



HOW PUBLIC IS THE SPACE IN WHICH WE LIVE? A CONVERSATION WITH LUNGOMARE

[Lungomare](#) is a long-established cultural association that creates, curates and produces interdisciplinary culture and design projects with a focus on artistic exploration and research in public space. The question “how public is public-space is?” is at the heart of their projects. We talked to them to hear how they have experienced the restrictions caused by the pandemic and to discuss the potential of the unexpected and other matters.

1. Lungomare has always had a particular focus on the exploration of public space. Because of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, for over a year now, we have all been experiencing a space that can no longer really be called “public.” What visions for public space have you developed during this time?

The public maxim that has defined us for nearly a year has been: Social distance equals safety. Public space is a space in which we meet, in which we are seen and heard by others and in which different perspectives constitute a *common difference* or *other*. Common worlds are created in public space. The corona pandemic makes such worlds impossible and the perspective of individual worlds increasingly prevails, while differentiated views of common worlds take a back seat. We have been forced to withdraw into imaginary, private and virtual safe spaces (if these spaces are available to us at all) and engage in and with public space only in a very limited way. Our exchange with and learning from the unpredictable has disappeared.

Lungomare understands public space as a *contact zone* and seeks to continually redefine and reimagine the community with its projects and interactions. We investigate how we shape and experience encounters, who is excluded in public space and who is allowed to participate. Since this space is currently off limits or ‘on hold’ and encounters with others are best avoided, learning in exchange with an extended community disappears, which is an enormous loss for all of us, while feelings such as fear, suspicion and control increasingly occupy our thoughts.



"Co-Carts", test ride, Bolzano, October 2020. A project by orizzontale, courtesy Lungomare. Image by Giulia Faccin.

2. Because of the pandemic, the possibility of experiencing public space as a contact zone of different communities has certainly been disrupted or, as you say, been put “on hold.” Yet, on the other hand, don’t you also think that COVID-19 has raised our awareness of the existence of different communities and the need for encounters? Your work focuses on making ignored or unheard voices audible and pointing out exclusions and restrictions of personal freedoms. Could this new awareness give your projects even more urgency in the future and, thus, also more relevance and attention?



On one hand, the corona pandemic has made many inequalities more visible, but our isolation within our own four walls has also rendered many urgent issues more invisible. To keep this invisibility from leading to indifference, Lungomare is seeking ways to actively participate in socio-political discussions and issues through cultural work. For the last few months and in cooperation with [Kunst Meran](#) and the [Summer School Südtirol](#), Lungomare has been developing a campaign that explores the role of women (and our society). The central themes of the campaign are the appalling increase in domestic and sexual violence against women, the countless feminicides in recent months and the precarious working conditions of many women with jobs in the vitally important “system relevant” professions.

We launched another project during the 2020 artist in residency program. Together with the [Rome-based architects' collective, orizzontale](#), Lungomare initiated the project “Co-Carts - Vehicles for the Community.” The idea for the project, developed during the first lockdown in spring 2020, was based on a compelling desire to experience our common urban spaces and give them back their central role of promoting a lively urban community. In close cooperation with other associations and activists from Bolzano ([Vivi Maso della Pieve](#) / [Officina Vispa](#), [Spazioautogestito 77](#), [Fridays for Future South Tyrol](#)), vehicles have been developed that strategically alter the urban public space through their functions and provide tools and strategies for those involved, enabling them to move their activities into the public space.

3. How do the co-carts work?

The co-carts are five trailers that can be attached to any bike. They have a built-in megaphone that amplifies protest voices and makes important messages loud enough to be heard. Temporary exhibitions can be staged on the vehicles; a table invites people to join in with activities; a movie screen creates a projection surface; a spotlight illuminates spaces; and the vehicle's ‘appendages’ create a temporary space. We hope that the co-carts can be deployed in summer 2021 and create numerous contact zones. After all, public space only becomes public when it is connected to other spaces and people, and exchanges take place.



"Co-Carts", test ride, Bolzano, October 2020. A project by orizzontale, courtesy Lungomare. Image by Giulia Faccin.

4. At the beginning of this interview, you spoke of the possibility of “learning from the unpredictable” (“Our exchange with and learning from the unpredictable has disappeared.”) that an unrestricted experience of public space offers. Based on your experience, what can grow out of this dimension of the unpredictable? What opportunities does it offer? (After all, we are still living in a long and unforeseen situation).

In a recent interview focused on our current situation, the philosopher Luisa Muraro said: “We have to be more present in our present.” In reality, we tend to plan for tomorrow in the present and focus less on the here and now. At the moment, however, the future seems to be more uncertain than the past. The unforeseen brings us into the present, to the reality at hand and it becomes a productive and tangible creative space. When we put something into practice, we exchange ideas and get to know each other, and things suddenly become concrete and visible. The unforeseen hides endless possibilities for us because it is



there that we experience things; an exchange of knowledge takes place, and we free ourselves from the expectations that so often limit us.

Lungomare

Lungomare (Bolzano, Italy) is a cultural association that designs, curates and produces transdisciplinary culture and design projects. It engages in collaborations situated at the intersection of public, virtual, printed, urban and exhibition spaces. Lungomare engages in interdisciplinary constellations and is a discursive platform for the testing and production of alternative forms of artistic, cultural and activist practices that explore socio-political issues. Lungomare is also a place for socializing in the green outskirts of Bolzano.