

Capturing and Shaping Meaningful Sensory Experiences in the Urban Environment

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1. Workshop Organisers

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2. Context of Workshop

People navigating their way through a city do not rely only on their vision for feedback, but use happenstance street sounds, smells, and tactile contact. These complex layered experiences are often not even registered consciously by them (or designers). In this workshop we explore how sensory design research can provide insights for creative and meaningful urban design interventions.

We believe that the design of a healthy city should address a balance between sensory modalities. This requires a shift away from the prevailing visual orientation of the west, as noted by sensory anthropologists, Howes & Classen (2014, 2005)¹. Indeed, Malmar & Vodvarka note that: *“not only is sensory response critical to any cultural outcome (like design), but the specific social context (the sensory ratio of that culture) will need to be addressed if it is to resonate with its users”* (2004:55²).

This workshop proposal draws from our ongoing design research with sensory walks (sound walks and multi-sensory explorations) with students and community members. Building on empathic exercises used in research for Universal Design, such as removing one sense (e.g.

¹ Howes, D. *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. New York: Berg, 2005, Howes, D. & Classen, Constance. *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*. Routledge: New York, N.Y. 2014

² Malnar, J. M. & Vodvarka, F. *Sensory Design*. Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota, 2004

blindfolding people) (Hanington & Martin, 2012)³, small groups of participants experience and map the contexts of their sensory journeys for subsequent co-design research interactions. These explorations emphasize the non-visual sensory modalities of contact (tactile), sound (auditory), and smell (olfactory) in the urban environment. Participants capture, and reflect on, the competing multi-sensory stimulations that shape people's lives intentionally or by accident. The aim of this work is to sensitize participants to the multi-modal design explorations that can engage citizens with their communities.

The experiential workshop proposed here will sensitize participants to some urban space of Brighton, including the sounds, smells and flavours that contribute to its sensory aesthetics. Drawing from the work of Schifferstein & Desmet (2008)⁴ participants will be introduced to tools for sensory sensitizing, sensory sampling, and sensory communication. The goal will be to influence design researchers, and eventually citizens, (social) entrepreneurs and policy makers to design the future with experiences from multi-sensory immersion in the present.

3. Planned Activities and Expected Outcomes

- i) Initial Discussion: Workshop Leaders and participants will discuss and define concepts pertaining to sensory experiences and practices in urban life, sharing examples from our work. This theoretical session will provide the contextual background and set the challenge for the workshop participants.
- ii) Sensory Journey & Preliminary Mapping: Participants will take an urban sensory journey in small teams, following a pre-determined path in the urban environment. They will be assigned unique sensory roles and asked to document the journey.
- iii) Immersive Taste Exploration: Over lunch participants will create urban taste compositions, interpreting the 4 tastes (bitter, salty, sour, sweet) of their journey into a balanced (umami) composition capturing their sensory insights, using a modified design thinking approach. The teams' separate journey representations will be combined into one multi-layered journey map with parallel sensory streams. That will lead to identifying areas for re-imagining sensory experiences in the urban environment.
- iv) Scenarios. The entire group will develop and present multi-modal scenarios that illustrate a sensorially-nuanced urban landscape, so as to capture the sensory criteria helpful for designing meaningful experiences in the urban environment.
- v) Debriefing: Concluding discussions will focus on the participants' key learning about the sensory qualities of the urban experience, possible future considerations, and additional suggestions for disseminating this knowledge.

4. Intended Audience

The workshop can accommodate 15-20 participants, who will work in small groups of 3 to 4 people. Participants researching sensory design, either from a sensory (e.g. music) or inclusive design perspective; architects and designers of urban experiences; and, of course, all interested conference attendees are welcomed. As sensing humans, participants will be

³ Hanington, B. & Martin, B. *Universal Methods of Design: 100 Ways to Research Complex Problems, Deep Innovative Ideas, and Design Effective Solutions*. Beverly, Ma: Rockport Publishers, 2012

⁴ Schifferstein, H. N. J. & Desmet, P. M. A. "Tools Facilitating Multi-Sensory Design." *The Design Journal* 11.2 (2008): 137-58

instructed to bring tools for capturing and recording data, (e.g. smartphone, notepad and pen, bags to collect artefacts, etc.) walking shoes and clothing for the outdoors.

5. Length of Workshop

A full day workshop (9am-5:30 pm approximately) in order to provide enough time to capture, analyze, share, and synthesize multi-modal insights into communicable outcomes.

Morning: First session (60 minutes): Introductions. Orientation to theme and brief review of related work. Sensory teams to be determined and sound, smell, and tactile teams will each receive discreet briefings.

Morning: Second session (90 minutes): Sensory journey in city.

Morning: Taste Workshop (90 minutes): Analysis and translation of urban journeys into edible taste compositions (*tasting encouraged*).

Afternoon: First session (60 minutes): Tasting and descriptive interpretation session.

Afternoon: Second session (90 minutes): Scenario session as described above.

Closing Session: (30 minutes) Wrap-up & debriefing, output planning for article & video.

6. Space and Equipment Required

Workshop location: studio space. Ideally this space would be reserved for the whole day, so participants can leave their personal belongings there while out on their “urban journey”. If possible, refreshments breaks would be in same room to encourage networking. We will supply small items with interesting tastes to add to the atmosphere of sensory exploration in a fun and participative way.

Equipment: Boards or walls where material can be displayed, (and appropriate adhesive or fixing medium (e.g. “blu-tack”, drawing pins, etc.)) Large sheets of paper, roll of white paper, coloured marker pens and sticky notes, glue, scissors, Wifi and computer, AV equipment (projector, speakers, screen. Tables and chairs for all participants. Disposable gloves for food handling.

Urban journey: The route will prepared beforehand by workshop leader in terms of areas that are rich in sound; food; odours; and contact with tangible feedback, e.g. the sea front for the sound of gulls: fish and chip shops; smell of the sea; walking on the pebbled beach.

7. Potential Outputs

An article for an academic journal may be planned, explaining the process of the workshop and possible multi-sensory insights for the design of future sociable sustainable urban environments. In this way the workshop experience and its results can be put back into the design research community. Other outreach would be to interested citizens. For instance, a short film documentary of the sensory urban journey uploaded to video channel (i.e. YouTube or Vimeo). This could also be disseminated to other stakeholders including business and industrial parties to illustrate and reinforce the role of current design work in initiating innovative and imaginative, sustainable and sociable urban futures.

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Dr. Frankel explores user experience and interaction design to improve the design of products and environments. Her work focuses on people's sensory and cognitive practices related to balance, communication, mobility, and memory.

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Dr. Darzentas is currently researching co-design methodologies in service design for engaging communities of vulnerable people. She assists in implementing the EU Mandate 473 for including a Design for All approach into standardisation initiatives for the upcoming European Accessibility Act.