

Original Research Article

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The role of color in reducing tensions in urban spaces “Case study Mohtasham Alley of Gorgan, Iran”

Abstract

Problem Definition: A variable called color is one of the most important factors affecting the urban space in terms of the visual and perceptual identity and according to the qualities of diversity, readability and cohesion of the environment that the audience encounters with. In fact, color is expressed as one of the most prominent components of visual elements in the design of urban furniture as well as the urban landscape. According to these points, the current research aims to express the role of color in the urban space of Mohtasham Alley in Gorgan from the perspectives of the three examined groups and tourist attracting approach.

Objective: The present study has been conducted with the aim of investigating the role of color on the physical and external structure of buildings as the most effective visual factor in creating a sense of social security, happiness and peace in the residents of Mohtasham Alley of Gorgan.

Research Method: The research has been carried out based on a descriptive-analytical approach using library resources and field studies. In line with the purpose of the study, interviews were conducted on a case-by-case basis with 30 residents of the study area in three different age groups.

Results: The present results showed that adolescents were more enthusiastic about the color variation in their living space. Also, young people have considered the beauty created in the neighborhood space to be a pleasant change, but stated that the needs of the residents go far beyond the temporary colors created in the environment. The third group, i.e. middle-aged people, depending on their age and different perceptions of poverty and poor living conditions in that area, have not significantly felt the necessity of being color in their living environment or pretended to ignore the role of color in creating a sense of peace and happiness and its positive effect on the structure of their lives.

Keywords: Color, Urban space, Liveliness, Mohtasham Alley, Gorgan.

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Introduction

Place alone is meaningless, and adding anything new and creative ideas creates a new definition and identity for the audience (Zanganeh, 2017, 88). The first contact between audience and culture is formed through external or visual senses. Regarding the structure of the city and a certain neighborhood, the first thing attracting the audience is the visual structure of the environment. After entering a city or a district and understanding the external structure of the environment, the audience also gets involved in the internal cultural, social and religious layers of that environment over time (Khodarahmi, 2017, 72). This external structure not only affects the audience who is temporarily located in the environment, but the energies of the environment also affect the residents of the area who are in contact with their living environment with all their senses. This effect will be significant on the sense of happiness, social security, violence, feeling of satisfaction with the environment and also the decreasing or increasing crime rates in a neighborhood and in the urban structure as well. The environmental energy is directly transferable to the audience. Part of the energy in the environment, which includes factors such as technical knowledge, art, demography, cultural, historical and social knowledge of the region, affect the creation of good, beautiful, ugly and influential feelings in the audience and the spirit of people living in the region. That is, everything related to the form, color and installation type of the urban furniture and materials used in the environment, will cause a better growth and manifestation of the audience and will create destructive or positive effects in the environment (Mozafarikhah & Kafshchian Moghadam, 2012, 86). In this regard, color is one of the most important factors in the quality of the environment that makes the identity, beauty and legibility of urban spaces. Therefore, a team of urban space experts can provide the conditions for improving the quality of an urban space in a desirable way by organizing the use of color.

In this way, the policy of municipalities in many developed countries having an independent cultural identity is based on the principles in order to seriously preserve the culture and historical identity of the city. The municipal policy makers believe that the space inside the houses belong to the landlords while the appearance and exterior structures of the buildings belong to all citizens, that is, the outer spaces of the houses belong to the culture, and it is culture that determines the social structure (Khodarahmi, 2017, 74-76). From the perspective of urban structure, creativity is primarily the study and observation of what a city needs materially and spiritually to meet the cultural and social needs of citizens, and ultimately to provide a city with a happy, dynamic and vibrant identity. A city, in which attention must be paid to the needs of contemporary man, whose life is full of challenges and concerns of modernity, in addition to having many basic infrastructures, must visually create the enthusiasm to step on the pavement of the streets, and also create sense of happiness and peace in the citizens. This task

is not possible except by managing the municipalities in establishing a team of specialized and powerful experts who are skilled in all related fields. The duty of art is nothing but to create a good mood for human beings. In fact, the art's task is to nurture the emotion (Haghighi, 2017, 215), induce a sense of security and peace and reduce the violence of urban structure, especially in neighborhoods where the people need more care and support due to belonging to a particular social class. Therefore, a city with proper visual structure will train citizens who see more beauty and display healthy social behaviors. In the not-so-distant past, due to the use of natural colors and indigenous materials appropriate to the geography of each region, the appearance of cities, in addition to having an architectural structure homogenous in accordance with the climate, had a beautiful homogeneous structure having a direct relationship with the spirit and mental structure of the local people. This color harmony has become one of the factors which create unity, sense of calmness and give identity to any city, region and smaller neighborhoods as well. This visual harmony and proper use of color in harmony with the geography, culture and religious beliefs will leave a good experience in the minds of citizens and visitors while being exposed to such urban spaces. That's why most audiences, well remember being in those spaces over time due to the sense of unity, joy and vibrancy that the environment has created for them. With the staggering growth of unprincipled and non-standard constructions and the incompatibility of the materials used with the climate of the region, as well as the heterogeneous growth of short, tall and ugly vertical buildings next to each other, despite the existence of academic experts and theoretical advances associated with urban planning and the visual arts, the existence of color and its relationship with creating a sense of pleasure and increasing the level of happiness and social peace in citizens has received less attention. Hence, the role of municipalities and expert city managers in creating this pleasant feeling in spaces full of audio-visual pollution is highly important. Although many wall paintings have recently changed the urban spaces, especially in large cities, but the visual structure and color identity expressed on the urban walls have been often implemented without pathology of the neighborhood and paying attention to the indigenous identity of the people living in that areas. However, they have temporarily and superficially created a sense of satisfaction and happiness for the citizens. The lack of accurate expertise and knowledge of social harms in the neighborhood and also lack of emphasis on the cultural and ethnic structures of the people living in "Kuy-e Mohtasham" of Gorgan in order to create a visual evolution and change the urban furniture of the area by urban experts, have motivated the researcher to investigate the relationship between the color space created in the area and reception of the color changes impact on the local citizens

Research Method

The present research is a descriptive-analytical study based on the field studies (in the form of interviews with the local residents and observation) as well as library data. It has been attempted to address the main subject of the research, that is the influence of color usage creativity in the exterior of buildings as the most effective visual factor on the creation of a sense of social security, happiness and peace among residents of Kuy-e Mohtasham. In this regard, interviews were conducted with three age groups, including the adolescents, young people and middle-aged. The reason for considering different age groups for the interview is that the mental perception and needs of the audience about the term social security and happiness differ based on the age and cultural conditions. Therefore, during two consecutive weeks, questions were randomly asked in terms of interviews from 30 citizens living in the studied area regarding the effect of color on the social behavior of the residents. The present study is based on the hypothesis that the creativity of using color in the exterior of buildings as the most effective visual factor has been able to create a sense of social security, happiness and peace in the residents of Kuy-e Mohtasham, Gorgan.

Research Background

Various studies have been conducted in the field of color element in urban and educational spaces, some recent examples of which will be mentioned in the following. However, no comprehensive study has been conducted on the social pathology focusing on the color effect in creating cultural and social relationships appropriate to the level of visual literacy and understanding the social needs of individuals. Zareh & Lotfi (2017) in a research entitled “color in the city with the approach of creating diversity and vitality in the urban environment”, have studied the salient features of urban planning in Iran with an emphasis on the color factor. According to these researchers, the low level of presentation associated with qualitative aesthetic values of landscape in architecture among the inhabitants of large cities, has nowadays appeared as a sense of insecurity, confusion and failure. Furthermore, researchers believe that the lack of effective communication between the citizens and the city, and ultimately the negligence and low participation of citizens has led to a kind of anonymity in the cities. Zareh and his colleague have mainly focused on the study of color element and its effect on the quality of individuals’ perception of the environment around their lives. This is mainly due to the fact that the experience of colored spaces in a systematic way and in a suitable combination in the urban planning structure, causes a sense of satisfaction and peace in the citizens. Kafshchian Moghaddam & Pahlavan (2016) in their research entitled “examination of the place of color in contemporary urban spaces (a case study: Tehran, Enghelab Street, the distance between Enghelab square and Vali-Asr crossroads)”, investigated the color characteristics in the

cultural and social identity of Enghelab St., Tehran. Researchers have pointed out that Enghelab Street is one of the main streets of Tehran and the main cultural highway in the capital. They also indicated that the color space of the facades of Enghelab Street has been formed during three different periods of urban planning, which are important in determining the current visual identity of this street. The researchers have also mentioned in their findings that today's multifaceted identity of Enghelab Street area in Tehran is due to the various cultural, political and social uses that exist around this street, and most importantly, the air pollution of this area is due to being located along one of the busiest highways in the city, which has caused undesirable color changes. Pakzad & Einollahi (2016) in their research entitled “color palette as a landscape design technique: city designing”, seek to provide a method or process for using color as the most important visual factor in order to improve the quality of public spaces using Kaplan's theory of environmental preferences. Although the color landscape of a city highlights its cultural identity and is one of the most important factors in the attractiveness of the environment and urban spaces, this important necessity has been neglected in Iran and the correct way to manage the use of color in public and urban spaces has not been provided. Hatami Nejad et al. (2014) in a study entitled “attitude on crime rise and criminality in the slum: the case of Shad Gholi Khan district of Qom” have examined the issue of crime and conditions for committing crimes in marginalized neighborhoods of Shad Gholi Khan, Qom. This study is comparable to Gorgan's Kuy-e Mohtasham only in terms of choosing the social status of the neighborhood as one of the crime-prone ones.

Geographical Location of “Kuy-e Mohtasham” Neighborhood of Gorgan

Kuy-e Mohtasham neighborhood is located in southwestern of Gorgan city (See Figure 1). This neighborhood with 264 families is a marginalized area of Gorgan and considered as one of the illegal settlements in the city. About 100 families in this area are covered by the Welfare Organization and Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation. According to the statistics recorded in the vulnerable and crime-prone areas of Gorgan, this neighborhood is one of the most significant marginal whose addiction, drug dealing and many other social harms statistics are undeniable (Mehr News Agency, 2016). In 2017, in an inappropriate project lacking expertized infrastructure in line with the policy of Gorgan Municipality



Figure1. Map of Gorgan city and Mohtasham alley neighborhood, red circle: Mohtasham alley neighborhood of Gorgan. Source: www.ajibtarin.com

to recreate the urban decay, the project of painting urban decay textures in Kuy-e Mohtasham has been implemented ([Mehr News Agency, 2018](#)). It is saying that among several crime-prone areas and marginal settlements with non-standard architectural structure in Gorgan, only the exterior structure of the buildings in Kuy-e Mohtasham area, which are located in a stepped manner on a hilltop located higher than the busy Shahid Sayad Shirazi Boulevard, and entirely visible to citizens and travelers who cross this boulevard, is painted. Definitely, the goal of Gorgan Municipality is to beautify only a part of the busy marginal space of this area, which has left an unpleasant physical appearance in the minds of the audience. Beside beautifying the area, no attention has been paid to other factors affecting the social satisfaction of citizens and also positive effects such as reducing crime and violence, creating the happiness, good sense of citizenship and identity for the residents of such areas who are less considered by the city officials.

Application of Color in the City

Human behavior generally takes place across the space, and people's mood depends on their perception of the identity of the place where they grew up and reside. In this regard, an interactive relationship is established among humans, urban structure and place identity. Therefore, all the physical, visual and even acoustic changes in the living space have a completely direct impact on an individual's mood, his/her attitude towards life and interaction with the society. Color is one of the important factors in urban graphics and as the most significant data processor approach in the structure of the city, it can have the most effective urban visual effects on the minds of the audience ([Pakzad & Einollahi., 2016, 165](#)). Therefore, color plays the most important role in creating the urban and social behavior patterns of citizens and as a powerful social element, it has the mission of conveying concepts and creating visual attraction of the city. It is clear that a painter's view towards the color element is totally different from the architectural view of urban designers towards that. Considering the climate of a particular area, urban designers use color in the urban environment significantly different from the painters. While the color harmony principles are the same for the painting and architecture, painters and urban designers use color differently in line with specific purposes ([Naderi Gorzaldini, 2016, 257](#)). Urban designers use color in three-dimensional spaces on a very large scale, considering that the quality of light varies in different cities and climates. Depending on the light in different seasons, the color creates different visual effects, especially during different hours of the day and night in the living space of citizens. In addition, an efficient urban designer must consider a lot of different factors in designing the urban space such as climate, natural and artificial lights, season and most importantly the cultural, religious and social structures of the city and citizens, to create an intimate and successful urban space ([Zareh & Lotfi, 2017, 104-106](#)). Thus, the color theory for

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the city should be observed and implemented in a wider context. Moreover, in the decoration of today's cities which are faced with the population growth and arrival of citizens with different cultural and social tastes, the urban designers should pay more attention to provide creative color harmonies with a scientific perspective and use climatic and cultural factors to scrutinize social and individual behaviors in residents of the city and neighborhood with more attention and curiosity (Naderi Gorzaldini, 2016, 258). According to the factors mentioned for the color designing of a city, the color of cities which includes the facade of buildings and its components, flooring and roofing of the buildings, urban furniture and green space is limited to certain ones. These factors account for as a kind of color identity of a city and a neighborhood (Zareh & Lotfi, 2017, 103).



Figure2.

Pictures of Mohtasham alley neighborhood of Gorgan. Source: Author

In line with the contents presented about the creativity in the use of color in Table 1, examples of urban spaces with a color structure appropriate to the climate, culture and religion in some different cities of the world are randomly presented in order to make a comparison with the color space created in the neighborhood of "Kuy-e Mohtasham" in Gorgan. As can be observed from the visual structure of the images, the use of color factor as one of the important visual characteristics of urban furniture is very effective in attracting tourists, creating a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere and most importantly, creating a sense of unity and satisfaction in the audience. Comparing the expert principles of urban managers in creating a pleasant atmosphere while using color with the neighborhood under study, one can easily find a blind, unprofessional imitation without considering cultural and social factors and also the needs of people living in the neighborhood. At a glance, the colors are unexpectedly eye-catching for the citizens and travelers who enter Shahid Sayad Shirazi Boulevard and cross it. The audience is tempted to head to the alleys of "Kuy-e Mohtasham" and enjoy the color dispersion in the environment. However, when entering the area, they will encounter buildings that are painted very hastily, perhaps only to create a temporary happiness for the residents of the area and, most importantly, to cover the ugly face of buildings made with inappropriate materials resembling a worn patchwork next to each

other (See Figure 2). Gorgan's municipality managers have tried to hide this area, which is considered as one of the marginal and illegal settlements of the city overwhelmed by thousands of feelings of insecurity under thin layers of color and provide a pleasant visual feeling for passersby and travelers. According to the above-mentioned points, the color landscape of the city is one of the main factors affecting the attractiveness of urban environments and spaces and accounts for a symbol of the city's character. Thus, the principled and appropriate use of color in the city landscape and urban spaces will make it possible to promote a sense of happiness and satisfaction among citizens and tourists.

Qualitative factors of urban designing associated with the color effects:

1. Solidarity: In fact, the city as a common component at all levels of behavior is affected in different proportions to be a meaningful bed for the lives of its citizens. Each citizen is the unconscious legal personality of all the people of the city, which derives its unique quality and nature from the unique quality of that city. From this perspective, the city as a semantic structure that is systematized based on its own relations, also includes the scope and perceptual quality of citizens.

Citizens visually and emotionally need to move around the city to receive the unity and solidarity that becomes a sense of calm and happiness in the audience. The urban space users and citizens become confused, disturbed, and feel lack of security and peace just as they confront with the heterogeneous visual elements that unfortunately have messed up the faces of many cities today, and also when they suffer the noise pollution in the space. Therefore, if the urban landscape is arranged with many appropriate elements such as principled constructions in accordance with the climate and culture, proper use of urban furniture and removal of visual elements harmful to the environment and creative and principled use of color, it will become a pleasant and united space. Audiences can establish a meaningful and coherent relationship with the environment in the case of the existence of an obvious systematic unity. It should be noted that solidarity without creative diversity will causes a boring monotony for citizens and will lead to dissatisfaction of the audience (Zareh & Lotfi, 2017, 96).

2. Vitality: The two main criteria of environmental vitality are the diversity of function and the extent of space (Bentley, 2006, 43). In his book entitled "the theory of the good city", Kevin Lynch discussed happiness and a sense of satisfaction mentioned in "the normative theory" of cities as one of the factors making the shape of the city beautiful. According to Lynch's words, the sense of happiness and vitality meaning to what extent the appearance of the city can support biological needs, vital

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Table 1. Comparison of the structural appearance of creativity in the use of color in the buildings of some cities of the world in comparison with "Kuy-e Mohtasham", Gorgan, from the audience's point of view, Sources: photo's of Gorgan are recorder by researcher, the source of other photos: www.khabaronline.ir/news/824633/.

Figure	Countr/ City	Figure	Countr/ City
	Turkey Istanbul		Iran Gorgan
	India Jodhpur (Rajasthan)		Italy Venice
	Spain Barcelo		Brazil Rio de Janeiro
	Moroc Chefchaouen		Argentina Buenos Aires
	Poland Poznan		Turkey Istanbul (Balat)
	Mexico Guanajuato		Germany Berlin
	Singapore		Greece Paros Island

and human abilities, and most importantly the way it enables the survival of all beings and continuity of life, is identified as a human-centered criterion (Zareh & Lotfi, 2017, 96).

Conclusion

Experiencing the energy of different colors obviously induces a kind of sensory-visual effect on us. Color can transform the surrounding environment and increase our creativity. Colors facilitate our self-awareness and help us become more lively and active human beings. The fluidity, dynamism, availability and, most importantly, affordability of the paint compared to many other materials, can make it possible for urban designers and visual artists to use it with a wider vision than other factors to make urban spaces more beautiful and cover some of inelegances existing in the environment. According to the study conducted in the neighborhood of "Kuy-e Mohtasham" and considering the high rate of social harms in the region and based on the interviews conducted with some citizens of the region, the researcher has achieved the following results. The citizens of the studied neighborhood are culturally and socially considered as one of the most vulnerable groups in Gorgan. The attention paid by the municipality regarding the use of color to beautify the unprincipled and ugly buildings of the region has pleased the citizens. However, it is certain that the needs of the residents of the area go far beyond the painted walls. They need cultural, healthcare and educational spaces and many other factors that could not be included in the category of the present research. The citizens participating in the interview were divided into three groups of the adolescents, young and middle-aged people. Adolescents were more eager to welcome the color changes in the area.

The second group, young people, considered the beauty created in the neighborhood as a pleasant change, but have stated that the needs of the residents of this neighborhood go far beyond the temporary colors. They have stated that the color has not solved the problems and social harms in the area. The third group, which includes selected middle-aged people, was not very willing to cooperate and answer the researcher's questions. Depending on their age and different perceptions of poverty and poor living conditions in that area, they feel a very weak presence of color in their living environment or pretend to ignore color in creating a sense of calmness and happiness and its positive effect on the structure of their lives. In many countries, such as India and Greece, different colors are used based on their geographical features (white in Greece and blue in India). However, the colorful spaces created in mentioned countries or other ones are one of the most significant factors to promote senses of happiness, tourist attraction and visual unity in the environment. In contrast, the use of bright and exciting colors in "Kuy-e Mohtasham" in Gorgan, in addition to having a very high energy load, has not been able to achieve significant success in attracting tourists and especially to create a low-stress and relaxing atmosphere for its residents.

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