

## **Mechanisms and effects of local community influence on decision-making related to non-urban space shaping**

The local community is one of the most important entities that should participate in spatial decision-making at local level. How the space, in which the local community functions, is developed, is the result of a number of processes, which include: determining the directions of development of the area, its destination, principles of development and use, determining the characteristics and location of specific projects and their implementation. At each of the above mentioned stages the local authorities, other authorized bodies and investors make decisions which directly or indirectly translate into the development of a section of space. Inhabitants can influence these decisions in a formalized way, according to the principles of public participation defined in the law and in a non-formalized way, through various grassroot, bottom-up activities. Particularly interesting and at the same time least researched and most difficult to investigate are those informal, bottom-up ways of influencing the decisions concerning space, apart from the statutory forms of public participation in planning, environmental and other proceedings. The objectives of the project are as following:

- (1) To identify and evaluate: (a) the mechanisms of local communities' influence on spatial decision-making (decision-making related to non-urban space shaping) and (b) spatial effects of the influence.
- (2) To identify whether the location in areas with diverse social and land-use characteristics differentiates the mechanisms and effects of local community influence on decision-making.
- (3) To evaluate the use of lay knowledge in spatial decision-making.

The last objective concerns the lay knowledge, i.e. local and non-professional knowledge, possessed by the inhabitants of a given area, concerning this area. The role of this knowledge is emphasized in spatial planning concepts present in contemporary world literature. We want to examine whether and how this common knowledge, possessed by the inhabitants, is taken into account in spatial decision-making in Poland.

The subject of local community participation in planning, or more broadly - shaping of space, is often undertaken by researchers, but most of the work is devoted to presenting innovative methods of involving residents. Little attention is paid to how this participation of inhabitants translates into concrete decisions of the authorities. The approach to local participation from the perspective of mechanisms of influencing decisions is rather rarely applied. In Poland, a dynamically developing country, where social participation is becoming more and more important, and at the same time characterized by weakness of the spatial planning system, such research is particularly valuable.

The project will address areas defined as non-urban, which is understood as rural areas and small towns up to 20 thousand inhabitants. The study will cover 120-180 municipalities, located in three regions of Poland, differentiated by social, cultural and spatial structure. We will study both suburban and peripheral municipalities. Various source materials will be analyzed, such as planning documentation, protocols, reports, petitions of residents, local press, etc. The most important sources of data, however, will be questionnaire surveys with representatives of the self-governments and competent officials in all municipalities in the research area and in-depth interviews in selected municipalities (5-10), constituting case studies. The in-depth interviews will be conducted with the village leaders or other local activists. The collected materials will be subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The most important effect of the research will be elaboration of models of local community influence on spatial decision-making.. The articles presenting the results of the research will be sent to internationally important scientific periodicals on rural and space shaping issues, such as Journal of Rural Studies, Land Use Policy and the most important Polish scientific journals dealing with geographical, rural and urban planning issues.