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Building social resilience through visual instruments in Polish public space in the era of Russia's aggression against Ukraine

Original article

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of the article was an attempt to answer the question of the impact of murals created in Polish public space on building social resilience in the era of war in Ukraine.

Methods: The methodology of the conducted research was based on non-reactive research.

Results: The results of the research showed the very rapid reactions of mural artists to the war in Ukraine. Works created in public space included both grassroots initiatives and mural painting supported by public entities and NGOs. Of interest was the presence of murals in public spaces in cities of different sizes, and the fact that they were created by both anonymous artists and authors who specialized in street art and were well-known in the community. Content analysis showed that the murals stigmatized the aggressor (Russia) and upheld the victim of the attack (Ukraine). They showed the heroism and bravery of Ukrainians, but also the trauma that war brings to hundreds of thousands of civilians and a country fighting for freedom. The murals showed who represents "good" and who represents "evil" in the ongoing conflict.

Conclusions: The murals were one of the instruments for building the social resilience of Poles against Russia's propaganda. Russia was presented on them as an aggressor, Ukraine as an invaded country. The message of the murals resonated in public spaces, but also in media spaces (newspapers, TV) and the Internet. Hence, their significance was broader than merely being present in the public spaces of individual cities.

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Introduction

On the morning of February 24, 2022, Russia's aggression against Ukraine occurs. Although the intelligence agencies of Western countries had already indicated that this could happen, nevertheless the attempted full-scale invasion comes as a surprise.

The encroachment of Russian troops on the territory of a sovereign country building - especially after 2014 - its own national identity causes shock and disbelief that such events could occur in the center of Europe, at the borders of Schengen, the European Union and NATO in the 21st century. The advance of Russian troops into Ukraine and the destruction wrought by the Russians is causing a mass exodus of people fleeing the aggressor. Hundreds of thousands of people are making their way to Europe across the border from democratic countries: primarily women, children, the elderly.

Russia fails in its blitz to occupy Ukraine and seize power in Kiev. Despite equipment limitations, the invaded country makes effective attempts to defend itself, the Ukrainian president refuses to leave the capital and becomes an icon of the fight against the invader. In the face of Ukraine's resistance and the political declarations of various countries and international organizations, support is emerging for the freedom-fighting Ukraine in the form of arms and ammunition, international anti-Russian sanctions, and aid for refugees fleeing the war. This wide-ranging support flowed not only from NATO, some of its signatories and other countries.

In symbolic terms, but also in material terms, help for Ukraine comes from so-called ordinary people from various countries. The forms of support for Ukraine are various. Helping refugees, hosting them in private homes, donating to the fighting Ukraine, organizing public collections both for people affected by aggression and for the fighting state - these are just selected examples of grassroots activities in Poland, but also in other countries located closer or farther from the ongoing conflict.

"Special military operation" from Russia's perspective was supposed to be short-lived, the reality proved otherwise. Ukraine lost part of its territory in 2022, but in time moved to a counteroffensive. Prolonging the conflict from the perspective of the aggressor was obviously unfavorable. At the same time, it proved to be unfavorable from the perspective of other countries indirectly embroiled in the conflict - especially for their societies.

The social commitment seen at the beginning of the invasion began to burn out, catalyzed by the economic costs borne by people living in countries supporting Ukraine. In view of the deteriorating material condition of societies and psychological "fatigue" from the war, questions

have arisen about the absorption of Russia's anti-Ukrainian external propaganda in Western societies. This raises the question of the importance of various initiatives, whether grassroots or institutionalized, that could counter the Kremlin's message and make people aware that the costs incurred as a result of the war are immeasurably lower than they would have been in the event of a Russian victory. Among these activities was the creation by street art artists in public spaces of visual objects that expressed opposition to the war and showed the victim and aggressor in specific ways. The murals broadcast solidarity with Ukraine in public places in an attractive form.

In this article, large-format polychromes located in the open gallery of cities - that is, murals - are treated as a medium of popular culture addressing socially important topics. In the era of aggression, murals as expressions of support for Ukraine began to appear in the public spaces of many cities around the world. The objects defined who was the victim and who was the aggressor. They stigmatized Russia and its president, and presented the Ukrainian president by presenting him as an icon of the cardinal values of the democratic world. They showed the cruelty of the war from Ukraine's perspective and the heroism of a country many times smaller than the aggressor. In the urban space - while performing aesthetic functions - they blended into a broader message of support and solidarity with Ukraine. They served as one of many platforms for building public resistance to the Kremlin's anti-Ukrainian propaganda.

The paper declined to look at murals created in Polish public spaces in the era of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. It was assumed that although they are artistic works, they nevertheless represent objects of socially engaged art of an egalitarian nature. They transmit and popularize issues that are relevant and important beyond the symbolic walls of art galleries. They do so in a communicative manner that is relatively easy for viewers to read and compels reflection. The message, the form, the accessibility make murals very attractive media for building resilience. These issues were relevant from the perspective of the non-resilience research conducted. First, based on an analysis of the literature, questions about murals as certain visual art objects and their social functions were answered. Next, the article described how the conflict in Ukraine resonated on the resulting objects. This allowed to move on to the key issue - the emergence of murals in the public space of Polish cities and towns. The final issue was the question of the content of murals being created in Poland, what values they popularize and how they present both sides of the conflict.

1. The importance of building the social resilience of Poles in the era of Russia's aggression against Ukraine

The term "resilience" functions in many scientific fields. It occurs in metallurgy, technology and commodity science, among others, also in ecology, biology, psychiatry and psychology. In a general sense, it is "the ability of bodies to resist the action of physical, chemical, biological and other factors." (Encyklopedia Zarządzania, 2022). In ecology, it is the state of an organism in which it is able to "resist the harmful factors of the external environment." (Leksykon Ekologii i Ochrony Środowiska, 2022). Resilience is one of the criteria for determining a given system's ability to accept ongoing changes and adapt to continue to function smoothly (Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2015, p. 91). Whether in traditional encyclopedic terms or in the context of the global coronavirus pandemic, the biological connotations of immunity are very often emphasized. This is important because it is defined as "a state of insensitivity to pathogenic microorganisms." (Encyklopedia PWN, 2022). In a broader view, resilience focuses on several aspects (social, economic, natural, physical, institutional). In the view of the social sciences, the organism is replaced by a human individual, a social group, a cultural, political, or economic system (Górska-Rożej, 2018, p. 57).

One of the basic prerequisites for security is the preservation and development of capabilities in the civilian and military spheres that impede hostile actions against a state and society. Resilience is therefore a response to a variety of threats (Rey, 2021). This is especially so when "Today's security environment is increasingly complex and uncertain" while political, military, economic and social interactions at the national, regional and global levels are on an upward trend and intensifying (Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Rzeczypospolitej, 2020). The above diagnosis flows from the Polish Security Strategy of 2020, the events of the following months have intensified their significance. In 2021, Poland is experiencing a migration crisis related to attempts by migrants from the Middle East to cross the EU and Schengen borders. These people were brought in by the regime of A. Lukashenko and tried to enter the various countries through Belarus. Experts saw the event as part of hybrid warfare (Białoruska „Operacja Śluza”. Starannie przygotowany plan służb, 2021). Some circles in Poland saw the Polish-Belarusian border crisis as a continuation of the refugee (or more broadly-humanitarian) crisis initiated in 2015. That's why some Poles in 2021 advocated allowing illegal border crossers to apply for asylum in Poland¹. The situation was different a few months later, when Russia invaded Ukraine

¹ In both September and December 2021, polls showed that 33% of respondents favored granting asylum to those on the Polish-Belarusian border. *Opinia publiczna wobec kryzysu na granicy z Białorusią*, CBOS, 160/2021, Warszawa, grudzień 2021.

in February 2022. The major political parties and the vast majority of society sided with the invaded state. Both events showed how important it is to build resilience not only of the state and its institutions, but also of society.

Traditionally, building resilience was viewed from the perspective of the state. Nowadays, in view of various threats, but also recognizing the importance of individuals, groups, communities for "bottom-up" countering threats, attention is paid to the aspect of social resilience both at the state and EU and NATO levels. For the North Atlantic Treaty Organization states operating in a globalized and confrontational world, building resilience is becoming a responsibility "requiring constant adjustments as new inadequate safeguards and threats emerge." (Shea, 2016). It is also an important element of deterrence policy, designed to force "a possible adversary to abandon an attack by convincing him that an attack would not enable him to achieve his goals or would be too costly for him." (Rey, 2021).

In the era of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, support for the invaded state and its people has become a Polish *raison d'être*, resonating strongly in society. Despite the differences dividing Poland and Ukraine, Poles and Ukrainians in their view of history, there is almost unequivocal support for the belligerent Ukraine. This is evidenced by the results of public opinion polls on the willingness to help neighbors, accepting and hosting refugees in Poland, social activity of Poles on behalf of refugees². With Russia's invasion of Ukraine grinding to a halt, bearing the direct and indirect economic costs of the war, the looming economic crisis, and the psychological "fatigue" of war recorded in the first days and weeks of the conflict, social resilience began to decline slightly³.

After six months of war in Poland, there were no spectacular demonstrations raising the negative consequences of Ukraine's struggle for independence for other countries. (Manifestacja Konfederacji uderzająca w Ukraińców. Nikt nie przyszedł, 26.09.2022.). However, we must remain aware that they were held in other European Union, for example, in the Czech Republic (Overbeek E., 2.11.2022), Germany (Stelmaszczyk, 11.10.2022) and Cyprus (Prorosyjska demonstracja na Cyprze. "Grupa Polaków powitała ich tak, jak powitano rosyjski okręt wojenny", 12.04.2022). Therefore, in view of the protracted war, it is

² The results of a survey conducted shortly after the aggression (28.02-10.03.2022) show that nine out of ten respondents advocated, among other things, that Russia should be completely isolated on the international stage, provide financial aid to Ukraine and supply the country with military equipment and armaments. Polacy wobec rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę, CBOS, 38/2022, Warszawa, marzec 2022.

³ Shortly after Russia's attack on Ukraine, 94% of respondents indicated that refugees should be accepted, in the July 2022 survey it was 84%. Polacy wobec wojny na Ukrainie i ukraińskich uchodźców, CBOS, 101/2022, Warszawa, sierpień 2022.

important to maintain social support for Ukraine and Ukrainians among Poles, to level potential social conflicts (in a situation where Poland has taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees), to ensure acceptance of increased defense budget spending in a situation where the quality of life of citizens is deteriorating.

Ways to build social resilience are many. One of them is to present, popularize and perpetuate the idea of solidarity between states and societies on objects operating in public space. Such objects are murals.

2. Murals as artistic works in public space

The term "mural" is short for decorative wall painting (Zwolińska, Malicki, 1990). These are "(...) large-format images applied directly to the walls of buildings" (Hołda, 2020, p. 51). The name is derived from Spanish (mural-, „wall mounted”). The origin of the name can also be traced back to Latin (muralis – “located on the wall”)(Statucki, 2019, p. 109).

In the history of art, it is difficult to clearly define the genesis of murals. Sometimes it is indicated that the prototype of modern murals were the works of Diego Rivera. Other approaches say that it was murals (due to the type of substrate) that were the first form of human artistic expression (Duchowski et al., 2016, s. 108).

Murals are a type of painting, that is, a part of architectural ornamentation known for centuries, made with paint on a wall, wood or glass (Petelenz, 2018, p. 18). Their external use (thus the survival of some works until modern times) limited the material possibilities. Therefore, other forms of malmatura were more popular, those intended for indoor use (frescoes). Of course, the circle of their recipients was limited to those residing in a church, castle, palace or other facility in which they were placed. It is different in the case of murals, paintings located outside. Murals, as they are understood today, are artistic works that "(...) resonate with a much larger and diverse audience, and their creation is often driven by different ideas" (Petelenz, 2018, p. 20), than artistic ideas. The popularization of murals in their modern form took place more than a century ago. In the 1920s and 1930s, murals appeared in Mexico and other Latin American countries (Smoczyńska, Łapiński, 2019, p. 10). They were created in buildings and on their exterior walls. The important thing was that they carried a specific message in an attractive and highly communicative form that was intended to reach the public.

Nowadays, other similar forms of art are also present in public spaces, especially in large cities. The most common is graffiti, or uncontrolled street art characterized by egalitarianism, as the creator here can be anyone. This form of wall art is a statement of "writers" - authors outside the artistic establishment. Graffiti often addresses issues that are important, considered

newsworthy and often controversial. Their authors sometimes operate outside the law and often remain anonymous. This gives rise to problems concerning the precise definition of how to put specific graffiti (artistic work vs. vandalism), but also how to look at murals.

Sometimes murals are considered the primary form of street art (Moch, 2016, p. 34). At other times, it is emphasized that murals differ from its most popular form, graffiti, in that they are a formalized form of intervention in urban space and can be designed on a larger scale. Through this legalism, murals can become a tool for improving the appearance of common spaces (Petelenz, 2018, pp. 20-21). The role of graffiti in this regard is no longer so clear-cut. Even assuming that graffiti carries a valuable message, the skills and competencies of its creators vary. Unlike graffiti, murals function as manifestations of official and aesthetic creativity, implemented on a larger scale (Gralińska-Toborek, Kaźmierska-Jerzyk, 2014, p. 21). In practice, their creation is often authorized by some institutional or social entity, for aesthetic reasons residents do not demand that they be painted over. There is also an approach that assumes that graffiti is an exemplification of street art, while murals are an example of visual arts as such, with all the variety and multiplicity of tools (Duchowski i in., 2016, p. 108). Another aspect is also important - the differences in public perception of graffiti and murals. The former can be seen as an act of vandalism, perceived as "meaningless" (Hołda, 2020, p. 52). The message of the graffiti, aesthetics, form and location of the work may also be controversial. The issues discussed above are important, but are of marginal importance in the case of the subject matter addressed in the article. What is important is what the individual works show and what messages they carry. Then the key turns out to be what the image represents (denotation) and the thoughts, associations, feelings it evokes (connotation) (Patrzałek, Perchla-Włosik, 2014, p. 234).

The literature points to a number of different functions performed by murals. They are artistic objects, works of artists and derivative of their impressions (Stępień, 2009, p. 5). Sometimes murals become spectacular productions by star artists (Duchowski et al., 2016, p. 114). Being an intervention in public space, they can perform an esthetic functions (Hołda, 2020, p. 52). Sometimes they are carriers of a marketing message, - they advertise some product, service or institution (Stępień, 2009, p. 5). It was in this role that murals appeared in Poland before or after World War II (Smoczyńska, Łapiński, 2019, p. 12). During the People's Republic of Poland, the murals provided information about the existence and areas of operation of individual businesses and service providers. It is reasonable to value their artistic and aesthetic qualities in the landscape of "gray" cities (Stępień, 2021). One can also look at the murals that have survived as objects of the history of individual cities. Murals covered

the blank gable walls of buildings allowing city residents to interact with art on a daily basis, and influenced the appearance of their surroundings. *Nota bene*, in the period of the Third Republic, this function also became important, especially for unattractive and neglected buildings and city districts. Nowadays, they can enhance the aesthetics of places, revitalize devastated spaces and mask the so-called "renovation gap" (Grochowska, 2013), be a tourist attraction (Jazdżewska, 2017). We also can't ignore the issue that is fundamental to the subject matter taken up in the article. Well, "Murals implement the model of engaged art and social activism, often rubbing up against propaganda or are the result of its influence, and the light form is often associated with a serious and sometimes difficult content." (Hołda, 2020, p. 53).

3. Mural as a medium for socially and politically relevant content

The 20th-century genesis of modern murals is related to their broadcasting of certain important issues. This justified and justifies a certain compulsion to read them from the perspective of viewers i.e. passersby and residents (Garlińska-Toborek, Kaźmierska-Jerzyk, 2014, p. 33 et seq.). Socially and politically engaged (Duchowski et al., 2016, p. 108), the murals were intended to serve to awaken national consciousness in Mexico after the so-called Mexican Revolution (Statucki, 2019, p. 109). Paintings by artists such as David Alfaro Siqueiros, Jose Clemente Orozco and Diego Riviera, to whom we refer when talking about contemporary murals, were characterized by uncomplicated figurative and expressive messages. The art created in urban spaces carried educational and social messages (Smoczyńska, Łapinski, 2019, pp. 10-11), and created a tradition of engaged painting, "bearing witness to the struggle against class oppression and speaking about the problems of racial segregation" (Bakowska, 2006, p. 89).

At times, due to their political dimension, the murals have been controversial. A good example is the mural commissioned by John D. Rockefeller Jr. in 1932 from Diego Rivera. It was supposed to decorate Rockefeller Center in Manhattan, but the commissioner ordered its destruction because "Man at the Crossroads" presented a then and contemporary highly controversial figure - Vladimir Lenin (Destroyed By Rockefellers, Mural Trespassed On Political Vision). In his works, Rivera popularized the egalitarianism of art, the need for it to take to the streets of cities from galleries and museums. However, this did not mean, in America at the time, a lack of support and commissions for him, as he created works popularizing republican ideas in cooperation with the local government. The socially engaged message of the murals was accessible to the public and had an attractive and communicative form. "The murals seemed to be an ideal solution, in addition to being extremely strongly rooted

in local tradition" (Duchowski et al., 2016, p. 109) for communicating with people who cannot read and write.

After World War II, murals found their way to Europe. They appeared after the period of reconstruction of countries after World War II. A factor that increased their popularity was the socio-political changes taking place in the 1960s. Over time, murals became "(...) one of the ways of expressing socially engaged art" (Duchowski et al., 2016, p. 110). As in the US, murals created in Europe allowed marginalized groups to emerge from the symbolic ghetto. They acted as a medium for social issues - they spoke out against poverty, inequality and racism. In the 1960s and 1970s in the West, murals were clearly political in tone, and were also a visual representation of power struggles. The first politically engaged murals appeared in the northern part of Europe (Great Britain, Scandinavia, the Netherlands) in the 1970s. The most interesting examples of monumental painting of this type are found in areas of heterogeneous social identity and in areas of religious or social conflict (Duchowski et al., 2016, pp. 110-111). During the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, each side encouraged its supporters to create murals. Between 1968 and 1998, nearly two thousand were created. Commemorating important events, they became an example of the use of painting within propaganda and had a fundamental impact on the development of the genre (Smoczyńska, Łapinski, 2019, p. 11). The ongoing political and social conflict has just found its street dimension in murals, a symbolic war of images and messages has occurred in urban space. From the perspective of murals, a new trend of murals that are statements and chronicles emerged (Petelenz, p. 22). Nowadays, murals in Belfast and Derry are tourist attractions, a signum temporis of past feuds and consensus-building, "(...) they are also becoming tools for taming militarized space not on the basis of radical cutting, but of preserving a familiar visual language, a component of the local iconosphere - symbolically saturated mural painting in urban space (Duchowski et al., 2016, p. 112).

Political murals also not infrequently serve a commemorative function, stemming from or contesting historical politics. They are a cheap, relatively quick and extremely impressive alternative to monuments, placed on pedestals at important points in the city - which is why many events commemorated through murals belong to social history (Duchowski et al., 2016, p. 112). In Poland, too, there are murals relating to historical and patriotic issues. Good examples are those created to commemorate partisans of the post-war anti-communist underground, known as "cursed" or "unbroken" soldiers (Hołda, 2020), or those dedicated to figures of the Warsaw Insurrection (Moch, 2016, p. 39 et seq.).

It is worth pointing out that during World War II, murals appeared in Poland from the bottom up as a symbol of Fighting Poland. In the occupied country, their function was combined with psychological warfare (Smoczyńska, Łapiński, 2019, p. 12). Although most of the murals of the People's Republic of Poland had an advertising character, nevertheless, one cannot ignore the fact that in the Western Territories there were also works with a clear socio-political message. They drew attention to the tradition of these lands belonging to Poland or popularized the outline of the post-war map of the country (Stępień, 2009, p. 7).

Of course, there are many other examples of murals with political significance, let's reach for the example of Iran. Realistic portraits of figures important to the state are placed on the walls of buildings. In addition to images of soldiers fallen on the field of glory, murals feature objects symbolizing the foundations of the country's national culture. "The mythical battle of Karbala, the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the Iranian Revolution of the 1980s or the war with Iraq are events in Iranian history that permeate the social consciousness of Iranians despite being separated by more than a thousand years" (Petelenz, 2018, p. 23). Politically engaged mural painting works are often associated with specific artists. A good example of this is Shamsia Hassani from Afghanistan who paints anti-war murals with silhouettes of Afghan women as the main motif (Burack, Hassani, 2021).

4. Reaction to Russia's aggression against Ukraine in murals

Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered a series of solidarity activities with the invaded country. Governments of many countries, societies, but also artists got involved in the aid. Evidence of support came from actors, writers, painters, musicians of the Western world. Figures siding with Russia were relatively few and their behavior or statements were often met with social ostracism. World-renowned street art artist Banksy, who had previously expressed his views on socially relevant issues on the walls of various buildings, created a minimalist work operating with modest means of expression a few days after the invasion. The blue and yellow flag of Ukraine covered a destroyed wall (War in Ukraine, a Real Subject of a Banksy New Painting, 28.02.2022), symbolizing the destruction wrought by Russia. The theme and color motif were later continued by many other artists in various countries (O'Leary, 7.03.2022). Over time, various pro-Ukrainian murals began to appear on the streets of various cities in Europe and around the world. Operating with different means of expression, more or less realistic in the visual layer, reaching for a number of symbols, finally taking various forms - they were dedicated to the victim or the aggressor (Kelleher, 4.04.2022).

Creators of murals, pursuing a vision of engaged and egalitarian art, manifested their opposition to aggression by creating works to which everyone had access. Murals placed in social spaces gained a wide audience, found their way into traditional and social media (Patrzalek, Wardzała, 2018), sometimes becoming viral. They compelled reflection, projected audience attitudes and public opinion, provoked discussion about the events that began on February 24, 2022. They focused and directed the attention of people, Internet users, journalists, politicians and elites, increased interest in the war and emphasized the importance of solidarity with Ukraine. For example, at the beginning of the war Banksy donated one of his works for auction, and the proceeds from its sale went to the Kiev Children's Hospital in Ukraine. The work ("CND Soldiers") was from 2005 and had a pacifist dimension (Dzieło Banksy'ego sprzedane. Pieniądze trafią do szpitala dziecięcego w Ukrainie, 29.03.2022). There were, of course, more similar initiatives in which artists called for material aid and organized fund-raisers.

The works produced in the first days and weeks of the aggression were primarily dedicated to Ukraine as a state and society under attack and to Russia. They also stigmatized the figure of V. Putin, the president of the Russian Federation, as the aggressor. Murals/graffiti with a pacifist, anti-war dimension also appeared in public spaces. Among them were also paintings calling for consensus of both sides. This was the case with the murals of Eme Freethinker (Berlin, Germany) and Laiki (Rome, Italy) (Moran, 2.03.2022), which were created in the first days of the war. Over time, when emphasizing the commonality of Russians and Ukrainians proved unwarranted, murals calling for friendship became controversial. Such was the case with the work of Peter "CTO" Seaton. His mural depicted a Russian and a Ukrainian soldier hugging each other in a gesture of friendship, or even brotherhood (Kielar ed., 5.09.2022). This work was decoded by many as duplicating Kremlin propaganda (Turnbull, 5.09.2022). The message aroused resistance because the Western public already knew about Russia's crimes against Ukrainian civilians (Bucha, Mariupol). Besides, after more than six months of fighting, the Ukrainian army then went on the counteroffensive (Ukraine war in maps: Tracking the Russian invasion after six months, 31.08.2022). After months of fighting, war crimes carried out by the occupying forces on Ukrainian soil, the relatively high support of the Russian public for the invasion, it was difficult to look at the war in Ukraine as a conflict between two equally guilty parties. After diplomatic intervention, the artist apologized and the work disappeared from public spaces in Sydney in Australia.

Mural paintings were also created in Ukraine. A mural painted in Kiev dedicated to a weapon that became very effective in the early stages of the aggression gained worldwide

popularity: FGM-148 Javelin, or F&F type hand-held anti-tank launchers. Saint Javelin (pol. Matka Boska Jawelińska) in the original was a meme by Christian Borys, a Canadian with Polish-Ukrainian roots (Kielar, 21.05.2022). Over time, the visual motif found its way into the public space of Ukraine's capital, and also found its way via the Internet to hundreds of thousands of recipients around the world.

Russia's aggression has dynamized the creative activity of Polish muralists and the street art community. Given the countries' neighborliness and the presence of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians in Poland before and during the war, the interest of artists and social activists is not surprising. Works began to be created in cities to show solidarity towards the side that was attacked: the state fighting for freedom, the society subjected to aggression, the civilians who were victims. As one of the creators, a street art artist from Krakow, Pieksa, expressed it: "The only thing I can say right now is that I'm simultaneously pissed, horrified and sorry. Pissed off by politics. Frightened by how quickly and dramatically people's lives can change. I am sorry for all the innocent people in Ukraine who are suffering during this unnecessary and unimaginable war. I encourage everyone to support and help as much as you can. Stay strong, Ukraine!" (W polskich miastach powstają proukraińskie murale, 10.03.2022).

Without institutional support, murals/graffiti addressing Russia's aggression against Ukraine began to appear in public spaces of cities. They were created, among others, by artists with pseudonyms Club2020 and Jay Pop, as well as Mariusz Waras and Vasyl Savchenko (Umięcka, 9.03.2022). Some of the works created spontaneously bore titles and were signed with the signature of the artist, others, for obvious reasons, did not. These were sometimes inscriptions on walls, blue and yellow flags, and sparing graphics. Given the form of artistic expression and the locations (lack of obtaining proper permits), as well as the anonymity of the creators, many of them would fit into a typological graffiti rather than a planned mural. In view of the consensus of the political elite, local government and the public, it was relatively quick to legalize and institutionalize artistic expressions of support for Ukraine. The process of creating murals involved, of course, the artists themselves, but also the local governments of individual cities, various foundations and commercial actors.

An interesting initiative took place in Gdansk. There, after the outbreak of war, a 300-meter retaining wall of the Pomeranian Metropolitan Railway (PMR, pol. PKM) was given to street art artists. A series of murals was created there under the common title "Solidarity with Ukraine" (Umięcka, 1.04.2022). The initiative was carried out jointly with the local government of the Pomeranian Voivodeship and the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk. The murals were made by students of both the Gdansk academy and other art schools in Poland. In addition,

artists from Ukraine were also invited to cooperate. The place which was filled with murals was very attractive from the perspective of aestheticization of public space. For the artists and their message, it was valuable from a communication perspective: "We chose this area because it is a place of many walks. Next to the Jasien stop, on the side of the Tri-City Landscape Park, there is a road that is used by cyclists and residents of the surrounding neighborhoods." (Gdańsk: powstają antywojenne murale. Artystyczny wyraz solidarności z Ukrainą, 10.03.2022). After six months of war, a summary of the campaign has been made. From the beginning of March to August 24, 2022, 30 murals were created on the wall (Włodarczyk, 24.08.2022).

Murals were created in different cities, and their stories varied as well. They were created spontaneously and anonymously, without institutional support and with it, sometimes outstanding artists were invited to decorate a specific place with their work. Sometimes the creation of murals was initiated by various institutions, foundations, local governments, providing material support to artists. The appearance of some of the murals in public spaces was celebrated, while others were created under the cover of darkness. Murals as mural paintings were also an expression of the creators' thanks to the city and its residents for their help, hospitality, commitment. For example, in Lodz, a three-dimensional mural decorated the building of an orphanage. Its author was Ukrainian artist Alex Maksimov, who had been associated with Poland since 2008, and painted the mural as a thank you for Poland's help to Ukrainian children (Ukraiński artysta stworzył w Łodzi mural 3D. W podziękę za pomoc, 27.07.2022).

The murals not only showed Ukraine as a state (frequent use of the colors of the flag and the figure of the president) fighting for independence and freedom, but also indicated who is the victim and who is the aggressor. The victim is the invaded state, but above all - the invaded society. The civilian population - especially women, children, the elderly - are killed during the "special operation." People are forced to flee their homeland, to leave their homes: threatened by hostilities or destroyed by the aggressor. Ukraine defends itself bravely, hence the symbolism present in the murals features pop culture heroes, but also anonymous figures who are artistic fiction (often women). It is a country with a clear collective identity, but also its own national culture - which is why the murals feature not only the motif of the Ukrainian flag, but also characteristic architectural objects and buildings, elements of folklore and tradition. Ukraine is a country in the era of aggression fighting heroically and making sacrifices. In the pre-war realities, architectural objects, landscapes of golden halves of grain and blue skies were the hallmarks of Ukraine. These images the murals also evoke.

The murals are diverse in terms of size, location, the means of expression used by the artists. Some of them operate with image and text layer, others do not. In the case of text, we are dealing with Polish, Ukrainian and English (possibly mixing foreign languages on one work). The use of two Slavic languages is not surprising, after all, communication considerations are important here, in the case of Ukrainian - an additional advantage seems to be not only the share of refugees among the Polish population, but also symbolic qualities - the hospitality of the host country. English is familiar to young people, phrases and phrases from English are present in the daily life of Poles. Besides, it is a "world language," allowing to communicate in a global world. This is important for murals as street art works operating in the globalized world of social media. In this global world, a mural transcends a specific "locus," reaching viewers in other countries via the Internet. It shows who is the victim and who is the aggressor to a wider audience, speaks of the barbarity of the war caused by Russia, gives encouragement to those fighting, calls for support and consolidates the anti-war community. The murals show that while there are two sides to the conflict, only one of them is fighting for cardinal values. The other side of the conflict is Russia. It is waging a war of aggression, invading a sovereign state and destroying the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Visualizations of Russia and its president evoke associations with the "imparium of evil" that Ronald Reagan spoke of.

5. Selected murals of solidarity with Ukraine in Poland

Shortly after Russia's aggression, works dedicated to Ukraine begin to appear in Polish public spaces. Over time, various entities begin to join in the process of creating murals: foundations and associations, local governments, companies, etc. Here, selected mural paintings created after Russia's aggression against Ukraine will be presented. They were found in the common spaces of Polish cities, both in regional capitals and in smaller towns. We do not have data to determine how many murals related to the war were created on Polish territory. Some of them were created legally, but others - not. "Lifetime" of the murals is also a matter of dispute. They can be created, but they can also be destroyed, replaced by others. Hence, here we discuss several works which differ, among other things: the means of expression used, location, size, openness of the author, level of legalism, durability.

„No more time” and ”Together we stand”, Gdańsk, Piotr TUSE Jaworski

In the first days of the "Solidarity with Ukraine" project in Gdansk, two works by Piotr TUSE Jaworski were created. TUSE is a graduate of the Faculty of Painting and Graphics at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk and a well-known street art artist (<https://tuse.pl/>, 2022).

The first work depicted figures of dictators, while the second showed the Klitschko brothers, former Ukrainian boxers, involved in the defense of the country. Both works were realistic in their visual layer, based on portraits of figures, and operated in English in their verbal layer. Their existence was noted by media outside Poland (Moran, 2.03.2022), and they became popular thanks to social media.

The mural by Piotr TUSE Jaworski and Mateusz Rybka, titled "No more time", was one of the first anti-war murals created after the invasion (Umięcka, 9.03.2022), the first to be created in Gdansk on the wall of the city railroad (No more time (by TUSE in Gdansk, Poland), 10.03.2022). The author has placed three figures on it. In the background we see the historical faces of A. Hitler and J. Stalin, criminals of the 20th century. In the foreground - implicitly - the figure of the criminal of the 21st century, the President of the Russian Federation, was placed. The historical figures are in black and white, the modern figure was made in color. No historical knowledge is needed to understand the message of the painting. The eyes of all three figures are obscured by a stripe, which was intended to make it difficult to identify the criminals. However, the viewer easily decodes who the heroes of the mural are, after all, their figures seem to be inscribed in the historical memory of societies. By juxtaposition with Hitler and Stalin, Putin becomes a dictator whose policies lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, or millions of people. Embedded in the text of the anti-dictatorial, or more broadly, anti-war message "Never Again" are the colors of the Ukrainian flag providing an additional bridge between the past and the present.



Fig 1. „No more time”, Gdańsk

Source: photo. Przemysław Świdorski, <https://gdansk.naszemiasto.pl/no-more-time-w-gdansku-powstal-kolejny-antywojenny-mural/ga/c13-8716157/zd/69513831>, [dostęp: 9.09.2022].

The above artwork is becoming one of the images-virals of the attack on Ukraine: it is shown by Internet portals and media outside Poland, the mural is popularized in memes,

so it finds its way to social media. The same is true of another work by the artist, placed in the same place a few days later ("Together we stand"). The protagonists of the second mural are the Klitschko brothers, because, according to the author, they are an exemplification of a noble attitude (Chudzyński, 19.03.2022). As athletes they were internationally successful, well-known and popular. In the era of aggression, they did not leave the country, joined in its defense, and were also active on the media level. The artist operated with the image of former fist fighters, color (blue and yellow flag) and added to the work the ambiguous caption "Brothers are not lost" which was meant to symbolize Polish solidarity with Ukraine. This mural was met with a response from one of the protagonists: the mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko shared the mural on social media (Wojciechowska, 18.03.2022).

“Maiden of the free” (pol. „Panna wolna”), Warszawa, Targówek, Andrzej Pęgowski

The mural bearing the title "Maiden of the free" was created in March 2022, in the Targówek district of Warsaw. It is located on the wall of a residential building, hence it occupies a relatively large area (130m²) (Konieczek, 4.04.2022). Its author is Andrzej Pęgowski, who said on the day the mural was unveiled: "The sight of mothers with children fleeing from Ukraine caused extreme emotions in me. In one day I created Miss Free. I purposely did not call the work 'Miss Ukraine.' I wanted to give it a broader, timeless context. It is a symbol of freedom. The hope that this senseless war will end quickly and Ukrainians will be free in their country." (Panna Wolna - mural dla Ukrainy na Targówku, 29.03.2022).

This mural seems worth presenting because it exemplifies a color motif present in very many works of this type - it is the blue and yellow flag of Ukraine. However, not only the color scheme is characteristic of murals created in the era of aggression. Noteworthy is the artist's handling of the figure of a woman. Ukrainian refugees are primarily women and children, but Ukrainian women are also present among those fighting the invaders. The murals, posters and graffiti feature girls deprived of home and a sense of security, mothers protecting their children from the aggressor. Their protagonists are also women fighting the invader and "ordinary" women whose previous world lay in ruins. In this particular mural, the outline of the figure's face is filled with field flowers and blue skies, while the hairstyle is adorned with an overly symbolic dove of peace. The creation of the mural itself is also noteworthy, after all, we were dealing here with the cooperation of a non-governmental organization and a local government.



Fig 2. „Maiden of the free”, Warsaw
Source: Galeria Czystej Sztuki EkoEvolution.org,
<https://kultura.um.warszawa.pl/-/panna-wolna-mural-na-targowku>,
[dostęp: 9.09.2022].

Glory to Ukraine (pol. „Chwała Ukrainie”), Kraków, Good Looking Studio

The mural created in Krakow, whose main figure is the President of Ukraine, was not the first mural of solidarity with Ukraine in the capital of Malopolska. In addition, it was also not the first mural featuring the figure of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (W Krakowie powstał mural z wizerunkiem prezydenta Ukrainy, 27.03.2022). This object is interesting because of its format and location in a city that has taken in a very large group of refugees from Ukraine. The mural was created by Good Looking Studio. As the artists indicated, the president's likeness was to become a symbol of the fight for freedom (Gruszecka, 24.03.2022). What seems crucial is that it was located in the vicinity of the Ukrainian consulate. There is another reason why this mural is worthy of presentation. In June 2022, it disappeared from Krakow's public space, replaced by an advertising mural (Zniknął mural z wizerunkiem prezydenta Ukrainy, 13.06.2022).



Figure 3. „Glory to Ukraine”, Kraków

Source: Robert Porzycki fot.,

<https://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/7,44425,28257435,prezydent-wolodymyr-zelenski-ma-w-krakowie-swoj-mural.html>, [dostęp: 10.09.2022].

Putin vs Zelenski, Poznań, Kawu

Another interesting initiative to depict support for Ukraine in public space is Kawu's work. The artist depicted the presidents of Russia and Ukraine in the style of the popular "Harry Potter" books. A separate work was dedicated to each politician. The plural was deliberately used here, as first one painting was created on a particular wall, then it was painted over with another work of art (Bryczkowska, 9.03.2022). Painting the figures of the presidents of both countries in the convention of pop culture was not a novelty for Kawu, as he often drew inspiration from cartoon and movie characters in his works (Tak polscy muraliści zareagowali na wojnę w Ukrainie, 3.03.2022).

The mural with Putin's figure was created shortly after the aggression began, on February 28, 2022 (Gargas, March 1, 2022). The artwork dedicated to Zaleski was created a few days later (Tak polscy muraliści zareagowali na wojnę w Ukrainie, 3.03.2022). Of course, each of the works is interesting, nevertheless, what is important is the replacement of one mural by another, which can be interpreted to mean that evil has been defeated by good (Godziński, 10.03.2022).

Both works are located in the universe of the well-known, especially by younger people, Harry Potter book series (by J. K. Rowling). In it, evil is personified by Lord Voldemort, good - and his victory - by the main character of the saga. In Kawu's murals, the former is V. Putin, the latter - V. Zaleski. Voldemort was an ambitious and powerful wizard who promotes the idea of domination, wizards over ordinary people. He is brutal, murdering and maiming his opponents. He is also lustful for power. Harry Potter, who was predicted to defeat

Voldemort, becomes his enemy. The Lord repeatedly makes attempts to eliminate his opponent. After one of these attempts, a scar is left on the hero's forehead, which will be the symbol of Russian aggression against Ukraine - the "Z" - on the mural. The antagonist of Voldemort is Harry Potter, dedicating another mural to his character is precisely related to the victory of good over evil. In the background of the figure of the President of Ukraine I no longer have fire and destruction, as was the case in the mural dedicated to Putin. Behind the figure of the Ukrainian President there are references to objects characteristic of the country: Sobor of Divine Wisdom and the monument to Bohdan Khmelnytskyi (Gargas, 9.03.2022). Bright and subdued colors dominate the new mural. The color scheme of the previous mural was darker, a gloomy combination of colors meant to arouse anxiety in viewers.



Fig. 4. W. Putin as Lord Voldemort, Kawu

Source: Piotr Skórnicki fot,

<https://kultura.gazeta.pl/kultura/7,183474,28203953,mural-w-poznaniu-juz-tak-nie-wyglada-putina-voldemorta-zastapil.html><https://kultura.gazeta.pl/kultura/7,183474,28203953,mural-w-poznaniu-juz-tak-nie-wyglada-putina-voldemorta-zastapil.html>, [dostęp: 11.09.2022].

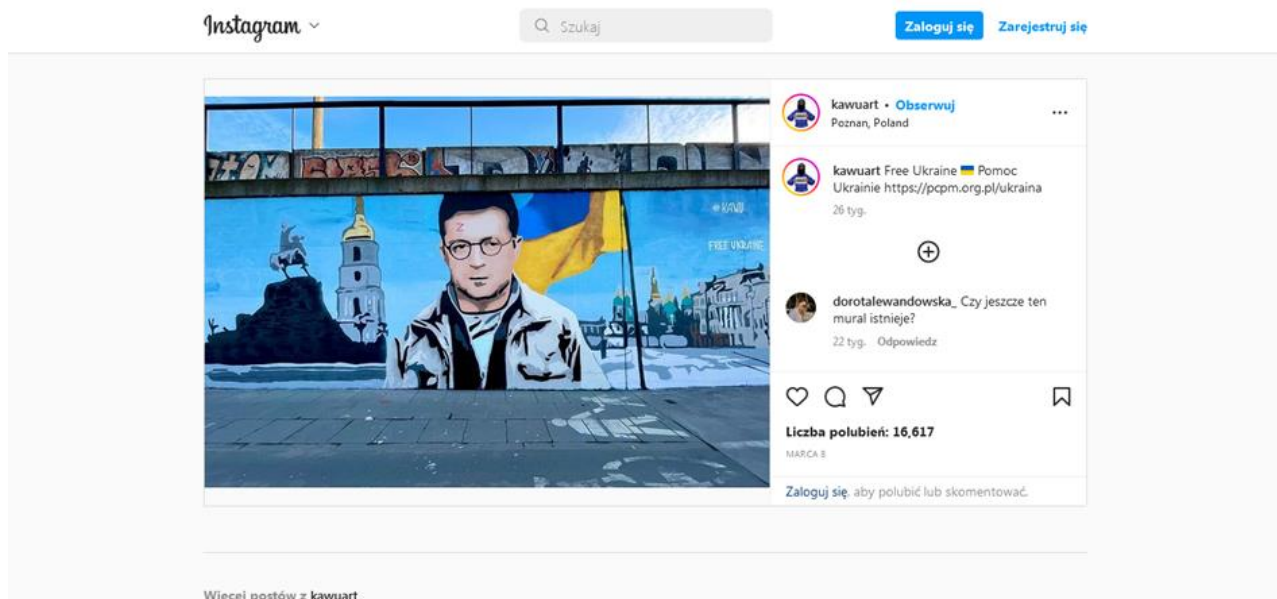


Figure 5. W. Zelenski as Harry Potter

Source:

https://www.instagram.com/p/Ca2SI2ZMnkO/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=a1d441c9-8cc5-415b-b89d-5aca4ed0a96c, [dostęp: 11.09.2022].

Hero girl, Kędzierzyn-Koźle, anonymous author

Finally, it is worth looking at examples of murals created outside the big cities. A good example seems to be the work that was created in Kędzierzyn-Koźle. It is a medium-sized city, the seat of one of the districts of the Opole region. The mural was created in the center of the city, on the facade of a dilapidated building, on a main thoroughfare (Poruszający mural w Kędzierzynie-Koźlu, 5.03.2022). "I did it to help Ukrainians psychologically," said the author of the work. The creator declared that he wished to remain anonymous. "The intention was that it should be some form of support for Ukrainians. I did it to help them psychologically in this hard time, because any help is good." (Poloczek, 10.03.2022).

The color scheme of the work blends in with the colors of the Ukrainian flag relatively often used in visual presentations of Ukraine. The girl is also a motif present in various works dedicated to Ukraine. The author turned the girl into a pop culture figure - a superman. Once again, this is a so-called positive hero, fighting for a just cause and achieving victory. "The painting has gone viral and is being shared by thousands of people across Poland. The artist's admiration was expressed, among others, by the official Facebook profile of the city of Kędzierzyn-Koźle." (Kapica, 8.03.2022).



Fig. 6. Hero girl, Kędzierzyn-Koźle

Source: Andrzej Kerner fot., <https://opole.gosc.pl/doc/7388759.Poruszajacy-mural-w-Kedzierzynie-Kozlu>, [dostęp: 10.09.2022].

Final Conclusions

Murals and graffiti denouncing Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 are being created in many cities around the world. What seems natural they are also present in Central European countries and thus also in Poland. In Poland, they stigmatize the aggressor, keep up the spirits of the victims of the attack, show the heroism and bravery of Ukraine, but also the trauma that war brings to hundreds of thousands of civilians and a country fighting for freedom. From the perspective of the residents of the cities where they are created, they show in an accessible, aesthetic form who is good and who is bad in the conflict. They call for solidarity and help to the state and society, but also to the hundreds of thousands of refugees, some of whom live people who see the murals every day. The murals are sometimes created under the auspices of institutions, at other times created as a reaction by artists to the situation. Sometimes they are accessible only to a limited number of passersby, but they can also be located in central points of cities, in which case their audience becomes significant. Thanks to the Internet, they can reach audiences living in different corners of the globe. Their lifespan may be ephemeral, but they can take up residence in public space for a longer period of time, thus becoming invisible to passersby over time, but on the other hand - building up historical memory resources. In an era of ongoing conflict, which may or may not end in Ukraine, they are a valuable - though obviously not the only - medium for building social resilience.

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