

## REVIEW ARTICLES

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### LEVEL OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN THE CREATION OF URBAN REGENERATION PROGRAMMES – THE CASE STUDY OF SMALL TOWNS IN POLAND

**Abstract.** Social participation enables citizens to take part in the decision-making process. It is an increasingly popular instrument in Poland. The effectiveness of participation is the most important issue in this context. In accordance with the Act of 9 October 2015, urban regeneration mainly applies to mitigating negative social phenomena. The social aspect is also important at the stage of establishing urban regeneration programmes. Extensive social participation in the process of creating these programmes is one of the main requirements. The aim of the article is to present the scale of the involvement of local communities in the procedure of creating regeneration programmes in selected small towns in Poland. Conclusions from the analysis include an assessment of participation success rate in regeneration activities.

**Keywords:** social participation, small towns, urban regeneration programs, effectiveness of participation, local government.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The turn of the 1990s brought significant changes in the perception of the role of public authorities. At that time, a top-down approach based on a bureaucratic model (the so-called *old public administration*) was replaced by a new one which

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focused on implementing methods and techniques of enterprise management to public organizations' operations (the so-called *new public management* – NPM). Public authorities began focussing on optimizing public spending by using such elements of rational management as outsourcing, decentralization, and objective-based management. It also changed the criteria for assessing the activities of public authorities. Increasingly, categories previously known from economics, such as: purposefulness, reliability, cost-efficiency, and effectiveness have been applied. In the NPM concept, the external responsibility towards citizens and the attitude towards achieving specific results were clearly marked (Kožuch, 2007). It also resulted in greater exposure of citizens' participation in the decision-making process.

Local governments in Poland began implementing the NPM principles with a delay. Additionally, a new institutional paradigm appeared in the Polish local government practice, namely: participatory public management. That model has changed the perception of the role of non-governmental entities (including citizens) in management. They have become co-participants in the decision-making processes. In the described model, local administration focuses on coordinating and supervising activities, and co-creating the final result with partners (Małeczka-Łyszczek, 2014).

Residents are the most important reviewers of local authorities. However, in recent years they have gained the possibility to co-decide on local issues through social participation. Thus, responsibility for meeting social needs has been divided. One of the manners for influencing local development is the participation in the preparation and implementation of urban regeneration programmes. That initiative is undertaken by the local governments at the municipal level, including small towns.

The initial section of this article focuses on the importance of social participation, as well as on the distribution of its instruments. The next section includes considerations on the effectiveness of participation and assumptions that should guide the creation of urban regeneration programmes in Polish cities. For this purpose, we made a review of literature and conducted studies of programme documents related to urban regeneration in Poland.

The major objective of the article is to analyse the level of social involvement in the process of creating urban regeneration programmes in small towns in Poland. Moreover, social participation instruments used by local authorities during the creation of these programmes have been identified. The empirical part of the article uses the analysis of the content of the programmes conducted in 20 selected towns. Those are current urban regeneration programmes that facilitate the acquisition of European Union funding for projects related to the reduction of crisis phenomena occurring there. The final section is a summary and a presentation of the most important conclusions.

## 2. THE ESSENCE AND INSTRUMENTS OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

The word participation comes from the Latin *particeps*, i.e. ‘participation’, ‘taking part’. It can be understood as participation in social (public and political) life. The term is used with additional qualifiers, e.g. ‘public’, ‘civic’, ‘social’. Public participation is a multi-dimensional matter and in order to understand it comprehensively it is necessary to analyse multifaceted phenomena and various perspectives. It can be analysed from the point of view of psychology, sociology, economics, politics, and law. It is related to such issues as individual motivation, the ability to debate, the level of group organization, and organizational and socio-political factors in the community. Therefore, the number of concepts and different approaches to participation is still growing. This discussion goes far beyond the framework of social sciences (Neverauskas and Tijūnaitienė, 2007).

In Polish literature, the term ‘social participation’ is used to refer to civic activity of Poles and the whole society. It is related to the active participation of individuals in managing the affairs of a community to which they belong or in which they live on an everyday basis (Kaźmierczak, 2011). Therefore, it is a certain attitude expressed through engaging in public affairs and being the basis of civil society. In recent decades, the participation of the society in local management has grown significantly all over the world. The public is frequently invited to provide input while making local decisions. Research shows that the use of social involvement favours the perception of the authorities as trustworthy, which, in turn, translates into a positive and comprehensive evaluation of the management (Herian *et al.*, 2012).

The principles of social dialogue and subsidiarity are the foundations of social participation. In addition, participation promotes a more complete implementation of the principle of social solidarity and access to the common wealth (Schimanek, 2015). The opportunity to participate in public decision-making gives residents a sense of agency, real impact on local life, and promotes the formation of strong local identity and community integration. Moreover, there can be found a correlation between participation and the level of public trust (Lawton and Macaulay, 2013). Residents involved in the functioning of the local government learn about its activities, establish contacts with politicians and officials, co-decide on the implementation of investments, etc. Thus, they develop a sense of trust in a public institution. As a result, the general level of public trust in a local government is higher than in the case of central institutions and political parties (European Commission, 2012).

One key indicator of the evaluation of local government activities is the quality and accessibility of public services. Continuous improvement of those services seems a big challenge in the context of growing customer expectations. Under the aforementioned New Public Management concept, local governments implement a number of instruments with a view to improve operational efficiency. Social participation serves as an example of such an instrument. It can be used as part of

a quality management system applied by the local government (Dorasamy, 2017). In that context, social participation should be treated as a process of continuous identification of expectations and needs. Therefore, it functions as the necessary input of standard operating procedures aimed at improving the quality of life of the local community. In many cases, however, the low level of civic engagement proves the main problem. It may result, among other things, from the attitude and intention of local authorities. Overall, several factors can be identified that affect the scale of participation (Rydin and Pennington, 2000):

1. Costs of participation;
2. Direct benefits of participation;
3. Costs of non-participation;
4. Expected likelihood of participation influencing the policy outcome;
5. Expected distribution of costs and benefits associated with the policy outcome;
6. Level of knowledge of the policy issue and the policy process.

There are many different instruments of participation by which urban residents can influence the process of public decision-making (Tab. 1). Among them one can distinguish one-sided communication instruments, feedback communication, and committed participation. In the first case, communication between the authorities and the community takes place only in one direction, e.g. in the form of a message. The next type of instruments – feedback communication – is based on interaction, and allows authorities to obtain information from residents in the form of an opinion or evaluation. In turn, the bottom-up initiative is the basis for committed participation, which is manifested by the local community.

Table 1. Selected instruments of social participation

One-sided communication
Messages and information posted in municipal and communal offices, in a Public Information Bulletin, information on websites, in local media, brochures, leaflets, posters
Communication with feedback
Obtaining information from residents through surveys, consultation points, complaints and requests, meetings and discussions, e.g. public consultations, public debates, diagnostic and design workshops, obtaining information through discussion forums, e.g.: local community forum, online forum, rural meetings, democratic elections, referendum
Committed participation
Participatory budget, administrative proceedings - the right to submit petitions, applications related to public administration, direct actions - demonstrations, manifestations and happenings in order to express opinions, protest or support by a social group, institutional consultations with experts, local community and representatives of the local government, social dialogue commissions

Source: author's work on the basis of Laurisz, 2013.

In Poland, the instruments of communication with feedback, particularly social consultations, constitute the most popular instruments of social participation. The detailed rules and mode of consultation should be specified in the resolutions of the municipal council, while the general guidelines are set forth in the Local Government Act (*Ustawa o samorządzie terytorialnym*, 1990). Public consultations are generally carried out according to the following scenario (Peter-Bombik and Szczudlińska-Kanoś, 2015):

1. Presentation of the problem and plans for its resolution by public authorities;
2. Opinions and proposals from members of the local community or other stakeholders;
3. Attempt to reach a common solution and final decision.

It should be noted that the society is becoming technologically advanced. Citizens keep using mobile devices, various applications, social networks, etc. That trend is also reflected in the activities conducted by local governments, which contribute to the development of an e-government offer, thus increasing the opportunities for social participation in public management. E-government can be understood as “the use of information and technology to support and improve public policies and government operations, engage citizens and provide comprehensive and timely government services” (Scholl, 2008, p. 21).

The use of e-government tools fosters the improvement of management quality, and increases the transparency of activities and legitimization of decisions (Reddick and Norris, 2013; Kim and Lee, 2012; Evans-Cowley and Hollander, 2010). It is also worth noting that through the use of ICT, the costs of organizing public consultations, gathering opinions, ideas, remarks and the time necessary to carry them out are reduced. If one takes into account the scale of popularity of ICT in the society and the catalogue of benefits for a local government, it seems likely that traditional forms of social participation will be increasingly replaced by e-participation.

The participation of citizens in making public decisions brings numerous benefits. First and foremost, communication between the authorities and residents improves, and the level of civic control over self-government activities goes up. It entails an increase in the effectiveness of self-government. Moreover, the education of both parties is of vital importance. On the one hand, residents become familiar with the way how a local self-government functions, its procedures and limitations. Consequently, it results in shaping civic attitudes. On the other, the authorities strengthen confidence in their activities, and build strategic alliances that legitimize the decisions made (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004). Public management with the participation of citizens can also raise some controversy. It is associated with high costs of the decision-making process, its time-consuming nature, blurring of responsibility, and taking into account exclusively the opinions and expectations of the most active groups or entities (Peter-Bombik and Szczudlińska-

ka-Kanoś, 2015). Thus, it should be concluded that in some cases the expected results are not achieved. Therefore, the doubt as to the effectiveness of social participation seems justified.

### 3. EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

In subject literature, the discussion on social participation and its role takes two directions (Lewenstein *et al.*, 2010). The first relates to the inclusion of citizens and community organizations in democratic processes and the significance of local communities in decision-making. In that case, such aspects of democracy as the transparency and credibility of democratic practices are emphasized. Meanwhile, the second direction is of an economic nature and consists of determining the impact of a local civil society on the effectiveness of the local system. The aim of the analysis is to determine the impact of residents on the efficiency of local authorities, on the increase in economic efficiency and the quality of public services provided, and, finally, the level of satisfying collective local needs. Interestingly enough, both perspectives may interact in different ways and not complement each other, *i.e.* strengthening of democratic processes does not always mean an improvement of economic efficiency and vice versa.

The issue of social participation effectiveness is relatively rarely addressed in literature. It is difficult to state clearly how it should be understood and which indicators should be used for its measurement. The discussions cover various issues which should be considered to determine effectiveness. Those include the level of antagonism, the length of the entire process, communication issues, cost-effectiveness, process transparency, representativeness, and the level of involvement. Stakeholders' very perception of effectiveness is also diverse. For the representatives of the highest local authorities, the effectiveness of participation is connected with the legitimacy of the authorities. The re-election and the lack of complaints from the residents are the basic arguments to recognize their role as fulfilled. It is important for city/town clerks to obtain reliable bottom-up information and get their actions approved by the residents. In turn, from the perspective of citizens, this efficiency is often equated with substantive bilateral communication, an opportunity to express opinions at an early stage of the decision-making process, engagement, and real dialogue with officials and local authorities (Berner *et al.*, 2011).

Research carried out in Polish local self-governments confirms the growing popularity of residents' inclusion in local management. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of participation remains low (Pracownia Badań i Innowacji Społecznych Stocznia, 2011). Residents are characterized by low civic activity, low interest in

public affairs, and a sense of low level of impact on public issues. The reason for that may be the fact that motions and opinions submitted by citizens are rarely used and are not later reflected in the activities of a local self-government.

The activity of urban residents in public activities depends on many factors. The most important include the size of the commune, the socio-demographic structure, local traditions, the level of socio-economic development, conflicts, and the way of exercising power. There is an opinion according to which large communities with limited contacts and neighbourhood ties are characterized by a low level of social integration and, therefore, are less likely to take action for the common good (Pietraszko-Furmanek, 2012). In addition, in large cities, the distance between local authorities and the inhabitants living anonymously and not identifying with the place of residence increases. Moreover, in case of conflicts between communities or between the authorities and citizens, it is more difficult to find a solution to improve relations and establish lasting relationships.

Thus, responsibility is a crucial issue to consider in connection with the effectiveness of participation. It is widely believed to be the basic principle of democracy and an indispensable element for local development to meet the citizens expectations (Darwin, 2016). Residents have the right to demand and assess the level of involvement of public entities. However, to ensure greater effectiveness of actions, it is also necessary for the citizens to consider themselves liable. As a consequence, the development of participative activities increases the responsibility of the authorities for their decisions, and distributes it among other decision makers, including residents (Słupik, 2016). At this point, it is important to explain what participation is, and what benefits it brings. Raising the awareness among citizens is necessary in order to allow them to express their needs, react to irregularities, and take initiatives with development activities. In this context, “participation” should mean the same as “bearing joint responsibility” (Małeczka-Łyszczek, 2014, p. 50).

It should be noted that in order to increase the efficiency of participation, an appropriate approach to the organization of the entire process is necessary. Effective public consultations should meet legal standards (formal obligations resulting from legal stipulations) and non-legal ones (related to ethical principles of public life, discussion skills, respecting different opinions, etc.) In addition, they should be organised in accordance with the following rules (Długosz and Wygnański, 2005):

1. Respect for the general public wealth and general interest, not only the consultation participants;
2. Legality – compliance with legal rules regarding consultations;
3. Representativeness and equality – all willing local actors have the right to participate in consultations, taking into account the degree of their representativeness for a particular type of social interests, diversified powers and functions they fulfil in public life;

4. Reliability – opinions presented are prepared reliably and carefully, they reflect real views of groups represented by social partners, and the administration undertakes activities that will ensure the highest organizational standard of consultations;

5. Continuity and feedback – the consultation process is continuous, planned and aimed to achieve the declared goal, it is not organized ad hoc, under the influence of demands (“forced consultations”) or growing social tensions. Consultation participants have the right to expect a public reaction to the opinions expressed, both during the debate and its summary;

6. Coordination – the consultation process has a coordinator, a person with important political functions in the public unit (city president), with full involvement of the administration subordinate to him.

In order to preserve the above principles, it is worth engaging specialists who can explain the mechanisms of the functioning of the authorities, bureaucratic and budgetary constraints, and convince the inhabitants to seek consensus to conduct social consultations. Frequently, when it comes to contacts with the administration at a distance, i.e. through surveys, petitions, etc., the inhabitants tend to express cynicism and distrust. It is therefore worth using a variety of consultation instruments based on face-to-face meetings and dialogue that allow the achievement of satisfactory results.

#### 4. ASSUMPTIONS OF COMMUNAL REGENERATION PROGRAMMES

Territorial self-governments take various actions aimed at stimulating local development. One of such initiatives is regeneration, which, according to the Act of 9 October 2015 on urban regeneration, signifies the process of dealing with crisis situations of degraded areas (*Ustawa o rewitalizacji...*, 2015). The process includes integrated activities reducing primarily negative social phenomena, in particular, unemployment, poverty, crime, low education, and insufficient participation in public and cultural life. In addition, it also influences at least one of the following spheres: economic, environmental, spatial, functional, and technical.

Municipalities can carry out the regeneration process based on two options. The first one is communal regeneration programmes adopted by the resolution of a communal council on the basis of the Act of 8 March 1990 on local self-government. In that case, the implementation of the programme takes place through the use of local government and private funds. As for the second option, it consists of communal regeneration programmes prepared in accordance with the Urban Regeneration Act of 9 October 2015 or the Urban Regeneration Guidelines in Operational Programmes for 2014–2020 (*Wytyczne w zakresie rewitalizacji...*,

2015). That procedure offers the opportunity to use EU budget funds. The aforementioned act and guidelines indicate that activities related to the preparation, execution, and evaluation of urban regeneration should be carried out in an open and transparent manner with the active participation of stakeholders. The notion of stakeholders encompasses public institutions as well as residents of the area of regeneration, and proprietors, or perpetual lessees of real estate. Furthermore, it includes real estate management entities based in the area, including housing cooperatives, housing communities, and community housing associations, as well as other residents of the commune, and entities operating or intending to run an economic and community activities in the commune, including non-governmental organizations and informal groups. A significant number of entities participating in urban regeneration does not mean that the expectations and preferences of each group will be fully taken into account. Most important is the public interest assessed for the entire city, i.e. obtaining a common value for all members of a given community referred to as *added public value* (Stawasz, 2017). Therefore, the inclusion of local stakeholders is necessary to improve communication with the authorities, and to achieve lasting results in a given area. Their participation is necessary at every stage of the activities carried out, and should occur through the forms of social consultations indicated in the Act. The above-mentioned consultations include the following:

1. Collecting comments in paper or electronic form, including via electronic communication, in particular electronic mail or forms placed on the local self-government website in the Public Information Bulletin,

2. Meetings, debates, workshops, study walks, surveys, interviews, use of representative groups, or gathering oral comments.

At the same time, the legislator stipulated that at least one form of consultation referred to in item 1 and at least two in point 2 should be used in the whole urban regeneration process.

An urban regeneration programme should include in particular (*Ustawa o rewitalizacji...*, 2015):

1. A detailed diagnosis of the area of regeneration;
2. A description of the links between the communal regeneration programme and the strategic documents of the commune;
3. A description of the condition of the area after regeneration;
4. Regeneration goals and corresponding directions of activities;
5. Description of regeneration projects;
6. Mechanisms for integrating activities;
7. Estimated financial framework of the municipal regeneration programme;
8. Description of the management structure for the implementation of the communal regeneration programme;
9. System for monitoring and evaluation the municipal regeneration programme.

The key role of social participation is stressed at every stage of the regeneration process, i.e. during diagnosis, programming, implementation, and monitoring (*Zasady programowania przedsięwzięć...*, 2016). It has been indicated that the authorities should ensure the most advanced forms of participation at least at the stage of designating the area of regeneration, and preparation of the regeneration programme. Providing a wide range of participants in the regeneration process involved in the discussion is to enable a substantive debate, and building trust between the authorities and the socio-economic partners in the area.

## **5. STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AS PART OF URBAN REGENERATION PROGRAMMES**

In the theory of local self-government finances, one principle is crucial: the effectiveness of spending funds is higher as the authorities responsible for the implementation of public tasks are closer to the residents. It is about better identification of the needs of local communities, and the supervision over the authorities exercising it. It should be noted that the principle applies to active participation of residents in the decision-making process. Therefore, the effectiveness of financial policy depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of social participation. Urban regeneration programmes created by Polish local governments, including those in small towns, are part of the financial policy. That is due to the fact that they allow the acquisition of EU funding to reduce local problems in the social, economic, technical, and environmental spheres. The questions then arise whether inhabitants feel responsible for the implementation of the policy, whether they participate in the preparation of urban regeneration programmes actively and, consequently, what the level of effectiveness of social participation is.

Taking into account the above questions, I decided to analyse the level of involvement of residents in public consultations as part of the preparation of urban regeneration programmes in selected 20 small towns (less than 20,000 inhabitants). The towns selected for analysis are located in different parts of Poland (Fig. 1). Therefore, attempts were made to take into account differences related to the level of civil society, and attitudes to participation in community life, which occur throughout the country.

In the case of all the towns, urban regeneration programmes currently in force have been taken into account, with their impact extending beyond 2020. In most cases, the development of the programmes will enable the use of EU funds available under regional operational programmes for 2014–2020. The analysis applied to the content of urban regeneration programmes originating from selected cities regarding socialization of regeneration. I examined the type of instruments of social participation applied, and the number of people who participated in these programmes.



Fig. 1. Location of Polish small towns that were selected for the analysis

Source: own work.

It proved that the range of participation instruments used in selected small towns was very diverse (Tab. 2). The most popular tools were comment forms, meetings with residents, and surveys. They were used in all the examined cities. The first of them was used to collect feedback from residents regarding particular parts of urban regeneration programmes. Open meetings served to provide information on the assumptions of regeneration, the progress of work on the programmes, as well as to discuss local problems and methods for resolving them. In turn, the aim of the surveys was to identify social, economic, environmental, spatial-functional, and technical problems occurring in given areas of towns.

Table 2. The instruments of social participation used in the creation of urban regeneration programmes in selected towns in Poland

No.	Town	Province	Comment form (electronic or paper version)	Meetings with residents	Surveys	Workshops	Individual in-depth interview	Research walks (local visions)	Other
1.	Kamienna Góra	Dolnośląskie	x	x	x				
2.	Kowary		x	x	x	x		x	
3.	Chełmno	Kujawsko-pomorskie	x	x	x	x			x
4.	Chełmża		x	x	x	x			
5.	Radzyń Podlaski	Lubelskie	x	x	x				
6.	Terespol		x	x	x	x			
7.	Zielonka	Mazowieckie	x	x	x	x	x		
8.	Łaskarzew		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
9.	Przeworsk	Podkarpackie	x	x	x	x			
10.	Leżajsk		x	x	x	x	x		x
11.	Siemiatycze	Podlaskie	x	x	x				
12.	Wysokie Mazowieckie		x	x	x				
13.	Ustka	Pomorskie	x	x	x	x		x	
14.	Bieruń	Śląskie	x	x	x	x	x		
15.	Radlin		x	x	x	x			
16.	Łędziny		x	x	x		x		x
17.	Ustroń		x	x	x	x	x		
18.	Złotów	Wielkopolskie	x	x	x	x			x
19.	Darłowo	Zachodnio-pomorskie	x	x	x	x	x	x	
20.	Sławno		x	x	x	x			

Source: author's work on the basis of urban regeneration programmes in the selected 20 small towns.

Among the surveyed cities, in several cases, civic participation was based on other instruments, i.e. cooperation with groups of representatives (including Chełmno and Łaskarzew), and a focused group interview (Leżajsk).

It should be noted that participation instruments requiring greater involvement on the part of city authorities, i.e. individual in-depth interviews, or research walks, which were found to be very attractive for inhabitants, were not used frequently. Among the examined towns, Łaskarzew, Darłowo and Leżajsk were found to be using the broadest catalogue of socialisation instruments.

It can be concluded that, with few exceptions, not all opportunities for establishing civil dialogue have been used. Moreover, the analysis of the content of urban regeneration programmes proved that traditional communication channels were used to promote social consultations, mainly town websites and posters. Advertising in social networks, which is rather popular among young people, was found to be very rare. That might had increased participation in that social group, and efficiency of urban regeneration.

As part of urban regeneration programmes, social consultations were held in two stages. The first included diagnosis and programming (discussions about the degraded area, regeneration area, vision and objectives, and regeneration projects). The second applied to changes and additions applying to entire urban regeneration programmes. The latter was characterized by a very low interest of the residents - in many towns not even a single comment to the programmes was recorded. The first stage was far more popular. From the analysis of the content of urban regeneration programmes, it can be concluded that among all of the instruments used for public consultations, the most popular were surveys. Therefore, I decided to analyse that participation instrument.

Table 3 provides data on the participation in surveys. For the sake of comparison, the turnout in given towns in the last elections for local municipal councils in 2014 was also presented. Local government elections have been the most popular of all the forms of social consultations for many years. From all territorial levels, the highest turnout in those elections were noted for municipal councils. Nationally, that amounted to 48.13%. The comparison between the turnout in the elections and the participation in surveys within the framework of urban regeneration programmes enables one to draw conclusions regarding the attitudes of residents to programme documents, and their engagement in development issues.

The analysis indicated that only eight of the examined towns exceeded the average voter turnout for the whole country, *i.e.* 48.13%. Terespol achieved the best results in that respect. Almost 63% of those entitled to vote appeared. The lowest turnout was noted in Chełmża. Only 36.64% of voters actually cast their votes. It should also be stated that there was no relationship between electoral activeness and the participation in the development of urban regeneration programmes. Among the towns with the highest voter turnouts which exceeded the average for Poland, only Terespol and Bieruń were at the forefront of involvement in the programmes.

Table 3. Involvement of residents in surveys as part of urban regeneration programmes and local government elections

No.	Town	Province	Number of inhabitants	Number of respondents	Number of voters	The number of respondents to the number of voters ratio [%]	Turnout in local government elections in 2014 [%]
1.	Kamienna Góra	Dolnośląskie	19,457	367	16,604	2.21	47.10
2.	Kowary		11,130	135	9,068	1.49	46.49
3.	Chełmno	Kujawsko-pomorskie	19,926	639	15,624	4.08	42.73
4.	Chełmża		14,715	191	11,577	1.65	36.65
5.	Radzyń Podlaski	Lubelskie	15,860	63	13,010	0.48	55.63
6.	Terespol		5,610	360	4,736	7.60	52.26
7.	Zielonka	Mazowieckie	17,528	154	13,606	1.13	55.79
8.	Łaskarzew		4,879	49	3,969	1.23	62.81
9.	Przeworsk	Podkarpackie	15,479	101	12,943	0.78	50.81
10.	Leżajsk		13,988	160	11,849	1.35	46.31
11.	Siemiatycze	Podlaskie	14,585	54	12,309	0.4	47.40
12.	Wysokie Mazowieckie		9,405	49	7,691	0.64	54.52
13.	Ustka	Pomorskie	15,774	70	12,969	0.54	40.87
14.	Bieruń	Śląskie	19,663	386	15,608	2.47	51.45
15.	Radlin		17,857	96	14,086	0.68	45.34
16.	Lędziny		16,758	208	13,042	1.59	50.48
17.	Ustroń		16,050	291	14,214	2.05	42.49
18.	Złotów	Wielkopolskie	18,491	500	14,809	3.38	45.62
19.	Darłowo	Zachodnio-pomorskie	13,918	100	12,949	0.77	38.96
20.	Sławno		12,641	293	10,236	2.86	44.39

Source: author's work on the basis of urban regeneration programmes and data from the Central Statistical Office and Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza (State Election Commission).

Despite that, in all the surveyed towns, the attendance at social consultations was at a very low level. Terespol from the Lubelskie province was a leader with the highest participation in the survey, which amounted to 7.6%. The runner-up was Chełmno from the Kujawsko-Pomorskie province with 3.52 percentage points less than Terespol. At the bottom of the list there was Siemiatycze from

the *podlaskie* province, where only 0.4% of the voters were involved in urban regeneration programmes. It should be noted that only in seven of the examined towns, participation in public consultations exceeded 2%. Radzyń Podlaski and Wysokie Mazowieckie were two interesting cases. Those towns recorded very low shares of residents in the development of urban regeneration programmes (approx. 0.5%), while in the local government elections they were among the leaders in terms of attendance.

It should be emphasized that in the majority of the cases participation in social consultations had an age constraint. That meant that residents under 18 years of age could also participate. If, as a reference point for the number of study participants, one considered the total number of city residents, the turnout in question would be even lower.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Social participation creates new opportunities for influencing local development. However, it must be noted that, like any instrument, it also carries some risks. Public consultations as a form of social participation in cases imposed by law is obligatory. Those include communal regeneration programmes that should include social involvement. The analysis carried out in selected small towns confirmed low effectiveness of social participation processes within the framework of urban regeneration programmes. The low numbers of discussion participants contradict the very idea of urban regeneration, which should be based on broad social participation in the local development process. It turned out that even in towns that were characterized by above-average turnouts in local government elections, the inhabitants were not very willing to participate in social consultations in the field of urban regeneration. The most popular consultation instrument were surveys concerning the designation of a degraded area and an area for regeneration. That confirms the common assumption that residents prefer a more anonymous way of expressing their opinions. Meetings, debates, and workshops were not so popular. The very nature of an urban regeneration programme may constitute a problem in that case. It is quite a complex document, and residents could be afraid that during direct meetings their lack of knowledge of the assumptions and contents of the programme would be exposed.

The errors on the part of entities responsible for conducting consultations could also be the reason for low attendance and a lack of representation. The list of such faults usually includes a lack of appropriate publicity concerning consultations, a narrow circle of invited communities, and too short a time between the announcement of consultations and their implementation. Additionally, the

analysed towns used a narrow range of participation instruments. Workshops that have a very practical dimension were not used in every case. The use of individual in-depth interviews and research walks was found to be very rare. Those tools are more labour-intensive and cost-effective when compared to others, and that seems to be the reason for their low popularity.

To sum up, it must be stated that the low effectiveness of social participation in the urban regeneration programmes conducted in the towns selected for the survey was a consequence of both low social activeness, and some organizational errors committed by municipal authorities.

The low effectiveness of social participation, especially in the area of consulting programme documents, leads to a situation where some of the inhabitants' needs are not included in a town's development policy. Despite the fact that civil society has been steadily developing in Poland since 1990, there are still large needs in the area of shaping awareness and attitudes among local communities. Therefore, it is crucial to present the benefits that residents can enjoy through participation. Furthermore, the attitude of local authorities, which should be more involved in a social dialogue, and the application of a wide range of social participation instruments, is also critical.

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