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## Community of Sounds – Community of Culture. Sound in Social Situations

### Abstract

This paper proposes a look at the community of culture from the viewpoint of the community of sounds, which is its immanent part. The sound environment is a significant element which builds a feeling of national, local, group, generational, and other affiliation and identity. Sounds may function as symbols, be a part of rituals, and carry values. Treating the audiosphere as an indicator of a community opens us to a new dimension of reflecting on the meaning of the sound landscape, understood, after R. M. Schafer, as the whole or a part of the sound environment with its perceptual, social, and historical-social context. Sound is the reflection of social organization systems created by people; therefore, social changes are reflected in the sound environment. In the analysis of this issue, I have used field recordings and their descriptions made by pedagogy students from the University of Lodz. The students' observations confirm that it is worth reflecting on the sound in the ocularcentric world, which seems more than before dominated by sight, considered a sense of distancing by Wolfgang Welsch.

**Keywords:** audiosphere, feeling of community, acoustic ecology, soundwalks, field recording.

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## Wspólnota dźwięków – wspólnotą kultury. Dźwięk w sytuacjach społecznych

### Abstrakt

W niniejszym artykule proponuję spojrzenie na wspólnotę kultury od strony będącej jej immanentną częścią – wspólnoty dźwięków. Środowisko dźwiękowe stanowi istotny element budowania poczucia przynależności i tożsamości: narodowej, lokalnej, grupowej, pokoleniowej i innej. Dźwięki mogą funkcjonować jako symbole, być częścią rytuałów oraz stanowić nośnik wartości. Potraktowanie audiosfery jako jednego z wyznaczników wspólnoty otwiera na nowy wymiar refleksji nad znaczeniem pejzażu dźwiękowego, rozumianego za R. M. Schaferem jako całość lub wycinek środowiska dźwiękowego wraz z jego percepcyjnym, społecznym i historyczno-społecznym kontekstem. Dźwięk jest odbiciem stworzonych przez ludzi systemów organizacji społecznej, w środowisku dźwiękowym więc odzwierciedlają się społeczne zmiany. W analizie tego zagadnienia wykorzystuję nagrania terenowe i ich opisy, dokonane przez studentów pedagogiki Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego. Spostrzeżenia studentów potwierdzają, że warto podjąć refleksję nad dźwiękiem w świecie okulocentrycznym, bardziej niż kiedykolwiek wcześniej zdominowanym przez wzrok, który Wolfgang Welsch nazywa myśłem dystansowania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** audiosfera, poczucie wspólnoty, ekologia akustyczna, *soundwalks*, nagrania terenowe.

### Introduction

The individualization processes, which advance fast, raise the concern of scientists and social life observers. And although some researchers (Olcoń-Kubicka 2009) state that the forms of community existing so far change their shape rather than disappear, the questions about the possibility of strengthening the sense of group affiliation and identity on various levels are still being asked. The tools for forming community, which have functioned so far, such as tradition (Guzy-Steinke 2010), are becoming increasingly weaker; therefore, a need exists to seek and define new ones, considering the fact that voluntary participation in communities is a characteristic of the present times. In this paper, I present the discussion on the audiosphere, which may function as a community of sounds and, as a result, strengthen the sense of community. I understand the audiosphere, after Tomasz Misiak (2009), as “sounds and noises that decide about a specific nature of a space.” A similar, although not equivalent expression is “sound landscape” created by R. M. Schafer, which means the sound environment of a place with its perceptual and historical-social context (Kapelański 2005).

Nowadays, more and more aspects of life become negotiable, depending on individual decisions. “Freedom and independence, resulting from individualization, have their price which are a loss of stability and permanent reference points” (Olcoń-Kubicka 2009: 32). The loss of the current sources of identity has given rise to the

need to search for new ones. What comes to the foreground is the individual identity, constructed mainly on the basis of lifestyle: experiences and sensations. However, that does not mean that social needs have disappeared, as “the presence of other people, initiating interactions with them or establishing more personal relationships play a key role in the identity formation process” (Olcoń-Kubicka 2009: 53). As a social being, an individual needs the sense of affiliation to gain support, bonds, and the feeling of being rooted. However, affiliation to a specific community is a result of a conscious choice.

The signs of community are also changing. “New communities are formed, most of all based on the communication network and the sense of affiliation” (Olcoń-Kubicka 2009: 65). Their foundations include shared pleasure and other emotions which enable an individual to express themselves. More and more frequently their purpose is to widen the horizons and facilitate the accomplishment of individual goals. Modern communities are less formalized and usually function with no connection to a specific single space. What strengthens them is their own aesthetics, myths, and rituals. Those may be situated in the audiosphere.

## **Towards the Audial Turn**

The consequence of ocularcentrism has been the fact that in western culture the linear order is favoured, characteristic for visual cognition, which has been pointed out by Marshall McLuhan (2004) as early as in 1964. Audial cognition is different, as sounds often come simultaneously from various directions. The representatives of sensory anthropology, which branched out of cultural anthropology in the 1980s, are critical towards seeing the representatives of other cultures from the angle of one’s own hierarchy of values, which is typical for ocularcentric observations (Sendyka 2011). Overcoming ocularcentrism and raising the status of the so-called “lower senses,” including hearing, is a step towards respecting cultural diversity and equality of variety.

The differences between the specificity of seeing and hearing were analysed, among others, by Walter J. Ong and Wolfgang Iser. Ong (1992: 105) points to the fact that, “Sight singles out, hearing incorporates. While sight situates the observer outside what they look at, at a certain distance, hearing pours itself into the listener.” Thus, audial stimuli trigger emotional experiences easier and to a greater extent. The specificity of sound makes an individual surrounded by sound or even immersed in sound, while visual stimuli reach the brain one by one, if only due to the limited field of vision, typical for the human species. Iser (2001) opposes the domination of sight typical for western culture, and sees it as a source of evil or even a danger for the whole modern civilization. To replace the “iconic violence,” he proposes a so-called audial turnaround which is supposed to be based on active presence and conscious communication and, as a result, to contribute to the formation of a community because: “As sight is the sense of distancing, hearing is a sense of bonding” (Iser 2001: 67).

Similar discussions have led to the formation of sound studies (*The Oxford Handbook...* 2011; Misiak 2014), which consider the phenomenon from different points of view. They fit into the scope of interests of anthropology, sociology, architecture, geography, urban studies, history, and other disciplines; their immanent property is an interdisciplinary approach. In that manner, they refer to the views of Raymond Murray Schafer, the author of acoustic ecology, who formed his theories in the 1960s. Schafer's project, which is most completely described in *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977), went beyond the borders of ecologic activities since the very beginning. Acoustic ecology has made us aware that sound is not only related to nature and, in certain situations, to art, but it is also a cultural phenomenon; what is more, those spheres are strongly interwoven with each other and it is impossible to separate them from one another (Misiak 2015). When it exceeds the issues related strictly to musicology or theory of music, research on sound must include, apart from aesthetic issues, also ones related to nature and culture.

As part of sound studies, scientists focus on, among other things, the examination of the meaning of sounds for the formation of the sense of community. The information collected using hearing is often less obvious than that collected via sight, which makes it influence the subconscious more strongly. Filip Szałasiek is convinced that the fascination with hearing is a response to the increase of anxiety and chaos; he writes poetically about how sounds awaken intuition: "The turn towards the sound and hearing seems a sign of the need to return to the world where the main role was played by intuition; to the complexity experienced by the primitive hunter when trying to track a crack of a sprig, a rustle in the forest floor, and other signs of the presence of god incarnated in the anima" (Szałasiek 2017: 11).

Since sound carries important emotional connotations, its influence on the formation of a sense of community cannot be denied. The spheres of the influence of sound depend on technology, customs, or even the architecture of a place. The audio experiences of an individual change from generation to generation, which encourages one to study sound landscapes also from the historical viewpoint, as "deeper awareness of the influence of sound in modern culture casts a new light on the sonic nature of the past" (Misiak 2014: 270). Since the sound landscape reaching human ears differed in individual stages of the civilization development, a new context of studying the past may result in the examination of the sonic history of a place, a region, or even the whole country. Studies of the sound landscape should also be an important element of modern local studies (Amato 2002), as everyday sounds are an expression of the specificity of a place and carry information about many aspects of life.

Obviously, "sound landscape" is a theoretical construct because in practice it is impossible to single out only the sound layer and to perceive it in isolation from other sensory stimuli (Sendyka 2011). It is important to analyse audio experiences considering inter-sensory interactions, seeing the whole complexity of the human sensorium. The environment, as such, stimulates multiple senses; the expression "sound

environment” directs one’s attention to its sound layer. Furthermore, sounds should not be considered in isolation from associations they induce, as human consciousness connects certain sound experiences with the functional and cultural contexts (Losiak 2012).

Sound environment is able to emphasize and strengthen the sense of cultural affiliation at each level of depth, according to the onion diagram (Hofstede et al. 2011). Sounds, not only musical ones, may serve as symbols, i.e. the most visible signs of culture (e.g. a national anthem as a symbol of national identity and state independence); they may be a part of rituals, i.e. group activities recognized as necessary by members of a community (e.g. listening to the national anthem during the decoration ceremony of medallists during international sports competitions); they may be associated with heroes, i.e. individuals deemed important in a certain culture (e.g. the “Barka” religious song associated with Pope John Paul II). In each of those functions, they may favour a choice of specific values which indicate the objectives that are at a specific moment proper for a certain community (e.g. courage, justice, peace). It is important that the association of symbols with objects be shared by all members of a community as they may represent hidden meanings (e.g. a deer bray as a symbol of beauty of the Polish nature, or a symbol of kitsch).

The sound landscape is one of those factors that create the atmosphere of a place, its *genius loci*. It may enhance the sense of security of the people staying there or, on the contrary, ruin it. That happens not only by associating sounds with specific situations but also through influencing their bodies on the biological level, which causes e.g. the heart rate to accelerate or slow down, or changes in hormone secretion to occur (Sasin 2022).

Sound plays a role of an important ingredient through which a landscape is experienced (Bernat 2008). In a specific sound environment, soundmarks (foreground) as well as keynote sounds (background) may be singled out. Soundmarks are short; they attract attention and are most often assigned to specific situations. Examples include the siren of an emergency vehicle, the sound of a school bell, or bells tolling. On the other hand, keynote sounds are long and do not attract attention but create the climate of a place. Examples include birds singing or the drone of traffic.

To assess the sound environment, the measure of human voice and hearing should be used, which are natural acoustic modules (Schafer 1982). Although the researchers of sound environments, starting from Schafer and Witold Lutosławski, bemoan excessive noise, it should be remembered that silence is not the ideal to be strived for. As explained by Robert Losiak (2017: 118): “When opting for silence, Schafer does not fight for the absolute elimination of noise; he is aware that some noises play the socially important function of signals (e.g. alarms); other ones, being sound traditions, are of significant cultural value (e.g. bells tolling) and should be protected simply for that reason.” Therefore, the concept of ecological sound environment does not require silence but sound balance. A sound landscape should be expressive; it may be rich and diverse but it should not be crowded and aggressive.

## The Audiosphere as an Element of Community Formation

The importance of non-artistic meaning of sounds is emphasized by Garth Paine (2017), who develops Schafer's concept of acoustic ecology in the spirit of the modern world's needs and possibilities. He points out to the meanings of sounds related to ecology, wellbeing, memories, or the local community.

Listening is one of the most powerful tools to become engaged and to understand one's environment. Often ignored or underestimated, simple active listening, i.e. being completely present in the environment, may reveal a great range of information" (Paine 2017: 177).

He argues that careful listening, used in an appropriate project, may become a tool of social change, leading to wellbeing, social cohesion, and a better quality of life.

Bells tolling is a special example of a sound with a great symbolic potential. In the past, it determined order and hierarchy, was used to alarm about danger, and reminded people about the need to be with God. What proves the meaning assigned to bells is the fact that during wars, bells were hidden with great devotion to protect them from being melted in order to be used to build cannons. Bells are a motif present in many fairy tales and folk tales. "A bell, dedicated to serve God and people, is a very respected device and in our lands, in Poland, it simply is greatly worshipped" – as the Polish painter and conservator, Aleksander Borawski, wrote a hundred years ago (1921: 2). Nowadays, no one needs bells any more to determine the rhythm of a day, less and less people treat them as a summons to pray, and, despite that, their sound still plays an important role in the sound landscapes of the European cultural circle. Until this very day, bells announce great events which are significant for a community, e.g. in Poland bells tolled to inform about the death of the Pope John Paul II, while in other countries they are used to commemorate victims of terrorist attacks.

Borawski (1921: 5) wrote that a bell "raises a colossal feeling in the human soul," and then explained more precisely:

During ceremonies, the sound of a bell enhances public joy, and it lends more dreadfulness to unfortunate events. It seems to summon to rescue during a fire all those sensitive to misery. The sound of a bell strengthens religious feelings; it is one of the sounds best remembered in various moments of life – from cradle until death. [...] In certain circumstances, the solemn sound of bells makes a grim and sad impression (Borawski 1921: 7).

During empirical studies, Schafer (1977) concluded that the sound of bells may construct the identity of small rural communities and give the sense of affiliation to a specific cultural circle. That has been confirmed by Polish field studies conducted in 2017 as part of the project titled "Bells in the landscape of the borderland along the San river" (Dziura 2019). They proved that cultural, symbolic, and religious associations with that sound are still present among the people living in the borderland

along the San river, in particular among the representatives of the older generation. The study participants recalled many situations where bells played a significant role, both from their own experiences and according to the stories told by other community members. The sound of bells is deemed “nice” and “familiar,” although it does not perform many practical functions any more. Following this example, it may be observed that repeated and familiar audio impressions favour the formation of the sense of being rooted and the sense of community (Dziura 2019); they also form the sense of being anchored and the sense of familiarity.

Undesired acoustic phenomena also have a unifying effect (Losiak, Tańczuk 2015). These are sounds from the so-called *lo-fi* landscape according to Schafer (1982), i.e. the landscape with a great share of disturbances. What brings closer residents of noisy industrialized areas— spaces near airports or with intensive tourism – is a kind of “community of misery,” i.e. the fact that they are all forced to endure a certain type of acoustic discomfort. Sometimes, apart from that feeling, residents also engage in joint action aimed at finding ways to change the onerous situation. Unfortunately, the visible pollution, e.g. waste or unaesthetic advertising banners, are still fought much more energetically and with greater conviction than aural pollution, which passes quickly and, as it would seem, does not leave any trace.

Sounds characteristic of a given region (e.g. a bugle call from the tower of St. Mary’s in Krakow, voices of gulls clashing against the sound of the sea, songs of gondoliers in Venice) have a great tourist potential (Rypiński 2013) as they arouse strong associations and emotions. Since a landscape is a geographical and psychological space, it may be said by analogy that a sound landscape is an acoustic and psychological space. Michał Rypiński (2013) points out that sound, being an indispensable element of a landscape, is an important, although often unnoticeable, element of a tourist product. It helps to increase a landscape’s attractiveness, although most frequently it does not belong to the tourist activity organizer (it does not emerge on their initiative). Here, it is worth mentioning that being interesting and friendly in terms of sound does not mean the same (e.g. a mine or a highway intersection generate interesting sounds, although they are not friendly to living creatures). Noticing the sonic potential of places valuable from the natural (e.g. national parks) or cultural (historic cities) point of view has led to the formation of the so-called sound tourism (Bernat 2014), i.e. travelling to places with a specific sound landscape. The appreciation of its unique character results in the protection of nature and cultural heritage, which leads to the recognition of sound tourism as a type of sustainable tourism. The pride of the cultural heritage, including sound heritage, or one’s own city or region enhances the sense of affiliation with the local community. The interest in the sound landscape of an interesting place may in turn lead to paying attention to sound values of one’s own surroundings. As explained by Losiak (2010: 226):

The sense of being at home in a specific phonic environment often remains hidden for us; it is revealed when a confrontation occurs with a strange sound landscape, one which has not been known to us before.

Sounds as an element of a tourist product play an important function in promoting selected cities as European Capitals of Culture. One of the purposes of this idea is to strengthen Europeans' sense of cultural identity and affiliation to the shared cultural area. Some cities have made sound and activities constructed around it one of their biggest assets. The examples include Linz in Austria, which was the European Capital of Culture in 2009 together with Vilnius in Lithuania. Referring to the musical tradition (it is the city of composer Anton Bruckner), Linz authorities promoted the idea of an acoustic city, i.e. Hörstadt (Hörstadt – Verein für Akustik, Raum und Gesellschaft). Following the belief that individuals are also formed by what they hear, a number of actions were undertaken to promote the conscious design of a sound environment in accord with human dignity. Educational, artistic, and touristic actions were combined and important demands were formulated as part of the city's cultural policy ("Linz Charta" adopted by the Linz Council in January 2009). The most important included the creation of a possibility to experience silence during the opening of the places of peace called "Ruhepol Central Kino" and "Ruhepol Cathedral," as well as the organization of "A day without music"; the opening of "Akustikon," a place of acoustic discoveries (acoustic illusions, experiments, learning the nature of sound); incorporating sound installations made by Andres Bosshard, a Swiss artist, in the public space; displaying a sound map of the city in the main square next to the tourist information center; installing a sound machine in Ars Electronica Center, "the museum of the future"; organizing a range of trips to present the city from the acoustic side. Importantly, those actions were not limited to 2009 but are also being continued today. The Hörstadt project prepared in relation to the celebrations of the European Capital of Culture has been transformed into a continuous international campaign:

Hörstadt is a laboratory of acoustics, space, and society. Localized in Linz but active internationally, we develop concepts and projects to accomplish our main goal: a conscious and humanitarian design of the acoustic environment. Main areas of our activity include art, research, education, and consultancy (Hörstadt – Verein für Akustik, Raum und Gesellschaft).

Linz is not the only city which encourages visitors to discover its sound landscapes. As a part of the European Capital of Culture, acoustic activities were also proposed by, among others, Tallin in Estonia and Turku in Norway in 2011. In recent years, more and more similar initiatives have also been carried out in Poland (Sasin 2021). From the point of view of the community, the Tonopolis project was particularly interesting (Kołacki 2011), which was conducted in Toruń since 2010 by artists Ewa and Jacek Doroszenko and Rafał Kołacki. It combined photography, new media, and field sound recordings. It included, among other things, an interactive presentation published online (the webpage is no longer available), a publication of an album with sound recordings under the same title, an exhibition of photos used in the project, and an audiovisual workshop for children. The project



focused on the process of sound unification of the cities, which is unfavourable for the formation of communities.

## Potential of Soundwalks

One of the best known and most frequently chosen activities aimed at learning the sound environment of an area is a soundwalk. It is a method of audio education consisting of walking around a specific area with a mindset to learn its audiosphere, starting from those sounds which are located closest to an individual, i.e. the sound of their steps, breathing etc. Its purpose is to make one more sensitive to the audiosphere and to stimulate one's interest in their surroundings. The author of this method is Hildegard Westerkamp (1974), a Canadian composer and musicologist, as well as Schafer's colleague. At first, soundwalks were used in the 1970s by the World Soundscape Project group established by Schafer. At present, they are used in many countries for educational, social, anthropological, and various other purposes. Soundwalks in Poland are organized by, among others, NOSPR (inside its own building) and the Philharmonic in Szczecin (outside). In recent years, many similar initiatives have been carried out; however, they are usually one-off events. Among the people guiding soundwalks in various places in Poland, the same list of names of musicians, musicologists, and culture researchers repeat, e.g. Aleksandra Chciuk, Marcin Dymiter, Robert Losiak, Krzysztof Marciniak, or Joanna Zabłocka. You may also go on a soundwalk alone, with no guide or an organized group.

Activities of those type are often combined with field recordings; they are impossible to make without a walk during which the place and extent of the recording is selected, but a soundwalk without recording is possible. The adjective "field" means that the recording may not be made in a studio but only in a natural place where sounds are generated and where they travel, not necessarily in a free space outside a building. Sound recordings are made for documentary (e.g. in historical or cultural studies), research (e.g. in ornitology), artistic (the registered sound is treated as a raw material for a piece of art), and educational (acoustic ecology) purposes. They are a specific type of "ear cleaning," in other words, exercises in sound sensitivity and carefulness demanded by Schafer (1967).

Soundwalks favour so-called deep listening demanded by Pauline Oliveros (2005). The artist assumed that hearing perception is subjective and there is no such thing as a single sound landscape, since each person has a slightly different and individual way of listening. Becoming aware of that fact and a reflection on the mutual relationships between sound and silence, as well as their processuality, is a starting point for deep listening which becomes a type of meditation.

I differentiate between hearing and listening [the author explained]. Hearing is a physical tool which enables perception. Listening is a type of attention directed to that which is perceived both acoustically and psychologically (Oliveros 2005: XXII).

Therefore, listening to the external world, as understood by Oliveros, leads to the development of the skill of listening to oneself, that is to say – carefulness and sensitivity to one’s needs and likes. The attention to relationships between sounds and between individuals, but also between individuals and sounds, lends a humanistic dimension to the concept. As a result, deep listening may be treated as an effective, though so far rarely practiced, way to understand the Other and their point of view (or rather – of listening), which is necessary for the peaceful coexistence of people in a community, and the community itself. Similar reflections are made by Szałasek (2017), who believes even that sound, or rather an appropriate attitude to sound, may become a remedy to the modern threat of the disintegration of subjectivity, since during field recordings one listens not only to one’s surroundings but, most of all, to oneself. The diversity of the audio matter which one has to cope with makes one open to the experience.

The potential of soundwalks and field recordings is confirmed by the analysis of the works of the 1st-year pedagogy students from the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Lodz created during the classes titled “Aesthetic and Cultural Education” in the academic year 2022/2023. After participating in classes concerning acoustic ecology and sound environment, students were supposed to prepare a short sound recording (1:30–2:00 minutes-long), containing sounds related to culture and civilization (not only nature). The integral element of the task was the preparation of a commentary, describing and reflecting on the activity. The purpose of the task was to consolidate the discussed issues of acoustic ecology, to awaken the awareness of one’s own sound environment, and to stimulate the reflection on the meaning of sounds and its effect on our wellbeing. Challenges for the students included directing their own attention to specific sound phenomena and selecting them for the recording based on a specific criterion, as well as the general requirement to express in words what usually remains not verbalized. For the purposes of this article, 29 recordings and descriptions were analysed.

The analysis of the obtained recordings and, in particular, their descriptions, enables the formulation of certain regularities concerning the students’ perception of the role of sounds in their own life and environment. As observed by Losiak, the descriptions of sound landscapes do not allow to express the sounds so precisely and objectively as a recording; however, they have other advantages, as “they are a source of not so much the objectivised knowledge of the phonic environment as rather a record of a personal and unique manner of hearing it” (Losiak 2010: 225).

In the case of the discussed exercise, the choice of the recording place itself carries important information. The students most often chose places well-known to them, those they visit frequently, e.g. a place of work, a courtyard, a means of transport on the way to work, the center of a hometown, a popular market where they do everyday shopping, their own kitchen etc. Therefore, those are so-called familiar landscapes (Losiak 2010). For most students, the main choice criterion was the ability to fix a part of their everyday life, to show their lifestyle: “directed by the intention

to discover something new, I decided that the best place for the task would be a place that I know well" (Students' statements 2023, S1); "I chose this place [a car park] because it is the fullest of life in my neighbourhood and it reflects everyday lives of many people" (S2).

In their descriptions, the students included many observations related to sounds, their diversity, their effect on human well-being, and their relationship with emotions. Some of them, presented as a "personal discovery," are very basic, which shows how neglected the sphere of sounds and reflections on sounds is. Those which are emphasized the most strongly and repeat the most often include:

- sounds that influence the frame of mind, the mood, or even the willingness to work;
- people usually prefer the sounds of nature which make it easier to cool down and reflect;
- modern people are surrounded by noise, in particular in cities;
- a reaction to sounds depends on the mood; when tired and irritated, we are less resistant to loud, unpleasant, or monotonous sounds.

Here, I pay special attention to the students' reflections on forming the sense of identity and community using sounds. The following are the most important observations:

- sounds evoke peace and positive emotions when they are known and related to what one is accustomed to; therefore, sounds identified as familiar strengthen the sense of relationship with a place and/or situation (e.g. place of residence, professional activity);
- sounds are carriers of memories and, as such, of feelings and emotions:

The sounds which I managed to record evoke positive emotions in me; they are related to what I'm used to. They make me feel comfortable and engage me in recalling memories from past moments (S3);

- sound recordings may fix pleasant situations and related emotions (working similar to photos):

I chose that type of recording because I wanted to show as many elements of my last year as possible, the time spent with my family or friends (S4);

- whether a sound is pleasant or not depends not only on its physical properties (intensity, tone etc.) but also on the associations it brings e.g. a sound of cycling:

is associated with rescuing the planet, the environment, and taking care of one's own health; [...] the repulsive sound of a [car] engine, of wheels grinding has bad associations: pollution, danger; [...] [beeps of gates in the entrance to the work place] is associated with work, not necessarily the one I like, a highly protected place, which also leads to stressful situations (S5);

- the same sounds are perceived differently by different people depending on their experience and audial habits; the reaction to a sound emphasizes a relationship with a specific territory:

In the small village I come from it is a very rare sound [the ambulance siren] and it is not often one may hear it, so when such an occasion happens, everyone in the village look out of their windows and want to know quickly what has happened. [...] When I went to study in Lodz, I noticed that people living in larger cities are used to those

types of sounds and when an ambulance or fire engine siren can be heard through a window, there is no reaction among people (Students' statements, 2023, S6).

Those sounds [recorded in the centre of Opoczno] are not particularly pleasant. [...] for people living in cities these are the sounds of their everyday life which they are used to and which do not attract their attention. For people living in the countryside, who usually have peace and quiet, these sounds may trigger irritation and discontent (S7).

An exceptionally interesting recording and description were prepared by a student who specifically arranged a nostalgic visit to the secondary school she has completed. That visit brought very lively emotions in her, among other things owing to the sounds: "I've decided to feel like a secondary school student again [...]. The return to my younger years and past dilemmas and problems triggered the sense of an overwhelming nostalgia in me." The student expressly describes the relationship of sounds with emotions:

The nicest moment of a lesson was the sound of a bell announcing the break time. A rustle of books, chairs scraping the floor, and the stampede of feet quickly heading towards the exit made me feel better (S8).

All emotions I felt were true and I felt like a carefree teenager again, who doesn't know yet what the adult life is. To sum up the time I spent in school, I can honestly say that it was a real volcano of emotions and feelings. I am surprised at my reactions to some stimuli which brought back the past to me (S8).

The students' reflections prove that the discussed exercise stimulated carefulness and sensitivity to sounds: "The task made completely unnoticeable things become important and made me look into myself" (Students' statements, 2023, S9); "In day-to-day life, we do not reflect on how sound and the ability to perceive aural stimuli are important, how much they give us, what role they play in the environment" (S10). Certain words and expressions used in the texts point to the innovativeness and novelty of the task: "I discovered with a surprise ..." (S11, S12, S13, S14), "I learnt about myself ..." (S15, S16, S17, S18), "I noticed that..." (S19, S20, S21, S22, S23). The presented exercise proves that soundwalks and field recordings may be an educational tool; they may lead to a better knowledge of one's own surroundings, increase awareness, and deepen reflections.

## Conclusion

Lodz was waking up. The first ear-splitting factory whistle tore apart the silence of the early morning and, following it, others began to sound more and more raucously in all parts of the city, and they bellowed with hoarse, unruly sounds like a choir of horrible roosters, crowing a call to work in their metal throats (Reymont 1977: 5).

The fragment above, which is the beginning of *Ziemia obiecana* (The Promised Land) by Władysław Reymont, is an expressive illustration of the changes of a sound

environment taking place over time. Modern Lodz dwellers express many issues related to the sound environment of their city; however, there is no doubt that it is completely different now than in the description above. The influence of the audiosphere on human wellbeing and social processes is still underestimated; however, in the situation of dynamic and often unpredictable changes, the audiosphere may become an important source of information on the human condition and the needs of members of modern society. Sound may be seen as a mediator of relationships between separate elements of a community; it may be treated “as active non-human actors who are equal elements of a group, who establish relationships between people and various non-human factors, such as things, plants, animals, and spaces” (Losiak, Tańczuk 2015: 193).

A vast and fascinating field of scientific and practical discoveries opens before people interested in the sound environment: psychological, sociological, historical, educational, and architectural ones, to mention only a few. The limited scope of this paper does not allow the author to discuss these issues in detail; however, it is worth listing some of them if only to signal the cognitive potential of sound studies: meaning of the acoustic design for the care of human wellbeing; potential of sounds in the process of studying the past; or the audiosphere in intragenerational social projects. At the same time, care should be taken to form a language which may be used to speak about sounds, which will not only make discussions more precise but also deepen the analysis of the environment. The skill of speaking about what one hears is useful to a scientist, but also simply to every individual, as sound is worthy of not being treated as “something which just is” (Rypiński 2013: 35). By saying that “a hearing individual is also a better individual,” Wolfgang Welsch (2001: 56) does not mean, of course, a physical act of perceiving sound waves but a potential self-development of an individual stimulated with a reflection on sounds and the related widening of the horizon of observations.

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### Students' statements in the text

Students' statements – comments on the field recording prepared as part of the Aesthetic and Cultural Education course at the Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Łódź. Own research, 2023. (S1–S29)

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