



# Soundscapes For Well-Being

- Soundscapes are the aural expression of landscapes as perceived by the communities (human and non-human) inhabiting them.
- Soundscapes are a **source of affective engagement** with landscapes, help communities navigate through them, and conditions how they behave within them.
- The **detrimental effects** of negative soundscapes (noise) and **beneficial effects** of positive soundscapes in community health and well-being are well documented in academic research.
- Negative effects of soundscapes range from sleep disturbance to cardiovascular disease in humans and from interference in foraging behaviour to altered reproductive success in animals.
- **Positive effects** of soundscapes include emotional restoration in humans and embryo development in non-humans.
- An integration of **soundscape guidance** into landscape planning, design and management is essential for protecting and enhancing positive soundscapes, and thus enabling the communities inhabiting those landscapes to thrive.

*This research has put forward a conceptual framework of embodied affectivity that emphasises listening in landscape planning, design and management and advances new ways of knowing that expand prevailing visual and human-centred ones. The research has been published as a book on Urban Soundscapes (Ruiz Arana, 2024) that invites landscape professionals to become soundscape architects and offers practical advice applicable to reading landscapes and intervening on them for multispecies communities.*

## Policy Recommendations

- **Integrate soundscape protection, enhancement and design**, beyond noise control, into landscape policy and practice, for the benefit of communities.
- **Expand current standards** focused on evaluating soundscapes through human perception (i.e. ISO 12913) to multispecies perception for the planning, design, and management of landscapes for all.
- Expand noise policies and maps to account for the detrimental effects of noise on non-human communities.
- **Foster pilot landscape management projects** involving multidisciplinary teams, leading to **new guidelines** for integrating various existing soundscape approaches and methods from arts, humanities and natural sciences.
- **Map, designate and protect** natural and culturally important soundscapes.



## Planning, Design, and Management of Soundscapes

- Existing **soundscape analysis** can provide invaluable information about the health, form and materiality of the landscape, and its history and cultural make up.
- Existing **soundscape characterisation** aids landscape decision making through understanding how communities perceive and are affected by soundscapes.
- A **soundscape-focused** approach to design contributes to place-making and use of landscapes.
- It informs **design decisions** for communities' benefit, i.e. by reducing the reverberance of places, including soundmarks that aid with navigation, or facilitating quiet retreats within cities.
- **Soundscape monitoring** helps to assess the evolution of the health of landscapes, the communities present within them, and cultural and natural processes.
- It **uncovers processes hidden from view**, including biodiversity loss caused by selective tree felling that might not have an apparent visual impact.

## Future Soundscapes

- The COVID-19 set a **precedent for quieter soundscapes**, and their positive impact on species communication and behaviour.
- **Future soundscapes** provide an opportunity for more conscious sound-making, to make space for other, non-human voices.
- **Nature-based solutions** and **wilding approaches** to landscape management will lead to better balanced soundscapes rich in biophony (biological sounds)
- A greater emphasis on soundscapes in policy will encourage **training for built environment disciplines** responsible for soundscape planning, design and management.
- **Interdisciplinary approaches** to soundscapes woven into all landscape projects will consider the physical, psychological and behavioural effects of environmental sounds on all species.

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Links to the publication: <https://shorturl.at/BJBRD>