



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Academic Year Opening Ceremony 2020/2021

Venice, 24 February 2021

Opening Year Address
by the Rector
Tiziana Lippiello

Dear all,

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to those who have made this **new beginning** possible, at an extraordinarily difficult time that has brought about, along with a sense of loneliness, new ways of working, socialising and sharing. During these months, we have developed an even keener awareness of how important it is to devote our attention to each other, regardless of what our roles are.

The need to **reorganise services** and **review working methods** has revealed the great dedication and expertise of the staff, who despite this difficult situation have managed to ensure the continuity of activities in support of teaching and research and the overall functioning of the university.

The pandemic has not stopped us. Thanks to the shared effort of our teaching staff, of our technical administrative staff, of our language assistants, of our scientific and technical staff, of our librarians, and of our students, our **university has been able to respond** to the challenge by continuing all of its activities safely.

Several months ago Ca' Foscari launched the **#IoSonoResponsabile** campaign, also endorsed by the Ministry of University, along with a **screening campaign** that many of us have joined: it is up to each one of us to set a good example.

One year after the start of this health emergency we can say that **our university is a safe place**. A few dozen cases have been registered in our university, no clusters. I wish to thank each and every one of you for your sense of responsibility. I also wish to thank our offices, and in particular our Risk Management and Prevention Office, for keeping us safe.

It is now time to **move away from the current emergency logic** and see **the future as a great opportunity** to rethink the organisation of work and the way in which services are provided.

During these months we have learnt to live in a disciplined way, respecting the space and time of others, and the space and time of nature. We need to learn to regard ourselves as just **one part of a complex ecosystem**.

Among the challenges that we will face in the coming year there will be the need to recognise the skills of our staff by means of a **development plan** aimed at enhancing the value of our professionals. We will all be united in this challenge, each of us in our own way.

1. Our history: when and why Ca' Foscari was founded

We are first and foremost **a free community** founded on the demand for knowledge by learners, gathered around lecturers who give *lectiones*. The institutionalisation of these first groupings in the 11th century gave rise to the University of Bologna, which was a fundamental event in European history.

Our university was founded some eight centuries later, when, **in** November 1866, immediately after the liberation of Venice, Luigi Luzzatti “put forward the idea of founding a higher institute of commerce”.

From 5 August 1868 until the end of the century, Ca' Foscari was the only centre in Italy for the training of economists, teachers of technical subjects and foreign languages, and aspiring consuls.

Local institutions participated in its establishment: the Province, the Chamber of Commerce and the City Council financed it. The City Council also provided access to Palazzo Foscari.

Our Royal School took part in **political debates on the future of the city** (and of its port), while the city was on its way to becoming a capital in the fields of culture, cinema, tourism and industry. In the 1960s, the Faculty of Industrial Chemistry opened the university up to scientific and technological culture, in connection with one of the largest chemical industry hubs in Europe, Porto Marghera. In those years the university also opened up to the humanities.

Ca' Foscari has grown while maintaining its **vocation** as an educational institute firmly rooted in the **needs of the territory**. However, that **original connection with local institutions** in planning the future of this rich territory has gradually weakened.

It is now time to resume the **shared**, long-term **planning** that once inspired the minds and hearts of teachers, scholars and politicians.

2. The women of Ca' Foscari

While it was men who led to the establishment of our School of Commerce, in connection with the expansionist aims of the territory and the nation, the pioneering work carried out by female students and teachers at Ca' Foscari in emancipating the **role of women** in education and society deserves special mention.

Despite the fact that women's right to education has been one of the issues discussed since the unification of Italy, in the second half of the 19th century our country still had an 80% illiteracy rate among women.

The Royal High School of Commerce was a **school for men *par excellence***: in its first 25 years, not a single woman left a trace in the records of the school. The **first female name** appeared in 1893. This was not an isolated case: when in 1883 our school became the only one in the Kingdom to hold teaching exams for external students, women in their early twenties came here to earn their right to autonomy and social emancipation.

When I was elected Rector, the first thing almost everyone asked me was: “How does it feel to be the first woman Rector of Ca' Foscari (and of the Veneto region), and one of the few in Italy?”. To tell the truth, this is a question that I continue to be asked, and to which I continue to reply in the same way: **I have never considered my being a woman as a credential to be used in order to be a candidate for the leadership of Ca' Foscari**, nor have I ever thought that this path could be more difficult for me as a woman.

Of course, inequalities do exist: there is no point pretending that they do not. There is a **work-life balance problem**, which often forces women to interrupt their careers or give up their families; we need to do more to overcome this gap, and I will personally work to improve the current situation.

However, I believe what matters most is **the perspective** with which many women naturally look at their careers and personal lives: the goal of constantly improving and enhancing ourselves must correspond to an inner drive, not to the need or desire to prove that we are worth more or just as much as men.

I see this awareness in the **young women of today**, in our students as well as in my daughters: they are brave, self-confident and hopeful about the future that not only awaits them, but that they themselves are helping to build. To these young women, I would like to say: continue to work hard and earn your future with dedication and strong motivation. **Tenacity, determination, resourcefulness, confidence** in one's own means and abilities: this is the capital we all have at our disposal.

Let me tell you a story, which takes us back some seven hundred years. This story has been handed down to us in a document which has been studied by Dr. Alessandra Schiavon and is preserved in the **State Archives of Venice**, an institute with which we have established fruitful collaborations.

The story is set in Venice, in 1366. **Fantina Polo**, daughter of the far more famous Marco, having been orphaned and then widowed went to court to claim her inheritance, of which she had been deprived by her husband and, after his death, by his powerful family, who had entrusted it to the custody of the Procurators of Saint Mark. Although she had been left alone in the world, Fantina did not give up. On the contrary, she embarked on a complex legal battle against her late husband's family and the powerful Venetian magistrates: she prepared carefully for the deposition, asserted her own reasons with strength and obstinacy, confident in justice and aware of her rights, which, in the end, were recognised. **Fantina was a woman whose history of determination and courage is exemplary.**

I have taken the time to tell you this story because I believe that, when our aims are innovation and renovation, it is important to always look back at the past and our history.

Let's fast-forward to today. In the last ten years Ca' Foscari has been deeply committed to gender issues. We have established scholarships to promote female students' access to science and technology (STEM) subjects, where the gap with their male peers is still high. Numerous initiatives and institutional actions have been contributing to the strengthening of the social and economic role of women in the world of work. One of these initiatives is the **project LEI – Leadership, Energia, Imprenditorialità (Leadership, Energy, Entrepreneurship) – which** has been running since 2017 thanks to our Career Service. Since October 2020, Edizioni Ca' Foscari has also been publishing the **four-monthly magazine LEI.**

For years we have been active in the field of social inclusion, against all forms of discrimination. We have set up projects which aim to foster civic awareness. The Archivio Scrittrici Migranti (ASSM - Archive on the Writings of Migrant Women Writers) is one of such projects.

There is certainly still a lot to do in order to facilitate the advancement of women's university careers. Consider that among 160 Ca' Foscari full professors, there are only 43 women – that's approximately 26%. We should work much harder in this respect.

3. Research, students and merit

Let us focus on **merit**. How can we recognise, cultivate, enhance and reward it? I am thinking in particular of **research**, but also more in general of all the fields we work in, including financial aid for students.

Those who do not know the university world well may have a skewed understanding of research: they often tend to see researchers as people absorbed exclusively in their studies and concerned with jealously guarding their discoveries. **Research**, on the other hand, even when it is the work of a single individual, **is always a collective, plural endeavour**: it demands **sharing and participation**, and ideally aspires to have a **beneficial impact on the whole of humanity**. Research is what restores trust and hope when trust and hope seem to be lost: it makes us aware of the complexity of the world we live in, and at the same time gives us the tools to face new challenges.

Ca' Foscari was founded under the banner of **innovation**; it was established by opening up

paths that had been little explored up to that time, by following the natural vocation of this extraordinary city. Our founders had courage and intuition, and we must have the same courage and vision.

Our university needs to recover and reinterpret this role, thereby adapting it to the present, in order to train not only the ruling classes, but also citizens who will be capable of influencing the present and future of our country and Europe. -

It is directly **to you, boys and girls**, that I would now like to speak, because a university is what it is mainly because of your presence: never before, I believe, has this word, **presence**, acquired such an emotional significance. To you, our students, we must all pass on **competence, professionalism, trust and a sense of responsibility**. We have many obligations towards you: the main one, which cannot be renounced, is to instil in you the ability to **believe in yourselves**. In you, I see a generation that is ready and willing to make a leap towards a better, inclusive and peaceful future. You seem to be more ready for this than our current society is.

It is important that we encourage you to study, so that you may face your future with ever-growing competence, and so that the number of people who are capable of using theoretical knowledge for practical purposes and of combining knowledge with know-how may increase.

Education, research and innovation are the pillars of this renaissance: education makes us more aware and freer; research opens up new possibilities; innovation enables us to achieve them.

The **digitalisation of knowledge** and of some services are the topics of the present and of the future. We need to manage these challenges wisely, in order **to preserve and promote the value of cultural heritage, to become equipped with advanced technology that we can share with the local territory, and in particular with businesses**.

Our university needs to become **a home for you, our youth. It must be home to your ideas and aspirations**. As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Day after day we are guided by our passion for learning and research. While we study the humanities, we also look at scientific subjects with interest and curiosity, and vice versa. We must "**contaminate**" **knowledge**, share knowledge, in order to increase its impact.

For me, an Italian and European citizen who, thanks to Ca' Foscari, was given the opportunity to choose to study the culture of a country which is very different from my own, and to dedicate my efforts to scientific cooperation between worlds and institutions thousands and thousands of kilometres apart, **the encounter between cultures and traditions, collaboration among scholars and international mobility** are fundamental values. Ca' Foscari has always known how to interpret these values, in accordance with the cosmopolitan vocation of the city of Venice. We will continue to promote these values, making them one of the cornerstones of the forthcoming Strategic Plan.

Just a few days ago, we received the news of the extraordinary result achieved by our University with the funding on the part of Europe of **thirty Marie Skłodowska Curie grants**, which makes us the fourth university in Europe by the number of grants awarded, as well as the first in Italy.

Thirty young talents from fourteen countries around the world will have the opportunity to carry out their research at Ca' Foscari and the other prestigious universities with which we collaborate. I wish to thank the young, talented people who have chosen to study with us, as well as the colleagues who have supported them, the personnel of the departments and of our university. Once again, your work has attested to the international vocation of Ca' Foscari, a university at the heart of Venice, a capital in the world. **Attracting young European and international talents is one of our priorities, in order to foster, in collaboration with the City Council, Venice's role in Europe**.

In the first few months of my term, we have taken a number of measures to **promote the academic and scientific careers of young male and female researchers**: we will continue to do so.

With regard to financial aid for students, we have provided for a series of rewards and incentives: **an incentive for off-site students** (€300,000), a prize for the best students, incentives for

connectivity, mobility and housing (for a total of €2,900,000), paid student collaborations, student loans, student self-managed training activities (€68,000), services for the disabled and SLDs, including access to specific psychological support. The university has also ensured that fees are reduced upon presentation of qualifying ISEE (**Indicatore di Situazione Economica Equivalente**, a tool which assesses the effective income and asset situation of anyone requesting financial aid) documents, and it has invested more than 2 million in order to cover the **Scholarships for Student Financial Aid** which were not covered by the Region. The initiatives promoted by the **Career Service** are also important: witness the vocational guidance service for Ca' Foscari students and recent graduates; internships throughout Italy; the **Cultural Careers** project, dedicated to students in the language and humanities areas; international remote internships to work on specific activities and develop strategic projects together with company tutors and institutions. We are now promoting new internships with the City Council and the local institutions, in order to strengthen this collaboration and create further opportunities. **Paid internships and apprenticeships** are among the initiatives we will promote with an ever-growing determination.

The year 2020 saw first the introduction and then the consolidation of a number of crucial innovations for **international student mobility**, which is one of the areas of the university experience most affected by the pandemic. Like many other universities, at Ca' Foscari we did our best to manage the emergency that broke out exactly one year ago, organising **virtual meetings** to offer support and advice to students who were abroad at the time. We experimented for the first time with the **management of so-called virtual – that is, carried out entirely online – and blended – that is, partially in-person and partially online – mobility**. At the same time, this gave the University the opportunity to rethink some **particularly important partnerships**, which would otherwise have been suspended: I am thinking in particular of the collaboration with the **University of Klagenfurt**, which is based on the exclusive, currently only virtual exchange of students, and of the partnership with the University of Warwick, with which we have established a fruitful collaboration.

This year will see the beginning of a **new cycle of the Erasmus Plus Programme (2021-27)**, which will be strongly geared towards **digitalisation**. The seven-year Erasmus Plus programme that has just ended has enabled us to achieve an important result, that of being **the first university in Italy in terms of the amount of funding for International Credit Mobility (ICM) projects**.

4. Ca' Foscari in the region

Within my role I feel a strong moral duty to cultivate and nurture **self-confidence** and a **spirit of cooperation**. I hope to give a strong impetus to cooperation with local universities and higher education institutions. Together we can do great things.

Today more than ever, Venice can appreciate the value of hosting **four university institutions** that alone have a population of at least **thirty-five thousand** people. **Venice is the university, and the university is Venice**: a large, **spread-out campus** around which an international community of people, talents and projects gravitates. **We will offer space and opportunities to young people, for education and research**, including seminars and public lectures in libraries and museums.

Universities are the **main source of cultural development and research** in the city and metropolitan area, as well as a driving force for the development of production activities.

A first important step in this direction is the **Study in Venice project**, which is a network that brings together our university and IUAV, the Academy of Fine Arts and the Benedetto Marcello Conservatory, in agreement with the City Council: the aim is to create **a platform for the promotion the local system** at national and international level, in order to improve the overall social and economic quality of the city.

Ca' Foscari has already made a strong contribution to the development of the city by building

new housing and enhancing the Scientific Campus in an area of Mestre that is currently undergoing major redevelopment. By the end of the year, the **Student Residence at the San Giobbe Economic Campus** will also open its doors.

Ca' Foscari wants to contribute to the reconstruction of the city by sharing and augmenting the spaces of the University in the lagoon and on land, from Via Torino to Via Forte Marghera, to our Campus in Treviso. We are working to offer **new spaces** for students and their needs to meet and socialise, and to give the **humanities area** a configuration that is more functional to its characteristics. For this, we rely on the support of the cities that are hosting us.

The rebirth of our city can only happen in synergy with the **City Council**, which I would like to thank for agreeing to cooperate with us in this process, and with all cultural and scientific institutions of our region. Together, we celebrate Venice by developing projects which contribute to the revival of this city as a capital of culture and sustainability. Together, we welcome young people from Europe and the world, from Ulan Bator to New York, from Singapore to Moscow who wish to pay homage to this European city, **an everlasting symbol of beauty and fragility**.

I hope we will be supported by a strong synergy with other local institutions and the Region, in order to promote a quality product range for the **European and international citizens** who visit our city and country and, above all, for **young people, who are at the heart of our vision**.

By means of our **Civic Engagement** we will **give value to the social, economic and cultural facets of our university, which must be at the service of society and the region**.

5. Ca' Foscari and sustainability

In 2011, **Ca' Foscari** was the **first** Italian **university to include sustainability in its Statute**, and it did so by making it one of the founding principles of our University in Article 3. **Ten years after that decision**, we want to pursue this goal with determination. Sustainability must become pervasive and inspire virtuous actions in all areas of life. This is all the more necessary if we want to take **Venice** along a path that will make it an **international capital of sustainability**. Together with local institutions and businesses we are working on a concrete programme to make **Venice a living laboratory, a breeding ground for ideas and good practices for the safeguarding of cultural heritage, for a sustainability transition and for social innovation**. This is also the context for the fruitful collaboration with the **City Council** and **Veneto Region** on sustainability, green procurement, the circular economy, climate change, and the projection of **Venice as a European university campus of international repute**. We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the **Veneto Region** to implement the **Regional Strategy for Sustainable Development**, and a few days ago we signed another Memorandum with the **City Council** for the creation of **VeniSIA**, a platform for innovation that will accelerate our work on sustainability, as part of a broader and more inclusive project.

6. Conclusion

If you were to ask me today, 24 February 2021, what I would most like to see as Rector, I would have no doubt about the answer: first of all, I would like to **see our students from Italy, Europe and the world** in the flesh, **in our classrooms**, in our beautiful buildings, in our refurbished libraries. I would like to see our students and staff live in this city, in the lagoon and on the mainland. I would like to see them go abroad thanks to Ca' Foscari's many **mobility programmes in Europe and in the world**, and I would like to welcome their peers and colleagues from the rest of the world to Venice.

Our university is an essential component of our **Venice**, the one that is perhaps most responsible for contributing to the rebirth of the city.

Let us draw inspiration from this city, which has always been accustomed to the **challenge of change**. There is a character in the classical and modern Chinese language, 化 [hua], which makes spontaneous change the art of politics. From this perspective, **change** means first of all understanding nature and knowing how to adapt to it. This is a vision that we can treasure in these challenging times.

As I come to the end of this speech, allow me to quote the ending of the work of a great 20th-century writer, **Italo Calvino**, who dedicated his book *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*) to Fantina's father, Marco Polo. As I was saying, we have reached the final lines of the book. Kublai Khan senses that his empire is about to end. Feeling discouraged and exhausted, the great emperor recognises that everything points to a single destination and acknowledges the futility of everything. **Marco Polo** replies:

L'inferno dei viventi non è qualcosa che sarà; se ce n'è uno, è quello che è già qui [...]. Due modi ci sono per non soffrirne. Il primo riesce facile a molti: accettare l'inferno e diventarne parte fino al punto di non vederlo più. Il secondo è rischioso ed esige attenzione e apprendimento continui: cercare e saper riconoscere chi e cosa, in mezzo all'inferno, non è inferno, e farlo durare, e dargli spazio.

[The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here [...]. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space].

Balance, in its constancy and progression, which makes us go forward, seems to be the real strong point of this conclusion. The words used by Calvino, "attenzione" (vigilance) and "apprendimento" (apprehension), together with curiosity, awareness and humbleness are the only possible way to build a new present and plan a future together. Where else can these demanding arts be kept alive and cultivated, if not in the classrooms of our universities?

As I take my leave of you all, allow me to express my **thanks**.

Firstly, I would like to thank **Michele Bugliesi**, with whom, as Vice-Rector in charge of international relations, I was able to collaborate fruitfully in the areas I have mentioned thanks to our frank and productive discussions.

Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude to those who work at Ca' Foscari every day, starting with the Head of Administration and the Vice-Provost, their vice-rectors, the delegates, the Department Heads and Directors, the Chairpeople of the Evaluation Unit, the Quality Assurance Unit, the Equal Opportunities, Employees' Well-being and Inclusion Committee, the Academic Senate and the Board of Governors, which are made up of people of great value. I would also like to thank all the staff, from the departments to the centres and the headquarters to our librarians, who work for our University with great enthusiasm and competence, energy and creativity.

Thank you, everyone, for having listened to me.

It is with this passion for study and research and the desire to offer the new generations an education that is in tune with the times and capable of influencing their individual and professional growth that **I hereby declare the 2020/2021 academic year at Ca' Foscari University of Venice officially open**.