Berenika Balcer
Lancaster University Graduate

Tell Someone About Poland.
Polish fight on the London walls

The desperate calling for creative measures. Since October, we have witnessed Poles aiming for the sky of creative heavens with songs, banners, outfits, battle cries, and more - and all of it just for the sake of street protests. Still, today's times are undoubtedly desperate. The COVID-19 pandemic has often made those wanting to fight for their rights look for other, safer, ways to act. And, Tell Someone About Poland found both, a simple and brilliant solution to inform Londoners about the current situation in Poland.

While Poles were marching down the streets showing discontent - to put it mildly - with the government and the Constitutional Court decision, those in London protested in front of the Polish Embassy, dubbed 'Embarrasy of Poland.' However, such a protest was only possible for a brief time. When the restrictions in the UK were tightened, the idea of Tell Someone About Poland became a great alternative. This form of solidarity protest includes projecting images, such as the Women's Strike logo, short videos about the violence of Polish Police towards protesters, and graphics supporting the women's rights movement in Poland on the most popular buildings of the British capital. The aim is simple - to tell someone about Poland.

A common mission

It started the same way as all bottom-up movements in 'post-Tribunal-decision' Poland - with a group of people who were angry and seeking change. 'It is a picturesque way of getting people interested, informed, and involved in the circumstances of women's rights in Poland. This way of protesting allowed us to meet and talk. And it was also possible for us to organise such small gatherings while respecting the COVID-19 restrictions,' says Alicja Pawłowska from Tell Someone About Poland. They only needed projectors, batteries, some cables, and a great dose of creativity and a feeling of a common mission. Some of them are activists, others are simply angry. 'Each of us is doing something different, but what we have in common is that we enjoy meeting up, talking about Poland with each other and with strangers, who approach us during the screenings,' Pawłowska adds.

The project is London-based. The screenings have already taken place on the walls of the Polish Embassy, Westminster, Big Ben, Tate Modern, BBC Broadcasting House, St Paul's Cathedral, Marble Arch, and Madame Tussauds, as well as close to the key tube stations. They are usually looking for places with good visibility and where they can catch people's attention.

The protest, the city, and the medium

The idea, however, is not original. Tell Someone About Poland and its organisers strongly emphasise this. The concept of guerilla projection has been widely used by the Black Lives

Matter movement, Extinction Rebellion, and Greenpeace. And in 2016, when the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the Law and Order's project of the amendment law regarding the Tribunal as unconstitutional, and which the ruling party - unlawfully - declared to not publish in the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland; Razem party displayed the Tribunal's verdict on the wall of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

Guerilla projection has been particularly embraced in recent years as a new medium for delivering messages. It is relatively cheap and risk-free and saves from the discussions happening around graffiti while remaining visually powerful. And much of the power of such projections is in the medium itself. 'Unlike hanging a banner, a projection can move and change, and even be interactive,' says Mark Read, an NYU professor of Media Studies. But guerilla projection also interacts not only with those within the urban space but also with the space itself. In urban sociology, the street is a space for critical discourse.

In the 1970s, Henri Lefebvre discussed the way space is produced within cities, and how cities, in turn, produce space and everyday rhythms. Although Lefebvre wrote about it fifty years ago, the street continues to offer endless possibilities for critical visual discourse. As Ulrich Blanche pointed out in his work on street art - in such space, images like graffiti, 'intentionally seek communication with a larger circle of people.' And guerilla projection presents itself as an attractive way to 'disturb' space. Compared to typical street art, it is not embedded within a particular place forever. It can move around depending on the needs - it happens right here, right now, so, again, it is greatly interactive. 'With a medium so versatile, why limit yourself to static slogans? With simple online tools, your projection can become interactive and crowd-sourced,' Mark Read adds.

Solidarity

Agnieszka Strzałka from Tell Someone About Poland said that Poland might be far away, but London protesters still care deeply about everything that is happening in their homeland. The acts of solidarity like the one involving the crowds in front of the Polish Embassy present 'unbelievably strong energy and unity,' says Ala Pawłowska. Some of these protests were not even organised by any collective of activists or by an NGO. 'It was just an angry crowd of people shouting "Fuck off!". I remember this one particular time when I brought a small speaker, and someone had a megaphone, so we played music, and everyone danced.' She also adds that these protests meant exactly what they were shouting in addition to the invectives towards the Law and Order party - you will never walk alone.

However, what's also fascinating is the fact that people who gathered at the protests were not only linked by the common anger, but they also work together in other fields. Many of those that could have been found in front of the Embassy, could also be spotted helping the drivers who were stuck in Dover over Christmas. Nevertheless, apart from both, a creative way to deal with the situation imposed upon us by the pandemic and the great protest potential of projecting information on the walls of one of the biggest cities in the world, guerilla projection is simply an act of solidarity. And, when other Londoners get to know more about the situation in Poland, it is definitely a big win. But for the protests all around the world, from New Zealand to small towns in European countries and villages in Podlasie, it did not necessarily matter to not be in Warsaw. The fight is not limited to Poland and its capital, which, although is still the most crucial arena of the biggest manifestations, it is no

longer the only one. ‘We felt the unity of experience, of the anger, and sadness that we could not be there in Warsaw with the rest of the protesters,’ says Pawłowska. ‘Still, thanks to these protests, we felt like we were there.’

Unfortunately, Tell Someone About Poland is currently not doing any new projects due to the Coronavirus situation in the UK. But they are ready to act again once it is possible. If you feel like contributing, joining or getting to know more about Tell Someone About Poland, follow them on Instagram - @tellsomeoneaboutpoland.