



ROTTERDAM



Creative Footprint
Report 2024



Creative Footprint Rotterdam
was conducted on behalf of the City of
Rotterdam by VibeLab in 2024.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About Creative Footprint: Creative Footprint (CFP) is a research project conducted by VibeLab and PennPraxis that researches creative spaces and communities to study the cultural strength and impact of a city's music and nightlife. As of this writing, it has been conducted in Berlin, New York, Tokyo, Stockholm, Montréal, Sydney, and now Rotterdam.

About CFP Rotterdam: This study, commissioned by the Rotterdam-based nightlife advocacy and advisory organisation N8W8 R'dam and financially supported by the Municipality of Rotterdam, was undertaken by VibeLab in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania's PennPraxis from March-August 2024. Research consisted of a richly detailed spatial analysis of venues in the city as well as a series of focus groups and interviews with stakeholders deeply embedded in Rotterdam nightlife. The aims of this study are to amplify the prevailing issues, challenges and opportunities for nightlife in the city.

What the report contains: Following a brief overview of Rotterdam's development of nightlife advocacy and nighttime-related policymaking (*Section I*) and CFP methodology (*Section II*), the report covers spatial and data-driven findings (*Section III*) and further discussion of key dynamics and issues identified by research participants. The report then spotlights nightlife communities, flagship venues and creative clusters (*Section IV*), before offering a set of recommendations for the years to come and an accompanying 'first 100 days action plan' (*Section V*).

Key findings:

Rotterdam's overall CFP score is 6.10/10, and the city's Space score, one of the highest of the CFP dataset, offsets far lower scores for *Community and Content* and *Framework Conditions*.

Rotterdam contains 71 venues, and just 8 of Rotterdam's 19 districts have venues in the CFP sample. Venues are highly concentrated in the city centre: 44 of 71 are in the Centrum district. Rotterdam's urban form is unique

Rotterdam's venues are highly concentrated in the city centre, and while relatively balanced among sizes, there is a lack of smaller spaces for emerging artists and it is becoming more difficult for venues to platform experimental concepts.

among CFP cities: its centre is venue-dense and well-served by transit, while seven further districts have small numbers of venues, often far from transit and relatively far from each other. Five of the city's eastern districts are largely industrial and port zones.

Despite a balanced venue mix, Rotterdam lacks small venues essential for talent growth and development. Rotterdam's venue mix is well balanced among sizes, but the relatively small number of venues overall means there are few small spaces (only 9) for emerging artists and concepts.

Over three-quarters of venues are programmed for multiple uses: the most of any CFP city. "Multi-use" spaces (e.g. offering space for film, concerts, club nights, as a cafe, etc) are a distinctive feature of Rotterdam nightlife, across all size categories and districts in the study area. They provide homes for various nightlife communities—but amidst growing financial pressure, they (and other types of venues) struggle to retain the community-focused programming that is their strongest offer. This holds true despite the business advantage of drawing diverse revenue streams from not only nightlife but other uses as well.

Rotterdam's venues were rated low for programming—and rising costs are a further challenge for venue programming. Across CFP reports, there is a well-documented inverse relationship between an area's rental costs, and that area's venue scores for experimentation, creative output, and community-oriented content—this pattern holds here. Rising costs citywide, but particularly in districts like Delfshaven and Feijenoord, threaten to further strain operators' ability to offer creative and community-focused programmes.

Rotterdam nightlife stakeholders feel strongly connected to the city's spaces and nightlife scenes, but worry about the city's nightlife future and struggle to navigate its permits, costs, and disjointed municipal departments. Years of venue closures, and major perceived barriers to launching new

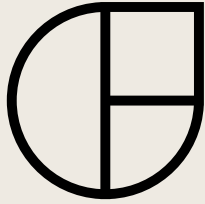
spaces, fuel concern and even cynicism about Rotterdam's nightlife future. While funding for nightlife activities is available, and the city's nightlife governance structure has both municipal and civic structures, a sense of fragmentation still pervades actors' understanding of the landscape.

Recommendations for action fall into three topic clusters:

- 1. Unlock untapped creative potential in Rotterdam by easing pathways and developing relationships so that nightlife can not only grow but thrive** through formalising night governance structures and fostering mutual education and exchange between the municipality and nightlife stakeholders, easing access to and legibility of funding and support for early career actors, increasing the viability of small venues and considering the potential for nightlife and municipal real estate.
- 2. Recognise and celebrate the unique value and importance of Rotterdam's nightlife culture and ensure the preservation of what the city already has** by elevating the visibility of nightlife in independent media communication and city marketing and promotion, reducing financial burdens for venues under threat from noise complaints and other outcomes of urban development, structuring a case-management approach to supporting nightlife venues and considering zoning changes to better embed nightlife as an essential element in the urban environment.
- 3. Reinforce the development of Rotterdam's nightlife by ramping up commitments in existing and new support infrastructures** including expanding and resourcing the *Nachtdienst* to include more municipal departments, increase policy making influence and better reach emerging nightlife stakeholders, establishing permanent and adequate funding for N8W8 R'dam to continue providing current and planned new services and addressing nightlife safety through improved nighttime mobility.



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYOND VAN MIL, SOEPELTJES AT SUPERDISCO



PROJECT PARTNERS

vibelab

Creative Footprint

CFP¹ is a research project by nighttime consultancy agency VibeLab that researches creative spaces and communities to study the cultural value and impact of music and nightlife in the city. Its unique methodology was developed by Lutz Leichsenring in partnership with Harvard University and has been used to research the creative nighttime sectors of Berlin (2017)², New York (2018)³, Tokyo (2019)⁴, Stockholm (2022)⁵, Montréal (2023)⁶, Sydney(2023)⁷ and now Rotterdam (2024).

CFP's team of data scientists, led by University of Pennsylvania lecturer Michael Fichman, analyse thousands of data points pertaining to a city's venues to develop a rich cultural analysis of the city's creative and cultural infrastructure. The team integrates venue data with economic and spatial data from government databases using a customised software environment. Working in collaboration with local music and nightlife experts, CFP's research team gathers insights from dozens of actors, stakeholders and decision makers embedded in a city's creative, music and nightlife scenes to assess the current picture. Through focus groups and in-depth interviews, the CFP process uncovers current issues, challenges and opportunities for the city's nighttime sectors.

VibeLab

VibeLab is a data-driven research, consultancy and advocacy agency dedicated to supporting creatives and preserving nighttime culture. With over ten years of experience, VibeLab works with local institutions and governments to develop strategies to effectively navigate and support the nightlife industry. We specialise in making complex data clear. VibeLab's research and consultancy helps identify growth opportunities and connects individuals, businesses, governments and institutions, to boost creativity and local economies. We are passionate about the transformative power that nightlife culture and creative communities have on urban areas. Our



strength lies in our connections: we bridge the gap between government authorities, nightlife creatives and local communities. VibeLab creates change with sustainable solutions, backed by data to make cities thrive at night.

PennPraxis: University of Pennsylvania

PennPraxis⁸ is the applied research, professional practice, and community engagement arm of the University of Pennsylvania's Weitzman School of Design. It provides opportunities for multi-disciplinary student and faculty collaboration through fee-for-service projects in the fields of Urban Planning, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Historic Preservation and more. PennPraxis' data analysis process involves the creation of custom, open-source software tools to allow for reproducible, flexible, and complex analysis for a range of use cases related to planning, health, landscape and the built environment. PennPraxis is an experienced global leader in nighttime urban planning and urban data analytics, and has been a part of the CFP project since 2018.

Project Partner: N8W8 R'dam

Rotterdam's independent night council is dedicated to fostering a vibrant, safe, and accessible nightlife. Founded in 2019 after the Opstaan voor de nacht (Stand Up for the night) demonstration, N8W8 R'dam has since become the trusted and independent discussion partner for all stakeholders in Rotterdam's nightlife. By uniting experts and those with lived experiences, facilitating connections, and addressing social issues, N8W8 R'dam plays a vital role in strengthening and advocating for the nightlife sector in Rotterdam.

N8W8 R'dam is known for its research and events, offering insights and fostering collaboration among community members, stakeholders, and experts. Through its efforts to connect, stimulate, and set agendas, N8W8 R'dam ensures that Rotterdam's nightlife remains dynamic and inclusive.





PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, CLOUD8 AT ANNABEL

SECTION I: **INTRODUCTION**

“It is up to us as institutions, artists, organisers, and other stakeholders to give meaning to what night culture is. To me, it is so much more than a business model for a bar. To me it is a celebration of new perspectives, of optimism, of pleasure activism and a form of art that deserves to be taken seriously. By politicians and other decision makers as well as by our sector itself. Our sector and municipality have a shared responsibility to provide not only a safe, but an interesting, inclusive and diverse night culture that enriches our city. A night culture that allows you to be yourself—or if you feel like it; your alter-ego.”

— Teun de Booij, Business Director, WORM

Rotterdam, the Netherlands’ ‘second city’, is known for its vibrant cultural diversity, daring architecture and design, industrial grittiness, and home-grown music and nightlife communities.⁹ Rotterdam has a distinct character, due in the main to the near complete destruction of the city centre during World War II. Reconstruction led to a more automobile-oriented city, a focus on industrialisation and modernisation and the principles of dividing urban functions (retail, industry, dwelling, etc.) in space.¹⁰ Rotterdam today boasts a wide array of rich cultural offerings, including over 150 festivals per year. Acclaimed festivals include the International Film Festival Rotterdam¹¹, *Rotterdam Unlimited Zomercarnaval* (Rotterdam Unlimited Summer Carnival)², Motel Mozaïque and Eendracht Festival.¹³

Rotterdam is a music city, enriched by genres and traditions from elsewhere. These factors have allowed the city to birth its own unique

sounds over time. Soon after the arrival of jazz on the radio in the 1920s, Rotterdam developed its own lively scene.^{14 15} Iconic club Jazzcafe Dizzy¹⁶ is still active today. In the 1950s the first Cape Verdean migrants arrived to work at the Port of Rotterdam. Since then, Rotterdam has become a world renowned centre of Cape Verdean music.¹⁷ Arriving in the 1970s after independence from the Netherlands, Surinamese migrants brought their own funk and soul music developed across the Atlantic.^{18 19} In the 1980s a number of music scenes electrified Rotterdam. The city gained a reputation as the hip-hop capital of the Netherlands and an important place for the punk and post-punk community.²⁰ The rising popularity of electronic music included techno, acid and house. In the 1990s, hardcore and gabber put the Rotterdam dance scene on the map, in the Netherlands and worldwide. Gabber music is hailed by some as the first truly Dutch style of electronic music and to this day remains a significant subculture.²¹

This research comes at a critical moment for the city to investigate and invest in its nightlife. Despite the arrival of Covid-19 pandemic debt relief, venues continue to struggle financially and are faced with a number of additional obstacles, leading many to permanently close. Nightlife is comparatively less visible in the city than Rotterdam's famous festivals.²² One such example is the advertising for festivals in public spaces including Rotterdam Central Station. Urban development in the city centre and elsewhere, for example the Schiekadeblok urban redevelopment plan, threatens the survival of a number of the city's most popular venues and nightlife cultural institutions (see pages 64-65 for more).^{23 24} The municipality has been actively engaged with nightlife safety for some time, with the first CCTV cameras installed in public space nearly 20 years ago and the trial initiative Safe'R Spot beginning in 2023.^{25 26} Since the fatal shooting at Hoek van Holland in 2009, and other incidents of audience aggression at music events, the city has renewed its commitment to nightlife safety and festival security measures.

Serving as the first study into the value of nightlife in Rotterdam, this report signals the municipality's commitment to supporting its nightlife, night culture and nighttime economy. It highlights key stories from Rotterdam's nightlife communities and stakeholders and delivers the necessary data, insights and recommendations to enact stronger and more sustainable policy for nightlife and night culture. Following a city profile and description of the Creative Footprint methodology, the report details quantitative, spatial and qualitative research findings. It closes with a set of recommendations and next steps for the municipality and Rotterdam's other nightlife stakeholders.

Geography

Rotterdam is in the *Zuid Holland* (South Holland) province, spanning the north and south banks of the mouth of the Maas river. Rotterdam's port and industrial areas occupy much of the western side of the city.

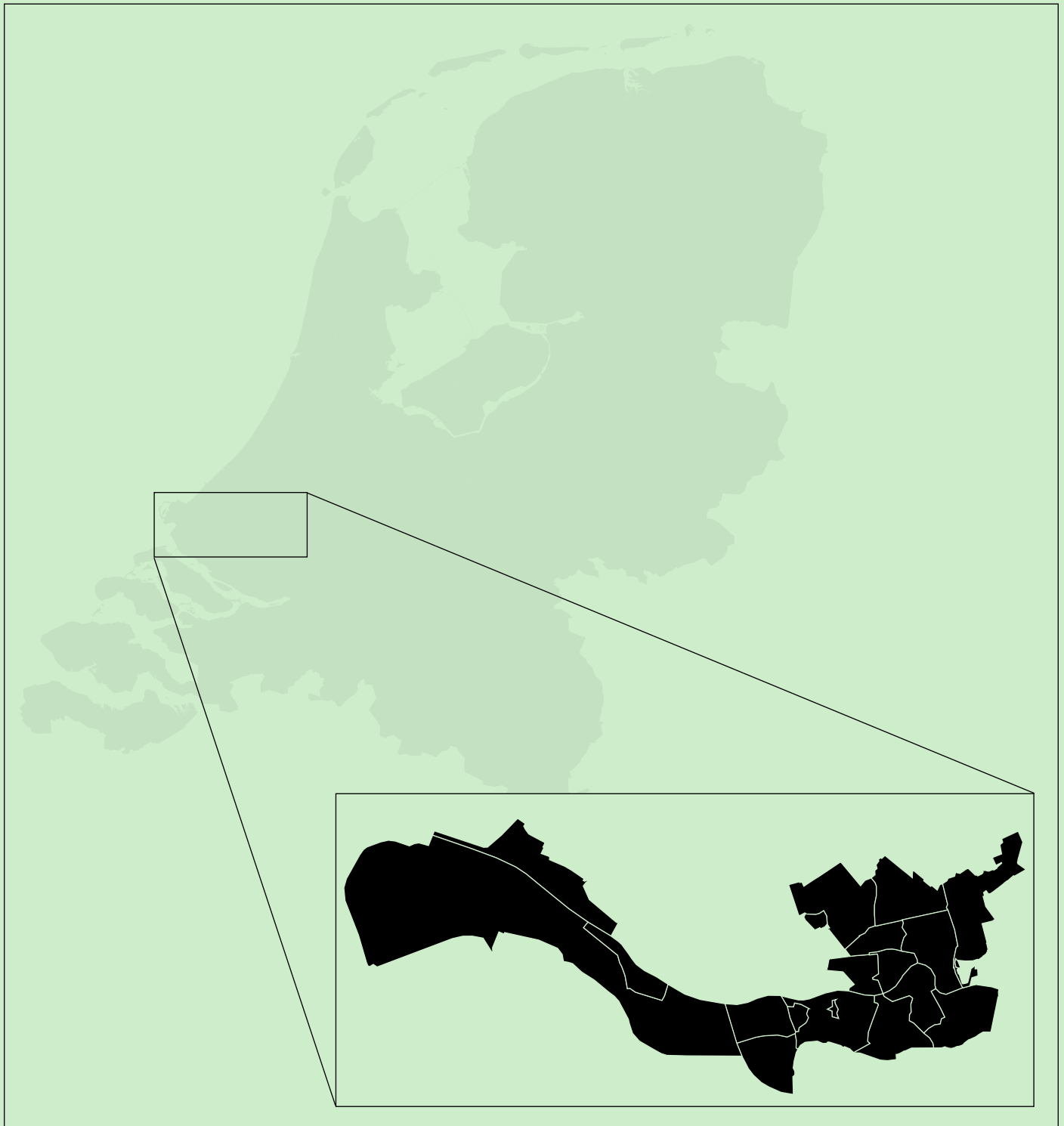


FIGURE 1: MAP OF THE 19 CONSTITUENT DISTRICTS OF THE CITY OF ROTTERDAM

Quick facts Rotterdam:

(Note: Demographic figures in this section are from the 2023 Census²⁷ unless otherwise indicated.)

Population:

663,900

Inhabitants (3,040 per sq. km)

Population demographics:

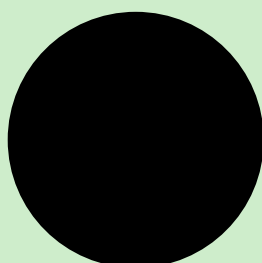
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Nationalities²⁸

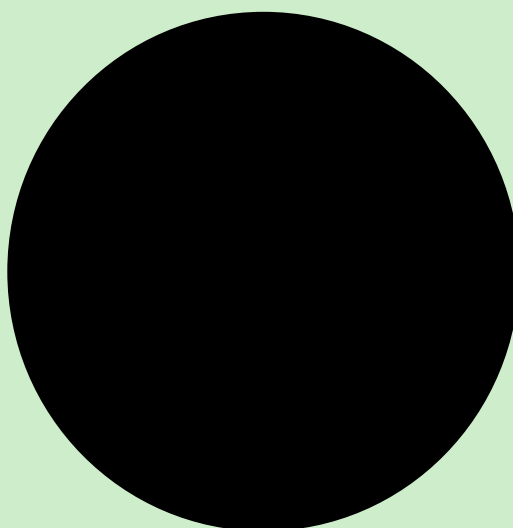
Age:



Migration:



32.3%
First-generation



~50%²⁹
First and second
generation (2017)

Largest migrant groups:

- Suriname
- Turkey
- Morocco
- Dutch Antilles:
Aruba, Bonaire,
Curaçao, Saba,
Sint Eustatius, Sint
Maarten

Official language: Dutch
(English fluency
80%³⁰)

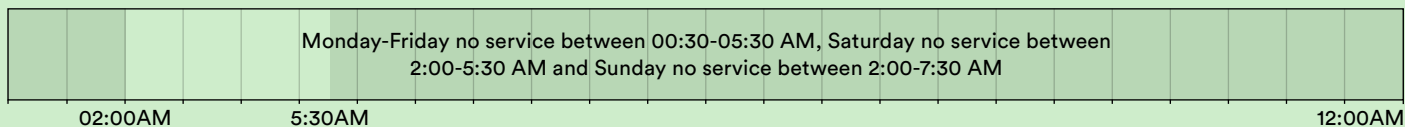
Percentage of population living in poverty (2018): 10.9% (highest in the Netherlands)³¹

Average household assets: €11,800 euros (national average of €135,100)³²

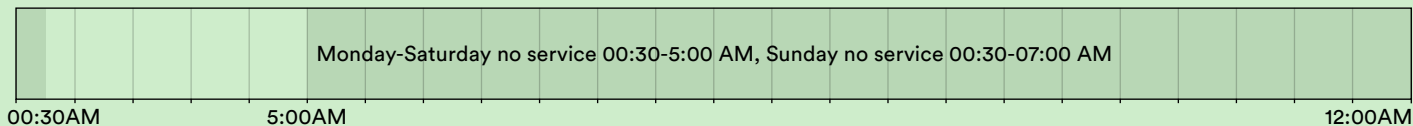
Change in unemployment rate 2014-2018: from 12.6% to 6.2%³³

Nighttime city public transportation:

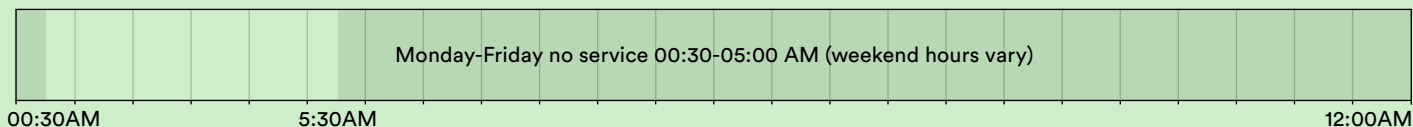
Rotterdam Metro:



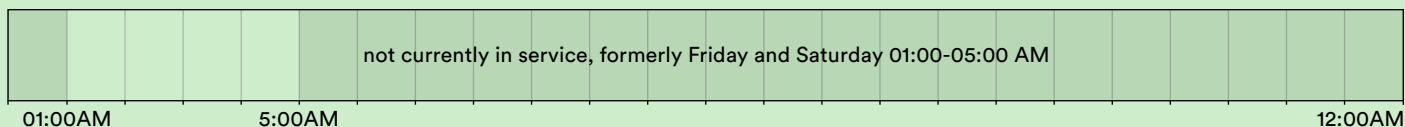
Rotterdam Tram:



Rotterdam Bus:



Rotterdam Nightbus (BOB Nachtbus):



Other methods: Ride share services

Cycle Network:



Night governance:

Below is an overview of some of the different national laws and regional and local policies that affect Rotterdam nightlife.

Governance actor	Nightlife-related implementation
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alcohol law• Municipal law• Environmental law• Police law
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public transportation (<i>RET</i>)
Mayor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alcohol licencing• Permitting• Public order and safety (including police)
City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local regulations (<i>APV</i>)• Zoning and planning
Municipal Department of Urban Development (<i>Stadsontwikkeling</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Zoning and building codes• Noise regulation
Municipal Department of Urban Mobility (<i>Mobiliteit</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public transportation (<i>RET</i>)
Municipal Department of Culture (<i>Cultuur</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Artist and venue grants and funding
Directorate of Urban Safety (<i>Directie Veiligheid</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public safety and safety permits

Legendary DJ David Vunk plays for the crowd at the 'Opstaan voor de Nacht' protest (see more on page 18) on February 20, 2019 at 17:00 PM



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, DAVID VUNK AT 'OPSTAAN VOOR DE NACHT'

In 2019, Club BAR³⁸, a nightclub mixing popular and avant-garde electronic music, closed its doors. This was one of the many catalysts leading to the "Opstaan voor de Nacht" (Stand Up For The Night) protest in February of that year³⁹, where 2,000 Rotterdammers gathered at City Hall to voice their grievances on the present state of nightlife, their fears for its future, and the need for night governance.^{40 41} N8W8 R'dam emerged from this event as an independent advisory body dedicated to sustaining nightlife that works in collaboration with the municipality. Since its inception, N8W8 R'dam has advocated for the nightlife sector,⁴² hosted Open Nights⁴³ for the local community to share their thoughts with the municipality, and organised knowledge sessions on topics such as political involvement⁴⁴ and urban development⁴⁵ in relation to nightlife.

Prior to this moment, the municipality had already begun to consider nightlife in policy making. The Coalition Agreement 2018-2022 (*Coalitieakkoord*) sought to grow the city's creative industry by highlighting the value of entrepreneurial cultural makers and offering the hospitality industry more flexibility.⁴⁶ The Neighbourhoods Plan 2019-2022 (*Wijkagenda*) prioritised the management of events and hospitality in the city centre to address a scarcity of urban space and increasing tourism.⁴⁷ The Pop Policy Vision 2019-2030 (*Beleidsvisie Pop*) aimed to support the city's music sector by empowering artists and finding opportunities for development.⁴⁸

In more recent years the municipality has made renewed and strengthened policy commitments to the city's nightlife. The Environmental Vision 2021 (*Omgevingsvisie: 'De Veranderstad'*)⁴⁹ and City Centre Vision 2021 (*Omgevingsvisie: 'Een groene en vitale binnenstad voor iedereen'*)⁵⁰ acknowledged the importance of nightlife for a liveable, vibrant and sustainable city. During, and since the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the municipality provided a number of support measures for the hospitality sector including permitting extensions and assistance

for terracing and other entrepreneurial ventures. The Coalition Agreement 2022-2026 (*Coalitieakkoord: Eén Stad*) included safety measures to support Rotterdam's night culture such as training for police officers on confronting street harassment and increasing the deployment of night hospitality stewards (*horecastewards*).⁵¹

The Hospitality Implementation Plan 2022 (*Uitvoeringsplan Horeca*) included allowances for later opening times and increased the number of days a hospitality establishment can use the exemption system for longer opening hours (*verlaatje*) and higher noise standards (*geluidje*).⁵² It also recognised N8W8 R'dam as the city's independent nightlife council with a yearly budget of €80.000 until 2026. The Cultural Plan 2025-2028 (*'Van onschatbare waarde': Uitgangspuntennota voor het Rotterdamse Cultuurbeleid*) identified culture as insufficiently accessible for Rotterdam residents living outside the city centre, especially in the neighbourhoods that constitute Rotterdam South. The plan recognised the divide between the north and south parts of the city, as well as the city centre and outlying areas, in terms of access to culture and the need to forge connections across the entire city. It will also invest in the talent development of night culture makers as well as spaces to create and perform.⁵³

In 2023 the cross-departmental *Nachtdienst* (night culture team) was established in order to embed nightlife and nighttime economy policy within the municipality and support the development of nightlife and opening of new venues. The city will publish a *Nachtplan* (night plan) in 2024, which will be implemented by all departments of the *Nachtdienst*.

SECTION II: METHODOLOGY

CFP's methodology was originally developed in 2017 by Lutz Leichsenring in partnership with professors based at Harvard University and was further developed in collaboration with other leading academics and practitioners in urban planning at the University of Pennsylvania's PennPraxis. Combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, CFP's approach yields detailed insights into a city's creative and cultural nighttime infrastructure, as well as the prevailing issues, challenges and opportunities for music and nightlife in the city.



PHOTO CREDIT: FLOOR BESUIJEN, CREATIVE FOOTPRINT ROTTERDAM FOCUS GROUP AT WORM

2.1 Creative Footprint’s process

From January to May 2024, CFP researchers and PennPraxis data scientists studied the key characteristics of Rotterdam’s creative and cultural nighttime infrastructure, as well as the current issues, challenges and opportunities for the city’s music and nightlife scenes.

2024						
February	March	April	May	June	July	August
<p>Stage 1:</p> <p>Literature review</p> <p>Review of journalistic, grey and academic literature pertaining to Rotterdam’s nighttime governance.</p> <p>Developing a venue database</p> <p>Assembly of a database of music and nightlife spaces across the 19 districts of the City of Rotterdam.</p> <p>Developing a stakeholder database</p> <p>Assembly of database of key actors, stakeholders and decision makers in Rotterdam’s music and nightlife scenes.</p>		<p>Stage 2:</p> <p>Venue focus groups</p> <p>Two online focus groups with Rotterdam-based music and nightlife actors and stakeholders (Session 1: 37 participants; Session 2: 32) to gather data on Rotterdam’s venues.</p> <p>Framework Conditions focus group</p> <p>In-person focus group with 36 Rotterdam-based music and nightlife actors and stakeholders, some of whom also participated in the venue focus groups, to gather data on issues related to Rotterdam’s nighttime framework conditions.</p> <p>In-depth interviews</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews with 14 Rotterdam-based music and nightlife actors and stakeholders to explore key issues, challenges and opportunities for the city.</p>		<p>Stage 3:</p> <p>Analysing research data and score calculation</p> <p>Analysis of data pertaining to Rotterdam’s music and nightlife venues, coupled with urban, economic and demographic datasets to understand the relationships between Rotterdam’s venue precincts, urban environment and population.</p> <p>Recommendations formulation and report development</p> <p>Compilation of research findings from focus groups and interviews; formulation of recommendations; report development.</p>		

2.2 Why music and nightlife venues?

CFP focuses on venues because nightlife requires physical space to thrive—and because urban places that host or create cultural activity are increasingly at risk. Mapping and assessing nightlife spaces affords insight into the health of a city’s cultural and nighttime ecosystem.

Nightlife spaces facilitate the sharing of ideas, beliefs and customs between different people and communities,⁵⁴ and through that exchange, have the potential to transcend social, cultural and political differences between the people and communities that make up the fabric of a city. Music and nightlife venues are the physical spaces that have traditionally driven Rotterdam’s creative and cultural sector. They serve as important anchors of its nighttime economy, and play a crucial role in shaping urban life after dark. CFP recognises that nightlife spaces are primarily interdisciplinary: they bring together different creative practices, which fosters cultural innovation across a range of fields from music, visual arts, fashion, dance, film, design—and increasingly, cultural heritage. Nightlife is a core creative activity that influences and generates related social, economic and cultural activity in the city:

Music and nightlife venues are the physical spaces that have traditionally driven Rotterdam’s creative and cultural sector.



FIGURE 2: GRAPHIC VISUALISING INFLUENCE OF ARTISTIC FORMS IN THE NIGHTTIME ECOSYSTEM ACROSS DISCIPLINES

How does Creative Footprint’s methodology define a **music and nightlife venue**?

In CFP’s definition, music and nightlife venues have regular music programming (at least one music event per month) that is advertised publicly. Our venue research in Rotterdam included dedicated live music venues, concert halls, arenas, nightclubs, parks and public spaces, bars regularly hosting music events, and rental venues regularly used by event organisers. It should be noted that CFP’s methodology does not factor in venues that only host private events such as birthday parties or weddings.

What’s the difference between nightlife and the nighttime economy?

CFP defines **nightlife** as social and creative culture traditionally expressed and experienced at night. (In Dutch contexts, this is often understood as **night culture**.) It is created by a broad range of creatives, supporting workers, stakeholders and consumers—together, they form the **nighttime community**. These individuals are part of the **nighttime economy**, which implies all the activities, businesses and workers operating at night: nightlife, hospitality and leisure as well as night shift workers, late-night transportation, retail, and more.

CFP employs 15 different indicators across three sets of parameters—*Space*, *Community and Content*, and *Framework Conditions*—to examine a city's creative and cultural nighttime infrastructure. Interviewees and focus group participants respond to specific statements using a psychometric response scale called the Likert scale to indicate their level of agreement or the validity of the statement for Rotterdam.

Space

Internal and external physical conditions of the city's creative and cultural nighttime infrastructure, including venue size, how well-connected venues are to nearby transportation hubs, the average age of venues, and their multifunctionality, reputation, and visibility.

Community and Content

Criteria related to how venues value creativity and culture, including how venues promote cultural offerings in their marketing, to what extent venues facilitate interdisciplinary and/or experimental artistic formats, how community-centred venues are, and if venues foreground original creative content.

Framework Conditions

External conditions affecting artistic, cultural and other nighttime activity, including relevant laws, regulations and policies; relationships between cultural actors and civic decision makers; the type of funding and support infrastructure available; nighttime public transportation; and access to public and private space for cultural programming and activities.

Space	Community and Content	Framework Conditions
<p>Venue size</p> <p>Venue floor space used for music events and performances, in m².</p>	<p>Promotion</p> <p>To what degree does the venue centre music and artistic content in their marketing and promotion (in contrast to food offerings or drink specials)?</p>	<p>Public transportation at night</p> <p>To what degree is the city's public transportation available at high frequency after midnight? How affordable and accessible are venues via public transport?</p>
<p>Pedestrian frequency</p> <p>Venues' proximity to fixed public transport nodes and pedestrian accessibility.</p>	<p>Interdisciplinarity</p> <p>To what degree does the venue enable a range of artistic practices and interdisciplinary formats?</p>	<p>Overall funding for music and nightlife</p> <p>To what degree is public or government funding available for music and nightlife activities?</p>
<p>Years operating</p> <p>Number of years a venue has operated since opening</p>	<p>Community focus</p> <p>To what degree does the venue provide space for specific scenes and communities, whether minoritised, marginalised and/or underrepresented in the city? Does the venue act as a hub for emerging talent, subgenre(s) and local communities?</p>	<p>Overall policies and regulations</p> <p>To what degree do the city's policies, licencing, and law enforcement support music and nightlife activities</p>
<p>Multifunctionality of spaces</p> <p>Venues' number of regular uses and functions</p>	<p>Creative output</p> <p>To what degree does the venue platform original creative content (including DJing and electronic music) through their music and nightlife programming</p>	<p>Access to local politicians and decision makers</p> <p>To what degree can music and nightlife stakeholders access the city's politicians and decision makers? Is there a night mayor or representative that fosters a collaborative approach to resolving issues?</p>
<p>Reputation</p> <p>Venues' social media reach.</p>	<p>Experimentation</p> <p>To what degree does the venue platform original experimental content through their music and nightlife programming</p>	<p>Public cultural activities</p> <p>To what degree do the city's public spaces and properties allow for music and nightlife activities? How affordable and accessible is acquiring a licence for music and nightlife events?</p>

2.4 Summary of research approaches, participants and scope

Quantitative and qualitative research approaches

CFP's data scientists examined 15 key indicators related to each music and nightlife venue in Rotterdam (totalling 71 venues) across Space and *Community and Content* parameters. Two online focus groups, with 69 Rotterdam-based music and nightlife participants across both sessions, were conducted to gather primary data on a representative sample of venues from the City of Rotterdam. These data were then related to economic, geographic, demographic, and transit data. Using a custom software environment designed and maintained by Michael Fichman at PennPraxis, the CFP data team described the distribution of variables in the collected data, mined them for important trends and relationships, and compared Rotterdam's data to that of other CFP cities. These data are also integrated with CFP's proprietary algorithms to calculate the CFP score. In analysing the original content and programming of each of Rotterdam's venues, this methodology evaluates the cultural and social impact of the city's creative and cultural nightlife, as opposed to solely its economic impact.

CFP conducted additional qualitative research including an in-person focus group and in-depth interviews with a range of stakeholders, to identify key issues, challenges and opportunities for Rotterdam's music and nightlife communities and creative spaces. This research was further contextualised with on-the-ground visits to a range of events and venues across Rotterdam and informal conversations with patrons and operators.

Research participants

Collectively, focus group participants and interviewees represented venue owners and operators, community organisers, DJs, label owners, artists, musicians, dancers, performance artists, producers, bookers,

policy makers, and operators of arts and cultural institutions—many of whom are activists and nightlife researchers. Participants also included policy decision makers and civil servants from the City of Rotterdam. Focus group participants and interviewees ranged in age, background, ethnicity, sexual and gender identity. They represented a blend of experience, from several years to several decades' work in music and nightlife across scenes and subcultures with a diversity of representation from Rotterdam's music and arts scenes.



Research scope

CFP's research scope examines the 19 districts which constitute the City of Rotterdam. CFP acknowledges the influence and relationship between Rotterdam and its surrounding suburbs, towns, villages and even nearby The Hague. However, the concentration of Rotterdam's nightlife within these municipal boundaries justifies this scale of analysis.

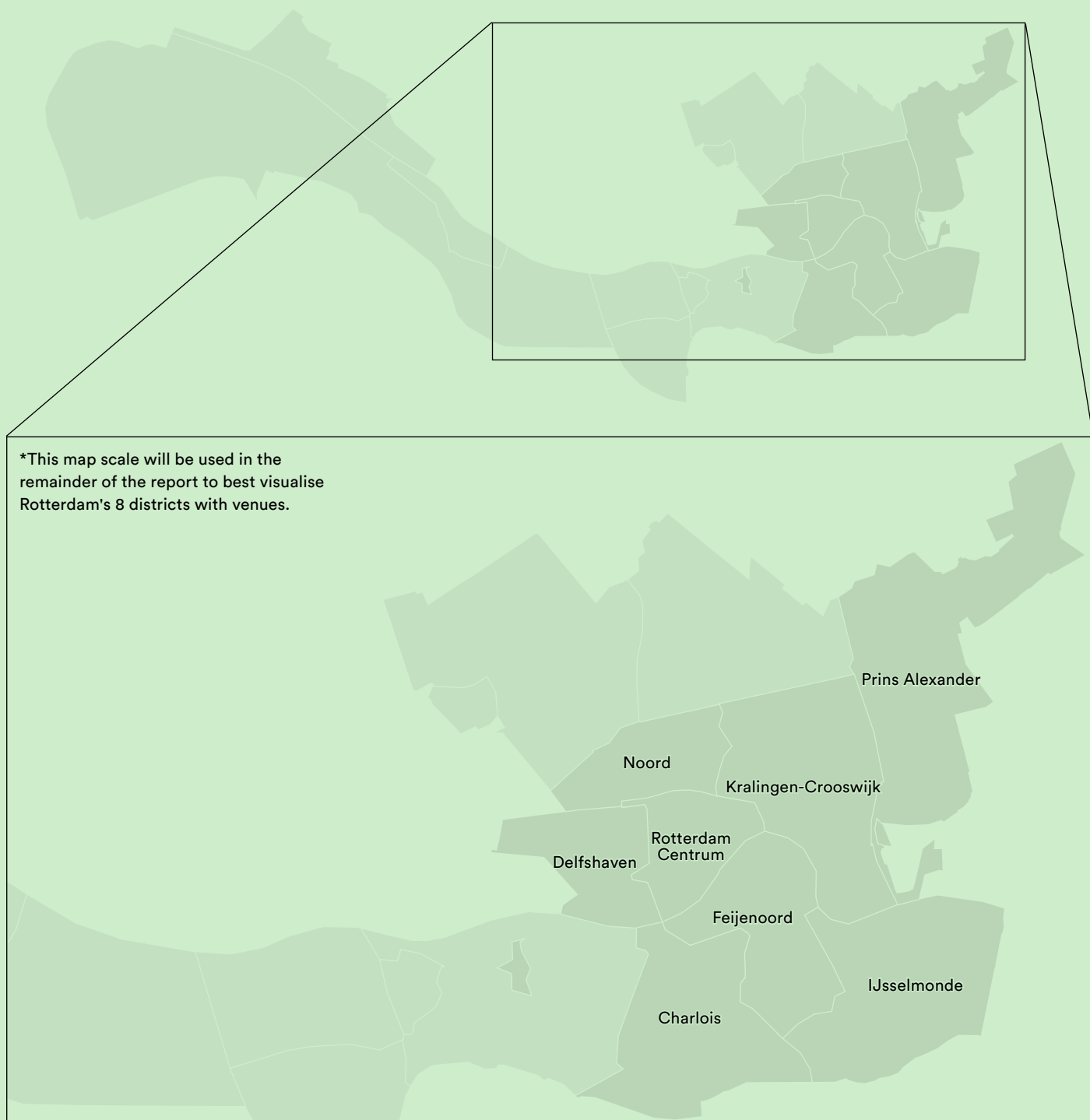


FIGURE 3: MAPS SHOWING FULL RESEARCH SCOPE OF CREATIVE FOOTPRINT ROTTERDAM AND INSET MAP OF DISTRICTS WITH VENUES



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, BLENDS AT MAASSILO

**SECTION III:
PRESENTING
ROTTERDAM'S
CREATIVE
FOOTPRINT
SCORES**

CFP uses quantitative, spatial, and qualitative analysis to offer unique insights about a city's nightlife culture. Rotterdam's overall CFP score is **6.10/10**. This section details spatial and quantitative research findings.

Rotterdam's Space score of 8.58/10 is the highest of the three categories and one of the highest in the CFP dataset. High scores for venue age, size and pedestrian frequency speak to an overall healthy mix of venues. However, venues in the city centre are much more accessible by metro than in other parts of the city. Rotterdam's *Framework Conditions* (**5.41/10**) and *Community and Content* (**5.90/10**) scores are almost equal and are significantly lower in comparison to the city's Space scores.

Rotterdam contains 71 venues and just 8 of Rotterdam's 19 districts have venues in the CFP sample. Four of these venues fall slightly outside the study boundary of 19 districts, in Schiedam. Five of the city's eastern districts are largely industrial and port zones. This urban form, with large swathes of the city not suitable for nightlife or residential areas, is unique compared to previous CFP cities in Europe, North America and Asia.

Venues in Rotterdam are largely concentrated in the city centre. 44 of 71 venues are located in Centrum, one of the smallest districts in terms of size. The district with the next highest number of venues is Feijenoord

with 6 venues. Venues in outlying districts are relatively isolated and do not cluster along 'high streets', in certain neighbourhoods, or close to public transit stations.

Venue density in Rotterdam is comparable to some of the highest density venue clusters in the CFP database. But, the size of the cluster is smaller. Venue density in the city as a whole is quite low and the average distance between venues is highest among CFP cities.

With only 9 venues under 100 square metres, Rotterdam is lacking in the kinds of small venues that are essential for talent growth and development. Smaller venues tend to rank more highly on *Community and Content* metrics (also referred to throughout this report as "programming"). Although Rotterdam does contain a mix of venues of different sizes⁵⁵, there is a notable lack of both small and large sized venues. This low count limits the opportunities for beginner artists to perform.

55. Throughout the report, venues are referred to across these categories as small (<100 m²), small-midsized (101-500 m²), midsized-large (501-1000 m²), and large (>1000 m²).

Rotterdam has a very high proportion of venues that have multiple programming uses: over three-quarters of venues are programmed for 2 or more uses. On average, a venue in Rotterdam is programmed for more types of uses (e.g. film, music, talks, DJs etc.) than in any other CFP city. Multi-use spaces⁵⁶ had, on average, slightly higher programming scores than single-use spaces. Spaces of all size categories showed this tendency towards multiple uses and these multi-use venues are spread throughout the study area.

Rotterdam's venues received overall low programming ratings. Venues in the city centre have a mix of programming rankings and for the most part venues just outside have higher programming ratings.

Rotterdam has a particularly strong correlation between venue density and fixed transit density. This suggests an urban form with a strong centre (similar to Stockholm), rather than a sprawling, more car-centric form like CFP cities Sydney or Montréal. Centrum is the most venue and transit dense district, while other areas of the city with nightlife are far less walkable or transit dense. The more experimental, community focused and creative nightlife outside Centrum is thus more difficult to access, due in part to a lack of late night public transit options.

Some of the most critical areas for night culture in Rotterdam, including Centrum, Delfshaven and Feijenoord, are experiencing urban development changes that threaten nightlife. Gentrification and increasing housing density are causing property values to rise and are leading to conflicts between nightlife, the city and its residents. Especially in relatively affordable areas, such as Feijenoord and Charlois, these developments are necessary to address.

Rotterdam nightlife stakeholders are particularly close-knit and feel strongly about the city's spaces, especially those serving specific communities—yet they also worry about the city's nightlife future. Participants

were generally critical of the status quo, and felt it is becoming increasingly difficult for original, authentic and innovative nightlife to exist in the city. While some participants felt represented by some city decision makers, there are strong concerns about venue closures, and increasing risk and uncertainty of opening new ones. However, participants were also motivated, willing to work with the city and other stakeholders to achieve tangible results.

56. For the purposes of this research, a multi-use space is a venue with more than one regular use and/or function.



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, CLOUDS AT GROOTHANDELSGEBOUW

3.1 Overall score










FIGURE 4: OVERALL CREATIVE FOOTPRINT SCORE FOR ROTTERDAM

Space	Community and Content	Framework Conditions
Venue size	Promotion	Public transportation at night
9.30	3.80	4.81
Pedestrian frequency	Interdisciplinarity	Overall funding for music and nightlife
8.70	6.87	6.42
Years operating	Community focus	Overall policies and regulations
8.09	5.18	4.53
Multifunctionality of spaces	Creative output	Access to local politicians and decision makers
8.24	5.66	6.72
Reputation	Experimentation	Public cultural activities
7.47	4.70	4.53
Overall	Overall	Overall
8.58	5.90	5.41

3.2 Comparing Rotterdam with Creative Footprint Cities

Rotterdam's overall CFP score is 6.10/10. The city scores highest on *Space* and lowest on *Framework Conditions* and *Community and Content*. Rotterdam has one of the highest *Space* scores of the CFP dataset, but some of the lowest *Framework Conditions* and *Community and Content* scores of CFP cities.

	Framework Conditions	Community and Content	Space	Overall Score
 Berlin 2017	8.82	6.75	8.49	8.02
 New York City 2018	6.35	6.92	8.59	7.29
 Tokyo 2019	4.48	6.96	8.08	6.51
 Stockholm 2021	5.06	6.27	8.40	6.58
 Montréal 2022	4.18	7.15	8.38	6.57
 Sydney 2023	5.37	7.08	8.38	6.94
 Rotterdam 2024	5.41	5.90	8.58	6.10

3.3 Visualising Rotterdam's creative and cultural nighttime infrastructure

Venue Density and Geographic Distribution

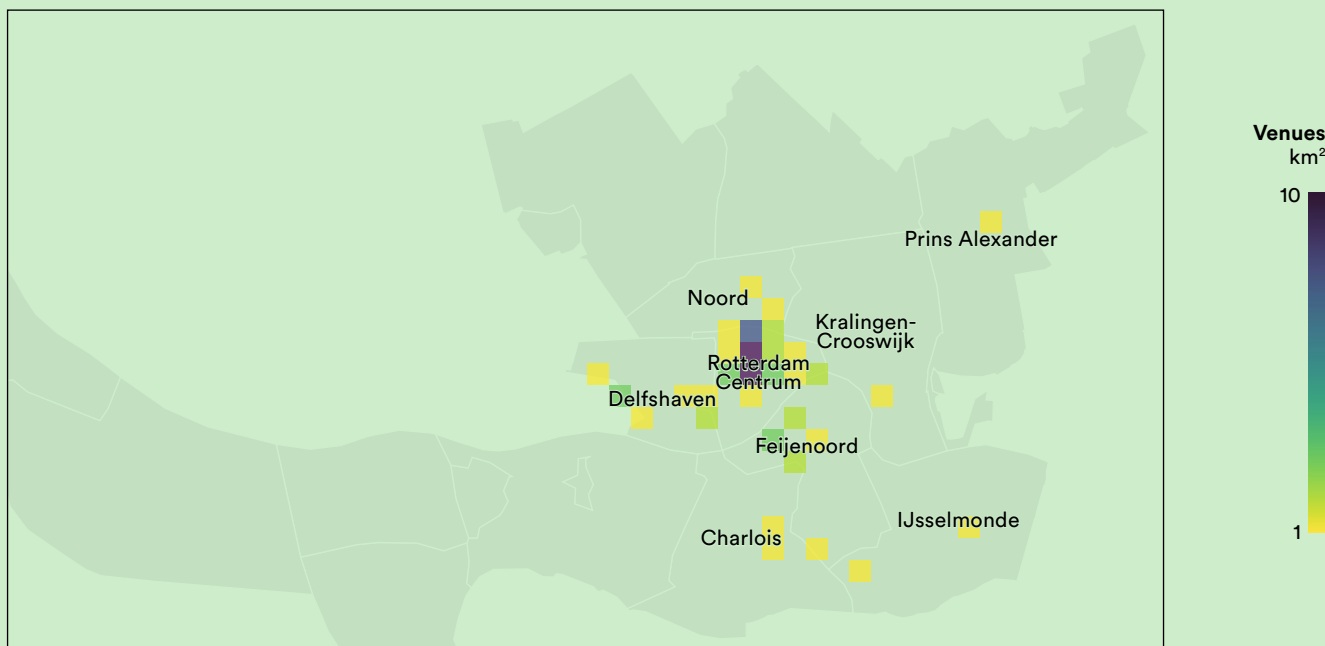


FIGURE 5: HEATMAP OF VENUE DENSITY

Rotterdam's venues are very highly concentrated in the city centre. Figure 5 above shows that Centrum contains 44 of 71 venues (62%). There are far fewer venues in the immediate surrounding areas—no other district has even 10 venues and some only

one (see Figure 6 below). After Centrum, the next most venue-dense districts of Delfshaven, Feijenoord, and Charlois are to the west and south. Northern districts with few or no venues are largely residential and suburban.

Venues by District

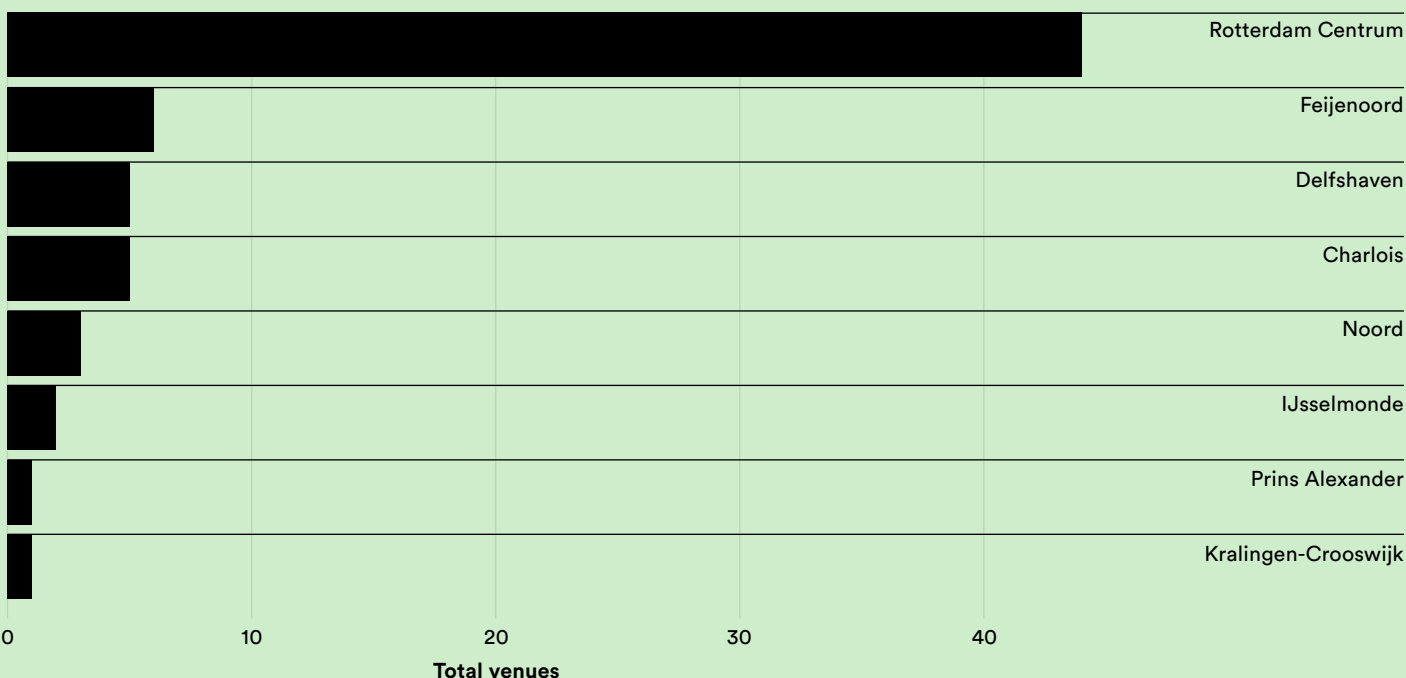
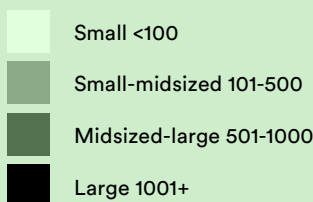


FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF VENUES BY DISTRICT IN ROTTERDAM

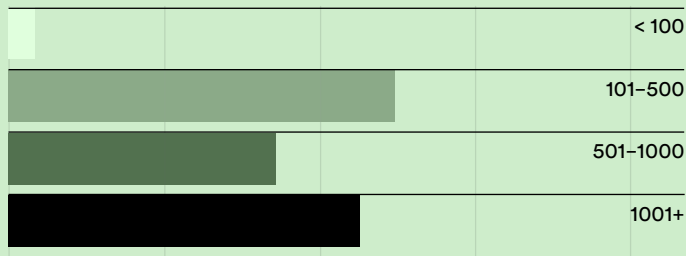
Note: Districts without venues are excluded from this graphic.

Venue Size Distribution

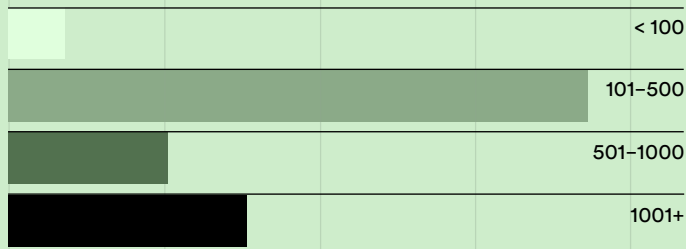
Size (Square Meters)



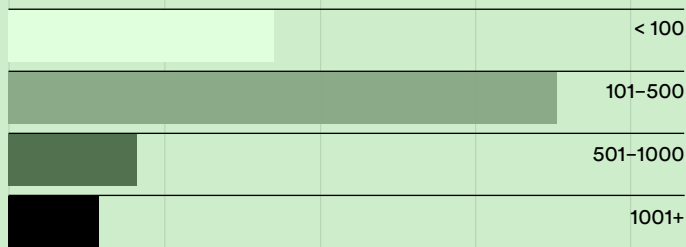
New York City 2018



Stockholm 2021

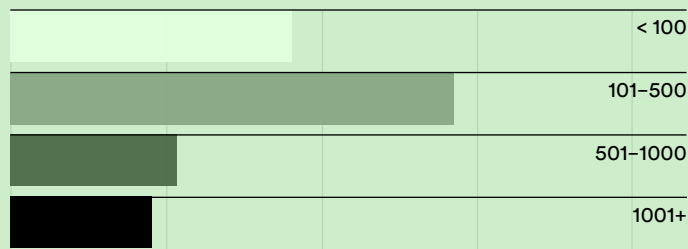


Sydney 2023

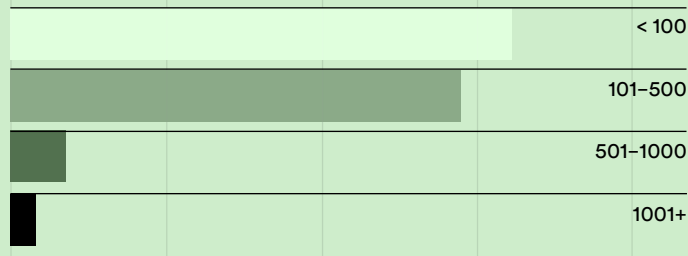


0 15 30 45 60
Percentage of Venues %

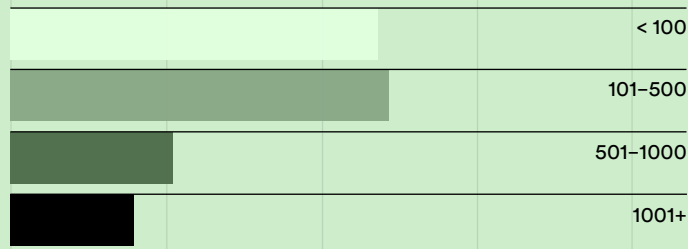
Berlin 2017



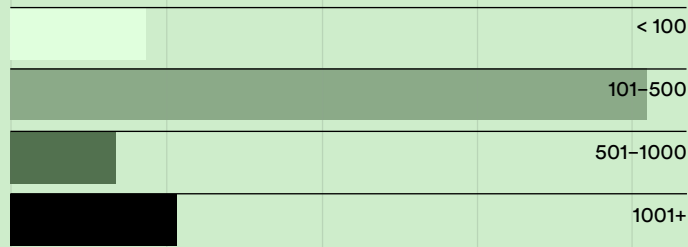
Tokyo 2019



Montréal 2022



Rotterdam 2024



0 15 30 45 60
Percentage of Venues %

FIGURE 7: COMPARISON OF VENUE FLOOR SIZE IN BERLIN, NEW YORK, TOKYO, STOCKHOLM, MONTRÉAL, SYDNEY AND ROTTERDAM

The Rotterdam venue ladder⁵⁷ lacks small venues: only 9 (12%) of Rotterdam's venues are under 100m². Nearly two-thirds of Rotterdam's venues are small-midsized and midsized-large (101-500 and 501-1000 m², respectively); large venues (over 1000 m²) make up 26% of the venue sample. As seen in Figure 7 above, this distribution most closely resembles that of Stockholm. In Rotterdam, there is little difference in *experimentation* indicator scores between venues of all sizes.

57. A venue ladder describes the mix of spaces from small local venues to stadiums or arenas that must be present in a city for an artist to move through as they develop career momentum and popularity. Emerging artists need small spaces to experiment and build an audience base; as artists grow, increasingly larger spaces are needed. It is essential that this mix of spaces exists to accommodate these trajectories.

Venue Uses and Interdisciplinarity

Rotterdam's venues have, on average, more types of uses than those of any other CFP city. More than three-quarters of venues host 2 or more uses (e.g. club, cinema, gallery, etc.), with some also operating (e.g. as cafes) during the day. On average, multi-use spaces have higher programming scores than single-use spaces. This tendency holds across venues of all sizes, and throughout the study area, including the city centre. Participants also recognize this tendency: *interdisciplinarity* scored highly at **6.87/10**. Delfshaven and Charlois were most likely to have venues with even more types of use (3+). *Section IV: Community and Content* discusses multi-use venues further.

Programming Characteristics

Expert panels and focus groups gave Rotterdam's venues relatively low scores on the majority of programming indicators, with the exception of *Interdisciplinarity*. Very few venues were highly ranked across all indicators (*community focus, creative output, experimentation* and *interdisciplinarity*); in particular, very few venues received high scores for *experimentation*, or *promotion* (how much the marketing of a space focuses on artistic content, rather than culinary offers or drink specials).

Districts surrounding the city centre had above-average programming rankings, whereas Centrum's ratings were relatively average. In Figures 8 and 9, where darker blue and purple represent higher scores, Delfshaven, Noord and IJsselmonde, despite have few venues, display particularly strong ratings.



Experimental Content and Community Focus Scores By District

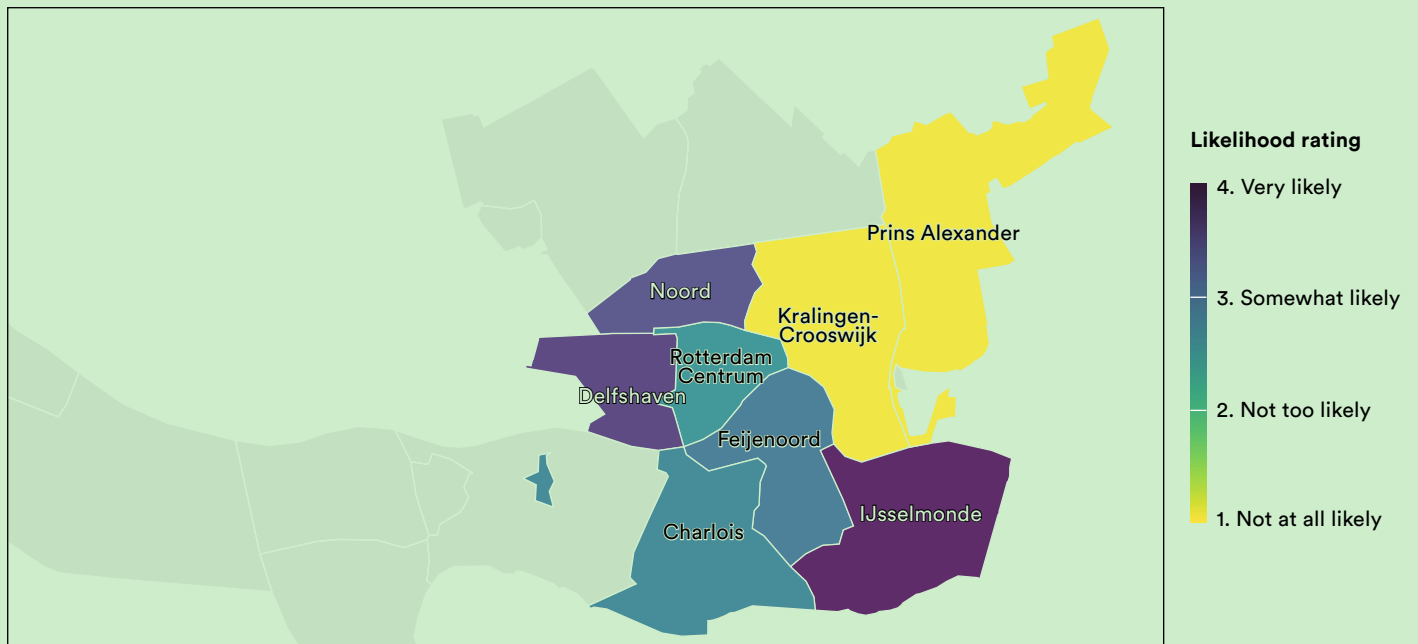


FIGURE 8: HOW LIKELY IS A VENUE TO PLATFORM ORIGINAL EXPERIMENTAL CONTENT?

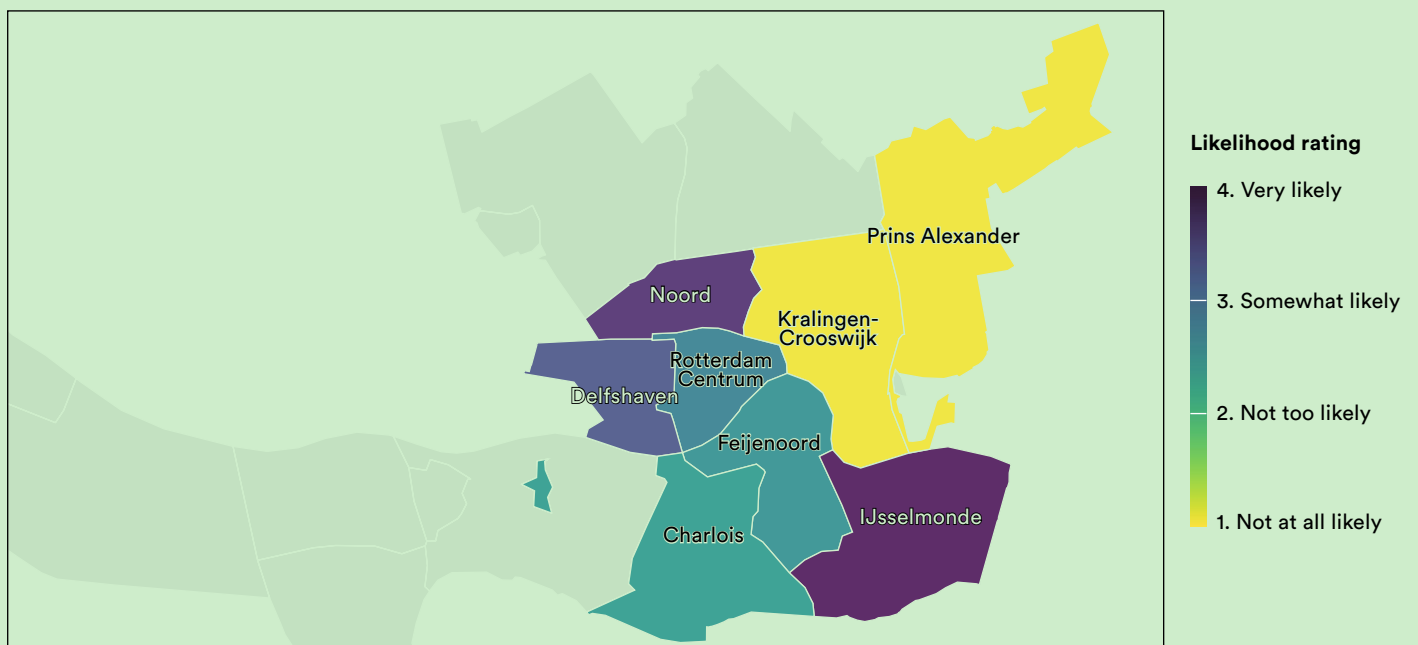


FIGURE 9: HOW LIKELY IS A VENUE TO PROVIDE SPACE FOR DIFFERENT UNDERREPRESENTED AND MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES AND ACT AS A HUB FOR EMERGING TALENT?

Rotterdam's Programming Clusters

How can we more easily understand what's going on with Rotterdam's venues when there are so many data points? The research team used a machine learning classification algorithm known as K-Means Clustering to understand patterns in the data. This method can reduce complexity from CFP's dozens of variables, making specific venue "types" visible. This algorithm identified three "thematic" types of venues which we can describe by the average characteristics of each group:

Legacy Venues: Larger, older venues with below average programming scores. (15 venues).

Emerging Venues: Midsized, younger venues with above average programming scores. (30+ venues).

Middle Ground: Midsized, younger venues with below average programming. (25 venues).

Our analysis shows a pattern observed in several CFP cities: newer spaces with higher programming ratings (Emerging) tend to appear in outlying areas. While we do see new venue development of all three types in the city centre, it is dominated by lower programming ratings (Legacy and Middle Ground).

Venue Density and Transit Density

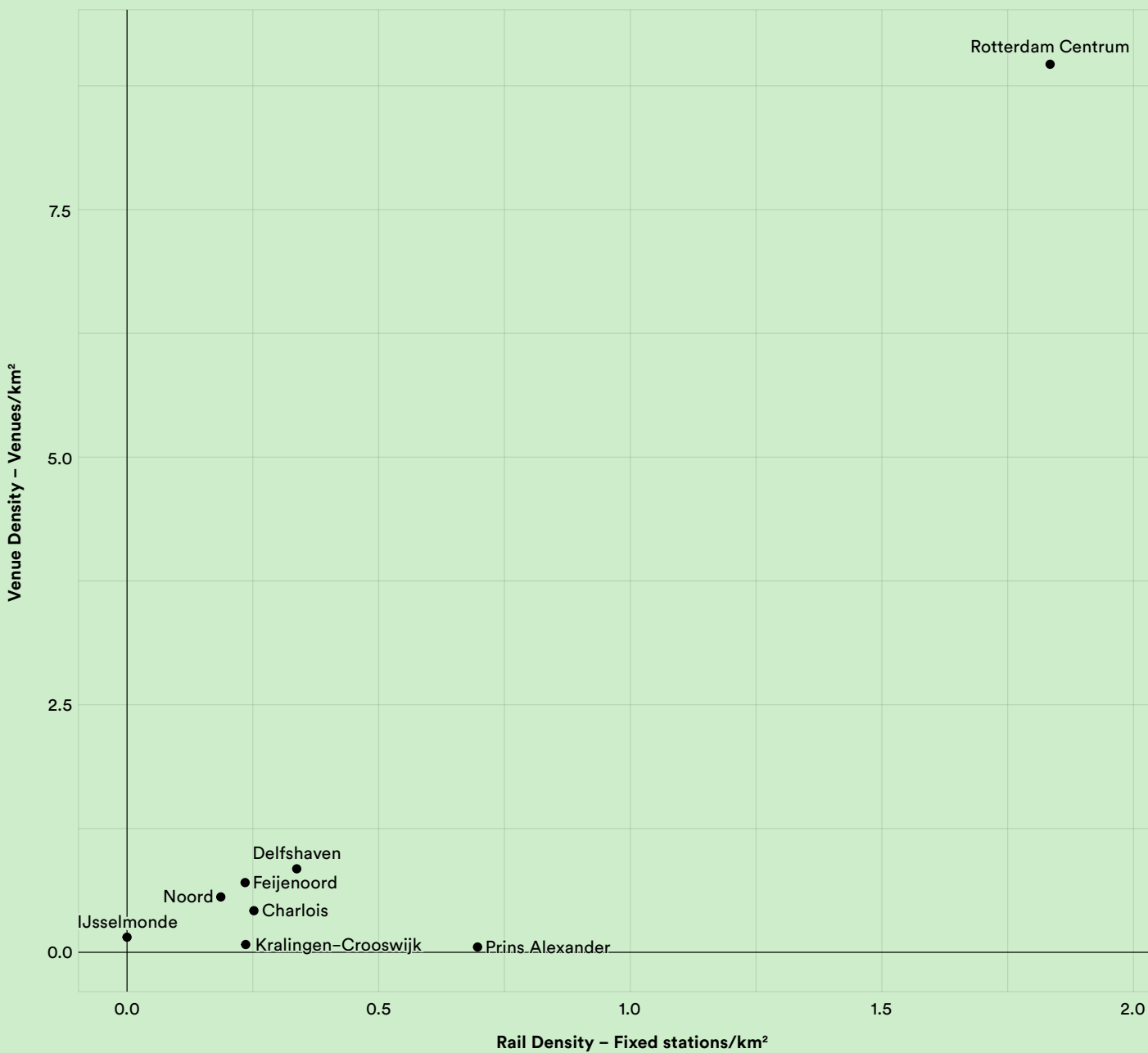


FIGURE 10: SCATTERPLOT SHOWING VENUE DENSITY AS A FUNCTION OF RAIL DENSITY

In Rotterdam there is a strong positive correlation between venue density and fixed transit density, especially in comparison to other transit-oriented CFP cities. Centrum has far and away the highest concentration of both transit infrastructure and venues. Figure 10 shows that other districts with venues are not as well served by public transportation. In particular, Delfshaven, Feijenoord and Noord have low transit density compared to venue density, and focus group participants reported many venues with highly rated programming in outer districts being difficult to reach by public transportation or bicycle.

Rent and Income Changes

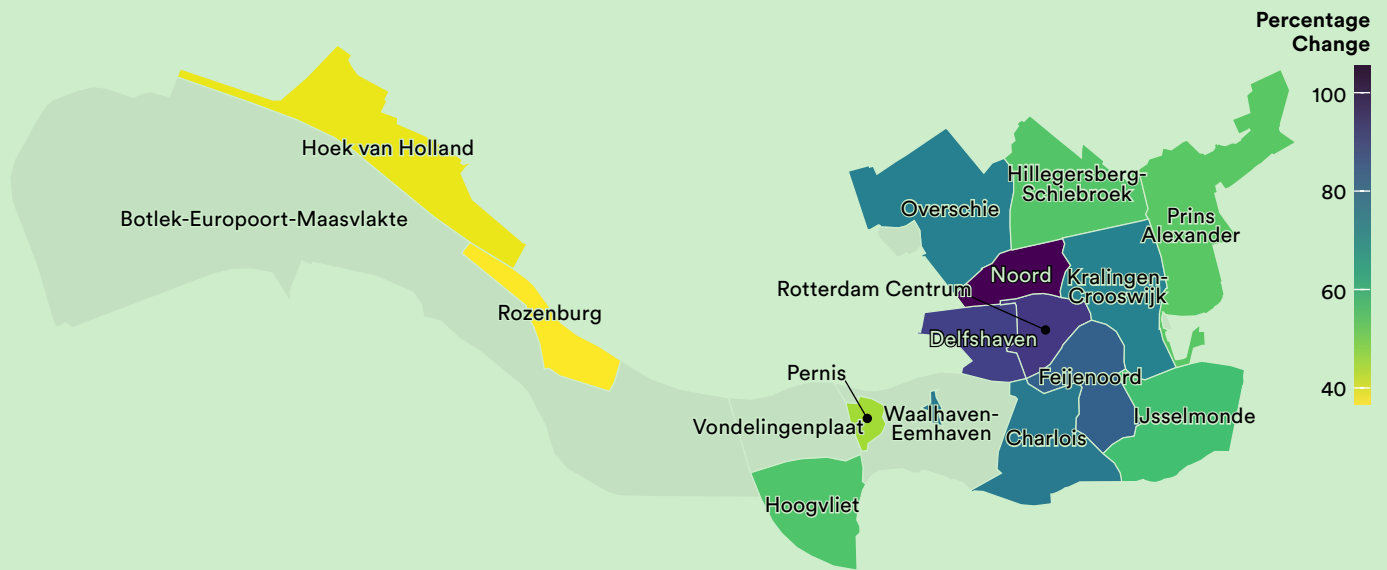


FIGURE 11: CHANGE IN MEAN TAXABLE HOME VALUES BY DISTRICT (2016-2021)

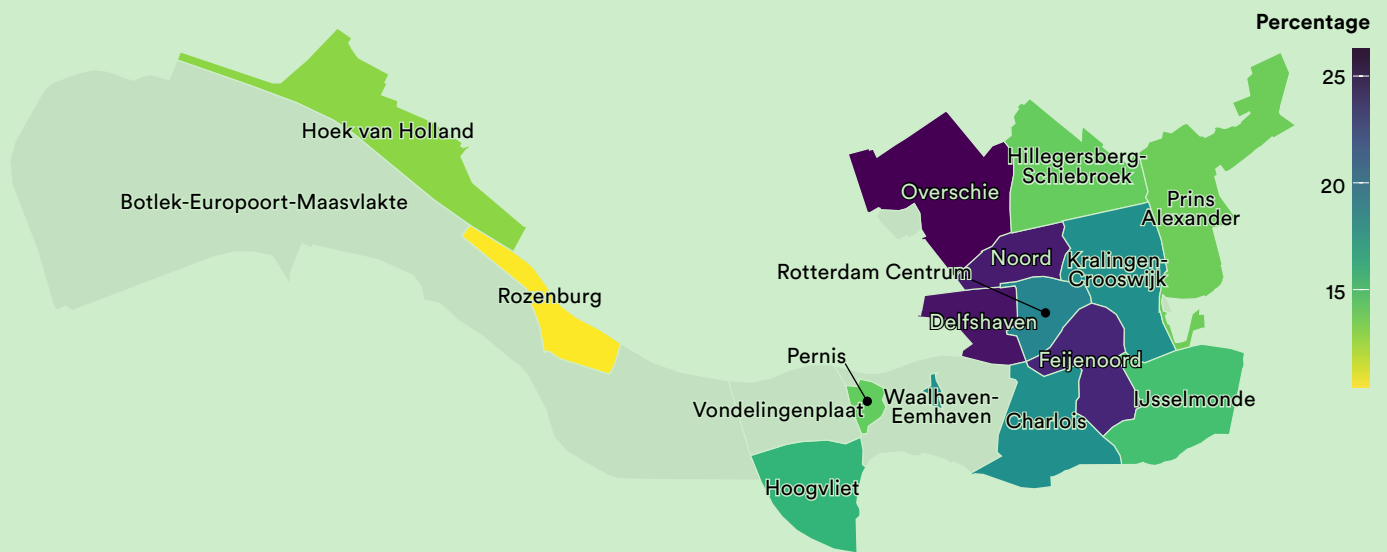


FIGURE 12: CHANGE IN AVERAGE PERSONAL YEARLY INCOME BY DISTRICT (2016-2021)

Rotterdam is experiencing a period of rapid urban development, and impacts of these changes are reverberating throughout the city and its nightlife. Rents are increasing most rapidly not only in Centrum and Noord (Figure 11) but also relatively affordable southern districts, such as Feijenoord and Charlois. Similarly, incomes are increasing not only in already wealthier areas, but also in districts with lower incomes in the south of Rotterdam (Figure 12). Areas of relative affordability in Rotterdam are becoming more expensive, which not only affects the residents of these areas, but also its nightlife.

Zoom in: Rotterdam's Nightlife Landscape

This section profiles a selection of Rotterdam's nightlife districts, including the densely populated Centrum with high transit accessibility, pedestrian frequency and young population. The districts of Feijenoord, Delfshaven and IJsselmonde do not exhibit these characteristics, however they contain the city's most highly rated venues in terms of programming. These districts have relatively lower rents and incomes and thus present favourable conditions for further programming investments.



Rotterdam Centrum 44 venues

The vibrant heart of the city hosts governmental buildings, cultural venues, and commercial areas. Highlights include the Erasmus Bridge, the Markthal and the Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen. It is easily accessible with public transportation, 50% of the population is between ages 15-44 and it is one of the most expensive parts of the city to live in. Rotterdam Centrum has the majority of venues in the sample, the highest venue density and some of the lowest overall programming ratings. It is a desirable place for venues but costs are a significant restriction.

Feijenoord 6 venues

Known for its diversity and affordability, Feijenoord is currently undergoing significant urban development along its long waterfront. Compared to other Rotterdam districts, it has a relatively large young population (45% between ages 15-44), slightly higher rents (5% above average) and slightly below average personal income rates. Its venues, highly-rated for their programming, concentrate in waterfront areas and large industrial redevelopment zones—areas where nightlife development is common in many cities. The municipality's Coalition Agreement 2022-2026 (*Coalitieakkoord: Eén Stad*) has identified Feijenoord as a focus for redevelopment and preservation of affordable housing, living conditions, cultural space and public safety. The prestige "Culture & Campus" development has been temporarily halted⁵⁸ due to cost.

Zoom in: Rotterdam's Nightlife Landscape

Delfshaven

5 venues

Delfshaven holds western harbour areas, historic districts, artistic communities, craft breweries, and vibrant street art. Despite low transit density, Delfshaven maintains a unique cultural and nightlife significance, with experimental, innovative venues including Maaspodium, Bitter and Weelde. It has a relatively high proportion of young people (50% ages 15-44), and the district is experiencing substantial income growth rates and the highest rent increases in the city. The municipality recognises the threat of gentrification and the need to balance urban development with the needs of existing residents. Additional needs identified by the city's Cultural Plan 2025-2028 (*'Van onschatbare waarde': Uitgangspuntennota voor het Rotterdamse Cultuurbeleid*) include supporting local artists and cultural organisations through financial support like affordable work spaces.

IJsselmonde

2 venues

This southeastern district of Rotterdam is primarily a family-oriented and residential suburb with numerous parks and recreational areas. The district features lower population density and a strong community feel with relatively affordable prices. It shows a middle-range median personal income (€29,500) and lower rent levels. IJsselmonde has few venues, however these spaces are rated as being relatively distinctive and experimental.

**SECTION IV:
DISCUSSING
CREATIVE
FOOTPRINT'S
RESEARCH
FINDINGS**

Rotterdam's overall *Space* score of 8.58/10 is the strongest of the three categories by a large margin, and also one of the highest in the CFP dataset. The high overall *Space* score can be attributed in part to the high proportion of venues in the city centre, near public transportation.

(See Section III: *Visualising Rotterdam's creative and cultural nighttime infrastructure* for more on the relationships between transit density and venue density).



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, BIERGARTEN

CFP defines *Space* as the interconnected internal and external physical conditions surrounding creative and cultural nighttime infrastructure in the city. This includes analysis of venue size, how well-connected venues are to nearby transportation hubs, the average age of venues, as well as their multifunctionality, reputation, and visibility.

But despite this high score, Rotterdammers described a fragile venue ecosystem marked by a history of closures, where obstacles remain in terms of marginalised and minoritised communities' access to and ownership of space. Individual participants in this research included women, LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual) and QTBPoC (queer, trans, Black, people of colour) people. This section dives deeper into what hinders a more inclusive, dynamic nightlife in Rotterdam—its shortage of small venues, venue closures, and barriers to opening new spaces—all of which combine to create the feeling of an acute lack of space and the sentiment that Rotterdam is losing its nightlife identity as a place for experimentation, new and innovative nightlife and a home for diverse communities. Vice Mayor for Sport, Education and Culture Said Kasmi underscored the importance of Rotterdam's nightlife spaces:

“For many young people, especially during a formative period of their youth, it [nightlife] serves as a crucial space. These venues are often where individuals discover themselves, find inspiration, form connections, and even fall in love. It's about much more than just parties.”

Rotterdam's shortage of smaller venues means that early-career nightlife creatives lack crucial stepping stones for career and audience development.

Although there is a full range of venues of different sizes in Rotterdam, this research has revealed a key insight: the city's pool of just 71 venues has only 9 small (under 100m²) venues. This shortage means that each of these spaces (particularly centrally located ones) are especially significant.

In Rotterdam, early career artists have very few spaces to perform. These spaces also allow for diverse nightlife experiences in terms of atmosphere, audience, types of entertainment, etc. A mix of venues in close proximity to each other adds to this possibility of diverse experiences for nightlife goers who

can easily choose between nearby options. DJ and multidisciplinary artist Franky Sticks reflected on the importance of small spaces and community networks in building his career:

“The journey at the beginning was hard. I had an underground sound that didn’t match the big clubs. I played smaller gigs mainly outside of Rotterdam for the first couple of years. The HipHopHuis network was big for me—it connected me to new gigs. Seeing other local DJs and more eclectic sounds inspired me. Rotterdam is like a village. It feels like a light switch, you’re playing small gigs and then all of a sudden everyone wants to book you.”

When venues close, especially those with high programming ratings, the accessibility to nightlife spaces for young and experimental artists is negatively impacted, and repercussions are disproportionately felt among different communities; in particular those that do not have a regular home.

A number of participants described the importance of multi-use and community-oriented spaces for giving opportunities to young artists and the communities they foster. Multidisciplinary artist Amara van der Elst described her beginnings at Maaspodium⁵⁹ and the necessity of such spaces:

“They welcome you like a part of the family, especially young people. I found my safe space there. On a personal level and on an artistic level, they encouraged me to try new things. I found Maaspodium through a programme for the development of young artists. They gave me space to make my own show with different disciplines.”

A number of venues in Rotterdam continue to make efforts to platform new and experimental artists from marginalised and minoritised backgrounds, despite the potential financial risks. One example is MONO, which provided weekly, free-entry ‘open booth’ nights for beginner DJs to showcase their talents.⁶⁰ Participants expressed that these types of

smaller venues are providing vital space and are in need of more targeted support than more established and larger venues.

One high-profile example to illustrate the impacts of the loss of space for community is the closure of POING, a multidisciplinary and inclusive nightlife space that describes itself as a “safe(r) playground for self-expression, upcoming talent, and collaboration.”⁶¹ In February 2024, POING announced it had to relocate from its home in Schiekadeblok due to insurmountable maintenance expenses, operations costs, debt payments and other financial difficulties.⁶² (See more on Schiekadeblok on pages 65-66.) Since then, POING has needed to rely on one-off events in various venues across the city. Participants confirmed that this instability of space hinders their communities’ ability to gather—in this case LGBTQIA+ individuals and artists. (See more on the necessity of continuity for venues that programme for LGBTQIA+, and other communities, to develop trust and access to safe and affirming nightlife space on page 54). POING co-founder Eef de Wit expressed how these venues’ precarity even pushes Rotterdammers to consider leaving the city: “Everybody’s leaving for Amsterdam...many of the people that were working at POING are looking for houses in Amsterdam now because there’s literally nothing to do here.”

DJ and multidisciplinary artist Franky Sticks reflected on the impacts of the losses of these kinds of spaces and the direct support and changes that are needed so that they do not continue to disappear:

“The POINGs, the MONOs, the Weeldes, all these spots bring a lot of creative energy to the city, but they are always at temporary locations. They can’t go further and develop more things because they may be kicked out in two months’ time. These spaces need permanent places...recognition, and protection as cultural heritage. The issue is that [they] do not own their spaces, they rent. Maybe a space could be half-funded by the city.”

The barrier to entry for opening new, smaller venues is reported to be disproportionately felt among underrepresented groups, who may rely on unsustainable business models and who lack the know-how needed to navigate the financial and regulatory challenges involved in finding suitable spaces.

One such example comes from Rotterdam's Ballroom community. Elly Vineyard, co-founder of QTBPPOC-focused House of Vineyard^{63 64}, reflected on the changes to Rotterdam's queer nightlife landscape over the past decade, the difficulties of operating nightlife venues for certain communities, and the consequences of venue closures:

“When I moved to Rotterdam in 2010, there were established places where my community went. Nowadays there are none. In my world, Ballroom, the demand for space keeps growing. We have to create our own spaces now. The city does not see the necessity in club culture, and this trickles down to less money for promoters to create these events and much less for clubs to open doors to specific groups of people, especially queer people.”

This is just one example of the experience of nightlife communities in Rotterdam who are lacking permanent spaces and whose business models may not be conducive to generating enough revenue to sustain a venue on their own. (See more on the unique needs and challenges of the House of Vineyard to find a home venue in the *Spotlight* on pages 49-50). This research revealed that a number of marginalised and minoritised nightlife entrepreneurs would like to see a more comprehensive approach to municipal assistance. In addition to the welcome support already provided with permitting, subsidy and other applications, participants expressed hope for additional support in developing sustainable business models and collaborating to find suitable and accessible locations. In this way, the city can further support a healthy mix of venues.

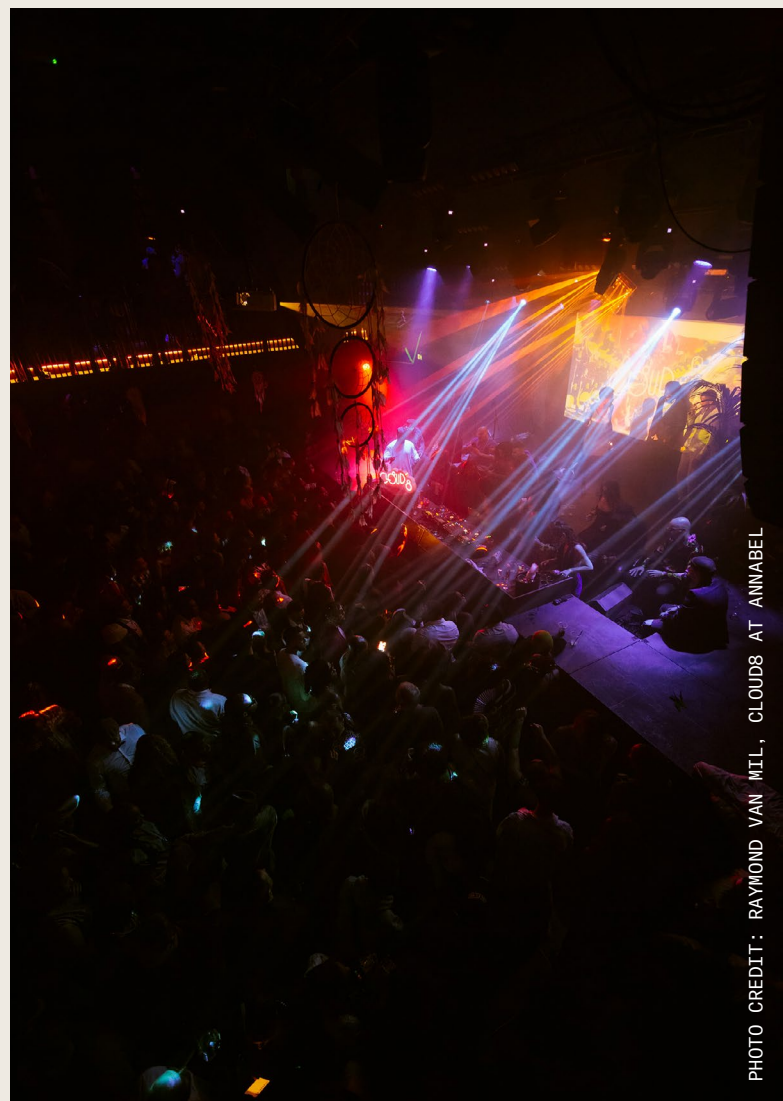



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, CLOUD8 AT ANNABEL

SPOTLIGHT: HOUSE OF VINEYARD

CFP spotlights Rotterdam's House of Vineyard⁶⁵, the first Ballroom house in the Netherlands. The House of Vineyard exemplifies one of many marginalised and minoritised nightlife communities in the city who are navigating the decline in cultural and nightlife spaces that has been identified in this research. Ballroom is a subculture originating in the United States from the self-expression of QTBPoC and LGBTQIA+ people who were, and still are marginalised from mainstream nightlife, arts, music and society at large. Ball events feature performances that critique, imitate and satirise gender and other social constructs and highlight unique art forms such as voguing.⁶⁶ The House of Vineyard was established in 2014 by 'mother' Amber Vineyard⁶⁷ and Elly (Elejandro Martinez) Vineyard became 'father' in 2017.⁶⁸ Within Ballroom culture 'houses' are groups of chosen family and safe havens from the exclusion and discrimination faced by members from mainstream society.⁶⁹

As an underground nightlife subculture, without a permanent space in Rotterdam, the House of Vineyard has unique needs and challenges finding suitable venues in the city. In the beginning, House of Vineyard hosted balls at BIRD. But as the community and the popularity of these events has grown, larger and larger venues are needed. The House of Vineyard has found it difficult to establish an adequate, or permanent home for their events in Rotterdam; this creates access issues in terms of affordability and the need to sometimes travel for events. Elly communicated that in nightlife, for the queer community at large, venue security is a regular challenge: "the first place things go left in nightlife with queer people is security." This issue can be addressed by ensuring events are served by a security team that is trained on the specific needs of Ballroom and other minoritised and marginalised communities.

The House of Vineyard prioritises staying rooted in Rotterdam. Ballroom houses are also much more than groups of artists—they may facilitate workshops, dance courses, social

A photograph of a woman lying on her back on a dark, textured floor, possibly a dance floor or stage, at a nightclub. She is wearing a black top and black pants, and has her arms outstretched. She has a tattoo on her left forearm and is wearing multiple bracelets on her left wrist. Her eyes are closed, and her mouth is slightly open. In the background, a crowd of people is visible, some looking towards the camera and others looking away. The lighting is dim, typical of a nightclub setting.

gatherings and other community services. For these reasons, the House of Vineyard is in need of much more than a single-use nightlife space. According to Elly, in order to provide nightlife and functions for the community of the House of Vineyard, their ideal venue would be an entire building with spaces to facilitate parties, gatherings, workshops, studios, clinics and even sleeping quarters. He communicated that this building could be publicly owned and remain exclusive of profitability—in many ways a community centre as well as nightlife venue: “this is a space where we get permission to do everything we want to do, that’s what we are dreaming about.” By facilitating this process, the municipality has the chance not only to provide a haven for a nightlife community, but also to add to the distinctive landscape of multi-use spaces in the city (see pages 52-53 for more on multi-use spaces).

Rotterdam's overall *Community and Content* score of **5.90/10** is the lowest among CFP cities. Within this score, there is a wide range between the lowest and highest individual indicator scores. Rotterdam scores lowest on *promotion* (**3.80/10**) in comparison to the other indicators and other CFP cities. One plausible factor contributing to this low score is the fact that participants feel that Rotterdam struggles to define and find pride in their nightlife in its current state. However, Rotterdam scores highest on *interdisciplinarity* (**6.87/10**) in comparison to the other indicators and all previous CFP cities.

CFP defines *Community and Content* as interconnected criteria related to how venues value creativity and culture, including how venues promote cultural offerings in their marketing, to what extent venues facilitate interdisciplinary and/or experimental artistic formats, how community-centred venues are, and to what extent venues foreground original creative content.

This section explores Rotterdam's interdisciplinary, community-oriented, and multi-use venues: the barriers and challenges they face, the strategic decisions and new business models they use to stay alive, and finally, the impact of these spaces' disappearance on artists and audiences.

Multi-use venues are well regarded in Rotterdam, both in terms of their programming and their ability to provide homes for different nightlife communities and stages for emerging talent.

Multi-use spaces provide two or more nightlife functions: for example, a venue that contains a concert hall, a nightclub and a cinema or a venue that contains a music bar, gallery and restaurant. Multi-use spaces provide opportunities to offer and enjoy interdisciplinary nightlife, entertainment, arts, dining and drinking within one space and often within one night. The phenomenon of multi-use venues is significantly stronger in Rotterdam than in other CFP cities.

Having multiple uses allows a venue to cater to different communities within one space and provide workshops, residencies and other artistic and community development functions on top of nightlife entertainment. Research confirmed the benefit of interdisciplinarity: Rotterdam's multi-use spaces have higher programming ratings than single-use venues, and participant feedback on well known multi-use spaces such as Roodkapje, Weelde and Time is the New Space affirmed their strong reputations and value in the venue landscape. Responses also indicate that in Rotterdam, these venues are seen as multidisciplinary cultural spaces with nightlife as one aspect of programming. One focus group participant described WORM, a well regarded multi-use space:

“WORM is one of the most interdisciplinary places. I've been doing their events for 20 years and they range from techno parties, to lectures, to live cinema. They have a hairdresser, film workshops. This is really what interdisciplinarity is all about.”

Multi-use venues in Rotterdam also have the business advantage of generating revenue from not only a club or nightlife concept, but also restaurant, bar, gallery or other hospitality and cultural uses. This can help to make ends meet by diversifying revenue and appealing to different audiences seeking different nightlife, arts and cultural programming. Participants also reported that a number of venues, including MONO and WORM pursue municipal and national funding support for programming and other functions. For more on the accessibility of funding, see *Section IV: Framework Conditions findings*.

Especially for community-oriented and highly creative spaces (often younger and/or temporary venues), increasing urban threats pose obstacles to providing the experimental, innovative programming for which they're known.

Both venue operators and event organisers described challenges such as increasing operations costs, real estate development and urban densification (fuelling noise complaints)—all of which make it more difficult to remain solvent. As one focus group participant put it:

“Everything is getting expensive: electricity costs, security service costs. In the last 1.5-2 years the price for organising has almost doubled. I see that as a threat. It’s no longer easy to organise an event and the risk is much higher. This means less room for experimentation and new concepts. The costs are ranking up and it’s crazy.”

This is especially true for venues that rent rather than own their physical space, often on temporary or insecure lease contracts. Marloes de Vries, director of Roodkapje, described challenges faced by operators in the city centre: cost, real estate, permits, and noise. In her words: “it’s really expensive to run a venue. Real estate and permits are a big problem. It’s not the funding for venues.” (See pages 65-66 about the predicament of venues within the municipal redevelopment plans for Schiekadeblok.)

While the temporary nature of many of these spaces may incentivise risk-taking or experimental programming, the insecurity of temporary permits and limited leases also decreases the ability of a venue to provide a consistent home for any given community. Some participants feel there is no space to grow nor invest. One lamented the recent loss of permanent programming at Weelde, where the venue has now been forced to reduce operations and open on an event-by-event basis:

“If your contract gets renewed every few months, if you want to do certain investments it’s not really worth it. It is really a struggle to run an organisation with temporary contracts.”

Even for venues who have managed to stay solvent for longer periods of time, and who have built the trust of specific nightlife communities, or specialise in entertainment niches, pressures are increasing. Nina Hooimeijer and Philip Powel from BIRD explained some realities of operating a nightlife business in Rotterdam today:

“Customers can want a combination between music, spoken word, a DJ and live music. You have to be very specialised in your programming, it has to be special to get people inside.”

“Venues must now be results-driven. Venues start programming to sell beer. What you want is to sell beer because you have visionary programming. That would be the ideal scenario.”

Financial necessity pushes venues in Rotterdam to sacrifice community-oriented and internal programming—and increasingly incentivises renting out space to external parties.

Venues may develop their programming either by booking in-house, or by renting space to external promoters and programmers—or a combination of the two. Internal programming allows a venue to more easily curate an identity and cater to certain genres and nightlife communities; venues may also build up a positive reputation by inviting external

collectives, promoters and parties to regularly rent their space, forming a stable identity for the venue. Participants noted that some venues use a combination of in-house and external programming, or that venues with multiple stages use different programming approaches per stage. These varying programming constellations reflect the adaptability and diversity of Rotterdam nightlife.

Venues who rent space to an ever-changing cast of external promoters and events have and do play a valuable, important role in Rotterdam's nightlife scene, but may find it harder to build a clear, consistent artistic or community identity of their own. These types of venues are essential in allowing nightlife communities to grow, even when access to permanent space is limited. And these venues, too, face pressing challenges and urban threats. (Read more about Maassilo, one such venue in Rotterdam, on pages 56-57.) This practice of renting out space is not new, and multi-use spaces have been doing so for a number of years.

Participants emphasised that more community-oriented spaces are moving increasingly towards renting out space to external promoters, programmers and parties. As shown above, this practice is not inherently good nor bad on its own—but when the decision is driven by financial pressures, rather than artistic or community goals, the survival of Rotterdam's community-oriented venues comes under threat.

Shirin Mirachor from (A)WAKE and former creative director of MONO explained how shifting to primarily rental programming erodes a venue's identity, sense of community, and relationship with its participants:

"I get excited by a fixed space for building community. It's so much work to gain people's trust. You have to create solid programming, where people know what to expect. It's impossible with rental."

She underscored the financial challenges of maintaining internal, community-oriented programming, and the need for more support:

"In the beginning MONO didn't do much rental. But that means that you need a lot of funding. It's hard because there's no funding for nightlife directly from the city. It's a start, but not always enough for us. The city and outsiders see that your club is full and they think there's a lot of money made there."

The shift away from internal programming has negative consequences for the reputation of a venue as a safe space for nightlife communities. The ultimate loss of these spaces impacts the ability for new artists to develop their skills and careers.

Some respondents indicated that a venue's reputation is quite important: they make choices where to spend a night out based on this information. As more venues lose their reputation as community gathering points due to increasing pressure to rent space (as described in the prior point in this section), nightlife audiences including QTBOC, LGBTQIA+ and different genre communities feel that their access to safe and affirming space is disappearing. DJ CyberFairy777 described the importance of community-oriented space and their observations on the disappearance of these spaces in Rotterdam:

"The booking of the venue itself and the way the venue handles certain problems is what creates community. The queer and deep rave communities need to know a place, they need to feel comfortable. You could start a new initiative in a random club, but you know that half of your community won't show up because they do not want to go to a place where they might be stepping into an unsafe or uncomfortable experience. It's easier to organise an illegal rave than to organise an event in a venue that no one trusts."

DJ, producer, and researcher Kris Fraanje contrasted the experience of being an up-and-coming artist in Weelde, against what has been lost when the venue ended its permanent programming:

“I had my first gig there. It was a place for me to grow. It offered a place for new organisations to programme and learn how a booking process goes. That's what makes it so good, that you share the bill with bigger artists and mid range artists. You get to know each other and help each other. People deeper in the scene can pick up new talents. It gave me the ability to discover new things.”

“What is already lost? It's not a regular place to meet up anymore, the community falls away. There are so many people who I used to see there who I don't really see anymore. There aren't many other venue options right now.”



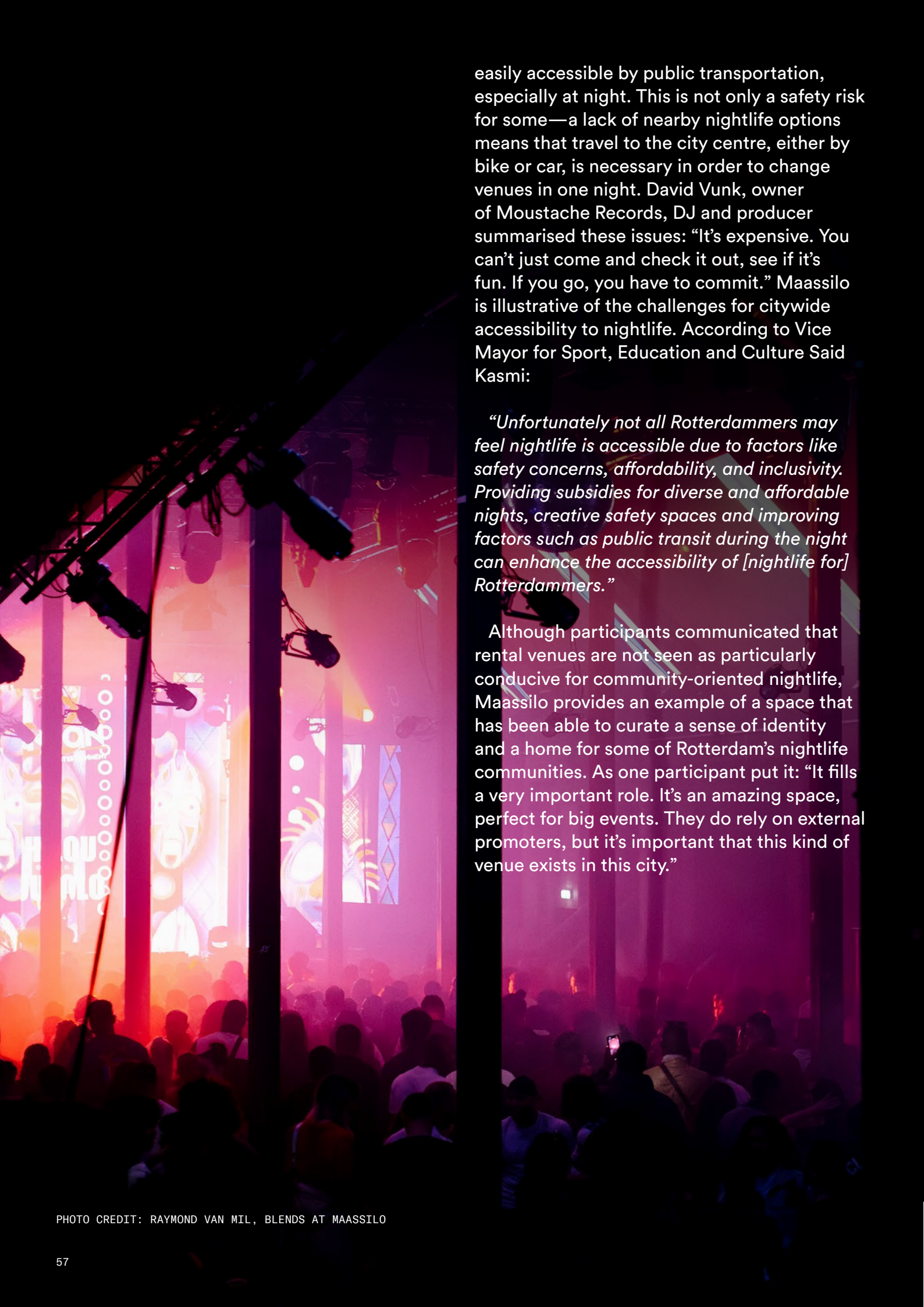
PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MEL, JORDI/DE LIKT AT BLIJDORP WINTER FESTIVAL AT VAN NELLE FABRIEK

SPOTLIGHT: MAASSILO

Maassilo is a well-known cultural landmark and venue that was once a grain silo. The century old building is situated on the shores of the Maas River in the south of Rotterdam. In 2003, prior to its establishment as Maassilo, the structure came under the ownership of *Ontwikkelingsbedrijf Rotterdam* (OBR) and risked demolition. These plans were rejected and instead it was transformed into a massive multi-use rental space.⁷⁰ Maassilo contains a range of spaces for rent in terms of size and functionality that can be used for a variety of cultural and nightlife functions. This creates a unique setting, as those who are drawn to the venue for one event, nightlife or otherwise, can also explore the other cultural and nightlife offerings within the space. As flagship venues tend to do in other cities, Maassilo contributes to Rotterdam's overall image, and draws in locals and visitors alike.⁷¹

Maassilo has successfully built trust with a number of nightlife communities. Now&Wow club, the first tenant of Maassilo, provides regular programming for gabber and other harder electronic music communities. One participant described their experience at Maassilo as follows: “I go to events there that cater specifically to the gabber community. You really look for a community that’s hosting a party there because the venue itself has the ability to do that. They don’t have their own programming, they work with partners that organise their parties as a rental venue. Every week it’s something else.” By consistently providing space for different external parties, a venue can develop positive relationships with promoters and the communities themselves. This approach arguably offers comparative benefits to the routine internal programming for the same genre or community seen elsewhere in Rotterdam.

However, barriers to access still remain. One such challenge is the prohibitive cost of event tickets. A number of participants shared that they feel Maassilo is not an affordable option compared to other clubs in areas of the city closer to the centre. Along with ticket price, Maassilo is also spatially isolated and is not



easily accessible by public transportation, especially at night. This is not only a safety risk for some—a lack of nearby nightlife options means that travel to the city centre, either by bike or car, is necessary in order to change venues in one night. David Vunk, owner of Moustache Records, DJ and producer summarised these issues: “It’s expensive. You can’t just come and check it out, see if it’s fun. If you go, you have to commit.” Maassilo is illustrative of the challenges for citywide accessibility to nightlife. According to Vice Mayor for Sport, Education and Culture Said Kasmi:

“Unfortunately not all Rotterdammers may feel nightlife is accessible due to factors like safety concerns, affordability, and inclusivity. Providing subsidies for diverse and affordable nights, creative safety spaces and improving factors such as public transit during the night can enhance the accessibility of [nightlife for] Rotterdammers.”

Although participants communicated that rental venues are not seen as particularly conducive for community-oriented nightlife, Maassilo provides an example of a space that has been able to curate a sense of identity and a home for some of Rotterdam’s nightlife communities. As one participant put it: “It fills a very important role. It’s an amazing space, perfect for big events. They do rely on external promoters, but it’s important that this kind of venue exists in this city.”

Rotterdam's score of **5.41/10** for *Framework Conditions* is the lowest of the three categories, only slightly lower than *Community and Content*. This score falls roughly in the middle of the CFP dataset. Participants reported appreciation that better night governance structures are developing. However, they also emphasised the imperative need for more support for emerging artists, prospective new venue operators, and the other nightlife stakeholders who find it challenging to navigate multi-layered and disparate bureaucratic processes, and access the funding and other resources that can be available to them. Improving these processes, and nighttime safety and mobility, will motivate emerging actors and have positive impacts for nightlife.

CFP defines *Framework Conditions* as the external conditions that affect artistic, cultural and other nighttime activity. This includes relevant laws, regulations and policies; relationships between cultural actors and civic decision makers; the type of funding and support infrastructure available; nighttime public transportation; and access to public and private space for cultural programming and activities.

Access to Decision Makers (6.72/10): While decision makers are accessible (especially following the *Nachtdienst*'s formation), the 'many-headed monster' of bureaucracy still feels disjointed and confusing to navigate.

This score is highest among *Framework Conditions* and higher than a number of previous CFP cities, supporting participant feedback that overall, the municipality remains reasonably open to nightlife stakeholders. However, participants also reported that this access is uneven, can be difficult to navigate and that results may not match up to expectation—in terms of the practical influence of nightlife stakeholders on municipal decision making. One participant desired a clear message from the city regarding their approach to nightlife:

"It feels like you're kicking in a closed door all of the time. It seems hopeful to be in touch with the dedicated night culture team. ...But in the end, it feels like the night culture team is also still kicking [at] the closed doors within the municipality. They are the in-between team that is there to hear all of the misery of those that want to create something in nightlife."

Many participants were pleased with the creation of the *Nachtdienst* and many had positive personal and professional relationships with its members. They also credited a number of civil servants for going out of their way to help. One described how a civil servant assisted them with an urgent licencing request, despite the fact that this delved into 'grey areas' outside of their jurisdiction. These personal relationships between nightlife actors and civil servants, built over time and with trust, are already beneficial. However, a number of participants reflected that new nightlife actors may feel disadvantaged navigating the current system. They were not necessarily aware of existing help channels including a general support email address (nacht@rotterdam.nl) and hospitality area advisors (*horecagebiedsadviseurs*). This mismatch leads to more limited access for emerging entrepreneurs.

Participants felt that access to higher level decision makers is limited. The institutional pathways from first contact civil servants to policy results are unclear. Additionally, while participants reported relatively positive experiences interacting with individual municipal departments, they reported that inter-departmental communication appears very limited. For them, these internal obstacles have led to delays and the feeling of getting ‘lost in the fold’. Participants noted that municipal departments appear to be working in different directions with different objectives and hoped for better alignment and structured communication and collaboration in bureaucratic and policy making processes.

Participants also perceive that more senior decision makers may not have firsthand understanding of nightlife and do not engage with it. To this end, some participants have invited municipal decision makers to nightlife events in the past. To them, the lack of contact between the city and the scene is an obstacle and an indication of the disconnect between what support and infrastructure the city provides for nightlife and what is actually needed. They saw the framework conditions focus group as an opportunity to communicate directly with the city. For a number of participants, this was not their first focus group. They appreciated these opportunities for direct input but desired more clarity from the city about how their contributions were being translated into policy. This request remains despite past successful participatory policy making related to extending opening hours, extra *verlaatjes*, and the introduction of the new *horecagebiedsplannen*, which resulted in possibilities for new 24-hour permits.

Overall Funding for Music and Nightlife (6.42/10): While funding is seen to be available, minimal visibility, a high degree of complexity, and a lack of nightlife-specific funding guidelines keep many nightlife creators from successfully applying and securing funding.

Participants generally felt that the current funding infrastructure is not conducive to supporting younger, emerging artists and experimental, grassroots venues and initiatives. They communicated that this is not due to a lack of available funding, but rather down to a lack of experience and the need for more targeted assistance from the municipality. A number described the ‘learning curve’ they have navigated alone: “It requires understanding, on your own, the language the government is looking for. Funding is open and approachable [sic] and well explained, but it still doesn’t solve this problem.”

Participants explained that there is no nightlife-specific or nightlife-targeted funding. In one participant’s words: “Not a single grant is really for nightlife or electronic music. These are not really seen as real culture yet.” This means that participants seeking financial support apply for more general arts and cultural funding opportunities. The language of this support is targeted towards more traditionally ‘high’ arts and culture⁷³ and thus nightlife actors do not feel seen within the current funding opportunities landscape.

Participants feel they need to convince funding bodies of the value of nightlife. This can be a discouraging process. Additionally, applicants must find workarounds to make their application ‘fit’ into a particular box that it is not necessarily meant for. This has led to extra burdens and has influenced the ability of applicants to utilise the funding in ways most beneficial to their concepts and audiences. One participant described their experience: “Our biggest problem was fitting into the boxes the municipality has for funding.”

Participants shared that newcomers are at a disadvantage to larger, better resourced institutions. They felt there is an unfair advantage and that funding will continue to be awarded only to those institutions that already have experience with applications, and that already have funding. DJ and arts educator Janpier Brands described the situation as follows:

“In Rotterdam, a group of big institutions [are] already receiving funding. What you see is a ‘winner takes all’ principle. This is a big risk in the cultural sector, especially for new culture producers. If they don’t get supported with grant writing, the big institutions will win and the small institutions and local initiatives will lose.”

Overall Policies and Regulations for Nightlife (4.53/10): Rotterdam must plan for nightlife in the urban environment more proactively—including resolving difficult, inaccessible permitting processes that leave otherwise-suitable nightlife spaces vacant.

Participants identified three major themes to illustrate what they felt is an overall disconnect between what is currently offered by the municipality and what is needed by nightlife actors, as well as what may be leading to the major risks in opening a new nightlife

business in the city. First, that permitting structures make it difficult for new venues to start and remain open on a permanent basis; second, that the city does not do enough to consider nightlife in city planning; and third, the privileging of residents and housing over nightlife.

Permits: Participants emphasised that there are indeed vacant potential spaces for nightlife, with suitable location, reputation and structural characteristics. Yet in Rotterdam, many spaces still sit vacant. One example heard multiple times was the former Waterfront space on the Boompjeskade. One of a number of roadblocks identified by participants is the difficulty of obtaining the right permits and affording the right space. Despite recognising municipal efforts and openness to granting more 24-hour permits—including the announcement of 15 locations suitable for new 24-hour permits—they communicated that it is still not financially possible to open and operate a venue in these locations. For participants, this remains an open topic and a final solution is still to be achieved.

Participants reported that prospective new venue operators are confronted with difficulties navigating and affording bureaucratic procedures and necessary venue renovations—and that these barriers are deterring young Rotterdammers from pursuing this path. This may be true even when such a nightlife entrepreneur already has some level of start-up funding. Aziz Yagoub, owner of multiple nightlife venues in Rotterdam, described this process and its limitations:

“A lot of new young people have some cash, got a good lease for an empty space, or won a tender. They have a community and a great creative and innovative idea that would add to the creative scene and value of nightlife in Rotterdam. But then they start the permit applications, that’s when they’re in trouble. If you want to make a venue suitable, you have to apply for so many things from so many different departments. To transform a space into a club these days is one big bureaucratic monster.”



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, NOW&NOW AT MAASSILO

Eef de Wit and Mark van Gogh, co founders of POING, observed a combination of obstacles to finding a new permanent space. Firstly, there is a shortage of affordable space. Insecurities around space due in part to permitting challenges is also an obstacle:

“There are a lot of potential spaces for new venues. We can apply easily for an event permit to organise 10 events per year. But if you really want to open a space to be a home to a new community, you need more than that. Also, you’re not going to invest in that [temporary] space. We as young starters don’t have big funding yet. We’re willing to make it happen. But we also need to know that we have a secure permit, for at least five years.”

Planning for Nightlife: Participants felt overall that the municipality can do more to understand the benefits and necessity of nightlife in the city and for this to be implemented in urban planning. Yagoub proposed an idea to designate “x square metres” of nightlife in new area development: “No matter how much extra housing should be built, this space is dedicated to nightlife.” Mark van Gogh and Eef de Wit discussed the potential benefits of ‘creative free zones’ in Rotterdam where flexible permits and zoning would be conducive to nightlife and other cultural activities. However, they cautioned that other conditions must also be met for these areas to draw audiences: they need to be safe and accessible.

Noise and Sound: A number of venue owners and operators communicated the experience that the current arrangement for addressing noise conflicts creates an undue burden on them, and that the municipality appears to prioritise residential development and the needs of new residents over nightlife. Participants understood that there is a balance between nightlife and housing in a densifying city. However, they anticipated that as new residential developments are constructed in existing night areas, this increasing proximity will lead to the disappearance of nightlife in the city centre. According to Marloes de Vries, director of Roodkapje:

“We have a housing problem in Rotterdam, more and more houses are being built—the more houses, the less noise. It’s really hard to claim space in the city. Everywhere will eventually become residential where it will be impossible to have live music.”

Public Cultural Activities (4.53/10): Smaller events struggle to find space among more established festivals—while urban development threatens events in public space, regardless of their size.

In addition to Rotterdam's large festivals, the city issues over 250 'A-events' permits for smaller festivals and events every year. Despite this fact, participants representing smaller festivals and events felt that Rotterdam's larger, well known festivals have advantages over smaller and emerging music, cultural and nightlife activities. According to them, these include high thresholds for accessing permits and space in the city. This means that less established artists and collectives with less resources struggle to find public spaces for their events. According to one: “The municipality does invest in a lot of cultural activities, like festivals and events that already exist, but not anything new.” Another shared their perception that larger festivals have a monopoly on public spaces in the city: “There are squares, parks, sport courts available—locations owned by the city. But for small events it’s impossible.”

But participants across the board expressed concerns about the impacts of residential development, namely rising property values and new wealthier residents, on nightlife and culture in public space. They fear the inevitable resulting noise complaints will make it more difficult to put on events in public, especially in the city centre. According to one:

“Neighbours complaining about noise always get what they like, they are not proud of these kinds of events happening in the city. There are rising numbers of people with money buying expensive apartments in the city and more people complaining about noise.”

One focus group participant wished for a change in the way noise standards are applied across the city: “Every neighbourhood could get one designated location where there are less rules, where nightlife and noise can happen. They could find places that are not close to noise complainers.”

Nighttime Public Transit (4.81/10): Limited nighttime transit and safe cycling options, particularly connecting outlying districts, influence audiences’ decisions whether to go out at all—threatening the survival of venues outside the city centre.

Participants agreed that although the city centre is well served by public transportation, transit operating hours should be extended. They shared that nightlife goes coming from other parts of the city and nearby towns face longer travel times, fewer options, less frequency and reduced hours of operation in getting to and home from nightlife. These transit limitations lead to people more often simply choosing not to go out. Participants feel that a lack of nighttime mobility and connectivity hinders connections from north to south Rotterdam across the river, and stifles areas outside the centre (including Schiedam) where there is more potential for new, creative and innovative nightlife. Existing options are not seen to be conducive to night usage. They felt that increased transportation infrastructure will be important for closing the divide between north and south Rotterdam and better connecting all areas of the city at night. One participant shared: “Better nighttime transit is an obvious thing to do, especially linking the north and south. I can’t get over this idea that Rotterdam has such a divide. If you could get a bus running north to south, there is so much potential.”

Although cycling was the most common method of nighttime mobility for participants, it is not possible nor preferred by everyone, due to factors including feelings of unsafety, long distances, and different cultural norms. Participants explained their thoughts when deciding whether or not to bike to a venue,

and felt that overall, it is more difficult for those who do not bike to reach nightlife. Particularly for venues outside the city centre, this concern has a major impact on their ability to draw crowds:

“People bike so much, but it’s also because there aren’t many alternative ways of getting home. Even if a place isn’t too far, it feels that way because it is far from public transportation. A place could be a 15 minute walk from the metro, but it only goes until 2 AM.”

Generally, as seen previously in Figure 8 and Figure 9 in Section III: *Visualising Rotterdam’s creative and cultural nighttime infrastructure*, the areas harder to reach with public transportation contain venues with more community-focused and experimental events. Participants agreed that increasing public transportation options to these areas will help ensure that these venues and events continue to attract critical mass and stay in business.

- **Safety: While many do feel safe to move around parts of the city at night, a lack of nighttime public transportation and varying perceptions of law enforcement can be detractors.**

In Rotterdam and other CFP cities, participants often make a connection between mobility and safety at night. Generally, whether a participant feels safe or not at night impacts their decision whether to go out. The majority of participants agree that Rotterdam is a relatively safe city, also at night. They feel they can move around the city centre at night with relative ease. However, some participants highlighted that women, QTBP OC and LGBTQIA+ individuals may feel more unsafe moving around the city at night to access nightlife. Many hoped that public transportation hours could be extended, but that safety issues remain:

“Friends of mine avoid the metro. Cycling is sort of considered the safest way, from my experience. Because there are not a lot of options. The few options that we have are used

by everyone in the city, a lot of people that might make you feel unsafe.”

CFP participants in different cities also often make a connection between mobility, nightlife and law enforcement. Several female, QTBPoC and LGBTQIA+ participants reported generally lower feelings of safety in relation to the presence of law enforcement in and around nightlife. These, and other participants, reported that law enforcement generally adds to feelings of safety in the city centre, where dedicated police hospitality teams and night hospitality stewards (*horecastewards*) are present. Other participants felt that law enforcement is not as attentive to nightlife safety as it is to other public safety issues, especially outside the city centre. For all participants generally, more activity in public space, better mobility and more consideration by law enforcement equals better overall safe nightlife.




PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, PERRON

SPOTLIGHT: SCHIEKADEBLOK

The Schiekadeblok is a well known area with many nightlife venues and creative and cultural institutions lying between Rotterdam Central Station and the city centre's retail core.⁷³ This close proximity to transit, central location and mix of functions make it a popular and easily accessible hotspot for those interested in nightlife and cultural offerings. However, as is the case in many cities, due to its location Schiekadeblok has presented an attractive opportunity for redevelopment and urban densification by both private and public interests.⁷⁴

Following the change of ownership of many structures in the area from a private developer to the municipality in 2008, redevelopment visions were paused due to the recession following the economic crisis. The creative scene in Schiekadeblok was left to grow and mature organically for more than a decade. This was in large part due to the low cost rental contracts offered by the city. However the temporary nature of these contracts has had impacts on the longevity of this creative cluster.⁷⁵ Participants confirmed that nightlife and multi-use venues within and nearby to the Schiekadeblok area including Annabel⁷⁶, HipHopHuis⁷⁷, BIRD⁷⁸, Perron⁷⁹, POING⁸⁰ and Roodkapje⁸¹ developed community followings and became deeply embedded and representative of Rotterdam's nightlife, arts and music scenes.

The redevelopment will include two mixed-use highrise towers that will combine residential, commercial and other uses as well as a 'cultural hub'. Although two venues will retain their 24-hour permits, other business licences will be revised to prohibit nighttime use past 23:00 PM.⁸² Nonetheless, the introduction of new uses to the area, in particular residential, can alter the character of this creative cluster and lead to undue burdens for venues and creative spaces. Participants expect venues to be priced out of the area, with no choice but to relocate. Those that remain will contend with a host of issues: rising rents, rising operations costs, costly permitting and potential renovations related to noise insulation.

A large, illuminated globe is suspended by several cables from a building. The globe is covered in small, colorful lights, creating a mosaic effect. In the background, a modern building with a grid of windows is visible, along with trees and a clear sky. The scene is set during the day, with the sun low in the sky, casting a warm glow on the building and the globe.

Despite the fact that nightlife and creative occupants have always known that housing will eventually be built, Schiekadeblok illustrates the uncertain position of creative clusters, with their cultural entrepreneurs and oftentimes temporary spaces, competing for space in city centres.⁸³ Nina Hooimeijer, manager of BIRD, warned about the consequences as well as the challenge for Rotterdam of pursuing urban densification while at the same time preserving nightlife and urban heritage:

“They will build their towers [Schiekadeblok]. We understand the city wants to have more people in the centre, that these people need more housing. But this urban development is pushing all the culture and clubs out, it makes it very hard to stay. It doesn’t make it nicer, it doesn’t make a complete city.”

**SECTION V:
CREATIVE
FOOTPRINT'S
RECOMMEN-
DATIONS**

Rotterdam sits today at an important juncture, where the city has the responsibility to work for and with nightlife to address the challenges presented in this report by focusing attention and resources on building the first steps on the path towards bringing together fragmented stakeholders and coordinating collective and targeted action.

This will rely on mutual engagement efforts by the municipality, the *Nachtdienst*, N8W8 R'dam, and nightlife actors themselves. These strategies have the potential to breathe new life back into the experimental heart of Rotterdam nightlife, jumpstart careers and new spaces and bring nightlife to the forefront as an attractive and valued aspect of the city's creative culture, economy and identity—alongside other cultural institutions and culture, music and arts makers. Nightlife is one integral part of the whole cultural landscape of Rotterdam, affected by many of the same cutbacks, challenges and needs in terms of resources and policy change.

Based on the findings in the previous sections, recommendations fall into three categories:

1. **UNLOCK** untapped creative potential in Rotterdam by easing pathways and developing relationships so that nightlife can not only grow but thrive.
2. **RECOGNISE** and **CELEBRATE** the unique value and importance of Rotterdam's nightlife culture and ensure the preservation of what the city already has.
3. **REINFORCE** the development of Rotterdam's nightlife by ramping up commitments in existing and new support infrastructures.

Recommendations timeline

Short term: (One year, commencing January 2025)	Medium term: (Two years)	Long term: (Three+ years)
Educate municipal departments on the core values and contributions of nightlife to the city.		
Strengthen and broaden the scope of the night culture team (Nachtdienst).		
Solidify and expand N8W8 R'dam as an independent advisory board.		
Name nightlife, night culture and nightlife music (e.g. techno) explicitly in eligibility guidelines—and conduct outreach to the nightlife sector regarding current funding opportunities.		
Structure and formalise existing grant support systems within the municipality.		
Professionalise the industry by educating nightlife actors to be self-sufficient in utilising all of the various resources available to them through the municipality and other public and private sources.		
	Support independent promotion and media.	
	Include nightlife in city marketing and events promotion.	
	Establish a structured approach to addressing neighbourhood conflicts over noise that prioritises mediation over penalisation and balances the needs of both residents and nightlife operators.	
	Improve security and mobility at night, especially to areas outside the city centre, so that Rotterdammers can get to and home from nightlife safely.	
	Make municipal properties available for nightlife use and encourage collaboration between nightlife actors and municipal real estate in finding new spaces for nightlife.	
	Ensure that in the planning of creative clusters, considerations for the viability and longevity of nightlife, especially small venues, are equal to those of other creative uses.	
	Reduce cost burdens of soundproofing on the smallest venues and organisers.	
	Develop a 'culture at risk' approach to supporting night culture producers and spaces.	
	Reclassify nightlife zoning to guarantee regular inclusion in planning for mixed urban development, on the same priority level as other cultural and recreational zoned functions.	
	Set aside space for music and creative pursuits related to nightlife within current and future creative incubator programmes.	

RECOMMENDATION

1

Unlock untapped creative potential in Rotterdam by easing pathways and developing relationships so that nightlife can not only grow but thrive.

Participants repeatedly echoed the sense that although Rotterdam has space, funding and talent for nightlife, these resources are not being utilised to their full potential, nor are they easily accessible for all. Rotterdam has available space for nightlife, including municipally owned space. However, many of these potential new venues sit vacant; participants identified a number of obstacles preventing would-be proprietors from making the most of these resources and opportunities. There is a sense that the financial risks of starting a nightlife business are too high, starting with a lack of affordable space. Commercial pressures from urban development make it more difficult to stay afloat. Some of Rotterdam's distinctive interdisciplinary and multi-use spaces are being forced to rent out space as a business model—an approach that does not always align with a community-oriented ethos. Prospective nightlife operators face the challenge of providing community-oriented and experimental nightlife while relying on unsustainable business models. Participants understand that there are funding opportunities for nightlife at the municipal, national, and international level, from small micro-grants to large projects. (See more on international funding opportunities in *Recommendation 3*.) However, those who could most benefit from this support miss out on this opportunity due to a lack of knowledge and networks.

Solidify working relationships for nightlife development, including public-private partnerships, partnerships between nightlife stakeholders and partnerships between nightlife stakeholders and other cultural producers. Nightlife actors perceived their access to decision makers more highly than their peers in a number of other CFP cities—yet this access was also felt to be uneven, and that it is still difficult to navigate institutional pathways, particularly when inter-departmental communication is involved. This research revealed that there are disconnects between what participants perceive and experience, versus what the municipality is

in reality providing. One example relates to citizen input into policy making through direct consultation—participants reported that there is a lack of transparency and clarity into how decision makers translate these contributions into policy. Improving direct communication between municipal and industry actors develops and deepens positive working relationships and builds trust. This underpins all other recommendations and actions in this section.

- **Educate municipal departments on the core values and contributions of nightlife to the city.** Efficient communication and collaboration between departments relies first on a shared understanding of nightlife as a social, cultural and economic asset. Addressing this knowledge gap

will also lead to better partnerships and clear messaging between the municipality and other nightlife stakeholders. This education and training can be conducted internally by relevant departmental actors (i.e. existing *Nachtdienst* members) or externally (i.e. by N8W8 R'dam and other nightlife industry stakeholders). This will prepare the municipality, the *Nachtdienst* and N8W8 R'dam to best educate and upskill nightlife stakeholders on the opportunities and resources available to them. (This process is discussed in detail in *Recommendation 3*.)

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture, urban development and safety, *Nachtdienst*, N8W8 R'dam, Havenbedrijf and other large scale property owners
Timeframe: short term (and as needed as new departments are added to the *Nachtdienst*)

Improve access to existing arts grants and funding by reaching those most in need of support. While research participants agreed that funding and resources for nightlife *do* exist, they described several key barriers to accessing it. One is a lack of knowledge around grant writing and budget development—particularly among emerging actors. Funding is largely geared towards ‘high’ arts and culture rather than ‘popular’ arts and culture. This requires applicants to fit nightlife initiatives to ill-suited guidelines and may discourage them from applying for funding that is available to them and already being utilised by more experienced nightlife stakeholders. The lack of clarity in communication from funding bodies surrounding which grants and funding streams can be used for nightlife means potential beneficiaries may not connect with valuable opportunities (see page 60 for more on *Overall funding for music and nightlife*).



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MILL, ELI FOLA AT PERRON

- **Name nightlife, night culture and nightlife music (e.g. techno) explicitly in eligibility guidelines—and conduct outreach to the nightlife sector regarding current funding opportunities.** This will help to ensure that new nightlife actors feel seen by the municipality and know that existing arts and cultural funding is ‘for them’. The range of art forms and music industries unique to nightlife intersect with commerce and business in ways that more traditional artforms do not. Reviewing application guidelines, to ensure eligibility and assessment criteria welcome nightlife as a non-traditional artform, will open up funding access to the full range of creative talent in Rotterdam. One starting point can be the *Projectsubsidies Cultuur*.⁸⁴

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture
Timeframe: short and medium term

- **Structure and formalise existing grant support systems within the municipality.** A simple, regularly updated webpage can centralise all available funding offers and support services, giving cultural actors an easy reference point to find suitable opportunities. (MusicNSW’s funding calendar⁸⁵ offers one template.) In addition, regular grant literacy workshops and ‘office hours’ (where the public can connect virtually or in person with relevant municipal actors) can make processes more approachable, especially for first-time applicants. While N8W8 R’dam strives to fill these gaps by sharing funding information with nightlife actors, and offering Open Nights on a semi-regular basis, limited staff resources restrict the potential reach of these offers. Building this into municipal structures—ideally in partnership with N8W8 R’dam—can ensure its ongoing availability. Improve the visibility of the regular *Spreekuur*—where citizens can book half hour consultations with Department of Culture (*Cultuur*)

policy advisors—to night culture actors, especially newcomers.⁸⁶

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture, N8W8 R’dam
Timeframe: short and medium term

Reduce obstacles to establishing new nightlife spaces, especially smaller venues, and ensure that new opportunities for nightlife development are accessible to all. The municipality has identified 15 locations eligible for 24-hour permits, which provides a clear opportunity for immediate nightlife development. However, certain barriers must simultaneously be addressed: participants feel the current permitting process to be costly and difficult, stifling creativity and industry entrants. Lack of affordability of these and other spaces was also a major concern. Improve the visibility of existing online support infrastructures such as the nacht@rotterdam.nl email address and area hospitality advisors (*horeca gebiedsadviseurs*) to create a more centralised and easy to navigate process. This will improve access especially for first time applicants.

- **Make municipal properties available for nightlife use and encourage collaboration between nightlife actors and municipal real estate in finding new spaces for nightlife.** Bring municipal real estate holders and nightlife stakeholders together, to foster an understanding of the potential for nightlife in city-owned spaces as a culturally and economically valuable activity. Investigate the potential of city-owned real estate to house nightlife, especially smaller spaces in order to increase their numbers in the city. Antwerp and Amsterdam both offer successful examples of this collaboration with Antwerp’s Ampere, Het Bos, Trix and Kavka, and Amsterdam’s De School (now Tilla Tec), Club 11, and the former Trouw. Allowing club operators themselves to manage renovations and other structural improvements can help to keep rents low.

Key players: municipal departments responsible for real estate, urban development and safety

Timeframe: medium and long term

- **Ensure that in the planning of creative clusters, considerations for the viability and longevity of nightlife, especially small venues, are equal to those of other creative uses.** Developing creative clusters in the city that include nightlife space, and especially smaller spaces that prioritise programming for emerging and experimental talent, provides an opportunity for nightlife to grow and reach new audiences and parts of the city. However, as land values increase it is important to prevent nightlife actors' being pushed out from the neighbourhoods they help to enrich. Smaller venues are the most vulnerable to these processes and should receive targeted support and opportunities. Support smaller spaces through existing municipal means so that they can transition from temporary to permanent status—encouraging their growth and longevity. As a starting point, a number of participants suggested designated 'creative free zones' with flexible permitting and zoning. The example of Cultural Sound Zone (*Kulturljudzon*)⁸⁷ in Malmö, Sweden provides a potential blueprint. This zone, located in an industrial neighbourhood, permits above-average noise from cultural uses including nightlife. As in Malmö, it is important in Rotterdam to ensure that space in new creative cluster development is affordable and accessible to nightlife stakeholders.

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture, real estate, urban development and safety

Timeframe: medium and long term

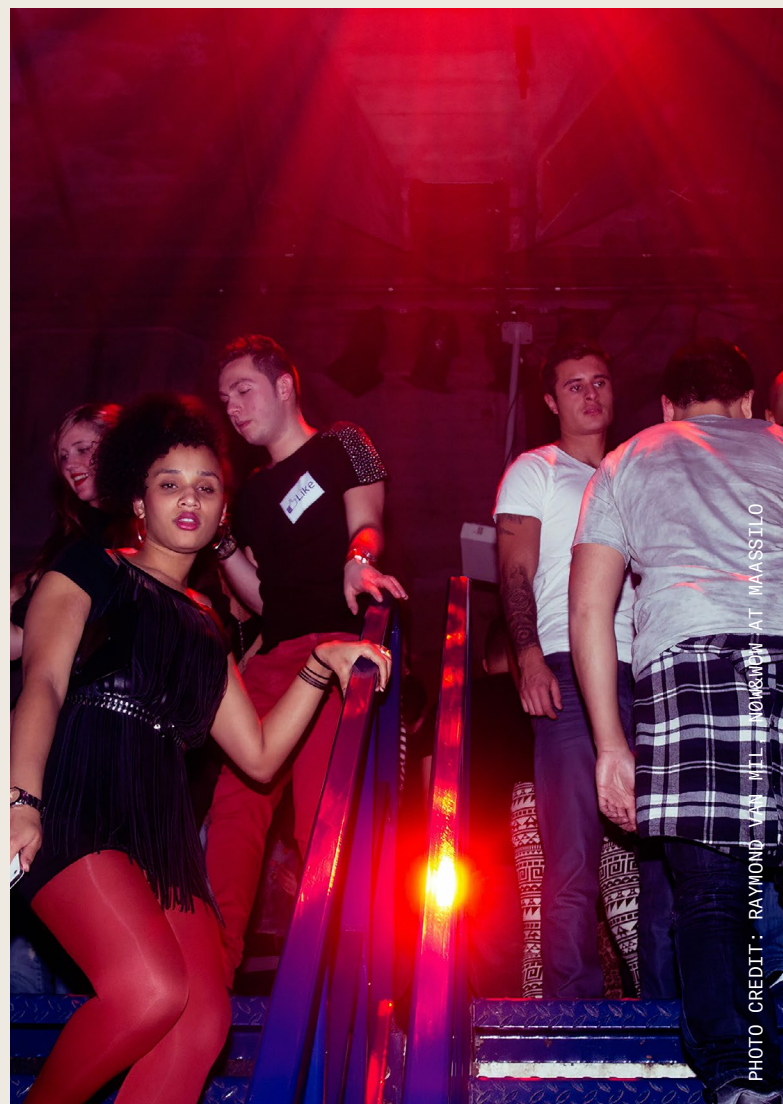


PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL / NOORDNEDERLAND AT MAASSILO

RECOMMENDATION

2

Recognise and celebrate the unique value and importance of Rotterdam's nightlife culture and ensure the preservation of what the city already has.

Research participants acknowledged Rotterdam's storied reputation as a music city and melting pot for the creation of unique sounds and communities, including gabber, the introduction of voguing in the Netherlands and traditions from migrant communities. However, there was a sense that these movements and potential for innovation and creative generation are in the past. For them, Rotterdam has struggled to find a nightlife identity in recent years. One reason for this is the sense that the municipality and general public do not see and respect nightlife as a generator of creative culture and an economic driver in the same way as other cultural institutions and disciplines. While a number have taken note of municipal recognition of nightlife in recent years, this is evidenced by the particularly low *promotion* score (3.80/10). They communicated that 'second city syndrome'⁸⁸ is especially prevalent in Rotterdam.

Increase public visibility of nightlife and specific events. Nightlife in Rotterdam must be viewed as a cultural and economic asset in the same way as it is in other Dutch cities. In terms of communication and promotion, nightlife must receive the same treatment and consideration from the city as do its iconic festivals and other cultural attractions. Amplifying all of Rotterdam's nightlife and creative communities will draw audiences to its most experimental, innovative and unique offerings—thus contributing to the longevity of the city's more vulnerable high programming spaces.

- **Support independent promotion and media.** Central, trusted and independent media outlets play an enormously important role in a nightlife ecosystem; the visibility they bring not only improves the image of nightlife in the city, but also makes nightlife more accessible to visitors and residents. These channels are already connected to and trusted by Rotterdam's nightlife to best promote and represent them, however they do not yet reach a wider audience outside of those who are 'in the know' already. Successful examples include Amsterdam's Aa Magazine⁸⁹ or BASH Social⁹⁰.

- **Include nightlife in city marketing and events promotion.** More ‘mainstream’ city-level marketing channels, such as UitAgenda⁹¹ or Rotterdam Partners⁹², also have an important role to play and must cover more nightlife listings. This involves a shift in how the city views life at night as a core part of Rotterdam’s identity, in the same way that it views its architecture, museums and other cultural spaces. This will not only make Rotterdam more attractive, it will also reinvigorate a sense of local pride in Rotterdam’s music—not just in the past but most importantly in the present.

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture, communications, urban development and safety, *Nachtdienst*, N8W8 R'dam, Rotterdam Partners, Uitagenda, Make it Happen, Open Rotterdam, RTV Rijnmond, Vers Beton

Timeframe: medium term

Protect small and community-focused venues under pressure by addressing concerns—including residential conflicts.

Participants gave numerous testimonies to the importance of community-focused venues and their value to the creative economy (see pages 52-55 in *Section IV* for a deeper exploration). This research found that the Rotterdam venues with highest ratings around community and creative focus are also under growing pressure related to rising costs, rising property values, precarious permitting, and proximity to new residential development. It also found that small venues make up a notably low proportion of Rotterdam’s nightlife spaces. As discussed in *Section IV: Community and Content findings*, these pressures—particularly financial—negatively impact their ability to provide experimental, innovative programming. Kickstarting strategies to systematically address the threats venues face can help to slow the spate of closures.

- **Reduce cost burdens of soundproofing on the smallest venues and organisers.** As residential construction grows closer to existing venues (and desirable venue space far from residents becomes more scarce), soundproofing is increasingly important. Yet costs related to sound management and soundproofing can be especially difficult for small venues to shoulder. Taking the example of Berlin’s *Schallschutzfonds*⁹³ or Montréal’s soundproofing fund⁹⁴ the municipality should consider allocating a portion of existing funding specifically for soundproofing venues under a particular capacity threshold, as well as matching funds to ease cost burdens on these venues. This would be relevant both in the opening stages (e.g. when conducting a sound report necessary for an amplified sound permit, which can be prohibitive for small venues’ budgets), and also



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when action is needed to prevent or ease conflict with residential neighbours. In providing such solutions, the municipality of Rotterdam supports the city's culture of small, multi-use and grassroots spaces alongside goals to increase housing density and retain a liveable city centre.

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture and urban development

Timeframe: medium and long term

- **Establish a structured approach to addressing neighbourhood conflicts over noise that prioritises mediation over penalisation and balances the needs of both residents and nightlife operators.**

Establishing a free, dedicated municipal service to help residents and nightlife businesses to reach collaborative solutions can help not only to solve disputes before they reach the level of an official noise complaint, but also increase neighbourhood cohesion. Fostering positive relationships between residents and nightlife businesses is beneficial for all involved parties. One successful example of such a service is MEND (Mediating Establishment and Neighborhood Disputes) NYC⁹⁵, wherein the city acts as an impartial mediator to assist with a number of quality of life concerns between residents and businesses.

Key players: municipal departments responsible for safety, area councils (*Wijk- and dorpsraden*)

Timeframe: medium term

Develop a 'culture at risk' approach to supporting night culture producers and spaces. Related to the prior recommendation, a case-management approach to supporting venues can help nightlife venues to address challenges and stay where they are, rooted in their communities—or, in worst-case scenarios,

can assist operators in finding alternative space and negotiating the transition. One potential model: London's *Culture and Community Spaces at Risk* Office⁹⁶ offers one-on-one guidance and advocacy for spaces, which ranges from interfacing with local authorities, to navigating the planning system, to business and organisational advice. Similarly, Berlin Clubcommission, a non-governmental entity, has mediated between venues and property owners,⁹⁷ and its working group on space (*AK Raum*) also helps to connect potential operators to available sites across the city.

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture, urban development and safety

Timeframe: medium and long term

Reclassify nightlife zoning to guarantee regular inclusion in planning for mixed urban development, on the same priority level as other cultural and recreational zoned functions. This is an important step towards unlocking and safeguarding more physical space for nightlife. Revisiting nightlife classification under municipal zoning code influences the degree to which it is considered in planning. Currently, nightlife is primarily permitted as catering (*horeca*) or mixed use (*gemengd*). Due to its high level of use and occupation and social and recreational nature, considering nightlife more broadly within entertainment and recreation (under *Kwetsbare objecten* and *Bijzondere objecten* zoning categories) may allow for better inclusion in planning. Rotterdam might follow the example of a number of other locales, who have recently revised restrictions to nightlife: A 2023 zoning change in Austin, Texas opened up 2.000% more space for live music venues citywide.⁹⁸ Germany decided in 2021 to re-classify clubs as cultural venues under national building law.⁹⁹ Toronto has opted to permit nightclubs in commercial zones citywide, under new zoning categories, beginning from 2025.^{100 101} Rotterdam must consider nightlife in planning functional mixed zones (*Functionele*

mixzones)¹⁰²; it can operate similarly to how retail is present as an important but not primary function, with the ability to coexist with other uses in the urban environment. More in-depth discussion of these concerns are anticipated in the forthcoming SITE report later this year.

Key players: municipal departments responsible for urban development, Rotterdam City Council

Timeframe: medium and long term



RAYMOND VAN MIL, PHILOU LOUZOLO AT BLENDS AT MAASSILO

RECOMMENDATION

3

Reinforce the development of Rotterdam's nightlife by ramping up commitments in existing and new support infrastructures.

Strengthen and broaden the scope of the night culture team (*Nachtdienst*). Established in 2023, Rotterdam's *Nachtdienst* is cross-disciplinary, drawn from the Department of Culture (*Cultuur*), cluster of urban development (*Stadsontwikkeling*) and the Directorate of Urban Safety (*Directie Veiligheid*)—and even more notably, contains staff members with work, networks and personal experience in nightlife. These two factors make it fairly unique among other cities' night governance entities, and help to promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Immediate growth plans include the addition of two new members from municipal departments for economic development and real estate. However, nightlife touches many more departments beyond these three, such as communications and public space. Thus far, the *Nachtdienst* has proven effective in implementing first steps for night governance and creating new connections. However, more can be done in the immediate and longer term to increase promotion of the *Nachtdienst* to the nightlife industry and actors. At present the team has few allotted hours, limiting their reach and impact. As budget allows—and as impact can justify:

- *Expand the Nachtdienst to represent all departments relevant to nightlife.*
- *Expand the hours of at least one Nachtdienst staffer to at least part-time, to allow for more comprehensive coverage of nightlife-related issues and industry support.*
- *Continue to build visibility of the Nachtdienst to nightlife actors, especially for industry entrants and emerging actors. (Here, N8W8 R'dam can serve as a bridge.)*
- *Continue building in regular participatory engagement with nightlife actors and their direct inclusion in night governance decision making.*
- *Consider partnering with other public and private sector actors relevant for nightlife including city marketing, public land owners for housing and industry, banks, and project developers.*
- *Ensure the Nachtdienst is staffed and resourced to implement the upcoming Nachtplan.*

The ultimate goal of this recommendation is to develop cross-departmental understanding and appreciation for nightlife, so that it extends across municipal governance—and results in efficient, effective communication and municipal processes for nightlife venues, events and businesses. This research team’s experience has shown that night governance structures are most effective and impactful when they involve nightlife stakeholders themselves. The municipality of Rotterdam can serve as an enabler of the expertise and experience of both established and new industry actors in order to change perspectives on the necessity of night governance. Effective night governance is achieved through sharing power and giving ownership to the nightlife industry, as is the model with the Vienna Clubcommission¹⁰³ and Berlin Clubcommission¹⁰⁴. Night governance should be underscored with the knowledge that nightlife is much more than a job; it is a passion and it is an integral part of the creative sector.

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture, urban development, real estate, safety, economic development, public space, communications and all other departments relevant to nightlife
Timeframe: short and medium term

Develop a cultural land trust to assist potential new small venue operators and existing small venue operators. This research has clearly shown the need to protect and open up the possibilities for new small and experimental venues. In order to ensure this, the city can set up a cultural land trust. These dedicated funds help prospective and established operators to navigate the various processes and expenses associated with venue operatorship. They can also be used to set aside real estate, both municipally-owned and private, for new venues. Cultural land trusts help kickstart the careers of motivated nightlife entrepreneurs and funds can be allocated following an application procedure. (The municipality can also provide support in this regard.) Rotterdam may see the example of a number of other cities: in Austin, Texas, the municipality’s Cultural Venue Trust allocates funding to preserve existing spaces by either purchasing the land itself or financing long-term leasing agreements to prevent displacement.¹⁰⁵
¹⁰⁶ In London, the Music Venue Trust provides an example of a government working alongside civic actors (in this case, a charity) to preserve grassroots venues in particular.¹⁰⁷

- **Set aside space for music and creative pursuits related to nightlife within current and future creative incubator programmes.** Specify nightlife participation in the Municipal Department of Culture (*Cultuur*) Studio and Incubator Policy 2023-2030 (*Atelier en Broedplaatsenbeleid*)¹⁰⁸ by ensuring the inclusion of nightlife culture makers, equally to culture makers from other sectors, in plans to protect affordability, expand floor space and commit to ateliers



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, BLENDS AT MAASSILO

throughout the city. Rotterdam can ensure that these actors are not left behind, and benefit from existing and planned creative and cultural development of the city. This approach would also be the first of its kind, as no other city has yet to specify nightlife in cultural land trusts nor creative incubator programmes.

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture, urban development, real estate and economic development, *SKAR (Stichting Kunstaccommodatie Rotterdam)*

Timeframe: medium and long term

Solidify and expand N8W8 R'dam as an independent advisory board. This research team's experience with night governance structures around the world holds that the most effective structure is typically a public office with a corresponding community or industry entity—allowing for long term and sustainable action, both top-down and bottom-up. Held first by Rotterdam poet and performer Jules Deelder¹⁰⁹, the Night Mayor arrangement pioneered in Amsterdam and seen in other Dutch cities, wherein one public figure is responsible for nighttime governance and advocacy, has proven useful in the past. However, most importantly, it does not provide the same consistency. Since 2020, N8W8 R'dam has served as a primary collaborator of the municipality and *Nachtdienst* in the city's nighttime governance ecosystem. In this role, N8W8 R'dam provides nightlife advocacy, research, community outreach, training, and other support. Facilitating these steps will allow N8W8 R'dam to focus on the long term: bringing in more staff for more hours with fair pay; focusing on promotion and lessening administrative burdens; and providing new services including skills training and office hours. Rotterdam can look to approaches taken by Vienna Clubcommission and Berlin Clubcommission, which utilises its resources for soundproofing, *Tag der Klubkultur*, *Awareness Akademie* and other mental health

work, free open-air, consulting, and other services.¹¹⁰

- **Professionalise the industry by educating nightlife actors to be self-sufficient in utilising all of the various resources available to them through the municipality and other public and private sources.**

Building upon and improving night governance from within the municipality is only one step in changing the direction of nightlife development in Rotterdam. This cultural shift relies on partnership and mutual understanding between the city and its citizens, and the motivation from nightlife stakeholders to become knowledgeable of all the opportunities for funding, support, collaboration and communication channels available to them to succeed. By bolstering the reach and efficiency of N8W8 R'dam in this way, the municipality can invest in a trusted partner to implement measures that lead to wider and deeper professionalisation in the industry. One important potentially untapped resource are the various European Union level funding opportunities for emerging and established artists such as the European Solidarity Corps¹¹¹ (for artists between 18 and 30 years old), Creative Europe¹¹², European Social Fund Plus¹¹³ and Erasmus+.¹¹⁴ Potential funding opportunities for venues include Culture Moves Europe¹¹⁵, European Regional Development Fund¹¹⁶, New European Bauhaus¹¹⁷ and Horizon Europe.¹¹⁸ The municipality can also benefit from exploring the potential for funding and resources through Interreg¹¹⁹ and URBACT.¹²⁰

Key players: municipal departments responsible for culture, *Nachtdienst*, N8W8 R'dam

Timeframe: short and medium term

Improve security and mobility at night, especially to areas outside the city centre, so that Rotterdammers can get to and home from nightlife safely. Rotterdam was rated low

on the *Framework Conditions* indicator *public transportation at night* (4.81/10). This research showed that Rotterdam’s community-focused and experimental venues are harder to reach with public transportation (see Figure 10 for an overview of transit density and venue density). Participants communicated concerns around nighttime mobility and safety at night (see page 63 for further discussions)—these factors of nighttime planning are not only important for nightlife goers, but for nighttime workers’ safety and wellbeing.

These recommendations echo and build on the Coalition Agreement 2022-2026 (*Coalitieakkoord: Eén Stad*),¹²¹ which makes a number of welcome commitments to improving nighttime mobility and safety, such as a night metro to Rozenburg, and more funding and training for the night hospitality stewards (*horecastewards*) responsible for ensuring public safety in certain nightlife areas. Further action steps may include:

- In the short and medium term, reestablish the night bus (*BOB Nachtbus*) network.
- Explore other forms of nightlife micro-mobility that complement underserved areas.
- In the longer term, expand the night bus network to reach underserved parts of the city and surrounding areas as well as areas designated for future nightlife development. Ensuring that night bus routes also reach existing and new venues outside of the city can benefit their longevity and viability.
- Extend nighttime metro services to 3:00 AM to coincide with nightlife businesses’ closing hours.
- Invest in other measures for public safety at night such as street lighting. While this report has not focused in great depth on these aspects of the urban fabric, further research and citizen participation can explore which areas are felt to have the most acute lack of wayfinding, visibility and safety measures at night. (See page 63 for more on mobility and safety at night.)

Key players: municipal departments responsible for public transportation, mobility and safety, regional and national transportation authorities
Timeframe: medium and long term



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, NOW&NOW AT MAASSILO

‘FIRST 100 DAYS’ ACTION PLAN

The following steps should be taken in the coming months to kickstart the above recommendations. Making these first steps will ensure their successful implementation now and into the future.

- N8W8 R'dam to meet with *Nachtdienst* members and their respective municipal departments to discuss initial ideas and plans for which new departments should be added to the *Nachtdienst* and which individual civil servants to involve.
- Invite operators of Rotterdam's small and community-focused venues to a networking event attended by *Nachtdienst* members and other representatives from the municipality, to begin making new personal connections between the city and the nightlife industry.
- Bring N8W8 R'dam and municipal tourism, marketing and businesses development representatives together to discuss initial plans to increase the visibility of nightlife in Rotterdam.
- Identify all municipal departments and agencies relevant for unlocking pathways to opening new venues and begin the process of bringing them together.
- Create and distribute a questionnaire to all municipal real estate holders to gain an overview of all available city-owned properties suited for cultural and/or nightlife use, as well as which noise levels are permitted, depending on proximity to other uses (residential, etc.)
- Identify what budget is available for the coming budget year(s), as well as which individual budgets to pull from, to implement these immediate first steps.



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SECTION VI: **CONCLUSION**

Rotterdam's nightlife community has been on high alert for over ten years given the tide of venue closures, disappearance of experimental spaces and perceived fragmentations and disconnects between nightlife scenes as well as within the municipality.

Barriers remain to the growth of nightlife in the city: there is a reported mismatch between the support offered to, and needed of, nightlife stakeholders; the risks associated with opening new venues; and challenges for new talent to find both funding and stages to perform. Fortunately, in the past five or so years, the municipality has already made a number of welcome policy commitments and enacted permitting and other reforms. The *Nachtdienst* has proved a bridge between nightlife and the city and the upcoming *Nachtplan* has the opportunity to set a new course.

This research has shown that now is the time to bolster and expand these efforts through a unified and informed approach involving all nightlife stakeholders—with clear goals and channels for communication, responsibility,

and accountability. The municipality and Rotterdammers must recognise and value the contributions of nightlife to the city's identity and contribution to its image and creative economy. Participants communicated the imperative for nightlife to be integrated into development plans so that densification, rising land values and other threats do not put nightlife at a disadvantage. Rotterdam stands out among CFP cities for a number of reasons; as an incubator for innovative music and nightlife, tough exterior and its no-nonsense image, working class traditions and underground communities. When asked to imagine an ideal future, participants shared the following sentiments on what they want to see more and less of, what changes and what stays the same:

“Our DNA. We are the very best at being Rotterdam.”

“[More] recognising the value of informal and unconventional culture, more unconventional spaces.”

“[Less] selling of maatschappelijk vastgoed (social real estate).”

“Dirty and scruffy venues. We don’t want gentrified clean new spaces.”

“Our unique identity, not too full of ourselves.”

“New places with new owners with new programming....it’s time for new energies in Rotterdam, a new start!”

“Protection, guarantee, or 'fair trial' around neighbourhood complaints and venue closures.”

“[Changes:] talent gets easy access to funding, venues and rehearsal spaces.”

“[Changes:] clear definition and understanding of nightlife and night culture.”

“[More:] funded spaces to make grassroots level experimentation possible.”

“Lack of credibility of nightlife culture within the Rotterdam municipality; shift in understanding needed.”

“Missing places to experiment—the responsibility of bigger institutions to give space to younger/emerging organisers.”



PHOTO CREDIT: RAYMOND VAN MIL, MAASSILO

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Datasets used for quantitative analysis:

1. All Rotterdam venue data, which includes the selected 71 venues and their corresponding geographic information, characteristics and rankings, were obtained through CFP research and local workshops throughout 2023 and 2024.
2. Geographic district boundaries (Groot-Rijnmond kaart, Wijken, Buurt) were obtained from PDOK open datasets. <https://service.pdok.nl/cbs/wijkenbuurten/2021/atom/index.xml>
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Janpier Brands

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Jermaine Berkhoudt

Joan Nunnely

Joris Strijbos

Juliana Bruinsma

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Khalil Ryahi

Kim Nguyen

Koen Frenz

Kris Fraanje

Lara de Moor

Laurens van der Werken

Lennert Kok

Lodewijk van Dijk

Marchiano van Campenhout

Mark van Gogh

Marloes de Vries

Mart Sanders

Mats van der Poel

Mauke Rodermond

Melanin Kris

Miguel Neiva

Mike van Gaasbeek

Mina Morkoç

Mitchel Sam Sin

Nathalie Cijntje

Nina Hooimeijer

NoBiggie

Ofra Beenen

Olympia Reynolds

Onno Lorenz

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Raymon de Graaf

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Said Kasmi

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CREATIVE FOOTPRINT TEAM



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Mirik is a former nightlife promoter and one of the first night mayors in the world, having played an instrumental role in the reshaping of Amsterdam's nightlife scene into one of the most vibrant and economically robust in the world. Mirik's inaugural position as Amsterdam's Nachtburgemeester in 2012 has since been replicated in major cities around the world, from New York, Paris and London. Nowadays, Mirik is a nightlife advocate, co-founder of VibeLab and author of the paper 'Governing the Night-time City: The Rise of Night Mayors as a New Form of Urban Governance After Dark'. In January 2020, the journal Urban Studies released this first qualitative study on night mayors around the world.



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Amir is a London-born, Berlin-based interdisciplinary urban researcher, project manager and writer of Swedish, Egyptian and German heritage. As a Project Manager and Researcher for VibeLab, he works across research projects that translate the significance of music and nightlife to decision-makers globally. Through reflexive and engaged research, Amir's work seeks equitable futures for underrepresented communities in music and nightlife. Amir holds a BA in Geography from King's College London, and a PGDip with Distinction in Urban Studies from University College London.



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Xiixin is a dedicated researcher at PennPraxis, where he plays a pivotal role in the collection and organization of demographic and social economy data for Rotterdam and Copenhagen. His work is guided by a deep commitment to preserving and promoting music communities and cultural heritage. In addition to his research endeavors, Xiixin is a co-founder of the Free Jam Club. This initiative supports international students in Changsha, China; Seattle; and Philadelphia in discovering and celebrating their musical cultures. Xiixin's passion for music is further evidenced by his roles as a drummer and band leader, where he continues to contribute to the vibrant music scene. Xiixin is also deeply interested in urban planning, spatial data analysis, and community development. Through his expertise and dedication, he aims to positively impact and support various communities, leveraging his knowledge to foster growth and improvement.



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www.creative-footprint.org

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