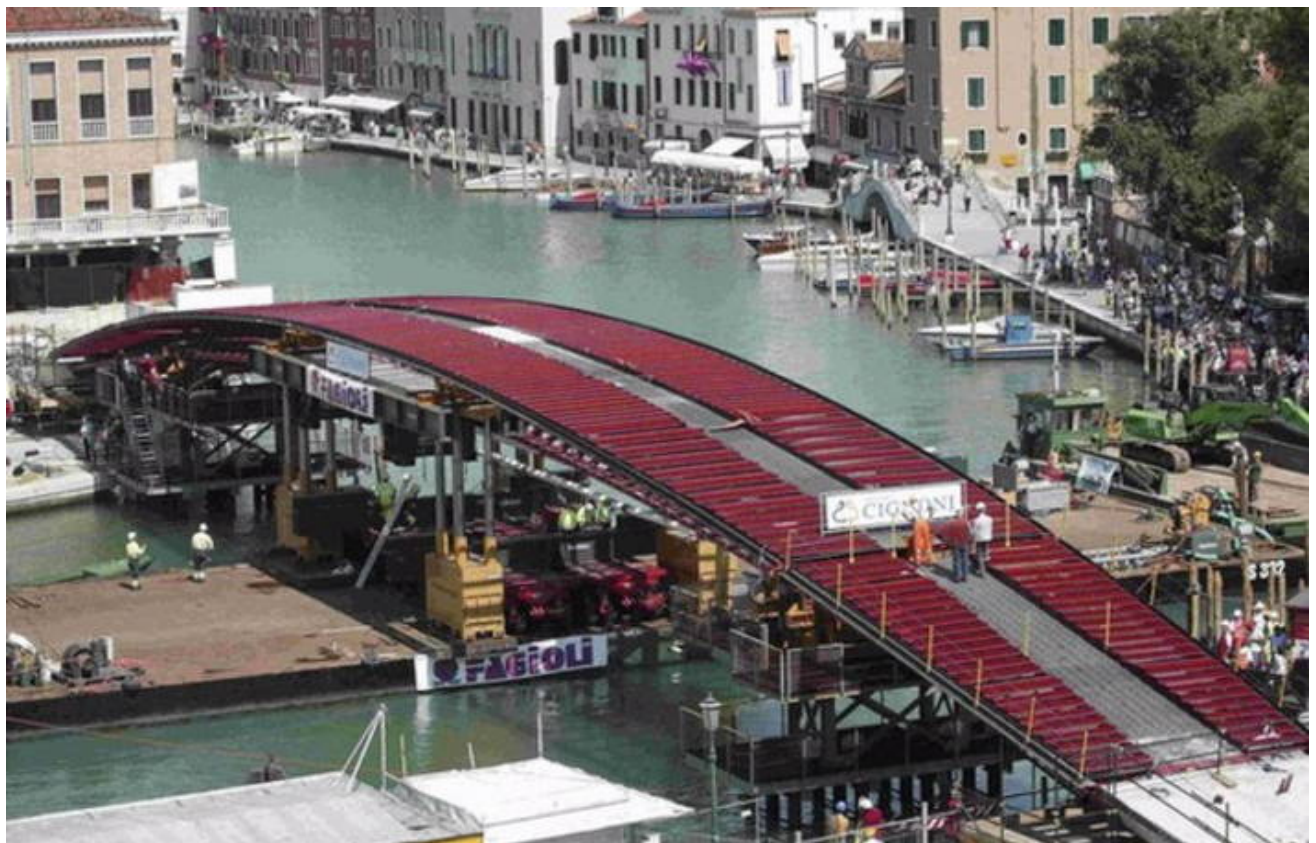


Venice's New Calatrava Bridge: an Everlasting Project, a Disputed Infrastructure

Marina Melchionda (August 26, 2008)



The inauguration of the Calatrava Bridge on Venice's Canal Grande, scheduled for September 18, has become a source of animated political debates both in town and at the national level.

The controversy regards not only the necessity of building this high-cost infrastructure but, more than anything else, its architectural stability.

Named after its first designer, the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, the bridge has witnessed strong opposition to its building since 1996, when it was first planned. Fears that the canal banks couldn't provide sufficient stability were rumored since construction began in the summer of 2007. Local authorities have since tried very hard to reassure public opinion.



Opponents to the structure include former culture undersecretary and art critic Vittorio Sgarbi, has declared that it will irremediably ruin Venice's skyline from Piazzale Roma.

Another hot topic of discussion is the cost of the project, which has risen from 4 to 10 million euros, an amount which Mayor Cacciari's staff however considers reasonable and appropriate for a 94-metre-long infrastructure linking Venice's railway station to Piazzale Roma, a fundamental public transportation terminal on the opposite side of the Grand Canal.

Of divergent opinion is the main opposition party, Alleanza Nazionale, who not only maintains that the cost of the project will more than double due to current legal disputes with the construction company, but also insists that the infrastructure itself is unnecessary. Therefore it plans to use the inauguration ceremony, which will be attended by Italy's President Giorgio Napolitano, to denounce the bridge as "a monument to bad administration and a waste of Venice's money".

Therefore the inauguration of the fourth bridge on the Canal Grande (and the first new infrastructure in Venice in 70 years) will be probably saluted by a chorus of protests.

Ironically, the only possibility of avoiding all this seems to be... no inauguration at all. This has been proposed by Venice's public works chief, Mara Rumiz: "To put an end to the exploitation and speculation, there will be no inauguration. I for one am not very interested in ceremonies and much more concerned with works coming to fruition effectively"

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