



Editorial: Sensing the urban

Jenni Rinne, Tiina Suopajarvi, Kirsi Sonck-Rautio and Maija Mäki

This special issue of *Ethnologia Fennica*, “Sensing the Urban”, began to take shape in the discussions of the research group at the University of Turku. The group, consisting of ethnologists, a museologist, and a cultural historian, together studied the designed, experienced, and perceived socio-material well-being in a newly built residential area near the medieval castle of Turku in southwestern Finland. The aim of the research was, on the one hand, to understand the everyday mobility of people living and working in this area and how they engage sensorily with its different kinds of places, materialities and temporalities, and, on the other hand, what sensory experiences could contribute to urban design and planning. So, we decided to invite other scholars to reflect on the importance of sensory urban studies in ethnology and our related disciplines. You can read the results in this special issue.

The starting point for urban ethnology is that people live in complex relationships with their urban environment. They move through the city and spend their work and leisure time in diverse urban settings. They live with other humans, but also with non-humans, so that the socio-materiality of their environment affects their lives in multiple ways. The city is also a place of memories, cultural heritage and hopes for the future. To study this complexity with a sensory starting point, through ethnographic fieldwork or documents, means to look at the city through people’s sensory experiences and narratives of it. There is no need to limit the research to the present, since the past and future sensing of the urban are equally important. Moreover, these experiences can vary across different bodies, genders, ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic groups.

Urban environments, and consequently the lives lived in them, are often planned and designed according to prevailing discourses, ideologies and ideas, while simultaneously being formed in different temporalities. These, in turn, direct and contextualize sensory experiences, knowing of the city, and everyday urban practices.

The method of sensory ethnography is well established. Anthropologist Sarah Pink (2009) describes this method as focusing on the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowledge, and practices. Ethnographers have considered different senses in their studies, such as sight, sound, smell and touch, and they argue that these experiences are multisensorial (e.g. Järvi-luoma 2022; Olsson, Rinne & Suopajarvi 2021; Vannini 2023). Scholars have also suggested that there are more ways of sensing the world than we currently acknowledge, and that sensing is culturally specific (Howes 2003; Ingold 2010; Pink 2009). In addition to ethnography, senses as part of urban life can be studied through different temporalities, past, present and future, in archives, documents for future urban planning or through participatory design processes (Pink 2023; Olsson, Rinne & Suopajarvi 2021).

This special issue presents articles that discuss different ways of doing sensory research in urban settings, especially sensory perceptions, knowledge and practices related to the urban environment in the present and through time. In these articles, the sensory approach to the urban *firstly* brings forth the embodied way of knowing. We know the urban by living in it with our bodies and with our senses: we feel, touch, hear, see, and smell it. Thus, knowledge of the city is formed through the human body in many ways. In Päivi Leinonen's and Sanna Lillebroända-Annala's article, this is demonstrated in the routes that city dwellers and visitors take, in Sandi Abram's and Blaž Bajić's article in the places they spend time, in Snjólaug G. Jóhannesdóttir and Ólafur Rastrick's article, in the urban stories that people become attached to, and in Pia Olsson's and the students' article, in what kind of socio-economic urban context people feel they belong to.

A city becomes to be known through bodily engagement with different places, people and materialities, and in ethnographies conducted in cities this is often done through movement (Venäläinen 2023), through walking, cycling, driving a car, sitting in a bus or tram. Consequently, urban sensory experiences, and thus knowledge of the city, are often both momentary and repetitive. Sensing while moving is part of the method in most of the articles in this issue (see Leinonen & Lillebroända-Annala; Jóhannesdóttir & Rastrick; Olsson et al.). The perspectives in the articles are mostly from the able-bodied point of view, and since urban dwellers' bodies have different abilities, this should be taken into account in future research design by including different types of bodies. But experiments can also be done. For example, in the article by Olsson et al. ethnographers sense the city by covering their eyes, which cannot be taken as an all-inclusive method. But what it does show is how much able-bodied people rely on vision, or/and it can help to focus on other senses outside of vision.

The sensory approach to the urban emphasizes, *secondly*, that it is possible to study layers of time in the urban environment through sensory experience and knowledge. A sensory focus helps ethnographers understand how and why places from the past matter in the present. Heritage and historical materiality are lived in the everyday lives of city dwellers. In addition, personal memories are intertwined with the materiality of the city, and certain places, buildings or other materialities evoke memories that are felt in the body and thus create meanings, such as a sense of belonging to the city (see Abram & Bajić; Leinonen & Lillbroända-Annala and Jóhannesdóttir & Rastrick in this SI). In addition to the past and present of the city, the future can also be considered by combining sensory ethnography with creative ethnographic methods (see Olsson et al. in this SI).

Thirdly, in order to capture the nuances and details of the entanglement of sensation, urban environment, and temporal layers, novel technological devices such as audio-visual recording glasses or wearable action video cameras are helpful (see Leinonen & Lillbroända-Annala, Jóhannesdóttir & Rastrick in this SI). These devices and the recordings made with them allow visual aspects in particular, but also sounds and non-human elements, such as animals or urban materiality, to become part of the analysis. Thus, the empirical material is not only based on observational descriptions and discussions about the urban. The audio-visual material, i.e. what is not spoken about but is otherwise present, allows researchers to give more space to the unspoken in their analysis. Through audio-visual material it is also possible to place the narratives in the physical places and to look at the embodiment of the urban in its actual context. Technology can also mean using the OpenAI technologies such as ChatGPT to work with empirical sensory material in different ways to answer the research question (see Olsson et al. in this SI).

It is common in sensory ethnography that the researchers' own embodiment plays an important role both in the field and in the analysis (Leinonen & Lillebroända-Annala; Olsson et al. in this SI). This is because some of the experiences are difficult to describe, so we have to rely on our own bodies to sense and interpret things. However, it seems that in some cases technology makes it possible to generate useful and somewhat different sensory material even when the researcher is not involved in the actual fieldwork (see Leinonen & Lillebroända-Annala; Jóhannesdóttir & Rastrick in this SI). Nevertheless, we still rely to some extent on our embodied being and imagination when analyzing sensory material.

The special issue brings together methodological articles that reflect on sensory methods. They sometimes come to similar conclusions, but they also complement each other from somewhat different starting points, approaches,

and questions they seek to answer. This is an important collection of articles, each contributing in its own way to the ongoing discussion about the method and its application in the field of urban research.

In addition to the thematic articles, this issue also includes articles, reviews, and conference reports outside of the theme. An article, written by Kinga Wygnaniec, is still very fitting to the methodological framework of the theme. In their article *Dance Floors of Polish Traditional Dances. Sensory Anthropology as a Research Tool in Dance Studies*, Wygnaniec applies sensory participation to a dance party with traditional music. This article is a contribution to the anthropology of dance, and with a framework of embodiment, the author proposes the category of the dance floor, where the modality of space is linked to the material interactions of the dancers.

Sanna Särkelä and Inkeri Hakamies attended and reported on the *Vaikuttava museo* (The Impactful Museum) seminar held in Helsinki on February 13-24 at the House of Science and Letters. The report on the event, which aimed to show a new way of understanding museums and their role in society, is published in this issue. Another conference report, authored by Siarhiej Makarevich, offers an interesting account of the International Conference on Cultural Policy Research, held in Warsaw on August 19-23, 2024, with the topical and important theme of Cultural Policies in Democratic and Nondemocratic Regimes, addressing the complex relations between culture and power.

This issue also offers number of reviews of recently published dissertations. Kim Silow Kallenberg reviews Johanna Pohtinen's dissertation *The Kink Community in Finland: Affect, Belonging, and Everyday Life*, in which Pohtinen explores the relationship between kink and everyday life. Another dissertation review in this volume was written by John Björkman on Niina Koskihaara's dissertation '*Kun kunta lakkasi olemasta. Kylä- ja kotiseutuyhdistykset kunnarakenteen muutoksiin reagoivina toimijoina*' (When the municipality ceased to exist. Village and local heritage associations as reactive actors to municipal mergers), which focuses on the question of how municipal mergers affect the citizen-oriented activities of associations focused on local culture. Anna Kirveennummi's dissertation '*Kutsu osallistua tieteelliseen toimintaan. Etnografiisia näkökulmia monitieteisen kyselytoiminnan yhteistyöhön ja käytäntöihin*' [An invitation to participate in scientific activity: ethnographic perspectives on collaboration practices in multidisciplinary questionnaire activity] was reviewed by Pirjo Korkiakangas. Kirveennummi's dissertation presents a novel approach to reviewing and analyzing folk culture questionnaires. Her research examines the processes of conducting questionnaires by academics in the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, the review of Lauri Turpeinen's dissertation *Cultures of Migration: A Multi-Sited Ethnography of Rural-Urban Migration in Finland* by

Roger Norum. Turpeinen's dissertation touches on the question of to what extent and why migration is a foregone conclusion for young people in rural areas.

Note from the editors-in-chief Maija Mäki and Kirsi Sonck-Rautio:

With this issue it is time to say goodbye. We have enjoyed our three years as the editors-in-chief of *Ethnologia Fennica*, which is a great journal with magnificent staff of editors, sub-editors, secretary and editorial board. We wish to thank you all. Now, it is time to pass the torch to new editors-in-chief and we take this opportunity to welcome Inkeri Hakamies and Anna Kajander to their new position.

AUTHORS

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