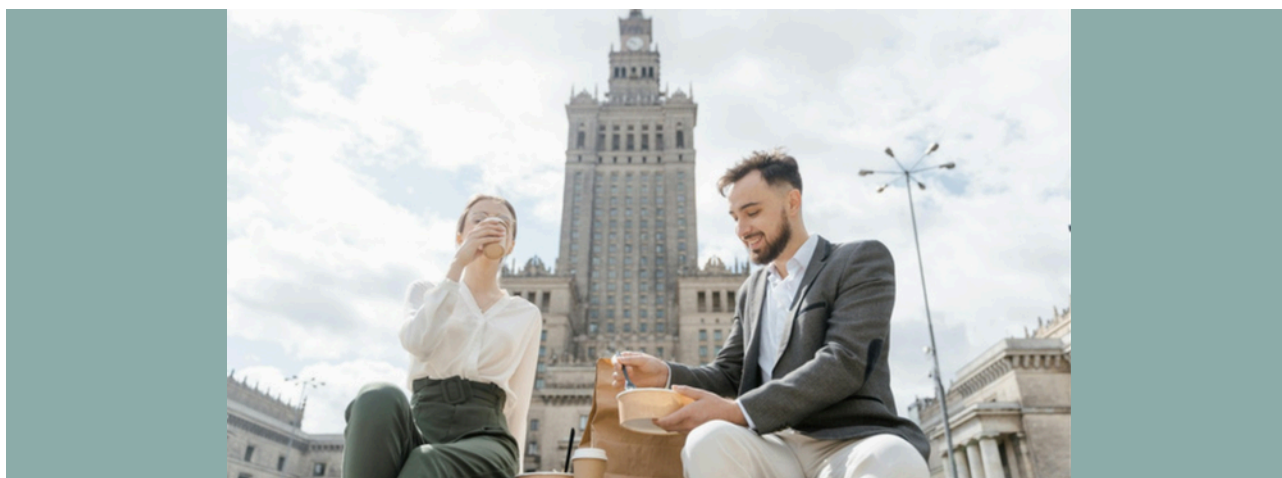


PRL Universe

Facilitator support sheet for youth workers, teachers and civic educators.



Tour Title: **PRL Universe: Polish People's Republic - Everyday Absurdities and Symbols of Power in Central Warsaw**

General Information



Primary Themes: Totalitarian urbanism, everyday adaptation and shortages, propaganda vs. lived reality, censorship and information control, transition from communism to capitalism, and the democratic reinterpretation of difficult ideological architecture.



Ages 16 to 30; optimal group size is 8 to 20 participants. Suitable for high-school, university, and civic education groups. No specific prior historical knowledge of the communist era is required, but a readiness to critically read the cityscape is highly recommended.



Languages: English, French, German, Serbian, Hungarian, Polish.



City / Country: Warsaw, Poland.



Starting location: Museum of Life under Communism, Piekna 28/34



Distance: Approx. 4,5 km by foot.



Estimated duration:

Before: 20 minutes (Introductory Hook & Framing)

During: 100–120 minutes (On-site Walk & Interactive Tasks)

After: 25 minutes (Debriefing, Reflection & Transfer)



Material needed: Charged smartphones (one per sub-group or individual), digital or printed copies of the PRL Universe Companion Booklet, a pen or pencil, and a blank piece of paper for each participant (needed for the creative task at Stop #9).
Optional: Notebook, water, comfortable walking shoes, and weather protection.



Accessibility level: Medium. The route is geographically longer (approx. 4.5 km) and entirely flat, but navigating busy central Warsaw arterial roads and subterranean passages (under Dmowskiego Roundabout) requires high physical attention. The content addresses emotionally and politically complex themes of state control and censorship.

Support Material

Learning Objectives

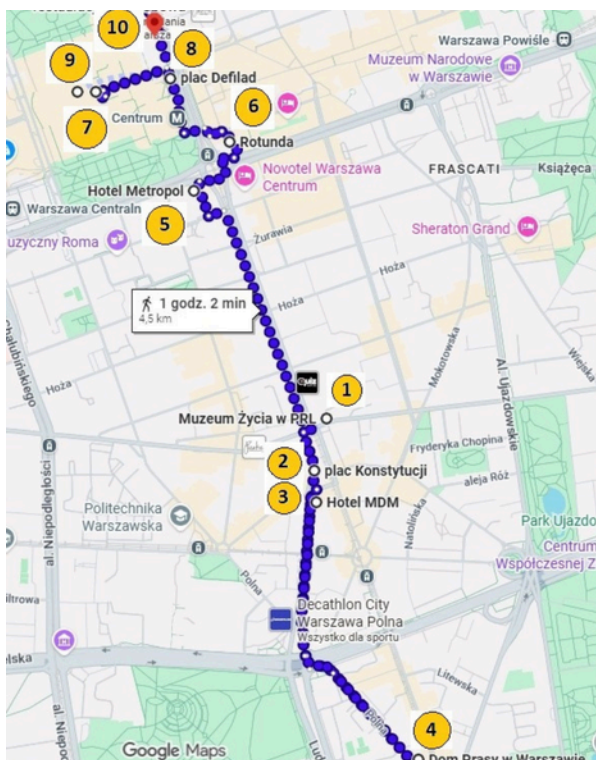
This guide is designed to help facilitators transform the "PRL Universe" walking tour into an active, critical, and civic learning experience. Rather than serving as a passive sightseeing tour of Warsaw's socialist-era architecture, this material guides young people through a deep exploration of the tension between authoritarian space-making and everyday human agency. Participants will learn to unmask monumental propaganda facades to discover the resourcefulness, absurdities, and survival strategies that characterized daily life under the communist regime.

By the end of this tour and its associated activities, participants will be able to:

1. Contrast official PRL state propaganda (monumentalism, heroised worker motifs) with the everyday resourcefulness, shortages, and economic realities of ordinary citizens.
2. Analyse how public architecture and urban design (e.g., Plac Konstytucji, Plac Defilad) were used to control, script, and discipline human movement and behaviour.
3. Evaluate the mechanisms of state censorship, media monopoly, and the emergence of conspiracy theories as a symptom of low institutional trust.
4. Reflect on contemporary civic choices regarding difficult, imposed ideological heritage (preservation vs. demolition, democratic reuse).

Practical Information

Tour 1 route map



Stop sequence:

1. Museum of Life under Communism, Piękna 28/34
2. Plac Konstytucji (Constitution Square)
3. Marszałkowska Housing District, MDM
4. Dom Prasy (Press House), Marszałkowska 3/5
5. Hotel Metropol, Marszałkowska/Aleje Jerozolimskie
6. Rotunda PKO, Marszałkowska 100/102
7. Palace of Culture and Science, Plac Defilad 1
8. Plac Defilad (Defilad Square)
9. Neon Museum, Palace of Culture and Science
10. Plac Centralny and the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

(Placeholder for the central Warsaw route map showing the 10 stops from Piękna Street to Plac Centralny)

Support Material

Accessibility

Physical Navigation: Central Warsaw features wide, mostly even pavements, but the overall distance is 4.5 km. Facilitators must ensure the group takes short sitting breaks (e.g., in arcades, park benches near PKiN, or the MSN lobby).

Acoustic Management: Marszałkowska Street and Aleje Jerozolimskie are major, highly congested transport veins with heavy traffic noise. Facilitators should gather the group in quieter building recesses, arcades (such as under Plac Konstytucji or MDM), or the courtyard of PKiN before speaking.

Emotional Readiness: Discussions address martial law, loss of political liberty, and surveillance. Keep debates open, civic-minded, and non-judgmental, allowing participants to process the limits of personal freedom.

Safety

Pedestrian Crossings: Warsaw's central intersections are wide and busy. Never cross on red lights, and ensure the entire group crosses together.

Subterranean Passages: The crossing under Dmowskiego Roundabout (near Rotunda) can be extremely crowded. Facilitators must keep a tight head-count and instruct sub-groups not to linger or block pedestrian flows.

Crowded Public Spaces: Watch out for delivery vehicles, trams, and electric scooters on sidewalks. Keep the group clustered and step away from active paths.

Support Material

Before the Tour

Group Organisation: Whole group, transitioning into pairs.

Facilitator Role: Discussion leader, critical inquiry guide, and mindset framer.

1. The Hook (5 mins)

Stand in a circle with the group at the starting point outside Piękna 28/34. Ask the participants:

"If a government could decide not only the law but also the colour of your street signs, what you buy for dinner, and how your living room cabinet looks, how would you protect your personal freedom?"

2. Pair Brainstorming (10 mins)

Have participants turn to a partner and list three items in their modern bedroom or backpack that they take completely for granted, but which under a planned communist economy might require waiting in a queue for days, holding a special state coupon, or paying in foreign currency (e.g., branded shoes, chocolate, a private telephone).

3. Framing & Ground Rules (5 mins)

Establish the core mindset of the walk:

Beyond "PRL-Nostalgia": Clarify that this is not a nostalgic tour about "quirky communist design" or a mocking session about administrative absurdities. It is a serious civic investigation into how citizens maintained their humanity, cleverness, and agency under an authoritarian regime.

The "Scenography" Concept: Encourage the group to view central Warsaw's massive buildings not as passive, static monuments, but as a grand, political "scenography" designed to script public behaviour.

Rule of Critical Distance: Encourage critical thinking and active comparison with contemporary systems of urban and media control.

Support Material

During the Tour

Stop 1 : Museum of Life under Communism



Facilitation tips: Gather the group inside the simulated panel-block apartment.
Ask: "How does the forced uniformity of identical home furniture (like the Kowalski wall unit) reflect a regime's desire to standardise individual minds?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: The museum showcases how state rationing (kartki) expanded to basic goods like sugar, meat, shoes, and petrol. This structural shortage forced citizens to develop "social resourcefulness" - forming queue committees, swapping goods, and repairing items by hand.



Solutions: Strong reflections recognize that DIY and repairing objects became small, crucial acts of autonomy and resistance against enforced uniformity, transforming home maintenance into a pursuit of personal liberty.

Stop 2 : Plac Konstytucji (Constitution Square)



Facilitation Tips: Stand under one of the three giant candelabra streetlamps.
Ask: "What architectural details here make you feel like an integrated part of a massive collective, and which make you feel like a tiny individual?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: Opened July 22, 1952, to mark the PRL Constitution. The square is a prime example of Socialist Realism ("socialist in content, national in form"). The monumental scale, symmetrical axes, and arcades were physically designed to host massive parades and weaponize public space for state intimidation.



Solutions: Participants imagine adding a realistic detail (e.g., a weary face, an empty basket) to the sculptures, which exposes the contrast between grandiloquent propaganda and the hardships of everyday life.

Stop 3 : Marszałkowska Housing District (MDM)



Facilitation Tips: Look up at the building facades showing reliefs of builders, mothers, and teachers. Ask: "If these stone figures are a visual textbook carved into the walls, what lesson was the state trying to teach ordinary passers-by?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: Constructed (1950–52) to bring the working class into the bourgeois city centre, proving the regime's ideological triumph. However, the apartments behind these heroic stone reliefs were cramped, and their allocation depended strictly on political loyalty.



Solutions: Group discussions should note how the monumental exterior "game of appearances" masked the reality of political favoritism and limited living standards.

Support Material

During the Tour

Stop 4 : Dom Prasy (Press House), Marszałkowska 3/5



Facilitation Tips: Stand in front of the modernist facade. Ask: "In a society where the government owns every newspaper and broadcasting station, how do citizens learn what is truly happening?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: Built in 1926–27 (modernist style), but seized after WWII by the communist publishing giant RSW "Prasa-Książka-Ruch". It printed "Trybuna Ludu" (the flagship propaganda newspaper) and "Życie Warszawy". It represents the absolute state monopoly on information.



Solutions: Group discussions should highlight historical methods of verifying truth: listening to foreign radio (e.g., Radio Free Europe), reading underground "samizdat" publications, and developing the skill of reading "between the lines" of official announcements.

Stop 5 : Hotel Metropol (Marszałkowska St./Aleje Jerozolimskie)



Facilitation Tips: Stand near the modern, glass facade. Ask: "If a regime officially condemns Western capitalism but builds luxury hotels for foreigners, what kind of hidden economic networks will naturally emerge?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: Opened in 1965 as a showcase of late Gomułka-era modernization. The area became the epicenter of the black market, ruled by "cinkciarze" (illegal currency changers). Citizens purchased US dollars here to buy coveted Western goods (jeans, Coca-Cola) at Pewex stores.



Solutions: Discussions should touch on the double standard of the regime, which officially condemned capitalist consumerism but relied on citizens' hard-currency desires to prop up the state's fragile economy.

Stop 6 : Rotunda PKO (Marszałkowska 100/102)



Facilitation Tips: Stand near the memorial plaque. Ask: "When citizens completely lose trust in state-controlled media, how does that affect how a community reacts to a sudden, real tragedy?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: Completed in 1966. On February 15, 1979, a devastating gas explosion killed 49 people. Because citizens did not trust the state-run media, conspiracy theories (e.g., bank robberies, deliberate bombs) spread instantly. The state quickly rebuilt it in 8 months as a political distraction.



Solutions: Guide the group to connect the historical distrust of the 1970s with contemporary phenomena, reflecting on how a lack of institutional trust fuels conspiracy theories and fake news today.

Support Material

During the Tour

Stop 7 : Palace of Culture and Science



Facilitation Tips: Look up at the massive spire of the building. Ask: "How can a building be both a brutal symbol of foreign, political occupation and a beloved hub for youth, education, and culture?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: Erected (1952–55) as a "gift" from the Soviet Union. Designed by Lev Rudnev, it combined Socialist Realism with Polish historicist architecture. To construct it, a dense grid of pre-war streets and tenements was completely leveled.



Solutions: Facilitate a discussion on whether difficult, imposed heritage should be demolished or preserved as a physical warning. Highlight how the Palace was repurposed for democratic culture, showing that meanings can be reclaimed.

Stop 8 : Plac Defilad (Defilad Square)



Facilitation Tips: Stand near the granite honorary tribune. Ask: "How does standing shoulder to shoulder in silence feel different from standing alone? How did the regime use empty space to design obedience?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: Designed to hold 400,000 people for choreographed May Day rallies. Its most iconic moment occurred on October 24, 1956, when Gomułka addressed a massive crowd during the political "thaw." Post-1989, it transformed into a chaotic free-market bazaar with metal shopping halls, showcasing rapid capitalist transition.



Solutions: The 30-second silent "alignment task" allows youth to physically feel how space-enforced discipline creates a collective, obedient body. The post-1989 market contrast demonstrates the sudden, unscripted collapse of that state order.

Stop 9 : Central Warsaw neon heritage



Facilitation Tips: Stand where the neon signs are visible or near their former locations. Ask: "If a neon sign in a communist city doesn't sell a private product, what is it actually advertising?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: Following the 1956 political thaw, the state launched a "neonisation" campaign. Designed by top-tier architects, neon signs (e.g., "Cinema", "Restaurant") were state-funded. They served to aestheticize the gray cityscape, mimic Western prosperity, and distract from chronic shortages.



Solutions: The Creative Neon Task: Participants take out a blank piece of paper and a pen/pencil. Instruct them to sketch a minimalist, single-line contour of their own neon sign (symbol or slogan) representing this stop, with no colors needed. Passing the sketches around the group to guess the meanings encourages creative collaboration.

Support Material

During the Tour

Stop 10 : Plac Centralny and the Museum of Modern Art



Facilitation Tips: Stand before the white, minimalist MSN building. Ask: "How does the low-rise, open white design of the MSN challenge the towering, dark, and central hierarchy of the Palace of Culture?"



Cultural Heritage Support Notes: The Museum of Modern Art (designed by Thomas Phifer) stands in stark contrast to the PKiN. The ongoing redevelopment of the surrounding concrete desert into "Central Square" aims to return the space to citizens.



Solutions: Guide the group to analyze the "scenography" of the entire walk. Reflect on how contemporary Warsaw is reclaiming former authoritarian spaces, layering new, pluralistic, and democratic meanings onto them.

Support Material



After the Tour

Group Organisation: Sitting in a circle (indoors or in a quiet square).

Facilitator Role: Active listener, synthesis guide, and debriefing leader.

1. Debriefing Activity (15 mins)

The Keyword Circle: Ask each participant to choose one keyword that best characterizes the PRL Universe for them: Absurd, Shortage, Propaganda, Adaptation, or Reinterpretation. They must explain their choice in one sentence.

The Game of Appearances Dilemma: Ask the group:

"Did you find the PRL Universe more absurd because of its monumental ideological demands, or fascinating because of how cleverly ordinary people bypassed those demands to survive?"

2. Transfer & Active Citizenship (10 mins)

The Challenge: Invite participants to look closely at their own contemporary city center, neighborhood, or media environment.

Ask: "What are the modern 'scenographies' - such as commercial billboards, corporate plazas, or sponsored public spaces - that try to script how you move, shop, or think today? How do we read between the lines of modern media and advertising?"

Closing Message: Remind the group that the tools of media literacy and critical urban reading they developed today are essential for active citizenship. True democratic agency is built on our constant willingness to look beneath the surface of the official message.

3. Optional Extension Output

Design a New Stop: Invite participants to design a blueprint for a stop in their own town titled: "The Propaganda of My Daily Life." They should identify a modern public space or digital platform, explain the simplified story it tells, and formulate a critical question for future visitors.

Support Material

References

1. Heritage Interpretation Models: Model 2 on difficult, controversial, and ideological heritage (EYES Project internal pedagogical framework).
2. Museum of Life under Communism Archives: Curatorial records on Polish state rationing, martial law shortages, and domestic material culture (1970–1989).
3. Warsaw Municipal Registry & Sigalin Archives: Post-war planning documentation for the Marszałkowska Housing District (MDM) and Plac Konstytucji (1950–1953).
4. Trybuna Ludu Publication History: Archives of the RSW "Prasa-Książka-Ruch" on the distribution of state press and censorship protocols at the Dom Prasy.
5. PKO Bank Polski Corporate History: Archive documentation regarding the design, tragedy, and record-breaking 1979 reconstruction of the PKO Rotunda.
6. Palace of Culture and Science (PKiN) Monography: Architectural records on Lev Rudnev's design and the demolition of pre-war Warsaw streets.
7. Museum of Warsaw Archives: Photographic and municipal records of the post-1989 capitalist transition of Plac Defilad and the market hall era.