EUROPEAN TRANSPORT CONFERENCE  
18-20 September 2006

“NOCTURNES” NIGHTTIME MOBILITY SERVICES AND TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE AND ON OTHER CONTINENTS

Luc GWIAZDZINSKI, associate professor at the Université de Technologie at Belfort-Montbéliard,  
Researcher at the Laboratoire Image et Ville (UMR ULP/CNRS) in Strasbourg and associate at the UTBM systems and transport laboratory

“The world is deeper as the day imagines”  
Friedrich NIETZSCHE

General background

The night as the forgotten dimension of the town. In the same way as the human body, the existence of the town has always been regulated by the alternation of day and night. A period of darkness symbolized by the curfew, the cessation of any activity and the closing of the city’s gates, night has been considered for a long time as the time of social rest. Even if studies have long been carried out on the town at day, researchers, technical experts and elected representatives ignored the urban night for a long time.

New needs. Human activities are progressively spreading through the night and reconstructing a new working and leisure space which requires a quasi-permanent mobility offer to which our organizations haven’t always been prepared. In order to answer to night mobility needs towards activity centres, various and diverse transport solutions are locally being instituted throughout Europe and the world. However, no appraisal of these experiences has been made yet. The data’s nighttime is also the transport and mobilities’ one.

Convictions. The exploration work has been established on the base of four convictions: there is a life after the day in our sterile cities where the non-daytime can reach the two thirds of a day; mobility is an essential condition to adapt to and participate in urban life, night and day; mobility allows to dynamically review the town, its structure, landscapes, actors, differences or contradictions, its tensions and its potentials through the distorting lense of the economy, of the right to urban services, of social equity or aesthetics; the night has a lot to say to the day;

A systematic approach. We will tackle intra- and intermobilities through a systematic approach of the town defined as the interlocking of three undersystems connected to one another by means of complex causal relations: a localization system which refers to the use of the soil; a movement system constituted from goods’ as well as people influx; a system of inhabitants’ practices and social relations which refers to the organisation of city-dwellers activities.

1 GWIAZDZINSKI L., 2003, La ville 24h/24 (The town 24 hours a day), Editions de l’Aube, 252p. / La nuit dernière frontière de la ville (The night as the last town’s border), 2005, Editions de l’Aube, 246p. 

©Association for European Transport and contributors 2006
Reminder

**Aims.** This study aims at analyzing mobilities around night activity centres. It is to contribute to analyzing the good practices and mobility services tested, the successes and failures. “The method used consists on the one hand in having an overview of European experiences and on the other hand in creating a network of specialized experts. Finally, all these works will be promoted by a European colloquium on the topic of night mobilities. The most innovative international experiences could be transferred and adapted locally depending on the results of the study and the characteristics of the territory concerned”.

**Schedule.** The study started in November 2003 to end in May 2005.

**Methodology**

The point was to establish a first overview of european experiences and to create a network of international experts specialized in these matters. The approach was based on two main lines: observation and analysis through an international survey, people meetings and night explorations, experience visits and observations; raising awareness and networking through the organization of colloquia, the institution of academic training courses, interventions in colloquia and the publication of scientific articles or articles aimed at the general public.

**Observation and analysis**

**International survey.** An international survey in 7 languages (French, English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and Polish) was carried out about night mobility services throughout Europe and the world, among more than 900 interlocutors in 106 countries on the five continents.

**Target.** In each selected town, different interlocutors able to answer to a relatively wide questionnaire on mobility services have been identified: local elected representatives, technical experts from authorities in charge of transport, local carriers, universities and research laboratories, heads of associations related to mobility (users associations, associations for the promotion of soft mobilities, etc.). The sample of 20 European towns initially planned has been extended to 165 towns in 54 countries: the 20 biggest French towns and the regions’ main cities, the capitals of the European Union and the enlarged Union as well as a few cities on the other continents. All towns were subjected to systematic reminders (per post, fax, mail, telephone) so as to receive a uniform information.

**Questionnaire.** The questionnaire has been built on two main lines allowing to include the question of night mobilities into a global thinking on the urban nighttime: mobility services (offer, evolution of the demand, functioning, parking, price setting, communication, policies, problems, etc.) and the other services. A first step consisted in establishing the survey with our technical, academic or institutional partners. A dozen of local authorities tested the questionnaires in a second phase, which have been improved in taking their

---

3 Subsidy decision, Ministry for Infrastructure, Transport, Housing, Tourism and See, Department of land transport, Underdepartment of Intermodal Strategies and Policies, September 26th 2003

©Association for European Transport and contributors 2006
remarks into account. Then they have been translated into 7 languages in order to be read and filled in by all local partners: technical experts of local authorities, heads of transport companies, academics or directors of associations.

**Special survey on youth mobility.** At the same time as the international offer analysis, a special survey carried out among a sample of more than 1000 young people on the Territory of Belfort allowed to better understand their night mobility behaviours and their needs.

**People meetings and explorations**

The survey was completed by an additional inventory of good practices, visits, town crossings at night and a special survey on youth mobility in the evening on a particular territory.

**Additional inventories of good practices.** An additional inventory of night mobility good practices was achieved in collaboration with the actors involved in the setting up of night mobility services in other European towns or territories.

**Experience visits.** About fifteen interesting experiences of night transport services have been visited and “tried out” : from Aix en Provence to Zurich.

**Night crossings.** Explorations were also conducted under the form of night crossings in about twenty towns throughout Europe, from Amsterdam to Tours, and others will next be conducted to Rennes and London in particular. Gathering the actors of each town (elected representatives, researchers, transport and local authorities technical experts, social workers, medical staff, directors of associations, artists, forces of law and order, etc.) during one night, crossings oblige them to change the view they have on their own town. Far from the day restraints, the immersion allows to feel and exhaust the night. At the end of these crossings, creativity workshops allowed to clarify the diagnosis, to give rise to the problems as well as to new ways of projects, and to establish local and international partnerships.

**Main results**

**Contrasting approaches to the night**

**Variable boundaries.** As regards our interlocutors in the different towns surveyed, the nighttime begins between 8 pm and midnight, and ends between 4 am and 8 am.

**Contrasting perceptions.** The nighttime is seen as a moment of freedom as well as insecurity.

**Plurality of night times and rhythms.** There is not one but many nights depending on latitude, climate, countries and cultures. Each town, and even each area, has got its own temporal structure and its own color, even if light as well as leisure offers are becoming commonplace.
Three times in the urban night. There are three main times to distinguish in the urban nighttime between 8 pm and 6 am, a night’s heart and two margins whose limits are vague: the evening, from 8 pm to 1.30 am, night’s margin in progress; the night’s heart from 1.30 to 4.30 am, slack period of the urban activity, the early hours from 4.30 to 6 am, day’s margin in progress. And the time slot between 6 am and 8 pm is the town’s empire at day.

A still limited offer at night. In all these towns, the only services available after the first hours of night are cash dispensers, medical care services, chemist’s, safety services or service stations. Special services have been developed in some towns at night: baby-sitting in Turin (Italy) and Angers (France), sport activities in Helsinki (Finland) (…)

Weekly and seasonal rhythms. The “organized activity” of the night is gathered at the end of the week and during the week-end, and preferably at the beginning of the month, in summer and on the occasion of some exceptional nights “going too far”: New Year, Music Day, sleepless nights, even at the time of victories of national or local sport teams or in time of elections.

A progress of night mobilities

Colonization of the urban night. Since the beginning of the nineties and no matter what the countries or cultures, we have been witnessing a progressive colonization of the urban night through economic activities. Lightening, shops development, automatic counters, round-the-clock services, etc.

New interest showed by public authorities. Local actors are now sensitive to the nighttime, a dimension of the town which has long been forgotten, as well as to night mobility problems, both for festive and working people. As well as organizing night events (sleepless nights, museum nights, etc.) and setting up “light plans” (“plans lumière”), elected representatives and heads of establishments are beginning to work together on different points: the acknowledgement of night questions in the town policy, as it is the case in Amsterdam with its “Night mayors”; the nuisance problems with the signature of “Night Charters”; the public calm with the establishment of “night correspondents” (“correspondants de nuit”), “urban stewards” (“stewards urbains”) or “Serenos”; the solidarity with the development of nighttime places such as “La moquette” in Paris and the transport with the creation of appropriate services.

Looseness of hour constraints. The European night work legislation and the legislation on shop opening hours in the evening which becomes decentralized and more flexible, authorise later and later opening slots and contribute to the development of night activities.

Progress of night mobilities. Everywhere in Europe, the question of transport and mobilities raises facing the development of festive or working night activities. From Barcelona (Spain) via Cremone (Italy) or Bristol (Great-Bretain) to Kharkiv (Ukraine), most towns assessed a development of night mobilities in the last years.

Evolution of the transport demand. They also noticed an increase in the night transport demand.

©Association for European Transport and contributors 2006
The development of a new offer of mobility services

**Evolution of the transport offer.** From Los Angeles to Poitiers, most towns surveyed developed their night transport offer in the last ten years: shifting schedules, institution of new transport lines at night, establishment of a call and reservation centre, videomonitoring, nightclubs’ public transport services, regulation of taxis tariff and waiting time; validity extension of month and one year tickets to night bus lines.

**Declared aims.** Improving inhabitants safety, diminishing the risks of road accidents, developing night life, reducing car traffic or reinforcing their cities attractivity, as it is the case in Zurich where transports are part of a global approach to night life’s development.

**The different events acting as tests.** New Year, Music day, Street market in Lille, Grape harvest day in Neuchâtel, Streetparade in Zurich, Lights day (Fête des lumières) in Lyon, Notte Bianca in Rome, etc. The events which are now scribbling away the nighttime schedules of cities are often an opportunity to try later public transport services inside the town or some of its areas.

**Other actors are rallied.** Associations and entreprises are also rallying to develop a safe mobility offer: carsharing for students party in Belfort-Montbéliard, bringing people back home by scooter in London, women’s exploratory walkings in Montreal to promote the inhabitants’ safe mobility.

**Particular mobility services**

**An offer remaining stronger at day than at night.** However the offer at night remains largely lower than at day for all kinds of transport (bus, train, tramway, trolley, etc.) except in the case of taxis for which the offers tend to balance each other.

**Variable strategies.** Time slots are extended in certain towns, special transport lines are being developed in others whereas it is preferred to establish flexible shuttle services on demand in others. Now the French cities surveyed have all an evening service. 17 towns have a special bus service until approximately 1 am. Six towns have a special bus service after midnight: Lyon, Paris, Rouen, Montpellier, Nantes and Rennes. Some have developed a special service for nighttime collective taxis. European capitals all have a special transport network at night after midnight and others like London or Athens have transport services running 24 hours a day.

**Equivalent fares.** In most towns, nighttime public transport fares are the same as daytime fares. They generally change between 11 pm and midnight.

**Less expensive car parks.** In 80% of towns, car parks remain open all night long with a fare lower than or equal to the day fare. Some parking areas are free from 6 pm to 9 pm at the latest (Montreal).

**A few centers open.** Only the half of exchange centres (stations, airports…) are open at night.

**Accompanying measures.** Car traffic is sometimes forbidden in the hypercentre (Mons, Rennes, etc.), in historical areas (Bordeaux, Ravennes, etc.) or in some particular sectors (San Lorenzo in Rome).

**Associated information tools.** More than 60% of the towns surveyed offer traffic information services to private individuals (Internet, radio, signs, etc.) or information on car parks.
The aims are reached

This study’s main aims have been reached with a plus in terms of extension of the geographic field of investigation and the organization of several international colloquia. Promises have been kept in spite of difficulties related to the multiplicity of partners as regards surveys, explorations and colloquia, cultural differences, the seven languages used and the questionnaire’s complexity which includes mobility services and other night services.

A first analysis of night mobilities

An enthusiastic welcome. We were able to get back the questionnaires in the 20 biggest French towns, the regions main cities, the EU capitals and most capitals in the enlarged Europe, i.e. 229 questionnaires out of 900 postings. The wonderful welcome received in the towns must be added to these results. These survey, observation and immersion works have brought us a first analysis of night mobilities as well as elements related to the conditions under which the network is running.

Mobility problems. Problems could be identified in the field: disparities between the centre and periphery as regards transport; public bus services limited in time with public transport stopping before midnight; the access cost to services such as taxis; public transport return timetables inappropriate for workers as well as revellers; a barely understandable transport offer, the inhospitality of public areas; transit places (stations, etc.) often closed and not very welcoming; bad connections between interurban and intraurban transports, connection problems at late hours; the lack of side networks from a periphery to another; conflicts between the “sleeping night” and the one “having a good time”, in particular at the establishments’ gates or during the migrations from one place to the other; alcohol abuse in public areas as a problem of health, safety and public calm.

Quickly evolving night mobility practices. The transport offer must be adapted to very quickly changing mobility practices: hours shifting at the beginning of the evening, lack of evening programmation and the demand for flexibility; development of night routes from one establishment to the other; scale change for night mobilities over dozens of kilometers, demand for safety which compells to imagine a mobility network (taxis, etc.), demand for comprehensibility of the night transport offer (clear plans, appropriate description); a transport offer’s synchronization with the rythms and hours of working and entertainment centres as well as a permanent adaptation are required.

Expressed needs to take into account. The demand expressed in favour of more accessible and hospitable towns depends on less expensive public transport and taxis, a greater number of shops open, more safety…and public conveniences.

Restraints to the development. The restrainsts to the development of night transport can be found in the descending order, insecurity, low profitability, service costs and the degradations.
Constraints to include. Other constraints push down on the development of mobility services: the competition with taxis, the taste for driving, the night work legislation which increases its cost, the lower density of potential public transport’s users, public authorities commitment in a merely financial logic, social constraints, trade unions opposition to night work, public authorities shyness. The lack of public solutions regarding night transport can also be explained by the reluctance of transport organizing authorities, the technical constraints related to the networks maintenance, the transport cost for the user at night and generally the high access cost to the town at night, are restraints to the development of mobility services.

Success conditions well identified. Some elements can explain the success of night transport systems: the integration in a global development policy of the night life such as in Barcelona with the programme Bonanit; the interdependence of night services and transport, the vitality in public transport, the design and conception of night mobility services adapted to this particular time such as the Party bus (Belgium, Germany, Great-Britain, Australia, …) where the bus acts as the direct prelude and outcome of festive evenings with developments and a musical atmosphere similar to a nightclub, the fine adaptation to the territory constraints as in the rural area of Delémont in Switzerland, with a well running on-demand transport system called “owl” (“Hibou”), the day-night fare integration and between the different networks, a good acknowledgment and adaptation to the market, to its targets (youth, workers, etc.) and to the timetables of leisure places, enterprises and time to allow to establish a system. Time must be given to night transport services to be established and to make a name for themselves, an efficient and original communication just like « Fledermaus » in Zürich, putting forward general interest and service’s benefits for the society: decrease in road accidents, traffic and nuisance reduction and development of night life; development of awareness and prevention actions such as in Newcastle (Australia), or strong partnerships between organizing authorities, transport companies and night life areas or private partners, such as in Zurich where the Kantonale Bank offered tariff reductions to its clients; an intermodal strategy allowing to answer the increase of the distances covered to obtain the night offer, as in Switzerland with the “Moonliner”, transport systems by interurban busses in Berne, corresponding to the train offers and local services.

Some transferable mobility services
Some of the many night mobility services listed could be transfered: the night busses of the network “Nightcruiser”, equipped with a bar and sound and lights in Perth (Australia); the night transport network included in a global project called “Good Evening Barcelona”: for young people and night workers; the New York (United-States) subway operating 24 hours a day, night tickets in Reims (France); night car parks for 1 euro in Besançon; free busses on the Los Angeles university campuses, the on-demand “Radiobus” in Milan, the tradition of the tramways which were running at night and also allowed to deliver shops in Cracow (Poland), the intermodal bus and train network “Nachtnetz” in Zurich (Switzerland), the communication campaign “Nachtnetz” in Zurich (Switzerland); the night train strategy in Germany, the “Zemidjans” taxi-motorbikes from Cotonou (Benin), the temporary closing policies for towns at night, the “Plan Vigicarotte” in Niort (France);
bringing drunk people back home, “Daiko Unen” in Gifu Shi (Japon), safety agents in the Newcastle (Great-Britain) busses; taxis access regulation, “Taxis Marshalls” in Bath (Great-Britain), the Women and Transport operation “between two stoppings” in Montreal (Canada), the continuation of salaried employees transport networks as on the PSA Peugeot-Citroën site in Sochaux (France).

**Other transferable services.** Some of the many night services or equipments located could be transfered: the “special nights” contributing to the town’s discovery at night: “Continuing training night”, Hamburg (Germany), “Museum night”, in Munich, Berlin, Frankfurt (…) (Germany), “Science night” in Berlin (Germany), “Long music night” in Munich (Germany), “Solidarity night” in Tübingen (Germany), “Local products night” in Ostouse (France), “Cultural night”, Reykjavik (Island). The nighttime information sites contribute to discover urban nights such as “Noctis” in Brussels (Belgium), the “Easy Roma” directory or the practical guide “Ravenna fuori orario” in Ravenna (Italy); the “Citizen call centre” in Rome (Italy) allows a round-the-clock access to official information or even the Hong-kong website (China). The policy of later opening of socio-educational, sport and cultural structures for young people such as “The night is yours” in Asturia (Spain) and Rennes (France); prevention with the “Walkers” association in Helsinki (Finland); the “night correspondents” from Strasburg (France) or the “City Guardians” in Westminster, London (Great-Britain), the association La moquette in Paris (France) gathering inhabitants and homeless people all night long; nightclubs operating according to adapted timetables: “Seven2one” in Paris (France), “Deafaves” in London (Great-Britain), night universities in the USA, the continuously open libraries, the “Night charters” for conciliation in Lille and Dunkerque (France), the night mayors teams “Nachtwacht” in Amsterdam (the Netherlands), night childminders: “HH-Babysitting” in Copenhagen (Denmark) and “Stern im Ried” in Bienne (Switzerland) or even the night wildlife park “Nocturnia” in the Ardennes (France).

**New ways for tomorrow**

“*It is at night that it is good to believe in light*”

Edmond ROSTAND

The night has really a lot of things to say to the day in a society which takes a fresh look at its nycthemers.

**New general ways for transport policies**

**Ensuring continuity.** The town must be seen 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, according to a logic of continuity: *geographical continuity*, by having the opportunity to go from one point to the other; *information continuity*: information must be guaranteed to the public transport user before, during and after its route; *temporal continuity* by imagining transport solutions 24 hours a day and 7 days a week and finally *political continuity* allowing to lead long-term projects at the right scale.

©Association for European Transport and contributors 2006
Opening the borders. The borders must be opened between collective and individual transport, research and experimentation, transport users and companies. Solutions in terms of lasting mobility cannot be found on the infrastructure’s side but rather on the side of intermodal network optimization, thanks to a co-construction approach and the use of Information and Communication Technologies.

Choosing the experimentation. The approach adopted by many towns which consists in testing a new network or a network’s extension at day during special events is a good one which allows or not – after assessment - to develop a night service.

Having the political courage. The decision to institute a night transport system is risky for local managers considering the long time required to establish this service.

New ways to develop transport networks

The development of mobility services in the urban nighttime, caricature of the day where everything seems to be exaggerated in excess, passion or rejection, must take into account the sensitive dimensions which are less considered at day.

Sensitive approach. The quantity and quality of the mobility services available, the networks specificity, the comprehensibility of night offers, design, comfort and safety constitute interesting ways of exploration for the different elements of the transport system: pathways for travelling, vehicles and transit areas.

Territorial approaches of collective intelligence. These ways are governed by the development of a collective intelligence of mobilities on metropolitan territories along with: territorial, intermodal and multiscalar platforms, gathering elected representatives, organizing transport authorities, transport companies, taxis, universities, students and youth associations, trade unions, companies’ heads, night establishments’ heads (bars, nightclubs, etc.), road safety for the observation, awareness raising and follow-up of night mobility offer and demand, testing and assessing appropriate solutions; night trip Plans in each department just as the enterprises trip plans allowing to improve the transport of salaried employees and users as well as their safety and quality of life.

New ways for a town which is more accessible and hospitable

Other nighttime services required. Surveyed partners think the services which could help towards making our urban nights more accessible and hospitable are: less expensive public transport and taxis, open shops, increased safety… and public conveniences, as it is notably proposed by the head of New York transport society.

Following our works, we can imagine suggestions in terms of urban offer, well-being and urbaniy, organization, knowledge and observation, information and description, equality, mediation, timetable flexibility, lighting, citizenship, culture and lasting development.
Conclusion

Beyond the question of mobility services and technical answers regarding adjustment, this first exploration of our urban nights raises the question of the emergence of a round-the-clock town. It makes us rethink the urban system’s times and spaces centred around a few main lines:

**Integrating the night into an urban time ecology.** Our thinking must definitely turn from a logic of saving time into a logic of time quality and therefore of life quality.

**Imagining a “Right to the town” at night.** In the same way, a new Right to the town must be defined, which wouldn’t be limited to the daytime but would take into account the developments imposed by the continuous time of the economy and the networks: a Right to the town for everyone, everywhere and at any time. Citizenship is part of the day as well as of the night, along with its rights and duties. The continuous right to the town is also a right to public spaces or rather to a collective urban space of quality.

**Reconstructing a complete urban system at night.** In front of the progressive colonization of nighttime by the economy and of the risks of current – or future – desynchronization we offer to move some temporalities and public timetables back or forward in order to rebuild a complete urban system at night respecting everyone, but in taking note of the transformations affecting our lives, towns, territories and organizations, as we are still helpless to limit its impacts at a local level or imagine to be able to influence the global system. Most public and private services would be guaranteed by “continuous time oasis” equally spread out in the town’s transit areas (stations, etc.) combining the function of the town as a guardian (safety, health, etc.).

**Out-thinking of a town planning at night.** In a space-time in which safety and freedom notions are essential, for the nighttimes of our towns also to become moments of sharing and friendliness, and for our public spaces to become attractive again, a new urban planning must considered, which would be based on a few main principles: the hospitality of public spaces, transport and urban furniture facing harsh living conditions; the information facing a territory which isn’t well understood; quality facing a difficult environment; equality facing too large differences between the centre and the periphery; sensibility facing the absolute rationality of the daytime; truth facing risks of trivialization; the unexpected by means of new inventions and the organization of events; the alternation of shade and light facing risks of homogenization; the safety through the increase of urban entertainment and human presence rather than through security technologies; making a delight of the nighttime in inventing new ways.

**And last but not least.** Before contributing to the emergence of a round-the-clock town and the continuity of transport services, one will systematically be compelled to raise this essential question: is the play worth the candle of it? The night has really a lot of things to say to the day. Tomorrow is another night.

---

4 In the spirit of the notion pushed forward by H. LEFEBVRE and developed in the European Urban Charter, adopted on March 18, 1992 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), during the annual plenary session (Strasbourg, 17-19 March)