

Final Report

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Introduction/Motivation

SoundPlace is a web-based interactive experience that helps users discover local and independent music through narrative, place-based storytelling, and intentional listening. It eliminates algorithmic personalization in favor of emotional connection and slow interaction by linking music to geographic locations and personal artist stories. Music discovery today is dominated by algorithmic recommendation systems that promote speed, personalization, and popularity. While it is efficient, it limits exploration and doesn't account for users who seek emotional depth or cultural context. Research conducted by Chang et al. [10] shows that digital storytelling increases user presence, immersion, and engagement with a digital experience.

Our interactive experience introduces a slow design approach [1] to interaction. Research by Villermet et al. [3] highlights how different modes of music, like algorithmic, editorial, and organic, shape user behavior and listening diversity in very different ways. They found that algorithmic recommendations narrow discovery, while human-curated and organic exploration have a greater diversity. Not only are users constrained, but local and independent artists also get the short end of the stick because of these algorithms. “Studies show that recommender systems disproportionately favor mainstream artists, while underrepresenting independent artists, regardless of musical quality” [7]. Meaning that this feedback loop makes it more difficult for emerging artists to be discovered. These two groups are the core users of our interface.

SoundPlace applies a slow technology perspective to music that shifts listening away from endless skipping and algorithmic efficiency toward anticipation, patience, and reflection grounded in story and place. Our original concept was centered on enforced intentional listening, but our user interviews revealed that people still want agency. Based on research conducted by Fink et al. (2024) [9], they found that removing user agency reduces satisfaction. Users are open to slowing down, but not at the cost of choice. Because of this, the no-skip intentional listening mode became an optional feature. Our MVP was centered around three goals: tying music discovery to places, highlighting local artists, and creating an interface that is easy to interact with but also encourages slow interaction without the sacrifice of autonomy. As we conducted our three user studies, SoundPlace changed in response to specific issues we observed when using a micro-entry approach that allowed us to see how users' understanding evolved over time [8]. Participants hesitated and/or misinterpreted certain elements, showing the gaps between our intended affordances and the signifiers that we had designed. Based on the feedback, we redesigned the interface to better align with users' already existing mental models of music platforms. This was done by reinforcing clearer visual signifiers, adjusting the constraint of intentional listening, and applying universal patterns of interaction so users can automatically understand what actions are available to them.

Specification

Requirements

- As a streaming application user, I want to explore music through an interactive city map so I can discover artists tied to specific neighborhoods and cultural spaces, rather than relying on algorithmic recommendations.
- As a listener, I want to see and interact with what others are discovering and listening to so that I can connect with people who share my local and musical interests.
- As a user, I want clear visual feedback when interacting with pins, toggles, and queues so that I always understand what actions are available and what state the app is in.
- As a listener, I want the music I play from each pin to feel connected to the space of the neighborhood it represents.

MVP Requirements

1. Location-Based Music Discovery: users can browse music by exploring a map centered on their current location.
2. Playback Controls: Users must have access to local tracks using playback functions that are persistently present at the bottom of the screen (play, pause, skip, restart).
3. Playlist Creation and Song Management: Users can add tracks they discover to a playlist or create playlists if none exist.
4. Login: User accounts store playlists, login information, and listening activity.
5. View Users' Activity: Soundplace UI allows users to add their friends and see what their friends last listened to and what playlists they have made.
6. Sorting Tracks by Genre: Users have agency over their discovery process because of the color-coded pins that differentiate music genres from each other, allowing listeners to choose whatever genre they are in the mood for.
7. Queue Manipulation: SoundPlace automatically adds songs to users' listening queue when they are moving through the city to encourage location/place discovery. Users can manipulate this queue at any time by removing tracks they don't want to listen to.
8. Narrative Context: Each pin has a drop-down section where artists share their stories about the song.

Missing MVP Requirements

1. Starting Guide: There is nothing implemented that gives new users a quick walkthrough or starting guide on the key features, like the map, playlist, or playback controls.
2. Mobile: Although SoundPlace can be accessed on both desktop and mobile devices, the interface isn't fully optimized for smaller screens.
3. Uploading Tracks: Soundplace still does not support track uploads by local artists.

Persona 1: Algorithmic Reliant User

Background

- 21-year-old college student commuting daily on Chicago's CTA Red Line. Uses Spotify exclusively for music discovery.

Current Behavior

- Listens to music during 45-minute commute to campus
- Relies on Spotify's Discover Weekly and Daily Mix playlists
- Cycles through the same 4–5 playlists repeatedly
- Music serves as both background (studying) and active listening (commuting, walking)

Goals & Needs

- Effortless discovery that breaks repetitive loops
- Occasional exposure to local artists without requiring active searching
- Music that feels fresh and contextually relevant to surroundings

Pain Points

- Experiences algorithm fatigue: “the same category of songs every time.”
- Wants variety but doesn't actively seek it out
- Disconnected from the local Chicago music scene despite living in the city
- dislikes features like “Intentional Listening.”

Persona 2: Community Reliant User

Background

- 23-year-old visual artist who is deeply connected to Chicago's creative community.

Current Behavior

- Discovers music through friends, artists, and local events.
- Uses SoundCloud to follow Chicago's underground scene.
- Values music that is personal and that is tied to people and places.
- Shares tracks with his own community and spreads the word about new artists.

Goals & Needs

- Wants a resource making local music easier to discover as opposed to mainstream songs.
- Wants to support local artists directly.
- Prefers authentic community-driven discovery.

Pain Points

- Dislikes algorithmic discovery.
- Feels that mainstream platforms push repetitive content from the same artists.
- Frustrated that algorithms overlook smaller independent artists.

Use Case 1

Context

Tuesday morning, 8:15. Max boards the southbound CTA Red Line at Morse station, heading to the UIC campus. He is tired of hearing the same tracks on Spotify during his commute.

User Actions

Max opens SoundPlace and sees a grayscale map of Chicago. He presses the “Find me” button, which centers on his current location, showing red pins. He notices that every time his route passes by a pin, he gets a notification that a new song has been added to the queue. Max realizes that SoundPlace has a function that automatically adds songs to the queue based on his proximity. He taps a pin near Pilsen’s National Museum of Mexican Art and views details:

Artist: Sofia Morales

Track: “Tierra”

Artist note: “Standing in front of Yolanda López’s reinterpretation of the Virgen de Guadalupe, I recorded ambient sounds mixed with traditional son jarocho rhythms. This neighborhood raised me.”

Max taps “queue,” and an “added to queue” notification pops up on his screen. He toggles his queue to listen to the song as the train continues moving.

System Functions Used

- Map-based interface & discovery
- Track details & artist story
- Add to queue feature

Use Case 2

Context

James is home after work, scrolling through social media. He sees a post about a new music discovery platform, Soundplace, an app connecting users to artists in their city. Curious, he opens it to explore what’s happening in Chicago’s local scene.

User Actions

James opens Soundplace, and the app automatically centers on Chicago. The map shows clusters of purple pins labeled with neighborhood names like Pilsen, Wicker Park, and Logan Square. He taps a pin near Logan Square, his neighborhood, and sees the following details pop up:

Artist - HoliznaCC

Track- “City Lights”

Artist note: “Recorded while watching the Blue line pass by, I wanted to capture the rhythm of trains and city motion.”

He sees that SoundPlace has a playlist feature. He decides to create a playlist and add the song to it. James shares the song with his friends and tells them to download the app because he discovered that you can add people and see what they’re listening to. Curiously, James looked up the artist on the internet and saw that they had a show coming up. James decides to go with his friends and meets the artist.

System Functions Used

- Playlist creation
 - Map-based browsing
 - Track playback & artist stories
 - Connect/follow feature
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Illustrated Report: MVP

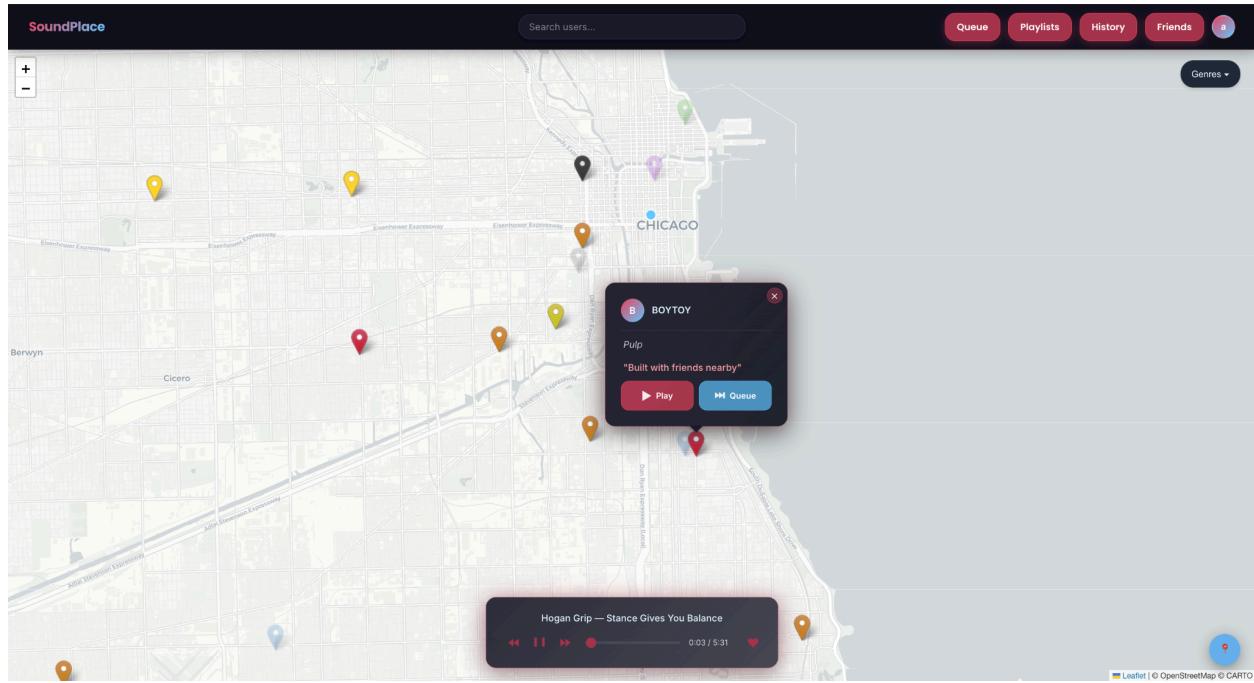


Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

- **Interactive Map with Geo-Tagged Music Pins** – Users explore Chicago through a map with pins representing local songs, color-coded by genre. Clicking a pin opens a pop-up showing the artist, track, and a short narrative linking the song to that location (Fig. 1). This design encourages exploration by making the map both informative and visually engaging, helping users understand the spatial and cultural context of music. The use of color coding and intuitive map controls reduces cognitive load, guiding users naturally to areas of interest and promoting discovery at their own pace.
- **Playback Controls and Location-Based Auto-Queue** – Persistent controls allow users to play, pause, skip, restart, and adjust volume, while songs automatically queue based on the user’s location. The queue is fully manipulable, letting users reorder or remove songs at any time. This functionality provides a dynamic listening experience that balances spontaneity and intentional curation. The integration of location-based triggers makes the app feel responsive and adaptive, encouraging users to engage with both the music and the environment around them.
- **Playlist Creation** – Users can save songs from pins or the queue into personalized playlists, edit entries, and delete playlists (Fig. 6). This feature supports long-term engagement, allowing users to curate music experiences connected to specific locations or moods. It also provides opportunities for repeated exploration and revisiting areas, reinforcing the sense of musical and spatial discovery.
- **Social Interaction** – Account creation, friend following, and viewing playlists and listening activity introduce a lightweight social layer (Fig. 6). Users can explore music through friends’ activity, fostering curiosity and subtle community engagement (Fig. 5). This functionality adds depth to the discovery process, as users are not only interacting with locations but also with a social network that enriches their understanding of the local music scene.
- **Search and Discovery Interface** – Dual-mode search allows users to find songs or other users in real-time (Fig. 3). Selecting a song centers the map on its location, while selecting a user opens their profile and shared playlists. This integration of exploration and social features ensures smooth navigation and encourages both targeted and serendipitous discovery without disrupting the map-based experience.
- **Settings Control Panel** – Users can manage playback, toggle intentional listening modes, adjust location-sharing settings, and control auto-queue triggers (Fig. 2). By giving users control over these variables, the app supports diverse interaction styles, from casual exploration to intentional, planned listening. The interface design prioritizes clarity and accessibility, ensuring that controls are discoverable and intuitive.
- **Song History and Statistics Analysis** – The app tracks user listening history and aggregates data to calculate statistics such as top-played songs and genres (Fig. 5). This functionality enhances user engagement by providing insights into their personal music habits. The design presents this information visually through charts and lists within the interface, making data easy to understand and act on, supporting both exploratory and goal-driven use cases.

- **Deferred Features** – Some secondary functions, such as mobile-specific layouts, onboarding tutorials, and direct artist uploads, were deprioritized to focus on delivering core functionality and ensuring smooth interaction with maps, music, and social features. These features remain planned for future iterations once the core MVP is validated.

The prototype was built using React.js for dynamic user interface rendering, Node.js/Express for backend management, and JSON-based session storage to maintain user data in real-time. Leaflet API was used for interactive maps, handling both the user's location and geo-tagged pins. Standard HTML, CSS, and JavaScript provide responsive, intuitive, and accessible interfaces. These technologies were chosen to create a web-deployable prototype that balances performance, scalability, and interactivity, supporting rapid iteration and easy testing with users.

The program functions reliably for its core features: users can navigate the map, interact with pins, play and manage music, create playlists, and explore social activity without major errors. Engagement is driven by the combination of spatial discovery, contextual narratives, playlist control, and social awareness. User feedback highlighted that both casual and intentional exploration felt seamless and rewarding, confirming that the system supports multiple listening behaviors while remaining compelling and accessible.

The MVP fulfills its original goals by enabling exploratory, social, and personalized engagement with music tied to locations. Users can spontaneously encounter tracks or plan experiences using playlists and queues, reflecting a flexible system that supports diverse usage patterns. The design balances clarity with richness of content, offering clear visual cues, map-based spatial information, and persistent playback controls that together provide a satisfying user experience.

Design implications were addressed through careful interface structuring, ensuring clear visual hierarchies, intuitive mapping of content, and consistent feedback from interactive elements. Control over personalization and social features supports multiple engagement styles without overwhelming the user, while narrative context provides cultural and emotional depth.

The project evolved from low-fidelity wireframes to the current functional prototype through multiple cycles of user studies and iterative refinement. Early testing identified difficulties with map navigation, intentional listening, and understanding the relationship between pins and songs, which were addressed through persistent playback controls, clearer button labeling, and more intuitive visual feedback for interactive elements. Features such as mobile-specific layouts and direct artist uploads were intentionally deferred to prioritize core functionalities that support exploration and discovery. By distinguishing between priority features, we focused on building a coherent and engaging MVP that balances music exploration, personal control, and social interaction, ensuring users can navigate, discover, and connect with music seamlessly.

Link: <https://four22-yclud.onrender.com/>

Studies Methodology

Study 1 - Music Habits & Discovery

Our first study was based on examining participants' everyday listening behaviors and the emotional association users have with music. We conducted 30-40 minute long semi-structured interviews with 12 participants who were all asked about their daily music routine, opinions and feelings toward algorithmic recommendations on mainstream music platforms, memories tied to specific songs or places, and how they typically discover independent and local artists. This phase helped us get insight into how different users discover and consume music and the types of users to take into account when creating our prototype.

Study 2 - Paper Prototype Interaction

In our second study, we conducted 30-40-minute-long semi-structured interviews with 8 participants using a low-fidelity paper prototype of SoundPlace. Participants were asked to use the paper prototype by pointing, tapping, and verbally describing their intended actions. We used similar questions as in study 1 to get an idea of the type of user they are. Participants explained what they believed pins, queue, and other controls represent and how they interpret what would happen if they interacted with said interactive buttons. The feedback from this study allowed us to see what users deem as obvious when it comes to interactive buttons, and what users had difficulty with, allowing us to change the way Soundplace came about for our final prototype.

Study 3 - Functional Prototype

In our third study, we conducted 7 semi-structured interviews, which were 30-40 minutes long, using our functional SoundPlace prototype. Participants started by creating an account, navigating the map, selecting geo-tagged songs, and interacting with queue and playlist features. We mirrored aspects from studies 1 and 2 to again understand user habits when it comes to music discovery and connection. The feedback from study 3 allowed us to fine-tune interactive buttons that users struggled with.

Study	ID	Age	Gender	Race	Persona
1	P1-1	19	Male	Hispanic	2
1	P2-1	20	Male	Black	2
1	P3-1	20	Female	Black	1
1	P4-1	19	Female	White	1
1	P5-1	21	Male	Black	1

Study	ID	Age	Gender	Race	Persona
1	P6-1	20	Female	Hispanic	2
1	P7-1	21	Male	White	1
1	P8-1	22	Male	Hispanic	1
1	P9-1	21	Female	Black/White	2
1	P10-1	20	Male	Hispanic	1
1	P11-1	24	Male	White	1
1	P12-1	19	Female	Asian	2
2	P1-2	19	Male	Black	1
2	P2-2	20	Male	Black	1
2	P3-2	21	Male	Black	1
2	P4-2	20	Female	Black/White	2
2	P5-2	19	Male	Asian	1
2	P6-2	22	Female	White	2
2	P7-2	21	Female	Hispanic	1

3	P1-3	22	Male	Black	1
3	P2-3	19	Male	Arab	1
3	P3-3	20	Female	Arab	2
3	P4-3	19	Female	Black	1
3	P5-3	20	Male	Hispanic	2
3	P6-3	19	Male	Black	2
3	P7-3	21	Male	Black	1
2	P8-2	20	Male	Asian	2

Studies Finding - Data Analysis

Across all three user studies, we recorded consistent patterns in what users valued and what confused them to shape the functional design of SoundPlace. In our first study, we found out that participants were either indifferent or disliked algorithmic repetition that loops the same artists while also describing discovery experiences they had from social interactions and local artists. This caused us to implement more personable and intentional ways to discover local artists that were non-algorithmic in our low-fidelity prototype. During our second study with the low-fidelity prototype, users struggled with interpretations of certain affordances, especially the “Intentional Listening” feature that participants strongly disliked. Users described it as frustrating and felt trapped, which influenced us to implement clearer visual cues, stronger signifiers, and the removal of the ‘Intentional Listening’ feature.

Code 1 - Clarity of Interaction & Visual Cues

Users relied on visual signifiers to understand how to navigate SoundPlace. Affordances were easily recognized, but secondary buttons were ambiguous until the user interacted with them. Some participants hesitated with the initial use of SoundPlace.

- “I know that I can interact with the map pins because they are big, and the buttons in the top right because that's usually where apps put things that a person can click on” - P1 (Study #2)
- “I think the add to playlist button, I wish it wasn't a separate button, it should be a nested button where it goes inside of the original playlist button” - P4 (Study #3)

Observations:

- Study #2 - Participants hesitated for several moments when greeted with the map. They scanned the map for interactive items before continuing. After first initial interactions, users got a hold of the concept and were able to interact with SoundPlace more easily.
- Study #3: Users successfully identified icons and interactive signifiers like playback and queue without assistance, showing us that recognition-based interaction worked well in our functional prototype.

Code 2 - Desire for Narrative Context

While the participants understood the basic song-artist hierarchy, they perceived a lack of depth in the pin pop-ups that lacked context on why pins were placed at specific locations, diminishing the meaning of the geo-tagged content.

- “I started following local artists... I knew how important it was to be tapped into a community I could belong in.” - P10 (Study #1)
- “The locations would need like a reason or like an explanation of why that song is there” - P2 (Study #3)

- “This pin (points to pin in Pilsen) is a predominantly Latin neighborhood, so being able to see what they are working on is pretty cool.” - P5 (Study #2)
- “I would say, when I interacted with the first song, I’m assuming it’s based on location. The last song I played gave off a peaceful tone, so I’m assuming in that general area there’s good views, a good area, and would be generally peaceful.” - P1 (Study #3)

Observations:

- Study #1: Users tend to value songs/music more when they resonate and tie them to a backstory, location, or memory.
- Study #2: Users had pre-biases when interacting with songs in certain areas on the map. They liked the idea of being able to see what is going on creatively in different neighborhoods in Chicago.
- Study #3: Participants seemed to interpret the significance of the songs beyond the UI. One in particular tried to infer the mood and the characteristics of the neighborhood where a pin was based on the song that was in said neighborhood.

Code 3 - Need for Greater User Control

Participants expressed frustration with the rigid system behavior and limited control over playback flow. Expectations for manipulability, filtering, and customization were not met. This shows gaps in user agency and flexibility within the interaction model.

- In reference to the “Intentional Listening” feature: “I feel stuck and trapped.” - P6 (Study #2)
- “What was unexpected was the no skip feature, feeling trapped in a song. Other than that, I was not confused.” - P6 (Study #2)
- “I guess with the queue, can’t move things around” - P1 (Study #2)
- “I was trying to figure out how to add it to my playlist.” - P3 (Study #3)

Observations:

- Study #2: Users were hesitant and frustrated because they could only add songs to the queue without the ability to save the songs locally.
- Study #3: Participants tried actions that were not supported by the UI. Participants also compared the interface with Spotify, which shaped expectations. There was hesitation around playlist and queue management.

Code 4 - Desire for Social & Community Features

Across all studies, users consistently expressed a desire for a more community and social-driven experience. Social connections tend to give people personal ways to discover music.

- “Yes, it would kind of be cool to see multiple pins on a location to see what songs people relate to in that general area.” - P3 (Study #2)
- “I expect that I will see what someone in that area is currently listening to.” - P5 (Study #3)
- “Music finds its way to me through experiences through the city... I always find myself amongst people who create music.” - P1 (Study #1)

- "I started following local artists... I knew how important it was to be tapped into a community I could belong in." — P1 (Study #1)
- "Add a top 5 list of songs people are most listening to, or see what other users are interacting with." - P4 (Study #3)

Observations:

- Study #1: Users discover music through social interactions and the people in their community.
- Study #2: Social interaction was imagined as part of the exploration experience, and some users asked how they could connect with other users.
- Study #3: Users showed curiosity about what other users are listening to, specifically the ability to see a top 10 song chart.

Code 5 - Algorithms

Participants shared their experience with how they typically discover new music and artists. Many of them described algorithmic recommendations to be an easy and simple way to find music, but oftentimes participants felt trapped in the repetition of only hearing mainstream artists.

- "Usually I listen to new albums that come out, or there's a thing called daylist on Spotify[...] " I feel like the only things they really promote are really popular artists." - P1 (Study #1)
- "Even if I don't go looking for music, the algorithm puts music that is in a similar tone to what I was listening to." - P2 (Study #1)
- "Sometimes I feel like I am in a loop of playing the same artists and the same style of music, so then I try to look up different playlists." - P3 (Study #1)

Observations:

Study #1- Even though algorithms provided ways to discover new music, participants felt as if the algorithm was pushing the same type of music.

Code 6 - Expectations From Existing Apps

Since the majority of participants use the same main streaming platforms (Spotify & Apple Music) as their form of discovering music, universal signifiers that are used in those platforms were easily recognized in SoundPlace, shaping how participants expected features to behave, and it also influenced their assumptions about navigation, queue, playlist management, and playback controls.

- "I would think it's just like how Spotify and Apple Music have their own queue, the song that you put in the queue will be the next song that plays" - P2 (Study #3)
- "I'm assuming that you make a playlist by clicking on this, I mean it's similar to other music apps (reference to playlist button)" - P5 (Study #3)
- "I wish that I could see what other people are listening to" - P6 (Study #3)

Observations:

Participants have previous experience and usage with music platforms that shaped what they expected SoundPlace features to have, and allowed users to be able to correlate the interactive buttons they usually use to the ones that are apparent in SoundPlace.

Overall Implications for Design

Give Users Flexible Control Instead of Forcing a Single Listening Style

Across all studies, one of the biggest things we learned is that users really want control. Not only over what they hear but also how they explore. People liked the idea of slower, intentional listening, but they immediately pushed back when the system felt rigid (like a no-skip queue or forced playthrough). This lines up with Slow Design research [1], which basically says that reflective experiences only work when people choose to slow down. Modern streaming apps have trained everyone to expect skip, queue, filters, and other quick interactions. This idea is also supported by [2]; in their studies, they found that how users bring expectations shaped by other apps can be compared to social processes of recommendation. They also found that transparency increased confidence, not because the algorithm was better, but because the user felt more in control of the system. So if we want to build an alternative discovery system, we can't remove those expectations; we need to layer them.

Implication: Apps like ours should offer multiple ways of interacting: casual browsing, guided exploration, or deeper listening modes. Give the user reversible actions, clear options, and transparent behavior. The bigger lesson is that alternative discovery shouldn't mean less agency; it should mean more ways to explore at your own pace. (Refer to figures 1, 2, and 5).

Treat Places as Interactive Elements, Not Just the Background for Pins

One of the clearest patterns from studies 1 and 2 is that users cared most about pins when the place itself had meaning, whether that be a story, a vibe, or some cultural connection. When a pin had no context, users called it random or just data. Prior work backs this up and points out that the place only becomes meaningful when it's tied to narrative or human interpretation. Even music discovery research [3] shows that people explore more widely when they're guided by context and storytelling, not just raw recommendations. Researchers at UC-Berkeley [4] found in their studies that people want to escape reality through stories layered onto physical space. Their storytelling prototype is about embedding narrative into everyday city spaces. They emphasize the emotional, fictional, and experiential layer, not just informational location-based services.

Implication: Location-based media can't rely on the map alone. Designers need to make the place itself part of the interface, using neighborhood playlists, little stories about why songs belong there, spatial clusters, or cultural tags. The broader lesson is that for apps like ours, narrative and place should work together. The map isn't just a backdrop; it is part of the story. (Refer to figure 1).

Make Spatial Interfaces Actionable Using Strong Procedural Signifiers

In studies 2 and 3, people immediately understood the basic hierarchy (Map -> pin -> song), but they weren't sure what to do first or how to control playback. They could recognize the interface, but they couldn't execute actions confidently. This reflects Norman's concept of a gulf of execution. Our findings echo work in cartographic interaction, showing that users often understand spatial layouts but lack clarity about system actions. Roth argues that interactive maps require explicit cues, such as clear symbol states, direct manipulation feedback, and tailored interface styles, to support actionable understanding [5]. Our participants' confusion about where to begin and how to manipulate playback reflects this exact gap.

Implication: Spatial discovery systems need explicit signifiers that guide users step by step. Small cues like different pin states, gesture hints, or short onboarding moments can make a huge difference. The takeaway for future designers is that spatial interfaces can't rely on metaphor alone. The interaction needs to be explicit, not just presented. (*Refer to figure 1*).

Using Light, Ambient Social Cues Instead of Heavy Social Features

Something that came up in our studies was how much users wanted to feel like they were part of a shared experience. People wanted to know what others were listening to around them, or noticing local patterns, but they did not mention things like posting, commenting, or any kind of social work. This pattern reflects the concept of social translucence, which emphasizes designing with lightweight representations of social presence rather than building full social networks [6]. Their work shows how minimalist cues can support awareness and norm formation without requiring heavy interaction.

Implication: While our current app does not implement these ambient social cues yet, our findings suggest that future iterations should explore light-touch mechanisms. Things like listening to heatmaps or neighborhood activity. This gives users the feeling of a community without forcing them into a social network. This big design lesson is that social features can make discovery richer, but only when they stay optional and low effort. (*Refer to figures 3 and 4*).

CONCLUSION

SoundPlace successfully challenges the dominance of algorithmic curation by proposing a platform rooted in geographic storytelling and 'Slow Interaction.' While modern recommendation systems prioritise efficiency and high-stream artists, often creating a feedback loop that suppresses independent talent, this project demonstrates that users desire a more emotional, personable connection to their local music scenes. Across our studies, participants gravitated toward experiences that anchored music in place, memory, and cultural identity rather than abstract algorithmic logic. By coupling narrative context with user-controlled discovery, SoundPlace reframes exploration as a collaborative process between listener, artist, and city. In doing so, it offers a compelling alternative to mainstream platforms: a system where meaning

emerges not from prediction, but from proximity, story, and the agency to explore at one's own pace.

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