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**FROM NIMBY TO LAWMAKING. EXPLAINING THE IMPACT
OF THE ANTI-WIND FARM MOVEMENT ON WIND ENERGY
POLICY IN POLAND** <https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2026-0004>

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In the contemporary world, including Poland, there is an increasing variety of new social movements that affect energy transition. One of them is the movement against onshore wind energy, which developed in Poland in the second decade of the 21st century on the basis of numerous controversies around the location of wind farms. The aim of the article is to explain the impact of social protests against the location of wind farms on wind energy policy in Poland, by linking the concept of NIMBY (standing for ‘Not In My Back Yard’, is a pejorative term for residents who oppose proposed local developments—such as housing, infrastructure, or shelters—near their homes, despite acknowledging the projects’ necessity elsewhere) with the concepts of social movements and energy populism. The article analyses the protesters’ motivations, their actions on local and supra-local levels, as well as actions of public authorities and institutions in relation to the anti-wind farm opposition. The article makes use of numerous source materials, including local and regional press (from regions with the highest levels of wind energy development), open letters to public authorities from opponents of wind farm siting, articles published on the websites of opponents of wind farms, documents published by public institutions, and some results of a few case-studies conducted to date. The research demonstrated how local, spatially dispersed conflicts of a NIMBY character transformed into an anti-wind movement, articulating specific demands to those in power and disseminating negative opinions about large scale wind energy using populist rhetoric. The anti-wind farm movement has exerted an impact on higher-level Polish institutions, raising the profile of wind farm siting issues to the national level and, capitalizing on the favourable political situation, contributing to the introduction in 2016 of restrictive rules for wind farm development.

Keywords

wind energy, NIMBY, social movement, energy policy, energy populism, Poland

Introduction

The expansion of onshore wind power is accompanied by a gap between its high level of public acceptance (general support for its development) and numerous local protests against planned specific sites (Huber & Horbaty, 2012; Read et al., 2013). Thus, social protests are one of the most frequently cited barriers to wind energy development in the world in the literature (Read et al., 2013). In Poland, particularly since joining the European Union in 2004, there has been a dynamic development of wind energy, which was halted in 2016 due to the entry into force of the Wind Power Investment Act. In 2021, the installed capacity of onshore wind farms in Poland was 6.35 GW, providing almost 13% of the country's electricity (Energetyka wiatrowa, 2021). A study of opposition to the location of nuisance investments conducted across Poland for the period 2007–2014 showed that wind energy was the most common subject of protests by residents (Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2016). According to Igliński et al. (2016), surveys with investors in Poland indicated that 42% had experienced opposition from local communities, including environmental associations.

It is important to note the paucity of research on opposition to wind farms in Central and Eastern European countries, such as Poland, where the issue of energy transition is associated with the deep political conflict (Žuk et al., 2021). Hard coal and lignite still constitute the most important sources of energy production in Poland, although their significance has been systematically declining. Poland ranks 10th in the world in terms of documented coal reserves (Transformacja..., 2023), and coal is still regarded as a national treasure. In this context, the development of renewable energy and the transition away from coal are not only technological and financial issues, but also socio-cultural and ideological problems (Žuk & Szulecki, 2020).

Theoretical framework

NIMBY versus social movements

Social opposition to wind energy can have diverse motivations, goals, and dimensions, ranging from the local to the international. Therefore, different theoretical approaches are applied to describe it, in particular the concept of NIMBY and social movements. In existing research, the NIMBY category (place-based phenomenon) is used much more frequently than the concept of social movements (translocal/networked phenomenon). A search of the Web of Science database using the keywords wind energy, NIMBY, and social movement yielded twice as many results for combinations including NIMBY than for those including social movement.

The NIMBY syndrome, in its classical understanding, denotes the opposition of a local community to the siting of an investment in a specific place, while simultaneously supporting that type of investment in general (Dear, 1992). In the context of wind energy, this phenomenon was described by Krohn & Damborg (1999): people support wind energy on an abstract level but object to specific local projects because of the expected consequences primarily concerning noise and visual impact.

The use of the concept of NIMBY in scholarly literature has been questioned for the past two decades (Kempton et al., 2005; Wolsink, 2006). Despite the frequent reliance

of researchers on this approach, studies of social opposition to wind farms have led to the conclusion that the use of NIMBY (in its classical sense) does not adequately explain the attitudes of local wind farm opposition (Swofford & Slattery, 2010; Boyle et al., 2019), and that this concept oversimplifies the issue and ignores other significant factors such as environmental identity and place attachment (Olve et al., 2025). Already in 2007, Devine-Wright proposed a reconceptualization of the NIMBY response as a place-protective action founded upon processes of place attachment and place identity. The new social movements are an attribute of civil society and at the same time an instrument for practicing politics, but not in the sense of politics subordinated to the interests of the state as an organisational system. They are oriented toward social change and are at least partly non-institutionalized and informal in nature. At the same time, the pursuit of social change is understood here broadly – it can be a desire to introduce new norms and values or organisational solutions, but also a desire to preserve the status quo, opposition to change (Sztompka, 2009). Approaches to new social movements differ in the role of conflict. Della Porta and Diani (1999) and della Porta (2020) emphasize the fundamental role of conflict. Research on social movements in this view focuses on protest and its forms, identifying the repertoire of collective actions with which collective claims are advanced. Protest – that is, manifesting opposition – is the *modus operandi* of social movements (della Porta, 2008). Thus, this framing of the new social movements is most appropriate for use in analysing conflicts around investment locations arising from social disapproval. Through actions of a confrontational and controversial nature, social movements attract the attention of the media, and thus public opinion, and exert pressure on decision-makers (della Porta, 2008, 2020). The distinguishing features of social movements are informal networks linking various individuals, groups and organisations, as well as a collective identity.

In this context, one may also attempt a theoretical linkage between the NIMBY category and the concept of social movements. That is, how the NIMBY syndrome can be transformed into a social movement. Although NIMBY (typically local, tied to a specific place and community) and social movements (connecting multiple actors across different locations) may at first glance appear to be opposing categories, Wexler (1996) already observed that the zeal of people involved in NIMBY conflicts can provide energy for the creation of social movements. Woods (2003), in conceptualizing the notion of rural movements, gives the example of opposition to locally disruptive investments as one form of defending values associated with rural space (for example, anti-road-building protests in Britain in the 1990s were critical moments in the evolution of the British environmental movement; Seel, 2000). McGurty (2000) points out that protests against the siting of waste facilities transformed into the environmental justice movement by abandoning the rhetoric of ‘anywhere but not-in-my-backyard’ and redirecting their activity toward the goal of reducing the amount of waste produced, thereby limiting the need for new installations. However, in the case of protests against the construction of electricity transmission networks in Germany, it has been observed that they did not, for the most part, lead to the emergence of a social movement. The grid extension protests can be seen as an aggregation of single-point or single-region protests that are at times dominated by a NIMBY character, at other times by a NIABY (Not In Anyone’s Backyard) character, and that are only loosely connected. Although the problem was the same in many locations, opponents did not share a common diagnostic frame, and their proposed solutions differed (Neukirch, 2016).

The transformation of NIMBY-type protests into a social movement can also be observed in the case of urban movements in Poland. As Kubicki (2017) points out, protests initially oriented toward defending individual interests in the face of the investment boom in cities began to evolve into broader coalitions, creating a grassroots social movement focused on protecting valuable urban resources: spatial order and nature.

Energy populism

The notion refers to the opposition of citizens and social movements against green energy innovations (Kallman & Frickel, 2019; Dechezelles & Scotti, 2022). The central point of populist movements is opposition of ordinary people to elites, and in the case of right-wing populism, the dimension of the nation and the threat to national values and interests is important (Žuk & Szulecki, 2020). Right-wing populist parties are most often sceptical of the anthropogenic causes of global warming, toward a climate agenda and highlight the need to protect the national landscape (Otteni & Weisskircher, 2022; Hatakka & Välimäki, 2019). Similarly, scepticism toward climate change also characterizes the electorate of such parties (e.g., Poortinga et al., 2011; Žuk et al., 2021). The term energy populism thus refers to the links between public opposition to energy policy and RES and the rise of right-wing and populist movements sceptical of global warming (Dechezelles & Scotti, 2022). According to Lockwood (2018), in the structural view of energy populism, hostility to climate policy is rooted in structural changes driven by neoliberal globalization, which has led to a decline in both income and social status for groups ‘left behind’ by the process of socioeconomic change. In ideological terms, the content of populism is a worldview in which ordinary people, citizens, are ruled by multinational, global corporations and institutions. Large-scale RES investments lead to the ‘expropriation’ of local communities and drastic changes in the local landscape. Energy populism is built on the principle of stark contrasts like: beauty of the landscape versus corporate profits, nation versus foreign invasion, ordinary people versus elites and experts. Discursive interactions can play an important role in shaping the response of authorities. Politicians need arguments to legitimize their decisions, and specific discourse can provide them with such arguments (Bues, 2021).

Methods

The study used several complementary data sources (Table 1) and research methods to identify the three dimensions of the anti-windfarm opposition: 1) motivations of opponents, 2) repertoire of action, 3) the influence of anti-wind farm actions on supra-local policy decision. An analysis of articles published in local media, and interviews conducted with local informants in three municipalities where protests against wind power took place, were used to assess the motivations of protesters. The interview-data used in the analysis came from two sources:

- Field research conducted in two case studies¹ located in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship (municipality B.) and the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship (municipality K.). The study included interviews with representatives of the local community protesting against wind turbines, the municipal mayor, and a municipal planning of-

1 As part of a research project carried out by the author (2013–2016).

ficer (a total of 3–4 interviews in each municipality) (Bednarek-Szczepańska & Dmochowska-Dudek, 2016).

- A. Graczyk's monograph (2021), which presents the results of survey research and interviews conducted with residents of three municipalities in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship where conflicts over wind farm siting had occurred (only the data from U. municipality were used).

To assess the ways in which protesters manifested their opposition, we used an analysis of: the content of the local press, the content of published open letters addressed to various entities, particularly state authorities, and a review of news published by opponents of wind power on a dedicated website.

The content analysis of local and regional press from 2010–2022 included online editions of local and regional newspapers (see Appendix) from 7 Polish regions characterized by the highest level of wind energy development, measured by the number and capacity of installations. Articles were searched using keywords related to wind energy (in Polish: wiatrowa, wiatrak, wiatr). All press reports whose main topic was wind energy (321 articles from 19 titles of regional and local media) were included in the analyses. The first stage of content analysis of media reports was used to determine how the opponents of wind farms motivate their resistance. For each article, it was checked whether statements by opponents of investments were cited. Next, it was examined what arguments against the location of wind farms are presented in the media. The arguments were categorized based on categories of impacts (inspired by Vanclay, 1999; Hindmarsh, 2013; Borch, 2020). It was checked in how many media articles a given category of motivation of wind farm opposition appears and the summary importance of a given category in all the articles was examined. Three levels of importance were identified by examining how much of the volume of a particular article (in relation to its total volume) was devoted to a given category of motivation: 1 – category present, 2 – category emphasised, 3 – category dominant in the content of the article. The summary importance of a given category of motivation was also determined (by a numerical value). The relevant equation was as follows:

$$I = n_1 + 2n_2 + 3n_3$$

where:

I is the summary importance of the given category in all articles

n_1 is the number of articles in which the given category was present

n_2 is the number of articles in which the given category was emphasised

n_3 is the number of articles in which the given category was dominant/prevalent.

In order to identify the range of activities undertaken by protesters, a database of excerpts from articles in which these activities were reported was created. The assumption was made that local media reflect and represent the problems of local communities (Heidenreich, 2016; da Silva et al., 2021). Referring to Songsore & Buzelli (2015), the local media are thus treated as 'a mirror'. Excerpts from the articles were assigned codes and, based on these codes, the activities were categorized and shown graphically in the form of a diagram. Next, the content of six open letters published between 2010 and 2015, addressed by anti-wind organisations primarily to state authorities, was analysed to show how wind energy is framed by the organisations (see the Appendix). We then analysed topics of ar-

ticles published in the only nationwide website run by one of the organisations working against the expansion of wind farms.

Table 1. Sources of data on anti-windfarm movement in Poland

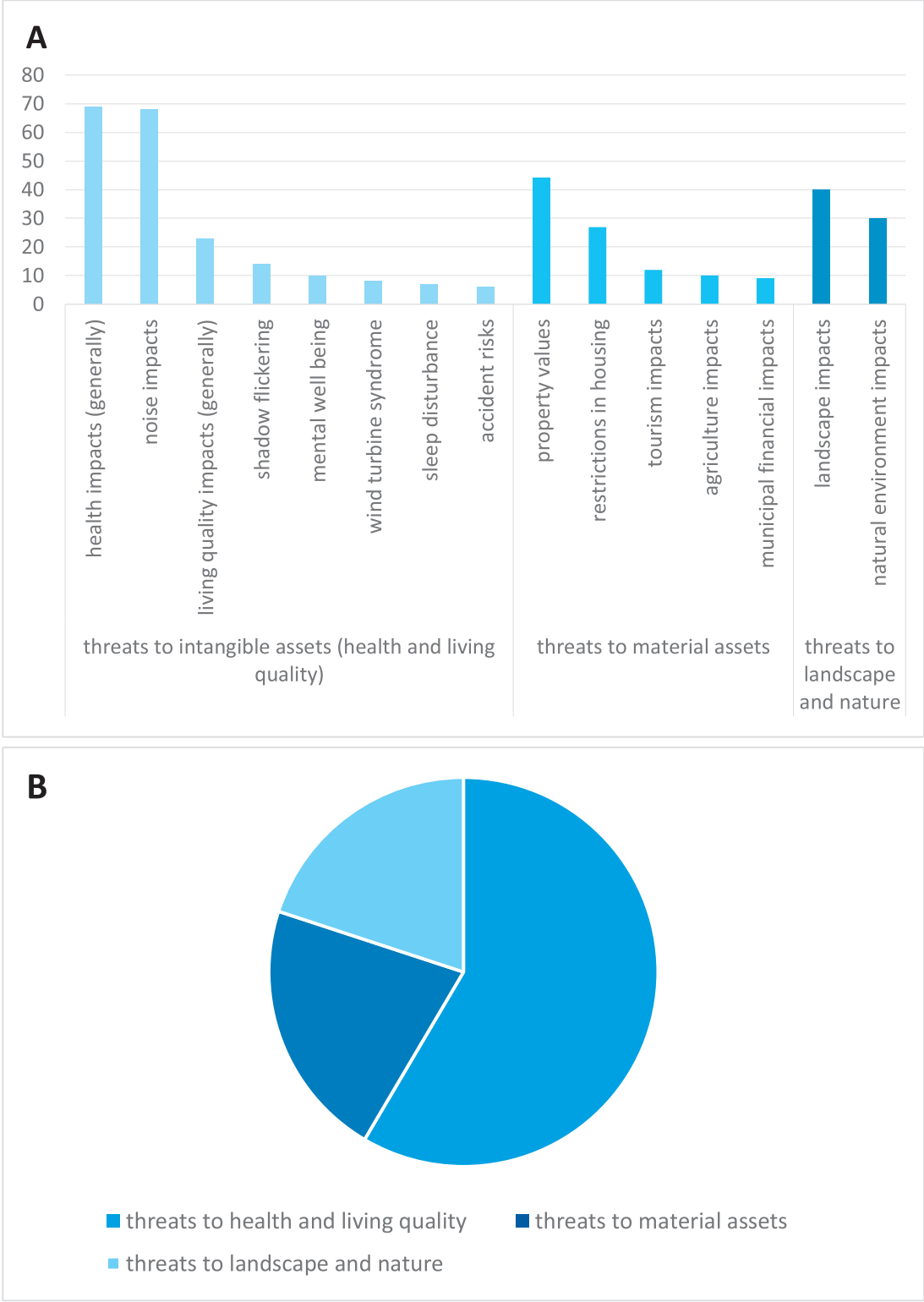
Issue	Data sources
Motivations of opponents	Interviews with local informants Local media
The ways in which opposition is manifested	Local media The website stopwiatrakom.eu Open letters to authorities
Influence on policy decisions	Documents published by the Parliament and other public institutions

Source: own elaboration.

Motivations of local wind farm opponents: beyond NIMBY?

An analysis of local media, conducted for the years 2010–2023, for 7 Polish regions, where 90% of all installations are concentrated, identified 321 media reports with wind energy as the main topic. In most of them, wind energy was presented as an object of local conflict with residents. The discourse around wind energy in the local media mainly involved local authorities (53% of all press reports analysed) and residents who were against wind farms (45%), while representatives of investors spoke much less frequently (23% of reports). Consequently, different views on wind energy clashed in the local press: local authorities most often pointed to financial benefits, while residents pointed to various threats to quality of life. A detailed analysis was carried out on 144 press reports quoting opinions and statements made by opponents of wind farms. By categorising statements indicating motivation of opponents, it was possible to determine which threats were most strongly emphasised. Harmfulness to health was the most common argument of wind energy opponents: it appeared in about half of the articles (harm to health functioned mainly as a general slogan – only occasionally was this argument elaborated or specified with potential consequences of living in the vicinity of wind installations, such as sleep disturbances, stress, or anxiety; Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2023). A similar number of articles pointed to noise. A decrease in property values, degradation of the landscape, negative impacts on nature, and the possibility of locating residential development appeared less frequently (Fig. 1A). Residents' concerns were accentuated to varying degrees in newspaper articles, and so the importance of a given category of threats in specific newspaper reports varied. The results of calculation of summary importance showed even more clearly that threats to people's health and quality of life play a dominant role in justifying opposition to wind farms in local press (Fig. 1B).

Fig. 1. The image of the motivations for opposition to the siting of wind farms based on statements by local opponents of wind farms published in the local press: (A) number of newspaper articles in which a particular motivation appeared (N=144); (B) summary importance of motivations (numerical value, according to the equation in the Methods section)



Source: own elaboration.

Assessing the actual motivations of anti-wind protesters is difficult due to the paucity of in-depth research. One question that can be asked is whether the arguments that appear most often in the statements to the media of opponents reflect their real motivations? Finding an answer to this question was helped by interviews with local informants carried out in several localities where significant activity of wind farm opponents was identified on the basis of media reports (Bednarek-Szczepańska & Dmochowska-Dudek, 2016; Graczyk, 2021), mainly in the north-western part of the country, where wind energy development was most intense.

Interviews with villagers and local authorities where wind turbines were planned to be located revealed that several groups of residents with different motivations for opposition could be distinguished. Firstly, there were landowners who protested against the proposed location on the grounds that their plots were not in the area of the wind farm, so they would not benefit financially. The unfulfilled expectation of financial compensation from the developer exacerbated the opposition, and the receipt of financial benefits mitigated (although not always) the protest (Graczyk, 2021). In peripheral areas with significant unemployment, the possibility of leasing agricultural land for wind installations meant a significant improvement in the material situation of farmers. Opposition to wind farms was generated by those whose plots of land were outside the area of the planned wind farm. In another case, respondents pointed to changes in the planned locations of the turbines by the developer as a cause of acute conflict (change of landowners who will derive income from the lease). Although, in interviews with local media, opponents created an image of wind energy threatening residents and the environment, the reasons for their opposition may have been quite different. Thus, cases that at first glance appear to be classic NIMBY responses turn out to be more complex, evolving even from YIMBY attitudes to NIABY positions (if not in my backyard, then in no one's backyard in my area).

The genesis of these protests stemmed from the fact that the first company was making some initial locations on some plots of land there. When the second company started to study the wind there additionally, they put up a mast there, and then it turned out that a few plots of land had been swapped, not on the plots that had been planned, partly it was supposed to be on other plots. And those people who were already prepared to actually have some money there and benefit from it, suddenly found out that they wouldn't have (local authority, K).

Some people who would not be the beneficiaries felt jealous of their neighbours that these wind turbines would be located on their plots and not on others. Such is our usual Polish envy. It is sad, but unfortunately this is often the case (local authority, B.).

At the start of the planning of the project, the majority of residents were in favour of building the park, until they were informed that only some would receive financial benefits. This information caused protests, which were pre-empted by concerns about the negative impact of the turbines on the natural environment. And when the residents on whose land the power plant was to be erected agreed to share the profits with other villagers, the protesters lifted their honour and refused to allow the construction, unwilling to admit their mistake (Graczyk, 2021, p. 65; based on interviews in U.).

The second group identified in area close to a large city were landowners with properties planned for sale for residential development. The siting of wind turbines would prevent neighbouring land from being allocated for development or reduce land values.

The greatest number of opponents of the wind farms are from the village of N. B., where their location has been unplanned from the very beginning. They are driven solely by the fear of losing the opportunity to sell land for development (resident, B.).

The next group were homeowners, or people genuinely concerned about the negative impacts of the wind farm where they live. Newcomers, or people who had invested in the purchase of a plot of land in the countryside and built a house, displayed this attitude to the greatest extent. They had paid a high price for their new place of residence and were therefore concerned about maintaining this high-quality space with which they had bound their lives.

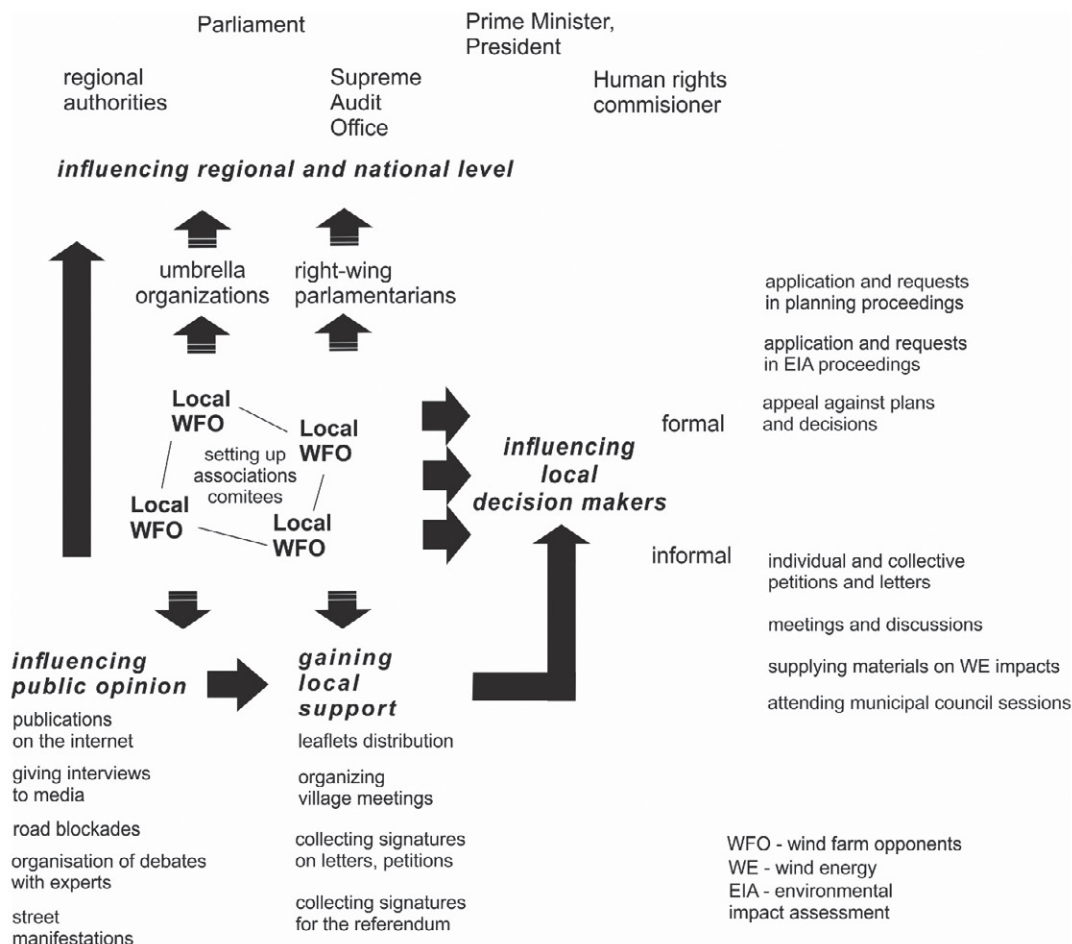
It is difficult to explain [the siting of the wind farms] to the residents who considered the municipality of B. as a green island until 2010 – they built their houses here and brought their families here – should they now leave it all behind? (local authority, B.)

Range of opponent's actions. Local level

Local anti-wind farm groups fought for a successful solution to a particular wind farm location problem, i.e., changing the location, reducing the number of turbines, or abandoning the investment. Based on local press analysis, the array of actions taken by the wind farm opponents was identified (Fig. 2). The most common form of activity was to address letters and petitions to local authorities expressing disagreement with the location of the wind power plant, preceded by the collection of signatures among local residents. Opponents of the investment participated in sessions of the municipal councils and submitted motions or draft civic resolutions. Such civic draft resolutions specified the minimum distance of wind installations from buildings proposed by residents. One of the activities was organisation of debates to which academics and local media were invited. The aim of these debates was to give a professional character to the protesters' arguments.

The media also reported highly informal methods of protest, such as organising pickets with banners, blocking a car park with tractors, or the disrupting of proceedings, with which they exerted strong pressure on the municipal council. Actions directed at the investor were rarely covered by the media (one case of blocking the entrance to a wind turbine construction site). The protesters' interactions with the investor consisted mainly of tripartite meetings (municipal authorities-residents-investor).

The windfarm opponents gained support among local residents and also influenced public opinion outside the local community. They organised meetings at which they presented arguments against the location of wind power plants, distributed leaflets; there were also cases of the village assembly adopting minimum distances of the investment from buildings and initiating a commune-wide referendum on the location of wind power plants. The media reported on networking and meetings of protesters from different locations. The establishment of committees and associations was common – such formalisation of activities mainly served to broaden the possibilities to participate in administrative proceedings (as a party to the proceedings).

Fig. 2. The repertoire of actions taken by wind farm opponents on the basis of local press analysis

Source: own elaboration.

Supralocal level – the emergence of the anti-wind farm movement

Some local activists took initiatives on a wider scale. A regional coalition was formed in two of the Polish voivodeships; in addition, three organisations identifying themselves as nationwide were founded, which carried out activities aimed at consolidating protesting groups from all over the country, informing the public and influencing state institutions: the president, the prime minister, and the parliament. One organisation set up a website, the Nationwide Service of Opponents of Windfarms Too Close to Homes. An inventory of protests against wind farms (based on reports from protesters) in Poland was maintained and published on this website. In 2011, protests from 195 localities were reported, while in 2015 there were reports from more than 500 localities (Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2016).

Opponents of windfarms established contacts with parliamentarians of right-wing parties, resulting in numerous so-called 'parliamentary interpellations' containing questions from MPs addressed to the Prime Minister or relevant ministers. The national coordinators of anti-wind farm movement also addressed open letters directly to the state authorities. Complaints were made to the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) and the Ombudsman. In 2014, even a hunger protest was organised in the parliament building. It was thus one

of the strongest forms of exerting informal influence on decision-makers. This is similar to the methods of professional groups fighting for salary increases or other social groups demanding certain benefits.

By 2016, a total of 73 speeches, interpellations, and petitions had been addressed to the council of ministers and parliament, including petitions of local associations (Uzasadnienie, 2016). The 2014 open letter to the Prime Minister was signed by 71 associations representing almost all regions of the country. In 2015, 134 associations signed the letter to the president, and in 2016, 104 organisations appeared under the open letter to the organs of state (the Speaker of the Sejm, the Senate, and the Prime Minister). Umbrella organisations consolidating opposition against wind farms thus succeeded in attracting broad support from NGOs, primarily small, local ones, but also tried to attract a few country-wide organisations playing a role in nature conservation, such as the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds, or the Committee for the Protection of Eagles (these associations were signatories of one of the open letters to the prime minister). However, it should be emphasized that the largest Polish bird conservation organisation, OTOP, was not a signatory to the open letters addressed to the government. OTOP issued its own documents, without taking a radical position².

The open letters published by anti-windfarm organisations are dominated by a narrative based on several key elements (Table 2). One of these is the most obvious argument of the threat posed by windfarms to natural and landscape values. An analysis of the documents indicates the important role of socio-political rhetoric. Local communities are framed as deprived of the right to decide where they live, against large global corporations that profit at their expense. Appeals to the national interest are present, by arguing that RES should support Polish entrepreneurship, and Poland should not be an area of expansion for foreign corporations. At the same time, energy localism – the development of prosumer energy – is advocated. The right-wing populist rhetoric is based on contrasts such as ordinary people versus global corporations, combined with the defence of national values.

In order to identify more broadly the ideas with which these supra-local anti-wind power organisations identified, the subject matter of articles published on the anti-wind power website (stopwiatrakom.eu) was reviewed (Fig. 3). Two periods were purposely selected for this study: the first period (2014–2015) comprised the years of peak development and heightened controversy surrounding wind energy, while the second period (2020–2021) comprised the years of stagnant development of onshore wind energy. In the first of the examined periods (2014–2015), the majority of articles conveyed information about local conflicts in Poland, about Polish wind energy policy, and its negative impacts. Thus, the stopwiatrakom.eu website then mainly served to share experiences and transfer knowledge useful to local groups. And in the 2020–2021 period, the vast majority of articles were about criticism of the European Union's climate policy, including denial of global warming. The titles of the articles used the terms *Eurokolkhoz*, *climate dictatorship*, *green dictatorship*, *climate gibberish*, *climate jihad*. Also present were texts on the important role of coal in the energy sector in Poland and around the world. Articles on wind power in the 2020–2021 period occurred less frequently than those devoted to criticizing climate

2 “Properly sited and distributed wind turbines do not have a significant negative impact on the environment, including avifauna. However, it should be noted that poorly located wind turbines may worsen environmental conditions, including bird populations” (OTOP, 2008).

policy, and mainly discussed the high cost of its development and the energy derived from it. In recent years, articles criticizing the development of offshore wind energy in Poland have also begun to appear on the portal. Thus, during the period of stagnation in the development of onshore wind power in Poland (related to the new laws, about which more later), the website of the anti-wind community served mainly to build a counter-narrative to the megatrend of climate transformation (Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2024).

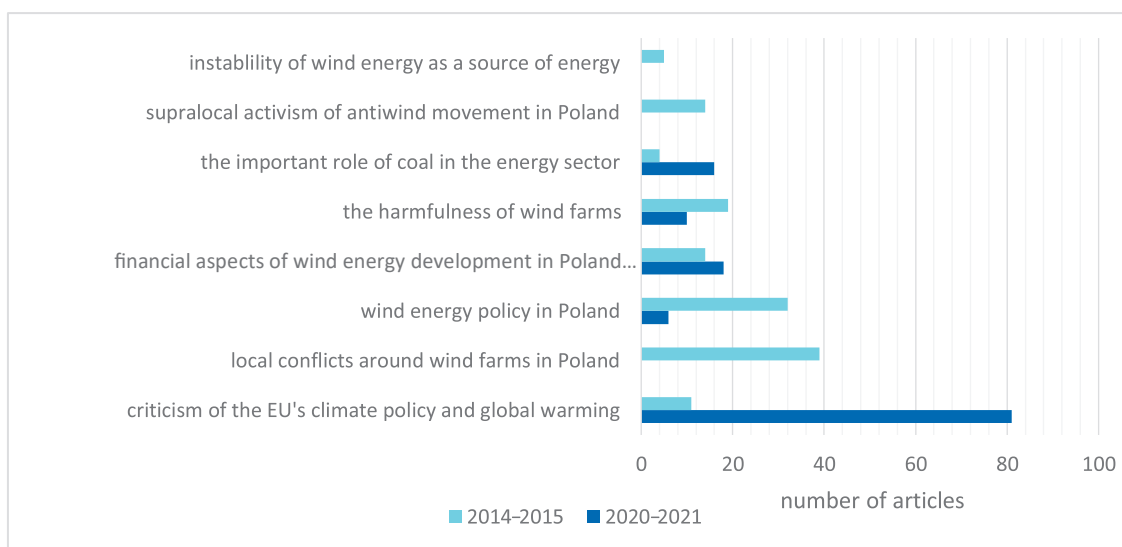
Table 2. The anti-windfarm framing in the open letters addressed to public institutions

Subject/issue	Framing	Quotations
Nature, space, and landscape	Wind farms as a threat to nature, landscape, and space	<i>There are many sites with special cultural, natural, and landscape value threatened by wind farms across Poland</i> (List, 2014a). <i>The rapid development of wind energy in Mazovia poses a threat to Europe's unique wealth of land, monuments, forms of nature conservation, forests, and geological resources</i> (List, 2014b). <i>Rural areas are treated as an industrial ground for corporate wind energy</i> (List, 2015).
Local communities	Without the right to decide, are defenceless against wind power investors	<i>Local communities are forced to live on wind farm sites</i> (List, 2016). <i>There is a lack of protection for the fundamental interests of local communities</i> (List, 2014a). <i>We refuse to continue to be treated in an objectified manner and to sacrifice our health and lives on the altar of a misguided pseudo-environmental policy</i> (Deklaracja, 2014). <i>They are denied the right to decide on the conditions and environment in which they live</i> (List, 2010). <i>Local people, who work hard every day, have, on the opposite side, the big foreign corporations, which are represented by the best (most expensive) law firms</i> (Deklaracja, 2014). <i>The public does not agree with the dependency and subordination to the business objectives of energy and financial corporations</i> (List, 2015). <i>On behalf of the thousands of Poles threatened today by large corporations...</i> (List, 2010)
Wind farms investors	Large foreign corporations profiting at the expense of local residents	<i>Eager to easy profits</i> (Deklaracja, 2014). <i>It is essential to condemn the existing practices of investors seeking to obtain their profits at the expense of rural society</i> (List, 2014b). <i>The various committees and advisory bodies dealing with renewable energy are mainly attended by wind lobbyists and their sponsored experts</i> (List, 2015).
Local authorities	Profit-motivated	<i>Local government officials mindlessly agree to litter the most beautiful areas of our province with monstrous wind farms</i> (List, 2014b). <i>They are blinded by the prospect of easy profits</i> (List, 2010).

Subject/issue	Framing	Quotations
National interest	Wind farms as a threat to national interest	<i>RES is supposed to create jobs in Poland, generate taxes for the Polish budget and support Polish entrepreneurship (List, 2014a).</i> <i>The territory of Poland should not become a raw material colony and a territory of expansion for global energy corporations that only transfer profits and contribute to the development of industry and jobs exclusively in their home countries (List, 2015).</i>
Alternative to wind energy	Prosumer energy as a future of RES	<i>Backyard turbine, photovoltaic panels are the future and reliability of electricity supply in rural areas (List, 2014b).</i> <i>Polish society expects solutions enabling the dynamic development of various forms of prosumer energy, which can become a pillar of energy and economic independence of Polish society, especially in rural areas. This will entail a huge development and transfer of technology and knowledge (List, 2015).</i>

Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 3. Subject of the articles published on the website run by a national anti-wind organisation (stopwi-atrakom.eu)



Source: own elaboration.

Impact of the anti-wind farm movement on wind energy policy

As a result of the activism of anti-wind farm movement, the issue of the location of wind farms has become an important element of public and political debate. Organisations whose activities were directed at national authorities clearly stated their goals in open letters. The overriding aim was to introduce a minimum distance of investments from buildings (2–3 km), moreover regulating the location of turbines in relation to naturally and culturally valuable areas, resolving the problem of existing controversial wind farms, and developing prosumer energy.

The influence of the anti-wind farm activism was evident at both regional and central policy levels. Planning and programming documents at the regional level mostly referred to the social controversy around wind energy. The most restrictive approach of the regional authorities was the designation of zones prohibiting wind energy development and minimum distances from development in the regional development plan (Plan, 2015; see Appendix), although this document was annulled as unlawful. Other documents set recommendations for minimum distances of wind turbines from buildings (Wojewódzki..., 2014; Studium, 2010; Plan, 2010; or indicated the need for public approval (Strategia wzrostu..., 2012; Plan rozwoju OZE, 2010).

Since 2011 the Supreme Chamber of Control (NIK) has launched nationwide audit activities of municipalities and county offices, covering a total of 70 local government units. As the NIK declares: *the increasing number of complaints and protests shows that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the investor to obtain social acceptance for the construction of wind power plants. The complainants to the Supreme Chamber of Control mainly raised concerns about guaranteeing them a safe, and at the same time environmentally friendly, neighbourhood for such investments, and safeguarding social interests* was indicated as the most important objective of the audit (Elektrownie wiatrowe, 2016). In the opinion of the NIK, the legitimacy of introducing a combined system for the location of wind farms taking into account a distance criterion, defining the permissible distance of the location of wind power plants from human habitats and buildings, while maintaining an indicator of the level of noise emitted, should have been considered. As early as 2012, the largest right-wing party, Law and Justice (then in opposition) had been proposing very restrictive changes to the law, in line with the protesters' expectations, but these changes were not adopted by the Sejm. With the party's coming to power in 2015, work on a new law regulating the location of wind power plants accelerated significantly (Sokolowski, 2017). The issue was addressed, among others, by the Sejm's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, which published a document condemning the uncontrolled expansion of large wind farms in rural areas and at the same time pointing out the need to use the energy potential of the Polish countryside through small-scale installations on households and farms (Dezyderat, 2015). Around the same time, there was also a political debate on landscape protection in Poland – legislative work on a law regulating this issue was undertaken, and the issue of wind farms became an important element of the discussion on landscape dominants.

The Polish Ombudsman participated in the debate on the siting of wind farms, and on three occasions (2013, 2014, and 2016), as a result of numerous interventions from local communities, appealed to the Prime Minister or ministers to undertake 'necessary legislative measures' (RPO, 2016). The Ombudsman referred, among other things, to the opinion of the National Institute of Public Health, which indicated that the distance guaranteeing compliance with noise standards, minimizing potential nuisances, and reducing to a minimum the impact of shadow flicker, infrasound emissions, and risks associated with pieces of ice breaking off turbine blades, is at least 2 km (NIZP, 2016).

In 2016, the Polish Sejm, in which the right-wing groups had a majority, passed the Wind Power Investment Act (Journal of Laws 2016, item 961), introducing some of the most restrictive rules in Europe for the location of onshore wind power plants. A requirement for a minimum distance between the wind turbine and residential buildings (as well as areas of particular natural value) equal to or greater than 10 times the total height of the

wind turbine has been established. The introduction to the Explanatory Memorandum of the law states that *the location of these installations too close to residential buildings has given rise to numerous conflicts between disgruntled residents and municipal authorities, as the devices emit noise, inaudible infrasound, cause vibrations, flicker of light, and can also pose a direct threat to life or health in the event of an accident, as well as the icing of wind turbine blades in winter* (Explanatory Memorandum, 2016). Thus, the Polish Sejm's setting of a strict distance criterion, in line with the demands of anti-wind organisations, was justified by the legislator primarily by the need to protect local communities from *uncontrolled location of wind power plants*. Other amendments to the law were also submitted to the Sejm, including in the law regulating spatial planning and development, the introduction of an obligation to locate all RES installations (not only wind power plants) with a capacity of more than 40 kW only on the basis of a spatial development plan (and not on the basis of an individual location decision) was proposed. However, this change has not been introduced.

Before the law was enacted, its draft provoked a number of controversies. In addition to the obvious and unequivocal opposition from investors, other actors also raised objections to the draft. The Supreme Court pointed out the inadequacy of the solution in the form of establishing a rigid distance criterion (Opinia, 2016a). The Association of Rural Municipalities highlighted the negative consequences of provisions prohibiting residential development within a distance of 10H from a wind turbine (Opinia, 2016b), and similar concerns were expressed in other opinions of local governments. Attention was also drawn to the fact that potential areas for the siting of wind farms would be reduced to 0.1% of the country's territory (Stanowisko, 2016). Other non-siting provisions of the draft law were also contested. As a result, the provisions concerning the competences of the Office of Technical Inspection, which were particularly burdensome for investors, were abandoned (Szydłowski, 2018). It should also be noted that there were indirect tax implications: by classifying the entire wind power plant as a building structure, the Act on Investments in Wind Power Plants had unfavourable tax consequences for investors.

The Act represented a radical shift from a lack of regulation to overregulation (Sokołowski, 2017). An estimated 95% of projects involving new sites were suspended following the Act's entry into force (Szczerbowski & Ceran, 2017). Therefore, almost immediately after its adoption, discussions began on the necessity of liberalizing it. In addition, the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis contributed to an amendment to the law, which relaxed the rules for siting wind farms in 2023 (Ustawa, 2023).

Discussion

The first important finding is the variation in motivation of local protests against specific wind farms. These protests were largely of a material – economic nature, and the variation in motivation was due to the differing interests of landowners, homeowners, and local businesses. The case of Poland indicates that, in the siting of wind farms, there are complex interrelations between NIMBY, YIMBY, and NIABY responses. Some of the instances of local controversy stemmed from a sense of injustice and sometimes even jealousy of residents who did not gain financial benefits from wind farms relative to those who did. An area of intensive wind energy development included areas dominated during the communist regime by state farms. After their liquidation during the political transition, these

areas were affected by the accumulation of development problems, including poverty and high levels of unemployment (Feltynowski et al., 2015). In such areas, wind energy was seen primarily as a source of financial benefits and it was the financial aspects that were the real bone of contention. Thus, it cannot be said that all protesters against windfarms were united by unified motivations or a common identity, which are characteristic of new social movements (della Porta & Diani, 2006). It is also difficult to clearly separate material and non-material motivations, rather it should be said that both the defence of the value of space and material interest 'are collapsed together as a motivating force' (Woods, 2003, p. 312).

Overall, the Polish study, like a recent study in Sweden (Haikola et al., 2024), identified the process of scaling up the localised and fragmented resistances and gaining broad national influence. In Poland, the main mechanism of action was the unification of fragmented protests by a small number of leaders. Few umbrella organisations emerged to build a coherent discourse, to influence politicians and public opinion (similar to Germany; Reusswig et al., 2020). They bridged the political gap between nationally dispersed protests and the political field (Dechezelles & Scotti, 2022). The populist rhetoric of the anti-wind farm organisations was based on several pillars: the powerlessness of local communities in the face of big global business and energy localism, the threat to the natural and cultural environment, and the emphasis on the national interest, accompanied by scepticism about climate change and EU climate policy. Local opponents of wind farms, despite their various reasons for opposing them, have 'tapped into' the rhetorical schema of 'the ordinary people versus cosmopolitan elites' propounded by umbrella organisations in order to achieve their specific goals, which does not at all mean that they are committed to populist and radical ideologies. They find in populist keywords a useful tool to represent their issues (Dechezelles & Scotti, 2022). This phenomenon, observed by the cited researchers in other countries, can be regarded as a characteristic feature of the anti-wind farm movements. During the period of heightened anti-wind farm protests, the largest right-wing party, Law and Justice, was gaining increasing public support, crowned by winning the parliamentary elections and forming a government in 2015. And it was the politicians of this party, especially parliamentarians from the 'protesting' regions, who played an important role in the process of raising the profile of local protests to a national level. At that time, there were favourable political conditions in Poland for the development of movements sceptical of EU climate policy.

The adoption by the Parliament in 2016 of a law on investments in wind power plants establishing restrictive rules for their location requires wider comment. The introduction of the 10H rule in a country with such dispersed development in rural areas, meant *de facto* preventing the construction of large wind farms almost all over the country. When interpreting this decision, one should take into account the fundamental role of the energy policy implemented by the Law and Justice government, which has always emphasized the crucial importance of coal for the Polish energy sector (Kamola-Cieślak, 2018). Prime ministers of successive governments in their expositions (2015, 2017) did not present plans for the development of RES (Kamola-Cieślak, 2018); also, an analysis of the programs of political parties shows that in 2019 the ruling party was the only one among the parties that advocated the dominance of coal, while the others emphasized in their programs the need to move away from this raw material in favour of renewable energy sources (Kamprowski, 2021). Nevertheless, in the government's document Energy Policy

of Poland until 2040 (2021), three pillars were adopted. The second pillar, 'Zero-carbon energy system', has three components: offshore wind energy, nuclear energy, and local and civic energy. In light of this document, the development of large-scale onshore wind energy in relation to other forms of RES is of little importance. The protests against wind power, therefore, fit well into the mainstream of the Polish government's energy policy. It can therefore be said that they were a prerequisite for the adoption of the aforementioned law – they offered the necessary argument to justify the introduction of such restrictive regulations, with the energy policy priorities probably being decisive. Referring to Rootes (2006), it can be concluded that the success of the protesters (halting the development of onshore wind power) was the result of political calculations, not the result of their efforts (Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2024).

It should be emphasized that the impacts of social movements constitute a very broad issue, encompassing influence on political decisions and the shaping of the political scene, but also economic, social, and cultural effects, including impacts on public opinion as well as on the participants of the movement themselves (Bosi et al., 2016). This study refers only to one dimension of political impacts, namely the influence on policy concerning the siting of onshore wind farms. The analysis of other aspects is hindered by the scarcity of source materials and lies beyond the scope of this study.

One may question to which category of social movements the anti-wind movement in Poland should be classified, and in particular whether it can be included in the broad category of environmental movements. Wind energy, as a source of clean energy, is generally considered environmentally beneficial. As Barry et al. (2008, p. 85) note, 'A common discursive move made by pro-wind energy discourses is to insist that the context for discussing wind energy must be climate. Any objection to wind energy cannot do so without reference to this context' (Barry et al., 2008, p. 85). The discourse around wind energy is thus characterized by a kind of polarization, or a 'split within green consciousness': 'saving the planet' versus 'saving the environment/landscape' (Szarka, 2004; Afanasyeva, 2018).

Without doubt, anti-wind farm movements belong to the conservative currents. As Riedel (2021) observes, according to the prevailing belief, there is a fundamental and irremovable contradiction between conservative tradition and thinking, and feeling within ecological sensitivity (p. 213). Nevertheless, the reluctance to change, and the drive to maintain the status quo inherent in conservatism carry a certain ecological potential, connected, for instance, with the protection of natural heritage. The demands of the anti-wind movement in Poland fit well into this model, appealing to the protection of nature and landscape.

The ecological movement in Poland has traditions dating back to the communist era, with one of its significant manifestations in the 1980s being protests against the construction of a nuclear power plant (Żuk, 2022). In the 1990s, there was a dynamic increase in pro-environmental activity and a rise in the professionalization of environmental organisations (Mandes, 2007). Nevertheless, in contemporary times neither green parties, nor the informal ecological movement, have become significant socio-political forces (Żuk, 2022). The Polish ecological movement is characterized by considerable diversity, encompassing both large professional organisations operating nationwide and small local entities, with its influence directed mainly toward young and educated individuals (lacking broad social support) (Mandes, 2007). It is worth noting that beyond the classical demands of protecting environmentally valuable areas or safeguarding animals, especially in the second

decade of the 21st century, we observe the growth of grassroots initiatives fighting for air quality, which have built an anti-smog social movement (Gorczyca & Zozulia, 2025). The classification of anti-wind opposition as a part of ecological movements is debatable; however, if such a categorization is made, it undoubtedly occupies a specific position within this movement, characterized by a conservative approach, including support for the protection of rural landscapes and environmental justice in relation to rural communities.

Conclusions

According to Haikola et al. (2024, p. 9) wind power resistances grow into potent environmental-political movements across Europe. In Poland we can also speak of the formation of a specific social movement rooted in NIMBY-type conflicts. The survey made it possible to assess the character of the anti-wind farm movement and its role for wind energy policy in Poland, a country with a strong right-wing political position. On the local scale, there were many small but active groups of residents, fighting for a solution to a specific problem related to the location of a wind turbine. There was some inconsistency between the media image of local conflicts (framed mostly as arising from the perception of a threat to health and quality of life) and the results coming from field research, which also indicate another important causes of conflicts, concerned (at least in some cases) with the distribution of financial benefits between local landowners.

At the national scale, there were individual umbrella organisations, aided by politicians of the right-wing, conservative party, which sought to introduce nationwide restrictive rules on wind turbine siting. Using populist rhetoric, they spread negative opinions about large wind power, harm to local communities vulnerable to multinational corporations, scepticism regarding global warming, and criticism of EU climate policy. However, it can't be said that this was a total criticism – these organisations proposed solutions for RES, especially the development of prosumer energy.

A comparison of the Polish case with the French and Italian cases, studied by Dechezelles and Scotti (2022), reveals certain similarities. In France, two nationwide anti-wind federations were established, which brought together more than 1,300 local associations and committees from across the country. Thus, in France the unification of local protests was more pronounced than in Poland. In Italy, by contrast, networks of wind farm opponents emerged, cooperating with associations such as those for bird protection or cultural heritage, but without a nationwide organisation. As the cited authors note, the anti-wind power movement is organised differently in each country – at both the local and national levels. Common features of the anti-wind power movements in Poland, France, and Italy include: support for small renewable facilities as an alternative; the national level as the main political arena targeted by anti-wind circles; and discursive frames such as 'the people' vs. 'the elites' and 'landscape beauty' vs. 'financial interests'. Favourable political conditions, especially the 2015 takeover of power by a conservative right-wing party sceptical of ambitious climate goals and a move away from coal, enabled the Polish anti-wind power movement to succeed. A 2016 law blocked the development of large onshore wind power by introducing restrictive distance criteria. Thus, della Porta's (2008) opinion that social movements grow and succeed when the political context allows them to do so is confirmed here. The introduction of a minimum setback distance of 10H from residential buildings effectively established a 'not-in-anybody's-backyard' principle in the legal framework.

Since the 1980s, Polish society has been engaged in discussions on the energy mix, although during the communist period and the systemic transition these were limited to episodic protests against the nuclear power plant near Żarnowiec or the construction of the dam in Czorsztyn. The debate on renewable energy sources (RES), which has developed since the first decade of the 21st century, already involves a large number of local communities due to the dispersed nature of RES. In the last decade, there have also been increasing protests against the installation of large solar power plants in rural areas.

The importance of renewable energy sources in Poland continues to grow. In 2025, installed RES capacity accounted for 49.5% (36.5 GW) of total installed energy capacity, with photovoltaics representing 65% of RES (Rynek Elektryczny, 2025). In 2024, more than 1,544 thousand micro-installations operated in Poland, mainly prosumer-based, with a total capacity of 12.7 GW (URE, 2025). As in other European countries, and in line with Poland's Energy Policy, the development of offshore wind farms has begun, with projects currently under development expected to reach a capacity of 8.4 GW in this decade (Palmowski & Kwiatkowska, 2023).

Anti-wind opposition has thus played a role not so much in halting the development of clean energy as in reshaping its structure. One may therefore put forward a thesis – worth testing in other countries – that social movements, including those evolving from NIMBY responses and their derivatives, by engaging in the energy discourse, contribute to the emergence of country-specific pathways or models of energy transition.

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Appendix

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