

Cities After Dark in 10 Steps

A handbook to
unlock the power
of the night in
your city



Cities After Dark in 10 Steps

A handbook to unlock the power of the night in your city

→ Final Publication

Final version

November 2025

Author

Simone d'Antonio, Lead Expert Cities After Dark

Graphic Design

HUND - Brand Guiders

Photo credits

All photos are included in the Quarterly Journals of Cities After Dark, where credits are available

Cities After Dark in 10 Steps

Introduction: Why the night matters 5

Step 1 Get to know your night-time economy 7

Step 2 Bring everyone to the table 11

Step 3 Rethink public spaces after dark 15

Step 4 Keep services running after dark 19

Step 5 Move sustainably at night 23

Step 6 Support culture and creativity 27

Step 7 Make nights safer and fairer 31

Step 8 Use smart tech to improve the night 35

Step 9 Share the night across the city 39

Step 10 Govern the night on the long term 43

Conclusions: Keeping the Lights On 47

Cities After Dark is the URBACT IV Action Planning Network that brought together ten European cities which explored different dimensions of the urban fabric at night-time. As the first EU co-funded network of local authorities ever dedicated to night-time economy, **Cities After Dark contributed to rethink what cities can become between 6 PM and 6 AM, a period traditionally overlooked in urban planning but full of untapped potential for creativity, inclusion and sustainable growth.**

Click the Icon and listen to the **Cities After Dark** playlist on Spotify!



Introduction: **Why the Night Matters**



Launched in June 2023, the 31-month journey of Cities After Dark, led by Braga with the participation of Budva, Genoa, Malaga, Nicosia, Paris, Piraeus, Tallinn, Varna and Zadar, invited local authorities to experiment new ways of governing, experiencing, and imagining their cities at night.

Developed in the wake of the pandemic, when night-time economy was among the most affected sectors, the network supported the revival of nocturnal life in the partner cities and stimulated a reflection on how the night can become a driver of urban innovation.

Economic and cultural vibrancy, creation of services, safety and contrast to noise and use of public spaces were the main themes addressed by Cities After Dark targeted through transnational meetings, online thematic seminars, articles, studies and journals.

Together, these activities generated a substantial body of knowledge and reflection on the social, environmental and economic dimensions of urban sustainability after dark.

Furthermore, the network integrated the URBACT cross-cutting priorities of **gender equality, green transition and digital transformation** producing a range of outputs that elevated the European debate on the night-time economy to a new level.

Although starting from different levels of experience on night-time policies, the cities in the network seized the opportunity offered by Cities After Dark to raise awareness on the untapped potential of the night. They actively involved local stakeholders in the creation of Integrated Action Plans (IAP), which in many cases represent the first example of a collaborative night strategy to be implemented on the medium and long-term.

The implementation of Testing Actions not only helped to popularize night-time topics among local communities, but served to validate the approaches at the core of the IAPs. These integrated strategies laid the foundation for transforming the URBACT Local Groups into permanent night councils or advisory bodies and for developing innovative models of night-time economy governance.



This Handbook offers a step-by-step guide to designing and implementing night-time economy strategies.

It synthesizes the collective learning of the Cities After Dark partners into practical guidance, illustrated with inspiring examples, innovative pilot actions, and strategic objectives. More than a summary of good practices, it is an invitation to think differently, to approach the night as a dynamic ecosystem where innovation, culture and sustainability meet to shape better cities after dark for all.

STEP 1

Get to know your Night-Time Economy

What happens in your city after dark?

Understanding the perception and the impact of the night-time economy is the first move toward unlocking its full potential.

Cities are designed to be fully functioning during the daytime. When the sun sets, another city awakens: a city powered by the thousands who work in bars, restaurants, theatres, public transports, hospitals, by residents and visitors moving through the streets, by people who attend social and cultural activities, by workers maintaining public spaces and setting up the next day's business

To design effective night-time policies, cities first need to understand challenges and opportunities of their night-time ecosystem. Within Cities After Dark, this work began with a [Baseline Study](#) that identified key issues faced by the cities in nocturnal hours, such as sustainability mobility, safety, licensing, and access to night-time work.

At the local level, collaboration between city departments and night stakeholders helped to map and analyze nocturnal challenges and assess how current policies address them.

Engaging residents through surveys distributed at the occasion of public events or Testing Actions, like in the case of some cities of the network, can also be a powerful way to capture residents' perceptions of the night while raising awareness on the potential of the night-time economy for cultural, social and environmental growth.

STEP 1 | Get to know your Night-Time Economy

Inspiring Practises

In Genoa, a survey conducted during the Testing Action, which delocalized nightlife through unconventional activities like night guided tours and DJ sets in historical palaces, gathered the perceptions of the night-time activities in different areas of the city by residents and tourists. The analysis of the findings gave useful elements to define the key priority objectives of the Integrated Action Plan.

The CIEDES Foundation in Malaga explored the perception and impact of the night-time economy by involving university students in a participatory workshop on how they experience the city after dark in different neighborhoods. In the framework of the Cities After Dark's Testing Action, this model of listening was later expanded to include also other categories, such as business owners and groups of residents, in order to include different perspectives in the holistic understanding of priorities for future night strategies.

What Cities Can Do

Counting how many people work at night in a city, and assessing how the night-time economy contributes to an economical and cultural development, is essential to identify the right actions and policies to be implemented on the medium and long-term.

As highlighted by Cities After Dark, although many cities lack specific night-time datasets, some steps can strengthen the evidence-based decision-making process, while improving knowledge of the challenges of the night-time economy.

STEP 1 | Get to know your Night-Time Economy

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Reinforce the collaboration with universities and research centers

Paris and Genoa tested innovative forms of cooperation during the network activities, for measuring the impact and the perception of the night-time economy. This action can be important for helping different departments of the city to understand cultural and economic impact of the night-time economy and how to include this dimension across different policy frameworks.

Organize regular roundtable meetings between city departments, police, residents and nightlife representatives

Tallinn planned this action in its Integrated Action Plan, in order to include different insights on the evolving perceptions on the night-time economy, and effectively address emerging night issues.

Use data and feedback

Inform planning, safety and cultural strategies from a night-time perspective.

To-Do List



- ▶ Raise awareness across different city departments about the night-time dimension and how it fits into existing policies

- ▶ Explore the perceptions of night-time economy by different categories of workers, residents and visitors

- ▶ Integrate night-time data into broader economic, cultural and social monitoring

- ▶ Use night-time insights and data to design better policies and actions



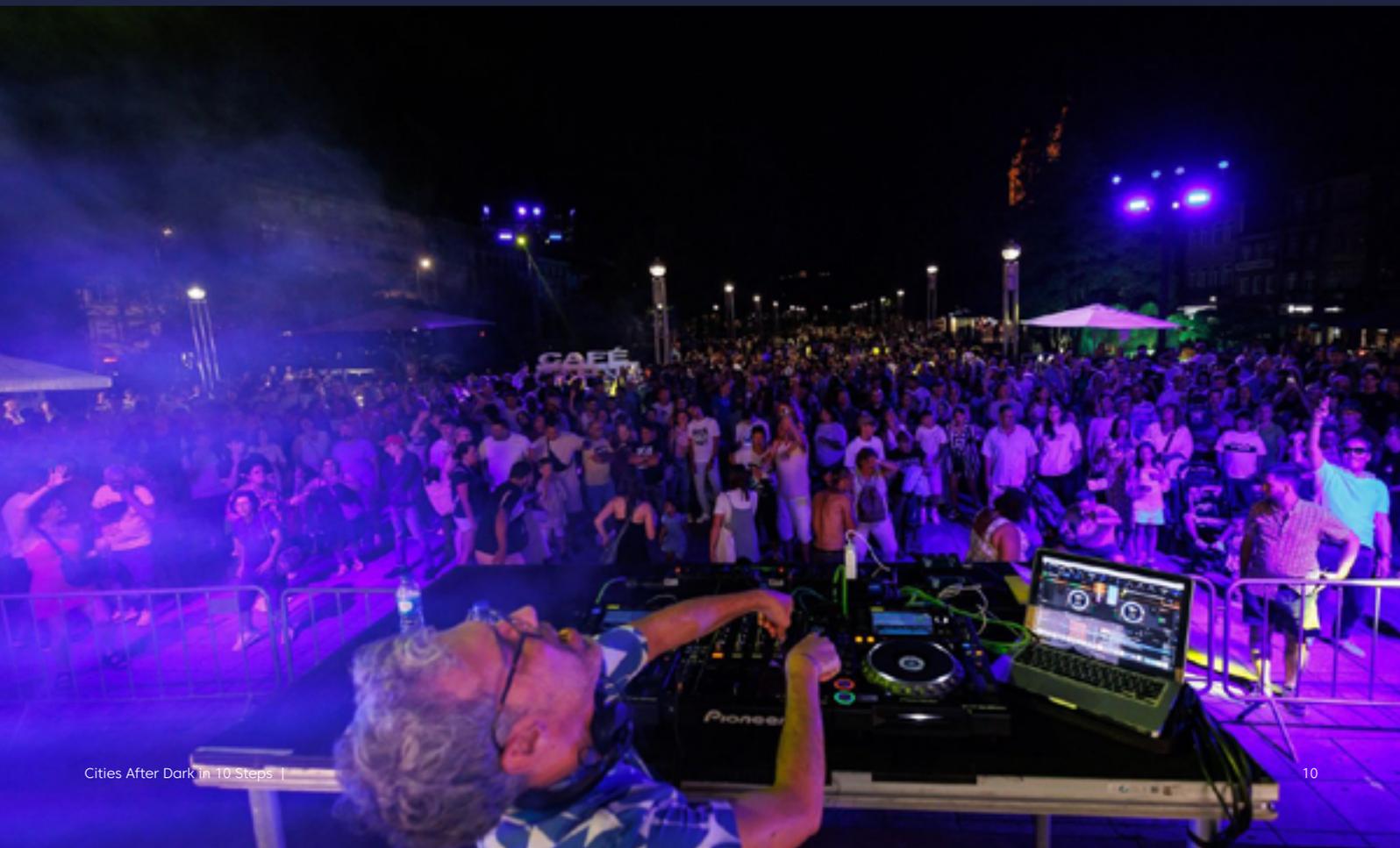
STEP 1 | Get to know your Night-Time Economy

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

Studying the key metrics of the night-time economy, such as the number of venues open after dark, employment levels and sales turnover, helps cities in understanding the total value of the sector and the diversity of the activities by nights of the week and neighborhoods.

As highlighted by the online thematic seminar on [Measuring the impact of night-time economy](#), data-driven approaches implemented by Melbourne and Sydney demonstrate how understanding patterns of diversity and concentration of night-time activities contribute to improve policy-making at different scales to boost the sector's vibrancy and, most of all, promote the culture of night-time impact measurement across public authorities.

In Bologna, a study to collect information from stakeholders and residents was the first step undertaken towards the realization of the city's Night Plan. Developed with the objective of better understanding the identity of the city at night, the study examined the behaviors of different categories of residents (like the places visited after dark or the frequency of their night-time activities) and became the foundation for a participatory planning process that designed actions on night-time economy.



STEP 2

Bring Everyone to the Table

Make the night a space of trust!
Bring local businesses, cultural actors, night workers, and community groups together to shape your city's night-time future.

Night-time economy is a complex ecosystem where multiple challenges intersect. Addressing them require the active involvement of different actors who bring unique skills, experiences and perspectives. Building shared understanding and trust among these players is the basis for designing lasting, creative and effective night-time solutions.

Launching a participatory process around night-time economy can be particularly challenging. Unlike other sensitive urban themes, the night often evokes polarized opinions and misconceptions. Before collaboration can begin, cities must first create a common language and broader awareness of the night as a strategic field of urban policy.

Each partner of Cities After Dark created an URBACT Local Group that in most of the cases was the first-ever multi stakeholder partnership focused on the nocturnal dimension. While Paris and Tallinn already had already collaborative night governance structures in place, other cities faced the typical challenges of a brand-new participatory process, like reconciling opposing views on controversial aspects such as safety, licensing, and noise management.

Yet, the process selection and engagement of the stakeholders often led cities to discover hidden strengths within their communities, by involving the so-called “unusual suspects” such as DJs, night workers, cultural promoters, NGOs and residents who rarely have voice in city planning.

STEP 2 | Bring Everyone To The Table

Inspiring Practises

In Braga, the creation of the URBACT Local Group was a precious opportunity for connecting different city departments and agencies with night-time stakeholders, in order to share challenges and create a common ground for developing innovative solutions. The process continued through the Braga After Dark, a Testing Action that promoted a street festival showcasing the creative vibrancy of the local night scene, an activity that fostered pride in the city's nocturnal identity.

Paris builds upon the work of its Night Council, active since 2014, to reinforce efforts to make nightlife safer and more inclusive. Its URBACT Local Group brought together NGOs and associations working to promote behavioral change in public and private spaces among partygoers. These groups played a crucial role in co-organizing awareness-raising initiatives like the Marateuf, a 42-hour festive marathon combining free parties and performances in which Paris hosted workshops and events on respectful nightlife organized as Testing Action.

What Cities Can Do

Creating a participatory framework that truly reflects the diversity of nocturnal life means including not only traditional stakeholders, like public authorities, businesses and cultural institutions, but also actors with untapped potential to expand night-time services, such as small shops, cafés, social and educational spaces.

The experience of Cities After Dark shows that strong local leadership and the determination in guiding all the actors towards a shared vision are essential to align different perspectives, turning the dialogue into concrete actions for a night-time economy that is sustainable and inclusive.



STEP 2 | Bring Everyone To The Table

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Promote night culture across sectors and target groups

Raise awareness among city departments and agencies to consolidate collaborative process on night-time economy, as Budva plans to do in its Integrated Action Plan, or to promote conscious approaches to nightlife as Genoa aims to achieve with the organization of night culture training in local schools.

Foster partnerships with cultural institutions and business actors

Nicosia’s Integrated Action Plan includes the creation of innovative night-time events in venues like museums and libraries, integrating feedback by community groups and associations with informed insights by night actors and culture professionals.

Run communication campaigns for raising awareness on night-time economy

Cities like Paris and Malaga plan to mobilize media and public displays to engage target audiences, like local youth and tourists, for improving their nocturnal behavior and perceptions of the night.

To-Do List



- ▶ Involve representative public authorities, agencies, local businesses and creatives
- ▶ Keep scouting for unusual night suspects!
- ▶ Empower night champions to drive positive change
- ▶ Make the night-time economy a visible topic in the local public debate



STEP 2 | Bring Everyone To The Table

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

Bringing all the actors of the local night scene together is the first step toward understanding the state of the night-time economy in a city, identifying gaps and building bridges between the different actors. The rise of collaborative forms of night governance and management across Europe has proven how collective action can be essential for resilience and recovery of the night sector.

During Cities After Dark, the online thematic seminar [Night Mayors, Night Offices and Night Commissions: Models of Governance of the Night-Time Economy](#) highlighted how several cities in Europe decided to act for improving their action on night-time economy through the active involvement all the different actors of the sector.

In **Vienna**, the Club Commission organized public consultations, workshops and campaigns to promote active involvement of all the stakeholders around the nocturnal dimension. Its three working groups on social, cultural and economic issues led to not only to new initiatives promoting club culture, but also to closer cooperation with city departments.

In **Berlin**, that hosted the first Study Visit of Cities After Dark, the coordination among night actors was initiated by the ClubCommission in 2000, which contributed in having nightlife recognized as part of the cultural fabric of Berlin. Operating with different financial tools from the Berlin's Senate and city districts, the ClubCommission contributed to update the night-time strategy of the city and in celebrating the positive role of night-time economy through events



STEP 3

Rethink Public Spaces After Dark

Streets, squares, parks and beaches don't close at sunset.

Turn them into safe, vibrant and inclusive places for social life, culture and relax at night.

Public spaces are among the most valuable urban assets, yet they are used to their full potential for only few hours during the day. Their possibilities after dark are almost limitless. When well designed and managed, public spaces can become welcoming backdrops for social and cultural life in nocturnal hours, encouraging residents and visitors to reclaim them in a way that are safe and inclusive for all.

To unlock this potential, cities must explore new nocturnal uses of public spaces, and identify what are the critical elements that limit their usability, from insufficient lighting or public furniture to restrictive regulations. A strategic approach can transform parks, squares and streets into lively and safe places around the clock.

Across the Cities After Dark network, many partners experimented with public spaces as testing grounds for innovative night-time solution. Temporary uses often revealed new possibilities for permanent transformation, strengthening the proximity of night-time activities and local cultural vibrancy.

Involving specific groups, like local youth and residents, in co-designing new nocturnal functions helped raise awareness on night-time challenges and created partnerships for the development of "third spaces" for non-commercial night activities.

STEP 3 | Rethink Public Spaces After Dark

Inspiring Practises

In Nicosia, Eleftheria Square, the landmark public space designed by Zaha Hadid connecting the old and new parts of the city, became a temporary open-air dancefloor during the Testing Action. The activity included also a DJ training programme for aspiring artists of all ages, offering them the possibility to perform and connect with cultural professionals and venue owners. Due to its success, the initiative was replicated across multiple weekends and later integrated into the city's official cultural programme.

In Tallinn, the focus was on engaging local youth aged 14-18 in reimagining how public spaces could serve as alternative night spots. In line with the strategic objective of enhancing the diversity and vitality of public spaces, the Kanuti Garden hosted workshops, dance camps, and cooking classes co-designed with local teenagers for developing their creative potential. The confirmed the huge potential of these "thirds spaces" for making night-time activities accessible and inclusive for all.

What Cities Can Do

Equipping public spaces for being fully functional and accessible in nocturnal hours is only one part of the task. True transformation requires co-designing new functions and activities that enhance the safety and vibrancy of these spaces. Building on pilot actions and temporary uses, cities can increase awareness among residents and night stakeholders, while reorganizing city services related to the nocturnal maintenance of these spaces to support a balanced use of public spaces at night.



STEP 3 | Rethink Public Spaces After Dark

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Improve usability through better lighting, furniture and infrastructure

Actions like the introduction of regulation for temporary use of vacant spaces for night-time cultural and community events, the installation of lighting on outdoor gyms and adding new public toilets available until midnight, all included by Tallinn within its Integrated Action Plan, are interesting examples of how spaces need to be fully equipped for all.

Map public spaces and how they are used at night

A first step for promoting a safe, inclusive, and diversified night-time economy at urban level, as highlighted in Genoa's Integrated Action Plan. This action contributes to give a clear picture of how public spaces are used and perceived, and a key step in designing new services and activities.

Consider different perceptions of public spaces at night by gender and age groups

Integrate these perspectives from the early design stages, as emphasized by Paris in its Integrated Action Plan, ensures safety and inclusivity of different needs, including the ones of people with disabilities.

To-Do List



- ▶ Organize a night city walk with city departments, night activists and stakeholders

- ▶ Launch pop-up night activities to test how public spaces work after dark

- ▶ Extend the opening hours of public parks, especially during summer months

- ▶ Assess how different groups perceive safety and comfort in public spaces at night



STEP 3 | Rethink Public Spaces After Dark

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

The **link between nocturnal use of public spaces and the 15-minute city concept** emerged as an interesting element from the conversation sparked for the first time in the European debate during the online thematic seminar on [15-minute city and night-time economy](#).

Enhancing how public parks or proximity spaces like schools' courtyards are used in nocturnal hours can foster the reuse of spaces which are usually closed or unused at night. The connection between programs like the Superblocks of **Barcelona**, which enhances walkability and resilience in various neighborhoods, and night policies can have a positive role for enhancing cultural and business vibrancy in different areas of the city.

In **Turin** the Urban Innovative Actions' ToNite project has fostered the use of public spaces and parks in two peripheral areas of the city, reviving community spirit and sense of safety in nocturnal hours with a series of activities ranging from live street radio shows, open-air theatre, film screenings and culture street festivals, which involved also different migrant communities and students and long-term residents.



STEP 4

Keep Services Running After Dark

Make essential services work for everyone, by day and night.

From transport and cleaning to culture and healthcare, a truly 24-hour city cares for its citizens around the clock.

In many cities, essential services already operate well beyond 6 PM. Mobility hubs such as ports, airports and railway stations, along with hospitals, waste collection, and street cleaning are active during the night. However, these services often remain disconnected from others that could support people who work or move after dark.

Cities are perfectly placed to bridge these gaps. By coordinating across departments and agencies, cities can design policies that improve usability, integration and visibility of services that sustain urban life on 24-hour basis.

The Cities After Dark network has demonstrated how these collaborations can be crucial for mapping existing nocturnal functions as basis for identifying which ones are needed, in order to significantly enhance the quality of life for residents, visitors and night workers.

STEP 4 | Keep Services Running After Dark

Inspiring Practises

In Piraeus, the city tested extended opening hours for shops and malls during the festive season. This Testing Action, combined with a night run through the city center, created new opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy the city after dark while giving a considerable boost to local commercial activities.

In Braga, reflections on nocturnal services inspired the opening of a nursery operating until 1.00 AM. Located between the local university and the city hospital, the facility provides crucial support for families where both the parents work night shifts. This innovative service not only meets the needs of the surrounding neighborhood but also improves the well-being of children and workers.

What Cities Can Do

Extending public services into nocturnal hours requires balancing economic feasibility and social impact, combining the development of new functions with ensuring that those who work or rely on night-time services are supported.

The Cities After Dark experience shows that this process must begin with understanding working conditions and the services needed for improving them, listening to night workers and identifying barriers that limit the development of new functions.



STEP 4 | Keep Services Running After Dark

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Include night workers in decision-making on new services and activities planned for their well-being

Initiatives such as health awareness campaigns and collaboration with mental health professionals, as included by Tallinn within its Integrated Action Plan, include aspects which are often unnoticed in the debate on night-time economy but constitute essential elements for night workers and their families, in order to raising employers' awareness of the health risks associated with night work.

Support private initiatives willing to extend their activities in nocturnal hours

Providing training, flexible regulations or financial assistance, as it happens in Genoa with the planned consolidation of the Evening Nursery tested until 11 PM in the historical centre. The service supports young families who want to enjoy a night out at a theatre or a restaurant, while Malaga is planning longer opening hours for senior care centers.

Revise opening hours of public services that could have broader usefulness after dark

Supporting the operational changes related to night shifts and reorganization of services, as Nicosia plans to do with the night opening of museums, while Piraeus and Genoa aim to extend public library hours as part of their Integrated Action Plans.

To-Do List



- ▶ Map which services already operate after dark

- ▶ Engage and consult night-time workers and residents to identify gaps in existing actions and policies

- ▶ Facilitate access to healthy food and safe rest areas for night-shift workers

- ▶ Consider rising temperatures due to climate change when planning extended hours for cultural and commercial activities



STEP 4 | Keep Services Running After Dark

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

The extension of services on 24-hours basis is not simply a logistical adjustment. Recognizing that night work exists across all industries transforms the night-time economy into a question of social justice, equity and inclusion. A city where essential services function at night is a city that truly serves everyone.

The case of London, showcased during the webinar on governance models of the night-time economy and at the [Cities After Dark Festival of Tallinn](#), highlighted how holistic 24-hour planning can improve health, access to leisure and quality of sleep. London has also introduced a Night test for all new policies to rate their impact on the city's culture, sociability and economy at night.

Shifting essential activities and services to nocturnal hours can be a powerful adaptation to climate change, as discussed by Cities After Dark with its webinar on [Improving the environmental impact of the night-time economy](#). The online thematic seminar highlighted examples like the night opening of museums and heritage sites in Turkish cities or the nocturnal opening of markets in Cairo and across Mediterranean, illustrating how rethinking urban schedules can help cities to stay vibrant and resilient in a warming planet.



STEP 5

Move Sustainably At Night

Make it easy and green to get around after dark.

Extend public transport, support sustainable logistics to reduce daytime traffic and create enlightened and safe walking and cycling paths.

Getting around the city at night often remains a challenge, not only because of the reduced availability of public transport, but also due to safety concerns around stations, stops and public spaces, especially for specific categories of users. However, sustainable and accessible night mobility is essential not only for those who want to enjoy a night out but also for night workers who rely on efficient and affordable transport to get to and from their workplaces.

To develop a truly sustainable mobility system after dark, cities need to reinforce services which are already active at daytime and explore how their extension can reduce car dependency in nocturnal hours while strengthening the night-time economy across different parts of the city.

The participation in Cities After Dark sparked new conversation in all the cities involved on how to make mobility safer, greener and more reliable. Departments of transport, urban planning offices and mobility agencies joined forces to identify shared solutions, from testing extended bus routes to rethinking intermodal connections.

STEP 5 | Move Sustainably At Night

Inspiring Practises

In Tallinn, the consolidation of the night bus service became one of the most tangible and appreciated achievements of the night strategy fostered by Cities After Dark. The extended routes connecting the city centre with the suburbs benefited both partygoers and night workers. Furthermore, to celebrate the Night of Culture festival as part of the Testing Action of the network, the night buses were transformed into mobile stages for reading performances by famous Estonian writers.

In Genoa, the extension of the operating hours of a bus line connecting the city centre with peripheral areas of the city contributed to the success of the Testing Action, which aimed to decentralize night-time economy activities beyond traditional hotspots. The positive public response opened up discussions on how to consolidate this service on the medium and long term as part of Genoa's intermodal mobility plan.

What Cities Can Do

Developing a night mobility plan is crucial for addressing the full spectrum of movement after dark, from private mobility and goods logistics to the reorganization of the public service.

The implementation of new mobility services in the Cities After Dark partner cities has been tied to feasibility evaluation and to the improvement of physical infrastructure around night mobility. Better road safety, public lighting and connection with mobility hubs such as ports and stations operating on 24-hour basis contribute to making night-time travel safer and more accessible for everyone.



STEP 5 | Move Sustainably At Night

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Consult users to understand their perception and habits related to night transportation

Collect and analyze data to optimize routes and schedule, in order to reorganize the service according to the real needs of residents and visitors as Varna has included in its Integrated Action Plan to complement the introduction of new electric bus in its local fleet. Building on an informal survey carried out during its Testing Action, Varna uses passengers' feedback to improve connection between the city centre, residential areas and seasonal tourism zones.

Test the introduction of extended mobility services during specific events or peak tourism season

Gradually introduce new services while studying the connection with existing mobility options, as Budva included in its Integrated Action Plan for providing pilot summer night-time public transport which may serve both residents and tourists

Improve accessibility of night transport for different categories of users

Develop partnership with local and international players, as Tallinn introduced within the strategic objective on convenient and environmentally-friendly 24-hour mobility. It includes actions like the development of urban infrastructure suitable for people with special needs (e.g., ramps and lifts) and improving the availability of information on night transport on the local transport digital platforms and via global services like Google Maps and Apple Maps for increasing visibility and ease of use.

To-Do List



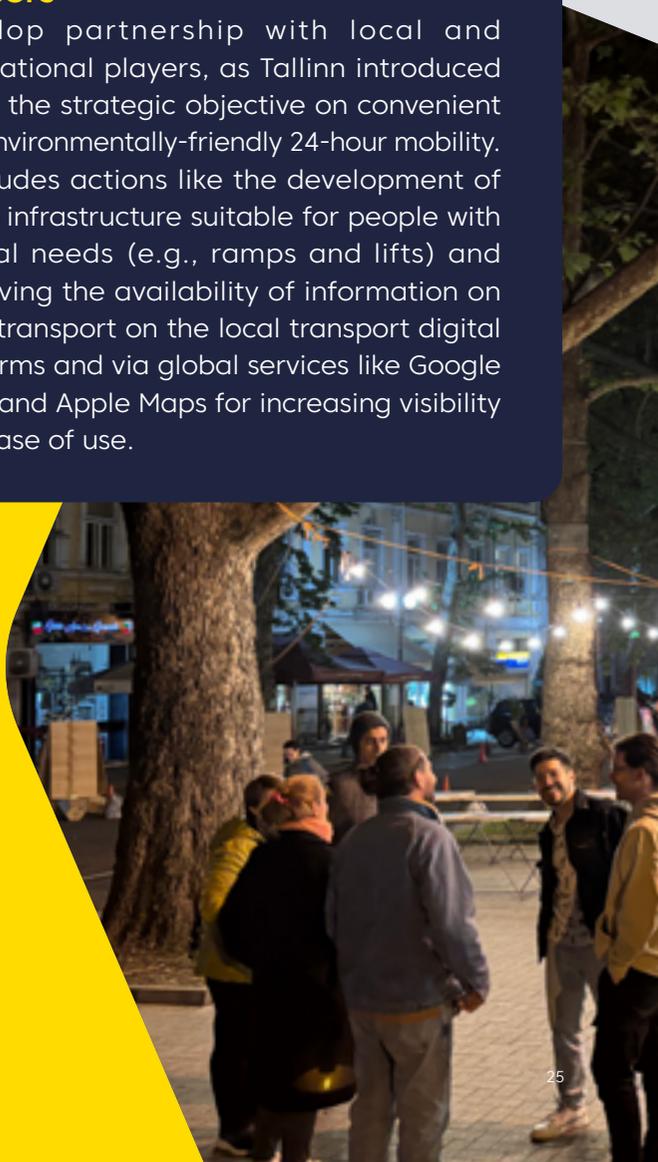
- ▶ Consult night workers, residents and party-goers to understand their travel patterns and needs

- ▶ Assess gaps in coverage, accessibility and safety of existing night mobility services

- ▶ Strengthen connections between night transport, major mobility hubs and peripheral parking areas

- ▶ Encourage partnerships with taxi and ride-sharing companies to develop reduced-fares or safety-oriented schemes (like women-friendly rides)

- ▶ Engage logistic companies and local retailers to reorganize delivering services at night, reducing congestion and emissions during the day



STEP 5 | Move Sustainably At Night

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

Night-time mobility is a crucial factor of social inclusion, gender equality and economic vibrancy. It supports workers in essential sectors, like healthcare, hospitality and manufacturing, while also making cities safer and more accessible for everyone.

As highlighted during the masterclass on [Innovative urban mobility at night](#), most European cities significantly reduce public transport services at night, especially on weekdays. Cities like Vienna and Berlin offer 24-hour metro services only in the weekends, while other cities like Brussels and Amsterdam rely on dedicated night bus networks.

Improving service frequency on weekdays and expanding on-demand and shared mobility services, such as the affordable shared night taxi Collecto operating daily in Brussels, are some of the solutions elaborated for adapting night-time mobility to the needs of different categories of users.



STEP 6

Support Culture And Creativity

**Night-time culture fuels identity
and inclusion.**

Support local artists, venues and entrepreneurs who make the night more vibrant and diverse

The vibrancy and attractiveness of a city after dark is deeply shaped by its cultural scene, which is a key element of the urban experience for both residents and visitors. Theatres, cinemas, clubs, music venues define the identity of a city and foster social interaction, generate economic prosperity and enhance community well-being.

Cities must acknowledge the crucial role of these spaces of cultural production, which are interconnected with other aspects of the night-time economy, such as economic vitality, livability in nocturnal hours and mitigation of noise pollution.

Through its transnational meetings and study visits, Cities After Dark explored the diversity of the nocturnal cultural scenes of its partner cities across Europe. At local level engaging cultural actors such as DJs, theatre and cinema managers, and concerts organizers proved essential to understanding the challenges of a sector that needs to attract audience not only at the occasion of large events but throughout the year, ensuring sustainable access to culture after dark.

STEP 6 | Support Culture and Creativity

Inspiring Practises

Inspired by the model of the White Night of Paris, **Varna** opened a series of cultural spaces and art galleries until late hours. Guided tours showcased key cultural venues participating in the European Night of Museums and Galleries. The Testing Action made cultural experiences more accessible after dark, while promoting a public programme of cultural activities that invited residents to enjoy the diversity of the local cultural scene.

In Tallinn, support to cultural vibrancy of the city is a key element of the night-time strategy. The municipality developed funding schemes to support the cultural programming of small venues, reinforcing night-time creative ecosystems and supporting local entrepreneurship, seen also a factor of attractiveness. These measures not only strengthen Tallinn's cultural identity but also promote equitable access to culture across neighborhoods, making night-time creativity part of a balanced urban and social ecosystem.

What Cities Can Do

Supporting the cultural scene as a driver of community cohesion and well-being of residents is a crucial action for sustaining existing venues and create the conditions for generating new cultural activities in nocturnal hours. Cultural and business vibrancy reinforce each other and contribute to make cities more lively at night, but must be supported by solid public policies, and mechanisms of collaboration with cultural stakeholders and night leaders.

The work of Cities After Dark strengthened the dialogue between night cultural actors and local authorities, leading to integrated policies that link culture to urban planning, use of public spaces, safety and coordination with existing services like public mobility.



STEP 6 | Support Culture and Creativity

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Promote the value of night-time culture as contributor to urban well-being

Reinforce awareness among residents on the positive role played by the night scene, as Braga plans to consolidated with the Braga After Dark festival, but also to make it more visible to tourists through the publication and distribution of a guide showcasing its night-time cultural. Piraeus and Nicosia also intend to include night events in their tourism calendars of events, increasing visibility among visitors.

Recognize club culture not just as entertainment but as part of the cultural scene

Destigmatize a distinctive aspect of the nightlife, as Paris aims to do with its Integrated Action Plan and in particular with the action related the promotion of the label culture. The French capital wants to join the national programme that rewards clubs that demonstrate a commitment to artistic creation, production, harm reduction and social and environmental responsibility.

Support the organization of cultural events for diversifying night-time economy in public spaces

Animate green areas, streets and squares in particular during the warmer months, as Piraeus and Malaga intend to do within their Integrated Action Plan with the launch of summer event series co-organized with local cultural organizations.

To-Do List



- ▶ Recognize the cultural landscape operating after dark

- ▶ Foster multifunctional use of cultural and creative venues

- ▶ Harmonize city services (like public mobility, safety and maintenance) with cultural events and concerts

- ▶ Develop targeted funding schemes or micro-grants for small venues and to support live music spaces

- ▶ Simplify administrative procedures for temporary use of public space for cultural purposes



STEP 6 | Support Culture and Creativity

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

The cultural dimension of the night-time economy and its connection with economic and environmental sustainability emerged as crucial themes from the dialogue with cities that are developing innovative and integrated night policies.

The [study visit to Berlin](#) highlighted how public policies can support creativity and foster the dialogue between authorities, curators, club owners and cultural managers to understand the current challenges faced by the city at night. The recognition of Berlin's club culture as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage celebrates not only the city's electronic music legacy, but testifies also its commitment to supporting cultural production through initiative such as Musicboard Berlin and other public funding schemes.

As highlighted during the online thematic seminar on [Urban planning tools for preserving night-time economy](#), the introduction of principles like the Agent of Change in London was crucial for protecting existing cultural and music venues, like clubs and concert venues. This principle reverses on property developers, rather than on existing venues, the responsibility for mitigating noise and other impacts when new residential developments are built nearby. This approach shows how national regulation and mediation actions can safeguard the crucial role played by venues for cultural and economic growth while protecting clubs, concert halls and other cultural spaces from displacement.



STEP 7

Make Nights Safer and Fairer

Promote respect, equality and inclusion in night-time spaces.
Safer nights mean better experiences for everyone, especially women and vulnerable groups.

For centuries, the night has been associated with darkness and danger. Reversing this perception and making cities safe, inclusive and welcoming after dark requires a combination of policies that go beyond a simple security framework. It involves nurturing a sense of place, strengthening community spirit, and fostering mutual trust among people.

Cities must understand and address the multiple factors that contribute to feelings of unsafety, from poor lighting and noise to gender inequality and social exclusion, and promote positive behaviors that can make the night an opportunity for coexistence rather than conflict.

Across the URBACT Local Groups of Cities After Dark, discussions on different perceptions of safety in nocturnal hours led to action-oriented reflections on gender equality, noise reduction, improved lighting and spatial design, highlighting how safety at night is an issue that touches many urban domains.

STEP 7 | Make Nights Safer and Fairer

Inspiring Practises

In **Paris** the municipality explored how to positively behaviors at night, involving the Paris' University PsychoSocial Laboratory to analyze possible levers and messages adapted to various target groups, like students, the LGBTQ+ community, the music scene and private party organizers. Focus groups involving different categories helped shape positive messages and contents that were launched at the occasion of the Marateuf festival and will be at the core of future integrated communication initiatives.

Inspired by London's Women Night Safety Charter, **Tallinn** developed a new guide on sexual harassment-free nightlife, providing useful tools to nightlife establishment to create safer nocturnal environment for all. The city also organized a series of thematic training for nightlife spots' owners and staff, to improve preparedness and more in general to embed a culture of safety and respect in night venues.

What Cities Can Do

Reducing any form of conflict, discomfort and safety risk linked to night-time activities requires a balanced combination of mediation, regulation and collaboration.

Strong partnerships among public authorities, businesses, residents and community groups ensure that safety policies reflect multiple perspectives, not only related to urban security.

Through Cities After Dark, cities promoted broader reflection on all the elements that characterize the sense of well-being and safety at night, and how this topic connects with gender equality and inclusion. This holistic approach helps create night-time economy that balance different needs and build a shared sense of trust and belonging.



STEP 7 | Make Nights Safer and Fairer

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Support soundproofing of night venues and noise reduction measures

Paris has subsidized soundproofing and acoustic panels for bars and music venues. The development of sounds audits and in nightlife areas and the creation of a system for monitoring compliance with noise regulation are the actions that Varna will introduce to implement noise control while supporting night-time vibrancy.

Protect the safety of night workers, artists and customers

Focusing on all women working in nightlife, Paris included in the Integrated Action Plan the organization of discussion groups and training for venue staff on implementing security protocols. The adoption of schemes like Ask for Angela in Nicosia and Paris will also improve the provision of safe places for anyone feeling unsafe or threatened in a nightlife venue.

Engage youth workers, night stewards and mediators

A series of professionals can raise awareness on the risks of the nightlife, as planned by Tallinn, or to act as point of reference for night users offering information and services to party-goers and night city users, as Genoa plans to do within its strategic objective on strengthening services and safety at night.

To-Do List



- ▶ Map perception of safety at night through surveys and focus groups and considering gender, age and vulnerability factors

- ▶ Launch multichannel campaigns promoting positive and respectful night-time behavior

- ▶ Make safety training mandatory for owners and staff of shops, bars and venues open after dark

- ▶ Involve local police in partnerships for safer nightlife with NGOs, minority groups and business associations

- ▶ Develop incentives and schemes for soundproofing and noise reduction



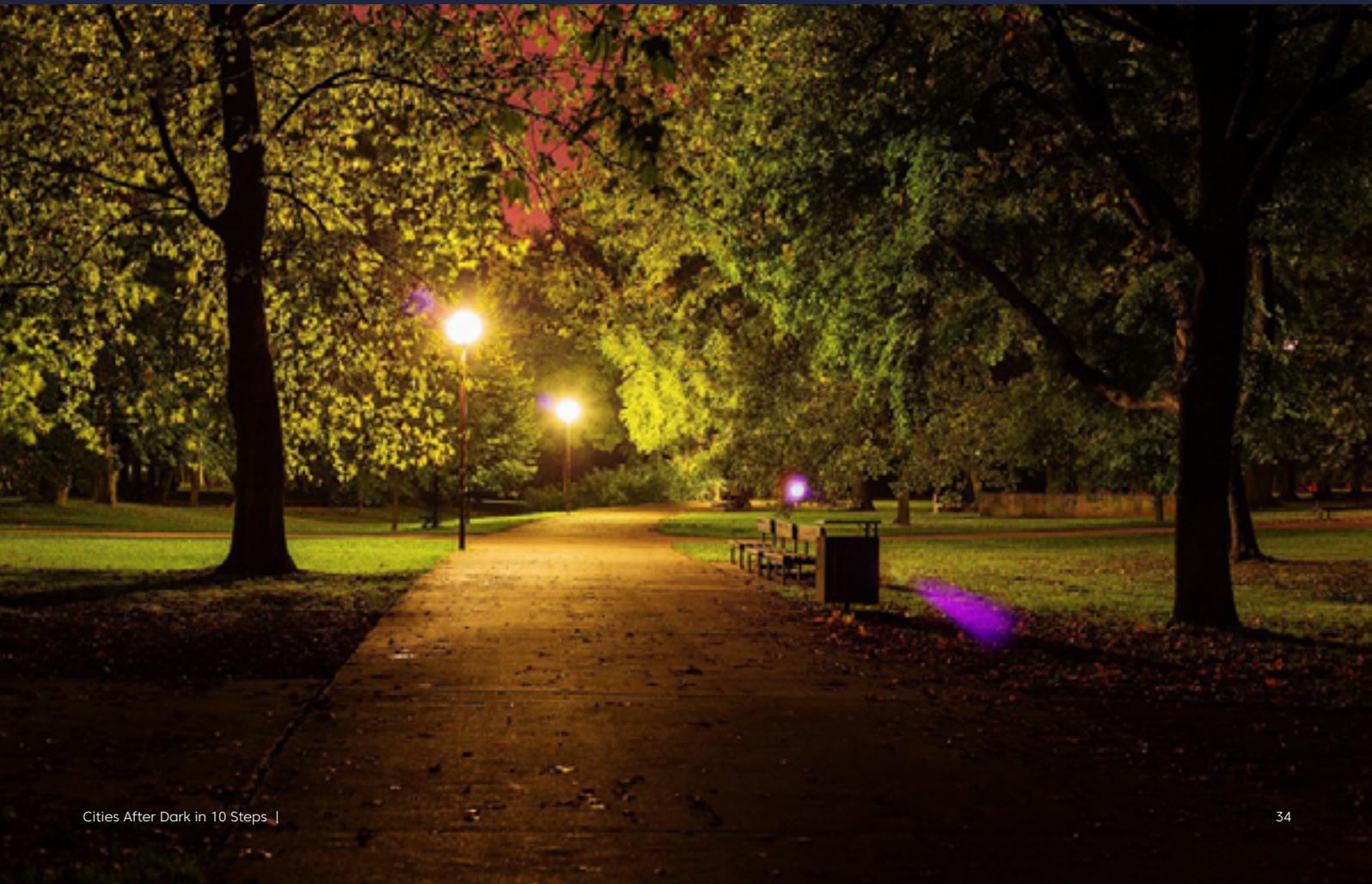
STEP 7 | Make Nights Safer and Fairer

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

Creating a sense of belonging after dark is a growing priority for many cities worldwide. Addressing the causes that associate the night with insecurity is essential for a more inclusive night-time economy.

During the webinar on [Gender equality in the night-time economy](#), Cities After Dark explored how women and men experience urban spaces and services differently at night. Examples such as the Women's Night Taxis in Munich and Mumbai, the Ask for Angela campaign active in several European cities or the on-demand stops on all bus routes after 10pm in Paris illustrate how small, targeted actions can have a major impact on safety and accessibility.

Training nightlife professionals, event organizers and cultural workers to recognize and prevent any forms of harassment proved to be an impactful action in many cities. In London the Good Night Out Campaign introduced an accreditation scheme empowering venues and communities to create safer nightlife environments for all.



STEP 8

Use Smart Tech to Improve The Night

Digital platforms and technology can make cities cleaner, safer and more efficient after dark.

The digital transformation of the night-time economy is necessary for its long-term sustainability, even in a sector based on human interaction. The use of digital tools is not only functional to the promotion of nightlife experiences or for enhancing the experience in club and music venues, but also to better plan, manage and understand night services and functions.

Recognizing the disruptive potential of digital innovation for improving nocturnal experiences is the first step. This requires collaboration across different sectors and a willingness to experiment with new approaches that combine creativity, data and design thinking.

Within Cities After Dark, the introduction of a digital perspective to nightlife management, through a thematic workshop and the review of the Integrated Action Plans, made this cross-cutting dimension a key driver for testing small-scale solutions and embedding innovation into a long-term vision for a more sustainable night-time economy.

STEP 8 | Use Smart Tech to Improve the Night

Inspiring Practises

In **Piraeus** the inclusion of night-time events in the city's digital calendar significantly improved the visibility of the local night-time economy scene and its contribution to city attractiveness. At the same time, the city strengthened the use of social and digital platforms for the promotion of this crucial dimension at different scales. These efforts complement its broader smart city strategy, that includes what the city has done in recent years for smart monitoring of public spaces and mobility on 24-hour basis, based on data-driven policy making.

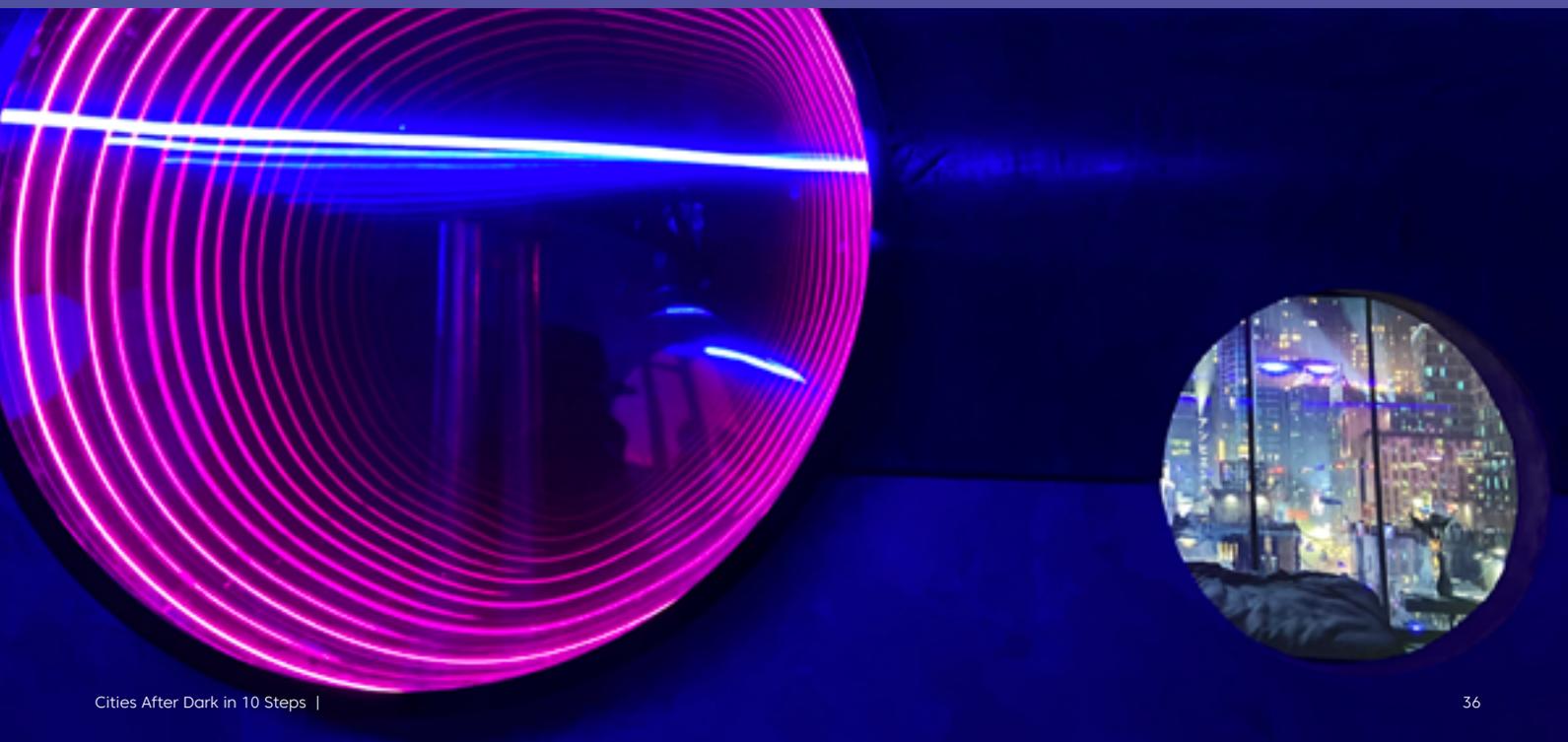
Budva developed an app providing residents and visitors with real-time information on available services and activities after dark. The Testing Action responded to the need of enhancing the visibility of local nightlife scene among residents and tourists, and extending participation in cultural and social events beyond the historic centre and peak summer season.

What Cities Can Do

Integrating the night-time dimension into local smart strategies pave the ground to interesting experimentations and creative uses of the technology to address some of the most urgent challenges such as safety, accessibility and noise management.

The implementation of innovative noise monitoring systems can provide useful data to inform mediation and enforcement actions, but they must be embedded in broader policies that don't rely just on the power of technologies, like spatial planning. Similarly, footfall sensors and analysis of digital data from global platforms can reveal trends in nightlife activity, supporting evidence-based policymaking.

Cities After Dark fostered reflection among its partner on how the use of technologies like GIS systems, digital twins and augmented and virtual reality can enhance planning, design and management of night-time environment, improving both the economy and the quality of life in nocturnal hours.



STEP 8 | Use Smart Tech to Improve the Night

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Develop predictive models for nightlife management

The use of digital tools can be crucial for better planning the delivery of services in nocturnal hours and simulate traffic levels, flows, and different usages of public space. Piraeus, for example, is improving its CURiM platform testing the application of its analysis features to night-time economy. Data collected from various sources like police reports, open sources and citizen feedback can help identify trends, anticipate risk and inform more responsive policies.

Use digital twin solutions to monitor and promote night-time economy

Nicosia has included in its Integrated Action Plan the use of the digital twin of the city Nicosia for nocturnal management. The system provides a 3D model of the city allowing a real-time monitoring of a series of functions, from the use of public spaces to street lighting which can be improved to enhance quality of life after dark.

Collaborate with local businesses and social media ecosystems

The promotion of the night-time economy initiatives can be part of the tourism attraction strategy of the city, as Genoa plans to do within its Integrated Action Plan with the activation of a section dedicated to night-time activities in its official event portal, showcasing public and private initiatives organized at urban level by night.

To-Do List



- ▶ Develop a digital strategy to promote night-time economy as part of the city's events agenda

- ▶ Organize a night hackathon to engage universities, start-ups and tech communities in developing smart solutions applied to night-time economy

- ▶ Use smart monitoring systems and diverse datasets for improving night policymaking

- ▶ Foster a local culture of open data and citizen participation, encouraging residents, businesses and night users to share feedback in real time



STEP 8 | Use Smart Tech to Improve the Night

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

Digital innovation offers powerful tools to tackle some of the most pressing challenges cities face at night, such as enhancing public spaces safety, improving accessibility and reducing noise pollution

During the Transnational meeting of Piraeus, cities explored several technological applications for improving urban planning after dark and developing night-time functions. Digital tools can provide valuable support in re-planning nightlife areas, from simulating the impact of lights and noise on surrounding neighborhoods, but also combining sensors and other tools not only to enhance public space safety, mobility coordination, and environmental management.

At the same time, solutions like the AI-powered chatbot helping tourists navigate Amsterdam's nightlife with personalized and data-driven recommendations, can be crucial for enhancing night-time exploration and engagement, while fostering active interaction between residents, visitors and night stakeholders.



STEP 9

Share The Night Across The City

Spread night-time activities beyond the city centre. New neighborhood hubs can bring culture, leisure and jobs closer to where people live.

Diversifying night-time activities is crucial to offer more people the chance to enjoy the night out in new ways. In many European cities, nightlife is concentrated in specific districts. However, promoting proximity-based night activities can help existing cultural premises like theatres, cinemas and music venues to thrive, while encouraging the creation of new night businesses and better use of public spaces after dark.

Exploring the potential of new districts and underused spaces for the development of alternative night spots is a key goal for many partners of Cities After Dark. Local stakeholders involved in the URBACT Local Group often highlighted the need of activating new initiatives and services across different neighborhoods, moving beyond traditional nightlife core areas.

While at network level the dialogue with the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnership on Sustainable Tourism led to the inclusion of the space/time diversification principle in its Action plan, at local level the collaboration with business owners, cultural actors and groups of residents encouraged cities to reimagine the impact of night-time economy as a tool for inclusion and revitalization, extending its benefits to peripheral and peri-urban areas.

STEP 9 | Share The Night Across The City

Inspiring Practises

Genoa tested the introduction of unconventional night activities, such as guided tours and DJ sets in historical sites located outside the city centre, to test how alternative areas could be activated at night. Residents responded enthusiastically to the approach proposed by the Testing Action, which fostered the possibility of exploring different uses of venues that are not normally used for night-time activities. These events were supported by extended public transport services, demonstrating how mobility and culture can be connected to enhancing the accessibility of the nightlife.

Zadar organized a series of cultural events and street art activities in neighborhoods beyond the city centre, testing how nocturnal activation could foster community interaction. Inspired by the Kwart Festival, which promotes cultural programming in alternative venues during summer, the Testing Action strengthened local participation and reactivated “third spaces” that had little or no previous night use.

What Cities Can Do

Identifying alternative spots for night-time activities goes hand in hand with listening to residents’ needs, in order to make the diversification of night-time activities positively impactful on the quality of life.

Valorizing the existing night spots and strengthening alliances between businesses, cultural actors and local communities can be crucial for bringing nightlife to new areas. By encouraging night-time activities close to where people live, cities can promote the right to the city at night for all, including families, migrant communities, and elderly persons.



STEP 9 | Share The Night Across The City

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Use green and rural areas for night-time activities

The promotion of innovative ways to enjoy nocturnal activities in the nature can foster the use of areas which are normally unused at night. The organization of outdoor activities and festivals in Budva as part of the nocturnal reactivation of rural outskirts and the creation of cultural events and initiatives in city parks planned by Genoa in its integrated Action Plan can be combined to original activities like stargazing, night-time explorations and open-air performances which may be attractive for both residents and visitors.

Engage cultural actors in the revitalization of peripheral neighborhoods

Fostering the creation of new cultural zones can increase the usability of the public spaces with thematic programmes after dark. Within its Integrated Action Plan Zadar intends to launch pilot cultural programming and bring spin-off of major cultural events and festivals from the city centre to suburban areas.

Create night activities in districts that need revitalization

Cities need to act on the extension of basic services and functions while adapting zoning regulations to enable cultural, social and sport uses. Malaga is planning to implement this approach with its Integrated Action Plan through the action focused in enabling new spaces in areas with few residents and good transport connections, based on the analysis of the perception map carried out within Cities After Dark.

To-Do List



- ▶ Identify areas that lack evening and night-time activities

- ▶ Test unconventional venues, such as libraries, shops, museums or schoolyards, for night events

- ▶ Reviewing zoning policies and licensing frameworks to enable night-time uses in underused areas

- ▶ Develop outdoor programming such as night walks, runs and sports activities in public spaces



STEP 9 | Share The Night Across The City

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

Developing partnerships with business owners, cultural actors, associations and groups of residents is fundamental for reimagining how the night-time economy can be spread beyond traditional night spots.

As highlighted by the online thematic seminar on [the environmental impact of night-time economy](#), the collaboration with the night industry is fundamental not only to diversify venues but also to organizing eco-friendly events and manage waste efficiently, especially in areas of the city which are less experienced in hosting nightlife activities.

Flexible zoning and licensing regulations are also powerful tools for unlocking the potential of night-time economy in new neighborhoods, as fostered in Sydney and New South Wales by the Special Entertainment Precincts, a policy that promote extended trading hours for venues and alfresco dining and simplified processes for live music events in areas outside traditional nightlife districts.



STEP 10

Govern The Night On The Long Term

Create dedicated roles and teams to consolidate governance structures on night-time economy and ensure continuity in nocturnal urban development.

Developing a sustainable night-time policy requires coordination across different departments of a local authority. Its implementation must be governed in a stable and structured way, also for ensuring legitimacy within local institutions and the local community.

Since the beginning of the network activities, Cities After Dark has emphasized the importance of transforming collaborative forms of integrated planning into stable night councils or permanent governance mechanisms. Strengthening administrative and managerial structures is crucial to secure continuity and long-term vision in the governance of the night.

At the local level, the dialogue with local stakeholders, city departments and elected representatives fostered reflection on how to sustain integrated planning efforts. This action included a reflection on how to institutionalize night-time economy portfolio within municipal structures and create new consultative bodies where the needs of all the night-time actors can be regularly discussed and addressed.

STEP 10 | Govern The Night On The Long Term

Inspiring Practises

The Night Council of **Paris** was established to balance the needs of diverse night-time users while promoting diversification and accessibility of the night offer, inclusion, and sustainable development. Launched in 2014, it developed a comprehensive night policy composed of 37 actions and 4 areas of focus (development, promotion, regulation, cooperation), implemented through the active involvement of stakeholders in thematic working groups and ensuring the coordination across different city departments and districts.

In **Tallinn**, the appointment of a Night Advisor was a milestone for introducing night-time economy as a political topic within the local agenda. This position enabled collaboration between different municipal departments and the local night scene, giving local and international visibility to Tallinn's projects aimed at developing a safe and diverse 24-hour strategy for the city.

What Cities Can Do

Identifying the most suitable models of governance of the night-time economy can be a powerful way for enhancing administrative efficiency and strategic planning coherence, which go well beyond the nocturnal issues.

During their local discussions on how to consolidate management and governance of the night-time economy, the partners of Cities After Dark faced some of the barriers caused by sectorial silos within public administrations. However, the exchanges during transnational meetings, study visits and thematic online seminars highlighted how to use night-time governance can become a testing ground for integrated policymaking, bridging environmental, social and economic sustainability.



STEP 10 | Govern The Night On The Long Term

Cities After Dark Recommends:

Establish structured decision-making forums on night-time economy within local authorities

The definition of a unified framework to harmonize policies and ensure collaborative implementation can be crucial for consolidating night-time economy as a policy field of action, as Braga intends to do with its strategic objective aimed at establish a comprehensive governance model of the night-time economy and the establishment of a dedicated municipal platform on the topic.

Transform participatory groups on night-time economy into Night-time City Councils

The objective is to ensure ongoing stakeholders' engagement and co-management of nocturnal policies, as many partners of Cities After Dark are planning to do in order to consolidate their URBACT Local Groups. These include Budva, that intends also to engage the national government, in order to secure national-level support and stable resources for the implementation of night-time policies.

Engage elected representatives on night-time economy

Ensuring full support to implement integrated strategies and promote timely coordination among different levels of governance, as stated by Paris which proposes to create a Night Steering Committee at central level involving deputy mayors concerned by the topic at both city and district level.

To-Do List



- ▶ Appoint a visible figure or a small team to act as a bridge between local authority, businesses, cultural actors and local community on night-time issues

- ▶ Involve different departments through a cross-departmental night team, designating a night-time referent in each relevant department

- ▶ Identify an elected representative who can champion the night-time economy at political level

- ▶ Define an annual budget for the implementation of the actions co-decided within the night commission, also exploring possible collaboration with the private sector

- ▶ Exchange knowledge with other cities on effective nocturnal governance models, also through city-to-city visits and structured conversations with cities officials



STEP 10 | Govern The Night On The Long Term

What We Learned From Other Cities After Dark

Globally, fewer than 100 cities have some forms of governance structures dedicated to the night-time economy. This shows that while the topic is gaining momentum in discussions on sustainable urban development, governance innovation on the topic is still at an early stage.

As highlighted during the online thematic seminar on Night Mayors, Night Commissions and Night Offices, there is no “one-size-fits-all” model. Many cities are experimenting with hybrid or evolving structures that adapt to changing local challenges and needs.

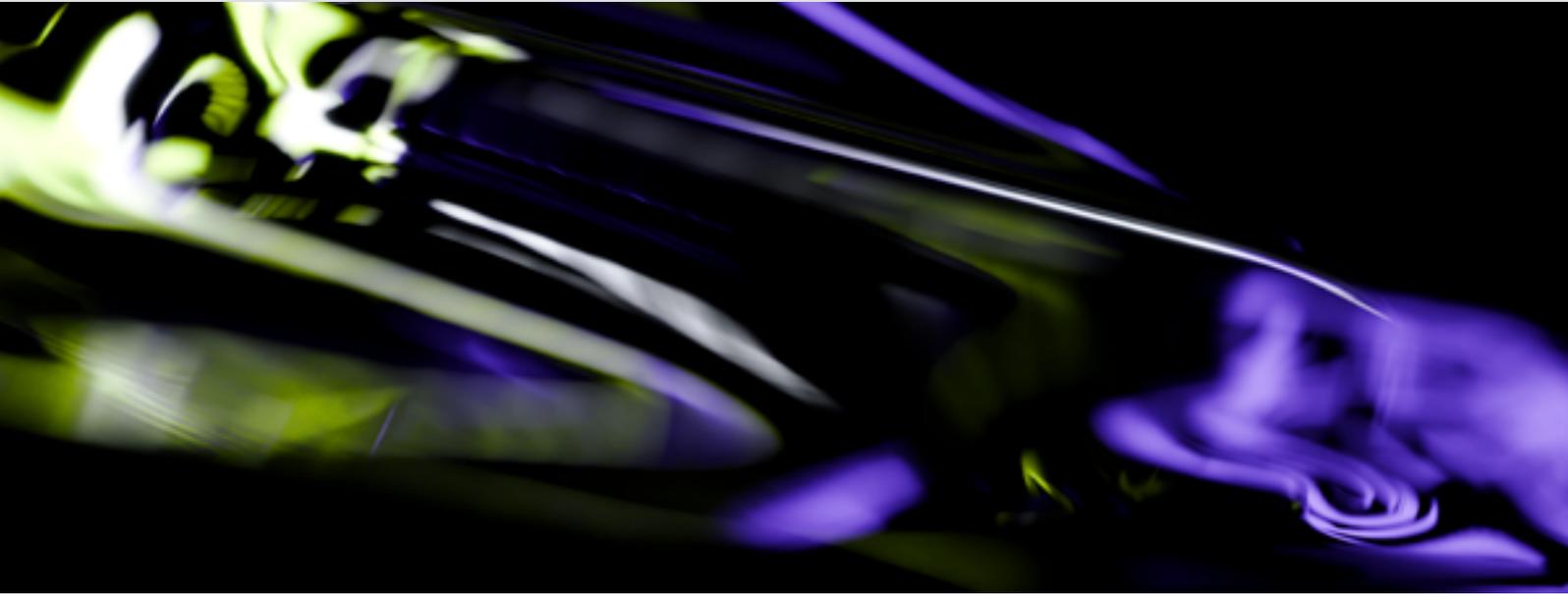
London, for example, evolved its approach on the night-economy from the London Night Time Commission, which ran from 2017 to 2019, to a strengthened

collaboration between the Mayor, the Night Czar and the 24-Hour London Team. Their joint efforts focus on a series of objectives, like the reduction of night-time inequalities and changing the narrative of the night, with the Night Czar championing night-time strategies in every borough.

The recent appointment of the London Nightlife Taskforce illustrates a global trend, also reflected in Cities After Dark partners, toward collaborative, multi-stakeholder governance models rather than relying on individual champions like the Night Mayors.



Conclusions: **Keeping The Lights On**



This Handbook is not only a practical guide for local authorities wishing to design and implement integrated night policies, but is the culmination of a collective journey that brought together the cities of the Cities After Dark network and some of the world's most renowned experts and advocates of the night-time economy.

The development of this shared body of knowledge stands as a tribute to the contribution of every partner city, stakeholder, expert, night leader and practitioner who shaped Cities After Dark. Together, they marked a turning point in the European and global debate on how cities can unlock the full potential of the night.

Throughout this journey we have witnessed a growing movement. From grassroot organizations to local authorities and international institutions, night-time economy is now at the core also of other EU co-funded projects, national and regional strategies and global initiatives that are promoting the night as a driver for growth, inclusion and sustainability.

As the cities of Cities After Dark take their first steps in implementing their Integrated Action Plans, the impact of the network will continue to grow. Dissemination of their experiences will help other cities across Europe and beyond to focus on their own nocturnal economies, building new alliances between municipalities, private partners, charities, and public institutions to develop pilot programs and innovative policies.

The exchange of knowledge among the partners of Cities After Dark will continue at a wider scale with the launch of Global Cities After Dark, an initiative co-founded by the City of Braga and the Nightlife Foundation. This voluntary global network will bring together local authorities from around the world to continue the exchange of knowledge building upon the achievements of the URBACT network. The voluntary initiative will activate partnerships with a series of European and global organizations and foundations, like UN-Habitat, OECD and many others that have already partnered with the network during its activities, for promoting night-time economy as a strategic and innovative driver of sustainable development of cities in Europe and beyond.

Cities After Dark Action Planning Network

→ Cities After Dark in 10 Steps

URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg