

Sensory Engagement Scores

Auditory Engagement Experiment with Acoustic Dimensions of Residential Neighbourhood Public Spaces

Score A: Neighbourhood Listening

Purpose: Here we are particularly interested in actively listening to soundscapes of neighbourhood streets.

Activity type – solo or group: Solo activity. You can conduct this activity with either your eyes open or your eyes closed. If you decide to blind fold yourself or keep your eyes closed in order to attune yourself better to the soundscape, ask a friend or a family member to accompany you.

Ask your companion to hold your hand during the soundwalk. This will help avoid any collision -related risks on the street.

Request him/her to stay as quiet as possible. This will help you stay focused on the listening.

In addition, request not to direct you to any specific sounds of his/her liking or disliking. Listening to specific sounds and taking interest in them are solely your decision. Your companion is only responsible for ensuring your safety while you conduct the soundwalk on the street with your eyes closed.

Site: Sidewalks on Neighbourhood Streets. Conduct the soundwalk on at least 3 streets in your neighbourhood – your street and two other adjacent streets.

Materials Needed:

- A sound recording device. You can also use your cell phone for recording.
- A blind fold (optional)

Tasks: (15-20 minutes per soundwalk per street)

- Start the soundwalk on your street. Walk slowly, listen actively and deeply to the soundscape of your street.
- Listen to macro sounds¹ as well as micro sounds² that make up the street's soundscape.
- Pause, listen and observe how you feel about sounds that catch your attention.
- Use your recording device to record the macro and micro sounds of your streets.
- After your soundwalk, narrate your subjective experience of it. Use your sound device to record the narration. Mention the street name and day/time of the recording.
- Repeat this activity 3 times in a day - morning, afternoon and evening – for 3 days. Choose 2 weekdays and either Saturday or Sunday.
- Repeat this activity on the other two streets.
- If you are interested in exploring further, you can repeat this activity every month and compare acoustic characteristics of your neighbourhood by month and by season.

¹ Macro sounds are almost always present in the background and are heard from almost everywhere in the neighbourhood, for instance, the sound of traffic, the sound from construction sites in summer months etc,

² Micro sounds are localized and may not be always audible, for instance, sounds from man-made sources such as wind-chimes, small water fountains in the front yard etc. or sounds from social activities such as children playing at a cul-de-sac, garage sale at a house etc.

Reflections:

Listen to the recordings you made of the street soundscape and of your personal experience during the soundwalks. And reflect on the following:

- What type of sounds – natural, social, mechanical - are dominant on the streets you investigated? How do they vary between the streets?
- Think about the less dominant sounds on each of these streets. What are they? Imagine these sounds are more present in your neighbourhood soundscape. How do they re-shape your relationship with these streets?
- How does the soundscape vary between different times of the day on each street? How does it vary between weekdays and weekends? Compare these variations between the streets as well.
- Are there sounds that repeat only at certain times of the day? What type of sounds are they?
- How does the nature of the soundscape on each street and the variation in it shape your understanding of your neighbourhood? How does it affect your mood (if any) and how does the mood vary between the streets?
- If you had the time to repeat the activity every month and every season over a course of 1 year, how did it inform you about your neighbourhood's sonic environment pattern? How does this sonic understanding help you develop a sense of place about your neighbourhood?

Score B: Walking in Search of a Human Sound

Purpose: Here we are particularly interested in finding human voices on neighbourhood streets. Residential streets within suburbia and on outskirts of the urban centre in many contemporary cities are almost always found empty and devoid of social life. Things such as children playing on the street, neighbours gathering in public spaces for communal activities etc that used to create the public life of the community in the past have gradually moved inside the private space of our homes leaving our public spaces feel desolate and alienated. In addition, the over reliance on automobiles, has boxed our bodies within the private space of our cars. It is as if the embodiment of public streets is no longer vital to the development of an active citizenship within the neighbourhood.

The score below allows us an opportunity to investigate our residential neighbourhood's public life. Through its instructions, which have a tad of poetic touches on them, it asks to search for human voices/human sounds on streets in order to reflect on them almost as a measure of 'public socialness' of our neighbourhoods.

Activity type – solo or group: Solo activity. Conduct this activity with your eyes open.

Conduct this activity during different times of the day – morning, afternoon, evening- for 2-3 days in a row. On each street, spend about 10-15 minutes. Then move to the next street. Each day, follow the same walking route and the same time schedule. For instance, everyday start the soundwalk on street A, then go to street B, followed by street C and end at street D. In the morning start the soundwalk at 10, in the afternoon at 2 and in the evening at 8. You can repeat this activity in every season too.

Site: Sidewalks on Neighbourhood Streets. Conduct the soundwalk on as many streets as possible within your neighbourhood.

Materials Needed: A notebook and a pen.

Task: Use the following instruction for your soundwalk

Walk on your street blind folded or not
 Walk many times
 How many? I have no guesses
 Walk forward
 Walk backward
 Walk slowly though
 Listen deeply and mindfully
 Is anyone talking? Anyone laughing? Anyone crying? Anyone yawning? Anyone walking?
 No? Then keep walking.
 Tired already, are you?
 Pause
 Sit in front of a house.
 Is there any living soul inside?
 Any child crying, any music playing?
 Nothing, eh?
 But do not give up
 Walk your day, walk your night
 In search of a human voice by your side
 Have you heard one? Not yet.
 Walk on every street in your neighbourhood.
 Do not give up.
 There is always next day.
 Have you heard one today? Where was it on your street? When was it?
 How did it make you feel? Did it make the street tremble with life?
 Remember this moment because it wasn't easily earned.

Reflections: Use your notebook to write down the location and the time every time you hear a human voice/ human sound during your soundwalk.

- If you have heard a human voice/human sound during the soundwalk, where was it on the street? When was it? How long after you started your first soundwalk did you hear this sound – within the first 10 minutes of your first soundwalk or on the 2nd day of the soundwalk etc.? Consult your notebook for these questions.
- If you have repeated this activity in different seasons, when was the easiest to come across a human voice/sound? When was the most difficult?
- How does the minimal or the healthy presence of human sound on these streets shape your relationship with your neighbourhood public spaces? What kind of sensory experience do you gather when you walk alone on these streets during different times of the day?

Score C: The Cultural Listening

Purpose: Here we are interested in exploring how our public spaces are sonically shaped by the diversity of languages commonly found within Canadian residential neighbourhoods.

Activity type – solo or group: Solo activity.

Site: Neighbourhood public squares or neighborhood open public spaces or neighbourhood public sports field etc which are seen as social junctions.

Task (as long as you like)

- Conduct soundwalks in the public social junctions within your neighbourhood during social and cultural events such as sports events, cultural festivals, community gathering etc. These events happen more often in summer months than the rest of the year and many residents seem to take part in them.
- Walk close to the audience area, walk between people, walk with people from an audible distance.
- Listen actively and mindfully to varieties of languages people use when they speak with each other.
- The intention is attuning yourself not to the content of the conversation, but to the language they use for conversing as well as to the diversity in the accent.
- During the soundwalk record the sound of the conversations from an audible distance.
- There is absolutely no need to pause to record any conversations. Continue slow walking and recording while treating the conversational sound as the ambient sound of your surroundings.

Reflections:

- How many languages have you heard during your soundwalk?
- Close your eyes and imagine you are walking among the same crowd you met during the soundwalk. Does it evoke any memory or any sensation? If yes, what are they?
- How would your relationship to your neighbourhood public space change if this sonic diversity disappears one day?

Score D: Eavesdropping on the Youth

Purpose: Here we are interested in exploring how youth's social activities in public spaces contribute towards creating a soniferous experience within residential neighbourhoods.

Activity type – solo or group: Solo activity.

Site: Neighbourhood public school sites, preferably secondary schools.

Task (as long as you like)

- Take a stroll on the street during the school's lunch break. Secondary school students usually leave the school premise during this time and walk to nearest plazas for buying lunch.
- Walk with them from a distance. Listen actively to their conversations. Notice they walk in small groups.
- Some groups talk loudly, some whisper, some laugh, some swear, some yell and some sing. Try to eavesdrop on each group.
- You do not need to understand what they say but simply listen to the rhythm of their conversations.
- Repeat this activity a few times (3-4 times) during the week. It should be done only during the school lunch break.

- Conduct this walk once or twice during the same time in summer months when the school is on holidays.

Reflections:

- How do sounds generated from youth's activities on streets during the break time shape the soundscape of your neighbourhood?
- How does the multitude of their sounds work against or with the constant macro sounds of your neighbourhood?
- What differences do you feel in the soniferous experience of your neighbourhood when students are on summer holidays?

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Score E: The Soundbathing in the Neighbourhood Greenspace

Preparation: This activity takes place in protected forest conservation area or in ravine. If you do not have an easy access to such areas in your neighbourhood, try it in an open green space in your neighbourhood.

Procedure:

- Take a slow walk in the forest/ravine ---- Listen to different sounds that the forest offers you as you walk through it ---- Let go your constant analytical mind but keep the curiosity alive---- If you see a bed of tall grasses, walk close to it. Find a comfortable spot to stand. Close your eyes and listen to the sound of their movements. Move with that sound. Imagine you are one of the tall grasses. ---- If a tall, large, mature tree in the forest attracts your attention, lie down under it and stay for 10-15 minutes with your eyes closed. Imagine the tree leaves are talking. What are they saying to you and at what rhythm? ---- If you come across a water source such as a creek or a river in the ravine, first walk slowly along it and listen deeply to the sound of the water. Then stand at one spot, close your eyes and imagine you are the water. What kind of sound do you hear now?---- If you come across a valley in the ravine, walk there and start clapping or make a loud sound. Imagine you are calling your friend. Can you hear the echo of your sound?
- As the season changes, so does our natural environment. To develop a more awareness of your neighbourhood public green spaces, try this activity in different seasons by visiting the same places and noticing the changes in the acoustic environment.

Score F: Listening to Your Footsteps on the Street

Preparations: Identify different kinds of natural and man-made materials that are readily found on public streets/sidewalks and in their immediate surroundings. ice, concrete, grass, pavement, heaps of pine needles etc. you can try this on any materials.

Procedure:

- Find a quiet street in your neighbourhood ---- Stand on the paved sidewalk----walk back and forth at your regular speed---Then stand at one spot----close your eyes----pretend to walk with your usual footsteps but don't change location ---- Can you hear your footstep?----open your eyes ----then stand on the grass

boulevard next to the sidewalk----walk back and forth ---- stand at one spot----Pretend to walk but don't change location--- how does your footstep sound change?

- b) Repeat this activity on different textures of snow – fresh snow, ice, slush – that you cover your streets/sidewalks during winter months.

Score G: Dominant Sound Direction Walk in the Public Walking Trail

Preparation: You will need assistance from a friend or a family member for this activity.

Procedure:

- a) Stand on one spot of the trail ---- close your eyes ----what is the dominant sound that you hear? which direction is it coming from? ---- name the source of the sound----Walk 5 steps towards that direction from your starting point ---- pause ----what is the next dominant sound that you hear? This could be same as the first one ----walk 5 steps towards the direction of that sound, name the sound source ----pause ----repeat this one more time.
- b) Your footsteps create 'sound direction walk tracks' on the ground. The person assisting you can use chalks to trace these footsteps on the trail.
- c) Repeat this activity at various locations on the trail. When finished, check if there is any trend for the dominant sound in your neighbourhood public trails or for the direction it is heard from.
- d) Repeat this activity at different times of the day to see how the soundscape of the public trail varies.

Score H: The Traffic Dance/Mind disrupted

Preparation: Traffic sound is the most dominant sound in and around my neighbourhood. Try this during the rush hour in the morning and repeat different times of the day.

Research Question I am asking: It has been well established that walking outdoor helps in thinking. Friedrich Nietzsche once said that "All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking." In this experiment I am asking how does a soundscape overloaded with traffic sound influence the thinking process of a pedestrian?

Procedure:

- a) Stand at a street corner where the main street and your neighbourhood street meet ---- Keep your eyes closed and try developing a thought : the thought could be about a dream, a book that you read last night or things that you will need to do today---- You are also aware of the soundscape you are in ---- As soon as your thought gets interrupted by the sound of traffic, create a small movement through your body to indicate the interruption---- Once that traffic sound disappears continue with your thought if you can---- Continue this process every time your thought gets interrupted by the traffic sound ---- Ask a friend or a family member to film your 'Traffic Dance'
- b) Continue this for 15-20 minutes. How many times have you been bombarded by the traffic sound within this short period of time and how far have you managed to develop the thought that you started with?