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Determinants Reading COVID-19 Visual Messages Located in Public Urban Spaces from the Perspective of P.M.Lester's Theory of Visual Communication

Uwarunkowania czytania komunikatów wizualnych COVID-19 znajdujących się w przestrzeniach publicznych miast z perspektywy teorii Komunikacji wizualnej P.M. Lestera¹

<https://doi.org/10.34766/fetr.v47i3.858>

Abstract: In the face of the multiplication of images in all spheres of human life, it is necessary to discuss the need to develop visual education, the purpose of which is to prepare people to read visual messages in the conditions of a changing culture. For the needs of the research challenge, the source of which was the global crisis caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, the subject of scientific interest was defined, which are the conditions for reading covid 19 visual messages located in public urban spaces. The article presents a fragment of a wider research. Due to the carrier of the visual message used, the analysis was based on photos presenting Covid 19 visual messages, obtained from cities in New Zealand, China and Kenya. It has been adopted that the critical theory and visual culture focused on the message can mutually support each other with the traditions of their discourses in the descriptions of the analyzed phenomena. For the purposes of the research, the theory of visual communication by P.M. Lester was adopted, taking into account six perspectives of knowledge: 1) historical, 2) personal, 3) ethical, 4) cultural, 5) technical and 6) critical.

Keywords: covid 19 pandemic, visual reading, visual communication,

Abstrakt: W obliczu mnożenia się obrazów we wszystkich przestrzeniach życia człowieka, można mówić o konieczności rozwijania edukacji wizualnej, której celem jest przygotowanie do czytania komunikatów wizualnych w warunkach zmieniającej się kultury. Na potrzeby podjętego wyzwania badawczego, którego źródłem stał się globalny kryzys wywołany pandemią Covid 19, zdefiniowano przedmiot zainteresowania naukowego, którym są uwarunkowania czytania komunikatów wizualnych covid 19 znajdujące się w publicznych przestrzeniach miast. W tekście zaprezentowany został wycinek szerszych badań. Z uwagi na zastosowany nośnik komunikatu wizualnego do analiz wybrano fotografie prezentujące komunikaty wizualne covid 19, pozyskane z miast w Nowej Zelandii, Chin i Kenii. Przyjęto stanowisko, że teoria krytyczna oraz kultura wizualna ukierunkowana na komunikat mogą wzajemnie wspierać się tradycjami swoich dyskursów w analizach i opisach analizowanych zjawisk. Na potrzeby badań przyjęto teorię komunikacji wizualnej P.M.Lestera uwzględniającą sześć perspektyw wiedzy: 1) historycznej, 2) personalnej, 3) etycznej, 4) kulturowej, 5) technicznej i 6) krytycznej.

Słowa kluczowe: covid 19, czytanie wizualne, komunikacja wizualna

¹ Polska wersja: <https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/Presentations0/2021-3-Perzy.pdf>

1. Introduction

The area of many cities on all continents resembles a scene of pictures and people, a performance, a spectacle that carries important informational functions (concerning the city, its inhabitants, visitors, social rules and interpersonal communication). These functions are integrating, aesthetic, but sometimes also disrupting correct perception of reality, a specific loss in urban visuality, in the processes of communication with others (mainly “strangers”, the unknown) and in deciphering the pictorial code of the city, on the one hand close to many such spaces, on the other - specific, unique for a given area (see: Perzycka, Łukaszewicz - Arcaraz, 2019; 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered changes in social relationships of a hitherto unknown nature (see: Menkes, Suska, 2021; Lupton, Willis, 2021; Czerepaniak - Walczak, 2020; Dhawan, 2020). Human activities in public urban places change day by day. There is no certainty about tomorrow. It is today and what people can do not to make it worse. More and more stringent restrictions on the prohibition, the injunction are communicated by the mass media and posted in the form of posters, stickers, leaflets and other messages, in public places: on doors, walls, floors, fences, sidewalks, streets, poles, vehicles, etc. In places intended for disseminating public information as well as in places not used for this purpose so far.

The quantity and variety as well as the place where COVID-19 visual messages are published in public urban spaces open up various possibilities for researchers to gather knowledge about the communicative meaning of visual messages in social relations (see: Bailenson, 2020). Public space is understood here as a place and space of communication. In terms of conceptual solutions to the issues indicated, Agora's proposal by J. Habermas (2002) is interesting. The interpretation problems of Habermas' public space are part of the current debates on social and cultural life, but also inspire reflection on the material elements of urban public spaces.

The city is a constantly changing organization/organism, created and changed by specific communication practices. It is a diverse and dynamic civilization creation with a complex spatial and mental structure, which is why it still inspires research. The multifaceted nature of the city gains particular potential in constructing and creating multidirectional learning processes inspired by critical reflection, addressed to various groups of recipients, and therefore it inspired the research presented in this study.

The development of modified and/or new forms of visual communication enables the creation of new types of messages (see e.g., Dylak, 2012; Barnes, 2017; Teruggi, 2021), and this entails setting new research fields and revising the existing knowledge. Therefore, taking into account the unusual methods of social communication, including the visual messages of

covid 19, an attempt was made to identify and describe this phenomenon. Three research objectives were identified: 1) theoretical - selecting a theoretical model of reading visual messages in the contemporary iconosphere, 2) cognitive - recognizing and describing the possibilities and limitations of reading covid 19 visual messages located in public spaces of selected cities, 3) practical - developing a proposed criteria of reading visual messages posted in public places for the sake of social security. The interest in the issues of visual communication has become a challenge to outline the theoretical and methodological scope of the research. This study focuses on the first two objectives due to their current implementation. The practical objective has been announced and shall constitute a separate study. The presented fragment of research is continued in the project carried out as part of the HORIZON 2020 program - H2020-MSCA-RISE-2016 No. 734602, entitled: Technologies of Imagining in Communication, Arts and Social Science (TICASS) (Perzycka, Łukaszewicz - Arcaraz, 2019; 2020).

2. Conceptualization of the Visual Messages Reading Theoretical Model in The Contemporary Iconosphere

Messages that connect people with the global data space (see **e.g.**, Hoelz & Marie, 2015) are no longer hand-painted, as can be seen in African countries, e.g. in Kenya (see: Perzycka, Łukaszewicz - Arcaraz, 2019; 2020). An analog photographic image is used to show visibility - distant places, it evokes the behavior of animals as well as people. Digital technologies, on the other hand, communicate events - situations that are difficult to observe, such as cosmic phenomena, the activity of human organs, or the behavior of animals living in the depths of the seas and oceans. Images, regardless of the technique they are created, affect knowledge of people and their world, as well as the way people perceive this world and themselves (see **e.g.**, Mitchell, 2005; Virillo, 1912; Fuller, 2018).

Taking into account the social point of view in visual communication, culture and everyday life are of great importance. The subject of research on these relationships are various scientific disciplines and sub-disciplines, including semiotics, sociology, the theory of visual communication, visual cultural studies, and visual anthropology (see **e.g.**, Lestner, 2011; Ryan, 2020b; Reynolds, Niedt, 2020). Visual messages are used to define identity and tell stories, which is studied by poststructuralism and critical theory (see **e.g.**, Tagg, 1988; Rose, 2014). Images are used in the process of medical and scientific diagnosis, which is also the subject of humanistic (see **e.g.**, Freenberg, 2010; Hausken, 2013) and social (see **e.g.**, Sztompka, 2014, McQuail, & Deuze, 2020) research.

Looking at how a person perceives the images contained in the iconosphere, one can notice the relationship of knowledge about the human attitude to visual messages in direct contact, and how these messages are reconfigurable, thanks to which and within which that

person works, maintains relationships with others, fills time with own activities. Increasingly, feedback takes the form of a visual presentation. Visualizations occur in many cultures and are often understood or interpreted differently (see: Perzycka, Łukaszewicz - Alcara, 2019, 2020). As a result, the importance of the shape and location of the message is growing exponentially, especially in the sphere of the use of media and multimedia information carriers. This is perfectly illustrated by the example of billboards, graffiti on the walls of buildings, packaging of everyday products or posters and leaflets with medical information about diseases and how to prevent them.

The time of the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a mass of different types of messages into the space of human life than has been practiced so far (see *e.g.*, Ryan, 2020a; Aiello, Parry, 2019). Therefore, in the face of this phenomenon, it seems reasonable to ask how messages are read and/or can be read, so that people can understand them and act in accordance with their content (see: Dylak, 2012; Ashman, Elkin, 2009) Since the interpretation of an image is inherently subjective, in order to objectify it, one should infer its meaning through careful analysis. For the purposes of the analysis of visual messages in public urban spaces, a methodology was used that takes into account the theory of visual communication by Paul Martin Lester (2011) referring to six perspectives of knowledge: 1) historical, 2) personal, 3) ethical, 4) cultural, 5) technical and 6) critical.

3. Methodological Conditions of Research

Imaging technologies are groups of technological imaging practices that are used in scientific projects, artistic research, and contemporary visual culture. This approach is based on the philosophy of Luis Althusser (2014) and Michel Foucault (2017; 2020), or the interpretation of John Tagg in relation to photography (Althusser, 2014). Photography is seen as devoid of any eternal or unchanging essence. It is not understood as a subject, a specific (ideal, mental) thing, but as a set of social practices developed by individuals and their bodies as a result of their capillary dissemination in the social body, in societies. These practices are closely related to social identities, supporting the process of constructing and reconstructing social identities and worldviews (Foucault, 2020). This perspective is developed and thus includes imaging technologies that originated from the first technology-based imaging practice, namely the image. Understanding the communicated content of visual messages with the use of photography as a cognitive tool is conditioned to the extent and to what extent photography is a construction, and photography is a construct of visual reality (see *e.g.*, Sztompka 2012, McQuail, & Deuze, 2020).

In visual sociology, image anthropology, as well as in other fields of science, photography is treated as a research method. Krzysztof Konecki (2005, p. 45) indicates four research strategies with the use of photography: 1) active photography, 2) analysis of

photography as existing materials, 3) combination of both strategies, 4) photography as an illustration of research results. Following the remarks of the cited researchers, for the purposes of this research, the strategy of analyzing existing photography was adopted. In that strategy photography may on the one hand be a carrier of a visual message and, on the other, may become a visual message analyzed in the research procedure. In the presented fragment of research, photography is a tool that documents the visual message found in public urban spaces (shops, stops, stations, public transport, streets, parks, squares, offices, etc.). The perception of images in these spaces takes place in a distracted state. As already indicated, the interpretation of the image is inherently subjective. In order to objectify it, all elements of the message must be read and analyzed in accordance with the adopted theory of description and interpretation (see: Lester, 2011; 2020). It was also assumed that the possibilities and limitations of the use of visual technologies are subject to dynamics of changes and depend on the contexts of the location of visual messages: cultural, religious, political, economic and other. Therefore, in this case it seems justified to refer to the methods of visual anthropology and visual culture. These methods allow to recognize the interdependence of people, their culturally defined messages and technologies developed by them: images, structures, information patterns and methods of communication. Visual anthropology allows the use of an approach to the image in all these relations by extending the definition of an image beyond its position in the history of art (see e.g., Belting, 2014; Freedberg, 2021). Visual culture provides researchers with tools to analyze various relationships with images on an emotional, social and political level (Mitchell, 2005). The visual message analyzed by design (resulting from external regulations) contains information formulated in the form of principles, rules, instructions for the functioning of people in the spaces in which it was placed.

Due to the limitations of movement, the empirical material was obtained using e-mail. Scientists - academic teachers (10 people), students (1 person) and friends (5 people) were asked to take pictures of visual messages in public places of cities and containing information about the covid 19 pandemic. These people were informed about the purpose of the photo. Some of the photos (60) were taken by the author of the research project. Each person sending the photo was asked to describe the place where the photo was taken and to translate the text from the native language into English from the messages. A total of 210 photos were obtained from 15 countries diversified in terms of culture, economy, religion and politics, including Europe (8 places) Africa (2 places), North America (2nd place), South America (1st place), New Zealand (1 place), Asia (3 places). The numerical list of places and photos as well as the list of people who are the authors of the photos are presented in the table no. 1

Table 1. Quantitative list of places and photos showing covid 19 visual messages and photographers

No.	Country	City/Town	Number of photos	The photographer
1.	Poland	Szczecin	20	author of the research
		Chojnice	11	
		Katowice	8	academic teacher
		Zielona Góra	6	academic teacher
		Rzeszów	8	academic teacher
2.	Germany	Hamburg	9	friend
3.	Sweden	Sztokholm	7	academic teacher
4.	Denmark	Aarhus	18	author of the research
		Odense	11	
5.	Norway	Stawanger	16	friend
		Lillehammer	12	academic teacher
6.	Czech Republic	Usti Nad Labem	6	academic teacher
7.	Belgium	Liege	5	friend
8.	Great Britain	Londyn	29	academic teacher
		Manchester	8	academic teacher
9.	Kenya	Pwani	11	academic teacher
10.	Republic of South Africa	Johannesburg	4	academic teacher
11.	Columbia	Barranquilla	4	academic teacher
12.	Canada	Gwelp	7	friend
13.	United States	Santa Ana	6	academic teacher
14.	India	Srinagar	4	academic teacher
15.	New Zealand	Wellington	5	friend
16.	China	Ningbo	12	student
17.	United Arab Emirates	Dubai	2	friend

Source: own study

The greatest number of photos was obtained from Poland (55). The task involved academic teachers from four academic centers located in remote parts of Poland: Szczecin, Zielona Góra, Katowice and Rzeszów. The choice was based on contextual variables: regional differentiation. The United Kingdom was second in terms of the number of photos taken (27). The photos were taken by academics in London and friends in Manchester. Here, too, attention was paid to regional differences. Subsequently, a large number of photos were obtained from the Scandinavian countries: Denmark (29) - two cities: Aarhus and Odense

and Norway (28) - two cities: Lillehamer and Stawanger. Here, too, the places are distant and regionally different. The smallest number of photos (2) were obtained from the United Arab Emirates, from the city of Dubai, with the annotation "with limited photo opportunities in public places, without clearly indicating the reason why the photo is taken". From the rest of the world, the number of photos oscillated around 5-10. More than ten photos were obtained from China and Kenya. These are the countries where the photographers collaborate scientifically with the author of the study as part of the TICASS project. The involvement of people taking the pictures was greater in the case of a stronger scientific and/or friendly relationship with the researcher of the described project.

In the conducted research, the phenomenon of a universal pandemic is not associated with any ethnic group or nationality. In order to avoid stigmatization of the place of origin of Covid 19 visual messages, no value comparisons were made with regard to the origin of the message. Each visual message was described and interpreted in relation to the applied theory of scientific cognition. For the purposes of this text, all messages were treated as unit material, the subject of which is the Covid 19 pandemic. PM Lester.



Photo 1.
Ningbo, China
Author: Chan Chan



Photo 2.
Wellington, New Zealand
Author: Anna Borowska - Rudings



Photo 3.
Pwani, Kenya
Author: Aleksandra Łukaszewicz - Alcaraz

4. Possibilities and Limitations of reading visual messages from covid 19 located in public spaces of selected cities - cognitive objective

4.1. Personal perspective

P.M. Lester (2011) claims that unforgettable images always evoke strong emotions in the recipients, both positive and negative, and thus allow them to create their own assessment of the message. After looking at the photos for the first time, the recipients quickly develop their intuitive assessment of what is seen. They use words such as: "pretty", "ugly", "I like it", "I don't like it". In this way, the recipient of the message establishes an

emotional connection with the message. A bond is created with the message on the basis of positive reception and acceptance, or its rejection under the influence of a negative attitude. The reception and evaluation of a message depends on individual evaluation. This can sometimes conflict with cultural, religious, political values and many other local and social factors.

Visual communication from the personal perspective is characterized by the recipient's instinctive reactions as a result of subjective own opinions, evoked under the influence of emotions. The judgment and evaluation of messages cannot be generalized beyond individual opinion. The essence of this perspective is that it says a lot about the commentator. At the same time, Lester (2011) emphasizes that such opinions and feelings are individual and do not reveal much in relation to the essence of the message.

4.2. Historical perspective

This perspective relates to a specific space of time and the circumstances in which the message carrier was created. Through the medium, the author of the message presents specific content with a unique history, as well as a certain sequence of events, which may consequently favor its understanding and promotion. The recipient's knowledge of the history of the medium that was used to convey the information has an impact on how the message will be received. Lester emphasizes that "the creative production of visual messages always results from the awareness of what happened in the past" (Lester, 2001, pp. 135-136). Three photos were taken into account for the analysis. Photo 1 shows the message on the billboard, photo 2 shows the message on the poster and photo 3 shows the message on the mural.

When undertaking the historical setting of: billboards, posters, it is worth noting that their evolution has been shaped over the years, but these were not events that should be considered very distant in time. The roots of the mural in photo 3 seem to be older. At the same time, it is important in this approach that learning about the history of a given message carrier, including its changes in production technology and the philosophy of technology that have occurred over the years, determines the understanding of the trends related to it, in our case, the choice of the carrier for the message covid 19 (Doucet, Netolicky, Timmers, Tuscano, 2020). Awareness in this area can be considered necessary when creating and reading visual messages, moreover, it is important due to the process of changing the use of media in the context of their, also in the future, as shown in photo 2.

The analysis of visual messages: 1,2,3, allows to capture the process of media evolution in the region, and also shows the diversity of evolutionary conditions related to these changes. It is important to consider reading visual messages by showing the history of typography and the history of graphic design, from the pre-Gutenberg period to the digital age.

4.3. Technical (aesthetic) perspective

This perspective indicates the carrier of the message - the medium that was used to create, save and present specific content, and it is associated with the assessment of the technology used in this area. When analyzing the message from this perspective, one should take into account the exposure, position and appearance of the image, the use of text, graphics, and the arrangement of elements in the message. Relationships/dependencies/relations between the elements included in the message are very important.

In the case of picture 1, there are two elements that relate to each other. They are drawing and text written in Chinese characters. The drawing of a knight-warrior, despite being placed in the lower left corner of the message, occupies the foreground, and thus becomes a visually significant element, influencing the relationship with the recipient. Translated into English, the text on the billboard says: "Epidemic prevention starts with me. How to proceed:

1. Do not shake your hand during meetings, keep a distance of one meter and nod your head.
2. Show your health code voluntarily and have your temperature measured.
3. Cover mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing. Civilized habits are key.
4. Sit separately during a meal. Don't talk much, eat quickly.
5. Do not directly touch the buttons on the elevator or wash your hands after use.
6. Don't share things like cutlery with others. Hygiene is paramount.
7. Always wear a mask. Wash your hands often "(translated by Kamil Kilian).

The billboard is located in Ningbo, China, in front of the entrance to a large shopping mall. The communication contains guidelines on what precautions should be taken by the city community. The described rules of behavior also take into account educational aspects, such as: "civilized habits are key", "don't talk a lot, eat quickly", "hygiene is the most important thing".

The second drawing is a poster on a bank door in Wellington, New Zealand. The poster is a form of appeal to residents asking them to scan a message to prevent the virus. To read, it is necessary to have a medium connected to the Internet, with the ability to read QR codes. After scanning, the recipient receives information in English: "Protect yourself, your whānau (in Maori it means - family) and your community. The sooner we can contact people who may have been exposed to COVID-19, the sooner we can stop the spread of the virus. You don't have a smartphone? You can register online to share your latest contact information". The following is the instruction on how to proceed with the application that can be downloaded to a smartphone in the App Store and GooglePlay. The content is as follows: "Here's how you can help support contact tracing: Enable Bluetooth Tracing - the

faster we can alert people, the faster we can get ahead of the virus, Keep scanning QR codes - the more we scan, the safer we will be, Add your up-to-date contact information so contact tracers can get in touch if they need to, Add your NHI number for quick reference if you need a test, Keep the app up to date to get all the latest features, Ask your whānau, friends and workmates to join in, You are in control of your data - your diary and Bluetooth data doesn't leave your phone unless you choose to share it."(<https://tracing.covid19.govt.nz>). The visual announcement was prepared by the Ministry of Health and is aimed at every New Zealand citizen.

The third picture is a mural located on a building in the city of Pwani in Kenya. It contains three clearly marked parts. Each part is information in the form of a command/recommendation written in English, enhanced with a colored symbolic drawing. Reading from the left side, the first element is the outline of the house with the information: "stay at home". The second figure shows the symbols of the three covid 19 viruses, under which there is a forearm with a hand on which drops coming from the dispenser of a bottle with a disinfectant liquid are poured. The whole is surrounded by the words: horizontally "wash" and smaller vertically "hands", and also: "be safe", "Covid 19 hashtag", "save life", "disinfectant". The third element is the figure of a man in a mask covering his mouth and nose with the inscription in the frame next to the head - "wear the mask". The whole picture is very colorful and comic.

The analysis of messages 1, 2, 3 showed the diversity of the use of message carriers, the purpose of which is to inform about recommendations to prevent getting sick. The language used is also different. The first messages indicated the rules of human functioning in a social group. In the second message, the content is aimed at arousing responsibility for oneself and others by carefully observing oneself and others. The second message contains guidelines on what must be done to avoid virus infection by covid 19 (see: Doucet, Netolicky, Timmers, Tuscano, 2020). The variety of form and content indicates the need to know two ways of reading the messages. For the first and third, instructions for reading analog messages are necessary. To read the third message, it is necessary to use an additional medium to be able to decode the message, which requires an instruction to read digital messages. The development of visual technologies is therefore related to the development of the competence of reading messages, taking into account changes in the area of technical and aesthetic perspective (with) understanding the message. The variety of stimuli is conducive to activating, sometimes strengthening or limiting cognitive activity: perceptive, emotional, intellectual and also manual. The wider the scope of the impact, the better the message will be conveyed by the covid 19 visual message.

4.4. Ethical perspective

The meaning of this perspective includes moral and ethical responsibility for the used message carrier, i.e. the medium, the presented topic and the reception of the content. At the same time, it takes into account the obligations incumbent on both the creator of the message and its recipients in this respect (Lester, 2011, p. 137). It is a moral responsibility, it connects the creator, viewer and message. This perspective is encapsulated in six categories: 1) categorical imperative, 2) utilitarianism, 3) hedonism, 4) golden mean, 5) golden rule, and 6) veil of ignorance.

In messages 1 and 2 categorical commands can be found. They adopt the principle that what is good for one person is also good for the rest of the group. Categorical commands are unconditional, without any mitigating conditions, without any exceptions. People's behavior must comply with the adopted imperative - in this case, the order to follow the rules written on the billboard and mural. People in the Kenyan community are to stay home, wash their hands and wear masks. The list of guidelines is also addressed to those wishing to enter the mall in Ningbo city: shake hands order, consent to share a health code, consent to take temperature, cover mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, sitting down with meals separately, not touching directly elevator buttons, not talking over a meal, eating a meal quickly, not sharing cutlery, wearing a face mask and washing your hands frequently. Responsibility for the spread of covid 19 has been shifted to everyone in the community with the first sentence posted on the billboard: epidemic prevention starts with me.

The second message highlights the second category of description, namely utilitarianism. According to the saying "although an act may not be beneficial for a few, the result may help many" in the analyzed message: family, friends and also colleagues. Having the program in your cell and using it to monitor the spread of virusa covid 19 is to minimize the risk of infection. In communiqué 2 we also find the golden mean and the golden rule. A visual message is designed to redirect the recipients of messages to the application, in which they learn that only those who will use it will be included in the group of people who will be protected and will receive quick help if such a situation occurs. According to the golden rule, everyone cares for others as well as for themselves. For the sake of family, friends and colleagues, a person should have applications, because it is humane behavior. Every person is to respect the principles of functioning, as this will also protect others.

Despite the common theme, visual messages are structured differently and contain different wording. The recipient needs to know what types of constructions appear in the messages. The competence of critical reading of visual messages is indispensable, as it will allow to assess what means of social impact in the message were used.

The perspective of culture (semiotic perspective) - it is the recognition of the identity of the image. The description contains words that are related to the content, dynamics and symbolism of the image - sociology.

4.5. Cultural perspective

A cultural perspective for Lester (2011) is an analysis of metaphors, including signs and symbols that communicate meaning in a specific social group, at a specific time. In terms of interpretation, he proposes a semiotic approach, pointing to two outstanding figures in semiotics: Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce (2006). Lester follows Peirce in recognizing three types of signs: index, iconic, and symbolic. He recommends that in this approach, in particular, analyze the text accompanying the image, the style, as well as the attitudes expressed by the creator, as well as define the recipient of the presented content. Using this perspective allows to identify the message. The content contains words which together with the content, dynamics and symbolism create a coherent or dispersed message.

Index characters were used in message 2. They have a logical, common-sense relationship with the image accompanying the message and the adopted idea - protection against falling ill. These signs represent phenomena, they do not have a direct similarity to the object of reference - QR code.

In messages 1 and 3, iconic signs are used. They express a strong resemblance to the images they represent.

In all messages, the addressees are city residents and all persons staying in the places where the messages are posted. They are global in nature. They relate to each person, making them responsible for themselves (message 3) and for themselves to others (message 1 and 2). Symbolic signs can be found on each message. They are the most complex and their meaning is based on historically conditioned cultural experiences that must be taken into account in order to understand the meaning of "words, numbers, colors, gestures, institutional logos, drawings." All of them are important, have their place and meaning in the communication message (Lester 2011, p. 56) and should be analyzed in the context of the place where they were created and posted.

4.6. Critical Perspective

This perspective deals with issues that go beyond specific images or shape in personal (subjective) reactions. It is an objective and final reflection and evaluation of a visual message in terms of its usefulness to society. It is also important to establish whether after a more detailed study of resources, as in the case of message 2 - Internet resources, the initial perception of the message conditioned by the first diagnosis has changed (Lester, 2011).

In communication gestures, images and proxemic location are much more informative than words. Every culture is made up of signs, each one different from itself, and the people of the culture are concerned with giving meaning to these signs. It can be stated with full conviction that in the case of messages 1,2,3, the words / phrases / sentences

contained in them have their own language and structure organized according to a specific "grammar". Reading them helps to understand the main values, their hierarchy, social order, relationships and events that are aimed at the recipient. The content of the messages takes into account the social interest, not only the individual one.

Each message informs, suggests and urges people to do something they haven't broken up before. For this reason, even anti-virus covid 19 messages are not innocent. The messages were built using a variety of practices, technologies and knowledge. Therefore, a critical approach to visual messages is needed: one that thinks about the agency of the image, takes into account social practices and the effects of its circulation. You may ask: who needs to read visual messages in public spaces with understanding? For all members of society? Only for residents? Or maybe for guests?

The following categories can be used to read and interpret visual messages in the public sphere: social justice, equality, freedom for all genders, age and social role. These categories were used to determine the content of information placed in selected places and recorded in photographs taken by researchers in the TICASS project (Perzycka, Łukaszewicz - Alcaraz, 2020), which I mentioned at the beginning, and in which groups I conduct my research. The analyzed messages noted that:

- Reading visual elements, both material and symbolic, is possible in relation to the cultural contexts in which it is placed / localized.

- Reading images in terms of the power relations in which it is embedded means that the visual messages are based on some kind of ideology: political, social and economic.

- The purpose of visual communication was in the case of the message 1- compulsion, message 2 - information, message 3 - encouragement. (Lester, 2011, pp. 77-88).

- The symbols presented were a stereotype in the case of messages 1 and 2, and an oversimplification of gender in the case of message 3. In Communication 1, "correctness" was exaggerated.

The critical perspective of reading visual communication in the public sphere helps to define their meanings in terms of universal conclusions about the dominant ideology, freedom and social justice (Lester, 2011). In the case of the analyzed three selected demonstration (linguistically, culturally and medially differentiated) visual messages, I do not undertake such a generality. The analyzes are individual and cannot constitute the basis for the generalization of conclusions.

A full reading of visual messages will be possible by a multicultural team who will fully discuss the message in the context of broad contexts.

Concluding Thoughts

Public urban spaces are shaped by people and for people. Houses, streets, parks, squares, buses, taxis, bicycles, etc., contain a number of data and information that communicate with each other and with those for and to whom they were directed - us, users of these things, these places. Messages from covid 19 are increasingly becoming an important and particularly useful category in the processes of social communication in the conditions of multidimensional diversity of cities around the world (see: Sztompka, 2005, p. 11). This has many different conditions (see: Reynolds, Niedt, 2020). Cities are mostly global because of the unlimited flows of people and capital as well as information increasing the power of media and visual culture today (Heiferman, 2012).

The visual messages from covid 19 are polyphonic, i.e. they have a variety of content and form (see: Reynolds, Niedt, 2020). One can recognize contradictions and sometimes absurdities in them. In many cities they are similar to each other, but there are also some that differ fundamentally from each other. Reading them requires specific competencies to be fully recognized and understood. There is no society today that would not solve the problems of communication in cities, in their public spaces saturated with covid 19 messages and which can be read in various ways (adequate, incorrect, falsified) by city users (residents, tourists, visitors, researchers). There is no teaching in school curricula to read and interpret visual messages present in social spaces. Therefore, from my point of view, as a researcher - educator - an important result of theoretical reflections and conducted research is the proposal to develop an integral (and possibly universal) theory of visual education using the knowledge of visual messages from covid 19 distributed in urban public spaces. I observe the need for educational support in the field of visual and informational thinking, building and developing visual and informational competences and developing, as far as possible, uniform visual messages relating to human behavior in crisis situations. This challenge is international, interdisciplinary and global.

Visual awareness enables the creation, reading and understanding of the message, as well as building a coherent image of the perception of messages as a source of information. It provides knowledge that allows to use message carriers and use them as a factor in learning about communication processes. Recalling the sentence of Jerome Bruner, who indicates that life is not "as it is", but as it is interpreted and reinterpreted, tells and recounts again "(Bruner, 1990, p. 17), one can conclude on the basis of the analysis of messages contained in the photos that public transport is not what it is, but it is defined by the way visual messages are interpreted and reinterpreted and how people experience them and read them themselves (Myers, 2021). This challenge is international, interdisciplinary and global. It is worth considering creating a "global" visual alphabet that may be useful to users of the urban public sphere in different parts of the world.

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