



Radical Exhibited Thought

Exhibitions of Architecture
in Italy in the Contemporary Age

Index

Theoretical Premises, Methodologies and Objectives	01
Implementation of Objectives <i>Udine Research Unit</i>	03
Research Units PRIN 2022	05

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Theoretical Premises, Methodologies and Objectives

The **PRIN 2022** project **PER – Pensiero Esibito Radicale (Radical Exhibited Thought)**, promoted by two research units based at the University of Udine and the Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, retraces the history of architectural exhibitions in Italy from the 19th century to the present day.

The investigation is guided by three key concepts. The first is **thought**, which finds expression through the project, understood in its broadest sense: theoretical framework, experimental concept, analytical tool, paradigm for validation, and so on.

The operative aim of thought is conveyed by the term **exhibited**, which suggests an aspiration for interaction and dialogue with those who engage with the exhibition spaces.

Finally, the term **radical**, the most controversial and ambiguous of the three, is here understood in the purity of its etymological meaning. In addition to disseminating architectural knowledge to a broader audience, the thousands of exhibitions held over the decades – spread throughout the Italian territory – have led to a reconsideration of architecture from its roots, that is, in its radical foundation, including its cultural, artistic, social, and political meanings. Such an outcome is the result of collaboration among individuals from different disciplinary backgrounds – public and private commissioners, architects, exhibition designers, artists, curators, critics, technicians – since the creation of any exhibition, large or small, is always a collective endeavour.

From a methodological standpoint, the PER project combines a rigorous, traditional historical-critical analysis with an interdisciplinary and innovative approach, as required by the complexity of the subject.

This can be summarized in two main areas of investigation:

1. The concept of the architectural exhibition as a complex and radical intellectual endeavour, embodying the theoretical and design principles that underpin it.

2. The role of the exhibition as a medium for displaying architecture, from its origins to the radical reformulation of traditional communicative codes.

Within these areas, several typologies of exhibition – among many possible – can be identified as of primary interest to the investigation:

- Exhibitions that highlight, for educational purposes, the historical and cultural principles of architectural design.
- Manifesto–exhibitions, understood as opportunities to redefine the foundations of architectural design in both theoretical and practical terms.
- Exhibitions that explore the theme of space, including its narrative specificities.
- Exhibitions as sites for the discussion and development of experimental projects.
- Exhibitions that have conveyed new ideas of the city and community.
- Exhibitions carrying political, economic, or social messages.
- Exhibitions that have challenged traditional architectural display formats through immersive and multidisciplinary experiences.
- Exhibitions capable of addressing current issues relevant to architecture, such as social and environmental sustainability, circular economy, the defence of rights.

Implementation of Objectives *Udine Research Unit*

With the theoretical framework in place, the subsequent step entails gathering, as extensively as possible, case studies distributed throughout the Italian context.

This survey, specifically undertaken by the Udine Unit, is aimed at constructing an *Atlas of Architectural Exhibitions* held in Italy in the contemporary age. These exhibitions are documented through detailed historical-critical records, which are progressively uploaded to an open-access online platform. The goal is to provide a publicly available resource that combines accessibility with academic rigor.

This phase of the research is structured around two primary goals:

1. Historical-Critical Objectives

- To define a typological repertoire, as broad as possible, of the exhibitions held throughout Italy in the contemporary age.
- To identify experimental exhibitions that have generated theoretical reflections contributing to the definition of significant design criteria.
- To outline the main narrative systems used to present historical-artistic, design-related, and restoration content to the public.

2. Knowledge Dissemination and Applied Objectives

- To develop open-source knowledge tools that can be further expanded beyond the duration of the PRIN project, conceived as the foundational element of a broader research network on architectural exhibitions, with potential for international outreach.
- To offer a historical-critical framework to public and private institutions, and to the diverse figures involved in rethinking the roles attributed to architectural exhibitions in the contemporary era.

- To highlight critical aspects useful in contextualizing exhibitions in relation to current issues such as the digital transition, ecology and sustainability, human rights.

The platform also hosts video interviews with key figures in the history of exhibitions, relevant publications, and updates on research activities and events.

To offer a practical guide for those approaching the topic of architectural exhibitions and to help navigate the platform's content, the Udine research group has promoted the publication of the volume *Mostrare l'architettura. Storie, progetti, innovazioni dall'Unità d'Italia a oggi* (Exhibiting Architecture: Histories, Projects, Innovations from Italian Unification to the Present), edited by Andrea Capriolo and Veronica Locatelli, Silvana Editoriale, Cinisello Balsamo, 2025.

Research Units PRIN 2022

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI UDINE

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Expertise

Organization of the scientific project and development of a freely accessible online platform to host the records of the Atlas of Architectural Exhibitions, video interviews with key figures in the history of exhibitions, publications related to the topic, research activities, and events.

Platform

<https://pensieroesibitoradicale.it>

Website

<https://uniud.academia.edu/PERPensieroEsibitoRadicale>

UNIVERSITÀ ALMA MATER STUDIORUM DI BOLOGNA

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Expertise

Creation and development of the scientific project for the editorial series *Pensiero Esibito Radicale. Mostre dell'architettura* (Radical Exhibited Thought. Architectural Exhibitions), consisting of volumes published both in digital format on the University of Bologna's open access platform (AlmaDL) and in print.

