

# Intermission

Between city and stage.

Complex Projects

P2 Booklet

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4846176



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**P2 Booklet**

COMPLEX PROJECTS  
Bodies and Building Milan  
AR3CP100

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# INDEX

**01 RESEARCH PLAN 006**

**02 RESEARCH & DESIGN  
BRIEF 022**

**03 CONCLUSION 098**

# RESEARCH PLAN

01

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the evolving role of performing arts centres as civic infrastructures that actively engage with the public realm. While historically positioned as monumental cultural landmarks, such institutions are increasingly called upon to play a more integrated role in the lifestyle of the city. Drawing on Patrick Lynch's idea that the civic environment should be conceived as a continuum of diverse and overlapping settings, this research examines how performing arts architecture can operate across multiple spatial and social scales, enhancing not only the functional presence of the arts, but also their psychological and civic resonance.

Situated within Milan's layered urban context and operatic heritage, the thesis investigates how architectural design can blur the threshold between performance and city life. Rather than treating the edge of the building as a boundary, the project explores how transitional elements such as porticos, plazas, and arcades, can become active civic stages, inviting both everyday participation and ritual gathering; this deepens the building's connection to the community, thereby amplifying the cultural and civic role of the arts within. Through observation, analysis, and design, the project intends to re-imagine the performance centre not as a retreat from the city, but as an extension of it; a place where cultural expression and civic life continually converge.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Opera, once a central part of public cultural life, is increasingly seen as a formal, exclusive experience with limited relevance to contemporary society. Changing demographics, shifting cultural interests, and the rise of more accessible forms of entertainment have contributed to its fading presence in civic life. As a result, opera houses risk becoming static cultural monuments. Milan, home to the iconic Teatro alla Scala, provides the context and site for this research, reflecting many of the same challenges faced by performance centres around the world.

Architecturally, these buildings often present themselves as monumental yet inward-facing. Despite their cultural significance, their architectural expression and public engagement tend to be confined to their decorative façades and enclosed interiors, lacking genuine spatial or social engagement with their immediate surroundings; a disconnect that risks diminishing the role of the performing arts in civic life. The thresholds and transitional spaces of the buildings envelope are typically underutilised, offering little in terms of public accessibility or informal interaction. As a result, there is minimal dialogue between the building and the street, weakening opportunities for civic participation and cultural spillover.

This reveals a gap in how performance centres can contribute to the vitality of the city beyond their interior programming. There is a need to rethink the design of architectural thresholds as active civic spaces that extend cultural life outward into the public realm. These transitional elements hold potential to bridge the gap between building and city, formality and spontaneity, audience and passerby.

This research is guided by the assertion that the civic environment should be understood as a continuum of diverse settings, not a binary between public and private. By designing across multiple spatial and social scales, architecture can restore the psychological and social significance of performance buildings and their role in civic life (Lynch, 2017).

The project aims to reposition the performance centre as a civic interface rather than a retreat; a space that supports daily interaction, cultural expression, and shared identity within the city, re-orienting the building as a place of continuous civic engagement.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

How can a performance centre participate as an **extension of the public realm** enriching its civic role?

## SUB QUESTIONS

- How do people currently behave around cultural buildings, and what spatial conditions naturally support gathering, lingering, and public interaction?
- How can architectural thresholds, such as entrances, edges, and transitional zones, contribute to informal public use and civic engagement around performance centres?
- In what ways can the relationship between performance centres and their urban context be reconfigured to support the appropriation of the buildings threshold and continuous public interaction beyond scheduled events?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is framed by a multidisciplinary theoretical foundation that draws from architectural, urban, and sociocultural discourse. It investigates how performance centres, particularly opera houses, can regain civic relevance by re-engaging with the public realm through architectural design. The research begins with a fundamental question:

### **How can a performance centre participate as an extension of the public realm, enriching its civic role?**

Opera houses and performance centres have historically been celebrated as grand cultural institutions—monumental in form and revered in function. Yet their architecture often reflects a logic of separation: performance is housed within, while the life of the city unfolds outside. Their civic presence is typically symbolic rather than experiential, defined by façades and formal entries, while everyday urban life flows around them, rather than through them. The question, then, is not simply how to modernise opera architecture, but how to re-orient it from monument to participant, from closed envelope to civic interface. This leads to a deeper design inquiry:

Can the edges, thresholds, and in-between spaces of a performance centre act as active civic grounds, rather than just transitions into an interior event ?

A notable historical example of architecture negotiating between the private and public realm is Andrea Palladio's Palazzo Chiericati in Vicenza. In this project, Palladio extended a portico beyond the conventional boundary of the building plot, projecting it into the street. The boundary between private property and civic space became indistinct, effectively transforming the portico into a public gesture. Rather than being a formal extension of the building, the portico acted as a threshold space — a semi-public zone that provided shelter, invited gathering, and visually contributed to the life of the street.

This example introduces an important conceptual shift: that civic architecture is not defined solely by program or ownership, but by the presence of civic elements — spatial conditions that support openness, interaction, and collective use. Palladio's use of the portico demonstrates that a building can incorporate civic intent within its architectural language, challenging the binary notion of a building being either "public" or "private." Instead, it suggests a continuum, where architectural thresholds can carry civic meaning and invite public participation, even within traditionally enclosed or elite institutions (Lynch, 2017).

This research proposes a composite approach, constructed from spatial fragments and architectural episodes that unfolds over time. In this way, the research aligns with threshold theory, particularly in the writings of Herman Hertzberger, who argues that thresholds are not merely zones of passage but spaces of encounter, sites where formal and informal use intersect. These in-between spaces support informal gathering, visual connection, and the potential for layered interaction (Hertzberger, 2008). Similarly, Richard Sennett's reflections on the public realm suggest that the health of a city depends on spaces that allow for



*Sketches of Santa Maria by Álvaro Siza showing the architect thinking simultaneously about the role of the horizon and topography in the design of the church and parochial centre, 1990. (Lynch, 2017)*

ambiguity, friction, and co-presence, qualities often excluded from formal cultural buildings. According to him, “buildings should function like cell membranes, porous and resistant at once combining form and change” (Sennett, 2008, p. 34). Aldo Rossi recognises cultural buildings like Teatro alla Scala not only as architectural artifacts but as essential components of the city’s collective memory and spatial identity. This perspective frames the design not as a singular intervention, but as a continuation of urban life across time (Rossi, 1966). Collectively, these theories reframe the design of a performance centre not around the spectacle of performance itself, but around the spatial choreography that surrounds it.

Van Eyck believed that architecture is not about choosing one quality over another — it’s about holding both sides of a relationship at once. He referred to these as “twin phenomena”. Aldo van Eyck’s concept of the ‘in-between’ provides a design philosophy in which transitional spaces act not merely as connections, but as sites of dialogue and belonging (Sack, 2024). Sack identifies three interrelated layers within this concept:

**Thresholds and doorsteps** - spatially mediating inside and outside

**Spatial interiorisation** - where enclosure and openness meet

**Design dualities** - like part/whole, mass/space, individual/collective

Together, these levels position the in-between not as residual or secondary space, but as a spatial and social condition capable of reconciling conflicting polarities and enabling human experiences of belonging, encounter, and co-existence.

The theoretical foundation also engages with relational urbanism, seeing architecture not as an isolated object but as an actor within a network of behaviours, flows, and social rituals. Cultural buildings, especially those with historical significance like Teatro alla Scala, must be rethought as performers within the city, not static icons, but adaptable interfaces that host a range of civic and cultural interactions. Based on this research, the design approach resists the binary of “inside” and “outside.” Instead, it intends to create the in-between as a civic condition, a series of spatial decisions that collectively reshape how cultural buildings participate in everyday life. From the portico that shelters the passerby, to the step that becomes a seat, to the foyer that dissolves into a public plaza, each intervention may be small, but accumulates into a larger civic act.

This thesis investigates how moments of gathering, waiting, passing, or observing can become opportunities for civic engagement; building a vocabulary of civic fragments, responsive to context, behaviour, and atmosphere, that together redefine the role of performance space in the city. **These moments are not secondary to performance; they are the performance - ephemeral, repeated, and shared.**

## RELEVANCE

This research is timely and relevant across multiple scales from the specific site of Teatro alla Scala in Milan to the broader discourse on civic architecture and cultural institutions in contemporary society.

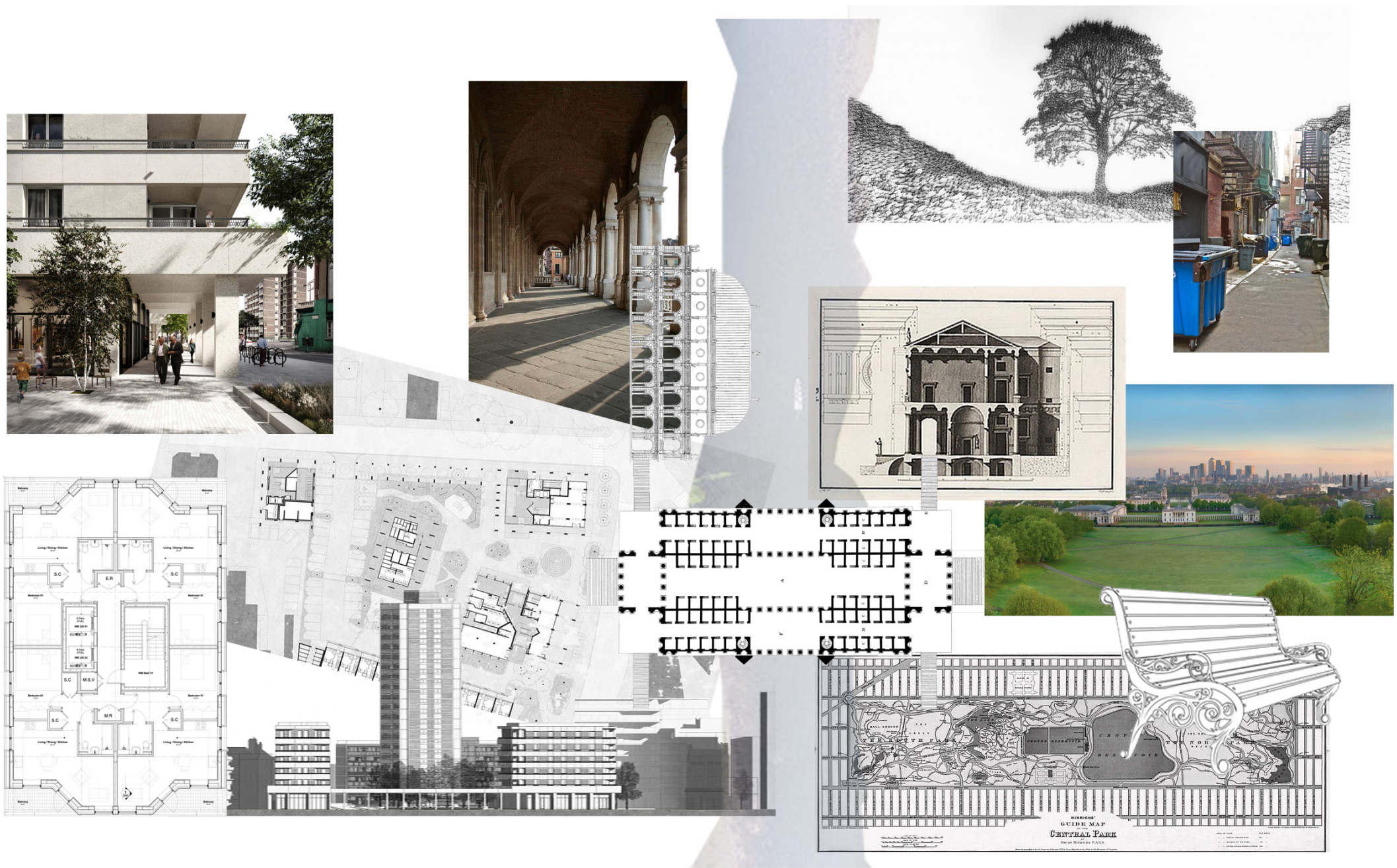
Teatro alla Scala holds symbolic weight in the city’s cultural and architectural identity, yet its current form reflects a historical model of cultural exclusivity and spatial separation. As Aldo Rossi suggests, enduring urban structures must be capable of absorbing new social meanings over time without losing their architectural identity (Rossi, 1966). This research asks how a renewed performance centre could act not just as a monument to the arts but as an active civic participant—open, porous, and responsive to the life of the city (Lynch, 2017). This aligns with Patrick Lynch’s notion that civic architecture should be understood not as “an object,” but as a communicative presence in dialogue with its surroundings (Lynch, 2017), and with Sennett’s view that openness and interaction are essential to sustaining vibrant public institutions (Sennett, 2008).

Architecturally, the project explores how architecture can generate civic value through relational spaces—what Hertzberger (2008) defines as the “in-between” that supports spontaneous use and social interaction. In doing so, the research contributes to discussions around human-scaled civic space, atmospheres of inclusion, and the cultural relevance of performance architecture in contemporary urban life, addressing the growing disconnect between cultural institutions and civic engagement in an increasingly globalized and dematerialized society, physical spaces risk becoming symbolic rather than experiential (Augé, 1992).

For performance centres, this project proposes a shift in civic role: from container of culture to host of civic life. Through the design of architectural thresholds that choreograph arrival, pause, and gathering, the project responds to van Eyck’s notion of “liminal space” as a space not simply of transition but of meaningful human connection (Smith, 2001). The work speculates on how the peripheral can become central, how the foyer, the step, or the portico might serve as stages of their own—places where the city performs itself.



*Architecture as a civic interface. View of Kings Gate. (Lynch, 2017).*



A collage inspired by 'Civic Grounds' shows an environment as a continuum of civic elements, transcending different scales. (Self-made)

# METHODOLOGY

## Main Question:

How can a performance centre participate as an extension of the public realm enriching its civic role?

## Sub-Questions:

- How do people currently behave around cultural buildings, and what spatial conditions naturally support gathering, lingering, and public interaction?
- How can architectural thresholds—such as entrances, edges, and transitional zones, contribute to informal public use and civic engagement around performance centres?
- In what ways can the relationship between performance centres and their urban context be reconfigured to support the appropriation of the buildings threshold and continuous public interaction beyond scheduled events?

This research utilises a qualitative methodology that combines theoretical grounding, contextual analysis, observation, and designed exploration to create and inform a design brief. The project is explored through the studio lenses of site, program, and client. Together, these approaches aim to develop architectural strategies that reposition the performance centre as an extension of the public realm, with a particular focus on the potential of thresholds and transitional spaces to act as an extension of the public realm.

## Client

The project should consider institutional and cultural stakeholders invested in the future of performance architecture, including the public.

## Site

Located at Teatro alla Scala in central Milan, the site will be studied through mapping, observation, and photography to understand its spatial and social dynamics. Focus will be on thresholds, edges, and the site's relationship to surrounding public life.

## Program

The program aims to redefine the performance centre as a civic interface. Case studies of cultural venues will inform how architecture can support informal gathering and urban integration.

## Literature Informed Theory and Framework

The project is grounded in the “Bodies & Building” theme, drawing on theoretical perspectives that explore the relationship between bodies, buildings, and the public realm. Literature which examines architecture's social, psychological, and spatial dimensions, including Patrick Lynch, Richard Sennett, Herman Hertzberger and Aldo Rossi, whose work informs the study's understanding of civic architecture, public space, and human-scale design. **These theoretical insights should guide the identification of spatial conditions that support engagement, inform design strategies for architectural thresholds and their subsequent appropriation, enabling a stronger justification for future design intentions.**

## Qualitative and Ethnographic Research

A component of the methodology is ongoing observation, carried out in Milan, as well as other cultural and public spaces encountered throughout the course. Resulting in a continuous, reflective engagement with how people interact with architecture in a variety of contexts. This includes: Photographic documentation, Sketching, notes and videography. **These observations will give insight into how people behave around cultural buildings and help identify the spatial conditions, such as thresholds, steps, edges, and open zones, that naturally support gathering, lingering, and public interaction.**

## Contextual Analysis

The project includes a spatial and cultural analysis of La Scala and its immediate urban surroundings, focusing on how the building's architectural history, typological evolution, and civic role have developed over time, this approach could be informed by the theory of Aldo Rossi. This analysis will examine how the site engages (or fails to engage) with the public realm today, identifying opportunities through maps, images, modelling and first hand experience. **Studying the relationship between La Scala and its context will help define strategies for integrating performance architecture into the everyday life of the city.**

## Precedent Studies

A series of comparative case studies will examine how performance centres address thresholds, public interfaces, and their relationship to the urban context. The research will also investigate relevant strategies from other building typologies to broaden the scope of spatial understanding. These studies will help identify spatial patterns and design approaches that support civic engagement through the appropriation of the a buildings envelope threshold. **Ultimately, the intent of the precedent study is to have a wide base of knowledge, a catalog of buildings and design strategies which can be applied and tested during the design process.**

## Design strategy development

Building on the research findings, a design strategy will be developed. Design iterations will be continually informed by the theoretical framework and insights gathered through observation and analysis. **The aim is to explore how a performance centre can be designed as an extension of the public realm, enriching its civic role through architectural thresholds and spatial transitions.**

## Summary & Expectations

The research is expected to result in a set of spatial strategies that can be applied to architectural thresholds and can foster civic engagement and reconnect the performance centre with the everyday life of the city.

- Read and analyse architectural theory to identify spatial principles that support engagement at the threshold.
- Observe and document public behaviour in the built environment through sketching, photography, videography and field notes to understand how people interact with edges, entrances, threshold and in-between spaces.
- Study the site and context of La Scala to assess its civic presence, spatial limitations, and opportunities for activation.
- Compare relevant precedents to gather a knowledge of design strategies, which can be applied and tested.
- Test and develop design strategies through drawing, modelling and other forms of speculation.

# CONCLUSION

This research aims to reframe the performing arts centre not as a sealed cultural monument but as an architecture embedded within the lifestyle of the city. By investigating how the design of thresholds, edges, and transitional spaces can foster civic participation, the project challenges the traditional boundary between performance and public life. Through an approach that integrates theory, observation, and design, the thesis builds a case for architecture that is relational, atmospheric, and inclusive; where culture is not only represented but lived.

Supported by literature such as Lynch, Hertzberger, Sennett, and van Eyck, the research explores how architecture can operate across multiple scales; urban, architectural, and human, to create conditions for shared presence, informal interaction, and everyday civic meaning. It sees the performance centre not as a destination apart from the city but as a civic interface that choreographs movement, encounter, and gathering both within and around its envelope.

The project is situated in Milan and focuses on the site of Teatro alla Scala, engaging with the urban qualities and history of the site. The research creates a design vocabulary of civic fragments that may inform how cultural institutions everywhere can reassert their civic value.

To summarise, this project proposes that it is not only the grand gesture of a building as an object, but the careful articulation of in-between spaces that can transform a performance centre into one that does not merely host culture, but helps perform the city itself; a platform where public life and cultural expression are no longer separate acts, but part of a shared civic performance.

RESEARCH  
&  
DESIGN BRIEF

02



*Portico - Palazzo Chiericat, Palladio*

## THEORETICAL REFERENCES

This section compiles ideas from architectural theorists whose work provides conceptual references relevant to the intent of this architectural project.

Rather than forming a critical literature review, the intention is to explore concepts, values, and spatial strategies that can inform the design approach; particularly in relation to civic thresholds, public engagement, and the spatial role of architecture in the city. The references selected reflect the project's focus on architecture as a communicative, participatory, and temporal discipline. The perspectives support thinking of architecture as an active civic interface, a principle applicable to a performing arts centre.

### **Civic Ground: Patrick Lynch**

In the opening chapter of *Civic Ground, The Problem of Sculptural Form versus Sculptural Spatiality*, Patrick Lynch critiques contemporary architecture's tendency to prioritise isolated, iconic forms (sculptural form) over contextually responsive, experiential space (sculptural spatiality). This distinction aligns with the premise of the project, which intends to reposition the performance centre not as a self-contained monument, but as a permeable contribution to the shared life of the city around it.

In his writing, the idea of civic ground becomes apparent as a way to think about architecture's relationship to its setting: not as form imposed upon the world, but as a structure that draws meaning from the rituals, flows, and shared experiences of urban life.

His term rhythmic spatiality frames architecture as something to be moved through and felt over time, where the sequence of spaces and bodily motion play as much a role as material or shape. This temporal unfolding, he suggests, is what allows architecture to resonate with people, similar to the rhythm of music or performance. The analogy is important when considering a performance centre: a building inherently tied to time, ritual, and public congregation.

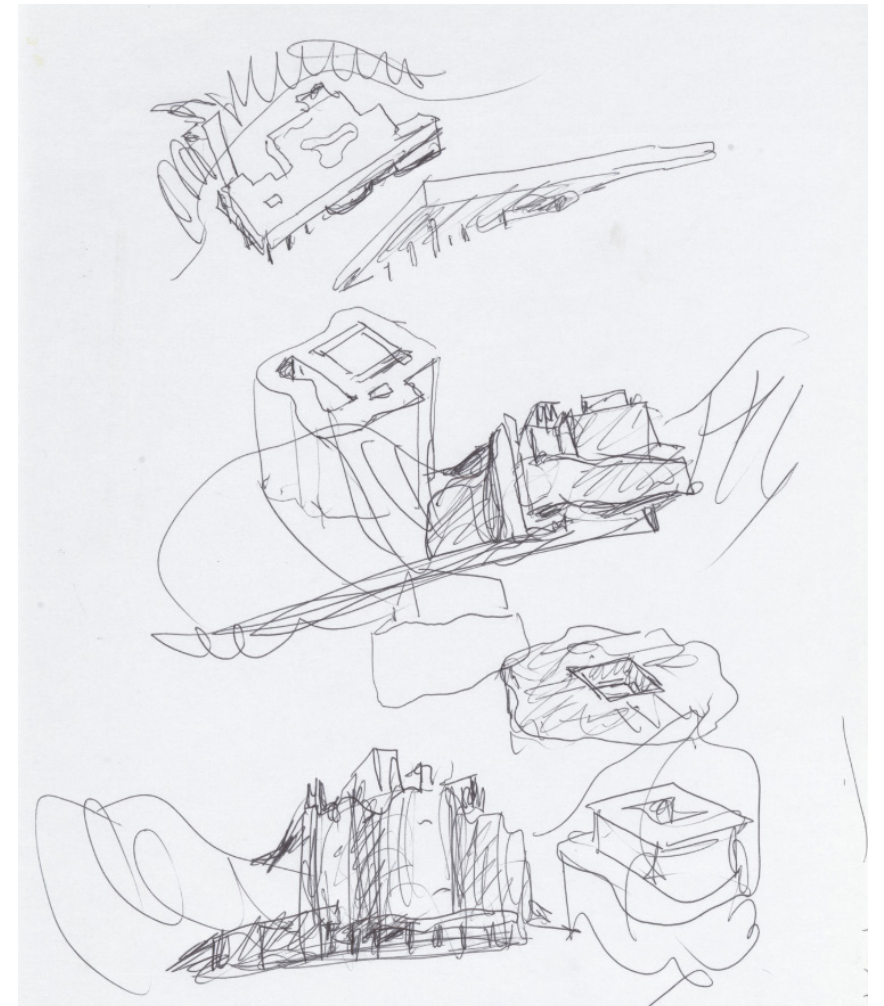
Instead, he positions sculptural spatiality as a richer, more civic alternative—where architecture becomes expressive not through isolation but through interaction with topography, movement, and symbolic memory.

The civic ground, as Lynch describes it, is not a typological category but a condition. A building does not become civic by virtue of its function as a theatre or museum; it becomes civic by how it receives people, how it stages their approach, how it responds to its site;

# **civic architecture is where public becomes participant.**

This position places importance on thresholds, entrances, and transitional spaces; not as neutral boundaries, but as areas of invitation, pause, and orientation. These spatial conditions resonate with the work of Álvaro Siza.

Siza's architecture is marked not by overt monumentality but by a quiet, calibrated unfolding of space—buildings that meet the ground intentionally, draw the body along subtle paths, and offer moments of shelter, stillness, and reflection. His projects embody civic character not through program alone, but through their ability to choreograph movement and encounters. Siza's drawings and projects illustrate this sensibility, with focus to architectural forms that create conditions for shared presence and lived experience.



*Sketches of Iberê  
Camargo Museum,  
Porto Alegre, Brazil  
by Álvaro Siza*



Sketches of the approach to Leça da Palmeira Swimming Pools, Porto by Álvaro Siza



Leça da Palmeira Swimming Pools - Movement Choreographed



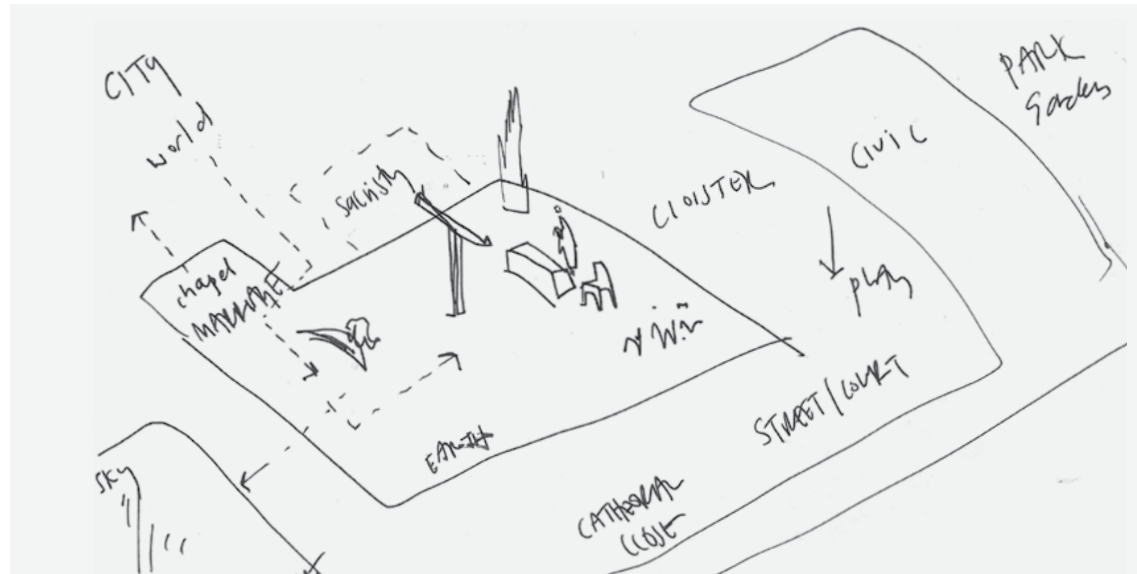
Leça da Palmeira Swimming Pools - Tension; the ocean is heard but now unseen

Lynch's drawings are also interesting; sketching spatial tempo, bodily direction, and urban context. They show architecture as something understood through motion, atmosphere, and position within a broader cultural context.

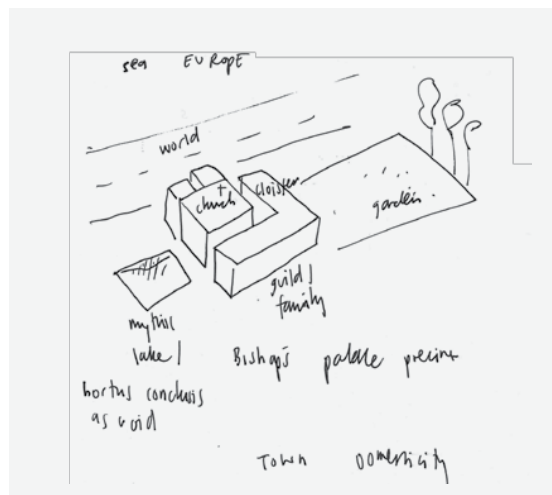
What resonates here for the project is the insistence that architecture must participate; in the rhythms of the city, in the meaning of the place, in the daily rituals and public life that give a city its character. A performance centre, through this approach, becomes more than a venue. It could become a terrain that facilitates these civic activities. The building's envelope,

its approach, recession, and interaction all become part of the civic performance.

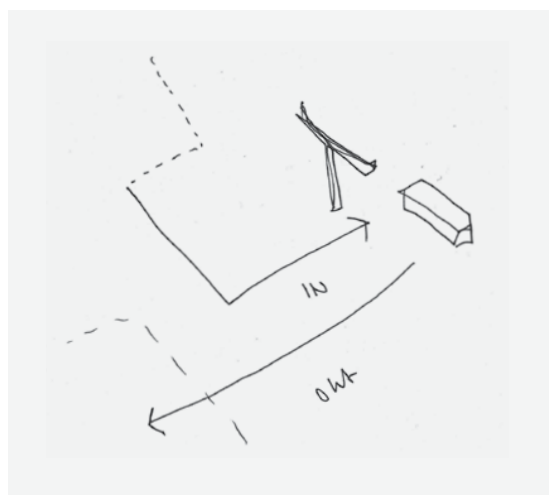
Lynch's writing suggests a way of thinking about public space that is beyond program or use. It is about attentiveness and reciprocity, about designing not just for access, but for presence and participation, a process reflected in the work of Alvaro Siza.



Patrick Lynch, sketch showing the movement of a worshipper at St Peter's, Klippan.



Sketch showing St Peter's, Klippan, as an urban ensemble.



Sketch showing the movement of a worshipper at St Peter's, Klippan.

### Lessons for students in architecture: Herman Hertzberger

Herman Hertzberger's work focuses on the social potential of architecture; how built form can support informal interaction, shared use, and a sense of belonging. His writing and buildings are shaped by the understanding that architecture is not only a matter of function or aesthetics, but of enabling life in ways that are open, adaptable, and humane.

The 'in-between space' frames architectural thresholds as zones where people gather, linger, or transition. These are spaces not overly prescribed, they are designed with affordance. In this way, civic meaning does not arrive through symbolism or scale, but through use. The public becomes participant not through spectacle, but through daily acts of occupation or appropriation.

Hertzberger writes, "just like words and sentences, forms depend on how they are read and which images they are able to conjure up for the reader. A form can evoke different images in different people and in different situations,

and thus take on a different meaning, and it is the phenomenon of this experience that is the key to an altered awareness of form, which will enable us to make things that are better suited to more situations".

What makes a form - as a structure - interpretable. Hertzberger says, it is the accommodating capacity of form, its competence, which allows it to be filled with associations, forming a mutual dependence with the users. This concerns the space of the form, in the same way that a musical instrument offers its players freedom of action;

## FORM AS INSTRUMENT.

His works reveal how minor adjustments; an extended stair, a covered recess, a considered column, can turn circulation space into communal space.



Apolloschools, Amsterdam - Lessons for students in architecture

In Chapter 8 of *Lessons for Students in Architecture - Making space, Leaving space*; Hertzberger explores how architectural form can simultaneously serve multiple purposes, opening space to appropriation without losing its coherence.

The Weesperstraat student housing project in Amsterdam - Concrete lighting blocks are positioned along an elevated outdoor corridor, they provide illumination, but also define small spatial niches along what might otherwise be a purely transitional zone. This intervention becomes a place to pause, lean, talk, wait or have a picnic. They introduce rhythm and variation to a circulation space and, in doing so, begin to create a kind of shared terrain within the building for all of the inhabitants. The lighting blocks sturdy and elemental quality suggests both permanence and openness. They articulate a threshold condition within the corridor, softening the boundary between movement and stillness.



*Concrete lighting blocks, Weesperstraat student housing*



*Concrete lighting blocks used as a table, Weesperstraat student housing*



*A Freestanding block disrupts a common space, Montessori Primary School, Delft - Herman Hertzberger*

A similarly nuanced spatial intervention appears in Montessori primary school in Delft. At the centre of one of the classrooms, a freestanding block interrupts the open plan. Hertzberger emphasises that it is the permanence, and immobility which emphasises its presence as a focal point that contains suggestions and incentives for response in each situation it arises. It functions as a spatial event within the room, not through grandeur but through utility and ambiguity. Children use it as a desk, a stage, a hiding place. It becomes meaningful through use.

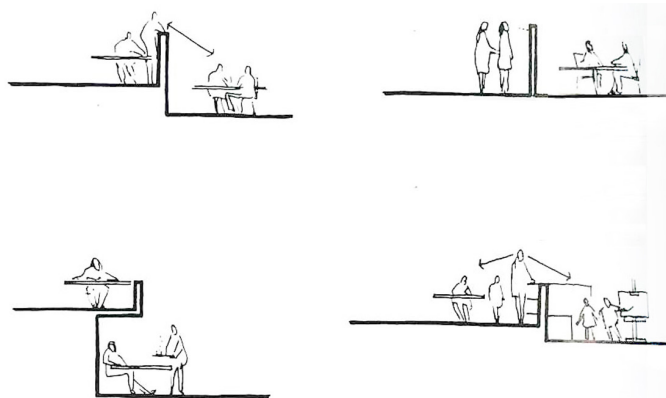
In both cases, Hertzberger is not designing "furniture" or "decoration." He is embedding in the architecture itself the potential for

informal interaction and appropriation. These blocks, both in the corridor and classroom, are architectural prompts; simple, materially honest forms that structure space without scripting behaviour. They create zones of encounter rather than passage or enclosure.

***"The user must be able to fill in the framework the architect has designed. Architecture must offer a setting, not prescribe the use."*** In principle, Hertzberger proposes that architecture can foster community by allowing room for it to form.



*Spaces in space (Edit), Montessori Primary School, Delft - Herman Hertzberger*



*Sketches of spatial relationships, Herman Hertzberger*

### Architecture of The City: Aldo Rossi

Architecture is grounded in memory, continuity, and urban permanence. Rossi considers buildings as elements within a city's collective consciousness; forms that endure through time and embed themselves into the civic identity of place.

**“If we find a mound six feet long and three feet wide in the forests, formed into a pyramid, shaped by a shovel, we become serious and something says, ‘someone lies buried here!’**

That is Architecture.” - Adolf Loos 1910

The idea of the urban artifact: a building or spatial form that transcends its function and becomes part of the deeper structure of the city. These artifacts are not defined by style or novelty, but by their ability to accumulate meaning and persist in the collective memory. Their presence shapes the organisation and perception of urban space, even when their original purpose fades.

This can be clearly seen in the relationship between Teatro alla Scala and Piazza della Scala. The theatre did not emerge from the square; the square emerged from the theatre. It is the building that gave the piazza its orientation, its use, and its identity. Without La Scala, the piazza would not have taken shape in the form we know today. And even if the theatre were to disappear, the square would still have its imprint; a spatial memory that outlives the object itself. This is exactly what Rossi describes: architecture as a generator of urban structure and symbolic continuity.

Rossi states that cities are layered structures, where meaning is built up over time through repetition and recognition. Buildings that align with established types,

whether theatres, basilicas, or palazzi, carry an inherited recognisability that connects them to past and future iterations. Architecture is most powerful when it engages with inherited forms and reinterprets them for the present.

In this way, Rossi offers a vision of civic architecture is not about surface or detail, but about spatial order, position, and memory; about architecture's capacity to become part of a shared urban consciousness.

A building's individuality, depends “on being a complicated entity which has developed in both space and time.” A recently built structure, in contrast, may possess style or compositional clarity, but lacks the embedded history that gives older forms their resonance. This proposes an interesting idea: that architecture is not only shaped by time, but can also shape the way time is remembered. Rossi notes that people project significance onto buildings and spaces through personal or collective associations, sometimes ominous, others auspicious and “All these experiences, their sum, constitute the city.”



*Teatro Alla Scala - Before Piazza Della Scala  
1858*



*Teatro Alla Scala & Piazza Della Scala  
1872*

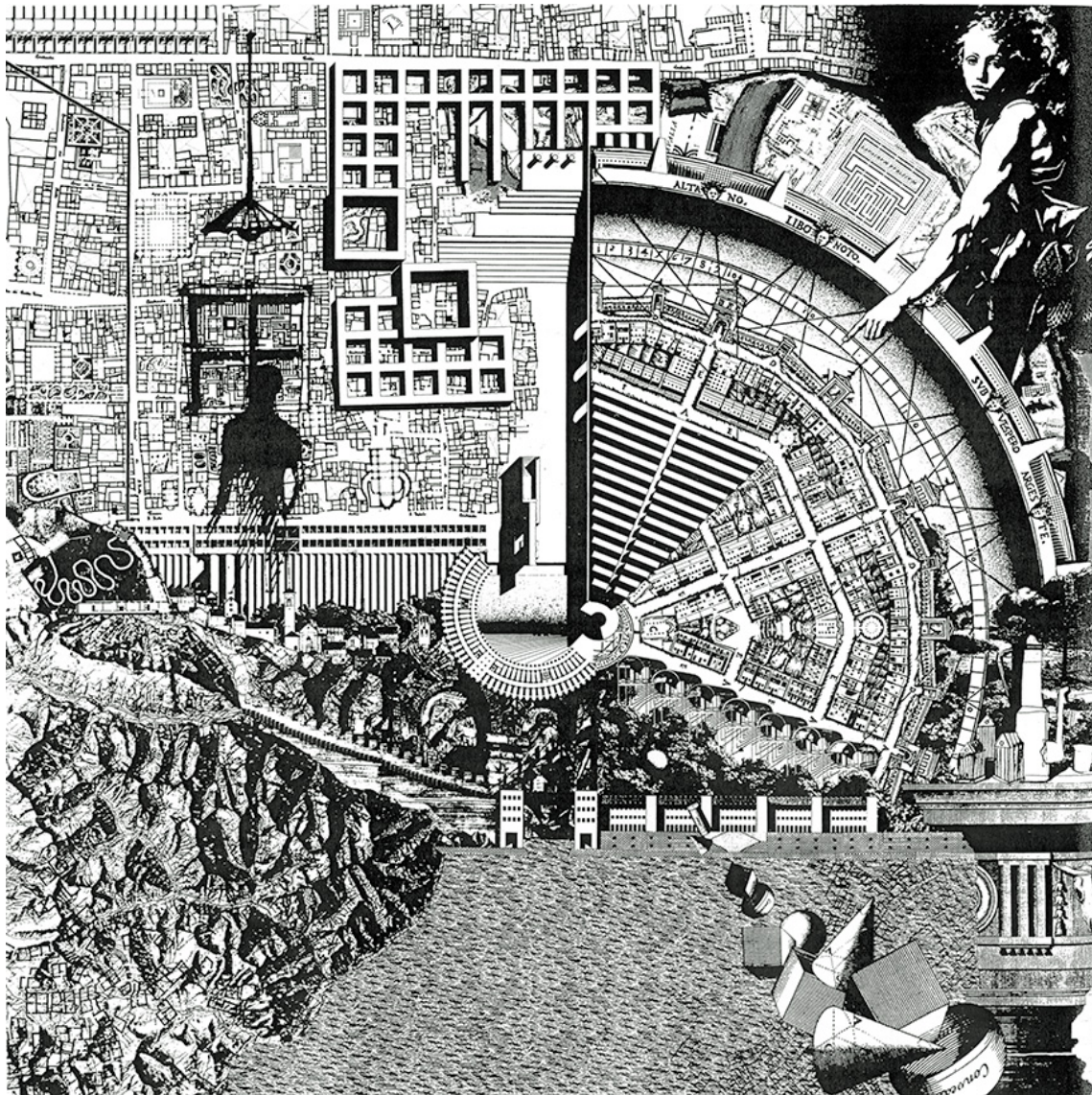


*Piazza della Scala and its surrounding developments arose as a consequence of Teatro alla Scala's presence; as an urban artifact shaping the memory and identity of the city.*

Teatro Alla Scala engraved permanently in the memory of the city.

Aldo Rossi – The Analogous City

A conceptual collage of memory, form, and typology. It reflects Rossi's belief that the city is shaped not only by function, but by the enduring presence of buildings as carriers of shared memory.



I take from this that architecture can participate in memory retroactively and deliberately too; by engaging the public through form, symbol, and sensory experience in ways that are open to interpretation. It implies that design can help guide what is remembered, not by dictating meaning, but by framing the conditions through which meaning arises.

If we can carefully compose the thresholds of a building: its sounds, its spatial alignments, its visual and tactile cues details, we can encourage meaningful and memorable interactions. In the context of a performance centre, this could mean crafting transitional spaces that give passing glimpses into rehearsal rooms, allowing sound to filter out into public space, or staging views of arrival and departure that remain with people long after the event itself has faded. These gestures make the building present beyond its immediate function, embedding it into the rhythms and recollections of daily life.

What lingers in memory is not always what is seen, but what is felt, overheard, recalled or even imagined as something anticipated.

## The Conscience of the Eye: Richard Sennet

Richard Sennett's work explores the city as a place of social complexity, where individuals encounter one another through difference, proximity, and visibility. In *The Conscience of the Eye*, he says that modern urban design has retreated from this idea by prioritising clarity and order over ambiguity and interaction.

A central concept in the book is what Sennett calls an "art of exposure." He writes that architecture and urban form should allow people to see and be seen as a basis for developing awareness of others. Rather than isolating functions, design should frame spaces where public life happens in its sometimes messy forms.

Sennett draws a contrast between pre-modern urbanism (Milans Urban Character), with layered thresholds, passages, and transitional zones, and modernist design, which tends to create legible but sealed environments. Sennett writes that "a good building... allows the stranger partial entry" not full access, but a glimpse, an acoustic spill, an overlap of experience. This insight is applicable to a performance centre: a building whose cultural function is usually hidden behind walls, but whose social role could be extended by designing its boundaries as places of contact and impression. These fragments of experience could allow the public to feel involved, even if not formally included.

Sennett is not interested in reviving old forms but to recover the social capacity of design. Similarly to Hertzberger, he challenges architects to design for interpretation rather than control, to allow users to draw meaning from encounters, thresholds, and chance exposures. It is in this ambiguity that architecture contributes most meaningfully to public life.

He writes: "Ambiguity enables people to interpret and explore... it creates room for play, negotiation, and invention." For Sennett, ambiguity is not a failure of clarity but a condition of openness, one that allows people to bring their own behaviours, associations, and improvisations into the built environment. This supports the idea that architectural thresholds in a performance centre might not only manage movement but support informal

gathering, listening, or looking, spaces where something might be overheard, or imagined.

Sennett calls for an "art of exposure" in architecture; spaces that do not only present finished outcomes, but reveal the processes, and practices behind them. In his critique of modern cultural institutions, he argues that too often architecture conceals the labour and rehearsal behind public performance, isolating cultural production from everyday life. He writes:

**"What we need is not polished presentation, but a spatial language that shows the seams - the effort, the repetition, the incompleteness."**

In Chapter 8, *Making things exposed*, Sennett writes that in a city that belongs to no one, people are constantly seeking to leave a trace of themselves, this was epitomised by the graffiti movement in 1970s New York. Like graffiti, which Sennett describes as imposing itself on the environment and therefore on those who inhabit it; architecture too can assert a presence in public life, through imposing visibility and experience. A busker, like the graffiti writer, interrupts the routine of the city, exposing others to sound or gesture; a building, through intentional thresholds, can do the same, bringing attention to, and imposing shared cultural activity.



Graffiti exposes a desire to be seen, to participate in the texture of urban life. It asserts that public space belongs to those who engage with it, whether invited or not.  
- Photograph by Martha Cooper, New York, 1981



Spoken without request, heard without intention; public expression as performance. The busker enacts what Sennett calls public life: visible, improvised, and shared.  
- Photograph by Gabby Jones for The New York Times, 2020

This could have a relationship with a performance centre: rather than hiding preparation behind closed walls, the building could offer partial views into rehearsal rooms, acoustic leaks, through thresholds where the public witnesses the making of the work. This exposure turns the institution outward; it could build curiosity, inviting the passerby to understand and identify with what is taking place inside.

He writes: "The public realm is not a fixed scene - it is something enacted, a space where people make themselves visible to one another in small but significant ways." For a performance centre, this challenges the idea that only what happens in the auditorium matters. The envelope and peripheral spaces are part of the performance too; Architecture should not hide process, but reveal presence.

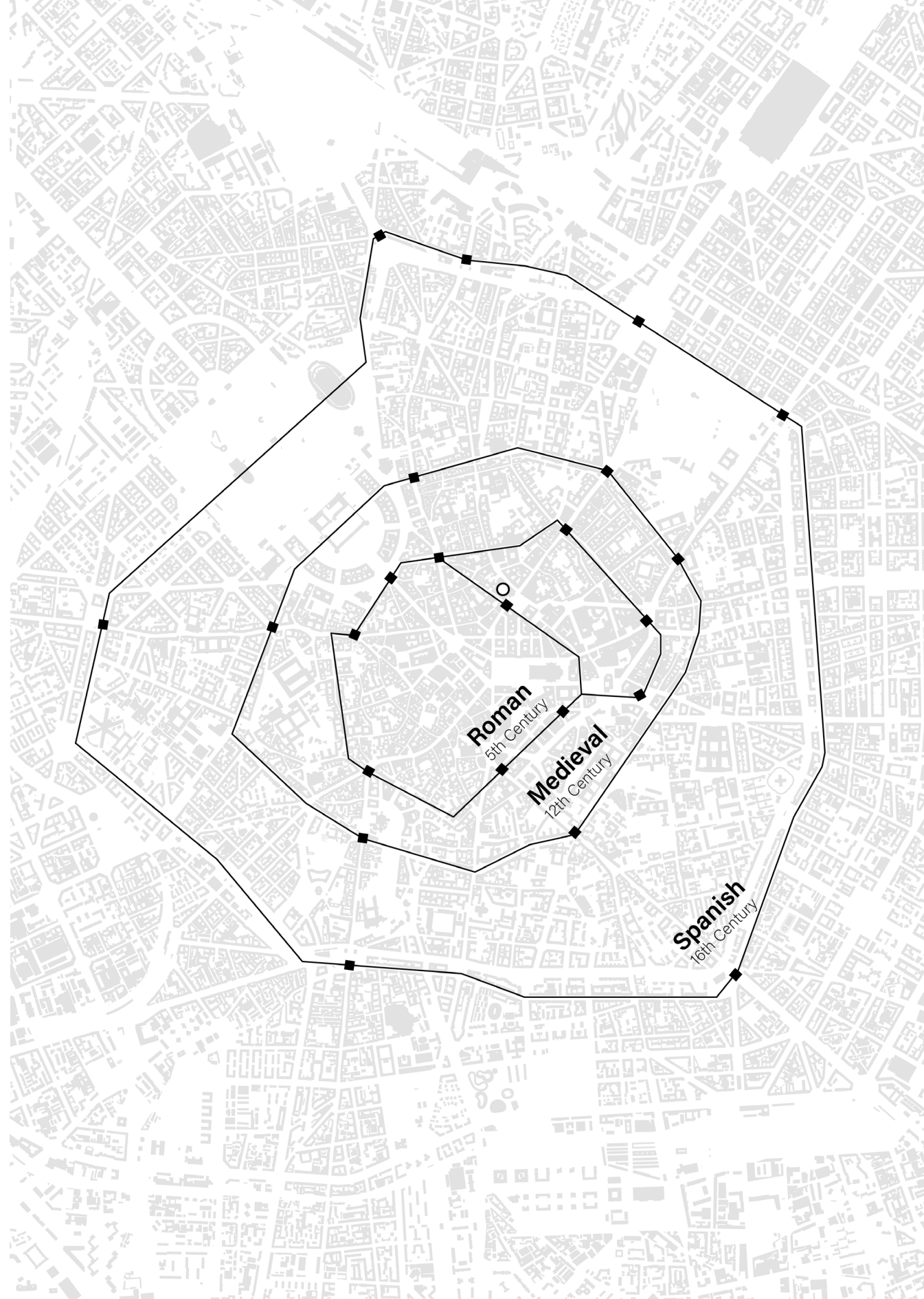


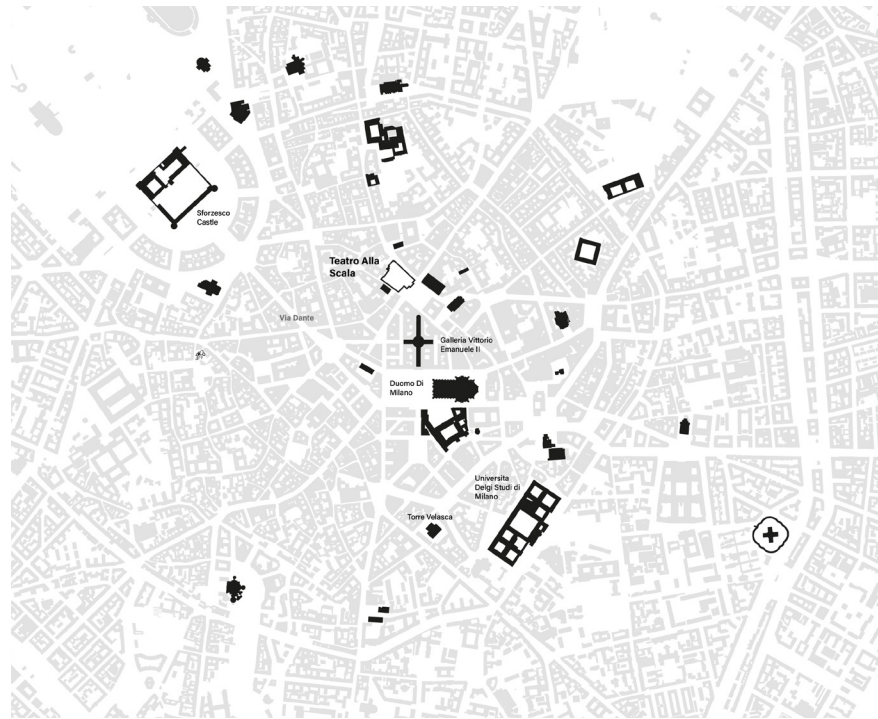
## CONTEXT

This section explores the context of the project by examining La Scala, its immediate site, and its position within the wider urban fabric of Milan. Understanding the spatial, cultural, and civic role of the theatre within the city provides a foundation for reimagining its relationship to public life and its potential as a more open and integrated cultural institution.

**Milan**

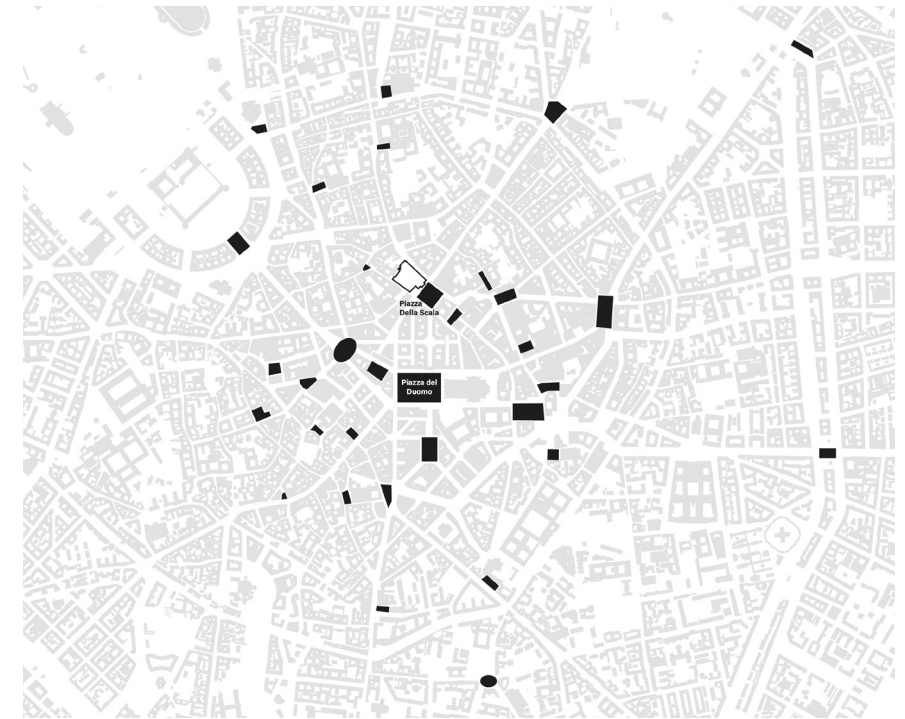
Teatro alla Scala is situated in the centre of milan, just outside the boundary of the original roman walls.





**Cultural Heart**

Situated in the centre of Milan, the theatre is in a cultural area of the city, surrounded by significant cultural buildings and attractions.



**Piazza Network**

Piazza della Scala is part of a citywide network of spaces with different spatial qualities, identity and associations.



**Pedestrian Area**

The theatre is on the periphery of a large pedestrian area, indicative of the areas popularity.



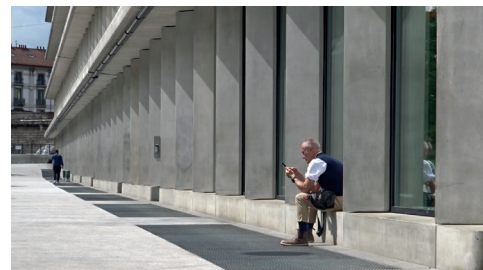
**Transport Routes**

There are metro and tram stations surrounding the theatre. The theatre faces a busy street which cuts the connection to the square.

### Excursion

The excursion to milan was used to observe how people interact with physical elements in the built environment, leaning against walls, gathering on steps, or pausing in architectural recesses.

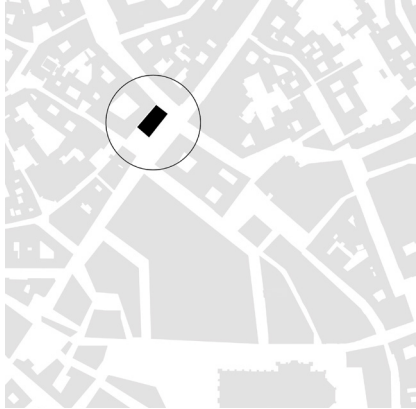
These small interactions often occurred in, edges, corners, and in-between zones that supported informal public life.



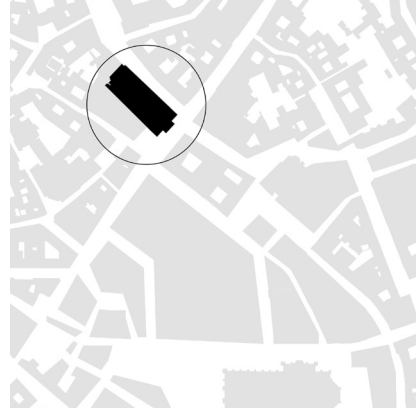
A catalog of spaces where **people make places.**

## Urban Morphology - Piazza della Scala

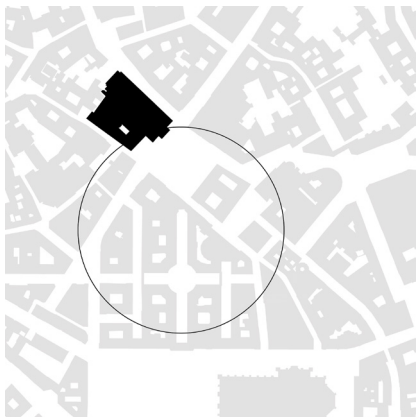
As a consequence of the theatre's cultural significance, a piazza was built opposite the site of the theatre. The periphery of the site is filled with important cultural and governmental buildings.



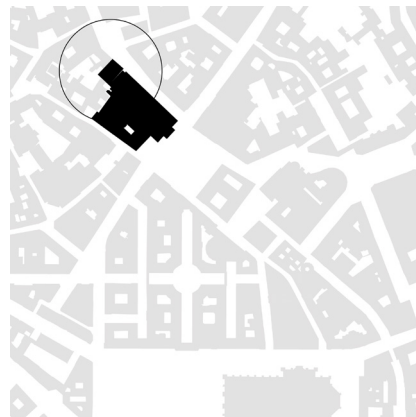
< 1776  
Church Santa Maria della Scala preceded Teatro alla Scala. The theatre carries the name of the church.



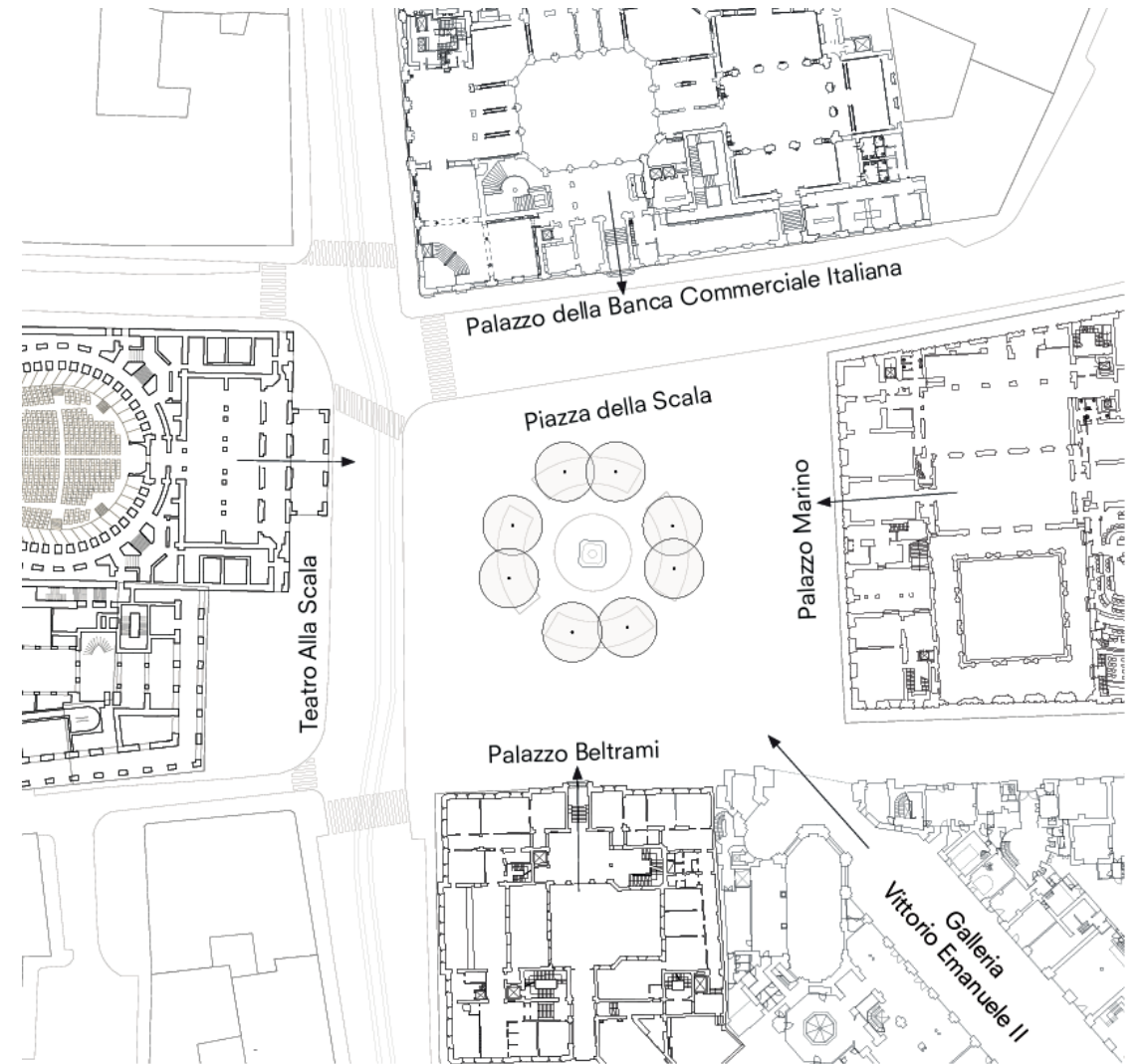
1778  
Teatro alla scala was constructed on the site of the former church. A replacement for Teatro Regio Ducale destroyed by fire.



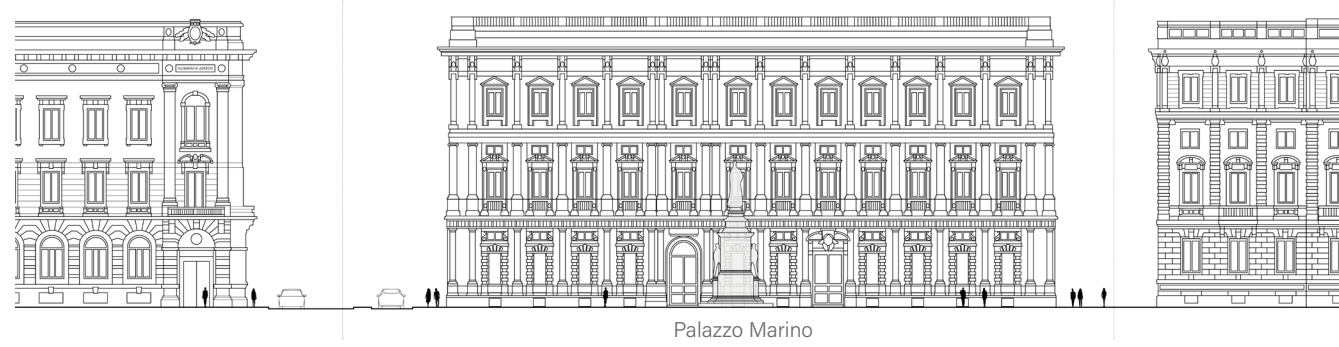
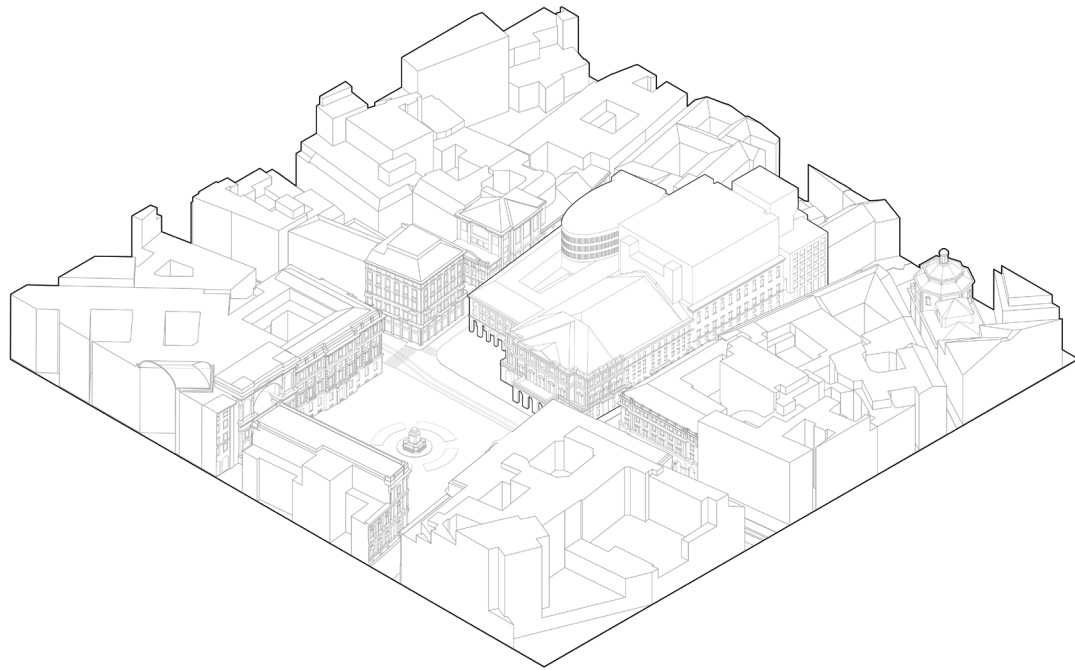
1858 - 1877  
Piazza Della Scala was created, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II followed, creating a connection to Piazza del Duomo.



2004 - 2023  
Teatro alla scala was renovated by Mario Botta. The first renovation was completed in 2004, the second addition in 2023.

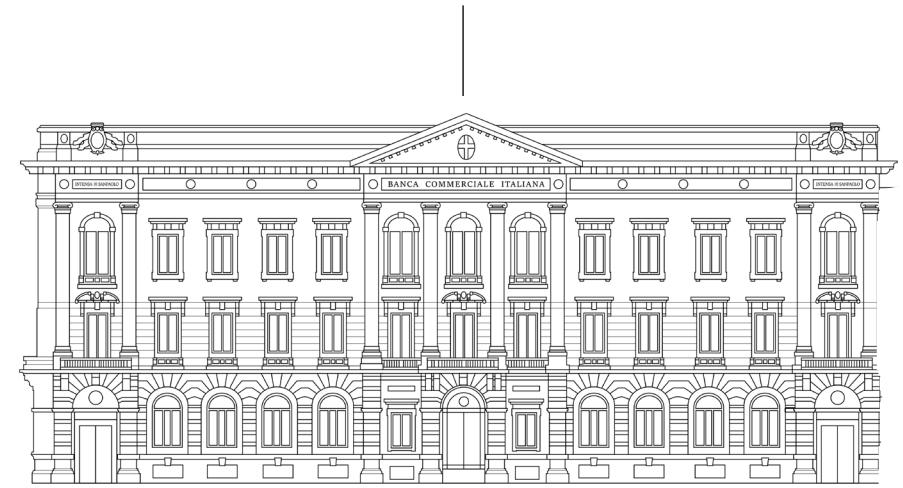


Site - Piazza della Scala

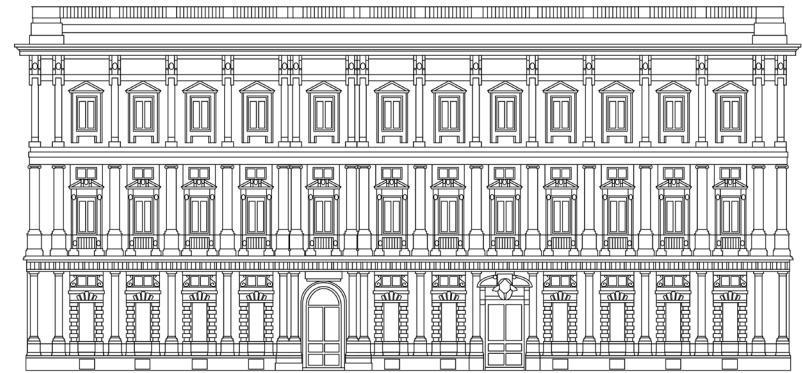


## Architectural Identity

The Architectural identity of Teatro alla Scala is typically classical, focusing on symmetry and hierarchy, this is juxtaposed by the form driven renovation by Mario Botta. Although built later, the surrounding buildings convey this classical architectural style too.



Palazzo Della Banca Commerciale Italiana



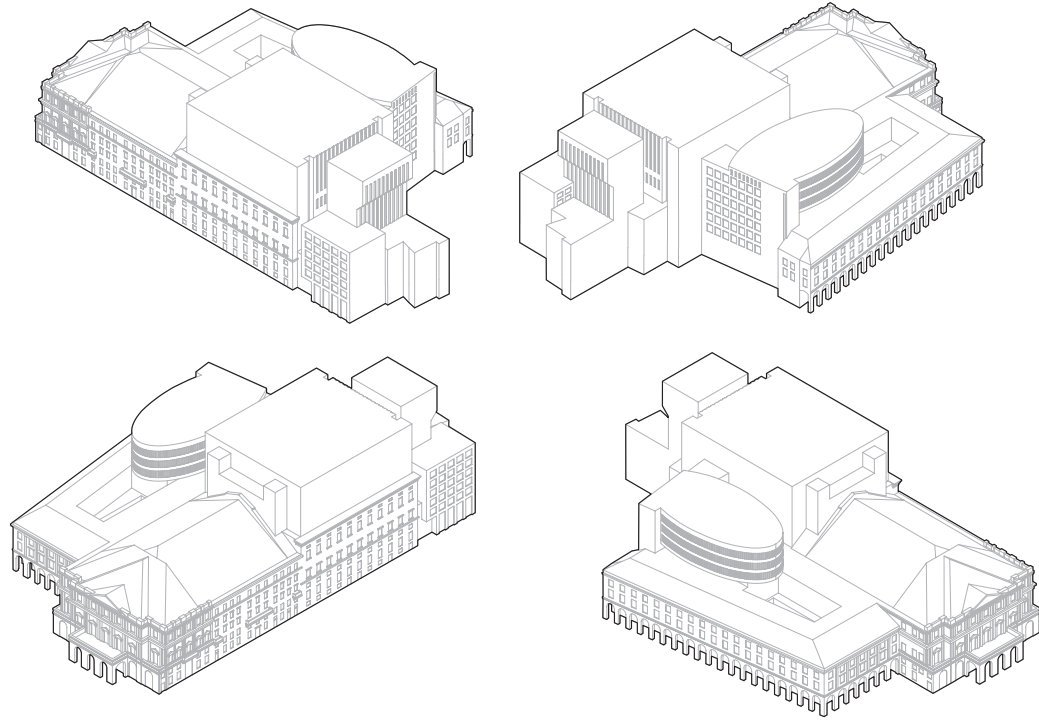
Palazzo Marino



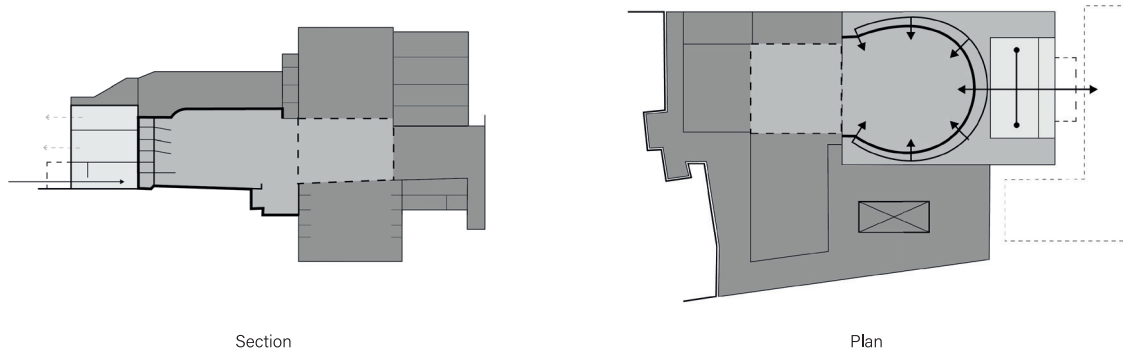
Palazzo Beltrami

## Threshold Observation

Despite the array of interesting functions and spaces that rest behind the walls of the theatre, the facade itself although expressive in decoration, could be described as inward facing. The doors are inactive and there is no visual access to the inside with few windows at eye height.



Public Threshold



Section

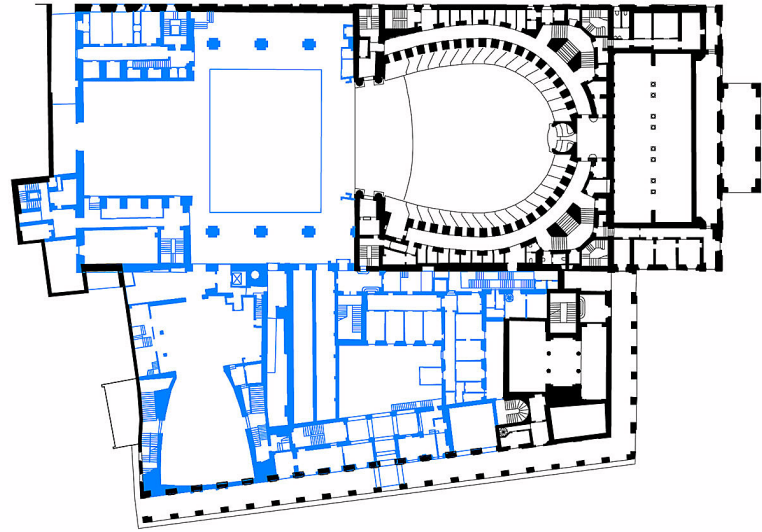
Plan



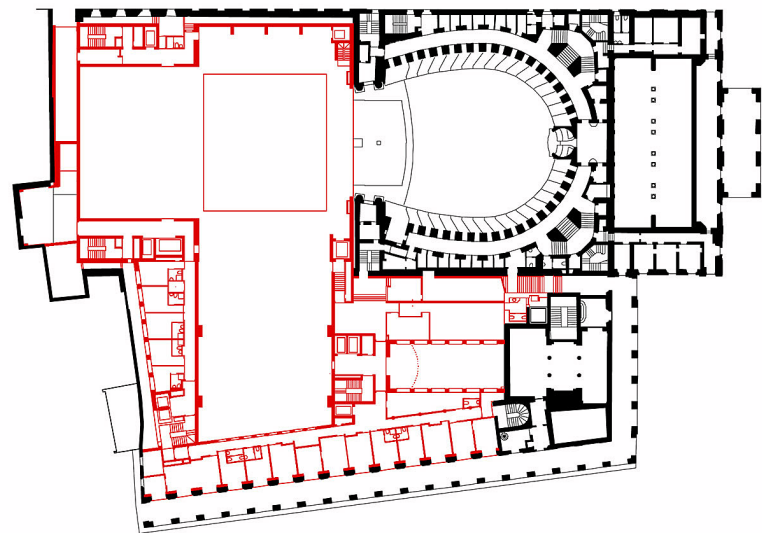
## Renovation - Mario Botta

The renovation of Teatro alla Scala was carried out in 2004. These drawings show the changes that were made to accommodate the demands of modern performances. The theatre was renovated again, completing its current state in 2023.

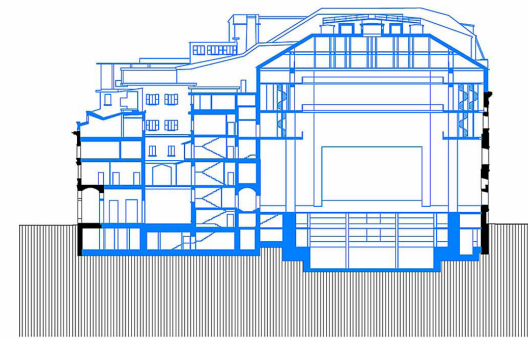
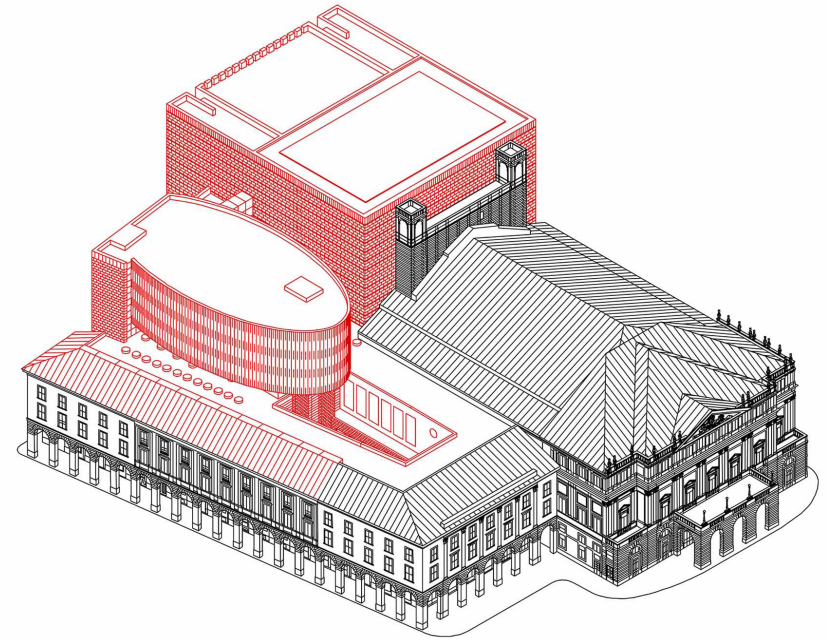
Mario Botta Architects 2004



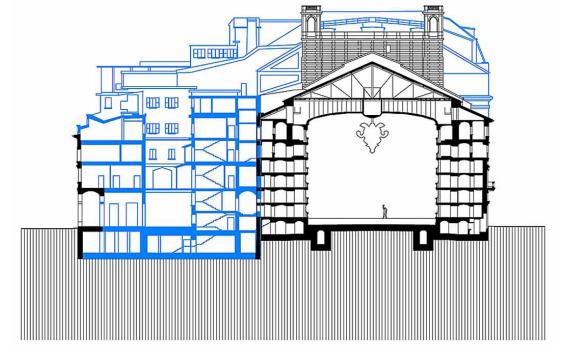
PRECEDENTE +3.80



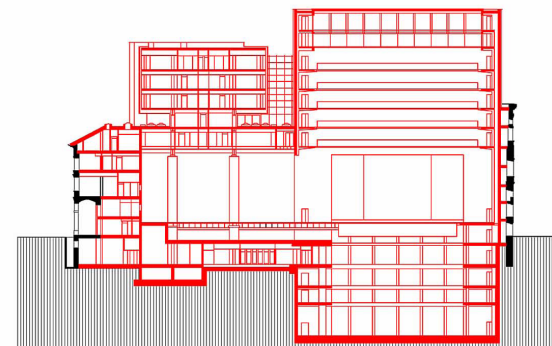
NUOVO +2.94



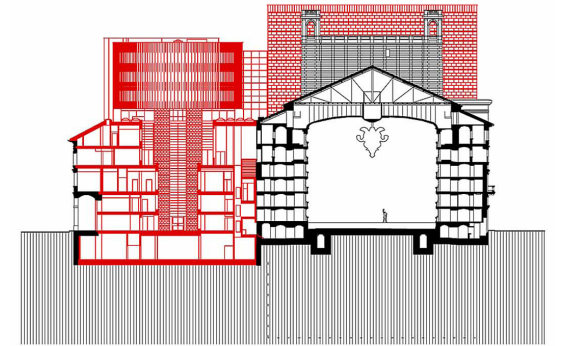
PRECEDENTE



PRECEDENTE

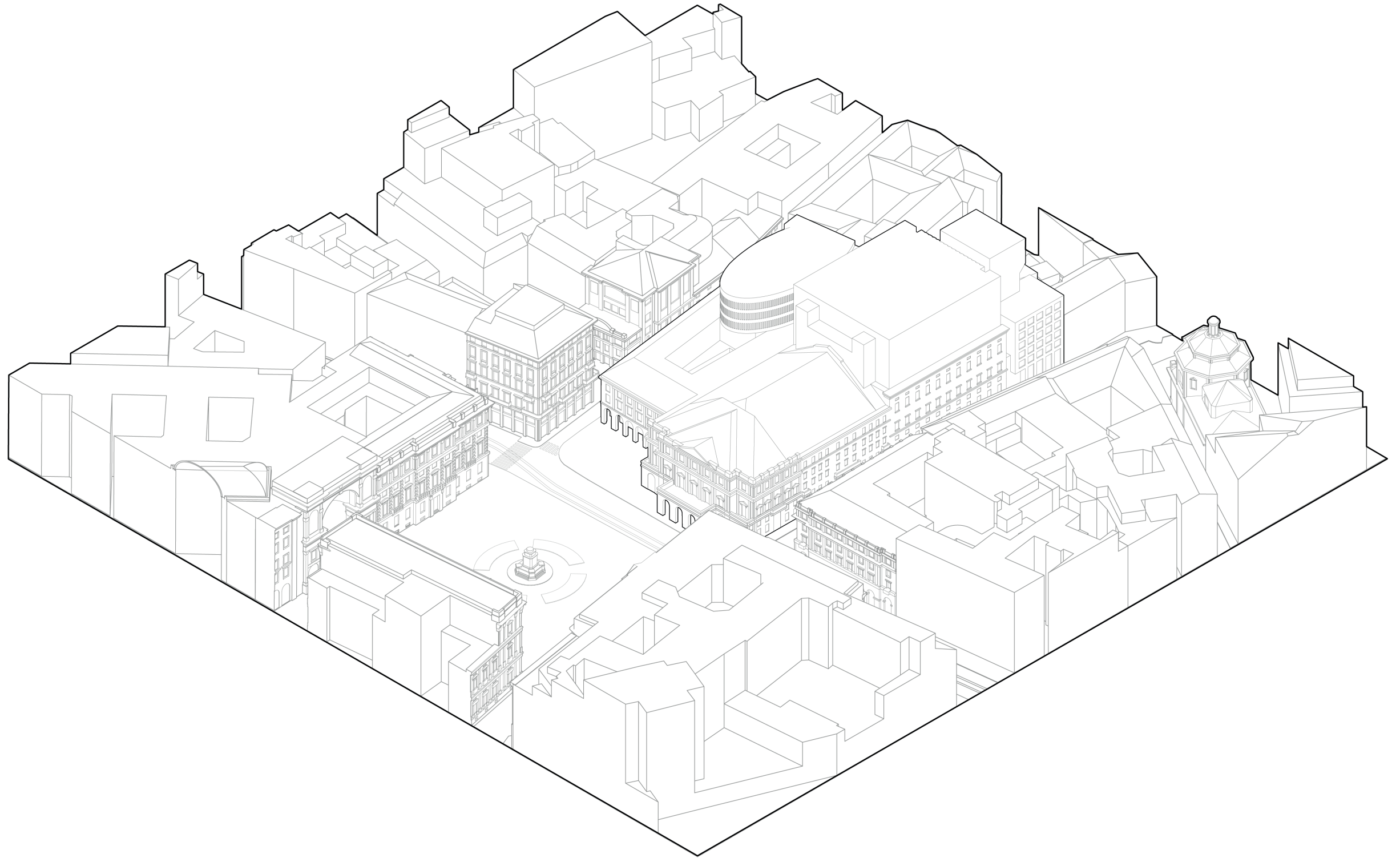


NUOVO



NUOVO

Site - Axonometric projection



## Site Timeline

During World War Two, Teatro alla Scala was bombed. Although it was repaired soon after the war, this offers an opportunity to interject in the timeline, imagining that the theatre was never repaired, instead it was demolished entirely, leaving space for a new project that would not be realised until many years later.

This would be an appropriate interjection as the theatre in its current position represents the approach to architecture that this project proposes an alternative too. Secondly, piazza della scala exists because of the theatre, therefore it is logical to recognise that it did exist on the site.



1381 - 1776

Church Santa Maria della Scala



1778

Teatro alla Scala

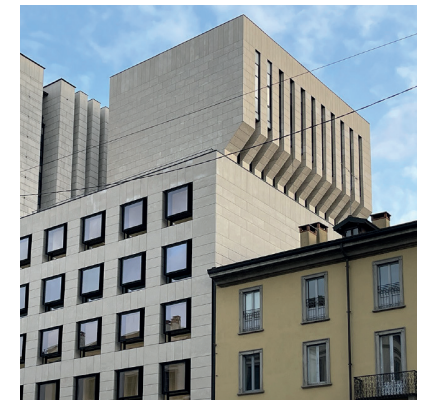


**1943**  
WWII Bombing



2004

First renovation of  
Teatro alla Scala



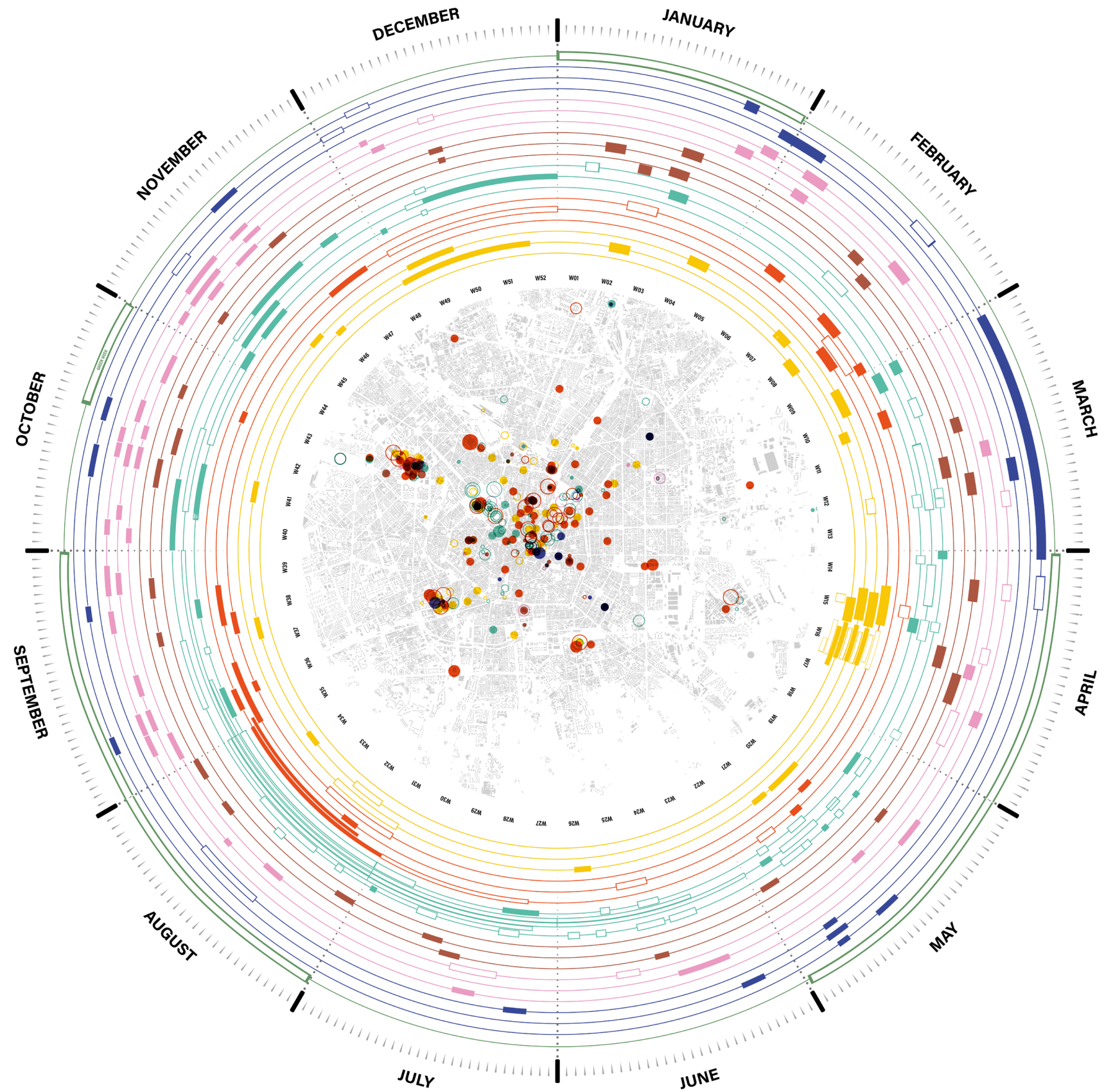
2023

Second renovation of  
Teatro alla Scala

## Milan Cultural Event Calendar

Milan is a cultural hub, there are cultural activities year round. This of course brings many visitors to the city however Opera must remain relevant within this rich cultural calendar.

- Design
- Fashion
- Bureaucracy
- Leisure
- Research
- Literature
- Greenery



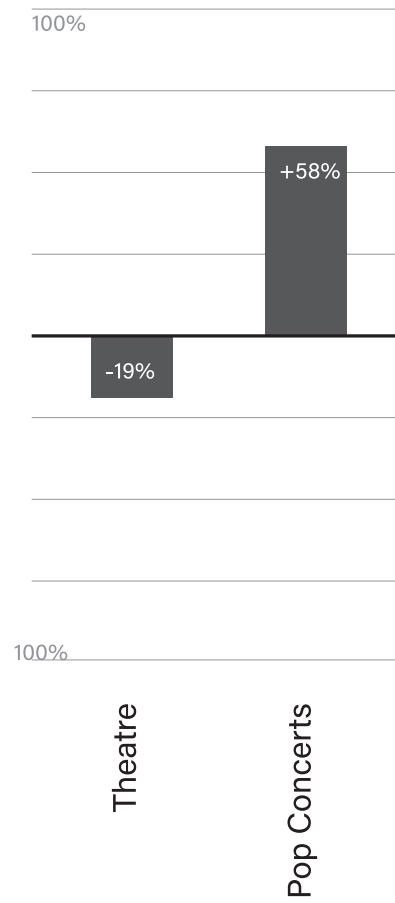
### Cultural significance

Gradually a decline in Opera's relevance within the cultural scene is becoming ever more prominent. These graphs here show that there is a growing increase in other forms of entertainment. Architecture could help address this issue.

Culture Statistics (Eurostat, 2022)

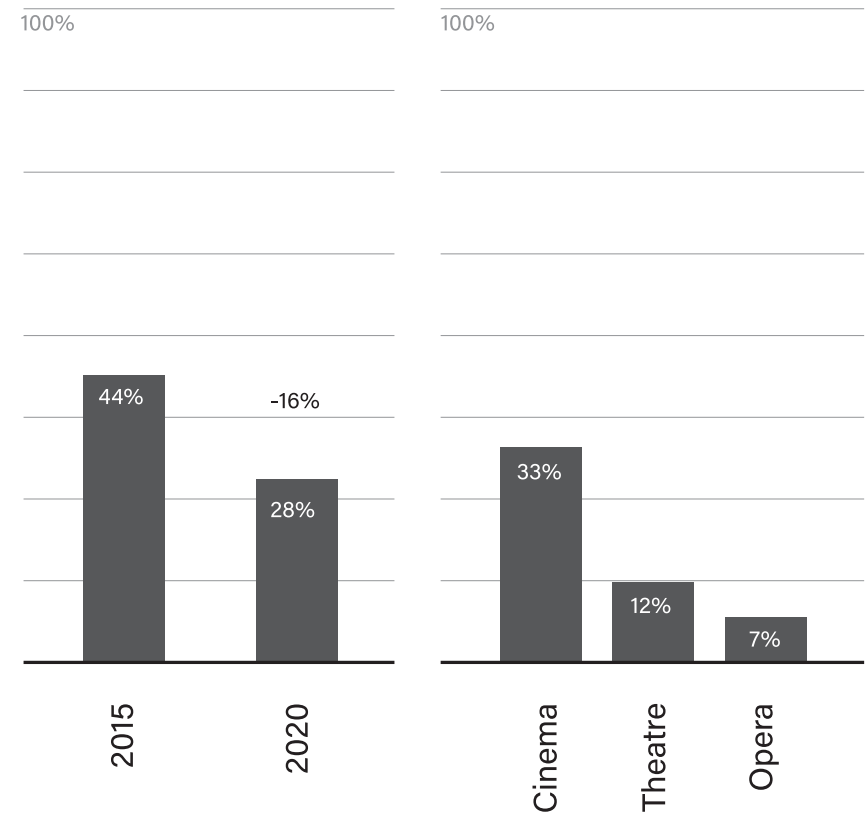
### Attendance at live performances

Difference between 2018 and 2022  
Italy



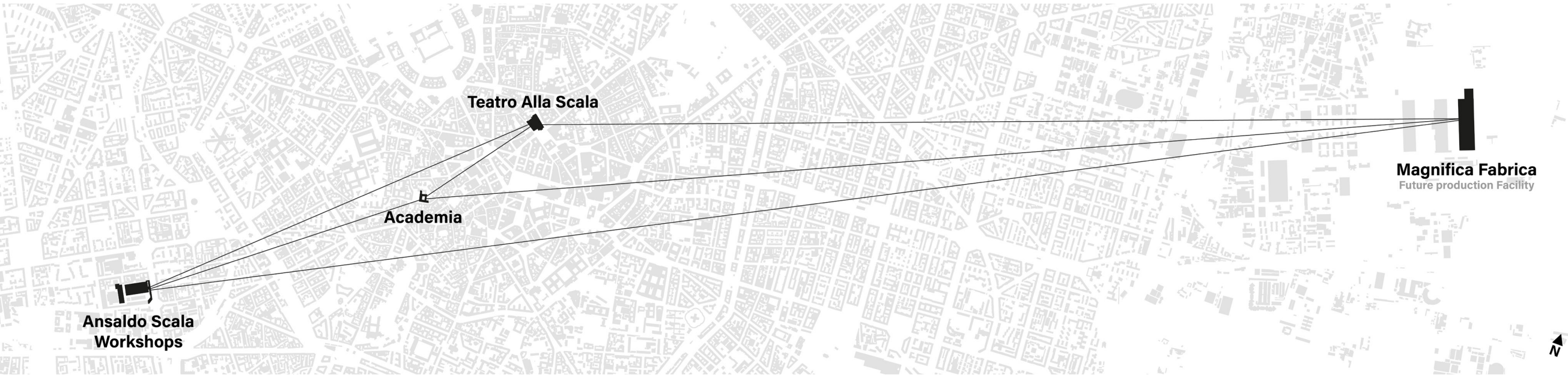
### Attendance cultural activities

Participating in any cultural activity once per year  
Europe



## La Scala Foundation

The Fondazione Teatro alla Scala was established in 1991, it consists of the Teatro alla Scala, the Filarmonica della Scala, the Accademia Teatro alla Scala, and the Ansaldo Workshops. The Foundation's ambition is to preserve and advance operatic and musical excellence on a global scale; ensuring that La Scala remains a leading institution in the global performing arts environment.



### Ansaldo Scala Workshops

The Ansaldo Workshops are the Foundation's technical production centre, where set designs, costumes, and stage machinery are conceived and built. Located in a former industrial site, they host specialised workshops for carpentry, tailoring, sculpture, and scenic painting.

### Accademia

The Accademia Teatro alla Scala is the Foundation's training institution. Here; performers, technicians, and arts professionals are trained. It offers programs in opera, music, dance, and stagecraft, in traditional and more innovative manners.

### Teatro Alla Scala

Teatro alla Scala is one of the world's most significant opera houses. It hosts opera, ballet, and concert performances, it is the performative face of the foundation. Located in the same building, there is a museum dedicated to the cultural history of the site.

### Magnifica Fabbrica

The Magnifica Fabbrica is the Foundation's future production facility. The intention is to bring a public element to the processes involved in set production.

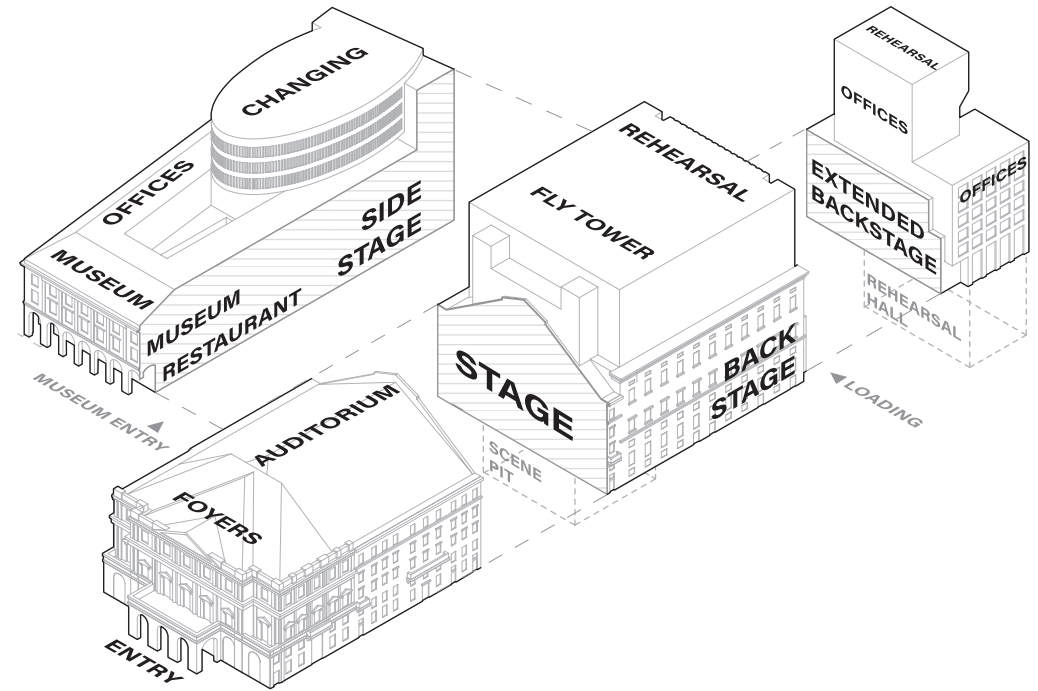


Brighton College Performing Arts Centre, KRFT

# PROGRAM DEFINING

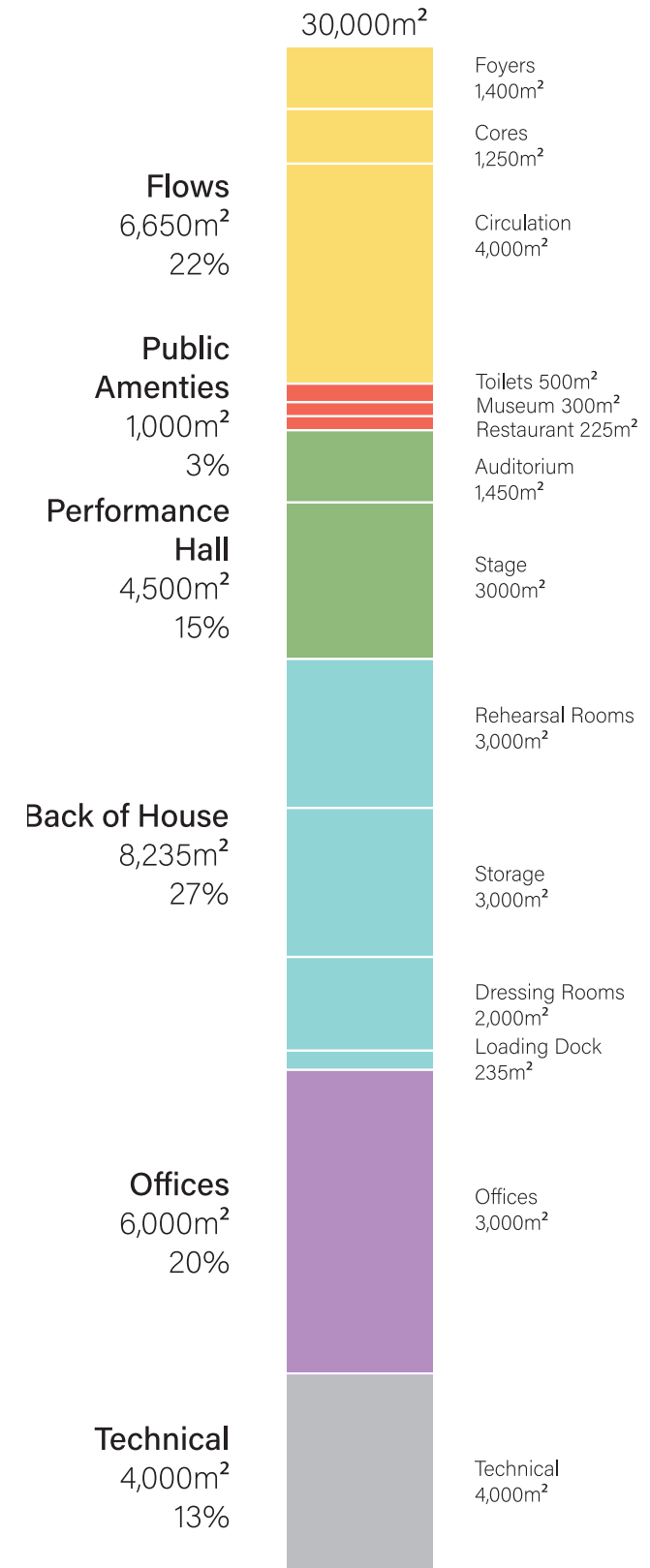
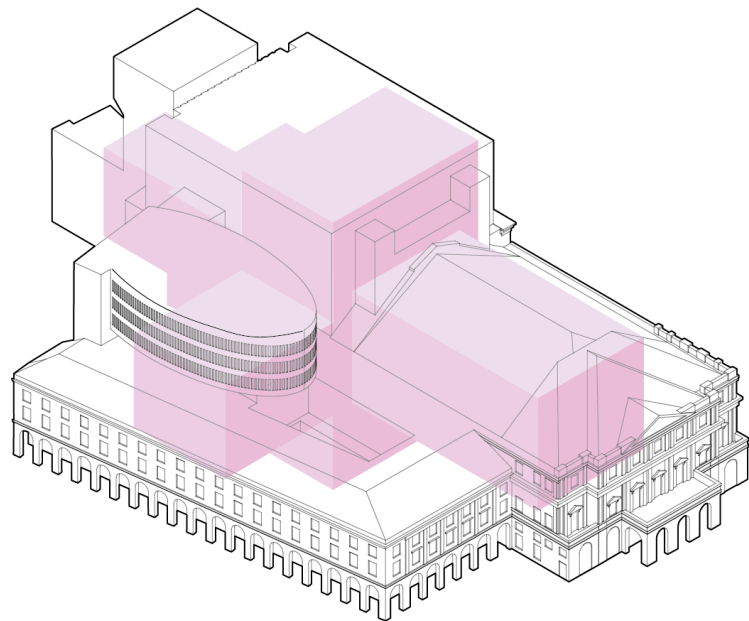
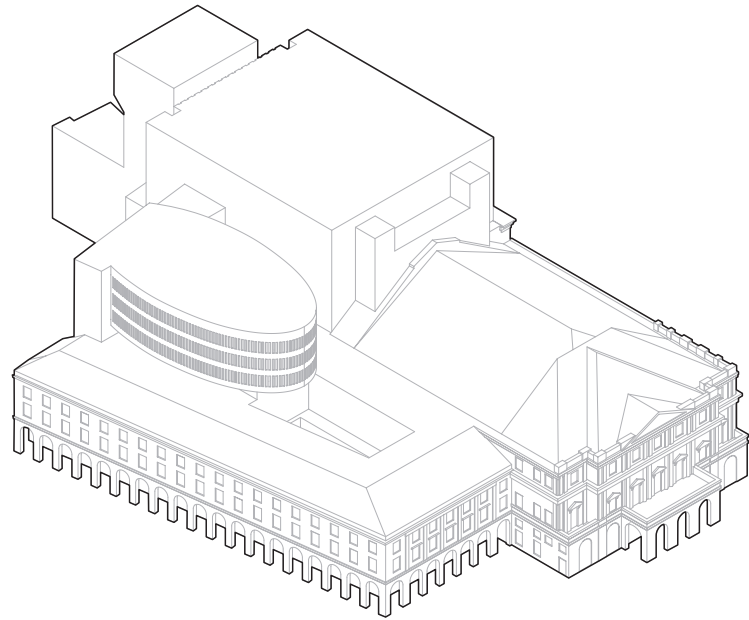
This section analyses the spatial organisation and typical program of opera and performance centres to develop a clearer understanding of their functional requirements and operational flows.

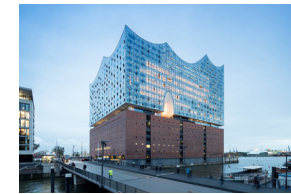
By studying these arrangements, the aim is to identify both essential spatial needs and potential points of civic interaction, which will inform the formulation of a project-specific brief that repositions the performance centre as a more open, participatory architectural typology.



## Current program - Teatro della Scala

The current program of the theatre. It is important to consider that the relationship between the area and the volume taken by different functions is not equivalent. As shown in the diagram below, the performance hall, auditorium, and backstage take a far higher percentage of the space than the area would indicate.





## Precedent studies

This section presents precedent studies that analyse the programmatic structures of other PerformanceCentres, using them as benchmarks to understand functional relationships, spatial hierarchies, and programmatic areas. These insights help inform a new program for the project, focused on the ambitions of reimagining La Scala as an open, responsive, and publicly engaged performance centre.



Oslo Opera House, Oslo



Amare Performing Arts Centre, The Hague



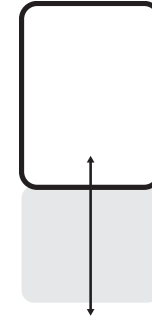
Casa da Musica, Porto



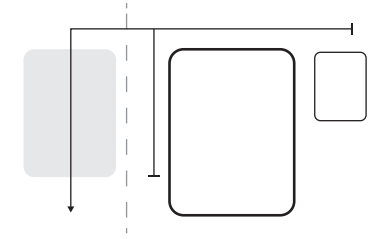
Brighton College Performing Arts Centre, Brighton



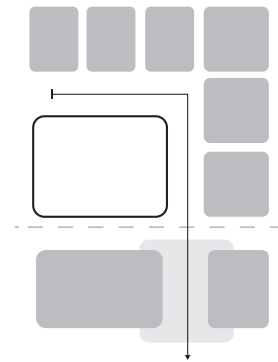
Tivolivredenburg, Utrecht



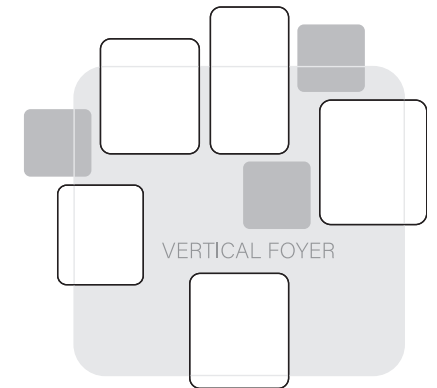
Teatro alla Scala



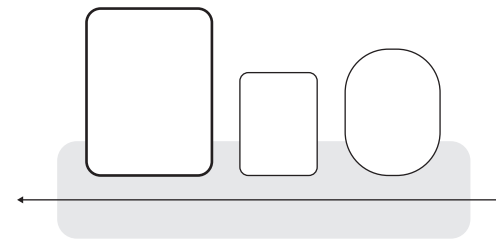
Circulation around the hall perimeter.  
Casa da Musica, Porto



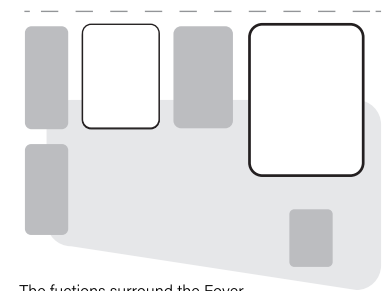
Circulation as a corridor.  
Performing Arts Centre, Brighton



The foyer is vertical host for the spaces.  
Tivolivredenburg, Utrecht



The foyer acts as a street.  
The Glasshouse, Gateshead



The functions surround the Foyer.  
Oslo Opera House, Oslo

**Program Benchmarking**



## Program Ambitions



### FONDAZIONE TEATRO ALLA SCALA DI MILANO

#### Global Stage

As a global destination, Milan would benefit from a more outward-facing La Scala, strengthening its international identity and public presence.

#### Transparency

Architecture that showcases the processes and support functions, causes for greater public understanding and connection to the institution.

#### Talent Development

Showcasing creative processes, such as rehearsal, the project attracts new audiences to the performing arts, supporting talent development through accessible engagement.



#### Back of House

The back of house, such as, rehearsal spaces reveal the creative process, and extend the buildings operation beyond the time of the shows.



#### Amenities

Increasing amenities is important to create a more welcoming, accessible environment that encourages everyday use and integrates the building more fully into public life.



#### Offices

Decreasing office spaces by moving them to other facilities alleviates space for an increase in other more engaging functions.



#### Flows

It is not about increasing or decreasing flows, but rather the project should focus on rethinking the approach to circulation in an engaging way.



#### Technical

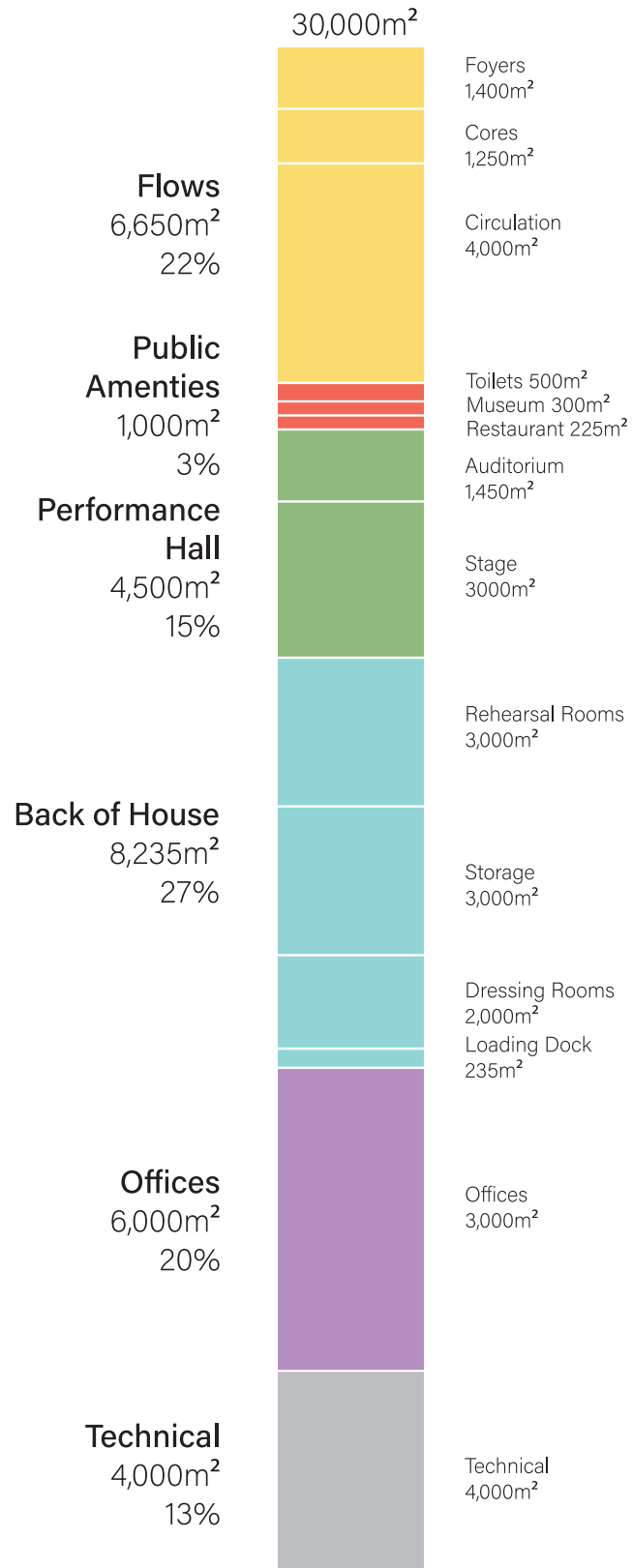
Dedicated technical spaces are mostly a consequence of the performance hall. They should be sufficient to support the hall with other general building support facilities.



#### Performance Hall

The intention is not to expand the performance hall but to make it more versatile, allowing for varied formats and flexibility.

# Current Program



**Flows**  
-1,050m<sup>2</sup>  
-0.5%

**Public Amenties**  
+900m<sup>2</sup>  
+4.3%

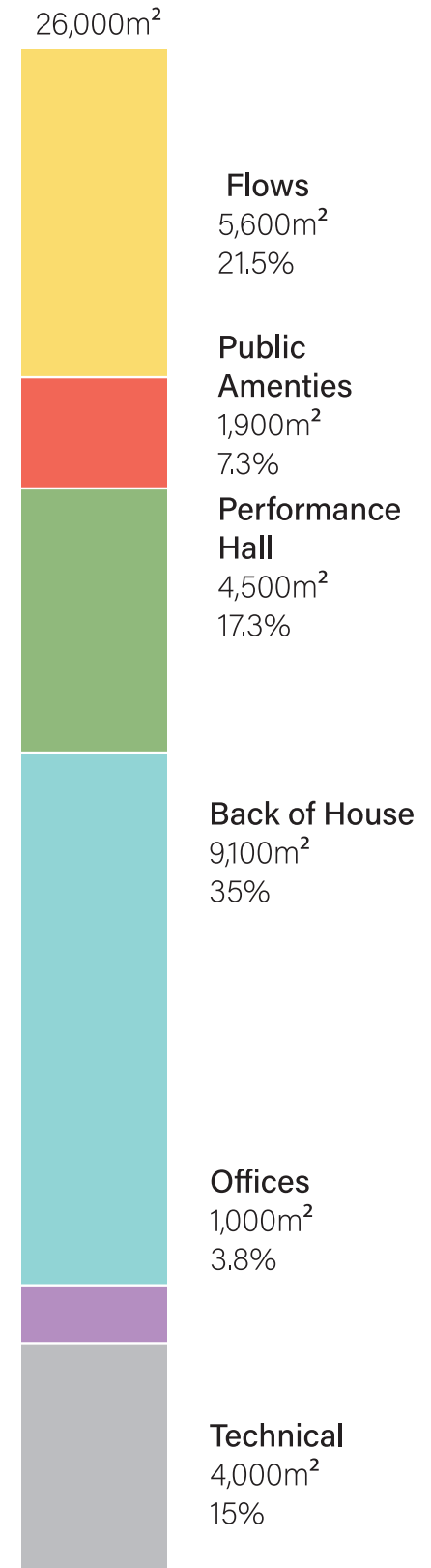
**Performance Hall**  
+0m<sup>2</sup>  
+2.3%

**Back of House**  
+875m<sup>2</sup>  
8%

**Offices**  
-5,000m<sup>2</sup>  
-16.2%

**Technical**  
+0m<sup>2</sup>  
+2%

# Future Program



**Flows**  
5,600m<sup>2</sup>  
21.5%

**Public Amenties**  
1,900m<sup>2</sup>  
7.3%

**Performance Hall**  
4,500m<sup>2</sup>  
17.3%

**Back of House**  
9,100m<sup>2</sup>  
35%

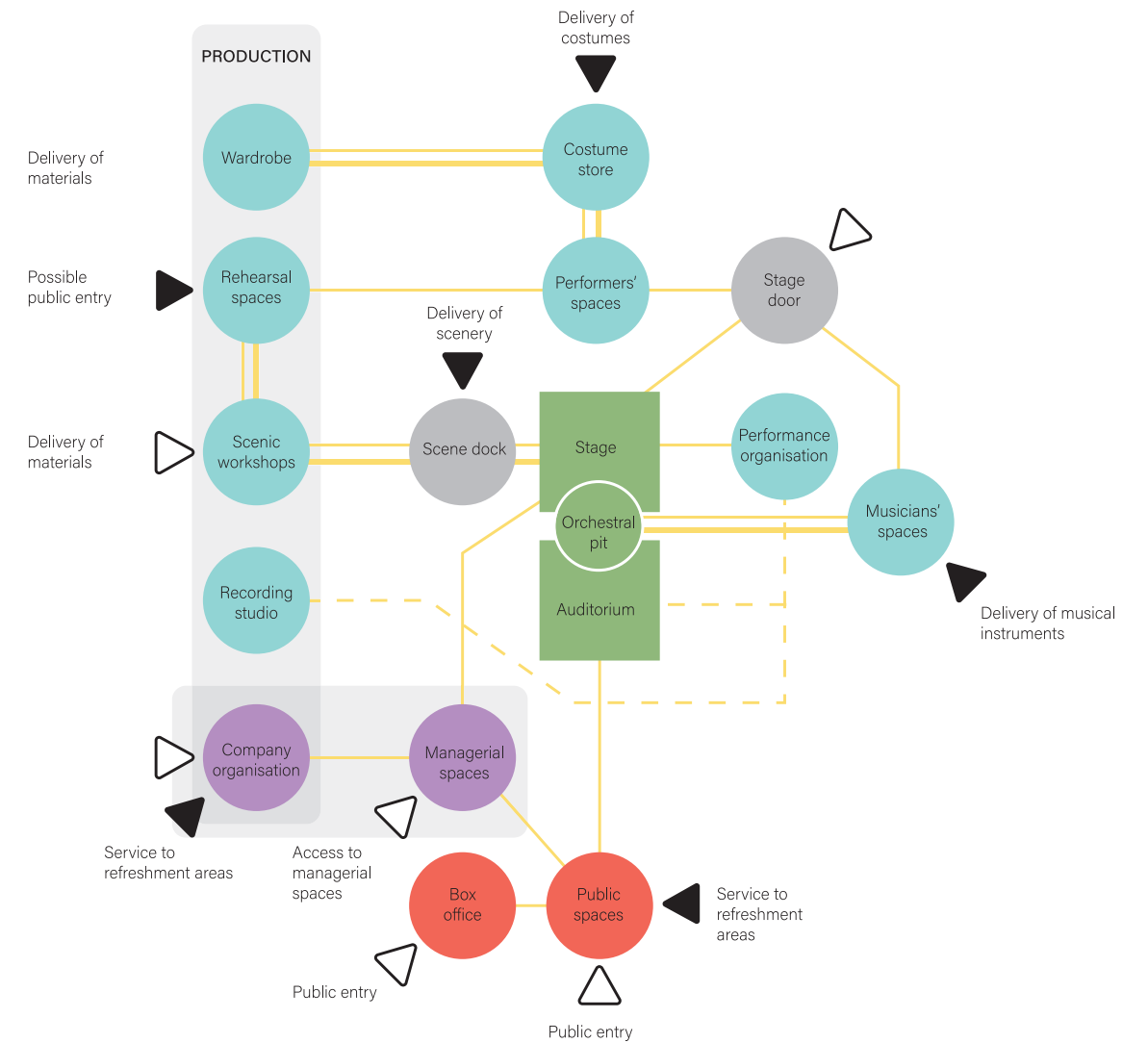
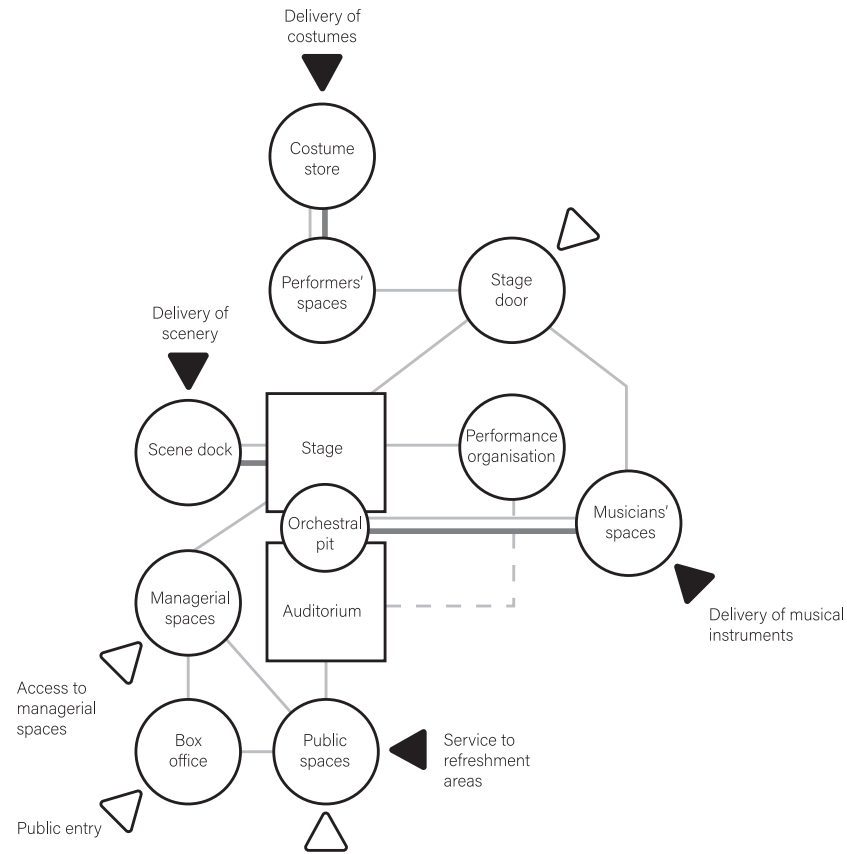
**Offices**  
1,000m<sup>2</sup>  
3.8%

**Technical**  
4,000m<sup>2</sup>  
15%

## Program Organisation

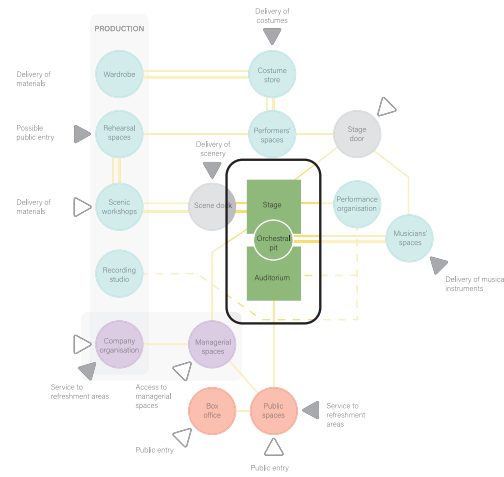
The first diagram on this spread maps the relationships between production, performance, and public zones, revealing how access, circulation, and program could be compartmentalised. The second diagram shows the program relationship diagram for the project.

It proposes what is known as a production theatre whereby the facilities such as workshops are located on site, additionally there are rehearsal spaces and music rooms, or recording spaces.

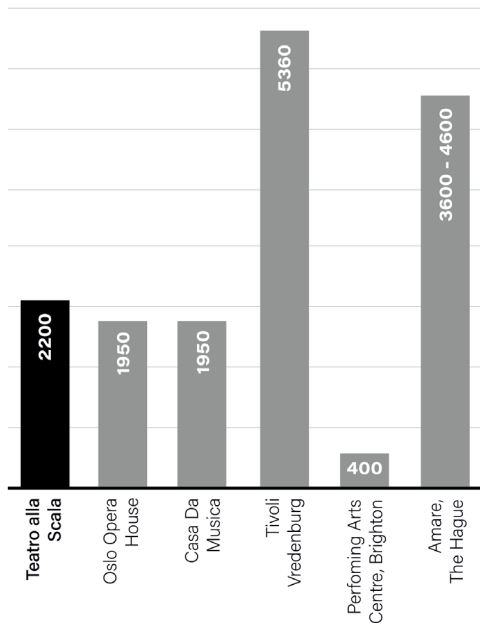


## Stage Approach

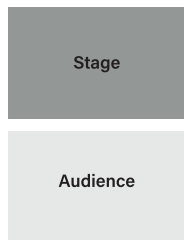
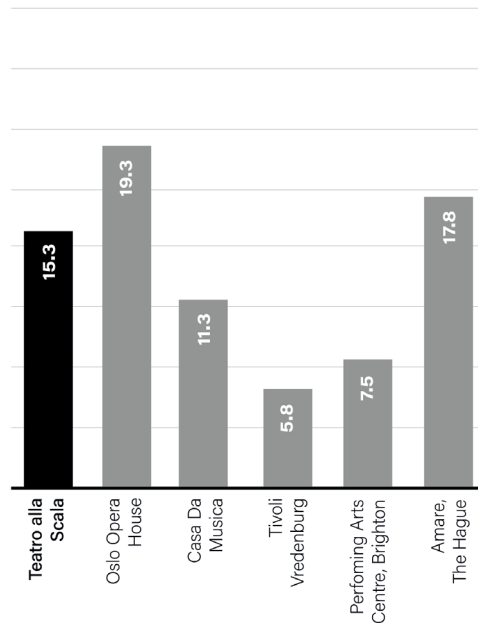
The design of the stage must accommodate a range of performance types through flexible configurations that support adaptability without compromising its primary role as an opera house. This flexibility important for broadening the building's cultural relevance, attract diverse audiences, and ensure the space remains active and responsive to changing artistic practices. To align it with other single hall comparable venues, the hall should have a capacity of 1500 - 2000 attendees.



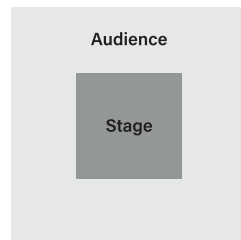
Performance Space Capacity



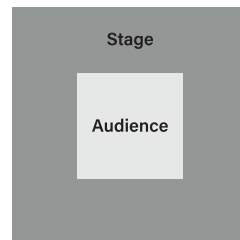
Performance Space Capacity / Building GFA



Linear



Central



Peripheral



Shakespeare Theatre, Gdansk.  
Linear Arrangement



Shakespeare Theatre, Gdansk.  
Central (Shakespearean) Arrangement

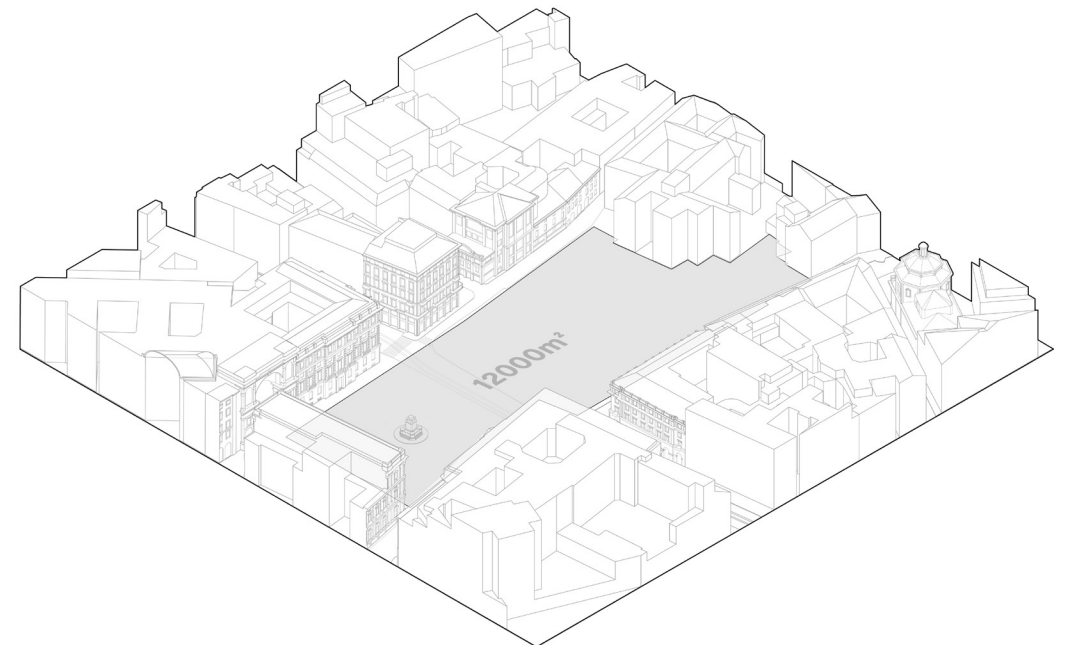
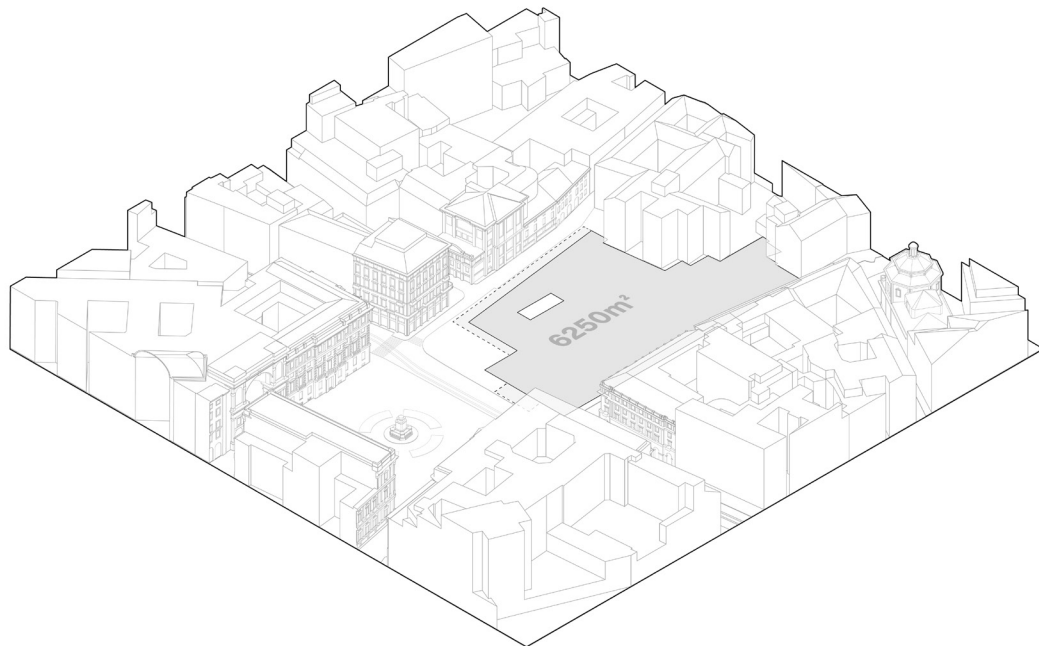
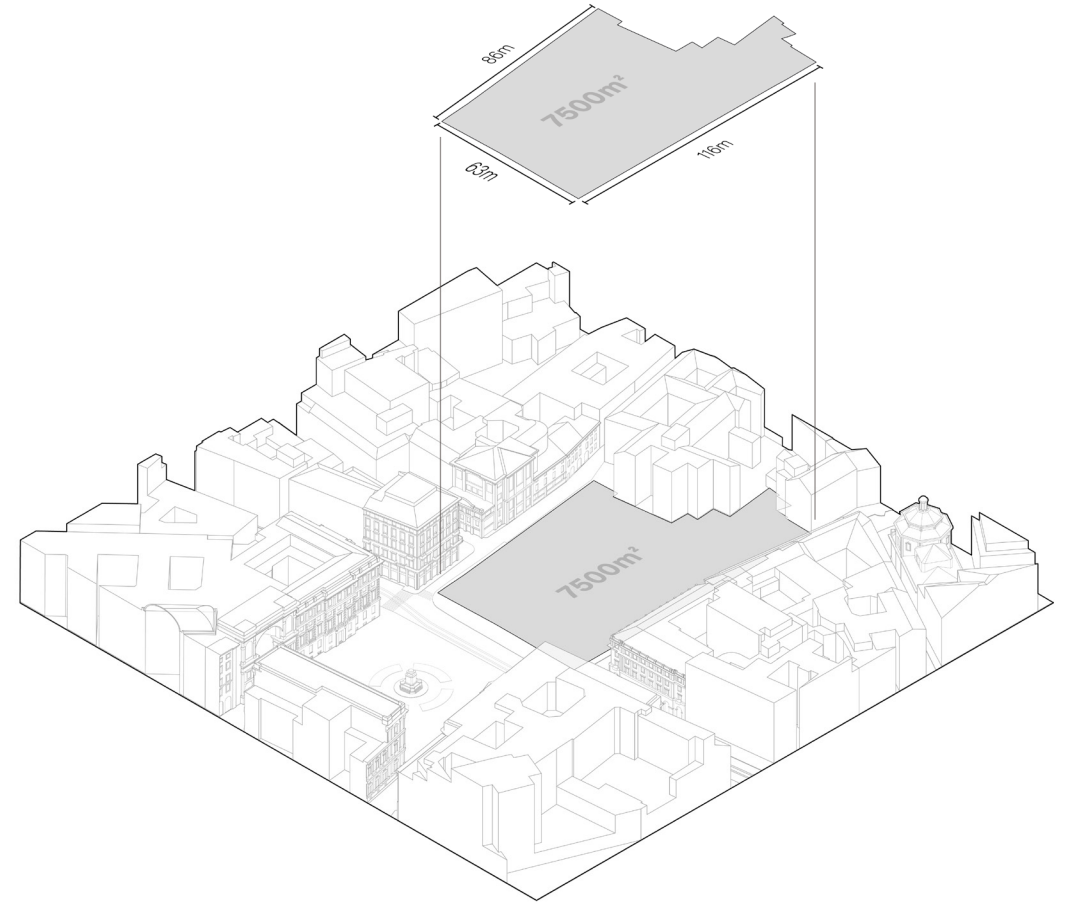
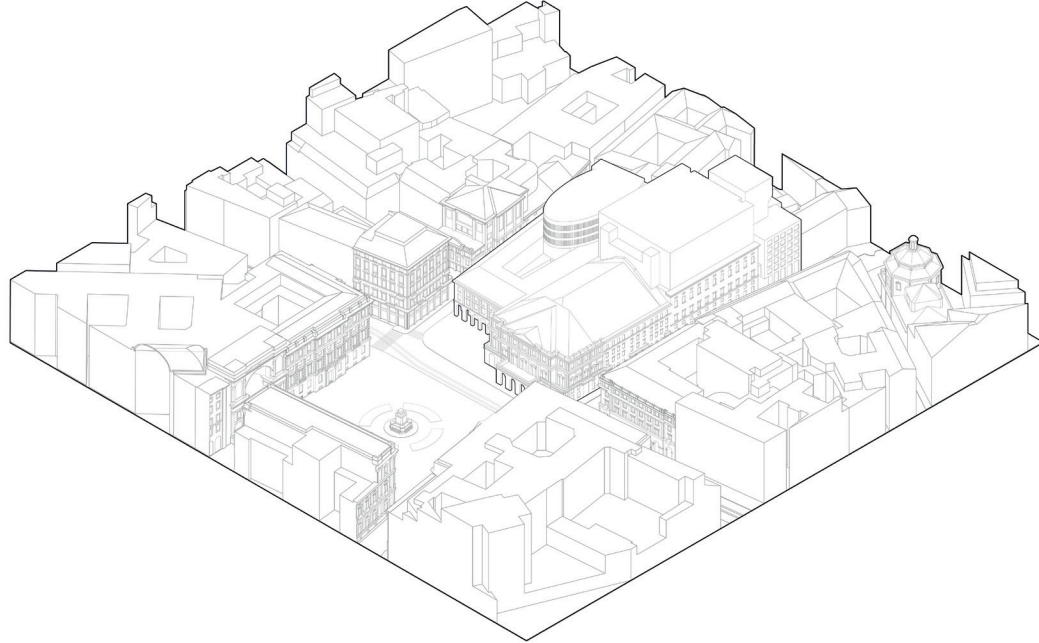


## SITE DEFINING

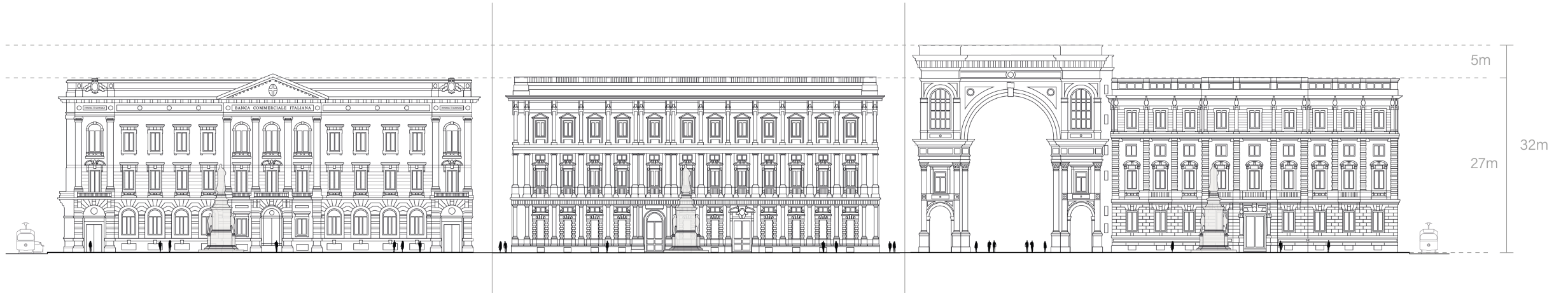
This section defines the site, the footprint, plot boundary, conditions and height. Additionally, it explores through massing the different ways which the program area could be applied to the site.

## Site Footprint Defining

The footprint of the site is extended to the limits of the urban block. The site requires that the buildings should act as an extension of the adjacent piazza, causing for a net growth in public area.

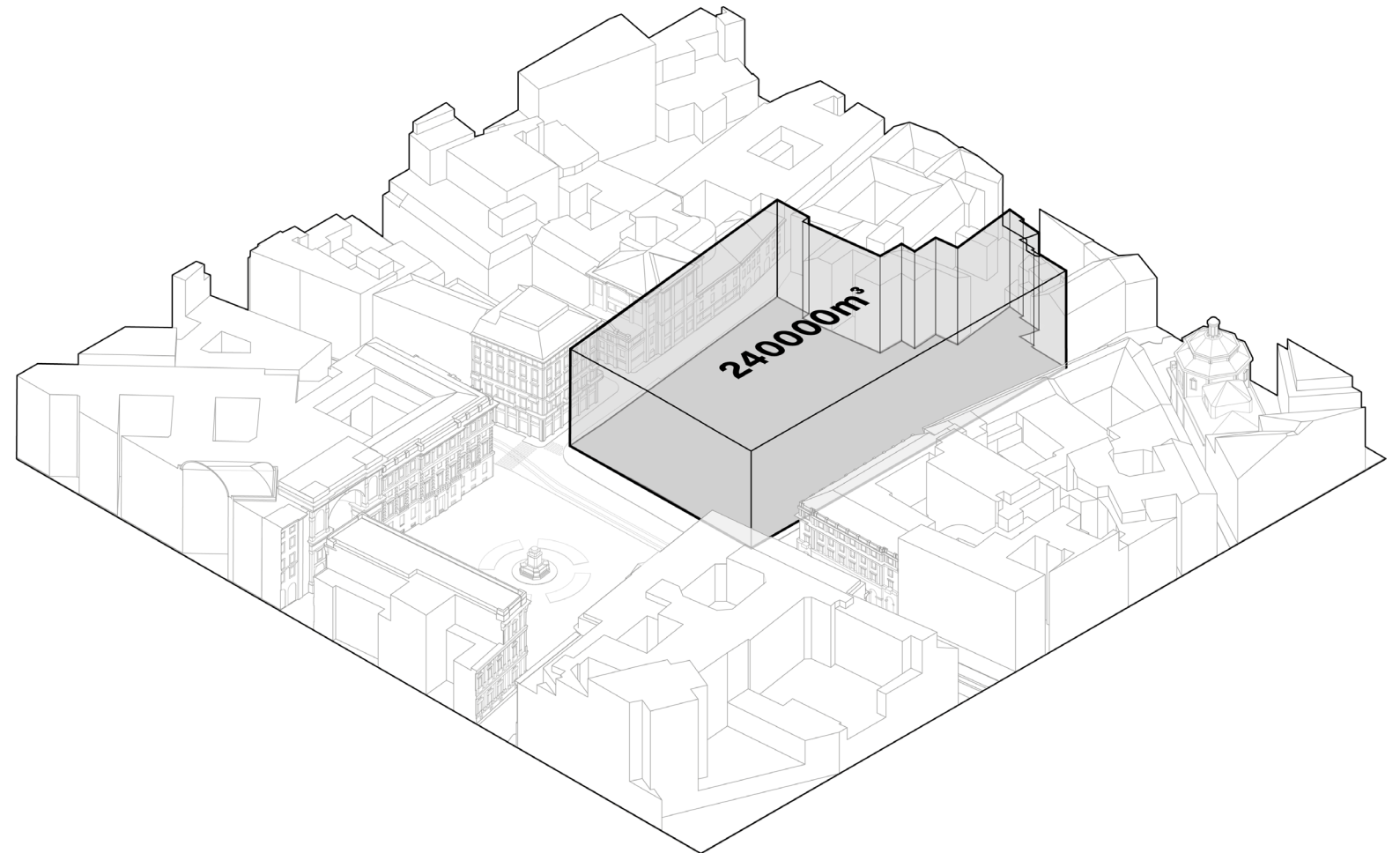


## Site Height Defining

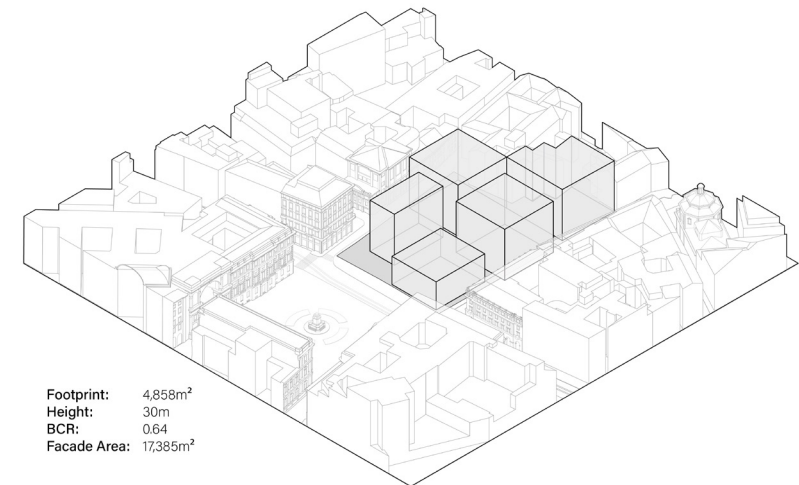
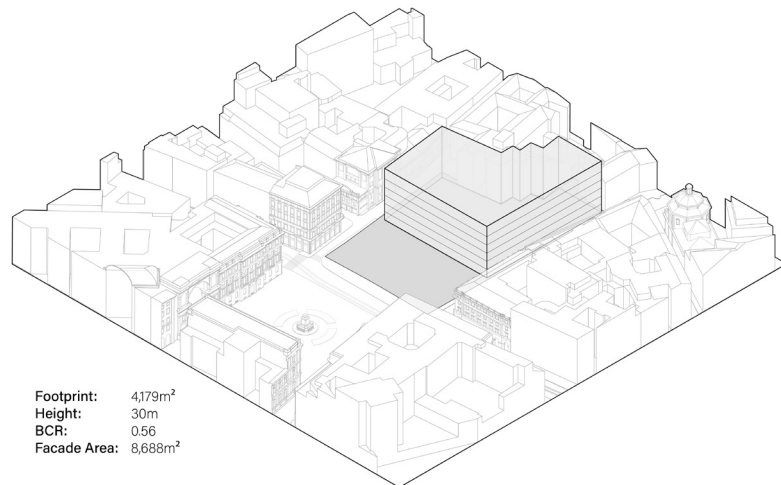
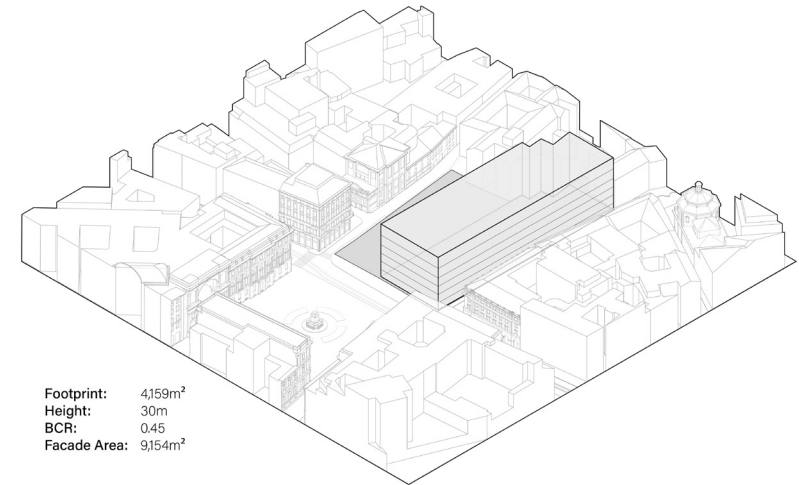
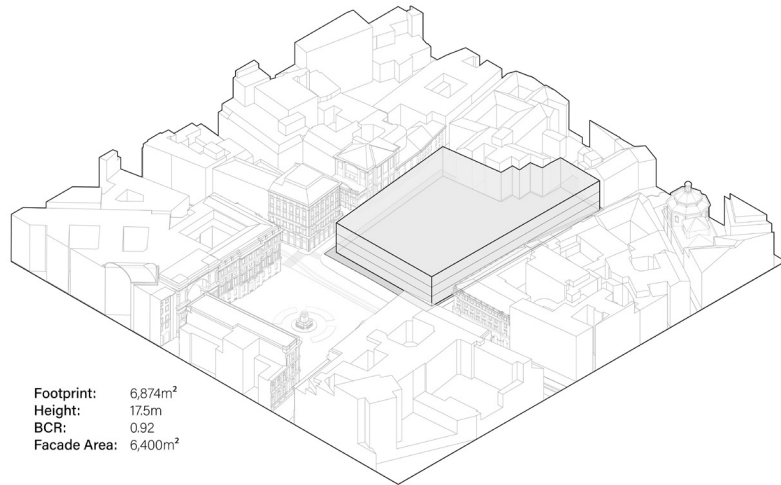
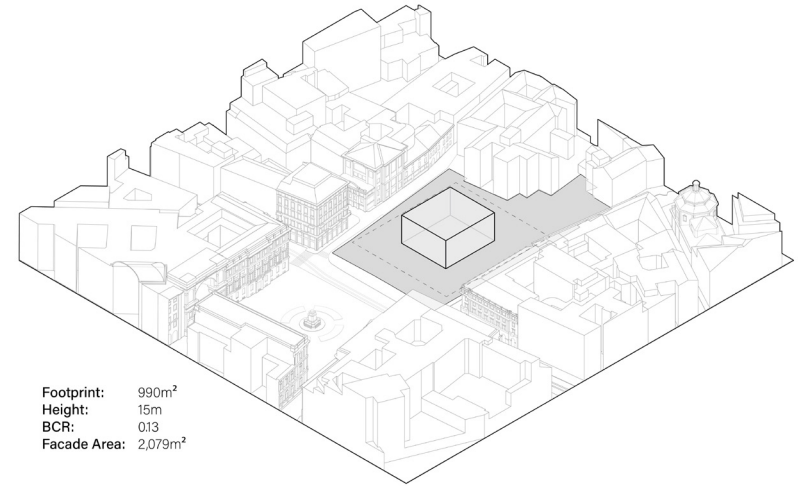
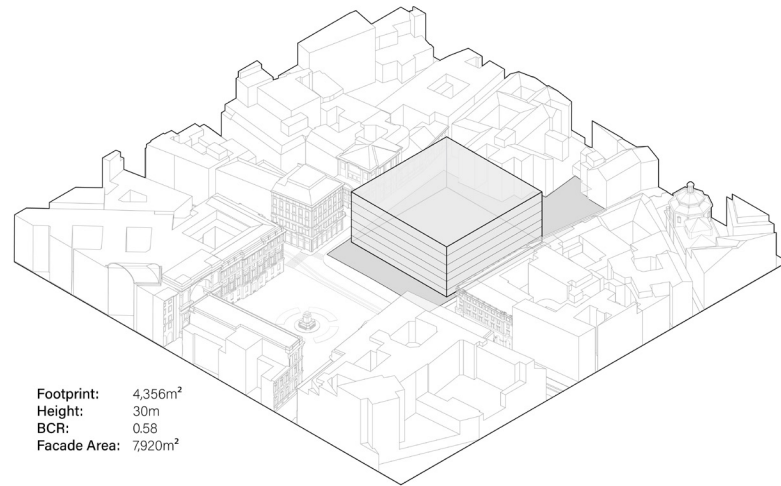


The height limit of the plot has been set to 32m. This is 5m higher than the average facade height on Piazza della Scala. However, 32m is inline with the height of the arched entrance to the Galleria. The Galleria differentiates itself to give a slightly more prominent impression than the surrounding buildings.

The intent of the height limit is to ensure that the building is kept befitting of the context in which it is situated, but to allow for a slight height increase to mark the buildings significance as a cultural institution.



# Initial Massing Studies



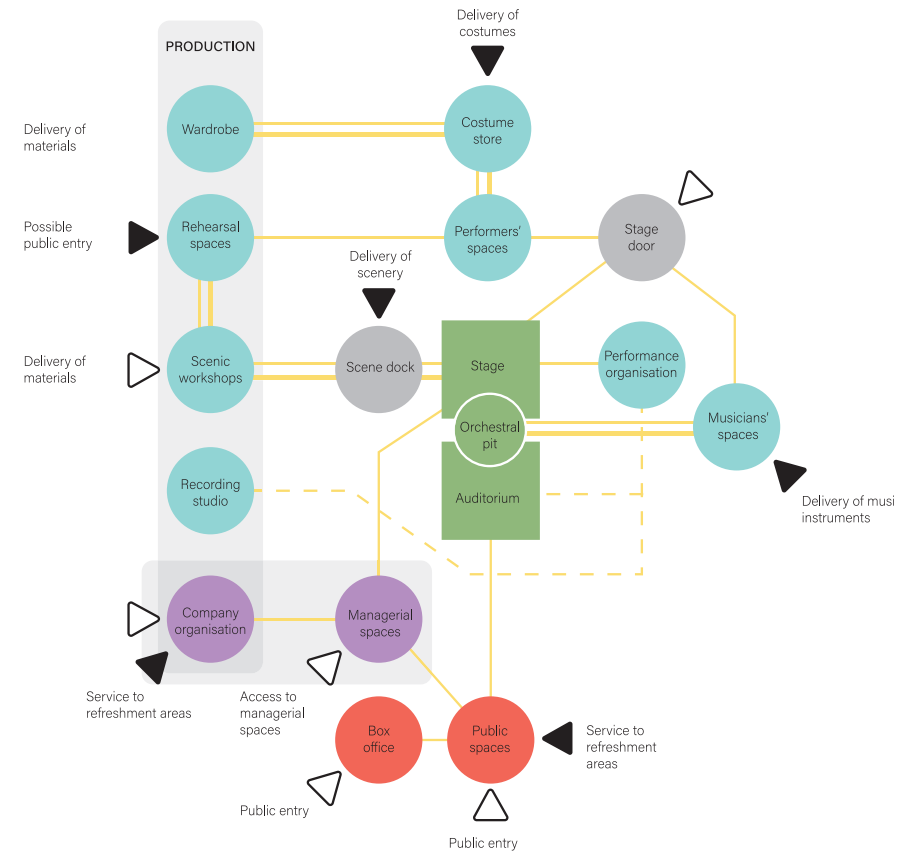
CONCLUSION

03

## Program Change



## Program Organisation



## Client Ambitions



FONDAZIONE TEATRO ALLA SCALA DI MILANO

### Global Stage

As a global destination, Milan would benefit from a more outward-facing La Scala, strengthening its international identity and public presence.

### Transparency

Architecture that showcases the processes and support functions, causes for greater public understanding and connection to the institution.

### Talent Development

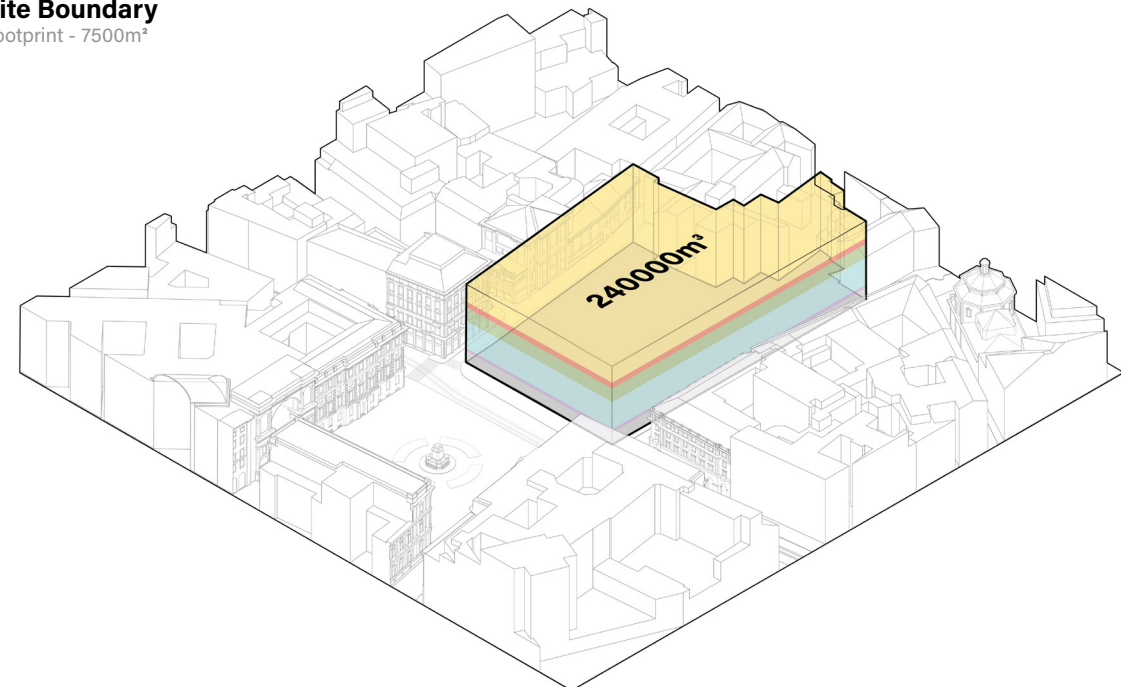
Showcasing creative processes, such as rehearsal, the project attracts new audiences to the performing arts, supporting talent development through accessible engagement.

## Height Restriction



## Site Boundary

Footprint - 7500m²



# Intermission. Between City and Stage.

How can a performance centre participate as an extension of the public realm enriching its civic depth?

This research explores how a renewed performance centre can move beyond being a static inward facing cultural monument to become an active civic participant, by rethinking its thresholds to create an open, porous, and responsive interface with the city.

## Client Ambition



FONDAZIONE TEATRO ALLA SCALA DI MILANO

## Global Stage

As a global destination, Milan would benefit from a more outward-facing La Scala, strengthening its international identity and public presence.

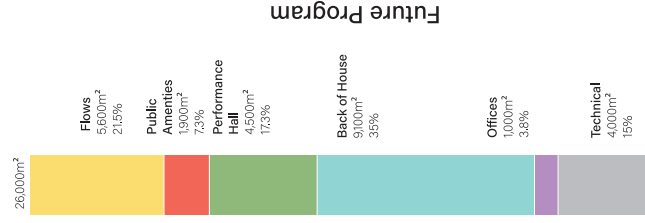
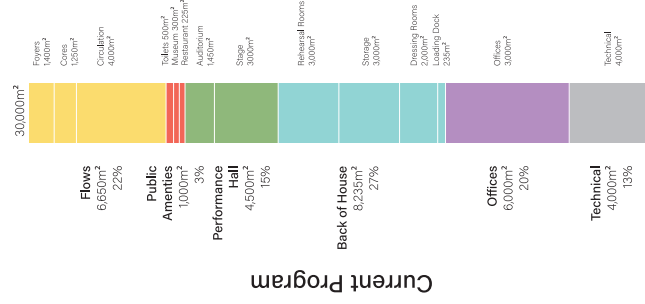
## Transparency

Architecture that showcases the processes and support functions, causes for greater public understanding and connection to the institution.

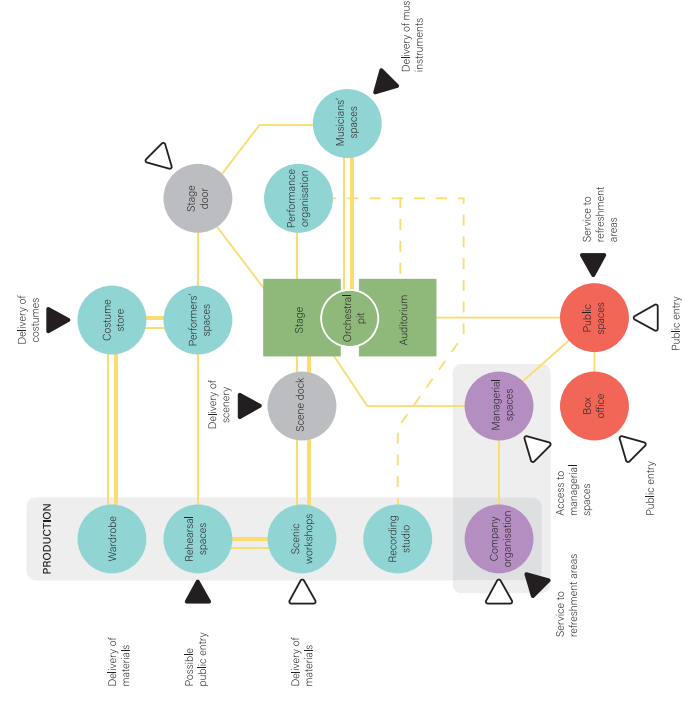
## Talent Development

Showcasing creative processes, such as rehearsal the project attracts new audiences to the performing arts, supporting talent development through accessible engagement.

## Program



## Program Configuration



## P2 POSTER ARRANGEMENT

Jack Pilkington  
4846176

## Program Intention

**+** **Back of House** **+** **Amenities** **-** **Offices**

The back of house, such as rehearsal spaces reveal the creative process, and extend the buildings operation beyond the time of the shows;

Increasing amenities is important to create a more welcoming environment that encourages everyday use and integrates the building more fully into public life.

Decreasing office spaces by moving them to other facilities alleviates space for an increase in other more engaging functions.

**!** **Flows**

It is not about increasing or decreasing flows, but rather the project should focus on rethinking the approach to circulation in an engaging way.

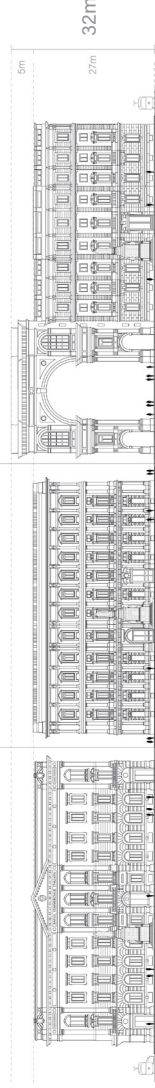
**!** **Technical**

Dedicated technical spaces are mostly a consequence of the performance hall. They should be sufficient to support the hall with other general building support facilities.

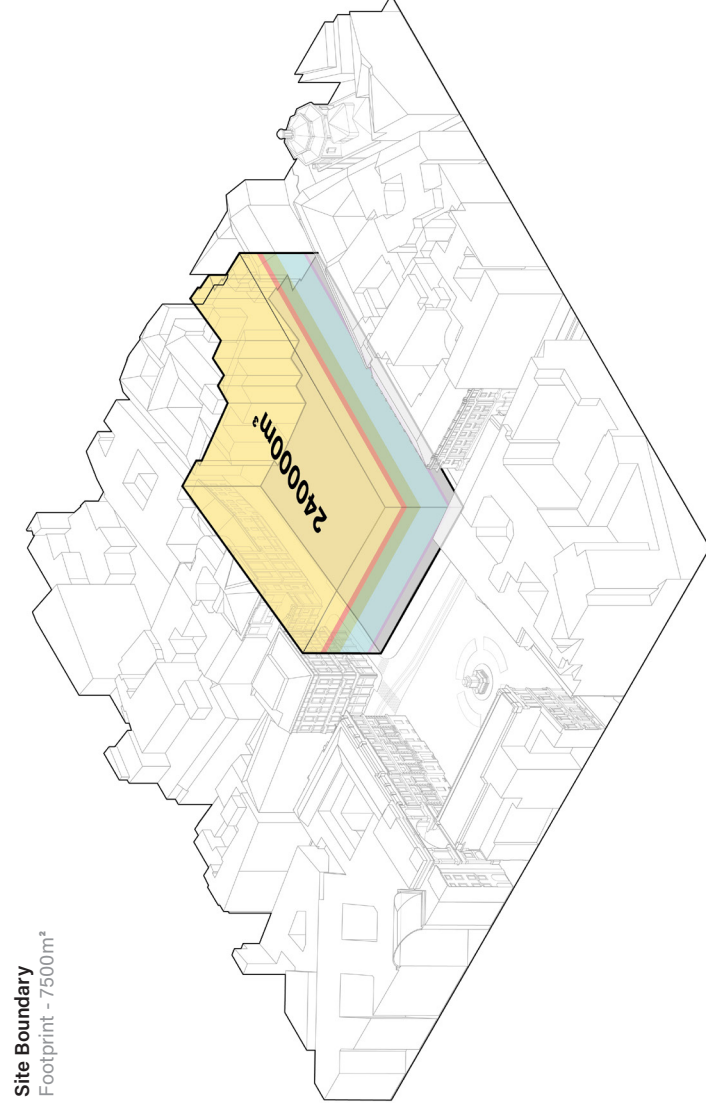
**!** **Performance Hall**

The intention is not to expand the performance hall, but to make it more versatile, allowing for varied formats and flexibility.

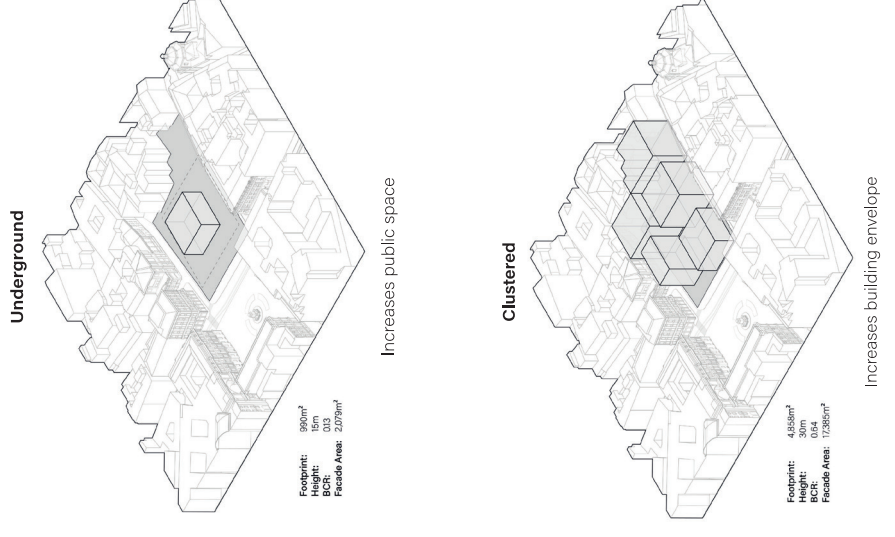
## Height Restriction 32m



## Site Boundary Footprint - 7500m²



## Initial Massings 2 of 6





SPRING SYSTEM  
ANTONIO LOTTARO

Unit

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Frequent Source for respective benchmarking projects: <https://www.archdaily.com/>

## ADDITIONAL ARTICLES

National Theatre, London. (2019). *Arts Engagement Report 2019*. This report discusses strategies for increasing youth engagement in the arts, emphasising the importance of listening to young people's preferences and leveraging digital platforms to make cultural experiences more accessible.

Vogue. (2019). *Will Millennials Kill Opera, Too?* This article explores the challenges opera houses face in attracting younger audiences, highlighting the need for modernisation and increased accessibility to maintain relevance.

UNESCO. (2023). *Protecting and Preserving Cultural Diversity in the Digital Era*. This article discusses how digital platforms and social media are transforming cultural institutions, offering new opportunities for engagement while also presenting challenges in preserving cultural diversity

