

Strategies “for” versus strategies “against”. The influence of rural residents on the planning of locally desired and undesired investments

Maria Bednarek-Szczepańska

Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Warsaw, Poland, e-mail: bednarek@twarda.pan.pl,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4986-2854>

How to cite:

Bednarek-Szczepańska M. (2026). Strategies “for” versus strategies “against”. The influence of rural residents on the planning of locally desired and undesired investments. *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, 72(72): 7-19. <https://doi.org/10.12775/bgss-2026-0012>

Abstract. The article deals with mechanisms of rural residents' influence on decision-making in matters of locating locally desirable and undesirable investments, using the concept of citizen lobbying. The aim of the study was to determine the features of a range of citizenry lobbying responses in support of certain proposed local investments and in opposition to others, and the differences therein. The primary method was a comparative analysis of strategies implemented by local citizen groups either supporting or opposing local investment proposals. The analysis was conducted based on responses to surveys conducted in 140 municipalities to reveal the scope of actions undertaken by local lobbyists. In-depth interviews in eight case studies enabled comparison of lobbying strategies that included: type of leader, ways of involving residents and other actors, ways of communicating with decision-makers/investor, and the effects of these actions. The threat of negative change (unwanted investment) motivates residents to be more active than the prospect of positive change. Situations of opposition to undesirable investments trigger greater involvement, create new leaders and foster innovations in the sphere of non-institutional public participation.

Article details:

Received: 07 April 2025
Revised: 16 March 2026
Accepted: 30 March 2026

Key words:

geography, planning
& development,
citizen lobbying,
public participation,
local investment,
decision-making,
rural areas,
Poland

Contents:

1. Introduction	8
2. Theoretical background	8
3. Research materials and methods	9
4. Results	11
4.1. Categories of desired and undesired investments	11
4.2. Diversity of “for” and “against” activities based on questionnaire results.....	12
4.3. Strategies of action and their effects based on case studies.....	13
4.3.1. Lobbying “for”	13
4.3.2. Lobbying “against”.....	15
5. Discussion and conclusions	15
Note	17
Acknowledgement	17
References	17

1. Introduction

Residents have their expectations of the quality of the space they inhabit. If their needs are not met, they may take action to influence decision-makers (Adams, 2007; Aizenberg et al., 2024). Residents can be actors involved at various levels of decision-making, namely: strategic planning, spatial planning, investment siting. This article focuses on the lowest level (investment siting) and addresses the influence of residents on decision-making processes in local investment matters. The aim of the study is to assess strategies of action implemented by groups of inhabitants in two different situations: (1) residents' desire for needed investments and (2) opposition to the location of investments perceived as a threat (conflict situations). The primary method, in light of the dichotomous nature of support versus opposition, was a comparative analysis. The study applies a framework based on the concept of citizen lobbying (Adams, 2007). We analyse actor types, how they mobilise the public and influence decision-making and what the effects of the actions are.

The implementation of an investment project is preceded by a design process, site selection, and a sequence of administrative procedures that enable the investor to actually carry out the undertaking. In Poland, if the project complies with the local spatial plan but falls under the category of developments that may significantly impact the environment, an environmental impact assessment may be required prior to the issuance of a building permit, and obtaining an environmental decision is mandatory. In the absence of a local spatial plan, the investor must obtain a site approval decision, which is also preceded by the acquisition of an environmental decision. Certain types of investments are subject to specific procedures, such as the ZRID decision (road investment implementation permit – the ZRID decision is the final stage of a long process of planning a road construction project. For the investor, it means a building permit and approval of the construction design) or other decisions arising from special legislative acts.

The local community interested in the planned project may undertake various actions that influence the investment process. Civic engagement may occur as early as the conceptual stage, during preliminary design, variant analysis, and site selection – before any formal proceedings are initiated. However, neither the investor nor any other entity is obligated to involve the public at this stage. If the adoption or amendment of a local spatial plan is required in connection with the investment concept, public

participation is guaranteed under the provisions of the Spatial Planning and Development Act. Similarly, environmental proceedings require public notification and the opportunity to participate. In contrast, proceedings related to the issuance of a road investment implementation permit – despite often generating significant public controversy – do not require resident involvement. Beyond the legally mandated forms of public participation, authorities and investors may choose to invite residents to engage in the process at other stages and through formats not specified by law.

2. Theoretical background

Since at least the 1960s, there has been extensive theoretical discussion on extending the governance process beyond formally elected authorities and on decentralising the decision-making and executive functions of public authorities. The capacious category of civic participation includes not only all forms of public consultation and the inclusion of the non-governmental and private sectors in the implementation of public tasks, but also the self-organisation of society to improve its own situation (Lewenstein, 2010).

The broader sphere of public participation can be divided according to the criterion of the initiative – on whose initiative citizens are involved in decision-making processes. Wynne (2007) uses the term “invited participation” to denote forms that are planned and organised top-down. Top-down participation involves inviting citizens to have their say on a particular issue on which a decision is to be taken. Invitation to participate is either enforced by law (e.g., a requirement of public consultation on revitalisation plans or local spatial plans) or results from the will of the decision-maker, who determines in what form he will collect opinions and how he will use them. Politics of invited participation have become fashionable features of governance, especially urban governance (Tahvilzadeh & Kings, 2015). However, invited participation is criticised for being inauthentic (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). In particular, traditional ways of including the public, such as submitting comments and public discussion, are criticised for not providing real participation (in the sense of co-creating a new quality) and for mainly being undertaken to ensure that residents voice their concerns, rather than to really transform how decisions are made (Maginn, 2007), or are even treated as certain “rituals” performed to meet

legal requirements (Innes & Booher, 2004). Also in Poland, it is perceived that traditional ways of involving the public (e.g., in spatial planning) have little to do with making collaborative planning a reality (Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2020; Mironowicz & Ciesielski, 2024).

In opposition to top-down participation, one can identify a sphere of bottom-up, informal, self-organised participation (Cuppen, 2018) that results not from any authority's invitation but from the initiative of stakeholders wanting greater influence on decisions of importance to them, using different ways to mobilise the public and influence authorities (Clausen et al., 2021). According to Legacy (2017), it is necessary to look broadly to participation as it occurs beyond the more formalised processes; it includes grassroots community organising, insurgent movements and informal campaigning driven by change: to stop or seek to advocate for certain planning outcomes (2017: 5). Cuppen (2018) proposes treating social conflict as self-organised participation. Conflict situations, understood as differences of interest regarding a specific place and project, can generate values in terms of empowerment, learning and legitimacy. Conflicts challenge existing institutions and create new political spaces, and they can be a source for the identification and inclusion of different normative appraisals. Conflicts can lead to better (richer, more integrated) knowledge and increase creativity and innovation (Cuppen, 2018).

There is close relationship between the concept of self-organised participation and lobbying, the latter meaning organised activities undertaken to influence the decisions of authorities. Lobbying in Europe, particularly in Poland, is most often perceived as a negative phenomenon and is associated with actions on the edge of the law – even corruption (Romaniuk, 2012). However, positive depictions of lobbying, understood as an element of communication aimed at achieving a desired outcome and an activity supporting social dialogue, are also increasingly indicated (Jakubiak-Mirończuk, 2015). By adopting an understanding of self-organised participation as activities initiated by groups of citizens wanting more influence on public decisions that are important to them, we can largely equate this sphere of participation with citizen lobbying (Adams, 2007). Thus, the difference between these conceptual categories concerns the distribution of emphasis. The term “lobbying” emphasises influence, while the term “self-organised participation” emphasises being part of a process. According to Adams (2007), citizen lobbying mostly occurs at the local level and concerns narrow issues that directly affect the

daily lives of citizens rather than broader societal matters. Citizens engaging in lobbying are involved in the policymaking process directly, aiming to influence policies. They set goals and participate in various activities to achieve these goals. When citizens engage in lobbying, they go further in their activities than conventional participation, including contacting and persuading officials, or mobilising other citizens. Citizen lobbying relies on the agency of individual citizens but is embedded in the formal structures of decision-making (Adams, 2007; Aizenberg et al., 2024).

When analysing citizen lobbying, we use the division of activities undertaken by residents into two general categories: formal and informal. The formal ones include resident-initiated activities that result from generally applicable laws or municipal council resolutions, including: participating in a municipal council session, organising a village meeting or writing petitions. Informal activities, on the other hand, include meetings, informal conversations, distributing posters or leaflets, or using social and traditional media. The categorisation of activities follows the divisions proposed by other authors, e.g. Forys (2023), who uses the categories of institutional and non-institutional activities.

There are various opinions in the literature about the civic activity of Poles, and in particular the rural population. Based on the low level of generalised trust and the number of non-governmental organisations, it is often concluded that Polish civil society is weak and that Poland is at a distance from many Western countries (Gliński, 2007; Będzik, 2012; *Diagnoza Społeczna*, 2009). This assessment is supported by observations of weakness of social capital, low civic activity, lack of interest of the majority of inhabitants in local development (Wiatrak, 2011) and in decisions made by the local government (Damurski, 2017) and a lack of willingness among the majority of inhabitants to get involved in local affairs (Hołuj & Legutko-Kobus, 2018). Poles do not organise themselves and interact effectively; they are not substantively prepared for participation in joint ventures (Sufek, 2009; Damurski, 2017).

3. Research materials and methods

The paper uses data from questionnaire surveys conducted in 2023 in the offices of rural and urban-rural municipalities of four provinces located in historically and culturally differing regions: Małopolskie, Mazowieckie, Pomorskie and Zachodniopomorskie

(Note 1). Within each voivodeship, questionnaires were addressed to communes that differ in location and functions (from suburban to peripheral). The study was conducted between September 2023 and February 2024. It addressed not only public participation in the siting of infrastructure projects, but also involvement in the development of strategic and planning documents. The research sample consisted of rural and semi-urban municipalities with small towns of up to 20,000 inhabitants, selected based on three concurrent criteria: (1) at least one strategic or programmatic document was adopted between 2015 and 2023; (2) at least one planning document was adopted during the same period; and (3) at least two public infrastructure investments were implemented between 2015 and 2023, either co-financed or fully financed by municipal funds, in response to needs expressed by residents of specific villages.

Based on pilot studies, a fourth criterion – requiring that at least one instance of public protest against an unwanted investment occurred during the study period in municipalities meeting the above three conditions – was excluded from the mandatory selection criteria. The pilot phase revealed that relatively few municipalities met this fourth condition. Consequently, it was decided that at least 60% of the municipalities included in the final research sample must satisfy this additional criterion.

Data collection from municipal offices was conducted via telephone interviews, following prior arrangements for participation in the study. This included identifying the representatives of the municipal offices who were deemed most competent to provide responses and familiarising them with the content of the questionnaire. The module concerning the siting of investments was most often completed by heads of departments responsible for investment-related matters or by staff members designated by them. In total, consent to participate in the study was obtained from 148 municipalities.

Responses to the questionnaire module on citizen lobbying were received from 140 municipalities. This module consisted of two parts. The first concerned activity of groups of residents who, on their own initiative, took action aimed at convincing local authorities to realise a local investment they needed. At the same time, this was a case of self-organised participation, so we did not examine, for example, investment planning in the process of revitalisation in which a specific scheme of public involvement is legally binding, or the activity of territorial partnerships (LAGs), whose activity is regulated by law and ministerial guidelines and is therefore included in the sphere of “invited participation”. The second part of the questionnaire characterised the activity

Table 1. Case studies

Community/region/type	Village	Desired investment	Undesired investment
Liszki/Małopolska/suburban	Kaszów and Cholerzyn	-	Liszki bypass
	Kryspinów	sports hall	-
Żegocina/Małopolska/peripheral	Łąka Górna	school building	overhead electricity line
Stare Babice/Mazovia/suburban	Zielonki-Parcela	enlargement of school	-
	Janów	-	housing estate in a forest area
Strzegowo/Mazovia/peripheral	Prusocin	playground with shelter	-
	Pokrytki	-	Pokrytki bypass
Kartuzy/Pomerania/suburban	Kielpino	roundabout	wind farm
Potęgowo/Pomerania/peripheral	Głuszyno	community hall	-
	Potęgowo	-	pig farm
Biesiekierz/Western Pomerania/suburban	Biesiekierz	bicycle path	-
	Gniazdowo, Witolubie	-	photovoltaic farm
Czaplinek/Western Pomerania/peripheral	Byszkowo	water supply network	-
	Łąka	-	pig farm

Source: ' own elaboration

of residents who took action directed against an undesirable investment (lobbying against).

The questionnaire indicated whether residents undertook specific activities (closed questions), and there was also an option to enter additional forms of involvement (open question). A binary matrix was created for each group (“for” and “against”), consisting of 12 columns (12 forms of activity from closed questions repeated in both groups) and the number of rows corresponding to the number of cases. The Python Data Analysis Library (Pandas) was used to compare the range of activities undertaken by residents in both cases: “for” and “against”. For each group, sets of activities were recognised out of a possible 2^{12} . The frequency of unique sets was counted. A clustering of sets according to similarity was then carried out to identify the most frequently occurring clusters. The grouping was carried out using two methods. The first method consisted of extracting the most frequently occurring set and combining it with those differing by a single criterion. The second method was based on the calculation of the Sokal–Michener similarity coefficient, which is a metric used to measure the similarity between binary data vectors. The Sokal–Michener distance was calculated for each pair of binary vectors corresponding to the activity sets. The pairs of the vectors were then grouped according to the values of the distances. In this way, the most numerous clusters linking similar cases were identified. The result of this procedure was identical to the first method.

The next step was to select case studies for in-depth research from a pool of 85 units (municipalities where both “for” and “against” activities occurred). Two municipalities for each province were included – one from a suburban area and one from a peripheral area (Table 1), each with the highest possible level of resident activity (according to the survey). Both decision-makers (mayors or deputy mayors) and leaders of the residents’ groups involved were interviewed to include different points of view (3 or 4 interviews in each municipality). Except for one online meeting, all interviews were carried out in person after prior arrangement with the respondents. Each conversation was conducted according to a pre-defined interview guide. Three separate structured interview guides were developed: (1) for the mayor or deputy mayor, (2) for a local leader – typically a village head – representing residents advocating for the establishment of a specific investment in their village, and (3) for a local leader representing residents opposing an unwanted investment. The structured interview guide contained general questions on the civic activities of village/municipal residents, as well

as questions concerning specific instances of desired and undesired investments, enabling the assessment of how residents influenced the decision-making process. Social media, materials published by residents, local media reports, petitions and documentation of proceedings were also reviewed.

In a final step, the interviews were coded and the codes were then classified into a number of aggregate categories within predetermined criteria for qualitative analysis, including the actor coordinating action, ways in which the public was mobilised, involvement of external actors (who were not decision-makers or investors), communication with decision-maker and investor, and the effects of the action. On this basis, a graphical diagram was created to compare the residents’ action strategies in the “for” and “against” cases.

4. Results

4.1. Categories of desired and undesired investments

Residents of the surveyed municipalities most frequently expressed a desire for the modernisation and expansion of road and water-sewage infrastructure, as well as for the construction and enhancement of sports and recreational facilities. Investments in educational institutions and rural community centres were also among the initiatives considered most desirable. These categories of investment accounted for 80% of all cases for which data were obtained from municipal offices. The conflict-prone investments that most frequently sparked controversy among residents included road infrastructure, followed by intensive livestock operations, facilities for waste collection or processing, wastewater treatment plants, mobile network base stations, and railway lines (70% of all investments opposed by residents, according to data from municipal offices) (Table 2). The research period coincided with a nationwide debate concerning the layout of linear infrastructure associated with the planned Solidarity Transport Hub (*Centralny Port Komunikacyjny*). This context explains the significant number of local protests surrounding the proposed national railway lines – an occurrence not observed in earlier studies (Bednarek-Szczepańska & Dmochowska-Dudek, 2015). As shown in the summary below (Table 2), the location and modernisation of roads are by far the most frequent subjects of local debate, serving

Table 2. Categories of investments desired and opposed by residents

Infrastructure investments desired by residents (N=337)	
Categories of facilities	Number of cases
Roads	84
Water and sewage infrastructure	60
Sports and recreational facilities; playgrounds	58
Schools; school sports facilities	36
Village community halls; cultural facilities	33
Bicycle paths; sidewalks	19
Nursery or kindergarten	18
Buildings and equipment for volunteer fire brigades	11
Other	18
Investments opposed by residents (N=121)	
Roads	33
Intensive livestock operations	16
Facilities for waste collection or processing; wastewater treatment plants	14
Mobile network base stations	11
Railway lines	11
Biogas plants	4
Solar farms	4
Central Communication Port (CPK)	4
Sport and tourism facilities	4
Mining and industrial plants	3
Water and sewage infrastructure	3
Other	14

Source: own elaboration

as the primary motivation for civic engagement among resident groups.

4.2. Diversity of “for” and “against” activities based on questionnaire results

Data were obtained from 140 municipalities on 337 instances of activity by groups of residents in favour of desired investments, in which 126 unique sets of actions occurred. Residents' activism against unwanted investments was recorded a total of 121 times in the 85 municipalities surveyed, and 86 unique sets of actions occurred in this group. The ratio of the number of unique sets to the number of instances indicates a higher variation of action strategies in situations of lobbying against unwanted investments.

Although informal meetings and conversations with the mayor were the most common activity in both groups (“for” and “against”), the number of activities undertaken was higher in the “against” group – residents organised themselves through

signature-gathering and village meetings and communicated with the authorities both in writing (petitions, motions) and through direct informal and formal meetings (sessions of the municipal council). In contrast, in the “for” group, residents based their activity mainly on informal meetings (Table 3). The aggregation of sets of activities, combining the most common set with all sets differing from it by a single element, made it possible to indicate, in the “for” group, a cluster of 96 similar cases (less than 30% of the total), in which residents mainly met with the mayor and councillors and used village meetings to discuss the desired investment. In the “against” group, on the other hand, the action strategies were more diverse: the aggregated sets of activities formed two clusters, which together comprised 30% of the total cases. The most numerous cluster (22 cases) was based on multi-channel activity of residents, targeting both residents and local authorities, both formal and informal (see Appendix). In the “for” group, despite a significantly higher research sample, sets of

Table 3. Selected characteristics of local citizen lobbying for and against

Criterion	Lobbying for	Lobbying against
Number of cases (N)	337	121
Average number of activities (incl. those beyond the 12 listed)	4.8	8.3
Average share of undertaken activities (12=100%)	40%	60%
The most common activity	Informal meetings/discussions with mayor	Informal meetings/discussions with mayor
Size of the most numerous cluster (no. of cases/N)	96/337	22/121
No. of activities in the most numerous cluster	2–4	10–12

Source: own elaboration

activities in which all or almost all activity criteria were met were among the few exceptions.

A comparison of the proportion of cases in which each activity was undertaken shows that the biggest differences between lobbying for desirable investments and lobbying against undesirable ones concerned informal channels for gaining public support (Fig. 1). Use of the Internet (including social media), distribution of posters and flyers, and notification of traditional media were characteristic activities against unwanted investments. The use of formal channels for contacting local authorities was also much more frequent in cases of opposition. At the same time, there were no types of activities

that were undertaken significantly more often in the “for” group than in the “against” group.

4.3. Strategies of action and their effects based on case studies

4.3.1. Lobbying "for"

Traditional leaders such as village headmen or councillors or (in the case of educational investments) school principals, assisted by a small informal group of residents, played a dominant role in the cases of lobbying for new investments. Only in one case

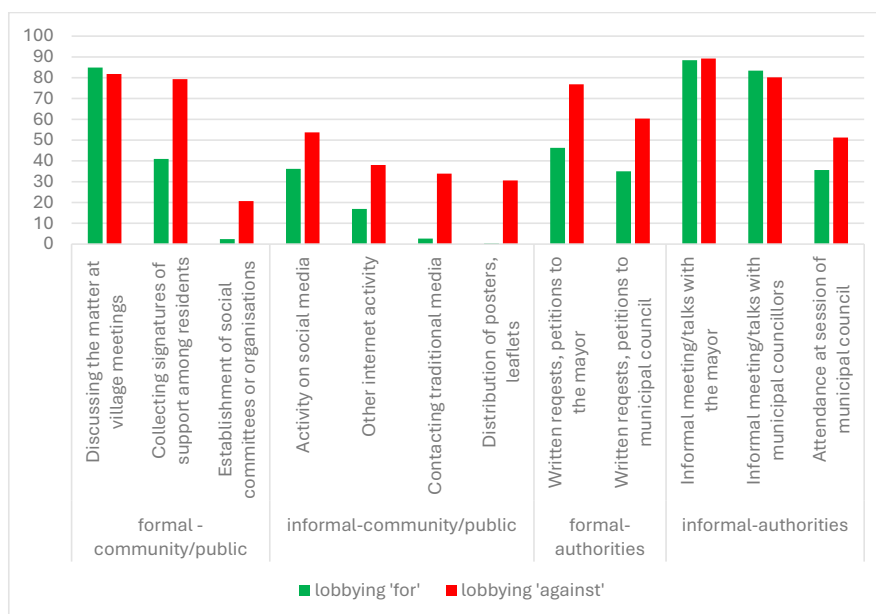


Fig. 1. Activities undertaken in support of desired investments and against unwanted investments (%)

Source: authors' own elaboration

out of eight (Kartuzy/Kielpino) did an association (an NGO) act as a leader. This was an unusual case also because the activity concerned an investment of supra-local importance with the financial participation of three units of local government, including the Kartuzy municipality.

Personal contacts, including informal and formal (village) meetings, were the primary form of engaging residents. The importance of social media in engaging with residents was indicated by interviewees in only two cases. If leaders collected signatures of support, they did so most often in the traditional paper form. No outside entities were involved in advocating for the desired investments. The only exception was the aforementioned association working for the construction of a roundabout (Kielpino), whose members had professional ties to the local media and used this channel to inform the

public about activities, as well as collecting on-line signatures.

The survey found that face-to-face interactions were by far the dominant form of communication with local authorities. There were multiple meetings and discussions at community council sessions and village meetings and in informal ways. As interviews with local leaders revealed, residents' activity on behalf of new investments was most often directed at accelerating the implementation of already long-planned facilities – investments that had been talked about for years and whose legitimacy no-one questioned. Thus, residents' activities served to give higher priority to the investment they expected, as well as to mobilise the authorities to seek external funding sources. Only in two cases – Biesiekierz (bicycle path) and Kielpino (roundabout) – were these new ideas, with the public action for the construction

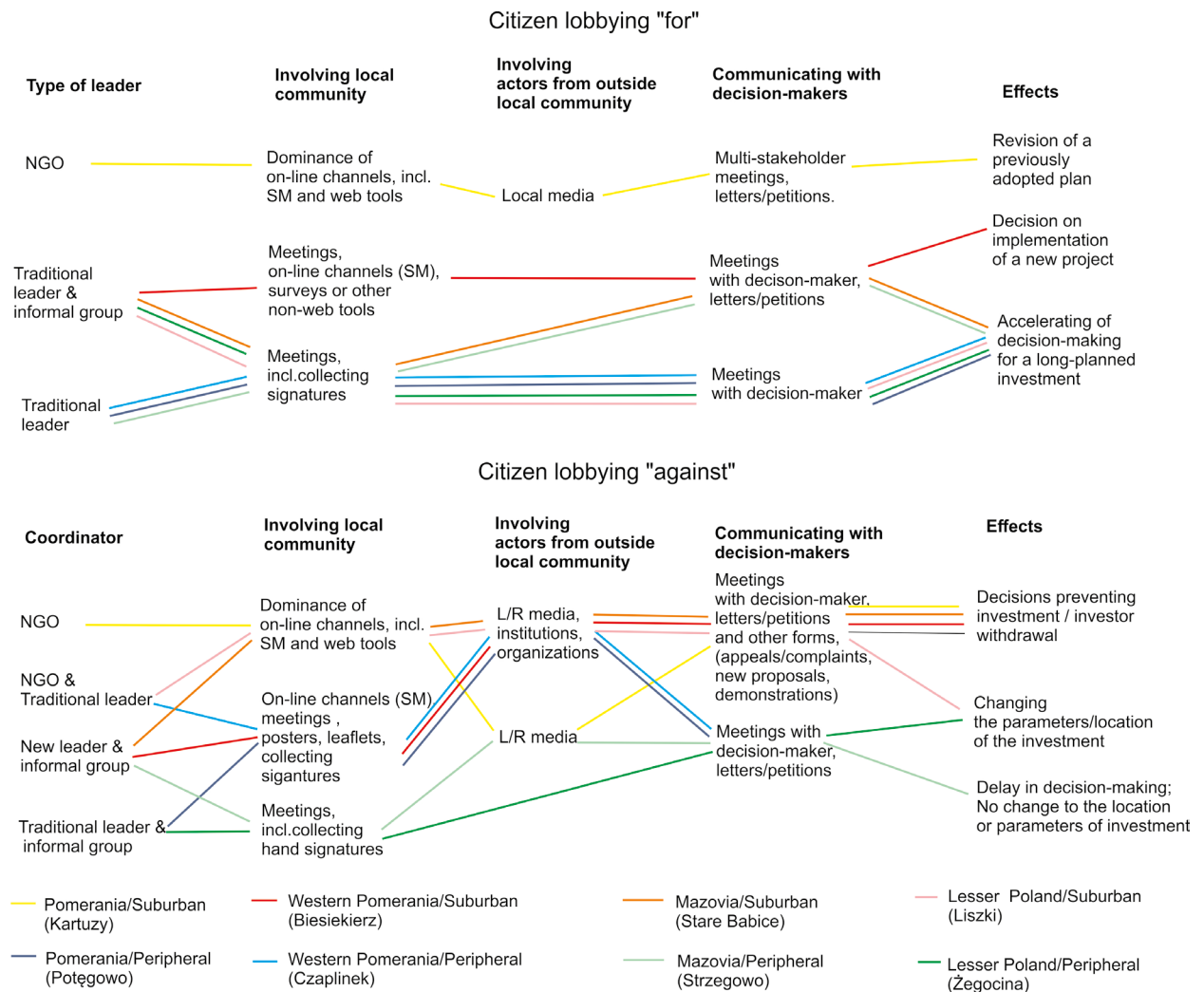


Fig. 2. Strategies of lobbying "for" and lobbying "against" (case studies)

SM – social media; L/R – local/regional

Source: authors' own elaboration

of the roundabout being directly provoked by the unveiling of plans to rebuild the crossroads that the roundabout was intended to replace. So, here we had a concrete event that motivated a group of Kiełpino residents to apply a strategy that stands out from the other cases of civic lobbying for desirable investments discussed. The association, which used its ties to local media, collected 1,800 signatures, convinced the municipal council to pass a resolution on the construction of the roundabout, and led to tripartite meetings with local and regional authorities. As a result, a decision was made to build the roundabout instead of the previously planned minor reconstruction.

4.3.2. Lobbying "against"

In cases of action against unwanted investments, new leaders, including entrepreneurs and NGO, were much more likely to emerge. Traditional village leaders (e.g., village headmen) also sometimes played important roles, but always in collaboration with other actors. Cooperation between neighbouring villages was also noted (Liszki, Kiełpino, Czaplinek). Social media played a much greater role in engaging the local community than in cases of desirable investments. Only in two cases (located in peripheral areas) were social media not indicated in the interviews as a tool for communicating with residents. In suburban areas, protest leaders even created several profiles in different media. They disseminated documentation of proceedings through this means, posted templates of official letters, published a list of plot numbers that might be affected, established rules for disseminating information to residents, and organised fundraisers to finance activities. Social media profiles attracted the interest of village residents and people from outside the local community, e.g. "No megafarm in Czaplinek", 269 observers; the group "Save Cholierzyn" (Liszki) – 515 members; "Z buta w Puszcza" – "On foot into the wilderness", Stare Babice – 2,000 observers).

What most differentiated the strategies of action for and against was the involvement of external actors, i.e. outside the circle of stakeholders (local community, investor, municipal authorities). In cases against, the strategies most often simultaneously involved several external actors, including traditional media, public institutions and organisations of different ranks. Relationships with decision-makers were also more varied in the "against" group. In the eight cases studied, none involved meetings and conversations being the only way to communicate with the decision-maker. There were always

at least two channels of communication. Residents submitted their own solutions in the form of textual and graphic elaborations that presented and argued their position (Biesiekierz, Liszki). Experts were brought in to provide new knowledge to assist in decision-making (Potęgowo); residents were also able to demonstrate the inconsistency and contradiction of decisions made by the authority (Strzegowo); they proposed the implementation of specific rules of communication between the investor and the public (Liszki).

In almost all cases (except one), residents had a significant impact on decisions taken by the investor or authorities. The residents' actions led to the "deterrence" and withdrawal of the investor (Czaplinek, Biesiekierz), to the adoption of a local spatial plan preventing the siting of unwanted facilities (Potęgowo, Czaplinek), to a change of key investment parameters in line with public demands (Żegocina), or even to the cancellation of an already adopted plan and expiration of a building permit (Kartuzy). Even in the case of supra-local road design (Liszki), which has to reconcile the most conflicting interests, the residents managed to achieve some of their objectives (moving the planned road away from the centre of the village of Cholierzyn, the school and the recreation area). It should be emphasised that this was a highly organised action, led by an association and village heads, involving numerous media, institutions and even parliamentarians.

Notably, in four cases (Kiełpino, Stare Babice, Czaplinek, Liszki), organisations that were set up to counteract unfavourable investments expanded their public engagement. Their new activities concerned other issues of local space, nature, infrastructure, and local planning documents, thus improving residents' access to information. The activities went also beyond the spatial sphere (charitable, educational activities – Czaplinek).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The focus of research on public participation lies in the sphere of discovering innovative tools for public consultations that are generally top-down-organised processes (Aizenberg et al., 2024). The sphere of self-organised participation is definitely underexplored in research, although non-institutional politics is gaining increasing prominence in democratic systems (Foryś, 2023). The study contributes to filling this gap by using the citizen lobbying concept in a rural context and demonstrating the differences between residents' strategies for influencing

decision-making in situations of supporting an investment and situations of opposing a planned investment location. The sphere of citizen lobbying falls between two opposing models. The first model is based on traditional rural resources and structures, such as the village leader, councillor or school director, and with a low use of modern communication channels, instead relying on typical face-to-face forms of engaging residents and authorities. At the other extreme is a model based on resources and structures that are atypical for villages – NGO and entrepreneurs – with a high level of use of modern communication channels and non-traditional, innovative forms of involving residents (e.g., online petitions). Actions in favour of desired investments are most often close to the first model, whereas situations of conflict more often see a shift to the second model. It should also be stressed that, even in cases where innovative tools for involving residents or other actors are used, traditional channels are also utilised along with them. Face-to-face contact, being this most typical form of communication, still plays an extremely important role in citizen lobbying. New communication techniques (most often social media) do not replace traditional forms of communication but complement and support them.

The comparative approach has made it possible to link the concept of citizen lobbying to the concept of conflict as a self-organised participation that generates values in the planning and spatial management process (Cuppen & Looze, 2023). Adopting Cuppen's definition of social conflict, which occurs when groups of citizens, governments and/or companies manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives with regard to a technology or policy option, both cases from the municipality of Kartuzy should be counted as conflict situations. In the case of the efforts to build a roundabout, local activists differed idea from the local authorities in terms of their idea about the reconstruction of the intersection. Their strategy of action was close to the typical "against" strategy.

Research has shown that the threat of loss of place values causes much more engagement of residents (more channels, more intensity and innovation) than the drive to improve infrastructure elements. The sense of threat becomes a driver of action (Devine-Wright, 2007; Dmochowska-Dudek & Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2016) and initiates conflict over the development of a specific place. The study revealed the values that social conflicts generated. First and foremost, new leaders emerged in the public sphere (new competences and skills previously used only in the private sphere started to be used in the public sphere). Conflicts opened up new

spaces for discussion and cooperation. The values also include the provision of new knowledge and pooling of knowledge from various sources, as well as increased community access to public information.

Conflicts with unwanted investments generate more involvement, as residents have to prove that the planned project is inappropriate. In situations of desirable investments, residents usually do not need to argue for the rightness of their needs, as these are not disputed by decision-makers, and the obstacles to implementation are usually funding opportunities. Conflicts therefore force more substantive work by the engaged entities, who need to understand the impact of investments and administrative procedures. In addition, there is usually time pressure, which forces intensive action.

To better understand the differences between activities for and against, we draw on prospect theory in cognitive psychology (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Prospect theory argues that individuals are especially averse to loss, resulting in a widespread tendency to maintaining the status quo, and will therefore endure considerably more risk to preserve what they already have than they will to gain something new. Central to the theory is the idea that people often do not perceive utilities in absolute values of wealth, but rather in gains and losses relative to the current state. This theory is particularly useful in behavioural economics, but it is readily applicable to choices involving other attributes, e.g., quality of life (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Our research relates precisely to the sphere of quality of life and confirms this theory. "Groups experiencing potential losses are more motivated to engage in collective action than groups facing the possibility of new gains" (Almeida, 2019: 45).

Opposition to the siting of new infrastructure can have negative consequences, such as delays in the implementation of necessary investments or increased costs. These consequences are primarily recognised by technical experts and representatives of industry and government – occasional opposition in siting processes is often interpreted by them as irrational, narrow-minded and stubbornly hostile toward progress and modernisation (Boholm, 2004, as cited in Wolsink, 2006). Similar statements were also recorded in the course of our study, particularly in media coverage – both traditional and social – of investor reactions (e.g., regarding opponents of the megafarm project in the municipality of Czaplonek). It is important to emphasise, however, that such protests can in fact foster modernisation and the adoption of improved technologies. This was the case with the planned power line in Łąka Górna, where public opposition led to the line being constructed

using underground technology. This solution contributed to reduced failure rates, enhanced safety and improved landscape aesthetics.

The present study has focused on inhabitants of rural areas. It is worth considering whether similar processes occur within large metropolitan communities. It should be emphasised that cities and urban communities have attracted the greatest interest from scholars of social participation. Public spaces play a far more significant role in the lives of urban residents than in those of rural dwellers, predisposing city inhabitants to heightened concern for the quality of these environments. Studies of urban movements that undertake grassroots initiatives to improve local urban spaces have a long-standing tradition (Castells, 1983). In Poland, research on the self-organisation of city residents, their impact on local spatial configurations, and their influence on municipal decision-making has developed primarily in recent decades (Skrzypiec, 2010; Środoń, 2010; Sowada, 2018; Kubicki, 2020), although the earliest documented cases appeared in the literature as early as the 1980s (Jałowiecki, 1988). Contemporary strategies for urban resident self-organisation and engagement with policymakers unquestionably rely more heavily on modern communication channels and innovative forms of participation than those observed in rural contexts. As early as the first decade of the 21st century, online tools were employed in major cities to orchestrate collective resistance against undesirable spatial changes (Środoń, 2010).

The threat of negative change in a place of residence, in the form of an unwanted investment, most often motivates residents to be more active than the prospect of positive change (a new, needed investment). Opposition to an unwanted investment leads to the launch of innovations in the sphere of non-institutional social participation. New leaders are more likely to emerge. The involvement of the public in “against” situations relies more extensively on electronic channels, in peri-urban but also peripheral areas.

There is a need for further research on interaction between social conflict and formal decision-making procedures – on how social conflict challenges existing institutions (Cuppen, 2018). The focus of contemporary research on social participation in shaping space should shift towards bottom-up, unconventional participation, resulting from citizens' initiative and based on their values, needs and potentials. The category of citizen lobbying, which is still too rarely used in the European, including Polish literature, is useful here (Allemano, 2017).

Note

1. Małopolskie – 58 municipalities in the following counties: bocheński, brzeski, ciechanowski, chrzanowski, krakowski, legionowski, limanowski, miechowski, nowotarski, myślenicki, oświęcimski, suski, tarnowski, wadowicki, wielicki; Mazowieckie – 41 municipalities in the following counties: mławski, nowodworski, płocki, płoński, pruszkowski, pułtuski, sochaczewski, warszawski zachodni, żuromiński; Pomorskie – 21 municipalities in the following counties: bytowski, kartuski, lęborski, słupski, wejherowski; Zachodniopomorskie – 20 municipalities in the following counties: białogardzki, choszczeński, drawski, kamieński, kołobrzeczki, sławieński, stargardzki, szczeciniecki, świdwiński.

Acknowledgement

Research financed by National Science Centre, Grant no. 2021/43/D/HS4/01720.

References

- Adams, B.** (2007). *Citizen lobbyists: Local efforts to influence public policy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Aizenberg, E., Werner, H., & van Geldere, S.** (2024). Helping citizens to lobby themselves. Experimental evidence on the effects of citizen lobby engagement on internal efficacy and political support. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31(11): 3561–3590. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2266459>
- Allemano, A.** (2017). *Lobbying for change: Find your voice to create a better society*. Icon Books.
- Almeida, P.** (2019). The Role of Threat in Collective Action. In: Snow, D., Soule, S., Kriesi, H., McCammon, H. (eds.), *Companion to Social Movements*: 43–62. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bednarek-Szczepańska, M.** (2020). The local community: an entity discriminated against in spatial decision-making in Poland? *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, 50: 55–72. <https://doi.org/10.2478/bog-2020-0032>
- Bednarek-Szczepańska, M., & Dmochowska-Dudek, K.** (2016). Syndrom NMIBY na obszarach wiejskich w Polsce. Uwarunkowania i specyfika konfliktów wokół lokalizacji niechcianych

- inwestycji (NIMBY syndrome in rural areas of Poland: determinants and specificity of conflicts on the location of unwanted investments – in Polish). *Prace Geograficzne*, 255. Warszawa: IGiPZ PAN. <https://doi.org/10.2478/bog-2020-0032>
- Będzik, B.** (2008). Bariery i możliwości generowania kapitału społecznego na obszarach wiejskich w Polsce (Difficulties and Possibilities of Generating Social Capital in Rural Areas in Poland – in Polish). *Acta Scientiarum Polonorum. Oeconomia*, 7(4), SGGW, Warszawa.
- Boholm, Å.** (2004). Editorial: what are the new perspectives on siting controversy? *Journal of Risk Research*, 7: 99–100.
- Castells, M.** (1983). *The City and The Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd.
- Clausen L., Rudolph, D., & Nyborg, S.** (2021). The good process or the great illusion? A spatial perspective on public participation in Danish municipal wind turbine planning. *Journal of Environmental Polic., & Planning*, 23(6): 732–751. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2021.1910017>
- Cooke, B., & Kothari, U.** (2001). *Participation: The new tyranny?* London-New York: Zed Books.
- Cuppen, E.** (2018). The value of social conflicts. Critiquing invited participation in energy projects, *Energy Research., & Social Science*, 38: 28–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2018.01.016>
- Damurski, Ł.** (2017). Poszerzony program partycypacji społecznej w procesie planowania przestrzennego na przykładzie małego miasta – sukces czy porażka? (An extended public participation programme in the spatial planning process on the example of a small town - success or failure? – in Polish) In: Rachwał, M. (ed.), *Współczesne oblicza władzy politycznej. Wybrane zagadnienia (Contemporary Aspects of Political Power: Selected Issues – in Polish)*. Poznań: UAM.
- De Looze, A., & Cuppen, E.** (2023). To wind up changed: Assessing the value of social conflict on onshore wind energy in transforming institutions in the Netherlands. *Energy Research., & Social Science*, 102: 103195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.103195>
- Devine-Wright, P.** (2009). Rethinking NIMBYism: The Role of Place Attachment and Place Identity in Explaining Place-protective Action. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 19: 426–441.
- Diagnoza Społeczna (Social Diagnosis).** (2009). *Wyzsza Szkoła Finansów i Zarządzania (University of Finance and Management – in Polish)*. Warszawa: Rada Monitoringu Społecznego.
- Foryś, G.** (2023). Przekraczanie granic polityki instytucjonalizowanej. Ruchy społeczne jako aktorzy polityki nieinstytucjonalnej – od teorii do praktyki (Crossing the Borders of Institutionalized Politics: Social Movements as Actors of Non-Institutional Politics: From Theory to Practice – in Polish). *Teoria Polityki*, 7: 13–31. <https://doi.org/10.4467/25440845TP.23.002.17515>
- Gliński, P.** (2007). Obszary aktywności i apatii obywatelskiej (Areas of civic activity and apathy – in Polish). In: Kojder, A. (ed.), *Jedna Polska? Dawne i nowe zróżnicowania społeczne (One Poland? Old and New Social Divisions – in Polish)*. Warszawa: Wyd. WAM.
- Hołuj, D., & Legutko-Kobus, P.** (2018). A participatory model of creating revitalisation programmes in Poland – challenges and barriers. *Mazowsze Studia Regionalne*, 26: 39–42.
- Innes, J., & Booher, D.** (2004). Reframing public participation: Strategies for the 21st century. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 5(4): 419–436. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1464935042000293170>
- Jakubiak-Mironczuk, A.** (2015). Lobbying – konflikt realizacji partykularnych interesów grup społecznych a ochrona interesu publicznego (Lobbying – the conflict of pursuing the vested interests of social groups versus protecting the public interest – in Polish). *Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego*, 12: 166–182.
- Jałowiecki, B.** (1988). Lokalne ruchy społeczne w perspektywie procesów globalnych (Local social movements in the context of global processes – in Polish), In: Dutkiewicz, P., Gorzelak, G. (eds.), *Problemy rozwoju lokalnego (Issues in local development – in Polish)*. *Seria: Rozwój regionalny, rozwój lokalny, samorząd terytorialny*, 11: 9–31. Warszawa: UW, Instytut Gospodarki Przestrzennej.
- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A.** (1979). Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk. *Econometrica*, 47: 263–291.
- Kubicki, P.** (2020). *Ruchy miejskie w Polsce (Urban Movements in Poland – in Polish)*. Kraków: Nomos.
- Legacy, C.** (2017). Is there a crisis of participatory planning? *Planning Theory*, 16(4): 425–442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147309521666743>
- Lewenstein, B.** (2010). Między rządzeniem a współrządzeniem. Obywatelskie modele rozwoju społeczności lokalnej. (Between governance and co-governance. Civic models of community development com-

- munity development – in Polish). In: Lewenstein, B., Schindler, J., Skrzypiec, R. (eds.), *Partycypacja społeczna i aktywizacja w rozwiązywaniu problemów społeczności lokalnych (Community participation and engagement in addressing local community issues – in Polish)*. Warszawa: Wyd. UW.
- Maginn, P.** (2007) Deliberative Democracy or Discursively Biased? Perth's Dialogue with the City Initiative. *Space and Polity*, 11(4): 331–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562570701811619>
- Mironowicz, I., & Ciesielski, M.** (2024). Collaborative planning? Not yet seen in Poland. Identifying procedural gaps in the planning system 2003–2023. *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, 64: 137–148. <https://doi.org/10.12775/bgss-2024-0018>
- Romaniuk, P.** (2012). Oddziaływanie organizacji pozarządowych na sposób zarządzania jednostkami samorządu terytorialnego (The Impact of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Management of Local Government Units – in Polish). *Studia Prawnoustrojowe*, 18: 129–141.
- Skrzypiec, R.** (2010). Konflikt lokalny motorem partycypacji społecznej i skutkiem zmiany – analiza wybranych przypadków: Oświęcim, Bieruń, Las i Kobiór (Local conflict as a driver of social participation and effect of change – analysis of selected cases: Oświęcim, Bieruń, Las and Kobiór – in Polish). In: Lewenstein, B., Schindler, J., Skrzypiec, R. (eds.), *Partycypacja społeczna i aktywizacja w rozwiązywaniu problemów społeczności lokalnych (Community participation and engagement in addressing local community issues – in Polish)*. Warszawa: Wyd. UW.
- Sokal, R.R., & Michener, C.D.** (1958). A statistical method for evaluating systematic relationships. *University of Kansas Science Bulletin*, 38: 1409–1438.
- Sowada, T.** (2018). *Rola ruchów miejskich w procesie partycypacji społecznej w funkcjonowaniu wybranych polskich miast (The role of urban movements in the process of public participation in functioning of selected Polish cities – in Polish)*. Poznań: UAM.
- Sowada, T.** (2024). Pre- and post-pandemic attitudes toward participation in community-based initiatives: The case of Poznań. *Geographia Polonica*, 97(2): 133–152. <https://doi.org/10.7163/GPol.0272>
- Sulek, A.** (2009). Doświadczenie i kompetencje obywatelskie Polaków (The experience and civic competencies of Poles – in Polish). In: Czapiński, J., Panek, T. (eds.), *Diagnoza społeczna 2009. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków (Social Diagnosis 2009: Living Conditions and Quality of Life in Poland – in Polish)*. Raport. Warszawa: Rada Monitoringu Społecznego.
- Środoń, M.** (2010). Konflikt wokół problemów zagospodarowania przestrzennego – rola internetu jako narzędzia politycznej samoorganizacji społeczności lokalnej. Przypadek Starej Ochoty w Warszawie (Conflict over land-use issues – the role of the internet as a tool for political self-organization among local communities. The case of Stara Ochota in Warsaw – in Polish). In: Lewenstein, B., Schindler, J., Skrzypiec, R. (eds.), *Partycypacja społeczna i aktywizacja w rozwiązywaniu problemów społeczności lokalnych (Community participation and engagement in addressing local community issues – in Polish)*. Warszawa: Wyd. UW.
- Tahvilzadeh, N., & Kings, L.** (2015). Under Pressure: Invited participation amidst planning conflicts. In: Gualini, E., Allegra, M., Morais Mourato, J. (eds.), *Conflict in the city: Contested urban spaces and local democracy*. Berlin: Jovis Verlag GmbH: 94–111.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D.** (1981). The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice. *Science*, 211: 453–458.
- Wiatrak, A.P.** (2011). Uspołecznienie przygotowania strategii w gminach wiejskich (Involving the community in the development of strategies in rural municipalities – in Polish). *Zagadnienia Rolniczego*, 4: 67–82.
- Wolsink, M.** (2006). Invalid theory impedes our understanding: a critique on the persistence of the language of NIMBY. *The Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 31: 85–91.
- Wynne, B.** (2007). Public Participation in Science and Technology: performing and obscuring a political-conceptual category mistake. *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal*, 1(1): 99–110. <https://doi.org/10.1215/s12280-007-9004-7>

