

<b>Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 23: Sociology</b>
<b>Title of case study: Promoting Effective Urban Place-Making through Strategic Illumination</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The significance of illumination for the development of innovative place-making strategies designed to enhance convivial life in the city, enable better communal heritage preservation and augment urban economic capacity has been acutely underestimated. The research showcased here is interested in discovering new concepts and methodologies for the understanding, utilisation and evaluation of illumination as both a facilitator and intrinsic expression of communal life in both the city and beyond. The research has initiated a vibrant knowledge exchange between academics, professionals and municipal authorities leading to the establishment of an increasingly international network focused on the politics, aesthetics, communal benefits and economic potential of effective urban place-making through strategic illumination. The research has also impacted on the tourism strategies of coastal towns and resorts, and on heritage cultivation through the provision of expert advice. Among both specialist stakeholders and the wider public the research has raised awareness of illumination as a place-making strategy, as well as a matter of class and taste. The research has also rehabilitated aspects of popular culture by reappraising the role of the vernacular in municipal event planning and general policy-making discourse.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The research on urban illumination by Dr Tim Edensor [Senior Lecturer in Cultural Geography at MMU since 2004, Reader since 2006] and Dr Steve Millington [Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in Cultural Geography since 1996] was originally prompted by a lack of scholarly analysis of the correlation between place-making, urban conviviality and popular culture, on the one hand, and municipal strategies of illumination, on the other. The increasingly practice- and utility-centred rationale informing this research follows in the footsteps of the pioneering work of MMU's Manchester Institute of Popular Culture (MIPC) (1991 – 2006). MIPC's research on the complex interplay between production, consumption and regeneration in contemporary urban contexts gave rise to a new MMU-specific brand of impact-led sociological research intent on boosting the local economy and promoting greater urban quality of life by developing close collaborative research and knowledge-exchange partnerships with the then newly emergent cultural industries as well as the city itself. The legacy of two of MIPC's leading proponents – Justin O'Connor, MIPC director (1995-2006) and now Professor of Cultural Economy at Monash University, and Derek Wynne, Reader in Sociology at MMU (1974-2002) – is particularly important here. In direct response to Manchester's radically deindustrialised cityscape of the early 1990s, subject to continuing accelerated change as new metropolitan lifestyles began to assert themselves, O'Connor and Wynne devised a new methodological approach to popular cultural research committed to making a real difference to people's daily lives by engaging in dialogue with the inhabitants of the city, as well as cultural entrepreneurs and the municipal authorities. Their research on urban development instigated an enduring intervention in debates and practices regarding the dynamics of cultural regeneration [1].</p> <p>MIPC's legacy underpins both the intellectual and methodological foundations of Edensor and Millington's research, which has from the start actively invited professional feedback and collaboration, and is now indeed increasingly opening up to non-academic expertise and co-authorship. Their work on urban illumination and popular culture has identified four key insights relevant not only to other scholars, but also to municipal policy-makers on urban regeneration and professional light designers: 1) that particular practices of illumination are conducive to generating a sense of place and community; 2) that vernacular light decoration can constitute an aesthetic resource facilitating valuable local forms of creative production; 3) that there is a profound lack of understanding of how illumination and darkness are experienced, 'felt' and interpreted; 4) that over-illumination impairs the potential for darkness to enchant space and, consequently, for illumination to be more effective. The research project originally commenced with an investigation into what motivated people to adorn their houses with extensive Christmas illuminations. This investigation revealed the contested aesthetics over this practice while highlighting the impetus amongst householders to generate conviviality, festivity and community, qualities often misrecognised in critical popular and media discourse [2]. The focus on contested aesthetics led to further empirical research (2009-11) examining the Blackpool Illuminations, hitherto wholly</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

neglected by researchers despite their enduring popularity. It was discovered that these illuminations – grounded in a highly localised form of production and consumed in ways that emphasise sociability, fun and nostalgia – have remained insulated from wider taste-generating design practices internationally [3]. This insight then inspired further conceptual research on how illumination can be generative of affective atmospheres [4]. Between 2011 and 2013 the research turned to the potential of darkness to offer stimulating encounters with space that foreground non-visual sensations and forms of conviviality, examining also how the saturation of nocturnal space with extensive illumination tends to minimise the potential for positive experiences engendered by encounters with gloom. This research coincided with the recent emergence of a range of popular leisure attractions that offer experiences of darkness, including Dark Sky Parks (<http://www.darksky.org>) [4], and resulted in Edensor being invited to play a leading role in a pan-European Berlin-based network ('Loss of the Night', <http://www.cost-lonne.eu>) that explores the 'loss of the night' through excessive illumination [5]. Most recently Edensor and Millington presented their work at the 2013 annual conferences of the Association of American Geographers in Los Angeles in April and the Institute of British Geographers in London in August. Edensor is now writing a monograph for the University of Minnesota Press on *Light and Darkness: Exploring the Changing Illumination of Space*. He is also editing a special issue on 'Darkness' for *Cultural Geographies* (to be published in 2014) and has been awarded a Fellowship at the Institute of Advanced Study at Durham University to study Light in the company of an interdisciplinary, international community of scholars, including light artists, from January to March 2014.

### 3. References to the research

- [1] O'Connor, J. and Wynne, D. (1996) (Eds.) *From the Margins to the Centre: Cultural Production and Consumption in the Post-industrial City*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 282 pages, ISBN: 978-1857423334
- [2] T. Edensor and S. Millington (2009) 'Illuminations, class identities and the contested landscapes of Christmas', in *Sociology* 43(1): 103–21. DOI: 10.1177/0038038508099100
- [3] T. Edensor and S. Millington (2012) 'Blackpool Illuminations: revaluing local cultural production, situated creativity and working class values', in *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 19(2): 144–60. DOI: 10.1080/10286632.2012.658048
- [4] T. Edensor (2012) 'Illuminated atmospheres: anticipating and reproducing the flow of affective experience in Blackpool', in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30:1103-22. DOI:10.1068/d12211
- [5] T. Edensor (2014) 'The Gloomy City: rethinking the relation between light and dark', *Urban Studies*, published online <http://usj.sagepub.com.ezproxy.mmu.ac.uk/content/early/2013/09/24/0042098013504009.full.pdf+html>

### 4. Details of the impact

Edensor and Millington's ambitions for producing impactful, practice-centred research capable of improving the everyday quality of life in the city is rooted in the work of the MIPC, which initiated the formation of Manchester's £31-million Museum of Urban Life, *Urbis*, in 2002 and also fostered the development of Manchester's Creative Industries Development Service (CIDS), the UK's first dedicated local economic development agency for the creative industries. Given the current recognition of the importance of the creative industries, this intelligence was critical in shaping public policy – particularly in Manchester where connectivity across the public and private sector facilitated through the work of CIDS ultimately paved the way for a later raft of investments including mediacityuk and the Sharp Project which have also had huge cultural and economic impacts since 2008 [A]. In the absence of alternative research into illumination Edensor and Millington's work stretches the boundaries of sociological research by developing a springboard for innovative collaboration and knowledge exchange with local authorities, urban designers and creative lighting practitioners involved in place-making and regeneration practices at national and international levels. It has resulted in the establishment of an increasingly vibrant and influential network of academics, lighting professionals, policy-makers, funding bodies, artists and curators, and the research findings have been scrutinised at both national and international conferences and workshops.

More specifically, the research has promoted professional engagement with lighting designers and place managers. In 2009 Edensor and Millington were invited to present their work on Christmas illuminations to a meeting of the Professional Light Designers Association (PLDA) in London. Subsequently, the chair of the PLDA, commissioned a non-academic article for the trade journal *Lighting Matters* to communicate these ideas more widely to professionals as, in his view, vernacular lighting practices deserved to be taken more seriously by the profession [B]. The journal is circulated to over 2500 lighting engineers, lighting designers, consultants, lighting manufacturers and local authority lighting personnel in the UK, as well as reaching an influential readership among key lighting specialists in other English-speaking countries. Also in 2009, Edensor and Millington were invited to address a large gathering of light designers and policy makers at *Fete Des Lumieres*, the annual international conference of Lighting Urban Community International (LUCI) in Lyon [C]. Their presentation on the Blackpool Illuminations prompted an unprecedented professional pledge to furthering the potential social and economic utility of vernacular illumination and led to further consultations with light designers from Columbia, France, Italy, Germany, China and Sweden. The research has also underpinned the development of certified qualifications for professional place managers in association with the MMU-affiliated Institute of Place Management <http://www.placemanagement.org/>. Millington's research has directly contributed to the Institute's development and delivery of a Masters programme in Place Management, an introductory diploma and international certificate, all of which have been lauded for their transformative effect on professional practice. This professional accreditation has been awarded to 48 place managers since 2008, and as one attendee testifies: *"The research context helped me to gain vital learning and knowledge which has been instrumental in shaping both my career and my understanding of the complexities in place management. The professional qualification has assisted my career enormously"* [D]. Research findings have also been shared with professionals at the annual Streetscapes conference in 2010 organised by RUDI <http://www.rudi.net/>, a national organisation for knowledge sharing about urban development for both professionals and academics.

The research has directly impacted upon cultural and creative policy and community development in a number of areas. Firstly, it has influenced the strategy of the Blackpool Illuminations Team. Edensor and Millington were consulted by the Director of Blackpool Illuminations, <http://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Services/G-L/Illuminations/> [E] on the basis of their research into visitor experience, which reveals how local lighting design can provide a more situated and grounded expertise that pre-empts homogenising tendencies. Their advice was subsequently incorporated into the department's strategic plans and included in a successful bid for financial support from Blackpool Council, which highlights the potential of the research to inform planning and stimulate collaborative research across the academic/professional divide. Secondly, the North-West Coastal Forum, which brings together stakeholders to promote sustainable management of the regional coastline, invited Millington in 2011 to discuss the policy implications of his research findings. In addition, the Littoral Society, an international network of coastline policy makers, invited Millington to utilise data from the Blackpool research to provide a workshop on lighting and coastal regeneration to industry professionals at their 2010 international conference. Thirdly, to develop further collaborative work with the PLDA, designers Sharon Stammers and Martin Lupton, members of the Social Light Movement [F], a philanthropic movement dedicated to improving light provision for people and communities, were invited to MMU in 2010 to deliver a public seminar that addressed the social uses of illumination. Their visit initiated the writing of a co-authored work-in-progress paper, which seeks to develop innovative theoretical perspectives in direct complementation of the designers' practical expertise. The next step in this collaboration will be a social lighting event scheduled for 2014 and involving hands-on collaboration with PLDA to devise more creative ways for illuminating the Bentley Housing Association in Manchester and an adjacent section of the Mancunian Way, which will exemplify the broader potential for making Manchester's public lighting at once more diverse and sustainable.

The important role of Edensor and Millington's expertise in securing and consolidating support for the archiving and exhibiting of popular heritage collections is evidenced a statement from the Head of Heritage at Blackpool Council, to add academic weight to a subsequently successful bid (awarded January 2012) to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The award has assisted 'with the

documentation and re-storage of the Illuminations Collection' [G], making the collection available to the public, particularly schools. Furthermore, Edensor has recently been invited to collaborate with a senior curator at Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, on a public exhibition for 2014 that will combine their academic and curatorial expertise to showcase the history of urban illumination and enhance popular understanding of its cultural evolution and contemporary relevance.

The research has also contributed significantly to public engagement. Millington collaborated with MMU's North-West Film Archive (NWFA) to host a presentation of historic film footage of the Blackpool Illuminations to over 70 people at Manchester's City Art Gallery in March 2013. Urbis Research Forum, a public forum for debating issues concerning urban regeneration and development in Manchester (<http://urbisresearchforum.wordpress.com/upcoming-events/>), initiated and co-founded by another UoA23 researcher (Holloway), invited Edensor and Millington in June 2013 to elaborate on the broader implications of their work. Their research has also been instrumental in creating a forum for collaboration and intellectual exchange through the recently established website-cum-blog 'Light Research at MMU' (<http://www.lightresearch.mmu.ac.uk/>), which provides an interactive resource for researchers and lighting professionals at an international level, and moreover serves as a device for public engagement. Beyond this, Edensor and Millington's lighting research has also contributed to broader academic, professional and media deliberations. The contemporary relevance of the debate on how illumination could be more creatively utilised by professionals to improve urban environments, enhance sustainability and develop place-making strategies is indicated by increasing media interest in the research, resulting, for example, in an invitation to contribute to the discussion about Christmas and taste on BBC Radio 3's *Thinking Aloud* in 2010 [H]. The research made a further significant contribution to public debate with an article in the *Manchester Evening News* and two appearances by Millington on BBC *Look North* in February 2013. Millington has also helped to enhance place-management activities along the Oxford Road Corridor, an important thoroughfare and economic and cultural quarter in Manchester city centre, by lending his research expertise to a high-profile design competition focused on improving a local "sense of place", which also included contributions from Transport for Greater Manchester, the Arup firm and Manchester City Council [I].

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[A] Corroboration available from ex-Head of Cultural Strategy Manchester City Council / Independent Creative Consultant

[B] Edensor and Millington (2010) 'Creating festivity: household Christmas light displays and community cohesion', in *Lighting Journal*, 75(3): 34-40. Full supporting correspondence on file from ex-Chair of The PLDA (Professional Lighting Design Association) <http://www.pld-a.org/>, also ex-editor of the *Lighting Matters* journal, corroborating reach of impact on professional lighting community.

[C] Link to evidence of Millington and Edensor involvement in The LUCI Association (Lighting Urban Community International) annual conference *Fete Des Lumieres*:

<http://www.luciassociation.org/> and conference details:

[http://www.fetedeslumieres2009.lyon.fr/lumieres/sections/en/about\\_the\\_festival/conferences/conferences](http://www.fetedeslumieres2009.lyon.fr/lumieres/sections/en/about_the_festival/conferences/conferences)

[D] Correspondence on file from Chief Operating Officer, City Centre Bid, Liverpool corroborating the impact of the research on professional place-management qualifications.

[E] Testimonial from Director of Blackpool Illuminations, corroborating impact on cultural and visitor strategies.

[F] The Social Light Movement <http://sociallightmovement.com/>

[G] Full supporting letter from Head of Heritage, Blackpool Borough Council available on file, corroborating impacts on Blackpool's tourist strategy and subsequent bidding activities resulting from the research: [heather.morrow@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:heather.morrow@blackpool.gov.uk)

[H] BBC Radio 4 – Thinking Allowed: *Class at Christmas*. Broadcast 27<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00wr5mw>

[I] <http://www.placenorthwest.co.uk/news/archive/11862-winners-chosen-in-corridor-contest.html>