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Infrastructure as interface.

Thinking the urban and the high-speed station: Italian case-studies.

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This presentation will document some results of an ongoing research focusing on the role of infrastructure in contemporary design practice. The methodology is based on critical design theory and combines theoretical aspects with a case-study approach, at the junction of infrastructure, urban design and architecture.

It is already well documented that 19th and 20th century infrastructure have deeply affected their programs in order to face new challenges over the last 30 decades. Railway stations are leading examples in this fields: they have gradually implemented their design, that already integrated commercial spaces and facilities, until involving in public space transformation.

Instead, focusing on currents high speed stations in Italy, such as *Torino Porta Susa*, *Florence Belfiore* and *Rome Tiburtina*, we can take into attention some aspects that are still to be examined. Analyzing how those fabrics act as urban-space definers, I would stress that prior residual conditions created by 19TH and 20TH century infrastructures – wherein parts of the city where disconnected or marginalized - are currently integrated in larger masterplans, in which the rail station acts as the primary integer of urban and architectural space.

Based on a comparison among a survey of European case-studies, I argue that, since railway station is today apprehensible at vastly different scales, Italian contribution particularly stresses the urban level. Therefore, I will note how that practice –which is political and architectural at once – links large surrounding areas to the station and transforms ancient urban tissues, where railway lines stood as separators.

Finally, I will show that apprehending the infrastructure as an interface redefines infrastructure itself as a connector, whose main quality becomes one of exchange, adaptability and compatibility, and calls for a more complex association of flows and urban matter, that focuses more on the relations between objects, than on the objects themselves.

Short (30 words)

Focusing on contemporary stations, I argue how the notion of flow acts in synergy with other design tools, in order to redefine infrastructure as an interface, urban-space definer and connector.