

Urban Night

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Abstract:

At first there was nothing but the night and from this eternal night everything else was created, agree many religions. For centuries night was feared and revered, people escaped from it as best as they could. Then, little by little, night started to lose ground. First of all people got smarter, more settled, they started making use of the night hours, to work. To enable that, they experimented with different sources of light, which often caused dramatic accidents and tragedies. Nevertheless eventually sufficient enough system of lighting had been developed in the cities and the night had to draw back from its positions once again. At early night hours streets started to fill up with fun and pleasure seekers as well as night shift workers heading to work. Especially the last century saw the masses coming out after darkness fell. So much so that it was necessary to start protecting with the help of laws – regulation concerning noise and light levels, traffic at night and opening hours, permissions to sell or not sell certain items and basis for night work had to be documented in legal texts. Without the legislation the night would have ended up in chaos. However, the legislative ground of night is also wearing down, the laws are redacted everywhere to offer equality for day and night. Only is this what we want?

Turning the night into a day has been a dream of many scientists for decades, but now whereas we've succeeded in making the use of night almost as easy and possible as the use of day, problems have started to appear that force us to reconsider the principles underlying the current state of affairs. Recent researches show that overusing the night causes several serious health risks to us and to the other species aswell as to our planet that is soon no longer capable of supporting it. In many places of the world it is no longer possible to see the night sky and our electricity bills are huge. Considering all those consequences, the race for setting the night ablaze all over the world seems to be slowing down a bit. New solutions are sought for – or ought to be sought for – that would help to find balance between the night and light. These new solutions are various, ranging from shutting off the street lights between the less used night hours to the switch-the-lights-on-yourself schemes suitable for smaller towns, from dimming the light to shutting off a third or even up to half of the street lights on the streets. Each of them has their strengths and weaknesses, but they all help to contribute to one aim – preserving the nights. Which option would be the best to use in every location is depends highly on local circumstances, but also on the intentions and knowledge of the local actors, who are often ill-informed of the possibilities and consequences. Therefore raising the

awareness and introducing night as a complex, multi-sided, interdisciplinary factor is necessary and important.

All in all it could be said that the current thesis on urban night and nocturnal city is an apology for night. It aims to concretize the night and portray its different faces as well as to explain the complexity of its nature, so that decisions concerning the future of urban night would have a solid background context. We spend half of our lives in darkness or in artificial light, so night matters. And there's so much more to night than just street lighting or projecting colourful lights on monuments. Night has shaped the development of city life and the behaviour of city people so remarkably, yet as it has often happened parallel to other developments, it is often not thought of. For example as far as conquering the night is concerned, it is usually mentioned so that transport system made a huge development leap, so people in the cities and suburbs were able to stay out later – so it is transport, that seems to be the star, not the late hours people now had means to deal with. But this way or another, by now loads of people stay out and party long into the night, having developed a night culture with rites and focal points, main characteristics as well as actors. Also many people work at nights, which is something of a novelty in the large scale. Considering how recent this conquering of night was, it seems a little bit logical that it results in health troubles – we've been used to spending the night in slumber ever since the beginning of times, our bodies are accustomed to it. One century of entertaining night and night shifts is by far too little for our organisms to get accustomed to a new rhythm, so that's something to keep in mind.

The detailed and concrete consequences of the effect of urban night on us are a bit hard to draw however, considering that night is something so interdisciplinary and intertwining with other fields of study that all these relations are extremely difficult to point out clearly and without any doubt. There is an increasing amount of data showing up concerning the effects of nightlife and owl's style of living on us, but at the moment the informational gaps are still wide. Considering that, specific recipes are hard to give. However, I have done my best to work through as much information from different aspects of life as possible, to categorize them and to make conclusions, logical assumptions and implications. Hopefully it helps to find the best compromise between the 24h society that we've been heading towards, and preserving the night and day cycle, by inspiring its readers to elaborate given ideas.