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## NIMBY SYNDROME AS AN EXAMPLE OF A SOCIAL CONFLICT WITH LOCAL CHARACTERISTICS

### Abstract

The article presents NIMBY syndrome as a type of local conflict, taking into account phases of development, its levels and methods of mitigation. NIMBY syndrome has been portrayed as a conflict affecting the lives of local communities, drawing on the classic concept of conflict. The article also provides an analysis of investment in renewable energy sources as potentially affected by NIMBY.

### Key words

NIMBY syndrome, local conflict, renewable energy sources.

### Introduction

NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) is a term used to describe the attitude of people who object to the location of an investment in their immediate surroundings, without questioning the necessity of the project. Investments that can generate such conflicts are seen as burdensome, life-threatening or health-threatening, and as having a negative impact on the environment. Examples of such facilities include penal institutions, psychiatric hospitals, landfill sites, waste incineration plants or crematoria: the list is long and depends on socio-cultural conditions and the level of social awareness. However, it is worth emphasizing that although all these investments are socially acceptable, their location remains problematic.

Other acronyms also appear in the literature, defining the nature of localization problems, e.g.:

- total lack of acceptance for the execution of a given type of investment: NOPE (Not On Planet Earth) and BANANA (Build Absolutely Nothing And Near Anywhere)
- non-acceptance of the authority for the investment: NIMEY (Not In My Election Year) and NIMTOO (Not In My Term Of Office),

It is also worth noting the acronym PIMBY (Please In My Back Yard), which highlights the fact that even the most unwanted and protested investments may produce benefits for local communities, resulting from the creation of new jobs or increased tax revenues. Often, however, both profits and losses are difficult to estimate, and the emotional background of NIMBY syndrome makes it difficult to make a rational assessment of the potential threat.

### NIMBY as a type of social conflict

The theory of conflict is one of the leading orientations in social sciences, and the concept of conflict is still very popular among sociologists. Conflict theory originates from Karl Marx, but its development in the middle of the 20th century was facilitated by, among others, Max Weber and Georg Simmel. Marx believed that conflict is an immanent part of social life, that it is the basis of social change, and that its causes are related to the unequal distribution of wealth between dominant and subordinate communities [1]. Weber criticized Marx's theoretical assumptions concerning the predominantly revolutionary and inevitable nature of conflicts [1]. Simmel, like Marx, claimed that conflict was ubiquitous, but criticized the Marxist idea of conflict as a revolution, highlighting its positive effects [1].

Social conflict is an interdisciplinary phenomenon, which is why it is important to take into account both social and psychological premises when analyzing it. Due to the diversity of form, extent or duration, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive definition of social conflict. Janusz Sztumski believes that the term "social conflict" is used to describe various phenomena, "(...) in which elements of struggle are manifested, or even fierce struggle, which take place both between individual people and between any large groups of people", emphasizing that it occurs not only on a micro or macro scale, but also on a mega scale [7]. He also draws attention to the fact that social conflicts are:

- normal - they do not necessarily and in most cases should not be considered in terms of pathology,
- ubiquitous - there are no social structures that are free from conflict,
- continuous - every conflict overcome can be the seed of another,
- useful - they are a stimulus for innovation and development.

In the literature on the subject, there are many typologies of social conflicts, and it is difficult to consider any of them to be exhaustive in the context of such a complex phenomenon. Janusz Sztumski proposed his own typology: based on the pre-existing typology, he distinguished social conflicts by [7]:

1. Entities

- *unit (unit-unit),*
- *collective (unit-community, community-community),*

2. Extent

- *micro scale - conflicts in small groups or communities whose members know one another,*
- *macro scale - conflicts between social groups existing in a given society,*
- *mega scale - these conflicts cover many societies,*

3. Subject

- *economic - related to the production of goods and division of labor,*
- *layered - linked to stratification of society,*
- *class - resulting from class struggle, which can manifest itself on the ideological, economic and political level,*
- *political - conflicts of an international or interstate character, based on various "raison d' être",*
- *ideological - they are based on different ideological values, which are the ideological basis of a given group,*
- *cultural - they result from the clash of different cultures or subcultures,*
- *values and goals - they are based on divergent values and goals pursued by specific social groups,*

4. Means of manifestation

- *open,*
- *concealed,*
- *managed,*
- *spontaneous,*
- *mild,*
- *severe,*

The presented division is not separable.

5. Duration

- *long-term,*
- *short-term,*

6. Community character

- *internal (egoistic interests of people) and external (conflicts of interests of different groups),*
- *antagonistic and non-antagonistic,*
- *main and secondary,*

7. Causes of the conflict

- *objective,*
- *subjective,*

8. Effects

- *direct,*
- *intermediate.*

The above typology shows that NIMBY syndrome can be considered as a type of conflict occurring on micro or macro scales, at the basis of which people's economic activity may lie. This is generally an open conflict, and its duration may vary. However, the fact of its spatial character is also extremely important. Elżbieta Michałowska, citing Drzazga, claims that: "*Spatial* social conflicts are different from others, because their source is the way humans use space and its external effects" [5]. The environment is the subject of a dispute in a spatial conflict, while the parties involved in the dispute are members of a given society.

Conflicts leading to NIMBY syndrome, in some cases (e.g. investments in biogas plants or wastewater treatment plants), can also be considered in terms of environmental conflicts. The construction of a given object, around which the protest is focused, may have a negative impact on the natural environment, and may lead to its contamination or aesthetic deterioration.

### **Levels of NIMBY phenomenon**

Four levels of NIMBY syndrome can be distinguished: economic, political, ethical and social [2]:

- Economic level - occurs when the axis around which NIMBY syndrome happens is “common good”. This is a situation where the costs are borne by a relatively small number of people, while the benefits are reaped by a much wider group. A wastewater treatment plant or waste incineration plant located in a given area may be a source of problems for the immediate environment, but a large number of people will benefit from it.
- Political level - involves a lack of confidence in authority and business representatives. In this instance, doubts are expressed about the intentions of the authorities (related to the location of an investment in a given area), whether the location is in the interest of the community, and whether the decision was taken in a correct and non-corrupt manner.
- Ethical level - submission of individual good over the common good, the manifestation of a selfish attitude.
- Social level - emphasizing the role of the entities (individuals and groups) involved in the conflict.

### **Parties involved in conflicts leading to the occurrence of NIMBY syndrome**

Various actors may be involved in conflicts involving the location of potentially disruptive installations: inhabitants, authority (both at local and higher level), media, investors, formal organizations (e.g. pro-ecological), and academic authorities. These entities may hold different positions: they may support or oppose investment. They may also be differentiated in terms of their level of involvement in the conflict or the moment of joining it.

It is worth emphasizing the role of the media here, because the level of reliability of their information and their impartiality can influence the course of the protest. One should also keep in mind the impact of the Internet: it is not only one of the easily accessible sources of information, but also a platform for people with similar views or problems. An example is the [www.stopwiatrakom.eu](http://www.stopwiatrakom.eu) website, which focuses on providing arguments for wind energy opponents.

In most cases, among the local community, in the immediate vicinity where the investment is planned, there will be more opponents than supporters. However, as the distance from the investment increases, there will be increased support for it. Even geographically remote communities may express their opposition because they are afraid of indirect losses (e.g. increased traffic) [3]. The strength of opposition to the planned installation also depends on the type of facility [4]: whether they are public utilities (e.g. libraries, rehabilitation facilities, hospitals, garbage dumps, airports) or private facilities. Fig. 1 shows the classification of public buildings by their preferred distance from the place of residence.

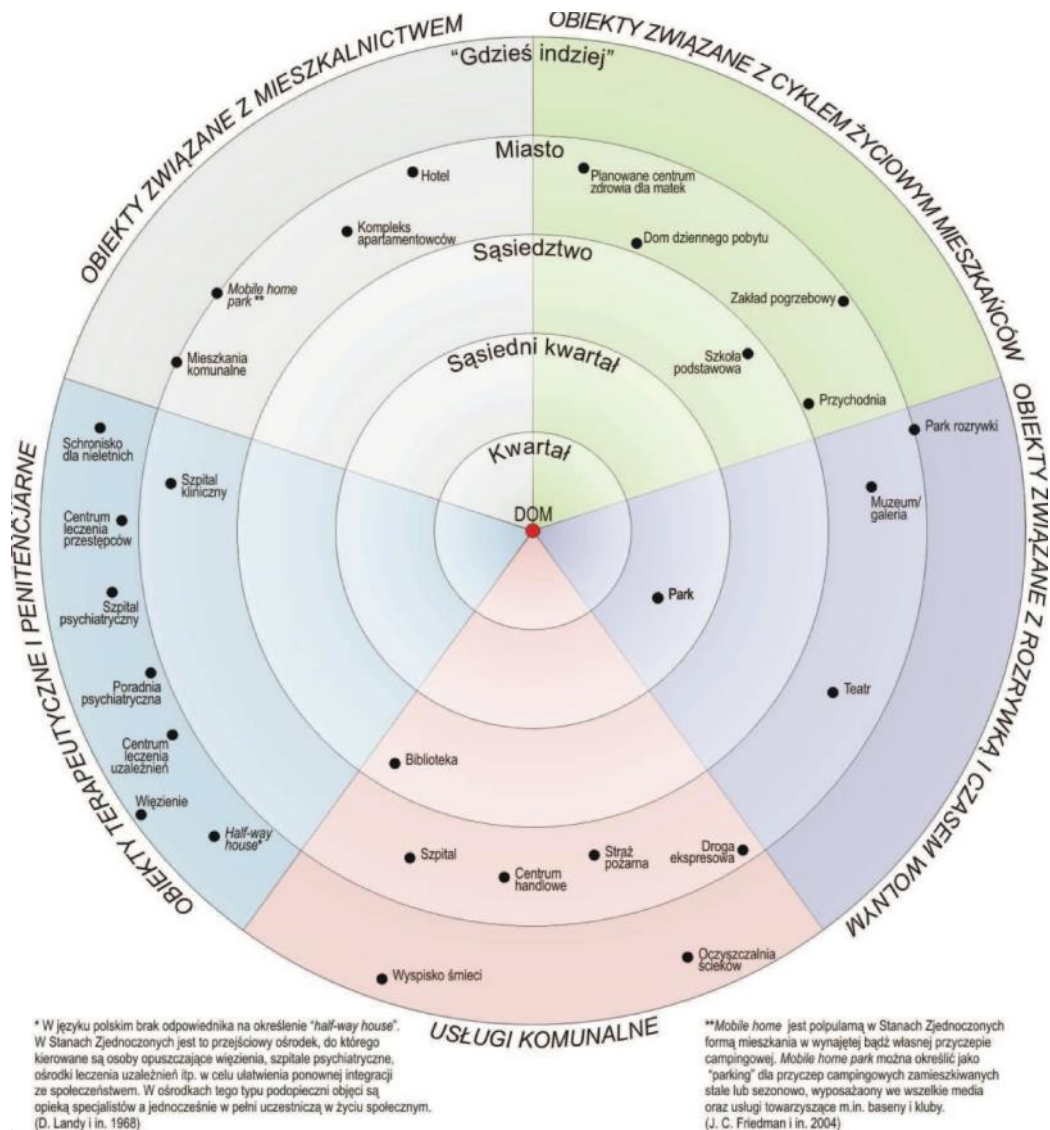


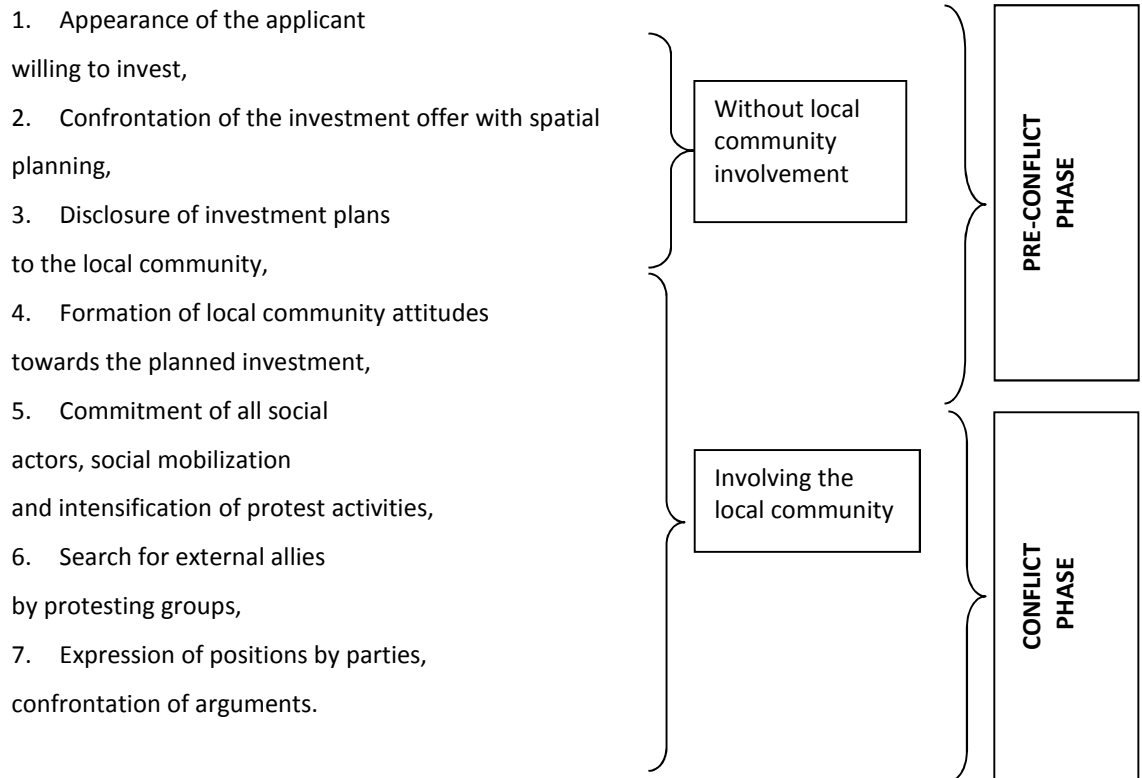
Fig. 1 Preferred distance from the place of residence to selected public utilities

Source: [4]

As can be seen in the figure above, respondents accept parks, theaters and primary schools in their immediate vicinity. On the other hand, objects such as garbage dumps, sewage treatment plants, prisons or therapeutic centers they would happily locate as far away from their homes as possible, in an unspecified place. Undoubtedly, investments associated with the NIMBY syndrome are centered on various social actors. Not all are involved in the conflict directly. They are also in different relationships with one another. Sometimes, supporters or opponents are internally inconsistent, and the choice of one side of the conflict is dictated by different factors. Depending on the type of investment, the territorial scope of the protests may vary.

### NIMBY conflict phases

The topic of NIMBY conflicts occurring in Łódź Voivodeship was the interest of Prof. Elżbieta Michałowska, PhD, hab. University of Łódź. Based on a content analysis of press materials on NIMBY conflicts in Łódź Voivodeship between 2001 and 2005, and unstructured interviews with conflict participants, the following stages of the conflict were distinguished [5]:



The scenario presented shows that the local community is not a partner in the negotiating process, and that no public consultation or information campaigns are carried out at the decision stage. Ignoring the local community in the first phase of the investment process can lead to conflicts later in the period of implementation of the project.

### Effects of NIMBY syndrome

Social conflicts can have both positive and negative effects. They can affect all the entities involved. NIMBY conflicts can integrate the local community, increase its social capital and provide new opportunities. "The analysis of conflicts in the Łódź region has shown that thanks to these the communities have learned to express their views and fight together for a cause. And even conflicts unresolved in favor of the inhabitants caused greater integration of the community and increased its activity. (...) participants in the protests see their rights as citizens more consciously, and take different forms of activity in associations and other forms of social self-organization, thus participating in an important process of building civil society. Where local authority and self-government and residents are on one side and cooperation is tightening, the level of citizens' trust in authority grows" [5]. However, the negative effects should not be forgotten. They may affect individuals as well as the local community or investor, increasing the level of stress. The obvious negative outcome for an investor may be the blocking of the investment or increased costs and extending its duration. For the authorities, especially when they are in opposition to the protesters, the conflict may be accompanied by a decline in confidence and support. For a community where some people support the investment, while others are opposed to it, this can lead to internal divisions and antagonisms, and also to social exclusion.

### Ways to relieve conflicts relating to NIMBY syndrome

The occurrence of conflicts is burdened with costs incurred by the parties involved. In order to avoid or mitigate the negative effects associated with NIMBY conflicts, appropriate actions are required. It is possible to distinguish two basic groups of such activities [2]: economic solutions and participatory solutions.

The use of economic solutions, in its simplest sense, involves offering compensation to the protesters. This may take the form of money, or be linked to community investments (e.g. road construction). In Poland this is not a popular practice [5]. Participatory solutions establish the local community as a partner in the decision-making process. Inclusion (at the earliest stage) of residents in investment-related activities reduces the possibility of

violent opposition. A referendum can also be such a type of solution, but it is potentially a problem solution because:

- *it is difficult to estimate the area on which a referendum should be conducted,*
- *there is a risk of low turnout, so the referendum will not be binding,*
- *the referendum can be politicized [3].*

Reliable and comprehensive information and treating the local community as one of the partners is not a common practice in Poland. It is important to emphasize the crucial role of negotiations, which should be undertaken in the earliest phases of investment and involve as many residents as possible, in addition to local leaders and those with the highest authority in the community. As shown in Fig. 2, among entities that provide information on energy issues, the most trusted for Poles are scientists and pro-ecological and consumer organizations; the least trusted are political parties, the government and the local authority. It is worth noting that the local authority has only 31% confidence. This may be due to the fact that in most cases self-government remains a party to the conflict, or is suspected of corruption or acting contrary to the interests of the community.

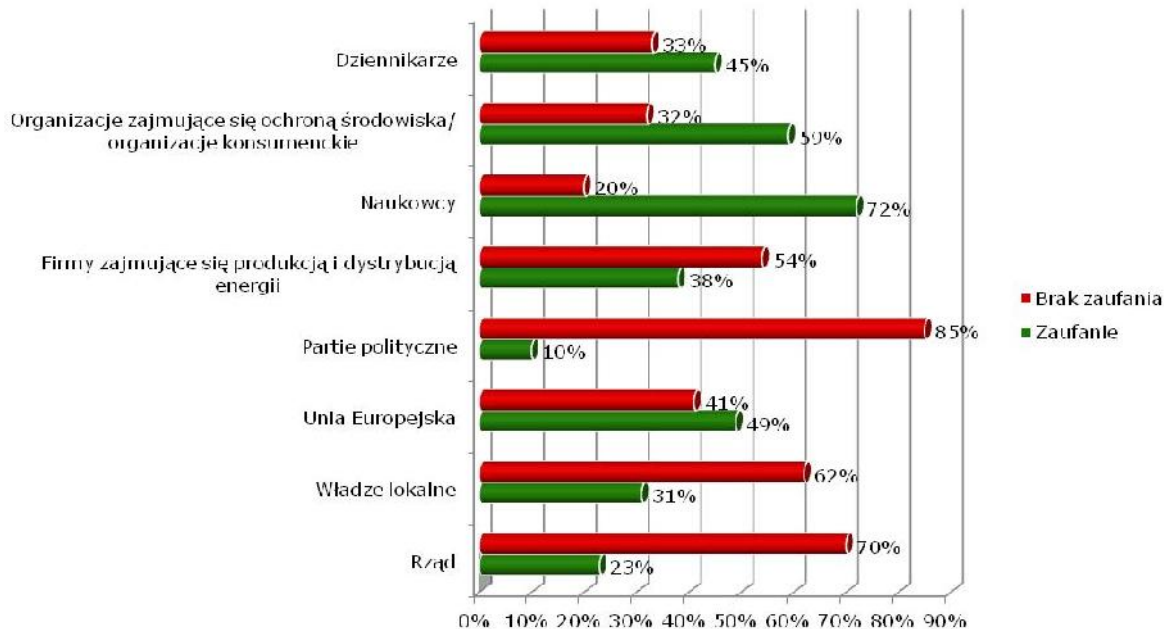


Fig. 2 Poles' trust towards individual entities that provide information on energy issues

Source: own study based on [6]

An important element of the investment process should be social dialogue. In Poland, however, there are no local leaders who would be able to look for constructive solutions in a competent way and effectively encourage residents to make rational decisions [5].

## Conclusion

In the Polish literature, relatively little attention has been paid to the NIMBY syndrome. However, this phenomenon has affected and will continue to affect processes, especially in the energy sector. Emerging public protests about the construction of biogas plants or wind farms can effectively block such investments for years. Examples are the protests by inhabitants of Jeźów, Konopnica, and Łaznów. NIMBY can be seen both as a negative and a positive phenomenon, largely caused by ignoring the local community in the decision-making process and treating it as an unnecessary stakeholder. It is therefore necessary to change the approach of investors, as well as making reliable and comprehensive information that generally available and potentially reducing the scale of protests. Also important are the factors of social awareness of the inhabitants, the understanding and acceptance of a given investment, and the presentation of the general good over particular interests. It is necessary to conduct in-depth studies of the NIMBY syndrome in Poland. It would enable not

only the identification of problematic issues, but also the provision of guidelines for counteracting related conflicts.

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