

Historical Colours of Rondocubist Architecture Facades in Bratislava

Eva Šperka

Faculty of Architecture, Slovak University of Technology, Bratislava, Slovakia
arch.eva.sperka@gmail.com

Abstract—Colour scheme of Rondocubist architecture passes and passed changes that in many cases disrupted its architectural expression. Cultural and historical values of this specific architecture facade, occurring only in the area of the First Czechoslovak Republic are disappearing. Rondocubist architecture is the architecture of a very short time period that is interesting from a historical and social point of view. This style is the expression of the spirit of the period in which it was originated and the colour scheme of facades played an important role in it. Its impact is evident on a number of buildings in Bratislava.

Despite the undoubted importance of Rondocubist architecture and its colour scheme, only little attention has been paid to it. At present, when choosing a colour scheme of historic facades often lacks the understanding of historical practices. Therefore, we consider it important to exactly document established information on colour scheme in research and so preserve information on authentic surface finish for further restoration of facades.

The research is devoted to the philosophical starting points and socio-cultural knowledge of contemporary literature, archive research of original documentation and laboratory research samples. These will aim to document the historical colour schemes and further serve as a basis for facade restoration.

The aim of the paper is to familiarize with ongoing research and its partial results.

I. INTRODUCTION

The colour and colour compositions, in relation to the stylistic elements, have a major impact on the character of the urban environment. In Slovakia, we often see colour, which disturbs the image of towns, not only during the installation processes of residential buildings but also in historical buildings. With the use of inappropriate color and materiality (which affects the perception of colour, especially by its structure), of the facade comes to suppress the validity of the whole set of historical objects in its visual context.

In our research, we deal with the rondocubistic architecture that has long been overlooked by the theoreticians of architecture and art. "The historical significance of the whole movement has been devalued by the work of followers who have not understood its artistic essence." [1] That is the reason, why this issue is little reviewed, even

when it is relatively well preserved to achieve quality research. Rondocubist architecture has not undergone morphological changing of facades, as is customary in historical architecture, so metamorphosis will be possible during research with most buildings based on authentic morphology of facades. Authentic plasters are on most buildings, although often they are covered with a new paint color.

This is a specific architecture occurring only in the territory of the first Czechoslovak Republic. Rondocubistic architecture is the architecture of a short period of time (approximately 1918 - 1930), which is interesting from the historical and social point of view. This architecture is a reflection of the spirit of the period in which it originated and the coloring of the facades played an important role in that period. Often, the restoration of rondocubistic architecture adapts to contemporary tastes and thus it loses its uniqueness. "For the decades, we are experiencing a process of general globalization, characterized by homogenization, weakening traditions and uniqueness of cities" [2]. We consider this uniqueness to be very important in today's globalized world. The article presents partial research results in which one of the objectives has documented the authentic historical state of the colours of the facades of rondocubist architecture by means of archival research focusing mainly on the philosophical foundations of the given architectural style.



Figure 1.
Project documentation - Institute of Anatomy of Comenius University
on Sasinkova Street, architect Klement Šilinger, 1926.
The archives of the capital of Bratislava

II. PROBLEMS OF THE COLOURING OF HISTORIC FACADES IN SLOVAKIA

A major problem in determining the historical colour of facades nowadays is the gradual loss of the material nature of the historical layers with the preserved original colour (human activity - because of multiple renovations, adaptations or modernizations and natural factors - mainly due to an increasingly aggressive influence of climatic factors).

The situation is getting worse by the insufficiently precise definition of colours in restoration and architectural-historical research, which often represent the only description of the architectural monument before its renovation. Despite the importance of detailed colour research, their number in Slovakia is rather small. The methodology of research and evaluation of the colour of historical architecture in the context of monument care is not very precisely elaborated in Slovakia.

Despite the fact that many conservationists, restorers, art historians and architects after many years of experience in the field, have very valuable knowledge and experience that deserve scientific processing at present, Czech methodology [3] is used in Slovakia. This methodology was written by Petr Macek, an expert with high reputation gained, by his research work in this field. Certain analogy of this material in Slovak conditions is the methodological guidance of the Monument Board of the Slovak Republic for the realization of architectural, historical and restoration research. However, professionals skilled in performing and evaluating such research do not have a duty to specify in detail the colouring. Usually selection of colour is a verbal description of the colour that may be misleading.



Figure 2. Change of architectural expression of facade. Monumentally protected building, NKP 101-722/0, architect Klement Šilinger, apartment house, Heyduková 23 before and after renovation.

Legislatively, the Slovak Republic has committed itself to the application of the principles enshrined in international treaties, conventions and recommendations of international organizations for the protection of cultural

heritage (Decree No. 91/2001 of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, February 2001). From the point of view of preserving the authentic colour of the monuments, they are especially important the following documents: The UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (1964), the recommendations of the ICOMOS International Congress (1981), the Burma Charter (ICOMOS, 1981) Charter of Historic Cities (ICOMOS 1987, Washington).

However, the practice shows that systematic colour research, efficient methodology of both research and design of colour creations in renovation interventions, or the elaboration of recommendations for the reconstruction of facades of particular objects in the historical environment of our settlements could significantly help to improve the current situation.

"It is obvious that at the level of sets, zones and even larger units without systematic knowledge, coordination and conceptual guidance, control of the realization of colour solutions and the underpinning of certain direction and principles, it is difficult to achieve maximum preservation of historical truth in creating an optimally functional and aesthetically impressive environment." [4]

III. ISSUES OF RONDOCUBISTIC ARCHITECTURE FACADES COLOURS

Rondocubistic architecture has long been overlooked by the theoreticians of architecture and art. For this reason, this issue is scarcely examined, although it is relatively well preserved to achieve quality research, by construction itself or archival documents.

The most serious problems in the reconstruction of the colourfulness of the historical architecture have been expressed in a clear manner associate professor Jozef Štulc, art historian and famous Czech conservationist: "The results of many reconstructions of facade colouring are characterized by frequent misunderstandings of historical habits, choosing a historic coating systems in past inaccessible and therefore unused colour tones." [5] This quote is very apt also in connection with the reconstruction of facades of rondocubistic architecture in Slovakia.

Since the emergence of rondocubistic architecture, most of its renewal has led to significant changes in the colour and materiality of facades and their colour division. However, the Rondocubistic architecture did not largely pass the morphological changing of facades, as it is customary in historical architecture, so it will be possible in research of majority of buildings come out of the authentic facade morphology. Most of the buildings have authentic plasters, although often covered with a new colour coating (Figure 2).

In the case of non-renovated buildings, the facades are significantly damaged (Figure 3). In the both cases, the cultural and historical values of this specific architecture are lost. One of the characteristic features is especially the colouring and its composition in relation to the morphological elements on the facade.

At present, there is a lack of detailed scientific research on this issue, which would serve as a base for rebuilding facades.



Figure 3.

Examples of objects with faults on facades.

1. apartment building on street 29. augusta 38, architect Klement Šilinger
2. apartment building on Sasinková 9, architect Klement Šilinger

A. *Summary of the most serious problems:*

- original colouration is not systematically explored until today
- historical changes and causes are not scientifically explained
- during current renovations of facades there are inadequate colours and materials applied.

The awareness of values is a necessary starting point for formulating goals of building restoration. The facades of rondocubistic buildings, their morphology and colourfulness have the values of a historical document, a cultural work, an identity, symbol, the value of the form

and the value of the emotional impressiveness of a monument. However, general awareness is relatively low, which is also reflected in the social interest in preserving these values.



IV. POLITICAL CONNECTIONS OF FOUNDATION OF RONDUCUBISTIC ARCHITECTURE AS A NATIONAL STYLE

In 1918 the first Czechoslovak Republic was founded (Figure 4). It was an ethnically, historically and religiously highly differentiated state unit, which had to be united internally and subsequently presented in the world untidily. One of the tools of "unification" was the creation of a modern national identity, which included architecture as well. "The gravity of visual culture for the purposes of state representation is indisputable in all epochs, but after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, the demand for symbols was particularly important for the creation of a unified state identity." [6]

Figure 4.

The map of Europe in 1921 with the designation of the first Czechoslovak Republic. Source: Wikipedia.org

Rondocubistic architectural style as a national style is also very interesting also in terms of its philosophy: "The architectural movement, which we call rondocubism, emphasizes the architecture that primarily fulfils the spiritual content without forgetting about social tasks." [7] Architecture has become an important tool for solving social problems, namely, the "contradiction between capitalist entrepreneurs and socially weaker layers. Like the authorities of the Czech intelligence- including President TG Masaryk, architects themselves have emphasized its democratic, if not egalitarian character." [8]

V. THE COLOUR OF FACADES AS PART OF THE FORMING NATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK STATE

Archival research confirms that one of the basic features of rondocubism is the contrasting colour of facades highlighting the distinctive facade morphology, often utilizing a varied palette of ochre and red paints. Architect Janak, explains in contemporary press the inspiration for rondocubism, what caused the change of colour schemes and explains why the rehabilitation of facade painting was made: "When these colours appeared for the first time, they raised a real alarm and a great resistance; today we see that it is a healthy retreat from colourless times. These colours responds to our temperament ... "[9] Architect Janak also advocates and guides the approach to the colouring of facades in architecture: "The new development of our art and architecture reminded us and brought us back to the colours that were forgotten for decades. "[10]

The architectural expression of rondocubism responded to the end of the World War the first, emphasizing the "specific Czech sense for lyrics, for joy and revival of things." [11] At the same time, it defined itself against the emerging functionalism, against its "cold and dehumanized pragmatism"[12].



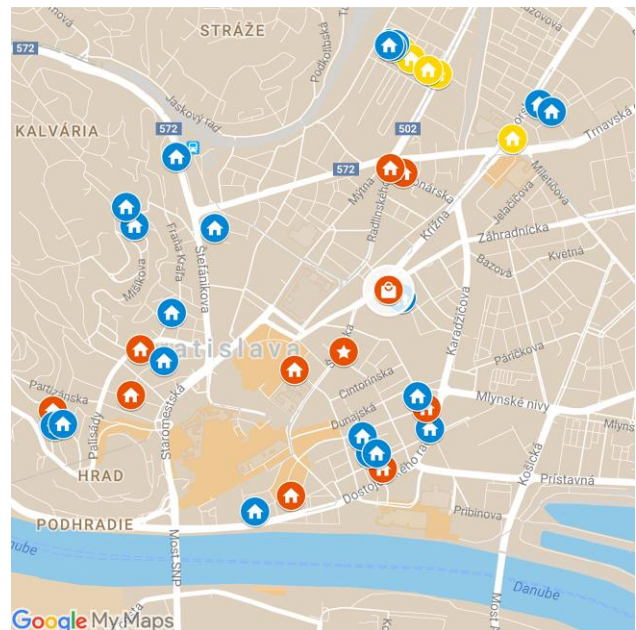
Figure 5.
Apartment building on Legionárska street after renovation.

The Czech methodology on the colouring of facades says that "only with rondocubism, appeared strong responses of the colourfulness of the early Baroque (at this time with red applied to the yellow base). As early as the second decade of the 20th Century, tinted plasters with decorative additives (black or coloured grained sand, distinct particles of mica) were used. "[13]

Rondocubism "was based on a regional link and, in particular, encouraged it to become an official style accessible to broad folk groups as well. "[14]

The most striking manifestation of architecture is the morphology and colouration of street facades, where there is a strong influence of regional reference and stylized folk

ornaments (Figure 5). "The circular forms and the red and white colouring of the rondocubist architecture were mechanically taken over and explained in the interpretation of folklore and symbols of our state independence." [15]



Nowadays, the issue of the colouring of rondocubistic architecture is still "loaded with numerous clichés. The automatic colour matching of tricolours with the national style re-establishes the connection with artistic

-  Housing
-  Administration building
-  Education
- Monument protection:**
-  National cultural monument
-  Notability
-  Monumentally unprotected buildings

craftsmanship. Here, three colours of the Czechoslovak state tricolour were very frequent phenomenon, unlike the architecture, which uses a two-colour scheme of the circumferential coat." [16] In several sources, short, more unexplained remarks were given that colouration is conditioned by symbolism of colours and refers to folk colouring. These questions will be examined in the next stages of research.

In the specific literature, mentions are made of plaster material, which significantly affects the visual aspect of facades. "Materiality is much more important than a specific shade for its colourful (architectural) facade design." A particular mention of the materialism of rondocubist architecture was in Czech methodology: "On the surface of the facades, rough and smoother areas or finely structured were alternated. The facade coatings receded.

In addition, the artificial stone was used again, much less used, often two coloured in mass, often formed on the basis of cement. Because of the colouring of other facade

elements, there were very few references, especially related to a particular building.

VI. RONDOCUBISM IN BRATISLAVA

After 1919 Bratislava became a new political, economic and economical center, which caused a large influx of the population and this caused a subsequent housing crisis. Its impact is evident in the number of buildings in Bratislava. "A law on building construction from 1921 to 1927 has become a means of eliminating housing hardship. There was massive development in the inner city and beyond its periphery (Figure 6)." Many of these buildings have the features of a rondocubic architecture, which was used in addition to residential buildings for administrative purposes. These buildings lacked the needs of the young state.

Figure 6.

Map of rondocubist architecture in Bratislava.

The first objective of this research was to map the rondocubistic architecture in Bratislava and its original functions. As of today, we have mapped 48 buildings with elements of rondocubistic architecture. We found that the buildings of this style in Bratislava had mostly a residential function, a total of 41. Most of them were rental dwellings and dwellings for civil servants. Administrative buildings served the needs of the state. Known buildings are the Police Headquarters and the State Railways building. An interesting example of the elements of rondocubism and functionalism is the Institute of Anatomy of Comenius University on Sasinkova Street.

The number of protected monuments is 26. The number of monuments is five. Other buildings are not monumentally protected, even in the case of renovation; there is no need for the authorities to make representations about the colour solutions of their facades. They often adapt to contemporary tastes and lose sight values.

The most famous architects of this period using the elements of rondocubism in Bratislava were: Klement Šilinger, Jindřich Merganc, Otmar Klimeš, Vojtěch Šebor, Alois Balán, Jiří Grossmann, Dušan Jurkovič, Jozef Pacl, František Krupka.

The authentic colour of the facades of this unique architecture, bound to the territory of the first Czechoslovak Republic, is an unforgettable element affecting the image of the city of Bratislava. In Bratislava on the facades of rondocubistic residential architecture and in archival materials most often contrasting double combinations and triple combinations of plaster facades that highlight plastic facade elements occur.

In administrative buildings, it was predominantly a gray colour monochrome. In protecting cultural heritage, the surface treatment of facades is a very important aspect. So far, research has shown that the most common authentic surface treatment facades are visual plasters, uncovered with colour coatings. We plan to collect samples from

dilapidated facades. As of today, we have been able to take samples from five buildings. The monumental office provided samples from two buildings directly from the archive. The surface of such a plaster is optically more attractive than the surface of the facade coating. The appearance of the visual plaster is emphasised by colour pigments, sand, or mica grains, stones, binders or other additives. Processing, and therefore the plaster structure, is different.

VII. CONCLUSION

The colour of the rondocubistic architecture goes through and undergoes changes that in many cases have disrupted its architectural expression. The cultural and historical values of the facades of this specific architecture occur only in the territory of the first Czechoslovak Republic. Nowadays, when choosing the colourfulness of historic facades, there is often no understanding of historical habits that we are exploring in research, and the lessons learned are described in the article. The authentic colouring of the facades in the objects examined so far has not been given by a coloured paint but with a tinted plaster that gave it a specific expression. The colour of the facades according to the research done so far shows the regional impact and the influence of the function of the building.

Figure 7.

Legiodomy , apartment buildings on Ursiny Street. Architect Dušan Jurkovič, Jozef Pacl. The colours of the facades in street view look disturbing. Heat insulation and new facades structures suppress the architectural expression of rondocubist architecture.



This research will continue by measurements, addressing the issues - as I stated at the beginning. We consider it important to accurately document and evaluate the discovered information of colour from archive, field and laboratory research, and thus maintain information on authentic surface treatment for further facade restoration. Therefore, it is beneficial to assemble an exact palette of colour combinations of this architecture. At the same time, we plan to evaluate the authenticity of the colour of the current state of the facades. According to the response of the Regional Monument Office workers, the results of the research could also be used in practice.

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