

DIFFERENT FACES OF PARTICIPATION: SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL PLANNING IN POLAND

MARIA BEDNAREK-SZCZEPAŃSKA , DAMIAN MAZUREK 

Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization Polish Academy of Sciences

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ABSTRACT: The article deals with public participation in two dimensions of local rural planning: development and spatial planning. The research consisted in determining, with the help of constructed indexes, the level of participation of rural residents in various planning processes and the factors that explain the variation in the level of participation. Spatial, demographic and social factors were examined, as well as the importance of location in different functional types of areas and historically diverse regions. The study analysed 148 municipalities selected from four regions of Poland for which data on the residents' participation in 367 planning processes were obtained. Two types of documents were selected for the identification of factors differentiating the level of participation: local development strategies and land use plans. The level of residents' involvement in strategic planning was not statistically related to demographic, spatial or even social capital variables. On the other hand, with regard to residents' involvement in spatial planning, the relationships with demographics and the functional type of municipality are clearly visible, with the highest correlations of the level of participation with the level of education of the municipality's residents and migration inflow.

KEYWORDS: public participation, spatial planning, development planning, rural areas, Poland

Corresponding author: Maria Bednarek-Szczepańska, Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization Polish Academy of Sciences, ul. Twarda 51/55, 00-818 Warsaw, Poland; e-mail: bednarek@twarda.pan.pl

Introduction

In the light of contemporary paradigms of local development and territorial planning, residents are key actors entitled to participate in decision-making on public issues affecting them. In the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which have pursued a rapid and intensive development path over the past three decades, the empowerment of local communities took place over a period of a generation; they have gained completely new rights to participate in decision-making.

Local space is shaped as a result of decisions made by public authorities at various levels (development planning, spatial planning and localisation of investments), as well as decisions of private investors. In this article, we are interested in the participation of residents in the local planning process, which includes development planning (i.e. drafting strategies and programmes) and spatial planning (i.e. drafting land use acts).

The purpose of the study is to assess the participation level of rural residents in various planning processes and to determine what factors differentiate the level of participation. Previous studies

have pointed out the links between various forms of residents' participation in public affairs and spatial (Bartkowski 2003, Stanny et al. 2018), social (Putnam 2000), demographic (Wendt 2007, Arvanitidis 2017) and historical-cultural (Putnam 1993, Peisert 2017) conditions. With reference to the above, the following hypothesis is put forward: The participation of rural residents in local planning is statistically related to demographic and social factors as well as spatial accessibility to large cities, and varies by the functional type of municipality and historical-cultural region.

By quantifying and comparing the extent to which residents respond to the invitation to participate in rural planning, the article brings new knowledge to the growing body of literature about the crisis of invited participation in planning (Cooke, Kothari 2001, Innes, Booher 2004, Legacy 2017). Although the failures of invited participation have been highlighted by researchers for more than two decades, there is a lack of analyses of a quantitative nature to compare a larger group of cases and several spheres of planning. The existing research on public participation in local planning is very extensive, albeit dominated by in-depth case studies. There is a lack of cross-cutting, synthesising studies that serve to clarify the factors of resident involvement in planning processes. Our methodological attempt, intentionally including cases from culturally, historically, socially and economically diverse areas, fits into this research gap.

The term participation, as used in the article, refers to the involvement of citizens in public decisions affecting them, including articulation of their needs, interests and opinions (Maier 2001, Tan, Kytta 2024). In view of the wide theoretical debate on public participation and the classification of its forms, we adopt a general division between invited (top-down) and self-organised (bottom-up) participation (Wynne 2007, Cuppen 2018). Invited participation in planning involves decision-makers inviting citizens to have their say on a planning document, whereby this invitation to participation can result (1) from obligations imposed on local government bodies by law (e.g. submission of applications and comments in the planning procedure, submission of comments on environmental programmes) and (2) from local resolutions and decisions of the bodies drawing up the document (e.g. use of

questionnaires when drawing up the municipal development strategy). Self-organised participation includes activities undertaken to influence the planning process at the initiative of residents (e.g. informal meetings with the decision-maker, collection of signatures of support among residents), which do not derive from the law governing the preparation of these documents or from resolutions and decisions taken by the authority. By 'planning process', we mean the process of drafting (preparation) a strategy, programme, policy or land use plan by the authorities.

Theory and literature review

In the 1960s, the need to include various actors, including residents, in the planning process gradually began to be recognised, and a scholarly discussion of public participation in spatial decision-making developed (Davidoff 1965, Arnstein 1969, Smith 1973). The theory of communicative action by Habermas (1981) provided the basis for a modern understanding of public participation in planning, in particular, the 'communicative turn' and thus the development of the concept of collaborative planning (Healey 1997). Despite some criticism of the concept in the literature, due to its downplaying of power relations and social conflicts (Hillier 2002, Legacy 2017), the idea of deliberation is widely accepted in the democratic world and provides a conceptual basis for formulating principles of public participation in planning.

In democratic countries, including Poland, the principles of participation in the processes of drawing up policies, plans and programmes are regulated by law which defines the duties of public authorities and the rights of citizens in this regard. Obligations most often consist of giving citizens the opportunity to express their opinions in a formalised manner at certain moments of the procedure. The term 'invited participation' refers to processes and procedures established by authorities at various levels, companies or consultancies to involve the public in some form of dialogue (Wynne 2007). Invited participation is often criticised for not being true participation (Cooke, Kothari 2001, Cuppen 2018).

According to Innes and Booher (2004), legally required methods of public participation in

government decision-making—public hearings, review and comment procedures in particular—do not work. They do not achieve genuine participation in planning or other decisions; they do not satisfy members of the public that they are being heard; they seldom can be said to improve the decisions that agencies and public officials make and they do not incorporate a broad spectrum of the public. They appear to be nothing more than rituals designed to satisfy legal requirements (p. 419). Criticisms also refer to more innovative, non-statutory forms of involving residents, which are fashionable ways of improving the image of authorities and often do not have the desired effect (Davies 2011, Tahvilzadeh, Kings 2015). There is a ‘crisis of participatory planning’ lamenting that citizen participation has lost its transformative potential and critical influence to forge new policies and urban directives (Legacy 2017).

As resident participation in local planning is a form of engagement in the public sphere, reference should be made to existing research explaining civic engagement in public affairs. The nature and level of engagement in the public sphere depend on many individual and systemic factors (Arvanitidis 2017). Most often, the level of participation is combined with demographic factors (Florin, Wandersman 1984), such as age or education and social factors. People who are more rooted in a particular place are more likely to be involved in local affairs (Arvanitidis 2017). Higher levels of education are associated with higher levels of awareness and understanding of public affairs (Delli Carpini, Keeter 1996). Density of social ties, especially weak ties, is also related to participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Valenzuela 2011). On the other hand, Arvanitidis (2017), citing Putnam (2000), points out that strong social ties in small communities are more likely to predispose its members to civic engagement than weak ties in the case of large cities. Therefore, the size and the location of the community are also important (McGrane et al. 2017, Filion 2018). Based on studies of participation in local elections, Gendźwiłł (2017) posited the so-called proximity hypothesis, which states that citizens in smaller political communities are more likely to participate in civic practices because their vote means more. People are generally more willing to participate in affairs that are more relevant to their daily lives and in which they have greater

expertise (Florin, Wandersman 1984). Extensive literature points to the dependence of activism in public affairs on historical and cultural conditions (Putnam 1993, 2000, Svendsen, Svendsen 2016, Evers 2019, Dang 2020).

In Poland, historical and cultural factors, especially those related to the historical affiliation of the territories of the contemporary Polish state to various partitioned states, still influence people’s activities in the public sphere (Bartkowski 2003). A historical region is a carrier of certain cultural characteristics (Peisert 2017). The area of Galicia (Austrian partition) is characterised by the permanence and vitality of local ties, attachment to the locality of residence and maintenance of strong local communities (Majcherek 1996; Bartkowski 2003). Attention is also drawn to the role of property in creating a sense of residents’ incumbency in the region and high aspirations to build their own homes. In the Western and Northern Territories (lands annexed to the Polish state after World War II), a confrontation of migrants arriving from different parts of the country took place, and two different opinions on the characteristics of the region’s society function. The first emphasises the phenomenon of uprooting, greater social atomisation and low development of collective consciousness, and thus lower social integration (Sakson 1996, Mach 1998). The second view speaks of the emergence of a new social quality in the area, a more modernised, open, pro-innovative and entrepreneurial society (Gorzelak, Jałowicki 1998). The Congress Kingdom (Russian partition) was the region poorest in civic traditions.

Study area, data sources and methods

In this study, a quantitative approach to assessing public participation was applied. The method used refers to the traditional model of assessing the level of public participation commonly used in previous studies (e.g. Lindström et al. 2002, Grootaert et al. 2004, Guillen et al. 2011), but in contrast to them, the goal was to collect the exact number of contacts between residents and decision-makers, and to develop relative measures. Consistently, our model is based on determining the number of contacts on a given issue established by residents with an institution

in relation to the total number of potentially interested parties.

Data on the involvement of residents in preparing development planning documents (DPDs) and spatial planning documents (SPDs) at the local level were obtained from 148 municipalities (rural, urban-rural, with small towns of up to 20,000 residents) in four Polish voivodeships: West Pomerania, Pomerania, Mazovia and Lesser Poland (from 15% to 37% of all municipalities of these types in a given voivodeship) (Fig. 1). It was assumed that:

- the study would be conducted in four spatially compact areas belonging to different regions;
- each of these areas would include a centre-periphery continuum;
- the studied areas would be functionally differentiated so as to provide a comparable representation of four types of municipalities (agricultural, extensively developed, non-agricultural and external zones of urban centres) (Śleszyński, Komornicki 2016).

A questionnaire was sent to municipal offices, in which officials entered data on (1) DPDs

(including development strategies¹, revitalisation programmes², programmes of environment protection³ and others) and (2) SPDs⁴ (including the study of conditions and directions of spatial development 'SUiKZP'⁵, defining the municipality's spatial policy and the local land use plan⁶, which is a local law universally binding in the area it covers), adopted in 2015–2023 with public participation.

The first stage of the study consisted of developing participation indexes (PIs) for the two groups of documents. The purpose of the index construction is to determine the share of people involved in the preparation of the document in

¹ In Polish: strategie rozwoju lokalnego.

² In Polish: gminne (lokalne) programy rewitalizacji.

³ In Polish: programy ochrony środowiska.

⁴ The term 'spatial planning documents' encompasses planning documents that formulate regulations for specific areas, both land use directions and land use principles and zoning.

⁵ In Polish: studium uwarunkowań i kierunków zagospodarowania przestrzennego.

⁶ In Polish: miejscowy plan zagospodarowania przestrzennego.

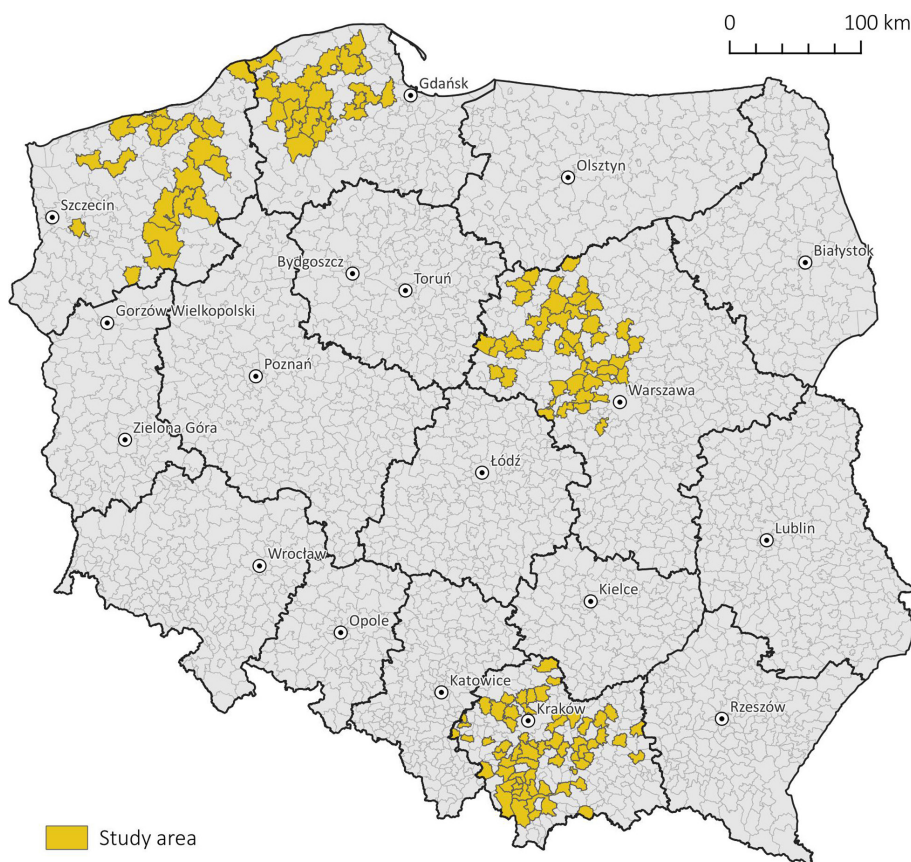


Fig. 1. Location of study area.

the estimated group of people potentially interested in the document. In the case of DPDs, the PI measure was constructed based on the number of participants in consultations related to the number of adult residents of the municipality, which was considered a group of potentially interested people. The use of such a general measure is due to the fact that in most types of these documents (except for revitalisation plans), during the period covered by the study, the law did not specify the stages of consultation as precisely as in the case of SPDs.

$$PI d_i = \frac{c_i}{n_i} \times 100\%$$

where $PI d_i$ – participation index for DPD of municipality i ; c_i – number of people participating in the consultation of the DPD; n_i – number of adult residents of municipality i .

In the case of SPDs, PIs resulted from the applicable (according to the Law on Planning and Spatial Development) forms of public involvement: submission of proposals for the document at the preliminary stage of the process and submission of comments on the drafted document (final stage).⁷ The indexes thus took the form:

$$PI p_i = \frac{p_i}{d_i}$$

$$PI c_i = \frac{c_i}{d_i}$$

where $PI p_i$ – participation index at the stage of proposals to SPDs in municipality i ; p_i – number of people who submitted proposals; $PI c_i$ – participation index at the stage of comments to SPDs in municipality i ; c_i – number of people who submitted comments; d_i – number of parcels covered by the document.

The construction of PIs for spatial planning was problematic due to the difficulty with estimating the number of people potentially interested. Most often, SPDs, especially land use plans, do not cover the entire municipality, the boundaries of the

areas covered by the plans often do not coincide with the boundaries of villages and include uninhabited areas. Therefore, relating the level of involvement to the number of residents of the areas covered by the plan would not be an appropriate approach. In addition, these documents regulate the zoning of specific areas, so the people potentially interested should be primarily the owners of the plots of land covered by the planning study. Determining the number of plot owners proved impossible (lack of data), so a simplified approach was used: the denominator of the PI was the number of plots covered by the plan. The authors are aware of the limitations of the method, which, due to the lack of more detailed data, are difficult to eliminate. Of the other possible approaches to estimating the level of participation (relating the number of participants to the number of residents, or to the area of the plan), this approach has relatively the fewest drawbacks.

In addition, another indicator of participation in spatial planning was developed, reflecting self-organised participation (Cuppen 2018), thus covering activities undertaken on the initiative of residents to influence the planning process, not resulting from the law. The index therefore did not refer to the number of plots, but to the fulfilment of 12 criteria derived from the questionnaire's possible forms of involvement⁸.

$$PI nf_i = \frac{nf_i}{12}$$

where $PI nf_i$ – self-organised participation index for SPDs in municipality i ; nf_i – number of forms of informal activity undertaken by residents to influence SPDs in municipality i .

⁷ The forms of citizen participation in development and spatial planning being in force in Poland have already been discussed academically (e.g. Zachariasz, Nelicki 2008, Kaczmarek, Wójcicki 2015, Bednarek-Szczepańska 2018).

⁸ Actions taken by residents before drafting a spatial planning document (SPD): (1) holding discussions with the mayor or councillors about the need to draft an SPD, (2) expressing in writing the need to draft an SPD, (3) taking other actions to influence the initiation of the planning procedure. After initiation of planning procedure: (4) engagement at sessions of the municipal council on SPD issues, (5) holding discussions with the mayor or councillors (outside administrative hearing), (6) collecting signatures among residents on SPD issues, (7) forming social committees and organisations, (8) discussions at village meetings, (9) social media activity on SPD issues, (10) other forms of online activity, (11) notification of the media, (12) distribution of leaflets, posters, to residents or other forms of manifestation in public space.

Table 1. Independent variables included in the study.

Code	Variable	Factor type	Year
I1	Travel time to nearest city with population of more than 100,000 (Rosik 2021)	Spatial	2020
I2	Population density		2020
I3	Demographic dependency ratio (number of people of post-working age / number of people of working age)	Demographic	2020
I4	Share of people with higher education in municipality's population		2021
I5	Share of immigrants (who moved between 2011 and 2021) in municipality's population		2021
I6	Unemployment rate	Socio-economic	2020
I7	Average share of members of clubs (cultural, sports, etc.) in municipality's population	Social	2015–2020
I8	Number of associations / 1000 inhabitants		2020
I9	Turnout in municipal council elections		2018

Statistical measures of all PIs were compiled: the mean, median and standard deviation. The next part of the study consisted of verifying the importance of independent factors for the level of PIs. A summary of the variables subjected to correlation analysis with the PIs is presented in Table 1. The correlation analysis was carried out for the type of document most represented by each group, i.e. the development strategy and land use plan. Conducting correlation analyses and measures of central tendency was preceded by rejecting outliers of the index according to the formula:

$$TV = A + 2 \times \sigma$$

where TV – threshold value; A – arithmetic mean for a set of p, c or nf; σ – population standard deviation for a set of p, c or nf.

PIs were also related to historical-cultural regions and functional types of communities. The research sample of communities was divided into three regions⁹: Western and Northern Lands, former lands of the Russian partition and Galicia, as well as into four functional types, aggregated on the basis of the typology of municipalities according to Śleszyński and Komornicki (2016): extensively developed, agricultural, with dominance of non-agricultural functions, external zones of provincial/subregional centres.

Results

Overall picture of participation in local planning

A total of information was obtained on the number of residents involved in the drafting of 367 DPDs and SPDs from 148 municipalities in the selected four voivodeships. The largest representation was obtained for development strategies (122) and land use plans (98).

The residents showed the lowest involvement during consultations on environmental documents. Although their contents address issues important to residents, such as the construction of water supply and sewage systems, the vast majority of PId values were zero or close to zero. Residents are also not interested in issues related to strategic planning and revitalisation. On average, <1% of adult residents of the municipalities were involved in strategy-making processes, and the median values of PId were 0.34 (Table 2). For half of the analysed strategy-making processes, the number of municipal residents involved did not exceed 20. Interestingly, there was only a slight difference between the level of involvement in the drafting of development strategies, which are more general documents, and the level of involvement in the revitalisation process (average PId = 1.1; median 0.42), which translates into specific investments. In addition, in the case of revitalisation, public participation is required by law on a fairly broad range.

In the case of SPDs, higher average PI values were achieved for land use plans than for the spatial policy document ('SUiKZP'), which can be seen especially in the case of proposals

⁹ The area of the Prussian partition was not analysed due to the under-representation of municipalities.

Table 2. Participation indexes for different types of documents.

Document	N (all)	N*	Development planning								
			PI _d								
			Av.			Med.			Stand. dev.		
Local development strategy	122	116	0.78			0.34			1.04		
Revitalisation programme	52	51	1.11			0.42			1.49		
Environemnt protecion programme	45	45	0.06			0.00			0.15		
Other	15	-									
Document	N (all)	N*	Spatial planning								
			PI _p			PI _c			PI _{inf}		
			Av.	Med.	Stand. dev.	Av.	Med.	Stand. dev.	Av.	Med.	Stand. dev.
Spatial policy document (SUiKZP)	35	35	1.20	0.50	2.16	1.80	0.80	2.59	0.27	0.25	0.18
Land use plan	98	78	7.00	2.88	12.97	3.29	1.48	4.32	0.28	0.25	0.15

* number of documents statistically analysed using PI, after rejecting outliers.

to the document (Table 2). Land use plans have a direct legal effect on any potential investor. A 'SUiKZP', on the other hand, is an act of internal management of the municipality, which, in the light of the legislation in force at the time of the study, was relevant to a potential investor only in the case of land use plan enactment.

The questionnaires to the municipalities indicated what was the predominant reason for residents to be active in spatial planning. Of all the cases, by far the most common reason was the desire to change the use of land for residential development (60% of the surveyed cases of spatial planning proceedings). Next, a possible location of a nuisance investment was the main reason for involvement (about 1/5 cases). Desire to change the parameters of buildings (11%), followed by controversy over traffic areas (6%) were also the reasons for participation. Overall, more than three times as many residents expressed their expectations about the content of the documents at the initial stage of the planning process (proposals to the plan) than commented on the draft plan drawn up. Proposals overwhelmingly expressed a desire to change the use of agricultural land to single-family housing (for 83% of the planning processes analysed, this was the predominant focus of applications).

Residents take action to influence the spatial planning process not only when they receive an invitation to participate from municipal authorities but also undertake activities on their own initiative. Of the 12 categories of activities, an

average of around four were undertaken, most commonly submitting letters to the local authorities (which are not plan proposals in the legal sense) and informal meetings and discussions with the authorities (not counting administrative hearings or sessions of municipal councils).

Factors differentiating 'residents' participation in local planning

Local development strategies

The level of participation in consulting development strategies shows very weak correlative relationships with all the variables analysed. The level of peripherality, population density, demographic and social variables do not explain the differences in the participation of residents in the process of creating municipal development strategies (Fig. 2). A relatively highest correlation was recorded with the variable of local election turnout, but this was still a weak relationship (0.19). Particularly notable was the lack of significance of the resident education variable. It was expected that in areas with a better-educated population, the level of involvement in the creation of a key document for the municipality would be higher. Yet the result may be influenced by the fact that the educated population is concentrated in suburban areas where there are large settlement units with an immigrant population largely uninterested in local affairs. When dividing municipalities into functional types, it is also apparent that there are no major differences in measures of

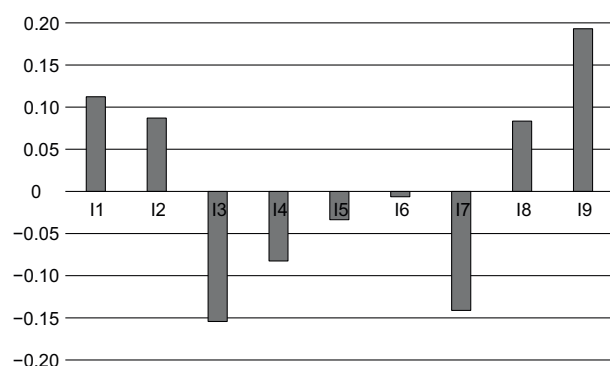


Fig. 2. Correlation coefficients of the participation index (PI) with selected variables in the case of development strategies.

I1 – travel time to the nearest city with a population of more than 100,000; I2 – population density; I3 – demographic dependency ratio; I4 – share of people with higher education; I5 – share of immigrants; I6 – unemployment rate; I7 – average share of members of clubs (cultural, sports, etc.); I8 – number of associations / 1000 inhabitants; I9 – turnout in municipal council elections.

central tendency for the PI. However, in non-agricultural municipalities, both the median and the mean reached the highest values (Table 3). When calculating the values of the index for historical-cultural regions, it also appears that the differences between the averages for the historical and cultural regions were small. Galicia, an area with incumbent population and strong local ties, fared relatively best, where it was somewhat easier to mobilise a group of residents to participate in the consultation than in other regions, as evidenced in particular by the highest median value (Table 3).

In relation to the fact that municipal authorities use diverse forms of involving residents in the preparation of strategies, it was examined

whether the type and number of forms used influence the value of the PI index. It turns out that above all, the use of a survey (questionnaire for residents) influenced the value of the index. The average PI in the group of municipalities using this form was 1.27 (0.36 in the group of municipalities not using the form). The use of other forms, e.g. workshops and meetings, did not significantly differentiate the value of the indicator. The number of forms of participation used was correlated with the PI, although the correlation was at a low level (0.27).

Land use plans

In the case of land use plans, there were correlations of medium to weak strength between PIs and spatial, demographic and social variables. The correlation varied, depending on the form of participation (submission of proposals – preliminary stage of the procedure, comments on the drafted plan and self-organised participation), with the highest correlations for the index related to comments (Fig. 3).

The PI at the initial stage of the planning process showed weak correlations with some variables, in particular, a negative correlation with the demographic dependency ratio (the older the area demographically, the fewer proposals submitted) and a positive (and weaker) correlation with the commuting time to a large city (the longer the commuting time, the more applications). These seemingly contradictory correlations correspond to the fact that, in the group of municipalities with the highest PI, most units represented the urbanised or extensively developed type. Both the mean and median values of

Table 3. Average values of the participation index for development strategies in historical-cultural regions and functional types of municipalities.

Category of region	Av. PI	Median PI
Historical-cultural regions		
– strong local ties, strong self-government and civic traditions, conservatism, incumbent population (Galicia)	0.79	0.40
– weakest civic traditions, weakest traditions of self-government, incumbent population (Lands of the former Russian partition)	0.74	0.11
– weak local ties, weak civic traditions, modernity, migrant population (Western and Northern Territories)	0.57	0.27
Functional types		
– extensively developed	0.82	0.35
– non-agricultural functions	1.02	0.57
– agricultural functions	0.67	0.32
– external zones of urban centres	0.72	0.21

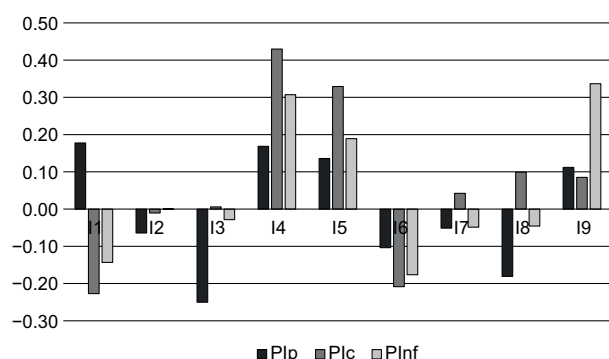


Fig. 3. Correlation coefficients of the participation index with selected variables in the case of land use plans.

I1 – travel time to the nearest city with a population of more than 100,000; I2 – population density; I3 – demographic dependency ratio; I4 – share of people with higher education; I5 – share of immigrants; I6 – unemployment rate; I7 – average share of members of clubs (cultural, sports, etc.); I8 – number of associations / 1000 inhabitants; I9 – turnout in municipal council elections.

the index indicating the number of applicants in relation to the number of plots of land covered by the planning document were highest for the extensively developed type of municipalities. Thus, the high social pressure for changing the status of farmland/deforestation (which is the main content of proposals) applies not only to areas around the largest cities, but also to peripheral areas with an attractive natural environment. Thus, it is noteworthy that there was a weak relationship between the PIp and the migration inflow variable; residents seek to change the status of their land not only in areas attractive for

settlement, where new residential development is growing.

The index of participation at the final stage of the planning process (submitting comments), showed the highest correlation (0.44) with the variable determining the educational level of the population. In addition, associations of the PIc with migration and the level of peripherality of the area were noted. More comments to plans were made in areas of higher population influx and closer to large urban centres. However, these correlations were almost twice as weak as in the case of education level. The group of municipalities with the highest PIc values was dominated by urbanised units. The average PIc was by far the highest in the group of urbanised municipalities, and was on average twice as low in other functional types (Table 4). The relatively high correlation with the education level is largely due to the fact that the educated population is concentrated in urbanised areas, where investment attractiveness stimulates a lively discussion of planning solutions. However, this is probably not just an apparent correlation, as reading, understanding and commenting on planning arrangements requires a level of planning awareness and is far more demanding than submitting a planning application.

The correlation analysis result for PInf was somewhat more similar to the correlation analysis result for the PIc than for the PIp. In particular, there was, as with the PIc, a correlation with the level of education, albeit with slightly less strength. What is also noteworthy is the highest

Table 4. Average values of participation indexes for land use plans in historical-cultural regions and functional types of municipalities.

Name	Av. PIp	Median PIp	Av. PIc	Median PIc	Av. PInf	Median PInf
Historical-cultural regions						
– strong local ties, strong self-government and civic traditions, conservatism, incumbent population (Galicia)	7.80	2.20	2.91	0.72	0.29	0.29
– weakest civic traditions, weakest traditions of self-government, incumbent population (Lands of former Russian partition)	8.28	4.31	4.70	1.97	0.31	0.29
– weak local ties, weak civic traditions, modernity, migrant population (Western and Northern Territories)	4.23	2.49	3.47	1.51	0.25	0.25
Functional types						
– extensively developed	16.03	5.97	2.06	0.10	0.30	0.33
– non-agricultural functions	4.10	3.66	3.01	1.62	0.28	0.25
– agricultural functions	3.08	1.47	2.11	0.74	0.23	0.25
– external zones of urban centres	12.50	3.73	5.01	3.32	0.36	0.33

correlation strength of the PInf with the turnout in local elections, which reflects the degree of involvement of residents in local affairs. Variables reflecting the level of social capital, both in its more traditional form (membership in circles, clubs) and in its more 'modern' form (number of associations per 1000 inhabitants), were not correlated with the level of self-organised participation in spatial planning. The median value of the PInf index was 0.42 for planning processes in which the main reason for residents' involvement was opposition to a nuisance development, with a median of 0.25 for cases concerning the conversion of plots of land to buildings. The differences in the averaged values of PIs in spatial planning for the historical-cultural regions were much smaller than the differences for the functional types of municipalities. It can be argued that the main historical-cultural factors differentiating the regions were irrelevant to residents' activities in spatial planning, as the highest level of involvement was recorded in the lands of the former Russian partition, i.e. areas with the weakest traditions of civic activity (even though the study area included not only the areas around Warsaw, but also those located peripherally); on the other hand, the lowest level of involvement in terms of submitting comments to the draft plan was in Galicia, a region with outstanding traditions of self-governance and local activity (Bartkowski 2003, Peisert 2017).

Discussion

The results show that the involvement of rural residents varies depending on which 'layer' of planning is subjected to public consultation. Development (strategic) planning does not meet the interests of residents. Elbakidze et al. (2015) point out that, for the average resident, local strategic documents are too general in nature; it is difficult to look at the municipality as a whole—people are primarily interested in the specific places where they live. As Leino, Laine (2012) point out, academic planning discussion dealing with public participation has forgotten one basic principle, namely that people are taking part in the planning process because they are interested in a particular issue at hand. As the Polish case shows, local authorities are most often unable to

convince residents that the local development strategy will have a notable impact on their lives.

The level of participation in strategic planning was found to be generally low and very weakly related to the independent variables (spatial, demographic and social), and more related to what opportunities for participation are made available by the consulting entity. A survey for inhabitants was the tool that most increased the value of the PI (filling out a survey is a much less demanding form of engagement than submitting a comment on a document or taking part in a workshop). At the same time, the preparation of a survey requires more attention on the part of the consulting entity. As indicated by Brody et al. (2003), it is the involvement in the preparation of the participation process, measured, e.g. by a variety of proposed forms of participation, which translates into the level of engagement of residents. Quite surprisingly, there was no correlation between the PID and the level of education. The level of education is recognised as one of the most important factors for involvement in public affairs (Delli Carpini, Keeter 1996, Arvanitidis 2017). In commenting on this result, reference can be made to Innes and Booher's (2004) views on traditional forms of public participation: 'Most often these methods discourage busy and thoughtful individuals from wasting their time going through what appear to be nothing more than rituals designed to satisfy legal requirements' (p. 419).

As Theiss (2010) points out, an overly narrow range of issues on which consultation is obligatory (required by law) does not support public participation. On the other hand, regulating the rules of public participation by law seems to have little impact on the actual level of residents' involvement. The imposition of further public participation obligations on public authorities by legislation does not translate into a real improvement in public involvement in planning. This is evidenced by the negligible participation of residents taking part in the consultations of environmental programmes, which have been mandatory for many years, or the low citizen interest in the development of municipal revitalisation programmes, despite the fact that public participation has a very high priority in the Revitalisation Law. This thesis is also confirmed by the fact that the average level of participation of residents in

the creation of strategies has not increased after the legal requirement to consult them was introduced. Expanding the statutory catalogue of public participation tools will not have the expected effect, but will only be another bureaucratic task to be carried out. Public participation is often treated by officials as 'another nuisance imposed by statutory laws' (Załączna 2018).

Residents willingly respond to an invitation to participate in spatial planning when they perceive that their involvement will influence decisions that are important to them (Brody et al. 2003, Zachrisson et al. 2021). The catalyst for engagement was the prospect of increasing the value of one's own property or the prospect of losing existing values. Particularly in the latter case, an expansion of self-organised participation is noticeable. On average, the PInf indicator reached the highest values in cases where residents felt threatened by the location of a nuisance development in the neighbourhood. Self-organised participation was correlated with the turnout rate in local elections. This, in turn, is higher in small communities, where residents are better rooted in local networks (Gendźwiłł 2017), which favours informal activities based on these networks, also in spatial planning.

Research has confirmed that the pressure to change the status of farmland to buildable is an essential component of public participation in spatial planning of rural areas (Bednarek-Szczepańska 2024), and not only in those areas where the economic importance of agriculture is low, but also in agricultural areas. In the case of municipalities with an agricultural function, in more than half of the cases, the willingness to change farmland into buildable land was the main reason for residents to get involved. For a small landowner – and such landowners prevail in Poland – the redesignation of even a small plot of agricultural land to other uses means a leap in value. It is also worth mentioning that in the 12 years since Poland joined the EU, the value of land increased sixfold (Wilkin 2019). Thus, the gentrification of agricultural land has been taking place in recent years (Sutherland 2012), and these small owners, active in the planning process, constitute an important group of actors. Other studies also indicate that most often citizens expect safeguarding of their private interests (Damurski 2012). The Polish case is not unique. For example,

a study in China has also found that personal interests, including economic interests, perceived benefits and changes in daily life are the leading motivations for residents' participation in spatial planning (Tan, Kytta 2024).

In the light of the theory of Fischler (1987, 2002), the influence of single-family homeowners and their economic interests is a major determinant of zoning policy. He coined the term 'homevoters' to emphasise that residents who own their homes have a stake in the outcome of local politics, which makes them especially attentive to the public policies of local governments. They aim to protect and maximise their housing values (Been et al. 2014). In the case of Poland, where ownership of agricultural land is fragmented, homeowners are often at the same time small landowners who seek to change the use of agricultural land for residential development. And they do it effectively, as in the case of 80% of the studied municipalities, it was homeowners' applications during the surveyed eight-year period that triggered (at least once, most often several times) the planning procedure. At the same time, according to the survey, proposals for land use change are granted if it does not contradict the law or the external authorities' agreements, and categories such as preservation of spatial order standards were occasionally mentioned as reasons for not granting the proposals.

Conclusions

The hypothesis posed at the beginning of the article was partially confirmed. The level of involvement of residents in strategic planning was not related to demographic or spatial variables. This was a rather surprising result allowing a positive conclusion that a significant level of resident involvement can be achieved not only where an active or educated population lives, but also in other areas if adequate effort is put into creating favourable conditions for participation. In the case of spatial planning, the relationship of PIs with the demographics and functional type of municipality is clearly visible, with the highest correlation of the education level with the participation level in submitting comments to the land use plan, as well as highest interest in submitting comments in external zones of urban

centres. Concerning social factors, only the activity in local elections was correlated with some PIs. The variation in PIs between historical regions was not pronounced, although in the case of strategic planning, residents of a region with traditionally strong local ties and communities showed slightly higher involvement than others.

The study is part of the ongoing academic discussion on models of public participation, with our study falling into the critical trend towards invited participation, especially its classic forms, which do not have the expected effect of actually involving residents (Innes, Booher 2004). Residents are generally not interested in the strategic and programme documents produced by local authorities. They respond to the invitation to participatory processes to a negligible extent, as the calculated indicators showed, probably not seeing the benefit of their involvement. However, this should not be interpreted as a criticism of the residents and their activity, but only a confirmation of the regularity that the public is most of all interested in particular issues that affect their lives (Leino, Laine 2012). Therefore, residents get involved in planning processes when they perceive threats to their place of residence and they use not only formal but also informal channels.

The main purpose of residents' participation in spatial planning was to expand the development potential of their properties. This does not at all imply that rural residents are particularly selfish, looking only after their own interests. However, such a character of participation is determined by an established pattern of invited participation in planning. The reasons for the pressure to change the purpose of agricultural land are complex, relating to the economic situation of society, their purchasing power and highly unmet housing needs (Surówka 2018). Thus, the public's response to the invitation to participate in local planning needs to be interpreted taking into account the broad socio-economic context.

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Authors' contribution

MB-S: conceptualisation, investigation, data curation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing, funding acquisition; DM: investigation, methodology, visualisation, data curation.

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