



# Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking

Barcelona :::::::::: Berlin :::::::::: London :::::::::: Sofia

Research – Exhibition – Youth Art – Conference

Urban Research on Resemblance and Diversity  
in four European metropolises

October 2007 – December 2008

A project initiated and coordinated by  
urban dialogues, Berlin

*The city is an ocean of signs. In our modern, urban society, we are surrounded by a culture of glittering signs and images: commercial and political hoardings, private messages, spontaneous markings, bombastic graffiti and penetrating advertising, rules and regulations are seeking an addressee.*

## Project description

**Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking** is a 15-month youth art project engaging with the signs of the European city by researching four selected metropolises. London: the centre of Europe's biggest conurbation with its multicultural flair. Barcelona: currently the most prospering city in Western Europe, a pivot between Catalan and Spanish cultural distinctiveness. Berlin: a city that had to reinvent itself after the fall of the Wall in 1989. And Sofia: capital of one of the youngest members of the European Union, expanding the visual research towards Eastern Europe.

Employing digital photography and new media, **Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking** explores the sign systems of the four cities by drawing up a visual inventory. Fed into an innovative online image database, the images create a contemporary archive, which is freely accessible and can be playfully interacted with.

## Research

Young people, guided and accompanied by professional artists, investigate the signs of their cities and thus document their urban life. Digital cameras and GPS-receivers are the tools with which they map and organise the discovered elements – signs, symbols, and signifying facets – in a visual inventory. All results are uploaded onto the internet image database. This phase of research will take place in approximately 30 workshops in the four participating cities from December 2007 to August 2008. Complemented by an exchange programme of the young participants and the artists involved, the project allows an interchange of artistic and methodological approaches across Europe, and generates knowledge on local specificities in its different cities.



## Exhibitions

During the final presentation of the project in autumn 2008, several exhibitions take place simultaneously in the four cities, while being networked amongst themselves. Two exhibitions take place in public space, thanks to the implication of the public transport companies Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona (TMB) in Barcelona and Berliner Verkehrsbetrieben (BVG) in Berlin. Public transport networks – linking diverse areas of the city, providing common public spaces and charting the movement of the city’s inhabitants and passers-by – are particularly suited to the project’s methodology. Furthermore, the Institutes for Contemporary Culture *Watermans London*, *House of Cinema Sofia* and the *House of World Cultures Berlin* host multimedia exhibitions presenting the outcome of the project.

## Conferences

**Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking** will culminate in an interdisciplinary conference entitled “Signs of the European City“ and hosted by the *House of World Cultures Berlin* in October 2008. Complementing this final conference, 3 one-day seminars will be held in the other participating cities, each in cooperation with the local **Goethe-Institute in Barcelona, Sofia und London**, in order to reflect on the implication and results of European youth art projects. Throughout, the project will be accompanied and evaluated by the *Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR) des Goldsmiths College University of London*.

These elements of **Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking** generate a border-crossing interplay linking and engaging renowned contemporary arts institutions, media training centres, youth art and leisure organisations, public transport companies, and one of the world’s leading academic institutes for social research. With the innovative possibilities of data processing, the four cities will be visually and virtually interwoven. This networking occurs by way of an artistic exploration of the pictorial and symbolic codes of contemporary urban landscapes, creating a hitherto un(fore)seen image of the **European City**.

In autumn 2003, *urban dialogues* had carried out a pilot project called *Archive of Signs – Inventory of a Metropolis*, which was exhibited on the platforms and advertising hoardings of one central Berlin tube station, making the research of young people available to the public and reaching around half a million passers-by. Expanding this initial pilot within a European context, solid networks emerged in the three partner cities London, Sofia and Barcelona, which contribute to a great degree to the development and realization of the current project.



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Culture Programme



Education and Culture DG



Transports Metropolitans  
de Barcelona



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