

2023

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Recommended Citation

Fusté-Forné, Francesc (2023) "The sounds of travel: video ethnography in multisensory tourism research," *Journal of Sustainability and Resilience*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jsr/vol3/iss2/3>

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Publisher's Note: Journal of Sustainability and Resilience (JSR) (ISSN:2744-3620) is published bi-annually by the Sustainability and Resilience Institute (SRI) of New Zealand. The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of SRI. SRI remains neutral about jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

The sounds of travel: video ethnography in multisensory tourism research

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Received: 26/06/2023

Revised: 24/07/2023

Accepted: 16/08/2023

Published: 01/09/2023

Abstract: While the analysis of the tourist experience often relies on the visual representations, recent research also increasingly calls for a multisensory understanding of tourism research. Soundscapes are an emerging type of tourism attraction that contributes to the protection and promotion of the sense of place. Departing from the use of video in ethnographic practice, this research notes illustrates the features of soundscapes in nature-based tourism research based on video auto-ethnography. Results show that the sounds of water, animals and gastronomy are evocative of people, places and practices in nature-based tourism experiences.

Keywords: audition, hearing, tourist experience, multisensory, nature-based tourism, senses, soundscape, video ethnography.

1. Introduction and objective

The soundscape is a growingly appreciated type of tourism attraction (Lu et al., 2021). While visual predominates in tourism management and marketing, researchers and practitioners also need to pay attention to sounds (Son and Pearce, 2005). In this sense, a shift toward a multi-sensory understanding of landscapes is observed in tourism research (Jiang et al., 2020). However, previous research has scarcely focused on the multisensory dimensions of tourism experiences from the perspective of the auditory sensory experience (see Jensen et al., 2015). In line with previous studies that have analysed the natural soundscapes in nature-based tourism experiences (Jiang, 2022), we also approach the impact of soundscapes on multisensory tourism research, within and beyond the boundaries of nature, for example, concerning gastronomy.

Soundscapes are an essential part of the tourists' experiences (He et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2021) since they capture the environments of tourism places. The sounds of travel are at the center of this research note, which is also a call to use video in sensory ethnographic research (Pink, 2014). The video draws both the researcher and the readers into sensory participation (MacDougall, 2005) and allows the viewers to evoke the experience of the researcher. Previous research has acknowledged the use of video to explore atmospheres because video recordings are made inside the environments (Pink, 2013) and they serve the purpose of capturing the soundscapes of the tourist experience and understanding the sense of place (Vannini et al., 2012).

In particular, the objective of this research is to create a dialogue between previous research about the understanding of soundscapes in tourism with examples

captured by the researcher, as an ethnographer, as part of his tourist experience. After this introduction, the paper contextualises the use of video ethnography in qualitative research and later describes the soundscapes of multisensory tourist experiences based on video examples.

2. Using video ethnography as a methodological tool in qualitative research

We argue, in line with Ren (2016), that qualitative research includes a range of methodologies, such as ethnographic fieldwork, and also methods, such as video documentation. Video is appropriate to communicate atmospheres and to understand “non-representational dimensions of the experience” (Pink, 2014). In line with research that is concerned with multisensory experiences (see a practical example in Aksenova et al., 2022) and that has analysed tourist experiences from non-representational approaches (Jensen et al., 2015), this paper contributes to innovative qualitative research based on the use of videos as primary data (Äijälä, 2021; Teoh et al., 2023) in the context of mobile video ethnography as a qualitative methodology (Brown & Banks, 2015; Vannini, 2017).

Video 1. The sounds of people walking in nature.



In this sense, “we can think of video recording as both making and recording traces through an atmosphere and bringing together in that recording traces of the constituents of that atmosphere” (Pink, 2014). In the framework of sensory landscapes, previous studies also built their analyses on soundscapes to tangibilise the results. While these are mostly evocative of nature, as we explore in the next section, they also illustrate tourism mobilities, for example in rail travel experiences where the auditory evidence is conveyed by “the sounds of the train moving through the night” (Jensen et al., 2015). The use of video, as observed in Video 1, “invites us to sense what we might think of as the atmospheres of other people’s worlds, by bringing their sensory, emotional, and affective qualities and affordances empathetically close” (Pink, 2014).

3. Soundscapes of multisensory tourist experiences

Tourism should focus on a holistic approach to sensescapes (Agapito, Mendes & Valle, 2013) since the five senses bring visitors to develop perceptions of the destinations they visit – among them, the sense of audition (see Cohen & Cohen, 2019) or hearing (see Pilcher, Newman, & Manning, 2009) appears as a pathway to appreciate the sounds of nature (Brochado et al., 2019). The planning and development of tourism experiences from a multisensory perspective also enhance them in the context of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

A soundscape is defined as an auditory landscape (Schafer, 1997), and a natural soundscape is a specific type of soundscape that refers to sounds that originated in nature (see Pijanowski et al., 2011). The sounds are important in nature-based tourism research (Jiang et al., 2018) and their understanding is relevant for nature-based tourism management and marketing

where natural soundscapes increase the tourist motivation to visit and get visitors closer to nature (Daugstad, 2008). For example, a waterfall or a bird singing. In this sense, the sounds of water are particularly relevant in the tourist experience (see Videos 2, 3, and 4), which also encapsulates the role of weather effects (for example, wind). These water-based videos provide examples of the dynamic nature of soundscapes concerning the setting where they are experienced – in a forest, in contact with other natural elements (the rocks), or in the sea, where the trace of the water is also shaped by the wind. Previous research has particularly analysed the impact of climate on the tourism experience (Etterna et al., 2017), both from the tourist behaviour (Lohmann and Hübner, 2013) and tourism businesses (Becken, 2010).

Video 2. A waterfall in a forest.



While the sensory dimension of the tourist experience (Liu et al., 2018) is increasingly investigated, little research has paid attention to the auditory dimension (Waitt and Duffy, 2010), especially to both natural and cultural, soundscapes in tourism. Previous studies show that listening to natural soundscape is a way to experience nature (Mace et al., 2004), and “natural soundscape is not only an indispensable attribute in tourism system but a desired experience for visitors in nature-based tourism” (Jiang, 2022). They also influence the meanings we attach to places. This is observed in previous examples, where a

tourism value is awarded to water – and, specifically, to the natural sounds of water, which are in turn diverse and rely on the setting and the climatic conditions of the recording time.

Video 3. Water splashing amidst rocks.



Video 4. Waves in the Mediterranean sea.



To investigate the power of natural soundscapes, Jiang (2022) refers to natural sounds as a source of the natural charm of scenic areas (see Video 4). This includes the soundscapes attached for example in agricultural (Video 5) and livestock (Video 6) activities, but also concerning the observation of animals in the wilderness (Video 7), where silence (see Video 8), the absence of sound, is also a source of tourist attraction. In this sense, soundscapes are indicative of a sense of place (for example, local dialects) and they are considered a new tourist attraction (Liu et al., 2016). In particular, music is a significant tourist attraction that allows people to immerse in the understanding of people, places, and

practices (Brown et al., 2011; Lu et al., 2021) – this is for example illustrated in the music that sounds during the Catalan tradition of *Castellers* (human towers).

Video 5. The wind moves the lettuce.



Video 6. The sounds of livestock.



In the context of the relationships between natural and cultural soundscapes, food emerges as a particularly unexplored realm. While only a few previous research have focused on the auditory attributes of food experiences, they have been observed from the role of music – “music could further enhance the wineries’ overall atmosphere and facilitate a deeper immersion into local culture” (Galloway, 2018). This paper also shows that the soundscapes of gastronomy can be traced from production (see Video 5), transformation (Video 9), and consumption (Video 10). This expands previous research that analyses food tourism from a multisensory lens (see Everett, 2008) and provides examples of the sensory experiences in the food value chain,

about both natural and cultural sounds that are created by humans. This is also observed in the atmospheres of cooking classes (Aksenova et al., 2022) or the understanding of wine tourism as a multisensory experience (Brochado et al., 2019), where the soundscapes refer to both the environment (for example, vineyard surroundings) and the narrative of the staff (for example, the storytelling).

Video 7. Horses walking through the wetlands.



Video 8. Ducks in a lake.



4. Conclusion

Soundscapes, as meaningful examples of sensory landscapes, portray “the agency and identity of the geographical subject” (Casey, 2001, p.405). The atmospheres bring a sense of place embedded in them and through our senses (for example, ears) attach a meaning to them. Wind, for example, *Tramuntana* in the Empordà

region, is a manifestation of *terroir*, that implicitly acknowledges people, places, and practices that are shaped by wind, and can also be applied to other components of weather such as precipitation (Becken, 2010). In line with previous literature that argues that tourism experiences should be explored from non-visual landscapes, we show that soundscapes, and natural soundscapes, are a tourism attraction factor. However, this research is limited to the dialogue between previous studies and a video auto-ethnography approach which requires the future analysis of unique soundscapes in destinations and their impact on destination image and tourists' behaviour (Jiang, 2022), for example, using methodologies such as video-elicitation.

Video 9. The sounds of cheesemaking at the factory.



Video 10. The sensory experience of gastronomy consumption in a restaurant.



While each tourist has a subjective experience of the destination, this research

note is also a call for destination stakeholders to increase the role of soundscapes in tourism management and marketing, where future research should also understand soundscapes in interaction with other sensescapes to improve the soundscape experience (Lu et al., 2021). In this sense, “the more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable it can be” (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In food, for example, the sounds can contribute to the memorability of the experience based on the environment where we do the food activity (Galloway, 2018), which can evoke the nature where the food comes from (for example, if we have a winery near the sea), but also its connection with the people and practices that attach meaning to food.

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