
PASSAGES

ARCHITECTURE FOR FLOWING AND CONNECTING SPACES

International Conference
September 24–26th, 2025
Politecnico di Milano

Book of Abstracts

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Raffaella Cavallaro
Nicolò Chierichetti

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Conference Proceedings
Book of Abstracts

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**Architecture for Flowing
and Connecting Spaces**
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Editors | Curators
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Nicolò Chierichetti

ISBN 978-94-6518-101-1

September 2025

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Welcome to *Passages* International Conference at Politecnico di Milano, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies.

Passages aims to investigate notions of space for mobility in contemporary architectural discourses. How architectural design can contribute to reimagining spaces to overcome functionalist engineering limitations, also considering the ecological, climate and social impacts of mobility spaces as something more than mere built objects?

This conference aims to unveil the potential of architectural design and research tools to enrich unconventional discussions about mobility in urban and periurban contexts, its spatial configurations and experiential qualities. Although mobility is intended as a framework, the discourse will focus on the spaces above, below, in-between, and to the sides of the ordinary boundaries of architectures of flow, as well as on the spaces of new forms of movement.

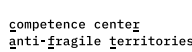
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Introduction

Why Talking about Mobility through Architecture?

Contemporary challenges, past legacies, and future visions

Raffaella Cavallaro, Nicolò Chierichetti

Introduction. Mobility as Frame, Space as Question

The question of mobility has been a central concern in urban agendas for a considerable period, particularly as a legacy of the modernist era, and is also closely linked to the pressing issues of decarbonization, climate adaptation, and the reduction of inequalities. However, the spatial and experiential dimension of mobility remains under-researched, while the evolution of technologies related to mobility dominates the debate. Infrastructures support flows, as well as producing forms of urbanity, transforming landscapes, and reshaping everyday practices. It is precisely at this point that the field of architecture becomes essential, even if nowadays the debate on mobility through architecture – as per theory and criticism – may be perceived as almost redundant, perceiving mobility from a mere strategic, transport and planning domain – where such policies and engineering approaches treat mobility as a technical system of connections.

Architecture instead has the capacity to reveal and articulate the cultural, ecological, and social values embedded in these spaces. Mobility, therefore, provides a frame, but the core of

our investigation lies in space: the thresholds, interstices, and passages that give shape to lived experience in the contemporary city. The present collection of abstracts emerges from the conviction that architecture has the capacity – and the obligation – to reframe infrastructures of movement as collective spaces, to overcome the clear distinction between public space and service space. The relevance of such architectural-mobility debate is also underlined by the framework of the *Sustainable Development Goals*, with Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which make explicit calls for infrastructures that are resilient, inclusive, and sustainable. At the same time, the *European Green Deal* and various national agendas underline the importance of a transition towards low-carbon mobility systems and the regeneration of public space in their interference. In this context, architecture assumes a distinctive role with its capacity to reshape infrastructures into public and shared environments, which can foster ecological transition and the reappropriation of public space.

In addition, emergent forms of mobility are also challenging the paradigms we

had established so far. The advent of forms of slow-mobility, micromobility, autonomous vehicles, and digital platforms – such as MaaS – is reshaping the palimpsest of contemporary movement - while the climate emergency requires to rethink the very materiality of infrastructures, integrating water management, vegetation, and permeability as part of the field of action.

These shifts are not to be considered neutral. Each of these components has the capacity to reflect profound changes to urban landscapes, influencing the perception of distances and proximities in the surrounding environment and redefining the boundaries between public and private spheres. Due to this, any discussion of mobility through architecture must necessarily engage with a set of fundamental questions. *How can infrastructures be transformed into spaces that facilitate interaction rather than serving as barriers? In what ways can design contribute to the realisation of equitable, accessible, and ecologically sustainable mobility? How can architectural thinking transform the pursuit of efficiency into the creation of spaces endowed with symbolic resonance and cultural embeddedness?*

By addressing these questions, the conference *Passages. Architecture of Flowing and Connecting Spaces* seeks to encourage reflection among researchers and practitioners on the potential of architecture to shape infrastructures as civic and collective spaces, essential to the quality of urban life.

Passages before Passages

“On both sides of the passage, which receives its light from above, the most elegant shops are lined up, so that such a passage is a city, a world in miniature.” (Benjamin, 1991, p.62)

The architectural and urban reflection on mobility is rooted in a genealogy of theories and projects that have progressively expanded the scope of design beyond the isolated object, starting from flows, networks and infrastructures. To position the research questions around *Passages*, it is crucial to revisit these legacies.

In *Mutations*, Koolhaas and his design team described the contemporary city as an undergoing of “mutations of urban culture” so radical as to require “a new conceptual framework and vocabulary for phenomena that can no longer be described within the traditional categories of architecture, landscape, and urban planning” (Koolhaas et al., 2000, 19). This notion of the *city-in-transformation* highlights infrastructures, flows and global urban processes as central agents of change. Similarly, in *S,M,L,XL*, Koolhaas foresaw mobility nodes and terminals shedding “their utilitarian character and become attractions” (1995, p. 581).

This shift was reinforced by Stan Allen's seminal essay *Infrastructural Urbanism* (1999), which argued that “*Infrastructure works not so much to propose specific buildings on given sites, but to construct the site itself*” (Allen, 1999, p. 54).

Infrastructures, in this sense, are not conceived as single points in space, but they act as critical masses which can engage the design ground for future building and “create the conditions for future events” (Allen, 1999, p. 54). As Allen further recalls:

“[...] networks of communication and transportation were all part of the traditional competence of the architect before the rise of disciplinary specialization. Territory, communication, and speed are properly infrastructural problems, and architecture as a discipline has developed specific technical means to deal effectively with these variables” (1999, p. 52).

By framing architecture as a field and system, Allen invited designers to see infrastructures as active agents of spatial production. This perspective resonates with the historical account of transport condensed in the text by Kelly Shannon and Marcel Smets, who describe how infrastructure has progressively shifted “the perception and spatial articulation of the public realm” (2010, p. 184). *Station, in particular, illustrates this transformation: “The 19th-century popularization of train travel accommodated the values of the new bourgeois society, and transport space took on an urban image. While assigned train carriages mirrored class distinctions, the station hall and platforms were common spaces through which everyone passed. In this way, train stations became the true initiators of transport infrastructure as public space” (Shannon & Smets,*

2010, pp. 184-185). In this sense, underlining the centrality of networks as design matter, infrastructures are not hidden technical artefacts but part of the visible structures that shape encounters, overlap different city-users, services and propose occasions for public interactions. Hauck, Keller and Kleinekort (2011) further expanded this perspective by mapping infrastructural practices through *research by design*. They describe *hubs* as hybrid knots, cultural opportunities and spatial experience that have reshaped the role of stations in the last decades: no longer mere points of transfer but multi-purpose environments where mobility converges with more functions, such as shopping, education, leisure and services.

“The overlays of the multi-layer city” they argue “have increased the importance of hubs, which now serve to ensure passage between several networks. Thus, they have acquired a critical, central function. Hubs are considered hybrid knots because their interchange function is mixed with other central functions like shopping, education, entertainment, and services.” (2011, 15)

More recently, Peter Eckart and Kai Vöckler have advanced the field of *mobility design*, emphasising that mobility should be understood primarily as a “qualitative experience”, despite traffic and transport which even in theory and practice refer more to a quantitative performance in moving between two points in space. (Vöckler & Eckart,

2022a, p.07). From this perspective, “mobility systems, therefore, not only consist of material infrastructures and modes of transport (the transportation system), but also of cultural concepts and symbolic languages that operate within them”. As the authors argue, “mobility design should therefore be seen as an interdisciplinary task. Design is the integrating element since it mediates between people and mobility systems through design decisions and shapes user experiences” (Vöckler & Eckart, 2022b, p.11-12). This approach recognises infrastructures as spaces of everyday life, subject to design choices, rather than neutral.

The very word *passages* resonate with this tradition. In his unfinished *Das Passagen-Werk (The Arcades Project)*, Walter Benjamin interpreted 19th-century Parisian arcades as emblematic sites of modernity, thresholds between commerce, leisure and urban spectacle, intersected in new spatial and social configurations. These galleries blurred the boundaries between public and private, consumption and experience, architecture and fantasy. For Benjamin, the *passage* was not merely a built form but a conceptual lens, revealing how infrastructures shape everyday life and inscribe aesthetic, symbolic and political meanings into the urban fabric. As experimental terrains of urbanity, *passages* became the stage of the *flaneur*, who navigated commodities and crowds while revealing new ways of inhabiting the city.

Significantly:

“This originally French word [ndr. here interpreted through its English transliteration] began to be used in France in the early 18th century to refer to the narrow private streets that ran through the interior of big residential blocks. The word comes from the latin passus, meaning a step, and relates to the movement, to the action of crossing a space” (Passages, 2017, p. C12).

In the 2010s, the *Passages (2017)* programme of the *Institut pour la Ville en Mouvement* extended the research investigating thresholds, crossings and intermodal transitions as fundamental elements of urban regeneration and for the reconnection of fragments of the contemporary city. The programme summarized the research outcomes in the form of a *manifesto* linking past experiences with “how we should design transitional spaces, today” (IVM, 2017, pp. 248-253). It also suggest that designing mobility transition spaces as more than just dots on a line would enable them to evolve into permanent public spaces that are an integral part of the city, rather than isolated concrete islands. The *Manifest du passage* underlined the importance of the experience of mobility as part of the right to the city, to stitch the fragmented city and propose urban transformations that also define day-to-day mobility as a non-ordinary experience – where you adapt, connect, support, anticipate and identify the user experience – in order to “find again the urbanity of mobility”.

Contemporary practice has absorbed and radicalised these insights. In *Our Urban Living Room (2023)*, COBE reflects on the transition “From Infrastructure to Public Space” as a guiding principle for their design in Copenhagen. The studio approach emphasises the shift from conceiving public infrastructure as a purely functional object to recognising it as a public space – where citizens actively shape the city through their daily activities, merging functionality with social life. As they argue, “cities should not only promote the safest and most convenient bicycle routes possible, but at the same time provide a beautiful public environment where infrastructure and public space are completely intertwined as a single urban organism” (COBE, 2023, p. 32). Interventions such as *Nørreport Station*, *Israels Plads*, and *Karen Blixens Plads* embody this design character, transforming former parking areas or infrastructural nodes into inclusive and vibrant urban living rooms. These projects illustrate how design can simultaneously accommodate technical demands and expand the civic and social capacities of the city, without having to distinguish the two components.

Finally, Studio Muoto's *Holy Highway (2023)* radicalised the critique of infrastructures by reframing motorways as environments to be re-appropriated by culture and collective imagination. Once celebrated “as a royal road to the future, a synonym of conquest and progress” (Muoto, 2023, p.5), their status has changed, yet they still maintain a romantic, utopian and nostalgic atmosphere. As Muoto observes, “this

architecture resembles the structures that we find on the edge of the roads, whose *Baudelairean* tones reveals to us all our contradictory desires, the desire for decadence and utopia, for progress and regression, for the eternal and transitory, for the sacred and profane, for eternal youth and for age” (Muoto, 2023, p. 9). More broadly, architectures of mobility embody this paradox, suspended between infrastructures of necessity and symbolic stages upon which societies rehearse their visions of progress and belonging.

Taken together, these reflections and projects aim to collect literature, experiences and experimentations over the last decades, from which the *Passages Conference* draws part of its essence. The objective of this proposal is to demonstrate that the architecture of mobility is not a marginal or recent concern, but a long-standing field of experimentation that remains partially unsolved. In the contemporary era, to debate on *Passages* means to inherit and update this intellectual lineage, conceiving infrastructures not as inert technical objects but as spaces of crossing, mediation, and encounter – an architecture of flowing and connecting spaces.

Intersection, Collateral, Evolution as Critical Trajectories

The notion of *passage* is not only a historical metaphor, but also a productive lens through which to read the multiplicity of phenomena addressed by this conference.

Infrastructures of mobility are not isolated technical objects; they are embedded

in wider spatial, ecological, and social processes. To capture this complexity, the contributions here collected in this volume have been articulated around three trajectories – *Intersection*, *Collateral*, and *Evolution*. These headings do not function as rigid categories, but rather as **research questions**, open to multiple interpretations and disciplinary approaches and aimed to comprehend the different forms, ways and interactions that can be explored in the relationship between city, users and infrastructures. Such framing allows us to construct a cartography of ongoing research and consolidated experiences, a heterogeneous landscape, where young researchers with a fresh perspective and alternative ideas, can interrogate the relationship between infrastructures, mobility, and urban life.

The first trajectory, *Intersection*, focuses on the spaces where infrastructures meet, overlap or cut across other systems. Historically, intersections have been points of intensity: railway stations where urban life condensed; ports that connected cities to global flows; urban crossroads that produced both congestion and sociability. Kelly Shannon and Marcel Smets have underlined that “*infrastructure may be seen as the ultimate public space: it is generally paid for by public authorities, it is accessible to almost everyone, and it marks a common itinerary or a collective place*” (2010, p. 184). Currently, the idea of *intersection* must be reconsidered, considering contemporary challenges. Multimodal hubs, bicycle stations, mobility interchanges, and transit-

oriented developments are no longer mere interfaces between different modes of transport, but civic environments where architecture plays a critical role. To conceive *intersections* as *passages* is therefore to recognise them as spaces of transition, encounter, and cultural significance. This recognition is supported by two parallel approaches: “Over, Under, Architecture” and as “Spaces of Transition”. The first is “an invitation to confront complexity, shaping layered, efficient, liveable mobility spaces” (Lepratto, 2025), while the second collects visions where “spaces of transition between past, present, and future”, but also as potential “opportunities to design in the city and outside potential hubs capable of driving the transformation of the built environment toward greater justice, sustainability, and inclusion” (Zanotto, 2025).

Stepping outside, *Collateral* redirects the attention towards the by-products and margins of the infrastructural systems, from the spaces in direct interference to the systems that intersect with the spaces of mobility. The interaction between highways, railways and waterways, for example, generates collateral landscapes: service areas, buffer zones, under and overpasses, interstitial voids. These spaces were usually treated as residual surfaces, if not entirely invisible to the eye of both the designer and the city-user. *Passages* tried to unfold such *collateral spaces* through a landscape approach, with the track “Landscapes of Re-Invention” as a series of attempts to re-frame the

mobility landscapes as a more qualitative experience, where the contributions debate on “the importance and necessity of engaging with the existing environment and its contradictions from a conceptual and theoretical perspective, while also emphasising the urgency of rethinking our living spaces” (Oldani, 2025). In a complementary way, “*Mobility and the Cityscape*” tries to “investigate the infrastructure’s space as the main background of everyday life and as an integral part of a strategic vision for the regeneration of cityscape” (Nifosi, 2025). The concept of margins as sites of potentiality finds profound resonance with contemporary ecological and social challenges. As demonstrated by several contributions, they have the capacity to establish settings for temporary uses, tactical interventions, and informal appropriation, thereby offering communities new forms of collective space.

The third trajectory, “*Evolution*”, focuses more on the time dimension of infrastructures. As per definition, anything related to movement cannot be considered stable in nature: infrastructures are dynamic entities which are subject to processes of transformation, adaptation, decay and re-interpretation. The experience of utopian visions from the 1960s – such as Archigram’s *mobile architectures*, Banham’s *Autopia*, and Constant’s *New Babylon* – has long associated mobility with the projection of futures. Evolution is present both as a vision from the past towards a more or less distant future, but also as a contemporary scenario of

what it is already happening, from urban-air mobility to alternative behaviours and forms of moving. “Unfolding new mobility” does this specifically: it debates on the short-term future from our present, towards “the emergence and evolution of new forms of mobility and new infrastructure, pushing the boundaries of visions and scenarios that could transform our cities and, above all, the ways we travel” (Setti, 2025). Instead, “*Between History and Utopia*” examines contemporary issues from the perspective of the past, even in a provocative way, where mobility is conceptualised through “extreme efforts of imagination” and critically “abandons commonplaces while exploring the passage and utopian thinking” (Zuccaro Marchi, 2025).

While the key questions around *Intersection*, *Collateral*, and *Evolution* provide a useful framework, the research experiences presented showcase how research on mobility and architecture extends even beyond these directions. Contributions address multiple scales simultaneously, ranging from metropolitan infrastructures to more local interventions, from architectural detail to territorial strategy – and from the recent past to the distant future, but with an eye on the present.

Towards an opening for reflections

The reframing of infrastructures through the conceptualisation of *Passages* as spaces of intersection, mediation, and encounter is indicative of the unique ability of architecture to transform systems that support movement,

reconfiguring them to create civic and collective environments. The contributions gathered in this book of abstracts – through an extensive atlas of strategies, critiques, scenarios, design and ideas – reaffirm that mobility is not reduced to a technical artefact but embeds an intrinsic and wider encyclopedia of situations, characters and influences.

The multiplicity of perspectives represented in the volume underlines how there are multiple ways of addressing the relationship between mobility and architecture. What emerges is a heterogeneous geography of approaches, methods and scales: from the design of small mobility-related facilities to the rethinking of metropolitan infrastructures; from tactical interventions in residual spaces to visionary speculations on the future of urban flows. This multiplicity reflects the complexity of mobility itself, which is simultaneously material and symbolic, functional and cultural, technical and political.

Mobility is at the core of the ongoing topics that require a rethinking for the ecological transition, throughout all the scales and degrees of implementation, and this cannot happen if we stick to the rigid prescriptive and functionalistic parameters that were a legacy of the last century and its ideology. Architecture must therefore reclaim its expertise as a discipline that can produce original, yet rigorous, atmospheres and shape both space, time and perception. At the same time, the urgency of the present demands that these reflections

extend beyond disciplinary boundaries. Architecture's contribution is to reveal and articulate the symbolic, aesthetic, and experiential dimensions of infrastructures – as Keller Easterling (2014) has framed as *infrastructure space*: “the hidden substrate of rules and relationships that is shaping the urban world” (p. 11). To engage with infrastructures as spaces of experience is not a decorative gesture nor an inert action, but a profound act of cultural and political responsibility.

The contributions collected here also invite us to consider mobility through the lens of *temporality*. Infrastructures evolve. They emerge, expand, decline and are re-appropriated, generating collateral landscapes, hybridize with ecological systems, and acquire new meanings as collective practices shift. The challenge for design is not only to construct new infrastructures – or to regenerate the existing ones – but also to imagine the future long-term transformations and to embed adaptability, permeability and openness into their very material and spatial forms. As Shannon and Smets wisely reminded us, “the public nature of transportation is forever in a process of evolution and transformation” (2010, p. 187), underlining that infrastructures are truly dynamic and continuously negotiated spaces.

The architecture of mobility must, finally, acknowledge three fundamental responsibilities. First, to contribute to the ecological transition by integrating infrastructures with environmental

systems and climate adaptation strategies, not in terms of compensation and regeneration, but as an active component of it. Second, to foster equity and inclusion by ensuring that infrastructures support accessibility and collective well-being, as well as a high level of publicness and usability of space. Lastly, to cultivate symbolic resonance, transforming everyday spaces of mobility into shared arenas where identities and cultures are negotiated. Ultimately, the ambition of *Passages. Architecture of Flowing and Connecting Spaces* is not intended to close a debate, but to open one and underline the importance of keeping the discussion alive. This book of abstracts offers a call to action: to truly rethink mobility infrastructures with a new eye, and to recognise architecture's essential role in this transformation. To inhabit infrastructures as *passages* – public, complementary, and vibrant spaces – by rethinking the infrastructures of the past and of the future, taking place right today.

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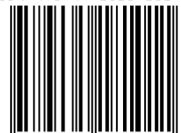
« *Ceci n'est pas une conférence sur la mobilité* »

As infrastructures of movement often prioritize technical efficiency, they risk neglecting the qualitative and experiential dimensions of space, an oversight that architectural thinking is distinctively positioned to address. Architecture offers a special perspective to address this gap, particularly in light of SDG 09-Industry, Innovation and Infrastructures and SDG 11-Sustainable Cities and Communities, and in reference to the principles of the EAAE Charter.

By engaging with mobility through a transversal approach, the conference explores how architectural design can contribute to reimagining spaces to overcome functionalist engineering limitations, also considering the ecological, climate and social impacts of mobility spaces as something more than mere built objects.

Through the examination of design methodologies and prototype case studies, the conference attempts to unveil the potential of architectural design and research tools to enrich unconventional discussions about mobility in urban and peri-urban contexts, its spatial configurations and experiential qualities. Although mobility is intended as a framework, the discourse will focus on the spaces above, below, in-between, and to the sides of the ordinary boundaries of architectures of flow, as well as on the spaces of new forms of movement. The conference «Passages. Architecture for Flowing and Connecting Spaces» invited contributions which critically address the role of Architecture in the Shaping the spaces of mobility, and in their interference, around the sessions of “Intersection”, “Collateral” and “Evolution”.

ISBN 978-94-6518-101-1



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