

Showcases of the new - innovative lighting technologies in fairs and festivals

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Festivals of light and trade fairs for lighting are showcases for innovations. In this project, Nona Schulte-Römer explores the role of temporal events with regard to the development of new lighting technologies.

Although trade fairs and festivals fulfil very different functions, they also show similarities. Both types of events are ephemeral and focus on the new. Hereby, the aim is to create lasting or unforgettable experiences. But this effect is difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, fair and exhibition companies highlight the successful presentation of the latest innovations in their marketing publications and festival practitioners, and some economists, claim that festivals have a positive effect on innovation. Following these arguments, the project studies the presentation and performance of innovative lighting technologies in the course of trade fairs and festivals.

Participant observation and interviews were conducted during various conferences on urban lighting, on lighting technologies or design, at festivals of light in Berlin (Transmediale 2010 and Festival of Lights 2010), Frankfurt (Luminale 2010) and Lyon (Fête des Lumières 2010) and trade fairs in Berlin (Belektro 2010), Frankfurt (Light + Building 2010) and Lyon (Lumiville 2010). First insights suggest that the events allow their active and passive participants –performers and exhibitors, expert and non-expert audiences or visitors – to encounter the new with little or no risk. As opposed to a linear modelling of innovation processes, the engagement with innovative technologies appears to take place rather simultaneously in a more or less disinterested, playful and appreciative manner. The aim of the project is to compare the different showcase events according to type and their distinct cultural configurations. The hypothesis is that trade fairs and festivals offer a time out from the invention and adaption process for testing and reinventing, as well as for the tactile engagement with new technologies.

The study is part of the dissertation project “Innovative City Lights”. Here, Nona Schulte-Römer will continue her research in the field of artificial lighting and focus on urban test sites for the Light Emitting Diode (LED).