

Making Space for Festivity –Venetian’s Views on *Carnevale*

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An important strand in the literature on public festivities debates the intrusive role that tourism plays in their reproduction (e.g. Boissevain 1996). Issues relating to commodification, authenticity and cultural identity are central, and the extent to which the presence of tourists negatively affects the process is a key question (Sampath 1997, Hitchcock 1999). This paper focuses on Venice, a city that has lived with tourists for centuries and specifically on the Venice carnival. Almost 20 years ago, Zanneto (1986) argued that the city’s citizens considered their city to have become something of a Disneyland, stripped of its culture, and resigned to serving the needs of European pleasure-seekers.

In the late 1970s the pre-lenten festivities famously associated with the historic city were revitalised mainly with a view to extending the tourist season. The paper re-assesses Zanneto’s assertion, by analysing both Venetians’ engagement with carnival and their attitudes towards tourists’ presences in the city during carnival time. The paper reports the findings of a survey conducted among residents of the historic city-centre during the 2001 carnival. They reveal carnival to be a practice which remains of genuine interest to local residents. However, structured as it is to serve the interests of the tourism sector, residents vocalise their desire for greater local involvement. Much of their critique revolves around questions of space and a strong theme in the findings is a call for the festivities to assume a stronger presence in civic spaces and public spheres and a greater concern for accessibility in ways that would enable Venetians to express their identity with their place through the carnival.