



# Theorizing Urban Movements in Pierre Bourdieu's Terms—the Example of Warsaw, Poland

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## Abstract

For more than a decade, the importance of urban social movements has been systematically increasing in the Polish public sphere. However, available theories of social movements cannot account for the variety of forms of urban mobilization or for the ideological differences between organizations. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social class for research on urban movements. Using the concepts of "capital" and "habitus," the paper explores the social vision and process of the emergence of two activist organizations in Warsaw, Poland. The study is based on qualitative research conducted from 2016 to 2019, which included an analysis of secondary resources and individual in-depth interviews with members from each organization. Bourdieu's theory of social class facilitates consideration of different aspects of the functioning of urban social movements, including the role of resources and competences, ideological divisions, and chances of success. The theory also provides an explanation for the importance of class within urban social movements. The article shows that, even though the demands of social movements appear to be values-led, in fact, they are based on the class interests of their members.

**Keywords** Habitus · Pierre Bourdieu · Public services · Social class · Urban movements · Warsaw

## Introduction

For more than a decade, the importance of urban social movements has been systematically increasing in the Polish public sphere. This has sparked interest among researchers from various academic disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, geography, and cultural studies. Notably, authors have pointed out that classical social movement theories are incapable of grasping all aspects of the functioning of urban movements

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(see, e.g., Jacobsson, 2015; Kubicki, 2020; Pluciński, 2015). Since Manuel Castells (1977, 1983) introduced the term urban movement to describe collective behavior in cities, urban mobilization has evolved, and new forms of activism have emerged. Urban movements range from informal groups and protest initiatives, through nongovernmental organizations, to political committees (Domaradzka, 2018; Lowe, 1986; Pluciński, 2020a; Polanska, 2020). Some are more progressive, while others are more moderate in their claims (Jacobsson, 2015). In recent years, these movements have entered political debates and moved towards clearly political forms of activism. All these factors force researchers to challenge established theories and reformulate explanatory models of urban mobilization.

This paper's objective is to offer new conceptual grounds for research on urban movements in Poland. To this end, it introduces Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social class as a framework to investigate urban mobilization. Although many researchers have analyzed the development of urban movements in Poland, to my knowledge, none of them have done so applying Bourdieu's theoretical perspective. The authors mainly drew on the theories of new social movements (see, e.g., Domaradzka, 2018, 2021; Kubicki, 2020), critical urban studies (see, e.g., Piotrowski & Lundstend, 2016; Pluciński, 2018), or protest analysis (see, e.g., Kowalewski, 2016). An emphasis was placed on the values and identity-building process (Kostka & Czarnota, 2017; see, e.g., Kubicki, 2020; Łuczak, 2015). Few researchers have addressed the problem of the interconnectedness of social status, financial resources, social networks, and cultural competences behind the demands of urban movements. In none of the works, the category of social class was central, and its relation with the social visions of the movements remains unclear.

In this paper, I aim to fill this gap by showing the relevance of Bourdieu's theory of social class for research on urban movements in Poland. Using the concepts of "capital" and "habitus," I discuss the processes of emergence and ideological differences between two activist organizations in Warsaw. Specifically, I seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the role of economic, social, and cultural capital in initiating and developing urban movements?
2. How do activists describe members of their movements and create distinctions from other actors?
3. How does social class appear in the social visions and meaning-making processes of activists?

I argue that although the activist demands of both organizations seem to be values-driven, they are based on class interests of the movements' members. In doing so, I closely follow Crossley (2002, 2003), Husu (2012, 2013), and other authors who insist that social movement theory can be improved with Bourdieusian theory (see, e.g., Bilić, 2010; Haluza-DeLay, 2008; Horton, 2003; Ibrahim, 2015). I believe that the sociological thought of Bourdieu can help expand the way urban movements are conceptualized and understood.

The findings are based on qualitative research carried out from 2016 to 2019 in the capital of Poland, Warsaw. Warsaw is an interesting place for research on this issue due

to the dynamics of urban transformation. According to Grubbauer and Kusiak (2012), Warsaw could be said to have three distinct urban layers: “a densely built-up central European city, [a] wide-stretched and large-scale socialist city, and [an] intrusive neo-liberal city” (p. 11). In the article, I examine organizations in the two districts of Wilanów and Ochota. My research, which included an analysis of secondary resources in conjunction with a series of individual interviews, also included an investigation of how each organization envisioned change in the public services provided in their respective local areas. From the collected material, I undertake an analysis of the capital that enables mobilization and the class position of activists.

This paper has been divided into the following parts. The first part introduces the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu. In this section, examples of previous research linking Bourdieu's theory with social movements are presented. I also show how the theoretical concepts of Bourdieu can be used in practice to analyze urban movements. In the second section, I outline the methodology and give a brief overview of the setting and methods used in the research. The last section provides the results. The focus is on two main dimensions of urban social movements: the process of creating an urban movement in the selected neighborhoods and the key aspects of their demands for urban public services. The article ends with a summary and conclusions.

## **Bourdieuian Theory of Class and Social Movements**

Pierre Bourdieu's work has made a significant contribution to fields such as the sociology of the arts, education, and cultural stratification. Social researchers have also drawn attention to Bourdieu's relevance to areas that he has not studied so extensively, namely, the analysis of social movements. The value of Bourdieu's work for social movement research has been documented most comprehensively by Crossley in his book *Making Sense of Social Movements* (2002), Husu in *Social Movements and Bourdieu. Class, Embodiment and the Politics of Identity* (2013), and Ibrahim in *Bourdieu and Social Movements* (2015). As stated by Husu (2012), the Bourdieuian framework “makes it possible to overcome dualisms between structural and constructionist, objective and subjective, and material and cultural accounts” of social movement research (p. 2).

Pierre Bourdieu analyzed class in a multidimensional space based on three basic types of capital: social, economic, and cultural. Whereas economic capital refers to money and ownership and social capital to the network of relationships, the notion of cultural capital has multiple meanings. This term is usually defined as a set of valued skills and behaviors, which includes not only educational qualifications or cultural goods (pictures, books, instruments, etc.), but also the “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 17), such as taste and lifestyle. As stated by Husu (2012), Bourdieu's concept of capital squares with the idea of resource mobilization theory that resource availability is crucial to the success of action. It is also consistent with network theory (ibidem), which has focused on how pre-existing social networks shape collective action (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Bourdieu, however, offers a more nuanced approach to resources and shifts analysis away from simplistic rational theory paradigms (Edwards & McCarthy, 2007; Jenkins, 1992). In most cases, for Bourdieu, the use of capital is unconscious and not deliberately aimed at achieving calculated goals.

Studies of social movements, which have applied the notion of capital, mostly draw attention to the middle-class status of activists and the large quantity and volume of capital they possess (Schmitt, 2016). As Husu (2012) has shown, in the case of identity movements, “economic and cultural capital function as symbolic power” (p. 11), opening up possibilities for movements to legitimize their social vision. Cultural capital enables a specific understanding of social problems and allows movements to take advantage of existing possibilities for change. “Making claims for recognition in symbolic struggles” is “more effective and credible when agents are middle-classed,” Husu has claimed (*ibidem*, p. 12). The same applies to social capital that, as Diani has shown (1997), creates new social bonds and opportunities for exchange and at the same time increases chances of success. Economic capital, in turn, facilitates mobilization and “creates distance from material necessities, which may shift the interest to symbolic aspects and status” (Husu, 2012, p. 11). Some authors, such as Dave Horton (2003), have applied Bourdieu’s description of “intellectuals,” a dominated fraction of the dominant class, to explain the functioning of social movements. However, the area of intraclass differentiation and division into factions has not been explored in depth.

From Bourdieu’s perspective, class cannot be understood simply in terms of access to capital: the concept of habitus is also important. Bourdieu uses the term habitus to explain how people’s behavior is dependent on their class position. He defines habitus in the following way (2002): “a system of dispositions, that is, of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting, and thinking. Or a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception, and action” (p. 27). This concept refers to a person’s taken-for-granted way of thinking and acting. Habitus is structured by past events and conditions, but also generates future practices and beliefs. It “is the link not only between past, present, and future, but also between the social and the individual, the objective and the subjective, and structure and agency” (Maton, 2012, p. 52). According to Husu (2012), the concept of habitus can be compared to the concept of frame in the social movement research which explains the way shared assumptions shape the interpretation of events. Bourdieu, however, places more emphasis on social class and preconditions, such as past experiences, in constructing practices.

In the study of social movements, the concept of habitus has been used to show the impact of individual biographies on social mobilization (Ibrahim, 2015; Schmitt, 2016). Sociologists have also developed and employed the concept in empirical research, such as “radical,” “resistance habitus” (Crossley, 2003), and “ecological habitus” (Haluzá-DeLay, 2008; Kirby, 2017). Haluzá-DeLay (2008) used the notion of habitus to explain the way of living of environmental activists. He claimed that an “ecological habitus” generates “living environmentally” (p. 207), that is, with attention to the environmental effects of the practices undertaken. Crossley (2002) argued that habitus could be a helpful tool to explore why the middle classes are more prone to involvement in social movements than the popular classes. In later work, he claimed (2003) that involvement in movements and protests creates a disposition towards further activism and generates movement-oriented habitus, which he called “radical” habitus. The main contribution of Crossley’s research was to show that habitus is not only the product, but also the producer of movements. However,

as Ibrahim has noted (2015), Crossley's concept was largely theoretical and requires reference to empirical data.

Researchers of social movements are increasingly using Bourdieusian field theory as a foundation for their analysis. The notion of field serves to designate various areas within the social world that are dedicated to a specific type of activity. It implies "a set of objective historical relations between positions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). According to Husu (2012), the concept of field can be used to elucidate the internal and external environments of social movements, as well as the types of relationships they have with other agents. Samuel (2012) showed how activists can be disadvantaged if they use tactics inappropriate for the field in which they operate. Crossley (2003) argued that movements act in separate fields. He used the notion of a "field of contention" as an analytical lens for describing movement activism. This analysis allowed him to create a multidimensional model of activism and to explain the different opportunities and constraints for social movements. Scholars who focus on the concept of field have, however, tended not to analyze the influence of class position on the development of social movements. As field theory is effective in explaining the relational aspect of relatively autonomous realms of society (such as the arts, literature, education) (Reed-Danahay, 2019), I view social class theory as more useful for analyzing the ideological differences between the urban social movements.

In this article, I focus on two notions fundamental to Pierre Bourdieu's theory: "capital" and "habitus." I rely primarily on the theory of social class, which was most fully presented by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984, originally published in French in 1979). I believe that class position, the volume and composition of capital, and habitus are crucial in the formation of urban movements and the elaboration of the ideals adopted by activists. Possession of capital defines access to certain forms of political protest and enables the domination of urban spaces, "notably by appropriating (materially or symbolically) the rare goods (public or private) distributed there" (Bourdieu, 1999a, p. 127). The concept of habitus, on the other hand, provides a framework for analysis of how activists acquire different skills and understandings of urban development.

This paper assumes that Bourdieu's model of social classes is adequate for the study of social structure in Poland. It draws on the works of Gdula and Sadura (2012; see also: Gdula, 2017; Gdula et al., 2014), who proved that Bourdieusian theory can also be relevant in the Polish context. Following Bourdieu (1984) and the Polish reinterpretation by Gdula and Sadura (2012), I develop a definition of classes and their factions by referring to three main forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. In this definition, economic capital consists of the type of work performed (manual, intellectual) and the type of employment (being managed by or managing other workers). Cultural capital comprised formal education. The third criterion was social capital defined as the network of social relations of an individual. The dominant class has the highest levels of all forms of capital, while the popular class has the lowest. Classes are divided internally into factions, with those possessing high levels of cultural capital occupying different positions compared with those with lower levels of cultural capital.

This methodology assumes that occupation is a by-product of the different types of capital possessed by an individual and, in that sense, is "deeply rooted in theoretical

predictions of Bourdieu's social class theory" (Tymicki & Gdula, 2015, p. 2). The dominant faction of the upper class are people in power: business owners, entrepreneurs, and chief executives, both in the public and private sectors. Intermediate positions include professionals (lawyers, medical doctors) and marketing managers. People who possess a high volume of cultural capital are scientists, university teachers, and artists, and constitute the dominated faction. As proposed by Bourdieu, the middle class is divided into the faction in decline (artisans and small merchants), the executive faction (officials, clerks, small entrepreneurs), and the faction on the rise (employees of the institutions providing symbolic goods and services in areas such as sales and marketing, medical and social assistance, and cultural production) (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 346–364). Due to limited economic capital, the popular class is the most homogeneous, with the dominant faction containing skilled and specialized workers, intermediate unskilled workers, and dominated small farmers.

## Methodology

The study is based on qualitative research carried out from 2016 to 2019 in the capital of Poland. This article is drawn from a larger study of how inhabitants respond to limited access to public services, such as primary schools and healthcare centers.<sup>1</sup> Urban mobilization was one of the strategies adopted by Warsaw's inhabitants to deal with the aforementioned situation. The collected material focuses on a group of locally based activists who participated in a debate on the role of public facilities in their districts. Hence, it gives a unique insight into how they articulate their interests and their vision of public services.

## The Setting

Field research was conducted among members of organizations in two districts of the city: Wilanów and Ochota. Wilanów is an example of a peripheral district. It began to develop rapidly after the Polish transition to the market economy. It remains one of the fastest-growing areas in Warsaw. In the 2000s, Miasteczko Wilanów, one of the largest urban projects in Poland after 1989, was built there. It is home to many people who acquired mortgage loans on apartments in the area at that time. According to Lewicki and Drozdowska (2017), who analyzed the social structure of Warsaw on the basis of Bourdieu's theory, Wilanów is one of the most "middle-class" districts in the city (the structure of the district is as follows: 20.70% upper class, 72.70% middle class, 6.60% popular class) (p. 117). Despite rapid development, the public services network is not yet well-developed. Also, there are still large rural areas in this district.

In contrast, Ochota is an area built up during the interwar period and after, during the Polish People's Republic period. As research shows, Ochota is most liked among Warsaw's districts, as it "has all the features of an ideal district" (Mazovian Centre for

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<sup>1</sup> For the results of the study see Orchowska (2022).

Regional Surveys, 2013, p. 29). With historic architecture, a good network of public services, and lying close to the city center, it attracts many young professionals. As a result, it is one of the most expensive districts in Warsaw in terms of property prices. At the same time, it is almost 100% urbanized, hindering the influx of new residents (ibidem). Some of the properties are still in the possession of the descendants of their former pre-war owners. As a result, the social structure of Ochota is more diverse than that of Wilanów, with figures showing 22.50% are from the popular class, 66.20% are middle class, and 11.30% upper class (Lewicki & Drozdowska, 2017, p. 117).

## The Methods

The first method in the study involved desk research. I summarized, collated, and synthesized the existing data on the organizations studied. I relied on articles in local media (newspapers, magazines, radio stations) and publications in social networks (online forums, websites, Facebook, Twitter) including those produced by the activists themselves. Some source documents were obtained during study visits in the districts. These included leaflets distributed by activists, brochures describing local events, or other documents that can be analyzed in terms of how activists present their activities to a wider audience. Secondary sources also included previous research reports, historical monographs, periodicals, and local government statistics. To ensure anonymity, sources that reveal the names of the organizations and activists are not included in the references. The desk-based research provided significant insights into the activities of each of the different organizations. In addition, the use of external data sources allowed to “objectify” the information from the interviews (Bourdieu, 1999b).

This article also relies on material from twelve individual in-depth interviews conducted in years 2017–2018. I conducted six interviews with activists from Ochota and one from Wilanów. I also analyzed five interviews with activists from Wilanów, conducted by students during the research workshop led by Mikołaj Lewicki and the author at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw in the winter semester of the 2017/2018 academic year. When quoting these interviews, I mark it with the initials of the authors. The respondents were of legal age. Participation in the research was voluntary. Before conducting the interviews, the verbal informed consent was obtained. The interviews were anonymous. Throughout the text, I applied anonymity techniques, such as distorting the identifying details of the interviewees.

At the time of the interview, all interviewees were active in local urban movements. The sampling of interviewees was purposeful, which is a widely used technique in qualitative research among “small samples of people, cases or phenomena nested in particular contexts” (Gray, 2014, p. 324). The activists were identified through the social media and websites of the organizations. In addition, some activists expressed their willingness to participate in the research in response to announcements that I posted on various websites. As mentioned above, social classes were assigned to the interviewees through the analysis of criteria reflecting the level of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Data on gender, education, and the occupation of interviewees, as well as their class assignments, are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1** Profile of interviewees from Wilanów

No	Gender	Profession	Education	Class
1	Male	Government official	College degree	Middle
2	Female	Marketing specialist	College degree	Middle
3	Female	Marketing specialist	Post-graduate degree	Higher
4	Female	Financier	College degree	Middle
5	Female	IT specialist	College degree	Middle
6	Male	Corporate employee	College degree	Middle

A semi-structured interview method was employed. The interview questions were designed to explore the reasons for participation in the movement, the history of the movement, and its main goals and demands. Additionally, interviewees were asked about their profession and level of education. Information on cultural and social capital was also obtained through questions about the place of residence, connections to the district, and family and neighborly relations. In addition, class dispositions were revealed in the way the respondents spoke and the language or gestures used. During the interviews, I took short notes in which, drawing on Bourdieu's (1999b) methodological guidelines, I described the intonation and body language of the interviewees. Transcriptions of interviews along with the notes were entered into the Atlas.ti software and manually coded. The data was approached with a developed set of flat framed codes, which corresponded to the thematic categories set out in the scenario. During the course of analysis, open coding was applied (the so-called *data-driven coding*).

## Empirical Results

### The Origins of the Organizations

The rise of associations in both districts coincides with the dates typical for the emergence of urban social movements in Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, namely, from 2007 to 2008 (Kubicki, 2020; Pluciński, 2015). However, in both of the cases studied, the milestones that initiated mobilization were different. An association in Wilanów was established in 2007 as a response to deficiencies in the newly built estate: Miasteczko Wilanów. When construction began in

**Table 2** Profile of interviewees from Ochota

No	Gender	Profession	Education	Class
1	Female	Higher education employee	Post-graduate degree	Higher
2	Male	Journalist	College degree	Middle
3	Female	Fashion stylist	College degree	Middle
4	Male	IT specialist	College degree	Middle
5	Female	Teacher	College degree	Middle
6	Female	Corporate employee	College degree	Middle



2002, the estate developers presented it as a “city within a city”: a mixed-use, self-sufficient, pedestrian-oriented district. However, when the apartments were put into use, it turned out that the promises had not been fulfilled. Inhabitants struggled with the shortage of places in kindergartens and schools, the lack of public spaces, and the absence of local stores. An activist remembered: “During the development of the estate it turned out [...] that it was a vision and not a plan to be implemented. There were attempts to urbanize the entirety of this area, without public services, [...] then the first red flag light appeared that something is wrong here” (Wil2, 2017). Anger at the discrepancy between the original design and the final result was the crucial factor in the ensuing social mobilization.

In contrast, a group of inhabitants of the Ochota district in Warsaw organized in 2008 to defend their right to participate in the modernization of the historic park in their neighborhood. The local authorities had proposed fencing the park, to erect a booth with a guard, and to cover the sandy alleys with Baum’s cube. According to the interviewees, the plan was not subject to public consultation. Meanwhile, the proposed solutions aroused opposition. The residents wanted the green space to remain unfenced and to have free access to the park in the evening. The discussion involved not only infrastructural aspects and the arrangement of green spaces but also the proposed design for development in the district. Local authorities planned to create a “fancy park. A fountain in the middle, with a golden ball” (O1, 2017). The inhabitants, on the other hand, feared restrictions on their freedoms. The protest was initiated by two female friends who later became the movement’s leaders. They mobilized the community and publicized the issue in the media. Although the park’s renovation project was eventually rejected, the inhabitants remained in contact with each other. “And then it turned out that it is a very useful structure for communication with local authorities”, one of the activists summed up (*ibidem*).

Activists in both movements, almost without exception, fall into the category of the middle class. All had high levels of social, cultural, and economic capital. However, using Bourdieu’s analytical tools, we see that they belonged to different factions. Among those who participated in the Wilanów movement, there were “all kinds of specialists. Lawyers, businesspeople, people who work in the non-governmental sector, but also in IT and PR, and managers of various kinds” (Wil1, 2018, AW). These were people who worked in corporations and private companies in areas such as marketing, finance, management, or political consulting, who had “some higher education [and] more professional experience” (Wil2, 2018, MC). The interviewees from Wilanów emphasized the importance of marketing and management competencies, thus valuing the capital with which they are particularly well endowed.

On the contrary, Ochota activists more often pursued careers in art or science. The local movement was comprised not only of upper middle-class professionals (e.g., media professionals, mid-level specialists), but also of a dominated faction of the upper class (e.g., university lecturers), which is not an uncommon trend in Poland (Pluciński, 2020b). Similarly, when talking about their companions, activists from Ochota emphasized competencies related to the high cultural and social capital: such as awareness of civic rights and obligations, in-depth knowledge of the inhabited district, and local attachment. It is this that distinguishes Ochotian from

the Wilanowian association, whose members were representatives of middle-class factions less wealthy in cultural capital.

As the final chapter of Bourdieu's *Distinction* demonstrates, having cultural capital disposes an individual towards involvement in a social movement, as it carries with it a "specific political competence – a greater or lesser capacity to recognize a political question as political and to treat it as such by responding to it politically" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 400). Cultural capital provides not only "the capacity to understand, reproduce, and even produce political discourse," but also "the (social authorized and encouraged) sense of being entitled to be concerned with politics, authorized to talk politics, by applying a specific political culture" (ibidem, p. 410). Similarly, for some activists from Ochota, social participation seemed to be something indisputable. An activist stated that joining the movement "was natural, obvious" (O2, 2018). Another person commented: "It just seems to me that this is the first thing a person should do if they want to have an influence on the neighbourhood" (O3, 2018). Seeing activism as a natural path or an obligation can also be interpreted in terms of the ethos of the intelligentsia, understood as "a social structure based sophisticated forms of cultural capital" (Zarycki, 2009, p. 22). In that sense, activism constitutes a distinction strategy, associated with the figure of the public intellectual, specific to the Central and Eastern European milieu (Pluciński, 2020b).

Moreover, some of the activists from both movements were more disposed towards public criticism and protest. These were people who already had experience in activism or who could draw an example from parents who had, for example, been a local politician or activist in their hometown. Some interviewees also mentioned the international experience of some activists: they were people who were "creative, open-minded, with experience from other cities and from all over the world, because they travel and then can use the knowledge they have gained there" (Wil3, 2019, MC). Reference to Crossley's concept of "radical habitus" seems to be appropriate. Involvement in movements, as Crossley (2003) pointed out, generates further mobilization and structures the habitus. In addition to practical know-how (e.g., how to organize a protest), it enables the acquisition of "an ethos that encourages engagement and gives "a 'feel' for protest and organizing which allows agents to derive purpose and enjoyment from it, to and to 'believe' in it and to feel 'at home' doing it" (ibidem, p. 52).

The rise of both movements was also affected by the social capital of their initiator-founders. The core of each organization was made up of people who had known each other before and who encouraged other friends to join the movement. The following quote from a research participant depicts this process in Wilanów: "A colleague called me, my friend, [...] and said: 'listen, we want to set up an association, because developers are playing a shell game with us. There were different plans and designs before, and now it is not as we had imagined it would be'" (Wil2, 2017). The role of friends was also mentioned by the Ochota interviewees. An activist explained that his individual involvement depended on identification with other members: all his closest friends got involved in this association. "It turned out that all these people know each other. These friends of mine seem to connect," he said (O4, 2018).

The movements were not only based on social capital but also contributed to its reproduction. In this aspect, they had both internal and external impact, as Diani calls it (1997). On the one hand, they facilitated exchanges between the members and created bonds of

solidarity among themselves. On the other hand, the establishment of each urban movement allowed contacts to be made with cultural and political elites. For example, through embedding themselves in social networks, the initiators of the association in Wilanów were able to cooperate with the architect of the estate, which gave credibility to their future activities.

### The Development of Organizations and the Elaboration of Demands

From the beginning, the activists from each of the organizations tried to establish a dialogue with politicians and officials. In Wilanów, the main demand was to build missing facilities. Activists pointed out the need to develop the network of public services to decision makers. “Listen, here it should be like this, and so, you should buy a plot for a school,” an activist remembered (Wil2, 2017). The interviewees were convinced that they were pioneers in publicly debating the need for state schools in the district. “There was no school and everyone had babies then, so it was clear that in three years they would have to go to kindergarten, and in six years they would have to go to school, and there was no school” (Wil4, 2018, LL). Although activists criticized real estate developers, their anger was directed primarily at local authorities. The way districts were managed aroused disagreement. “We spoke in completely different languages” an activist commented (*ibidem*). According to the interviewees, local authorities failed to play the role of the provider of public services. An activist said: “It’s not a whim; it is the obligation of the local government to provide schools and kindergartens for children here” (Wil2, 2018, MC).

In contrast, in Ochota, one of the organization’s main demands was the improvement in transparency and participation, what can be described in terms of an idea of “the Right to the City,” a common frame of global urban movements, originally elaborated by Henri Lefebvre (1968) and developed by David Harvey (2008, 2012) and Peter Marcuse (2009). This slogan encompasses both individual liberties to access urban resources and a common right to participate in decision-making processes (Harvey, 2008). Accordingly, activists in Ochota argued that local authorities were not listening to the voices of residents. Over time, activists’ demands came to focus on the poor quality of existing public services. As is typical of Polish urban movements (Kubicki, 2020), the organization was predominated by people of a similar age from 30 to 40 years, who had school-age children. They directly experienced problems related to education, such as overcrowding of facilities and the inconvenient working hours of after-school activities. In addition, activists organized against the plans of privatization of the state school system. In this context, the slogan “Right to the City” also resonates with activists. They mobilized to defend public services in the city, in line with the idea of “cities for people, not for profit” (Brenner et al., 2012).

So far, the organizational claims and demands described above fit into the conceptual framework often used in the analysis of urban social movements. Almost 40 years ago, Castells (1983) noted that one of the key themes in the organization of urban social movements was the demands of collective consumption. Since then, many authors have focused their attention on the processes of mobilization against neoliberal urbanism with its associated reduction in public service provision (Harvey,

2012; Lowe, 1986; Mayer, 2010; Mayer et al., 2016). It is recognized that the ineffectiveness of neoliberal policies led to the appearance of conflicts and, consequently, the emergence and consolidation of urban movements in Poland (Mergler et al., 2013; Pluciński, 2020a) and other central European countries (Jacobsson, 2015; Mayer, 2010). However, in both case studies presented in this article, the mobilizing frame had a different meaning. The focus on issues related to access to public services not only expresses opposition to the current model of urban governance, but also reveals the specific class habitus of the movements' members. The Bourdieusian concept of social class provides the necessary power not only to understand the intentions of the activists, but also to explain the ideological differences between the organizations, which are overlooked by most studies on urban movements.

For Wilanowian activists representing the middle-class faction, who were best equipped with economic capital, the vision of a “self-made man” was important. When explaining the reasons for their involvement, activists referred to the financial burdens of purchasing an apartment. Some of them have signed a contract with a bank for a mortgage loan. As one interviewee said: “We bought a certain vision of the development of this place. We have invested a lot of money and probably several dozen years of credit, each of us, to live in a place that corresponds to this vision” (Wil5, 2018, AW). Several studies have found that a mortgage loan is not only a simple financial activity, but also a producer of a number of expectations and aspirations (Halawa, 2015; Lewicki, 2019). It is also connected with the vision of ensuring prosperity through individual effort, as Lewicki showed (2019).

Similarly, the interviewees linked their involvement in the urban social movement with their financial outlay. According to them, people who had inherited property paid less attention to the quality of the public space. The following sentence illustrates this belief:

All the real estate in Miasteczko Wilanów was bought by people with money, and no one inherited it. Everyone had to spend money on it, so they care about what they spent the money on. All these estates are bought by people, so there is also a lot of attention and care (Wil5, 2018, AW).

In this way, activists questioned the value of capital based on inheritance and emphasized the role of strenuous work and effort, thus “discrediting the form of capital upon the force of their opponents rests (e.g., economic capital), and valorising the species of capital they preferentially possess” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99).

Similarly, the main demands of the activists were to maintain order in the district and get what they had paid for. “We were here as residents, we paid taxes, and we wanted public services to be built,” an activist said (Wil2, 2017). When explaining the need to build public facilities, activists referred to the specific vision of the welfare state in which the merits of citizens, such as paying taxes or collective mobilization, are important. In this context, Bourdieu’s description of someone who is a member of the *petite bourgeoisie* (1984) and “is convinced that he owes his position solely to his own merit, and that for his salvation he only has himself to rely on” (p. 337), seems appropriate. Adopting a meritocratic perspective allowed this middle-class faction to maintain the feeling that their achievements mostly come from their own merit thereby realizing the disposition of the habitus to improving individual social position.

In contrast, activists in Ochota, representing middle- and upper-class factions, whose position depended mainly on cultural capital, more often justified the need to develop good quality public services by pointing to more “ideological” reasons, such as universality and social solidarity. They outlined several rationales for developing public services in the city. According to them, the provision of public services is a key component of the local community, as its delivery shapes the trust of residents and their attachment to the neighborhood. One of the interviewees explained that state school enables the formation of

normal bonds in the community [...], so these children are not anonymous to each other, they know each other, visit each other at home, and create friendships [...]. That is how the next generation of residents of the district is growing up; they identify with the area (O2, 2018).

Among the most important values of public services, activists mentioned social diversity, which can contribute to a richer and more creative environment. For them, the privatization of education and the outflow of students to the private sector were a threat. One activist said, “Well, we could afford this private school, but... instead, for ideological reasons, it seemed better to [send the kids to the] state school” (O4, 2018).

Bourdieu's analysis of “the intellectuals” in 1960s France (1984), and Horton's (2003) subsequent description of the green movement in England in the early 2000s, can be applied to urban activists in Ochota today. Similar to English environmental activists, members of the Ochota movement distinguished themselves by “ascetic aristocratism”; they questioned the value of economic capital, demonstrated their opposition to “luxury tastes” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 286), and prioritized the earning of cultural capital. By doing so, they “demonstrate their freedom from ‘brutish necessity’ on the one hand and profligate ‘luxury’ on the other and assert the distinctive power of their cultural capital” (Horton, 2003, p. 67).

The aspirations of activists at Ochota relate to values such as social solidarity and equality; therefore, they seem to be less instrumental. In this context, it seems that activists in Ochota can maintain a cooperative relationship with the popular classes. However, I am inclined to believe that a potential alliance of activists with the popular classes will not constitute a strong coalition. Activists' interests in public services are based on ideological motives and are not related to economic necessity (Erbel, 2012). Moreover, as Pluciński (2020b) and Schmid (2012) showed, the slogan of “Right to the City,” although it refers to the vision of just, inclusive and sustainable cities, is more a conceptual “umbrella” that defines a common space for urban activism, than a specific concept. Although the demands of universality seem to be devoid of clear class interests and refer to abstract values, in fact, they appear to be both an expression of intraclass struggle for domination and a distinction strategy that allows these activists to emphasize the role of cultural capital.

## Conclusions and Discussion

The aim of this article was to demonstrate the theoretical potential of Bourdieu's social class theory for research on urban movements in Poland. Using the conceptual tools proposed by the French sociologist, I have discussed the process of emergence and the social vision for public services presented by members of two organizations in Warsaw. Bourdieu's theoretical perspective provides the framework to pull multiple data together in a coherent way (Crossley, 2003), thereby responding to the challenges faced by urban movement researchers. It allows for consideration of various aspects of the functioning of urban social movements, such as the role of resources and competencies, ideological divisions, and their chances of success. In my view, it is particularly well-suited to examining the ways in which urban social activists frame their demands and position themselves in relation to others in making those demands.

A few points can be emphasized. First, the Bourdieusian concepts of capital and habitus can advance a social movement theory by showing that social mobilization can be fostered not only by material and measurable resources but also by broadly understood cultural competence. My analysis confirms the thesis that higher levels of capital are crucial to the success of the action (Diani, 1997; Husu, 2012; Schmitt, 2016). However, it shows that cultural resources should not only be understood as practical know-how but also as a specific understanding of social problems. The example of activists from Ochota shows how cultural capital provides the sense of being entitled to take political positions. This is relevant not only for the urban movements described in this article but also for other social movements, for example, identity or environmental organizations.

Second, habitus and capital can play an explanatory role in relation to “‘repertoire selection” (Crossley, 2003, p. 64), i.e., why certain activists choose certain topics and forms of protest and how they justify their choices. As urban movements are often connected to middle-class activism (Lowe, 1986), Bourdieu's analytical lens allows for the exploration of intraclass differentiation and factional divisions. The examples of Wilanów and Ochota show that although the vast majority of activists occupy higher positions in the social structure, their demands differ depending on the habitus and the level of capital they possess. Interviewees from Wilanów, who were better equipped with economic capital, more often referred to the merits of citizens, such as paying taxes, as a basis for the postulates for the accessibility of public services. In contrast, for well-endowed in cultural capital activists from Ochota, the ideological motives, such as social justice and solidarity, were more important.

Finally, Bourdieu's perspective can be used to explain the importance of class with respect to urban movements. The classical theses presented by Claus Offe in his paper *New social movements: challenging the boundaries of institutional politics* (1985), and related to Polish urban movements by Pluciński (2020a), assumed that members of “new petit-bourgeois movements” do not always act in their own objective class interests, sometimes even acting in opposition to them. The examples of Wilanów and Ochota illustrate how class interests continue to shape the demands of social movements. Urban movements in Poland express two intraclass conflicts: first, between representatives of the “rising” faction of the urban middle class and the so-called old

middle class, currently managing cities (Pluciński, 2020b), second, between middle-class factions better endowed with cultural capital and those richer in economic capital. My research shows that, even though the demands of social movements may seem to be values-led, they have a clear class dimension, as they are based on class interests of the movements' members.

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**Data Availability** The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical and privacy reasons.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The author declares no competing interests.

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