A City without Noise? Tackling the Unintended Effects of Noise Abatement, and developing Strategies to enhance the Quality of Urban Life

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Noise has always been part of city life. However, noise abatement standards rely on technical norms and general public health considerations. Therefore, they ignore the distinctiveness of urban life and the diversity of lifestyles. By means of technical regulation, such standards influence urban development, and they unconsciously arbitrate between alternative conceptions of urban life. When the researcher asks inhabitants, what makes for the difference between sound and noise, and which noise is a source of annoyance, she/he will get quite different answers. Is it not necessary to take hold of this simple fact when noise abatement standards are developed?

The contribution builds on a research project in the city of Zurich, Switzerland, bringing together scholars from architecture and community development. The project shows that the city is a site of interconnected problems, indeed. Tackling the noise abatement issue involves challenges to architecture, transportation, urbanism, spatial development, housing, community development, and social policy alike. For instance, the noise abatement standards create obstacles to urban densification. They increase the price
of housing and tend to accelerate the squeezing out of inhabitants with low incomes. In the meantime, these standards give birth to an architecture turning life away from the noisy street, deteriorating the quality of street life even further. But, as urban research has shown for decades, there’s no urban life without street life.

The project comprises interviews with 20 persons dwelling on a noisy Zurich street. Furthermore, workshops with inhabitants, called “my perfect apartment”, were organized, permitting the expression of housing preferences, and the weighing out of noise compared to other environmental goods and bads. The project will bear recommendations for the modification of noise abatement standards. It also aims to help urban dwellers to co-produce urban soundscapes and shape their living environment in a way that enhances quality of life.

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**Peter Streckeisen** is teacher and head of projects at the Department of Social Work at Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland. He also is a senior lecturer at University of Basel, Switzerland. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Political Sciences at University of Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1999, and his Master of Arts in Sociology at University of Zurich, Switzerland, in 2002. He obtained his PhD in sociology at University of Basel, Switzerland, in 2007, and his habilitation thesis in sociology at University of Basel, Switzerland, in 2013. His main topics in teaching and research include social policy, poverty and exclusion, economic sociology, the sociology of work and workfare, and community development. He currently directs a project funded by the Swiss Confederation addressing community development issues in rural areas, and he co-directs a research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation focusing labor market and workfare. He also is a team member of a current research project funded by Zurich University of Applied Sciences, focusing noise abatement and quality of life in urban areas.

**Anke Kaschlik** is teacher and head of projects at the Department of Social Work at Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland. She also is a senior scientist at University of applied sciences Hildesheim, Holzminden, Göttingen, Germany. She is a graduate engineer of urban planning at University of Kassel, Germany since 1997. She obtained her PhD in economic and social sciences at University of Kassel, Germany in 2008. The main topics of her research are urban and regional development in different spatial contexts and transdisciplinary methods. Currently, she is leading a project that deals with the transformation of urban centers through civil society activities, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany, and co-leads a project, funded by Swiss Confederation, that focuses on center development within the agglomeration of Zurich. She is also a team member in the project named by Peter Streckeisen, funded by the
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