

DIFFICULTIES IN FIELDWORK

The Weather

The Wind

At times, the sound of the wind was a real problem for us as we recorded. Sometimes we did not actually realise that the wind had affected the quality of our sounds until we listened back sometime later on computer. We also found that a windshield was one item of equipment which was easy to forget. On at least two recording trips we resorted to using a hat or scarf to act as a replacement windshield.

The Rain

Recording in the rain was often problematic because it involved the use of an umbrella, and the sound of the rain on the umbrella often held precedence over any other sounds which were being heard at the same time. It was also often difficult to keep the equipment dry during recording. However, we were very lucky when conducting joint and group fieldwork because on each occasion we had dry conditions. Only during individual fieldwork was the weather sometimes a problem.

Bird Excrement on Microphone Cable

While we were recording Vladimir, a street musician in Breite Straße, a bird's mess fell from the sky onto the microphone cable, which held us up for a while as we cleaned the mess.

Cold Weather Affecting Battery Performance

This happened in the Weihnachtsmarkt, and we eventually had to abandon making 4CH recordings because the batteries keep going dead, even when we put new ones in the recorder.

With People

Language Difficulties

Trying to speak to street musicians presented some difficulties. Often they spoke little German or English. As they were often from Eastern Europe, speaking languages such as Romany, Slovakian, and Latvian, it was hard to understand what they were saying and we could only get minimal information from them.

Recording at the Main Train Station

Ignorant of the questions which might arise in the minds of staff at the central train station after we had been standing on the platform for around fifteen minutes making video and audio recordings of the trains, we were surprised when two members of staff approached us to ask us what we were doing there. The police had already been called and were pacing the station, presumably concerned that the two women standing and documenting activities on the platform may be allied to a terrorist agency and plotting an assault. This was only days after a threat had been announced in the nearby city of Hamburg, and at the time much of Germany was alerted to a potential attack. Barbara treated the situation with great charisma, and although we had forgotten to bring permission forms or any form of identification, she explained our project to the surprised staff and convinced them that our motives were innocent! However, we were

told that it was in fact illegal to make video recordings at the train station unless we had permission from the manager. While Barbara Alge attempted to contact him in his office in Berlin to ask for permission to use the recordings, she was unable to get through to him. Because of this, you will find that we have only included sound recordings from the train station as we were unable to gain permission to use the video recordings for the project.

Negative Reactions from the Public

As you can see above, we sometimes came across negative reactions from people around us - although in general people did not show any objections to being recorded. On a few occasions we were treated with suspicion, and a couple of times we were told that by someone that they did not want to be in a recording. The first experience of this was on the first joint soundwalk in the Stadthafen on 11th November 2010. As we walked along the Stadthafen we came across a flag producing an interesting flapping sound as it was being blown in the wind. After we had made an audio recording of the sound and taken a photograph, Barbara decided to make a short video recording. In the recording there was a company car, which happened to be parked on the road beside us. A man jumped out of the car while Barbara was recording, and shouted at us to delete the footage and not use it in any way. He insisted that we stop recording and promise not to use the footage. We found this very confusing at first as we could not understand why he had taken such objection to our video recording. A few weeks later we came to the conclusion that the man could have been taking time off work - perhaps a break he wasn't entitled to - and was worried that the footage would somehow find its way back to his employer!

On another occasion, when we were recording in the Christmas Market, we came across (for the first time - although we had been keeping an eye out for him for a few weeks) the well-known Rostock accordionist, a street musician who has been busking in Rostock for many years (his name, 'Rostocker Original'. We were excited to have finally caught up with him, but when we asked him if we could record his music (and him), he took objection. He told us that he didn't want us to record him at all, and he then went so far as to say that he did not want us to even listen to his music! this was quite confusing and also disappointing. However, we did record the general sounds of the Weihnachtsmarkt, and it is possible to hear a vague impression of the recording through the foreground sounds of shoppers and stalls.

Refusing Permission to Record

On one occasion on our first joint field trip on 11th November, Barbara and I went to a restaurant in the Stadthafen to drink some coffee. The ambience in the restaurant included the sounds made by the waitress as she brought drinks to the table, and the sound of music coming through the speakers near the table. We were keen to make an audio recording of the ambience as we sat there. We asked the waitress whether they were happy for us to do this. She told us that she would ask the manager and walked away to find him. A few minutes later she returned. She said that he wanted to know why we wanted to make a recording. We explained that it was for a 'Soundscapes of Rostock' project at HMT which we were carrying out, and that an exhibition and website would be launched to display the city's identity through sound. She went away again, and when she returned she said that her manager had not time to think about this at the moment, and that we could not make the recording. It seemed that people felt threatened by our presence and the idea of making recordings. Perhaps this was construed as an invasion of privacy.

Also more curious/positive responses.

While we did experience a few negative reactions to our recording activities, most people either ignored us or joked with us about what we were doing. One man who walked past us in the Stadthafen jokingly told us that he thought our external microphone was a rabbit. Other people shouted amused comments as they cycled past. In the city centre, there were a couple of occasions when people started interfering with our recordings. In Kröpeliner Straße, during our first joint fieldwork on the 11th November, Barbara and I started talking to Juris, a Latvian accordionist and trumpeter. We started recording, and as I held the Zoom recorder out, directed down the street, a group of young people shouted very loudly into the machine, 'eins, zwei, drei!'. A couple of minutes later a man in his forties walked past and tapped the microphones quite hard. People were certainly not shy of recording equipment in the centre. At first I was annoyed, but then realised that these sounds were exactly what helped to give a place its sound identity. This was very different to reactions in the Stadthafen, where people kept more of a distance. On the first recording we made (of creaking pontoons) at the start of our walk, a family group were about to walk past us when they saw Barbara holding the audio recorder. They hesitated, as if they were about to walk into the path of a photograph, until we indicated that it was fine for them to pass.

Equipment Difficulties

Forgetting to Change The Microphone Input Level

It was important to change the microphone levels according to the place and level of noise, but it was easy to forget to increase the level in less noisy environments. During team fieldwork we turned the levels right down, to such an extent that the following sound not recorded properly.

Right Place, Wrong Equipment

Sometimes we heard great sounds, but did not have the right equipment to hand. For example Barbara captured the sounds of a military band playing outside the church near her flat, but as she was not prepared at the time she only had a voice recorder to hand, and the sound quality was quite poorer. I recorded sounds on a number of occasions where I had no camera or video camera, so only captured the sounds. This was not as useful as having all three media together.

Long switch-on Time for the Flash Recorder

This presented difficulties and meant that we sometimes missed out on recording sounds because we were simply too late for them. The switch-on time for the flash recorder was ten seconds. This was long enough for us to miss a number of opportunities to record sounds as they appeared. For example, on one occasion during team fieldwork some football fans started to pass through the street singing loudly. The flash recorder took so long to turn on that we only caught a small part of this event, thus missing a valuable opportunity to capture a unique Rostock sound.

Other Difficulties

Mobile Telephones - forgetting to switch off

On the first recording which Barbara and I made, we forgot about the possibility of sound coming from mobile phones. During that first recording a sound of SMS being received could be heard.

Difficulties Foreseeing (or hearing) Sounds

This was especially the case when trying to record church bells. On a number of occasions during our soundwalks, we heard church bells start to chime. By the time we had turned on the recorder and pressed record, we had missed most, if not all, of the bell sounds. This caused us to check our clocks more closely and be prepared for the bells when they sounded on the hour.

Difficulty Recognising Sounds Afterwards

It was sometimes difficult to recognise the exact sounds after we had recorded, especially if the recordings had not been analysed immediately after the fieldwork had been done.

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