

LIGHTing

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OUT IN THE OPEN

BY CLAIRE THOMPSON



Welcome to a new era of open space lighting, where new technologies and approaches to urban design are transforming the cities we live in. Today, open space lighting is moving away from what Arup's 2015 *Cities Alive* report describes as an outdated perception of lighting as 'a functional add-on for safety or beautification' and towards

'a new wave of innovation that has the potential to once again transform the way humans utilise and experience spaces in the hours of darkness'.

According to Kurt McRae, the director of Perth-based Engineering Technology Consultants (ETC), lighting for today's public spaces, including parks, streetscapes and

pedestrian plazas, are now being developed or repurposed with a greater emphasis on community interaction. Place-making initiatives are encouraging people to actively engage within these spaces as part of a growing trend more commonly referred to as 'place activation'.

"What we're seeing is public realm areas going through a transformation towards becoming more community-orientated and active spaces," he says.

"In response there is increased emphasis on the nightscape and lighting integrated within

Wirelessly-controlled colour changing technologies connect lighting to broader community activities at Scarborough Beach. Here, the Scarborough Foreshore Amphitheatre turns pink for Breast Cancer Week.

Photography by Kurt McRae. Image courtesy of ETC.



The use of colour adds drama to the Scarborough Foreshore Rotary Clock Tower.

Photography by Kurt McRae. Image courtesy of ETC.



Light projections onto the Albany Town Hall façade in honour of Anzac Day.

Photography by Lee Griffith. Image courtesy of City of Albany.

public spaces – it's about activating these places for all kinds of purposes, from events to community functions, markets, cultural and art installations enriching the experience and bringing community together."

It's an idea that's mirrored in the 2015 *Light for Public Space* report produced by Philips, which describes a new wave of lighting projects that 'embodies a completely transformed understanding of light's ... users, their behaviour and their preferences.' McRae says that where these spaces might previously have had a narrowly defined scope – a park that hosts sporting events, a pedestrian plaza that enables

role within that, because what we're seeing is this activation is not just a daytime thing – it's very much a night time opportunity as well."

Innovations in technology are facilitating more active and dynamic lighting solutions with the ability to scene set to suit each mode or function. The inclusion of technologies like urban event screens, outdoor projectors, people sensors, control and colour changing capabilities are underpinned by increasingly smart wireless control systems that are simple to operate. As part of ETC's recent redevelopment of the Scarborough Beach foreshore Rotary Clock Tower and beach amphitheatre, McRae and



people to move from point A to point B – today's projects are focused on the creation of multi-purpose spaces that engage the public in new and exciting ways.

"Where previously we might have been designing lighting for the local park with a playing field and toilet block, now we're seeing very active spaces that incorporate facilities for the community to exercise, recreate, socialise and even dine out, encouraging people out of their residences and into these spaces," McRae says.

"With more community events being held within these spaces, so lighting plays a massive

his team specified a range of colour changing technologies wirelessly controlled via a mobile app, enabling the local council to adjust the lighting based on what's happening in the space or in the broader community at the time.

"They have regular scheduled changes, everything from pink for Breast Cancer Week to the WA-based football teams colours during finals week – to their own City of Stirling colours, to really dynamic colour changes pulsating, flashing, and chasing for special events," McRae says.

"The control can also be interfaced to a staged performance event within the space

Lighting creates an element of fantasy in Auckland's St Patrick's Square.

Photography by Jason Mann. Image courtesy of Lighting Design Practice.

where, as part of a concert, they can patch into the control system. So instead of just having stage lighting, there's a much wider colour change and atmospheric lighting show going on around the audience."

Another recent ETC project was the town square in Albany in Western Australia. A major goal for this project was to create a dynamic and flexible space that could support multiple activities, such as hosting weekend markets, formal ceremonies and concerts. It also needed to be aesthetically pleasing, supporting an active public space located in the very heart of the city.

The lighting team set out to deliver a user-centric proposal that provided ability to adjust the nightscape ambience, with dimming capabilities, control and programming options. They consulted with entertainment companies involved in events rollout in the space, and developed an adjustable lighting system able to support a variety of event types and layouts.

"We developed an adjustable LED lighting system utilising multi-function poles. The multi-function poles deliver the flexibility to add lights, change lights, move lights, add video or gobo projectors, incorporative banners and

event power, with provision for CCTV and wi-fi [that's] adaptable to all the different needs and functions required for the space," McRae says.

"It's about ensuring the lighting design responds to all [types of] event scenarios and place-making initiatives."

The user experience is also central to the work of Domenico De Vincentis, a senior lighting designer at the Auckland-based Lighting Design Practice. De Vincentis has contributed to a range of high profile projects, including St Patrick's Square and the award-winning Wynyard Crossing Bridge. He advocates a less-is-more approach when it comes to open space lighting, subscribing to what Arup's *Cities Alive* report refers to as a transformation of approach 'from "the more the better" towards "the right kind of light"'.
"We don't want the lighting to overwhelm the space, making it more important than the space itself. As a joke I always say that if the lighting is okay, nobody will say 'What good lighting!' - they will say 'What a good space!'" De Vincentis says.

"The first thing we do is always analyse the space and interpret and try to understand what

the space transmits, what the space is asking for. The light has to follow.

"We want to create a more special place, and in that case, the lighting plays the role of a fantasy element. So I think some emotion, adding something interesting to see, can be achieved by the type of light fitting, maybe the way the vegetation is accentuated, maybe the landscape design."

Drawing people to public spaces has the potential to provide a wealth of community benefits beyond entertainment. Encouraging greater use of pedestrian spaces contributes to health and wellbeing by inspiring people to walk rather than drive; it also has the potential to reduce traffic and the problems associated with vehicle-heavy areas.

However, it also comes with a laundry list of requirements to ensure that people can use the spaces safely. Effective lighting ensures that pedestrians and cars are visible to one another, assisting people to navigate using well-traversed routes, and minimising opportunistic crime through effective illumination, and adhering to relevant lighting standards is crucial in this domain. But De Vincentis believes that the way

a public space is lit can deliver a confusing message about how safe it actually is.

"Certainly I should say that safety is paramount, but safety through lighting is relative too. The safety of any place is not made just with lighting - there are many other ingredients that go into it," he says.

"Often people think 'Okay, if we install more lighting we have more safety,' which is not correct. We can have the reverse effect - having excess lighting makes the place feel like a prison. You're transmitting the wrong message - you're saying 'This place is very risky, that's why it's over-lit, so be careful.' We don't want that. We want people to feel comfortable in the space."

Finding a balance between standards and aesthetics is an ongoing challenge in this type of lighting design. One project that walks the line successfully is Wellington's Opera House Lane. According to Pontus Hammarbäck, a lighting associate with Stephenson Turner, the company behind the lane's award-winning lighting design, the client wanted to transform the lane's dim and uninviting space while also improving user safety.



Safety and aesthetics go hand in hand on the Wynyard Crossing Bridge in Auckland.

Photography by Jason Mann. Image courtesy of Lighting Design Practice.

"It was a dark lane that was perceived to be very unsafe, but the council directly asked us to do something that brings magic to the space - something fun. They didn't just ask for safety lighting," Hammarbäck says.

The result was a combination of pedestrian lighting with a lighting feature suspended above the centre of the lane, as well as sensor-triggered, moving heads that project coloured patterns on the walls.

"It's a very rough, raw space - it's graffiti and concrete and pipes, but with the new lighting, people are drawn into it and they actually use the lane as a passage rather than avoiding it by taking a detour," Hammarbäck says.

Hammarbäck believes that designers should see a city by night as a blank canvas - one on which lighting designers should embrace the opportunity to give the city a new identity that provides a contrast to the world that inhabitants experience by day.

"We can't strive to recreate day just by using a lot of bright floodlights - it's never going to work, so we should take the opportunity to create a completely different atmosphere in cities and spaces by doing things that you're absolutely unable to do in daylight," he says.

"So lighting with colour, lighting very low levels, using the darkness as a tool and to highlight certain features and draw attention to the things that you may not notice in the day." ■



Skaters using the lane trigger the coloured lighting effects in Wellington's Opera House Lane.

Photography by Paul McCredie. Image courtesy of Stephenson Turner.



People enjoying the 'chandelier' behind the Opera House at night.

Photography by Pontus Hammarbäck. Image courtesy of Stephenson Turner.