LGBTQI Nightlife in London
from 1986 to the present

Interim findings

Research designed in collaboration with
Raze Collective & Queer Spaces Network
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London’s LGBTQI nightlife in the period since 1986 has catered to a great diversity of people. The provision has varied in quantity and types of space available for different groups within the LGBTQI community. It has been located in a wide variety of spaces, including community centres, cinemas, shopping malls, theatres, bookshops, as well as bars, pubs, nightclubs; and widely dispersed across London, with larger concentrations in some specific areas.

This is the first research to show that, in the overall context of the past three decades, there has been a recent intensity of closures of longstanding LGBTQI nightlife venues; that those catering to women and black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) LGBTQI people have been disproportionately vulnerable to closure; and that more venues remain at risk thus including the spaces LGBTQI community members deem to be of most value in terms of heritage, social and cultural functions.

In the period of study, LGBTQI nightlife spaces have accommodated a range of important welfare, wellbeing and community functions in the period. At a time of rising inequality and intense competition for space, closures of venues and other spaces present a challenge for already vulnerable minorities, for the neighbourhoods in which they form part of the social, cultural and economic fabric, and for social integration in the capital more widely.

In the period of investigation, London’s LGBTQI nightlife has been distinctive through its variety. Case studies reveal imaginative appropriations and re-uses of space, and a range of dynamic and adaptive organisational forms – including entrepreneurial and not-for-profit models and close links to the creative industries providing important space for cultural production.

There is a strong appetite amongst community members, venue owners, performers and promoters, not only to protect sites of LGBTQI heritage, but also to shape new forms of nightlife, responding to sexual, gender and ethnic diversity in the capital, and nurturing successful and inclusive LGBTQI night spaces which could potentially be showcased internationally. Performers and community members, in particular, called for new community-oriented spaces.
The Mayor, Greater London Authority, London Assembly members, and local government can positively respond to closures and pressures on venues and other spaces through practical measures proposed and/or supported by venue owners, managers, performers, promoters and community members, such as: building the protection and promotion of LGBTQI spaces into the Mayor’s London Plan and local borough plans; promotion of the value of LGBTQI culture and community including making it a priority for the Night Czar; creating a more favourable culture to support new and existing LGBTQI venues and events through recommending and enforcing improvements to licensing, policing, business regulation, rent conditions, statutory protections for buildings and businesses, subsidies e.g. for accessibility; and through promoting networking among LGBTQI venue owners and managers, night-time entrepreneurs and civil society organisations in order to promote the use of venues for a mix of uses including day-time uses of benefit to LGBTQI and local communities.
In this project we have been gathering information on nightlife spaces (e.g. bars, clubs, performance, cultural or other venues) understood to be important to London’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) communities.

Our research focuses on the period **1986 to the present**. It begins in 1986 as the year that the Greater London Council was disbanded, marking a shift in urban regeneration policy, and the closure of the Greater London Council-funded London Lesbian and Gay Centre. It ends in the present, 2016, at a time of **wide reporting and activism around the closure of commercial LGBTQI spaces**, with a number of ongoing high-profile cases in the media, a spate of recent closures of long-standing venues of high community esteem; and after some recent successful architectural and community asset value listings (see bibliography p.35). Some spaces and events have also launched recently, and we have been keen to document emergent forms of LGBTQI nightlife. In the present moment, following the election of the new Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and London Assembly members, there are also renewed discussions of policy change to support culture, social integration and the night-time economy (e.g. the Cultural Infrastructure Plan and Culture Supplementary Planning Guide – strategic documents that will inform the London Plan). A process is underway to recruit a Night Czar, and there are heated debates about licensing and the forced closure of iconic venues – debates which are by no means contained to LGBTQI venues. Our research, conducted independently, is intended to positively inform these discussions, and wider public, media and LGBTQI community debates.

The topic of LGBTQI nightlife is of importance to LGBTQI communities not only in terms of cultural production, leisure and consumer practices, important as they might be. It is clear that London’s LGBTQI night scenes make a huge contribution to the cultural and economic life of the capital. But in the period of our investigation, civic life and welfare space for those communities have been inextricably bound with nightlife. Furthermore, going beyond the interests of LGBTQI groups and individuals, **what is happening to LGBTQI venues and night scenes is of wider relevance to society, and indeed the activities of LGBTQI nightlife are integrated into London’s neighborhoods and cultural scenes.** Venue closures must be seen alongside other contemporary public conversations on gentrification and regeneration; on social inclusion, diversity, safe space, and the assimilation of minorities or their assertion of difference; as well as the culture and heritage, particularly of minority groups.
3. Methodology

This pilot project was conceived and designed in conversation with the Raze Collective, a charitable organisation that supports and develops queer performance in the UK, and Queer Spaces Network, which facilitates discussions across queer venues, and the campaigns to support them. In alignment with these groups our aim has been to begin to build an evidence base to document the presence of existing and past LGBTQI nightlife spaces in order to understand the value of these spaces for LGBTQI and wider communities, and to London's culture and heritage more broadly.

The research was conducted with the intention of providing evidence to better understand the value of a diversity of LGBTQI nightlife spaces. It has focused on a wide range of examples, including those deemed to provide safe social and/or work environments for people with minority gender or sexual identities; those considered important to such groups because a significant proportion of the clientele identify as LGBTQI; and those associated with LGBTQI people through the ways that the space has been designated or marketed. Our data gathering has included spaces that have already closed and those that are currently at risk, but it also documents spaces that are still open and operating successfully, commercially or otherwise, those protected by community action, and those that have recently opened.

In line with other Urban Laboratory work on citizenship, cosmopolitanism and minority heritage within regeneration, we have been keen to represent spaces of importance to a diverse range of distinctive LGBTQI communities, even while we recognise shared challenges and interests across those groups.

4. Methods and activities

In order to capture the complexity of London’s LGBTQI night scenes we used mixed methods combining the quantitative and qualitative methods. This aligns with the Urban Laboratory’s ‘engaged urbanism’ approach, which is underpinned by an understanding of urban sites as diverse, specific and changeable. This requires methodological flexibility and attention to the variety of experiences across time and space; and research that is both sensitive to empirical complexity and anchored in concrete places at specific points in time. Engaged urbanism seeks to establish research methodologies that provide opportunities for city dwellers who may otherwise suffer adverse effects of urban development processes to express their experiences, views and knowledge, and work towards improving their quality of life and to contribute to eliciting improved participation and, ultimately, quality of life, for them.

The main elements have included the construction of a database of venues and events, a survey and interviews, two documented workshops with panels and small group discussions and charrettes, and a review of relevant literature.
As part of our work we have designed and constructed a matrix of LGBTQI venues, spaces and events from 1986 to the present. Our intention has been to chart changes to the profile of London’s scenes over time and space. We began with 1986 at the time of the disbanding of the Greater London Council and have brought things right up to the present, with the hope that this 30-year view will enable specific shifts to be seen alongside policy changes. The database we have created intentionally captures one-off events and nights as well as venues, and goes beyond just those venues that have recently closed, or are threatened with closure, in order to chart ongoing successes and new ventures.

In order to construct this database we have visited archives to sample LGBTQI scene listings taken from publications such as City X Pink Pages, Fluid, Time Out, TV/TS London News, QX and in more recent years online sources. Specific listings are biased towards particular constituent groups within LGBTQI communities, and particular geographical territories, and so we have addressed this, as far as possible, by using a range of publications. In sampling these publications we are aware of how listings reflect changes in night scenes seasonally, as well as periodic shifts, just as their production and circulation also change in relation to technology and social behaviour.

**Table: Database fields**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database fields</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host venue name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events hosted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>(in research period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Type of venue</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>centre, nightclub, bar, pub,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cafe, performance/cabaret space)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clientele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(unspecified clientele, L, G, B,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDSM/Kink, Men only, Women only,</td>
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<td>Address</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
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<td>Email</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Survey

The survey compiles responses from 296 people who have answered questions tailored to specific groups (229 community members, 27 performers, 20 promoters, 5 managers/venue owners and 10 workshop participants). The intention of these surveys has been to elicit a range of narratives and data to profile the capital’s nightlife and to understand what has been valued about different kinds of space, as well as the hopes and concerns of those who use and operate them.

Survey responses have mostly been collected online, through four questionnaires, drafts of which were discussed with members of the Raze Collective and Queer Spaces Network, and which were uploaded to the questionnaire website, Typeform, selected for the clarity and accessibility of its interface. The call to participate was widely distributed using a project website, Facebook page and Twitter feed, Urban Lab’s networks, and those of Raze Collective and Queer Spaces Network. We were proactive in strategically disseminating the call to people who organise and attend nights and spaces oriented towards people of colour, women, trans and non-binary people, older members of LGBTQI communities, and organisations representing intersex people, with the aim of eliciting wide representation of different constituents within the LGBTQI community, documenting and making diversity in LGBTQI communities more visible. The community questionnaires were designed to allow respondents to self-identify with regard to their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and other identity characteristics which they determined to be important, and to remain anonymous. The respondents to the performer, promoter and manager/owner questionnaires could identify themselves if they so wished.

We have also, where possible, interviewed venue owners in person, and in venues, in situ. We have undertaken an initial analysis of this data using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.
Workshops, panels and charrettes

We expanded the range of participants in our research through designing two workshops, one at UCL involving 50 people, mostly with specific expertise in contemporary and past LGBTQI nightlife spaces and/or built environment expertise; and one at Peckham Festival in a transportable queer community venue, the Camp-er-Van, with a public audience comprising general attendees of the festival and those who had specifically come for the workshop and performances located in the Camp-er-Van.

**Workshop 1** included talks and small group charrettes and **Workshop 2** was designed as an interactive event, opening possibilities for the audience to engage with the research data and findings to date and contribute to them. It also involved **on-stage interviews** with four people with expertise in specific night scenes. In inviting speakers and attracting participants to these events we have invested in ensuring diversity through, for example, specifically contacting individuals and organisations that represent and campaign for a range of distinct LGBTQI communities. We have **actively sought and successfully included participation from** trans, women’s, BAME and older LGBTQI peoples’ organisations, venues and events. Although we reached out to intersex community organisations, we were less successful in this, and in future work would be keen to redress this imbalance.
5. Emerging findings: pilot database

Between 1986 and the present, we have recorded the presence of 233 venues, 80 nights/events. This is, of course, just a snapshot, based on the particular listings we have identified and recorded so far. Nonetheless, we have attempted to use a cross-section of publications and other sources to construct our data, so that a spectrum of spaces and activities are represented. This pilot data collection is still being constructed and analysed, but some of the key points that are emerging, which help to understand the distinctiveness of LGBTQI nightlife in London in this period, are as follows.

- London’s LGBTQI nightlife in this period has catered to a great diversity of LGBTQI people, but the provision has varied in quantity and types of space available for different groups.

- LGBTQI nightlife has been located in a wide variety of spaces, including community centres, cinemas, shopping malls, theatres, bookshops, as well as bars, pubs, nightclubs.

- London’s LGBTQI nightlife has been widely dispersed across London, with larger concentrations in some specific areas. There are distinctive clusters associated with Earls Court/Shepherd’s Bush in the 1970s and 1980s and King’s Cross in the 1980s/1990s; and, continuing into the present, Soho from the 1990s; Vauxhall from the late 1990s and early 2000s, Shoreditch/Dalston/Bethnal Green/Haggerston from the 2000s, and both closures and openings in Bermondsey/Lewisham/Peckham/Deptford from the 2010s. Numerous smaller clusters are also evident.

- In this pilot study we have so far documented 233 individual venues and 80 nights/events (including both regular and one-off). Given that this is a time-limited pilot study, in which only a sample of sources have been documented, these figures represent only a partial picture. In the next phase of research we anticipate that the actual total numbers of venues recorded in the period will be higher, and the total number of nights will be substantively higher.
Approximately 3% of venues have existed continuously for the entire period, from 1986 to the present (Admiral Duncan, The Back Street, City of Quebec, Comptons of Soho, Heaven, Royal Vauxhall Tavern, The White Swan). 14% existed for over 20 years; 35% existed for over 10 years. In the overall context of the past three decades these figures, which will change as more data is added, highlight a recent drop in LGBTQI nightlife spaces from a peak in 2004. A notable intensity of closures of long-standing venues (e.g. The Black Cap, 1965-2015; Bromptons, 1984-2008; The Colherne, 1930s-2008; Club Colosseum, 1974-2014; The Fridge, 1981-2010; The George and Dragon, 1997-2016; Joiner’s Arms, 1997-2015; King Edward IV, 1966-2011; Madam Jojo’s, 1966-2014; The Queen’s Head, c. 1950-2016) evident in the data tallies with reports in our survey responses.

There are ongoing threats of closure to some of the venues most frequently cited in our survey as of importance to the capital’s LGBTQI communities (e.g. The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, 1880s-present; The Yard, 1994-present).

The recent closure of long-established central London venues that have specifically catered to BAME LGBTQI communities and/or have been important women’s spaces is notable (e.g. Busbys, 1986-2008; Drill Hall, 1977-2012; First Out, 1986-2011; The Glass Bar, 1995-2008).

Women’s and BAME-specific spaces have more often been events hosted in venues, rather than venues themselves.

With further expansion of the pilot database we will be able to better understand how the character of the capital’s LGBTQI nightlife spaces and scenes have shifted over time in terms of types of venue and space, frequency of openings/closures, target clientele, and how specific communities within the LGBTQI umbrella have been served.
Performers survey

- The practices of the performers we surveyed are wide-ranging emphasising the diversity of London’s LGBTQI performance scenes. These included, for example, acrobatics, acting, bingo, burlesque, cabaret, comedy, curating, dance, drag, live art, music, parody, pop, queer theatre, satire, singing, striptease, tap, and writing.

- The range of LGBTQI venues/events that performers considered significant to their performance careers was wide, from specific cabaret venues, commercial and community-oriented bars and clubs, to theatres and hotels. Some of the most often mentioned venues were those that have recently been closed or threatened with closure (Madam Jojo’s, The Black Cap, Royal Vauxhall Tavern including its Duckie and Bar Wotever nights) as well as recently opened spaces (The Glory, Muse Soho).

- Amongst the impacts of venue closures, performers commented on the loss of: safe space, community contact and visibility; employment/business, funding, pay; risk-taking venues to experiment and nurture new talent; as well as increased competition over fewer venues.

- Some of the ideas and emphases in this group’s recommendations were that the Mayor should support LGBTQI communities through structured dialogue with them; through recognising and celebrating the value of LGBTQI nightlife to culture, community cohesion and individual wellbeing. Performers also suggested protection orders for iconic venues; and that the Mayor could have a role in enabling community purchase; incentivising flexible licensing and rent control or other financial subsidies. Performers were also keen to see the Mayor actively encourage London’s performance culture through, for example, financial subsidies and grants to artists and through support for new rehearsal spaces and other cultural infrastructure that would enable artists to transition from smaller to larger audiences. As with other groups we surveyed, performers were strongly supportive of the idea of a Night Czar and the night tube.
Performers Survey Results

Gender identities: Performers

Sexualities: Performers

Age: Performers
Promoters survey

• The promoters we surveyed reported similar concerns about the negative impacts of venue closures. In response they felt that a more sympathetic licensing policy framework was needed – one that actively encouraged new venues and temporary/one-off nightlife events; along with the protection of certain venues, financial concessions to support a range of for- and not-for-profit models; as well as investment by local authorities in night-time environments and educated policing, sensitive to LGBTQI lifeworlds. This group emphasised the importance of the development of welfare and social services for LGBTQI communities alongside nightlife, and were supportive of a Night Czar with a good understanding of LGBTQI nightlife.

• In addition, promoters were worried about nightlife leaving London for other cities internationally. Some members of this group also raised challenges within LGBTQI night scenes which they felt need to be addressed, such as a perceived monopoly of gay men over venues; and a lack of accessible venues. Promoters noted that a decline in LGBTQI nightlife connects with a loss of stable welfare structures for community members. They were also hopeful, however, about the potential of a younger generation to reinvent nightlife, and about the increase in genderfluid and non-binary nightlife in London’s contemporary mix.

What makes you concerned or hopeful about the future of London’s LGBTQI nightlife?

**Concerns**

Licensing regulations tightening and venue closures.

Property prices are definitely the biggest concern.

Gay men have the monopoly on venues and that’s got worse.

Lack of accessible venues - the events are meant to be inclusive - it sucks leaving out people with mobility problems.

Issues with gendered toilets and need for trans awareness training for venue staff.

**Hopes**

The ridiculous amount of talent in an ever-changing landscape of young artists coming through, who look to challenge gender stereotypes and how this fits with wider society. There is fire within their bellies.

New parties are showing up in non-traditional venues.

Queering spaces is more exciting to me than queer spaces.
Venue owners and managers survey

- The venue owners and managers who responded in most detail to our survey and/or were interviewed, represented a range of business types with annual turnovers of between £40,000 and £1.1m and employing between 1 and 30 staff, as well as 6-15 paid/unpaid artists/performers per week. They all happened to be housed in Victorian buildings, of between 50 and 190m² and these were leased and run by a range of individuals and businesses (pub companies).

- Their target clientele included LGBTQI communities with a mix of genders and sexualities, as well as groups such as music fans, students and specifically art students from local universities.

- They placed emphasis on creating spaces and events that were welcoming and ‘safe’ to the LGBTQI individuals they were hosting/attempting to attract. Strategies to make this possible included e.g. having an all female staff; and marketing on platforms such as established fashion and LGBTQI scene magazines as well as social media, especially for bespoke nights.

- As well as commercial considerations, they emphasised the importance of community activities taking place in venues (fundraising, sexual health awareness, HIV testing, yoga), as well as direct ways that they are supporting local creative industries, beyond e.g. hosting performers, promoters and DJs, such as through accommodating other forms of art production and exhibition, and educational events.

- Those surveyed noted that the use of space by LGBTQI nightlife businesses is inventive, diverse and responds creatively to challenges and change. The adaptability of venues to such different uses of space, and in some cases the amenability to a DIY ethos of adaptation by users from the creative industries, was seen to be an important and distinctive feature for queer nightlife space. Some owners/managers also reported having taken over run-down/disused and/or stigmatised spaces and converting them into nightlife uses. Support from local communities including neighbouring businesses was identified as an important factor in starting and running businesses.
Heritage Values

Respondents understood the LGBTQI venues to be of heritage values through a mix of social, architectural and cultural definitions of heritage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Heritage</th>
<th>Cultural Heritage</th>
<th>Architectural Heritage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Through being inclusive, supportive and nurturing spaces for communities, employees, artists and customers.</td>
<td>Through being different, unique and representing freedom of expression.</td>
<td>Through being continuously in use as a LGBTQI space for a long period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As initiatives led/managed by minorities (e.g. gay women).</td>
<td>Through hosting cultural activities and art.</td>
<td>Through being located in architecturally significant and/or historic (e.g. Victorian) buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through contributing to local communities and events.</td>
<td>Through being exported to different venues nationally and internationally.</td>
<td>Through converting disused, run-down and/or stigmatised spaces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Venue owners and managers survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special factors that enabled venues to open</th>
<th>Challenges to venues opening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills to adapt a building in poor condition</td>
<td>Finding the right site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Rent</td>
<td>Raising money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsorship from some suppliers</td>
<td>Neighbours’ objections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive community / neighbourhood relations (e.g. shop owners)</td>
<td>Licensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive landlords, allowing freedom to be creative</td>
<td>Need for sensitive policing and security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard work, luck, tenacity, determination</td>
<td>Time taken for space to take-off / word to spread</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Venue owners’ and managers’ suggestions for how the Mayor can support LGBTQI nightlife

Venue owners and managers felt that there were concrete ways the Mayor could support LGBTQI nightlife businesses such as through: protection against redevelopment for alternative uses; protection from unethical landlords, including sudden evictions and rent hikes; nurturing of networking across LGBTQI businesses; assistance with making venues more accessible, or incentivisation of local boroughs to assist with this; developing licensing regimes that support independent businesses and the cultural events constituting the night-time economy.

“The landlady leaves us alone. They wanted an artist with a family to live here. The estate agent who I pay my fee to is lovely and just comes to check if the building’s still standing and checks for structural issues which we address. There were no working toilets to start with and every window was smashed. The back of the house was subsiding with water leaking in so we addressed that, and now we’re keeping the building well. The fact that they overlooked the rent to start with, when we couldn’t afford to pay, meant we had freedom to start something. The council were supportive when it became legal.”
Community survey

Given that we asked respondents to self-identify, rather than assigning categories for them to identify with, the returned questionnaires strikingly emphasise the distinctive diversity of London’s LGBTQI communities in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age and other identity characteristics people deemed important. However, although the respondents were notably diverse, the data also emphasised a bias towards white and gay-identifying men.

Community Survey Results

Gender identities: Community

Sexualities: Community
Ethnicities: Community

Age: Community
There were a significant number of survey respondents of **non-binary genders**, identifying as **genderqueer** and **a-gender**, for example. Recognition of gender diversity was evident in a number of respondents identifying themselves as cisgender, so it was not only trans and non-binary respondents who, **when given the space to define their own gender**, did so in ways that **exceeded the usual ‘male’ and ‘female’ tick boxes you find in surveys**. This indicates recognition and acceptance of non-binary identities amongst some members of LGBTQI communities, although this is not uniformly the case.

**As asked ‘Have LGBTQI nightlife spaces been important to you? If so, why? If not, why not?’ The overwhelming majority of survey respondents said yes and the quotes we have selected in this report, while they do not capture the full complexity of commentaries provided, suggest some of the common themes raised by respondents.**

For most LGBTQI people nightlife is or has been hugely valuable in **providing spaces of belonging and community**, places to perform, experiment and find friendships and relationships. However, nightlife spaces are **not accessible to everyone**, for a variety of reasons, including (but not limited to) gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, age, mental and physical health and mobility. It’s important to recognise that **not everywhere is experienced as inclusive by virtue of being an LGBTQI space**. Trans and non-binary respondents tended to create, perform at and attend nightlife spaces that are more oriented towards queer and trans communities. Examples include well-established nights like **Bar Wotever**, newer nights such as **Bbz**, and performers like **Travis Alabanza, Krishna Istha and CN Lester**.
LGBTQI spaces are absolutely essential to me. They are some of the only spaces I feel safe and alive and happy. It’s more than a generalised feeling of ‘community’ or about buying things – it’s about being in groups and spaces where I don’t need to feel the pressure of being seen as different. Or where I can see other people being safe and happy in their own queerness.

They have enriched my life and made me a more politically-aware and engaged person.

Coming out in London in the noughties they were my first experiences of any sense of community, they gave me a sense of belonging when I felt isolated.

Not a lot. There are no events that are geared towards bisexual women as such. This makes it very hard to feel integrated. There is also a ‘norm’ on ‘the scene’ that some people do not adhere to which puts us off... It’s still hard to find events where you are not judged in 2 secs, but i guess that’s nightlife’ for you...

Yes, particularly when mainstream spaces were more homophobic.

When I was coming to terms with my gender identity it was great to be in trans-friendly spaces where gender was being explored.

No, I don’t like very loud places with many people and drinking so I have difficulty finding interesting nightlife spaces. The underground queer scene is all I can afford.

Have LGBTQI nightlife spaces been important to you?
Workshop 1, at UCL, included participation from a diverse audience of those with specific interests or expertise in LGBTQI nightlife. The range of participants included, for example, venue managers, DJs, performers, bar staff, academics, diversity and inclusion professionals, planners, architects, communications professionals, activists, performance union members, archivists, charity workers, health care professionals.

The event was structured by using opening provocations from the initial survey results and from three individuals who – as venue owners, managers and DJs – had substantive expertise, and narrated their experiences as autobiographical stories experiences. Following this, informal charettes in mixed groups were organised using prompts to understand different perspectives on LGBTQI night scenes.
In the second part of the workshop participants were divided into groups (mixed in terms of profession and known identity characteristics) to undertake a two-part charrette.

In part 1, ‘Perspectives on LGBTQI Night Scenes’, each group was assigned to represent a different set of interested people: community members and community leaders representing LGBTQI communities; local government representatives, politicians, policy makers and licensors; business and venue owners, leaseholders and managers; event promoters, DJs, performers; developers. They were then asked to discuss and document on a worksheet how this group of people connect with LGBTQI nightlife spaces, and institutions that shape them, and to address the questions:

• What have been the impacts of venue closures, or related challenges, on this group, and how have they responded?

• From the perspective of this group, and the institutions and organisations they connect with, what lessons should be learned, and what positive changes could they work towards?

In part 2, ‘Utopic Planning’, the groups were asked to consider, since LGBTQI nightlife has provided important social welfare and civic functions in the past and present:

• How could this be enhanced now and in the medium-term future?

• Beyond nightlife, how could new structures for welfare and collaboration across LGBTQI groups take shape and/or be supported?

The following are summaries of each charrette’s discussion.

The performers group, facilitated by artist and venue manager Lyall Hakaraia discussed a wide range of issues relating to venues, audiences and performers’ experiences. This included a focus on the differences between the needs of new, emerging or established artists; the impacts of digital technology on venue/event attendance and performers’ practices; differing understandings of what queer space is and is not and how scenes evolve and reinvent themselves; the importance of ‘safe space’ for performers and artists, and also because of prejudices within LGBTQI communities; experimental spaces as launch pads for performance careers; the increasing importance of non-traditional spaces such as street performance and festivals; and the way in which incubator spaces/programmes could provide useful support for LGBTQI performers.
In the local authorities group, facilitated by DJ Ritu, the conversation was similarly wide-ranging. This group noted how LGBTQI nightlife is subject to broader cultural changes over time (e.g. recession, communication technology, social movements, availability of physical venues/spaces). Other topics included aspects such as the inconsistency between different boroughs’ attitudes and policies towards nightlife (e.g. Soho ‘Vice and night-time’ vs. Camden ‘Entertainment and night-time’) and a suggestion that this should be monitored. They observed that venue users impact or are impacted by a range of factors influenced by boroughs such as opening hours; availability of nightlife in specific locations/boroughs; local government intentions (personalities or party political); the way that local authorities policies and actions are influenced by or operate within markets. They suggested that there was a need for the public value of LGBTQI spaces to be better communicated and for this to reach existing and new audiences; as well as a need for an LGBTQI Centre which as a non-commercial entity would serve a diversity of people across LGBTQI communities; and support and recognition of the importance of community spaces and services, such as LGBTQI-specific public health spaces, e.g. 56 Dean Street; the potential value of engagement/support from Higher Education Institutions to create accessible spaces for education for LGBTQI communities.

For the developers group, facilitated by activist and academic Chryssy Hunter, the recommendations included financial incentives for supporting LGBTQI nightlife spaces; funding case studies of minority cultural venues who have succeeded to aid learning across difference spaces and contexts; preventative measures to help resist re-development and closure; financial subsidies for venues; and the facilitation of networking as well as genuine community engagement.

The venues group, facilitated by entrepreneur and DJ Dan Beaumont, noted the different models of nightlife, naming these hedonistic, DIY, and radical. They also observed that queer spaces had ‘non-commodifiable’ values; and that queer identities overlap, and shape, or are shaped by, queer spaces. They had a concern that a new generation of performers had a decreasing range of options of places to perform.

Finally, the communities group, facilitated by Juan Miguel Kanai, an urban geographer, echoed some of the concerns and interests present in the other discussions. This group also raised issues such as how new digital/virtual LGBTQI nightlife spaces might emerge through queer augmented reality; how group-specific spaces, as well as those used by/for everybody (e.g. libraries) are important – because of a significant decline in venues, as opposed to dedicated nights, for women (queer, bi, lesbian, trans, cis etc.) in London, Manchester and Bristol. They also noted issues around how venues, nights and networks can be difficult to find; how gay men often outnumber people of other genders and sexualities; and how there is a lack of LGBTQI BAME/queer, trans, intersex, People of Colour spaces and venues. This group discussed a need to recognise a shift to more fluid identities, especially
amongst younger folks within communities, and understand relationships between this phenomena and LGBTQI spaces. For LGBTQI nightlife, the group commented on a need to both ‘avoid normalising’ and ‘avoid ghettoising’ and to create shared spaces; for multi-use approaches to space to ensure commercial viability and a 24 hour combination of activities. They named some of the important spaces to the group as the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in the 1980s [London Lesbian and Gay Centre, 1985-1990, a mixed space, set up with Greater London Council Funding, that accommodated a diversity of functions], and Dalston Superstore, The Glory and London LGBT Film Festival now, as well as more anonymous venues such as warehouse parties in Manor House. Also, in terms of diversity, it was observed that nightlife spaces can be age specific/segmented, and often are not inclusive for older people who lack spaces. It was noted both how LGBTQI nightlife was frequented by students and also how clubs themselves are sources of information/education. The group additionally noted that land value and rent increases with high costs leading to declining profitability of venues and projects were important factors to be addressed.

London Lesbian & Gay Centre flyer, Hall-Carpenter Archives, LSE.
Charrette documentation, Night Scenes, UCL, 2016.
Part One

Perspectives on LGBTQI Night Scenes

Prompt 1:

- Delegates engaged through personal contact
- High-powered networking
- Case studies where innovative approaches have succeeded
- Voluntary work to engage community

Financial Incentive

Minority cultural venues make low money

Preventative facilitative services

Part Two

Utopia Planning

Prompt 2:

- Critical agencies to provide support
- How might this be introduced into new venues
- What are the outcomes for social cohesion
- How can we achieve this?

Queer Space East

DIY events

VENUES

- Hedonistic models
- Diverted, less loud diversity
- New generation of performers

Wunderlust

Diverse, less loud diversity

Interconnected identities
Part One: Perspectives on LGBTQI Night Scenes

Prompt 1: What are the experiences and challenges faced by members of the LGBTQI community in accessing nightlife, and how do these vary across different locations and time periods?

- MSM
- GAY MEN
- SCIENTISTS
- ACADEMICS
- BI-CIS-WOMEN
- QUEER WOMEN
- STUDENTS
- NON-GENDER SPACES
- PLACE OF STUDENT UNION OUTSIDE CAPITAL
- AGE SEGMENTATION

Part Two: Venue Planning

Prompt 2: How can venues and organizations create inclusive and welcoming nightlife spaces for the LGBTQI community, considering factors such as accessibility, safety, and visibility?

- LGBT FILM FESTIVAL AS NON-PROFIT SPACE
- HIGH COSTS AND IMPACTS ON VENUES AND PROJECTS
- CHANGING INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSES

- MOVE FROM PHYSICAL TO DIGITAL SPACES
- VIRTUAL
- USE TECHNOLOGIES
- GROUP-SPECIFIC AS WELL AS FACILITIES USED BY EVERYBODY E.G. URBAN LIBRARIES
- UNDERSTANDING SHIFT TO MORE FLUID IDENTITIES
- AVOID NORMALISING/AVOID GENERALISING
- SHARED SPACES
- MULTI-USE APPROACHES TO SPACE

- GLCC: DSC/ERAS
- DSS/ERAS
- YOUTH W/MORE FLEXIBLE IDENTITIES
Night Scenes at Peckham Festival

Following the first Night Scenes event in July 2016, on 10 September 2016, UCL Urban Laboratory took Night Scenes to the Camp-er-Van at Peckham Festival. The Camp-er-Van is the creation of architectural designer and filmmaker Samuel Doeuk. In response to the increasing number of London’s queer spaces that have closed or whose futures are uncertain, Samuel sought to design and operate a ‘queer space’ that is immune from the threat of gentrification and oriented toward performance and community. At Peckham Festival, the Night Scenes workshop joined a line-up of performances - from burlesque to spoken word - film screenings and audience participation events. It was accompanied by an exhibition of some of the key findings to date.

Following a report on emerging findings from our archival and survey-based research, attention turned to a knowledgeable panel of creators of LGBTQI nightlife: Jeffrey Hinton, Mzz Kimberley, and Tia Simon-Campbell and Olivia Mastin from Bbz London. Jeffrey is a legendary DJ, producer and visual artist who has been a key figure in London’s gay and queer nightlife since the 1980s and continues to play at clubs such as Heaven and nights including Bootylicious. Kimberley has been a highlight of gay and queer culture and cabaret scenes in London and beyond since the 1990s and has performed in seminal venues including Madam Jojos, Heaven, The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, The Glory and the Arcola Theatre (to name a few). Part art

exhibition, part club night, *Bbz* are a relative newcomer to London’s LGBTQI scenes and were represented by founder, curator and photographer Tia Simon-Campbell and resident DJ Olivia Mastin. They are based in **South London** and their events are run by and predominantly for *queer women* and *genderqueer people of colour*. Along with nights and collectives such as *The Batty Mama, Goldsnap* and *UNITI*, *Bbz* form part of an emerging scene of more **political and inclusive queer nightlife** oriented towards communities who have all too often found themselves sidelined within London’s LGBTQI scenes.

The wealth of experience of London’s LGBTQI nightlife brought to the discussion by Jeffrey and Kimberley was invaluable. Both contributed poignant insights regarding recent closures of key venues and related the need for venues to keep up with and invest in supporting shifting cultures within LGBTQI scenes. This point was supported by members of the audience during the Q&A. Kimberley and Jeffrey also reflected upon changes over time. Notably, Mzz Kimberley discussed her pioneering role in fighting for hitherto male-only gay clubs to be accessible to people of all genders, and being the first trans woman of colour to perform in many LGBTQI nightlife spaces.

The panel agreed that the most exciting spaces on London’s nightlife scenes where those that are most **inclusive and embraced a queer ethos and community focus.** *Bbz* is an excellent example of this approach, as was clear from Tia and Olivia’s comments, which emphasized the need to more community-oriented spaces for socialising. A vital point raised by Olivia, and supported by the panel, highlighted the need to more opportunities for **inclusive daytime and nighttime spaces** across London that are created, owned, run by and for women, trans and non-binary folks, LGBTQI people of colour and others for whom the intersectional dimension of their identities often result in experiencing relatively **fewer socio-economic privileges than white, cis, middle-class men.**

Overall, a clear message that emerged from the panel and audience at the Camp-er-Van is that, while it is important to support and protect LGBTQI heritage and spaces threatened with closure, in the current political and socioeconomic climate venues and communities **cannot afford to be complacent.** While discussion and action around venue closures are vital, longstanding club nights and venues, as well as new spaces that are emerging, require support and demand recognition – especially those playing a vital role by addressing prevailing absences within London’s LGBTQI night scenes.
The 'decline' of LGBTQI nightlife, collage of news headlines, Ben Campkin and Laura Marshall, 2016.

London's most iconic LGBT+ venue, the Black Cat, announced it will close. The future of London's queer scene is in serious doubt, as developers threaten to gentrify the area.

The Black Cat, former London's iconic LGBT+ venue, closes.

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The Black Cat, former London's iconic LGBT+ venue, closes.
Longstanding and new inclusive LGBTQI nightlife, collage of news headlines, Ben Campkin and Laura Marshall, 2016.

Is art political? That is: can you, as artists, promote change?

The DJ collectives making partying political
London party crew SIREN speak to six other collectives about how they’re creating an inclusive environment for clubbing

172 Illegal Raves Planned In London This Weekend

17 Things You Need To Know About Bar Wotever!

The new face of London drag
London’s drag scene is on fire right now. We meet the drag kings and queens leading the way.

Battling to Save London’s Avant-Garde Culture
Have LGBTQI nightlife spaces been important to you?

Panelist Quotes

When I was in Madam Jojos and Heaven, I think the scene was a lot smaller, there wasn’t so many clubs as they have today. And it’s kind of sad because we have the bears going off over here, and the twinks have gone over here and then, the lesbians you know, the butches over here.... When I was at Heaven, all of us were a bit more together and I think that’s one of the reasons for what’s happening [with LGBTQI nightlife spaces closing] now: it’s kind of sad. It upsets me, but that’s the reason why I really appreciate Bar Wotever because it’s a space where anybody can come together and it can be a safe space...

Mzz Kimberley

What makes me hopeful is trying to send out a message to our community that we should stick together more. You know, we’re not all gonna like each other but we should respect each other more. That would be my message.

Mzz Kimberley

Cost of space was always, it was prevalent in the ’70s, ’80s...That’s why a place has to embrace it’s moment. And obviously, yeah, we’ve got higher rent...and they have to pay more for drinks etc... but you should start with throwing your imagination at it. Nothing comes out of anything without you putting something in. You can’t coast on a memory.

Jeffrey Hinton

The actual physical building is very important, because there will always be stories held within the physical structure...

Jeffrey Hinton

It starts off as an exhibition – and everybody that is involved is a queer woman or gender queer person of colour – and then it progresses into a club night. It’s all good and well when you can go out and rave and have a good laugh, but it’s so much better and more enriching when you can go out, meet people, talk about artwork, actually connect with somebody on a much deeper level and then progress into a clubbing space and environment. It’s uplifting, it’s energising... it’s just important to vibes with people on something that is far deeper and not superficial.

Tia Simon-Campbell, Bbz

It is inclusive, anybody can roll through, but the main point is, we’re trying not to say safe space now, cause I don’t have control over everybody’s space, so we’re calling it a brave space. It’s just important that everybody who does come is respectful that is created for and by these people [queer women and gender queer people of colour]

Tia Simon-Campbell, Bbz
Have LGBTQI nightlife spaces been important to you?
Participant Postcard Quotes

Yes, it was “out of the closets and into the streets”, but often it was “back into the bar-club ghetto closets”. But it gave me a space to BE me. First places, Yours & Mine, El Sombrero, High St Ken, Bangs, Tottenham Court Road, Black Cap

As an older queen now, nightlife spaces are not as relevant but are needed so I can get out of isolation, where sound is not so loud in part of the venue. Mixed spaces for all!’

Lavinia Fox

During the course of our research we’ve heard a number of repeated arguments about LGBTQI nightlife space which the evidence from this pilot project contests.

Cliché: LGBTQI nightlife spaces are closing rapidly – but that’s because they’re no longer necessary.

There is a causal argument often put that the closure of LGBTQI spaces is natural or inevitable – various reasons are given for this, ranging from greater legal equality and social acceptance, meaning that socially segregated spaces are unnecessary, to technological change and the way that apps now mediate different kinds of social experience, meaning traditional bars and clubs are outmoded (the ‘everyone is staying at home using Grindr’ argument).

Our research problematises this in a number of ways. Our survey has emphasised the value LGBTQI people place on nightlife, whether for in-person socialising, mutual support, or entertainment through performance or dancing. Our mapping exercise shows a rich variety of successful, established and new venues and events. We would point to the exciting new spaces for queer, trans and non-binary communities and LGBTQI people of colour as evidence of new forms of nightlife that provide space for political and cultural engagement, which need to be supported. Furthermore, the greater legal or social acceptance of homosexuality, and provision of nightlife, has not been equally distributed across LGBTQI society. This is something that has come up a number of times through our quantitative data, surveys and workshops. While technological change and the use of apps has impacted on how people form identities and communities and how they inhabit places, this argument is often put in a reductive way, and is not properly thought through in relation to the diversity of LGBTQI communities.

Another way in which the decline of nightlife is made to seem natural is as a result of gentrification. Scenes will inevitably come and go, this argument goes, because there

Cliché: Cities change and neighbourhoods gentrify, so bemoaning the loss of bars and clubs is just nostalgia.'
is a cycle in which pioneers make
neighbourhoods trendy and then lift
property prices and move on. Bars and
clubs will fall victim to this, but there’s
nothing that can be done.

LGBTQI communities have created
custers of nightlife and cultural
venues in neighbourhoods of London
that have gentrified or are currently
gentrifying, and this has often involved
the retrofitting of derelict buildings in
stigmatised locations; such venues,
as with other forms of art production,
may unintentionally have contributed to
gentrification processes. But to focus on
this rather than on how clusters of small,
often community-focused and culturally
productive businesses and other
organisations, and individual bars and
clubs, have themselves been subjected
to these processes with detrimental
effects, is a distraction. Take the case
of the LGBTQI nightlife of 1980s King’s
Cross which has largely disappeared
in the state-led redevelopment and
gentrification of the area without a
wider debate about the erasure of
LGBTQI heritage.

The recent spate of closures of long-
standing and flourishing LGBTQI venues
emphasises how such venues, like
other small businesses, arts venues and
social housing, need to be supported
in the face of the distinctive bias
towards profit-led development by
larger corporations, prohibitive rent
increases and sudden evictions in
favour of ill-conceived forms of socially
regressive enterprise. As a sign of hope,
in our research we have encountered,
effective and increasingly joined-
up campaigns to resist developer
takeovers. Rather than accepting
gentrification and the pressures of
living in an unaffordable city where the
financialisation of land and property
excludes civic functions, these social
movements are building momentum
towards different models of urban
change based in ethical responses to
communities’ needs.

Cliché: Soho is where
London’s LGBTQI
nightlife takes place,
in gay bars and
nightclubs, and gay
villages are the same
the world over.

A strong misconception is that LGBTQI
nightlife in London equates to ‘gay bars’,
and more specifically, to Soho. This
is a sign of the success of Soho as a
branded ‘gay village’ or ‘gaybourhood’: an
important super cluster of bars, clubs
and other businesses. But it overlooks
the way in which LGBTQI nightlife, in
its diverse forms, has been dispersed
across the capital and integrated into
the fabric of many neighbourhoods and
communities.

Our surveys and mapping of venues and
events has emphasised that London is
distinctive because of the diversity of
its LGBTQI nightlife scenes: surely the
most diverse in the world. The range
of spaces in which LGBTQI nightlife
is accommodated – from shopping
centres to theatres and art galleries –
is remarkably wide.

We would also point out that specific
venues, such as bars and clubs and
events, all contribute to the wider
night-time economy, and these
venues are often recognised for their
importance, and direct economic
benefits, by surrounding businesses,
such as shops and restaurants. Although
LGBTQI venues offer specific social
value to their target communities, they
are not solely used by LGBTQI clientele,
and they should be thought about in
context as part of the fabric of the city
and the social infrastructure of their
neighbourhoods. London’s nightlife
models have also been exported
nationally and internationally, as
venues takeover festivals or are transported to Pride events in other cities.

Along with the assumption that all LGBTQI venues are synonymous with ‘gay bars’, another is that these bars are welcoming to all who identify with the LGBTQI community. Our research does emphasise common needs for nightlife space across these communities, but also that they are extremely diverse in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and other expressions of their identities.

If it’s important to consider the full range of venues for LGBTQI nightlife, it’s equally vital to understand and challenge how ‘gay bars’ dominate

**Cliché:** Gay bars are inclusive and “safe” for all LGBTQI people by virtue of being gay bars.

the media discussion about nightlife, but are not necessarily inclusive to LGBTQI people, or even all gay people. Many venues are purposefully exclusive spaces, but not always because they want to create ‘safe’ space, sometimes just by virtue of the privilege needed to access them (money, youth, mobility, whiteness, maleness, a certain kind of body or image). Others are genuinely attempting to create ‘safe’ environments for specific groups who have actively been excluded from mainstream LGBTQI nightlife clusters, and this is enforced through marketing or door policies. The venues we collected data from reported how protecting their clientele’s safety is an ongoing concern, with spaces having been subjected to homophobic or transphobic attacks or harassment.

There is a view of LGBTQI nightlife as dominated by a hedonistic party scene, of drinking, dancing, drug-taking and sex – this argument has often been made in a moralising tone or as part of a homophobic discourse, and often focuses attention on gay men over other LGBTQI people.

Complicating a more superficial view, our research highlights that historically, since the mid 1980s, and in the present, important community and civic functions for LGBTQI communities have been wrapped into nightlife spaces. It also suggests how these communities have valued parties as political spaces, in terms of visibility and providing space for mutual support or community-building. All of the venues we surveyed were also places of cultural and artistic production, through music, performance, fashion and other forms of practice.
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**Policy-related literature**


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