

Press publication IN THE SHADE.  
LIGHTING LOCAL URBAN COMMUNITIES  
Megan Charnley and Tom Jarvis

Why are some areas of the city over-illuminated, but other pockets of the urban fabric left in the dark? How can we create a more sustainable and inclusive approach to outdoor urban lighting that allows local inner-city communities to enjoy the social realm at night? This publication describes a research project in lighting design on the Boundary Estate in East London, undertaken by Helen Hamlyn Research Associates Megan Charney and Tom Jarvis from the RCA. In its engagement with diverse communities and its design of a new system, it proposes a radical new way to make neglected corners of the city more liveable.



Broken Light Project by Rudolf Teunissen. Luminaires create light columns and patterns on a street in Rotterdam, radically changing the feel of this once ignored district. Photo: Hans Wilschut

#### THE ROLE OF LIGHTING

Numerous social studies, as well as extensive anecdotal evidence, show that women and older people in particular tend to avoid city areas at night. To make a place that feels safe, more people must be encouraged to spend time there. By making public spaces more enjoyable, more people will occupy them, and they will seem less threatening. In this way, lighting has a crucial role to play in the creation of a more inclusive urban public life. Although much current lighting practice is focused on advertising, traffic and crime prevention, the broader social and economic potential of lighting is recognised in British lighting standards. British Standard 5489-1:2003 states that 'a function of lighting in urban centres, in addition to that of general safety and security, is to enhance the night-time environment. The provision of appropriate and attractive lighting can assist in stimulating trade and commerce'; lighting should also 'attempt to encourage people to visit and make use of the facilities'.

But while social opportunities opened up by good urban lighting may be acknowledged in lighting standards, our explorations of certain pockets of the city revealed little evidence to suggest that local authorities consider this function a priority. Almost everywhere, vehicular traffic, commercial interests and the requirements of CCTV and crime prevention seem to dictate lighting policy.

After initial research, we concluded that to create a successful night-time urban realm that can be economically and socially sustainable, lighting design should:

- create well lit (but not necessarily bright) spaces to be used by the people who live in the city – rather than spaces designed mainly to be attractive to visitors;
- engage with communities to engender a sense of belonging and civic pride;
- consider the potential for changes to the lighting conditions (for example for a special event) and be adaptable to meet different requirements;
- encourage the use of outdoor space at night by local communities;
- challenge lighting codes and guidelines, which can be outdated and over-specify high levels of light;
- recognise that it is the quality of the lit environment that affects fear of crime, not simply the quantity of lux levels;
- design in shadows as part of the lighting strategy – the intensity and layering of shadow can be just as important in creating a sense of place as the levels of light.