MUSEO DI STORIA DELLA MEDICINA IN PADOVA

Mediterranean heritage: communities, alliances, common horizons
Perspectives in the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region

BETWEEN NARRATIVE AND GOVERNANCE

The MUSME Model – Museum of the History of Medicine in Padua

Dr. Isabella Bonasera
Collection manager of the MUSME



In the contemporary museum landscape, the role of museums is undergoing a profound redefinition, as evidenced by the very definition developed by ICOM. Museums are recognized as permanent institutions serving society, engaged in the production, mediation, and sharing of knowledge. In this context, scientific cultural heritage is no longer understood solely as an object of conservation, but as a narrative tool capable of fostering dialogue between academic research and the broader community.
Consistent with this definition, MUSME — Museum of the History of Medicine in Padua, inaugurated in 2015 within the historic San Francesco Grande Hospital— serves as a space where the history of medicine becomes an opportunity to reflect on the cultural and scientific processes that have shaped the Mediterranean and Europe, making Padua, in the 16th century, a cradle of the Scientific Revolution. In Padua, in fact, University established itself as a meeting place for different scientific traditions, contributing significantly to the development of the experimental method. MUSME is a museum capable of restoring and reinterpreting this historical dimension, placing the history of medicine within a broader cultural and epistemological context.

A PUBLIC-PRIVATE GOVERNANCE MODEL

One of the distinctive features of MUSME is its institutional structure. The museum was established through a collaboration between various public entities—the University of Padua, the Veneto Region, the Municipality and Province of Padua, Padua University Hospital, and ULSS 6 Euganea—united within the MUSME Foundation, along with a private entity, Palazzo della Salute, which is responsible for operational management and the planning of activities.
This governance model enables the integration of diverse skills and resources, effectively bridging the institutional and entrepreneurial spheres. On the one hand, the presence of public entities ensures scientific rigor; on the other, the involvement of the private partner introduces managerial flexibility, strategic planning capacity, and economic sustainability.
MUSME represents a significant example of how collaboration between public and private entities can generate cultural value. This structure is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary museums, which face challenges related to economic sustainability, audience diversification, and the need to innovate exhibition languages.





MUSEUM NARRATIVE AS A MEDIATING TOOL

A central element of the MUSME model concerns the construction of the museum narrative. Unlike many traditional institutions, the museum was established without its own permanent collection, initially positioning itself as a mediator between the medical and scientific heritage of the University of Padua and the public.
This circumstance has fostered a curatorial approach strongly focused on the narrative construction of the exhibition itinerary. Heritage is not simply displayed, but interpreted and made accessible through a variety of languages: historical, scientific, multimedia, and interactive. The museographic design is based on the integration of tools and devices that allow complex content to be translated into accessible and understandable experiences. Interactive exhibits support historical artifacts and become interpretative tools, fostering active and participatory engagement.
The museum is thus configured as a space where knowledge is shared, rather than merely transmitted.
Over the course of its first ten years of operation, MUSME has gradually begun to build its own collection thanks to donations from citizens, healthcare professionals, and institutions. This process is particularly significant, as it highlights the museum's recognition as a place for the preservation and promotion of contemporary medical and scientific memory. The collection does not stem from a logic of systematic acquisition, but from a relational process in which the community itself contributes to the building of the heritage.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND INTEGRATED MEDIA

At the heart of the MUSME project lies a strong focus on the educational dimension, understood not as the mere transmission of content, but as the active construction of knowledge. The museum adopts an approach inspired by "learning by doing," which values direct experience as a primary tool for learning.
Interactive technologies are not used as mere spectacle, but as tools that facilitate understanding. Through interaction, visitors are invited to experiment, explore, and reflect, thereby developing a personal relationship with the content.
Significant examples include exhibits that allow visitors to simulate the functioning of the human body, measure physiological parameters, and leaf through ancient books, as well as engaging visitors emotionally. In these cases, technology acts as a mediator between the visitor and the content, amplifying the narrative potential of the objects.



Via San Francesco, 94 - 35121 Padova
049658767
info@musme.it
www.musme.it