

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a massive crowd of people at night. The scene is illuminated by a bright, vertical beam of light that cuts through the darkness on the left side. The people are densely packed, and their movements are captured in a way that suggests a large-scale event or festival. The overall atmosphere is one of energy and scale.

# Space for night culture

Future of the Amsterdam Night





**“The absence of daylight and bustle bares a part of people’s souls that you don’t easily encounter during the day.”**

*Soumaya Bazi, Future of the Amsterdam night #4, 2 March 2021*

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# Preface

**When I think of Amsterdam at night, I think of strolling across beautiful old bridges. Of sticky pavements illuminated by the neon lights of Leidseplein. Of runny mascara, laddered tights and too-high heels. Of not daring to speak to that one special person before it's three in the morning. The white wine in plastic cups; only feeling how tired you are when the lights come back on. Feeling free and happy. No work, no rules, just music and a joy that transcends the mundane. Tired, exhausted, but deliriously happy.**

As a young woman, I came to Amsterdam and found myself in the nightlife of this city. And I wasn't the only one. As deputy mayor Arts and Culture, I am proud of Amsterdam's night culture. It has a rich past, ranging from an acclaimed underground scene to world-renowned clubs, parties and festivals. That world has had an enormous influence on the city, on music and on the visual arts. Nightlife is where you discover yourself, certainly when you are young, but also when you are older. Where you make friends and meet lovers and where your world expands, and you feel safe. You get that feeling in cities with a vibrant nightlife, and that is what Amsterdam has.

We need to cherish our nightlife. Which is why the City of Amsterdam is presenting its first vision for the night. In late 2019, we made a promise to our city in the Arts and Culture Memorandum 2021-2024: Amsterdam recognises a rich night culture as an essential component of the arts and culture. Amsterdam will make space for the night. Fewer than three months later, COVID-19 forced us to deprive the night and its creators, artists, performers and public of all their space. Suddenly, a part of Amsterdam that is normally bursting at the seams with energy and creativity came to a standstill. A part that means a great deal to many Amsterdammers. That gave me a lump in my throat.

Still, we continue to look ahead. That standstill of the night was only temporary, although we cannot yet foresee all its consequences. I know the sector has plans, proposals and line-ups ready for a strong reboot. It is especially important to consider the future of night culture in Amsterdam after the coronavirus crisis. The many conversations I have had with the sector over the past few months in relation to this vision have shown me that its creators, organisers and initiators have a tremendous amount to offer that could prove of great benefit to the city. This vision would never have seen the light of day without their contributions.

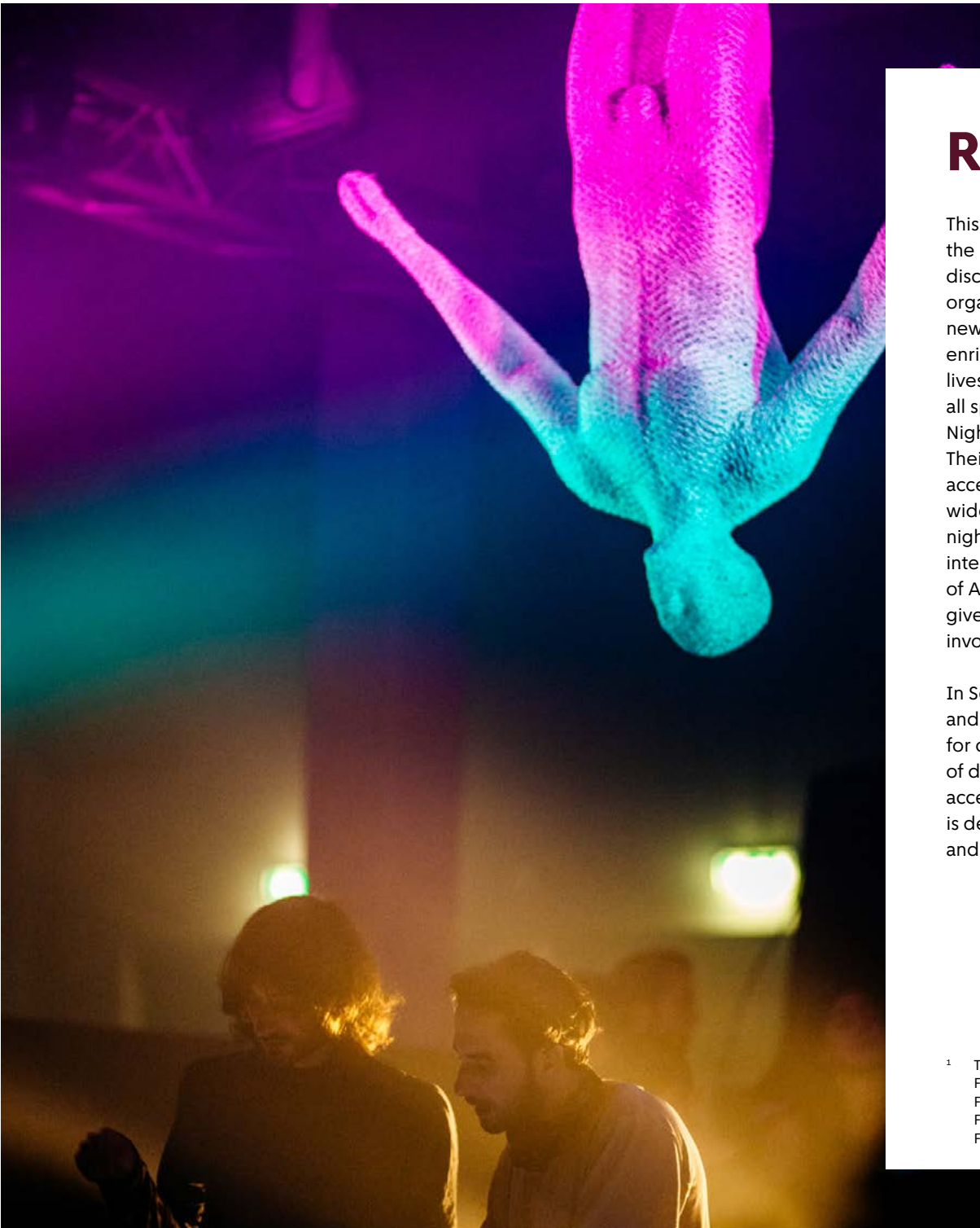
Night culture deserves our support. We should offer not only moral support, but facilitate it where possible with urban policies aimed at restoring and protecting. And we must make space for innovation. One of our tasks for the future is to create space for everyone at night. The city is growing. That means finding more space for night culture, both in the existing city and in the neighbourhoods that will be developed in the coming decades. We must ensure that Amsterdammers in all their diversity have a place in the city – also at night. In the Arts and Culture Memorandum 2021-2024, I challenged the 'daytime' cultural sector to collaborate increasingly with nighttime culture. To make space, in both physical and substantive terms, for nighttime creators, programmers and artists.

The night is for all Amsterdammers. For those who, out of love for the city, take the initiative to create spaces to play at night. For new stories that deserve a place. The night is for the huge numbers of people who actively take part in nightlife, but also for all others who live in our beautiful city. Because without night culture, Amsterdam is not Amsterdam. The night is full of promise every time, of special moments that escape the rules of daytime. The night deserves our recognition as the protection it is for many, as a place where you can be yourself without judgement.

*Touria Meliani*  
Deputy mayor Arts and Culture

'Where you make friends and meet lovers and where your world expands, and you feel safe. You get that feeling in cities with a vibrant nightlife, and that is what Amsterdam has.'



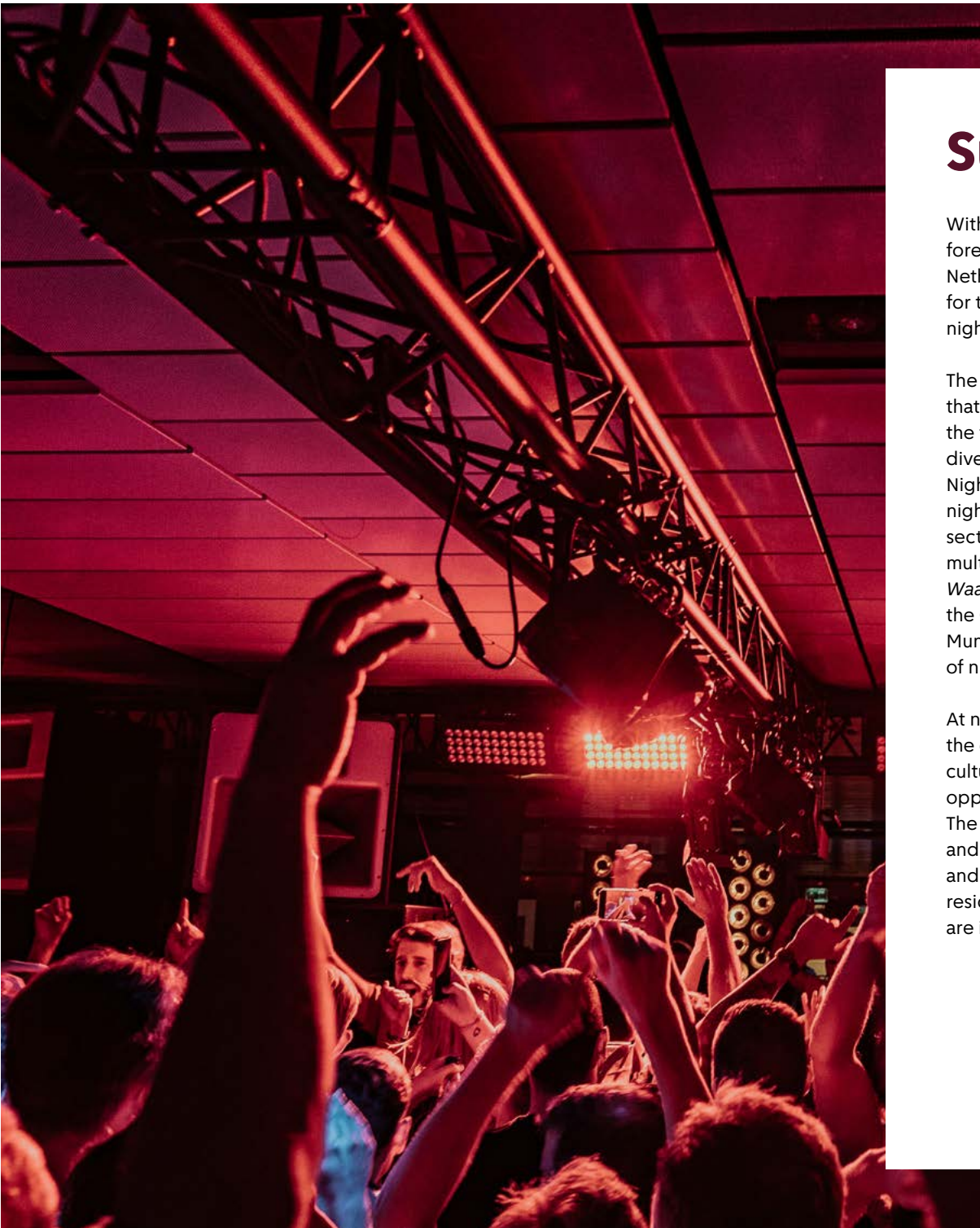


## Reading guide

This Night Vision highlights the value, importance and needs of night culture from the perspective of both the City and the relevant sector. To enable this, the City held discussions with a broad range of representatives from the Amsterdam nightlife scene: organisers and initiators, producers and performers, established names and relative newcomers. Together, discussing various topics, we explored what is needed to enrich night culture in our city. These discussions included public conversations in a livestream from Pakhuis de Zwijger<sup>1</sup> and a series of interviews. We want to stress that all speakers at Pakhuis de Zwijger (in the discussion series Future of the Amsterdam Nights) spoke in a personal capacity or as a representative of their organisation. Their views and insights show how differently people think about issues such as accessibility and affordability. However, the case for a safe, inclusive night culture is widely supported. In the interviews conducted for the Night Vision (see Voices of the night), connoisseurs of the night speak freely. The personal views they express are intended to set the agenda, and do not necessarily represent the views of the City of Amsterdam or its representatives. Including them in this way makes sure they are given a place in the Night Vision. To support this vision, we used the insights of various involved parties about the value of night culture.

In Section 1, we define the problem statement of this Night Vision: why is it necessary, and what is the task of the City? In Section 2, we define the value of the night, for creators, audiences and the entire city. In Section 3, we address the themes of diversity, inclusion and social and physical safety. The issues of availability, accessibility and affordability of night culture are addressed in Section 4. Section 5 is devoted to the connection between day and night, as manifested at festivals and events.

<sup>1</sup> These are available for replay:  
Future of the Amsterdam Night #1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrCruR\\_FbRM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrCruR_FbRM);  
Future of the Amsterdam Night #2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDOmlngvix0>;  
Future of the Amsterdam Night #3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBXpHmpOJ14>;  
Future of the Amsterdam Night #4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIXxJZrH7mw>



## Summary

With this Night Vision, Amsterdam's College of Mayor and Alderpersons is first and foremost giving night culture the recognition it deserves. We are the first city in the Netherlands to define an integral vision of the value and importance of night culture for the city. This follows in the footsteps of other cities with a long tradition of a vibrant night culture, such as Berlin, London and New York.

The purpose of this vision is to identify the key themes for the sector and the city, so that we can secure and integrate night culture more firmly in City policy, now and in the future. This includes arts and culture, as well as many other policy areas, such as diversity, urban development, economy, traffic, health and public order. With this Night Vision, the College provides a stage for the – sometimes invisible or unknown – night culture to indicate what is needed for the development of a thriving professional sector in the future. In addition, the Night Vision provides an overview of the current multi-faceted and comprehensive policies related to the night in Amsterdam. The study *Waarde van de kleine uurtjes* ('Value of the small hours') from 2021, commissioned by the City and conducted by Atlas Research (formerly Atlas voor Gemeenten, 'Atlas for Municipalities'), is an important part of the inventory and underpins the economic value of night culture.

At night, Amsterdammers and visitors can participate in and enjoy culture that enriches the city and is an essential part of the story of Amsterdam. At the same time, night culture is under pressure from urban growth and an increasing lack of space and opportunities. There are not enough affordable venues for new initiatives and events. The city is also becoming less and less affordable for people working in the sector and for their public. As the municipality, we want Amsterdam at night to be preserved and attractive for artists, creatives and organisers, and as accessible as possible to residents and visitors. Diversity, inclusion, social and physical safety and accessibility are important requirements. We have explored these themes broadly in this vision.



## Value of the night

Art and culture in Amsterdam do not stop at midnight. In a city of almost 180 nationalities, the diversity of culture, music and dance is especially broad. For many, the night remains meaningful all their lives. They cherish night culture as a place where they feel at home and where they can continue to nourish a part of their personality and identity. The City recognises the significance of night culture – cultural and artistic, social and economic – for the development of Amsterdam at large.

The night is a rich artistic resource that produces new forms, styles, disciplines and genres. Amsterdam's night culture is living cultural heritage. From acclaimed clubs to world-renowned festivals and artists, Amsterdam is firmly on the global map as a city with a rich night culture. In recent decades, Amsterdam's night culture has matured and become a major international attraction. For the arts sector at large, night culture is an important part of the incubator layer: a space for inspiration and cross-pollination and part of the talent development chain.

Some 5000 jobs are associated with night culture in Amsterdam. In addition to artists and organisers, night culture provides work for a variety of related and derived professions. The study *Waarde van de kleine uurtjes* found, among other things, that Dutch and foreign visitors spend an estimated €1.25 billion annually during their stay in Amsterdam. According to Atlas Research, the annual prosperity gain for Amsterdam from their spending is €63 million, not counting income from tourist taxes and entertainment fees.<sup>1</sup> Amsterdam's night culture generates an estimated €49 million in tax revenue for the state.

However, the night also has its downsides: for example, excessive substance abuse, drug crime and criminal involvement, discrimination at the door, sexual harassment on the dance floor, or threats and violence against marginalised groups. In addition, in a densely populated city like Amsterdam, there is regular friction between revellers and residents who want peace and quiet. These issues and challenges are addressed in the Night Vision. The solutions are mostly in different policy areas. As a City, we continue to focus fully on such policy.

<sup>1</sup> For definition and explanation, see Appendix 1. *Waarde van de kleine uurtjes*

## Diversity and inclusion

Amsterdam should be a city where everyone can join in. There should also be space for everyone at night, regardless of cultural background, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age or economic status. The City wants to work with the night sector to do justice to this multi-voiced diversity. An inclusive night sector can contribute significantly to a thriving, free and open city.

We maintain a focus on policies against violence, harassment and discrimination at night. We are also explicitly looking at safe/safer spaces for marginalised groups. We have clear agreements with the sector on countering substance abuse and noise and disturbances. In our discussions with the sector, we have identified developments that make us even more aware of these issues and, at the same time, also identified great potential within the sector to provide its own solutions. The City would like to strengthen that self-reliance.

## Accessible night

The city is a lot more expensive at night than during the day. For example, night rates apply to public transport. Food and drink is usually more expensive (in restaurants, but also in night shops). Venues that are often free during the day or early evening charge entrance fees. If we want the night to be accessible to all, we must continue to explore where barriers can be removed, for organisers, entrepreneurs and artists as well as visitors. Our scope to manage this remains limited for now. However, it is an important issue to put on the agenda and to continue cooperating on, both within and outside the City organisation.

It is important to continue providing space for night culture as the city grows – space that is and remains affordable and can count on support among current and future residents. Moreover, the sector needs both temporary and permanent business locations. An important step for the City is establishing a Night Culture Team, as a point of contact for newcomers and established parties. This team will be able to answer questions about policies, give input about new initiatives and refer people to the appropriate permit offices.

## Day and night

For decades and in various forms, night culture has manifested itself in the daytime, too, often as festivals. These types of events are currently the ideal link between day and night. Their entrepreneurial nature provides opportunities for meaningful interaction and synergy. Young talent can break through, and innovation is given space. Visitors benefit from a complete and diverse offering. Festivals bring jobs and revenue to the city and make the city attractive to visit and live in. The City's policy in the coming years will be to encourage interaction between day and night through festivals and events.

The cultural, economic and social value means that space for festivals must continue to be found in the city, but within clear and well-grounded frameworks based on rules and standards that protect liveability. The ultimate goal is a sustainable balance between those two factors. Based on clear criteria, we can distribute the scarce spots available for festivals fairly. The city executive is working on scenarios that can form a basis for a solid discussion about the number of large festivals the city can handle, first in the City Council and then more widely in the city. This allows us to work towards an offer that best matches Amsterdam's identity and adds value to the city and its residents. An expert, independent music events committee will play a key role in this respect. A number of high-profile festivals will be given a place on the calendar on a multi-year basis.

## Conclusion

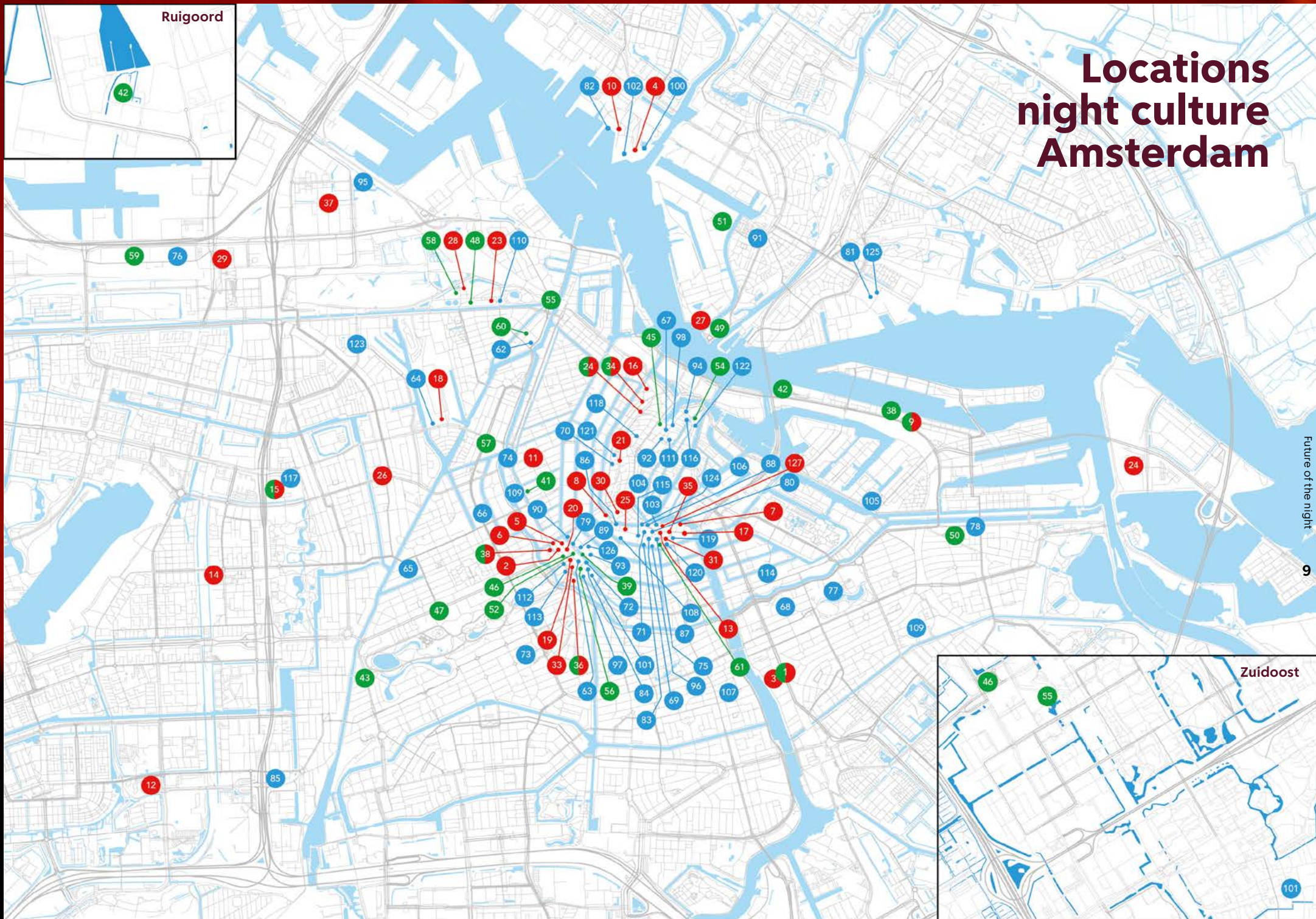
What kind of city do we want to be at night? This College wants to give space to a night culture that enriches the city; where there is room for experimentation and alternative expressions. Where people can be themselves, where they can be immersed in a collective experience, and yet develop as individuals.

Based on this vision, we continue to work on a policy agenda for the night, in consultation with the City Council, the city districts, all involved and interested parties from the sector and beyond, thus with the entire city. Ultimately this will give us the means to work more sustainably on Amsterdam's night culture.



Ruigoord

# Locations night culture Amsterdam



Zuidoost



## NIGHTCLUBS

- 1 Canvas op de 7e
- 2 Jimmy Woo
- 3 Doka Underground
- 4 Faralda Crane Hotel
- 5 Club Nova
- 6 Lovelee
- 7 CLUB Y.O.L.O.
- 8 Supperclub
- 9 Panama
- 10 Sociëteit SEXYLAND
- 11 Chin Chin Club
- 12 Radion Amsterdam
- 13 Escape
- 14 VLLA (Dwaze Dagen)
- 15 De School
- 16 Club Mystique
- 17 Club AIR
- 18 De Marktkantine
- 19 Club Up
- 20 Chicago Social Club
- 21 Nieuwezijds Lounge
- 22 Akhnaton
- 23 Radio Radio
- 24 Recycle Lounge Gallery Club
- 25 Club Nyx
- 26 The Jazzebel
- 27 Shelter
- 28 Westerunie en Westerliefde
- 29 Bret
- 30 Disco Dolly
- 31 Prime
- 32 Bitterzoet
- 33 La Favela
- 34 Paradiso
- 35 Club John Doe
- 36 Stichting Melkweg
- 37 Nachtlab/Warehouse
- 127 Oliva

## MUSIC VENUES

- 38 Stichting Café Mezrab
- 1 Canvas op de 7e
- 39 Bourbon Street
- 40 Stichting Landjuweel 2000  
Kerk Ruigoord
- 41 Maloe Melo Home of the Blues
- 9 Panama
- 42 Bimhuis Café
- 43 OCCII
- 44 Ziggo Dome
- 15 De School
- 45 Beurs van Berlage
- 46 The Waterhole
- 47 OT301
- 48 Pacific
- 49 Tolhuistuin (Paradiso Noord)
- 50 Studio K
- 51 Café De Ruimte
- 52 Rock Club The Cave
- 53 AFAS Live
- 22 Akhnaton
- 54 Casablanca
- 55 Jongerencentrum Volta
- 56 Café Alto
- 57 De Nieuwe Anita
- 58 Westergasfabriek Gashouder
- 59 The Box
- 32 Bitterzoet
- 36 Paradiso
- 60 Vereniging Zaal 100
- 61 De Heeren van Aemstel
- 36 Stichting Melkweg

## OTHER PROGRAMMING

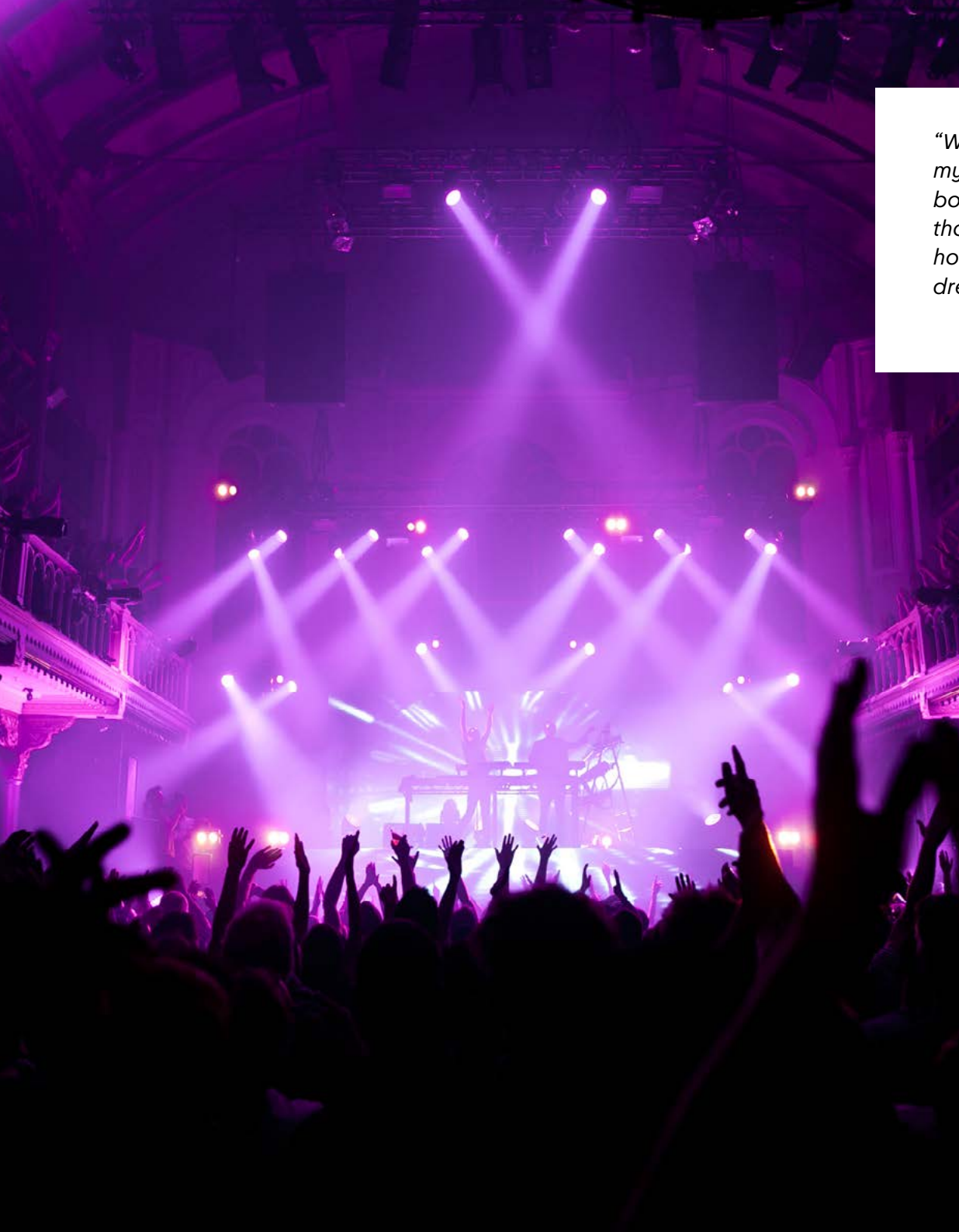
- 62 Checkpoint Charlie
- 63 El Punto Latino
- 64 Club Lite
- 65 Café de Kashmir Lounge
- 66 Vereniging de Trut
- 67 The Warehouse
- 68 Mike's Badhuis theater
- 69 Jantjes Verjaardag
- 70 Schuim
- 71 Escape Caffé
- 72 't Lammetje
- 73 Café Welling
- 74 Sound Garden
- 75 Café La Bastille XL
- 76 H7 Warehouse
- 77 Generator Hostel
- 78 Café The Zen
- 79 Brasil Music Bar
- 80 Café Savoy
- 81 TIOFLI/Skatecafé Karin & Yvonne
- 82 Veronica Schip
- 83 Woody's
- 84 Le Petit Difficile
- 85 Atelier AF3
- 86 Bar Blend
- 87 Huis van iemand anders
- 88 Café Tante Roosje
- 89 Cooldown
- 90 Suzy Wong
- 91 Rolling Rock Kitchen
- 92 Hotel Winston
- 93 't Feest van Joop
- 94 Skek
- 95 Thuishaven Events
- 96 Dragshow Bar Lellebel
- 97 Hartje Amsterdam
- 98 Eagle Amsterdam
- 99 't Klokje
- 100 Noorderlicht
- 101 Hush Silent Disco Club
- 102 Pilek-NDSM
- 103 Amstel Fifty Four
- 104 The Tara
- 105 De Nieuwe Vaart
- 106 Waterkant
- 107 Café Cinetol
- 108 Taboo
- 109 Q-Cafe/Q-Factory
- 110 North Sea Jazz Club
- 111 W139
- 112 Bubbels
- 113 Kopstootbar
- 114 Kriterion
- 115 Live
- 116 Café The Queen's Head
- 117 Dido Events
- 118 Belgique
- 119 Kitchen & Bar Van Rijn
- 120 Club Smokey
- 121 Hotel W Amsterdam
- 122 Club San Francisco
- 123 No Man's Art Gallery
- 124 De Kroon
- 125 Garage Noord
- 126 Club Church

The listed sites were inventoried by Atlas Research as part of the study Waarde van de kleine uurtjes (April 2021). We have updated the list as much as possible.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a white ruffled blouse and a black headset, is shown from the chest up. She is looking slightly downwards with a neutral expression. The background is dark, with several bright, parallel blue light beams shining from the top, creating a futuristic or high-tech atmosphere. The overall lighting is dim, with the blue beams providing the primary illumination.

# 1. Why a Night Vision?



*“When I was little, I kept a reading light under my pillow. When my sister and I had to go to bed, I often still felt like playing. I read books, drew pictures and got lost in my imagination while my parents thought I was asleep. At night, when silence descended over the house and the street, the day began for me. Endless ideas formed, dreams were born, solutions devised. I have always been a night owl.”*

*Soumaya Bazi, Future of the night #4*

The night culture adds colour to Amsterdam but has been under pressure for some time. The city’s growth and lack of space present numerous challenges. There are fewer and fewer venues, particularly affordable ones, for new initiatives and events. Moreover, the city itself is becoming less and less affordable, including for people working in the night sector and for their audiences. This means they are considering leaving Amsterdam for cities such as Rotterdam and Berlin.<sup>1</sup> In the long run, this leads to a weakening of the city’s cultural fabric.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the City of Amsterdam continued to work steadfastly on the Night Vision, in the form of a broad inventory and exploration of night culture. The conversation about the night in Amsterdam has been initiated and conducted a number of times previously with representatives of the night. Good preliminary progress was achieved with the *Night Memorandum*, drafted in 2003 by the Night Watch, predecessor to the Night Mayor. The sector’s continued advocacy for support and recognition over the past year has also been valuable in the creation of this vision.

Especially now, we find it important to interpret the role that night culture plays – and can play – in the development of a growing and changing city. There are many interesting creators and creatives who see the night as their domain. There is plenty of nighttime collaboration between clubs, organisers and artists. We have a vibrant network of incubators, leading pop venues and world-renowned festivals where day and night merge creatively, and a dynamic underground scene. On the other hand, successful initiatives are regularly discontinued because there is not enough room for tailor-made solutions or because they can

<sup>1</sup> Future of the Night #4



only use a permit or location temporarily. We still see relatively little interaction between small initiatives and venues and the larger clubs and institutions. There is also room for more collaboration between day and night cultures.

As a municipality, we want to create the conditions for momentum and development. This means, for example, that we are working hard to ensure that the city remains accessible to creatives by providing sufficient workplaces. That kind of space is one of the most important conditions for a vibrant nightlife. Artists, graphic designers, lighting designers and artists affiliated with nightlife need workplaces where they can experiment and practice freely, and where they have permission to make mistakes and develop. At the same time, we want to ensure that cultural capital that has proven its worth is not destroyed simply because, for example, a temporary venue is demolished or a lease expires. We discuss this in more detail in Section 4.

## What kind of city is the Amsterdam of the night?

Apart from space issues, there are other issues that deserve our attention. That is what we hear from both the sector and society. What is on offer is often still too uniform, which means that different, often marginalised groups in our city lack a place of their own or don't feel welcome. We have an extremely diverse city, but you don't always see that reflected in its nightlife. That nightlife is also not always safe and accessible to everyone. Women and LGBTIQ+ persons are still vulnerable. Some locations are difficult to reach due to the lack of adequate public transport at night – and in some parts of the city there is relatively little night culture on offer (for now). JACK in Zuidooost and Noorderling on the NDSM Wharf are examples of clubs that proved difficult to reach and, in part because of this, did not attract enough public. JACK closed at 05:00, meaning visitors had to wait several hours for public transport to start running. The last direct ferry to Amsterdam Central leaves NDSM at 03:00, while venues are open much longer.

A recurring comment during conversations about the Future of the Amsterdam Night was that the City is not always easy to approach or understand for those who want to do business or organise something at night.

The inventory of concerns translates into many practical questions that we address in this vision: how do we keep night culture vibrant? How do we ensure enough room for innovation? How do we keep venues for night culture affordable? How do we help creators and organisers navigate City policies and regulations? How can we learn from other cities in Europe? The larger underlying question is: What kind of city is Amsterdam willing and able to be at night? Therefore, in the next section, we first look at the value of night culture to the city, both intangible and measurable value, socially and economically.

## How can we deploy appropriate policies?

As a city government, we have (and need) policies to encourage desirable development in the city and prevent undesirable consequences. The need for policy also applies to night culture. In this vision, we describe and examine our existing policy instruments and review how to use them more effectively. Examples include the Arts Plan, 24-hour permits, Expedition Free Space and the Incubator Policy, which ensure dynamism so that new creators can always make use of scarce spaces. In addition, we are now working from a more coherent vision to develop city-wide policies and other instruments for preserving and strengthening night culture in our city. These include the new hospitality policy, which has been in development for some time, and the music events committee being set up by the Events Bureau. We are also starting an integrated approach within the City for policies focused on night culture.

## Cultural policy 2021-2024

With the Night Vision, the College underscores the importance of night culture as previously announced in the Arts and Culture Memorandum 2021-2024. With its arts and culture policy for the period 2021-2024, the City is committed to strengthening the connection between arts and culture by day and night. The night culture has a lot of space for experimentation, which leads to innovations that can also be applied by the day culture. Incidentally, this also works the other way round.

A large proportion (more than 35%) of the institutions in the 2021-2024 Arts Plan have developed plans for arts and cultural activities

at night. From exciting nighttime programming – such as Asko | Schönberg’s cross-over Grass Nights or the evening/night series TAKE PART CELEBRATE ART at Nieuw Dakota – to FIBER’s pushing of artistic boundaries and technical challenges and the activities of clubs such as OCCII and Sexyland aimed at protecting and developing the underground electronic music and dance culture. In addition, the multi-year funding of concert venues including Melkweg, Paradiso and Tolhuistuin (Amsterdam Basic Infrastructure) and events such as ADE (through the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts, AFK) is an important contribution to talent development within night culture.

Over the years, various nighttime arts initiatives and projects, festivals and venues as well as creators have been supported through project or multi-year subsidies from the AFK. The Fund remains committed to supporting the development of local talent in nightlife in the coming years.

## City Centre Action Plan

In the City Centre Action Plan, the City sets out the goal for Amsterdam’s inner city to once again become a place that all Amsterdammers enjoy visiting and going out in, and where residents feel at home. Dutch and international visitors remain welcome to discover Amsterdam, as long as they respect the city and its residents. The Action Plan also focuses on enriching the entertainment offerings in the city centre, benefiting Amsterdammers from all parts of the city. With innovative programming on day- and nighttime culture, shopping and hospitality. Where Amsterdammers set the atmosphere and visitors also like to come. This supports innovative initiatives as much as possible and works to build coalitions between different sectors in society. We welcome and support all initiatives to make the city centre more attractive to Amsterdammers. This includes explicitly inviting entrepreneurs who have avoided the city centre in recent years to invest in the area again. In addition, Amsterdammers are actively invited to present, and if possible implement, their plans for the inner city.





## Interview: Bogomir Doringer, curator NXT Museum

*As a teenager, Bogomir Doringer experienced the NATO bombing of Belgrade during the Kosovo War. On the dance floor, he found comfort and was given courage by his peers. The power to connect and the revolutionary potential of dance culture continue to fascinate and inspire him. He will soon receive his doctorate on the subject of dance culture from the University of Applied Arts in Vienna.*

‘I learned to dance in Belgrade during the war. I was about eight years old when Yugoslavia fell apart. In the war years that followed, there were many student protests. This was always connected to nightlife. Nightlife was an important meeting place for like-minded people. As a gay man, it’s where I found a safe haven where I could develop. Dancing was a way to channel emotions: anxiety, insecurity, restlessness. And a way for the political opposition to come together. For me, that freedom of movement is always connected to the freedom of ideas and expression.’

### Ideal

‘I expected to find a vibrant, multicultural melting pot in Amsterdam. All the conditions to go wild were present: wonderful venues, solid sound, great drugs and fantastic DJs. But I arrived a few years after the political assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, when Islamophobia was on the rise and multiculturalism was under attack. What I found in the night was a huge division between groups. Everyone stood still and stuck to their own little group. I found out that Dutch nightlife was incredibly commercialised. Amsterdam’s mayor praised Amsterdam Dance Event for its economic contribution to the city. But it was never about whether dance music could also be a political movement or more than just a lifestyle.’

## Changing climate

‘Until about five years ago, important questions were never asked, such as: where are the female DJs? How inclusive is our nightlife? Why is it that the inclusiveness of the 1990s has largely disappeared? We must realise that nightlife does not equal casinos and prostitution. There are also places of cultural value, which are important for new music, the creation of art, communities, youth development and new ideas. If festivals or clubs contribute to Dutch cultural heritage, they should be protected just as much as theatres, ballet companies and museums.’

## Free spaces

‘Creative minds come here for the freedom that the squatting movement fought to achieve in the 1980s. The city is also increasingly subsidising electronic music and nightlife-related, experimental art projects. Now funds are needed to start new sites. Not incubators, but mini-social experiments that can continue to grow once they prove successful. The problem with incubators is that they eventually have to make room for project development. Now projects and communities never reap the benefits of their pioneering work. How do you make sure initiatives can stay where they are?’

## Values of the night

‘Policy makers still approach the night from an economic perspective. That may apply to the Rembrandtplein, where police must patrol on horseback to keep people in check. Those people never learned what going out means. You need to teach people the values of the night – if the dominant group in a club or at a festival holds the right values, it will influence the rest.’

# Voices of the night #1

## Night at NXT Museum

‘We mainly show work by artists who are part of the nightlife scene or have had practical experience there. Take Heleen Blanken, for example. She was not really able to show her innovative form of art within the standard institutions. She developed as a video artist at music festivals. Now her work HABITAT is popular at the museum. A lot of ground-breaking art comes from club culture. People like Rineke Dijkstra, Ari Versluis and Erwin Olaf all started off in clubs at one time or another. Now they are part of the national cultural heritage.’

## Night conferences

‘Symposia and conferences dedicated to the nighttime economy are a good idea. Public round tables with people from government and nightlife, along with experts who feed the discussion with hard evidence, figures and statistics. Not just economists or drug policy experts, but also Uber drivers and night-shop owners. When this kind of symposium becomes commonplace, it becomes part of the culture.’

## Impact of dance

‘Clubs are not just places to lose yourself in a crazy scene. They are also places where you come precisely to stay sane. This is described in a very striking way in the book *Choreomania: Dance and Disorder* by Kéline Gotman. She writes about people’s right to freedom of movement and dance as a form of self-healing. When will our governments realise what it means to impede people’s movement for so long? Fortunately, interesting innovations usually take place in a crisis. Therefore, I expect a wave of new music, art movements, meeting places and ideas in Amsterdam in the coming years.’





## Interview: Kees Koenders, artist and organiser SMIB

*Kees Koenders – better known as KC – was born and raised in Amsterdam’s Bijlmer neighbourhood in the district of Zuidoost. As a musician and organiser, he is a member of the creative collective SMIB, which brings together multiple disciplines that all have a strong connection to the night. Kees has a great love of nightlife ‘inside the Ring’ (the A10 ring road around Amsterdam). Ideally, he would like to see more room for new initiatives in Zuidoost, but of the kind that best reflect the culture and lifestyle of the neighbourhood.*

### Our Concertgebouw

‘I make music, so I get inspired by everything around nightlife. For people around me, a club is more important than a museum or an opera house. Bitterzoet is our Concertgebouw. That’s where we see all the acts we think are important. Everyone comes together to learn from each other. Taken together it is culture, all the brands that come from here, all the DJs, musicians, other creatives and enthusiasts – that coming together of people is what counts. On a good evening, at first you are mostly talking. That’s how you make contacts and get jobs. I often say that to the artists I mentor. In the club, you will meet many people who can do something for you. Then comes the release on the dance floor. On Friday, you can dance everything away. I’m not much of a dancer myself, but I still find my release in the music and the energy it creates. When I walk out of the club, I feel completely free.’

### Systemic problem

‘I have never personally experienced profiling at the door. I went out with my friends when they were DJing and pretty soon found out about guest lists. After that, I never had any problems at the door. I did hear many stories and saw it happen. I think racial profiling is systemic. It has been in play for a long time, but much has changed. The fact that we can do what we do with SMIB indicates that much has changed, but there is still work to be done. I think the clubs’ house rules, which instruct doormen how to screen, should be reviewed.

There are plenty of guys from the Bijlmer who work on the door themselves and they just have to do their job. The change has to start with the clubs’ rules.’

### Initiatives for the Bijlmer

‘I think the City should fund nighttime events in the Bijlmer. For example, suppose you put on a night with Vic Crezée, LYZZA and David Vunk and make sure that everyone in the neighbourhood knows about it, that you can win tickets and that free tickets are sent to people with the neighbourhood’s post code. The Amsterdam Open Air festival got that right. They knew their music would annoy some people in the neighbourhood so invited everyone right away. Even now, you get a discount if you live near Gaasperdam. That’s how you attract the neighbourhood instead of just helicoptering in and doing your own thing. The Bijlmer would come alive if there was something to do at night. Now we have to rely mostly on illegal house parties. We would love to host an evening, for example, at Club JACK. Now is the time to think about that kind of initiative. I know plenty of people who are looking for a job and would like to work on something like this. We should just sit down with the community and exchange ideas. With studio space, it’s kind of the same story: just not available. That’s why we’ve all built our own studios in our garden sheds.

### Your own night culture

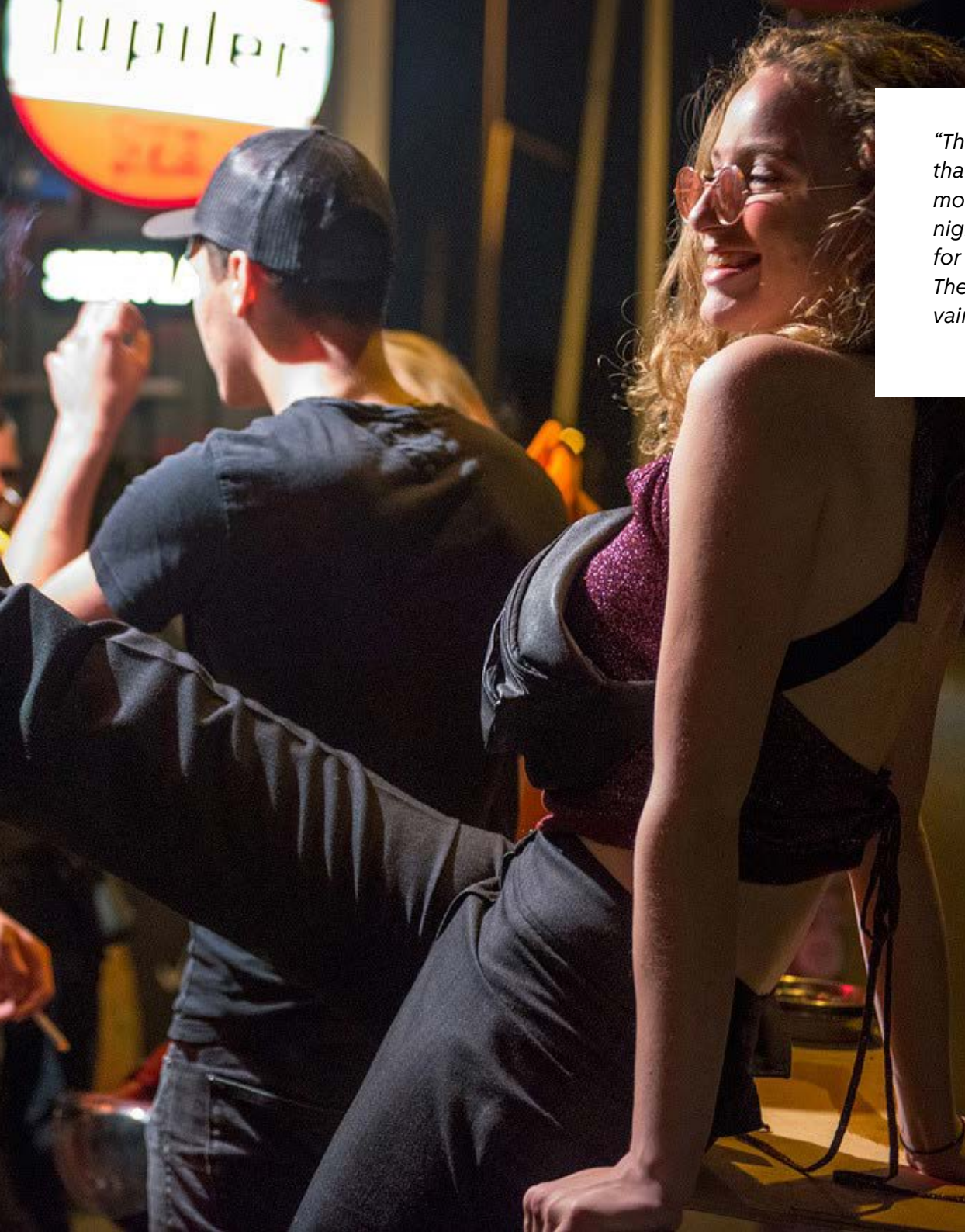
‘The Bijlmer should not try to replicate what the centre already offers. You get a very different lifestyle, culture and nightlife culture here. I think you have to highlight that in the nightlife of Zuidoost. If you’re at a techno party or at the Soho House in the city centre, and you’re in the mood for reggae, dancehall or Afrobeat, you know that you’ll find the best of the best in those genres and entertainment cultures in Zuidoost. I’ve been to dozens of family parties in my mother’s living room. The bands that play there release three CDs every year. If you have them do a release party at a place like Club JACK, their reach grows, but they also have a place to sell their CDs. You have to look for those kinds of musicians in the Bijlmer and someone who knows the people.’



A night sky filled with stars. A prominent constellation of stars is connected by blue lines, forming a complex, branching pattern. Another constellation of stars is connected by white lines, forming a more regular, grid-like pattern. The background is a dark, starry field.

## 2. Value of the night





*“The absence of daylight and bustle bares a part of people’s souls that you don’t easily encounter during the day. These are the most fertile hours of the Earth’s orbit around the sun. I yearned for nightlife beyond my own street. Yet this world was long undefined for me. Something to do with gender and clashing norms and values. The night became a world I deeply longed for but reached out for in vain.”*

*Soumaya Bazi, Future of the night #4*

**I**n this section, we address the value of night. Nightlife culture still regularly faces unjustified prejudice. *“Night culture? Isn’t that all just shallow nonsense and hedonistic debauchery?”* But those who work, make, build, DJ, play, design or go out at night know better: night culture is at least as dynamic and has as many layers as daytime culture in the city. Art and culture in Amsterdam do not stop at midnight.

The night is full of value – in the broadest sense of the word. For many Amsterdammers and visitors, the night is a valuable place to invent and reinvent yourself and meet others. In addition, for decades the night has been a space in the city that encourages the growth of all kinds of art and culture. Then there are numerous entrepreneurs and professionals who provide products or services that are important to night culture. Nightlife is an essential part of the story of Amsterdam and its people.

With this Night Vision, the City acknowledges the importance of the night for the development of Amsterdam in the broadest sense. Culturally and artistically, socially and also economically. Moreover, that importance is greater than we often realise. The city would not be Amsterdam without night culture. Even those who do not participate in the night indirectly enjoy the enrichment that night culture brings to the city. But how do you measure the value of the night in a way that enables investment and creates attractive conditions? What indicators do we use? These questions regularly came up during the discussion series Future of the Amsterdam Nights at Pakhuis de Zwijger. To answer these questions, we must first define what we mean by night culture.



## 2.1 What is night culture?

To shape this Night Vision, we asked a broad range of representatives from the night sector for their experiences and ideas. Makers, organisers, programmers and other involved parties have given us a better idea of what is unique and distinctive about night culture in our city. Their input provided the building blocks for this vision. Certain concepts also keep recurring in that input: magic and intoxication, exploration of one's identity, space to be yourself and develop, artistic innovation and the experience of feeling at home as a member of a community.

Night culture is both an incubator and a stage for makers and pioneers in music, dance, performance art, video art, film and photography, graphic design and design, stage and set design, fashion and storytelling (spoken word, stand-up comedy). For the arts sector at large, night culture is an important space for development and growth: a place for inspiration and cross-pollination, and a stage for talent. The night scene is often ahead of the curve – in music, clothing and lifestyle. Innovators come out at night, you find new art forms and you encounter (sub)cultures that remain hidden during the day. Night culture can provide a springboard to a larger scale of production and presentation for organisations, creators and artists. In addition, it offers a safe place for many to experiment with new concepts, cultural expressions or new art and music.

Night culture has been likened to an organic whole in which different layers of development and industry can be identified: from underground to mainstream, from open-air rave to sold-out Arena event, from niche programming to iconic three-day festival, from Instagram page to exhibition. Despite the many discussions, it still remains difficult to find a really solid definition for what night culture is; it is all-encompassing.

Night largely escapes the rigid confines of the day. In 2003, the *Night Memorandum* underlined: "The night gives people space and tolerance to be different. That is an important quality." At The Future of the Amsterdam Night #2, artist and cultural entrepreneur Jordi Ariza Gallego said: "The night is a place where the strict rules of the day do not apply, where there is a greater freedom." The magic of the night also often came up in the conversations: the magic of the moment; the night as a magical, secret world, undiscovered. The night makes

us think and look differently, and this includes how we experience art. The night thus constitutes a rich artistic resource that produces new, different forms and styles and even completely new disciplines and genres.

## 2.2 A bird's-eye view of Amsterdam's night culture

Amsterdam's night culture is living cultural heritage, born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the theatres, *café-chantants* and taprooms around the Nes in central Amsterdam. Space has often been created or claimed in the night by (sub)cultures, and this process has not always been easy. The night always offered space for new developments and experimentation in art and culture, space that may not always be offered during the day. The underground and avant-garde scene have often been driving forces in this dynamic.

Eighty years ago, Amsterdammers were introduced to African-American jazz music at the Cotton Club on Nieuwmarkt. In recent decades, artists, famous performers, creatives, entrepreneurs and audiences found each other in illustrious clubs such as RoXY, iT, Studio 80, Club 11, Sugar Factory and Trouw. In addition, Paradiso and Melkweg offer space in their programming for different genres, such as Boss with hip-hop and r&b, and Marmoucha with music from North Africa and the Middle East.

At the turn of the century, several spin-offs from the club scene appeared in the form of large-scale events such as Sensation and the now iconic annual Amsterdam Dance Event (ADE). With festivals such as Milkshake, Valtifest, DGTL and Dekmantel, night culture also manifested itself in all its exuberance during the day. Amsterdam Pride grew into one of the busiest public events in the Netherlands. Section 5 discusses this in more detail.

In the 2020s, the night scene moved to other parts of the city, where rents were lower and noise complaints were fewer. The City also provided space for this with 24-hour permits. The new hot spots became Radion, Sexyland, Skate Café, De School and Garage Noord. Downtown, Club Church, Lovelee, Bitterzoet, Encore in De Melkweg, and – until recently – Claire continued to provide space for new and experimental programming.



24-hour culture has now transcended the club scene. There are places where you can learn about the work of new artists after midnight, such as No Man's Art Gallery. Earlier this century, the basement of Trouw hosted exhibitions in collaboration with museums such as Palais de Tokyo, Paris and the New Museum, New York. De School presented lectures, films, video art and installations, such as the works of Children of the Light. As part of the popular annual Museum Night, clubs also showcase what they have to offer with special programming and audio and visual art. At Future of the Amsterdam Night #2, for example, the question was asked why Museum Night only takes place once a year, or alternatively, why are museums not open at night? The event is a calling card for the museum world, but does not yet target the groups who mostly go out at night or for whom night time opening can also provide a safer space.

Nightlife is an important source of inspiration for books, magazines, stories, podcasts, music and films. From Joost Zwagerman's key novel *Gimmick!* (1989) to the many documentaries that capture night culture, such as *Gewoon uit je dak!* (1992) by Hans Polak, *De negen levens van DJ Dimitri* (2014) by Vice/Thump or the ode to Club Church in *Weg van de Kerk* (2015) by Robin Vogel.

### 2.3 Value of the sector

Amsterdam's night culture has become a leading industry within a few decades. The transformation of Paradiso from a church occupied by squatters in 1967 into a world stage for pop music and night culture is a fine example. The conversion of the Shell Building into A'DAM Tower in Noord, with Shelter and The Loft, is another sign that night culture has a social and economic impact and value for the city. There are many other clubs, venues and places in Amsterdam that have managed to build loyal audiences over the years and have continued to innovate. Amsterdam is rich in places that – hand in hand with the zeitgeist – provide space for experimentation, and new initiatives are constantly emerging. Moreover, night culture is an industry where you can start as a bartender or valet parker and make it to DJ or club owner.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Trouw book, Olaf Boswijk et al, 2014

<sup>2</sup> *Waarde van de kleine uurtjes*, Atlas Research (commissioned by the City of Amsterdam), Amsterdam, April 2021, p. 29

With top-level music producers, DJs and organisers, Amsterdam's night culture has a huge international reputation. New music movements have emerged from the Amsterdam night and a billion-dollar industry in electronic music. House and techno, spawned from the black community and queer underground scene in Chicago and Detroit, and spilled over to Europe, have become music genres that attract millions of visitors. Amsterdam is one of the epicentres of techno and dance and therefore home to global players in the sector. On top of that, Amsterdam also hosts the world's largest electronic music festival and conference, ADE. The city is known for the creativity and quality with which organisations develop and organise festivals. Successes like this come from the wealth of initiatives our city has. Local night culture has become an international drawing card. Every year, 1.5 million foreign visitors come to Amsterdam specifically for our nightlife. Over 3 million unique visitors from outside Amsterdam visit the city's nightlife.<sup>2</sup> But there is still room for improvement: Amsterdammers are increasingly calling for more 24-hour hospitality venues (as there are in other cities around the world).

### 2.4 Value for the public

For the general public, Amsterdam's night culture has primarily cultural and social value. At night, Amsterdammers, young and old, can search for their identity by connecting with strangers outside their work, study and established social circles. At night, you meet people you wouldn't easily meet during the day and you are inspired. Ideas are exchanged, deals made, networks enlarged, and extraordinary concepts are born. You can explore – perhaps more than during the day – what style of music, clothing and dance suits you, what community you feel at home with. You can discover where you find like-minded people and where you can safely discuss your political beliefs or dare to express your sexual orientation for the first time. In doing so, it makes sense to distinguish between groups that need the night as an outlet, and groups that need the night as a safe haven because the city does not offer them enough space during the day. Especially for people who are outside the dominant social structures, the night offers a shared value and a meeting place where you can be yourself without bias, prejudice or expectations.

For many people, night culture offers a collective experience rarely found anywhere else. Researcher Bogomir Doringer calls clubs “a playground in which visitors engage in physical, non-verbal communication that is not accepted outside the context of the club”: the mosh pit or dance floor acts as an outlet. The night is used to practice dancing and to loosen up the body. Night offers protection as a safe place of experiment for young and old, for marginalised groups who feel little or no control during the day. They are more likely to be able to claim a place at night, even in public spaces.

In addition to the widely known array of parties and programming in the clubs, much more is happening at night in Amsterdam. In a city of 180 nationalities, the diversity of culture, music and dance is enormous. Amsterdammers dance to music from all over the world, at Turkish and Caribbean parties, at salsa nights and 40UP nights. For many, therefore, the night remains meaningful throughout their lives. They cherish night culture as a place where they meet chosen family and can permanently nurture their personality and identity. For much of the LGBTIQ+ community, this chosen family is the only family that ‘really’ knows and accepts them or that they have any contact with. Where they can be themselves and feel connected to a community. And perhaps have an experience that transcends reason.

## 2.5 Value for the city

The night contributes to the appeal of our city. There are numerous people who have a direct or indirect interest in a rich night culture. Some 5000 jobs are associated with night culture in Amsterdam. In her book *The Warhol Economy* author Elizabeth Currid-Halkett argues that a strong night culture can be a powerful driver for the rest of the creative and cultural economy. This effect can also be seen in Amsterdam.

Around the creative core, night culture has a carefully developed infrastructure of stage builders, lighting and sound technicians, agencies, bookers, programmers, security, catering and other suppliers or service providers, such as cleaners and taxi drivers. For pubs and restaurants, visitors to nightclubs are an important source of revenue. Property developers sometimes temporarily accommodate night culture to explore and enhance the potential of an area. Night culture often establishes itself on the fringes of the city and contributes

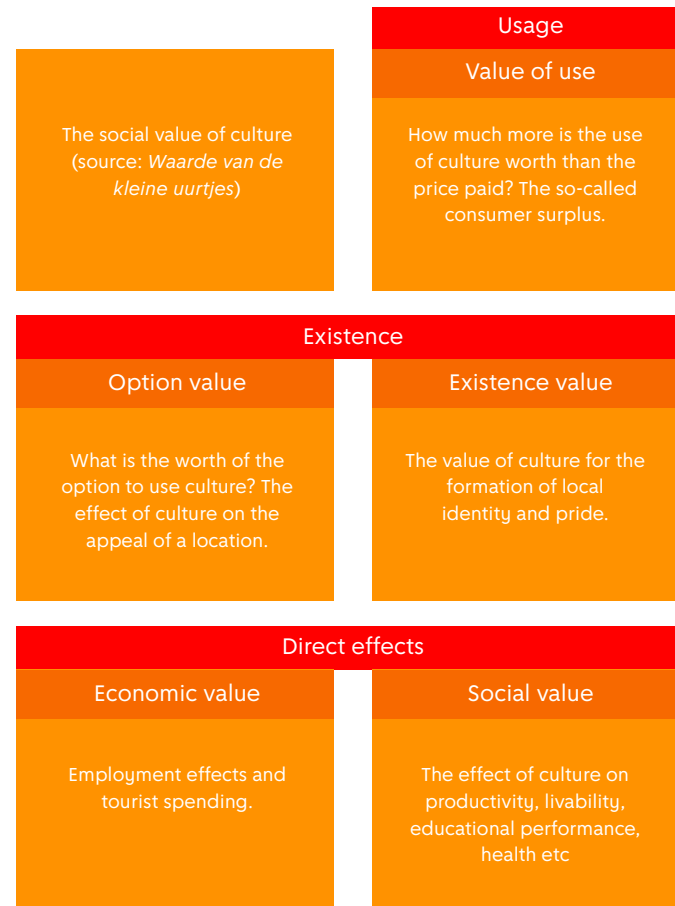
to upgrading these areas. Consequently, cultural sites often become part of the gentrification process. Well-known examples include the NDSM site, the Sluisbuurt area and the IJ bank.

Amsterdam’s night sector is also important to the national creative and cultural economy. For example, the export value of the dance industry alone, which has put the Netherlands on the map worldwide, exceeds €150 million annually. ADE has been an important factor in the professionalisation of Amsterdam’s night culture. The five-day event takes place annually at nearly 200 locations in Amsterdam. The festival thrives on the presence of an intricate, interconnected infrastructure of venues and creators, and of an innovative drive that is constantly nurtured. ADE attracted nearly 400,000 visitors in 2019, but its primary significance is as a conference for professionals in the dance scene: ADE is the world’s first and largest convention for culture and knowledge exchange in the field of night culture.



## 2.6 Measurable value

To substantiate this Night Vision, we wanted to indicate the value of night culture to Amsterdam's economy. As part of this Night Vision, the City commissioned urban, socioeconomic and cultural issues research firm Atlas Research to carry out an exploratory study of the supply and attendance of night culture and festivals in Amsterdam in the year 2019.<sup>3</sup> In addition, an estimate was made of the social value of the sector.



To quantify this value, Atlas Research uses five specific categories of values: value of use, option value, existence value, economic value and social value (see Appendix 2, 4.1 for a detailed explanation of these values).

### The main outcomes of the survey are:

- The available number of cultural sites at night per 10,000 inhabitants is comparable to that in Berlin, and higher than that in Tokyo and New York.
- These spots are concentrated in the centre: 56% of all cultural venues and 65% of meeting places are located in the city centre.
- Amsterdam's night culture represents a significant **economic value**. National and international visitors who come to Amsterdam for fun and entertainment spend an estimated €1.25 billion during their stay. Based on this, Atlas Research calculated a total of €63 million in additional business profits from entrepreneurs. On top of this comes revenue from City taxes, and an estimated €49 million in additional prosperity gains due to tax revenues from VAT and excise taxes on foreign visitor spending flowing to the state. Furthermore, Amsterdam's 541 nightlife venues provide more than five thousand jobs.
- The annual **value of use** of night culture and night or night culture-related events, the added value that people attach to their visit, is estimated at over €22 million.
- Furthermore, people are willing to pay more for a home near cultural facilities: the so-called **option value**. Extrapolation based on the estimated 1.6 million visitors to music venues belonging to night culture gives an option value of €22.9 million per year for residents of Amsterdam, and €2 million for surrounding municipalities, according to Atlas Research.
- Finally, night culture has a **social value**. This social value consists, for example, of providing meeting places where creativity and knowledge can be exchanged, and where groups that may feel excluded during the day can safely discover, form and express their identity.

<sup>3</sup> *Waarde van de kleine uurtjes*, Atlas Research (commissioned by the City of Amsterdam), Amsterdam, April 2021

In the Culture Monitor 2019<sup>4</sup>, the City's research and statistics department (OIS) researched the cultural lives of Amsterdammers. For the first time, night culture was also considered in the survey. Questions about night culture were presented to two groups: the regular group of survey participants, and a group of young Facebook and Instagram users who have an affinity for arts, culture and nightlife.

**The main outcomes are:**

- Of both youth and adults, one-fifth attended a nighttime event between September 2018 and September 2019.
- Of these young people, 11% feel something is missing in night culture; among adults, the figure is 9%. Among the group of adults approached via social media, a much higher proportion (40%) are missing something in night culture.
- Among other things, people want more diversity in music styles, dance styles and audiences, wider and more varied opening hours, intimate low-threshold live music performances and alternative venues on the fringes of the city.

<sup>4</sup> Culture Monitor 2019, OIS City of Amsterdam, 2020



# Voices of the night #3



## Interview: Ramon de Lima and Helena Castro, Night Mayor Foundation (N8BM A'DAM)

*As director and secretary of the Night Mayor Foundation, Ramon de Lima and Helena Castro are constantly looking at ways to improve Amsterdam's night culture. In doing so, they focus mainly on social issues such as inclusiveness and social safety. Their ClubEthics project offers Amsterdam clubs a handle on how to make the night safer and more inclusive*

### Self-expression and community expression

Helena: 'Night culture is a place of self-expression and of community expression, but also for tradition and intangible heritage in which we come together and perform rituals. Both creatively and socially, then, nightlife is culture.'

Ramon: 'The night has brought me much: friendships, inspiration and a broadening of the mind. I studied for six years but learned the most in the pressure cooker of my own club Kondo. The knowledge, experience and the people I met in those six months – that's priceless.'

Helena: 'Nightlife has given me a place where I can be completely myself. I am not very feminine, but I do feel like a woman, and that is sometimes difficult to manoeuvre in daily life. In the night, there is a lot of room for that; anything on the gender spectrum is possible. Growing up, the world of culture felt very distant. Nightlife has allowed me to find a place as a creator by DJing, organising events and programming performances.'

### Bottom-up organisation

Ramon: 'The Night Mayor Foundation was established in 2003 to build a bridge between nightlife and city government. The focus is on the quality of nightlife: how

can we make it better, where are the dilemmas and how can we solve them? We acquired a voice at the City table thanks to our predecessors. We can now focus more on social issues such as gentrification and inclusiveness. The ambition is to make the Night Mayor Foundation a platform where the nightlife community can help build an inclusive, diverse and vibrant nightlife.'

Helena: 'We want to become more of a bottom-up organisation, more visible to the community. Visitors pay for the club nights, they are the ones dancing, so they should also have a say. We hope they will come to see themselves as more than just consumers, but as creators of the night.'

## Code of conduct

Ramon: 'In 2017, the Chicks on a Mission conference on women's representation in nightlife and the safety of women on the dance floor took place. The conference concluded that there was a need for a code of conduct for clubs, which we named ClubEthics. Ultimately, it takes more work to realise what you support as a club culture. You need workshops and training and a platform where you can hold clubs accountable to the agreements.'

Helena: 'The first clubs have now joined this initiative: AIR, DOKA, Garage Noord and RadioRadio. They receive two training sessions: a 'safer clubbing' workshop and one designed specifically for the club. This can result in policies on issues such as corporate culture, architecture, dealing with DJs and handling guest lists. The idea is to create a knowledge platform, where clubs and events exchange best practices and where visitors have a say in the policies at their favourite club.'

## Social safety required

Ramon: 'Every club wants to be inclusive and safe for everyone, but clear policies are lacking everywhere. Once that's in place, you can call a club to account as a visitor if it's not being applied properly.'

Helena: 'There is no intention to put certain clubs on the spot or to publicly shame them. ClubEthics it is primarily intended to stimulate the larger conversation, so that inclusivity really becomes part of the DNA of Amsterdam's club culture.'

Ramon: 'I hope it will become mandatory to think about social safety and participate in the ClubEthic programme when applying for a night license.'

Helena: 'It would be cool if there were dedicated City funds, so you could apply to improve your club in terms of sustainability, noise pollution and social safety. In the code of conduct survey, it was striking that while most clubs want to address social safety, no one owns that topic within the City. It would already help a lot if there was someone to coordinate that.'

## Throw open the gates

Ramon: 'I hope that after the pandemic, there will be room for new night creators and that the City will provide space for interesting ideas and guide creators through the jungle of rules and subsidies. Throw open the gates and see what emerges. Offer not only physical space, but also regulatory space.'

Helena: 'In this DIY culture, places are often temporary. I hope the City will invest more in sustainable solutions.'



# Voices of the night #4



## Interview: Gert van Veen and Rolinde Hoorntje, journalists/writers

*Gert van Veen and Rolinde Hoorntje write about electronic music and night culture. Gert was the first Dutch journalist to report on house in the late 1980s, in national broadsheet De Volkskrant. With his live act Quazar, he is one of the most influential artists in the history of Dutch house. In addition, he was the founder of Studio 80 and owns the Welcome to the Future Festival. Rolinde is a music journalist and reviewer for national newspaper NRC and wrote the novel The Club about Amsterdam's night culture. They co-wrote Mary Go Wild, the award-winning book about the first 25 years of dance in the Netherlands.*

### Popular art

Gert: 'The Van Dale dictionary says: "Culture is the set of norms, values, traditions, rules, artistic expressions, etc. of a country, people or group." Night culture includes many artistic expressions, creative expressions of younger generations. Events are a combined work of art of music, scenery, lighting, visuals and theatre. The interaction between the artist on stage and the audience is much stronger than in traditional art. Nightlife is popular art, so it is often overlooked. 'Serious' art generally works with subsidies. Night culture has always taken care of itself and has remained invisible to official bodies as an art movement. Meanwhile, the night is far too busy doing its thing to explain why this is culture.'

Rolinde: 'In the night, you often see an early reflection of what is happening in society. Not only in music and fashion, but also in the social field. Movements like New York's Discwoman, a DJ collective and agency fighting for more inclusivity and more women on the dance floor, are fuelling a movement in nightlife that you later see reflected in society.'

## International meaning

Gert: 'The night culture in Amsterdam has developed into something immense. ADE is the best proof of that. This is one of the key moments of the year for dance culture, when the whole world comes to Amsterdam. Compared to 30 years ago, that's a giant leap. We often don't talk about the economic factor, but it is huge because night culture has become so big. There are many people doing something, and that has a huge appeal to an incredible number of people. That generates a lot of money. Unfortunately, this is less recognised in Amsterdam than in a city like Berlin. There, the night culture is seen by the authorities as an important part of the city's culture.'

Rolinde: 'Thanks in part to clubs like Trouw and Studio 80, Amsterdam has become an international destination for the electronic music scene. Dekmantel, Awakenings and Mysteryland attract many foreign visitors. That reinforces Amsterdam's international significance as an electronic music city.'

## Noise makers

Gert: 'It is unfortunate that the night is often portrayed as a collection of troublemakers and noise makers. If the City was smart, it would cherish the scene. It is one of the city's crown jewels, such a vibrant night culture.'

Rolinde: 'DGTL is a good case study. Everyone went nuts two years back because the sound carried so far you could hear it at Central Station. However, the festival is very innovative and has long been working to become climate neutral, for example. Or by having artists like Nick Verstand build a large installation. Yet people only talked about the noise.'

Gert: 'I think clubs and events should not be pushed to the outskirts of the city, as is happening now. It makes Amsterdam livelier when things happen in the inner city, too. Now the NDSM site is also being developed. The space is decreasing everywhere. Project developers are hard to stop.'

## Policy officer

Rolinde: 'The City should appoint a young policy officer to follow the music and identify what discussions are relevant in the night. Someone who can make an analysis of what has been in the clubs recently, how culture is developing, and which venues are contributing what and therefore need to be stimulated, for example with subsidies. Also consider a dedicated night desk where young entrepreneurs can quickly and smoothly apply for permits for events or get help finding venues and vacant buildings. That way, the City can facilitate nightlife.'

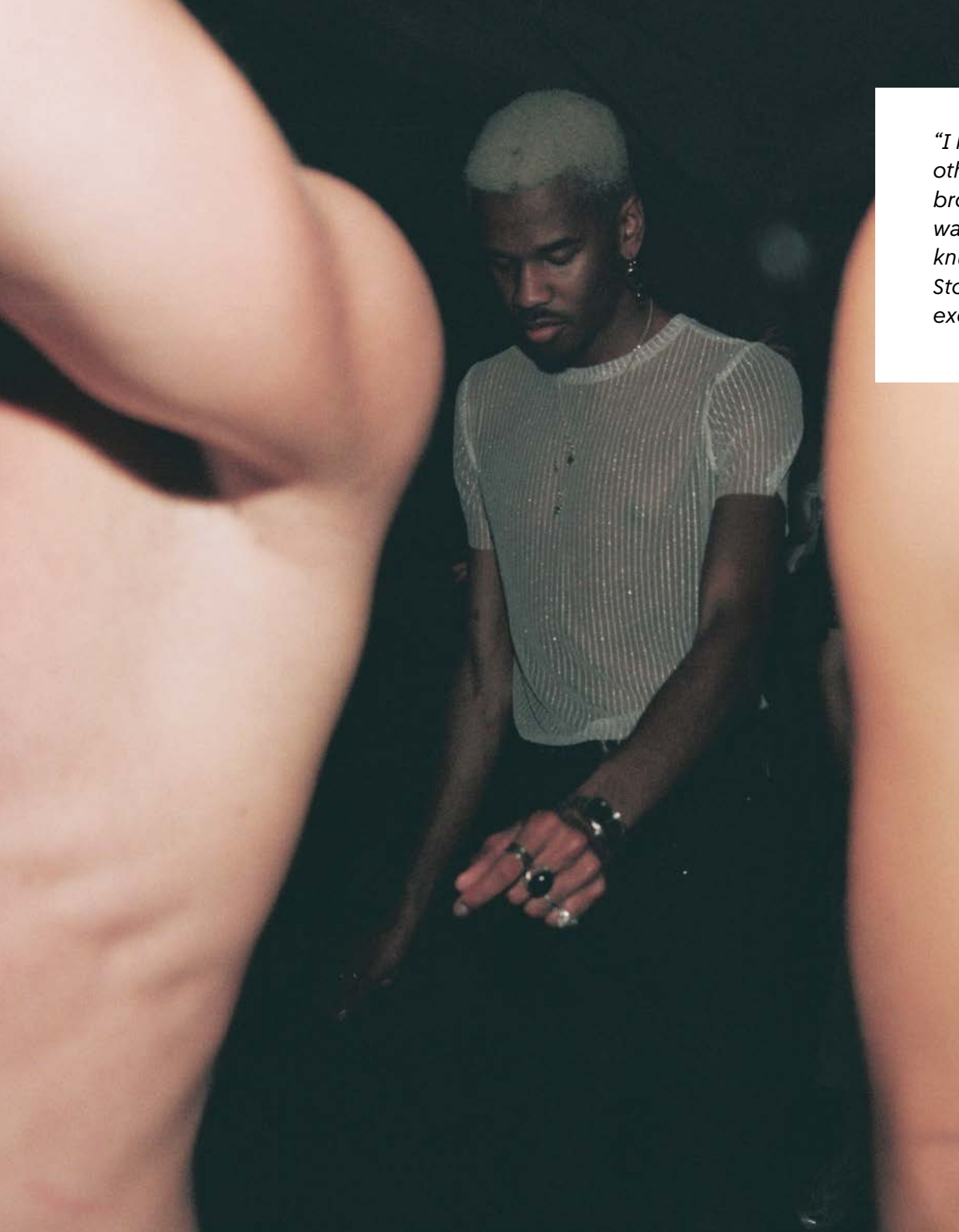
Gert: 'Let's hope that after the coronavirus pandemic the night will become as vibrant again as it was from 2005 to 2015.'

Rolinde: 'Yes, and hopefully it is also becoming more diverse. The scene is already very diverse in terms of different education levels. But it would be nice if in the future there was more mixing in terms of gender and ethnicity.'





**3. The night is for everyone**



*“I heard my friend’s stories, stories of sweaty bodies finding each other’s rhythm on the dance floor, where relationships began and broke down, where pain and sorrow were sweated away and ecstasy was shared. Also violent stories of women who clutched white-knuckled hands around the bunch of keys in their coat pockets. Stories of unwanted touching, spitting and swearing, of being excluded for how you look.”*

*Soumaya Bazi, Future of the night #4*

**A**msterdam should be a city where everyone can participate and no one is excluded. There should be space for everyone in the Amsterdam night, regardless of cultural background, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age or economic status. In 2021, the arts and culture sector still does not accurately reflect Amsterdam’s population. The Future of the Night discussion series and other conversations reveal a perception that night culture – especially the underground – is doing better in terms of diversity and inclusion of marginalised groups and subcultures.

Yet even in night culture, unfortunately, we still see exclusion and discrimination, and low representation of people of colour and LGBTIQ+ communities. The City wants to work together with the night sector to do justice to our multi-voiced city. A more inclusive night sector can contribute to a thriving, free and open city.

### **3.1 Physical and social safety**

An important condition for an inclusive city is that Amsterdammers can move safely and freely around the city both day and night and feel comfortable in their city. As City authorities, we have a responsibility to ensure that safety as far as we can. In recent decades, Amsterdam has taken numerous measures aimed at making and keeping the city safe and liveable for residents and visitors. These range from keeping public spaces clean and accessible on foot, to the deployment of hosts in nightlife areas, restricting the enforcement of rules about noise



disturbances to the mitigation of health risks and a policy to counter criminal influence on the night economy. Some of these measures specifically address nightlife. Below we give an overview of our actions in the area of security.

#### **Safety is a priority**

Of particular concern to the College are street harassment, racism, the increasing violence against and intolerance of LGBTIQ+ persons, and women's safety. These are hot topics within night culture. The Future of the Amsterdam Night discussion series showed that the public is vulnerable in places with little or no regulation. Certain activities take place on the edges of the city, in places that are out of sight of enforcement officers and police or less easily accessible. This is not without risks. In 2019, for example, there were several incidents in which visitors to queer parties were victims of violence and harassment. As the City, we cannot accept this.

#### **Physical safety**

Sexual harassment and sexual violence are unacceptable. In Amsterdam, everyone should be able to live in freedom and safety. In particular, we are looking at the safety of women and LGBTIQ+ persons. They must be able to move freely and safely in public spaces, also at night. Amsterdam has developed specific policies against harassment of women. To emphasise the importance of this, the College also signed the UN Women's Safe Streets Declaration in November 2019. This means we commit to ensuring safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces – and ending street harassment. We encourage the Public Prosecutor's Office and police to communicate transparently about the prosecution and sentencing of crimes of violence against women and LGBTIQ+ persons. We also continue to advocate for opportunities to report discrimination more easily.

The lack of safety in nightlife manifests itself in unwanted touching, sexual assault and harassment, among other things. Feeling unsafe on the way home is unfortunately still the norm for many women. Men can also experience insecurity. Several drag performers in recent years have spoken to the council and let the City know how unsafe their journeys home are and how often cab drivers refuse to take them. In addition, sexual harassment and abuse by (usually male) artists, professionals and DJs are still too common. We are in dialogue with the sector to make clear that such behaviour has no place in a healthy, thriving night culture. The City continues to work with the sector on physical safety. In doing so, it is important that nightlife entrepreneurs and organisations take responsibility for safety within their own spaces.

#### **Safe(r) spaces**

We are increasingly seeing party and club night organisers taking matters into their own hands to provide a safe environment for the most vulnerable. Harassment and unwanted behaviour against women and LGBTIQ+ persons have been virtually eliminated at queer parties through strict door policies, including personnel policies in clubs and from promoters, and awareness before and during events. Moreover, to ensure safety, organisers sometimes deploy 'awareness teams'. These teams monitor social safety and the atmosphere during an event. They are the first contact with visitors as soon as tensions arise, either due to misconduct or unsafe alcohol or substance use.

## Current policy on substance use

The use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs, is undeniably present in our society. In order to minimise drug use and its associated health risks and risks to safety, the Jellinek Clinic, the public health department (GGD), the police and the Public Prosecutor's Office have worked with the night sector to draft the *Amsterdam policy framework for dance events* (2015) and the *Detailed rules for dance events within hospitality* (2016). The principle of the current policy is that drugs have no place at dance events or in clubs and that the ultimate aim is for drug-free parties. However, substance use can never be completely eliminated. We are therefore committed to risk mitigation. The organiser of a dance event or a club operator is obliged to take general risk control measures, such as education, provision of water and proper first aid, in addition to proper door control. The City, police, GGD and Medical Aid Organisation (GHOR) work together implementing this policy. The sector endorses the principles of the policy. It is important that visitors also remain aware that drug possession and drug trafficking are prohibited and substance use can pose health risks.

During ADE, the achievements of Amsterdam's policy, the multidisciplinary cooperation with Celebrate Safe, Jellinek and the City, among others, and communication around this issue are noticeable. Despite the many thousands of revellers in the city, the number of incidents and arrests recorded by police and the number of ambulance rides during ADE don't usually differ from an average (very) busy weekend night.

The Alcohol Prevention and Enforcement Plan 2021-2024 contains measures to reduce problematic alcohol use. These include banning alcohol price promotions in the hospitality industry and improving compliance with the rules of the Alcohol and Hospitality Act. The Act also creates the option, in some areas, of requiring hospitality staff to receive additional training on responsible alcohol service and of prohibiting hosting organised pub crawls in hospitality venues.

## 3.2 Call for change

The issues of diversity and inclusion on the night have mostly been put on the agenda in recent years by marginalised groups such as the black community and the LGBTIQ+ community. The under-representation of women, persons of colour and LGBTIQ+ persons in event line-ups, as well as within the organisations themselves, has led to cutting-edge discussions. One criticism – which also emerged during the Future of the Amsterdam Night discussions – is that within established structures and organisations there is often insufficient (self-)understanding, expertise or willingness to change. This is because night organisations themselves are often not yet sufficiently diverse. The call for change is becoming louder: there must be room for new initiatives and existing organisations must change from within.

The good news is that all sorts of night culture venues are working very hard on diversity and inclusion. Subcultures and communities of marginalised groups claim places in the night, both within the underground and mainstream. Underground organisations like Spielraum and First Communion, as well as VaVaVoom, are finding their way into the existing clubs. The artists they are giving a stage to for the first time, such as KI/KI and MARRØN, are being picked up by mainstream clubs and channels. The public plays an important role in this development. For example, the Future of the Amsterdam Night discussions showed that visitors to clubs and festivals are becoming increasingly critical of the values promoted by organisers and who they provide a platform for, both in front of and behind the scenes.

As the City, we deploy various tools to encourage diversity and inclusion. Subsidised institutions have been required to implement the national Diversity and Inclusion Code since 2017. Institutions within the 2021-2024 Arts Plan have also committed to the implementation of a diversity and inclusion action plan that they prepared independently and that was reviewed as part of their subsidy application. In night culture, however, non-subsidised initiatives are predominant. Through a permit, we can require transparent and public door policies, but this still does not guarantee diversity and inclusion.

One issue that needs further attention is the accessibility of night culture and daytime festivals for people with physical or mental disabilities. The first steps are thankfully being taken in this regard. A great example is the cooperation between the Amsterdam STRAFWERK



Festival (SWF) and Handicap NL, in which the organisations strive to make the festival as accessible as possible for people with disabilities. The knowledge and experiences gained during this collaboration will be shared with the sector. The City welcomes the initiative, but notes that accessibility remains a major problem.

The sector must also take responsibility. The City is playing its part by enabling dialogue and making these issues open for discussion, for example in the Future of the Amsterdam Night series. In the coming years, we will continue to use this vision to remain in discussion with sector representatives, creators and organisations.

### 3.3 Diversity increases diversity

Within the regulated nightlife circuit, clubs and organisers face fundamental questions about inclusivity. Do you select at the door to create a safer space for specific groups or do you welcome everyone so as not to discriminate? One way for clubs to become more inclusive is to focus less on their own identity, and more on their function for as many different cultures and subcultures as possible. At the same time, inclusive programming can be more than just a line-up that's a bit less mainstream than usual. The public often criticises appropriation or superficial representation for opportunistic or commercial reasons. To prevent artists, DJs and performers from being abused for window-dressing, the entire chain must become more inclusive: from management, door hosts and bar staff to staff at the toilets. Experience shows that a diverse and inclusive team invites a diverse audience.

#### Door hosts & take-overs

Queer festivals like VaVaVoom and Spielraum have strict additional door policies so that performers and visitors can feel safe and free. These nights are organised in existing clubs, which often have different, broader door policies on other days. In practice, the organisers announce additional house rules for their events. A strict door policy may be at odds with the ban on discrimination. Exactly what the role of door hosts is and how door policies should be handled are points that are often discussed within the nightlife industry.

It is agreed that transparency about door policy, house rules, atmosphere and programming is the basis for a successful match between event and visitor. At the very least, the door policy must

always be transparent and uniformly implemented. It is important to manage expectations and show clearly what you stand for.

The operator ensures safety by setting clear conditions for use of the site. These conditions should be consistent with the permit conditions and with laws and regulations. From a content perspective, the organiser should have a say in who gets to enter. With transparent and public door policies and, in addition to the official security guards, an in-house door host who, for example, handles the guest list and makes visitors aware of the rules, the organiser can ensure that the intended target group is admitted. The door host and security guard can complement each other in the balance between physical safety and social safety.

#### Parallel worlds and accessibility

Another way to achieve inclusivity is to create space for subcultures to coexist, creating opportunities for spontaneous encounters. For example, the team behind Sexyland is working on the new concept of Sexyland World, where various subcultures can use the simultaneously. This is an extension of the current model, where most club nights are take-overs from different programmers and organisations. Sexyland World operates on the premise that all these subcultures have their own value and aims to enable organisers to occupy a space without sacrificing any of their identity. This example also shows that the simultaneous use of existing venues can potentially provide a solution for initiatives that don't yet have a permanent place, such as pop-up concepts and small initiatives. In addition, such takeovers often provide opportunities for small, new organisations by and for people of colour and LGBTIQ+ persons. However, this involves a risk of having only one-time or very sporadic space available for representation and niche programming.

#### Space for all

At the Future of the Amsterdam Night discussion series, there was a plea to get involved if you want to create a place for a subculture or a marginalised group. This is based on the idea that it is easier and much faster to create one's own playing field than to change existing institutions. There is clearly sufficient demand, as can be seen in the many cases where hundreds of people for whom a special club night is intended have to be turned away because the event is sold out. Queer party organisers see this as a sign that demand is not currently being met.

A number of supply-and-demand topics deserve extra attention. Why do young people from neighbourhoods in Nieuw-West and Zuidoost seldom find their way to nightlife venues in the city centre? And how can that distance be bridged? We know that many events are organised outside of Amsterdam in (often cheaper) locations such as Almere, Beverwijk and Zaandam. How is it that Zuidoost, with all its dance and music culture and creativity, has no real nightclub? In Berlin, club YAAM focuses on Caribbean music, reggae and dancehall. Amsterdam has nothing like this, even though Amsterdam has much stronger ties to the Caribbean (e.g. Surinam and the Antilles). To make room for this type of initiative, we need to know why it has not emerged until now. Is it not possible to find a suitable location? Is it too complicated to arrange a permit? What role can the City play to help?

These examples and questions underscore the need to further explore what offerings are currently missing from our nightlife culture and what audiences need. The sector and the City can work together more to better identify this. This includes the issue of a level playing field, where there are opportunities for young and inexperienced promoters to raise their profile within or in relation to established institutions. This touches on how the City can encourage new initiatives and innovation on the one hand, and how existing organisations can share space with new initiatives on the other.

## Current policies on diversity, inclusion and safety in the night

### Diversity & Inclusion Code

Diversity and inclusion play a central role in Amsterdam's 2021-2024 arts and culture policy. Institutions that receive multi-year subsidies, based on the national Diversity & Inclusion Code, have developed an action plan to be implemented in the coming years. Actions relate to the institutions' programming, audiences, staff and partners. In addition, institutions are expected to implement the Diversity & Inclusion Code. It is 'a code of conduct for the (subsidised) cultural sector that aims for inclusion, as it's essential to ensure diversity. Adherence to the new code will create a cultural and creative sector where everyone feels welcome, regardless of cultural background, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age or economic status.' Representation is the starting point: this is how art and culture in Amsterdam can truly reflect the city.

### Anti-discrimination policy in the night

The local triangle of mayor, police and judiciary want to strengthen the approach to discrimination during the day and the night. Victims too often feel inadequately heard or taken seriously, and perpetrators of discrimination need to be addressed. Interventions must be visible and noticeable to victims, offenders and those around them. Government discrimination is totally unacceptable in any form. The College is developing tools to better monitor police actions in order to counter ethnic profiling among other things.

### Door policy and house rules

Hospitality venues have a door policy to create a certain atmosphere at themed and regular nights, to ensure safety, but also to refuse visitors who, for example, cause disturbances or are under the influence of drugs or drink. Entrepreneurs also say that selection at the door is sometimes necessary precisely in order to get a mixed audience into a venue.



Door policies must always be clear, verifiable and non-discriminatory.<sup>1</sup> The entry rules set out in the door policy state the conditions under which visitors are welcome in an establishment. For example, there may be requirements for visitors' dress and behaviour (no drunkenness, possession of weapons, etc.). A visitor may be rejected if they do not comply with these rules. A clear and transparent door policy prevents unnecessary problems at the door. Discrimination is prevented as much as possible in this way. All venues with door staff are required to communicate their entry policies to visitors.

House rules are rules that visitors must follow once they are inside. This may include, for example, mandatory checking in of jackets and bags or the prohibition of racism, sexism, xenophobia and unwanted touching. The door policy may specify that visitors must abide by the house rules. It is advisable to publicise the door policy and house rules as widely as possible, including online.

Enforcement on transparent door policies became stricter in 2018. Mystery guests are periodically used to test clubs' compliance with these regulations.

#### **ClubEthics**

The Night Mayor foundation is working with experts from the Amsterdam nightlife scene to develop a code of conduct and protocol for clubs that want to actively contribute to a safe dance floor, especially for women and LGBTIQ+ people.<sup>2</sup> This involves collaboration with the Sexmatters Foundation.<sup>3</sup> The code makes it clear to visitors which clubs are working to provide a safe environment. Visitors to clubs are also reminded of their responsibilities. Clubs that commit to ClubEthics communicate this to visitors and colleagues. Ultimately, a safe night culture is a shared responsibility between industry and visitors.

#### **'Safer clubbing' training for hospitality staff**

The Sexmatters Foundation is offering the 'safer clubbing' trainings and refresher workshops for the staff of a number of Amsterdam clubs and nightlife venues.<sup>4</sup> The trainings aim to make clubs safer and more inclusive, with a specific focus on the role of gender and sexuality in the nightlife experiences people may have. In addition, Sexmatters works with entertainment venues to see how safety can become part of a venue's image, for example through its door policy, by hiring a diverse team that makes visitors feel represented, by encouraging interactions between colleagues and by installing a code of conduct for visitors. Staff are also given practical tools for de-escalating tense situations.

#### **Awareness campaigns**

Addressing sexual harassment and violence against women is a priority for the College. The Programme Against Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence (SISG), established in 2020, created the #YouAreNotAlone campaign. This approach also includes the Safe Cities project, which works with various partners to combat sexual and other harassment on the street. The Night Mayor foundation is a partner in this project, as are Emancipator, the Stop Straatintimidatie foundation, Sexmatters, Qpido, COC Amsterdam and Fairspace. In 2020, the City's 'Come on Amsterdam!' campaign called on residents to speak out against all forms of discrimination. In 2021, we will launch a campaign to stop violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ persons.

#### **Rainbow policy 2019-2022**

All Amsterdammers have the right to be able to freely be themselves, whoever they are and whoever they love. Yet too often, exclusion and discrimination still take place and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people is under pressure. To combat this, the City developed the Rainbow Policy in cooperation with the LGBTIQ+ community. In relation to nightlife, some activities are highlighted in this policy:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.amsterdam.nl/ondernemen/horeca/terrassen/horeca-deurbeleid/>

<sup>2</sup> The night mayor is a discussion partner for the City, entrepreneurs and residents in the field of night culture, among others. The night mayoralty is an institutionalised position, associated with the N8BM A'DAM foundation since 2014. More info: <https://nachtburgemeester.amsterdam/>

<sup>3</sup> More info: <https://www.sexmatters.nl/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sexmatters.nl/saferclubbing>

### Supporting LGBTIQ+ initiatives

We support LGBTIQ+ initiatives and networks with subsidies and budgets. We facilitate debate and invest in meeting formats for communities.

- LGBTIQ+ people may be at increased risk for HIV, some may be entering a transition process. The volunteer peer project Pink Unity works with the Jellinek Clinic and GGD Amsterdam to provide education about sex and drugs at club nights and dance events where the target group is present.
- Crimes against LGBTIQ+ people reinforce the sense of insecurity within the community. At the same time, the willingness to report such incidents among LGBTIQ+ people is low. We are committed to increasing the willingness to report hate crimes.

### Health

Nightlife can pose public health risks. These include risks related to sexual health and the use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

- **Sexual Health (MSM)**  
The collective prevention programme 'MSM' aims to prevent the spread of STDs and HIV among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Amsterdam.
- **Health Preventive Drug Policy**  
This policy aims to minimise short- and long-term health damage from recreational and other drug use and reduce the likelihood of addiction and subsequent social problems.
- **Unity**  
Spokespeople from peer education group Unity educate their lifestyle peers at dance festivals and club nights about the health risks of using both alcohol and other drugs while going out.

### • Celebrate Safe

Alongside club owners and organisers, Unity is running the Celebrate Safe campaign to educate event and club visitors in an accessible way about the risks related to nightlife, and how to reduce these risks. This includes alcohol and substance use, as well as hearing damage and unsafe sex.

### City policies

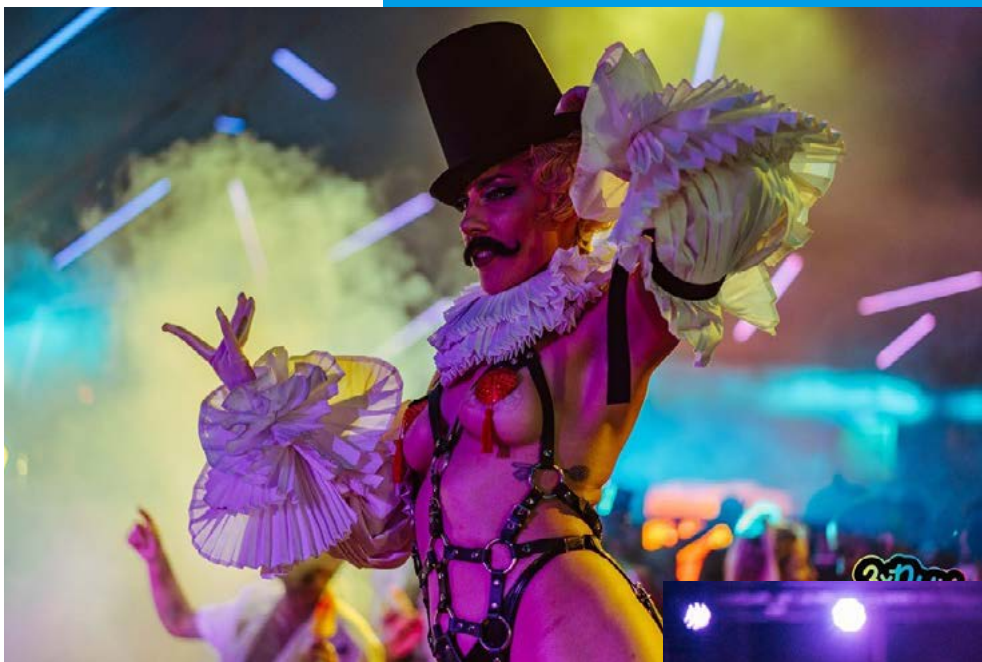
We are working towards a safer, cleaner and more liveable Amsterdam – especially at night – through the proper design of public spaces, effective regulations, clear communication and encouraging behavioural change in public spaces in the case of undesirable, unsafe or disorderly behaviour.

Various types of disorder in the city peak on weekends, evenings and at night. Part of our task is to organise the deployment of enforcement, waste collection and cleaning personnel to match the rhythm of the city – day and night. The City is making additional efforts in this context in the city centre, Zuidoost and Nieuw-West. Amsterdammers, visitors and business owners have a shared responsibility. We are committed to the involvement of residents, business owners and visitors, as well as strict enforcement by disorder.

### Approach to nightlife areas

To combat nighttime violence and disorder, the City works closely with business owners, residents and police in the main nightlife areas and the Red Light District. Since 2015, nightlife hosts have been deployed on Rembrandtplein to welcome visitors, provide information and address problematic behaviour. Nightlife hosts are also deployed in the area around Leidseplein and in the Red Light District. The approach to nightlife areas, which also includes other measures to ensure safety and liveability, has been integrated into the Implementation Programme of the City Centre Action Plan.





## Interview: Amber Vineyard, Lysa da Silva and Sanae Tijou, organisers House of Vineyard and 3X

*Lysa da Silva – stage name LYZZA – and Sanae Tijou were missing a place in Amsterdam’s nightlife where they could feel safe and free. With their 3X parties, they offer a safer space for queer people and people of colour. Amber Vineyard is breaking new ground for ballroom culture in Amsterdam with House of Vineyard where again, queer people and people of colour are given the space for self-expression.*

### Foundation

Amber: ‘Club culture is the foundation of my existence. The club offers me a social safety net, a career, the outlet for my self-expression, and art and fashion. When I was young, I was not allowed to be myself at home. I found night communities where I could be, where I was given the freedom to explore what didn’t fit within my family’s worldview. In the clubs, I found people who believed in me. That has given me a lot of strength and confidence. It has had a lasting impact on my being: how I walk down the street, how I walk into a room with people, even how I behave at a job interview.’

### Safer space

Lysa: ‘3X is a grassroots organisation that focuses on a more balanced representation within the night. We want to offer safety to everyone who walks through our doors. By communicating that we are a safer space, people who visit us know they can be confident that steps have been taken to ensure inclusivity and social safety.’

# Voices of the night #5

Sanae: 'To ensure that safety, the rules are clearly explained upon entry. Also, the staff is well informed: everyone at the door, everyone behind the bar. There are special places where visitors can go if there's a problem.'

LYZZA: 'They are simple rules, mind you. For example, racism, sexism and xenophobia are not allowed. And you're not allowed to touch anyone without asking. We try to arrange the place so that you have space to explore yourself, without having to worry about things like that.'

Sanae: 'If you have rules in black and white and you have to throw someone out, you can remind them that they agreed to the rules.'

## Privileges

Amber: 'The contradiction is that sometimes you have to be exclusive to achieve inclusiveness. There are places where you need to exclude some to ensure inclusiveness. If you throw a night for Bears or host a women's gathering, no one will be surprised. So why shouldn't there be nights where people of colour come together on their own terms without interference from others? When I organised an evening at the Lovelee – which focused on the LGBTIQ+ community and people of colour – many of my white friends asked if I could put them on the guest list so they could come and show support. I tried to explain to them that they were actually supporting me by not visiting. If you are white and straight, you have 500 other places in the city where you can go. The young black transgender person has nowhere else to go. That's what I mean by privilege.'

## Limited space

Sanae: 'Amsterdam mainly invests in commercial venues. These are usually places where gentrification and commodification prevail. They make a lot of money but are less concerned with culture. This compromises the places where queer people and people of colour come together. There is just one lesbian bar left in town and one autonomous punk bar. This is a worrying development because traditionally marginalised communities are formed at night. If that falls away, it has huge implications for their mental health and safety in general.'

LYZZA: 'I think we need to start thinking less in terms of us and them but realise that we are all in this together. Safety for marginalised groups is going to create more safety for everyone.'

Sanae: 'What would help would be subsidies for queer organisations, but especially spaces. Because those are harder and harder to find.'

Amber: 'The discussion about an inclusive night is meaningless until the underlying problem is addressed. If decision-makers themselves are not inclusive, how can they make inclusive policies? It is important for the community to hire professionals who can assist in the learning process that leads to a more inclusive work environment. Inclusiveness must start at the top, with the people who make decisions about the night. Only then can we move toward a truly inclusive nightlife.'



# Voices of the night #6



## Interview: Diego Meijers & Sven Bijma Organisers Spielraum

*Diego Meijers and Sven Bijma are initiators of Spielraum, an acclaimed celebration of the LGBTIQ+ community. What originated three years ago out of dissatisfaction with existing offerings has grown into a platform that attracts visitors from throughout the Netherlands and far beyond.*

### Awareness on the dance floor

Diego Meijers: 'Spielraum was primarily aimed at giving queer peoples a safe place. And providing high-quality music. But we kept looking at how we could improve. We have worked to create a more diverse line-up, in terms of gender as well as colour and cultural background. Later, we started looking at how to make the dance floor even safer.'

Sven Bijma: 'We've always tried our hardest to be close to our audience, having lots of conversations on and around the dance floor. We also engage with artists and their agencies on these topics. As a result, we have become increasingly idealistic over the years.'

### Awareness team

Diego: 'Our awareness team is a group of regular visitors who volunteer to do this. They spread out through the club and are clearly identifiable by their neon yellow T-shirts. If something is going on, they see if people can solve the problem among themselves, or if a security guard should be called in. When people know that such a team is present, they are more careful and take better care of each other. Currently it is volunteer work, but we would like to see subsidy funding for awareness teams.'

Sven: 'Perhaps there could be special training for these kinds of awareness teams, supported by the City. This should be combined with Unity with their drinking and drug focus and with Sexmatters from the sexual consent aspect. In fact, I think such a team should operate in the rest of the city as well. It would be good if you could earn a seal of approval as a club or party and then have such a team provided.'

## Being distinctly yourself

Diego: 'In nightlife, you get to know a lot of people, but you also discover your own freedom. The night often feels like the ultimate society, a better version of real life. It is a form of self-development. Nightlife is a place where you can be yourself, especially for queer people and minorities. Of course, something bad can still happen, but the chances are much smaller than out on the street.'

Sven: 'We have friends who dress quite distinctly. When we walk down the street with them, we notice how they are stared at, spoken to, yelled at or treated aggressively. This is usually only picked up by the media when people are actually attacked in the streets.'

## Uniform city

Sven: 'Amsterdam is still very diverse now, but when I look at the rents and how it's almost impossible to continue living here, I fear we're at a turning point. A city that is too expensive to live in for too many people becomes more homogeneous.'

Diego: 'So many people are leaving for Rotterdam or Berlin, because they can no longer afford to be here. That includes people important to the scene at Spielraum. If people like this can no longer live in Amsterdam, we can talk about inclusive and diverse parties all we like, but the city itself is no longer inclusive and diverse.'

Sven: 'On the one hand, you have the City saying we need to think bigger and broader. But at the same time, the city is not developing fast enough to ensure that there is 24-hour transportation everywhere. Especially for our public, the suburbs are not the safest areas to travel to. I think the City needs to play a more active role to retain clubs and provide spaces for club nights that are not focused on making the maximum profit.'

## Rebound from lockdown

Sven: 'We hope for a quick recovery of the club scene, but also for a climate where there will be more room for new parties. Let the community bring fresh blood to the rescue. You can see from the many illegal raves that there is a need for something different. Maybe that's an idea for next summer: an area, managed by the City, where the infrastructure is in place for groups to throw parties outside. A licensed rave. That would help the scene spring back from the lockdown.'





## Interview: Natasja, door person, and Bróna Lynch, sound engineer

Natasja is affiliated with Het Kollektief. In twenty years as a door person, she has acted as security for almost every club in town. Bróna Lynch has made many a club sound better as a sound engineer. Both are passionate about their work and about the night. However, they do see how Amsterdam has changed in recent years.

### Spiritual gatherings

Bróna: 'I grew up in a conservative part of Ireland, near the border with Northern Ireland. In the late 1990s, I had my coming of age there in the club scene. Growing up in the Irish bible belt, such a community of misfits is very valuable. My generation no longer goes to church, but nightlife also offers a kind of spiritual gathering. That's why I find it so special that I was able to build a career in the night. In Amsterdam, I found the inspiration and space to develop myself as a sound engineer.'

Natasja: 'I started in the night as a flyer distributor for Dance Valley. At the very first festival, I stood in front of the backstage area. Everyone kept walking past the security guard, who was quite small, but they didn't dare pass me. I was immediately employed as a door person. From there I went on to the Melkweg, where I worked at the women's night Planet Pussy. From then on, I was always at the door. On the one hand, nightlife is exhausting; on the other, there is something magical about it: no nine to five, a life outside the box. That people can show themselves as they are, I find that very appealing.'

## Part of your upbringing

Natasja: ‘Just as when you stand next to each other in a museum looking at the same work of art, are both touched by it and feel connected to each other, you can have the same feeling on the dance floor. Especially for kids just out of school, the night is an important part of their education: how to interact with people, that it can be very free, but that it also has limits.’

Bróna: ‘I think the night appeals to another side of our consciousness. This is why I think nightlife is so important: the veil of night has tremendous appeal and is a way for people to discover themselves and be themselves in a different way. Besides, many people are simply nocturnal. Many other elements are intertwined, all of which combine to form the cultural weave of the night.’

## Profiling

Natasja: ‘I understand that girls are reluctant to approach the door staff when they get harassed. I think that by being here as a woman and with my striking appearance, I can inspire confidence that we take those kinds of complaints seriously and do something about them. What I find stupid is profiling at the door. Even if you really don’t want it, it still happens from time to time. If it’s busy or you’ve just had an unpleasant experience, you can make snap judgements based purely on someone’s appearance. When door staff receive regular refresher training, they learn to handle certain situations better and with due care.’

## Fading authenticity

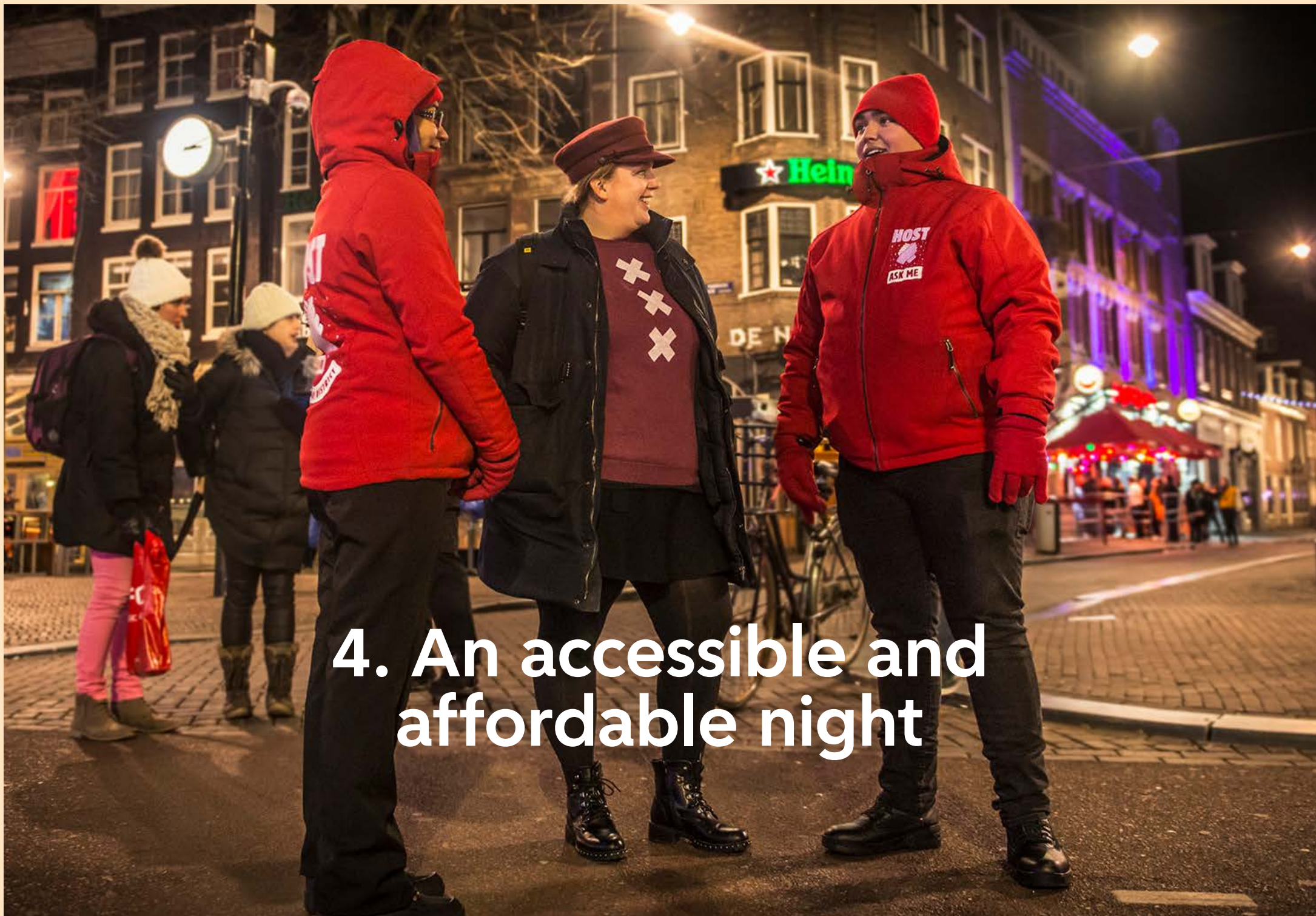
Bróna: ‘Since I came to Amsterdam about 12 years ago, the city has changed tremendously. The scene has professionalised. The equipment got better, there was more work and more money. But there are fewer and fewer quirky places like Vrankrijk on Spuistraat. That was a great example of a low-key space for queer people, where almost everyone volunteered, fantastic performances were held and there was a close-knit community where many transgender people felt at home. With the demise of squatter culture, the city lost many accessible bars with cheap beer and activist ideology. Those people have been driven out of the city by encroaching gentrification. Now the city is glittering and polished, ideal for the giant tourist industry, but also increasingly inaccessible and inauthentic.’

Natasja: ‘Indeed. Amsterdam is now glittering mostly for the wealthy, but not for hard-working low-income people. You see that reflected in the night and that doesn’t make the city any nicer.’

## Free spaces

Bróna: ‘I hope there will be funding for freer and more diverse spaces. Most clubs are big money machines, always with the same kind of backers behind them. Even at the clubs that pretend to be inclusive, the same kind of university boys and girls are always in charge. It is a difficult issue because even those university types often do their best for a more inclusive scene. It works better to make new spaces available than to try to change the old structures. New spaces would automatically mean room for more diversity and inclusiveness.’





## 4. An accessible and affordable night





*“When I finally stood at the door to enter the world of the night, coronavirus slammed it shut. I know, it’s a sad story. But I’m not one to just sit back and accept things. Now for the first time, I am no longer the only one deprived of the dream of a sparkling nightlife, and I have a small consolation for everyone. See this as an opportunity to reshape the night. So we can tickle everyone’s fancy.”*

*Soumaya Bazi, Future of the night #4*

**I**n the introduction to this Night Vision, we mentioned that space in Amsterdam is under pressure. This has a major impact on the affordability and accessibility of the night, for audiences, for creators and for everyone who participates in social and economic life at night.

In this section, we outline the dilemmas, needs and possible solutions. In addition, we provide an overview of existing and future policies, with which the City can play a role in making and keeping night culture accessible.

#### **Price tag of the night**

If we want the night to be accessible to all, we need to consider more carefully how the City can remove barriers. This includes good infrastructure so that venues outside the centre are accessible to visitors and affordable public transport, also at night. At the same time, we need to make the centre attractive (again) to young people from the neighbourhoods outside the A10 ring road. For them, a lack of affordable transport options as well as high entrance fees at central venues are significant obstacles.

Another obstacle to further development of night culture is that the Netherlands – unlike many countries around us – still barely has a 24-hour economy, apart from the logistics sector. Still, there is a need for good services and offerings during the night in Amsterdam. For example, good, healthy food has been in demand around nightlife venues for years.

In the Future of the Amsterdam Night discussion series, it came up a number of times that the night is usually more expensive than the day. We are all aware that night shops charge higher prices than



supermarkets where you shop during the day. We must also consider that night culture organisers pay higher rates to staff and suppliers because they have to work outside regular hours. On top of that, fixed operating costs are higher due to the need for more lighting and heating. For audiences and creators, there are fewer low-cost transport options at night. Even a ride on the night bus costs considerably more than taking the bus during the day.

#### Room for night culture when developing new areas

In Amsterdam, a fierce battle of interests rages over the use of scarce space. Therefore it is important to consider what space can be provided for clubs and night venues in the areas that will be developed in the coming decades. This involves questions of affordability (rent or ownership) and duration of operation or use. While the lifespan of a successful club is usually limited to a decade or so, there are also initiatives that can or will remain relevant for a longer period of time and that become an important part of the city. Room must be reserved accordingly, including in the zoning plan. (Starting with the 2022 zoning plan.)

It is also important that rents remain affordable and that long-term public support among existing and new local residents is monitored and developed. Night culture venues tend to be metropolitan facilities that appeal to a wide audience. This makes the neighbourhoods they are in especially attractive to real-estate developers, resulting in steep increases in land and house prices. Regarding the construction of housing in the immediate vicinity of night culture, there is tension between the needs of the venue and the programming on the one hand and enjoyment of the environment for new residents on the other. A current example is the discussion surrounding the organisation of (semi-acoustic) live music in the outdoor spaces of the Tolhuistuin. Inspired by examples from abroad, several participants in the Future of the Amsterdam Night discussion series argue that ‘those who came first’ cannot be forced by pressure from newcomers to limit their activities due to impact on the environment. However, the reality is unpredictable and finding a sustainable balance requires tailor-made solutions.

#### Lessons from abroad

In several cities, we can see interesting examples of urban policies regarding the balance between area development and night culture.

**London** uses Night Time Enterprise Zones (NTEZs). These are areas where later opening hours and greater access to a wider range of shops and services can be tested and evaluated in a controlled manner.

**Toronto** has special policies to protect the night. With the ‘Agent of Change’ process, the city protects existing music venues from conflicts that may arise with residents of newly built homes in the neighbourhood. Planners are made aware early on of the presence of music venues in the neighbourhood. Developers are required to include clauses about entertainment activities in sales and rental offers. This allows potential new residents to know what is in the area nearby so they can decide against the location if they are looking for peace and quiet.

**Berlin’s** city government introduced a €1 million fund in 2019 to help nightlife venues pay for soundproofing, as well as hire hosts and staff, in hopes of protecting the sector from complaints about noise from neighbours. The local government has also developed policies for clubs to purchase temporary premises.

## 4.1 Accessible to the sector

Can the City play a part in setting aside affordable spaces for existing and new initiatives? High rents make it difficult for young, innovative entrepreneurs to start a new business. To ensure adequate supply in a growing city and room for diversity in events, more venues are needed. The study by Atlas Research counts 541 night venues in Amsterdam in 2019, including 38 nightclubs and 30 music venues, based on the definition used by the researchers:

*'Night Culture includes all art and culture offered between 22:00 and 6:00, including, for example, nightclubs and music venues, and the meeting places that primarily play a social role in nightlife, including cafés and bars.'*

It is possible that the period following the coronavirus crisis, when demand for business space is expected to drop temporarily, will provide opportunities for better distribution throughout the city. This effect occurred after the banking crisis of 2008, when vacancies in the city led to various spaces being filled temporarily or permanently by cultural initiatives.

The current generation in night culture is asking for a shift in thinking regarding available space. 'Dare to give us the key,' they say. There is a need to be able to work from a basis of mutual trust. Speakers at the Future of the Amsterdam Night discussions agreed that it is precisely in the places where there is room for ownership that the most interesting things happen. A previously mentioned example of an organisation making a particular choice in this regard is Sexyland (see 3.3). Practically all club nights are organised by different programmers and organisations on the basis of the take-over principle.

At the same time, night culture actors are also critical of the sector's own performance. For example, in Future of the Amsterdam Night #4, it was revealed that there is little room for new concepts from crews, DJs and artwork designers. At clubs, programmers are often in-house and can take a very narrow view when deciding on content. It is also difficult for a small initiative to compete against large parties. One exception is ADE, when there are many big artists in town who are happy to DJ at smaller venues. This gives local creators and organisers

the opportunity to book a major artist. Normally, major festivals and clubs book their artists exclusively. They pay high fees to artists on the condition that they only perform at their event.

There are several venues in the city that invest in talent development, such as Melkweg and Paradiso. During ADE, Amsterdam has room for international new talent. In addition, ADE has an intensive talent development programme, ADE LAB. Smaller organisations also offer room for new talent and, for example, space for internships. Nightlife in particular offers plenty of room for students, including vocational trainees.

### Temporary versus permanent spaces

An important characteristic of night culture is its highly dynamic nature. Clubs, incubators and hotspots appear quickly and sometimes disappear again after a brief heyday. Clubs do not automatically serve their original area of establishment, but sometimes choose a location based on other considerations (cost, accessibility/inaccessibility, rawness). In places in the city where there are often temporary opportunities, young cultural entrepreneurs find cheap premises. That low price does come with a variety of conditions. Locations are usually in poor condition, for example, and available for short-term rent only. This means that investments must be recouped quickly. Because of the temporary nature, there is not always room to make major investments, such as insulating properties. If these investments are not made, problems with noise are more likely to occur. As a result, renewal of the lease and license may be in danger. For this reason, the sector would like more certainty, enabling them to stay at a venue for a longer period of time, in order to make the necessary investments and ensure greater accessibility (including low admission prices at the door). The team behind Post CS, Trouw and De School, on the other hand, preferred temporary arrangements. When these places disappear, visitors of yesteryear still look back with longing. For local communities and subcultures, temporary arrangements seem less attractive; they are more likely to seek a safe and permanent home that would justify sustainable investment.



## 4.2 Accessible to the public

We want all Amsterdammers, regardless of socio-economic or cultural background, and regardless of physical or mental disability, to feel welcome at night. There need to be meeting places and safer spaces for people of colour and LGBTIQ+ people, as well as affordable nightlife spots for young people, for whom the night is often a first voyage of discovery into their identity. More and more communities are emerging in the city around social and cultural themes. There must also be room in the night for this multitude of voices. In the Future of the Amsterdam Night discussion series it emerged that there is not enough such space within the traditional clubs.

### Public transport

To make night culture accessible to everyone, no matter where they live, we, the City, need to be aware of the infrastructure that enables just that. How do you move safely to where things happen and how do you get back home safely? There is not enough affordable night transport available, as mentioned above. The planned trial of a night metro has been scrapped for now due to the coronavirus pandemic, which affects the availability of public transport at day- and nighttime throughout the Amsterdam transport region. An experiment with a longer weekend operating time of tram 26 to IJburg has also been postponed. These options for a more accessible night remain a focal point for the College.

## 4.3 Accessible to the whole city

Affordable housing, working, commuting and living in the city is also important for a vibrant nightlife culture. Since the national ban on squatting in 2010, Amsterdam has become less interesting to people from outside looking for a sanctuary where self-organisation is possible. Fringe areas have therefore become more important, as have incubators operated with or without City support.

### Area-based management

An accessible area depends in part on low costs for rent and fixed charges. A successful example is NV Zeedijk, in which the City is a 78% shareholder. A mix of commercial and non-profit or cultural activities

creates a mix of functions that ensures diversity and dynamism. Among other things, this has allowed businesses with strong ties to night culture, such as Patta and Mary Go Wild, to set up shop in the city centre.

### New area development

The city will grow by 70,000 housing units by 2040, with associated social and other facilities. Our focus here includes major new area developments such as Port-City, Sluisbuurt, IJburg II, Nieuw-West and Zuidoost. We aim for several of these areas to also consider the needs of night culture. This could include infrastructure that ensures the area's residents have access to public transport at night. Another important element is temporary and permanent places for night culture in the new or redeveloped neighbourhoods themselves. Either way, more attention should be paid to the spatial incorporation of new (temporary or permanent) places for night culture, given the increasing scarcity of space. One of the options is combining various social facilities such as incubators, neighbourhood centres or theatres with night culture initiatives. Soundproofing and a dance floor should also be considered in advance.

### Gentrification

Incubators, clubs and cultural initiatives are often pioneers in yet-to-be-developed urban areas, such as the city's fringes, industrial sites or abandoned properties waiting to be repurposed. With their programming and activities, they contribute to the attractiveness and upgrading of these places. As such, these cultural sites are essentially part of the gentrification process. Property developers and local governments use arts and culture to speed up the process of development and make an area attractive for other parties to invest in it. An urgent challenge, given the continuing rise in real-estate prices, is how the City can control development to ensure space for activities whose financial basis differs from that of commercial real estate. In other words, how does Amsterdam remain a city for everyone?

## 4.4 Policy

What lessons can we draw from our findings and our discussions with the sector? The number of places for night culture is (still) limited, according to some. There is also a need for tailor-made licensing and enforcement solutions. Entrepreneurs often need very little to bring something to fruition, but sometimes get bogged down by regulations. Some organisers and promoters with plans for new projects are not necessarily looking for subsidies, but primarily for space. Other creators and initiatives are seeking subsidies to allow for experimental programming. In general, more interaction more with the community on these matters is needed.

### Agenda for 2021 and beyond

#### Point of contact for the night

Clear communication and well-supported regulations are important and desirable to keep the night accessible to creators without weakening public support. A recurring request of the night sector is a central point of contact within the City. Organisers and promoters need the City to know what is going on and be able to respond quickly to what is needed. A common request is for a dedicated night official who can answer questions about policies, permits and complaints, and also give input for new initiatives. This plea was already part of the *Night Memorandum 2003*.<sup>1</sup> Here we can learn from examples abroad, such as Berlin (see box).

#### Club Commission Berlin

In Berlin, the Club Commission Berlin has been active for 20 years. It serves to create awareness about the importance of club culture. ‘We have changed from a lobby group to an advocacy group,’ says Lutz Leichsenring, spokesperson for the Club Commission. This means members can contact the Club Commission for legal advice, knowledge sharing and exchange. The scene has invested years of effort into gaining support from political parties for the activities of its 300+ affiliated members. This has led to each party on the Berlin City Council having a spokesperson for club culture. The fact that people in different layers of the city’s administration grew up with an active and empowered sector has contributed to this achievement, according to Leichsenring.

Eight years ago, Berlin established a Music Board, a council that can invest €4.5 million annually in the city’s music scene. There is also a fund of €1 million to make venues soundproof (for outdoor clubs). In addition, the Day of Club Culture provides €500,000 for ‘corona-proof’ events and a showcase for diversity. The 15 employees of the Club Commission work with all departments, including the environmental, social and economic departments, to ensure coordination. In May 2021, the Berlin City Council officially designated nightclubs as cultural institutions.

With the Night Vision, the City has made a start in bringing together the whole spectrum of knowledge, expertise and responsibility involved in the night in Amsterdam. We are continuing this integrated approach through collaboration between Arts and Culture, the department of Public Space Surveillance and Enforcement (OOV), the Incubators Office and the Urban Events Office, among others. This is based on an integrated focus on issues relating to the night, providing the necessary coordination and advising the portfolio holders within the College who are involved in terms of content and policy.

<sup>1</sup> See *Night Memorandum*, p. 59



### Event policy for festival sites

Given the popularity of outdoor festivals and the discussion surrounding their impact on the environment, the obvious thing to do is to aim for a permanent festival site for the entire city. This is a much-expressed wish from the sector. There are also many voices advocating for small-scale outdoor events where initiatives and creators have a chance to organise something in the city. More on this in Section 5.

### International exchange and cooperation

Knowledge exchange is crucial for pioneering and facilitating innovation in all culture. Amsterdam, along with Berlin, Helsinki, Vienna and others, has participated in the platform Space of Urgency – International Knowledge Exchange on Culture and Nightlife since 2020. This European platform focuses on knowledge sharing around arts and culture, free space and night culture. During the summer of 2020, there was extensive contact between the cities about dealing with night culture and free space, and best practices were exchanged. The focus here was on facilitating commercial and non-commercial day and night culture in outdoor spaces during and after covid-19. In addition, cities will learn more from each other in 2021 in terms of the deployment and use of free space, permitting processes, forms of cooperation and governance. The first phase of the Space of Urgency knowledge exchange concludes with a conversation among the participating administrators. The intention is to expand the platform to include more European cities and work together on solutions for night culture and free space. Within the World Cities Culture Forum, Amsterdam collaborates with world cities such as London, New York, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Paris, Toronto, Lisbon and Sydney on culture policy, including night culture policy.

## Current policies for the accessible night

### Incubator policy

A thriving cultural sector brings creativity, innovation and liveability to the city. Artists and creatives play a central role in this respect. Amsterdam has developed over 100 initiatives during 20 years of incubator policy, of which more than 70 are now in use.<sup>2</sup> They are special places where thousands of creatives work and collaborate, including many painters, sculptors, photographers, as well as lighting designers, DJs and composers.

Some incubators focus on studios and visual arts. Others have, for example, a local community function or a function in night culture, such as Acta and A Lab. Spaces are rented for low prices to night initiatives to make music and experiment. There are regular collaborations with other cultural institutions and artists. The incubator policy encourages this diversity and variety of offerings.

The 2018 coalition agreement established a structural budget for incubators for the first time. Due to budget cuts for 2021 and 2022 this has returned to the pre-2019 situation. As of 2023, there is no structural budget. Until 2019, we managed to realise about 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> of incubator space per year with a growth of about 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> per year. Due to the temporary nature of many incubator sites, another 7,000 m<sup>2</sup> disappear on average each year. Unfortunately, price increases due to scarcity in the market mean there was more space in 2019 than there is now.

Currently, new incubators are still being created. Temporary options and initiatives also continue to find a place. The lead time for planned temporary options varies widely, ranging from four to ten years. The new incubators tend to be innovative and complementary to the existing stock. Two incubators will be created in the field of theatre, including experimental theatre. The renewal of incubators is also more focused on space for the neighbourhood in the form of creating or working with a neighbourhood centre or offering programmes and activities. This may include a focus on night culture.

<sup>2</sup> More info: <https://www.amsterdam.nl/kunst-cultuur/ateliers-broedplaatsen/over-broedplaatsen/broedplaatsenoverzicht/>

Meanwhile, the city's area development agenda is also working hard to include new space for incubators in tenders to ensure the long-term presence of incubators throughout the city. This is bearing fruit as a number of incubators are already planned, including at Amstel Station, in Sloterdijk Centrum and on IJburg.

#### **Expedition Free Space**

Amsterdam is unique for its long tradition of counter-culture at the fringes of the city. Garage Noord, OT301, OCCII, Vondelbunker, Ruigoord, Nieuw en Meer and Sexyland are examples of such places. The College sees free space as a crucial part of the urban environment and therefore ruled in July 2019 to protect existing (and endangered) free space, and to make new (built and unbuilt) free space available to Amsterdammers residents. This enables initiatives in all sorts of areas: art and culture (including night culture), sustainability, ecology, exercise, food production, experimental forms of living and working – or something completely different.

The City facilitates initiators by reviewing how procedures and regulations can be eased for non-commercial initiatives. This process is different each time, depending on the initiative, location and environment.

Expedition Free Space is complementary to the Incubator and Studio Policy. With its broader scope, the Free Space Action Plan provides a broad connection to the city so that user groups within the arts and culture sector can also use it. Free space also contributes to achieving the goals of the Arts Plan, especially in the areas of night culture, small-scale outdoor events and inclusivity.

#### **Area-oriented hospitality policy**

Increasingly, functions are being mixed in the hospitality industry. For example, we see restaurants that have a club function after 23:00. The new Environment Act is an opportunity to ensure better consideration of where a hospitality venue can be located and under what conditions.<sup>3</sup> The College will present a new hospitality vision and hospitality system in autumn 2021.

This urban policy framework will set out area-specific details, because the city is diverse and customisation should remain possible for each area.

In order to provide more space for new concepts and functions, the College is looking at the option of giving 24-hour opening licenses a permanent place in the new hospitality policy by making this permit more broadly applicable. In addition, hospitality businesses already have the option to occasionally extend their opening hours by applying for an exemption. When coronavirus measures allow, night businesses in the entertainment areas and outside the city centre will be allowed to apply for 12 rather than five exemptions annually.

#### **Public transport policy**

Nighttime public transport keeps the city accessible at night for as many Amsterdammers as possible. Due to the coronavirus measures, the number of night bus passengers has fallen sharply. Amsterdam's public transport operator, the GVB, has been forced to temporarily scale down the night network in frequency, scope and size. It is still unclear when scaling up will be possible again.

#### **Taxi policy**

Taxis are an important mode of transport in the city at night. Every taxi customer is entitled to a safe, direct ride, fair treatment (the correct fares) and a driver who knows the city and applies the rules of good conduct. In 2020, licensed taxi operators were given more responsibility to deal with poorly performing drivers. The City impose sanctions for serious disorder, misconduct and failure to comply with permit requirements. With the Taxi Agenda 2020-2025, we aim to manage the taxi market in Amsterdam as a single market.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Economic policy: night shops**

Amsterdammers can make use of night shops after 22:00. The national Shop Opening Times Act requires shops to be closed between 22:00 and 6:00, but in Amsterdam, shopkeepers can apply for an exemption. Only shops that primarily sell food

<sup>3</sup> The Environment Act combines and modernises the laws governing the living environment. These include laws and regulations on construction, environment, water, spatial planning and nature. The Environment Act aims to ensure a good balance between utilising and protecting the living environment. The law is expected to take effect in late 2022.

<sup>4</sup> <https://amsterdam.raadsinformatie.nl/document/9256803/1/Agenda%20Taxi%202020-2025>



and beverages, excluding alcohol, are eligible. The College is working to recalibrate the night-shop policy with uniform rules, clear grounds for refusal and exemption conditions. In doing so, we are once again balancing the interests of residents and neighbours, current exemption holders, new entrants and other entrepreneurs. In addition to night shops, Amsterdam has several shops in public transport stops and petrol stations that are exempt from the Shop Opening Times Act and can set their own opening hours.

### Area and district-based policies

The Atlas Research study examined the location of nighttime venues by city district. Of the total of 541 locations (based on the definition applied), the majority are located in the Centrum district (63% of all venues). Districts West and Zuid are the next best represented, each with more than 10% of the total supply. City districts that have relatively more residents and where the population is also younger are under-represented. These include Noord, Nieuw-West and Zuidoost.

In addition to accessibility-oriented policies applying to all districts, some districts already have specific policies regarding night culture. The Night Vision provides an urban framework to move these developments forward.

#### Nieuw-West

Nieuw-West is the district with the most residents and the highest proportion of young people but has only three venues offering night culture. The Arts Plan includes the goal of promoting youth and night culture there. There is room and a need for activities and facilities in contemporary music genres, dance and night culture, including practice rooms and a performance space. Amsterdam music venues can play a role, as well as other local and national institutions.

#### Zuidoost

District Zuidoost supports all policies committed to the growth of a broad and affordable night culture in the area. This district emphasises preserving Zuidoost's unique identity and taking into account the preferences of the residents. The district is currently exploring with various cultural parties in the city whether it is possible to create

a music venue and hip-hop centre in Zuidoost. This effort mostly focuses on preserving and enhancing the local colour of the district. In addition, it is important for night culture in Zuidoost, to have an integrated approach to accessibility, for example through connections from the metro, but also buses, trains and other forms of transport.

#### Noord

Night culture has been important to Noord since heavy industry, including shipbuilding, gradually started abandoning the area in the 1980s. The abandoned industrial buildings and grounds offered pioneers of nightlife, dance and other events unprecedented opportunities. This has contributed greatly to the rediscovery of Noord.

As Noord undergoes a transition and develops into a dynamic and rapidly growing part of Amsterdam with a highly mixed population, in part due to the arrival of art, culture and festivals, night culture is still very important. Noord has a good number of locations with a 24-hour permit for good reason. Young locals and Amsterdammers from other areas enjoy using the locations and opportunities. But with Noord's strong population growth and the accompanying rapid development of previously empty and run-down areas into residential neighbourhoods, the space for nighttime culture is under pressure. Noord wants to remain attractive and interesting, even as the night locations on the banks of the IJ are having a harder time because of dense housing development. The night culture at the NDSM site and in other locations near the IJ deserves protection; Buikslotermeerplein has great potential to become a home to night culture.

#### Oost

In the recent past, there were numerous locations in Oost, including Cruquiusweg, where more was allowed at night. The more densely built-up the district becomes, the fewer such spots remain. Yet the current transition phase still offers opportunities to enable temporary night culture. The trick is to see these opportunities and act accordingly. Doka at Volkshotel and De Oosterbar at the Generator Hostel are the only locations in the district to have a 24-hour permit. To boost local nightlife, the number of 24-hour permits in District Oost could be expanded.

### West

West has a history of free spaces and (legalised) squats that had a role in underground night culture. Good examples are the Silo and the old Westergas gas works. There are still free spaces for experimentation in the district, such as Vondelbunker, OT301, the Marktkantine, Warehouse Elementenstraat, Checkpoint Charlie, De Nieuwe Anita, De Trut and various locations at the Westergasfabriek site. It remains important to be aware of these locations in relation to regulations and provide tailor-made solutions where possible.

### Zuid

The Gerrit Rietveld Academy can be a stimulus for new night culture initiatives in District Zuid, as outlined in the Plan Kunst en Cultuur Zuidas 2021-2025. The easy accessibility of the Zuidas area by bicycle contributes to a good climate for the establishment of evening or night initiatives, possibly enhanced by a future expansion of the metro and bus network with night rides. The arrival of new cultural facilities in the Zuidas area provides an opportunity to capitalise on the possibility of hosting evening and nighttime activities as well. Empty buildings and redevelopment plans provide opportunities for temporary use of spaces for other purposes, including initiatives that contribute to night culture. The public space in Zuidas will also eventually offer opportunities for open-air events in the evening or at night.

Redevelopment areas, including Schinkel and Buitenveldert, also offer opportunities for night culture. Considering the goals for these areas, more use can be made of empty buildings. Temporary initiatives can also be facilitated in the form of incubators combined with opportunities for clubs and multipurpose spaces.

Students are an important target group for night culture. A significant proportion of them are housed in or on the outskirts of Zuid (including at the Ravel Residence and Uilenstede). This also creates opportunities for more initiatives in the district.

### Centrum

In the City Centre Action Plan, the City sets out the goal of Amsterdam's inner city becoming once again a place where all Amsterdammers enjoy going out, and residents feel at home. Visitors from home and abroad remain welcome if they come for the unique character of our city and respect the city and its residents. The Action Plan also focuses on enriching the night culture offerings within the Centrum district.



# Voices of the night #8



## Interview: Heleen Blanken and Chafik Benhmidouch, artists

*While studying Fine Art at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Heleen Blanken realised that the rules of the art world were restrictive. Nightlife offered her the freedom to develop her own style. Her work is at the intersection of audiovisual art, artificial intelligence and microbiology. Chafik Benhmidouch has also always felt more attracted to the night. As a creative entrepreneur, he is committed to a multidimensional nightlife. With his latest project, he is facilitating an art residency at the HEM-brugterrein in Zaandam.*

### Integral art

Heleen Blanken: 'Trouw has played a key role in propelling art into club life. Previously, visual art in the context of clubs felt mostly decorative, but we were given the space to take it to the next level. The bar is now as high as it is in the traditional art world. Perhaps art in nightlife is even more experimental at the moment, because all disciplines come together there as an integral work of art.'

Chafik Benhmidouch: 'Why is everything so framed so rigidly? You can only go to the museum during the day, while the night is the time when everyone is open to new impulses. Art in a gallery or museum often feels a little out of place. Once you put art in a different context, it suddenly takes on more value because it becomes part of your evening.'

### Hybrid spaces

Heleen: 'Yet in recent years, I have moved further and further away from the night because it was too volatile for me. I wanted to keep people's attention for longer. Especially at festivals, it's a shame that you spend weeks working toward a short peak moment, then you pack everything up and leave. That's why I advocate for more

# Voices of the night #8

hybrid spaces, like NXT Museum, that can offer space for club events and where different disciplines and layers within the arts come together.'

Chafik: 'Yes, or that you jump on your bike to visit an obscure little bar, and you walk into a super cool art installation. That is exactly the tension that is missing here. It is always the same recipe: DJ, dance, pub and very occasionally, some works of art are displayed. On the other hand, when you go to the opera, you're in the auditorium for three hours. You're not even allowed to go to the toilet or get a drink.'

Heleen: 'That is why it would be good to stretch the opening hours. For example, let all museums stay open until 4 in the morning one day a week. If there's plenty of time, you have the space to spend half an hour watching a video installation. Or, for example, you might decide at 10 in the evening that you're looking for inspiration and want to wander around a museum. In a city like Berlin, much more is already possible in that regard.'

## Reasoning things to pieces

Chafik: 'I think the way subsidies are given is outdated. Sometimes you need to have your plan practically finished when you apply. Then you have to wait six to eight weeks to hear whether you will be awarded the subsidy. I see more in a system where you can make a pitch and then get to develop your idea further.'

Heleen: 'The fact that you must already have a plan completely worked out for a subsidy application really oppresses your creative process. It leaves little room for experiment. It would be better to get more guidance from the funds. I think many artists feel a barrier when it comes to entering into a conversation with them.'

## The heart of the city

Heleen: 'It's actually a shame that artists have to move out of the city to places as far away as Zaandam. Both Chafik and I have a place there now because there is no more affordable space in Amsterdam.'

Chafik: 'There should be a place for Amsterdammers in the heart of the centre again, where underground culture is supported. Old institutions are held up to admire, but there is no place left for youth culture. If you really want to make a statement, you need to create something in the middle of the city. A place where you have to reapply every five years, so that it doesn't become a kind of social housing where artists spend their old age, like you see all over the centre now.'

Heleen: 'Let that place be a cultural platform with a club, a restaurant, incubators, where you can put into practice the fluidity between all streams of art. Where you can experiment because you want to, not because you feel it is required. Where a Michelin-starred restaurant can coexist with an experimental artist. They will reinforce each other.'





## Interview: Sander Groet, co-owner A'DAM Tower

*In the early 1990s, infected by the house virus, Sander Groet travelled from Edam to Amsterdam every weekend. He found the inspiration for his first major event – Mysteryland – at the legendary warehouse parties at Oostelijke Handelskade. Since then, he has made a valuable contribution to Amsterdam's international allure with clubs like AIR and Shelter, festivals like Milkshake, Amsterdam Open Air and Buiten Westen, and the iconic A'DAM Tower.*

### Icon of Amsterdam

'During the day, we are in our work mode and busy; at night we are in a different state of consciousness. Hanging out in a dingy old pub is not for me. Dancing to good music, being fired up by the energy of people around me, I can really enjoy that. I don't think that ever ends.'

'The other day, a number of iconic buildings worldwide were booked for the global launch of Playstation 5. Alongside the Pyramid of Cheops and the Burj Khalifa in Dubai was A'DAM Tower. We've done our best to project that international allure. Even during the time of coronavirus, we make sure we remain a music tower. With our flexible workspaces and our clubs and restaurants, we can play an important role as an incubation hub after the crisis.'

### Non-financial value

'People who talk about cultural value often mean museums, concert halls and other elite meeting places. For young people, cultural value is going out, dancing, doing drugs, discovering yourself and meeting people. If you provide that, you will become an important location for students, expats and artists. Look at Berghain in Berlin, recognised by the German state as cultural heritage. You cannot express the cultural value of the night in money. If you add up all the sales totals of all the clubs, you still haven't calculated the true value. An event like ADE is invaluable to our image. That really puts us on the front lines of what's cool.'

### Attraction of Night

'In Amsterdam, new things come fast: before you know it, something new and cool is created. There is a wide range of possibilities. You can go to Bitterzoet, AIR, Radion, Garage Noord or Chin-Chin, all completely different but well-run and lively clubs. Broad-minded people with metropolitan attitudes are attracted to Amsterdam. They are not going to study in Groningen, Enschede or Eindhoven. That is thanks to the nightlife. The city needs to recognise and communicate this more clearly. Freedom and permits are the key ingredients for a healthy night. With that mix, the nightlife will always thrive. We have so much talent walking around here in terms of music and events. Every so often, something grows into a festival with appeal for all of the Netherlands and even beyond.'

### Open doors, open city

'Overly strict and selective door policies need to stop, as far as I am concerned. At one point I read many reviews that people were being turned away at Shelter. So I said: "You know what my door policy is? That you made the effort to take the ferry to Noord." In general, I notice that the wider I open the door, the more fun it becomes.'

### Beyond the lockdown

'The lockdown showed us how valuable it is to have the freedom to come together. I have a plan on my desk for a two-day festival, organised for and by all the clubs, for when things can reopen. The first day there will be a parade through the city, in which all of Amsterdam's clubs will participate with their own sound system, free to all. The second day people will pay admission. The proceeds will be divided fairly among all the city's clubs. That way, a festival can give something back to the clubs for once and enables us to generate money ourselves without just holding up our hand for support.'



**5. Day and night:  
inseparable**





*“For those to whom the night is a world as dangerous as it is brilliant; to whom the night is dull because not all colours are seen equally well; to whom the night goes beyond dancing and drinking. My wish is that when we all stand on the threshold of the door again and it opens, it will be as beautiful on the other side as we thought it would be when we were still sleeping in our beds with the nightlight on.”*

*Soumaya Bazi, Future of the night #4*

As mentioned in Section 2, galleries regularly experiment with late-night openings, and venues seek cross-pollination with the night. A strong spillover from night into day is increasingly seen abroad. One possible reason is that in cities like London and Berlin, there is more physical space for programmes that run non-stop for days. Yet in several places in Amsterdam, initiators are also trying to blur or eliminate the separation between daytime and nighttime culture. Organisations are calling for more opportunities to programme from day into deep in the night. Examples are Sexyland in Noord and BRET in Sloterdijk.

### **Cross-over between day and night**

Outside the mainstream subsidised arts and culture circuit, night culture has manifested itself in a variety of daytime forms for decades. In daylight, the night takes on a different guise: from Breakfast Clubs, 40-hour weekenders, music events and daytime festivals to an intimate open air event on the fringe. This ‘night-into-day culture’ is inseparable from the network and infrastructure of the night. Artists and professionals as well as visitors tend to belong to the same group. This manifestation of night culture may just be the key to increased collaboration and cross-pollination with Amsterdam’s rich mainstream cultural offerings. Through more crossovers between music festivals and daytime culture, more Amsterdammers come into contact with art forms that are unknown to them, and new hybrid forms can also emerge. Currently, festivals are the ideal link between day and night. Their entrepreneurial nature provides reciprocal opportunities for meaningful interaction and synergy. Young talent can break through and innovation is given space. Visitors benefit from a comprehensive



and diverse offering. The City's policy in the coming years will be to encourage interaction between day and night through festivals and events.

### Festivals and events

This section is dedicated to the festivals and events with a nighttime DNA, which add an extra dimension to the city's cultural offerings.

#### Festival or event?

- A festival is an event with a collection of activities, with multiple sound sources, multiple styles of music, (often) multiple locations (tents, stages) and a crossover of music, food, drink, theatre and arts and culture.
- Festivals generally take place outdoors, on private property or in public spaces (park, square or street).
- Amsterdam has food festivals, theatre festivals and art festivals, although most festivals are music festivals, ranging from electronic dance music to reggae or folk music.

#### Impact on the environment

Many issues that clubs and incubators face also apply to Amsterdam's festivals. This includes issues such as: is the supply sufficiently diverse and inclusive? Is there enough room for newcomers? Suitable locations are also scarce at festivals. One aspect specific to festivals and events is the tension between an attractive offering in a public space and the annoyance it may cause local residents. The debate over the space for and the impact of festivals in Amsterdam has polarised in recent years. Crowds and disorder in the city have reduced tolerance regarding events in public spaces. That puts pressure on music festivals, including electronic music festivals.

We are facing major changes in the city: the growth in population, the challenges of densification and new construction, the more intensive use of increasingly scarce public space, and the discussion of its use for all kinds of activities, including festivals. The Events Policy (2019) was up for early review at the end of 2020. The main conclusion was that the city needs to find a new balance between festivals (vibrancy) and

their impact on local residents (liveability). The Night Vision contributes to this quest by defining the value of festivals for the city and reflecting on the space that is needed for festivals in Amsterdam (5.2 and 5.3).

## 5.1 Festival city at a glance

Large-scale music events in public spaces are a relatively new phenomenon. Amsterdam has experienced unprecedented development in this area. In the 1990s, events were mostly small-scale neighbourhood performances around holidays, and illegal raves or open-air and spontaneous festivals, or music parties on the city's fringes, often with little or no regulation. We now see public events in the city that attract thousands (music festivals), tens of thousands (honouring the Ajax football club), hundreds of thousands (Amsterdam Pride) or even millions of visitors (Sail). Amsterdam has built a reputation as a progressive festival city, especially in terms of electronic music festivals such as Milkshake, Loveland and Dekmantel.

This development was largely organic: many pioneers were Amsterdammers with a creative idea and the courage and drive to organise something. For example, the hip-hop festival Appelsap once started as a free music festival for Amsterdam youth and a stage for local talent. In the 1990s and the beginning of this century, the motto was primarily to make a thousand flowers bloom. Organisers were given a lot of space to implement their ideas: events created liveliness and made the city more attractive. There was also plenty of room. The huge crowds on Queen's Day in 2010 marked a turning point in thinking about large-scale events in the city. From then on, the City was committed to having large events with large crowds take place on the outskirts of the city.

What spaces are available for festivals and how far can the night be added to Amsterdam's days? The City came up with new policies in 2018, aimed at spreading events across the city, limiting disturbance from noise and limiting the number of (music) events in the city. In 2020 hardly any events and festivals were held after March due to the coronavirus pandemic restrictions. 2021 was also a difficult event year. Organisers have taken a huge hit from the crisis with many having to lay off staff. Yet the enthusiasm for organising festivals still seems strong. The problem of scarcity of venues has not disappeared with the coronavirus pandemic. For all parties – residents, visitors, organisers





and the city as a whole – it is important to have clarity and find a sustainable balance. Then creative and festive initiatives by and for Amsterdammers can flourish once again without undue disruption to the city.

## 5.2 Value of festivals

### Cultural value

Festivals are, by definition, expressions of culture. People coming together at a festival focus on music, theatre, dance, art, sports or food. This is how festivals contribute to the city's cultural life in various ways.

#### Accessible cultural participation

Some Amsterdammers still feel uncomfortable visiting a museum, gallery or theatre. Festivals make participating in cultural activities more accessible. Good examples include Parade, Uitmarkt, Kwakoe and the numerous music festivals. These offer visitors an opportunity to be exposed to different cultural expressions or art forms. Visitors can also be inspired to further explore Amsterdam's cultural offerings.

#### Youth culture today

Festivals have become an important part of youth culture. Festivals offer diverse programmes, music and other art forms in outdoor spaces, a place for young people to enjoy the programming in their own way and to immerse themselves in an unusual experience with like-minded peers.

#### Pioneering through cross-overs and inspiration

Festivals are prime places for experimentation. There is often room for diverse programming and new styles of music, often with nightlife as the original source. Unlike a museum, theatre or club – where all kinds of amenities are present and there are specific requirements for the building – every festival begins with a blank canvas: an empty square or field. Everything must be thought through: stage, scenery, furnishings, walkways and facilities. This is a strong stimulus for creativity. We see promoters finding new places for festivals all the time despite all kinds of obstacles. Thus, rooftop festival ROEF skilfully exploits unused space on the city's rooftops.

### Space for talent development

Festivals are incubators for new art and a breeding ground for new and young Dutch artists and creative makers. Talents who take their first steps in the club scene often advance to the line-up of the city's biggest festivals. Creative or musical concepts created in the nightlife scene find their way to a festival. For example, Amsterdam Open Air was developed by the people behind the club AIR. Another example is Milkshake. New music can also reach a wider audience through festivals. The most prominent example is the great successes that entire generations of Dutch DJs have celebrated, emerging from the club scene and at festivals that broke through at home and abroad.

### Economic value

A vibrant industry has grown up around festivals in Amsterdam. Hundreds of Amsterdammers earn their living in the events sector: artists, creatives, production workers, security guards, catering or hospitality staff, media and communications experts, stage builders, lighting and sound technicians and many others. This alone makes festivals an important economic sector in the city. In addition, the dozens of large and hundreds of smaller events attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. Visitors spend money on hotels, cafés and restaurants, on taxis and in stores. Events indirectly contribute to economic activity and employment in the city. The annual value of use (as defined in the Atlas Research study *Waarde van de kleine uurtjes*) of night culture and nocturnal or night culture-related events, the added value people attach to their visit, is estimated at over €22 million.

### Visitors

All festivals in Amsterdam combined attracted 2.2 million visitors in 2019. The City was planning to conduct a visitor survey of all festival organisers in 2020. This research had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. In this survey, we plan to highlight the proportion of festivals with a strong link to night culture.

### Appeal

Festivals play an important pivotal role in Amsterdam's creative sector: they provide a stage for creative and technical talent, and act as a magnet to creative talent because of the inspiration and innovation



they provide. In addition, festivals make Amsterdam more appealing as a business location for young professionals and their employers.

### Social value

Festivals have a social value by helping connect individuals and groups. Where people come together in person to experience music and culture together, new contacts and social networks are created. Amsterdammers and visitors from outside the city come into contact with people outside their own network, whether it is the neighbour they never speak to or like-minded people from another city or country. Festivals can thus contribute to a tolerant and inclusive society, where unity is paramount. Many Amsterdammers also discover parts of the city through festivals that they would never have visited otherwise.

### By and for all Amsterdammers

Organising a festival is specialist work; large-scale events are complex and risky. Yet anyone who wants to should be able to organise a festival or event in Amsterdam. Public space belongs to all Amsterdammers, and every Amsterdammer has an equal right to use that space, including for a festival. With that said, an event basically starts with a good idea: an artist, a concept or a performance.

As a city, we must avoid having only festivals that cater only for high-income groups. As much as possible, we should also be able to use the scarce space in the city for offerings that appeal to a broad target group in Amsterdam. Ideally, the range of events would serve all Amsterdammers well. Not all festivals have to be of interest to everyone. Small-scale fringe festivals excite and stimulate innovation. Nor do there have to be the same number of festivals for all groups of Amsterdammers or in every conceivable music genre.

### Identity and values

Certain events convey an idea or value, or are an expression of pride or identity. Amsterdam Pride, as a celebration of the freedom to be yourself, has grown into an event that attracts more visitors than King's Day.

Festivals can also play a connecting role in transforming areas. In districts such as Nieuw-West, Zuidoost and Noord, events can connect old and new residents and users of the area. In the celebratory and approachable setting of a festival, themes of gentrification, empowerment and ownership can be shaped and explored for and by all. Amsterdam needs festivals that recognise everyone's right to exist, and have their identity acknowledged and that provide space for everyone's input.

### Outdoor life

Life in Amsterdam is increasingly taking place in the streets, parks, squares and waterfront. Amsterdammers are doing more outside, in part because of the increase in warm days. A festival is pre-eminently about the outdoor experience, hanging out and dancing to music in an inspiring setting in an attractive location. That location is one of the most important elements of a festival. The Green Vision 2020-2050 (adopted in 2020) identifies two issues relevant to events. Sites that have been specifically constructed for events should be maintained as such. This requires more intensive maintenance than average. This is based on the principle that the additional costs should be recovered from rental income. Furthermore, it is important to find a good balance between busy and quiet areas in public parks.

## 5.3 Searching for balance

The fact that night culture manifests itself as a festival or event in public spaces during the day brings with it a number of dilemmas as well as benefits. This section lists these dilemmas and benefits, outlining the approach we envision for the coming years.

Their great cultural, economic and social value means that space for festivals must continue to be found in the city, but within clear and well-founded frameworks and based on rules and standards that protect liveability. Basically, the aim is to ensure that events can take place anywhere in the city where it is safe to do so. Space should be found for large and small festivals, with or without acoustic or amplified music, organised both by large companies with an established reputation and by small or novice groups, resulting in events that fit the city's needs. Disruption and noise should be controlled as much





as possible with generic measures and regulations and limited in duration, frequency and extent through clear agreements set out in site profiles. We must make a trade-off between a thriving festival climate that is attractive, inclusive and progressive on the one hand, and the protection of liveability on the other.

The ultimate goal is a sustainable balance between liveability and enjoyment. On the basis of clear criteria, we can fairly distribute scarce spots for festivals and enable an offer that best fits Amsterdam's identity and adds value to the city and its residents.

### Vibrant vs. liveable

The 2018 Events Policy aimed to minimise the impact of festivals on the environment. Noise standards were established for music festivals along with rules for the maximum number of days of set-up and take-down, and space requirements for each location. Site profiles define the number of events that can take place at each site. An early evaluation shows that the policy is working. Yet in recent years, there have been many complaints about festivals, especially relating to noise. The discussion of events in recent years has been accompanied by a call for firm action against the disturbances caused by events.

A survey on public support for events was conducted among 1,500 Amsterdammers in 2019. Interestingly, this (representative) survey shows a much more nuanced picture (see box). The fact that 80% of Amsterdammers are not inconvenienced by events is positive. The College considers the interests of all Amsterdammers, including those of the minority. We remain in discussion with the city about the value of events and the disturbance experienced, with the aim of reaching a compromise on what the city can handle and what space we should free up for events and under what conditions.

#### Outcome public support survey among 1,500 Amsterdammers, commissioned by the City of Amsterdam, 2019

- 77% are satisfied with current event offerings; 70% feel the event offerings enrich the city.
- Over two-thirds attended an event in Amsterdam in 2019.
- 30% feel a need for smaller-scale neighbourhood events.
- In the 18-24 and 35-44 age groups, music event offerings are rated 7.2 out of 10.
- 29% think there are too many dance events.
- 20% experienced disturbances from an event in 2019 (of this group, 19% experienced noise pollution).
- The most disturbance is caused by the parking problems associated with an event.
- The Museumplein and NDSM are seen as the most suitable event locations.

#### Approach

The City must work with Amsterdammers to find a balance when it comes to the number of events the city can handle. That new balance follows from weighing up the added value of events against the impact they have on the environment. We want to have a conversation about the preferred number of events (and their size and distribution across the city) based on all the facts and considerations. It is important that all parties have the opportunity to participate: residents, organisers, event visitors and Amsterdammers who work in the sector. In 2021, the College will develop scenarios that can be the basis for a good conversation – first in the City Council and then in the city.

#### The battle for space

When discussing the future of festivals in the city, the lack of venues is a major factor. Partly due to lack of space, the number of events in the city declined in 2019. According to the Night Mayor foundation, the number of events in Amsterdam has decreased by as much as 25%. Event venues have disappeared because homes have been built. Other sites have become less suitable due to further urbanisation. The scarce public space that remains needs to be shared with more people.

Many people have moved into the city in recent years. On top of that, Amsterdammers are increasingly using public spaces more intensively for leisure and other activities. Existing spots are allocated, leaving virtually no room for new initiatives. This has made the need for proper and fair distribution of space even more urgent. New criteria could be added, such as the regular utilisation rates of a location, the level of facilities available for events and/or the ecological value of a park.

### Approach

The City wants to be able to allocate space based on facts and data. We don't just look at the plans submitted, the audiences or how the festival relates to its surroundings. We will also structurally collect data on the appreciation of festivals by visitors as well as residents. For this purpose, we conduct random surveys around all major music festivals. Objective noise measurements and observations by supervisors are also taken into consideration.

When assigning a spot on the events calendar, a festival's distinctiveness and added value to the city are considered, based on the following principles:

- We encourage events to enable meeting and social cohesion between and within groups of Amsterdammers.
- We make room for events that celebrate and enhance the city's identity.
- We are looking for ways for events to contribute to the development of new and existing areas of the city.
- We reserve space for events with Amsterdam bravado and guts, providing a place for mainstream, underground and fringe.
- Events are welcoming and accessible, consider local residents and seek connections with local business owners and organisations.

### Choices in scarcity

How do we distribute the scarce remaining space? Out of the total of all site profiles, there is room for approximately 50 days of music festivals (noise levels up to 85 dB). However, the number of requests for a spot on the calendar is much greater. Currently, we, the City, do not have the ability to make an argument-based choice between events when demand for spots on the festival calendar exceeds supply. If we resort

to drawing lots, iconic events such as Amsterdam Pride or Keti Koti may miss out. What we actually want is for the festival offerings, like those in night culture, to match the needs of Amsterdam residents. This is why we are exploring how we can best manage the proper distribution of spots among the city's target groups. At the same time, we do not want the City to take the role of curator.

### Approach

Festival offerings should fit Amsterdam and respond to the city's identity and makeup. We also want to provide space for new movements and initiatives by marginalised groups or cultural pioneers. In allocating scarce spaces for music festivals, we take advice from an independent and expert music events committee. This committee also advises the College on encouraging new festivals with subsidies from the events fund. Established in 2021, the committee has started with an exploration and inventory of music events in Amsterdam and trends in this area.

The College notes that the committee must bear in mind that Amsterdam is an international leader in electronic music in nightlife and festivals and that it is important for the cultural sector and for Amsterdam's economy to maintain this position. In addition, there should always be room for Amsterdammers with a good idea. This can be ensured by, for example, reserving some of the available spaces for newcomers and subcultures. We also make budget available to implement plans. The events calendar in Amsterdam must be diverse and inclusive.

### Appropriate scale

The 2019 public support survey shows that a significant portion of Amsterdammers want more small-scale events. These events often focus more on the needs of residents and cause less disruption. However, the number of small and medium-sized events has declined sharply in recent years. In 2019, there was a 28% decrease in small events up to 500 visitors and a 46% decrease in events with between 500 and 2000 visitors. We suspect that this decrease is related to increased costs, including the cost of permits and of meeting sustainability, safety and noise requirements. Large events also need to attract an increasing number of visitors simply to cover costs.





They face rising costs for equipment, staff and artists' fees. As a result, major events become larger and/or more expensive. As a result, they cause more inconvenience and are less accessible to lower-income visitors.

How can we guarantee that there will still be enough space for small-scale events and new initiatives? How can we lower the threshold? A first step is the pilot in which the limit for a mandatory permit was raised from 100 to 250 visitors. Additional measures will be needed over time.

#### **Approach**

Organisers, local residents and the city all have an interest in a sustainable framework for events with sufficient public support. We set policies and site profiles for a longer period. We are also creating the opportunity to give organisers multi-year spots on the calendar. This way local residents know how often to expect an event in their neighbourhood, who the organiser is and what rules apply. For organisers, clarity and certainty is important in order to plan several years ahead. This increases opportunities for creative, sustainable and progressive programming. Permanent festivals can build a relationship with their environment.

Amsterdam has a number of iconic recurring events but also a number of festivals that have stood out and proven themselves in recent years such as Pride, Kwakoe, Ketikoti and the arrival of Sinterklaas. It is important for such festivals and events to have multi-year certainty. The College would like to see some of these festivals allotted space on a multi-year basis.

#### **Accessibility under pressure**

Resistance from residents, a shortage of venues, rising costs, intense competition – and then the weather can be a disappointment as well. Who can or will organise another festival when there are so many barriers and obstacles?

Often, organisers cannot recoup costs until after several editions of a festival. Logically, it is difficult for new organisers or parties without large financial reserves to organise an event of any size in Amsterdam. Visitors notice this in the rising price of admission tickets. If we want

to be an inclusive city in terms of daytime night culture as well, we need to work on solutions in this respect. Possibly reserving a limited number of spots for new initiatives and making an earmarked subsidy budget available could help.

#### **Approach**

The City authorities are tasked with enforcing rules and agreements. Better organised events should lead to less disruption and more public support. Festival organisers are temporary occupants of a site. Public space belongs to all Amsterdammers and organisers are expected to treat it responsibly: with respect for the site, for the flora or fauna present and for the environment. In addition to ensuring compliance with all rules and standards, we also want organisers to make every effort to ensure that the event is as enjoyable an experience as possible for everyone, both visitors and those in the surrounding area.

Surveying visitors and residents provides objective data on the quality of an event's performance. When combined with any resident notifications and follow-up by supervisors and with the organiser's plans, a better picture of the festival's performance emerges. This can be evaluated when considering whether to assign a spot on the calendar.



## Interview: Niels de Geus and Jasper Goossen Events Association Amsterdam (EVA)

*Niels de Geus and Jasper Goossen were hooked on the Amsterdam night early on. Each has contributed to the subculture in their own way: Jasper with his company Apenkooi, through which he organises festivals such as DGTL, Strafwerk and Pleinvrees; Niels as operations director of ID&T, responsible for festivals such as Milkshake, Mysteryland and Welcome to the Future. As a member of the Events Association Amsterdam, they represent festivals in and around the city.*

### Intertwined

Niels: 'You often hear in politics that club culture has to come back. That's what I thought ten years ago when we opened Club AIR. But it makes no sense, in my opinion, to yearn for the situation 20 years ago. What does night culture or youth culture really mean? It would be good if something were written about that.'

Jasper: 'What we do with festivals and what happens in the clubs is very much intertwined. There is cooperation on many levels. The night, meanwhile, goes beyond going out. It has become a way of self-development for young people. Whether it's a festival, a trip or a club night, all are ways to escape from the straitjacket. A place where you can develop, but also meet people in a free environment.'

### Catalyst

Niels: 'A lot is created at night. Cool music is made and all sorts of cross-media things are coming to fruition. There are a lot of interconnecting artistic expressions. There is an incredibly wide variety of nightlife, with so many different currents that there is something for everyone.'



Jasper: 'If you look at the creativity in the night and the professional way it is handled, it is substantial. The night is a catalyst for the creative, advertising and film industries. People get to know each other, many photographers, cameramen, writers and designers have been involved in the night at some point. It is a breeding ground for the cultural and creative sectors.'

## **Broad infrastructure**

Jasper: 'Amsterdam has been the dance capital of the world for 25 years but is slowly but surely losing that leading position. This is due to the fact that the Netherlands is small and Amsterdam is especially small. Developers are just filling up all the spaces, and only later thinking about how residents can enjoy themselves. The issue is that we must prepare now for situations that will occur 10, 20 years from now. Whether it's a club, a café, a theatre or a festival site, it's essential to set aside the space now.'

Niels: 'A party or festival doesn't start with 1,500 or 20,000 people, but with 30 friends. This is how the most famous evenings and festivals were created. Take an evening like Afrosloesjes. That once started in Bitterzoet and grew in small steps to become a national club night. An example like that shows how important it is for the Amsterdam night to maintain a broad infrastructure in which small venues are as important as larger ones. I think that the idea you sometimes hear that "it must always remain small" is short-sighted. The artists in that dilapidated bus or in that youth centre end up performing at Mysteryland. Then they are seen internationally.'

## **Gabber culture**

Jasper: 'Who decides what culture is? Culture with a capital C. Often that means elitist culture in the fancy areas. The Van Gogh Museum, the Stedelijk Museum. Is gabber also culture? People who, thirty years on, are still walking around with a bald head in an Aussie tracksuit and are still listening to gabber music. Of course that's culture. It's just not the culture of the people who claim they know about culture.'

Niels: 'All the City has to do is facilitate space for youth culture, and interfere with it as little as possible in terms of content.'

## **Stimulate creativity**

Jasper: 'There is a group of Amsterdam residents for whom it is never enough. If it were up to them, all events that make noise and have anything to do with youth culture would have to leave town. Festivals are always seen from a negative perspective. We need to think less in terms of how to restrict things. It would be better to think in terms of how to encourage them and about where we want to go. That is how the creativity of the night becomes useful and reaches its full potential.'



## Interview: Vic Crezée, Head of Music Patta

*Vic Crezée grew up on Lange Leidsedwardsstraat and fell under the spell of hip-hop at a young age. In record store Fat Beats, he found like-minded people, including the founders of Patta, the famed Amsterdam lifestyle brand and clothing brand. Crezée made a career as a DJ/producer and was asked to set up Patta Soundsystem two years ago.*

‘For me, nightlife is where everything and everyone comes together. If you are interested in different musical cultures, you will meet all kinds of people there. You make friendships and get to know people who change your perspective on the world.’

Nightlife is a place where barriers between people come down. When you get to places where you find people with similar interests, you soon feel a deeper connection, even without booze and drugs. You gravitate toward a certain genre of music and with that comes a lifestyle, a style of dress or ways of talking. Maybe you come from a village with no punks and meet people from a totally different background somewhere in Amsterdam. That’s how you develop your brain and your being.’

### Equal value

‘For Patta, music has always had an important value, especially rap. When Patta was just created, it released a rap album and has hosted countless parties over the years. With Patta Soundsystem, we are focusing more on that, with stage hosting, collaborations with musicians, releasing music and radio stations. Whether it’s Jamaica Lounge around the corner from me, or Paradiso, or a chi-chi bar I’m not familiar with, I think they all have equally high cultural value. Every place

where people gather, with a certain kind of food, music and attitude, contributes to how people manoeuvre through the city and how they can identify with a group they didn’t know about.’

### Eclectic culture

‘I would hate it if Paradiso disappeared, but also if the Jamaica Lounge no longer existed or Garage Noord. If the Concertgebouw disappears, that’s terrible too, but I don’t think it should be prioritised for support. Because Amsterdam is so small, we have a highly eclectic nightlife culture. And because we are dead serious about nightlife, everything is of high quality: the hip-hop parties are good, but also the techno parties and punk shows. From the DJs and promoters to the flyer designers, everyone has a high level of professionalism.’

### Passion for the night

‘I think we are all keeping Amsterdam’s night culture alive. Of course, there are those who are primarily concerned with making money, but there are also plenty who are passionate about the night. The latter do all they can to help each other and maintain a healthy entertainment culture. I approach nightlife primarily from a musical perspective. I think it’s important to continue to offer people a place where they can discover new music within a certain niche and meet others.’

### Prevention of violence

‘Violence is unfortunately more likely to lurk at night than during the day on the streets. Violence against women and the LGBTIQ+ community must stop immediately. To stop that kind of violence, you have to start at the core. It has to do with education and training of young people, especially men. After a



certain age you can no longer influence the way people treat each other. From birth – in school, in the media, everywhere – you should be told that being in love with someone of the same sex is normal.’

## **Supporting both accountants and DJs**

‘Money needs to be put into nightlife, because to my knowledge it is the only sector that is completely stagnant. Self-employed people and those working in nightlife do not get support because they are not understood by the government. Businesses that contribute nothing at all to the city’s culture do receive support from the government to pay their staff. Nothing about that makes sense at all. The government and the City could provide more financial support during the pandemic.’

## **Night menu**

‘Before COVID, I actually thought the nightlife was pretty healthy. Every so often, a new club would get a 24-hour permit. I didn’t have much to say about that. The only thing that could really be better: more nighttime restaurant permits. The number of places open after three can be counted on one hand, and the food is gross. You just want to be able to go to a decent place at six in the morning.’



## Appendix 1 – Waarde van de kleine uurtjes

### Appendix 2 – Sources

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