

***CitySounds* – Community Sound Survey**

Report

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Executive Summary

The extensive variety of sounds in cities and their impact on listeners is rarely investigated by government agencies. Most survey and measurement projects are directed toward noise and its degree of annoyance on listeners. The *CitySounds* survey focused on the wider acoustic environment, to broaden Council's spectrum of knowledge about listener awareness and attitudes to sounds in the Central Business District (CBD) of Melbourne.

Like most inner city councils, the primary source of information available to the City of Melbourne about sound issues comes from ongoing complaint procedures and intermittent noise measurements.

The *CitySounds* survey was embedded inside a 3D model of an indicative Melbourne precinct complete with realistic visual and soundscape design. Respondents could self-navigate or be guided through the 'virtual soundscape', answering survey questions in pop-up windows at specific locations. Survey results were returned online to servers at RMIT University.¹

CitySounds was used to determine if noise complaints were representative of wider community attitudes to the acoustic environment, and to collect more in depth information to assist Council in developing sound related guidelines, forming information campaigns, and identifying potential acoustic design interventions or other initiatives.

To access the variety of respondents required with the available resources, the *CitySounds* survey was made available directly to the public via online distribution, CD-ROMS, and at City-based libraries. In addition to general questions about sound, respondents were asked for their opinions of sounds heard at seven indicative city locations inside the virtual model; a café, two sites-of-respite, an apartment, spaces affected by air-conditioning, nightclubs and construction sites. The modular design of *CitySounds* allowed survey questions at each site to be analysed independently of the whole survey, and are reported individually in this report in sections A-K.

The *CitySounds* survey ran for seven months, supported by a communications campaign. An estimated 668 people answered all or part of the survey, producing over 3,949 reportable results.

A general observation from the survey results are for a series of *listener-scale interventions* into the City. These include providing specific sites-of-respite in the CBD, initiatives to enable people in the CBD to self-manage their sound exposure, a quieter café campaign, indications of ways to enhance patron experience in nightclubs and potentially reduce the impact of amplified music on nearby residents, changes to the use of loud-speakers on CBD streets, and suggestions to improve the design of community and industry sound management information and awareness campaigns.

¹ The model is available on-line http://www.sial.rmit.edu.au/Projects/City_Sounds.php.

CitySounds suggested a more sophisticated attitude in listeners to their acoustic environment than might generally be assumed, and an underlying interest in audible change to the various CBD locations occupied daily by people. The City of Melbourne currently undertakes many roles in determining the visual experience of individuals in City spaces and places. The *CitySounds* survey and general observations reveal opportunities for Council to make a parallel contribution to the aural experience of the City.

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