



TRANSCRIPT

2018 Melbourne Insights

KEYNOTE: NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

Speaker Key:

- JG Jane Gazzo (host)
- SH Shane Homan, Associate Professor, Monash University
- AM Audience Member

JG Part two of Melbourne Insights. Thanks so much. I would like to welcome Dr Shane Homan, the associate professor at Monash University. He's going to give us the keynote speech for this morning: the state of Melbourne's night-time economy; the role of live music in the night-time economy; what makes Melbourne so different to the other Australian capitals in our night-time economy; the challenges faced as Melbourne is a global, 24-7 city. Please welcome Dr Shane Homan.

SH Thanks, Jane. Yes, I thought I'd go presidential fireside chat mode, if that's okay? Yes, thanks for the opportunity today to provide some thoughts on Melbourne's place within Australia's night-time economy. I don't want to hit you with a lot of stats about why Melbourne's nightlife is in broad good health, hopefully it'll be slightly more interesting than that; I want to dig into some of the reasons.

I'm drawing on 20 years as a cultural policy researcher, and particularly a music industry researcher. I did a Live Music Industry Report for the New South Wales government in 2003, which then led to some planning and licensing reform, and Dobe Newton and I did Victoria's first Music Strategy Report in 2010.

I should say too, in a previous life, I was a rock drummer with various bands from Sydney, and everyone always says, Shane, were you in anyone famous? And the answer is, sadly, no, I was in spectacularly mediocre rock bands in the '80s. But I did gain a historical perspective touring up and down the east coast a lot, about different city cultures and different nightlife strategies, going back to the '80s.

I should say too, my introduction to Melbourne was as a 12-year-old buying Skyhooks's first three albums from the age of 12, so I got a very weird, strange, prism of what Melbourne nightlife was like from those Skyhooks albums, Greg Macainsh's mind. So hearing songs about Toorak drug dealers, Balwyn housewives, wasn't the best... it was a strange introduction to Melbourne for someone who grew up in Sydney.

So I just really want to quickly look at Melbourne through the prism of night-time music consumption and production. Clinton Walker, a very famous music historian and journalist, once

said history is made at night, and I think that's quite true if you merge the consumption and production aspects of the night-time economy.

Firstly, Nick, the structured slides, slide two, let's talk structures. The Cain Government's decision to review the state's liquor laws in 1986, against very strong opposition it might be said, can't be underestimated. The subsequent Liquor Control Act of 1987 simplified and reduced the number of licence categories. It went from something like 29 liquor licences to seven. It freed up the times and places of consumption and, most importantly, encouraged a diversity in night-time activities.

I think of significance as well here is that it broke with the axiom that increased licences and drinking outlets simply automatically led to public order problems. It broke that binary, saying if we increase the number of outlets where you can drink, you automatically get a rise and a spike in drinking problems. So the Niewenhausen Report was actually very bold move, and I would argue put Melbourne at least a decade ahead of other Australian capital cities in that regard.

I think Melbourne, of course, also enjoys other historical advantages. By this, I'm referring to planning and space. I'm repeating a little bit of what was going on there in the design panel in some respects. So Melbourne's 1836 grid plan allowed for much later exploitation of the city's laneways from '85, to promote both the commercial and the quirky. So form and function, I think, meet in celebrating the smaller scale: the jazz laneway bar, the offbeat fashion shop.

In addition, the city enjoys a CBD geography that caters to an astonishing layering effect of night-time activity. So coming from Sydney, where people would say, yes, I'll meet you at the Rocks, I'll meet you at King's Cross, I'll meet you in Newtown, I think, just by historical happenstance, Melbourne's multi-layered grid system actually works quite well for it.

I think taken together, these combinations of structures, both spatial and regulatory, have given Melbourne an enormous head start in building foundations for rethinking what nightlife can be. If I can just go to a blast from the past in 2007, who can forget the Australian Hotels Association chief, the then AHA chief, John Thorpe, who stated, quote, "Melbourne is Melbourne; Sydney has a different outlook. We aren't barbarians but we don't want to sit in a hole and drink chardonnay and read a book". Well, Mr Thorpe, I think it seems most Australians now do.

I think buried in that statement as well is the attraction of the multiple diversity of activities on offer. Yes, eating and drinking might be a primary consideration, but other times these might take a back seat to other settings and activities. But these often overlap if the planning, licensing and building settings aren't right.

So Nick, slide three. Secondly, let's talk people. Immigration has re-emerged as a national topic, with the idea promoted by some politicians that Australia is, quote, full. However, Melbourne enjoys a significant student population of more than 100,000 students. Melbourne attracts more international students than any other capital city in Australia, and I think this is sometimes overlooked. It provides a density of night-time consumers, obviously, but also feeds back into cultural production in different ways, and we see that with music and fashion, for example.

Within popular music structures, Melbourne enjoys a sophisticated network of players, I'm thinking here musicians, very committed musicians, venue-owners, lawyers, academics committed to improving processes and practices. Again, this is something where Melbourne's more mature in this regard than other cities.

So while the state government might disagree at times, this ensemble actually improves the policy process. The best example of course is the SLAM organisation. SLAM stands for Save Live Australian Music. It was founded by Helen Marcou and Quincy McLean of Bakehouse Studios in Fitzroy.

Helen and Quincy not only created the SLAM Rally of 2010, which argued against licensing conditions which were affecting music venues at the time, I think SLAM is part of a wider ensemble which also includes Fair Go 5 Live Music, led by Jon Perring, and Music Victoria, led by Patrick Donovan.

This ensemble of actors, if you like, exists as an alternative policy engine to governments, so I think we're getting more sophisticated in those kinds of organisations coming together and doing their own research, presenting data to governments to say, this needs to be fixed, this needs to be done.

We can also simply say, too, I think that Melburnians display a great curiosity about exploring their own city, and are committed to supporting its creatives. So in art and music design, film, for example, there's a readiness to embrace the shock of the new, to borrow Robert Hughes's phrase.

Next slide, Nick. So finally, let's quickly talk challenges. In short, I think cities are incubators for creativity. Consider that, unlike other western nations, Australia does not currently have a national cultural policy, we haven't had one since the Gillard government, and that wasn't implemented because Julia didn't hang around long enough to implement it.

So clearly, I think city and state governments are picking up the slack here, around what should be an evidence-based cultural policy. Also, we're now aware we have endless construction of league tables: which city is more creative, which city is more cultural, which city has the most vibrant nightlife. I've come to the conclusion now, I think, that these are deeply unhelpful. Yes, they're trotted out by mayors, they're trotted out by counsellors, they're trotted out by state premiers when they're released: look where our city did compared to yours, nah nah nah nah.

But I think cities are increasingly sharing night-time economy ideas. One great example of recent times. Melbourne implemented the Agent of Change legislation to give some form of protection to venues against residents complaining about noise. It also went to the time of use, how long the venue had been going for.

London and Edinburgh are two great examples of cities which are now implementing their own Agent of Change laws. So I think there's a global supermarket of ideas now, which cities are taking off the shelf and retrofitting according to their own city conditions.

But I think as Melbourne grows, the commodification of nightlife will grow with it, to state the bleeding obvious. Scale, here, will not be a problem; I think encouraging the transgressive, the emergent, the different, the quirky is the challenge. The organic, the informal needs to be nurtured in terms of consumption and production.

Paul Kelly didn't begin his career playing mid-tier, mid-sized stadiums. As he put at the SLAM rally, Melbourne's smaller and grottier music venues were his university. So Melbourne leads in promoting a diversity of uses within a single streetscape, but are its building and licensing laws up to scratch in encouraging diversity of uses within a single venue?

Can we envisage, for example, as is happening increasingly in Europe, venues that can be a café, gallery, music venue, according to different times of day and night? The National Gallery of

Victoria night-time gigs points to one model for this. I think we also need to rethink what a venue is in this century, and have another look at how land use and zoning can support spaces and places that are pivotal to a particular cultural ecosystem.

And final slide, Nick. The sheer complexity of city night-time economies also calls for a rethink, organisationally. The idea of the Night-time Mayor, or the Night Tsar, who oversees planning, licensing, event permissions, policing and safety measures, has arrived. Its time has arrived.

So there are now Night Mayors or Night Tsars in cities as diverse as Amsterdam, London, Paris, Toulouse, Zurich, Berlin, New York. There are two advantages in this role, in being a one-stop shop across different forms and functions: retaining corporate and governmental memory, and as a useful conduit between night-time industries in the states. And we had a half-day last week, hosted by Creative Victoria, Music Victoria, looking at the night-time economy idea in relation to how a Night Mayor would fit in governmentally for Melbourne, perhaps.

And the final slide there, the Espy, to conclude, yes, other people have already mentioned this but I think it's important to note here the very well refurbished Esplanade Hotel. So final thought here: this venue is one of the very few that is National Trust-listed because of its night-time music uses. Australia is appallingly bad at using heritage law and heritage regulation to protect its cultural uses.

So often, venues, for example, attempt a back-door protection by saying it's because of its architectural heritage, but we are very poor, in comparison to the United States and Europe, when it comes to protecting something that was significant historically, culturally.

Of course, Esplanade is National Trust-listed because it dates back to its renown as a jazz and ballroom venue back to the 1920s. The Espy has had a wild regulatory ride. It came very close to being shut down a couple of times, it was shut down a couple of times, it came very close to being overlaid with apartments, but I think the Espy is a very good bricks-and-mortar reminder that vibrancy cannot be taken for granted but is continually constructed and reframed. I'll leave it there. Thanks.

JG Wow, lots of food for thought there. Dr Shane Homan. Has anyone got any questions for Shane, or would like him to expand on anything he's raised? Yes?

AM I'd just be interested, it was mentioned before, about how there's a lot of folks on the CBD, and the CBDs been thriving for a long time, but I'm interested in your opinion on how some other areas that perhaps should be thriving might be revitalised, and I'm thinking particularly of round the corner, Fitzroy Street, the top end of Chapel Street, Docklands, places like that.

SH Yes, that's a fantastic point in that often we disregard the suburbs; the suburbs can be just as creative as the inner city. And I think there's an issue there too with musicians who are saying, yes, we play in the CBD but we probably can't afford to live in the CBD, so musicians have to live elsewhere.

But going to your other point, I think, yes, St Kilda has lost some venues recently, there's no doubt that something needs to be done there. I think you need to come back to this ecosystem idea, that you need a diversity of scale. So for St Kilda, where are the smaller, quirkier venues that were lost in the last couple of years, for example, that need to be replaced, because musicians need to go... you need to have those three tiers of experience. If it's a pyramid system, then you need that bottom layer of venues. And I think that comes back to planning laws as well.

Places like Amsterdam has land-zoning use laws, for example, which say a certain quota, or a certain proportion, of land use should be for cultural use. So we're not obviously there in those kinds of regards yet, but I think Australia could actually investigate some of those, what would be seen as more extravagant, land use policies, for example.

JG

Yes, that's a great idea. Anyone else? Well, thank you, Shane, that's great. Thank you very much.