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► **To cite this version:**

Ari Koivumäki. Coincidental and Bottom-up Method for Soundwalking. *Ambiances, tomorrow. Proceedings of 3rd International Congress on Ambiances*. Septembre 2016, Volos, Greece, Sep 2016, Volos, Greece. p. 283 - 287. hal-01409173

HAL Id: hal-01409173

<https://hal.science/hal-01409173>

Submitted on 12 Dec 2016

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Coincidental and Bottom-up Method for Soundwalking

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Abstract. *The city of Tampere has decided to develop their oldest suburban area to avoid expectable problems with poverty, inequality and migration. Plenty of activities are ongoing to find sustainable and efficient solutions for social challenges. The writer has worked with a project group planning a pervasive game app to get people to know more of their environment and to create together their common history by gamification. The key concepts are 'bottom-up' and coincidental. A gamer will create the route and it will vary each time. How does this help the community? The aim is that the ambience of Tesoma changes from one end: the strange areas become familiar, because there is a big difference between just walking crisscross and sticking to routines and following the same paths once again. A comparison will be made with similar applications.*

Keywords: *ambiences, soundscape, soundwalk*

Introduction

The theoretical background of my article lies on soundscape studies. The ISO definition for a soundscape is the following: 'acoustic environment as perceived or experienced and/or understood by a person or people, in context'. Soundscape exists through human perception of the acoustic environment, and it will be understood as a perceptual construct, related to a physical phenomenon¹. Composer and sound theorist Murray Schafer coined the soundscape concept in his seminal book *The Tuning of the World* (1977). The concept of ambience lacks a similar definition/standardisation but has the same kind of features, as Jean-Paul Thibaud (2002) puts it: experienced ambience is everyday experience of city dwellers. Ambience puts us in immediate contact with a situation in its entirety and involves consequently an ecological approach to perception. A soundscape is one feature of the acoustic space; an ambience cannot be examined outside of that. The listening subject is synchronised to be part of the lived milieu (Thibaud 2011, 43-53; Augoyard 2008, 487; Böhme 1993, 113-126). *Soundwalk* is a method to make perceptions by plan, experience and construct our relation to our acoustic environment. The benefit of this procedure is to focus on the present by listening (Järviluoma *et.al.* 2009, 175). Moving in sonic environment it is possible to hear sounds generated by nature or human activity; sounds from working and living the everyday life (Uimonen 2011, 256–263; McCartney 2010).

1. <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso:12913:-1:ed-1:v1:en>

In Tampere, Finland, there is a typical suburban area built forty-fifty years ago called Tesoma. The inhabitants, approximately 8000 people, find the place unpleasant and are suffering from its negative image. The amount of elderly people in relation to schoolchildren is higher than in other areas in Tampere. The price level of the apartment houses is one of the lowest in Tampere region, as well as the average income level and the amount of citizens with higher academic education². When a Spanish exchange student was visiting Tesoma for the first time, her first thought was: 'There is nothing here-woods, a small road and woods'. It reminded her of some towns in the North of Spain - the small towns passed when going to somewhere else. The city center looks all the same: nothing but houses and maybe, just maybe, a shop or a cafeteria. She was used to people and movement and wondered where all people were. The city council of Tampere has decided to develop their first suburban area with an EU-funded project called Oma Tesoma (Our Tesoma³) to avoid the predictable problems. Besides infrastructural planning, participatory workshops and seminars have been organised to find sustainable and efficient solutions for social challenges. A lot of activities are going on.

Tesoma soundscapes

Creating soundwalk routes was something to begin with. Already in 2009 during the project *Pirkanmaa soundscapes* some of the places in Tesoma were spotted. The original aim of the project was to increase the awareness of local soundscapes and to use that knowledge in urban planning. People were asked to listen to their sonic environment as well as to try to recall their sonic memories, to verbally describe them and to submit their proposals for meaningful soundscapes and soundwalks worth recording, researching and conserving, as we started to make a compilation of *Pirkanmaa soundscapes* in social media⁴.

One of our goals was to pick up proposals for a soundwalk to create routes on the map in the web with the stories, interviews and soundscapes attached to it. Soundwalks were meant to be made with the person behind the proposal and in the authentic sonic environment. The idea was to invite friends to talk through the walk with a sound designer to record the dialogue. After the walk, the designer was supposed to make more recordings along the route and mix the samples together with the interview.

The main criterion was that the informant would be able to express his relationship to the sonic environment and verbally describe it. The emphasis was put on people's personal experiences and the subjective ways of interpreting the sonic environment. Looking back it would have been useful and important to look for more concrete connections by visiting people and places like societies or schools straight from the beginning. That would have functioned well in giving the project more of public awareness and pursued more proposals of meaningful soundscapes from the area.

2. http://omatesoma.fi/wp-content/uploads/TESOMA_vest.pdf

3. <http://omatesoma.fi/>

4. <http://pirkanmaanaanimaisemat-english.blogspot.fi/>

All in all, very interesting and varied material was collected, of which one example is from Tesoma Church in the middle of an apartment area near a kindergarten. On Fridays the church bells ring for the memory of the deceased parishioners, and the sound gets mixed with the voices of children playing. The recorded soundscape is a strange mixture of grief and joy, a *soundmark*, i.e. sound which is unique to an area (Schafer 1977, 10). By Tesoma lake I also managed to make a *100 Finnish Soundscapes* -recording from a memory 'When I was ten I remember going to the lake with my friends. There we would throw small pebbles on the thin ice, just after the first frosty night.' Ducks are heard in the foreground and ice hockey is being played in the background⁵, another typical sound of Finnish suburbs, especially in wintertime. The recording is also presented in the listening map of the project *Transforming Finnish Soundscapes*⁶.

There are several applications for soundwalking available, such as noTours⁷. A couple of years ago (2013) together with TAMK students we created a mobile radio play with noTours. The story was told during a route in a park and could be heard through headphones while navigating with smartphone. During the soundwalk the participant was able to listen soundscapes from the past, present and the future. With a story, virtual and real places could be combined. The soundwalk and the story was carefully pre-planned and executed and therefore the result was more or less artificial by nature. The role of the player was to act a passive performance.

During the autumn 2015 I worked with another project group planning a pervasive game in which the gaming experience blends with the physical world of Tesoma area. The game was called *Augmented Tesoma Reality*. The idea is to get people know more of their environment, to get experiences, and to create together their common history by gamification. The group decided to pilot their own app in Tesoma among the people in ordinary settings. The key concepts were 'bottom-up' and coincidental. So the route was created by the player and it was different each time, quite the opposite compared to the mobile radio play I mentioned earlier. During the route, assignments were given to the player, such as 'try to listen and recognise how many birds there are in your neighborhood right now', 'search for an object that makes the most pleasant sound around you' or 'find a place in which people are having a good time'. The players had to record or write down the assignments with their mobile devices and put the results on a map of Tesoma to be seen and heard by other people too.

It is said that when you have a hammer, you start seeing nails. Being part of a game gives an opportunity to have a decent look into and to in peace listen to the sonic everyday environment and to gather on the map information of the experiences by ordinary inhabitants, not an outsider, for the purposes such as for example tourism or marketing. People in Tesoma may compare their findings with each other and obtain and increase common knowledge of their surroundings. Hopefully this contributes to the positive development in the community, and the ambience of Tesoma will change: the strange areas become familiar due to the big difference this

5. http://www.gruenrekorder.de/?page_id=172

6. <http://kartta.aanimaisemat.fi/pages/info#en>

7. <http://www.notours.org/soundwalks>

game gives compared to just walking crisscross or sticking to routines and following the same paths once again. The game was piloted in 2016. People liked the demo⁸, they consider moving outdoors healthy, activating and practical.

What do we gain from soundwalk routes?

The main target for planning soundwalk routes is to activate our thoughts, our minds and change our mindsets. The reason for that is to get in-deep experience of our familiar environment, to see it in another way, to engage the meaning of making, and to look for something new. A problem is that those in need for a change in their life are perhaps the most difficult people to bring a kick-off to get up and go.

We are used to following our everyday routines and spending our leisure time accordingly, maintaining old habits. Walking outside, perceiving, listening and seeing must give awards, but these awards should be mentally valuable, mean something, be a strong experience, something people want to share with each other. In Facebook I have seen pictures and videos full of pets, birds, sun sets, sceneries, weather, people living their life. I would say we have the tools; we just need to get going and give chances to deepen the relation to our environment. People must understand and have the knowledge before they are willing to explore their surroundings. That is the case with for example birds: if you are not able to hear their special differences, you can not hear anything else than an abstract bird. The same applies with flora: the sooner you can see the difference, the more you see, and the more anxious you are to get to know more.

Prejudices are also an obstacle and an important matter to be recognised. One should be open with oneself and open one's mind. Sharing experiences solves the problem. Maybe this is the point in social media: letting people see that your findings are equal to others and that your experiences are just as valuable and important as other people's experiences, and simultaneously winning approval by all that. Shared experiences are a world of opportunities to learn from one another, from our friends, even between people who have not been acquainted with each other.

The tangible heritage is conveyed through understanding the value of the perceptions made in the lived, mundane environment, everyday, just around us, seeing the world changing little by little in its richness and hues. The biggest problem is that to avoid boredom or in chase for ever greater experiences, we have to go somewhere else with other people than the ones we have chosen to live with, and that kind of life means having to let go, stepping aside. Many people are persistent in maintaining the control of their life, of their body, whatever it takes. Being in front of others, among the others is as controlled as it can be when you are alone in your flat, doing what you want. In *Augmented Tesoma Reality*⁹ the purpose was to get people 'to get lost', just start walking without a purpose, without a destination in order to experience something new - but maybe that is the hardest issue in life: to face the uncertain, accidental, environment full of surprising events. We should be

8. tinyurl.com/jcnoljf

9. <https://augmentedtesomareality.wordpress.com/>

prevented from being alone without connections to the outside world to feel home and not to feel a stranger in the ambience, to not to be afraid, and to be approved and not neglected. Soundwalking is a way to reflect our sonic experience. Tuning the acoustic environment is one part, and the other is to change ourselves, to improve listening skills. To discover something new, we should break our routines and walk further than we use to, choose new routes for us and at the same time stay alert in a positive way, be ready to focus around us.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Augmented Reality -group for inspiring conversations and Katja Ruokonen for the help with the translation of this manuscript.

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