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# Local Coloring and Regional Identity: Colors on Buildings Exterior

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## ABSTRACT

The project's main thesis is to verify the existence of local colours and colouring. The research is done in the rural areas of southern Sweden at dwellings from the 19th century. The results are supposed to show the different kind of colours used and to indicate orders for how the colours were combined during different times and in various geographical areas. To find out of the local traditional coloring could be a way to strengthen the identity of regions. The introducing research had the main aim to identify geographical areas adequate to our criteria for the building objects. This resulted in four geographical areas for further investigations. The investigations have been made as archival research work, short interviews, colour steps and microscopic analyses of colour sections, which indicates presence of local colours and colouring. To be able to establish the thesis, a deepened research has to be done. Therefore the identified geographical areas will be enlarged with more microscopic analyses of colour sections, partly at new buildings in the areas but also at new building details at already investigated building objects. Through this deepened investigation it's possible to make the results more distinct and reliable. The results will further be used to recognise orders for the colouring in the regions during the topical time. The orders of colouring will be indicated in the building objects within the project's delimitations, though the results might be applicable to new colourings for different settlements, new and historical.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

All built-up areas have colors. We remember and describe buildings as blue and old or for their beautiful details and even the details have colors. Our ideas about places we like are partly describe through the colors. If the color in a well-known place or room will be changed the room or place will get another character and it's obvious for everybody visiting the place. The color is an important part of the character at a place or a room.

As an example I will mention color research results made on the capital of Italy, Rome. When the danish architect and color researcher, Bente Lange presented her PhD results, *the Colors of Rome* (1993), everybody wasn't that pleased about her new idea of Rome's 18<sup>th</sup> century coloring. To maintain that this city, with its completely golden colored facades, had during the 1800<sup>th</sup> century had different light colors as light-blue, light-grey, light-green and light-red at palaces and other buildings, disturbed the idea of the colors about this worldwide known city. Everybody "knew" what Rome looked like and it seemed as a problem to accept anything else. It's easy to confirm status but difficult to accept new results. This is one example and I think it's easy to find others around the world.

In Sweden at the end of the 20th-century, the local differences of colors wasn't that strong. New more general ideas about coloring was increasing. So the problem framing was, did it

exist local coloring during the 19<sup>th</sup> century at rural dwellings and was it the same colors and coloring that was possible to see at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

## 2. METHODS

It's obvious that the colors from the 19<sup>th</sup> century isn't visible at all buildings from this era. Despite of that the main source to detect the colors are the existing buildings. Other sources as archives, oral sources and iconographic materials are not enough to verify the existing of local colors and coloring during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and can only be used together with the main source; color investigations at adequate existing buildings. An important part in the beginning of the project was to identify the building objects where the color sections could be made. How is it possible to know where to find building objects with facades covered with layers of paint containing old original colors?

Archive studies together with short interviews with building archeologists made it possible to find areas with adequate building objects. Next step was to make ocular investigations in the suggested areas to find out if the building objects were from the delimited period of the project. Details as the plaster, the shape of the profiles from the wooden panels and the type of nails used, determine whether the facades could contain desirable layers of paint or not. When areas with relevant building objects were defined the color investigation could start in four separate geographic areas.

The most applicable method in this project was to make microscopic analyses of color sections, this because of the small injury at the facades. Color steps, the other conceivable method makes to much injury at the facades. Of course it's important to use a method with the lowest injury at the facade because the objects are private property. The color sections cut out of the facades are about 5x5mm and into the underlaying building material. When the sections are examined the other sources are used together to make the results more reliable. The most interesting source is part of the iconographic sources; wall paintings. In one of the geographic area the wall paintings are of great interest for the defining of the colors at old layers of paint. Parts of the wall paintings show the facades of the farms from when new-built (Figure 1). This has been an important part together with the color sections in the defining of the original colors at the facades where the wall paintings existed.



*Figure 1. Wall painting from the farm, Hemmingsmåla, Blekinge, Sweden. This wall painting shows the exterior colors of the building complex when it was new-built in 1849.*

### 3. RESULTS

The general ideas of the coloring at traditional buildings in Sweden today can sometimes be simplified. This can be seen very clear at the results from this project. For example at the south coast in Sweden today the farmers dwellings are white, traditionally from white limewash. And this is an accepted idea of a typical traditional coloring in this area. But the results from this investigation present all colors but white on the facades at these dwellings. The buildings are from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and have almost similar details at the facades, it's a very well defined group of buildings. Some of the dwellings have been painted red or green since they were built in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s but today after forty years the knowledge is already forgotten.



*Figure 2. This detail of a plastered facade, from a farmers house in the coastal region of southern Sweden, shows many of the old layers of paint in many different colors.*

The results from the fishermen villages in the same geographic area are totally different from the results at the farmers dwellings. The absolutely most common color at the facades of the fishermen's dwellings during the 19<sup>th</sup> century are white limewash. In the other geographical areas the results show the same appearing of lost contact with the original coloring. At the same buildings the most common color at the window frames are green and it seems like it's the same color as the boats. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century these poor fishing villages at the south coast in Sweden painted the dwellings in the most simplified way; with white limewash and rests from the paint to the boats.

The only traditional pigment produced in Sweden today is a red-oxide pigment. This is still very common at rough wooden panelling and it's a strong symbol for rural buildings in Sweden. In the southern coastal region of Sweden this pigment is not used. Therefor this area was the most relevant to make investigations about local characteristics in coloring in Sweden during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Another aim with the investigation was to find out of forgotten local production of pigments.

One of the geographic areas studied in the project is surrounded by the common red painted facades. This area was very wealthy in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. New facades with planed wooden panelling was erected with mouldings, cornices and other costly details. Through the color sections made at these facades it's possible to detect oil paint in light-green, light-red and light-grey. Before this period of expansion all the buildings in the region was with visible wooden constructions and just tared or painted with the common red paint.

Another local coloring is at the island Öland in the Baltic Sea. The investigated dwellings in this geographic area are architectonic of the same type as the one in the previous example.

The facade are developed from the 18<sup>th</sup> century's vicarage and manor houses. The main difference from the dwelling described before is that they were not panelled. Details as cornices, mansard roof and detailed main entrances was the same. A common way to protect the wooden construction was to give it a tar coating. Some of these facades were panelled in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but it's still possible to find these building almost black from tar. From color sections made on the facades that was later panelled it's detected that the coloring was homogeneous with tared wood, white window frames and polychrome main entrances.



*Fig. 3. This dwelling is from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the wooden construction visible and tared. Together with the white windows and polychrome main entrance it's a typical local coloring at Öland during the period.*

#### **4. PURPOSE AND APPLICATIONS**

Of course coloring is a process with changes over time as architecture itself but the knowledge about the traditional coloring and perhaps of orders in how to combine colors is of great interest for the coloring today of both the traditional buildings and new-built ones. As I've tried to show there are examples of local coloring still used and of coloring that is partly forgotten or will be in a couple of years. The main purpose with this project is to establish a knowledge about the local coloring at traditional buildings. The orders of local coloring from the 19<sup>th</sup> century show the many possibilities color gives architecture.

Another idea is that this project is applicable at any place around the world and can put focus at the original local and regional coloring in specific places where a similar investigation can be done. To detect the local coloring makes the traditional architecture more locally characteristic and strengthen the relation to the local population.

#### **5. BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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