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The dark night sky. Starlight. The Universe that we live in. They are up there above us at night if only we could see them. Some few people can, those who live under dark skies. Others have never seen a really dark sky or even the Milky Way.

And who are we who might want to look up and see these things? Professional and amateur astronomers. The public. Nature lovers. Children. We all can benefit by dark skies and a sense of our place in the universe that we live in.

This loss of the dark night sky is an issue independent of national borders. Stars and the Milky Way, even a dark sky, have existed in all cultures, even to being part of our souls. We need them.

The dark sky is lost (or being lost) most everywhere. Just like a lot of nature. It has been with mankind for millennia, forever in fact. And now in the recent past, it is going, going, gone. Most have never seen a dark sky. Nor more than the moon, planets, and a few stars, except in a planetaria. The real thing is better. There is more to stars than the Hollywood stars on TV. The real thing is where that usage of “star” began. There is more to the real world of nature and culture than TV or Hollywood “stars.”

Where has the dark sky gone? The growth of outdoor lighting in the last century (coupled with cheap electricity until the last few years) has blotted our view of it. It has been a growth in quantity of light, not in quality of light. It is like a cancer that has crept up on us without us noticing. Sure, night lighting is a real need for us in our daily living, but it must be done well. We need to ask the key questions: Why, what, where, when, how, and how much it costs. “We” seldom if ever have done so. So here we are, without starlight, the Milky Way, or a dark sky.

Plus we have had very little appreciation for what makes for good visibility at night, or an appreciation of night vision, nor much sensitivity for the role night lighting plays in energy savings and sustainability. It seems to be mostly glitter, glare, and flash – the more light the better and the glarier the better. “See Me,” get attention, seem to be the goal. But too much of it is distracting, no attractive. The goals seems to be: Light it up all night and as bright as possible. But “The More the Bette” is a design myth.

The Night needs to be appreciated and treated better. Dark skies demand it, and so does effective and efficient urban planning for the night environment.

Last year, IDA held the first of what will be many symposia over the years with the topic of The Night, with the goal of helping to build awareness of the value of the night.

We noted that over 99 percent of the population of the USA and Europe live in light polluted areas. And this is only a fraction of the problem. There are the associated problems of energy waste due to the bad lighting, adverse impacts on night vision, on flora and fauna and even on human health. The symposium focused on discussion from disparate disciplines into the perfect multidisciplinary topic – the night. Astronomy, biology, ecology, energy, engineering, government, human health, outdoor lighting, and urban planning. Research, education, innovation. and government and individual action.

Without the inspiration of starlight and the night, much of the world's science, literature, art, and music may never have been created. What our children under urban sky glow are missing today maybe be incalculable to our future. Likewise for the professionals in all the sub-fields mentioned above. We need the night, and we need starlight.

IDA much appreciates the Starlight 07 creators, sponsors, hosts, and speakers for their inspired efforts and actions in organizing and holding the conference. It was a great job by all. We hope and expect it to have a major impact in preserving both starlight and the night. Thanks!