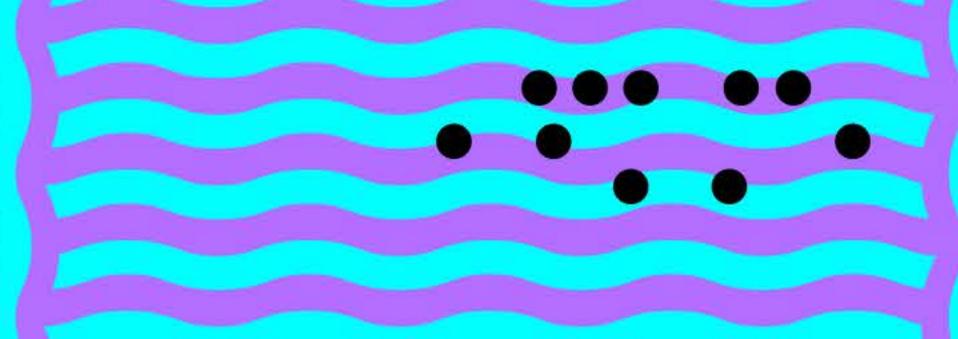


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TANGIBLE AND

INTANGIBLE



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Envision the nocturnal territory: Urban lighting as a design strategy for the recovery of places

by Helena Gentili and Daria Casciani

METADESCRIPTION

The paper aims to picture the nocturnal territory as an important design lever for cities and address artificial lighting as an urban design strategy for recovering urban territories.

KEYWORDS

Artificial lighting, nocturnal territory, lighting design, urban strategy, design toolkit

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to address artificial lighting as an urban design material and to picture the nocturnal dimension of cities as an important design lever for the recovery of a territory. This research has focused in the exploration of tangible and intangible aspects of urban lighting in order to propose a design toolkit based on multidisciplinary backgrounds to rethink the social urbanity from the street level perspective at night. Thus, to picture the strategic use of artificial lights to reinvent public spaces at night without the dominance of technology over environmental and aesthetics quality.



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1. Introduction

Correspondences between space and society have been transformed, so as the perception and functions of day and night in contemporary cities, so why not considering the nocturnal dimension of cities as part of the design process? Grounded on the authors' previous works and research experiences (Casciani, 2014; Gentili, 2015) in the lighting design discipline, this paper would like to describe public spaces and urban lighting as a common design resource with the potential to stimulate local economies and reinvent the nocturnal territory.

Nowadays the expansion of human activities after sunset is claiming for a strong design involvement in the discovering, envisioning and empowering of the urban spaces at night as an important design lever for a sustainable development of territories. This shift needs an understanding of the problems and limitations of the nocturnal dimension of cities but also of the opportunities offered by using an intangible and flexible material such as artificial lighting as a design tool to recover a sense for places both in terms of identity and in terms of social urbanity. The paper will highlight intangible and tangible aspects of lighting in order to understand and characterize the nocturnal territory, by analysing the relationship between the architectonic shapes, people's experience and the nocturnal urban interpretations by taking a street-level perspective. More than this, the paper aims to emphasize the strategic use of artificial lighting in urban design by presenting a set of tools which are useful for communicating and designing with a multidisciplinary background.

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2. Stating the limits and the opportunities of nocturnal territories

The problematic of loss of territorial reference, due to several and disperse hybridization of functions, is much accentuated today, in a condition that has been defined as "understanding space-time" (Harvey, 1990) due to the processes of acceleration of production cycles and therefore of trade and consumption, until the abatement of spatial barriers. Besides, the most important issue for this paper is the overlapping of day and night conditions. In that sense, the valorisation of the territory either day and night features should be implemented especially when designing with lighting because local culture means local light. Even though lighting is critical to our perception of the urban environment, yet its consideration remains peripheral to professional discourse and its role 'invisible' to the community. Frequently, the lighting design is viewed as a step afterwards the architectonic or urban design process. Consequently, cities have been deformed by the play of uncontrolled and misguided lighting schemes, derived by a unilateral design that takes into account only the technical-scientific needs, underestimating the aesthetics, social and symbolic aspects of lighting in the urban territory (Lambertucci, 2001). The increasing permanence in public spaces, in other words, the nightlife of a territory, is strictly related to the development of artificial lighting systems since the industrial revolution (Schivelbusch, 1995). This relationship has already altered the physiognomy and the meaning of life in the dark, sheltered and far from the diurnal rhythms.



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cial lights properties and the dimensionless character of the spaces since the darkness has the ability to cancel shapes transforming the territory at night as an immaterial background, a black canvas whose identity can be reinvented each night differently. (See fig.1)

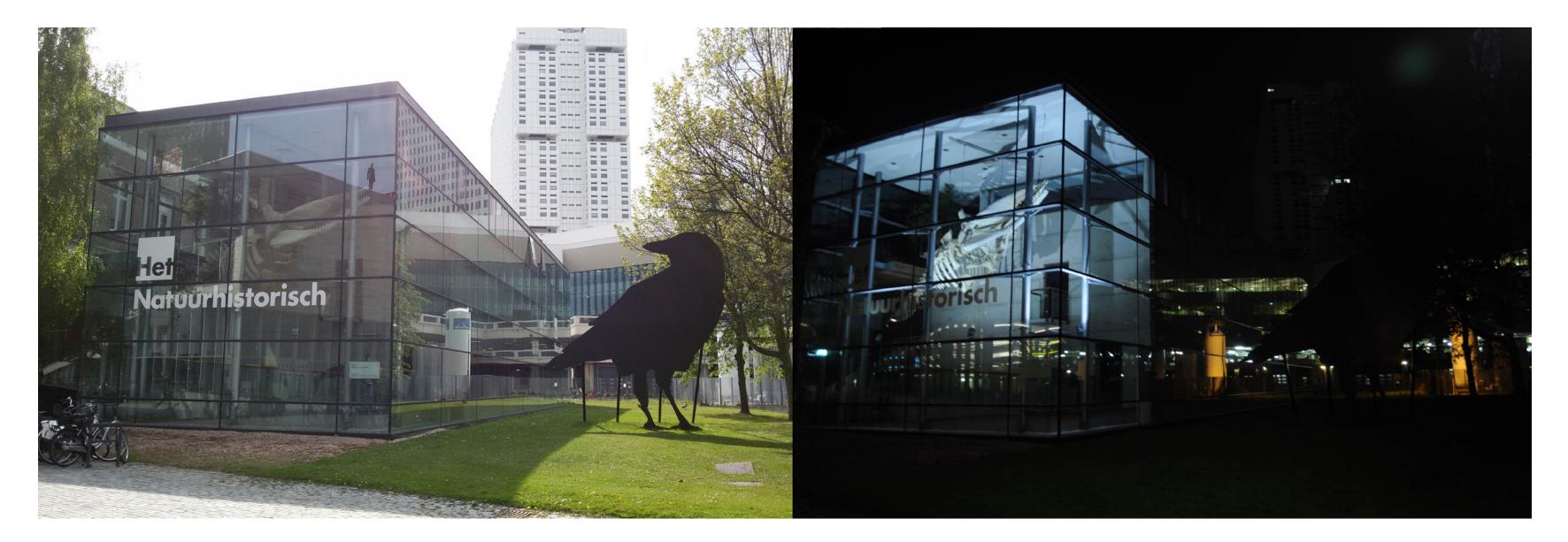


Fig. 1. Day and night pictures of the Natural History Museum in Rotterdam. Relationship between external and internal lighting and positive/negative effects due to an immaterial background (2014). Picture by Helena Gentili

Nevertheless, the contemporary urban nightlife plays a significant role in place-making strategies. More than simply a means of amusement, the night-time entertainment industry has contributed to widen the urban economy with its potential to attract investments, creative people, tourism and boosting the night-time economy by creating job opportunities under different luminous conditions. In terms of artificial lighting, this phenomenon has challenged the nocturnal territories not in a standardized way. From a positive / attractive approach, there are the Festivals of Light offering creative non-standard lighting techniques communicating a different message about the nocturnal territory. On the other hand, negative/repulsive results are represented by the use of massive and bright commercial signs defining stereotyped

readings of the city, which can create more confusion in defining the urban image at night. (See fig.2)

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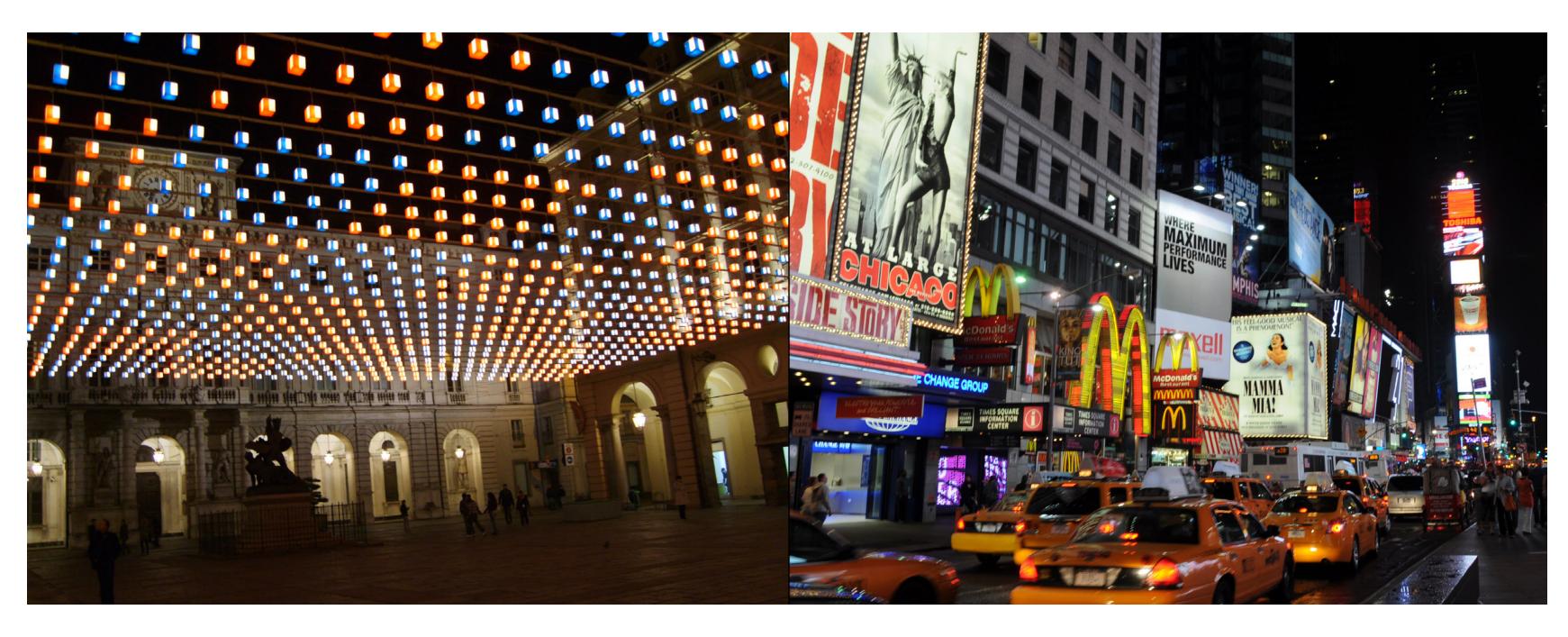


Fig. 2 Right: Flying Carpet installation by Daniel Buren in Torino on the occasion of the Light Festival Luce D'Artista, (2009). Left: Time Square bright lights and luminous billboards in New York,USA (2010). Pictures by Helena Gentili

Urban lighting is more than energy and costs statistics related to savings: by guaranteeing visibility, accessibility and safety at night, it can influence social and cultural life of the nocturnal city and, as a consequence, the improvement of the economy and the environment as well. Lighting is primarily intended for people's experience and perception of the urban space and it should be considered for the beautification of public spaces, the social engagement and well-being of its inhabitants (Narboni, 2004; Brandi & Geissmar, 2007; Raynham & Gardner, 2001; Raynham, 2007).

3. Nocturnal territory of the city described between tangible and intangible aspects of lighting

The relationship between lighting and the urban territory at night can be perceived by human beings through many different physiological, cognitive, psychological and inter-

pretative mechanisms. In this complex perceptual phenomena, some aspects can be objectively measured and experi-

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mentally evaluated (tangible aspects of lighting) otherwise others can be relatively interpreted or subjectively considered (intangible aspects of lighting). Therefore, the relationship between lighting intercepting tangible and intangible elements of the city and its inhabitants have been selected as following:

Tangible aspects of lighting in the public realm

• *Urban Accessibility:* The accessibility of a place can be measured by looking at the physical and visual connections to its surroundings fundamental characteristic to discover the nocturnal city. Hillier and Hanson provided an entire methodology to measure this relation through the concept of integration, connectivity and accessibility, which

construct social and cultural understanding of urban places (Hillier & Hanson,1984)⁻ Those principles and methods have been only applied for the daytime of the city but result to be useful for understanding the urban integration at night.

• *Urban Form:* The day and night views of the same territory allow us to make parallels and to establish a common language to interpret the nocturnal image of a territory: by using the same point of view, it is possible to compare the positive or negative impacts that lighting might act upon building structures and on public spaces. Observation principles, such as complexity, selectivity, subjectivity, experience and contrast have a key role in the nocturnal visual perception of the urban form. The luminous surrounding will determine the required luminance contrast in order to perceive the hierarchy and establish an orienta-



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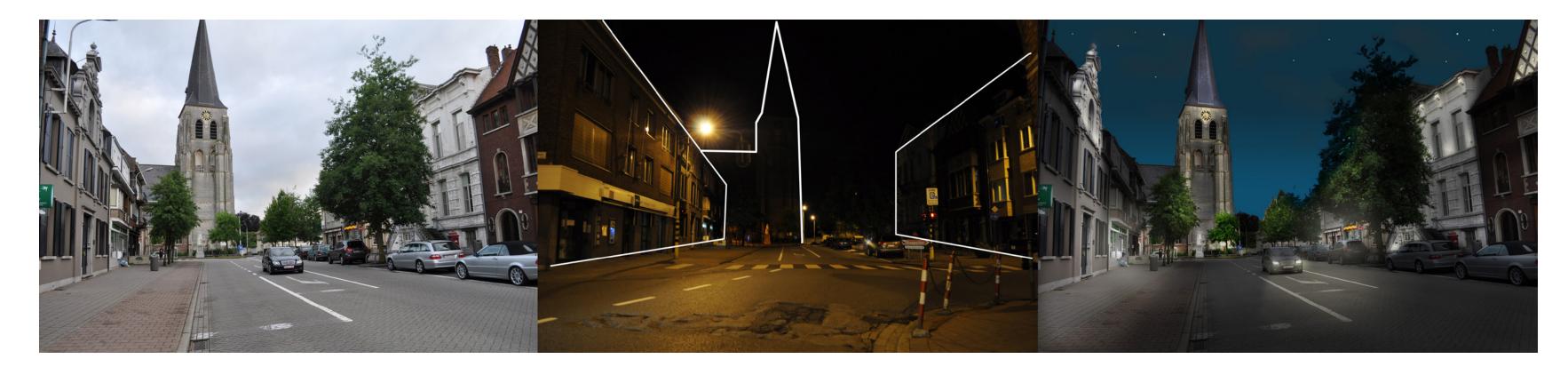


Fig. 3 Day and night view in order to select the most representative aspects of the urban form to propose a lighting scheme illustrated by the render image. Urban form survey for the Lighting Masterplan of Antwerp, (2011). Author: Studio Susanna Antico Lighting Design

our and lighting in the city determine the nocturnal appearance and works as a visual communicative tool. It requires an accurate study of the city components in order to establish a directive for this multifaceted and subjective relationship between intrinsic colours from the urban space, the luminous information from the environment and coloured lights. The binomial light-colour has more than ever become a tool for reading the nocturnal urban realm or a method to communicate importance to an element of the design or from the context.

- *Light Pollution:* Concerning the issue of sustainability, light pollution is an unwanted consequence of outdoor lighting and includes such effects as glare, sky glow, light trespass, light clutter, light profligacy and absence of darkness. It is necessary to avoid light pollution in order to better design, taking in consideration the territory as reference and to control lighting effects when and where it is needed.
- *Energy Consumption and Costs:* Energetic sustainability is conceived as achieving the desired illuminance levels and lighting quality in a given application with the lowest practicable energy input. The efficiency of urban lighting



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Gentili and Daria Casciani Envision the nocturnal territory by Helena

fixtures accompanied also by intelligent lighting management systems and maintenance procedures. All these elements contribute to the longer lasting life span of urban lighting ensuring the performance of the entire system. Intangible aspects of lighting in the public realm

• *Human Perception:* Visual perception is defined by the relationship between light and space, which is perceived by the eyes and interpreted by the brain based on background experiences. David Canter (Canter, 1977) describes the space as a unit of "environmental experience", where the knowledge about physical attributes, emotional cognitions and human activities is useful to completely understand the perceptual relationship between places with people: this underlines the implications of cognitive and psychological lighting factors of the inhabitants towards the environment in the design activity. • *Perception in Motion:* the urban environment at night is generally perceived in movement, walking or driving, which involves the necessity to consider the nocturnal territory as made of a sequence of events that can be used as references to decide how lighting will contribute to the comprehension of the space for both safety and interpretative reasons. The nocturnal landscape from an in moto point of view can be described in a serial vision (Cullen,1971) which is related to the physical movement, to the idea of temporal continuity and to the necessity of wayfinding and navigation of the space. (See fig.4) • Perceived Safety and Security: Many studies (Bilotta, Bonaiuto & Bonnes, 2010; Welsh & Farrington, 2008; Pease, 1999) have explored the issue of the relationship between light-



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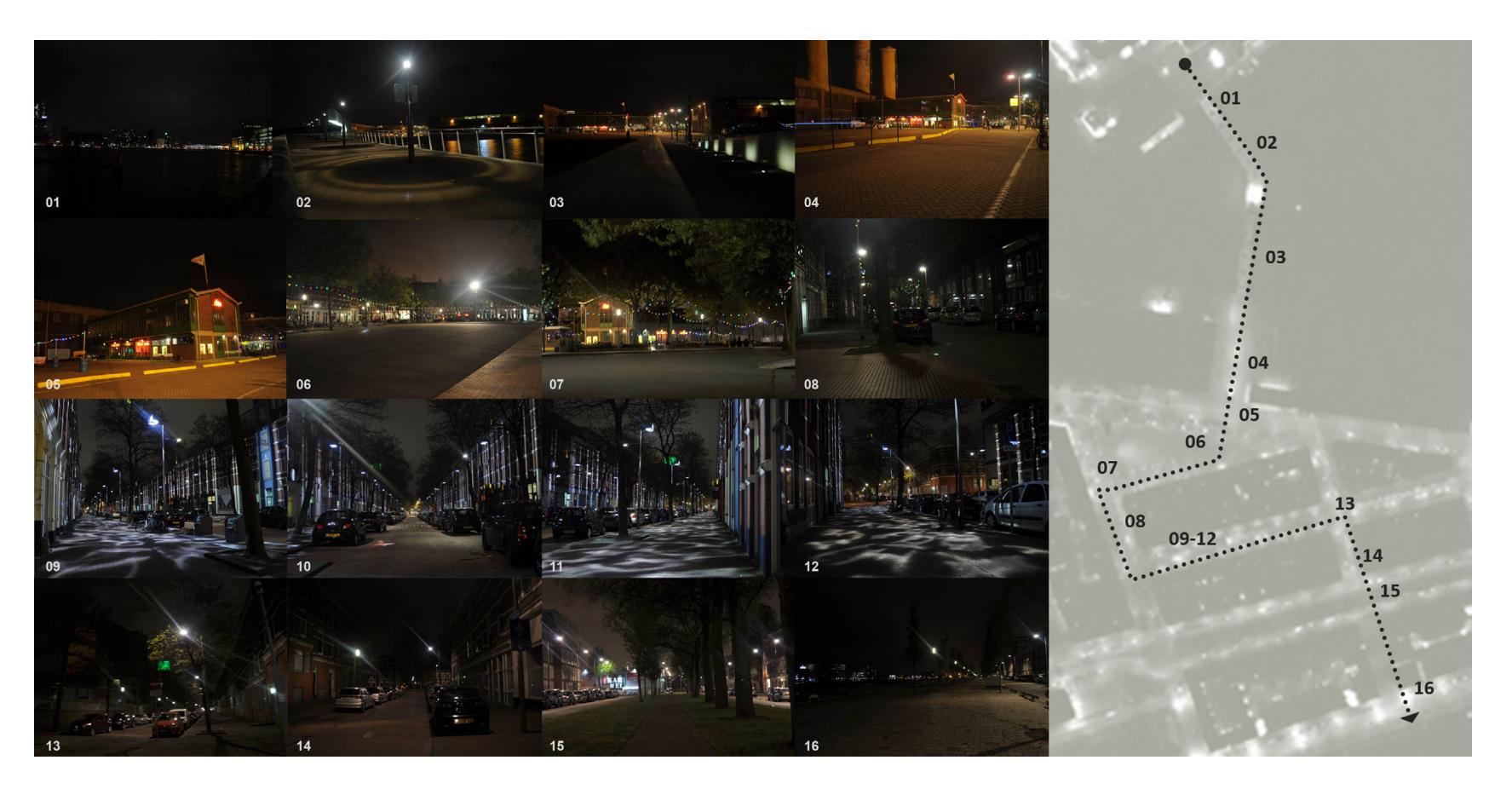


Fig. 4 Nocturnal serial vison survey following a determined route to understand the surrounding lighting conditions near the area of Atjehstraat in Rotterdam (2014). Author: Helena Gentili.

lighting. The issue of the correlation between safety and lighting is highly debated: if on one hand, there were certain studies reviewing that improved lighting results in less outdoor criminal behaviour in homogeneous communities, other studies do not support this results but conclude the opposite or controversial outcomes (Farrington & Welsh, 2002). In addition to this, the research shifted gradually from the measured safety (evaluated in terms of decreasing number of illegal and criminal acts) to the perception of safety (that is a more subtle and subjective impression).

• *Atmosphere Experience:* Atmosphere is not defined as an affective status, but as an affective evaluation: it means that the perception of the atmosphere of the environment is expected to be independent of people's emotions (Vogels,

2008) of the environment and it is fundamental to the interpretation of the lighting conditions of the urban realm.

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- "Urban atmospheres are most often created by specific materiality, scale, rhythm, colour [...]. Materials, colour, rhythm and illumination are strongly atmospheric" (Pallasmaa, 2014). These elements can influence the physiological, cognitive, affective, interpretative and evaluative perception of human beings (Bell, Greene, Fisher & Baum, 2001).
- *Urban Rhythms:* temporal understanding of territories (Lefebvre,2004) which is derived by considering the urban playground in a dynamic perspective where the flows of people, routine performances or nightly rituals lead to the idea that places are in constant processes of transformation. The sequence of these informal moments of spontaneity, lucidity and flexibility is related to the urban rhythms in order to better design with lights in the nocturnal city.

This provides different interpretations of the urban territories and different experiences either during the day or during night that could be integrated in the design process of the nocturnal territory. (See fig.5)

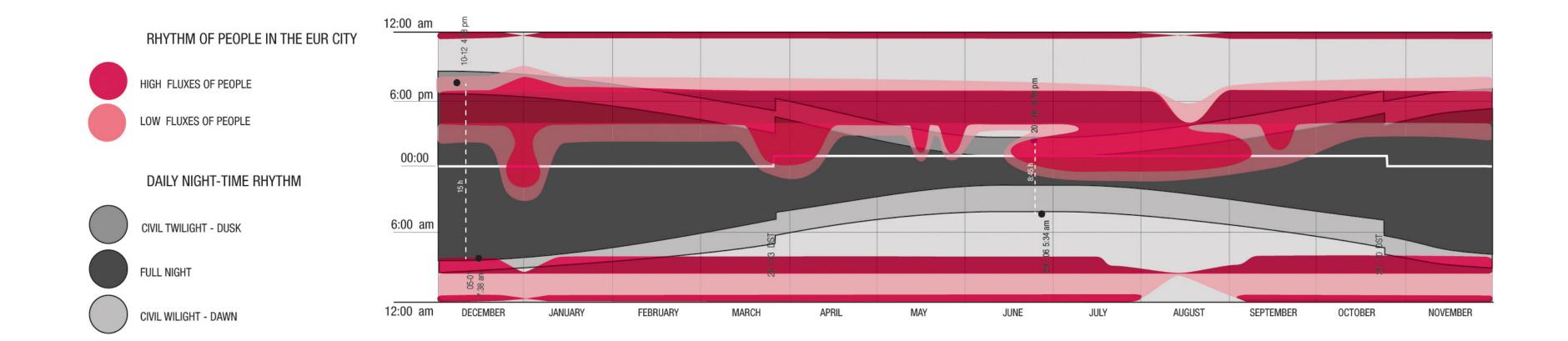




Fig. 5 Urban rhythms analysis of EUR Rome developed for the International competition Urban lightscape, Genius Luci (2015) Authors: Daria Casciani, Helena Gentili and Studio D'Alesio e Santoro

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4. Toolkit for discovering and envisioning the intangible aspects of urban territories of the night

In comparison to the tangible aspects, the human and social value of lighting (intangibles) is more difficult to estimate: theories, methods and models from social studies, behavioural sciences and environmental psychology can be used to assess the intangible aspects that link the nocturnal territory of the city with people and lighting (Tillet, 2006; Tillet, 2011; Bordonaro & Aghemo, 2006; Amendola, 2009). The connection between artificial lighting and the human scale is one of the key aspects, since artificial lighting has a strong influence on the behaviour and activities in the space. The measure of man is not a metric and objective measurement but a complex and relative one; perception is not only individual but it is also cultural (Abbagnano & Fornero,1999). The following paragraphs presents a list of tools, which enable the designer to better investigate and envision the intangible aspects of urban territories after dark.

The designer as detective of the real life of the nocturnal territory A way to interpret the nocturnal landscape is the *Flaneur approach* conceived as a real-life experience, which is a not so common but a highly recommended approach in urban lighting for analysing the nocturnal human and social experience of the territory (Bordonaro & Aghemo, 2007) The flâneur approach works by taking the pedestrians point a view to experience and understand the nocturnal territory. Several different tools can be used such as the *Nightly Walking Methodology* (Jenks, 1995; Gehl, 1991; Whyte, 1980) and

the *Nocturnal Serial Views* that represents the visual experience that people have of the nocturnal territory.

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Envision the nocturnal territory by Helena Gentili and Daria Casciani ties. The *digital Flaneur* can also navigate social forum, virtual

From on-site to on-line, the *digital Flaneur* can use the *Vid*eo-Monitoring Tools for observations of real activities and night-rhythms, which can be done also remotely by sensing the city with video cameras, that are able to acquire real-time data about the pattern of use of the territory of the city after dark (Köhler & Sieber, 2011). The *Time-Lapse Techniques*, in between on-site and on-line tool, will reveal inhabitant's paths and habits along the hours of observations and from this, the lighting strategy can be elaborated in a more flexible and mutable way in order to address lighting where and when it is useful, depending on different uses and necessi-

discussions and social software applications in search of information and content freely and openly generated by the community. Its practice is based on a virtual ethnography, called *Net-nography* (Kozinets, 2010). An applied example in the urban lighting design has been the Atlas of Urban Lighting Experiences 2.0 (Atlas of Urban Lighting Experiences 2.0, 2012), an attempt to map the different perceptions of the nocturnal image of the city from all around the world, using user-generated content available freely on social networks (See fig.6).

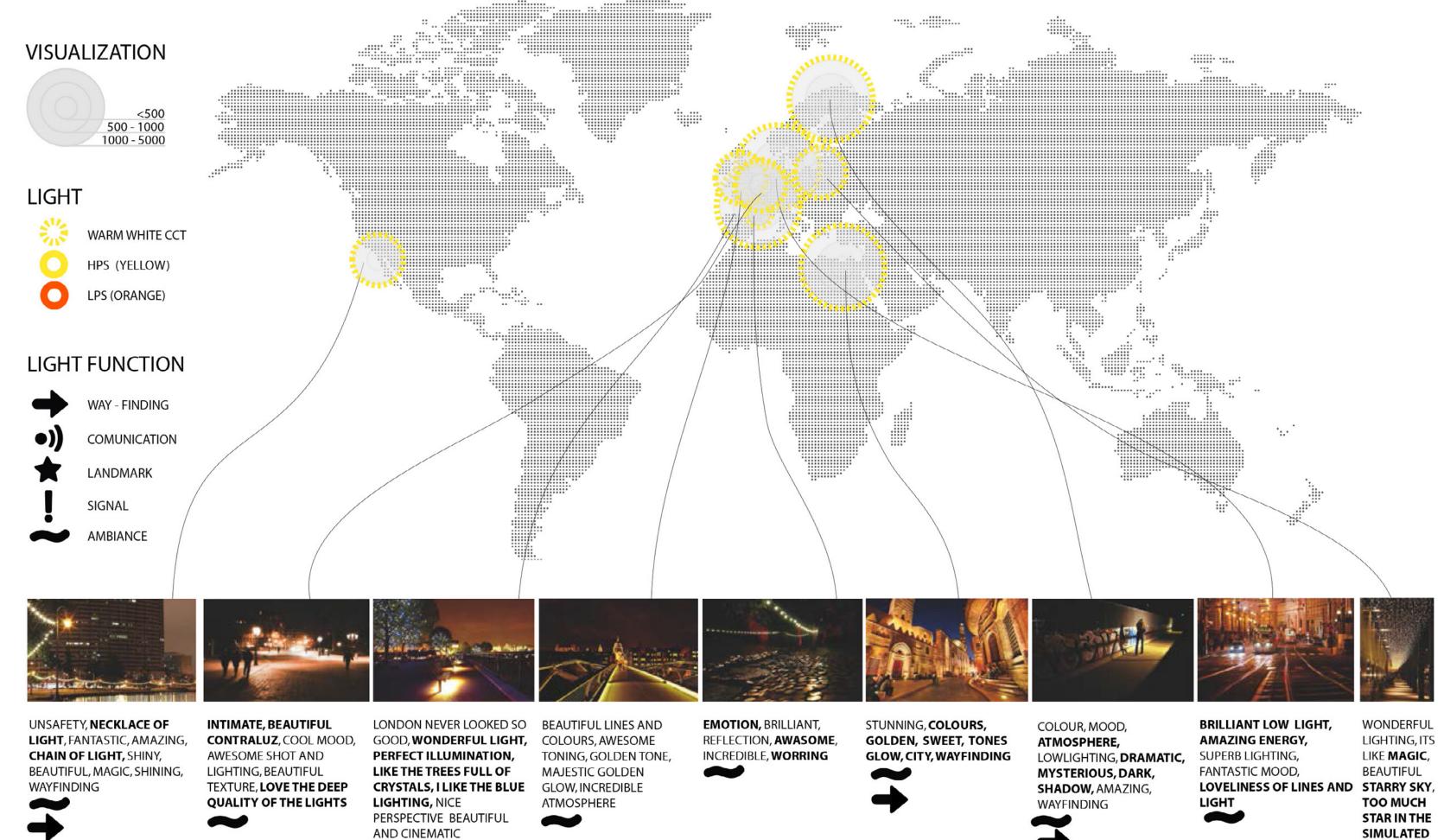
The designer as educator and storyteller in exploring the nocturnal territories

People can be involved in exploratory walks and talks at night, aimed at discovering and taking care of the urban night-time image. Lighting Walks are conceived as an educative and storytelling tool aimed at increasing the critical reflection about lighting at night. The *NightSeeing*TM (NightSee-



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PREFERENCE OF WARM LIGHTING



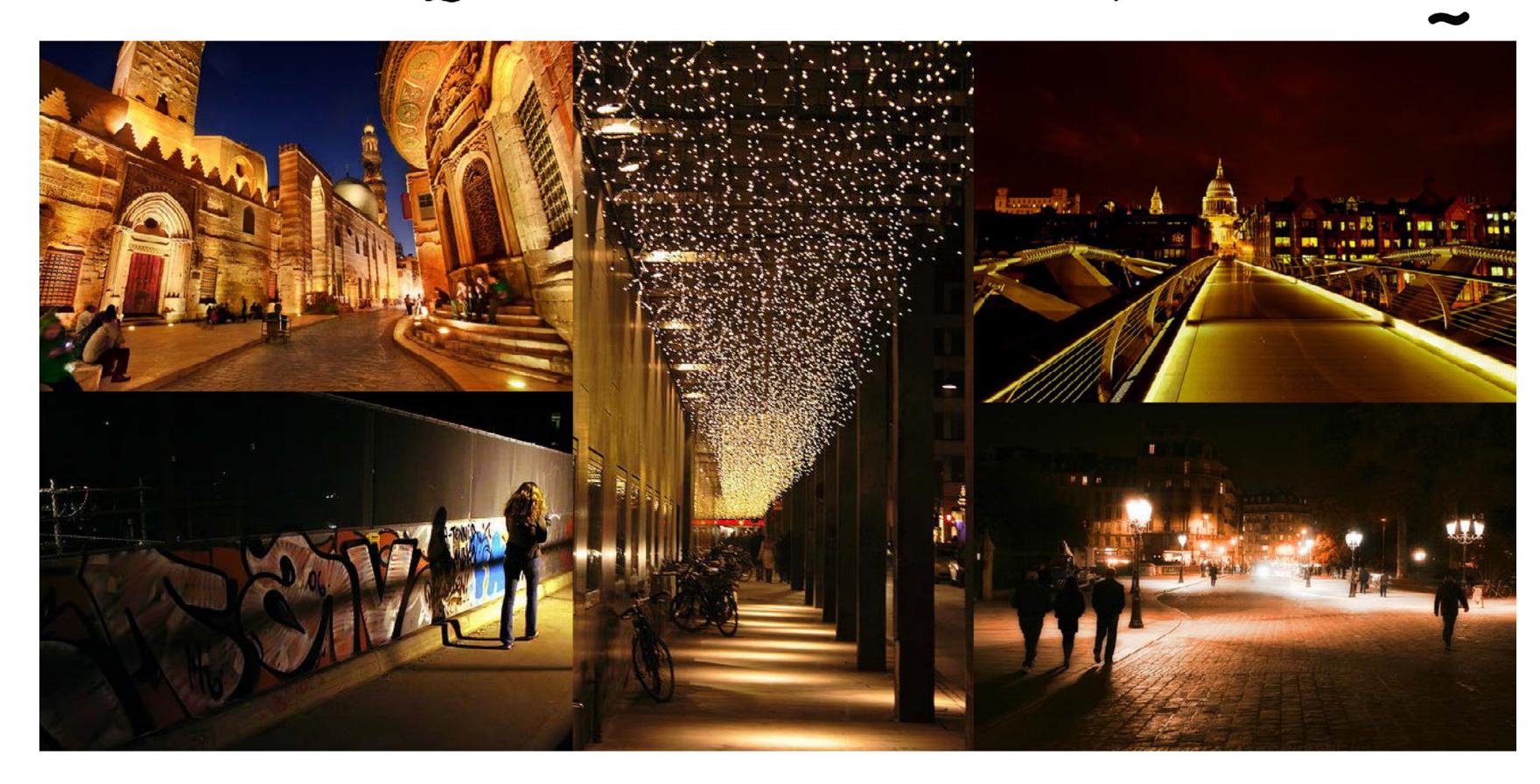


Fig. 6 Example of Nocturnal virtual etnography about different perception of the nocturnal image. Atlas of Urban Lighting Experiences 2.0 (2012). Author: Daria Casciani

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which is a night bicycle ride through the centre of Milan in order to experience and analyse the urban space and architecture under artificial lights, are both examples where the local inhabitants and tourists are incentivized to discover the



Fig. 7 Light Ride moment of discussion about the relative lighting condition in front of the Duomo di Milano (2015). Authors: Helena Gentili and Giacomo Rossi. Picture by Bernardo Petrucci

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The advantages of storytelling rely in the fact that the impressions and experiences of the participants can be collected and exchanged in an informal way. The proposed night walks wish to raise awareness in the profession of lighting design and demonstrate the importance of artificial lights when discussing the nocturnal character.

The designer involving directly people as advisors

The practice of *Nightly Public Outreach*, employing evaluation techniques developed by the social sciences, is very important for both gathering information about people's perception of the lit environment but also for motivating people to reflect in a more critical and active way about their surrounding environment. *Evaluative questionnaires* (Deleuil, 2009) about the perception of urban lighting can been distributed in order to define a shared, polyphonic and social

based lighting project for their city. Public involvement of the urban community in the dialog

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about urban lighting can be wider, through the use of *Online Public Platforms*, providing the direct possibility to citizens to participate and give their opinion about the urban lighting of their neighbourhood or of their city: examples like *LED Your City* (LED Your City, 2011) and *SEETY Milano* (Seety Milano,2016; Casciani, 2014) show that participants can vote, select or refuse a project or declare their point of view, give direct opinions, ideas, solutions and possible al-



Fig. 8 Results of the on-going research SEETY Milano, on-line public platform for nighttime identity assessment of the city of Milan. Author: Daria Casciani

ternatives. (See fig.8)

The general requirement for these surveys is that the participation would be effectively active and extended and that the platform is reachable, open, understandable and used in a correct way. Even though, these platforms of public out-

reach are rarely used in real critical decisional projects., on the other hand, they are a useful tool for gathering insights

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and impression about the nocturnal territories and for engaging people in a discussion about its renewal through lighting.

The designer help people transforming and renewing actively their nocturnal territory

In limited and temporary occasions, Urban Lighting Co-creation occurs when people are directly involved in the practical renewal of their nocturnal territory and become active in the preparation of lighting performance, lighting fixtures and settings (selecting, donating, preparing, creating, and repairing) with the help of lighting designers as in the example of Synoikia Pittaki (Pittaki, 2013). Driven by the experience of professionals, people are involved in expressing their belongings, imagination and memory in relation to a space, which is generally a neglected and abandoned territory and, with lighting is renewed and valorised. *Lighting Workshop* is another method used to understand people perception and experience of the night-time of the city and, at the same time, make people understand their urban environment. Generally organized by the Social Light Movement, *Guerrilla Lighting* (Guerrilla Lighting, 2016) are conceived as workshop where students and local residents are involved together in temporarily changing the lighting atmosphere of the space by turning and handling portable lighting systems such as torches, lanterns, lamps, etc. for one night. (See fig. 9) In addition to this, digital technologies today enable the possibility of having changeable nocturnal territories that can be manipulated directly by users, which are able to select (between a range of lighting atmospheres what they

want). Urban Living Labs methodologies (Living Lab, 2012) 14 conceived as catalyser for innovation and co-creation in cit-

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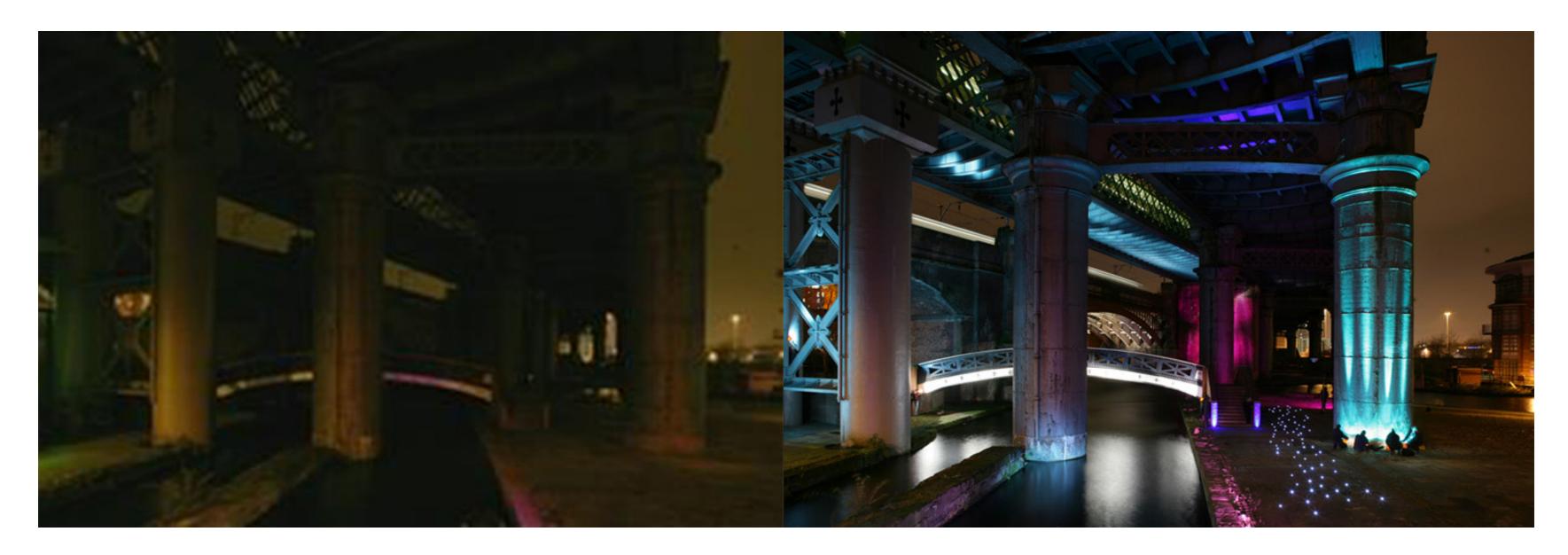


Fig. 9 Before/after Guerrilla Lighting at Castelfield, Manchester UK (2007-2008) Author: BDP Lighting - Photograph © David Barbour/BDP Lighting

ies, can be used for allowing people and industries to test the best innovations, in a process that involves citizens, businesses and public authorities to gather more user-oriented design of nocturnal territories. About this tool, an example is the *Valotarina* (*Light Stories*) *Project* (Pihlajaniemi, Österlund, Luusua, & Tanska,2012) which enable city dwellers to decide the atmosphere of the streets at night by writing its digital storytelling, posting online digital recordings or sharing stories, messages or greeting.

5. Conclusions

Lighting has been the medium and the message (Mcluhan, 2008) to build the nocturnal city, but unfortunately this instrument has not been deeply studied yet and its potentials and limits need a more critical approach in order to avoid misinterpretations when it comes to the design of urban spaces. The problems to be solved, when it comes to the urban nocturnal territory, is that of its definition through the



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and described.

Lighting designers play an important role in discovering and envisioning scenarios that push and disrupt the limits of new technologies in order to answer both users and city needs. Many different competences are converging and an emerging hybrid fields are springing from the integration and cross-fertilization of different disciplines such as interaction design, environmental and perceptual psychology, environmental, product, graphic, service design, sociology, ethnography, computer engineering, ICT system engineering, architecture and landscape planning.

The lighting experience as a whole process and project is connecting those areas in a new trans-discipline interested in exploring and designing actively the way in which lighting

impacts human experience and transforms the urban space and vice-versa. The rescue of the value of the design process might be the only solution if we, once more, would like to see our cities as real places and establish a strict dialect between lighting and territory, becoming once again dependent of each other, all perceived and lived under natural and artificial conditions.

The research about the nocturnal territory condition and artificial lighting as a contemporary tool for the recovery of public spaces encounters the idea that lighting has its own language still to be further developed in association with the research for new references in design, if we want to reinterpreted the actual crisis of the public space as a moment to open up a field of new possibilities.



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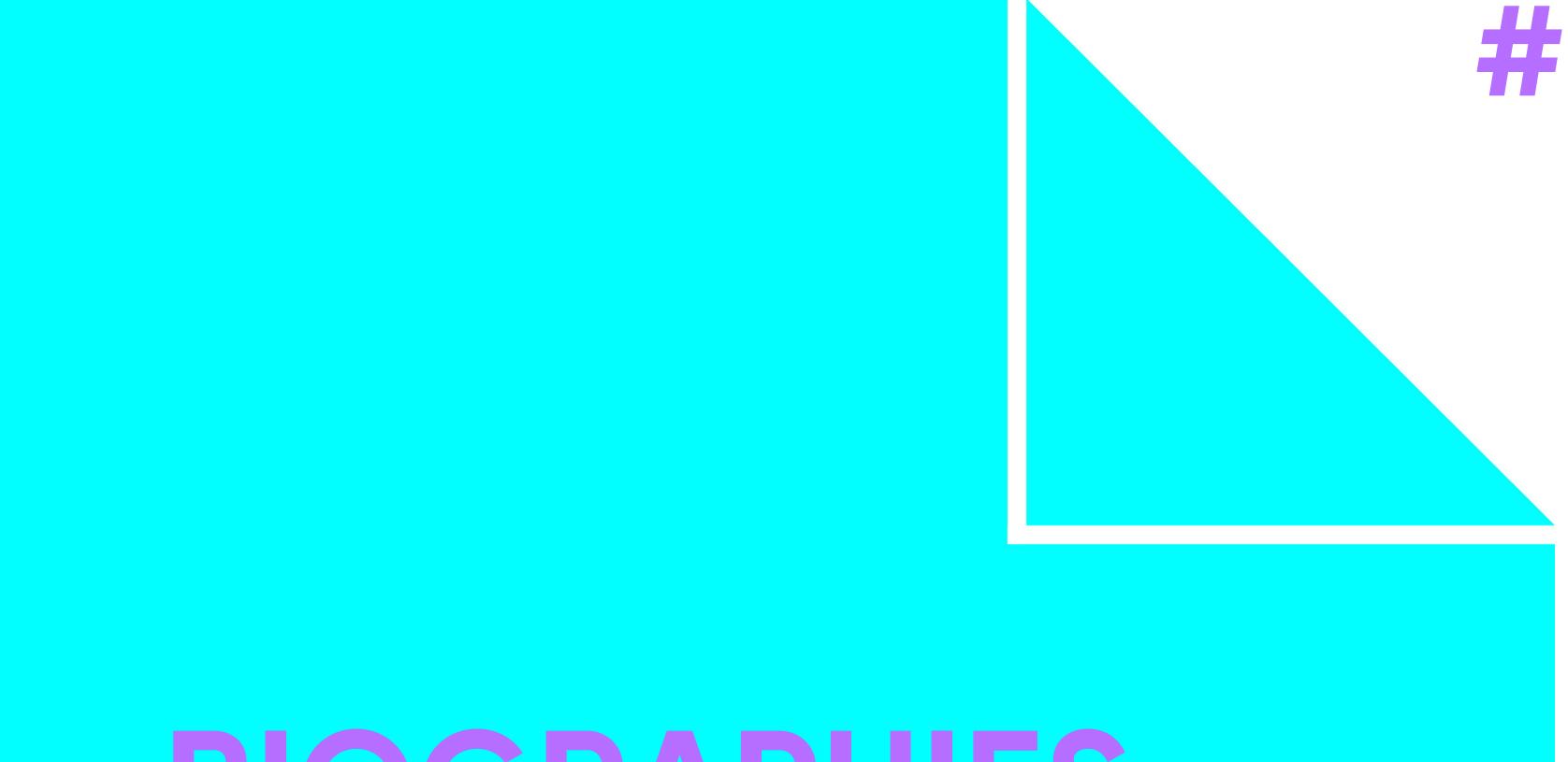
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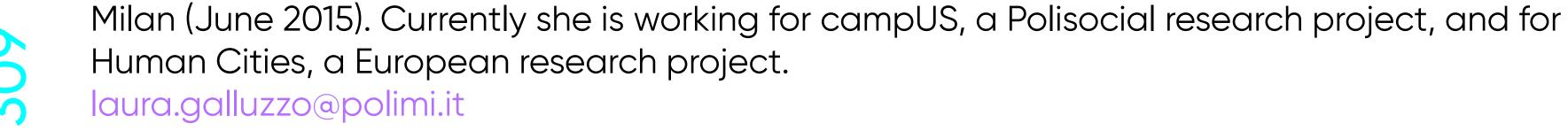
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