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Title:

From Historic Tridentine Museum of Natural Science to MUSE

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Biography of the author(s)

My name's Valentina Amonti, I'm Italian and I'm 26 years old. I came from Castiglione delle Stiviere, a little country in Lombardia, north of Italy.

I'm degree in Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage and since 2012 I work at Group Reservation at MUSE – Natural & Science Museum of Trento.

Abstract

The intention of my paper is to present the example of the historic Tridentine Museum of Natural Sciences (of Trento), MUSE today, which has become an exception among the large number of Italian museums due to its ability to adapt to innovations in museology, in addition to consistent and attractive educational offer.

During the time, more and more significant acquisitions and donations have enriched the collections with artifacts from different backgrounds and types. Moreover, more and more specific research in the fields of paleontology, zoology, and botany have multiplied, whereas the promotion and the protection of nature and landscape have also bloomed. Particular attention has been paid to the involvement of visitors in what the museum displays: Interactive exhibits, hands-on, explanatory panels, human reconstructions, dioramas, and so on, all have been prepared with the intent of putting the visitors at the centre of the exhibitions.

The educational proposals have also been conceived and designed to make the consumers experience the museum in a perspective of lifelong learning and to promote science through a new educational paradigm, the 'edutainment', a blend of "educational and entertainment".

Keywords

Natural Museum, science center, entertainment, hands on

Introduction

The intention of my paper is to present the example of the historic Tridentine Museum of Natural Sciences (of Trento), MUSE today, which has become an exception among Italian museums due to its ability to adapt to innovation in museology and museographic, ability which add to its consistent and attractive educational offer.

An extreme simplified and universal definition of the concept of museum could be "a room or set of rooms used for the collection and exhibition of a collection of works of art, and rare objects of historical, cultural, scientific meaning linked together by interpretative criteria that justify the choice and which are transmitted to the viewer through a didactic kit, or through verbal illustration". In reality, the little evidence and the discontinuity of the testimonies on the birth and

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evolution of the Science Museum of Trento reveal an unclear situation, with the result that it is not possible to precisely track the linear development of the history of the museum itself from its remote origins.

The life of the Science Museum has gone through momentous events: change of sovereignty, the political regime, the war's destruction and external conditioning ideological and managerial conditioning render its evolution very rich and varied.

In this web of events, however, the motivation which has supported and strengthened the Entity over time can still be found: the interest in the surrounding reality, studied through an interdisciplinary point of view in order to disseminate the naturalistic knowledge by offering the public its material evidence.

There were many venues that have hosted the museum over the years - from the Town Hall at Palazzo Thun, to the Sociology's faculty at Palazzo Sardaña- , and just as many directors who have succeeded each other and faced more or less tiring period in the life of the museum and its collections.

Extraordinary was the ability to address critical historical moments with optimism and willpower: the precarious conditions of the museum due to the inconvenience caused by the First World War were followed by various initiatives to solve the problems in question, including numerous exchanges of opinions between highly qualified scholars aiming at examining the situation of public museum and the public fruition of their collection, conferences promoted to find solutions for the coordinated management of the Museum and its libraries, etc ..

A great resumption of the institution's activity started again from 1921-22 with the aid of concrete initiatives: more and more consistent acquisitions and donations favored the increase in collections with the addition of finds from different backgrounds and types; researches multiplied increasingly and focused on specific fields of paleontology, zoology and botany; scientific research proliferated and was given more attention thanks to the publication of numerous periodicals created with the intention of making the community more aware of knowledge about nature. The particularly favorable situation allowed the museum to extend its territorial jurisdiction to the whole region, so on February 17, 1929, the "Museum of Natural History" was transformed into a "regional museum", called "Natural History Museum of Tridentine Venice ". In the years between the two World Wars the Institution became one of the most active centers of naturalistic study and research in Italy. Despite this, the dramatic political and economic events and the World Wars (in particular the Second, which touched directly the region of Trentino), compromised once again the good functioning of the Museum and hindered its regular activities. Nevertheless, the Museum managed to continue to incessantly perform its traditional activities. What now deserves to be stressed is the organization of congresses and national exhibitions, events and competitions for the knowledge and protection of the alpine flora; initiatives whose purpose was to inform the public and spread knowledge, natural science courses and courses for the training of teachers.

In 1964, as a result of agreements established by the provincial government, the Museum became an institution under the jurisdiction of the Autonomous Province of Trento with a new name: "Natural and Sciences Museum of Trento", and acquired a new statute, consistent with the newly identified requirements and objectives.

Since the early 90s, the naturalistic collections have been coexisting with permanent exhibitions designed with the intention of keeping contact with the public. Particular attention has been paid to the preparation aimed at involving visitors through different tools such as interactive exhibits, hands-on, explanatory panels, human reconstructions, dioramas, multimedia, video, etc ..

From May 2011 even the name has undergone a change: from "Tridentine Museum of Natural Sciences" to "Science Museum".

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The institution is currently the main hub in a network of museums scattered in different locations of Trentino (territorial sections and affiliated), that offer during the entire calendar year initiatives and activities aimed at different types of users, proposing offers based on research, education and entertainment. The network of museums in the wider area, whose heads is the Science Museum of Trento, is composed of: Ecological Monitoring Centre (Udzungwa Ecological Monitoring Centre), Adamello "Julius Payer" Centre for Studies, Monsignor Mario Ferrari Visitor Centre and Learning area, the Air Force Museum of Gianni Caproni, Arboretum of Arco, Museum of stilts of Ledro's Lake, the Alpine Botanical Garden and the Terrace of the stars at Viote of Monte Bondone, Lake Tovel Limnological Center in Tuenno, Geological Museum of Predazzo, Centre for Prehistory in Marcesina, The Garibaldi Bezzecca Historical Museum,.

The researchers provide advice for the conservation of nature and uses of the European Community fundings for environmental research.

In time the museum has seen a growth of its educational role that allows the institution to set for itself the goal of becoming a cultural center where formal and informal education is promoted through a wide range of proposals addressed to both public schools than to a generic public. Since 1995, in fact, the museum makes use of a new sector named Educational Services, born from the need to produce experiences in a perspective of lifelong learning, that is to say, the process of education, continuous learning, involving all the lifespan. It is a training program that allows the users to update their knowledge whenever they feel the need of it.

Educational Services offers more than 300 workshops for schools of different types and grades designed with the intention to promote science through a new educational paradigm: the edutainment, a blend of "educational and entertainment", for which the Museum make available for its customized multi-sensory funny experiences through which the users themselves can build in a conscious, pleasant, and efficient way their own knowledge.

The proposals range from workshops at the Museum, in the classroom, to hiking in nature and in the city following paths which put the hikers in touch with the researches carried out by the scientific sections, from structured pathways offering various interventions of operators in the classroom to study issues specifications. In addition, there is the possibility offered to the teachers and schools to co-design with the specialists of the museum specific workshop based on the needs of the former subjects.

The museum in this way intends to offer itself as a center of education and lifelong learning.

In recently years, and alongside the Educational Service section, another new one was created and named Events: it deals with the activities for the public school and generic public, the intention being to solicit participation in scientific issues through numerous opportunities for entertainment, meetings and discussions , characterized by a blend of science and entertainment, theater performances, which prefer a method of entertainment and "intelligent entertainment". The proposed activities are diversified by theme and involve all sections of the museum, and are arranged either to stay inside the museum or to go outside.

Particular relevance deserves another factor that strongly characterized the activity of the last two decades of the museum: temporary exhibitions. To be precise, the change has happened already in 1992, still under the direction of the Director Gino Tomasi (recently deceased) with "*Dinosaur*, the world of dinosaurs," the first major exhibition on dinosaurs in Italy. Since that time the commitment in the implementation of temporary exhibitions of great organizational impact has become one of the areas of greatest logistical and financial effort from the museum's part.

Exhibitions on current topics have joined traditional themes for such events in a natural history museum. These current topics interweave local traditions with global problems, and are biodiversity, evolution, global change, energy. They can be considered pioneering exhibitions in that they make

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use of interactive installations and multimedia in a way that no other museum in Italy does so much as Trentino has been called the science center for excellence in this regard.

These innovations have contributed to the start of a new generation of shows that have characterizes ever since their birth the museum and have placed it at the top of the national museological experimentation, and on par with major European galleries.

In 2000, within the strategic planning of the Municipality of Trent for the redevelopment of former industrial Michelin, the Autonomous Province of Trento has proposed to allocate funds to Entity with the intention to renew culturally this portion of the city and to give substance to the Mueum's aspirations.

By the "Feasibility Study" funded by the province and built in 2002-2003, the vision of the new museum, the size, content, organization and cost estimates, and therefore the preparation of the plan and the functional rough draft, the financial statement for the development and management of the new museum, all this was identified and put on paper; in 2005 the cultural plan for The MUSE (acronym derived from SciencE Museum) has been prepared: in it, the cultural and scientific content of the new structure were pointed out.

From 2006 to 2008 the famous architect Renzo Piano and his collaborators designed the architectural design of the MUSE. In 2009, following the approval of the final design by the entities interested in funding, the construction work began , and on 27 July 2013thenew seat of the MUSE was inaugurated. The event proved to be a unique occasion: 24 hours of non-stop events, scientific entertainment, concerts, guided tours for any type of public, for a total of 30,000 admissions.

According to this new project, the MUSE is proposed as a highly innovate scientific museum, thus being hard to classify in the traditional museological categories: it is a natural history museum with regard to the issues related to the nature of the Alps and the collections displaying artifacts taken from the collections of the Scientific Museum; *scientific* because of the attention paid to scientific methods, for example, during the workshop the public has the opportunity to meet and talk with researchers in various scientific fields; a *science center* for the presence of communications equipment which includes multimedia and interactive installations; a place of reflection and emotion thanks to the numerous exhibition in which techniques of cinematography allow the immersion in virtual contexts thematic museum. Also, connected to the main body of the museum and inside a greenhouse a prototype of rainforest has been recreated one of the "hot spot" with the higher biodiversity on the planet, designed with the aim to draw attention to biodiversity conservation. The architecture of the museum, which evokes the profile of a mountain, promotes the feeling of immersion in the natural surroundings; within the same structure different interactive thematic tours are offered: from the origin to the summit of the mountains, the alpine nature, the first human settlement on the Alps, the relationship between man and environment inserted into the discourse on sustainability, a short tropical trip inside the greenhouse ending in the heart of the earth with the history and evolution of life.

The trails meander through a suggestive and exciting environment enriched with communication equipment of various kinds: explanatory panels, multimedia exhibits, interactive installations, dioramas, cinematography techniques that allow immersion in virtual contexts of the museum's main themes.

It is also interesting to know the materials used in the Museum: bamboo, glass – the former allowing a reflection on sustainability, the latter promoting the feeling of continuity between inside and outside.

The Institute's evolution occurred over the years and its recent moving has further accentuated the importance not only of the technological innovations offered, but also of its transformation into a cultural center for the citizens, loyal to its educational proposals. Even the orientation of the Museum itself has changed over time: thanks to all of the mentioned events, it has moved away

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from the traditional idea of a permanently static place where to passively observe evidence of the past, collections of objects and stuffed animals, to a dynamic environment providing an increasing range of activities. This reveals a renewal in both the scientific content and the cultural message for the public.

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