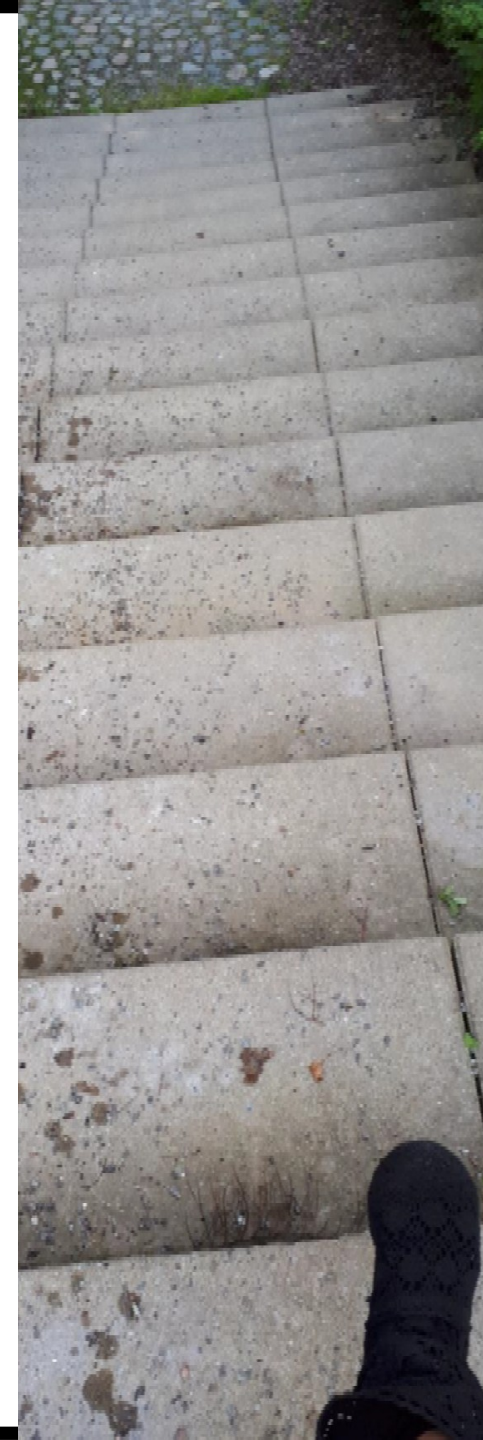


Helmi Järviluoma, Professor Emerita
SENSOTRA ERC AdG, University of Eastern Finland 2016—21

SENSOBIOGRAPHIC WALKING AS A QUALITATIVE METHOD OF INQUIRY

BEYOND
BOUNDARIES
THROUGH APPLIED
QUALITATIVE
RESEARCH

MCAST 20-11-2024



SENSORY TRANSFORMATIONS (SENSOTRA) 2016–2021

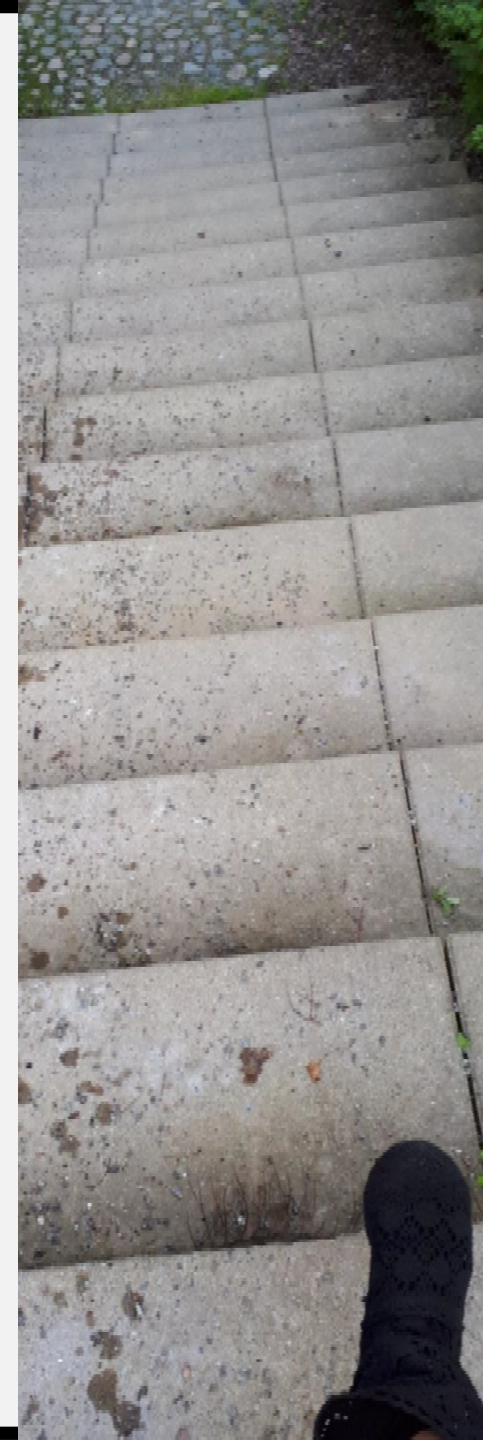
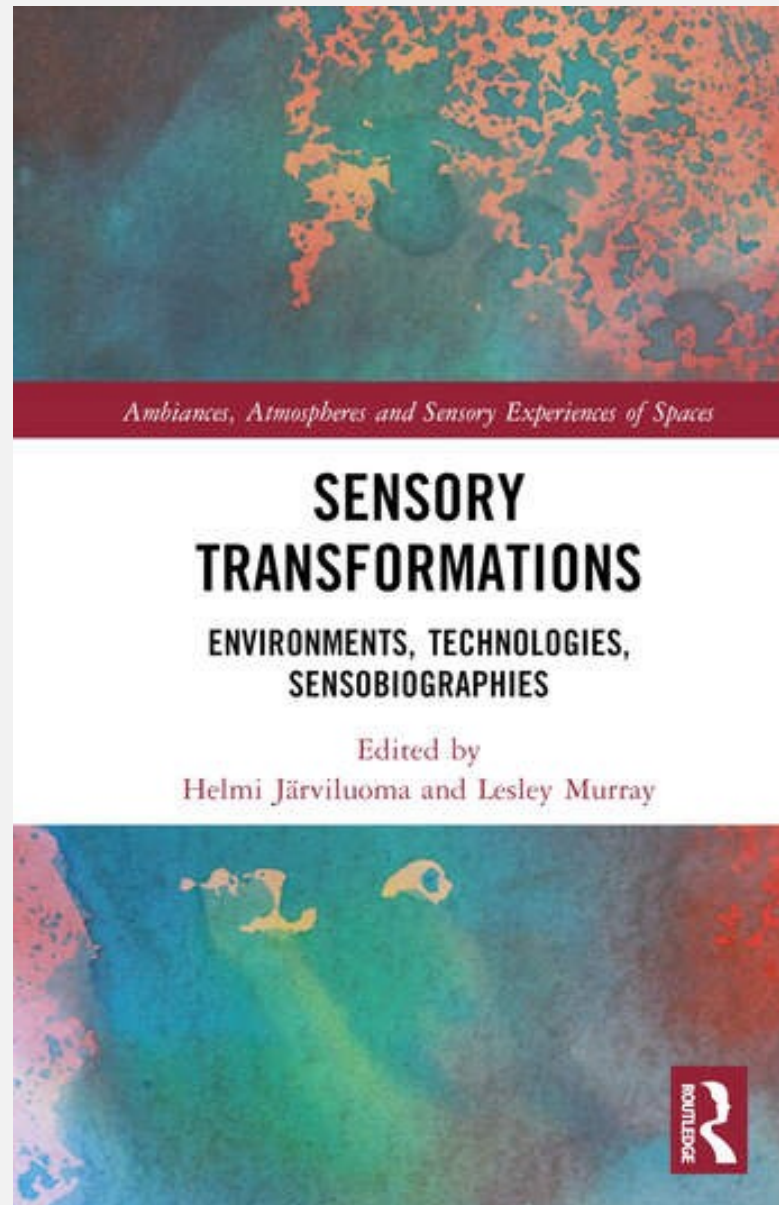
2016—2021 *Sensory Transformations and Transgenerational Environmental Relationships in Europe, 1950–2020* (SENSOTRA), ERC Advanced Grant project

Principal Investigator Helmi Järviluoma

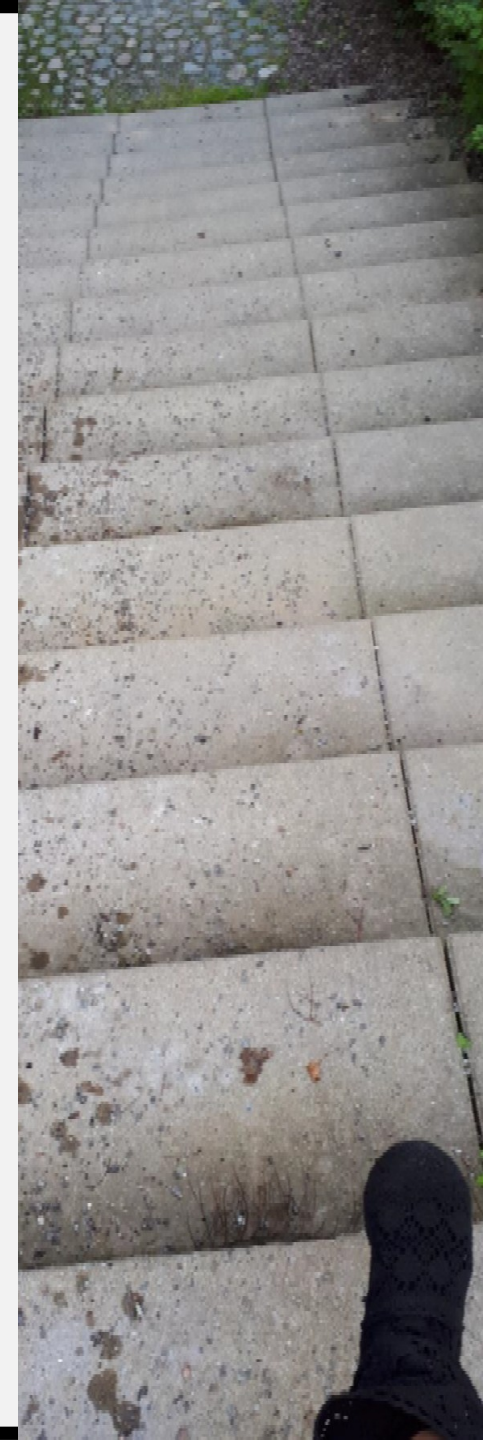
Latest publication: the book

SENSORY TRANSFORMATIONS
(Eds) Helmi Järviluoma and
Lesley Murray, London,
Routledge 2023

22.01.2025



- It was still possible to study people ethnographically who were born in the 1930s and 1940s and hence lived their early years without computers and other digital devices.
- the moment also ideally suited for studying the sensory environmental relationships of generations born in the 1990s and early 2000s, those who were born straight into the digital world in Europe



STRUCTURE OF THE LECTURE

- (1) Beginning – SENSOTRA project
- (2) Project participants
- (3) Methodology – Sensobiographic Walking in particular
- (4) Examples and selected results
- (5) Conclusion

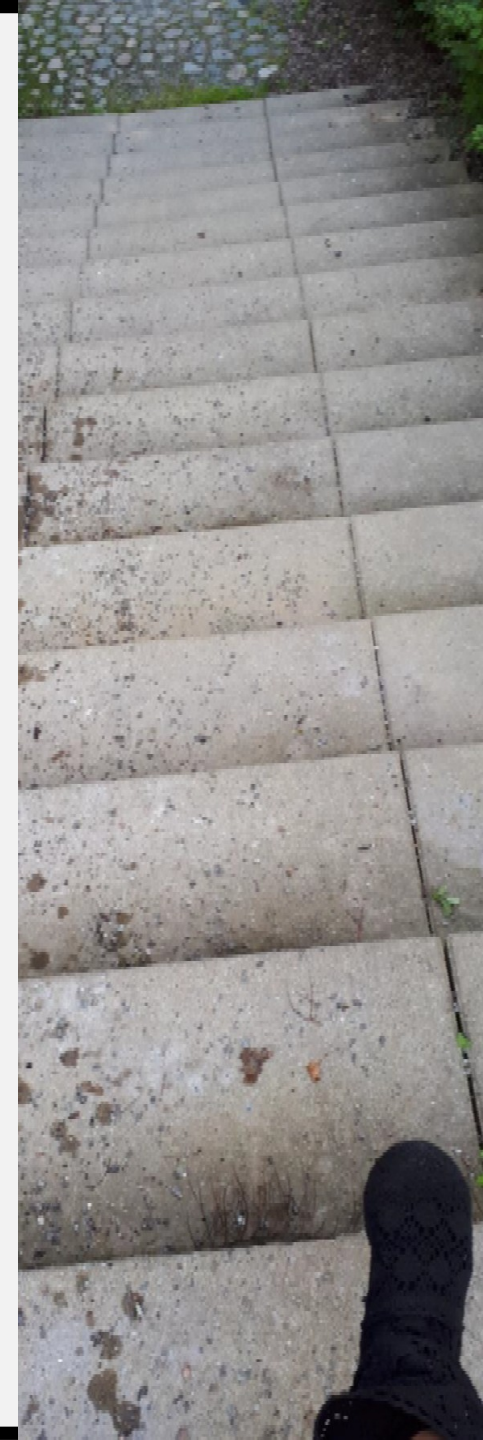


SENSOTRA GROUP PICTURES



SENSOTRA

- ***Members of the research group:*** PI Helmi Järviluoma; University of Eastern Finland (UEF)
- researchers Sandi Abram, Inkeri Aula, Blaž Bajič, Laura Formenti, Lesley Murray, Rajko Muršič, Eeva Pärjälä, Sonja Pöllänen, Milla Tiainen, Heikki Uimonen, Juhana Venäläinen, Henna Volotinen, Jari Ruotsalainen
- ***Discipline(s):*** Ethnomusicology, Cultural Anthropology, Sociology of the Arts, Geography, Psychology and Adult Education
- ***Main collaborators:*** University of Jyväskylä (Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology), University of Brighton (School of Applied Social Science), Milano Bicocca University (Department of Human Sciences for Education)





[HTTPS://
EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/
WIKI/
SENSOBIOGRAPHIC_
WALKING](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sensobiographic_walking)

Sensobiographic walking is an ethnographic research method

It provides a possibility for the study of rich, embodied and site-specific emergence of sensory remembering and experiences.



SENSO BIOGRAPHIC WALKING AS TALKING SENSORY LIFE INTO BEING WHILE MOVING

SENSOTRA developed a distinctive methodology: sensobiographic walking in order to learn how social and personal sensory remembering were intermingled dynamically in motion

Sensobiography: mobile life writing, talking sensory life into being while moving, and then the researcher writing about the biographical fractions captured by microphone and video devices.

Järviluoma, Helmi (2022) Sensobiographic Walking and Ethnographic Approach of the Finnish School of Soundscape Studies. In Stahl, Geoff & Mark Percival eds. *The Bloomsbury Handbook on Popular Music, Space and Place*.



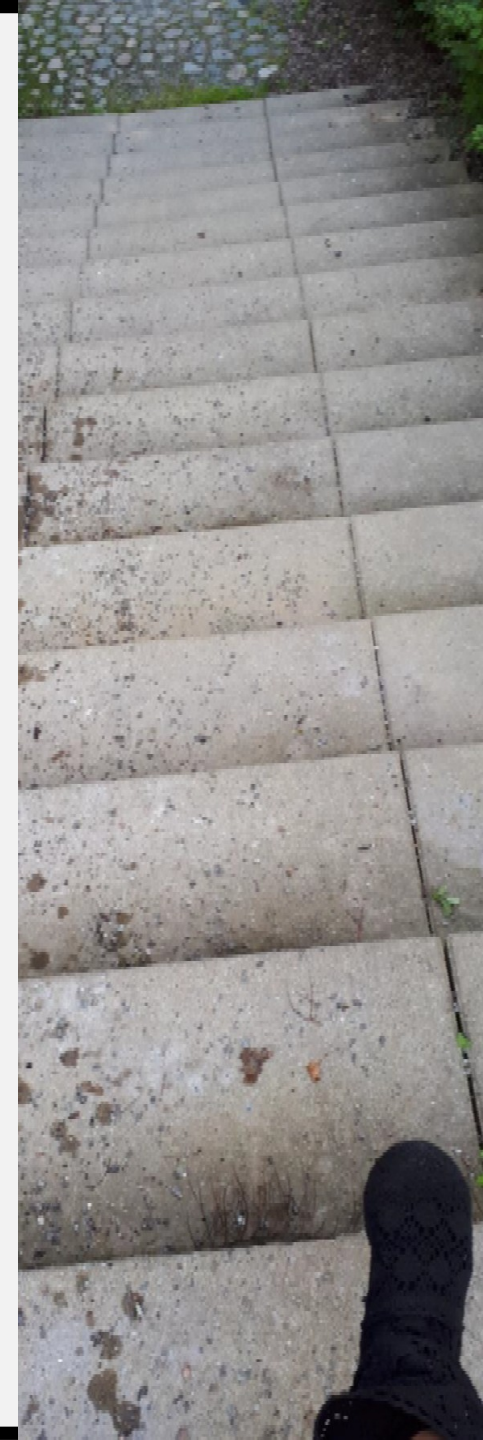
THE BLOOMSBURY HANDBOOK OF
POPULAR MUSIC, SPACE AND PLACE

EDITED BY
GEOFF STAHL & J MARK PERCIVAL

BLOOMSBURY

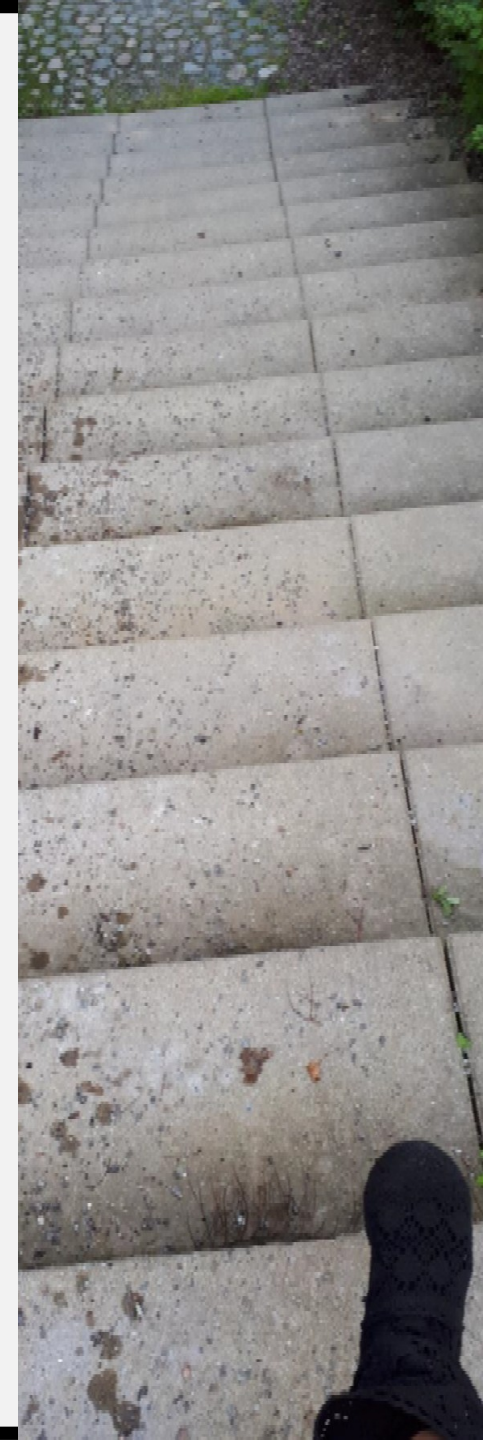
SENSORY TRANSFORMATIONS (SENSOTRA)

- sensobiographic walking – is a kind of culmination in a long row of attempts to chase the ever-escaping phenomena related to sensory remembering, together with my colleagues
- the method has a long history, but this particular format was developed for *Sensory Transformations in Europe between 1950–2020* (SENSOTRA)
- engaging participant pairs composed of different generations
 - Three mid-sized European cities: Turku, Brighton, Ljubljana
 - About 180 walkers altogether (from 26-32 transgenerational pairs in each city)
 - Approximately half of them artists



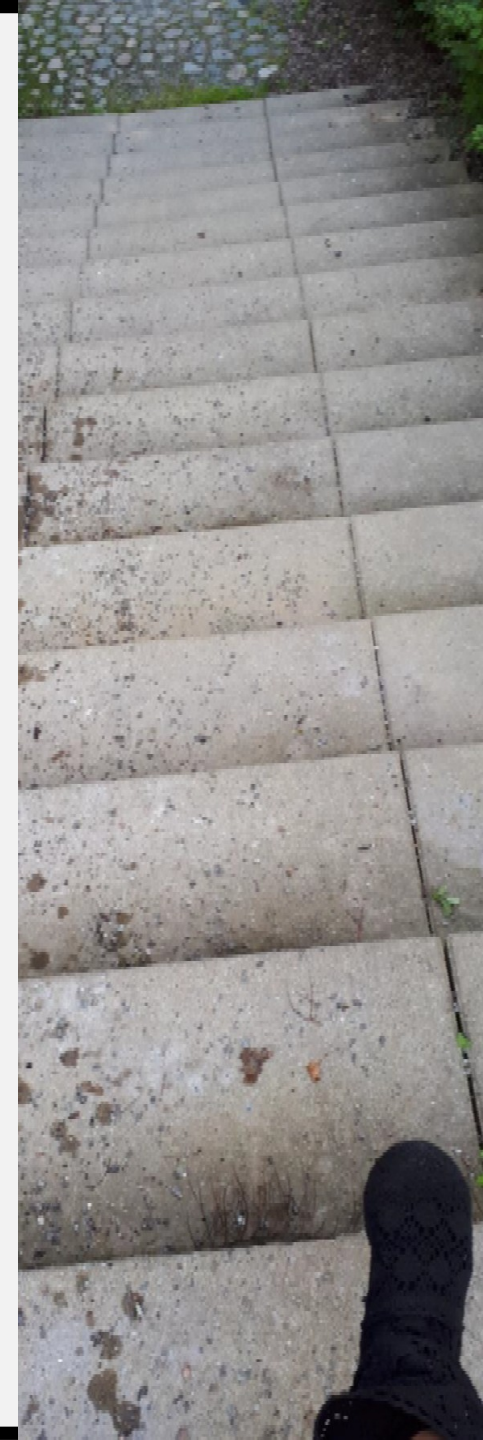
MOULDING SOUNDSCAPES STUDIES TOWARDS ETHNOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS

- recent keen interest towards the walking methodology (Grosz 1998; Collie 2003; Kusenbach 2003; Wylie 2005 Büscher et al. 2010; Fincham et al. 2010; Lee and Ingold 2006; Lund 2006; Pink et al. 2010) , New Walking Studies
- BUT in the 1970s the representatives of soundscape studies were ahead of their time with their mobile, dynamic methods of studying environment (Westerkamp 1974; Schafer 1977; see also Järviluoma 2000; Järviluoma & Vikman 2013; McCartney 2014)
- In its experimental methodologies when studying Five Village Soundscapes (FVS) in Europe in 1975, World Soundscape Project (WSP) researchers combined arts and sciences.



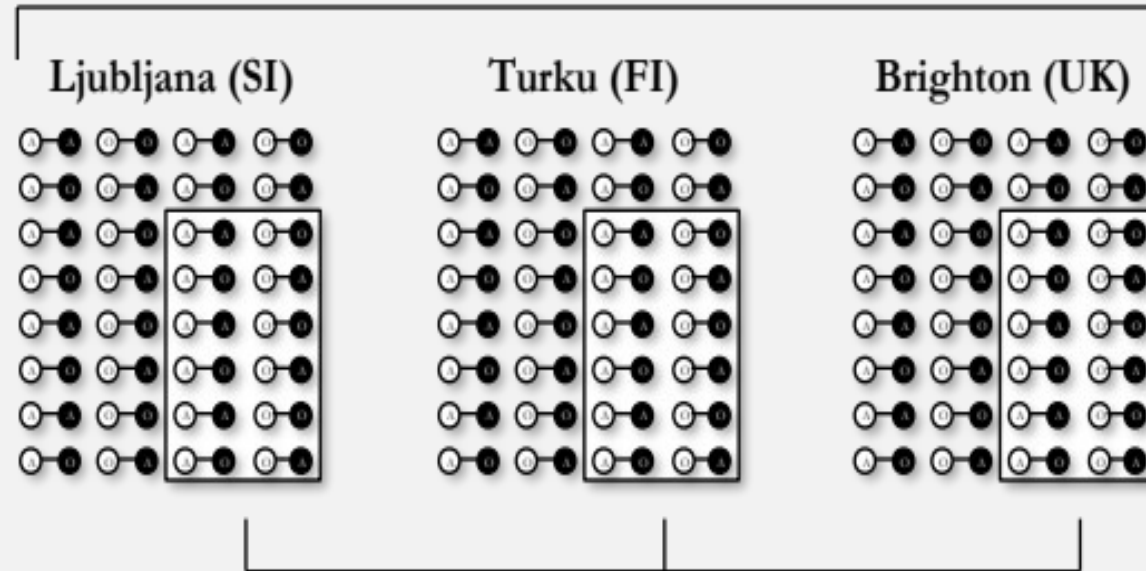
METHOD IN PRACTICE?

- (1) To start with, you have to ask a person or a group of persons to select a path significant to them in the past.
- (2) The person/s are invited to tell about the sounds, smells and other sensuous memories they have from that path – in the case of SENSOTRA, we are interested especially in memories from childhood and youth.
- (3) After the selection, you as a researcher walk this path with the person or group studied. In SENSOTRA, the walking is transgenerational (see Murray & Järviluoma 2019; Tiainen, Aula & Järviluoma forthcoming 2019).



THE THREE SITES: BRIGHTON (UK), LJUBLJANA (SI), TURKU (FI) AND THE PARTICIPANT CROSS-MIX

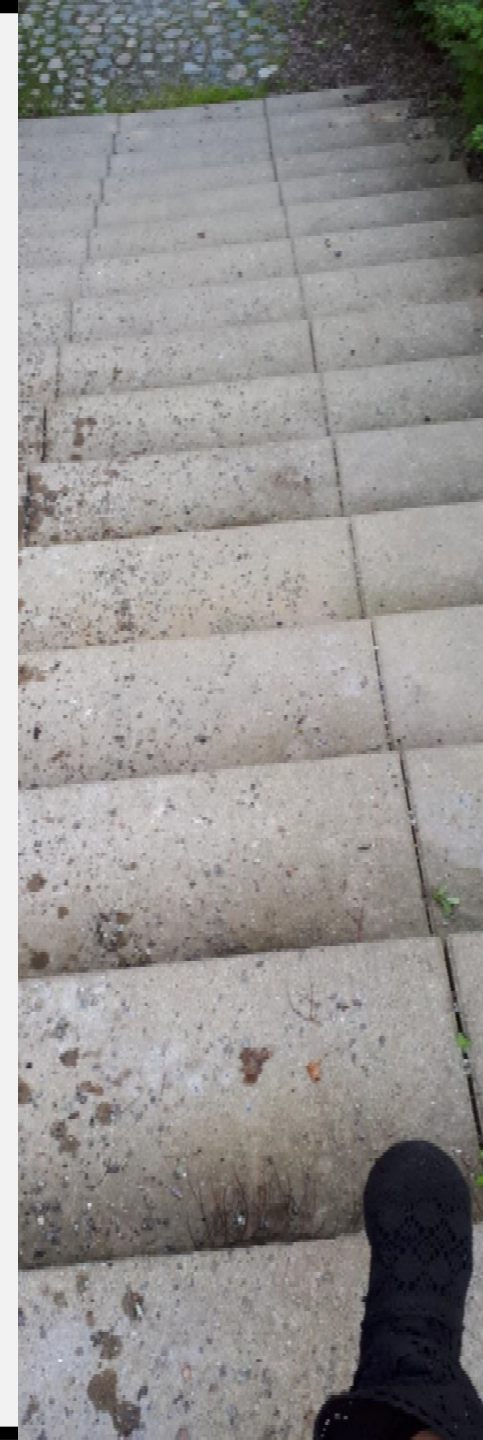
3 × 32 sensobiographic walks



3 × 12 dialogic
deep interviews

192
= informants in
three sites

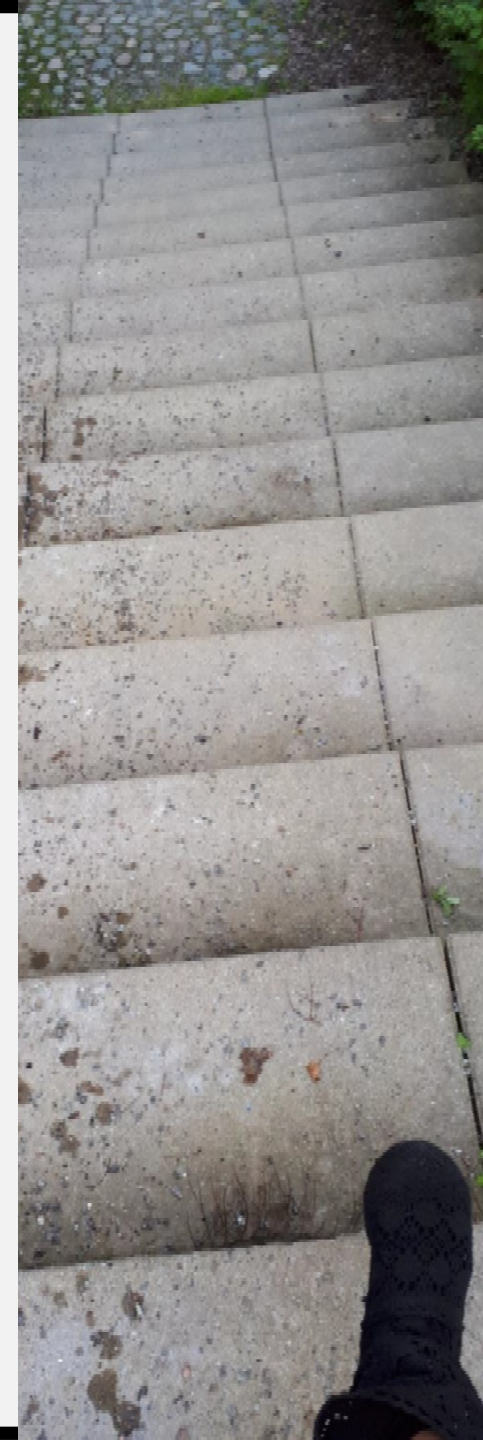
+ auxiliary materials
(diaries, memoirs,
letters, artworks, etc.)



METHODOLOGY, RESOURCES

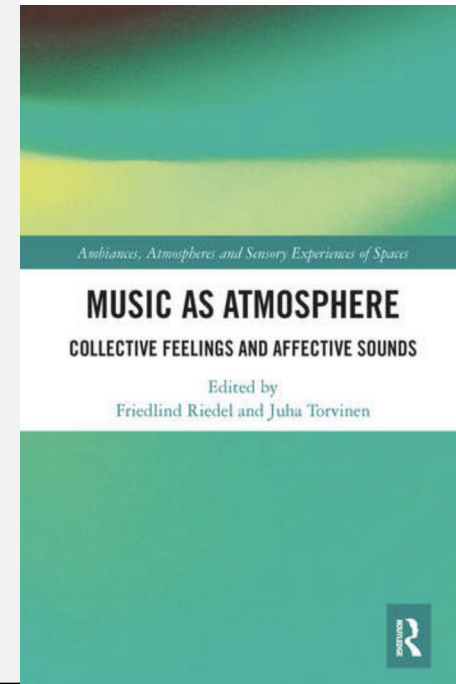
Table 2. Resources, research strands, and impacts

Data collection	Sample	Strands	Fields of impact
Transgenerational sensobiographic walks with short interviews	3 x 32 pairs (n = 192)	2, 1, 3	Sensory memory studies Human geography Narrative psychology Medium-sized cities' sustainability
Deep interviews	3 x 12 pairs (n = 72)	1, 2, 3	All above
Art works, texts, diaries, architectural sources, Internet including social media	Carefully selected cases based on the deep interviews	1, 2, 3	Humanities, especially art studies, and all above
Observation		1, 2, 3	All above



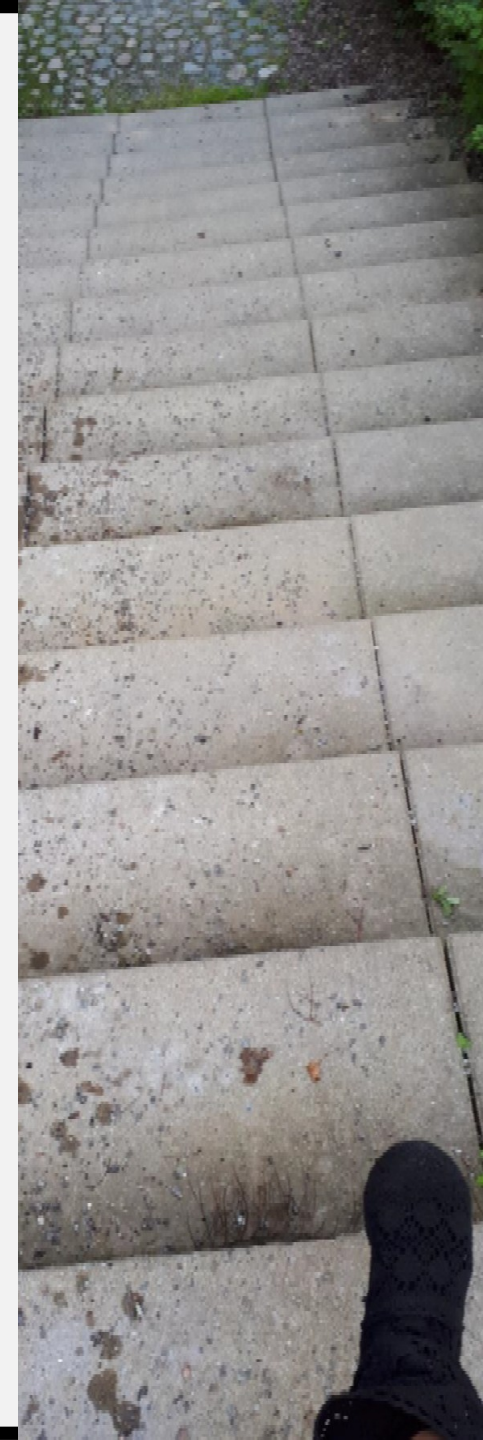
MULTISENSORY ENVIRONMENTAL PHENOMENA BECOME MEANINGFUL IN RELATIONS

- The 'older walker' and the 'younger' walker, the 'environment' and 'the researcher' are not complete, clearly defined entities who settle only secondarily into mutual interaction



BIOGRAPHY IN SENSOBIOGRAPHY?

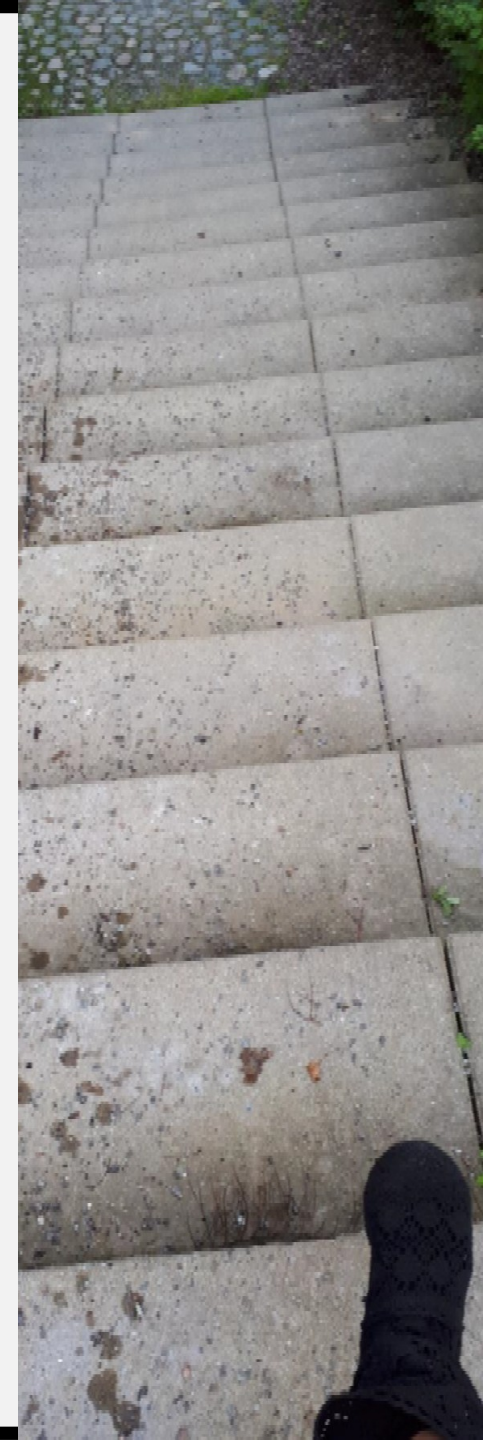
- so-called biographic turn of the early 2000s
- locality and specificity of the lives of subjects studied given new emphasis, along with careful analysis of situations, processes and practices at the microlevel (Leskelä-Kärki 2012, 29)
- Feminist researchers: call for a qualitative reshaping of auto/biographical research already more than 30 years ago / coherent narrative abandoned / focus was on moving towards processes through which it is possible to interpret past lives (and their representations) from the present perspective (Liz Stanley, for instance 1992, 2001)



DESJARLAI & SEREMETAKIS – SENSORY BIOGRAPHIES

- One work especially worth mentioning in the history of terminology:
- Robert Desjarlai: *Sensory Biographies – Lives and Deaths Among Nepal’s Yolmo Buddhists*. (University of California Press 2003), quoting Seremetakis (1994, 129, who uses the term sensory biography)

”play of senses in specific social settings. To wit, (--) sensate engagements have both personal and cultural strands to them. Sensory perceptions are profoundly patterned by technologies, social histories, and cultural sensibilities that contribute to people’s lives. At the same time individuals perceive the world in different ways. They live out different sensory biographies.”
(Desjarlai 242)



IDEA OF RELATIONALITY

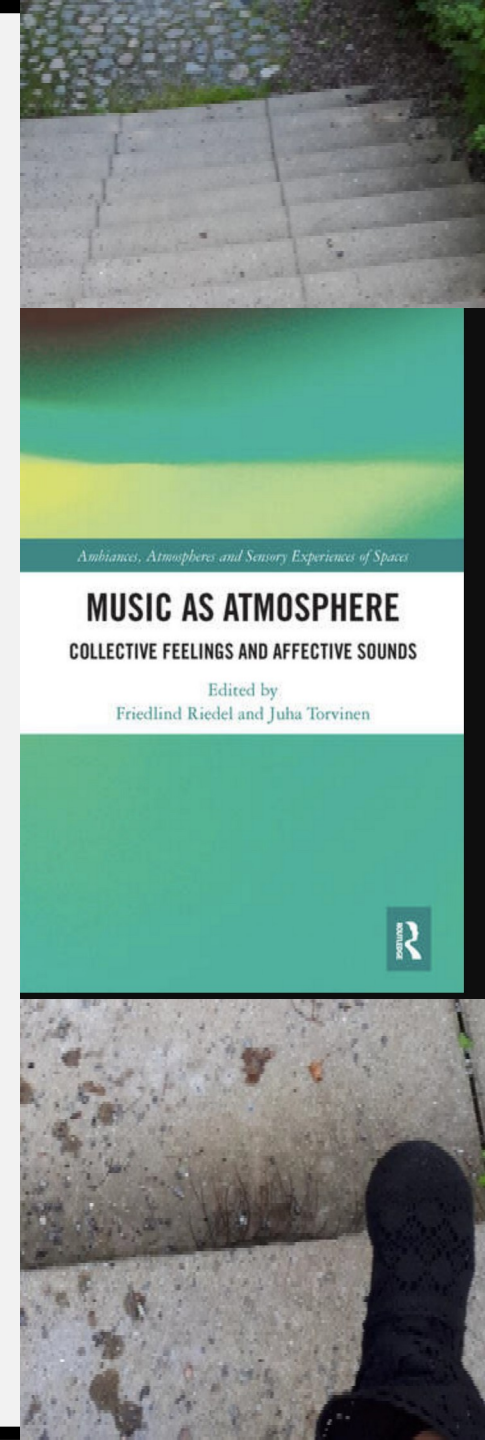
A key concept gaining momentum in qualitative methodology has been Karen Barad's intra-action.

For her (2003), matter and meaning do not pre-exist as individual entities, rather, the world is composed of intra-acting phenomena which are ontologically inseparable, meaning that they become determinate, material, and meaningful through relations (p. 815)

See also Possing's concept 'relational biography'.

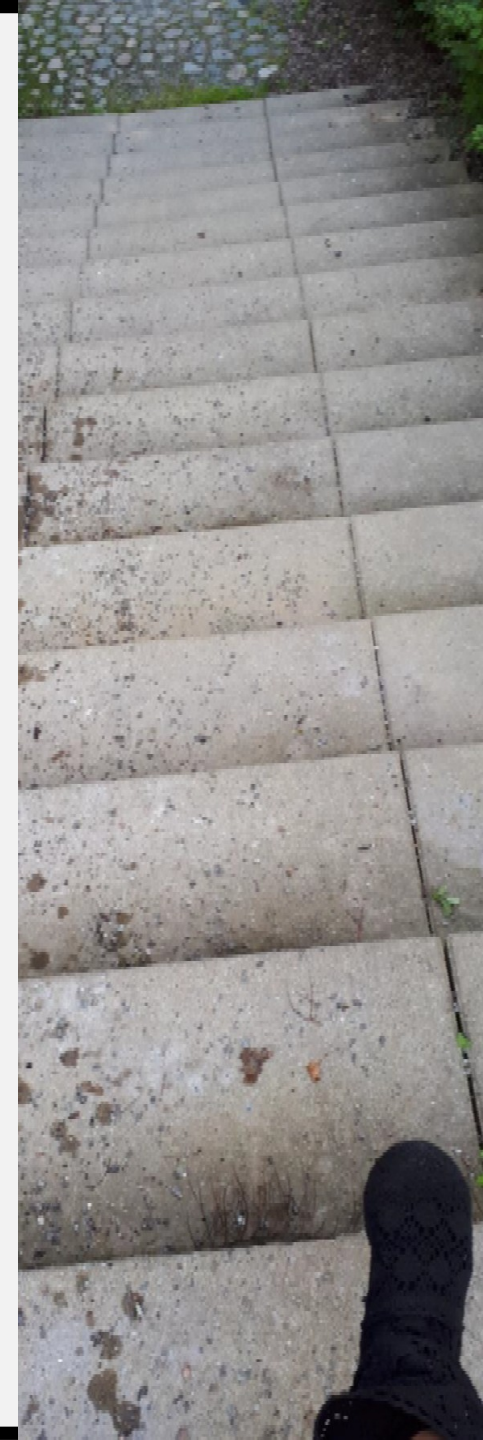
ATMOSPHERIC RELATIONS

- Atmosphere as “sensory incarnation of genius loci” (Thibaud 2004, 147)
- Music researcher Friedlind Riedel has urged us to think in terms of atmospheric relations, directing attention
- “to the ways in which a rhythm or sound translates itself into the environment, and in doing so, modulates a situation in its entirety and pulls all bodies within reach into a relationship” (2020, p. 29).
- In “Music as Atmosphere”, eds. Riedel & Torvinen (2020)



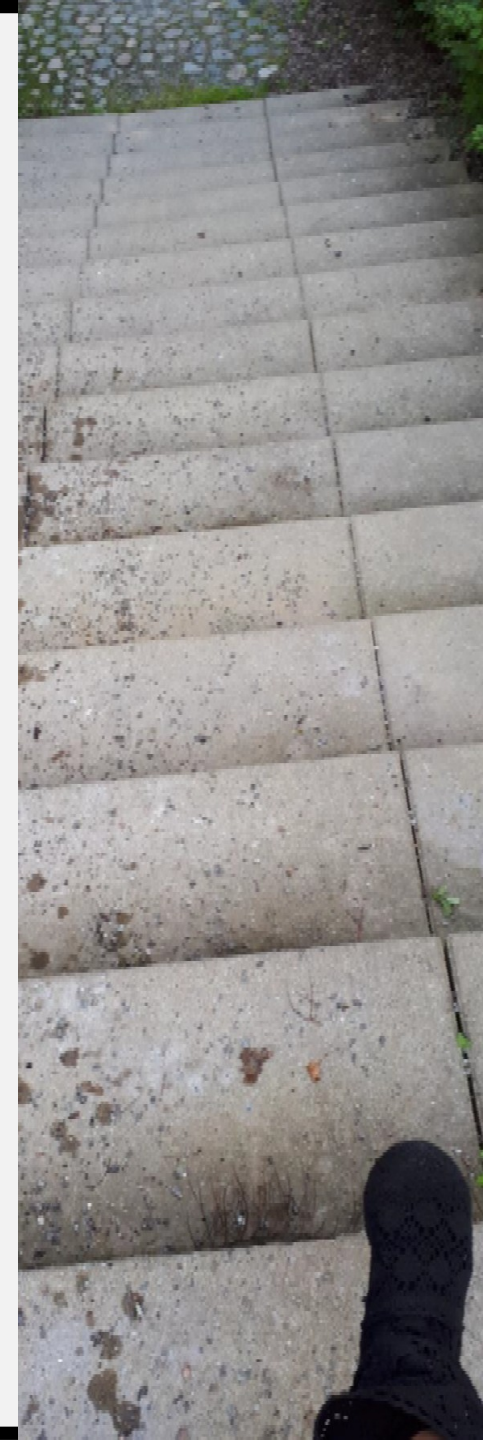
Our method provides a template for the unfolding of experience in a shared situation

“We focus on transgenerational environmental relationships and the potentially significant shifts therein: both temporally, between generations, and when people of different age groups become acquainted with each other’s experiences” (Tiainen, Aula & Järviluoma 2019)



WALKING-WITH AS MOVEMENT OF THOUGHT

- Sometimes sensobiography goes beyond knowing to transforming involving collective “thinking in the presence of others” (Stengers 2005, 996)
- “Walking-with becomes a movement of thought not only with others, but a process of engaging with erased or disavowed histories.” (Clough & Calderado, *ibid*; see also Bates and Rhys-Taylor 2017; O’Neill and others 2015.)



4. EXAMPLES AND SELECTED RESULTS

- Extract 1. Walkers “Tuija”, born in 1953 and “Linnea”, born in 1989

Turku-Pair3-SBW-Aging-Audio

Tuija: Yeah. There’s always this particular scent here.

HJ: Is this the same as back then?

Tuija: Well I mean books do have that scent, I’ve always, liked books terribly, so to me bookshelves and such where you can browse, I think these are just so.

HJ: Could you describe it somehow?

Tuija: Wood scent.

HJ: I wonder what components are in it? You don’t have to, but.

Tuija: Yes, well.

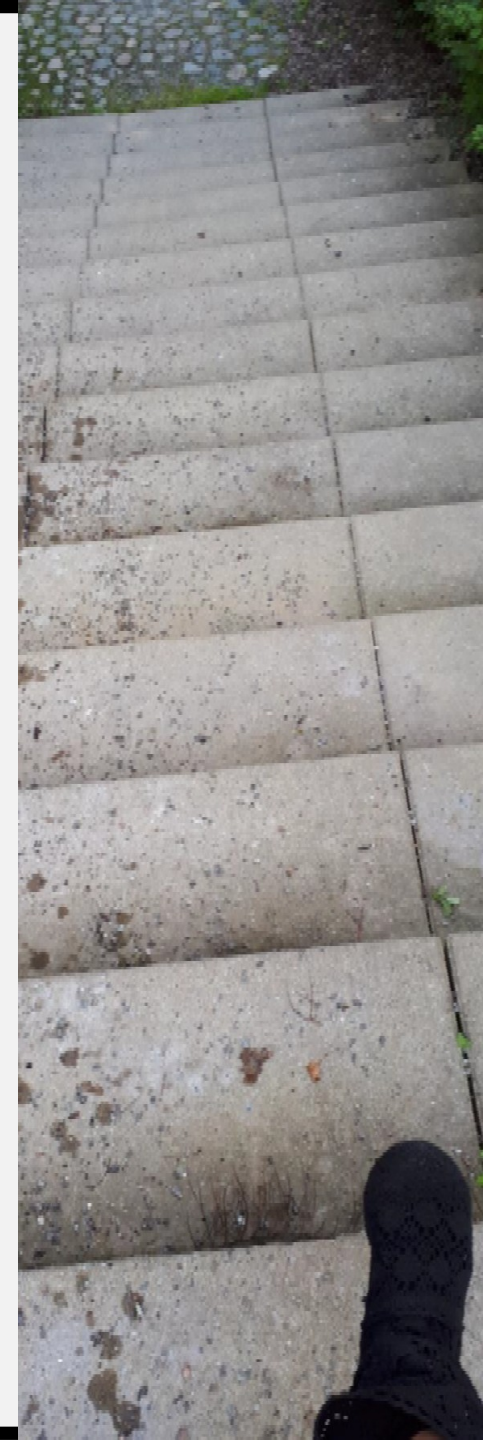
HJ: It kind of reminds me of dust.

Linnea: Yeah.

Tuija: Dust, well.

HJ: Book dust.

- Picture: Turku main library from outside, 1955,
- Fotographer Reuna Rusko



"TUIJA" CONTINUED

Tuija: Well I don't know if I'm thinking of dust, because I think it, I think it's like interesting the book and the paper.

JV: Could it be paper, as it ages?

Tuija: Yes it's paper all right.

HJ: Hey, paper getting older.

Tuija: Yes.

HJ: Yeah I don't know either, what it is but.

Tuija: - yeah because a lot of people like say that books are dusty but, I think books are like in my opinion so interesting that, I don't think of something that negative, -

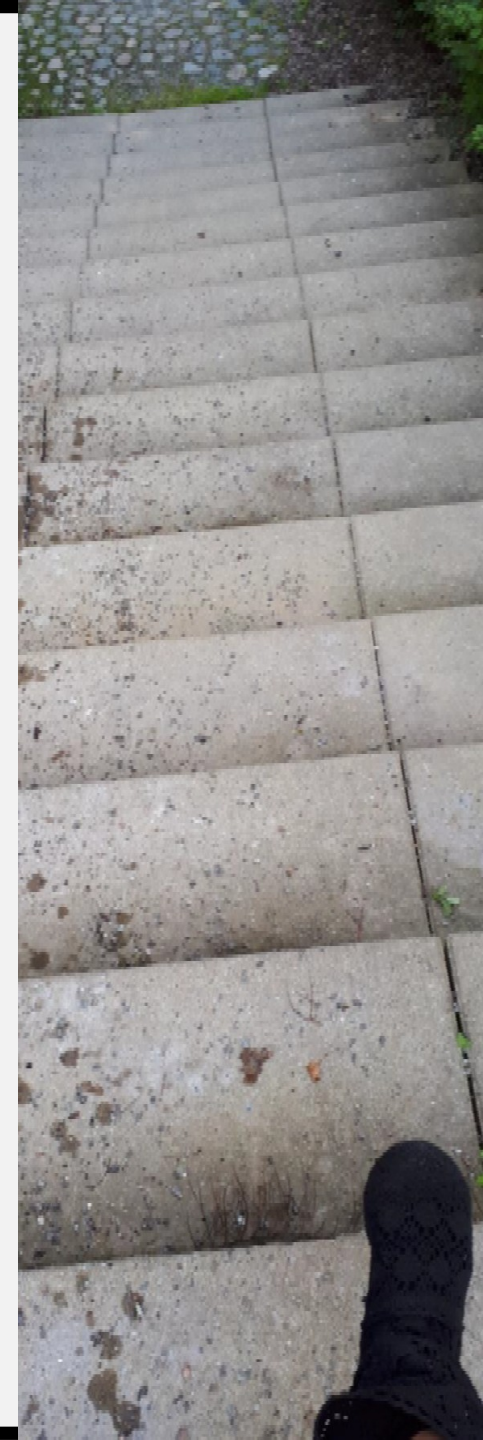
HJ: Good.

Tuija: - like dust.

HJ: Good.

Tuija: Yes.

HJ: Well, well put, I do adore it too, and I recognise it.



SENSOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

- this discussion inside the old library house at the stairs an example *par excellence* about sensory remembering as a joint venture
- we form a **temporary community of meaning**



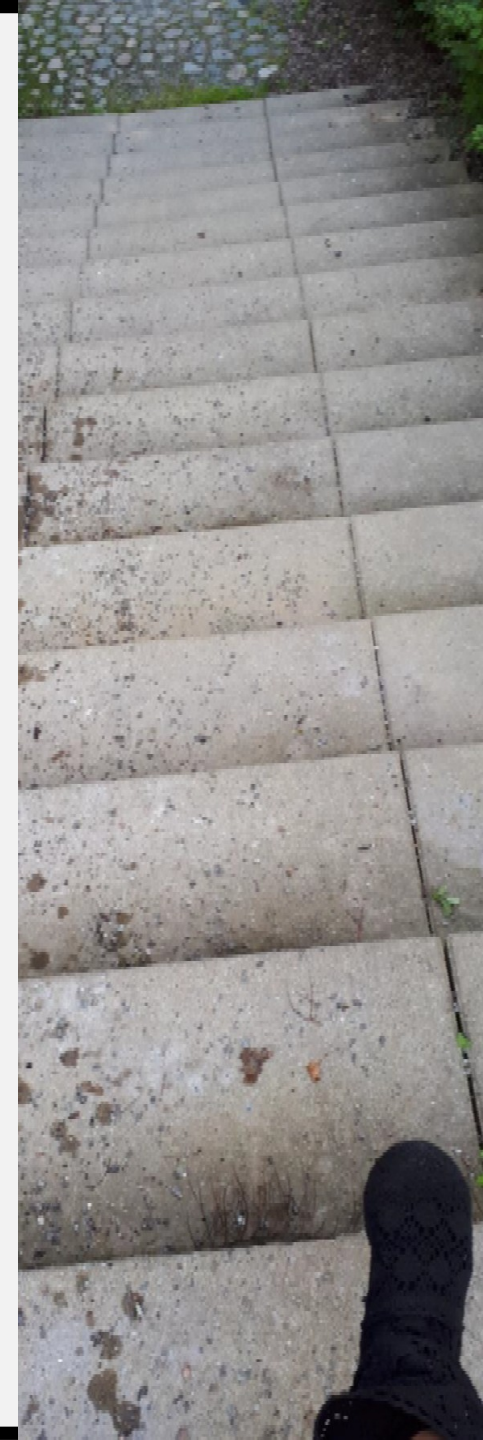
”But if sensory perceptions are intimately bound up with language, they often also escape it, as feelings and sensations can be at times difficult to put into words: the taste of a liquer, the pleasure of a caress, an odor or a painful sensation, for example, can often only be described using metaphors and comparisons, demanding an effort of the imagination and the creative use of language that fails to translate the subtleties of experience. Around the core of every felt sensation is a surrounding residue that cannot be reduced to language. (--)” (Le Breton 2017, 13; italics HJ)

See also Laplantine (2015/2005) about the experience of fieldwork as an experience of sharing the sensible



DATA ENTANGLED IN UNFOLDING RELATIONSHIPS

- We all participate in the negotiation and definition of the smell, the smell actually is right there at the corridor, present with the old wooden stairs that used to squeek
- features of book smells are unfolded
- embodied remembering strong for Tuija, but the bodies and minds of all of us five are relating to our own embodied memories, and trying to tune into Tuija's experience
- Linnea accompanies, at first, my blunt notion of the smell as 'dust' – notice how gracefully Tuija denies it, firmly but not unpolitely
- Juhana finds the word that describes the smell, and it is also acceptable for Tuija: smell of old paper
- The ways in which Tuija smells books, inform her engagement with the world, and senses are here entangled in values (cf. Howes 2019, 22)



Sensotra Tour – voice acted online demonstration pages of the project

- <https://www.thinglink.com/scene/1364831714358067201>



SADIE, OLDER WALKER, BRIGHTON

- Researcher: Is the feeling of the, the building similar to when you went there, or
- Sadie: Oh yes, because of –
- Researcher: -has it changed –
- Sadie: -all the students, yes, it still has the same feel. And thinking of the senses... what I specialised in was printmaking, lithography, and for that we used a printing ink that's made with linseed oil. And the oil has a strong smell, and so... I really liked the smell of the ink. And nowadays I make my prints on a computer and there is no smell, so... [laughs] So I miss that –
- Researcher: Do you miss that smell?
- Sadie: I missed it so much I actually went to work in a place called North Star Printers, where they had an old-fashioned litho press, just for the sake of the smell of the ink. But it was such hard work that I decided I was better off with the computer...
- Researcher: Okay, yeah.



Image: Dorothy Coke,

'The Demolition of the old College of Art, Brighton', 1963-6, pencil, biro and watercolour. From the Aldrich Collection.



"NIKA, LJUBLJANA BASED SEMI-PROFESSIONAL MUSICIAN "YOUNG" PARTICIPANT OF WALK

Nika: *You're lying on a couch for the hour to strike, I don't know, ten in the evening. So that you can go out into // out to // those 28 degrees, right.*

(--) *But yes, to me this idea of mingling outdoors, out there, with a cold beer and, by chance, some slightly remote music, just enough for// you // to hear it, but still be able to talk. that's perfect for me.*

From this perspective I'm really fond of Trnovo, as it has all of these // // three components, let's say. You can be (P) outdoors // somewhere in/ Yes, yes. // The fact that you have Gradaščica [river] next to you means SO much, you know. This water.

Researcher Bajic: Mhm [affirmative] To recap/ To recap, it's: fresh air, wind. / (- -)

Of course the willow trees there (P), with just a little bit of music from these bars. Just a little, but you can still hear it, // // while you're talking, right.



”NATURE INTERTWINED WITH THE WIRED LIFE?”

- How digital media technologies affect especially young, city-dwelling people’s everyday sensory relations with their more-than-human environments?
- Inkeri Aula’s article ‘Urban nature and digital media technologies entangled’
- Digital entangled in complex ways in young people’s lived environmental relationships
- She analyses SENSOTRA data from perspective of sensory attunement with affective atmospheres

- Headphones

- Route choices



- BOTH methods used in attuning to desired affective atmospheric qualities of the environments

Smartphones being an element of being-in-space, as music device, camera, recorder, social media channel, torch

Technological affordances do not determine the experience – camera, tree, and selfie posing are mutually constituted

EVEN SMALL natural stretches in the city, parks, wooded areas, watersides with diverse greenery offer deeply beneficial experiences to the young, both with and without gadgets.



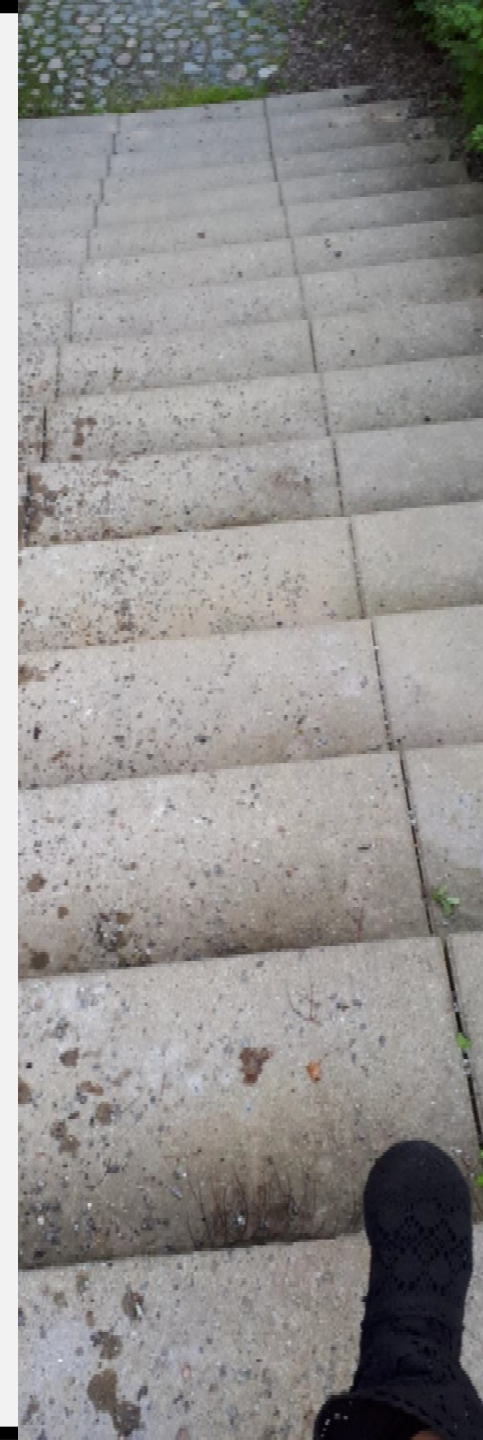
CONCLUSIONS

It is suggested that the sensobiographic walkers coming from different generations are constantly, in multi-sensory ways, dynamically perceiving, interpreting, remembering and producing their lived environment.

Urban sensescapes are not taken as static or mechanical collections of features of the environment.



- We have queried and pondered upon how multisensory processes usually unfold are moulded through interaction and become meaningful in a constitutive relationship with material, discursive and social factors during walks and subsequent interview
- The sensory atmospheres and their remembering become relations as we all participated in the unfolding of negotiations and definitions of smells, creaks, and sounds that percolated through the transgenerational togetherness at the same time remembered, real, and unreal, imagined – importantly, but not only through words – also with our whole bodies, moving, smelling, stamping, listening, watching, touching and tasting



The research not only offers sustenance to analysts of sensory transformations but may hopefully also possess a transformative power of its own.

Järviluoma, Helmi & Lesley Murray
(Eds)

- *Sensory Transformations. Environments, Technologies, Sensobiographies* (2023, London, Routledge)

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!



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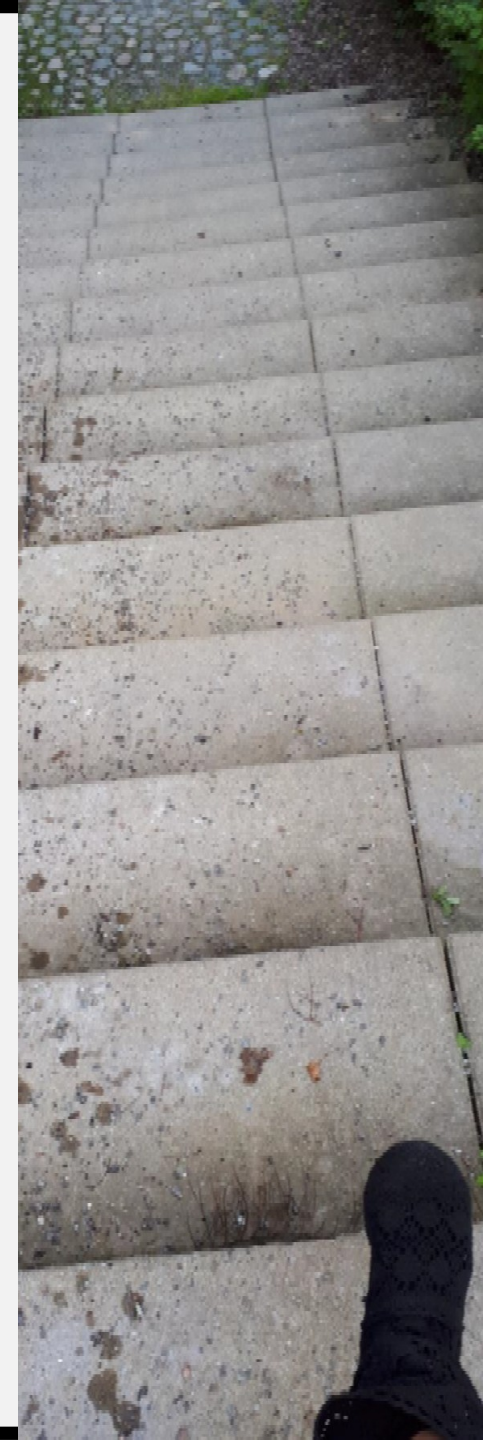
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For us:

Transgenerational refers to the passing across or between different generations – more often used to refer to the biological transfer of characteristics from parents to children but is also associated with the communication of ‘traditions, beliefs and behaviours’ from one generation to another (Lieberman 1979).

Here our transgenerational methodology is premised on the **mobilisation of the term so that it refers to the production of knowledge between generations through shared experience and shared remembering**. As Hallam and Ingold (2007, 7) have argued, “following a tradition...is a matter not of replicating a fixed pattern of behaviour, but of carrying on from predecessors.”