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Conflicts of Liveability in the 24-hour City: Learning from 48 Hours in the Life of London's Soho

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ABSTRACT *The 24-hour city has been put forward as the urbane solution to many of the problems of the central city. As a development from the 24-hour city concept, the expansion of the night-time economy has become a contentious issue in neighbourhoods with established or expanding residential populations. This pilot research project focused on a small area in Soho, London, to examine in depth, over 48 hours, the extent and nature of the problems associated with the night-time economy. The investigation employed video surveillance to observe and record such problems. **The study demonstrates that residents' complaints of unacceptable levels of noise, activity and waste can be substantiated.** By contrast, detailed police statistics do not support a picture of exceptional crime. The main outcome of this investigation is to suggest that mixed-use, late-night centres are viable but emphasizes that they require more careful regulation and management in order to achieve comfortable liveability. The video recording technique also has the potential to provide objective evidence at licensing hearings.*

Introduction

In central London the evening economy is a contentious issue. In this pilot project a detailed study was made of a small area in Soho over 48 hours to examine in depth the extent and nature of the problems associated with it. **Many feel that Soho is becoming a liminal zone (Zukin, 1993; Hobbs *et al.*, 2000), where people feel they can behave in ways that might be unacceptable in their own neighbourhoods.** It is feared that 24-hour licensing, which is now available in the UK, will exacerbate these problems (Open All Hours? Campaign, 2002). This study explored the concerns that some residents and businesses have about the night-time economy in central London, for which there is only anecdotal and journalistic evidence, with empirical facts, by employing video surveillance to observe and record such problems. **This conflict between the city centre as a place for leisure and entertainment on the one hand, and as a home for established communities on the other, raises key questions about the future form and management of cities.** A UK journalist has suggested that:

If Soho cannot balance city-centre living and late-night pleasure, then perhaps this mixture will ultimately fail in Britain too. From Leeds to

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Glasgow, councils have sought in recent years to regenerate their old and frayed urban cores by encouraging new flats and nightclubs. (Beckett, 2000, pp. 1–2)

Whilst it might be argued that Soho is unusual, in that it is at the centre of a world city, it should be noted that it has not always been an entertainment centre. The eastern part of Soho is composed mainly of Georgian houses dating from the 18th century, whilst its street layout originated in the 17th. Its fortunes have risen and fallen and the mix of uses has been subject to change. **Soho has always had a residential base and has hosted a number of different types of residential community** (Mort, 1995).

The eastern portion surrounding Old Compton Street, on which this study is focused, was a bohemian enclave in the 1950s, when many artists and writers lived there. In the 1960s the growth of the sex industry gave it a national notoriety (Mee, 1975). This set of uses declined due to the actions of the city council, the police and the residents. Soho was affected by planning blight in the 1970s due to redevelopment plans that were keenly fought by residents and later discarded. It became run down preceding the implementation of these plans and provided opportunities for residential accommodation and other commercial and industrial activities, such as the growth of film production companies around Wardour Street.

A mix of uses in the central city, and the encouragement of a night-time or evening leisure economy, have been enthusiastically promoted by urban theorists under the banner of the '24-hour city' concept (Bianchini, 1995; Montgomery, 1995). The central idea behind the concept, of extending the hours during which urban streets and public places are used, has also been promoted by urban designers as a means of ensuring the vitality and viability of urban areas (see, for example, Alcock *et al.*, 1988; Sherlock, 1991; Montgomery, 1998). This investigation of current conflicts in central London is preceded by a discussion of the 24-hour city concept in order to set the context in a framework of policy and ideas.

Background: The 24-hour City

The concept of the 24-hour city is derived from Jacobs's (1961) classic text, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jacobs's (1961) arguments against the mono-functional zoning of modernism and in favour of medium- to high-density mixed-use living found a particular resonance amongst urban theorists and designers in the late 1980s and 1990s. An influential study by the think-tank Comedia (1991) exposed the barren and intimidating nature of a representative sample of UK town centres at night. Comedia's researchers were also struck by other factors, such as changes in work patterns as exemplified by the growth in 24-hour call centres and strategies for cultural animation developed in mainland Europe. A conference held in 1993 (Lovatt *et al.*, 1994) coined the term '24-hour city' in its title. Papers at the conference set out arguments and evidence for the concept, which had the broad aim of revitalizing urban centres in the evening and into the night as well as during daylight hours.

Despite the founding conference adopting a critical stance towards the 24-hour city,¹ the idea proved popular amongst local authorities (Heath, 1997). A broad package of policies could come under the 24-hour city banner. These included physical improvements to the public realm, reintroducing residential

uses back into the centre, promoting festivals and evening entertainment, making centres safer at night through closed-circuit television (CCTV) schemes, encouraging evening and night-time entertainment uses and relaxing restrictions on alcohol licensing (Heath & Stickland, 1997). The policies were attractive because not only did they promise much-needed regeneration, but also their implementation was suited to a form of governance that favoured public-private partnerships between local councils and a mixture of stakeholders (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002). The public sector could offer improvements in the public realm and a relaxation of planning and licensing controls that permitted mixed development and the growth of entertainment uses.

The 24-hour city concept was applied to city centres that were suffering from decline brought about by economic restructuring in the 1980s and the recession that hit the UK in the early 1990s. Most typically this included former industrial cities such as Manchester, Cardiff and Leeds, but also drew in the West End of London, whose shops and small businesses had been adversely affected by the economic downturn and a decline in tourism (Westminster City Council, 1997). Policies of mixed-use, high-density living in major urban centres became accepted as mainstream (Urban Task Force, 1999; Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2000). In Manchester, for example, the residential population grew to 14 000 in 2002 from a low of 200 in the mid-1980s (Lovatt, 1997, cited in Hobbs *et al.*, 2003) and was projected to rise to 17 000 in 2003 (House of Commons, 2003a). Many are housed in warehouse conversions in now revitalized former industrial districts. Manchester became pre-eminent in the club and music scene to such an extent that its heyday of 1998–2000 has now become immortalized as ‘Madchester’ (Hobbs *et al.*, 2003). The West End of London, which had always hosted a significant residential population, also saw a growth in the number of permanent residents and an exponential increase in the number of bars and clubs throughout the West End neighbourhoods of Soho and Covent Garden.

By the millennium dissenting voices were heard to disrupt this narrative of success. They came from two different sources. On one side were residents groups, which had become alarmed that their neighbourhoods were attracting ever larger crowds and that, with a relaxation of licensing laws, these crowds were staying longer into the night. Residents complained of noise, social disorder and crime (Soho Society & Meard and Dean Streets Residents Association, no date; Central Westminster Police/Community Consultative Group, 1998; Civic Trust *et al.*, 2001; Open All Hours? Campaign, 2002). From a different perspective came academic researchers investigating youth cultures and door security (Lister *et al.*, 2000). Researchers charted the way in which the ownership of bars and clubs was changing (Chatterton & Hollands, 2001). They noted that, rather than having a mainland European structure of independent operators, the UK entertainment industry is dominated by large corporations. These corporations swiftly saw the potential of the expansion in the hospitality sector and invested heavily. Large venues, sometimes with a capacity of as much as 2000, directed at a youth market in the evening and at night for ‘vertical’ drinking accompanied by high-decibel music, moved in. As commercial rents rose, a dynamic was being created whereby corporately owned themed clubs and bars, whose most profitable activities were derived from selling alcohol to 18- to 35-year-olds, were driving out other types of commercial uses. Urban centres were being turned into ‘youthful playscapes’ (Chatterton & Hollands, 2001, 2003). Not only was this concentration of youthful

drinking impinging on residents' enjoyment of their neighbourhoods, but other researchers also brought forward evidence to suggest that it was depressing the desire of other social groups to go into provincial city centres at night (Bromley *et al.*, 2000).

Soho

In Soho the dilemma of living the urban renaissance was and is felt particularly acutely. The first 24-hour city conference had heard police evidence in 1993 that it was the first neighbourhood to operate successfully as a 24-hour area. Westminster City Council had adopted a relaxed attitude to public entertainment licensing and this had encouraged venues to open until 3 or 4 a.m. In 2003 there were 263 late-night licences in Soho. Since 1991 almost 9000 homes have been built in Westminster, of which over 2500 are in the city centre (House of Commons, 2003a). By 1997 residents felt that the noise and disruption had reached unacceptable levels and were granted leave in the High Court to take the council to judicial review.² Following this legal judgement, the council rapidly reviewed its policies and declared that Soho should be part of a West End Stress Area (Figure 1), in which no new permissions should be given or extended hours for liquor licences granted for restaurants, clubs and bars (Westminster City Council, 2001). This policy was tested in the courts by the entertainment operators and suffered condemnation in the press. Fears were expressed that London was in danger of being 'shut down' at night.³ An organization representing Westminster property owners also became concerned and commissioned its own research study that made claims that traffic congestion was a greater problem than issues associated with a proliferation of late-night entertainment uses (Travers, 2001).

Westminster City Council has also commissioned research on measuring the impact of entertainment uses (Town Centres Ltd, 2001; Elvins & Hadfield, 2003). These studies yielded valuable data on a variety of numerical measures that assess the strains on the public authority across the stress area as a whole. They incorporate crime statistics, overall noise measures, ambulance call-outs, refuse collection routines, parking restriction violations and other useful figures that

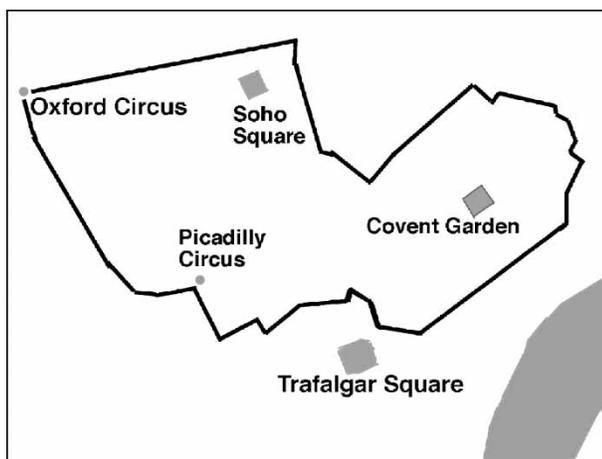


Figure 1. The West End (Soho and Covent Garden) Stress Area.

demonstrate the particular strain that public services are put under within this designated area. However, these studies do not address the texture and flavour of the experience that such a concentration of entertainment uses brings to residents, workers and visitors alike. The division of views between the acceptable limits on public behaviour and its intense concentration led to this particular study. The seriousness of complaints by local residents and businesses, as evidenced in their organization in funding and success in winning a judicial review, prompted the question: is the experience of 'living the urban renaissance' in Soho truly 'urbane'? Or is it, as Greed (1999) has suggested, a 'parody of urban life' that is inimical to the well-being of the city as a whole?

The present study was developed in order to examine this question in greater depth. Rather than looking at experiences of reportable events, such as ambulance call-outs, the study was intended to examine the issues that residents complained about, for example crowds, traffic, noise and low-level examples of anti-social behaviour, such as shouting and insensitive boisterousness. In particular the issues that were pertinent were whether the residents' complaints related to specific gangs or groups of people who were the cause of disturbance, or whether there were other, more general patterns of activity that were causing disruption. For these reasons, the detailed study of one micro area was chosen in order to assess how many people and vehicles were on the street, what they were doing and how they were behaving.

Methodology

Jacobs (1961, p. 44) documented life in her own street over the course of 24 hours:

The way to get at what goes on in the seemingly mysterious and perverse behavior of cities is, I think, to look closely, and with as little previous expectation as possible, at the most ordinary scenes and events, and attempt to see what they mean.

Differing degrees of social contact were built up by the continuous movement of her Greenwich Village neighbourhood, which she compares to an 'intricate street ballet' that 'eddies back and forth' ceaselessly in a series of different but continuous acts all day and night. This study sought to examine Jacobs's street theatre of contacts and flows by using film. In the 1960s researchers in the social sciences started using time-lapse photography to study human behaviour in the built environment and this project has taken a cue from this earlier work. William H. Whyte, who Jacobs (1961) claimed as her mentor, was a pioneer of such studies.⁴ Whyte (1988, p. 3) thought that, though in the "late 60s and early 70s the specter of crowding was a popular worry", the real problem of city centres was "too much empty space and too few people" (p. 3). By contrast, this investigation was interested in using Whyte's time-lapse research tool to examine a place that was crowded and experiencing pressures because it was perhaps too successful.

New developments in video technology facilitated filming at night, allowing a case-study area of 24 or 48 hours. Time-lapse video recording and a decibel count were used to collect a wide variety of data on pedestrian and vehicular activity on a portion of Old Compton Street. Old Compton Street was chosen as a suitable site because it has become, over the years, an 'entertainment zone' whilst simultaneously being celebrated as an example of a congenial and mixed-use

urban space. It also falls into Westminster City Council's designated West End Stress Area in its unitary development plan (Westminster City Council, 2001).

The organization Project for Public Spaces in New York still uses Super 8 filming in its continuation of Whyte's work (Whyte, 2001). For this study an analogue time-lapse video recorder (SVT-S168P) was used instead, which, when rigged up to a camera, can be set to record 12, 24, 48 or 72 hours of footage on a single tape. This equipment is sold to be used in conjunction with CCTV systems and the image can be slowed down to something approximating real time during playback for close analysis. In 2002, when the government announced 27 new London CCTV schemes, the West End was granted an additional £1.2 million to finance a state-of-the-art centre with 24 cameras and three round-the-clock operators (*Evening Standard*, 2000).⁵ Cummings (1997, p. 5) comments on CCTV's role "in the almost schizophrenic attempts of several cities to foster a vibrant 'night-time economy'". It would not have been possible to examine existing CCTV footage in this study for both practical and legal reasons. Most CCTV cameras owned by premises are trained on entrances and dark corners and do not record the street. The police CCTV system at West End Central is used to track suspicious elements in the crowd and cannot be made available for legal reasons. The data for this study were collected from two static cameras mounted so as to give wide-angled views of the street and later subjected to intense analysis, putting the material to different, sociological ends. The method was piloted just before Christmas 2001 with a 24-hour video. The street was subject to repair in the spring of 2002 and the final videotape was recorded over a summer weekend, from Friday 6 p.m. to Monday 5 a.m. in August 2002. The summer is a time when residents' complaints are at a peak, with a maximum volume of external disturbance.

Cameras were set up at two ends of the section of Old Compton Street selected for study (on the Frith Street and Greek Street intersections) (see Figures 2–4) and filmed from the upper storeys of two offices. In one of the offices the equipment was remote and could be left running unattended. Manual counts were taken from the footage, adapting the Project for Public Spaces' (2000) behaviour mapping data collection forms for the monitoring of pedestrians and vehicles. However, there are precedents that use video processing and computer vision techniques to do an automatic count. Sergio Velastin, of the Digital Imaging Research Centre at Kingston University, has developed a tool, Cromatica, for estimating pedestrian density in crowded areas. This was created to improve surveillance of passengers in public transport systems and uses hardware to pixilate the image and estimate how many people there are in the camera frame. When these reach dangerous levels an alarm sounds and the station can be closed to protect security. The focus of such equipment and the accompanying socio-psychological literature on crowd dynamics is on preventing and studying panic behaviour, which is a feature of crowd stampedes in life-threatening situations. For this study a manual count was preferred in order to assess other factors besides volume. The data were analysed with a different set of priorities, such as anti-social behaviour and people interaction, in addition to creating a detailed picture of volume and flow over a lengthy period. **Alongside the time-lapse film recording, a decibel count was recorded.** This provided an assessment of the peak times and intensity of any disturbances. Recordings were made at intervals of 10 seconds, which gave 55.54 hours of readings if the equipment was reset after 12 hours. In one of the locations recordings had to be set at an interval of



Figure 2. Camera angles (left, Kismet; right, Gorgeous). Crown Copyright/database right 2005. An Ordnance Survey/(Datacentre) supplied service.



Figure 3. Video still (Kismet), 7.40 p.m. Friday.

15 seconds because the equipment was too remote to reset it, and this yielded 41.65 hours of results.

Findings from the Video Surveillance Material

Researchers conducted a detailed count of the total number of individuals passing a certain point for a sample of 5 minutes, three times an hour, over the 48-hour period recorded (i.e. for 15 minutes of each hour, or 25% of the total time).⁶ The sex and approximate age of these individuals were estimated and the number of people walking alone, in couples or in groups was also noted. The volume of traffic was recorded and broken down by type: cars, cycles, vans and rickshaws. The occupancy levels of pavement cafés were also logged. These figures were then expressed as graphs over time so that the high and low points in the use of the street could be documented.



Figure 4. Video still (Gorgeous), 7.37 p.m. Friday.

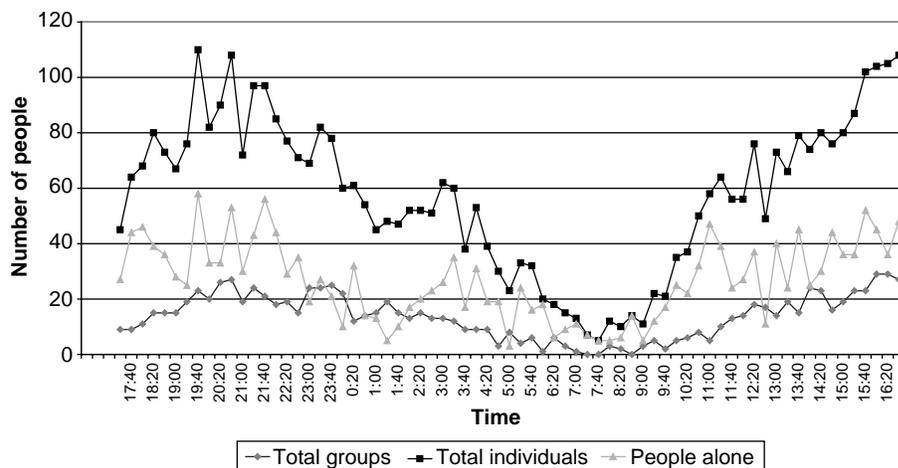


Figure 5. People in the study area over time.

As London's 'biographer' Peter Ackroyd suspected, Old Compton Street is never entirely empty at night (Ackroyd, 2000). From Figure 5 it can be seen that **there are roughly the same amount of people in Soho at midnight, and at 3 or 4 a.m., as there are at midday**. This large volume is the result of Soho's bars and cafés being largely geared towards sustaining a night-time economy. There has been a significant rise in late-night entertainment uses in the West End Stress Area and there has also been a change in the nature of these venues, with a move towards 'superpubs' and 'mega-restaurants'. **Whereas restaurants used to have 50–80 seats, some now have 200 or more, and pubs use all their available space for vertical drinking (Westminster City Council, 2001)**. In the West End, **between 1992 and 2002, there was 35% growth in food and drink (A3) uses, a loss of 350 retail units, a loss of 7% of office floor space and 35% growth in late-night capacity of entertainment uses.**⁷ A study notes that there has been 40% growth in liquor licences in the South Westminster area (Town Centres Ltd, 2001). In 2003 there were 2700 licensed premises, i.e. pubs, clubs, restaurants and bars, in the West End of London. This compares with an estimated 1500 in Amsterdam's city centre. This density of drinking establishments leads to high pedestrian densities on the street (see Figure 6 and Table 1).

Calculations from this video study using just one of the camera frames provides an estimate that between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. on Saturday night approximately **20 352 people walked through one corner of Old Compton Street**. It would be prudent to allow for the same people to be going and returning and therefore for this figure to be halved. **Nevertheless, this means that the residents in the flats above that corner, on a Saturday night in August, experienced on average 14 people, a number that equates to that of a football team, walking underneath their windows every minute throughout the evening and the night.**

In practice these numbers were not evenly distributed and there was a swelling of numbers around the closing times set for some premises (theatres, pubs, cafés and clubs), with larger numbers of groups seen wandering the street (Figure 7). There was a noticeable concentration of people walking in groups in the period after pub closure from 11 p.m. to 12.30 a.m., though in general groups tended to fracture into couples, which made up a much larger category.



Figure 6. Density of drinking establishments (shaded). Map base assembled from: © Crown Copyright/database right 2005. An Ordnance Survey/(Datacentre) supplied service.

Despite the wide range of cultural experiences on offer in the evening—the theatre capacity of the West End is 39 600 and the cinema capacity is 14 700 (Town Centres Ltd, 2001)—Soho's late-night economy mainly appeals to 18- to 35-year-olds. Although the video material did not permit facial recognition, judgements made by observing clothing and posture suggested that most of Soho's users almost exclusively fitted into that age range (Figure 8).

This seems to be a significantly larger proportion than that quoted in the London Tourist Board's own figures; it found that 50% of night-time visitors to the West End were in the 16–34 age group, though this category only made up 36% of the total visits by tourists to the area. The clubs that attract them finish at 3 or 4 a.m., which accounts for the large exodus at that point. In 1999, 149 premises held music and dance licences, an increase of almost 70% since 1995. This has trebled capacity from 33 418 to 127 860, which is 73% of the total capacity for the City of Westminster as a whole (Town Centres Ltd, 2001). However, public transport to remove such large numbers from the area is limited to night buses after 12.30 a.m. and crowds were seen to mill about until the underground opened at 5 a.m.

Table 1. List of public entertainment and night café premises (Old Compton Street)

Licence type Hours (beyond 11 p.m.)	Premises name	Cap	Premises address
Public entertainment <i>Monday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–12 a.m.</i>	Lab Bar	193	12 Old Compton Street
Public entertainment <i>Monday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–3 a.m.</i>	Soho House	560	13–17 Old Compton Street
Public entertainment <i>Monday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–5 a.m.</i>	Café Boheme	225	13–17 Old Compton Street
Public entertainment <i>Monday–Thursday: 11 p.m.–1 a.m.</i> <i>Friday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–3 a.m.</i> <i>Sunday: 11 p.m.–12.30 a.m.</i>	Bar Soho	300	23–25 Old Compton Street
Night café <i>Thursday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–1 a.m.</i>	Dukes Bar	20	27 Old Compton Street
Public entertainment <i>Monday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–midnight</i>	Manto	310	30 Old Compton Street
Night café <i>Sunday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–2 a.m.</i>	Express	20	33 Old Compton Street
Night café <i>Sunday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–5 a.m.</i>	Old Compton (The)	40	34 Old Compton Street
Night café <i>Sunday–Wednesday: 11 p.m.–1 a.m.</i> <i>Thursday: 11 p.m.–2 a.m.</i> <i>Friday & Saturday: 11 p.m.–5 a.m.</i>	La Creperie	10	34B Old Compton Street
Night café <i>Sunday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–4 a.m.</i>	Pizzeria Pulcinella	50	37 Old Compton Street
Night café <i>Monday–Thursday: 11 p.m.–1 a.m.</i> <i>Friday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–2 a.m.</i> <i>Sunday: 11 p.m.–midnight</i>	Maoz Falafel	42	43 Old Compton Street
Public entertainment <i>Monday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–1 a.m.</i> <i>Sunday: 11 p.m.–12 a.m.</i>	Dome (The)	100	55–59 Old Compton Street
Public entertainment <i>Sunday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–3 a.m.</i>	Balans	75	60 Old Compton Street
Night café <i>Tuesday–Saturday: 3 a.m.–5 a.m.</i> <i>Sunday: 11.30 p.m.–5 a.m.</i>	Balans	75	60 Old Compton Street
Public entertainment <i>Sunday–Saturday: 11 p.m.–12 a.m.</i>	Prince Edward Theatre		Old Compton Street

Numbers only start to drop off after 6 a.m., and Soho’s quiet hour is between 7 and 8 a.m. (Figures 5, 8 and 9).

Though obviously estimating people’s age and sex is hard from film footage, there was a dominance of men in the area (Figure 10). Soho’s reputation as the UK’s most famous red light district goes back to the 19th century, and it became known as the ‘sleazy square mile’ after the Second World War. By the 1950s, Mort (1995, p. 576) explains, “what predominated were rituals of masculine excess which had their origins in the 19th-century aristocratic culture of London’s west end. They were frequently centered on disruptive rituals of consumption”. Soho also became a famously homosexual quarter. Old Compton Street was the venue for Soho’s ‘Queer Valentine Carnival’ in 1993, when the activist Peter Tatchell conducted a ceremony in which Old Compton Street was renamed ‘Queer



Figure 7. Crowds leaving the theatre, 11.12 p.m. Thursday.

Street'. The dominance of men is easily explained by the concentration of gay bars that are open late on Old Compton Street.

On Old Compton Street there is a predominance of night cafés (Table 1 and Figure 11). Over 60 premises in Soho hold night café licences, which permit

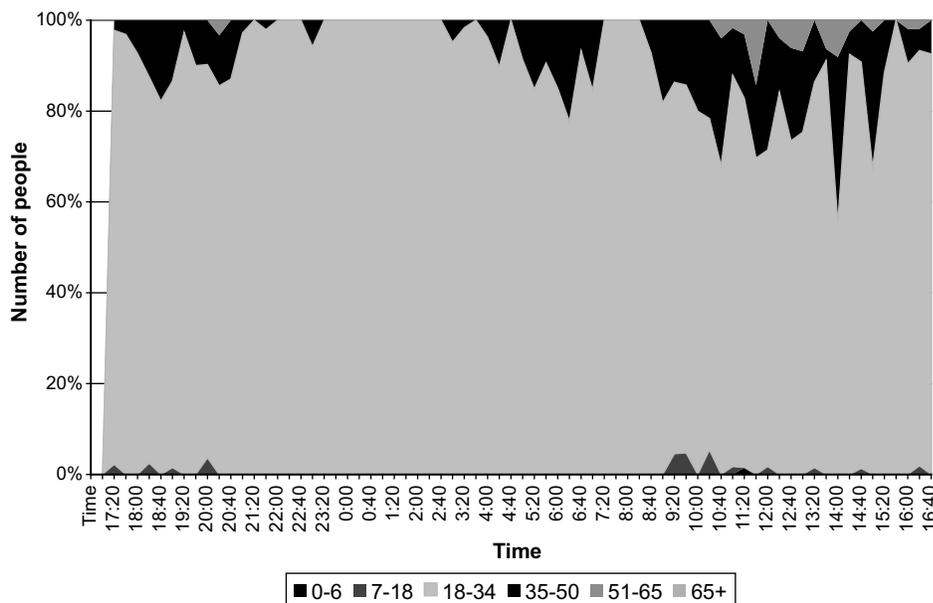


Figure 8. Numbers of people by age over time (Kismet).

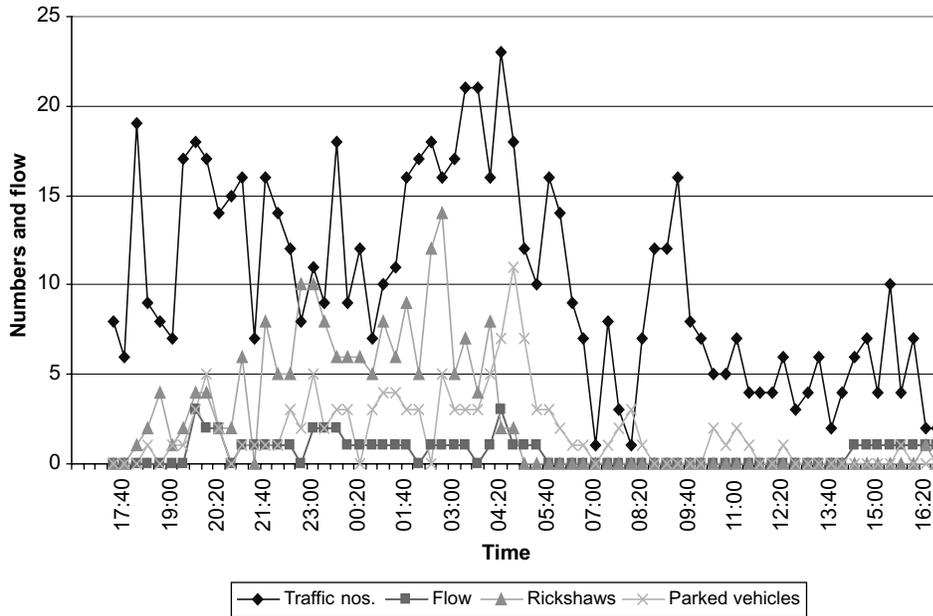


Figure 9. Numbers of vehicles and traffic flow over time.

opening beyond 11 p.m., an increase of 39% since 1995 (night cafés have a total capacity of 7000 in the West End). One of the cafés filmed stayed open until 5 a.m., and it is these premises that keep people in the area after the bars and pubs close. Pavement cafés are fully occupied until 12 a.m. and are busy until 5 a.m., with a 50% occupancy rate at intervals between midnight and 4 a.m. They close at 5 a.m., resuming business at 8 a.m. In the 1980s, when the area became gentrified with the influx of media companies, the area was marketed as having a continental air and there was a trend for a continental café culture and alfresco drinking and dining: “Much of the new Soho raised Parisian models of urban behaviour. But the overall effect was not simply a continental pastiche, rather a distinctly English reading of Gallic culture” (Mort, 1995, p. 577). Owners have installed gas heating

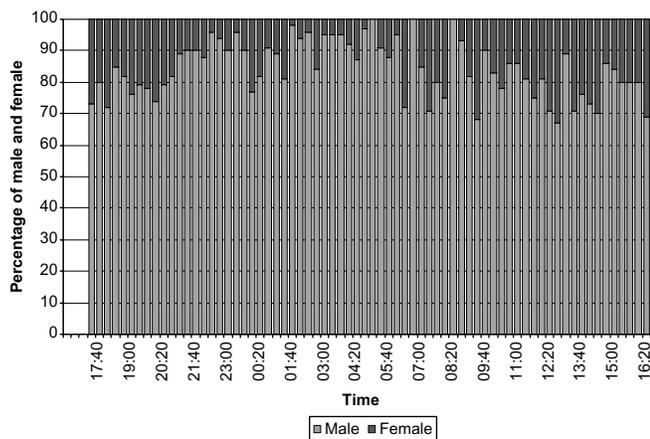


Figure 10. Percentage of males and females over time.

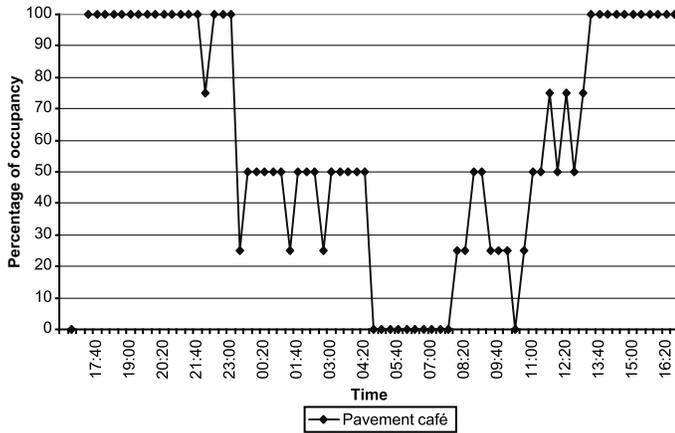


Figure 11. Percentage of occupancy at the pavement café.

‘mushrooms’ so that people can sit out in the English weather. The footage showed that tables and chairs were not brought in at 11 p.m., contrary to regulations. There is a perpetual negotiation of space as cafés push the strict limits of the pavement (marked with a grey line) allowed them by official regulations and there are ‘alfresco wars’ between cafés and the council as it exercises its right to confiscate tables and chairs less than 1.8 metres from the kerb or those out after the allowed hour.⁸ Montgomery (1997) suggests that in 1993 the council even contemplated banning pavement cafés in Old Compton Street.

Traffic is at its most intense in the early hours of the morning from 3 to 5 a.m. Traffic numbers peak in a 24-hour period just before 5 a.m. (Figure 9). This is due to the late-night transport problem. Illegal minicabs also cruise the streets looking for a fare and there were four taxi ranks nearby (only one of which was licensed in 2002) which also touted for trade from people leaving premises. Deliveries and services also concentrate their activities in the early hours, presumably for ease of access, though the streets are most congested at around 4 and 5 a.m. ‘Close of business’ refuse collections are made between 2 and 4 a.m. Deliveries also arrive in the early morning and many white vans were seen to be unloading then.



Figure 12. Police tape off street after shooting incident, 5.51 a.m. Monday.

Rickshaws are also a nocturnal phenomenon, serving the area until 4 or 5 a.m.; they cause significant disruption to traffic and park in rows along the kerb, forcing pedestrians out into the street. **Their popularity, peaking at 5 a.m., is largely due to the desperate lack of public transport in the area after 12 p.m.**

The video footage recorded evidence of anti-social behaviour. During trials a street fight was filmed which erupted outside a late-night café at 5.30 a.m. on a Sunday. In the 48-hour study period the workings of drug dealers were captured on video, working their patch from a street corner, going off with clients to secure drugs, exchanging money openly on the street and operating until dawn. This suggests that drugs are as important a factor in Soho's problems as alcohol. A clash between rival drug lords led to an armed struggle and a shooting incident. The tape ended with the Metropolitan Police closing off the street for a forensic team to comb it for evidence and the tape was taken as evidence as part of the Metropolitan Police's Operation Trident programme aimed at combating armed crime (see Figure 12).

For the year 2000–01 the total number of offences in Soho was 11 167, compared to 3825 in Covent Garden and 5116 in Leicester Square (Town Centres Ltd, 2001). **Of street crime in Westminster 40% occurs in the Soho/West End area, although this is only 4% of the land area.**⁹ As well as being a stress area Soho has also been called a Street Crime Hotspot by the Metropolitan Police (this area stretches from Charing Cross Road to Regent Street and from Brewer and Peter Street to just north of Trafalgar Square). In summer 2002, the Metropolitan Police planned 3 weeks of intensified policing, at a cost of £80 000 in overtime (normally it complains of a shortage of officers on the beat in Soho; it has been quoted (Civic Trust *et al.*, 2001) that **the number of officers available at night in the West End is as low as 13**). In Operation Upright, as the scheme was known, extra police officers would control micro-beats **to see how much crime there was in Soho and to find out whether a higher police presence would alleviate it.** During the period Operation Upright was running (10–30 June 2002) there were 242 arrests, which works out at 16 per day the scheme was in operation, and there were 1018 '5090s' (stop and searches), an average of 68 a day.¹⁰

Perception of crime is often as much of a problem as crime itself. Some of the streets' residents who were interviewed on a random basis for this project complained of feeling unsafe in their locality, and of drunk young men going around in the middle of the night shouting and keeping them awake and urinating (even defecating) and vomiting outside people's houses:

I walked home on Sunday from Charing Cross, it was only 8.30 p.m., but I felt unsafe because of the crowds of very drunk people, wholly unaware of the space around them and totally uncaring of other people's space—shouting and screaming. I found it threatening. Police warnings of muggings by cash machines; a scene of squalor, degradation and dirt. People, late at night, just pee and vomit all over the place. Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights are the worst. The West End at night is a pretty squalid place, just horrible.¹¹

One police officer, also interviewed in the context of another research project, talked of the "sense of being in danger" caused by the beggars, drug addicts, people who have had too much to drink, the disturbance and the sheer numbers of people in nocturnal Soho. Another described **how she observed that after 1 or 2 a.m. the area seemed to become a much more threatening environment:**

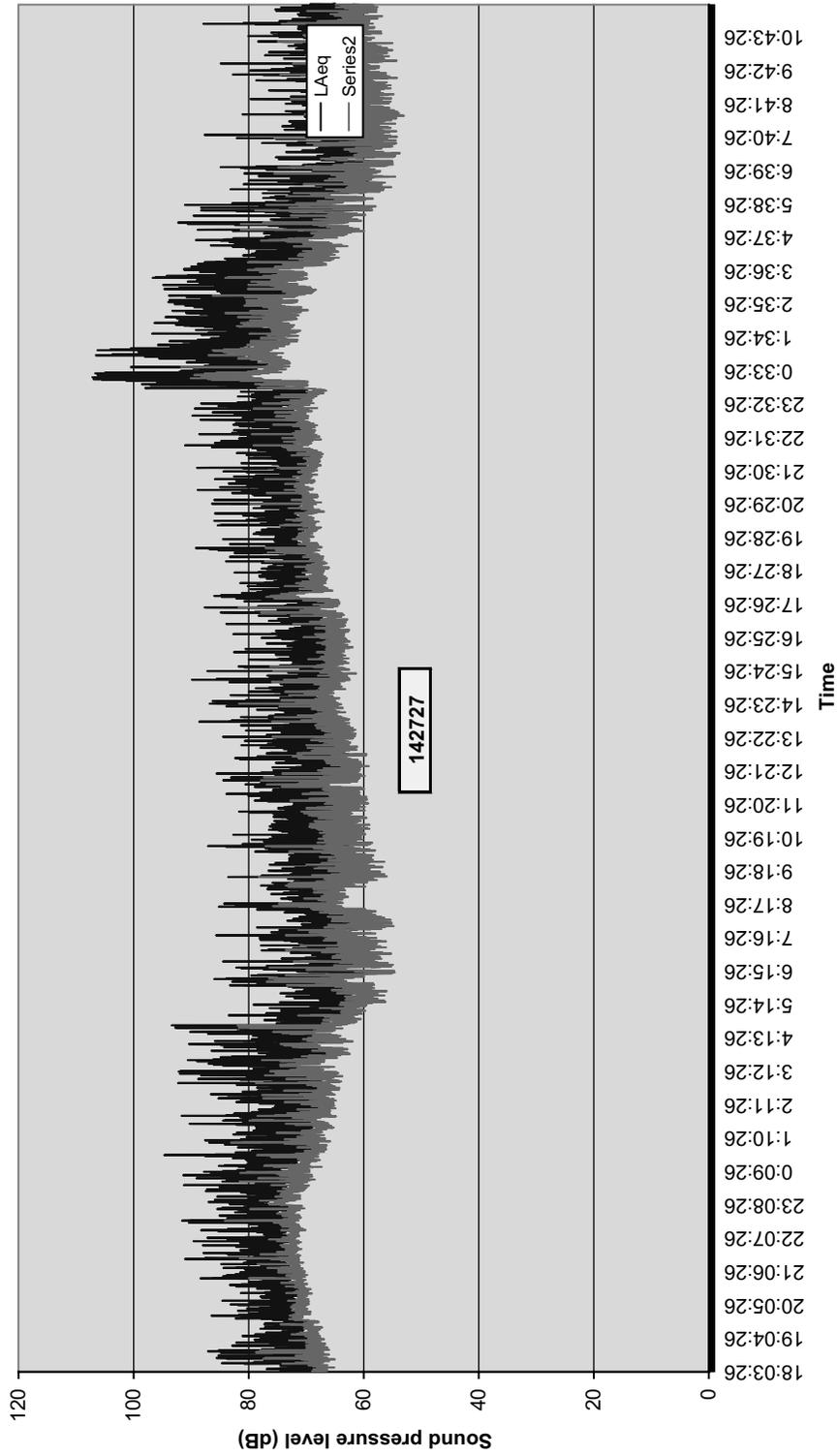


Figure 13. Decibel count (Friday, Saturday and Sunday Morning).

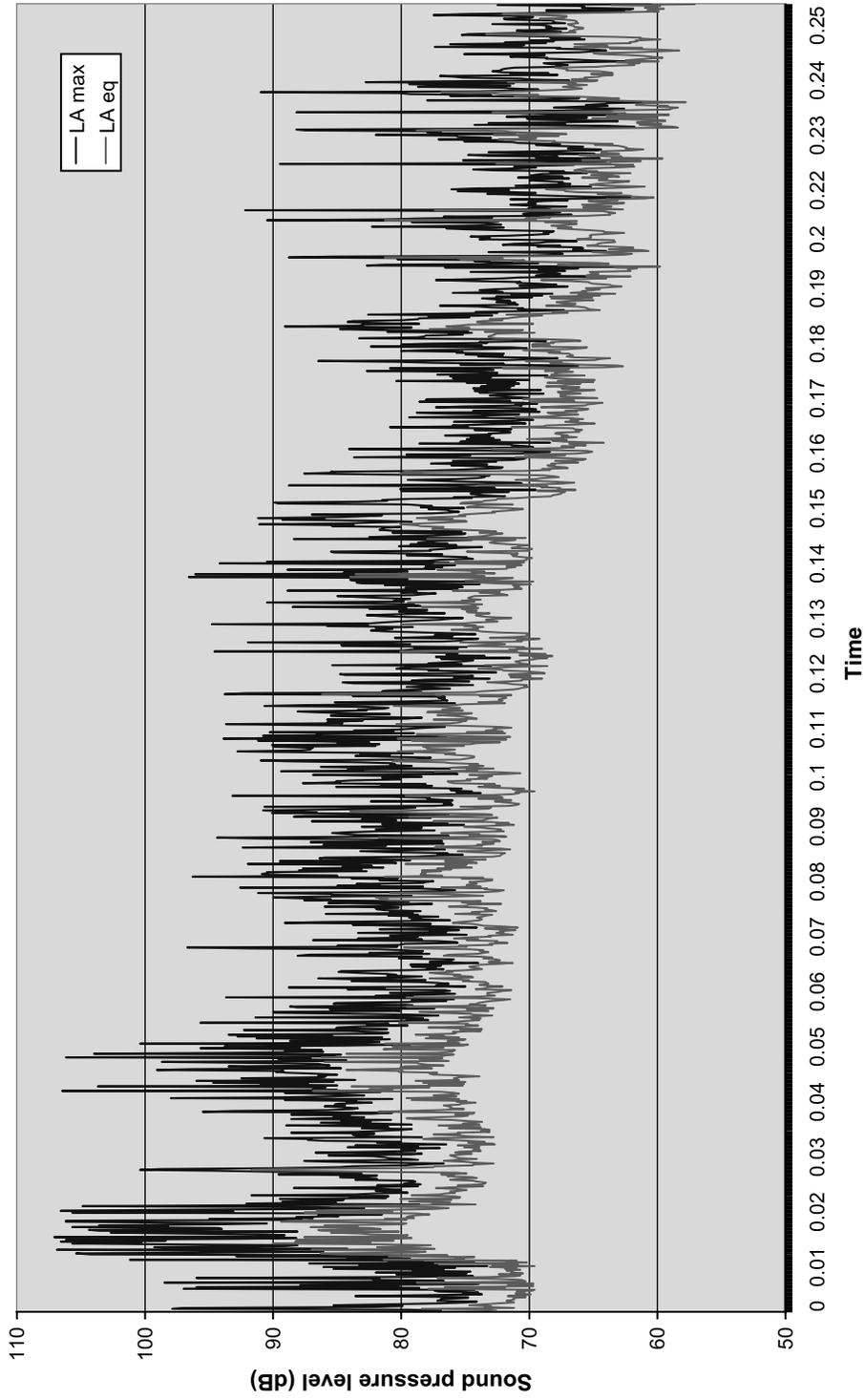


Figure 14. Detail of decibel count (Saturday (11.48 p.m.) to Sunday (6.13 a.m.)).

People wander around spaced out, disorientated, not knowing how to get home. This appears quite threatening when there are 1000 people wandering around in that condition.¹²

The study found noise levels in Soho to be consistently high at night, and significantly louder than they are by day (see Figure 13, which covers a 48-hour period). The decibel count shows that peak levels of noise appear after 11 p.m., so closely correlate with pub closing. This peaks again after 2 a.m. From 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. the sound pressure level is consistently high. Indeed, much of the noise reaches levels over 90 dB, which is the level to which noise limiters are set in clubs (set at 85–90 dB).¹³ On the Brüel and Kjaer scale this volume of noise lies somewhere in between the noise of a heavy truck and a pneumatic chipper. In one locality 107 dB was recorded, which is 3 dB short of the noise made by a pop group. This was caused by the queues outside bars that had their windows open to the street, as they were inadequately ventilated when accommodating large numbers. The noise levels recorded were much worse on a Saturday rather than a Friday night (see Figure 14, which is an expansion of the Saturday night period of Figure 13). This contradicts Travers's (2001) survey, in which residents claim that Friday nights are the worst in terms of noise. As part of their obligations to a European Union noise directive, Westminster City Council has conducted a decibel count of the area to define problem zones, but no readings were taken on the Saturday night, a time which this study found to be significantly worse than the Friday evening. Travers (2001) found that residents thought the worst time for noise to be between midnight and 3 a.m.: 83% said noise was a problem at those times.

A further observation made from the decibel counts is that intermittent disturbances jump out from a generally quieter period between 3 and 7 a.m., which must cause disturbance to residents (39% thought noise in that period was a problem). It must be noted that environmental health legislation does not cover noise emanating from the street if it comes from traffic or people talking or shouting. The Noise Act 1996 and the Environmental Protection Act 1990 relate to noise from equipment, such as music. Environmental health officers are powerless to prevent the sort of disturbances that occur in Soho save for regulating the noise of entertainment systems emanating from pubs, restaurants and clubs. This study found that noise derived from groups of people wandering through or loitering on the street, from deliveries and services, from queues outside cafés and bars and from car horns. It was not derived from the actions of a small number of excessively anti-social individuals but came from large numbers of people going about the business of having a good time. The council acknowledge in the unitary development plan that:

These communities are now under threat from the levels of noise and disturbance arising from music, large numbers of people leaving premises late at night and taxis, for example, and minicabs revving their engines and sounding their horns as customers are picked up. (Westminster City Council, 2001, Article 8.7, p. 315)

It also notes that the increase in the number of residents living in the West End in recent years "has added to the potential for conflict". Westminster City Council received 7700 complaints about noise in 1992, which almost doubled

to 15 200 complaints in 1998. It received over 4000 complaints about noise in 1999 in the West End alone and complaints about noise in the borough as a whole increased by 400% between 1995 and 2000 (Westminster City Council, 2000).

Implications of the Study

The video surveillance methods were effective in measuring the flow and pressures created by large crowds of people in a confined space. The time-lapse recording captured a wide range of data which could be carefully scrutinized during playback, and which would almost certainly have been missed by even the most experienced observer. Not only was the technology practical and easy to set up, but also it could be left running unattended and it was possible to collect detailed data which successfully illustrated some of the pressures that the central city is under at night.

The video technique successfully provides evidence for the degrading impact of large numbers of people present in the late hours of the night and the early hours of the morning. The noise figures alone demonstrated that the residents' complaints of disturbance could be upheld. This noise and disturbance did not come from people behaving in an excessively boisterous manner, running and shouting in large groups. Rather, the impact of large numbers of people, traffic, refuse vehicles and other features of living, but at exceptional hours, was demonstrated to accumulate to a level that is detrimental to ordinary definitions of residential amenity.

The term that has been used to describe this effect in planning policy is 'cumulative effect'. Cumulative effect or impact is a concept used to describe the collective impact of a number of licensed venues within a small area in UK national planning guidance (Department of the Environment, 1996). Whilst it is a concept that has been given statutory force, its role in liquor licensing legislation is hotly contested.¹⁴ This debate was pursued in Parliament with the passage of the Licensing Act 2003.¹⁵ The video clips graphically illustrate the contrast between the 'continental ambience' of a relaxed café society desired by urban theorists (Tiesdell & Oc, 1998) and the 'Ibiza' style of 'pleasure space' actually experienced. Current UK planning policy suggests that local authorities should decide whether their town centres should have specialized entertainment zones, or whether a mixed-use policy should be pursued throughout (ODPM, 2004).

Furthermore, the video evidence demonstrates that the impacts of cumulative effect are not solely concerned with issues of crime and disorder. For the most part of the footage the evidence is actually straightforwardly about the impacts of excessive numbers of people in a confined physical space. Although there was some evidence of anti-social behaviour, it was relatively unobtrusive. Residential amenity was more disturbed by the noise levels and the traffic jams.

Revisiting the 24-hour City

There are also wider implications to be drawn from the study. These results clearly suggest that the 24-hour city concept, as it has developed in the UK, needs to be modified. To complete this study several academics who had been enthusiastic supporters of the 24-hour city concept in the late 1980s and early 1990s were contacted. All had spoken at the Manchester conference on the 24-hour city in 1993. They now, unanimously, held reservations about the 24-hour city concept

and the ways in which it has been implemented in this country. John Montgomery, for example, believed in 1993 that the 24-hour city was the answer to revitalizing the city centre:

It seemed a great idea [he remembers], and I certainly had visions of elegant café society, of British people strolling about civilized streets as the Italians do... It was as though the evening economy was some sort of magic wand which would solve the problems of town centres, but of course this proved not to be the case.¹⁶

Montgomery thinks that residential areas should be protected from late-night uses and believes that councils should pursue a proactive planning policy, with strict rules as to where late-night activity should be allowed and with tough regulations to ensure the late-night economy is better managed. Justin O'Connor, like Montgomery, believes that cultural factors in the UK have led to a very narrow interpretation of what the 24-hour city might be. In continental Europe he thinks it has a much wider connotation (referring to "the relationship between time, the state and the citizen in the 21st century"), but here it seems to just refer to matters of licensing. He comments that "The whole issue of a diverse and high quality provision of different leisure, entertainment and cultural services outside the 9 a.m.–5 a.m. period has been missed".¹⁷ Ken Worpole also believes that European countries, especially Italy, have a more sophisticated approach to 'time planning'.¹⁸ He regrets that the 24-hour city in this country only caters for commercial rather than social needs:

The 24-hour city concept, which started out as a project to extend cultural democracy, is in danger of ending up as a means of extending the commercialization of urban areas across 24 hours rather than 12. We have yet to see the 24-hour library or the 24-hour study centre, let alone the 24-hour railway or bus station. So the project ends up being targeted at those with money, principally the young and other groups with disposable income. (Worpole, 1999, pp. xxvi–xxvii)

Some have argued that residents should move if they do not like the pressures of life in the West End (an option, as Worpole would point out, not available to those in social housing within the area). Travers (2001, p. 34), for example, has played down the West End's problems:

There can be no easy solution to the problems of an area where residents and night-life co-exist. Residents have a vote. Their views will inevitably weigh importantly with local politicians. But there are trade-offs to be made by people who live in the centre of a very large city. The 'convenience' cited by many residents as the key reason for living in the area would not exist if a heavy concentration of commercial and residential businesses did not operate in Soho and Covent Garden.

Although much of the contemporary debate focuses on licensing, this pilot project suggests that the presence of other entertainment uses, such as all-night cafés, also forms part of the problem of 'saturation'. This suggests that in order for the 'continental ideal' of a mixed-use city centre, as conjectured by Montgomery, to exist, much more sophisticated planning controls need to be in place. On mainland Europe, for example, it is possible for local plans to specify the proportions of different types of uses in particular narrowly defined areas.

Contrary to commonly held opinion, planning laws in, for example, Germany, prevent nightclubs from being located in mixed-use areas with a substantial residential population. Furthermore, stricter environmental protection controls, that are actually enforced, oblige café owners in cities such as Copenhagen and Barcelona to remove their tables and chairs from the public pavement at agreed hours (Central Cities Institute, 2002). It is the presence of these types of controls that assists in the creation of the 'continental ambience' that was originally admired by the protagonists for the 24-hour city. This brief discussion has highlighted the need for more fine-tuned controls over mixed-use areas in order to avoid excessive noise and conflicts. Whether such controls are possible within current UK planning and environmental regulations would form the subject of a further study.

It would seem therefore that if UK city centres are not to revert to a series of defined zones, of which entertainment would be but one, more refined arrangements for mixed-use living and working environments need to be championed. The 24-hour city concept has been subverted in the UK and the term is no longer expressive of its original intention. Nevertheless, the idea of a mixed-use area that includes housing and that is vibrant for 18 hours of the day still has currency. This project has demonstrated its popularity in the number of people who wish to visit Soho, day and night. Rather than giving up on the idea of mixed-use living because of current difficulties about preventing the concentration of licensed premises, a modified version of the original idea should be championed instead. Perhaps the term the 'renaissance city' would more accurately describe the desired state. This study has helped to demonstrate that the current UK version of the 24-hour city, with its excess of alcohol-related nighttime activity, is probably not a desirable urban philosophy for the 21st century. Further, it suggests that more investigation and experimentation need to take place to achieve the fulfilment of the original concept, within the context of UK urban centres.

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Notes

1. The title of the conference had a question mark against it. Andy Lovatt has confirmed that the intention of the conference was critical.
2. Interview with David Bieda, Meard and Dean Street Residents Association.
3. "Perhaps this famously swinging city could swing for 24 hour a day, not come to a juddering halt, in all but a few exceptional places, one hour earlier than Cinderella's bedtime" (Moore, 2000).
4. One of Whyte's undergraduate students—who described himself as 'the Clauswitz of retail'—set up a company in 1979 used Whyte's time-lapse techniques to pioneer the study of consumer behaviour in supermarkets.
5. This has been boosted following the government's recent announcement of a further £79 million investment in CCTV (*Guardian*, 2001).
6. Aliis Kodis should be thanked for this painstaking work.
7. Talk by Simon Milton, leader, Westminster City Council, to Government Office for London's 'Late night London: responding to change' seminar held on 6 June 2003 in City Hall.

8. See *Evening Standard* news items, 6 March 1998, 21 July 1999.
9. See Westminster City Council (2003).
10. Arrests broke down into the following categories (%): street crime, 4; assault, 7; theft, 14; wanted on warrant, 7; loitering, 9; drug possession, 19; drugs supply, 2; offensive weapons, 3; other, 35.
11. Interview with president, Soho Society.
12. Note of meeting with assistant commissioner Metropolitan Police, accompanying officers and M. Roberts, C. Turner, S. Greenfield and G. Osborne, University of Westminster, February 2002.
13. Interview with environmental health officer, Westminster City Council.
14. The concept of 'need' for a licensed premise within a locality has been abandoned. Currently, impacts have to be related to particular establishments.
15. See House of Lords debates, Hansard, 24 February 2003 (230224-18).
16. Interview with John Montgomery.
17. Interview with Justin O'Connor, 17 November 2002.
18. Interview with Ken Worpole, 19 November 2002.

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