Colore Identità
Valorization of the historic urban centre of San Sperate (CA) Sardinia

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ABSTRACT
The project has the aim of changing permanently the centre of a rural village through the use of coloured asphalt. The project is a result of the experience gathered in 40 years of recent history of the village, during which it has been transformed in an open air artistic laboratory by both local and international artists who have changed the colour of the village walls from earth-like ones, to carefully chosen “enthusiasm colours” of mural paintings.

The operational phase of the project, started in 2007, allowed an exchange of knowledge with people from different backgrounds. From the academic point of view the project has become post-disciplinary, involving scholars from disciplines as diverse as environmental psychology, semiotics, architecture. The next stage will involve non-scholars in the design of the intervention in the public space. We want to demonstrate that a new methodology - both in urban planning and in academic research - is not only needed but also viable.

Keywords: Architecture Design, Metamerism, Colour Management

1. INTRODUCTION
Colore Identità is a synthesis operated through the observation of the spontaneous behaviour of the people who belong to a community: that of the village of San Sperate.

This is not a top-down project aimed at defining an urban furnishing historically and aesthetically appropriate to the place, on the contrary, it is the interpretation of a demand, not necessarily a conscious one, manifested by the people of San Sperate in the last years. “La valorizzazione del centro storico di San Sperate” (The improvement of San Sperate historic centre) with colour on the streets becomes an excuse and a means at the same time to recover the identity of the Paese Museo.

2. THE CONTEXT
San Sperate is a village - 8.000 inhabitants -15 Km far from Cagliari in Sardinia
It was originally called *Orticedro* because of its excellent agricultural products, and it was a village as many others until around the late sixties. A village made of mud where the public space, the street, was characterised by the monochromatic character of the material used. The paving was in clay and the fronts of the houses were in mud bricks, thus the prevailing colour was brown, contrasting with the blue of the sky and the green of vegetation.

The private space, with its typical *campidanese* house, enclosed in itself, defined a fundamental architectural element, the party wall: an element of partition between the public and the private space.

From 1968 San Sperate has undertaken a process of deep cultural, social and architectural change. Such changes link the personal story of Pinuccio Sciola with the history of his community. At that moment the artist was 26 years old and he used to alternate periods of work and study abroad with stays in his village. Every time he came back from his trips he could feel the cultural distance between him and his mates grow deeper and deeper. This put him in front of a crossroads: either he left his village for good to take advantage of a vast and creatively stimulating world, or he worked in order to make the world enter his village and become part of it.

His choice to pursue the second road involved many youngsters who, in June 1968 transformed the earth-village into a village of white walls through the use of lime.

This process had allowed for a social change (opening the community to the idea of change) and for the creation of a new architectural base (white walls were a new story could be written). In this way, with the direction of Sciola, the young people and the children of San Sperate started to draw on the walls of the village together with artists coming from different parts of the world.

Thus the wall was no longer an element of partition be-
between public and private space, on the contrary it became a uniting element, an element for communicating, a medium for the social participation of a community which became able to rebuild its identity while opening itself to cultural realities outside of it. Such process has been going on for 40 years now. Its importance does not lay in the artistic factor, but in the socio-cultural implications which come with it. As Sciola frequently reminds: “the mural painting is just an excuse to stay together, to start an exchange, to open ourselves to the world and finally be a part of it”.

3. COLOUR, FROM THE WALLS TO THE STREETS

In the summer of 2007, during the theatre festival ‘Cuncambias. San Sperate and its sea. False stories’, a part of San Sperate’s streets were painted in blue, in order to simulate the sea. Indeed, a few months after, the traces of blue left space to many more colours. On one side the artist Mariano Corda gave to the use of colour on the street a clear social character, through the set up of a workshop where dozens of children drew and painted the asphalt. On the other hand Pinuccio Sciola elaborated the concept from a more architectural point of view. In order to be able to put his ideas in practice he needed some simulations which would convince the local administration to provide him with the large amount of painting needed for his project.

This is when the architecture studio Officinevida comes into play, together with the architect Schirru. As it happened throughout this whole process, the three decided to add something more to it, building on their expertise. They realised a deep analysis of the context which brought to the actual project Colore Identità. Valorizzazione del centro storico di San Sperate, which was subsequently funded by the Autonomous Region of Sardinia.

In this way the chromatic simulation as an aesthetic and chromatic vision of an idea (that of colouring the streets with paint) left space to an action aimed at improving the social and street fabric, thus ensuring at the same time the maintenance and the management of a decaying urban space.

The passage from the idea to the project sparkles from a critical assessment of the urban fabric. Indeed the historic centre, influenced in its genesis and development by the presence of two rivers, has been able, exactly thanks to the presence of those boundaries, to keep its autonomy from the new urban developments on the one hand, and on the other to maintain a direct relationship with the countryside, reflecting in its own fabric the rural parcelling which defines the big urban blocks. In such context the external walls and the street level represent an important project compass.

In the analysis of the historical part, the project managers were able to individuate a street arch which crosses the urbanised part putting the three churches of the village in relation to one another. From the chromatic analysis of the fronts along such arch, the project managers were able to determine, through an objective/tool-driven method (the open source software Agave was used for the task), a range of possible colours for the paving. The resulting range of colours was then presented to the citizens of San Sperate for a subjective choice. Colore Identità became a new excuse, used to develop yet another moment of community participation, as in the past had happened with the other turning points such as the ‘lime years’, the mural paintings and the painted streets. Both the movement linked to the mural paintings and the colour on the streets are not simply paintings, but interactions with architecture and society. There is a continuity between the walls and the streets granted by the fact that in both cases the public space is the place were the interaction takes place, with the citizens and the colours.
4. MATERIAL
The extremely temporary result of the actions performed in 2007, which after only a few months had left a lasting memory but only feeble traces of colour, brought us to elaborate a different project to be carried out with more lasting material. The transient colour did not match with Pinuccio Sciola’s oximoron “in San Sperate we should only have permanent events”. Nor did it match with the strong identity value attributable to the sudden passage from the clay streets to the asphalt ones in the seventies. These two considerations brought to the only possible conclusion: what was needed was coloured asphalt.

5. THE PARTICIPATED PROJECT
The action programmed was a delicate one, so the project managers chose to involve the population in such fundamental choices through the organization of participated design workshops. The staff at Officinevita was supported by highly qualified specialists as color perception from the Department of Psychology of the University of Trieste and environmental psychologists from the association Mind in Action, the artistic director of San Sperate, Pinuccio Sciola, the association NoArte-Paese Museo, based in San Sperate, and finally the faculties of architecture of four Italian cities: Cagliari, Ferrara, Genova and Milano.

The staff, at their very first approach to the context, realised that San Sperate really is a workshop in which the citizens recognise themselves, by mirroring themselves in the streets, the paths and the squares.

Environmental psychologist refer to the whole of these concepts as ‘place identity’, that is that part of oneself which is intrinsically social, made up of physical spaces which we defend and protect as parts of our own bodies. The concept of identity thus recalls, in a synthetic and precise way, everything that we know about ourselves both at a conscious level and at a more deep, unconscious one. The place identity refers particularly to the perception of the place: its emotional value and the rational. The idea of the participated design, inside such psychologically determined context, calls some technical aspects. The enthusiasm and the passion of the locals needs to be conjugated with the method of environmental psychology with both a molecular perspective, regarding the technical aspects of the details of the perceptive and cognitive aspects which intervene in the modification of the asphalt, and a molar one, in that the street, as a public environment, is mainly a common space for sharing identities, social values, life stories and construction
of meanings which become even more relevant when the actual users are involved in the very process of creation of that same public space.

At a symbolic level one of the most meaningful architectural elements of one’s place identity is the street where we live. The street allows us to put together places and people and, at the same time, it is used as a spatial point of reference in order to get to a mental representation of the environment. Thus the structural and chromatic choices for the streets are strictly linked to the emotional and cognitive components of identity and place affection.

Just think of the moment in which a person has to decide the colour of his new car. There are both personal and emotional factors that influence this choice, as if the colour chosen reflected something of the person, his/her character the way in which she/he perceives the world. The decision-making process is complicated when the person has to make a choice together with other individuals. The individual, in such circumstances, is elevated to a community level, where the single person thinks not as an individual but assumes a group perspective.

The workshops were divided into three macro-areas: school workshops, architecture workshops, and chromatic tests. At the same time the sense of belonging to the place and the residential satisfaction were assessed through an intense activity of monitoring and gathering of data. The same activity will be repeated at the end of the whole process.

5.1 School workshops

Around 100 pupils at the Istituto Comprensivo Grazia Deledda of San Sperate (primary school) approached the theme of colour (both in its physical and psychological sense) and that of the knowledge of their historic centre through guided tours, in-class activities and a drawing contest. This gave the project managers a strong input: the idea that the natural green of vegetation could not be underestimated in the design process.

5.2 Architecture workshops

People from different walks of life, public officers, citizens 20 architecture students from Cagliari, Ferrara and Milano took part to the workshops. They were players in a role game where they played themselves. The working group challenged the original project and, through the analysis of the many facets of the context, established the path which the action would follow and another range of possible colours for each part of it. The group also approached more technical problems such as the crossroads, which where considered not only as points at which the colours would meet, but also spaces charged with functions and meanings; the green of the vegetation, which apart from being a colour in itself is also an instrument used by the citizens to appropriate a part of the public space for themselves, and finally the closed streets, which are perceived as sitting rooms in which public and private space are fused together.

Other themes where the drains, the maintenance, the spaces for the cars etc.

Some important scholars and professionals contributed with creative stimuli during the architecture workshops:

Professor Marcello Balzani and architect Federica Maietti, from the faculty of Architecture, University of Ferrara, spoke about colour as matter and its more or less coherent use in architecture. They also invited the students to consider the Colore Identità project as a ethic and behavioural model, capable of suggesting a utopia which could gradually modify the use of the public space;

Professor Giovanni Maria Campus from the faculty of Architecture, University of Cagliari, started from a technical-
instrumental concept such as that of the number of colours that compose an image to get to the idea of the pixel as a communication unit in the digital era and of the street as a huge communication platform, where the information assumes a graphic code;

Dr Barbara Cadeddu, research fellow at the faculty of Architecture, University of Cagliari showed some international experiences of actions in the public space which were capable of changing in a participated way the perception of the space by residents, despite the modest amount of money used to undertake them;

The experts in environmental psychology Mauro Murgia (University of Trieste), Stefano Feduzi, Maura Putzu and Laura Oppo, showed to the residents the results of the psychological survey which had involved around 150 of their villagers.

5.3 Chromatic test
At the end of the workshop it was clear that the colour on the streets, as it was for the mural paintings in the sixties,
is just an excuse to stay together and to live the public space while re-designing it. In the end, nonetheless, a choice of colours had to be made.

Thus the members of the staff took to the streets for three days with six simulations of different colours for each street. They asked residents to express a score for each of simulation from the lowest (1) to the highest (10). The data gathered where elaborated by the experts of the Psychology department, University of Trieste.

6. RESULTS
At the end of the workshops the results were interpreted by the project managers who finally elaborated the executive project taking into account the decision of the people of San Sperate.

The project has been constantly communicated through daily updates on the following website http://colorcolor.officinevida.it.

The executive phase is due to start on September 20th 2010.

REFERENCES