THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MARKETING IN OVERCOMING THE NIMBY SYNDROME

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to analyze the “NIMBY syndrome” in the context of the infrastructure projects and the potential of implementing certain marketing strategies, in order to diminish its’ negative effects. It creates a theoretical background for a larger-scale research project: “Innovative Model of Socioeconomic Benefits and Costs in Infrastructural Projects”.

Approach: In the first part of the paper, basing on review of literature, the essence and concept of the NIMBY syndrome has been explained, along with possible areas of occurrence. Next, the evaluation proceeded to explain the concept and range of social marketing, which tools and principles can resolve conflicts that raise on the base of the NIMBY syndrome. Addition to theoretical approach is the analysis of exemplar marketing actions, which can be taken in connection with the construction of Wind Farms. In the case study, it has been pointed that certain marketing actions may be taken by followers as well as opponents of the given investment.

Implications for society: The composition of marketing strategies (marketing mix) may affect the favor of the local population (target market of investment projects). Due to the fact that important feature of social marketing is the change of behavior of specific target groups, the course and economics of an investment process may strongly depend on the taken marketing actions.

Value of the paper: This paper explains the NIMBY syndrome and presents selection of marketing tools which can diminish its’ outcome and minimize the costs of investment.

Keywords: social marketing, NIMBY syndrome, wind parks

Paper type: General review

1. Introduction

With the development of the concept of marketing, its use in various areas of economic life is increasing. The aim of this article is presentation of the concept of social marketing and its tools, that can be used to solve problems encountered in the preparation and implementation of infrastructure investments, such as wind turbines, biogas power plants, waste dumps, roads, airports, etc.

At the basis of deliberations presented in the study, a social phenomenon termed “NIMBY syndrome” can be found, which is expressed by opposition to
the investments at a particular location and at the same time with support for such investments in general.

The main aim of the analysis of this phenomenon, carried out on the basis of studies of literature and the study of selected cases (social conflicts) is to identify the key aspects of marketing activities, which could provide a tool to counter the effects of the NIMBY syndrome and streamline the investment processes.

An article was prepared on the basis of studies of literature conducted within the project “Innovative model of socioeconomic benefits and costs in infrastructural projects”, co-financed by the National Centre for Research and Development.

2. Characteristics of the NIMBY syndrome
There are many aspects to the implementation of investment projects. Looking from a practical perspective, we are mainly concentrating on financial and market aspects, examining the profitability of individual undertakings or the coincidence of products produced there with expectations of customers. We often neglect public aspects, in particular the societal acceptance in addition to the prepared plan. This negligence can have particularly unpleasant consequences for investments such as waste dumps, wind power stations and biogas power plants, roads, airports, or graveyards, potentially causing arduousness for the surroundings. Such investments evoke emotions, which are relatively easy to focus and turn in organized opposition against the implementation of these investments. As a result, socially useful projects, that should have widespread support, are blocked or have significant delays in implementation, due to local protests, sometimes by a small group of people.

In order to explain this phenomenon, special attention should be paid to the NIMBY syndrome described in the literature of sociological and political science. The concept of NIMBY is an acronym for the English words “Not in my backyard”. This concept means opposition to the implementation of the specific task of investment in a given location while the approval for the entire project. Often described in literature, an example of the NIMBY effect is support for renewable energy, while strongly in opposition to the location of the wind power plants in the neighborhood (Wolsink, 2000). A typical example is the protest of the inhabitants of the Tuchomie municipality in Pomorskie, who say: “We are not against the construction of windmills in our community, but we do not agree for their location to be so close to the buildings” (Boyke, 2013) [1].

As E. Michałowska writes, NIMBY syndrome is one of the types of local conflicts, as is intertwined with the concept of space in both, geographical and social terms, utilized by a specific group of people. Their essence is the difference between the concept of development of a given space, the current users, and the vision of its development by the new users.
NIMBY conflicts usually have ecological character and an expected or made decision is the subject of litigation about locating the investment in the given space, causing potential worsening of the quality of life of the local community. The harmfulness of such investment is being expressed by ecological threat to the entire environment, worsening the quality of life of residents, e.g. on account of the noise or increasing the motor traffic, with worsening aesthetic advantages or also a negative or unknown influence on the medical condition of the man (Michałowska, 2008).

NIMBY syndrome may have different bases. The literature mentions the four dimensions of conflict (Michałowska, 2008; Matczak, 1996; Frączek, 2010):

- economic dimension;
- political dimension;
- ethical dimension;
- sociological dimension.

The economic aspect is based on the fact that the beneficiaries of the public good are not willing to incur the additional cost of producing it. Such additional costs may be, for example, the need to accept the inconveniences arising from the operation of the planned investment or acceptance of risks arising from its location in a particular place. This leads to a sense of social injustice. The reasoning in this situation is relatively simple: “The other people will use the road, which is to be located behind my house, and I’ll have to put up with the noise caused by the cars”. Most do not want to incur the cost of production of goods, which are used by all. In this situation, just a small group of opponents (sometimes one person) is enough and is focusing social protest around the planned investment, which entails negative consequences for the majority of the participants, and in particular for the investor.

There are many aspects of the political dimension. It is manifested most often by a lack of trust in the government and business representatives, accompanied by strong emotions. Negative emotions in terms of project, can be called in a relatively simple way for example questioning whether the government acts in the public interest or for unknown reasons, primarily cares about the welfare of the investor. Often there are expressed suspicions that the decision-making process is affected by irregularities of corruption. In such a situation, even if there are expert opinions, expressing support for the investment, protesters treat them as a manifestation of bias and actions to defend the decision taken previously by the decision makers. We are dealing here not only with the crisis of trust in local authorities, but the questioning of all different opinions and actions perceived as favoring a priori only a selected group of stakeholders. It should be noted that some of the actions conducted by the authorities, carried out in the DAD (Decide, Announce, Defend) scheme (Matczak, 1996) may affirm opponents of the individual investments in the conviction of the rightness of their position.
and strengthen the conviction of the marginalization of interests of the local community.

Analyzing the press reports and the actions of some politicians, it can also be said that protests such “Tilting at windmills”, have become part of the programming of some political parties, and may be treated as an effective way to acquire the electorate. Firstly, politicians and the disgruntled group are united by a common belief and a common goal, which is the frustration of local investment plans [2]. And secondly, the support of the protesters by the authorities and capabilities of politicians, not only adds interest of media to the conflict, but also allows for the publicity of the problem using tools not available to most people (e.g. parliamentary questions, legislative initiatives, etc.) [3]. As a result, with the escalation of the conflict, the authorities of local governments may fear making rational, though unpopular decisions, yielding to social pressure expressed by the voice of a small group of activists. This can lead to damage to the investors, for reasons other than justified protection of the interests of the local community.

Analyzing the NIMBY syndrome in the ethical dimension, it can be concluded that the blockade of the investment as a result of the protests is mostly a victory of interests of the individual over the interests of the whole society and is often mistakenly understood as a manifestation of democracy. Although the individuals’ right to defend their interests cannot be denied, but each conflict, its outcome, and resources used in the fight, should be carefully evaluated through the moral point of view.

In actions taken by the parties, the manipulation of public opinion through selective forwarding or over-inflating opinion of experts and facts often occurs. In the publication “Windmills - (not) clean energy” (Truszczyńska, 2012), we read: “The Ministry of Health indicates health risks that may arise from such a close location of windmills: wind turbine syndrome and vibroacoustical disease”. Meanwhile, in the cited opinion we have the following statement: “However, all the studies show that the noise emitted by wind turbines in the immediate neighborhood does not exceed the sound pressure equal to 85 dB”. Therefore, theoretically there is no reason to believe that this intensity of noise can cause direct negative health effects. The problem for local residents can rather be inconvenience, associated with sounds, not exceeding the legally prescribed standards, which have their origin mainly in the lack of acceptance of any changes or modifications in their immediate vicinity. Consequently, this may lead to non-acceptance of wind farms as part of the infrastructure in the immediate vicinity and, consequently, to observe the symptoms of Wind Turbine Syndrome (WTS). Admittedly, there is no clear evidence that the incidence of the Wind Turbine Syndrome rises significantly among the people living near wind farms. However, due to the fact that the research is still ongoing, according to NIZP-PHZ “this phenomenon should not be underestimated and belittled”. Text of opinion does
not contain such radical statements about the dangers of wind turbines, which can be deduced from the text and the title of the article.

An important issue that requires moral evaluation is to determine at what stage of the investment process, representatives of the local community have the right to raise objections against the project. In practice, this is the most controversial issue, because it exposes investors to financial losses of significant size. Analysis of more than 10 cases of blocking energy investments shows that local community representatives had the opportunity to read the intentions of the investor at a relatively early stage of the project preparation, but for various reasons they did not do that.

Raising objections at the stage of construction means that investors incur substantial financial loss, reparation of which they may claim on the road of compensation proceedings. The problem is that the cost of any compensation shall bear the local community as a whole and not the individual at the head of the opposition.

**Sociological factors** seem to be the driving force behind the NIMBY effect. The root of NIMBY-based conflicts seems to be a gap between what could be considered a common interest and the interest of a particular group of people (or just one person). Sometimes this conflict is founded on rational arguments and can protect local communities from investments that could prove harmful to them. However very often the conflict is caused by people or groups concentrated only on their particular interests. A very interesting study of the sociological aspects behind the NIMBY syndrome can be found in a paper by K. Dmochowska-Dudek. Apart from introducing an interesting classification and categorization of the arguments brought up by the opponents of infrastructural investments it also goes to prove that these arguments have been known to exist for as far back as the 19th century (Dmochowska-Dudek, 2010).

Considering the fact that the NIMBY syndrome is undesirable from the perspective of efficiency and effectiveness of the investment process, it is worth to continue to study its determinants and to explore mechanisms enabling its neutralization.

The NIMBY syndrome can be observed in relation to a variety of investments and cannot be viewed as a phenomenon to be viewed on a case-by-case basis. Research commissioned by the Pomeranian Special Economic Zone into the possible future locations of a nuclear power plant in northern Poland has found other, apart from distance, variables influencing the level of social acceptance of potentially harmful projects (Stankiewicz and Lis, 2011). Therefore extensive diagnostic surveys should be carried out before commencing the execution of any such project. Due to the scope of this paper and the existence of abundant literature on the topic [4], no further analysis on the background behind the occurrence of the NIMBY syndrome shall be included.
As this is a social phenomenon, its overcoming requires reaching for the tools used to shape socially desirable attitudes and behaviors, that is, the social marketing tools.

3. The nature and tools of social marketing

Social marketing, as a separate concept, appeared at the beginning of the 70s., when Ph. Kotler and G. Žaltman recognized that the techniques and marketing tools typically used when selling products and services, can be used with equal success to promote the idea. It was originally defined as the design, implementation and control of programs aimed at better assimilation of the social ideas (Sargrant, 2004).

In the twentieth century in the 90s. Ph. Kotler propagated the social marketing as a variety of classical marketing concept, which is based on enabling the simultaneous increase of consumer and societal welfare. In publications devoted to fundamentals of marketing, Ph. Kotler suggested the need for shaping of such marketing activities, to keep a balanced representation between the three objectives: companies’ profit, satisfaction of the consumer, and the public interest (Kotler, 1994).

From the prospect of this study, the social marketing will be defined as the process, in frames of which, actions being aimed at triggering desired attitudes and behaviors of particular social groups are being taken, at using assumptions and marketing techniques. This action can serve both promoting the idea and socially desired attitudes, and supporting of implementation of projects of commercial character.

An important feature of social marketing is that it does not deal with the physical product or service, and the main objective of the action is to change the attitudes and behavior of a specific target group. This is reflected in the composition of marketing tools commonly defined by the term “marketing mix”. Bearing in mind proposals presented in literature (Lipska, 2011), it is possible to suggest 5 element composition of tools of marketing mix, possible to apply in the social marketing. It includes:

- product (benefits);
- cost (price);
- communication;
- distribution;
- people (leaders).

As explained by A. Sargrant, the product in a social context, is defined as a thought, an idea, a concept, which is wanted to be spread, causing changes in behavior (Sargrant, 2004). Such a representation of the problem, however, reminds the sales approach, and thus a situation in which the entity offering the particular good uses the tools of promotion and distribution channels, trying to maximize the sale of the product.
According to marketing concept, at the basis of actions of the seller (here: the initiator of changes) should be the needs of buyers (here: the units of a given community), and what’s more they must determine his actions. Holding on to this concept, at the project preparation stage, should be identified individuals in the community whose needs should be met, because only then we will be able to offer them something they need, and thus more effectively influence their decisions and behavior.

Contrary to traditional marketing as it seeks to know and meet the needs of individual consumers, in the interest of social marketing are the needs of a larger group of people and causing such behavior, which is desirable from a societal point of view, or eliminating those of a destructive nature. The aim of marketing efforts may be, for example, a change in behavior leading to separate waste or changing hostile attitude towards investment in infrastructure, such as roads and power plants, while the component of the product may be, for example, the benefit from the increased value of better-connected property or elimination of threats caused by the contamination.

Analyzing benefits, which units of the determined community can seek, one should also pay attention to the aspects associated with the membership to the specific group, including also the desire for acquiring the status of the leader.

It is also possible to present the product in the form of the benefit to the specific group of stakeholders, that is e.g. of larger impacts on account of the property tax, enabling the structure and maintaining the new common rooms.

The price has two dimensions in social marketing. On one side is the cost, which shall be borne by the society for the promotion of socially desirable attitudes and behaviors, on the other hand are all values that must be paid by the entity, to acquire a “product”.

The price may have a financial dimension at the time if, for example, medical prophylaxis requires self-financing certain specialized studies, or non-financial, when resigning from certain privileges for the common good. Care should be taken to avoid a situation when price paid by the entity for its beliefs is the exclusion.

Extremely important tool of social marketing is communication. Using the concept of communication seems to be in this case more reasonable than the promotion, because communication to a greater extent is associated with nature interaction of bidirectional flow of information and feedback. Moreover, the acts of communication always occur in a society in its various structures and at different levels, and thus, in principle have social nature (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2004).

In the case of communication used in social marketing, it is worth paying attention to the theory of agendas formulated in the 60s of the twentieth century by M. McCombs and D. Shaw (Smith, 2011).

Already in 1922 W. Lippmann argued that people form cognitive maps of the world around them based on the media information. He claimed that public
opinion reacts to the image of the world constructed by the media, not the reality in the strict sense because the topics attracting public attention are usually not based on the personal experiences of customers, but on the informations derived from the media (McCombs, 2008).

Information and emotions provoked by the images and words contained in communications may start heuristics, and thus simplifications of thought made by the people in order to overcome the limited capacity of data analysis. This simplifications rely on subconscious elimination of part of the features and alternatives (Bęben, 2013). As explained by G. Polański, “headline, magazine covers, the first information in TV news, on the web portal tells not only what to think but how to think. Media can even tell us what we should do” (Polański, 2013).

Moreover, anchoring heuristic is being launched, so all further information will be referenced to the one obtained first.

The trouble is that the number of events taking place worldwide is so huge that it would be impossible to inform the society as a whole. When, for example, the Jones’ child is born, it will not interest any reporter and world won’t learn about it. And when princess Kate Middleton has had a son, all sorts of media informed about it, not only the British. And so, only some events take rank of the message and are an object of the public interest. So if a certain issue became important, it should be publicised appropriately.

According to the theory of McCombs and Shaw, media affects public opinion in a very significant way, because it focuses attention on certain events, shaping the agenda. Agenda is in fact a collection of events and issues, considered in a given period as the most important (Lipska, 2009).

Properly conducted communication can shape the status of individual problems, and properly edited headers and messages-public perception of specific events or issues. Due to the limited human perception and the limited capacity of the media (television time limit, the surface of one edition of the newspaper) the most difficult task is putting your problem on top of the agenda. In the remaining area common tools of promotion are used, widely presented in the literature [5].

**Distribution** is a marketing tool that is usually associated with the physical movement of goods from producer to consumer. With regard to social marketing, it has somewhat different tasks. It is about creating possibilities of realizing the desired behavior at a particular time and place (for example a bus, where you can give blood). The distribution in this case is also related to the information transmission channels designed to help meet social needs-for example the need to belong - in joining a social media profile (eg. Facebook) to a group of supporters or opponents of a particular investment. Components of distribution can also be places, such as AA clubs, the meeting point for people who want to overcome a drinking problem. Distribution in social marketing includes activities and
tools related to overcoming the spatial and temporal barriers that block or hinder the realization of socially desirable behaviors or activities and tools supporting refraining from socially undesirable activities.

The last of the proposed marketing tools are the **people**. Just as in marketing of services, their qualifications and skills affect the quality of services that the consumer receives, so in social marketing people can be invaluable.

Described in literature, rule of authority clearly indicates that people are willing to comply with the suggestions or demands of authority, taking it as a natural pattern of behavior. The effect of this rule is so strong, that individuals can behave even irrationally, not recognizing the threats that come down on themselves and others. R. Cialdini calls this phenomenon “Captainitis”, giving as an example plane crashes, which none of the crew prevented despite obvious errors of the captain, surrendering unto the rule “if the authority says so, it probably is so” (Cialdini, 1996). Of course, authorities can also have a positive impact on the behavior of specific groups, for example the one of the most popular social campaigns conducted under the slogan “Drink milk, you’ll be great”.

From the perspective of marketing activities, it is important both the issue of appropriate selection of “authorities”, as well as their creation. Conducted analysis [6] of 10 cases of power plants under construction leads to the conclusion that the focusing conflicts need a “face”. In the analyzed cases, the conflict created the leader or leader created the conflict, among the others, realizing his social needs and fulfilling the role of leader. It should be noted that, not always, organizers of the conflict are also leaders. The leader is the person or group who has the same needs or views as specific community and takes active measures to their public presentation and changing a particular state or blocking the changes.

Proposed tools of marketing mix, similarly as in the case of classical marketing actions, should create the composition formed appropriately to the target which they are supposed to carry out. They constitute basic tools of the positioning, thanks to which in the awareness of the chosen target group occurs the desired image or the mental tension stimulating for taking the defined action.

4. **Tools of marketing mix in the context of conflicts around the construction of wind power plants**

While preparing investment projects it is often forgotten that one day may reveal the conflict of interest, following which it will be necessary to solicit the favor of the local community. Of it may depend the effectiveness, and in extreme cases - possibility to realize the planned investment. Therefore, already at the design stage, it is good to take care of proper relations with the local community and to monitor social attitudes to prevent destructive conflicts. They can occur despite the fact that the investment is socially and economically justified.
It is worth to give as an example the renewable energy and to recall that Poland, like other countries of the European Union, committed itself to undertake actions to reduce CO2 emissions and produce at least 20% of energy from renewable sources. This type of energy production has from the principle social support. According to a study conducted in 2011 by the Department of Public Health, Medical University in Szczecin for the Polish Wind Energy Association, a representative sample of adult Poles expresses support for wind power and other renewable energy sources. The study showed that the respondents strongly favor wind energy from the traditional power plants and nuclear power plants (Department of Public Health, University of Szczecin, 2011). So what causes that in the most media stormy protests against the construction of specific wind farms are reported? The answer seems relatively simple - the NIMBY syndrome.

Inadequate investment preparation in social terms causes that many investors feel the severe consequences of the protests, which increase the risk of investment and the effective implementation of the vision of its cost and time, and often obstruct the path to obtain financing for the investment project. So the question arises: why opponents of wind turbines seem to be more effective?

The first difference can be seen in the products offered to the local community. The investor usually provides about the need for the construction of renewable energy sources, ecological benefits, the compliance of investment with the requirements of applicable law and receipts from property tax [7]. Opponents of the location arouse anxiety and offer satisfying security needs, manifesting concern for the health of people living in habitats adjacent to the area of the planned investment. When assessing the validity of the problem from the perspective of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, it’s easy to see that the protection of human health and life is the need of a higher order than the need to care for the budget revenues from property tax, which is not known whether and when will translate into welfare of the protestor. In this situation, the only option for investors is to develop their own product or reliably convincing the public about the fragility of the theses advanced by the protesters. It should be remembered about the phenomenon of framing, in consequence of which effort of convincing the society about the rightness of their arguments will be the greater, the more widespread will be the views of opponents, being the benchmarks in assessing the positions of the sides in the conflict.

Analysis of several cases of building wind farms [8] leads to the conclusion that the greater part of the local community is directly financially interested in the creation of a specific project, expecting revenues from the lease of land for the construction of wind turbines, the less tendency of the communities to take action to block a planned power plant construction. The rent is in this case the price for use of the property and for acceptance of potential risks which may arise during the operation [9]. It can be assumed that the smaller the number of direct
beneficiaries, the greater the risk of escalation of protest. There is an ongoing media debate regarding the development of financial mechanisms compensating for the whole local community disadvantages of the investments, but their introduction on a wider scale seems unlikely [10].

The level of preparation of opponents is sometimes very high. For example, on website uniting opponents of wind power, we can find the “manual of the protestor” as well as document templates for effective blocking and delaying the investment. As it can be seen the opponents of the power plant, with cleverness and commitment have prepared a web portal which is in this case the primary distribution channel providing the tools to facilitate the recall of specific behavior, which depends on the opponents of the windmills.

Crucial to the course of the dispute, is the agenda and the content of messages published by the investor (communication). In a conflict situation, the exemplary cooperation with the media and respect of fundamental principles of crisis public relations is necessary. Although it is difficult to avoid publicizing the dispute, however, the fixation of negative information in the public consciousness can be prevented. However, this requires prior preparation of “emergency plan” and ensuring the right people and procedures responsible for a proper crisis communication. Lack of corresponding mitigating actions taken in time may result in the escalation of the dispute, the transition to a higher level of agenda and consolidation in the public mind the negative image of the investor. The last from discussed elements of the marketing mix are people. It should be noted that the opponents, far easier than the investor, can create a leader that does not change the fact that every large investment should have a “face”. It may be a representative of the investor or a representative of local government, interested in realizing the investment for the benefit of the local community. It must be a person whose authority and interpersonal skills will serve gaining sympathy of the local community. It is difficult to indicate a general way of selecting such person, because the choice of marketing tools is the result of the analysis of the target market, conditions specific to individual investments.

5. Final remarks
The efficient implementation of the investment process requires not only adequate technical preparation, but also building social acceptance of project. As evidenced by the analysis of NIMBY syndrome, each, even socially necessary investment can be blocked as a result of the protests of the local community. It is highly important for both private and public investors.

To achieve the compatibility of the interests of society with those of the investor the requirements are: identification of stakeholders and the benefits for individuals as a result of the project, as well as the elimination of uncertainty about the potential nuisance that may occur both during construction and during
operation. Therefore, the skillful use of marketing tools, leading to a social acceptance of the project may be important to its economy. Unfortunately there is no all-purpose marketing mix to insure an efficient conduct of each investment. Marketing research, stakeholder analysis and a case-by-case approach are required.

The basis for effective action, is proper communication, supported by other instruments of marketing. It is therefore desirable, to create the project leader, whose opinions will be credible to the public, and the preparation of distribution channels in such a way as to provide interested accurate and complete information, to take a position on an upcoming project.

Proper preparation of the social marketing mix is one of the main ways of preventing conflicts and allows efficient implementation of planned investments.

The abovementioned project “Innovative model of socioeconomic benefits and costs in infrastructural projects” aims to create a set of best practice guidelines and social cost and benefit indicators for infrastructural projects under construction. When completed the project could provide future investors with an efficient tool for stakeholder management.

Notes

[8] Conclusion based on interview conducted on a sample of 8 wind farm investors. It can’t be treated as representative for all projects. Interviews were a part of preliminary descriptive analysis for further analysis under the project “Innovative model of socioeconomic benefits and costs in infrastructural projects”, co-financed by the National Centre for Research and Development.
[9] On the margins should be noted that the source of radiation that could potentially pose a risk to human health is also a mobile phone. Commonly, however, we accept this invention because convenience and accessibility are the benefits balancing price, which is the uncertainty of the negative effects of having the phone.

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