

Agnieszka Murawska*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3745-2548>

Małgorzata Marks-Krzyszowska**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9430-8476>

CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN PAWEŁ STAROSTA'S RESEARCH

Abstract. Research on the condition of democracy in post-socialist countries focuses primarily on issues of civic participation. This article, which provides an analytical overview, presents civic participation in light of the achievements of Professor Paweł Starosta. The text has the character of an analytical overview study. Particular attention is focused on the social context, the aims and directions of the research, the definition and determinants of public participation, and the main results of the observations made by Starosta. Starosta's contribution, visible in the analysed works, extends the perception of public participation beyond the behavioural dimension and constructs theoretical concepts to explain political involvement based on the criterion of subjectivity. It also distinguishes ideal types of political involvement at the local level. In conclusion, Starosta's research has considerable application potential in the context of the methods used to measure and explain participation at the local level. The comparative value may be particularly useful for researchers of local systems, especially rural systems (rural studies), who come from various scientific disciplines, including political sociology, rural or urban sociology, and socio-political geography.

Keywords: active citizenship, local civic participation, alienation, empowerment, rural areas, post-industrial cities, Central and Eastern Europe.

* PhD, The Department of Rural and Urban Sociology, Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Lodz, ul. Rewolucji 1905 r. 41/43, 90-214 Łódź, e-mail: agnieszka.murawska@uni.lodz.pl

** PhD, The Department of Rural and Urban Sociology, Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Lodz, ul. Rewolucji 1905 r. 41/43, 90-214 Łódź, e-mail: malgorzata.marks@uni.lodz.pl

PARTYCYPACJA OBYWATELSKA W BADANIACH PAWŁA STAROSTY

Abstrakt. Badania dotyczące kondycji demokracji w krajach posocjalistycznych przede wszystkim skupiają się na kwestiach aktywności obywatelskiej. Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie zagadnienia uczestnictwa obywatelskiego w dorobku publikacyjnym profesora Pawła Starosty. Tekst ma charakter studium przeglądownego. Szczególną uwagę skoncentrowano na kontekście społecznym, celach i kierunkach badań, definiowaniu i determinantach partycypacji publicznej oraz na głównych wynikach obserwacji prowadzonych przez Pawła Starostę. Widoczny w analizowanych pracach wkład w naukę prof. Pawła Starosty polega na rozszerzeniu postrzegania partycypacji publicznej poza wymiar behawioralny oraz skonstruowaniu koncepcji teoretycznych tłumaczących zaangażowanie polityczne według kryterium podmiotowości, a także wyodrębnieniu idealnych typów zaangażowania politycznego na poziomie lokalnym. Podsumowując, uzasadniony wydaje się wniosek o znacznym potencjale aplikacyjnym prac badawczych Pawła Starosty, zarówno w kontekście stosowanych metod pomiaru, jak i wyjaśniania zjawisk partycypacji na poziomie lokalnym. Szczególnie duża w tym zakresie może być wartość porównawcza dla badaczy układów lokalnych, zwłaszcza wiejskich (tzw. rural studies), reprezentujących różne dyscypliny naukowe, w tym np. socjologię polityki, socjologię wsi lub miasta, geografę społeczno-polityczną.

Słowa kluczowe: aktywność obywatelska, lokalna partycypacja publiczna, alienacja, podmiotowość, obszary wiejskie, miasta przemysłowe, Centralna i Wschodnia Europa.

1. Introductory issues

Participation in wider social life has long been regarded as an intrinsic element of democracy and deserves special attention. Axiologically, it is as positively valued as other democratic virtues, e.g., subsidiarity, self-governance, or representation. It is understood mainly as a means of controlling the authorities (influencing them, appointing them, and relieving them of excessive responsibilities). More figuratively, the concept was defined by Arnstein (2012: 13), who mentioned the need to redistribute power: "Civic participation is synonymous with civic power. It is the redistribution of power to include people currently excluded from political and economic processes. Public participation is close to political participation, or, in other words, political society, although these are not fully identical concepts". Kaźmierczak (2011: 84) noted that the term public participation is absent in the Polish literature, and the terms civic participation or social participation are used instead.

The extensive bibliography of works, both theoretical and empirical, mainly refers to the advantages and limitations of participation, comparative studies, historical analyses, or case studies. According to Dahl's (1995) concept of procedural minima, regular and fairly held elections are necessary for democracy to exist. Peisert (2011: 157) stated, "It has become established that elections are the essence and the heart of democracy." However, electoral procedures do not immediately imply the existence, or permanence, of democracy. A natural consequence of the persistence of a political system is the legitimisation of power. In classical concepts

of the legitimisation of power (see, e.g., Beetham 2001), participation is an immanent feature of legitimised power. Modern democracy cannot exist without the activity of citizens (e.g., Dahl 1995; Sartori 1998; Cześniak 2007), and the extent of their freedom of political involvement is determined by the existence of the democratic system in a given country. Interest in political participation thus corresponds to changes in the socio-political environment, particularly if the changes are accompanied by significant expectations and hopes regarding them, including the possibility of the real political influence of citizens on the decisions of those in power. Citizen control, considered a pillar of trust, also plays an important role. Through their own actions, citizens try to control who holds public office and influence what the government does. As Etzoni (2012: 24) wrote, being active is equivalent to having control, while being passive is equivalent to being controlled. Controlling what is happening is determined by the extent of 'one's knowledge and awareness, the purpose of 'one's actions, and the instruments or means of exerting pressure.

The importance of political participation also cannot be stressed enough from the perspective of how local communities function. By involving residents (and their organisations), their responsibilities increase, and local authorities are more responsive to their needs and more effective in providing public services. Political participation provides a mechanism through which citizens can communicate their interests, preferences, and needs, and generalise pressure for an expected response. Otherwise, there is a risk of a lack of trust in the government and its activities, which often results in the alienation of citizens from public life.

When addressing the issue of civic engagement in politics in the 1970s, political scientists focused on direct citizen action to influence government decisions. Analyses focused on the election of political leaders, the acceptance of their practices and, above all, on electoral participation. Voter turnout was one of the most widely used measures (Verba, Nie 1972; Brady 1999; Almond, Verba 1963). This viewpoint was determined at the time by the commonly accepted definition of political participation, which was reduced to legitimate civic activities that were directed toward the election of those in power and the actions they implemented (Verba, Nie, Kim 1978).

Citizen participation beyond the sphere of influencing those in power was initially not addressed in public discourse. Over time, however, the research focus has broadened to include citizen activism (directed against political actors), such as demonstrations, strikes, or boycotts (Teorell et al. 2007; Norris 2002). It has also begun to look for explanations of the activity of 'ordinary citizens' rather than political elites, which is directed at influencing the outcome and effects of policy in society (Brady 1999; Teorell et al., 2007).

Research on political participation has also been conducted in Poland. Initially, as in Western countries, it focused on electoral participation. However, due to the peculiarities of how the socialist system was organised (ideological entanglement) in postwar Poland, it was quite limited. Cześniak (2007: 42) suggests that "it is difficult

to treat participation in elections held in the PRL (Polish People's Republic) as a phenomenon of the same kind as voting in free elections (although sometimes the patterns of citizens' voting behaviour seem surprisingly similar)". Markowski (2000) and Czeńnik (2007) also draw attention to the relative freedom in addressing the issue of citizens' political activity among sociologists (as opposed to political scientists), which resulted in a relatively large output of studies in this area.

Czeńnik even wrote about the socialisation of Polish reflection on political issues, which, in his opinion, is ongoing (2007: 43). He also mentions several studies written at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries (e.g., Markowski 1992, 1993; Raciborski 1997; Cichosz et al. 2001; Czeńnik 2002; Skarżyńska 2005), which analysed voter participation, pointing to the great similarity of Polish patterns to those observed in Western European societies. The interest of sociologists in this issue was also noticed by geographers (e.g., Rykiel, Śleszyński 2018), who appreciated Starosta's (1993) research on electoral orientations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This period was particularly interesting for researchers interested in political participation in Poland because of the change in the country's political system and the potential increase in the democratisation of the state. The 1980s in Poland were characterised by a crisis of legitimacy in the sociopolitical system of society, which coexisted with an increase in political powerlessness (Jasińska-Kania 1989). The systemic change brought hope for a change in these attitudes.

The preparation of this paper was inspired by the 50th anniversary (which falls in 2023) of the professional work of Professor Paweł Starosta at the University of Łódź, a sociologist, researcher, academic teacher, and university life organiser. As a researcher of local communities, he did not ignore the analysis of the local political scene, although this area is not the main focus of his scientific interests. He did dedicate some of his research to political participation in the villages and towns of the present Łódzkie Region, however. Although these issues were the central focus of sociopolitical research on local communities, among researchers of the time, apart from the work of Wiatr et al. (1958, 1980, 1983), Narojek (1967), and Gostkowski (1961), they did not receive much attention in Poland (after Falecki, Starosta 1987: 93). For this reason, a sociologist's research perspective is a valuable contribution to the issue of political participation at the local level.

The purpose of this review is to present civic participation in the publications of Professor Paweł Starosta. In the Polish literature, various terms are used to describe citizen participation in public life, e.g., involvement, participation, and civic activity. The most popular of these is participation, understood as the direct participation of citizens (to a greater or smaller extent) in social, public, and political aspects (Maźnica 2013). In this article, we use the category of civic participation, understood as involvement in the public sphere (civic participation). We are prompted to do so primarily by considering the subjective role of citizens in political activism. This concept goes beyond a narrow understanding of citizens' electoral activity. At the same time, it does not include civil disobedience or activity that threatens the common good.

The research began with a thorough analysis of Starosta's scientific output. The publications included 96 single-author and multi-author works in journals and collective studies, and four monographs (two single-author and two co-authored). The criterion for selecting the sample of items for the survey was the keyword: participation. In addition, it was decided to deliberately select two 'authors' monographs in which Paweł Starosta devoted a chapter to participation or in which participation was an important variable in his deliberations. As a result, seven academic publications were analysed (see Table 1). Finally, the analytical categories were distinguished: the social context and the objectives of Starosta's research, the construction of the variable and the determinants of participation, and the main results of his research. They also constitute the structure of this article.

2. The socio-political context and objectives of the research

The deep socio-political crisis of the PRL and the public's dissatisfaction with the central political authorities constituted the research context of Starosta's first works that referred to political participation. The lifting of martial law, the expansion of the national councils' authority and power, and the modification of the electoral laws for local representatives all contributed to the unique political situation in which Polish society found itself in the 1980s. The change in legislation aimed to strengthen the importance of local government and increase the participation of various population groups in forming these bodies. These things posed new research and interpretative challenges for researchers such as Starosta. Initially, research into political participation aimed to verify common judgements and statements about electoral law and elections and, more specifically, to establish the structure and correlates (Falecki, Starosta 1987).

Starosta's (1993) subsequent research was conducted in the country's new political system. Therefore, it probably aimed to answer questions about changes in the internal structure, the correlates of electoral orientations, and the motivations for participating in elections. Therefore, the two studies mentioned above did not directly refer to the concept of participation but attitudes towards it. The focus of these attitudes was electoral law, which is, therefore, an issue directly related to political participation.

In the 1990s, the involvement of residents in the local affairs of "young democracies" was treated as a significant and exceptionally important research subject. One area of interest, although no longer the only one, was local electoral activity. In 1995, Starosta produced an extensive monographic study that compared macrosocial order models with data that characterised the territorial communities he studied. He devoted one chapter to political participation and set it in the context of local participation. The purpose of the chapter was to compare model assumptions with data on patterns of political participation (1995: 12).

Table 1. Basic information about the material analysed

Title of publication	Year of research	Purpose of research	Research sample and area	Research method
1	2	3	4	5
Citizens' attitudes in elections to national councils (Postawy obywateli w wyborach do rad narodowych)	1984	To verify common judgements and statements regarding the law and elections	Łódź – quota selection from employee lists, small and medium towns – selection of quotas from electoral lists, villages – random selection. Total N = 625, Area: the then Łódzkie Voivodship	Lodz – survey; Small and medium towns – postal questionnaire survey Villages – questionnaire and questionnaire-based interviews and open-ended interviews (40)
The attitude of the inhabitants of the rural areas and small towns toward local government elections in 1984, 1988 and 1990 (Dynamika orientacji wyborczych mieszkańców wsi i małych miast w wyborach lokalnych)	1984, 1988, 1990	To show the change in the internal structure of voter orientations and their correlates in rural and small towns of Poland in the 1984, 1988, and 1990 local elections.	A representative sample of selected localities in central Poland in 1984 (N = 625), in 1988 (N = 878), and in 1990 (N = 370), as well as GUS (Statistics Poland) data. Area: the then Łódzkie Voivodship	Questionnaire interviews
Beyond the metropolis (Poza metropolią)	1984, 1988 ^a , 1990 ^b	To compare macro-social order models with data that characterise the territorial communities studied (including political participation)	Lottery from electoral lists in 1984 (N = 531), in 1988 (N = 861), in 1990 (N = 370). Area: the then Łódzkie Voivodship	Questionnaire interviews

1	2	3	4	5
Political participation of rural and small-town residents in Bulgaria, Canada, Poland and Russia (Zaangażowanie polityczne mieszkańców wiejskich i małomiasteczkowych społeczności lokalnych w Bułgarii, Kanadzie, Polsce i Rosji)	1996–1997 ^c	To determine the level, forms, and determinants of the political activity of the inhabitants of selected rural and small-town local communities in Bulgaria, Canada, Poland, and Russia	A representative sample of the population of the villages and towns surveyed. Study area: Bulgaria, Canada, Poland, Russia 12 villages N = 1946	Questionnaire interviews
The Political Participation of Rural Population in Central Poland (Zakres i uwarunkowania partycypacji politycznej w wiejskich gminach centralnej Polski)	2006	To identify the level and dominant components of political participation, the patterns of relationships between them, and the determinants of their occurrence.	Representative inhabitants (N = 977) Study area: rural and urban-rural municipalities in the Łódzkie Voivodeship	Questionnaire interviews
Civic participation in rural Europe	2008 ^d	To identify models and levels of civic participation of the rural population in Europe	Data relating to the sample of N = 14,509 respondents, who declared that they live in rural areas in 21 European countries	Questionnaire interviews
The social potential of the resurgence of post-industrial cities (Społeczny potencjał odrodzenia miast przemysłowych)	2011–2014 ^e	To identify the level and conditions (e.g., subjectivity mobilisation) of social potential for revitalisation.	Representative sample, N = 400 (Panevezys, Lithuania), N = 700 (Lodz, Poland), N = 400 (Miskolc, Hungary), N = 430 (Adapazari, Turkey), N = 437 (Ivanovo, Russia)	Questionnaire interviews

^a Conclusions for publication based on, among other things, the research programme CPBP 09.8 “Local development – local government”, coordinators Prof. dr. hab. Antoni Kukliński and Prof. dr. hab. Bohdan Jałowicki.

^b Starosta only mentions that this year he conducted his own research in the area of Poddebice, Grabica and Głowno (Starosta 1995: 201).

^c A project entitled “Patterns of social participation and social structure in territorial communities”.

^d Based on the fourth round of the European Social Survey.

^e Based on the project “Revival of post-industrial peripheral cities” UMO-2011/01/B/HS6/02538; awarding/funding body: National Science Centre. Source: own work.

Another paper identified the level and dominant components of political participation, the patterns of relationships between them, and the determinants of their occurrence (Starosta 2012). The possibility of including two new indicators in the analyses (Poland's referendum for accession to the European Union (EU) and elections to the European Parliament) appeared thanks to Poland's accession to the EU in 2004. It provided opportunities for comparisons with countries belonging to the community.

The end of the 1990s and the early 2000s was a period when research questions were repeatedly posed in the literature on the significance of the impact of democratic traditions on the development of civil society and the impact of the socialist period on types of civic attitudes. Therefore, subsequent research aimed to identify the patterns and level of civic participation of the rural population in selected countries (Starosta 2002, 2010). This is an innovative approach, as comparative studies on this issue usually focus only on whole countries and not rural communities. Rural sociology often focuses on case studies rather than, as in this study, a database of international survey data. The accession to the EU of former Eastern Bloc countries with significant rural populations increases interest in civic activity, including political activity, of precisely this group of voters.

The last analysed work (Starosta 2016) identifies the determinants of urban regeneration in post-industrial European cities. Participation was an explanatory variable in this research, which took a different perspective on the issue from the previous studies.

3. Participation – determinants and construction of the variable

In examining orientations and attitudes about election law, Starosta drew on Stefan Nowak's (1973) definition of attitude, which is understood as dispositions or inclinations to judge some emotional object, to react to it, beliefs about its nature and properties, and certain dispositions to behave towards this object. There is no definition of political partisanship in either of the two articles that deal with this issue, although such a reference can be interpreted indirectly through the sub-variables of the behavioural dimension of attitude. Starosta's first academic publication (Falecki, Starosta 1984) lacks precision in this respect, although it contains a general description of the construction of indicators. The synthetic index of attitudes towards the electoral law was created by summing up the sub-variables, as many as twenty. However, as the authors note, only a few are readily discernible to the reader. These variables comprise the evaluative component (the perception of the ordinance as being new and different from the previous one; the perception that it enables the election of councillors in line with the expectations of the majority of the population) and the behavioural component (personally checking one's name on the electoral register; participation in pre-election meetings with councillor candidates; participation in voting).

Starosta (1993) described in more detail the attitudes toward electoral legislation used for the 1984, 1988, and 1990 comparative studies. He used an indicator of information and knowledge about the electoral law and elections (the subindexes were degree of knowledge of the electoral law, knowledge of whether a candidate's place on the ballot paper affects their chance of being elected, knowledge of the name of a certain council candidate), and an indicator of voting behaviour (personally checking one's name on the electoral register, attending pre-election meetings with council candidates, and participating in voting).

A definition of participation only appears in his monograph. It was defined as "the collective and individual actions of residents to create local power and exert pressure on the functioning of local power structures" (Starosta 1995: 198).

Starosta's texts are based on the work of Verba, Scholzman, and Brande, who defined participation as "an activity whose purpose or effect is to influence political institutions directly, through the development or implementation of public policy, or indirectly, through the selection of those who make those policies" (Starosta 2006: 294, quoting Verba et al. 1995: 3). Starosta (2002 and 2006) uses the same index of local political participation, taking into account three aspects: the electoral aspect of participation,¹ the campaign aspect,² and the communal aspect.³

Starosta and Stanek (2002) stated that attention should be paid not only to the behavioural aspect but also to the psychological attitude of individuals to the local political scene, i.e., alienation or subjectivity. He understands the concept of alienation⁴ as a negative phenomenon, indicative of low civic competence and a threat to democracy: "Its source may be the individual's lack of acceptance of the rules of the local political scene, self-awareness of low competence to understand political processes, and a negative attitude towards functioning local authority structures" (Starosta, Stanek 2002: 27). Civic inactivity is therefore a result not only of the individual's attitude towards democracy but also of the functioning of the ruling elites.

However, Starosta did not just stop at determining whether the respondent engaged in a particular type of participation. He also distinguished four types of political engagement, taking into account the alienation aspect of citizens. A high level of alienation with a low level of participation meant that citizens were disengaged

¹ Participation in elections to the European Parliament, the referendum on Poland's accession to the EU, and the frequency of participation in local, presidential, and parliamentary elections.

² Persuading others to vote for a particular candidate for local elections; the frequency of persuading others in presidential or parliamentary elections, and the frequency of doing work for a particular candidate or party during an election campaign.

³ Attending meetings with a candidate for councillor, with the municipal council, or reporting to a councillor on a matter concerning your place of residence within the last 3 years.

⁴ He used scale to construct a synthetic index of local alienation (Campbell et al. 1954): 1) "People like me have no say in what the local government does"; 2) "Local politics is so complicated that people like me cannot understand what it is all about"; 3) "Local politicians don't care what people like me think"; 4) "Acquaintances and bribes are the best ways to get things done in the offices and institutions of our municipality (city)"; 5) "Every inhabitant of our municipality (city) can nominate a candidate for the municipal (city) council elections".

from sociopolitical life. Meanwhile, the type of mobilisation of involvement was characterised by a high level of political alienation and a high level of participation due to external stimulation to act. According to Starosta and Stanek (2002), the most favourable type of engagement for the development of a democratic system was the subjectivist type, which is distinguished by a high level of participation and a high sense of empowerment.

Table 2. Types of political engagement at the local level

		Alienation	
		High	Low
Participation	High	Mobilisation commitment	Subjective engagement
	Low	Disengagement	Contesting engagement

Source: (Starosta, Stanek 2002: 118)

We can also find issues of political engagement in the monograph *The Social Potential of Urban Revival* (Starosta 2016), in Chapter 4, on the sense of subjectivity, and Chapter 9, on social mobilisation⁵ in the consciousness of residents. Here, empowerment is understood as the ability to autonomously create social reality in a specific local context (Starosta 2016: 94). The index of subjectivity used included the following items: residents' interest in the public sphere,⁶ local political alienation,⁷ local public participation,⁸ a sense of influence on the functioning of local authorities,⁹ and self-assessment of public competence.¹⁰

⁵ The electoral mobilisation index is concerned with R's persuasion of others in local, parliamentary, and/or presidential elections and R's persuasion to vote in local, parliamentary, and/or presidential elections. The non-election mobilisation index, on the other hand, includes items such as encouraging R to participate in local activities and local consultations, sign petitions, or attend rallies.

⁶ The first item of the scale formed by the index of interest in local affairs consists of residents' interest in local affairs, interest in local authority plans and decisions, and the number of sources of information on local affairs.

⁷ It uses respondents' opinions to construct an index of local political alienation for three statements: 1) "Local politicians do not care what people like me think"; 2) "Acquaintances and bribes are the best way to get things done in the offices and institutions of our city"; 3) "City authorities do not inform residents sufficiently about their plans and intentions in city politics".

⁸ The Index of Public Participation in the surveyed cities comprised the following items: organizing action groups to solve social problems; contacting a local politician to deal with a public issue; participating in local consultations; taking part in collective local actions and campaigns; reporting local problems to the relevant services; donating money to local initiatives; informing the mass media about local problems; providing advice in solving a local problem; performing unpaid work for the city; participating in local elections; participating in a local election campaign; attending a city council meeting.

⁹ The sense of influence over the functioning of local authorities was analysed by respondents' references to the question: "People like me have no influence on what local authorities do".

¹⁰ The self-assessment of public competence is understood in three dimensions: the ability to understand political processes and phenomena, the ability to speak up in public situations, and the knowledge of local institutions to go to for help in cases of job loss, threat of crime, and domestic violence.

In another study (Starosta 2010), there are direct references to civic participation. He defined it in the same way as Pattie, Seid, and Whiteley (2003), as an action performed by citizens in public, political, and associative spheres. Starosta, therefore, made a deliberate selection of the above variables, taking primarily the behavioural aspect and ignoring the mental sphere. He also recognised that the selected set of questions was not exhaustive, considering it sufficient out of necessity. He used a ready-made ESS (European Social Survey) database (Starosta 2010). As a result of his empirical analyses (factor analysis), he distinguished four main patterns of civic participation: campaign participation (taking part in a demonstration, signing a petition, boycotting a product, displaying a candidate's badge), party participation, association participation, i.e., volunteer participation (voluntary work for an association or other people, contact with a politician), and voting participation (joining a trade union, voting in parliamentary elections) (Starosta 2010).

In almost every work analysed, Starosta looked for determinants to explain a certain state. To study the level of participation, he most often used personality or group maladjustment theory, stratification or status theory (SEJM Socio-Economic Status-Model), socialisation or civic theory (CVM Civic Voluntarism Model), and communal theory. In many of his works, stratification theory was crucial in explaining the phenomena analysed. This is consistent with the results of Inglehart and Baker (2000) and Curtis, Baer, and Grabb (1992), who found that GDP per capita is positively correlated with greater community involvement. Thus, it is not enough to teach civic-minded attitudes. One must strive to improve citizens' economic and social position. However, Starosta's research showed that other factors also mattered. For example, he (1995) found that a municipality's environmental factors (e.g., size of residence) differentiated participation more than status factors.

Starosta is well-recognised in the scientific community as a social capital researcher. However, in the publications he analysed, he used this variable in only one case (Starosta 2010). He demonstrated that in European rural areas, the social capital model had the greatest explanatory power for variation in civic participation. Activism was more related to the presence of network capital than social trust. Less important were the socioeconomic status model or the attachment model, understood as an emotional connection to a particular group. In addition, especially in earlier works (Starosta 1984, 1993, 1995), he used motivation as an explanatory variable. He understood it "as a more or less realised reason for realising electoral behaviour" (Starosta after Reykowski 1983). He made the motives for participating in elections the subject of his research interest, taking inspiration from Riesman et al. (1971), who presented a distinction between inwardly, outwardly, and tradition-driven men.

4. Research conclusions: What do we learn about participation from Starosta's research?

This review of selected publications not only provides knowledge about the trajectory of Starosta's research interests, but also reflects on the context of socio-political changes that took place in Poland at the turn of the millennium. The picture of the political activity of the residents of Poland's central region that emerges from the research reveals a low level of involvement of local collectives, which corresponds to negative attitudes towards participation in local elections. The observed ritualistic, conformist, individualistic, and often cognitively devoid behaviour of residents can certainly be disappointing, especially in the context of the promises brought by the democratic changes in Poland's political system. Despite expectations that systemic changes would enable participation in elections and increase interest in political procedures, participation in this public sphere between 1984 and 1990 was relatively low – from election to election, turnout declined (1984 – 75%, 1988 – 55%, 1990 – 42%).

As Starosta (1993: 88) concluded, “paradoxically, the growth of democratic procedures in elections was accompanied by an increase in sociopolitical passivity and apathy in Poland.” He sought an explanation mainly in the internal divisions of Solidarity, the loss of the organisation's sociopolitical strength in the late 1990s, and its inability to formulate a programme of interest at the local level. He confirmed the dominance of incoherent attitudes,¹¹ i.e., in some years, at least half of the respondents declared a lack of even minimal knowledge of electoral laws and procedures. Knowledge, as Starosta (1993: 98) stated, was the weakest element of electoral attitudes, regardless of changes in the electoral climate, ordinance, and political context of elections. The problem was the wide social scope of the phenomenon because the very fact that it occurred is typical of the structure of socio-political attitudes.

Another finding concerned motivation. The reason Starosta gave for the negative attitudes towards elections was a negative attitude towards the general political climate and that the state operated as a macrostructure. The main driver of positive attitudes was the need to collaborate locally to address macrosocial issues. However, analysis revealed that even in 1990, the need to function and survive under precisely defined local conditions, with no obvious prospect of alternative solutions, was the driving force behind positive orientations.

The resulting picture of civic activity among rural residents in the early 21st century also reflects the relatively low levels in all the countries analysed by Starosta. Against this background, Canada was the most active society. Poland and many other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Hungary, Bulgaria,

¹¹ The term “coherence” refers to the relationships linking the cognitive component with the other components of attitude.

and Russia) were characterised by the withdrawal of citizens from the public sphere, which was manifested in a low level of interest in social issues, a lack of responsibility for the common good, and action to support the community. Political involvement in rural communities was derived from the influence of informal groups and narrow circles of social trust. Apathy was linked to the possibility of success outside the political sphere and the characteristics of social exclusion. Starosta conceded that political participation was not treated in normative but in rational terms, as a means of achieving benefits for the respondents.

The conclusions of the international surveys (ESS) showed great variation in civic participation in the countries surveyed. In general, the former Eastern Bloc countries, as well as Portugal and Spain, formed a group of countries with the lowest levels of civic participation. They are countries with authoritarian governments (Starosta 2010). Poland and many other Central and Eastern European countries (e.g., Hungary, Bulgaria, and Russia) have seen a decline in participation in elections and interest in politics or participation in political parties (Starosta, Stanek 2002). Starosta attributed this to the historically long influence of Russian political culture with a dominant authoritarian type of governance (Starosta 2016). Italy, Cyprus, and Switzerland were an intermediate group between the previous group and the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, and the UK.

The highest levels of civic participation were found in Scandinavia (Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden). Starosta explained this through the excellent service system for rural residents, the large number of voluntary associations in the area, and the partnership style of government officials (Starosta 2010). The most frequently cited form of political participation in Poland over the years was participation in elections, while the least frequently cited form was membership of political parties and systematic work within groups. Only in rural Canadian communities were there other forms of political involvement. The results led to the conclusion that the longer the tradition of democratic procedures and values, the higher the percentage of civic-subjective attitudes. It also led to less frequent withdrawal from public life and low susceptibility to externally induced mobilisation (Starosta, Stanek 2002: 118).

A study conducted among residents of post-industrial cities (Starosta 2016) also confirms a significant level of political alienation in all units analysed. Starosta explained the high level of alienation from the local political sphere by the elitist nature of local policies implemented in cities. The general level of mobilisation of local societies (for public activity) was in line with other international studies and was ranked very low. In conclusion, the order of mass society was present in Łódź, Panevezys, and Miskolc; the order of authoritarian and extraterritorial society was in Ivanovo; the order of authoritarian, massive, and civic society was in Adapazari.

5. Summary

In his research on political participation, a special place for Starosta was the central region of Poland, which today more or less corresponds to the borders of the Lodz Voivodeship, with its capital in Lodz. This is understandable since, as a researcher, he has been professionally associated for more than 50 years with the University of Lodz, one of the largest academic centres in the region. His research was conducted primarily in rural or small-town areas. However, his research approach evolved to an urban and international level. The choice of research area can be considered original and innovative, especially in the context of the transformation of post-socialist and post-industrial structures, and operating in different cultural, political, and socioeconomic systems. Here, we have both new EU member states (Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania), countries aspiring to EU membership (Turkey), and a country outside the EU (Russia) and non-European (Canada).

Paweł Starosta is a sociologist who primarily uses quantitative methods. The most commonly used research technique is the interview questionnaire. The desire to construct relatively large and representative samples allows the use of advanced statistical calculations and the generalisation of conclusions to entire populations. The multifaceted nature of the quantitative analyses he used should also be noted. Among other things, he used measures of central tendency and examined relationships between variables using one-way analysis of variance. He used regression analysis and cluster analysis to learn about the relationship between variables, and he used the Eta coefficient, among others, to measure its strength. He always checked the reliability of the constructed scales using Cronbach's Alpha and their homogeneity using factor analysis. In his work, political involvement was treated as an independent variable, whose level and determinants he tried to determine. Only the most recent work discussed (Starosta 2016) concerns the treatment of political participation as an explanatory variable. We should also appreciate the organising aspect of both the proposed typologies and the characteristics of the conditions that affect the level of the phenomena discussed. Despite the desire to professionalise the methodological side, especially in his initial work, full information about the projects for which he conducted analysis was missing.

Participation in the public sphere has not been Starosta's main focus. This is evidenced by the relatively small number of publications on the subject. The originality of the work analysed lies in its ability to go beyond the analysis of electoral aspects that dominate the literature on the subject. It considers issues such as electoral subjectivity and alienation, self-assessment of political competence, social capital, and community involvement in local affairs. All this goes beyond the narrow definition of political involvement and allows him to use the term civic participation.

However, research on public participation in the publications selected for analysis does not consider an important aspect for civil society researchers, i.e.,

nonformal and associational activities. It includes, among other things, participation in the activities of nongovernmental organisations. Civic activity means, first of all, formal or informal voluntary activity in the sphere of social and political life. It aims to make changes in the local environment, solve social problems, and create the common good (Murawska 2020).

Starosta's research provides insight into the socio-political changes that occurred in Poland from the mid-1980s to the beginning of the 21st century. Thus, they allow us, if only to a small extent, to trace the political involvement of Poles over almost 40 years. Researchers rarely focus on public activity among rural residents in particular.

In conclusion, we see great application potential inherent in Paweł Starosta's research into civic participation, especially for today's younger generation of sociologists, political scientists, or geographers.

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