



LOCAL AND REGIONAL **TIME AGENDA**

Topic 6



**CHRONOCITIES FOR
SUSTAINABLE FUTURES**



Local and Regional Time Network

The **Local and Regional Time Agenda (LRTA)** is a pioneering compilation of time policies implemented by local and regional authorities around the world. It provides an updated compendium of time policies grouped by topic and practical recommendations on how to implement them.

The Agenda is coordinated by the **Local and Regional Time Network**, the international alliance of cities, metropolises, and regions aimed at promoting the right to time where people need it most. It is the main forum to exchange and promote implementable time policies that are already changing daily life for more than 90 million people in Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

More information:

<https://timeuse.barcelona/local-and-regional-time-network/>



The **Time4All 2.0** project is a two-year initiative (2025-2026) that includes a series of exchanges and workshops in partner cities. Its main objective is to raise awareness about time policies and promote a balanced and sustainable use of daily time, engaging citizens and cities in discussions on the right to time. The project targets 1,800 participants, focusing on young people and women, who are disproportionately affected by time poverty.

Funded by the European Union through the EACEA Agency (European Education and Culture Executive Agency), Time4All 2.0 seeks to explore the value of time organisation while developing policies that enhance health, equality, productivity, sustainability, and civic participation. The project is part of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme and builds upon the achievements of its predecessor, Time4All project, implemented in 2023-2024.

The project is led by the city of Bergamo and Time Use Initiative (TUI), the international organisation promoting time policies and the right to time, which currently runs the Network's secretariat.

More information:

<https://timeuse.barcelona/time-networks/time4all-2-0/>

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TIME AND THE CITY

When Rest is as Important as Race

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Sleep and Rest

Modern societies are increasingly recognizing that time is not only a social and economic construct, but also a biological and environmental one. Circadian rhythms regulate sleep, metabolism, cognitive performance, and overall health of living organisms such as humans, even though our lifestyles and often our social organisation are driven by a *“productivism”* view that often excludes or ignores rest.

Sleep is not a purely individual responsibility, but a structural and societal matter shaped by working hours, urban environments, school schedules, and institutional organization. Sleep times and bedtime routines entail overcoming the multiple distractions we face that keep us awake. Yet, poor sleep is not only associated with chronic diseases, but also reduced productivity, mental health problems, and social inequality, and it is even an economic concern that limits a country or city's productivity.

Circadian rhythms regulate sleep-wake cycles, hormone production, body temperature, and cognitive performance. Unsurprisingly, when social schedules conflict with these rhythms, individuals experience fatigue, stress, and reduced performance. At a societal level, this leads to higher healthcare costs, lower productivity, and environmental degradation. Furthermore, these effects are not equally distributed across the population and give rise to significant socio-economic inequalities in healthy behaviours. Therefore, sleep and circadian rhythms must be protected, just as we protect air quality, nutrition, and physical activity.

Urban policy as health policy

Many current urban and institutional systems operate in ways that disrupt these rhythms, creating stress, sleep deprivation, and environmental harm. Regulations, urban

planning, and legislative measures that create territories respectful of human and nature's rhythms are therefore essential to improving wellbeing and sustainability. Policies that focus on human and natural rhythms represent a new model of health governance. This includes policies such as healthy street lighting, silent public services, traffic limits, circadian hospitals, adapted school timing, and protected night zones, all of which aim to create environments that support sleep, health, and ecological balance.

Time Governance

Time governance refers to the tools we use to structure life through schedules, regulations, and institutional practices, including customs and mealtimes. For decades, time has been treated mainly as an economic and administrative tool, structured around productivity, transportation, and consumption. However, growing scientific evidence shows that ignoring biological rhythms has significant health and social costs. Restaurant meal, opening times, and late-night leisure customs, as well as practices such as daylight-saving time, are examples of practices that limit rest. Cities offer around-the-clock schedules that raise expectations in individuals about time and employment alertness, when the associated time stress and fatigue entail costs in later life health. Integrating sleep and circadian science into public policy, therefore, becomes essential for creating sustainable and healthy communities.

A time-sensitive governance model does not simply reorganize schedules; it redesigns environments and institutions to align with human and natural rhythms. Urban planning and legislative measures play a key role in achieving this transformation, similarly to ending practices such as daylight savings time, which reduce individuals' well-being and are estimated to give rise to large welfare consequences. Below are a few:

a. Healthy Street Lighting

One of the most visible and impactful measures to improve sleep quality is the development of healthy street lighting. Artificial light at night, particularly blue-rich LED lighting, interferes with melatonin production and disrupts sleep cycles. Excessive or poorly designed lighting reduces sleep quality, increases stress, and affects both human health and wildlife. Cities that update street lighting to use warmer colours and reduce intensity at night can significantly improve sleep conditions for residents while saving energy. Healthy lighting policies also reduce light pollution, protect biodiversity, and create more comfortable urban environments.

b. Silent Nights

Another important initiative is the reorganization of noisy public services, such as garbage collection, street cleaning, and logistics, to avoid sleeping hours, and more generally access to cars and the racket of buses. Noise pollution is a major factor in sleep disruption, especially in dense urban areas. Night-time noise increases stress levels, contributes to cardiovascular diseases, and reduces overall well-being. Hence, the promotion of silent public services can reduce unnecessary disturbances during the night by scheduling noisy activities outside of sleeping hours or using quieter technologies.

c. Circadian Hospitals

Healthcare institutions have a unique responsibility in promoting circadian-friendly environments. Circadian hospitals are designed to align medical care with biological rhythms by adjusting light levels at night, timing medication appropriately, and organizing staff shifts to minimize sleep disruption. Patients recover faster in environments that respect natural sleep cycles, and healthcare workers perform better when their schedules reduce fatigue. Stable and well-designed temporal environments reduce medical errors, improve recovery rates, and enhance overall quality of care.

d. School Timing and Biological Needs

School schedules are another key area where time-sensitive policies can improve health and performance. Adolescents naturally have later sleep cycles due to biological changes during puberty. Early school start times often force teenagers to wake up before their bodies are ready, leading to chronic sleep deprivation. Adapting school start times to biological rhythms improves academic performance, mental health, and emotional stability. Students who sleep better show higher concentration, better memory, and lower stress levels. Flexible school schedules also help reduce inequality, as sleep deprivation disproportionately affects disadvantaged communities.

A Comprehensive Time-Sensitive Governance

All the interventions mentioned point to the needs of a comprehensive governance system centred on sleep and biological rhythms. This entails coordination between governments, municipalities, healthcare institutions, schools, and communities, and it requires system-level interventions as well as changes in the choice architectures individuals face, affected by present bias, and lead them to ignore bedtime reminders, or to follow the social practices of a local culture that primes nightlife over rest.

Citizens and institutions need to recognize sleep as a collective good rather than a private matter. Policies that respect sleep and biological rhythms can reduce healthcare costs, improve productivity, and enhance quality of life across societies.

Respecting human and natural rhythms is becoming a central challenge for modern societies. Interventions such as healthy street lighting, silent public services, circadian hospitals, adapted school timing, and night zones demonstrate how this vision can be implemented in practice. By designing territories around biological and natural rhythms, societies can create healthier, more sustainable, and ultimately more productive environments, reinforcing the idea that “rest is as important as race”.

References

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Joan Costa-i-Font is an economist, specialised in Health economics. His work examines the origins and economic consequences of health and economic disadvantage, especially at old age.