

# Past, present and future of the Enrico Fermi museum – DOI: 10.1051/epn/2024202

**The Enrico Fermi Museum<sup>1</sup> is a journey in the life and scientific discoveries of Enrico Fermi, defined as ‘a giant’ of the physics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is an emotional journey in which the visitors can immerse themselves to discover and understand how the explorations of the matter were intertwined with the historical events of that period.**

**T**he research and experiments carried out within the walls of Panisperna cannot be disjointed from the events that characterized the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Born as a moving exhibition, first exposed in Genoa in 2015, and then set up in Bologna the following year, in 2019 the Museum found its permanent home in Rome. The building of via Panisperna was the seat of the Royal Institute of Physics of the University of Rome, inaugurated in the 1880s under the direction of the physics Pietro Blaserna. It represented the first Italian “practical school” of physics, with a revolutionary teaching idea: the laboratory becomes the protagonist. No longer ‘ex-cathedra’ lessons were carried on, but students could independently use scientific tools and carry out research activities. Half a century later, Enrico Fermi and his collaborators conducted here the famous experiments on radioactivity induced by neutrons. These fundamental experiments allowed to understand the structure of the atomic nucleus which earned Fermi the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1938.

Today the building, returned after a long and philological restoration at the end of 2018, houses the ‘Enrico Fermi’ Study and Research Center (CREF) in addition to the Museum. A young institution with a dual mission: on the one hand, in the spirit that characterized Enrico Fermi’s activities, it aims at developing original and interdisciplinary lines of research; on the other hand, thanks to the Museum and strong outreach activity, it intends to offer wide dissemination and communication of Enrico Fermi’s life and discoveries, and, in general, of the historical and scientific events that took place



▲ Enrico Fermi Museum, entrance.

here, in a period in which Italian physics was at the center of the international science panorama. Through the identification of a dozen steps, combining traditional objects and panels with modern multimedia technologies, the most significant stages of Fermi’s life and discoveries are presented.

At the end of 2022, the Museum also acquired, through a private donation, two autograph letters by Enrico Fermi, dated 1947 and 1954, sent, the first from Chicago, the second from Como to his elementary school teacher. In the autumn of 2023, the entrance was redesigned, and a timeline was installed in Italian and English with the most important stages in the history of via Panisperna.

Located in the internal courtyard of the complex, as an integral part of the Museum itinerary, there is the ‘Goldfish Fountain’, the first Italian historical site of the European Physical Society inaugurated in 2012. Of particular interest

is the access staircase, immortalized in an iconic image from 1931 taken at the first International Congress of Nuclear Physics organized by Fermi, with Guglielmo Marconi as honorary president and Orso Mario Corbino as effective president. That was the opportunity for the ‘Panisperna’s boys’ to appear on the international scene for the first time.

Reopened in March 2022, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, today the Enrico Fermi Museum is experiencing exceptional success and notoriety. In March 2022, a technical-scientific committee was officially established made up of researchers from CREF that deals with the organization and management of the Museum. Today, we aim at placing teaching at the center of our activities, in a continuous dialogue with the history and diffusion of scientific culture. The focus of the proposals and projects involving the Museum are the themes of communication, accessibility, and inclusiveness, with the fundamental issues of research and conservation. We therefore support stimulating and engaging learning paths; we certainly share the model of “open education”, through an integrated and multidisciplinary approach that can improve the learning experiences of everyone, starting from students. Museum experiences are extraordinarily memorable and remain imprinted in the memory for a long time, thus becoming a driving force for learning.

We aim at creating itineraries for the Museum, which is a place of historical memory, as a unique experience, in a continuous dialogue between history, and

<sup>1</sup> [www.museum.cref.it](http://www.museum.cref.it)

dissemination of science.

Schools are the Enrico Fermi Museum's target audience, but the exhibition is open to all.

In 2023, over 3500 visitors attend the Museum, of which schools represented over 75%. These data are extremely significant: the Museum is open to schools one morning a week and welcomes the public once a month, on special Open Days. These results are made possible by the continuous and passionate work of the CREF research staff who are making the Enrico Fermi Museum possible for ever larger groups of visitors, guiding them in the Museum.

The future goal is to welcome an ever-increasing number of visitors with an adequate training offer of high educational value. We aim at making the Museum a place of dialogue and exchange, where different but complementary skills and professionalism can meet and collaborate to create learning paths. We are starting to create a network of contacts and collaborations to increasingly insert the Museum within a network for the diffusion of scientific museology and to create connections with the institutions and interested operators, through an exchange of opinions and news.

Since October 2023, the Museum has been officially a member of the National Association of Scientific Museums (ANMS). A dialogue in which the Museum's visitors are the protagonists, often represented by young students who are organizing and planning their own choices to fit into society. Future citizens must increasingly be able to approach science critically and consciously to orient themselves in our knowledge society. An awareness that brings with it curiosity, open-mindedness, and a critical spirit. ■

■ **Miriam Focaccia**

*Museo Storico della Fisica e Centro Studi e Ricerche 'Enrico Fermi'*

▼ Enrico Fermi Museum's interactive fountain.



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