



Beer drinkers... unite! Unite for the sake of—
Buuuurp.
 Hey man, knock it off!
 Sorry. What were we uniting for?
 Goddamnit.

The first meeting didn't go so well. It was just me and a few buddies, longing desperately for a place to go drink beer during those oh-so-lonely hours between 4 and 7 a.m. So far, we've found nothing—nothing legal, at least.

But why not? Politicians and businessmen alike are touting slogans that proclaim Amsterdam's blossoming creativity. They're continually adding new cultural enhancements to the scene to entice even more tourist money. And they regularly decree our forthcoming membership in the so-called Top Five World Cities.

Yet, at the same time, the great majority of bars and cafés are browbeaten into closing at exactly 1 a.m. during the week. If they miss that cut-off time, then it's American-style retribution: three strikes and you're out. Certainly, there are a handful of bars with licences that allow them to stay open till 3 a.m. during the week and 4 a.m. on weekends, but if we're truly becoming a *world* city—the message Iamsterdam keeps hammering into our heads—then a mere handful of late night pubs doesn't do it. And what the hell are we supposed to do after 4 a.m.?

Buuuurp.

Jongen, please. This is serious.

Going deep, falling hard

A case in point: De Diepte, the much-loved little dive bar tucked behind the Dam on St Pieterspoortsteeg, which was shut down two weeks ago, after a day of particularly heinous court decisions. De Diepte tended to blare out raw punk and the nastier roots of rock 'n' roll from the speakers. It was run by Pyotr, a hard-drinking, crazed-looking individual with dark, sunken eyes, given to slamming tequila and leaping from his bar stool to rock out to the music. To the casual observer, it might have seemed like he was having a nervous breakdown. But they'd be wrong. He always acts this way.

'See, that's what I'm talking about, man. That whole place was full of characters,' says Bjorn, member of eclectic music duo zZz. 'The bartenders, the DJs, *everybody* that came in there, they were all so cool. It was one of the only places you could go and just be yourself.'

We're sitting in a quiet pub and Bjorn is reminiscing. It seems difficult for him to accept the loss of his favourite bar: 'There was never a problem at De Diepte. They never had to use a bouncer. They didn't even have neighbours. [The city] really got the wrong place, man. I don't know where to go now.'

And he's not alone. Regulars of De Diepte estimate that roughly 2,000 locals had a real attachment to the place. On top of that, a huge international following of artists and musicians knew the bar well, and they always stopped by on their visits in town.

'The place itself was really like a friend or a family member,' says Bjorn. 'You can't replace that. You can't rebuild it somewhere else... And the music! Where can you hear music like that anymore? That powerful rock 'n' roll, '50s garage, hard punk. It was at De Diepte that I really got to know this music.'

From the city's viewpoint, however, closing down De Diepte was rather simple: no night bar may stay open past 3 a.m. during the week, or 4 a.m. on weekends, and Pyotr regularly violated that rule. But there are always other aspects to consider beyond the rules, especially when they're made by suits disconnected from the scene.

'People always got to De Diepte around two a.m.' explains Bjorn, 'just after the early bars would close. So that was Pyotr's time to make a living. If he has to close at three a.m., then one hour is not enough—especially if the place is still packed. Why throw everybody out?'

DJ Bone would agree. He turned records there on a weekly basis, worked behind the bar for years, made flyers, and painted some of the murals on the walls. Few people know the place better than he does.

'For late hours,' says Bone, 'it was the most happening bar around. It would've been nice to get people in there earlier, and we tried that. But people always thought about De Diepte when they're drunk and want to get drunker.'

This is true, but despite the heavy intoxication and hard music, the vibe was always amiable. This was largely due to Pyotr's continual presence and generosity. 'For

him, it was very important that you never had to pay an entrance fee. The bands always got as much as they wanted to drink—not just five little beers, you could really drink till you dropped dead. And every band, no matter how small you were, got paid the same amount. Even the DJs just starting out, they'd always get twenty-five euros an hour. That guy's super generous. And the bar wasn't making that much money.'

Like most little bars with big attitudes, this was not the first time De Diepte had been shut down. 'I've been to three "Last night at De Diepte" parties,' says Bone. 'But this is the first time it was closed for this reason. I think it's even the first time *any* bar lost its licence for staying open too late. It's serious, but Pyotr's still optimistic. With the help of Chiel van Zelst, he really expects to get the bar back.'

Voices of the night

'By far, the most common thing people say to me is, "Get later hours for nightlife." That's what *everybody* wants.' As Nachburgemeester, Van Zelst spends almost all of his time—unpaid—talking to everybody that has any interest whatsoever in the night. 'The PvdA is the biggest opposition, and they're always saying they want a city where you can live. But I think a local bar *is* part of living. They want all these artists and writers and creative people here. They keep calling it a creative city, using that as a marketing tool. But if you're a writer and at one a.m. you've just finished another chapter of your great book about life in Amsterdam, you're gonna want to go out and get a beer and tell people about it. Then you'll get your creative city.'

The opposition, however, argues that extended hours mean Amsterdam will become an unruly party city. 'But I talk to the bar owners. Most of them don't even want to stay open later. And besides, why can you have the Uitmarkt blocking off streets, or have two big festivals at the same time, but you can't have a bar open later where twenty people walk out? [The city] wants to be hip and exciting, but hip and exciting doesn't stop at one a.m.'

Van Zelst is quite confident that these early hours can't stay for long. 'It's a waste of money to promote the city at one end, and close it off at the other. It destroys capital. They won't be able to hold this forever. It's gonna have to change.'

Meanwhile, out across the IJ, just next to Robodock, Marc Koolen sits quietly in the newly refurbished home of his performance/party space, the Pickup Club. On meeting him there, he regales me with visions of a truly nocturnal Amsterdam: a city where the nightlife would be freed from its 4 a.m. shackles; a city that would actually *live* up to its progressive liberal reputation; a city that would be for *all* the people, not just members of the PvdA. It's a lovely dream, but how would all this happen?

Koolen thinks for a moment, focusing his words. 'The council needs to give parameters, pinpoint some places. They should say: "If you want to party all night long, please do so in these specific areas." That would help to isolate the nightlife in a few spots, and leave plenty of areas where people can sleep quietly. They could provide better night-time transportation, and give the [late-night] culture a chance to grow. But that's not what they're doing.'

He recalls the fire on New Year's Day 2001 in 't Hemeltje, a third-floor café in Volendam, where 14 young party-goers died, and 250 more were injured. 'Since then, the city really started controlling nightlife: adding new rules, and stricter and stricter regulations. I think that's really wrong. It's important to feel your own decisions.'

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