24x7 Cities: Recommendations for an India Playbook

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ABSTRACT In 2016, the Indian government cleared the Model Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Services) Act, allowing retail establishments to remain open throughout the day and night. Proponents say that when fully implemented, the act will drive nighttime economy and, in turn, increase cities' incomes. In the past few years, certain states have begun implementing such concept of "24x7 cities", including Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Indore. This brief outlines the idea of 24x7 cities, and explores the lessons that can be learnt from the experience of other countries. It offers a working framework for India's own 24x7 cities.

INTRODUCTION

The Model Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Services) Act 2015 was passed to permit eating joints, movie theatres, malls, and local markets with more than 10 employees to remain open round-the-clock.[1] The Act intended to level the playing field amongst offline and online retailers, and help generate employment opportunities for both men and women. It mandated that women workers be provided with safe transportation and even daycare services where necessary.[2] The law advised States to incorporate the act at their level and introduce a nighttime economy in their cities.

Since the law was passed, three states have initiated their respective plans for creating 24x7 cities: Maharashtra (Mumbai), Gujarat (Ahmedabad), and Madhya Pradesh (Indore). In Delhi, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had announced its aim to introduce the 24x7 concept if it got re-elected in 2020.[3] With its coming back to power following the February elections, Delhi too will get added to the list. Estimates show that nighttime economy will add six percent to the urban output in India, amounting to US$ 24 billion or an additional 0.8 percent of GDP. These projections are based on the contribution of India's top 10 cities to GDP, pegged at US$ 400 billion of US$ 3 trillion.[4]

In September 2017, the government of Maharashtra mooted a notification to declare Mumbai, India's financial capital, as the country's first city that will remain open round-the-clock. This was done through an amendment to the Maharashtra Shops and Establishment Act, 2017, allowing shops, restaurants, cinema halls, and businesses such as banks, medical establishments and tax consultancies to remain open throughout the night.[5] The government estimated that keeping the city open throughout the night could bring in an additional revenue of US$ 649 million annually to the state's coffers, with about three million foreign and 40 million domestic tourists visiting Mumbai annually.[6] As part of the initial plan drawn out by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), two pilot projects were identified – a compound of a shut-down mill at Lower Parel and a business district, the Bandra Kurla Complex.[7] However, the city police did not approve the plan.

The initiative was revived by the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government which took charge in December 2019,[8] under the leadership of current Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray, who was the first to propose the concept in 2015. Thackeray's proposal was to bring alive a few areas of Mumbai at night and declare them as "special entertainment zones".[9] In January 2020, Thackeray issued an order allowing restaurants, malls, multiplexes, and shopping plazas, falling within 'gated communities' or non-residential zones with security, CCTVs, and parking areas, to remain open round-the-clock beginning 27 January 2020. There is also a plan to set up 24x7 food courts across the city, which the government hopes will generate employment opportunities and open more business avenues.[10]

The government of Gujarat, for its part, notified the Act on 1 May 2019, the state's foundation day.[11] This followed the completion of a successful pilot project rolled out by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation

in January 2019 during the Amdavad Shopping Festival hosted under the "Vibrant Gujarat" tourism programme.[12]

Meanwhile, the Indore excise department, in December 2019 announced plans to allow hotels that have liquor licences FL3, for permit rooms, to keep bars open 24x7. The department is considering to allow this facility initially to a limited number of hotels (to be determined through either a draw of lots or an auction) in a particular area. The proposal will also call for charging additional licence fee from all those who apply for this facility.[13]

DRAWING LESSONS FROM PIONEERING CITIES

The concept of "24x7 cities" (or "nighttime cities") is hardly new, and is prevalent in over 30 cities[14] in developed countries across Europe, Asia and the United States. The idea is loosely defined as cities that work beyond working hours. The early bloomers include London, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Paris and New York, having incorporated the concept as part of their city planning, administration and city economy plans in the past several years.

If cities in India want to become 24x7, nocturnal cities, it will mean institutionalising a new system and machinery that will involve the civic administration, the police, and the people of the city.

In July 2005, then NCP home minister R.R. Patil (now deceased) ordered a ban on the dance bars in Mumbai on issues of morality. In 2012, the police took cognisance of "public nuisance" complaints against the pubs and discos in residential areas and conducted raids on these establishments. This completely brought the city nightlife to a naught.[15]

These examples make it necessary to address issues of law and order as a priority in laying out plans for nighttime cities. The other priorities should be boosting employment and commerce, providing entertainment and leisure, creating local partnerships, and improving mobility and infrastructure. The steps will include simplifying licensing processes, creating special posts for nighttime administration, strengthening the night transport system, and establishing rules for citizens' safety and security.

London

London is one of the global cities that first realised the benefits that can accrue from being a 24-hour city.

In May 2016, London launched night services for the city's underground train system (called the 'tube'). Since then, a 24-hour service has been running on the city's five metro lines, and today, there are trains every 10-20 minutes. The trains run alongside the existing night bus and taxi services. According to Transport for London (TfL), the government's transport body, the night tube has opened up London's nighttime economy to new opportunities, bringing benefits to theatres, live music venues, and restaurants. It contributes GBP 77 million a year to the city's income and supports 2,000 permanent jobs.[16]

The Mayor of London in 2016 appointed a 'Night Czar' and also set up a 'Night Time Commission' for the city. The Night Czar

brings together the local authorities, businesses, police, residents and workers to work towards the Night Vision,[a] which is hinged on creating a safe, yet economically and culturally vibrant city.[17] The Night Czar also embarks on 'Night Surgeries' – meeting people who work and live in the nighttime areas which include hospitals, shopping marts, restaurants and call centres. The role of the Night Time Commission is to seek the views of Londoners on policies and new initiatives to ensure that the community is involved in this endeavour.

To further engage with locals and create partnerships, London has also introduced the concept of 'Night Time Economy Borough Champions'. Authorities working in boroughs – in departments of planning, licensing, regeneration and culture – form the backbone of the night planning. The vision looks at working further on these partnerships and networks to help address challenges faced by both authorities and locals.

By 2017, the nighttime economy of London was pegged at GBP 26 billion (US$ 33 billion).[18] By then, too, one in eight jobs in the city was generated at night. Overall, the nighttime economy employed an additional 725,000 people,[19] both in the public and private sectors.

The biggest challenge for London's nighttime plan has been in policing. In 2016, the police and crime committee issued a report, "Policing the Night-time economy", expressing concerns about the pressures facing the police in securing the city in the nights. The report suggested changes in the licensing agreements, to bring in policing at the borough level, nationally identify what crimes should be reported as alcohol crimes, and record every crime that took place at night. In 2019, keeping in mind the demand for more police personnel, the Mayor of London announced the allocation of GBP 60 million (US $77 million) to fund 1,000 extra police officers.[20]

New York

In 2017, the New York Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment created the Office of Nightlife to serve as a contact point for the city's nightlife stakeholders – the industry, community, and city agencies. The office defines its goal thus: "to help ensure a more vibrant, viable, safe, fair, and well-managed nightlife environment in New York City." While the office is not a reporting or enforcement agency, it is tasked to promote safe spaces—including for minority and marginalised communities like the LGBTQ— as well as to protect grassroots cultural spaces, streamline red tape and regulations, and work with agencies to develop recommendations that help to ensure fair and proportionate enforcement of the nightlife plan.[21]

In the past few years, New York's nightlife industry has supported 299,000 jobs, disbursed US$ 13.1 billion in employees' salaries, and contributed US$ 35.1 billion in total economic output. This annual economic impact also yielded US$ 697 million in tax

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a   London's first ever night vision, London Mayor Website, accessed on February 29, 2020, https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/arts-and-culture/arts-and-culture-publications/londons-first-ever-24-hour-vision.

revenue for New York City.[22] A report commissioned by the Mayor of New York in 2018, 'NYC Nightlife economic impact report', noted that "there are more than 25,000 nightlife establishments contributing USD 697 million in local tax revenue. Nightlife-related jobs and wages are growing faster than the rest of the city's economy. Food service is the backbone of NYC's nightlife economy, responsible for the vast majority of jobs, employee compensation, and economic output".

Like London, NYC has a subway system that functions 24-hours a day and seven days a week, through all the five boroughs of New York.

The New York model divides nightlife into five categories of hospitality and entertainment: food service; bars; venues; arts and culture; and spectator sports and recreation. The office of nightlife is supported by a 14-member Nightlife Advisory Board.[23] The board is also charged with making independent recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on ways to improve regulations and policies that impact nightlife establishments.

One of the standout features of the New York model is the access provided to nightlife entrepreneurs through various city agencies that process applications and issue permits. A fully-functional webpage[24] gives them information and links to opening and operating nighttime establishments. It handholds entrepreneurs to set up businesses, understand compliance as well as workers' laws and rights, and make establishments accessible, inclusive, and clean.

However, several residential neighbourhoods that have pubs and bars around them, have complained about the high-decibel noise created by the people loitering outside their homes as well as the street litter. In 2019 this was addressed through the introduction of a pilot "Late-Night Quality of Life Improvement Plan", focusing on a specific area of the city that is home to more than 80 food and beverage establishments. The plan includes measures to reduce congestion, increase garbage pickups, and reduce noise levels.[25]

Amsterdam

Amsterdam was the first city to introduce the Night Mayor in 2012, a concept that would later be replicated by several other cities in different parts of the world. Amsterdam's Night Mayor, however, is not a person but an office, and it is run not by the municipal government but by an NGO that works with it, the Night Mayor Foundation.[26] The funds for running this office are shared equally by nightlife entrepreneurs and the city council.

The night mayor's roles include identifying locations for 24-hour licensing, as well as enabling the expansion of nightlife in a way that it does not become noisy and disproportionately concentrated in a single area. In the past five years, the office has helped secure 24-hour licences that allow clubs located away from residential areas to operate at any time; appointed social workers to maintain peace, especially in residential communities where nightclubs are located; and engaged in business improvement projects like improving signages and building lighting fixtures that have helped increase safety in the city.[27]

The 24-hour alcohol licences are extended to only 10 bars and clubs and these venues are not located in the city centre, but in older buildings that have been transformed into cultural spaces. The licences were also given on the basis of what other services the buildings could offer, with an emphasis on multidisciplinary venues featuring bars, galleries and co-working spaces, and the number of employees and security they had planned for.

In the entertainment districts, the Night Mayor concentrated on three main projects. The first was to look at city design – on how the city's public spaces, pavements, walkways, subways, and gardens were provided more lighting so that they are safer for people to walk at night. The second was to have 'square hosts' at different locations who help people who may not know their way or to de-escalate any tensions. The third was the launch of a simple mobile website where residents could complain to the first community officer in the neighbourhood, who would then facilitate further action.[28]

Sydney

Sydney is a fairly new entrant in the nightlife cities list globally. In 2018, Sydney started an extensive consultative process involving over 10,000 stakeholders in local communities.[29] Based on the consultations, the city started making changes in its urban planning and charted out a roadmap for nightlife activities. For one, a 24-hour city centre was established where most venues are allowed to function throughout the night up to 5 o'clock in the morning. This was followed by a proposal to increase the operations of the Sydney metro to 21 hours a day, a decision which is still awaiting implementation. Additionally, some new late-night trading areas were established in new fast-growing neighbourhoods, where the government determined the business timings based on their potential footfall. It also introduced a new category of trading hours for unlicenced shops, like bookstores and clothing shops, and businesses like gyms, drycleaners and hairdressers. This allowed them to trade up to 24 hours a day in the city centre and other busy inner-city areas, until two o' clock in the morning on village high streets, and until midnight in other areas.

An old heritage warehouse precinct in an industrial area was converted into a 24-hour trading area focusing on arts, culture and entertainment. The precinct's proximity to existing and future public transport services, and its distance from residential areas, has made it a unique spot for live performances. Today Sydney's night economy generates more than AUD 3.64 billion (US$ 2.37 billion) in revenue each year, with more than 4,600 businesses employing over 32,000 people.

Apart from consultations on where venues could be opened up for 24x7 nightlife, the 24-hour centre had also called for a public consultation on planning for a nighttime economy and late-night trading for Sydney. Suggestions included new approaches to manage noise pollution produced by entertainment activities by allowing only those with minimal noise, especially around residential areas that are occupied, as well as getting new residential developments to be more noise-resilient by design. A Nightlife Creative Sector and Advisory Panel was created to "advise the City on how they can

best work with industry, businesses and other government agencies to support a thriving, diverse and safe nightlife. It also advises on new initiatives, identifies emerging issues and opportunities for Sydney's night-time economy, and helps the City engage with local creative, cultural and nightlife communities."[30]

They have also launched a 'Safe Space' programme operated by the Salvation Army, the New South Wales Police, and the City council. These work in conjunction with licensed premise officers and city rangers in place to deal with noise complaints and conduct compliance checks on licensed premises in the entertainment areas.[31]

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIA'S 24x7 CITIES

More than 30 cities across the globe have incorporated nighttime city plans as an integral part of their urban frameworks, initiating experiments to convert their prime urban spaces into nocturnal areas. Most of them have formed an informal alliance through the night mayor's summits, the first one of which was held in Amsterdam in 2016.[32] The experiences of these global cities over the past several years offer lessons for India to consider as its own cities prepare to open up for nighttime life. The first lesson could be that there are four pillars for nighttime cities: the local government, the police, the business community, and the citizens.

The following paragraphs outline a plausible framework that India can follow in initiating plans for 24x7 cities.

1. Draw up city nighttime plans

Planning bodies are crucial to ensure that a healthy balance is maintained between the different uses of space, including residential, commercial and leisure. Spatial plans should include provisions for nightlife, incorporating specific regulations and construction measures that could help in managing the consequences of increasing nighttime economy, including ambient noise.

Largely, urban planning and design of cities is determined by the activities that take place during the day. Planning a city that is attractive, yet safe, is fundamental to the success of a nightlife plan. It is therefore important for a city government to build an inventory of its leisure assets and their importance to the community. Additionally, there will be a need to identify new spaces, re-imagine dead spaces that are important, as well as industrial and abandoned spaces for cultural regeneration.

Other crucial elements of a reinvigorated urban plan include increasing street lighting, building footpaths, creating better signages, and maintaining the structures and cleanliness of facades within the areas targeted for nighttime economies. The concept of multi-use of space, already proposed in the Mumbai Development Plan of 2014-34, for instance, could be incorporated by other cities too. Under this concept, school grounds are opened up for community sporting activities or cultural programmes during after-school hours. Likewise, city libraries can be used for public events during some nights.

Considering the issue of noise and disturbance in residential areas, entertainment zones could be identified which are far from

high-density residential areas yet well-connected through transportation networks. Issues of garbage disposal and littering are also crucial in developing plans for city nightlife. Rules need to be set to task business establishments with maintaining cleanliness in their areas, while special awareness is created so that people dispose of garbage properly. The number of well-maintained public toilets will also need to be increased.

2. Create a nightlife economic vision

An economic vision and strategy is central to the success of a nightlife plan. Indian cities need to first define what they mean by '24x7' cities. It is important to assess the current situation and the economic benefits of the leisure, tourism and other related industries such as healthcare and transportation. Estimates should be drawn up on how much nighttime commerce will contribute to the city's income.

The economic plan should be incorporated into the government's 'Ease of doing business' strategy and the process should be kept simple and seamless to attract new players for its execution. There could be a group of business people and entrepreneurs who will engage with the government and police by acting as representatives of the leisure industry.

3. Streamline licensing and regulations

The Model Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Services) Act 2015 needs to be further fleshed out from the viewpoint of easy and transparent licensing, preparing businesses and leisure establishments for such a change, and involving them in civic and security matters.

The number of licences to be obtained for establishing a business needs to be brought down, and there should be a single authority for obtaining these permits. Licensing should be least intrusive and not seen as a hindrance to entrepreneurial spirit. A website could be established to give step-by-step information on how to go about registering a business for nightlife.

At the same time, with business comes responsibility and the licences need to be linked with it. The licensing exercise must ensure prevention of crime, public nuisance, and public safety. Matters including staff, guards, and other security measures may be woven into the regulations both in the national and local licensing policies.

Different licences could be issued to different kinds of businesses and traders and time-restrictions could be applied according to zone. The approach cannot be singular, and instead consider differences between areas and business types.

4. Create a single authority to lead the nightlife plan, and a commission to support

It is crucial to have a nightlife champion to lead and coordinate the '24x7' plan for the city in the form of a night mayor or an authority (whether in an official or unofficial arrangement).

Such a person needs to be a highly effective individual who is organically linked with the city and who is driven to ensure that the plan is implemented by bringing all the different stakeholders together. The person in-charge becomes the central point for creating the

vision and driving it through different stakeholders. The champion becomes the coordinator with the civic government, the policing authority, businesses, service providers, mobility providers and the people and community. Without a central figure driving this concept, it is easy for the plan to fail as driving a night economy is a new concept and will face resistance, to begin with.

To ensure that this champion has the required support, there needs to be a panel or commission consisting of a team of local stakeholders including civic and police authorities, citizens, business people, leisure artists who chart out the vision and revisit the plans laid out in the vision. These could be honorary/voluntary positions, and the commission could meet at regular intervals to take decisions on important matters, and draw up action plans.

5. Maximise existing infrastructure

To support nightlife, a city will need to be ready with various contingency measures, including the police, fire-brigade, ambulances and medical services. The government could consider integrating the 24x7 city programme with disaster management centres, "war rooms" or Integrated City Command and Control Centres (ICCC)[33] that are being set up in all the 100 cities included in the Smart City Mission of India. These nerve centres will connect the different agencies and services, and serve as the central point for citizens' needs.

6. Enhance community participation

People's participation lies at the crux of a successful nocturnal city. Authorities must take the local communities into consideration while charting out their vision for a nighttime economy. The first steps should involve public meetings, and public drives to get citizens on-board. They should thereafter be involved in different ways that they can, such as implementing specific projects like putting up more street lights.

Changing perceptions of the nightlife economy, which is otherwise associated with generally frivolous activities, will need to be driven through public campaigns that will talk about safe communities and spaces. Citizens should be made partners in events like night markets, local square events, 24x7 libraries and museums, round-the-clock public parks, civic celebrations, and city festivals.

7. Strengthen police and security

In Mumbai, the police authorities had initially expressed reservations against the city's nightlife plan. This is understandable considering the already stretched policing resources.

Like London, or New York, the police needs to work with the nightlife commission/panel to list out its concerns with statistics and maps on incidents of violence, crime, sexual harassment, drunk driving, and nuisance in the city during the night. A geographical mapping juxtaposed with crime incident types and figures will help them understand the classification of the crimes and the possible reinforcing circumstances. This could help develop a crime protocol that will be followed by all stakeholders, especially the leisure industry. This should be reviewed periodically.

Second, the government should assess the economic and cultural benefits that a nightlife economy will bring to the city and divert funds to increasing the police strength and train them for this new exercise. Along with a regulatory system, voluntary campaigns done in partnership with different stakeholders could help the police in providing better security and safety. There could be street hosts, credits given to pubs which maintain protocol, the appointment of citizen marshals, and giving awards to leisure establishments that practice best behaviour.

8. Improve transportation and mobility

While city and economic planning, regulations and policing form one part of the nightlife plan, public transport and mobility of a city can prove to be a gamechanger. Public transport providers—including the trains, metro systems, buses, autorickshaws and taxis—will need to cooperate in implementing plans. If a 24x7 plan is to be inclusive, then providing round-the-clock safe public transport is crucial. This could be done through providing special night trains, metro, and bus services at certain intervals in the entertainment zones. Cab and rickshaw sharing schemes could also be useful.

9. Nurture nightlife beyond clubs

The nightlife plan of a city should be well-defined and provide a holistic strategy where other uses are equally matched with clubbing and entertainment. In cities like Mumbai, people travel for indefinite periods of time from their workplace to residences and they do not get down time. Getting supermarkets to function 24x7, having more 24x7 medical facilities, or keeping museums, libraries, theatres, bookstores, outdoor gyms and illuminated gardens open at night should be part of nightlife planning. These plans should aim at different users from different economic and social backgrounds. Citizens should be made aware that nightlife is not only about going to nightclubs, it is about being able to walk safely on a well-illuminated pavement at night to a local garden which has been set up for local cultural festivals or other community events and activities.

CONCLUSION

Cities can serve as powerhouses of the economy, and promoting nighttime activities should be viewed as a step ahead in urbanisation. It will increase employment, encourage tourism, push a city's creative and cultural industries, regenerate places that are forgotten and unused, and make cities safer and more dynamic.

However, this step cannot be taken in a haphazard way and pilot projects need to be carefully planned, and a framework drawn up in consultation with every stakeholder involved in the process. As suggested in this brief, there will need to be holistic urban and economic plans, security regulations, and licensing regulations drawn up before even considering a 24x7 plan.

Systems will need to be set up, and the first steps include appointing a night mayor/champion, setting up a panel/commission, improving public transport systems, getting local residents on-board, and partnering with the leisure industry. It is only after some initial success that a city can scale up.

Indian cities like Mumbai, Bangalore, New Delhi, Hyderabad, Indore and Ahmedabad are culturally young and vibrant. They can take a few bold steps to make the '24x7 city' dream come true in India. ⊚RF

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