

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS IN PUBLIC GOVERNANCE – PAST AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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Introduction/background: The last few years have seen an increase in the number of publications that address research questions on public consultations in public governance. However, knowledge on this subject is dispersed, and there is a need for its systematisation.

Aim of the paper: This paper aims to identify current and emerging research on public consultations in public governance.

Materials and methods: This goal was achieved by conducting the Systematic Literature Review.

Results and conclusions: The bibliometric analysis carried out has identified four main thematic clusters around which this research is conducted. These relate to: 1. issues directly related to the conduct of public consultations; 2. issues related to deliberative democracy and accompanying matters; 3. issues related to community involvement in public consultations processes; and 4. issues related to the influence of stakeholders and interest groups on the process of public consultations implementation. In addition, this publication has mapped thematic groups that are drivers for further research on public consultations (issues related to public participation in terms of cultural risk theory and public participation in Chinese version of authoritative deliberation) and niche topics for further development (issues related to stakeholders and interest groups in participatory public policy making).

Keywords: public consultation, public governance, public value co-creation, New Public Governance, Public Service Logic, bibliometric analysis.

1. Introduction

Public consultations are one of the most important tools of direct democracy through which citizens can be involved in the co-creation of public value. Both the New Public Governance and Public Service Logic paradigms emphasise the need for public participation in the processes of creating public services and the inclusion of consumers from the very beginning of the conceptualisation of these services. From the perspective of the two aforementioned public

governance paradigms, consultations are seen as a process that influences the effectiveness of collective problem-solving (Hausner, Jessop, Mazur, 2016) through bottom-up engagement oriented towards cooperation and consensus building (Podgórnjak-Krzykacz, 2017) benefiting both parties (Ramaswamy, Ozcan, 2014).

Although in practice public sector organisations are obliged to carry out public consultation, this issue is still under-researched in the academic literature on public governance (Marchaj, 2016). Research on this topic is most often described in relation to issues:

- legal, on the impact of the development of national legislation; national judicial jurisprudence and international law on the conduct of public consultations;
- sociological and political studies, which address issues such as the aspects that condition and influence public participation in democratic procedures and the significance of such participation for the development/legitimisation of political systems;
- social communication, with a particular focus on research into the tools and instruments of communication that influence the conduct of the process.

The objective of this paper is to systematise existing knowledge on public consultations in public governance and to identify research needs in this area. The achievement of the objective was guided by the search for answers to the following research questions:

1. How are research issues shaping up for public consultations?
2. How has the research issue of public consultations developed so far?
3. What are the research needs for public consultations?

Finding answers to the above research questions was possible due to a systematic literature review based on the Scopus database, with reference to bibliographic items in law, political science, social communication, management and quality, sociology, and philosophy. The research outcome presented in this paper has implications for the theory and practice of public consultations in public governance.

2. Theoretic basis for public consultations in public governance

Public Governance is the set of methods, mechanisms and guidelines that enable the effective delivery of public services. The subject of the analyses undertaken in this research area is the behaviour of the actors involved in delivering public services, the structures, and processes they create, and the methods used to implement public policies.

The issue of public consultations is a natural consequence of the development of the scientific sub-discipline of public governance. On the Polish ground, it is not without significance that its development coincides with the transformation¹ of the Polish political system to a democratic system (Kozuch, 2005). We can observe here a shift of about 20 years compared to the interest in this research area in the world, which began to develop in the 1970s as a response to the erosion and deficit of democracy manifested in the weakening involvement of citizens in the process of shaping public services (Brandsen, Steen, Verschuere, 2018). The rationale for addressing these issues in post-communist countries is therefore different - it was influenced by the emergence of entirely new public areas and problems due to the restoration of political subjectivity to citizens, referring directly to the "sovereign determination of Its (the Republic - author's note) fate" (Preamble to the Constitution of the Third Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997) and reflected in the free - active and passive - electoral right². The result of this process was the emergence of various tools of direct democracy, such as public consultations³.

Public consultations, until public governance's interest in this research area, were mainly analysed in the social sciences (sociology, political science, social communication, philosophy) and legal sciences. Table 1 provides an overview of the ways in which public consultations have been defined, broken down into different approaches.

Several basic elements common to the definitions cited in Table 1 can be identified:

- legal standardisation in national legislation;
- tool of direct democracy, involving participation in the decision-making process;
- process for obtaining opinions that is not binding on the decision-making centre.

¹ Polish authors further point out that while in western countries of 'old' and established democracies the process of implementing market mechanisms into public governance was possible much earlier than in Poland after 1989, 'this backlog in Poland has never been made up' (Kulesza, Sześciło, 2013, p. 16).

² Active (ability to seek election) and passive (ability to elect).

³ Applying these relationships to the field of public governance science, we can see that in this non-hierarchical network of dependencies, it is the citizens who are the supreme authority, but to increase the effectiveness of management - they delegate their prerogatives as sovereign to elected representatives. With precisely this in mind, it should therefore be noted that any form that aims to directly involve citizens in the process of co-creating public value is in fact the realisation of the fundamental assumptions that underpin the democratic system. This could lead to the conclusion that the co-creation of public value is one constitutional possibility for the direct participation of the sovereign in the process of shaping public policies.

Table 1.
Examples of ways to define public consultations in the social sciences

Approach	Example definitions	Characteristics
Language	Consultation.	They centre around etymology.
Legal	<p>A form of involving citizens in the decision-making process of public authorities (Miaskowska-Daszkiewicz, Szmulik, 2010, p. 359).</p> <p>A concept legally regulated by local government laws. Public consultations form the basic framework for public participation in decision-making on local or regional issues, they are considered a form of direct democracy, although they are not of a sovereign nature, but only of an opinion-making character (their non-binding character is emphasised in doctrine and case law) (Haładyj, 2014, p. 680). In doctrinal terms, they are conceived of as a process in which representatives of the authorities present to citizens their intentions directly or indirectly concerning them (Haładyj, 2014; Zychowicz, 2011, p. 13).</p> <p>One of the forms of participation of the inhabitants of local government units in public affairs, consisting in consulting them on matters of importance for a given local government community or part thereof and constituting a means of supporting civic initiatives for its benefit and a means of informing the inhabitants (commune, district, voivodship) about the activities of the local government administration (Brunka et al., 2003, p. 149).</p>	They focus on the legislative solutions that condition the conduct of the process; court judgements that influence the development of the procedure for conducting them; international legislation that influences the development of national legislation.
Political science	They are a form of direct democracy (Kubas, 2014); they are an intentional stage of the public decision-making process with the participation of persons, groups of persons or communities interested in the subject of the decision (Konsultacje społeczne..., 2019). Public consultations is the second of the three stages of public participation (Konsultacje społeczne..., 2019).	They focus on distinguishing the instruments of direct democracy; the impact of public participation on the legitimacy of political systems according to their types; and they focus on the mechanisms that foster or limit public participation.
Sociological	An instrument for reconciling conflicting interests and thus for resolving conflicts; it is a form of interaction between stakeholders in the decision-making process and gives them certain responsibilities (Knosala, 2016, p. 28).	They focus on issues related to channelling potential social conflicts and laying down the rules of social life.
Communication	Two-way communication between the public administration and the social partners, carried out to obtain feedback on the administration's proposed solutions (Gawroński, 2010).	They focus on issues related to the conduct of the public communication process.
Public governance	It is a process of obtaining opinions from individuals and organisations directly or indirectly affected by certain public sector activities. Consultations is one of the most important forms and tools of public governance, an institutionalised form that provides a platform for the exchange of views and the development of positions regarding the functioning of specific industries, regions, communities, etc. and the satisfaction of needs. The reliance on public consultations in the public sector, as one form of social dialogue, stems from legal legislation that sees the need for public involvement and participation in matters that affect it (Nogalski, Rybicki, 2006).	They focus on the impact of conducting public consultations to optimise and increase the efficiency of public service management processes.

Source: own study.

In the last few decades, these issues have been analysed through the lens of the new public governance concepts of co-production and co-creation⁴ of public value. In the case of the above-mentioned social science disciplines, on the other hand - the analysis of public consultations is linked to the broader issue of public participation (Swianiewicz, 2012; Niżnik-Dobosz, 2014).

Taking this into account, it is possible to define public consultations in such a way that the process aspect of the concept of co-creation of public value is emphasised. Adopting such a perspective *public consultations are a legally standardised instrument of direct democracy involving citizens in the process of co-creation (Ostrom, 1996) of public value in order to influence the effectiveness of public management in solving collective problems (Hausner, Jessop, Mazur, 2016, p. 13) through bottom-up, cooperative and consensus-oriented involvement (Podgórnjak-Krzykacz, 2017) for the benefit of both parties (Ramaswamy, Ozcan, 2014).*

Public consultations in Polish legislation are regulated at the level of national laws and laws on the organisation of local government units. As far as their authoritative power is concerned, they perform only opinion-giving functions, and the outcome of their conduct is not binding for the decision-making centres. In terms of the law, we can divide them into (1) obligatory consultations, whose obligation to conduct their results directly from the law, such as the adoption of a development strategy or change of a municipality's boundaries, and (2) optional consultations, whose catalogue is open and which may concern 'other matters important' for a given local community (Article 5a of the Municipal Self-Government Act). From 2014 onwards, there is also a new division, initiated by amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers, which separates consultations in the governmental legislative process into two categories: (A) public and (B) social. The main difference between the two, as interpreted in government studies (Guidelines for conducting impact assessments and public consultations...), is the introduction of the criterion of social partners, who are not explicitly indicated in the specific laws, but it is beneficial for the further legislative process to consult them.

⁴ Co-production, and then co-creation extracted from it, are concepts transposed into public governance from a reference to the mechanisms of industrial production functioning. The main difference lies in the stage of citizen involvement in the process. In this sense, when citizens are involved in the co-creation of a public service already at the stage of its strategic planning, and perhaps even initiate the process themselves, then we are dealing with co-creation. On the other hand, when citizen participation and involvement are limited to the final stages of the process, which precede the implementation of a service that has already been planned and prepared, then we speak of co-production (Brandesen, Honingh, 2018, p. 27; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2016).

The process of analysing the legal conditions is complicated by the fact that public consultations and the procedure for conducting them are not codified in a single legal act (Public consultations..., p. 9), as well as the fact that in some laws the legislator does not use the term 'consultation', although their detailed provisions define, for example, the procedures for consulting residents⁵.

An analysis of the scholarly literature on public consultations and their role in public governance indicates that authors often raise legitimacy, transparency, leadership and influencing the quality of public service design, which have been developed since the New Public Management paradigm (Partycypacja obywateli..., pp. 13-18; Małecka-Lyczak, 2014; Kożuch, 2006; Kożuch et al., 2021).

On the other hand, in conducting public consultations, we can observe that the start of this process is already met with reluctance from the entity managing the consultations and its participants (Zalewska-Turzyńska, 2017). An analysis of the literature complemented by source material in this area (national press, local press, content of digital broadcasters) leads to the following observations:

- quality of public value co-creation in the public consultations process carried out using existing methods is relatively low;
- residents are unable to identify the tools with which they can influence public decisions;
- those in power are reluctant to use public consultations in their decision-making processes.

The low quality of public value co-creation in the public consultation process is an issue highlighted by the Supreme Chamber of Control in 2019. The body carried out an audit of the public consultation⁶ on the issuance of environmental decisions conducted⁷ between 2015 and 2018 (Public consultations...). The audit report stated that:

- the audited consultations met only one of the seven principles in the Consultations Code (CC)⁸. Only the principle of universality was met;

⁵ The Spatial Planning Act refers to "consultation" (with the announcement in the press and the display of documents for public inspection and the possibility to submit opinions, thus describing the procedures undertaken in public consultations - Article 38), and in the Act on the provision of information on the environment and its protection... - the consultations procedure is described as "proceedings requiring public participation", as described in Article 5 of the above-mentioned Act: "Everyone has the right to participate, under the conditions specified by the Act, in proceedings requiring public participation".

⁶ The types of planned developments indicated their onerous impact on the community that lives in the immediate area. It concerned the planned construction of: poultry houses, piggeries, a vehicle dismantling station, wind farms, an aircraft engine repair facility and sand mining.

⁷ One of the areas of obligatory consultations in Polish legislation, which is set out in the Act on the provision of information on the environment and its protection, public participation in environmental protection and environmental impact assessments (Journal of Laws 2008, No. 199, item 1227 as amended).

⁸ The 7 principles of consultations in the CC: 1. good faith, 2. universality, 3. transparency, 4. responsiveness, 5. coordination, 6. predictability, 7. respect for the general good (Seven principles of consultation, 2013).

- meetings with residents were described as "chaotic" both in terms of their preparation (lack of a moderator, external experts, scenario) and the discussions held (although this was described much more bluntly in the report as: quarrelling, mouthing off and pressurising). Documentation (minutes) following meetings was not compiled reliably and mayors did not fully use residents' submissions when issuing the final decision on consulted issues.

Even though residents feel they have an influence on local decisions, they are unable to indicate the tools through which they can influence decision-making processes or which formal platforms for cooperation with local authorities they can use. The research conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (Public Opinion Research Centre announcement 2018) shows that:

- more than 60 per cent of respondents recognise that local authorities take the voice of residents into account when making decisions, but a third of respondents could not identify any form of public dialogue with local authorities;
- of the 15 different types of forms of cooperation with local authorities (with formal and informal dimensions) that were listed in the research questionnaire, only 4% of respondents indicated social consultations as a possible form of cooperation with the authorities. Informal cooperation instruments such as direct meetings with the municipal authorities received the most indications.

Even though social consultations are one of the forms of social participation⁹, those in power are reluctant to use this form of cooperation with the inhabitants, which means that the potential of these tools in the process of co-creating public value is not fully exploited. This is pointed out by M. Zalewska-Turzyńska (2017) indicating potential sources of these problems, namely:

- competitiveness of the objectives of the participants in the process - it is difficult to reconcile everyone,
- problem of consistently sticking to an earlier position,
- social embedding of participants - formation of lobbying groups,
- dilution of responsibility,
- bureaucratisation of the process,
- low investment in diagnosis.

⁹ Forms of public participation can be divided into formal (statutory) and informal (not prescribed by statute), obligatory (delegated by statute) and optional forms. Other forms of public participation include: local referendum, recall, people's veto, plebiscite, local resolution initiatives, citizens' budgets, informal meetings with municipal authorities, access to public information, complaints and petitions, UX tests, thematic workshops, etc.

Public consultations should be characterised by dialogue with respect for differing opinions, but participants in the process relatively often feel that they are not equal partners, which affects their involvement. This manifests itself in, for example: low attendance¹⁰, lack of substantive preparation for the discussion taking place, and lack of a sense of influence to change the decision under discussion¹¹.

The phenomena indicated above have a negative impact on the quality of public consultation. Therefore, the exploration of these research areas - especially as both theorists and practitioners emphasise their important role in public governance - becomes all the more important when we take into account the development of modern concepts concerning the co-creation of public value, which aim to exploit the potential of bottom-up initiatives so that the products or services developed are tailored to the expectations and needs of its end-users. The evolution of the concept of public governance and the role of the citizen in shaping public services is shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Citizen/resident in the concept of public services

Concept of public services	Period of origin	The role of the citizen	Description of citizen-power interaction	Nature of citizen participation
Weberianism	1940s	Petitioner	Something he/she wants because he/she himself/herself does not have and cannot	Passive
New Public Management/ New Public Governance	1970s-80s	Customer/ stakeholder	he/she wants something because he/she is entitled to it	Passive
Public service-dominant logic	End of the 20th century - first decades of the 21st century	Stakeholder	he/she wants something because he/she cares	Active
Public service logic	From 2018	Prosument	he/she has something and shares it	Active

Source: own study based on: Chrisidu-Budnik, 2013; Chomiak-Orsa, 2016.

¹⁰ One example is the public consultations before the creation of the Upper Silesian Metropolitan Area. Less than 13,000 people took part, while the area of the Upper Silesian Metropolitan Area was then inhabited by approximately 2.3 million people. The largest number of votes (1,315) were cast in Katowice. The capital of the Metropolis in 2018 (State Electoral Commission data for the last local government elections) had a population of around 280,000, of which around 230,000 were eligible to vote. This means that only 0.5 per cent of those eligible took part in the consultations (Machaj, 2017, pp. 18-30).

¹¹ The research conducted by Jacek Sroka shows that those in power treat the joint agreement of positions as protection, while the participants, who have no real decision-making power, do not feel that they can really influence the change of decisions of those in power by articulating their proposals. This research analysed the functioning of deliberative democracy institutions found in the Polish political system. In one interview concerning the work of the District Employment Council, an interviewee who represented the NGO community said that (original spelling): "as an association representative, so to speak, I have the least involvement in all this. There are mayors. There are, well, sort of their own people who they can, I don't know, employ, they can support, so here my person, so to speak, well this is such a very, very, modest fraction of what I can..." (Sroka, 2008, p. 158).

The contemporary development of new digital and communication technologies, which allow simultaneous contact between many participants in the consultation process, generates new challenges, but also risks related to the privatisation of public discourse to individual preferences, which contradicts the basic assumptions of public value co-creation¹². In the same way that concepts of public governance developed in relation to new consumer behaviour, where purchasers of different types of goods and services wanted to have a greater say in this production process: how the product was designed (Perechuda, Chomiak-Orsa, 2015; Ramaswamy, Ozcan, 2014), how it was created, how it was advertised and sold, this can be applied to the phenomena in the field of cooperation between participants in public networks, whose role evolved from petitioner through customer and stakeholder to move towards presumption.

3. Research methodology

The systematisation of existing knowledge on public consultations in public governance and identifying research needs in this area is based on a systematic literature review according to the Prisma methodology (Page et al., 2021). The search was conducted in February 2023 based on the Scopus database, as it is one of the largest scientific databases that contain information on peer-reviewed and thus credible and reliable scientific papers (Mongeon, Paul-Hus, 2016; Harzing, Alakangas, 2016). The process of identifying publications on public consultations in public governance, on which the analyses illustrated in this paper are based, is shown in Table 3.

¹² In the 1970s, when the concept of co-creation was developed, technological barriers were some of the most serious constraints to the spread of these technologies. In the 2020s, the development of digital technologies makes it possible to overcome these barriers, but the activity of consultancies such as Cambridge Analytica show that these tools can be used to mass personalise messages almost to individual preferences. This in turn can lead to manipulation and abuse. In an extreme situation - it is a threat to the stability of the functioning of the entire political system, where the citizen becomes, as it were, the victim of an unfair process of controlling his/her preferences, while he/she himself/herself does not have the tools to oppose and respond to them. The privatisation of discourse also stands in opposition to co-creation, the aim of which is to create public rather than private value (Brandesen, Steen, Verschuere, 2018; Kaiser, 2020).

Table 3.
Citizen/resident in the concept of public services

Stage of the search process	Result
I. Search terms “public consultation*” and “social consultation*” in the Scopus database in the areas of social sciences and business and management, in English	Number of publications identified after removal of duplicate records: 944
II. Limiting the number of identified records by analysing titles, abstracts and keywords according to the following exclusion criteria: 1. Publication outside public governance 2. Publication that is an introduction to an issue, a number, a collection of papers, a conference issue	Number of excluded publications according to criterion 1: 704 Number of excluded publications according to criterion 2: 26 Number of publications further processed: 214
III. Limiting the number of publications through whole content analysis. Exclusion criterion: public consultations was only a side thread, one of the factors mentioned in the content, but the scope of the paper dealt with other issues.	Number of publications excluded: 167 Number of publications included in the study: 47

Source: own study.

In the first phase of exclusion (phase II of the research process), the dominance of publications on public consultations in implementing medical, biotechnology and transport solutions was evident. In contrast, in a significant proportion of the publications reviewed in the second phase of exclusion (phase III), the authors focused on other research problems and mentioned public consultations only in the content. Therefore, the number of publications included in the analyses was 47 (Annex 1). These publications were analysed by the author team and the VOSviewer and the Bibliometrix software were used to present the findings.

4. Research results

The results of the research carried out were presented according to the research questions presented in the introduction to this paper. They were preceded by a bibliometric analysis to indicate the characteristics of the publications included in the research. The following sections contain first the bibliometric analysis and then the results to answer the research questions.

4.1. Bibliometric analysis

The bibliometric analysis began by verifying how the distribution of publications on public consultations in public governance evolved over the years. This trend is illustrated in Figure 1.

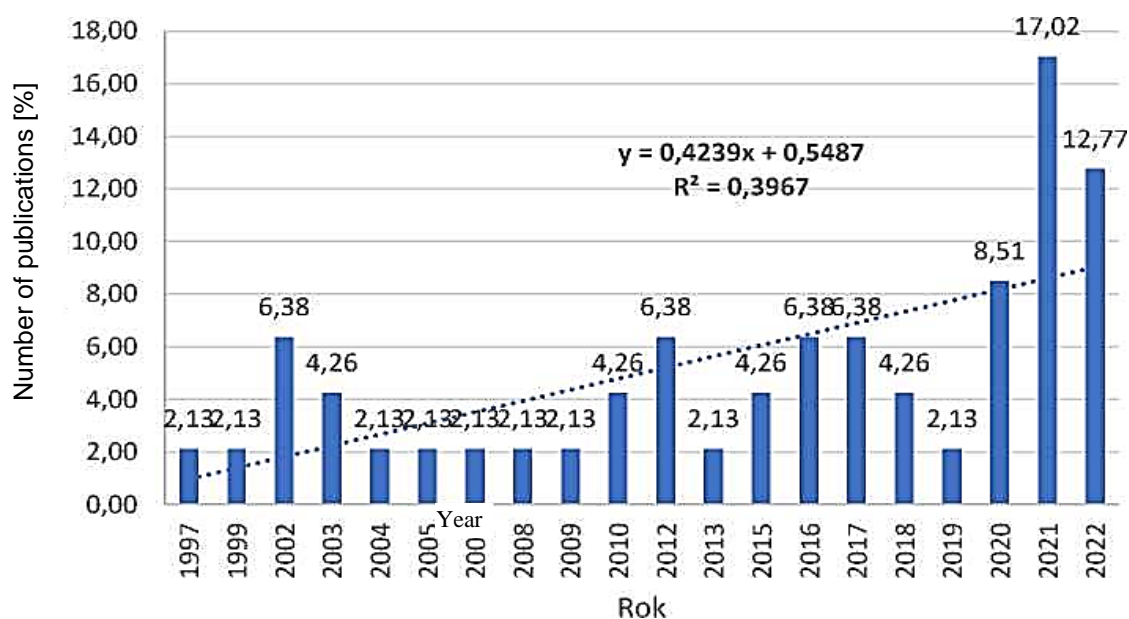


Figure 1. Annual growth of publications on public consultations.

Source: own study.

The results shown in Figure 1 indicate that research on public consultations in public governance is on an upward trend. However, fluctuations in the number of publications are apparent. The years with the most publications in the study area were 2002-2003, 2010-2012, 2016-2017 and 2021. However, it can be assumed that with the growing interest in public participation in delivering public services (Osborne, 2018, 2021), this topic will receive increasing attention.

The type of publications included in the study includes: research papers (85.1%), chapters in monographs (4.25%), post-conference papers (6.4%) and reviews (4.25%). Leading authors dealing with the issue of public consultations in public governance are: Gustavo Cunha Garcia, John Gastil, Jonathan Soares Pereira, Flavio Saab and Jane Suiter. Studies on the subject are mostly published in the Australian Journal of Public Administration, the Australian Journal of Political Science, Political Studies, and Public Administration. The analyses presented above allow us to conclude that the selection of publications for the research is apt, includes texts in high-quality journals and allows for analyses aimed at seeking answers to the research questions posed and achieving the purpose of this paper.

4.2. Research issues addressed in public consultations

An analysis of the research issues undertaken on public consultations in public governance is presented using the VOSviewer programme. The results are illustrated in Figure 2.

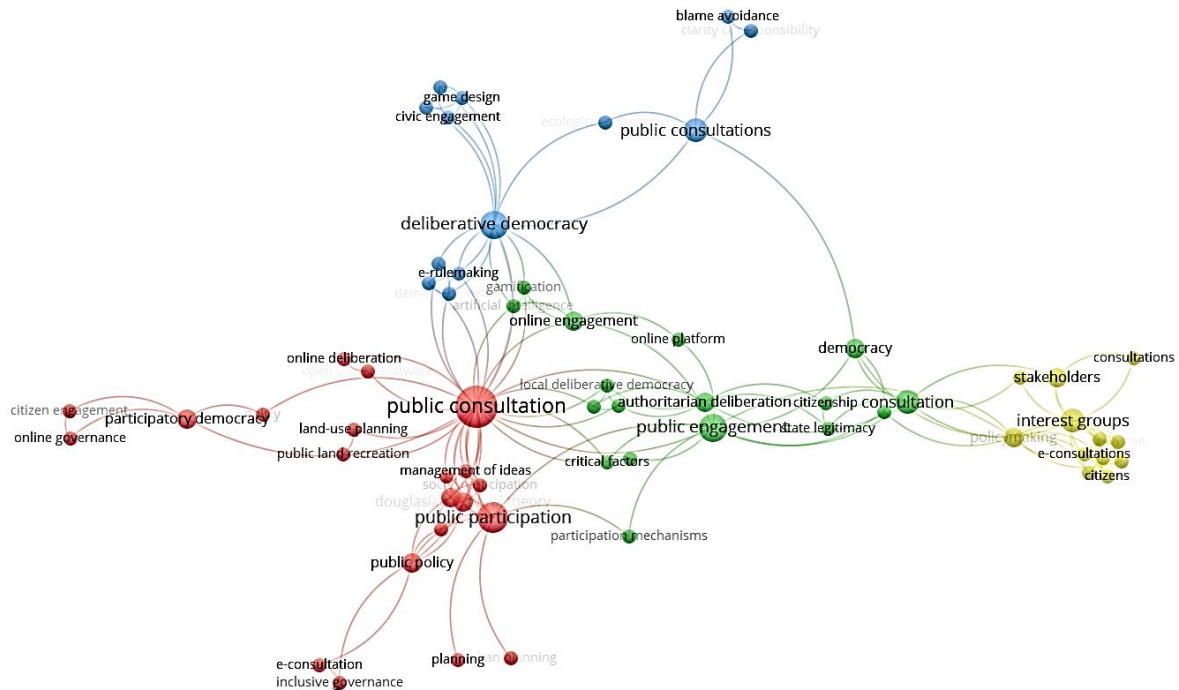


Figure 2. Research issues in public consultations.

Source: own study based on the VOSviewer version 1.6.19.

Analysis of the results shown in Figure 2 identifies four thematic clusters:

- Cluster 1 - red - issues directly related to conducting public consultations. Research conducted in this area includes, among others, the scope of public participation in the implementation of public policies, planning of activities with the participation of the public, and technological solutions enabling the inclusion of the public in the implementation of public services.
- Cluster 2 - blue - issues of deliberative democracy and accompanying issues. The research area in this cluster relates primarily to the course of collective debating processes, the advantages, and disadvantages of this process, and ways of reaching consensus.
- Cluster 3 - green - issues related to community involvement in public consultation processes. The issues addressed in this cluster concern ways of motivating the public to get involved in implementing public policies and services.
- Cluster 4 - yellow - the issue of the impact of stakeholders and interest groups on the process of public consultations implementation. This cluster includes research dedicated to the impact of stakeholders and interest groups on public consultation processes.

It is also worth noting that clusters 1, 2 and 3 are strongly interlinked and their research themes intersect. Reference to democracy and consultations can be found in each of these clusters. Therefore, the division into these clusters is mainly due to the dominant research problems in these clusters. The first cluster is dominated by the main issue of public consultation, the second by deliberative democracy and the third by issues of public

involvement in public affairs. It is also significant that cluster 4 is furthest from the main thematic strand of public consultations in public governance. These themes have spun off most likely because of the significant implications of stakeholder and interest group influence on public consultation processes.

4.3. Research needs for public consultations

The VOSviewer programme was also used to analyse the development of the public consultations issue over time, as illustrated in Figure 3.

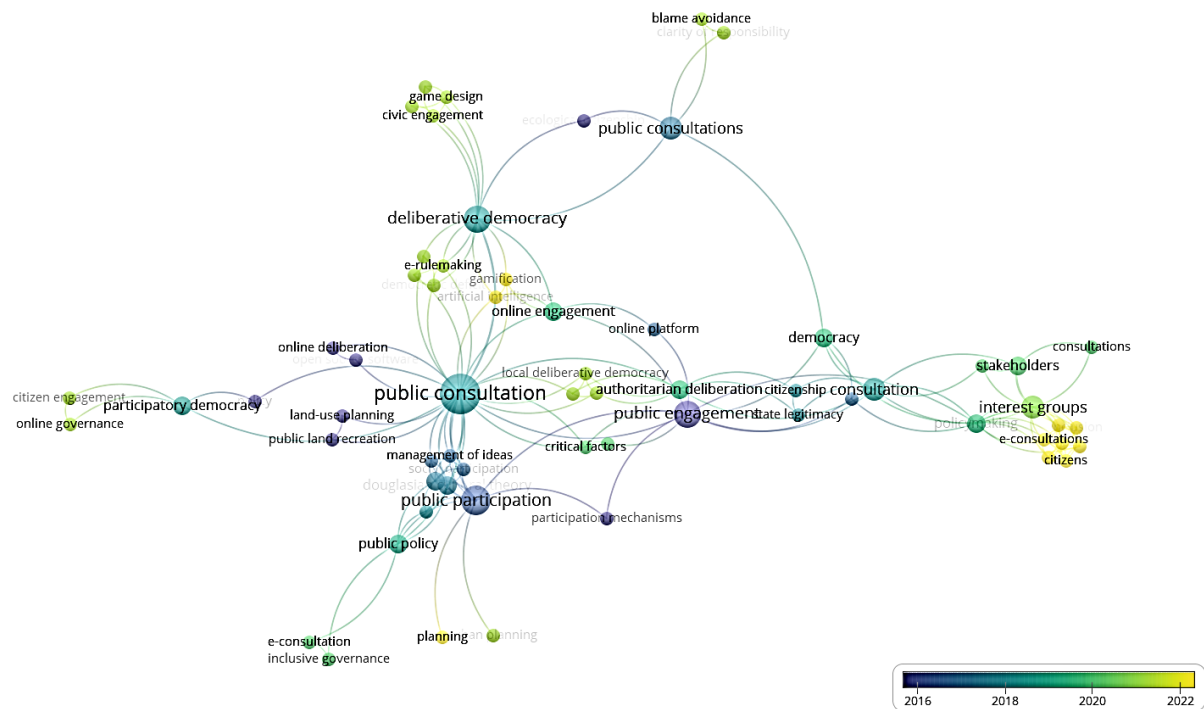


Figure 3. Development of research on public consultations issues.

Source: own study based on the VOSviewer version 1.6.19.

According to the results presented in Figure 3, before 2016, publications focused on community engagement in public policies, the mechanisms used to do so, and online deliberative consultations dominated. Around 2018, public consultations researchers focused mainly on deliberative and participatory democracy and Douglasian cultural theory, and after 2020 on stakeholders and interest groups, participatory public policy making, accountability and authoritative deliberation. Recent years have seen abundant research on the use of technology in the conduct of public consultation. Complementing the above analyses is an exploration of the thematic map presented in Figure 4, which was prepared using Bibliometrix software.

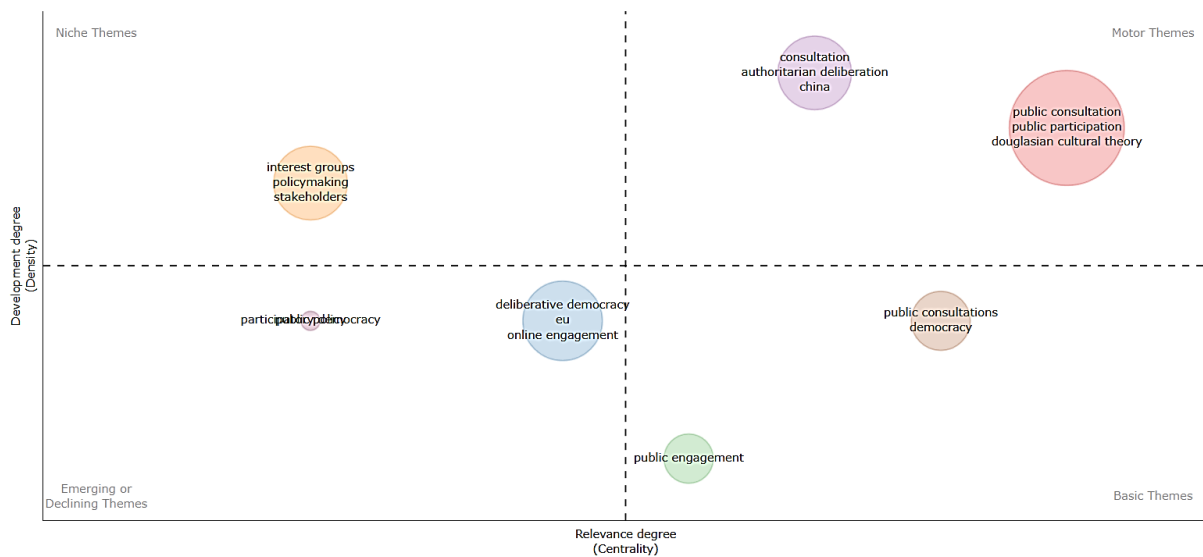


Figure 4. Public consultations as a research subject - thematic map of the themes addressed.

Source: own study based on the Bibliometrix.

An analysis of the thematic map indicates that the general themes of public consultation, democracy and public engagement are core, well-established research themes. The driving themes are authoritative deliberation, public participation and Douglassian cultural theory. These themes are prominent and developing in public consultation research. In contrast, themes with low recent development and relevance are participatory and deliberative democracy and online public involvement in public service delivery. Interest groups and stakeholders, on the other hand, have received a lot of attention in recent research, which is in line with the results of the analyses presented in Figures 2 and 3.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The objective of this paper was to identify research directions on public consultations to date and to identify potential thematic groups around which future research on these issues will evolve. The main findings, answering the research questions posed in the introduction, indicate that:

- issues related to the conduct of public consultations have not been sufficiently researched in the public governance sciences and there is a need for continued research in this area. A significant increase in interest in this topic is observed in 2021-2022, when the rate for the number of such publications exceeded the 10% level;
- there are four thematic clusters, grouping together the undertaken research problems of public consultations in public governance. Three of them showed strong links with each other. The first is made up of issues that are directly related to public consultations including, but not limited to, public participation in the implementation of public

policies. The second cluster is areas related to deliberation. The third is on how to involve and engage communities in the formulation of public policies. A more loosely related and niche cluster is the fourth group of issues concerning interest groups as actors in public policy making. New issue threads related to the development of modern technologies such as gamification and artificial intelligence have also started to emerge in the network;

- added value of this paper is the mapping of thematic groups that are driving forces for further research on public consultations and niche topics hitherto insufficiently explored and with the potential to be developed in further research. The group of driving themes includes issues related to public participation in terms of cultural risk theory and public participation in Chinese authoritative deliberation. Niche themes, which have begun to receive attention since 2020, focus on issues related to stakeholders and interest groups in participatory public policy-making;
- in the theoretical implications presented, it has been identified that the development of this research issue in established Western democracies has been developed globally since the 1970s, while in Poland it only became possible after 1989 and was linked to the systemic transformation and the restoration of real political subjectivity to citizens. Just as new paradigms of public governance have developed in relation to changes in consumer behaviour, so has the evolution of the role of the citizen in these concepts, who may move from the role of a petitioner, customer and stakeholder to prosumer;
- importance of public consultations as a tool for shaping public policies is noted and emphasised in theoretical considerations, while the observation of the practice of its conduct using current methods is characterised by low quality in the process of co-creation of public value.

The findings presented serve aggregating and informative functions, which are supported by bibliometric studies and their visualisations. The findings can provide an element of justification in the design of future research on public consultations on public governance grounds by considering the existing body of research.

The topics presented also have the potential to be developed in the future. Further bibliometric research can be updated on a regular basis to keep up to date with the direction of research related to public participation in public policymaking. This, in turn, will make it possible to observe the dynamics of change and to conduct comparative analyses that can be used to identify research gaps that still exist and groups of issues that already have an established theoretical basis.

A certain limitation encountered by the author team concerned the broad selection of keywords, which affected the precision of the designation of a given publication. This can be seen in the difference between the number of records generated in the first stage of the work (944) and the number of publications corresponding to the area of public governance (214), and the number of publications to which the research material was eventually narrowed down

(47), as only one in five publications met the basic criterion of public consultations being one of their leading themes.

This observation could contribute to further discussion on how to increase the accuracy of keyword selection while maintaining freedom of choice to maintain the highest precision of indications during bibliometric research, which would be reflected in the accuracy of thematic mappings. One suggested solution could be a percentage estimate of the thematic content of the publication and an estimate of the ranges that would allow a phrase to be included or not indicated. It seems that this could be of great importance at a time of increasing digitisation of source materials and an increase in the parameters of search engines, which could increase the effectiveness of the source research carried out.

Another limitation observed is in the terminology used, which affects the precise identification of the overall research material. This relates to the described fact that different terms are used interchangeably in Polish statutes to describe the consultations process - in one, the phrase 'consultation' is used explicitly, while in others it is used to describe 'consultation/formulation of opinion' or 'proceedings involving public participation'. Furthermore, through non-statutory interpretations, a new category of division is introduced. The advisability is also debatable because if, in principle, consultations are intended to have a universality function, it does not require an additional category to oblige the entity managing the consultations to include other social partners who are not explicitly mentioned in the specific laws.

The results presented may also have important implications for the practice of public governance and the conduct of public consultation. This is because the analysis shows that after 2018, consultations issues are analysed in the context of deliberation (also in the dimension of Chinese authoritarianism), cultural theory of criticism and, from 2020, interest groups. These findings may influence the development of work aimed at modernising the tools used to conduct public consultations in Poland to increase their effectiveness. At this point, it is worth noting that in Poland the deliberative survey has been conducted only once, in 2009 in Poznań. The subject of this survey was issues related to the development of the stadium, which was being built for the Euro 2012 tournament. More frequently used deliberative tools are citizen panels, which have been conducted several times so far, e.g. in Gdańsk, Wrocław, Lublin, Łódź and Kraków (Rykała-Podgórska, 2020).

Research problems directly related to public consultations in public governance require further development, as their subject matter is still under-researched. Their further development could be guided by the thematic map shown in Fig. 4, which would allow for the introduction of up-to-date research. When undertaking this work on the Polish ground, it would be necessary to engage in activities related to the identification of factors and conditions that could positively influence the improvement of the quality of public consultations, since - as was discussed in more detail in the main part of the paper - despite the fact that no formal shortcomings can be alleged, the report of the Supreme Chamber of Control shows that out of the seven principles

of public consultations, only one, the principle of universality, is met. Methodologically, this research could be developed using qualitative research (e.g. interviews with experts, case studies, experimental techniques, etc.), which could be used to develop, among other things, a set of good practices.

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