



Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking (Germany)

Summary

The project “*Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking*” developed an innovative way of encouraging youths to examine and understand the multicultural environment of their cities. The project organised workshops for young people led by professional artists and photographers in four European cities: Berlin, Barcelona, London, and Sofia. The results of these workshops were presented in exhibitions and compiled in an electronic database. The diversity of visual signs of urban culture compiled by the workshop participants were also analysed in cooperation with the major cultural and scientific institutions of each country. The project not only stimulated the desire to learn about cultural diversity among youths through artistic activities, but also brought together artists, researchers and institutions from the participating cities in creating a completely new image of each European city.

The project

The practice initiated research on the resemblance and diversity of visual signs of urban culture in four European cities: Berlin, Barcelona, London, Sofia. These signs and symbols can be read as traces of values and stories relating to different layers of urban history and different cultures.

The examination and documentation of this contemporary diversity represents a way of helping to understand the intercultural complexity of the urban landscape. This was also the main objective of the “*Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking*” project. The project also aimed:

- To create a new perception of the European city as an 'arena for intercultural encounters';
- To establish a dialogue between young European citizens based on visual arts and modern communication technologies;
- To stimulate the participants' and public's interest for visual signs and different layers of meanings in urban landscapes;
- To support the process of identity construction and political consciousness among the participants; and,
- To show the differences and similarities between cities in Europe.

Sector(s) covered

Main Sector

Arts & Creative Industries

Other Sectors

Education and Training

Society

Science, research and ICT

Approach



Within the framework of the project 35 workshops for young people were held in four participating cities. These were led by professional artists and photographers in cooperation with major cultural and scientific institutions of the country. These workshops confronted the participants with visual sign systems present in European cities and invited them to take pictures of the characteristic signs of their cities. The collected visual material was then discussed in the group and systematically archived on www.citipix.net – a database bringing together the outcome of all the workshops. This digital archive can itself be regarded as one big piece of art unifying the different levels of the project. Each picture in the database was classified by theme and key words. In addition, GPS data was added to the picture, making it possible to create a network of interactive maps.

The outcomes of these workshops were presented and discussed during conferences and exhibitions in each of the participating cities, accompanied by a publication that is being distributed world wide by a major publishing house.

Element of innovation – the process

“Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking” not only created a virtual database of 'signs of the city', but also a dynamic network involving established institutions of contemporary art, media and cultural centres, youth centres, as well as leading academic research institutes in the field of social sciences.

Young people from the four participating cities were brought together and interconnected by information and communication technologies (ICT).

Youths had an opportunity to develop innovative and creative thinking throughout the project. This was achieved through the use of an artistic approach towards the perception and interpretation of images and signs in urban landscapes. By further networking the participants, the artists and institutions managed to create a completely new image of each European city. In short, the innovativeness of the project lies in its format that approached the topic of urban signs on an international scale, made possible by art and ICTs.

Key successes

(outcomes, results, impacts)

The outcomes of the project are twofold: on the one hand the artistic and creative work of all workshop participants and on the other the cultural products created, such as exhibitions, conferences, websites, archive and the publication. In addition, a functioning and dynamic network inducing people and institutions to participate was established, promoting a new understanding of the European city seen as 'arena' for intercultural encounters and a laboratory for various identities.

Over 350 participants were involved into the workshops. These were made possible through networking and the cooperation of 40 institutions. The exhibition in Berlin, for example, attracted 1,200 visitors, while the exhibition publication was printed in 1,500 copies.

“Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking” was promoted through flyers and press releases at national and international levels. The institutions involved in the project disseminated information through their own channels.



Public feedback was, overall, very positive especially regarding the new, interdisciplinary approach to the project – combining elements of daily surroundings with new concepts. The evaluation of the project pointed out that the very high level of motivation among the young participants could be directly linked to the creative aspect of the project.

Finally, an added value of the project can be found in its interconnecting nature. It built intercultural and interdisciplinary bridges between different people and through innovative ideas. The preparation of the workshops could be mentioned as one example in which very different views, artistic positions, cultural and political backgrounds had to be integrated into an overall coherent concept about social and artistic interventions in the urban sphere.

Challenges

The most difficult challenge was the identification and synchronisation of various interdisciplinary activities with very different partners in four different countries. Active coordination and organisation skills as well as extensive internal communication helped to overcome intercultural differences.

Transferability and sustainability

The approach developed by the “*Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking*” can be transferred to other cities. It can also be further developed to other contexts of culture and, particularly, in the field of professional education.

Special Highlights

“*Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking*” was using art and creativity to bring together youths, artists and the leading academic research institutes in the field of social sciences in four European countries in order to create a deeper understanding of the intercultural complexity of the urban landscape.

The project stimulated innovative and creative thinking through the use of art and photography to capture images and signs in urban landscapes as well as the meanings and values that these can represent.

Key characteristics

General purpose of the practice Stimulating creative/innovative behaviour and thinking

Target group a wide spectrum of teenagers and young adults, including art and design students as well as persons with little educational background

Type of learning Informal



Level of implementation	International (activities in four European cities)
Funding	Public: (European Commission, Capital Cultural Fund Berlin, British Council, Spanish Embassy, and others)
Time frame	2007 - 2008 (total 18 months)
Leading organisations	urban dialogues e.V.

Further information

Website of the project

<http://signs.urbandialogues.de/>

<http://www.citipix.net/>

<http://urbandialogues.de>

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