A place to play: an historical geographical perspective on live music and poker machines in Australian pubs

Sarah Taylor
Abstract

This paper investigates the changing distributions of two respective forms of entertainment offered in Australian hotels: Electronic Gaming Machines (also known as poker machines or ‘pokies’) and live music. While live music is now described as something deserving of, and in need of, protection from external factors, poker machines are rarely subject to concerns about decline. This paper brings an historical and spatial perspective to the relationship between poker machines and live music, focusing on Sydney and Melbourne. These two cities have experienced divergent outcomes for live music, and have been subject to different state policies on poker machines, both with significant changes in the 1990s. The arrival of poker machines in Sydney hotel spaces seemed to exert a more noticeable negative influence on the live music scene than in Melbourne. It is not immediately clear why this would be so. However, drawing attention to themes of concentration and dispersal, rather than to aggregate growth or decline, helps to bring important nuance. A key difference is that in Sydney since 1997, most pubs have some poker machines, while in Melbourne since 1992, some hotels (‘pokies pubs’) have many poker machines. This pattern reflects regulatory details not designed to influence live music, but with effects felt by its participants.

Introduction

Live music is now something that some policy-makers wish, at least on paper, to encourage, as it offers prospects for localised social and economic development and vibrancy (Beer, 2011; Burke & Schmidt, 2012). Nonetheless, reports indicate that live music can, and does, decline in particular locations, often seemingly in defiance of the stated intentions of policy-makers. The sale and consumption of alcohol, on the other hand, has rarely been seen to need policy encouragement. In common with other western countries, the regulation of alcohol in Australia has been characterised by proliferations of ‘smaller prohibitions’ (Valverde 1998) that have tended to influence the spatial and temporal distributions of drinking practices more conspicuously than aggregate alcohol consumption (Taylor 2018; Wright 2014).

While alcohol regulations tend to seek to contain the possibilities for alcohol sale and consumption, live music is a highly contingent practice, dependent on participants (musicians, audiences, promoters, booking agents) and on a physical location (venue, stage and sound system). In turn, musicians are often keenly aware of local spaces suited to live music (Cohen 2012; Gallan, 2012; Homan 2000). In Australian cities, contemporary live music venues are often premises with liquor licences, and hotels (a mostly interchangeable term with ‘pubs’) have been central to alcohol sale and consumption, particularly until the mid 20th century.
Live music in Australian pubs enjoyed a profitable period in the 1970s and 1980s that now tends to be viewed nostalgically (Homan 2000, 2003), but which when viewed in the wider history of Australian liquor licensing, is relatively recent.

Another relatively recent use of Australian pub space has been the installation of poker machines (known colloquially as ‘pokies’). Gambling legislation in Australia is administered at state level, and as such poker machines have quite different legislative histories in respective states. Poker machines, too, are contingent on participants and location, but are rarely subject to concerns about decline – rather, the opposite. Sources of concern about poker machine growth in the 1990s included, but were not limited to, live music scene participants who found poker machines to be a mutually exclusive use of space (Johnson and Homan 2003; Catanzaro 2010). Famously, Sydney band The Whitlams released the song ‘Blow up the pokies’ in 1999: a key time in the presence of poker machines in Sydney. The impetus for the song came from the impact of gambling within the band, and, as described in an interview with singer Tim Freedman, the experience of ‘seeing my friend play the pokies where we used to play music’ (Rooke 2018).

Poker machines have been legal in hotels in New South Wales since 1997 and in Victoria since 1992. The arrival of pokies in hotel spaces seemed to exert a noticeable negative influence on the live music scene in Sydney (NSW), while in Melbourne (Victoria) live music scene participants were more concerned with other threats even though poker machines were also able to be located in hotels, just as in Sydney. It is not immediately clear why this would be so.

This paper brings an historical and spatial perspective to the relationship between poker machines and live music by comparing their respective distributions and relationships in Sydney and Melbourne, over key decades of legislative change. In addressing this particular question in Australian music history, it also contributes to histories of Australian pubs as commercial and social spaces. The methodology builds on examples of research wherein attention to spatial and temporal details has proved productive for understanding live music (Bennett 1998; Homan 2003), and the history of alcohol regulation (Taylor 2018; Valverde 1998).

**Research background**

Data in this paper draws on a three-year research project investigating patterns of growth, decline, contraction and dispersal of live music in Sydney and Melbourne between the early 1980s and mid 2000s. The research collected quantitative and qualitative data: interviews were conducted with live music organisers and musicians who had been active in Sydney or Melbourne at any point in the study timeframe, and a quantitative geodatabase of live music locations was built from geocoded yearly samples of advertisements for live music. The geodatabase is the source of live music maps and tables in this paper. Details are included in Taylor (2016).

**Pubs and clubs as spaces**

In common with several British colonial countries, ‘pub’ (short for ‘public house’) in Australia is a common term for an establishment permitted to sell alcohol. ‘Pub’ and ‘hotel’ are almost interchangeable terms, a linguistic conflation that also derives from specific liquor licensing histories. The broad history of liquor licensing in Australia provides context to the late 20th century arrival of live music, and then poker machines, within hotel spaces (Horne 1964; Kirkby 2003; Room 2010; Taylor 2018; Wright 2014). After a proliferation of drinking establishments following white settlement, temperance movements gained some traction in the late nineteenth century, and venues were subjects of tightened standards (Taylor 2018). Among them was the fact that it was, for some time, easier to obtain a liquor license when offering accommodation: hence the historical conflation of ‘pub’ and ‘hotel’. From the First World War to the mid twentieth century, the famously unintended effect of reduced hotel opening hours, to 6pm in most states, was of incentivising rushed and crowded alcohol consumption, in a spectacle later referred to as the ‘six o’clock swill’ (Homan 2003; Oldham 2014; Room 2010; Turner 1992).
In the 1950s and 1960s, respective Australian states reviewed licensing policies in line with ideals of cosmopolitan drinking and dining habits, such that ‘swill’ pubs were associated with the past (Kirkby 2003). The late twentieth century chapter of liquor licensing in Australia was characterised by the intersection of market-driven ideas and desires for cosmopolitan night-time economies (Beer 2011; Homan 2003). The spatial dynamics of Australian pubs were also reshaped by policing of drink-driving in the 1980s through ‘Breathalyser’ tests (Homel 1994); increased control of passive smoking in the early 2000s (Champion & Chapman 2005); and gentrification (Gibson & Homan 2004; Shaw 2005). In Victoria, the liquor licensing system was amended in 1987 so that it was easier and cheaper to obtain a liquor licence; a change now associated with a desirable night-time economy epitomised by the ‘small bar’ scene, and emulated decades later in New South Wales (Barrett 2007; Knight 2006; Sas 2018).

In Australia, and especially in New South Wales, a ‘club’ refers to the premises of a registered club. Clubs developed in the twentieth century into an idiosyncratic Australian, indeed, New South Welsh, institution roughly analogous to a cross between a small casino, a country club, and a pub. Legally, registered clubs are not-for-profit organisations for people with shared social interests (Hing 1996, 2006). In the early twentieth century in New South Wales, clubs for interest groups such as sports teams and returned servicemen gained a foothold in the hospitality industry. The appeal of New South Wales clubs was helped by six o’clock hotel closing times: while publicans were incentivised to facilitate maximum drinking in minimal time, clubs could offer more relaxed conditions (Homan 2003; Hing 2006). After hotel closing hours were extended in the 1950s, NSW clubs gained exclusive rights to operate poker machines, a monopoly successfully challenged by hoteliers in 1997.

**Live music in Australia**

For much of the twentieth century, Australian pubs and live music had little in common. This changed considerably and quickly, as pubs became a key site for popular music consumption in Australian cities from the 1970s onwards. Homan (2000, 2003) has described in detail the multiple social and policy factors which combined to encourage this transition. A key factor was the phasing out of six o’clock hotel closing times. Campaigners for extended trading hours had not specifically intended to encourage live music, but nonetheless succeeded in opening up a gap in hotel operating times, within large rooms previously given over to entertainment-free drinking, for which live music presented a profitable new use (Homan 2000; Oldham 2014; Patterson 2010; Turner 1992). In addition, the potential range of pub clientele broadened, as the legal drinking age was lowered from 21 to 18, and publicans were no longer permitted to exclude women (Kirkby 2003).

Without ever specifically conspiring to bring live music into pubs, enough changes overlapped that, temporarily, live music was a relatively easy choice for pub operators. The era from approximately 1975 to 1987 constitutes something of a high water mark, even if only in hindsight, against which decline of live music in Australian cities is measured: it has been described as ‘the Countdown era’, ‘the golden age of pub rock’, or the ‘Oz Rock heyday’ (Duffield 2009; Rhodes & Pullen 2012; Stratton 2006). These terms are approximately interchangeable with respect to the timeframe, but emphasise different features: *Countdown* was a popular music television show which ran from 1975 to 1987, pubs became the primary venue for live performances, and ‘Oz Rock’ was an aesthetic and attitude associated with rock music in pubs (Barrett 2012; Fiske et al. 1987; Oldham 2014; Stratton 2006). In this timeframe, live music was profitable and not generally viewed as something in need of saving (Freeman 1981, Homan 2003, p. 114).

Between the 1980s to the 2000s, descriptions of live music in Australian cities changed from that of being a booming but not particularly inclusive industry (Milsom et al 1986; Walker 1996), to something deserving of, and in need of, protection from external factors (Breen 1999; Homan 2013). Reports of venue closures, particularly in Sydney, began in earnest in the late 1980s, and continued through the 1990s (Bilic 1989; Holmes 1993; Molitorisz 1999). Accounts of live music in Melbourne also suggested the end of a boom time, but were less negative than those in Sydney (Duffy 1994; O’Farrell 1995; Roberts 2003; Schwartz 1996).
Early in the 2000s, live music gained a new status for policy-makers as a desirable feature of night-time economies and creative economies (Beer 2011; Green & Rood 2004; Lobato 2006). In a similar timeframe, research into the factors affecting live music locations became increasingly sophisticated (Burke & Schmidt 2009, 2012; Homan 2000, 2003; Shaw 2013; Wardle 2008). A key finding in live music research was that on-paper support for live music counted little when policies inadvertently made live music a difficult choice for venue operators.

More recently, the Melbourne live music scene has been reported upon positively as a booming ‘music city’ in terms of aggregate live music activity (Arts Victoria & Deloitte Access Economics 2011; Boulton 2013; Ross 2013). But it has also been the subject of activism about decline in music venues (Doman 2014; Donovan 2004; Homan 2010), thus presenting a seeming conundrum of simultaneous growth and decline. Sydney is more often described as an extreme example of a depletion of live music scene, and an example of what not to do to keep live music (Burke & Schmidt 2009; Carroll & Connell 2000; Faulkner 2013; Purcell 2009).

The presence of poker machines in pub spaces has tended to provide a visible manifestation of change in live music, with seemingly greater impact in Sydney than in Melbourne. Momentum for the Vanishing Acts report (Johnson & Homan 2003) derived in large part from concerns about the impact of poker machines on live music opportunities in Sydney. The report included a summary of press coverage about poker machines (pp. 69-70: ‘Pokies sound off key at jazz club’, ‘Music loss, gaming wins’, ‘Musicians blame pokies for lack of venues’, ‘Killing live music’). Vanishing Acts noted the phenomenon of music spaces being displaced by poker machines, particularly in hotels, where owners found themselves choosing between two competing uses of space, even if (in some cases) they didn’t personally like poker machines. Ultimately, Vanishing Acts cautioned against attributing too much blame to poker machines, but its inception indicated the extent to which poker machines were a source of concern for Sydney music scene participants.

In the same timeframe as Vanishing Acts addressed poker machines in detail for Sydney, the Live Music Taskforce report in Victoria (Carbines 2003; Boulton 2004) did not address poker machines, having not been called upon by lobby groups to do so, and instead focused almost exclusively on noise complaints.

Live music scene participants in Melbourne succeeded on occasion in intervening to protect particular live music venues. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the Save St Kilda, and Esplanade Alliance campaigns leveraged local government planning mechanisms to protect the Esplanade Hotel (Shaw 2005a, 2005b, 2013). From 2003, the interests of the Esplanade Alliance segued with those of VicMUSIC and Fair Go 4 Live Music, two newly formed Victorian lobby groups concerned with the protection of live music venues (Webb 2003; VicMUSIC 2003).

In Melbourne in 2010, the Save Live Australian Music (SLAM) rally drew a crowd of approximately 20,000 protestors (Homan, 2010; Levin 2010a). As with the Esplanade Alliance, the impetus for the SLAM movement was built around concern for a particular pub: in this case, the Tote Hotel, in Collingwood, which (despite the name, deriving from ‘Totaliser’, a type of betting machine), had concentrated on live music since the 1980s. The venue operator, Bruce Milne (long associated with independent record companies in Melbourne), expressed exhaustion from administrative hurdles to live music (Levin 2010b; Roberts 2011).

After this, Melbourne live music scene participants mobilised in large numbers against proposed liquor licensing changes that had provided the tipping point for Milne (Emery 2012; Homan 2011). Among the proliferation of ‘Don’t kill live music’ and ‘I Tote and I vote’ signs at the SLAM rally, some campaigners carried a ‘Don’t let Melbourne become Sydney’ sign: intimating that whatever happened to live music in Sydney, would be preferable to undo, and to avoid in Melbourne. Whatever this was, it could not be poker machines alone: poker machines were also present in Melbourne but were not a prominent concern.

Since 2016, the ‘lockout laws’ in Sydney have been the subject of extensive protests: the laws enforce greatly reduced hours for licensed premises in central Sydney, including Kings Cross, a nightclub and bar hotspot (Evershed, 2016, Taylor 2018). These protests have shown
greater mobilisation from musicians and audiences than was shown earlier toward Sydney pubs, for whom closures in the 2000s had garnered attention but no venue-specific activism as in Melbourne (Calvert 2012; Purcell 2009).

**Poker machines**

Poker machines are electronic games of chance, in which players place coins in machines that then simulate the draw of different suites of cards. The equivalent machines in the US are referred to as ‘slot machines’, and in the UK as ‘fruit machines’, although the particular configurations of Australian machines have idiosyncratic features (Kruger 2011). Within Australia, official reports tend to use the term Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs), although the colloquial term ‘pokies’ is widely understood.

Other kinds of gambling and gambling machines (e.g. lotteries and sports betting) were allowed in different Australian states since the 1950s (see Hing 1996, p. 17). However, poker machines have a longer history of being either specifically banned or meticulously controlled by state governments, who are responsible for gambling legislation.

The history of poker machines in New South Wales is strongly tied to the history of registered clubs, for whom poker machines were legalised in 1956, decades before hotels, or any other entities in Australia. The Registered Clubs Association of New South Wales (RCA), established in 1920, was influential in this outcome (Hing 1996). In 1996, 74% of Australia’s 83,625 poker machines were located in New South Wales clubs (Gibson and Homan 2003, p. 4). After lobbying from the Australian Hotels Association of NSW (AHA), in April 1997 poker machines were legalised in New South Wales hotels, with a cap of 15 machines per hotel, which was increased to 30 per hotel in February 1998 (Johnson and Homan, 2003, p. 4).

Poker machines did not move out of New South Wales clubs when they moved into hotels: instead, the majority of hotels took up poker machines, while clubs also increased profits (Johnson and Homan, 2003, p. 5). In addition to the uptake of poker machines by hotels, New South Wales poker machine growth was characterised by the emergence of ‘super clubs’ with hundreds of machines (Productivity Commission 1999, quoted in Johnson and Homan 2003, p. 7; Hing 2006; Livingstone, et al. 2012).

While this offered a substantial increase in tax revenue, the state government faced criticisms about the impact of poker machines. From 2001 onwards, all successive New South Wales legislation relating to poker machines presented strategies to control growth and to minimise harm (Robertson and Robertson 2018; Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2010). A state freeze of 104,000 poker machines was applied in 2001, and localised Social Impact Assessment (SIA) criteria were introduced for venues applying to acquire new machines. State numbers were capped further in 2008, at 25,980 for hotels and 78,020 for clubs. The per-hotel cap of 30 machines has remained in place since 1998.

In Victoria, poker machines have only been legal since 1992, and differentiation between hotels and clubs has not been as influential as in New South Wales. Successive state governments facilitated the introduction and expansion of poker machines in the 1990s (Livingstone, 2001). The rapid introduction of poker machines to Victoria has been attributed to a wish for a quick-fix to revenue issues (Livingstone 2015; Costello and Millar, 2000). In 1993 there were 251 venues and 13,661 poker machines in Victoria, and by 1995 there were 468 venues and 21,268 machines (Livingstone, 2001, pp. 47-48).

A distinctive feature of Victorian poker machine distribution was the enforced duopoly in place between 1991 and 2012. A state-wide cap of 30,000 poker machines applied and was required by legislation to be distributed in a specific way amongst named interests: 2,500 machines to Crown Casino, and the remaining 27,500 machines to one of two companies (Tattersalls and Tabcorp), with no more than 50% of all machines outside the casino licenced to either company.

Under this arrangement, Tattersalls and Tabcorp acted as intermediaries between consumers and venue owners, administering the legal and technical requirements of poker machines and
leasing them to pubs and clubs across Victoria, within the bounds prescribed by the state-wide cap of 27,500 machines outside of Crown Casino, and the per-venue cap of 105 machines. Marshall and Baker argued that this arrangement meant that geography was of ‘immense importance to the profits of the duopoly’, given that ‘where the operators assign their share of EGMs is one of the few avenues by which they might increase revenue’ (Marshall and Baker 2001, p. 85).

Victorian data by Local Government Area (LGA) was released for the first time in 2000, confirming the suspected correlation between geographic concentrations of socioeconomic disadvantage and poker machine numbers (Livingstone 2001, p. 53). Legislation in 2001 and 2006 introduced regional caps on the maximum per-capita rate of poker machines in specific areas of socioeconomic disadvantage (Brown 2010).

In 2008, the state government announced that the poker machine ownership arrangements would not be renewed in 2012, thereby ending the duopoly; after this, the two companies attempted to sue for compensation (Dowling 2012; White 2016). Since 2012, the state cap of 30,000 machines has remained in place, but poker machines can be owned by different companies through a bidding process up to a maximum of 35% market share. ALH (Australian Hospitality and Leisure) was among the key groups to step into this market. ALH is a venture between the Woolworths group and Bruce Mathieson, a Melbourne hotelier who operated many of the Melbourne hotels with duopoly-era poker machine leases (Millar 2009; O’Malley & Gladstone, 2018; Shapiro 2018).

Qualitative accounts: musicians and poker machines

This section draws on the literature collection and interview material from a wider research project (Taylor, 2016). Interviews with music scene participants comprised 12 live music organisers and 39 musicians (26 male, 13 female). Participants were asked to describe where and how they had performed or organised live music, and to identify factors they thought had contributed to the distribution of live music. 25 participants were most active in live music before the arrival of poker machines in hotels in the 1990s, while 26 participants were most active after this timeframe.

Accounts of interactions between live music scene participants and poker machines varied between Sydney and Melbourne, and between different eras of poker machine legislation. Live music scene participants who were active in Sydney in the 1980s noted the later arrival of pokies in pubs, but did not personally feel strongly about them: one musician described first hearing The Whitlams’ song ‘Blow Up The Pokies’ (1999), and wondering if other people would feel strongly enough about pokies for the song to be successful (it was). Another musician, having enjoyed his time in live music in the 1980s, saw pokies as one of several signs to move on, and the slow end of an era in Sydney:

The venues were just starting to change and something was different. People were changing their behaviour, poker machines were coming in...if you compare it to what happened afterwards, it was incredibly healthy. (Interview with musician, 2013, referring to late 1980s Sydney)

By contrast, musicians who started their involvement with live music in Sydney in the late 1990s or 2000s were accustomed to poker machines, although rarely (read: never) enthusiastic about their presence. Poker machines were, at best, able to be ignored and ‘just there’ (Gallan 2013, p. 186), or, at a pinch, acknowledged as a potential source of live music subsidisation (Lyon 2010). Encounters with poker machines in Sydney were described on a room-by-room basis, with pokies and live music often existing within the same pubs. This could cause friction between live music participants and venue operators. Most awkwardly, this included requests to turn the music down in order not to disrupt the machines. More subtle effects came from an increased demarcation of band rooms, which in turn encouraged ‘pay to play’ policies to justify live music’s relatively low profitability in comparison to the machines.

Competition for space within music venues (as in Sydney) tended to contribute to a stressful live music experience. These experiences often felt unwelcoming or hostile, and added to the
appeal of either seeking out alternative venues (Catanzaro 2010). Other factors were already making Sydney a difficult place for musicians in the 1990s: more expensive (Carroll and Connell 2000; Gibson and Homan 2004), more administratively challenging (Creagh 2008; Wardle 2008), and lacking in community radio infrastructure (Jellie 1995b). The sudden ubiquity of poker machines within Sydney pubs – particularly those that had hosted live music before, and still wished to trade on this reputation – added to the impression of a fragmented, hardening, or just disheartening music scene in Sydney in the 1990s. While by no means regarded as the key source of problems, for live music participants in Sydney, poker machines arrived at a bad time, and never left:

Sydney changed, Newtown changed rapidly. Every venue shut down, essentially, or discarded music in favour of pokies. The whole landscape changed. So to actually play was a horrible, horrible experience. (Interview with musician, 2014, referring to Sydney in the late 1990s and early 2000s)

In addition, the social standing of hotels and hotel owners as live music champions tended not to be helped by the presence of poker machines, such as with the Sandringham (‘Sando’) Hotel and Annandale Hotel:

It’s disappointing that the legacy of a great venue with deep roots in the Australian music community has fallen by the wayside…. But for anyone who has ever signed up to play The Sando this isn’t a surprise and to most it’s not really a loss. (Maclean 2012)

I won’t miss this version of the Sando because while I did go there quite often it was purely to see a friend’s band and I couldn’t wait to get out of the place. (Calvert, 2012)

The Annandale [Hotel] were always complete bastards. Everyone I knew was like ‘f*** that place, f*** that guy’. (Interview with musician, 2014, referring to early 2000s Sydney)

In Melbourne, the impact of poker machines was less immediate, described on a pub-by-pub basis rather than room-by-room. Venues in Melbourne became ‘pokies pubs’, or remained as live music venues, but they did not attempt to do both. Some former music pubs close in the inner city turned quickly into ‘pokies pubs’ in the 1990s, including the Tankerville Hotel (Fitzroy), the Parkville Hotel (Fitzroy North), and the Albion Charles Hotel (Northcote). Having converted to pokies so unambiguously, but being located near to pubs that focused on live music instead, as well as many new small bars that also hosted live music, there was no need for live music scene participants to engage with the operators of these hotels, or to awkwardly share space within them. When visiting Sydney on tour, one Melbourne musician was bemused by the experience of live music and pokies within the same pub:

We played upstairs, but it was really quiet because the bands couldn’t upset the people playing pokies downstairs…the [pinging noise] from the pokies was actually louder than us. So that was a pretty sad show. And I heard all about the Sando, like back in the 1980s and 1990s. (Interview with musician, referring to tours from Melbourne to Sydney in the early 2000s)

At a wider scale, participants who had been active in Melbourne in the 1980s noted that pokies pubs had quietly and somewhat insidiously replaced Melbourne’s suburban touring circuits. They noted that performing in both the inner city and in suburban venues had previously been more common: large suburban pubs (‘beer barns’) had been important stepping stones to mainstream music careers. Such suburban gigs were facilitated by booking agencies rather than the face-to-face negotiation characteristic of inner city pubs. Former booking agency venues such as the Matthew Flinders Hotel (Chadstone), the Cross Keys Hotel (Essendon), and Village Green Hotel (Mulgrave) converted on a grand scale to pokies pubs in the 1990s. However, this was scarcely noticed by live music scene participants: firstly because they had not dealt with these pubs directly, but through booking agencies, and secondly because inner city music venues, concentrated in Fitzroy, Richmond and St Kilda, were becoming more prominent at this time (Jellie 1995a; Roberts 2003; Walker 1996).
Some participants felt this inner city ‘out of sight, out of mind’ forgetfulness of suburban pokies pubs was detrimental to music scene quality (‘you’ve got to break the suburbs’), but still had not experienced intrusion of poker machines at a close scale. Thus, the phenomenon of ‘pokies pubs’ in Melbourne meant that live music participants were spared the immediate awkwardness of sharing space with poker machines:

The pokies only affected the beer barns, the suburban venues…The pokies weren’t like in Sydney where the Annandale had frigging pokies…our music venues were largely untouched and unaffected by the pokies. (Interview with live music organiser, 2014)

**Quantitative views: distribution patterns**

This section provides quantitative context on live music and poker machine distributions in Sydney and Melbourne. Details on live music data sources in the maps and tables can be found...
Table 2: Venues with highest numbers of live music performance listings in Sydney, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Venue type</th>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Live music performance listings in 2006 street press sample</th>
<th>Poker machine licence?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candy’s Apartment</td>
<td>Nightclub</td>
<td>Potts Point</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopetoun Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Surry Hills</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin Club</td>
<td>Nightclub</td>
<td>Haymarket</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat and Fiddle</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Balmain</td>
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<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandringham Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empire Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Annandale</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excelsior Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Surry Hills</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectrum</td>
<td>Nightclub</td>
<td>Darlinghurst</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annandale Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Annandale</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>Nightclub</td>
<td>Camperdown</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Marquee</td>
<td>Nightclub</td>
<td>Pyrmont</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basement</td>
<td>Bar: jazz venue</td>
<td>Circular Quay</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>The Rocks</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Harp</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Tempe</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excelsior Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Glebe</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaelic Theatre</td>
<td>Theatre/bar</td>
<td>Surry Hills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sol’s Deck Bar</td>
<td>Nightclub</td>
<td>Darlinghurst</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Wise Monkeys</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agincourt Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Venues with highest numbers of live music performance listings in Sydney, 2006


Table 1 lists the twenty venues with the highest numbers of live music performances in Sydney in 1996, one year prior to the introduction of poker machines to New South Wales hotels. Table 2 lists the twenty venues with the highest numbers of live music performances listed in Sydney in 2006, nearly ten years after the introduction of poker machines. None of the top Sydney venues (by volume of live music performances) shared space with poker machines in 1996, but by 2006, nearly half did, including 10 of the 12 hotels in the list. This concurs with qualitative accounts of live music and poker machines sharing space in venues, and of established music hotels attempting to also incorporate poker machines.

Table 3 lists the twenty venues with the highest numbers of live music performances in Melbourne in 1996, four years after the introduction of poker machines to Victorian pubs and clubs. Table 4 lists the twenty Melbourne venues with the highest numbers of live music performances in 2006.
performances listed in 2006. In neither 1996, nor in 2006, did any of the top twenty Melbourne live music venues also host poker machines. This included all eleven hotels in the 2006 list, in spite of the fact that, legislatively, hotels in Melbourne could host both poker machines and live music. In contrast to Sydney, the practice of sharing live music and poker machines within the same venue was not common. Also of note, is the concentration of live music performance numbers into particular venues such as the Tote Hotel or Esplanade Hotel: this venue-specific music concentration was greater in Melbourne than in Sydney, and greater in 2006 than in 1996.

Figure 1 shows a map of the hotels with poker machines in Melbourne, in 1992, the first year of legislation in Victoria. Here, early takers for hotel poker machine leases are shown geographically. None of these early poker machine hotels were located in the inner suburbs;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
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<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Live music performance listings in 1996 street press sample</th>
<th>Poker machine licence?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joey’s Nightclub</td>
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Table 3: Venues with highest numbers of live music performance listings in Melbourne, 1996
rather, they were distributed in the middle to outer suburbs, in a similar circuit to that worked by live music booking agencies in the 1980s.

Figure 2 maps live music performances by venue in Melbourne in 2006 and poker machine counts by hotel in the same year. Here, the separation of live music venues and pokies pubs in Melbourne can be discerned, as can the tendency for live music activity to concentrate in inner city venues. Large poker machine concentrations in single venues can be seen across the city-wide constellation of ‘pokies pubs’. They are not concentrated in the inner city, like live music, and there are few small players: poker machine hotels are ‘in for a penny, in for a pound’.

Figure 3 maps live music performances by venue in Sydney in 2006 and poker machine counts in 2017. Here, the tendency for Sydney poker machines to be present in high aggregate numbers, but small per-venue numbers for hotels, is noticeable in comparison to Figure 2 (Melbourne). There are many small players, while stand-out ‘pokies pubs’ are not apparent; rather, hotel

<table>
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<th>Venue</th>
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<th>Live music performance listings in 1996 street press sample</th>
<th>Poker machine licence?</th>
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Table 4: Venues with highest numbers of live music performance listings in Melbourne, 2006
poker machines are scattered across many locations through the city and suburbs, and overlap with live music venues.

A review of 2017 poker machine numbers by venue offers further quantitative context (see details in Liquor & Gaming NSW 2018; Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation 2018). This data indicates that in Sydney, most pubs have some poker machines, while in Melbourne, some pubs have many poker machines.
In Victoria in 2017, 498 venues (237 clubs and 261 hotels) held poker machine licences. Of these, 11 venues (all of them hotels) held the maximum allowable amount of 105 machines. 203 of the 261 hotels (78%) held more than 30 machines, the maximum allowable in Sydney hotels. The highest-profit venues for poker machines were the Epping Plaza Hotel (100 machines), the Plough Hotel (100), the Keysborough Hotel (89), Berwick Springs Hotel (105), and the Gladstone Park Hotel (86). While fewer hotels in Melbourne held poker machine licences than in Sydney, the majority of these had more machines than any hotel in Sydney.

In New South Wales in 2017, 1493 hotels held poker machine licences. The top poker machine profits for hotels were the El Cortez Hotel (30 machines), the Railway Hotel (30), the Markets
Hotel (30), the Eastwood Hotel (30), the Cross Roads Hotel (30), and the Meridian Hotel (30). In fact, venue poker machine counts are somewhat moot for high-profit Sydney hotels, given that all of the top 20 hotels by profit ranking had the maximum allowable amount of 30 machines each. However, 87% of hotels (1293 of 1493) had fewer than 30 machines.

However, the biggest concentrations of poker machines are found in New South Wales ‘super clubs’. In 2017, 47% of New South Wales clubs had more poker machines than were allowed in hotels (530 of 1119). Top clubs by profit were the Mt Pritchard & District Community Club (with 603 machines); Bankstown Sports Club (745), Dooleys Lidcombe Catholic Club (450), Canterbury League Club (689), Cabra-Vale Ex-Active Servicemen’s Club (450), and Canterbury League Club (689).
Discussion and conclusions

Distributions of poker machines have differed between Sydney and Melbourne, and changed over time. The differences were influenced by policies that were not designed to affect live music, but whose effects were felt nonetheless. The sudden presence of poker machines in a city (as enacted in Melbourne in 1992) was scarcely noticed within the live music scene; the presence of a certain number of poker machines, in a certain number of pubs, was crucial to the particular anxieties of the Sydney live music scene.

Common to live music, alcohol, and poker machines, tipping points for concern have often come from patterns of concentration and dispersal. The defining feature of the ‘six o’clock swill’ was the spectacle of spatially and temporally concentrated drinking; conversely the cosmopolitan night life ideal pursued in the late 20th and early 21st century was defined primarily by dispersal into small venues, rather than aggregate decline in alcohol consumption (Barrett 2007; Beer 2011). Poker machines continue to attract concerns about growth when they exhibit patterns of concentration, such as in ‘super clubs’ and in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage (Hing 2006; Livingstone, Kipsaina & Rintoul 2012), even when, as presently the case in New South Wales and Victoria, aggregate numbers are capped.

In the case of live music, accounts of precipitous decline (Doman 2014; Newstead 2013; Levin 2010) can be potentially confusing when read alongside reports of a booming scene (Boulton 2013; Music Victoria 2012). Similarly, it has not always been clear why poker machines seemed to exert a more noticeable negative influence on live music in Sydney than in Melbourne. Attention to spatial details helps to bring important insights to this question.

In Sydney in 1997, the arrival of poker machines in pubs brought a noticeable new presence to live music spaces, although poker machines had been a familiar sight in the state’s clubs since 1956. With a per-hotel cap of 30 machines, no caps for clubs, and a higher state wide cap than in Victoria, a room of pokies was relatively easy to implement and made sense (on paper, at least) for hotel operators, even when they were not particularly keen on poker machines. Separate ‘band rooms’ and ‘pokies rooms’ became a feature of the Sydney live music scene. While small in comparison to Sydney club numbers, this distribution pattern was readily noticed by live music participants.

One effect was to reduce concentration of Sydney live music, so that there was no unambiguous ‘music pub’ in the late 1990s, at a time when Sydney was already becoming more expensive and more challenging for conducting live music (Gibson and Homan 2004; Molitoritsz 1999; Wardle 2008). Without obvious music pubs to congregate in, nor the option of dispersing into the burgeoning ‘small bar’ scene as in Melbourne, Sydney music scene participants found poker machines in hotels awkward but hard to avoid. This increased the appeal of alternative spaces such as night clubs, festivals, or do-it-yourself venues, and is likely to have been a factor in more ambivalent attitudes to Sydney hotel operators.

In Melbourne, from their introduction in 1992, ‘music pubs’ and ‘pokies pubs’ remained largely separate, in spite of the fact that hotels could, in theory, host both uses of space. The development of ‘pokies pubs’ in Melbourne was influenced by nuances in the legislative framework of Victorian poker machines. The caps on state and per-venue numbers, in combination with the legislated duopoly of poker machine ownership in place from 1991 to 2012, provided a strong incentive for some pubs to opt into poker machines with gusto, and for other pubs to opt out entirely.

Under the Victorian duopoly arrangements, there were few incentives for the two poker machine operators to enter into lease agreements with hotel operators who were not serious about poker machines, and much to be gained from strategically located hotels with large numbers of machines. The wider tendency of poker machine operators to select locations in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage (Livingstone et al 2012; Brown 2010) played out within these Victorian arrangements. In addition, a per-venue cap of 105 machines made it physically possible to allocate most of a pub to poker machines, whereas smaller Sydney hotel caps precluded this. This meant that Melbourne hotels were less likely to choose poker machines on a whim, or to attempt to juggle live music with poker machines.
In Sydney from the late 1990s, where most pubs had some poker machines, the competition for space within venues contributed to live music scene participants’ sense of an unwelcoming scene. In Melbourne after 1992, where some pubs had many poker machines, the machines were not a source of direct friction between live music scene participants and hotel operators. The split between ‘pokies pubs’ and ‘music pubs’, an accidental outcome of 1990s poker machine policy, contributed to the sense of a more welcoming live music scene in Melbourne, but also increased concentration into particular inner city venues. Here, the potential impact of external threats to particular venues was heightened; so, too, was the potential for a less ambivalent response, such as that seen at the Save Live Australian Music rally in 2010.

The respective historical distributions of live music and poker machines highlight that accounts of ‘growth’ and ‘decline’ need not necessarily refer to aggregate numbers. Just as geography was of ‘immense importance’ to poker machine operators (Marshall and Baker 2001), so, too, were the distinctions in poker machine distributions for live music scene participants seeking a place to play.

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