



Reclaiming the night – developing the night time economy

A submission to the Task Force on Developing the Night Time Economy under the
direction of Minister Catherine Martin, T.D.,
Minister for Tourism, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

Submitted by Cllr Mary Hoade, President,

**On behalf of the Executive Committee and Membership of the Association of Irish
Local Government**

Purpose of paper: the purpose of this paper is to contribute the perspective of the Association of Irish Local Government to the consideration of the development of the night-time economy as provided for in the Programme for Government.

Structure of paper: the paper reviews the commitments in the Programme for Government regarding the night time economy; it acknowledges that there have been concurrent developments both foreseen and unforeseen including the Covid crisis which has had a severe impact on night-time culture and economy, and on a more positive note, the Town Centre First Initiative; the paper continues by commenting on the benefits and the costs which might arise from the local authority perspective in fostering the night time sector; and it concludes by emphasising that any initiatives in relation to the development of the night time economy should be situated firmly within the existing democratic and operational structures of local government. The penultimate section highlights a case study of how Galway City Council engaged with the bench-marking Purple Flag initiative and worked with a range of other agencies to set high standards of safety, security, mobility and diversity for its night time offering.

Programme for Government Context: Developing the Night Time Economy

The Programme for Government published in June 2020 gave the following commitments – although all such commitments which were developed in the spring of 2020 when Covid seemed controllable must be read in the knowledge that a “force majeure” situation has arisen due to the unforeseen severity and longevity of the pandemic.

- Establish, in the first thirty days of Government a Night-time Economy Taskforce.
- Conduct a full review of the regulations and policy framework governing our night-time culture at national and local level, including the staggering of trading hours for pubs, late bars, clubs and restaurants.
- Modernise our licensing laws and application processes.
- Support the establishment of the Night-Time Culture Mayors proposed for Dublin and Cork and examine the establishment of local committees to advance and improve our night-time entertainment and creative offerings in other urban areas.

The Government through the office of Minister Catherine Martin, TD, announced the establishment of the Taskforce in July 2020.

It comprises seventeen members mostly drawn from civil service Departments and associated agencies such as An Garda Síochána, the National Transport Authority and the National Cultural Institutions. There are two elected members on the Taskforce – the Lord Mayor of Dublin and Cork respectively.

While the Taskforce has been deliberating a number of developments have taken place which will impact in a significant way on the evolution of the night-time economy concept.

Concurrent developments:

Covid prolongation: The prolongation of Covid emergency measures has forced the closure of all night-time venues for an unprecedented duration of twelve months and more. The impact this closure will have on the sustainability of many venues and night time networks is as yet incalculable. The essence of the night time economy and culture was that of people assembled in compact venues such as coffee bars and theatres. The prohibitive circumstance of a public health emergency lasting for one year – and at time of writing with an uncertain end state - could not have been envisaged when the Taskforce was established.

Town Centre First Initiative: A Town Centre First Initiative was established by Mr Peter Burke, T.D., Minister of State for Local Government and Planning. The objectives of the Town Centre First initiative have strong synergy with the Taskforce on the Night-time economy – essentially to rejuvenate the town centres as attractive places to work, to live and to recreate both day and night. A vibrant town centre will act as an incentive for people to invest in urban renewal and for others to consider residing in town centre locations. Such a reversal of the drift away from town centres has the potential to provide a ready audience for commercial and cultural activities by day and by night.

Safety concerns: The safety of night time activity and especially the safety of women in the night setting remains a concern on the public agenda. A survey published by Transport Infrastructure Ireland in March 2021 highlighted that 55% of women surveyed would not use public transport by night.¹ In real terms a number of well-reported assaults on women in urban settings in the past number of months has reinforced the real issues that surround the safety of women in cities and towns notwithstanding the work that has taken place through campaigns such as Dublin City Council's lead on the UN Safe Cities Programme.²

Local authority authorities and the night time economy – functional issues

¹ "Travelling Women's Shoes", TII, published March 2021

² Report of Scoping Study for Dublin City Council Safe City Programme, Challenging Sexual Harassment and Other Forms of Sexual Violence in Public Space, DIT/Dublin City Council, 2015

From the City and County Council viewpoint there are a multitude of issues some involving the reconciliation of conflicting visions regarding quality of life.

The headings involving local government functions whether solely the preserve of the local authority, or in combination with other agencies include:

- Planning policy both at development plan and individual planning application level – while our plans are comprehensively spatial in nature there also needs to be a temporal element – in other words how do planners and elected members envisage their cities and towns after normal daylight hours?
- Promotion of enterprise – night time can be a fertile breeding space for imaginative start-ups and customer-facing services which can bring added vitality to otherwise moribund streetscapes.
- Public lighting – for people to feel safe and facilitated at night there has to be high-quality public lighting systems in place. However this does pose a conflict with environmental principles. “Green” thinking would suggest a minimal approach to public lighting so as to reduce electricity consumption – witness “Earth Hour” for example when public floodlighting is switched off on landmark buildings. Technology may help to provide a middle ground with LED lighting reducing energy use and sensor type equipment helping ensure lighting is turned on when and where it is needed.
- Public safety – closely related but broader than the public lighting question is that of the design of the urban realm with safety and security in mind throughout the design process. The perception of women that their safety is compromised in many street settings where vacant or dark sections have to be addressed in the rearrangement of street furniture, lighting and pavement configuration. A study carried out by DIT which recorded the responses of women transiting the Heuston Station-Abbey Street corridor of Dublin City concluded that: ³“A recurring theme is the sense that the public realm is far less safe for women at night.”
- Street cleansing and maintenance – night-time activity can leave its mark on the streetscape in a way that is not always the most attractive. Intensified night time activity will involve costlier cleansing and maintenance regimes
- Public order – while primarily a policing role, local authorities do have an interest via their involvement in Joint Policing Committees. The right mix of night time activity will

³ *Op cit*

help ensure that there is not necessarily a relationship between intensified night life and public order infringements. However there are issues of which the patrons of night time activity may themselves be entirely innocent.

Firstly, there is the reality that opportunistic crime thrives in the shadows – witness consistent Garda advice on lighting as a crime prevention tool.

Secondly, there is public perception of what constitutes a breach of the peace. For instance, residents who live in a settled area close to a night time venue might perceive any change in noise level at all as being detrimental and will be on the phone immediately to their local Councillor. However it is impossible for even the most orderly crowd to enter or egress a venue without making some level of sound. Again, this poses a conflict of interests which providers and public agencies will have to navigate.

- Licensing and permits – much of the licensing labyrinth is matter for the Dept. of Justice which needs to codify the complex foliage of licensing around night-time venues. However Councils administer their own share of licensing rubrics in the areas of, for example, pavement seating and conditions attached to planning decisions. Promoters have expressed frustration at the multiple layers of bureaucracy needing navigation before even the most modest night-time enterprise involving food and beverage can get under way.

Local government – budgetary issues

The night economy poses both a utility and a cost to local government infrastructure and services.

From a capital spending viewpoint, the night time economy makes great sense making 24-hour use of expensive infrastructure such as pavements, drainage and car-parking. There is also the potential to make greater use of Council provided arts infrastructure such as libraries, arts centres and town halls.

However, from a current spending point of view this will also bring extra costs by way of additional staffing of council facilities, street cleansing, fire brigade cover and the like. Staff will, understandably, seek overtime premia for late-night working. It is not clear how the Councils will be able to recover the costs of such extra spend.

Local government – democratic issues

Two of the commitments in the programme for Government relate to the establishment of “Night Time Mayors” and the examination of establishing specific committees to promote the night-time economy.

In relation to the night-time mayor, it would seem surely to make much more sense to fashion the concept around the existing mayoral role rather than creating confusion or unnecessary duplication by having a functionary with a similar title. Adding a night-time portfolio to the existing Mayoral suite would bring with it all the civic authority vested in the office with its ability to call in support from across the range of City Council departments. Ireland’s cities – certainly outside Dublin – are too small to have two mayors.

One area where there may be room for integrating this concept ab initio is in the structuring of the Directly Elected Mayor scheduled for Limerick within the next eighteen months. The legislation for same is currently being drafted and it would make sense to propose that some reference be included to the Mayor having a role in the promotion of a night-time economy for the city.

In relation to the idea of special committees, similar considerations apply. The last thing that the local government system needs with its already multi-layered committee hierarchy is yet another committee. Rather the remit of the existing LCDC could be readily expanded to include representatives from the night-time sector economy. This would make use of the existing structures and linkages within the Council and obviate the need to establish yet another secretariat and administrative back office. Crucially it would facilitate the night-time sector to key in to supports and expertise already deployed to service the LCDC from the Council’s Enterprise and Community Departments.

Case Study – Galway City Council

The City Council and the Purple Flag benchmark programme for fostering a safe yet vibrant night time economy

Galway City Council has taken a collaborative approach to managing the night time economy through the Purple Flag initiative which aims to increase the profile of footfall to the night economy by highlighting and putting plans in place to manage the great bars and clubs, transportation service and ensuring a safe vibrant cultural space.

The collaborative approach to the purple flag brings together local businesses, community reps, An Garda Síochána and cultural groups to assess and evaluate the night time economy and continually recommend improvements and changes.

Galway City first received its purple flag in 2015 and has retained its flag ever since. Galway has generally scored 'Above Standard' or 'Excellent / Outstanding' across the core agenda. This core agenda should be the basis for any consideration for new policies or initiatives for the night time economy:

- Wellbeing – Welcoming, Clean and Safe
- Movement – A Secure Pattern of Arrival, Circulation and Departure
- A Broad Appeal – A Vibrant Choice and a Rich Mix
- Place – A stimulation Destination and a vital place
- Policy Envelop – A clear aim and a common purpose

The 5 attributes highlighted in the purple flag are key to establishing, developing and maintaining a positive night economy

Wellbeing: A safe environment for all users, a clean environment with services available as required and a welcome for all people. The wellbeing of users has to be core to any policy or strategy for the night time economy

Movement: A range of options for safe public transport including taxis and buses. Alongside public transport a safe environment must be created to cater for people cycling and walking to the city centre, between venues and home again. Additionally, a range of closing times to ensure we don't have overcrowding on the streets at any one time.

A Broad Appeal: A range of products, services and entertainment that creates a family friendly environment. Attracting a wide range of users, mixing in a manner that is safe and enjoyable

Place: Multi use public realm spaces that add to the attraction of area and can provide the backdrop to an enjoyable evening. Public spaces should cater for entertainment, outdoor dining, and shopping in all weather.

Policy Envelope: Co-operation is key to achieving a thriving night time economy, collaboration between sectors, agencies, service providers and policy makers is essential.

Conclusion

The Covid pandemic has had a severe impact on the night time economy with many venues closed since March 2020. The night-time model of accommodating people in small spaces such as café bars and small theatres will be challenged by the separation requirements needed to maintain public health. So too will the willingness of certain demographics to return to town centres for evening time entertainment such will be their enduring concern regarding the presence of the virus.

However, it is nonetheless an important investment in the future to plan for the return and the promotion of a thriving night-time economy in which safety, security and respect for all who live and work in town and city centres is to the forefront.

Local authorities through their well-established community engagement and their democratic and operational structures are well placed to be at the forefront of developing the night time offering and thereby help to revitalise our urban centres into the future.