SenseScapes: Sound+Smell+Light Scape in the Urban Context

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Description of the session
The dominance of the notions of wellbeing and quality of life in the discussion on the urban context can be largely attributed to the socioeconomic developments of the 20th century. Vision exerts a definite dominance over a common – bordering universal – contemporary design culture that recognises it as the ultimate sense, in terms of the organisation and development of the urban fabric, whereas other sense components – haptic, acoustic and olfactory – are still relevant parameters in human perception, evoking feelings of calmness, discomfort or nuisance. The ultimate aim of preserving and enhancing wellbeing for citizens necessarily involves (re)designing contemporary cities through an understanding of how intimate and private symbolic experiences and public and communal infrastructures intertwine and evolve together.

Soundscape and smellscape are formed within a context, shaped by perceived sensory stimulations – of which visual observations are indeed most prevalent – and by conditioning: the knowledge people have accumulated about places / spaces, their use, purpose, cultural meaning, their motivations and associated activities, etc. Urban design has recently focused on the human scale, the experience, perception and understanding of the urban environment. Contemporary research findings have demonstrated that purposefully designed places can utilise combinations of olfactory, acoustic, psycho-acoustic, and cognitive effects induced by either physical or digital media in order to evoke feelings that inhabitants would not commonly associate with a given urban context.

This session discusses sensescapes in the urban context, elaborating on investigations of the effects of acoustic, olfactory and visual stimuli on space perception, the sense of place, quality of life, health and socioeconomic developments. The invited speakers will present research papers on soundscape theory and its application, the relationship between landscape and soundscape design, smellscape perception in intermodal transit spaces, and on sensescapes, with particular emphasis on the dissimilarities of the perceived quality of urban surroundings between groups of people with and without visual impairments.
Sense-walking with the blind: a study in the city of Thessaloniki

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Abstract

The paper presents findings of the research project: "Walking in the city of Thessaloniki", 2013-'14, undertaken at the School of Architecture, A.U.Th., and part-funded by the Post-doctoral Fellowship Program of Excellence '12-'13, A.U.Th. Research activities are supported by ArchSix Architecture Studio and by the Panhellenic Association of the Blind.

The research focuses on how the perception of Thessaloniki's cityscape is shaped through hearing, vision and smell.

The research expands on previous work, undertaken by the authors as part of the international COST TUD Action TD0804: Soundscape of European Cities and Landscapes. The research methodology consists of parallel sensewalks and on-site measurements and recordings. The perception of smells and sounds, in the urban environment, is monitored through a questionnaire that combines: i) the Swedish Soundscape Quality Protocol - adapted in the Greek language - and ii) a smellwalking map and notation - preference tool, thus resulting in a combination of soundwalking and smellwalking.

The research is conducted through group - sensewalks with able-bodied participants and through individual interviews - tours with the participation of people with reduced visual perception (partial - total blindness). This paper focuses on the dissimilarities present in the responses of the two distinct groups of participants, highlighting different versions of the perceived urban landscape and examining the ways that different groups - individuals use stimuli such as sound and smell to evaluate the quality of their surroundings and to ultimately form a sense of place.