

Seville's silent summer: Spanish city bans outdoor noise

Activities ranging from domino games to singing in the street banned as locals win fight for peace and quiet

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As the heat of the day gives way to the evening breeze, Seville comes to life. Distant wails of flamenco singers mix with hearty cheers of seniors engrossed in a game of dominoes. Bar patrons spill onto the sidewalk as they noisily recount the day's events over a round of cañas. Now the push is on in this fun-loving city for a little peace and quiet. On Friday, councillors passed a raft of regulations¹ looking to silence the noisy city banning activities ranging from domino games on the outdoor terraces of bars and cafes to singing in the street.

"It's a balance between the right of residents to get a little rest and the development of economic activities," city councillor Maximiliano Vilchez told reporters.

Locals have been urging the city to crack down on noise for years. In a petition last year, more than 4,000 residents asked, "Can you imagine what's it's like to have 100 people under your window screaming as they watch a football match? Our children can't perform well at school. When we leave for work in the morning we're already exhausted."

The rules focus on the city's hundreds of bars and cafes, where patrons regularly crowd outside. Anyone having an "excessively loud" conversation on the street now faces fines, as do bar owners who set up televisions on their terraces or who serve patrons who are standing up outside. Bartenders will no longer be able to roll beer kegs in the streets or drag chairs along the sidewalk when setting up or taking down their terraces. Fines for those caught engaging in banned behaviour range from €300 to €300,000.

Drivers were also targeted. Playing loud music while driving, having a car alarm that goes off for more than three minutes or revving car engines unnecessarily is now prohibited.

Many residents lambasted the regulations for not going far enough in the battle against noise in the city. Karaoke bars and nightclubs are still allowed next to homes and no attempt was made to regulate noise levels in these types of clubs, pointed out members of Sevilla Sin Ruidos Ya² (Seville Without Noise Now) on their blog.

Religious processions, the city's April Fair and parades are also exempt.

Several councillors voted against the new rules, worried about potential legal uncertainty for residents and business owners as it is unclear exactly how the wide-ranging bans will be enforced.

In many cases, enforcement will be left up to local police officers, city councillor Josefa Medrano told Europa Press. As they don't carry any kind of device to measure noise levels, they will be forced to make a judgment call on whether an activity is too noisy or not.

Source : <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/27/seville-ban-noise-bars-cafes-spain>

¹ <http://www.sevilla.org/urbanismo/documentos/pdf/expedientes/Ordenanza%20C.C.A.R.V..pdf>

² <http://sevillasinruidosya.blogspot.fr>