

Viewpoint

## Night tourism: A Strategic or Tokenistic Measure in Urban Management?

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**Abstract** | The expansion of cities and the change in the urbanization system have led to the increased activity duration in cities and the continuation of part of daytime activities during the night. In this sense, the night is an opportunity to redefine the urban landscape in a period, and this definition is different from urban society and urban tourism. The term “night tourism” refers to any kind of tourism that occurs between sunset and sunrise. Therefore, this type of tourism is raised by the time when tourism activities are carried out and their spatial limits, not by the nature of these activities and their motivations. Despite the development of the “Master Nightscape Plan” in official documents and academic literature, the term “night tourism” has not yet been correctly defined, and the night tourism classification has not been analyzed in terms of the type of audience, the selection of a suitable place, and the type of activity carried out during the night. In many cities of the world, night tourism has become the main element of tourism competitiveness in the city and makes an essential economic contribution to the urban economy. The existing studies in the master nightscape plan focus on decorative actions and specific spaces. However, there is no approach to the different timings making the night, and no realistic interpretation of night tourism and its impacts.

**Keywords** | *Urban nightscape, Urban night tourism, Urban lighting, Urban management.*

**Introduction and Problem Statement** | Regarding urban dynamics during the night, the following question is raised: Can the tokenistic and decorative approaches to the nightscape be effective measures for it?

Before the Nasser era, the nightscape in Iranian cities did not include any concept except for the lighting of the main roads for providing security in the city. In the mid-Qajar era, the use of gas street lamps in the city center and its surrounding streets, has raised the nightscape as a new concept playing a role in giving identity to the city. Nowadays, the change in the urbanization system and the expansion of cities, especially metropolises, have led to the increased activity duration in cities and the continuation of part of daytime activities during the night. In this sense, the night is an opportunity to redefine the urban landscape in a period, and this definition is different from urban society and urban tourism. The

nightscape makes it possible to give meaning to the hierarchy of the city's elements in different periods of the day and study how these elements are displayed in the urban night tourism programs.

### Structure of Criticism

In recent decades, the situation of the urban night, which is here referred to as the urban nightscape, has changed. Night, which was long considered a marginal issue, has become increasingly significant in urban politics. Night tourism development, as one of the axes of urban tourism development, is associated with changes in the scope and time of urban activity (Giordano, Nofre Mateu & Crozat, 2018). Recently, in different countries such as France, numerous measures have been taken at local and national levels to highlight the dimension of night tourism. Now, the urban night is characterized by

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multiple tourism methods and has become an attractive element for a wide range of tourist populations (*ibid.*).

Nowadays, urban nightscape management has become an urban and managerial demand, nightscape planning and the attractiveness of cities at night are considered important issues in urban policy, and in some cities of the world, it is seen as a specialized issue for which a “master nightscape plan” has been developed.

When describing the programs presented in the nightscape plan, “Behnaz Aminzadeh”, the director of “Tehran’s Master Nightscape Plan”, stated that the plan was developed based on the comprehensive needs of the city of Tehran, it is not only based on the landscape and appearance of the city but also based on its life. Accordingly, the requirements for executing this plan include social and cultural requirements. Moreover, the aspects of visual beauty, including lighting, have been taken into consideration. On the other hand, due to the presence of tourists in cities, it was necessary to consider functional requirements in the plan ([Jamshidian, 2018](#)).

In sum, consistency can be established between the two by using a new platform and an approach to the relationship between tourism and cultural identity. Human identity has roots in the human’s innate, which is the cradle for forming culture and tourism. Modern society takes a step in the path of search for its own; thus, by looking deeper into the philosophy of travel, on the one hand, and searching for a cultural identity that is unique and attractive for those who observe it, tourism requires consistency between the nature of tourism and culture, with identity formed inside them both. Tourism and culture are thus the two phenomena that work to introduce and reveal identities. In Tehran’s master nightscape plan, the city has been divided into small spaces such as streets, squares, cultural centers, entertainment, and multi-purpose centers. Regarding urban dynamics at night, the city has been investigated based on the functional zones (religious, tourism, entertainment) in districts 1, 3, 6, and 12. Regarding the dynamics of the defined zones, the night-time economy in each zone has been considered an important factor for city life at night but no action has been presented to realize it. The objectives of the plan were defined in two general categories: 1. “Landscape” in the form of the city body; and 2. “City life”. According to these two categories, the city was divided into functional zones, for which micro-scale programs were presented based on economic efficiency. Despite the ability of the landscape to provide a realistic reading of the city in different time frames, it has not been considered. The perspective of the master plan is a system of the values of the designer who considered herself/himself qualified to comment

on the social and cultural dimensions of the perceived space. While city life depends on its landscape and is not a body-based matter ([Fig. 1](#)).

Concerning the night-time lighting of the city, it is possible to manage the lighting in the city in its body to provide lighting and improve security in segregation policies, considering the functional areas and passages. Regarding the nightscape, one of the important and basic principles of the plan is to recognize, correctly locate, and manage the specific characteristics of city life at night. Some day and night activities overlap. However, at night, due to the presence of limited activities and pause spaces, there is perceptually a more centralized relationship between the activity realm and the audience’s perceived space compared to the daytime period. At night, there is more focus on pause spaces. They are considered turning points for the dynamics of the nightscape. In these spaces, a more intimate human-city space relationship emerges because other intervening factors disappear, and humans communicate with the immediate space. This space shows a nightscape different from the landscape in the day to the tourist. The nightscape provides an opportunity to revise the visual and perceptual quality of the urban landscape by creating a new semantic connection in the night realm. In the nightscape, what is of great importance is to consider the perceptual changes in the space and determine the realms of activities and tourism at night, not to consider the darkness of space and take measures for lighting.

In this aspect, urban policies regarding the night landscape can be divided into two categories: 1. Those emphasize the city at night; and 2. Those stimulate the nightlife of the city. Night gathering is one of the policies emphasizing the city at night and is one of the necessary conditions for the landscape. The “evening economy” condition is one of the sufficient conditions and also, one of the driving factors for nightlife. In the analysis of these two policies, it is important to pay attention to the fact that the daylife and nightlife of the city are different in terms of social and tourism activities. The actions occurring in the city at night indicate a narrower urban landscape compare to the daylife, so it offers a more centralized and selected category of spaces. It is not possible to divide the night spaces based on the functional zones presented in the master urban plan and then, seek the dynamics of night tourism in the city using decorative measures.

Therefore, to enhance the dynamics of night tourism in the city, one of the important and strategic measures is to select a place based on its identity in the process of social perception, and the conceptual and functional

structures of the city. Only in certain places in the city, such as the city center, day and night activities overlap, and this place is considered a turning point for the strategic nightscape plans. From the perspective of the target society, full conceptual-activity adaptation throughout the day is a necessary and sufficient condition for the dynamics of the environment. Also, the attendance of the audience in the city center as a special place in the city is a result of social structures that have been developed over time due to current activities such as economic activities. Based on the evening economy strategy, the goal of cultural or activity innovation in the nightscape should not be prioritized in policies. Identifying those applying nightscape and strengthening tourism-dependent activity potentials in the perceptible realm at night would be a driving factor for the dynamics of the city nightscape. The master nightscape plan is not considered a strategic plan. Developing a strategic nightscape plan is one of the requirements of urban management and it has not been addressed so far. Regarding relevant concepts, there is no consensus on their definitions between the

relevant officials. The aforementioned plan tends to challenge the image of a non-dynamic city at night and leads to the emergence and improvement of some night spaces. The selected policies in the plan are looking for the dynamics of the nightscape in the same way that the dynamics of the dayscape is sought. Despite the overlap of some day and night activities, the nightscape is a complementary concept of the dayscape, not the same as it. A realistic look at the urban management studies and actions regarding the nightscape indicates that the lack of coherence of actions and studies by the intervening authorities and the lack of complete and accurate knowledge of this important urbanscape are the origin of some infeasible measures to improve the nightlife of the city. The actions and programs presented are based on the beautification of the city and are considered a subset of night decorative programs. These programs have a decorative and tokenistic approach to setting goals and managing actions and rely on the mechanistic and linear structure of the master urban plan, not on the discussion of night tourism as the most dynamic activity of the city at night.



Fig. 1. A light tunnel in Tajrish square, which was developed according to Tehran's master nightscape plan. In this plan, Tajrish Square was known as one of the nightscape axes. This action is seen as an action that has reduced the nightscape to the level of street lighting and it is a decorative action using color and light rather than a life-giving action for the city. Source: <https://seeiran.ir/>

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