

Aesthetic, perception and preference for historical and modern buildings

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Focusing on the relationship between built environmental characteristics and environmental preference, the present study aims to investigate the expressed aesthetic preference toward different architectural styles of buildings in reference to how old they are.

The graph model of Mallot (2000) assumes that the main issue relative to the spatial behaviour refers to the relationship between type of memory and perception: the complex movement plans (Gärling et al. 1984) are based on landmarks and require the activity of long term and declaratory memory as well as snapshot that are compared with the real vision. According to the literature on the cognitive maps (Lynch 1960; Evans et al. 1984; O'Neill 1991; Golledge 1992, 1999; Holding 1994; Kearney and Kaplan 1997; Allen 1999), Mallot's study confirms the importance of buildings in the orientation. The meanings associated to the building are manifold: i.e. aesthetical (Stamps 2000; Nasar 1994), of pleasure (Hildebrand 1999) or regional identity (Grauman 1978): they permit a function of orientation as well as a decisional frame based on individual preferences. Moreover the architectural-urbanistic aspects relative to the "visualized space" (i.e. aesthetic aspects, spaciousness and size) can be considered as indexes of Perceived Environmental Quality (Bonaiuto et al. 2002). Starting from these studies we aim to deepen the psychological-social content of the preference for buildings of one's own city.

We hypothesize that more ancient buildings could result more pleasant than more recent ones: in particular (cfr.

Mura 2005), a big difference could be found among the buildings built after and before 1950s.

Furthermore we hypothesize that preference for buildings is related to the complexity of the façades—higher in most ancient buildings—because of the process of structuration of a specific visual environment. This process has been analysed according to the rules of perception of the macro-morphemes from the level of the road: exterior walls, roof, window openings, entrance, principal divisions of the solid and other large elements (Niezabitowski 2001–2002, p 5).

The appreciation for western cities characterized in a different way by modern or ancient architecture (renaissance, modern, contemporary) was analysed to understand if the preference derives from the identification with the social group (preference for the historical buildings of one's own city) or from a more general preference for ancient architectural typologies. Starting from this consideration, our research aims to deepen the relationships among buildings' age, familiarity and expressed aesthetical preference.

Twenty-one buildings of the city of Cagliari, divided into threegrups of different historical periods, have been selected for their age of construction (considering in this sense age as a discrete variable).

The buildings have been selected by two independent referees (architects) that valued the complexity of façades and selected the historical building age.

The survey has been submitted to N = 120 inhabitants who had to express their appreciation and familiarity with all selected buildings on a 5 point Likert scale.

Furthermore, personal data, length of residence and level of knowledge and appreciation for the whole city were requested.

In the data-analysis, appreciation for buildings has been analyzed in relation with buildings' age, considered both as a continuous and a discrete variable, familiarity, length of residence elderly, the knowledge of the whole

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a city, and personal variables (gender appeared in empirical studies to be not related with preference of built environment).

Preliminary results confirm the general hypothesis according to which buildings age could be considered as a variable able to influence people's preferences, while the knowledge of buildings and the general preference for "historical cities" does not appear a clear indicator of this.

In future research major attention will be paid to the buildings' age-groups, including more variables related to regional identity and place identity.

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