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ABSTRACT BOOK

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**Geology for a sustainable
management of our Planet**



Politecnico
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An “enlightened” museum of Nature, Art and Science. Rediscovering Specola 250 years after its foundation

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On February 21, 1775, Grand Duke Peter Leopold of Lorraine inaugurated, in the ancient Bini-Torrigiani palace in Via Romana in Florence, the Imperial and Royal Museum of Physics and Natural History, probably the first scientific-naturalistic museum open to the public.

The Grand Duke of Lorraine did not limit himself to welcoming the heritage of art, science and culture collected by the Medici over three centuries. As a convinced Enlightenment thinker, he immediately understood the importance that these collections, especially those of a scientific nature, could have for the education of his people. It was an unprecedented operation: his museum was literally the “Museum of Nature” because, as its first director Felice Fontana wrote, nature was represented in it as a whole, “from earth to sky”, with the establishment of the first Florentine astronomical observatory, (i.e., the Specola), on the top of the Palace. The purpose was “to enlighten his people and make them happy by making them more cultured”, and in fact the museum was open to everyone “as long as they were cleanly dressed”. Thus, at the end of the eighteenth century, a museum was born for the cultural growth of the people, thus anticipating by almost 250 years the Faro Convention of the Council of Europe on the value of cultural heritage for society and the contemporary concept of “museum” as an institution at the service of society, open to the public, accessible and inclusive.

After more than four years of structural work and refurbishment, the Specola Museum reopened its doors to the public on February 22, 2024. After almost a century and a half away, the mineralogical collections return to the Specola with a new exhibition itinerary that develops in four large monumental rooms. The museological project and the museographic arrangement of the collections intended to ideally reconnect with the conceptual framework of Peter Leopold’s museum. A special section of the exhibition is dedicated to illustrating some of the infinite applications of minerals for the satisfaction of the needs of our society, with particular emphasis on the indispensable need for ethically and socially sustainable exploitation.

The specimens exhibited here are only a very modest fraction (about 1200) of the more than 50,000 specimens that the Museum preserves, a priceless heritage that the Florentine mineralogical tradition has been able to put together and preserve for over five centuries.