UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Economy, Society and Governance
Working Paper 1/2023

'Night-Time Economies:
The Case of Nightclubs in Amsterdam'

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Abstract

Night-time economies have traditionally clustered in city centres and nightlife districts. Yet, due to regulation, urban regeneration and gentrification, nightclubs are increasingly located in spaces across cities. As the dynamics behind this diffusion and the significance of peripheral locations remain poorly understood, this paper provides a case study of nightclubs in Amsterdam, involving 36 interviews, participant observation and document-based analysis. It demonstrates how nightclub promoters attune their curatorial practices to urban change and the ways in which nightclubs stage affective atmospheres by combining appropriate 1) music 2) spaces and 3) audiences. The paper contributes to studies which focus on nocturnal spaces, actors and activities beyond the urban core and positions nightclub promoters as reflexive actors who negotiate urban change rather than merely as passive victims of gentrification.

Introduction

Over the years, urban scholars have explored the development of night-time economies in cities as a response to deindustrialisation and the need to revitalise abandoned city-centres (Chatterton and Hollands 2003; van Liempt et al. 2015). City councils have organised nightlife through zoning laws and designated districts where assemblages of nocturnal entertainment venues and services like bars, clubs, restaurants, public transport, and taxi stands were able to emerge (Hae 2011; Shaw 2014; van Liempt et al. 2015). Urban governance bodies had traditionally conceived of nightlife districts as sites and sources of crime, disorder, excess, and anti-social behaviour, but the night-time economy – if well-regulated – came to be perceived as an economic booster that would attract young and educated residents (Seijas and Gelders 2021).

As spaces for identity formation, informal creative exchange, and musical innovation, nightclubs have been key to such rebranding strategies (Watson et al. 2009; Gallan 2015;

Lange and Schüßler 2018). However, despite city councils' growing interest and the institutionalisation of night-time economies, the position of nightclubs remains contested: because they are seldom at the centre of urban policy and urban development, political interest is contingent on how well they fit into certain policy discourses. For example, in Berlin clubs are used to support the same redevelopment plans they are excluded from (Rapp 2010). Hae (2011) describes how nightclubs attract affluent tenants to formerly unpopular neighbourhoods, given their associations with bohemian life and creativity, but once the new middle-class residents have settled, the same clubs and late-night bars are forced to close as a result of noise and disorder complaints or rent rises. Artists leaving neighbourhoods as property prices go up is now a familiar trope in gentrification discourse, but Hae (2011) argues that their relocation is often preceded by nightlife venues, dubbing this phenomenon 'gentrification with and against nightlife', highlighting that nightlife is both an enabler and a victim of urban regeneration.

Research on the urban night has primarily focused on city centres and nightlife districts as spaces where night-time economies are clustered (Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Shaw 2014; van Liempt et al. 2015; Hubbard 2019). Yet, because of regulation, regeneration, and gentrification nightclubs are increasingly spread out across cities. While peripheral locations are becoming important, there has been less attention paid to spaces and activities beyond urban cores (Hubbard 2003; Gallan 2015; van Liempt et al. 2015). To address this gap this paper draws on a case study of Amsterdam's night-time economy. The fieldwork consisted of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 36 nightclub promoters, 111 hours of club visits and participant observation at industry events, and document-based and archival research.

In the Dutch capital the historic city centre is increasingly regulated. Governance bodies and (middle-class) residents consider the area 'too popular' and 'overcrowded' with tourists (Pinkster and Boterman 2017) and assert that the centre, which includes the redlight

district, should be curtailed because it attracts 'the wrong kind' of visitors (Chapuis 2017; van Liempt and Chimienti 2017). Thus, when Amsterdam sought to revitalise its night-time economy in the 2010s, it did so through a policy that was explicitly aimed at persuading nocturnal entrepreneurs to move beyond the city centre. In 2013, the council initiated a competition for a limited number of 24-hour permits, allowing clubs to stay open without curfew restrictions, but only clubs located outside of the city centre could apply (Seijas and Gelders 2021).

While policy makers prefer nightclubs to locate outside of the cities' core, clubs have a much more ambiguous assessment. To understand the night-time economy's dynamics, urban scholars have studied a range of actors involved in these activities, including policy bodies (Wicks 2019), owners (Chatterton and Hollands 2003), musicians and artists (Hracs et al. 2011) and consumers (Marsh 2006). More recently, specialised or niche actors such as night mayors have been investigated (Seijas and Gelders 2021). However, other crucial actors have received less attention in urban studies. Indeed, while cultural intermediaries such as booking agents, venue marketers, and promoters have been studied as part of the cultural industries (Watson et al. 2009; Balaji 2012; Hesmondhalgh 2013), their role as urban agents who shape and adapt to the dynamic urban fabric of the night-time economy remains poorly understood.

Studying these actors addresses the tendency to understand the corporatization of nightlife as the main driver behind the spatial transformations of the night-time economy, where city centres are dominated by pub-chains and non-mainstream forms of nightlife (independent venues, working-class pubs) are pushed to the periphery (Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Anderson 2009b). Most nightlife venues fall somewhere between the two poles: for example, in Amsterdam, an underground club located on the city's outskirts might be owned by a corporate festival organizer. This means there is a need for more research on

the complex and diverse ways in which nightclubs respond to urban change (van Liempt et al. 2015).

The research in this paper addresses two gaps. First, we analyse the significance of peripheral locations, going beyond city centres and nightlife districts, to nuance our understanding of how nightclub promoters attune and adapt their curatorial practices to the spatial dynamics brought about by urban processes such as regeneration, regulation, and gentrification. This has been observed by urban scholars (Talbot 2004), but not systematically researched. Second, we introduce the poorly understood nightclub promoter not just as a victim of gentrification, but rather as a reflexive urban actor (Nieuwland and Lavanga 2021). By unpacking their curatorial practices we contribute to existing studies on curation and highlight its role in the urban experience economy and cities more broadly. In our three empirical sections, we argue that the myriad ways in which promoters attune the curation of 1) music, 2) spaces, and 3) audiences to urban change has profound implications for the types of affective atmospheres (Anderson 2009a; Tan 2014) nightclubs produce. These sections are preceded by a review of our methods and two key concepts 1) curation and 2) affective atmospheres which help us understand the motivations and practices of nightclub promoters.

Conceptualising Curation

In the marketplace for cultural products value often rests on symbolic rather than material properties (Hracs et al. 2013). Because it is difficult to predict consumer tastes and preferences the marketplace also features a high degree of uncertainty. These conditions have long necessitated the involvement of cultural intermediaries who Bourdieu (1984) defined as market actors, existing in-between producers and consumers, involved in the framing, qualification and circulation of symbolic goods, services and experiences. These individuals share common characteristics, including high levels of cultural capital, and positions within

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subcultures, scenes, industries and organizations, which contribute to and validate their legitimacy and authority (Maguire, 2014).

Curation is a distinct subfield of intermediation (Jansson and Hracs 2018). The word 'curate' is derived from the Latin verb 'curare,' which means taking care and is traditionally associated with art and museum collections (Balzer, 2014). Over time the role of curators has shifted from preserving and archiving art to selecting, evaluating, displaying and framing pieces. Recently, the concept has been extended and applied to curators who perform a broad range of activities in other fields such as music, fashion, food and craft (Balzer, 2014; Jansson and Hracs 2018). The focus on curatorial practices has also extended beyond objects to include services, interactions and experiences such as fashion weeks, food markets and music festivals.

Existing literature also highlights that curators are motivated by a range of economic and non-economic imperatives such pay and profit, exerting influence by shaping tastes or reinforcing their positions and value within local scenes while also brandishing and enhancing their own brands and social and cultural capital (Jansson and Hracs 2018). Spatially, curation is performed in a range of physical, temporary and virtual spaces including record shops, food markets and music streaming platforms (Concha 2019; Jansson and Hracs 2018; Hracs and Webster 2021). Importantly, the unique dynamics of such spaces not only contain but shape the nature, qualities and outcomes of curation (Jansson and Hracs 2018). Yet, as markets, consumption and curatorial practices continue to evolve there is an ongoing need to consider 'what' curation is and 'why' and 'where' it is performed in general while also exploring poorly understood actors and spaces such as nightclub promoters and nightclubs. Moreover, there is a need to investigate how curation is shaped by specific urban contexts, for example, how nightclub promoters in Amsterdam negotiate the city's unique night-time economy.

Assembling Affective Atmospheres

Nightclub promoters negotiate cultural, social, artistic, and economic goals in the creation of a venue-specific, multimedia, and participatory cultural product: the club night. To understand how they do so, we turn to the geographical literature on affective atmospheres. In Anderson's (2009a) terms, affective atmospheres are always emerging, transforming 'shared ground' – that exceeds an assembling of human bodies – from which collective affects emerge. While some urban scholars focus on the meso-level (location, neighbourhood) or the micro-spatial scale (the home, the bar), we regard urban spaces as 'porous', as affective atmospheres include 'sensory transitions' between inside and outside (Bille and Hauge 2022), highlighting how peripheral locations shape both the exterior and the interior of nightclubs.

Affective atmospheres are both perception and production: they reflect the actions of and relations between various actors who are trying to take ownership by controlling and steering the atmosphere (Bille and Hauge 2022). Malbon's (1999) nightclub ethnographies underline that affective atmospheres are shaped by curatorial discourses and practices: promoters, DJs, and other key actors attempt to *stage* club nights to synchronise audience reactions and create emotionally charged leisure experiences (Hubbard 2003; Swartjes and Vandenberg 2023). Crucially, part of the work that allows collective affects to emerge is done *in advance*.

Since nightclubs sell a complex cultural product that requires audience participation, promoters aim to anticipate and control what happens on a night out at their venue to match appropriate music and appropriate spaces with appropriate audiences to produce affective experiences. Tan (2014) argues that for nightclubs space is not just a neutral backdrop, as dancefloors are 'engineered' through "theatrical assemblages of dimmed lighting and pulsating music" (Tan 2014: 27). She conceptualises nightclubs as environments that are simultaneously regulated and deregulated, where affective atmospheres are actively staged,

even though she devotes little attention to specific curation-related practices and strategies. This paper builds on these insights by offering an exploratory overview of such practices as nightclub promoters attune and adapt their curatorial strategies to an ever-shifting, dynamic urban context.

Methods

The paper is based on a case study of Amsterdam's nightclub sector, with fieldwork conducted in 2018 and 2019 (before clubs closed their doors to comply with government-imposed lockdown regulations in March 2020). The research design consisted of three methods: semi-structured qualitative interviews with promoters, document-based analysis, and short-term ethnography. Before starting fieldwork, clubs were categorised by looking at their programming, use of genre labels (Lena 2012) and social media and marketing (Garcia 2011). This inspired an analytical distinction between niche-edm clubs (niche-oriented electronic dance music clubs, that predominantly program house, techno, and electro) and eclectic clubs (that program hip-hop, R&B, dancehall, pop, and Latin)[1]. This is significant because genres organise and enable cultural production in urban cultural economies (Alacovska and O'Brien 2021). During the interviews, participants would draw symbolic boundaries between these two sets of clubs, highlighting differences in curatorial practices.

We focus explicitly on workers in urban cultural economies who bridge the interests of three groups: owners, core cultural workers (promoters) and consumers (clubbers). In nightlife the most common term for this curatorial role is promoters, which includes both club personnel tied to a specific club (club promoters) as well as freelancers and event companies (external promoters). Club promoters are responsible for music programming which involves booking DJs or selecting external promoters. External promoters bring their

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[1] For a more elaborate explanation of the use of genre, see Koren (2021) and Koren (2022).

own network to the club, which ensures attendance and makes it easier to organise parties in emerging music genres. As they cater to specific target groups, the work involves curating audiences. Promoters then match music and audiences with appropriate spaces, for example venue location, club layout and lighting, to create the desired affective atmospheres. External promoters have more fluid locational strategies: some have long-lasting collaborations with a specific club, while others look for the most appropriate venue for every club night they organise. In some cases, promoters are also responsible for marketing. In their practices, promoters straddle the line between commerce (ticket sale, bar revenue) and creativity (innovative music, trendsetting clubbers).

The interview material consists of semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 36 Amsterdam-based promoters. Of this group, 19 were employed by a nightclub (club promoters). Eight promoters worked for peripheral / niche-edm locations, three promoters worked for peripheral/eclectic locations, seven promoters worked for central/eclectic locations, and one promoter worked for a central/niche-edm location.[2] 17 promoters were self-employed or work for an external event organisation (external promoters). Respondents were mainly male (25/36), mainly white (29/36), mainly in their 20s or 30s (29/36), and most had completed a university-level degree or were in the process of doing so (24/36).

The interviews are corroborated by 111 hours of short-term ethnographic visits at nightclub and industry events to understand the cultural product in its spatiotemporal dimensions and a background document-based analysis (policy documents, newspaper articles, archives, dance music history books, TV documentaries). These documents offer a historical and institutional context that situates cultural production in a specific time and place and in dialogue with different policy rationales and cultural ideals, highlighting the importance of temporality and locality.

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[2] For a map of nightclubs and their locations, see *Figure 1*.

Data analysis involved a systematic process of coding and re-coding with Nvivo. At first, sections relevant to the research themes and questions were labelled. After that, initial codes were applied to the labelled sections which were derived from the theoretical framework. This process was followed by axial coding, which allowed thinking about different codes relationally and discursively. We then moved toward identifying preliminary theories and collapsing categories into overarching themes through an iterative process of moving back and forth between the data and the research questions, interview guides and literature.

The Case of Amsterdam

Although many cities in the global North share similar challenges, policies and development patterns, this section provides a short historical overview of relevant events and developments that have changed Amsterdam's night-time landscape. From the mid-1990s, Amsterdam's population started to rise again after declining since the 1960s, which, along with policies favouring homeownership and deregulation of housing associations, lead to a growing core-periphery divide (Savini et al. 2016). This coincided with the demise of nightlife. While national policy was relatively liberal, Amsterdam's city council started a zero-tolerance policy on hard drugs resulting in club closures (Nabben 2010). After the turn of the millennium, newspapers reported a dearth of nightlife activity and hoped that with new clubs opening Amsterdam would 'start swinging again' (Carvalho 2006). However, as late as 2010 the German magazine *Der Spiegel* reported on Amsterdam's dying nightlife, mainly attributed to the difficulty of obtaining and keeping the right permits needed to stay open late enough to operate a nightlife business. In Amsterdam, tight regulations for nightclub permits and relatively early (5am) curfews remained a topic of public debate throughout the 2000s.

A breakthrough in the curfew debate came when the policy notion *Topstad bij Nacht* ('Top City by Night') in 2010 coupled nightlife, creativity, economic prosperity, and growth in tourism, offering an 'enabling frame' (Peck 2012) for a city seeking new pathways for economic growth. At the same time, the role of night mayor – an independent broker between nightclubs and city councils – professionalised and gained a major victory after securing a pilot with 24h permits for creative and innovative nightclubs located outside of the city centre, with Trouw (in the East (*Oost*) neighbourhood) as the first club with a 24h permit in 2013. Spurred by this policy, rising rents and genre-specific commercial risk, new niche-edm clubs opened in more peripheral locations in the city, while many city centre clubs decided to stop programming niche-edm as a response to this new wave of competition. This shaped the location strategies of venues and reconfigured the urban geography of nightclubs in Amsterdam. It also produced a new spatial discourse where niche-edm promoters do not see the city centre as 'cool' anymore.

Gentrification in Amsterdam, with the city centre becoming more expensive since the 1990s (Savini et al. 2016), coincides with the rapid growth of the electronic dance music industries. This consists of two developments: an accelerated rise in DJ fees and a rapid increase in festivals. Therefore, nightclubs compete with other clubs and music festivals for the same audiences. This shows the increased importance of curation as an economic strategy to ensure a nightclubs' survival.

Figure 1 shows the nightclubs' locations in 2019. We identify 49 DJ-oriented nightclubs[3]: 32 can be classified as eclectic while 17 are defined as niche-edm. As the map illustrates, only five eclectic clubs are in peripheral locations, while three niche-edm clubs are in the seventeenth/eighteenth century city centre (*Centrum*). Eclectic clubs are mainly found

[3] For the purposes of this research, nightclubs are defined as a venue with a dancefloor and a DJ that programs weekly club nights, mostly after midnight.

in the nightlife districts around Rembrandtplein and Leidseplein (in *Centrum*). Niche-edm clubs are mostly located outside of the city centre, increasingly also beyond the nineteenth century crescent (*West*, *Zuid*, *Oost*) around *Centrum* towards *Nieuw-West* (post-WWII suburbs) and *Westpoort* (an industrial/harbour area).

Figure 1: Nightclub locations in Amsterdam (2019)
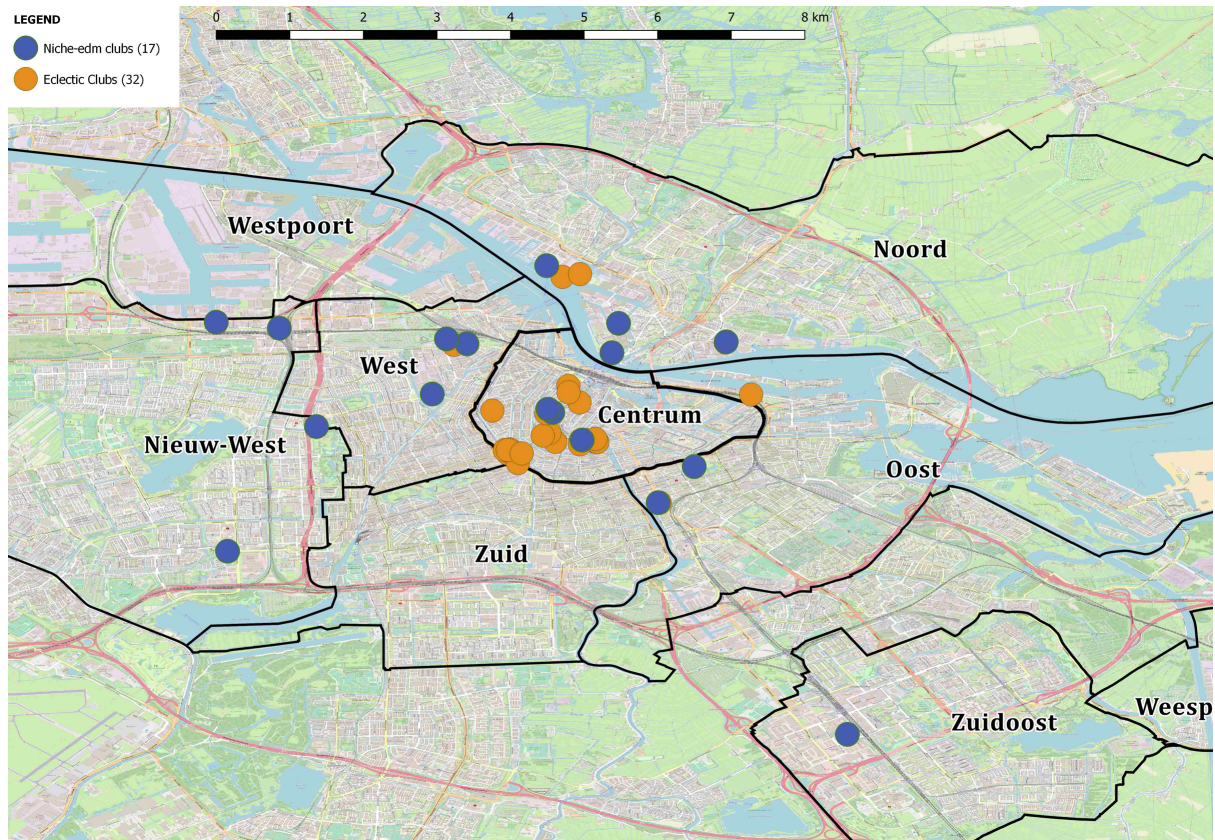
For niche-edm clubs it is now quite common to be in the northern area above the river IJ (*Noord*), the relative remoteness of which increases because pedestrians and cyclists can only reach it by ferry. Nightlife moving to *Noord* and *Nieuw-West* is a recent development: in 2011 only a nightlife guide for locals put 'the ferry back to the city centre' in their nightlife top 5 for *Noord*, while *Nieuw-West* is not mentioned at all (Kluun and van der Beek 2011: 139). The map in the same book only includes *Centrum*.

Curating Appropriate Music

In the context of the experience economy, the affective atmospheres that nightclubs stage are commodities that are enabled and constrained by economic imperatives (Hesmondhalgh 2013). Nightclub promoters therefore navigate a series of tensions to bring together music taste, economic viability, venue profile and audience expectations and affects. Promoters' main responsibility is music programming, which means music is at the forefront of promoter's minds when it comes to describing their curatorial practices. This section outlines how music genres – as a set of cultural ideals, conventions, and orientations (Lena 2012) – shape curatorial practices, stage affective atmospheres and impact venues' commercial orientations. We find promoters of Amsterdam-based nightclubs adopt two different, genre-based strategies.

In the niche-edm genre, DJs are seen as stars or artists which means they have a high degree of autonomy. Their fees are higher and their performances are based around, mostly, obscure music tracks. In this genre, promoters expect lower bar revenues, not only because of musical connoisseurship ('going out for the right reasons'), but also because of higher drug intake among audiences. In the eclectic genre (R&B, hip-hop, dancehall, Latin, etc), the qualities of a DJ are centred around playing recognisable hits at the right time. DJ taste is less guiding and therefore less risky and alcohol intake is expected to be higher, increasing bar sales. While in both genres nightclubs rely on a few hours on two weekend nights to make profit, the eclectic genre is typically seen as more commercially viable than the niche-edm genre.

In the eclectic genre, promoters assess a DJ's quality not primarily by their mixing abilities or musical connoisseurship, but rather by the ability to use well-known songs to create an atmosphere to 'synchronise' (Swartjes and Vandenberg 2023) the audience reaction. As a promoter explains:

> Mixing is not so difficult but playing a set is. A set is a story… if you're a hip-hop DJ and you want a mosh pit where everyone jumps because you play the hit of the moment, you first have to play a record that people sing along to, a tune where they put their hands up in the air, because until I do that, I'm not going to jump.
>
> (Club promoter, 30s, eclectic, city centre)

Producing an atmosphere requires orchestrating people's actions (Bille and Hauge 2022): the sought after audience reaction spans a range of emotions (singing along, putting hands in the air) that eventually leads to a collective affective outburst (jumping) inspired by the music.

In the niche-edm music genre, promoters describe a DJ's quality in different terms: they place more emphasis on musical connoisseurship, distancing themselves from eclectic clubs by stating DJ'ing should not be about playing the hits. Rather, they see the DJ as an autonomous artist, someone with a specific taste, who should be allowed artistic freedom. In other words, nightclub music should not reflect audience tastes in the best possible manner, but guide audience tastes. This implies audiences need to be 'open' to new styles and sounds. As this promoter explains, the electronic dance music DJ has to make sure that the audience 'gets behind it':

> I think it's important to not impose something on the DJ, to constrain them in what they're doing, because I think it gives freedom to exactly play what you like as a DJ. I think that gives the biggest feeling and you are really behind it.
> (External promoter, 20s, niche-edm)

Here, we see how a different conception of DJ quality changes the ways in which promoters seek to stage an 'affective atmosphere', something which is felt by individuals sharing space (Shaw 2014). The eclectic promoter describes this as a synchronised, collective euphoria (singing along, hands in the air, jumping) while the niche-edm promoter captures this more abstractly as 'the biggest feeling'.

For niche-edm, DJ selection rests less on hits, nostalgia and collective memory, the DJ's task of synchronising the audience is arguably more difficult - it's harder to determine the outcome. Promoters want DJs who are forward-thinking and will introduce the audience

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to new music but promoters are also aware that audiences enter the club with certain expectations of what the night will look like, and therefore might experience DJs as too innovative, experimental, obscure, or novel. This explains why niche-edm club nights are seen as commercially riskier than eclectic nights. As one eclectic promoter points out: niche-edm club owners have to "dare to do it" and "need patience", because it takes longer for a club to fill up consistently every weekend.

Curation is not purely a trade-off between the promoter's taste, expected revenues, and location. The club's reputation and cultural prestige is also at stake. For example, promoters might book DJs that are too expensive to establish or reinforce the club's profile as a key venue in the genre. A promoter for an underground niche-edm venue explained that booking DJs is not just about taste, but also about the 'momentum' of a DJ – promoters respond to industry-based and scene-based trends. The idea is that investments will pay off in the long run as the appropriate DJ or live act generates a stronger cultural profile, increasing audience loyalty in the form of repeat business.

This section demonstrates how music curation uses genre (as ideal, orientation and convention) to create appropriate atmospheres and synchronise the 'biggest feeling'. However, genre ideals also have economic implications: the eclectic genre is seen as more commercially viable than the niche-edm genre. Since niche-edm promoters stage an affective atmosphere around DJs as musical connoisseurs, they target a knowledgeable and open 'in-crowd' that is willing to travel further for more 'sophisticated' nocturnal experiences. Eclectic clubs in the city centre, on the other hand, benefit from the economic advantages associated with clustering. The next section considers how promoters curate space and adapt to spatial dynamics in an urban context characterised by regulation, regeneration, and gentrification.

Curating Appropriate Spaces

Successful club nights are about more than music and DJs. Promoters know it is crucial to embed collective musical experiences in appropriate spaces. We consider and discuss how promoters attune their curatorial practices to space at the meso scale and micro scale. First, nightclubs negotiate their location within the city (meso scale), based on certain characteristics including the area's charisma, accessibility, proximity to clusters of other relevant activities and / or its relative remoteness or isolation. Second, nightclubs attune their venue design (micro scale) to the music and audience because genre histories evoke spatial aesthetics and dancefloor conventions. In the urban studies literature, the main locational focus for nightlife has been nightlife districts and city centres (Shaw 2014; van Liempt et al. 2015; Seijas and Gelders 2021), but the specific urban planning, regulation and gentrification context of Amsterdam has resulted in an urban geography where niche-edm clubs are scattered around the city.

Many clubs are in rather 'atomic' locations, sometimes close to other types of creative businesses and service industries, but often not in designated or branded nightlife districts. Nightclubs in peripheral locations are typically not housed in purpose-built venues, but rather in regenerated buildings, such as former industrial estates or schools. Space has profound implications for curation: external promotors move around and can pick from a range of spaces – they choose the appropriate venue from a range of locations in the city. Club promoters, on the other hand, attune their entrenched club spaces to different genres and organisers by arranging the 'appropriate' lightning plan, decorations, and design.

To understand curation at the meso scale it is not enough to confirm that gentrification has led nightclubs to move to more peripheral urban locations. Rather, it is crucial to understand how this process has inspired a reflexive set of aesthetics that shape promoters' curatorial practices. Niche-edm promoters, often more orientated towards the outskirts,

typically see city-centre venues as polished, boring, safe, commercial, and inauthentic. For example, a niche-edm promoter explains how she feels Amsterdam nightlife is "overregulated", reminiscing about a queer club before it changed strategy and became more sanitised: "it was a bit disgusting you know, but you did go there".

Niche-edm promoters reflexively re-orient their curatorial practices towards something 'different', embracing 'grit' in search of subcultural authenticity (Garcia 2016; Hracs et al. 2013). From the 1960s to the 1990s countercultural and squat venues would typically spring up in Amsterdam's historic canal district or in the affluent *Zuid* (South) area (*see Figure 1*) (Verlaan 2016; Nabben 2010), but recent urban processes have prompted niche-edm promoters to start branding the city centre as a "no-go area" in terms of non-mainstream nightlife (even though specialist record shops and promoters' offices are still located there). Meanwhile, promoters in the eclectic genre continue to organise in the city centre, benefitting from clustering and centrality in terms of accessibility (especially public transport) and commercial viability (spending power, tourism).

In their search for 'something different', niche-edm promoters profit from the association with urban grit and the disassociation with the over-regulated city centre. At the same time, remote locations create new tensions: there is the feeling that they attract a more dedicated audience (see also Garcia 2011), who feel that a hard-to-find venue adds to the exclusivity and experience of the night (Hracs et al. 2013). But if peripheral locations are perceived as 'too exclusive' they will easily discourage people and require more effort and planning than a spontaneous night out. A telling example is a promoter's reflection on his venue's curfew being extended from 4am to 5am by the local council. His nightclub is in *Noord*, the part of the city above the river IJ (see *Figure 1*). He explains it makes a big difference, because people might not be willing to travel from the city centre for one or two hours, but they might for three or four. This impacts curation: for more remote clubs there is

a stronger incentive to produce club nights that offer something that audiences are willing to travel for. Therefore, location increases the need to produce something that is cutting-edge or unique for audiences 'in the know'.

Longevity is also an issue for peripheral locations: licenses are often temporary and club promoters feel they are reaching the limits of the space available for new nightlife ventures in the city. In 2019 the art and event space Het Hem had just opened in Zaandam, a town north of Amsterdam, which was perceived as a landmark moment in the process of activities moving further and further out.

Space also impacts curation at the micro scale: the venue itself. Because niche-edm is associated with old industrial heritage, peripheral nightclubs make sure lighting, decoration, and the aesthetics of a club's dancefloor and non-dancefloor spaces (including for example bar, cloakrooms, lounge areas, smoking rooms, bathrooms) emphasise the neo-industrial romanticism of urban grit (Garcia 2016). The following excerpt from the fieldnotes illustrates how this assemblage of objects and practices (Shaw 2014) creates an affective atmosphere:

> In this building nothing is straight – it's the opposite of the black cube that so many clubs are. All the dark spaces make it feel like a club, but you can tell it was not designed as such. It gives people the freedom to appropriate space the way they want. Its maze-like structure adds to a sense of possibility, of discovery.
> (Field notes, 20 October 2019)

In purpose-built music venues (often 'black cubes') that host both niche-edm and eclectic nights, promoters are also aware that on certain nights the dancefloor should not come across as too polished and clean. A promoter explains how light and sound engineers are instructed to attune to a party's needs, comparing two club nights:

> "For our Latin night we always put palm trees, nice decorations, balloons, it's cheerful. The light needs to be a bit higher, we add a disco ball. To make sure people can see each other we add some platforms that people use as dance stages…[but] when we do a drum & bass night we need strobes, a smoke machine, to turn off the lights…"
> (Club promoter, 30s, eclectic, city centre)

Different genres require different approaches: dancefloor space can be transformed accordingly to ensure the possibility of 'big feelings' or collective euphoria. This links to genre ideals. The darkness of niche-edm dancefloors can be seen as an effort to stage an affective atmosphere where the music is central, one that fits the notion that most of the tracks played will be unknown by the audience – there is a strong focus on the aural senses. By contrast, at eclectic nights in Amsterdam, the warm feeling contributes to the cheerful atmosphere where people can 'see and be seen' – eliciting flirting (Tan 2014). With genre differences in mind, promoters curate spaces to stage the appropriate atmosphere by combining the meso-scale (an aesthetic vision of what the city at night should look like) with the micro-scale (an aesthetic vision of what the dancefloor should look like) to shape nightclubs' 'affective experiences' (Shaw 2014). Thus, at the micro and meso scale, we assert that spaces are not mere containers of economic activity but rather important sites of curation which shape the nature of clubbing experiences.

Curating Appropriate Audiences

Audiences co-produce the affective atmosphere of a club night, because even a carefully attuned combination of music and space will not work if the audience does not feel they can share ownership of the club night (Bille and Hauge 2022). Therefore, nightclubs devote a lot of attention to curating audiences. Academics have written about the role of door policies as a tool to select the appropriate audience, for example attracting cool subcultural or affluent audiences (Measham and Hadfield 2009). But the search for the appropriate crowd starts long before the event night and the real-time selection process at the door. Indeed, promoters seek to match genre, space, marketing, guest lists and door policies to attract the audience they want (Koren forthcoming). Most importantly, curating audiences entails a negotiation of musical and spatial context: promoters not only need to navigate how audiences move

through the night and which audiences go where, they also need to consider what these audiences will think when they encounter and experience a club night.

Given the wide range of entertainment and nightlife options available in a city like Amsterdam, nightclubs cannot just build on their reputation as a venue but need to stand out on a nightly basis. It's not the venue, it's the night, as a club promoter explains:

> We find that people really know what they're coming for at the door, they really come for the party…They do not just walk into [name of nightlife district] to see what's going on. That era is kind of over, I think. And that's not a bad thing, because you have people inside who know what they came for so they're really going for it instead of cowardly standing on the side and leaving after five minutes. So you have a cooler crowd but it's not like if you open the doors on Friday we'll have 500 people pop in. That's not the case anymore.
> (Club promoter, 30s, eclectic, city centre)

The observed change from spontaneous to informed audiences highlights the importance of curation in today's urban experience economies. This quote addresses how audience curation translates into the affective atmosphere on a given club night: clubbers are invested in the night, so rather than "cowardly standing on the side", they actively and enthusiastically contribute to the collective feeling of the party. Promoters prefer crowds who know what they are in for, not only because of their increased enthusiasm, but also because it makes the curatorial aspect more interesting: it allows them to challenge audiences with new and innovative sounds and trends rather than tried-and-tested formats. This feeds into the more general idea that by simply being there appropriate audiences add value and co-produce and co-promote the club experience (Hracs et al. 2013).

At the same time, audience curation is a complex process that is difficult to navigate. Door policies may help select the appropriate crowd, but also exclude audiences along classed, gendered and racialised lines (Buford May and Chaplin 2008; Garcia 2011) and many promoters feel morally ambiguous about these policies (Koren forthcoming). Moreover, strict door policies are expensive in a competitive nightlife sector like Amsterdam,

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because turning people away means loss of revenue. Therefore, to attract the appropriate people clubs strategically consider audience curation early in the planning process. Many promoters use ambassadors to create a 'buzz' around their club or event. For example, a club promoter explained that in the previous club he worked in he thought the atmosphere was too 'boorish', by which he meant heteronormatively masculine. So, when he could open his own space, his first marketing strategy was a combination of distributing flyers in Amsterdam's gay saunas as well as offering guest list spots to 'tastemakers'. The club's idea is that by attracting a core group of people who fit into their envisioned audience, other clubbers with similar taste, style and behaviour will follow suit.[4]

Yet, despite the perception that audiences are more informed, clubs also need to consider uninformed, more spontaneous, or more sporadic audiences. As explained in the previous section, this is mediated by space: peripheral locations and re-used buildings attract electronic dance music enthusiasts to such an extent that niche-edm promoters brand the city centre as a 'no-go area'. City centre promoters find they need to attract local clubbers by organising and marketing club nights that stand out, but they are also aware that, because of their location, they attract tourists who lack a (tacit) knowledge of local nightlife and might not have looked at the venue's program. City centre clubs experience tourists as a mixed blessing: Amsterdam's international image fills dancefloors and brings in revenue, but too many tourists, or the 'wrong' type of tourists can potentially ruin the atmosphere of a club night (Rapp 2010). For example, 'stag parties' were a frequent scapegoat among the interviewed promoters.

Curating audiences entails not only a negotiation of the spatial context, but also a need to imagine what audiences might think when they approach or enter a club. Regarding

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[4] The impact this shift in attention, from door policies to cultural production, has in terms of social inequalities in audience participation is discussed in Koren forthcoming.

tourists, this leads promoters to adopt two different curatorial strategies. The first strategy is embracing the venue's location. Here, promoters acknowledge that to stage the desired affective atmosphere, they need to consider the audience's musical frame of reference. For example, a promoter explained that on a night where they only played Dutch hip-hop all the tourists left. Because they brand themselves as a hip-hop club, he argued his club should curate hip-hop in such a way that it is also understandable to someone "from France". In terms of staging an atmosphere, the promoter 'saves' the vibe not by preserving the 'local' elements that club nights use to stand out, but rather by creating a more international atmosphere informed by a global definition of the hip-hop genre.

The second strategy is mediating the venue's location. Reflecting on a niche-edm club that used to be in the city centre, a promoter explains that door policies become more important for centrally located clubs, to reject "stag parties" and "people who think they're going to one of the commercial clubs". In other words, people who might ruin the collective affective experience. At an earlier stage, therefore, the curatorial strategy of the marketing department is one of selected visibility: promoters explained that they tried to reduce their presence on Google Search and tourist websites and only advertise on specialist websites like Resident Advisor. Promoters figure out the appropriate – both physical and virtual – promotion channels to engage with the desired audiences (Jansson and Hracs 2018). Going with the idea that high tourist rates in Amsterdam are both inevitable and a commercial blessing, promoters try to ensure they mainly attract informed, subculturally savvy tourists on weekend nights, while they allow a Tuesday night external promoter to distribute at youth hostels, given that it is hard to attract a local audience on a school night.

Thus, club promoters not only consider what happens inside the venue but negotiate a series of urban challenges that are inherent of or fundamental to the functioning of the night-time economy, including gentrification, regulation, and tourism. Geographers and urban

scholars have highlighted that these processes impact nightclubs' location and longevity (Hae 2011). Our discussion of music, spaces, and audiences shows that these processes also shape the curatorial practices of nightclubs, highlighting not only how urban and economic contexts enable and constrain creative opportunities, but also the self-reflexive manner with which club promoters seek to create 'the biggest feeling' as they carefully attune club nights to the economic and urban dynamics of the city they're based in.

Conclusion

To understand the impact of regulation, regeneration, and gentrification on the night-time economy research needs to shift its attention beyond city centres and nightlife districts towards more atomised nightlife on the fringes of the city. In the changing urban context of Amsterdam, nightclub promoters emerge as vital yet understudied urban actors who attune their curatorial practices (regarding music, space, and audiences) to spatial and market dynamics. This analysis shows not only how the self-reflexivity of cultural businesses adapts to urban processes in a tough and competitive economic climate, but it also highlights how promoters attune the cultural meaning of club nights, through genre, to spatial dynamics at the meso-scale (neighbourhood), which then translates into spatial aesthetics at the micro scale (venue). This enriches our understanding of how curation stages affective atmospheres and how nightclubs produce the type of commodities that have come to define the experience economy through matching appropriate music with appropriate spaces and appropriate audiences.

Nightclub promoters stress that affective atmospheres depend on genre. Given that, due to high DJ fees and increased unpredictability, the niche-edm genre is more costly than the eclectic genre, niche-edm venues increasingly locate themselves on the fringes of the city, often in relatively isolated (former) industrial areas. Remote locations have advantages, because promoters believe they attract more dedicated crowds, but promoters are also aware

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their location puts more pressure on them to create unique, cutting-edge parties. They do so by curating space at the micro scale: the spatial aesthetics of the venue create the appropriate affective atmosphere for a given club night. Promoters find that curation is increasingly important in a competitive night-time economy where a nightclub's reputation by itself is not enough to attract audiences: venues must stand out on nightly basis. Appropriate spaces need to match appropriate audiences. For example, city centre clubs experience tourists as a mixed blessing: they bring in revenue but are perceived as a potential threat to the night's affective atmosphere. Some city centre clubs embrace their location by catering to tourists, at least on selected nights, while others mediate their location by decreasing online and offline visibility.

The findings make several important contributions. By exploring the case of Amsterdam, the paper nuances our understanding of urban night-time economies and processes of urban change while highlighting the important role of locational, historical and contextual specificity (van Liempt et al. 2015; Chapuis 2017). The novel focus on nightclub promoters also contributes to existing theory and developing conceptualisations of curation including the interplay between specific spatial dynamics and curatorial practices (Jansson and Hracs 2018). Beyond the typical focus on microspatialities, the paper considers how Amsterdam's unique urban context shapes the nature of curation. The paper builds on studies which look at how affective atmospheres are assembled and experienced (Bille and Hauge 2022) by looking at different scales (venue and neighbourhood) and times (before and during events) and the influence of genre-specific ideals, conventions and constraints. Finally, by exploring the motivations and working practices of nightclub promoters the paper sheds light on these vital yet understudied actors within urban night-time economies (Seijas and Gelders 2021).

This research focused on Amsterdam as a critical case study, but the explored themes hold wider relevance for academics who seek to track and trace the ongoing evolution of

night-time economies in a variety or urban settings, especially in the context of post-pandemic revitalisation. However, context matters: regulation, regeneration, gentrification and tourism vary across cities depending on policy, size, history, culture, and geography. Further studies could enrich academic understanding of how, after night-time economies made city centres more attractive again, nocturnal venues were often unable to retain their presence in the urban core on their terms. The peripheralisation and atomisation of 'cool' and 'subculturally edgy' nightclubs raise questions about the cyclical geographies of urban bohemia: will nightclubs continue to be able to move out further and further, will they be able to make a return to city centres, or will they ultimately decrease in number? Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are needed to map out and understand how the spatial transformations of night-time economies unfold.

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