Introduction to Soundscape Composition

A Manual for Practitioners

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2. SOUNDSCAPE STUDIES AND TERMINOLOGY

The eld of soundscape studies provides valuable strategies for deepening aural awareness and enhancing our relationship with the environments we inhabit. Soundscape studies is a discipline that explores the sonic environment and the ubiquitous array of sounds that de ne our daily lives. In the 1970s, R. Murray Schafer (together with H. Westerkamp and Barry Truax) established a research and educational group called the World Soundscape Project (WSP), which documented and analysed the sonic environments of various locations. The WSP intended above all to educate and archive, but it also helped to develop 'soundscape composition'. [8] More about the WSP can be found following the link.

The approach adopted in this manual focuses on deep (or "heightened") listening, going on soundwalks to record, and editing and presenting soundscape compositions. It is important to establish an understanding of the basic terminology as developed by scholars such as R. Murray Schafer and H. Westerkamp.

Sound is a concept, an interpretation of variations of atmospheric pressure levels perceived by the human brain. It is essential to understand how we listen to different kinds of sounds; one distinction is that there is a difference between listening and hearing. Hearing occurs involuntarily, a subconscious process, while listening focuses attention on speci c sound(s). This distinction was made in the past, but some of the most well-established de nitions are the 'listening modes' by Pierre Schaeffer, Michel Chion and Pauline Oliveros. To listen is an endeavour to be cultivated; it needs the practice to develop hearing sensitivities and awareness of the surrounding sounds. Sound scholars have introduced various techniques to sharpen our ears to the surrounding sounds, e.g. stop making sounds for a while, soundwalking, and others. [9]

According to Murray Schafer, a soundscape is de ned as any sonic environment, which can be actual or an "abstract construction such as musical compositions and tape montages, particularly when considered as an environment". [10] Hildegard Westerkamp,

8   B 2002. T. 67(1), 5-14.
9   RM 1977. M.
10 b p275.

a collaborator of Schafer and a critical contributor to the field of soundscape studies, further elucidates by describing soundscapes as "the study of the interrelationship between sound, nature and society". [11] Soundscapes involve methodical studies of a given environment to understand the intersection of social behaviours and natural phenomena through the study of sounds. For example, Schafer proposed soundwalking as a helpful way of introducing "ear cleaning" in schools. [12] The idea of the soundscape refers to both the natural acoustic environment consisting of natural sounds, including animal vocalisations, the sounds of weather and other natural elements; and environmental sounds created by humans through musical composition, sound design, and other human activities, including conversation, work, and sounds of mechanical origin. One can think of soundscapes in terms of how the listener's surroundings present themselves through sound, much like landscapes present themselves visually.

> A soundwalk can be defined as "any excursion whose primary purpose is listening to the environment" (Westerkamp, 2007, p. 1)

WHAT IS A SOUNDWALK?

Hildegard Westerkamp defines the soundwalk as "any excursion whose primary purpose is listening to the environment". [13] This term was first used by members of Murray Schafer's World Soundscape Project and has since been developed by Westerkamp, Andra McCartney and Janet Cardiff, among others. This act of going for a walk and attentively listening to every sound in the environment is a useful method for engaging with soundscapes. In addition, soundwalking is a vital aspect of the recording stage of soundscape composition. Soundwalks focus on walking and listening, creating the potential for opening our ears and minds to the sounds within us, around us, and the world's soundscape. Soundwalks are a mobile listening experience and provide a shift in attention that can change how we attend to the world. Westerkamp's practice incorporates soundwalks with audio recording and an "exploration of our ear/environment relationship, unmediated by microphones, headphones and recording equipment".

Schafer differentiated between two types:

1   Listening walk is a walk where the participants focus on listening in silence.

2   Soundwalk would explore the soundscape of a particular area and might also include ear cleaning exercises and sound-making by the participants to explore the sounds of the environment and be aware of one's own sounds. The participant becomes a 'composer-performer'. [14]

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1 Westerkamp,H., 2 Linking soundscape composition and acoustic ecology, Organised Sound, 7, p. 2

2 Schafer, R. M., 5 The soundscape, p. 2

3 Westerkamp,H., 2 Linking soundscape, p. 1

4 Schafer, R. M., 5 The soundscape, p. 2

Soundwalk can be considered a primitive soundscape composition. In a soundwalk, the composer moves through their chosen environment, listening and recording the sounds

.   RECORDIN AS TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

The creative process of composing soundscapes requires one to go out for a soundwalk and record the sounds of traf c, birds, cars, metro stations, children playing, and a river owing in their city. To do so, one only needs to use the microphone of their mobile phone. Listening to familiar spaces with headphones differs from the usual perception of environments. As a result, your sense of hearing is heightened, and it is possible to hear multiple sounds that blend into the background. For example, one can point the microphone toward the ground while walking and hear their shoes on the pavement. This experience heightens one's appreciation and sensitivity to the sounds around them even when not using these devices. One can change their habits, like, listening to music with headphones while being in an exciting environment sonically. Moreover, using recording technology to direct one's perception of sound can be a means of re ecting on their awareness of the external world. Listening and recording have a transformative effect on our conscious awareness of ordinary surroundings. By editing the recorded sounds, one can create artworks in the form of soundscape compositions. These compositions exist as digital audio les and provide snippets of one's experiences of living in their city. As artistic work, they have personal resonance and meaning; yet, they remain open to the interpretation of the listeners who understand them through their experiences. In

5. EDITING - WEB RESOURCES

Further resources regarding the eld of soundscape studies, as well as how to use freeware for editing sounds, can be found in the following links. Practitioners interested in implementing soundscape composition in the classroom are encouraged to navigate through the proposed web pages.

http://sounds.bl.uk/sound-maps/
https://www.sfu.ca/~truax/wsp.html
http://www.acousticecology.org/
http://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio.html
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzJ2VyYkmaA   (Audacity tutorial)

. EDCATIONAL APPLICATION - THE FAM-STRATEY

Soundscape composition can be used as an educational tool in the classroom environment. When implemented in this context, educators can either co-identify, together with participants, or stipulate, speci c themes of pedagogic relevance, using the transformative creative process of the soundscape composition process. As this potential lends itself to foster empathy and tolerance across societal division, examples of themes that may be relevant and bene cial for young people to explore may relate to gender, age, class, ethnic, or other divisions in society. These could be explored in relation to the sounds found in spaces demarcating such societal divisions (e.g. marginalised groups might live in spaces of greater sound pollution than privileged groups).

For practitioners, their knowledge of participants' abilities and vulnerabilities is of great importance. Different group of young people might require variation and adaptation of the FAM-strategy in order to avoid alienation or disengagement. Alcd.d2

De nitions:

- 'Critical thinking is re ective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do.' [22]

- It is the 'deliberate use of skills and strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome.' [2]

- 'Critical thinking consists of seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that discon rms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth'. [2]

- The forming of atypical ideas that vary from current individual perceptions. [2]

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effective (see example pre-pulse questionnaire, appendix 1). For evaluation, this can then be compared with material produced once the workshop has nished, the post-pulse. These pulses can be formatted in different ways but will provide better evidence when pre-existing and changing attitudes and thinking are captured, either through notes, questionnaires, informal interviews and voice recording (with participants permission), or similar (see FAM-concept paper). .

> "It [the task-sheet] was very useful, and it allowed me to gain new ideas and to express them more easily" Feedback post-pulse, female participant, Shkoder.

No intervention and evaluation should be conducted without appropriate ethics considerations and, in the case of research, research ethics approval, to ensure participants' right to informed consent, to withdraw at any time, anonymisation and data protection in accordance with the laws of the country.

The preceding pages assisted in establishing a basic understanding of soundscape composition as a practice, its history and conceptualisation, as well as its application – original in combination with the FAM-strategical application – as tool of cognitive and societal transformation in youth work and educational practice.

> "The FAM informed implementation aims to foster a bridging of societal divisions, embracing alternative perspectives, enhancing of creative and critical thinking skills, and advancing cognitive transformation."

Teaching aims:

- To record sounds of the area, everyday life and social surroundings

- To recognize and evaluate the sounds of the environment through active listening.

- To understand the value of the sense of hearing for human life.

- To recognise how sound can help identify, demarcate and represent distinct societal spaces.

- To characterize and evaluate sounds and music using appropriate terms.

- To develop non-familiar ways of telling a story through composing a soundscape composition.

TEACHER ACTIVITY
Time duration: 10 minutes
Place: classroom

Modes o Listening

The teacher de nes "sound" and the difference from "audio".

Sound: variations of the pressure level in the atmosphere that reaches our ears are interpreted as sound.

Audio: sound reproduced by media (analogue or digital). No human is involved but a device.

The teacher offers a new idea to students: we listen in different modes.

We listen to someone or something, and through the intermediary of sound, aiming to identify the source, the cause, it treats the sound as a sign of this source.

We hear lots of things we are not trying to listen to nor understand passively. Hearing is involuntary. .

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Thining o soundscapes

STUDENT ACTIVITY
Time duration: 10 minutes
Place: classroom

The teacher asks students to look at a painting and imagine what would be the sounds they hear if they were in the presence of this landscape? In groups students should write down their responses and then share in class.

Example of painting to use: Albert Bierstadt "Among the Sierra Nevada   ".

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Option B: only

Facilitators may opt to use a painting that represents decided upon theme.

Option A & B

10 minutes

classroom

The idea of the soundscape refers to both the natural acoustic environment consisting of natural sounds, including animal vocalisations and the sounds of weather and other natural elements; end environmental sounds created by humans, through musical composition, sound design, and other human activities including conversation, work, and sounds of mechanical origin.

Think of soundscapes in terms of how the listener's surroundings present themselves through sound, much in the same way as landscapes present themselves visually.

Phase 3

Option A & B

30 minutes

classroom

Field recording is the art of capturing audio recordings outside of a recording studio. Field recording is all about capturing audio straight from the source, no matter where it is. Subject matter ranges from natural to human-made sounds.

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The teacher will demo how to use audio recording apps to capture sounds in the classroom.

Then ask the students to capture sounds in the classroom (they could probably go out of the class for that purpose) using their smartphones. Then come and listen back to the sounds they recorded.

The art of Soundwalk

Walk where the participant (or participants) can concentrate on listening. The main goal of the activity is to facilitate heightened listening. When more than one person is involved, silence is expected throughout (no chatting during the walk). And there is usually a discussion about the sounds, and the soundwalk, at the end.

Soundwalks can be recorded and used as a source of sounds, or used as an inspiration for works.

"Field recording is the art of capturing audio recordings outside of a recording studio."

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TEACHER / STUDENT ACTIVITY
Time duration: 30 minutes
Place: outside of classroom

You will record the sounds that you hear on your walk using a mobile phone so that you can listen to them again at a later time.

Duration of soundwalk: 10 minutes.

What you need:

- Headphones (or earphone)
- Smart phone (which is your recording device

Route: Perhaps look at a map and try to plan a journey that takes you through a few different areas (e.g., past houses, a factory, a river, near a road), but also passes through key locations (e.g. past the town centre with the clock bell, the railway station, the bus station, the shopping centre).

Remember: you are a ⸎_____!

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Exploration Day

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STUDENT ACTIVITY

Time duration: Whole day

Place: Personal/social environment

Depending on the time available for the workshop, it would be bene cial at this point to allow participants an individual exploration day.

Armed with both conceptual and practical knowledge, participants should be encouraged to explore their own surroundings away from the workshop to record sounds for creation of their soundscape.

If implementing with critical and creative objectives, practical divergent thinking activities should take place prior to dispersal of participants. A task sheet could be developed around the speci c theme to encourage alternative perspective-taking. A simpli ed example of such a task sheet, in this case focusing on gender norms, is available in appendix 2.

Composing a soundscape

TEACHER / STUDENT ACTIVITY

Time duration: 60 minutes

Place: classroom

Based on the soundwalk recording, edit the sounds you gathered in smaller audio les and create a soundscape composition study based on a narrative or idea you will come up with.

The narrative could be something along the lines of a representation of an idea (i.e. bewilderment, inclusivity, cultural diversity).

Your composition should be between 2-3 minutes long. Feel free to experiment with different edits and repetitions of the sounds.

As an example, listen to the composition "Bewilderment" by Valerio Zanini.

Here's a link to Zanini's composition: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GIRjrUqm6g

Tips:

Explore the interesting and unique sounds available in your location.

Soundscape composition relies upon detailed listening, and clever editing.

Often, there is a play between sounds that are in the foreground and those that are in the background.

Sounds might move, from being in the foreground to being in the background or vice versa..

Exhibition (and Post-Pulse)

TEACHER / STUDENT ACTIVITY

Time duration: 1-2 hours

Place: classroom

The participants will each have a chance to exhibit their soundscape to the rest of the group. Discussion should be encouraged surrounding the perspective and purpose of their individual composition and any difculties they faced whilst recording. During this phase it would also be benecial to ask the participants what they both liked and disliked about the workshop, and what they feel they have learnt – this is to gauge likelihood of them using these skills moving forward, and how the workshop can be bettered for next implementation.

If FAM-strategy is applied (implementing with a critical and creative learning and evaluation objective) there must also be discussion about learning around the themed task. Participants should be coached to explain how the soundscape represents the societal boundary, and what they feel they individually have learned. Despite individual exhibitions taking place facilitators should encourage conversation between group members during this phase – various compositions may present differing ideas, and these differences can equally have the power to alter perspective.

This acts as a narrative, reective 'post-pulse' in conjunction with the aforementioned aims and facilitators are encouraged to voice record this exhibition for evaluative purposes. Questionnaires can be given in conjunction with recordings, or instead of, in exceptional circumstances.

> "If implementing soundscape composition with a critical and creative objective in mind, there must also be discussion about learning around the themed task."

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

> "[I learnt] the different ways of how people express their different views/opinions towards one or multiple matters" participant response, Shkoder.

> "The imagination doesn't know any limits. Even though, in the beginning it seemed impossible for me to work with something so new, in the end I still managed to come up with satisfying results" participant response, Shkoder.

> "Soundscape composition is a form of art where you can express your own opinions" participant response, Shkoder.

EVALUATION SYNOPSIS

the initial programme to better suit the needs of future participants. It was decided that two manners of implementing the intervention would empower future facilitators to better meet the needs of the young people participating. Due to this, the two differing aims and steps outlined above (Option A and Option B) were developed.

The young people, within this pilot project, produced insightful nal pieces that were coupled with dynamic group discussions. This supported the aims of the FAM-strategy, utilising creative arts mediums to encourage young people to engage with perspectives beyond their immediate experiences.

FINAL NOTE

Subtle editing can transform a "normal", "everyday" soundscape into something mysterious and wonderful. Sound designers in lm often do this to add to the lm's story and the world of the movie in which it takes place.

Therefore, a soundscape is not simply presenting pre-recorded soundscapes but telling a story through the control and manipulation of these pre-recorded soundscapes.

To conclude the workshop on creating soundscapes, the teacher or youth worker can organise a showcase event where students will present their soundscape compositions in concert. The concert can take place in the classroom or the social events room of the school, alternatively in a youth centre. It might further be possible to explore possibilities of disseminating the artistic creation to a wider audience in collaboration with the young people, e.g. creating an online exhibition.

> "Subtle editing can transform a "normal", "everyday" soundscape into something mysterious and wonderful."

Section 1 could contain more general questions, should as age (if participants vary), gender, or any other administrative questions that are deemed appropriate. Names should not be required so they are unidenti able.

1. Expectations and Motivations

1.1. What motivated you to take part in this workshop?

1.2 What do you hope to learn in this soundscape workshop?

3. Technical Understanding and Application of Soundscape Composition

3.1 Do you know what soundscaping and soundscape composition is?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3.1.2 If yes, where have you learnt/heard about it before?

3.2. Soundscape composition is based on: (select as many as you think are correct)

☐ Active listening and recording

☐ Writing Lyrics

☐ Recording interviews

☐ Telling stories through sound

☐ Applying software skills (such as audacity)

☐ Singing and recording

3.3. Can you envisage anywhere you could apply soundscape composition in the future?

4. Storytelling through soundscape composition

4.1. Prior to this workshop did you engage in storytelling through writing, music, video or any other art form?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4.1.2. If yes, which art form/s? _____

4.2. Do you think soundscaping can be used to tell stories that matter?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4.3. What type of stories do you think are important for young people to tell?

4.4. Do you think gender norms in your environment restrict the choices you have as a young person to shape your future?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4.4.1 Please explain your answer to the question above:

APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLE EXPLORATION TASK SHEET

1. Can you identify, in your environment, places where only men, or only women can inhabit?

Men:

Women:

Which places do genders come together?

2. Which gendered sounds can you record in these places?

3. Which places can you not enter because you are a young man or young women?

4. Can you identify sounds associated with the environment of a:

Younger woman:

Older woman:

Younger man:

Older man:

4.1 What differences did you identify?

4.2 Think about how you can describe the differences have discovered, through sound.

For this exercise it is of utmost importance not to record any sounds without permission from people in the space you are recording (if there are people present), and you must not record in places that could put you at risk of any danger.