

# Exploring Popular Perceptions of Soundscapes



Dr Mags Adams  
Senior Research Fellow  
Acoustics Research Centre  
University of Salford



# Urban spaces: a multi-sensory experience

- Ocular-centric position of urban design
- Inter-modal experience of the urban
- Challenge of emphasising sounds without developing an acoustic-centric position



# Vivacity 2020 and Positive Soundscapes



- Three years research into designing urban environments, environmental quality and soundscapes
- Aim to influence the future planning and design of urban areas
- Variety of methodologies to engage urban users



# Multi-sensory methodologies

- How can we obtain information about soundscapes?
  - Exploit multi-modal experience
  - Embodied participation in familiar environments
  - Complementary methodologies
    - Photo surveys
    - Sound walks
    - Questionnaires
    - Qualitative interviews
  - Dating gathering – the Vivacity 2020 experience



# Participation



- How to encourage participation?
  - Interesting and relevant research context
  - Positive outputs from the research
    - e.g. engaging end users
    - appropriate dissemination



# Perceptions of Soundscapes

Sometimes when I open the door on a weekday morning and I look out I feel invaded by the outside because there's so much traffic. I feel my private space is completely gone. During the weekend I feel that the space outside is more mine. This main street is an artery, and one of the main roads in the centre of London so I suppose there's a lot of traffic going to from north to south London and vice versa

- (resident, London)





Positive Soundscapes



The final one is early morning deliveries, which is an absolute pig. It's normally between 5.30 and 6.30 in the morning and it's early morning deliveries and those kind of metal things on the front of the shops. They're sort of rolled up and make a hell of a racket. How would I describe it? Noisy and, not fast, but approaching fast. It's not a dozy or quiet, like for instance parts of Fulham or Chelsea maybe. ... and, I wouldn't say there's always noise, but there is quite a lot of noise.

- (resident, London)





Positive Soundscapes



The two-stroke motor-bikes. The people who live in the housing estate at the end of the street like to ride up and down both ways on their two-stroke motor-bikes and they make a hell of a racket. There's no point to it, it just fun for them. I'm not that old but when I was that age I had a motor-bike and I quite liked doing that sort of thing so I'm not going to be intolerant about it but I don't like it.

- (resident, London)





Positive Soundscapes



The other night I came home and there was this massive roar. I looked out the window and the Red Arrows were shooting across and did their coloured smoke. And during the long weekend, just recently, at eight thirty in the morning a massive roar, I opened up the window and there was a kind of a convoy of motor bikes, they must have been going to Brighton or something, Harley Davidson's, all kinds of things, and it went on for five minutes. There must have been about 500 bikes. ... I was thrilled I suppose. Because I've never seen to many motorbikes kind of all at once. You know it was wonderful, excellent.

- (resident, London)





Positive Soundscapes



# Findings on soundscapes

- Not just sound levels important to urban residents
  - context, source, distance, temporariness and control
- Developing a soundscape terminology useful in articulating auditory appreciation
  - beyond Schafer and Truax
  - objective of Positive Soundscape Project



# Public space design and management

- Need to move beyond residents of the city
  - Planners, architects, developers
- Acknowledge the multi-modal nature of public space usage
- Need to facilitate the maximisation of positive sensory characteristics of public space while minimising the negative ones
- Achievable through design-led interventions including
  - Building design that acknowledges transmission of sensory information
  - Insulation against negative impacts
  - choice over those sensory impacts considered positive
  - Orientation of building facades
  - Uses of spaces within and between buildings
  - Juxtaposition of living and commercial spaces

