LGBTQ+ Cultural Infrastructure in London:
Night Venues, 2006–2017

Executive Summary

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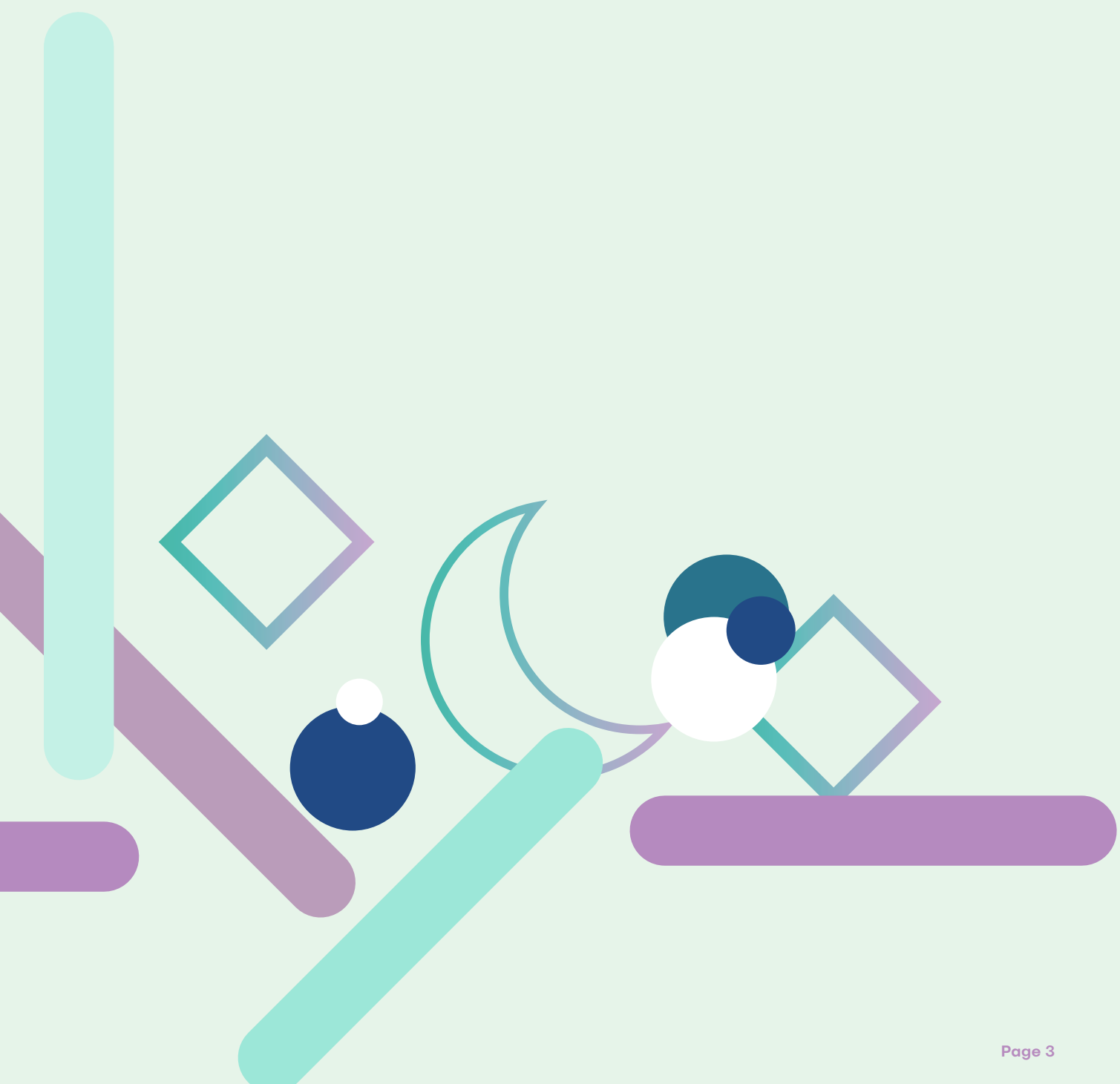**Principal investigator: Dr Ben Campkin**
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Introduction and background

This research develops a pilot mapping of LGBTQ+ nightlife spaces published in the report *LGBTQI Nightlife in London: from 1986 to the present* (2016). Both projects have been undertaken by UCL Urban Laboratory, a university–wide centre for research, teaching and public engagement on cities worldwide. The pilot research was designed in collaboration with LGBTQ+ community organisations Raze Collective (representing LGBTQ+ performers) and Queer Spaces Network (a group interested in preserving and supporting spaces for the LGBTQ+ community).

The pilot research looked at LGBTQ+ nightlife in London from 1986 – when the Greater London Council was disbanded, marking a shift in urban regeneration policy – to the present day, a time of wide reporting and activism around the closure of commercial LGBTQ+ spaces. It evidenced, for the first time, the recent intensity of closures among London's LGBTQ+ nightlife spaces, with significant impacts on the most longstanding and community–valued venues. It also highlighted that spaces catering to women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) LGBTQ+ people have been disproportionately vulnerable to closure. The pilot project emphasised the continuing risk to many LGBTQ+ nightlife venues, including those that survey evidence showed the London LGBTQ+ community deemed to be of most value.
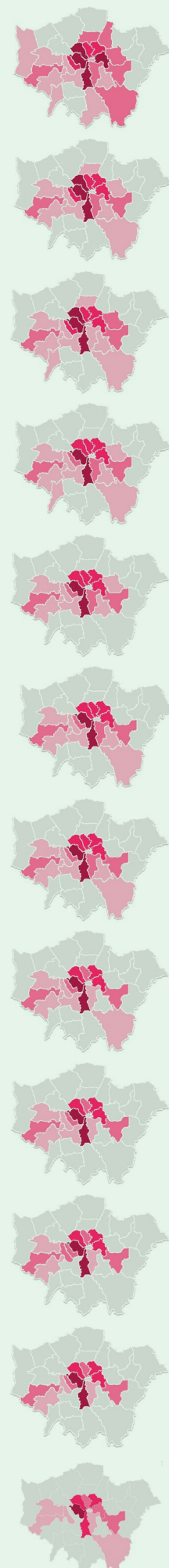
The research presented evidence of the diversity of the capital's LGBTQ+ nightlife as an important contributor to neighbourhoods, the night–time economy and culture. It showed the importance of nightlife venues and events to community life, welfare and wellbeing.

New evidence to inform the Mayor's *Cultural Infrastructure Plan*

This report contains the findings of a second phase of work extending the pilot study.

UCL Urban Laboratory have undertaken an intelligence audit of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ+) night-time venues in London in order to develop a database of these venues covering the period 2006–2017, and have assessed the trends of openings and closures of these venues and identified opportunities and challenges related to these aspects of London's cultural and social infrastructure.

The Mayor of London has supported this work to further the development of the *Cultural Infrastructure Plan*. This is a manifesto commitment by the Mayor and will be published in 2018. The plan will identify what London needs to sustain and develop culture up to 2030. The collection of quantitative data on venue openings and closures will be reflected within this as part of the capital's cultural infrastructure.

Number of LGBT+ Nightlife Venues lost per year, 2006 (top) to 2017 (bottom)
Source: www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/arts-and-culture/how-were-protecting-lgbt-nightlife-venues

Venues: key data

- Since 2006, the number of LGBTQ+ venues in London has fallen from 121 to 51, a net loss of 58% of venues.

- This compares to drops of 44% in UK nightclubs (2005–2015), 35% in London grassroots venues (2007–2016) and 25% in UK pubs (2001–2016).

- Of all venues counted in our study that were in operation between 2006 and 2017, bars make up the largest proportion of venues (30%), alongside nightclubs (23%); pubs (24%); performance venues (19%); cafés (3%); and other/unspecified (2%).

- A further 35 non-LGBTQ+ specific venues that regularly host LGBTQ+ events have been counted, but since these venues were not the main focus of our research this is a partial representation. Of these venues, 29% also closed between 2006 and 2017.

Notes:

(i) UCL Urban Laboratory have searched for venues using a variety of sources. We expect that the publication of this data may prompt a small number of omitted venues to be highlighted and these will be added to the dataset and the overall figures adjusted as appropriate.

(ii) We have defined 'venues' as spaces designated as primarily LGBTQ+. See commentary, 'LGBTQ+ nightlife events', below.

LGBTQ+ nightlife venues: main drivers of closure

There were 116 venue closures in the period, often with multiple factors at play. The following table shows estimates based on information available.

Reasons for venue closures	Count	%
Became a different LGBT venue	2	1%
Venue continued/converted to non-LGBT venue	32	21%
Redevelopment	57	38%
Lease expiration/renegotiation/terms/rent increase	10	7%
Taken over by new owner/company/manager	5	3%
Financial issues/business viability	7	5%
Licensing dispute/revoked	5	3%
Refurbishment/renovation	3	2%
Manager/Owner decision	2	1%
Other/unknown	28	19%
Total number of reasons counted	151	100%
Total number of venue closures	116	

On the basis of this information, as well as detailed case studies of venues, we note:

- The number of closures linked to the redevelopment is significant when we consider the relatively small number of venues in the first place, and also the negative impact of large-scale transport infrastructure development on clusters of venues. This includes 5% linked to large-scale transport infrastructure development and 11% to mixed-use or residential development or conversion.

- Closures involving lease renegotiation frequently featured unfavourable terms or disproportionate rent increases. Operators and customers who have wanted and/or campaigned for venues to stay open have had severely limited negotiating power compared with large organisations leading development, such as large pub companies, property owners, off-shore investors, developers and their mediating agents.

- The number of venue closures linked to business-related financial issues was low, and this included business rate increases and brewery price increases.

- The number of venue closures as a result of a choice made by the owner/manager is likely to be higher than reported and would also include a proportion of the 28% 'other/unknown' category which includes venues for which we have no information.

LGBTQ+ nightlife events: key findings

- Although this research focuses on LGBTQ+ venues, we also present findings related to LGBTQ+ nightlife events held at a range of venues. Solely examining LGBTQ+ venues, limited to established premises, would have excluded a variety of non-venue-specific LGBTQ+ nightlife events, therefore potentially misrepresenting the overall provision of spaces and scenes, and the provision for specific groups within the LGBTQ+ community.

- Longstanding events have had important social outreach functions and value to LGBTQ+ communities, within but also far beyond venues, appearing in multiple spaces and locations around the UK and internationally.

- Our database of nearly 200 events suggests a lack of provision of LGBTQ+ venues or spaces serving women, trans, non-binary and Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC) communities. This is partially due to closures of spaces as well as a longer-standing dearth of permanent spaces owned by and/or run for women's, trans, non-binary and/or QTIPOC communities. Yet these groups have been notably under-represented in media reports about the closure of LGBTQ+ venues.

  - Collecting events data highlights an emerging shift towards LGBTQ+ events happening in non-LGBTQ+ venues in south-east London.

Survey data: key findings

As part of the research, 239 members of the LGBTQ+ community completed an in-depth survey about LGBTQ+ nightspaces. Detailed commentaries in response to the survey powerfully illustrate how the heritage of LGBTQ+ people is embedded in the fabric and specific cultures of designated LGBTQ+ venues and events. They also stress that venues are important spaces for education and intergenerational exchange.

- Anxiety and other negative emotional consequences of venue closures were consistently expressed in strong terms.

- Night-time and daytime spaces are desired by members of LGBTQ+ communities: night-time venues alone are not accessible and/or preferable to all.

- The most valued LGBTQ+ spaces were experienced as non-judgemental places in which diverse gender identities and sexualities are affirmed, accepted and respected. These were sometimes described as 'safe spaces'. What this means to individuals varies, according to personal preferences, experiences and the specific forms of discrimination and oppression that people are vulnerable to (e.g. transphobia, homophobia, racism, ableism).

- Where they are found, safe spaces are extremely valuable to the LGBTQ+ communities who use them.

- Spaces that are/were more community-oriented, rather than commercially driven, are considered vital and preferable by many within LGBTQ+ communities.

- Our survey respondents articulated support for the establishment of new LGBTQ+ community spaces in London.

Pubs, music venues, nightclubs: data for comparison

- According to Inter-Departmental Business Register data, the number of pubs in the UK fell by 25% from 2001 to 2016.

- GLA/CAMRA data shows a fall of 25% in the number of pubs in London between 2001 and 2016.

- There has been a 35% drop in London's grassroots music venues since 2007, with 94 venues extant in 2016.

- According to data from the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers data, 44% of the UK's nightclubs closed from 2005 (3,114) to 2015 (1,733).

Full Report

ucl.ac.uk/urbanlab/research/lgbtqi-space

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Venues shift and change over time, but if they disappear entirely, the LGBTQI community is poorer for it.

If there are less places for queer people to connect and socialise on a normalised level, stigma returns and pushes the marginalised further into the margins and shadows.

Loss of community and the sense of shared ownership, shared experience, are devastating to marginalised individuals and groups.

Closures make the city less welcoming and less accessible for queer people and further marginalise us.

The LGBTQI community still need safe places where they can connect with each other. LGBTQI people are still closeted, feel isolated and are discriminated against and LGBTQI nightlife spaces give the community a place to feel safe, express their sexuality freely and openly.

LGBT spaces provide a safe space for people to socialise, free from fear of harassment and discrimination.

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Survey respondents on the consequences of venue closures

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