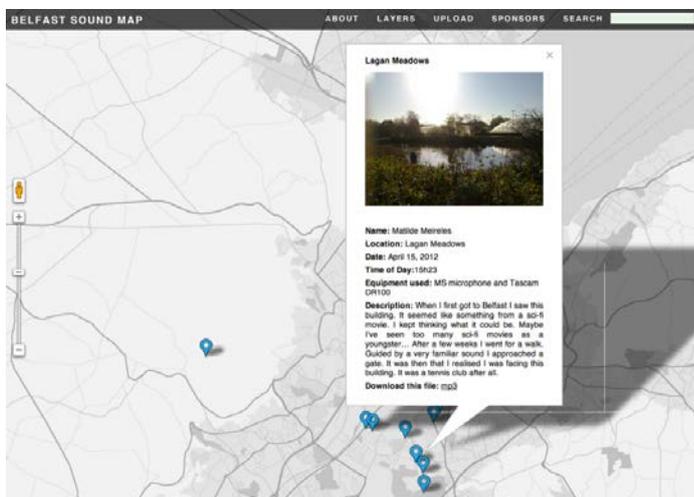


Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Queen's University Belfast
Unit of Assessment: 35
Title of case study: Sounds of the City: Engaging Communities in Sonic Arts
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This case study demonstrates how new approaches to collaborative sonic arts lead to increased awareness of the role of sound and its relationship to place in everyday life. This new understanding of the aural world resulted in the preservation and presentation of past and present cultural heritage specific to two intergenerational participating communities. The impact of the research is specifically articulated through a community project and exhibition entitled “Sounds of the City” commissioned by the new Metropolitan Arts Centre (Belfast) and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2012.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
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The impact associated with Sounds of the City draws on soundscape research conducted at the Sonic Arts Research Centre (SARC) since its inception in 2004; in particular through work concerned with the role of sound in everyday experience. The underpinning body of research employs multiple methodologies to address cultural, aesthetic and social aspects of sound in its relation to memory, place and community. The core research that underpins this impact focuses on the following questions: How can sound help articulate an experience of place and

everyday life? How can the notion of evocative listening be promoted in the context of sound art? How participatory community engagement encourage sharing of experiences through sound?

The research falls under two categories; the Sounds of the City project itself (led by Professor Rebelo with PhD students Chaves, Meireles and McEvoy) and two publications, (Chaves, Rebelo 2012) and (Rebelo, Green, Hollerweger, 2008) outlining theoretical frameworks that informed the exhibition. “Sounds of the City” is a large-scale community project and exhibition commissioned by the £18m Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) for its opening in April 2012. Over a four-month period, the artists worked together with two intergenerational groups in Belfast with the aim of addressing specific sound qualities of places, events and stories. Themes that surfaced from this process constitute the basis for the exhibition which promotes listening as a form of intersecting daily life, identity and memory. Five installations address aural contexts ranging from Belfast’s industrial heritage to the local family home. These are shaped by present and past experiences of workshop participants at Dee Street Community Centre in East Belfast and Tar Isteach in North Belfast. The materials for these installations centre upon the relationship between sound and memory, sound and place, and the documentation of everyday personal auditory experience.

The five installations include interactive sound environments based on participant’s memories of shipyard workers returning home “The Walk Home”, a participative open platform inviting Belfast’s residents and visitors to contribute sounds to the “Belfast Sound Map”, the use of image and text in “Five Places” based on the field recording experiences of

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five community participants, the use of interviews reflecting on the role of sound in three aspects of everyday life “Work / Home / Play” and a sound object rendering an ubiquitous sound of the past in “Call for Work”.

The exhibition materials and their documentation (www.soundsofthecity.info) constitute the core underpinning research for the impact described here. The exhibition was subsequently selected by Invest Northern Ireland to represent Northern Ireland in a state visit to Brazil by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Presented by the British Embassy at Espaço Ecco in Brasilia (14 March – 14 April 2013) this event provided further opportunities to articulate impact through community visits and school visits engaging in the gallery’s outreach and education programme.

Two other pieces of published research directly underpins the impact described here: The paper “Evocative Listening: Mediated practices in everyday life” (Chaves, Rebelo 2012) outlines how the use of technology can induce a sense of the evocative and enrich the relationship between individuals and their sound environment through memories, behaviours and cultural context. The paper further outlines creative works exploring public engagement in sound art. The paper refers to work developed by three PhD students under Rebelo’s supervision (Chaves, Hollerweger and Green) and provides a framework for active listening in an everyday context. This work has been central to the development of both workshops and presentational strategies in Sounds of the City.

The article “A Typology for Listening in Place” (Rebelo, Green, Hollerweger, 2008) provides a theoretical framework for thinking about the listening strategies at play in archetypal places such as the theatre, museum and the city. Ideas of listening in place as well as the relationship between sound and location were further developed in Sounds of the City.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Creative Practice:

Rebelo, P. Chaves, R. Meireles, M., McEvoy, A. (2012) Sounds of the City, *Exhibition at the Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast, UK*
Funded through the Metropolitan Arts Centre with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (£20k)

Rebelo, P. Chaves, R. Meireles, M., McEvoy, A. (2013) Sounds of the City, *Exhibition at the Espaço Ecco, Brasilia, Brazil*
Funded by Northern Ireland Bureau, Invest Northern Ireland, British Embassy Brasilia and Queen’s University Belfast

Peer Reviewed Publications

- Chaves, R. Rebelo, P. (2012). Evocative Listening: Mediated practices in everyday life, *Organised Sound*, 17
Research partly funded by a Gulbenkian Foundation PhD studentship (2009-13, £60k)

- Rebelo, P. Green, M. Hollerweger, F. (2008) A Typology for Listening in Place. *Mobile Music Workshop*
Research partly funded by an EPSRC Case studentship sponsored by Hewlett Packard (2006-10, £60k)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact of the research will be described in relation to participating individuals (intergenerational local communities in Sounds of the City), the public visiting the exhibition (over 60 000 during five months) and initiatives which will translate the project's methodologies and approaches to further exhibitions in different regions (Sounds of the City in Brasilia and Sounds of the City : Rio which will be taking place in 2014 with local favela communities and in collaboration with the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro).



Beneficial impact for participating communities is focused on raising awareness of sound in everyday life and hence enriching cultural life. Connecting younger and older individuals from opposite ends of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland in a collaborative project focusing on Belfast as a city makes a contribution to reconciliation through the sharing of experiences. The project also impacts on the preservation of cultural heritage through sound and presents it publically in a professional art context.

This impact was achieved by developing exhibition materials through workshops, interviews and field- recording sessions with community members. Workshops acted as a basis from which to inform each group about the project's aims, methods of listening, methods of documenting sound and the other topics relating to soundscape studies and acoustic ecology. They also provided a central point for allowing participants to organize outside activities and share materials for the exhibition. Participants gained listening skills as well as a vocabulary for describing listening experiences. The younger group of participants benefited from the acquisition of practical skills in sound recording and editing.

Written questionnaires completed by fifteen participants at the end of the Belfast project revealed that 93.33% felt that the project had increased their awareness of sound. When asked to rate the extent of their awareness of sound in everyday life post-‘Sounds of the City’ on a scale of 1-5 (5 representing maximum awareness 1 being minimum), the survey averaged at 3.733. The overwhelming use of positive language and willingness to not only engage but also to suggest a wide range of possible activities to take place in the future, point towards a positive experience of the project.

The exhibition in Brasilia benefited from widespread media presence, including national TV (Rede Globo) and was able to articulate further impact through, for example, the visit by an education centre for the visually impaired on 14th March 2013. This group was able to reflect on the experience of sound and place and expressed how the exhibition acted as a trigger for their own experiences: “I was able to identify the sounds that I heard. They reminded me of when I was a child in Minas Gerais and went to the waterfalls” (Izabel Goncalves Costa, 45 years old, blind), “Through sound we know where we are”, “I compared the sound of city centres with remote places. I suggest you make some recordings in São Paulo. I used to live there and there is a great contrast between the centre and the periphery from this point of view.” (Fernando Rodrigues, 36, blind from 6 years old).

From the point of view of internationalisation, the exhibition in Brasilia performed a role in terms of showcasing Belfast through the sonic arts (a relatively unknown artform in Brazil) from the perspective of local individual listening experience. The international recognition of the city of Belfast and its association with ground breaking sonic arts practice is referred to in speeches and letters by the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and British Ambassador.

“When we look at our history we're having to look at postcards and old photographs but this tremendous initiative [...] to put this exhibition together where we have sightseeing by sound if I can put it that way to experience Belfast.” (First Minister, Peter Robinson)

“Going through the exhibition and seeing places that are familiar, sounds that are familiar is a

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very extraordinary experience.” (Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness)

Wider impacts of the project include:

- innovative creative practice showcasing local everyday experiences in a high profile museum environment
- stimuli for positively engaging with the city through participation in the ongoing Belfast Sound Map project, now the focus of an AHRC Cultural Engagement Grant in partnership with the Belfast City Council (Belfast Soundwalks)
- contribution to the international recognition of the city of Belfast through the exhibition in Brasilia and related media coverage

The development of workshop methodologies which will be transferred to other cultural contexts - Sounds of the City: Rio Maré 2014, at the Maré Favela and in partnership with the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Letter from the British Ambassador in Brasilia describing the impact of the Sounds of the City exhibition at Espaço Ecco in terms of showcasing Belfast’s identity through innovative sonic arts – on file
2. Transcript from speeches by Northern Ireland’s First Minister and Deputy First Minister on the occasion of the opening of Sounds of the City in Brasilia (12.03.2013) – on file
3. Testimonials from members of the Centro de Ensino Especial de Deficientes Visuais (Visually Impaired Education Centre in Brasilia) – on file Sounds of the City 2012 participant questionnaires and analysis (Sonic Arts Research Centre) – on file Sounds of the City project website: <http://www.soundsofthecity.info>

Final Report to Lottery Heritage Funds (Metropolitan Arts Centre)