

## Colour and Participative Process in Urban Requalification of Tirana

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents a review of the urban requalification and the impact of facade colour in Tirana, Albania through analyses and comparisons. Generally speaking, colour is considered as appearance; therefore it may identify an object or a city. Based on an in-depth literature review of the colour impact on urban patterns and social changes, Tirana is one of the most impressive examples. Tirana is known as the city of colour since 2000, when its mayor Edi Rama decided to "...revive the hope that had been lost in the city" by painting the facades in different intensive colours. For thirteen years till now Tirana citizens has experienced the feeling of living in a city full of colours. The approach consists of the followings steps: i) data collection ii) an in-depth literature and media review concerning the colour impact in urban requalification iii) a questionnaire of 150 participants including different ages, gender, professional categories as well as Tirana residents and non-residents inhabitants, iv) a comparison of the requalification techniques of Tirana with other cities. The results concluded that, despite many factors such as geographical position, urban and social characteristics, the colour encourages people for a more productive, sensitive and healthier environment. In addition, the results showed that the colour is more than decoration.

**KEYWORDS:** Tirana, colour, urban requalification, city

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Urban requalification is considered a long term and sensitive process, which can be achieved using different tools. Form, texture, material, light are often considered of more importance than colour because we do not know that a simple colour can change people's mood by stimulating different chemical in our body (Triantis, 2010). Goldstein (1930) advances with the impact of the colour, pointing out that colour is responsible for 62-90% of our first impressions of one another. Hidayetoglu, Yildirim and Akalin (2012) study the impact of warm colour in the increase of perception and attractiveness.

The same impression impact has been studied by Le Corbusier also in architecture and urban scale. Polychromy is an architectural technique as powerful as the plan and the section. Better than that: polychromy is itself an element of the plan and the section (Klinkhammer, 2011). Different studies have shown that the impact of colour is more influential than the form of the building or architectural elements. Therefore colour has been used in requalification of a single building, a neighbourhood, (*favela* in Rio de Janeiro), or even a city. Aguinar and Pernaó (2010), focused on the Colour and Participative Processes in Urban Requalification for Social Housing in Portugal. The authors analyzed the exiting situation and

present new façade proposals for neighbourhood requalification. Other authors, (Sciola et.al. 2010) studied the transformation of the centre of a rural village San Sperate in Sardinia, through the use of coloured asphalt and mural paintings.

In this context it is interesting to note that it is really the colour, with its evocative and emotional force, that plays a crucial role in the debate on the need to preserve the city's identity, but also to initiate a process of urban and social requalification. Colour in that sense, as already remarked by Bruno Taut, is revealed as the most effective, quick and cheap means to counter the inexpressive grey of much of the building production and to awake the consciousness and perceptual capacities of the citizens. (Boeri, 2010).

Tirana, the capital city of Albania, is an example of a city built in the communism area with few typologies of buildings, generally in grey colour, repeated in the whole urban pattern. The case of reviving Tirana through a colour project and its impact has not been scientifically studied yet. This paper is focused in an in-depth research of colour impact and identifying the positive and negative results of Tirana case requalification.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 General Overview**

The methodology involves the following steps: i) A general description of Tirana situation is made to understand the conditions of Tirana that lead to the colour rehabilitation. ii) Through a questionnaire and statistics, the paper analyses the social behaviour and impact toward the intervention. iii) A comparative study of Tirana and Moscow urban requalification is used to identify causes which lead to the above-mentioned intervention and the positive and negative results of the process.

### **2.2 Space Description**

Tirana is a dynamic city of noise and contrasts, where the modern lifestyle meets old traditions. In 2000, the mayor of Tirana, Edi Rama was facing a post communist city with illegal buildings, high crime levels, no public spaces and a gray colour which owed the city: gray in buildings, gray in roads and therefore gray in people's life (Rama,2012). According to Tirana Municipally Yearly Report, the crime statistics and illegal contraction were at a high level. Following the chaotic early transitional period, which led to spatial anarchy in Tirana (Aliaj et.al. 2003) and was accompanied by the most rapid population increase in all Central and Eastern Europe (Tosics and Dukes, 2005) the Municipality's discourse expressed the need to restore the city's lost identity.

Edi Rama, in 2000, decided to reveal the hope that had been lost in the city by offering Tirana a new identity, a face of certain hope and joy that only colour can give. The decision to paint a whole city in bright colour was one of the biggest risks that a mayor could take, but as a painter, the Tirana mayor was conscious about colour effects on people and their psychology.

### **2.3 The Painting Process**

At first, the Major invited international painters and organized a competition with the aim to give a new identity to its city. His idea was based beyond the painting the facades. He generated artistic values on the communism facades. The requalification project considered two divisions of buildings: the first one included objects which do have architectural values or belong to a certain style (mostly institutions or objects built during Italian conquest) and the second division included the 'grey colour' communism residential buildings which do not provide any architectural value. According to the classification, the buildings of the first division preserved their initial basic colours, which became brighter (see Figure 1). The colour was used to emphasize the style elements and attract the intention toward the renewed façades (see Figure 2). His first action was painting a grey building in bright orange (see Figure 1). The façade restoration of this residential building preserved the architectural elements by emphasizing the horizontal

and vertical proportions using a different colour pattern. The building had two phases of construction over the time. However, in the restoration phase (see Figure 2), the structure was unified, preserving the horizontal structure, but painted at the same colour in order to unify the building. (Municipality, 2003)



Figure 1: First division. The original facade of first building restoration. It was realised in a residential façade at the street of Kavaja.



Figure 2: First division. The restored facade of first building restoration. It was realised in a residential façade at the street of Kavaja.

The first façade intervention was an experiment to test public reaction and behaviour toward a new and different project with their city. The impression caused by Rama's first intervention was a mix of feelings for Tirana inhabitants, which were unsure if this kind of restoration was for better or for worse. The public reaction admitted that the surprise they faced cause a positive impact that something big was going to happen with their city. Figure 3 illustrates another example of restoring a building façade by preserving its initial colours with the main difference that they became brighter (see Figure 4).



Figure 1: First division. The original facade of Shallvare's block



Figure 4: First division. The restored facade of Shallvare's block

Meanwhile the buildings that were classified at the second division went through a different process. An international competition took place in Tirana in 2000 (Municipality, 2003) to repaint buildings (see Figure 5 and 6) in a riotous array of colour and pattern (Rama and Sala, 2009).



Figure 5: Second division. The original façade of an apartment building.



Figure 6: Second division. The restored façade of an apartment building.

Figure 7 and Figure 8 show the same building before (see Figure7) and after (see Figure 8) restoration. The facade project was designed through an international competition organized in 2003. (Municipality, 2003)



Figure 7: Second division. The original façade of an apartment building from Bolles & Wilson.



Figure 8: Second division. The painted façade of an apartment building from Bolles & Wilson.

As illustrated in Figure 9 to Figure 12, the second division of painted facades offered a variable and cheerful environmental. Each façade was unique and soon they became useful checkpoints of the city. Figure 13 illustrates the summary of requalification projects that were classified in two divisions as explained in paragraph 2.3.





Figure 9 "Waves"



Figure 10: "Horseman"



Figure 11: "Washing clothes"



Figure 12: "Words"

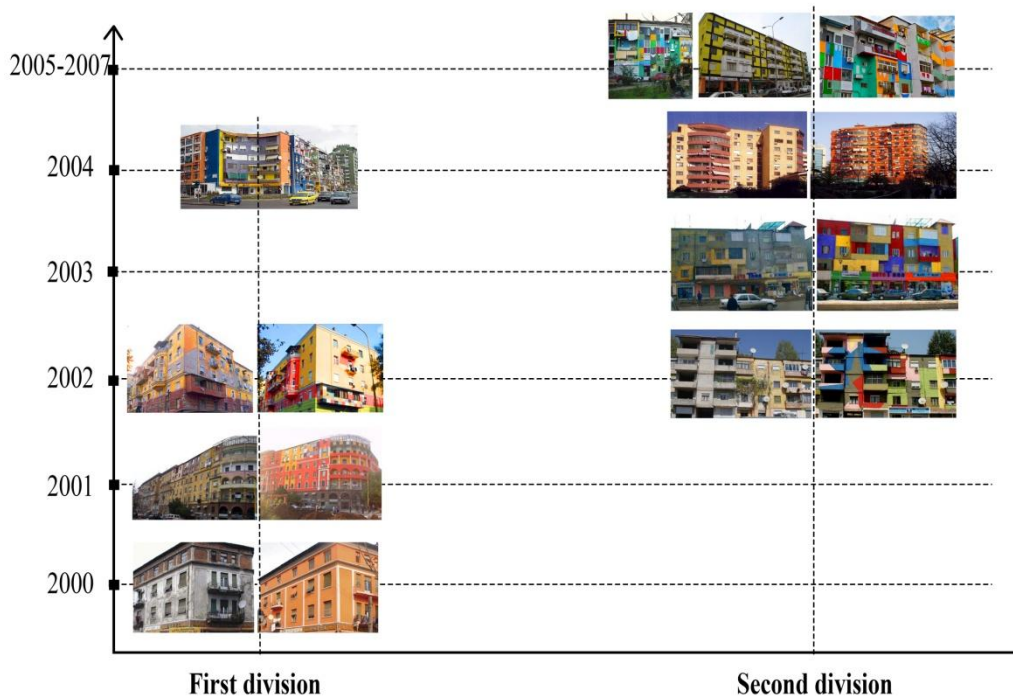


Figure 13: Painted building classification.

## 2.4 The questionnaire

To analyze the social impact of Rama's painting action, a questionnaire was prepared. The questionnaire objective is to show if this experience has served positively or negatively on the lives of the citizens. The questionnaire included 450 people, while 89% Tirana inhabitants. Table 1 illustrated the distribution percentages of the participants.

Table 1: The percentage of participation

Percentage of participative inhabitants	Categorization
6%	Psychologists
3%	Tourists
12%	Professors of Architecture and Urbanism
8%	Other citizens of Albania (not specified)
72%	Other professions

The participants in this questionnaire were firstly asked about their age and the city the live to create a general picture of this social impact.

Second, they were asked if they considered the "painting the city" process as positive or negative and if they would prefer to live or walk through a painted block or an original grey one. Third, the questionnaire includes consideration statements related to this process such as:

- *The "painting the city" process:*
- *Revived the feeling of belonging to a city with identity*

- *Makes people feel better*
- *Is not appropriate for a city*
- *Increased the feeling of safety*
- *More commitment to pay taxes*
- *The city looks disordered*
- *Colours brought joy and hope*
- *Social and psychological impact*

Lastly, the participants were asked if they would like to preserve the painted facade and the colour identity or it should be thought for a new and different identity.

## 2.5 A comparative case of Tirana and Moscow

Rama undertook such an initiative, launched by two main factors: Urban chaos that had included any part of the gray city without identity and extremely low budget that the government had available. Meanwhile, a block in a Moscow suburb underwent an experiment where the dull gray residential buildings (see figure 14), known as Russian Panelak, were painted a variety of bright cheerful colours. Panelak is a colloquial term in Czech and Slovak for a panel building constructed of pre-fabricated, pre stressed concrete, such as those extant in Czech Republic and elsewhere in the former Soviet bloc. (Zarecor, 2011)



Figure 14: Apartment building painted in bright colours, Moscow.



Figure 15: Apartment building painted in bright colours, Tirana.

Similar to Tirana's history, in Moscow the planners from the Communist era wanted to provide large quantities of affordable housing and to slash costs by employing uniform designs over the whole country. They also sought to foster a "collectivistic nature" in the people. In case of war, these houses would not be as susceptible to firebombing as traditional, densely packed buildings.



Figure 16: "Leaf" concept, Moscow



Figure 17: "Leaf" concept, Tirana.

The idea of painting a nature panorama in the block façade came out when for almost a month Moscow inhabitants had not seen the sun raised in the sky because of cloudy weather. During the time, almost 75% of the population was in a light depression. The desire for work decreased and people needed sunlight and colours to feel alive (Brumfield, 2004).





Figure 18: "Rainbow" concept, Moscow



Figure 19: "Rainbow" concept, Moscow

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section shows the results of the questionnaire and the results of a comparative study of Moscow and Tirana urban generation using. As illustrated in figure 20, the colour process is considered as a positive intervention in general. But even though the people who considered this experience as a negative one, would rather prefer walking through a coloured block, rather the original grey. They declared that the city should maintain the identity of "the city of Colours" rather than looking for a new identity.

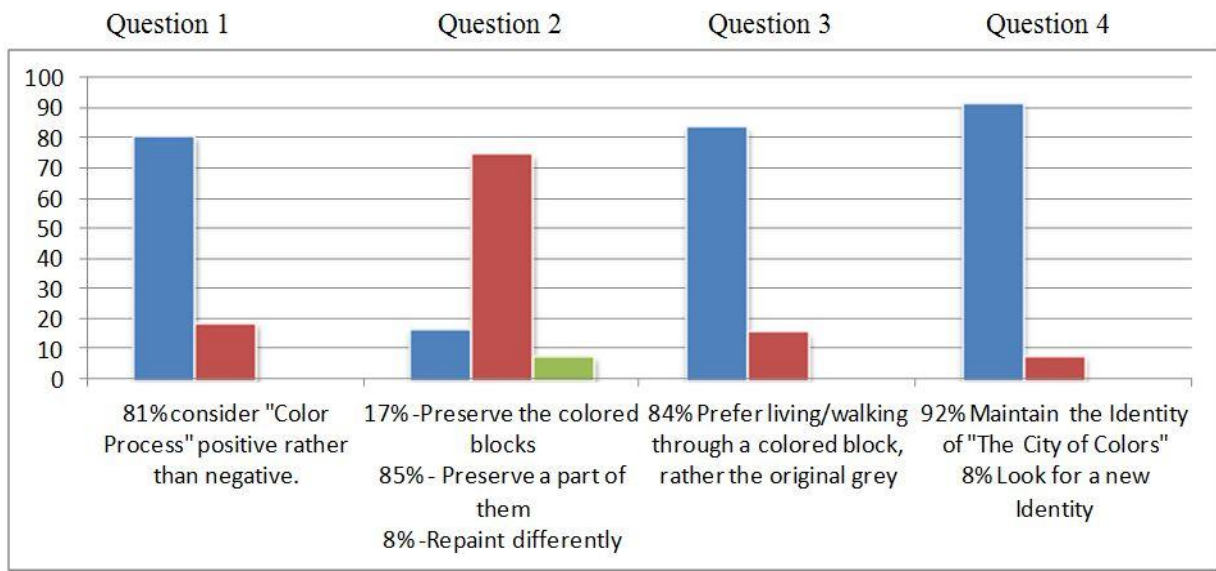


Figure 20: The results of Question 1 to 4 of the Questionnaire

As shown in Figure 21, referring to the statistics of Table 1, most people agreed that this process revived the feeling of belonging to a city with identity. Colours influenced in their psychology making them feel better and eager to enjoy life. According to the questionnaire, colour increased the feeling of safety because the environment seemed brighter, joyful and lighter.

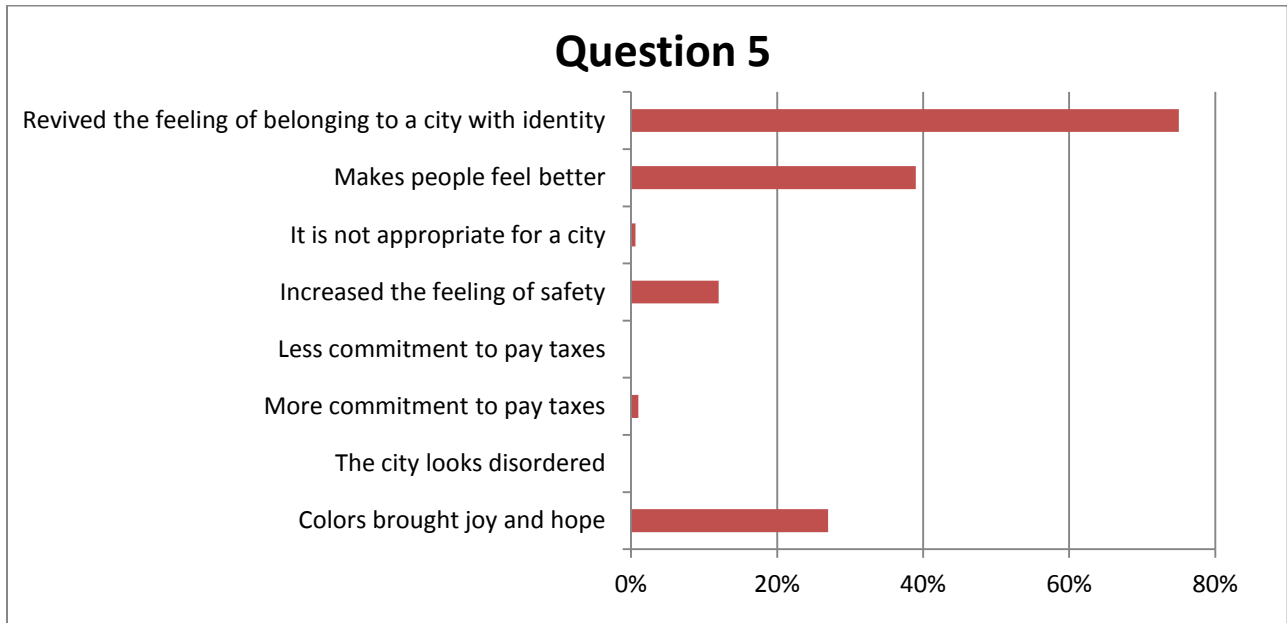


Figure 21: The results of Question 5 of the Questionnaire

### 3.1 Comparison of case of Tirana and Moscow

Urban planners and architects decided to turn this grey neighbourhood into a colourful block that radiated positive energy and a joyful view. The results of this project were:

- i. *A new face for the district. The Russian Panelak buildings gained a colourful nature panorama, which made a large impact in the city, country and international magazines. Tirana went through a similar process too.*
- ii. *The intense colours affected people's mood and feelings. Experiencing a relaxing, but happy view of the sit facades, people started to enjoy more living in these buildings. After the requalification the gray colour was almost totally removed.*
- iii. *The site was converted into a landmark thanks to the unusual and unique panorama.*
- iv. *The economic value of the apartments raised from 20% - 60%.*

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Colour studies inside participative processes are extraordinary effective tools to urban rehabilitation and requalification planning. In general, causes for Tirana urban requalification using colour, were the absence of a strong and unique identity, the low budgeted, informal constructions and the large number of buildings of socialist communism. The capital city needed hope and joy. The paper, in Tirana and Moscow case studied, allows concluding that colour can help and contribute in the city rehabilitation, especially residential buildings. This means that the palette of colours should be considered important element, which has an immediate effect in people brain and therefore emotions. The relationship between materials and colours is still a subject that needs to be study. Tirana's rapid development has a constant need for renewing and rehabilitating the buildings. Urban requalification encourages people for a better life, less pollution and social awareness. As such, the colour is more than decoration. While accepting the big positive impact that the painting of the facades brought to the city, the author are aware that this is only the face of the buildings. The communism area buildings have to go through a long process of restoration based on energy efficiency and sustainable design.

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