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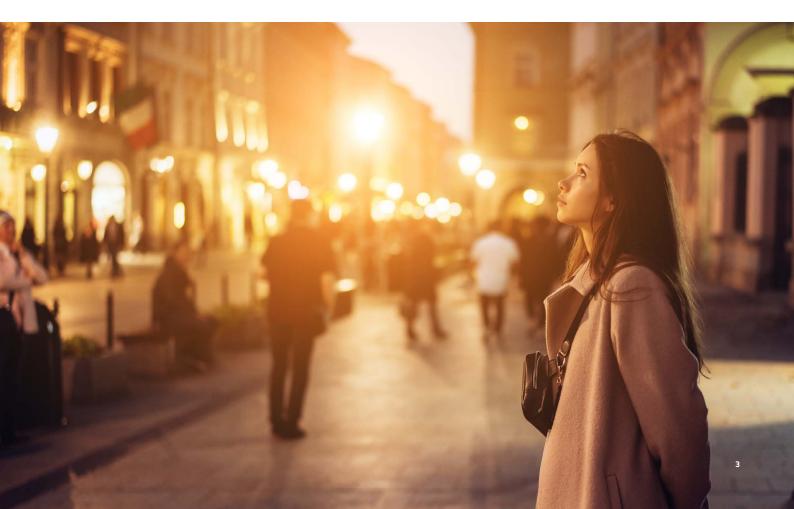
24-Hour Cities Network safety workshop

INSIGHT REPORT

JUNE 2022

Contents

Introduction

This report synthesizes insights drawn from the safety workshop of the 24-Hour Cities Network on June 14th, 2022. The two-hour workshop covered a wide variety of topics and included presentations and discussions on how to create safe and inclusive cities at nighttime. This report is divided into three main sections: introducing the concept of safety from a nighttime planning perspective, insights from the main case studies that were presented, and insights from the group discussion that followed.

"Nighttime safety is a multi-dimensional concept that calls for all city stakeholders to work together."

Different perspectives on safety after dark

Andreina Seijas, resident expert and consultant at IdenCity

The question of safety at night is one that resonates in cities around the world. The perception of safety often does not match the situation on the ground. As urban dwellers, we form mental maps based on cognition of memorable places, street names and other spatial cursors, but from a physiological perspective, our sense of location and orientation work in a different manner after dark. During the nocturnal hours, such cartography may be dramatically rescaled and aspects such as lighting and wayfinding become more relevant in creating a familiar and comfortable feeling. In practical terms, a street that is filled with people and activity feels much safer than an empty street. As North American journalist and urbanist Jane Jacobs explained, the appropriation of public spaces throughout the day creates a greater sense of safety and belonging.

In this context, nighttime safety is a multi-dimensional concept that calls for all city stakeholders — residents, businesses and government — to work together to take advantage of the many opportunities to work, play and connect that exist after dark. Using different methods of urban planning, particularly participatory strategies, is crucial in helping different groups feel comfortable and more included in their own spaces and therefore improve their perception of safety during the day and night.

"Proactive approaches are important, such as encouraging young people to appropriate space in positive ways through sports, music or educational activities."

While there are many methods, its important to remember that improved safety need not mean greater policing or greater surveillance. Proactive approaches are important, such as encouraging young people to appropriate space in positive ways through sports, music or educational activities. Its also important to see the night through the lenses of different groups like women and LGBTQ communities. These groups have been traditionally disadvantaged at night and, given their particular vulnerability, experience more fear. Here again, proactivity is key. In the U.K., for example, the Ask for Angela program involves a public-private partnership and communications campaign that encourages nighttime establishments to take an active role in guaranteeing the safety of their patrons by inviting them to use a safe word ('Angela') with staff to ask for help in situations of risk, fear or vulnerability.[1]

Additionally, it's vital to think beyond leisure and entertainment and consider the challenges faced by those who work in different sectors at night, whether it be healthcare, mobility, logistics, or even the person who delivers the newspaper. These nighttime workers face a unique set of challenges while working and commuting when there are limited transportation options available and limited services that cater to them.

When exploring different strategies for creating safer nighttime cities, we must keep a few essential aspects in mind:

- **Local context is important:** Cities can learn from each other, but what may work in one country or city may not work in another.
- **Nighttime planning is not a static activity —** its a long-term endeavor with constantly changing priorities and city environments.
- **Limited time and resources:** Solutions must be feasible and sustainable if they are to remain permanent.

1. Read more about **Ask for Angela on the U.K. Metropolitan Police website**

Credit: City of Amsterdam
Rembrandtplein Square Hosts assist visitors in Amsterdam

"Culture and creative industries provide leaders and influencers that can positively impact the city and drive social change."

A bottom-up approach to safety in nightlife areas

Mirik Milan, Amsterdam Night Mayor (2012-2018) and co-founder of VibeLab

A key component to creating a safe night city is to focus on cultural vibrancy and diversify the types of activity that take place at nighttime. Providing a diverse set of nighttime activities, rather than just alcohol-driven antics, can prevent nightlife from getting out of hand and allow a broader spectrum of groups to enjoy the night. When creating a culturally vibrant city, three main factors should be involved.

First, is nurturing a creative community. Culture and creative industries provide leaders and influencers that can positively impact the city and drive social change. Second, it is important to make room for creative space, both in the digital and physical domains. This space is essential to enable people to develop capacities, build identities and present their content and ideas. Lastly, a night mayor or nighttime governance structure is necessary to tie all these factors together within a coherent policy framework. This also helps with bringing together all the relevant stakeholders to develop effective strategies.

Credit: City of Amsterdam
Rembrandtplein Square Hosts assist visitors

"Providing more time for opening hours allows closures to be spread more evenly throughout the night."

Amsterdam took this approach when addressing alcohol-related violence that tarnished the city's image as a hospitable destination. Under Mayor Eberhard van der Laan (2010-2017) the city focused on making its public spaces — and particularly its highly concentrated nightlife districts — more pleasant places to move about. This approach was pioneered in Rembrandtplein, a five-by-ten block area that's home to much nightlife activity. The area has many obstructions, if frequented by large crowds, and traditionally featured a large number of alcohol-related activities. This often led to different groups clashing physically when navigating the square and would lead to alcohol-fueled altercations.

To respond to the challenges public spaces like Rembrandtplein were facing, Amsterdam undertook several novel approaches. The city limited bicycle use in the public square and worked to increase the availability of taxis to provide people with a safe way to return home at the end of the night. It also lowered the brightness on the large television screen in the square to lower the aggression level of bar patrons who had spent hours in dark rooms and could react negatively to jarring bright lights.

The city also engaged nighttime business operators to find solutions to make public spaces more livable and safe. Rather than restricting nocturnal activity, one of the major and most innovative changes introduced was to extend business hours until 6:00am and 8:00am in the morning (from 4:00am and 5:00am) to ensure a better tapering of bar and venue closures. In many cities, when all the establishments close at the same time, patrons spill out onto the streets leading to a concentration of noise, littering and violence. Providing more time for opening hours allows closures to be spread more evenly throughout the night and makes nightlife districts pleasanter and easier for police to manage.

Rembrandtplein Square Host Post where Square Hosts assist visitors

Since the introduction of the
Rembrandtplein Square Hosts:

20%

decline in alcohol-related violence

28%

decline in reports of nuisances

The city also introduced Square Hosts, young friendly hosts dressed in bright red jackets who patrol the streets every Friday and Saturday night and function as intermediaries between different people and groups throughout the night. Their primary objective is to de-escalate confrontations before police get involved, but they also help guide people through the area and remind visitors to respect those who live in the neighborhood. The hosts are always available at the "Host Post" for questions and information. The impact of the Rembrandtplein Square Host project was overwhelmingly positive. While it did come with a substantial financial commitment, it led to a 20 percent decline in alcohol-related violence and a 28 percent decline in reports of nuisances of any sort. All this was due to the multistakeholder, multi-year approach that ensured clear and frequent communication between the community, police and city residents.

The Rembrandtplein Square Hosts

In Mexico:

69%

of women feel unsafe working at night outside their homes

60%

of women feel unsafe in public spaces like parks and markets

– According to a 2021 national security survey

A gendered approach to safety at night

Silvia Chi, architect at Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario, Territorial y Urbano (Secretariat for Agrarian, Land and Urban Development, SEDATU)

Mexico, like many other countries around the world, has a persistent violence problem. This is particularly evident at night. According to a 2021 national security survey, 69 percent of women in Mexico feel unsafe working at night outside of their homes, and 60 percent feel unsafe in public spaces like parks or markets. This feeling of insecurity keeps women from fully participating in society and forces them to abandon both enjoyable activities and those that are essential to their well-being such as using a cell phone or wearing jewelry in public, taking a walk or enjoying nightlife. As a result, many women end up missing out on work and educational opportunities and forgoing healthcare because of fear violence. In many municipalities, girls stop going to school aged around 12–15 years for of fear of unsafe streets. This hinders women's independence and exacerbates existing inequalities.

To combat this, Mexico's Secretariat of Agrarian, Land and Urban Development (SEDATU) created a design guideline called 'Calles Seguras, Caminemos Unidas' (which roughly translates to 'Safer Streets, Lets Work Together') to help shape the built environment in Mexican cities around improving public safety, particularly for women. The goal of the guidelines is to provide guidance on making streets safer for women and children and designing infrastructure with a gender perspective.[2]

2.   Download and read the Calles Seguras, Caminemos Unidas guide (Spanish)

"There are no better experts on the state of a neighborhood than its residents."

The **first step** of Calles Seguras, Caminemos Unidas's six-step methodology is undertaking urban analysis. This analysis should not only take into account the level of safety in a city, but also the physical conditions in place. Of particular importance is the state of urban infrastructure and the quality of city roads and lighting along the streets.

The **second step** is to define priorities. While ideally all streets could be transformed, in reality, many cities are working with limited resources. It's important to establish which of the streets are most important to improve so cities can make the largest impact for their financial commitment.

Step number three is to involve the community in planning. A participatory process is important in ensuring the solutions provided are fit-for-purpose for the communities they serve. There are no better experts on the state of a neighborhood than its residents, and working with them to understand their perceptions of safety, and identifying why they feel unsafe, is crucial.

Step four is to build an action plan to transform a city. As is common when it comes to urban infrastructure development, there are a complex web of stakeholders involved. These include residents, businesses, and governments at all levels. Bringing together all of these groups is an important prerequisite for success and creating a plan that reflects this is crucial.

This step is followed by number **five**, which is to execute the plan devised in step four, which is then followed by the all-important **sixth step**, monitoring. This is important because it helps to measure success across changes of government, which in Mexico typically happens every three years at the local level. The ability to pass along lessons and show successes across changes in government is one of the most important elements of creating sustainable policies

In addition to the six-step methodology, Calles Seguras, Caminemos Unidas delineated four key components of safer streets. The first one is quality public servicing—good lighting, clean space, and a focus on green infrastructure. Second, well-planned and maintained road infrastructure, including visible public signage, safe crosswalks, and smooth and even road and sidewalk surfaces. The third component is a focus on public safety, such as CCTV cameras to assist in police surveillance. Fourth is a focus on community identity that helps residents make the space their own through painting murals or planning neighborhood gatherings.

While these four components are all important, the level to which they are addressed depends on the needs of the municipalities and how many resources they have. The first and second are, of course, very important for the physical transformation, while the third is important for the physiological one but more complex to implement given the distrust between the police and residents in many cities. However, the last component — the community identity — is crucial for all interventions.

To date, the Calles Seguras, Caminemos Unidas guidelines have transformed 850 spaces throughout Mexico. Many cities are using the program as an opportunity to support public art and the increase in planned public gatherings has improved the perception of public safety. Using Calles Seguras, Caminemos Unidas, cities can spend the same amount of money but, using a different approach, make a huge difference for the safety of women and children.

"Nighttime workers have less access to advice on their employment rights and often struggle to undertake actions that can improve their workplace well-being."

Creating safe spaces for nighttime workers

Alessio Kolioulis, lecturer at University College London

While nightlife is an important component of the nighttime city, an often overlooked group that deserves to feel safe at night is nighttime workers. Without these workers, many of the activities that take place at night would simply not be possible, from leisure and entertainment to healthcare and city services. Finding strategies to support these groups benefits all residents in a city and deserves particular attention.
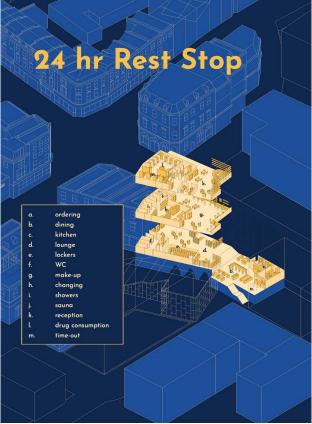
In London, specific attention had been paid to the precarious situation of night workers, focusing on co-producing solutions with communities, workers, government decision-makers, advocacy organizations, and researchers. Autonomy, a U.K.-based think tank, issued a report that examined the issues faced by what they term the four lodestars of the nighttime economy: gig economy & food delivery riders, sex workers, migrant workers, and people who work in logistics and retail. What they found was that these groups all share a certain set of challenges and needs at night. These include a lack of access to healthcare and childcare and common facilities to rest, recuperate and socialize. Nighttime workers also have less access to advice on their employment rights and often struggle to undertake actions that can improve their workplace well-being, such as unionization.

Download and read the report

One way to address this is to democratize the nighttime economy. The Autonomy report posits six ideas for doing so: 1) Establish night work assemblies, 2) Create a night workers equity commission, 3) Build a community-centered framework for governing local nighttime economies, 4) Enforce a nighttime living wage, 5) Establish night funds to leverage resources for public–commons partnerships, 6) Move toward community-based frameworks for policing at night.

One concrete example of how these ideas can play out in the real world is the Night Work Center — a physical place for nighttime workers to access services, use hygiene facilities, rest and recharge. This is particularly important as the number of night workers, especially those who participate in the gig economy, is increasing and demands more space to congregate.
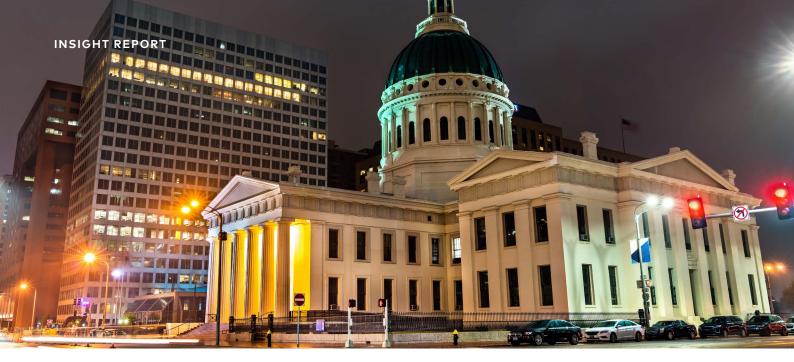
In addition to giving visibility to the night workers who support the nighttime lifestyles of the rest of us, the Night Work Center provides workers a place to socialize, get a hot meal, go to the bathroom or recharge a phone. The Autonomy proposal includes several varieties — the 24-hour rest stop that provides basic services, the 24-hour workers club that takes those basic services and adds additional enrichment, employment, and socializing opportunities, and the 24-hour health center that offers health, wellness and childcare services. These facilities not only have the potential to provide a place of rest but also offer language lessons, nurseries, and workers' rights seminars that can help improve nighttime workers' lives.

These types of facilities already exist in some Scandinavian countries, and in London, the idea of the 24-hour worker's facility has been around since the late Nineteenth Century. The first London 24-hour worker center is under development with the Greater London Authority's 24-hour team, with big questions of who will build, maintain and finance these centers still under discussion. Additionally, the issues around data loom large for this project, as they do for most when it comes to city planning. Often the most crucial types of data, such as who works in the nighttime gig economy, is not publically available, and good data can be expensive to purchase. Solving this piece will be important in measuring and replicating success.

24 hr Worker Care and Health Centre

a. reception
b. café
c. gym
d. showers and WC
e. sauna
f. waiting area
g. admin office
h. GP and therapy
i. medical supplies
j. nursery
k. nursery terrace

24 hr Workers Club

a. quiet area
b. cycle workshop
c. meeting room
d. terrace café
e. stepping plaza
f. courtyard
g. library
h. assembly and dining
i. kitchen
j. meeting rooms
k. showers
l. changing
m. lounge / kitchenette
n. terrace
o. meeting rooms
p. lounge / kitchenette

24 hr Rest Stop

a. ordering
b. dining
c. kitchen
d. lounge
e. lockers
f. WC
g. make-up
h. changing
i. showers
j. sauna
k. reception
l. drug consumption
m. time-out

Credit: *Drawings by Autonomy Research Ltd*

"Issues that lead to
unsafe environments
cannot simply be
solved with more
policing."

Addressing underlying causes and leveraging data for measurement

John Fimbel, senior vice president for business development at Mastercard

Wilford Pinkney Jr., director at the Mayor's Office of Children, Youth and Families, St. Louis, USA

Oftentimes what happens at night is dictated by what happens during the day. Issues of unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, and housing are universal and feed into inequities in cities around the world. Given this, many of these issues that lead to unsafe environments — and the perception of unsafe environments — cannot simply be solved with more policing and require a solution that keeps the community engaged.

In St. Louis, building these solutions required working with a cross-section of society, from the local communities to the business world, as well as with healthcare and social services. During these meetings, which began as far back as 2019, the groups explored where within the criminal justice system alternatives to traditional policing could help improve safety and the perception of safety. One of the issues repeatedly mentioned was dealing with individuals experiencing mental health or substance use crises. Because residents don't know of any alternatives, they call 911, which dispatches either the police or an ambulance, neither of whom will likely have the necessary capabilities to deal with such a situation. This often leads to people becoming unnecessarily entangled in the criminal justice or hospital emergency care system.

"Behavioral Health Response, diverts those experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis to professionals with the proper expertise."

To solve this, St. Louis developed a 911 diversion program, Behavioral Health Response, to divert those experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis to professionals with the proper expertise to handle the issue. The city partnered with a crisis line to provide people the opportunity to talk with professionals who can evaluate the situation. Using strategies like this, a professional can mitigate the problem before an unnecessary trip to the hospital, or a jail cell, becomes involved. They can even provide an in-person response if necessary. Clinicians partnered with police officers in real-time to address low-level, low-priority calls to engage people, assess them, stabilize them, identify their needs and connect them to those partners that can address them.

In addition to this work on the front lines, the city is also working on the back end to ensure that the system can handle this new strategy. Mental health providers have increased their hours, and their backend systems can help identify if a particular person in crisis may already be working with someone in the system and involve that person in the care. The program can also connect those it serves with peer support groups that provide them the space to talk with those who've lived through the same experiences. Having this support system makes it easier for patients to return home, where they often feel the safest and where they can recover the fastest.

This was all part of a new approach in St. Louis and how it interacts with its residents and spaces on an individual level. This includes finding ways to activate spaces in the city to provide a positive experience, particularly for young people. The city is partnering with communities to provide opportunities to engage youth by staging shows, encouraging physical activity, and providing food — especially important in the more food-insecure parts of the city. This is also important in helping address some of the trauma those in the city have faced through the years, which was only heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw increased rates of domestic violence and assaults citywide.

An important part of continuing, expanding, and replicating programs like this is measurement. For the St. Louis program, the city partnered with Mastercard to leverage its Test & Learn technology to help tell the impact story. Test & Learn used multiple data sources to pull information together to create a coherent case study that showed how the city saved a large number of man-hours because of the program, which in turn leads to significant savings in money. Fewer police officers were dispatched, and fewer EMS transports were needed, minimizing unnecessary hospital visits. Those that do have to go to the hospital receive better care, and health systems are now more willing to engage at the front lines knowing there is an ecosystem in place to make their jobs easier as well. Using Test & Learn analysis, the city found the following results:

Behavioral Health Response Program outcomes

2021 actuals	2022 estimates
450 hours saved	**1700** hours saved
650 police dispatches reallocated	**2000** police dispatches reallocated
250 EMS transports reprioritized	**900** EMS transports reprioritized
120 hospitalizations averted	**430** hospitalizations averted

St. Louis continues to confront challenges on perceptions of safety, police legitimacy, and procedural justice- but programs like Behavioral Health Response are a vital part of the solution. Taking a proactive approach that takes into account better ways to engage people in crisis and focus on the individual can be extremely valuable, and finding methods to measure success is important in scaling success.

Read more about this partnership

"Interagency approaches can pool resources where there are none and can help ensure that successful methods survive the change of administrations."

Discussion

Comprehensive planning approaches

Often after a traumatic event that threatens public safety happens, such as the mass shootings all too common in the United States, the instinct is to double down on draconian law enforcement. In reality, the better approach is to take a more proactive and comprehensive path toward better nightlife planning and management. Interagency strategies are crucial here, given that many of the interventions needed can be quite expensive. Interagency approaches can pool resources where there are none and can help ensure that successful methods survive the change of administrations.

In 2021, after a mass shooting in Austin's famous 6th Street entertainment district, city officials focused on an inter-departmental approach. This involved working with law enforcement while making it clear the burden was not entirely on them, and that a broader approach was needed. Part of this involved rethinking the district's public space. With narrow sidewalks, insufficient lighting and crowds that can approach 25 thousand people at weekends, the chaotic public space can lead to a chaotic environment. Improving the experience in the built environment is one tactic the city is exploring.

Additionally, diversifying activities so there is more live music, performances, comedy and theaters, restaurants, and cafes rather than just high-volume bars can help temper the underlying causes of violence. More remains to be done on this approach, but it is part of the long-term solution, as is improving communication and collaboration with operators. While nightlife businesses in Austin need to be more accountable and improve their operating standards, the police also need to take a more collaborative approach with them.

"Understanding design and safety from a gendered perspective is critical in building safe public spaces."

However, it is important that cities not wait until an incident like a mass shooting to act on comprehensive nightlife planning. Mass shootings are relatively rare compared to the ongoing gun violence across many American cities. Engaging with people and developing solutions before crises happen is the best strategy.

In St.Louis, the city leveraged federal funds to create safe spaces in the summer for people to take their kids from 8:00am to 6:00pm where they could get three full meals and participate in a variety of activities. This keeps the youth out of trouble and provides them with a safe space to congregate and socialize in a positive way. This is just one example of a more comprehensive solution in a broader, community-based approach to public safety.

"No amount of lighting can out-design the patriarchy."

Gender-sensitive design

It has been said that no amount of lighting can out-design the patriarchy, and this is evident in the fact that cities have not been designed from a female perspective regarding nighttime experience. Understanding design and safety from a gendered perspective is critical in building safe public spaces. It is important that urban planners keep those who have been most disadvantaged in the conversation as we try to reframe these spaces.

Basic differences in the way women and men interact condition their nocturnal experience but are often disregarded when designing public space. For instance, while men usually form lines when socializing, women commonly form circles. Male social interactions are therefore attuned with the traditional bar setting with stools placed in a row, while women feel more comfortable in a booth or lounge setting. Another example of gender-blind design can be observed in the distribution and availability of public restrooms. At night, public toilet facilities provided for women are usually less than half than those provided for men. While men's urinals are open through the night, most women's toilets close earlier, sending a message that women are not expected — or supposed — to be out in public after dark.

In Groningen, Netherlands, the city received a research grant for the development of a Night City Hall. The space is in the city center and provides services to people who've taken too many substances or alcohol or can report and receive counseling for sexual assault. It also provides many of the services that support nighttime gig workers, such as toilets, showers and spaces to rest.

Read more about gender-sensitive nighttime design

"As data become an increasingly important tool for nighttime economy planning, it is important to explore the potential implications for privacy."

The role of data

In Austin, data is playing an important role in the city's public safety response. The city started by analyzing venue occupancy data and working closely with the police department to track reductions in violent crime associated with the new measures the city is taking. This will help the city know which interventions are successful and support scaling them.

As data become an increasingly important tool for nighttime economy planning, it is important to explore the potential implications for privacy, as well as the possibility of exclusion. Data can be as simple as writing down lists of incidents and issues people have or as complicated as facial recognition software. Creating the right frameworks for responsible use for all types is essential. While some solutions like facial recognition can provide lots of efficiency in solving problems, they also come with a high social, cultural, and political cost in many places. Top-down approaches to collecting and using data with communities can breed distrust. Therefore, engagement in this area with communities is critical.

It is also crucially important to develop real questions for data to answer, rather than just treating the data as an answer in and of itself. Many times data just measures who is willing to complain and who is willing to report things rather than what actually happens. Measuring things like the intensity of policing and conflating it with intensity of crime, as so often happens, is the wrong approach to take when trying to use data to find solutions.

Data doesn't always lead to implementable solutions, and it is important that data and the findings that it produces are shared with communities in a way that they can receive and benefit from it. Decision-makers need to ensure that they're asking the right questions and collecting the right information to make useful decisions.

"Promoting greater public-private collaboration is key in securing the necessary funds to achieve these transformations."

Conclusion

This global discussion highlighted the need for cities to adopt a multidimensional approach to safety and inclusion after dark. Participants stressed the importance of transforming urban environments as well as updating norms and regulations to create better and safer experiences in the places we live in.

A key aspect mentioned throughout the discussion is the need to destigmatize and change the negative perception of certain groups, places and activities in order to remove the inequalities that make them feel vulnerable when experiencing the city after dark. Also, promoting greater public-private collaboration is key in securing the necessary funds to achieve these transformations—whether behavioral or in the built environment — and to democratize the use of urban spaces throughout the day.

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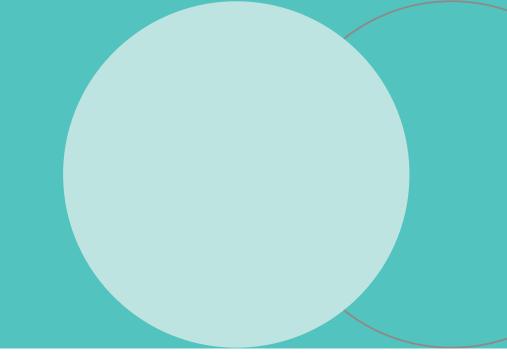NYC Office of Tech and Innovation
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Helpful links

Urban night-related news

Calles Seguras guidelines

Philadelphia nighttime data dashboard

Philadelphia City Council Arts and Culture Task Force nightlife data analysis

Global Nighttime Recovery Report, chapter 7: Measuring and analysing the nighttime city for data-backed decision-making and political advocacy

Safer night goals

Read more about Ask for Angela on the U.K. Metropolitan Police website

Download and read the Calles Seguras, Caminemos Unidas guide (Spanish)

Read more about this partnership

Read more about gender-sensitive nighttime design