Aesthetic, perception and preference for historical and modern buildings

Marina Mura • Renato Troffa

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**Abstract** This study aims to deepen the relationship between environmental characteristics of built and environmental preference, investigating how the aesthetical preference for buildings could be influenced by building’s age. Building’s age could be considered as a factor able to influence the perception of built environment as a part of regional identity and of the built environment’s perception rules. Starting from the perspective according to which the aesthetic evaluation could be influenced by physical characteristics (Stamps III, 1999) and that built environment could be considered the spatial, three-dimensional system, we hypothesize that elders buildings could result more positively evaluated than recent ones and, in particular, those built before 50’s (Mura, 2005). Another hypothesis is that façades’ pleasantness is related with their complexity, because of the process of environment visual perception, analysed in according to the perception’s rules of macro-morphemes (Niezabitowski, 2001). Complexity is made up by the quantity of macro-morphemes perceived from the street-level: “the exterior walls, the roof, windows opening, principal divisions of the solid and other large elements, playing decisive role in defining total perception” (Niezabitowski, 2001, p.5).

The study target how preference could be derived by the identification with the social belonging group (as for the expressed preference for historical building of the city: Grauman, 1978)) or by a more general preference for elders architectonic typologies. So the study investigates the appreciation for a sample of cities defined by architects as prototypically “historical” or “modern”. A number of 21 buildings built in different historical periods have been selected. The complexity of their façades have been evaluated by 2 independent referees. A sample of N=120 subjects indicated on a Likert’s scale the appreciation and familiarity for the buildings. The level of appreciation for different buildings has been analysed in relation to the age of buildings -considered both as a continuous and as a discrete variable-, complexity of façades, familiarity, preference for historical cities and the age of the inhabitants. Gender appeared in other empirical investigations (Stamps III, 1999) as not significantly related with preference. The analysis partially confirm the hypothesis. Theoretical and methodological implications will be discussed.