The idea of doing-it-yourself in Urban Space Coloration

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The urban environment is all in color, both natural and artificial. The color development of cities is officially regulated and controlled. But at the same time doing it yourself offers alternatives to official resources. It functions as an anti-pole to the officially regulated and controlled urban color design.

“Do it yourself” in urban coloration is a very convenient for citizens cultural practice. Color is accessible to individual citizens or ‘actors’ who desire a means of self-expression and control of the impression they wish make upon others. People can choose the colors in their personal spaces, dwellings, ornamentation, and landscaping.

Together with these individual actors in the color space of the city we find collective actors as well (they are social and professional groups, ethnical communities, age groups and various social institutions), and the influence of these actors on color characteristics of the city is much more essential.

The citizens use color in order to re-arrange the objects and to bring them together in new ensembles, to give them new purposes and functions. They ‘modify the city’ by use of color (R. Koolhaas). This design is manifest in patterns derived from history, cultural tradition, local techniques, materials, and meaningful symbolism, all elements that determine a sense of ‘place’.

The paper will focus on the heterogeneous forms of do-it-yourself and bricolage, and will analyze the practices that are being produced by them in urban space and its relation to formal and regulated urban coloration.

It will be shown, that the idea of doing-it-yourself in urban coloration can also be politically instrumentalized and become part of mainstream culture like «die farbige Stadt» movement in the 1920s in Germany and Switzerland.

The paper will present methodology involved observing and documenting urban colors and results of experimental research into the role that the idea of doing-it-yourself can play in the built environment.