COLOUR - IMPORTANT FACTOR IN PRESERVING THE LOCAL IDENTITY

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Abstract. The concept of sustainable competitiveness, referring to the city, requires the analysis of the characteristic elements that confer identity to the city. Could be colour one of them? This article, based on the Doctoral Dissertation "The colour in rehabilitation" presented to the Faculty of Architecture, University of Architecture and Urbanism "Ion Mincu" Bucharest, explores the role of colour in the urbanscape in terms of local identity and perceptual connections, concluding that the transformations of urban space and architecture are visible even on the chromatic level. The colour control in urban areas can be a means of preserving local identity and a potential element of sustainable urban competitiveness.

Key words: urban chromatic identity, local colours, chromaticscape.

1. Introduction

Sustainable competitiveness refers to a characteristic of a product to be attractive for a long time. In the case of consumer goods, marketing strategies of companies are extremely varied, but in the case of a city, how to approach the concept of sustainable competitiveness?

De Certeau (1984) states that "The City as a proper name, will offer the possibility of designing and building space from a finite number of stable properties, isolated and articulated", while Mihali (2010) observes that the city is "the place where the space and time coalesce, the power to overcome space and time". In other words, the city bears within individual reading keys of the space, being the support of the fundamental links between space-human-perception.

In the conditions of globalization and of the needs for identification of characteristic elements specific to an urban landscape (Caivano and Lopez, 2007), in order to become competitive on a rapidly developing market, preserving the local identity acquires a particular importance: belonging to a community confers to a human being, at a psychological level, a sense of stability in a society where the influences from other cultures or generated by commercial reasons tend to take him over (Avila, 2002; Julier, 2005; Hall, 2006; Calabi *et al*, 2009; Sepe, 2010, Cler, 2011). Many countries focus on the preservation and conservation as well as on the development of local identity in terms of sustainable competitiveness, approaching the chromatic of the city with great responsibility, people referring to colour both in the urbanscape and architecture (Neill, 2004; Hemelryk Donald and Gammack, 2005; Knez, 2005; Sepe, 2006; Sciola *et al*, 2010; De Mattiello and Rabuini, 2011; Jaššo, 2012; Restuccia *et al*, 2012).

Kevin Lynch (1990) noted that one of the most important factors concerning the imageability of a city is the colour. Green-Armytage (Cugley and Green-Armytage, 2003) observed that the inhabitants of Warsaw, desiring to reconnect with the past, felt the need of rebuilding the old town (destroyed in the Second World War), keeping the previous colours, while Xiaomin and Yilin (2009) presents the case of Tokyo where exist "colour riots", because of the excessive chromatics and the dynamic advertising.

On the other hand, cities of China or of the United Arab Emirates, in their desire to display the technological and economic success, turn to colours able to support this message and attract attention to their self (Behbudi *et al*, 2012).

It is thus observed that for the collective mind the role of colour, associated with meanings, symbols, preferences etc., is particularly complex (Mazzilli, 2002).

In this context, this paper aims to define the concept of local identity through the chromatic point of view and to highlight both the determinant chromatic characteristics of the urbanscape and the role of colour in preserving local urban identity.

2. Local chromaticscape: definition, components, influencing factors

The concept of local colourscape can be defined as the summation of all colours of the perceptual elements of the local landscape closely connected with local characteristics.

Green-Armytage (Cugley and Green-Armytage, 2003) defines the concept of local colour as "all sights, sounds, smells and tastes, impressions of space and time, physical meetings and social interactions that individual experiences in space", so 'colour' is referring to the appearance, to the senses, and 'place' to the physical, objective environment.

Vasiljević Tomić and Marić (2011) review the elements that shape the chromatic urbanscape: "characteristics of nature and climate, interrelations of colour and shape, as well as the experience of the form of the urban public space while preserving its identity".

Regarding the physical environment it should be noted that there are landscapes whose colour values are dramatically changed during the day, acquiring almost totally different identities. We can thus speak about the chromatics of the diurnal and nocturnal landscapes, some cities finding their chromatic identity in the nightscape.

Globally, Moughtin *et al* (1999) suggest that the chromatic urbanscape can be split up into four components:

- the first component, represented by the overall characteristics of the city chromatics, which are giving it identity;
- the second, represented by the colours of the streets, buildings, waters, traffic signs, street lighting, etc. ;
- the third component, represented by the colour of vegetation, of sunlight, of the sky etc.;
- and the fourth component, represented by the colours of vehicles, pedestrians, of advertising panels and light commercials.

However, this classification is not withholding an essential component of the chromatic urbanscape, namely the geographic framework. Therefore, this article proposes a separation in layers:

- First layer – **the geographic and climatic layer**, comprising the

elements of the geographic framework (soil, water, vegetation etc.) and of the climatic one (climatic characteristics, sunlight etc.)
- The second one - **the layer of the built environment**, including the streets and buildings.
- The third layer - **of the man-made natural landscape** (planted vegetation, lakes etc.)
- The fourth layer - **layer of the everyday's life**, including both the elements related to the auto and pedestrian traffic and all items related to the advertising industry.

All these overlapping layers generate, at a global level, the chromatics which gives identity to the city.

Each of these layers has a certain dynamics resulting from the rhythm and from the speed of change.

The geographic and climatic layer has a relatively static character, but it has a certain cyclicity due to the vegetation existing outside the city, as a part of the geographical framework, and due to sunlight and to the seasons.

The layer of the built environment has a low dynamics generated essentially by the different values of the light throughout the day.

The layer of the man-made natural landscape has a greater dynamics generated by the colour of vegetation changing with the passage of seasons, but it has a cyclical character.

The layer of the everyday's life is a layer with a large influence at the level of the individual who is crossing through the urban area, but having also a very high dynamics.

This dynamics leads to the idea that in the urbanscape exist colours with different degrees of permanence, with different 'lifetime', some with a strong character of permanence and others with temporary, ephemeral character:
- permanent colours - the colours of the natural framework where the city exists (soil, rocks, vegetation, water , sunlight);
- semi- permanent colours - the colours of the streets, buildings and street furniture;
- temporary colours – colours of the billboards, of the illuminated commercials, bright signposts of firms, shop windows, traffic signs etc.

The analysis of the permanence of colours within the chromatic urbanscape is extremely important because, according to that, one can set the colours on which it can intervene.

On the permanent colours one cannot intervene significantly. They are the general background of the chromaticscape on which the semi-permanent colours (as a closer background, more tangible by the user) and the temporary colours (as accents of the chromatic urbanscape, that are in a more intimate connection with the user) are overlapped. The temporary colours, although of ephemeral nature in the chromatic urbanscape, have, at the level of the individual's perception, a character of semi-permanency. Coherence and harmony between these three types of colours (permanent, semi-permanent and temporary) will produce, from the chromatic point of view, a positive experience at the individual's level.

Regarding the constitution of the types of colours existing in the urbanscape (components in the physical sense),

Xiaomin and Yilin (2009) identify two categories: natural colours (those of earth, stones, water, vegetation) and artificial or cultural colours (those of the buildings, street furniture, vehicles, traffic signs, billboards).

However, between artificial colours and cultural colours it cannot be achieved an identity: the contemporary chromatic urbanscape abounds in non-specific colours, colours resulting from fashion, trends or from the desire of hegemony. They cannot be considered cultural colours because they are not specific for that urbanscape. Cultural colours are directly connected with the chromatic tradition and with the social and cultural values of that townscape. Non-specific colours can be either assimilated, in the course of time becoming cultural through the acceptance of the urban community, or parasitic. The difference between assimilable and parasitic colours of the chromatic urbanscape can only be done after analyzing the chromatic urban palette and on the basis of the relations of chromatic harmony established between colours.

In conclusion, from the point of view of the constitution, the urbanscape colours can be classified as:
- natural colours
- artificial colours:
- cultural (of the built urbanscape, directly connected with the chromatic tradition and its social and cultural values)
- nonispecific (assimilable or parasitic, which could be of the entire built landscape).

Regarding the extent to which the colours exist in the urban landscape, i.e. the chromatic composition of the urbanscape, Xiaomin and Yilin (2009) identify three types of colours with different proportions: basic colour (of the buildings) - which has a ratio of 75% of the general chromatic landscape, auxiliary colour (that of other objects outside the buildings) - which covers about 20% of the overall chromatic landscape and the decorative colour (that of the details of buildings) - which occupies about 5% of the general chromatic landscape.

Adding these features of the layers that form the chromatic urbanscape, one can come to the conclusion that, in terms of planning the colour, it must be focused mainly on buildings. 'Everyday's life's colours, especially those of the street advertising, should be carefully controlled because of their great influence on individuals that use the urban space.

Each geographical area, each country and each region has its own specific that leads to both a different image of cities and a chromatics associated to them. Differences in the historical, cultural, technological, economical and social development of the cities graft certain chromatic characteristics and preferences in terms of the chromatics.
Xiaomin and Yilin (2009) , Swirnoff (2000) and Porter (1982) noted that the factors influencing the chromatic urbanscape are the geographic and climatic factors, the factors related to cultural and historical context and the technological factors.

In other words, these factors can be placed in two large categories: natural factors and anthropogenic factors.

Natural factors that give the basic chromatic identity, primary, of a city include:
- geographical factors that determine the type of the relief and the natural landscape which includes the city ;

- climatic factors, which determine both the climate and the level of sunlight.

Anthropogenic factors, that distinguish the chromatic landscapes of cities, are:

- historical factors (political included) related to the historical context of the evolution of the city;
- cultural factors which reflect a tradition of using colours and the colour meanings for different cultures, putting the mark also on the chromatic urbanscape (e.g. Asian cities compared to European cities);
- technological and economical factors influence the development of chromatic urbanscape: the use of the latest materials and means of architectural expression, creation of the tallest buildings depend on both technological development and economical power. On the other hand, these factors affect also the traditional chromatic urbanscape; maintaining a balance between traditional and modern is one of the most important aspects of planning the urban landscape ;
- social factors closely related to the cultural and historical ones influence, along with the technology, the development of the chromatic urban landscape. Differences at the social level are visible both within a city and between different cities.

Traditionally, buildings were made of local materials and painted with pigments available locally.

The colours used in the past were in close relation with all the traditions and customs, while the materials used were mainly determined by the characteristics of the geographical area. Thus local materials and locally pigments determined the colour of the built landscape.

The contemporary chromatic urbanscape uses the colour in architecture in accordance with "fashions" and directly related to latest materials and technologies.

The concept of traditional chromaticscape appeals to the geographical area and to the cultural traditions, while the contemporary chromaticscape promotes most often, the uprooting, and universalization of the response.

Unver and Ozturk (2002) noted that a very important element in the assessment and cognitive and affective judgments of colour is the familiarity. Thus the individual will relate positively to familiar colours and will reject the 'foreign' ones.

Traditional colours are mainly cultural memory boosters, while contemporary colours find their reference in fashion. Traditional local colours, with which the individual is familiar, can significantly influence the appreciation of the urbanscape.

3. Conclusions

Local features of the chromatic urbanscape are generated by the location (as defined geographically) and by the culture and dynamics of the urbanscape. Some options for chromatics, closely related to the shape, spatial and volumetric composition, influenced by historical, cultural, social factors, led to the establishment of some preferences for the urban chromatics, in the collective memory. The differences are visible if we examine, for example, a city in Africa and another one in Europe or Asia.

It can be thus concluded that, in terms of the role of colour in the urbanscape, this is the means to store and transmit the

historical and cultural memory, namely the chromatic identity, being also the signal of contemporary civilization and an important component of the quality of life, by the power of the relationship with the psycho-affective collective. Colour control in the urban planning may thus be a way of preserving the local identity and a potential element of sustainable urban competitiveness.

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