GLOBAL NIGHTTIME RECOVERY PLAN

CHAPTER 2 – THE FUTURE OF DANCEFLOORS: BUILDING MORE FLEXIBLE, OPEN AND INNOVATIVE CLUBBING EXPERIENCES

Introducing the **Global Nighttime Recovery Plan (GNRP),** a practical guide for cities that are trying to determine the best way to design and safely execute a strategy to reopen and reactivate their creative and night-time economies. The guide was created in response to the severe vulnerability of nighttime industries caused by Covid-19, and in acknowledgement of this unique opportunity for improved, night-centric city planning offered by the crisis.

The GNRP is an international collaboration of some of the foremost minds in nightlife governance, planning and culture, spearheaded by nightlife advocacy agency, **VibeLab.** First conceived in June 2020, it has quickly grown to include the work of 130 practitioners, academics, public health experts, advocates and industry representatives from more than 70 cities spanning 6 continents – that network growing and strengthening with each new chapter.

Download and read the complete chapters via *nighttime.org*

The GNRP is published by VibeLab

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ISSUE STATEMENT AND KEY CHALLENGES

The pandemic has exacerbated the pre-existing fragility of the nightclub industry – clubs are at high risk of permanent closure.

Their loss means less connected, more vulnerable communities – especially marginalised ones – as well as a strong ripple effect of reduced nightlife tourism that impacts other businesses (gastronomy, hotels, supply chains).

We must explore tactics to facilitate safer, more inclusive and viable dancefloors, including frameworks for new business models, crowd management, and evaluating equitable practices.

METHOD

Drawing on interviews, case studies and strategy development from operators in **London, Turin, Seoul, Tokyo** and **Belgium** to discern possible challenges and advantages, assess existing trials, and produce best-practice recommendations.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ON THE DANCEFLOOR

- **Mapping the impact**

Challenges:
- It is crucial to gather data to understand how the sector has been hit by the pandemic.

Solution:
- Projects like the Creative Footprint can be used as a robust benchmark.

Case study: **The UK Nighttime Industry Association** surveyed over 200 nightlife businesses during April lockdown, finding 63.8% felt reopening with social distancing would not be financially viable, while 75% did not have reserves to avoid defaulting after 3 months of lockdown.

- **Reimagining business models**

Challenges:
- How can we use reduced capacity to create intimate events, or benefit from spaciousness in typically crowded venues?
- How can spaces be used differently during bans on dancing?

Solutions:
- Seated concerts, drive-ins, segregated dancefloors, repurposed spaces
- Engage in trial and time-limited events with closed or controlled audiences to identify successes and challenges, and refine hygiene measures.

Case studies: **Village Underground in London** – Operators researched local demand, assessed resources and pivoted business model by temporarily converting space into bicycle storage facility. **Bubble raves in Belgium** – Inventive tactics from barricades to floating dance floors explored to prevent mingling and keep patrons within household groups whilst dancing.

- **Adapting programming**

Challenges:
- Big brands can outbid smaller for competing resources.
- Travel is restricted, international and often interstate acts unavailable.

Solutions
- Local officials to make public spaces available to grassroots businesses at reduced cost
- Promoters focus on booking local artists
- Venues explore new hybrid event formats of live and digital
- Make use of outdoor space (see Chapter 1)

- **Designing safer club interactions**

Challenges:
- Given the tradition of close interaction between people inside clubs and indoor music venues, are safety measures actually enforceable? And will they allow for a fulfilling experience that preserves the socio-cultural values of the venue?

Solutions:
- <u>Reduced capacity and physical distancing</u> can result in less overcrowded spaces and less antisocial behaviour
- <u>Masks</u> can be seen as 'cool', and in keeping with rave aesthetic. Safety campaigns can encourage mask use as they do successfully for condoms or earplugs
- <u>Tracing apps/event registration.</u> Ability to trace in case of positive test. Improved privacy technology.
- <u>Temperature tests/rapid testing</u>. Improvements in rapid testing technology can be a game-changing tool in creating covid-free events

Tool: **Vibecare 5 level framework.** Eventsure (Belgium) offers an international training programme to create VibeCare teams that support security teams in managing crowds with a friendly, caring approach. Framework focuses on the 5 stages of Arrival, Entry, Circulation, Exit, and Departure—to ensure safety and harmony of patrons, staff and nearby residents.

ENVISIONING INCLUSIVE, EQUITABLE DANCEFLOORS

Challenges:
- Dancefloors provide space for cultural self-determination, social inclusion, diversity, imagination, and safety. Their closure exacerbates cities' structural inequalities.
- Public and institutional perception that clubs are uncontrollable, unsafe and not essential activities can stigmatise clubs, and result in strict licensing schemes, surveillance, rigid policing—and ultimately closure.

Solutions:
- Formal and informal nighttime networks are proving essential in partnerships with governments and local councils, to coordinate communication strategies and actions in response to misinformation, accusations and moral panic.
- **Tool: Equality Framework.** Checklist can be used by venues' whole event teams and staff to gain insight from front-line event staff and facilitate more inclusive practices, addressing space/inclusion, health and control and artistic expression.

Case studies: **Tokyo** – nightclubs vilified in media and blamed for outbreaks. Industry collaborated with government to boost clubbing safety protocols, discourage illegal operation and improve public opinion. **Seoul** – Due to an outbreak in a gay clubbing area, many patrons were outed without their consent during test and trace efforts. An anonymous testing system was developed. Clubbing industry collaborated on campaign to encourage people back to the district.

CONCLUSION AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Nightlife professionals have useful perspective and experience in urban planning, managing sound and safety, 24-hour operation, and use of nontraditional spaces to keep tourism and local engagement alive and cohesive. They should be participating in wider city development conversations.

Key recommendations:

1. Clubs already have expertise in health, safety and prevention, and narrative around this can and should be more positive.

2. The event industry should adopt lean start-up approaches as common practice to build resilience to crisis. Cities can support this through funding, training, and capacity-building.

3. Measuring and monitoring are fundamental to identify challenges and opportunities, and envision tactics.

4. Networks and organisations can make a difference through advocacy, community organising and partnership with local government.

5. To protect clubbing diversity and address barriers to inclusion, independent, BAME and vulnerable organisations should be supported. Gathering data, building networks and coordinated actions are key.

6. Funding should be available to cover costs for health measures and PPE in clubs.

7. Digital literacy and inclusion are more urgent than ever—as digital content, communities and practices continue to expand, we must address issues of privacy, accessibility, and ownership.

AUTHORS

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THE NEXT CHAPTERS OF THE GNRP WILL ADDRESS:

- Building nocturnal governance capacity
- Financial support models for creative industry workers, individuals and vulnerable populations
- Support models for independent nightlife businesses
- Gathering data and measuring nightlife's impact

Find out more at *nighttime.org*