

Accademia Unidee
School of Visual Art

PUBLIC!

[adjective used as a noun; cf. Latin *Publicum* «public domain» and the phrase *in publico* «in public»]

Research Conference

What about the public?

Who can define what is public?

How is the idea of public constructed?

Can the public represent a form of resistance and survival to contemporary environmental and biopolitical crises?

In 2022, a revision of the notion of **public** is necessary. The term 'public' means, firstly, that anything that takes place in public can be seen and heard by everyone and has the widest possible publicity. Secondly, it means the world itself, in that it is common to all and distinct from the space each of us occupies in it privately¹. The interest in the antinomian **common**² is one of the fields from which much reflection comes. The common both as the negative of property, implying equal access, and as the positive of property, implying a participatory decision-making process.

By 2022, digital space has joined and increasingly replaced physical **public space**. The questioning of definitions and the public-private opposition have been evident. We just have to think of the emergence of creative licences, actually defined as 'commons', and, in the opposite sense, of the pervasiveness of digital surveillance, i.e. the effective appropriation for private purposes of the public imprint that each person leaves in the exercise of their electronic personal identity. The question to ask is where the public stands in the 'digital sovereignty'.

The vision proposed by Jürgen Habermas³ identifies the public “as a space of encounter and argumentation between free subjects holding equal rights of speech, who address problems of collective interest and submit their ideas-opinions expressing them through argumentative forms to inter-subjective scrutiny”. The **public sphere** is therefore to be understood as an intermediate space between the public, as the seat of political power and collective passions, and the private, as the area of production and reproduction of individual interests and orientations. “It is therefore the space of speech, criticism and rational argumentation in which the signals and impulses of civil society are elaborated and presented to the sphere of political power and in which the actions of public power are subjected to criticism and judgement”⁴. A vision that today can be partially revised. Either from the point of view of the spatial public dimension, redetermined within new definitions based on practices or, also, rethought around a relational dimension: “public space” not so much as a space that alludes to a non-private property, but a space determined “by the use that is made of it”, or that takes on different declinations according to the “ways of being together”, trying to reason on the one hand not so much on “what a space *is*, rather on what a space *does*” and, on the other, developing a research around the ways of “comment vivre ensemble”⁵.

1 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958.

2 M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2009.

3 J. Habermas. *History and Critics of Public Opinion*.

4 M. Cerulo, *Sfera pubblica e opinione pubblica. Habermas e Bourdieu. Una comparazione* (Public sphere and public opinion. Habermas and Bourdieu. A comparison), Quaderni di Teoria Sociale, Morlacchi Editore, 2020.

5 The reference is to the Italian research tradition on public space from recent years, obviously in dialogue with an international debate. In particular P. Crosta, *Pratiche. Il territorio è l'uso che se ne fa* (Practices. The territory and the use we make of it), FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2010; C. Bianchetti, *Spazi che contano. Il progetto urbanistico in epoca neo-liberale* (Spaces that count. The

Alongside the rethinking of public space, it is again the notion of the “common” that opens up avenues of research and practice, moving from the “tragedy of the commons” to forms of both radical and legal pragmatisms that define a way “other” of dealing with the public. “After half a century of neoliberalism, a new radical, practice-based ideology is making its way from the margins: **commonism**. It is based on the values of sharing, of common (intellectual) property and of new social cooperations. Common citizens claim that social relations can replace monetary relations (contracts). They advocate solidarity and rely on peer relationships to develop new modes of production”⁶.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the neoliberal proposal of **stakeholder capitalism**, with its corollary **brand activism**⁷. The former being a public devolved to the private sector and the latter a form of insertion of this new industrial public into the market. And, as far as Europe is concerned, the fundamental experiences of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity, which not only cross the theoretical elaborations of contemporary law, but also rethink the concrete possibility of action and relations between organisations in every sector.

The proposals of the artistic production, however, already burst onto the scene of a “life in common”⁸ at the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s. In particular, the notion of public art was regenerated along different pathways, including a radical change in the way of understanding and interpreting public space and the work of art intended for it⁹. The **new genre public art** implies “public strategies of engagement as an aesthetic language, the structure of which is a necessity perceived by the artist in collaboration with their audience”¹⁰. Site-specific art is replaced by community or **audience-specific art**. And it is the citizen who suggests the intervention starting from their needs, shifting from being a passive user to a co-author, in the same way as the artist”¹¹. **Socially engaged art** was born in the 1990s and 2000s, which contributed to redefining the very function of the public, in an interpretation of the artist as a builder of structures and infrastructures¹². In 1994, Michelangelo Pistoletto published the manifesto *Progetto Arte* in which he stated that “the time has come for artists to take on the responsibility of establishing ties among all other human activities, from economics to politics, science to religion, education to behaviour – in a word, among the threads that make up the fabric of society”¹³.

These practices are joined by the experiences of once very distinct worlds: design, social innovation, sharing economy and new forms of governance. “Creative communities”¹⁴ are emerging, “people who cooperatively invent, develop and manage innovative solutions for new ways of living”. The “policies of everyday life”¹⁵ developed in many cities are reshuffling the cards, so much so that the distinction between public and private subjects, common goods and collective or personal interests becomes in some cases less clear and less relevant.

In a relational sense, being public is a “staying” *among* others: in the intimacy of solitude, in the extimacy of small groups, in collective expression¹⁶. Staying: a term that comes from the Latin *status*, which in turn derives from *stare* (i.e. staying together). The **state** is public and the *status*, therefore, is nothing but the situation, the position. This situation is not based on thought, which is a personal property, but more on an *acting intelligence*, i.e. a faculty that extracts the truth directly from a shared imaginary. The *State*, therefore, is based on a thought that is *multitudo*, which is the repository of the common intellect, that is, of a historical-cultural heritage that articulates it, thanks to the coexistence of processes of knowledge and political practices. In the philosophical sense, the meaning is not *of being* but *among beings*, and the *Status*, therefore, is nothing but the situation, the position, the public condition. The public, then, is the *structure* of the connections that constitute society, which produces the *state* of relations between its members, which is embodied in certain institutions, regulations and

urban project in neoliberal times), Donzelli, Rome, 2016, based on the research inputs of Colin Ward (“what the space does”) and Roland Barthes (“comment vivre ensemble”).

6 N. Dockx, P. Gielen, *Commonism. A New Aesthetics of the Real*, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2018.

7 https://www.feelingeurope.eu/Pages/Klaus_Schwab_letter.pdf

8 We are here mentioning a notion that would be explored further in Cittadellarte's research into the theme of *life in common*.

9 Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the terrain. New genre public art*, 1995.

10 The pilot project of the new genre public art is *Culture in action: new public art in Chicago*, 1993.

11 A. Zevi, *Arte e spazio pubblico* (Art and public space), Treccani, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/arte-e-spazio-pubblico_%28XXI-Secolo%29/, consulted on 28 March 2022.

12 M. Pistoletto, *Progetto Arte*, 1994.

13 M. Pistoletto, *Progetto Arte*, 1994.

14 A. Meroni (ed), *Creative communities. People inventing sustainable ways of living*. Edizioni Polidesign, Milan, 2007.

15 E. Manzini, *Politiche del quotidiano* (Daily politics), Edizioni di comunità, 2018.

16 C. Bianchetti, “Intimité, extimité, public. Riletture dello spazio pubblico” (Re-readings of public space), in *Territorio*, 72, 2015, pages 7-17.

laws in continuous conflictual negotiation with the corresponding instances of the private, the market and the strenuous claim to the common. In the public sphere, communities, organisations and groups act out ritual forms of social relations, identifying that sphere as the place where the collective imagination, self-recognition and identity are constructed¹⁷. In short, it is the space of *social sacredness*, that is, the space of connection to the experience of a totally different reality, with respect to which man produces his common rights and therefore his proportions in a continuous negotiation. And he does so by updating himself while art, technology, memory and language change their repercussions.

Public! wonders how the public dimension operates in the contemporary socio-political complexity: physical, cultural and theoretical spaces. A condition where localisms are exacerbated and property boundaries are strengthened, where collective responsibility is questioned by the neoliberal construction of the individual.

In order to analyse the historical-theoretical importance of the concept of the public and to test its current fertility, artists, sociologists, philosophers, politologists, researchers, scholars, but also students, are invited to contribute to the conference by sending proposals related to the following problematic areas:

- the historical genesis of the concept of the Public, its role in society, its relationship with the private sphere;
- the dispersion and expansion of the concept of the Public in a contemporary liberalism characterised by the irruption of the private sector;
- the more properly anthropological and philosophical aspects of the concept of the Public, where it refers to the externalisation of processes of a possible anthropotechnics (e.g. the public as a system representing a particular model of citizen);
- the role, definition and contemporary use of public space as a useful category for understanding public objects and contexts (libraries, museums, public 'offices', but also places of worship, sports centres and even territories, rivers, forests...), as well as possible criticisms of such uses;
- the possible points of contact and dialogue between the Public and property;
- the role of art as public practice, in particular in reformulating the dialectical categories of individual and collective, subject and object, market and common good, human and non-human;
- contemporary issues of law, economics and sociology around the concept of the Public.

Curated by Paolo Naldini, Francesco Monico, Michele Cerruti But.

17 E. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1912.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Researchers, scholars, philosophers, artists, practitioners are invited to participate in the Research Conference by sending an essay proposal in the form of an abstract to the Scientific Committee by 15 May 2022 at the following address:

callforpapers@accademiaunidee.it
(subject: PUBLIC_Surname)

The confirmation of acceptance of the abstract will be communicated to the authors by 30 May 2022, together with the indications proposed by the Scientific Committee, while the full paper of approximately 2500/3000 words must be sent by 20 June 2022. Abstracts and papers in English, Italian and French are welcome.

Each author may submit only one abstract, but may appear as co-author of papers submitted by other participants. The papers of participants who have paid the registration fee presented at the Research Conference will be published in a volume with an ISBN code.

Guidelines for the abstracts:

Guidelines and editorial standards are available here

Each abstract must include the following information:

Full name of the author(s), Affiliation, E-mail address

Title of abstract, Keywords (maximum five)

Abstract (about 500 words)

Main bibliographical references

DEADLINES

- abstract: 15 May 2022
- abstract acceptance: 30 May 2022
- full paper: 20 June 2022
- reduced fee registration: 3 June 2022

REGISTRATION COSTS:

To participate in the conference: 50 €

For researchers under 35: 30 €

The registration fee corresponds to a contribution to organisational admin expenses, as well as being an incentive for a serious and committed participation.

Reductions or total exemptions are possible on the basis of the motivation expressed by the candidates.

Reduced fees

participation: 30 €

under 35: €15

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