

GLOBAL NIGHTTIME RECOVERY PLAN

CHAPTER 2:

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

WHAT IS THE GLOBAL NIGHTTIME RECOVERY PLAN?

The **Global Nighttime Recovery Plan** is a collaborative practical guide that aims to provide all members of the night-time ecosystem the knowledge and tools to aid their cities in planning for safe, intentional, and equitable re-opening.

Opportunities to Reimagine

Nighttime industries are facing unique pressures, but are also led by strategic and creative problem solvers and collaborative, resourceful organisers. By considering both spatial and temporal dimensions of the 24-hour city, these cross-sector leaders can enable cities to rebound from COVID-19 stronger and more resilient than before.

“WE’RE LIVING THROUGH A STRANGE AND RARE OPPORTUNITY TO BREAK AWAY FROM A BROKEN SYSTEM AND SECURE THE FOUNDATIONS OF A MORE SUSTAINABLE UNDERGROUND CULTURE.”

– CHAL RAVENS, FOR DJ MAG

Each chapter includes:

Guidance from re-opening to re-imagination:

1. **RESOLVE: Analysis** of cities’ immediate actions to contain COVID-19.
2. **RESILIENCE and RETURN: Tools and strategies** to shape recovery.
3. **REIMAGINATION and REFORM: Scenario planning** to define next normal.

Not “Best Practice,” but “Practice”: No one has all the answers yet—the plan highlights various workable approaches in an ongoing, collective learning process.

Challenging “the way things were”: Pre-pandemic, nightlife was already vulnerable, and working close to the margin. As we return, how do we re-envision a better “normal”?

Never one-size-fits all: We know what works in one political or cultural context may not work in all. These models are a starting point for cities to modify and re-contextualise in service of more equitable, just, and inclusive nightlife scenes.

Suggestions for measuring progress: Both stories and data—quantitative and qualitative—are essential to capture progress and success in nightlife landscapes.

Harm-reduction mindset: We recognise that people will always want to gather. Rather than denying that impulse, we wish to help people do so safely. This guide should always be used in the context of local public health guidelines.

We hope this resource is of use in your city, and we’d love to hear how you’re putting it to work. Please stay tuned at nighttime.org, and reach out to us with questions, ideas, and interest: hello@vibe-lab.org.

With warm wishes,

The Global Nighttime Recovery Plan team



THE GLOBAL NIGHTTIME RECOVERY PLAN WILL BE RELEASED CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER OVER THE COURSE OF 2020. FIND THE LATEST INSTALLMENT ON [NIGHTTIME.ORG/RECOVERYPLAN](https://nighttime.org/recoveryplan).

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PHOTO: EVA DE KORTE

INTRODUCTION: THE FUTURE OF DANCEFLOORS

AS CLUBS REOPEN, WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

While the Covid-19 pandemic has encouraged many cities to re-imagine the use of public outdoor space during the daytime, innovation is also needed to prepare indoor spaces as we move towards the winter months in the Northern Hemisphere.

In the past decades clubbing was already undergoing a worrying and complex transformation: financial pressure and gentrification processes, socio-cultural stigmas, competition, lack of institutional support and difficult conversations with regulating bodies have put many music clubs in a precarious position and led to waves of closures. A 2015 study from The Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers (ALMR) found that the UK lost over 1400 clubs between 2005 and 2015 alone. Venues serving marginalised communities are often more vulnerable to these pressures.

The Covid-19 outbreak exacerbated those trends. In many cities, clubs have been left alone to find alternative ways to survive - after several months of missing income, some venues around the world are shutting down for good.

In this chapter we explore tactics and propose tools to facilitate safer, more inclusive and viable dancefloors, including frameworks for new business models, crowd management and evaluating inclusive and equitable practices in your venue or collective. It's now more important than ever to question, innovate and re-imagine the status quo and help build the future of dancefloors.

1 / CHALLENGES ON THE DANCEFLOOR—AND OPPORTUNITIES

Around the world, Covid-19 prompted sudden closures of music venues and clubs. Closures, “second waves”, and new restrictions enforced in the reopening stages have put venue managers, artists and staff under unprecedented stress.

Clubs and organisers are utilising live streaming, crowdfunding campaigns and complementary services as strategies and experiments to stay afloat and raise awareness about the importance of night venues in our economic and social life. However, without clear support from governments or tested operational models, the entrepreneurial risk and challenges are still immense.

As *Berlin Clubcommission* pointed out, there remain many reasons why dancefloors shouldn't reopen at this stage. And while this scenario can sound gloomy, it is important that venues consider all the costs as well as benefits of reopening; in terms of safety, economic risk and “people experience”. Diversification of activities can be key now to test innovative solutions, disrupt the status quo and find new business models.

This section explores the opportunities and challenges of nightlife in both **physical and virtual spaces** as it relates to business models, patron and worker safety, and programming.

“SATURDAY 4TH JULY SAW THE OPENING OF BARS, PUBS AND RESTAURANTS IN THE UK, [WITH MANY] REPURPOSED TO REFLECT A PUB/RESTAURANT ENVIRONMENT WITH SEDENTARY SEATING AREAS, NO DANCING AND LIMITED MUSIC. WE ARE FACED WITH A SECTOR WHICH IS OPERATING BELOW BREAK EVEN WITH MANY UNABLE TO SURVIVE PAST SEPTEMBER, WITH A REVOLUTION OF ILLEGAL RAVES TAKING PLACE ALL OVER THE UK”

– MICHAEL KILL, NIGHT TIME INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION

MAPPING THE IMPACT: UK NIGHT TIME INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION (NTIA) SURVEY

Given ongoing uncertainty, it is crucial to gather data to understand how the sector has been hit by the pandemic.

An online survey of UK nightlife businesses conducted during peak lockdown in April 2020 by the Night Time Industry Association (NTIA) in partnership with Professor Fiona Measham (University of Liverpool and The Loop) and Maria Measham (The Loop and NTIA) illustrates the scale of the problem facing businesses.

Of 200+ nightlife businesses surveyed:

- **63.8% felt reopening with social distancing would not be financially viable.** They estimated that they could only operate at an average of **43% capacity**.
- 43.1% felt that **social distancing guidelines needed to be lifted in order for their business activities to restart.**
- Businesses estimated that they would need an **average lead-in time of 3+ weeks** to prepare to re-open.
- Respondents estimated that the **average cost of restarting activity after lockdown would be £31K** each—and for nightclubs an average of **£62K each**.

Finally, from the NTIA Landlord Survey Report - April 2020, 45% of the respondents stated that they won't survive longer than three months and 75% of them don't have reserves to avoid defaulting.

REIMAGINING BUSINESS MODELS

Club Operations in a Pandemic: Concerns and Opportunities

The unsustainable model of **reduced capacity and sales, shorter operating hours,** and continued **bans on indoor dancing** means that many venues' existing business models simply cannot work. Even in regions where clubs have reopened, many have since closed with the threat of a "second wave," making the necessity of alternative approaches clear in the medium term.

In this scenario, lean start-up approaches and tools, like PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental) and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis should become common sense among event planners and venue managers. Developing alternative business models and reimagining use of space doesn't happen spontaneously, but requires thoughtful planning.

Some key questions to ask:

- **Reduced capacity:** How can smaller-crowd shows or events build a different sense of intimacy and depth of experience—or benefit from spaciousness in typically-crowded venues?
- **Reduced sales:** What other kinds of products can be introduced to cater to different demographics? (And, practically speaking, how can venues manage binge drinking that may occur due to shorter hours?)
- **Perception of Venue Safety:** Who is likely to return to venues first, and how might spaces create actual and perceived safety?
- **Bans on dancing:** How can existing spaces be used differently, activities diversified, or alternative creative offerings pursued (i.e seated concerts, drive-in shows, socially distanced outdoor concerts and dancefloors)? What community partnerships could be fruitful?



PHOTO: FUTURE DESIGN SHIBUYA

"IN JAPAN, THE GOVERNMENT HAS PROVIDED VARIOUS FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THE MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY. CROWDFUNDING PLATFORMS WERE LAUNCHED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE CRISIS TO SUPPORT THE FREELANCE MUSICIANS AND GRASSROOTS VENUES. ARTISTS STARTED DELIVERING ONLINE PERFORMANCES AND COLLECTING SMALL AMOUNTS OF MONEY. HOWEVER, THESE MEASURES ARE SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH TO ENABLE MANY PLAYERS IN THE MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY TO SURVIVE.

TWO REMEDIES ARE CRITICAL FOR THE INDUSTRY, INCLUDING ARTISTS, VENUES AND PROMOTERS, TO BE SUSTAINED WHILE THE COVID-19 THREAT REMAINS. ONE OF THEM IS TO CONVINCE THE AUTHORITIES TO RELAX THE CURRENT STRINGENT OPERATING GUIDELINES WHICH REQUIRE EXCESSIVE SOCIAL DISTANCING AND SHORTENED OPERATING HOURS. THE OTHER IS TO ESTABLISH AN INDUSTRY-WIDE MECHANISM FOR DJS TO EASILY OBTAIN MASTER LICENSES OF RECORDED MUSIC SO THAT THEY CAN MONETISE ONLINE PERFORMANCES WITHOUT LEGAL ISSUES."

— TAK UMEZAWA, JAPAN NIGHTTIME ECONOMY ASSOCIATION

ADAPTING PROGRAMMING

One of the main challenges in lockdown and reopening phases is for venues to programme and create activities that generate income, raise awareness and build community loyalty.

With reduced capacity, issues with travelling, competition and unlicensed/private gatherings starting to boom in many countries, coming up with new viable formats and use of space challenges the entire clubbing supply chain.

Programming in a Pandemic: Concerns and Opportunities

- **Competition:** Big brands and chains can better afford to operate under new requirements than smaller or independent venues, which may not be able to operate with reduced capacities.
How might local officials make public spaces available to smaller grassroots venues and businesses, at reduced or zero cost?
- **Artist Travel:** In a time of travel restrictions, programmers can focus on emerging and local artists, crews, and residents—though savvy marketing is required to appeal to audiences accustomed to more international lineups.
This moment is a chance for KMO (zero-kilometre travel) residencies, exchanges, and mentorship programmes that can strengthen local artist communities in climate-friendly ways—and to share that mission with audiences.
- **New Creative Formats:** Virtual clubbing, VR experiences, hybrid live-virtual shows, and complementary services/merch are emerging during this crisis.
How can venues and collectives take small, smart risks on new formats, to experiment while remaining financially sustainable?

Small, Smart Experimentation

Flexibility and ongoing learning is essential in this tumultuous time, and so a stepwise approach can enable venues to learn as they go—and remain flexible in the case of rising or falling case counts:

1. **Efficient use of outside space** (local authorities can facilitate by easing restrictions and providing streamlined, unbureaucratic processes—see Chapter 1 for further detail).
2. **Test events** with closed or controlled audiences who can give feedback or help to identify successes and challenges
3. **Time-limited shorter events**, such as 2-3hr live concerts (potentially seated or more low-key), to test and refine hygiene measures
4. **Hybrid Events**, small crowds in the venue, streamed to a bigger audience
5. **Longer events and club nights** as local situations permit

Consider also adapting a model like **Open Club Day**, which aims to raise awareness about day-to-day realities of a live music venue with neighbours, local cultural players, authorities, and policy makers.

Solutions & Innovations

While some venues have pivoted their programming, other venues have fully shifted their business model or developed entirely new collaborations as a result of these limitations. Some snapshots of efforts underway:

FOR THE VENEZUELAN DIASPORA, VIRTUAL PARTIES SUCH AS #CASAECHEO--A WEEKLY INSTAGRAM LIVE GATHERING HOSTED BY A PROMINENT DJ AND FORMER MEMBER OF LOS AMIGOS INVISIBLES--HAVE BECOME VITAL SPACES TO SOCIALISE WITH FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO NOW LIVE ALL OVER THE WORLD. WHILE THEY CAN'T REPLACE THE MANY LINKS AND TRADITIONS OUR COUNTRY HAS LOST TO THE CRISIS, THESE PARTIES CREATE A UNIQUE PLATFORM TO KEEP OUR MUSIC, OUR HUMOUR AND OUR ESSENCE ALIVE."

– ANDREINA SEIJAS

Bubble Raves: Large and Small

Virgin Money Unity Arena, Gosforth Park, (UK) Socially distanced music concerts from August 2020, with platforms for customer ‘bubbles’. 2,500 capacity compared with a norm of 15,000.

While arenas operate on a very different scale from clubs, smaller venues can learn from positive feedback from artists and audience: for instance, women who felt safer from sexual harassment, and eventgoers with disabilities who felt more included by the event space design.



PHOTO: JELLE DREESEN

Thé Dansant (Belgium) piloted ‘bubble raves’; afternoon parties with masked patrons and staff, but maskless dancing within household “bubbles,” and visible support by VibeCare teams. Further research is needed to evaluate whether these concepts can transfer indoors.



PHOTO: THIBAUT FEYAERTS

Paradise City Festival (Belgium) held its (usually land-based) festival on boats this year, enabling social distance between event goers.

Virtual Collaborations

Ampere club, Antwerp (Belgium) presented Ampere on Air, a hybrid model with three weeks of virtual programming, and a partnership with Deliveroo to offer attendees food boxes and boutique cocktails to their homes.

United We Stream (Berlin/Global) brings digital clubs to people’s homes. In partnership with local channels and networks, livestream DJ sets and crowdfunding campaigns support clubs and their infrastructure, and raise awareness and self-determination more than 80 cities worldwide.

CASE STUDY: LONDON

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND CYCLE PARK

Village Underground (VU) is a multi-purpose events space located in the heart of East London, regularly hosting a broad range of activities from concerts and club nights to theatre, live art, workshops and exhibitions. Following the Covid-19 outbreak, the VU team soon realised it would not be possible to operate as a ticketed cultural venue for quite some time, given the reduced capacity and prevention measures being introduced. Currently VU finds that only private and corporate events are financially viable to host, if they are to comply with the prevention measures.



PHOTO: BETH CROCKATT PHOTOGRAPHY

“WHEN THE LOCKDOWN EASED, COVID-19 RELATED CAMPAIGNS BY NTIA AND MUSIC VENUE TRUST STATING THAT MUSIC VENUES COULDN'T OPERATE UNDER THE CURRENT RESTRICTIONS, PROBABLY, ALTHOUGH INADVERTENTLY, LED TO SOME MISUNDERSTANDING WITH PRIVATE BRANDS, THINKING THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO USE MUSIC VENUES TO HOST THEIR EVENTS. SO AT LEAST SOME OF THAT BUSINESS IS THERE WHEN WE THOUGHT IT WASN'T!”

– KATHARINE KHAN

In the period of complete lockdown, VU firstly made sure that all the team was financially protected via the furlough scheme, and that contractor balances were being settled, then VU business manager Katharine Khan ran a quick business analysis to figure out what they could do to support themselves.

The main problems seemed to be uncertainty and no ability to plan, complete change in people's behaviour, changing governments policies instructions and agenda and money flowing differently from usual (and not to VU!).

“THE MAIN PROBLEM OF THE COVID-19 SITUATION IS UNCERTAINTY AND THE CONSTANT WAITING FOR GOVERNMENT INDICATIONS: IN ORDER TO MAKE A PLAN NOW...WE DECIDED EARLY, BACK IN MAY, TO ASSUME THAT FULL CAPACITY TICKETED EVENTS PROBABLY WOULDN'T HAPPEN UNTIL AROUND FEBRUARY 2021.”

– KATHARINE KHAN

Human Behaviour & Government Policy

In looking at the UK political and economic environment, Katharine observed that:

- With the closure of gyms, leisure centres and swimming baths, many people were choosing to exercise outside more
- The UK government announced that in order to limit the virus spread, people should avoid public transport wherever possible
- More roads were being closed to car traffic in London, and an increased congestion charge was implemented
- Cycling is becoming officially encouraged by the authorities because it is eco-friendly, reduces pollution, contagion-safe and cheaper than cars.

CASE STUDY: LONDON

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND CYCLE PARK

Money Flowing - Where?

And then came the hard proof from the market: share values of bike companies and the UK cycling industry started to boom.

Another challenge was having almost zero economic resources. VU needed to think very carefully about the assets they had: a great problem-solving team of people, an alcohol license and a location on the edge of the City of London.

Whilst being close to the City of London's financial district doesn't have an impact on VU regular customers, it does enable them to be considered as a customer base. VU's location turned out to be very valuable for people who daily cycle to and from their offices in the City and might require secure cycle storage.

It was decided the VU Cycle Park was worth researching and modelling.



PHOTO: VILLAGE UNDERGROUND INSTAGRAM

"WE SELF-EDUCATE OURSELVES BY INCESSANT GOOGLING, FOR EXAMPLE, "BIKE RACKS FOR EVENTS", AND WE FOUND OUT THAT THE LONDON MAYOR AND TRANSPORT FOR LONDON HAD POSTED ARTICLES ABOUT HOW TO BUILD THEM! ALSO, IMPORTANTLY AND THANKFULLY, OUR VENUE MANAGER KEELAN WARR HAPPENS TO BE A CYCLING PASSIONATE AND WAS INTERESTED TO TAKE ON THE CHALLENGE OF SETTING UP THE OPERATIONS OF THE VU CYCLE STORE AND ALL THE [HEALTH & SAFETY] AND RISK MINIMISING IT INVOLVED"

– KATHARINE KHAN

VU set up the cycle park, bringing just four people out of furlough for less than a week. The team was carefully chosen for their sales, marketing and operational skills.

They looked for expert partnerships that would fill any potential lack of credibility and / or reputation in the cycling industry, as well as, potentially, some additional income. Look Mum No Hands! was deemed to be the perfect candidate; a high-end independent bike shop that serviced the geographical market VU Cycle Park was aiming for, and one that was also prepared to work in the VU premises once a week tuning and servicing bikes.

They also looked for other income streams and made use of their alcohol license by running a bottle shop. They are planning to partner with a coffee vendor who can sell both to the cyclists and the street. They thought it would be good to offer this service to an independent retailer who might otherwise have been trading at a music festival and is suffering through similar restrictions.

"I GUESS RIGHT NOW PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN MUSIC VENUES HAVE TO PREPARE TO BE VERY FLEXIBLE, BRAVE, PROBLEM SOLVING AND SELF-EDUCATE - WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?!"

– KATHARINE KHAN

VU is testing and amending the model for an initial, trial period of 8 weeks and recently announced they are reopening the venue as a socially distanced bar on Thursday – Sunday nights. "The temporary pop-up bar will run alongside our secure bicycle storage, with a fully stocked bar, table service, specially curated music, live DJ's and all the good vibes you would expect from our teams at VU."

DESIGNING SAFER CLUB INTERACTIONS

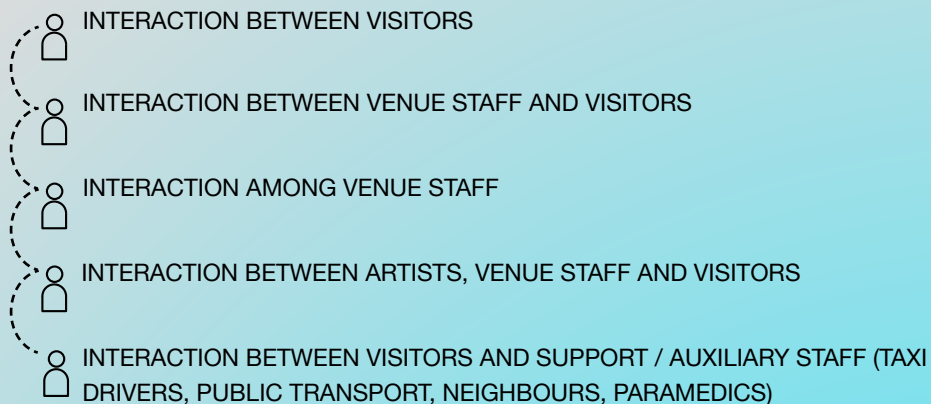
“WE AS A SECTOR SHOULD BE DRIVING THE AGENDA FOR REOPENING DANCEFLOORS, FOCUSING ON SAFETY, VIABILITY AND AN EVOLVED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.”

– MICHAEL KILL, NIGHT TIME INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION

As central elements of the night-time economy, clubbing and indoor music venues normally rely on close interaction between people and gatherings—making Covid-safe and worthwhile experiences challenging.

There are numerous how-to guides and resources on implementing Covid-safety measures in venues and nighttime spaces. See the Further Reading section for links from New York City (A Light in the Night), Hong Kong (Black Sheep Restaurants), Belgium (Covid Event Risk Model). As a companion to those existing resources, this section provides key questions and frameworks to begin implementing changes.

Prevention must act at several levels of interaction during events:



Safety and perceptions of risk are two key elements to consider in preparing to host an event. However, it's key to consider whether necessary prevention measures would allow for a fulfilling experience: are the socio-cultural values of the dancefloor/venue preserved? And are the measures actually possible to enforce?

SOCIAL DISTANCING BETWEEN CUSTOMERS / BETWEEN EMPLOYEES - CUSTOMERS / BETWEEN ARTISTS

Less overcrowded spaces.	Difficult to implement and control.
Less anti-social behaviour stemming from close interaction (ie, harassment of staff).	Close dancing is prevented.
	Certain performances can't be staged.

MASK REQUIREMENT FOR CUSTOMERS

Masks can be seen as “cool”, carnivalesque, or allowing for more anonymity.	Masks can be uncomfortable and unappealing to wear.
Communication campaigns can be like: “use masks as you use condoms and earplugs”.	Masks limit communication. In spaces with loud music, limiting lip-reading and non-verbal expression can negatively impact staff & customers, especially with some disabilities.

TRACING APPS AND/OR EVENT REGISTRATION

Ability to contact-trace in the event of a positive test.	Privacy concerns with contact tracing lead to fake names and information.
Innovations in tracing apps for stronger privacy protection (see Closecontact in Further Reading).	App downloads below effective thresholds in many regions.

TEMPERATURE TEST OR RAPID COVID TESTING

Detection of symptomatics.	Possibility of false-negative test results; asymptomatics may not be detectable.
90 minute tests are being introduced in UK schools & care homes (see Further Reading). If these prove to work well, people could do a test 90 minutes before entering a festival or nightclub.	Raised temperatures may also result from other medical conditions or intoxication.

TOOL: VIBECARE 5 LEVELS FRAMEWORK

Eventsure (Antwerp, Belgium) offers an international training programme to create **VibeCare teams**, a group of open-minded people with nightlife experience that support venues' security teams in managing crowds with a friendly, caring approach.

An event experience is the result of visitors' interactions with environmental (both physical and digital) factors before, during and after events. The VibeCare strategy combines atmosphere management, crowd management, and body language to create positive, intentional experiences from beginning to end.

This 5-level framework focuses on the 5 stages of *Arrival*, *Entry*, *Circulation*, *Exit*, and *Departure*—and while this approach was created before the outbreak of Covid-19, this tool applies to both Covid-19 logistics and “normal” event-management routines.

“AT EVERY STAGE, ASK: WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO TAKE CARE OF OUR PUBLIC? AND TO TAKE CARE OF ALL THE PEOPLE PRESENT AT THE EVENT? AND TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY ALL THE SAFETY MEASURES IN PLACE?”

– ROBBE VAN BOGAERT, EVENTSURE

VIBECARE 5 LEVELS FRAMEWORK FOR COVID-19 MANAGEMENT:

Arrival <i>Everything that takes place before the door (ticket purchase, queueing...).</i>	<i>Consider: how are expectations communicated digitally? On the path to the venue? By door staff or security?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guests' contact info, temperature checks or rapid Covid tests (if implemented) may also be taken here with clear explanations of data storage and management. • Count people coming in and out to maintain reduced capacity. • Consider staff friendliness and body language, key in loud or dark spaces.
Entry <i>How guests enter the space.</i>	<i>Consider: What do people do in the waiting line?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark floor or queue area to ensure distance, and ensure guests put on masks, even in line. • Provide hand sanitizer, and ideally, masks for distribution or affordable purchase.
Circulation <i>How people move around different areas of the space.</i>	<i>Consider: How do people move between areas? How to facilitate social distancing and airflow in: toilets, bars, hallways, stairways, terraces, tables, cloakrooms—particularly narrow or smaller spaces?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What processes might need to change from “normal” operation to maintain distance? • Suggestion: Employ a VibeCare or awareness team member in narrow spaces to remind people about rules, manage flow and avoid congestion.
Exit <i>How guests prepare to leave.</i>	<i>Consider: How will crowds leave?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At closing time, use timeslots/staggered exits, multiple exits, and consider one-way traffic. Disinfect again afterwards.
Departure <i>How the venue manages outside its space—once patrons leave.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially with reduced bar hours, people may binge drink and be more inebriated than usual when leaving. • Use design, written messages, and staff to encourage quiet departure and dispersing—rather than talking/partying/gathering on sidewalks or in neighbourhoods near the venue, or travelling en masse to peoples' houses. • Remind those using public transport to maintain social distancing.

2 / EXPERIMENTS IN VIRTUAL SPACES

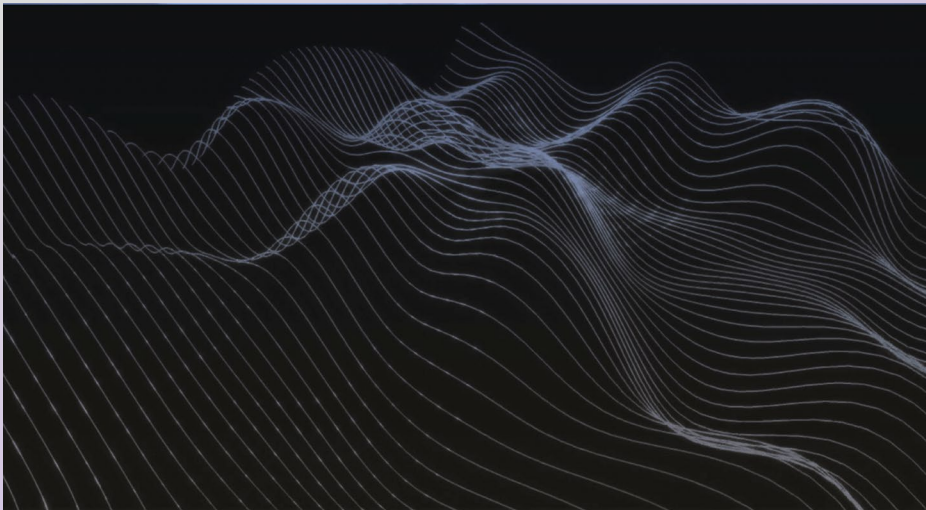


PHOTO: ALGO:RITMI TORINO FACEBOOK

Virtual events and clubs have proliferated as a reaction to lockdowns and closures—and offer their own set of opportunities, challenges, and new questions. At their best, they can connect communities who can't otherwise be together in person, like Toronto-based queer dance party Club Quarantine, or Cheo Pardo's #casaecho, connecting Venezuelans living in diaspora worldwide. But this leads to a pivotal question: who owns and controls virtual dancefloors?

“UNDERSTANDING ISSUES OF EQUALITY AND INEQUALITIES IN THE ONLINE WORLD BECOMES A NEW CHALLENGE FOR THE RISE OF ONLINE CLUBBING. AS ALGORITHMS CAN ALSO BE RACIST, AGEIST AND SEXIST - WHEN THEY ARE BUILT USING BIASED FRAMEWORKS - IT IS IMPORTANT TO QUESTION HOW TO BUILD SPACES THAT CONTINUE TO BE SAFE, DEMOCRATIC AND COMMUNITY-LED.”

– ALESSIO KOLIOULIS, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

PROS	CONS
Limited physical risk: Safer against Covid-19 and other risks like fires, code violations, physical harassment or inaccessibility.	Digital health risk including hacking, harassment - particularly for the digitally naive. Lack of privacy; companies may gather data in unregulated ways.
Artistic Innovation: Can positively challenge an artist and audience to expand their expressive & technological practice to explore new components of performance and connectivity.	Artistic Limitation: Can negatively challenge an artist and audience's capacity to create and experience music/performance/art, especially if they do not have access to the necessary digital tools.
Available to a broader audience via the internet including elderly, youth, people with disabilities, and people regardless of geographic location.	Limited interactivity between audience members and artists. The creative process is limited to what is “listenable” online or digitally.
Democratising Access: Not exclusive, many participants possible, potentially more accessible given free/cheap content and a stable internet connection.	Limiting Access: technological and cost barriers for artists and promoters to get resources for recording and broadcasting—and stable internet connection.
Innovation: Opportunity to increase digital literacy and innovation in the clubbing sector.	Inclusivity: How can you keep spaces safe and inclusive on the internet?
Revenue from clicks and possible partnerships.	Profitable? Currently does not generate significant, long-term revenue.
But Who Benefits Most? Ownership questions, especially as the currently most accessible platforms are owned by Facebook and Amazon.	

CASE STUDY: TURIN

ALGO:RITMI

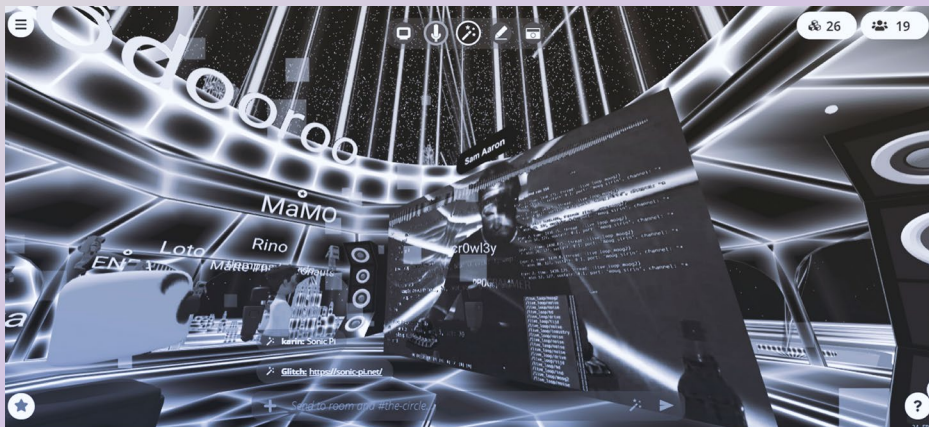


PHOTO: ALGO:RITMI TORINO FACEBOOK

algo:ritmi is a grassroots project of virtual clubbing born as a reaction to the Covid-19 lockdown, aiming to offer cultural contents and social interaction while all the physical venues were closed in Italy. The project had already started at the end of 2019 and received a cultural grant from Regione Piemonte; originally it was supposed to take place as a mix of physical live performances, art exhibitions and educational activities interconnecting live coding and electronic music. When it became clear that venues wouldn't be able to reopen for quite some time, Karin Gavassa, the creator of the project, teaming with Enea Le Fons (XR Cybernaut, Developer and R&D Engineer) and Edoardo Salviato, decided to transform the original concept into a completely virtual experience by creating a virtual world called *uxr.zone* on the *moz://a* platform.

The Circle virtual club has run every Monday for two months during the lockdown, hosting more than 60 artists from around the world. To attend the event, participants have to anonymously log in via their laptop to the *uxr.zone* and customise an avatar to access the virtual club.

Once there, avatars can interact with other users and with the virtual objects of the space: if you are equipped with coding expertise you can add objects in the space, otherwise you can use what is already there and create your drinks, play with gigantic donuts and other similarly playful things.

"THERE IS NO BOUNCER INSIDE UXR, THE ONLY TIME WE HAD TO PUT IN PLACE SOME FORM OF CONTROL WAS WHEN THERE WERE TOO MANY OBJECTS THAT USERS ADDED IN THE ROOM... HUNDREDS OF HAMBURGERS AND GIANT DONUTS [WERE] CAUSING DIFFICULTIES TO OTHER USERS TO ACCESS THE ROOM AND CRASHING SERVERS."

– KARIN GAVASSA, ALGO:RITMI CREATOR

Parallel virtual spaces were also created to further enhance the experience: the 24/7 space (always accessible) can host a permanent collection with the live coding performances. There is also the Dome, where site specific projects and exhibitions are showcased. In June they also hosted a workshop in UXR and a guided tour of the Dome.



PHOTO: ALGO:RITMI TORINO FACEBOOK

CASE STUDY: TURIN

ALGO:RITMI

“PEOPLE WERE SO MUCH IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES WITH THEIR AVATARS THAT WE SAW (AN) “ACTUAL” MOSH-PIT HAPPENING ON THE VIRTUAL DANCEFLOOR, BATHROOM QUEUING, AND PEOPLE COMPLAINING BECAUSE SOMEONE ELSE WAS BLOCKING THE VIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE WITH THEIR TALLER AVATARS.”

– KARIN GAVASSA, ALGO:RITMI CREATOR

The main benefits of this experience have been:

- Absolute democracy and accessibility, absence of any form of harassment or aggression
- Wild experimentation
- Access to artists from all around the world that wouldn't be possible to book in real life
- Augmented interaction among a community of people coming from all around the world

In the coming months, Karin and her team will reflect on how they can push the boundaries of physical/virtual interaction by creating a cross-real clubbing: bring UXR to the physical club and allow clubgoers to use VR Oculus goggles during the club night while promoting different levels of interaction between avatars, real people and artists.



PHOTO: ALGO:RITMI TORINO FACEBOOK

3 / ENVISIONING INCLUSIVE, EQUITABLE DANCEFLOORS

As places of cultural production, clubs, festivals, and dancefloors provide space for cultural self-determination, social inclusion, diversity, imagination, and safety. They have long served as creative infrastructure for the development of new forms of art, technologies, music, and trends, and as social infrastructure for individual and community wellbeing.

“ENFORCED ISOLATION HAS ALSO THROWN INTO SHARP RELIEF THE VALUE OF ARTS AND CULTURE TO OUR MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING AND ABILITY TO CONNECT WITH OTHER HUMAN BEINGS, WHETHER OR NOT WE OCCUPY THE SAME PHYSICAL SPACE IN THAT MOMENT.”

– SOUND DIPLOMACY’S MUSIC CITIES RESILIENCE HANDBOOK

The closure of dancefloors further exacerbates cities’ structural inequalities. Venues were disappearing long before the pandemic: a 2017 University College London study found that London’s LGBTQ+ nighttime venues were particularly vulnerable to housing and financial crises—especially those serving BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) communities.

Venue closures impact audiences and workers differently: these spaces are not only social and creative infrastructure but are, for many people, a source of income. It is particularly crucial to protect and support the livelihoods of the most precarious people working in the sector. And failing to address these closures exacerbate inequalities not only in regional economies and cultures, but across global music and technology industries.

Who Controls Dancefloors?

Issues of control and surveillance are closely linked to the closure of venues. Public and institutional perception that clubs are uncontrollable, unsafe and not essential activities can stigmatise clubs, and result in strict licensing schemes, surveillance, and rigid policing—and pandemic-related public health directives may highlight and exacerbate this pattern, especially for BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) and LGBTQ+ spaces already vulnerable to economic instability, socio-cultural stigmatisation and institutional racism.

While it is difficult to completely change public opinion surrounding clubs, formal and informal nighttime networks are proving essential in partnerships with governments and local councils, to coordinate communication strategies and actions in response to misinformation, accusations and moral panic.

Venues can also self-initiate new forms of management and alternatives to policing, by developing ground rules for safer spaces, employing VibeCare or awareness teams, and developing community-led participation strategies. These tactics can have a positive impact on the public image of clubbing, and allow for more audience engagement and support.

“Public criticism toward music venues, bars, and clubs which are open late at night with alcohol provision, was growing: The mass media in Japan repeatedly pointed out that “nightlife” was a hotbed of infection. Club owners, employees and customers are subject to prejudice and tend to be accused as social villains who spread viruses. But blaming them will end up isolating them from the society, obscuring the routes of infection and potentially accelerating infection.

Shinjuku Kabukicho is one of the largest nightlife districts in Tokyo, with a dense cluster of hostess clubs and host clubs. Because these venues are among the most criticised by the general public as a high-risk hotbed, they have a strong incentive to go underground and keep operating without being properly monitored.

Maki Tezuka, who runs a number of host clubs and restaurants in the area, started collaborating in June with the local government to avoid such a catastrophic situation. He and the ward mayor jointly persuaded other club operators in the district to take precautionary measures. Now, when an infected person is found at a certain club, all the colleagues at the same club take PCR tests regardless of the degree of contact. This procedure has greatly enabled Kabukicho district to identify the infected earlier and avoid outbreaks.

Effective collaboration like this between the authorities and the local community is particularly important to contain the risk of outbreaks without completely shutting down nighttime businesses.”

– TAKAHIRO SAITO, JAPAN NIGHTTIME ECONOMY ASSOCIATION

CASE STUDY: SEOUL

APRIL 2020 OUTBREAK IN ITAEWON

Clubs in Seoul have always been in a legal grey area, because of their relatively short history, and they are not considered as cultural places.

Most of the venues have been closed since March 2020 - to date, without any help from the government. The only official association representing night-clubs also includes hostess bars and doesn't represent the music-oriented clubbing scene:

"it's a very old and shady association and, while prostitution is not legal in South Korea, hostess bars are and since there's a lot of money involved there, the association mainly protects the interests of hostess bars and Las Vegas style bottle sales oriented night-clubs". – Julian Quintart

At the end of April, one man tested positive after having spent a night in the *Itaewon Gay Club cluster*, one of the biggest club areas in Seoul. As a result of that, many people were outed without their consent. In Korea LGBTQ+ communities are not well accepted, and being outed and associated with the virus can easily translate into personal threats and stigma.

Korean human rights activists denounced media outlets for having put unnecessary attention on the type of clientele that visited the venues that night and, after a widespread campaign, government decided to provide anonymous testing in clinics to counter the discrimination which would have hampered case-finding. More than 40,000 nightclub visitors and their contacts were tested, helping to stop a nationwide outbreak that spread to at least 246 people.

However, because the *Itaewon* case was all over the news, nobody wanted to visit the area anymore for fear of being associated with it. Music-oriented clubs teamed up with other bars and restaurants from the area to create a T-shirt to support and revive Itaewon's image by also donating sales profit to charities. "We made around 900 of those and are almost sold out." - Julian Quintart

A positive aspect of the whole Covid-19 situation has been the creation of new alliances, like the VFV event, which involved three once-competing key techno venues - Volnost, Faust and Vurt- and the KCCBA - Korea Club Culture Betterment Association.

"WE DECIDED TO TEAM UP WITH PLAYERS OF THE INDUSTRY TO SET UP THE KCCBA - KOREA CLUB CULTURE BETTERMENT ASSOCIATION AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER. RIGHT NOW, AMONG THE CLUB OWNERS IN THE BOARD MEMBERS THERE ARE SOME OF THE KEY VENUES LIKE FAUST, VURT, SOAP SEOUL, HENZ, TRUNK AND CHANNEL 1969; THEN WE HAVE DJ CONAN AS THE ASSOCIATION LEADER, SEOUL COMMUNITY RADIO MEMBERS, AND SOME OTHER EVENT CREATORS AND MUSIC RELATED PEOPLE."

- JULIAN QUINTART

LIVE STREAM TIME TABLE

RESTREAM CET 9:00PM - 1:00AM

2020. 06. 05. FRIDAY

KST	CET	EST	VURT	FAUST	VOLNOST
8PM	1PM	7AM	Koshin	Polarfront	Soseol
9PM	2PM	8AM	Inger	DAMIE	Soseol
10PM	3PM	9AM	Scope	Marcus L	Ininin
11PM	4PM	10AM	Djillogue	Suman	Ininin

worldwide
stream at

vfvcclub.live

2020. 06. 06. SATURDAY

KST	CET	EST	VURT	FAUST	VOLNOST
8PM	1PM	7AM	Unjin	Stan Lumo	DJ SIN
9PM	2PM	8AM	Cobahn	UNREALNUMBERS	DJ SIN
10PM	3PM	9AM	SUNA	Dooit	Salbaram w/ Mallo (Live Painting)
11PM	4PM	10AM	Xanexx	Hyenam	Jared Redmond, VPR & Eexppoann (Live)

PHOTO: VURT FACEBOOK

TOOL: EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

Existing issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, disablism, exclusive door policies and precarious conditions for night-workers are likely to be exacerbated by this pandemic. In a moment where so much must be re-imagined, addressing these issues is part of a vision-oriented approach to recovery. Recovery cannot simply be returning to business as usual: it must include putting more equitable and inclusive practices into place.

Below we propose an Equality Framework for promoters, venue managers and music collectives to think about initiatives for more equitable dancefloors in the context of the pandemic.

The Equality Framework can be used by venues' whole event teams and staff to gain insight from front-line event staff and facilitate more inclusive practices. This ongoing process can positively affect venues' perception, community base and engagement, which can in turn translate into more economic support.

	SPACE/INCLUSION	HEATH AND CONTROL	ARTISTIC EXPRESSION
ARTISTS	<i>To what extent do current spaces increase or decrease issues of equality and inequalities among artists? What can artists do to create, develop or protect venues?</i>	<i>To what extent do regulations affect artists?</i>	<i>What artists are being booked? Are local/emerging artists and communities involved?</i>
VISITORS/ USERS	<i>How do current spaces engage with issues of equality and inequality among visitors and users?</i>	<i>How do current regulations protect people, ensure public health and expand notions of "safe spaces" online and offline?</i>	<i>Can visitors give feedback to the venue regarding their experience? How do we create equality & diversity strategies?</i>
STAFF	<i>Are my employees up to date regarding what's going on with the venue?</i>	<i>Am I providing ad-hoc training for my employees?</i>	<i>Am I doing actions to guarantee inclusion, access and equality for my employees?</i>
VENUE	<i>Are venues engaged in community life and in campaigns to protect and prioritise community-led spaces? How can venues use planning tools to find solutions with local city governments and the private sector?</i>	<i>Are my control measures excluding specific communities or putting up social barriers of any type?</i>	<i>Is my programme/policy facilitating privilege, inequalities or discrimination?</i>

SUMMARY

In many cities, financial support for dancefloors and clubs—regarded as anything but an “essential activity”—has been limited or nonexistent. The uncertainty and novelty of this moment has challenged the sector: few clubs were equipped to face a complete lockdown, and the industry is still struggling to adapt to social distancing rules, prevention measures and lack of support from local and national governments.

However, the impossibility of sharing physical dancefloors has fostered experimentation, and forced the development of complementary activities and alternatives to stay alive, raise awareness, encourage conversation, build networks and collaborations among artists and venues.

Our observations and recommendations as clubs begin to reopen:

1. **Clubs already have expertise in health, safety and prevention**, and narrative around this can and should be more positive. The *VibeCare 5 Level Framework* can be used to manage events and change the narrative.
2. **The event industry should adopt lean start-up approaches as common practice** to build resilience to crisis. Cities can support this through funding, training, and capacity-building.
3. **Measuring and monitoring** are fundamental to identify challenges and opportunities, and envision tactics. Projects like the Creative Footprint can be used as a robust benchmark.
4. **Networks and organisations can make a difference** in the short and long term through advocacy, community organising, lobbying, and partnership with local government. Find—or add—your city’s night mayor or commission on nighttime. org’s interactive map.
5. **Communities need cohesive health and safety practices** and a shared social contract defined by the communities themselves.
6. **To protect clubbing diversity, independent, BAME and vulnerable organisations should be supported.** Gathering data, building networks and coordinated actions are key.
7. **Industry professionals must address barriers to inclusion;** the *Equality Framework* can help to reflect on socio-cultural impact and build more inclusive and equitable dancefloors.

8. **Long-term funding** should be directed at cultural workers, organisers, artist communities and venues who do not own properties to continue innovating and building capacity.
9. Funding should also be available to **cover costs for health measures and PPE in clubs.**
10. **Virtual clubbing can’t replace physical experiences:** it lacks too many essential aspects of “real life” dancefloors. However, it can enhance community experience.
11. **Digital literacy and inclusion are more urgent than ever**—as digital content, communities and practices continue to expand, we must address issues of privacy, accessibility, and ownership.

When producing a virtual or live party or event, we should all ask ourselves: *what are the real needs of people showing up, and can they be viably and safely addressed?* If that can’t happen in an inclusive way, it’s very likely that informal, underground, and spontaneous gatherings will continue to boom.

LOOKING AHEAD...

In this moment, there is a real danger that venue closure could lead to permanent losses of community and cultural space in neighbourhoods and cities worldwide. Locally, this makes for less connected, more vulnerable communities, as well as a strong “ripple” effect of reduced nightlife tourism that impacts other types of businesses (gastronomy, hotels, supply chains).

But in this danger, there is also an opportunity for cities to rethink how nightlife creators and businesses participate in the wider city development conversation. Nightlife professionals have expertise and unique perspectives in urban planning, managing sound, 24-hour city management, creating gatherings in alternative or nontraditional spaces to support community cohesion, and in helping to define new audiences to keep tourism and local engagement alive. In partnership with other urban stakeholders, formal and informal nighttime networks can deeply reconfigure not only nightlife dynamics and narratives, but the broader cultural and community experience of cities worldwide.

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