



**Mela** Books

# EUROPEAN MUSEUMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

Volume 3

edited by  
**Luca Basso Peressut**  
**Francesca Lanz**  
and **Gennaro Postiglione**



*European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework*  
Vol. 3

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# Local Museums



# Case Studies



IMG. 6.55 — Gallerie Piedicastello, Trento, Italy. The exhibition "Ritorno sul Don," 2010–2011. Courtesy of Fondazione MST.

# Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino

Trentino History Museum Foundation, Trento, Italy

This complex institution, aimed at investigating, presenting and adding value to the historic evolution of the Trentino Province and historical South Tyrol, works as a catalyst for an interconnected system of research and exhibition activities diffused throughout the territory, playing a crucial role in the production of a coordinated cultural programme. Though it has a physical base in Trento, where the administrative offices, library and research centre are located, the “Museo Storico del Trentino” Foundation is the operative core of a widespread network of different initiatives and actors, fostering and enhancing cooperation among the institutions, associations and communities distributed throughout the valleys, stimulating interaction and supporting participation practices, thus promoting an inclusive representation of the multi-layered cultural identity which characterises the region.

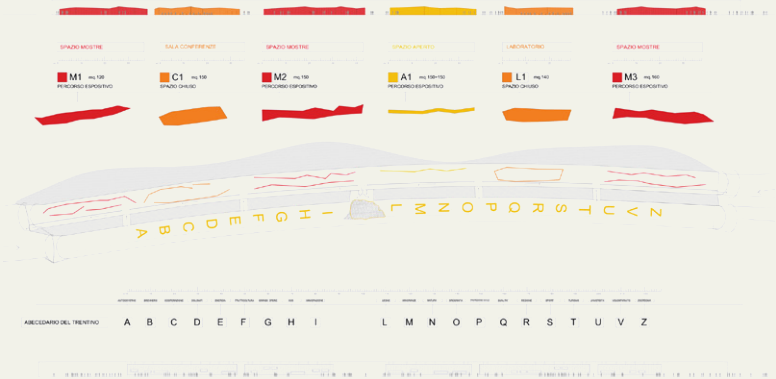
The Foundation operates as a living archive of local memory, managing several collections and supporting new collecting activities—historic objects, photographs, paintings, prints, maps, cards, diaries, letters, journals and popular literature are currently being integrated with new media and tools, which are implemented through innovative projects, such as “Trentino Italia storie pop” (2012–13). The intention is to present significant stories of contemporary citizens via modern means of communication, and to document and present the history of the region from the 18th century up to the present day. In recent years, it has also been supporting the constitution of new archival and documentation centres, such as the “Archivio della Scrittura Popolare” (1987) and the “Centro di documentazione sulla storia dell’emigrazione trentina” (2004), in order to promote further conservation and retrieval practices, organise educational and informative events, and guarantee wider accessibility to artifacts and information. The Foundation works

as a cultural interface patronising the construction of a networked conception and fruition of the diffused local heritage, for example through the coordination of tourist itineraries connecting significant sites characterised by natural, architectural, symbolic or historical values. It also promotes and funds permanent and temporary research projects, mainly developed by young local scholars, which focus on different aspects of the local area’s identity. These include the history of the city of Trento and of the region, the physical and social transformation of significant “places of memory” (“Il parco di Piazza Dante: imparare a leggere i monumenti pubblici come fonti per la storia,” 2011; “La monumentalizzazione del Doss Trento,” 2011; “Vuoto di memoria: la riscoperta del quartiere del Sas di Trento,” 2011–12), the diffused cooperative economic structure, as well as various linguistic and distinctive cultural issues (“Confini demarcati - percepiti - superati,” 2007–11; “Per una storia del turismo nell’arco alpino,” 2009–12). One major focus of these investigations is dedicated to the 20th-century emigration flows from Trentino to neighbouring countries (“Partenze, Arrivi, Ritorni: Trent’anni di emigrazione trentina in Svizzera,” 2010–11; “Gli archivi della Vallagarina: fonti per lo studio dell’emigrazione trentina negli anni settanta del 19 secolo,” 2010–12) and to the Americas (“Trentini Americani: memoria di emigrazione negli Stati Uniti,” 2009–12; “Emigrazione trentina in Colombia,” 2010–11), although some recent activities have also demonstrated an increasing interest in contemporary immigration phenomena (as illustrated, for example, by the photos by Adelfo Bayr exhibited in January and February 2012, in “Trento né ieri né domani,” which highlight the heterogeneity of men, women and objects flowing through the permeable spaces of the city). The outcomes of the collection and research activities are present-

IMG. 6.56 — Simulation of the development of the galleries throughout the mountain, 2010–2011. Courtesy of Studio Terragni.



IMG. 6.57 — Plan of the exhibition “Storicamente ABC,” 2009–2010. Courtesy of Studio Terragni.



IMG. 6.58 — The exhibition “Storicamente ABC” in the Black Gallery, 2009–2010. Courtesy of Fondazione del Museo Storico del Trentino.

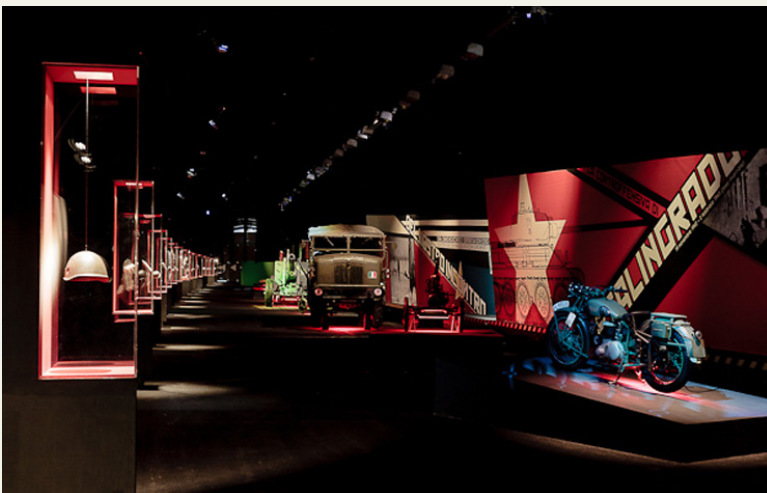




IMG. 6.59 — View of the entrance. Courtesy of Fondazione del Museo Storico del Trentino.



IMG. 6.60 — The library in the White Gallery, 2010–2011. Courtesy of Fondazione del Museo Storico del Trentino.



IMG. 6.61 — The exhibition "Ritorno sul Don" in the Black Gallery, 2010–2011. Courtesy of Fondazione del Museo Storico del Trentino.

ed through the promotion and/or coordination of conferences, public events, publications, a TV channel (HistoryLAB) and, above all, permanent and temporary exhibitions, organised in cooperation with partner institutions and associations (municipal offices, libraries, cultural associations, historical sites and ecomuseums).

In particular, temporary exhibitions play a crucial role in the development of the Foundation's mission. They allow a diversification of the cultural offer, the enhancement of networked initiatives, the presentation of transversal topics and engagement with controversial themes. In order to enhance and develop these aims, the Foundation supported the constitution of the Gallerie Piedicastello, an exhibitive institution founded in 2007, designed to present the histories of the places and of the communities of Trentino. The Galleries are situated in two former highway tunnels, built in the 1970s to permit rapid crossing of the urban district of Piedicastello, and transformed into a cultural venue through the contribution of architect Jeffrey Schnapp and Studio Terragni. The Black Tunnel is a 300 metre non-stop, immersive exhibition space: the completely dark linear path offers an evocative setting with a high degree of visual impact for the long-term, temporary installations (one to two years), promoted by the Foundation and with the aim of exploring major thematic issues related to the history of Trentino. The White Tunnel was conceived as an operative space, improving the acknowledgement of the Black Tunnel contents and providing further instruments and opportunities to enhance the cultural offer. It includes a specialised library, characterised by a territory-oriented collection, and a permanent exhibition dedicated to "The Invention of a Territory. The boundaries of Trentino: 18th–21st Centuries." The latter illustrates the historic evolution of the definition, delimitation and perception of the region through cartographic documents. In addition, it provides facilities for the promotion of conferences, events and educational activities, and a space for short-term temporary exhibitions (one to three months), that may be promoted by different institutions and associations (such as libraries, schools and

cultural organisations) or even by specific communities and individual citizens. This Gallery is, in fact, presented as a laboratorial space hosting an "open cultural programme," designed to experiment with innovative forms and languages for investigating, communicating and debating the local history and memory, in order to promote knowledge and awareness and give voice to the population. The institution represents one of the most significant instruments of the "Museo Storico del Trentino" Foundation, and was conceived to promote the cultural diversity which characterises the Trentino communities and, at the same time, facilitate recognition of the common roots which are found in the history of the Province.

The current structure of the Foundation is the result of the recent transformation of an ancient institution. Indeed, it represents the final evolution of a traditional history museum founded after WWI, in 1923, when Trentino was annexed to Italy, and situated in the ancient Buonconsiglio Castle in Trento. Originally known as "Museo Trentino del Risorgimento," this civic museum was conceived of as an instrument to preserve and display the memory of that particular moment in the history of the region in-between the 19th and 20th centuries, and to foster a patriotic sense of belonging to the Nation through a politically oriented narration. The institution was renovated after 1945, when new research and exhibition activities were integrated with testimony of the contemporary history relating to WWII and, in 1995, it was renamed "Museo Storico in Trento" in order to remove the emphasis on the history of the Risorgimento and to extend its mission to wider themes and perspectives related to the entire regional territory. This revision represented the first step in the evolution of the traditional institution towards a new, inclusive and democratic model, re-imagining the history museum as an institution of memory through the implementation of a "biographical narration"—the historical events began to be illustrated not only through the description of the "heroes' deeds," but also via the testimonies (from diaries, interviews, etc.) of ordinary people, such as soldiers and peasants. This

was the development of a new approach to the production of local history, integrating a plurality of voices and combining the main stream with different socio-political studies. The renovation process could be depicted as a passage from a “monumental” (celebrating the greatest achievements of humanity) to an “antiquarian” historical knowledge (revering the past in order to encourage appreciation of contemporary lives and culture), as described by Friedrich Nietzsche (1980). This could be achieved by adopting a “critical” historiography (avoiding a conservative approach and considering attentively the flaws and failures of the past) through the transformation of the museum into an innovative institution, the Foundation “Museo Storico del Trentino,” established in 2007. This institution was designed to respond to the new political, economic and cultural policies promoted by Provincial Law 3/2006, which transferred major decisional powers to sixteen territorial strongholds, the “Valley Communities,” thus fostering the devolution of the centralised system and increasing the power of local bodies. This promoted the diversity and distinctiveness which characterise the cultural structure of Trentino, and enhanced, empowered and created links between all the diffused centres (and peripheries) that build this complex region.

#### → A CATALYST FOR A NETWORKED CULTURAL PROGRAM

Trentino is characterised by particular physical connotation and geographical location, which has had a significant influence on the development of its historic evolution, political and social organisation, economic structure and cultural system. The mountainous territory across the Alps has encouraged the constitution of a network of scattered communities distributed throughout the valleys and coordinated by the main city of Trento. The different centres have always been clustered together according to socio-political and cultural connections, which can be seen in their shared, common history. Examples include the affirmation of the institutional autonomy in 1972 (allowing the Provincial Government to autonomously administer health,

education, welfare and infrastructures), and the constitution of a strongly codified material and immaterial heritage, arising from a unique relationship with the local resources, topography and ecology. Nevertheless, deeply-rooted diversity has always been a feature of the area. On the one hand, the physical boundaries separating the communities favoured the construction of “cultural perimeters” and the development of a multi-layered regional identity. Each valley is characterized by particular declensions in the rituals, mores, dialect and popular literature, which have fostered strong community bonds and a sense of belonging. On the other, the cross-border position of Trentino, which has always been the historical route connecting northern Italy with the rest of Europe (and is today a part of the Euroregion Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino), stimulated the development of a complex history. This margin has always been fluid—it has often “moved” and was permeable to flows and exchanges—and the territory has been influenced by various political and cultural systems, encouraging the formation of a highly diversified identity, especially in the transitional areas, where local, national and transnational characters have met, interacted and coalesced. Cultural diversity is a prominent feature of the Province. In recent decades, more attention has been paid to acknowledging, preserving and promoting this diversity, as demonstrated since the 1990s, for example, by policies regarding the three indigenous linguistic minorities, Ladin, Mócheno and Cimbrian: they are now protected by laws and regulations, as well as being recognised and valued in areas such as bilingual school curricula and street signs.

In this unique context, the “Museo Storico del Trentino” Foundation plays a crucial role as an active cultural force, critically depicting the complexity of the region and fostering a multi-layered sense of belonging; this is centred, on the one hand, on the distinctiveness and specific features of the single communities and, on the other, on the acknowledgement of the common roots, thus demonstrating the reasons for the special autonomy of the region. This institution is meant not only as an instrument to

IMG. 6.62 — Setting of the exhibition “Ritorno sul Don” in the White Gallery in the making, 2010–2011. Courtesy of Fondazione del Museo Storico del Trentino.

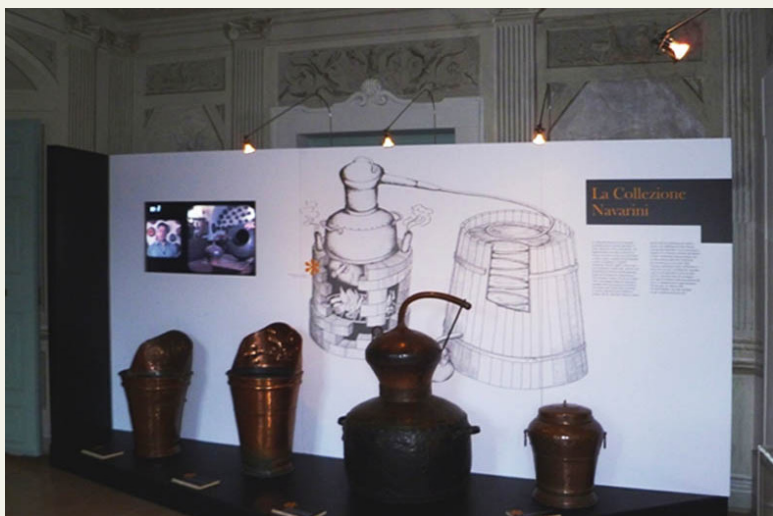


IMG. 6.63 — Forte di Cadine, Trento, Italy, 2011. Courtesy of Fondazione del Museo Storico del Trentino.

The Austrian stronghold was part of the defense system of Trento during the WWI; currently, it is managed by the Foundation as a cultural venue for exhibitions and conferences.



IMG. 6.64 — The exhibition “DiStilla InStilla” at Palazzo Baisi di Brentonico, Valle Lagarina, Italy, 2011. Courtesy of Fondazione del Museo Storico del Trentino.



coherently present Trentino to visitors, but also as a mirror in which the local population views itself to discover its own image, in which it seeks an explanation of the territory to which it is attached. Its main mission, in fact, focuses on the active involvement of the Valley Communities in the Provincial cultural programme. This task is developing through the construction of networked research, educative and exhibition activities, which are not merely produced by the Foundation and distributed in the territory, but rather achieved via cooperation between the Foundation (offering economic, technical and scientific support) and the members of the local communities; these initiatives are thus developed in relation to a specific place and ensue from its specific features and themes.

The diffusion of coordinated activities and initiatives throughout the territory takes shape in the “Portals of History and Memory.” These cultural centres, generally based in historical buildings with a particular symbolic or historical value (e.g. the Enel House near the dike in Val di Non), represent the physical presence of the Foundation within the region, established and managed in cooperation with local institutions, associations and population. Each Portal may also potentially become the core of a further network of cultural strongholds, encouraging and supporting further diffusion of the system. The activities they promote are specifically tailored to the distinctive location and addressed to the inhabitants, who are meant to participate in the conception of the initiative (temporary or permanent exhibitions, conferences, publications, etc.), the selection of the themes investigated (historic explorations of single issues or transversal studies, generally varying according to the specificities of the Valley in question: e.g. the analysis of the economic, social and cultural effects of fruit cultivation in Val Di Non) and the realisation of the project. For example, involvement could include interviews, donations and management. The networked strategies of the Foundation are thus strengthening its role as an inclusive cultural force, presenting the plural identity of the territory through adding value to both distinctive and common features.

The involvement of the population in the Foundation's activities is currently being extended to all the members of the community: on the one hand, the voices of the immigrant citizens integrated in the socio-economic structure of the Valleys—in 2011, according to ISTAT, 13.6% of the Trentino population arrived from Albania, 11.6% from Romania, 9.1% from Marocco, 6.2% from Macedonia and 5.8% from Germany—are included in the narrations which came out of the participative practices (especially via interviews and photographic reports). Several of the activities promoted are beginning to explore and present the cultural features of the minorities that settled in Trentino—e.g. the exhibition “Wooden Miracles” promoted by Gallerie Piedicastello in 2011, showcased the outstanding religious architecture of the Sinth.

Through experimentation with new forms of exploitation and valorization of local memories, the active participation of the population and the power of networking among different institutions, the Foundation is contributing to the creation of an inclusive and participative history of Trentino which, in turn, is becoming a cultural factor in the promotion of integration and the enhancement of cultural pluralism.

Elena Montanari

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## EUROPEAN MUSEUMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

This book grew out of the earliest work of the MeLa Research Field 6, "Envisioning 21st Century Museums," aimed at exploring current trends in European contemporary museums. Analysing their ongoing evolution triggered by this "age of migrations" and with specific attention to their architecture and exhibition design, the volume collects the preliminary observations ensuing from this survey, complemented by the some paradigmatic examples, and further enriched by interviews and contributions from scholars, curators and museum practitioners.

*With contributions by Florence Baläen, Michela Bassanelli, Luca Basso Peressut, Joachim Baur, Lorraine Bluche, Marco Borzotti, Mariella Brenna, Anna Chiara Cimoli, Lars De Jaegher, Maria Camilla De Palma, Hugues De Varine, Maria De Waele, Nélia Dias, Simone Eick, Fabienne Galangau Quérat, Sarah Gamaire, Jan Gerchow, Marc-Olivier Gonset, Klas Grinell, Laurence Isnard, Marie-Paule Jungblut, Galitt Kenan, Francesca Lanz, José María Lantarote Guiral, Vito Lattanzi, Jack Lobman, Carolina Martinelli, Frauke Miera, Elena Montanari, Chantal Mouffe, Judith Pargamin, Giovanni Pinna, Camilla Pagani, Clelia Pozzi, Paolo Rosa, Anna Seiderer.*

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**VOL. 3, COVER IMAGE** — Ruhr Museum, section "Industrial work." © Ruhr Museum, photo by Brigida González.

MeLa-European Museums in an age of migrations



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