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Interview with the EMA students representatives (2021 - 2022)



The Press Office of the Global Campus of Human Rights had the opportunity to ask the EMA Students Representatives Briana Keogh, Alannah Owens and Beatrijs Gelders about their experiences of studying in Venice and in the Global Campus.

Could you tell us more about yourself and your roles as EMA student representatives? Could you describe the experience of studying in Venice during the first semester of the Masters?

As student representatives, our role is to lend an ear and a helping hand to our fellow masterini, and to communicate any issues or concerns with the EMA team on the campus at the Monastery of San Nicolo. We strive to help everyone feel supported and work actively towards solutions that allow the intense first semester in Venice to run as efficiently and comfortably as possible. Venice has offered us an impressive and unique environment in which to study during this first semester of the Masters. The Monastery of San Nicolo presented us with a beautiful and historical backdrop against which to study the diverse human rights topics that we were exposed to by professors from all over the world, and with resources and support of the EMA and GC staff. A special mention is due to the librarian and all the volunteers who helped to make those academic resources available to students. Every corner you turn in the maze of Venetian streets is a guaranteed picturesque surprise and being surrounded by water everywhere gives the city something magical. The amazing views, sunsets and aperitivos with Spritz and cicchetti made sure we could relax during this intense semester.

What could be a possible future for the city in terms of hospitality of foreign students, academic offers, quality of living and ways to improve the current conditions you have experienced? Do you think there is a way for Venice to become more efficient, innovative, attractive and well-prepared to host important events and course studies? What could students like you need?

Venice is known for grappling with the trifles and treasures of its tourism industry, and therefore life in the city adapts to the tourism. A shift in investment priorities toward more residential activities would be crucial to encourage hospitality of foreign students and people wanting to emigrate and allow people to meet locals, develop friendships and feel more integrated in the city. Encouraging the development of social spaces to host non-tourist oriented activities would be a welcome addition. More support and development of community-based initiatives would be immensely beneficial, in line with the efforts of groups like Venice Calls or We Are Here Venice, founded in direct response to the lack of opportunities for locals in the city. Additionally, changing the Venice City Libraries Wifi so that you do not require an Italian phone number to connect would greatly improve accessibility of foreign students to these amenities. The city's local sports and leisure clubs could even have recruitment drives for international students to engage with local activities more and bring diversity of nationalities and ages to such local groups. Finally, it may be beneficial to encourage more museums and cultural spaces to be included on the student museum ticket, and for more cultural activities to have a more competitive student rate or student discounts.

Which topics could be interesting to address and related to your human rights and democracy education during and after this covid-19 emergency? What will the most important challenges be in relation to promoting human rights and democracy in the years to come?

The biggest challenges that we feel will be coming our way in the field of Human Rights will be

difficulties relating to the following. Firstly, globalisation, misinformation & (social) media will be a force to grapple with. Secondly, we will need to understand how to move forward in the context of worldwide vaccine disproportionality and the retreat of the Global North from the issue coupled with the risk of future pandemics. Thirdly, climate change will undoubtedly cause a challenge that human rights will be ever more called on to address, as through climate justice. Fourthly, human mobility will undoubtedly face and pose challenges for policy, and will require sensitivity to human rights, especially in light of covid restrictions and procedural and systemic inadequacies highlighted by the pandemic. Finally, the rise of new technologies and artificial intelligence, especially in struggling healthcare settings, will be an area to watch. These are just some of the many realms in which it will be of vital importance to ask questions from a human rights perspective.

How do you envisage the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) being integrated into the sustainable future of the city of Venice and the Region of Veneto? Do you have any specific concrete ideas? How might EMA students continue to help at the local level in the possible sustainable future scenarios?

In striving towards building a sustainable future for the city of Venice, the motivation and vision of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) may urgently be called upon in the next eight years. It's been made clear to us that Venice has made efforts to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the fabric of the city through some of its most well-known features. For example, Venice's iconic Architectural Biennale paid attention this year to the question "How will we live together?" This is such an important question to have asked at a truly international forum where different countries are represented and can share learning. We would look forward to new and urgent implementation of the goals. Taking the example of Venice's vulnerability to flooding and its complex history with 'acqua alta', a learning centre for climate-change education and management could be developed (SDG 13). This could include an interactive learning experience about the MOSE for the general public, with free admission, accessible and open to all ages to facilitate lifelong learning and even a research centre for the scientific community linked with Venice's colleges and universities (SDGs 4 & 10). We think this could encourage citizen-engagement and spread the immense local knowledge on climate change. In this respect, a valuable resource would be the lived experience of Venice's more senior residents, who have lived many years without such measures and experienced flooding and its varying intensities pre- and post-MOSE. Despite the relative tranquillity of Venice in this covid time, we saw evidence of the over-tourism that has and is predicted to be a challenge for Venice in the abundance of tourist-focused shops, restaurants etc. - with a lack of diverse amenities for locals. Typically tourist activities such as sightseeing from gondolas could be made more inclusive and accessible, with recruitment drives for Gondoliers being run to represent diverse identities and promote the inclusion of women in this workforce. Tours in turn could reflect alternative histories of Venice, emphasising the contributions made by women and minorities. Inter-artisan initiatives could also be encouraged, helping traditional glassmakers, painters, booksellers etc to develop synergies and thus foster more sustainable industry (SDG 9). Investing in improving the quality of the natural environment at the municipal level with more widespread placing of trash bins, for example on Lido's beaches, and for the more widespread cleaning of litter from such natural amenities. This year, the EMA students carried out a beach clean on Lido and we would encourage this tradition in years to come to improve life on land and below water (SDG 14 and 15). Electric bus services on Lido are a step in the right direction for Venice's transport sustainability, but the next step could be to follow Stockholm's plans for commuting between islands via electric ferry - avoiding spillage of so much fuel into the lagoon.

Could you share a message with the Global Campus of Human Rights Community (professors, experts, alumni, staff) and to their students in particular?

Studying Human Rights is never easy, least of all during this time of global pandemic, but we hope that we may face the issues that we are studying in solidarity. Drawing on the strengths of this amazing network of present and future practitioners, we hope that we may collectively and creatively work to empower our societies around the world to ensure dignity, justice and respect for all. The volume and richness of interactions with both inspiring and inspired people within this program has been a privilege to be a part of, and we are motivated to continue being a source of support throughout our second semester, and look forward to reuniting in September for our graduation ceremony.

For more information contact our [Press Office](#)

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