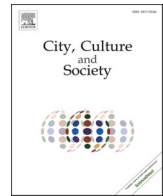


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Midlife, diversification, and inclusive town centres at night

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ABSTRACT

The perception that young people and youth orientated venues dominate the nocturnal city has stimulated calls on the part of government to address the exclusion of specific demographics, particularly those who are midlife. Focusing on those now aged 40–65, this paper explores how policies concerned with diversifying nightlife engage with this ageing demographic. Drawing on both scholarly and policy literature, the discussion examines how a discourse of diversity, diversification and vibrancy frame ageing and urban centres after dark. Acknowledging this demographic is under-researched, the paper brings together diverse literatures from urban planning, gerontology and sociology with a view to question the ways diversity, nightlife, and ageing are articulated and deployed in British urban policy. The paper challenges a normative concept of the life course, and a simplistic approach to place on which calls for diversifying nightlife within urban centres often rest. It concludes with a call for a framework for future research which connects place identity and demographic diversity within this cohort to inform future policy initiatives.

1. Introduction

Research on British nightlife has primarily focused on young peoples' activities, their attitudes and behaviours, and the expansion of youth focused nightlife venues. While drawing on this body of literature, the aim of this paper is to consider the relatively unexamined midlife cohort and, in particular, the ways this cohort is figured in policy discourse. Defined here as 40–65, this demographic is broad and heterogeneous but there has been concern in the UK for some time now about their assumed absence from urban centres after dark. The 'problem', as it is understood in current policy, is that midlife consumers have been excluded from urban nightscapes due to the dominance of venues catering to younger patrons. As well as undermining the goal of diverse and inclusive urban centres, the absence of midlife consumers is framed as a missed opportunity to expand economic benefits. Moreover, their absence and exclusion is figured as a contributing factor to risky drinking within the home, a subject which has received growing attention over the past decade (Barrett, 2016; Siddique, 2017).

Though the participation of older groups, or lack-of, in public nightlife has been noted since at least the millennium (Bromley et al., 2000; GLA Economics 2018; Thomas & Bromley, 2000), and evidence suggesting 45–54 year olds report the highest levels of loneliness of any age group (ONS, Siegler, Njeru, & Thomas, 2015), there is still limited

work and data on how this demographic socialises in and engages with urban nightlife. We do not counter this with evidence that midlife drinkers are indeed active consumers of nightlife, although there is indeed evidence for their participation, nor do we seek to propose how midlife drinkers might be better enticed into urban centres after dark. Instead, the paper interrogates how this discourse of absence and calls for diversity suggests a simplification in current nightlife policies. In these terms, rather than seeking to challenge or confirm the exclusion of midlife consumers from nightlife, the problem addressed in the discussion below is how ageing, nightlife, and diversity become articulated, and to what effect. It is motivated by a desire to think about age and ageing informed by critical work on the life course (Hendricks & Cutler, 2003; Roberts, 2013), and a recognition that the experiences, practices and desires of people now experiencing midlife are not homogenous. The paper furthermore examines discourses of place making, in which the concept of diversity has entered as a normative goal (Eck, 2020; Fainstein, 2005; Lees, 2003). The paper does not critique the notion of diversity in itself but instead the ways diversity becomes mobilised in segmented terms, most notably in terms of age. In short, while the problem of nightlife and midlife consumers for some policy makers is one of absence and exclusion, the problem we examine here is how such discourse becomes channelled through the 'malleable concept' (Eck, 2020, 3299) of diversity.

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The paper starts with a discussion of diversity with regard to urban planning followed by a brief summary of current work around theories of ageing and leisure. It then proceeds to develop the argument through a review of UK policy, followed by research on midlife consumers. It concludes by proposing a more refined and detailed framework for future research and policy development that draws on life course theory and thus a more critical approach to understanding the intersection of ageing, planning, diversity, and nightlife.

2. Diversity

2.1. Arguments for diversity

Diversity is a statutory requirement of public policy and the appointed and local authority funded night time advisers in London and Manchester have taken the promotion of diversity as a key part of their brief. Race and ethnicity has been highlighted in Manchester (Lord, 2020), while the Night Czar in London asserts that London's nightlife is diverse and as such must be protected (Mayor of London, 2017). As well as being members of the 40–65 year old demographic under discussion here, and once subjects of the literature around expanding nightlife in the 1990s, the position of night mayor (or night czar) was established in the context of discourses around planning and diversity. Around the millennium, diversity became the new norm in planning theory and practice, following a critique of the segregation of land-use functions espoused by modernism. Championing the concept of mixed use and hence physical diversity has a long pedigree reaching back to Jane Jacobs (1961). Indeed, policy support for night time activities is itself derived from an objective to increase diversity in uses and activities within urban areas (see for example Heath, 1997). Talen's (2006) review of planning literature provides four theoretical arguments for the support of diversity, each of which are interlinked. Three are relevant to nightlife and these are the promotion of urban vitality, economic health, social equity or the 'geography of opportunity'. The fourth argument, environmental sustainability, has less relevance for night time activities.

The expansion of British night time activities from the 1990s onwards therefore paralleled academic and practitioner's arguments for mixed use and it was unsurprising that extensive press coverage of drunken and youth-dominated town centres around the millennium led to calls for greater diversification of night-time services and leisure opportunities (ODPM, 2005). More particularly, older residents were singled out as having been excluded from nightlife and framed as more desirable night-time consumers. In the United Kingdom these calls to increase diversity in urban centres at night entangle land use, users, age and class, particularly through the belief that an older clientele will help 'civilise' existing nightlife via a preference for quirky bars and more cultural pursuits (Haydock, 2014). Diversity, in regard to age, is thus deployed as an 'antidote' (Lees, 2003, p. 614) to the commercialised homogeneity and youth focus of many British towns.

Diversity remains fairly ambiguous however; it could refer to both a wider range of leisure facilities and other types of services as well as a wider range of user groups. This lack of clarity has not stymied the still considerable reach of the diversity rhetoric, however, or its frequent usage in policies seeking to develop or shape British town and city centres after dark.

2.2. Policies to promote diversity after dark

From the central government sponsored research which proposed 'broadening the appeal' of town centres at night to the Home Office's Local Alcohol Action Area scheme, central government has consistently aspired to greater diversity (Davies & Mummery, 2006, Home Office, 2014). The 2010 Equalities Act places a requirement on public bodies and organisations in the UK to consider the impact of their policies and practices on eight identified 'protected characteristics'. These are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race,

religion, sex, sexual orientation and age (Government Equalities Office, 2011). This call for inclusion is reflected in local and regional strategies for expanding and promoting nightlife, for example the current regional plan for Greater London lays a responsibility on the thirty three London boroughs to 'develop a vision for the night time economy, supporting its growth and diversification' (Mayor of London, 2018, p. 206). This aspiration has received approbation from industry bodies, notably through the Association of Town Centre Management's Purple Flag scheme, an award given to town and city centres offering a broad variety of leisure opportunities, amongst other criteria. The Portman Group, which represents the alcohol industry, in collaboration with Britain Thinks, similarly refers to the need to encourage 'a thriving and diverse night-time economy' (2017). More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has not only highlighted the importance of nightlife for sociability, it has also reignited the argument that town planners need to 'build back better' and redress assumed problems of pre-pandemic nightlife (Lord, 2020).

Notably, while these calls do not clearly distinguish between users and use, of particular relevance is how this discourse associates an older demographic with the further regeneration of urban centres at night. Policies concerned with the urban night have long prioritised the economic benefits of cities after dark (Hubbard, 2017), and while policies drawing on discourses of diversification do also refer to sociability, it is largely within a neo-liberal doctrine where the economic potential of urban centres, and the assumed economic power of older consumers, are emphasised and conflated. A clear example of this is the British government's Local Alcohol Action Areas (LAAA) programme. Of its three core aims, one is 'generating economic growth by creating a vibrant and diverse night-time economy' (Home Office, 2016, p. 3). The first phase of LAAA, which ran from 2014 to 2015, claimed that economic growth could be achieved through diversifying the night-time economy, with the added benefit that this would reduce 'health harms' (2016, 3). In the second phase, further support was offered to areas which chose 'to focus on generating economic growth by creating a more diverse and vibrant night-time economy' (2016, 14).

Policy support for diversifying nightlife in the UK rests on and typically champions (and conflates) economic health and urban vitality, but social equity has been largely ignored. Socio-economic status, for example, does not form one of the 'protected characteristics'. This situation has been exacerbated by the political context since the banking crisis in 2008. The backdrop of on-going austerity and funding cuts in the UK has meant that the responsibility for diversifying and managing urban nightscapes has typically rested with the private sector. A recommendation by the London Night Time Commission (2019) that non-commercial activities for older people be promoted at night is a welcome change of approach, but until now much of the responsibility for diversity has seen industry taking the lead. Local authorities in the UK have seen cuts in their funding by up to 40% since 2010 and support for social infrastructure have been stymied. The prospect of providing late opening museums and galleries outside of central London, or supporting libraries, youth clubs and community centres, as championed by a House of Commons Inquiry (HoC 2003), has receded. Instead, the alcohol industry now actively participates in partnerships empowered with initiating, managing and planning urban centres after dark (Hadfield, 2015) while Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) and other commercial groups play an active role in expanding, developing and diversifying night-time provision. Indeed, the Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) supplied the secretariat to an informal grouping within the UK Parliament which identified policies to support nightlife during the Covid-19 pandemic (appg 2021). Despite, then, frequent calls by local and government groups for diversity and diversifying urban centres after dark, this has not always clearly translated into local or government led initiatives, or the funding to do so.

3. Research on midlife consumers

It is against this backdrop where we turn to the question of midlife consumers and their participation, or lack of, in urban nightlife. [Brim et al. \(2004\)](#) refer to midlife as ‘unchartered territory’ and while the drinking practices of older consumers have come under examination of late ([Brierley-Jones, 2014](#); [Gell et al., 2014](#)), there is little research on their engagement with *public* nightlife in town and city centres and what contribution they might bring beyond the economic.

There is existing research on leisure and midlife, much of it finding a pattern of withdrawal as one ages ([Harahousou, 2006](#)), but, again, there is little on the *public* leisure practices of midlife consumers after dark. There are exceptions here, most notably in terms of the well cited argument that pubs are an important space for sociability; a point which [Thurnell-Read’s \(2021\)](#) work clearly demonstrates regarding older drinkers. His work, based on focus groups in 86 urban, rural and suburban locations across England, finds a familiar pattern, nonetheless, of retreat later in the evening as venues become more dominated by younger participants. [Jackson’s \(2020\)](#) ethnography conducted at a 10-pin bowling alley in London is also notable in foregrounding belonging and community in a nightlife venue that attracted a broad range of ages and users. Recent work on ageing and clubbing ([Bennett and Hodkinson, 2020](#); [O’Grady & Madill, 2019](#); [Smith, 2014](#)), is equally important here in drawing attention to how age, culture, and gender intersect in the EDM scene, which is international in its reach.

While critical work on ageing and nighttime leisure spaces remains limited, further insights can be gleaned from research into ageing and leisure more generally. Firstly, the question of whether leisure patterns formed earlier in life remain constant in later life is important, and we return to this point later. A second more general observation of the leisure and ageing literature is the extent to which it engages with the ‘active ageing agenda’ ([Wheaton, 2017](#)), which is most often associated with daytime activities. To clarify, it is beyond the scope of this paper to do justice to the extensive body of literature on leisure and midlife, but it is notable nonetheless that much of it is framed through what Joseph and Human phrase as ‘social, emotional, mental, spiritual and psychological wellbeing’ (2020: 72; see also [Dupuis & Murray Alzheimer, 2008](#)). Pubs, nightclubs, and traditional nightlife spaces are not as commonly understood according to this dominant model. Though this perhaps explains the limited work around ageing and nightlife, it also points to a tension central to our aims here – how nightlife, ageing and diversity become promoted in often imprecise terms. Though venues such as pubs and bars are important for social networks and sociability, they are also associated with long-term health impacts and thus do not fit neatly into the dominant framing of leisure and ageing as a social ‘good’. There is a further ambiguity here that owes to the often normative ideas that circulate around ageing and nightlife, to which we now turn.

3.1. Midlife consumers: anxieties and ambiguities

The dominant narrative of nightlife participation concerns the consumption of alcohol, with the assumption being that public drinking and youthful exuberance is followed by a period of private and established patterns of consumption ([Seaman & Ikegwuonu, 2010](#); [Törnqvist, 2007](#)). Indeed, much of the work that does exist on midlife leisure at night concerns home-based drinking ([Brierley-Jones et al., 2014](#); [Foster & Ferguson, 2012](#); [Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2008](#); [Foster et al 2010](#)). Risky drinking is declining for young people in the UK but 55–64 year olds are, as of 2017, the most likely to be consuming alcohol ‘at higher or increasing risk levels’ ([ONS, 2017](#), p. 22). When midlife consumers’ leisure choices at night are referred to it is therefore typically in relation to drinking at home and subsequent health concerns ([Gell et al., 2014](#)) or as the demographic deliberately avoiding venturing out at night ([Roberts & Eldridge, 2009](#)).

The reasons why older residents might choose to drink at home

rather than in public spaces at night are broad and vexed. [Golant \(1984\)](#) asks a similar question, and though his study concerns those over 60, a similarly complex picture emerges whereby demand, attitudes towards their local environment and, most importantly, a sense of control over one’s own life, are each significant. A common explanation for the withdrawal of midlife and older consumers from urban centres at night now is the perception that younger people and youth-focused bars and clubs dominate urban centres. Supermarkets selling alcohol far more economically than is available in bars or pubs, the smoking ban, limited transport options, the numerous home entertainment options available online, a lack of variety, and of course domestic responsibilities and lack of desire have also been touted as possible explanations ([Roberts & Eldridge, 2009](#)). A concern about pub closures is also now well known in Britain ([Andrews & Turner, 2012](#)) and the closure of traditional pubs has been cited as detrimental to older group’s leisure choices, the maintenance of their social networks, and, more broadly, the diversity of urban centres.

Nevertheless, there are numerous spaces other than pubs frequented by older demographics. 45–64 year olds are most likely to eat out at restaurants, for example, and while 63% of 25–34 year olds reported going to pubs, bars or clubs, the figure for 45–63 year olds was still a relatively robust 44% ([ONS, Siegler, Njeru, & Thomas, 2015](#)). Eating out has been a growth sector within nightlife, suggesting that midlife consumers are going out in greater numbers. While these figures do point to the participation of older groups venturing out, as reported by the [ONS, Siegler, Njeru, and Thomas \(2015\)](#) people aged 45–54 reported the highest levels of loneliness of any age group, and the lowest figure for socialising. These figures reveal an ambiguous picture of midlife participation in night-time culture. These ambiguities are more explicable when recent research on the life course is brought into the picture.

3.2. Changes in the life course

As noted above, the normative model of ‘active ageing’ revolves around activities associated with good health, and while pubs and their role in fostering sociable networks for some people should not be ignored, it does not always sit easily alongside the normative model of nightlife, which is that youthful enthusiasm precedes midlife (and often assumed middle class and heteronormative) domesticity and stability. This framing, however, ignores how ageing is contoured by other identities – race, class, sexuality, ableism, or gender, for example – as well as variations in the ageing experience and the ‘web of social, cultural, and historical influences patterning beliefs, behaviour, and events’ ([Hendricks & Cutler, 2003](#), p. 107). Following [Green \(2017\)](#), ageing is not a stable category, or a fixed social practice, but is apt to change and vary according to individual experiences, its intersection with other identities, and, importantly, broader social, economic, and political changes.

Exploring these points in more detail, British consumers who are now midlife were witness to a considerable transformation in how nightlife was experienced, managed, and represented from the 1990s onwards. To illustrate this argument, in research conducted in the mid 2000s in five different towns and cities in England ([Eldridge & Roberts, 2008](#)) it was found that older women, particularly those over 60, avoided venturing into pubs or bars alone. However, borrowing from [Roberts \(2013\)](#), a question to be asked is to what extent such decisions owe to past experiences or to current contexts? Representations of and attitudes towards women’s drinking remain marked by contradictory discourses ([Brooks, 2008](#); [Bailey et al., 2015](#)) but we might speculate as to whether women (and which women) who participated in nightlife during its period of rapid expansion in the 1990s and the development of new types of venues such as the All Bar One chain carry the same stigmas or concerns about public drinking. Roberts suggests that continuity is ‘the strongest leisure tendency within as well as between life stages. People never start afresh, but always rebuild, when required to do so, with what they already know and have experienced’ (2013; 260). If Roberts’ claim

that leisure practices and behaviours do not change considerably over the life course rings true, what then happened to the UK generation that came of age and directly participated in Britain's expanding nightlife culture?

The assumption that midlife consumers are following a normative pattern of retreat into the domestic and private realm at night, and need to be coaxed back by policy intervention, needs to be tempered with reference to changing work and lifestyle patterns. Chrono-normative (Freeman, 2010) models which figure life as progressing through fixed points (graduation, marriage, children, retirement, death), ignore the extent to which a much more dynamic range of influences and experiences shape our passage through time in ways that make it unstable and unpredictable (Green, 2017). Emslie, Hunt, and Lyons's (2012, 2013, 2015) work in Scotland, and discussed in more detail below, clearly illustrates how divorce, (un)employment, re-marriage or the absence of children impacts on drinking practices of midlife consumers, choices which further fluctuate over time and according to context in ways that trouble any sense that there is a singular chronological way of participating in nightlife according to age. While not discounting how nightlife spaces can act to also constitute age and make one 'feel' older than other participants, Hendricks and Cutler (2003) explain that changing patterns of work, and the increase in more chaotic models of employment challenge the idea of midlife as either fixed, or a period of domestic or employment stability.

3.3. Midlife and social and cultural segmentation

Whether established patterns of consumption do or do not continue through the life course, the segmentation of nightlife by socio-cultural markers needs to be taken into account. Emslie, et al (2012, 2013, 2015), and Lyons et al. (2014), reporting on one of the few research projects to have specifically explored midlife public drinking, again establishes the point that bars and pubs serve an important role in maintaining friendship networks for midlife consumers. Based on 60 interviews conducted in Scotland with 30–50 year olds, their research takes a slightly younger cohort than of interest here, yet it also clearly demonstrates the elasticity of the lifecourse with various 'markers' of ageing, such as parenting reaching across the entire age range. Hickman's (2012) work is based on a study across England with 180 participants living in deprived neighbourhoods. Drawing on Oldenburg's (1999) notion of 'third places' (shops, cafes, pubs and community centres) he argues that such venues serve an important role for established and new residents to meet and mingle within their community. Hickman's research was specifically targeted towards a demographic at the lower end of the income scale and thereby shifts the focus from the economic to the social benefits of spaces for midlife consumers, thus challenging the otherwise economic focus of the diversity and midlife discourse. His work is further echoed in Hubbard's (2017) later discussion of Wetherspoons, purportedly the UK's largest pub chain. For the benefit of non-British readers, Wetherspoon's is a pub chain with over 900 premises that started in 1979 and is aimed at a mass consumer market providing low cost alcohol and food. While seen as a working class venue and, again, not typically taken up within the 'diversification' discourse, the chain is understood by Hubbard to serve an important role in facilitating sociability for an intergenerational clientele.

Calls to diversify nightlife often emphasise spaces where alcohol is not integral, however, such as museums, festivals and markets, (HoC 2003), reproducing in turn the sense of a more aspirational midlife consumer. The danger of promoting such solutions to diversify nightlife is that they could lead to new policies (Colomb, 2007) that, in effect, cancel out other forms of diversity as well as ignore venues which do provide the very diversity often seen as lacking in contemporary cities. Furthermore, as Kolioulis (2018) points out with regard to the Greater London Authority, such policy interventions ignore the impacts of gentrification, often resulting in further exclusions. Eck, et al. (2020) find a similar pattern where micro-management strategies in

Amsterdam have employed a "therapeutic" and aestheticized notion of diversity that fits the political goal to secure socio-economic development and security in [already] super-diverse contexts' (2020, 3311). In effect, a privileging of one form of urban diversity over others could unwittingly lead to the precise opposite. As noted by Haydock (2014), based on his ethnographic study of nightlife in Bournemouth, diversity shouldn't lead to social displacement or be used as a euphemism for other forms of social exclusion on the lines, in particular, of class.

4. Is a diversity of nightlife possible?

Thus far, it has been suggested that the picture of ageing, diversity and nightlife is slightly muddled by the erasure of some forms of diversity (social class in venues such as Wetherspoons) and a tendency to homogenise ageing cohorts. A deeper examination of diversity should, nonetheless, allow opportunities to define what it might mean, including the dimension of social class and, most importantly, to think about what a diverse nocturnal city might actually look like. Equally, it could mean challenging models attempting to diversify simply by 'adding' the desired age group. For example, Porto, in Portugal, has specifically called for more middle-class people over 40 to venture out into the night (Nofre, 2017). Similarly, in Australia, calls to diversify the night by the City of Sydney explicitly single out age. The government's Sydney 2030 strategy aims to ensure "40% of people using the city at night will be aged over 40" (CoS, 2013:20, cited in Wolifson & Drozdowski, 2017: 494).

Foregrounding the argument made here, this rhetoric of diversity and diversification has been deployed as not only an answer to youth and alcohol-focused nightlife, but also promotes the economic and reputational benefits that might be accrued through attracting an older clientele. A fixed and pre-determined understanding of diversity and ageing such as this might unwittingly fix and predetermine what both older consumers and diversity 'should' look like, ignoring the more dynamic ways that cities and consumers vary across time and space. Attempts to insert specific venues or demographics, or to set quantitative measurements of diversity erases the complexity of the urban and what it is that makes the night a unique optic for thinking about diversification. There is never a singular night operating but instead multiple 'scenes', distinct quarters, users and uses, and different and, most importantly, competing claims to space.

4.1. Towards a framework for future research

A shortcoming of some early literature on the 24 h city was to idealise Mediterranean café culture and imagine it could be transported to the UK (Degen, 2003). Attempts to simply insert specific spaces in the hope of attracting specific demographics not only presumes a fairly homogenous cohort, it obscures a more critical understanding of how different places, place identities, users and uses overlap and intersect. These observations suggest that future research needs to encompass both place and people, in order to understand the complexities of differentiation and the affordances offered by local environments (Townshend & Roberts, 2013; Wilkinson, 2018). An example of such detailed research is offered by Yeo et al. (2016)'s study of Tao Payoh Central, a mixed use neighbourhood in suburban Singapore, where they combined mixed methods social and urban design research to investigate intergenerational interactions in a specific geographic and historic context.

Nightlife in the west is for many people a fundamental part of their identity, desires, taste and distinction and is therefore constitutive of the very cultural segmentation (Measham & Hadfield 2009) we might be attempting to erase through diversification policies which focus only on one segmented understanding of identity, or that seek to achieve diversity through merely imposing specific venues. Creating diverse, inclusive and intergenerational spaces is important and laudable but we must account for how nightlife is a site through which ideas about who we are and our desires and tastes are realised. Current forms of

segmentation in nightlife are not based solely on age but instead reflect a broad range of different desires, economic factors, tastes, domestic and work schedules, and other forms of difference. The role of gentrification and deliberate attempts to shape or indeed ignore nightlife also need recognising. Too often the night is seen in blunt, ahistorical and apolitical terms which render it as simply a time for fun, transgression or escapism for all. Inserting new venues or specific demographics in the hope it will lead to more diverse cities, and economic benefits, elides the ways nightlife is always bound up with various performances of differentiation, and more complex questions about how these come to be lived and represented in urban centres.

5. Concluding thoughts

Recent policy calls to diversify nightlife have been addressed, especially in terms of how they interpellate the cohort of concern to this paper, midlife consumers. However, policies encouraging diversity on the basis of age downplay important questions about the assumptions upon which such calls might rest. Calls for diversification along the axes of age erase significant diversity within this cohort, depoliticise exactly who does and does not typically have access to urban centres, ignores the role of government in failing to fund such alternative venues, and assumes a fixed and chronological understanding of age and the ways it contours our desires and experiences of leisure at night. The problem we arrive at is that calls for diversification need a much greater evidence base, a robust understanding of the fluidity of the ageing experience, an awareness of how our experiences of the urban after dark become constituted through specific activities, and, as important, what is actually meant by diversity and diversification in the context of planning policy.

What is proposed here is a framework of understanding nightlife, ageing and diversity which does not only ignore questions of whose nightlife is typically marginalised and in fact makes it central. Policies designed to diversify nightlife along the axes of ageing must also remain attuned to life course theory and the question of how our engagement with nightlife is influenced by earlier experiences. Further evidence is required to understand first, what has happened to the cohort who grew up alongside the expansion of nightlife and who are now midlife? How their activities, aspirations and desires have been inflected through other attributes such as personal circumstances and other attributes of identity requires further examination. While critical work on leisure and constraint remains important, critiques of the ways it assumes leisure is always neutral and barriers can be overcome through policy tweaks or normative measurements has been equally criticised (Godbey et al., 2010). We also need to recognise that there was a significant proportion of midlife consumers who did not engage in the expansion of the night as it is now understood, and they too need further research. On this note, how nightlife changed in recent decades requires further research which acknowledges the precise changes that happened to nightlife, such as suburban pub closures and changes in nightclub formats, the urbanisation of nightlife venues, and the growth in casual dining. These, occurring over a period in line with the ageing of the now midlife demographic, have all changed the conditions and context for participation in urban centres after dark.

In policy terms, there is no simple solution to creating more diverse cities at night. Diversity remains an aspirational goal that has been pursued alongside the expansion of urban nightlife development. As the night remains largely about distinction, sometimes across age but more generally along the lines of identity, taste and desires, a diversification that will attract midlife consumers means unpacking what is meant by both 'diversification' and 'midlife', and a fine grain assessment of how different sectors could appeal to a wider base. Further nuanced research is needed to understand how these interact with the parameters of place and identity, and of spatial configuration, bringing together further research into the triad of people, place and activities.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Adam Eldridge: Conception and design of study, Conceptualization, acquisition of data, Formal analysis, Drafting the manuscript, revising the manuscript critically for important intellectual content, Approval of the version of the manuscript to be published. **Marion Roberts:** Conception and design of study, Conceptualization, acquisition of data, Formal analysis, Approval of the version of the manuscript to be published.

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