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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 730280.



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Lyon's Festival of Lights: study of the process that led to the current form of the event

— *Overview* —

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Introduction

Both in France and abroad, Lyon is now inextricably linked with the Festival of Lights. This event, directly founded on the city's 8 December tradition during which residents place tealights in their windows, has bolstered Lyon's expertise in lighting and raised the city's profile around the world. An important moment for heritage enhancement, this annual event has become part of Lyon's identity and is a driving force behind its growth.

This document provides an overview of a study carried out from July 2018 to February 2019. It is based on documentary sources, particularly City of Lyon Archives and interviews with people directly involved in the design and implementation of the Festival of Lights, from 1989 to the present.

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The study aims to both share and capitalise on Lyon's experience. It seeks to answer questions from ROCK project partners about the factors that led to the success of the event while also providing the City of Lyon with a record of the process that transformed a local tradition into the major annual event it has become.

Our choice of sources, and our desire to create a living memory of the event through oral testimonials, necessarily limited the scope of the study: we started with the 1980s, but the first efforts to create an event around 8 December occurred as early as the 1970s. The records we examined came from the City of Lyon, the people who gravitated around the municipality, and the internal documents and external communications produced by the city's agents, service providers, elected officials, and employees.

We retrace the "production of the Festival of Lights" through 4 main approaches:

- A chronological approach that identifies major milestones, key events, and moments of continuity and disruption
- A contextual approach that places the Festival of Lights in its environmental, political, economic, and cultural context
- A stakeholder ecosystem approach that examines how the Festival of Lights was designed and the links between all those involved in its production, in both the public and private sphere
- And an assessment of the Festival of Lights' most significant impacts by examining the markers of its success and its current challenges

1. From political strategy to technical development

1.1 — The 1970s-1980s, the first impulses

Starting in the second half of the 1970s, a community celebration featuring urban entertainment was organised around 8 December. At this time, residents of Lyon went out into the streets with their families to see the tealights placed in people's windows and the decorative lights strung in shop windows. The city also organised several forms of entertainment.

In the 1980s, 8 December was still an important religious holiday in Lyon. The traditional candlelight procession up to the Basilica of Fourvière was a constant thread in the celebration of this Marian feast. Variants were occasionally introduced, initiated by citizens or community organisations, but eventually petered out: illuminations in shop windows, street performances, etc. The 8 December festivities also became an excuse for student revelry, particularly in the Old Lyon historic district. The municipality felt the need to reinvent and reclaim this tradition.

It was also during this time that Lyon's expertise in lighting began to emerge. The city created a public lighting department in 1976, gradually providing it with significant resources and a mandate for action. The illumination of large buildings and shopping streets in the early 1980s laid the foundations for a new approach to lighting that went beyond safety and function to an interest in aesthetics to create an urban atmosphere through special lighting. This approach gradually became Lyon's trademark.

The 1980s were also marked by cultural renewal and vitality. This was driven by a political desire to expand the city's cultural offerings and led to the creation of performance halls, cultural events, and special programming for young audiences.

1.2 — The turning point at the end of the 1980s: from inspiration to first steps

Michel Noir began his first term as Mayor of Lyon in 1989. The new Mayor and his team, including Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning Henry Chabert, had new ideas to promote Lyon and supported proactive efforts to beautify the city, including lighting. The first Lighting Plan was launched at the very beginning of this first term. The City of Lyon's elected officials and technicians drew inspiration from other places, travelling to Milan and Barcelona to study their practices.

In 1989, the beginnings of a Festival of Lights also emerged as part of an events-based strategy. This contributed to the development of other public policies in Lyon (urban planning, economic development, tourism, and international outreach). Within the municipal government, discussions on how to stop the "deterioration" of the 8

December event was tied to efforts to create a celebration that would help define Lyon.

The approach combined international outreach with local tradition by drawing on the event's roots in Lyon's community tradition, while also seeking to attract outside visitors. The idea was to draw on the history of Lyon's celebrations and inspiring events such as the Fête des Merveilles that was held along the River Saône in the Middle Ages. At the same time, an attempt was made to change perceptions the 8 December illuminations and distinguish it from the Advent lighting many cities offered during the holiday season.

The city organised or supported events that took the form of sound and light shows. One inspiration at that time seems to have been a river cruise organised by Navig'Inter on Lake Grangent, in the Loire: elected officials and technicians were invited on a trip that featured audio commentary highlighting the local heritage seen from the boat.

On 8 December 1989, the Traboules Blues event in the Pentes de la Croix Rousse neighbourhood was a resounding success. It was a sound and light show that was not originally connected to discussions about renewing the 8 December event. Rather, it sought to address urban development issues in response to the neighbourhood's gentrification, which was creating new uses and ways of living. A renewed focus on heritage enhancement also put renovation of the neighbourhood's deteriorating *traboules* (corridors through buildings that are typical of the area) on the public agenda. The event was a form of "diversion through the spectacular" that served to unite people with divergent interests around the importance of protecting this particular local heritage.

With support from the SERL¹, this event brought together those who would become the driving force behind the future Lyon Lumière Festival in 1999. Henry Chabert, Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning, was the elected official who provided the most direct support to this initiative. Traboules Blues served as an important example in subsequent discussions about the Festival of Lights, because of the city's organisation of the event was tied into urban development goals and its use of sound and light to create an itinerant show that put the spotlight on a heritage feature.

1.3 — The 1990s: a city transformed by lighting

The Lighting Plan that was developed at the beginning of Michel Noir's mandate in 1989 went into effect in 1990. It was one expression of the urban transformation strategy being promoted by a political team with a very specific vision that was integrated into its planning strategy. Along with the Lighting Plan, a Colour Plan was launched in 1989, as were other thematic plans (for public spaces, green spaces, water, the urban skyline — the Lyon site — neighbourhood identity, etc.) which aimed

¹ Société d'Équipement et d'Aménagement du Rhône et de Lyon (an urban development agency)

to beautify, reveal, and show off the city's monuments. It provided an overarching approach to the city's beautification.

Alongside the implementation of the first Lighting Plan, the 8 December event underwent a period of renewal with a new approach to programmes, performances, and multi-stakeholder work. Through it remained formally associated with André Maréchal, the Deputy Mayor for Celebrations and International Outreach, the 8 December Festival was already beginning to reflect Henry Chabert's urban strategy.

The first 8 December shows, including Illumina'Saône in 1990, started with the rivers. Thanks to connections made with work carried out under the Lighting Plan, 8 December illuminations extended to farther off districts by illuminating their monuments as well. A new tradition had begun: inaugurating new buildings by illuminating them on 8 December as part of the Lighting Plan.

The public enthusiastically supported the very first suggestions, and the event was immediately successful. The rapid popularity of the 8 December Festival also stemmed from Michel Noir's media presence and promotional efforts outside Lyon, particularly Henry Chabert's outreach to national media.

This led to the gradual institutionalisation of a once spontaneous community celebration. One example was the role of business owners and community organisations, who became "actors" in the Festival, whereas they had previously participated as residents of Lyon.

Efforts to develop a real "branding strategy" began in the early 1990s. It started with the choice of a name. A logo was created in 1991, along with other communication materials: in 1992, the first coloured banners with the 8 December logo were placed in the streets.

In the middle of the 1990s, momentum created around the 8 December Festival petered out, mainly because of a change in the municipal government. At the same time, Lyon's reputation as a permanent lighting expert was growing and being exported abroad: Lyon's teams carried out lighting projects in St Petersburg in 1994, Havana in 1996-1997, and Ho Chi Minh City in 1998. These projects were linked to Lyon's expertise in permanent lighting and conducted jointly with EDF (the French national electric company), Mat' Electrique (a major lighting equipment distributor), and the City of Lyon.

1.4 — The end of the 1990s: scaling up

At the end of the 1990s, there was a new upswing in the 8 December Festival. It was named the "Lyon Lumière Festival" in 1998-1999 under Henry Chabert, who had returned to the urban planning department. The project was founded on the ideas and connections created over 10 years of collaboration between partners, technicians, lighting engineers, and lighting designers.

The change of scale that was already emerging at that time was part of a strategy to bolster Lyon's economic and tourism growth and raise its international profile, building on the foundation established as part of city's work on international projects. During this time, the municipality created a department within the Lyon Urban Community to specifically boost economic and international development.

However, this international outreach strategy did not eliminate the festival's local roots, since local activities remained the most important aspect of the event. At first, the approach remained consistent with the Lighting Plan, including the use of lighting in the urban space: the idea was to go into Lyon's neighbourhoods using lighting as a tool to promote urban revitalisation projects.

An initial project was launched in the *traboules* in 1998, but it wasn't until 1999 that significant resources were allocated for a major event.

This was a symbolic moment, since the Lyon Lumière Festival was part of festivities around the year 2000, requiring a great deal of preparation and coordination on the part of the municipal staff. As soon as the 1999 edition was finished, elected officials praised the success of the event and voted to do it again in December 2000. They highlighted the need to express an "internal" objective as an event for the people of Lyon, and an "external" objective to boost Lyon's profile. The Festival's strategy was clearly focused on reinforcing Lyon's lighting expertise and its international reputation.

The Lyon Lumière Festival was gradually given more resources through the involvement of private partners. The first were EDF and Mat'Electrique, seen as the co-founders of this event.

1.5 — The 2000s: new directions and growth of the Festival of Lights

In 2001, following the elections, a new political team arrived at Lyon City Hall, with Gérard Collomb as Mayor. Starting in 2002, the event organised around 8 December changed its name to the "Festival of Lights". The goal was to combine the Lyon Lumière Festival and 8 December tradition into a single event. The Festival of Lights became part of the City of Lyon's ambitious events policy, which helped raise its international profile. The links between the strategy for the event and the Lighting Plan gradually weakened. The city's work on permanent lighting also shifted under the second Lighting Plan, which continued efforts to expand Lyon's expertise to maintain its status as an urban lighting pioneer.

The Festival of Lights' increasing independence from the Lighting Plan was reflected in the responsibility for organising the Festival shifting from the Public Lighting Department to the newly created Events Department, starting in 2003.

The 2004 edition of the Festival of Lights, which took a contemporary art approach, was considered "a failure" by some. This marked a turning point in its development.

During the following editions of the festival, when the Events Department was entirely responsible for its artistic direction, there was a strong focus on spectacular lighting

performances: first at Place des Terreaux, with the “Joueurs de Lumière” show by Groupe F., a world-renown producer of pyrotechnics events.

Thanks to these major light shows, attendance at the Festival of Lights was quite strong starting in 2005 and continued to increase during the 2000s. Alongside Place des Terreaux, Saint-Jean Cathedral and the Basilica of Fourvière became iconic sites for the event's programming. Collaboration with artists brought new ideas to these light shows. Student experiments were also encouraged, facilitating expansion to other parts of the city.

2 — Lyon's particular context

2.1 Lyon, city of light

At the end of the 1980s, in a context that was conducive to an exploration of lighting issues, the lighting professions truly emerged. They were able to flourish in projects initiated through the Lighting Plan and the Festival of Lights. Different forms of light were put on display in the Lyon area: natural light, with exceptional sites stemming from the city's location at the confluence of two rivers; the artificial light utilised by Lyon's Lumière brothers, cinematographic pioneers; and the spiritual light of the tealights displayed on 8 December. Lyon's natural light and traditions were a constant source of inspiration to artists.

In this specific context, lighting design in Lyon began developing in the late 1980s. With the Lighting Plan, lighting engineers began working on public spaces. The city's lighting design had initially focused on function, safety, and urban traffic needs, and paid little attention to scenography and aesthetic or artistic considerations. The lighting designer profession emerged at that time and took on greater importance in the 1990s when Lyon became a fertile canvas for expression. Through the work of lighting engineers and designers, buildings and public spaces became an open-air décor, transformed by lighting that created luminous atmospheres and nocturnal landscapes. At the end of the 1980s, the lighting professions became more organised and the association of lighting designers and engineers (ACE) was created by pioneers who brought their creative expertise to public spaces and mobilised their professional networks.

2.2 — A city revealed by urban transformation and heritage enhancement based on lighting

Starting in the late 1980s, lighting became a critical component of the city's urban development and revitalisation strategies. This approach emerged at a time when urban heritage efforts began including the city's historic districts, which had previously been slated for destruction.

During Henry Chabert's first term as Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning in 1989, he began promoting a new urban development strategy with lighting at its core. Changing perceptions of urban heritage influenced major urban planning projects. In Lyon, this was driven by residents early on, particularly in the Vieux Lyon historic district, before being addressed through public policies.

This shift in approach occurred in a particular context in which Lyon's city centre was becoming gentrified. This led to property speculation and a new perception of public spaces and their uses. The urban development and heritage promotion policy needed to take all these factors into account. This context contributed to the emergence of the Traboules Blues project, which sought to unite Lyon's residents and elected officials around the shared goal of preserving, rather than privatising, the *traboules* as important components of the city's local heritage.

Lighting became one aspect of a comprehensive approach to urban renewal centred on a multi-partner framework with upstream discussions on the design of public spaces. During Henry Chabert's time in office, strong connections were made between urban planning and the events-based approach organised around 8 December festivities. This led to a real analysis of urban composition based on the conditions of the site and the heritage in question. It was the beginning of a tradition that was destined to last: urban transformations, the city's beautification strategy (Lyon's 2010 Master Plan) and heritage enhancement projects (notably following Lyon's inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1998) were revealed each year by the Festival of Lights' illuminations.

2.3 — A wealthy city that mobilised its networks of influence

Lyon had prudently managed its budget, which gave the city the resources to directly implement its various urban beautification projects, without taking on debt. Nevertheless, public expenditure remained fairly restrained at first, since the first events around 8 December were given limited resources, mainly from the existing Urban Lighting Department's budget. The close connection between the political and economic spheres also led to the development of public/private partnerships (EDF, electrical equipment companies, etc.). They first supported the Lighting Plan, and then the Festival of Lights, with financial, human, or technological resources. These partnerships were formed in the specific context of the renewal of the city's electrical distribution concession. EDF worked very closely with the City of Lyon because the stakes were so high for the company. This renewal also provided EDF with an opportunity to experiment with new content and ways of doing things at the local level that were nonetheless being observed at the national level. A "Lighting" amendment (including a grant) was included in the concession contract and EDF co-financed the international projects relating to the Lighting Plan.

2.4 — A favourable political context

One of the main driving forces behind the development of the Festival of Lights was strong political commitment, which persisted despite changes in elected officials and their staff. The projects continued to receive support, and new priorities were set, particularly starting with Gérard Collomb's first term in office.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the first Lighting Plan was developed and the initial events around 8 December took place, stakeholders felt that “anything was possible”. The political context fostered innovation, creativity, and inventiveness. New Mayor Michel Noir's team included elected officials from the private sector who trusted their teams to find ideas and conduct experiments around lighting. The international outreach policy had not yet been developed, as it was not well understood, and the notion of attracting tourists was still in its infancy.

This climate of trust and openness to experimentation continued, at least around the Lighting Plan, allowing further progress to be made under Mayors Raymond Barre and Gérard Collomb. Work on the city's beautification, heritage enhancement, and marketing continued and remained consistent. Meanwhile, local expertise around lighting grew and became known outside Lyon. The controversial 2004 edition of the Festival marked a shift in how elected officials interacted with their staff around the organisation of the event. The success of the event, which had a positive impact on the economy and tourism and raised the city's profile, led to greater political control over programming choices.

3 — Genesis and development of the Festival of Lights' stakeholder network

3.1 — Development of a multi-stakeholder approach

The human factor was the most powerful driving force behind the expansion of the Festival of Light. Political commitment and the combination of technical and artistic expertise and talent helped turn the event into the world-renowned festival it has become. Motivated by a shared passion for lighting and their city, professionals with different approaches and backgrounds joined forces and overcome their misunderstandings. They sought to innovate and experiment by pooling their skills and combining their expertise. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the 8 December event in Lyon had become a landmark for all the lighting professions. Conscious of the technical, economic and tourist potential of this event, private partners began providing technical and financial support and mobilising their networks.

Until the end of the 1990s, the Festival of Lights was put on by a combination of elected officials, city technicians, and private stakeholders. The Public Lighting Department responsible for organising the festival went through an intense period, with very long

days. The ability to rely on human resources was key to organising an event with limited financial support. The municipality also innovated by “recruiting” volunteers, which was quite uncommon in local government.

The city also extended its reliance on the community to the private sector to obtain additional funding for the event. Technicians, artists, lighting designers and elected officials solicited their personal and professional networks. They visited suppliers and producers of technical equipment to explain the project and ask them to contribute their technical innovations.

The growth of the Lyon Lumière Festival from 1998-1999 onwards was founded on the partnership that had been created through the Lighting Plan with EDF and Mat'Electrique. An initial public-private project group was formed, comprising a limited number of stakeholders, municipal technicians, elected officials, lighting designers, technicians, and private sponsors.

As part of an approach that sought to highlight the different roles of lighting in public spaces, the stakeholders who were already active sought to bring in other talents (in the cognitive sciences, arts, events organisation, etc.) to design the artistic aspects of the event. Artists and designers from different disciplines contributed to the event, year after year.

The creation of private partnerships was intended to ensure the sustainability of the event. While the city had initiated the event, the idea was to find other resources to strengthen the festival. Among the factors that facilitated this partnership network, there was the existence of a well-established lighting ecosystem in Lyon, since the Lighting Plan had attracted companies in the sector. Beyond their financial sponsorship, private partners worked with local authorities by helping attract other partners, define a commercial development strategy, test new materials, etc.

3.2 — The emergence and formation of an ecosystem

As the Festival of Lights grew into a major event, the municipal government gradually established a dedicated organisational and management framework. Though the people who were involved in the early 1990s spoke of municipal “artisanry”, starting with the Lyon Lumière Festival the organisation of the Festival became more and more codified.

At the end of the 1990s, the Lyon Lumière Festival was organised by the Public Lighting Department, particularly in the wake of the international lighting projects that had bolstered Lyon's lighting expertise. The festival was a way to capitalise on this experience and innovate by bringing in new talent. As part of this new mission, technical personnel were required to learn a somewhat new profession, because the Public Lighting Department was supposed to work on permanent, non-events-related lighting. The creative challenges associated with managing an event were not always aligned with the municipality's organisational structure, particularly in terms of procedures.

Design of the Festival became more structured, as did the role of Lighting Plan's long-standing partners. In 1999, EDF contributed a part-time project manager. Mat'Electric supported the festival's commercial development. A steering committee (including elected officials) and a technical committee were created.

However, this structure changed during Gérard Collomb's first term. In 2003, he created an Events Department. Its role was to coordinate all major municipal events, including the Festival of Lights. Technicians from the Urban Lighting Department continued to participate, setting up installations and carrying out their own projects every year. But they began to play a less important role in managing and organising the event. Meanwhile, other players became more involved: the mayors of each of Lyon's districts, business associations, and the city's religious authorities.

Following the creation and development of the Events Department, the Festival of Lights' organisation became more professional. Between 1998 and 2003, artistic and technical directors split their time between the organisation of the event and their main job. From that point on, the City of Lyon's in-house staff began organising the Festival of Lights.

Starting in 2002, at Mat'Eléctrique's initiative, a Partners' Club was formed. The goal was to find additional support to expand the Festival of Lights without relying too much on municipal funding. Outreach efforts first targeted companies in the lighting field, through Mat'Eléctrique's network. Then efforts were made to diversify support by reaching out to other sectors. The Partners' Club later became a non-profit organisation. Gradually, the Partners' Club created a more formal structure and three partnership levels were established based on the financial contribution to the Festival of Lights: Partner, Official Partner, Lighting Partner.

Artists who wanted to present a project during the Festival of Lights had to fit into the municipality's structure and reply to public calls for tenders. Participation in the Festival of Lights gradually became heavily sought-after, which is why the Events Department decided to develop a network of certified artists in 2016. It drafted a charter and rules describing the criteria for obtaining this certification. As of 2019, there are 35 certified artists. For the City of Lyon, they serve as ambassadors for the Festival of Lights.

4. The Festival of Lights: assessment and prospects

4.1 — Markers of success

The Festival of Lights has become an unqualified success: attendance figures speak for themselves. However, other factors offer insight into its impact on various areas: the affirmation of lighting expertise, the heritage enhancement approach on which the event was based, the development of the city at night, technological advances, and economic development.

1) Lighting expertise

Lighting is now an integral part of Lyon's identity. In fact, during the work carried out as part of the Lyon 2020² forward-looking plan, lighting was defined as one of Lyon's seven symbols (the others are solidarity, health, rivers, gastronomy, dance/performing arts, fashion/creation, cinema, and sport). The city was able to position itself as a laboratory for science/art/industry and developed real expertise in those areas.

Several factors led to Lyon's increasing reputation as a city with lighting expertise, particularly Lyon's work on foreign projects. Lyon first promoted its expertise outside the city through permanent lighting projects with twinned cities in the 1990s as part of the Lighting Plan.

Gradually, the city's expertise in temporary illuminations became increasingly sought after abroad (in addition to its permanent lighting know-how). This was the result of the city inviting foreign delegations to Lyon during the Festival of Lights, and its efforts to export the expertise of the festival's lighting designers. In 2009, the City of Leipzig asked the city to work on a lighting event during the 20th anniversary of the peaceful revolution. Other projects followed in Birmingham, Mauritius, and Frankfurt.

Initially, as with the permanent lighting projects in the 1990s, Lyon exported its expertise and technology free of charge to twinned cities. Starting in 2013, given the high demand, the city developed a Project Management Assistance service. As a result, the city was not only paid for its expertise but above all was able to leverage it to raise its profile. As part of this approach, projects were carried out both in France (Château de Chazay, Menuires ski resort, City of Dijon) and abroad (Dubai, Quito, Montreal, Hong Kong).

2) Events expertise

Through its organisation of the Festival of Lights, Lyon developed real expertise in major events organisation that is recognised outside the city, particularly the organisation of major sporting events.

The city has managed an increasingly successful event, with new artistic and technical feats every year and constantly increasing attendance, all within a complex national context, particularly after the 2015 terrorist attacks (followed by implementation of a strengthened Vigipirate [anti-terrorist] plan). The municipality acquired this expertise during the 2000s by constantly learning and adapting its organisational framework. The city expanded its skills by managing the major Festival of Lights event in terms of safety, parking, cleanliness, management of flows, etc.

² Lyon 2020 is a forward-looking programme organised into workshops led by the Lyon Urban Community in 2005-2006 (see the timeline at the end of the document)

3) An integral part of Lyon's living heritage

The Festival of Lights is now a world-renowned event. Lyon's membership in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (2008) in the digital arts sector has further bolstered its image by revealing the city's ability to leverage creativity as a strategic component of its development and allowing it to consider new forms of cooperation. At the local level, there are several objectives for the city's participation in the network, such as developing major events that incorporate digital culture, creating innovative projects that highlight the impact of digital technology on cultural policies, and supporting the development of the local digital arts scene.

In France and abroad, Lyon is now identified with the Festival of Lights. With nearly 3 million visitors per year, the Festival has become the fourth largest event in the world in terms of attendance.

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4) A component of Lyon's attractiveness and its economic development

The Festival of Lights was a catalyst for Lyon's economic development. It helped change the city's image and was key to reinforcing Lyon's new attractiveness. It is a real showcase that spotlights the city, its local companies, and its partners. The Festival's impact is not a coincidence but was part of a strategy that had these goals in mind from the very first pre-project for the Lyon Lumière Festival in 1997. The idea was to develop this potential for increased attractiveness, which had already become clear in the context of the Lighting Plan. In 1996-97, Philips, the world leader in the lighting industry, opened a 47,000 m² international showroom (OLAC — Outdoor Lighting Application Center) 30 kilometres from Lyon, now dedicated to smart and connected lighting. This is an important recognition of Lyon's expertise and sends a strong message.

Today, the Festival of Lights is part of Lyon's external development policy, particularly through OnlyLyon, the international branding and marketing programme created in 2007 by the 13 institutional partners who share the same goal of promoting Lyon abroad. ADERLY (agency for the economic development of the Lyon area) understood the importance of a dynamic and innovative culture and events policy in attracting executives and, consequently, their companies. For several years now it has been promoting the Festival of Lights and inviting companies that are considering a move to Lyon.

Starting in 2007, a brand strategy was developed around the Festival of Lights. The Partners' Club first used the brand for tie-in products given to the event's sponsors. Then from 2011 onwards, the "Lyon 8 December — Festival of Lights" brand was directly developed and marketed by the City of Lyon. Tie-in products were launched with varying degrees of success, in collaboration with the festival's private partners.

5) Technological innovations

The Lighting Plan helped produce technological innovations by creating demand for new materials, launching competitions and international experiments, and attracting experimental sites such as OLAC to the Lyon area.

To a lesser extent, the Festival of Lights has also contributed to technological innovations. The materials used in the first years were not adapted to outdoor use. Those working on the event devised creative solutions but also generated market demand that manufacturers sought to meet by producing and selling new materials for outdoor settings. And events-based lighting has had a direct influence on urban lighting.

6) A spectacular reflection of Lyon's nightlife.

In just a few decades, the Lighting Plan changed the city's nighttime appearance and urban atmosphere. The city's lighting revealed a new nocturnal landscape. Starting in the 1990s, residents of Lyon gradually got to know their city at night. The Festival of Lights was the most spectacular expression of this nocturnal world created through lighting, which appealed to night owls. Lyon's nightlife boomed, and residents (re)-discovered their city at night.

4.2 — Multiple perspectives on the Festival's history and future

The strong personal commitment of those who were or are currently involved in the Festival of Lights is closely linked with the mark they each sought to leave on the event. The vision associated with the Festival of Lights in people's recollections is tinged with these different approaches to the event's position in Lyon's landscape and its connection to religious tradition.

The Festival of Lights has become a major community event with roots in a religious festival, which itself is based on pagan rites. The Festival continuously seeks to reconcile its multiple origins and the need to keep updating it, to strike a balance between grounding itself in its traditions and looking to the future. Starting with the very first events in the early 1990s, there has always been a tension between the desire to update and preserve tradition. Testimonials about the origin of the event reveal the continuity of the tradition of the 8 December Feast — the religious Marian celebration — for some, and the reinvention of a secular celebration — a community event with an artistic bent — and reflection about its audiences. Religious and secular, tradition and modernity: these factors intersect and coexist without completely merging.

Similarly, some of those who contributed to the development of the Festival of Lights now feel nostalgia for the "tealight festival", the community event that residents and business owners once took part in spontaneously. The Festival has changed over time, and now that lighting professionals are involved, shop windows are no longer on display as before. Residents of Lyon still place tealights in their windows on the evening

of 8 December, but the modern version of the Festival of Lights lasts 4 evenings and take place on the city's facades, squares, and streets via light shows. Yet according to some of the people we interviewed, the tealights remain closely identified with a sense of connection to Lyon, a symbol of a tradition that must be preserved.

Some see its drastic departure from the "original festival", whether religious or community-based, real or imagined, as a shift in the wrong direction. They also mentioned the need to return to the roots of the festival and the essence of the event, that of a darkened city reconnecting with the original light.

The Festival, and the meaning ascribed to it by various stakeholders, is thus torn between tradition and modernity, between being a local celebration and a "mega-event" that seeks to draw international crowds. Several of those involved in the first editions thought the Festival was running out of steam, losing its soul and its foundation in Lyon's history. They felt the city's use of the Festival as a marketing tool has turned it into an overly commercial event, distorting the meaning of the Festival and alienating Lyon's residents.

Others pointed to a dichotomy between the artistic and festive aspects of the event and the effects stemming from the change in scale due to its success. Some thought the popularity of the event has undermined the Festival's ability to innovate and experiment, to make artistic projects "accessible", or to use technical skills to adapt to all audiences.

These questions are not as recent as we might expect. At the end of the 1990s, discussions around the prefiguration of the Lyon Lumière Festival highlighted the need to remain connected to its tradition and local roots.

The Festival of Lights has gradually become disconnected from the urban development strategy with which it was linked under the first Lighting Plan. The limitation of the Festival's perimeter to the city centre is one way in which people claimed it had lost its connection to its roots. This re-centring is due to the new security constraints following the 2015 terrorist attacks: a narrowing of its scope, closing off spaces, security measures, etc.

4.3 — Challenges to overcome

Ever since the City of Lyon began investing time and resources into the Festival of Lights in the 1980s, the event has evolved according to changes in politics, new ideas from those involved, and technological innovations. Today, the Festival takes place in a context of increased competition around lighting in France and abroad, as well as security threats. The event must overcome the challenges stemming from this new context, as well as its own success, which requires finding a new balance.

One major challenge is maintaining leadership in the lighting field. This has been a recurring issue for the past twenty years. Competition has only increased, and elected officials are determined to maintain Lyon's leadership status and special position. This

challenge can be seen as an imposition by the operational teams since they don't always see the same risk of losing their leadership.

A second challenge is striking a balance between the local event and international outreach: returning to its local roots, limiting the development of the event, examining the connection of Lyon's residents to the Festival of Lights, and addressing the need to create a narrative around Lyon's historical relationship to light.

A third challenge is to implement innovative ideas in a context of tighter security measures required by the reinforced Vigipirate plan and the remarkable success of the event in recent years, both of which negatively impact perceptions of the Festival. This is mainly because strategies to manage the flow of visitors through more limited routes accentuate the feeling of crowdedness and restrict free movement. The current team has had to overcome the challenges stemming from these new security requirements, which they had not anticipated. Before the terrorist attacks, programming was focused on expanding into new neighbourhoods, such as Part-Dieu. Now the event is limited to the Presqu'île, Old Lyon and Fourvière hill. The prefect in charge of security must approve the event's programming, which also has an impact on the budget. In order to overcome this challenge, the Director of Events is placing the focus on new artists to expand the offering and accompany visitors' strolls along the route.

Another avenue mentioned by some of those involved is the need to improve understanding of how people in Lyon perceive the Festival of Lights. The relationship between Lyon's residents and the Festival of Lights is a major topic in the media every year. To go beyond the anecdotes shared in these reports, the idea is to create a real usage survey among Lyon residents to measure the difference between the government's goals in organising the event, and the ways residents and users understand and perceive it.

Additionally, the Events Department wants the Festival of Lights to become more constant in terms of time, space and connections. The Festival of Lights, once a showcase for the Lighting Plan and permanent light displays, has become known precisely for its ephemeral light. Yet some claim there is work to be done to perpetuate this ephemeral light, to leave a mark, and go beyond a purely event-driven approach. The idea would be ground the event in a long-term approach by allowing art projects to inhabit the public sphere, leaving a more lasting trace of the Festival and the government's investment. Another aspect of this question of long-term viability would be to extend the Festival of Lights' presence beyond December.

The Events Department also mentioned the need to rethink the Festival of Light's governance. This was a topic of discussion even before the first edition of the Lyon Lumière Festival and has also been a source of conflict between the stakeholders involved and elected officials. The Events Department evoked the need to create new forms of governance and organisation that are simpler and more agile to keep developing the Festival. The idea of an ad hoc structure focused on the Festival, with a mixed-ownership funding capacity, was one suggestion. Another is the need to keep an eye on what is being done elsewhere to ensure Lyon's event remains unique.

Conclusion

Through our study, and our interviews with those who helped, at some point in their career, turn the Festival of Lights into the well-known event it has become, we wanted to highlight the different factors that made the Festival of Lights what it is today.

We thought it was important to start with a chronological approach to retrace the Festival's trajectory step by step. This history, which has shown continuity despite changes in political leadership, is that of a city that has chosen to become known for its beautification efforts, with lighting as one major component. It is also closely connected to the Lighting Plan in particular, and even beyond to Lyon's political, technical and artistic history. In this process, permanent and ephemeral lighting are often complementary, yet do not yet function in unison.

Our second approach was contextual, to highlight the different aspects — natural, heritage-related, historical, political — that created fertile ground for the germination and development of the idea of a light-related event on 8 December.

Human factors emerged as the beating heart of this process, which would not have been possible without the commitment, energy, and already existing connections between the political and economic spheres. But equally as important were the interactions between and the skills of the people driven by a passion for lighting and a desire to create an exciting event to energise their city. These ideas and skills were first put to use in Lyon before being exported abroad, helping to raise the international profile of “Lyon, city of lights”.

The last part of this study sought to add to the historical overview by including assessments from those who have contributed to the development of the 8 December event over the past 30 years. We also examined the current challenges and prospects. As a pioneer in the field of lighting, Lyon seems to be at a crossroads today. It has extensive experience in both permanent and ephemeral light, which it has built over the past 30 years. But this experience must constantly be bolstered and updated: in a context of tighter security and an exponential increase in visitors for ephemeral lighting, and the emergence of competing cities in the field of permanent lighting. Lyon's lighting ecosystem also needs to be bolstered, particularly by deepening connections to teaching and research and incorporating user input. This context has forced Lyon to constantly innovate to ensure they don't lose that little extra something that makes the Festival of Lights such a unique event that is strongly rooted in Lyon's culture and the hearts of its residents.

Appendix: Timeline of key events in the development of the Festival of Lights, from 1989 to the present

1. The impetus (from around 1989 to 1995)

1986

- Concert by Jean-Michel Jarre in Lyon in which the words “see you in Houston” were projected onto the façades of the River Saône (some claimed it served as an inspiration).

1989

- [Start of Mayor Michel Noir's term. Henry Chabert is Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning, André Marechal is Deputy Mayor for Celebrations and International Outreach, Christian Boiron is Deputy Mayor for Economic and International Development.](#)
- Development of the 1st Lighting Plan.
- The Traboules Blues project in the Croix Rousse neighbourhood.
- The city's elected officials and technicians witness the light show on Lake Grangent.
- News report on the Festival of Lights on Channel 2/France 3.

1990

- As part of the Lighting Plan, 250 monuments in Lyon are lit up.
- The 8 December event is called the “festival of lights” in the municipality's documents.
- The Illumina'Saône show.

1991

- [End of Christian Boiron's term.](#)
- Theme: Mozart (sound and light) The logo is first used.

1992

- Organisation of light parades from Place A. Briand to Bellecour.
- The opening performance, “The Song of Lights”, is a participatory show organised in the 9th district, a rapidly changing neighbourhood (35 December agency).
- The first coloured banners with the 8 December logo go up.
- The Festival of Lights takes place over three days (from 6 to 8 December).

1994

- Lyon exports its expertise St Petersburg to light up the Hermitage Museum.

1995

- End of Michel Noir's term and beginning of Raymond Barre's term. Henry Chabert, who had wanted to run against Raymond Barre, is named Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning again but has lost political influence.
- The elected official assigned to the Festival of Lights: Michèle Mallard.
- The event runs out of steam until the end of the 1990s.

1996

- Opening of OLAC (Outdoor Lighting Application Center) / Philips' centre for connected and smart lighting.
- Lyon exports its expertise in permanent lighting to Cuba.

2. The foundations (1998-2004)

1997

- The City of Lyon develops a preliminary project to create a "Festival of Light".

1998

- Lyon exports its expertise in permanent lighting to Ho Chi Minh City.
- The first events of the new "Lyon Lumière Festival" are held in the Pentès de la Croix-Rousse neighbourhood.

1999

- The first "real" edition of the Lyon Lumière Festival is held from 3 to 8 December as part of celebrations for the year 2000. They are very successful.
- Involvement of the co-founders: EDF contributes a half-time project manager and provides part of the financing. Mat' électrique is also a partner and makes a financial contribution the following year.
- Registration of the "Lyon Lumières" logo.

2001

- Beginning of Gérard Collomb's first term as Mayor of Lyon.
- Gilles Bona is named Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning.
- The elected official assigned to Festival Lyon Lumière / Festival of Lights: Pascale Bonniel Chalier.
- Representatives from several cities around the world visit Lyon on 8 December.

2002

- The event changes its name: the Lyon Lumière Festival becomes the Festival of Lights (once again).
- Creation of the organisation LUCI (Lighting Urban Community International), an international network to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and good practices.

- Creation of the Partners' Club (City of Lyon/EDF/SONEPAR) and development of the sponsorship policy.

2003

- Creation of the Events Management department led by Jean-François Zurawik. Tensions arise around governance of the event, attempts are made to create an independent office.

2004

- Artistic Director of the Festival of Lights: Claire Peillod (a turning point? Politically, the event was considered a failure, "overly intellectual design"). Nature and Landscape visual / promotion of the event to tourists. Beginning of discussions of the 2nd Lighting Plan through a multi-partner approach.

3. Development (2005-today)

2005

- Oversight of the Festival of Lights shifts to the Events Department.
- Spectacular programming (Place des Terreaux) — extension of the Festival of Lights' scope.
- New constraints and measures to manage visitor flows.
- Development of student experiments during the Festival of Lights.
- Registration of the trademark "Lyon 8 December — Festival of Lights".

2005-2006

- Lyon 2020 work led by the Urban Community's Forward-Looking project. Work on Lyon's symbols, 7 of which were identified, including lighting. Workshops to debate the new Lighting Plan / discussions about maintaining Lyon's leadership in the lighting field.

2007

- A contract to use the "Lyon 8 December — Festival of Lights" trademark is granted to the Partners' Club.

2008

- [Gérard Collomb re-elected as Mayor of Lyon.](#)
- [Elected official assigned to the Festival of Lights: Najat Vallaud-Belkacem.](#)
- Lyon obtains the "Creative City in the Digital Arts" UNESCO label.
- Creation of the Lighting Cluster (Philips/ENTPE/SONEPAR/CDO/Lyon Chamber of Commerce).
- Relaunch of the window lighting competition.

2009

- The Festival of Lights is exported to Leipzig (commemoration of the peaceful revolution) and Mauritius (Divali Festival) — Lyon's ephemeral lighting expertise is increasingly in demand.

2011

- The City of Lyon reclaims the “Lyon 8 December — Festival of Lights” brand and hires an outside company to develop and market tie-in products.

2013

- 78 lighting works are produced for the Festival of Lights.
- The City of Lyon's takes on its first Project Management Assistance assignments in events lighting: at Château de Chazay and then Menuires ski resort.

2014

- [Gérard Collomb re-elected as Mayor of Lyon.](#)
- [Elected officials assigned to the Festival of Lights during this 3rd term: Georges Képénékian and Yann Cucherat.](#)
- Lyon's event lighting expertise is exported to Dubai (Festival of Light).

2015

- Lyon becomes involved in the ROCK/UNESCO project.
- Terrorist attacks in Paris: the 2015 edition is cancelled. A turning point for the festival of lights: security issues limit the scope of the event in the following years restricting it mainly to the Presqu'île (and Tête d'Or park).