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A TWO-MONTH PUBLIC ENQUIRY ON URBAN NOISE IN BRUSSELS REGION FOR A GLOBAL PLANNING

G. Clerfayt

I.B.G.E., 100, Gulledelle, 1200, Brussels, Belgium

Tel.: ++33(0)2-775 76 76 / Fax: ++33(0)2-775 76 79 / Email: gcl@ibgebim.be

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ABSTRACT

Facing to the noise multi-sources problem, the Brussels Regional authority decided to elaborate a fight against urban noise plan. Before his definitive adoption by the Regional Government, the plan project had been submit to a two months public enquiry. This usual procedure in Brussels Region aim to collect the different opinions about the plan noise abatement proposals. Theses opinions were asked to the population and also to the others actors involved with urban noise aspects: political and administrative of Regional and local level, private sector and associative middle. The pro-active communication means used lead to a massive participation. This success give legitimacy to this urban noise plan initiative. The examination of the results enlighten about the various priorities to consider in matter of noise. Theses options have been integrated to the definitive version of the plan adapted by the Regional Government. To day, this plan privileging partnership and dialogue between the actors involved by urban noise, have engaged several concrete actions. One of these consist in a negotiation of a convention between the national railway company and I.B.G.E. This agreement engage the former to integrate noise criterias in its management. On the other hand, the national airport authorities who don't accept the discussion, compel the Regional Government to adopt regulation text on planes noise.

1 - INTRODUCTION

The Brussels-Capital Region created in 1989, with an area of 160 square kilometers and a population of 950,000 in 19 municipal districts, has competence for a number of territorial questions (urban planning, economy, energy, transport ... and the environment in the broad sense of the word). To fulfil these duties, the Region has its own legislative and executive bodies.

Like other large European cities, Brussels has faced major changes, in the past and at present, and urban challenges in the social, economic, housing, mobility ... fields. This urban environment exposes Brussels' inhabitants to considerable noise pollution—so much so, that various studies reveal that, in the population's opinion, noise is the largest disadvantage to living in town.

In view of this observation, and the consideration that inhabitants have a right to a healthy environment, the Brussels-Capital Region has adopted a series of regulations and a planning action to reduce noise. The idea is not to bring the country to town. The objective is to create urban areas where noise in the environment is compatible with the housing function in particular.

2 - THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK IN THE BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION

The framework for the noise reduction campaign in the Brussels-Capital Region is evolving at a fast pace. The regulations were initially based on former national decrees dating from the 70s, and after a number of subsequent initiatives, the Region adopted a Framework-Decree (framework-decree of 17 July 1997 on combating noise in the urban environment) which made it possible to develop normative action. This constitutes the strategic framework for the implementation decrees in the fight against noise. Some texts have been adopted (to date, four implementation decrees of the framework order have been finally approved by the Government: methods of controlling measurement conditions, neighbourhood noise, noise and vibration generated by classified installations and aircraft noise), others are in the process,

and still others have yet to be drafted. Other regulations, taken essentially in the fields of urban and land-use planning, indirectly complete the set of measures that can be used in the fight against noise. As concerns planning, the Decree provides that the Regional administration for the environment (IBGE-BIM), in association with the service for road infrastructures (ADE) will draft a *preliminary proposal for a plan* to define the **noise-reduction strategies and measures** for the next five years. This preliminary proposal will be submitted to a *public enquiry*, after which the Government will adopt the final version of the plan integrating the reaction of the population.

3 - A PLAN TO COMBAT NOISE IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

This is a horizontal Plan involving all of the regional and municipal authorities as well as all federal bodies concerned, which tackles the various sources of noise pollution with a number of complementary means of actions.

The Plan defines the working guidelines for the next 5 years. These are enforced by 40 regulations covering noise created by transport (automobile traffic, railways, aircraft) as well as noise caused by the normal city activities (business, nocturnal activities, recreational facilities, neighbours . . .).

The Plan attempts to clarify the role of all, in particular at the regional and municipal levels and even the federal level. This is why the plan insists on the principle of negotiation and association around common objectives, resulting in a concerted programme of a certain number of actions. Among other things, the plan promotes development of acoustic expertise of the public authorities.

4 - THE POLICY LINE: NEGOTIATION

As the fundamental principle of the Plan, consultation is given priority in the implementation of each measure. The convention negotiated between the IBGE-BIM and the Belgian railways (Société nationale des Chemins de Fer belges) illustrates this procedure. This is a voluntary undertaking to include the *noise criterion* in the management of railway projects in the Region. This convention notably specifies emission standards (based on a description of the general situation at present) and preventive measures in matters of urbanism (insulation standards, land use . . .).

This principle of systematically involving the agents concerned is found in each of the measures under consideration: concertation with those living nearby and with the municipal authorities for particularly congested areas, associating the IBGE-BIM in planning projects of the infrastructure administration, preparing protocols of agreement between the municipal and regional bodies on managing complaints about noise . . .

On the other hand, some agents seem to be indifferent or reluctant to start negotiations. In this case, the Region will use regulatory measures after exhausting all possibilities for discussion. This was recently the case for a problem of aircraft noise. The airport management, which is answerable to the federal authority, refused to engage a dialogue, so the IBGE-BIM was asked to note infringements of the noise standards set by the decree to combat aircraft noise (decree of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region on combating aircraft noise of 27 May 1999). The action finally incited the airport management to provide certain information.

In the context of the adoption of the Plan, another type of consultation has been developed. The Framework Decree specifies that the Plan must be subject to public enquiry before adoption.

5 - PUBLIC ENQUIRY

The enquiry procedure is stipulated in the provisions of the Framework-Decree on noise reduction, and the organisation of public consultation for environmental and urban planning questions has become customary today in the Brussels-Capital Region.

So from 11 February to 11 April 1999, the IBGE-BIM organised a public enquiry to collect reactions to the plan from the population and also from agents in the public, private and associative sectors. The enquiry focused on two main lines: the consultation procedures and a media campaign.

Publications were drafted to inform the public and facilitate participation in the enquiry (brochure on the Plan system and questionnaire). The consultation procedures on the proposed plan and information meetings were organised in some municipal districts. On the other hand, a media campaign helped mobilise the public on the theme at the same time. The campaign, developed on a "combined media" principle, included actions based on local events and actions in the press and the media. This combination proved to mutually reinforce the guidelines of the campaign.

The campaign action revolved around a slogan ("Question bruit, nous voulons vous entendre"; we want to hear you on noise) and a logo created for the enquiry. Throughout the entire period, a bus in the campaign colours proposed an amusing noise tour for children and adults. This bus with its giant

inflatable ears was installed in various popular spots (malls, markets, large squares ...) covering most of the territory of the Region. Hostesses invited passers-by to read the brochure and fill in the questionnaire. These events aroused interest of journalists, encouraging them to relay information on the enquiry. In addition, the information was publicised in radio broadcasts, posters ...



Figure 1: Public enquiry 's logo.

At the end of a 60-day enquiry, the outcome of the action was more than positive: **more than 8,000 reactions** were recorded—a real success in terms of participation.

For the most part, the reactions consisted of an answer to the questionnaire. At one regional hearing, more than a hundred written replies were filed, along with a few dozen opinions expressed orally. Nevertheless, we regret that the private and institutional sectors did not take a greater part, showing too little interest for the noise pollution topic (contrary to public demand).

The survey confirms that **road traffic** is considered as the first source of noise pollution, followed by aircraft. The reactions demand **more effective action** by the authorities and are favourable to **restrictive measures** for road traffic (but not always in keeping with the 'polluter pays' principle). The table below shows the position of persons questioned on various alternatives.

To help reduce <u>road noise</u> , I agree with:	Answer
- strictly limiting the use of cars in Brussels and encouraging alternative means of transport	74.3%
- reserving areas without automobile traffic in my neighbourhood or in other parts of Brussels	74.3%
- installing 'no traffic' Sundays	52.2%
- reinforcing speed controls	70.3%
- favouring road installations limiting speed	75.2%
- creating subsidy mechanisms for acoustic installations	79.8%
- imposing a tax on road users to finance measures for reducing noise from traffic	35.1%
- installing anti-noise walls or hedges alongside parks	61.5%
To reduce aircraft noise, I agree with:	
- limiting the number of landings and take-offs	47.9%
- stopping the extension of the airport	52.2%
- travelling 50 km or more to take a plane in another airport	50.6%
- increasing the price of airplane tickets slightly to finance measures to protect the nearby population from noise	44.9%
- prohibiting night flights	62.7%

Table 1.

The associative sector specifically wants to reinforce **noise prevention actions**. In addition, the municipal authorities, who participated intensively in the enquiry, ask for **simplification and coordination** of regulations.

These elements were introduced in the final version of the *plan to combat noise* to be adopted by the Government during 2000.

6 - AN AWARENESS-BUILDING OPERATION

A public enquiry is a legal measure indeed, but it is also a real awareness campaign on several different levels:

- First, this enquiry was an opportunity to undertake a successful pro-active awareness-building operation with the population. Noise appeared not as inevitable but as an aspect of a living environment where the authorities and all the persons involved can mobilise their efforts.
- In addition, this is a democratic communication exercise encouraging citizenship participation. This context favours an environment that leads to successfully completed action.
- Finally, the success of the enquiry gives perfect legitimacy to a Plan such as this one, necessitating an explicit position from policy makers.