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PRESS RELEASE

SEA BEYOND OCEAN LITERACY CENTRE OPENS IN VENICE

The Prada Group and UNESCO-IOC announce the opening of the first Italian centre dedicated entirely to ocean literacy, co-designed by CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati, located on the island of San Servolo in the Venetian Lagoon

Milan, Venice, 3 April 2025 – The ocean, human beings, and how each influences the other. The first and only Italian Centre dedicated to ocean literacy, which opens today, aims to encourage a wide and diverse audience to engage with this vital topic.

The initiative is promoted by Prada Group and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (UNESCO-IOC), and forms part of the SEA BEYOND project, which has been working since 2019 to increase awareness among the younger generations of issues surrounding sustainability and ocean preservation.

The SEA BEYOND Ocean Literacy Centre, co-designed by CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati and UNESCO-IOC, is located on the island of San Servolo, a cultural hub in the Venetian Lagoon that is already home to various major institutions. The choice of site is both tangibly and symbolically significant, as the area is a unique example of a 'transition ecosystem' shaped by continuous interactions between land, sea and humankind. It was for this reason that Venice was selected for the first Ocean Literacy World Conference in June 2024, a two-day event that ended with 131 delegates representing UNESCO member states signing the Venice Declaration for Ocean Literacy in Action, a ten-point manifesto designed to restore society's relationship with the ocean.

The Centre's activities – designed to foster dialogue and employing an accessible, inclusive and multi-sensory approach – have been developed for students of all ages, local communities, researchers, residents, and tourists from both Italy and overseas. These diverse audiences will be addressed in a similarly broad language that compares ideas and perspectives from different disciplines. The aim is to encourage visitors to think critically about their relationship with the ocean, and the lagoon, and to adopt positive behaviours in favour of a more sustainable future – transforming ocean knowledge into action.

Francesca Santoro, UNESCO-IOC Senior Programme Officer, who leads the team that worked on the project to develop the Centre, said: *"The SEA BEYOND Ocean Literacy Centre reaffirms the commitments we made during the Ocean Literacy World Conference, and supports the development of other SEA BEYOND activities in the city, like 'Kindergarten of the Lagoon', a project that helps Venetian preschool children build a stronger bond with the lagoon through outdoor education activities. In this new phase, the Ocean Literacy Centre is aiming to become a go-to structure at a local, national and international level."*

Lorenzo Bertelli, Prada Group Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, commented: *"The SEA BEYOND Ocean Literacy Centre we are opening today in Venice is a real accomplishment that bears witness to the strength of the partnership between the Prada Group and UNESCO-IOC: an example of teamwork that has seen us working side by side since 2019, and particularly over the last three years, collaborating enthusiastically and with determination to promote the principles of ocean literacy and protection. The Centre's opening, supported by the contributions of experts from diverse disciplines, means the ocean now has a physical space where people can 'learn by doing', a place where SEA BEYOND's motto – learn, think, act – can really take shape."*

The concept of the Centre organically brings together the three main spaces. Zooming in from a macro to a micro level, from 10 million metres to 1,000 metres from the Earth, visitors are taken on a journey through three rooms: the first provides a global perspective, the second adopts a local dimension, and the third focuses on the human scale, examining the power of action. Large interactive tables encourage guests to explore immersive maps, created in collaboration with the CMCC Foundation (Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change), the CNR (National Research Council) and Dotdotdot, a multidisciplinary firm specialising in interactive design. These provide a dynamic visualisation of currents, temperatures, salinity, shipping routes and animal migrations and their evolution over the decades, highlighting their interconnectedness at a global level and the relationship between humans and the ocean, and emphasising how the entire planet is connected by a single ocean.

“Redefining our relationship with water is one of the greatest challenges of the climate crisis” said **Carlo Ratti, Founding Partner of CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati, Director of MIT Senseable City Lab and Curator of the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2025)**. *“Venice, with its fragility, can serve as a laboratory for the future. We’re proud to collaborate with UNESCO-IOC on the SEA BEYOND Ocean Literacy Centre on the island of San Servolo, merging environmental advocacy with data-driven storytelling and immersive experiences. The challenges facing Venice today will soon be the world’s.”*

THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE: FROM MACRO TO MICRO

The main display in the first room, ***A World of Islands***, is centred on the Spilhaus Projection: a map drawn by the geophysicist and oceanographer Athelstan Spilhaus in 1942 that presents the ocean as a single interconnected body of water, turning traditional cartography’s anthropocentric perspective on its head. A 3D extrusion of the map is presented as a table of water, 60 centimetres off the ground to make it accessible to all. The visuals are accompanied by audio descriptions. *Feel the Change* – located in the same space – is a predominantly tactile installation, allowing visitors to touch reconstructions of marine ecosystems, both in their natural state and when damaged by acidification. Meanwhile, the *Water Salinity* activity allows guests to taste water from parts of the ocean with different salt levels.

The **Venetian Lagoon** takes centre stage in the second room; a table displaying a 3D extrusion of the lagoon is set against a wall with windows that forge visual continuity with the outside landscape. The story narrated in the previous space here takes on a local dimension, illustrating how tides function in an area that acts as a buffer between land and sea, where hydrodynamic exchanges influence temperatures, salinity and currents, and shape the entire habitat. The lagoon’s extraordinary biodiversity can be examined in a child-focused tabletop science lab. This area features digital and analogue microscopes, including one connected to a screen that projects an enlarged version of the image onto the side wall – a further inversion of micro and macro. Here visitors will be able to analyse samples collected from the lagoon on guided boat trips organised periodically by the Centre. Audio elements – bioacoustic recordings – allow guests to experience natural sounds like the noise made by colliding icebergs and man-made sounds in the undersea environment, and to reflect on noise pollution, which is also found under the sea. These stimuli round off an exploration of a unique environment that provides us with a vast source of knowledge, with certain parts yet to be explored even by the lagoon’s own inhabitants.

Finally, the third space – ***The Power of Actions*** – introduces a human dimension and more explicitly invites us to take action. It employs an interactive and fun approach, particularly through a floor game in the shape of the island of San Servolo, honed in partnership with game designer Luca Borsa, which challenges young visitors to create their own ocean literacy project. The library along the wall of the Centre, with chairs and a variety of books to browse, provides the ideal setting for the activity. Here, interactive screens provide information on four educational initiatives, including some promoted globally by SEA BEYOND, with the aim of inspiring users. The stories are told by: **Carmelo Isgrò**, a biologist and founder of the MuMa Museo del Mare of Milazzo, Sicily; **Meghan Marrero** from the NMEA (National Marine Educators Association), which takes schools on a quest to become *Blue Schools*; **Carlo Barbante**, Professor of paleoclimatology at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice and Scientific Director of *Follow the Ice - The Memory of Glaciers* project; and **One Ocean Hub**, a research programme focused on ocean sustainability and conservation.

THE ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPT

Design and innovation office CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati has worked to combine the principles of ‘learning by doing’ and circularity. The visitor experience follows a narrative inspired by the concept of ‘Powers of 10’, as depicted in Charles and Ray Eames’ 1977 film. This guides visitors on a journey of scale, from the very largest to the smallest sizes, from the vast expanse of the ocean to the complex biodiversity of the microorganisms in the Venetian Lagoon. The Centre is equipped with personalised video projections that teach visitors to see water as a resource and a living system, while the opportunity to interact directly with marine ecosystems and scientific practices provides a hands-on learning experience.

The office’s sustainability values are reflected in its commitment to circular solutions, including floors made of post-consumption oyster and other seashells, as well as recycled wood. The Centre also has its own interactive water supply with a closed-loop filtration system, to reduce consumption to a minimum. The various intertwined aspects of the design and visitor experience lead people to reflect on water systems, on the relationship between humanity and the ocean, and on the interconnectedness of all aquatic ecosystems at different scales.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The SEA BEYOND Ocean Literacy Centre will be open on Tuesday and Friday from 10am to 12pm and from 3pm to 5pm. Special events for local residents will be organised at weekends. Those interested can visit the website www.oceanliteracycentre.org to browse the full schedule and book tickets.

SEA BEYOND

SEA BEYOND is a project by Prada Group conducted in partnership with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (UNESCO-IOC) since 2019 to raise awareness of sustainability and ocean preservation, contributing to the progress of ocean education on a global scale through a series of training initiatives for younger generations. Since its debut, the educational program has shared the principles of ocean literacy with more than 35,000 students around the world. Moreover, the “Kindergarten of the Lagoon” project – outdoor education activities for preschool children in Venice – was launched in 2023 to create links between kids and the lagoon ecosystem. While the main focus remains education, SEA BEYOND has recently extended its scope to new areas of focus: support for scientific research, community engagement activities and policy advocacy dedicated to the ocean. As of July 2023, 1% of the proceeds from the Prada Re-Nylon for SEA BEYOND Collection benefit SEA BEYOND. The list of products in this Collection is available at www.prada.com.

Through SEA BEYOND, Prada Group has also trained its more than 14,000 employees worldwide on ocean literacy principles via VR educational content and the AWorld app, the official platform selected by the United Nations to live more sustainably.

Prada Group

Prada Group is socially engaged to contribute to the sustainable development of communities and stimulate cultural debate in all its forms of expression. The Group partners with recognized players and international entities to develop educational and training programs, promote talent, support scientific research, foster women’s empowerment, and promote local culture and artistic heritage. Prada Group operates in the luxury sector through the Prada, Miu, Church’s, Car Shoe, Marchesi 1824 and Luna Rossa brands.

UNESCO-IOC

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (UNESCO-IOC) promotes international cooperation in marine sciences to improve management of the ocean, coasts, and marine resources. The IOC enables its 150 Member States to work together by coordinating programmes in capacity development, ocean observations and services, ocean science, tsunami warning, and ocean literacy. The work of the IOC contributes to the mission of UNESCO to promote the advancement of science and its applications to develop knowledge and capacity, key to economic and social progress and the basis of peace and sustainable development. The UNESCO-IOC is the entity in charge of coordinating the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 (The Ocean Decade).

CRA-CARLO RATTI ASSOCIATI

CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati is an international design and innovation practice based in Turin, Italy, and New York City. Drawing on Carlo Ratti’s research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the office is currently involved in many projects across the globe, embracing every scale of intervention – from furniture to urban planning. Among recent projects are the Italian Pavilion at Expo Dubai 2020, the biophilic skyscraper CapitaSpring in Singapore, the urban curatorship of Manifesta 14 Prishtina biennial, the redesign of the Agnelli Foundation HQ in Turin, and the master plan for Milan Innovation District (MIND). CRA is the only design firm whose works have been featured three times in TIME Magazine’s “Best Inventions of the Year” list – respectively with the Digital Water Pavilion, the Copenhagen Wheel, and Scribit. Carlo Ratti is currently the appointed Curator of the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2025).

For more information, please contact:

Prada Group Press Office

corporatepress@prada.com

www.pradagroup.com