

Staging the City through the Architectures of Mobility: Napoli through step-by-step storytelling

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary era, networks and infrastructure have become ways to generate reference and recognisability of cities and territories. Recently the global development of several projects regarding urban transformations started with the redesign of the architecture of mobility. Railway stations, spaces for arrivals and departures full of symbolic meanings, have become places of experimentation to define contemporary urban public spaces. The contribution highlights how the underground stations of Naples are capable of preserving the Mediterranean essence of the city within the architectural dimension. Architectures of mobility are interpreted as narrative devices to reveal stories arising from the city's underground.

KEYWORDS

urban networks, local identities, mobility architectures, memory, underground

I n t r o d u c t i o n

This contribution is part of the flow of studies and activities carried out by our research team: one of the types of research we are pursuing is looking at *architectures of mobility* as elements of storytelling and interpretations of urban transformations. Nowadays, a virtual universe allows us to connect to the world in real-time with no distances, though, increasingly, the time of movement marks contemporaneity. Physical and digital networks and infrastructures have become ways to generate references of the recognisability of cities, lands, and territories. Travelling and travels keep changing as well as the ways in which cities and landscapes are told and explained through their own infrastructures.¹ This will be the main topic of the contribution and evidence can be found in the city of Naples. Out of this, architectures of mobility in Naples are read and interpreted as narrative devices to reveal stories arising from the city's tuff underground.²

The structure of the paper has three parts. In the first part, an attempt is made to briefly clarify the role of architectures of mobility at their origin, from the beginning of the construction of the first train stations, to trace a background for this type of architecture. What is discussed in this scenario is an idea of global architecture, which becomes local in reference to the mentioned train stations. In the second part, we look at the contemporary, with the more recent Italian train stations, and in particular High-speed Train Stations. Still in a global dimension, as with the stations of the Twentieth-century, these train stations reveal greater complexity of relationships. Sometimes they are landmarks in the landscape; other times, they are internal to contexts and are superimposed on them. While the train stations of the last century interpreted international styles and languages, contemporary stations are those of *archistars* – a contemporary neologism used for world-renowned architects – and are great examples of authorial architecture. The third part is about the city of Naples. We will analyse the subway stations in Naples representing contemporary architecture. The subway stations we talk about are complex works of architecture, that from the underground, translate the history, geography, and culture of the city.³ They are works of architecture designed by *archistars* but remain strongly local in the story-telling of the city. Following numerous researches, studies and on-site visits, the contribution aims to testify that the city of Naples has made subway station architecture a way of story-telling the city - interpreting and even rediscovering it.

B e t w e e n g l o b a l a n d l o c a l : m a k i n g t h e c i t y t h r o u g h r a i l w a y s t a t i o n s

Worldwide architectures of mobility and infrastructures played significant and different roles in the construction and development of cities, and urban and peri-urban landscapes.⁴ Since the beginning of the Twentieth-century architectures of mobility such as train stations seem to have become more and more central as an architectural design theme to deal with. Globally, stations represented the chance to carry out unprecedented

experimentations and innovations in large-scale building design. Locally, some architectures of mobility seem to have been the starting point for relevant urban processes within the contexts superimposed by the projects. In the beginning, infrastructures and architectures of mobility were one of the physical outputs of the industrial revolution. Architects and engineers found fertile ground for experimentation by adopting large-scale bearing structures made of cast iron or steel with wide glass surfaces. In the early 1900s, central train stations were already recognised as places of representation for cities. The first central train stations were considered not only as service architectures, but also as new monuments of the modern city. Stations are the places that represent the city to those who arrive. In almost all central train stations, the architecture of the station is always composed of two highly recognisable parts: the station building with large lobbies and entrances and the often-covered rear part from which the railway tracks depart. The first part is a real architecture of the city, almost always with a strong monumental character. The use of spaces and forms of a monumental character and the strict correspondence to the architectural styles of the time are architectural choices found simultaneously in various European contexts (Italian, Austrian, French, English stations, etc.). Examples of these train stations are the *Helsinki Central Station*, designed by Eliel Saarinen in a typically Scandinavian Style, halfway between the Gothic Revival and the Liberty, and the station of *Karlsplatz Railway Pavilion*, designed by Otto Wagner during the flowering Viennese Secession.

Frequently architects of the past such as Ulisse Tacchini - designer of the *Milano Centrale Station* at the beginning of the century – used monumental forms and spaces. They have also created new public spaces in the part of the station that relate directly to the city. These spaces begin to make stations not only service facilities and places of representation but also spaces of new urban relations. In the late 1930s, especially in Italy, keeping up with the increasing technological innovation, some stations became places for the representation of political will.⁵ In this context, the greatest architects at that time were called to reinvent a new typology, innovating not only techniques and structural solutions, but also the very new space of the station. The *Santa Maria Novella Station* in Florence, designed by Michelucci and Mazzoni in the late 1930s, tells of this new approach. The station is in dialogue with the surrounding urban fabric, with the people who live and cross it, with the church of Santa Maria Novella, of which it is connected through its accentuated horizontality. Since the 1930s and throughout the 1900s, therefore, these architectures of mobility served the city either as modern landmark insertions within its historic urban fabric, or as representations and encouragement for the development of the city yet to come.

Looking today at the impact that train station projects have had on the cities, one could say that throughout the Twentieth-century, in Europe, cities have been built almost from the location and configuration of some architectures of mobility.

Landmarks for landscapes and new urban spaces : Alta Velocità stations in Italy

Looking at today's Italy, we can see how deeply the urban landscape has been modified by a network of infrastructures and architectures of mobility. It is a system located both above ground and below ground, innervated in territories at various scales, but not homogeneously. Indeed, to claim that the *iron mobility* system in Italy is advanced as in other European contexts would be wrong; it seems that the peninsular geographical shape of the country led to an unbalanced distribution of railway tracks and stations. The nation is innervated more to the north, physically connected with the rest of Europe, and less served to the south. The Italian islands are still waiting for effective improvements on the theme. In this unbalanced framework, the TAV (*Treno Alta Velocità* or High-speed Train in English) line has played a significant role in connecting Italian cities between themselves and the south of Europe.

Infrastructures, and in particular those related to the movement of people or goods, have strongly characterised the course of the Twentieth-century, becoming a symbol of modernity, one of the most important indicators for evaluating the development of a country [...] their image, shaped by architects and engineers, has also provided the most up-to-date representation of the cities or territories to which they belong.⁶

At the beginning of this century, the issue of infrastructure has become relevant not only politically or architecturally, but also culturally.⁷ A sign of this new meaning attributed to infrastructure is surely the *Triennale di Milano* in 2003. The exhibition analysed and pointed out the role of infrastructure, railways, and mobility lines in shaping and defining landscapes, cities, and communities.⁸ The cultural fervour that the infrastructure theme has acquired in these years is mirrored by the funding of several projects for *Alta Velocità Stations*, all designed by well-known architectural international firms. These stations sometimes fit into established urban systems by overwriting existing layouts and by reinterpreting traces of infrastructure. It is worth noting that in these contemporary stations the subdivision of the monumental access part and the back part is almost completely lost. The large stations we are talking about, in Italy as in other European contexts, are among the few big-scale architectural projects that have been built in the west in recent years; and they are still confirmed today, as in the early 1900s, as places of experimentation on the architectural project in its relations with different contexts of cities.

A first example is the *Porta Susa Station* in Turin, designed in 2005 by Silvio d'Ascia. The project reinterprets a previous underground station and becomes a public space of relations and connections for the surrounding parts of the city. The project proposes the idea of a station through a language of transparency and lightness, fully embodied in a crystal and steel gallery that, bringing light and movement, concretises the new philosophy of railway architecture and gives a futuristic trace to the capital of Piedmont, looking like an entrance door to Turin, a city walk, a square where to meet. Another

of the Alta Velocità Stations that creates complex and new relationships with the context is the new Matera station designed in 2018 by Stefano Boeri. He was commissioned for the renewal project of the previous station, which represented not only a high-quality public space, but at the same time a great opportunity for a city so deeply relaunched and improved in recent years. The design of the new station sees the square as an essential connection and focal point for the ecological, cultural and traffic systems that are already present. The design of the new square reinterprets the existing urban fabric and proposes a new matrix as a defining element. As a striking new urban landmark for *Matera 2019 Capitale Europea della Cultura*, the roof shelter in the square is highly noticeable, made using partially reflective metal panels in a fragmented vision of the surrounding urban landscape, offering new perspectives.

Unlike the previous stations, the *Alta Velocità Reggio Emilia Medio Padana Station* fits into the peri-urban territory, standing as a potential driver for future urban development. This project by Santiago Calatrava, which opened in 2003, with the rhythm of the white elements featured by a variable geometry, interpreting the theme of crossing in relation to the surrounding landscape. This station by Calatrava, a *white sign* in the Padano territory, represents a process of progress in Italy in recent years. Whereas these Alta Velocità Stations were designed outside the city centre, thereby rural, some more recent Alta Velocità Stations could be defined as metropolitan. This certainly includes the latest project realised by the Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid: the *Napoli-Afragola Alta Velocità Station*. Formally immersed in the peri-urban landscape, the station, through its shapes, interprets the surrounding landscape acting as a structuring element for the planned urban developments in the northern part of Naples. The territory of *Afragola* related to the station still retains a strong agricultural and rural character but is increasingly closer to the urban expansion of the city of Naples. It must be said that locally the Napoli-Afragola Station is part of a network of mobility infrastructures with an internationally relevant architectural dimension. These interconnected mobility projects are shaping the metropolitan city of Naples and its surroundings.⁹ While the Napoli-Afragola Station is located to the north of the metropolitan city, the airport is to the northeast, and a new important seaport, the Salerno Maritime Station, also designed by Zaha Hadid, was built to the south of the metropolitan city in 2016. In Campania, it appears that railways, maritime stations, and metro lines are playing two different roles in the relationship with their context.

In some cases, these architectures of mobility and infrastructures played a key role in giving a new structure to the contexts in which they are located; instead, somewhere else these stations have been able to interpret contexts they are inserted in, by disentangling places and layers, staging several narrative urban scenarios.¹⁰ Two works by Zaha Hadid can be traced back to the first approach. The sinuous architecture of the Napoli-Afragola Station stretches out in the peri-urban landscape of the metropolitan city of Naples,

measuring and comparing itself as a large geographical sign, imposed as a reference for an urban development to come. It is also part of the national Alta Velocità System which, as mentioned above, now reaches the heart of Europe. Meanwhile, the Salerno Maritime Station, located on the seafront of the historic centre of Salerno, is one of the interventions on the Salerno city waterfront. Zaha Hadid's project is the first contemporary architectural project that consists of a complex set of interventions that restructure Salerno in favour of inhabitants and tourists. Starting from the shapes and colours of the sea, thus, the Zaha maritime station reinterprets the role of architectures of mobility as something more than a transportation facility for tourists and citizens.

Underground and the city: a storytelling through architecture

Among the architectures of mobility of the last century, metropolitan subway stations have often established themselves as elements of recognition of the city, and in the city. In the recent past, the architecture of the subway stations led tourists and citizens to experience the city through recognisable elements and forms: this is manifested in the station in Paris designed by Hector Guimard.¹¹ Nowadays, subway stations are no longer just the exit of an above-ground mobility system. They often become an excuse to take advantage of the station project and reconfigure a piece of the city.

In Naples, much has been done to transform the city out of the works of the mobility infrastructures. In particular, an infrastructure system has been set up by creating an underground ring in the city centre, which links the mobility lines of the eastern and western cities: Metro Line 1. Contrary to the Zaha Hadid Stations, Metro Stations in Naples use the second approach, the Neapolitan approach. It sees the urban context at the same time as a matter, and as a reason for the brand-new station's design. By realising authorial stations of mobility, architecture in Naples has been called to contribute to the definition of a contemporary cityscape. Thus, Metro Line 1, known as the *3 A Line* (Art, Architecture and Archaeology), can be understood as a story-driver that holds together ancient traces and contemporary transformative processes generating new possibilities and revelations both for the historical and the archaeological heritage and for the redefinition of city parts.

Beginning in the early '90s, managed by the Neapolitan mobility company ANM (*Azienda Napoletana Mobilità*), the works for Metro Line 1 are today modifying entire parts of the city. The most recently opened stations have been the *Municipio* and *Duomo*, both strictly connected to several historical urban layers. In the next few years, a series of the so-called *art stations* are planned to be opened, including the *Centro Direzionale Station* designed by the EMBT Miralles Tagliabue Studio. The brand-new Metro Line 1 will include the airport stop, designed by RSHP. The *Aeroporto Station* hub will connect Metro Line 1 with international destinations through the airport. On the other hand,

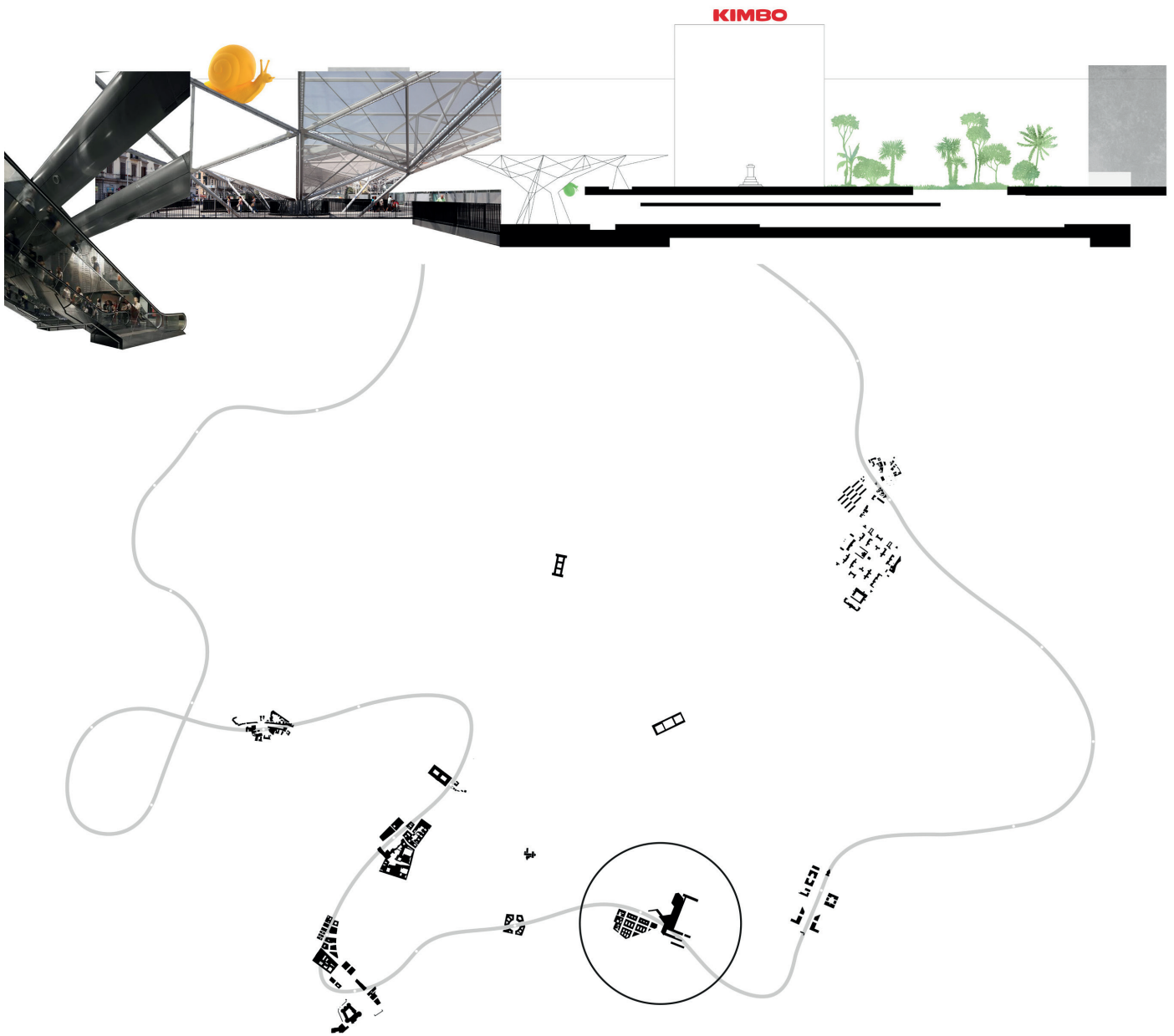


Figure 1: Garibaldi station, a collage made of art, architecture and city (Giuseppe D'Ascoli 2021).

some of the Metro Line 1 stations define new spaces for tourists and citizens and their unexpected experiences of the city of Naples through stops, races, descents, arrests, waits, ascents and beauty. Among the many art stations of Metro Line 1 inaugurated in recent years, we have chosen to select some of them to discuss in this paper. These projects have created substantial transformations for the city, and are today tools to read its layers, stories, and underground dynamics. The *Garibaldi Station* is an important interchange centre of the city of Naples. The project of the French architect Dominique Perrault redesigns the place of arrival for travellers. It works by crossing layers and by articulating the public space on several levels. Thus, it defines an upper plaza with an urban green area and an underground commercial square. The several squares defined by Perrault can be crossed in several ways. In it, the works of art are positioned between the inside and outside (Fig.1).



Municipio Station is another station constituting a large centre of interchange linking the Neapolitan archipelago and attractive seaside spots. The design of the new station aimed to reconnect the long-inclined square to the ancient *Angioino* pier, intercepting the underground several historical city's fragments. Architects Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura decided to stage stories and traces from the past – revealed during the excavation works – in an archaeological exhibition structured to be offered to the city through a narrative path. This open-air museum defines a brand-new urban space. The Municipio Station also connects the city that looks to the sea with the *railway city*. In fact, in *Piazza Municipio*, next to the *Stazione Marittima* designed by Cesare Bazzani, a commercial train used to arrive along the sea and used to be the central station (Fig.2).

Figure 2: Municipio station, a collage made of art, architecture and city (Giuseppe D'Ascoli 2021).

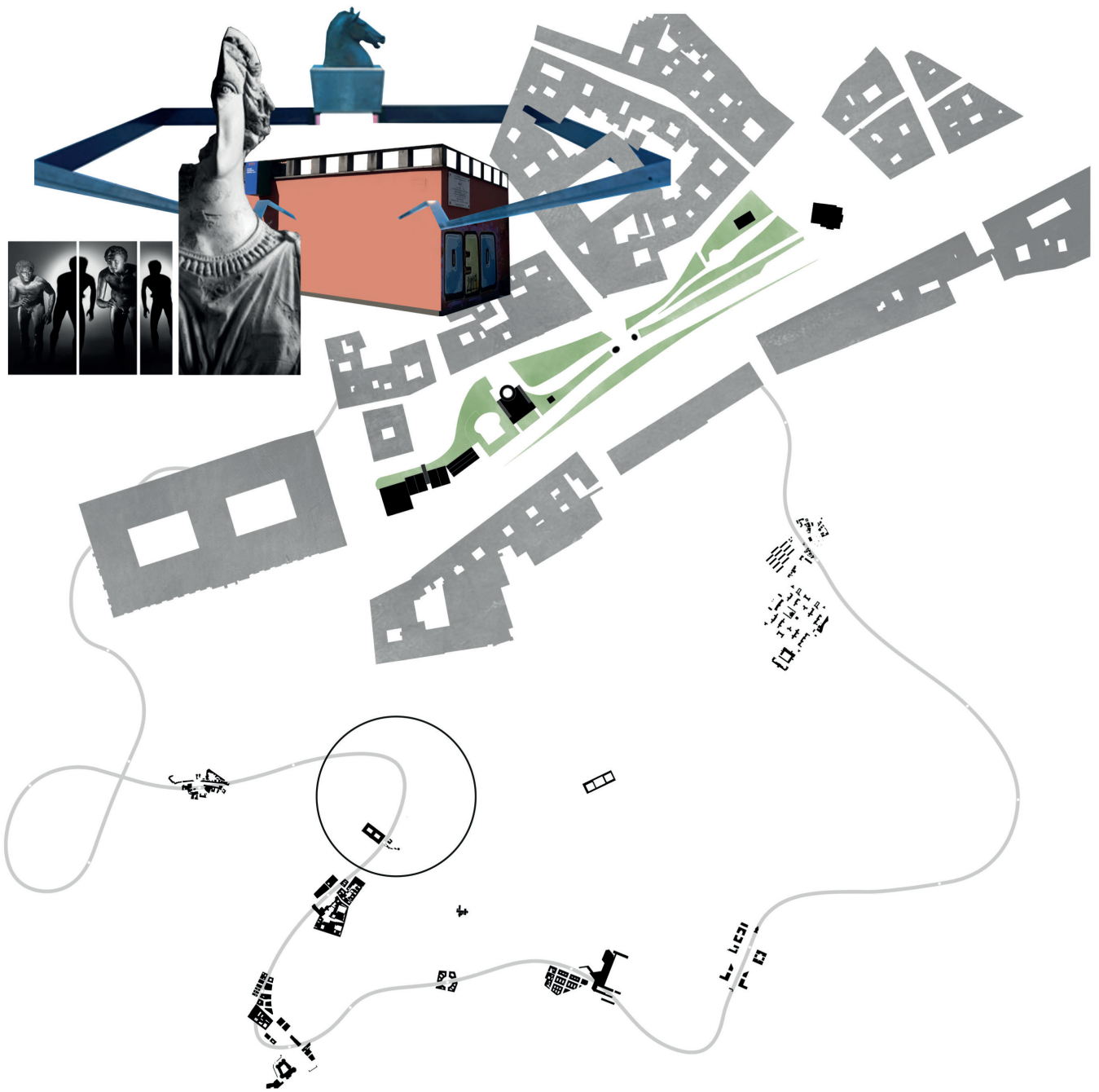


Figure 3: Museo-Cavour stations, a collage made of art, architecture and city (Giuseppe D'Ascoli 2021).

Changing the scale, another nerve point of the mobility of Naples is the *Cavour-Museo interchange Station* that provides access to Metro Line 2. Flying over the exceptional value of the location as a tourist stop, the station with its long underground transport tunnels is an interchange architecture with other city lines. Located at the ancient edge of the city, the station designed by Gae Aulenti is defined through its red volumes set inside a long-time empty space, a green public space, open to the city and its inhabitants (Fig.3). In the densest parts of the city, the Metro Line 1 stations have often been confronted with a system made of historical and archaeological fragments. The *Salvator Rosa Station*, designed by Atelier Mendini in 2001 is an



exceptional work of art in movement. The architecture of the station, through fragments and contemporary elements easily recognisable in their function, solves considerable leaps and distances. The station passes through several buildings in the neighbourhood, all held together by an easily approachable system of stairs, lifts, elevators, and escalators. The peculiarity of this station is found in the inside and outside spaces of the subway, shaping the facades of the buildings themselves (Fig.4).

Figure 4:
Salvator Rosa station, a collage
made of art, architecture and city
(Giuseppe D'Ascoli 2021).

The last of these particular art stations is *Toledo*. Famous for being called the most beautiful subway in the world by the *Daily Telegraph*, it was built in a very dense part of the city, near the *Quartieri Spagnoli* and was designed by Oscar Tusquets. Through its architecture and the depth of its section, the

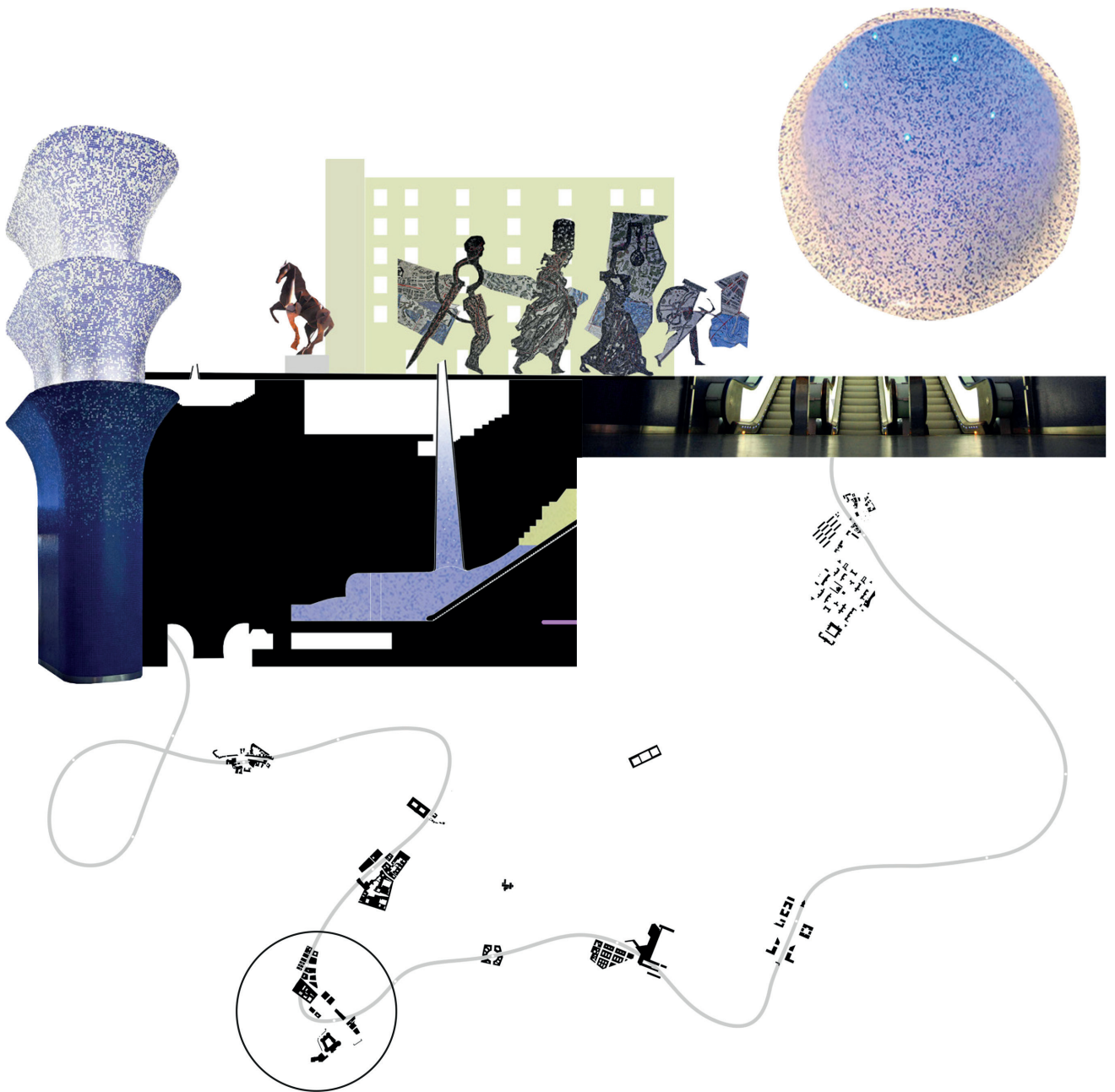


Figure 5: Toledo station, a collage made of art, architecture and city (Giuseppe D'Ascoli 2021).

station tells us about the relationship between the Neapolitan tuff subsoil and the Mediterranean Sea.¹² Colours, textures, and drawings typical of the city are chosen as protagonists of this story made of art and architecture. Together with the path descending into the deep blue of the Mediterranean Sea, there is another exit, away from the crowds of the city centre, designed to reach the Spanish Quarters. This exit-project, working on two levels, proved to be a punctual intervention but capable of having an echo throughout the surrounding district (Fig.5).

Architecture [in Naples] is as porous as this stone. Construction and action interpenetrate in courtyards, arches, and stairways. Everywhere suitable space is kept becoming the scene of new unforeseen circumstances. What

is final, formed is avoided. No situation appears as it is, thought forever, no form declares it so and not otherwise [...] In corners like these it is difficult to distinguish the parts where construction is continuing from those already in ruins. In fact, nothing is finished and concluded. Porosity is not only met with the indolence of the southern craftsman, but above all with the passion for improvisation. In any case, space and opportunities must be left to this.¹³

Everything we have seen seems to identify itself, in a contemporary key, in what Walter Benjamin wrote last century about the porosity of Naples. The face of the city of Naples, a city of tuff, porous as this stone, seems to express itself through its architecture of mobility and its stations. This contribution describes the Neapolitan projects investigated through a series of assemblages as a method of analysis. The process of the collages, allows us to keep together different representations in a single drawing. Their will is to describe the investigated stations, not only in plan or section, but also their relevant elements in the perception of the spaces as well as through the artworks located in the stations. In each collage, the Naples Metro Line 1 is always drawn in its totality, whilst the station investigated is circled, represented in a plan or section, focusing on the urban context in grey colour. We refer to and therefore include the urban context that is part of and informs a station project. Through the drawings, therefore, we wanted to highlight the relationships between the underground and the urban level of the city such as Garibaldi and Toledo Stations; the relationship between the station and urban elements such as Salvator Rosa Station and the relationships between the station and the historical and archaeological layers of the city such as the Municipio Station.

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