

European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools (ECLAS) Conference, Rapperswil Switzerland, 10-14 September, 2016.

I've recently returned from two months study in Europe, during which time I presented the preliminary findings of my PhD research at this year's ECLAS conference in Switzerland. My research investigates the nature of the landscape architect's design expertise and how this engages with communities and the design of public space.

Over 200 participants from 30 countries attended the conference. The theme was "**Bridging the Gap**" and I was invited to give an oral presentation titled, *Bridging the Gap between Expertise and Engagement: an exploration of elegance and design process*.

While much is understood about the importance of community involvement in the design of public space, relatively little research has been carried out on the application of the landscape architect's design expertise in this context. This is of course surprising given that landscape architects are interested in the relationship between people and place and in generating new possibilities for transforming communities through design.

Christchurch is a rich context in which to explore the nature of design expertise given the tensions that have emerged in the city post-earthquake. My research investigates the design and public engagement process of Albion Square in Lyttelton, which was one of the first urban space projects designed and constructed in Christchurch since the earthquakes.

Public engagement is most often focused on appropriate process and inclusion, which appears to use different decision making processes than designers typically adopt. The relevance of my research to the conference was in sharing my findings of how landscape architects 'bridge this gap' in their engagement with the public to achieve both inclusive and elegant design outcomes.

One of the benefits of presenting at the conference was that it enabled me to gain feedback on my findings given the large network of educators that were present, representing universities and practices across Europe. I met and talked with many other PhD students engaged in landscape architecture research and it was valuable being exposed to a diverse number of research initiatives that are relevant to my area of interest. The ongoing contacts will be very useful.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Canterbury branch of the NZFGW for your generous support in helping me to attend this conference.

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