8.2 Selection of landmarks

8.2.1 City landmarks, silhouettes and panoramic views

A city area is primarily determined by its geographic location and topography. Relief with its hills, valleys and water surfaces (rivers, lakes, etc.) has always influenced the development of urban structures. The diversity of urban elements offers different perceptions of the city from various viewing directions.

Experience of a city starts at first sight. If the city is located on a hilly terrain, the first sight experienced from a distant view can include a large portion of the urban space (and sometimes the whole city). Both built and natural structures that stand out in the city panorama represent city landmarks. They can be tall buildings, monuments, symbols (signs), landscapes, hills, cliffs, etc. At sunset, when looking west the city image becomes darker from distant views and the colours turn into variations of grey, making the urban structure a unique silhouette on which important landmarks can be recognised (a city silhouette can also be experienced at sunrise when looking east). A visual impression of the silhouette remains in the memory. (CIE TC 5.21 2007) As an example, a distinctive silhouette of the historical part of Belgrade, taken at sunrise, is shown in Fig. 8.8.

During the night, adequate lighting should make city landmarks distinctive, lively and attractive. Panoramic views should give a hint of the atmosphere and ambience that the visitors can expect.

Figure 8.8
Silhouette of Belgrade, Serbia (view of the Cathedral Church from the Sava River)

During daytime landmarks contribute to orientation in space, this function becoming more significant at night. The structural and ambience aspects of a city will be well presented by illuminating representative landmarks. If the city contains an urban element that represents its symbol, such as the Parthenon in Athens, the Eiffel Tower or the Statue of Liberty, much attention should certainly be paid to its illumination (CIE 2019c). If no such element exists, lighting can create an interesting image of a physically significant element (preferably tall), so that it becomes distinctive and attractive. There are landmarks outside the city that, due to their form and position, facilitate orientation in the city, which is why they should be illuminated. Such landmarks include (lonely) towers (as shown in Fig. 8.9) and hills.

Figure 8.9 The Avala Tower in Belgrade, day and night views

City landmarks can be observed in different panoramic views. With the change of the viewing direction, the same objects can be experienced in different urban contexts, which may change their significance. Therefore, when designing the illumination of city landmarks it is important to identify and analyse all panoramic views from which these landmarks can be observed. If there are parts of a structure that cannot be seen or the views are of little significance, then these parts do not have to be illuminated or can be illuminated less intensely, which would contribute to energy savings.

The distances from which a certain structure or a city panorama can be viewed influence the lighting solution. Large distances enable a wider urban context to be seen, assuming recognition of the form and spatial relationship between buildings, while the details on particular structures cannot be seen and, therefore, should not be stressed. On the contrary, if the viewing distances are short, the views are occupied by a larger plan on which the building details can be recognised, and thus they may be accordingly emphasised.

If the city contains numerous tall urban elements (buildings, towers, chimneys), and especially if they are densely arranged, not all of them need to be illuminated. Only those structures that will sufficiently facilitate orientation and make views more attractive should be chosen and adequately pointed out. An interesting example is Moscow, where towers of historical significance are emphasised, while the modern box-shaped buildings remained unlit (Fig. 8.10).

Illuminating a large number of densely located buildings can cause monotony and reduce expressiveness of buildings of greater significance. In addition, orientation becomes more difficult. This is typical for large Asian cities like Hong Kong and Tokyo.

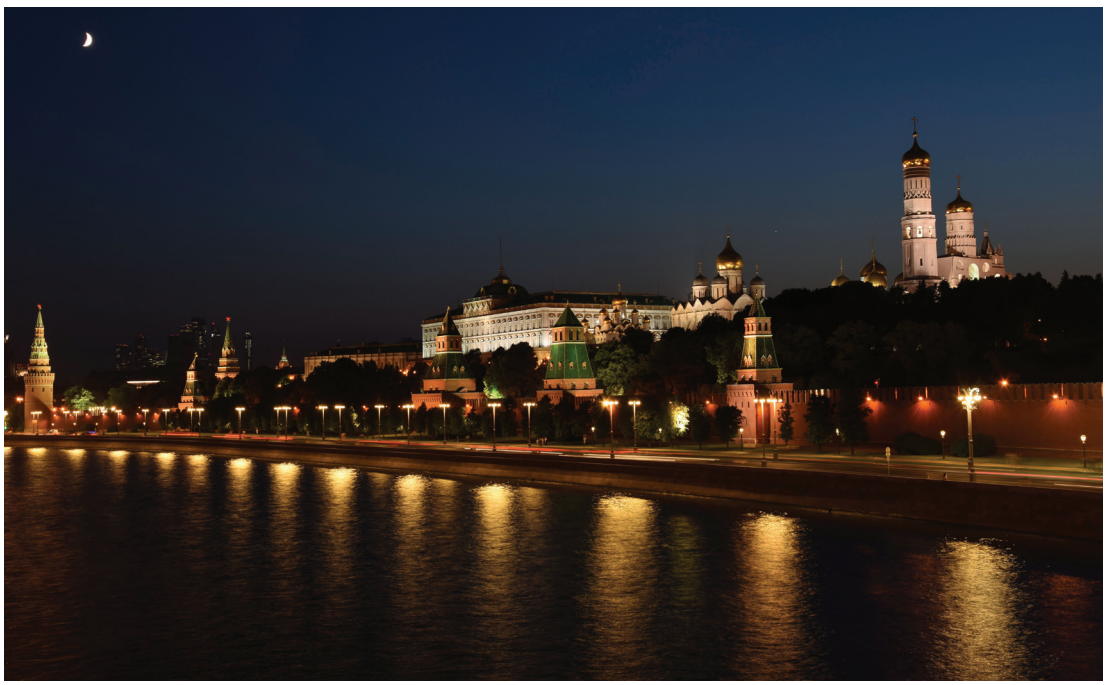

Figure 8.10 Night appearance of the historical part of Moscow, Russia

Let us repeat that landmarks should be treated according to their value and significance, regardless of ownership.

To become a city landmark, an urban element should meet at least one of the following criteria:

- visibility from panoramic or other significant views,
- possession of an exceptional architectural, historical or symbolic value,
- housing an important public institution,
- extremely large or of unique form, and
- busy street or urban ambient.

Requirements for the rational use of energy and minimal light pollution might impose the need to switch off architectural lighting late at night. However, the illumination of key city landmarks should be kept active throughout the night, in order to provide basic orientation in the city and its recognition, even for a small number of observers.

Some of the structures that represent city landmarks can be illuminated so that the lighting of their specific parts is active in predetermined periods of time. Of course, this assumes the application of easily controlled light sources.

Bridges usually represent city landmarks and can always be emphasised by lighting. They can, for example, be treated as sculptures in space (Fig. 6.48). It should be noted that harmony needs much attention when illuminating simultaneously viewed bridges.

Given that the initial views provide impressions that remain in the memory, it is important to specify the places from which visitors experience the city for the first time. If the city is entered through roads or rivers, depending on the configuration of the terrain, either panoramic views with city landmarks (if a greater part of the urban area is visible) or local landmarks (if the terrain is flat and there is no possibility for a broader view of the city) can be significant. On the other hand, travellers who arrive by train enter the city from the inside: through the railway station. Therefore, squares surrounding railway stations should be illuminated in a welcoming manner. The same is valid for the illumination of roads connecting airports with cities, including their surroundings.