

Reports from Spring 2022 meetings



Photos: Megan Eaves; Illustration: Rae Coddard / paraphrase.studio

U.K. Dark-Sky Meeting

21–24 March

Exeter College, Oxford, U.K.

darkskymeeting.co.uk
groups.io/g/darkskiesandsociety

Representatives of the dark-sky community from the U.K. and Europe gathered at Exeter College at the University of Oxford (pictured) to discuss topics ranging from astrotourism and environmental philosophy to satellite data trends. Interactive workshops and focus groups allowed participants to explore solutions, future collaborations, and funding. As a result of the conference, the U.K. Dark Skies and Society Network was formed to share news, funding calls, upcoming meetings, and collaborations.

15th European Symposium for the Protection of the Night Sky

30 Apr – 2 May

Fulda International Dark Sky Community, Germany

lichtverschmutzung.de/symposium_2022

Held this year in the dark-sky community of Fulda, this symposium covered issues of light pollution, its causes, negative effects, and possible remedies. Some of the topics included measuring light pollution; dark-sky parks; astrotourism in Europe; efficient, dark-sky-friendly lighting; environmental impacts; and lighting regulations. IDA Executive Director Ruskin Hartley gave the opening address on the topic of “Under One Sky: growing the global dark-sky movement” and participants had the opportunity to join an evening tour of Fulda to see the dark-sky community’s stellar work under a starry sky.

Responsible Outdoor Lighting at Night Online Conference (ROLAN)

12–13 May

Online

cibse.force.com/s/lt-event?id=a1E3Y00001oeMEWUA2

Co-founded by IDA, the first international ROLAN conference saw virtual panel discussions on responsible outdoor lighting with practitioners, scientists, and lighting designers, with the aim of facilitating much-needed collaboration and support to improve lighting practice and enhance research. Thirty-one speakers from Europe and the U.S. gave insights on four themes: (1) losing our dark nights, (2) best practice to reduce light pollution, (3) legal aspects of light pollution, and (4) impacts of light exposure at night on the environment and humans.

Seeing stars

THE LIGHT ARTIST HELPING HUMANITY
REDISCOVER THE STARS

WORDS BY **Kyra Xavia**

It may seem counterintuitive and radical for a light artist to create a project that turns lighting off, however that is exactly what Daan Roosegaarde has done. Collaborating with UNE-SCO, Roosegaarde Studio convinced

Franeker, a city of about 12,000 in the Netherlands, to turn off its lighting in November 2021. Franeker seemed the ideal place to launch the project, as it's home to the world's oldest working planetarium — the Royal Eise Eisinga

Planetarium (completed in 1781).

The initiative came about to give people a renewed sense of connection, belonging, and wonder by enabling city residents to experience something that's been impossible for decades: seeing a majestic, starry sky from their streets.

"It's very important for humanity to feel there is something much bigger than ourselves; that we're connected to nature and each other," Daan says. "We need to find a new perspective and new harmony, and 'Seeing Stars' does that."

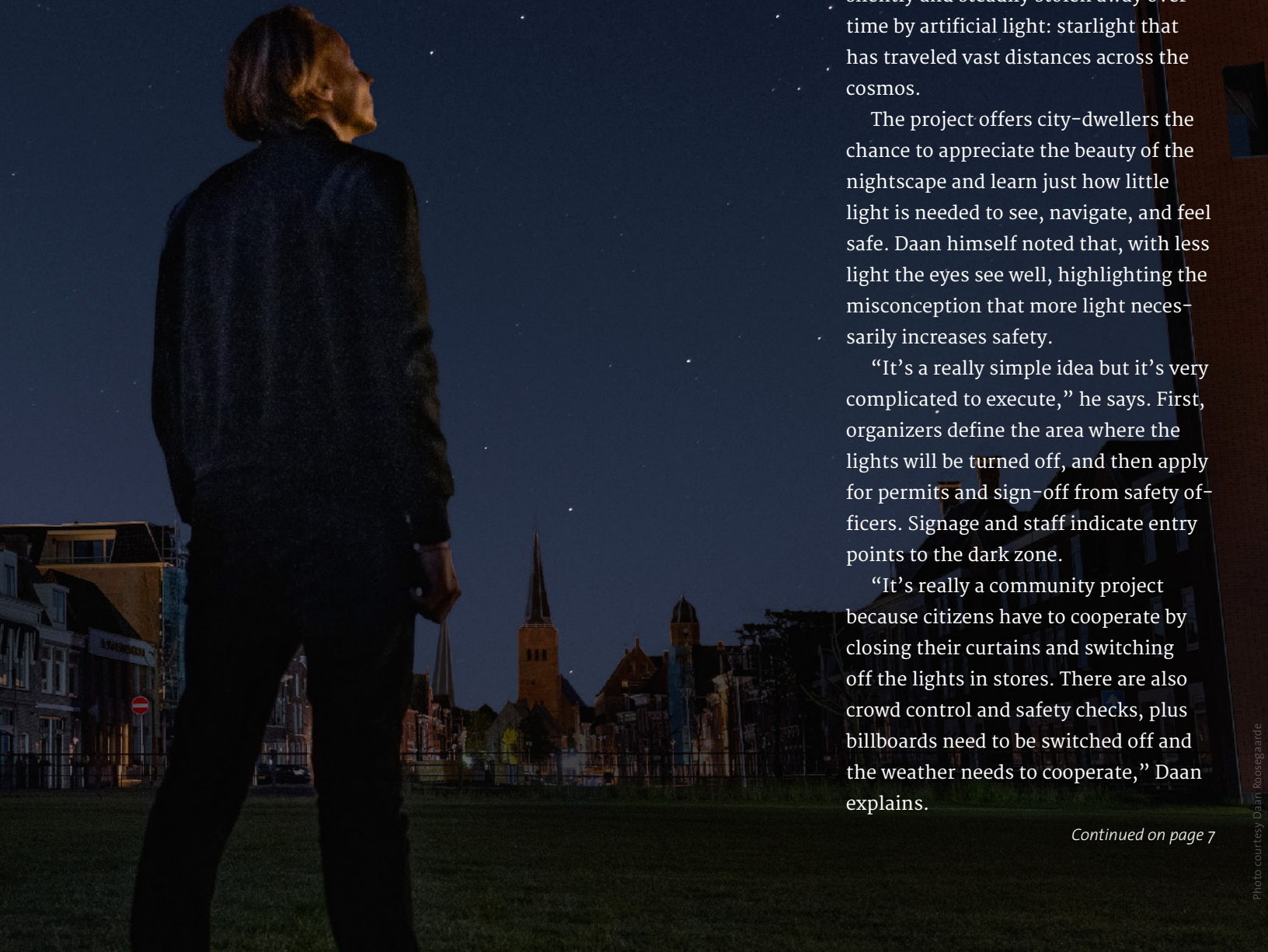
For several hours on the night of the event, urbanites enjoy the best light show on Earth — one that's been silently and steadily stolen away over time by artificial light: starlight that has traveled vast distances across the cosmos.

The project offers city-dwellers the chance to appreciate the beauty of the nightscape and learn just how little light is needed to see, navigate, and feel safe. Daan himself noted that, with less light the eyes see well, highlighting the misconception that more light necessarily increases safety.

"It's a really simple idea but it's very complicated to execute," he says. First, organizers define the area where the lights will be turned off, and then apply for permits and sign-off from safety officers. Signage and staff indicate entry points to the dark zone.

"It's really a community project because citizens have to cooperate by closing their curtains and switching off the lights in stores. There are also crowd control and safety checks, plus billboards need to be switched off and the weather needs to cooperate," Daan explains.

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Bringing Dutch stars back

“Seeing Stars” was so successful that a second event is planned in September 2022 in the larger city of Leiden, home of another historic European observatory. Both Dutch cities have an astronomical connection. Astronomer Jan Oort was born in Franeker in 1900 and later moved to Leiden, where he built one of the largest telescopes of the time.

“As artificial light increased,” Daan adds, “Oort became frustrated and developed a switch to turn off Leiden’s streetlights when he undertook observations. There’s an urban myth [that] there’s an ‘Oort switch’ somewhere in Leiden, and it’s a lovely connection to this current project.”

Daan also contacted Kathleen Ferrier, Chair of the Dutch UNESCO Commission, to see if UNESCO would support the project.

“The aim of UNESCO is to create peace in the mind of humanity and to encourage a sense of our own humility, which aligns perfectly with ‘Seeing Stars,’” says Kathleen. She believes “Seeing Stars” touches

people deeply and encourages people to look at things from a different perspective.

Urban starry night

“Seeing Stars” raises awareness about the visibility of the night sky and creates an experience of awe for several hours one night.

“We focus on one date and people give lectures and bring telescopes. The intent is to make a big bang to show what’s possible,” Daan says, so that once the event is over, people may question why it was only for one night.

In Leiden, the project will have a strong citizen science element, with hundreds of telescopes to count the increase in visible stars and long-term research on how light impacts ecology. New software will map the darkened areas in each city using 3-D to show how many more stars are visible.

Other cities, including Miami, Reykjavík, Stockholm, Sydney, and Vienna, have expressed interest in holding “Seeing Stars” events and Daan is hopeful that the project will have a domino effect.

“This needs to be a bottom-up move-

ment that comes from the people,” he says. “Nobody agreed to losing the stars, it just happened, so we need to bring them back. It’s good for people and it’s good for nature.”

Hold your own “Seeing Stars”

How can you organise a “Seeing Stars” event in your city? Studio Roosegaarde offers guidance on its website:

<https://studioroosegaarde.net/data/files/2022/01/503/seeing-stars-short-manual.pdf>

The studio is also working with IDA’s Executive Director, Ruskin Hartley, to create a manual for municipalities to integrate this approach into policy.

“Light is my language, but here it’s not about adding but removing,” says Daan.

“We’ve been told it’s the era of abundance yet we have to accept our resources are limited. By removing something — turning lights off, preventing light pollution and saving energy — we get something extra back.” ★

Kyra Xavia is an IDA advocate based in Dunedin, New Zealand.



