

**solvita krese**

republicart-interview on *re:public*  
riga | 09 09 2003

**raimund minichbauer:** within the framework of the lcca-project *re:public* art projects by more than 20 artists take place over a period of 2 weeks. the project is located outside the city center of riga, in the urban sphere as well as in a variety of places: pharmacies, train stations, a hair dresser's, taxi, market stalls, etc. what kind of projects did the lcca work on earlier in the realm of public art and how did the concept for *re:public* evolve?

**solvita krese:** we produced several public art projects. in 1995 we organized the project *monument*, which was mainly object-based and for which we asked artists to react to spaces in riga, where monuments had been located before and to play with the historical circumstances and with the change of the political situation. three years later we organized a project in another latvian city, in ventspils. it was called *ventspils transit terminal* and was still mainly object-based, but there were also communication- and process-based elements in it, mainly by artists from abroad, e.g. superflex. the project *re:public* was developed responding to the local situation, i.e. that everything is centralized and that there are almost no activities in the regions of latvia or in riga's suburbs, that there is no exhibition hall for permanent contemporary art activities and we are always looking for alternative spaces to turn them into exhibition spaces, also that there are in general almost no grassroots activities or processes coming from the communities themselves. so we decided that the project was going to happen outside the riga city centre, that it would be more about communication and participation and spectators, who act not only like spectators, but are rather like co-producers of art. we also hoped that such a project could contribute to the emergence of grassroots initiatives. and then, with the participation in *republicart*, the project got framed in a broader theoretical context.

**raimund minichbauer:** have the latvian artists, who participate in *re:public* done social art projects or participatory art before, or was this suggested through this project now?

**solvita krese:** only few of them did such work before. several artists used local and social contexts to produce their work, but only in very rare cases they tried to meet their audiences directly, involve them in some way and create an interaction. one example is gints gabrans' project *starix*, which tries to make a homeless person famous through the appearance in a variety of tv-programmes. the project is about popular phantasies, that you could become a tv-star and then all your problems are solved. these are phantasies that arise from people in latvia being desperate about the economic situation and the social inequality. the project started in 2001, and it is based on local research. the project was presented - at different stages - in international exhibitions, but the artist never went so far as to show it to the local audience, to the people it really addresses. now it was presented in a show and a video lecture in a local cultural centre in a riga suburb<sup>1</sup>. up to now the majority of the audience was consisted of the art crowd, and it is unfortunate that there were not so many people from the area, although we did a lot of advertisement and we distributed posters around the area, and the moderator of the show is quite famous in latvia. it is difficult to reach this audience.

in general, there are some latvian artists who are working with social contexts, but only few among them have done projects with participatory aspects.

**raimund minichbauer:** in the *re:public* art projects, the political aspects seem to be quite - i would say - subtle, and when i asked artists about that, there were often answers like: we do not want to be political in a bold way...

**solvita krese:** yes, this is a strange situation in latvia - especially compared with the situation in austria. a few artists are involved in documenting or reflecting social problems, but almost none of them is trying to directly approach political questions. in the art field there have been some singular projects, like anti-consumerist projects organised by creative group *open*. it seems almost

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<sup>1</sup> *how to get yourself on tv*, see photographs at <http://www.lcca.lv/en/repdar.html>

like the mainstream attitude among artists is: we do not want to be involved in any politics. compared to a critical tradition in the west, which is mainly based on marxist or leftist ideas, latvian society after the breakdown of the soviet union was more right-wing oriented. it is only recently that a critical attempt towards globalisation and capitalism has become a bit more part of the public discourse.

an exception is the ecological movement - there is a tradition of critique and protest, which was very strong at the end of the soviet times. this is also the background of the bolderaja group, which participates in *re:public*. it was not formed as 'bolderaja group' at that time, but the people, who are members of the group now, were very active in the ecological movement already at that time.

**raimund minichbauer:** bolderaja is a remote suburb of riga, close to the sea...

**solvita krese:** it is a very beautiful area and in recent times a few richer people started to buy houses there, because it is so close to the sea. but generally it is still considered as one of the most unfavorable city zones.

**raimund minichbauer:** in which way is bolderaja group connected to the art sector?

**solvita krese:** they are activists, they never call themselves artists. but for some projects, they invite artists to co-operate with them. they are quite known in the art field and a number of famous latvian artists have worked with them. sometimes their projects are more aggressive, but this time they made a very optimistic project: *bolderaja is beautiful*, in which they invited people to take pictures of what they find beautiful in bolderaja, and then they displayed the pictures in several shops on the local market place.

**raimund minichbauer:** as for the participatory aspect, what was the overall concept of *re:public*?

**solvita krese:** it is strongly determined by a local context. The project is planned as a first step to interrupt this passive silence, as an invitation for participation. By raising their interest, we try to convince them that art could be used as a tool to express their ideas and demands. Then this may result in local initiatives organised by communities themselves or even articulation of critical statements. eriks bozis' piece<sup>2</sup> is in a funny way to reflect on that: it displays in public space - on a wall surrounding a busy market place - excerpts from the new city regulations on public order. as a community for this, eriks chose a district of riga, which is very much a world of its own, where you get the impression that the people there are not even aware that something like the municipality exists. so it becomes obvious that there is no way to communicate between those power structures and real people and displaying those excerpts of the city regulations might produce some - in the best sense - aggression, that people ask, what this is supposed to mean. because normally there is not even any interest in what is happening around them, and that might be a first step for them to do something on their own.

another aspect of communication we can notice in dace dzerina's project *the itinerant dance teacher*<sup>3</sup>, in which a dance teacher comes to places in two parks, where also the dance steps are painted on the floor. the project is mainly about humanising an area, and to invite people to cross this border and to just step on the dance floor and do something. there is no critical message behind, just the invitation to take part in process.

**raimund minichbauer:** for *re:public* a program-booklet was published in the form of a city guide<sup>4</sup>, which in addition to brief project descriptions includes texts on psychogeographic walks and travels through riga. what is the concept behind offering these different ways to perceive of and take part in the project?

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<sup>2</sup> *regulations*, see photographs at: <http://www.lcca.lv/en/repdar.html>

<sup>3</sup> see photographs at: <http://www.lcca.lv/en/repdar.html>

<sup>4</sup> *psychogeographic riga this week # 63a, september 2003*; see publications at the lcca-website: <http://www.lcca.lv/en/publikacijas.html>

**solvita krese:** one aim, that i just briefly described, was to try to reach the people, who live in the suburbs and to communicate with them and we also wanted to offer something to people who live in the city centre or to guests in the city. we liked the idea of psychogeography because of the situationist experience and in practical terms we thought that people maybe will not like to spend many hours in order to go to bolderaja to see only one single art project, but that maybe they would like to go there to see also other places or discover this specific neighbourhood, and so we can give them some useful hints what to hope for and what to do. on the one hand we developed this idea of psychogeography and wanted to invite people to look at things from another point of view. on the other hand it was also a question of public relations and how to advertise a project.

**raimund minichbauer:** what is the relevance of *re:public* for the further development of the projects of the lcca?

**solvita krese:** in a way it is like a logical development of our activities and a step in this development from object-based to more process-oriented and also participatory projects. the feedback and the reflection on the project will be important for new directions to be taken and for defining our future activities.

**raimund minichbauer:** thank you very much.