Demonstrating change from a drop-in engagement activity through pre- and post- graffiti walls: Thematic analysis and quantitative linguistics applied to a soundscape exhibit

Martin Archer
Queen Mary University of London, School of Physics and Astronomy, London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (m.archer@qmul.ac.uk)

Evaluation of drop-in engagement activities, particularly trying to demonstrate impact or change, is difficult given their transient nature and many logistical factors. Many typical evaluation techniques such as surveys are often unsuitable and current best practice recommends integrating evaluation methods into the activity itself. We present a novel implementation and analysis of an established evaluation method, which has the ability to demonstrate change even from a drop-in activity.

A space soundscapes exhibit saw young families taken on a journey experiencing the real sounds of near-Earth space recorded by satellites – normally inaudible to humans due to their weakness and extremely low pitch. Graffiti walls were placed at the start and end of this journey where participants were prompted by event staff to reflect on what they think space is like. Thematic analysis of the words and drawings from the two walls showed a change from obvious space-themed bodies and typical misconceptions of the lack of sound in space to much more reflective and reactionary results afterwards. Applying quantitative linguistics shows an evolution of the distribution of words which demonstrates a greater diversity following the experience. Similar techniques have been applied to evaluating children's language as they age, however, we are unaware of this being applied to public engagement activities before. We therefore propose that these methods may be useful in evaluating other drop-in engagement activities and demonstrating the impact that they had.