

Written by: Mirik Milan,  
Jane Slings and Dayle Bennett

# The Lockdown Effect

Our cities are experiencing rapid change due to the lockdown effect. Covid-19 continues to redefine Australia's urban environments and challenge the needs of the population. Australia's night-time economy sector has borne the brunt of the pandemic's impact and has effectively been shut down by the recurring lockdowns. Considered a diverse and emerging growth sector, the nation's night-time economy sector is now facing a raft of immense challenges. The impact

of Covid-19 and the lockdowns has reached a critical point and has the potential to leave lasting effects on our cities, communities and night-time economy as a whole.

We are now forced to rethink the nature of the night-time economy, particularly in how it will shape the next generation of creatives, activate vacant spaces and celebrate unique places in a post-lockdown world.

## Education and Talent Development

One of the biggest risks playing out in real time is the loss of skills and talent in the creative industries. A recent [I Lost My Gig survey](#) found that 60% of respondents have recently looked for work in other industries. Education and talent development must be prioritised just as much as providing relief and rescue packages to artistic institutions and venues. Of course we need to ensure that our current cultural spaces are protected, but these homes for creativity are pointless without the talent to bring these spaces to life.

2020 and 2021 have resulted in missed educational opportunities for a generation of children and young people seeking to learn and practice in a creative industry. Whilst we have seen many educators pivot to digital, online learning translates only so far. There are many aspects of learning that don't translate digitally. For example, students of classical instruments, DJing, electronic music instruments, lighting/stage design, and music production require physical spaces, equipment and collaborators to develop their craft,

skills and practice their art. While many were happy to pivot to online learning during the lockdowns of 2020, creative educators have expressed a diminished appetite for online learning during the lockdowns of 2021. Zoom fatigue is real, as evidenced in Professor Jeremy Bailenson's article [Technology, Mind and Behaviour](#).

Lockdowns also limit exposure to creativity in practice and remove the opportunity for greater learning and exploration of art, performance and creative skills at work. Visiting exhibitions, attending live performances, internships and practical workshops are critical to deeply inspiring young and emerging talent, capacity building and professional development.

Without a focus on talent development now, there is a significant risk that in four to five years there will be no next generation of talent to keep the wheels of our creative industries turning. If resourced, creative industry workers with decades of expertise could work with young and emerging talent. A creative industries

Studio 301, Sydney - Image courtesy of Studio 301 ... Video crew at Create or Die Warehouse, Marrickville 2020 - Image by and courtesy of Adam Scarf ... Mirra live at Create or Die Warehouse, Marrickville 2020 - Image by and courtesy of Adam Scarf



apprenticeship, of sorts. This could provide much needed employment to thousands of established professionals in the creative industries, preserve and pass on the legacy of their skills and experience, and be a significant contribution to developing the talent of the next generation.

### Real Estate and Repurposing Space

Bricks and mortar retail is experiencing intense disruption with lockdowns accelerating the shift to online shopping. [CBRE's 2021 Asia Pacific Retail Market Outlook for Australia](#) found that physical retail space required per capita is shrinking, with department stores forecast to decline the most. [KPMG's Retail Outlook 2021](#) further highlights the dramatic shift to e-commerce with 42% of retailers finding that their e-commerce revenue significantly increased. 70% of respondents chose to invest more in digital business due to Covid-19 and move away from physical (bricks and mortar) retail. This coupled with the forced closure of non-essential retail during lockdowns has resulted in the demise of many businesses and increased

vacancies of shopfronts, shopping centres and high streets.

Despite the dramatic shift to online retail, the sector is restructuring. For example the 'International Council of Shopping Centres' renamed itself to '[Innovating Commerce Serving Communities](#)', in an effort to rebrand its image from 'consumption' to 'innovation and communities'. Another solution being adopted here and in London is '[Meanwhile Use](#)', a concept that utilises an empty site for a duration of time before it is turned into a more permanent end state. We are seeing the repurposing of empty spaces across Australia to benefit the creative industries, public health needs and social causes. The [Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences](#) launched its [NSW Creative Industries Residency Program](#) in 2019. The program provides subsidised space to 19 residents at Ultimo's Powerhouse Museum from multiple disciplines including architecture, fashion, film, music and visual art. The former David Jones building in the Wollongong CBD is currently being used as a [mass vaccination](#)



Coles Building, Fortitude Valley 1957 - Image courtesy of State Library of Victoria ... Lollie live at BIGLOVE dance party, Coles building 1994 - image courtesy of Jeff Polley (Rebel Media) ... Fortitude Music Hall Exterior 2020 - Image by Stephen K Lightart courtesy of Fortitude Music Hall

centre for the Illawarra Shoalhaven LGA. Prior to the pandemic, Melbourne's [Space2B](#) started with two pop-ups, before securing a permanent shopfront and gallery in St Kilda that provides a hub for 50 local artists, refugees and newly arrived migrant designers.

As [Arup](#) highlights in [Meanwhile Use](#), long term benefit, repurposing vacant spaces enables place-making and creates cultural clusters which entice investors, visitors and new residents. We can think of meanwhile use through the lens of pop-ups, or as a vehicle for longer and more secure use. Brisbane's largest inner city live music venue is a prime example of meanwhile-to-permanent use. Once a mid-century Coles store, following its closure in the early '90s it was used temporarily as a space for large scale dance parties before eventually opening as the 3,000 capacity, [Live Nation](#) backed [Fortitude Music Hall](#) in 2019. Meanwhile-to-permanent to use is a long lasting investment in area development and liveability for generations to come.

## Localised Night-time Economy

Australia was quick to close international borders at the start of the pandemic, and has maintained its strong stance to limit travel in and out of the country. The halt on international travel and recurring state border closures has led to an increase in domestic tourism with many Australians turning inwards to rediscover destinations within their own backyards. For example Canberra showcases its biggest attractions at night as part of its 'Attractions After Dark' events during its 17-day [Enlighten Festival](#). Liverpool City Council recently hosted a pop-up event series called ['Love Live Nights'](#) moving to a new laneway for each event to showcase the city's unique streetscapes and partner with local restaurants, cafes and bars. [NightQuarter](#) has established itself as a family-friendly festival every weekend on the Sunshine Coast, bringing an ever changing roster of street food, night markets and live performances. An entertainment hub built into shipping containers it offers a unique blend of local food, community and culture. The idea of being a tourist in your own town and capturing the essence of



Enlighten Festival Canberra - Image courtesy of Photox, Canberra Photography Services ... Dodgems at NightQuarter - Image courtesy of NightQuarter ... Live music performance at NightQuarter - Image courtesy of NightQuarter

a place will be vital to restoring vibrancy and activity in our cities.

Lockdown has reinforced the working-from-home and flexible working arrangements established at the start of the pandemic and has led to an increase in remote working opportunities allowing workers to consider relocating away from capital cities to regional areas. This provides an opportunity to create localised night-time economies that showcase the unique character and aspects of a place. Diversifying offerings in regional and suburban centres beyond the typical 9 to 5 will assist with attracting increased business and increasing the overall amenity and liveability in these places.

### **Where do we go from here?**

VibeLab is seeking to create pathways for cities to reopen their nightlife during-and-post Covid. We believe that a healthy, independent nighttime culture shapes the identity of a city, and more importantly it's best done through collaboration.

VibeLab has published a seven chapter Global Nighttime Recovery Plan together with 120 scholars, industry professionals and night mayors from around the world as a roadmap for cities re-opening their nightlife during -and post- COVID. We invite everyone to join our collective effort of making the Global Nighttime Manifesto, a symbol of our dedication to imagining and fostering a safer, more equitable and sustainable nighttime.

**Get in touch  
with us at  
hello@vibe-lab.org**

