Governance innovation cases in coastal tourism
Governing the tourism soundscape

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A vibrant and loud touristic environment
Photo: Leonora Beck

Governing the tourism soundscape

In tourism, there has always been a distinct focus on visual experiences. The splendid views of great nature phenomena, the sublime architectural manifestations from the antique and modern eras, and the man-made designs of hotels, restaurants, theme parks, museums, shops, and other interiors constitute the touristic environment and experience. However, the tourism experience is also connected to sound, such as the roar of the waves at the sea, the animal grunts in the zoo, the cheering and squeals of the audience at sporting events and carnivals, the footsteps and chatting of people in the streets, the market stall keepers announcing their goods, taxis coming and going, etc. Experience designs increasingly combine aspects that appeal to all the senses - viewing, hearing, tasting, feeling - so as purposely to enhance the experience and create viable and consistent business cases.

Soundscapes are in many ways more critical for the touristic experience than visuals, as tourists often cannot escape from sounds that they find unpleasant. Many airports have introduced a practice of not announcing departures in lounges in order to safeguard travelers from noises that are not strictly necessary. “Silent forests” offer visitors the opportunity to concentrate on experiencing selected sounds from the wind and the birds. Luxury restaurants usually operate with very discrete or no music in the background and limit the waiters’ rattling of cutlery and porcelain to a minimum, while other types of restaurants and bars tend to welcome noise, finding it a remedy to attract customers and stimulate business.

Touristic soundscapes as a totality are not always managed in a concise and strategic way. Resorts and other tour areas are characterized by loose boundaries between public and private spaces and
between the outdoors and indoors. The public space, such as streets, parks, beaches, and promenades, constitute the touristic landscape. The crowd and its activities, together with the sounds these produce, are objects of gazing and listening. However, public spaces under limited or non-observable control may also attract noisy behavior, such as the use of amplified music or the exhibition of happy shouting. This tends to increase in areas where alcohol is part of the key service. The use of motorized tools such as motor-bikes in loop-circulation and water-scooters along beaches also contributes to the soundscape and thereby defines the identity of the area.

Dilemmas and conflicts in the regulation of soundscapes

Governing and managing noise in areas that accommodate tourism is a controversial topic. For some tourism enterprises, noisy environments inside and outside the premises mean good business and profits. For other categories of tourism business, excessive noise does not comply with the possibility to accommodate for the right type of customers. When residents inhabit the same areas as tourists, disputes arise as well, as residential users typically want more peaceful environments.

Over the years, many touristic places seem to have become louder as an effect of wider dispersed amplifying technology, more mobile and outdoor service provision of food and entertainment, and the development of behavioral norms, both among tourism enterprises and among customers. Holiday patterns and leisure hours are spreading 24/7, with no “natural” intervals of quietness.

For these reasons, governing tourist soundscapes is an unavoidable issue for local administrations. Ensuring good touristic experiences depends on long-term and transparent approaches.

Since 1990 in the UK, noise from entertainment facilities has been a matter embedded in environmental regulations. Accordingly, noise from tourism enterprises is included in the environmental protection act. Touristic activities, and pubs in particular, are regarded as potentially harmful to the environment, with noise being the most discussed type of emission. For noise to amount to a statutory nuisance, it must be “prejudicial to health or a nuisance.” A contributing factor to the higher focus on noise from entertainment is that the UK brewery business is extremely competitive, and its customers are often attracted by various offers and entertainment add-ons. Furthermore, pub-goers often drink outside the facility in the street or in courtyards and pub gardens.

Bars and pubs need licensing in the UK. If neighbors do not find that enterprises are run properly, they can object to the renewal of the license. Decisions are made by the local magistrate courts. The police are responsible for the regulation of the licensed businesses, for example, overseeing that closing hours and noise limits are at the permitted levels.

In UK law, pub guests’ noisy behavior is the responsibility of the owners of the premises, not the guests. Accordingly, the owners usually have good reason to ensure that the noise is kept within the allowed or acceptable limits. Pubs are requested to have noise control procedures and are advised to denominate members of staff with the authority to approach customers to behave in manners consistent with the regulations. Authorities have the obligation to investigate complaints. Not complying with the regulations after a notice may cause fines or closures of the premises. The authorities may, as part of the obtaining and renewal of a license, ensure that the premises have sufficient noise control plans and procedures. It is considered important that all staff members understand the importance of knowing and keeping to the regulations at all times.
UK local authorities can also designate “noise abatement zones”. This is also a measure from the pollution act. A noise abatement zone is a district where the authority wants to lower the noise pollution from any source, including touristic facilities. Abatement zones can be used when noise pollution has gone too much out of hand, and when the noise has led to a general and unacceptable decline and degradation. Together with other measures (such as, for example, building renovations and planned conversions), noise abatement actions are attempts to rejuvenate the area, including districts that serve and are popular among tourists. Noise abatement programs may include subsidies and loans to assist enterprises’ investments in lower noise levels and compensations for residents. Abatement programs are found in connection with airport developments, but not to any significant extent in zones with mixed use for touristic and residential purposes. Good examples are generally lacking.

Porter and Shaw (2013) point to the fact that urban regeneration is ambiguous, and authorities show some reluctance when it comes to enforcing requirements on noisy behavior. There are not very specific and quantitative standards for acceptable noise, and community administrations and courts often defend the qualitative and subjective assessment of noise as a necessary mechanism allowing for the flexible and adaptable means of responding to specific neighborhood requirements (Ross, 2014). Governance innovations such as licensing regimes are still needed. The UK experience with possibilities to prosecute easily identifiable subjects - pub owners rather than elements in the crowd of tourists - is an example of a deliberate policy choice and mitigation measure.
Self-governance noise control plans and procedures

The interruption of business caused by closure for noise may lead to losses in both economic terms and reputation. UK authorities and trade organizations propose that patrons work consistently to control noise, including taking into account the following measures, here provided by the South Gloucestershire Council:

### Amplified music and entertainment

Many premises—even modern ones—were not designed to accommodate problems caused by amplified music. Very often, the problem is caused by low frequency bass notes, as these carry through structures more easily than higher frequency sounds. However, it can be complex and expensive to remedy structure-borne noise.

- Try to judge noise levels at the boundary of neighbouring houses, rather than within your venue.
- Bear in mind that the more often you hold noisy events and the later they finish, the more likely they are to cause complaints.
- Contact an acoustic engineer, acoustic consultant, or noise and vibration consultant who can install a sound insulation scheme.
- Install an acoustic lobby and ensure doors are closed at all times.
- Avoid holding entertainment in rooms with windows or doors facing out onto residential areas.
- Keep windows closed at all times. Doors should be close-fitting and constructed from dense materials. Keep them closed as much as possible.
- Fit mechanical ventilation systems so that you do not need to open doors and windows. Fit all ventilation systems with acoustic baffles.
- Designate somebody to control the noise levels for the evening. Never leave the control of the entertainment sound to the entertainers.
- Consider giving neighbours the name and telephone number of the person responsible for controlling the noise. They can alert that person if there are any problems, so you can hopefully resolve the matter.
- Install a sound limit or cut-out device, with the maximum sound level approved by us.
- The audience will often open fire doors for ventilation. Obviously, you must not lock them. You can connect them to a sound-limiting or cut-out device. Ask a noise consultant for more advice.
- Never have music played in a conservatory if your premises are in a residential area. They offer very little resistance to noise.

### Patrons

- The designated premises supervisor must take all reasonable steps to ensure nobody causes noise nuisance while on the premises or while leaving.
- Put up notices asking for patrons to avoid causing too much noise, especially when leaving.
- Employ trained door stewards to restrict entry at certain times and control noisy patrons. This may be a requirement of your license.
- Tell taxi firms they should not sound their horns when collecting customers.
- For some types of events, consider selling tickets that include the cost of private coach transport.

### Deliveries

- When loading or unloading, use working methods that minimize noise.
- Make sure deliveries are not made late at night or early in the morning. If your site is next to residential or business premises, you should not have deliveries outside the hours of 7.30am to 6pm on weekdays, and 8am to 1pm on Saturdays. There should be no noisy activities on Sundays or bank holidays.

### Beer gardens and children’s play areas

- Do not play music in these areas.
- Keep doors leading onto these areas closed.
- Managers have a responsibility to control customers’ behaviours to make sure they do not cause noise nuisance.
- Restrict access to these areas, particularly at night.
- Place play equipment and plants, such as air blowers for bouncy castles, away from boundaries with neighbouring homes.

### Cleaning and bottling out
• Place refuse storage areas away from neighbouring homes.
• Conduct cleaning and bottling out during normal working hours—not early in the morning or late at night.
• Provide a smooth pathway between the venue and the refuse area.

**Plant and equipment**
Chiller units, extract ventilation systems, and air conditioning can all cause complaints. You may have to get planning permission or building regulations approval before fitting some equipment.
• Install, operate, and maintain equipment according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
• Where possible, place equipment and exhaust outlets away from homes, or screen them.
• Always get specialist advice when planning to install such equipment. If necessary, use acoustic silencers, screens, and enclosures.


At the international level, the World Health Organization (WHO) Noise Guidelines constitute the leading document dealing with noise control. These guidelines suggest three key noise control principles:

(a) The precautionary principle. In all cases, noise should be reduced to the lowest level achievable in a particular situation. Where there is a reasonable possibility that public health will be damaged, action should be taken to protect public health without awaiting full scientific proof.
(b) The polluter pays principle. The full costs associated with noise pollution (including monitoring, management, lowering levels and supervision) should be met by those responsible for the source of noise.
(c) The prevention principle. Action should be taken where possible to reduce noise at the source. Land-use planning should be guided by an environmental health impact assessment that considers noise as well as other pollutants.

From: Berglund et al. (1999)

Further reading and viewing


