

Mobile inhabitants and territorial cohesion: a temporal perspective

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The rise of mobile populations signals a structural transformation in how territories are inhabited and produced. Contemporary mobile inhabitants—such as international students, migrants, long-term visitors, and digital nomads—are no longer marginal figures but integral to spatial and socio-economic systems. Their mobility challenges planning paradigms historically grounded in sedentary populations, permanence, and stable spatial organization.

This paper examines the impact of mobile inhabitation on territorial identities, cultural practices, and social cohesion through a spatial perspective. While mobility is often framed through economic or policy mechanisms, this study repositions architecture and the built environment as central mediators of these transformations. Drawing on Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which understands social reality as emerging from interactions between human and non-human actors, the paper acknowledges the presence of broader networks—such as policy instruments, digital infrastructures, and housing markets—not as primary analytical focus, but as conditions that frame and limit spatial action.

Within this network, architecture occupies a critical yet underexamined position. Existing spatial systems remain largely oriented toward permanence, standardized dwelling, and fixed occupancy patterns, revealing a mismatch with increasingly transient forms of inhabitation. This misalignment raises a key question: how can spatial design engage with temporality without reinforcing isolation or undermining the human need for continuity, community, and belonging?

The paper proposes to transform existing building stock as a spatial infrastructure for temporal inhabitation, capable of accommodating fluctuating populations and multiple rhythms of use. By foregrounding space as an active agent—rather than a passive container—this approach positions architecture as a tool for negotiating between mobility and rootedness. In doing so, the study reframes equitable and balanced territorial development as a spatially mediated process through which the interaction of permanence and temporality produces the conditions for well-being, understood as the integration of social cohesion, spatial equity, and lived experience.