

# Open call

**From declaration to law:  
a public Policy Lab for the rights  
of the Venetian Lagoon**

From March to October 2026, Ocean Space hosts *Nature Speaks: Listening for Rights of Nature in Venice and Europe*, a community-led initiative to recognize the Venetian Lagoon as a rights-bearing subject within Italian and European law. At the core of the initiative is a **Policy Lab** dedicated to advancing the **Declaration of the Rights of the Venice Lagoon** into a concrete **legal proposal**.

TBA21–Academy, in collaboration with **NICHE Centre for Environmental Humanities**, Ca' Foscari University Venice, and the grassroots network **IDRA – Iniziativa per i Diritti delle Reti d'Acqua**, is convening a **Working Group** to participate in the Policy Lab and support the next phase of the initiative:

**DRAFTING A LAW PROPOSAL**

based on the Declaration

**DESIGNING ITS GOVERNANCE**

and legal pathways, and

**DEVELOPING A CIVIC CAMPAIGN**

required to bring it into public institutions.

The **Rights of the Lagoon Policy Lab** brings together legal expertise, ecological knowledge, and interdisciplinary perspectives to transform a collective declaration into an actionable instrument for the recognition of the Venice Lagoon.

TBA21 Academy  
Thyssen-Bornemisza  
Art Contemporary

**NICHE**  
Centre for  
Environmental  
Humanities



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

**IDRA**

Iniziativa per i Diritti  
delle Reti d'Acqua

# About the initiative

The [Declaration of the Rights of the Venice Lagoon](#) is a community-led process coordinated by **IDRA – Iniziativa per i Diritti delle Reti d’Acqua** and connected to the broader network, [The Confluence of European Water Bodies](#), a continental movement that brings together initiatives working for the legal recognition of rivers, lagoons, and aquatic ecosystems across Europe.

Since 2023, residents, researchers, lawyers, activists, and cultural workers in Venice have gathered through citizen assemblies to draft and collectively amend the Declaration, envisioning the Lagoon as a **legal subject** rather than a resource governed solely by anthropocentric frameworks. The Venetian process constitutes one of the key strands of the *Confluence*, contributing to a shared European effort to rethink governance models for water bodies.

Launched publicly in November 2025, the Declaration now enters a decisive phase: translating its principles into a **workable legal instrument** capable of operating within Italian and European law. *The Rights of the Lagoon Policy Lab* at Ocean Space supports this transition by hosting a Working Group dedicated to discussing the possibilities to implement the Declaration at a local, regional and national level, that will develop the legislative proposal, its governance architecture, and the civic strategy required for a future citizens’ initiative.

The process remains **open, participatory, and rooted in Venice**, while actively engaging in dialogue with parallel experiences across Europe through the *Confluence* network.

## What the Working Group does

The Working Group will operate as the core engine of the *Rights of the Lagoon Policy Lab*. Its mandate is not consultative but **productive**: to transform the Declaration into an actionable legal and civic instrument and studying its implementation in the context of the legal frameworks. The work will unfold through three interconnected strands:

### 1. Legal Drafting: from Declaration to Law

The group will translate the principles and language of the Declaration into a structured **legislative text** capable of operating within Italian and European legal frameworks. This involves defining key concepts, rights, and mechanisms for recognising the Lagoon as a subject of rights, while ensuring coherence with existing environmental legislation.

### 2. Governance & Legal Pathways

Beyond the text of the law, the Working Group will address how such rights could be **exercised and represented**. Participants will explore governance models for the guardianship of the Lagoon, analyse institutional competences, and map the procedural routes through which the proposal could enter public decision-making.

### 3. Campaign & Citizen Strategy

Legal transformation requires social infrastructure. The group will design the civic strategy that can carry the proposal beyond expert circles, shaping narratives, alliances, and formats for a future citizens’ initiative, while keeping the process rooted in the

everyday realities of Venice and in dialogue with the *Confluence of European Water Bodies*.

Participants will work collectively through monthly sessions, two Citizen Assemblies, and focused workshops with invited experts, functioning as a bridge between **grassroots knowledge, legal practice, and institutional processes**.

## Who can apply

The Working Group seeks a diverse and committed collective able to connect legal thinking with ecological knowledge and civic action. We welcome applications from lawyers, jurists, and legal researchers; scholars in ecology, environmental studies, and the social sciences; activists and community organisers; practitioners in communication, arts, and cultural work engaged with environmental justice; as well as residents and citizens with situated knowledge of the Venice Lagoon. Applicants should be able to participate regularly in an **in-person** process in Venice and work collaboratively in **Italian**. Previous experience in Rights of Nature or legal practice is **not required**, but a clear commitment to collective work and to the long-term protection of the Lagoon is essential.

We encourage applications from people of different generations and backgrounds, particularly those aged **18 to 40**, to ensure the group reflects the future of the Lagoon's communities.

## Time commitment & format

The Working Group will meet **monthly at Ocean Space** from March to October 2026, alongside two Citizen Assemblies open to the wider community. Sessions will be held primarily **in person**, with the possibility of occasional online meetings when necessary.

To ensure a meaningful and coherent process, participants are expected to:

- attend at least three Internal Working Sessions,
- take part in both Citizen Assemblies, and
- contribute to collective drafting and discussions between meetings.

Meetings will combine structured working sessions, collaborative drafting, and exchanges with invited experts. The format is conceived as a **hands-on laboratory**, where legal work, situated knowledge, and civic strategy evolve together.

## Calendar

The process is organised through three types of activity:

1. **Internal Working Sessions** – dedicated to collective drafting, legal pathways, and strategy development.
2. **Citizen Assemblies** – public moments to discuss and amend the work with the wider community and the IDRA network.
3. **Expanded Public Program (optional)** – workshops, seminars, and events connected to the broader *Nature Speaks* initiative.

## 1) Internal Working Sessions

- **March 29, 2026**
- **April 17, 2026**
- **June 11, 2026**
- **July 15, 2026 (online)**
- **September 13, 2026**

## 2) Citizen Assemblies

- **May 16, 2026**  
Collective discussion of the first draft with the wider community and IDRA network.
- **October 10, 2026**  
Presentation of the work accomplished and proposed next steps.

## 3) Expanded Public Program (optional)

Participants are welcome, but not required, to join the wider program:

- **March 28, 2026** – Opening of *Nature Speaks* (Ocean Space)
- **April 2, 2026** – *Sounds Wild and Broken* workshop with Letizia Artioli (in the Lagoon)
- **April 24, 2026** – Walking seminar with Nadia Breda (in the Lagoon)
- **May 22, 2026** – Public Art, hydrophilia and rights of nature with Rivers Sisters (NICHE)
- **May 23, 2026** – *Voga! Woda!* workshop with River Sisters (Vogalonga in the Lagoon)
- **September 29, 2026** – NICHE Annual Seminar with Serpil Oppermann (NICHE)

*\*The schedule may be subject to change.*

## Practical conditions

- **Working language:** Italian. All meetings, documents, and collective drafting will be conducted in Italian.
- **Location:** Ocean Space, Venice (Church of San Lorenzo). The program is primarily in person, with occasional online sessions when required.
- **Remuneration:** Participation in the Working Group is conceived as a **civic and voluntary engagement**. No fees are provided. TBA21–Academy's Ocean Space supports the process by offering space, facilitation, technical resources, and visibility, but the content and direction of the work remain community-led and independent.

## What TBA21–Academy's Ocean Space provides

Participants will have access to:

- a dedicated working space within the Policy Lab at Ocean Space;
- facilitation and coordination support for meetings and Citizen Assemblies;
- exchange with invited experts from legal, scientific, and civic fields;
- visibility through the public program and the *Confluence of European Water Bodies* network;
- documentation and dissemination of the outcomes.

The Policy Lab functions as a **support infrastructure** for the initiative, without replacing the role of IDRA or the autonomy of the Working Group.

## How to apply

Please send a one-page document with a **250-word statement** to [research@ocean-space.org](mailto:research@ocean-space.org) by **February 27, 2026**.

### Subject line:

*Rights of the Lagoon Policy Lab – Working Group Application*

Your statement should briefly address:

- **Your interest** in joining the Working Group and in the Rights of Nature process in Venice.
- **Any relevant experience or knowledge.**
- **Your connection to Venice or the Lagoon.**
- Whether you are already involved in **IDRA** or have participated in previous related activities.

Applications will be reviewed with attention to the diversity of perspectives, backgrounds, and generational balance within the group. Selected participants will be contacted **by March 11, 2026**.

## About

### Nature Speaks's Policy Lab

*Nature Speaks: Listening for Rights of Nature in Venice and Europe* is a community-driven initiative hosted at Ocean Space in 2026, dedicated to advancing the [Declaration of the Rights of the Venice Lagoon](#) into a concrete **legal proposal**. The project hosts a **Policy Lab** focused on two aspects: developing the legal tools required to implement the Declaration into a law, and envisioning public communication strategies to broaden participation and sustain the future of the initiative. The program connects local efforts in Venice with wider European debates on Rights of Nature and ecosystem representation through the [Confluence of European Water Bodies](#), an artist-led continental network of more than 35 ecosystems fighting to obtain rights.

### IDRA – Iniziativa per i Diritti delle Reti d'Acqua

IDRA is a grassroots network promoting the recognition of rivers and aquatic ecosystems as legal entities. Inspired by international precedents, from the Whanganui River in Aotearoa New Zealand to the Mar Menor in Spain, IDRA works to shift ecological governance from an anthropocentric model toward an ecocentric approach. Since 2023, the network has coordinated citizen assemblies in Venice to draft the Declaration of the Rights of the Venice Lagoon and collaborates with neighbouring ecosystems from the Po to the Tagliamento and the Dolomites, while collaborating with communities across Italy and Europe through the *Confluence of European Water Bodies*. IDRA brings together lawyers, scientists, activists, artists, and local residents in a collective effort to expand ecological justice.

### Ocean Space & TBA21–Academy

Ocean Space is TBA21–Academy's centre in Venice, located in the Church of San Lorenzo, dedicated to research-based projects and public programs at the intersection of art, ecology, and civic action. TBA21–Academy operates as an unorthodox research and advocacy platform fostering new relationships with the Earth's hydrosphere through collaborations between artistic practice, science, policy, and community

knowledge. Ocean Space functions as a situated field station, anchoring long-term processes in the Venetian lagoon while connecting them to planetary debates on oceans, climate, and environmental justice.

### **NICHE Centre for Environmental Humanities**

NICHE Centre for Environmental Humanities is a research Centre at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. NICHE aims to produce transdisciplinary scholarship and public engagement initiatives where environmental humanities can play a major role. NICHE supports and develops creative and academic collaborations with a number of local and international partners, and it contributes to a wide range of projects, small- and large-scale workshops, public programs, and exhibitions. From the unique vantage point of Venice, a city vulnerable to sea-level rise but also a living laboratory for a balanced ecosystem and a plural global community, NICHE fosters dialogue between leading scholars, scientific innovators, artists and writers, journalists and public stakeholders for a new alliance between humanities, social life, and natural sciences with a local and global impact.

**T**  **Thyssen-Bornemisza**  
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# FAQ

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## Is a legal background required?

No. The Working Group is interdisciplinary and values a diversity of perspectives, including legal, ecological, artistic, activist, and community-based knowledge.

## Can I apply without prior experience in Rights of Nature?

Yes. A clear interest in the topic and a willingness to engage collaboratively are more important than previous expertise.

## Is online participation possible?

Some meetings may take place online, but the process is designed as primarily in-person in Venice, especially for the Citizen Assemblies.

## Is the program open to non-academic participants?

Yes. The initiative is community-led and welcomes situated knowledge and forms of engagement beyond academic or institutional settings.

## If I am not selected, can I still be involved?

Yes. The wider initiative includes other groups and public activities connected to IDRA and the *Confluence of European Water Bodies*. Please get in touch with [idra.acqua@gmail.com](mailto:idra.acqua@gmail.com).

## Is this a residency?

No. This is not a residency but a collaborative civic process focused on developing a law proposal and its accompanying strategy.

## Is this a political project?

The project operates in the field of public policy and environmental law but is not affiliated with any political party. It promotes a civic approach to ecological justice.

## Will the proposal be presented to institutions?

This is the intended direction, but outcomes depend on collective work and broader institutional processes.

## What is the role of Ocean Space?

Ocean Space hosts and supports the process without directing the content, which remains community-led and coordinated with IDRA.

## How would I benefit from participating in the program?

Participants will connect and collaborate with experts from different fields to advance the law proposal based on the *Declaration of the Rights of the Venice Lagoon*, with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and share skills or learn new ones (such as working collaboratively, engage with the legal framework, organising events, elaborate on a communication campaign).

## What happens after the program at Ocean Space ends?

The initiative will continue to exist and enter the next phase that will be decided within the wider civic movement, for example, launching a Citizens' Initiative campaign. The outcomes, aiming to build a foundation for future developments beyond the duration of the program, will feed into the broader work of IDRA and the *Confluence of European Water Bodies network*.

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