




Analyzing the impacts of nightlife on cities- the case of Tehran

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, many sociologists and urban scholars have focused on the development of nightlife and placed it at the center of their agenda. However, nightlife, like a double-edged sword, has both positive and negative impacts on cities, and there is a gap in the literature on the relationship between nightlife and urban sustainability. Accordingly, this paper aimed to analysis the perceived impacts of nightlife on Tehran sustainability. Based on snowball sampling, a web-based survey was carried out among 10 experts. To investigate perceived impact and evaluate statistically significant differences skewness and kurtosis test and one samples t-test were used. Our findings revealed that although nightlife leads to urban sustainability in Tehran, these results are not same in other cities and is place-specific and vary over time and space. It largely depends on the type of governance, planning, design and legislation of cities. Accordingly, legislative measures and regulations, collaborative efforts across different sectors, developing sustainable infrastructure and facilities, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility, and good governance, transmitting heritage values to young people and minimizing ecological impacts in nightlife environments plays a crucial role in cultivating a sustainable city.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Nightlife
Sustainability
Tehran

Article history:

Received: 24 May 2023
Accepted: 26 Nov 2023

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Citation:

Dolatabadi, A., Navabakhsh, M., & Baghaei Sarabi, A. (2023). Analyzing the Impacts of Nightlife on Cities- the Case of Tehran. *Sustainable Earth Review*: 3(1), (54-61).

DOI: 10.48308/SUSTAINERTH.2023.233032.1014

1. Introduction

In the twentieth century, several transformations have occurred in modern societies including the liberalization of socio-cultural practices, technological innovations in lighting supply, demographic changes, increase in the number of urban single people without limitations of time and the coming out of new urban life patterns. This technological and socio-cultural changes have increased the importance of night as a spatio-temporal concept crucial to urban areas. Urban nightlife has emerged not only as a key space-time of regenerative economic activity but also as an important policy in the revitalization and regeneration of downtowns (Farrer, 2011; Nofre, 2013; Tadié and Permanadeli, 2015). So that, nowadays, nightlife has become an integral element to the lives of many people in cities.

The urban nightlife settings refer to urban areas that provide various leisure and entertainment products and services from midnight to morning (Van Liempt and Van Aalst, 2012). In some countries, the policy of developing night life has been implemented for the gentrification and economic regeneration of cities, especially in the downtowns (Hobbs et al., 2005). For example, since the 1980s, nightlife was seen in some cities of Britain as a tool for reversing de-industrial decay in city centers (Stevenson, 2018). This could be achieved by encouraging people to remain in downtowns at the end of their workday, developing the night economy of the city such as night clubs, restaurants and bars, improving the image of the city, providing a safe city center for all people to enjoy without being afraid, encouraging new housing development in urban centers and holding events after dark (Hughes, 1999; Kreitzman, 1999).



Night-time leisure venues and diverse streetscapes would attract not just new residents, renters, developers, investors, but would also open up other new supply chains, such as taxi companies, and other businesses in new mixed-use developments (Roberts, 2004). Ray Oldenburg (1989) point to how urban nightlife contribute to cities' overall social capital and public life of cities. He argues that nightlife in bars, restaurants, clubs, and cafe's, have historically functioned as intimate worlds of sociability, conversation, and leisure where urban residents can enjoy the pleasures of informal public life, and a popular forum vital to the sustainability of urban governance. Similarly, Anderson believes that nightlife creates inclusive environments that value equality, diversity, and acceptance (Anderson, 2009). Moreover, successful nightlife attracts visitors to cities; increase the livability and pedestrian traffic of downtowns after the close of the business; boost local economic development as well as serve as driver for developing cultural creativity and expression (Grazian, 2009). A 24-hour society and nightlife also contribute to the possibility of avoiding commutes at busy times, allowing traffic congestion to be reduced (Carmona, 2010). These advantages have motivated the managers of many cities in the world to encourage nightlife in order to promote their urban sustainability, especially in the socio-economic and cultural dimensions. However, nightlife does not always lead to positive impacts. literature review shows that nightlife can lead to conflict between local residents and nightlife customers, noise, anti-social behavior, the commercialization of leisure and entertainment, and over-development (Eldridge, 2019). It could also negatively impact on real estate and property prices and reduce further development (Thurnell-Read, 2012). Although violence and alcohol consumption occur in a variety of environments, a large proportion takes place in urban nightlife. Many studies reveal that nightlife environments are hot spots for engagement in risky behaviors including excessive alcohol consumption, drug usage and sexual violence (Hughes et al., 2008; Schnitzer et al., 2010; Pedersen et al., 2016). There is no doubt that to fully enjoy the advantages of nightlife and promote sustainability, their relationship needs to be studied further. An issue that is rarely covered in depth in the

literature and discussions on urban sustainability dimensions and nightlife is scarce. Accordingly, this paper aimed to analyze the impact of nightlife on urban sustainability in Tehran.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. Urban sustainability and nightlife

Following the industrial revolution and economic reconstruction, the post-industrial redevelopment of some cities often included a transition from manufacturing to service provision and from lifetime employment to other forms of employment. "Flexible" and temporary work, often involving fixed-term contracts, seasonal, occasional or part-time work (Taylor, 1999). The flexible, irregular, and contingent nature of many jobs in the night-time economy provides many opportunities to earn money while remaining "officially" unemployed (Beattie, 1986; Hobbs et al., 2000). These transformations increased attention to nightlife – night/night-time economy, in short "NTE" or 24-hour cities. The night economy is related to leisure activities at night, which in a way guides the economic, cultural and physical dynamics of the city, which in a way brings people back to the abandoned neighborhoods and areas (Shaw, 2010). Erving Goffman (1963) defines nightlife as: "night resorts can be thought of as "back places," that is, places where people hide – or believe they are hiding – to forbid authority figures such as parents, teachers or criminal justice system authorities" (Redmon, 2002; Tutenges, 2012). This creates special attractions, especially for young people, who spend more money and time on this type of land use. Thus, with these interpretations, leisure time has evolved in response to changing local and global economic conditions, and in turn has created a range of leisure options at complex night, through which new economic and occupational opportunities circulate (Hobbs et al., 2000). Despite the fact that in most countries, nightlife was initially opposed by the government and the police, this type of use was welcomed by urban planners because they believe that areas and uses specific to nightlife create dynamism and vitality in the place and spread this vitality to other sectors, including residential, office and commercial (Hobbs et al., 2000). According to Heath (1997), the goals of expanding nightlife

are: a more comprehensive and broader look at all city centers. This includes their social and cultural aspects, but also an ambitious aspect aimed at stimulating ideas and entrepreneurial activity (Eder and Oz, 2017). As centers of everyday nightlife, urban nightlife areas undergo a transformation into cultural venues; the changing landscape of urban nightlife inherently reflects the local culture and to some extent the emotions of its patrons, thereby highlighting the vitality of a city (Liu, 2023). Incorporating nightlife into daily routines plays an important role in the development of a sustainable society by enhancing accessibility, tolerance, diversity and participation (Liu, 2023). Among the important points in all matters related to urban planning, attention to sustainability is the first priority. This means that any urban phenomenon should be examined in the context of urban balance and sustainability. Sustainability theory has a long history. The United Nations has defined sustainability by dividing activities into three pillars: social, ecological and economic (Brandt and Svensson, 2013). The overall sustainable object, regardless of its size (city, neighborhood or even house), has the ability to maintain a balance between these pillars (Hassan and Lee, 2015). The concept of a sustainable city emerged as a political initiative in response to the deterioration that occurred in urban environments throughout the 20th century (Hassan and Lee, 2015). Over the last few decades, urban sustainability principles have guided the development of urban areas and municipalities to achieve higher standards of social, economic and environmental sustainability (Radzi, 2018; Spiliotopoulou and Roseland, 2020). Some scholars believe that sustainable city is a framework for greater protection of the environment and resources; and others see it as a way to maintain economic growth by using green technology to maintain ecological stability and social equality, and some believe in all three pillars of sustainability (De Jong et al., 2015; Hamman, 2017; Hassan and Lee, 2015; Fu and Zhang, 2017; Spiliotopoulou and Roseland, 2020). Concepts of urban sustainability are on the one hand inspired by technological innovations, and on the other hand go beyond technological advances. Up to now, urban sustainability has become an umbrella concept that includes

“ecological modernization”, “green economy”, “regenerative sustainability”, “eco-cities as urban economic city”, “social justice”, etc. (Barton, 2000; Cole, 2012; Mol, 2003; World Bank, 2010). A systematic review of the literature shows that the expansion of nightlife environments and activities has many positive and negative social, economic and environmental impacts (Pino and Johnson-Johns, 2009; Kavanaugh, 2013; Bianchini, 1995; Statista, 2020; Elshater & Abusaada, 2022; Abusaada & Elshater 2021; Grazian, 2009; He et al, 2018), and we cannot claim that it leads to sustainability of cities or jeopardize their sustainability. This study seeks to investigate this relationship.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Case study

The study utilizes a quantities case study approach and was carried out in an urban population of Tehran city. The capital city of Tehran is the first largest city in Iran and located in north-central of Iran at the foot of the Elburz mountains range. The city has 9.0390.000 inhabitants, distributed over an area of 730 km², with a population density of around 12.382 inhabitants/km². The city is distributed into 22 districts and 134 subdistricts with very different characteristics regarding the building density and height, social and economic base as well as green area. The metropolis typically has multiple urban centers/subcenters and city center is where commerce, leisure, bazar, shopping, and political power are concentrated. The city also has many subcenter including Tajrish, Aryashahr, Vanak, Valiasr square and Bamland of Chitgar. Over the last few decades, these spaces along with tremendous socio-cultural transformations have created unique opportunities for nightlife.

2.2. Study Procedure

We employed a web-survey plan to investigate the impacts of nightlife on urban sustainability in Tehran, using an anonymous online questionnaire. A systematic literature review was performed to identify indicators relevant to the urban nightlife and sustainability. We selected the 22 indicators at the end of the Delphi procedure.

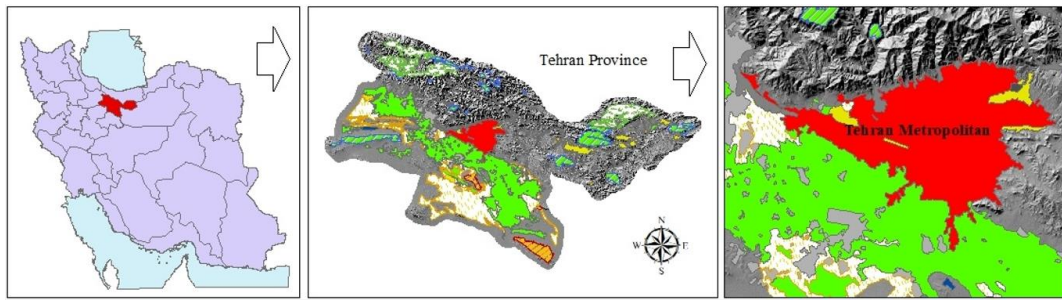


Fig. 1. Location of Tehran

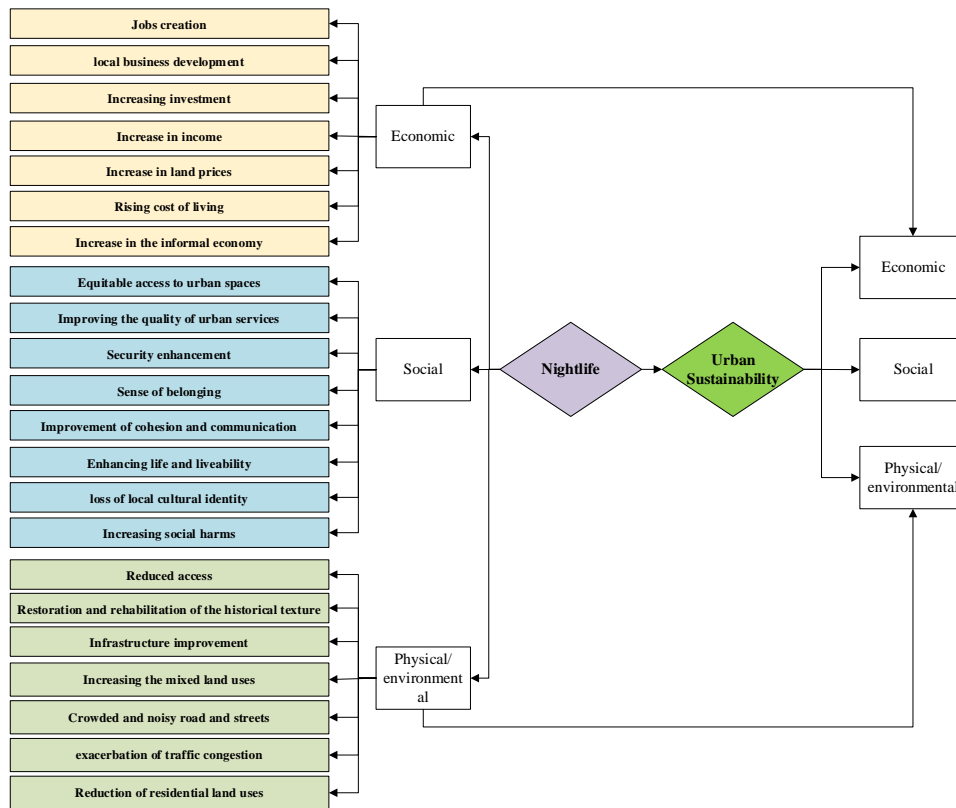


Fig. 2. Conceptual framework of research

A cross sectional experts-targeted online questionnaire was designed using web-based questionnaire maker system (Porsa). The questionnaire was developed to analysis impacts of nightlife on urban sustainability from perceptions of urban scholars and sociologists using 5-point Likert. In other words, participants were asked to rate the impact of nightlife (ranging from 1 = Insignificant to 5 = Sever) on sustainability of Tehran. The questionnaire was revised in a pilot study with 9 respondents to ensure that the survey instrument was reliable and valid. The web- survey was conducted from 15 Murch 2022 to 25 April 2022. Snowball sampling technique was used to identify urban planners and sociologists who are experts in nightlife and urban sustainability. Finally, 10 experts participated in the web-survey. Snowball

sampling is a nonprobability method of survey sample selection that is commonly used in settings with a specific and small population that is difficult to define or locate.

2.3. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to identify the demographic characteristics of respondents and find out possible patterns using SPSS version 24. In addition, a one-sample t-test was also used to analyze the impacts of nightlife on Tehran sustainability from the perspective of experts. The skewness and kurtosis test were employed for normality of data distribution. Cronbach’s alphas were applied to check the reliability of the instrument. Perceived economic impacts of nightlife on urban

sustainability were measured by 22 indicators based on three dimensions (economic= 7 indicators, social= 9 indicators and physical=6 indicators). Cronbach's alphas coefficients ranged from 0.63 (lowest) to 0.87 (highest) for 22 indicators with a total scale reliability of 0.73 which were proved acceptable level of inter-

item consistency and reliability. Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, Skewness and Kurtosis for all indicators. As you can see the values of the Skewness and Kurtosis (± 1.98) show the normality of data distribution. Therefore, parametric statistical methods have been used for data analysis.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, Skewness and Kurtosis for indicators

Dimension	Impact indicators	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Economic	Jobs creation	10	3.70	.483	-1.035	.687	-1.224	1.334
	local business development	10	3.70	.483	-1.035	.687	-1.224	1.334
	Increasing investment	10	3.30	.675	-.434	.687	-.283	1.334
	Increase in income	10	3.50	.707	-1.179	.687	.571	1.334
	Increase in land prices	10	1.90	1.524	-.264	.687	-1.706	1.334
	Rising cost of living	10	.90	1.524	1.385	.687	.431	1.334
	Increase in the informal economy	10	3.60	1.075	.349	.687	-1.274	1.334
Social	Equitable access to urban spaces	10	3.20	1.398	-1.353	.687	-1.456	1.334
	Improving the quality of urban services	10	3.70	.675	.434	.687	-.283	1.334
	Security enhancement	10	4.30	.823	-.687	.687	-1.043	1.334
	Sense of belonging	10	3.80	.789	.407	.687	-1.074	1.334
	Improvement of cohesion and communication	10	4.30	.483	1.035	.687	-1.224	1.334
	Enhancing life and liveability	10	3.80	.632	.132	.687	.179	1.334
	loss of local cultural identity	10	.80	1.317	1.183	.687	-.577	1.334
Physical	Increasing social harms	10	.80	1.317	1.183	.687	-.577	1.334
	Reduced access	10	1.40	1.350	.095	.687	-1.018	1.334
	Restoration and rehabilitation of the historical texture	10	3.10	1.370	-1.192	.687	1.396	1.334
	Infrastructure improvement	10	2.80	1.135	-1.800	.687	1.336	1.334
	Increasing the mixed land uses	10	3.40	1.430	-1.460	.687	1.349	1.334
	Crowded and noisy road and streets	10	1.60	1.506	.127	.687	-1.487	1.334
	exacerbation of traffic congestion	10	2.00	1.826	-.137	.687	-1.100	1.334
Reduction of residential land uses	10	1.10	1.729	1.584	.687	1.862	1.334	

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Participant Characteristics

Participants from the nightlife and sustainability expert-targeted questionnaire included 10 experts from 7 universities and

organizations. The demographic characteristics of the survey samples show that, of 10 study participants, 10 (100%) were male. All education levels were PhD. Degree and in the selection of the sample, diversity was taken into consideration and the participants were from the public and private sectors.

Table 2. information of experts

No.	gender	Level of education	Status and place of employment
1	Male	PhD in urban planning	Member of the faculty of Shahid Beheshti University
2	Male	PhD in urban planning	Tehran Municipality Regeneration Organization
3	Male	PhD in law/ in future studies	Lecturer at Allameh Tabatabai University
4	Male	PhD in regional planning	Director of faculty of earth science, Shahid Beheshti University
5	Male	PhD in Sociology	Member of the faculty of Allameh Tabatabai University
6	Male	PhD in Sociology	Cultural and Social Deputy of Tehran Municipality
7	Male	PhD in media management	Military
8	Male	PhD in Sociology	Cultural and Social Deputy of Tehran Municipality
9	Male	PhD in urban planning	Lecturer at Islamic Azad University, South Tehran branch
10	Male	PhD in urban design	Head of Parhase and association consult engineering

3.2. Respondents' perceptions of nightlife impacts on sustainability of Tehran

Table 3 indicates the perceived impacts of urban nightlife on Tehran sustainability and it was measured by three impacts indicators. In terms

of economic dimension, experts perceived that urban nightlife has a positive impact on jobs creation, increase in investment, local business development, increasing investment, increase in income and increase in the informal economy. However, p value of “Increasing investment” (p=.193), “increase in income” (p=.052) and “Increase in the informal economy” (p=.111) is longer than 0.05 and difference is not statistically significant. Additionally, nightlife does not increase land prices, real estate or the cost of living. Thanks to that, it can be said that nightlife brings positive economic effects to Tehran city. The results with respect to the social dimension indicated that nightlife have positive impacts on improving the quality of urban services (m=3.70, p=.010), security enhancement

(m=4.30, p=.001), Sense of belonging (m=3.80, p=.011), improvement of cohesion and communication (m=4.30, p=.000) and enhancing life and liveability (m=3.80, p=.003). Furthermore, it does not increase social damage, destroy local cultural identity or limit access to urban space. Participants were asked to express their opinions about the impacts of nightlife on physical/environmental dimensions and results revealed that it has little impact on the increase of mixed land uses and the regeneration of the historical texture of the city. Moreover, nightlife does not make streets crowded and reduce accessibility and residential land use. Therefore, it can be said that nightlife improves the sustainability of Tehran.

Table 3. Perceived impacts of urban nightlife on Tehran sustainability

Dimension	Indicators	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	P value	Mean Difference
Economic	Jobs creation	10	3.70	.483	4.583	9	.001	.700
	local business development	10	3.70	.483	4.583	9	.001	.700
	Increasing investment	10	3.30	.675	1.406	9	.193	.300
	Increase in income	10	3.50	.707	2.236	9	.052	.500
	Increase in land prices	10	1.90	1.524	-2.283	9	.048	-1.100
	Rising cost of living	10	.90	1.524	-4.358	9	.002	-2.100
	Increase in the informal economy	10	3.60	1.075	1.765	9	.111	.600
	Equitable access to urban spaces	10	3.20	1.398	.452	9	.662	.200
	Improving the quality of urban services	10	3.70	.675	3.280	9	.010	.700
	Security enhancement	10	4.30	.823	4.993	9	.001	1.300
Social	Sense of belonging	10	3.80	.789	3.207	9	.011	.800
	Improvement of cohesion and communication	10	4.30	.483	8.510	9	.000	1.300
	Enhancing life and liveability	10	3.80	.632	4.000	9	.003	.800
	loss of local cultural identity	10	.80	1.317	-5.284	9	.001	-2.200
	Increasing social harms	10	.80	1.317	-5.284	9	.001	-2.200
Physical/env ironmental	Reduced access	10	1.40	1.350	-3.748	9	.005	-1.600
	Restoration and rehabilitation of the historical texture	10	3.10	1.370	.231	9	.823	.100
	Infrastructure improvement	10	2.80	1.135	-.557	9	.591	-.200
	Increasing the mixed land uses	10	3.40	1.430	.885	9	.399	.400
	Crowded and noisy road and streets	10	1.60	1.506	-2.941	9	.016	-1.400
	Reduction of residential land uses	10	1.10	1.729	-3.475	9	.007	-1.900

4. Conclusion

The emergence of new technologies, the economic reconstruction of cities and socio-cultural changes have had a huge impact on cities and one of its consequences has been the expansion of nightlife and the emergence of 24-h cities. Although many cities have put nightlife development policies on their agenda, there is a literature gap on the impacts of night life on urban sustainability. Accordingly, using a cross sectional experts-targeted online questionnaire and a web-survey plan, the perceived impacts of the nightlife on urban sustainability in terms of economic, social and physical/environmental

dimensions was investigated in Tehran. Our empirical findings reveal that nightlife has positive social, economic and physical impacts on the sustainability of Tehran. Economically, nightlife leads to significant job creation and local economic development and does not increase the cost of living or land prices. The results are consistent with to the findings of previous studies. The nightlife economy leads to the overall economic growth of cities or regions by creating employment opportunities, developing tourism, fostering entrepreneurship, and boosting LED (Abraham et al., 2009; Son et al., 2023; Bianchini, 1995; Statista, 2020; Elshater and Abusaada, 2022). For example, in

New York in 2016, nightlife industry generated 299,000 jobs, \$13.1 billion in employee compensation and \$35.1 billion in total economic output (The North Highland Company, ESI and Urbane Development, 2017). From a social perspective, nightlife in Tehran leads to an increased sense of belonging, promotes social interaction and cohesion, improves security and increases urban livability. It also has a negative impact on social problems. Furthermore, it does not lead to reduced accessibility or loss of local cultural identity. These findings are contrary to several previous studies. Grant (2009) reported that Manhattan nightlife consumes the liveability of quiet residential neighborhoods. In some cities, nightlife not only reduces security but also increases sexual violence against women (Pino and Johnson-Johns, 2009; Kavanaugh, 2013; Parks and Miller, 1997; Hughes et al., 2008). Additionally, some cities and regions have suffered from poor physical and mental health due to increased night-time alcohol and drug use (Bellis et al., 2005; Pedersen et al., 2016; Ejrnæs and Scherg, 2022). However, Others point to nightlife scenes contribute to the public life of cities, to the inclusiveness and their cities' over social capital (Grazian, 2009). He et al. (2018) concluded that nightlife is one of the most important urban metrics for attracting and breeding creative entrepreneurship, creation of vibrant, liveable, and innovative urban environments. Regarding the physical/environmental dimension, the findings showed that nightlife does not lead to crowded streets, noise pollution or reduced accessibility and does not reduce the residential land uses. This increases the mix of land uses and somewhat regenerates and renewal historical areas. These results are not similar to several previous studies. Keohane (2006) revealed that East Village residents complained that commercial activities at night led to severe traffic congestion and noise pollution. Similarly, Abusaada and Elshater (2021) and Hadfeld (2015) concluded that nightlife could lead to overcrowding, noise pollution and traffic congestion. Although the results showed that nightlife leads to urban sustainability in Tehran, these results are place-specific and vary in time and space. It largely depends on the type of governance, planning, design and legislation of cities. Accordingly, legislative measures and regulations, collaborative efforts across different sectors, implementing energy-efficient

measures, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility, transmitting heritage values to young people, improving street lighting, reducing waste, promoting sustainable transportation modes, and managing noise pollution in nightlife environments plays a crucial role in cultivating a sustainable city.

Acknowledgement

This article extracted from the first author's doctoral thesis with the title sociological analysis potentialities and consequences of Tehran's nightlife and its implications for sustainable urban development which was done in 2023.

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