

CONFIGURING LIGHT
staging the social

RESEARCH PROJECT

ACHIEVING PUBLICNESS

REPORT

**BY CONFIGURING LIGHT/STAGING THE SOCIAL
LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
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Lendlease's Elephant Park is set to deliver 2,500 new homes in Elephant & Castle between now and 2025, as well as 50 shops, restaurants and cafes and a brand new park right in the heart of the scheme. This qualitative study explores the park's public realm as a strategic link between the Elephant Park development and its surrounding communities. It identifies the following factors that will help produce and maintain Elephant Park as an open access public realm space: Locality, Green Space, Connectivity, Curation, (Super) Diversity, and Care and Maintenance.

The 'Achieving Publicness' study was commissioned by Lendlease and conducted by researchers of the Configuring Light/Staging the Social research programme based at the London School of Economics and Political Science and King's College, London. Field research took place June 2015-April 2016 and included participant observation, social mapping and in-depth interviews with local stakeholders. Research was conducted on an iterative basis and saw regular debrief meetings with the Lendlease team, the park's landscape designers Gillespies and the lighting design team at Speirs+Major.

Overview: Achieving 'Publicness' in Elephant Park

Elephant Park's public realm in general, and its park area in particular, will play a strategic role in managing the relationship between the development and its surrounding communities: the park is a public amenity and a public access pathway through a private development. It therefore has both practical and symbolic importance in managing sense of ownership and access, inter-community relations and the social meaning of the development as a whole. It can therefore be consequential for social issues that the development may face in the future. Conversely, the park is an important local amenity with various consequences for the well-being of diverse stakeholders. This qualitative study explores the park's public realm as strategic link between the Elephant Park development and its surrounding communities.

Most broadly, this research investigates how the new urban park fits into the wider area – both physically and within people's mental maps, identifying diverse (potential) users and stakeholders and the way in which the park impacts them. It specifically addresses potential uses of the space, perceptions of the space, and how the space fits into existing and emerging patterns of use, movement and orientation in the area. The social research also focuses on to the ecological, infrastructural and biodiversity dimensions of the park by looking at the aspects of urban nature that are perceived and valued by diverse potential users.

Drawing from extensive qualitative data, this study identifies the following distinct but overlapping factors that will help produce and maintain Elephant Park as an open access public realm space:

Locality

Stakeholders articulate a clear desire for Elephant & Castle to become a destination while maintaining its unique character as a diverse and vibrant place, and the park can play a crucial role here. While voices critical of ongoing gentrification can still be heard, there is a more widespread support for change as opportunity, as leading to a general uplifting of the area that can preserve a sense of Elephant & Castle as a diverse, and vibrant urban space. 'Locality' also relates to different and not always reconcilable understandings of Elephant & Castle as a 'cultural hub' ranging from emphasis on public culture to preserving the cultural heritage of the Latin-American community, a diverse food and retail offering and retaining Elephant & Castle as a traditional 'entry point' for incoming immigrant communities. The park can potentially mediate between these diverse concepts of the Elephant as a 'cultural hub'.

Green Space

There is an expressed desire for unstructured, flexible and responsive green space, a breathing space that is characterised by pleasant aesthetic tranquillity. In this regard, the symbolic significance of preserving the Heygate trees is widely appreciated and sets the scene for the new park's local value. Teenagers in particular are looking for an un-programmed and unpoliced space where they can hangout in groups without being perceived as a problem. Local parents are looking for an open space which can be reached via a safe route, where they can socialise with other parents and which has a small café with a basic and affordable offering. Accessibility and connection to surrounds is widely emphasised, and is related by stakeholders to the need for the park to cater for cycling and walking.

Connectivity

For most people, 'publicness' in relation to the park means being able to access it and comfortably navigate through it. While at least two access points for the Phase 1 and final park are important here, this also relates to the common concern of policing: people are most interested in whether the park will have gates or other modes of policing, such as private security monitoring behaviour. Improving connectivity via accessibility of the park is also important for connecting local communities and overcoming old territoriality. Here, literal connections that link into people's everyday practices and movements, such as the Green Links initiative or cycle paths, are important for integrating the park by putting it on people's mental maps.

Curation

Local stakeholders have a clearly holistic understanding of the park: it is not just a green space but rather an entity that includes natural features, retail, events and activities. 'Curation' rather than 'landscaping' best captures the need to produce a complex and responsive social space rather than a park for structured and fixed activities. Artworks is widely seen as a successful pilot for this kind of space. Similarly, in the transition from Phase 1 to permanent park, the focus should be on responsive and flexible spaces and infrastructure for events and activities of different scales rather than fixed physical structures. Programming needs to be curated to show flexibility, inclusion and openness.

(Super-)Diversity

The changing social complexity and (super)diversity of Elephant & Castle is recognised as a defining element of the area, and which is appreciated across stakeholders. This (super)diversity is reflected in the very diverse ethnic make-up and different local interest groups and communities as well as the local retail and gastronomy offering. The existing ethnic diversity and social complexity stands in contrast to some policies and initiatives that focus on a single ethnic identity: branding Elephant & Castle as a 'Latin Quarter' in Elephant & Castle risks losing the wider ethnic dynamism that most people identify as 'typical Elephant'. Retail is crucial, with stakeholders keen on maintaining diverse small-scale businesses as opposed to seeing more chain stores in the area. Therefore, 'ethnicity' and 'diversity' should not just be 'represented' by an ethnic market, but sustained through local and diverse small-scale business models, such as shops, restaurants, market stalls that have historically been the mainstay of many ethnicities entering London.

Care and Maintenance

Care and maintenance are closely linked to a sense of publicness in Elephant Park. Consistent and careful maintenance of the park relates to an understanding of what and who is valued. The core questions stakeholders are concerned about are: Who can and will use the park – and how? Who cares for the park? Who are they caring for?

Against a perceived background of historical neglect of the area, most people are hoping – based on their current positive perception of Lendlease – that Lendlease will achieve a significant improvement: expectations are therefore quite high. Care and maintenance are also linked to policing: while there is an acknowledged need for policing, there is strong demand for 'toned-down' and 'unbranded' policing that focusses on care and maintenance. This also connects to a rejection of intense branding and corporate aesthetics, which clearly signal 'privateness'.

Methodology

- **Qualitative research conducted by Configuring Light June 2015 – April 2016.**
- **Number of completed interviews: ca. 40 (average 1 hour each).**
- **Interviewees for this study include PAG members; Artworks staff; Lendlease staff; recent and longer term local residents from ‘both sides’ of the roundabout; community gardeners; parents, kids and teens; library staff; local business owners; representatives of the Latin-American community; and activists.**
- **Walkabouts and participant observation also focussed on residential parts of the Elephant as well as its multi-ethnic retail landscape.**
- **Two groups of LSE masters students on MSc City Design and Social Research carried out research projects in the Elephant (‘Green Spaces’ and ‘Transport’) during October – February 2015–16.**
- **Research was conducted on an iterative basis and saw regular debrief meetings with the Lendlease team, the park’s landscape designers Gillespies and the lighting design team at Speirs+Major.**





LOCALITY



Becoming a destination

There is a clear desire, across the board, for Elephant & Castle to be upgraded while maintaining its unique character, that there should be less down-market provision (which makes people feel not 'valued') but which still is affordable. This concern ties into a general understanding that Elephant & Castle needs to move from being a (historic) thoroughfare to being a destination. This is a particular concern of new residents who have trouble getting their friends to come to the Elephant because of a perceived poorer offering compared to other places (e.g. around their work place).



Locality

Change as opportunity

People appear to have made peace with the scale and direction of change in the area and are largely positive about the regeneration. They tend to see the energy associated with this rapid change (and its physical manifestation in the construction site) as an 'opportunity'. They have positive expectations, partially due to Lendlease's successful work in terms of community engagement and delivering on promises. Local concerns now are detailed and practical rather than aimed at development as such, and focus on ensuring that promises are fulfilled – people are watching very closely, but not angrily. Relating the park to this shared sense of opportunity right from the start is crucial.



Maintaining diversity and vibrancy

Local residents and stakeholders understand the diversity and vibrancy of Elephant & Castle as an asset that is unique to the place and therefore needs to be carefully maintained. The main concern about the regeneration process is that the 'new' Elephant should be an upgraded version of the old: still diverse, multi-cultural, socially mixed, vibrant and urban. In this context, 'keeping local businesses' as opposed to chains is marked as important, and Artworks is deemed successful for precisely achieving this.



Contesting understandings of 'cultural hub'

Elephant & Castle as a 'cultural hub' is a defining aspect of the future Elephant & Castle for various stakeholder groups. However, the term 'culture' is understood in quite different ways: some council voices define 'culture' in terms of new spaces for cinema, theatre and other offerings to draw tourists down from Southbank and central London; planners as well as representatives of the Latin-American community are concerned to make 'clusters' (or a 'cultural hub') of ethnic food offerings; for others 'cultural hub' simply signifies the multi-cultural density of Elephant & Castle that is worth maintaining.



GREEN SPACE



A green space to hang out in

There is very little unprompted demand for particular facilities and programmed activities. Quite the opposite, there is an expressed desire for unstructured, flexible and responsive green space, a breathing space that is characterised by pleasant aesthetic tranquillity. In this context, accessibility and connectivity which goes beyond the park and the Lendlease development is emphasised. Burgess Park is frequently mentioned as exemplifying popular green space, a valued urban recreational space encompassing a diversity of uses and users who can move freely and gather in unstructured ways.



'Park' versus 'Space'

Whereas policy, design and public discussion have focused on Elephant Park as a 'park', residents and potential users talk about it more 'holistically' as a total space that includes natural and green elements, but also retail, restaurants/cafes, activities, mobilities, connections and so on. This is also how they talk about other 'parks' (like Burgess) and 'spaces' (like Artworks). It is important that many people often frame this space other than as a park, so that publicness and access are not just understood as access to a public park.



Trees, gardening and a sense of publicness

The trees in the park continue to have an enormous symbolic importance for local communities, are universally known and appreciated, and have secured Lendlease's positive perception in the area. This also clearly connects to the vocalness of environmental, gardening and cycling/mobility interests in the area, which is currently positive but watchful and with a potential to be disillusioned. Any perceived threat to the trees, green-ness or access for cycles and walkers will be rapidly perceived as a threat to publicness and accessibility. More permanent facilities for gardening might be helpful here. One concern is a lack of realism about the physical size of the park and therefore the kinds of activity it can actually accommodate: having been publicised as a large park, expectations can be exaggerated.



Nature and mobility

Cycling and walking are modes of mobility which have strong advocates in the local community and integrating their concerns into the ongoing discussion has gained Lendlease much credit. Concerns here are around maintaining a truly green space which at the same time caters towards these particular mobility needs. Stakeholders clearly recognise competing uses of a public space but are less good at exploring how to reconcile them.



A place for families

Parents in the area are looking for an open space where they can safely take their kids, i.e. the route needs to be safe (without too much traffic) and attractive (aesthetically pleasing and interesting, potentially with shopping opportunities on the way). Parents, in particular, also need something attractive, interesting and useful at their destination, e.g. a café and also toilets. The café, however, should have a carefully selected offer which is affordable; this is not because young and affluent parents cannot afford a more exclusive offer, they just do not want to have to negotiate with their children about buying expensive snacks every time they go to the park. Furthermore, parents want a place where they can socialise with other parents in the area, something which is currently lacking in Elephant & Castle.



Teenagers need a space to just 'be'

A common concern is the offer for teenagers, particularly in relation to the park. Teenagers are either mentioned as a problem (for example, because they occupy playgrounds) or interviewees positively want the park to include an offer for them as well. Teenagers whom we interviewed felt excluded from most public spaces due to perceived intensive policing. They also voiced a need for unprogrammed space where they can just 'be', in a group and potentially noisy, away from those groups (e.g. parents and children) which could potentially perceive them as threatening. This is obviously a perennial issue, but it needs special attention in Elephant Park as management of teenagers could rapidly become a test and symbol of its publicness.



ELEPHANT & CASTLE STATION

CONNECTIVITY



Publicness means 'access'

Most people see the publicness of Elephant Park in terms of very practical matters rather than political or symbolic ones (e.g. in terms of who actually owns it). For them, publicness largely means being able to access the park, but also being able to easily and comfortably navigate through it. A common concern in this respect is whether the park will have gates and/or other modes of policing. In this light, introducing a second entrance to the Phase 1 park as early as possible, or opening it up at more than one end (e.g. via transparent hoardings or a viewing walkway) will assist in achieving a sense of publicness for the permanent park.



A space for everyone

The old Heygate Estate is commonly mentioned in discussions of publicness and connectivity: it was widely regarded as not accessible. This is linked in local memory to an older, gang-like territoriality and local marginalization. From this perspective, Elephant Park can be perceived as a positive change in creating a modern and democratic space. This is a specifically local sense of publicness that links to Elephant's history.



Putting the park on people's maps

Physical and conceptual connections such as Green Links and cycle paths are important to people: though already on people's mental maps, there is scope to make them more visible, e.g. with signage, GPS, digital apps and media and publicity. The main point here is to integrate Elephant Park into people's everyday practices and movements so that it is 'on their map'. The park therefore evidently needs to be linked to existing movement patterns (getting to transport, work, shopping, recreation) but there is also scope to be more wide-ranging and inventive in establishing additional and new routes that include Elephant Park. For example, while there is a focus on cycle routes and green links, there are also pedestrian pathways that link Elephant Park all the way to Burgess Park.



The Elephant as 'halfway point'

Virtually all interviewees shared the idea that Elephant needs to be perceived as a destination rather than a transport hub, and gave many examples, at different scales, of what this transformation might mean for them. At the same time, LSE students working on transport in the area identified an important alternative perception of Elephant: it is a 'half way point' for many people who live outside the area but stop here on their way in and out of London and make substantial use of amenities while they stop. Significantly, local business depends on this pattern (not just restaurants but also services and leisure businesses). This 'half way' character as a stopping off point is a good way to reframe the negative 'transport hub' view of Elephant and to connect the Park itself to a demographic that will continue to be important for the area.



CURATION



Curating 'The Park'

Because most stakeholders regard Elephant Park 'holistically' (as a total space rather than solely as a green space). In other words, people understand 'The Park' as the whole thing (including nature, retail, events, activities etc.) not just the park as such. Therefore, the idea of 'curation' rather than 'landscaping' best captures the need to produce a complex and responsive social space. Above all, the research shows that the retail offer is as important to potential users in integrating Elephant Park as is the green layout. Thinking about landscaping and retail could be more closely and creatively integrated.



An 'authentic' Elephant

There is a shared understanding that the 'new' Elephant needs to be an 'authentic' Elephant which is not strictly programmed, but rather carefully curated (by local groups, if possible, for example through a group similar to the PAG). 'Authenticity' is a widely used but ambiguous word: it is generally used to identify the 'real' Elephant as diverse, vibrant, urban and a bit edgy rather than overly branded, programmed and too neatened up. Hence, an ambience that retains but upgrades the identity of Elephant is far more important to people than structured amenities (such as playgrounds), which may in any case conflict with 'authenticity'. The focus should therefore be on responsive and flexible spaces and infrastructure for events and activities of

different scales rather than fixed physical structures. Artworks, again, is widely seen as a successful pilot for this kind of space. It is well curated, socially exciting and explores the opportunities and experimentation opened up by regeneration - and it is clearly multi-ethnic and convivially open to all, which is recognised across all groups.



From Phase 1 to permanent park

People are concerned that the Phase 1 park will provide them with opportunities which will not be available anymore in the final park (e.g. events which could disturb the residents in the surrounding blocks). This has the knock-on effect of turning the Phase 1 park into a false promise rather than a first step towards a new and permanent public space. Similar questions arise about the permanence of Artworks, which is already a genuinely popular space. What is important, again, in this context is opening up the Phase 1 park via a second entrance to allow it to be a throughway integrated into people's movements (rather than a special and limited destination), as it will be in the final park, which could build a strong - and more importantly clear - identity for the park from the start.

JUMBO
roudly African

GOOD

GREEN KING IPA



(SUPER) DIVERSITY



Superdiversity and social complexity as distinctly 'Elephant'

All of Elephant & Castle is characterised by dense diversity and multi-ethnicity. Interviewees widely acknowledge that and see this ever changing '(super)diversity' and the social complexity resulting from it as a distinctive feature of Elephant & Castle. This includes, but is not limited to, very diverse interest groups and communities as well as retail and gastronomy. Appreciation of the Elephant on the basis of diversity sits alongside, and is compatible with, complaints about particular manifestations of that diversity: it is an over-arching identity and value for the Elephant.



(Super)diversity

Multiculturalism vs. 'Latin Quarter'

People appreciate (super)diversity – multiple and complex ethnicities. In this respect, moves to characterise the Elephant in terms of a 'Latin Quarter' is very double-edged. On the one hand, the Latin American community is visible, important and successful, and symbolises the multi-culturalism of the Elephant very vividly. On the other hand, people appreciate that the diversity of diversities, as it were, and the vast range of ethnicities connected to the area, over a long history, need to be made visible and integrated in the place making. This sense of (super)diversity constitutes a very important and popular understanding of publicness in the Elephant.



Diverse retail as opportunity

Multiculturalism and diversity are currently reflected in the retail offer in Elephant & Castle. People do not want to only see chains in the area but are keen on maintaining this diversity in retail, i.e. 'ethnicity' and 'diversity' should not just be 'represented' in an ethnic market, but retail is an opportunity to maintain diversity if these small-scale business models are supported, i.e. a 'path to upgrade' is provided. Hence, achieving publicness in the broadest and most successful sense needs to include full support for diversified retail, for affordable retail, for business development support for small enterprises and training programmes for ethnic residents.



CARE AND MAINTENANCE



Maintenance as responsibility

Maintenance and care are important themes that are mentioned frequently amongst interviewees. Maintenance is linked to a sense of being cared for, of being important enough. The extent to which councils and developers care is very vividly and practically identified in the quality of provision and response to concerns. The core questions here are: Who owns the park? Who can use the park? Who does use the park – and how? Who cares for the park? Who are they caring for? Lendlease is perceived positively, and this is, again, based on its actions which are closely watched (preservation of the trees, community engagement activities, perceived responsiveness), and closely compared with

the actions of other parties to local development. As the Park develops, every physical aspect and response to concerns will be scrutinized in the same way, with care and maintenance as a sensitive and potentially volatile indicator of how stakeholders are valued.



Avoiding a sense of privateness

When speaking about a sense of publicness, most people actually talk about what they don't want the park to feel like and they explicitly linked this to avoiding a sense of privateness. Concern about Elephant Park as a literally or metaphorically gated community and space is explicit. The threat of privateness is visualised differently by different kinds of people, but is generally linked to intense branding as well as atmosphere and aesthetics: branding, e.g. on hoardings, but also distinctive landscaping or the like, signals privateness; by the same token, streets and places that 'look' like any other street in Southwark feel 'public', simply because they are not distinguished from the surrounding area. Elephant Park can most directly counter an image of privateness by ensuring visual and atmospheric connection to and blending in with its surrounds, which are in any case valued as a vibrant urban space.



Policing

Questions of care and maintenance are inevitably linked to questions of policing. Interviewees acknowledge the need for policing, but articulate the desire for a ‘toned-down’ and ‘unbranded’ (i.e. not private) policing. Policing is important in different ways to different stakeholder groups, e.g. parents want policing to ‘clean up’ the playgrounds and keep alcoholics away whereas teenagers are worried about being marginalised or even excluded by policing.

We are very much looking forward to the redevelopment. As a modern young family we look for facilities where we can take our children, where we can take our dogs, and to be out in the open area without... the smell of wee and rubbish around... Towards Walworth, there's nowhere really that we go as a family there...the closest park is in Imperial War Museum. (...) We want the area to be a bit cleaned up. There's a lot of, you know, drunks hanging around...There's a lot of police presence trying to clear up any negative aspects to the area.

somewhere I can sit and there's a willow tree or something and... This is a busy area, you go to the Elephant... that's full of life. Just somewhere where you can just sit for a while and maybe take a breath, a bit of calm in the middle of the chaos

But I mean there's always been a very strong community feel in this area and there's a great energy, there's a lot of life and vibrancy. But before it was a bit like warrens so people could sort of disappear. It was a bit scary. You wouldn't have walked there at night, and of course you want the children to be safe in public... There's a lot of energy.

Artworks: 'You need to come on a Friday, it's vibrant and I think it's drawing people in out there, you know Professionals or students or... quite a cool crowd I would say. and Moms with pushchairs as well down there, having lunch...And then later on it livens up, doesn't it. (...) ...that's what you want, you want some vibrancy and them coming to the Artworks.'

it's still South London and really ordinary. But its loveliness is its ordinariness.



People really appreciate any outdoor space.... Elephant and Castle is just such a nightmare ...But if there's a lovely space where you can just sit on a bench, have your sandwiches and it's away from that traffic noise... it will be nice as well if there are playgrounds for the kids ...which make the place more family orientated

You don't necessarily want to spend twenty quid in a park. Kids want that, but if you just go to the park, like Elephant Park, I am not going to spend £20 because we've got food at home. So things like coffee for the mums, just to keep them awake and then obviously some snacky bits, but not... I wouldn't go to a restaurant in a park. I know the kids would want to and they would drive me crazy, but I think that would be one thing that would put me off, to go somewhere knowing that I am going to get headaches. So I would want a very limited selection in terms of what you can buy there.

So I think there's some ecological policing of the design that I'm not too much in favour of. And also there's an influential minority in the area, who are very interested in gardening. I mean, as a social activity, that's fantastic, but there's got to be some principles that govern it... otherwise it becomes an allotment.

On the other side of the Old Kent Road, a lot of new buildings went up. And it's become very popular with the media, young media types and things like that. And, of course, they bring money and they bring what they want, which is great because I like that too. I mean I like eating out myself and that's slowly seeping across... Now it's young couples, gay couples, the sort of people who've got money.

Conclusion

Lendlease are committed to providing a public park that will benefit the local communities in Elephant and not just the residents on the estate. This qualitative research project has produced a rich picture of the different stakeholders and users of the Phase 1 and permanent park. The park holds the potential to support the diversity of Elephant by providing an open space convivial to all. In this respect, the public park is hugely important and warmly welcomed by all stakeholders and potential users.

While there remain some anxieties as to impact of possible 'gentrification' on existing residents, there is a general consensus that the area needed redevelopment to uplift the area. The park's identity is clearly important to the redevelopment of the area and it should therefore be well connected to surrounding retail, housing and civic amenities. The park has the potential to create new, green pathways, provide open green space for all, and improve the look and ambiance of the area that will help improve the image and identity of Elephant. Through careful and low-key management and curation, it also holds the potential to provide new civic spaces for different activities and events that can be enjoyed by the many different community groups and stakeholders.

Without suggesting a comprehensive approach, the Configuring Light research suggests several core concerns and areas for development in order to achieve and sustain 'publicness' for Elephant Park:

- Elephant is valued and identified as a (super)diverse, vibrant, multi-cultural urban space – maintaining this atmosphere is a central concern of most stakeholders. This should be reflected in: how diversity is defined and sustained; how cultural and ethnic quarters are identified for support; the visual integration of the park into its surrounds; the extent to which the park is experienced as 'branded' as opposed to 'authentic'.
- Elephant Park obviously needs to be connected – cognitively and practically – to people's everyday routes and journeys. There is scope for much more creative thinking both about which routes can be identified or created to include Elephant Park in local life and about how to make those routes more visible and popular.
- While transforming Elephant & Castle from transport hub to destination is paramount, there will always be an important constituency of park and area users for whom Elephant is a 'halfway point' conveniently located on their way home or to work. Elephant Park needs to be curated rather than landscaped or designed. A future socially successful and popular public place was imagined by residents not as a park with structured facilities but rather as a holistic 'space' with a desirable integrated offering of retail and landscape (rather than park alone), and largely described in terms of quiet space to hang out rather than built facilities.

- More planning work needs to be done on strategic prospective users of the park, above all (from our research) teenagers and young parents. Both are likely users as well as visible evidence of healthy public use; at the same time, teenagers are likely to provide early and ongoing 'tests' of the publicness of this space while young parents will provide visible evidence of security, access and a welcoming atmosphere.
- Lendlease has a very good local reputation, but this is always fragile, and stakeholders are always watching carefully. Their concerns largely focus on practical evidence that promises are being fulfilled (rather than broader political concerns). Lendlease could therefore usefully frame their relationship with stakeholders and users in terms of ongoing care and maintenance as evidence of concern and value.

The Configuring Light Programme

Configuring Light/Staging the Social is an interdisciplinary research programme based in the Sociology Department at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). It explores the role lighting plays in our everyday life to help build a better social knowledge basis for lighting design interventions. It was founded in 2012 by the sociologists Dr Joanne Entwistle (King's College London), Dr Don Slater and Mona Sloane (both LSE) and is supported by the LSE and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Past and current collaborators of Configuring Light include Ove Arup, Derby City Council, Speirs+Major, Lendlease, the Wellcome Collection and the London Science Museum.

All Configuring Light projects explore how lighting is configured into social life: as infrastructure, as technology, as ambiance or as a particular kind of material that we make and shape through our everyday practices and professional expertise. Configuring Light is committed to developing an empirically grounded social understanding that can work with engineering, psychology and architecture but contributes something distinctive: the 'social' refers to the various social groups that use a space and through which individuals relate to the spaces that designers design. Since individual identity is shaped through membership of these groups, for example families, genders, ethnicities, communities (local, urban, national) but also subcultures and other groups, so is the understanding and use of light. Looking at light as important 'stuff' within social life allows us to explore how professional practitioners – from lighting designers to architects, planners and regulators – 'work' this material into the urban fabric.

Configuring Light/Staging the Social is located in the higher education sector and aims to foster and explore innovative and interdisciplinary practitioner-academic collaborations. As a programme, Configuring Light runs a range of projects and activities that range from research to education and knowledge exchange and impact. For example, since early 2014, it has been hosting an ESRC-funded seminar series that brings together academics and practitioners concerned with contemporary lighting issues. A particular research focus within the programme is a concern with public lighting in the urban realm, previous research projects looked at public lighting in, for example, Derby (UK) and Cartagena (Colombia).

Offering cutting edge social research methodologies and analytical resources to build a rich and secure understanding of the social spaces for design and planning interventions, Configuring Light also works on a consultancy basis with a range of clients – including lighting designers, city councils, housing trusts and developers. The emphasis here lies on developing rich social knowledge that can enter into a productive dialogue with professional designers and planners to foster an iterative development process.

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CONFIGURING LIGHT
staging the social





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Boss Division

Two men are sitting at a table in front of the Ria sign. One man is resting his head on his hand, while the other is looking towards the camera. They are in an outdoor setting with wicker chairs and tables.



