



Principles and methods for the conservation of indigenous cultural soundscapes

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to suggest basic ideas and methods for the conservation of local sonic environments, taking socio-cultural factors into account. Conservation of sonic environments has conventionally been regarded as noise control to protect public health. However, residents' responses to the sonic environment of a specific place is usually affected by socio-cultural contexts because residents usually share local knowledge about the sound source and its associated place. From this perspective, I will introduce the concept of cultural soundscapes, which originated from the concept of cultural landscapes, defined as the cultural properties that represent the combined works of nature and of man. A cultural soundscape should be regarded as an intangible property representing the indigenous culture and nature. I will discuss the principles and methods for conserving cultural soundscapes in reference to the cultural landscape and the '100 Soundscapes of Japan' project, which is a rare example of a policy approach concerning cultural soundscapes.

Keywords: soundscape, conservation, policy, socio-cultural I-INCE Classification of Subjects No.: 56.3

1. INTRODUCTION

The socio-cultural aspect of soundscape is significant especially in considering the management and conservation of local sonic environments. Generally, local residents' response to the sonic environment of a specific place is affected by socio-cultural contexts because residents usually share local knowledge about the sound source and the place.[1-3] The final report of the COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) project 'Soundscape of European cities and landscapes' stressed the importance of the soundscape approach as 'a new multidisciplinary approach' and of involving human and social sciences such as sociology or anthropology.[4] More attention should be paid to the socio-cultural aspect, although the conservation of sonic environments has been conventionally regarded as noise control to protect public health.

This study aims to suggest basic ideas and methods for the conservation of local sonic environments, taking socio-cultural factors into account. For this purpose, I will introduce the term *cultural soundscape*, which originated from the term *cultural landscape*. The cultural landscape is a concept used as a category of cultural heritage in World Heritage Convention. I will discuss the methodology of conservation of sonic environments in reference to usage of the concept of cultural landscape. I will also adopt the project '100 Soundscapes of Japan' as an example of a policy practice concerning cultural soundscapes.

2. SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECT OF THE SOUNDSCAPE CONCEPT

Attention on the socio-cultural aspect can be easily found in the early soundscape studies conducted by Schafer and his colleagues. For example, in Schafer's book, 'The Tuning of the World', published in 1977, he stated as follows: 'the home territory of soundscape studies will be the middle ground between science, society and the arts'. This demonstrates interest in the sonic environment within society. Furthermore, focus on society as regards the soundscape is observed in the explanation of the term *soundmark*: it is explained as 'a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community' and 'Once a soundmark has been identified, it deserves to be protected, for soundmarks make the acoustic life of the community unique'. This explanation focuses on meanings of sounds in a community.[5]

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The fieldworks of the World Soundscape Project, which Schafer and his colleagues organized, also reflected their interest in the relationship between sonic environment and local society. They studied five soundscapes of small European villages, for example, not only by depicting the physical sonic environments and gathering local people’s responses but also by exploring local history to identify the socio-cultural contexts of each soundscape.[6] Their attitude in these fieldworks demonstrates that they deemed the collective experience of soundscape as more important than an individual’s cognition.

Thus, it is obvious that the concept of soundscape has, from its inception, included the socio-cultural aspect as an important element. The concept of soundscape is considered to have three aspects as shown in Table 1. Most focus has been upon the environmental and cognitive aspects, especially in the context of noise control, while the socio-cultural aspects have been comparatively ignored. In many such cases, ‘community response’ has been treated as a simple aggregate of individual responses, not as the result of interactions among people. More attention should be paid to the socio-cultural aspect where specifically considering a local soundscape.

Table 1 – Three aspects of the soundscape concept

Aspect	Orientation
Environmental	To <i>sounds</i> which surround <i>humans</i>
Cognitive	To individual <i>humans</i> who listen to <i>sounds</i>
Socio-cultural	To relationships among <i>humans</i> concerning <i>sounds</i>

3. CONCEPT OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

In this section, I focus on the term *cultural landscape*. It is used as a political term as well as an academic concept, as UNESCO and other bodies have embraced it as a category to conserve cultural and natural properties.

Jones examined the development of cultural landscape as a perspective in academic research within the discipline of geography.[7] According to his explanation, the term *cultural landscape* was, in the early studies, used to describe the role of humans in changing the physical landscape. Subsequently, as humanistic approaches activated the study of landscape meanings, the term *cultural landscape* was sometimes applied to the cognitive aspect of landscape. He suggested that the term *landscape*, not *cultural landscape*, has been deemed sufficient by many researchers although the term *cultural landscape* is useful in focusing on the role of humans in processes of change in our physical surroundings and the cultural meaning of landscape.

UNESCO adapted the concept of *cultural landscape* as a part of world cultural heritage in 1992. Article 1 of the World Heritage Convention suggested that cultural heritage should include certain types of sites in addition to monuments and groups of buildings, and the sites should be works of man or the combined works of nature and man.[8] Then *cultural landscape* is defined in the operational guidelines as the cultural properties and represent the ‘combined works of nature and of man’; the guideline proceeds to explain that ‘they are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal’.[9] The guidelines indicate three main categories of cultural landscape: (1) landscape designed and created intentionally by man, (2) organically evolved landscape, and (3) associative cultural landscape. Explanations of the categories are provided in Table 2.

4. A CASE OF CONSERVATION OF SOUNDSCAPES IN JAPAN

This section will briefly describe ‘100 Soundscapes of Japan’, a project conducted by the Environment Agency (former body of the Ministry of the Environment) of Japan in 1996. It is a rare case of a policy practice aimed at conservation of soundscapes that focused on the cultural aspect of soundscapes.[10]

The project designated 100 soundscape items which are regarded as ‘significantly meaningful in preserving sound environment’. The aim of the project was ‘promoting rediscovery of various sounds that we can listen to in daily lives and supporting the area-oriented efforts to preserve superior sound environment’. In its screening procedure, the Screening Board focused on ‘the people getting involved with sound environment’.[11] The Board selected 100 of 738 items which were applied by

local governments as well as interested individuals and entities.

Table 3 shows the numbers of entries for each category. The most frequent category of sound source was 'Daily lives and culture'. This category included the subcategory 'signal sounds', which have a function and are produced intentionally, such as a temple bell and a time bell. Entries in the subcategory 'Festival and other events' were soundscapes of traditional local festivals in most cases. The subcategory 'Industries and transportation' included soundscapes of various local industries and revival operations of steam locomotives. All the sounds were considered to be cherished as local symbols. In addition, items in the categories 'Living things' and 'Natural phenomena' also represent the local culture which people deem the sounds to symbolise. Thus, each of the '100 Soundscapes' commonly reflect local people's culture of listening to their sonic environments.

Table 2 – Categories of cultural landscape in the World Heritage system

Category	Content
(1) Landscape designed and created intentionally by man	Embracing garden and parkland landscapes constructed for aesthetic reasons, which are often (but not always) associated with religious or other monumental buildings and ensembles
(2) Organically evolved landscape	Resulting from an initial social, economic, administrative, and/or religious imperative and that developed its present form by association with and in response to its natural environment
(3) Associative cultural landscape	Containing virtues of the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element

Table 3 – Numbers of entries for the '100 Soundscape of Japan'[11]

Sound Source Category	Total Entries	Qualified Entries
I. Living things	208	31
Birds	93	12
Insects	40	7
Frogs	23	2
Other creatures	13	2
Plants	29	5
Combination of the above sounds	10	3
II. Natural phenomena	164	19
Land water (e.g. rivers and waterfalls)	93	10
Sea (e.g. waves)	41	9
Other natural phenomenon	21	0
Combination of the items above	9	0
III. Daily lives and culture	291	37
Festivals and other events	69	9
Signal sounds (e.g. bells)	65	10
Industries and transportation	74	11
Other sounds from daily lives and culture	73	6
Combination of the items above	10	1
IV. Combination of I to III above	52	12
V. Others (silence, or other unclassifiable sounds)	23	1
Total	738	100

5. DISCUSSION ON CULTURAL SOUNDSCAPE

5.1 Definition

In this section, I discuss the conservation of local soundscapes by introducing the term *cultural soundscape*. This term analogically refers to the concept and usage of *cultural landscape*. A cultural soundscape may be tentatively defined as ‘a sonic environment or way of understanding a sonic environment which is shared within a cultural group’. Use of the term *cultural soundscape* would be useful to take into account the socio-cultural aspect of soundscape in considering local soundscape management and conservation.

While the term *cultural soundscape* is not a category of soundscape but rather an expression to emphasise the socio-cultural aspect of soundscapes in this paper, Dumyahn and Pijanowski used the same term as one of the eight soundscape types listed in their paper.[12] They provided such examples of their category ‘cultural soundscapes’ as ‘City markets, church bells in small town[s], coastal areas with foghorns’, and described its values as ‘Sense of place, cultural and historic values related to sounds’. Their category ‘cultural soundscape’ is similar to the category ‘Daily lives and culture’ in the ‘100 Soundscapes of Japan’.

5.2 Evaluation principles and methods

The term *cultural soundscape* can be a concept for conservation as *cultural landscape* continues to be. A cultural soundscape should be regarded as an intangible property representing the indigenous culture and nature. The value of cultural soundscapes should be in their appropriateness for each specific place, which is associated with the geographical, historical, or societal characteristic of the place. A culturally important soundscape may contain at least one of the following features:

- Symbolic meaning in the community
- Representation of the characteristics of the place
- Close connection to the local daily life

Learning from UNESCO’s usage of *cultural landscape* and the practice of ‘100 Soundscapes of Japan’, categories of cultural soundscape targets can be conceived. Table 4 shows the tentative categories I have directly drawn from the three categories of cultural landscapes in the World Heritage system. In many cases, ‘soundmarks’ should be mainly focused on identifying features of cultural soundscapes to be conserved. It is also considered a relevant way to seek to identify the characteristics or symbols in the community and then find a soundscape for them. In addition, extinct and threatened soundscapes should need special attention.

The procedure of conservation policy can be designed at various levels: from a local level, such as a community or municipality, to a national or international level. Regardless of the policy level, the basis of conservation should be the participation of the local community which holds the culture. Those who are associated with the important elements of the soundscape should be involved in these processes with members of the local authority, representatives of residents, and stakeholders.

The main materials to be investigated are qualitative and quantitative descriptions of the physical sonic environment and community attitudes towards it. The local residents’ narratives are the most important because you can clearly understand from them how cultural the soundscape is. Moreover, gathering narratives is itself conservation of the cultural soundscape: the way of listening is a conservation target in addition to the physical sonic environment.

Table 4 – Categories of cultural soundscape targets

Category	Sound sources or situations
(1) Soundscape designed and created intentionally by man	With sounds that are intentionally created and have some function or meaning; e.g. sound signals (bells, horns etc.), music, etc.
(2) Culturally evolved soundscape	Sonic environment resulting from various activities within the interaction between sounds and humans; e.g. festivals, industries, daily lives, etc.
(3) Associative cultural soundscape	Local people share the meaning of sounds or other cultures of listening to the sonic environment; e.g. interpretation of natural sounds, etc.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted to discuss the concept of *cultural soundscape* in reference to the concept *cultural landscape* and '100 Soundscapes of Japan' project. Although the term *soundscape* has itself always included a cultural aspect, the term *cultural soundscape* would be useful to emphasise the significance of the socio-cultural aspect to develop the methodology of conserving soundscapes, just as with the term *cultural landscape*. This paper has provided tentative principles and methods on the conservation of cultural soundscapes. Further investigation can explore the detailed policy on soundscape management and conservation, especially in relation to the European noise policy and other practices such as 'European Acoustic Heritage'[13].

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