

canadian association for sound ecology



association canadienne pour l'écologie sonore

# Report on Soundscape Ecology Futures

Insights and Visions from a Focus Group Discussion held on June 13, 2023 (via Zoom)

*Prepared by the Canadian Association for Sound Ecology (CASE) by Dr. Mickey Valley*

## Note

*This report is the outcome of a conversation on June 13, 2023 between CASE members moderated by CASE board member Dr. Mickey Valley. CASE is publishing the report on its website for our members and for the general public as a synopsis about some of the current trends in acoustic ecology in Canada. Warm thanks to all participants and Mickey for this engaging conversation.*

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## Introduction

This report provides an analysis of a focus group session that sought to investigate the future trajectory of soundscape ecology in Canada. By engaging participants from diverse backgrounds encompassing academia, artistic practices, and community engagement, the session aimed to collect valuable insights and perspectives on the foundations, current practices, and future directions of the field. A broad spectrum of themes emerged, encompassing the overarching objectives of the focus group, participation in public and indigenous communities, ethical considerations, existing challenges and potential opportunities, resource requirements, and the significance of collaboration and actionable outcomes.

## Methodology

The focus group session was conducted virtually, utilizing video conference technology for participant engagement. Mickey served as the moderator for the session. The association's President, Claude Schryer, initiated the discussion by providing an overview of the association's direction. In a

collaborative effort, Julie Andreyev assisted Mickey in moderating the conversation. Carol Ann Weaver followed up with a paste of the chat and listed the names of the participants. In total, there were 14 participants: Participants were: Mickey, Rene, Hildi, Lauren, Claude, Tim, Terri, Leonardo, Jacky, Chris, Milena, Laurent, Aaron, and Carol. The discussions held during the session were transcribed and subsequently analyzed thematically to identify important points and recurring themes.

## Findings

### *1. Housekeeping*

The session began with a discussion of the house rules, ensuring that all participants were aware of the guidelines for the meeting. The facilitators also provided an explanation of how the questions would be presented and the format for the ensuing discussion. In order to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis, the session was recorded with an emphasis on privacy and restricted access to the recorded video. This approach aimed to protect the confidentiality of the participants' contributions and maintain the integrity of the data gathered for further analysis and interpretation.

### *2. Timeliness, attendance, and introductions*

The high level of participation observed in the focus group session highlighted the widespread interest and enthusiasm surrounding the topic of soundscape ecology. Recognizing the significance of these collective contributions, it was emphasized that the valuable input provided by the participants would play a vital role in shaping the future direction of soundscape ecology as both a field of study and practice.

### *3. Objectives and scope of the focus group*

The primary objective of the focus group was to foster in-depth discussions on a wide range of topics within the realm of soundscape ecology. Participants were encouraged to share their interests, motivations, research directions, challenges, visions, and explore the intersection between artistic and scientific practices within the field. The inclusion of individuals at various career stages and the integration of diverse perspectives were recognized as essential elements for shaping the future domains of soundscape ecology – indeed, the participants in the focus group session represented a diverse range of backgrounds and experience levels, including those who were pioneers and founders in the field, as well as graduate students from various regions across Canada. The aim was to create a space that facilitated the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences, fostering a collaborative environment where participants could collectively contribute to the field's advancement.

### *4. Involvement with public and indigenous communities*

During the focus group session, participants shared their experiences in engaging the public, emphasizing their efforts in presentations, raising awareness about the disappearance of natural soundscapes, and connecting with broader audiences through art exhibitions and workshops. The discussions highlighted the importance of collaboration with indigenous communities and the integration of indigenous perspectives in soundscape ecology research. Participants recognized the value of conducting workshops and establishing partnerships with First Nations communities and organizations to ensure a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach.

### *5. The role of the field and recording practices*

The field of soundscape ecology was characterized as a space for gathering raw data, enabling the exploration of multi-species interactions, and establishing meaningful relationships with the environment. Participants acknowledged the ethical considerations involved in sound recording practices, particularly in terms of seeking permission, respecting privacy, and being mindful of ceremonial aspects, especially when collaborating with indigenous communities. This recognition emphasized the importance of conducting research in a manner that respects cultural protocols and acknowledges the rights and sensitivities of local communities. In addition, the integration of fieldwork and laboratory research was underscored as crucial for studying and comprehending ecological relationships within the context of soundscape ecology.

### *6. Ethical considerations in recording practices*

During the focus group session, participants delved into the ethical dimensions surrounding sound recording practices. Specifically, they raised important questions regarding the potential impact of recording on the natural world. The discussion emphasized the necessity of demonstrating sensitivity towards certain populations, particularly indigenous communities, and recognizing the significance of adhering to cultural protocols and environmental sensitivities. Participants highlighted the value of utilizing autonomous recording units as a means of minimizing disturbance and preserving the authenticity of natural soundscapes. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of respecting wildlife reactions during the recording process, acknowledging the need to minimize any potential disturbance or harm to the animals present.

### *7. Connecting with environmental groups and public privacy*

Participants in the focus group expressed a strong desire to forge connections between soundscape ecology and environmental groups, aiming to collaborate on localized environmental initiatives. This aspiration reflects their commitment to applying the principles of soundscape ecology to practical environmental actions. During the discussions, concerns were raised regarding the protection of public privacy in the context of sound recordings. Participants recognized the importance of addressing privacy rights and developing clear protocols to ensure that the privacy of individuals is respected during the recording process. These discussions emphasized the need to strike a balance between the collection of valuable acoustic data and the protection of individuals' privacy, highlighting the ethical considerations that accompany soundscape ecology research and the importance of responsible and considerate practices.

### *8. Displaced experience and mediated interactions*

The participants in the focus group astutely acknowledged the mediated nature inherent in the process of field recording. They recognized that when capturing sounds, there exists a level of mediation that separates the recorded sounds from their original context. This understanding shed light on the challenges associated with faithfully representing the true essence of the recorded environment. The participants further underscored the significance of being mindful of incidental sounds that may unintentionally find their way into the recordings, such as snippets of conversations or ambient noises from passing cars or mobile devices. These discussions sparked a collective call for heightened considerations and increased awareness to ensure that recordings accurately capture the intended soundscape while minimizing unintended disruptions or artifacts. The emphasis placed on attentiveness and conscientiousness in the practice of field recording highlights the participants' dedication to preserving the integrity and authenticity of the recorded soundscapes.

### *9. Strategic research mission and future directions*

Engaging in dynamic discussions, participants of the focus group dedicated their efforts to crafting a strategic research mission for the Canadian Association for Soundscape Ecology (CASE). The focus was placed on fostering transparency, openness, and the collaborative shaping of future directions within the field. Participants recognized the significance of establishing a clear vision and guiding principles to guide the trajectory of soundscape ecology research in Canada. When prioritizing transparency and openness, the aim was to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and foster a collective approach to shaping the future of the field. These discussions reflect the participants' commitment to promoting a shared vision and collaborative framework that advances the understanding and practice of soundscape ecology in Canada.

### *10. Challenges, opportunities, and collaborations*

Challenges in research, such as capturing perceptible change and producing evidence-based results, were identified as areas of concern. Participants recognized the importance of storytelling and preserving cultural memories through sound, emphasizing the need to integrate ecological questions into the field. Collaboration with communities and individuals on noise and soundscape issues was emphasized, with a focus on making acoustic ecology more public, accessible, and inclusive. The potential for soundscape consultants and activism within acoustic ecology emerged as potential avenues for addressing challenges and fostering collaborations. These discussions demonstrate a shared commitment among participants to address the complexities of soundscape ecology and promote positive change through interdisciplinary approaches and community engagement.

### *11. Resources, technologies, and interdisciplinary approaches*

The focus group discussions revolved around the critical aspects of resources and technologies necessary to facilitate research, artistic practices, and community engagement in the field of soundscape ecology. Participants expressed a strong desire for collaboration, networking opportunities, and a dedicated platform to connect sound ecologists and share information, fostering a sense of community and knowledge exchange. Furthermore, the importance of striking a balance between technological tools and human relationships was emphasized, recognizing that while technology plays a crucial role, the value of personal connections and interactions should not be overshadowed. Additionally, the integration of sound ecology with other fields, such as geography and equity studies, was recognized to foster interdisciplinary approaches and broaden the understanding of the impact of sound on various aspects of human and environmental experiences. These discussions highlight the participants' recognition of the multifaceted nature of soundscape ecology and their commitment to leveraging resources, technology, and collaborative networks to advance the field.

### *12. Action-oriented outcomes and translation of research*

The focus group participants expressed a strong call to action, advocating for the translation of research findings into tangible outcomes that have a positive impact. Recognizing the profound influence of sound on local environments and communities, they emphasized the importance of responsible and thoughtful engagement with soundscapes. This includes considering the ecological, social, and cultural dimensions of sound and its effects. By highlighting the need for actionable initiatives, the participants demonstrated their commitment to creating real-world change and utilizing their research and expertise to address the challenges and opportunities present in the realm of soundscape ecology.

## Conclusion

The focus group discussion provided valuable insights into the future of soundscape ecology in Canada. The discussions touched upon technical challenges, the importance of ethical considerations in recording practices, community engagement, resource needs, and interdisciplinary collaborations. The participants emphasized the need for transparency, inclusivity, and active involvement of diverse perspectives to shape the future of soundscape ecology. The findings from this focus group will serve as a foundation for further research, collaborations, and action-oriented outcomes in the field.

## Chat Discussion Highlights:

### *Listening to Natural Environments:*

- Participants expressed their involvement in listening to and recording sounds from wilderness areas.
- Noted the disappearance of natural environments due to invasive plant species and human activities.
- Highlighted the urgent need to understand the connection between native plants, insects, and the survival of birds and animals.
- Urged the championing of the survival and flourishing of natural environments.

### *CASE's Mission and Objectives:*

- Participants referred to CASE's bylaws and mission statement.
- Noted the broad mandate of CASE, which allows for the connection of different fields and the consideration of economic models.
- Emphasized the importance of research, advocacy, and decolonization within acoustic ecology and soundscape studies.
- Proposed fostering young acoustic ecologists and providing ongoing funding to support their work.

### *Mobilizing Action and Community Engagement:*

- Participants discussed the need to move beyond research and translate findings into tangible actions.
- Explored the potential of CASE to mobilize communities and promote local relationships.
- Highlighted the significance of conferences, workshops, and collaborations with neighboring fields to build trust and solidarity.

### *Access to Tools and Technologies:*

- Recognized the importance of providing equitable access to tools and technologies.
- Suggested the creation of a collection of different devices and resources for experimentation.
- Discussed the need for time and support to create and share knowledge.

The CASE meeting brought together passionate commitments to soundscapes, ecology, and climate justice. The participants shared their interests, concerns, and ideas, highlighting the need for understanding, preserving, and promoting the natural environment. They emphasized the importance of research, action, community engagement, and decolonization within the field of acoustic ecology. Additionally, the participants discussed the significance of access to tools and technologies and the need for equitable opportunities for experimentation and knowledge sharing. The meeting concluded with appreciation for the discussions and the potential role of CASE in promoting the goals and values discussed.

## Emerging Research Areas

Several areas of research interest emerge from the focus group discussion:

1. **Mediation and Authenticity:** Further exploration of the mediated nature of field recording and its impact on the representation and authenticity of recorded soundscapes. This could involve investigating different methodologies and techniques to minimize mediation and preserve the wildness of recorded environments.
2. **Ethical Considerations in Soundscape Ecology:** In-depth research on the ethical dimensions of sound recording practices, particularly in relation to indigenous communities. This could involve examining cultural protocols, privacy rights, and environmental sensitivities to develop guidelines and protocols that ensure responsible and culturally sensitive research practices.
3. **Community Engagement:** Further investigation into the integration of local community perspectives in soundscape ecology research and the establishment of meaningful partnerships with those communities. This research could focus on collaborative approaches, workshops, and inclusive practices that promote indigenous knowledge and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of soundscapes.
4. **Public Privacy and Soundscape Recording:** Research on the balance between collecting valuable acoustic data and respecting public privacy rights during sound recording processes. This could involve developing clear protocols and guidelines to ensure responsible and considerate practices that protect individuals' privacy while advancing soundscape ecology research.
5. **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Exploring the integration of soundscape ecology with other fields such as geography, equity studies, and environmental sciences. This research could examine interdisciplinary frameworks, methodologies, and collaborations that enhance the understanding of the ecological, social, and cultural dimensions of soundscapes.
6. **Action-Oriented Outcomes and Community Impact:** Investigating the translation of research findings into tangible outcomes and practical actions that have a positive impact on local environments and communities. This research could focus on developing strategies, initiatives, and community-engaged projects that apply soundscape ecology principles to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable practices.
7. **Resource Needs and Technological Advancements:** Research on the resources, technologies, and tools required to facilitate soundscape ecology research, artistic practices, and community engagement. This could involve exploring innovative recording devices, data analysis methods, and collaborative platforms that support knowledge exchange and foster a sense of community among sound ecologists.