

“Venice in Vienna” – or the “Electric City”

Abstract

In 1888 Vienna’s city was artificially illuminated at night – thousands of people came to enjoy the new „bath in light“. Besides downtown Vienna the *Viennese Prater*, a huge public park and recreation ground, became a prominent new center for artificial light. A special attraction was the so called Venice in Vienna which is said to be one of the worlds first theme parks. It was a small copy of the famous lagoon town, located in the *Prater* on the areal of the Kaiserwiese. It had artificial canals and a lake with Venetian gondolas. In addition it offered a number of exciting public attractions such as the giant wheel which was erected in 1897.

In 1903 *Venice in Vienna* was transformed into the *Electric City*. The visitors were supposed to experience the latest electric technical devices and more than 300 streetlamps and 5000 light bulbs created „glooming facades and sparkling gables“. From today’s point of view, it was a time when a new kind of architecture was born – a mix of utopian themes with spectacle carried by an overwhelming euphoria for science and technical invention. Introducing electricity into urban infrastructure, in particular as source of light, fascinated architects right from the beginning, because it offered new possibilities for urban design. One can argue that the *Electric City* marked the beginning of many themes which are still important in the current architectural discourse: Media- architectures and -facades, theme parks - and leisure architecture and last but not least the commercial aspects of architecture as touristic attraction.

Keywords

Event, Light, Loos, Media, Venedig in Wien.