

Noise and cultural differences

One hesitates to write on cultural, which encompasses racial, differences in noise making and response and on the preconceptions and antagonistic actions which are triggered by these, but a revealing case in the USA merits comment.

The city of Springdale, Arkansas, located 200 miles north west of Little Rock, has a population of about 45,000, including nearly 20% Hispanics. The city has recently agreed to pay \$12,000 to settle a federal lawsuit that claimed enforcement officers unfairly cited Hispanics for violating the city's noise ordinances. Of 55 noise ordinance violation notices issued between January 2001 and September 2002, there were 42 (76.4%) aimed at Hispanics, leading to one, who had been accused of four violations, to take defensive action through the federal court.

This Hispanic family was the first one to move into their street in April 2001 and problems surfaced about a year later at a child's birthday party, which was claimed to be both "loud" and "raucous". The police were called by neighbours and a citation was issued. It later transpired that, out of 15 noise complaints that day, this was the only citation. Two further citations were issued to the family a month later, both on the same day, followed by a fourth in late 2002. All were in relation to children playing outside during daylight.

A problem is that the Springdale noise ordinances are so widely drawn that enforcement becomes discretionary, without requiring measurements, and it was claimed that police used it to harass and intimidate Hispanic residents because of their race, ethnicity or national origin.

The lawsuit asserted that the noise ordinance was disproportionately and selectively enforced, to the extent that civil rights were infringed. After preliminary hearings, the City decided to settle for \$12,000 and avoid a full trial.

It is possible that, within the EU, the different lifestyles of northern and southern Europeans leads to different sensitivity to noise. People from warmer areas tend to live more in the open, resulting in the potential for greater noise exposure, which may mould expectations. We have to accept that different groups, whether they be young people, students, deaf old people, minorities or majorities have differences in their lifestyles which may impact adversely on others. That is life and living together.

But what has to be avoided is an unfounded "statistical" misconception that any one ethnic group is more likely to be noisier than another. The location of a person who has special requirements for quiet alongside exuberant children, of any origin, could lead to complaints

noise notes

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Ohio's Department of Transport has built an eight mile stretch of road, the two eastbound lanes in concrete, the two westbound in asphalt. The aim is to properly compare the two surfaces over a several-year period. Noise is of course one of the comparators; others include: initial construction costs, maintenance costs, skid resistance, safety experience, response to loads.