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NIMBY

Not in my back yard!



An Academically Controversial Term

NIMBY (not in my backyard) is commonly used to describe the phenomenon where local citizens oppose the construction of various infrastructures or housing/facility projects in their area. Though it was not originally an academic concept, it had come into academic use by 1982(Farkas).

Over the years there has been published multiple articles some are expanding on the concept in an attempt to avoid public resistance while others criticise the use of the concept or argue for abandoning it altogether as an academic term.

The following two abstracts show these different ways of engaging with NIMBY. In the first, NIMBY is treated as a valid explanation for social movements whereas the second clearly distances itself from the use of it:

Article 1: Non-critical of NIMBY

Study on the architectural design of a new type of waste incineration power plant based on NIMBY effect
Open Access

Yuanyuan, L.

2021 IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science
825(1),012025

Hide abstract ^



Related documents

With the development of economy and urbanization, facing the dilemma of "garbage besieged city", China's "fourteenth five year plan" continues to focus on development and ecological protection. Waste incineration power generation is the most environmentally-friendly and efficient means of waste treatment. However, facilities such as waste incineration power plant are often faced with the problem of "NIMBY effect". Through the analysis of typical cases at home and abroad, combined with the project practice of Foshan Gaoming District waste incineration power plant, this paper explores how to alleviate the NIMBY effect through architectural design from three aspects of appearance design, ancillary functions and external environment.

Article 2: Critical of NIMBY

Energy infrastructure, NIMBYism, and public opinion: A systematic literature review of three decades of empirical survey literature
Open Access

Carley, S., Konisky, D.M.,
Atiq, Z., Land, N.

2020 Environmental Research
Letters
15(9),093007

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Public support is a key determinant of whether any energy project is developed in democratic countries. In recent decades, scholars have extensively examined levels of support and opposition to energy infrastructure, often with a focus on so-called Not-in-My-Backyard (NIMBY) sentiments. As the need for energy infrastructure grows, so does the need to extract insights and lessons from this literature. In this systematic literature review, we evaluate decades of research to identify important trends in topical focus, research findings, and research design. We find a disproportionate focus on wind energy, followed by solar, fossil fuels, and transmission, with most studies conducted in the United States or United Kingdom, and that individuals are more often supportive of energy projects than they are opposed. Scholars have examined the role of many factors in understanding attitudes toward energy infrastructure, and often find knowledge, trust, and positive perceptions about the benefits of projects to be positively correlated with support for projects, although with variation across energy types. NIMBY attitudes differ widely in approach and are often plagued by problematic research designs that limit inferences and the generalizability of findings. We provide a detailed discussion of these limitations and suggest areas in which the literature can expand.

An Academically Controversial Term

Academically, the question of whether to use NIMBY and how still remains unsettled. Some argue that the term NIMBY is too broad to have any significance whereas others argue that using NIMBY makes researchers miss other possible explanations when trying to understand opposition.

To better understand the discursive development of NIMBY, we trace the term back to its origins. Based on data from the Scopus database we aim to give a brief overview of NIMBY as a topic of academic debate.

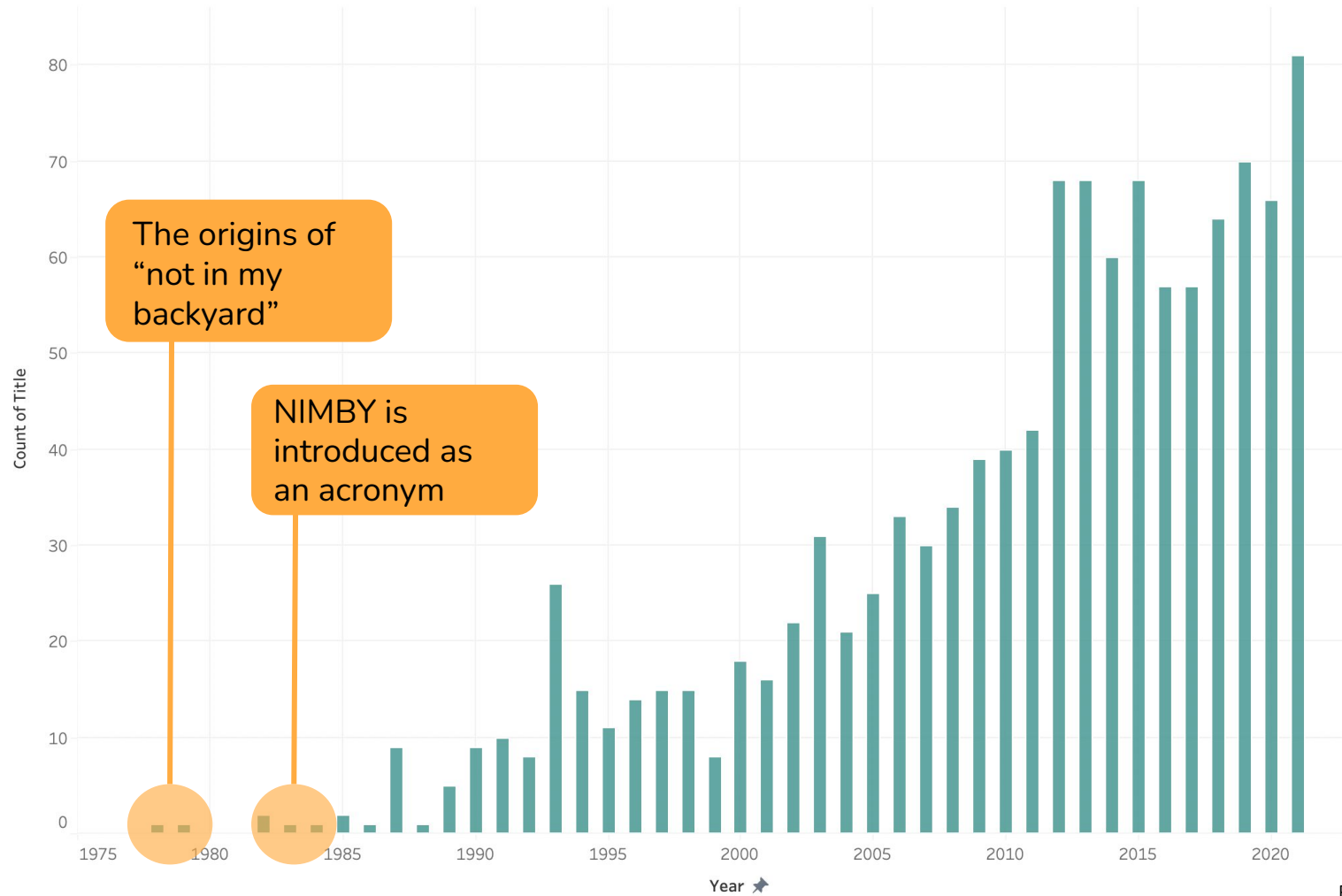
Visualisation 1: Timeline

The Origins of NIMBY

In the late 70's NIMBY had not yet become a popularized acronym. In 1978 Massachusetts based journal "Technology Review" publishes an article entitled "Nuclear waste disposal: Not in my backyard"(Jakimo & Bupp) and the year after another article called "Needed: Hazardous waste disposal (but not in my backyard)"(No name 1979) is published in Environmental Science and Technology which is run by the American Chemical Society. The phrasing and mentality "not in my backyard" is almost exclusively brought up in relation to hazardous waste disposal within the United States as in the case of the Valley of the Drums which is depicted on the cover.

By 1982 the acronym NIMBY has been established and refers to a certain mentality of mostly egotistic opposition. Also, there is a tendency within academia to describe NIMBY as a syndrome, which reflects a focus on the individual.

NIMBY



The origins of
"not in my
backyard"

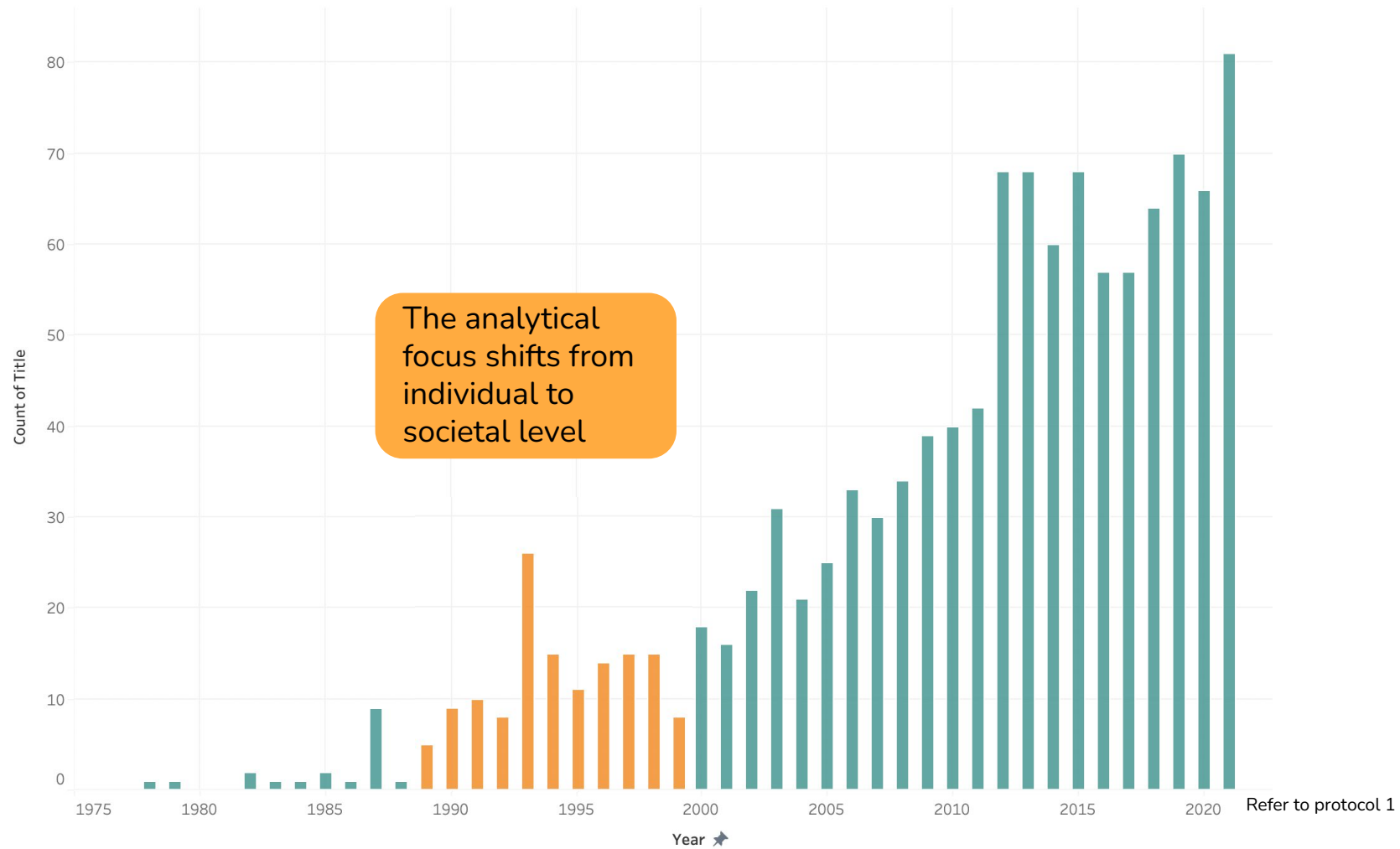
NIMBY is
introduced as
an acronym

Diversification and a Shift in Focus

Throughout the 1990's there's a shift in focus. Where researchers previously discussed NIMBY as a certain set of rationales and egotistic ideas dispositioning them to act in self-interest, they are now starting to acknowledge the underlying wider social dynamics. Alongside this, NIMBY is being picked up by other branches of academia stretching across a wide range of natural sciences, social sciences and even a few humanities.

NIMBY has also been introduced to geographies outside of the US and subcategories and countermovements are continually emerging. These are terms like: YIMBY (yes in my backyard), LULU (locally unwanted land use), CAVE (citizens against virtually anything) or BANANA (build absolutely nothing near anything (or anyone)).

NIMBY

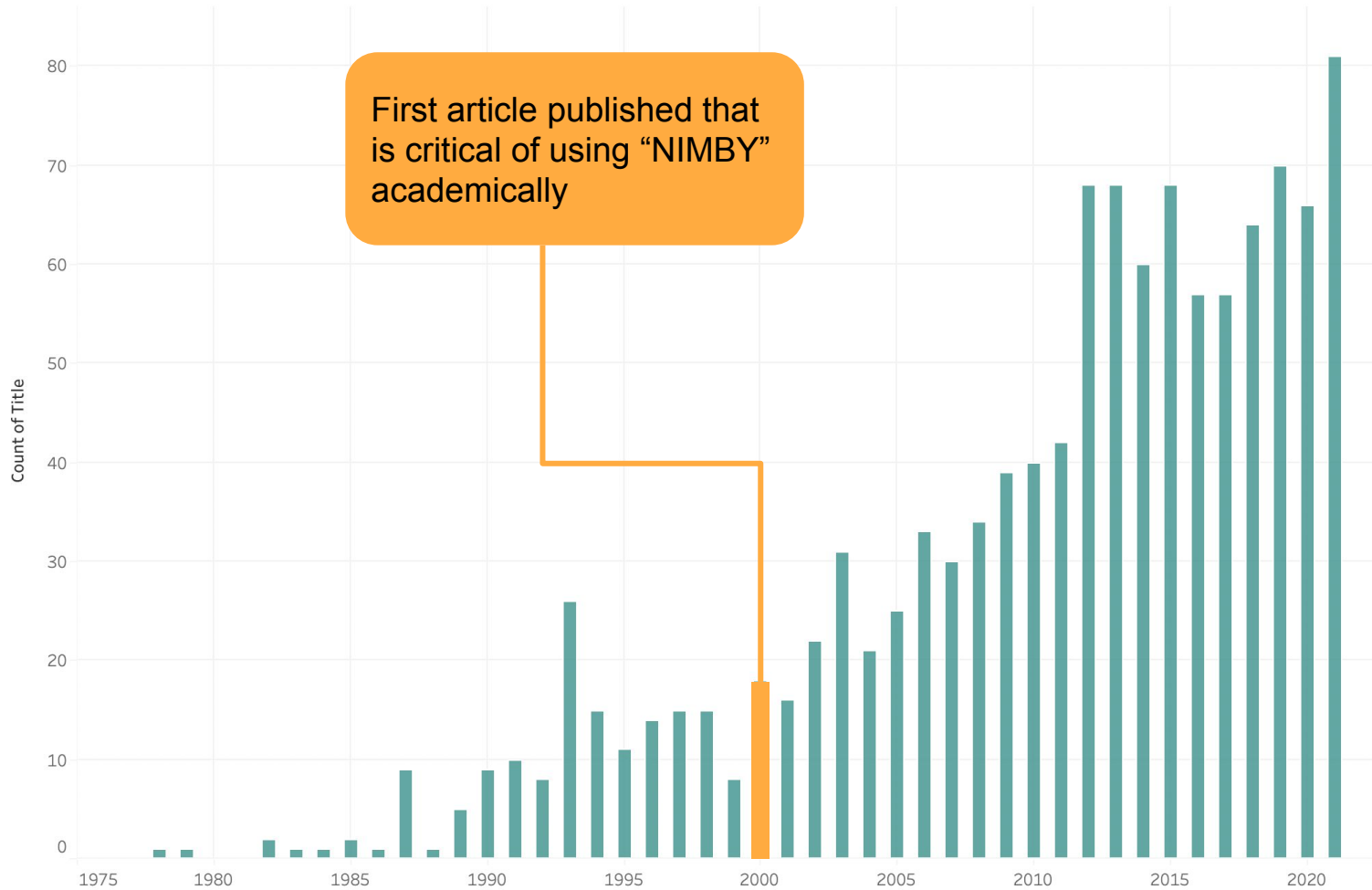


The analytical focus shifts from individual to societal level

Refer to protocol 1

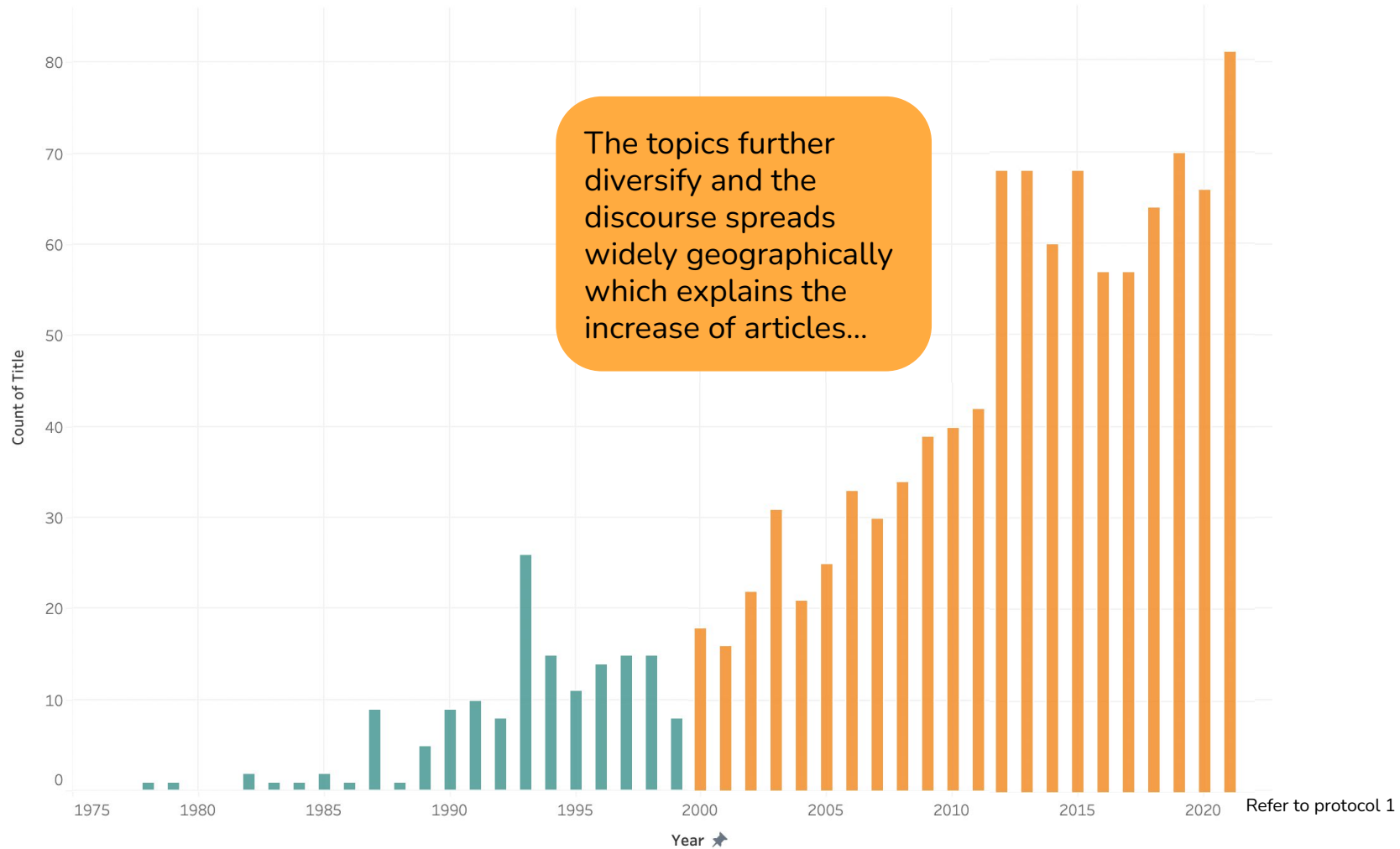
Academic reflection on NIMBY

In 2000 an article called “Using the language of NIMBY: A topic for research, not an activity for researchers” was published, criticizing the academic use of NIMBY. This article is the first attempt found within the Scopus database at instigating a collective abandonment of the term altogether.



First article published that is critical of using "NIMBY" academically

NIMBY

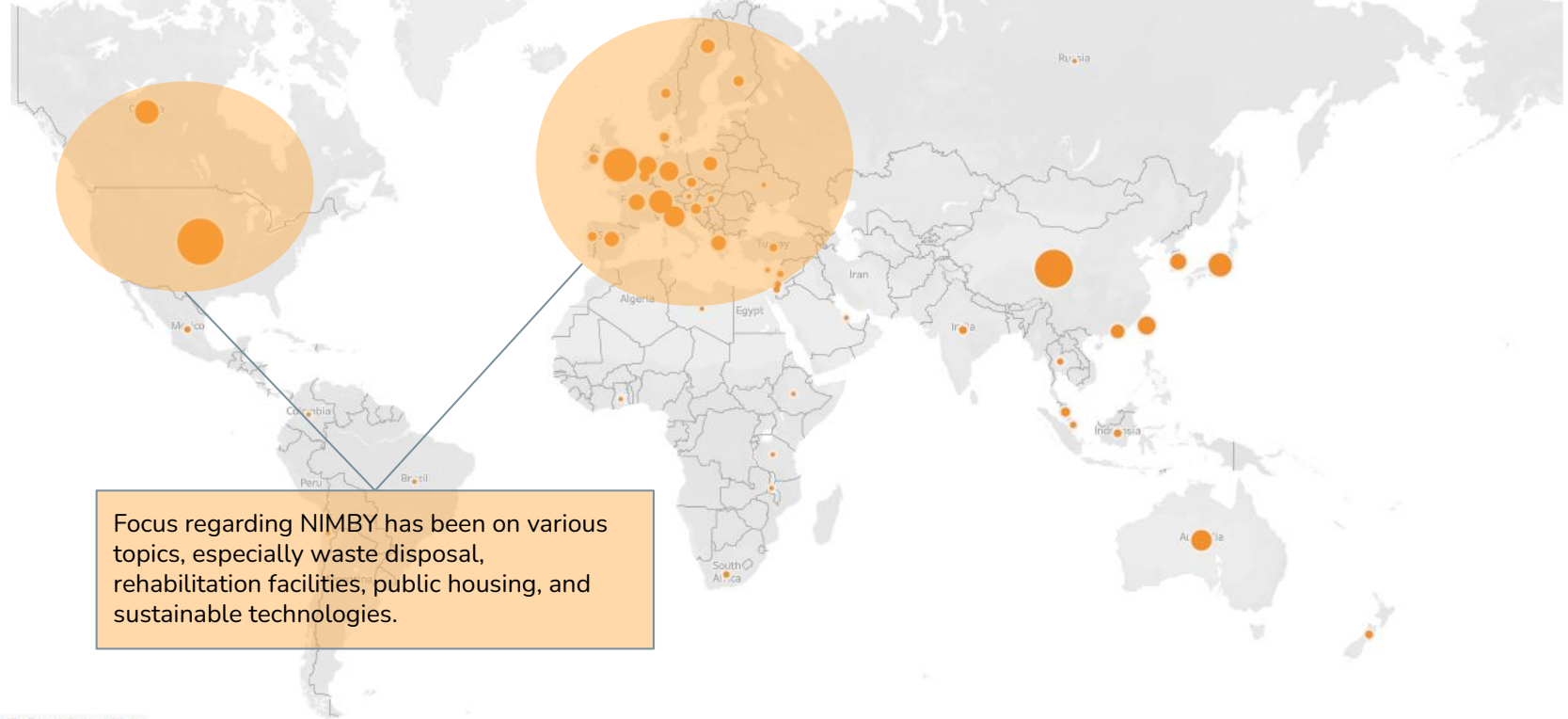


Visualisation 2: Worldmap

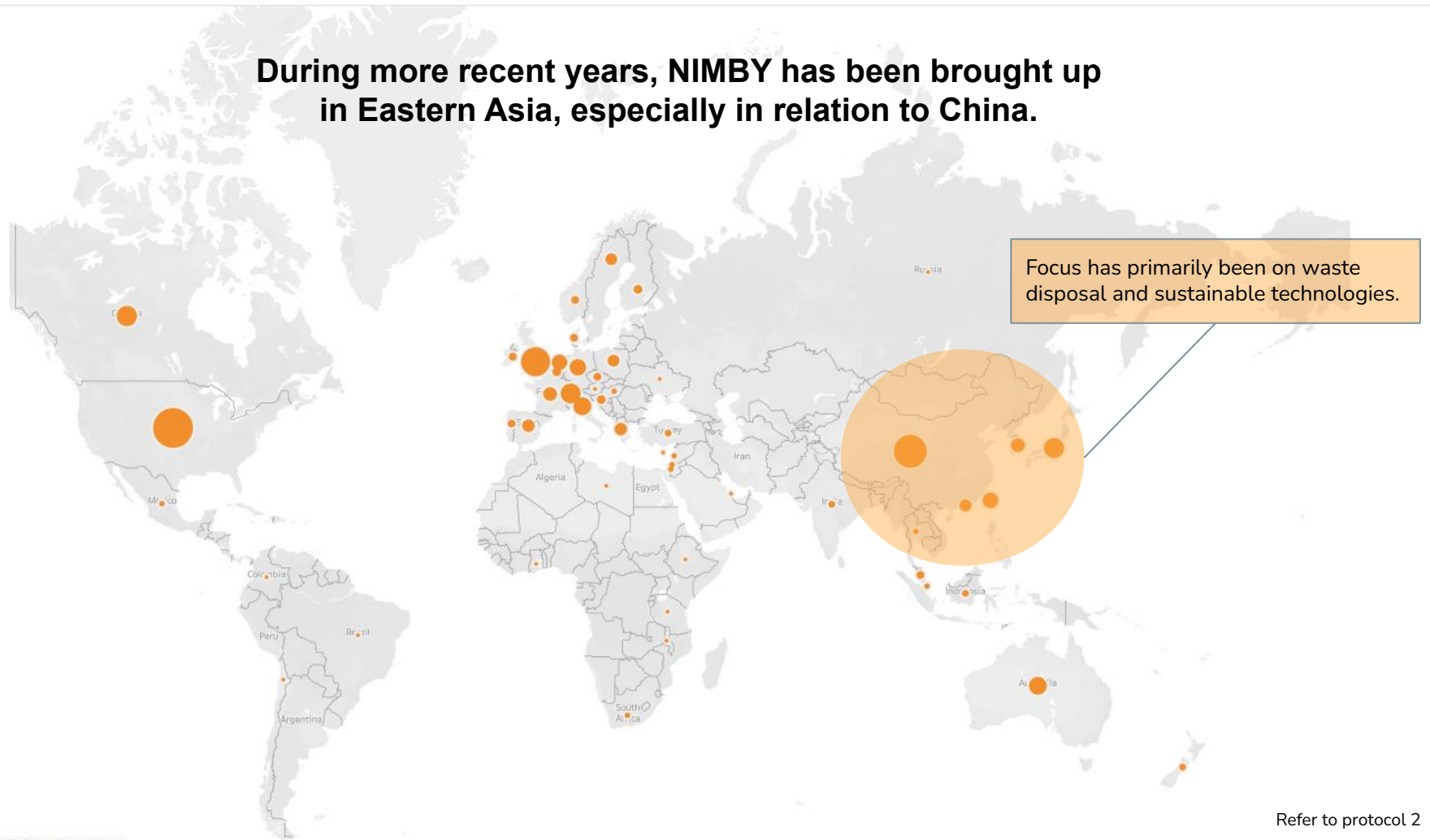
Further Widespread Diversification

From around 2000 and onwards the diverse use of the acronym rapidly expands. There is a near constant growth of articles published regarding NIMBY and they cover ever more different topics in various ways. The topics are no longer primarily rooted in the US but extend across the western world, as well as parts of Asia, Oceania, Africa, Latin- and South America. Among the newer NIMBY issues are subjects of renewable energy facilities (especially wind turbines), urban planning and NIMBY itself, as in how to deal with the term analytically.

Historically NIMBY has existed primarily as a North American and European phenomenon



During more recent years, NIMBY has been brought up in Eastern Asia, especially in relation to China.



Refer to protocol 2

The geography of NIMBY

In contrast to the previous literature, several recent articles focus on Eastern Asia, especially China. These articles are mostly concerned with waste management, sustainable technologies, and public housing while the focus on rehabilitation facilities is less prevalent. Among the articles regarding China a dominant topic is how to overcome the NIMBY dilemma. Many suggest public participation in the decision making as a possible solution.

Visualisation 3: Bi-partite Network

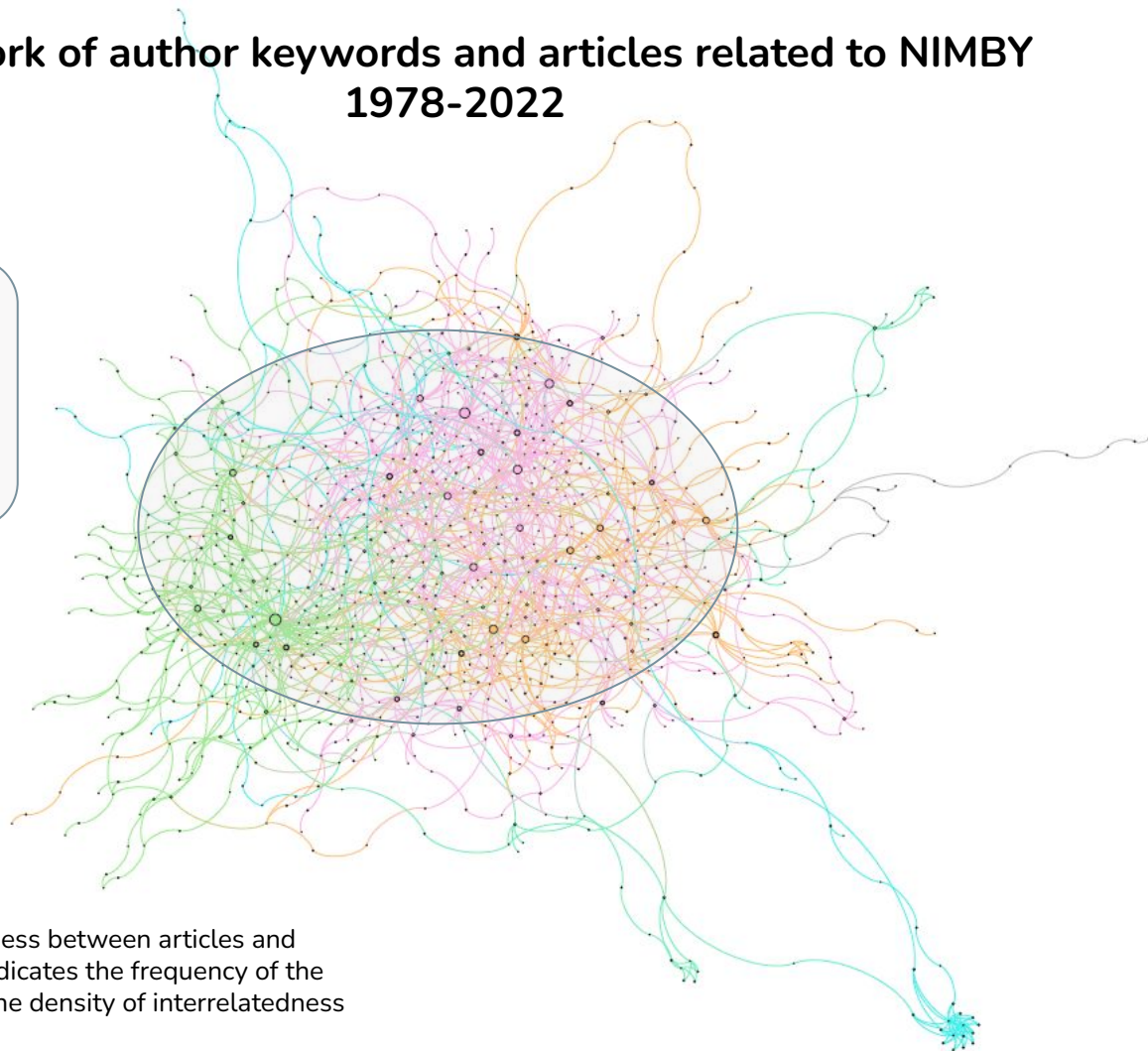
A network center

Having established the complexity of the discourse surrounding NIMBY, we now dive deeper into this complexity. The following network, which is based on the same search results as the previous visualisations, represents the interrelatedness between author keywords and articles from 1978-2022.

At first glance, the network is characterised by having a dense center, implying that the keywords and articles are deeply interconnected, basing the discourse on a common foundation.

Network of author keywords and articles related to NIMBY 1978-2022

A larger central cluster is identifiable. This shows the high level of interrelatedness between all the author keywords and titles.

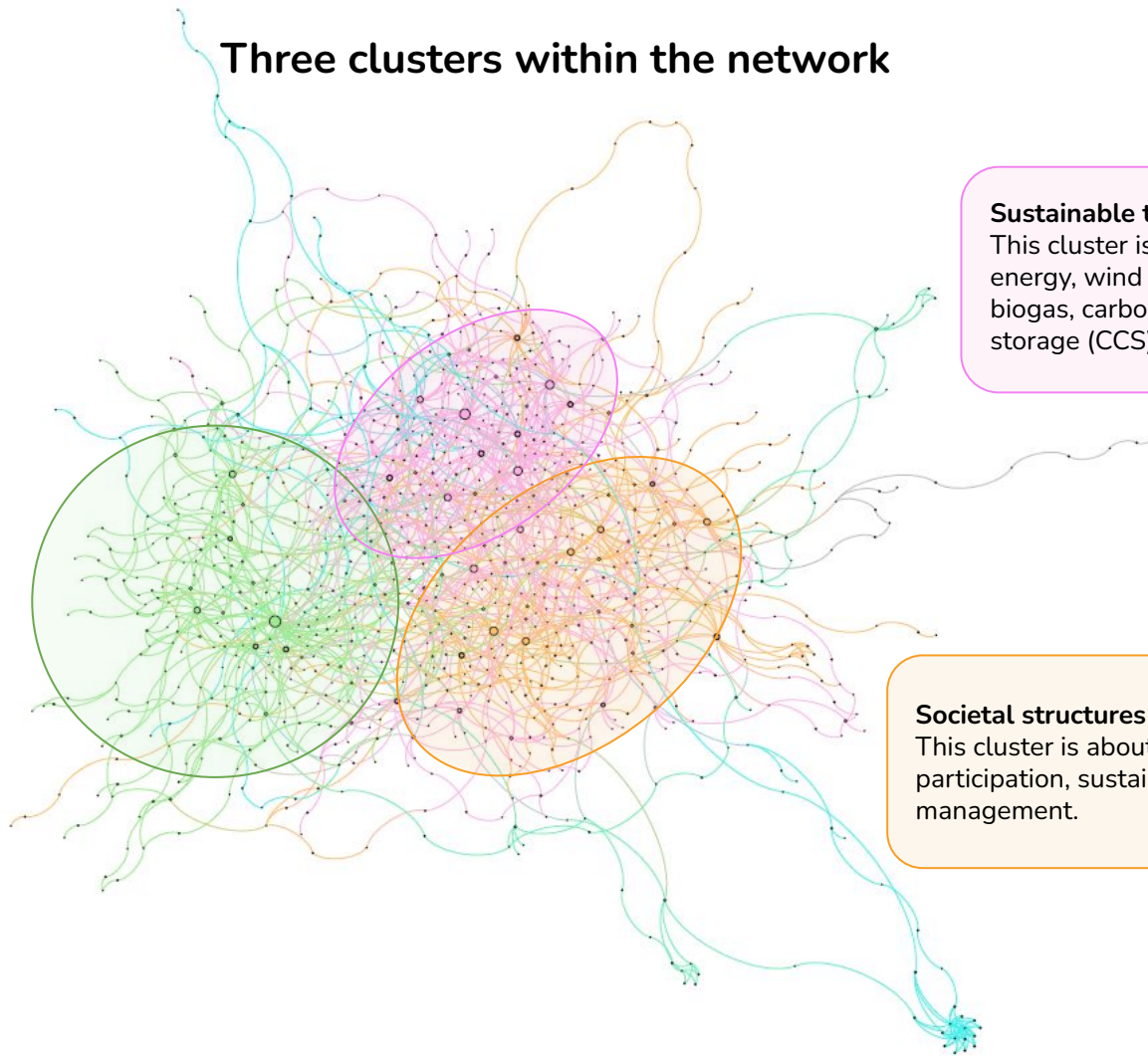


This is an illustration of the interrelatedness between articles and keywords about NIMBY. The nodesize indicates the frequency of the keyword and the cluster appear due to the density of interrelatedness between keywords and articles.

Three clusters within the network

Housing- and rehabilitation facility projects:

This cluster is about urban planning and facilities for homeless people, drug users, and people struggling with mental health.



Sustainable technologies:
This cluster is about renewable energy, wind energy, nuclear, biogas, carbon capture and storage (CCS) and solar energy.

Societal structures and sustainability:
This cluster is about risk perception, public participation, sustainability and waste management.

Three clusters in the network

However, taking a closer look, there seems to be three main clusters as illustrated in the visualisation above. These areas reveal three different tendencies within the literature and thus three standpoints taken by authors due to their active selection of keywords. Looking at these author keywords for each area shows that:

- *The green cluster is focused on “activism”, “empowerment”, “resistance”, “neighborhood”, “localism”, and “local- and community opposition”.*
- *The pink cluster is focused on “place- attachment and identity”, “stigma”, “values”, “fairness”, “climate change”, and “justice”.*
- *The orange cluster is focused on “Protest”, “trust”, “self-interest”, “distributive justice”, “stakeholder participation”, and “environmental governance and -policy”.*

The different clusters show that even though there are different words attached to the areas these words are not fundamentally different, but touch upon the same central theme of belonging to a place and having a voice. This also reflects back on the general interrelatedness of the network.

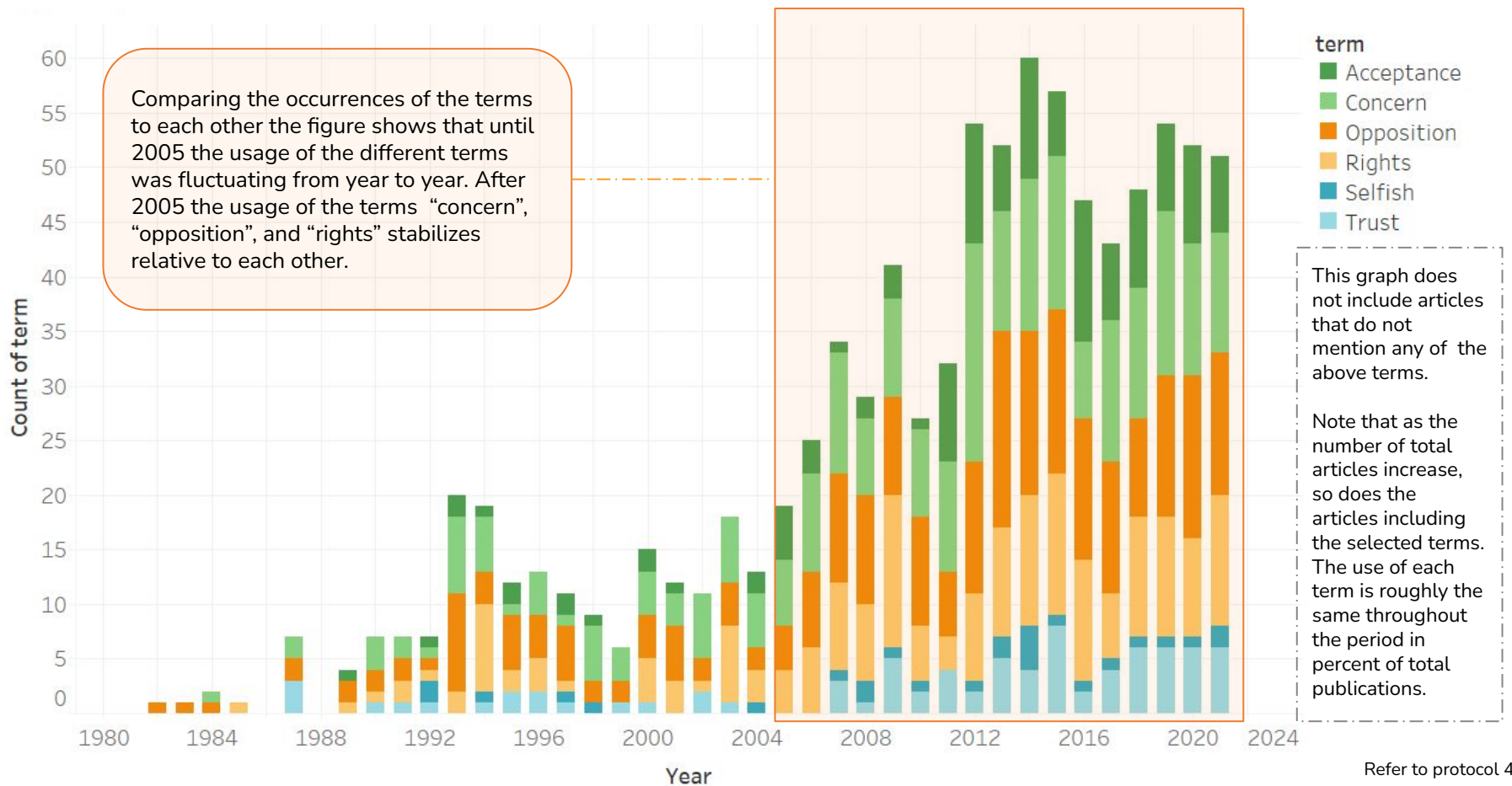
Visualisation 4: Timeline of words

Frequently used terms

Going through our search results qualitatively, we find that NIMBY is controversial in two dimensions. One is the controversy regarding whether NIMBY is academically useful or not. However, there is also a dimension of greater human impact where the words used to describe NIMBY points towards the controversy between the parties involved.

Our next visualisation shows how NIMBY is being portrayed by looking at a selection of words commonly found in abstracts. We see that words like “*acceptance*”, “*concern*”, “*opposition*”, “*rights*”, “*selfish*”, and “*trust*” have been steadily used since the early years of the academic literature.

Timeline of 6 frequently used terms in abstracts concerning NIMBY



Common foundation

The stabilization of the frequency of the usage indicates that these terms have become part of a common academic discourse around NIMBY based on a growing literature on the topic.

Summarization

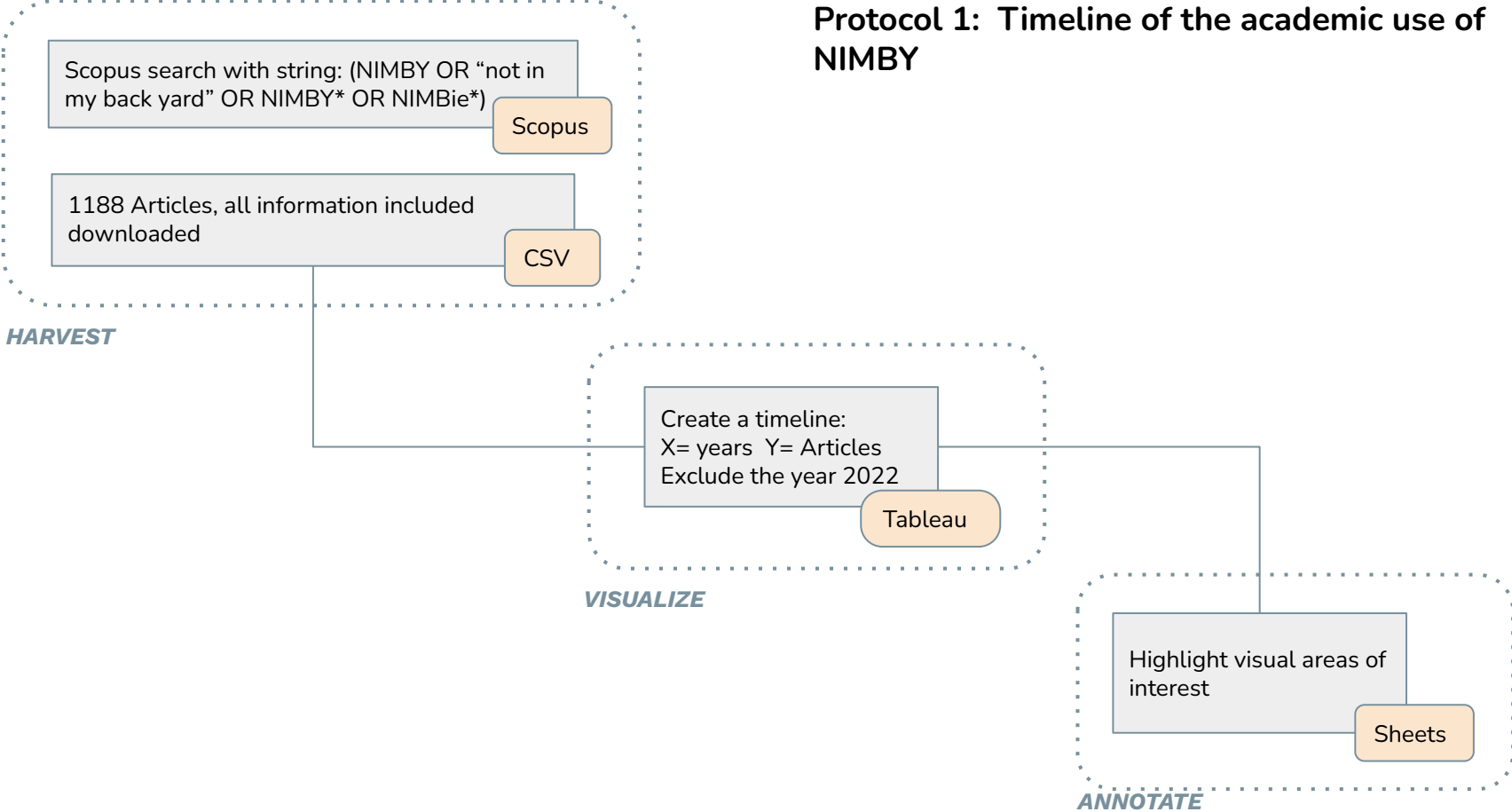
The term NIMBY was once used to refer to local opposition against hazardous waste disposal sites in the US. It is now broadly used in a wide variety of contexts, topics and places, blurring the definition of the term and thereby the discourse surrounding it. However through our previous visualisation we have shown that some specific words have been used continuously through the existence of NIMBY, despite the growth of the term.

Throughout the years NIMBY has been critiqued as an academic concept as some see it as being too broad to have any significance as well as too generalizing in understanding local opposition. In the meantime still more articles are being published, putting the exact meaning of NIMBY and how to properly engage with the word up for debate as it has been ever since its conception in 1980.

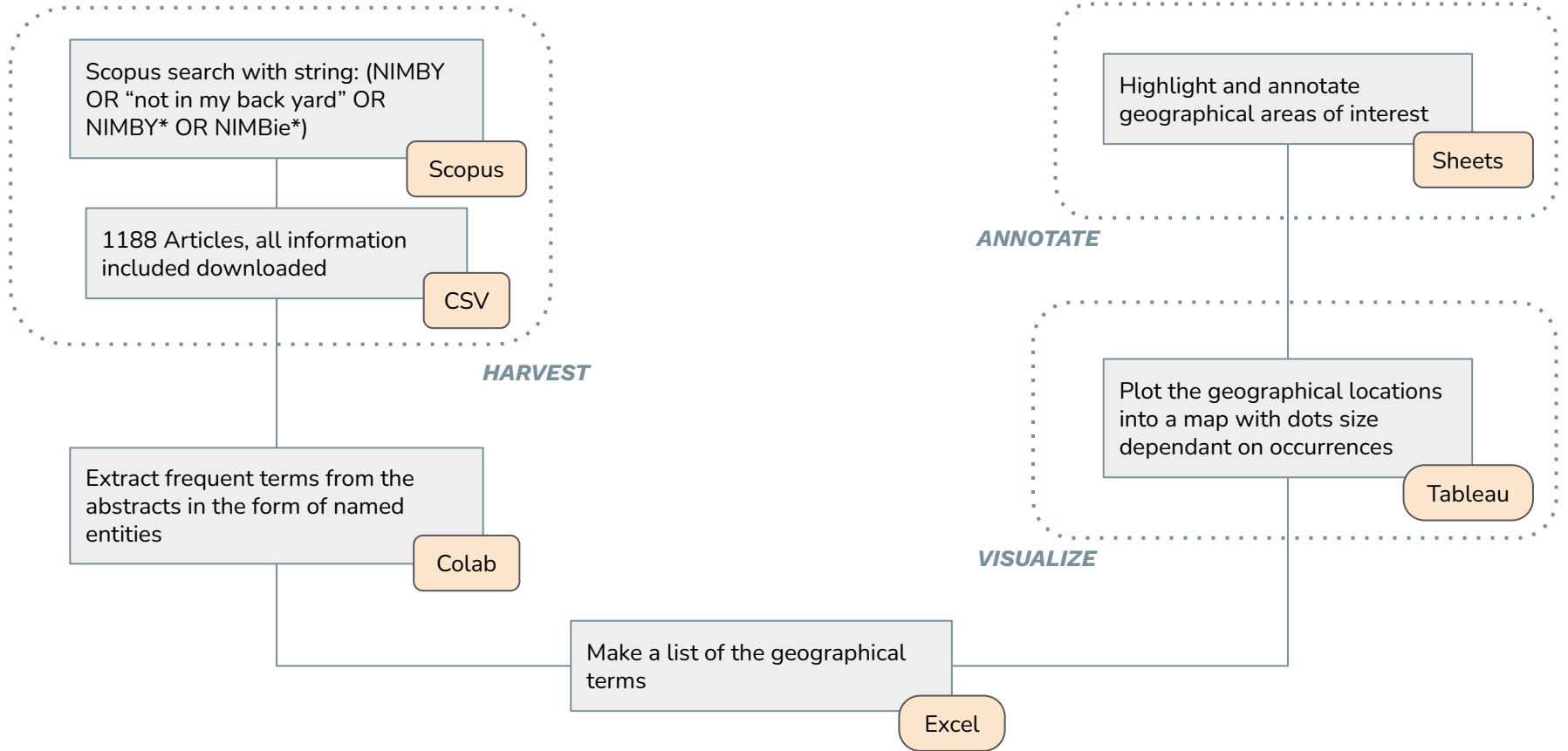
NIMBY!... for any Occasion!



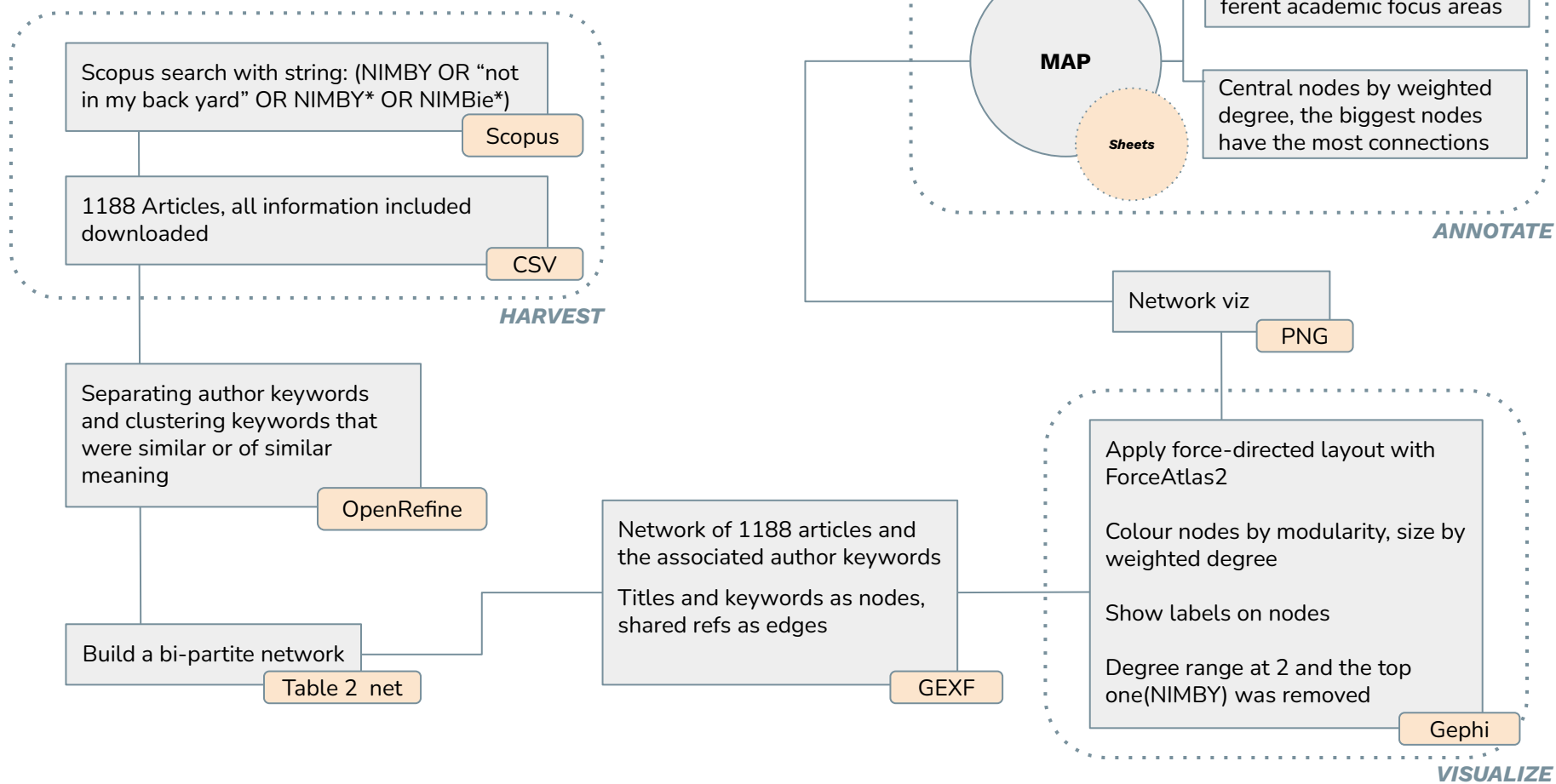
Protocol 1: Timeline of the academic use of NIMBY



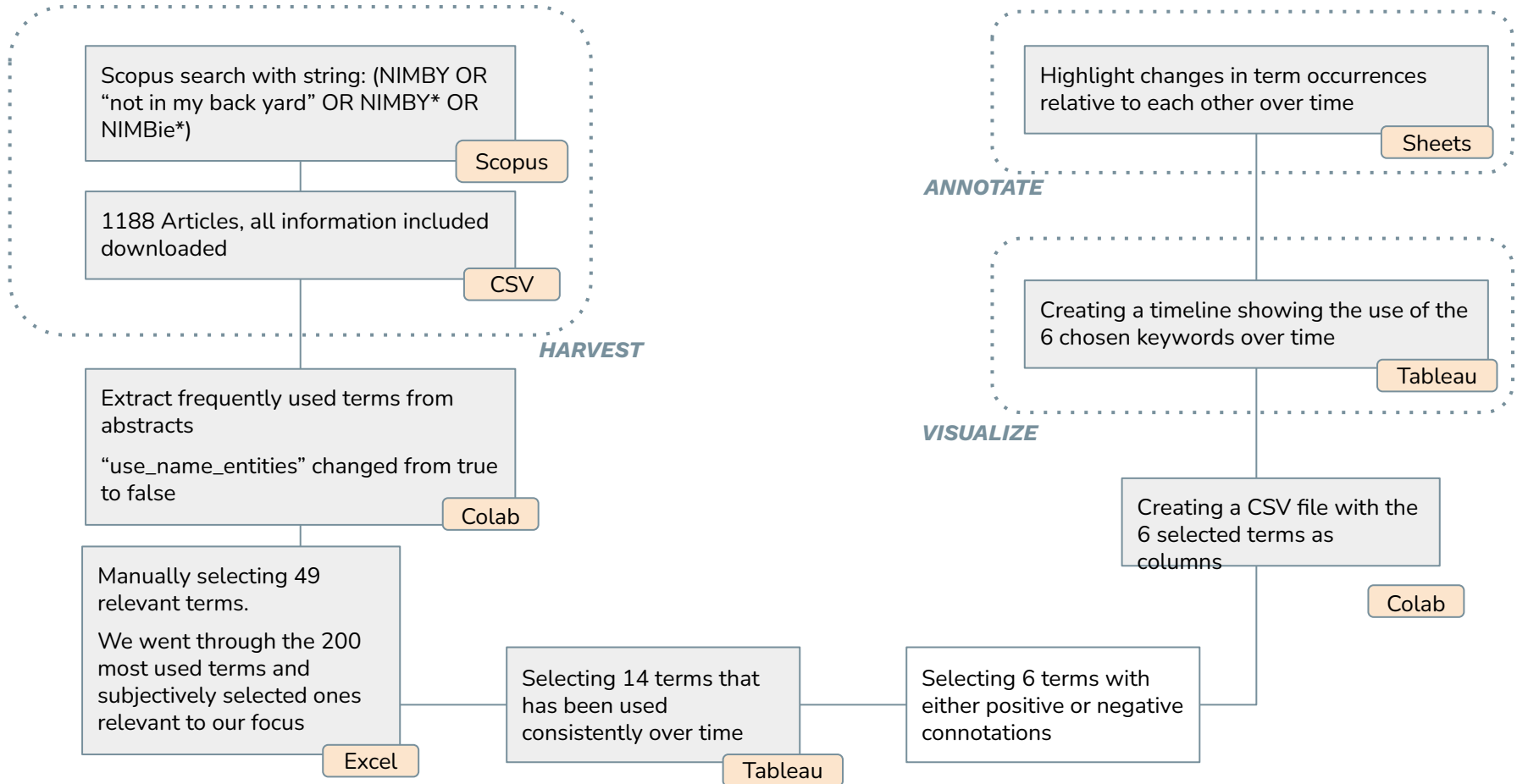
Protocol 2: Geographical areas of interest



Protocol 3: Network of author keywords and articles related to NIMBY



Protocol 4: Frequent terms from abstracts



Literature list

Farkas, E. J. 1982. "The Nimby Syndrome (waste-disposal)". *Alternatives*, 10 (2-3): 47-50.

Jakimo, A and Bupp, I. C. 1978. "Nuclear waste disposal: Not in my backyard". *Technology Review*, 80 (57): 64-72.

No name. 1979. "Needed: Hazardous waste disposal (but not in my backyard)". *ES&T Outlook*, 13 (8): 913-915.