

Peaceful pockets of Helsinki

Resident survey results on places with quiet and peaceful soundscapes

Vilhelmiina Hynninen and Anne Leppänen



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1 Introduction

Environmental noise is a major environmental problem across Europe. In Helsinki alone, around 256,500 or 39% of the 656,600 local residents are exposed to average day-time noise levels of more than 55 dB $L_{Aeq,7-22}$ from road and street traffic.¹ Studies have shown that long-term exposure to environmental noise poses a wide range of health hazards. As a counterbalance to noise, many crave places with a quiet and peaceful sound environment, and these have been proven to promote wellbeing.

This report deals with the experiences of City of Helsinki residents of places with a quiet and peaceful soundscapes. It is based on the results of a resident survey conducted in the spring of 2025. The survey and its results will complement the city-wide noise survey carried out every five year, next in 2027. The work is also part of the measures under Helsinki's Air Quality and Noise Abatement Plan (ILME). The aim of the ILME plan is to improve air quality and the sound environment in Helsinki and to ensure that the City's residents are not exposed to harmful emissions or continuous noise in the future. The action plan contains a number of noise abatement measures that support the objective, one of which is the preservation of quiet areas.²

The purpose of the survey was to chart which places and areas in Helsinki the residents perceive as quiet or peaceful and pleasant in terms of their soundscape. In addition, the factors influencing a pleasant sound environment were investigated. The results were compared with the noise zones from the City of Helsinki's 2022 noise survey. The aim of the work is to produce information about quiet and peaceful places to support planning, contributing to the objective of improving the soundscape of Helsinki. By providing more information on areas perceived as quiet or peaceful in terms of their soundscape, the aim is to also encourage residents to take advantage of the recreational opportunities these areas offer.

Helsinki sites with a quiet sound environment have been studied before. The latest report was published in 2020, and the one before that in 2010. Based on the results of the surveys, we know that Helsinki residents consider quiet places very important. The results highlight large forest and park areas, islands and waterfront areas, but the built environment also offers many relatively quiet places, such as small parks and courtyards. The studies also confirm the notion that the experience of a quiet or peaceful sound environment is not based solely on the sound levels measured. Other pleasurable factors in the environment, experienced through different senses, also hold a great deal of meaning.^{3,4}

¹ City of Helsinki national noise mapping 2022

² Background report on noise abatement 2024

³ Leppänen & Kuja-Aro 2020

⁴ Päivänen & Leppänen 2010

2 Soundscape

People perceive and analyse their surroundings through their senses. Sounds are external stimuli, and unconscious physiological and psychoacoustic processes impact the way we interpret them. These processes activate the nervous system and affect the body, which in turn affects the emotional interpretation of sounds. The result is a mental image of the acoustic environment i.e. the soundscape. The emotional experience of sound can be influenced by individual differences, such as preferences, sensitivity to noise, heredity and previous experience.⁵

Typically, an acoustic environment consists of sounds of different intensity, direction of arrival and duration.⁶ The typical sounds of an area vary according to the characteristics of the environment, and the expectations placed on them also vary. For example, it is more acceptable to hear the sounds of human activity in a dense built environment in a city centre than in large natural areas on the outskirts of a city.⁷ The soundscape of a built environment, in particular, is diverse and often includes both sounds that are perceived as unpleasant and those considered pleasant. Sounds commonly perceived as unpleasant include road traffic, construction sites, industrial operations, technical equipment and outdoor events.⁸ In larger nature areas, the emphasis on sounds of nature is typical. Sounds such as birdsong, the sounds of water and wind in the trees are considered pleasant.⁹

Noise refers to unwanted sound that is perceived as disruptive or unpleasant. High noise levels can directly damage hearing, but long-term exposure to lower noise levels is also harmful to health.¹⁰ Noise has been linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, metabolic diseases, problems with foetal development and a decline in mental wellbeing.²

The term 'quiet area' refers to an area in a population centre where the noise level from any source of sound does not exceed 50 dB during the day and 45 dB at night.¹¹ A quiet soundscape, however, does not mean total silence, but rather a peaceful and pleasant soundscape. Some places can be perceived as quiet despite being having some sounds of the city, such as traffic noise. It is their other characteristics, such as greenery, comfort and beautiful landscapes, that make them feel pleasant and calming. Having a relatively quiet place, i.e. an area that is quieter or calmer than its surroundings, may also be important. This is reflected, for example, in how people may consider even slightly noisy areas in the city centre as quiet. However, it should be kept in mind that noise is harmful to health, even if it is not perceived as disruptive.

⁵ Kumpulainen 2025

⁶ Pesonen 2004

⁷ Bruce & Davies 2014

⁸ The Finnish Environment Institute 2025

⁹ Buxton et al. 2021

¹⁰ The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2024

¹¹ Government Decree on noise reviews and noise abatement action plans 1107/2021

3 Resident survey results

3.1 Survey's implementation

The data was collected through a map-based resident survey in spring 2025. There were 530 responses to the survey and a total of 1,133 map entries were made. The survey covered all residents of the City of Helsinki and the area covered the whole of Helsinki. The survey consisted of a front page, an introductory information page, background questions, a map page and a closing page where respondents could give free feedback related to quiet or peaceful places in Helsinki. The survey was available in Finnish, Swedish and English.

The background questions were designed to gauge the respondents' experience of the importance of quiet and peaceful areas and the number of such areas in their living environment. The questions were: 1. How important are quiet or peaceful places in your living environment to you? 2. Assess the number of quiet or peaceful areas in Helsinki. Respondents were also asked to give the postcode of the area where they lived in order to assess the regional distribution of respondents.

On the map page, the respondents were asked to make map entries in two different categories: built environment and nature sites. For each map entry made, the respondents were given three additional questions: 1. What makes this place pleasant? What do you hear, see or smell? What happens there? 2. Is there something about the place that bothers you? 3. How often do you come here? The survey was conducted anonymously, so respondents cannot be identified on the basis of their answers.

Residents were informed about the survey through several digital channels, such as the City of Helsinki website, information screens in the citywide operating system and the social media channels of the Urban Environment Division. In addition to these, the survey was presented at a public and free of charge opening event of the Cycling Week on 3 May 2025 at Kansalaistori, where visitors could also get help with filling in the survey. Additionally, the contact persons of Helka ry, Helsinki Neighbourhood Association, were informed of the survey, as were the borough liaisons of the City Executive Office's participation unit, who informed residents of different neighbourhoods about the survey through their own channels. Communications were conducted in Finnish, Swedish and English.

3.2 The importance and amount of quiet and peaceful areas

The survey asked respondents to rate the number of quiet or peaceful places on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 equalling the verbal description of 'not important at all' and 10 being 'very important'. A total of 518 responses were received to this question. The distribution of responses on a scale is presented in figure 1.

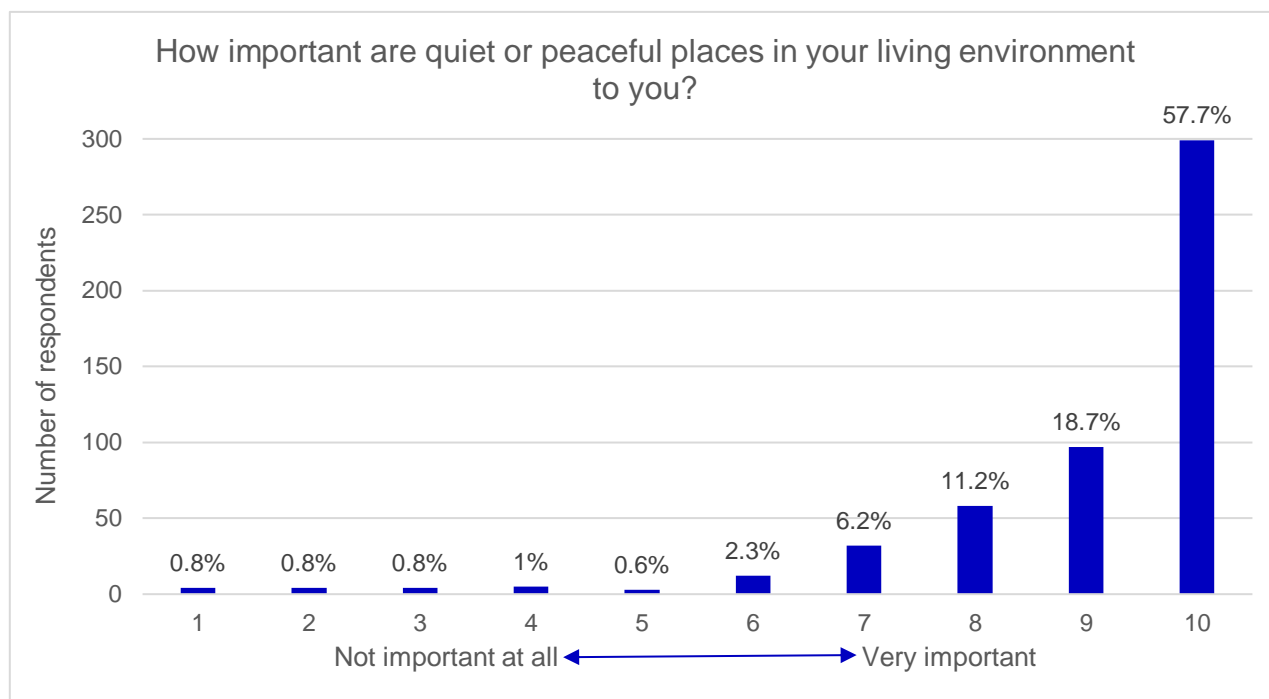


Figure 1. Distribution of responses to the question on the importance of quiet or peaceful areas in the respondent's living environment.

Just under 60% ($n=299$, where n =number of respondents) of respondents considered quiet or peaceful places to be very important (10). The second highest score (9) was given by around 19% ($n=97$) of respondents. Around 20% ($n=105$) of respondents gave a score of 5–8, while only around 3% ($n=17$) gave a rating of 1–4. None of the respondents considered quiet or peaceful places not at all important (score 0).

The respondents were also asked to estimate the number of quiet or peaceful places available in Helsinki on a scale of 0–10. The score of 0 on this scale corresponded to the description 'few' and a value of 10 corresponded to 'many'. A total of 443 responses were received to this question. The breakdown of responses is presented in figure 2.

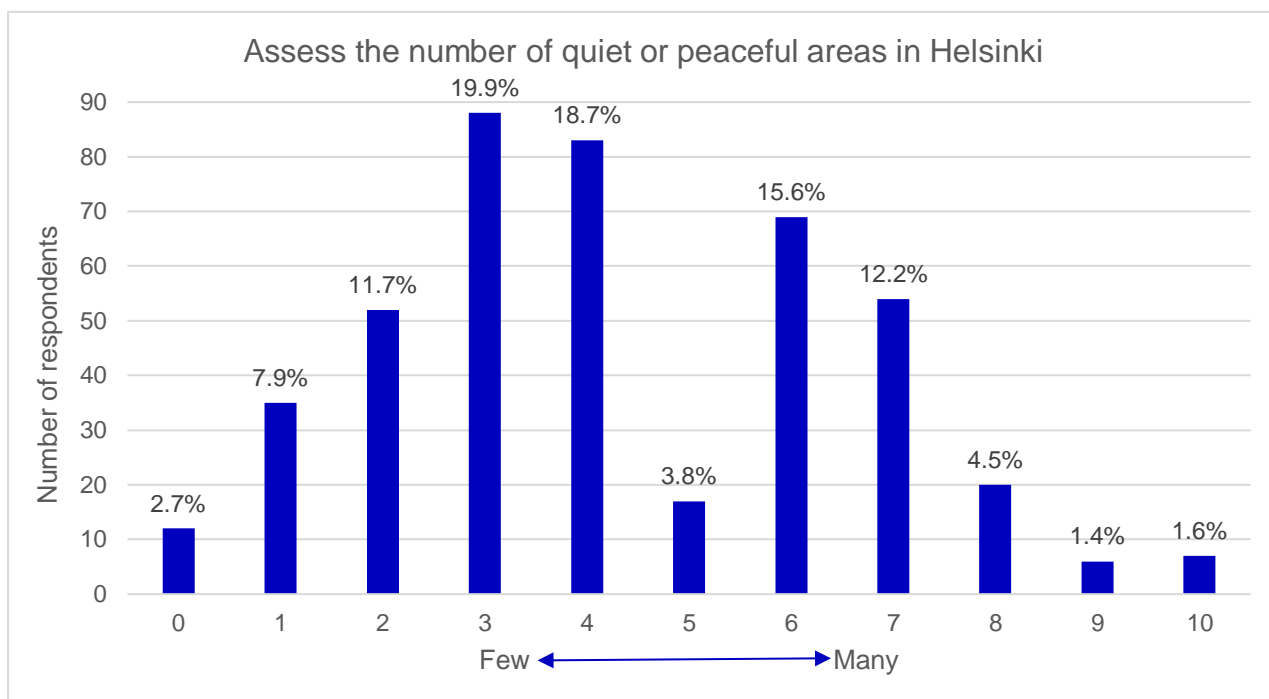


Figure 2. Distribution of responses to the question on the number of quiet or peaceful areas in Helsinki.

Only around 7% (n=33) of respondents gave a high score of 8–10. Around 32% (n=140) of respondents gave a rating of 5–7 and around 39% (n=171) gave a rating of 3–4. Around 22% (n=99) of respondents stated that there were few quiet or peaceful areas in Helsinki (0–2).

3.3 Built environment sites

A total of 506 sites in the built environment were entered as quiet or peaceful areas (Figure 3). The additional question ‘What makes this place pleasant?’ received 239 responses and the additional question ‘Is there something about the place that bothers you?’ received 175 responses.

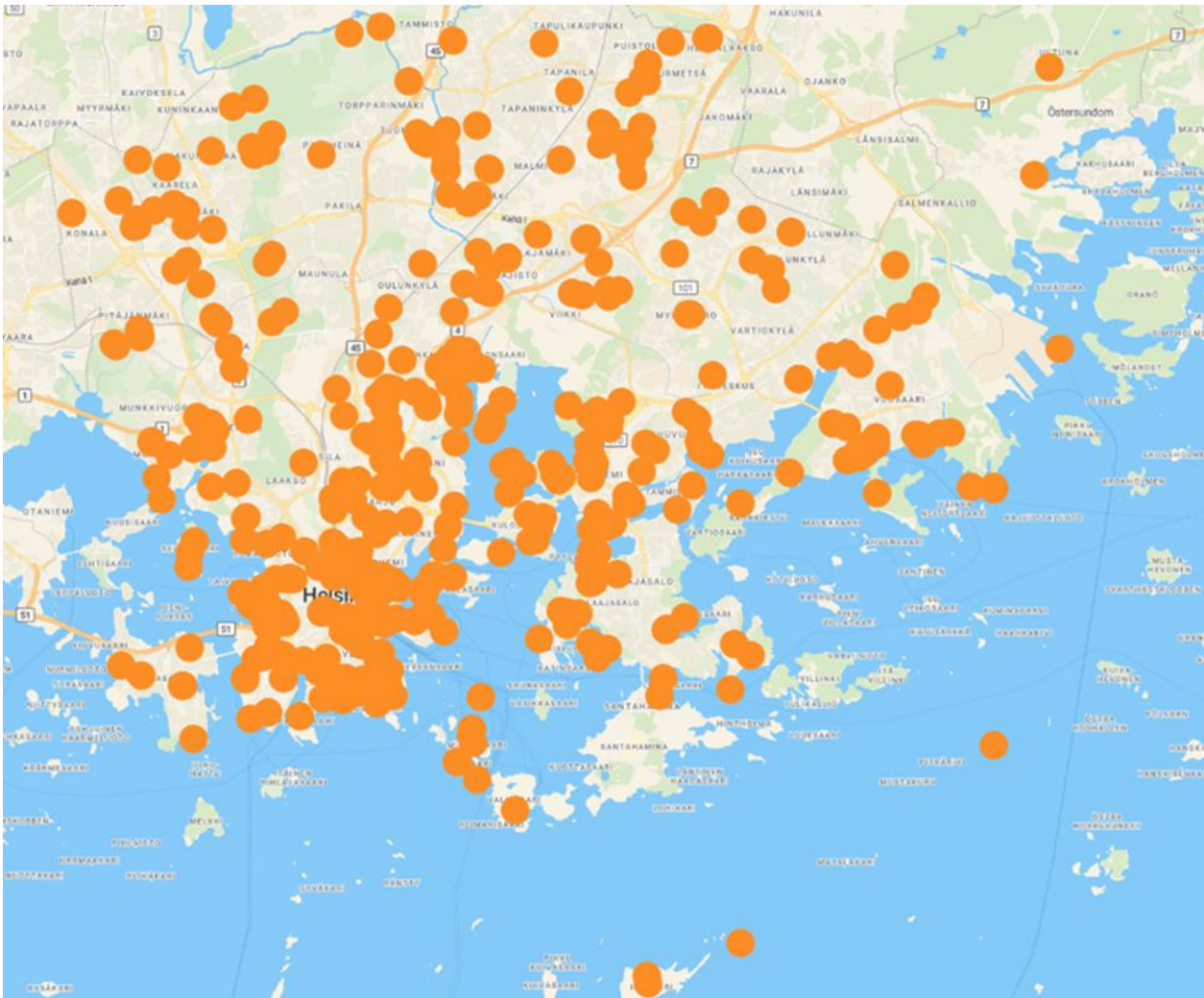


Figure 3. Areas with quiet or peaceful soundscapes in a built environment, as indicated by respondents on a map.

Places with pleasant sound environments were marked extensively around Helsinki. Most of the entries were made in Helsinki city centre and near bodies of water. In the city centre, the old districts of South Helsinki, such as Eira, were particularly prominent. Other individual sites with a high number of entries were Lapinlahti, Vanhankaupunginkoski, Kumpula, Malminkenttä and the Herttoniemi area. In the vicinity of bodies of water, places with a pleasant sound environment were marked in areas such as along the seashore and the river Vantaanjoki, but also along smaller streams and ponds, urban canals, marinas and docks.

There were also many entries for parks of different sizes. Both larger park areas, such as Töölönlahti and Tervasaari, and smaller green areas and parks around Helsinki gained entries. Other pleasant sound environments were found in the City's botanical gardens, the courtyards of old manor houses and in allotment areas.

Important places with quiet or peaceful sound environments were found in cemeteries, such as Hietaniemi and Malmi, and in the old neighbourhoods with wooden buildings, such as Käpylä and Puu-Vallila. Several entries were made about public courtyards, such as the Rikhardinkatu library and the institutional district of Topelia of the University of Helsinki. Pleasant sound environments were also found in the courtyards of housing companies and in the yards of detached houses. Tilkankatori and the summer street in front of the Design Museum were brought up as examples of plazas or squares with peaceful sound environments. Some found the sounds around sports fields pleasant, and some of the entries were placed in sports parks, for example. Some entries were made in typically busy locations, such as Esplanade Park and the Market Square.

The survey asked how often respondents visited the place with a pleasant sound environment that they entered on the map. A total of 461 responses were received to this question. The breakdown of responses is presented in figure 4.

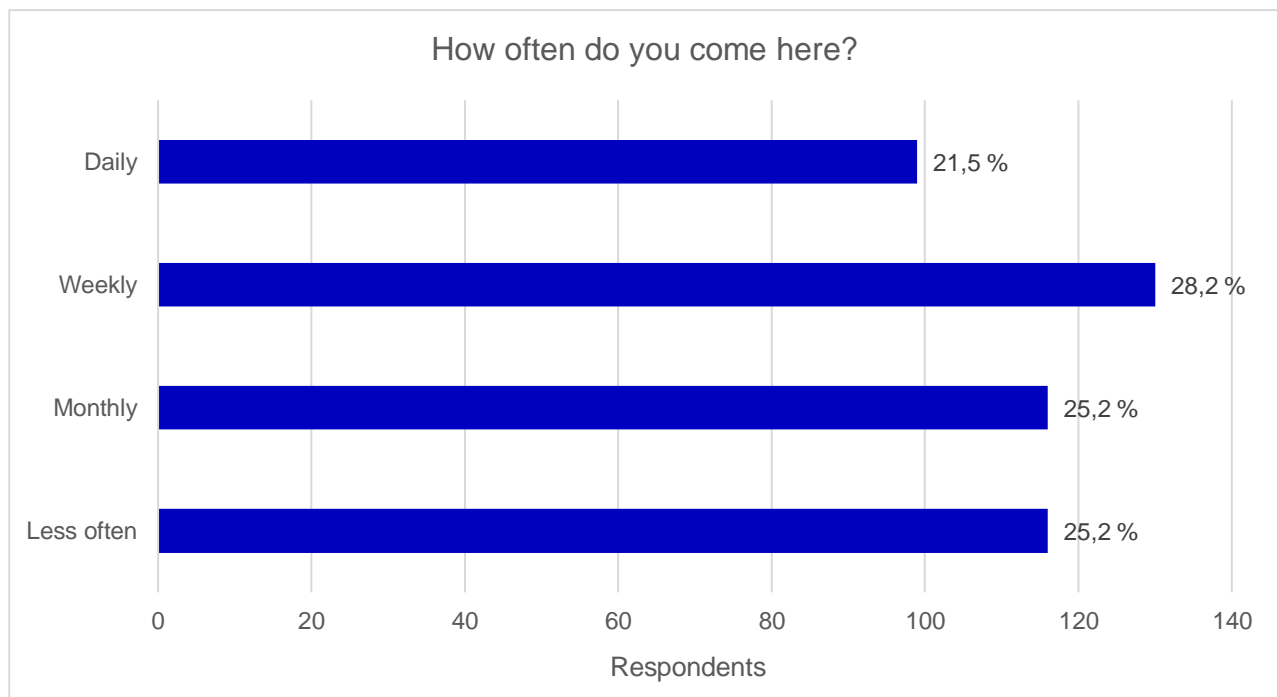


Figure 4. Distribution of responses to the question on the frequency of visits to built environment sites.

According to the survey, the majority of respondents, around 28% (n=130), visited the site weekly and around 21% (n=99) said they visited the site daily. About 25% of respondents (n=116) visited the site monthly and around 25% (n=116) visited less frequently.

3.4 Factors affecting soundscape in built environments

The descriptions of quiet and peaceful places highlighted recurring themes in relation to the different characteristics of the environment. These themes included nature experiences, activities, social environment and different aspects of urban spaces.

3.4.1 Nature experiences

One important aspect was the experience of nature and greenery. Trees, plantings and shrubs that soften the sound environment and make the surroundings more beautiful were considered pleasant. Greenery, such as lawns and small parks, provided a contrast to the otherwise densely built-up urban area. The sounds and presence of different animals and insects were also associated with a closeness to nature and a pleasant sound environment. Birdsong, in particular, was a recurring theme in respondents' comments.

A beautiful park, elegant plantings and tall trees are calming. Traffic may run right next to you, but you can still hear the birds singing! Next to the park, dog walkers come together and chat with each other.

The yard area of the Sjökulla croft and the adjacent meadow are stunning. The croft yard has flowers and greenery, such a lovely old garden. It also brings back good memories of different events. Birds sing in choirs in the meadow in spring, and crickets chirp in late autumn.

The sounds of the sea, the lapping of waves, and the bubbling of streams and fountains were perceived as pleasant sounds. The comments also linked other factors to pleasant sound environments, such as the scents of the sea or other aspects of nearby maritime nature, such as the rhythm of sailboats moving against the waves or the sensation of wind from the sea.

Fresh, clean air and the opportunity to observe signs of the changing seasons also gained many mentions. Places where one could enjoy darkness and the night sky without any light pollution were also found to be pleasant. The respondents stated that varying forms of the terrain helped calm the soundscape. For example, places higher than their surroundings received several mentions. Small winding paths that follow the contours of the terrain and sandy paths and cobbled streets were perceived as pleasant and soothing in terms of the sound environment compared to a flat asphalt road.

Old, carefully maintained gardens are delightful with their apple trees, berry bushes and flowers. Clean and fresh air to breathe in between busy street areas. A nice area for daydreaming and a walk.

3.4.2 Services, activities and accessibility

According to the responses, services such as cosy cafés and restaurants, as well as their characteristic soundscapes and smells, contributed to experiencing the sound environment as pleasant. Some felt that accessible, small events in the area and the opportunity to use other services and public spaces made the area more pleasant. The cleanliness of a place was also seen as a factor with positive impact.

The beachfront café and the kayak shed. The café has served great coffee and sometimes food, too. You can rest your eyes in the seascape. Seagulls are screeching and other birds sing and chirp. People chatting.

Plenty of nature, despite housing areas. Good outdoor trails and wonderful, lovely beach saunas.

Places with quiet and peaceful sound environments were often places for pleasant activities, such as hiking and exercise. A pleasant sound environment attracted the respondents to spend time outside while reading a book, having a barbecue or eating snacks. Responses also highlighted the accessibility of the location, such as along their commute or close to home.

3.4.3 Social environment

According to the respondents, the presence of other people and the related noises were often perceived as positive. Social experiences generally did not mean a busy environment, but rather spending peaceful time together in a way where other people's activities and sounds complemented the soundscape without being disruptive. Several mentions were made regarding people milling about pleasantly and peacefully and the happy sounds of children playing. Family barbecues, people toiling in their garden plots and friendly encounters between people were also mentioned as pleasant aspects of an environment. Many described sounds related to sports and hobbies, such as the sounds of ball games and the general joy of sports.

An amazing park with old trees. Skateboarders zoom by along their long asphalt hill with the wheels rattling nicely. A true oasis of tranquillity in southern Helsinki.

It's surprisingly quiet near the sports park in Kontula. The sounds of happy football players or fans are not disruptive, and also bring me joy from a distance. These sounds are part of a summer evening! The noise of traffic is quite low. There is a lot of bird song in the area.

The responses indicated that historical and culturally significant environments were important factors in increasing the pleasing nature of a sound environment and created a dignified and atmospheric ambience. The responses also highlighted the respondents' personal memories, awakening imagination and sense of adventure. These sites offered places for daydreaming and deep thoughts.

The history of Helsinki is close. People are renovating their houses and enjoying their surroundings. Scents of flowers and berry bushes float in the air in spring and early summer, apples ripen in autumn. Annala hill with its maples and old trees and the untouched buildings are beyond compare.

3.4.4 Urban spaces

The responses highlighted in particular the aesthetic and calming effect of old and ornate buildings. Beautiful details, colourful allotment garden cottages, idyllic residential areas with detached houses and manor gardens were considered pleasant and often believed to soften the soundscape. Buildings can act as barriers against traffic noise or other disruptions, creating more peaceful immediate surroundings.

A lush park, lined with grander and grander houses, all different from each other. Every time you look at the details of the houses, you can discover something new. I often wonder what the interiors of these houses look like or what their history is.

Courtyard of our own building. Along a cul-de-sac, the yard is quiet and peaceful, and there is no traffic passing through it. You can walk directly to the forest path behind the houses.

Some also felt that the sounds of vehicles provide a familiar, even soothing, background to the urban landscape. Some found the rattle of trams and the sounds of trains pleasant. Many found the spaciousness and airiness of a place very pleasant as they allowed visibility to further away. This airiness was associated with a sense of space, which makes the soundscape more tranquil and leaves room for thinking. Benches and seating areas were also highlighted as important elements in increasing the comfort of a site.

3.5 Nature sites

A total of 627 sites were entered in nature areas (Figure 5). The additional question 'What makes this place pleasant?' received 294 responses and the additional question 'Is there something about the place that bothers you?' received 215 responses.

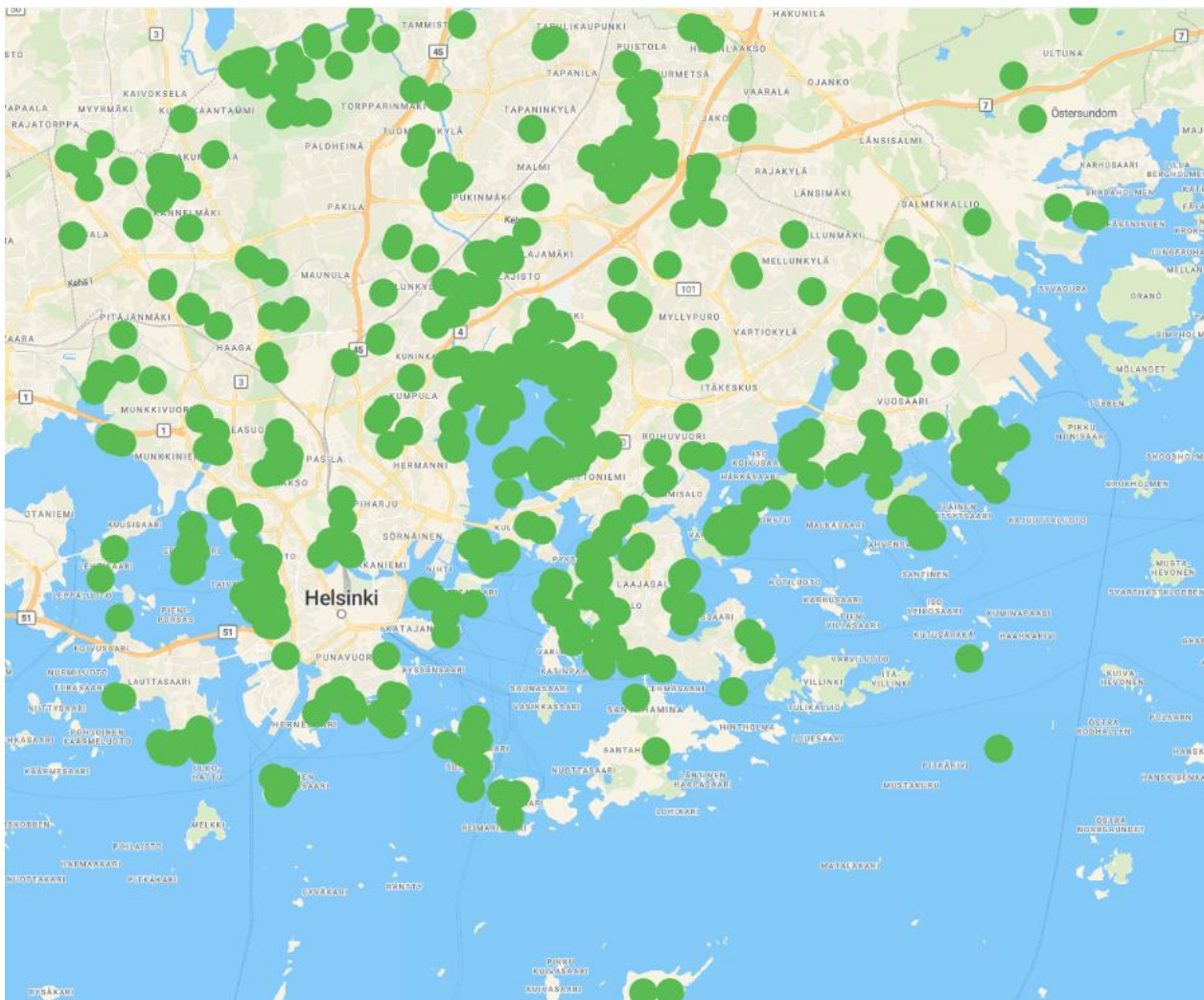


Figure 5. Areas with quiet or peaceful soundscapes in nature sites, as indicated by respondents on a map.

The sites indicated were primarily wooded areas, large parks and areas near waterbodies. A large number of entries were made especially in the areas around Vanhankaupunginselkä, Central Park, Lauttasaari, Laajasalo, Malminkenttä and Vuosaari nature areas. In particular, the areas around Vanhankaupunginselkä received a large number of entries: places perceived as quiet or peaceful were marked in Kuusiluoto, Lammassaari, Fastholma and Pornaistenniemi, among other locations.

Near water areas, the emphasis was on the seashore and sites along the river Vantaanjoki and river Mätäjoki. Island sites also attracted entries. Peace and tranquillity were found both on islands accessed by boat, such as Vallisaari, Pihlajasaari and Vartiosaari, and on islands accessible by bridge, such as Mustikkamaa and Seurasaaari. Pleasant sound environments were also found in large park areas such as Kaivopuisto, Tali and Savelanpuisto. In entries marked in forested areas, Ramsinniemi, Kallvik, Uutela and Mustavuori in Vuosaari, the southern end of Central Park in Laakso and its northern end in Haltiala were highlighted. Quiet sound environments were also found in smaller local forests around Helsinki.

A total of 583 responses were received to the question on frequency of visits to these areas. The breakdown of responses is presented in figure 6.

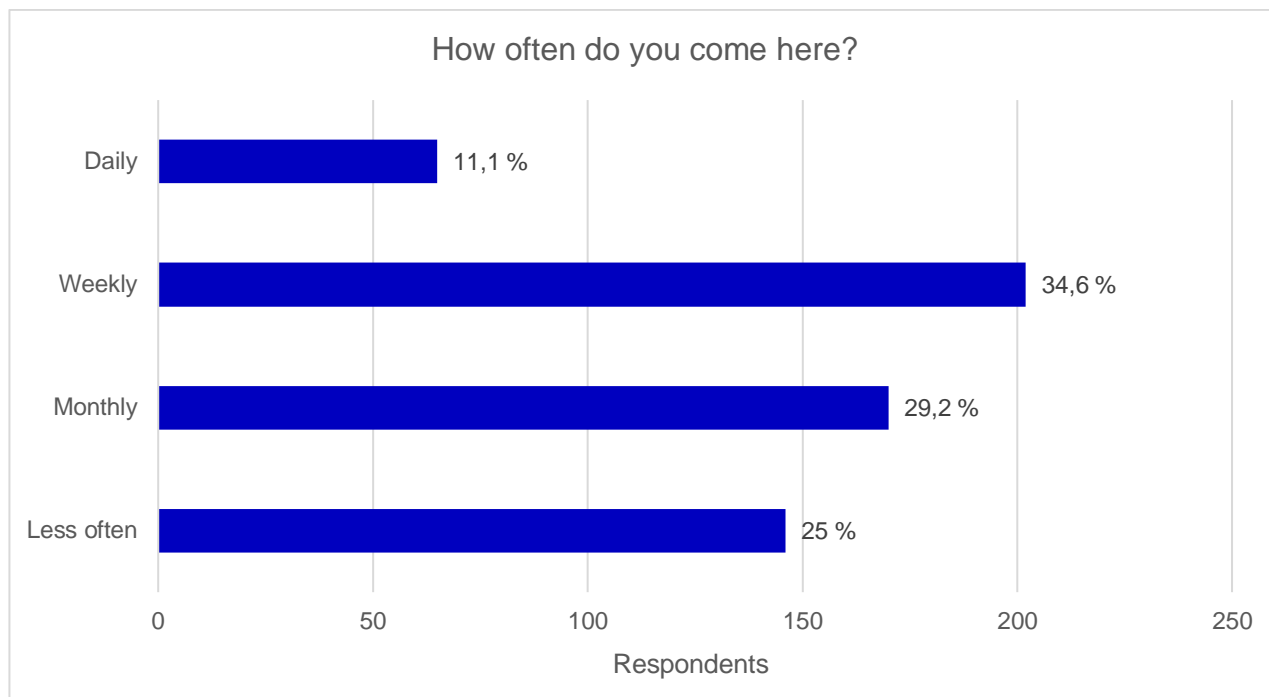


Figure 6. Distribution of responses to the question on the frequency of visits to nature sites.

The majority of respondents, around 35% (n=202), visited a nature site with a quiet or peaceful sound environment on a weekly basis. About 29% (n=170) of respondents visited the place they marked monthly, and about 25% (n=146) less frequently. Only around 11% (n=65) visited the place they marked every day.

3.6 Factors affecting soundscape at nature sites

The descriptions of quiet and peaceful nature sites highlighted recurring themes in relation to the different characteristics of the environment and the experiences it provided. These themes included nature experiences, activities, social environment and different aspects of wellbeing and meaningfulness.

3.6.1 Nature experiences

Lush vegetation and extensive forested areas created a peaceful and sheltered environment, according to the survey's respondents. The responses highlighted the importance of old trees and the natural, untouched state of the site. In hot weather, wooded areas provided a cooler place to spend time. They also highlighted the importance of bodies of water, and in particular the sea, for the pleasantness of sound environment. The sound of rushing waves and water lapping at the shore, the roar of rapids and the babbling of brooks were all considered pleasing sounds. The smells hinting at the nearness of the sea were perceived as soothing.

The dense forest immediately next to the residential area calms the soundscape of the city right away. The mossy spruce forest feels like a room with soft acoustics.

The smell of the sea and the sound of the waves, birdsong, the sway of trees. In summer, I feel the warmth of the rock. This is also a good place to be quite alone, with visitors spread over a wide area.

Respondents found the sounds and presence of animals calming. Bird song was the most commonly cited pleasing factors, and was also perceived as a desirable part of the environment. The

abundance of birds and the variety of their sounds added to the pleasantness of sound environment. In addition to birds, other forest animals and domestic animals such as horses and sheep were also mentioned. Butterflies, insects, fish and frogs enriched the experience of biodiversity and the soundscape it creates.

A wonderfully cool and surprisingly peaceful place in the summer. Plenty of different birds, and rabbits and squirrels, sometimes a fox. A stream is flowing by, creating a beautiful sound. Small areas of forest in a relatively natural state and the grass is allowed to grow long, how lovely! Butterflies and buzzing insects in summer.

Lots of birds, swaying trees. People keep their voices down and no electric scooters are zooming by. Sometimes the rooster crows, taking your mind far away.

The responses highlighted a diverse range of sensory experiences and elements related to the natural environment. These included varied terrain, such as steep cliffs and slopes, and small paths and routes, such as sand roads, forest paths and duckboards. The humming sway of trees, the whistling of the wind and the rustling of reeds were also often mentioned as soothing sounds. The responses also highlighted the different smells of nature, such as damp forest and moss, and the experience of clean and dust-free air. Some explained that they went to the site to enjoy sunny weather and daylight. The responses indicated that pleasant landscapes had a positive impact on how the sound environment was experienced. Respondents described, among other aspects, beautiful island landscapes and rural views. The ability to see far away and a sense of space were important factors, adding to the experience of freedom and space.

The contrast between the city and the old forest is magical. We cycle through here almost every day with the children, and when we reach the forest, everything goes quiet. It smells like damp forest and the air is cool and fresh. It is like a bubble, where individual sounds stand out, birds sing and all is peaceful.

Here, you can see the sea far into the horizon and feel the power of the wind. The cliffs are also very beautiful and impressive.

3.6.2 Services, activities and accessibility

Based on the responses, accessibility and proximity to everyday environments supported the experience of places with pleasant sound environments. Many places were easily accessible by walking or cycling or were found along the respondent's commute. In addition to this, recreational and leisure activities such as jogging, cycling, skiing, berry picking and mushroom foraging were mentioned often. Places with a pleasant sound environment offered opportunities for activities such as dog walking, children's play, picnics, barbecues and relaxation.

Nice jogging trails, or skiing tracks in the winter, and a fun sledding hill for children

Wooded terrain, where you can also go berry picking. A peaceful environment where you can hear birdsong. Great and popular outdoor trails, where you can also admire the water areas. The barbecue area is a nice addition.

Some comments were made about local services, and some felt that the good information boards in the nature reserve and the guidance provided by the nature centre, for example, made the environment more enjoyable. Pleasant sound environments were also found on the terraces of cafés by the sea.

3.6.3 Social environment

According to the responses, some felt that the presence of other people was a positive part of sound environment. People's peaceful coexistence was reflected in families spending time outdoors, joggers and dog walkers, for example. The peaceful chatter of people and their cheerful greetings enriched the soundscape. Additionally, background sounds typical of certain locations were mentioned, such as the sound of church bells and pleasant sounds of the harbour.

Beautiful riverbank landscape. The birds are singing, the dirt road winds alongside the river, offering beautiful views along the way. The barbecue spots, the scents carrying over and the cheerful chatter of people add joy to a summer evening.

I can smell the sea, hear the birds and the wind. You see some people on the way, and they smile at you and say 'hi' as they pass.

3.6.4 Wellbeing and experiences of meaningfulness

According to the responses, places considered to have a quiet and peaceful sound environment offered stress relief, a sense of security and a chance to escape from everyday worries and the hustle and bustle of the city. Respondents felt that in a place with a pleasant sound environment, the environment fuelled their imagination, allowing them to feel like they were somewhere else, such as in the wilderness of Lapland or in a fantasy world. These places brought back memories and historical elements, such as trenches, forts and old structures, evoked images of the past.

A nearby forest that brings balance to my nervous system, relieves stress and gives energy. I walk through the forest to and from work. I'm often busy and stressed on my commute, but the forest silences all such noise and puts me in a good mood. I can then be kind to others again.

A lovely little nature area in the middle of the city, this is where I go to relax, for example on my lunch break during remote work days.

The beachline of Pitkäkoski offers a fleeting illusion of being somewhere in Lapland.

3.7 Factors perceived as disruptive

Traffic noise, such as the roaring of cars, the rough grinding sounds of studded tyres and distant background noise from traffic, was identified as a particularly disruptive noise both in the built environment and in nature sites. Other disruptive factors included children playing too loudly, bustling crowds, other people's disruptive behaviour such as drunkenness, excessive tourism and loud music.

Cars going over the speed limit 24/7.

Playing music too loudly through speakers.

Lawn mowers and leaf blowers were also mentioned as disruptive noises, as well as noise from construction sites. Factors like untidiness and lack of maintenance, such as littering, animal droppings, especially from geese, and high levels of street dust, increased the level of disruptiveness. Furthermore, a lack of greenery, unpleasant smells, light pollution and lack of seating were also perceived as disruptive factors.

Barnacle geese mess up the lawn area and footpaths.

The sounds of traffic and the street dust from Itäväylä. In spring, the balconies are black and grey with dust.

Particularly in nature sites, some respondents found the sounds of sports and the dominance of spaces reserved for exercising disruptive, along with structures that disturb the landscape, such as power lines and pylons. Some felt that the areas were too small or too densely built, which made them less comfortable. In nature areas, cyclists riding fast and eroding the forest floor were seen as a nuisance.

Cyclists are going fast. You have to be alert all the time.

Many respondents raised concerns about the changing environment of the site and the intensifying land use in the area, both in natural and built environments. The loss of a space reserved for nature caused sadness among the respondents and reduced vegetation intensified the sounds perceived as disruptive in the area.

3.8 Other comments on quiet and peaceful places

At the end of the survey, respondents were given the option to comment freely on the topic. A total of 211 responses were received. These responses revealed that there are quiet and peaceful places in Helsinki, but emphasised that more are needed. The responses also stressed the disruptive nature of traffic noise and how it carries around Helsinki.

The respondents emphasised that existing quiet places and areas should be preserved and their surroundings developed to reduce traffic noise and other disruptive sounds. Responses included requests for more greenery such as flowers, trees and shrubs, more frequent emptying of bins, less light pollution and more pedestrian walkways and noise barriers.

It was also considered important that areas with a quiet and peaceful sound environment were easily accessible by walking or cycling from respondents' own neighbourhoods without the need for a car. Respondents highlighted the role of green spaces, small forests and parks in creating space for silence and hoped that construction and city planning would take the preservation of quiet areas better into account in their work.

3.9 Joint review of the resident survey and the traffic noise survey

When the locations marked on the map by the respondents were compared with the traffic noise zones by City of Helsinki's noise survey 2022, it was found that the majority of the entries were located in areas where the average daytime noise level is below 50 dB. Several entries were also made in the 50–55 dB and 55–60 dB zones. Some individual entries were also found at locations where the calculated noise level is above 60 dB (intense noise). The location of the map entries in relation to the noise zones is shown in Figure 7.

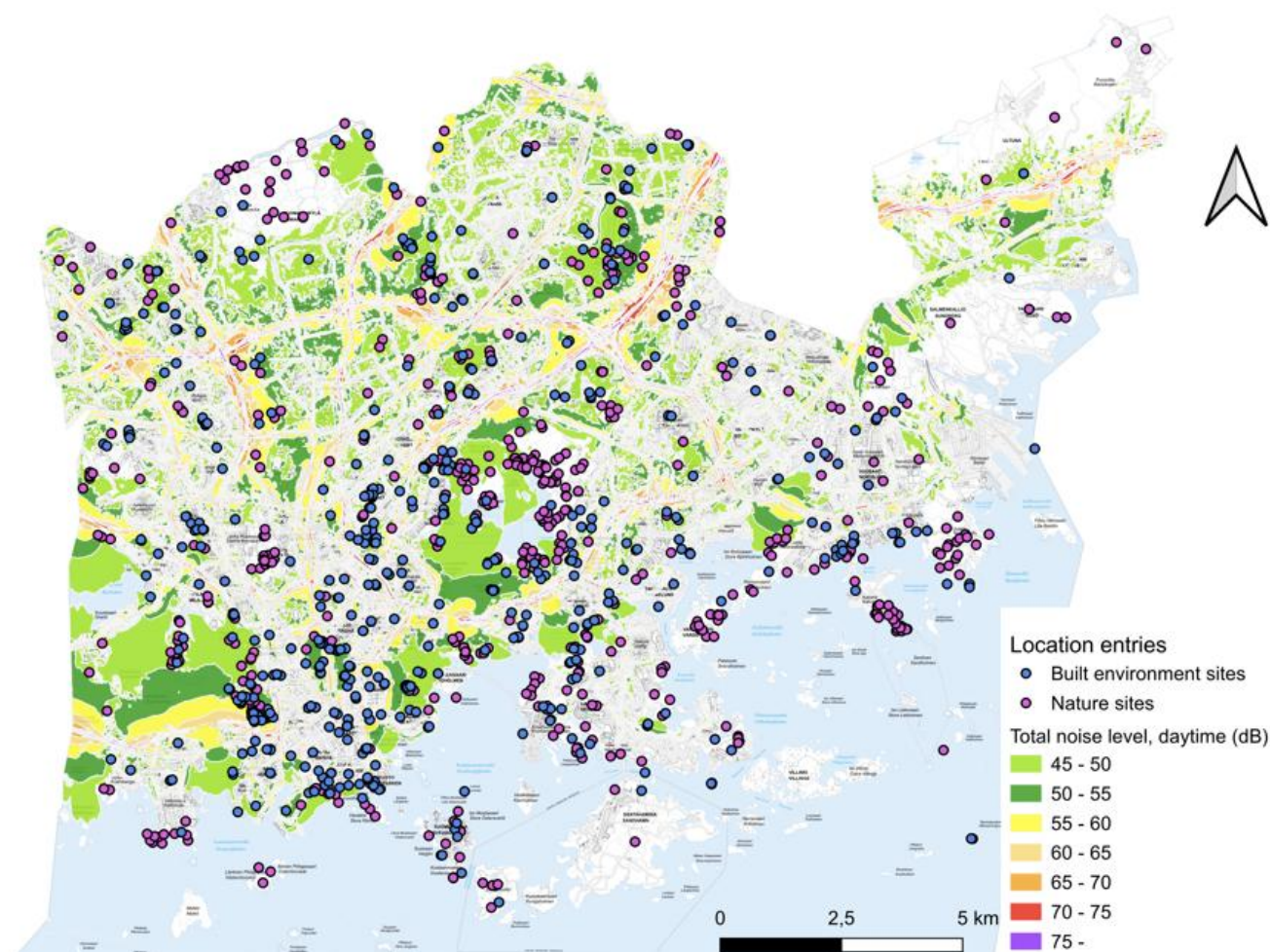


Figure 7. Location of map entries in relation to Helsinki's traffic noise zones.

Other elements contributing to the pleasantness of the sound environment were present in places perceived by respondents as quiet, but where the City of Helsinki's noise survey showed traffic noise levels above 55 dB. The entries marked in such places repeatedly highlighted the sounds of nature, such as bird song, as well as lush greenery, beautiful landscapes and proximity to water areas. In these places, elements perceived as soothing mitigate the disturbance created by other sounds, but do not eliminate the harmfulness of the noise.

4 Final words

Based on the results of the survey, it can be concluded that quiet and peaceful places in terms of sound environment can be found in Helsinki, both in the built environment and in nature sites. The responses to the survey further confirm that quiet and peaceful places are important to Helsinki residents. People also seek out and visit these quiet places actively and they are perceived to have many benefits. Most felt that there are not enough quiet and peaceful areas in Helsinki. The results are in line with previous resident survey carried out in Helsinki in terms of importance of these places, their number and frequency of visits, with no significant change in attitudes.

However, a pleasant sound environment is a subjective experience and a number of factors influence how it is perceived. Some of the factors that came up in the responses included greenery, bodies of water, animals, the feel of the wind, opportunities for leisure and recreation, and experiences of other people.

This was the first time the survey looked at built environment locations and nature sites in Helsinki separately, and it discovered interesting differences between them: The expectations set for a pleasant sound environment differed between built environment and nature sites; in built environment locations, the respondents often hoped for peace and quiet in relation to the other surroundings whereas nature sites were expected to provide deeper silence and the ability to listen to the sounds of nature. People also partly sought different things from quiet and peaceful places in the built environment to those they wanted from nature. People visited the quiet places of built environments more often for a short-term respite from everyday life, while in nature, they sought a deeper sense of calm, mental wellbeing and stress relief.

Exposure to traffic noise is widespread in Helsinki. Noise affects people's health and wellbeing and makes areas less pleasant to live in. Noise often goes hand in hand with air pollution, as traffic is the main source of both. Noise and air pollution can strengthen each other's adverse health effects. Usually, measures to improve air quality or the sound environment are mutually supportive.

Reducing noise emissions, e.g. by regulating traffic and driving speeds, and understanding the importance of quiet areas are important factors to safeguard quiet areas in a densifying city. However, it would be useful for those involved in city planning operations to consider also other ways of improving the quality of the acoustic environment than simply by reducing noise levels. The quality of the acoustic environment can be improved, for example, by increasing and protecting sounds that are perceived as pleasant, such as sounds of water, and by adding noise-absorbing surfaces, such as vegetation.

One of the purposes of the survey for quiet areas was to provide information to support planning. Taking quiet areas into account in land-use planning is especially important to ensure that Helsinki will also have quiet and restorative spaces in the future as it densifies. It is important to improve the comfort, accessibility and usability of areas perceived as quiet, and to improve the City's sound environment in general. The comfort of an environment also affects how the sound environment is experienced. An environment's comfort can be improved by adding natural elements and by investing in other pleasant features such as aesthetics and cleanliness.

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Kuvailulehti

Tekijä	Vilhelmiina Hynninen ja Anne Leppänen
Nimike	Helsingin hiljaiset helmet – Asukaskyselyn tuloksia ääniympäristöltään hiljaisista ja rauhallisista paikoista
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Tiivistelmä:

Tämä raportti kuvaa keväällä 2025 toteutetun asukaskyselyn tuloksia. Kyselyn tarkoituksena oli selvittää, mitkä paikat koetaan hiljaisiksi tai ääniympäristöltään rauhallisiksi ja miellyttäviksi Helsingissä. Lisäksi kysyttiin, mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat vastaajien kokemukseen ääniympäristöstä. Hiljaisten paikkojen sijainteja ja ominaisuuksia selvitettiin sekä rakennetussa ympäristössä että luontoalueilla. Työn tavoitteena oli tuottaa tietoa ääniympäristöltään hiljaisista ja rauhallisista paikoista suunnittelun tueksi sekä edesauttaa tavoitetta kaupungin ääniympäristön parantamisesta.

Kyselyyn saatiin 530 vastausta ja ääniympäristöltään miellyttäviksi koettuja paikkoja merkittiin kartalle yhteensä 1133. Paikkamerkinnot sijoittuvat laajasti eri puolille kaupunkia sekä rakennetuille alueille että luontoalueille. Valtaosa vastaajista piti hiljaisia alueita erittäin tärkeinä asuinympäristössään. Useimmat kuitenkin kokivat, että ääniympäristöltään hiljaisia ja rauhallisia alueita on Helsingissä vähän.

Rakennetussa ympäristössä hiljaisia ja miellyttäviä paikkoja merkittiin usein kantakaupunkiin ja vesistöjen äärelle, kuten Etelä-Helsinkiin ja Töölönlahdelle. Rauhallisiksi koettiin myös kartanoiden pihapiirit, siirtolapuutarhat ja hautausmaat. Luontokohteet painottuivat metsäisille alueille, laajoihin puistoihin sekä rantojen läheisyyteen, kuten Vanhankaupunginselälle, Keskuspuistoon, Kallahteen ja saaristoon. Miellyttäviksi ääniksi mainittiin erityisesti luonnon äänet, kuten lintujen laulu, veden solina ja tuulen humina. Osa koki miellyttäväksi muiden ihmisten äänet, kuten rauhallisen puheensorinan. Mainintoja saivat myös esimerkiksi vehreys, kauniit maisemat, arkkitehtuuri, saavutettavuus ja palvelut.

Melupäästön vähentäminen sekä hiljaisten alueiden merkityksen ymmärtäminen ovat tiivistyvässä kaupungissa tärkeitä keinoja hiljaisten alueiden turvaamiseksi. Melutason alentamisen lisäksi olisi tärkeää parantaa ääniympäristöä esimerkiksi lisäämällä melua vaimentavia, pehmeitä pintoja.

Avainsanat:

Hiljaiset alueet, ääniympäristö, ympäristömelu, kyselytutkimus

Presentationsblad

Författare	Vilhelmiina Hynninen ja Anne Leppänen
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Sammanfattning:

Denna rapport beskriver invånarenkätens resultat våren 2025. Enkätens syfte var att utreda vilka platser som upplevs som tysta eller lugna och trivsamma till sin ljudmiljö i Helsingfors. Dessutom frågades det vilka faktorer som inverkar på respondenternas upplevelse av ljudmiljön. Tysta platserns läge och egenskaper utreddes såväl i den bebyggda miljön som i naturområden. Målet med arbetet var att producera information om platser som till sin ljudmiljö är tysta och lugna, som stöd för planeringen samt att främja målet för att förbättra stadens ljudmiljö.

Enkäten gav 530 svar och sammanlagt 1 133 platser med trivsam ljudmiljö antecknades på kartan. Platsmarkeringarna finns på olika håll i staden såväl i de bebyggda områdena som i naturområdena. Majoriteten av respondenterna ansåg att de tysta områdena är väldigt viktiga i boendemiljön. De flesta upplevde dock att det finns få områden med en tyst och lugn ljudmiljö i Helsingfors.

I den bebyggda miljön markerades tysta och trevliga platser ofta i stamstaden och vid vattendrag, såsom i Södra Helsingfors och vid Tölöviken. Också herrgårdars gårdsområden, koloniträdgårdar och begravningsplatser upplevdes som lugna. Naturobjekten koncentrerades i skogsområden, vidsträckta parker och i närheten av stränder, såsom Gammelstadsfjärden, Centralparken, Kallviken och skärgården. Naturens ljud, som fågelsång, vattnets sorl och vindens sus, nämndes som särskilt behagliga. En del upplevde att ljudet av andra människor, till exempel ett lugnt sorl av röster, var behagligt. Även till exempel vegetation, vackra landskap, arkitektur, tillgänglighet och tjänster nämndes.

Att minska bullerutsläppen och förstå betydelsen av tysta områden är viktiga metoder i en alltmer tätbebyggd stad för att trygga tysta områden. Utöver en sänkning av bullernivån är det viktigt att förbättra ljudmiljön till exempel genom att öka mjuka ytor som dämpar bullret.

Nyckelord:

Tysta områden, ljudmiljö, omgivningsbuller, enkät

Description

Author	Vilhelmiina Hynninen ja Anne Leppänen
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Summary:

This report describes the results of a resident survey conducted in the spring of 2025. The purpose of the survey was to chart which places in Helsinki are perceived by residents as quiet or peaceful and pleasant in terms of their soundscape. Respondents were also asked what factors influence their experience of the soundscape. The locations and features of quiet places were charted in both the built environment and natural areas. The aim of the work was to produce information about quiet and peaceful places to support planning, and to contribute to the objective of improving the soundscape of Helsinki.

The survey received 530 responses, and a total of 1,133 places were marked on the map. The places marked by respondents are spread extensively across the city. The vast majority of respondents considered quiet areas to be very important in their living environment. However, most felt that there are not many areas with a quiet and peaceful soundscape in Helsinki.

In the built environment, quiet and pleasant places were often marked on the map in the inner city and by water bodies, such as in Southern Helsinki and Töölölahti. Respondents also found manor yard areas, allotment gardens and cemeteries to be peaceful. The nature sites marked by respondents were concentrated in wooded areas, large parks and the vicinity of shores, such as Vanhankaupunginselkä, Central Park, Kalllahti and the archipelago. Nature sounds, such as birdsong, the sound of water and the hum of the wind, were particularly mentioned as being pleasant. Some found the sounds of other people, such as quiet chatter, to be pleasant. Factors such as verdancy, beautiful landscapes, architecture and accessibility were also mentioned.

Reducing noise emissions and understanding the importance of quiet areas are important ways of safeguarding quiet areas in a densifying city. In addition to reducing noise levels, it is important to improve the soundscape by means such as increasing the amount of noise-absorbing surfaces.

Keywords:

Quiet areas, soundscape, environmental noise, survey



Helsinki

The Urban Environment Division is in charge of urban planning, construction and maintenance, building control, and services related to the environment in Helsinki.