

on food sharing / support / care / small efforts to promote cycling

with **Hannes Muhr**
31 may 2021

*an ongoing collective exploration / learning, from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with Hannes Muhr, Matteo Zoccolo – 31 may 2021
matteozoccolo.net/on/_listening/conversations.html*

HM: Thank you for the invitation. We met here, in Landhaus Hof Graz, because it's a pretty quiet space, good for a talk. Before Corona I made the Carnival balloon decoration of this court, which is about, let's say, 30 meters times 20 meters big on three sides of the court. It kind of gives a roof to this party for children.

MZ: That's nice to imagine it, now there is nothing... Yes, it's very nice to be here. It's very quiet and still you can hear some people talking in the background. Yeah, it's the first time I'm in Graz, I'm looking forward to discovering the city today. Last night it was nice to meet you. We were really searching for some food, but it was already 22:00 and shops were closing. And then we saw you with this big bike and baskets full of bread and food. It happened at the right time. I think it's very interesting what you are doing with this bike.

HM: Yeah, I like to cycle for nearly all of my life. 8 years ago, they stole my bike, which needed about five hours of hard work to adapt it to my needs. And then I said, "I will try to live without any bike." Some people think that I'm crazy for cycling. I showed myself and other people that I can live without any bicycle for 3 years. I was using in-line skates. During these three years I carried many, many refugee children in camps on my shoulders, to show them that movement and transportation can be done with your own body only, with muscle power. Then I bought a transportation bike, a Bullet. I experienced a very high increase of efficiency in transporting my body and goods. At the time when I was only inline-skating, I supported activists against the hydropower plant in Graz, delivering them bakery products and other foods that would be wasted and thrown away otherwise, just to support this movement. When I got the transportation bike, I was able to carry not only 10Kg, but up to 100Kg. For years I brought all my saved food, mainly bread, bakery, fruits and vegetables for a distributor called 'Boxes' in about 12 places in town here, in Graz. These boxes are organized by the 'foodsharing' community and are open to everybody to bring in food that is not needed anymore, and it's open for other people who can take out food, that just need it or want to give it to friends or so.

MZ: It sounds pretty good.

HM: I used to bring bread cut into small pieces to demonstrations that I wanted to support. Demonstrations against climate change, or better, for efforts against climate change, and demonstrations to promote cycling or soft and sustainable traffic. That was very practical with inline skates. I came with the cardboard tray with small pieces of bread from the end part of the demonstration and rolled forward, turning around and offering it to people, taking something or giving it for free.

MZ: What was your intention?

HM: To give the people the feeling that it's nice they are here, I consider it a small gift for them.

MZ: Do you still do that?

HM: Especially with the Corona parties in Stadt Park and other places in Graz. Cafes and restaurants were closed, and people started to meet in the open air, and they started to play sports outside. I saw that people that are used to getting toast or something, a small snack in a pub, they want some bread in the late evening or night. Just plain bread or with something in it. And I offer it for free, just asking for a free donation, and say, "Take as much and donate as little as you want." People are supporting me to save food from waste. And it's a kind of adventure for me to get this thrown away food.

MZ: Where do you get it?

HM: Sometimes you get it nearly presented on trays! They put it in grey waste plastic bags but sometimes we have the feeling... I say 'we' because there are about hundreds of people that save food in Graz, more or less organized. When we get in contact with workers in these food stores, which are mainly women, they usually accept that we save the food.

MZ: That's nice.

HM: We are meeting them just accidentally when we try to get food from the waste bins. And they accept it. They see us and we silently greet them. We do not speak, mainly. But it happened once to me, during the day, that I've been in a small area where they had bins within the fence. The door was open and I entered, a woman came from the corner. She was a little frightened of me, she didn't expect it. We laughed a little bit, I said sorry a little bit. Sometimes a person says, "You know that you're not allowed? Please leave." And you have to follow that. Many shops close the area where they have the waste bins, they do not accept that we enter, at least during daytime. But, in the nighttime, sometimes the doors of fences are open, or a wall can be climbed. That depends on the company. Companies that are very professional and optimized have closed doors and closed rooms. Even there we can see that at least farmers can come to get the food of the day for the cattle, for the pigs to feed them. Some shops have agreements with social organizations like Caritas that systematically give food to people who are poor, sick, lonesome or so. And then there are organizations like foodsharing, where people systematically get food from some bakeries or food shops. And then there are creative and chaotic people like me that make it just on their own and give the food to friends, or to people on the street. I support musicians and artists a little bit and say, "Take, it's free for you, I want to support what you do."

MZ: That's great. So, you basically care. We can say you are a careful person.

HM: Yeah, I try to be. Certainly, with some things in my life, or with certain things I am not so careful. But I try to care for others. As a child I've been a Scout. I learned there that there are two mottos. One motto is 'be ready every time', and the other is 'make one good action every day'. A good action for the community, a good action for nature, for the world or whatever. You decide what's good and you do it. You should make a little bit more than to care for your own interest, but care for other people. With the Scouts I got in contact with nature and sports and when I was 18 or 20, I served as a guide for a group of younger Scouts. I think many of us Scouts do their way quite well in life, trying to be a good member of the community and of society. When I save food, I try to optimize not the commercial interests of the shop, even though I accept it, but try to work a little bit further. That means to save waste, which also supports the company because they have less to pay for their transport, we save space and so on, but especially supports people that cannot spend much money for food. As I already said, it's a kind of adventure and play. What will I get today? Every day you have different chances for different goods, for different food. It's just by chance what's on the menu of the day!

MZ: Yeah. I remember that yesterday you also said that it's a win-win situation. You do sport with the bike, you give food to people who need it, you meet many new people every day and you also get a little tip as a reward. That's very powerful what you're doing. And it's also powerful what you told me you did, those bike ramps that you put in the streets.

HM: Yes, I like to promote cycling traffic. And I am pretty sad that Graz, which has always produced bikes, now it's mainly in the auto industry. I try to promote cycling because it's more fundamental, it's more human and it's more sustainable. It needs less space in town. It makes you healthy and lucky in communication with other people on the street. And you see more of the sky during the night. You see more of nature. You can hear the river flowing beside you if you ride along it. For some decades, I have tried to communicate with politicians and officials of the towns, mainly of the towns where I lived in, and I think I gained my goals only for 1% because the commercial interests of building companies and car selling companies are much bigger, streets get wider and longer and highways and tunnels are built. For cyclists there's only a sign that shows you that you are not allowed to go through the tunnel and have to use the road beside the tunnel or walk. And for me it's so complicated to talk to officials, to the mayor and others in town, that I tend to make small things on my own to promote cycling, to make cycling a little bit smoother. And just a few weeks ago, I got some waste material from a construction site down there. That made me able to make

small ramps to overcome these annoying 2 or 3 cm steps that you have to jump on and down with your bicycle when you ride in the city. The planning people in the offices of town and companies think mainly for the car riders and make their path smoother.

MZ: I can really appreciate these little efforts. You know, it's trying to change something at a very small scale, hoping that these small changes can be an example for bigger ones. And this is something everybody can do. You don't need to be a politician to care about the well-being of the city and the people around you.