

Call for Papers

Railway stations, buildings and infrastructure in France and Italy, 1918–1945: between modernit(ies) and territorial identit(ies)

Versailles and Paris, 17 and 18 November 2023

As places where different scales of mobility intersect – from building interior to immediate neighbourhood, to urban, regional, national and international destinations, – stations have, since their first appearance, created new focal points and centralities in the urban landscape. They have always had to respond to multiple requirements, whether expressing invitation to travel, a call to set off for other places, or acting as a city's first showcase at the moment of arrival. These buildings present specific technical and functional challenges, and their construction requires architects and engineers to keep up with advances in rail traffic management and infrastructure modernisation. The circulation of models, methods and knowledge is inherent in the development of railway networks, generating collaboration, emulation and competition between countries and companies.

For railway architecture, the interwar period was a time when damaged stations were rebuilt, networks were modernised (advent of electrification), reinforced concrete was introduced, and new building standards were imposed. The railway station as a specific architectural programme changed profoundly and to a certain extent independently, even while participating in and contributing to broader developments in architectural and urban history. During these decades, the world of architectural planning and design was marked by vigorous debates and accelerating circulation of information, knowledge, and ideas. The long-standing close cultural ties between France and Italy continued in this new context. Exchanges and crosscurrents between French and Italian professionals were also informed by the changing political situation and by attempts to bring the two countries closer – attempts whose political and strategic implications attest to the complexity of the period.¹

In Italy, from the 1920s on, modernisation of infrastructure and proliferation of construction sites for new facilities were a key part of the Fascist regime's efforts to build consensus and support in the nation.² Modernisation occurred differently in France, a country with a long history of centralized administration that had experienced a period of intense industrialisation and railway development in the 19th century.

¹ Catherine Fraixe, Lucia Piccioni and Christophe Poupault (eds.), *Vers une Europe latine: Acteurs et enjeux des échanges culturels entre la France et l'Italie fasciste* (Paris: INHA, 2014).

² Paolo Nicoloso, *Mussolini architetto: Propaganda e paesaggio urbano nell'Italia fascista* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008) and *Gli architetti di Mussolini: Scuole e sindacato, architetti e massoni, professori e politici negli anni del regime* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1999).

Among the structures that marked the history of architecture in the first half of the 20th century, railway stations constitute a stimulating corpus for exploring the various dynamics at work. A parallel analysis of French and Italian railway architecture, and of passenger stations in particular, can provide keys for exploring the range of possibilities developed during this period of radical transition. A period during which familiar plan types and series could be found alongside entirely new spatial propositions, and where historicist references, picturesque approaches reinvented by regionalist currents, and hybrid proposals reconfiguring elements of the classical tradition, could coexist with buildings deeply engaged in the architectural avant-gardes of the time.³

Looking at the development of railway architecture in France and Italy can help us distinguish aspects that are part of a broader, supranational cultural climate, of modernisation on the scale of Europe and beyond, from a discourse or expression that is more strictly national, if not regional or local in scope (whether for simple display or deeply felt and real).

Objectives

A station construction project brings together technical expertise, building knowledge and artistic practices, combining them in a collaborative process. Architecture, urban planning, engineering, applied arts and artworks are all involved in developing new forms and languages, with the idea of combining modernisation of technical infrastructure with architectural proposal, giving shape to a programme that remains today in a process of constant change. The aim of the conference is to develop a shared narrative, involving coherent sequences of buildings and the identification of connections between various aspects of the projects; a narrative that can shed light on phenomena of communication and shared knowledge or, on the contrary, of compartmentalisation and closure. The conference also aims to promote better knowledge of inter-war railway architecture and infrastructure heritage, in all its multiplicity and diversity, thanks to the participation of professionals and researchers involved in the identification and protection of railway heritage.

Paper proposals can present case studies or take on more interdisciplinary questions, relating to history, to the issues at stake during the period studied, or to the protection of this heritage. Papers with more theoretical concerns, possibly with a comparative approach, are also welcome. They can be related to the **following issues**:

³ We draw here on the following reference works on the history of stations in Italy and France: Ezio Godoli and Mario Cozzi (eds.), *Architettura ferroviaria in Italia: Ottocento* (Palermo: Flaccovio editore, 2004); Ezio Godoli and Antonietta Iolanda Lima (eds.), *Architettura ferroviaria in Italia: Novecento* (Palermo: Flaccovio editore, 2004); Bertrand Lemoine, *Une histoire des gares de France* (Paris: Archibooks, 2022).

1. Modernit(ies) and identit(ies) at the architectural, urban or network scale – the station and its languages.

If we consider various elements, features, stylistic expressions, and material and structural choices, and the relationships between railway buildings and their urban context, which of these factors can be thought of and perceived as indicators of a specifically national approach and which suggest adherence to international standards? How and to what extent are these national approaches or international standards presented as ‘modern’ and by whom? Can we identify stations as ‘French-style’ or ‘Italian-style’? Which critical perspectives are relevant today for understanding the ‘national’ aspects, or on the contrary, those that are part of broader developments in station architecture and infrastructure design and construction? How do the border stations on international lines express network continuity and/or affiliation with particular regions?

2. The station as “generator”, putting knowledge, models and practices into circulation.

What media supported cultural and technical transfer between the two countries and what paths did they follow? Can we identify the sites where dialogue and exchange took place among the various professional figures who contributed to the design of railway buildings?

3. Stations and the people who designed them.

What types of skills and competences did station designers have during this period? What kinds of training did they have? What positions did they hold? During the period in question, how were the project management teams organised and how did this evolve? Who designed what in the two countries, according to the companies involved and the respective political systems in place – from the programmatic outline to the detailing of the furnishings? Were they architects or engineers, civil servants, salaried staff or freelance practitioners?

4. Spaces in process, between movement and perception: the passenger station as catalyst for experimentation and spatial innovation.

How were station plans designed so as to ensure fluid circulation of passengers and goods as well as effective sequencing of interior and exterior spaces, transitional areas (concourse, platforms), services (ticket offices, luggage transfer), waiting rooms, meeting places and food outlets? Can we identify common characteristics in plan designs in France and Italy, whether recurring features or new alternatives, innovations, during the period studied? In 1936 Henri Pacon described stations as ‘places rich in human feeling’:⁴ What was the atmosphere inside the buildings? How did natural and artificial light contribute to it? What materials, what furnishings, what works of art or decorative elements were used for the ‘modern’ station? How can we understand these atmospheres and ambient effects today? How can we describe and document them?

⁴ Henri Pacon, ‘Gares’, *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui* (August 1936): 5.

5. Images and spaces as a means to promote new mobilities: the station as a 'gateway to travel'.

During a period of increasing access to train travel, what “imaginary” did the works of art that were incorporated into railway buildings, or the organization of interior spaces, spark in the traveller as they prepared to board a train? What images of the city and its environs did the designers and the people backing the projects want to awaken in travellers as they disembarked in the city and made their initial discovery of it through the station’s spaces? How were the new railway buildings of the interwar period presented in magazines, specialist publications and to the general public, in short films of the opening ceremonies or in exhibitions in France and Italy? What were the characteristic features at that time of the various modernities and identities suggested and constructed by these representations in the two countries? How should we interpret them today?

6. Modernisation, transformation, heritage issues: the station as legacy.

What phases marked the development of railway stations and sites during the interwar period? If this corpus of buildings first achieved recognition in both countries in the mid-1970s, how might we assess the heritage process today?⁵ How have these buildings – many of them reconstructions or adaptations of pre-existing stations – been transformed, altered, disfigured, or restored? In what ways has developing knowledge informed choices regarding maintenance, rehabilitation and restoration?⁶

Call for papers

Proposals should be limited to 500 words maximum. They can be written in French, English or Italian and should be accompanied by a short (150 words) biography of the author. They should be sent to the following address no later than **20 June 2023**:

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Timetable

15 July 2023: Papers selected and contributors announced

17–18 November 2023: Meetings at ÉNSA Versailles and Centre André Chastel, Paris

⁵ Jean Dethier (ed.), *Le temps des gares*, exh. cat., Centre de création industrielle, Paris (1978); Alfredo Forti, *Angiolo Mazzoni: Architetto tra fascismo e libertà*, (Florence: Edam, 1978); *Angiolo Mazzoni (1894–1979): Architetto nell'Italia fra le due guerre* (Bologna: Grafis Edizioni, 1984).

⁶ The *Revue d'histoire des chemins de fer* has devoted several issues to questions relating to railway heritage: no. 54 (2020), 'Le patrimoine ferroviaire dans le monde, regards croisés'; no. 40 (2009), 'Faire l'inventaire du patrimoine ferroviaire'; no. 32–33 (2005), 'Le Paysage ferroviaire: Mémoire et patrimoine'.

Place(s)

ÉNSA Versailles, 5, avenue de Sceaux, 78000 Versailles, France.

Centre André Chastel, Galerie Colbert, 2, rue Vivienne, 75002 Paris, France

Scientific committee

- Karen Bowie, emeritus professor at École nationale supérieure d'architecture Paris la Villette, researcher at AHTTEP, UMR AUSser 3329, member of the scientific committee of Rails & Histoire, France
- Andrea Giuntini, professor emeritus in the Department of Economics, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy
- Franca Malservisi, consulting architect, researcher at LéaV, École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles, France
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- Nathalie Simonnot, research director, École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles, director of LéaV, France
- Veronique Veston, heritage architect, head of studio Patrimoine AREP (SNCF/ Gares & Connexions), France
- Annalisa Viati Navone, professor of history and architectural culture at École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles, researcher at LéaV and at Archivio del Moderno (Academy of Architecture at Università della Svizzera italiana), France and Switzerland

Programme leads

- Karen Bowie, emeritus professor at École nationale supérieure d'architecture Paris la Villette, researcher at AHTTEP, UMR AUSser 3329, member of the scientific committee of Rails & Histoire, France
- Franca Malservisi, consulting architect, researcher at LéaV, École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles, France
- Annalisa Viati Navone, professor of history and architectural cultures at École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles, researcher at LéaV and at Archivio del Moderno (Academy of Architecture at Università della Svizzera italiana), France and Switzerland

Organising committee

- Maddalena Carli, professor in the Department of Political Sciences, University of Teramo – Italy, research associate at CRHEC – Université Paris-Est Créteil, France and Italy.
- Federico Ferrari, lecturer at École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Nantes, researcher at UMR AUSser-ACS 3329 of CNRS, France
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Scientific secretariat

(for all requests for information)

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The conference is launched jointly by LéaV ÉNSA Versailles and the Association Rails & Histoire, Paris, in the context of two broader programs : the École Française de Rome 2022-2026 program *Spazidentità, Spatialité matérielle et immatérielle de la construction nationale italienne de la République cisalpine à la fin du fascisme*, with LéaV Versailles as a contributing member; and the Association Rails & Histoire 2023-2025 program on *Architecture, urbanisme et territorialité du ferroviaire entre histoire, mémoire et projet : savoirs, modèles et méthodes en circulation*.

It is prepared in partnership with the Centre André Chastel (UMR 8150, Sorbonne Université, CNRS, Ministère de la Culture) -- a contributing member of the École Française de Rome *Spazidentità* program -- and the Heritage Department of AREP Architecture (SNCF group – Gares & Connexions).