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## **SOUNDSCAPE AND EMPLACED PASTS – ANALYZING ONE HUNDRED FINNISH SOUNDSCAPES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*One Hundred Finnish Soundscapes* is a three-year research programme organised and executed by the Finnish Society for Acoustic Ecology [1]. The goal of the project was to record, protect and research sonic environments and to increase the awareness of the importance of soundscapes among the Finns. This was accomplished by arranging a writing competition in order to get suggestions for the soundscapes which were considered important within the geographical borders of Finland. The final one hundred soundscapes were selected by the jury from 762 hundred written suggestions. An integral part of project was to get the suggested soundscapes recorded and archived. This fieldwork was carried out in collaboration with the competitors. The reason for this was to gather additional information of the sounds and to get the soundscapes recorded in the way they would have been recorded by the writers.

The descriptions give a good sonic map of the richness of Finnish soundscapes from 80 years ago to the present. Writings were sent from all over Finland, both from the countryside and cities, they were written by both young people and old people; sounds of nature, people and technology represented. The material was be archived for future research in several archives, including Finnish Literature Society, Tampere University, Sibelius Museum and Tampere University of Applied Sciences. Several researches are already on the way at the universities involved. Our paper discusses categorizing the gathered data and doing the actual fieldwork in recording the sounds. We also give examples of the research material dealing with sound memories and places of sounds and events.

## CATEGORISING THE QUALITATIVE DATA AND COLLECTING THE SOUNDS

Because of diverse descriptions of the sonic environments with such different relationship to the sounds the suggestions were divided to five categories in order to get the material evaluated before the actual field recordings. The categories are as follows:

- a) *Startling curiosities,*
- b) *Sound memories,*
- c) *Personal favorites,*
- d) *Literary merits and*
- e) *Places of sounds and events.*

Any of these categories are by no means considered more important than the other.

a) *Startling curiosities* consists of descriptions of sounds that are important for the writer because of their uncommonness. They have grabbed the attention of a listener in some special way. Needless to say, these sonic phenomena are sometimes quite troublesome to record. They include for example various sounds of the frosting of water or melting of ice in lakes, seas and rivers. Luckily this year the weather conditions were favorable for the recording crew. On one hand it was not snowing too much in the early fall, on the other we got plenty of it later in the winter. First we managed to capture sounds which are very familiar to many Finnish kids: the clear sound of small pebbles rolling and sliding while thrown on thin ice. Another example of fortunate sound hunt was the thump of the falling snow heaps gathered on spruce branches.

b) *Sound memories* are subjective experiences, and perhaps somewhat nostalgic. In these writings the soundscapes act as a key of remembrance. Part of this category had to be covered by radio sound effect archive of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE). One Hundred Finnish Soundscapes project needed to rely on YLE since some of the sounds described are not audible anymore due to infrastructural and cultural changes. The YLE tapes were played to the interviewees in order to elicit the comments on the sounds of the past.

c) *The Favorite sounds* category consists of individually precious sounds. The criteria were in most cases clearly demonstrated. These soundscapes are frequent and common since it is the subjective meanings attached to the sounds that make them important. However, also the challenge in recording these sounds lies in their subjective nature. Luckily the interviewees were very helpful. For instance the school break was recorded quite far from the yard, since the description was written from the distance, too. With the help of the farmer who had lived close to school for six decades, the project members managed to get more nuances, distance and echo to

the tape. What the project unfortunately could not fix were the occasional car and an airplane.

d) *Literary merits* is the fourth category. These descriptions are the proof of the very good co-operation of ears and verbal skills. Some of them are fictitious e.g. ghost stories and anecdotes, but so beautifully written that a recording of the described sounds would most probably ruin the meticulous narrative. It certainly is possible to make a radio feature of a little girl who sees a witch at the bottom of a draw well, but it would be quite challenging to find the soundscape for that during the field work.

e) *Places of sounds and events* category consists of sounds which are tied to particular places and times. Some of them were proposed for protection like the steam whistle in the town of Dalsbruk in the archipelago in South-West of Finland. The whistle was actually saved once from abolition by the local activists. The Dalsbruk steam whistle was recorded several times from different distances with the attempt to capture the signal as the community hears it.

Soundmemories (category B) and Places of sounds and events (category E) will be presented here in more detail

#### **SOUNDMEMORIES (CATEGORY B)**

When asked to write about “the meaningful soundscapes” the past experiences have played an important role for a considerable amount of entrants. Many of them have written about their memories of sound although this was not particularly requested. These memories of soundscapes have happened more in time than in specific places. The experiences are very descriptive but the place seldom plays a significant part in the memory.

Helmi Järviluoma has written about the way people write about the past in comparison to the present soundscape [5]. These sound memories can thus be categorized as follows:

- 1) A neutral description of both past and present soundscapes
- 2) A slightly negative description of the present soundscape: past good – present worse
- 3) A highly negative, even bitter description of the present soundscape: past good – present ruined
- 4) A philosophical description of the present soundscape: past good – the past also nourishes the present
- 5) A positive description of the present soundscape: past bad/good – present good

Järviluoma stresses that not only the lived experience is what constructs the memory but also the time and place of the remembering plays a significant role to the way we make past present as memories.

It should also be mentioned that the written soundscape proposals include a great variety of historical sounds of both private and public sphere. Along side the extinct intimate sounds of people's private lives there are also proposals concerning monumental historical soundscape heritage. In one written example the visual surroundings of a historical and culturally important mansion in Haminalahti is strictly and beautifully conserved, but the soundscape had changed drastically due to a motorway running all along the shore of the lake where the mansion is located. Clearly the soundscape has changed also due to infrastructural changes, but the question still remains of concern: should we make the difference between conserving historical sound environments and constructing them artificially [6]?

#### **PLACES OF SOUNDS AND EVENTS (CATEGORY E)**

The places of sounds and the events are usually described in three dimensions such as time, place and the combination of them. Different places and events are intertwined and they should not be analysed separately. Two central themes occurred in these writings, namely noise and silence in various contexts. A silent or peaceful moments experienced in nature were often related to recreational activities such as watching birds, hunting or fishing and so on when the writers were not specifically seeking silence.

On the other hand for some of the writers experiencing the silence was the main purpose to go to the forest or wilderness. Although the sounds are seldom completely absent the soundscape is experienced as silent. The silence in the nature is cherished and highly valued. Certain sounds belong to silence but not any sound or any kind of behaviour. This was confirmed by a gentleman who was annoyed of the school children who were not respecting the peaceful environment of the national park. Also the sounds when they are contrasted to long silent period are represented in writings such as birds or sound of Spring in general or the tiny cracking sounds caused by the freezing lake in late autumn.

The sounds of the city environment are usually noticed when they are connected to human beings or their activities. These sounds include living in the block of flats or listening to the silently moving crowd muffled up in their winter clothes during the Independence Day festivities. Favourite places are described vividly such as the clacking of the billiard balls in the local bar. The places are constructed also via media. The declaration of Christmas peace is broadcast to all country, and it is considered as the essential part of Christmas season.

The peaceful environments are often contrasted to noise of traffic. Even if traffic noise is not present it is used to refer to unpleasant sound. The traffic noise includes also the booming stereos from the cars. According to a Canadian research

one of the major actors of background music named their product as environmental music [2]. This raises a question whether background music should be evaluated as an environmental sound, and respectively disturbing background music as an environmental problem.

## CONCLUSIONS

The categorization *startling curiosities, sound memories, favorite sounds, literary merits* and *places of sounds and events* was created in order to manage the various subjects that were dealt in the writings. The categorization was created in order to collect the environmental sounds during the field work.

As one might expect, the archived sounds seldom equalled to the memories. The past recollections are sometimes so personal that that a few-minute condensed sound object cannot depict the memory of the lived sound event. In addition to that there were some technical incidents e.g. the thresher was recorded too close to the machine so the ambiance was not right. However, the project managed to tape some very interesting discussions concerning the historical sound environments that are no longer possible for the rest of us to experience.

The written material of One Hundred Finnish Soundscapes was gathered in collaboration with the Finnish Literature Society (FLS), and as a result a part of it has folkloric tendencies. The network of FLS produced soundscape descriptions in which the historical places are more or less descriptions of childhood, work and family life than reminiscences of sound events even though one can find descriptions of them, too. One should bear in mind that the urbanization of Finland in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century affected the lives of many entrants in a way that is appearing now in a nostalgic form.

Places of sounds and events were constructed in context of pleasant or unpleasant sounds. In qualitative research of environmental sounds the symbolic order is crucial. As the excerpts show, even if the noises or unpleasant sounds were not actually present, the well-liked sounds were characterized in relation to them.

Among other definitions, noise is often described as an unwanted sound. The definition is analogous to the anthropological definition of *dirt* as matter out of place. [5] Consequently, a sound in a wrong place can be described as noise. Because of the temporal nature of sound the analogy between dirt and noise needs to be re-considered. Not just the sound in a wrong place but also at the wrong time is regarded as noise [6]. This opens up various questions of qualitative definitions of noise such as who has the power of defining the unpleasant sounds or to what extent is the sound's unpleasantness culturally constructed.

A project similar to the One Hundred Finnish Soundscapes is taking place Istanbul in the near future. The project will be carried out in collaboration with local organizations, educational institutions, advisories and Istanbul residents. The project is planned to be a part of the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture program. There are already a couple of sound samples on to be listened at <http://www.akueko.com/>

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## STRESZCZENIE

### **PRZESZŁOŚĆ OBECNA W KRAJOBRAZIE DŹWIĘKOWYM. PROJEKT „STO FIŃSKICH KRAJOBRAZÓW DŹWIĘKOWYCH”**

„Sto Fińskich Krajobrazów Dźwiękowych” to trzyletni projekt (2004-2006) obejmujący dokumentowanie krajobrazów dźwiękowych w Finlandii. Krajobrazy dźwiękowe są rejestrowane, archiwizowane i stają się przedmiotem dalszych studiów. Do chwili obecnej jest to w Finlandii najszerzej zakrojona próba zgłębienia jakościowych aspektów środowiska dźwiękowego i sposobu, w jaki ludzie żyjący w obrębie określonego krajobrazu dźwiękowego doświadczają swych środowisk. Głównym celem nie było zbieranie materiałów, ale zwiększenie świadomości mieszkańców w zakresie znaczenia krajobrazu dźwiękowego. Dodatkowo, projekt określił wpływ krajobrazów dźwiękowych na jakość życia społeczności oraz fakt, że krajobrazy dźwiękowe są złożone, wielowarstwowe. Projekt rozpoczął się ogólnokrajowym konkursem, którego celem było zebranie opisów krajobrazów dźwiękowych, wykorzystując doświadczenia, wiedzę i umiejętności mieszkańców różnych fińskich miast i wsi. Przesłane opisy skupiały się głównie na momencie usłyszenia lub słuchania dźwięku, na rzeczywistym doznaniu. W związku z tym konkretne miejsca nie zawsze były odzwierciedlone w opisach. Jednakże jest możliwe analizowanie danych z perspektywy słuchania przestrzennych rozmów. W artykule przedstawiono analizę opisów, skupiającą się na tematach miejsca, historii i pamięci, wzbogaconą o konkretne przykłady z nagrań terenowych. Projekt „Sto Fińskich Krajobrazów Dźwiękowych” jest przedsięwzięciem Fińskiego Stowarzyszenia Ekologii Akustycznej we współpracy z fińskimi uniwersytetami i Fińskim Przedsiębiorstwem Radiowo-Telewizyjnym (YLE).