



# PARTICIPATION, CONFLICTS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN MINING AREAS: THE CASE OF BOR AND MAJDANPEK

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# Research Background

Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and mineral extraction as a development model on the (semi)periphery

Factors: low labor costs, deregulated land ownership, weak environmental standards

Neo-extractivism: monopolized resource extraction, privatized profits and externalized costs, close state-private capital ties, generated value is not directed toward the local population negatively affected by extractive activities, nor to those (individuals or institutions) who may have a legal right to a share of the profits

Developmental (economic growth, jobs, infrastructure) vs. critical perspectives (environmental damage, social exclusion, weak local influence) on resource extraction

# Theoretical framework

Professional, Participatory (Della Porta and Dianni, 2006) and Transactional (Petrova and Tarrow, 2007) Activism (spectrum, sometimes conflicting) (Vukelić et al., 2021)

- Ecological Distribution Conflicts (EDCs) (Martinez-Alier and O'Connor, 1996):

- Conflicts over unequal environmental benefits and harms
- Mining leads to pollution, displacement, distrust in companies
- Conflicts may escalate or lead to cooperation

Mining conflicts (Martínez-Alier, 2001; Urkidi and Walter, 2011; Conde and Le Billon, 2017; Scheidel et al., 2018)

# Mining in Bor and Majdanpek: Local Context

- Bor and Majdanpek as historical mining hubs, Copper mining since the early 20th century
- 2018: Privatization of RTB Bor – acquisition by Chinese company Zijin

## EU integration and Green Agenda ambiguities:

- Accession pushes stricter environmental standards
- Demand for critical raw materials increases mining activity (and conflict)

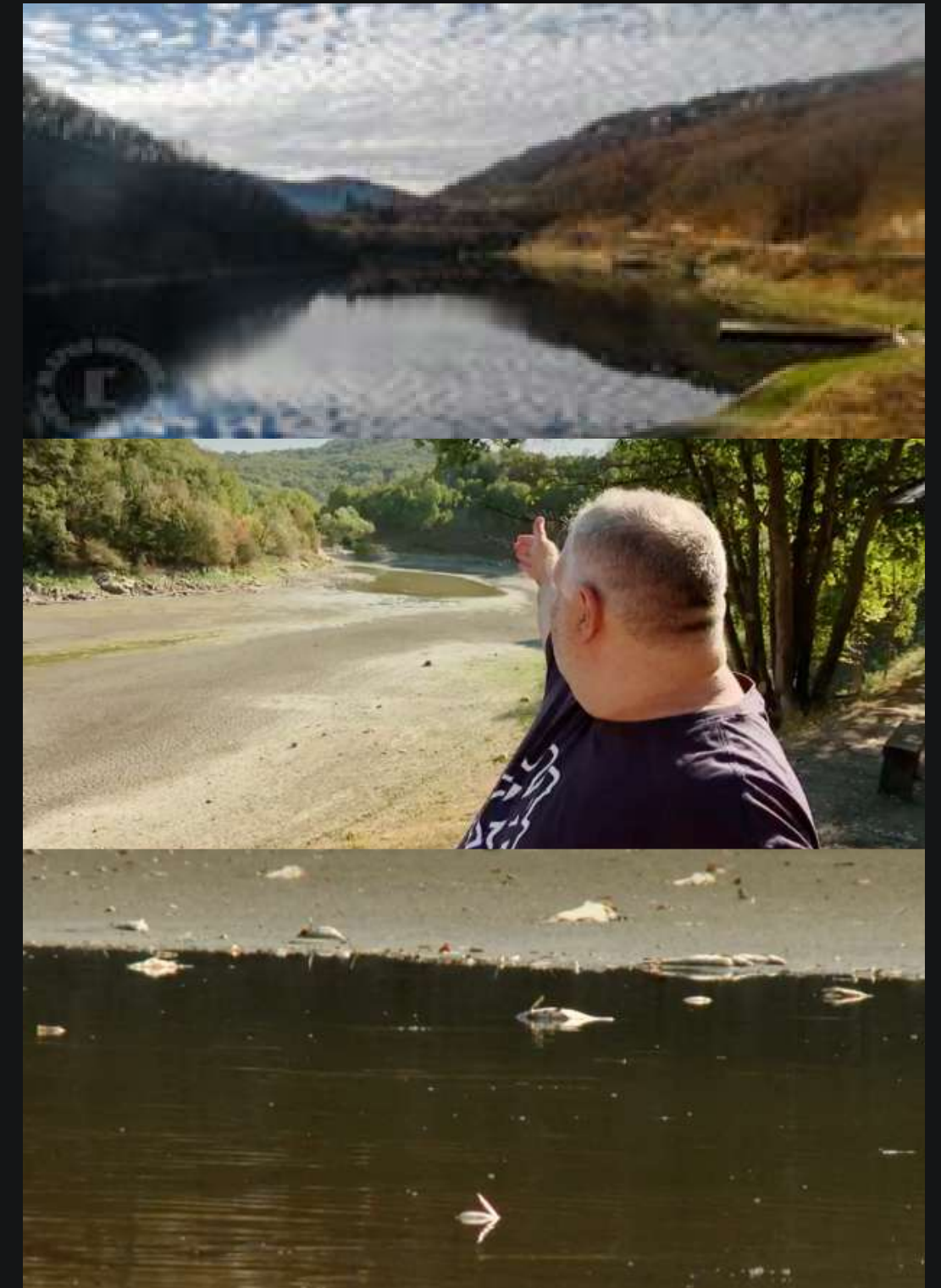
## Environmental and Social Consequences

- Air, soil, and water pollution (sulfur dioxide, land degradation, toxic waste)
- Public health deterioration
- Limited local benefits from resource extraction
- Institutional neglect and exclusion from decision-making





- A report by the National Institute of Public Health from 2019 documents that pollution in this area is life-threatening
- The publication "Improving the Management of Contaminated Sites in Serbia" defines Majdanpek as an ecological black spot
- "For all malignant tumors except skin cancer, there is a significantly higher risk of illness for both men and women" (Čubrilo Filipović, 2022).



Source 1: Marko Popović, Flickr.com

Source 2,3: dw.com

# An Analysis of Secondary Sources on Community Engagement in Bor and Majdanpek

- Local initiatives: Borani se pitaju, Ne damo/Nu dau (We don't give), Ne damo Staricu (We won't give up Starica), Društvo mladih istraživača iz Bora (Society of Young Researchers, Bor)

Ekoloski ustanak (Ecological Uprising)

Evropski Majdanpek (European Majdanpek)

Majdanpek.info (engaged local community media)

- Actions: Protests, petitions, media campaigns
- 2022: Activist camp on Mt. Starica against open-pit expansion
- Framing of struggle as defence of home, nature, and rights



# Activist camp: protest on Starica mountain (2022)

- Starica mountain: a symbol of Majdanpek
- A hydrogeological collector for the water supply of the entire area
- Without warning, the Zijin company detonated rocks from one of the peaks of this mountain in June 2022
- Citizens organized an activist camp at the top of the mountain, trying to prevent further blasting
- Arrests, police brutality against the activists



Source 1: Udruženje građana Ne dam  
Source 2: Mitrović, N., 2022, BBC News na srpskom

"It can't go on like this, by force, completely ignoring the people. We used to have resorts, sports fields, a ski resort, a swimming pool, a hotel... This makes no sense, except for the investor. All we are left with is pollution and destruction, as if they want to push us out" (Čubrilo Filipović, M., 2022).



Source: Mitrović, N., 2022, BBC News na srpskom.

"We want to know if we need to move because of the mine" (Đukić Pejić, J. 2022).

"The goal is to finally find out what the boundaries of the mine are" (Čubrilo Filipović, M., 2022).

"The people of Majdanpek have always lived next to the mine, it is an integral part of our life. But I think it is unacceptable that in the 21st century we do not have any information. I think we deserve to know what's in store for us" (Đukić Pejić, J. 2022).



# Survey Data

- Citizen polling: July – September 2024
- Random sample: urban municipalities (N = 200)
- Two-stage sample: purposive selection of rural communities with random sampling during the field research phase (N=100)





☞ To identify...

Key Issues of Concern for Citizens in Their Local Community

The key reasons why citizens, according to the respondents, do not participate more in the planning document creation process

Why the population feels more comfortable expressing their opinions - anonymously or through direct representation



# RESEARCH GOALS



High  
unemployment

5.4%

Infrastructure  
issues

15.3%

Environmental issues  
39.1%

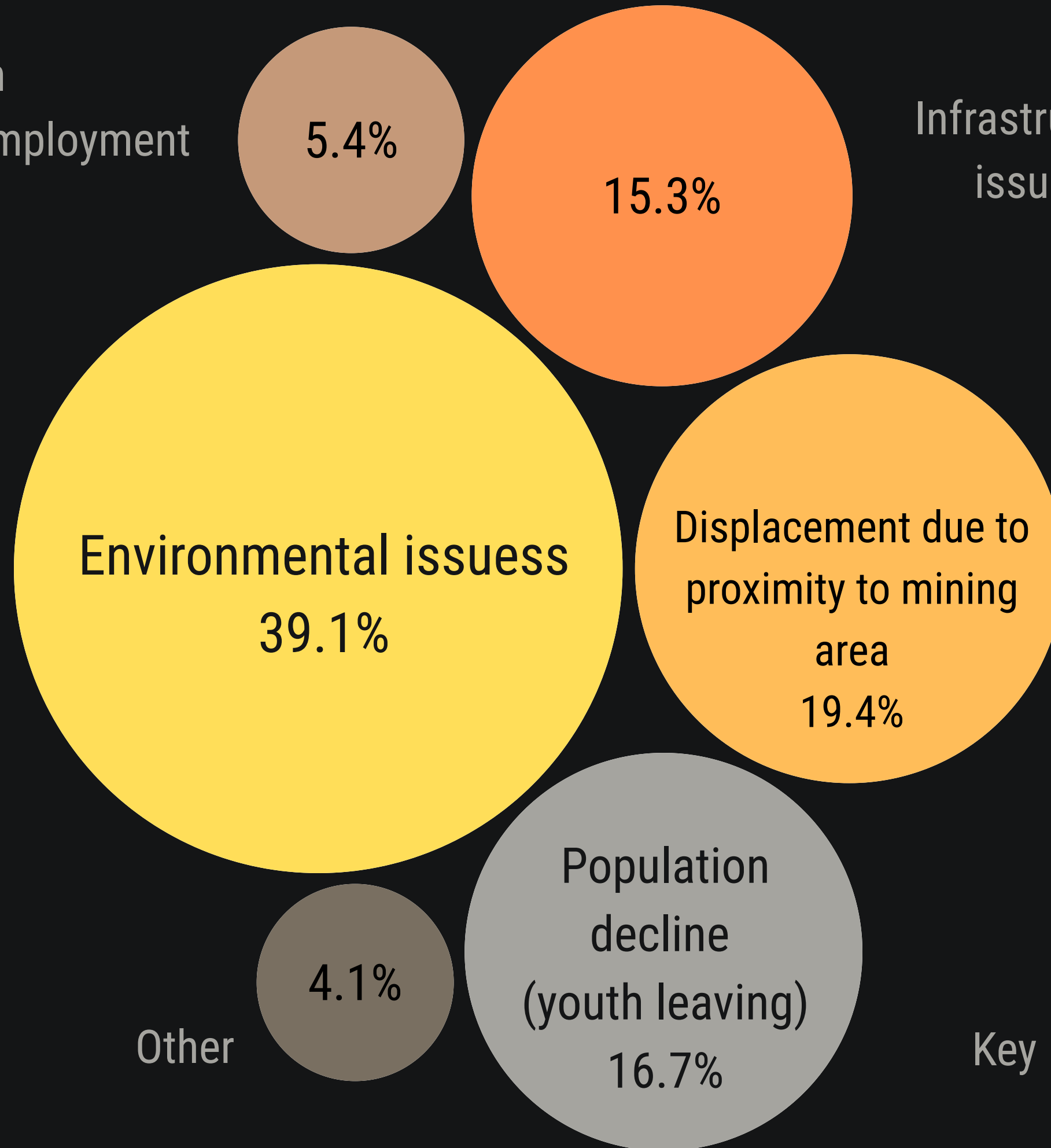
Displacement due to  
proximity to mining  
area  
19.4%

Other

4.1%

Population  
decline  
(youth leaving)  
16.7%

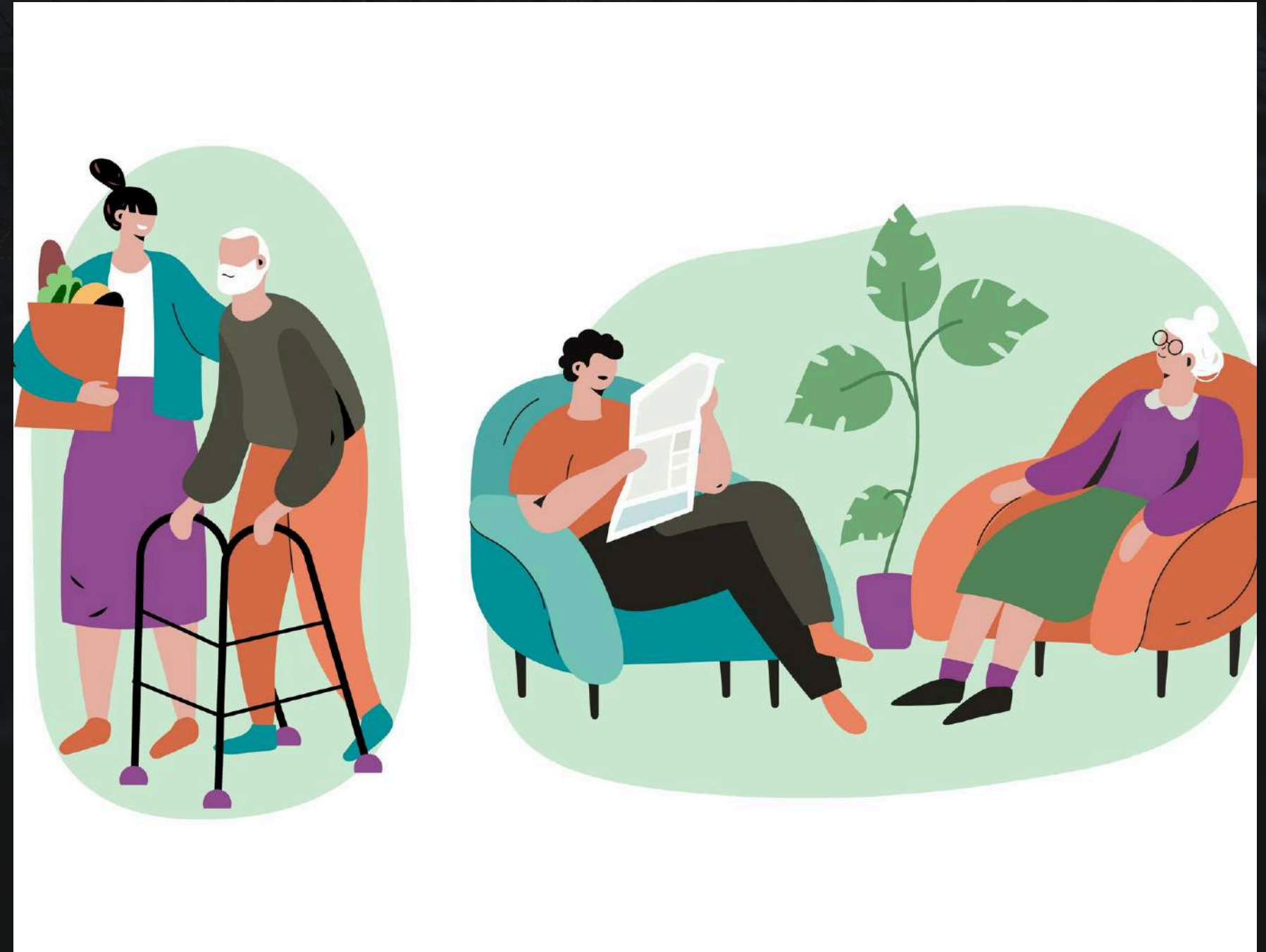
Key Issues of Concern for Citizens in Their Local  
Community



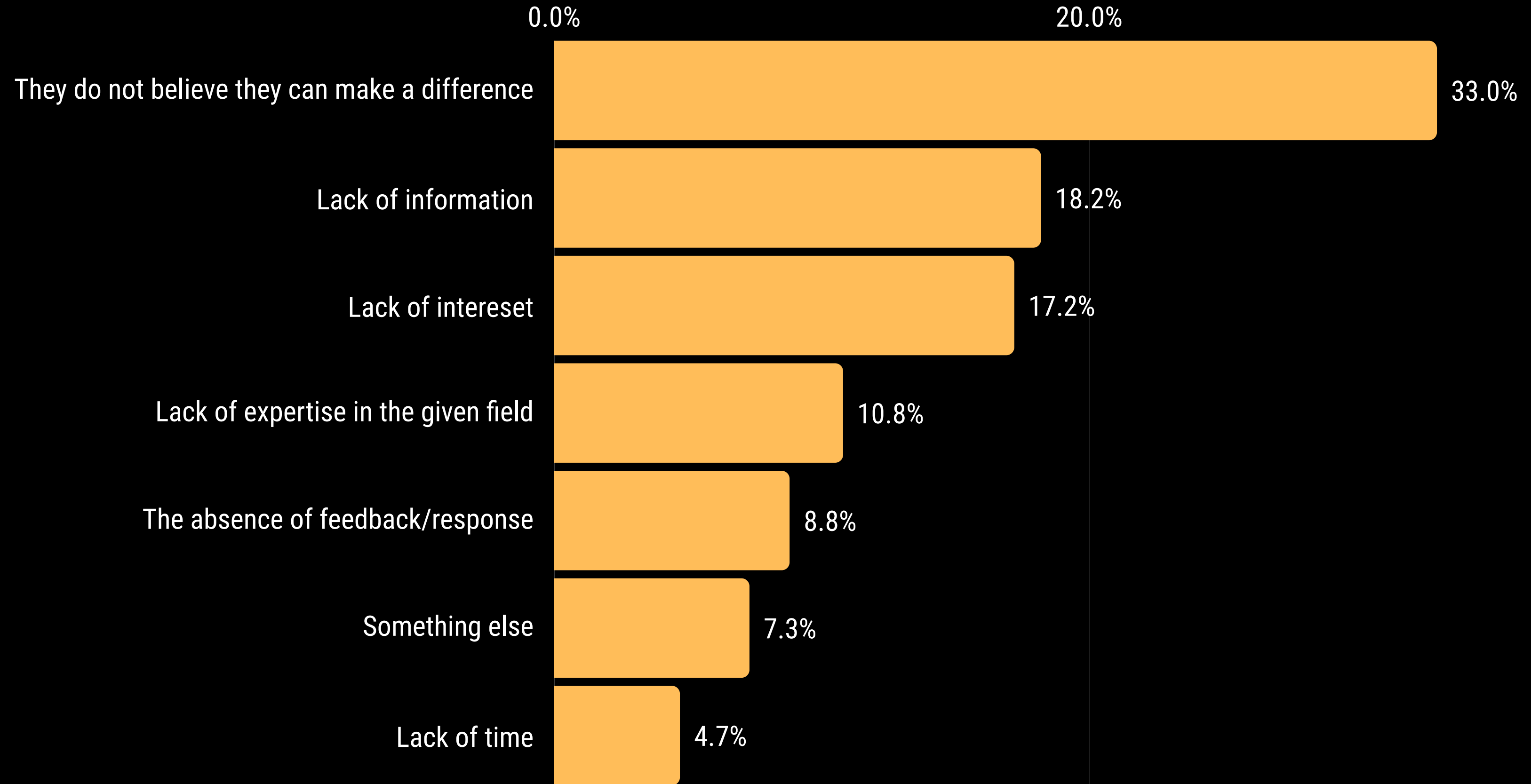


# OTHER?

- Corruption
- Current Government
- Lack of Healthcare Services
- Lack of Cultural and Recreational Facilities
- Poor Infrastructure
- Substandard Housing Conditions
- Frequent Power Outages
- Insufficient Social Support



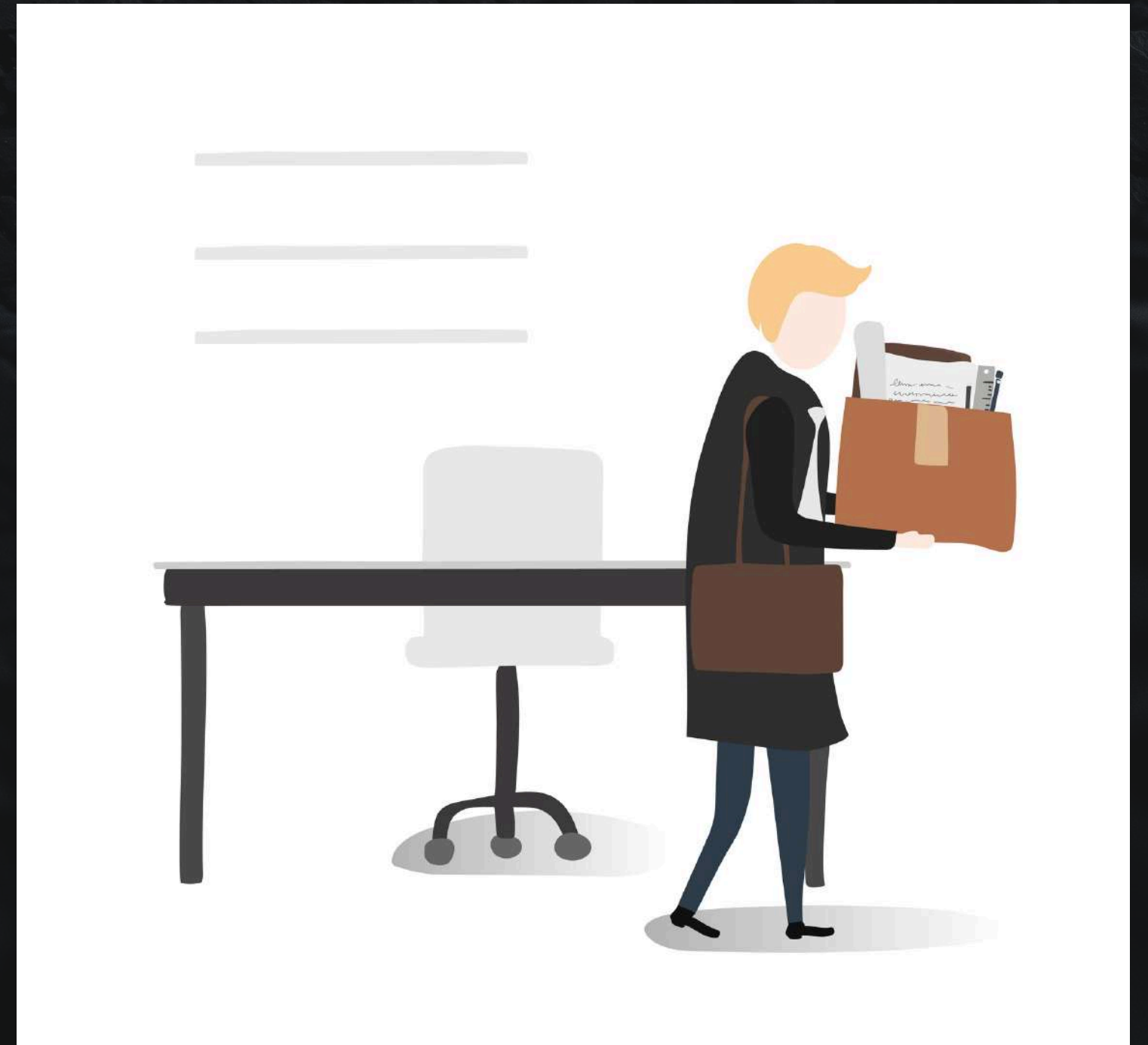




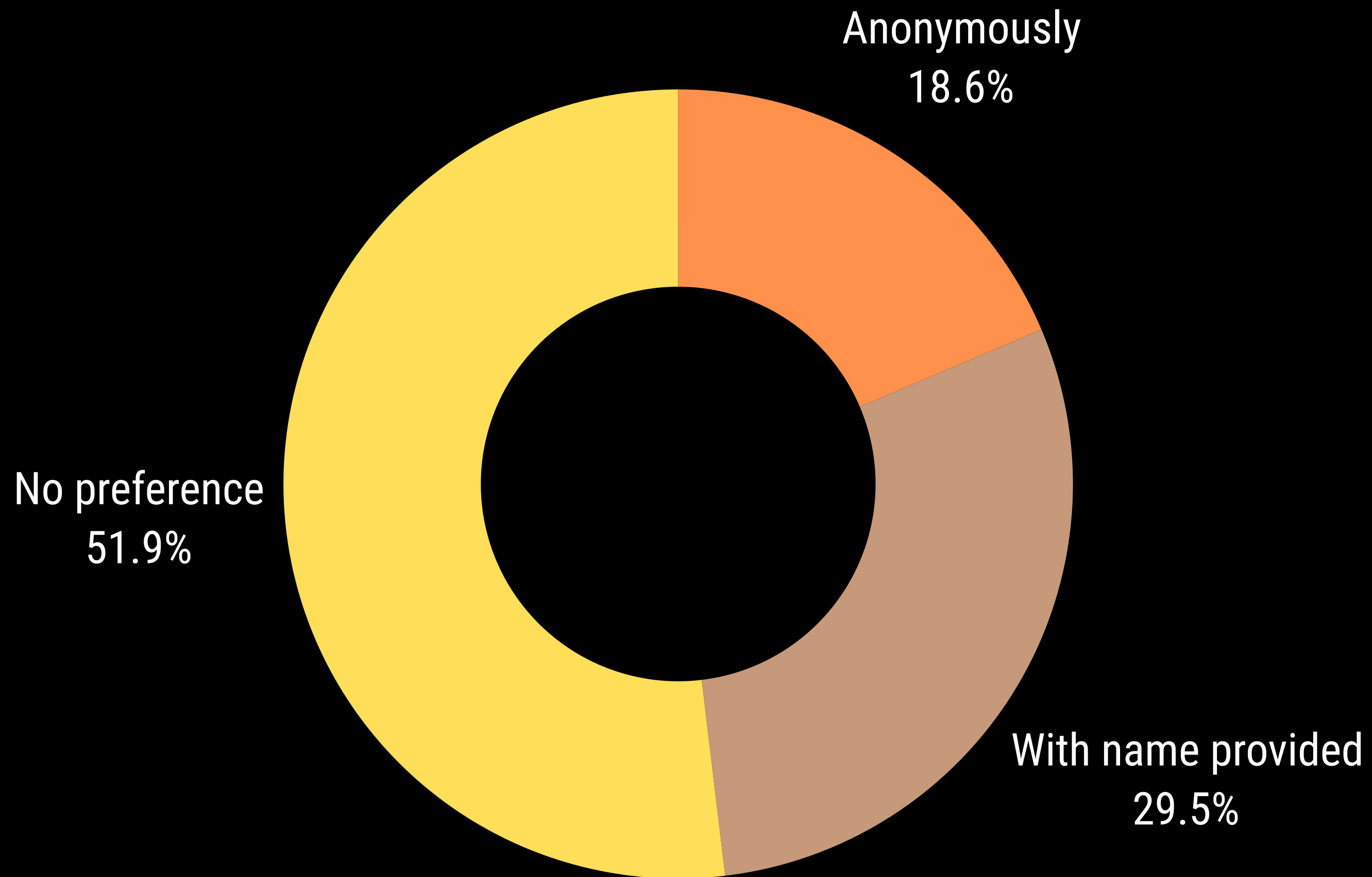
The key reasons why citizens, according to the respondents, do not participate more in the planning document creation process

# Something else?

- Rudeness
- Fear (of authorities, blackmail, workplace pressure)
- Relocation
- Young people are not interested in anything
- Feelings of powerlessness against profit-driven, self-interested stakeholders
- Distrust in authorities (local and national)
- Lack of interest from local authorities in involving citizens in planning







Do local residents feel more comfortable expressing their opinions in the planning document creation process...



# Why anonymously?

## FOR SAFETY AND SECURITY REASONS

- *Prevention of personal data misuse*
- *I feel safer and more secure*
- *To protect personal identity*
- *To protect privacy...*





# Why anonymously?

## BECAUSE OF FEAR

- *Losing my job*
- *Political influence*
- *To avoid consequences*
- *It feels safer because I work in a public enterprise*
- *I am employed by Zijin company*
- *To avoid conflict with people*
- *So that no one stops me in the street afterwards*
- *For myself, to avoid suffering*
- *So that no one calls me out*
- *To avoid conflict*
- *To stay out of trouble*
- *Difference of opinion*
- *It feels more comfortable that way*
- *Because of the fear of being beaten*

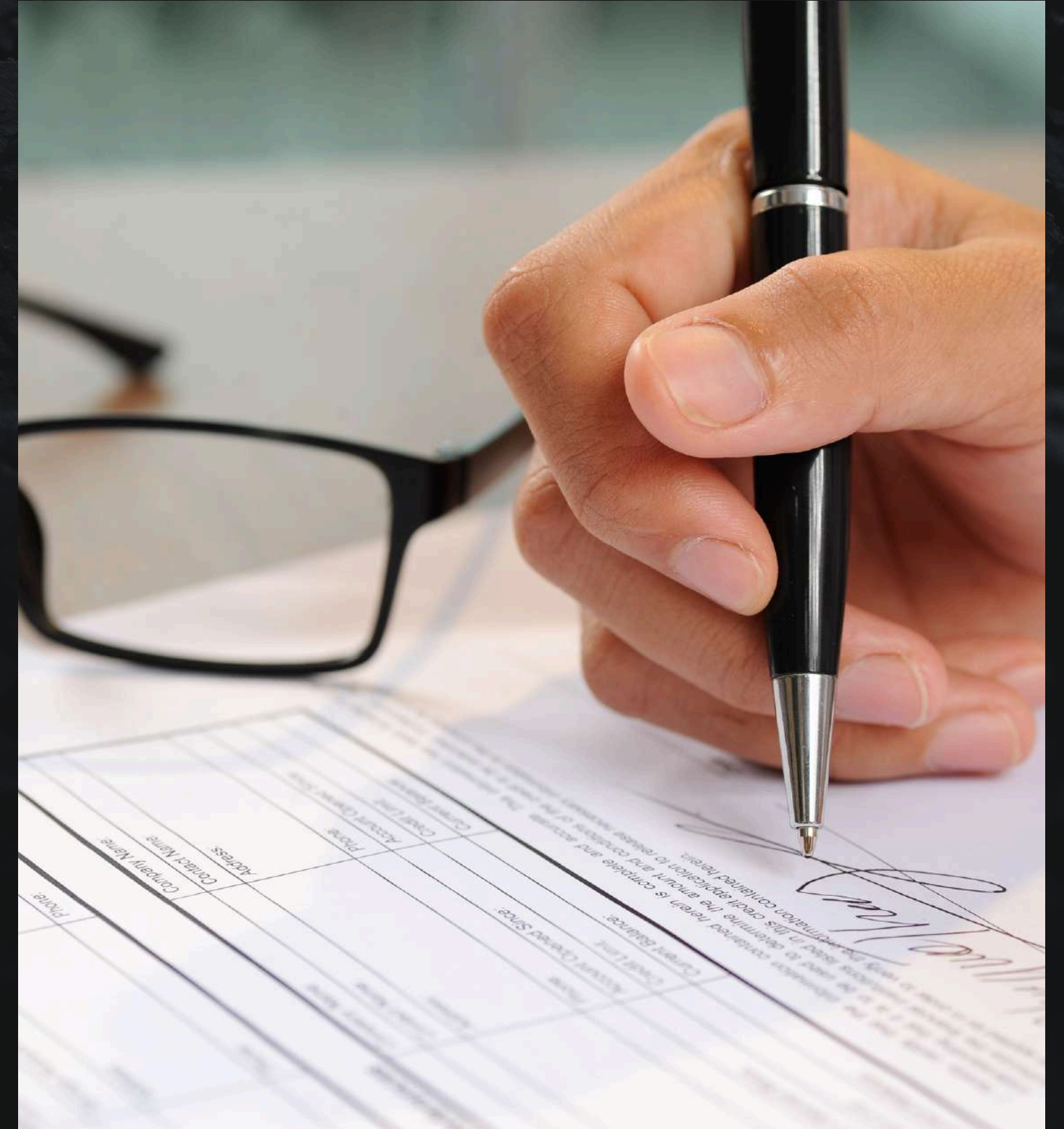




# Why with name provided?

## BECAUSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND CONSEQUENCES

- So it's clear who said what, so they can be held accountable
- So they know who is saying what – no hiding
- Anything can hide behind anonymity
- If authorities don't act, I'll have proof that I voiced my concerns
- I believe every individual has a responsibility to the community
- It's important to hear who is actually saying what
- Anonymous input is rarely taken seriously
- It helps authorities identify what the community is lacking
- That way, I'm more likely to receive a response
- At some point, it must be known who wants what, and why
- Identified feedback carries more weight and has greater impact

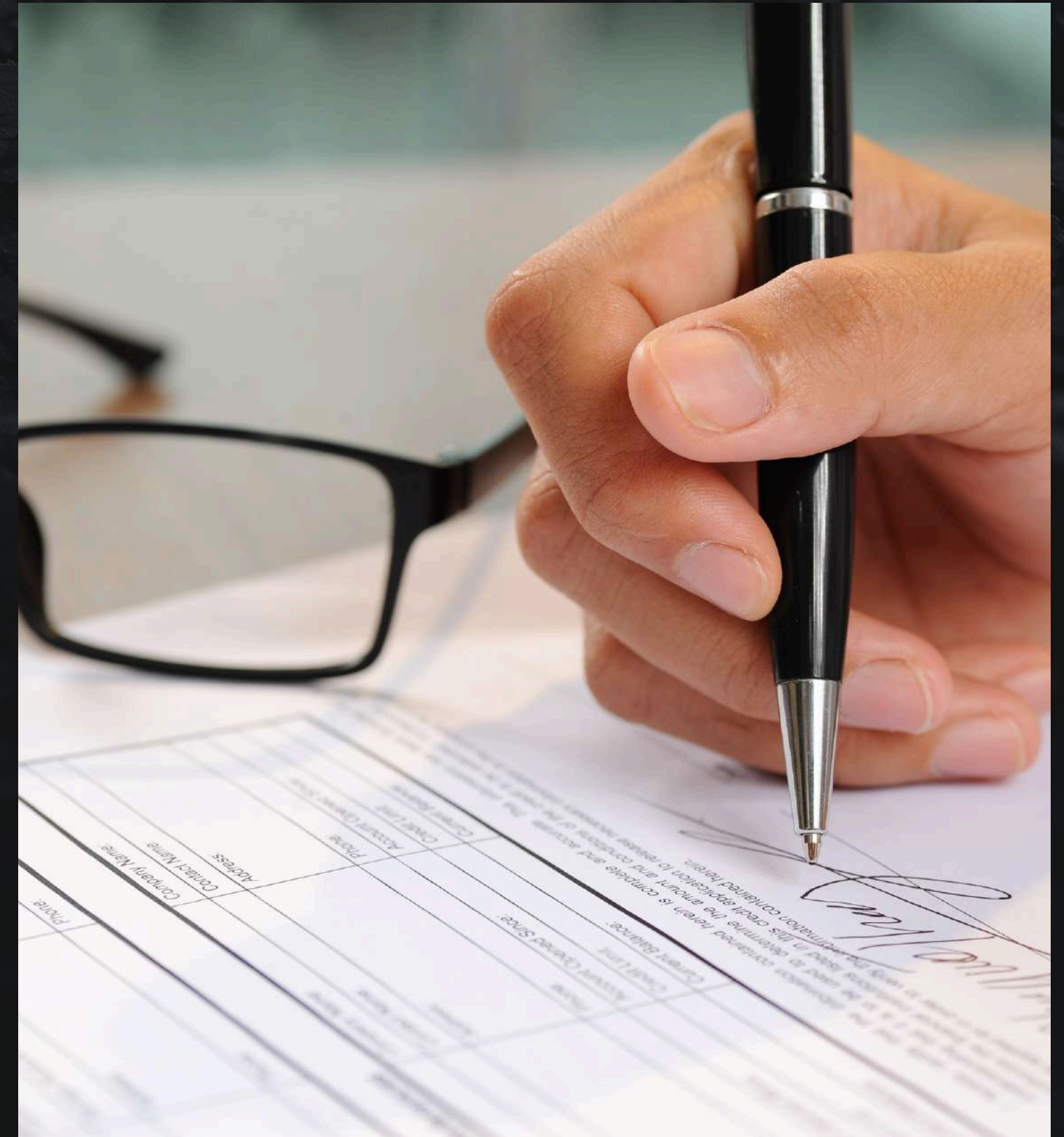




# Why with name provided?

## MORALITY, INTEGRITY, ABSENCE OF FEAR, FREEDOM TO EXPRESS ONE'S OWN OPINION

- *Everyone should express their opinion without fear*
- *Old-school values*
- *No hiding what someone thinks*
- *Because I aim for what is right*
- *I stand by my words*
- *I always stand behind my opinion*
- *I want to express my opinion through my personal stance*
- *I am responsible and don't hide my opinion*
- *No hiding – everyone should stand by their words*
- *I don't want to hide behind fake profiles, I don't tolerate injustice*
- *I don't like being anonymous – I stand by my words*
- *They can't harm me – I'm retired*





# Why with name provided?

## BECAUSE OF TRANSPARENCY

- *Everything should be transparent / I want everything to be transparent*
- *If we want to solve a problem, it has to be public and open*
- *Because a viewpoint must have legitimacy*
- *Transparency is the most important thing*
- *Transparency face to face*





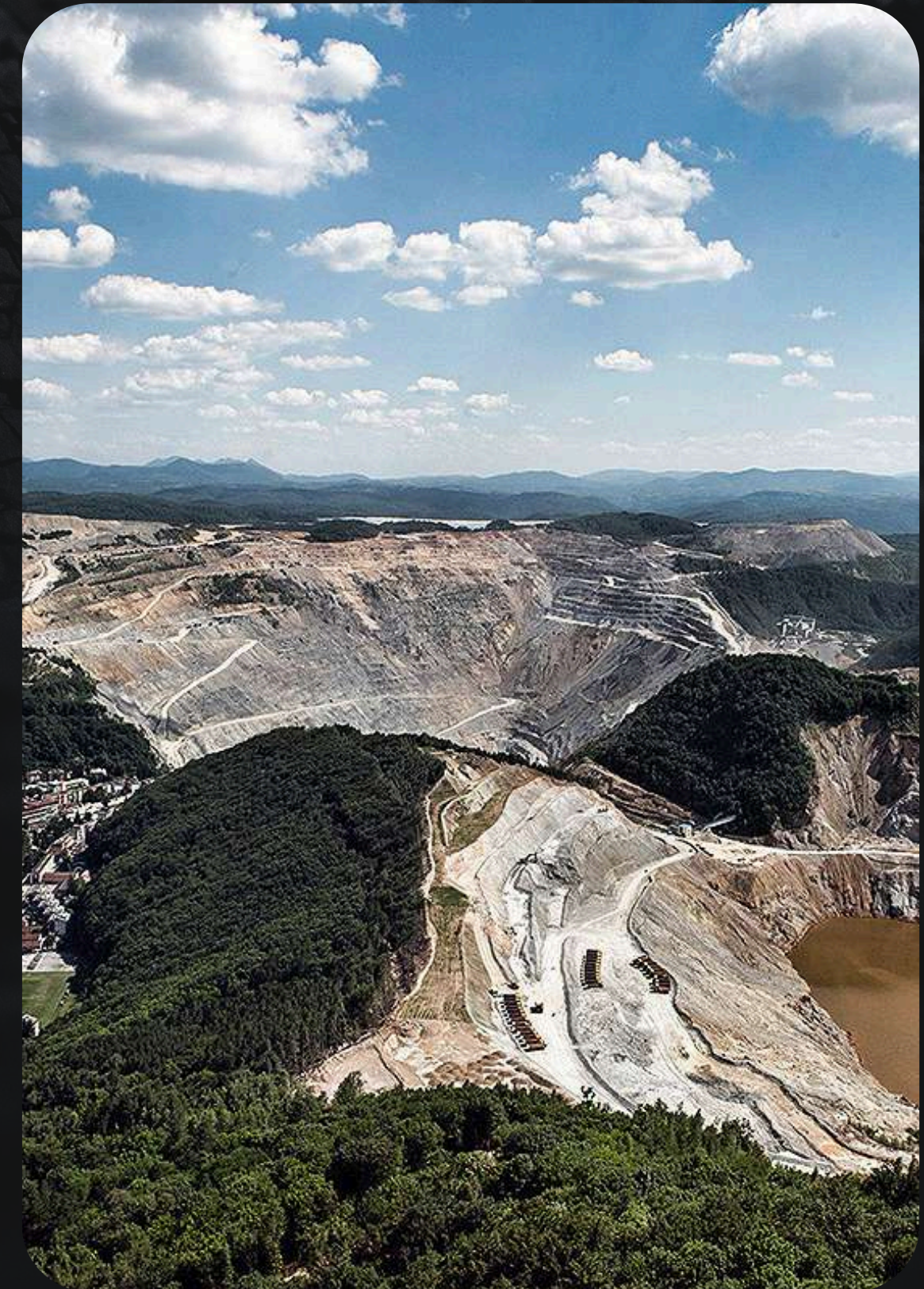
## CONCLUSION

The local population is very aware of the negative consequences of mining activities, especially the environmental ones.

Due to a lack of trust in both the mining company and the state, citizens are also discouraged from participating in formal decision-making processes.

The residents primarily participate in activities organized by local activist groups and citizens' associations. They create grassroots groups, which are close to the participatory type of activism.

The experiences of activist groups from Bor and Majdanpek may prove important in organizing resistance strategies to other projects, contributing to the development of the grassroots ecological movement in Serbia.





Thank you for your attention!



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Marko Popović, Flickr.com

dw.com

Udruženje građana Ne dam

Mitrović, N., 2022, BBC News na srpskom

### Web Source

ZaMedia. Story about the demolition of "Starica" – video report. Available at:

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