

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Acoustic Pollution and the Challenges of Enforcing Legislation in Albania: A Comparative Regional Analysis

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Abstract

Acoustic pollution has emerged as a significant environmental and public health concern in urban areas, particularly in countries undergoing rapid urbanization and institutional transition. In Albania, the issue is regulated primarily by Law No. 9774, dated 12.07.2007, “On the Assessment and Administration of Noise in the Environment,” yet enforcement remains uneven and often ineffective. This article analyzes the main challenges in implementing noise-related legislation in Albania, with emphasis on institutional capacity, monitoring systems, urban planning, public awareness, and sanctions. The study also places Albania in a comparative regional framework by examining similarities and differences with neighboring Western Balkan countries. The analysis is based on legal documents, institutional reports, scientific literature, and policy-oriented sources. Findings indicate that Albania shares many noise-governance challenges with the region, but remains particularly vulnerable due to limited monitoring, fragmented institutional coordination, and insufficient integration of acoustic criteria into urban development policies. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, expanding technical capacity, and improving public awareness are essential for moving from formal legal compliance toward effective environmental protection.

Keywords: acoustic pollution; environmental noise; Albania; legislation enforcement; urban planning; public health; Western Balkans

1. Introduction

Acoustic pollution is among the most underestimated forms of environmental degradation, despite its documented effects on human health and quality of life. Unlike visible forms of pollution, noise is often normalized as part of everyday urban life, even though long-term exposure may lead to sleep disturbance, stress, reduced cognitive performance, and increased cardiovascular risk (Basner et al., 2014; WHO, 2018). In densely populated urban settings, traffic, construction activity, nightlife venues, and industrial operations are the main sources of environmental noise. At the international level, noise has increasingly been recognized as a public health issue. The World Health Organization identifies environmental noise as a major environmental stressor in urban Europe, with consequences extending beyond discomfort to

measurable health effects (WHO, 2018). Similarly, the European Environment Agency reports that transport noise remains one of the most widespread and damaging environmental threats in Europe, affecting millions of people annually (EEA, 2025).

In Albania, acoustic pollution is addressed through Law No. 9774, dated 12.07.2007, “On the Assessment and Administration of Noise in the Environment,” which provides the legal basis for noise assessment, prevention, and control (Republic of Albania, 2007). However, the existence of legislation does not automatically ensure effective enforcement. In practice, implementation remains constrained by weak monitoring mechanisms, limited institutional capacity, insufficient interinstitutional coordination, and inadequate integration of acoustic standards into urban planning. These challenges are not unique to Albania, but are also visible across the Western Balkans, where

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rapid urban growth and uneven institutional development have complicated environmental governance (EEA, 2025; OECD, 2019).

This article aims to examine the legal and institutional framework governing acoustic pollution in Albania, identify the main obstacles to enforcement, and compare Albania's situation with selected regional cases.

2. Material and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, document-based analytical approach. The research is based on:

- National legislation and policy documents related to environmental noise in Albania;
- Institutional reports issued by the Institute of Public Health and the National Environment Agency;
- International scientific literature on the health effects of noise;
- European and regional reports on environmental noise and governance;
- Comparative policy-oriented materials on environmental management in the Western Balkans.

The material was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the legal framework and the practical enforcement challenges. The analysis combines legal interpretation, policy analysis, and comparative regional review. Special attention is given to the relationship between legislation, monitoring capacity, public administration, and urban development.

2.1. Comparative Framework

The comparative component focuses on Albania and selected Western Balkan countries, including North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The comparison is structured around five analytical dimensions:

- legal framework;
- monitoring capacity;
- institutional coordination;
- urban pressure and land-use planning;
- overall enforcement effectiveness.

This framework allows a systematic evaluation of whether Albania's challenges are specific to the national context or part of a broader regional pattern.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Acoustic Pollution as a Public Health and Environmental Issue

The scientific literature consistently shows that environmental noise is not merely a nuisance, but a risk factor with measurable health consequences. Basner et al. (2014) demonstrate that prolonged exposure to noise can impair sleep quality, increase stress levels, and contribute to cardiovascular disease. WHO (2018) similarly emphasizes that noise exposure is associated with both auditory and non-auditory effects, including annoyance, reduced concentration, and sleep disturbance.

In Albania, available institutional reports indicate that urban noise remains a persistent issue, especially in major cities where traffic intensity and construction activity are high (Institute of Public Health [IPH], 2011, 2014). The problem is particularly visible in Tirana and other expanding urban centers, where population density and vehicular congestion create chronic exposure conditions. These findings confirm that acoustic pollution is not only an environmental issue, but also a matter of public health governance.

3.2. Legal and Institutional Framework in Albania

Law No. 9774/2007 establishes the basic principles for noise assessment and administration in the environment (Republic of Albania, 2007). The law is conceptually aligned with European approaches to environmental noise management, particularly Directive 2002/49/EC, which stresses assessment, mapping, and action planning as core elements of noise governance (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2002).

Despite this formal alignment, Albania continues to face major implementation gaps. The National Environment Agency publishes environmental status reports, while the Institute of Public Health provides technical information on noise monitoring and health implications (National Environment Agency [NEA], 2024; IPH, 2014). However, these efforts are not yet integrated into a stable national monitoring and enforcement system. As a result, legal standards exist on paper, but the practical enforcement of these standards remains inconsistent.

3.3. Enforcement Challenges in Albania

The main obstacles to effective enforcement can be grouped into six categories.

- First, monitoring is insufficient and fragmented. Noise measurements are often periodic rather than continuous, and the available data do not always allow for long-term trend analysis (IPH, 2011, 2014). This limits the ability of authorities to identify chronic hotspots of noise exposure.
- Second, institutional capacity is limited. Effective enforcement requires trained personnel, calibrated instruments, and financial resources. In practice, these capacities are often inadequate, which weakens the ability of authorities to respond promptly and consistently (Monitor, 2023).
- Third, interinstitutional coordination is weak. Noise governance requires collaboration between environmental agencies, local government, public health institutions, and inspectorates. When coordination is poor, responsibilities overlap or remain unclear, reducing accountability and slowing enforcement.
- Fourth, urbanization is rapid and poorly controlled. In Albanian cities, especially Tirana, traffic growth, dense construction, and concentrated commercial activities have intensified exposure to noise. Urban planning often fails to incorporate acoustic criteria such as buffer zones, functional zoning, or physical barriers (UN-Habitat, 2020).
- Fifth, public awareness remains limited. Many citizens perceive noise as an inevitable feature of urban life rather than a public health threat. Businesses may regard noise reduction as an additional cost rather than a legal duty. WHO (2018) stresses that public awareness is essential to effective prevention.
- Sixth, sanctions are not always effective. A legal framework is only as strong as its enforcement. If sanctions are low, delayed, or applied unevenly, they fail to deter violations. In Albania, the perception that noise regulations are weakly enforced reduces compliance incentives (Monitor, 2023).

3.4. Comparative Regional Analysis

Table 1. Comparative overview of acoustic pollution and legislation enforcement in Albania and selected Western Balkan countries

Country	Legal framework	Monitoring	Institutional capacity	Main problems	Overall assessment
Albania	Law No. 9774/2007	Periodic, limited	Limited	Weak enforcement, poor coordination, rapid urbanization	High vulnerability in implementation
North Macedonia	Approximate alignment with EU standards	Partial	Moderate	Urban pressure, uneven enforcement	Similar implementation challenges
Serbia	More developed in selected urban centers	More developed	Moderate to high	Traffic noise, uneven local enforcement	Better reporting, still enforcement gaps
Montenegro	Harmonized with European approaches	Seasonally affected	Moderate	Tourism-related noise in coastal areas	Strong seasonal noise pressure
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Fragmented institutional structure	Difficult to sustain	Limited	Administrative fragmentation, weak coordination	Structural enforcement difficulties

The comparison suggests that Albania is not an isolated case, but part of a broader regional pattern. Across the Western Balkans, acoustic pollution is shaped by rapid urban growth, weak local governance, and partial harmonization with European environmental standards (EEA, 2025; OECD, 2019). However, Albania appears

particularly fragile in terms of monitoring continuity and enforcement consistency.

Serbia has a somewhat more developed reporting system in major urban centers, while Montenegro faces distinct seasonal pressure due to tourism in coastal areas. Bosnia and Herzegovina struggles with

administrative fragmentation, making uniform enforcement difficult. North Macedonia faces challenges similar to Albania, especially in urban zones where traffic and construction increase noise exposure. In all cases, the gap between legislation and implementation remains a major concern.

3.5. Urban Planning and Environmental Governance

The literature on sustainable urban development emphasizes that noise control cannot be separated from land-use planning and infrastructure design. UN-Habitat (2020) argues that urban sustainability depends on integrating environmental criteria into spatial planning, transport design, and public space management. In the Albanian context, this means that noise mitigation should be incorporated into zoning policies, traffic regulation, and construction control. Where urban growth is poorly managed, acoustic pollution becomes structurally embedded in the built environment. This makes legal enforcement more difficult and more reactive. Therefore, environmental noise policy must be understood not only as a regulatory issue, but also as part of long-term urban governance.

4. Conclusions

Acoustic pollution in Albania represents a significant environmental and public health challenge. Although the country has established a legal basis for noise assessment and administration, practical enforcement remains limited. The main barriers include insufficient monitoring, limited institutional capacity, weak interinstitutional coordination, poor integration of acoustic criteria into urban planning, low public awareness, and inconsistent sanctioning.

The comparative analysis shows that Albania shares many of these difficulties with neighboring Western Balkan states. Nevertheless, Albania stands out for the fragility of its monitoring and enforcement structures. This suggests that legal formalization alone is not enough; effective environmental protection requires institutional strengthening, technical capacity building, and more coherent policy implementation.

Future improvements should focus on developing continuous monitoring systems, training enforcement staff, strengthening coordination between institutions, integrating noise considerations into urban planning, and increasing public awareness about the health

effects of environmental noise. Only through a multidimensional approach can the country move from formal compliance to effective acoustic governance.

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