

# City Sounds

Summer observations

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Landscape Environment Advancement Foundation, LEAF

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## Introduction: All ears

Perception of environment is a multi sensory phenomena. Sight, touch, smell, and sound all together give a holistic experience of a place. While sight probably dominates consciously; the other three senses are more deeply embodied and invoke places and memories in a very strong manner.

Conventionally cities have been visualized as points and spaces; lines and connections; as streets, neighbourhoods and landmarks.

But, they are experienced as places which engage more than our eyes. While moving through a city, shaded streets invite us in; smells push us away from, or draw us towards places, crowds indicate activities and events through the buzz they create.

A vibrant, interesting city can also be called a buzzing city.

While these busy, buzzing cities have become synonymous with noise; noise itself is now deeply associated in our minds with the idea of a city. Can we even suppose for a moment a silent market, or a silent street?

A completely silent city is almost a frightening thought.

Instead, can we imagine the city like a spatial orchestra, creating a noise, a buzz, a steady hum; hitting a high crescendo at its peak and winding down towards the end of the day as a low note?

While we take this constant backdrop of human speech, moving and honking vehicles associated with streets, markets and public places for granted; do we really pay attention to what has now become an inextricable part of urban life?

How much noise does an extremely busy street actually generate? How much of it is carried in into spaces abutting it? Is it even possible to imagine a quiet, reflective island within this constant drone of human speech, moving and honking vehicles?

How does a sound generated at one point move through stone and brick of a dense city core?

How much of it penetrates houses after crossing a grove of trees and a garden?

How much of it does the wind carry across open fields?

Also, are there distinctive sounds that give places in the city an identity?

## Sound in the City

### Sound

We live in a vibrating universe and perceive the sense of the world through its many rhythmic pulses. Sounds are perceived vibrations - they are perceived as words, sonatas, buzz saws and thunder traveling in space through air, or through other mediums such as metal, water or any other substance.

Inspired and referred from "Sound Hearing Resonance" - Thomas Humphery and Marcia Tanner.

Spaces have resonance and this quality adds to its holistic perception. Conversely, space can also qualify sound. A low intensity sound can be heard in a small space while it may lose its significance in a large area. For, e.g., drop of a pin or the ticking of a clock in a quiet room can be noticed while it goes unnoticed in outdoor spaces.

Sounds are also markers of places and activities. Markets and cities are noisy; but this very 'sound' and related activities make a city feel alive.

### Sound mapping of Ahmedabad

Ahmedabad is the eighth biggest city in India by population - 5.4 million people spread over 205 sq kms, make up the urban populace. Like all other cities, activities are varied and intense; and occur in dense or spread out fabrics. Each kind of engagement creates its own sound conditions - the beat of metal work within a unit of a tight, medieval fabric; or the roar of machinery in an open shed industrial area. Similarly, every urban act generates its own characteristic sound which we are accustomed to hearing in the background of our day to day lives.

I decided to explore this phenomenon of sound for my study. I chose five different areas within Ahmedabad, based on a combination of land use and building typology - the tightly packed fabric of the old city which has both residential and commercial spaces; a slice of the University area which is open in nature with large green buffers; fields on the outskirts of the city and a part of a designated industrial estate in the southern part of Ahmedabad.

I recorded sounds in each of these places at three specific time periods of the day - morning, afternoon and evening. Based on these recordings, I have drawn 'Sound Maps' of each of these areas. The maps indicate the spread of sound over a given area at a given point in time. Observations and recordings have been made in the months of May, June and July. Observations might be slightly different for other times of the year.

## Activities



**01** Hawkers lane along the edges of Gandhi road.



**02** Conversation at road edges between buyers and sellers.



**03** Parking lane on Gandhi road edges.



**04** Various activities along the street.



**05** Traffic congestion, center of the road.



**06** Intense traffic and noise during peak hours.



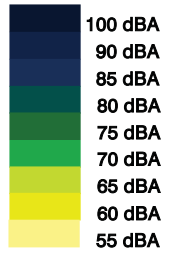
**07** *Jami* mosque during prayer time.



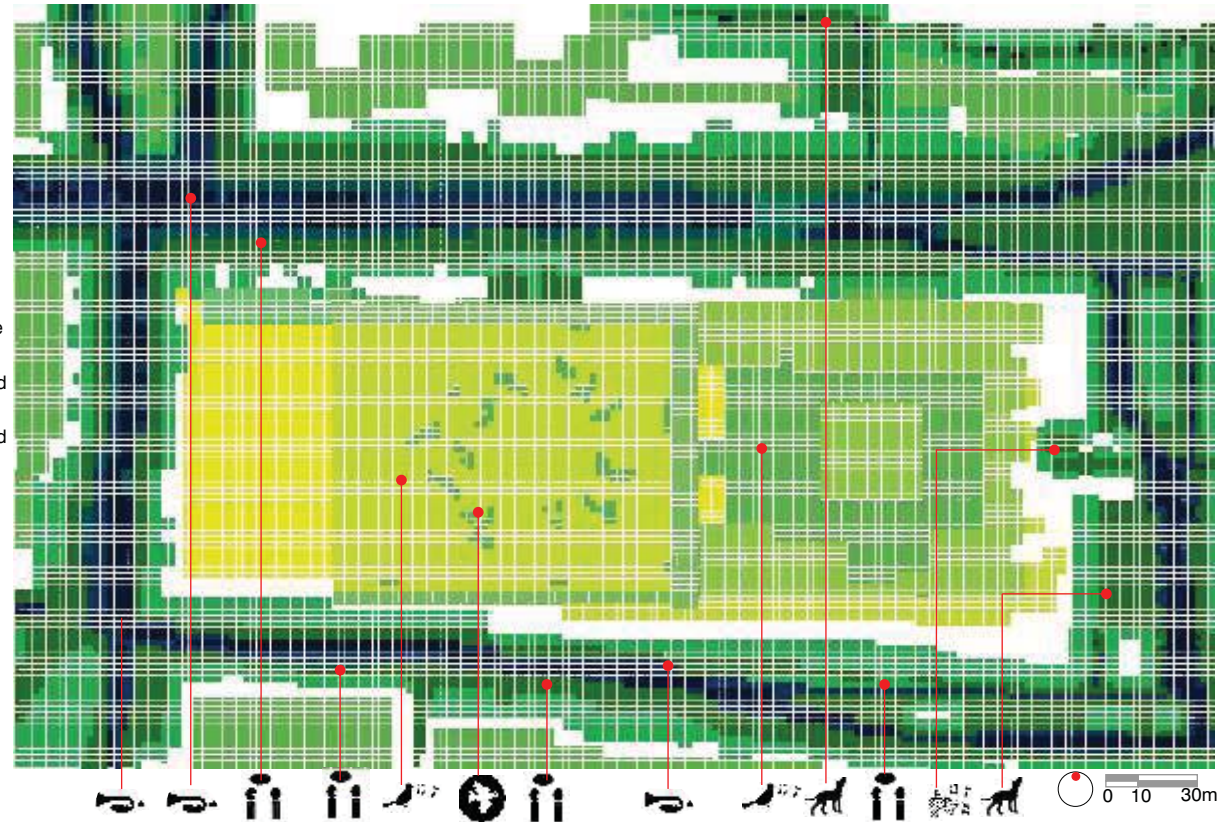
**08** *Jami* mosque behind an envelope of shops, shoppers and traffic.



Sound Map of area between 07:00 - 09:00 hrs.



Intensity of sound at distance from source



90-80 dBA - sound of vehicles passing , increases with honks.

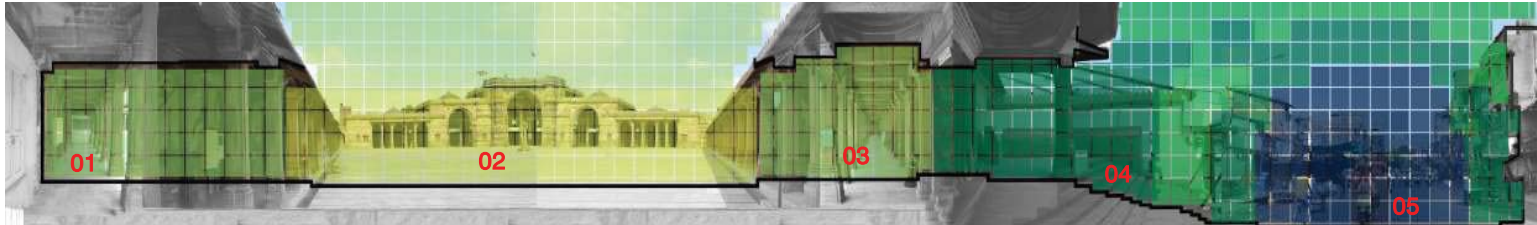
80-70 dBA - sound of a single vehicle passing.

75-65 dBA - sound heard when a vehicle passes, with no hawkers .

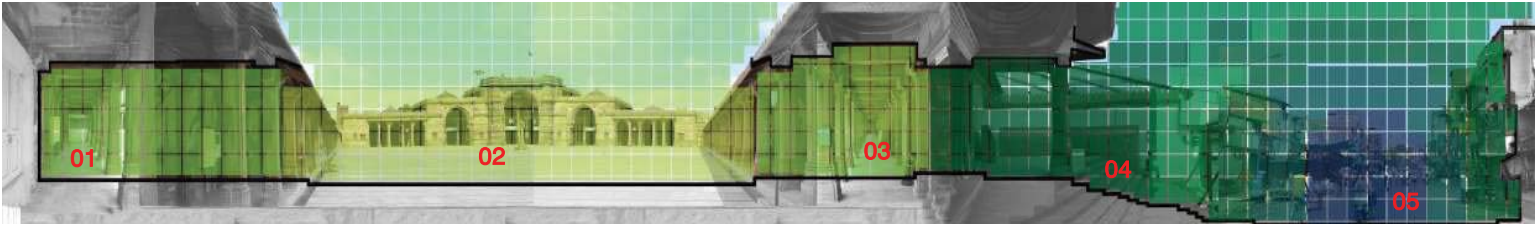
55-60 dBA - silent; chirping of birds, buzz of vehicles in background.

Sectional view indicating intensity of sound

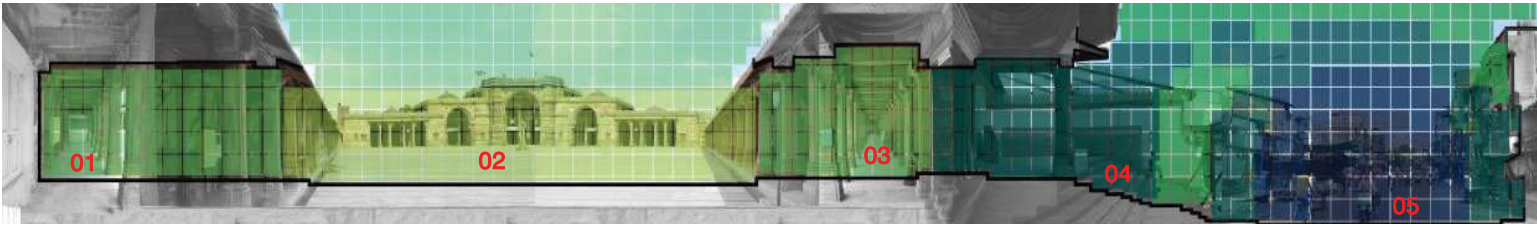
07:00 - 09:00 hrs.



14:00 - 16:00 hrs.



18:00 - 20:00 hrs.

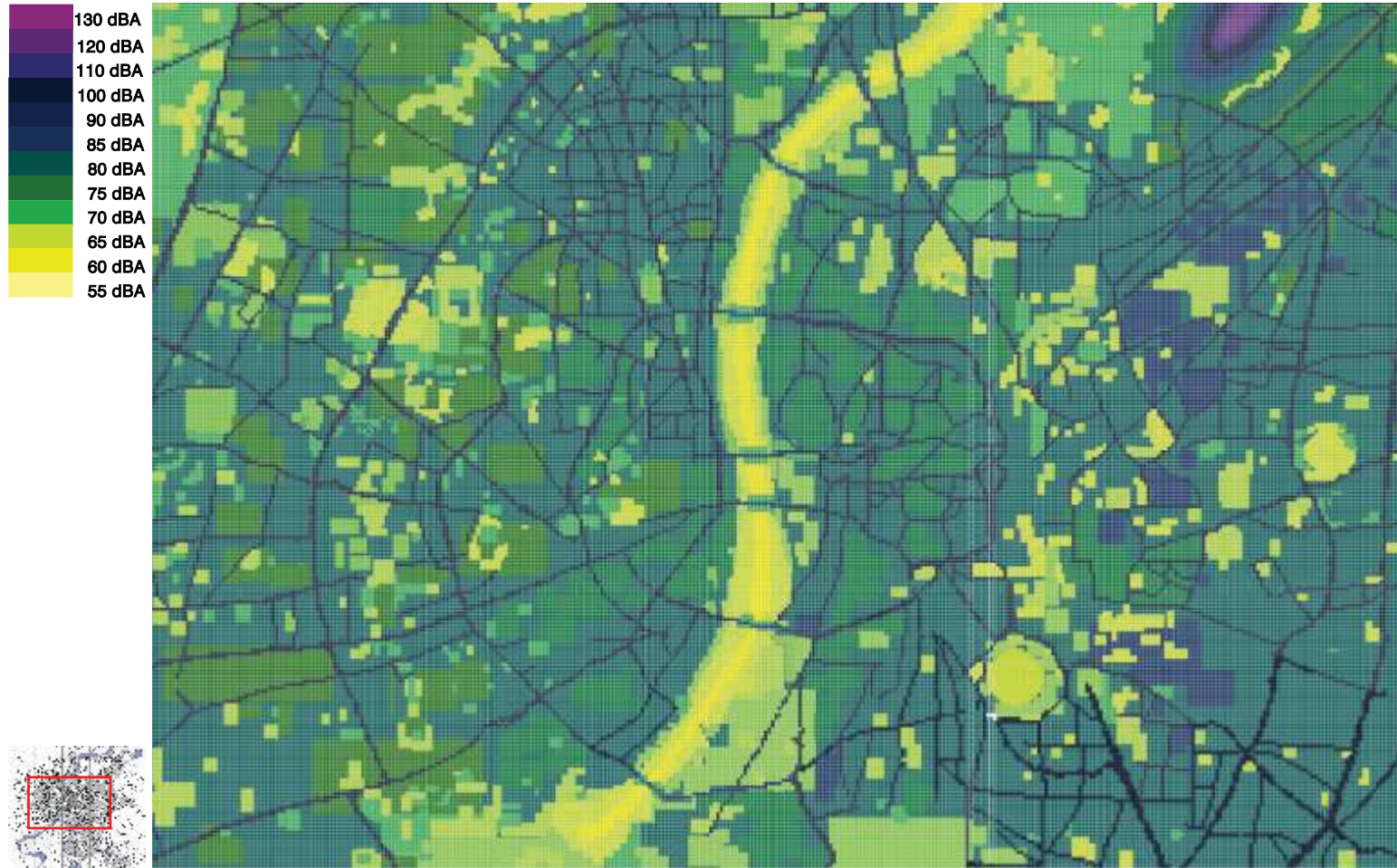


Key Plan





## Sound Map of the city



Key Plan

This is a hypothetical map and based on the case studies carried out in this study.

0 0.1 0.3km





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