

Looking to Europe

Graham Festenstein takes up the pen on behalf of the Professional Lighting Designers' Association – and reports on a highly stimulating conference in Belgium, which he attended on behalf of the PLDA and the ILE

The Southern Belgian town of Liege recently hosted a conference entitled 'The Social Impact of Lighting', organised by LUCI, the international commission set up to represent the interests of lit cities, which boasts 60 members across the world. The Deputy Mayor of Liege's introduction discussed how lighting gives structure to public areas, makes the city more liveable -- and how lighting forms a part of sustainable development. The event was born out of a desire by LUCI to prepare a charter to foster the goal, and express the aims, of social lighting.

Local is Best

Jacques Teller, of the University of Liege, presented a paper analysing the impact of lighting in the Walloon region of southern Belgium. He had discovered that, out of 18 new public lighting installations, the one that had the most impact on a positive perception of public safety was a scheme for a social housing neighbourhood. The other schemes looked at town and city centres from a civic and heritage perspective, not at suburban areas. He concluded that for lighting to succeed in this context it must be focussed on a specific area -- broader schemes have less impact -- and the lighting must be integrated with other elements of design and involve consultation with the local communities concerned.

The next speaker spoke of the work of *Concepteurs Lumière Sans Frontières*, which has 100 lighting designer members from

around the world, who promote lighting in humanitarian projects and undertake lighting training. They undertake voluntary work in developing countries (e.g. Mali) and have an aspiration to extend their work to include the socially excluded, through such bodies as homeless associations and charities. (<http://www.concepteurslumieresansfrontieres.org/>)

A lighting designer from the city of Lyon presented the next paper, describing how the revised lighting strategy includes 'Citizen

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Lighting' -- the provision of a Light Charter, which is a planning tool that aims to bring light to the threshold of buildings. She also spoke about the Grand Project de Ville, an area of Lyon with 22% unemployment, 80% social housing and poor public transport, where they are using lighting to bring identity to the area and its inhabitants. The scheme included major public consultation, involving local people in workshops, backed up with significant political support. The designers say this is critical to the delivery of the project. Through quality lighting they aim to increase social cohesion at night and instill a feeling of ownership -- this is key to the success of the scheme. Overall, the project aims

to improve the context of everyday life, strengthen tranquillity, improve the links with surrounding areas -- and improve mobility.

Isabel Corten, author of the lighting strategy for Liege, which also incorporates social lighting concepts, spoke of running a PLDA Workshop in Liverpool, which was recently reported in these pages (*LJ*, February 2009, p. 42). The site was a housing association estate on the edge of the city centre with a reputation for unruly youth. Isabel stressed the importance of working with local people and having an understanding of the

human dimension, along with excellent communication skills. In Liverpool, for example, residents tended to use their back doors, so there was little point working at the front. Converting the street lighting to a warm white light was a high priority. A combination of tree lighting and image projection resulted in a very simple, low key scheme, which clearly made people feel more secure, and better about their environment.

Moving Example

Joran and Eric are familiar names associated with this campaign. They are Swedish designers who have worked extensively with social housing -- and they spoke about their experiences



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and approach. Informative, entertaining and in places moving, this talk connected with the people they work with and gave the delegates real insights into the way lighting can really make a difference for ordinary people. First they engage with the housing companies, municipalities and communities. The communication process includes demonstrations -- showing people what can be achieved on the ground. They also work with school children and involve them in new schemes. For them, creative lighting design can ensure that safety and security equates to a nice place to live -- especially for kids. In their experience, too, it is possible to offer good colour rendering, improved quality of lighting, yet still offer savings of around 50% on energy costs.

What I found in Liege is that what we are proposing for the UK is already being delivered in France, Belgium and Sweden. We are not alone and we should draw inspiration from these towns, cities, projects and their designers, and use our combined enthusiasm, professionalism and commitment in the UK to deliver schemes to people who can really benefit.