

# **Color and Place: New Ways of Expression in the Contemporary City**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The clear trend towards the global city, a virtual city of flows, as the expression of the contemporary city makes us focus our attention on the Urban Place and its insertion in the present urban condition. The urban exteriors display new expressive and communicative functions of color that facilitate the promotion of pleasant experiences and contribute to the construction of urban places. Light, color and sound are sensory effects with the relevance of new ways of expressions established by present technologies (Bahamón 2010).

In the unique Latin-American context, and especially in the city of Córdoba, the intervention of color is essential. The iconic-linguistic potential of color, which has been enhanced by new production ways, boosts its capacity to communicate by creating atmospheres that go beyond materiality into new perceptive dimensions. This experience of the city and the resulting promotion of urban life are very important for the production of the urban place.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The contemporary world witnesses essential changes in the production of urban environments which are shown in its architecture. Moreover, these changes take place in the new possibilities of expression of color and the different signs that go with its perception such as cesias, chromatic contrasts and textures that facilitate a bigger variety of environmental experiences and make us reflect on the Urban Place and the context that produces it.

The new interventions related to the structure, expression and meaning of the urban place, which in some cases involve the appearance of new architectural and urban components as well as a renewed value of spaces that already exist, have as a main objective to re-value the urban environments for the enjoyment of their inhabitants and to generate experiences in the social life context.

The combined impact of worldwide events such as globalization together with the local effects of the changing social-economic and cultural Latin-American context leads us to focus our attention on the interventions and transformations that have taken place in the urban public space in the last decades, especially in the city of Cordoba, Argentina.

## **2. URBAN PLACE AND URBAN CONTEXT**

The concept of urban place has changed throughout time together with the evolution of societies and the research contributions of many disciplines. Nevertheless, the close relation between the concepts of urban and existential space (Norberg Schulz 1975) proves that the perceptual expression of the city and its places matches the ideas of city throughout time.

This is shown in the leading roles of different components which, according to the perception of each historical time, are predominant. Consequently, every place or net of places in the city is the result of their previous history.

At present, the issue of public space and place is considered a priority. The present debate explains different perspectives. The urban condition is presented as an ideal kind of city connecting the physical-spatial with the mental-imaginative. On the other hand, the new technologies, communications and global deals place flows before places, dividing the city between hyper-mobility and stagnation. This meaning of urban city is expressed by the so-called global cities (Mongin 2006).

In this context where the traditional concept of place is under discussion, new urban interventions show a change of meaning of the concept of urban place. The expression of urban language takes advantage of new technologies but its inherent meaning, its essence, may not have changed completely. Urban places keep on being an environment of communication and socialization. The urban image does not belong to the city, but to its inhabitants since this image is born in the way it is represented in the minds of inhabitants. The city makes sense when it satisfies its inhabitants' needs (Pérgolis 2005).

In this context regarding the perception of Place, emerging urbanity elements rise with the purpose of regaining the traditional idea of urban place in the present socio-cultural contexts. Consequently, color and other components of language, renewed by their new ways of production, participate actively in the construction of the concept of Place.

As living meaningful environments, both individual and collective, the social production and construction of the urban public place must be understood as a dialectic relationship which changes along time, creating new ideas, social structures and meaningful places.



*Figure 1. Different ways of production in urban places of the last decades in Córdoba city*

### **3. THE CHROMATIC EXPRESSION IN THE CONTEMPORARY CITY**

The urban color, as one of the structural components of the language of the city, contributes, as a quality, to fulfilling the needs of man; if these are fulfilled in city places, they become urban places. At present, other spatial configurations reveal that the expression of urban language has changed taking advantage of new materials and technologies developments. By means of new expressive forms of color, these urban places propose a different way of suggesting, informing and stimulating the sense of place in the city. This prompted a chromatic survey and the subsequent analysis of uses and behaviors in paradigmatic places of the city of Cordoba, Argentina in the last decades.

#### **3.1 Method of the chromatic survey**

Light, color, textures and cesias are main components of urban language, and as a consequence, of the created spatiality. These elements work on the whole configuration of limits having influence on the perception and communication of the urban environment.

By recognizing paradigmatic urban places in the city of Cordoba in the last decades, it is proved that color has accompanied the development of the concept of place in the city. The aim is to prove how the new materials and architectural trends have changed the chromatic expression creating changes for those who perceive and inhabit those environments.

The steps to conduct the chromatic survey are as follows:

- The paradigmatic environments are chosen according to their chromatic expression and temporal condition of urban place.
- The Natural Color System (NCS) is used to measure color since it is the most appropriate way to reveal the different chromatic modifications produced in urban spaces.
- Simultaneously, the performing cesia degree is measured and textures are surveyed to determine more accurately both the perceived color and the inherent one.
- A synthesis matrix is laid out to present the survey of different variables as well as the perceived color and the inherent one.
- The chromatic survey is conducted at different times of the day and in different seasons.



Figure 2. Urban color in urban places of the contemporary city – N.C.S.

### 3.2 Analysis of uses, appropriation and sense of place

The appropriation and use of urban environments are determined by the satisfaction of physical and psychological human needs. When these take place, the sense of place becomes real and is expressed by the emotional behavior and reactions of the inhabitants.

To confirm the new relations between space and sense an analysis of uses and behaviors is carried out to prove the meaning given by inhabitants to the urban experience.

The steps to analyze the uses and behaviors are as follows:

- An interpretative observation is carried out with the aim of determining the behavior and appropriations in the different selected testing environments. This observation takes place at different times of the day, on different week days and different seasons.
- with the aim of completing the analysis, questions are made to casual users to verify the association and the meaning the inhabitant relates to the perception of chromatic elements influencing public spaces.
- A synthesis matrix is laid out to present the analysis of recorded uses and behaviors.

#### 4. PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS

In accordance with the above mentioned it is stated:

- According to the perception of each period of time, the notion of place proves the main function of color and different components of language and the different role they play.
- In the contemporary city the new urban architectural expressions affect not only the physical aspect of the city but they also condition the use and appropriation of the public urban space, changing the meaning of the concept of traditional place the inhabitants have.
- At present, the perceptual variation between the applied color and the inherent color is broadened as a consequence of the performance of perceptual signs as cesias, textures and the synesthetic process shown in the new expressive possibilities of innovative technologies and materials. Besides, an appearance variety is displayed, sometimes short-lived, supported by the new role of sensory effects such as light and sound.
- The chromatic survey and the survey on uses and behaviors show that the perception and meaning the inhabitants confer to color are associated to the different periods of time.
- The role of color in the contemporary city exhibits its potentiality to promote real experiences of city environments which have become Urban Places, both in new sites or in re-valued spaces. This highlights the need for chromatic design at different performance degrees in the city.

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