

WFAE 2011 PAPER SESSION (13):

“Soundscape Design of Public Spaces and the Community.”

Thursday, 6/10/2011—17:45-18:30 -- Ionian Academy, Corfu

Session Chair: Katharine Norman¹

Title of Presentation: *“Using the Soundscape as a Tool for Placemaking and Community Building.”*

Abstract:

Urban planning and sound phenomenology are an unusual pairing. How do urban planners focused on increasing the quality of life think about a city's soundscape? Should the audible attributes (soundmarks) of a city be promoted, prohibited or protected, like landmarks, blight or wetlands? If so, which attributes? Should our sonic environment be carefully planned like the built environment, where public and open spaces are used to create a sense of place and community? This paper examines the city Portland, Oregon, and employs it as a model for future discussions into using the soundscape as a tool for community building for urban planners, designers, artists, musicians, and others interested in placemaking.

Our project is a detailed methodology with the key objective of community participation, led under the guidance of an organization or team. The guide provides instructions to help participants to identify and categorize soundmarks. The first step is to label designated neighborhoods. (Fortunately, Portland already has designated neighborhoods, eliminating this initial phase.) Next is the heart of the survey: “sound truthing.” Sound truthing is a sound survey or the act of identifying soundmarks within a neighborhood or area. Participants are given an indexing system for identifying soundmarks, ranging from noise (bus, cars) to cultural soundmarks (church bells, playground), natural sounds, and acoustical phenomena. Other criteria could include natural elements like tree canopies or water sources. In addition, there are criteria for evaluating the status of a soundmark, for example, is it temporary or endangered? We intentionally leave out the notion of “positive sound” or “negative sound” using other terminology like perception or quality of sound. Finally, the collected data is sent to the team or organization where it can be reviewed and ultimately made available to the public.

We see this project as an integral component in empowering a community, strengthening local ties or creating tourism. As cities around the country shift, transforming with the vicissitudes of the economy, urban growth

¹**Katharine Norman's** endeavours include writing about listening and sound, making creative work through the medium of sound, and thinking about our listening relationships—both sonic and metaphorical—in everyday life. She is currently a visiting fellow at De Montfort University, Department of Music, Technology and Innovation and has recently guest edited two forthcoming issues of *Organised Sound* journal (Cambridge University Press), on the theme of Sound, Listening and Place. More information on her work can be found at www.novamara.com.

or compression, we feel that the identification of soundmarks can play a significant contribution to the uniqueness or character of a city. Through awareness, citizens may learn how to promote soundmarks to their benefit, both aesthetically and economically.

The Community and Sound: The Soundmark is our first film in an educational series introducing the public to soundscape awareness. We feel strongly about two issues: 1) that a “community building tool” must be easily accessible and comprehensible, and 2) that film is a highly effective form of communication. With social media in mind, we have kept this film as brief as possible, focusing on key points, guiding the viewer to become the observer, the seeker, and ultimately the decision maker and active participant. Our objective is to create dialog, to leave soundscape issues unanswered so that the community (urban planners, architects, commissioners, artists, and citizens) can develop and reach its own conclusions.

From GIS programs to crowd sourcing, communication channels are expanding. Our film attempts to encompass some of these newer developments in very generalized terms. A soundmark should stand alone through its inherent sonic uniqueness, but we also acknowledge that a soundmark is “experiential”—an extra-sensory phenomenon inextricably linked to various senses and emotional connections.

AUTHORS

Mary Wright & Kenya D. Williams.

Mary C. Wright holds degrees in music theory and composition from Cleveland Institute of Music (B.M.), California Institute of the Arts (M.F.A.), and Princeton University (Ph.D.). By not aligning herself with any particular aesthetic "camp," she has maintained a unique and original voice. Nevertheless, her frequent, subtle references to popular music and the use of theatrical elements have enabled her music to appeal to a diverse audience. Since 1998, her artistic focus has principally been interdisciplinary, collaborating with architects, scientists, and visual artists and participating and organizing cross-discipline symposiums.

Kenya D. Williams is the Founder and Principal of Adore Recordings, an environmental planning firm specializing in soundscape planning and design. He serves on the Board of Directors for the One Square Inch of Silence Foundation. Kenya is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Urban Studies at Portland State University. His research field areas are Urban Planning and Acoustic Ecology. In addition, he has a master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning with specializations in Environmental Planning and Urban Design.

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Title of Presentation: *“Ear to the city: The Urban Soundscape Pilot Data Base of Palia, Volos..”*

Abstract:

The following text concerns a pilot research program on the urban soundscape of “Palia”, the city of Volos historical center, carried out by LECAD (Lab of Environmental Communication and Audiovisual Documentation), a research laboratory of the Department of Architecture,

University of Thessaly (<http://www.arch.uth.gr/en/labs>). Since 2008, LECAD has established a collaboration with the Municipal Centre for Historical Research and Documentation of Volos (DIKI), aiming at developing material related to Volos city history as well as multimodal immersive and interactive applications for the Museum of the city of Volos.

In the last three decades and with an increasing rhythm, architectural thought focus on a global sensuous experience in situ, adding to the prevailing visual experience the other neglected senses. Today, it is largely accepted that sound identity of a space in the city, formed by multiple sound qualities, tensions and multiple layer depth, represent its historic, social and functional characteristics.

Volos, a seaport city of 150.000 inhabitants and roughly 150 years of history, has rich industrial, commercial, intellectual and social history marked by cultural diversity and intense population movements. The project concerns a broad cooperation among researchers and experts in diverse fields of study with the purpose to contribute in the innovative development of an urban sound data base.

The Urban Soundscape Pilot Data Base of Palia, Volos will include: - General urban atmosphere recordings on every crossroad, Specific sounds recordings in private and public spaces, Soundwalks by people working or living in the area, talking about their present or past experiences of a place or a trajectory.

This Data Base will be used in a multipurpose 3D digital city model of the historic city center of Volos as a backbone for the development of various augmented reality and ubiquitous computing applications. In the same time, it will be presented in an internet application (Representation modes: Map/ Aerial photo/ Abstract-symbolic).

In the future, a second phase will include artistic activities, such as musical interaction with the objects and their surroundings as well as poetic recitations in situ.

A third phase, implying the use of Audio Augmented Reality-Enabled Social Navigation will combine the simulation of past audiovisual traces and the spreading of narrations, sounds and music in characteristic urban spaces.

AUTHOR

Giorgos Papakonstantinou, Department of Architecture, University of Thessaly

Giorgos A. Papaconstantinou was born in Athens in 1953. Studies in architecture (Athens), in cinema and multimedia (Paris). D.E.A. (Master) thesis in Fine Arts and Image Technology, University of Paris VIII. Associate researcher at the Architectural Technology and Research Unit (ATRU) of the National Technical University of Athens (N.T.U.A.) 1989-1998. Since 1999, he teaches Representation Technologies at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Thessaly and he is a member of LEDAD-EPEOT laboratory. Since 1985, he works as a director of documentary films on art, architecture and the city as well as of cultural interactive multimedia. http://www.arch.uth.gr/en/staff/G_Papakonstantinou

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Title of Presentation: “*Turku is Listening 2011 - An initiative towards Culture of Listening*”

Abstract:

Turku is Listening is a project in the program of Turku European Capital of Culture 2011. It aims to activate the inhabitants of Turku into thinking about and listening to their acoustic milieus. We have decided to advance on different fronts: Community Art, DIY/Workshop culture and Sound Art in public and semi-public spaces.

- by producing large scale community art projects that capture the attention and interest participants of different generations and backgrounds. With River Aura Symphony project we try to activate people of different professions and generations to work together in a frivolous act of producing a communal sound performance. Our aim is that River Aura Symphony will continue living after 2011 as a "new" tradition.

- by involving and recruiting local citizens into creating a Listening map of Turku.

We use the term listening map because we aim to create a tool could be used as an instrument in charting changes in local soundscapes. Public can use our listening map to compare daily changes in sound environment or as an information bulletin board about seasonal sound events like owls or the returning of migrating songbirds in spring. We start with something as common as an internet sound map and try to turn it into instrument by which people could study and evaluate changes happening in their own soundscape.

With this project we try to test whether it is possible to combine activism, DIY Culture, Mass Observation and community art into a method that would allow citizens to observe the changes happening in their local soundscape.

-by producing three Sound Installations by international artists that reflect and/or provide a counterpoint to existing public or semi-public locales. By bringing new elements into existing locales and institutions we try to produce a context shift that would turn citizens attention towards their familiar sound surroundings.

At all these fronts we actively try to create new traditions or practices that would survive after the European Capital of Culture year is over. During the first half of we realized that our goal is a quite big challenge.

In this paper we try to explicate how art can be used to focus citizens attention to their own acoustic environment and ecology, and how different approaches work and appeal to general audience. It is our first attempt to evaluate Turku is Listening 2011 project.

AUTHORS

- Tuike Alitalo, Producer, Curator
- Simo Alitalo, Sound Artist, Finnish Academy of Fine Arts

Tuike Alitalo: The Executive producer of Turku 2011 European Capital of Culture project Turku is Listening (Finnish Society for Acoustic Ecology) and a consultant and a coordinator in The Finnish Foundation for Media, Communication and Development in a Journalism for Social Change project. Writer, journalist since 1975, in different media. Editor of cultural journals and magazines and a columnist for Helsingin Sanomat. Curator, producer, consultant

in art projects, specialising in producing, media relations and project development. A member of juries and a curator and a producer in Simo Alitalo's sound art projects.

Simo Alitalo is a Finnish sound artist who works with sound installations and radio. Alitalo's works often start from the basic question of acoustemology: what do we know about the world through sense of hearing, and how what we hear affects the way we understand the world. Simo Alitalo's sound projects have been exhibited and broadcast in U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in several European countries.

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