AIRPORT SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND REGIONAL COMMUNITY RELATIONS: NOISY ELEPHANT IN THE SKY?

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ABSTRACT: Although the aviation industry is an integral component of regional economic development, aircraft noise complaints have become an increasingly contentious issue. This raises the significant question of how airports can better position themselves as socially responsible drivers of regional economic development. This study examines airport-regional community relations in one of the fastest growing airports in Australia—the Gold Coast Airport. The contributions of this paper are two-fold. First, it demonstrates the analysis of social barometers such as media reports and community attributes that can generate useful insights for airport management. Second, it highlights the need for proactive airport social responsibility measures to address the issue of aircraft-noise in a regional setting.

KEY WORDS: Australia; Gold Coast Airport; Leximancer analysis; regional development; social barometer, stakeholder engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aviation sector, inclusive of airports and airlines (see Kaszewski and Sheate, 2004) is considered one of the critical components of regional development (Florida *et al.*, 2015). The industry has been one of the most significant contributors to global economic growth, supporting nearly 65.5 million jobs worldwide and generating nearly AUD $3 trillion in global economic activity (ATAG, 2018). In Australia, the sector employs over 88 000 people and generates an annual revenue of AUD $44 billion (AIS, 2018). One of the major impacts of the recent growth in the aviation sector is noise pollution (Bröer, 2013), which has become a contentious management issue between airports and residents living around airports.

As there has been a shift away from managing airports exclusively by government in countries like Australia (Graham, 2003), the onus of addressing the noise issue is increasingly on airports. The rationale behind privatisation was to improve management efficiency and service delivery (see Advani and Borins, 2001). However, it has been argued that the changes in the ownership—from state-owned infrastructure to a fully privatised business—of Australian airports since 1998 has encouraged the maximisation of profits (Forsyth, 2002) and ignored social cost. The concept of the 'corporatisation of airports' as proposed by Wiltshire (2018, p. 1) suggests that economic growth fueled by privatisation has been at the expense of regional environment and society. For instance, one of the architects of airport privatisation in the country, and a former federal transport minister recently acknowledged that the privatisation has allowed regional airports to not only bypass stakeholder engagement but also rampantly increase passenger charges driving up travel costs for regional communities and hurting the local economy (Sharp, 2019). In addition, the lack of a stakeholder-centric approach has meant that the development plans of airports across Australia has been at odds with the interests of surrounding communities as issues like aircraft noise have garnered significant media attention in places like the Gold Coast, Perth, and Sydney (see Conlin, 2014; Law, 2015; O'Rourke, 2016).

Kasioumi (2015) pointed out that the discontent in regional communities has largely revolved around two concerns: aircraft noise and inadequate community benefits (p. 410). Although various studies have considered economic aspects (e.g. managing property values as well as markets for noise licenses (Nelson, 2004; Bréchet and Picard, 2012)), informative aspects (e.g. socio-spatial interaction of aircraft noise with noise complaints (Ogneva-Himmelberger and Cooperman, 2010; Goldschagg, 2013)), public health aspects (e.g. the implications of exposure to noise

levels above certain threshold on illness (Passchier-Vermeer and Passchier, 2000; Ozkurt *et al*., 2015)) and technical aspects (e.g. forcing airlines to pay higher landing fees on noisier aircraft or setting up a noise quota scheme (Roosens, 2008; Janic, 2010)); the socially responsible response of airport management in the regional context has remained under the radar. This paper responds to this gap and examines this issue through the case of the Gold Coast Airport (OOL) in Australia.

The Gold Coast Airport (OOL) is selected because a) it is one of the fastest growing airports in Australia in terms of the average annual growth of passenger movements (BITRE, 2019) and b) it received the highest number of noise-related complaints in 2011 (Menon *et al*., 2012). The contributions of this paper are two-fold. First, it demonstrates that the analysis of social barometers such as media reports and community attributes can generate useful management insights in regional settings. Second, it highlights the utility of an airport social responsibility lens as a tool to address the issue of aircraft noise complaints and to position airports as vehicles of regional development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMING

The literature on airport-stakeholder relations suggests that the expansion of regional airports has brought significant socio-economic benefits. For example, regional airports contribute over a quarter of billion dollars into the Australian economy and support nearly 4 500 jobs (AAA, 2016). It has also been pointed out that: "air travel enables people living in regional communities to maintain social ties, and remain connected to the wider community. Regional airports also provide a base for emergency services to operate effectively outside of major urban centres. The Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) is highlighted as an essential service that relies on access to regional airports" (AECOM, 2016, p.1). Consequently, the regional aviation industry has received significant policy impetus in recent years with initiatives such as: a) infrastructure upgrade funding under the regional airport program worth AUD $100 million (DITCRD, 2019), and b) regional air network assistance worth AUD $300 million aimed at preventing smaller regional airlines from going bankrupt in the immediate aftermath of economic downturn associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Ison, 2020).

However, the growth in the aviation industry has also raised concerns amongst stakeholders that have been impacted by both real and perceived negative social impacts. In one of the first reports on aircraft noise

complaints in Australia, Hede and Bullen (1982) demonstrated that thousands of Australians were exposed to excessive amounts of aircraft noise and recommended a concrete engagement processes to improve airport-community relations. Experiences from Australia and other parts of the world (Table 1) suggest it would be economically and socially responsible for airports to adopt proactive stakeholder engagement approaches to improve community relations and resolve contentious issues such as aircraft noise complaints. For instance, local opposition to Narita Airport construction in Japan was resolved by utilising deliberative forums to garner the trust of community residents and gradually reduce their antagonism (Yamada, 2004). Similarly, the lack of trust that impeded the Netherlands' Schiphol airport's relations with the community improved when a government agency started to take a leading role to facilitate stakeholder engagement (Boons *et al.*, 2010). In addition, San Diego Airport in the United States found that customised engagement initiatives, rather than a 'cookie-cutter' approach, were more effective in attaining middle-ground on aircraft noise complaints (Frazze, 2011). These experiences suggest that the perspective of stakeholders is an important social barometer for shaping airport-community relations in the regional context (Cowper-Smith and de Grosbois, 2011; Skouloudis *et al.*, 2012).

Private enterprises, including airports, are increasingly expected to adopt social responsibility measures to improve their environmental performance and stakeholder relations (Caroll, 2016). Stakeholders represent groups or individuals who can be affected or are affected by the functioning of an organisation (Freeman, 2010). International Standard ISO 26000 Guidance on social responsibility (ISO, 2018)—although not a certification for the management system in place, and not as widespread as other ISO standards (see Balzarova and Castka, 2018)—points out that responsible businesses are expected to embrace two fundamental practices: recognising its social responsibility within its sphere of influence, and identifying and engaging with its stakeholders. This expectation is in line with the definition of social responsibility adopted by the European Commission (2011) which states that in order to fully meet social responsibility expectations, "enterprises should have in place a process to integrate social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their stakeholders, with the aim of: a) maximising the creation of shared value for their owners/shareholders and for their other stakeholders and society at large, and b) identifying, preventing and mitigating their possible adverse impacts" (p. 6).

Table1. Selected Literature on Airport-Community Relations.

Country (Airport)	*Authors – Issue*	*Core Findings*
Australia (Canberra)	May and Hill (2006) – Noise ramifications of airport expansion	Airports need to be aware of stakeholder polarisation – an alliance between local developers and community groups vs powerful vested interests seeking to manipulate residents' perceptions
Japan (Narita)	Yamada (2004) – Opposition to Airport Construction	Airport operators need to utilise deliberative based forum e.g., regional symposium on Airport Issues, round table Conference in order to gradually reduce residents' antagonism
The Netherlands (Schiphol)	Boons *et al.* (2010) – Debate between growth and noise	Stakeholder engagement for noise mitigation policymaking suffered from the lack of trust. More importantly, the non-leading role of national government was the main barriers to solution
UK (Birmingham)	Whitfield (2003) – Aircraft noise impacts on different types of residents	Airports need to realise not only high level of noise exposure, but also low exposure affects different residents differently
USA (San Diego)	Frazze (2011) – Communication to Mitigate Noise Related Complaints	A cookie-cutter approach to aircraft noise mitigation is not appropriate, and airports must customise effective communication strategies to better public understanding

Source: Compiled by the Authors.

Notwithstanding the limitations of social responsibility as a tool to resolve real-world problems (see Visser, 2014) and go beyond public relations exercises (see van Rekom *et al.*, 2013) for businesses to cover up

their irresponsible behaviours (see Jones *et al*., 2009; Lin-Hi and Müller, 2013; Riera and Iborra, 2017), the European Commission's dual social responsibility perspective has the potential to be particularly useful in the context of regional airports because it prioritises cordial stakeholder relations over the often previously adversarial ones. In Australia, social responsibility discourse is generally understood through the lens of shared values whereby businesses encourage and or engage with a variety of stakeholders to pursue mutually beneficial or win-win solutions (Fordham and Robinson, 2018). Nonetheless, apart from a few case studies from within the resources industry (see Moyeen and Courvisanos, 2012; Measham *et al*., 2013; Basu *et al*. 2015), the way in which the notion of social responsibility has manifested in regional Australia remains poorly understood. In this context of gaining deeper regional insights, this paper argues that airport induced economic growth and the associated noise pollution need to be viewed as asymmetrical and proposes specific airport social responsibility measures as a way forward.

3. RESEARCH AIM, METHODS AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Research Aim

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the research question was broad: how can airports better position themselves as the socially responsible drivers of regional economic development?

Method

As Bhattacherjee (2012, p. 6) acknowledged, exploratory studies are carried out primarily to: "scope out the magnitude or extent of a particular phenomenon … and generate some initial ideas (or 'hunches') about that phenomenon". Consequently, although the outcomes of exploratory research may not influence the decision-making processes immediately, they certainly have the potential to produce regional insights (see Myles and Filan, 2019). This paper adopts a three-step approach to examine the research question which allowed the extensive scoping of the phenomenon of airport noise and stakeholder responses in the context of social responsibility.

First, the suburban level aircraft noise complaints data reported in publicly available quarterly Noise Information Reports for the OOL between 2012 and 2016 are examined. Second, an automated content analysis (Leximancer, 2018) of a total of 62 local media reports on aircraft

noise reported between 2009 and 2016 are carried out. Leximancer software provides a quantitative approach to the standard content analysis, and identifies themes and concepts based on the word frequency and co-occurrence of families of terms (Smith and Humphreys, 2006; Mahmood *et al*., 2014; Dhakal *et al*., 2019). One of the key applications of the software is to conduct media analysis (Leximancer, 2018, p. 6). The electronic media reports were searched through a purposive sampling method via Google News using keywords 'gold coast airport' and 'aircraft noise complaints'. There are two specific benefits of automated content analysis for this research. First, it eliminates pre-existing assumptions and potential researcher bias towards communities and the airport management. Second, it generates a network map to demonstrate the cluster of related concepts as themes—the most important theme appears in red (hottest), and the next hottest in orange, and so on according to the colour wheel. The output setting (Theme 50%, Concept 100%) was used to generate a thematic network map on media coverage. Third, current community consultation practices of OOL is briefly reviewed as a way to triangulate the findings.

Site Description

As Figure 1 depicts, the Gold Coast Airport—located in Southeast Queensland (QLD) but straddling the state border with northern New South Wales (NSW)—is significant infrastructure for the economic development of two adjacent regions: Northern Rivers (NSW) and Gold Coast (QLD). As Table 2 indicates, these two regions not only have contrasting socioeconomic profiles but also have significant differences in terms of economic benefits associated with tourism facilitated by the airport. After the privatisation policy was introduced by the federal government in the late 1990s, Queensland Airport Limited (QAL) purchased the 'Coolangatta Airport' in 1998 and renamed it the Gold Coast Airport (OOL), as is it is known today under the management of Gold Coast Airport Private Limited (GCAPL) (GCAPL, 2012). The total number of passenger movements through OOL has increased from 1.9 million in 1998/1999 to 6.4 million in 2017/2018 (BITRE, 2019), which is more than a triple increment since the changes in ownership structure.
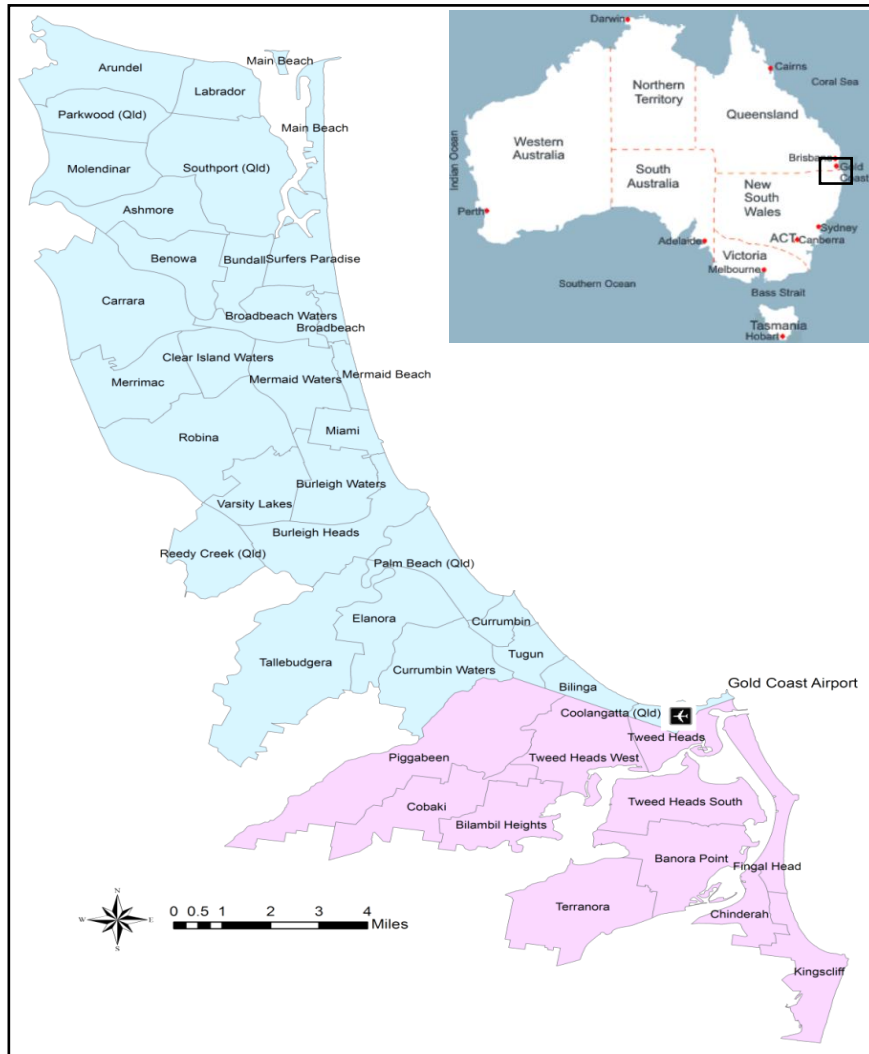
Figure 1. The location of Gold Coast Airport. Source: the Authors

Table 2. Attributes of Two regions Adjacent to the Gold Coast Airport.

Indicators	*Gold Coast*	*Northern Rivers*
Population	620 518	300 239
Unemployment rate	5.70%	4.80%
Accommodation and Food Services Jobs	32 469	10 320
OOL's economic impact	545 million*	64 million
Tourist arrivals through OOL	5 million/year*	1 million/year
OOL linked employment	1850*	400

Note: * represents estimates. Sources: GCAPL (2017); CGC (2019); RDA (2018); TCCI (2019).

The economic importance of the airport for regional development has become increasingly significant. For instance, the Master Plan (GCAPL, 2017, p. 38) states that OOL currently employs more than 2 250 individuals and will have a total economic impact of more than AUD $545 million. More importantly, nearly two-thirds of passengers passing through the airport are tourists, and OOL contributed $1.8 billion to the regional economy in 2016 (GCAPL, 2017, p. 37). Because of growing connectivity between the Gold Coast and cities across Asia and the Pacific, it is also predicted that OOL will service more than 16 million passengers by the year 2031/2032. In order to cope with this predicted growth in passenger numbers and associated aircraft movements, ambitious infrastructure plans, such as installing Instrumental Landing Systems (ILS) and improving terminal facilities have been proposed (GCAPL, 2012). Although Australian airports do not necessarily have direct accountability for addressing operational externalities, OOL management has undertaken various regulatory and voluntary measures to address aircraft noise complaints. For instance, in accordance with the Air Navigation Regulations of 1999, OOL has adhered to a curfew for aircraft movements between 23:00 and 06:00 since December 1999 (GCAPL, 2012).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Noise Complaints

AirServices Australia (2012), a government-owned agency that aims to provide safe and environmentally responsible services to the aviation

industry, admits that the growth of OOL coincides with substantially increased noise grievances. Consequently, various Noise Abatement Procedures (NAPs) in accordance with international aviation industry standards—including preferred runways, preferred flight-paths, night-time curfew, and community consultations—have been adopted as a part of the AirServices Australia's (2015) environment strategy. The airport owner considers environmental sustainability a key priority and states: "we want to ensure our business efficiency meets our visitor and community expectations and that, where practical, our environmental management practices go beyond legislative compliance" (QAL, 2017, para 1). Consequently, regional community consultations around aircraft noise related grievances have become an integral part of OOL's social responsibility initiative (QAL, 2016). Despite these measures, regional community residents remain vehemently opposed to unprecedented airport growth. For instance, AirServices Australia (2012) reported that in 2011, a total of 38 813 aircraft noise related complaints (against 37 370 aircraft movements) were lodged by surrounding communities, one of the highest of any airports across Australia at the time (Dhakal *et al*. 2015). The magnitude of regional resentment received substantial media interest, at least partially, because of concerns over the continuous upsurge of aircraft noise under the flight-paths.

Noise Complainants

AirServices Australia manages the aircraft-related noise complaints through its Noise Complaints and Information Service (NCIS) system. Complaints are stored in a database and reported on a quarterly basis between the 3rd quarter of 2012 and the 1st quarter of 2016. However, the way OOL noise complaints data is collected and reported to the public has varied over the years. For example, while some of the reports identify all the suburbs from which complaints are lodged, some recent reports only name the top complainants. In addition, quarterly reports have not been made publicly available since the 2nd quarter of 2016. Instead, AirServices Australia (2016) indicated that there was a total of 338 complainants from various suburbs for the year. The aggregate data (Figure 2) shows that two of the regional communities with the highest number of complaints— Fingal Head (a total of 493 complainants) and Banora Point (a total of 306 complainants)—are located south of the airport.
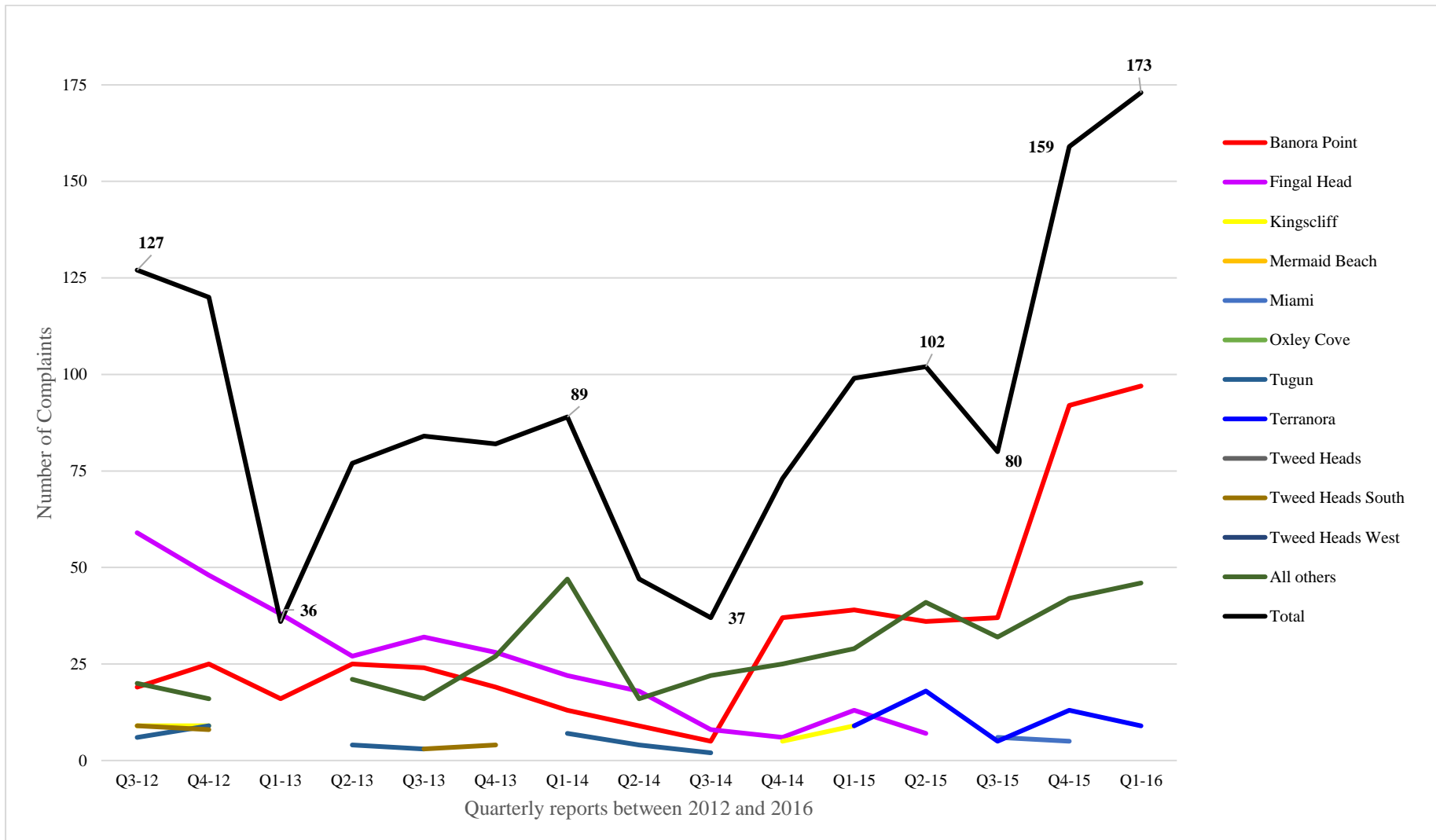
Figure 2. Frequency of Gold Coast Airport Noise Complaints. Source: AirServices Australia (2016).

Thematic Analysis of Media Coverage

An automated content analysis of 62 media reports on aircraft noise between 2009 and 2016 (11 media outlets) was carried out. Figure 3 depicts the frequency of media reports on aircraft noise at OOL analysed on a yearly basis. The highest number of media reports on noise issues were produced by two media outlets; *Tweed Daily News* (head office located south of the airport, n = 19) and *Gold Coast Bulletin* (head office located north of the airport, n = 18). This trend also indicates two periodic spikes in media reporting on the aircraft noise issue, once in 2011/2012 and again in 2015. These spikes can be attributed to two main issues related to airport operations and plans.
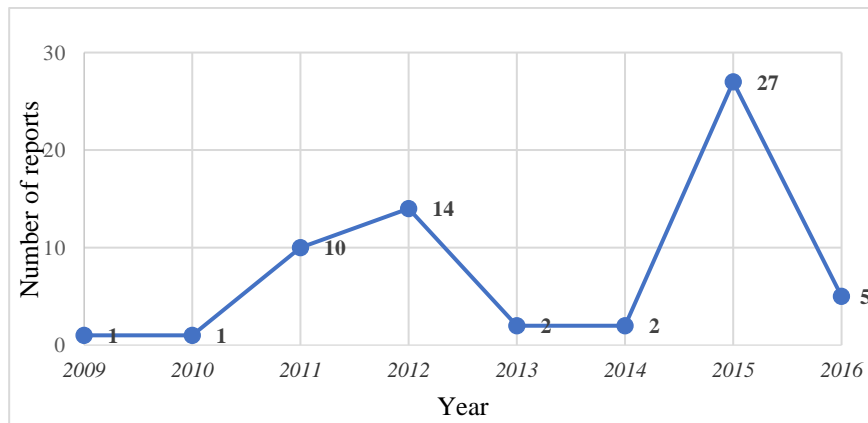

Figure 3. Noise Complaints Related to Local Media Coverage Analysed Between 2009 and 2016. Source: The Authors

First, GCAPL released its draft masterplan in 2011. While ambitious airport development and growth plans contained in the draft generated wider local media and community interests, residents south of the airport were particularly unhappy about their suggestions to minimise noise levels being disregarded. For instance, Kippen (2011, para. 3) reported that "AirServices community relations group senior advisor … told the vocal audience they would not be consulted before terms of reference for a noise abatement review into the Gold Coast Airport was drafted". Once the Airport Masterplan was approved by the federal government in May 2012 (GCAPL, 2012), the media interest withered. However, in early 2015, the Airport and AirServices Australia jointly released their plans to install an

Instrument Landing System (ILS) aimed at reducing weather-related missed approaches, diversions, and delays (Australian Aviation, 2015). This announcement reignited the previously subdued resentments amongst residents, and the media capitalised on the re-ignition of community disquiet. The ILS installation was also associated with the potential loss in property values. For instance, Weston (2015, para 4) reported "residents … have raised the prospect of a class action if their properties are devalued by aircraft noise".

The Leximancer analysis (Figure 4) revealed a total of six themes based on hit counts (in parenthesis): Aircraft-Noise (491 hits), Airport (262 hits), ILS (221 hits), Flights (215 hits), Community (165 hits), and Complaints (66 hits). Table 3 depicts key concepts grouped within each theme and provides a deeper understanding of stakeholders' interests and issues at sub-thematic level. Given the media reports were primarily about the growing number of flights in and out of OOL, the two most important themes are self-evident and understandable. However, the remaining themes warrant further discussion.
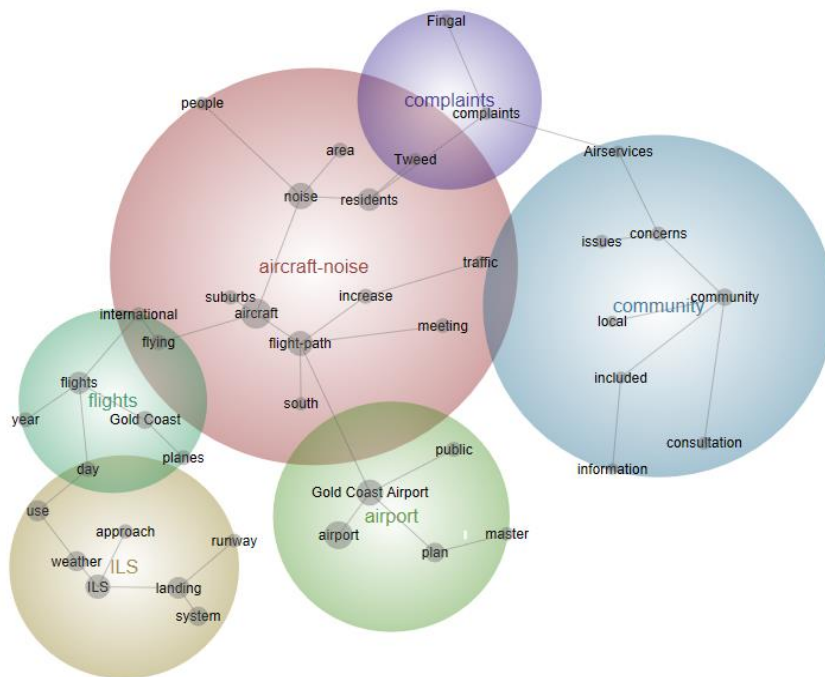

Figure 4. Leximancer Generated Thematic Network Map of Local Media Reports. Source: the Authors.

Table 3. Attributes of Two Regions Adjacent to the Gold Coast Airport.

Themes	Hits	Relevant Concepts
Aircraft-Noise	491	aircraft, noise, flight-path, residents, increase, area, meeting, suburbs, south, people, traffic
Airport	262	airport, Gold Coast Airport, plan, public, master
ILS	221	ILS, landing, use, weather, system, approach, runway
Flights	215	flights, Gold Coast, day, flying, year, planes, international
Community	165	community, concerns, issues, consultation, included, AirServices, information, local
Complaints	66	Complaints, Tweed, Fingal

Source: the Authors

First, the ILS theme captures the justification behind the installation of ILS—OOL was the only airport among Australia's top 12 to not have an ILS at the time—with economic consequences on airlines because of landing difficulties during bad weather (Nichols, 2015). An ILS is designed to improve the predictability of landing in low visibility conditions by reducing the minimum decision altitude or minima (runway distance the pilot must be able to see to continue with the landing) of 280 feet when compared to the existing Smart Tracking option with a minima of 430 feet (AirServices Australia, 2017, p. 1). However, this technical justification failed to achieve any traction, not only because of the growing opposition by regional communities worried about the increased number of flights (and associated aircraft-noise), but also because of opposition from airlines such as Qantas and Jetstar that operate from OOL (Stolz, 2015).

Second, the flight theme captures the divergent views of the local council and political representatives. For example, reporting on a community consultation meeting, Doherty (2015, para 6-7) stated "… we would like to see the ILS stopped … if introduced, there will be greater aircraft noise, property values in the flight-path will fall and tourism will be affected. From this meeting, we hope to send a petition to the Gold Coast City Council to condemn the new flight-path and hopefully for them to send a letter to the federal minister. …we will also form a community group to continue the fight".

Third, the community theme broadly encapsulates the lack of trust on current consultation mechanisms to yield tangible outcomes. This is reinforced by the opposition to the ILS in the region, as Emery (2016) reported that new community alliances against noise pollution were being forged to the stop the ILS. Gilmore (2012) reported that then CEO of OOL had a view that complaining residents were overstepping the airport's mandate to grow. This attitude was reflected in the media statement from one of the community consultation forums which indicated that the forum is designed to consult with stakeholders and the open nature of the forum has meant the minority view has overshadowed the broader public interest (GCAPL, 2013). This outcome is clearly an indication of lack of trust between the airport and regional communities as it not only questioned the salience of community stakeholders but also highlighted the airport's view on the sufficiency of current consultations arrangement.

Finally, the complaints theme exemplifies the core conundrum around noise-complaints and airport expansion. For example, when approving the Master Plan in 2011, the federal minister said that "he made it clear to the airport that it needs to communicate better with the local community in relation to aircraft noise and other issues, adding that he expects to see genuine engagement with the community as Gold Coast Airport develops" (Anonymous, 2012). These findings suggest that the consultation arrangements in place, while able to build consensus on some issues, are inadequate to address the more contentious community complaints associated with aircraft-noise as well as to bridge the trust-deficit between airport and regional communities.

Current Consultation Practices

The airport Master Plan puts emphasis on community consultations as an integral part of social responsibility, and, as a result two community forums, the Community Aviation Consultation Group (CACG) and the Airport Noise Abatement Committee (ANACC) have been established. First, the CACG was established as mandated by the Federal Government's *Aviation White Paper* (DITRDLG, 2009) for all major Australian airports and subsequent *2010 Airports Act Amendment Bill* (TPCA, 2010). The group is not necessarily a decision-making body but operates as an independent consultation forum designed to share views and information about the operations and future planning of OOL and its stakeholders, including key local associations interested in the issue of noise (GCAPL,

2012). Second, the ANACC specifically concerns the impact of aircraft noise (that are handled by AirServices Australia) at the community level.

Careful analysis of the airport documents however raises serious doubt over the desire to resolve the issue as a part of its social responsibility. On the one hand, airport management depicts CACG and ANACC as consultative forums to address aircraft noise complaints. On the other, airport management argues that noise complaints are outside the scope of its operation "All issues relating to aircraft noise are handled by AirServices Australia and not the individual airports" (GCAPL, 2014, para. 1). For example, OOL's written submission to the Inquiry into the effectiveness of AirServices Australia's management of aircraft noise (SSCRRT, 2011) mentioned that there was a lack of support from AirServices Australia in devising a coherent stakeholder strategy around the noise issue. The submission made a case that since the airport provides only the transportation infrastructure and it is AirServices Australia that is responsible for regulation and determining aircraft movements (in terms of when, where and how much), AirServices Australia need to undertake a leading role (Porter, 2011). The blame game underestimates the magnitude of the noise problem for affected communities as well as contradicts the operator's position on the environmental sustainability of going beyond regulatory compliance.

Divergent Community Views

Although Woodham (2012) reported that the then CEO labelled some of the complainants as minority opinion with an anti-regional development agenda in a public forum, there is clearly a dichotomy of community views based on their geographic location. Some local groups in the Gold Coast region indicated that the people living north of the airport understand the importance of the economic value of the airport, and that the associated noise is part of the everyday operations of the airport. For example, a local association in the northern suburbs (represented in the ANACC) acknowledged that communities in this region have accepted aircraft noise as a part of their living arrangements (Larkins, 2013). The view is that the OOL has been in the same location for nearly 80 years, long before people in the surrounding suburbs built houses or bought properties there.

On the contrary, local associations in the southern suburbs, also represented in the ANACC, point out that regional communities south of the airport were carrying more than their fair share of noise during take-offs (higher level of noise exposure) because aircraft mostly land (lower level of noise exposure) through the northern suburbs (Spencer, 2011). As

highlighted in Table 2, the contrasting views can be linked to the differences in the magnitude of OOL associated economic benefits accruing from tourism flowing into the two different regions. However, these divergent views not only reaffirm that aircraft noise impacts affect different locations differently, but also indicate that the one-size-fits-all modality of utilising quasi-public forums may not always work in improving airport-community relations. There is a need and an opportunity for the airport to present itself as a socially responsible vehicle with a genuine intention to foster economic opportunities in both regions.

5. CONCLUSION

The expansion of private airports has brought significant economic benefits to regional communities in Australia but this growth has also raised concerns in adjacent communities that have been impacted by negative environmental externalities such as noise pollution (see May and Hill, 2006; Freestone and Baker, 2010). This exploratory analysis provided preliminary but incisive insights into the research gap of understanding whether or not social responsibility could be a vehicle for improving OOL-regional community relations in Australia. The analyses presented in this paper indicate that airport-regional community relations are unlikely to be improved under the existing AirServices Australia approved consultative arrangements adopted by OOL. It is clear that the current low-hanging fruit approach has not been able to foster genuine engagement with regional communities. The focus instead should be on doing things the 'right way' (see Makadok, 2003). The literature supports the stance that stakeholders are more likely to take into account the economic benefits of airports when it comes to tolerating externalities, if there is a proactive engagement strategy and tangible economic benefits (Kasioumi, 2015).

Experiences from other airports also indicate that there are mounting public expectations that the airports can position themselves as a major economic force in the region only when they recognise noise grievances as part of their broader social responsibilities and adopt management practices to improve their relations with stakeholders. This study recognises that social responsibility is a contested concept with shortcomings (see Okoye, 2009), but concurs with the view of Dhakal (2018) that the concept has the potential to be a win-win proposition for business and society. An important contribution of this study relates to the demonstrated analysis of social barometers such as media reports and community attributes for shaping airport social responsibility initiatives in

regional settings. With fulfilling community expectations increasingly seen as important image for airport operations (Amaeshi and Crane, 2006; ICAO, 2008), airports such as OOL can position themselves as socially responsible only when stakeholder's concerns are addressed. The following social responsibility initiatives can then serve as a way forward to improve airport-regional community relations:

- Positioning the airport as a driver of regional growth rather than undermining the salience of resident's noise complaints;

- Recognising the differences between socioeconomic attributes of regional communities to formulate tailored engagement strategies as opposed to relying on one-size-fits-all consultation forums;

- Warranting AirServices Australia's involvement as a central feature instead of taking part in a blame game;

- Signing up for external credentials such as ISO 26000 guidance on stakeholder engagement.

Although the initiatives proposed above may be resource-intensive at the outset, the findings of this study demonstrate that proactive measures to address community concerns support OOL's standing in the region. The findings herein are also applicable to other regional airports facing the challenge of improving community relations.

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