

REFLECTION PAPER

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Cross Domain Studio
Class of 2020

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1. The relationship between research and design.

One of the reasons why I decided to join the studio *City of the future* was for its necessary relationship between research and design as a way to investigate contemporary and future challenges of our cities. Reframing the role of Architecture on a broader, cross-disciplinary network, exploring social and economic issues which can lead to new reflections on the way of practicing architecture in contemporary and future context.

On this basis, looking back at this past year, I believe that my thesis project is very much the result of a constant intrinsic dialogue between research and design, which aims to translate and define my position on how contemporary socio-economic issues can be translated into an Architectural/Urban proposal, hence, how to operate as Architects in contemporary and transitioning times.

This year was essential to develop my own perspective in what it means to be a designer today. Throughout the whole year, I came to understand the importance of looking beyond architecture as such and by taking a multidisciplinary approach, which was strictly informed by the intense literature research undertaken. The extended research on infrastructure and economy became essential to inform certain design choices but, more importantly it helped to shape a general *modus operandi* towards designing into contemporary glo-cal urban contexts.

The research process was a constant discovery and exploration of different themes and theories from different disciplines, which I tried to connect by constantly reframing and posing the next question which led to a series of design choices. (from defining the site to the materialisation of an architectural solution).

During the first semester (until P2) I was exploring the role of infrastructure, both digital and physical and the way that mobility and ease of global movement was shaping new networked contemporary urban territories. In other words, it became crucial to incorporate mobility, accessibility and time within the realm of Architecture. In order to justify such a splintering phenomenon, it was clear to me that such mechanism developed to prioritise highly economically valuable clusters. Hence the importance of further researching into the field of economy to add another tile to the complex mosaic of what it implies to design in contemporary cities.

This second phase of research brought me to explore a branch of today's experience based economic model called culture economy, where art, cinema, fashion and other culture related activities became part of the economy, which every year sees a high flux of international movement of people and goods among cities which promote such economic model. This phenomenon takes the name of Festivalisation, where cities civic places are 'borrowed' to host a global flux of people interested in a particular cultural event, transforming a local space into a glocal dichotomic space where a global and a local user have to cohabit.

More steps were taken into this constant reframing, layering and diverging into different fields in order to parallelly inform specific design steps and progress into the design. Moreover, I think that before informing on the design, the theoretical framework helped me to frame a problematic/ phenomenon which expresses my own personal view on what it will require to design for contemporary/future cities.

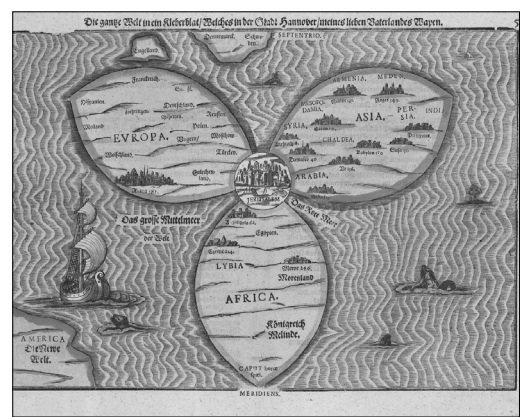
Looking back at this year I can point out how every step of the research informed a design choice. For instance, the location of my thesis project (Milan) was a consequence of the research into event-driven tourism and the framing of this topic of festivalisation of culture economy. The choice of the site of



Clustering and Tunnel effect



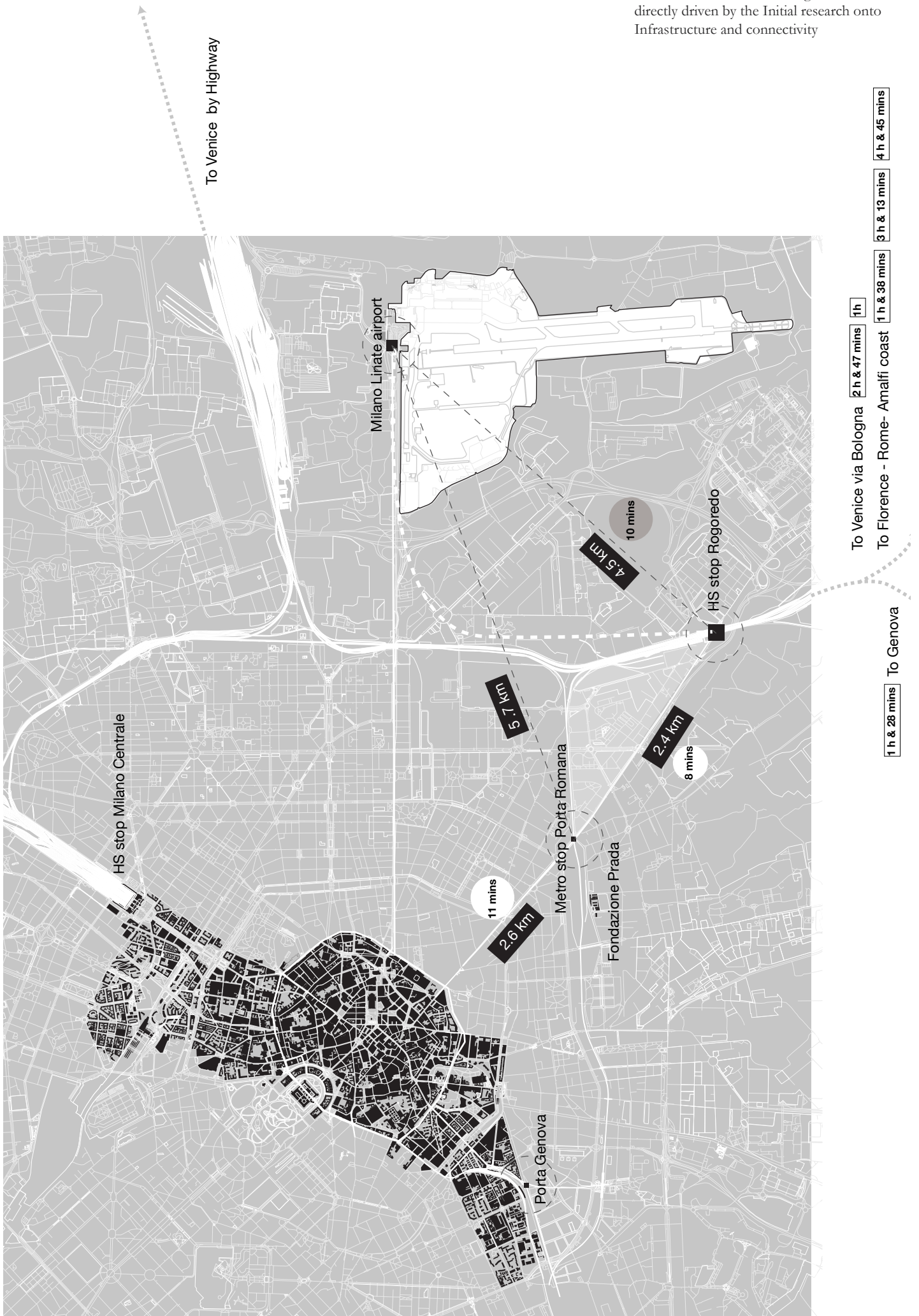
Global & Local coistency with the same space



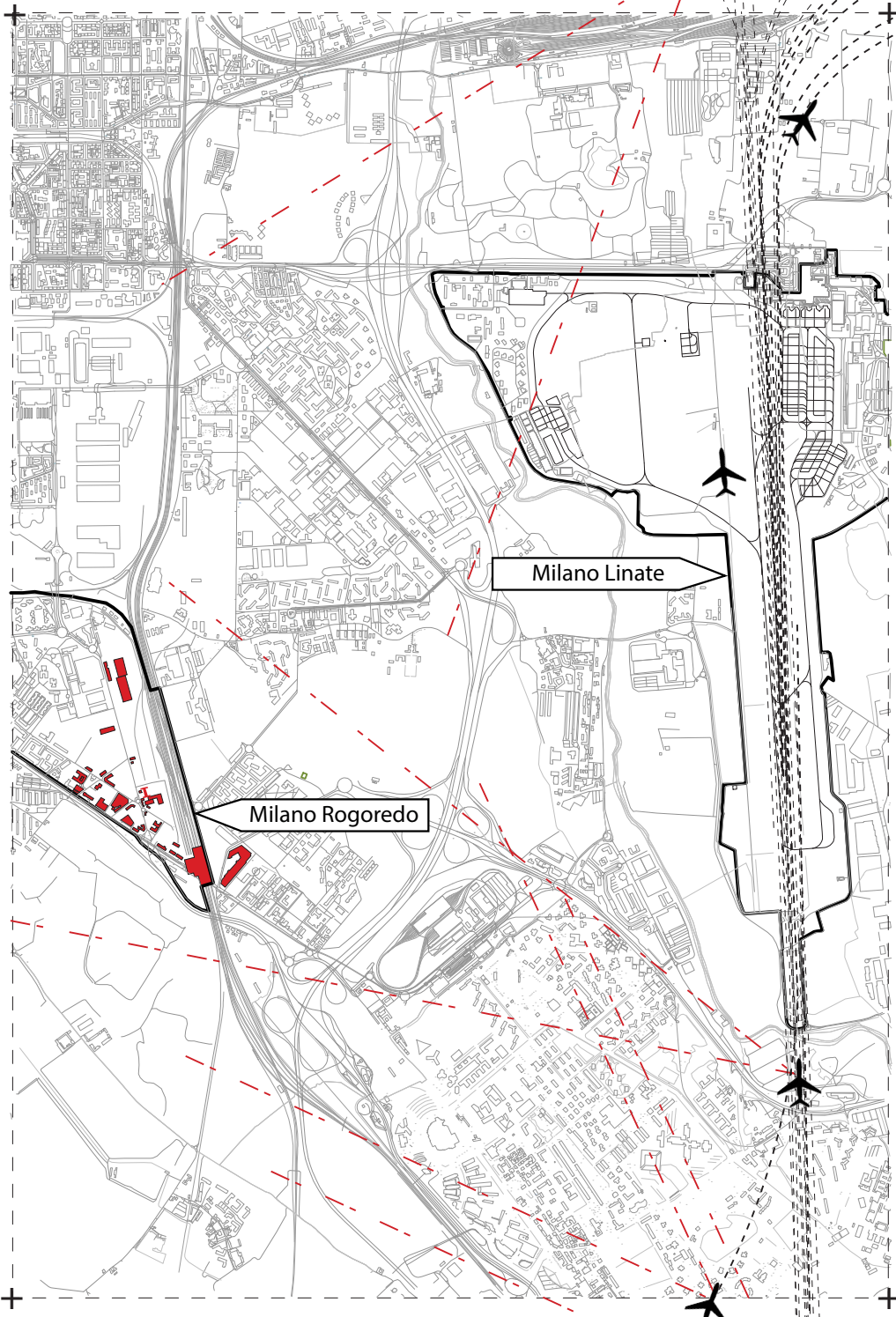
Multiplicity of scales

The effects of Splintering Urbanism:
 Images showing the initial theoretical
 investigation into infrastructural splintering
 effects

The choice of the site of Rogoredo was directly driven by the Initial research onto Infrastructure and connectivity



Vision of Rogoredo from the Airplane as
a new key ple for Milan's global events and
cultural manifestations



Rogoredo (ex railway yard) was clearly informed by the necessity of looking for an area which embraced this contemporary dichotomy, a space of the city of Milan, which was highly connected at a local, national and international scale. Moreover, the way the design tries to express a dichotomy on all scales, from its programme flexibility, internal space size, materiality choice and orientation aims to answer the questions raised by the research and to manifest within the design my position derived from the theoretical framework.

To conclude this chapter on the relationship research-design I believe that my thesis design proposal represents a first attempt at a bigger *modus operandi* I will carry onto my professional career, in order to express and translate current and future socio-economic phenomena into design.

2. The relationship between the graduation project, the studio topic, and the master track architecture.

In my opinion, the graduation studio *City of the future* aims to investigate and speculate possible scenarios on innovative and/or alternative in the broader understanding of how cities will operate in the future (either recent or long term). As part of the studio philosophy, there is not a strict agenda that every student has to follow, which leaves space to different and many interpretations on what the future will be like and moreover, it implies the question on what is a city today (or tomorrow)? What are the factors that are transforming, or will transform the way we live? These were the sparks of build up onto a vague initial fascination on the way time, speed and accessibility were becoming a crucial factor in the built environment of contemporary and future cities.

I believe that my graduation project benefits from the cross disciplinary approach where architects, urbanists, transport and logistics sit together to share opinions and different perspectives. I believe that the seminar offered by the studio in the first semester was crucial to generate a topic of discussions on very relevant thematics which fed the necessary theoretical framework of my initial research. This weekly debate opened up the key references and literature that initiated my project.

Moreover, I believe that the variety of themes that were discussed was also crucial, both for my thesis development but also to brainstorm ideas onto future scenarios which embedded the studio philosophy. For instance, The discussion and literature review on Graham, S., & Marvin S. Book on Splintering urbanism led me to explore concepts such clustering, tunnel effect and other spatial manifestations of this splintering phenomenon which helped to question how is this phenomenon relevant today, and what could be the contemporary and future splintering effect. (Events as networks, the following investigation of the contemporary role of cultural events as an economic asset).

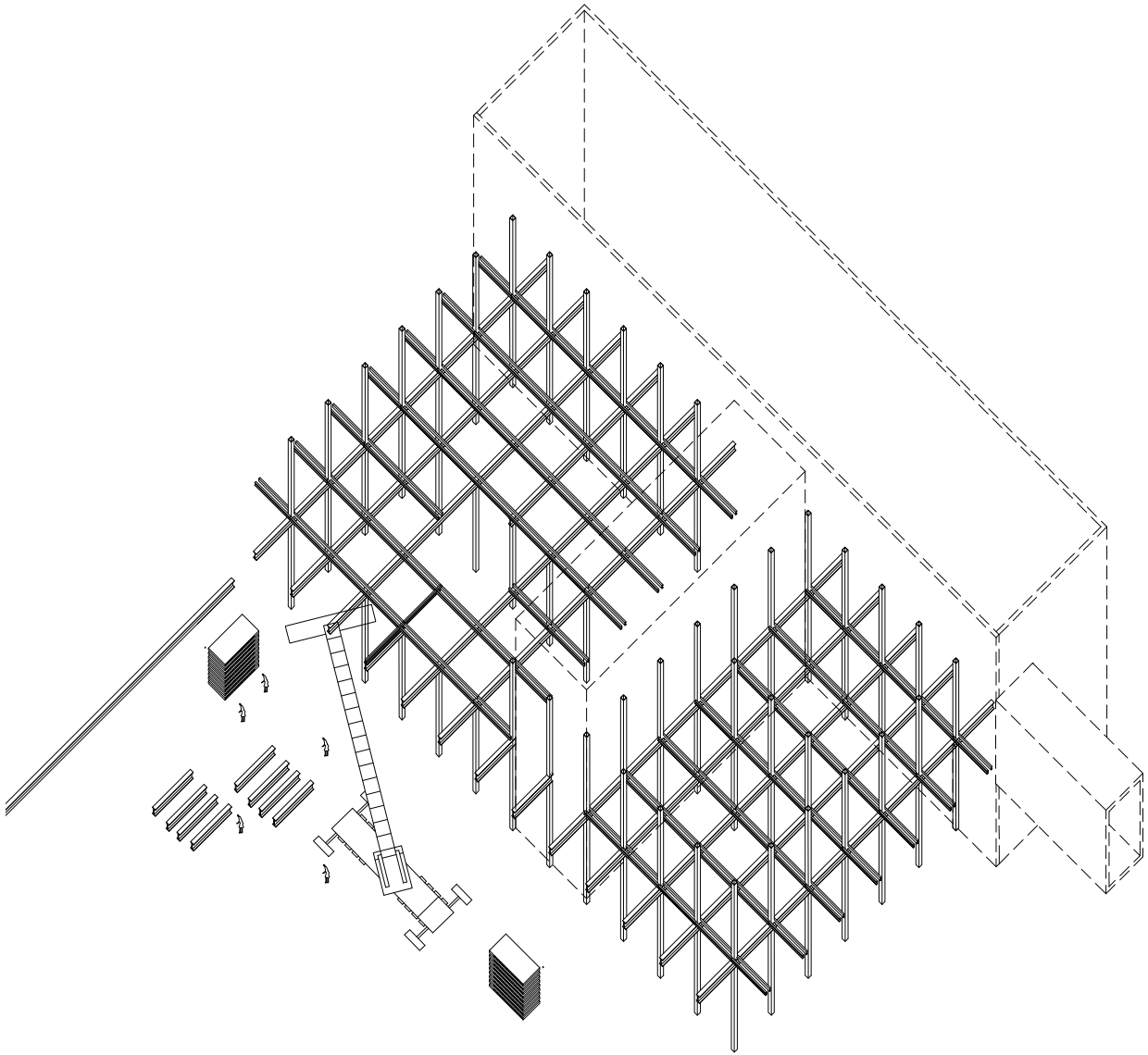
In other words, the keywords that link the graduation project, the studio topic on the future of our cities and the master track of architecture are : variety and flexibility.

Being exposed to different experts from different fields was as important as being in a constant dialogue between each other (students). Especially in the first semester, despite the different direction that each of our graduation projects was taking, it was always possible to have a confrontation and understand the way similar tematics were treated, and translate into architecture, sometimes also enabling us to reflect upon how to tackle the next phase. The variety of perspectives enriched each other's projects, embodied the cross disciplinary approach of the studio and embedded what I believe is the core of a master in architecture. A group of individuals that share their findings and expertise in constant conversation to offer innovative perspectives on what it means to practice Architecture in contemporary and future scenarios.

The second aspect is of course flexibility. Given the topic theme, treating uncertain conditions, the concept of reversibility was very important. Especially in my case, where I base my research onto economic 'trends' which could change in the future, it was important that the design enhanced this reversibility within its principles and be able to adapt and change. This is also a key aspect that relates my thesis to the studio topic. Looking into reversible technical solutions in order to avoid that our solutions can be the problem of the future. In my opinion, as part of a master in architecture is also important to 'elevate' the graduation project as a way to respond to social and cultural dilemmas, always maintaining that level of truthness to the practice of Architecture as operating in the built environment.

Especially in my case, this pandemic outbreak which has revolutionized the way we live, was a clear alarm to always allow for flexibility and expect the unexpected, by the use of phasing strategies and reversible construction techniques.

As part of a master track in architecture I think that my graduation project offers a relevant innovative perspective on different pressing issues and themes of our current and future society. The way architecture can address/ operate in these more common glocal urban fabrics spread among our cities, dealing with coexistence of local and global citizens. It offers an interesting approach in the way infrastructural barriers can be reused and transformed while not demolished. Finally I believe that cultural economy will have an even bigger impact once the epidemic status is past, since people will want to travel and connect more than ever, putting such themes under the spotlight of how to design our cities of the future.



Future proof constructions:
Design construction diagram showing the use of a dry , modular system in order to allow for future flexibility and changes and possible desassemblage

3. Elaboration on research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevance of the work.

The first step that defines my research approach, derives from the understanding of the role that event assumed in contemporary cities. Following an investigation of the etymological meaning of the word event I was able to frame the terms of my research. Among the notion of temporality, memorability, and remembrance (in the sense of practice of memory, events worth remembering), a modern additional description was added, which expands the notion or the word to any event or show that attracts the public.

By the use of a cross disciplinary research, focusing on theories related to economic studies, I researched into the post-industrial socio-economic evolution which led towards today's economic model based on cultural economy.

The shift of events from a cultural practice to its contemporary value of economic asset used to attract global tourism, clarifies the terms framing my approach towards a territorial investigation focusing on movement, flux, migration, infrastructure and network. For this reason my initial approach focuses on a theory led research driven by Stephen Graham, Simon Marvin and Keller Easterling investigating networks and systems. I initially used an etic viewpoint to gain an overview of the relationships that are linking major contemporary cities in a linear network of events.

I used territorial investigation by the use of cartography which reveals networks and connections. To support this etic approach I also conducted a quantitative research to find out numbers and affluence of visitors to selected events, passengers using airports and trains in the time frame and place where the event occurs.

If on one side the mapping of the local network and physical infrastructure will provide insights on quantitative data of number of passengers, capacity and connectivity needed to support the event. On the other end, the local nature of the manifestation of events brings time at the centre of discussion. Moreover, the concept of cycle and the alternation of the events becomes the real scope of the research. For this reason, mapping which implies a temporal dimension becomes crucial for this investigation. The use of serial photographic documentation becomes a key tool to explore temporality.

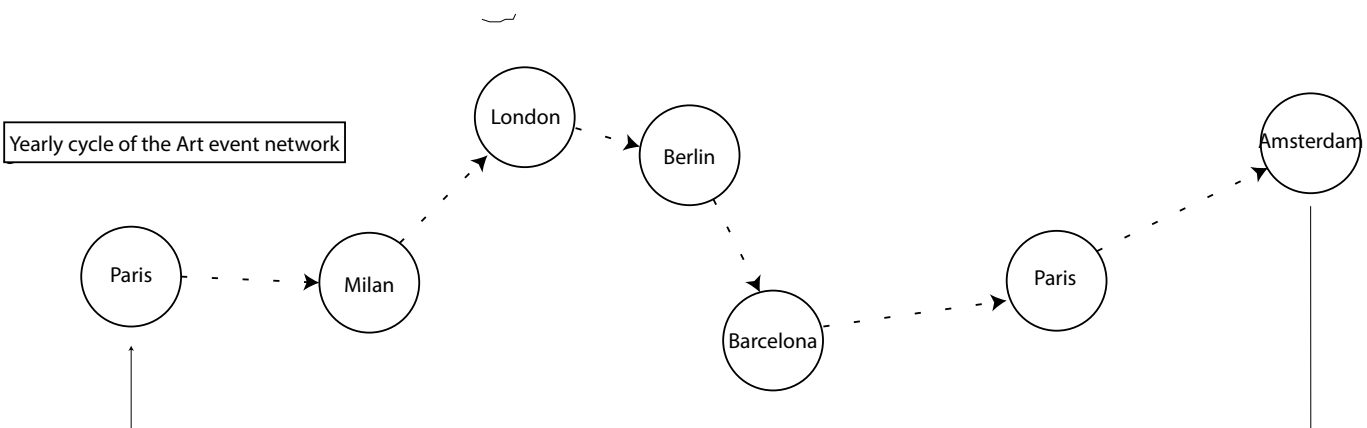
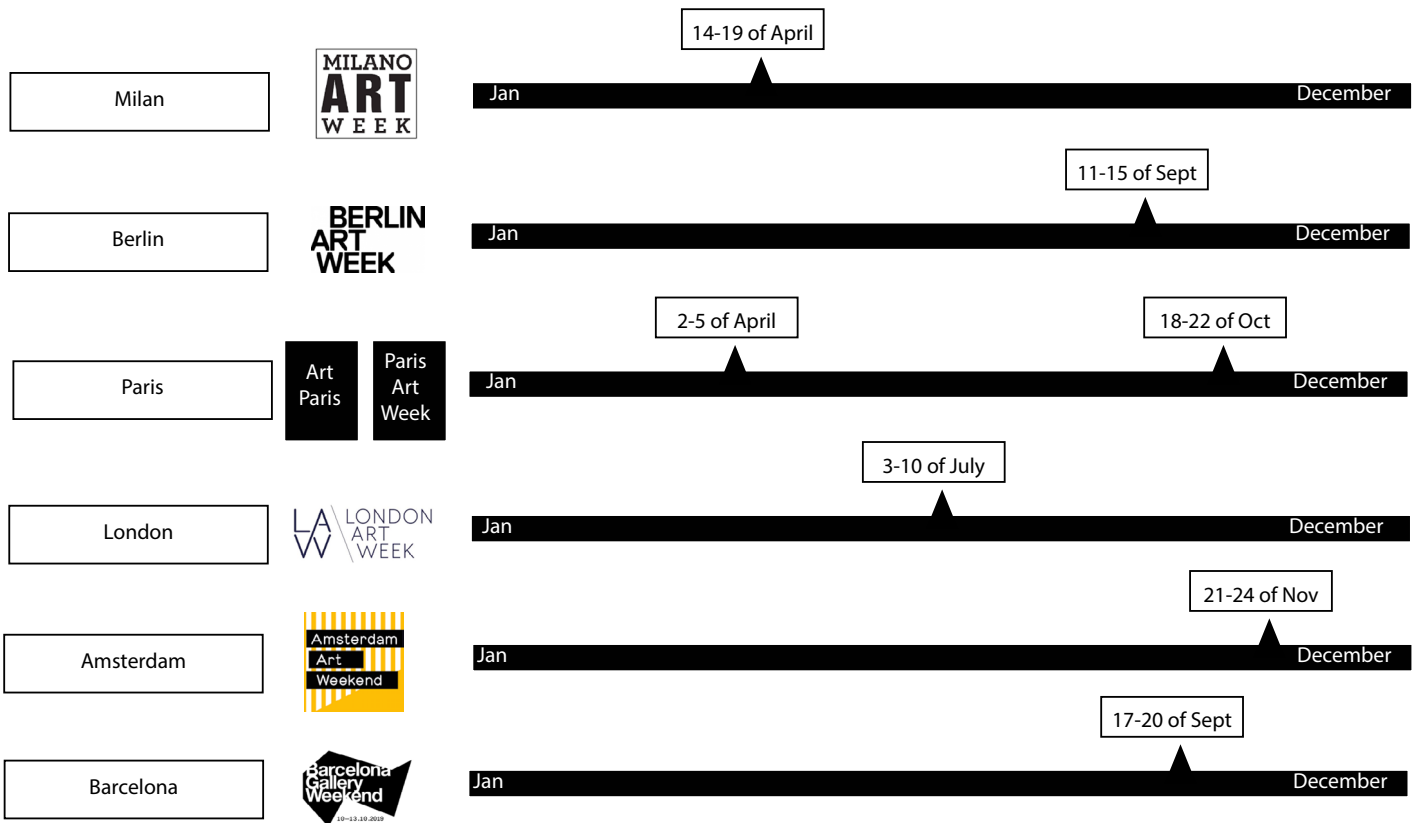
Moreover, I feel that my approach can indirectly contribute towards the epistemic framework of praxeology, because it analyses a modern way of living, the birth of a global community of nomads that constantly move around the globe from one city to the other.

Great part of my research related to design revolves around the concept of staging, selling, advertising, front and back, views, framing hence my research into the American architecture of the 60' based on entertainment and the architecture which relate to the theme parks and movie industry.

Finally I have recently visited the Cinecittà studios in Rome to study and gather information on the way architecture is used to stage and create an experience and I visited Milan multiple times and explored the role of signage and advertisements within the city.



Welcome to Culture Economy
 Milan's annual plan of thematic events to attract international event-driven tourism and using culture as an economic asset



Culture as Networks.
A diagram map showing the cycle of all European capitals culture based events.

4. The relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework.

The graduation project investigates the role that architecture could play to deal with a very contemporary issue related to public space and its dichotomic function of civic space and economic space. One of the goal of my thesis was indeed to investigate what can be described as a new normality of contemporary cities, where public space is often deprived from its civic role and transformed into a space for tourism, and in general for an economic gain. In other words, contemporary architecture is very much dependent on the economy and used as a tool to make money, which often means that the public space is not designed for its local users, but for a client with financial return ambitions.

As part of the hyper connected world we now live in, it became very hard to design spaces that embrace this existential dichotomy where different users, and stakeholders demand for complete different spacial requirements.

In my project I try to design a space that can serve both purposes. A space that fulfills its economic duties while it can also provide a qualitative improvement on a local scale.

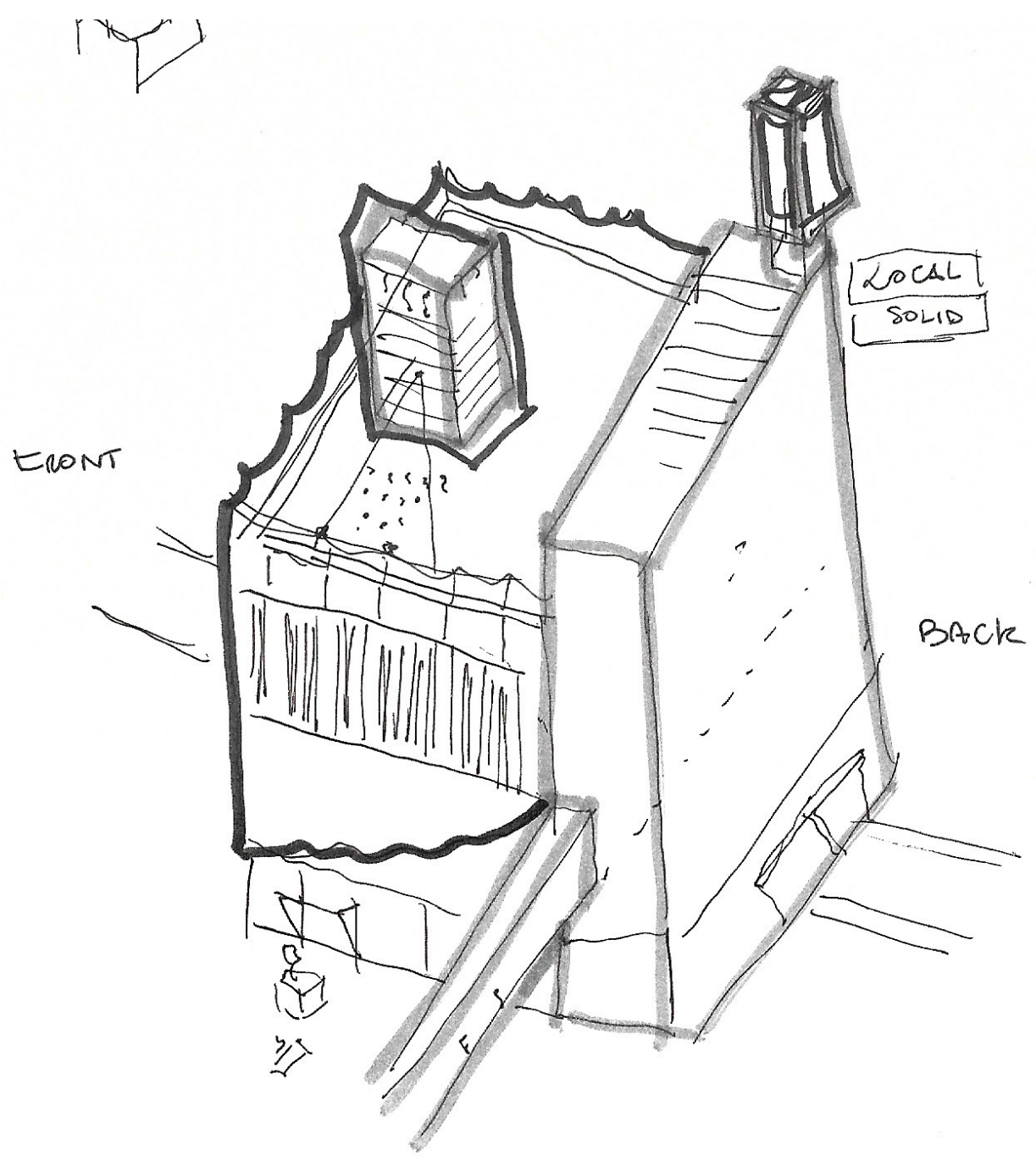
I believe this is one of the biggest social dilemma and duties that not only on my project but, on a professional level every architect should acknowledge. For this reason I stress the importance of understanding and researching the socio-economic context of both, global economy and local neighbourhood, in order to always address both audiences.

For these reasons I have been looking in great depth into theatrical and cinematographic techniques that can be borrowed and used in order to design spaces that can host simultaneously two different performances. The everyday life and events of global scale. In order to embrace and design for such dichotomic scenarios, I used specific materials, spacial arrangements and technical choices that allow me to create two emotions within the same space. Moreover, trying to express this dichotomy on all scales from architecture to urban, to strategic in order to produce a graduation project which can inform a way to address this dilemma where architecture and architects can design for both audiences.

I believe that my project also offer an alternative on how to use the economic forces (in my case the festivalisation of the city of Milan) in order to propose spatial solutions that aim to improve segregated outskirts areas of the city of Milan, by revaluing an abandoned rail yard, reusing and expressing the local qualities of the site and providing new public spaces, access and cultural activities by designing.



Learning from Cinecitta. A site visit to the Cinema studios in Rome to learn the art of staging and the architecture of setting up a performance.



Exploring the Architecture of Dichotomy
Sketch showing the contrasting facade
interplay and materials of the design.

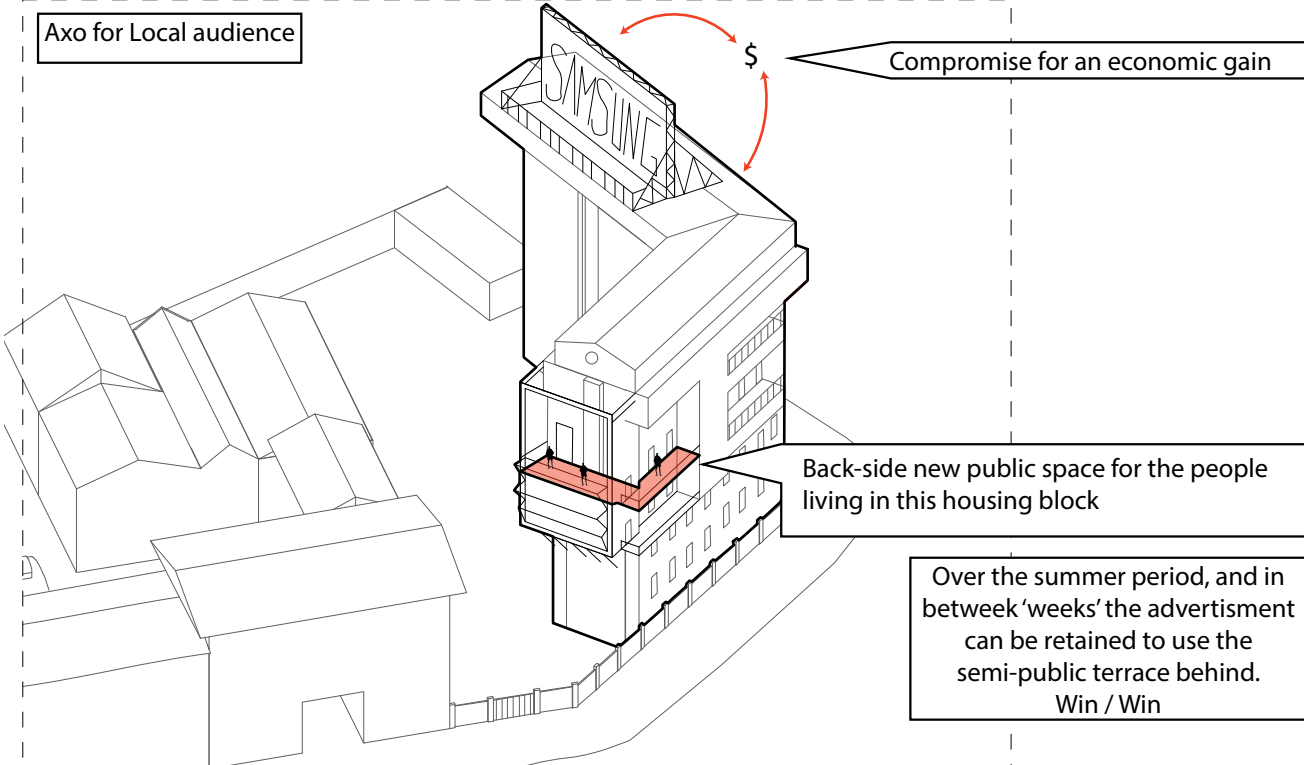
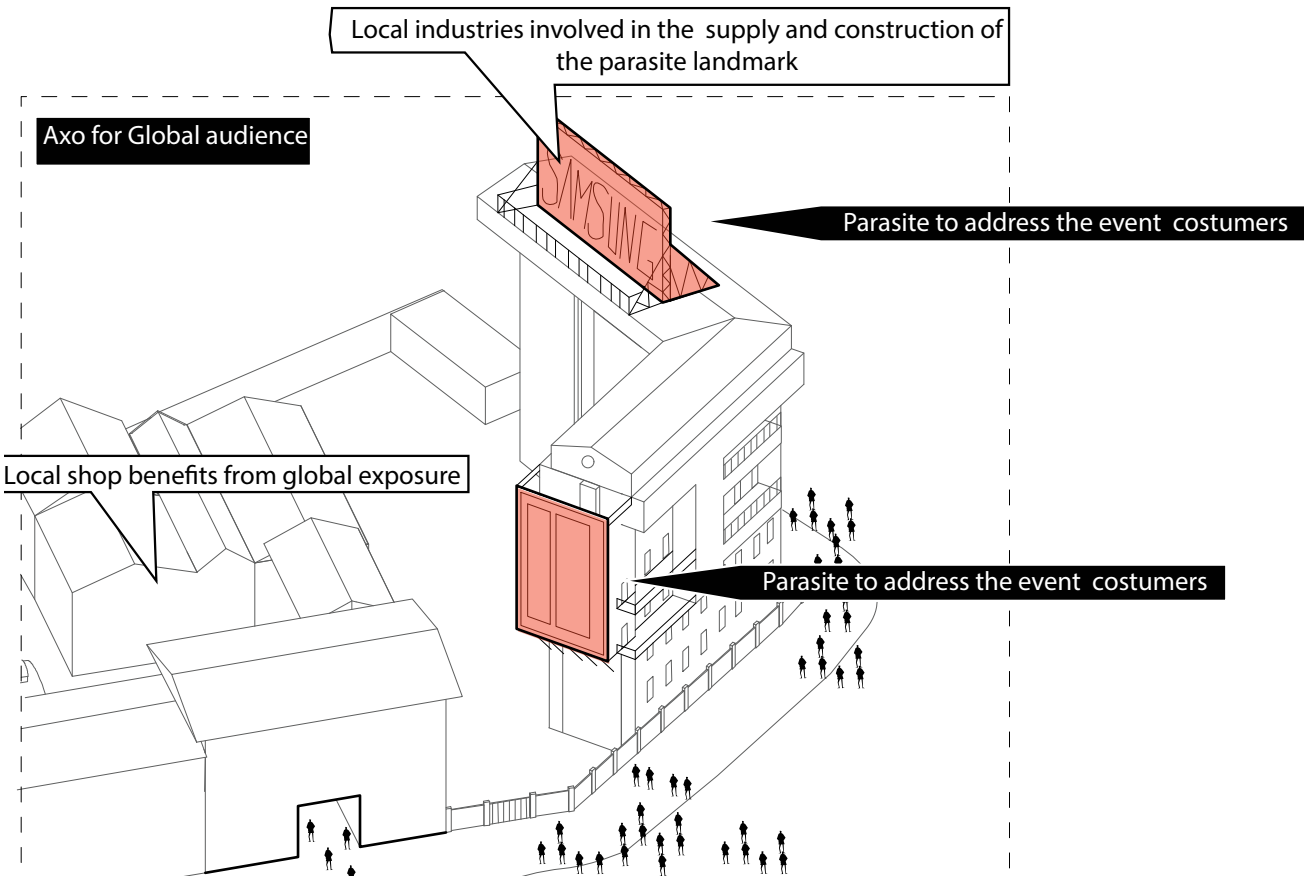


Diagram showing the dichotomy of Global and Local coexistence exploring possible win win situations.

5. Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in (i) doing the research, (ii, if applicable) elaborating the design and (iii) potential applications of the results in practice.

Because of the nature of the project, this graduation year has been a constant search of balance, from the very beginning to its conclusion. There have been and there are ethical concerns through the whole process from research to design. When tackling and researching dichotomic designs that gumble between money driven choices and social concerns, the ethical aspects are always extremely important to keep in mind through the whole process.

Starting from the research phase I was exploring and deeply researching this general connection between economy and architecture, with particular focus of course in the key role of infrastructure. During the initial phase, until P2 I was simply investigating the phenomenon and saw the spatial implication that this had on the built environment. For example I was looking at infrastructural bypass such as premium connections (from bridges, airlines, metro etc) where imposed over the urban territories to connect highly valuable zones (clusters). For instance the case of Financial districts and how the territorial distance was bridged by the use of high speed infrastructural axes. I was interested to understand the economic rules that allowed such prioritisation of value over space.

Later on, when I started to research onto the experience economy and how it shift from a product to an experience based system I started to explore the cases of the 60' 70' where Phenomenon such as Disney, Las Vegas expressed a very unique Architectural language and spatial characteristics based on Experience, theatrical set up, views, impact branding, but also the whole logistic and infrastructural backbone that such Experience relied upon.

I was indeed, searching and forecasting a similar connection that could be applied between this theoretical research and the current Festivalisation phenomenon taking place among the capitals of Europe, including Milan.

The main ethical dilemma I had was at my P2 when I was warned and reminded that such approach of opening up local context to a global audience is a very delicate process and needs to be a positive intervention for the locals, without transforming an area of Milan in a Disneyfied global space used as a tourist attraction.

In other words I was faced to the risks and challenges that, in my opinion, characterise today's contemporary cities: How to design glo-cal spaces that deal with such necessary dichotomy where the global does not cannibalise the local.

From this there are of course a whole series of sub-ethical issues that come with it, such the process of gentrification, disruption of local social infrastructure, and the risks concerned to improving a space without causing damage to its current residents.

I believe it was not until after P3 that I truly acknowledged the complexity of my project and opted for a strategic change. My initial design consisted in a series of thematic build, each of them designed for a specific cultural activity which could both provide a space that can get used for its global and local audience. However, the scale of the project was hard to manage and the risks of transforming this site in a thematic centre was too high.

I so decided to break down the project in phases and focus on one of these elements I was designing in order to truly work out and fully express this dichotomy at all scales (from spatial, technical, material etc) in order to set up specific rules that can guide towards the design of the other buildings that can follow the same principles, not only to transform Scalo Rogoredo in a pole for Milan's culture identity but also as a mock-up for smaller interventions across the city that can embrace this necessary dichotomy of contemporary cities.

Moreover, I was trying to solve clear local issues and integrate them within the design while also providing a multifunctional space that can host this multiscalar and multiuser environment.

I have explored the idea of revaluing this infrastructural abandoned node and preserving most of its abandoned buildings to express a very clear statement about sustainability and the importance of repurposing existing buildings. The new intervention explores technical solutions that allow for reversibility so that the building can be modified or used for a different purpose in the future (especially considering the impact that this pandemic is having to our lives routine and the built environment)

On one hand , I believe I took all the necessary measurements and reflected upon my graduation project in order to design a space that aims to answer the thematic raised from the research and allow for future changes in case my assumptions and theories were not accurate. I believe the most ethical thing designers can do is in fact to allow others to change and adapt in the future the work that we assume was right in the present.

To conclude, I believe that such a project can have a very important impact in practice, providing a perspective on how to design from glo-cal urban scenarios, but also for the city of Milan, especially on a post-pandemic scenario where there is a clear need to restart the economy and people will want to be able to travel and experience more than before. Having said that, it is just as important that the job as an Architect is part of a wider network and cooperate with policy makers, municipalities, communities in order to guarantee the success of this cross disciplinary project.

6. Entrepreneurship annotation

Alongside my academic master degree at TU Delft, I was very interested to further explore the possibility to integrate my architectural academic education with the world of entrepreneurship. I believe that such, cross-disciplinary attitude of thinking outside what is considered architecture, can benefit my future career as a contemporary architect.

During my first year of Master I decided to take part in the entrepreneurship annotation project offered here at TU Delft, completing a total of 21 credits parallel to my architectural master, gaining great insights and knowledge on how to translate entrepreneurial thinking into Architecture.

Moreover, my Msc2 theory thesis topic, I was researching onto the concept of value in contemporary architecture and how it is intrinsically connected to the capitalistic economic market.

As it can clearly be seen, from the topic of my graduation project and the way I approached it, such entrepreneurial mindset is very much present in my way of thinking; always looking to integrate architectural solutions which could resolve spatial challenges as much as economic ones.

As part of the requirements to achieve the annotation in Entrepreneurship, alongside my diploma, I am in the process of writing an additional report which explores such dynamics of my graduation project.

My thesis project explores the opportunity and challenge that the city of Milan is facing, looking for new design strategies for these 7 major abandoned railway yards, surrounding the city. Looking into spatial solutions that can transform what today is an infrastructural barrier into a valuable public space of the future. Moreover, the municipality of Milan and the Italian railways company had found an agreement to change the land-use from transportation to new building plots for all these seven railway yards areas.

Considering my theoretical research into the relationship between infrastructure and current cultural economy, particularly in regards to the city of Milan, the goal of my entrepreneurial integration will focus on architectural solutions to maintain and revalue the railway yard of Rogoredo (Milan) and its surrounding. As part of my project I have been exploring the possibility of re-valuing the existing infrastructural framework of the site, no longer as a transit hub but as a construction hub, and how it could lead to the design of flexible, reversible public spaces to host these series of cultural/economic events, and improving the local contexts.

In other words, looking at the advantages (economical and sustainable) of avoiding a tabula rasa scenario of the site, and instead reusing, and integrate the existing infrastructural framework (from train tracks, train cars, abandoned warehouse, etc) together with the series of industrial clusters that are present in the proximity of the site, to regenerate the area from an ex-mobility node to future proof, flexible construction arteria which can rely onto local (on-site) construction industries.

Eventually transforming Rogoredo as one of the key glo-cal cultural nodes of the city of Milan.

As part of my integrated entrepreneurial strategy I have considered, and aim to expand upon the following points:

- Cultural economy (fundamental research into current socio-economic background)
- Experience economy (fundamental research into current socio-economic background)

- Infrastructural heritage (revaluing the existing abandoned buildings limiting new constructions if possible)
- Architecture & train tracks (rethinking the train tracks as a key architectural and urban element to facilitate the assembly and disassembly for cyclical cultural events)
- Modular and reversible design (The construction techniques of the new intervention allows for future adaptation and reversibility by dry construction and innovative dismountable techniques)
- 'Km 0' (The proposed logistics of the project, very much rely onto the strength and existing industrial business of the imminent area, lowering the construction costs looking, reducing CO2 emissions due to import of materials , and bring economic advantages to the local industries)