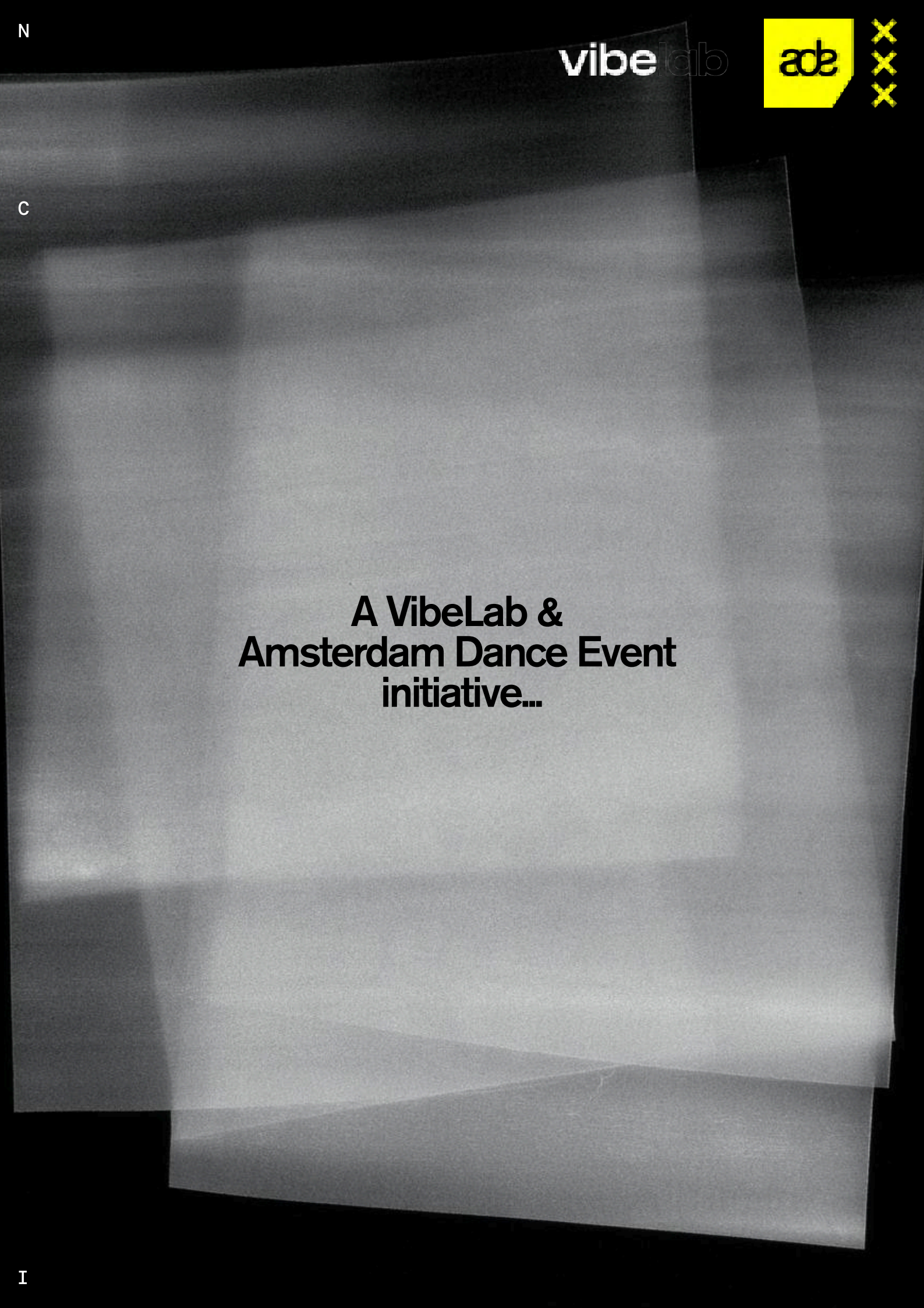
Nighttime Culture Index

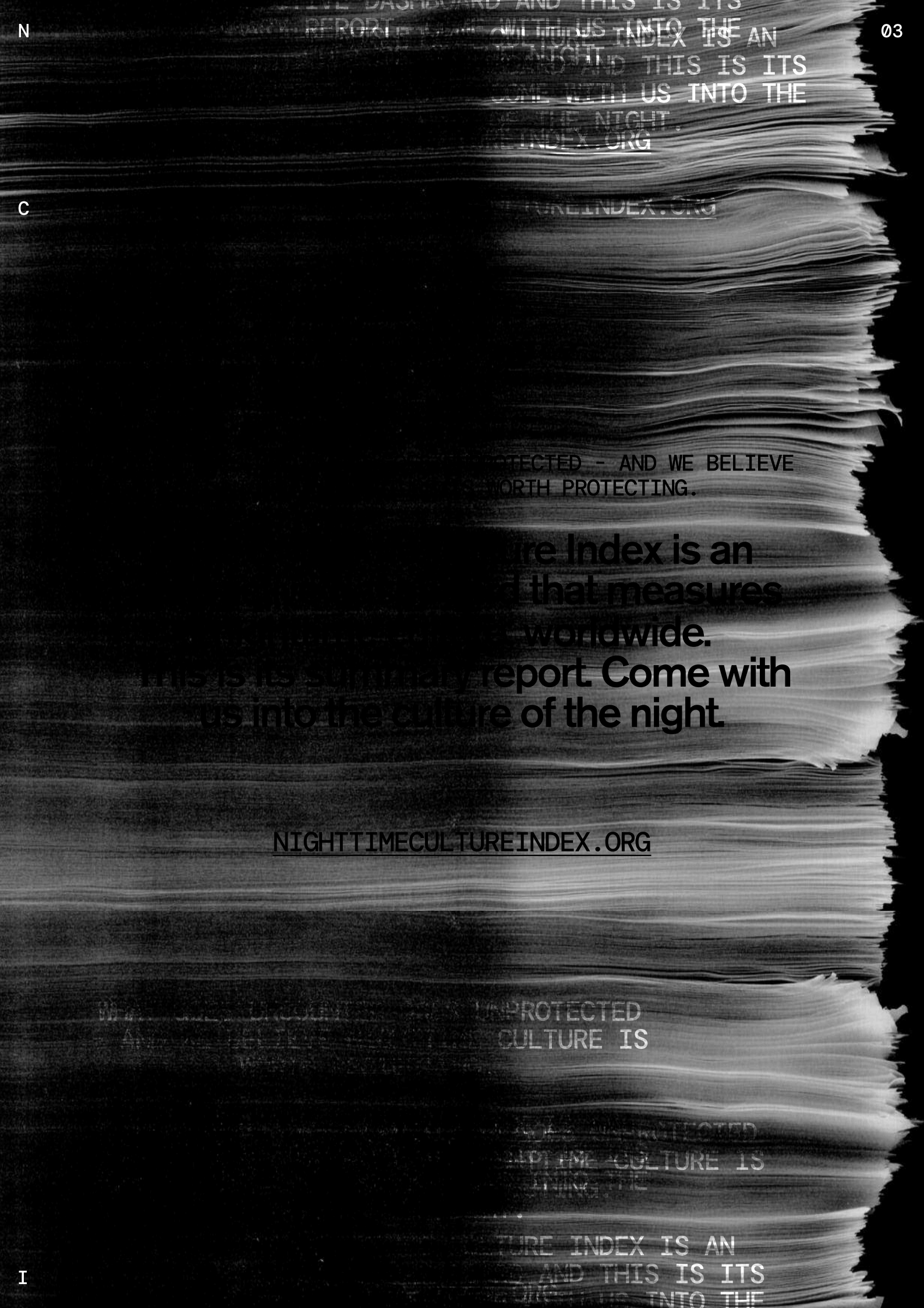
NCI

EDITION 1 - 2026


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A VibeLab &
Amsterdam Dance Event
initiative...

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FOREWORD

BY MIRIK MILAN
VIBELAB CO-FOUNDER

Throwing parties made me feel seen. Later, speaking up for the night as Amsterdam's Night Mayor gave me purpose.

Every party I've thrown, big or small, had a bit of play in it. Something that caught people off guard and changed how they felt in the room. After that shared moment, people drop their guard, feel more themselves and feel closer to each other. That connection is why I'm still here.

But a night like that doesn't come free. The people who make it are brave. They put their money, their name and their nerve on the line, taking risks most of the city never sees.

Night culture has always existed. We just rarely call it culture. Instead, the night gets managed and restricted, and that lands hardest on the people with the least power. We know what nightlife is worth in money. We've never had a way to show what it's worth as culture. That's why we made the Nighttime Culture Index.

Let's be clear: it is not a popularity contest. It's not about which city has the best nights. It's about showing the value of night culture in hard numbers, year after year.

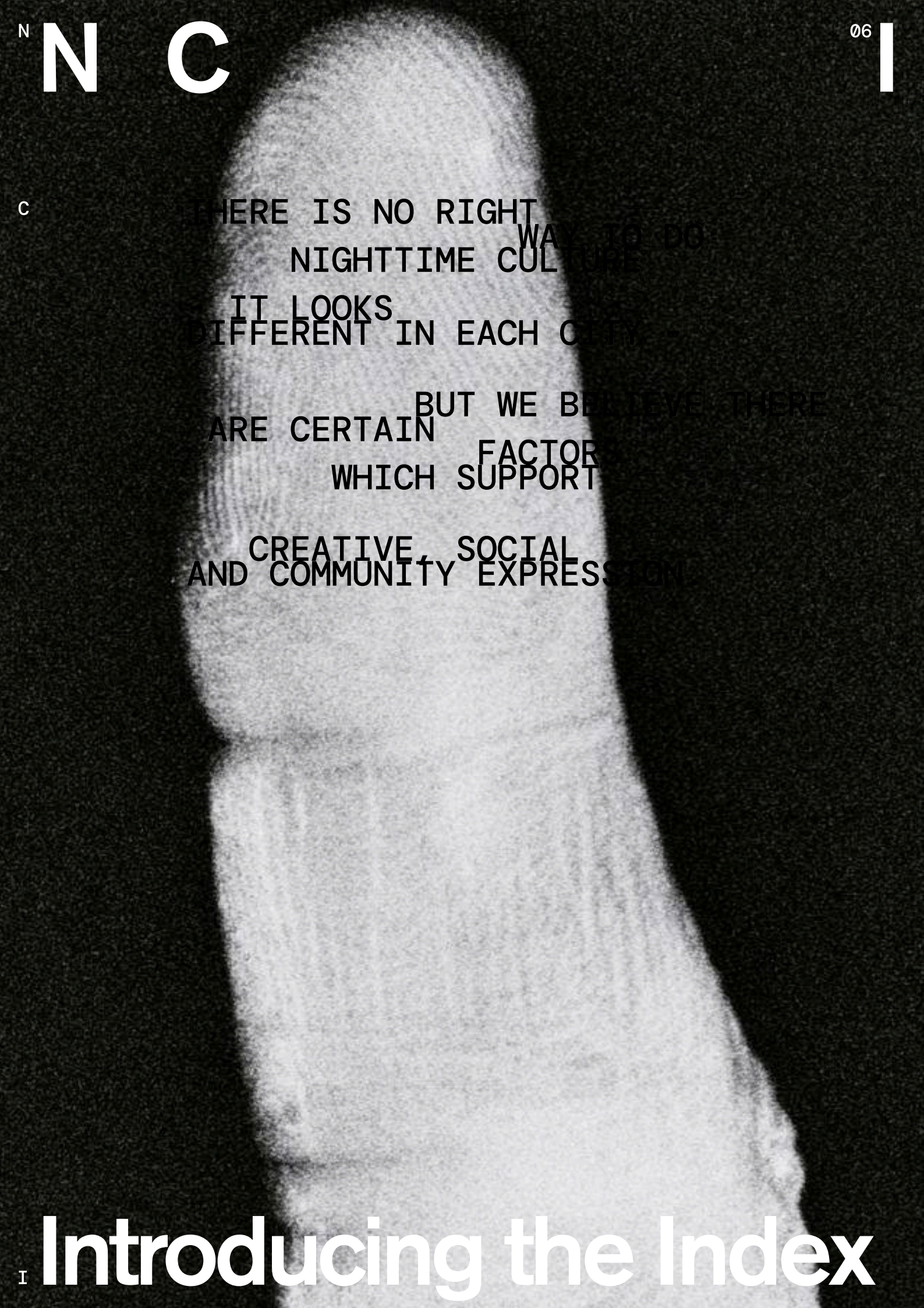
It's difficult and it isn't perfect. Building it was humbling, even for someone who has lived this from the inside. But the mission hasn't changed: to support creatives and keep pursuing nighttime culture.

I hope the Index helps us learn from the night, not just measure it. The underground keeps coming up with good ideas, made with little money and a lot of nerve. Why does the mainstream so rarely learn from it? Meanwhile, across the cities, newcomers are finding it extremely hard to get in. Being brave at night is getting more expensive. Platforms and education can be part of the answer, so people can still build a life in nightlife.

Costs and rents keep climbing, there are wars, and tech is eating our attention and our interest in each other. Nightlife hasn't lost its function. It's where people are seen, build resilience and learn things about life they won't learn anywhere else. It's time to come together and keep it for everyone.

Thank you to everyone who gave their time and trust.

Throwing parties made me feel seen. I want the next person to get that chance. Nightlife is brave. Let's help it flourish.



Introducing the Index

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DEFINING NIGHTTIME CULTURE

Night culture has always existed, even if it wasn't recognised explicitly as such. It has often gone by other names: subculture, a scene, a movement. Rarely has it been recognised purely as culture.

Things are different at night: opportunities open up, people feel looser, and connection happens faster. The night is a space of experimentation and excitement, where things unfold differently from the day.

For too long, that difference has been met with suspicion. The night has been something to manage, control and restrict, and those restrictions have too often fallen hardest on the people with the least power: women, queer people, migrants, Indigenous communities, and the working class, among many others.

But we know the truth to be different. Far from simply a site of hedonism and excess, the night has nurtured and created much of the culture we value in the day – be it inspiration for next year's catwalks or the soundtrack to next summer's blockbuster. Throughout history, ideas, risks and experiments that first took shape on dancefloors, in basements and in back rooms have eventually become mainstream culture.

What is nighttime culture?
The Nighttime Culture Index exists to protect nighttime culture and the communities who create and sustain it. It aims to guide conversations about what happens at night away from a purely regulatory or economic lens to one that values the cultural aspects of the night. In order to protect these forms of culture, they must first be measured.

Nighttime culture covers a wide range of activity, from nightclubs to performance to city-wide festivals. Its boundaries are not fixed: it sits within a wider cultural ecosystem in which different artforms inform one another, and it has different expressions in each city.

What we measure is events which primarily take place at night, or for which night hours materially shape their social and cultural expression. We also recognise that night culture can – and often does – express itself in the daytime too. The meaning of a traditionally 'daytime' artform can be changed by expressing it at night, too. Put simply, it recognises a simple fact: that a majority of live, place-based culture is experienced at night. And the night changes both how it is experienced and regulated, so we should study that.

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Introducing the Index

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AMSTERDAM LAGOS NEW YORK
SÃO PAULO SEOUL SYDNEY

The Index aims to be holistic and includes theatre, performance, art and comedy to name just a few. But we do have a closer focus on music–led nightlife, partly due to the specialisms of both ADE and VibeLab, but also because this form of nighttime culture has historically been the most subject to control and regulation – and where there are the biggest gaps in the cultural evidence base. However, we measure indicators that have broad implications for cities, brands, creators and anyone who goes out at night, such as safety, transport, policy, licensing.

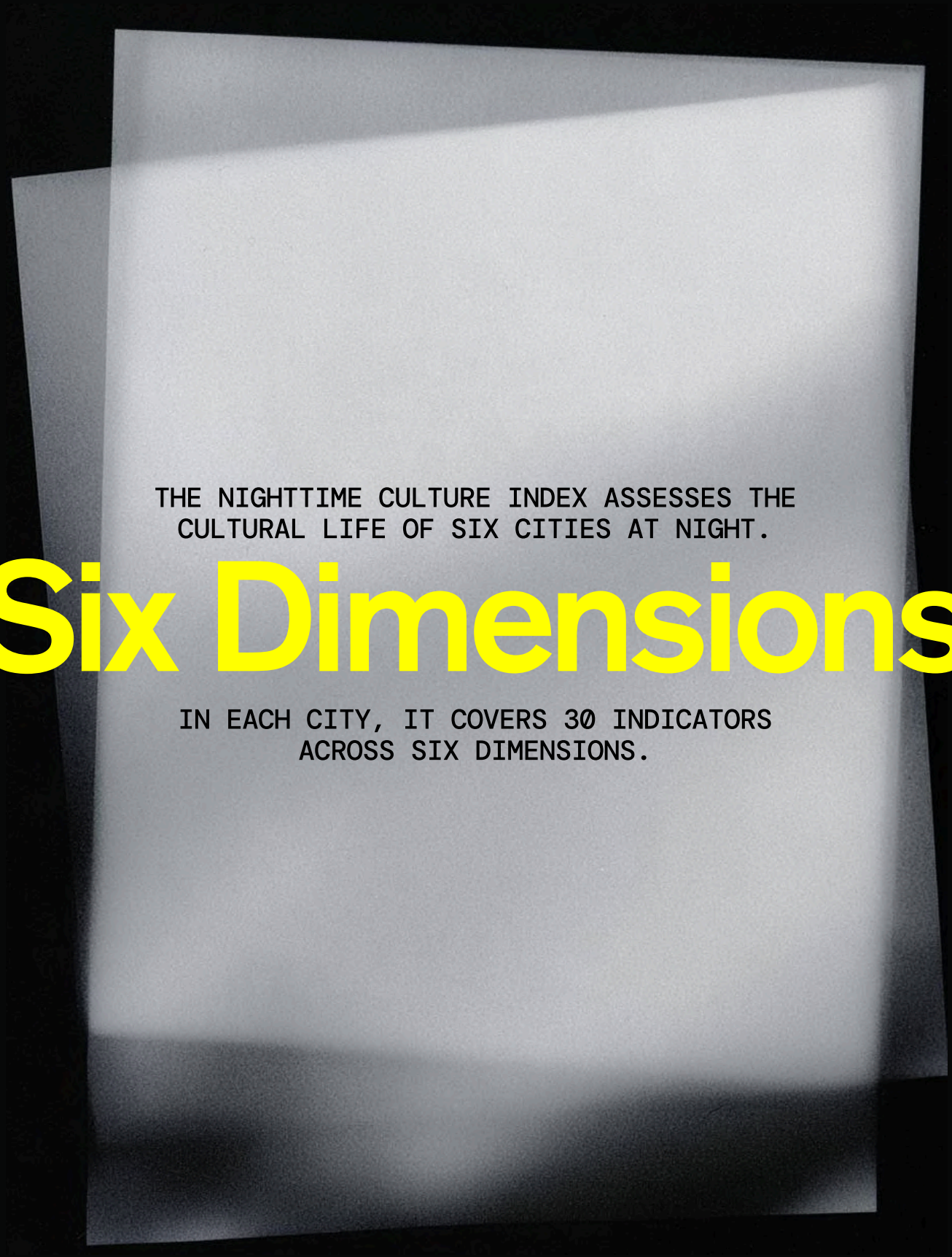
The first NCI takes six cities, one from each inhabited continent, to create a picture of how nighttime culture is expressed across the globe. It is not a ranking, but an attempt to measure the core elements that might measure a healthy and successful nighttime culture ecosystem. There is no right way to do nighttime culture – it looks different in each city – but we believe there are certain factors which support creative, social and community expression.

Our focus is cultural, but the argument is also economic. Decisions that affect nighttime culture also have broad economic impacts. We don't argue for either or – the Index exists to expand the frame of reference for how cities, brands and industry understand nightlife. After all, there is no business without culture.

This report draws out key insights across and within cities – but the full Index is available on the Nighttime Culture Index dashboard at nighttimecultureindex.org

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Introducing the Index



THE NIGHTTIME CULTURE INDEX ASSESSES THE CULTURAL LIFE OF SIX CITIES AT NIGHT.

Six Dimensions

IN EACH CITY, IT COVERS 30 INDICATORS ACROSS SIX DIMENSIONS.

N How We C Measure

DIMENSION 1

Creative Ecology: How does the local cultural ecosystem support original creative work and careers, through both educational opportunities and experimental, diverse programming?

Why it was chosen: A city can have a busy night out while producing little new work of its own. Without this dimension the index would count the consumption of culture and miss its production.

Creative Ecology Indicators:

- Education pathways into nightlife careers
- Experimental venues
- Non-music cultural events at night
- Diversity of scenes & experimental programming

DIMENSION 2

Space & Infrastructure: What kind of physical spaces host night culture, and how many are there? How accessible is nighttime transport to get there and home again?

Why it was chosen: Night culture is physical. It needs places to gather, be heard and stay open late, and a city built so that people can reach them. When those conditions are lost, the culture and connections built around them is hard to replace.

Space & Infrastructure Indicators:

- Nighttime activity
- Programmed cultural venues open at night
- Influence of informal & grassroots spaces
- Rehearsal & recording studios
- Late-night public transport coverage
- Number of music venues
- Number of music festivals
- Nightlife districts

I Six Dimensions

How We Measure & Six Dimensions

DIMENSION 3

Diversity & Representation: How does this city's night culture represent its residents, across cultural background, economic status, gender, physical ability, sexuality?

Why it was chosen: A calendar full of cultural events says nothing about who is on the line-up, who can afford the ticket or who can get through the door. This dimension scores those things, because a city's night culture should be made by, open to and shared between all the people who live there.

Diversity & Representation Indicators:

- Gender balance on lineups
- Diversity in venue ownership & production
- Cultural diversity in programming
- Ticket price, wage-normalised
- Artistic & musical innovation
- Balance of local and international artists

DIMENSION 4

Community & Belonging: How does a night out feel in the city, and who has the power to shape their scene? Who feels safe at night, and what data and resources support safer nights for different communities?

Why it was chosen: Listings and licensing data can tell you the scale of nighttime culture, but to understand how it is experienced is just as important. A good night can be ruined by a bad vibe, so this dimension includes the views of the people who go out and work at night about how it feels.

Community & Belonging Indicators:

- Nighttime crime data measurement
- Perceived safety at night
- Sense of cultural ownership & belonging
- Harm reduction & welfare

How We Measure

DIMENSION 5

Policy & Civic Health: How is night culture protected and valued in governance structures and programs, both in and out of government?

Why it was chosen: A thriving nighttime culture can easily die out if it is not protected or supported by government and advocates. Because nighttime culture needs support, this dimension measures the conditions which help it thrive.

Policy & Civic Health Indicators:

- Number of cultural conferences
- Nighttime governance
- Legal status & protection of cultural venues
- Public funding for nighttime culture
- Relationship with law enforcement
- Cross-agency coordination for nighttime culture

DIMENSION 6

Sustainability & Environment: How are venues, events and festivals reducing their footprint, and with what support? Are festivals using their platform to change behaviour?

Why it was chosen: Night culture takes place on land that everyone in the city shares. Caring for land – and the planet – is a collective responsibility that belongs to venues, festivals, audiences and cities together, so the index counts it as part of a healthy night culture.

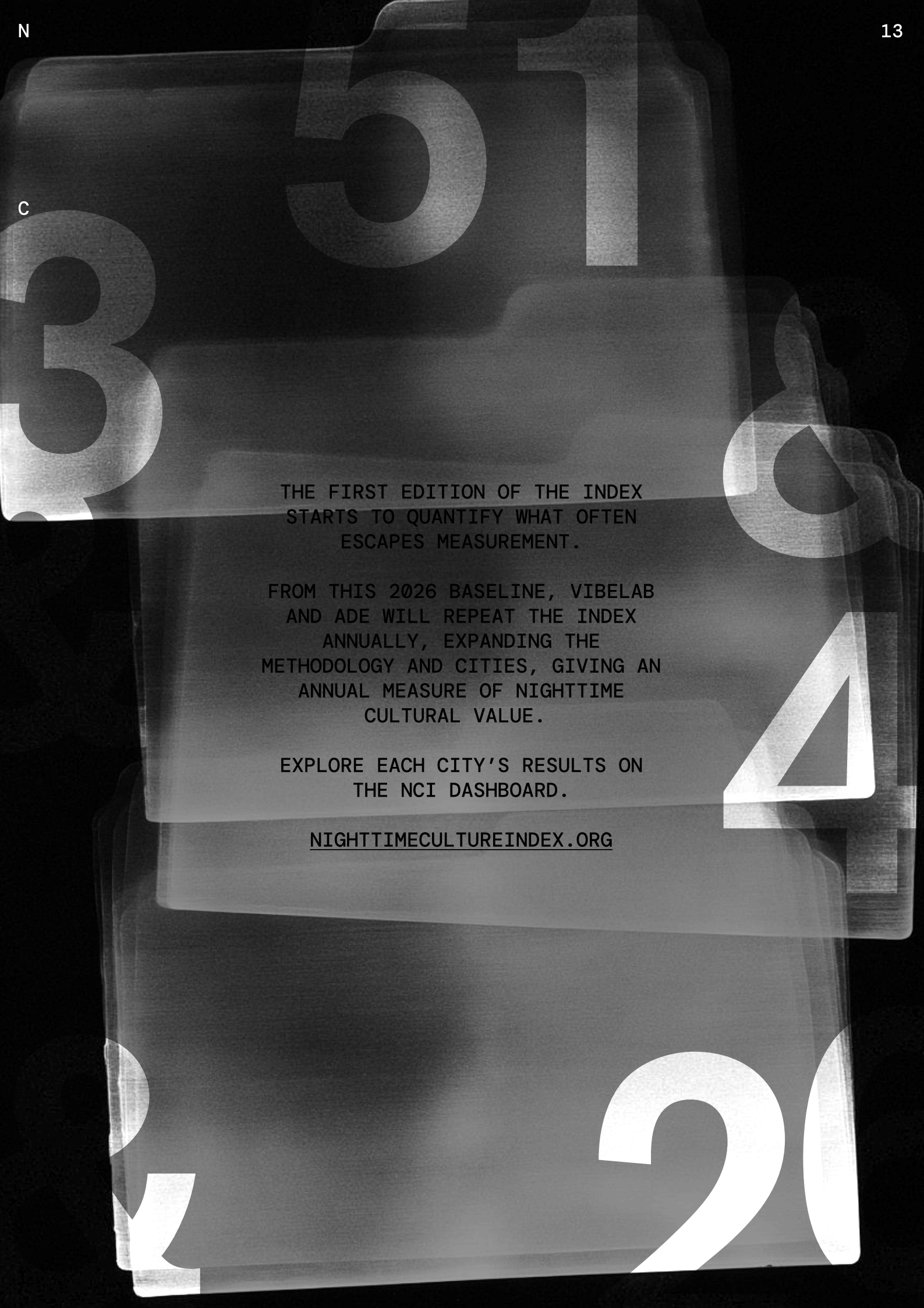
Sustainability & Environment Indicators:

- Festivals with sustainability commitments
- Public support for environmental sustainability

Our evidence comes from five sources. Desk research documented policy, public funding, and governance. Data collection covered 12,000+ event line-ups, 3,000+ venues and 29,000+ non-music cultural events. A survey of 767 respondents recorded people's views on nightlife. Interviews with 14 experts identified gaps. Focus groups with 67 stakeholders enriched findings with lived experiences.

Of the 30 indicators, 24 carry an index score, triangulated by 574 reviewer scores. The other six are reported as absolute figures or unscored findings.

Six Dimensions



THE FIRST EDITION OF THE INDEX STARTS TO QUANTIFY WHAT OFTEN ESCAPES MEASUREMENT.

FROM THIS 2026 BASELINE, VIBELAB AND ADE WILL REPEAT THE INDEX ANNUALLY, EXPANDING THE METHODOLOGY AND CITIES, GIVING AN ANNUAL MEASURE OF NIGHTTIME CULTURAL VALUE.

EXPLORE EACH CITY’S RESULTS ON THE NCI DASHBOARD.

NIGHTTIMECULTUREINDEX.ORG

Summary of Findings

KEY RESULTS
ACROSS ALL CITIES



Summary of Findings

"NIGHTLIFE IS NOT ABOUT CONSUMPTION, IT'S ABOUT EXPRESSION - AND THAT OFTEN NEEDS SUPPORT."

Nightlife is usually judged by what it can earn: ticket sales, footfall and jobs. These things matter, but it is only part of the story. The Nighttime Culture Index asks a different question: what is nightlife's cultural value? Across six cities – Amsterdam, Lagos, New York, São Paulo, Seoul and Sydney – we looked at who shapes the night, where it happens, how it feels and what it needs to last. The Index clearly shows its cultural value: creative expression, talent development, wellbeing, social connection and civic engagement are all supported by a thriving nighttime culture. It is where much of a city's culture is made, tested and shared, and this depends on conditions that are rarely measured – until now.

The good news is that nighttime culture is thriving in every city, even though it has different expressions everywhere. Some of the Index's highest scores are for non-music events – theatre, galleries, opera, comedy – the things that often spring to mind when you think of culture. What varies most across the cities is music-led activities and spaces: venues and nightclubs that incubate tomorrow's musicians and DJs, but are often the subject of regulation and control. Too often, these venues are left out of the conversation, which is why the Index seeks to surface data on these spaces particularly. The Index highlights that still too little is being done to protect this culture, and the lowest scores across the Index are for indicators relating to legal protection for venues, cross-agency coordination, governance and festival sustainability.

Cost is the clearest dividing line. Entry to a typical club night costs about an hour of minimum-wage work in Sydney, nine in São Paulo and about 25 in Lagos. Asked who night culture is for, many participants told us: those with money. Access to culture – whatever form it takes – shouldn't be limited to only those who are able to afford it, but without support there is a risk of it becoming elitist. Many cities now have dedicated nighttime offices, but most are still built around nighttime economy rather than nighttime culture – or only focus on certain artforms at the expense of others. Nightlife is not about consumption, it's about expression – and that often needs support.

Summary of Findings

"WE KNOW THAT NIGHTTIME EXPERIMENTS AND IDEAS FIRST FORMED ON DANCE FLOORS SOON BECOME DAYTIME CULTURE AND SHAPE THE WORLD WE LIVE IN."

However, venue numbers and listings don't tell the whole story. Whatever a city's size, creators told us they feel gaps in the venue ecosystem, from access and licensing to who gets into the room to present their work. Informal, DIY and public spaces often fill them: street parties in São Paulo, parks in New York, radio stations in Seoul. They offer lower cost places to experiment with new formats and ideas, but come with more risks.

Most often, it is grassroots and alternative creators and producers who are leading on creating inclusive, safe and sustainable spaces, especially for marginalised communities. They push the creative envelope – and social change – forward (with diverse line-ups, welfare teams and inclusive door policies) but are often those with the least support. Diversity continues to be an issue overall: men make up 68-73% of club night line-up bookings in all six cities, and respondents in most cities told us that men continue to own most of the venues. Safety at night remains an issue, particularly for women, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Our research highlights potential solutions, too: across the cities, participants told us that greater collaboration, resource sharing and organising could help nighttime creators advocate better for what they need. Education, too, is important in supporting the wider nighttime ecosystem: helping the next biggest act to hone their craft or producers to navigate complex regulations. However, too often we heard that educational programmes and support do not reach those who need them most, and may not necessarily lead into work.

The Index produces numbers, but what sits behind them is in-depth research and conversations with hundreds of participants into the cultural meaning and significance of the indicators. We know that nighttime experiments and ideas first formed on dance floors soon become daytime culture and shape the world we live in. Recognising that fact is what this index seeks to do: highlighting the social and cultural role that nightlife plays in society. We argue it is cultural value that should be considered when cities, brands and industry make decisions about investment, not just economic ones. A world without culture is a dull one, and most often that culture starts at night.



What We Found

Headline Numbers

Who We Spoke To

767 SURVEY RESPONSES

67 FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

14 EXPERT INTERVIEWS

What We Analysed

12,664 EVENT LINE-UPS

3,073 VENUES ASSESSED

29,727 NON MUSIC-CULTURAL EVENTS RESEARCHED,

OF WHICH **1,236** INDIVIDUAL EVENTS ANALYSED

Indicators & Scores

180 INDICATOR ANALYSES:

30 INDICATORS **x6** CITIES

144 FINAL SCORES:

24 INDICATORS CARRY AN INDEX SCORE

574 INDIVIDUAL SCORES ENTERED:

6 INDICATORS ARE SCORED IN ABSOLUTE NUMBERS OR AVERAGES

Trends at Night

MEGA TRENDS ACROSS CITIES:

HOUSE
GQOM
HYPERPOP
JAZZ
OUTDOOR EVENTS
DIY
BAILE FUNK
DRAG
KUDURO
LATIN AND BRAZILIAN SOUNDS
QUEER EVENTS
TECHNO
HIP HOP
AFRO-ELECTRONIC

AMSTERDAM
- LISTENING SESSIONS
- B2BS
- BAILE FUNK
- BRAZILIAN SOUNDS
- DRAG
- GQOM
- HOUSE
- HYPNOTIC SWAMPY
- JAZZ
- JUNGLE
- KUDURO
- LATINO SOUNDS
- MULTI-PURPOSE CLUBS
- NEO-SOUL
- POST-INTERNET GARAGE
- SOBER PARTIES

LAGOS
- AFROTECH
- FUJI X EDM
- FUNK FUSION
- GQOM
- HYPERPOP
- KUDURO
- MARA
- TECHNO

NEW YORK
- DIY QUEER EVENTS
- DRUM AND BASS
- DUB SOUND SYSTEMS
- ELECTRONIC IMPROVISATION
- ELECTRONIC MUSIC
- JAZZ
- JAZZ IMPROVISATION
- LIVE HARDWARE SETS
- PARK JAMS

SÃO PAULO
- AFROBEATS
- DISCO
- AFRO HOUSE
- AMAPIANO
- BAILE FUNK
- BASS MUSIC
- BOUYON
- FOOTWORK
- GQOM
- HARD TECHNO
- HIP HOP
- HOUSE
- LATIN BASS
- SAMBA
- SOUND HEALING

SEOUL
- ASIAN DANCE MUSIC
- HYPERPOP
- OUTDOOR FESTIVALS
- AMBIENT
- DEEP HOUSE
- EXPERIMENTAL HIP HOP
- FREEDOM TO DANCE
- ORGANIC PARTIES
- UK DANCE MUSIC

SYDNEY
- DIY
- HOUSE PARTIES
- UNCONVENTIONAL SPACES
- DIGITAL RADIO
- EXPERIMENTAL DRAG
- EXPERIMENTAL JAZZ
- GRIME
- HYPER-LOCAL COLLECTIVES
- IMMERSIVE CLUB EXPERIENCES
- JAZZ DOOF
- JAZZ JAM NIGHTS
- LO-FI
- QUEER BURLESQUE
- QUEER-LED HYPERPOP
- SKATE PARK PUNK SHOWS
- SKRAMZ

Key

Night

Cultu

Findings

Index

Key Findings

Night culture is thriving across the index cities. But what varies by city is the scale, support for night culture, and who is able to take part. We asked people what made them *proud* of their city's nightlife, and we heard about many scenes and spaces. Lagos raves like Group Therapy. Sydney's Ramadan night markets and community-owned warehouse theatre. New York City parties and festivals celebrating Black music history. São Paulo's underground electronic spaces, queer-run parties, and annual WME (Women's Music Event). Seoul's community radio and how venues like Kockiri bring many scenes into one room. Amsterdam's array of independent venues – and, of course, ADE. Indicators measuring cultural activity – non-music culture at night, the importance of informal spaces, rehearsal and recording studios, and cultural conferences – have some of the highest scores across the index. These six cities, each very different, come alive at night.

But night culture's scale and accessibility separate cities:

- **Venues:** New York and Amsterdam have about 50 dedicated music venues per million people. Sydney has about 30, Seoul about 12, São Paulo about 7, and Lagos about 1. *(Every city defines its metro area differently, so these figures are approximate.)*
- **Festivals:** The Amsterdam region held 105 large music festivals in 2025, against 47 and 45 in the Sydney and São Paulo regions, and just 16 in Lagos State. A typical festival day ticket costs between 3–4 hours of minimum-wage work in Amsterdam and New York – but over 37 hours of work in São Paulo and Lagos.
- **Lowest scores:** The lowest-scoring indicators across the board are about protection and sustainability of night culture, such as legal protections for venues, cross-agency coordination, governance, and festival sustainability.

These next pages highlight key findings from the research. Some findings confirm existing understandings of trends in nightlife – and others surprised us.

INDICATORS MEASURING CULTURAL ACTIVITY – NON-MUSIC CULTURE AT NIGHT, THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMAL SPACES, REHEARSAL AND RECORDING STUDIOS, AND CULTURAL CONFERENCES – HAVE SOME OF THE HIGHEST SCORES ACROSS THE INDEX.

C **Cost was one of the most frequently-repeated challenges for promoters, venues and audiences alike. But the new finding is how a night out is far more expensive in some cities than others.** Who is night culture for? When asked, focus group participants in several cities said: those with money. But the cost of a night out varies significantly across cities. Measured in hours of minimum-wage work, entry to a typical club night costs:

- about 1 hour in Sydney
- 1.3 in Amsterdam
- 1.7 in Seoul
- 1.8 in New York
- 9 in São Paulo
- about 25 in Lagos

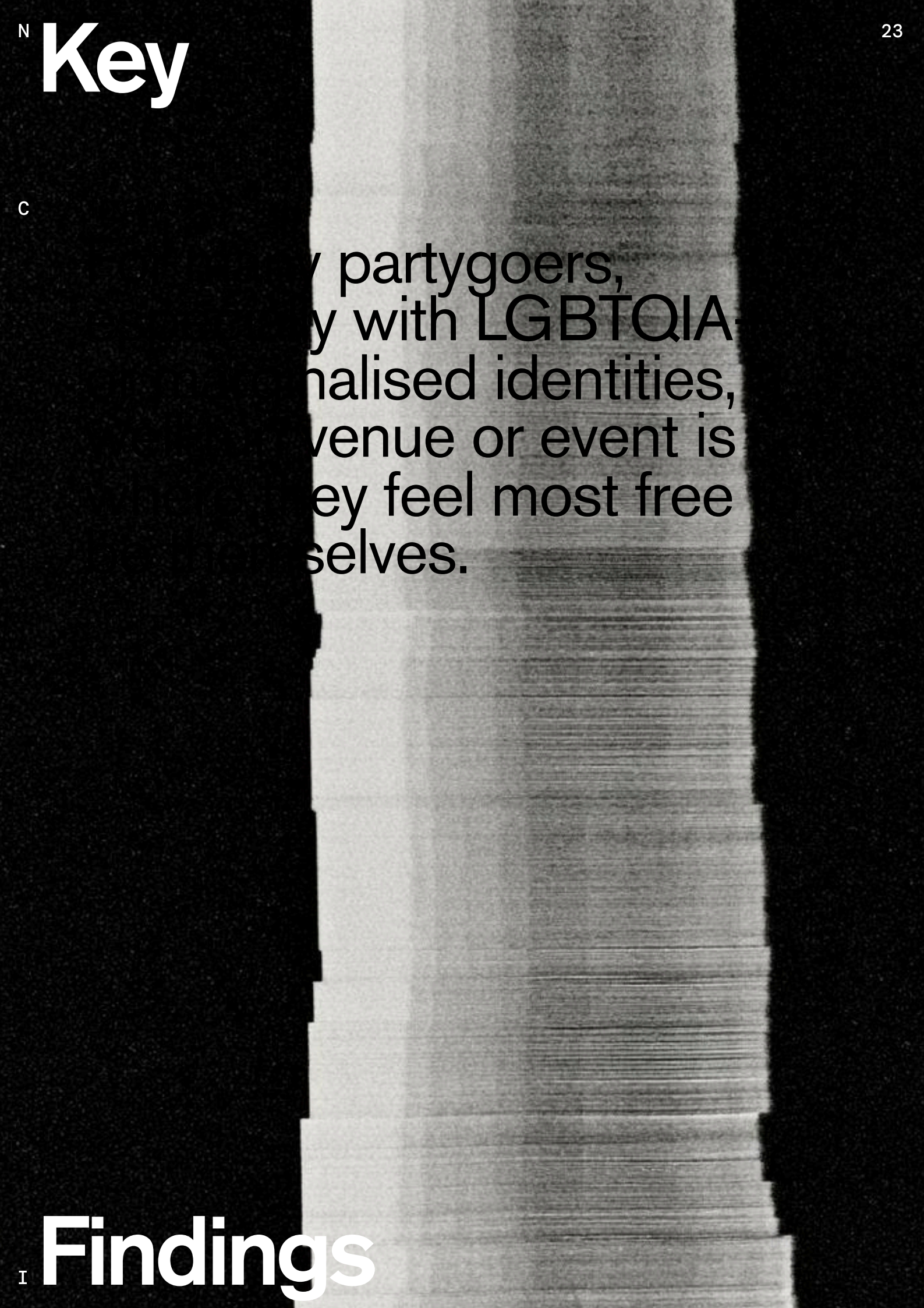
These figures exclude the cost of drinks, getting there and back, or any other costs of the evening. Some experts observed that rising costs keep younger audiences out of clubs. Others pointed to growing costs for promoters: pricey venue hire and bar minimums in clubs, or expensive permits and equipment rentals associated with producing warehouse or off-location events.

Night venues do serve as "safer space." Across the index, a majority of respondents feel safe inside nighttime venues: 86% to 88% in Amsterdam, New York and Sydney, and around three-quarters in Lagos, São Paulo and Seoul. For many partygoers, especially with LGBTQIA+ or marginalised identities, a well-run venue or event is where they feel most free to be themselves. One factor may be an explicit attention to care: a growing number of grassroots and alternative spaces offer some type of welfare, harm reduction, or awareness team. 73% of Amsterdam respondents say these teams would be helpful if something went wrong, and in Lagos, trained welfare staff are rated as helpful five times more often than the police. By contrast, feelings of safety drop outside venues: in every index city, people feel less safe in the streets of nightlife areas than inside venues, and in five of six, they feel less safe travelling home – which can add more to the cost of going out.

Night

Cultu

A GROWING NUMBER OF GRASSROOTS AND ALTERNATIVE SPACES OFFER SOME TYPE OF WELFARE, HARM REDUCTION, OR AWARENESS TEAM.



y partygoers,
y with LGBTQIA+
nalised identities,
venue or event is
ey feel most free
selves.

C **Grassroots, alternative and queer scenes pioneer diverse line-ups, care teams, and policies for inclusive spaces, but these practices are particularly vulnerable to rising costs.** Free-entry guestlists for trans and non-binary partygoers in São Paulo. LGBTQIA+ safer spaces in Lagos alternative nightlife. A growing number of collectives led by First Nations, queer and gender-diverse artists in Sydney. Increasing adoption of event welfare teams across cities. Grassroots and alternative spaces are far likelier than mainstream nightlife spaces to initiate measures for diverse line-ups, wellbeing and inclusion, but research participants told us that these aspects of events can sometimes be the first thing lost when budgets tighten.

Gender diversity on line-ups is still lagging: female and gender-diverse artists only make up 27% to 32% of line-ups across index cities, and are booked for fewer events on average. Yet even in cities where diversity has improved among artists and collectives, or among frontline staff, venues are still primarily run by men. Across cities, indicators around diversity onstage and backstage have some of the narrowest spreads in the dataset, suggesting more work to do in every city. In addition to lagging line-up diversity, experts in five of the six cities also scored the representation of women, LGBTQIA+ and other marginalised communities in venue ownership and leadership at 4 out of 10 or lower. Experts in Amsterdam and Seoul said diversity behind the scenes is getting worse, not better. In New York, participants could name only one large venue who'd previously had a Black female booker, and noted that front-of-house staff tend to be more racially diverse than more-powerful decision making roles at the top.

Night

Cultu

GRASSROOTS AND ALTERNATIVE SPACES ARE FAR LIKELIER THAN MAINSTREAM NIGHTLIFE SPACES TO INITIATE MEASURES FOR DIVERSE LINE-UPS, WELLBEING AND INCLUSION, BUT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS TOLD US THAT THESE ASPECTS OF EVENTS CAN SOMETIMES BE THE FIRST THING LOST WHEN BUDGETS TIGHTEN.

C **Regardless how many dedicated music venues a city has, nightlife creators still feel gaps in the venue ecosystem.** Nightclubs and live venues are still the most-valued type of space in every index city but Lagos, where temporary spaces rank almost equal. New York and Amsterdam have about 50 dedicated music venues per million people, Greater Sydney slightly more than 30, the Seoul and São Paulo regions about 12 and 7, respectively; Lagos has just over 1. But participants across cities raised issues with access and licensing. Those from Amsterdam, Sydney and New York felt that large operators hold outsized influence over new and existing spaces. São Paulo operating licenses were reported to be costly and difficult to obtain, while Seoul has no real licensing category for a small venue that allows dancing. Lagos lacks venues for dance music, which pushes promoters towards wedding halls, photo studios, and multipurpose spaces instead.

Night culture isn't just clubs and bars. Informal, DIY and public spaces are critical infrastructure for night culture – especially for experimentation. As rising venue rental costs shut out early-stage collectives, or push programmers and venues to play it artistically safe, non-traditional spaces offer essential low-cost, low-barrier space to experiment. Lagos promoters seek out beaches and multipurpose spaces to play the genres that clubs won't programme. Young Amsterdam collectives rely on informal spaces that share volunteers and equipment. Seoul's record shops and community radio make up essential scene infrastructure alongside clubs. São Paulo's alternative culture historically flourished in street parties, while New Yorkers rate public space like parks almost equal to clubs in their importance to nightlife. While night culture does exist in clubs – artistic and social innovation is often happening in locations beyond them.

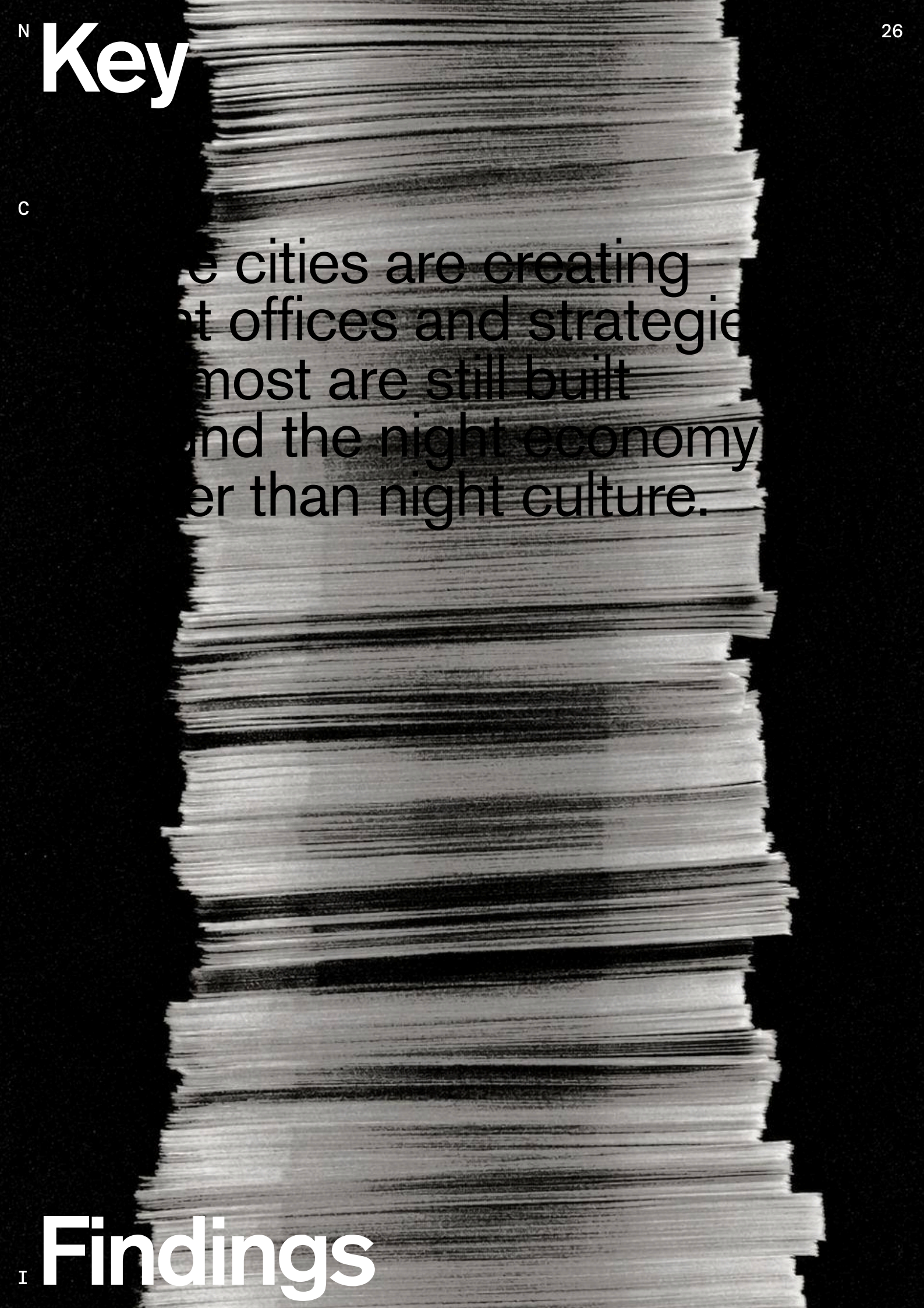
Night

WHILE NIGHT CULTURE DOES EXIST IN CLUBS -

ARTISTIC AND SOCIAL INNOVATION IS OFTEN HAPPENING IN LOCATIONS BEYOND THEM.

Cultu

Key Findings



C **Education for careers in nightlife exists in every city, but often relies on the ability to pay – and may not necessarily lead into paid work.** Where index cities offer university-level training in music business or electronic music production, it is usually embedded in broader degree programmes in music, stage design, or events management. Private studios or vocational schools provide further opportunities for those who can pay. But how training feeds into careers is still patchy: only a handful of institutions in Sydney, Lagos and New York require work placements as part of university or private education programmes. For now, state or scene-run programmes fill in the gaps. Venues, festivals, community radio stations, and night governance entities offer a variety of training programmes, open-decks nights, mentorship and more, to train early-career actors in a field with few formal entry points.

More cities are creating night offices and strategies, but most are still built around the night economy rather than night culture. The scene also has a role to play in night governance, through collaboration and political organisation. A growing number of cities now have entities overseeing the night – including Sydney, New York, Amsterdam, and recently, Seoul. But these offices' remits still tend to be framed in economic terms, seeing the night through the lens of businesses, tourism and turnover. Amsterdam's 2021 vision for night culture is a welcome departure from the norm. Participants in São Paulo and Seoul called for the night to be governed as a cultural dimension, not solely a subject of economic policy or noise. But night governance isn't only the state's work: one expert called for nightlife actors to get more involved in advocating for the night in city policies and funding structures, and participants from multiple cities also called for more collaboration, solidarity and resource-sharing within scenes.

Night

HOW TRAINING FEEDS INTO CAREERS IS STILL PATCHY:

ONLY A HANDFUL OF INSTITUTIONS IN SYDNEY, LAGOS AND NEW YORK REQUIRE WORK PLACEMENTS AS PART OF UNIVERSITY OR PRIVATE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES.

Cultu


CITY
Amsterdam
Lagos
New York
São Paulo
Seoul
Sydney
SPOTLIGHTS

CITY SPOTLIGHT 1

Amsterdam
Lagos
New York
São Paulo
Seoul
Sydney

A NIGHT CULTURE BUILT
FROM THE BOTTOM AND
SUPPORTED FROM THE TOP

Amsterdam

WORKING WELL:
CITY SUPPORT AND HARM REDUCTION

MAIN CHALLENGE:
DIVERSITY, OWNERSHIP AND SPACE

TRENDING:
KUDURO (GENRE) & LISTENING PARTIES (FORMAT)

OPPORTUNITIES:
PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT NEW PROMOTERS AND/OR EXPERIMENTAL FORMATS

Strong support for grassroots nighttime culture

From Amsterdam Dance Event to open-air festivals along the water, Amsterdam turns the whole city into a stage, and its clubs, canals and former factories into the backdrop. It has long had strong recognition of nightlife from its city government, with financial and support structures in place since 2003. Public funding for nighttime culture scores 65.0 and night-time governance 66.5, reflecting a relatively advanced framework. Respondents saw this positively: funding has allowed new collectives to experiment and grow, while soundproofing initiatives have supported some venues.

The city's night reaches well beyond the club. Music festivals score 80.0 and cultural conferences 74.0, although non-music cultural events at night score 67.0. Behind this sits a strong ecosystem: education pathways into nightlife careers score 81.0, and rehearsal and recording studios 78.0. Sexyland, a venue with a rotating ownership concept open since 2017, was consistently called out for supporting experimentation, but the most frequently named innovations were formats rather than genres: album listening sessions, ambient and daytime listening, sex-positive parties, sober clubbing and multi-purpose rooms. Latin music and, in particular, baile funk were highlighted as emerging sounds, along with jazz improvisation.

"YOU REALLY SEE A DIVERSE OFFER. A LOT OF PARTIES ARE REPRESENTING A CERTAIN COMMUNITY, A CERTAIN CULTURE, A CERTAIN MUSIC. AND YOU SEE THAT IN AMSTERDAM THERE ARE A LOT OF COLLECTIVES THAT BRING THEIR OWN SOUND."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Those working in nightlife valued the city's grassroots attitude, with strong agreement that the community has power to shape its own scene, but suggesting this was more to do with audience-promoter relationships than to policy. This trust was evident: 83% felt venue or event staff would be helpful if something went wrong, and harm reduction and welfare scores 82.3. But more extensive welfare and awareness teams are still mostly found in scenes with more diverse audiences, rather than mainstream spaces, and respondents worried these services are most likely to be cut when funding is tight. Accessibility of venues was also raised as an issue that, although improving, was still in need of work, with one promoter noting how hard it was to find appropriate accessible spaces.

Amsterdam

NUMBER OF MUSIC FESTIVALS
80.0 / 100

HARM REDUCTION & WELFARE
82.3 / 100

NON-MUSIC CULTURAL EVENTS HAPPENING AT NIGHT
67.0 / 100

DIVERSITY IN VENUE OWNERSHIP & PRODUCTION
51.0 / 100

> EXPLORE INDICATOR SCORES AT THE NCI DASHBOARD

A city that celebrates its nightlife is still working out who gets to shape it

As a global city recognised for its nightlife, Amsterdam shares its nighttime spaces with tourists, and over tourism is a live issue in city policy. Only 56% of survey respondents agreed the scene is oriented to residents rather than tourists, though as one respondent noted, residents also see nightlife as part of Amsterdam's brand, whether or not they go out.

"ESPECIALLY IN AMSTERDAM'S UNDERGROUND NIGHTLIFE SCENES, WE REALLY DO A GREAT JOB AT CURATING EVENTS AND ARTISTS. BUT THERE IS AN ISSUE WITH THE SPACE, THE BRICK AND MORTAR ITSELF"
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, EVENT PRODUCER

Support for experimental formats was recognised, but diversity, in both crowds and lineups, was viewed more harshly. Only half of respondents felt people from different migration backgrounds, ethnicities and social classes take part in nighttime culture, and women were less likely than men to agree there is a variety of scenes and sounds. Many linked this to a lack of diversity among programming teams. The Index reflects this, with diversity in venue ownership and production at 51.0 and cultural diversity in programming at 53.3.

The most widely held concern was costs. Promoters described a high barrier to entry and tightening audience spending, and smaller venues are struggling, leading to closures. Only 49% agreed that new and experimental events happen often rather than proven formats, and the promoters taking the most risks, including on harm reduction and spaces for diverse audiences, were felt to be the most vulnerable. Views were split on whether diversity is improving, with some suggesting it has worsened since COVID.

Many promoters felt power and venue ownership remain concentrated among "white, Dutch men", partly because space is at a premium and historic ownership structures remain. Legal status and protection of venues scores 47.0. Some called for more funding for new nights and greater collaboration, potentially pooling resources.

CITY SPOTLIGHT 2

Amsterdam
Lagos
New York
São Paulo
Seoul
Sydney

KNOWN THE WORLD OVER FOR AFROBEATS, A FAST GROWING, HIGH ENERGY ELECTRONIC MUSIC SCENE IS NOW EMERGING

Lagos

WORKING WELL:
QUEER EVENTS ACT AS A SPACE OF SAFETY AND SELF-EXPRESSION

MAIN CHALLENGE:
HIGH COSTS LIMIT ACCESSIBILITY

TRENDING:
EF MOON (ARTIST) & GQOM (GENRE)

OPPORTUNITIES:
EDUCATION PATHWAYS FOR NIGHTTIME PRODUCERS

Many nights, one city

Euphoric. Adventurous. Unexpected. Three words used to describe nightlife in Lagos, one of Africa's biggest and most exciting cities. Theatre, arts events and festivals are part of the picture, but the city is best known as a home for Afrobeats, and for helping grow some of the genre's early stars. It still dominates much of the clubbing scene, and is a huge cultural export for Nigeria, but in recent years electronic music has grown, with new energy from Mara, AfroTech and Gqom.

Much of this happens outside conventional venues. Lagos scores 74.0 for the influence of informal and grassroots spaces, and 71.0 for rehearsal and recording studios, a key support for a healthy nighttime culture. Despite lower scores for traditional music venues and late-night transport, its night culture is built around people and events more than purpose-built premises.

"A MAJORITY OF LAGOS NIGHTLIFE IS FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE MONEY TO SPEND, BUT RECENTLY, WITH THE GROWTH OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC AND THE RISE OF RAVES, THERE KIND OF IS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE — AS LONG AS YOU'RE WILLING TO SEARCH AND FIND YOUR CIRCLE, FIND YOUR PEOPLE, AND FIND YOUR TAX BRACKET."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Events like Group Therapy have built a reputation for parties around the city, and many respondents see these raves as distinct from traditional nightlife, in both music and experience. Some organisers report electronic events now often sell out faster than Afrobeats nights. They move around frequently, and respondents were more likely to name events than the venues hosting them.

Lagos knows how to have a good time, but it isn't cheap. Average nightclub entry costs the equivalent of three days' minimum wage work, and 'table culture' means traditional clubs often require bookings. Yet these spaces alone don't define the city's night: 75% say there is real variety in scenes, styles, sounds and genres, and most feel Lagos represents the diversity of people around it.

Lagos

INFLUENCE OF INFORMAL & GRASSROOTS SPACES
74.0 / 100

REHEARSAL & RECORDING STUDIOS
71.0 / 100

TICKET PRICE, WAGE-NORMALISED
10.0 / 100

LATE-NIGHT PUBLIC TRANSPORT COVERAGE
10.0 / 100

> EXPLORE INDICATOR SCORES AT THE NCI DASHBOARD

Waiting for recognition and support to grow
Despite a hostile legal context for LGBTQIA+ people in Nigeria, many reported that events in the electronic scene feel increasingly safe to LGBTQIA+ attendees, underscoring the importance of nighttime culture for social wellbeing. These spaces and scenes incubate future social shifts, with some artists challenging rigid gender expressions whilst drawing from a wide range of musical styles.

However, some respondents reported that some venues refuse to host explicitly queer events, and that some events have been 'exposed' on social media in the past. There were also concerns that as these spaces grew in popularity, their relative safety to LGBTQIA+ people may decrease – although this sentiment is not limited to Lagos.

As with many cities, safety at night remains a concern. While 74% feel safe inside venues, only 20% reported feeling safe in the streets of nightlife areas. 84% avoided going out, or avoided a place, at least once in the past year because they did not feel safe. Unsurprisingly, women were more likely to report feeling unsafe. However, encouragingly, our research found that women are becoming increasingly present in production teams that support

"THE TERM NIGHTLIFE FOR MANY YEARS HAS BEEN USED TO JUST BE KNOWN AS THE CLUBS. THEY DON'T REALLY COUNT THIS RAVE SCENE, AND THAT'S A CONVERSATION THAT NEEDS TO BE HAD"

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, ARTIST AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR

nighttime culture, but less often in leadership roles, or in the technical side of events.

This tension in the growth of the electronic music scene was reflected in other areas too, with many expressing a desire to keep the authenticity, intimacy and trust of the scene despite its increasing popularity. Organisers expressed concerns that as it grew, the influence of outside money might threaten its culture. Similarly, some felt that, partly due to a lack of spaces, the balance of power remained in venue owners' hands rather than organisers', and that most events were operating at a loss as a result. As with many cities, there are concerns about larger festivals impacting smaller events, particularly during the peak December period. Artists and events are in need of support to grow, with risk of brain drain to other cities – Group Therapy already hosts many international editions. But with a lack of government funding available, careers in nighttime culture are difficult to make a career out of – the city scores low for educational pathways into nightlife careers.



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CITY SPOTLIGHT 3

Amsterdam
Lagos
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São Paulo
Seoul
Sydney

THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS
HAS LOTS TO OFFER - BUT
IT'S NOT CHEAP

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New York

WORKING WELL:
SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

MAIN CHALLENGE:
COSTS AND POLICING

TRENDING:
JAZZ IMPROVISATION (GENRE) AND BLOCK PARTIES (FORMAT)

OPPORTUNITIES:
BIPOC-LED PROGRAMMING COURSES OR FUNDING

Up all night in the park

New York's theatre, galleries and music scene are world famous, but it is perhaps the city's grassroots and alternative nighttime move-ments that have had the biggest impact on social and cultural trends worldwide today. From disco, to ball culture to the Stonewall riots, nighttime culture in New York has helped earn it a reputation as the city that never sleeps. Non-music cultural events at night score 85.0 in the Index, among its strongest results.

This was recognised by our survey, with 94% agreeing that there is a variety and diversity of different scenes, styles, sounds and genres in New York. When asked for up and coming sounds and artists in New York, no artist, sound or style was named twice, reflecting the diversity of offer in the city. Our focus group felt strongly that New York was a place where new artists, sounds and styles can emerge and that New York's nightlife community has the power to shape its scene.

New York has had an Office of Nightlife since 2018, with a primary focus on the economic and planning side of nighttime culture. The work of the Office was recognised by our respondents as helping support the scene's health, such as its mediation-first approach to venue disputes, even if they recognised there was more to do.

"I THINK NEW YORK DOES ALLOW FOR THE MOST CREATIVITY, MORE THAN ALMOST ANY OTHER CITY, AT LEAST IN THE US. I DO THINK WE DIY, WE GRASSROOTS, THERE'S SO MUCH GOING ON.."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, DJ & COLLECTIVE CO-FOUNDER

New Yorkers have always made culture in unexpected places, activating underused spaces like piers, and this tradition continues today. The DIY party scene was seen as strong, along with parties in parks, and respondents rated free or outdoor events in public space almost as highly as clubs as important nightlife spaces. Survey respondents rated free or outdoor events in public space almost as highly as clubs when asked which were the most important nightlife spaces in the city.

But despite their popularity, promoters recognised the financial and legal risks of holding DIY parties – and one participant said she would be concerned inviting Black attendees to a DIY party for fear of 'overpolicing' if it were shut down. However, audiences were generally positive about nightlife inclusivity, with 84% of survey respondents agreeing that people from diverse communities, races, social classes and other parts of the city participate in nighttime culture.

New York

EDUCATION PATHWAYS INTO NIGHTLIFE CAREERS
74.5 / 100

INFLUENCE OF INFORMAL/ THIRD SPACES
73.0 / 100

PUBLIC FUNDING FOR NIGHTTIME CULTURE
45.0 / 100

FESTIVALS WITH SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENTS
30.0 / 100

> EXPLORE INDICATOR SCORES AT THE NCI DASHBOARD

Who shapes nighttime culture when it costs so much?

As with many major cities, cost was regularly raised as a barrier to entry for both promoters – particularly venue hire and permits – and audiences. It was suggested that the DIY scene was thriving, but costs were also blamed for making careers within the industry difficult to sustain. Many called for more funding for marginalised groups to put on events, as well as for informal and DIY spaces. Gentrification threatening venues were also raised regularly, as well as a need for more sustainable wages for workers at night.

Diversity, particularly in terms of ethnicity, was raised in several contexts: in terms of ownership of venues, experiences of door staff and in power structures within the scene, with a particular focus on the lack of Black programmers. Trust in the police was generally low, too, and both women and LGBTQIA+ respondents felt notably less safe and trust the police far less – with 67% calling them unhelpful. Diversity of line-ups was also noted as an issue, with fewer opportunities for BIPOC artists, and a sense that the problem was not improving. The communities which have arguably had the biggest historical impact on its nighttime culture still remain shut out.

New York scores highly for supporting routes into nighttime-focused careers, recognising the city's own training programme as just one example. However, there was a disconnect between the education available and lived experience within the scene, with the idea that larger clubs were unlikely to support emerging artists and that programmers tended to book people they already knew – squeezing talent development pathways.

"I THINK GAY AND QUEER BARS ARE THE ONLY VENUES THAT ARE DOING PROGRAMMING EVERY NIGHT OF THE WEEK. THAT'S SOMETHING THAT JUST DIED AFTER THE PANDEMIC."
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, DJ & CURATOR

The effects of COVID are still being felt too, with several noting that there were fewer weekday events than prior to the pandemic. A lack of 'all ages' events was also expressed – although several promoters suggested that intergenerational programming was happening too, and positive. Social media was raised by several promoters, who generally felt it was becoming more difficult to advertise events through.

CITY SPOTLIGHT 4



THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE'S BIGGEST CITY HAS A NIGHT OF MANY SOUNDS AND STRONG INFORMAL SPACES - BUT SHIFTING POLITICS AND STREET SAFETY MAKE IT HARD TO SUSTAIN

São Paulo

WORKING WELL:
VARIETY OF OFFER

MAIN CHALLENGE:
SAFETY AFTER DARK

TRENDING:
MU54O (ARTIST) AND NOVO AFFAIR (PARTY)

OPPORTUNITIES:
COORDINATED NIGHTTIME GOVERNANCE, WITH CLEAR POINTS OF CONTACT

A city-sized night

In São Paulo, the dance floor, the rooftop and the street are all spaces for expression, belonging and cultural resistance, in a night that is both welcoming and frenetic. It's a city of many sounds, scenes and settings: baile funk, hip hop and samba share the night with techno, house and afrobeats – perhaps unsurprising for the largest city in the southern hemisphere. Its size is reflected in its diversity, with 94% agreeing that a variety of scenes, styles, sounds and genres is available. There is no shortage of things to do: and non-music cultural events at night score 82.0 in the Index, with programmed cultural venues open at night 66.0, both above average. Informal spaces are highly valued and Paulistas are proud of their nightlife, with a strong sense of cultural ownership. Although still lagging, our research heard that the number of female and gender-diverse artists on line-ups has increased in recent years, showing signs that diversity may be improving.

"SÃO PAULO DEMONSTRATES EVERY DAY THAT NIGHTLIFE IS A KEY DRIVER OF COMMUNITY INCLUSION, SOCIAL CHANGE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH"
SÃO PAULO CITY COORDINATOR

However, many felt nightlife in São Paulo was experiencing distinctive change in recent years, at least in part driven by political changes in how it is policed and funded. Despite a history of strong cultural funding, many programmes are tied to political administrations, making certainty hard for producers. Funding has shifted from government to corporate and philanthropic sources, and many night operators aren't suited to bidding for this kind of investment. Cultural funding is, however, open to those who aren't formally registered as a group, potentially positive for smaller organisations – and there's no shortage of ingenuity for how to create great parties without it anyway.

It is also a city of contradictions: what happens in one area doesn't happen in another, and a night out can be a stretch on a São Paulo wage. Ticket prices measured against wages score 15.0, which may help explain the desire for free parties.

São Paulo

NON-MUSIC CULTURAL EVENTS AT NIGHT
82.0 / 100

INFLUENCE OF INFORMAL & GRASSROOTS SPACES
78.5 / 100

PUBLIC FUNDING FOR NIGHTTIME CULTURE
45.0 / 100

FESTIVALS WITH SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENTS
30.0 / 100

> EXPLORE INDICATOR SCORES AT THE NCI DASHBOARD

Politics, policing and the street

For all its energy, São Paulo's night has been shaped by how the government treats it. Paulistas love a street party, and a decade ago nightlife was actively encouraged into public space by the municipality, but it has since been forced to move into more formalised spaces and up to rooftops. Noise enforcement laws are now used to shut down street parties, or unfairly target smaller venues, some said, which reflects a score of 27.0 for the legal status and protection of venues.

There is no shortage of energy and diversity on offer, but many nightlife producers have difficulty with the practicalities of their craft. Operators said they found communicating with City Hall difficult, with no point of contact, made harder by changing administrations and priorities. Many felt grassroots nightlife had little way to make its voice heard with decision makers, or with public services such as police. Nighttime governance scores 15.0, and cross-agency coordination 36.0.

Safety also feels different here. Feelings of safety inside venues were broadly similar to other cities, but the street felt significantly less safe, and perceived safety at night scores 29.8.

"THERE ARE MANY SPACES AND THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE, BUT WHAT IS MISSING, AND WHAT HAS BEEN MISSING FOREVER, IS COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PEERS. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE PARTIES, COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE BOOKERS, COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE ARTISTS."
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, ARTIST

Views on diversity were mixed, but there was no strong sign it was improving. Black and trans artists described fighting hard for recognition, and while some events providing free guest lists for trans and nonbinary people were welcomed, being invited into a space doesn't guarantee safety. Respondents also raised concerns about harm reduction and welfare provision across the scene.

Rising costs make going out increasingly expensive, and late-night public transport coverage scores 43.0. Even where it does exist, late night transport doesn't always feel safe, with many opting for a more costly taxi. Although funding is clearly available for cultural aspects of nightlife, a lack of joined-up thinking with a nighttime lens may be holding the city back.

CITY SPOTLIGHT 5



KNOWN FOR K-POP, FOOD AND STREET LIFE, SEOUL SCORES HIGHLY ON NON-MUSIC CULTURE - BUT HAS A DANCE SCENE WAITING FOR THE RULES TO CATCH UP

Seoul

WORKING WELL: PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

MAIN CHALLENGE: REGULATION AND SPACE FOR EXPERIMENTATION

TRENDING: K-BASS (GENRE) & SEOUL COMMUNITY RADIO (MEDIA)

OPPORTUNITIES: SUPPORTING GRASSROOTS, EXPERIMENTAL AND ALTERNATIVE CULTURE THROUGH FUNDING AND TRAINING

Nights that are built on street life and small spaces

Korea is known for its outsized cultural impact, from K-pop to fashion and cuisine, and Seoul reflects it: a buzzing city at night, with street performance, market retail, and food and drink at its heart. Non-music cultural events at night score 74.0 and music festivals at 68.0, reflecting the broad offer in the city.

But these sectors can overshadow other forms of nighttime culture, which sit as one part of a wider ecology. Regulation has held back the organic growth of traditional nightclubs: many music venues and clubs are still classified as restaurants or bars, rather than a designation that recognises their cultural role. That creates tension, as dancing is technically illegal in restaurants, and many have called for the government to review this, as has happened in some districts. Legal status and protection of venues scores 40.0.

"I USED TO LIVE IN LONDON BEFORE MOVING TO SEOUL AND … LONDON IS LIKE ONE OF THE BIGGEST CITIES FOR MUSIC, BUT I DO FEEL LIKE SEOUL HAS LITTLE TO ENVY … THERE'S SO MANY PARTIES, THERE'S SO MANY COLLECTIVES … THE LEVEL OF THE DJS AND THE PRODUCERS AND THE ARTISTS IS ACTUALLY REALLY HIGH."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, A&R, DJ AND RADIO HOST

None of this dims the city at night, and much of its nighttime culture is rooted in smaller supporting spaces, with high scores for rehearsal spaces, for example. In our survey, 87% said places that hold the scene together without hosting events (record shops, vinyl bars, rehearsal rooms, radio, instrument shops) are important to the scene, and 82% said the same of cultural and community spaces that also host nightlife. Projects such as Seoul Community Radio, collaborating with both western artists and K-pop labels, typify this influence, punching above their weight.

Government attention has recently turned to the night, focused on the practical: sanitation, noise, transport and formalising nightlife areas. Late-night public transport coverage scores 45.8 so there is room for improvement. But Seoul already has the highest perceived safety of any city in the Index (69.5), including by gender and identity.

Seoul

NON-MUSIC CULTURAL EVENTS AT NIGHT
74.0 / 100

PERCEIVED SAFETY AT NIGHT
69.5 / 100

DIVERSITY OF SCENES AND EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMMING
50.0 / 100

NIGHTTIME GOVERNANCE
39.0 / 100

> EXPLORE INDICATOR SCORES AT THE NCI DASHBOARD

A scene with strong foundations, still looking for room to experiment

Despite a busy non-musical calendar, many contributors who work in nightlife felt Seoul's clubbing scene was underdeveloped and short on space for experimentation: just 44% said it is a place where new and experimental events happen. The Index reflects this, with experimental venues at 53.0 and diversity of scenes and experimental programming at 50.0, below average for the Index. Views on the range of sounds were split. Seoul's styles are rated highly by people who go out, but many felt international influence was thin. That raises a wider question: should Seoul's nightlife follow global clubbing trends, or lean into local ones?

"I THINK COMMUNITY RADIO ARE THE ONES WHO ARE GIVING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE NEWCOMERS TO HAVE THEIR SOUND HEARD BY THE WORLD"
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, AGENT & ARTIST MANAGER

Promoters said many DJs are willing to play different musical styles, but audiences are less interested. Many felt the scene was slow to develop: people producers play several roles that might be separate elsewhere, and a lack of domestic talent development came up repeatedly. There are strong examples of talent development in genres such as K-pop – and education pathways into nightlife careers scored 62.5 – but this is not being felt at the grassroots level. Respondents asked for more industry and scene-level coordination, while cross-agency coordination for nightlife scores 37.5. Concerns were also raised that venue ownership is concentrated in a small elite; diversity in venue ownership and production scores 44.8.

Respondents also want policy to reflect the full range of what happens at night, including activity now on the margins because of restrictive laws. Policy and civic health scores 45.8, with nighttime governance and advocacy at 39.0. Seoul's distinctive identity is worth protecting, but if the government wants to keep its international relevance, as it signals, there is a clear call for support for nightlife's cultural side, not only its economic and practical one.

CITY SPOTLIGHT 6

Amsterdam
Lagos
New York
São Paulo
Seoul
Sydney

EVEN AS NEW DOORS OPEN,
SYDNEY FINDS SOME STILL SHUT

Sydney

WORKING WELL:
DIY COLLECTIVES AND
DIVERSE PROGRAMMING

MAIN CHALLENGE:
OVER POLICING AND
LGBTQIA+ VENUES

TRENDING:
UNCONVENTIONAL SPACES
(FORMAT) AND MOTHERSHIP
STUDIOS (VENUE)

OPPORTUNITIES:
LONGER LEASES AND REDUCED
RENTS FOR NEW SPACES

Out of the 'lockouts', and into a new era

Some of Australia's biggest cultural institutions call Sydney home, and it offers up a huge array of nighttime activity to suit most tastes.

Our research surfaced a wave of new energy that is sweeping the city and seeing an array of new venue types and formats. Public funding for nighttime culture scores 61.3 in the Index, nighttime governance 63.5 and cross-agency coordination 59.0, all above average.

Appetite for new and experimental nightlife is strong: diversity of scenes and experimental programming scores 70.3, with events taking place in unconventional spaces receiving significant interest from audiences. One respondent – who ran a ticketing service – said that events labelled 'location TBA' were much more likely to sell out than those with the venue identified. This was reflected in survey responses too, with free or outdoor events in public space rated almost as highly as clubs and live music as important to nightlife in Sydney (90% versus 93%) – and temporary and pop up events at 89%.

Many felt that new, emerging DIY collectives and spaces were doing the most to improve diversity and representation in the scene, and some tied this to new bottom-up, community models of organising and programming. Spaces such as Red Rattler, a Queer-run, community-owned, not-for-profit warehouse theatre, and Petersham Bowls Club, a long running community owned venue, were highlighted as successful examples. The city's diverse offering was reflected in the range of activity on offer, with non-music cultural events at night scoring 73.4.

"SKATE PARKS, GRASSY PARKS, CAR PARKS, THOSE POP-UP SPACES ARE REALLY GETTING ACTIVATED… ARTISTS LIKE HEARTHOLDER ARE HAVING THESE POP-UP EVENTS WHERE YOU DON'T EVEN NEED AS MUCH INFRASTRUCTURE OR PERMISSION."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, NOT FOR PROFIT CO-FOUNDER

However, there was a general feeling that nightlife in Sydney is still concentrated in central areas and that large 'commercial' run venues made up the majority of nightlife in the city. This was seen as at the expense of areas such as Western Sydney, which has relatively fewer venues, potentially limiting the appetite from more diverse communities in these areas to go out. This might explain why respondents from marginalised communities were less likely to agree that people from diverse communities take part in Sydney's nighttime culture, with just 50% agreeing, against 75% of other respondents.

Sydney

DIVERSITY OF SCENES AND EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMMING
70.3 / 100

NUMBER OF MUSIC VENUES
70.0 / 100

LATE-NIGHT PUBLIC TRANSPORT COVERAGE
45.0 / 100

LEGAL STATUS AND PROTECTION OF CULTURAL VENUES
51.0 / 100

> EXPLORE INDICATOR SCORES AT THE NCI DASHBOARD

Reform is the start, not the finish

Although there is funding available for nightlife in Sydney, and appetite for new and experimental formats, these don't appear to be happening as often as audiences would like: just under half of survey respondents agreed that new and experimental events happen often, rather than the usual proven formats. Experimental venues score 54.5, close to the Index average. A lack of opportunities for young people to attend and create their own nightlife formats was highlighted several times, and late-night public transport coverage scores 45.0.

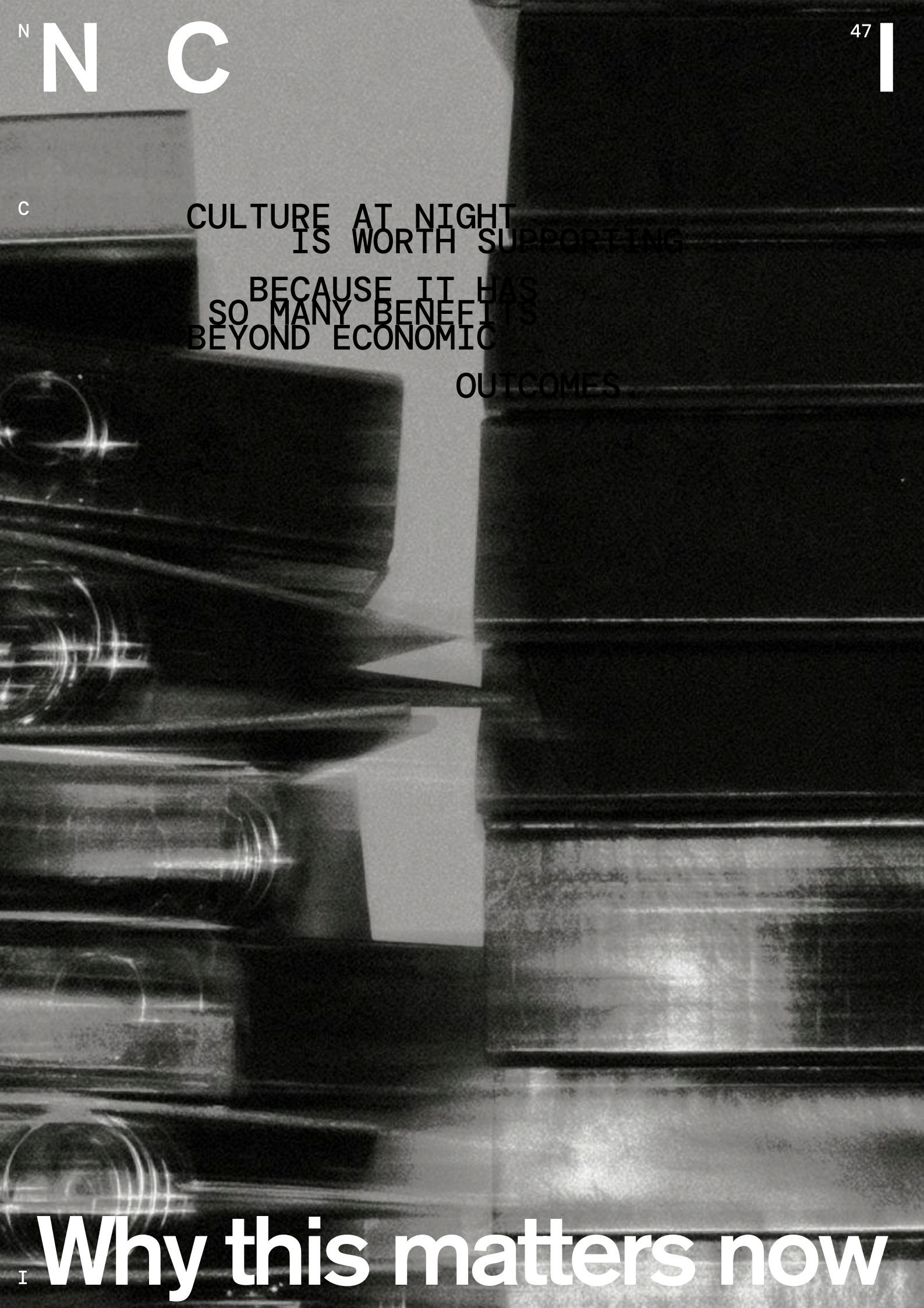
Many said reduced rents and longer leases for new spaces could help, as one of the biggest issues is money going to landlords rather than promoters. Years of 'lockout laws' were felt to have affected promoters' capacity and knowledge, and their ability to organise collectively.

Respondents saw the reforms as a good first step but only the start of a longer journey, with power over shaping nightlife still unbalanced and landlords and police holding too much power to harm the scene. Legal status and protection of venues scores 51.0.

"THE DISPOSABLE-INCOME QUESTION IS DOMINATING EVERYTHING. THERE'S SO MUCH MONEY THAT USED TO GO BACK INTO COMMUNITY THAT IS GOING INTO THE POCKETS OF LANDLORDS… YOU'RE SEEING A LOT OF THAT NIGHTLIFE GO INTO PRIVATE SPACES, A LOT OF PEOPLE GOING BACK TO THE HOUSE PARTY. WHO IT'S FOR AND WHO IT SHOULD BE FOR ARE NOW DIFFERENT QUESTIONS."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, NOT FOR PROFIT CO-FOUNDER

Just 43% of survey respondents said police would be helpful if something went wrong, and there was wider concern that recent police 'raids' on clubs were having a negative impact. Our focus group said this 'over-policing' particularly targeted LGBTQIA+ venues, which were already struggling, with several high-profile closures in the past year. LGBTQIA+ people were twice as likely to say they had avoided going out, or a specific place, in the past year.



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CULTURE AT NIGHT
IS WORTH SUPPORTING

BECAUSE IT HAS
SO MANY BENEFITS
BEYOND ECONOMIC

OUTCOMES.

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Why this matters now

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BY MEASURING THE CULTURAL VALUE OF NIGHTLIFE, WE REVEAL THE IMPORTANT ROLE IT PLAYS IN SOCIETY

There are very few places where nighttime culture is counted in its own right. Where the night is measured, it is usually through jobs, tax revenue and visitor spend. These figures matter, and we don't set them aside, but they describe what the night earns, not what it means to the people who shape it, or its outsized influence on wider culture.

The Index reveals the breadth and depth of cultural activity that takes place at night. By widening the range of data we collect on nightlife, we hope to show how diverse it really is. By measuring the cultural value of nightlife, we reveal the important role it plays in society, which is often overlooked. Creatives need spaces to test ideas. Marginalised communities need spaces of safety. Everyone needs a place to let their hair down.

Although it's clear that nighttime culture is thriving, there is still much work to be done. No city scores more than 63 in the Index, but we hope to see these rise in future years. Scores tend to be lowest in dimensions relating to policy and sustainability, and where cities do have a nighttime function they mostly focus on the economic or regulatory aspects, rather than the cultural ones. The Index proves this frame is too narrow: culture at night is worth supporting because it has so many benefits beyond economic outcomes.

Nighttime culture is situated in a wider cultural ecosystem. It is not the only space of cultural expression, but it’s quite often the place where new ideas are first tested and new creative possibilities are explored. Nighttime culture supports artists, creatives and producers to do their work: to push boundaries, and help give meaning to our lives.

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Why this matters now

C

TO UNDERSTAND NIGHTLIFE
IS TO UNDERSTAND
FUTURE CULTURE.

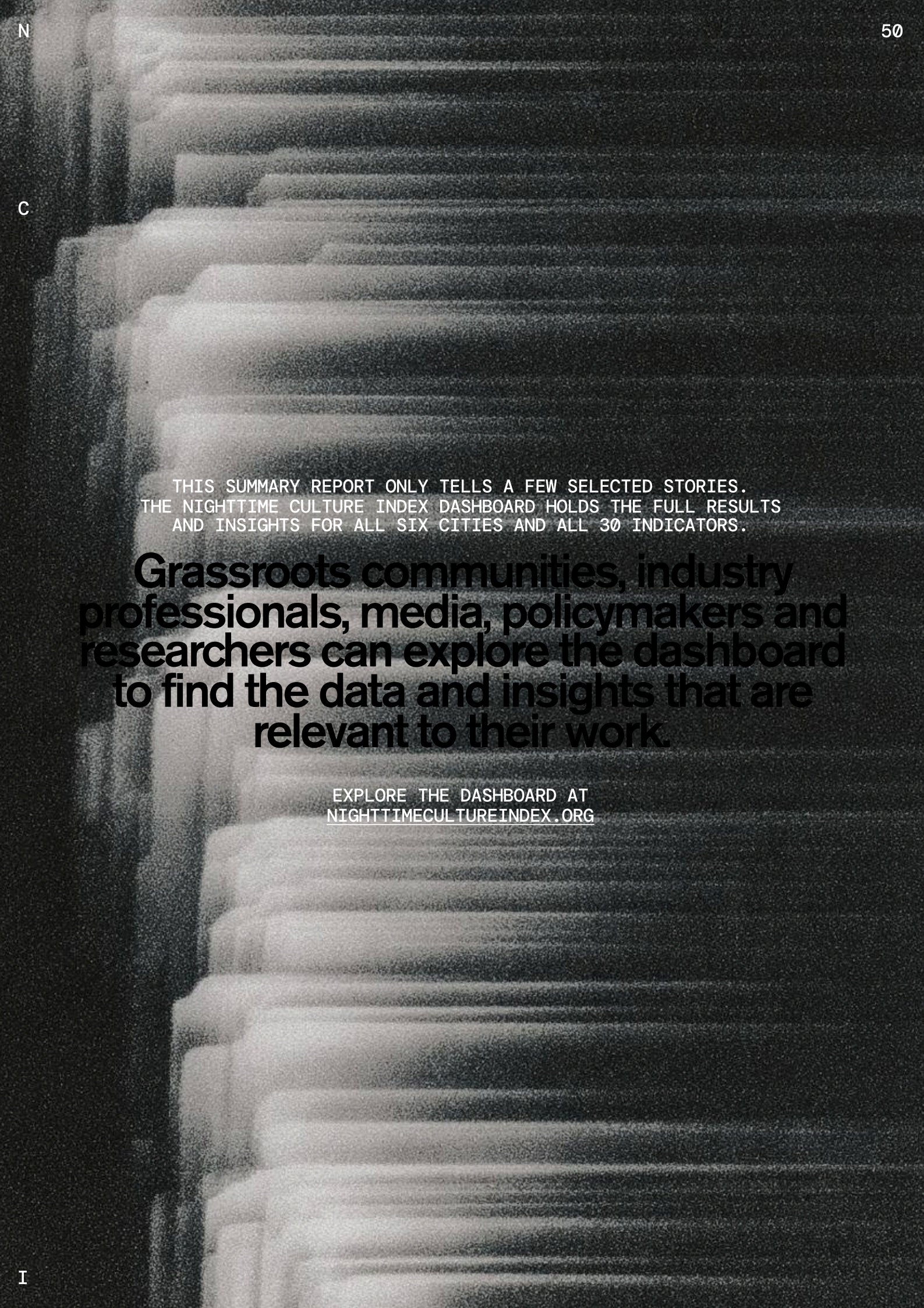
Perhaps unsurprisingly, cost is an issue in every city, and continued pressures on the cost of living risk making a night out the preserve of a lucky few. This would have economic impacts, yes, but the cultural and social impacts are more urgent. If the pandemic proved anything, it was that humans need space to gather, to create, to share ideas – the experience of a night out can never be matched by a screen. The role of nightlife in supporting social connection and wellbeing is clear.

Culture is funded differently everywhere, but the aim is the same: enriching human life. Night culture does more than fill a calendar. It supports, and often anticipates, wider culture, giving new ideas their first audience. It sustains an ecosystem of creatives, from performers to promoters to designers. It offers social connection, and a vital space for marginalised communities. And there is growing evidence it benefits wider civic life, from wellbeing to democratic participation.

For cities and brands, this matters. Investing in night culture creates culture: a young fashion designer finds a first audience, a new sound finds a room. To understand nightlife is to understand future culture. Measuring it is important: it predicts future trends, social movements and ideas. More support – through funding and education – is needed to grow the nighttime ecosystem, to help creatives stage new work and audiences to enjoy it. Investment and policy decisions inevitably need an economic lens, but adding a cultural one makes a clearer case: investing in culture is good for cities and it's good for humans. In the end, it's hard to argue against the value of a good night out.

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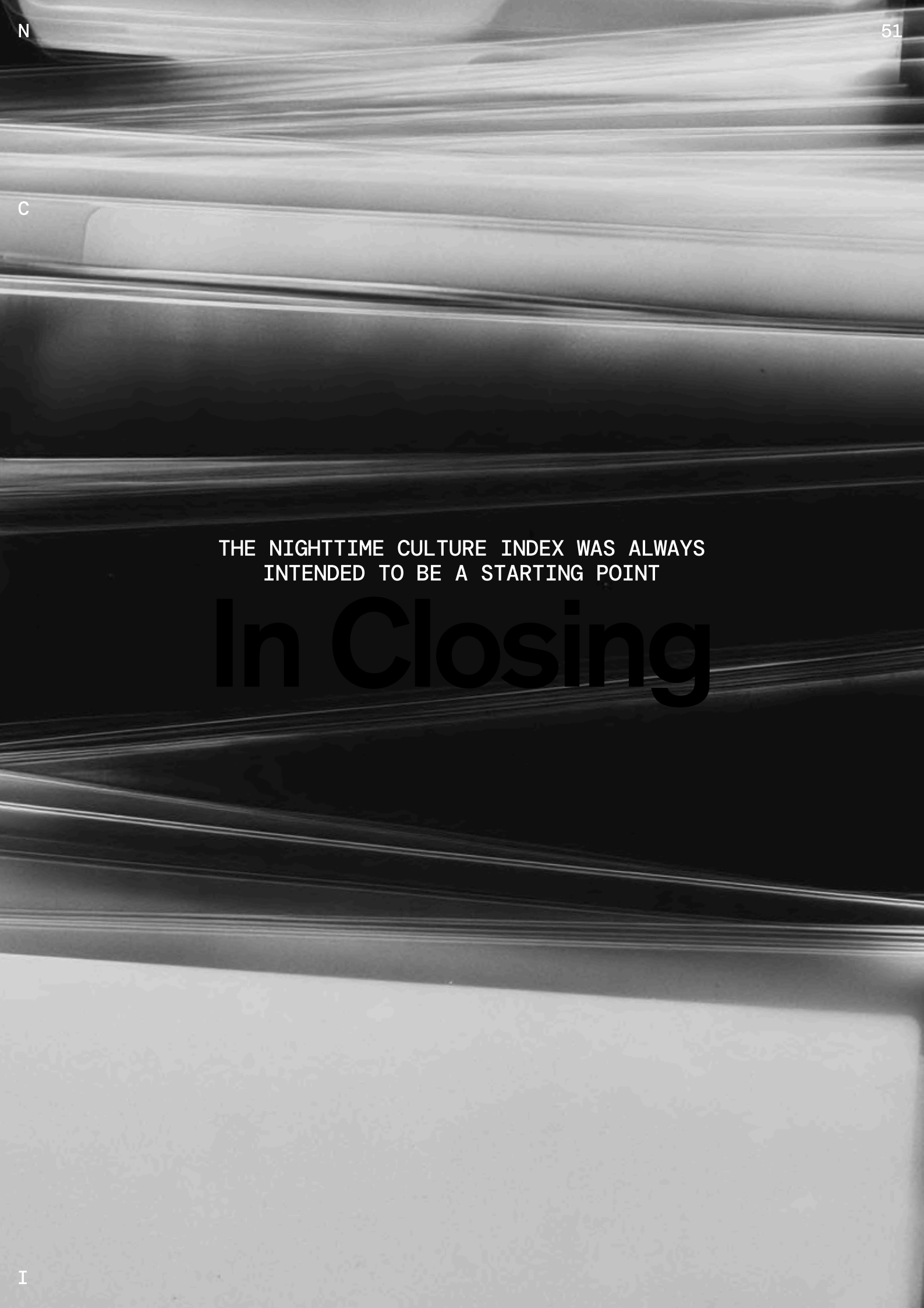
Why this matters now



THIS SUMMARY REPORT ONLY TELLS A FEW SELECTED STORIES.
THE NIGHTTIME CULTURE INDEX DASHBOARD HOLDS THE FULL RESULTS
AND INSIGHTS FOR ALL SIX CITIES AND ALL 30 INDICATORS.

Grassroots communities, industry professionals, media, policymakers and researchers can explore the dashboard to find the data and insights that are relevant to their work.

EXPLORE THE DASHBOARD AT
NIGHTTIMECULTUREINDEX.ORG



THE NIGHTTIME CULTURE INDEX WAS ALWAYS
INTENDED TO BE A STARTING POINT

In Closing

AFTERWORD

Our research shows us that nightlife is much more than just an economic vehicle. Its cultural value is huge: and it contributes to, and shapes, wider culture. This Index seeks to bring that contribution together in one place, and in doing so stands on the shoulders of all those who came before us: championing creativity, resisting oppression and challenging the status quo. Those who stayed up late so that others could feel at home.

The Nighttime Culture Index was always intended to be a starting point. We acknowledge the passionate experts, creators, promoters, artists, academics and nightlife community members who gave their time to this project, and also honour the work of people around the world who create and contribute to nighttime culture every evening. We also pay our respects to the traditional owners of lands on which nightlife takes place.

But we haven't spoken to everyone. There are voices still to be heard, and we hope this work can help make space for them.

What we present here is not a static picture, precisely because culture at night by definition is not static: it constantly evolves, changes and reinvents itself, and it has many different expressions around the world. We don't seek to argue what nighttime culture should look like, or how it should be expressed. But recognising and counting what exists is one way of taking it seriously, and of asking whether the night should be valued both for the jobs and livelihoods it supports and for the creative expression it makes possible.

The NCI is not a standalone report. We intend it to be a dynamic, continuously updated dashboard that grows richer year on year as data accumulates, methodology deepens, and new cities are added. Our work is a starting point: a chance to reframe a conversation that has for too long seen nightlife purely in economic terms – or restricted it altogether.

We want others to join us in this conversation, and carry it forward where they live. Challenge us, tell us what we've missed, collaborate with us to create something better. That's the spirit of nighttime culture, after all.

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About ADE:

ADE is one of the world's largest music and cultural events on the global calendar. Its record-breaking 2025 edition drew 600,000 visitors from more than 150 countries, alongside the ADE Pro conference, the leading business gathering for the global electronic music industry. 30 YEARS ADE (21–25 October 2026) marks three decades — 1996 to 2026 and beyond: a three decade long cultural legacy.

About VIBELAB:

VibeLab is a data-driven research, consultancy and advocacy agency dedicated to supporting creatives and preserving nighttime culture. With over ten years of experience, VibeLab has worked with hundreds of local institutions and governments around the world to develop effective strategies that support and navigate the nightlife industry. VibeLab specialises in making complex data clear. Its Founders are the pioneers of nighttime governance Mirik Milan and Lutz Leichsenring, and Jane Slingo is Director, VibeLab Asia Pacific.

Researched by VibeLab and co-published with ADE

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SPECIAL THANKS



NCI images: The Archives, a photography series accompanying the NCI is an art project by photographer Vladimír Nezdařil. Created at various events between 2025–26, the series uses a portable Xerox machine to scan the crowd. The resulting images capture fragments of rawness, spontaneity and energy present at each specific dancefloor, yet choose to immortalise them with the notoriously rigid, static technology of photocopying.

Nighttime Culture Index

NCI

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