Characterizing urban areas with good sound quality: how people living in areas with varying levels of transportation noise describe their sound environment.

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ABSTRACT

The association between noise and health has seldom been placed in a broader context of acoustical and environmental quality. The focus of the few studies into this topic has primarily been on the health benefits of natural recreational areas outside the urban environment and its restorative potential. The role of pleasant sound environments in this process has been understudied, and evidence of the beneficial health effects of areas with high sound quality is still lacking, as is the mechanism by which restoration might occur. Studies into the effects of environmental noise in their term seldom incorporated perceived soundscapes and are typically focused on negative effects only, such as annoyance. In order to understand the effect that different environments have on people it is important to know how people experience and describe their sound environment.

This paper describes the first results of a study, which was aimed at investigating people's perceptions of the sound quality of their immediate living environment in urban areas, and to study individual differences in perception between groups with varying self-reported mental and/or physical health. The first results from a questionnaire survey applied among 3,972 participants (aged 18 years and older) living in 31 neighborhoods in three Dutch cities supplemented with neighborhood characteristics from a systematic audit and national databases will be presented.