

Considering Colour as a Functional Element of the Built and Inhabited Spaces in Tirana

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Abstract: *In the built space in Tirana, colour is rarely represented as a formative element but just as a decoration quality. As one of the units of space perception, colour plays an important role in how the city is perceived, how the identity of a city is constructed and the form with which the senses capture the atmosphere of inhabited spaces. The object of this study, as a macro-space is Tirana, and especially the buildings painted during the time of Edi Rama as mayor of Tirana. During the years 2000-2004, Tirana experienced an aesthetic and visual change. Many of the palaces built during the dictatorship period were painted in different formats and colours as a process of modernization for the city, but also to lay a new foundation of change in terms of how inhabited buildings might look.*

Keywords: color, Tirana, architecture, perception, space

1. Introduction

Architecture plays a vital role in how it affects the psychology of the inhabitants; in the way it affects the attraction and how this place changes or creates a typical experience for them.

The impact of this seemingly artistic but also can be perceived political process puts architecture in a position which is manifold and interchangeable. An architectural object can be viewed and labelled based on the style and shape of the structure, but also how it looks.

In this paper will be examined the dimensions mentioned above, but this paper is part of a broader study a connection with the colours on the facades of buildings inhabited in Tirana.

2. Colour through time, space, and history

This study focuses on the study of space built in Tirana from an exterior point of view. At this point it should be noted that the exterior of buildings has a subjective and emotional impact on residents and offers to each experience, which can be interpreted in so many ways.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the typical characteristics of the impact of this process which it extends not only to the architectural plane, but also to the social, anthropological, and emotional one. In a way the issue of colour also takes on a biological dimension which the researcher Hal Levin clearly defines by stating that: *Colour and the concept of colour can be confronted from different perspectives and disciplines, such as from natural sciences, colour theory, philosophy, biology, medicine, psychology, architecture, and art.*¹

Secondly, his studies focus on healthy buildings, in a new refreshing biological point of view, emphasizing the

importance of having buildings that are not only functional but also family friendly. Considering also what we experience as individuals or as community members sharing living spaces together in a way, designers can improve the likelihood of a building while being healthy. Also, by setting a level of ventilation, lighting that precedes the functionality of the building and providing it primarily in design.

In Tirana, at the beginning of the 21st century, this healthy intervention was first visual. Even many of the buildings that underwent this almost surgical change in visual terms. Urban transformations are not always attributed to the aesthetic movements or artistic visions of an aesthetic group or the artistic visions of a stable group of creators. In many cases, external factors also influence, without a connection at first sight with the artistic process or standard articulations which define the stylization or decoration of the facades of residential buildings.

In places of the former communist dictatorship, where brutalist architecture was typical and representative, in Yuri Lottman's terms, we would call the self-portraiture of a space, an element that takes on a dimension, beyond the visual, and at the same time equally as important as the structure of the building itself and this element is colour. The space-colour unit conditions the form in which this operation will be performed.



Figure 1: A building in Tirana before the intervention

¹ Levin, Hal. Building Ecology: An architect's perspective on Healthy Buildings, Milan, Italy, September 1995



Figure 2: The same building after the intervention

In the above case we are dealing with the aesthetical change and not substantial procedure of meddling with the structure of the building, by using colours which are not the same plan as other buildings of the same era.

Colours are more in tune with natural elements, which the Bauhaus movement mastered in terms of the use of colours in the implementation, in an architecture sense. Natural colours like white, green, earthy colours, are closer to the primordial elements of environmental delineation. The building already enjoys another identity but can also be seen as a canvas which can be perpetually changeable.



Figure 3: A typical changed façade



Figure 4: A typical changed façade

The above figures show more chaotic interference which does not resemble the simple nature of fig.2, evoking a more chaotic and dynamic aspect of colour usage. Having no genuine scenario, other than the aesthetic revitalization without a certain visual rhyme, has produced diversity in the way the facades are painted. It seems that each of the buildings is taken as a separate constructive entity and that fragmentarily represents what this pop movement represents. The awareness and dynamism that Tirana experienced at the beginning of the XXI century, taking various elements from world examples, known for the developed and vibrant colour as in the following cases:



Figure 5: Burano, Veneto, Italy



Figure 6: Favelas in Rio de Janeiro, Brasil

A mix of these two models embraces the movement developed in Tirana to give a new name and atmosphere to the city. This aesthetic intervention did not come without controversy, being considered as a venture which was essentially personal and selfish. One of the most popular public debates is the one between Edi Rama and Fatros Lubonja² on the change of identity of Tirana, considering it as a job which did not reveal the change that the city really required, but an intervention at the facade level without substance.

3. Color as a provider of an identity

One aspect of this study is not simply highlighting the changes that have taken place on the surface, but further understanding what psychological or emotional effect these changes bring in time and space. One of the key points of this study is the survey of residents in the main areas where these changes have taken place.

The survey has been complete, but at this point we will focus on some figures which belong to only one of the items in the questionnaire, regarding their perception of these facades. The conditions in which these surveys were conducted should also be clarified, considering the quality of life in the city, the main problematic points and the emotional aspect related to the built space. Respondents belong to the ages of 20-75 years.

Several different generations who answer the question of how they feel answer the question of how they feel about the visual aspect of the city. Out of 150 participants, the results related to this question (full results for each question posed

² Howden, Daniel. The major transforming Tirana, BBC News, digital edition, Thursday, 27 June, 2002

to residents will be published in a more complete edition) are:

About 20.3% of participants find that visually their homes give them a good and positive feeling.

37.6% of the participants did not evoke any kind of feeling reflecting on the fact that the colors of the buildings are a constant part of the image they belong to and have not built a strong emotional connection.

15.4% of respondents find that this image evokes chaotic sensations.

In the central areas of Tirana as in 'Wilson' square, st. of Kavaja (which also has a dichotomy of buildings with painted facades and old buildings characteristic of the city), st. Myslym Shyrietc, it can be seen that this visual influx for a good part of the respondents does not arouse interest as before, so they have behaved apathetically towards the environment, while the other two massive sides of the respondents have passionate behaviour from two different directions, some aroused positivity and the last group who see it as a kind of visual pollution of the city.

Observing such behaviours almost shifted to opposite poles attitude shows that everyone in some way is affected by the psyche this kind of pattern of building colouring. In FriedellAnter's work on the psychological perception of colour, this essential impact is specifically expressed:

*Advanced colouring methods specify psychological phenomena - color perception - in addition to physical measurements and the transmission of a certain energy.*³

Also reading this space is necessary, not only to outline a basic experience of a certain group of residents who have essential connections to the environment where they live. At what stage of elaboration should we also explain how those who visit the city for the first time react. In the work of several authors regarding the influence and function of colour in urban space, it resembles not only the subjective and emotional aspect, but also the cognitive aspect, which has to do with the logical and semiotic dimension of how an individual can read an inhabited space: *'Human beings receive about 80% of information thanks to the environment. Colour belongs to the environment and is also a method of absorbing information and communication as a radical need to interpret and understand the environment. Perception of colour in the environment always carries with it a visual, associative, synthetic, symbolic, emotional and psychological level.'*⁴

Another study by Horowitz and Albers highlights the psychological dimension, but also the traditional and anthropological dimension. The way we perceive the colours and living urban spaces have historical and cultural

stratifications which are ingrained in the collective psyche as an axiomatic saying that is constantly affirmed. They state that: *'We constantly see colour in relation to colour... the first is not just a visual issue, it is almost impossible to remember a colour exactly as it is because colour evokes psychic effects. As a psychological effect that is deeply rooted in the culture of colour perception, it cannot be easily ignored.'*⁵

The main purpose of this presentation is not to interfere with the political, legislative, or state dimension of making such decisions. Such a presentation would require a more detailed study of the form in which power affects the visual identity of the inhabited space. What is most important is to highlight the elements with which we can read these altered spaces in cities in an approach between different generations and cultures.

Now days these buildings reflect upon a psychological effect that bring positivity and joyfulness since the Covid-19 situation, residents of Tirana see the city in a more glamorous and playful way.

4. Conclusions

One of the aspects that should be considered to study in more depth is the relationship of colour and the material to which it is applied as it brings different effects in aesthetic, psychological and cultural aspects. The architecture is emotionally entrenched as it offers a range of connections which make it more tangible in relation to the residents or visitors.

First, colour defines not only the visual aspect, but also the material of buildings by undertaking a process of erasing an old identity and replacing it with a whole new one.

Secondly, the case of Tirana is specific and at the same time marks an era of the way the buildings are conceived from the outside, giving it an image as modern as possible, but which for some residents also stands as foreign meat in relation to the history of the city.

Thirdly, such an enterprise consists not only in the identity aspect, but also in the psychological aspect of the inhabitants. Forms, dimensions, and perceptions create a unique experience for each, and at the same time collective regarding the cultural and thought structures of the inhabitants of the city.

This paper is focused on creating an opportunity to see and read the living space in Tirana as a human element and that affects as much as historical, political events or major social changes, for the only fact that colour is what in the end it remains.

References

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⁵ Frederick Horowitz, Josef Albers: to open eyes: the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and Yale, pg.201

³FridellAnter, Karin. What colour is the red house? Department of Architectural Forms Institution of Architecture Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) Stockholm, Sweden 2000, pg 52

⁴ReyhanehBehbudi, Syed ZainolAbidin Syed Abdullah Idid and Mahdi Torabi. 'The function of color in urban settings', Department of Architecture, Faculty of Built Environment, University Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Johor, Malaysia

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Author Profile



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The range of projects in which he has been involved goes from interior design to urban planning, but the main part of his work is concentrated in multi-story housing buildings in Tirana and other big cities of Albania.