



Crowdsourcing Mr. Visserplein

English introductory text

How can we design a city with sound in mind?

Urban makers (like planners, designers, architects) are interested in understanding and intervening, to a reasonable extent, in the aspects of the urban environment that encourage people to use spaces and to feel comfortable engaging in activities in public spaces or, on the contrary, to control and limit the elements that make them feel uncomfortable, unwelcome or in danger. In this process, urban sound (understood as much more than simply noise) and the auditory experience are underrepresented and underestimated components of the urban experience, that, when fully understood and accounted for, could contribute to developing more livable cities.

We developed "Crowdsourcing Mr. Visserplein", a trans-disciplinary project that would allow us to explore the auditory dimensions of the urban experience in a small square in the centre of Amsterdam - Mr. Visserplein. The project is based on strong theoretical and professional interest on moving beyond a constraining understanding of urban aesthetics as being relegated to vision and how things *look* like, towards how cities and particularly public spaces *sound* like. There is increasing awareness on the knowledge that how cities sound like is inextricably connected with aspects of urban identity and dynamics. On the one hand, people, through their everyday movements through spaces, influence their urban environments of sound and how their spaces sound like; on the other hand, what people hear in their public spaces and their overall auditory environments influence their actions. Mr. Visserplein was selected as a case-study to research the relationship between urban form, sound and human experience due to its specific urban form and seemingly hybrid function as an urban space; imbued with a rich history, the square is situated at the intersection of traffic arteries, communities and urban neighborhoods with distinct cultural profiles, being exposed to a symphony of sounds dominated by traffic.

We integrate the knowledge and expertise of various public and private stakeholders that are based in the vicinity of the square (including community members, business owners, frequent visitors) with that of scientists, architects and sound artists. Our aim is to understand the current experience of the square and to suggest minimally invasive, cost effective innovative sound-based solutions that could help improve the auditory and overall quality of the square. This initiative is bottom-up and centered on the square user as the everyday expert, whose auditory knowledge and experience can contribute to processes of spatial transformation or redesign.