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**The Color of the City, Identity Beauty**

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**The Color of the City, Identity Beauty**

**ABSTRACT**

*The colors of urban facades have always followed the historical, social and artistic evolutions, and they highlight different traditions, cultures and habits of a population. As a perceptive and material aspect, the color of buildings surfaces, being those painted or characterized by specific building materials, is considered not only in the variety of tones and types of processing, but also as an expression of its ancient use with a strong cultural value, recalling the importance of contextualization in the analysis of urban contexts. In this sense, identity beauty of color recalls is meant as the set of knowledge and practical applications that over centuries have led to a harmonious connection of the designed and chromatic material, with façades in first place, and after with the surrounding environment. Never, as in recent years, the chromatic aspect in urban areas, especially in the peripheral areas of cities or in those small abandoned towns, has signaled the profound socio-cultural transformations implemented by globalization. Perceptively, urban art, characterized by the strong graphic-chromatic impact it generates within the urban context, profoundly differs from the traditional historical pictorial art of facades, in which, on the contrary, harmonization is sought. Artworks as a performative act, aimed at describing contemporaneity in its meanings, as well as artistic and cultural, but also political and social, evoked through a reinterpretation of the sign gesture and figuration. The undifferentiated use of modern saturated products and colors, as places change, makes explicit the homogenization and globalization of this art. Colors culturally recognized as identity of a place, since derived from local materials, are repeated identically from one place to another, and what stands out is the uniqueness of the artwork itself. By choice, it does not seek a philology to drawing and chromatic arts of the past, but it accentuates their detachment, to devote itself to contemporary themes and to a figurative art more similar to the artistic taste of new generations, highlighting the extemporaneousness and temporariness of these artworks. Urban art that, in its generation of new perspectives and points of view, enters everyday life and is characterized as a new identity image. The present study addresses the theme of design and color, applied to facades for which we are losing technical and cultural identity information related to the location, and of how important is the identification and cataloguing of these pictorial representations.*

**Keywords:** *Color – Identity Beauty – Visual Culturale*

**Introduction**  
**Cultural identity e *Genius loci***

The term *Genius loci* and the term culture are both concepts that concern the understanding of environment and interaction between identity and location. The *Genius loci* manifests itself as location, spatial configuration, and characteristic articulation. These aspects are the objects of human orientation and identification, together, of course, with the primary structural properties, such as type of urban settlement or methods of construction.<sup>1</sup> This term embraces and relates, transversally, the socio-cultural, architectural, linguistic and traditional characteristics distinguishing a place, an environment or a city. While the term “culture” is defined as the set of spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional aspects, unique in their kind, distinguishing a society or a social group, in which not only art and literature are included, but also ways of life, the fundamental rights of human beings, systems of values, traditions and beliefs. A set of experiences and behavioural codes shared by each member of the society to which they belong, as a privileged place of knowledge where it is possible to find, conserve, enhance, safeguard and make accessible the multiplicity of cultures in which the entire population is immersed<sup>2</sup>.

Culture, therefore, is closely linked to the concept of *Genius loci*, since the recognition of cultural characteristics and values attributed to cultural heritage derives from the authenticity of cultural identities and from collective memory. The relationship between *Genius loci* and culture lies in the fact that the culture of a community is often strongly influenced by the spirit and identity of the place where it develops, while the *Genius loci* can be reflected and preserved through the culture and traditions of the local population. (see Figure 01)

The loss of the *Genius loci*, of the spirit of the place, which makes a city or a landscape recognizable by those who live there, is the loss of the human being and his cultural identity.

The specific safeguarding of the built cultural heritage, which has always been considered as wealth for the community, has the aim, from a regulatory point of view, to protect the cultural and artistic characteristics in the perceptive complex of urban decoration. The relationship created between man and environment, in which he lives, becomes the existential space that fixes the image that man has of his environment and in which he orients and identifies himself<sup>3</sup>.

The city changes continuously like a living organism with its own “biological identity”, made up of historical evolution, shape and color, production of resources, social order, educational capacity. In particular, the historic city, in recent years, has become the privileged place for experimenting with “cultural urban regeneration”, where the urban form, the historical monumental and architectural heritage, the cultural and artistic expressions, the social community and the local economy, meeting each other, produce powerful innovative effects.

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<sup>1</sup>Cfr. Norberg-Schulz, C., 1979. *Genius loci. Paesaggio Ambiente Architettura*. Electa Editrice, Milano.

<sup>2</sup>Cfr. Unesco (1982), *World Conference on Cultural Policies*, Mexico City, 26 July-6 August 1982: final report, UNESCO/CLT/MD/1 Digital Library, Parigi.

<sup>3</sup>Norberg-Schulz, C. *Existence, Space and Architecture* 1971, p. 13.

**Figure 1.** *Coastal Landscape - Genoa City*



*Source:* Photo by the author

The definition of culture, and the principles indicated in the international conferences promoted by UNESCO<sup>4</sup>, which have contributed in different ways to the identification, conservation, protection, transmission and development of the meaning of cultural heritage, specifically the architectural ones, constitute the preamble to the concepts highlighted in particular in the NARA Charter.

In drafting this document, conceived in the spirit of the Venice Charter, the experts recognize as universal value the respect for the cultural diversity and heritage of all societies as authentic and identitarian. However, its recognition depends heavily on the possibility of finding original and accessible information that helps the complete understanding and identification of the characteristics and meanings of the cultural heritage, as a result of its authenticity. A topic that in the last decade has generated debates and continuous reflections on the profound transformations of the meaning of contemporary cultural heritage brought about by globalization<sup>5</sup>. [Boccardi 2019]. However, since it is not possible to fix international judgments of value and authenticity on fixed and preordained criteria, the only common denominator for all countries is that of considering the authenticity of cultural identities, as a collective spiritual and intellectual memory, in cultural heritage conservation practices and recognizing the fundamental role played by communities in defining the value of the heritage itself.

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<sup>4</sup>Charter of Athens (1931), Charter of Venice (1964), Charter of Amsterdam (1975), Charter of Washington (1987); Nara Document (1984), Burra Charter (1999) and in the Restoration Charters: Italian Restoration Charter (1932), Italian Restoration Charter (1972).

<sup>5</sup>In particular, we recall the Convention adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 20 October 2005 and approved in Italy in 2007, which turned out to be one of the fundamental stages in the process started for the awareness of the equal dignity of all cultures and the recognition of cultural diversity as a common heritage of humanity for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions in which a very close relationship is ensured between protection and development precisely for the purpose of enhancing.

## **Painted Decorations and Street Art Colors and Traditional Techniques vs Colors and Contemporary Techniques**

Polychromy in architecture has always been an integral and inseparable part of buildings and a reference identity component for cities, environments and places; component that over time has generated images that characterize the landscape in any part of the world on a mnemonic/perceptive level. The different uses of color as a form of universal language and free expression of human genius, is an implicit character of the perception of each environmental, architectural and social component. (Salvetti, 2020)

Color stands out for being a natural filter of the historical and artistic events of the moment. From color we can deduce the design intent which specifically defines the connection of the material with the surrounding environment, or its absolute detachment. From the planning of this feature, the methods and speed of the transformations implemented can be deduced.

The analysis and survey of the chromatic aspect of the historic building has been the subject of in-depth studies and research, on historical archival, iconographic bases, direct and indirect instrumental laboratory investigations. It has led to a design which is sensitive to the traces left by the past. In this sense, by color culture we mean that set of knowledge relating to this form of natural expression of man's vision and perception, which invests multiple fields, and which symbolizes the different traditions, cultures and habits. (Salvetti, 2020) (see Figure 02)

**Figure 2.** *The Colors of the Facades of Santa Margherita City*



*Source:* Photo by the author

The protection of the visible and perceived aspect of the historic building, in its volumetric, design and chromatic characteristics, has been a subject widely dealt with both in the theoretical scientific field and at the regulatory level<sup>6</sup>. A first attempt to develop a universal regulatory plan for the conservation of historic cities' center dates back to the second post-war period with the conference on the "Safeguarding and rehabilitation of historic-artistic centres" and the subsequent promulgation of the Gubbio Charter (1960) and the formation of Ancsa (1961). The historic centers were subsequently subject to urban planning laws, which over the years have come to define the specific perimeters of the master plan and the implementation plans for building recovery (law 475/78). The role of color in construction and its study as a qualifying and identifying aspect of our environment, has led to the birth of multiple fields of investigation on historical documentary basis, technical/objective analyses, theoretical/sociological observations. The control of geometries and colors on an urban scale, in particular for the historical ones, where the signs left by the past are present and visible, becomes an element where the scientific debate has outlined, over time different methodological approaches, to study and experimentation in design choices. The first attempts at urban-scale planning of color date back to 1970 with the intention of enhancing and codifying, through specific operational guidelines, the interventions on buildings and on the colors of urban centers as a whole<sup>7</sup>.

The definitions and provisions on the subject of landscape, introduced by the European Landscape Convention on 20 October 2000 and subsequently confirmed by the reform of the Code of Cultural Heritage Legislative Decree n.42 of 22 January 2004, which introduced the importance of protecting and enhancing the landscape as an identity of the entire community, including within it, from an anthropic point of view, the transformations that man with the built environment has produced on the territory, has led to the evolution of theme of color, defining it as an element of strong characterization of inhabited centres. (Salveti 2009). It is in those years that the first regional laws were issued aiming at defining guidelines for conservation interventions, maintenance enhancement of buildings and common parts of the existing heritage, in order to restore and guarantee the buildings fabric a recognizable identity and a high urban quality in the specific regard of color.

Currently, Italian regions that have adopted laws on the specific issue of color are, in the temporal sequence of implementation, the Campania Region L.r. 26/2002, the Liguria Region Regional Law 26/2003 and the Sicily Region, which with a law proposition has established the "Urban decoration and landscape color plan for the cities, seas and mountains of the regional territory" elaborated in 2003.

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<sup>6</sup>In Italy the first laws for the protection of historic centers were introduced, starting with the law 1497/39 on the protection of natural beauties.

<sup>7</sup>The color plan of the city of Turin was born on an experimental level in 1979 on the basis of university research which brought to light procedures and colors that were used in the past to decorate the facades. The project carried out experimentally on about 2000 buildings, led in 1993 to the drafting of a Plan including operational tools such as: technical standards, maps and reference color charts which became operational four years later. During the approval phase, it was included as an integral part of the Municipal Regulations dictating prescriptions regarding the maintenance and/or renovation of the facade colors.

The list can be integrated by the Piedmont Region which, although it does not have a specific law, approved in 2010 a legislative guideline on the subject of "Urban recovery, architectural quality and landscape insertion", in which it is suggested that the Municipalities adopt Color Plans, to be drawn up according to well-established methodology of the Color Plan of the Municipality of Turin. (Pellegri, Salvetti, Eliche 2019).

In the specific case of "Progetto Colore", the theme of color, as a perceptive and material aspect of the painted surfaces of building materials, is considered not only in the variety of colors and types of processing, but also as an expression of its ancient use with a strong cultural value, which recalls the importance of contextualization in the analysis and design of both individual interventions and those of an overall urban nature.

But the awareness of the "culture of color" as a mainly regulatory and design attitude is a field in continuous evolution and in which it is essential to keep interest alive, in particular for the historic centers, for the existing architecture of smaller urban centers but also for all those episodes of modern architecture in the suburbs which in recent years have undergone profound transformations from a chromatic point of view. (Salvetti, 2020).

The design and color of the facades, as a form of artistic expression with a very high impact and social communication, have opened up to new figurative, geometric, chromatic representations, with the variegated decorative phenomena of contemporary art. These graphic, visual and aesthetic artworks contribute to the definition of a different image of the city, imbued with a strong non-traditional cultural identity, given by the new contemporary culture that is extremely controversial in the sociological, regulatory and legislative fields. Visual, perceptive glimpses of the constantly evolving urban complex, which lead to the continuous genetic mutation of places into multifaceted structures; new centralities, new paths, new internal communication structure, with profound consequences not only in the organization of the territory but also in the daily life of citizens. (Salvetti, 2017)

In the specific Italian case, the use of contemporary artistic creativity to regenerate interest in abandoned or degraded places has given way to many redevelopment projects recognized and promoted by local institutions. It is no coincidence that the minor historical centres, at least for those that are not included in the recovery of local traditions and perceptually recognized identities, are reconverted for a creative cultural tourism, through participatory pictorial projects with the involvement of the citizens themselves. Processes launched for years for the redevelopment of the suburbs, against social and civic decay, which stimulate the reconnection and sense of belonging of the community.

The concept of extemporary expressive manifestation, of fast and immediate transformation of the image and perception of places, has led to the evolution of a new concept of urban art. Artworks as a performative act aimed at describing the contemporary in its meanings, as well as artistic and cultural, also political and social, evoked through a reinterpretation of the sign gesture and figuration. (Salvetti, 2017). (see Figure 03)

Perceptively, urban art, characterized by the strong graphic-chromatic impact it generates with the urban context, differs profoundly from what is the traditional historical pictorial art of facades, in which, on the contrary, harmonization is sought not only with the very nature of the building but with the context.

Urban art which, in its generation of new perspectives and points of view, enters daily life and is characterized as a new identity image.

The public space from the stage has become the main actor, transforming, intercepting the wishes and problems of the inhabitants, creating relationships between public administrations, clients, institutions, inhabitants, bringing the citizens' requests to the decision-making table.

**Figure 3.** From Top to Right – no.3 Examples of using Contemporary Artistic Creativity to Regenerate Interest in Abandoned Places; To Follow Examples of Redevelopment of Italian Urban Suburbs



Source: digital processing by the author



The values that art projects in public spaces share are always collective, aimed at the civilian population and accompanied by the assumption of improving the quality of life of citizens.

We can therefore speak of a transition from public art in the strict sense to social art, meaning a different way of making art in the public space, giving priority to the needs of those who live in the city, the desire to ‘make the city’ expressed with the will to regenerate, a complexity of relationships, environments, opportunities.

But urban regeneration does not necessarily have to go through the impoverishment of the cultural knowledge typical of a population. In particular, we want to pay more attention to the use of colors and artistic techniques in the practical dimension of know-how, as irreplaceable sources not only for the conservation or restoration of the existing historical artistic work, but also for the definition of new forms of contemporary art.

The homogenization and lack of respect and understanding of the unique historical cultural process that led to the generation of historic centers brings with it an irreversible progressive cultural and aesthetic degradation.

The always equal use of works performed with modern techniques and saturated colors as places change, makes explicit the homogenization and globalization of this art with the consequent loss of the historical cultural identity values of the historic city.

The colors, culturally recognized as the identity of a place, because they are derived from local materials, repeat themselves identically from one place to another; what stands out is the uniqueness of the work itself. Often, contemporary urban muralism does not seek a philology with the drawing and chromatic arts of the past, but accentuates their detachment, to devote itself to contemporary themes and a figurative art more similar to the artistic taste of the new generations, bringing out the extemporaneousness and temporariness of these artifacts.

The complex nature of the processes affecting the contemporary city therefore means that solutions are also sought outside the traditional planning tools. Design approaches, aimed at individual case studies that go not only to fill what may be discrepancies or alignments with current legislation, but that allow the active participation of citizens, for a renewed sensitivity towards the subject, to understand its cultural value in maintaining that decorum and cleanliness of public spaces and buildings.

The first Italian Regional Law “Provisions for the enhancement, promotion and dissemination of Street Art” of 7 July 2020, n.23 by the Apulia Region is very recently introduced, with no explicit guidelines on addressing design and implementation methods of the new forms of public art, but the principles, purposes and actions that the Municipalities must carry out to receive regional economic support are defined.

The Lazio Region has also moved in this direction, presenting a law proposal introducing more specific investigative elements than the Apulia region, which will be treated and shared with the territorial realities but still being defined. The Directorate General for Contemporary Creativity has also launched an initial

mapping of urban creativity in Italy, not only in terms of recognition and interest, but a possible preamble for its subsequent evaluation in terms of value.

Both art forms can coexist as they represent two different ways of interpreting the urban environment and communicating with the community. Street art, with its more spontaneous and contemporary nature, can add a dynamic and innovative dimension to the city, while historical painted decoration can maintain a link with the city's tradition and history. Balance and respect for both art forms are key to preserving the artistic and cultural diversity of the city. Undoubtedly regarding new forms of urban regeneration, pilot projects with a methodological matrix are hoped for, in which research groups and technical-professional figures are involved who promote the culture of color, for a fluid interaction that is never prevaricating and aware between the community, territory, cultural identity and historical era.

The new cultural proposals, which lead to the involvement of the entire community and local administrations, cannot ignore its development at a regulatory level, which directs its intentions at a national level and defines its guidelines at a regional level. Predictions and developments of the matter, both from a procedural and methodological point of view that guide the final choices, and from a future management of these works during maintenance and conservation.

On the other hand, the enhancement and conservation of the chromatic and design values of the historical painted facades requires a contemporary interpretation that supports the theoretical debate and rekindles the critical interest in these unique testimonies that have played a decisive role in the evolution and interpretation of historical centres.

For the pursuit of these objectives, the investigation of the chromatic values of the historical heritage must include the study, survey and cataloging of all aspects, in the artistic, historical and social dimension.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used for cataloging the chromatic values, relating to the architectural and decorative components of the building, has envisaged direct and indirect investigations for its future compilation and use in a web environment through the General Information System of the SIGECweb Catalog<sup>8</sup> promoted by the Central Institute for Cataloging and Documentation. This web-based platform, which manages the entire cultural heritage cataloging flow, includes the definition of cataloging standards, the assignment of unique codes to the assets and the cataloging of various cultural categories. The main objective of the system is to improve the management and valorisation of cultural heritage, as well as educational, research and dissemination activities. The platform also promotes the

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<sup>8</sup>The system controls the entire process linked to the production of the catalog cards in a single homogeneous environment, managing all the procedural flows and allowing, in real time, the dissemination of cataloging standards, functional updates, the immediate implementation of cognitive data on cultural heritage and their availability for use and sharing with other systems.

use of open data and fosters interconnection between different administrative levels.<sup>9</sup>

The surveys conducted for the acquisition of data concerned the direct survey of color through sampling and technologically advanced instruments, and the indirect collection of information through bibliographic, archival and iconographic sources. The conclusion of the collection phase is the filing and cataloging of the data.

The filing constitutes a very important phase in the collection of information because it constitutes a synthetic but complete picture of the constituent components of the urban building.

The cataloging introduced and used in the drafting of the Color Projects,<sup>10</sup> launched in the early 2000s, has undergone additions and modifications over time to adapt to the evolution of research, technology and computerization in this area.

The file inserted and cataloged is defined by three distinct but interconnected information levels which allow the overall and continuous use of the data collected: Descriptive, Iconographic and Cartographic. The Descriptive level, in which the descriptive and technical-scientific information relating to the asset itself is transcribed, is the 'open' part of the form which can be implemented from time to time by additional information. The Iconographic level in which the photographic images of the facades and of the decorative/chromatic details can also be integrated by other reference multimedia files. The cartographic level for the geolocation of the asset.

Methodology that would further increase a broad line of research that began with the investigations carried out for the drafting of the Color Projects.

### **Digital Cataloging of Façade Colors Painted Facades in Genoa**

The methodology was applied to the buildings of the historic center of Genoa with particular regard to painted facades which are unique in their kind and have occurred over five centuries.

A methodology of digital typological cataloging of the facades but the aim is to highlight the harmony of the decorations according to an overall reading that includes the entire facade and the richness and refinement of the graphic and chromatic sign of the single detail. Investigation aimed at recovering drawings and colors of decorations as a scientific and knowledge base.

The Genoese painted facades, designed to harmonize, enrich and embellish buildings of a simple and bare nature, must be considered as a phenomenon inseparable from the morphology of the territory.

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<sup>9</sup>Pellegrini G., Salvetti F. (2020), Digital cataloging of the painted façade decoration. In: a cura di Giulia Pellegrini. Giornata di Studi "De-Sign: Environment Landscape City\_2020", pp.241-252, Genova University Press.

<sup>10</sup>Requirements for the drafting by the Municipalities of the Color Project referred to in the Regional Law of 27 October 2003 n.26 "Città a Colori". Amendments to regional law no. 25 of 5 August 1987 (Regional contributions for the recovery of residential buildings and other planned interventions)".

The relationship between the painted facades and the architecture are also inseparable from the sixteenth-century building development of the city which, with its evolution in urban transformations and in the individual buildings, gives the very identity of the painted finishes, making Genoa “a point of maximum phenomenal concentration”.<sup>11</sup> (Argan, 1982)

The particular location of the city, in fact, has led to the exponential spread of the taste for painted facades, as the natural boundaries between the mountains and the sea have forced urban development into a small portion of territory, stratifying it and resulting in the construction of narrow spaces that painting aims to allusively expand.

The painted facade as an overall phenomenon that unifies the relationship between architecture, color, material and the context in which it is placed, this can be read as a transposition of the typology of the building, its dimensions and its aesthetic value on the urban area constituting its formal and spatial characteristics.

The event is to be considered a cultural, social and political event even before an architectural one since it was the rich mercantile aristocracy that began the transformation of the medieval centre, merging the buildings, redistributing the spaces and closing off the porticoed areas. Hence the need to intervene on the little graceful changes with appropriate pictorial and chromatic operations. The phenomenon is clearly visible in many cases throughout the area of the historic center of Genoa and in particular in the area behind the Ripa Maris.<sup>12</sup>

A scenographic “open-air museum” therefore, where architectures, decorations and painted figures are connected .... A painted apparatus that wants to create and simulate architecture, becomes architecture itself ...<sup>13</sup>.

### **Collection of Historical Descriptive and Iconographic Data**

The historical sedimentation of this phenomenon, very important for the architectural historical memory and for the whole community, does not appear to be digitally collected and catalogued.

The oldest collection of these drawings, including plans, elevations and sections, was produced and published in the early 1600s by Pietro Paolo Rubens, then printed in the volume “I palazzi moderni di Genova” in 1622, and taken up by other reprints with the implementation of further buildings. Another volume in which there is a collection of accurate surveys of buildings and refined decorative details of the facade is that produced by Martin Pierre Gauthier, “Le plus beaux édifices de la ville de Genes et de ses environs”, printed in Paris in 1818. In 1878, the architect and painter Giuseppe Berlandis published in Milan the “Collection of

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<sup>11</sup>Giulio Carlo Argan, *Convegno di Studi di Genova*, 1982

<sup>12</sup>Pellegrini G., Salvetti F. (2020), Digital cataloguing of the painted façade decoration. In: a cura di Giulia Pellegrini. *Giornata di Studi “De-Sign: Environment Landscape City\_2020”*, pp.241-252, Genova University Press.

<sup>13</sup>Conference proceedings: “Colore Architettura Ambiente - Esiti, problematiche, conoscenza, conservazione e progetto delle finiture dipinte e del colore, nella città storica e nella città moderna, in Italia e in Europa” edited by Patrizia Falzone, edizioni Kappa 2003.

the best factories and ornaments of the city of Genoa”, in which the great care in surveys performed, follows representations in which are highlighted many valuable details in the richness and refinement of the design not only of the pictorial panels but also of the individual elements such as frames, portals, capitals, pilasters. Another very interesting collection is the one published in 1886 by Robert Reinhardt entitled “Palast-Architektur von ober Italien und Toscana Vom XV. Encore XVII. Jahrhundert. GENUA. Berlin”, where some finely detailed reliefs of Genoese palaces are represented, including Villa Giustiniani Cambiaso already noted in 1818 by Paul Gautier. (see Figure 04)

The archival investigations conducted, reveal ancient publications in which surveys of some selected Genoese buildings are represented in detail, but not in color.

The collection of this information on an archival basis is of fundamental importance not only because it allows us to underline the persistence of the phenomenon of painted facades and to compare the transformations that have occurred over time but also for its integration into the iconographic section of the digital catalogue.

From the aforementioned Study Conference held in Genoa in 1982 derives the presentation of an Exhibition of which there is the publication of the Catalog<sup>14</sup> in which some examples of Genoese painted facades have been detected and represented analogically.

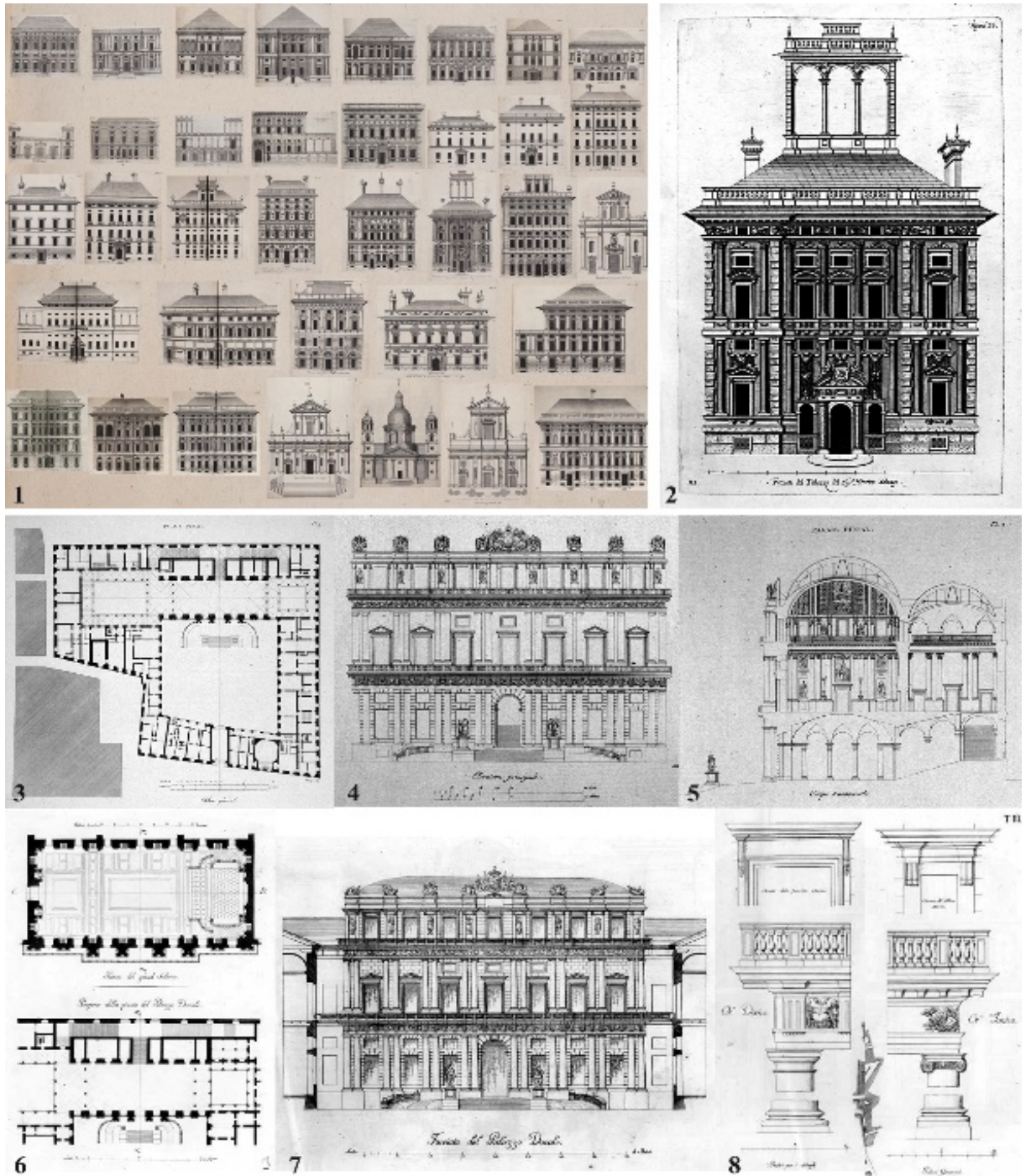
The Catalog subsequently became a point of reference and updating for the photographic and descriptive cataloguing of 27 Genoese buildings with painted facades, conducted in 2008 by the Superintendency of Cultural Heritage of Liguria and never completed, for a renewed discovery and a proposal for the recovery of the painted facades.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Exhibition catalogue “Genua Picta”. Genova, Commenda San Giovanni di Pré, 15 aprile - 15 giugno 1982, Genova, Sagep, 1982.

<sup>15</sup>Pellegrini G., Salvetti F. (2020), Digital cataloguing of the painted façade decoration. In: a cura di Giulia Pellegrini. Giornata di Studi “De-Sign: Environment Landscape City\_2020”, pp.241-252, Genova University Press.

**Figure 4.** Collection of Palaces represented by Pietro Paolo Rubens, in the catalog “The Modern Palaces of Genoa” in 1622. 3/4/5 Plants prospect and section of Palazzo Ducale (Genoa), represented by Martin Pierre Gauthier in «Le plus beaux édifices de la ville de Genes et de ses environs», printed in Paris in 1818. 6/7/8 Plans elevation and details of Palazzo Ducale (Genoa), represented by G. Berlendis in “Raccolta delle migliori fabbriche ed ornamenti della città di Genova” Milan 1878



Source: digital processing by the author

## **Color Survey and Photographic Investigation**

The first approach to reading the building with painted decorations and its colors takes place through a photographic campaign for the identification of the facade under study and the best sampling points where to perform color surveys. The survey that was performed in situ according to the direct perceptive/comparative method of preparation of the widest range of international standard samples on the market and indirect analytical/instrumental reading via a DataColor Check portable spectrophotometer. To complete the phase of acquiring the chromatic data of the building, a specific photographic campaign was carried out simultaneously with the direct surveys, conducted through traditional type instrumentation implemented by the use of a UAV platform. The acquisition of these images in 'ultra high resolution' expressed in terms of pixels/mm using very high resolution photographic equipment and processed with the most advanced digital representation technologies, allowed the sampling of the color in the points of the facade where it was not possible to perform the direct survey. In this phase, particular attention was paid to carrying out both the direct surveys and the photographic shots with ambient lighting as constant as possible to avoid chromatic changes, distortions and omissions due to shadow areas and to better support the post-production operation.

The raster images were saved in a double format: an uncompressed raw file to keep the quality characteristics of the image unaltered and a compressed file in "lossless" mode for its use for the web.

To complete the cognitive investigation of the color of the individual buildings at present, plaster samples were taken, only for some specific cases, for the subsequent stratigraphic investigation. The analysis of the component layers of the plaster, named numerically starting from the innermost layer, has allowed the identification, if any, of the original pictorial layer. The different colors thus identified were compared and recognized, taking into due consideration the chromatic variation due to the action of sunlight on the pigments of the internal layers and their natural aging.<sup>16</sup> (see Figure 05)

These types of reading used together have produced a survey of the exhaustive chromatic data of the state of affairs of some buildings in Genoa historic city center.

The processing of all the collected data has allowed the formulation of summary files for each case study in which the following are reproduced: images and description of the building and the coding of the chromatic survey. The following are detected, recorded and translated in the form of color codes and cataloged in internationally recognized codes: painted plaster, painted decorations, stone artifacts, fixtures, windows, railings and any other element that characterizes the facade in terms of color.

Figures 07/08 show the first results of a census, in continuous implementation, of the chromatic aspect of the facades of some buildings in the historic center of Genoa.

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<sup>16</sup>The observation of the samples, performed according to the Recommendations Normal 12/83, was carried out with the optical microscopy technique, using a Leica MZ7.5 stereomicroscope.

**Figure 5.** From top to right - Example of plaster sampling for subsequent laboratory stratigraphic investigations, 2 sections of the sample seen under a microscope; n.3 reproduction images in paint product of the original local colors and drafting on supports with different granulometry; representation of the decorative elements of the façade and of the design color choices; Restored painted facades



Source: graphic elaboration by the author

## Conclusion

The present study is part of a wider line of research that wants to fill the gaps not only of the knowledge of the graphic signs typical of the painted decorations of



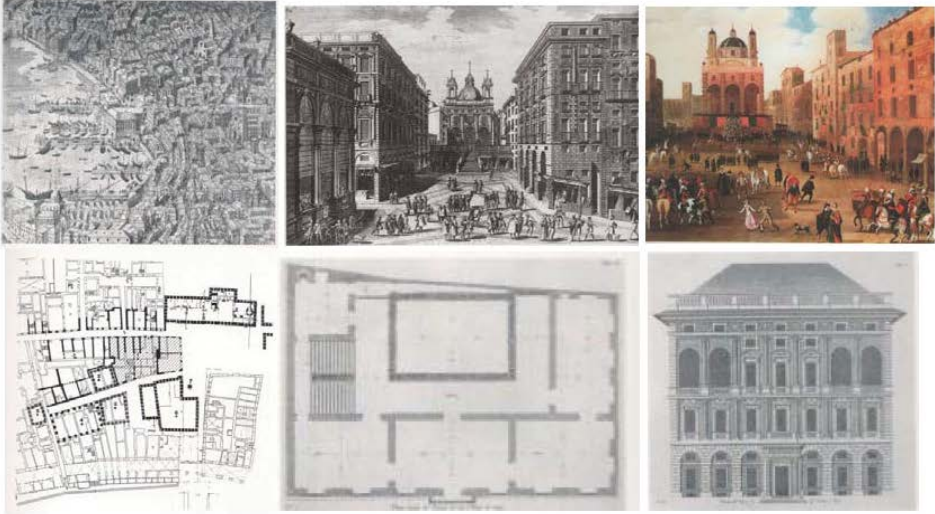
the historic center of Genoa, but through the reconstruction and representation of the same in digital format to provide an operational tool of immediate usability.

This is a further strategic step, which involves the scientific community of the various disciplinary sectors, for the recovery and cognitive historical memory on a real and archival basis of the whole heritage of painted facade decorations, a possible starting point for its continuous implementation and extension of national research.

Cataloging of images and iconography, representation of painted decorations and chromatic values as an act of profound knowledge of what has been designed and planned over the centuries for a reference that is not only visual but in particular as an operational methodological guideline for a careful reconstruction of the traces still present and not yet detected. The theme of cataloguing, as an essential element for the management and enhancement of cultural heritage, and as a support for the promotion and implementation of educational, dissemination and research activities

The city is a living organism in continuous evolution. With this cataloging we do not intend to crystallize the urban scene in a single ideal historical moment, but as an act of profound knowledge that does not *a priori* disregard design choices that take into account the past. Knowledge that involves awareness in the design and chromatic choices that have meant the spatial criteria and values of the city.


**Figure 6.** *Compilation forms for the digital cataloging of the colors of the pictorial decoration of the facade - Attachments of Historical Iconography Palazzo Ambrogio di Negro in Piazza Banchi - Genoa*

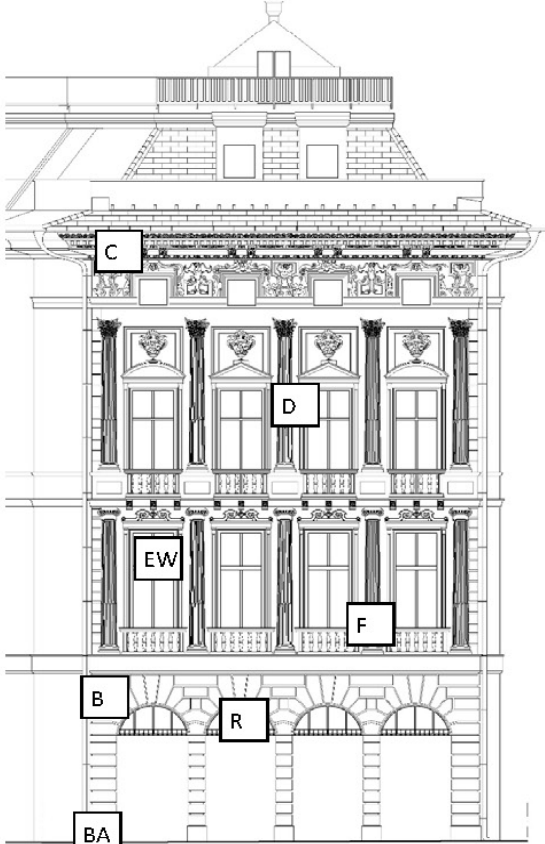
SURVEY OF THE COLOR VALUES OF THE FACADE - ATTACHMENTS	SCHEDA N. 0/C
HISTORICAL ICONOGRAPHY	
	

Source: graphic elaboration by the author

**Figure 7.** Compilation forms for the digital cataloging of the colors of pictorial decoration of the façade - *Palace Ambrogio di Negro in Banchi Square – Genoa*

<b>SURVEY OF THE COLOR VALUES OF THE FACADE</b>		SCHEDA N. <b>0/C</b>
Color survey: NCS system		
color sampling point <b>Z</b>		





BASE	BA	S2000N	CORNICE	C	S1015-Y70R
BASEMENT	B	S1015-Y70R	EXTERNAL WINDOWS	EW	S5000N
FACADE	F	S1510-Y30R	FRONT DOOR	FD	S5040-B20G
DECORATION	DD	S1010-Y10R	RAILINGS	R	S5002-B

Materials constituting the element


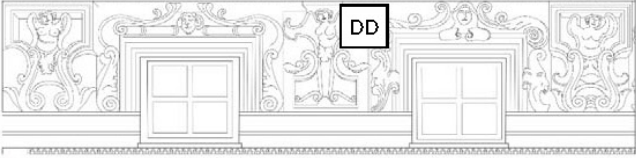



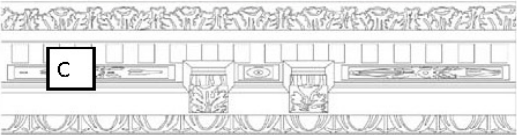




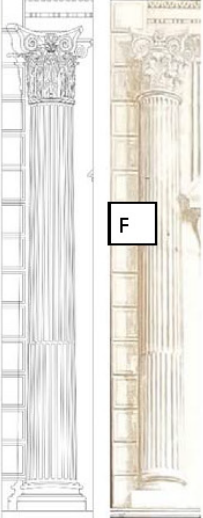

- La - Stone element
- Ma Marble element
- Ar Slate element
- Le Wooden element
- Fe Iron element

Formal characteristics of the element

- P Relief element
- D Painted element

Source: graphic elaboration by the author

**Figure 8.** Compilation forms for the digital cataloging of the colors of pictorial decoration of the details - *Palace Ambrogio di Negro in Banchi Square - Genoa*

SURVEY OF THE COLOR VALUES OF THE FACADE - DETAILS		SCHEDA N.																							
Color survey: NCS system		0/C																							
color sampling point <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 5px; font-weight: bold;">Z</span>																									
<div style="display: flex; flex-wrap: wrap;"> <div style="width: 50%;">   <p style="font-size: 8px;">2 Affresco Scala 1:20</p> </div> <div style="width: 50%;">   <p style="font-size: 8px;">7 8 Mensole balcone Scala 1:5</p> </div> <div style="width: 50%;">   <p style="font-size: 8px;">3 Affresco Scala 1:10</p> </div> <div style="width: 50%;">   <p style="font-size: 8px;">5 Affresco Scala 1:20</p> </div> <div style="width: 50%;">   <p style="font-size: 8px;">4 Balcone Scala 1:20</p> </div> <div style="width: 50%;">   <p style="font-size: 8px;">6 Affresco Scala 1:20</p> </div> </div>																									
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 20%;">BASE</td><td style="width: 10%;">BA</td><td style="width: 70%;">S2000N</td></tr> <tr><td>BASEMENT</td><td>B</td><td>S1015-Y70R</td></tr> <tr><td>FACADE</td><td>F</td><td>S1510-Y30R</td></tr> <tr><td>DECORATION</td><td>DD</td><td>S1010-Y10R</td></tr> </table>	BASE	BA	S2000N	BASEMENT	B	S1015-Y70R	FACADE	F	S1510-Y30R	DECORATION	DD	S1010-Y10R	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 20%;">CORNICE</td><td style="width: 10%;">C</td><td style="width: 70%;">S1015-Y70R</td></tr> <tr><td>EXTERNAL WINDOWS</td><td>EW</td><td>S5000N</td></tr> <tr><td>FRONT DOOR</td><td>FD</td><td>S5040-B20G</td></tr> <tr><td>RAILINGS</td><td>R</td><td>S5002-B</td></tr> </table>	CORNICE	C	S1015-Y70R	EXTERNAL WINDOWS	EW	S5000N	FRONT DOOR	FD	S5040-B20G	RAILINGS	R	S5002-B
BASE	BA	S2000N																							
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Source: graphic elaboration by the author

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