

Grace Hayden writes: The Venice Film Festival, whose opening night is Wednesday August 27th, is a cultural gem. The celebration attracts hoards of tourists every year who come to the city to get a glimpse of their favorite A-list celebrities and see the incredible featured works of cinematic art. The films are shown on Venice Lido, which experiences a vast increase in sightseers every year thanks to the festival. When asked about what it is like to live on the island during the festival, local resident Regina Poniridis painted a vivid picture stating:

Thanks to the festival for two weeks Lido is full of life. During the winter not many people come, but by the time the festival arrives, sometimes I can't even manage to get out of my house!

Today the festival is a high-status event, yet it is accessible enough for the public to attend showings - a remarkable feat when compared to other prestigious film festivals like the Cannes Film Festival.

The festival originally started as a product of the Italian fascist regime in 1932 with three main economic and political purposes. First and foremost, the festival would bring wealthy tourists to the city whose hard earned cash would support the local Italian economy. In the event that these wealthy tourists were traveling on a budget, the festival would serve as a way to boost Venice's reputation as a "cultural capital" and advance the globalization of Italian films. But perhaps most importantly, the festival would serve as a platform to conduct mass-showings of fascist propaganda promoting nationalism and the authoritarian ideals of Mussolini's regime. From early on the celebration was a success, due mostly to the fact that it was backed by the government and widely supported by the public.

By the early forties the festival had taken on a whole new persona. In 1940, the film festival was reorganized as a Nazi-Fascist affair. By 1942, the celebration had become the "Italian-German Film Festival" in honor of WWII and what the axis powers hoped would become the "New Europe". The event was no longer accessible to the public at that point and had practically become a celebration for military and government officials alone. However, The Nazi and Fascist leaders celebrated too soon, as the festival in 1942 would be the last of the fascist era. The subsequent festival was revamped, and the original goals of promoting Italian film and bringing international culture to the community were restored, putting the celebration back on track to earning the Italian film industry international recognition and prestige. The film festival's overhaul was well received to say the least. In 1947, the film festival went on to have record-breaking attendance with 90,000 visitors.

By the fifties, the festival had moved into a new era of international expansion. Films from India to Eastern Europe were shown, and for the first time, emerging authors were recognized alongside their more established, mainstream competition. While the sixties and seventies marked a post-war adjustment period, by the 80's the festival had become a booming success - a trend that would flow into the nineties and onto the 2000's.

Today the film festival seems to be doing well despite competition in places like Toronto, New York, and Cannes.

Said, Ugo Rigoni, the director of the Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Management program at the University of Venice - Ca'Foscari.

The festival has gradually grown during the years, increasing the number of tickets sold and the participation of both Italian and foreign tourists, besides Venice and Veneto residents.

The fact that the event takes place in a very powerful tourist trademark like Venice is, of course, of help for both the city and the event. The other side of this growth can be explained by effective marketing strategies to accommodate younger viewers. For example, the festival offers special accommodation, discounts for the tickets, restaurants, transportation and museums entries for festival attendees under the ages of 26. The festival generates jobs for the residents, because it demands infrastructure, such as transportation (both public and private), accommodation, restaurants, museums, souvenir shops, etc.

Today the festival has added another item to its long list of accomplishments with the unveiling of The Venice Film Market - making the festival a great place to work as well as play. Initiated by Alberto Barbera in 2012, labiennale.org describes it as "the new business platform dedicated to cinema professionals attending ... the annual film festival". Complete with three market screening rooms, exclusive networking sessions, and most importantly happy hours every evening, the VFM has been a huge success reporting 25% growth in the last year alone. The VFM is set to heighten industry presence and ultimately, the festival's competitiveness in regard to other prominent festivals in Europe and America, proving once again, its ability to adapt and stay relevant.

Despite its politically charged origins, the Venice Film Festival has rightfully managed to garner a reputation of glamour and international respect, in addition to having an important positive impact on the city. The Venice Film Festival highlights the social, cultural and environmental aspects of Venice, in addition to increasing profit/income and job creation. The result: international renown for the city - not just as a cultural center but as a commercial one as well.