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Sound Museum of Istanbul

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This paper introduces the conceptualization of a museum project which will exhibit the sonic environment of Istanbul. As sounds are distinctive elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage, my objective is to capture, collect and protect them from a possible extinction and to increase public awareness of their importance and uniqueness. Recording the most characteristic sounds, I will archive them in digital media and I will display them with mobile installations, which can also be readapted to other museums or to various sites throughout the city. Because the soundscape is constantly changing, this museum project will allow us to add new recordings and to update it regularly. Therefore, even though recordings are frozen ICH elements, the collective soundscape will not represent a frozen moment in time. Being the first and only of its kind, the Sound Museum, has great importance for maintaining the sonic reflections of culture and for keeping them alive.

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Introduction

How many people can describe in detail the sonic world in which they are living? How many people realize the sonic values with which they are surrounded? Even when people notice them, do they consider them as a part of cultural heritage, or do they only perceive them as part of their everyday life?

This paper explores ways of raising the awareness of sonic environment within a museum concept. My project of musealization of intangible cultural heritage is to design a museum consisting of the sounds of Istanbul and exhibiting them through installations. The intention of establishing the Sound Museum of Istanbul is to make people aware of the daily acoustic environment that surrounds them. Everyday traditions are indeed fundamentals of cultural identity; however, these traditions and their sonic reflections are rarely ever consciously experienced in the moment, and unfortunately they get lost in the rhythms of daily life.

Moreover, intangible cultural heritage elements are also changing over time. If not protected, they will disappear, and so do their acoustic values. Once their sonic reflections are gone, it is not possible to create those sounds in their original form.

Hence I aim to collect and protect these sonic values and to create a public con-sciousness of the uniqueness and importance of the acoustic environment. In order for the sound heritage to have an adequate effect on visitors, experience design will be applied, rather than just playing the sounds.

In the next sections, I will give detailed information about properties of the main parts of the museum, such as collection, archive and exhibition. In the final section, I will mention potential future studies.

Museum

The Sound Museum of Istanbul, which is planned to be established within the coming three years in Istanbul (Turkey), will display the contemporary sounds of Istanbul which are unique expressions of sonic culture. They give the sense of connectedness and identity. However, these characteristic sounds are not realized within everyday life. Carrying the sounds which can be heard around the city into the museum, the exhibition has a tongue-in-cheek approach. The exhibition presents them to audience once more in a clear way. Bringing them inside, I will design an isolated space where the audience will focus on the sounds and realize their uniqueness in terms of cultural heritage. The whole objective of the project is for the visitors to have more conscious ears and a more conscious sense of aural perception than before.

What?

Sound is everywhere, as John Cage's famous phrase "*There is no such thing as si-lence*". No matter what type, level, quality or meaning it has, we hear it. First of all, there is a very crucial difference between sound and noise. To distinguish one from the other, we have to know the entire acoustic environment and its context. What is heard may be considered noise in one context and sound in another as they cannot be thought separate from their surroundings. To give a concrete example, traffic is definitely perceived as noise for those who are subject to hearing it at home, whereas for those who are in traffic, car horns are no longer considered noise, but sound-signals warning them (Redström, 1998). On the other hand, John Cage declares in his most famous book, *Silence: "Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating"* (Cage, 1961).

We can classify sounds by using R. Murray Schafer's taxonomy. He puts forward several categories of classification based on physical characteristics, referential aspects, and aesthetic qualities. To briefly explain, physical characteristics mainly concern duration, frequency, fluctuations and dynamics of sound. They define sounds with their quantitative physical features. Referential aspects give us information about sources that produce sounds. Its sub-categories include natural sounds, human sounds, sounds and society, mechanical sounds, quiet and silence, and sounds as indicators. According to Schafer, sorting sounds based on their aesthetic qualities is hardest to accomplish, as effects of sounds differ from society to society, from person to person, and even from context to context for the same person. This type of classification depends entirely on aesthetic values and perceptive differences of people and societies (Schafer, 1977).

If we are to describe an acoustic community, all relevant elements specific to that area have to be determined. For example, comparing a rural environment to an urban one, we hear completely different acoustic harmonies. In fact, they vary even among themselves from country to country or from region to region, depending on factors such as climate, agricultural properties, population, language, and nature. Or we can choose to observe a specific event or development, such as gentrification process of a certain place through the modification of its acoustic environment. This study, of course, differs from the previous one both in content and required type of research. Here, the goal is to determine the initial concept of the museum.

The very first step is to define the soundscape concept and the boundaries of the content of the acoustic environment to be put on display. The urban soundscape consists of different types of sounds and noises, such as natural sounds (wind, sea waves, birds, dogs, etc.), mechanical sounds (car horns, alarms, signals, etc.), musical sounds (street musicians, festivals, etc.) and so on, each of which can be explored under its own title. For example, the songs and cries of different types of birds of Istanbul can be considered in the context of the Natural Soundscape. Since in the Sound Museum of Istanbul, my focus is on the daily life and urban culture of Istanbul and their sonic values, I include only the sounds that belong to culture itself, no matter if they are produced by human, nature or by machines. Therefore, with the aim of emphasizing the city's everyday habits and lifestyle through their acoustic reflections, which are basically Istanbul's cultural sound heritage, I propose to use the term *Cultural Soundscape* to describe the content of the museum collection.

Even if my concentration is on sounds, they are not the initial point of the research process. I depart from the lifestyle of the city and from urban culture itself. Once the most characteristic traditions are determined, their acoustic qualities are explored. Not all the symbolic cultural items have sonic values; for example, there are many churches in Istanbul and they represent the diversity of religion in the city, but it was forbidden to ring church bells under the Ottoman Empire, and churches still continue to be silent in contemporary Istanbul. Hence, even though a fundamental cultural value may play a great role in the history of city and its culture, it may not be part of the collection of the Sound Museum of Istanbul. On the other hand, those who have also sonic values, such as the nostalgic tramway, the Ahırkapı festival, smoking nargile (water pipe), preparation of kokoreç (a kind of food), call to prayer, playing backgammon, stirring tea in a glass with a clinking spoon, marches on national festivals, car horns commemorating Atatürk (the founder of the Turkish Republic) every year on a specific day, and so on, are considered unique parts of the *Cultural Soundscape*.

Why?

Traditions and culture are not stable phenomena; they are evolving over time. Being part of intangible cultural heritage, they are endangered unless they are protected. Especially sonic culture is temporary in two aspects: First, traditions are changing, being quickly replaced due to transformed conditions of living, political situations, immigration, and so on. Secondly, the physical presence of sound depends on the factor of time. In order to listen to the same sound again, one has to rewind it or produce it once more in the same way. It might even be different from what has been heard before. In other words, unlike visual elements, sonic elements do not last for a long time. Hence they are twice endangered.

Today, the acoustic facets of Istanbul's past daily traditions, such as the cries of firemen (tulumbaçılar) and street vendors are already lost due to a lack of protection. We see them in films or read about them in books, but we cannot hear them. We do not know their exact qualities. Only imagination can enliven them in our minds.

Thus, I aim to prevent at least the extinction of the present city's acoustic environment and to keep it for following generations.

How?

At present, the preliminary research toward the museum project consists of a review of primary sources, followed by soundwalking. The latter is a walk focused on listening and discovering the acoustic environment (to be discussed in greater detail below). Based on the soundwalk's findings, further, more focused research into textual sources continues, which in turn determines an adjustment of focus for additional soundwalks. As a result, a table of key traditions and daily habits including both the past and the contemporary city, day and night, will emerge for each region.

The process: first steps

As I mentioned above, my departure point is the daily city culture and then as a second step, exploring its sonic values. (Çevikayak, 2012) Starting from the historical aspect, the history of the city has led to determining and selecting the neighborhoods I currently investigate.

The chosen neighborhoods are Karaköy, Galata, Beyoğlu, Pera, Eminönü, Beyazıt, Ahırkapı, Kumkapı, Fatih, Eyüp, Balat, Beşiktaş, Ortaköy, Kadıköy and Büyükdada. They all have a rich cultural history and have housed people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, different religions and with various languages since the first Megaran settlement was established starting in 8/7th century BC.



Figure 1. Istanbul map. (The selected regions are in dark grey).

The pace of Istanbul can be clearly observed in these regions as they are located in the heart of the city, as shown in the map above (Fig. 1). To have a better understanding and comprehensive knowledge, I have conducted library research for each region. This research is supported by systematic soundwalks before, during and after the studies, all of which have a different approach to sonic exploration. During the soundwalks, I have examined whether the daily traditions that I have determined from my research also have sonic values. I have prepared detailed tables for each region according to my

findings which are the fundamentals of Cultural Soundscape. Below, there is a sample table (Fig. 2) consisting of past and contemporary traditions of the neighborhood of Pera.

		PAST EVERYDAY TRADITIONS	CONTEMPORARY EVERYDAY TRADITIONS
DURING THE DAY		children going to armenian schools going to cinemas and to theatres with elegant dresses different languages in hotels and in cafés horns of buses at square bargaining with flower sellers feeding pigeons in the parc horse-drawn tramways rituals in churches	antique dealers souvenir shops many tourists in hotels and in cafés booksellers tea houses passages dead-end street of Terkoz mosques and churches tramway different types of music coming from the shops kokoreç (a kind of food)
AT NIGHT		bars brothels nevizade raki (typical Turkish alcoholic drink) fasil (music that is played while drinking raki) belly dancers transvestites midye, kokoreç	elegant restaurants bars, clubs kokoreç (a kind of food) the music coming from the shops that are still open drunk people taxis traffic and car horns street musicians and accompaniers from regular public people drinking on the street

Figure 2. Table 1. Table showing past and contemporary traditions of Pera. (Note: since each neighborhood has a different demographic and cultural make-up, this is not to be considered a representative sample of the entire city. For example, drums used to wake up people at sunrise during Ramadan are not commonly encountered here).

Soundwalking

Soundwalking was born out of curiosity about how it can be adapted and engaged as a methodological tool, both for academic qualitative research and for artistic purposes. It has always been of particular importance for acoustic ecology as well as disciplines such as contemporary performing arts (Paquette & McCartney, 2012).

A soundwalk consists of a walking tour concentrated on listening to the surround-ings. It is most effective when standing at certain points with eyes closed, focusing only on listening. A soundwalk may result in different findings according to the soundwalker's previous knowledge about the area explored. It can be applied at three levels, paralleling three phases of research: discovery, observatory and analytical soundwalking.

- No Knowledge → Discovery Soundwalking
- Some Knowledge → Observatory Soundwalking
- Adequate Knowledge → Analytical Soundwalking

Firstly, soundwalking without having any idea about the area is discovery sound-walking since whatever is heard is new and maybe not yet meaningful. Secondly, knowing some information about the region turns soundwalking into an observatory action. This knowledge makes the area theoretically familiar to soundwalkers and encourages them to seek clues about what they know. Lastly, when soundwalkers are knowledgeable enough about the zone, they reinforce what they already knew by catching additional small details.

In the step of collecting information about the areas of Istanbul, all levels of soundwalking have been applied. In other words, all regions that are covered in this project - Karaköy, Galata, Beyoğlu, Pera, Eminönü, Beyazıt, Ahırkapı, Kumkapı, Fatih, Eyüp, Balat, Beşiktaş, Ortaköy, Kadıköy and Büyükdada - have been visited at least three times, according to the type of soundwalking outlined above. First, I have

carried out site discovery myself; thus the soundwalks are individual. During the individual soundwalks, I have conducted interviews and questionnaires with locals to understand the neighborhood. Then, I have organized collective group soundwalks with non-locals of the zone or the city. The route choices were always different depending on the participants' suggestions. Thus, the decision about what to collect would be more objective.

Significance assessment

Significance assessment is a common and important method applied in museums to evaluate an item's value and appropriateness for the collection during the process of accessioning. Once I have created tables of characteristic traditions and their sonic representations, further research is needed to assess their significance. The assessment process consists of analyzing the soundscape element, gathering information, researching its history, provenance and context, comparing it with similar items, understanding its values, consulting people, and finally writing a statement of significance (Russel & Winkworth, 2009); in other words, a concise summary of the values, meaning and importance of the object (Russel & Winkworth, 2009). The significance assessment has to be done for each and every sound, to understand its values and meanings. It also shows whether the determined sonic reflections are appropriate for the collection of the Sound Museum of Istanbul, as it is meant to be a systematic collection. A systematic collection requires the collector to be consistent and related to the theme when collecting (Pearce, 1991), and an assessment of significance will help deciding on what to include or exclude. This example below demonstrates why that specific sound item is important and how it is connected with the theme:

The first tramway of Istanbul, which was a horse-drawn type, started to operate in 1871. Before horse-drawn tramways, fiacres and phaetons were hardly affordable for middle-income families. A great demand occurred for horses with the Balkan War in 1912. Since the horses were all used for war purposes, there was a lack of transportation as tramways were the only way of transportation at that time. In 1914, electrical tramways were introduced. Over time, Istanbul expanded very much, and this has led to a search for alternative ways of transportation. Due to tremendous traffic problem in Istanbul, there are only a few tramway lines left today and just two of them are nostalgic tramways. In today's Istanbul, although there is another nostalgic tramway on the other side of the city, you can hear this sound only on Istiklal Caddesi, Beyoğlu. The other tramway has no sonic value and almost disappears in the urban fabric. Despite the fact that the sound of the tramway bells is similar to that of other cities and other countries, each one has a different meaning and history behind. In Istanbul, the sound of the tramway bells symbolizes Istiklal Caddesi, Beyoğlu. It is a very characteristic sound which has a strong relationship with the place where it is located. It has a great contribution to the sonic environment of both the zone and the city. Moreover, the nostalgic tramway of Beyoğlu not only contributes to the acoustic environment of today's Istanbul but also represents the historic sonic values, such as sounds of horsewhips and bugles and cries of vardacılar who were shouting "*the tramway is coming, get out of its way*" to warn people in the streets. Having these strong meanings, this sound fits perfectly to the theme of the exhibition which is "*Cultural Soundscape of Istanbul*." Since the aspect is related to culture and its reflections on the acoustic environment, "*The Sound of the Tramway in Beyoğlu*" is a unique piece of the collection.

Archive

Deciding on the most important characteristic cultural soundscape elements, I will record and archive these in an appropriate manner.

I will record the sounds with the method of binaural recording. Binaural recording is done with two microphones in order to give a sense of depth. Then I will transfer the recordings to the digital library. This arrangement of sound recordings will be done according to the ontological representation of the *Cultural Soundscape*, which I will explain below.

R. Murray Schafer, who was the first to propose the term soundscape, has directed the *World Soundscape Project*, including many studies and research project from the 1970s to the 2000s across the world. The recordings collected during these studies are kept in a digital library called the *World Soundscape Tape Library*. For this archive, a formal semantic representation of a library has been developed based on the soundscape taxonomy outlined by Schafer (Thorogood, Pasquier & Truax, n.d.). Departing from this point, the Sound Museum of Istanbul needs a model appropriate for its own specific context.

The ontological representation of *Cultural Soundscape* is mainly a categorization method for cultural sounds in order to archive them systematically. To classify these intangible cultural heritage elements, I need to pick up specific terms to define the concept clearly and I need to arrange tags to find the sounds easily in the digital archive. This ontological model will facilitate placing the cultural sounds of Istanbul according to their various qualities, such as source, type, zone, and frequency of repetition, and tags will be determined accordingly, such as food, entertainment, religion, daily, weekly, annual, at night, during the day, etc. For example, some traditions are daily actions, such as call to prayer which is heard five times a day. Therefore, for this sound item, the tags would be religion, daily, during the day and at night, as well as the name of the zone in which it is located. This is in contrast to annual events, such as national and religious festivals, which happen only once a year. With this example, a different aspect of the model arises: I need to clarify the frequency of repetition that contributes to their meaning in cultural

identity as well. Hence, this model does not offer a simple classification method by demonstrating only the physical qualities – location, source, and type – of cultural sounds, but it provides a deep perception of evaluating the essence of the cultural sonic values in the context of city life.

Exhibition

Having been determined, recorded and archived, the most characteristic cultural sounds of Istanbul can now be displayed within a well-designed exhibition in order to communicate the museum's message. According to Beverly Serrell, an authority on museums, deciding on the *Big Idea* of the exhibition is the very first step of the entire process (Serrell, 1996). The Big Idea tells the general concept of an exhibition with one sentence or statement. Considering the main message, the big idea of this exhibition is the following: *What you hear in this exhibition can easily be found and listened to in the outside world, but to be able to do so, you have to, first, hear them consciously. I would like to emphasize the importance of approaching the sonic environment consciously.* The Sound Museum of Istanbul also has the purpose of protecting sounds that are about to disappear from urban culture and providing an accumulation of sound heritage for future generations.

Most residents are not aware of the sounds collected, despite being immersed in them every day; on the other hand, for foreign visitors, visuality is more dominant when discovering the city. This museum aims to increase awareness of sonic culture and, at the same time, to create a unique experience for all visitors through the exhibition. Since my target group includes domestic visitors and tourists, the behaviors and characteristics of both need to be considered. The message I wish to convey requires the museum to be visitor-based in terms of participation and experience. Nina Simon explains the concept of participatory museum and what is intended by participation in this way:

The goal of participatory techniques is both to meet visitors' expectations for active engagement and to do so in a way that furthers the mission and core values of the institution. Rather than delivering the same content to everyone, a participatory institution collects and shares diverse, personalized and changing content co-produced with visitors. It invites visitors to respond and add to cultural artifacts, scientific evidence, and historical records on display. It showcases the diverse creations and opinions of non-experts. People use the institution as meeting grounds for dialogue around the content presented. Instead of being "about" something or "for" someone, participatory institutions are created and managed "with" visitors (Simon, 2010).

Therefore, beyond my studies and recordings, visitors will be able to contribute to this accumulation as well. There will be a specialized area for exchanging ideas and sharing sonic memories. This sound heritage and culture belong to Istanbul, to its residents and to the entire humankind, and everyone has the right to contribute and to protect it.

A statement from the Excellence and Equity report of the American Association of Museums explains exactly my point of highlighting the importance of soundscape: *"Objects are no longer viewed solely as things in themselves, but as things with complex contexts and associated value-laden significance"* (AAM, 1992). For this reason the museum, in general, will be designed as a sonic space in which the audience gains aural experiences, rather than an object-centered museum where visitors are only viewers. This design decision can be supported with another statement from the same report: *"Changing interpretive approaches will have a strong impact on museum collections and the public's understanding of them"* (AAM, 1992).

Now I will turn to various aspects of the design process, such as the technology, colors, lighting and graphics. The sounds will be communicated to the audience through directional sound technology, which operates like an audio spotlight. In other words, speakers send sound waves to a particular direction, and visitors cannot hear the sound outside this specific direction. Using this technology for each sound, dispersal of sound waves will be prevented, and there will be no interference with other sounds. Thus, a sound can only be heard if the visitor is in the particular area dedicated to that sound. Outside of those areas, the exhibition space will be quiet. Despite creating experiences, installations are neither the final objective nor the visual focus; they are just the medium used to convey the message.

Taken as a whole, the exhibition makes use of *"white cube design"* approach – keeping the architecture and interior design as simple as possible – to emphasize the sounds themselves. The Museum of Modern Art, New York; can be given as a very successful example in which the focus always remains on what is exhibited. Hence, the space will be designed with a minimum number of visual elements, not more than necessary. For instance, since the exhibition space is silent for those who stand outside the sound spots, gently flashing lights together with an appropriate choice of graphics and colors will be used as indicators of the area of each sound. I will conduct workshops to decide whether the photographs or videos of the cultural items need to be included in the exhibition. If so, I will conduct further research on how to present them without hindering or lessening the attention on sonic values. Moreover, in order to

keep the displayed sounds on focus, possible unwanted sounds will also be prevented. For example, the floor will be designed with soft materials in order to prevent the noise of footsteps.

A representative map of Istanbul will cover the ground and determine the organization and placement within the exhibition. As the sonic environment needs to be perceived as a whole, the exhibition space will be designed as a unique section without walls or any kind of separation. It will be designed on an open plan, since I want visitors to see the entire exhibition (McLean, 1993). In order to avoid confusing visual elements, there will be no permanent labels. For the duration of the visitor standing in a sound spot, the related label will be projected on the wall. Thus, visitors will see only what they absolutely need to see. The image below (Fig. 3) is a preliminary sketch to visualize the initial idea.



Figure 3. Preliminary Sketch by the author.

Labels will present information updated daily - an example for this kind of a label:

"What you are listening to now is the sound of 'Ahirkapi festival' (Hidrellez) which was celebrated three days ago in Ahirkapi. Every year in the evening of 5 May, people dance and make wishes by tying ribbons on rose trees to welcome spring."

Sounds will also be updated regularly via live streaming technology which will be placed in the original locations of the sounds. Communicating in a dynamic manner, the exhibition will be alive, just like its content.

In this exhibition, accessibility especially for the hearing impaired is a major issue. Not to deprive them from this experience, vibrations will be designed in accordance with the rhythm of the sound which they can feel in the sound spots. For the visually impaired, information will be provided as tactile experience.

Conclusion

In the process of working towards the Sound Museum of Istanbul, such steps as assessing the significance of soundscape elements, soundwalking, archiving, and exhibition design will lead to further studies. As this

is a multi-disciplinary project, it will bring forth new terms and applications derived from the interaction of various subjects, as well as several additional projects.

First, discovering the *Cultural Soundscape* of the city and determining the significant sounds of daily culture, I will explore whether there is a distinctive soundmark, in parallel to generally visually perceived landmarks, for each zone. A soundmark is the most characteristic and unique element of the acoustic environment. Therefore, it needs to be protected, as R. Murray Schafer states: "*Once a soundmark is identified, it deserves to be protected, for soundmarks make the acoustic life of the community unique*" (Schafer, 1977). Significance assessments, as mentioned above, will play an important role to determine the soundmarks of each region and of the city as a whole. For example, the sound of the tramway bells symbolizes only one specific place in Istanbul. It is a unique sound, thus the soundmark of that neighborhood.

Second, after collecting the essential sounds from the entire city, I will analyze the distribution and prevalence of these sounds. The results of these analyses will help to draw the general outline of the contemporary *Cultural Soundscape* of Istanbul. This outline will then be compared with that of the past *Cultural Soundscape*, as far as it can be reconstructed, to see how changing life conditions affect the sonic environment. The results will lead to a longitudinal study to which future *Cultural Soundscapes* will be added.

Third, as mentioned above, in the archiving process a method will be developed to organize sounds. This method will be turned into a model that may be applied to all cities to classify the concept of *Cultural Soundscapes* across the world.

Finally, the exhibition design – which, I hope, will offer several innovations in display technology – will be planned to allow for easy transportation and travel. Installations will consist of interchangeable and moveable parts to facilitate adaptability to other museums and even to open air spaces.

Overall, I hope that the Sound Museum of Istanbul will help visitors to become aware of their sonic surroundings, to own these intangible cultural heritage elements as an important part of their daily lives, and to protect their cultural identity, as it is partly shaped by sound-related practices.

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