

Artificial Lighting and Darkness in the Architectural and Urban Practices

Session 2 – Introduction

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As a public service taken for granted by populations for its contribution to comfort, identity and the feeling of safety, urban artificial lighting has recently started a renewal process of two kinds: light extinction and/or switching the lamps in favour of energy-efficient ones. The first option faces an outcry regarding the discomfort and the feeling of insecurity generated, while delighting associations and individuals with strong ecological values. The second option does not initiate the expected reduction in light pollution. If it does generate the energy savings that are called for, these could be short-lived. It is undoubtedly the first time since its invention and deployment on a large scale that artificial lighting is so controversial.¹

Largely studied in its geographical (Challéat, 2011; Gwiadzinski, 2014), ecological (Gaston & al., 2018), sanitary (Zieliska-Dabkowska, 2007) or even security-related (Mosser, 2007) dimensions, night remains a space-time explored through political and technical considerations in relation with artificial lighting. The question of the connection to darkness (Edenson, 2013) seems in turn to represent a wealth of resources and knowledge to be discovered. In reply to this, university and institutional initiatives are nowadays in place to study the protocols for the complete or partial restoration of darkness in urban environments (Challéat, Samuel, Lapostolle, 2017; Chhaya, 2012). In a context where, in the western world, artificial lighting is culturally accepted as an identity and security tool, what nocturnal urban landscapes will we eventually design and experience if darkness is partially restituted?

The return of darkness to spatial and societal environments takes different paths. Each author questions the spatial and mental representations in terms of individual cognitive experiences. The observation of the semantic fields evoked by the perceptions of coloured illuminated interiors, the pictorial representations of nocturnal electromagnetic and sound waves captured near Glasson Dock and the opening to the concept of Dark Design illustrate the transversality of the notion of darkness. In their own way, each author contributes to the discovery of the diversity in imaginations capable of accompanying the spatial and societal reintroduction of darkness.

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