Signs in public space reflect ‘normalcy’ in a community (cf. Blommaert 2012: 39). In this paper, we focus on mundane controlling signs – dog signs. By warning (beware of the dog!) and prohibition (no dogs here!), they reveal what is expectable by indicating potential transgressions (cf. Scollon & Scollon 2003: 147). We will analyse and compare the genres of these signs in Eastern and Northern European towns and villages. As data we have altogether 60 photos of the signs including both pictures and text or only pictures or texts.

Both prohibitions and warnings function through negation – which implicates the norms and normalities (e.g. Sacks 1992 [1971]: 453 ff.). The signs guard the spaces either from the dogs or the Others, that is, humans – at the same time revealing what is expectable. Our data show where the communities stand in terms of a ‘dog index continuum’: are they ’dog as a (co-)worker’ (the Eastern data) or ’dog as a pet’ communities (the Northern data) (cf. Kete 1995).

In the study, we apply the methodology of geosemiotic Linguistic Landscape Studies (e.g. Scollon & Scollon 2003), and aim at enriching the model of Visual Communication by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) with insights from Conversation Analysis. Our focus lays in the resources of the addressing (e.g. the breed, the posture and position of the dogs and the texts used) as well as in the varying cultural frames of interpretation (cf. Coupland 2012). The goal is to provide a ”diagnostic of social, cultural and political structures inscribed in the linguistic landscape” (Blommaert 2012: 7); the analyses are discussed in relation to the political, historical, and socio-economic situation of the data sets.

Keywords: negation, visual communication, norms.