Colours and cultures on contemporary public space design

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ABSTRACT
The sociological analysis of at-risk neighborhoods in the suburbs showed that quality, awareness and identification of any urban environment encourages people to come forward becoming proactive citizens.
In the design of public peripheral spaces, the colour of materials plays an important role, evoking and narrating memories and events of a common background, introducing dissonant or ironic signs, even stimulating a critical reflection in both inhabitants and visitors.
The paper aims to discuss how the colour, in a new and carefully public space design, can influence the daily life of its users and can become an identifying icon for the town.
Keywords: colours, neighbourhoods, public art, public spaces,

1. ROLES OF URBAN PUBLIC SPACES
Outdoor public spaces are places of interrelation, social encounter and exchange where, in everyday life, people moved by different interests converge for different purposes: leisure, play, culture and not just transit.
Within the city anyone can identify the main types of outside spaces: private spaces usually closed by barriers to public access; spaces definable as private-public, such as commercial places where economic activity is present; public spaces, where plurality and social diversity are ideally encouraged.
Urban public spaces have been subject of study in a number of disciplines (anthropology, sociology, geography, landscaping, architecture, arts, etc.), they can be defined from different though complementary perspectives and can be the result of participatory and interdisciplinary design (Altman I., Zube E. H., 1989). The development of a perspective of interdisciplinary and multiculturalism requires mapping ‘cultural topography’.
In peripheral neighborhood, the planning of available spaces according to quality in landscape, architectural and art design may contribute to the residents’ quality of life, promoting social inclusion and helping to bring about a more balanced use of spaces with regard to sex, age, any handicap and social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Magatti M, 2007).
Through its public spaces, the city reflects cultural and economic forces and, at once, it must expose identity and collective significance. The planning of new public spaces has been conceived by local governments even as a tool to promote an image of the city for marketing purposes and to put it between the worldwide touristic attractions, with the aim of reconstructing the 'local identity' of districts in physical and social transformation.
Since the 80’s, the studies carried out regarding the metropolitan area of Barcelona, show how the artistic rehabilitation of the public space can play an important role in upgrading the socio-economic area, promoting gentrification processes (Díaz F., Ortiz A., 2006).

2. PUBLIC ART AND ‘SPATIAL PRACTICE’
In ‘public art’, the word ‘art’ describes the object and the process and ‘public’ the site in which the contextual art-work is placed, the participation of the community and the audience of people ‘for’ / whom the art-work is intended.
A new more significant and adequate term, ‘critical spatial practice’, is suggested by Jane Rendell to describe work that ‘transgresses the limit of art and architecture and engages with both the social and the aesthetic, the public and the private’ (Rendell J., 2006).
In projects community-based, an essential role is played by the formation of an interdisciplinary forum and special requirement is to consolidate a ‘public art audience’, to encourage a range of creative practices. The perspective is to achieve a good level of knowledge and satisfaction through different target, as well as to increase public art audience and cultural communication.

The social communication in public space through community-based public art works is developed in the interventions of Suzanne Lacy. She coins the term ‘new genre public art’, to express what she sees as a new view where public art could include conceptual and critical work with a focus on collaboration, interaction, process and context (Lacy S., 1995). The role of creative practices in a deprived and in transformation community is to help communication, to use the imagination and to give a view of a different future.

3. SIGNS AND SPACES. THE ROLE OF COLOUR
The colour plays key roles in the public space:
- correct signal of the space functions;
- element of the artistic and cultural quality;
- users’ interaction stimulating factor.
The colour may be defined in relation to chromatic perception and memory, it isn’t a property of objects as such, but the better discrimination of surfaces and spaces plays a central role in various experiences of interdisciplinary and multicultural approach.
At the beginning of the XX century and between the two wars, the ‘Nouvelle Vision’ movement - Kollar, Man Ray, Brassai, Léger - and also the ‘Futurism’ – Balla, De Pero – and the ‘Catalan Modernism’ - from Gaudí to Mirò - were aware of the changes taking place in his time and expound the new means of communication linked to the rapid growth of railways, road and maritime transport.
The concise forms and flat tints of modern communication techniques (signals, lettering and pictograms) are translated in pictures, plastic motifs and decorative arts, sometimes schematized to the point of abstraction.
The signals and the primary colours often symbolized - in two spatial dimensions - the movement and the sound of the new urban transformation, become a creative allegory of the industrial word.
The approach of colour moved from the experience of Avant-garde paintings to the applied arts, architecture and public art. The colour as signal aesthetic reached its apogee in the decoration of the ‘Palais des Chemins de fer’ (1937), a collective work by Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Félix Aublet and Pierre Hodé in Paris. The great decors and the signal aesthetic had a great influence on young artists, including Nicolas Schöffer, who would have continued developing cybernetic art, exploring the science of signals. The potential offered by art and technology (mechanical, electronic, multimedia tools) in chromatic expressions is applied in innovative ways, beginning from advertising communication.

In the Avant-garde of the early ‘900, Le Corbusier recognized the perfect contiguity between architectural design, decoration, plastic arts and painting; this perspective is reflected in the experiences of decoration and expression of public space between the wars and until the ‘60s (Arnauld P., 2010).

Joan Miró created a public sculpture garden for the Maeght Foundation (1964) consisting of enormous sculptures and mural ceramic works, a Labyrinth inhabited by creations of the artist’s dream world (Figs. 1-2). The public art–work was result of a collaboration: the artist, the architect Josep-Lluis Sert and the patrons discussed about lighting, colour and spatial location.

Already in 1937, Fernand Leger symbolically suggested the move towards 'site-specific mural art', which responds both to the function of decorative and utilitarian individualism of painting and was increasingly interested in large-scale public art.

In the Musée Fernand Léger at Biot (1960), the white architecture of André Svétchine similarly contrasts with colorful mosaics, stained glass windows, sculptures, outdoor furniture and art works of Leger, in the garden designed by Henri Fish (Fig. 3).

The loss of the ‘aura’ and the reification of the art–works, the iteration of the ‘iconic brand’, with the reinterpretation of the standard signal and the popularization of art images, led to the crisis of this perspective of ‘contiguity’ between arts.

Since the 80s, Barcelona is an example of the artistic and envi-
The integration of social, political, and environmental dimensions are achieved and the visionary creativity has essential expression in the ‘power of color’; a key issue is the change from colours as standard signals to colours as emotional activators, in continuity with the local tradition of decorative art (mosaic, ceramic) and the Catalan Modernism.

The Parc Joan Miro, realized in the 1983, comprehends the artist’s last sculptures, entitled Dona i Ocell (Woman and Bird), dominating as a fantastic and colorful land-mark, between an artificial water channel and a cement plaza, designed to host any kind of event. As in Miró’s public art works in the 50-60s, the sculpture is covered with glazed ceramic tiles in bright, basic colors of yellow, red, and blue.

The Parc dels Colors (2002) is commissioned by Mollet Town Council to Miralles, with the aim to provide a remarkable, unrepeatable landscape. The artificial is expressed through strong colours and unexpected connections: graffiti becoming architecture, paintings becoming places.

In the Mercado de Santa Caterina, by Enric Miralles and the artist Toni Comella, the cover is made of laminated wood and finished with a ceramic mosaic reproducing stylized fruit and vegetables. The patchwork consists of 200,000 ceramic hexagons, the colorful roof looking just like a wave lying on an open space, between the buildings of the ancient Barrio.

The colours and materials accentuate the reflection and distortion of the natural /anthropic environment, increasing the optical and tactile perception /interaction.

In the urban-spatial language, the symbolic communication is associated with standard urban signals, publicitary images and daily objects, too. In the Capsas de Mistos (Match Box) (1992) near the Parc de la Vall d'Hebron, the artists Oldenburg and van Bruggen started from physical, iconographic and historical characters of the place to build a synthetic image; the transgressive purpose is developed through the representation of a common everyday life object (a match box), a product which evokes the area’s industrial past - realized as a large-scale public art monument, made of painted sheet metal.

In other recent projects realized in Berlin, the mean of road surface is reversed and a new artificial landscape quality is defined: to apply road graphics and colours as an artistic element is part of Topotek 1 concept, similar to the Avant-garde of the early ‘900.

In 2005, at Niebuhrstrasse, in Berlin-Charlottenburg, the landscape architects have tried to work with spatial language, transforming it and making the aesthetic experience of traffic surface and graphics into a poetic language. Playground and parking are marked by coloured asphalt, thus awarding the unconventional quality of an abstract picture, an elegant, sensuous surface. For the office, the ‘smooth dermis of asphalt’ contains an essence of ‘human interaction’ and at the same time it’s a ubiquitous, banal material’ (Fig. 4).

The Topotek 1’s projects strive to respond to site conditions and programmatic necessities listening to the social demand and high quality of creative design of the public space.
Experiences of community based - public art regard the North Mirafiori district, at Turin, within the European project “Urban 2”, under the ‘new patrons’, a public art program started in France and promoted in Italy by the Adriano Olivetti Foundation (A.tblolo, 2008). Stefano Arienti project, “Multiplayer”, is instead the result of design process of a playground, according to the suggestions of the residents, especially young users in a neighborhood of public housing.

The aim is to create an outdoor space that is capable of promoting social relationships and specific activities, through unusual, imaginative shapes and colours; despite its positive general evaluation, the colorful waves of surface finishes of playgrounds present some weaknesses (Fig. 5).

The site-specific work, each time, disorients the perception of the place and the monochromatic emphasizes the sign and the role.

“City Lounge” is an outdoor living space in St. Gallen, Switzerland, created by artist Pipilotti Rist and architect Carlos Martinez, originally intended as a temporary installation, it was so popular to become a permanent work (Fig. 6). Outdoor space doesn’t corresponds to the metaphor of ‘square’ but of ‘living room’, as in the ‘urban interventions’ of Ugo La Pietra ‘70s. A red carpet flows all around the buildings, recreating a public living rooms: places to relax, to converse, to walk. The free-forms (tables, benches, low walls, fountains, even replica of cars) and the carpet are made in glass-fibre reinforced plastic.

4. CONCLUSIONS

“City Lounge” is a ironic and critical expression of urban integration between art, architecture and landscape, in a discordant relationship with the architectural culture of the historic city, and in response to the question of ‘living spaces’ in the pedestrian area.

The ‘creative spatial practice’ may stimulate reflection on a state ‘here and now’ of a community, on its roots and its future, accepting the value of temporality and waiting a possi-
ble assumption of historical value, but engaging, at the same, its role as functional service to the same community. The aim is to highlight - through creative practices - not only the problems, but the history and the imaginary associated with a place: ‘to rebuild’ a sense of community is, in fact, a condition for local governments, to develop policies and space planning with consensus and satisfaction of the inhabitants.

At the beginning of the XX century and between the two wars, the art-works were deliberately put together with monochromatic architecture and colorful forms of natural/artificial public spaces; on the contemporary, the use of colour returns to be essential expression of popular identity and urban aesthetic. The creative and critical reinvention of colour signals in the town – for example, in the altered road signs of Julian Opie - can contribute to the memory of the industrial age and to re-build the identity of a post-industrial town.

REFERENCES