

REFLECTION

INTRODUCTION

My graduation project, titled *On the Move*, emerged from a curiosity about the future of mobility and the cultural potential of large-scale transportation infrastructure.

Initially driven by an interest and inspiration by the Italian Futurism and its rhythms of movement that shape cities, the project quickly became a personal exploration of how architecture can mediate between functionality and identity. Centered on Milan's Central Station—an iconic yet often impersonal node in the city's urban system—the proposal seeks to transform the station from a place of mere transit into an active civic agent.

The project investigates how infrastructure, particularly one as monumental and symbolic as Milan Centrale, can host not just flows of passengers, but also **flows of culture, memory, and experience**. By integrating a new layer of public programming, including the reuse of Milan's historic ATM trams as mobile cultural units, the proposal envisions a hybrid station that extends its presence beyond its physical boundaries, activating the city in sync with its cultural calendar.

These tram units become instruments of connection and continuity, allowing events to circulate through the city while maintaining a dialogue with the station as their anchor. In this way, the design reflects a belief that mobility should not only move people physically, but emotionally and culturally as well. Throughout the development process, I was challenged to rethink questions of temporality, adaptability, and urban presence—shifting the project from a conventional infrastructural brief to a broader inquiry into how architectural design can contribute to a city's cultural metabolism.

RESEARCH & DESIGN

The relationship between research and design in my graduation project was one of continuous exchange—each phase testing, refining, and expanding the other. Guided by the central research question, “How can Milan’s Central Station be transformed into a flexible, responsive, and scalable urban hub that addresses evolving cultural demands?”, the thesis began by identifying a conceptual and spatial gap in current station design: while infrastructural updates have prioritized mobility and commerce, the integration of cultural programming remains marginal and underdeveloped.

This recognition framed my research not as a search for immediate solutions, but as a process of opening possibilities—exploring how culture could be spatially embedded in a typology that has traditionally resisted flexibility or civic intimacy.

The absence of clear precedents for this kind of cultural-mobility hybridization did not hinder the design process; on the contrary, it activated it. The theoretical ambiguity became fertile ground for iterative and speculative design testing. Early on, I realized that the research raised more questions than it resolved, particularly around program definition, spatial organization, and temporal adaptability. For instance, while the idea of activating historical trams as mobile cultural venues emerged from cultural mapping and stakeholder analysis, it was only through successive spatial experiments that their architectural and urban role could be fully understood. These mobile interventions—trams as traveling stages, restaurants, or workshops—allowed the project to bridge the static monumental scale of the station with the dispersed rhythms of Milan’s event calendar.

At the same time, the act of designing revealed limitations in the original research framework. Some assumptions about user flows, program

sizing, and depot logistics had to be revisited and re-validated. This prompted a back-and-forth dynamic where speculative massings tested the feasibility of cultural adaptability, and research recalibrated the scope and operational logic of the design.

As a result, the process was not a linear translation of theory into form, but a layered and responsive development, where the design brief itself evolved alongside the architecture. Ultimately, it was this productive tension—between grounded investigation and open-ended speculation—that gave the project its critical depth and conceptual coherence.

THESIS TOPIC & STUDIO TOPIC

The relationship between my thesis topic and the studio theme Bodies and Buildings: Milan is rooted in a shared ambition to reimagine public architecture as a medium for social, cultural, and urban transformation. Within the studio's structured framework—comprising typology, context, and thematic lens—my work emerged at the intersection of the Flow typology (train station), the city of Milan, and the research lens of Culture. The Culture group, explored how Milan's cultural landscape—ranging from literature to fashion, from research to leisure—manifests spatially in its public and private spaces.

This thematic lens prompted us to critically reflect on how cultural identity shapes, and is shaped by, the built environment.

My graduation project, *On the Move*, builds directly on these foundations by proposing a transformation of Milan's Central Station from a mono-functional transit hub into a responsive cultural infrastructure. In particular, I investigated how culture—understood not only as static content but as dynamic practice—can travel across the city, occupy underused temporal gaps in infrastructure, and activate civic life in new ways. By incorporating Milan's historic trams as mobile cultural venues and embedding a Mobile Experience Centre into the station fabric, the project engages with the Culture group's broader ambition to make Milan's identity more visible, adaptable, and responsive to global trends while preserving its unique local character.

The studio's methodological structure—anchored in collaborative research on program, site, and client—also supported the transition from theoretical inquiry to spatial proposition.

Our group's comparative study of building typologies and cultural manifestations in

Milan revealed recurring tensions between monumental form and ephemeral activity, between fixed architecture and moving culture. My project responded to this by proposing not only a spatial reorganization of the station, but also a new kind of urban rhythm—one that accommodates both the flows of people and the pulses of Milan's cultural calendar. In doing so, the project does not treat “culture” as a decorative or secondary layer, but as a structuring principle that informs layout, materiality, and the experience of movement itself.

Ultimately, the synergy between my thesis and the studio theme lies in a shared belief: that public architecture must be both infrastructural and imaginative, grounded in real urban conditions but open to redefinition.

The Culture lens enabled my thesis to become not just a speculative redesign of Milan Centrale, but a **critical proposition for how infrastructure can become an active participant in the cultural life of a city.**

STUDENT & STUDIO RESEARCH METHODS

The research approach adopted in my graduation project was shaped by the multi-scalar framework of the Complex Projects: Bodies and Buildings 2025 studio, structured across three levels—thematic group, typological group, and individual.

At the thematic level, I was part of the Culture cluster, which explored how Milan's public architecture could respond to and reflect its complex cultural identity. Led by Benjamin Groothuijse and Maria Finagina, our group examined how spaces for literature, leisure, fashion, design, bureaucracy and research collectively shape the city's image, while also identifying emerging tensions between institutional narratives and more dynamic, event-based cultural practices. To capture these layers, we collectively built a temporal and geographical mapping of Milan and assembled a shared analytical framework that examined the spatial implications of different cultural sectors. This collaborative work not only provided a contextual foundation for our individual projects, but also encouraged us to imagine new architectural responses to cultural fragmentation, temporality, and mobility.

At the typological level, and through comparative case study models and typological diagrams, explored how circulation, access, and spatial hierarchy operate within major rail hubs, with a particular focus on how stations negotiate their dual identity as both infrastructural machines and public spaces.

This typological research deepened my understanding of spatial sequences, programmatic adjacencies, and multimodal transitions—knowledge that later informed how I reorganized the flows and layers of Milan's Central Station. The typological evolution research also served as a space for method sharing, where we critically assessed not only station architecture, but also how

its monumental scale could be rethought to host softer, more civic-oriented programs.

Individually, I built upon this collective foundation by focusing my research on three pillars: site, program, and client. My design brief, developed for the P2 presentation, was grounded in historical & typological research, Site mapping, Client visions, and programming.

Inspired by Milan's cultural calendar and decentralized cultural venues, I proposed to increase the use of tram lines and repurpose historic tram units as mobile cultural devices.

This idea evolved through mapping, temporal implications, and feedback sessions, and became a central speculative element of the project. This cyclical method of testing theory through form, and refining theory through design, allowed the final proposal to embody both analytical precision and imaginative flexibility.

SOCIAL, PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This graduation project responds to a broader societal need to rethink the role of large-scale infrastructure in contemporary cities—not only as technical systems for movement, but as meaningful public spaces that actively participate in urban life. In many metropolitan contexts, train stations remain underutilized outside of transit hours, and their monumental nature often creates a spatial and symbolic disconnect from the everyday cultural practices of the city.

On the Move engages this gap by proposing a model of flexible infrastructure that can accommodate evolving social demands, cultural rhythms, and spatial reconfigurations over time. At its core, the project advocates for a more sustainable and culturally sensitive approach to urban architecture—one that resists the logic of demolition and replacement, and instead embraces transformation and coexistence. By reusing Milan's historic tram network as a distributed cultural platform, the design taps into an underexplored layer of mobility, suggesting how lightweight, adaptive structures can amplify the civic role of existing urban systems.

From a professional perspective, the project contributes to ongoing architectural discussions around adaptive reuse, temporality in public buildings, and programmatic hybridity. It questions the conventional one-building-one-function model and proposes a station that is not merely an infrastructural container, but a node of cultural activation, civic encounter, and urban storytelling.

This aligns with current professional trends that value resilient, multipurpose, and experience-driven public architecture, while also pushing those ideas further through speculative design. For planners and policymakers, the project offers a conceptual blueprint for how large-scale infrastructures can evolve without losing

their heritage value or operational integrity.

Scientifically, the project provides a methodology for embedding qualitative cultural narratives into the design of transit-oriented developments. Through cultural mapping, scenario testing, and programmatic layering, the project demonstrates how intangible cultural heritage and urban rituals can be translated into spatial strategies that go beyond symbolic gestures.

The combination of user-centered flows, flexible programming, and cultural layering offers a case study in how to bridge urban infrastructure with cultural production in a way that is both imaginative and grounded.

As cities grapple with climate imperatives, social fragmentation, and cultural displacement, On the Move proposes an infrastructural model that is not only efficient and sustainable, but also tailored to its context, inclusive, and deeply connected to the evolving identity of the city of Milan.

ETHICAL ISSUES & DILEMMAS

Throughout the development of my graduation project, several ethical dilemmas emerged—primarily revolving around the tension between innovation and preservation, freedom and regulation, and inclusivity and control. One of the most critical questions I encountered was how to reconcile the rigid, institutional identity of Milan's Central Station with the more informal, unregulated character of cultural practices I sought to accommodate. In proposing a hybrid infrastructure that integrates cultural programming into a highly regulated transit node, I was confronted with a fundamental contradiction: while the station is a space governed by formal protocols, surveillance, and logistical efficiency, the kinds of cultural events I envisioned—rooted in spontaneity and collective expression—often thrive in conditions of informality and freedom. This raised an ethical question about whether such a proposal might inadvertently instrumentalize cultural expression, particularly when working with symbols such as Milan's historic trams, which carry their own layered histories.

On a broader ethical level, the project implicitly engages with the politics of cultural visibility and urban inclusivity. By proposing a distributed cultural infrastructure that extends beyond the limits of the station, the project seeks to democratize access to cultural experiences across Milan. Yet this ambition also brings with it the risk of selective appropriation—of favoring highly curated or institutionally approved forms of culture at the expense of grassroots initiatives. Navigating this ethical terrain required careful consideration of how programmatic flexibility could be embedded without imposing aesthetic or ideological constraints. In this sense, the most persistent dilemma was how to design for openness—both functionally and symbolically—without over-determining the kinds of publics and practices the space could accommodate.

Ultimately, these dilemmas sharpened the project's architectural ambitions and deepened its sense of responsibility. Rather than offering clean solutions, they served as productive tensions that shaped both the design process and its outcomes.

The result is a proposal that acknowledges its own limitations while striving to create a framework where infrastructure, heritage, and culture can coexist—not without friction, but with a generative and intentional dialogue.

A DESIGN MANIFESTO

This graduation project presents itself not as a final answer, but as a prototype—an open framework for rethinking the relationship between Infrastructure and Culture. On the Move proposes a shift in how we conceive and design public architecture: no longer as static, mono-functional buildings, but as dynamic systems capable of responding to the evolving rhythms of the city. Rooted in a fascination with movement and inspired by early 20th-century Italian Futurism, the project adopts some of its core provocations—not in the glorification of speed or rupture, but in its belief that architecture must evolve with the times, must interpret change, and must participate in shaping new urban conditions.

Rather than framing mobility solely as an engineering problem or a logistical challenge, the project embraces it as a cultural condition. It invites architects to design for flows that are not only physical, but temporal, symbolic, and collective. The integration of mobile cultural units—repurposed historic trams—signals a broader design attitude that prioritizes adaptability, context, and layered meaning.

These elements are not merely architectural gestures but part of a wider call to expand the definition of infrastructure to include emotional, social, and cultural dimensions.

This **design manifesto** acknowledges that architecture cannot operate in isolation from its civic responsibility. As such, the project positions itself as a starting point for future explorations—designs that are informed by cultural practices, attuned to urban complexity, and capable of negotiating between permanence and change. By using a highly regulated and infrastructural space as the testing ground for cultural experimentation, On the Move opens a conversation on how design can support multiplicity rather than singularity, flexibility rather than fixity.

Ultimately, the ambition of this project is to offer a model—both conceptual and operational—that others can build upon. A model that reflects the layered identity of a city like Milan, while remaining open to future reinterpretation.

Architecture, in this view, becomes less about fixed objects and more about systems of interaction and care.

On the Move is not a conclusion, but an invitation to design with movement, culture, and transformation at the center of the architectural imagination.



STAZIONE DI MILANO

ON THE MOVE





"architectura in motu vitam inspirat"

fabio sala