

## Title: Opening Doors

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019

Venue: Kings College London, Science Gallery



Universities, museums, performance venues, football clubs and other organisations are looking at how to connect with new 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences and create places for diverse communities to come to, enjoy, interact and enjoy a range of different activities.

Following an initial introduction comparing two projects in Helsinki and Santiago de Compostela, one the new Central Library in the heart of Helsinki described as a ‘living meeting place’ which in less than a year has achieved amazing success, and the other, the

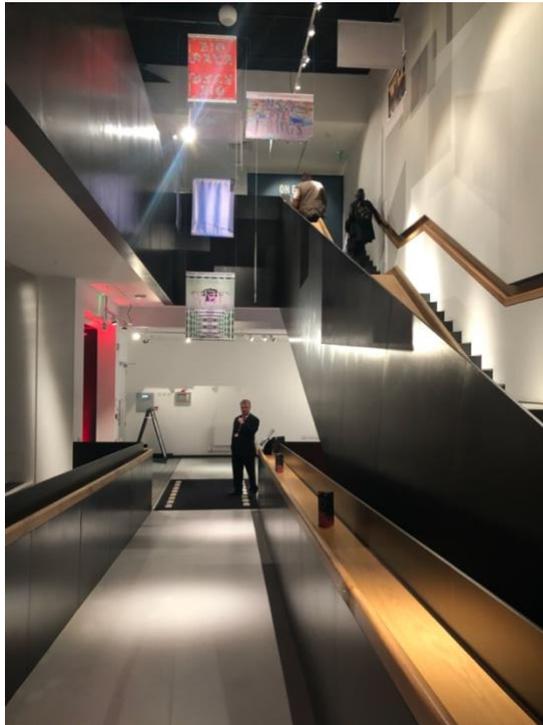


Gaias City of Culture on the outskirts of Santiago, an architectural masterpiece which is underutilised and vastly over budget, now being completed with the Fontán Building for Galicia’s three universities and a heritage study centre, delegates at the event ‘Opening Doors’ held on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019 in the new Science Gallery, King’s College London, heard from five different organisations who have completed or are planning projects that will make a difference:

- University and Community in NW Cambridge: Heather Topel, Project Director, NW Cambridge development
- Open Doors at the Royal Opera House: Rawden Pettit, Associate Director, Stanton Williams
- The Strand/Aldwych project: Ruchi Charravarty: Head of Place Shaping, Westminster City Council
- The V&A at Stratford: Catherine Ince, Chief Curator, V&A East
- The Science Gallery London: Tim Henbrey, Operations Director at the Science Gallery, London

The University and the City of Cambridge have had an intimate relationship going back hundreds of years, but the physical constraints of the city meant the university had an urgent need for good quality affordable accommodation to be able to recruit and retain academic and support staff. The solution is being achieved at Eddington, a 150 ha site in NW Cambridge. In planning this development, the University recognised that it was creating an ambitious new extension to the City for a community of 8,500 people which needed to be high-quality, sustainable and long-lasting and includes a primary school (which also links to the teacher training and educational research at the University), nursery schools, a flexible community space which has already been very successful for a wide range of different events and a market square at the heart of the development.

Community involvement has been key, not only in the varied community activities which take place, in the shaping of the development and the public spaces, but also in important aspects such as the street names.



The Royal Opera House in Covent Garden for 300 years, during which time it has evolved in different ways. While the 1999 redevelopment had brought all the different departments of the Royal Opera House together and created facilities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Opera House wished to evolve further with its ambitious 'Open-Up' project to transform itself from a place which was, to many people, inaccessible unless you had a ticket for a performance or an event, to one which was open all day, while also enabling flexible ways to use its spaces, with activities for new audiences and to excite a new generation of opera and dance lovers. Spaces have been opened up, extended and connected together to enable activities to take place throughout the building, to provide views into areas such as the Costume Department and to create places for Covent Garden visitors to meet, eat and drink

throughout the day, whether in the ground floor café or the rooftop terrace with its views out over Covent Garden.

Moving a little south, the £28 million Strand-Aldwych project which will transform the area for visitors has three aims: to reduce traffic circulation, improve the extremely poor air quality, and to create an identity to the area which is a bridge between Covent Garden and the South Bank.

Critically, a great deal of time has been taken to work with around 70 local stakeholders on what sort of place they wanted to achieve, the connections with the cultural and education institutions, which themselves have been running new programmes of activities and the future of the historic church which at the moment is a traffic island. Stakeholders agreed that they wanted something more creative than Trafalgar Square: a place where art was created, not just displayed, where music was rehearsed and composed, not just performed. There has been a wide consultation on the proposals which has paid off, with 1500 responses of which 74% have been supportive. Challenges for the future will be how to manage and curate the new spaces alongside the other public spaces in the area and how to ensure sustainability in the long term.

One of the 2012 London Olympic successes has been the ongoing transformation of Stratford into a new quarter of London, enabling organisations such as UCL, the University of the Arts and the Victoria & Albert Museum to plan and develop new facilities. The announcement of closure of the Museum's existing storage building near Olympia, to which there has only been limited public access provided a challenge and an opportunity for the Victoria and Albert Museum to look at its planned two new developments at Stratford and to consider how the Museum could be experimental, do things in new ways, both physical and virtual, show many of the wonderful objects which are in storage, attract and engage younger audiences and

connect into the artistic communities in the four local boroughs, along with a partnership with the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC.

The Science Gallery, London has sprung out from its origins at Trinity College Dublin and is part of a unique international network developing in universities across the world as a place where 'science and arts collide'. The Gallery has no collection of its own and runs three free exhibitions a year, focussed on 15 to 24 year olds, along with a programme of related events that partner with, and showcase, research carried out at the university and link with users in its sister NHS Trusts. It also acts as a research tool through visitor engagement. Commercial activities, including the now-popular café, are essential to support the funding from the university and the Gallery aims to connect with young people in the adjacent boroughs in South London. In doing this, it supports student ambassadors who gain skills and experience as they interact with the public and a Leaders' programme of young people who organise events and provide the gallery with input from its key audience. Only a year old, it has already been a great success.

Following the presentations, discussion focused on what are the key factors for success which were suggested as:

- Focused and ongoing communication with partners and stakeholders;
- Knowing what it is that you want to achieve, who you want to connect with and why;
- People, Processes and Interaction all through the project;
- Vision, Ambition and Commitment from the senior team;
- Persistence, with senior champions in the organisation that can keep the project moving as inevitable staff changes occur;
- Strong leadership for the physical project and for innovation and change in the organisation.

Many thanks to the Science Gallery and King's College London for hosting the event, to the speakers and to the sponsors LTS Architects and James Hardy/Farmacell.

**KING'S**  
*College*  
**LONDON**

LTS Architects

 **JamesHardie**<sup>TM</sup>

**fermacell**<sup>®</sup>