are heavily affected by global warming (Dawson et al., 2011). Furthermore, Lemelin et al. (2010) link LCT to dark tourism, which initially encompassed the disappearance of socio-cultural heritage or individuals through disasters. They argue that the concept could be expanded to the disappearance of natural heritage due to climate change (Lemelin et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, the current understanding of LCT encapsulates any destination, species, natural heritage, or social heritage impacted by climate change (Wu et al., 2020). LCT tourists tend to have the desire to rush to destinations to see nature-based attractions or cultural heritage before they disappear or are permanently transformed (Finastiian, Farsani, & Mortazavi, 2019; Dawson et al., 2011). This rushing can connect LCT to the concept of *bucket list*, initially conceptualised as a "set of meaningful goals that a person hopes to achieve before they die" (Chu, Grühn, & Holland, 2018, p. 151). Since travelling to particular destinations is a typical bucket-list item, ticking off destinations on a bucket list has become a popular trend in tourism (Tickle & von Essen, 2020). While LCT and bucket-list travel are similar in how they elicit rushed behaviour to travel, the difference lies in the *before the destination dies* for LCT and *before I die* for the bucket-list destination (Tickle & von Essen, 2020).

The somewhat general definition of LCT has then been expanded by other scholars, with Miller et al. (2020) including cultural, historical, or human-focused resources in LCT. Likewise, Fisher and Stewart (2017) suggest LCT is a type of "tourism motivated by the belief that the things of interest (places, people, or objects) may either cease to exist, or may not be possible to visit, in the future, prompting a sense of loss." (p. 514). The decision to visit an LCT destination can vary between individual tourists and depends on their perceptions of time, meaning there could be a delay in visiting destinations if the *last chance* is not considered immediate enough (Fisher & Stewart, 2017). The authors argue that for something to be regarded as a *last chance*, tourists need to believe "that there is limited time available to visit a particular place or person, or undertake a particular activity" (Fisher & Stewart, 2017, p. 519). Moreover, they suggest that LCT tourists are more likely to spend more time and money to see an LCT destination due to a potential sense of loss (Fisher & Stewart, 2017).

This travel trend is, however, paradoxical *(s. Figure 2).* Global warming creates supply for LCT by adversely impacting destinations and making them vulnerable, which can be directly affected by externalities, such as habitat loss. Similarly, demand is increased through externalities, primarily media coverage, thus promoting the LCT status of a destination. As a result, LCT contributes to the existing pressures on endangered destinations through direct tourist-associated and indirect GHG emissions-associated effects. This exacerbates the LCT status of the destination and creates a vicious circle (Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017). Hence, the paradox lies in the fact that people travel to primarily remote destinations before their disappearance. However, that exact travel contributes to their disappearance through the release of GHG emissions via long-haul air travel, leading to questions regarding LCT's sustainability and whether it should even be promoted (Dawson et al., 2011; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Hindley & Font, 2018; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Woosnam et al., 2022).

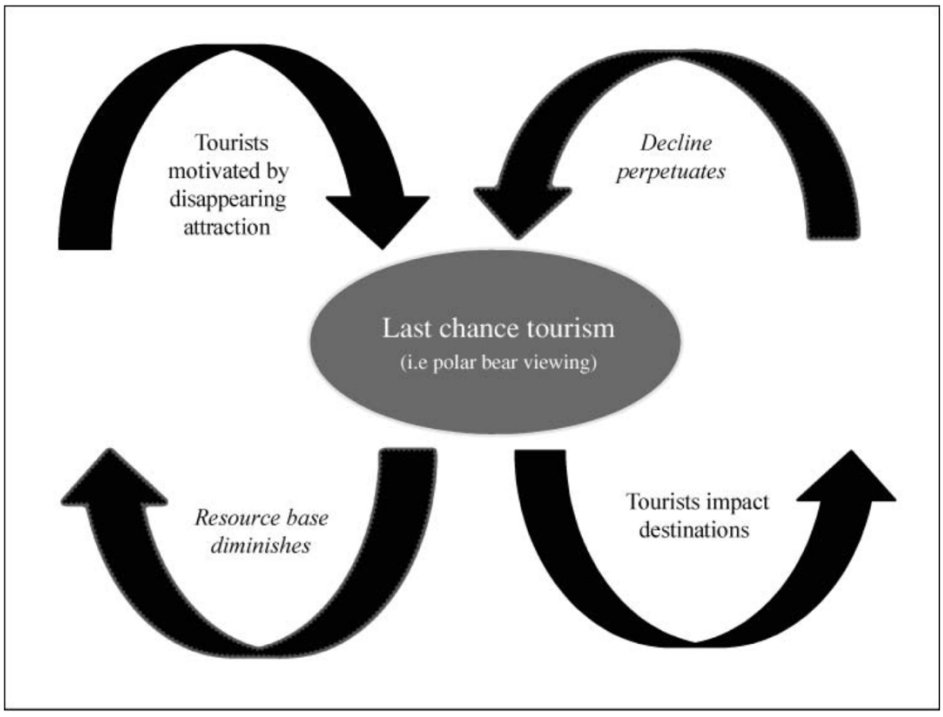


Figure 2: The paradox of LCT (Dawson et al., 2010)

Considering LCT as a tourism approach that takes advantage of the vulnerability to gain economic benefits, Dawson et al. (2011) argue that while it may be economically beneficial for the host communities in the short term, LCT is risky and jeopardises the sustainability of tourism in the long run. Lemelin et al. (2010) formulate this dilemma succinctly: "The short boom from the doom tourism will, according to most long-term climate change predictions,

end up in gloom." (p. 484). Moreover, increased short-term vacations can adversely impact LCT destinations since tourists contribute less to the local economy by spending money at local businesses than the amount of carbon produced through travelling (Groulx et al., 2016). Still, avoiding travel to LCT destinations to reduce GHG emissions can have severe economic and social repercussions for the host communities (Hindley & Font, 2018; Denley et al., 2020). While this shows an inherent dilemma with LCT in connection to sustainable tourism, this has yet to be discussed in LCT research.

Denley et al. (2020) further expound on the outlined ethical paradox, indicating that tourists with pro-environmental values wish to engage in LCT, contributing to the cause of the problem. Thus, despite being aware of climate change, LCT tourists want to engage in this travel trend and seem unaware of or unbothered by the consequences. This is supported by Groulx et al. (2019) and Miller et al. (2020), who argue that the desire to travel to an LCT destination dominates the awareness of needing to conserve the environment. Research has discussed solutions or consequences to offset the adverse impacts of LCT tourists, ranging from visitor capping and controlling entry through a holiday lottery, carbon offsetting, and fees for biodiversity protection to tourist taxes (Lemelin et al., 2010; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Groulx et al., 2016; Denley et al., 2020).

LCT research has primarily focused on tourist motivations and their psychological antecedents (Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017). Multiple authors suggest that tourists engage in LCT out of self-interest (Dawson et al., 2011; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Hindley & Font, 2018) and self-promotion, disregarding the well-being of the destination (Groulx et al., 2019). However, LCT is often not the sole motivation to visit a disappearing destination, according to Kucukergin and Gürlek (2020), who suggest that environmental consciousness significantly impacts motivation. Furthermore, Hindley and Font (2018) reflect on how tourists might be under the impression that their pro-environmental behaviour acts as a trade-off for long-haul flights connected to LCT. In contrast, Piggot-McKellar and McNamara's (2017) findings about the Great Barrier Reef indicate that tourists most concerned about its deterioration also had LCT as their primary motivation.

Thus, LCT is frequently considered a double-edged sword, referring to its use to attract more tourists that contribute to the deterioration of a destination and, conversely, to its ability to raise awareness about climate change since LCT tourists are the most educated and

environmentally conscious (Lemelin et al., 2010; Dawson et al., 2011; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Miller et al., 2020). For instance, Denley et al. (2020) suggest promoting climate change ambassadorships, as LCT tourists already tend to have pro-environmental values, which DMOs can utilise to maximise tourists' sustainable impact. This can be done through activities tailored to pro-environmental travellers and safety and responsibility guidelines (Hindley & Font, 2018; Woosnam et al., 2022). Miller et al.'s (2020) findings support this by indicating that LCT can lead to an increased intention to engage in pro-environmental and ambassadorship behaviours.

Media coverage is also considered a mediator of tourist motivation, with exaggerated headlines about last chances to visit. This creates a sense of urgency and results in an enhanced risk response and increased visitation to disappearing destinations (Groulx et al., 2016). Hence, LCT promotion predominantly depends on media publicity, while DMOs typically do not acknowledge the phenomenon (Dawson et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2020). Thus, the status of an LCT destination is primarily given by the media, subsequently heightening the demand for tourism (Groulx et al., 2016).

As outlined, LCT research is primarily focused on tourist motivations, with most studies being quantitative (Groulx et al., 2016; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Groulx et al., 2019; Denley et al., 2020; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Wu et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020). While this provides insight into why tourists engage in LCT in a more generalised manner, qualitative analyses may present more profound and detailed findings on tourist motivations. In addition, Schweinsberg, Wearing, and Lai (2021) and Woosnam et al. (2022) argue that LCT research lacks theoretical underpinnings, meaning they are predominantly descriptive. Even though there are some studies on local stakeholders' perceptions of LCT, they merely indicate that the locals are unaware of their homes being LCT destinations (Denley et al., 2020; Woosnam et al., 2022). Furthermore, nature-based attractions are emphasised in LCT research, with Churchill, Manitoba, in Arctic Canada, being the main focus (Lemelin et al., 2010; Dawson et al., 2011; Groulx et al., 2016; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Groulx et al., 2019; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Wu et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020; Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Lai, 2021). Only Hindley and Font (2018), as well as Finastiian, Farsani, and Mortazavi (2019), strayed from nature-based LCT. Thus, the local perceptions of LCT and non-nature-based

destinations in the context of sustainable tourism development have yet to be examined in LCT literature, which this thesis aims to achieve.

3.3. Local perceptions of tourism development

With the increasing necessity for sustainable tourism development, considering local communities in decision-making and tourism management is crucial (Nunkoo, 2016). To sustainably develop the tourism industry, support from locals needs to be gained (Nkemngu, 2015; Nunkoo, 2016). Thus, Nkemngu (2015) suggests examining local perceptions of tourism development and its possible consequences to inform decision-making and implement adequate policies that minimise potential negative perceptions (Nunkoo, 2016). In addition, including local perceptions in sustainable tourism management can enhance tourism outcomes for the community, the environment, and the tourists (Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010). Considering the importance of local perceptions, it is a widely researched topic in tourism literature.

According to Gursoy and Rutherford (2004), while the first studies on local perceptions lacked profound theoretical underpinning, the social exchange theory (SET) has rapidly become the dominant theory to explain local perceptions in tourism research (Nunkoo, 2016). SET is a sociological theory introduced to understand the exchange of resources between two parties (Ap, 1992). Applied to tourism studies, SET postulates that the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental tourism impacts affect local perceptions; this determines local support for tourism development by weighing the perceived benefits against the perceived costs of tourism (Nunkoo, 2016; Eslami et al., 2019; Khalid et al., 2019). Antecedents determining local perceptions include demographics, community attachment, employment in the tourism industry, tourism infrastructure, and the relationship between locals and tourists (Butler, 1974; McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010). In addition, Ward and Berno (2011) argue that the country of residence, along with perceptions of tourism impacts, are determinants of locals' attitudes towards tourism, indicating that locals from developing countries and those perceiving more benefits from tourism development have a more favourable attitude towards tourism (Ward & Berno, 2011). In contrast, some studies suggest that locals support tourism despite its negative impacts, mainly when they economically depend on tourism (Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010).

According to Nkemngu (2015), positive perceptions of tourism development turn into favourable attitudes towards tourism and tourists. Thus, the author investigates the local perceptions in a community in South Africa and the potential implications on their quality of life. The findings suggest that the most noticeable and positive impact locals perceive from tourism are the economic benefits and positive impacts on their quality of life (Nkemngu, 2015). Similarly, using a qualitative approach, Moyle, Croy, and Weiler (2010) examined local perceptions of tourism impacts on two Australian islands and found that locals perceive positive direct economic benefits from tourism development. However, they also argue that a lack of local involvement in decision-making regarding tourism development is more of a determining factor of negative perceptions, potentially leading to locals' unwillingness to interact with tourists (Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010).

Considering community empowerment as a crucial aspect of local perceptions, Khalid et al. (2019) argue that it is essential to enhance empowerment among locals to balance the power relationship between them and tourists. Since an imbalance in the power relationship could lead to negative perceptions, the level of control over tourism development and power relations are key factors in forming local perceptions. Thus, the authors suggest that involvement in tourism planning and decision-making leads to positive perceptions and attitudes towards tourism (Khalid et al., 2019). In contrast, Eslami et al. (2019) highlight the importance of community attachment. By examining local perceptions in a community in Malaysia, their findings suggest that community attachment influences perceived tourism impacts and, in turn, quality of life satisfaction and support for sustainable tourism development (Eslami et al., 2019).

Kamata (2022) argues that place attachment and identity are crucial factors when explaining local attitudes towards tourism development. This can also be seen in Gu and Ryan's (2008) research, who found that a strong sense of place and living heritage impacts local attitudes and behaviour towards tourism in a Chinese community. Hence, a firm place identity leads to stronger perceived positive and negative tourism impacts (Guo et al., 2018).

While research on local perceptions in connection to tourism is already extensive, there is a paucity of studies which examine local perceptions of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development, which this thesis aims to achieve.

3.4. Risk perceptions

Perception of risk has proven to be a crucial factor in understanding the social dilemmas considering risks around us (Sjöberg, 1998). The literature revolving around risk perceptions is mainly dominated by two theories (Rippl, 2002). The more traditional understanding is a psychology-based theory that argues that individuals' cognitive factors impact their perceptions (Sjöberg, 1996). In contrast, the other theory attempts to explain the perceptions through the socio-cultural factors that influence the individuals' views of the world (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983).

When it comes to risk perception studies within the tourism industry, the research is primarily focused on the tourists' perspective (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Yang & Nair, 2014; Chiu & Lin, 2011). Moreover, the most researched threats in the tourism field are climate change (Pandy & Rogerson, 2019; Dannevig & Hovelsrud, 2016; Ridha, Ross, & Mostafavi, 2022; Shakeela & Becken, 2015) and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (Xu et al., 2022; González-Reverté, Gomis-López, & Díaz-Luque, 2022).

Dannevig and Hovelsrud (2016) researched the risk perceptions from the viewpoint of climate change adaptation and conducted a case study amongst different occupational groups in Northern Norway. Their findings suggest that "in the cases where climate change is not perceived as a risk, adaptation will not be high on the agenda, and it will not receive any human or financial resources in competition with more pressing and mandatory tasks" (Dannevig & Hovelsrud, 2016, p. 272). In other words, for a society to be able to adapt to climate change, it must first perceive it as a risk. Furthermore, the authors found different perceptions of climate change risk amongst the occupational groups (Dannevig & Hovelsrud, 2016).

Similarly, Pandy and Rogerson (2019) conducted a qualitative study on risk perceptions amongst tourism stakeholders in Johannesburg, South Africa. Their findings support Dannevig and Hovelsrud's (2016) research, as their study revealed that compared to more immediate and pressing risks, such as marketing challenges, government regulations, and human resource development within the local tourism sector, climate change was not considered to be high on the list of risks. Contrastingly to the aforementioned studies, Xu et al. (2022) examined the risk perceptions of tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that the pandemic substantially affected the tourists' risk perceptions. The authors emphasise the

study taking place “at the peak of the crisis” (Xu et al., 2022, p. 345), implying that, at the time of the study, the pandemic was a pressing issue globally.

Moreover, Shakeela and Becken (2015) studied climate change risk perceptions of the local tourism stakeholders in Maldives. The authors seek to investigate these perceptions through another theory within risk perception studies, called social amplification theory, according to which an individual’s perception can be either amplified or attenuated by different sources (Shakeela & Becken, 2015). Their findings indicate that the local tourism stakeholders were not immediately concerned about climate change due to the risk being “amplified for international audiences” while “several factors lead to an attenuation of risks for domestic audiences” (p. 65); one of these factors being the nation’s own government (Shakeela & Becken, 2015).

Nonetheless, while the academic discussion on risk perceptions focuses on the perspectives of tourists and shines a spotlight on climate change, the local risk perceptions of LCT are yet to be studied. Therefore, regardless of LCT’s general connections to climate change (Lemelin et al., 2010), we deem it necessary to examine the risk perceptions of this specific phenomenon due to its status as a rising travel trend and its potential to impact the local communities of the destinations (Lemelin et al., 2010); hence, our research aims to contribute to the risk perception literature by filling this gap.

3.5. Tourism in Venice

Venice is a frequently used destination for case studies and quantitative or qualitative analyses in tourism research due to severe issues regarding overtourism, climate change, and gentrification. Thus, research has primarily revolved around overtourism, the gentrification and touristification of the city, local perceptions, and tourism management (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019; Cristiano & Gonella, 2020; Scarpi, Confente, & Russo, 2022; Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018; Salerno, 2022; Bertocchi et al., 2020; Kryczka, 2019).

Venice has continuously been referenced as “the poster child of overtourism” (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019, p. 2) or “the capital of overtourism” (Kryczka, 2019, p. 50). Overtourism in Venice, as Salerno (2022) examined, has resulted from gentrification and touristification processes over several centuries. He argues the city was aestheticised for touristic

consumption, leading to the exponential growth of the tourism industry, which again led to the re-creation of the city as a tourist attraction (Salerno, 2022; Salerno & Russo, 2022).

Furthermore, Venice has been dependent on the tourism industry since the late 1970s (Salerno & Russo, 2022), with Bertocchi and Visentin (2019) suggesting a divide in the community between those who work in tourism and those who do not. Adding to this examination, Cristiano and Gonella (2020) argue that a destination's dependence on only one industry makes it vulnerable to externalities such as pandemics or extreme weather conditions that could result in a sudden stop in tourism and high unemployment in the community. The authors highlight Venice being an example of a dying city due to adverse overtourism impacts and poor tourism management leading to touristification (Cristiano & Gonella, 2020). Additionally, the negative population trend induced by poor living conditions and high prices can contribute to Venice turning into an open museum or amusement park (Scarpi, Confente, & Russo, 2022). Moreover, Cristiano and Gonella (2020) emphasise that, in Venice, "the levels of local culture, well-being, and other immaterial assets are depleted, also affecting the very image originally attracting tourists" (p. 7).

Overall, overtourism is a dominant research topic regarding tourism in Venice due to tourism pressures in the entire historic centre (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019). These pressures primarily affect Venice's environmental and socio-cultural spheres, such as unaffordable housing, loss of sense of belonging, and privatisation of public spaces (Salerno & Russo, 2022; Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018). In addition, Seraphin, Sheeran, and Pilato (2018) stress that the tourism industry in Venice results in increased crime, pollution, and destruction of historical and cultural sites. Such negative impacts have intensified the discussion of the city's tourism carrying capacity (Bertocchi et al., 2020), which is defined as "the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic and socio-cultural environment and unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction" (UNWTO, 1981, p. 3). Hence, for sustainable tourism in Venice to be possible, the tourism carrying capacity must be considered (Bertocchi et al., 2020). Moreover, overtourism and the introduction of AirBnB in 2010 have resulted in increased short-term stays, transforming Venice into a short-term city (Salerno & Russo, 2022).

Considering all of these pressures resulting from overtourism and Venice's high vulnerability to climate change (Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018), effective management of the tourism

situation is crucial and, thus, frequently researched by scholars. However, studies find that Venice's tourism management and regulations, such as the *#EnjoyRespectVenezia* and *#Detourism* campaigns, have been poor and ineffective (Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018; Kryczka, 2019). Salerno and Russo (2022) state that Venice primarily focuses on tourist expenditure and monitoring visitor flows instead of implementing adequate tourism regulations. Similarly, Cristiano and Gonella (2020) reflect on the city's suggested entry barriers and the tourist tax for daytrippers, indicating that they emphasise the profit-maximisation goal of Venice. Thus, they propose to restart Venice's entire urban system and set different goals and priorities to preserve the quality of life and bring people back to the historic centre in the post-pandemic era (Cristiano & Gonella, 2020). Alternatively, Seraphin, Sheeran, and Pilato (2018) suggest forming private-public partnerships to work towards a common goal and remove Venice from all promotional material.

Since overtourism in Venice severely impacts the local community, research has also explored local perceptions of tourism. For instance, Bertocchi and Visentin (2019) found that Venetians feel invaded by tourism and are dissatisfied with the city's tourism management; they argue that overtourism threatens the cultural heritage and the local quality of life, suggesting that tourism made Venice "more hospitable to tourists than to its residents" (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019, p. 14). In contrast, Scarpi, Confente, and Russo (2022) indicate that Venetians' decision to remain in the historic centre frequently depends on social and environmental benefits provided by tourism. Thus, the authors recommend policymakers develop policies based on local perceptions of tourism (Scarpi, Confente, & Russo, 2022).

As suggested by the authors above, we aim to contribute to the literature regarding tourism in Venice by exploring the local perceptions of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development.

4. Theoretical framework

This chapter delineates the theoretical framework applied in this thesis, including our understanding of last-chance tourism, the triple bottom line, the concepts of authenticity and cultural heritage, social exchange theory, and risk perceptions.

4.1. Last-chance tourism

As the literature review outlines, scholars have provided various definitions for LCT. While these are relatively similar and straightforward, others are more comprehensive. For example, authors such as Lemelin et al. (2010) and Dawson et al. (2011) define LCT as tourists seeking destinations, natural attractions, or cultural heritage disappearing due to climate change. More recently, other scholars have elaborated on this definition and added experiences (Prideaux & McNamara, 2013), human-focused resources (Miller et al., 2020), and a sense of loss to the definition of LCT (Fisher & Stewart, 2017). The latter definition extends the previous understanding of LCT – *see it before it disappears* – by including *do or experience it before the opportunity disappears* (Fisher & Stewart, 2017).

While these definitions provide a valuable foundation for this thesis, we deem it necessary to build upon them in the context of Venice since it is the focus of our case study. As described in the literature review, studies on LCT have primarily focused on tourist motivations to determine whether a destination is, in fact, an LCT destination. This is exemplified in Fisher and Stewart's (2017) definition, which indicates that a destination is only considered an LCT destination if tourists visit it due to the limited time available to see it. In the case of Venice, the LCT narrative is supported by media coverage stating the city will disappear as soon as 2100 (Phelan, 2022) and that tourists should visit while they can (Sowden, 2018). Considering that all previous definitions of LCT have explicitly referred to tourist motivations being the driving force of the phenomenon, we aim to examine the local perceptions of LCT to understand the concept from a different perspective.

4.2. Triple Bottom Line

Initially developed as a framework for corporations to engage in sustainable development and rethink the capitalistic paradigm, the triple bottom line (TBL) comprises three principles businesses need to consider to become sustainable. These principles refer to sustainable development's economic, social, and environmental dimensions *(s. Figure 3)* (Elkington, 2018; (Spindler, 2013). While the economic dimension of TBL primarily refers to financial performance indicators, such as sales or profit, the environmental dimension is also called natural capital and includes indicators like water or energy use. Last, the social dimension of TBL relates to employment, job satisfaction, overall well-being, and quality of life (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012).

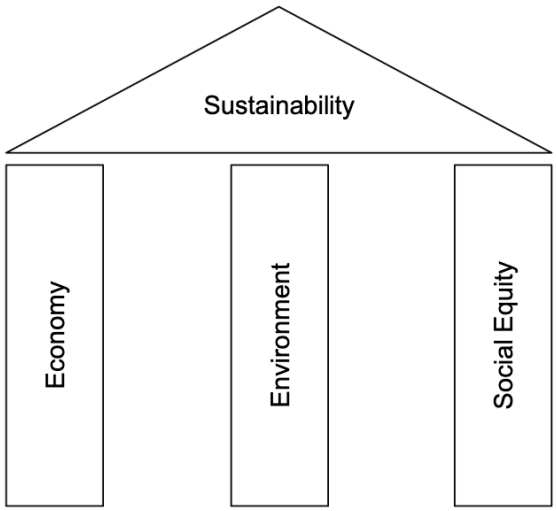


Figure 3: Three-Pillar Model (Spindler, 2013, p. 23)

Even though this framework seems relatively straightforward, it has received substantial criticism through the years. The main three critique points include the emphasis on controlling negative impacts rather than improving positive ones (McDonough & Braungart, 2002), the difficulty in measuring social indicators (Vanclay, 2004), and the question of whether the social and environmental bottom line should be measured (Norman & MacDonald, 2004). As for the latter critique, the authors suggest that the financial bottom line is the only important business metric and that the TBL may be used for greenwashing (Norman & MacDonald, 2004). Regardless, TBL offers the ability to hold organisations accountable for their possible negative impacts on society and the environment (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012). Moreover, Elkington (2018) criticises his own concept, intended initially to shift the focus beyond the economic towards the social and environmental dimension. He argues that today the TBL is merely used as an accounting tool to manage trade-offs, failing "to bury the single bottom line paradigm" (Elkington, 2018).

Considering this critique, Stoddard, Pollard, and Evans (2012) argue that the TBL can still be useful to generate social and environmental indicators and apply it to the tourism industry. Thus, they adapt the original framework for DMOs to improve their sustainability and the destination's sustainable tourism development (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012). They indicate that economic measures of tourism are straightforward and frequently include the number of tourists, tourist expenditures, and hotel occupancy rates. In addition, economic benefits for the destination, employment issues, and poverty alleviation are often considered

in the economic dimension (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012). To measure the environmental dimension of the TBL, various indicators have been suggested by tourism research, such as the use of energy and water, GHG emissions, and ecological footprint (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012). However, Stoddard, Pollard, and Evans (2012) highlight that the list of indicators in the tourism indicator guidebook developed by the UNWTO provides a broader overview of environmental indicators. Examples include resource management, climate change, and the impact of tourism on the natural environment (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012). The social dimension of the TBL in tourism predominantly refers to tourism's social and socio-economic impacts on the host communities, such as community attachment and the state of the local economy. Broader social indicators – as listed in the tourism indicator guidebook by the UNWTO – include issues regarding tourism access and equity, sense of belonging, health and safety of the community, as well as cultural concerns (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012).

We suggest the framework is relevant for this thesis, as we apply it to the analysis in its intended way, i.e., focusing on all three dimensions equally (Elkington, 2018). The framework of the TBL in tourism is applied in this thesis to examine the locals' understanding of sustainable tourism development in Venice. This further allows us to answer our main research question regarding the local perceptions of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development. We extend this framework – precisely the social dimension – with the concepts of authenticity and cultural heritage since Venice is a World Heritage Site and has often been argued to not be authentic due to overtourism (UNESCO, 2023b; Landon, 2020).

4.2.1. Authenticity

The concept of authenticity has been widely discussed and contested in tourism research resulting in its ambiguous definition (Moore et al., 2021). Authenticity is often viewed as a primary motive for tourists to travel to destinations to see and experience the original value of something authentic (Park, Choi, & Lee, 2019). MacCannell (1973) coined *staged authenticity*, where inherently inauthentic tourist experiences are presented to tourists who believe they are witnessing something authentic (Wang, 1999). Additionally, MacCannell (1976) suggests that tourists seek authenticity away from home. This can be connected to the concept of the tourist gaze, introduced by Urry (1990), which postulates that tourists "gaze upon the world through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education" (Urry & Larsen, 2012, p. 3). This gaze is

structured and organised by the tourism industry (Smith, Macleod, & Robertson, 2010). While the original conception of the tourist gaze encompasses power imbalances between the gazer and the gazee (Samarathunga & Cheng, 2021), Maoz (2006) coins the term *mutual gaze*. With this, the author argues that the tourists and the locals gaze at each other, with the tourists behaving according to what the locals expect of them. However, the locals still tend to be defensive in this conceptualisation and develop techniques like staged authenticity to adjust, hide, and protect themselves from tourism (Maoz, 2006).

Authenticity in tourism research is predominantly discussed from three dimensions: objective, constructive, and existential. The first refers to experiences considered authentic when the toured object is the original, such as scientific or historical artefacts (Wang, 1999; Park, Choi, & Lee, 2019). Wang (1999) argues that this is a binary perspective, whereas authenticity is more ambiguous and "involves a much wider spectrum." (p. 353). Thus, constructed authenticity indicates that the toured object is authentic based on people's beliefs, perceptions, and expectations – not because it is inherently authentic but because it is a sign or a symbol of authenticity. Since this type of authenticity depends on people's perspectives and interpretations, authenticity is pluralistic, i.e., it can have multiple and different definitions (Wang, 1999). The third dimension is existential authenticity, which suggests that participation in tourist experiences instead of merely spectating them makes tourists feel more authentic than in their daily lives (Wang, 1999).

Considering the three dimensions of authenticity, we understand in this thesis that toured objects and experiences are authentic based on people's beliefs, perceptions, and expectations instead of a label indicating whether something is original. This is because we explore local perceptions that are highly subjective, rooted in assumptions and expectations, and differ from person to person, which aligns with constructive authenticity (Wang, 1999).

4.2.2. Cultural Heritage

As Venice and its lagoon carry the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is necessary to consider the concept of cultural heritage as a part of our framework. Furthermore, UNESCO states that without a secure culture component, development can never be sustainable (UNESCO, 2023a), and hence it is crucial to consider cultural heritage when examining sustainable tourism development.

UNESCO World Heritage Convention encapsulates cultural heritage as "our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations" (UNESCO, 2023c). The more extensive definition, according to the organization, is as follows:

> *"Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immobile and underwater), intangible cultural heritage (ICH) embedded into cultural, and natural heritage artefacts, sites or monuments. The definition excludes ICH related to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebration etc. It covers industrial heritage and cave paintings."* (UIS, 2023).

Hence, cultural heritage does not only involve physical artefacts but intangible heritage like traditions and customs as well.

UNESCO's views and ideals of cultural heritage are challenged in recent literature in several cases; Brumann and Gfeller (2022) claim that non-European cultural landscapes struggle with being approved for the World Heritage List, whereas Debarbieux et al. (2023) question the idea by UNESCO according to which heritage should be transnationally shared (Brumann & Gfeller, 2022; Debarbieux et al., 2023). Moreover, Harrison (2010) takes the concept of cultural heritage under deeper examination and proposes questions of what heritage is and who decides what is considered cultural heritage. Additionally, Harrison (2010) implies problematic considerations regarding the World Heritage Site status, as, by definition, it indicates that the destination is culturally owned by the whole world instead of the local people.

Nevertheless, similar to UNESCO's definition, Harrison (2010) agrees that the objects of heritage are used to construct ideas about the past, present and future. Hence, this thesis considers both definitions while examining the connection of cultural heritage to our case study.

4.3. Social exchange theory

Local perceptions of tourism impacts and attitudes towards tourism are a common research topic in the tourism literature (Kamata, 2022), with SET being the predominant theory to

examine local support for tourism development (Nunkoo, 2016; Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010; Eslami et al., 2019). SET is conceptualised by Ap (1992) as "a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation" (p. 668). This theory postulates that a social exchange process occurs when it benefits both parties in the interaction (Nunkoo, 2016).

In tourism research, SET has primarily been applied to investigate local perceptions of tourism impacts to determine the level of support for tourism development (Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010), as it proposes that local support depends on the perceived benefits from tourism (Nkemngu, 2015; Khalid et al., 2019). Thus, SET suggests "that individuals' attitudes towards tourism and their subsequent level of support for its development will be influenced by their evaluations of the outcomes of tourism for themselves and their communities" (Ward & Berno, 2011, p. 1557). Hence, tourism's economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts affect local perceptions of it and the decision to support its development (Nkemngu, 2015; Nunkoo, 2016).

The suitability of SET has also been widely criticised (Kamata, 2022). For instance, Moyle, Croy, and Weiler (2010) indicate that studies on local perceptions are primarily quantitative, treating communities as single entities and leading to bias among survey respondents. Thus, the authors suggest favouring qualitative methods, especially in-depth interviews (Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010).

Moreover, Nunkoo (2016) argues that power is commonly disregarded in SET, even though it is a crucial construct in exchange relationships; the level of power determines each party's ability to benefit from the interaction (Nunkoo, 2016). Thus, in tourism, Kayat (2002) defines power as "residents' ability to control the resources required for tourism development (such as labour, capital, culture, and natural resources) and to secure personal returns from having tourism in their community" (p. 175), impacting their perceptions of tourism development (Nunkoo, 2016). Similarly, Khalid et al. (2019) argue that community empowerment is crucial for locals in forming their perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development. The more power the community possesses, the greater the locals' ability to benefit from tourism and support tourism development (Khalid et al., 2019).

Other authors have also criticised that SET alone cannot sufficiently explain and predict local attitudes towards and support for tourism development (Ward & Berno, 2011; Eslami et al., 2019). Thus, Ward and Berno (2011) propose integrating other theories and concepts in SET, such as the TBL (Nkemngu, 2015), to provide richer and more profound understandings. In addition, Kamata (2022) highlights that although SET postulates that social exchanges in tourism are voluntary, locals frequently have little choice in interacting with tourism. Hence, place identity theory is another suggested theory that explains local perceptions through personal value systems (Kamata, 2022).

As we examine local perceptions of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development in Venice, SET, in combination with TBL, offers a suitable theoretical framework to investigate locals' understanding of sustainable tourism development. In addition, we complement SET with the cultural theory of risk perception to thoroughly address the research question, as LCT can be regarded as risk-laden (Dawson et al., 2011).

4.4. Risk perception

The cultural theory of risk, one of the most dominating theories in risk perception studies (Rippl, 2002), was developed by Douglas and Wildavsky (1983). According to the authors, different social principles affect our judgement of what risks and dangers should be most feared, as they state that "most people cannot be aware of most dangers at most times" (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983, p. 1) and hence claim there must be an explanation for how people decide which risks to fear. The authors' core assumption is that any form of society produces its own view of the world and the risks within it (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983). Moreover, they argue that having common values within any society will lead to having common fears and "by implication, to a common agreement not to fear other things" (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983, p. 8).

Prior to introducing the cultural theory, the authors state that the pre-existing consideration of risk has three peculiarities (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983) that the cultural theory seeks to fill. These peculiarities are "*disagreement about the problem"*, "*different people worry about different risks"*, and "*knowledge and action are out of sync"* (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983, p. 1). In turn, the cultural theory – amongst all other theories in the field of risk perceptions – has been criticised by Kasperson et al. (1988), who claim that there are no comprehensive theories

that can explain why a small risk sometimes generates an immense reaction amongst the public.

To fill this gap in risk research, Kasperson et al. (1988) introduced the social amplification of risk framework (SARF). This theory integrates findings from a wide range of studies, such as media research, both the psychometric and cultural schools of risk, and studies on organisational responses to risk (Pidgeon, Kasperson, & Slovic, 2003). According to SARF, "communication process, risk, risk events, and the characteristics of both become portrayed through various signals (images, signs and symbols), which in turn interact with a wide range of psychological, social, institutional, or cultural processes in ways that intensify or attenuate perceptions of risk" (Pidgeon, Kasperson, & Slovic, 2003, p.15). In other words, different factors can either amplify or attenuate one's risk perceptions.

We view the theories on risk perceptions as highly relevant, as LCT is a phenomenon typically considered to contain various risks (Dawson et al., 2011). Therefore, to examine the local perceptions of LCT, we deem it necessary to look into the local risk perceptions. To study these perceptions and their potential variety, we adopt the ideas of Cultural Theory and SARF. While we see the cultural theory providing a valuable base for our risk perception studies due to Venice's status as a cultural destination (UNESCO, 2023b), SARF is a suitable addition to further examine the possible disparities within the local perceptions.

5. Methodology

In this chapter, we outline the research orientation of this thesis, the research design comprising the secondary data collection through desk research, and the primary data collection through fieldwork. This includes the description of the fieldwork progression from preparation to fieldwork procedures and post-fieldwork, quality criteria, our positions as researchers, ethical considerations, and the limitations of this thesis.

5.1. Philosophy of Science

Within social science research, researchers consider their position within different schools of thought based on contrasting views of ontology and epistemology, which influence the research process (O'Leary, 2021). Ontology refers to the study of what exists in the world and how that can be understood and explained, while epistemology is how humans come to know, discover, and understand what exists (O'Leary, 2007). There are two primary schools of

thought in social science research which can explain the world: positivism and post-positivism. Positivists understand ontology as the physical things that can be experienced through the human senses. Thus, their epistemology is the direct experience of those material things like touching, seeing, or hearing them. This leads to positivist researchers often using quantitative or statistical research methods (O'Leary, 2021).

In contrast, post-positivists reject this research orientation due to its limitation and inability to explain abstract concepts. In post-positivism, the world is seen as ambiguous and can have multiple interpretations, meaning that it is continuously being constructed through human action and interaction (O'Leary, 2007). Thus, for post-positivists, ontology is both the physical things experienced through the human senses and abstract ideas such as emotions. Consequently, their epistemological view is that material things can be understood through the senses and abstract concepts through ideology or perceptions. Hence, post-positivists' research orientation is primarily inductive and qualitative (O'Leary, 2021). As our research focuses on the local perceptions of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development in Venice, we also aim to gather a more profound understanding of this topic, which necessitates using qualitative research methods (Krauss, 2005).

Under the post-positivism paradigm, one way of knowing is social constructivism, which is rooted in the understanding that things and social phenomena are constructed and given meaning through human action and interaction. For instance, the meaning and value of money are socially constructed; it would merely be a piece of paper without people giving meaning to it (O'Leary, 2007). The primary characteristics of this worldview are that humans construct the world, its definitions can be changed, and the social construction is interactive. In other words, the world's construction depends on the point of view (Hjelm, 2014), meaning that multiple realities can exist (Krauss, 2005). In general, Hjelm (2014) states that “whatever people define as real, becomes real in consequences, regardless of “objective” reality.” (p. 11). Thus, knowledge is constructed in social settings and depends on previous knowledge and assumptions (Hjelm, 2014). This also refers to the process of meaning-making in social science research. Meanings are “the cognitive categories that make up one’s view of reality and with which actions are defined” (Krauss, 2005, p. 762), which people draw from or give to events and experiences in everyday life. Through learning processes, where new information is

gathered, existing meanings can be informed and changed according to the gained knowledge (Krauss, 2005).

The data gathered in this meaning-making process is qualitative, typically comprising unquantifiable words, images, experiences, and observations. Qualitative data is primarily linked to the assumption that various subjective realities can exist, as is the social constructivist approach (O'Leary, 2021). Compared to quantitative data, qualitative data is detailed information, often described as *rich* and *thick,* collected from a small number of subjects (Veal, 2017). Even though qualitative data is relatively subjective, as its analysis depends on the researchers' interpretation (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000), it allows for the exploration of the construction of meaning, understanding of the social relationships and dynamics in greater detail, and the reflexivity of the researchers in the research process (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Hence, the collection of qualitative data fosters the meaning-making process of researchers, and its analysis aims "to understand the complex world of human experience and behavior from the point-of-view of those involved in the situation of interest" (Krauss, 2005, p. 764). In addition, qualitative data tends to be open to multiple interpretations depending on which analytical and theoretical approach the researcher applies to the analysis (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Thus, our choice of qualitative research methods and theoretical framework can impact the meaning-making process of the data analysis.

Considering this, our research orientation coincides with the social constructivist worldview since we focus on the local perceptions of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development, meaning that every local understands Venice, tourism, and sustainable tourism development differently. Even though the perceptions may differ, it does not make them any less accurate to the questioned person. Consequently, we gather distinct interpretations and understandings of LCT as a phenomenon. This induces a learning process that informs our previously acquired knowledge and leads to new insights. Through this, new forms of meaning can be constructed, which may transform perspectives and actions (Krauss, 2005).

This process can also be called the *hermeneutic circle*, regarded as the methodology of interpretation and understanding (Scholz, 2015). These concepts are rooted in the researcher's previous knowledge, assumptions, and perceptions. Such assumptions can guide learning and inform prior knowledge and future pre-suppositions, resulting in a constant back

and forth (Grondin, 2016). This is also relevant to our research as we delved into the research process with our assumptions and knowledge about the topic and Venice. Through desk research and literature review, we gained new understandings of sustainable tourism development, LCT, local perceptions, risk perceptions, and tourism in Venice, which informed our previous knowledge and facilitated the creation of the interview guide. During the fieldwork, observations and interviews added to our already acquired knowledge, using the information gathered for subsequent interviews. Thus, a certain flexibility in design, data collection, and analysis is necessary for qualitative research to obtain a profound understanding of a subject's perspective. Through interviews and observations, it is then possible for researchers to identify what meanings people apply to things and experiences (Krauss, 2005). Then, as researchers, we construct meaning by interpreting the interviewees' responses when analysing the primary data.

Krauss (2005) suggests two categories of meaning relevant to qualitative data analysis: rules and unarticulated meanings. While rules are often viewed as shared meaning among a community, the researcher articulates the interviewees' unarticulated meanings. This is done through typifications that give meaning to a broad set of data to generalise it (Krauss, 2005). This means that data from different interviewees that point towards a similar theme are generalised under one typification or theme that the researcher creates, thus, interpreting data and giving meaning to the interviewees' answers. For instance, interviewees talking about tourists throwing away trash and not respecting Venice and the locals can be combined in a shared theme called *tourist behaviour*. This shows that we, as researchers, are a part of the meaning-making process since we engage with the setting and the interviewees and interpret answers to develop themes and give meaning to their responses (Krauss, 2005).

Considering the above, this thesis is conducted from a social constructivist perspective. The meaning-making of this thesis is characterised by a learning process and the acquisition of new knowledge throughout the research. We begin the research process with our own assumptions and knowledge, which are expanded by knowledge gathered from the literature review, theoretical framework, and desk research, informing the development of the interview guide. Through the interviews and observations, we gather multiple perspectives of the studied subject and, thus, a better understanding of it, which subsequently lead to adaptations of the interview guide. In the analysis, we then interpret and give meaning to the

data by combining similar data in overarching themes, which adds richness to the findings. This shows that meaning-making through a social constructivist perspective in this thesis is impacted by a learning process, and new understandings continuously inform knowledge and meanings.

5.2. Research design

In this section, we delineate the research design of this thesis. As this project examines the local perceptions of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development in Venice, we chose a case study as the methodological approach. A case study is "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). When conducting a case study, an in-depth exploration of the selected case is needed to understand the rich experiences of individuals. Case studies can illuminate different perspectives to offer new understandings of a topic, and have intrinsic value, meaning they can be highly relevant (O'Leary, 2021). We regard a case study approach as adequate to answer our research question, as we aim to explore the local perceptions thoroughly in Venice to understand the phenomenon of LCT and how the locals perceive it. In addition, we consider this case highly relevant since Venice is frequently exemplified as a prime example of an LCT destination (Miliani, 2023; Haslam, 2023; Cohen, 2017; Olander, 2020; Seema, 2021; Huber, 2018). Moreover, the case study approach aligns with social constructivism, as it considers multiple subjective perceptions and offers rich information on specific topics instead of generalising findings on a broader issue. Thus, this methodological approach is considered suitable for this type of research.

The case study consists of the collection of secondary and primary data, the former meaning already existing data and the latter referring to data generated by the researcher (O'Leary, 2021). For the secondary data, we conducted desk research on tourism strategies and media portrayal in Venice, while the primary data was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews and observations during our fieldwork in the destination (*s. Figure 4*).

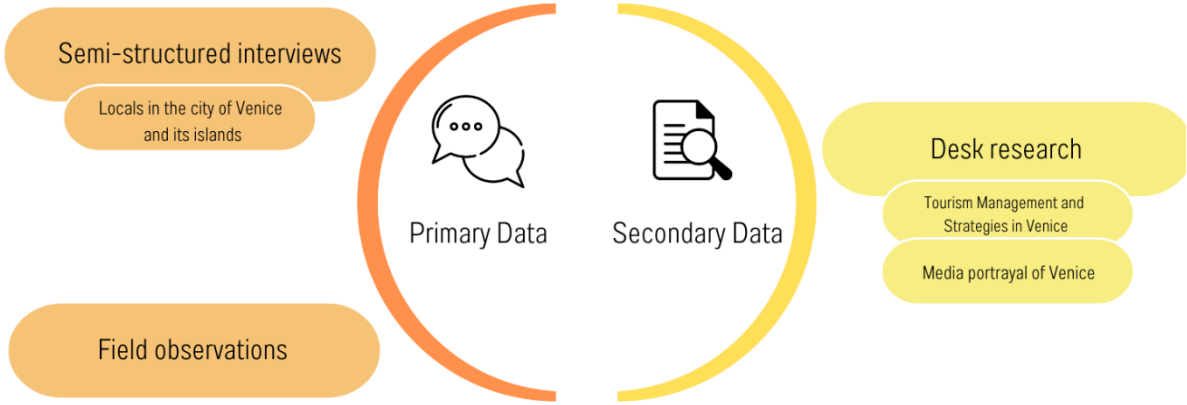


Figure 4: Collected Primary and Secondary Data

5.2.1. Secondary data: desk research

The first phase in our research process was to begin our data collection journey through desk research. Blommaert and Jie (2010) define desk research as the process of collecting secondary data from various available sources. The search engines used to conduct this research varied based on what data we were searching for at the time; for academic literature, we used Google Scholar and Aalborg University Library, and for information on the case study destination and its media portrayal, we utilised Google. Google Scholar and Google were selected based on the search engines' extensiveness and their status as the leading search engines on the internet (Statista, 2023). In contrast, Aalborg University Library was included due to its ability to provide material directly linked to our study programme.

To find relevant material from the sea of academia and media, we searched for academic literature from Google Scholar and Aalborg University Library. First, we selected the relevant keywords to our research: 'last-chance tourism', 'sustainable tourism development', 'local perceptions', 'risk perceptions', and 'tourism in Venice'. Then, to find extensive data, we searched the same keyword with different adjustments, abbreviations, and synonyms. For example, while we searched 'last-chance tourism', we also searched with the terms 'last chance tourism', 'LCT', 'disappearing tourism', and 'doom tourism'. This allowed us to find articles that discussed the same topic and contributed to the same field of literature regardless of the author's use of different spelling or terminology.

As the academic literature revealed that LCT is generally promoted by the media instead of DMOs, we deemed it necessary to conduct desk research on media portrayals and tourism

management strategies in Venice. Once again, we identified the appropriate keywords to find the relevant data and moved the search to Google News to specifically target media portrayal. We began the search with 'Venice' and received 72,400 hits. As this search did not generate much tourism-related content, we specified the keyword to 'Venice Tourism'. Through the adjusted search term, we received 17,000 search results, which included more relevant content; we came across various articles regarding Venice being an LCT destination and articles listing destinations to visit before it is too late. These articles piqued our interest, and we decided to run another search, using the search term 'Venice last-chance tourism', resulting in 574 hits. This led us to find various articles mentioning Venice as one of the last-chance tourism destinations.

To find the different tourism management strategies in Venice, we searched for the various stakeholders' websites. This was done using keywords such as 'Venice tourism', 'Venice tourism strategy', 'Ministry of Tourism Italy', and 'Visit Italy'. The numerous searches with various keywords were deemed necessary, as many of these stakeholders appeared to have no collaboration with each other. For example, searching 'Venice tourism' on Google led us to find *Venezia Unica*, the city's official tourism website. Through this site, we discovered the municipality of Venice's website, as they administrate *Venezia Unica*. However, these two sites did not have connections to the other stakeholders, such as the national DMO of Italy, which were found separately through the other keywords.

This desk research builds on our case study's background and adds to the primary data we discuss in the following chapter.

5.2.2. Primary data: fieldwork progression

This section explains the progression of the conducted fieldwork in Venice to collect primary data. First, we describe the preparation of the fieldwork by developing the interview guide. Then, we outline the fieldwork procedures applied in Venice, including field observations and qualitative semi-structured interviews. Last, we discuss the post-fieldwork process, comprising the review of the observations and the collected data's transcriptions and coding.

Fieldwork preparation

In preparation for our research's primary data collection phase, we created an interview guide *(s. Appendix A).* An interview guide, also known as an *interview schedule* or *interview protocol*,

can be defined as “a list of questions that directs the conversation towards the research topic during the interview” (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2960).

Kallio et al. (2016) conducted a systematic methodological review of different ways of developing an interview guide for semi-structured interviews, based on which they produced a general framework on how to construct a successful protocol for such interviews. While various other frameworks are available (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Turner, 2010), we found this one appropriate due to its specific focus on semi-structured interviews. Moreover, their approach aligns with the social constructivist stance since the construction of the interview guide is characterised by a learning process, where the continuous acquisition of new knowledge informs the creation of the interview guide.

According to their findings, five phases construct the development process of a semi-structured interview guide. As presented below in *Figure 5*, these phases are identifying the prerequisites for using the selected interview method, retrieving and using previous knowledge of the subject, formulating the preliminary interview guide, pilot testing the interview guide, and presenting the complete interview guide. (Kallio et al., 2016.)

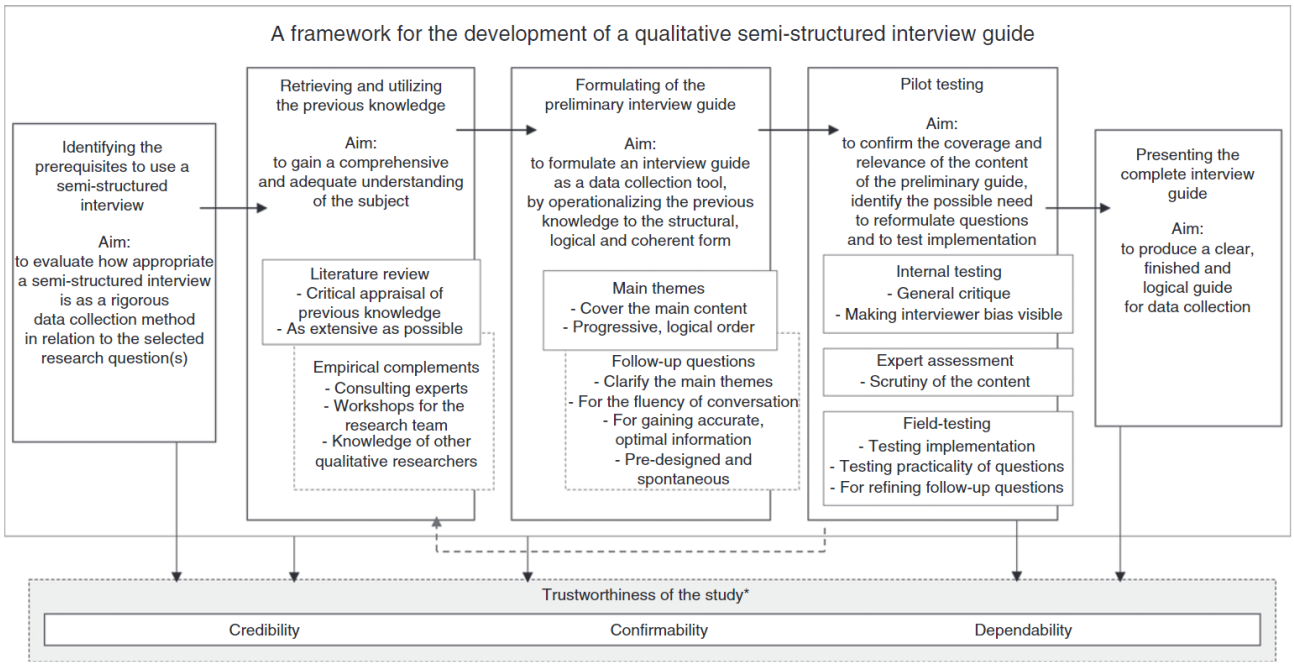


Figure 5 - A framework for the development of a qualitative semi-structured interview guide (Kallio et al., 2016)

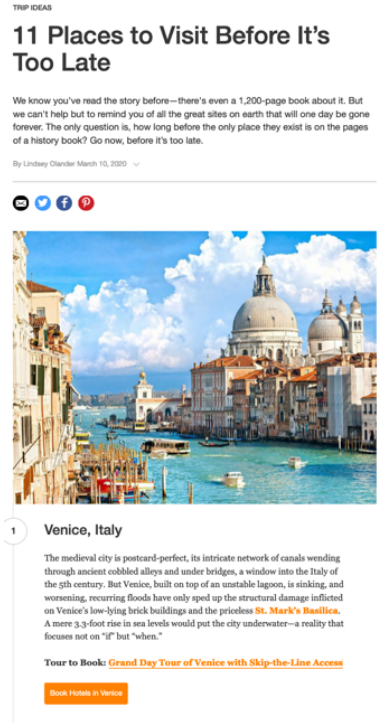
Beginning with the first phase suggested by Kallio et al. (2016), we evaluated how fitting the semi-structured interview method is considering our research question. As our research aims to analyse local perceptions of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development in Venice, the critical component of our research is perceptions. Perceptions are highly subjective, as they depend on the individual's interpretation of a subject and reflect their prior experiences (Pickens, 2005). Therefore, Barriball and While (1994) state that semi-structured interviews fit well for examining perceptions. Furthermore, it can be argued that to understand how the locals perceive LCT, we must understand the interviewees' personal experiences and views on the matter. This can best be achieved through semi-structured interviews, as they are versatile and flexible (Kallio et al., 2016), leaving space for the interviewees to share their stories and experiences.

Since the second phase, *retrieving and utilizing the previous knowledge*, was already carried out and discussed in the literature review and the theoretical framework of this thesis, we now move directly onto the third phase: *formulating the preliminary interview guide*. Kallio et al. (2016) suggest that the questions in a semi-structured interview guide are divided into two levels: main themes and follow-up questions. Boyce and Neale (2006) state that there should be at most fifteen open-ended questions. However, probes – or follow-up questions, as Kallio et al. (2016) call them - such as *Could you elaborate on that?* and *Would you give an example?* are recommended to use whenever needed to guide the interview towards more profound findings (Boyce & Neale 2006).

As our goal was to examine the interviewees' perceptions, and we attempted to receive spontaneous answers that revealed the interviewees' personal feelings (Kallio et al., 2016), we decided to include projective techniques in addition to descriptive questions. As defined by Decrop (1999), projective techniques are "indirect means of qualitative questioning that enable the informant to 'project' beliefs and feelings onto a third person, to an inanimate object, or into a task situation." (p. 159). In other words, the interviewee is provided cognitive stimulation, e.g., pictures or videos, to derive more profound answers based on their assumptions, values, and knowledge (Comi, Bischof, & Eppler, 2014; Decrop, 1999) As Comi, Bischof, and Eppler (2014) state, "projective techniques evoke reactions to a familiar stimulus (i.e. an image) in order to help participants elaborate their thoughts about a complex subject" (p. 111). In addition, it has been researched that by focusing on the visual level, the

interviewees are allowed to move beyond “a verbal mode of thinking”, which can lead to “wider dimensions of experience, which one would perhaps neglect otherwise” (Bagnoli, 2009, pp. 565-566). As we were unsure whether the interviewees would recognise LCT as a phenomenon, we considered how to bring up the topic during the interviews without unintentionally leading the interviewees’ responses in a specific direction. Moreover, we were unsure if we could phrase our questions so that the interviewees would understand them beyond the language barrier, especially if they were unfamiliar with the phenomenon. Hence, projective techniques were deemed suitable to introduce LCT as an interview topic.

As our projective technique, we selected three visuals portraying LCT in Venice. First, we selected one article titled *11 Places to Visit before It’s Too Late* (Olander, 2020), placing Venice in the number one position *(s. Picture 4*). This specific article was chosen amongst several similar articles due to it capturing the essence of the media presentation of LCT well and for being a classic example of such articles; it comes with a bright coloured picture of Venice, briefly explains the reasoning behind why there is a limited time available, and proceeds to encourage the readers to book their stay immediately with direct links to find accommodation in the city.


TRIP IDEAS

11 Places to Visit Before It's Too Late

We know you've read the story before—there's even a 1,200-page book about it. But we can't help but to remind you of all the great sites on earth that will one day be gone forever. The only question is, how long before the only place they exist is on the pages of a history book? Go now, before it's too late.

By Lindsey Olander March 10, 2020

1 Venice, Italy

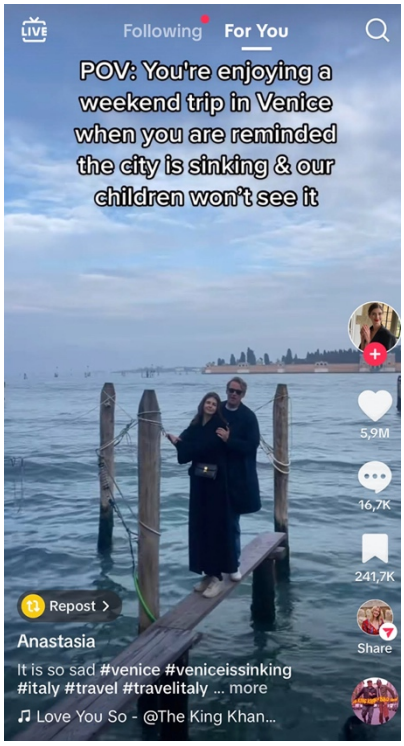
The medieval city is postcard-perfect, its intricate network of canals wending through ancient cobbled alleys and under bridges, a window into the Italy of the 5th century. But Venice, built on top of an unstable lagoon, is sinking, and worsening, recurring floods have only sped up the structural damage inflicted on Venice's low-lying brick buildings and the priceless St. Mark's Basilica. A mere 3.3-foot rise in sea levels would put the city underwater—a reality that focuses not on "if" but "when."

Tour to Book: Grand Day Tour of Venice with Skip-the-Line Access

Book Hotels in Venice

Picture 4: Article about LCT tourism in Venice (Olander, 2020)

Picture 5: First TikTok visual (@vikki.mckenzie, 2022)



Picture 6: Second TikTok visual (@lisogora, 2023)

The two other visuals we selected to project during our interviews were two short videos from the popular social media platform TikTok. The videos were found by simply searching 'Venice' within the platform. While various videos surfaced with this search term, many of them were about the sinking of the city and created by tourists, hence having connotations to LCT. The first chosen video contained imagery of the flood in the Piazza San Marco – the most famous square in Venice – with humorous background music and the caption: "you're visiting Venice but are reminded that it's sinking" *(s. Picture 5)* (@vikki.mckenzie, 2022). In contrast, the second video we selected was painting a slightly more sombre image of LCT; the video has sad background music, shots of Venice's canals, and a caption that states the creator of the video is sad that she is visiting Venice and is being reminded her future grandchildren will not see it in the future *(s. Picture 6)* (@lisogora, 2023). Thus, these two videos were chosen due to them portraying two extremes within the surfaced videos; one approached the topic from a humorous perspective, while the other took a serious point of view by capturing the melancholy of LCT. However, these videos were left out of the interview guide after the first two interviews due to reasons elaborated in the fieldwork procedures.

After formulating the preliminary interview guide, we proceeded to the pilot testing. The purpose of pilot testing is to confirm that the interview guide will help the interviewer to collect the relevant information and to reveal any need for reformulation of the questions before the actual interviews (Kallio et al., 2016). Kallio et al. (2016) suggest three different techniques for carrying out pilot testing: internal testing, expert assessment, and field-testing. Due to our limited time on the field and inaccessibility to experts, we decided to rule out the possibility of field-testing and expert assessment and rely on internal testing instead; we pilot-tested our interview guide by interviewing each other. This test round revealed that some of our questions were quite broad and hence could be considered difficult by the interviewees. This finding prepared us for the possibility of the interviewees simply answering *I don't know.* Furthermore, it made us think of techniques for proceeding in case such a scenario presented itself and come up with some probing questions beforehand. In addition, we noted down some possible answers that we were expecting from the questions in the interview guide. After pilot testing, the interview guide was finalised, and we were ready to begin our fieldwork.

Fieldwork procedures

In this chapter, we describe the research methods we applied in the field in Venice. We primarily used two research methods commonly used in fieldwork: field observations and qualitative interviews (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). What follows is the delineation of the choice of methods and how they were conducted in the field.

Field observations

Observations and the subsequent notetaking form the core part of field research (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). We chose unstructured/naturalistic/qualitative observation as the preferred type of observational research since we aim to explore the local perceptions of the phenomenon of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development in Venice. Veal (2017) describes this type of method as informal, which intends to outline a phenomenon and develop explanations for it. Other types of observational research either primarily yield quantitative data or disrupt the social environment or behaviour, which is not feasible in this thesis (Veal, 2017). Since we aim to explore the phenomenon of LCT through the local perspective, the unstructured method is preferred for this thesis. Thus, unstructured/naturalistic/qualitative observations are relevant to our research objective,

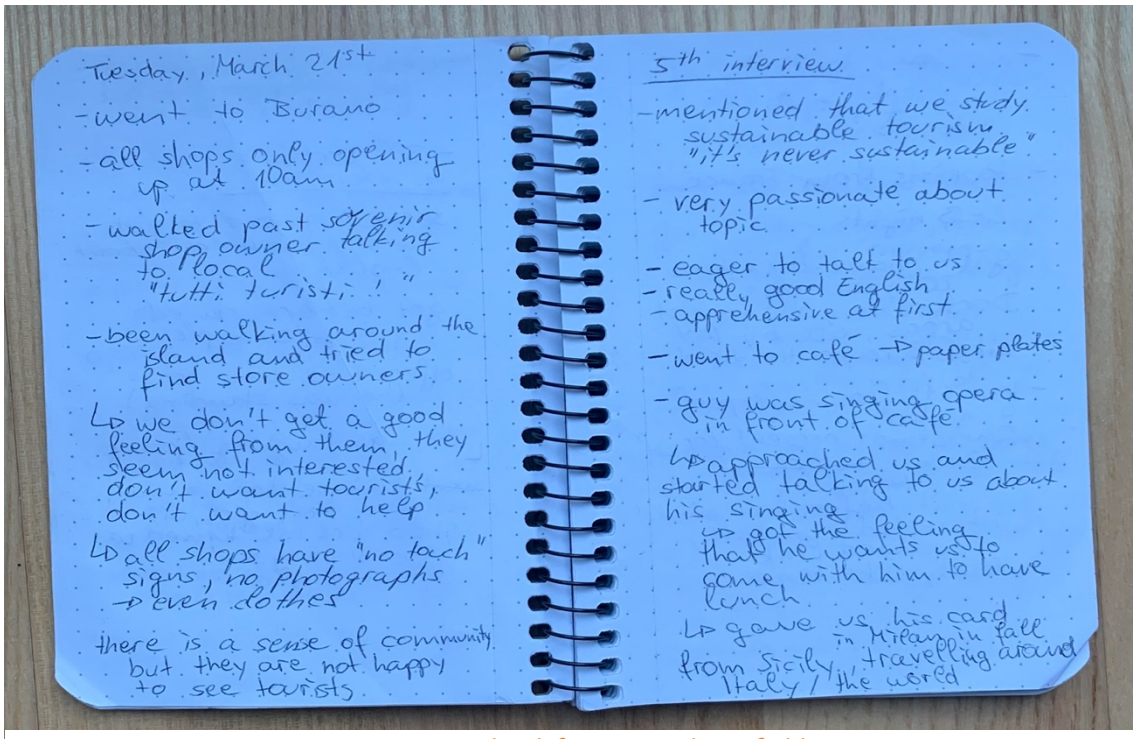
especially since we seek to record information about the destinations and the local perceptions regarding LCT.

Upon arriving in Venice, we aimed to observe everything to develop a general image of the destination. This was done by finding our way around the city, discovering paths, and registering the social behaviour of the locals and tourists, all observed and noted down (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). This allows us to construct an overall understanding of the tourism situation in Venice, which then facilitates the identification of patterns. This means that by targeting specific places or businesses – determined through the overall observational process – we could identify small things or events that become meaningful relative to the overall picture. However, according to Blommaert and Jie (2010), this can only be achieved if observations are made at different levels, times, and places and connected for contextualisation. Thus, when possible, we observed similar events or places at various times to contextualise them within the broader picture of the phenomenon of LCT in Venice. For instance, from the beginning, we noticed that some locals behaved unfriendly or intimidating towards us when speaking English to them, which tourists are possibly confronted with as well. After repeatedly encountering this situation and talking to locals in interviews about this issue, we learned that most locals are not impolite but insecure in their English proficiency. Thus, we identified a pattern amongst locals in their social behaviour towards non-Italian-speaking people. Once again, this aligns with our research orientation and meaning-making, where we were puzzled by behaviour and, through further investigation, informed the meaning-making process and gained a new understanding of the behaviour.

We considered it essential to note down the observations made while in the field, as such field notes provide us with the necessary information on what was observed and how it was observed (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). Furthermore, they are typically descriptive and allow for different interpretations. This means that other descriptions of the same event are possible due to the different lenses through which researchers view it. For instance, we took note of the environment and noticed that there were few garbage cans around Venice and primarily in touristic areas. This can be interpreted as the city's administration catering towards tourists instead of locals. At the same time, it can also be viewed as locals not needing many garbage cans since they can dispose of their waste at home. Similarly, selecting and filtering which events to note down is also open to interpretation (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). This is in

line with the research orientation of this thesis, which emphasises the construction of the social world depending on the point of view through which it is perceived (Hjelm, 2014).

Since Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) suggest a regular and systematic way of taking notes of what has been observed and learned in the field, we wrote down happenings, observations, and impressions at the end of each day. For this purpose, we created an observation diary on our laptops, where we systematically narrated the observations made at the end of each day and sought to identify patterns *(s. Appendix D).* We used jotting in the field to recount the entire day's observations accurately. This is defined as the quick scribbling about events or interviews, later used to trigger a memory while writing field notes. These scribbles can be key components of observations, sensory details, short, direct quotes, or emotions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). There are two ways to approach jotting: either in the moment or after the moment of the observation. While jotting in the moment provides flexibility and allows the researcher to note down detailed information, it could ruin the moment and possibly lead to distrust, especially during interviews. In contrast, jotting down in private after the moment has passed allows the researcher to be sensitive to the situation even though the possibility of forgetting details increases (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Since we also sought to note down interview observations, we wanted to keep the interviews as natural as possible without distracting the interviewee with jotting. Thus, we chose to jot down observations after the moment to be more considerate towards the locals and blend in more efficiently at the destination. For instance, when walking around the city, we used a small notebook to jot down things we noticed *(s. Picture 7).* For observations regarding interviews, we took some time after the moment to sit down in a café, restaurant, or square to note them down.



Picture 7: Notebook for jotting down fieldnotes

In addition to noting down observations of the environment, events, and interviews with the locals, we engaged in casual conversation with tourists to gather information on their perceptions of LCT in Venice. However, these conversations were informal and unstructured and did not resemble interviews. Instead, they merely aimed to gain a broader picture of the phenomenon of LCT in Venice. For this purpose, we approached people at tourist sites and asked them whether they were visiting Venice and spoke English. If they fulfilled the criteria, we asked them four questions about their trip: *Where are you from?*, *How long are you staying in Venice?*, *What are you planning on doing here/what have you done here so far?* and *Why did you come to Venice?*. Last, we also showed them the article we showed the interviewees to get their thoughts on this type of media portrayal. Thus, we also jotted down notes of such casual conversations with tourists. Moreover, we took pictures of relevant sites, events, or impressions to support the written material of the observations.

Qualitative interviews

As mentioned in the fieldwork preparation, we conducted semi-structured interviews in Venice. Since this thesis aims to explore local perceptions of LCT, our criteria for identifying interviewees were that they were either living in Venice and its islands or actively contributing to the local community, such as working in the city. Hence, the interviewees consist of local

business owners, locals working in the tourism sector, and local students. Therefore, we will refer to all of them as locals of Venice.

When booking the accommodation for our stay on a sustainable booking platform, the hosts offered to pass some of their contacts interested in sustainable tourism on to us after we explained the purpose of our stay. In addition, we sought to schedule an interview with our hosts since they are third-generation owners of the accommodation and passionate about sustainable tourism, thus, fulfilling the criteria for being participants in an interview. However, when we arrived at the accommodation, their level of English was not as high, and we did not have many conversations with them, especially not about the research topic.

Since we had no pre-scheduled interviews, we identified the interviewees on the field. It turned out to be challenging to encounter locals with a proficient level of English who were willing to speak to us, as neither of us speaks Italian. Therefore, we began by targeting tourist shops, assuming the employees spoke English. Still, they were unwilling to talk to us due to different circumstances, such as their English level or not wanting to be recorded. We then changed strategies and went to the Dorsoduro district, the student area of Venice, since we hoped to find younger people who were more open and had a higher proficiency in English. Thus, the first four interviews were with employees at the district's bookstores and a student. This speaks to our research orientation, as we had to adapt and inform our strategy while in the field after learning our initial approach was not fruitful. Such a learning process is a crucial part of our philosophical stance.

Furthermore, we took a ferry to another touristic island and interviewed a couple born and raised there who owned a handcraft store. Towards the end of the field trip, we specifically targeted stores we had walked past or visited earlier while seeking out potential interviewees. We interviewed a student working part-time in a jewellery store, an owner of a design studio, and an owner of a fashion store. The latter suggested going to a nearby hotel and interviewing the reception workers since they might be willing to help us. We conducted nine interviews *(s. Figure 6),* which we consider sufficient, as we already started receiving repetitive information on sustainable tourism and LCT during the eighth interview. In addition, we aim to gather more rich and detailed data, as we analyse local perceptions, which are highly subjective and differ from each individual (Pickens, 2005). Thus, as qualitative methods value

depth over quantity (O'Leary, 2021), we considered a high number of interviews not beneficial.

Figure 6: Profiling the interviewees

We were both present for all the interviews, with one person taking the lead and the other performing tasks such as recording the interview, making observations, and asking follow-up questions. We chose to leave out specific questions during the interview depending on whether the interviewees had already answered them through a previous response. After the first four interviews, we noticed that we did not receive sufficient information on LCT and sustainable tourism in connection to tourists, which is why we adapted the interview guide and added two new questions: *Why do you think tourists visit Venice?* and *In your experience, how do tourists behave/act in Venice?*. The adaptation of the interview guide *(s. Appendix A)* conforms with social constructivism and the learning process, where we first developed the interview guide based on our understanding and knowledge gained from the literature review and added questions after learning that we were not completely satisfied with the data collected so far.

As part of the interviews, we used projective techniques, as previously introduced. We planned on showing the interviewees three visuals. However, after the first two interviews, we realised that showing multiple forms of media was too time-consuming for the interviewees. Furthermore, we learned it was unnecessary to include numerous visuals to gain

richer data due to the similarities between the responses. Hence, we proceeded only to show the article, once more aligning with our research orientation. The projective technique allowed us to end the interview by encouraging the interviewees to talk freely about their thoughts and feelings regarding LCT.

According to Blommaert and Jie (2010), qualitative interviews should be conversational and natural and offer room for anecdotes. Thus, we aimed to balance the formality of the semi-structured interviews with conversational engagement and natural reactions from our side and emphasise building rapport during the process. This is also encouraged by Spradley (1979), who stresses the importance of establishing rapport with interviewees since it leads to a relationship of trust and the free flow of information. He proposes four phases of the rapport process: apprehension, exploration, cooperation, and participation. At the beginning of an interview, interviewees often meet the interviewers with uncertainty as they do not know what to expect from the situation. Thus, it is essential to keep the interviewees talking by asking descriptive questions, eventually leading to the exploration phase, where the interviewer should repeat explanations and restate what interviewees said to facilitate the process. This results in cooperation built on mutual trust, where interviewees offer personal information and ask their own questions (Spradley, 1979). We applied the first three phases to how we approached the interviews to develop and foster rapport with the interviewees. Initially, it was noticeable that the interviewees were apprehensive of us and our research. However, it quickly led to exploration, as we asked them descriptive questions and let them talk freely. Frequently, we remained silent for a brief moment after the interviewees stopped talking, which according to Blommaert and Jie (2010), can encourage them to start talking again and break into anecdotes or repeat something in greater detail. Subsequently, this led to cooperation, where they opened up even more, talked about personal experiences, and asked us questions about our research. Unfortunately, the last phase – participation – is not always achieved in interviews as it requires a prolonged collaboration (Spradley, 1979), which we could not establish.

We also prepared consent forms regarding recordings and the use of interviewees' answers for scheduled interviews *(s. Appendix B).* However, since we did not conduct planned interviews for the reasons stated above, all our interviews were spontaneous, with us walking into stores and hotels asking employees whether they had time for an interview. Since this

already created a sense of apprehension, we did not want to further intimidate them by handing them a consent form. Instead, we obtained verbal consent before starting the recordings, leading to a natural conversation flow. When a person did not consent to be recorded, even though they had already agreed to an interview, we thanked them for their time and did not proceed with the interview to ensure we were abiding by ethical standards.

Post-fieldwork

This chapter discusses the fieldwork procedures after returning from the destination. These include the processing and analysis of the raw data we gathered in Venice. We do this by reviewing the observations and field notes, transcribing the interviews, and coding the interviews and observations according to themes.

Review of observations

Once we returned from Venice, we reviewed the observations we had noted down in the form of field notes and began the analytical writing process. For this, we started reading and re-reading our notes, viewing them as a data source and reflecting on and interpreting the observations (Blommaert & Jie, 2010; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Furthermore, since data from field notes can be used in a myriad of ways, e.g., in the analysis or the background of the case (Blommaert & Jie, 2010), we decided to use the data from the observations as supporting material to the findings of the interviews. Combined with the primary data from the interviews, the data from the observations provide a certain rigour for this thesis (Hollinshead, 2004), further explained in the *quality criteria* section.

Transcriptions

For the analysis, it was first necessary to transcribe the interviews we conducted in Venice to thoroughly and methodically analyse them (Veal, 2017). Therefore, we divided the interviews equally among us according to the length of each interview and transcribed them manually by listening to the recordings *(s. Appendix C).* Even though this is a challenging and time-consuming process, it helped us to already familiarise ourselves with the raw data by listening to the audio material and re-reading the transcriptions. Although we transcribed each interview in its entirety, some parts were unintelligible due to background noises or the interviewees' accents. However, this did not impact the quality of the interviews as inaudible parts remained scarce. In addition, we distinguished between interviewees and us as

interviewers in the transcripts and added line numbers on the left side to reference direct quotes easily for the analysis.

Coding

Once all the interviews had been transcribed and the field observations had been reviewed, we applied the thematic analysis approach by Braun and Clarke (2012) to the coding of the raw data to identify key themes relevant to the research question (O'Leary, 2021). In general, thematic analysis is defined as "a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set." (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). It tends to be flexible as it can be approached from distinct theoretical perspectives and data orientations. While the inductive approach is driven by data, meaning that codes and themes arise through coding, the deductive method is theory-driven, where preliminary concepts, ideas, and topics are used to develop codes and themes. In practice, both approaches are typically applied to thematic analysis; however, one tends to predominate (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Since our research orientation is from a social constructivist perspective, we bring our knowledge and presuppositions into the analysis process. This means that while we intended to gather codes and themes as they appeared from the raw data, we were also explicitly searching for themes regarding LCT, risk perceptions, and the three dimensions of sustainable tourism development to be able to answer our research question. As a result, we then obtained a more comprehensive understanding of local perceptions of LCT and local risk perceptions in Venice in the context of sustainable tourism development. The coding of the raw data was executed through the qualitative analysis software NVivo. This software efficiently indexes, interprets, and visualises the collected data from the qualitative semi-structured interviews and field observations (O'Leary, 2021; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

Braun and Clarke (2012) suggest a six-phase approach when applying thematic analysis to qualitative research. The first phase involves the familiarisation of the raw data. This encompasses reading and re-reading the transcripts, listening to the recordings, and making notes during this phase. The aim here is to notice and already start identifying things relevant to the research question. Thus, before we started the coding process, we followed this protocol closely and noted down the overall findings. In the second phase, we generated initial codes which "identify and provide a label for a feature of the data that is potentially relevant

to the research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 61). For instance, as we started the coding process, we created the codes *Economic, Environmental, Socio-cultural, Risk perceptions*, and *LCT* to help us answer the research question.

In the next step, we searched for themes which reflect meaningful patterns within the data set. This involves reviewing the codes and identifying similarities and patterns, which leads to the collapsing and clustering of codes. While searching for themes, it is also essential to make connections between them and reflect on how they work together in the bigger picture (Braun & Clarke, 2012). While going through the raw data, other themes that required their own codes emerged. Thus, we developed, for instance, the codes *Respect* and *Tourism in General*. In addition, we added sub-codes to already established codes in cases when sub-themes were repeatedly mentioned, such as *Authenticity* and *Cultural Exchange* under *Socio-cultural*. We also merged certain codes and moved sub-codes to their own codes, such as *Respect*, which was initially a sub-code for *Socio-cultural*. However, after noticing it was an essential theme throughout all interviews, we decided to make it its own code. After the coding process, we created a codebook with definitions and examples for each code and sub-code to facilitate the next phase *(s. Appendix E).*

The fourth phase refers to reviewing the themes to quality check the coding and development of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). We did this by going through each code and sub-code to determine whether the data fits the code or should be moved to a different one. Then, we defined the themes, which according to Braun and Clarke (2012) should have a singular focus, be related but not overlapping, and directly address the research question. Thus, we ended up with the main themes that refer to the research question, such as *selling of the city*, *amusement park*, and *media hysteria* regarding LCT in Venice. Consequently, the names of the themes should be informative, concise, and catchy, perhaps even a quote from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The last step is producing the report involving a logical and meaningful order of the themes and the narrative of a coherent story (Braun & Clarke, 2012), which is applied in the analysis chapter of this thesis.

5.3. Quality criteria

In qualitative research in the social sciences, the validity and reliability of studies are questioned since a generalisability of data is not possible due to the research subjects being humans and social situations (Decrop, 1999; Veal, 2017). Therefore, to ensure the quality of

research findings, trustworthiness with the criteria *credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability*, and *reflexivity* was introduced (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The criterion credibility refers to how truthful the research findings are, while transferability concerns the applicability of the results to other settings. Then, dependability is the consistency and reproducibility of the findings over time, while confirmability refers to the objectivity of the research (Decrop, 1999). Last, reflexivity is self-reflection and positioning as a researcher, including biases, preconceptions, and the research relationship with the research subjects (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

For qualitative tourism research, Decrop (1999) suggested triangulation as a strategy to ensure the credibility and, thus, the trustworthiness of research, in which "a single point is considered from three different and independent sources." (p. 158). Triangulation allows for the limitations of personal and methodological biases and improves the generalisability of the research findings by investigating the research topic from multiple data sources (Decrop, 1999). To ensure the credibility of this thesis, we follow Decrop's (1999) strategies. The first approach is *data triangulation*, which refers to various data sources such as primary and secondary data and pictures or audio (Decrop, 1999). In this thesis, we collect primary data through interviews with locals and observations in Venice and secondary data through desk research on Venice's tourism strategy and articles about tourism in Venice. In addition, we took pictures of Venice during the fieldwork, which act as supporting material in analysing the collected primary and secondary data.

Method triangulation is another way to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings by applying multiple research methods to examine one research topic (Decrop, 1999). For this, Decrop (1999) suggests including projective techniques in qualitative research in addition to interviews and observations. Hence, we showed an article regarding LCT in Venice at the end of each interview, without talking about LCT beforehand, to allow the interviewees to express their feelings and thoughts on the topic based on their values and preconceptions. Combining projective techniques with semi-structured interviews and field observations allowed us to fulfil method triangulation.

The third approach is *investigator triangulation*, which means that more than one researcher codes and interprets the collected data (Decrop, 1999). Since we are two researchers transcribing, coding, and analysing the data, this thesis also achieves investigator

triangulation. Last, *theoretical triangulation* refers to using various theoretical perspectives to analyse and interpret the collected data (Decrop, 1999). As our theoretical framework comprises SET, the TBL, risk perceptions and cultural theory, we examine the collected primary data through various theoretical lenses, which allows us to fulfil theoretical triangulation.

Regarding the transferability of this study, Korstjens and Moser (2018) suggest *thick description* as a strategy to fulfil the trustworthiness of the findings. This means contextualising the results, which we ensure by clearly referring to the context of the data when relevant. The criteria dependability and conformability can be provided through *audit trial*, according to Korstjens and Moser (2018), where we transparently describe the entire research process and research design in the methodology chapter of this thesis. Concerning the criterion of reflexivity, we outline our self-reflections and positioning as researchers to ensure our awareness of our biases and how we are perceived in the field in the following chapter.

Considering the above-outlined strategies and applications of triangulation in qualitative tourism research, this thesis meets the criteria and ensures the trustworthiness of the research findings.

5.4. Positioning as researchers

In this chapter, we provide our self-reflections and positioning as researchers in the field, as it is necessary to ensure transparency and reflexivity in this thesis (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Privilege and power relationships

As Bourke (2014) suggests, achieving true objectivism in research is an unrealistic goal due to a researcher never fully being able to separate from their subjectivities. O'Leary (2021) confirms this view by stating that instead of a researcher denying their subjectivity, they must acknowledge these personal biases to attempt to manage them. Furthermore, addressing subjectivities is needed to guarantee the research's credibility and trustworthiness (O'Leary, 2021).

Hence, for this research to produce trustworthy and credible data, we need to acknowledge our privilege, power, and the power relations between us and our interviewees. As we are two young female students from European countries and conducted the fieldwork in an Italian

city, the power relationships regarding ethnicity were relatively balanced. However, it needs to be acknowledged that it was perhaps easier for us to simply walk into stores and talk to employees *because of* our ethnicity, age, and gender, as our physical appearance did not seem intimidating to them.

Regardless of English not being our first language, it became apparent that it was of a higher level than the local level of English we encountered. This created an unintentional power relation between us and the people we approached on the field. For example, one of the first people we approached during our fieldwork answered affirmatively when asked if they spoke English, but quickly changed their mind and told us their English was not good as soon as we mentioned the word *interview*. Similarly, some of the people who did agree to be interviewed apologised for their level of English several times. As we learned relatively early on from an interviewee that the locals might be embarrassed about their level of English, we aimed to encourage and reassure them during the interview about their language skills, for example, by indicating jokingly that their English is better than our Italian.

Tourists or researchers

Even though we position ourselves as researchers first, it is undeniable that while on the field, we were simultaneously tourists. Hence, it is crucial to further contemplate our role and how we were perceived by the locals during our fieldwork, and furthermore, how this may have impacted our research process.

There were variations in how the interviewees perceived us. It was apparent that some interviewees perceived us as tourists, as phrases like “you as tourists” occasionally surfaced within the interviews. Furthermore, this could have affected their responses; as many of the interviewees worked in the tourism sector, the possibility of the interviewees wanting to please us with their answers exists. Contrastingly, some acknowledged that the purpose of our visit was research. This became evident through many interviewees expressing that our research is important, as they thought the current tourism situation needs improvement and therefore were interested in the results of our thesis.

5.5. Ethics

This chapter outlines the ethical considerations regarding the research process of this thesis to ensure we abide by ethical standards.

Ethical obligations and dilemmas

O'Leary (2021) states that the researcher has an ethical obligation for "ensuring respondents have given informed consent, ensuring no harm comes to respondents [and] ensuring confidentiality and anonymity" (p. 76). To comply with this obligation, we created a consent form to inform the interviewees on how the data provided by them will be used and stored. However, once we began our fieldwork, we soon realised that since many of the potential interviewees seemed already quite nervous to talk with us, we did not want to intimidate them by handing them a form to sign. This could have also disrupted the rapport between the interviewees and us, as we wanted the interview situation to feel natural and comfortable for the interviewees. Hence, instead of handing the consent form to sign, we verbally explained the purpose of our data collection and asked permission to record our conversation and use the data we collected. While we did not manage to stick to our original plan, the *AAU Handbook* approves verbal consent as an equally acceptable form by stating the following: "Consent can be collected in the manner (format) that best suits the given task requiring consent. Consent can thus be collected both in writing and orally" (AAU, 2023). Thus, we fulfil the ethical obligations regarding the interviewees' consent.

In addition to the ethical obligations, O'Leary (2021) discusses ethical dilemmas. Since the data we collected focused on tourism and not directly on the interviewees' personal matters, we did not consider the data to be that sensitive. Nevertheless, an ethical dilemma regarding asking insensitive questions (O'Leary, 2021) did surface on a few occasions; a few of the interviewees felt sad about one specific question and responded with phrases like "this makes me want to cry" and "I did not want to see this". Since, for us, this question was nothing out of the ordinary, we did not think of the possibility of such reactions beforehand. As we apologised to these interviewees for making them feel bad, we were met with immediate responses of "It's alright, this happens" and "No, no, it's the truth". While these two cases did not disrupt the rapport with the interviewees, nor did the interviewees seem uncomfortable answering the question after their initial reaction, we found it surprising that we had not anticipated such responses. An explanation could be that because we are not the ones living in a destination severely affected by climate change and confronted with it on a daily basis, such questions do not produce similar reactions in us.

The dilemma of us going to Venice in the first place

Another rather apparent ethical dilemma in our research is conducting a field study in Venice in the first place. Since both overtourism in Venice and LCT contributing to the deterioration of the destinations through GHG emissions are widely discussed, we were aware of both problems. Regardless, academics have discussed how the solution to these problems is not ending tourism in Venice but transforming it into something more sustainable (Hindley & Font, 2018; Denley et al., 2020). Hence, while we cannot deny our travelling to the destination and back producing GHG emissions, we made a conscious attempt to make sustainable choices in other aspects of our travels to give back to the local community.

To begin with, we scheduled our time on the field for the lower tourism season to not contribute to the volume of tourists Venice experiences from Easter until fall. For our accommodation, we arranged a stay with a Venetian host family and stayed in their guest room in the apartment they had inherited from their grandparents. During our stay, we ate locally and tried to steer away from the tourist hotspots during peak hours. All in all, as we had examined the tourism portals of Venice prior to our time in the field, we were aware of what the city of Venice and their tourist information consider sustainable and respectful tourist behaviour, and, furthermore, we made a conscious effort to act accordingly.

5.6. Limitations

In this chapter, we establish the limitations referring to the methodology and fieldwork of this thesis.

Desk research

While our desk research was extensive and thorough, conducting systematic desk research throughout the whole research process could have led us to both gain different knowledge regarding the topic and affirm the knowledge we gained. In addition, we could have conducted a more extensive search throughout different social media platforms. However, as we did find an alignment between our desk research and traditional media, we decided not to analyse the data further due to the research's focus on the local perspective and not the image the media paints.

Interviews

While we did collect rich data through our interviews, certain limitations arose within them. Before going to the field, we communicated with our accommodation host via email, who suggested she could pass down some contacts to reach out to once arriving in Venice. However, quickly after arrival, we realised the host of our accommodation seemed to be a different person than we had talked with beforehand, as the language barrier was more significant than expected. While we brought up the email conversations with our host, she did seem to know what we meant. Hence, we could not access the contacts we relied on before going to the field. In hindsight, we should not have relied on these as heavily as we did but also attempted to pre-schedule interviews ourselves. However, reaching individual locals from afar would have been difficult. While we could have contacted different organisations to set up interviews, this contained the risk of us getting the organisations' alignment and views on the topics rather than the interviewees' personal perceptions, which would have conflicted with our research goal.

The lack of pre-scheduled interviews led us to identify possible interviewees spontaneously in Venice. We mainly approached people in stores, e.g., bookstores and handcrafts, after approaching potential interviewees in public proved to be unsuccessful. This, however, led us to our second limitation; most of the people we interviewed were working and, thus, only had a limited time available for an interview. In addition, due to many of the interviewees' jobs being tied to the tourism sector, they might have had the mindset that they were answering questions presented by tourists rather than researchers, which might have impacted their answers as well.

Language barrier

Another more evident limitation regarding this research is the language barrier between the interviewees and us. Due to neither one of us speaking Italian, we could not communicate with the interviewees using their native language. Before going to the field, we had expectations regarding the level of English in the destination; since Venice is such an iconic tourist destination, we assumed the level of English would be high due to the large number of locals working in the tourism sector. However, this was not the case, as many of the people we approached told us they did not speak English or that their English was not good enough to converse with us. Furthermore, the English skills seemed limited to younger and middle-

aged people, ruling out the elderly population. This led us to miss out on various interviews and possibly alternative perceptions.

Additionally, the language barrier might have led to some of the data getting lost in translation; whether it was the interviewee not remembering the word they wanted to use or us understanding something differently. During the interviews, we asked specifying questions on the spot to ensure we understood the interviewee correctly, which led to the interviewees either confirming or rephrasing their thoughts. This allowed us to be confident that no misunderstandings would occur. Regardless, the possibility of the language barrier affecting the translation process still exists and must be acknowledged.

6. Analysis

In this chapter, we analyse and interpret the collected primary and secondary data to examine the local perceptions of LCT in the context of sustainable tourism development in Venice and its islands. First, we investigate the interviewees' understanding of sustainable tourism development. Hence, we analyse the interviewees' positive and negative perceptions of tourism impacts in the three dimensions of sustainability. Furthermore, since LCT can be considered risky (Dawson et al., 2011), it is crucial to explore the local risk perceptions to understand their perceptions of the phenomenon. Last, based on the gained insights into the local understandings of sustainable tourism development and their risk perceptions, we are able to examine the local perceptions of LCT and discuss the implications of these findings.

Demanding Respect for the Environment

Venice and its nearby islands find themselves in a precarious environmental situation, as the water levels of the lagoon are continuously rising due to climate change. Simultaneously, the historic centre's unstable foundation is slowly sinking into the muddy ground (Phelan, 2022). Upon arriving at the historic centre of Venice, the fluctuating water levels became immediately apparent through the visible high-water marks on the buildings' walls *(s. Picture 8).* Contrastingly, before our fieldwork, various news sites worldwide had reported that Venice's canals had run dry (The Guardian, 2023; Verdú, 2023), making it difficult for locals and tourists to navigate the city. As one local spoke about the matter, "*You go by walk, or you go by boat. And you cannot go around the canals with the boat because there was no water, so it's crazy.*" (C.VI, 98-99). Such times of drought can potentially cause severe repercussions, as we observed that even ambulances and the police travel by boat.

Picture 8: High water marks in the historic centre

Most interviewees perceived climate change and the increasing water levels posing a threat to Venice's future; however, to which extent this threat was perceived as concerning varied amongst the interviewees. One interviewee mentioned that the rising water levels and the high tides make the future of Venice unpredictable, with another even jokingly saying that she sees the future of Venice *"under water"* (C.II, 83) and specifying that *"we have to enjoy the city now that we can"* (C.II, 83). Another interviewee expressed fear while talking about the future:

> *"The future of Venice is really unstable actually; […] The water is gradually catching up, so that's really scary. […] We really have to think about how to behave and how to help*

the city […]. I'm just really scared, and I try to live the best that I can, but it's really… it's difficult." (C. VIII, 85-88).

The city of Venice has taken measures to combat the increasing risk of high tides by installing a series of floodgates at the door of the lagoon (UNESCO, 2023b), which seems to have given hope to some of the interviewees. However, others remain sceptical; one of the interviewees mentioned that the system would not be working against the rising water levels induced by climate change, meaning that it is only a temporary solution for the high tides. In addition, another interviewee mentioned the floodgate system being *"the first thing done for the Venetians who live here"* (C.III, 75). This could indicate that the city's administration seldom prioritises the needs of the locals or their environmental concerns.

Even though the adverse consequences of the rising water levels loom in the near future for Venice (Phelan, 2022), the interviewees highlighted other environmental aspects as more concerning. For instance, one interviewee expressed concern towards the number of flights to and from Venice:

"Probably the way, the first task [towards more sustainable tourism] could be how you can reach the city. For example, if you go by plane, now there exist 40 flights every week, that half of these flights are empty" (C.IV, 67-68).

Hence, the more pressing environmental issue remains the pollution caused by tourism. Many interviewees highlighted that a lot of rubbish is left lying around at night and that tourists "*feel free to do everything they want"* (C.VI, 63) – especially during the carnival season. We also observed barely any rubbish bins in the narrow streets, which could add to the littering issue. One interviewee emphasised that domestic tourists from the mainland are the ones who litter and act disrespectfully towards the environment.

Respect appears to be a frequently surfacing theme, as many interviewees talked about it, with one even suggesting that respecting the environment is what sustainability is all about. Other interviewees also highlighted the literal weight of tourists on the carrying capacity of Venice to be troubling. One of them said that "*When you're here [Venice] in summer, you see how hard it is. Not just for the people that live here, but just for the ground in Venice"* (C.VIII, 80-82). These interviewees suggested that fewer tourists should come to the city, while another interviewee said that "*people who are respecting the environment here are more than*

welcome in Venice" (C.VII, 18-19). This contrast in responses implies that regardless of the several environmental concerns enhanced by the tourism industry, not everyone disapproves of tourism itself but of how tourists behave.

Money versus Identity

Even though the weight of the tourists and their behaviour towards the environment is perceived as concerning, according to the interviewees, the city's administration seems to keep emphasising tourist numbers. Thus, the primary concern lies with the administration of Venice, which is focused more on economic growth and tourist expenditures than the well-being of the locals, as two interviewees pointed out:

> *"I think it's [tourism] something really good because […] all of Italy's economy is based on tourism, so it's really good, of course, but in a city like Venice, it's maybe too much in the sense that everything is built for tourists." (C.VIII, 32-34).*

> *"Our administration is full of people that think only about the money, not our identity, our culture. Now politicians everywhere have changed the politics with economy. Economy is economy. Politics is politics. So, they don't understand this problem, and they don't do the real job they should do." (C.V, 71-75).*

Similarly, Venice's mismanagement and focus on the economy have been highlighted in the media, referring to it as the "tragedy of Venice" (Goodell, 2019). This supports the argument by Dwyer (2018), Joppe (2018), and Becken and Kaur (2022) that an emphasis on economic growth and benefits in tourist destinations overrules socio-cultural development and even environmental preservation.

Some interviewees stated that "*tourism is bringing us […] money which allows us to live"* (C.VII, 13) and "*tourists come in and buy the books, so I'm happy"* (C.III, 44-45), indicating income from the tourism industry is necessary to survive in Venice. Thus, Venice's economic dependence on tourism was another rising theme amongst the interviewees. As one interviewee succinctly said, "*Without tourism, Venice is not the same city*" (C.I, 25). Such dependence leads to a conflicting situation where the interviewees need tourism to live, but simultaneously, continuously encouraged tourism growth could adversely impact their quality of life. As Sheldon (2022) argues, a heavy focus on profit maximisation in an industry can lead to environmental degradation and increased inequalities. However, banning tourism entirely

could severely affect the local population since "*Venice lives with tourism"* (C.I, 22). While this can be interpreted as Venice being economically dependent on tourism, the quote could also imply that, without tourism, there are no people to bring life to the city. This two-fold interpretation can be noticed in another interviewee's response as well:

> *"I'm not against tourism because even though it can be a bad thing, it's also the thing that keeps the city going now because people that actually live here are actually leaving. So, of course, I'm not saying we should ban tourism." (C.II, 31-34).*

The dependence on tourism is also perceived as a risk by some interviewees, one of whom talked about how the city was empty during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another spoke about the extreme high tide in 2019: *"I remember after the big tide, the city was empty"* (C.IV, 90-91). When a destination is heavily dependent on tourist expenditure, such incidents can lead to a sudden halt in tourism, meaning that those who work in the industry receive no income from tourism during that period (Sun et al., 2022). This can prove to be a precarious situation since the locals' livelihoods are relatively unstable, as suggested by Sun et al. (2022). One interviewee referred to tourism in Venice as a paradox: *"Venice lives with tourism, but the tourism dies the city"* (C.I, 22). On the one hand, he could mean that Venice depends on tourism, and this exact dependence will be the city's demise, and on the other hand, it could also imply that the negative impacts of tourism severely affect Venice's future. Another interviewee also mentioned the second interpretation, believing that *"Venice is dying"* (C.IV, 149). Similarly, Cristiano and Gonella (2020) argue that the adverse overtourism impacts, gentrification, touristification, and poor tourism management all contribute to the death of Venice. Various news sites also report on the possible death of Venice, frequently with poetic phrasing (Goodell, 2019; Newman, 2009). Several comments from the interviewees support this finding, indicating that Venice is at risk of turning into an amusement park:

> *"It's not the people that come. The problem is the transformation of the island. […] It's starting to be a Luna Park"* (C.V, 69-71).

> *"It [Venice] has this image of being like a Disneyland kind of thing"* (C.IX, 62).

Some interviewees had hoped that tourism in Venice would have been re-launched differently after the COVID-19 pandemic, with slow tourism being the new norm. However, the contrary

happened, and tourist numbers have exceeded the pre-pandemic levels. This speaks to Cristiano and Gonella's (2020) suggestion of restarting Venice's urban system and defining resident-based priorities for tourism management after the pandemic, which ended up not happening. Some interviewees also expressed fear regarding this increase in tourist numbers, with one stating that seasonal tourism no longer exists. Instead, *"it's [peak tourism season] every year all the year, maybe after COVID it was better, but now it's worse"* (C.III, 34-35). Another interviewee expressly referred to the upcoming summer and how she feels about it:

> *"It's [tourism] getting worse and worse, and I'm waiting. Since I think from Easter on, it's going to be like a mess until November. So, the city is like boom. And I'm afraid of it because we saw already lots of people during March and we never saw that many, so all of us are really afraid of how summer is going to be"* (C.IX, 131-134).

These comments indicate that the interviewees feel the city's administration failed to restructure the tourism sector after the pandemic. The previous interviewee stated that she hopes for the city to return to *old times* and restore the well-balanced co-existence between locals and tourists she feels used to exist. Nevertheless, she believed that this scenario was quite unlikely.

Furthermore, the dependence on tourism can point towards a power imbalance between the local population and the administration of Venice since, according to the interviewees, economic growth is emphasised over the well-being of the people and the environment. This results in negative perceptions of tourism amongst the local people, as Khalid et al. (2019) suggest. The interviewees lament such an increased number of tourists that any leisure activity outside of their homes is impossible. In addition, the locals are missing shops made for Venetians and stated that the city is *"more like a tourist city; everything, every shop that opens is for the tourists and not for the local people"* (C.VIII, 28-29). Another interviewee pointed out the same issue by saying:

> *"We are losing the social tissue of the city" (C.III, 17-18).*

Moyle, Croy, and Weiler (2010) suggest that local communities often perceive direct economic benefits from tourism, which also appears to be the case for most interviewees. However, the costs of tourism seem to have exceeded the benefits, as one interviewee described:

"We got no patience anymore; I'm sorry. Because you know the tourists as well, they pay to stay here, but we are not patient anymore" (C.III, 28-29).

This also supports Bertocchi and Visentin's (2019) findings about Venetians feeling invaded by tourism and unsatisfied with its management. As one interviewee summed it up, *"It [tourism] makes me work, but the tourism has to be put under the right administration*" (C.V, 90-91). Thus, the interviewees viewed the focus on profit and the management of the tourism situation in Venice as concerning since the city's administration has different ideas on how to manage tourism in Venice.

Selling of the City

Currently, limiting access to the historic centre by selling tickets to tourists before their visit is under consideration to regulate and manage tourism in Venice (Hughes, 2023). However, many interviewees oppose this strategy; *"Administration sells the city as it's like a museum or an amusement park"* (C.IX, 57-58). This refers to the idea that the selling of tickets to enter Venice resembles tickets to an amusement park or other tourist attractions. One interviewee explained her conflicting feelings about this initiative:

"Some people say it's better to get a ticket […], which makes sense in the sense that you have less people, so that's, I think, in a way, sustainable […]. So, I think that's good, but at the same time, it just really makes Venice like a Luna Park […]. It's just like you have to enter; what about the people that live here? It's just really weird, I think. So, that would be a sustainable option, but at the same time, really, I don't know, insane. (C.VIII, 72-78).

This type of regulation would further the narrative of the *selling of the city* that several interviewees touched upon. Besides the limited access through tickets, residential housing turning into AirBnBs due to Venetians "*selling everything and moving away"* (C.IX, 118) add to this narrative. Still, according to the interviewees, the city's administration primarily sells Venice to tourists. This indicates that many locals seem not to be involved in decision-making regarding tourism since they are dissatisfied with how the situation is handled in Venice, referring to Moyle, Croy, and Weiler's (2010) study. They argue that a lack of involvement in decision-making can lead to negative perceptions of tourism (Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010), indicating a lack of community empowerment in the city. While one interviewee suggested that the administration should attract the correct number of tourists and the right people for

the city, another proposed balancing tourists between the low and high seasons. Even though Cristiano and Gonella (2020) claim that a tourist tax for day-trippers and entry barriers emphasise Venice's goal to maximise profit, one interviewee indeed advocated for a tourist tax after initial apprehension:

> *"Some people propose like a tax to come in the city […] I mean, at first, I was like, 'Why would you?' but if you think about it a little more, if people actually don't buy anything here or don't use the place we have, then that might be the only way to have a ground, like base of money to keep taking care of the place" (C.II, 86-89).*

Since Venice can also be considered a short-term city due to the high number of one-day visitors, which do not spend much money in Venice (Salerno & Russo, 2022), the economic benefits look accordingly. Multiple interviewees mentioned that tourists come and go and do not leave anything in Venice. As one interviewee phrased it:

> *"They [tourists] don't come here to spend the day or even money, which is not sustainable because there's a lot of offer, but when the offer is not taken, it can raise all the prices for the people that actually live here"* (C.II, 21-24).

As suggested by Groulx et al. (2016), such short-term vacations are especially problematic for LCT destinations since tourists contribute less to the economy than the GHG emissions they produce through travelling there. If tourism is not managed adequately in Venice, promoting one-day trips can contribute significantly to climate change and, potentially, to the disappearance of Venice. Thus, amongst the interviewees, the preferred option to regulate and manage tourism in Venice seems to be slow tourism, meaning that tourists visit Venice for an extended stay instead of a one-day trip. This kind of tourism was noticeable during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, as one interviewee described:

> *"People coming here for maybe two weeks, renting a house with a family and staying here, living in the city in the slow way, not just like rushing around, seeing stuff. […] That's what the really good tourism that I was talking about. I saw it just after COVID, but I think it was just because it was open just for Europe, and people weren't able to travel that far, so everybody came back here, and people wanted to come for years because lots of people are in love with the city" (C.IX, 124-130).*

This *love* that people feel for Venice, mentioned by the interviewee, creates an almost heart-breaking contrast with the narrative of the *selling of the city*, which in many cases, forces the locals to leave Venice.

Gentrification of the Historic Centre

The administration's pursuit of economic benefits seems to override Venice's socio-cultural sustainability. As one interviewee expressed:

> *"[Venice is] not ever thinking about residents or services for residents. […] Everything is disappearing, and everything is for tourism" (C.IX, 37-39).*

All other interviewees also articulated that tourism negatively affects the socio-cultural sphere in Venice, resulting in various distinct impacts. With this comes the implication that small direct economic benefits are not justifiable for tourism's adverse effects on the locals' daily lives. These perceptions coincide with the recent tourism literature, which calls for a shift from emphasising profit towards tourism rooted in socio-cultural and environmental values (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021; Joppe, 2018; Sheldon, 2022).

One of the primary negatively perceived impacts of tourism on the locals' quality of life in Venice is the rising living costs in the historic centre, which lead to unaffordable housing for many locals. This results in locals leaving the historic centre and moving to the mainland, where housing is still affordable. Gentrification, as this process is also called, has been happening in Venice for multiple decades, with Salerno (2022) and Salerno and Russo (2022) explaining that the encouraged exponential growth of the tourism industry in Venice has led to the displacement of residents to the mainland. This promotes the assumption that no locals are living in the historic centre, as described by one interviewee:

> *"I think the most important thing is really the prices because Venice now is not known as a city where people live, like now I'm on Erasmus, and when I say that I live in Venice, people say like 'oh, people actually live there?', and I'm like 'yes'. So, everything is made for tourists, so normal people that are here, many times, don't even have the chance to keep affording what they used to afford, so they have to leave" (C.II, 73-77).*

Another interviewee expressed her distress by suggesting that "*it's hard to be here; it always feels that the city, the administration of the city wants to kick you out. They don't want us to stay here"* (C.IX, 31-32). She further mentioned that this is because the city is sold to tourists,

giving the example that most of her friends with whom she went to university left Venice. This again points to a power imbalance between the locals and the administration of the city since the administration aims to cater the city towards tourists, leaving locals with the perception that they are being kicked out of their homes. The interviewees also pointed out that not many residents are left in the historic centre and that Venice needs to be a city where people live; otherwise, it could die. One interviewee succinctly described this problem:

> *"We try to, and we populate it [Venice] too because lots of people, even Venetians maybe, go to live in the mainland; they rent their houses, sell their houses. So, the city needs more population staying here and living here. So, that's the struggle for us" (C.IX, 18-21).*

While one interviewee said the number of residents was so low the previous year that it beat a record, another mentioned a pharmacy close to the Rialto Bridge with an LED indicator for the same number. However, the latter interviewee also said he was missing tourists in the city during the COVID-19 pandemic as no locals were walking the streets of Venice. The gentrification process in Venice is slowly "*fading away the community*" (C.II, 11) and making it "*very hidden […] because the thing you experience the most is not the actual community when you come here for a short amount of time, so it's a really closed community*" (C.II, 9-11). According to the interviewees, many locals, also those who work in tourism, are forced to leave the city because of increasing housing prices. Therefore, the community the interviewees referred to seems to be shrinking and fading away, which could lead to a loss of sense of place and belonging among the locals. This is suggested by Salerno and Russo (2022) and Seraphin, Sheeran, and Pilato (2018), who argue that tourism adversely impacts the socio-cultural sphere in Venice with the example of the loss of place identity.

All things considered, the gentrification process, the shrinking community, and a loss of a sense of place raise a question of the authenticity of Venice.

Historic City or a Luna Park?

The authenticity of Venice and its community seems to be vanishing, which was raised as a concern by the interviewees. The mention of *Luna Park*, which is defined as an amusement park or a funfair (Collins Dictionary, 2023), *amusement park*, *Disneyland*, or *museum* frequently emerged during the interviews, with *Luna Park* being the most used expression of

all. Since everything in the city is catering for tourism, turning it into an amusement park, according to the interviewees, the locals feel stuck in a real museum. Examples of the depleting authenticity of Venice are:

> *"Bakery, marketplace – real marketplace, not a supermarket, fish market, it's not the same anymore" (C.III, 20-21).*

> *"If you go around here, you can find a lot of small places with a lot of fake Murano; it's from China because the price is one Euro, so this is not very good for the city" (C.VI, 81-82).*

While the first quote refers to selling the city by only providing services for tourists and not for locals, the second one concerns the tourist shops selling counterfeit Murano glass, negatively impacting the authenticity of the actual products. We made similar observations while walking through the city's historic centre, and even in Murano itself, many shops were selling the same glass figures for low prices. One interviewee's comment sums up the interviewees' general perception of the authenticity of Venice: "*It was more a city for Venetian ten years ago than now Venice is"* (C.III, 25-26). The finding of Venice turning into a real-life museum or amusement park is supported by Scarpi, Confente, and Russo (2022) and Kryczka (2019). This issue is made relatively straightforward in the following description of life with tourism by two interviewees:

> *"W: Sometimes when you open, you get up, you open the windows, and you have a group of people that take pictures that you are with the hair that way [gestures wild hair]. You look at them, you say, 'Where is the respect?'. I'm not a monkey in the zoo.*
>
> *H: You are like a monkey in the zoo. It's the same" (C.V, 95-99).*

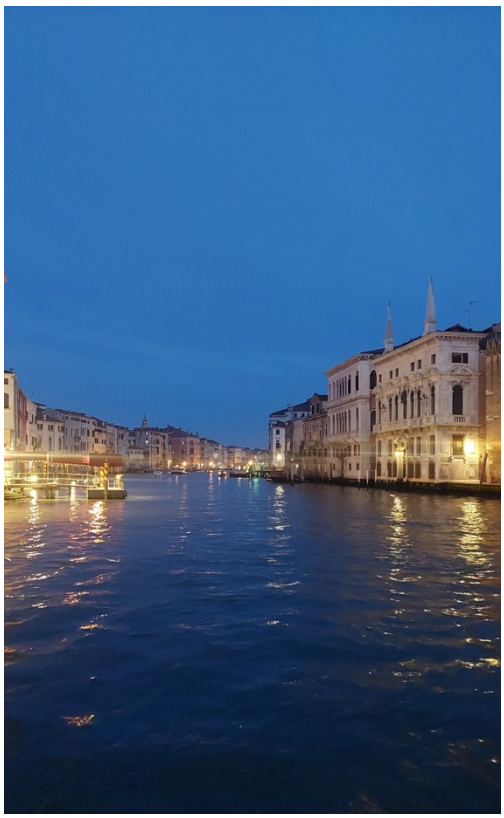
Picture 9: Tourists taking pictures in front of houses in Burano

Immediately after we conducted this interview, we walked through Burano's streets and witnessed tourists taking pictures on the porches of the locals' houses *(s. Picture 9).* The tourists were leaning against the doorframe of a stranger's house to take pictures, which could be posted on Instagram or other social media platforms. This again points towards transforming Venice into a museum, which worried the interviewees. Similarly, Salerno (2022) also found that the residential life was substituted by tourism in the city, re-creating Venice as a tourist attraction or museum. Not only is authenticity threatened through this process, but also the cultural heritage and quality of life in Venice, as suggested by Cristiano and Gonella (2020) and Bertocchi and Visentin (2019).

The diminishing authenticity and cultural heritage can be exemplified in the well-known symbol of Venice, the gondolas. Tourists view them as inherently authentic; however, they seem to be primarily for touristic purposes, as we observed only foreign tourists getting onto the boats. This can be explained through constructive authenticity, which postulates that authenticity is based on an individual's perceptions and expectations (Wang, 1999). Thus, tourists perceive something as authentic even though the locals might not. For instance, when talking to a tourist from the UK, she said that her friends had told her to go on a gondola ride because *you haven't done Venice if you haven't taken a gondola ride*. However, she disagreed with her friends because, to her, they were a cliché and too touristy. Since something once authentic to residents has become a tourist attraction, the interviewees had different understandings of what makes Venice Venice; while some highlighted the beauty and serenity of the city, others mentioned the architecture, history, and art, which we also admired during the fieldwork *(s. Pictures 10, 11).* This is also explicitly emphasised in the media, which urges

people to put Venice on their bucket lists (Miliani, 2023; Haslam, 2023; Fodor's Travel, 2022; Brown, 2018; Wright, 2022). Another interviewee referred more to the light and atmosphere that makes Venice unique:

> *"Because where can you find a city like that? […] There is a river, canal, it's like Amsterdam, for example. Or another city in Europe. But only Venice is Venice. Also, the building, Canal Grande…Also, the light is different here. Especially during the morning, it depends on the season […] There is something different here. And this is why 'where the magic happens'" (C.VI, 43-48).*



Picture 11: Light in Venice

Picture 10: Banksy art in historic centre

Regarding the interviewees' understandings of the authenticity of life in Venice, one interviewee provided two instances where tourists think something is authentic or inauthentic that locals would potentially disagree with:

> *"Our student life, or even just general people's life, it's not in San Marcus Square. Everyone thinks that Venice is San Marcus Square, but it's not" (C.II, 39-40).*

"That's [Castello district] such a beautiful place, it's wonderful, and nobody goes there. It's a little far, of course, but yeah, that's all left; it's knocked aside because people think it's just a square" (C.II, 43-44).

In addition, the interviewee referred to incidents where, while abroad, she had been asked about the high water in Venice, suggesting that it symbolises Venice and makes it a popular tourist destination. At the same time, other more authentic places, according to the interviewees, are swept aside. Thus, some interviewees also suggested educating tourists on what makes Venice unique besides the typical tourist attractions. The previous interviewee also offered concise guidance that seems to resonate with the rest of the perceptions of the interviewees:

"I would suggest for tourism because there's a lot to see and people say, 'yeah Venice, you can go in one day and see it', but it's not true because you don't even get in contact with the community. And if you just go to touristic places, then you'll have the same offer that you have in another general big city, while there are so many little osteria, which is where you eat, that may look old and you're like 'ugh', but it's actually wonderful" (C.II, 46-51).

While the authenticity of Venice can be questioned and perceived in various ways, the interviewee quoted above suggests that tourists should learn what is truly authentic from the local community. However, this can be challenging, as there are also different perceptions of community in Venice, with some suggesting that it is hidden and hard for tourists to find.

The Hidden Community

Describing the local community, those that were born and raised in Venice felt a solid connection to other Venetians, as this interviewee highlighted:

"The local community, I would say, they are very linked to the city because if you are a Venetian and you were born in Venice, you really feel like you're Venetian, and that is something […] you feel really proud to be Venetian" (C.VII, 5-9).

The slow way of life that is accompanied by easiness and quietness, and the friendliness, helpfulness and *good vibes* of the locals are emphasised by some interviewees. We had a similar experience during the fieldwork; however, the quietness and slow way of life were only apparent in a few areas that tourists did not frequent. Especially interesting was that the

further east we walked, the more Italian we heard and the fewer tourists we saw. We could also listen to birds chirping, which gave us a sense of serenity in the otherwise busy city *(s. Picture 12, 13, 14).* One interviewee commented on how tourism has affected this slow way of life:

> *"There are no seasons anymore during the year in which you can stay quiet in Venice, in the centre of Venice. Maybe in some points that we know they're more quiet" (C.III, 40-41).*

Picture 12: Neighbourhood away from the tourist hotspots

Picture 13: Serene Venice in the evening

Picture 14: Tourist-free bridge

Some interviewees who were not born in Venice, but moved there later in life, mentioned that it is hard to connect with Venetians. For instance, one interviewee came to Venice in 2006 for her studies; still, she has "*not been in touch a lot with Venetians, but lots of people are coming to Venice. […] So, the community of the Venetians is a little bit detached from maybe everything else. There's lots of students that make the city really liveable"* (C.IX, 5-8). However, another interviewee, a young student, said she has connected with many different locals because they know she lives in Venice and loves the city. This perception implies that the *community* in Venice appears disconnected to some people but protective and hospitable to others. Since we stayed with a host family who was originally from Venice, we experienced the kind, helpful, and warm side of the locals; however, we also encountered some locals that seemed intimidating and annoyed with us. While walking around the streets, it also seemed

like all the locals knew each other since people were constantly greeting and talking to each other on the streets. Thus, some interviewees perceived the local community more positively, while others argued that they do not feel connected to locals born and raised in Venice. The interviewee, who mentioned that she had not been in touch with many Venetians, also added that "*it's hard to create a normal life in here"* (C.IX, 34-35), so they're "*trying between us, this like new residents, to create something for ourselves and also make the city more liveable for us"* (C.IX, 14-15). This also refers to the liveability and the daily life of the locals in Venice.

Everyday Life in the Sea of Tourists

The liveability of Venice is made especially difficult by the excessive number of tourists and their behaviour. Other interviewees shared this sentiment, pointing out that tourism negatively impacts their everyday life. For instance, one interviewee described a common occurrence with tourists in Venice:

> *"One thing I hate, and it happened to me many times, was just when I was crossing a bridge, and I see people taking pictures, and I'm really late, so I wait for a second, and then I go, and they just say something like 'I was taking a picture', and I'm like, 'I'm going to work, I'm sorry'" (C.VIII, 53-55).*

Similarly, as we also experienced, others mentioned that when walking in the narrow streets of the historic centre, it is often impossible to get through since there is a sheer number of tourists walking at a slow pace and not staying to the side *(s. Picture 15, 16, 17).* In 2009, National Geographic already reported on the overtourism issue, stating that the abnormality of it has become the new normal for the locals (Newman, 2009). This indicates that the overtourism situation has been going on for several years and seems to have not improved since then.

Picture 15: Busy tourist square

Picture 16: Narrow main street filled with tourists

Picture 17: Tourists on San Marcus Square

What also becomes apparent is that the interviewees distinguished between two kinds of tourists. Some visit Venice for one or two days to take their pictures for social media and do not seem to care about the city's culture. Especially during carnival season, one interviewee pointed out that "*it's [Venice] a mess, so there are a lot of people around, and the quality is not really good, and they suppose just to have fun here, drink a lot around the city, the city is not your city anymore*" (C.VI, 27-29). Several interviewees highlighted the drinking since alcohol is cheap in Venice, but specifically, domestic tourists from around Venice seem to be the problem:

> *"One thing I don't like a lot is people from just around like Venice; they come here every weekend to get drunk because you don't have cars here and there's lots of bars and even that, it's not respectful at all because you wouldn't do it in your hometown and you do it here" (C.IX, 63-66).*

During the fieldwork, we noticed many young people gathering in groups and drinking *Aperol Spritz*, also mentioned by one interviewee. After some research, we found out that Aperol Spritz originated in Venice, which is why tourists can find various merchandise for the alcoholic beverage in souvenir shops. This means that the city is indirectly also promoting this tourist behaviour. When tourists behave disrespectfully, some interviewees explained that "*it makes*

you really mad" (C.IX, 46) and that "*sometimes people don't understand the limit in which to stop their curiosity. And this is the respect, in my opinion"* (C.V, 100-101).

In contrast, the second type of tourist that the interviewees mentioned is interested in the local culture, such as the Biennale, eager to talk to the locals and learn about their lives in Venice, all while being respectful towards the city and the culture. Especially the cultural exchange with these tourists is emphasised by the interviewees, as this comment suggests:

> *"People that come in [the store] are very curious people; they like to speak with me about where are you from, what are you doing, what about this project. So, I know a lot of different cultures, and it's very interesting for me. Because you never know who you are speaking with" (C.VI, 19-22).*

Moreover, other interviewees added that they adapt their own behaviour to the nationality of the tourists because they already know what they want and how to help them. This could refer to staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) since tourists expect a particular service from the store owners, who adapt to these wishes instead of helping them as they would with locals. In addition, one interviewee was eager to provide suggestions for tourists visiting Venice on how to behave and set up some ground rules by developing a small guide with friends to make residents and tourists co-exist more comfortably in Venice. To exemplify how tourists should behave, she provided the following opinion:

> *"I think [tourism should be] something that comes and not just takes stuff from the city but gives too. So, it can be like supporting local businesses and, I don't know, sharing thoughts, interests, being open to sharing stuff with people, like living together with the people who live here" (C.IX, 97-99).*

Overall, living amongst this sea of tourists has led to the locals struggling with the disrespectful behaviour of tourists and lamenting that it affects their daily lives. While some interviewees offered positive examples of encounters with tourists, all of them implied there is a general lack of respect present in their everyday lives from the tourists' side.

Where is the Respect?

Throughout the various socio-cultural issues from tourism in Venice that the interviewees discussed, the emerging theme is respect. This means sustainable tourism development is *"a question of respect. So, that's not the right tourists, just the respect for the city. For the history*

of the city" (C.III, 71-72). This seemingly aligns with the city's administration's view of sustainable tourism; in 2017, they even launched a sustainable tourism campaign called *#EnjoyRespectVenezia* (Venezia Unica, 2023a). However, as previously discussed, most interviewees perceived that the city's administration is selling Venice and turning it into an amusement park or museum.

One interviewee referred to the transformation mentioned above in both a positive and negative sense. When talking about her favourite thing about Venice, she described it as living in a museum, as there are always different things to discover, and she is mesmerised by the beauty of the architecture. Contrastingly, when talking about respecting the people and the culture, the image of Venice as an amusement park or Disneyland was mentioned in a negative context. The difference between the two opposing views is that in the former, she is the one *visiting the museum*, whereas, in the latter, she has no choice but to be part of the exhibition and be gazed at by tourists. Another interviewee related to this feeling of being gazed at and described herself as a *monkey in a zoo*. In this instance, a power imbalance between the locals and the tourists is apparent and can be explained by the concept of the tourist gaze, where tourists gaze upon the locals based on their expectations and ideas (Urry & Larsen, 2012). Referring to the same issue regarding the lack of respect, another interviewee added the following:

> *"They must respect the city. And sometimes, you know, in Venice […] especially with the statues, they climb on it. Like the lion in San Marco Square and they stay on the lion, but you cannot do that because you break that, and you break a part of history. There is not too much respect". (C.VI, 68-71).*

Furthermore, some interviewees are discontented with the type of tourists whose sole purpose for a visit is to generate content for their social media accounts. This is exemplified in a comment from two interviewees, who stated:

> *"W: Tourists arrive with the telephone, they take pictures and Instagram, BeReal, Facebook, the stupid photographs…*
>
> *H: And then understands nothing about our culture" (C.V, 43-45).*

While visiting the island of Burano, we saw what the interviewees meant. After getting off the boat, we walked around the small town alongside tourists. One tourist stood out for us by

quickly going to the main attractions, taking a selfie with a selfie stick, and proceeding to turn around and going to the next attraction.

By respecting the people and the culture, the interviewees mean that tourists should be interested in Venice instead of coming for quick one-day trips just to have seen it once. Additionally, the interviewees suggested that tourists should be educated about everyday life in Venice and how to behave; for instance, tourists should be aware that locals might be in a rush getting to work and, thus, walk on the right side of the narrow streets. Other interviewees valued when tourists support local businesses by, for instance, eating at a trattoria instead of McDonald's since "*you also have to invest a little bit, I think, because you're taking something, but if you don't give anything and if we all do this then it's not easy to keep going for a long time"* (C.II, 68-70). No matter in what way, respect seems to be the overarching theme to managing tourism sustainably for all interviewees, which this interviewee summed up:

> *"I think my relationship [with tourism] has changed a little bit in the sense that I really value a lot of respect from other people that come here, and I don't see that much […]. I think that's something I never thought about because I've always thought that tourism was really good in any way, but by living here, I see how I value respect a lot […] so my perspective has changed a little bit" (C.VIII, 35-40).*

When the Costs exceed the Benefits

Even though the interviewee quoted above explained how she used to think that tourism was a good thing, her perspective has shifted since moving to Venice; *why* this happened can be explained through *social exchange theory*.

This theory postulates that local attitudes toward tourism development in a destination depend on whether the perceived benefits exceed the perceived costs of tourism (Nkemngu, 2015; Khalid et al., 2019). Even though the interviewees seem to have different perceptions of and concerns regarding tourism, supporting Moyle, Croy, and Weiler's (2010) findings, the benefits from tourism in Venice tend to be minor, according to the interviewees. These benefits revolve primarily around direct economic benefits through employment in the tourism industry or the cultural exchange between tourists and locals.

The costs, on the other hand, seem to be significantly higher than the benefits. For instance, the interviewees perceived the economic dependence on the tourism industry, a lack of

respect for the environment, people, and culture, pollution generated by tourists, the power imbalance between the city's administration and the locals, and the selling of the city as the primary drawbacks from tourism development in Venice. Thus, the interviewees' attitudes towards tourism in Venice seem more negative than positive since their perceived costs surpass their perceived benefits.

Future Outlook through the Local Eye

As the interviewees appear to view the socio-cultural issues induced by tourism as more pressing than others, it is also necessary to analyse their perceptions of risk. The explanation for this can be found in cultural theory, which postulates that individuals' perceptions and views of the world are shaped by their culture and its social norms (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983). Indications of this can be seen in the following quotations from two interviewees, both of whom moved to Venice later in life:

> *"I was not born here, so I decided to come here, so if you love the city, some problems that are big problems for everybody, for you are not so difficult to manage" (C.IV, 17-19).*

> *"When you live in this kind of environment [Venice], which is really weird and different from any other city, I think, really quickly, you become very aware of the problems and everything" (C.VIII, 8-10).*

Douglas and Wildavsky (1983) argue every form of society has its own perceptions of what is risky and what is not. As some of the interviewees pointed out, for them, the born and raised Venetians' community feels separate from the community of locals that have moved to the city later in life. Furthermore, this could indicate that there are several different *societies* within Venice instead of one homogeneous community. This could explain why most of the migrated locals we interviewed have different perceptions of risk than the interviewed born and raised Venetians.

The future of Venice is perceived to contain several risks. As one of the interviewees joked, Venice's future will be "*a dark future*" (C.III, 74). While it remains uncertain whether the interviewee said the joke because he did not genuinely see the future as a risk or because, to him, the risk was so significant he felt the need to lighten the mood with humour, his mannerism and nervous laughter implied the latter. Nevertheless, other interviewees

expressed their concerns regarding the future as well. One interviewee referred to the future of Venice with the Italian phrase "*in via d'estinzione"* (C.III, 6), which translates to *on the verge of extinction*, meaning that the local population of the historic centre is endangered and about to become extinct. Thus, the interviewee feared that further gentrification of the historic centre would lead to even lower numbers of residents and a more significant gap in the resident-to-tourist ratio in the city. To see how rapidly the local population of the historic centre is declining, one interviewee described the gentrification process over the last few years:

> *"It's [the future of Venice] very difficult to predict because a lot of local people are leaving Venice now, meaning that they are going away from the city because of tourism. Because there used to be 150,000 inhabitants recently, I mean recently 15 years ago, but now there are less than 50,000 so… Population decreased very fast" (C.VII, 46-49).*

However, other interviewees seemed hopeful and offered suggestions for a better future. These included limiting the number of tourists, educating tourists on the city's history, and respecting the environment. For one interviewee, "*these are all footsteps to make a better future for Venice. You can see the light at the end of the tunnel, for me"* (C.III, 78-79). In addition, another interviewee believed that the city would be rejuvenated with the young talent coming from outside of Venice, as this quote shows:

> *"I think it [the future of Venice] will be great; I hope that a lot of young people come here and stay here because right now, if you live here, it's a city of old people, and there is not a very big community right now. But it's very interesting for the young people because there is a lot of art. And I hope that we can create a new community here about young talented people" (C.VI, 73-76).*

Contrary to the hopeful interviewees, others perceived climate change as a great risk for Venice. For instance, one interviewee seemed to be highly aware of how climate change might impact Venice:

> *"We're really afraid of what is going to be if it's going to be sinking someday soon because it's getting worse and worse and worse every year, and that's what I saw since 2006 on. It's a mess, and we're really afraid of it since every year it's getting worse and*

worse and worse but in like a crazy way, and we need to think about that too, really soon. So, the situation now it's really worrying. I'm really worried about that, but I hope since I love so much living here, we will make it and survive" (C.IX, 140-145).

Another interviewee indicated that he is also worried about climate change and the extent to which it can impact destinations. He stated:

"*I feel bad because I think that not many people feel like me. That is a very obvious feeling […] We think about migration of people now, of course, because of wars or not enough food, or earthquakes…okay. But the very, in the future probably, the biggest migration could be for these [climate change] type of things"* (C.IV, 105-110).

Once more, the cultural theory could explain the variation in risk perception amongst the interviewees; those who were not born and raised in the historic centre, but moved to the city at a later stage in their lives perceive climate change as a risk and are aware of its consequences for Venice. In contrast, those originally from the city seemed to prioritise different risks and were less apprehensive of climate change. For instance, one born-and-raised Venetian stated that "*for me, the danger [of climate change] is not so near"* (C.III, 104), with others indicating that, for them, the socio-cultural issues connected to tourism are more pressing than climate change.

Local Risk Perceptions

Based on the interviewees' perceptions of the sustainability of tourism in Venice and the future risks revolving around it, four main risks could be identified. As pictured in *Figure 7*, these risks are climate change, gentrification, deterioration in the quality of life, and economic dependence.

Figure 7: Local risk perceptions in Venice and its islands

Concerning climate change, the main risk was perceived to be the sinking of the city due to the rising sea levels and the unstable foundations Venice was built on. While the interviewees acknowledged this risk and expressed their environmental concerns, it was not perceived as the most pressing. This could be due to it not impacting the everyday life of the interviewees but rather being a risk looming further away in the future. In addition, climate change was seen as a risk that, in the future, has the potential to accelerate the city's gentrification through climate change migration.

Gentrification and touristification of Venice were themes that emerged in nearly all of the interviews and were generally considered as more significant risks than climate change. The interviewees implied that gentrification and touristification have already led the city to lose some of its authenticity due to the city being treated like an amusement park. As one interviewee stated:

"It [the future of Venice] will be worse than worst, I think. And there will be no more people living here at all anymore and just AirBnBs, hotels, and like Disneyland" (C.IX, 109-110).

Furthermore, this not only impacts the city's authenticity but also potentially leads to deterioration in the quality of life through the increasing number of tourists. This already shows in the everyday life of the locals, as one of the interviewees put it:

"You can't move, you can't go out with the children and the dogs, or maybe just for a run. You can't. Or you have to know Venice very well, or maybe at dawn you can do something, but in the middle of the day now, you can do nothing because it's full of tourists" (C.III, 30-32).

Since the increasing touristification of Venice contributes to overtourism (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019), which again increases the cost of living (Salerno & Russo, 2022), touristification can negatively impact the locals' economic quality of life. Therefore, this is considered another risk for the interviewees who love their city but are afraid of not being able to afford it in the future:

"They [residents who have moved out of the historic centre] must leave because they can't afford it anymore" (C.II, 24).

"The city is sold to people like tourists, and people come here for not that long of a time, and it feels like they [city's administration] want to kick us out" (C.IX, 32-34).

Moreover, the economic risks are considered worrying by some interviewees due to Venice's economic dependence on tourism. The fear of a halt in tourism in case of a natural disaster is present but not as pressing as the other aforementioned risks. This circles back to the risk of climate change existing amongst the interviewees. However, as suggested by Pandy and Rogerson (2019), due to climate change not currently impacting the everyday life of the locals, unlike risks that have a more immediate effect on the local's quality of life, it is not perceived as risky.

Local perceptions of Last-chance Tourism

The analysis so far has led us to understand how the interviewees perceive the current state of tourism in Venice and what sustainable tourism development means for them. Additionally,

we have identified what the interviewees perceive as risky in the future of Venice and, on the contrary, what opportunities it could hold. This has created a base for us to now explore what kind of perceptions of LCT exist amongst the locals of Venice since LCT is generally considered a risky matter and its sustainability is widely questioned in academia (Dawson et al., 2011; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Hindley & Font, 2018; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Woosnam et al., 2022).

Like within the perceptions of sustainability and risk, differing understandings surfaced amongst the interviewees regarding LCT. For instance, the interviewees who perceived some issues more pressing than climate change also indicated that the disappearance of Venice is not a concern to them:

> *"The problem is that the climate change… maybe for the Maldives, but I'm not scared that people don't go to the Maldives. Venice probably needs protection because we want to see Venice like it is now. Venice changed a lot during the years because, in the past, they didn't need to preserve it; they only lived in the city. It's another idea in the city. So, you can see Torcello, the oldest part; it's older than Venice. In the past, it was full of people and a lot of construction; that changed, and then they built Venice. Maybe if we are in a few [years], we were like in the 7th century, we make another city" (C.V, 208-214).*

This interviewee's response differs from the other interviewees' perceptions, as he perhaps unintentionally questioned the whole concept of cultural heritage. His contemplation on why society feels the need to preserve Venice speaks to the critique by Harrison (2010), who questioned who decides what is counted as cultural heritage in the first place. Saying that, in the past, people did not feel the need to preserve the city, as it was simply a place where the people lived, could imply that, to him, the Venetian culture is not tied to the city but the people themselves. Furthermore, in the case of the city's disappearance, this culture could be transported to the newly built Venice.

Furthermore, several interviewees were unfamiliar with the concept of LCT and its implications. For instance, the aforementioned interview quoted above immediately referred to the Maldives as an LCT destination when the theme emerged during the interview, but seemed confused about why Venice would be considered one. Denley et al. (2020) and

Woosnam et al. (2022) come across a similar response in their studies that examine local stakeholders' perceptions of LCT in other destinations; their findings indicate that local stakeholders are unaware of their homes being an LCT destination (Denley et al., 2020; Woosnam et al., 2022). Additionally, this response can be connected to Shakeela and Becken's (2015) findings, according to which the locals in the Maldives did not express concern towards climate change due to the government amplifying the risk to the outside world, but attenuating it to the domestic audiences. Similarly, the reason for Venice not being seen as an LCT destination by the locals could be that the media amplifies this image to the international audience, whereas the local administration downplays the risk to the locals by not acknowledging it.

This connection is further supported by our encounters with tourists in Venice; the young tourists we spoke with consider Venice an LCT destination, as it surfaced as a motivation for them to visit the city. For instance, one young tourist stated he wanted to come to Venice since his grandfather had told him that he needed to come before it sank. In addition, a tourist couple jokingly said they visited to see Venice before it disappears. Upon learning that Venice is considered an LCT destination by the media, they said they were glad they came to see Venice now. Another tourist couple we encountered in Venice realised that the reason for their visit was the possibility of the city disappearing soon. They stated that they had already been to the Maldives for this exact reason and asked us for recommendations on other LCT destinations they should see while they still have the chance. This was not surprising for us, as several articles include Venice on lists of places about to disappear (Haslam, 2023; Cohen, 2017; Olander, 2020; Seema, 2021; Huber, 2018).

Nevertheless, some interviewees recognised the risk of climate change and agreed with the statement of the LCT article that claims Venice to be number one on the list of *11 Places to Visit Before It's Too Late* (Olander, 2020):

> *"I really feel, I mean, if I'm reading it [article], I'm not surprised because this is something that I think is in Venice because I was talking about people not respecting the environment because of the climate change and the water level is rising very high so the city can disappear very shortly. I mean shortly, not for us because I think we will live in Venice until the end of our lives, but for the next generations" (C.VII, 54-58).*

Other interviewees had stronger reactions when seeing the article, saying it "*makes me want to cry"* (C.IX, 150) and that they "*didn't want to see this type of article, but it is the truth"* (C.III, 89). This shows that these interviewees seem to have a firm attachment to the city, as talking about its possible disappearance led to emotional responses. Furthermore, several interviewees surprisingly understood why LCT has become a phenomenon. Some indicated that "*there is only one Venice in the world […] you have to visit, one more time in your life"* (C.VI, 38-39) and that Venice is "*the first place you can see just for one time"* (C.III, 93-94). One interviewee expressed her feelings regarding the phenomenon in the following:

> *"Well, for sure, this [the article] does not really help at all with what we were saying before [sustainability of tourism] and like not go one day, just one day and say like 'oh, I saw it!'. So yeah, I don't think it helps. But I mean, I get it also because I can say this because I've seen it already, but I also do get the fact that people want to see this because who wouldn't want to? I live here, but I still am in awe when I see it when I come back from another place. So, I don't know; I'm a little […] It doesn't help, but it makes sense that it's [the article] written." (C.II, 102-109).*

Another interviewee showed understanding towards LCT tourists by putting himself in the tourists' shoes and explaining how he, too, has the desire to visit places he has heard good things about:

> *"I think that Denmark, it's a beautiful place, and I'm looking forward to go to Denmark because Copenhagen, they said to me 'it's a beautiful city', and I'm going to see it; I hope so, in the future. So, maybe for Venice, it's the same thing. Every place has a soul that you have to know if you decide to go there" (C.III, 112-115).*

Contrastingly, some interviewees referred to LCT as hysteria created by the media. One interviewee believed that such articles are *"only a publicity, in which [media tells you] [with an exaggerated tone] 'go before it disappears, in 2020 it is destroyed', and we are here, 'in 2050' [screams and imitates hysteria], and this creates a crazy, crazy movement"* (C.V, 225-226). Her quote indicates that for years now media has been saying that Venice is disappearing, yet it is still here, and she believes this will also be the case in the future. She also questioned what such articles imply by saying people must visit *before it is too late* by

asking, *"Too late to do what?"* (C.V, 227). Another interviewee suggested these articles are leading to rush tourism:

> *"This is the worst thing people can do for people to come here because NO. It's increasing even more like the worst tourism thing ever because it's like 'okay, rush, come to the city, everybody. […] It's [LCT articles] the worst thing that can happen to this city, I think, and it makes me [angrily gestures with hands]"* (C.IX, 155-165).

This perception of media creating rush tourism became also evident in the desk research, with several articles urging people to travel to Venice before it sinks (Sowden, 2018; Haslam, 2023; Cohen, 2017; Olander, 2020; Seema, 2021). This portrayal goes hand in hand with LCT definitions, which include tourists rushing to destinations before they disappear (Dawson et al., 2011). Several other interviewees supported this view by disapproving of this type of promotion, one of them connecting this type of tourism to bucket-list travel, where tourists travel for the purpose of ticking destinations off of their lists (Tickle & von Essen, 2020), as the following quote highlights:

> *"You travel because you have time and you are bored, and you move your body from one country to another country, and you collect places. It's a stupid thing. It's like you have a lot of books: today I read two lines of this book, tomorrow two of that one, and tomorrow two lines of that one, and I say that I have read all the books. It's not true. I read one book, I study, and I become the book, and the book enters in me. And this is the travel, one travel but that changes your life. Not a collection of places; it's different." (C.V, 141-146).*

The sense of urgency created through such articles and bucket-list type of travel trends can lead to an increased risk response amongst tourists and increased visitation to LCT destinations, according to Groulx et al. (2016). In other words, tourists can feel the fear of missing out on a destination if they do not manage to visit it before it disappears, so they all end up simultaneously rushing to these destinations. While most of the interviewees suggested that the media should not promote Venice as an LCT destination, Seraphin, Sheeran, and Pilato (2018) suggest that Venice should not be promoted at all.

In contrast, some interviewees offered suggestions on how to promote the city; the magical atmosphere, rich culture and history, Venice's uniqueness and otherworldliness were all highlighted as potential alternatives. In addition, one interviewee would prefer the media to talk about LCT tourism in a more positive light, suggesting they could write *"Respect Venice before it's too late"* (C.VI, 109) instead of *See Venice before it is too late*. Considering this, we found two articles during our desk research that offered suggestions for planning a sustainable trip to an LCT destination (Angermann, 2022; Brown, 2018). Another interviewee summarised these views by saying:

> *"I would say they have to promote Venice, but in the right channels. So, they don't have to do it like Disneyland but have to do it like art city tourism. And once they promote Venice, they will also have to explain how to live in Venice, I mean how to respect and enjoy the city." (C.VII, 78-80).*

This is also suggested by another interviewee, who agreed that LCT tourists should come to see Venice before it is too late but also to be respectful of the future history of the city. Some interviewees, however, reflected on the fact that the promotion of LCT is paradoxical, with one interviewee saying:

> *"In a certain way yes [answer to whether Venice should be promoted as an LCT destination], but this sounds very catastrophic…it is catastrophic, but it sounds too catastrophic, but it is catastrophic."* (C.IV, 122-123).

Another one expressed her conflicting views on the same dilemma in the following:

> *"I think it's a really good thing to make people aware of places that you should definitely visit, and at the same time, it makes me a little bit sad because I know that Venice is one of those places that you have to visit right now and might not be here, or might be different to see in the future. […] It's really great, and at the same time, it's just like… Venice is beautiful, but at the same time, it has this melancholy." (C.VIII, 101-106).*

While the paradox of LCT refers to LCT tourists contributing to climate change and the deterioration of the destination through their travels (Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017), this interviewee seems to introduce another perspective on this paradox. She views the media

promoting Venice as an LCT destination as positive since tourists should also be able to enjoy Venice. However, she also refers to the melancholic nature of this type of promotion, as there seems to be not much time left to see Venice as the locals know it.

The Paradoxical Views of Last-Chance Tourism

Similar to the local risk perceptions, the local perceptions of LCT differ significantly depending on the interviewee. Since LCT can be considered a risk-laden phenomenon (Dawson et al., 2011), the interviewees viewed the riskiness of the phenomenon differently as well. An explanation can be sought from cultural theory and SARF; it could be that the interviewees perceive the risk of LCT differently depending on their cultural background and social norms (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983) or due to varying information sources amplifying or attenuating the risk for the interviewees (Pidgeon, Kasperson, & Slovic, 2003). As seen in the word cloud illustrating the fifty most frequent words in connection to LCT mentioned by the interviewees LCT *(s. Figure 8)*, most of these words can be associated with the concept of risk. Examples include *change, late, problem, disappears, future, climate, live* and *dies.* Especially the contrasts of life and death highlight the paradoxical nature of LCT.

Figure 8: Fifty most frequent words regarding LCT

Considering these different perceptions of LCT, it is evident that there is a divide between those who argue that LCT is the worst thing that could happen to the city and those who believe Venice could be promoted as an LCT destination but in the *right* way. Nevertheless,

the interviewees with more understanding towards the LCT destination status of Venice still advocate for the right kind of promotion, stressing the importance of respect for the city, the culture, and the people.

7. Discussion

In this chapter, we further examine the findings of our analysis by broadening the discussion and challenging the current understanding of the concept of LCT.

The Foundation of Sustainable Tourism Development in Venice

While the triple bottom line was used as one of the main theories throughout this paper, in the case of Venice, we now deem it necessary to expand it by an underlying foundation in which all three dimensions are rooted. Based on our analysis, respect emerged as such a significant theme that we argue it needs to be acknowledged as the overarching base of sustainable tourism development in Venice.

We began to analyse our data with an understanding that respect is primarily linked to the socio-cultural aspects of sustainable tourism development. In this context, the locals want tourists to be interested in their culture and be willing to learn about their history, present and future. A large part of the disrespectful behaviour was perceived as how tourists treat the city like an amusement park instead of someone's home and make the locals feel like monkeys in a zoo.

However, while coding the raw data, it quickly became clear that the interviewees also associated respect with the other two dimensions of sustainable tourism development. According to them and our desk research, tourists should not only show respect for Venice's culture and history but also be respectful towards the city's environment. This includes, for instance, proper waste disposal instead of littering, not swimming in the canals, and causing dangerous situations by being inattentive to the surroundings.

In the context of economic sustainability, respect was not directly communicated but can be seen as an underlying theme. The locals feel like they have much to offer to the tourists but claim this offer is not taken; instead, tourists tend to support the counterfeit Murano glass and even bring their own lunch for the day trips. While this issue is acknowledged by the administration that tries to communicate to tourists to change this behaviour through, e.g.,

their campaign *#EnjoyRespectVenezia*, the locals feel the administration is one of the parties who partake in this disrespectful behaviour. Furthermore, through locals expressing their concerns about the increasing cost of living in the city and the feeling that it wants to kick them out to sell the city to tourists, it is apparent that the locals do not feel the administration is respecting the city's economy. This brings up an interesting paradox of the administration expecting tourists to respect Venice but appearing not to do so themselves.

Hence, we argue that the sustainable tourism development of Venice must be rooted in respect, which constructs the foundation for the triple bottom line. Since there are strong connections between Spindler's (2013) three-pillar model of sustainability and sustainable tourism development, we adapted the model and added the base of respect for the case of Venice *(s. Figure 9).* This finding aligns with Joppe's (2018) and Sheldon's (2022) suggestion to steer away from a profit-driven tourism economy towards one based on values. Thus, to foster sustainable tourism development and create a symbiosis in Venice, all actors – the tourists, the administration, and the locals – need to be respectful towards each other.

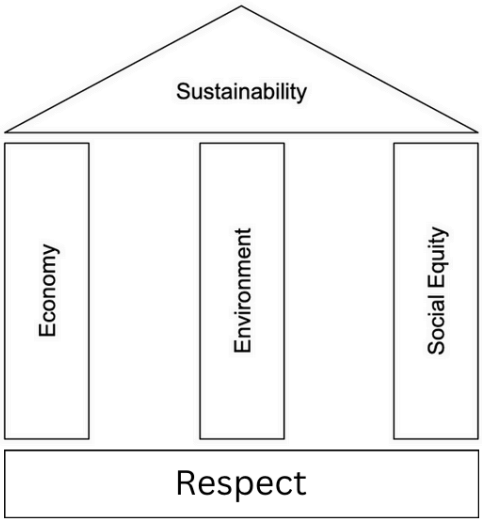


Figure 9: Sustainable Tourism Development in Venice; adapted from Spindler (2013)

The Presence of Last-Chance Tourism in Venice

Similarly to how we found the need to expand the triple bottom line in the context of Venice, it is necessary to examine the concept of last-chance tourism further. As our data revealed, most of the interviewed locals did not deliberately bring up the topic of LCT; however, after introducing it, some acknowledged the phenomenon and its consequences. According to

Pandy and Rogerson (2019), an explanation for LCT not being intentionally perceived as a phenomenon by the locals is that when more immediate issues are present, such as touristification and gentrification, other problems are often not considered high-risk. Even though LCT is not an overt phenomenon for the interviewed locals, it is still perpetuated by the media since the city keeps being included in lists of destinations that are about to disappear due to climate change (Haslam, 2023; Cohen, 2017; Olander, 2020; Seema, 2021; Huber, 2018). In addition, LCT is recognised amongst tourists visiting the city; *the last chance to see it* was a motivation for many of the tourists we talked to. Fisher and Stewart (2017) suggest that for a destination to be considered an LCT destination, tourists need to perceive a limited time frame to visit that specific destination. In this case, the younger tourists we talked to in Venice all expressed the desire to see the city before it disappeared as a travel motivation, implying a limited time available. Hence, while tourists and media perceive the city as an LCT destination, the general conception amongst the interviewees was that an LCT destination is not the primary association they make with Venice.

Last Chance to Whom and to What?

Figure 10: Last chance to whom and to what

As one interviewee pointed out, the question of *what the last chance in LCT stands for* piqued our curiosity to question the linguistic meaning of the concept ourselves *(s. Figure 10).* One way to illuminate the concept of LCT is by contrasting it with bucket-list travel; literature suggests that while these two concepts are similar (Tickle & von Essen, 2020), they diverge in the notion of the *last chance to whom*. Current conceptualisations tend to frame LCT from the perspective that it is the last chance to visit before the destination disappears. In this case, people tend to prioritise the risk of the destination disappearing and feel a sense of urgency to go there. Contrastingly, bucket-list travel emphasises that it is the last chance for individuals to visit a place before they die. Since individuals typically navigate and respond to risks based on their personal lives and values, they prioritise some risks over others (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983). Thus, some people may perceive it to be a greater risk that they might die before seeing a destination. As tourist motivations were not within the scope of this thesis, LCT literature should further investigate this connection between LCT and bucket-list travel to identify such risk perceptions amongst tourists.

Another lens through which to interpret LCT is the question *last chance to what*. While LCT literature suggests that the phenomenon is about the last chance to visit specific destinations before their disappearance due to climate change (Lemelin et al., 2010), such as the Arctic and the Maldives, we argue that this is different in the case of Venice. Even though climate change and the sinking of the city remain a threat to Venice, a threat much more urgent, as perceived by the locals, is the gentrification and touristification of the city. We propose that before the tourists have a last chance to go to Venice physically, the last chance to experience the authentic Venice is in danger of occurring first. While the media's perception of LCT implies the disappearance of Venice will take place by 2100 due to climate change (Phelan, 2022), we argue that the last chance to experience Venice looms closer in the future. This is due to the city's transformation into an amusement park and the locals fleeing the city, taking the culture of Venice with them. Hence, in the case of Venice, the *last chance to what* in LCT signifies the last chance to experience the culture before it is the last chance to experience the destination itself. Through this, the concept of LCT includes not just the disappearance of a destination but is expanded to the loss of an entire culture.

The Contested Concept

Based on our expansion of the concept of LCT, we propose the concept to be contested. In LCT research, the phenomenon has primarily been linked to climate change (Wu et al., 2020), suggesting that LCT is mainly caused by global warming. Based on our research, we find the LCT concept needs deconstruction, as we argue that, in the context of Venice, LCT has multiple layers, including touristification and gentrification alongside climate change, turning it into a multi-layered phenomenon.

In addition, the various layers apply not only to the different perceptions of the phenomenon but also to how different actors in Venice, such as locals, media, and tourists, can perceive it to differing extents. Therefore, based on our findings, we propose that depending on the context of a particular LCT destination, the perceptions of the phenomenon can vary. This means that, similarly to Venice, LCT in other destinations may have different layers and drivers other than climate change. Thus, it is crucial to undertake future research on perceptions of LCT on a local level.

While previous LCT literature is not only missing theoretical underpinnings of the studies, it is also heavily focused on climate-change-induced LCT (Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Lai, 2021; Woosnam et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2020). Hence, instead of continuing to place such a heavy focus on climate-change-driven LCT, the literature surrounding the phenomenon should be inclusive of other contributing factors, such as the gentrification and touristification of a destination. While these factors might not have an environmental input and therefore do not partake in the physical downfall of a destination, they do have a remarkable influence on the authenticity of the destination. Therefore, as we applied multiple theories to provide theoretical underpinnings to our findings and examined a climate-change and touristification-induced LCT destination, our local-level research in Venice is highly relevant to LCT literature.

The Light at the End of the Tunnel

Considering these different lenses through which to study the concept of LCT, the pace of this tourism trend also requires further investigation. Through our observations, conducted interviews, and the extensive literature on tourism in Venice, it is undeniable that the feeling of rush and urgency in the destination is overpowering. LCT literature also suggests that LCT can cause an unwanted rush of tourism for the already endangered destinations (Dawson et

al., 2011). Determining whether this rush is induced or impacted by LCT requires more thorough future research about tourist motivations in Venice.

Regardless, as the interviews revealed, the locals wish the pace of tourism to slow down – not only in the sense that fewer tourists enter the city but for the ones who do enter to behave more calmly. As our findings indicate, the locals' way of life is slow and now feels disrupted by tourism. Additionally, the locals have much to offer, which is often not taken by tourists. This offer can exemplify the local businesses but can also be connected to the way and pace of life: the locals want the tourists to learn their way of life and to respect it by slowing down while in Venice.

Despite the longing for respect and the other negative perceptions regarding tourism, the ban on tourism as a means to foster sustainability is not perceived as an option. Instead, tourists should be educated, informed, and interested in the happenings of Venice. This local desire can be linked to literature on LCT, suggesting LCT tourists are environmentally conscious (Lemelin et al., 2010; Dawson et al., 2011; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Miller et al., 2020). According to Denley et al. (2020) and Miller et al. (2020), they have the potential to play the role of climate change ambassadors by spreading awareness of LCT destinations. This suggestion has also been contrasted by the finding that LCT tourists display pro-environmental behaviours but seem unaware of or unbothered by the consequences of travelling to an LCT destination (Denley et al., 2020). Regardless, we argue that the possibility of ambassadors raising awareness for climate change and the disappearing culture of Venice can still serve as a real opportunity for the city to generate positive impacts for the locals. Thus, we suggest that the city's administration draw on LCT to communicate the need to slow down the pace, respect the city, raise awareness, and foster sustainable tourism development in Venice.

Denley et al. (2020) and Groulx et al. (2019) found that LCT has primarily been publicised by the media. This aligns with our findings that, in the case of Venice, the media has the power regarding the promotion of LCT. While Venice's administration discusses possible solutions to combat overtourism, such as visitor capping and controlled entry (Lemelin et al., 2010; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Groulx et al., 2016; Denley et al., 2020), the interviewees implied the locals do not approve these plans due to their contribution to the city's transformation into an amusement park. Furthermore, we found the city's administration not acknowledging or perhaps not even being aware of LCT, which refers to Dawson et al. (2011) and Miller et

al.'s (2020) findings that DMOs typically do not do so. However, we suggest that Venice use LCT to its advantage to communicate issues surrounding the phenomenon to manage and promote in a controlled way. In contrast to how LCT is currently perceived through media as rush tourism and shock news, LCT has the potential to educate and encourage people to experience and respect Venice while they can.

Since LCT is occasionally referred to as *doom tourism* and *disappearing tourism* and is connected to dark tourism (Lemelin et al., 2010), the phenomenon can be typically perceived in a negative light. However, if tourists are aware of the issues and are educated on the culture and history of the city, we argue that LCT can also function as a positive source for the sustainable tourism development of Venice. Thus, LCT is not just another threat to the city but could be the light at the end of the tunnel that some locals hoped to find.

8. Conclusion

Being a fairly new phenomenon and relatively new to the academic discussion, research in last-chance tourism is yet to be examined from the local perspective, as well as in connection to sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, regardless of the title of an LCT destination the media has given to Venice, the phenomenon remains to be researched within the destination. This thesis contributes to the literature by filling these remarkable gaps in research by examining the local perceptions of last-chance tourism in the context of sustainable tourism development in Venice and its islands.

Our findings indicate the interviewed locals deem the current tourism situation in Venice not sustainable. They feel the current pursuit of economic sustainability overrides the environmental and socio-cultural sustainability, leading to further gentrification and touristification, and, hence, to the feeling of the administration disrespecting the city and its residents by turning it into an *amusement park*. The interviewed locals emphasise respect as the main driver of sustainable tourism development and demand tourism that is respectful for the environment, the economy and most importantly, the people and their culture. We conclude that the local understanding of sustainable tourism development in the city of Venice and its islands revolves around respect, which creates a foundation for all other pillars of sustainable tourism development in the city.

Furthermore, this understanding of sustainable tourism development speaks to the local perceptions of LCT, where the perceptions have more variation. While none of the interviewed locals referred to LCT initiatively, most recognised the phenomenon after it was introduced. Some perceive the phenomenon as an environmental risk due to its contribution to climate change and the city's carrying capacity. In contrast, others perceive the more significant threat to be more cultural through the phenomenon's connection to hysteria and rush tourism, which in turn can lead to disrespectful behaviour from the tourists' side. Moreover, some of the interviewed locals do not perceive LCT as threatening but instead have an understanding towards the phenomenon and the tourists who want to see Venice while they still have the chance.

We conclude the local perceptions of last-chance tourism in Venice and its islands are multi-layered, making the concept of LCT contested. Moreover, we challenge the general conception of LCT destinations being climate-change-related (Lemelin et al., 2010; Dawson et al., 2011; Groulx et al., 2016; Piggott-McKellar & McNamara, 2017; Groulx et al., 2019; Kucukergin & Gürlek, 2020; Wu et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020; Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Lai, 2021) by arguing that gentrification and touristification can be driving forces of LCT as well. As indicated by the interviewed locals perceiving the socio-cultural threats as more pressing than climate change, while Venice is portrayed as an LCT destination due to its sinking, we argue the factor leading to the vanishing of the city first is the cultural loss, making Venice a much more urgent LCT destination.

9. References

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