

Noise, well-being, everyday life and work

1 Warmer

a. Answer the questions and talk with a partner.

- What city noises do you dislike?

- How do they make you feel?

e.g., annoyed, irritated, tired, shocked, sad, surprised, angry, distracted, mad, unhappy, upset, displeased, fed up, ...



2 Key words

a. Write the words from the boxes next to the definitions below. Check your answers and your understanding of the words by using the same word to complete the example sentence immediately after each definition.

Then read the complete article to see how each of the key words is used in context

biodiversity crowded impair menace nuisance surpassed

1. the variety of different types of plant and animal life in a particular region

The island's large and exotic _____ is one of its biggest tourist attractions.

2. something that is annoying and a continuing problem _____

What a _____ that we can't use the car park this month.

3. make something less good or effective _____

His medical condition does not _____ his ability to work.

4. containing a lot of people, especially too many _____

The train was very _____ this morning. I had to stand all the way to work.

5. something that is dangerous and likely to cause harm _____

Drunk drivers are a _____ to everyone else on the road.

6. became greater and larger in number and amount than something else _____

Sales of his new book _____ everyone's hopes and expectations.

absorb

amplify

cacophony

din

measures

vegetation

7. plants and trees _____

It's an unusual type of _____ that is found only in this part of the world.

8. take in and reduce the unwanted effects of something _____

A good sports shoe should _____ the impact on your feet.

9. make sounds louder _____

Darkness seemed to _____ the calls of the creatures in the jungle.

10. actions that are intended to achieve or deal with something _____

The government must introduce stronger _____ to reduce unemployment.

11. a very loud unpleasant noise that lasts for a long time _____

Josie found it difficult to work with that _____ going on outside.

12. an unpleasant mixture of loud sounds _____

We decided not to sit outside the street café because of the _____ of cars, trucks, dogs, people, church bells, and people all around.

The world's cities must take on the cacophony of noise pollution

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- 1 Cities provide something for everybody: opportunities for employment and entertainment; diversity and density, social benefits as well as social tensions. Yet the world's greatest metropolises — from Bangkok to Barcelona, Bogotá to Cairo, Damascus to Delhi, Karachi to Kolkata and New York to Nairobi — also hold environmental dangers for their residents.
- 2 While many of these — notably waste, biodiversity loss and warming — are already well-documented, there is another often ignored environmental threat having an increasingly significant impact on city dwellers: noise.
- 3 Much like air pollution, noise pollution is far from being a mere nuisance. In fact, it is increasingly understood to have long-term effects on human health. Defined as unwanted, prolonged and high-level sounds, it can seriously impair our physical wellbeing. This includes chronic annoyance and sleep disturbance, resulting in severe heart disease and metabolic disorders such as diabetes, as well as hearing impairment and poorer mental health.
- 4 As cities become more crowded, their soundscapes become a global public health menace. Acceptable noise levels, as defined by the World Health Organization, are now surpassed in cities across the world. An estimated 90 per cent of New York City mass transit users are exposed to levels exceeding the recommended decibel limit. In Ho Chi Minh City, cyclists are exposed to noise levels above 78dB, which can cause irreversible hearing loss. In the EU, noise pollution affects one in five citizens and leads to 12,000 premature deaths every year.
- 5 In her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs wrote that cities can provide something for everybody only because, and only when, they are created by everybody. That egalitarian ideal is rarely realised today. Cities, especially in low-income countries, are marked by social inequality and geographical segregation. Noise pollution particularly affects the very young and the elderly among marginalised communities that tend to live in proximity to high traffic roads and industrial areas rather than close to green spaces.
- 6 As most of the world urbanises, cities are becoming an increasingly important ecosystem, not just for humans, but for biodiversity as a whole. Noise pollution is also a threat to animals, altering communications and the behaviour of various species, including birds, insects, and frogs.
- 7 However, research makes clear that natural sounds, emanating from green urban spaces, can offer various health benefits. In some cases, vegetation in urban environments can absorb acoustic energy and diffuse noise. Tree belts, shrubs, green walls and green roofs not only help amplify natural sounds by attracting wildlife, but improve the visual streetscape as well. While the ultimate solution to noise pollution is its reduction, rows of trees planted behind highways have been reported to reduce noise levels by up to 12dB in certain locations.
- 8 City planners should take both the health and environmental risks of noise pollution into account. Good measures have been applied already in urban areas across the world: from London's Ultra-Low Emission Zone, "noise radar" in Paris and Berlin's new cycle lanes on wide roads to Egypt's national plan to combat noise and Pakistan's 10bn trees "tsunami".

Continued on next page

9 Yet much more is needed to tackle the din in much of the world's cities. Noise pollution is not a mere inconvenience, but a serious health and environmental issue. Nor is it an unavoidable part of urban life. In recent years, there has been a great mobilisation of resources to combat air pollution, which is responsible for the premature death of more than 7mn people a year. Cities need a similar campaign waged against the cacophony that is harming people and planet.

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3 Understanding the article

a. Choose the option (a, b, or c) that best answers the questions according to the information in the article.

1. Noise pollution in cities is:
 - a. annoying but harmless
 - b. not annoying
 - c. annoying and harmful
2. A good way to avoid unacceptable noise levels in large US and Chinese cities is to:
 - a. use public transport
 - b. ride a bike
 - c. none of the above
3. The percentage of people in the EU who are negatively affected by noise pollution is around:
 - a. 12%
 - b. 20%
 - c. 90%
4. Noise pollution in cities affects:
 - a. the way birds communicate with each other
 - b. the number of eggs a female bird can lay
 - c. when and where birds build their nests
5. Trees, bushes and green spaces:
 - a. increase natural sounds by encouraging wildlife
 - b. reduce noise and social tensions
 - c. are most important in low-income cities
6. Noise pollution:
 - a. an unavoidable fact of city life
 - b. does not have to be part of living in a city
 - c. no longer a serious health and environmental problem

4 Business language

a. Match the words to make word pairs from the article.

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. city | deaths |
| 2. chronic | transit |
| 3. hearing | health |
| 4. public | dwellers |
| 5. mass | streetscape |
| 6. premature | annoyance |
| 7. social | impairment |
| 8. visual | inequality |

b. Match them with their meanings.

- a. public transport in the US
- b. the way a city or town looks and feels
- c. people who live in large urban areas
- d. when people are not treated the same as each other
- e. when you start to hear fewer sounds or they are not as loud as before
- f. the well-being of everybody
- g. when people die earlier than they should
- h. when you feel irritated, angry, and impatient all the time

c. Now use them in sentences to talk about the article.

d. Then use the four you find the most useful in sentences of your own.

5 Discussion questions

a. Discuss in pairs or groups.

- In contrast to the question in Exercise 1, what sounds do you find pleasant, soothing, or relaxing? Describe them and say why you like them.
- What sounds and noises make it difficult for you to work? Which ones help you to concentrate better on your work?
- Are you more of a city person or country person? Say where you prefer to live and where you prefer to work and give reasons.

6 Wider business theme – office soundscape

a. Your company, with its 20 employees, moved into an open-plan office space in a newly renovated industrial building two weeks ago. Unfortunately, the large space makes everything very loud.

- Your boss has asked you to suggest ways to reduce the noise in your work environment.
- Look at: furniture, dedicated quiet (or noisy) spaces, sound masking, wall panels, lighting, ambient (background) sounds, plants, flooring, fabrics, hangings, and any other ways to reduce noise in your office
- Choose two or three that would be suitable and helpful in your workspace. Look at their cost and where you can get them from.
- Talk about your choices and ideas. Make sure you use some of the key words and business language from this worksheet