

Cities After Dark

Network Journal #05

→ Network Highlights & Progress



Cities After Dark Network Journal #05

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Cities**AfterDark**

The fifth Network Journal of Cities After Dark highlights the activities carried out at both transnational and local level between May 2025 and August 2025.

As the network approaches the final months of its activities, the partners of Cities After Dark have completed the final draft of their Integrated Action Plans (IAPs). These drafts also include details on the implementation framework, outlining **how the actions included in the plan will be financed and monitored on the medium and long-term.**

Stronger cities through the night economy

The transnational meeting hosted in Genoa provided an important opportunity for identifying possible sources of funding for the implementation of the IAPs and for reflecting on how to promote the IAP at local level and use the final months of the network activities for consolidating integrated night policies at local level while strengthening the narrative around the positive role of the night-time economy for sustainable urban development.



Stronger Nights, Sustainable Cities

Shaping Inclusive and Vibrant Night-Time Policies

The Genoa's meeting was also crucial for immersing into the local challenges of the Italian coastal city, and to reflect on the impact of events and festivals on nocturnal vibrancy of the urban areas.

The study visits to Zadar and Varna focused respectively on the decentralization of night-time activities and the improvement of mobility services in nocturnal hours, constituting interesting opportunities for enhancing the connection between local stakeholders and the partners of Cities After Dark, aiming to reinforce the implementation of night policies developed within the network.

The online thematic seminars addressed topics such as innovative urban mobility at night-time, funding strategies for night-time economy and the environmental impact of nocturnal activities. Through a combination between masterclasses and the presentation of case studies from European and global cities, the last online thematic seminars of the series launched by Cities After Dark supported partner cities in developing their IAPs and inspired cities from other URBACT networks in considering the nocturnal dimension in their urban agendas.

At local level, the meetings of the URBACT Local Groups of Cities After Dark contributed to finalize the IAPs, while opening up the conversation on how to transform these participatory groups into more stable forms of governance of the night-time economy. The implementation of Testing Actions in Malaga and Varna was crucial for validating the respective approaches developed to foster cultural and economic vibrancy during nocturnal hours. These actions also provided useful insights from night-time users and stakeholders which will be used for improving the quality of the night policies developed with Cities After Dark.



2 – 4 July 2025

The Transnational Meeting of Genoa



Beyond the Season, Into the City

Festivals Fuel Night-Time Economy

The organization of events and festivals can constitute a boost to the night-time economy of a city, not only during the events themselves but throughout the year. These events help develop new skills in the sector and have an impact on city centres and suburban areas.

The link between the festivals and concerts economy and the overall nocturnal vibrancy of the cities is an interesting element experienced by many partners of Cities After Dark, that are working on switching the focus from a seasonal nightlife towards fostering business and cultural vibrancy and dynamic use of public spaces throughout the year.

Balancing Nightlife, People and Place

Genoa: Culture & Community After Dark

The transnational meeting of Genoa promoted reflection on how the integration between special events and regular cultural programming of the city could significantly enhance different dimensions of the nocturnal life of the cities. While the economic and cultural benefits of a well-curated calendar of music and theatre events are evident, the impact that these activities have on the reorganization of city services for enhancing their accessibility is a topic that deserves to be further explored in order to foster the growth of different segments of the night-time economy.

The dialogue with night stakeholders of the city and different departments of the local authority highlighted the main challenges of the Genoa's nightlife, which range from the delocalization of festivals and after dark cultural activities from the centre to peripheral areas (an interesting element for a city that spans more than 40 kilometers) to the connection between a rich programme of events and festivals with innovative night policies.



The walking tour through the historic city centre, one of the largest in Europe, and the meetings with local stakeholders and bar owners gave to the partners of Cities After Dark a deeper understanding of how hard is to create a balance between the needs of different categories (tourists, residents, entrepreneurs) for reviving an area that is currently targeted by huge plans of urban regeneration but is also facing the potential risks associated to over-touristification.

Experiences like the one of the Giardini Luzzati, a community space located in the heart of the old town, show how the combination between cultural programming, active mediation with the residents and inclusive youth projects can be crucial for the creation of the so-called “third spaces” where it’s possible to experience community-oriented nocturnal activities which are not just focused on alcohol consumption, providing more sustainable and inclusive models for night-time engagement.



Stronger nights through local collaboration

Making the night a positive ground for collaboration with a wide range of local actors, including the local Chamber of Commerce, is an important focus of Genoa’s effort to enhance the skills of various categories of night professionals (such as bartenders and bar owners) and to promote the use of local products in the hospitality sector, so to make night-time economy more sustainable across multiple dimensions.

The dialogue with DJs, cultural actors and night-time entrepreneurs for revitalizing nightlife spots of Genoa through integrated policies was at the heart of the public event hosted by the beach club Tiglé. The event fostered a local conversation on how to bring the night-time economy back to the vibrancy of the 90's while offering a glimpse into a golden era when Italy was a driving force of the Europe's disco culture.

The presentation of Discomute, a photographic project focused on abandoned clubs and discotheques across Italy, sparked the conversation on the new forms of alliances between entrepreneurs, cultural stakeholders and local authorities needed for "making the night great again", in Italy and in Europe.



Bringing nocturnal strategies to life

Financing the Night: From Plans to Action

As showcased by Cities After Dark across its activities, the development of new strategies for enhancing night-time economy depends not only on collaboration but also on the activation of the right resources available at different scales for implementing concrete actions on the ground. That is particularly crucial especially when establishing new mechanisms of public-private partnership, which can be combined with an integrated use of EU, national and local resources for the implementation of the night strategies.

The interactive session with the partners of Cities After Dark explored how to combine different financial resources for implementing the Integrated Action Plans, with a focus on the most urgent actions that could have a tangible impact in improving the nocturnal dimension of the cities.

Funding tools to light up the night

The session, coordinated by the Ad Hoc Expert Alberto Lorente Saiz, highlighted a range of financial tools offered by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund which were used for funding festivals and night programs in cities across Europe, like the Europalia Festival in Brussels.



Urban-Rural Nights

Linking resources to action.

Empowering the partners of Cities After Dark in the use of these tools is essential, also for experimenting interesting connections with the urban-rural dimension (as in the case of the EU Fund for Agricultural Development) which may be crucial for addressing emerging themes like the diversification of night activities through stronger urban-rural linkages.

Testing the use of the Relevance Map for specific actions identified by the partners proved to be an interesting exercise that the partners of Cities After Dark are planning to replicate in their local contexts, in order to involve different departments of the local authorities and local stakeholders in the identification of funding resources, as well as in the development of innovative partnerships for co-creation and co-implementation of the actions.

The state of play of local activities and the implementation frameworks developed by the cities within their IAPs were also explored during the interactive sessions of the Transnational Meeting. The partners discussed the main **challenges that are emerging in terms of implementation and how to proceed in the final months of the network activities to deliver night policies that will help to consolidate the management of the night-time economy in the medium and long term.**

The group reflection on the main contents of the final Handbook on how to create better cities at night showcased useful elements that will be centrale to the Cities After Dark Festival of Tallinn and the local and national events of presentation of the IAP, in order to promote the narrative shift on night-time economy to a higher level and foster the activation of new programs and initiatives at different scales.



Cities After Dark on **Italian Media**

At the occasion of the Transnational Meeting of Genoa, the network received wide media coverage through a press conference hosted by the Deputy Mayor for EU Affairs of Genoa and through interviews with news agencies, national and local media like ANSA, Il Secolo XIX and La Repubblica.

The Lead Expert of Cities After Dark was also featured as special guest by Alex Bianchi DJ on his radio show Timeless on Radio Zena, in an interview that explored the work of the cities of the network and possible strategies for reviving nightlife in Italy and in Europe.

The Study Visits to Zadar and Varna



Exploring Night-Time Innovation

Learning from cities, shaping the night.

Cities After Dark organized a series of study visits to focus on specific topics that emerged from the transnational exchanges within the network. After a first study visit to Berlin in April 2024, which focused on how to make night-time economy a resource for economic and cultural growth, the study visits organized in these months were carried out in some of the cities of the network that are experimenting with innovative approaches to the nocturnal dimension of urban life.

The visit to Zadar: Revitalizing Night- Time Economy Through Stakeholder Collaboration

The delocalization of the night-time economy activity was the main topic of the study visit to Zadar on 12-13 June 2025. This topic is also aligned with the commitment of the Croatian city within the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnership on Sustainable Tourism, in which context Zadar is guiding the implementation of an action on the diversification in space and time of tourism activities, which aims at enhancing the opportunities for residents and visitors with a focus not only on the central areas of the cities.

The approach at the bottom of this action is also at the heart of initiatives like the Kvar Art Festival, which encourages the reuse of public spaces in peripheral areas of the city during the summer months, especially in favor of the residents who feel excluded from the Old Town overcrowded by tourists during the holiday season.



Collaboration for vibrant nights

The study visit constituted an important opportunity to engage with some of the local stakeholders who are actively supporting the City of Zadar in redesigning its night-time offer, while promoting innovative forms of cooperation that are also regenerating abandoned sites for hosting services and cultural activities.

The Youth Center hosted in a former military base is an interesting example of participatory space, explored during the study visit, that hosts 40 local youth associations organizing a wide range of activities, like dance classes, music events and astronomy workshops, some of which held in the evening and at night.

The visit to the Višnjik Sports Center, built on the site of former Yugoslav National Army barracks, showcased the popularity of after-dark outdoor sport activities and special events like the Zadar Night Run that attracted hundreds of runners from across Croatia, while making running an unconventional element of tourism attraction for the city.

The attraction of residents and visitors in residential areas of the city for night-time activities is also the result of the development of innovative venues, like the BRLOG cooperative craft brewery which organizes only “silent events” like film screenings, poetry evening and pub quizzes in order to reduce noise disturbance to the neighbors, or Morlacco located in a former bauxite mine turned into a wine cellar.



The organization of events and festivals aimed at revitalizing public spaces while improving the cultural offer of the city to the residents is the core of the Zadar’s strategy.

The study visit provided also the opportunity to participate in the activities of the KvartArt Festival, that brings together young creators and their artworks in different areas of the city, stimulating a reflection on the function of the public spaces for creativity and quality of life.

Each summer the festival features music, drama, art and literature through street performances, educational workshops, and public screenings that revitalize public spaces with the active involvement of night activists, educators and community leaders.

Launched in 2017 with the participation in the EU co-funded LIFE project Living Streets, the KvartArt Festival is now a consolidated event of the Zadar's cultural agenda and a laboratory for innovative actions that contribute to the collaborative rethinking of the role played by streets and squares in fostering co-existence among different categories of residents on 24-hour basis.



Learning together, planning better

The creative use of multifunctional venues outside the city centre is making Zadar a remarkable case study of how the focus on specific categories of residents can activate night entrepreneurs, artists and creative people in improving the quality of the offer for all.

The organization of music events for adults by Rythmica, a local music organization creating events in unusual venues, or the wide range of recreational activities offered after dark by the ZYX Bowling Centre, from dancing to darts competitions, are great examples of how night-time economy can evolve and grow through thematic and spatial diversification.

The Visit to Varna: Cultivating Cultural Vibrancy After Dark

The connection between cultural vibrancy and extension of services during nocturnal hours was the core topic of the study visit to Varna on 19-20 June 2025. The two-day visit provided an interesting opportunity to observe how Varna is shaping its identity as a dynamic city after dark, in line with its youth, cultural and tourism policies that are making the Bulgarian city a testing ground for participatory solutions and cultural vibrancy, while balancing tradition and innovation.

The visit of the main attractions of the centre with the Varna Highlights Walk, a guided walking tour through the historic city centre, helped participants to understand how different spaces shift in function over the course of the day, but also gave an interesting perspective on Varna's evolving identity as a cultural hub and seaside retreat.

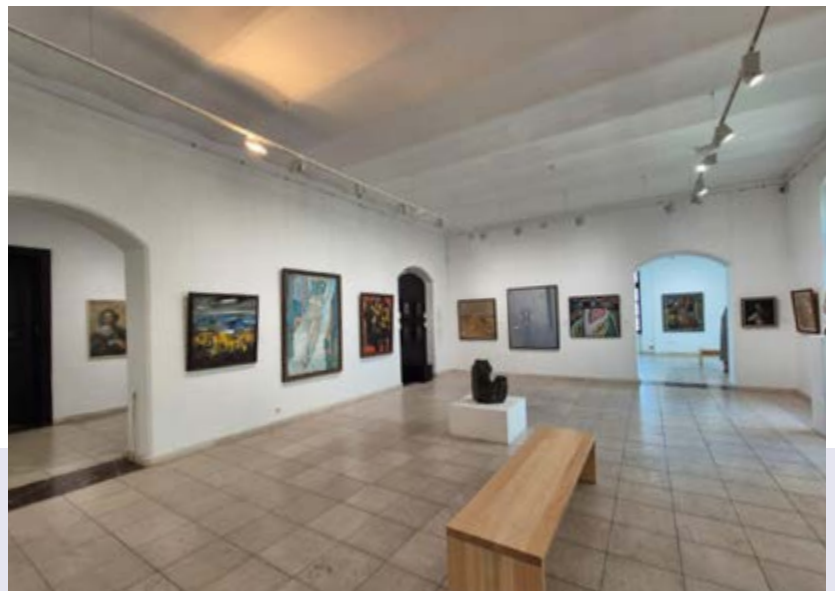


For the participants, the walk served as a moment of reflection for understanding the main challenges of the city in terms of revitalization of public spaces and economic and cultural vibrancy.

During the visit, the presentation of Varna's Testing Action, which was conducted during the European Night of Museums and Galleries in May 2025, highlighted the success of pilot cultural tours, which had successfully engaged over 90 participants across three guided routes. The guided tours visited major cultural venues open for the occasion, offering residents and tourists an engaging and curated way to explore Varna by night. The action underscored the city's commitment to making culture accessible, inclusive, and decentralized. By moving cultural activities beyond typical central locations and peak seasons, Varna is working to build a more resilient and expansive cultural ecosystem that functions year-round and reaches different segments of local population.

The participation in the closing ceremony of the International Festival of Red Cross and Health Films, held at the Festival and Congress Centre, was an interesting opportunity for immersing into one of the city's most prestigious cultural events bringing together filmmakers, humanitarian actors, health professionals, and artists to explore issues of care and solidarity through movie making.

The event reflected the vitality of the Varna's cultural ecosystem and highlighted how festivals can contribute to the night-time economy while also fostering dialogue and social awareness around pressing global and local issues.



Collaboration and vibrant nights

Using culture as a catalyst for urban transformation is the principle at the basis of Varna's action, which is reshaping also the perception of the night-time economy as a space for collaboration between public sector, private and community. The meetings with local stakeholders involved in the actions of Cities After Dark in Varna revealed also other areas on which the city is working, like the improvement of urban mobility in nocturnal hours or the extended opening hours of art galleries.

25 May 2025

Innovative Urban Mobility at Night-Time

The sixth online thematic seminar of Cities After Dark



Connecting cities after dark

Granting sustainable and efficient urban mobility options after dark is usually mentioned as one of the main challenges that cities face in ensuring vibrancy during nocturnal hours while expanding services that are traditionally designed for being fully functional only during daytime.

Urban Mobility After Dark

Inclusive, safe, and vibrant cities at night

The webinar explored the realities, challenges, and opportunities of urban mobility after dark, with a focus on inclusion, accessibility, and innovation across European cities. Hosted by Karolina Orcholska, Ad Hoc Expert of Cities After Dark and Lead Expert of the PUMA network, the masterclass offered a broader understanding of the different categories who move after dark and shared a series of examples, tools and strategy which may be included by the partners of the network within their Integrated Action Plans.



Urban mobility after dark serves more than just leisure activity, but it supports night-shift workers in essential sectors like healthcare, manufacturing and hospitality.

At the same time, it's a decisive factor for cultural and economic vibrancy of the cities, since public transport is heavily used by individuals travelling at night for attending events or dining out. As is the case during daytime, women tend to rely more on public transport but face greater safety concerns. Lower-income groups also use public transport more frequently, but the lack of frequent connection services between city centres and suburban areas might be a problem in terms of safety and access to work.

Mobility at night is not just about infrastructure, but it's a question of equity, safety, and social participation. This issue is particularly significant in its connection with the cross-cutting topic of gender equality. Women consistently report feeling less safe at night and often spend more on transport (e.g., taxis) to avoid walking or waiting in unsafe areas.

In cities like New York, women pay up to \$1,200 more annually for safe night travel. While men tend to travel more directly and with access to private vehicles, women face higher barriers and often change their routes or plans based on safety perception.

Furthermore, in many cities night buses and metro systems can be crucial factors in terms of quality of the tourism experience. As international tourism grows in European destinations, night-time activities have become an essential part of the visiting experience but inadequate transport after dark can limit access to cultural venues, leaving tourists stranded, and discouraging night-time economic activity. Women tourists are particularly impacted by unsafe or unclear transport options, while night transports often don't connect places where people are staying with night entertainment areas and districts where they want to go.



Most European cities significantly reduce public transport services at night, especially during the weekdays. In Warsaw night buses frequency drops to 30–60 minutes in nocturnal hours while metro stops at midnight. In Paris, Amsterdam, Lisbon, Milan the metro systems close by 1 a.m., while in Berlin and Vienna 24h metro services run only on weekends and in Brussels the Noctis buses operate only on Fridays and Saturdays.

These reductions leave many without viable options, especially essential workers needing weekday service.

Some cities are redesigning their nocturnal services keeping into account the feedback from the users that are mostly related to safety, accessibility and frequency concerns. The urban advocacy group Spasi Sofia conducted a study on Sofia's night bus network that revealed that women felt significantly less safe than men while fear, cost, and lack of lighting kept many women out from using the night buses, even when needed. Inclusion isn't guaranteed by a bus alone: improving how the service is designed in terms of accessibility, frequency, cost and information plays a critical role in enhancing its usability by different categories of users.



The Cost of Poor Night Mobility

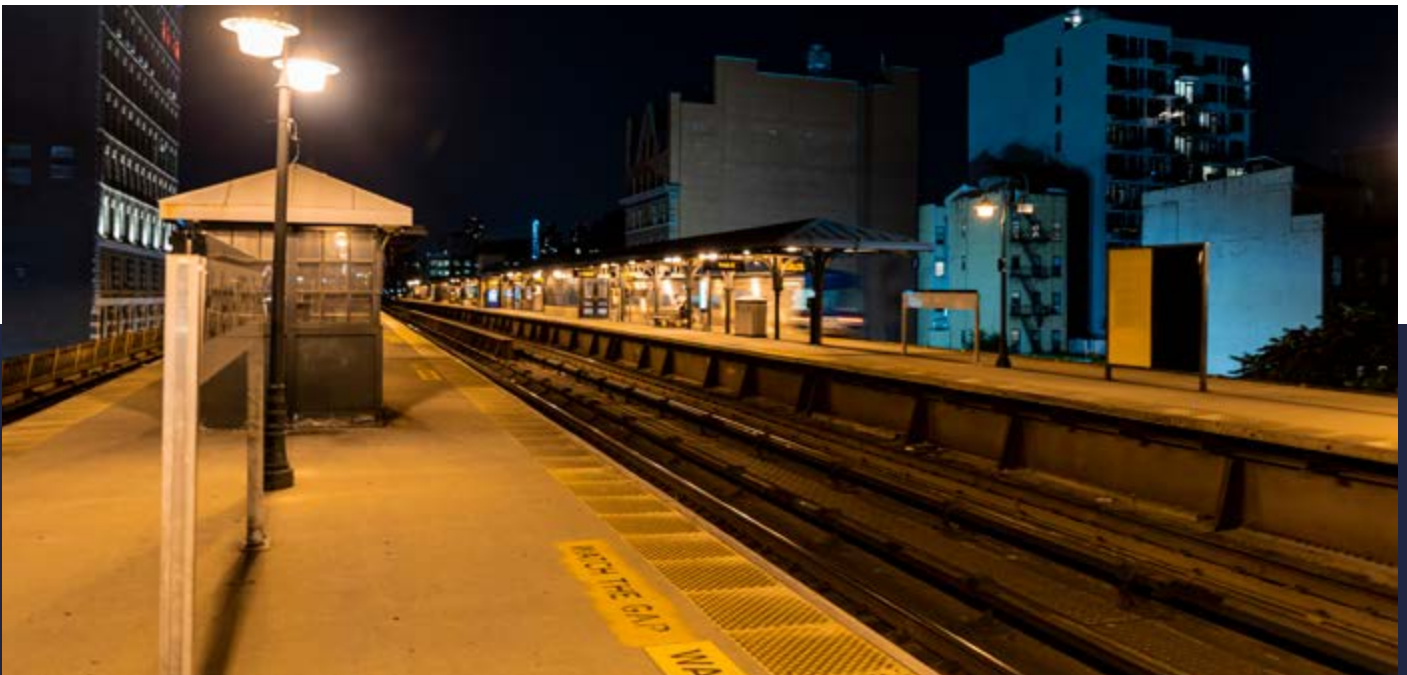
Without reliable night transport, cities risk a decline in their night-time economy, since workers can't reach night-time jobs, and missed tourism potential, as visitors avoid inaccessible venues. At the same time, without public transport available at night cities foster hidden inequality, as women and low-income groups pay more or prefer stay home. It can also lead to brain drain, with students, creatives, and workers moving to more accessible cities.

Flexible and safe transport

Designing Cities for Night Mobility

Many cities across Europe are consistently investing in night-time transport as a way for revitalizing city centres and foster night economy. In Dresden, the GuteNachtLinie ensures city-wide night connectivity with trams, buses, and on-demand taxis. In Zurich, Pikmi, an on-demand night service (8 PM–12 AM), fills transit gaps using a mobile booking system. In Brno, the Rozjezdy night buses run hourly from 11 PM–5 AM (7 AM weekends), converging at a central hub.

Reliability, transfer coordination, and user-centered design are at the core of these success models, but a series of elements can be put in place for making night transport better in cities of different type and size. One of the main strategies is enhancing service design through the extension of metro/tram hours in the weekends or at the occasion of night events or align transport schedules with night shift patterns (especially for healthcare and hospitality workers), while fostering flexibility can be done through the promotion of on-demand apps and shared taxis for low-density areas or offering night pooling and micro-transit options.



Improving night-time mobility

Safety and inclusion remain crucial elements, that can be granted through the improvement of lighting, staff presence, and CCTV systems at mobility hubs.

At the same time, the use of gender-sensitive planning tools and the provision of clear signage and real-time information can be decisive for improving the quality of the services.

The active engagement of different categories of stakeholders in co-designing night mobility, for example involving shift workers and vulnerable groups or partnering with nightlife venues, event organizers and entrepreneurs, can really make the change from the phase of planning until the implementation of innovative measures.

The dialogue with the partners of Cities After Dark highlighted how the integration of the nocturnal dimension within the urban mobility policies is crucial for making cities safer and more inclusive on 24-hour basis, for all. How to ensure that everyone can use transport at night should be the driving question for policies that need to be informed and adapted also through an ongoing analysis of gaps and challenges and collecting insights from different categories of night users.



23 June 2025

Funding Strategies For Night-Time Economy

The seventh online thematic seminar of Cities After Dark



Leveraging EU Funds for Night-Time Innovation

Defining a clear strategy for using EU resources to implement Integrated Action Plans is crucial for structuring integrated resourcing schemes which balance the use of public and private funds.

Flexible and safe transport

Designing Cities for Night Mobility

The online thematic seminar provided an overview of funding opportunities available to support urban night-time strategies, with a focus on local authorities, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and cultural or community-based initiatives. With a masterclass ran by the Ad Hoc Expert Alberto Lorente Saiz, the session highlighted how European and complementary public-private funding sources can be strategically accessed to support projects linked to night-time vibrancy, inclusion, and sustainable development. **The online thematic seminar introduced a theoretical framework for integrated funding that was then developed with concrete exercises during the Transnational meeting of Genoa.**



The adoption of a multi-funding approach was presented as the key element of a strategy that combines the use of European Structural Funds and related programs with national and EU funding for SMEs and alternative financial sources, like foundation grants or crowdfunding schemes.

In a sector like night-time economy which for decades has relied only on private funding, introducing the use of EU and national resources may be crucial for fostering innovation in festivals and events, regenerating public spaces and developing innovative urban mobility schemes active after dark, all actions which may have a tangible impact in promoting cultural and economic vibrancy in nocturnal hours.

The support offered by ERDF programs to innovative night festivals and events, like the activities carried out by the Alicante's cultural centre Las Cigarreras, or the possible use of the resources of the European Social Fund for upskilling night workers and promoting innovative forms of night entrepreneurship are some examples of how the funds for regional and social development may contribute to improve the quality of night-time economy projects.



Using funds strategically

The use of EU funds can be also important for addressing challenges that are still not prioritized but that are emerging from the debate among the partners of Cities After Dark and in other networks, such as disparities of access to night-time activities between urban and rural areas or the creation of night programs in small and medium towns.

The masterclass also offered concrete tips on how to apply for different types of funding, providing also an overview on the alternative sources of funding and how to integrate them with municipal and metropolitan schemes.

The analysis of many of the actions included in the IAPs of Cities After Dark shows that a combination among different types of resources can be enough for granting the economic sustainability of night policies on the medium and long term, without necessarily activating huge investments from the local authority's budget.

The development of partnerships with private investors, the activation of projects with local NGOs supported by foundations and philanthropic support, the inclusion of innovative actions in crowdfunding platforms can be interesting ideas for implementing small-scale night-time initiatives or for consolidating some of the Testing Action implemented in the framework of Cities After Dark.



The thematic seminar was an important opportunity for reflecting on how to create a strategic approach to sustainable funding, that can match with ideas and actions developed in collaboration with local stakeholders.

While structural projects like the revitalization of public spaces, the installation of new lighting systems or the development of night transport need balanced investment and coherence with other thematic funding schemes, the implementation of night projects for promoting cultural and economic vibrancy, improvement of partygoers' behaviors or noise reduction can be carried out through innovative alliances between local authorities, enterprises, associations and cultural organizations.

5 August 2025

Improving the **Environmental Impact** of the Night-Time Economy

The eighth online thematic seminar of Cities After Dark



Connecting Cities through Sustainable Nights

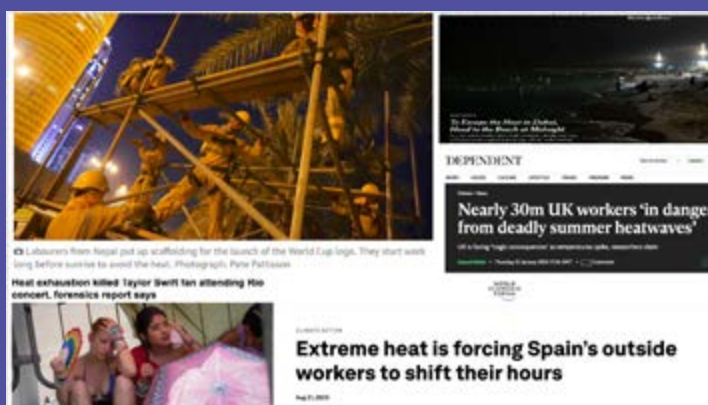
The cross-cutting dimension of the green transition has been explored in several ways during the transnational activities of Cities After Dark, but as IAPs are getting closer to their final version the last online thematic seminar offered useful examples from different corners of the globe that the cities of the network can integrate within their night policies.

The climate of the night

How Climate Change is Reshaping Urban Life After Dark

The relationship between night-time activities and climate change is becoming increasingly relevant, as multiple sectors from cultural events to urban planning begin to address sustainability challenges during nocturnal hours. Alessio Kolioulis explored this complex link in its research action, with a focus focusing on how climate change is shifting the dynamics of urban life at night.

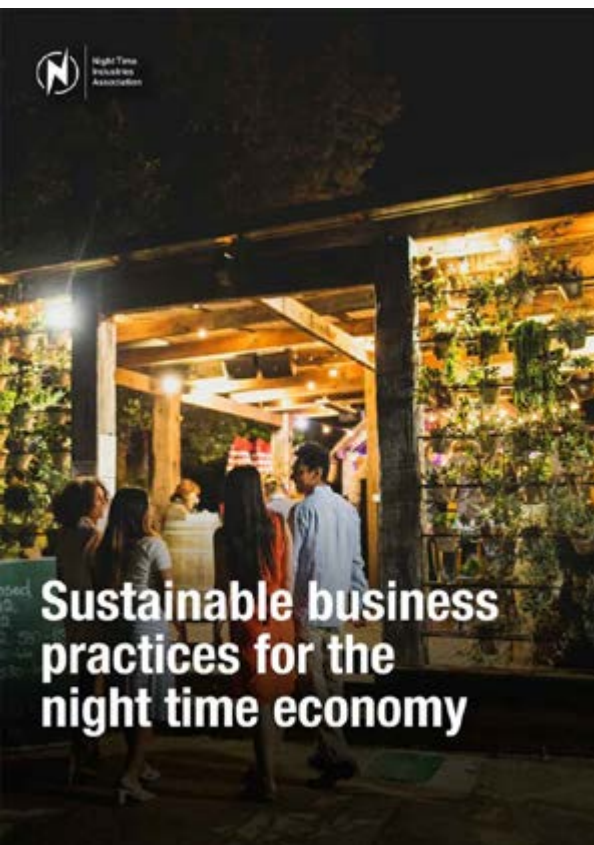
While this reflection began with the experiences of migrant construction workers in Qatar during the World Cup, forced to work at night to avoid the effects of daily heatwaves, the practices developed in many cities globally show that night shifts are becoming increasingly important due to climate adaptation reasons. In cities across the United States, India, Pakistan, and Spain, activities once conducted during the day are now being shifted to night-time to avoid extreme heat. For example, garbage collectors in Spain now operate only at night, while in Dubai public beaches are equipped for being used in nocturnal hours.



The night is becoming both a victim and a cause of climate change, with scientific data revealing that nights are warming faster than days due to rising greenhouse gas concentrations and intensified urban heat island effects.

Persistent night-time heat significantly disrupts the body's capacity to recover from daytime exposure, especially among vulnerable populations like the elderly. Unlike daytime heat, which is often more visible and reported, night-time heat increases mortality during heatwaves by stressing the body during what should be its recovery period.

Urban climate mitigation strategies are just slowly starting to take the nocturnal conditions into account. Cities must adopt heat management plans that consider how to reduce nighttime temperatures, while integrating night-time needs into broader Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans, developing green infrastructure, designing climate shelters and cooling centers for hot nights, and using heat-mitigating materials in building construction.



In Australia, the Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) is addressing sustainability challenges by providing thematic guidance and enhancing coordination among the stakeholders of the sector.

The night as a laboratory for climate resilience

Night-time can be an innovative dimension for testing solutions against the impact of climate change that are developed by public authorities, but also by the night industries.



The CEO of NTIA Mick Gibb highlighted the efforts carried out by its organization representing the industries of the sectors to foster the adoption of sustainable practices through the creation of a practical guidebook for businesses in the night economy.

The guide highlighted structured steps to operate in a more sustainable way, ranging from choosing sustainable suppliers to organizing eco-friendly events, managing waste efficiently, training staff, and even certifying sustainable practices.

The process starts with promoting a broader understanding of why sustainability matters, particularly in the context of energy crises and rising costs. Nightlife operators are encouraged to work collectively on a series of topics, from waste collection to reduction of CO2 emissions, with a strong support by the association representing the category which helps small and large operators to take measurable steps toward sustainability, contributing to cost savings but also to create reputational benefits.



Uniting for climate action

The growing attention towards sustainability by venues and different segments of the audience is a positive element on which NGOs across Europe are investing for enhancing awareness on the need for collaborative action against climate change.

Greener nights, stronger communities

Culture at the Heart of Climate Action

Showcasing the experiences of projects like Clubtopia and Zukunft Feiern which fostered the conversation on sustainability in the Berlin's night-time scene, Ina Friebe recalled the decisive role played by NGOs and volunteers in embedding sustainability within the city's renowned club culture. From offering free energy consultations and air quality assessments for clubs to the development of training programs and practical sustainability guides tailored for nightlife venues, Clubtopia addressed different dimensions of sustainability pushing the venues in acting also on very simple elements, like energy use in dance floors and waste separation.

With the current project Zukunft Feiern, the work of the NGO Clubliebe culminated in the creation of a Code of Conduct for Sustainable Festivals, which promotes voluntary commitments across diverse venues. Recognizing the uniqueness of each club, the code is designed to be adaptable, offering a series of possible measures rather than a rigid standard.



These clubs not only adopt greener practices but also become role models, inspiring others across the cultural sector.

Clubs from different cities, such as Cologne, Hamburg, Bremen, and Vienna, have since joined the initiative, with over 100 signatories committed. Concrete successes are evident: Uebel und Gefährlich implemented smart automation to reduce refrigeration energy use by 47%, while Club Gloria in Cologne cut CO₂ emissions by 85% acting on green electricity and heat recovery systems.

Fostering the commitment of arts and culture sector for combating climate change is also at the core of other schemes promoted by URBACT, which may provide useful elements in terms of combining cultural vibrancy to sustainability efforts.

An interesting example is given by the experience of the URBACT National Practice Transfer Initiative, that enabled the replication of Manchester's MAST scheme in seven Italian medium-sized cities. As highlighted by Sandra Rainero, who drove that experience as Lead Expert until December 2022, the core idea behind MAST is that climate change is not merely a technical issue, but it is also linked to culture. Cultural actors in Manchester voluntarily aligned themselves with the city's 2030 Climate Strategy, organizing green events, renovating spaces with sustainability in mind, and acting as communicators of climate awareness.



Cities like Mantua adopted this model, **focusing on green cultural infrastructure and integrating climate impact measurement into cultural activities**. Training programs like carbon literacy workshops helped cultural operators to learn how to apply environmental metrics to their events and institutions. Mantua's Local Group (ULG) evolved into a permanent governance body for sustainability in cultural policy, an interesting practice that was also replicated by other Italian cities.

An outcome of this transfer of innovation was the co-creation of a Manifesto for the Environmental Sustainability of Arts, Culture, and Sports, signed by over 20 organizations in Cuneo.

Other cities, like Siena and Rovereto, engaged through smaller-scale but impactful testing actions, such as climate dialogue events or campaigns to raise awareness about sustainable practices in culture. These examples show that even minor interventions carried out with a participatory approach can produce lasting change, making cultural activities a key element of the green transition in nocturnal hours.

The elements highlighted during the online thematic seminar were also at the core of the thematic evaluation of the Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) of the Cities After Dark network from the perspective of green transition, carried out by Marieke Mulwijk who presented the main findings of the IAP revision. Many IAPs addressed public transportation, noise pollution, and green infrastructure but stronger links must be drawn between these measures and broader environmental goals, for instance, aligning night-time transit strategies with energy-saving objectives or mitigating the heat island effect through targeted interventions in public spaces and venues.

Cost savings, alignment with audience values, and long-term business resilience can be key motivators for acting on sustainability goals, while actions like training night-time staff can be crucial to understand and lead sustainability efforts not only in night venues but also to raise awareness among the local audience.



The **Testing Actions** of Varna and Malaga



Turning plans into action

Some of the partners of Cities After Dark are implementing their Testing Actions to validate the innovative approaches at the core of their Integrated Action Plans.

Rethinking the city after dark

Navigating the Night: Varna's Inclusive Approach

Based on the connection between night-time mobility and cultural participation, the Testing Action carried out by Varna on the occasion of the European Night of Museums and Galleries on 17 May 2025 offered an interesting example of sustainable and inclusive night-time activity which engaged a wide audience in the exploration of the central neighborhoods of the city, main target of the action of revitalization fostered by the IAP.

The first part of the Testing Action focused on understanding patterns and perceptions of night-time mobility within the city. A detailed questionnaire was designed and disseminated at urban level, capturing responses from a diverse cross-section of city users. The survey reached not only local residents from both central and peripheral neighborhoods but also tourists, international visitors, teenagers, students, and members of the city's international student community. The goal of the survey was to gather data on how people navigate the city at night, how safe they feel, and what transport methods they rely on.



The responses revealed several insights that may be used for improving policies on urban mobility and public spaces, in particular after dark.

One of the most interesting outcomes was the overall sense of safety reported by the majority of participants, who affirmed to feel comfortable moving through the city in nocturnal hours. In terms of transportation preferences, about 80 percent of those surveyed indicated that they either use public transport or prefer to walk when navigating the city at night. Additionally, around 40 percent also reported using personal cars, suggesting a hybrid model of mobility that combines various modes of travel.

However, a deeper analysis of the respondents' geographic distribution raised important equity concerns. More than 70 percent of local participants were residents of central Varna, highlighting a spatial imbalance in who participates in night-time activities. This element suggests that residents in peripheral areas of the city are underrepresented in the city's nocturnal life. Such disparity may be connected to limited public transport options to and from outskirts during night hours, or from a lack of cultural programming that specifically targets or includes these districts. **Expanding late-night transport links and designing events that actively involve residents outside the city centre were highlighted as possible solutions for enhancing proximity and sustainability of the night-time economy in Varna.**



The second Testing Action took a more experiential and cultural approach, drawing inspiration from Paris' White Nights model, which opens a series of cultural spaces across the city during late hours. The Testing Action of Varna introduced guided group tours to key cultural venues participating in the European Night of Museums and Galleries.

The goal was to create a curated and accessible cultural experience that could appeal to both locals and visitors while promoting the use of public space after dark in a structured and safe way.

Three separate guided tours were organised, each starting at 7PM and concluding by 9PM. More than 30 participants joined each group, and every tour included visits to over ten cultural stops. A strong interest in night-time cultural exploration was shown by the participants who appreciated the format of the initiative and asked for more frequent and varied cultural offerings during night hours. Suggestions for improving the initiative, that Varna aims to integrate within its Integrated Action Plan, included the incorporation of gamification elements, interactive storytelling, and stops at local bars or cafés for informal discussions following the tours.

Beyond the success of the format itself, the pilot revealed several broader impacts.

The event served as a gateway for civic involvement, with a number of attendees expressing interest in contributing to future cultural programming or collaborating in the co-creation of subsequent editions of the night tours. Furthermore, the pilot created momentum among the local business community with several entrepreneurs proposing ideas for partnership, ranging from special late-night offers to themed activities designed to complement the tours, highlighting the potential for developing a more integrated night-time ecosystem that links culture, commerce, and local community.



Fostering a broader understanding of the perception and impact of the night-time economy among various local stakeholders is the element at the core of the Testing Action kickstarted by CIEDES Foundation in Malaga in June 2025.

This action took place in key areas of the city where night-time activity is most intense, including the Historic Center, Teatinos, and Huelin neighbourhoods. The initiative is based on a participatory and data-driven approach, with a particular focus on incorporating diverse voices and using innovative tools to map experiences and challenges.



The first phase of this process included a dedicated session for young people, held as part of the Economy and Environment Classes cycle and concluded with a participatory workshop. During the session, young residents of Málaga shared their perspectives on the city's night-time activity and articulated a vision for a more balanced and inclusive night-time economy.

Their proposals highlighted the importance of a nightlife that promotes employment and cultural activities while maintaining a strong commitment to sustainability, safety, and quality of life.

In the coming months, additional sessions are planned with business owners and residents, particularly in September. These next steps are expected to provide additional insights and broaden the understanding of how nightlife is experienced across different parts of the community. The inclusion of varied perspectives is central to developing an innovative and place-based approach to the night-time economy, that can be seen not part of the problem of the over-tourism but as part of a bottom-up series of solutions.

One of the most innovative aspects of the Testing Action is the development of a perception map that visualizes how different users experience the night-time economy in various parts of the city.

Using GIS technology, this mapping effort allows for the georeferencing of feedback from youth, business owners, and residents. This digital and collaborative tool not only makes it possible to link perceptions to specific geographic areas, but also introduces a technological dimension that can raise local digital competencies and supports the culture of participatory urban planning.



Another key element of the testing action is the identification and mapping of both best and worst practices of night-time economy developed locally. By recognizing what works well and what generates conflicts with residents, the city can promote positive models while also targeting problematic areas for improvement like the need to balance the vibrancy of the night-time economy with the quality of life of local residents.

Evening challenges, lasting solutions

As a year-round tourism destination, Malaga faces unique pressures related to noise, overcrowding, and disruptive behavior, particularly during evening and night hours.

Local stakeholders involved in planning the Testing Action expressed a shared interest in finding ways for nightlife and community life to coexist more harmoniously, acting on licensing and regulation, redistribution of night-time activities across the city, and greater coordination with local services to improve the management of the impact of tourism on 24-hour basis.



Under the Spotlight: The Action of the Cities at Local Level



From planning to action, together

The partners of Cities After Dark focused on the implementation framework to refine the final version of the Integrated Action Plans, that are going to be delivered by the end of the network activities.

From collaboration to actionable plans

Refining Integrated Night Strategies

Insights shared during transnational meetings, study visits and online thematic seminars were crucial for connecting the action of the ULG with innovative experiences across Europe, but also to highlight possible funding sources for the implementation of the actions co-designed at local level.

The thematic review of the IAPs under the lenses of digital transition, gender equality and energy transition provided by the Ad Hoc Experts of the network and the periodic review of the IAP by the Lead Expert provided useful support for consolidating the approaches tested by Testing Actions within the IAPs, but also for making these integrated night strategies the basis for a long-term commitment on night-time economy.



In the second quarter of 2025 all the cities involved the members of the ULG in meetings aimed at defining actions to be included in the final draft of the Integrated Action Plans and to identify possible resources for the implementation. This exercise, that was conducted using the tools offered by the URBACT Toolbox, was important for providing feedback and suggestions to improve their coherence and feasibility.

Shaping safer, vibrant nights

Collaborative Governance for Vibrant Nights

The finalization of the Integrated Action Plans led also many cities of the network to promote internal meetings with different departments of the local authority, in order to find solutions to the challenges emerged while planning how to implement the actions. These meetings constituted also interesting opportunities for highlighting how the action on night-time economy is connected to broader local policies, and how possible solutions need to be planned and implemented in a coordinated and participatory way keeping into account a 24-hour dimension.

In the case of **Varna**, the organization of two technical meetings by the ULG between April and August 2025 on the central pillar of the IAP, the connection between cultural vibrancy and mobility and safety policies, brought together a wide range of stakeholders, like civil servants, public services providers, artists, venue owners and residents. During the first meeting, dedicated to the challenges of the mobility sector in nocturnal hours, the topic of the shortage of bus drivers emerged as an unexpected obstacle to the extension of the service in nocturnal hours. Although this issue also affects the daytime operations, the ULG proposed the development of a city-led information campaign to promote job opportunities in the public transport sector. The campaign, that will be launched during the European Mobility Week in September 2025, will contribute also to promote a broader public reflection on the benefits of the public mobility in nocturnal hours.

The dialogue between the local stakeholder highlighted also the need for better alignment between public transport schedules and night-time cultural events, in order to enhance their accessibility, a topic that emerged also from the conversation on the reactivation of cultural premises until 11PM in the city centre and the diversification of night activities, which are now mostly focused on the coastline. The discussion among a diverse group of stakeholders with very different backgrounds highlighted possible cultural activities, ranging from artists talks and neighborhood concerts, which may be included in the cultural programming of the city for enhancing the participation in the nightlife for all.

The dialogue on the implementation of the IAPs has led in many cities of the network the conversation on how to consolidate the collaborative forms of governance of the night-time economy tested by the action of the ULG during the activities of the network.



Paris focused its two ULG meetings, held in May and June 2025, on reimagining the future of the ULG after the end of the Cities After Dark activities and on redesigning the governance model of the Night Council. Making the participatory and cross-sectorial dynamic initiated by the ULG and moving from a purely consultative body towards a co-governance model with shared responsibilities between institutions and nightlife stakeholders are some of the proposals that emerged from the discussion, that positively highlighted the impact that the participation in the URBACT network had also for the city presenting at the beginning the most solid form of integrated governance of night-time economy of the network (and among the most relevant at global level).

Providing a clear mandate and visibility to the ULG beyond the URBACT framework, so it can continue to act as a collective voice for night-time stakeholders and the integration of thematic working groups around issues such as safety, sound, and inclusion are some of the proposals that emerged from the dialogue within the ULG, which also claimed for more transversal representation (involving care work, nightlife workers, and youth collectives) and more transparent communication tools.

The second quarter of the year was also crucial in many cities for consolidating the implementation of the Testing Actions and for launching new initiatives based on the topics explored by the Integrated Action Plans.

Paris contributed to the organization of the second edition of the Marateuf, particularly the “Day of Care” which preceded the festive portion of the event. This day offered workshops on consent, mental health, risk reduction, and collective care, in partnership with local associations and nightlife professionals. Furthermore, the French capital supported the realization of innovative nightlife initiative that are aligned with the objectives of the IAP: these includes the launch of a podcast series spotlighting lesser-known night-time professions, the organization of festivals such as Voyage Voyage and Burning Womxn, promoting inclusion and diversity and a two-year retrospective event on the Club Zéro Plastique initiative, co-organized with nightlife venues.

In terms of implementation of schemes for a safer and more respectful nightlife, Paris strengthened the collaboration with the municipal police for the launch of the Ask for Angela in two priority neighborhoods, in collaboration with the municipal police, aimed at improving safety and comfort in nightlife venues, especially for women and vulnerable populations, and the creation of neighborhood referents, contact points in each district facilitating dialogue between local residents, shop owners, nightlife venues and city authorities, especially around recurring issues such as noise, safety, and public space management after dark.



Regarding the continuation of the Testing Actions, **Piraeus** reviewed the Online Event Calendar testing action which is being developed as a central platform for promoting cultural, social, and entertainment events after dark. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of scaling up this tool by integrating it into the new DestinationPiraeus.com website and using it as a long-term mechanism for community engagement, encouraging event submissions, and supporting local businesses. Among the first actions proposed by stakeholders were the expansion of festive-themed events, the introduction of night-time childcare services, awareness-raising campaigns and the introduction of a dedicated night-time officer.

The vision of Piraeus as a thriving city after dark was not only a matter of discussion within the ULG, but influenced also the evolution of festivals and events of the city.

One significant example is given by the Sea Days Festival, that incorporated the Cities After Dark vision to meet the growing demand for a more vibrant night-time programme. Held between 26 May and 8 June 2025, the festival included over 20 evening and night-time events, such as Karagiozis shadow-theatre nights, a street party in the Troumpa district, night-time guided boat tours with gastronomic experiences, open-air cinema screenings, fashion shows, poetry nights, chess competitions, and traditional Greek music and dancing evenings. These activities brought new life to Piraeus after dark, creating a more lively, participa-

tory, and inclusive atmosphere for residents, tourists and visitors alike.

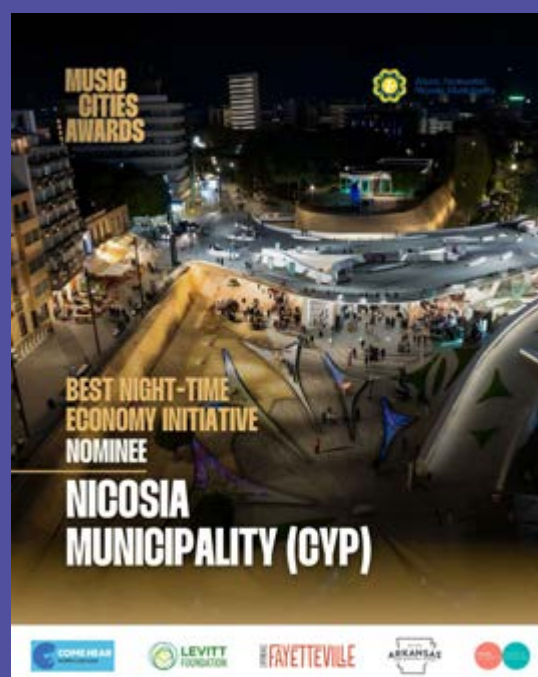
The finalization of innovative visions and approaches to the night-time economy is also positioning many cities of the network to act as ambassadors of the Cities After Dark vision at national and regional level. On 30 May 2025, Genoa presented its strategy on night-time economy in Pisa during an event organized by the Municipality and the Local Public Transport company PISAMO, focused on health, sport and sustainable mobility. The presentation focused on the extension of the public transport service tested at the occasion of the Testing Action, highlighting the benefits of aligning a safe, accessible and widespread municipal mobility offer with the diversification of nightlife activities and events.

The objectives and goals of the Cities After Dark project were also presented by Genoa during the three-day event “inVulnerabilia. For a Culture of Vulnerability” organized by the University of Genoa. The event encouraged the reflection on the vulnerabilities tackled daily in the urban contexts like natural hazards, data security, personal health, workplace safety, and from social marginalization and violence against women. As night-time is often associated to vulnerability, Genoa used this platform to reverse the narrative showcasing how urban innovation and reactivation of public spaces can foster a positive perception of the night as a platform for shared transformation



Cities After Dark Shortlisted for Music Cities Awards 2025

Braga and Nicosia have been nominated in the Best Night-Time Economy Initiative category of the prize that celebrates innovative projects from around the globe using the transformational power of music to strengthen their communities.



The Braga After Dark festival and the temporary use of public spaces for nocturnal activities in Nicosia were both implemented as Testing Actions in the framework of their participation in the first URBACT network on night-time economy.

The Awards Ceremony will take place on 16 September 2025 during the Music Cities Convention in Fayetteville (USA).

Next Steps



Finalizing plans, showcasing results

The finalization of the Integrated Action Plans and the presentation of the results at transnational and local level will be the main focus of the final quarter of the network (September 2025 – December 2025). A series of URBACT Local Group meetings will take place in September for fine-tuning the IAPs before the publication and for co-designing local events to showcase the outcomes of the network activities.

The night-time impact

Showcasing Europe's night-time innovations

The final Transnational Meeting of Tallinn will combine collective reflection on future activities of collaboration at European and global level on night-time economy with the public events of the Cities After Dark Festival on 25 and 26 September, a two-days event which will constitute a unique opportunity for sharing the results of the network with international experts, city representatives and the local audience of Tallinn.

Designed as an itinerant event across various cultural and music venues of the Estonian capital, the Cities After Dark Festival will also feature study visits, DJ sets and exhibitions that will revive the conversation on night-time economy at national, regional and European level.



The partners of Cities After Dark will also participate in the Stadt Nach Acht in Berlin, one of the most important events on night-time economy in Europe to showcase the results achieved in the framework of the network activities to a public composed by night-time economy experts, cultural organizers, DJs and artists from all over Europe.

Some cities of the network, such as Budva and Zadar, will finalize the implementation of their Testing Actions, while Budva will also host the final study visit in September focusing on strategies for improving the quality of the cultural offer in nocturnal hours.



Furthermore, Cities After Dark will be presented by the partners at the occasion of various events and conferences organized across Europe by the National URBACT Points for celebrating the conclusion of the Action Planning Network activities. Nicosia will host the URBACT City Festival on 26-27 March 2026, the programme's flagship annual event, where the results of all APNs, including Cities After Dark, will be shared and celebrated.

Cities After Dark

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