

Concept Note

Nightlife as a Driver for Adaptive Reuse: Cultural Reprogramming of Vacant Urban Interiors

For Horizon Europe / New European Bauhaus Consortium

Context

Across Europe, cities are experiencing a dramatic rise in underutilized commercial interiors—particularly office buildings and retail centers—amid structural shifts in work, commerce, and urban mobility. Simultaneously, the nightlife sector, a proven catalyst for cultural innovation and social cohesion, is under threat from rising costs, restrictive zoning, and spatial displacement.

VibeLab proposes an integrated urban strategy: transforming vacant interior spaces into hubs of night-time and cultural activity. By connecting real estate stakeholders with nightlife communities, we can pilot models of non-extractive, socially inclusive reuse that anchor long-term revitalization.

Our Approach

VibeLab is a global consultancy specializing in night-time governance, cultural policy, and creative spatial development. Building on our work with Berlin's Clubcommission and international city partners, we advocate for a process-first, participatory methodology that frames cultural actors as co-developers—not just users—of urban space.

Core pillars:

- **Urban matchmaking** between property owners and cultural communities to initiate bottom-up programming of vacant interiors.
- **Governance innovation**, enabling cultural stakeholders to co-shape spatial outcomes through open assemblies and working groups.
- **Process prototypes** that use temporary activations to test long-term use models and build local legitimacy.
- **Cross-sector convening** of real estate, culture, policy, and civil society through platforms like the *Club & Raum* conference (see below).

Key Case Studies

1. Berlin Retail Centers

With over one-third of shopping malls in Germany deemed “not future-proof,” VibeLab (via Clubcommission Berlin) initiated planning scenarios for adaptive reuse through nightlife and culture. A participatory design process engaged club operators, artists, and urban stakeholders to reimagine retail centres as mixed-use spaces combining evening cultural activity, community infrastructure, and inclusive public use. This culminated in workshops and strategy input for Berlin’s Senate-led *Zentren Gipfel* (Centres Summit), influencing policy discussions on cultural uses in commercial interiors.

2. Tegel Airport / Turbulence TXL (2023–ongoing)

The disused Berlin-Tegel Airport was transformed into a cultural testbed through a public-private-community process led by Clubcommission Berlin. A multi-phase “space host” competition invited grassroots collectives to programme the site’s former freight terminal as a nightlife venue, with city backing and iterative regulatory support. The project demonstrates how temporary cultural uses can inform long-term planning, offering a replicable model for cities managing post-infrastructure vacancy.

3. Club & Raum Conference (2025)

Held in Berlin in early 2025, *Club & Raum* (club & space) convened nearly 200 stakeholders from real estate, finance, cultural policy, nightlife, and creative industries to develop cross-sector responses to spatial scarcity. Hosted by Clubcommission Berlin, the event provided a setting for urban matchmaking, policy discourse, and design collaboration—bridging informal nightlife actors with institutional partners to co-develop reuse scenarios for empty commercial interiors.

Relevance to the Horizon / NEB Agenda

This concept directly supports the New European Bauhaus goals of creating inclusive, beautiful, and sustainable places by:

- **Activating vacant spaces** through cultural and social value, not speculative reinvestment.
- **Strengthening urban resilience** through night-time economies and community governance.
- **Linking local cultural ecosystems** with city-making and spatial transformation agendas.
- **Prototyping scalable governance models** for adaptive reuse, transferable across European contexts.

Consortium Invitation

VibeLab seeks partners in architecture, urban planning, real estate innovation, and cultural infrastructure to co-develop a European pilot. Our goal: design and test frameworks for transforming vacant commercial interiors into nighttime and cultural commons across multiple urban sites.

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