Discovering Weedy Landscapes as Sensory Commons

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Abstract: Environmental relationships need to be understood as crucial in contemporary social research. This article explores relating with nature in urban contexts and its diverse temporalities. How do people relate to the more-than-human natural environments in the city? How does urban nature appear through sensory memories and perceptions? To answer these questions, this research analyzes sensobiographic walks conducted with young (15–30 years of age) and old (70+ years of age) city dwellers in Turku, southwest Finland. Via transgenerational sensobiographic walks (Järviluoma 2021), less controlled urban green spaces such as parks, riversides, margins, and pathways are discovered as weedy landscapes, where encounters between the human and the non-human take place. These weedy landscapes allow the sharing of sensory experiences and memories of transformation, following that sensing itself can be grasped as a collective endeavor. This article asserts that urban biodiverse sites maintain their interrelations with other forms of life. The multi-sensorial atmospheres they provide – smells, sounds, silences, views, moisture, shadow, feeling – could be cherished as sensory commons. The findings presented in this article contribute to current discussions in several research fields from urban planning to mobile ethnography, landscape architecture, spatial design, and the anthropology of the senses.

Keywords: Sensory Commons; Weedy Landscapes; Environmental Relationships; Anthropology of the Senses; Sensobiography.

Introduction¹

Environmental relationships formed in everyday lives can prove crucial in fighting for a more sustainable future. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic surged partly due to loss of biodiversity (Platto et al. 2021). As the concurrent wave of mass extinction becomes aggravated by the unstable conditions of a changing climate, social and human sciences are increasingly turning toward ways of knowing that seriously consider more-than-human

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interactions. Wilderness and non-human forms of life affect not only our daily atmospheres and health, but also fundamentally participate in the constitution of our living spaces and our very being – also in urban environments (Schliephake 2015; Aula, forthcoming). Nevertheless, not much is known about sensorially mediated relationships with the more-than-human environment in cities, nor about how they have changed in recent decades.

This article asks how urban wilderness is experienced through the senses, and explores spaces that often go unnoticed as »weedy landscapes« by combining anthropologist Anna L. Tsing's thinking about attunement to multi-species ecologies (Tsing 2015: 22, 33; 2017) with landscape geography of urban wildscapes (Jorgensen/Keenan 2012). Environmental relationships are explored through multisensory ethnography produced on transgenerational sensobiographic walks, as coined by Helmi Järviluoma (Järviluoma 2021), in the seaside city of Turku in southwest Finland. The research design is set to multisensorially discover less controlled spaces of urban nature such as parks, riversides, margins, and pathways. In these weedy landscapes, multi-sensory encounters of human and non-human participants take place, and sensing itself can be grasped as a collective endeavor.

A plethora of research exists on the beneficial health effects of urban green areas (e.g. Roslund et al. 2020). This article focuses on the often overlooked mixed spaces of weedy landscapes, with particular focus on their experiencing, namely investigating how they are experienced, remembered, and sensed by people from different age groups living in Turku. The question emerges of how these transforming spaces could be understood as points of encounter for personal and social convergence of the present moment, the not-yet, and the ghostly presences of the past:

»The winds of the Anthropocene carry ghosts – the vestiges and signs of past ways of life still charges in the present. [...] Our ghosts are the traces of more-than-human histories through which ecologies are made and unmade« (Tsing et al. 2017, G1).

Sensobiographic Walks into Urban Nature

Multisensory ethnography enables researching forms of diversity, collaboration, transformation, and particularities that often remain covered up by the master stories of progress and urban development. However, accounting for both the more-than-human elements of shared space and people's personal

experiences as formative parts of urban environmental relationships poses methodological and epistemological challenges. A response is offered in the methodology of sensobiographic walking formulated by soundscape scholar Helmi Järviluoma (Järviluoma 2021; 2017) and developed in the ERC Horizon 2020-funded, transdisciplinary research project SENSOTRA in 2016–2021². In the application of this method, younger participants of 15–30 years of age and older participants born before the 1950s were asked to pick a route that has been significant to them at some point in their lives. On these walks, conversations about sensory perceptions and memories are filmed and recorded.

This article is based on 64 walks conducted in Turku from 2018–2020 with a pair of research participants of different ages, and one or two researchers of a team of seven (the author participating as a researcher in 34 of the mentioned walks). Three walks have been chosen for a closer reading. These transgenerational group walks tackle different temporalities, where the sensations and memories evoked intermingle with a conversational and embodied interaction between the participants (Murray/Järviluoma 2020). For instance, when walking over bridges, the interlocutors vividly how terribly the River Aura smelled in the 1960s when it was still used as a public drain, but they also recalled the »wonderful smell of the trees in the spring«³ (Ylva, age group born in 1945–49).

Personal routes trigger sensory memories. Here, biographic research reaches beyond individual life courses: sensobiographic walking acknowledges the particular, unique, and situated nature of the sensobiographic narration in a shared experience of walking, where the interaction between all participant components and their relations influence both sensing and remembering (Järviluoma 2017; Karjalainen 2009). The very landscape itself has agency in triggering and mediating narration and remembrance (Järviluoma/Vikman 2013; Kantonen/Kantonen 2017). Ways of sensing in urban surroundings include different material and imagined relations that become actualized when moving in space on the walks, while the dialogue moves back and forth, also in time. This situated collective on a sensobiographic walk brings sensing into awareness as a mutual act (for more

2 See uef.fi/sensotra.

3 Interviewees are referred to with pseudonyms and approximate birth years to protect their identity.

elaborate discussion on the co-constitutive nature of the walks, see Tiainen et al. 2019).

When moving in space and sensing together is understood relationally, the nature of urban nature needs to be rethought as well.⁴ Relational epistemology focuses on the co-constitutive entanglement of human and non-human agencies in constant change. This mixed diversity implies transformative encounters: not self-contained units thrown into an empty space, but the coming together of different life forms in co-constitutive existence. Knowledge is formed in relation to different others.

Natural phenomena such as fires and floods, as well as plant and animal life – domesticated or wild – have always had their part to play in urban ecologies (Schliephake 2015). The climate crisis and aggravating loss of multi-species ecologies has evoked growing interest in post-humanist approaches across disciplines. Natural forces and other species are also being analyzed as entangled in the social, cultural, material, and political life of contemporary cities (e.g. Franklin 2017). By following Anna Tsing's suggestion for noticing weedy configurations and particular encounters, it is possible to perceive an alternate life in the city landscape. In landscape geography, similar observations have been made about urban wildscapes, defined as sites »where the city's normal forces of control have not shaped how we perceive, use, and occupy them« (Sheridan 2012: 201; Jorgensen/Keenan 2012: 1).

Where multi-species diversity is present, human and non-human routes and developments gather together forming entanglements of different modes of being in the world, encounters of different aspirations (Tsing 2017: 7, 17) – not necessarily all harmonious. These relations are perceived and mediated by multiple senses and their interactions (Howes 2011). Culturally informed ways and routines of sensing can be tackled with multisensory ethnographic data, such as the archive produced in Turku with 64 different sensobiographic walks, from which sensorial accounts of »weedy landscapes« on five different walks have been chosen for analysis.

Sensing Ghostly Temporalities with the More-than-Human

Many of the walks in Turku were taken on sites of urban green, in forests, and on shores, especially in the case of routes chosen by the younger participants (Aula, forthcoming). Non-human forms of life, including bodies of water,

4 For discussion on the different notions of nature in anthropology, see Descola 2012.

are in many ways connected to the sense of belonging and social experience of places. One of the walks, led by a teenage girl, Sanni (2000–05), took us up the River Aura to the nature reserve at Halinen rapids, just three kilometers from the center on foot. The rapids were mentioned by some of the older interviewees in remembering a seasonal event historically recognized by the dwellers of Turku. That is, the springtime flood from Halinen, when ice breaks at the dam and the glaciers forcefully rush down the River Aura, through the city center all the way to the sea. This noisy cracking ice mass is known locally as the »Old Men of Halinen« (*»Halisten ukot«*). Somehow, the term refers to old names of folk religion deities (the god of sky is called *»Ukko«*, the *»Old Man«*), and of rune spells about sacred places (verses such as »the high masters of Mount Koli«, *»Kolin korkeat isännät«*)⁵.

We walk past the dam and the rapids running down from it. Once we enter the reserved park area, the sound of traffic disappears and the scent of pines in spring sunlight fills the air. For Sanni, the place is a favorite among the riverside paths in Turku she has explored widely with her father to enjoy the peace and quiet. When the icy path becomes extremely slippery, almost impossible to walk on, we slow down and stop at a cultural heritage sign pointing at Iron Age cup-marked stones. In Finland, stones with natural or carved holes, »cups«, supposedly functioned as placements for sacrificial gifts to connect with the invisible world of the dead (Ahlqvist 2020). To our surprise, we notice that someone has left a modern gift in one of the cups: a mandarin opened into a round mandala form, shining amid snow and ice. Looking at the stones, a distant past converges with the present, together with the hint of a wish, hope or prayer oriented toward the not-yet. Landscapes as overlaid arrangements of human and non-human living spaces (Tsing et al. 2017: G1) enable the sensing of ghostly temporalities and traces of an invisible past (fig. 1).

This ancient grove and its open meadows in between big old trees can be experienced as carrying an aura of the sacred. Anthropologists Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen, Marja-Liisa Honkasalo, and Eleonora Lundell have discussed the way that landscapes are populated by diverse human and non-human agencies that assemble and transmutate in co-constitutive relations to form ritual landscapes (Virtanen/Lundell/Honkasalo 2017). Here, while the »Old Men of Halinen« are preparing for the spring, Neolithic sacrificial

5 Several rune verses of these topics are found in the Finnish folklore archives, such as SKVR VII2: 1463 in www.skvr.fi.

*»Maderine arranged in a clearing in the snow.«
SENSOTRA research project / Inkeri Aula
Photographer: Inkeri Aula.*

stones bear gifts of orange tropical fruit left not long ago. This place is not untouched nature, but walked and felt by generations before us who now color our steps. The walk evoked reflections on the concept of »nature«. The oldest participant in the walk, Markku (age group 1945–49), had a daily habit of long walks along the riverside and through the urban parks. Yet he claimed to hate nature, as the following excerpt from a conversation with the author illustrates:

Markku: »It's funny how nature, the way nature is. All my life I've been against nature, and against sport, but I've always practiced sport [laughs]. And here you notice how there's suddenly a swift, suddenly you walk like this here. It has a huge effect, on the longer run, it influences the general state of one's psyche, it's immensely effective, no matter what you, think of nature.«

Inkeri Aula: »How do you mean you've been against nature?«

Markku: »Well it's so repulsive to me, all that kind of promoting a thing real hard, anything, say all the fuzz about healthy living, or say, that now we are »nature-loving people« or whatever-something people, this way you lose the core of it.«

This passage expresses a dislike of common representations of nature, even of nature as a representation. For the speaker, the practice of walking in green sites and its effects are something that the idea of nature does not capture. There are trees, there is wind, there are the sounds of birds and of snow under the shoes as bodies move in a landscape, which is also in constant and seasonal transformation. Markku goes on to compare the ancient magical practices of sacrifice to modern human activities: to him, both are based on ignorance, the little we actually know about the world or about ourselves.

Thus, the sensory perceptions of the non-human world are not about interacting with »nature« as a separate realm but as something we are part of. Ghosts of the past, the not-yet, and the perceptions of the present surroundings are entangled with personal history and life experiences. This plural, co-constitutive way of being enables diverse ways of sensing.

Diverse Weeds in Common Sensescape

Standing ashore in a seaside neighborhood of Uttamo evokes memories in two research interlocutors, Mirja and Katja. They both reminisce about swimming adventures as children and skiing or skating on ice in the winter. The experiences with the waterfront have molded the selfhood of the participants and some of their affective memories are brought to consciousness by the conversation on the walk. Entanglement with the landscape in these walking interviews can be understood as a becoming, where particular sensations and memories emerge together.

Mirja (age group 1945–49) describes her feeling of wilderness in the little forest area in Uttamo, when she encountered a wild beast in the dark, suddenly standing eye to eye with a fox. Laughing, she recalls thinking to herself: should I play dead in front of one of those? But the fox was as wary of her as she was of the fox, so they just »parted ways«. As in many cities, city foxes are common in Turku. They have their own life in the shadows of the human world, like the many forms of wildlife at home in urban surroundings, from common rats to snakes, seagulls and rabbits. Many research interlocutors mentioned having seen foxes; even some Turku-born foxes' caves in Luolavuori Park were known to some. Although foxes and other wild animals in the city are mainly treated as a public hygiene problem in the interviews, they had a positive connection to natural forests even in urban surroundings.

Natural sounds from water and wind to birdsong, and the green visual scenery are often brought up on the sensobiographic walks. Here, other senses also became present: the tactile experience of water, the affects in animal encounters, the proprioceptive perceptions of one's own body movements in freezing when crossing paths with a fox or in the pleasurable found in moving on ice. This way, the more-than-human weedy landscapes in Turku form a significant common resource for the senses. As inclusive spaces free to use, they afford particular sensory experiences appreciated by the city's inhabitants.

The refuges for diversity, which make these encounters possible, could be thought of as a *commons*, not a form of a private, but of a shared resource. Cultural studies scholar Juhana Venäläinen has proposed that the sensory can also be analyzed as commons. Sensory commons could be understood as what we sense and what we can bring about to be sensed by others, in the way

that producing noise takes the silence away from others sharing the same space (Venäläinen 2020).

Close to the shore there is a painting of barnacle geese that, as Katja points out, refers to the often aggressive flocks of birds that invade the beach in the summertime, leaving a mess on the ground – in a way, contesting the recreational human space. Multispecies encounters enabled by the site are not necessarily harmonious. Rewilding forms of life may constitute an aggressive invasion of space and a particular coordination of »weeds« may effectively block other weeds, other types of coordination that constitute a local environment (Tsing 2017: 14). Growing flocks of wild barnacle geese, unlike the declining native geese, are protected under Finnish hunting laws and cause much debate in the country due to the serious harm they cause farming. However, the overall number of birds has declined globally, and the accelerating extinction of bird species indicates a bigger loss of biodiversity, oftentimes caused by farming (Birdlife International 2006). »Geese on beach« signs signal changing ecological circumstances, in which resolving multi-species cohabitation can become crucial for maintaining diversity.

Geographer David Harvey asserts that the freedom to make and remake our cities is a human right (Harvey 2003). To go further, public space can be understood as commons, where more-than-human forces also claim their agency. The question of who controls the ongoing transformations, and how, is crucial for experiences of belonging, but also for the sensory, by defining what kind of sensescapescapes are available. That means how, where, and by whom the environment is sensed – in short, how life is lived. This exercise of power is revealed in observations by Siiri (age group 1990–94):

Siiri: »For instance the place where I live, there's a forest and sometimes, well, I don't know where it came from, this request, that the kids would not bring sticks to the yard. And we were all like, huh, there really is no reason, [laughs] why should we implement this! There are things that, you can understand somehow, why is it forbidden or requested not to do [...] Like, some of us parents think that – [Her baby stumbles on playground stairs] Climb down backwards, Aino!«

Inkeri Aula: »A bit demanding these stairs.«

Ylva: »Oh but she can do it alright.«

Siiri: »I think that trees can be climbed too. And then the janitor thinks trees should not be climbed too. Somehow, I don't know, it supposedly ruins the tree. Well, why is it that they want to control that, this somehow wild part in the yard, and in the children, in people? And how come it is okay to make it into a rule, like, whom does it harm really?«

What Siiri refers to as wilderness controlled both in the environment and in people or their behavior, especially in the case of children, relates a lot to the culturally constituted ways of haptically interacting with one's surroundings and with the body. Choice of routes is controlled by planned structures, sometimes in vain: people walk on grass and cross the railways when they benefit from the shortcut. When thinking of urban space as common and shared, the sensory perceptions and memories experienced on weedy landscapes could also belong to the sphere of urban commons: something not private, but shared among many (Stavrides 2016). In anthropology, the idea of *politics of sensing together* proposes a parallel approach to sensory commoning (Laplantine 2015[2002]). The sensory experiences afforded by weedy landscapes and routes can defeat order imposed by the few, and afford communally initiated ways of sensing together. Routes and ways to interact with the environment do not need be harmful to others or to other ways of interacting with the surroundings.

The Smell of the Railway

Sensobiographic accounts in Turku bring up the success of the authorities in cleansing undefined spaces from the city center. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, the River Aura was still used as a drain and the riverside was dark with few lamp posts. Trucks loaded products in the backstreets next to the river and industries resided in the center. Older walkers repeatedly mentioned how homeless alcoholics literally lived in cardboard boxes on the riverside and under the bridges.

The horrendous odor of the water has now gone. The polished riverside has become a well-appreciated living room and a preferred walking route for locals and visitors alike. The river bank is furnished with benches, flower beds, and pieces of art, and the water bounces with restaurant ships. Here, some of the old and even medieval cityscape is preserved unlike in many other central sites of Turku, where collaborations between municipal authorities, construction companies and media known as the »Turku disease« led to

the demolition of many traditional buildings in the 1960–70s (Lahtinen 2018; Le Galès 2002: 190–91).

This facelift received praises from several of the research interlocutors. However, there were different opinions about the riverside's atmosphere. It has become clean and commercialized with no space for wilderness. Some of the older participants savor memories of lost liveliness including art, political activism, fishing boats and small industrial activities. On the walk with retired architect Ylva, coming from the river bank, to the university campus, to a street where there used to be a civil activist center with the cooperative Emmaus that offered free meals:

»Here, there was a bike repair workshop and everything. And I suppose all that served well those people who moved about in here, in this so-called, border zone. Where there are no new buildings yet, but they are already being planned. These are, to me, terribly interesting areas in a city, those that are in a process of transformation. Something new is coming in, and the old will be gone, but how it will be gone and what is preserved? It brings up a lot of emotions too. There's also the history of the people, there was this and that and suddenly it's not there anymore, landmarks are gone, and such.«

Site-related memories are connected to the physical surroundings: where demolished old buildings are replaced with modern ones, it becomes more difficult to recall what used to be and happen there (on sensory remembering on site, see Järviluoma 2002; 2017). The demolishing of weedy landscapes takes away a wide array of personal and collective sensory experiences, memories, and possibilities of encounter. Geographer Tim Edensor (2005: 829) has criticized the modernity of oblivion: »because of imperatives to bury the past too swiftly in search of the new, modernity is haunted in a particularly urgent fashion by that which has been consigned to irrelevance but which demands recognition of its historical impact.« The weedy spaces cleared for construction still haunt the city space through the memories that older interviewees shared on the walk. This sharing also makes their memories become part of the walk's other participants' experience of the place (cf. Tiainen et al. 2019).

Upstream, only a few steps from the city center, the riverside continues framed with bushes and wild growth. A railway bridge connects other neighborhoods to the university across the river. Students who have still managed to find flats for rent in the gentrifying historical area of Raunistula will have

a rather short walk to the campus, if they cross the railway and use the pedestrian side of the railway bridge. An overgrown shortcut over the rails passes by signs warnings against trespassing, but it continues to be used anyway as it offers a straight route on foot or by bike. The wild growth and the warning signs signal that stepping on the path takes one away from the ordered city.

The railway margins also have a sensescape of their own. With Ylva and Siiri (born 1990–94) we listened to the whistle of a train passing, and I asked how they experience the sound:

Ylva: »Somehow, it's related only to pleasant things, the sound of the train. To traveling, to leaving, and furthermore there's of course what is represented by the sound.«

Siiri: »Railway smells really good to me. Here, it's a weird smell too, somehow, I don't know what it is. But it can be sensed here as well, just next to the railway.«

Inkeri Aula: »The smell of trains.«

Siiri: »No! It's the, I don't know if it's in the – in the rails themselves, or it's what's between the rails.«

Ylva: »It's the iron, and oil, and then these, well, saturated wooden parts, and the rocky soil, and all that there is – I was just about to say that it's what's in these borderline areas, like, some spaces that have not yet been taken into, so called, better use. These places also relate to such odors. Like, the relation with them is not so protective, so hysterical, so there all this life that is becoming, the diversity. Just all that.«

These very analytically rich accounts of sensory perceptions and their meaningful connotations inspire the whole walking group (Ylva, Siiri, and the author-researcher) attuned to the contaminated diversity present in the weedy landscapes of railway margins. In the central area of Turku, this kind of less-defined space, partly abandoned by the city's efforts to ensure order can be found in the unofficial shortcuts, upper riverside, and rocky hills with wilder growth. On a smaller scale, weeds crack through the pavements, however, attention to weedy landscapes entails attention to the non-scalable (Tsing 2015). Immensely powerful thought systems such as

neoclassical economics, population genetics, and Social Darwinism ontologically rely their premises on self-contained units that strive toward their own interests. Weedy landscapes bring forth mixture and transformative entanglement where neatly packed monads melt into a bubbling diversity of co-constitutive existence.

Weedy landscapes are contaminated by previous uses, polluted by urban traffic, litter, and microplastics. The dirt, the smells, the uneven stepping ground on weedy pathways is something that rebels against the order inherent in dominant notions of development. There is danger in waste, as elaborated in Mary Douglas' conceptualization of purity, dirt is something out of place that threatens the order of things (Douglas 1966). Yet, despite its apparent scarcity, a small patch of green, between gray blocks of flats, can sustain a gathering site and lifeline for differing forms of life. Wilderness is not always purposeful for human intentions in the city, nor pleasant for everyone.

Nevertheless, there is something about wild growth and uncontrolled diversity that touches on the classic Spinozan concept of *natura naturans*. Nature is there, »naturing« for itself (Descola 2012). Let us return to the smell of the railway. What is revealed by this particular experience of a weedy landscape is an almost intangible atmosphere of breaching order. Contamination is something that enters your sphere of life, crossing (imaginary) boundaries of self and other:

Inkeri Aula: »What is it then, that wasteland smell?«

Ylva: »It's just that! Like, someone has spilled oil on the soil, and, there's decomposing and rotting, wood, wood and leaves and.«

Siiri: »Yeah. Perhaps that's what it is, a kind of contrast that appears. That somehow, something is in a way, dirty, and not made for anyone. It's not made for, like, so that it should please anybody. The way a railroad is not, it's not meant to be, it's not having a pleasurable smell so that it would be somehow nice to me! [Laughs.]«

Ylva: »No but you're such a freak that you need to go there to smell it! [sniffs air inwards, both laugh.]«

Siiri: »But that's what is interesting, this, how something else enters your sphere of life. Maybe the appeal is, that it's not so clinical, not so constructed and ready-made.«

Wilderness is there, a bursting life of its own. As Siiri eloquently points out: it is something else, an affective alterity that is encountered in a way that is potentially transformative: something that makes one feel, sense, or think differently in the moment. Weedy landscapes, thus, lead us to grasp a politics of the sensible (Laplantine 2015[2002]) that takes into account the multifaceted and sometime inharmonious qualities of contemporary environments.

Weedy Spaces Maintain Diversity and Sensory Commons in Urban Environments

This article has elaborated on the idea of weedy landscapes as spaces of »contaminated diversity« by analyzing how they are sensorially co-constituted among a temporary collective moving through space, together with more-than-human forces and life forms. In recent decades, the development of the center of Turku has turned idle lands into buildings, pavements, commercial venues, and streets. This transformation affects the sensory environmental relationships of the people who move through the urban landscape in their daily lives. The central riverside is well appreciated by the city dwellers as a common space. Some research participants, however, long for the ambience of freedom, community, and self-agency in the previously less ordered riverside.

Encounters with wildlife and the atmospheres experienced on walking paths relate to multiple senses. These kinds of experiences could be difficult to capture in formal interviews at a desk. The multisensorial method of sensobiographic walks provides a tool for noticing local ways of relating to the more-than-human, and for bringing these particular encounters into social scientific knowledge practices. Thus, sensobiographic walking in weedy landscapes can function as a grassroots takeover of urban experience. Simultaneously, it enables the sharing of sensory memories between participants from different age groups, and the following overlap of different temporalities in narration and focus, which affect the sense and perception of place for the walkers. Sensing can thus be perceived as something relational that happens together between the participants. In the same vein,

biodiversity in landscapes contaminated by encounter is formed in inter-relations with other forms of life.

The spaces of urban nature that have here been called »weedy landscapes« are experienced and remembered by the multisensorial perceptions they provide – smells, sounds, silences, views, moisture, shadow, and feeling. The perceptions related in this article suggest that, together with urban parks and other formal recreational spaces, the weedy landscapes could be approached as a form of *sensory commons*. This multiplicity could be cherished as a common, an important property not to be privatized but shared.

Ethnographic reflection on the walks in Turku has demonstrated that weedy landscapes of virtually unnoticed sites can emerge and bloom with diverse forms of life that remain in people's memories, after they are also demolished. Even small-scale sites between the formal lines of urban routes and the discovery of these weedy areas can prove valuable. An important assertion for environmental planning and policies that emerges from this sensobiographic analysis is that urban wilderness plays a fundamental part in sustaining possibilities for different forms of life and their encounters.

The findings of this article demonstrate that natural areas left without formal maintenance are also significant for sensory environmental experiences in an urban context. After the data was produced, the COVID-19 pandemic further increased the use of urban green areas. Urban wilderness, from forest parks to small stretches of weedy greens that cross-cut formally planned areas, is significant for the environmental relationships of the city dwellers in Turku. In the contestation over public space and sensory experience, domesticated and regulated life does not have the final say over the wild.

Data

Sensobiographic Walks, SENSOTRA Archive: TP2WYSanni, TP1WYKatjaB, TP23WOYlva. Sensobiographic Walking Interviews, conducted in Turku from autumn 2017 to autumn 2018, duration: 60 – 90 minutes. Interviewers: Inkeri Aula, Sonja Pöllänen, Milla Tiainen.

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