Cities After Dark

Varna

Integrated Action Plan

1. Executive Summary of Varna's Integrated Action Plan

Context and Framework

Varna's Integrated Action Plan emerges from the city's participation in *Cities After Dark*, an URBACT network focused on understanding how European cities function after sunset and how they can create safer, more inclusive, and more sustainable night-time environments. As Bulgaria's leading coastal and cultural hub, Varna experiences dynamic night-time activity shaped by tourism, student life, and a flourishing creative scene. At the same time, the city faces the interconnected challenges of noise pollution, gaps in late-night transport, fragmented governance, and limited early-evening cultural diversity.

The development of the plan followed URBACT's integrated and participatory methodology. Over two years, Varna's Urban Local Group-bringing together municipal departments, public transport operators, venue owners, cultural organisations, NGOs, educational institutions, and resident representatives-worked collectively to map needs, identify priorities, and propose coordinated solutions. The process drew on learning exchanges with partner cities, on-site study visits, thematic workshops, and several locally implemented testing actions. These tests, including mobility surveys, awareness campaigns, and pilot cultural events, revealed both the challenges residents face at night and the opportunities for meaningful transformation.

The IAP is therefore rooted in real, observed behaviours and local expectations, while also aligning Varna with European urban development principles centred on inclusivity, sustainability, and shared governance.

Vision and Strategic Direction

The vision behind the plan is to position Varna as a city where the night is vibrant yet balanced, lively yet respectful, open to cultural expression yet supportive of residents' need for rest and safety. It imagines a night-time environment where movement is easy and affordable, cultural life is diverse and accessible, public spaces feel safe and welcoming, and noise is managed proactively rather than reactively.

Central to this vision is the belief that quality of life after dark depends on three interdependent systems: mobility, cultural participation, and a fair regulatory environment. Strengthening transport options, diversifying the cultural offer, and improving noise management must evolve together rather than in isolation.

The plan also aligns Varna with URBACT's cross-cutting themes: supporting gender equality by improving safety and accessibility for groups who experience the night differently; advancing the green transition through cleaner mobility choices; and contributing to the digital transition by introducing systems that use data to inform decisions and improve communication with citizens.

Above all, the strategic direction aims to ensure that Varna's night-time economy remains a source of identity, creativity, and opportunity, while operating within a framework that

protects public health, encourages responsible behaviour, and supports long-term urban sustainability.

Governance and Implementation

The implementation of the plan relies on coordinated governance led by the Municipality of Varna, supported by an expanded network of stakeholders who have been engaged since the IAP's inception. Municipal departments will work in tandem with public transport providers, cultural actors, law enforcement, NGOs, educational institutions, resident communities, and private-sector partners. This cooperative model ensures that decisions reflect multiple perspectives and that accountability is shared across institutions and sectors.

Implementation is planned as a phased and adaptive process. Early efforts focus on understanding behaviours and patterns-gathering data on night-time mobility, mapping noise dynamics, and engaging communities in conversation. Subsequent phases introduce targeted improvements, refine regulatory frameworks, and expand successful pilot actions. Throughout the timeline, the plan integrates continuous feedback, allowing the city to adjust measures as real-world conditions evolve.

Monitoring plays a central role: data from transport use, noise levels, public perception, and cultural participation will inform decision-making and help determine whether adjustments are needed. Progress will be communicated openly through digital platforms, community meetings, and collaboration with civil society, reinforcing transparency and public trust.

Risk management is embedded in the process by anticipating challenges such as low participation, stakeholder resistance, or technical constraints, and addressing them early through dialogue, gradual roll-out, and targeted communication.

Conclusion

Varna's Integrated Action Plan offers a forward-looking blueprint for improving the city's quality of life after dark while supporting its cultural and economic vitality. It acknowledges that the night-time city is not a separate entity but an essential extension of daytime urban life-one that must be approached with the same level of care, planning, and inclusivity.

By strengthening governance, enriching cultural life, modernising transport, and managing noise more effectively, Varna commits to building a night-time environment that is safer, quieter, more connected, and more representative of its diverse communities. The IAP is designed not as a fixed document but as an evolving framework that grows alongside the city, its residents, and its partners across Europe. Through collaboration, innovation, and long-term commitment, Varna aims to become a model for sustainable and people-centred night-time development.

2. Varna after Dark - a short introduction of the local context and motivation to participate

"Cities After Dark '' explores the vibrant life of cities at night, focusing on economic, social, and cultural activities. The night time economy includes restaurants, bars, clubs, theaters, and late-night shopping, which boost local economies and create jobs. Safety and security are key, with public safety measures, sustainable and mindful urban design, and community involvement ensuring safe environments.

Public health and well-being at night involve making healthcare available, reducing noise pollution, and considering mental health impacts. Promoting social inclusion and diversity is crucial, with policies that allow everyone, including marginalised groups, to enjoy nighttime activities.

Effective transportation is vital for a thriving night time economy, needing reliable public transport and sustainable options. Good governance and policy frameworks are necessary to manage nighttime activities, balancing business interests with community well-being. By focusing on these themes, "Cities After Dark" provides insights to optimise urban environments at night for all residents.

The project is realised in partnership with nine (9) other cities, namely - Braga (Portugal), Budva (Montenegro), Genoa (Italy), Malaga (Spain), Piraeus (Greece), Nicosia (Cyprus), Zadar (Croatia), Tallinn (Estonia), Paris (France). Each of those cities focuses on different aspects of the night time economy. Paris and Tallinn tackle the safety issues surrounding party-going in terms of drug consumption, gender and ethnicity profiling, while other partners of the network focus on diversifying their night time cultural and entertainment agendas such as Nicosia utilizing public spaces as party zones and Zadar and Budva exploring the benefits of upcycling spaces and discovering new approaches to the nighttime entertainment culture. Our main partner Braga even has already utilized and is preparing to open a night kindergarden in the beginning of 2026 for the parents who work in the nocturnal hours.

a. Varna at Night: Why the City Joined *Cities After Dark*

Varna is a city with deep roots - continuously inhabited for over 6,000 years, stretching 30 kilometres along the Black Sea coast. It's Bulgaria's third-largest city, home to 348,000 residents, and since the country's independence in 1878, it has grown into a key administrative and cultural hub.

Our coastal identity drives much of Varna's energy. Shipbuilding, port activity, and maritime trade remain central to the economy, while tourism, education, and new technology industries add layers of vibrancy.

Varna has long been Bulgaria's top seaside destination - famous for its hot springs, beaches, and lush forests - and also a major cultural centre. The city hosts over 30 festivals each year, including the *Varna Summer Music Festival*, which celebrates its 100th anniversary next year.

This reputation has built strong tourism infrastructure. Just 18 km away, the Golden Sands resort welcomes around one million visitors annually, adding to the city's lively rhythm.

Meanwhile, a growing fintech and IT sector, along with six universities and 30,000 students, continues to attract young talent and creativity. More and more expats, foreign investments in services and new tech companies are making Varna their home due to the growing possibilities of quality university education, remote and mobile working options. For those young newcomers Varna has to foster a dynamic style of life and vibrant culture and social life activities.

All of this is wonderful - yet as Varna grew, so did its challenges. With more people came more cars, more tourism, and inevitably... more noise. Managing this balance between a vibrant nightlife and quality of life became essential.
That's where *Cities After Dark* came in - giving us the tools and network to rethink not only how the city sounds and moves after sunset, but how it feels to live in Varna at night.

b. An introduction to URBACT

Since 2002, URBACT has supported cities across Europe by fostering cooperation, knowledge exchange, and the development of integrated, participatory urban policies. Cities today face some of the world's most pressing challenges - from climate change and social inequalities to digital disruption - while also serving as hubs of cultural diversity, economic activity, and essential public services. Through collaboration with peers, local authorities can learn from one another and harness these opportunities to advance more sustainable urban development.

At the heart of URBACT's mission is the promotion of integrated development, which means addressing environmental, economic, and social priorities simultaneously, and ensuring alignment across local, regional, national, and EU levels. The programme encourages cities to move beyond traditional, top-down governance models and instead adopt more inclusive, holistic approaches. The URBACT Method provides tools and processes that help cities design policies that cut across sectors such as housing, mobility, environment, and economic development, ensuring these elements work together rather than in isolation.

Equally important is URBACT's commitment to participatory practices. Sustainable urban development is most successful when it is co-created with the people it affects. This means involving a wide range of stakeholders - residents, community organisations, businesses, service providers, experts, and public institutions - in shaping strategies from the early stages through to implementation. By bringing diverse perspectives around the same table, cities strengthen the legitimacy, relevance, and long-term impact of their actions.

To support this way of working, URBACT uses Action Planning Networks (APNs): groups of cities that collaborate on a shared urban challenge. Within these networks, cities exchange good practices, test solutions, and build new capacities. Each participating city develops its own Integrated Action Plan, drawing inspiration from transnational learning as well as local

needs and priorities. This collaborative, hands-on approach is what enables cities to innovate, adapt, and address complex urban issues with confidence.

At its core, URBACT promotes the vision of cities that are environmentally responsible, economically vibrant, and socially inclusive - places where policies are integrated, decisions are shared, and sustainable solutions are built together with the community.

c. How the IAP has been developed: methodology and approach

The development of Varna's IAP for reducing night-time noise pollution emerged from a noticeable need for better governance of the night-time activities carried out by the municipal administration, private actors, and all participants in the city's nocturnal processes. Until now, the city has had no coherent policy for managing these dynamics, and our task was to identify the main points requiring improvement and bring to light the most pressing issues.

While topics such as night-time public transportation, noise-monitoring policies, and cultural programming had never been addressed in depth before, our previous experience showed us that a co-creation approach - such as the one promoted by URBACT - would be far more effective than isolated, top-down methodologies. This perspective allowed us to include a wider range of representatives in our ULG and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues we aimed to tackle, as well as the active entities contributing to the night-time ecosystem.

The ULG in Varna played a crucial role in the development and implementation of the IAP. Comprising a mix of business representatives, municipal officials, academic researchers, civil-society organisations, and public-transportation companies, the ULG enabled a well-rounded discussion of needs, possibilities, and practical constraints. With the support of this diverse group, we were able to develop an integrated Action Plan that not only captures all the necessary points of view but also offers solutions that address the root causes of the challenges, rather than merely scratching the surface.

Alongside the ULG's active involvement, we drew valuable inspiration from colleagues and experts during transnational meetings and online seminars. The integration of practices from cities such as Paris, London, and Malmö ensured that Varna's approach is informed, inclusive, and aligned with sustainable urban development. Malmö's bicycle-sharing systems, real-time information tools, and public-awareness campaigns provided guidance for our future testing actions. Paris and London's night-time electric buses and delivery vehicles presented a realistic outlook for Varna as well, given that the city has already introduced more than 60 electric vehicles into its public-transport fleet. Additionally, London's methodology for measuring and operationalising data on night-time transport use has given us clearer direction on how to analyse community needs more effectively.

Varna also welcomed a delegation from our partner cities in June 2025 to showcase some of our testing actions and provide a clearer picture of the current state of affairs. At the

same time, we were able to contribute actively to discussions on themes relevant to other partners, particularly those connected to maritime economic development and coastal entertainment and cultural activities.

d. Who contributed

Varna's Urban Local Group (ULG) brings together a broad and diverse coalition of partners from the **public sector**, **private sector**, and **civil society**, ensuring that the city's urban strategies are co-created with all relevant voices at the table.

From the **public sector**, the ULG is anchored by the Municipality of Varna through its key directorates, including Tourism, Control of Public Order, and Environment and Ecology. Additional support comes from the Department of Culture, the Department of Legal Affairs, and the Department of Urban Maintenance and Public Parks. Strategic municipal enterprises, such as the Public Transport Company and the Waste Management Company, are actively involved, as is the Department for Social Affairs. Coordination at the local level is further strengthened by the five district mayors, while local law enforcement and the Port Authority provide crucial security and regulatory perspectives. Academic expertise is contributed by the University of Economics – Varna, Varna University of Management (VUM), the Medical University of Varna, and the College of Tourism, whose research and knowledge feed directly into the group's evidence-based decision-making.

The **private sector** brings the voice of business and entrepreneurship to the ULG. The Chamber of Tourism, the Association of Bar Owners, and the Association of Restaurant Owners represent the hospitality industry, while the concessionaires of the port and the balneotherapy zone ensure the inclusion of Varna's maritime and spa sectors. Cultural and commercial operators - including theatre, cinema and music venue owners, the Festival and Congress Center, night shop owners, as well as local producers and artists - contribute their experience in sustaining the city's cultural and entertainment ecosystem.

Civil society and the NGO community add yet another crucial dimension to the ULG. Organisations such as *Talyana NGO* and *Varna Spaces* advocate for urban regeneration and better planning, while the Chamber of Architects, the Association of Architects, the Cycling Club and a local bike-sharing company speak for sustainable urban design and mobility. Cultural and community initiatives like *ReBonkers*, alongside independent cultural operators, sports clubs, local high schools, and the public library, ensure that grassroots voices, creative ideas, and community needs remain at the heart of the process.

By weaving together these diverse actors, Varna's ULG embodies the integrated and participatory approach promoted by URBACT, creating a platform where governance, business, education, and community interests converge to drive forward a shared vision for the city's sustainable future.

e. An introduction to the following sections of the IAP

The Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for Varna addresses critical urban issues with a focus on noise pollution during the high summer season caused by private vehicles, as well as night-time activities and their partakers at different times and places. The city context reveals a pressing need for a better-organised public transportation system that is accessible, affordable, and well-communicated to both citizens and visitors. The shared vision aims to significantly reduce noise pollution by encouraging the use of public transportation, thereby creating a more pleasant urban environment.

The overall logic and integrated approach of the IAP hinges on improving night-time public transportation. By enhancing these services, the plan not only mitigates noise pollution but also strengthens public health, safety, accessibility, and economic opportunities across various areas of the city. This approach is designed to make nightlife safer and more enjoyable while promoting economic development for residents, workers, and the tourist sector.

In addition, the lack of administrative digital and on-site monitoring of the noise pollution created not only by transportation but also by night-time entertainment providers and consumers leads to an imbalance in both offerings and types of activities. As many people as we are trying to reach as users of public transportation are also directly influenced by the offerings of Varna's nightlife in one way or another - some may participate as service workers, while others, such as citizens, tourists, and students, are an inseparable part of its consumption. Due to this, we have taken on an approach that will address both the content provided and the safe, accessible, and comfortable ways to get to it and return.

Action planning details involve several key steps: conducting thorough research and analysis, engaging in a collaborative planning process with all stakeholders (in separate groups for the topics of transportation and cultural agenda, as well as a few meetings involving everyone), and testing proposed actions to ensure their effectiveness. This structured approach ensures that the solutions are well-informed and broadly supported.

The implementation framework sets the stage for these actions by outlining the necessary steps for execution, monitoring, and evaluation. This framework will coordinate efforts among city departments, transportation authorities, local businesses, and community organisations to ensure that the improvements effectively address noise pollution and contribute to the overall quality of life, health, and entertainment in Varna.

3. Context, Needs and Vision

a. Setting the Scene: Europe's Night-Time Renaissance

Cities are typically designed around daytime rhythms, yet what happens between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. is equally vital: dining, entertainment, cultural activities, retail, public transport, healthcare, environmental services, logistics, and more. Many cities worldwide have substantial night-time economies-for example, New York supports 300,000 night-time jobs, and in London, one in every eight jobs is linked to the night. Cities of all sizes increasingly recognise that a well-managed, inclusive night-time economy enhances urban attractiveness, quality of life, and opportunities for economic and social development.

The Cities After Dark network uses an integrated approach to address the complex challenges of the night-time economy. Cultural hubs such as theatres, cinemas, music venues, and nightclubs form the backbone of a vibrant nightlife, and collaboration between nocturnal stakeholders and local authorities is essential for fostering new business models, strengthening cultural identity, boosting tourism, and revitalising both central and suburban neighbourhoods.

Noise pollution and anti-social behaviour are central issues that require careful mediation between the needs of those who want to sleep and those who want to enjoy or conduct business at night. Cities are also improving licensing regulations and opening hours to balance the needs of different resident groups while creating new opportunities for cultural and economic activity.

Another core focus is the promotion of **innovative uses of public space at night**. Opening parks and green areas for cultural and community events can strengthen social cohesion and improve safety, while also serving as climate shelters during increasingly warm nights.

Partners in the network also examine **gender equality at night**, acknowledging that the perception of safety differs significantly between men and women. Some cities are exploring inclusive night venues designed to meet the needs of specific groups, such as the LGBTQ community, while others are organising training for nightlife workers to prevent harassment and discrimination.

Ensuring **access to urban transport during night-time** is furthermore essential for enhancing gender equality, improving mobility for workers, and enabling safe return journeys for partygoers. Extending public transport hours or developing innovative door-to-door services are key actions improving night-time accessibility across the network.

Global models such as Berlin's Club Commission (2000) and Amsterdam's Night Mayor (2012) have popularised innovative governance structures for the night-time economy. Cities After Dark partners examine such international examples to understand how local

stakeholders, cultural actors, and night-time advocates can be actively involved in policy-making. Many partners aim to transform their URBACT Local Groups into **permanent advisory bodies** for co-creating policies and coordinating night-time governance across municipal departments.

Paris' Night Council exemplifies the value of diverse stakeholder representation and strong connections to central governance structures. Several American and Canadian cities have gone further by appointing night-time economy managers within mayoral offices or cultural and economic departments, setting benchmarks for cities seeking to consolidate comprehensive night-time governance.

A recurring challenge across the network is the **lack of data** on night-time activity. Few cities systematically collect information about noise, mobility, behaviour, or economic impact after dark. Raising awareness about the need for European standards for nightlife research is essential for supporting data-driven decision-making at all levels.

Our network

Through initial meetings with the members of the URBACT Local Groups, the cities of the network identified the main challenges they need to address within the night-time economy. These include noise pollution and the safety of public spaces in Piraeus and Genoa; the connection between night-time economy and tourism promotion in Braga; extending night-time activities beyond the tourist season in Zadar and Budva; promoting respectful behaviour among night users in Paris and Málaga; enhancing urban mobility services at night in Varna; improving local services and the accessibility of night venues in Nicosia; and formulating new licensing regulations in Tallinn.

Tackling these issues in each city also entails improving broader dimensions such as gender equality, the use of public spaces, environmental sustainability, accessibility to culture, working opportunities, and public services. These themes are central to the network's transnational meetings, study visits, and thematic webinars, where partners exchange good practices, explore innovative approaches, and stimulate local discussions for testing actions on the ground.

The overarching goal is to translate a **shared vision of the night-time economy** into integrated plans and long-term policies that can transform the night-time hours into a space for innovation, safety, cultural vibrancy, and mutual trust.

b. The Local Context: Varna by Night

Varna, the third-largest city in Bulgaria with 348,000 residents, is strategically located on the Black Sea coast, making it vital for maritime activities and tourism. As one of Europe's oldest human settlements, dating back 6,300 years, its rich cultural heritage remains integral to its identity. Post-Bulgaria's independence in 1878, Varna emerged as an important administrative and cultural hub. Its coastal character fuels the local economy, with shipbuilding, ship repairing, and port activities driving growth as the largest Black Sea port.

Varna has been Bulgaria's top tourist destination since the 1920s, renowned for its hot springs, beaches, and surrounding forests. This reputation led to the development of extensive tourist infrastructure. More recently, the Golden Sands resort, 18 km from the city, attracts around 1 million visitors annually.

Financial services, fintech, and IT industries have spurred Varna's growth, drawing new talent. The city hosts six universities with 30,000 students, fostering a vibrant academic community that supports a knowledge-based economy. Varna's focus on digital and green
Considering the city is one of the most popular summer destinations for both Bulgarian and international visitors, there are a few steps that have been taken in the direction of systematising, monitoring and regulating the causes of noise pollution, both during the day and night.

Firstly, to tackle one of the main challenges - noise from traffic, the Municipality already included in the Plan for Integrated Urban Development and in the Green City Action Plan of Varna (GCAP) actions to decrease the noise coming from urban transportation, mainly during the night-time.

An Action plan for prevention of the noise from Varna has the following objectives and priority measures: installation of noise protection shielding equipment (noise barriers), of acoustic barriers and slopes in order to optimally ensure protection from heavy traffic and create favourable conditions for limiting the noise load on the environment in the municipality main roads.

The municipality also implemented an Action Plan to the Strategic Noise Map for the Varna Agglomeration. It aims to reduce the noise load in residential buildings close to the boulevards and with a budget of 2,7M Euros is foreseen for this activity. It is worth noting here, that this map does not address the noise-pollution, created by night life culture and activities.

Secondly, a pilot night bus transport has been initiated - for a second year in a roll, the public transportation has a summer schedule (1st July to 1st September) with 6 lines (see img.1) running with extended hours until 1am (in contrast to 11:30 during the rest of the year). The lines cover most of the city's more distant areas, yet the main line connecting the airport, the city centre and the most popular resort "Golden Sands" is not on the list. (see img.2) Those running lines, thor schedule and track are not based on any testing of the benefits and potential of this approach has been implemented prior or during this initiative.

Thirdly, one of the main issues we have faced as a local administration is noise pollution and security issues, a collateral effect of the night-life sector. Another city-specific source are the leisure establishments - bars, disco clubs and restaurants along the coastline with night programmes. Many of those spaces are open air venues and have permits for extended working hours.

Image 1

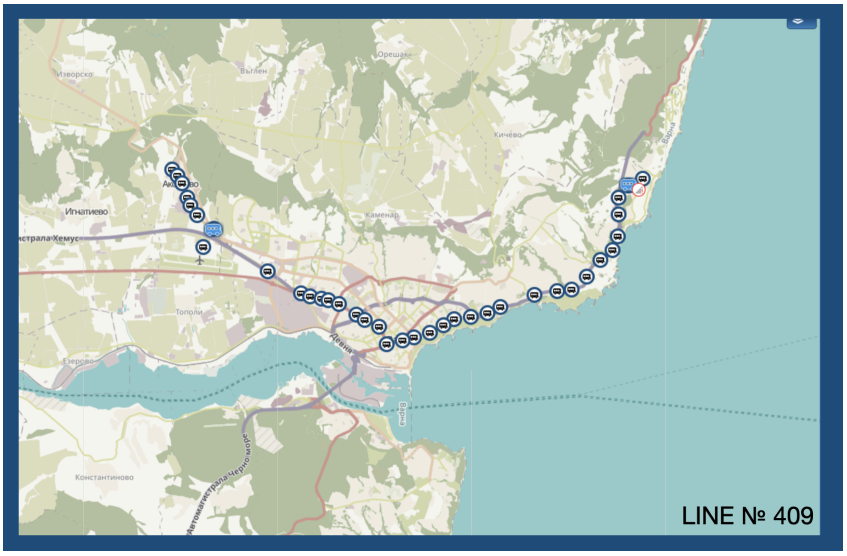

Image 2

There is no system (apart from complaints of residents) to control whether the level of noise is within the allowed limits. Thus, initially, a discourse on zoning the city has been part of the municipalities ideas as a way to separate residential and business zones and navigate licences for allowed working hours according to this, among other requirements. However, data from other cities that introduced this approach show deterioration in the urban fabric and decreased quality of life of residents in central areas, gentrification and depopulation of the zones with longer working hours. Therefore, with the local professional organisations of architects and urbanists - Chamber and Union of Architects, , the Design Hub, universities of economics, medicine and Varna Free University (architecture department), regional health department, Bulgarian Red Cross and other civil society organisations propose that a new place specific approach should be sought.

c. Connecting the Dots: Linking Varna's Vision to Broader Strategies

Promoting sustainable urban development and the night economy together can have several benefits for Varna. For instance, a sustainable urban development strategy can help to create a more attractive and welcoming environment for the night economy businesses, which in turn can help to drive economic growth and create jobs. Similarly, a thriving night economy can contribute to the overall economic sustainability of a city by increasing tourism and attractiveness, generating revenue, and creating jobs.

In order to promote a more sustainable urban development and responsible night economy, Varna would take several steps, such as:

- Creating a more pedestrian-friendly streets and public spaces that are safe, clean and accessible at night;
- Investing in sustainable public night transportation, such as electric buses, electric car or bike-sharing programs, parkings, to reduce carbon emissions and noise pollution and improve mobility; ,

- Improve the streets illumination from RES, the management of the garbage collection, and the control of the night economy activities.
- Encouraging the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, to power businesses in the night economy;
- Promoting the use of green building materials and designs that are energy-efficient and environmentally friendly;
- Ensuring that businesses in the night economy adhere to sustainable practices, such as waste separation, using biodegradable materials or reducing waste;
- **Introduce regulation for responsible investments** in noise control, soundproof insulation of licensed premises and entertainment venues for night economy - music clubs, concert halls, bars, pubs, restaurants etc.
- Invest in smart online platform continuously operating Noise Monitoring System controlling the noise transgression and **apply the sanctions envisaged for transgressors,**
- Allow license for extended open hours only after the requirements are met - soundproofing; installation of a sound limiter linked to an online platform; Accomplishment of an acoustic assessment, distance from residents, etc).

Overall, the goal of the night economy could create a more sustainable and prosperous Varna for visitors and residents, and would adhere to green and regulatory standards.

d. What We're Tackling: Key Challenges and Stakeholders

Within the context of the Cities After Dark goals, Varna aims to address the lack of effective tackling of the reasons of noise pollution during the night without compromising the ways in which visitors and citizens participate in the night-time economy. This challenge is approached through three interconnected dimensions: public transportation, noise regulation, and the cultural agenda. Stemming from the dynamics of night-time activity and mobility, the project deals with reducing night-time noise pollution, which has proven to negatively affect public health, sleep quality, mental well-being, and the overall sense of safety in urban environments.

First, transportation.
Many consumers and workers in the night-time economy rely on private vehicles to reach their destinations. This not only generates additional noise pollution but also raises important questions regarding road safety, accessibility, affordability, and the effectiveness of late-night mobility options. The core of this problem lies in the irregular, insufficiently promoted, and often misunderstood night-time transportation system. This is compounded by outdated regulations regarding the ownership and condition of private vehicles, as well as broader infrastructural challenges that limit the appeal and reliability of public transport after dark. The absence of unified communication channels further deepens the issue: many citizens and tourists are simply unaware of the transport opportunities that do exist.

Next, noise monitoring and management.
Although Varna is not zoned into formal night-life districts, in practice its night economy unfolds mainly in the city centre and along the coastline where late-night clubs, bars, and

concert venues are concentrated. Yet even in these well-known zones, there is no coherent monitoring system or unified set of regulations for sound levels, late-hour behaviour, pedestrian flow, or crowd management. This lack of structure has led to a significant imbalance between night-life offerings and community needs.

Many venues close as early as 3 a.m., leaving party-goers with no alternatives while simultaneously provoking frustration among nearby residents who wish to rest but continue to hear the social activity outside. At present, citizen complaints and consequent police interventions are the only mechanisms for regulating sound - leaving venue owners exposed, residents dissatisfied, and municipal authorities without reliable data or tools to enforce meaningful standards. This daily tension generates mistrust, unpredictability, and missed economic opportunities.

Last but not least, the cultural and entertainment agenda.
Varna's cultural and entertainment landscape suffers from a lack of diversity in the early evening hours. While late-night options are relatively strong, many citizens express dissatisfaction with the limited programming between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. During these hours, the only lively social spaces are restaurants, leaving entire demographic groups - such as young families, teenagers, students, and older adults - with few or no cultural or community-oriented activities. This creates a sense of disconnection and a lack of belonging in the city's cultural planning.

Moreover, there is a notable absence of events in shared public spaces, which further reinforces social segmentation and limits the ability of cultural life to bridge different age, social, and economic groups. The result is a night-time cultural agenda that feels fragmented, unequal, and overly dependent on private venues rather than on citywide, accessible cultural infrastructures.

Underlying administrative challenges.
The lack of administrative regulation and coordination over noise pollution, combined with the absence of a unified agenda for developing the night-time culture across different hours and districts, contributes significantly to Varna's current difficulties. There is no clear framework regarding who can measure noise, how it must be monitored, or what enforcement mechanisms should look like. As a result, existing policies do not function effectively, and both residents and businesses feel underserved.

Closing hours for restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues frequently extend beyond public transport operating times. Consequently, both employees and customers rely on private vehicles or taxis to get home. Besides being unsustainable and costly, this dependency further contributes to noise pollution and raises safety concerns - including driving under the influence of alcohol or other substances.

e. Our Vision for Varna at Night

The vision for Varna's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) revolves around ***creating a sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant night-time economy that enhances the quality of life for all residents while addressing pressing issues such as noise pollution, accessible mobility and diverse cultural agedna.***

Through our work with Varna's ULG's and in close collaboration with the municipal entities responsible, the integrated action plans aims to put Varna on the map as a city of color and diversity, which is accessible and welcoming to all citizens, tourists, students and expats.
The vision created during those two years is built to serve all layers of Varna's inhabitants - from those who want to sleep, through those who want to enjoy the night, to those who provide for their families working during the dark hours of the day.

The inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders allowed us to define the following priorities our vision should run after:

- Green (and thus quieter) offers for public transportation, accompanied by a coherent information system in order to enhance the user experience, making it easier for residents and visitors to navigate the city at night.
- A united monitoring and regulation system for noise pollution
- Diversification of cultural agenda with a strong focus on inclusion and accessibility

All of this without compromising any of the active participants of Varna's night.

f. Analysing the Main Integration Challenges

For Varna, the most important and challenging aspects of integration in the night-time economy are **governance**, **processes**, **people and information**, **performance management**, and **compliance**. These dimensions shape how effectively the city can coordinate policies, stakeholders, regulations, and data in order to manage noise, mobility, cultural activity, and safety after dark.

Governance

Governance is the core integration challenge. Until now, Varna has lacked dedicated policies and clear institutional responsibility for managing night-time activities, resulting in fragmented decision-making and reactive responses to complaints. The IAP seeks to establish coordinated governance structures, clarify roles between departments, and introduce mechanisms for co-creation with stakeholders. This foundational work is essential to ensuring that night-time mobility, noise management, and cultural planning operate as part of a unified system.

Processes

Another critical challenge is the absence of standardised processes for monitoring and regulating night-time noise and mobility. There are no established procedures for who measures noise, how it is monitored, or how enforcement should occur. Developing these processes from scratch is demanding but provides an opportunity to design systems

tailored to the local context. Through the IAP, Varna will define operational procedures, protocols, and cross-department workflows that support effective night-time governance.

People & Information

Stakeholder engagement and information flow are currently limited. Communication between municipal departments, businesses, cultural actors, residents, and service providers is inconsistent and unstructured. The IAP places strong emphasis on co-creation - using URBACT tools to build dialogue, coordinate interests, and involve direct beneficiaries in research, testing actions, and evaluation. Improving this integration aspect will be crucial for gathering reliable data on needs and preferences, strengthening trust, and ensuring broad support for new policies.

Performance Management

Varna lacks a data-driven approach to understanding night-time activity. There is insufficient information on transport usage, noise levels, behavioural patterns, and the economic impact of nightlife. The IAP aims to introduce new methods of data collection, including surveys, monitoring tools, and digital systems. This will support evidence-based decision-making, allow for assessment of the night-time economy's performance, and help track progress toward reducing noise and improving accessibility.

Compliance

Compliance presents a significant integration challenge, as existing regulations are poorly enforced and often not linked to operational capacity. Venue owners currently operate in uncertainty, residents rely on complaint-driven enforcement, and authorities lack tools for consistent monitoring. The IAP seeks to harmonise existing regulations, introduce clearer standards, and ensure that compliance is achievable, measurable, and fair. Improved compliance will also depend on strengthening communication between authorities, venues, and communities.

Assessment of Current Integration Levels

At present, Varna's level of integration is **low to moderate**, with major gaps in:

- cross-departmental coordination (governance),
- stakeholder communication (people & information),
- evidence and monitoring (performance management), and
- regulatory enforcement (compliance).

Processes remain largely informal, siloed, and reactive. There is no unified vision or operational framework for managing the night-time economy.

Key Aspects of Integration to Improve Through the IAP

The IAP focuses on improving:

- **Governance integration:** creating a coordinated structure for night-time policy-making.
- **Process integration:** establishing regulatory and monitoring procedures.
- **Stakeholder integration:** building sustained collaboration through the ULG and broader networks.
- **Data integration:** implementing systems for monitoring noise, mobility, public space use, and user perceptions.
- **Policy integration:** linking noise, transport, culture, safety, and public health into one coherent approach.

Together, these improvements will allow Varna to develop a balanced, inclusive, and well-regulated night-time economy that reduces noise pollution, enhances public health, and supports cultural and economic vibrancy.

g. Connection with the URBACT cross-cutting themes of Gender Equality, Green Transition and Digital Transition

If transportation during the night is affordable and safe, it opens up more job opportunities for female workers and people from disadvantaged groups. Public transportation substituting private car mobility leads to fewer emissions, contributing to a greener city with reduced carbon and noise pollution. Managing night mobility and noise pollution through digital solutions supports the overall digital transition, as data from the system will be available to city planners for better urban development.

Varna's involvement in the network allows the city to apply solutions and best practices shared among partners, particularly in areas close to venues of night-time activities. This is crucial for developing an Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for the night economy, which aligns with the city's priorities: diversifying business activities, promoting creative industries and the art sector, reducing alcohol abuse, decreasing night-time noise pollution, addressing social issues like sexism and gender insecurity, and providing citizens with a better and more sustainable nightlife experience. The network also offers opportunities to develop pilot actions and activities based on learning experiences and best practice exchanges with other partners.

To address noise pollution in these areas, Varna plans to develop a noise reduction strategy for bars and restaurants, potentially including mandatory sound limiters for all establishments connected to a digital platform managed by the Municipality. Another key focus for the Municipality is reducing traffic and emissions around night-time activity areas, especially during the high tourist season. The Sustainable Mobility IAP aims to create an efficient, eco-friendly, and affordable transport system that enhances the quality of life for all residents, addressing noise pollution reduction, safety, and accessibility to job and entertainment opportunities.

The main objectives include implementing an all-year-round solution for night transportation, even to the furthest parts of the city, lowering greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, increasing the use of public and shared transportation, cycling, and other sustainable and affordable options for night transportation, and reducing night-time noise pollution. Key actions to achieve these objectives involve expanding and improving public transportation, extending bus networks to underserved areas, introducing a fleet of electric buses to reduce emissions and noise pollution, and implementing a real-time information system for public transport users. Additionally, promoting active transportation through a network of safe and accessible public transportation and further developing bike-sharing programs with affordable pricing and strategically positioned new pick-up locations is essential.

Implementing traffic management solutions, such as developing park-and-ride facilities on the outskirts of the city and ensuring that new and existing policies and regulations are enforced, with well-communicated and served consequences, is also crucial. Establishing a night-time no-private traffic zone, where only public transport is authorized, and measuring noise levels in that area, is another significant step. Engaging the community through workshops and campaigns to raise awareness about sustainable mobility, involving residents in planning through participatory workshops and surveys, and partnering with local businesses to promote alternative commuting options, is vital for the project's success.

This approach aligns with URBACT's cross-cutting themes of gender equality, green transition, and digital transition. By ensuring safe and affordable night-time transportation, Varna can promote gender equality by enabling more women and disadvantaged groups to access job opportunities. The green transition is supported through the reduction of emissions and noise pollution, contributing to a more sustainable urban environment. The digital transition is facilitated by integrating digital solutions for managing mobility and noise pollution, providing valuable data for urban planning and development. This comprehensive strategy aims to create a more inclusive, sustainable, and digitally advanced city, improving the quality of life for all residents and supporting Varna's long-term development goals.

h. Details of your initial ideas for testing actions.

The state of affairs as it currently stands leads us toward a relatively clear conclusion: very little has been done to directly and effectively address the night-time economy in Varna in the fullness of its aspects up until the release of an update version of the Draft "Action Plan for the Management, Prevention and Reduction of Environmental Noise in the Territory of Varna Agglomeration" in October of 2024[1]. Thus, together with Varna's ULG and based on the knowledge collected through all transnational meetings and online seminars, we have taken steps to understand the following:

- What opportunities has the functioning pilot night-time transportation system revealed so far?
- What are the public's opinions and needs regarding night-time public transportation, noise monitoring, and cultural programming after dark?
- What can be done at municipal, local, and business levels to ensure quieter nights in Varna without compromising the diversity and inclusiveness of its nightlife?

The Integrated Action Plan can never be a completed, static document or a strict plan to follow. Instead, it must remain adaptable and responsive, allowing changes where needed - and the results of our testing actions further confirmed this necessity.

The **first testing action** took place during the European Night of Museums and Galleries on May 17th, 2025. It consisted of an online and printed survey aimed at understanding how people travel to and from leisure events, as well as their general mobility habits within the city. The results were surprising. While many respondents admitted to owning and using private cars, just as many expressed a preference for public transportation if reliable options were available. A notably small percentage reported using taxis, while an unexpected 15% said they typically get around by bicycle. The most surprising finding, however, was the lack of awareness about the pilot night-time transport service: nearly 60% of respondents had no idea it existed - yet many said they would gladly try it once informed.

These insights led to our **second testing action** - an information campaign aimed at raising awareness among the general public about the benefits of using alternative mobility methods such as public transport, carpooling, and the city's shared e-bike services. This initiative was carried out in close collaboration with the municipal entities responsible for buses, infrastructure, and mobility. Many citizens expressed genuine interest in exploring alternative mobility options, especially considering Varna's growing population and the limitations of an infrastructure that cannot sustain widespread private car ownership.

[1] https://www.varna.bg/bg/2648

Images from Testing action №2 (22.09.2025 - International Car Free Day)

Last but not least, during May, the cultural sector - specifically the galleries in the Old Town district - came together to offer citizens and tourists a new activity for the early evening hours between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. Inspired by France's "White Nights," we organised guided gallery tours featuring preselected locations and a unifying theme, making visual art more accessible, helping cultural managers promote their work, and filling the programming gap during these hours in a meaningful way.

This testing action was undeniably inspiring. New ideas emerged, such as partnering with a local bar where tours could end with an informal discussion over a drink, providing guests a seamless transition into later-night activities. Another idea discussed involved adding gamification elements, encouraging deeper involvement from participants and enhancing the excitement of taking part.

The action proved to be a great success. All participants shared very positive feedback, and when the results are weighed, the initiative required minimal expenses yet delivered high added value - with galleries welcoming large groups of visitors for each tour.

Images from testing action №3 (17.05.2025 - Mussala for all - pop-up cultural square + Varna's White nights)

These testing actions allowed us to gradually learn about Varna's needs and opportunities and to better understand how the city can improve its approach to the night-time economy. They also strengthened collaboration within the ULG, giving members the chance to work together on practical tasks and test ideas in real time. Furthermore, the actions brought the general public closer to different municipal entities and opened up space for important conversations between citizens and the city administration.

4. Overall Logic and Integrated Approach

a. Reference to vision and proposed integrated approach

As mentioned before, Varna's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) aims to ***create a sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant night-time economy that enhances the quality of life for all residents while addressing pressing issues such as noise pollution, accessible mobility and diverse cultural agedna.*** Varna is well-positioned to tackle these challenges and transform its urban environment. Central to this vision is reducing noise pollution through targeted reforms in transportation and night venues.

The plan prioritizes overhauling Varna's night-time transportation system, a key contributor to noise and air pollution. Introducing a fleet of electric buses will significantly lower noise levels while expanding bus routes to underserved areas ensures year-round accessibility. A real-time public transport information system will streamline travel for residents and visitors, encouraging greater reliance on public and active transportation options like bike-sharing. By making eco-friendly travel more convenient, the city aims to reduce reliance on private vehicles, curbing congestion and noise in residential and tourist-heavy areas.

Equally important is reforming public and private night venues to better manage noise without stifling cultural activities. The IAP focuses on modernizing proximity music venues and grassroots spaces to adopt soundproofing technologies and optimize layouts that minimize noise spillover. Nightlife hubs will be encouraged to embrace multi-purpose business models, allowing cultural activities to thrive in ways that respect nearby communities. Collaborative efforts, such as enforcing noise regulations and incentivizing quieter operations, will ensure venues contribute to Varna's vibrant culture while reducing disturbances.

Digital innovation plays a crucial role in managing and monitoring noise pollution. Data on transportation usage and nightlife patterns will help optimize operations and measure the effectiveness of noise reduction strategies. Smart urban planning tools will integrate these insights to support sustainable growth, ensuring the city adapts to evolving needs while maintaining a balance between economic vitality and community well-being.

By focusing on quieter transportation systems and noise-conscious venue reforms, Varna's IAP offers a comprehensive approach to tackling noise pollution. This initiative enhances urban livability, fosters cultural and economic growth, and positions Varna as a model for sustainable night-time economies. Through collaboration, technological innovation, and a commitment to inclusivity, the city aims to create a vibrant yet peaceful environment for all.

Strategic Objective 1:

Transform Varna's Night-Time Transportation System

This objective seeks to establish an efficient, eco-friendly, and accessible public transportation system operating year-round in order to reduce noise pollution, traffic congestion, and emissions. Varna plans to introduce **30 electric buses** by the end of 2026, expand routes to underserved areas, and achieve a **30% increase in night-time public transport usage**.

Implementation will begin with **pilot routes during the peak tourist season**, providing evidence on usage patterns, demand peaks, gaps in coverage, and accessibility needs. These insights will inform a fully operational system by 2027.

Areas of intervention:

- Integrating sustainable mobility into night-time planning
- Improving lighting, safety, and accessibility of transport corridors
- Promoting bike-sharing and door-to-door services

Key Actions:

- Research and testing of night public transit usage to identify gaps in schedules and routes
- Awareness campaigns on alternative mobility (public transport, carpooling, shared e-bikes)
- Collaboration between municipal departments, operators, and infrastructure units to optimize service

Integration Aspects:

- **Knowledge & Evidence:** data from testing actions guides route adjustments and policy advocacy
- **Urban Planning:** aligning transit routes with night-time clusters and residential zones
- **Health & Well-being:** reducing noise from private cars and lowering the risk of DUI incidents
- **Environmental Sustainability:** promoting electric mobility and reducing emissions

Strategic Objective 2:

Implement Noise-Control Measures in Public and Private Venues

This objective focuses on working with cultural spaces, nightlife venues, and residential areas to design and enforce noise-reduction strategies without compromising the city's vibrancy. The goal is to **reduce night-time noise complaints by 40%** within two years, beginning with priority zones in the city centre and coastline and later expanding to suburban districts.

Areas of intervention:

- Developing a coordinated regulatory framework for sound levels
- Testing noise pollution in residential areas near nightlife clusters
- Encouraging venues to adopt noise-conscious designs and technologies

Key Actions:

- Establishing a **baseline** for noise pollution through coordinated measurements
- Supporting compliance with Varna's **noise pollution reduction plan (2024)**
- Encouraging voluntary adoption of soundproofing and modern noise-control techniques
- Mediating between residents and venue owners to build trust

Integration Aspects:

- **Governance:** introducing cross-department coordination for enforcement
- **Compliance:** clear standards, responsibilities, and monitoring mechanisms
- **Participation:** engaging venues, cultural organizations, and residents in policy formation
- **Environmental Sustainability:** reducing harmful sound exposure

Strategic Objective 3:

Foster Cultural Industries While Minimizing Noise Impact

This objective aims to support creative spaces, music venues, and nightlife hubs by modernizing facilities, diversifying programming, and promoting multi-purpose, noise-conscious business models. Varna seeks to fill the **programming gap between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m.**, ensuring that families, young people, and diverse social groups have meaningful cultural opportunities outside restaurants and clubs.

Areas of intervention:

- Strengthening cultural offerings in early evening hours
- Encouraging collaborations between galleries, artists, bars, and state-run venues
- Improving use of public spaces through inclusive nighttime programming

Key Actions:

- "White Nights"-style gallery tours to animate early evening cultural participation
- Public events, exhibitions, and discussions to raise awareness of nightlife issues
- Assisting local venues and cultural actors in accessing grants, workshops, and technical upgrades
- Promoting cultural programming that balances vibrancy with responsible noise management

Integration Aspects:

- **Social Inclusion:** making cultural nightlife accessible to all demographics
- **Gender Equality:** improving safety and comfort in cultural spaces for women and vulnerable groups
- **Communication:** using cultural events to foster dialogue between residents and nightlife operators
- **Innovation:** testing new models of community-based cultural activation

Strategic Objective 4:

Leverage Digital Solutions for Night-Time Economy Management

This objective introduces real-time digital systems to optimise transport, monitor noise levels, and support evidence-based policy-making. By developing a **real-time noise and mobility monitoring platform**, Varna will strengthen transparency, enforcement, and community engagement.

Areas of intervention:

- Collecting data on night-time needs, flows, and behavioural trends
- Supporting the city's digital transition through shared platforms and monitoring tools
- Providing residents and visitors with accurate transport and noise information

Key Actions:

- Designing and piloting a real-time monitoring app for noise and transport
- Partnering with tech companies, transport operators, and ULG members to integrate systems
- Leveraging EU urban innovation grants to support digital infrastructure
- Publishing insights to support long-term urban planning and participatory decision-making

Integration Aspects:

- **Knowledge & Evidence:** digital tools enable accurate measurement and forecasting
- **Communication:** sharing real-time information builds trust and accessibility
- **Innovation & Experimentation:** pilots provide scalable models for the whole city
- **Governance:** digital systems support coordinated actions across departments

The four strategic objectives together address Varna's night-time economy in a holistic manner, targeting mobility, noise, cultural vibrancy, and digital governance. By focusing on governance, processes, people and information, performance management, and compliance - the integration aspects most relevant to Varna - the IAP supports a balanced, inclusive, and sustainable night-time ecosystem. These combined actions aim to improve public health, expand cultural accessibility, strengthen safety, and ensure Varna's nightlife continues to thrive without compromising community well-being.

5. Action Planning Details

Strategic Objective 1:

Transform Varna's Night-Time Transportation System

Establish an efficient, eco-friendly, and accessible public transportation system operating year-round to reduce noise pollution, traffic congestion, and emissions.
Varna is expected to introduce into circulation 30 electrical buses by the end of 2026. By then we will work to have expanded routes to underserved areas as well as achieve a 30% increase in public transport usage at night.
Realistically, this action will begin with pilot routes during peak tourist season to demonstrate viability and hopefully be fully operational by 2027.

Action 1.1.	**Conduct a survey of perception of night public transportation usage and identify gaps in hours, routes, and intensity**
Description	A city-wide survey will be designed to collect data on current night-time public transport usage, focusing on underutilized routes, underserved areas, and peak night-time demand. The survey will also gather input from residents on desired improvements in hours, routes, and service intensity. Insights will inform pilot projects for enhanced transport services.
Beneficiaries	Night-time commuters, public transportation operators.
Main partner	Municipal Transport Department (expertise in data collection).
Partners	Academic institutions for data analysis.
Tasks	• Design and distribute a public transport usage survey. • Analyze data to identify underserved routes and time slots.
Resources	• Financial: €5,000 for survey design, distribution, and analysis. • Human: Municipal staff for coordination, researchers for analysis. • Tools: Online survey tools, physical distribution materials.
Risks & constraints	Risk: Low response rate (medium). Mitigation: Offer incentives for survey participation.
Expected results	Identified service gaps and informed planning for improved routes.
Progress	Set dates for February and july.
Evaluation	Mid-point check: Number of survey responses collected by 2026

Action 1.2	**Measuring the Usage of Night Public Transportation to Optimize Hours, Routes, and Intensity**
Description	This action tests the feasibility of night-time transport improvements through real-world pilot implementations, assessing the effectiveness of proposed changes in hours, routes, and service frequency.
Beneficiaries	**Direct**: Night-time workers, tourists, and local residents relying on public transport. **Indirect**: Businesses benefiting from increased night-time accessibility.
Main partner	Municipal Transport Department (expertise in data collection).
Partners	Public transport operators for route and schedule adjustments; local NGOs to assist in public outreach.
Tasks	• Conduct pilot tests of adjusted transportation schedules in identified high-demand areas. • Collect real-time data on passenger counts and travel times during pilot periods. • Gather feedback from passengers and transport operators post-test. • Develop a final set of recommendations for service adjustments.
Resources	• Financial: €15,000. • Human: Pilot coordinators, survey analysts. • Technical: GPS tracking systems for buses, feedback collection tools.
Risks & constraints	• **Risk**: Resistance from transport operators to adjust schedules (medium). • **Mitigation**: Offer training and incentives for operators to participate in pilots.
Expected results	• Improved understanding of demand patterns for night-time transport. • Recommendations for permanent schedule optimization.
Progress	Will have progress after the survey results.
Evaluation	• **Quantitative**: Passenger count increase during pilot tests (target: 20% growth). • **Qualitative**: User satisfaction measured via post-pilot surveys.

Strategic Objective 2:

Implement Noise-Control Measures in Public and Private Venues

Work with cultural spaces, nightlife venues, and residential areas to design and enforce noise-reduction strategies without compromising the vibrancy of the night economy.

Specifically, we aim to reduce complaints about noise disturbances by 40% within two years. This will only be possible through a collaboration with venue owners, starting with the priority areas in the city center and coastal area and expanding towards the suburban zones.

Action 2.1.	**Analyze Disturbance Claims and Conduct Sound Audits in Pilot Zones**
Description	Conducting a comprehensive audit of noise disturbances and developing updated regulatory frameworks to reduce negative impact without harming the night-time economy.
Beneficiaries	**Direct:** Residents in the pilot zones, business owners in the affected areas. **Indirect:** Citywide improvement in noise regulation practices.
Main partner	Varna Municipality
Partners	Urban Planning Department, Local Community Associations, Cultural Venue Owners, Nightlife Operators.
Tasks	• Collect and analyze disturbance claims related to noise from various city zones. • Select a pilot zone for a comprehensive sound audit. • Conduct sound level measurements over a period of time (e.g., 30 days) to identify peak disturbances. • Survey business owners and residents in the pilot zone to gather qualitative data. • Propose updated local regulations based on findings.
Resources	• Financial: tba (Sound auditing tools and equipment rental: €2,000 - €5,000) • Access to data on disturbance claims. • Sound auditing equipment and professional expertise for analysis.
Risks & constraints	• Risk: Resistance from business owners to new regulations. (Medium) • Mitigation: Regular communication with stakeholders and pilot projects to test changes before city-wide implementation.

Expected results	• Clear understanding of the noise impact in specific zones. • Updated regulations and a mechanism for dealing with complaints more effectively.
Progress	

Evaluation	• **Quantitative Indicators:**
	  ○ Number of disturbance claims analyzed.
	  ○ Number of zones surveyed for noise levels.
	  ○ Percentage of claims resolved with regulatory updates.
	• **Qualitative Indicators:**
	  ○ Feedback from business owners and residents about the effectiveness of proposed changes.

Action 2.2..	Create a System for Monitoring Compliance with Noise Regulations
Description	Conducting a comprehensive audit of noise disturbances and developing updated regulatory frameworks to reduce negative impact without harming the night-time economy.
Beneficiaries	Direct: Venue owners, residents. Indirect: The wider community as noise pollution decreases.
Main partner	Varna Municipal Police, Environmental Protection Agency.
Partners	Local businesses, cultural venue owners.
Tasks	• Develop a system for tracking noise compliance in venues. • Work with local authorities to integrate this system into existing enforcement mechanisms. • Provide training to venue operators on how to maintain compliance.
Resources	• Financial: tba (System development: €10,000 - €15,000//Training materials and session costs: €2,000 - €3,000) • IT resources for developing the monitoring system. • Staff for training and regular enforcement checks.
Risks & constraints	• **Risk:** Resistance to a new monitoring system.(Medium) • **Mitigation:** Gradual implementation with pilot programs and consultation with venue owners.
Expected results	• Improved enforcement of noise regulations and higher levels of compliance.
Progress	

Evaluation	• **Quantitative Indicators:**
	  ○ Number of venues enrolled in the compliance monitoring system.
	  ○ Percentage of venues passing inspections.
	• **Qualitative Indicators:**
	  ○ Venue operators' feedback on the ease and clarity of compliance protocols.

Strategic Objective 3:

Foster Cultural Industries While Minimizing Noise Impact

Support creative spaces, music venues, and nightlife hubs by providing incentives to modernize facilities and adopt multi-purpose, noise-conscious business models.

Support modernization of noise management and the cultural program that fits the night-life expectations in balance with the need for noise control during the night.

This we plan to do through encouraging collaborations between venues and artists, as well as state owned venues which would be more suitable for late night music and dance events. The plan includes advising the venues and owners how to get financial and technical assistance through grants and workshops.

Action 3.1.	**Organize Awareness Events to Address Safety and Accessibility of Night-time Economy**
Description	A month-long series of events and discussions will raise awareness about the challenges and opportunities of creating a more inclusive night-time economy, focusing on community needs and collaborative solutions.
Beneficiaries	**Direct**: Marginalized groups, local residents, event attendees. **Indirect**: Businesses and policymakers implementing recommendations.
Main partner	Varna Municipality's Department of Culture and Community Engagement.
Partners	Local NGOs (e.g., women's rights groups), advocacy organizations, and community leaders, artists.
Tasks	• Plan and schedule a series of events, including evening concerts, discussions, and workshops focused on inclusivity and safety in the night-time economy. • Partner with advocacy groups and experts to develop engaging and informative content. • Conduct outreach campaigns to attract diverse participants, emphasizing marginalized communities. • Draft reports from discussions to identify actionable recommendations for improving safety and inclusivity.
Resources	• Financial: €6,000. • Human: Event organizers, volunteers, content creators. • Technical: Marketing tools, adaptation of public spaces.
Risks &	• **Risk**: Low community turnout due to insufficient outreach

constraints	(medium). ● **Mitigation**: Enhance visibility through partnerships with local media and targeted campaigns.
Expected results	● Increased awareness of safety and inclusivity in Varna's night-time economy. ● Actionable insights for future policies and initiatives.
Progress	We already have established partnership with the Odesos district mayor and are working on the program and presentation of the project
Evaluation	● Mid-point check: Attendance figures and social media engagement during events. ● Final evaluation: Post-event reports summarizing participant feedback and recommendations.

Action 3.2.	Organize Evening Gallery Tours Inspired by France's "White Nights"
Description	Inspired by France's "White Nights," this action involves hosting a series of guided evening gallery tours. These events will promote Varna's cultural offerings, encourage nighttime public space use, and enhance the city's cultural vibrancy.
Beneficiaries	**Direct**: Art galleries, artists, tour participants. **Indirect**: Local businesses benefiting from increased foot traffic, cultural sector stakeholders.
Main partner	Talyana Association, known for its expertise in organizing cultural events.
Partners	Varna Municipality, local galleries, and cultural NGOs.
Tasks	• Collaborate with local art galleries and cultural institutions to schedule and host evening tours. • Develop a promotional campaign to engage residents and tourists. • Create a digital guide/map for participants, highlighting venues and events. • Train volunteers to act as guides and ensure smooth event coordination.
Resources	• Financial: €1,000 per event (online promotion+ hiring a guide+print material) • Human: Event coordinators, guides, volunteers. • Technical: Marketing and digital guide creation.
Risks & constraints	• Risk: Low gallery participation or limited public interest (medium). • Mitigation: Offer incentives for galleries and use targeted outreach campaigns to attract attendees.
Expected results	• Increased nighttime engagement with cultural spaces. • Strengthened partnerships between cultural institutions and the community.
Progress	This campaign is already in planning
Evaluation	• Mid-event check: Monitor attendance and participant engagement during initial tours. • Final evaluation: Analyze participant feedback and gallery reports to assess the program's cultural impact and refine future initiatives.

Strategic Objective 4:

Leverage Digital Solutions for Night-Time Economy Management

Utilize real-time data and digital platforms to optimize transport, monitor noise levels, and inform city planners about night-time activities and challenges.

This objective aims to develop and deploy a real-time noise and transport monitoring app for public use. To do this, the ULG partners dealing with tech, transpiration and information campaigning will partner and leverage EU urban innovation grants.

It is planned to begin with an app beta version focused on transport before integrating noise mapping.

Action 4.1.	**Pilot a Noise Monitoring and Control System in Live Music Zones**
Description	Test the feasibility of sound measurement and automatic control installations in Varna's live music zones. Conduct a noise audit in a pilot area, analyze disturbance claims, and propose updated local regulations based on findings. Develop a system to monitor compliance, track violations, and enforce fines.
Beneficiaries	• **Direct**: Business owners, residents near live music zones, Varna Municipality • **Indirect**: Visitors to live music venues, the broader Varna community
Main partner	Varna Municipality (Environmental Department)
Partners	Local live music venues, urban planning consultants, sound engineering experts, resident associations
Tasks	• Conduct a noise audit in a selected live music zone. • Analyze complaints and claims about noise disturbances in identified areas. • Install pilot sound measurement and automatic control systems. • Gather feedback from business owners and residents through surveys. • Measure the cost of reducing noise levels and evaluate implementation feasibility. • Draft updated local regulations based on findings and community input. • Develop a monitoring and compliance system to track violations.
Resources	• Financial resources for pilot system installation and maintenance • Technical expertise in sound measurement and urban planning

	• Stakeholder engagement resources for surveys and consultations

Risks & constraints	• Risk: Resistance from business owners (medium)
	  ○ Mitigation: Provide incentives for participation, highlight economic benefits.
	• Risk: Technical challenges in implementing the system (low)
	  ○ Mitigation: Partner with experienced sound technology providers.

Expected results	• Reduction in noise complaints and disturbances • A functional compliance monitoring system • Updated regulations that balance business needs with residential concerns
Progress	It is already adopted by city council to create a municipal database for the state of the acoustic environment and the sources of noise on the territory of the municipality;
Evaluation	• Quantitative: Number of complaints logged pre- and post-pilot; reduction in noise levels in dB; number of businesses adopting the technology • Qualitative: Resident and business satisfaction surveys

6. Implementation Framework

Varna's IAP implementation is structured around strong governance, stakeholder engagement, efficient resource planning, and a clearly defined monitoring and risk management system. This approach ensures alignment with the city's strategic vision for a sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant night-time economy.

a. Governance Mechanisms and Processes

The governance of the IAP is coordinated by the Municipality of Varna, specifically through the Departments of Environment and Ecology, Urban Maintenance, Culture, and the Transport Department. These entities will be responsible for operational leadership, budgeting, and reporting.

A multi-stakeholder implementation team drawn from the Urban Local Group (ULG) will support delivery and ease the processes related to municipal to citizens communication. . This team would include representatives from municipal services, public transport operators, nightlife venue owners, law enforcement, NGOs, and local businesses. Responsibilities are delegated according to action lines (e.g. transport, noise control, digital monitoring), ensuring expert oversight and interdepartmental coordination.

Decision-making is supported by regular steering group meetings, hosted quarterly, with working groups, formed around plot actions or regulatory improvements.

b. Engagement of Wider Stakeholders

To maintain momentum and transparency beyond the core governance structure, wider ULG participants and other local actors will remain actively engaged through:

- Public forums and consultations with thematic workshops and events, relating to exchange of good practices between colleagues and other professionals. In other words - expose the wider ULG to the wider picture of the Cities After Dark agenda, beyond their personal interest and aim to create a strong and sharing network of a variety of different stakeholders
- Regular open hours or round tables with the municipal administration in order to ensure stakeholders feel heard and participate actively in the building of Varna during the dark.
- As an extension to the previous point - A public-facing digital platform where residents can access data, submit feedback, and monitor progress.
- Updates through newsletters and social media by the Municipality and ULG partners.

This ensures continuous involvement of community voices, especially from marginalised groups, venue owners, students, artists, and residents.

c. Costs and Funding Approach

The implementation is designed to be modular and adaptive based on funding availability. Indicative budget allocations include:

- €5000 - Night transport perception survey. (incl. Preparation of the survey,Information campaign, digital and physical carrying out of the survey, data

analysis & summarization) - Considering this action will optimize the municipality's process of further improving night transportation, a budget should be negotiated with them.

- €20,000 - Pilot tests for transport routes (incl. Development of the routes, information campaign, personnel to drive, sell tickets, keep order on the bus, technology to monitor the frequency usage)
- €5,000-10,000 - Purchasing sound auditing equipment, planning municipality ran initiatives to measure noise in active night-time areas to measure the needs and resources for the next point. Funding sources include the municipal budget, national urban development programs, and external financing such as URBACT and potential EU Urban Innovation grants.
- €15,000-20,000 - Noise compliance monitoring system - this step is the most sophisticated and requires most financial support as it includes long-time investments in a team for monitoring, who would collaborate with municipality police, as well the implementation of digital monitoring and communication systems. The main source of funding would have to be provided by the municipality itself or through municipal application for national urban development programs.
- €6,000 - Safety and accessibility awareness events - This should be done by the stakeholders representing the NGO's and cultural venues, as well to include the presence of municipal police and health professionals who can further elaborate on safety measures citizens and venue owners can implement or exercise. Municipality and interested stakeholders shall be invited to fund this campaign.
- €1,000 per gallery event - Cultural programming.- This action can be funded by the competitive culture fund of the municipality through applying in collaboration with cultural organisations with interest in this action. This event can also become self-sustainable if a fee is collected from the participants.

d. Timeline for Implementation

The timeline for implementing the IAP spans from early 2026 to 2028, structured as follows:

2026: Survey development, stakeholder engagement, and planning.

2026-2027: Launch of pilot transport routes and noise audits

2026-2027: Evaluation of pilots and development of regulatory frameworks.

2026-2027: Implementation of transport infrastructure upgrades (electric buses), noise monitoring systems, and expanded cultural initiatives.

2027-2028: Full roll-out of night transport, expanded monitoring, and policy finalisation.

Monitoring and revision cycles are embedded annually to allow for learning and adaptation.

e. Monitoring and Performance Indicator

The monitoring of Varna's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) is designed to ensure accountability, data-informed adjustments, and transparency throughout implementation. The approach combines quantitative and qualitative indicators across all strategic objectives, directly linking performance tracking with the governance structure outlined in Section 6.1.

The Municipality of Varna, through its Environmental, Transport, and Urban Maintenance departments, will oversee monitoring, supported by the core ULG implementation team. Each action line-transport, noise control, cultural vibrance, and digital tools-will have designated lead stakeholders responsible for data collection, reporting, and analysis.

Monitoring tools include:

- real-time transport usage data (e.g. passenger counts, GPS tracking)
- resident and business surveys
- sound audits
- event attendance metrics.

For instance, pilot transport actions will track passenger volume growth and user satisfaction. Noise reduction efforts will monitor the number of noise complaints, sound level changes, and venue compliance. Cultural initiatives will measure event turnout, engagement levels, and inclusivity, while digital tools will evaluate platform usage and feedback form users and venue operators.

The governance mechanism guarantees that findings are not only collected but acted upon-triggering policy or operational shifts when targets are not met. Additionally, summaries of progress will be shared publicly through the municipal website and community workshops to foster transparency and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

This integrated monitoring system ensures that the IAP remains a living document-adaptive, evidence-based, and responsive to both successes and challenges throughout implementation.

f. Risk Management

Varna's IAP adopts an integrated risk management approach by consolidating key risks from all action areas into a unified framework. Common risks include low public participation, stakeholder resistance (e.g. from venue owners or transport operators), and technical or financial limitations. These are mitigated through early engagement, pilot testing, targeted outreach, and adaptive budgeting. Each lead stakeholder is responsible for tracking risks in their domain, reporting quarterly to the ULG governance team. This ensures timely interventions and maintains momentum across all objectives, reinforcing the IAP's resilience and responsiveness throughout implementation.

Key Contacts

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