

The ruin and the path;

New accessibility and infrastructure for the archaeological park of Paestum

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September 2025

This project reconsiders the ancient city of Paestum—founded by the Greeks and later expanded by the Romans—as more than an archaeological site. Today, Paestum is primarily known for its monumental temples and defensive walls, but these remains represent only fragments of what was once a vibrant urban fabric. Once structured around a network of houses, civic buildings, and public spaces, the city has now become isolated, functioning largely as a destination for tourism rather than a place integrated into contemporary life. The central aim of this research and design proposal is to explore how architectural intervention can bridge the gap between heritage and daily use, allowing Paestum to be experienced as a living city once again.

The design approach draws from Aldo Rossi’s theory of the city as a “collective artifact,” in which monuments and urban forms serve as anchors of memory and continuity, even when their original functions have been lost. Rather than treating Paestum as a static open-air museum, the project frames it as a layered environment where memory and design engage in dialogue. Key strategies include both the preservation of archaeological values and their translation into meaningful contemporary experiences.

Central to the proposal is the redesign of Paestum’s train station, originally built in 1936, which serves as the main access point for visitors. Four design alternatives were tested—ranging from a transparent glass structure emphasizing openness, to a monumental volume asserting urban presence, to a multifunctional hub integrating transport, hotel, and commercial facilities. The selected approach redefines the station as both a functional node and an urban landmark. Its strategic placement near Porta Sirena allows a direct connection between the station and Paestum’s historical axis, transforming the journey from train to city into a layered spatial experience that links past and present.

Beyond the station, the project reactivates the historical axis stretching from Porta Sirena to Porta Marina and ultimately the sea. This route, once the lifeline of the ancient city, is reimagined as a contemporary urban path where visitors move through overlapping layers of history and daily use. Following Colin Rowe’s concept of “collage city,” the path integrates archaeological fragments and modern interventions into a coherent, yet multifaceted urban experience.

Further interventions include the visual reconstruction of the ancient walls, restoring the perception of scale and enclosure; the re-creation of the agora and stoas as civic gathering spaces for modern use; and the revitalization of the amphitheater and heroon as living cultural venues. These typological revivals

extend Rossi's notion of continuity, where historic spatial forms are reinterpreted for contemporary conditions without losing their identity.

Through these strategies, the project positions design not only as a means of conservation but as an active tool for social and urban reintegration. Paestum becomes more than an archaeological destination; it transforms into a living fabric where the past is preserved yet animated by present needs. Ultimately, this work proposes a model for reconciling memory and modernity: a city that is neither frozen in time nor erased by it, but one where history and everyday life coexist in an active and evolving dialogue.