

**Who owns the night?**

**The right to night spaces for the youth in Caracas, Venezuela**

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*“And nothing has substituted the Night, because it was the main area of voluntary risk, of the pleasure of the unknown. And its epitaph is the television turned on until dawn”*

Monsiváis, 1999: p. 63

*“It is the random interaction that gives a city its sense of excitement. Remove it carelessly and much of what makes a city work will be lost”*

Kreitzman, 1999: p. 149.

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## **Executive Summary**

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### **Who owns the night?**

#### **The right to night spaces for the youth in Caracas, Venezuela**

Most academic literature advocates a vision of the night as a negative space where transgressive behaviour is exacerbated. As a result, night-time policies presume the need to restrict social behaviour as a precondition to restore and maintain order during this time frame.

Collective experiences in Europe and Latin America demonstrate the opposite: night spaces can be a positive scenario for social interaction and the consolidation of trust within a society. In contexts where the night is highly fragmented and polarized, the need for positive night-time policies becomes evident as a means to generate norms of reciprocity and reduce social exclusion.

This is the case of Caracas, a city where only those who 'own' the night have access to its spaces, but where a positive night-time policy has been able to generate broader access to the nocturnal by providing a way for the youth to reclaim their right to the city.

*Key words: Night studies, Latin America, Caracas, positive night-time policies, youth, trust, the right to the city.*

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

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## **1.1 Background**

Most academic literature concerning night spaces – predominantly of British or North American origin – advocates a vision of the night as a negative space where crime and other transgressive behaviour is exacerbated. The night, as opposed to the day, requires a specific set of restrictive policies to regulate this behaviour, mostly associated to increased policing and surveillance.

Several experiences around the world demonstrate the opposite vision: the night can be a positive space, an opportunity for social interaction and civic engagement. However, most literature that accounts for this vision refers to the economic value of the night-time – or night-time economies – for the commercial development of urban areas. Its positive social potential is rarely emphasized.

In Latin America there are examples of how the night can become a friendly environment in which citizens coexist in private and public spaces. Although some academic work accounts for the value of these positive experiences, it is mainly focused on its physical dimension, on the way the night is associated with the use of public space. To the date, none of these studies address the positive social dimension of the night, or the way public policies can be implemented to enhance social outcomes during this time frame, particularly, to build trust among the youngest of a society.

Young men and women not only are the main perpetrators of violence, but also its main victims. As a result, the ‘youth bulge’ could increase the current levels of violence in urban centres (UNPFA, 2007: p. 26). This is particularly true in Latin America, a region that holds some of the most violent cities in the world.

Notions of trust and social capital have been widely associated to positive effects such as crime reduction and the development of networks of solidarity. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), “Investing in urban children and youth, helping to integrate themselves fully into society, is a matter of human rights and social justice. It is also the key to releasing potential economic benefits and ensuring urban security” (UNPFA, 2007: p. 27).

Hence, designing social policies that broaden opportunities for social interaction and engagement among the youngest of society can be a valuable mechanism for local and regional governments to promote trust within their population. The night as a space where codes of conduct are loose and social identities are born is an ideal scenario to build networks of reciprocity and recognition. In some cases, cultural interventions have been the vehicle to promote such opportunities in Latin American cities.

Nonetheless, this is not an easy task in a region where high criminality and violence generate a negative vision of the night, and the configuration of night spaces often favours social exclusion. This is the case of Caracas, a city where only those who “own” the night have access to its spaces.

In the ‘murder capital of the world’ (Foreign Policy, 2008), going out at night has become a challenge rather than a leisure activity. Under these circumstances the most affected are the youngest of the population, victims of a night that is becoming increasingly smaller. In Caracas, the existing social and political polarisation reduces the interaction among members of diverse sectors of society. Each sector “owns” its separate spaces, allowing little mobility or coexistence. As a result, the right to freely engage in night-time activities is severely restricted.

This study will explore the impact of the ‘reterritorialisation’ of the night – process of reconfiguration of night spaces (Williams, 2008) – over the feelings of mistrust,

resentment and fear that characterize the relationships between young men and women in the city of Caracas. The aim of this work is to analyse the capacity that local governments have to transform these relationships by providing broader access to spaces where the barriers of otherness can be significantly reduced.

## **1.2 Research question and objectives**

By analysing a local case study in Caracas, Venezuela this work aims to demonstrate the validity of the following assumption:

*Broader access to night spaces can contribute to develop trust among the youngest of a society.*

Considering the relevance of night spaces for the creation of youth values and identities, the present work will focus on studying the capacity of *positive night-time policies* to reshape social interactions during this time frame and strengthen the levels of trust among the youngest of the population.

## **1.3 Relevance of the topic**

From the perspective of social policy, a study of the night is concerned with the social implications of night-time regulations. An analysis of such implications is useful to determine whether those regulations – both normative and intrinsic – generate opportunities and access to night spaces, or whether they reinforce patterns of social exclusion and injustice.

Considering the research question at hand, this work will draw concepts related to the social significance of the night, particularly to its emotional dimension. Such dimension is associated to the perceptions and ideas attributed to this time frame and its implications for social behaviour and policy.

By analysing such implications, the present study seeks to explore the capacity of night spaces to facilitate coexistence and recognition among diverse sectors of society. Moreover, by illustrating how positive interventions can provide greater access to night spaces particularly for the youth, this work will add value to the field of night studies by demonstrating the need of positive policies to govern this specific timeframe.

Considering the scantiness of research that addresses the social meaning of the night in Latin America, this work will also expand the academic knowledge that exists about this field in the region.

The present study acquires particular relevance in the context of Caracas. On one hand, elements such as violence, insecurity and socio-political polarisation accentuate the lack of social interaction. On the other, the privatization of spaces and the lack of political will to 'humanise' the city calls for the need to devise social policies that generate night spaces for the youth, in order to develop relationships based in trust instead of resentment and fear.

#### **1.4 Research methodology**

The study is based on a conceptual framework drawn from the social dimension of night studies. Such framework is the outcome of a revision of books, articles, press reports and internet-based materials on the subject.

Due to the novelty of this field of study in Venezuela, this work required primary research to compensate for the scarcity of secondary sources. Such research contemplated a series of personal interviews to experts in social sciences, as well as government officials and civil servants responsible for the implementation of relevant public policies. All subjects who are quoted in this study agreed to collaborate as life sources before participating in on-the-record interviews.

Aside from the literature reviewed for this study, the nature of the methodology is interpretive in the sense that it seeks to understand the meaning of the night from the subjective standpoint of the people involved. Bearing in mind the nature of the research question, a qualitative approach is valuable to gain an understanding of the social behaviour of young *Caraqueños* during the night time, as well as to assess the causes of such behaviour and its implications for policy design and implementation.

Aware of the limitations of the methodology, the outcome of the present study cannot be generalised to other cities with a different demographic configuration. Nonetheless, the analyses of its policy implications as well as additions made to the theoretical framework constitute relevant contributions to the field of night studies in Venezuela and Latin America.

### **1.5 Structure of research paper**

The first chapter of this research paper will introduce the topic at hand, present the research question and objectives, and provide detailed information of methods.

The second chapter will summarize the main theoretical contributions around the subject of the night, particularly those that address its social significance. Additionally, it will summarize the main theoretical contributions around this subject in Latin America. Finally, aware that the literature fails to consider a positive reconfiguration of night spaces, this work will introduce two new concepts to the framework of night studies: *'the right to night spaces'* and *'positive night-time policies'*.

The third chapter will provide conceptual references and testimonies that describe the night in Caracas, in order to contextualise the analysis of a case

study: *Por el Medio de la Calle (PEMDLC)*, a local urban art festival and an example of a positive night-time policy in Caracas, Venezuela.

The fourth chapter will analyse the broader policy implications of promoting the right to night spaces in Caracas and in other cities in Latin America. Finally, it will offer recommendations for further review within the field of night studies and other social policy research.

## ***2. LITERATURE REVIEW***

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### **2.3 Night studies**

The night, as a referential notion of time and space has been addressed scantily in social research, especially in urban studies. One of its earliest mentions in social research was Henri Lefebvre's notion of 'night spaces', which differentiates spaces for work and spaces for leisure as well as daytime and night-time activities (1991: p.320). This line of study understands night spaces as the outcome of a socially mediated process in which government policies, business strategies, and social codes of conduct regulate the practices and relationships associated with the darkness (Williams, 2008: p. 514).

Particularly in the UK and North America, the study of the night has taken two significant directions. A first direction is the notion of the *night-time economy*, which analyses all the economic activities that take place during the night such as the rise of the consumption of leisure and the production of service jobs during this time frame (Chatterton, 2002; Brabazon and Mallinder, 2007). The impact of round-the-clock shifts in the functioning of the city, as well as the role that night economies have in a city's development have also been addressed (Bianchini, 1995; Kreitzman, 1999; Melbin, 1978; Sharman and Harris, 2008; Winlow and Hall, 2008).

A second direction explores the aspects of the night related to *social behaviour*. This dimension analyses different attitudes, habits, expressions and cultural manifestations that emerge as a result of night-time regulations with diverse age, gender and socioeconomic implications (Talbot, 2007). Under this second perspective the night is seen as combination of rational elements – increased surveillance and policing – as well as emotional elements – related to alcohol, drugs, sex – that are not always easy to reconcile (Palmer, 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Williams, 2008).

Aware that the literature concerning the night in Latin America is insufficient and mostly associated to the use of urban space, this study will draw concepts from the *spatial* notion of night studies – associated to the concept of night spaces – as a means to understand the potential of designing local policies to regulate this time frame.

The present study will also draw concepts and references from the *social* perspective of night studies, particularly from its emotional dimension, to analyse the effectiveness of existing social policies implemented in Latin America to regulate social behaviours during this time frame. The *economic* dimension of the night will not be considered in this study.

### **2.3.1 *The spatial dimension of the night***

Williams (2008) introduced a spatial approach to the analysis of the meaning of the night over the exercise of political and social control. According to this author, “we must spatialise time of day and temporalise space” (Williams, 2008: p. 517), diverging from Lefebvre’s (1996) idea of the night as part of the 24-hour day and emphasizing a clear distinction between the spatial implications of the day and those that derive from the night.

As opposed to the day, the night is a space where boundaries and codes of conduct become more flexible, allowing opportunities for transgression. Darkness ‘deterritorialises’ society by obstructing the implementation of policies and techniques to promote order (Williams, 2008: p. 518). From this perspective, the night is seen as a negative space that must be strictly regulated.

For Williams (2008), regulating night spaces refers to a process of ‘reterritorialisation’ or reconfiguration that can take three types of modalities (Williams, 2008: p. 521).

- *Channeling* or directing activities to 'socially appropriate places' – e.g. indicating safe areas through illumination and advertising.
- *Marginalising* or spatially segregating groups of people considered dangerous or transgressive by creating special places for them – e.g. curfews and zoning laws.
- *Excluding* these groups from certain areas – e.g. gated communities and neighbourhood watches (Williams, 2008: p. 522-523).

Despite their instrumental value, the spatial configuration that results from these modalities might contribute directly or indirectly to generate social exclusion. For instance, in Venezuela certain groups are excluded from 'appropriate spaces' by circumstances such as income. In some cases, their impossibility to participate in certain spheres of the night fosters feelings of fear and mistrust within the population. This case will be further discussed in chapter 3.

Other more positive approaches to night-time governance highlight the need for policies that stimulate the emergence of a 'more civilised city' (p. 124). Examples of these policies are public transport provision, revision of licensing and public timetables, deregulation of parking, and provision of free car parks during the night (Bianchini, 1995: p. 124).

Another example of positive night-time policies used by local governments is the use of cultural expressions to revitalise the night. An increasing demand for night-time leisure activities as well as increasing availability of disposable income during the 1970s and 1980s has led to the emergence of rich calendars of night-time cultural events in many European cities (Bianchini, 1995: p. 122). For instance, *La Noche en Blanco* (White Night) in Madrid is a popular event that gathers thousands of citizens every September to enjoy a rich display of artistic expressions (Mariña and Viso, 2008: p. 90)

None of these 'reterritorialising' experiences have a purely social motivation. For

this reason, their social impact is seldom analysed. Their implications for the development of social trust and cohesion have not been thoroughly addressed.

### ***2.3.2 The social dimension of the night***

Beyond its great potential to increase the economic value and competitiveness of a city, the night has deep social strengths and implications. It is 'the time for nobody', free from social constraints and conventions (Bianchini, 1995: p. 124) providing more opportunities for engagement by those who are oppressed and exploited during the daytime (Palmer, 2000: p. 454).

Night spaces have the potential to break down misconceptions of the other by promoting positive interaction among sectors of society, understood as the possibility for different groups to coexist without physical or social barriers such as resentment and exclusion. Such barriers become looser during the night due to the flexibility of social codes associated to the darkness (Williams, 2008).

Despite its social benefits, however, the night is an ambivalent space that allows pluralistic behaviour while simultaneously regulating it through restrictive policies (Chatterton, 2002, p. 25). It is also a space for conflict between the needs and interests of those groups who govern the night-time: licensing judiciary, police, local state, door security, nightlife operators, residents, consumers, workers. (Ibid., p. 28).

Particularly for the youth, night-time leisure is becoming a 'growing daily need and vital cultural ritual' (Winlow and Hall, 2006, p. 7). Night-time activities are slowly replacing the school, the workplace and other environments to become young people's primary arena for the construction of friendships (Winlow and Hall, 2006: p. 91).

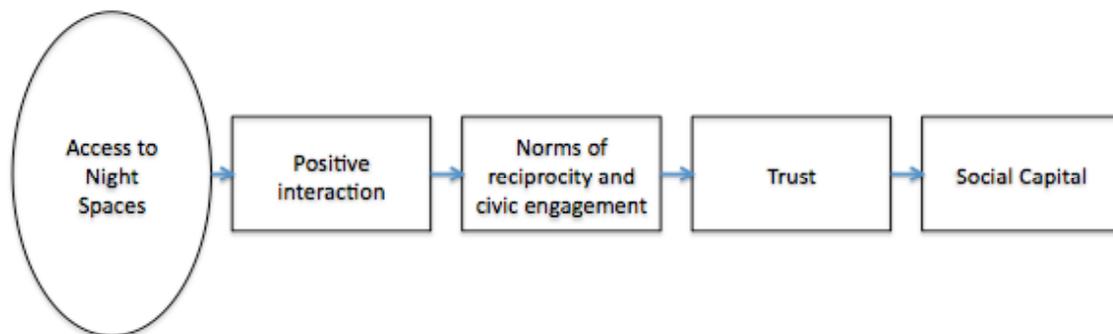
Due to an image of 'youth as trouble', young people are among the most affected

by the severe night-time regulations (Chatterton, 2002: p. 27). Considering the social relevance of this time frame, night-time policies are perceived as mainly negative and restrictive.

Ideally, the night is a space where individuals develop values, identities, attitudes and particular habits, and where groups look for spaces to socialize and gain recognition. The way in which individuals coexist during the night is determined by a series of behaviours and relationships mediated by trust (González Maldonado, 2011).

Trust is considered one of the main components of the notion of social capital, defined as the “features of social organization that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, 1993: p. 167).

Authors like Fukuyama (1996) believe that trust is not only a component of social capital, but also a necessary precondition for its existence (p. 26). Trust is seen as a ‘by-product’ or the outcome of shared norms of honesty and reciprocity (Fukuyama, 1999: p. 51). Tonkiss (2000) agrees with this view by considering trust, norms and networks of reciprocity as the antecedents of social capital (Tonkiss, 2000: p. 81). The present study will also adopt this view, which is summarized and outlined in the following diagram:



The general notion of social capital has been associated to broader social and economic objectives such as civic engagement, crime reduction and improved economic performance as instruments for the healthy integration of a society (Putnam, 1993; Woolcock, 1998; Tonkiss, 2000).

For Putnam (1993), 'personal interaction generates information about the trustworthiness of other actors that is relatively inexpensive and reliable' (p. 172). Frequent interactions generate dense networks in which it becomes easier to spot a "bad apple" (p. 178). Social capital can thus be a valuable tool to reduce negative social behaviours such as cheating and opportunism.

Despite the many positive effects associated to this notion, some authors remain sceptical of its theoretical and empirical consistence. Among its main criticisms is its technical nature that 'avoids issues of context and power' (Harris, 2002: p. 12), its little explanatory power (Tonkiss, 2000: p. 72) and its Western origins associated to capitalism (Wolcock, 2001: p. 14).

Another crucial limitation is the lack of consensus on how to measure social capital. For Woolcock (2001) a quantitative as well as qualitative dimension of this notion must be taken into account in order for it to become a serious indicator of development and wellbeing (p. 21).

For the present work, the notion of social capital only has an instrumental value: to illustrate the social implications of trust – or its absence – in a society. Hence, providing detailed considerations of the types and definitions of social capital is not within the scope of this research paper.

Considering the relevance of night spaces for positive social interaction and the development of norms of reciprocity, their availability has a crucial impact over the levels of trust that exist in a society. Nonetheless, to the date the relationship

between night spaces and trust has not been thoroughly addressed within the subject of night studies, particularly in Latin America.

### **2.3.3     *The night in Latin America***

In Latin America the study of the nocturnal remains in its exploratory phase. The few existing references can be categorized in two directions.

A first direction refers to the descriptive accounts of the night present in literary texts and essays. This is the case of the work of Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis (1998) who defines the night – as opposed to the day –, as a space that softens individual differences, reduces physical imperfections, and even helps to forget about certain risks or dangers (p. 55).

A second direction refers to the use of urban planning strategies and behavioural policies to reshape the social configuration of urban space. A common issue addressed by these policies is a style of urban design that favours cars and shopping malls over people. For Enrique Peñalosa (2011) – former Mayor of Bogota and exponent of this direction – “the real class conflict in developing countries is between those who own cars and those who don’t” (2011).

Inclusive spaces for interaction are rare in many Latin American cities. The majority suffer from a process of social polarisation characterised by a spatial exclusion that compromises the possibilities of democratic coexistence (Lozada, 2004: p. 339-340). Social polarisation is particularly relevant in countries like Venezuela, where political variables intensify the differences between the views and interests of different social groups. Chapter 3 will analyse this case in detail.

A by-product of this polarisation is the restriction to certain spaces of the city, the emergence of spaces of fear and violence and the loss of the right to the city (Garcia-Guadilla, 2003 in Lozada 2004: p. 354). The notion of the ‘right to the

city' was first utilized by Henri Lefebvre to refer to the need for 'a transformed and renewed right to urban life' (Kofman and Lebas, 1996: p. 159) associated to the access citizens have to 'spaces of representation' where they can freely engage in the activities that take place in urban spaces (Lefebvre, 1991).

Due to the absence of spaces for interaction and sociability, this right is lost in many cities in Latin America. Particularly during the night, the possibility to engage in urban life is severely restricted.

Nonetheless, recent efforts – particularly in Colombia – illustrate a shift in the use of urban spaces. An example of such efforts is *La noche de las mujeres* ("Women's night"), a 'social experiment' undergone by former mayor of Bogota Antanas Mockus that imposed a 'curfew' on men – the main agents and victims of local violence – and invited the female population of the capital to 'take the night'. As a result, nearly a quarter of the city's 3.3 million women went out on a Friday night and violence was reduced by 40% (Schapiro, 2001: p.30).

This is a good example of a night-time social policy with the potential to transform the idea of the night. However, by spatially segregating groups of people – based on gender – this case constitutes an example of a 'marginalizing reterritorialisation modality' (Williams, 2008) that restricts the use of space during the night. The next chapter will provide an example of a positive night-time policy or reterritorialising modality that has been successful in Caracas, Venezuela.

Despite the existence of this and other examples of positive uses of the night, there is no literature in the region that analyses their social implications from the perspective of night studies. Nonetheless, their potential to promote a culture of citizenship and restore interpersonal trust have been advocated by local leaders such as Mockus (2011).

Although these initiatives have been designed to occur during the night-time, influence over the governance of the nocturnal is rarely analysed. The absence of academic literature on the subject calls for a more thorough investigation of its social implications as well as of the policies to govern this specific time frame.

## **2.4 Conceptual framework**

For the purpose of this study, night spaces are defined as opportunities for social or economic interaction during the night-time. Their existence is associated with the activities that are facilitated or restricted during the darkness.

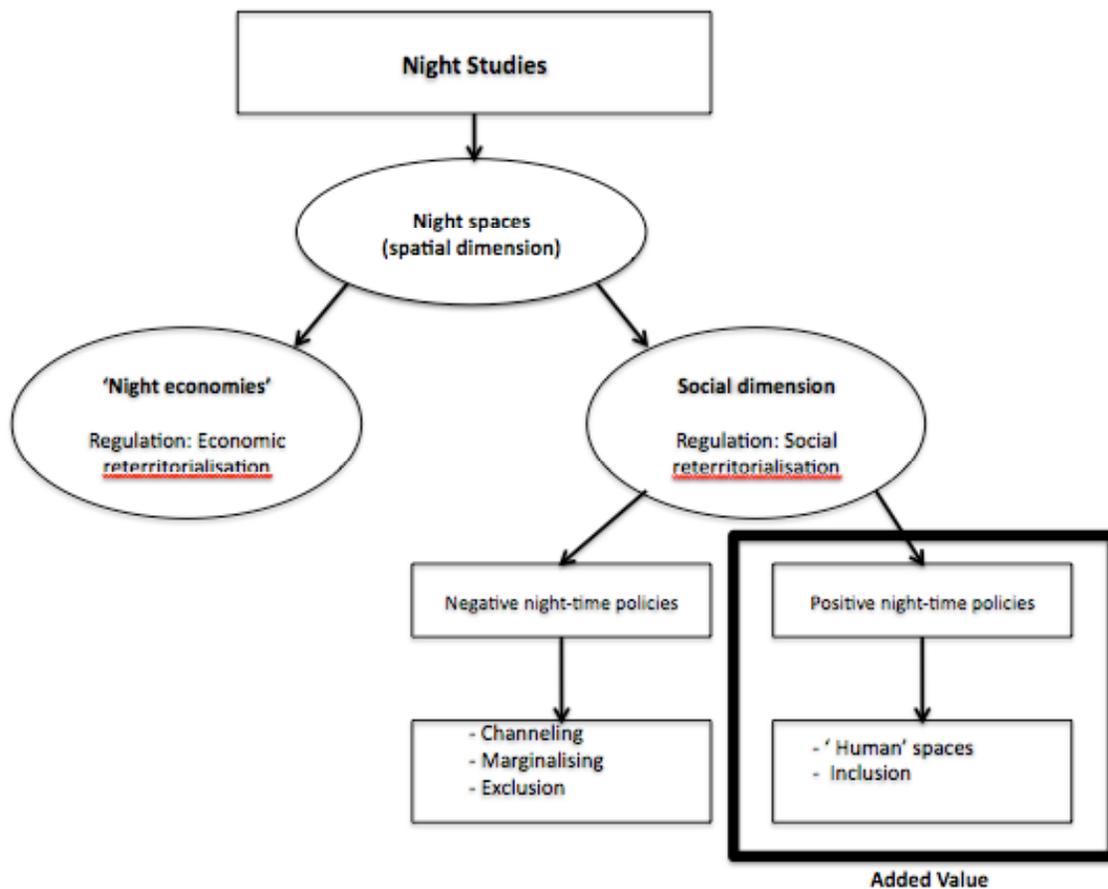
A thorough analysis of the literature allows to assert that the night is commonly understood as a negative space that demands restrictive policies to counter the 'deterritorialising' effects of the darkness (Williams, 2008). However, recent experiences in Latin America evidence that positive interventions can also restore order by providing increased and more equitable access to the night. To the date, however, social implications of these interventions are not thoroughly addressed.

Aware of this knowledge gap, the present study will seek to examine the relationship between designing policies to provide broader access to night spaces and successfully maintain social order by generating trust among the population. To address this deficit, it will introduce two new concepts to the framework of night studies:

- *The right to night spaces*: Inspired by Lefebvre's ideas of the 'right to the city', refers to the possibility citizens have to use and actively engage in the activities that take place in urban night spaces.
- *Positive night-time policies*: attempts to reterritorialise or restore social order by promoting the right to night spaces as a means to develop trust.

By promoting inclusion and social trust *positive night-time policies* can contribute to strengthen or develop social capital. Considering the relevance of night spaces for the creation of youth values and identities, the present work will focus on studying the benefits of these policies for the lives of young people.

The following diagram summarizes the main conceptual notions that will be used throughout the study:



Having articulated the conceptual backbone of this study, the next chapter will seek to answer the research question by analysing a case study in Caracas, Venezuela. For the purpose of this analysis, both the spatial and social dimensions of the night will be considered:

- A *spatial dimension*: characteristics and policies associated to the two main night spaces in the city - public squares and shopping malls.
- A *social dimension*: behaviours, expressions and manifestations that take place in these spaces during the night-time, particularly those associated to young men and women.

### **3. NIGHT SPACES IN CARACAS**

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With a population over six million, Caracas is a vibrant city. During the day, chaos rules the streets overwhelmed with noise and traffic. During the night, many seek to break the routine and find opportunities to disconnect. “The nocturnal allows individuals to show other faces and to loosen up” (González Maldonado, 2011).

As darkness falls, however, mobility is reduced and spaces become restricted. In 2010 one in every 500 people in Caracas was a victim of violence (Smith et al., 2011). Named by Foreign Policy (2008) as “the murder capital of the world”, the capital of Venezuela remains today in global indexes as one of the world’s deadliest cities.

For González Tellez (2004) high levels of violence are “an expression of the negativity of an impossible coexistence” (p. 302). More than 80% of *Caraqueños* declare that they do not trust other citizens (Ibid., 2004: p. 303). Due to their need to socialize and interact with other people, young men and women are the most affected by this situation.

Since its foundation in 1811, Caracas has been the object of study for local and international sociologists and professionals of urban planning. Despite its relevance to understand social patterns and behaviours, to the date little research has been done to address the social implications of the night.

Considering the novelty of the field, this chapter will first describe the use and relevance of night spaces in Caracas by drawing notions and views from two main sources:

- References of local literature in the field of urban planning.

- Personal interviews to experts in social sciences who address the subject of the night, as well as government officials and civil servants responsible for the implementation of local night-time policies.

Finally, it will present the case study of *Por El Medio de la Calle*, an example of a local positive night-time policy to generate inclusive night spaces in the capital of Venezuela.

### **3.1 Two worlds, one city**

According to González Tellez (2004), there is a dual notion of the city in Venezuelan culture. The 'ideal or positive city' is a normative notion based on what it 'should be', expressed by laws, plans, discourses and regulations (p. 290). The 'natural or negative city' is a subjective notion based on the coexistence that originates from the diverse traditions associated to a place or context (González Tellez, 2004: p. 292).

The clash between these two notions leads to a situation of 'civic distress' that favours a negative vision of Caracas. As a result, many *Caraqueños* reject the city because of its chaotic, overpopulated and hostile nature, hoping to escape to a better life in other locations (González Tellez, 2004: p. 293- 294).

Among the causes for this dichotomy is a situation of deep social polarisation, which refers to a complex social dynamic in which a group rejects the position of another, perceived as its enemy (Lozada, 2004). This situation obstructs the dialogue among citizens and favours the emergence of confrontation and violence (Idem: p. 342,355).

In a city spatially divided by class, polarisation is also territorial (Brillembourg, 2005: p. 112). Caracas is determined by a spatial configuration based on

economic, social and cultural variables, where the 'clean and prosperous' East refuses to recognise a 'poor and dangerous' West (González Maldonado, 2011).

Between 2000 and 2004, a third type of polarisation emerged when Venezuelan institutions and social sectors aligned with one of two positions: government or opposition (Lozada, 2004: p. 340). High political polarisation is one of the main features associated to Hugo Chavez's regime.

These opposing ideas of the city – the positive and the negative, the rich and the poor, the *chavista* and the oppositionist – become even more antagonistic in the darkness.

### **3.2 The 'deterritorialisation' of the night**

For Venezuelan sociologist Tulio Hernandez (2011) – one of the few exponents of the nocturnal in Venezuela – the deterritorialisation of Caracas is a process by which people use a limited number of spaces in the city to avoid 'red' or violent neighbourhoods. This situation is made more evident during the night, when people repeat the same living rooms, restaurants and shopping centres, victims of a phenomenon also known as 'monothematic focalization' (Hernandez, 2011).

In his essay 'The density and the lightness of the night in Caracas' (2007), Hernandez describes a process of deterioration from a rich scene of leisure spaces – bars, restaurants, nightclubs, theatres, boulevards – to a deficit of options due to crime and insecurity. For this author, the process of deterritorialisation is a recent phenomenon that indicates the 'nomadic' nature of the city and the end of its night culture.

Besides violence and insecurity, the absence of public policies to 'humanise' the city is another element that contributes to the reduction of spaces for interaction.

Such policies refer to the improvement of urban infrastructure such as benches, streetlamps, and waste receptacles that invite the citizens to use public spaces.

Examples of these policies are found in areas like Chacao, where according to Mayor Emilio Graterón (2011) “special levels of security and service make people feel safe and stimulated to go out during the night”. In the past 5 years more than a dozen public spaces have been created in this municipality.

Despite the emergence of new public spaces, young men and women in Caracas have few recreational options during the night. Besides insecurity, one of the main reasons for this situation is the lack of mobility during this time frame.

Caracas is a city for cars: “trains and trolleys have been destroyed; sidewalks are non-existent, and walking on the street is difficult and dangerous” (Brillembourg et al., 2005, p. 75). The subway is the only democratic element during the night (González Maldonado, 2011). However, after it closes at 11 pm, mobility becomes restricted to those who own a vehicle.

Besides transportation, another element that restricts the use of night spaces in Caracas is social exclusion. For Gerardo González Maldonado (2011) — a Venezuelan sociologist recently embarked on a study of the nocturnal —, “only in few places in the city everybody is accepted, due to barriers imposed by appearance, income or even vocabulary”. Either public or private, this situation is extended to most spaces throughout the city.

In order to further illustrate the spatial and social causes of the reterritorialisation of the night, the next section will characterise the use of two of the main night spaces in Caracas: the public square and the shopping mall.

### **3.1.1 Public squares as 'tourist' spaces**

Caracas is one of the few cities in Latin America that does not own a dignified historic centre (Brewer-Carías, 2006: p.48). During the day, the few public squares that exist are mainly used for transit or commercial activities. During the night, they remain deserted.

For González Maldonado (2011) one of the main features of public spaces in Caracas is the presence of 'tourists' or individuals who use spaces located far away from their homes as their main sources of socialisation and interaction.

This is the case of Plaza Altamira, a big public square located in the Chacao municipality that offers good illumination, security and nearby public transportation. "Young people go in droves and gather around the plaza to talk, make jokes and take pictures of each other. They are 'tourists' within their own city, especially during the night-time where the options are limited and space becomes restricted" (González Maldonado, 2011).

Plaza Altamira is an exception, an island in a city where public space is scarce and neglected (Hernández, 2011). The lack of urban infrastructure and public transportation limits the use of many parks and squares that remain 'sub-used' by the population (González Maldonado, 2011).

As a result, subcultures emerge: punks, skaters, graffiti artists, among many others groups of young people trying to find 'spaces for representation' (Lefebvre, 1991). Nonetheless, most attempts to reterritorialise the night restrict the right these groups have to use public spaces, reducing their possibilities to interact with other individuals. This situation becomes more evident in the use of private night spaces.

### **3.1.2 The mall as the centre of social activity**

For Fernandes (2011) social exclusion in cities like Caracas is the consequence of decades of economic crisis and neoliberal policies such as the privatisation of urban space (p. 73). This phenomenon has created commercial safe havens such as malls and hypermarkets, where leisure activities are restricted to income and social status.

In most Venezuelan cities the mall has substituted the public square. During the day, adults go to shopping centres to buy goods and pay for services. During the night, the youth take over. “They meet with others who might be friends, acquaintances or strangers that offer opportunities for contact, exchange, admiration and even conflict” (Finol, 2005: p. 587).

For Finol (2005) young people’s behaviour in malls is similar to that of their parents and grandparents in public spaces. However, as opposed to the traditional square, the mall is a space where leisure, entertainment and the acquisition of basic goods have the same relevance (Finol, 2005: p. 587). As a result, those who don’t have access to the market are also restricted from social behaviour.

Malls are not public spaces; they are spaces *for* the public. As such they are designed to attract individuals with certain purchasing power (Hernández, 2011). Some of these spaces restrict the ‘right of admission’ of citizens who make others feel threatened by not meeting the required social or economic standards (Fernandes, 2011). These patterns of exclusion are so embedded in society that those who exclude others are rarely aware of their behaviour (Hernández, 2011).

The absence of public spaces and the privatization of the night is a reality that affects *Caraqueños* according to their experience. “Those who have travelled

outside Caracas feel restricted, but for those who have never left the city this situation is not even a problem” (Hernández, 2011).

In a city where the majority of the population is not aware of the need to reterritorialise the night, local authorities can easily overlook the right for night spaces without generating resistance. A broader conscience of the relevance of urban spaces is thus necessary to promote equal opportunities to socialise during the night.

For Hernández (2011) this task is possible through the implementation of policies that demonstrate the liberating effect of the appropriation of public space, such cultural events and civic associations. Nonetheless, these policies overlook the need for a broader notion of the city by focusing only on reducing criminality and providing greater cultural agendas (González Maldonado, 2011).

The next section will analyse the case of *Por El Medio de la Calle* (PEMDLC) to illustrate the potential of positive reterritorialising policies to develop a broader conscience of the ‘right to night spaces’.

### **3.3 A broader sense of the night? The case of *Por el Medio de la Calle***

*Por El Medio de la Calle* (PEMDLC) is an urban art festival that takes place once a year in the Chacao municipality of Caracas. It consists on a circuit of artistic expressions – music, art, theatre and dance among others – that invites citizens to take the streets and enjoy the city’s public spaces.

With the permission of the local authorities, *Platanoverde* – a local publication and foundation that promotes urban art and culture – organized the event for the first time on April 2006. Despite attracting more than 3000 people from all over the city, local neighbors complained about high levels of noise and rubbish leading to an early suspension of the activities (Barboza, 2011).

In 2007, the Alcaldía de Chacao – the office of the Mayor – became involved as one of the organizers of PEMDLC. A joint effort between *Platanoverde* and Chacao determined the success of this initiative that has become a cultural icon and gathered more than 20,000 people in its latest edition (López, 2011).

According to Diana López (2011), head of Cultura Chacao – the municipality’s Department of Culture –, the event initially attracted only young people, mostly associated with subcultures and the ‘underground’ movement of the city. More recently PEMDLC is becoming a leisure activity for adults, families and children that come from all over the city.

This demographic shift, however, does not correspond to a change in its objectives, but to an increased consciousness of the relevance of public spaces, particularly during the night-time (Hernández, 2011). This new ‘conscience’ becomes evident in participatory budgeting processes where neighbours favour the creation of public spaces over parking spaces for their vehicles (Graterón, 2011).

PEMDLC is in essence a cultural activity that seeks to promote emerging local talent. However, its potential to generate deep social transformations transcends the realm of the artistic and provides opportunities for social transformation.

In the past five years, this festival has generated night-time spaces for coexistence and recognition of sectors of society separated by strong polarising forces. Moreover, its capacity to engage local subcultures such as ‘punks’ makes it a positive example of the appropriation of public space (Mariña and Viso, 2009: p. 12).

For López (2011) PEMDLC is a process of social pedagogy that helps citizens understand the benefits of a rich night scene for the development of the city.

Besides stimulating the local economy, vibrant night spaces can contribute to reduce violence and criminality. “It is not the same to have a lonely street than a street full of people” (Ibid., 2011).

From Williams’ (2008) notion of ‘reterritorialisation’, PEMDLC is a positive modality that provides a temporary space where marginalised groups can leave their anonymity and coexist with the mainstream. By promoting these groups’ rights to the use of night spaces, this event helps reduce feelings of frustration and anxiety associated to social exclusion.

For its sixth edition, PEMDLC received more than 400 postulations of local artists wishing to share their talents in what has become the main scene of urban art in Venezuela. Massive attendance year after year also indicates the need for young people to take back the streets and recover public spaces of the city.

Nonetheless, effective policing and urban infrastructure are necessary conditions for this appropriation (González Maldonado, 2011). According to Ludmila Gómez (2011), the Executive Director of Integral Security in Chacao, the low impact of PEMDLC in public order corresponds to high policing and strict public regulations.

Among these regulations, the event is scheduled to begin and to end at specific time frames. Once it is over, the crowds are removed from the streets by redirecting them to private night spaces such as bars and restaurants in the area (López, 2011).

For Hector Barboza (2011), Director of *Platanoverde*, the use of such regulations might seem as a contradiction: “we ask citizens to go and take back the streets, but a few hours later we ask them to leave”. Its short duration and low frequency – 4 or 5 hours only once a year – is one of the main limitations of PEMDLC as a

mechanism to reterritorialise the night, making it a temporary solution to a problem that highly impacts the lives of young people in Caracas.

PEMDLC is not capable of changing the underlying structures and patterns that generate social exclusion in the city. However, its potential to provide spaces for interaction is highly relevant to reduce spatial segregation and promote democratic experiences in the city (Lozada, 2004, p. 356).

Although similar events such as the 'Festival de la Salsa' and 'Hatillarte' are emerging in municipalities like Sucre and El Hatillo, in the absence of a unified metropolitan strategy to govern night spaces they might remain as isolated cultural activities (González Maldonado, 2011).

### **3.4 Main findings and analysis**

Previous sections of this chapter have described the use and relevance of night spaces in the city of Caracas. In the light of the conceptual framework, this final section will summarise the main findings of this study and use the case of PEMDLC to analyse the advantages of implementing positive night-time policies.

- *The night in Caracas is 'owned' by those who can afford it*

The privatisation of the night in Caracas has imposed artificial limits to human interactions: just like business transactions, friendships are conditioned by economic opportunities. Spontaneity and freedom are absent from a space where relationships have a price, an opening and closing time.

As a result, public space becomes foreign and residual, used only by those whose purchasing power fails to meet the market standards. The owners of the night are those who can buy their way out of these spaces threatened by insecurity and abandoned by local authorities.

- *The right to night spaces is relative*

Caracas is not one, but two neighbouring cities with opposite social and political perspectives. A 'positive' Caracas cannot exist in the absence of a shared notion of how it 'should be'. The night is only negative for those who have experienced its alternative. The rest don't feel the need to claim a right to a space that has never been theirs.

However, activities like PEMDLC can facilitate the emergence of a broader conscience of urban space by inviting citizens to use culture to take back the streets during the night.

- *Spatial configuration in Caracas favours exclusion*

The configuration of the night in Caracas favours social exclusion. Particularly in the East of the city, the 'exclusiveness' of night spaces is considered a positive feature by those who feel threatened by the presence of other citizens with a different social or territorial background.

The origins of this type of exclusion can be found in a lack of opportunities to know and coexist with the other, which leads to feelings of suspicion and fear. Young men and women rarely reflect on the types of night spaces they use. However, their selection is made in terms of the possibilities they offer to interact with those they recognise as friends, and limit encounters with those they do not trust. Social exclusion becomes a defence mechanism, an alternative to survive insecurity and polarisation.

PEMDLC fractures the spatial configuration of the night and provides an opportunity to break barriers of otherness based on proximity rather than ideas.

- *Reterritorialisation can be positive*

Despite the need to restrict transgressive behaviours that intensify during the night, social order can also be restored in the darkness by designing policies that promote inclusion and recognition.

Local policies to ‘humanise’ public spaces – such as the incorporation of urban infrastructure – are a way to make them more attractive. As their use becomes universal rather than residual, public spaces facilitate interactions among citizens of different sectors.

By inviting all citizens to walk during the night, PEMDLC provides a space where those who own a car and those who don’t can equally benefit. Moreover, by embracing subcultures as legitimate expressions of urban culture, these activities provide a temporary space where marginalised groups can leave their anonymity and exercise their right to the city.

- *Positive night-time policies can develop trust*

In a context of high polarisation, reterritorialising policies based on segregation can further deterritorialise the night. By reinforcing patterns of exclusion, they can become part of the problem instead of the solution.

PEMDLC advocates an opposite way to deal with the darkness. By providing ‘spaces for recognition’ the event facilitates coexistence and more frequent interactions among citizens, which provide more information about the other, and help reduce the social barriers that exist during the night.

In a city where exclusion has a territorial background, trust is conditioned by recognition. The East does not mix with the West in an attempt to negate values, identities and expressions that it doesn't recognise, due to a lack of communication between two sides that share the same enemy: insecurity. In the long run, recognition paves the way for norms based on reciprocity, as well as for trust to replace fear as the main feature of night-time relationships.

- *Positive night-time policies can develop social capital*

As a temporary reterritorialising experience, PEMDLC is not able to eliminate the patterns of exclusion that are embedded in social relations and reinforced by different forms of polarisation. Their ultimate goal is to strengthen networks of solidarity that can develop social capital and its associated positive effects such as the reduction of criminality and the enhancement of economic performance.

Despite there is little consensus in on what is the best way to measure social capital; examples of its outcomes can be identified in PEMDLC. By inviting citizens to explore areas of the city they are not familiar with, the event not only facilitates their interactions with public squares and sidewalks, but also gives exposure to private businesses such as restaurants, bars and cafes.

As mentioned by Tonkiss (2000: p.89) "viewing social capital in terms of *capacity*, then, allows one to focus on the way social networks and resources of trust can be *capitalized* as resources for economic action". In this sense, the event becomes an opportunity to stimulate the local night-time economy.

- *Effective night-time policies require internal coordination*

Diverse actors are involved in night-time governance: police, local authorities, tourists, residents, workers and consumers of the night. Part of the success of PEMDLC is its ability to coordinate their different interests and needs.

Residents have a particularly relevant role in the design and implementation of night-time policies. The lack of involvement of neighbours and local organizations during the first year of PEMDLC almost compromised the integrity of the event. As evidenced in participatory budgeting processes in Chacao, residents are becoming increasingly conscious of a broader notion of the city. Bottom-up policies that incorporate their views and opinions provide a stronger base for their sustainability and success.

- *Towards an integrated framework of night-time policies*

One of the limitations of PEMDLC is its capacity to fulfil the need of night spaces of young people in a city like Caracas. The temporary nature of the event, combined with its geographic identity with the East, does not allow many citizens to benefit from its positive effects.

Despite the existence of similar initiatives in other parts of the city, the lack of integration between these policies reinforces the patterns of exclusion they seek to reduce. As a result, positive integration is facilitated in a *micro* level, restricting the possibilities for overall social transformation.

The need of an integrated framework of policies to govern the night-time becomes evident in a city where the night is highly fragmented and deterritorialised. In order to be able to reach a wider number of individuals, as well as to measure the impact of these activities, positive night-time policies must be articulated under a single effort to dignify the night.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **4.3 Conclusions and Policy Implications**

By analysing the benefits of a positive night-time policy in Venezuela, the present study provides evidence to test the assumption that broader access to night spaces can contribute to develop trust among the youngest of a society.

Such evidence validates the use of a conceptual framework that promotes the *right to night spaces* through the implementation of *positive-night time policies* as a means to reterritorialise the night. However, certain limitations such as the risk of replicating patterns of exclusion in the configuration of these policies demand careful consideration of their relevance in particular contexts of violence and polarisation.

The following are the main policy implications of the use of this conceptual framework in Caracas or in other cities of Latin America:

- Due to a regional phenomenon of the privatisation and deterritorialisation of the night, there is a growing need to study its social, spatial and economic dimensions as a means to design policies to generate a broader notion of the nocturnal.
- The night incorporates new actors and dynamics to the policy process. Though policing forces are the main guarantors of social order during the night, the role of residents must not be overlooked. For instance, communication strategies to remind neighbours to lock their doors and take certain precautions during the night have proven to be highly effective mechanisms to reduce criminality.

- Local governments must design mechanisms to determine specific needs of the population during the night. Surveys or participatory budgeting processes can be helpful to ask the residents of a city what are their main concerns associated to this time frame. NGOs and civil society organisations also play a relevant role in assessing these needs.
- Once night-time needs have been identified, a set of specific policies to must be defined to address them. Some of these policies might significantly differ from those associated to the daytime. For instance, the establishment of social norms that restrict night-time disposition of rubbish in public areas. These norms are common in places where rubbish recollection is limited during the night.
- According to the positive or negative nature of the need at hand, local governments can choose from two types of policies to govern this time frame.
  - a. *Negative policies* that seek to reduce transgressive behaviour, such as the establishment of fines to penalise high music volume during the week.
  - b. *Positive policies* that seek to build trust and recognition of certain groups such as subcultures. For instance, the provision of a public space for skaters to practice their sport safely during the night-time could contribute to maintain social order as well a to generate 'spaces for representation' and recognition.
- In contexts where the night is particularly deterritorialised, positive and negative policies can be implemented in tandem with efforts to 'humanise' the city. Examples of these efforts are the incorporation of urban infrastructure such as illumination and surveillance to invite citizens to

make use of certain spaces during the night. Another example is the improvement of transportation infrastructure – better roads, sidewalks and public transportation – to increase urban mobility as a means to provide a broader access to the night.

- Night-time policies have particular relevance to reshape social relationships between young men and women. To the date, they are mostly used to restrict their access to certain spaces as a means to maintain social order – e.g. licensing and age requirements. However, their capacity to generate positive recognition and proximity of youth from different sectors of a city can have positive implications on the configuration of night spaces in the future.
- Culture can become a vehicle for the reterritorialisation of the night. However, night spaces that are generated as the outcome of cultural activities tend to be temporary, framed in the duration of a particular festival or event. Despite the value of temporary night spaces to promote a broader notion of the nocturnal, *the right to the night* of the youth can only be fulfilled by spaces that are continuous and reinforced by *positive night-time policies*.
- Beyond their aim to restore public order, positive policies to reterritorialise the night not only have the potential to develop trust among the population, but also to achieve some of the positive outcomes associated to social capital, such as reducing negative behaviours like opportunism and corruption, and promoting opportunities for economic growth and development.

#### 4.4 Recommendations for further research

The main objective of this work is to serve as an exploratory study of the social significance of the night not only in Caracas, but also in other cities in Latin America.

By expressing the need to differentiate between positive and negative policies to govern the night, this study seeks to reveal a broader social meaning of this time frame that has not been addressed. Understanding the night as a space that can be both positive and negative can help theorists and practitioners uncover social needs that remain unattended during this time frame.

Among those needs, the night can become a space for social exclusion. *The right to night spaces* refers to the social implications that derive from the access – or restriction – to engage in opportunities for socialisation, coexistence and recognition during this time frame. As a conceptual framework it provides an alternative to visualizing the night as a negative space. From the policy perspective, it is associated to the design of *positive night-time policies* to provide broader access to night spaces as a means to develop trust in a society.

The potential of night spaces to facilitate coexistence and recognition among diverse sectors of society, can vary from context to context, and from individual to individual. By considering other variables such as a race or gender perspectives to *the right of night spaces*, this conceptual framework could offer many other opportunities for further research and policy consideration, particularly in Latin America.

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