

Design And The City

Experiences From Mexico City And Berlin

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Having experienced the hospitality of Mexico City in 2001 and 2004 and worked with students there, as well as working with students in Berlin for many years I was faced with many questions. These questions are about living and working in a city. They look at design and communication, they take a closer look on public life, personal places and official signs. There are questions about personal attitude, way of thinking, living and designing. There might be some answers to these questions. I will try to get them through a few projects, all done in Mexico City and Berlin by students from both cities. Maybe we will even have more questions in the end.

First of all I want to look at the city itself. The aim is to gather as many information as possible. Not only with an objective view but also a very personal one. Here we are looking at Mexico City and Berlin:

1. What possibilities do we have to describe the city, the inhabitants, the daily living?

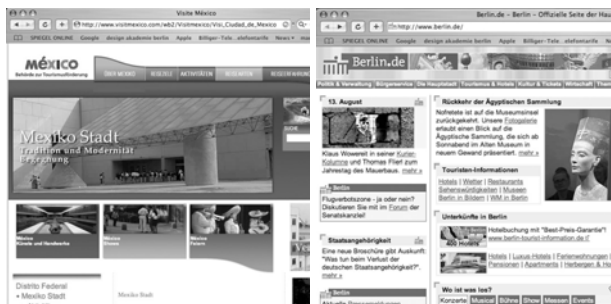
Geographical pictures

Probably the first contact to an unknown place. With your finger in the atlas.



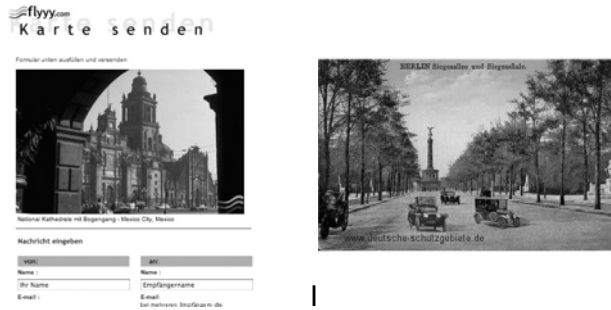
Official websites of the cities

Usually this is the quickest way to get some information about an unknown city. The other advantage is that the information usually is up to date.



Postcards sent all over the world

Sending postcards has always been a tradition of travelling people. With the use of the Internet the digital version becomes more and more popular.



Personal reports

Talking about the experiences in different cities has been quite a private thing. With Weblogs people started to make their reports public, often followed with lively online discussions.

Photos taken by tourists

These pictures are mostly taken for documentation and to preserve positive impressions during a stay. Often enough they tend to be annoying to others, forced to watch them and listen to the cheerful memories of the person showing them.



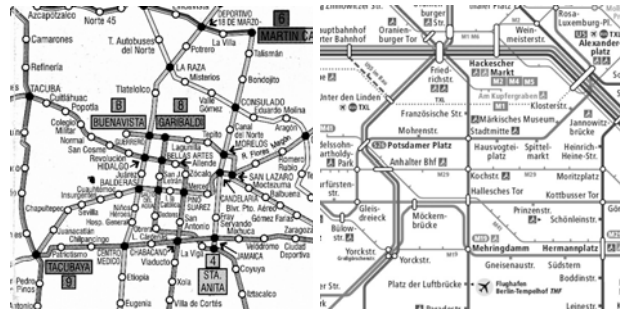
City maps

Abstract pictures showing the structure of the city. Useful helper not only for tourists but also for inhabitants who don't know every part of their city with some millions inhabitants.



Maps of public transport

It is a big task to create easy to understand plans of such complex traffic systems. They should be easy to understand, without knowledge of language or even without the ability to read.



Traffic

Many visitors from Germany get quite nostalgic feelings being faced with the Beetle all over the streets in Mexico City. One of only a few signs left from the DDR is the "Ampelmännchen". Besides the Brandenburg Gate one of the famous signs, often used for different souvenirs.



Statistical Numbers and Graphics

Exciting life reduced to numbers and diagrams. But it is useful information for a lot of people and besides a demanding task for designers.

POBLACIÓN		SIGECO	
2.5.1. POBLACIÓN TOTAL POR SEXO SEGÚN GRUPO DE EDAD 1997			
ver cartograma			
Grupo de Edad	Total	Hombres	Mujeres
Total	8,520,090	4,050,950	4,469,140
0 a 4 Años	2,268,939	1,172,076	1,116,863
5 a 14 Años	5,726,759	2,677,460	3,049,299
15 y Más Años	496,032	196,947	301,985
No Especificado	3,460	1,467	893

Monat	Bewölkung zum Monatsanfang	Geburten minus Sterbefälle	Zu-/Abnahme	Folge	Wanderungsgewinn/abnahme	Bewölkung zum Monatsende	Bewölkung zum Jahresende
2004							
Jan.	3 388 677	1 524	2 212	-686	8 217	8 100	117
Feb.	3 387 652	2 202	2 576	-437	7 862	8 662	-779
März	3 386 641	2 423	2 847	-424	9 343	8 632	711
Apr.	3 385 929	2 348	2 598	-250	8 877	8 152	725
Mai	3 387 654	2 232	2 380	-148	7 786	7 538	446
Juni	3 387 701	2 686	2 789	-103	8 906	9 563	-657
Juli	3 385 942	2 672	2 568	104	10 213	10 940	-727
Aug.	3 389 319	2 696	2 636	67	10 948	11 236	-290
Sept.	3 386 586	2 611	2 475	141	12 128	11 626	1 102
Oktober	3 387 530	2 420	2 489	-69	12 645	10 356	2 289
Nov.	3 389 950	2 513	2 636	-126	8 603	8 451	152
Dez.	3 389 979	3 279	3 633	-354	8 724	10 128	-1 404
2005							
Jan.	3 387 628	1 577	2 137	-560	8 128	8 196	830
Feb.	3 389 288	2 123	2 677	-554	8 114	7 266	848
März	3 388 683	2 288	3 026	-650	8 672	8 460	1 162
Apr.	3 389 078	2 415	2 836	-421	9 775	7 689	1 681

Weather

Always a good theme. Especially if it changes that often like in Mexico City.

Language

It is quite good to have English as a worldwide language. But it usually doesn't replace the knowledge of the local language with all the details of words and structure of sentences.



Noise of the city

You will surely find different noise in every city. Depending on the area, the day of the week, the time, even depending on the weather.

Music in the streets

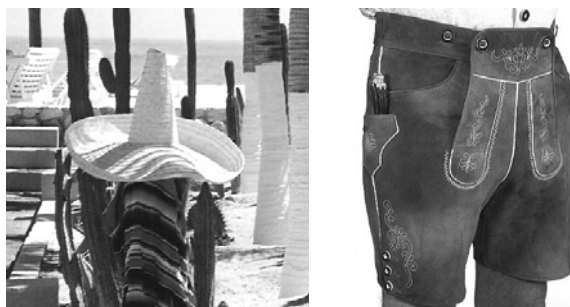
Sometimes you will find live music as an expression of local culture, sometimes there are people from different cultures bringing their music to cities all over the world.

Italians, living and working in Berlin around 1900, created an instrument, the "Harmonipan" which is still in use for traditional street music in Berlin and can also be found in the streets of Mexico City.



Clothing

If you are looking for the cliché of traditional, local clothing, you will hardly find it. A sombrero is not a sign for urban living in Mexico City. And leather trousers are just a traditional piece of clothing in the countryside of southern Germany.



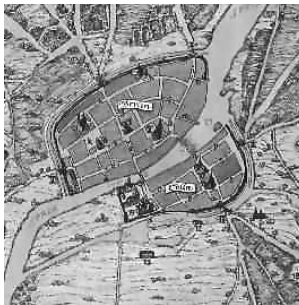
Religion

There is a big discussion in Germany about the role of religion in politics and education. In Mexico City you find signs of religious life nearly everywhere.



History

Comparing Berlin, founded in 1237 to a city which roots reach back more than 3000 years is not a good point. But in Mexico City it is of interest, that you can see traces of history all over the city, which do influence the structure of it.



Social Structures

Especially in big cities social conditions are often quite obvious. An example how you can handle this can be seen in a student's work in the second part.

Communication

Everywhere in the city you will find communication. Most interesting often is the non-designed pieces of communication. From typography with no rules out of books to artistically street art.



All these impressions lead to the second part with the following question:

2. Does living in a certain city influence our way of thinking, our abilities of perception, our way of designing?

To find answers to this, we will look at different projects from students. They are all studying communication design, either in Mexico City or in Berlin or with experiences in both cities.

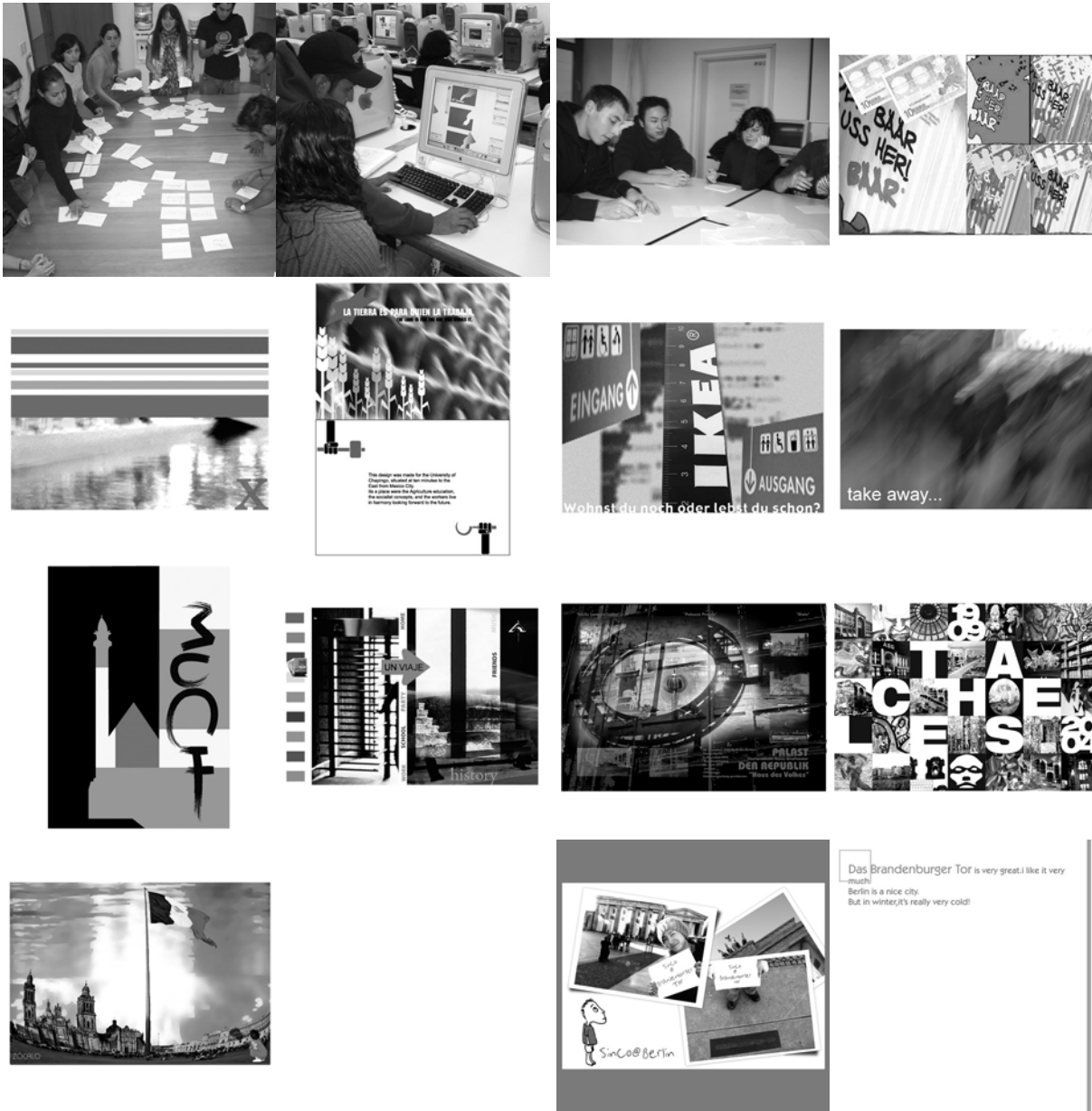
Project 1: “Milkbar”

This project was made in April 2001 simultaneously in Mexico City and Berlin. The task was to create a logo and some basic parts of a corporate design for a milkbar. Students started with the same briefing and worked on this project for four days, exchanging their steps of work and the results by Internet.



Project 2: "Places in the City"

This project took place in Mexico City in October 2004 and a few weeks later in Berlin. Students were asked to choose a place anywhere in the city and describe it very carefully and personally. The final design was a postcard.



Project 3: “Berlin VS Mexico D.F.”

This project was the degree of Thomas Krämer, a student from Berlin. He was living in Berlin and for some weeks in Mexico City to do the research for this project. The title is “Black Tar – White Feathers”. The results are a photo book and a short film, documenting the life of street kids in both cities. It was presented in March 2005.

Growing up with both languages, German and Spanish, Thomas had a good base for this work. The sensitive approach to his actors and their open-hearted reactions lead to a great result.



Project 4: Student exchange

During summer 2005 Anne Krieger, a Berlin student went to Mexico City for the summer courses. Her personal experiences as well as her projects done in Berlin compared to the projects made in Mexico City will add further material.

Picture credits

Geography: Diercke Weltatlas, Westermann Verlag, 1973

Website: www.visitmexico.com; www.berlin.de

Postcards: www.flyyy.com; www.deutsche-schutzgebiete.de/siegessaule.htm.webloc

Photos: both Armin Knoll

City maps: Guia Roji, 2001; RV-Verlag, 1989

Public transport: Guia Roji, 2001; BVG-Online

Traffic: Anne Krieger; www.ampelmann.de

Statistics: www.df.gob.mx/agenda2000/poblacion; Statistisches Landesamt Berlin 2005

Weather: dashboard from MacOS, www.accuweather.com

Language: Armin Knoll; Sascha Abramov

Music: Armin Knoll; www.leierkastenheiterkeit.com

Clothing: Los Mexicanos, 20251 Hamburg; www.trachtenonlineshop.de

Religion: Armin Knoll; www.bistumsblatt.paulinus.de

History: Mexico, Editorial Limusa, 1994; www.chronik-berlin.de

Communication: Armin Knoll; street art

All others from students of Mexico City and Berlin