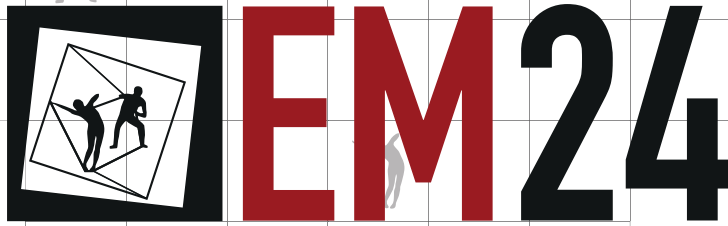


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EURAU - EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON ARCHITECTURE
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**IN-PRESENCE /
THE BODY AND
THE SPACE**

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

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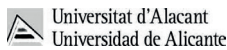
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The Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Politecnico di Milano organises at the School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering (AUIC), EURAU Milan 2024 "IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE - The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization", the eleventh edition of the international conference, which takes place from 19 to 22 June 2024.



/ EURAU Milan 2024

11th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON ARCHITECTURE
AND URBANISM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

For those who deal with the city and the territory, space refers to the body
(C. Bianchetti)

The EURAU Milan 2024 Conference aims to unpack the significance of corporeality in contemporary times and its relevance for the upcoming years. Specifically, the focus is on the relation between body and space and how this relates to architecture, the city and the environment, interpreted as physical facts and processes. Within the background of a technological turn, the focus is now on what has changed or will further change in this relationship and what, on the opposite, remains unalterable, inherently bound to the material and impervious to the virtual.

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Spaces, Bodies, Design A Multidisciplinary Perspective

MARCO BOVATI, ANNA MORO, DANIELE VILLA

In an era in which many aspects of our society, lives, and disciplines are shifting - sometimes too lightly, others forcibly - from the physical to the immaterial, from the corporeal to the virtual, EURAU Milan 2024 Conference reflects on the current and future role of corporeality, examining what has changed and is changing, what is effectively irreducible from the material to the virtual intangible dimension and what, in terms of values and experiences, is gained or lost in this shift.

EURAU Milan 2024 solicits researchers and professionals in the spheres of spatial studies, from architecture to urban and environmental design, planning and policies, artistic disciplines and experimentations, etcetera, to reflect on the conditions/practices/tools that require the presence of a body or several bodies in a space, whether small or large, indoor or outdoor, in order to be lived, experienced and realised authentically, and if so, how this is different and why this is crucial compared to technologically mediated, non-corporeal, non-material, even non-human, experiences.

Considering diverse points of view and arguments, the perspective of corporeality appears intimately linked to architecture and urbanism in multiple ways and through the many approaches over time.

This vital link can be seen, for instance, if we consider the many perspectives from which space can be conceived: from the uses and the interpretations of space through 'practices', through a culturally-mediated perception of space, to the role of space itself as a source of sensory and environmental stimuli, to the production of space through design, or even to the social usability of space as a container of practices and events.

Following this perspective, the spaces of architecture, the city and the environment can be inhabited thanks to, by and through the body and its physical extension. The body is the transit of the relationship between design and space, practices and society. Placing bodies at the core of our disciplinary discourses means interfering with their material, organic and affective narrative, embracing their uncertainties and stumbles and dealing with the consequences. Bodies are traces of a creative multiplicity, interlaced with the possibility of an open and continuous dialogue with the world.

This multifaceted relationship occurs in two principal ways: one as 'acting bodies', bodies that touch, bodies that act, bodies as actors of practices and

actions, and as a tool for transformative reflection on space; and one as 'acted bodies', bodies as filters, bodies affected by the physical-spatial and environmental conditions of space. This dialectic between the body as an active medium and the body as passive exposure derives from Gilles Deleuze's reading of Spinoza and carries with it the idea that 'the body is the world, is made of the world, is at one with the world.'

Starting from the intention of investigating the space-body relationship, its modifications and resistances, the basic questions EURAU Milan 24 intends to ask are:

/ Is this condition still actual? How much has it changed, and will it change in the coming years?

/ What cannot change as it is effectively irreducible from the material to the virtual?

/ How has the body-space relationship changed with the advent of new technologies?

/ What still can a body do, and what can only be done by a body?

/ What is the added value of a body-centred approach to our disciplines?

The issue can be approached by questioning boldly a series of recent or well-known assumptions, which refer to different disciplinary fields but share a core theme: the co-presence and relationship of bodies in space.

Furthermore, in the current global conditions – full of innovation but with multiple crises that must be overcome through collaboration and research aiming towards a different future – researchers and professionals are driven to question even the fundamental traits of our disciplines profoundly. What the recent crisis, starting from Covid-19, has reiterated is indeed the centrality of the individual bodies and of bodies interacting in space.

Among the many emerging issues recently developed at the international level – for instance, the European Agenda or the international SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), which points to sustainability, justice, equality, freedom, hospitality, health, a new and fairer economy, care for the most fragile people and territories, memory, beauty and socio-spatial transition – EURAU Milan 24 aims to underline and integrate the aspect of 'togetherness' that can be defined as being together, sharing practices and values through bodies and multiple, even non-physical bonds that occur within space.

The format of the conference is the result of a shared reflection that started with a research seminar on the current state of scientific events, held in March 2023 at Politecnico di Milano. As our network is based on a deep-sharing approach to research and design, we have identified a flexible format that includes both online and in-presence moments. The integration of modes has allowed us to promote a long-term format going from the summer of 2023 to the summer of 2024, called The Road to EURAU, which has engaged participants in bringing their contribution to the table and shaping the conference themes and contents.

We have proposed five preparatory thematic meetings organised by EURAU network partners to discuss this topic in advance. Each meeting introduced a different thematic approach to the conference topic. The outcomes of the meetings helped refine the thematic sessions of EURAU Milan 24 and the preparation of the open call. The aim was to activate an ongoing and wide-ranging discussion, fed by other forms of communication (a forum, an Instagram profile, a website), leading up to June 2024 as the final moment in which - IN-PRESENCE - we have met to draw conclusions.



The EURAU Milan 24 Conference addressed issues that delve into the tapestry of the relationship between body and space, framed and articulated within five thematic areas:

/CONCEIVED, /INTER-ACTIVE, /AFFECTED, /VULNERABLE and /AUGMENTED.

These five themes, as adjectives of the body as well as of the space, are intended as facets of a unique narration that is brought into focus through the exploration of each area. Cross-reading these themes provides a comprehensive lens through which to investigate the dynamic interplay and the multiple layers underlying the body-space relationship.

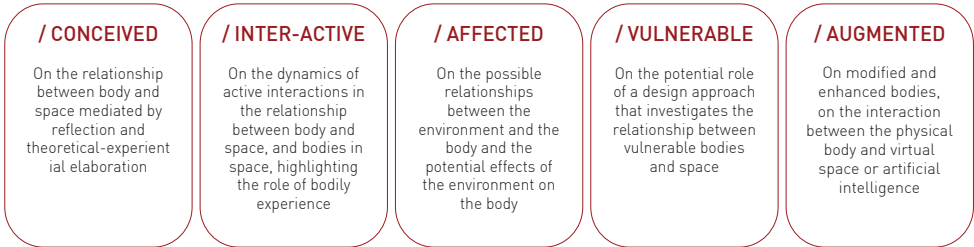
Specifically, **/CONCEIVED** anchors the exploration in the realm of reflective and theoretical-experiential elaboration and its foundations. Going beyond the notion of body-space relations grounded in proportions, measurements and geometry, there is an opening towards new forms of action, inter-action and reflection.

In the second session, contributions are asked to delve into the adjective **/INTER-ACTIVE**, which refers to the dynamics of active interaction in the body-space relationship, highlighting how movement, gestures, and sensory engagement contribute to craft a tapestry weaving together the materiality of space and the embodied experience.

The third theme, **/AFFECTED**, refers to the possible relationships and actions of the environment on the body, where the environment is understood as the artificial urban territory but also the natural and the natural and climatic domains. This thematic area underscores the profound impact of external factors on bodily experience.

/VULNERABLE bodily experience as well as climatic and natural consequences on space, points at the potential role of a design approach that investigates the relationship between fragile bodies and space. The session is dedicated to the manifold layers of vulnerabilities of bodies in space, and their role as a critical contribution to refocusing our disciplines.

The last thematic area, **/AUGMENTED** disciplines towards the design and reflection of inclusivity, is dedicated to modified and enhanced bodies and the interaction between the physical body and virtual space or artificial intelligence. It explores the evolving landscape of technologically mediated interactions, as well as contemporary art interventions.

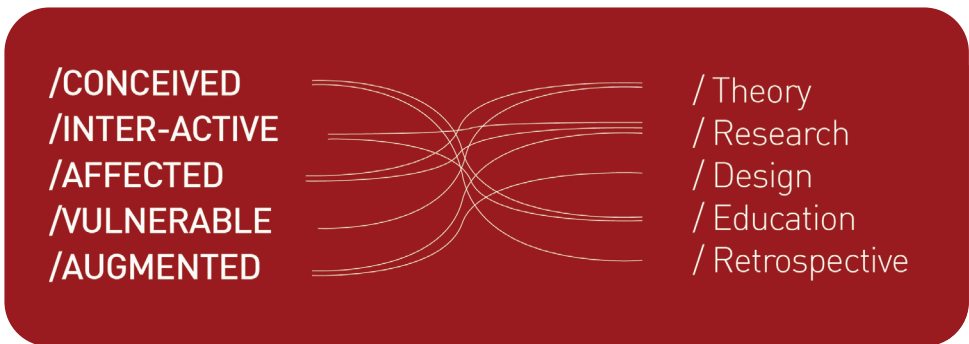


The thematic areas are intersected transversally by five operational perspectives: **Theory, Research, Design, Education and Retrospective.**

These propose five possible approaches that can also be combined within the same contribution.

The five approaches are based on the idea that the theme of the body-space relationship can be investigated according to different and interrelated modalities and perspectives, allowing for the various theoretical and practical experiences that characterise the activity of architects and urban planners, whether they operate as historians, theorists, designers, educators or professionals.

The thematic areas and transversal perspectives form a matrix where contributions can be freely placed.



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3 / AFFECTED

/ On the possible relationships and actions of the environment on the body. Built and natural environments can be considered spatial agents acting on bodies in their various features. This corporeal view seeks innovative ways to engage people with environmental challenges, tracing the relationship between the environment and bodies in guiding a spatial transformation and cultivating a shared understanding of this perspective on 'affected' bodies.

Rather than relying on ideological stances, we draw inspiration from the experiential and corporeal aspects of the human body, how they are affected by architectural and urban spatial configurations, as well as by thermal comfort and – in general – the impact of the natural/artificial environment on it. This theme encourages disciplines to interact with frontier knowledge, investigating the relationship between the body/space and other entities and organisms.

Light, energy, temperature, fluids, and microorganisms generate/inform/form the experience of body/space, mutually modifying each other. Moreover, considering the physical and social body as a perceiving element, comprehending and interacting with the environment, and creating opportunities for environmental transformation also means investigating the role of corporeity concerning commons in their action on territories and urban spaces.

To delve into the theme of affected bodies and expand the gaze towards the condition of the climate crisis means to question the current resilient practices and post-disaster modification from a body-centred perspective. Accordingly, it means observing emergencies but also temporally broadening the view towards the future to understand and interpret risk phenomena, environmental but not only, which affect daily life, the possibilities for transformation, and the relationship between body and space. By assuming this perspective, the session could touch on the contemporary definition of this relation and the historical transformation of the issue, looking at moments of shifting conditions or significant understanding of the topic.

The session welcomes contributions which include but are not limited to:

- / The built and natural environment/body relationship;
- / The body/environment relationship in defining relationships with climate and comfort issues;
- / The body/space relation as an organism, where light, energy, temperature, fluids, and microorganisms generate/inform/shape the experience of the body-space, modifying each other;
- / The city as a place of bodies: the relationship between body, city, and commons;
- / The body affected by climate change: resilient transformation practices, and post-disaster transformations;
- / The relationship between body/climate/environmental risk.

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Overtourism in UNESCO sites and its effect on urban public space.

An EU project experience of research by design in Athens, Florence and Krakow

Key Words

Overtourism, Public space, Research-by-design, UNESCO cities

When discussing the contemporary evidence of the shift from the physical to the immaterial, from the corporeal to the virtual, there's a prominent phenomenon that reveals a strong persistence of the need and desire for an in-presence experience of places: tourism.

In the last decades, the interlace between the increasingly easier physical act of travelling/visiting and the socio-economic patterns driven by social networks dynamics and digital services has transformed the tourism industry and caused uncontrolled consequences on urban spaces. This phenomenon has taken the name of 'overtourism', described by the World Tourism Organization as "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitor experiences in a negative way" (UNWTO, 2018). Effects can be seen on gentrification processes, housing market, commerce patterns, de-signification of public spaces, risks for heritage preservation, and several others [Liberatore et al, 2022; Shirvani and De Luca, 2022; Gössling et al, 2020; Celata and Romano, 2020; Koens et al, 2018].

The Covid19 pandemic has made clear the vulnerability of the UNESCO historic centers, which have reorganized their economies and the uses of their physical and intangible heritage on tourism, undermining the monocultural models dedicated to mass tourism and revealing new critical issues and fragilities of the urban systems.

With the restrictions imposed by health prevention systems, tourist flows have stopped and the historic centers have emptied, both in their streets and squares, and in their abundant building heritage dedicated to hospitality (restaurants, bars, hotels, short-term rentals, etc.). In this context, the public space, normally intended to welcome visitors, has been dramatically emptied of presences and functions, making the historic centers unwelcoming and unsuitable for the needs of residents; however, it has not been the subject of a real rethinking from a more resilient perspective, respecting the local cultural identity and environmental, social and

economic sustainability.

Starting from these considerations, the Erasmus+ (Call 2021 Round 1 KA2) project Sustainable Urban Space Pavillion (SUSPA) intends to produce alternative urban scenarios through the experimentation of new forms of international teaching - using innovative technologies and methods that allow an articulation of teaching in presence, at a distance and in mixed mode - aimed at investigating on the impact of the pandemic and to formulate intervention hypotheses, according to the practice of "research by design". The work focuses on the central areas of cities located in the countries of the partnership, registered in the UNESCO list of world heritage sites.

SUSPA is promoting a transnational discussion on the effects of overtourism with a specific attention to UNESCO cities in the European context, aiming at investigating how design actions on urban public spaces could mitigate the impact or readdress tourism dynamics to reconcile residents' and visitors' agencies. UNESCO cities, in fact, are a significant example of these phenomena as they live the paradox of making the effort itself of protecting and promoting heritage (UNESCO, 2011 – 2013) one of the main drivers of the overtourism process that put that same heritage at risk.

The project focuses on three cities – Athens, Florence, and Krakow, inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1987, 1982 and 1978 – combining analytical studies and research-by-design through the organization of study-trips, seminars, and workshops in the field with the final aim of drafting guidelines to support the local decision-makers in addressing the increasingly urgent situation. In the three cities, dynamics affecting the public space are similar, even if contextually declined according to the local urban culture and climate: overcrowding, privatization and foodification of major attractive areas, together with the neglect of others, that can present traces of gentrification when tourism penetrates the residential city outside the historic center [Dodds and Butler, 2019]. Overtourism has social, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts all affecting the physical space of the city.

Being a complex phenomenon, it needs specific policy actions and planning tools supported by a strong political will to set the framework to reconsider the role of tourism on cities in a more sustainable way, as Florence is interestingly experimenting in the last years [Francini, 2022; De Luca et al, 2021; Del Bianco, 2020]. Moving in a complementary and spatialized urban design perspective [Del Bianco and Montedoro, 2023], SUSPA's preliminary outcomes trace four main trajectories focused on public space design, open to be further explored in supporting the broader policy-making effort. The common purpose is to explore possibilities to drive public investments or to manage private-public partnerships with an inclusive perspective able to have an effect on the full spectrum of the overtourism impact.

The first has to do with the need to better understand metropolitan dynamics in a systemic way, with the aim of rebalancing the effects of tourism in historical cores through the reconnection with their territorial systems by cultural and ecological itineraries and corridors. This could have several benefits, both from a cultural perspective of awareness and understanding, and from a socio-economic perspective of redistribution. This dynamic was especially explored studying the relation between Athens and Eleusis, a city in the metropolitan area of the Greek capital, historically connected by the Sacred Way. In 2023, Eleusis has European Capital of Culture, an occasion aimed at repositioning Eleusis out of its image of industrial city excluded from the tourism circuits and at strengthening its livability and cultural role through the regeneration of its industrial heritage and open spaces: a vision facing several challenges.

Secondly, the research project focused on the gates to the cities, questioning what it means today being welcomed in a highly visited heritage city, both in terms of logistics and in terms of diversity of the needs and desires patters of visitors. Also considering, of course, the variety of risen expectations and information that are remotely accessible through the internet and social media. This welcoming role can be performed by reinventing underutilized or undervalued open spaces in strategic locations and by reconsidering how residents will also interact with these spaces. These places could work as welcoming gates also for locals and metropolitan city-users, to raise awareness on their own city's history, present socio-cultural initiatives, and future transformations. This role of welcoming gates as broader intended 'urban centers' could be envisioned setting a more or less physical relation with existing cultural institutions, strengthening and expanding their role. Some design explorations on this issue have been performed both in Florence and Krakow. In Florence, discussing and building on the ongoing plan of the Municipality to transform part of the Santa Maria Novella complex, in front of the main train station, in a renewed visitor center. In Krakow, considering urban open spaces in strategic spots, like the ones in front of the National Museum and the Ethnographic Museum, as potential strategic locations for newly built pavilions interpreting the history of places.

A third design trajectories opens the reflections on diffused systems in the city fabric built by constellations of smaller interventions. The main hint came in Florence from the possibility

to reconsider the role of urban kiosks, partially abandoned, as providers of services at the neighborhood scale, both for tourists and residents. Going beyond the basic existing functions of flowers or newspaper selling (disappearing) or low-quality souvenirs shops (increasing), kiosks could become multifunctional hub interacting with digital services, providing a wide range of facilities and becoming a reference point for the neighborhood life, also transforming the public space around them.

Fourth and last attention has to do with the role of nature in improving urban livability, overlooking at how climate change is affecting European cities, in terms of temperatures, natural hazard and psychological wellness. Overtourism needs infrastructure and services that massively consume resources, produce pollution, raise heat islands. Driving tourism investments in improving the landscape quality, environmental comfort and ecological performativity of public spaces could contribute to heal urban systems and build more sustainable cities, setting compensation patterns potentially contributing to the reconciliation between tourists and residents. Design opportunities in this sense could combine the production of ecosystemic services and the building of new functional and aesthetic relations between cities and their landscapes, such as Florence with its river, Krakow with its parks and Athens with the sea.

All the four trajectories have to do with the value of places, that's also what push for the desire to experience cities in presence. However, overtourism determines an over-presence that turns public space from a common good and polysemous common ground [Lotman, 1985], able to host a great plurality of actors and practices [Montedoro, 2017], into a disposable commodity, to be rapidly used and consumed, with the risk of losing its sense of place and therefore paradoxically, its attractiveness. How design actions can contribute to counteracting this process is the open question that the SUPSA project is investigating.

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