

Navigating by Neon:

Inclusion and Diversity in the City after Dark



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Australian Government

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CENTRE FOR
CULTURAL RESEARCH

The City After Dark Project

The stimulation and regulation of the city at night is among the most important issues facing urban life around the globe.

The Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney is currently undertaking research into competing uses of urban space and the levels of planning and regulation required to foster night-time cultures and minimize alienation among different interest groups.

The Australian Research Council funded project *The City After Dark: The Governance and Lived Experience of Urban Night-Time Culture* is the first comprehensive examination of the use, experience and governance of night-time cultures and spaces in metropolitan Australia.

The Project addresses issues of diversity, inclusiveness and public safety, and contributes to international interdisciplinary debates concerning cultural planning and crime prevention.

Project Team

The City After Dark researchers are:

- Professor Deborah Stevenson (Chief Investigator)
- Professor David Rowe (Chief Investigator)
- Professor Stephen Tomsen (Chief Investigator)
- Mr Nathaniel Bavinton (Research Officer)
- Mr Phillip Wadds (Research Higher Degree Candidate)

Aims and Objectives

The research aims of the project are to:

- Develop an interdisciplinary framework for understanding the lived experience of night-time culture that transcends the prevailing, limited dichotomy of stimulation and control;
- Provide a theoretically and empirically-informed understanding of urban leisure patterns in the 'night-time economy' that addresses such variables as age, gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality, and issues of diversity and inclusiveness in cultural participation and planning;
- Inform the development of policies for the long-term cultural, social and economic sustainability of urban night-time leisure.

In combination, these strands of investigation provide the theoretical, conceptual and empirical tools for a sophisticated understanding of contemporary urban leisure cultures and the relationships between diversity, governance and the city.



Presentation Summary # 1

Conceptual Origins of the Night-Time Economy

David Rowe

Conceptual Origins of the Night-Time Economy

The Night-Time Economy (NTE) concept is derived from the UK, and came to prominence during the Blair New Labour Government, and especially its 'Cool Britannia' era in the 1990s.

Issues surrounding the NTE are relevant to Australia, but little detailed research has been done on the subject in this country to date. The City after Dark Project sets out to redress this gap in policy-related knowledge and analysis of the NTE.

Britain in the late 20th century had many 'de-industrialised' inner-urban spaces that had fallen into disuse. The NTE was proposed as a new focus for commercial, social and cultural activity that would bring prosperity as well as enliven British cities.

The model for the NTE was that of a southern Mediterranean lifestyle, which was seen as more flexible, diverse and sophisticated than that of Britain, with its history of regulated licensing hours and predictable leisure routines.

Conceptual Origins of the Night-Time Economy

However, the contrast between what was envisaged and what actually transpired was significant. The NTE in Britain has been characterised by concentrations of licensed venues and high levels of 'vertical drinking'. The deregulation of licensing and leisure hours has, for many residents living within and close to NTE precincts, meant a loss of amenity and, quite frequently, a threat to their personal safety.

These issues are now being debated in Australia, where the development of the NTE has been popular among its participants, but also caused problems surrounding alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour. The promised cultural diversity has often been notable for its absence. Instead, a youth-oriented monoculture of drinking has dominated many after-dark leisure spaces.

In Sydney, for example, the so-called 'small bars' debate has exposed the differences between interest groups including the liquor industry, local councils, residents, police and pleasure-seekers.

It is difficult to accommodate all interests concerning the night-time economy, and it is clear that it is not possible to return to early periods, such as the 'six o'clock swill', or to assume that high-intensity policing will solve a complex set of problems with deep social and cultural roots.

For these reasons, the City After Dark Project is adopting a wide-ranging approach in seeking out equitable and realistic policies for the night-time economy.





Presentation Summary # 2

Fear, Inclusion and Diversity in the City after Dark

Stephen Tomsen

Sydney has a history of concern and anxiety regarding, crime, disorder and violence .

There exists an association of the inner-city, especially at night, with danger. Different waves of 'moral panic' position respectable opinion versus 'disrespectable' groups.

There are frequent panics regarding collective, public leisure - especially night-time activities such as hard and rowdy drinking, the underground economy of illicit drugs, sex work and vice, and gambling.

Post-convict 19th and early 20th century NSW featured many eruptions and concerns over urban disorder, violence and police trouble in city streets, slums and poorer districts.



The Promise of 'Night-Time Economy'

- The Night-Time Economy (NTE) concerns an expanding range of leisure consumption after dark and associated activities and services.
- 'City branding' increasingly directed towards tourism and leisure, including high-end dining, cinemas, concerts, theatres, festivals and major events.
- NTE generates substantial revenue and employment.
- There are efforts underway in Sydney to harness the NTE through approaches such as extending licensing hours and encouraging small bars.
- Growth of new styles of venues featuring *al fresco* 'pavilion drinking'.

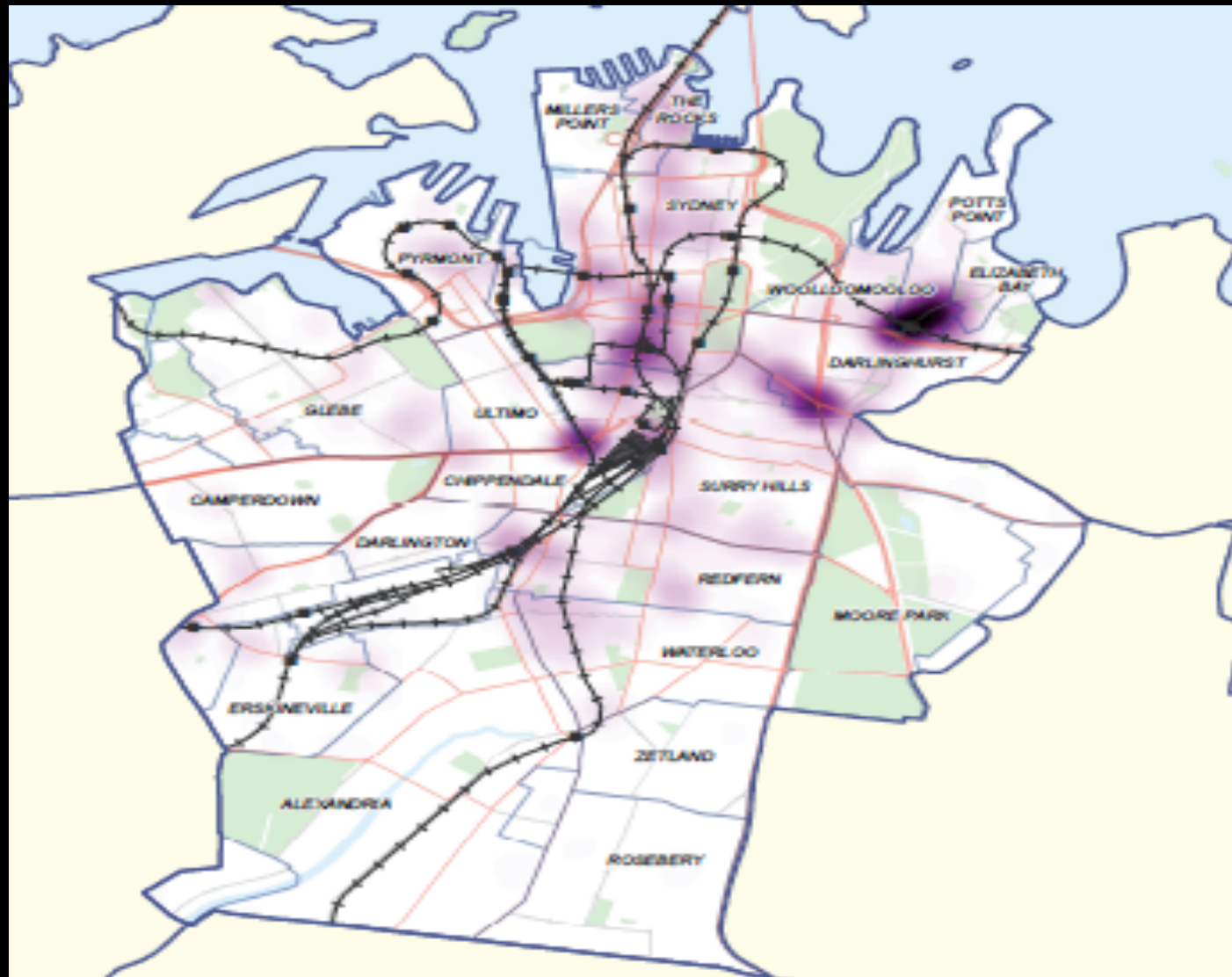


Danger, 'Moral Panic' and Victimisation

- Night-time leisure can reflect both 'moral panic' and real concerns about risk of assaults, injuries & robberies.
- There is a perceived need for intensified policing, expanded private security and surveillance.
- A growing uncertainty and anxiety about increased violence in the community.
- Reporting and recording of crime and anti-social behaviour can be misleading.
- Spaces of danger in the city match closely with night-time leisure precincts. These include George St., Central/Haymarket, Kings Cross and Oxford St./Taylor Square.



‘Hotspots’: Alcohol-Related Assault Incidents
Sydney Local Government Area, 2007
Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research



Fear, Inclusion and Exclusion

- Fear in night-time leisure can be either inflated or rational.
- Fear and 'incivility' in public space, related to specific places and time segments, can exclude and marginalise some groups (for example young women and older people).
- Night-time leisure predominantly features masculine, young, heterosexual and cashed-up participants.
- Urban night-space is a domain of fear for many women although anti-violence campaigns focus more on danger of domestic spaces.
- There is a revived fear of 'hate crime' which complicates the civic vision of a diverse and inclusive urban culture.





Presentation Summary # 3

Nightlife in Public Spaces

Nathaniel Bavinton

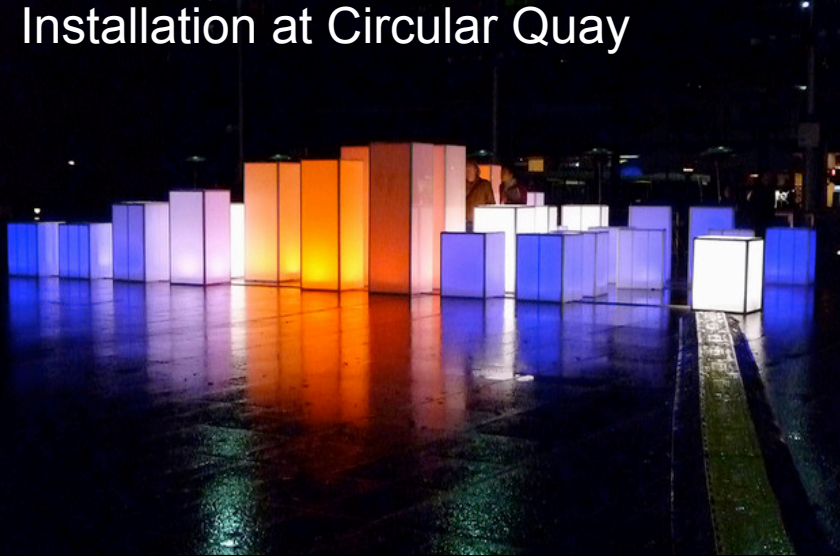
This is a new twist on a familiar image. Pictures of Sydney's Opera House, as part of the recent Vivid Festival, were recently beamed around the world. They represent the use of nightlife as a dimension of city-imaging strategy in the portrayal of a vibrant, 'cosmopolitan' city.



City-imaging processes are not solely aimed at tourists, but also at residents; designed to encourage different forms of engagement with urban spaces; to promote cultural participation and create modified understandings of what a city can be.

The Light Walk

Installation at Circular Quay



It was estimated by event organisers that more than 200,000 people took part in the light walk centred on Observatory Hill and threaded through the Rocks.



Installation at the Rocks

Fire Water



The festival culminated in the moody atmospherics of the Firewater historical re-interpretation that attracted large numbers to the shores of Circular Quay.

Yet, for all its capacity to attract the desired diversity of nightlife participants into the CBD, within an hour of the last scheduled sinking of the burning ship, the thousands of spectators had evaporated from the public spaces of the city at night.

This occurrence indicates two interrelated things:

- 1) The dominance of after-dark options by the alco-leisure industries.
- 2) The absence of a culture of public night-space.

Time-Space Segmentation of Nightlife

9pm-11pm Evening Economy

The evening economy is the nightlife of city imaging brochures. It is supported by city authorities because of its capacity to convey a 'cultural sensibility', and is characterised by a comparatively extensive array of leisure options.



11pm-2am Night-Time Economy

From 11pm we witness a transition into a different night-time economy. Typically, there is a dramatic shift into alco-centric service provision.



2am-5am Late-Night Economy

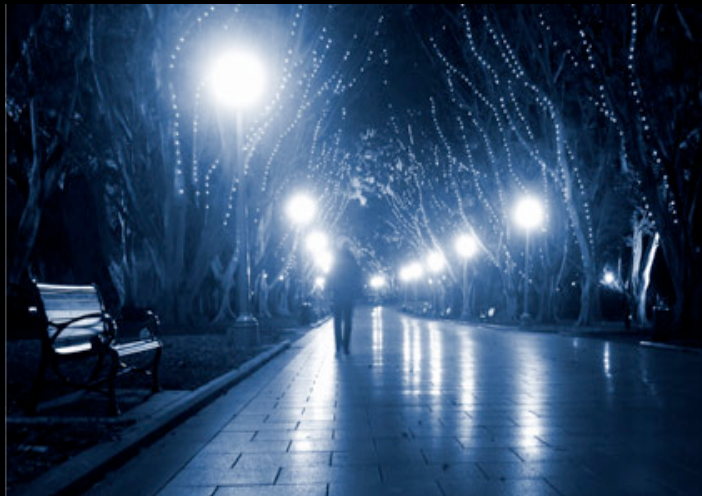
Only alco-leisure venues remain open. In the nocturnal city public space is often subordinated to commercial space.



Hyde Park – Daycentric Space



As day turns to night the city undergoes a transformation in which there is often a 'disconnect' between the locations of material-arrangements conducive to dwelling, and the positioning of lighting.



Nocturnal
Thoroughfare

Residual Space



In the city after dark many public spaces are reduced to thoroughfares. Lights tend to mark out routes through space, rather than indicate places where people may like to gather and meet.

Attention to night-time public space is one way of ameliorating the dominant influence of the alco-leisure industries over nightlife options.

It is in the intersection of diverse cultures of consumption that public spaces are made *public*. Nocturnal public spaces are important *as spaces*, rather than just as the interlinking areas in which venues are positioned relative to one another.

The production of inclusive and diverse after-dark urban cultures is an important objective.

To achieve this goal it is imperative to manage the dominance of alco-leisure and to facilitate venue diversity, while at the same time giving greater attention to the creation of enticing public spaces in the city after dark.

The City After Dark project is currently conducting an online survey of nightlife participants. You can access the survey at:

www.uws.edu.au/cityafterdark

If you would like further information concerning the City After Dark project, please contact Nathaniel Bavinton.

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