

Privacy and data protection case study

3 – PROTEST



You are testing your drone in the countryside in an authorised airspace. After several minutes, you notice a group of people 300 meters from your position. After having checked that no particular safety issue could arise, you use your drone to capture images of the group. You also maintain visual contact with your drone and remain at a minimum safety distance from the group.

Your drone captures footage of the people who appear to be a group of environmentalists protesting against forest destruction. They are not aware that they are being filmed and – at some point – you decide to zoom in for a few minutes on two particular individuals and the signs they are carrying.

Back home, you decide to send the footage to a local newspaper that might use it for an article. You also post the full footage on your social media account(s) in order to support the cause.

Privacy

Chilling effect: People captured in the footage might feel under surveillance (even when they are not) and might be under the impression that they need to restrict their behaviour. This infringes their right to move freely without being watched, and in this case, to express their opinion about forest destruction.

TIPS - *Whenever possible, inform people before you start recording. If anyone asks you a question about what you are doing, answer them.*

Function creep: In that particular scenario, you went from “testing out” your drone to producing footage for a potential news article. This may constitute “function creep”.

Dehumanisation of the surveilled: In this particular scenario, you might feel protected from the consequences of filming the protestors since you are at distance from them. You are also considering your own interests above theirs when capturing the footage.

Privacy of association: This footage could result in the individuals who were captured with zoom lens being associated with certain conservation groups. This may lead to them being discriminated against by their peers or employers, for example.

Data Protection

Data protection: The sharing of images captured by the zoom lens and subsequently used in a news article or on social media could potentially breach aspects of European data protection laws.

TIPS - *Think before sharing: do not share any image that leads to the identification of a person or which may harm them on social media. Always ask for permission from the individuals you capture in your footage.*

Lastly! A note on public dissatisfaction: The drone use presented in these case studies may contribute to public dissatisfaction about drone use, particularly by those caught in the footage. Their dissatisfaction may be even greater, and when that footage has been publicly shared, without their permission.

TIPS - *Before using a drone, consider your surroundings and the full impact of your drone use on others.*