Noise Pollution

Noise levels in Amman are on the increase and have reached alarming levels in the past few years. A scientific analysis of the various components of this problem is long overdue. Practical solutions with strong deterrents are urgently required.

Noise pollution in a typical Jordanian city has many components ranging from the unwarranted use of car horns, to mobile peddlers promoting their various goods on crude loudspeakers, to construction sites working late at night or early in the morning, to loud music transmitted from cars as well as houses, to the corner shopkeeper or construction site guard that has taken it upon himself to bombard the surrounding population with ear piercing relays of his favourite radio transmission, to celebratory gunfire, to door to door salesmen disturbing households at awkward hours and many others. It is also interesting to note that noise levels are also inversely proportional to the status of a government official that happens to live in a particular area, a higher status promotes lower noise tolerance levels and in some cases a "zero tolerance" policy is applicable. I am not aware of any specific laws in Jordan that regulate the generation of excessive noise. In some countries, noise levels are regulated either by environmental laws or by laws related to "disturbing public peace". We know, for example, that in the interest of public health and safety, industrial zoning requirements restrict factories from springing up in residential areas, but what we ended up with are unregulated noise levels in some urban areas that exceed levels in a typical industrial zone.

Information technology could provide a practical solution to this problem. One suggestion would be to implement a national noise level monitoring system to continuously monitor and identify the sources of excessive noise. As a joint venture between public and private sectors, a prototype could be developed and installed in a very short time. The system would involve the installation of computer-controlled sensors over a specific area. These sensors would be triggered whenever a noise source exceeds preset levels during a fixed time span. Information on the offending source would then be relayed to a central database using wireless connectivity. The offending source would be identified (possibly by GPS) and warned. In case of repeat offenses, the source would be fined. This is not a far fetched science fiction idea. Systems with roughly similar functionality have been implemented nationwide for monitoring seismic activities and water quality management purposes.

One certainly does not wish to stand in the way of progress and prosperity, but after a stressful work week city dwellers are entitled to some peace and quiet. After all, weekends were supposedly introduced for the very purpose of rest and recuperation.

Unless, of course, these arguments happen to fall on deaf ears.