

The Past for the Future of Geography: Introducing the Padua Museum of Geography

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The Cabinet of Geography at the University of Padua, at the time of its establishment in 1873, represented the doorway to modern geography in Italy. In the 18th century, geography made its appearance at the University of Padua as a minor part of the course in Astronomy and Meteorology. Between 1746 and 1749, the new Chair of Nautical Science and Geography was assigned to Gian Rinaldo Carli Rubbi,¹ In 1764, the word 'Geography' appeared in the title of the course *Ad lecturam Astronomiae, Geographiae et Meteorum*.² At the beginning of the 19th century, when the discipline was little more than an inventory of names and statistical data, it disappeared from the University of Padua until 1855, when a lectureship in geography was assigned to Francesco Nardi.³ In 1867, after his studies in Vienna, Giuseppe Dalla Vedova started teaching in Padua where he introduced Ritter and Humboldt's new approaches to geography, making Padua a leading centre for geography in Italy. Five years later he was given the Chair of Ancient and Modern Geography within the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy and, thanks to him, in 1873 the Cabinet of Geography was established. The same chair, after him, was held by eminent professors such as Giovanni Marinelli, Giuseppe Pennesi, Roberto Amalgia, Arrigo Lorenzi, Giuseppe Morandini. In 1904, at the Faculty of Science, the Institute of Physical Geography was created under the direction of

¹ Almagià, 'Padova e l'Ateneo Padovano nella storia della scienza geografica', p. 488.

² Lorenzi, 'L'insegnamento della geografia nello Studio di Padova', p. 464.

³ Lorenzi, 'L'insegnamento della geografia nello Studio di Padova', p. 465.

Luigi De Marchi, where Bruno Castiglioni and Francesco Vercelli also worked until its fusion with the Institute of Geodetics and Geophysics in 1942. Giuseppe Morandini, who from 1946 taught physical geography, was also assigned the Chair of Geography at the Faculty of Letters in 1948, finding himself in an emblematic situation, reflecting what became his life's work—the uniting of all geographical institutions into one single department. This came about in 1984 at Palazzo Wollemborg, where courses in both geography and physical geography were held from 1972.⁴ The Department of Geography was the first and only one of its kind in Italy until 2012 when, within the general reform of the Italian university, the Department of Geography became a section of the larger Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World (DiSSGeA).

The heritage

Over the years, in Padua, geographical research and teaching have built up a unique set of both material items⁵ (atlases, maps, terrain models, globes, instruments and photographs)⁶ and distinctive research practices (excursions, field-work, photography used as a geographical tool, etc.). An intense survey activity carried out from 2012 to 2014 made it possible to proceed with the cataloguing (via ArtinXML software) of the material heritage, which was acknowledged in 1996 as a 'collection' by the University Museums Center (CAM).

Museum's spaces

The Museum will be housed in Wollemborg Palace in Via del Santo 26 in Padua, within the area (four rooms, amounting to 160 m²) which has been reserved for it by the Section of Geography of the Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World (Figure 1). It will be closely related to the areas and activities of the Section itself, of the Geography Library and the Periodical Section linked to the Social Science Pole of the University Library Centre (CAB). According to the museographical issues and the logistic situation, an initial set-up project has been sketched; the intention is for it to be simple but dynamic, able to adapt to exhibit variations.

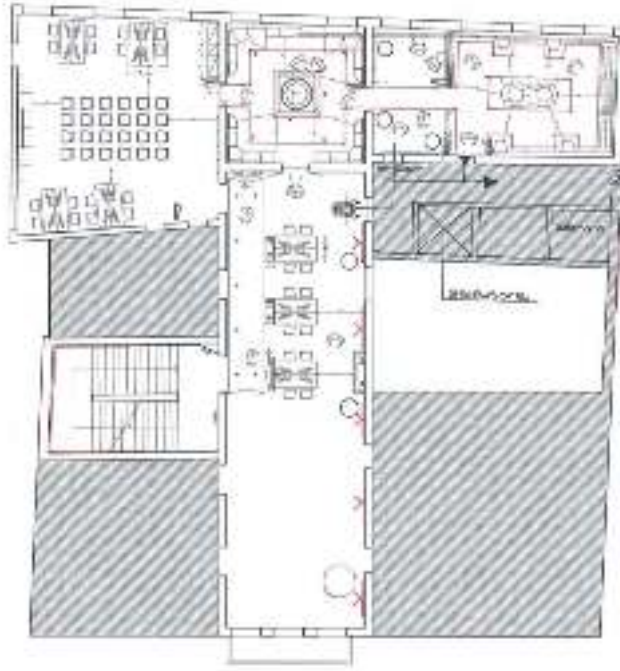
⁴ Bondesan, 'Il Dipartimento di Geografia «G. Morandini»', p. 6.

⁵ Vallerani, 'Oggetti di interesse storico del Dipartimento di Geografia'.

⁶ Rossetto, 'Gli archivi fotografici della geografia italiana'.

Figure 1

Plan of the first floor of Wollemborg Palace, where the Museum of Geography will be housed



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Mission, aims, target and activities

The idea of a Museum of Geography in Padua was suggested by Lorena Rocca in 2011 with the double purpose of preserving and promoting the heritage accumulated in 140 years of research and teaching, and creating new perspectives for the education and dissemination activities currently in practice. The Museum will involve every year around 2,000 university students and 700 pupils of the pre-schools, primary and secondary schools.⁷

The Museum of Geography is an absolute novelty on a national level. The project, approved by the Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World on 7 March 2015, intends to revitalise the relationship between university and society. Therefore, enhancing procedures will be combined with

⁷ Babetto, 'Una geografia da Museo?'

dissemination activities allowing visitors to discover a discipline made up of engaging practices and pressing topical themes. The project proposes to extend the involvement of visitors beyond the museum tour, by providing preparatory steps (via a web portal, social network, online catalogues) and follow-up initiatives (engagement and visitor retention projects, packets or proposals for further in-depth study).

The objective is for the Museum to act as an ‘incubator’ of the Third Mission of the University, an innovative hub capable of creating communication and aiding reciprocal legitimisation of the three university functions: scientific research, education and social responsibility.⁸

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BIOS

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⁸ Varotto, ‘Tertium non datur’.

Chiara Gallanti is a PhD student in Geographical Studies collaborating with the project of the Museum of Geography at the Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World (University of Padua). She is in charge of the scientific cataloguing of the historical items of the collections.

Lorena Rocca is professor of Geography/Didactics of Geography at the University of Padua and researcher in Human Geography and Education. She also collaborates with the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SuPSi). She is member of the Scientific Committee of the Museum of Geography at DiSSGea.

Mauro Varotto is associate professor of Geography and Cultural Geography at the University of Padua. He is coordinator of the Scientific Committee of the Museum of Geography at the Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World. His researches are mainly in human and cultural geography.

