

Spotlight on Local Laws Turns La Dolce Vita a Bit Sour

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ROME — The Tuscany town of Forte dei Marmi recently banned the use of lawnmowers and electric hedge-clippers on weekends to cut down on noise.

In Novara in Piedmont, the mayor issued an order this summer prohibiting groups of three or more people from gathering in some public parks between 11:30 p.m. and 6 a.m.

And in the Amalfi Coast town of Positano, local officials have prohibited fireworks except on Saturdays between 8:30 and 11 p.m. Fireworks can “alter an animal’s psycho-physical state,” leading to “panic attacks” or “aggressive behavior,” according to one of the rationales listed in the ordinance.

Say what you will about the reasonableness of those rules. Then consider these:

In Capri, clogs have been outlawed since 1960. And in Eraclea, a resort on the Adriatic coast, the town prohibited certain beach games and activities in 2004 as potentially dangerous to beachgoers. Among those activities is digging holes in the sand.

In recent weeks, newspapers and radio and television stations have been having a field day reporting on the finer points of local Italian laws, ever since the interior minister, Roberto Maroni, gave cities additional powers to address security and public decorum issues.

But what began as a bit of summer fun in the Italian news media spun into an international incident of sorts after The Independent newspaper of London reported on the to-do last weekend, warning: “Tourists beware: if it’s fun, [Italy](#) has a law against it.”

That hurt.

“When we say something, no one cares,” said Marino Livolsi, a professor of sociology at the Università Vita Salute San Raffaele in Milan. “But once foreign papers start writing, the polemic starts. Our national identity is so weak that it’s easy to go into crisis mode.”

Perhaps foreigners are “irritated by the idea that they can’t come to Italy and do as they like any more,” a columnist, Massimo Gramellini, wrote in a front-page editorial in Turin’s La Stampa on Monday. Latin chaos “is a splendid alibi” for tourists who come to Italy so they can misbehave with impunity, he said.

The Independent article is “insulting,” said the deputy culture minister, Francesco Giro. He pointed out that Britain had its own oddities.

“In London, they’ve banned popcorn from movie theaters because its consumption can interfere with the watching of a film,” he told the ANSA news agency, referring to news reports of some theater owners doing away with the treat.

What no one here seems to contest is that Italy has too many laws.

“Only on one point do I agree with the British correspondent: the excess and diversity of laws” in Italy, said Osvaldo Napoli, a center-right lawmaker and vice president of Anci, the Italian National Association of Municipalities.

He conceded that there was a need “for greater coordination” between city halls.

Duccio Canestrini, an anthropologist who monitors tourism trends, said that while some local

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laws seem arbitrary, others make sense.

“Mayors now have more authority to regulate behavior,” he said, “but the fact is that when you have a greater density of people, as you do in the summer, you have the too many mice in the cage problem, and so you need rules.”



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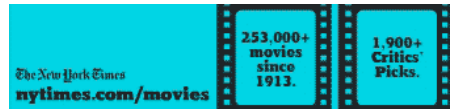
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