

CHANGING WINDS: AN ACCOUNT OF THE BORA MUSEUM IN TRIESTE (ITALY) AS A SPACE OF ROOTEDNESS IN CLIMATE CHANGE

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Abstract

The Bora Museum in Trieste was founded in 2004 to celebrate the bora, the typical wind of Trieste, which for thousands of years has had an enormous impact on the city and the region in social, urban, economic, cultural and artistic terms. The museum has always been a space 'in progress', collecting testimonies of the wind and its changes. Since mid-2023, thanks to a major national grant, the museum has been working on opening a new exhibition space, the Borarium, designed as a centre for reflection on climate change. This contribution (presented here in the form of reflective papers or personal accounts) first aims to discuss the bottom-up and co-creation projects of the Bora Museum together with the citizens of Trieste, in particular Memories of bora, a series of videos dedicated to citizens' memories of this characteristic wind, and Changing winds: climate emergency and us, dedicated to the climate changes perceptible in the wind. It then describes the ongoing interactive experiences, the Borarium Interactive project to digitise the museum's analogue heritage, and initiatives to co-create content with visitors to support local processes of green transition and raise awareness of environmental choices. This work exemplifies a museum's commitment to rooted work, as evidenced by its partnerships and collaborations with local communities on environmental issues, as well as its shared practices with its fellow citizens.

Keywords: Museum, wind, climate change, co-creation projects, Bora, Trieste

The Bora Museum in Trieste

The city of Trieste, the last eastern outpost of the Italian peninsula and historically recognised as the maritime outpost of Central Europe, is especially known for the bora, an east-northeast wind typical of the northern Adriatic. The bora, a strong and ever-present wind, has for centuries been a fundamental feature both in ecological and climatic terms, as well as in the anthropological development of these areas (Tufano, 2023). The wind is also celebrated in the city through the experience of the Bora Museum/Magazzino dei Venti, created as a space 'of wind and fantasy'. It was inaugurated in 2004 and conceived as a space workshop and a museum 'in progress'.ⁱ The visit is a numbered transition between various activities related to the bora, which seek to bring order to the natural disorder of the wind. The experience moves in two directions that constantly intersect: memory and creativity, from the testimonies of the past related to the wind to new artistic

and social inventions on the subject, allowing visitors to give space to their imagination through various manual activities where they can familiarise themselves with the wind phenomenon in a playful way. The visits are personalised, with workshops organised for groups, and all the activities are designed to create a participatory experience for both locals and tourists.

Some collections have also been developed as 'participatory collections' (Cecalupo, 2017), the best known of which is The archive of world winds, a bizarre assortment of boxed winds (currently over 130) sent in by museum visitors from different parts of the world. There is no shortage of bora and wind curiosities, with various objects donated by citizens and linked to personal or community memories related to the wind. In this way, the museum/warehouse collects objects and memories from visitors and citizens without abandoning its role in documenting and describing the bora. The museum also houses a wind documentation centre with over 400 titles, whose main collections include an archive of photographs, scientific publications, newspapers and scientific instruments belonging to Silvio Polli, one of the greatest bora researchers.

In this sense, it is a hybrid and interdisciplinary space that exhibits a variety of objects from science, art, culture and society, presenting itself both as a place of documentation about the city of Trieste and as a point of exchange with the rest of the world, making the Bora a means of promoting the circulation and exchange of ideas. It is a museum that is as alive as its wind and, as such, does not hesitate to organise activities in the city outside the museum, wind festivals and tours of the Bora (see Fig. 1).ii



Fig. 1a-b. Public and visitors during activities in the city organised by the museum. Courtesy of Museo della Bora.

Given this focus on weather phenomena, the Bora Museum necessarily participates at a local level, as many small local museums often do, in the reflection on the climate crisis and sustainability. Weather and climate are always presented as two distinct concepts at the centre of each visit and museum activity.

Participatory climate-related projects and activities

From this brief overview, it is clear how the Bora Museum acts as a place of reflection on the city of Trieste's living traditions, climate and environment. Its activities are therefore conducted in these two directions: bottom-up crowdsourcing and co-creation projects. Several projects are currently underway at the Bora Museum in collaboration with the citizens of Trieste. I focus on Changing winds: climate emergency and us and Memories of bora, dedicated to the climate changes perceptible in and through the wind.

Cambiaventi: L'emergenza climatica e noi/Changing winds: climate emergency and us

The Changing winds: climate emergency and us project, which took place between 2021 and 2022, involved a series of training activities, meetings and workshops to raise awareness of climate change through various channels, especially among younger users.

Firstly, a series of open-access webinars were presented on the climate emergency in the mountains, the sea and agriculture, in particular on rising temperatures, melting glaciers and rising water levels in the Trieste region. Scholars from various disciplines contributed to both the webinar and the final open-access volume.ⁱⁱⁱ People between 18 and 35 could



Fig. 2. Two pages of the final book of the project "Cambiaventi" (Lombardi, 2023).

register for the webinars (held via Zoom) and had time to interact freely with the scholars. They were also involved in online participatory climate workshops where they were asked to create visual and textual contributions on the topic.

In order to inspire the creativity of the participants and the public, an exhibition titled Tale of a past climate was opened, in which the museum's photographic collections, belonging to Professor Silvio Polli (1904–1990), Director of the Thalassographic Institute of Trieste, vividly documented the climate of the past. Selected materials from these activities were compiled in a 'social book' (see Fig. 2), a free, participatory book dedicated to the climate emergency in the region, curated by the Bora Museum and published on the project website in open access in February 2022 (Museo della Bora, 2022).

The book was written by all participants (researchers and the public) and is divided into three parts, reflecting as much as possible the work carried out in the webinars: the first part contains the scientific content of the webinars produced by the scholars, with links to the video recordings of the meetings; the second part contains the participants' contributions relating to the city's climate (photographs, personal anecdotes, proposals and thoughts on the future); and the third part is dedicated to old and contemporary photographs on the climate, proposals for action by individuals and works of art on the subject of climate change.

Although some of the content produced by the public may have been imprecise from a scientific point of view, it was preferred to preserve its spontaneity as a symbol of awareness and sensitivity in order to involve as many people as possible. In this sense, it is clear that activities of this kind in a museum can raise some critical questions regarding the dissemination of objectively correct scientific knowledge, which is certainly a central objective of museums but which very often clashes with the idea of leaving freedom of expression to the visitors participating in the activities. However, in a co-creation activity, it can also be useful to provide the participants with scientific content but then let them process what they have learned independently on the basis of their own experience without receiving an 'academic' evaluation of their thoughts. In practice, this means guiding visitors' ideas within a scientific framework but in an informal way, giving community members a voice in community issues, empowering participants and resisting the urge to act as a one-way provider of knowledge (Lynch, 2021).

Memorie di Bora/Memories of bora

The summer of 2023 was the hottest on record in the Trieste region, marked by rainfall and hailstorms, as well as sea storms and river flooding in the autumn. These climatic changes also impacted the inhabitants, the focus of the museum's interest. The project

“What the wind was like: memories of the climate” was developed by inviting citizens to send in a video of no more than three minutes about their memories of this characteristic wind in response to one of the following questions: “Do you have any special memories of the bora”? “In your opinion, how has Trieste’s climate changed, or does the bora of the past no longer exist”? All these images and memories stimulate reflection on climate change, and it is the visitors themselves who become witnesses to the climate simply by using a smartphone. In any case, the Bora Museum continued to collect memories and testimonies, including texts, photos and videos. The project generally benefited from the cooperation of citizens and various institutions. The Istituto Triestino Interventi Sociali and the ‘Danilo Dobrina’ University of the Third Age provided invaluable assistance. The museum staff interviewed people and students from these institutes who shared their memories of the strength of the bora in the past and how they dealt with it in everyday life, using visual and written sources and objects.



Fig. 3. Page of the final book of the project “Memorie di Bora” (Museo della Bora, 2022).

In addition, they helped the museum collect interviews and materials with memories, thus revitalising the Bora Museum's memory heritage. Among the themes that emerged from the memoirs and interviews were anti-bora strategies, specific memorable episodes involving the city, and special and personal memories related to the weather. The interviews have been made freely available as videos on YouTube, and the personal stories, narrated by the individuals or museum staff, are available as short podcast episodes on Soundcloud and Spotify. The museum's website provides access to all this content. The result is a free collection of spontaneous memoirs and a short book (see Fig. 3),^{iv} all of which are freely available online on the museum's website (Lombardi, 2023).

It is interesting to note how the majority of the older people delved into recounting how much colder it was in the past and how this colder climate affected their everyday lives, developing in the listeners a sense of a lost world that was wiped out by global warming. Many of the interviews, especially those recorded at the 'Danilo Dobrina' University of the Third Age, were made during general meetings with the students in groups, so they succeed in conveying a sense of shared memory, a collective practice of remembering a collective past that can only be passed on to the next generations through personal stories that find their way into the museum and help to reinforce and humanise the scientific message conveyed by the exhibition.

Towards new participatory projects

In recent years, the museum's expansion projects have been made possible thanks to funding from the Italian government's NextGenerationEU post-COVID Recovery and Resilience Plan. This funding requires that the beneficiary projects are closely connected to the EU's current issues with their communities.^v To this end, the museum will soon open the Borarium. This new playful outdoor wind space will house real, digital and virtual attractions and provide a space for exhibitions, meetings and conferences in a suburb of the city. In this way, not only will the cultural offer of a peripheral area of Trieste, close to the border with Slovenia, be revitalised, but it will also be possible to offer content and activities that are open in terms of accessibility, inclusiveness and active participation to the people of Trieste, as well as to visitors from all over the world. The idea of creating an accessible and inclusive space is being realised in the Borarium Interactive project, which supports digitising the museum's analogue heritage by transforming its content co-creation initiatives with visitors into digital interaction design installations. These installations will make it possible to translate the values and knowledge related to the meteorological phenomenon of the bora for a much wider audience, regardless of language, motor skills or geographical origin (in particular, they

will communicate in multilingual Italian, Slovenian and English). Accessibility to the content will be promoted both physically through lifts and access ramps, audio content for the blind and visual content for deaf people, and digitally through visits to the web portal and the mobile application. The mobile application will allow those who cannot visit the museum in person to use it, provide a guide for visiting other indoor and outdoor spaces in the city and allow for remote interaction and learning. Indeed, the ability to interact digitally with the content on site or remotely is a fundamental feature of an exhibition space that pursues the concept of an accessible and inclusive museum for all visitors.

The mobile application also includes an area for user-generated content on bora and climate, making the user a co-creator of a truly diffuse experiential museum. This exchange of experiences forms the basis for creating a sense of belonging for the citizens and visitors to the climate reflection. As with all museum activities in general, the connection between the past and the present will be fundamental for the transmission of subjective experiences and the creation of a relationship between generations, both creators and users, through this intangible heritage linked to the climate, which so strongly characterises the local cultural identity. In this sense, the sections of the Borarium dedicated to the green concept will also be set up to reflect on climate change with ideas on sustainability to raise awareness of local processes of green transition and environmental choices for visitors of all ages.vi

Concluding Thoughts

The work of the Bora Museum is to tell the story of climate change through objects and documents, but above all, through the memories of people from different generations, by presenting examples, best practices and the direct involvement of visitors and local communities in the face of climate change. The underlying idea is to stimulate the visitor's emotional and physical participation, an example of a contextual learning model (Falk and Dierking, 2018), with several objectives: to help the visitor establish a direct relationship with the exhibits through direct participation and comparison or sharing with others.

The goal is to promote a connection to everyday life and contemporary issues (Godfrey, 2002), as well as socially constructed learning, where the presence of learning communities encourages the exchange of information and interaction between visitors (LaBarge, 2014). The aim is also to come as close as possible to the participatory function of the contemporary museum, as recently established by the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) new definition of a museum as a place of active participation, capable of accommodating a plurality of voices, centred on the visitor's experience as well as the collection it houses.vii

In these times, constant instability is a central theme. This appears to be an excellent example of rooted museum work, expressed in partnerships and collaborations with local communities on ecological issues, as well as in shared practices with their fellow residents. Communities can find roots and rootedness by learning and participating in the creation of content for the Bora Museum related to climate and weather issues inherent in the local tradition. To be sure, the museum follows the models proposed (Simons, 2010) for public participation in projects facilitated by the museum itself when it asks visitors to provide specific objects and ideas (requests for contributions, e.g. donation of objects related to the wind), to participate directly in the development of actions (proposals for collaboration, e.g. in the creation of open access books), and to work together (in co-creation) to generate content based on community interests (especially climate change).

By collecting experiences, memories and objects, the museum encourages active participation, reflection and interaction with the past to enable awareness of green topics (Monk, 2012, p. 66). Therefore, the museum constantly empowers visitors to actively participate in the creation of meaning by proposing activities that stimulate the recollection of memories without presenting information in a one-sided and unidirectional way that leaves no room for emotional and sensory involvement (Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995, pp. 67–75).

The citizens of Trieste are a participating and active community in the process of collecting, interpreting, exhibiting and expanding knowledge to raise awareness of climate change. It is therefore a vital form of knowledge for understanding the historical, ecological and social reality of the city and region of Trieste, which the museum creates through partnerships and collaboration with local communities and shares with the global community in various ways.

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Notes

i <https://museobora.org/> (Accessed: 10 April 2024).

ii Available at <https://museobora.org/boramata.php> (Accessed: 10 April 2024).

iii The scholars were affiliated with the WWF, local meteorological societies, national institutions of geophysics and oceanography, as well as an artist and a photographer.

vi Available at <https://museobora.org/che-vento-faceva.php> (Accessed: 01 August 2024).

- v The museum project is in line with the design of NextGenerationEU in promoting the concepts of the green transition to renewable energy and sustainability by improving access to training in skills relevant to the future economy and supporting inclusive participation in growth, research and development for all. This is all also framed within the European Green Deal actions, especially when it comes to climate (the first climate-neutral continent by 2050) and environment (protecting our biodiversity and ecosystems).
- vi Developing cultural strategies to raise awareness about the protection of our biodiversity and ecosystems, alternative energy sources and the effects of climate change. See Sutton (2023) for an overview.
- vii According to the ICOM, "[Museums] operate and communicate . . . with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing", <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/> (Accessed: 08 August 2024).

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