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Acoustics experts to create sound map of Britain

Acoustic engineers at the University of Salford will, this week, launch a unique project to create a 'sound map of Britain.'

From Monday, the public will be invited to use their mobile phones to record around five 10 second audio clips from different environments - such as a local park or a street - and upload them to a virtual map at www.soundaroundyou.com with their opinion on how it makes them feel and why they recorded it.

The study, which is being launched at the Manchester Science Festival (24 Oct – 1 Nov), aims to get a better understanding of what gives a place 'character' and how opinions and attitudes to 'noise' vary.

PhD student Charlie Mydlarz, who is leading the study, explains:

"We're asking people to capture any environment they choose, and that includes both public and private spaces, so recordings could capture anything from a family car journey to a busy shopping centre.

"And by using everyday technology to get people involved, this has the potential to be the largest study of its kind. We'll be producing the first ever sound map purely for research purposes - the findings of which could have far reaching uses from psychological research to town planning."

While existing studies tend to focus on volume, with loud assumed noisy/undesirable and quiet as desirable, this study will investigate the idea that there is no such thing as 'noise', simply sound that is out-of-place or context.

For example, the sound of a busy street and shouting voices may be unpleasant and out-of-place in a quiet residential area but is an essential part

of the 'atmosphere' and personality of a market.

Sound, especially in urban areas, is an increasingly important issue, as recent debates about potential noise levels from a third runway at Heathrow demonstrate. While there are many bodies concerned with how our environments look (e.g. English Heritage or CABE) – how they *sound* has, until recently, often been overlooked.

With more people living in cities, urban areas being redesigned and new technologies such as electric or hybrid cars offering the potential for quieter streets, there is a need to reassess our understanding of 'noise'.

This sound map of Britain could be useful in a variety of ways, for example, for urban planners or people checking out an area ahead of buying a house;

If used along side Google street view, end users could not only see a place – they could hear it too, thereby getting a far better understanding of what a place is actually like.

In raising awareness of how our sound environment influences us, researchers hope that participants will embrace a new 'language of sound'. For example, rather than 'landmarks' and 'landscapes' we might describe distinctive features of our sound environment or 'soundscapes', as 'soundmarks' and value them as highly as an attractive country vista or dramatic urban skyline.

The research is being run by a team including PhD student Charlie Mydlarz, Prof. Trevor Cox and Dr Ian Drumm at the Department of Acoustic Engineering, University of Salford.

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