

A Sound Eutopia

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Summary

The sound of a city reflects its functioning, its heart beat. It could accentuate lively commercial neighborhoods, historical and religious places, and restorative urban green. However, the rapid growth of cities combined with mechanization has equalized urban sound climates over the last century to become a monotonous hum. Soundscape has been introduced as a concept to counteract this trend, yet the perception and understanding of the sound environment is often considered late in the urban planning process and at a local scale. So how can we find our sound eutopia, a city where planners consider sound from the initial stages of conceptualization of a neighborhood, where developers have sound in mind while creating the built environment, where people co-create and co-maintain their common soundscape? Today, we reached a level of knowledge that allows to understand the needs and desires of the (future) users of a space or at least we have the tools and methodologies to identify them. While bringing this knowledge to action, the wide range of spatial scales involved need to be considered. Development at each scale should create opportunities for soundscape design at a lower scale or at least should avoid jeopardizing them. In most countries society and technology change at a much faster pace than the built environment which creates a challenge for urban sound planning for reaching a soundscape sustainability. Smart city concepts, internet-of-things, and equivalent connectivity create new opportunities and tools for urban sound design. Augmented reality seems an ideal tool for soundscape (re)design; digital twinning may connect planners, managers, city authorities to their urban areas; machine listening and recommendation may adapt the public space to the users of the day. So maybe sound eutopia is going to be a virtual utopia.