



Shop signs: Overseen traces of the past

Do you know what happens every time when a foreign friend comes to visit me in Barcelona? Instead of visiting the Sagrada Familia, we go to visit the Raval neighbourhood. It is one of the most multicultural neighbourhoods in Europe and hides a lot of heritage within itself.

One of the most important artistic movements which left their traces in Barcelona was modernism, also known as Art Nouveau. It was developed at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and played an important role in all artistic disciplines – in architecture, literature, and music. Modernism wanted to recover traditional and artisanal techniques linked to glass, ceramics, mosaic and other materials without renouncing industrial advances and apply them to

free, modern concepts. One of the major representatives of the movement was Antoni Gaudí who created the Sagrada Familia, Casa Batlló and other buildings iconic for Barcelona. However, we should not only think about the big monuments, but also about the urban landscape in general or the smaller artistic elements which are characteristic for the architecture of that period. To the most eye-catching of these elements belong the commercial signs of the stores.

Shop signs in Raval neighbourhood are testimonies of history and development during the 20th century. These elements are an intrinsic part of the businesses to which they did belong. However, when businesses close or change ownership there come up conflicts. This problem heightens in the Raval neighbourhood

where rapid changes happen due to the neighbourhood's high level of multiculturalism.

If you walk through this neighbourhood, you will see many current premises with commercial signs more than hundred years old. For example, in Carmen Street we can find signs of "Farmacia Carmen" or "Bar Muy Buenas". They are of different materials, styles, and shapes – for example the pharmacy uses mosaics and the bar glass and wood. The shop signs give to the urban landscape a unique significance related to how they belong to the community that lives there.

Currently there are regulations to protect this special heritage, but they are not sufficient enough what is why changes of the businesses have caused

destruction of countless shop signs; numerous others are in poor condition.

But there are also projects to recover these elements and to preserve them as part of the historical memory of the city and of the people they belong to. Since modernism recovered crafts, some of these commercial signs are protected since they stand out due to their artistic quality showing Catalan and natural symbols. Throughout the neighbourhood one can find various artistic techniques applied at commercial signs. For example, the sign of "Bar muy buenas" was destroyed by the old owner, but the new owner decided to restore it.

We live in a society of constant change and adaptation, but we can learn from the errors of the past and the present. The commercial signs in Raval neighbour-

hood are true examples of the impact of the traditional skills and the artistic expressions of the past, they are part of the urban landscape and of the identity of the community that lives there. This urban landscape is part of our daily life, and we embrace it along with our memories and experiences.

In Barcelona, the shop signs are overshadowed by more iconic heritage sites of the city, such as Sagrada Familia, Park Güell or La Pedrera. I encourage everyone to observe the small architectural details that are part of our daily life. We should be aware that without these elements urban landscapes would not be unique nor represent the community that lives there.

■ Raquel Castillo Sagredo



Giaveno: A chromatic transformation

Colour is one of the important fragments of the perception which helps to define a place by decoding it within our memory. It is an important way to create the image or sense of "this" place or "that" place through the colour-scape that is one of the stratifications of memory's landscape.

Colour planning is an urban design tool which had its executive origin in the historical trajectory of the city of Turin, dating back to the 1850s. Yellowish and reddish hues had been dominantly used at the building façades within the historic centre of the Turin and its surrounding area, and these emblematic colours had become the important characteristics to describe the city's overall image and charisma. In fact, the yellow perceived in Turin and its suburbs, known as Turin's yellow, later became fashionable for other places in Italy, including surrounding villages in Piemonte region.

The colour planning invented in Turin in the 19th century was subsequently elaborated by Prof. Giovanni Brino from

Polytechnic University of Turin in 1978, who also prepared environmental colour plans for various other Italian and French cities. The Turin Colour Plan from 1978 was the first operative regulation in Italy in which the yellow, red and blue were prescribed as emblematic colours to be applied on the façades that define the fundamental streets and squares of the city. How these colours have become symbolic for Turin is a long historical process that caused the emergence of Turin's yellow or Piemonte's yellow.

It would be interesting to know the story behind Piemonte's yellow and how it became the primary colour to memorialise many cities in Piemonte, as well as other cities in Italy and France. It was most probably derived from the landmark building of Turin that is Casa Antonelli designed by architect Antonelli in the 1850s and its original façade's colour using in a polychromatic manner yellow, reddish and blue hues. In Piemonte, we might see many cities and villages in these colours because the historic building

façades are hued in these three main colours. Giaveno, located at the Salgone Valley on the western border of the Metropolitan City of Turin, was one of those villages in Piemonte designated by Prof. Giovanni Brino in 1987 in the means of colour uniformity based on his previously described approach.

The dominance of the yellowish hues used in the city feels like looking at something through a yellow filter, reminding of a resort. For example, a holiday home that is mainly used for seasonal purposes, in which whole furniture or objects are usually covered by white sheets to prevent them from becoming dusty. When someone comes to spend a certain period, some of those white sheets are removed from the objects which brings a place to life for those periods.

The concept of "transience" might be interesting to describe these places; they are not stable, but rather they are places in transience as their users are in motion. It is interesting to define a city or a place by using Benjamin Walter's description

of Naples as a "porous city" that was later over-used for capturing the contemporaneity of Italian cities for understanding the contemporaneity. Another to use is Orhan Pamuk's description of Istanbul as *hüzün* – a melancholy that was based on memories regarding the city.

If one can analyse the city of Giaveno through defining within a capsule term, it might be the "transient" city which perfectly shows the city's temporariness characteristic. It is not a static city, but rather, it represents a conduit city that is generally used as an alternative location in summertime or vocational periods by the local people of Turin. This character of the city, being in a state of "transience", is seen from the yellowish filter of the façades which are reminiscent of the covered furniture in holiday homes to protect them from the dust.

Recently completed research, conducted by Polytechnic University of Turin and coordinated by Prof. Silvia Gron, proposes new polychromatic alternatives in various colours and tones for those

historic building façades. Although the city's overall image is changed via different colours, the city's character as being in a state of "transience" is strengthened, as if someone has come back to home for a while and has removed the covered sheets from some objects and furniture to live temporarily. There are some angles within the city which seem like livelier parts due to a different colour composition of the façades, on the other hand, there are also streets that are still defined by this yellowish colour due to the building's historical character, which gives impressions of those covered, non-used objects. Accordingly, the city represents one of the significant examples of chromatic transformation, exemplified through the use of colour as a tool for place-making and image-creation in the present, or as sense-defining to provide continuity between the past and contemporaneity.

■ Gözde Yildiz

