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From Local to Digital and Back: E-Resourcefulness Among Urban Movements in Poland

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Introduction

The speed and side effects of urbanizations result in the growing importance of social movements for urban democracy and quality of life. In this context, the relatively new phenomenon of urban movements has emerged all around Poland. The conceptual framework of the "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1968) has migrated into Polish activists' narrative and allowed for wide mobilization with a concept of "rights" as a new frame of meaning (Strang & Soule, 1998, p. 280). Polish activists are following the growing number of international actors promoting the idea of spatial justice and the "right to the city," developing a dynamic urban social movement focusing on "concrete narratives" of residents' needs as well as

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political postulates around more democratic city management (Mergler, 2008).

Describing strategies of networking, framing, and mobilizing support through virtual and symbolic means, this chapter explores the resourcefulness of these new civil society actors in their pursuit of novel forms of engagement with citizens and their attempts to influence public institutions. Here, urban movements are defined as associations, foundations, or informal grassroots organizations focused on representing the rights of urban residents vis-à-vis the local authorities and business actors that shape cities' development. The variety of actors in the urban arena, as well as the resources that they have at their disposal, are analyzed using the theoretical work on collective action (della Porta & Diani, 2009), movement networks (Diani & McAdam, 2003), autonomous spaces (Castells, 2013), and norm diffusion processes (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Strang & Soule, 1998). This study captures the complexity of processes occurring in contemporary urban civil societies concerning new forms of bottom-up mobilization, networking via information and communication technologies, and the professionalization and politicization of various forms of grassroots activities. The results also reflect changes in the perception of cities themselves as independent actors in political and economic processes and arenas of civil society development. The interest in this area of research is fostered by the growing importance of the civic sector in meeting the needs of urban residents and by a socio-political discussion around involvement in public life through neighborhood activities.

The analysis in this chapter is based on a historical overview of the last ten years of urban movement development in Poland. Data were gathered from documents, media statements, Internet ethnographies, observations, participatory observations, and individual interviews during the period 2011–2018. The research was conducted with respondents' full awareness, and preliminary results were presented during debates, discussion meetings, and informal conversations with local activists (see also Domaradzka, 2015a, 2017, 2019, 2021; Domaradzka & Wijkström, 2016, 2019). The chapter is structured as follows: First, a broader context of Polish civil society is outlined to introduce some of the main challenges and opportunities for urban grassroots activists as they engage with their urban

environment. Subsequently, an analysis of the development of Polish urban movements is embedded in the broader context of previous research on the issue of civil society and the theory of social mobilization.

Polish Civil Society

To understand the challenges that Polish urban social movements currently face, we must take into account both the historical–regional factors shaping the context in which they developed and the specificity of Polish society and culture. In a nutshell, the Polish civil society tradition is rooted in nineteenth-century charity work (often faith-based) and elite activism in the spheres of education, social support, culture, and sports. Specific forms of activism developed in rural areas around folk culture as well as farmers' cooperatives and volunteer fire brigades. The development of a more widespread and democratic civil society structure was dramatically halted by the outbreak of the First World War and soon again by the Second World War, which left Poland brutally destroyed in both material and societal terms. The social elites (both urban and rural) were decimated due to war losses and planned extermination by both the Hitler and Stalin regimes, severely weakening the pre-war charity and social activism base.

Nevertheless, during the communist regime, various forms of civil society organizations existed, including associations that were accepted by the state (due to their approved ideological profiles) and informal or undercover forms of social activism creating an outlet for civic engagement and freedom of thought (what Kubik (1994) called "illegal civil society"). The 1989 breakthrough was, in part, the result of many years of this oppositional grassroots mobilization and one of the main motors of change at the beginning of the transformation of Polish civil society. More recently, however, Social Diagnosis data for the years 2003–2015 (Czapiński & Panek, 2015) suggested that participation in voluntary organizations in Poland has stagnated and that organizations have failed to attract new members. In the last ten years of research, the association participation indicator hovered between 12% and 15%. Additionally, only 15% of respondents were involved in any activities for the benefit of

Table 6.1 Active organization members and people active in local communities (municipalities, settlements, villages, neighborhoods) in Poland 2000–2015, %

	2000	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015
	–	12	12	15	13	15	14	13
Active in the community	8	13	14	14	16	16	15	15

Source: Czapiński and Panek (2015, p. 334)

the local community. As Table 6.1 shows, slow but systematic growth in community work involvement took place during the last decade, although this trend has slowed since 2013. As Makowski (2012) argues, in general, Poles tend to be reluctant to associate but are slightly more willing to support the activities of associations. However, that support is often occasional and prompted by a direct need or duty, for example, involvement in school social activities while one's child is a pupil, or ad hoc protests concerning local developments.

The greatest weakness of formally organized civic activism is, according to the NGO Sustainability Index (2011), the low level of skills related to financial and organizational issues. Only 7% of Polish civil society organizations are large entities with significant budgets, employing personnel, creating plans and strategies, and professionally organizing their work (Przewłocka et al., 2013, p. 10). At the opposite pole are organizations with low budgets, poorly managed and acting in an ad hoc manner; these constitute 35% of the Polish non-governmental sector (Stankiewicz & Seiler, 2013). The main challenges faced by all new civil society initiatives in Poland concern the lack of organizational culture and of available financial as well as human resources. The development of many civil initiatives (including watchdog organizations, cf. Jezierska, Chap. 2 in this volume) is reliant on external sources such as EU and other international funds. The majority of civic initiatives, however, must do without any public or external financial support; they depend on members' fees or private donations. As for human resources, the level of staff professionalization is low but increasing steadily due to training programs financed by government, EU, and international donors (cf. Chimiak, Chap. 9 in this volume).

While the majority of Poles are not engaged in any form of civic activism, there is a specific group of super-activists who engage in many

organizations at the same time, allowing for knowledge transfer between different organizations. This transfer, as well as that of other resources connected with know-how, is facilitated by highly developed civil society support structures based on umbrella organizations, such as Klon/Jawor, Boris, and Splot, which constantly incubate, support, connect, and study the sector. While the ongoing debate on the state of Polish civil society pays little attention to informal initiatives and their role in developing the culture of civic cooperation and strengthening social bonds (Mocek et al., 2014), we can observe dynamic recent development among the informal neighborhood initiatives around the country (Chądzyński, 2016). Many of these grow out of local protests, some subscribe directly to the "right to the city" movement (Pluciński, 2012), and others have emerged in response to the economic crisis and consumerist culture. Among those are food cooperatives, urban gardens, bartering collectives, and neighborhood associations (Domaradzka, 2018).

What remains characteristic for urban movements is that they also distance themselves from the general concept of the NGO. Urban grassroots activists often criticize formal organizations for becoming "zombies" (Michalski, 2015)—professionalized subcontractors of public institutions—and therefore lacking the independence and courage to act as watchdogs. While some decide to formalize as associations, foundations, or social cooperatives, many grassroots initiatives either see no need to formalize or believe that doing so could prevent them from achieving important social goals (Mocek et al., 2014). They often focus on creating good neighborly relations, influencing the decisions of the local government, or in some way resolving a pressing social issue that is not being addressed by state or market institutions. Urban initiatives often offer an opportunity to create lasting social ties and achieve a sense of belonging to a group of people with similar goals while also fostering a feeling of responsibility for the community.

The popularity of grassroots initiatives all over Poland proves the attractiveness of this form of participation, particularly when it involves neither bureaucracy nor long-term commitment (Mocek et al., 2014). This "soft" form of civic involvement, which characterizes contemporary social movements around the globe, appears to be an especially good fit for Polish society, whose different types of institutions are treated with

suspicion by default and whose citizens are still more focused on family values and economic stability than on wider social issues (Czapiński & Panek, 2015; Siemieńska, 2002). Social activity in cities, implemented within both formal non-governmental organizations and informal residents' initiatives under the common slogan of the "right to the city" and the ideal of improving quality of life, features all of the hallmarks of the social movement. Moreover, it is a movement that combines actions at both a very local level (street, housing estate, or district) and a national one (in the form of networks of organizations and groups trying to represent generally understood interests of urban residents); at the same time, it fits into the broader global phenomenon of "right to the city" protest movements.

Urban Challenges at the Roots of Mobilization

Analyzing problems that currently occur in cities, many theorists conclude that the immanent feature of cities in developed capitalism is their crisis, manifested in the drastic deterioration of living conditions and causing a number of negative social and spatial phenomena (Castells, 1986; Florida, 2017). As Beauregard (1993) writes, the urban crisis includes deep physical and economic changes in post-war cities whose common denominator is loss—of jobs, importance, and income. This is compounded by broader demographic, social, and political problems such as poverty; aging; migration; racial, ethnic, and religious segregation; social pathologies; and disorganization. Rather than defining it as a crisis, I would argue that we are witnessing a new wave of challenges as cities sprawl uncontrollably; face problems integrating residents with diverse cultures, religions, and income and education levels; and, most of all, confront overburdening with regard to the costs of infrastructure and public service delivery. Therefore, the emergence of urban movements in their present form should be analyzed not only in the context of the ongoing processes of globalization, but above all in terms of the resulting new neoliberal models of urban governance and the dominance of investors' interests in the field of urban policy.

After the fall of communism, Poland followed the path of Western European countries, where the liberalization of the public sector triggered reactions from various parts of civil society. This mobilized already existing social movements on one hand and, on the other, stimulated the emergence of new forms of collective protests and actions. In cities, where the processes of globalization and economic development are particularly visible, liberal policies provoked special forms of protest generally referred to as urban movements (Andretta et al., 2015; Hamel, 2014; Mayer, 2007). During the 1990s, Poland's relative poverty created an investment vacuum that was quickly reversed by foreign companies enjoying many privileges and tax exemptions. Thus ensued an intensive yet unregulated spatial development that led to classic suburbanization processes, the deterioration of central city districts, and the general precedence of private investors' interests over residents' needs (Dorda, 2017; Kajdanek, 2012). This neoliberal fast track resulted in an urban policy gap promptly filled by new urban actors with origins in both commercial and civil society. While the developers' lobby focused on overcoming the legislative chaos and bureaucratic obstacles in investment processes, urban activists mobilized to counteract the processes of commercialization of public space and to protest against pro-market city management.

As a result of different forms of mobilization, the variety of urban initiatives in Poland now includes grassroots protest groups, organizations working for the benefit of the local community, residents' lobbying groups, and local anti-globalization movements (Domaradzka, 2018). Applying the slogan of spatial justice and the "right to the city" to the local terrain gave the activists a new conceptual framework and generated energy for joint action. In 2007, a new civil actor—the Urban Movements Congress—emerged, ready to build broad coalitions and professionalize the representation of interests with media know-how and organizational awareness. Congress activists were able to create a platform combining the political aspirations of the residents' organizations with the goals of a social services organization and the objectives of various social movements and civil society organizations, overcoming the geographical fragmentation of protests. Today, their actions combine the traditional repertoire of social movements with the new tactics of civil disobedience,

the use of social media and audiovisual communication in communities, and flexible forms of organization and protest (Mayer, 2007, p. 108).

Moreover, in contrast to the stagnating overall levels of civic participation (see Table 6.1), engagement in various types of meetings and actions regarding residents' immediate environments has increased in recent decades (see Fig. 6.1). Residents' meetings, discussions about the immediate surroundings, and meetings of housing cooperatives have all recorded an average increase of 10% during this period.

As modern cities lose their significance as industrial and production centers, real capital ceases to accumulate within their borders, and they become merely another source of global capital (Nawratek, 2012). The perceived helplessness of the municipality in the face of growing social problems has prompted residents to organize themselves in order to meet current needs and mitigate the effects of liberal urban policies. Increasingly, activities on the neighborhood or local level aim directly to articulate claims to the existing public space, co-creating it in accordance with the needs of local communities and improving the living conditions of the residents of a given area (Domaradzka, 2015a). There are many

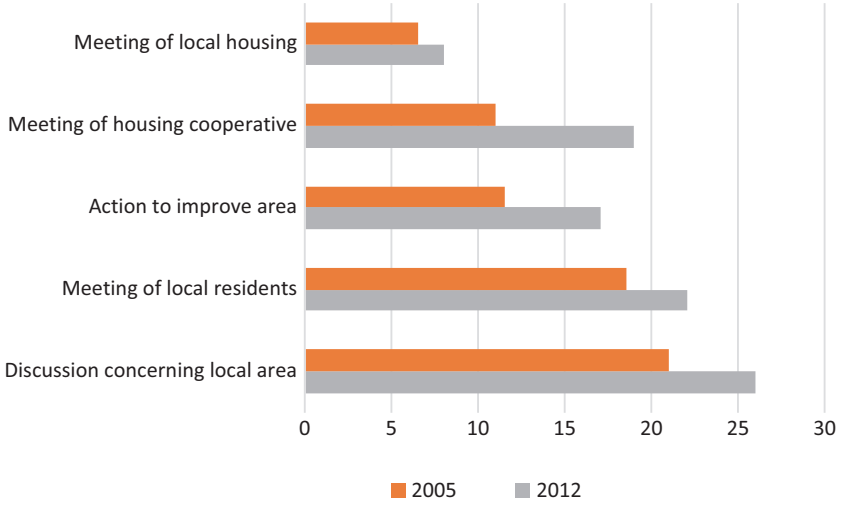

Fig. 6.1 Levels (%) of civic engagement of Poles, 2005 and 2012. (Source: Author's calculations based on Polish World Values Survey database, Waves 5 and 6. Question: "In the last two years, have you participated in … ?")

indications that taking action on the immediate environment has opened the arena of civil society to new groups of citizens who had not previously been involved in social activities (Domaradzka & Wijkström, 2016; Mergler et al., 2013). Shortcomings in the area of civic education mean that local conflicts become a "school of citizenship" for some Poles, giving them a sense of agency that promotes long-term social involvement (Kowalewski, 2016). Polish cities constitute a specific context for social activities because of the density of inhabitants and the problems particular to urban areas as well as the historical and social conditions typical of post-communist countries. The conviction that only personal involvement can lead to the right solution in a given case is an important driving force behind the creation of grassroots movements. Generalized lack of trust, however, usually makes it difficult to build larger coalitions, especially cooperations between local authorities and groups of dissatisfied but active residents (Domaradzka, 2015b). For this reason, bottom-up initiatives in Poland are traditionally characterized by significant fragmentation and particularism (Chądzyński, 2016; Mocek et al., 2014).

As in the case of other social movements (e.g., women's or ecological movements), urban movements have from the very beginning had the character of a multilevel network combining various forms of urban involvement. Over time, the diversity and complexity of this network has increased both in Poland and in other countries, and its composition has changed with the transition of some organizations from civil society to the field of public services or party politics. Despite its liquid form and multilevel character, the Polish urban movement as a loose network of organizations, initiatives, and individual actors now functions on the national level as well as in individual cities and local communities. With the Urban Movements Congress as their main organizational platform, Polish urban activists are also among the best organized in the world, along with those using similar platforms that have emerged in the United States (Right to the City Alliance) and Spain (PAH, Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca). To understand how this came to be, it is necessary to explore how these organizations generate, use, exchange, and transform different forms of resources.

Urban Movement Resources from the Perspective of Social Movement Theory

As aptly noted by della Porta & Diani (2009, p. 17), the condition for the transformation of dissatisfaction into action is the existence of certain material resources (such as work, money, or services) and non-material resources (authority, moral commitment, faith, or friendship). Mobilization results not only from tensions, but also from the capacity of social movements to capture dissatisfaction within the organizational framework, reduce operating costs, create and use solidarity networks, share benefits between members, and develop consensus between entities (ibid.). The nature of available resources translates into tactical choices and the influence of collective action on the social and political system (McAdam et al., 1996); the degree of opening or closing local political systems is also extremely important (Eisinger, 1973). In other words, the political situation may favor or block the creation of collective activities of an organized nature. The opening of the political system, while partly supported by the processes of democratization and pluralization of the public sphere, may also arise from the failure of the administrative system and its attempts to transfer certain of its competences to social partners. These factors were thoroughly analyzed by Tarrow (1989), who indicated the importance of several components: formal access to the political sphere, the level of stability of political alliances, the presence and position of potential allies, and the existence of social conflicts within and among elite groups.

In the case of Poland, the opening of the political system can be considered a result of cross-party conflict (with each party seeking to co-opt external allies in order to improve its own position), the strong influence of European Union policies and targeted funding streams (focusing on developing urban areas, but also fostering participatory processes and civic engagement), and a general welfare system crisis (with the outsourcing of social services to local organizations serving to disperse governmental responsibility and ease the burden). The relative success of Polish urban movements can thus be attributed not only to the resources and

adopted strategies of the country's activists, but also to the appearance of a gap in the usually rather hermetic political–bureaucratic apparatus. It is not without reason that Lech Mergler, commentator, activist, and co-creator of associations *My-Poznaniacy* (We, the Poznanians) and *Prawo do Miasta* (The right to the city), refers to "fracking" as a very effective long-term strategy, with urban activists entering the local councils and city offices one by one (L. Mergler, personal communication, October 1, 2015). It can be argued that this new opening (beginning in 2008/2009) resulted from the weakening of the positions of local and national political coalitions and from attempts to rebuild legitimacy through participatory activities. However, it is also an indication of the maturing of civil society structures in Poland and the growing know-how of local activists using their own and international experience.

In the Polish urban movement, we observe brokering practices and leadership based on a central position in the process of information exchange: a network node (della Porta & Diani, 2009, p. 159). A good example is the figure of the abovementioned Lech Mergler, who at the stage of establishing an urban movement in Poznań acted as a contact person connecting individuals and groups into a larger network opposing local plans for spatial development. Putting individual activists in touch with one another and supporting the exchange of experiences was of key importance to building a strong interest group. As a result, *My-Poznaniacy* association was established in 2007, gathering people operating in different neighborhoods and districts who had not previously known each other (Mergler, 2008; Mergler et al., 2013). This coming together would have been impossible without a database of telephone contacts and, later, e-mails collected and shared through the broker. His involvement made this scale shift (Diani & McAdam, 2003, p. 293) possible, allowing local activists to move from neighborhood-level activities to the citywide coalition that then played a focal role in organizing similar activities across Poland. The change of scale enabled the emergence of an extensive protest movement involving a wider group of actors, combining their postulates and identities into a larger whole (Diani & McAdam, 2003).

After the initial period of local self-organization, the further development of the urban movements network was made possible by means of Internet forums, where activists from different cities shared their

experiences and exchanged know-how gathered in the course of their local struggles. As similar confrontations were taking place in many Polish cities at the time, this exchange led to the emergence of an Internet-fueled network of local activists who quickly recognized their common goals. Through the intervention of internationally connected norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998), the "right to the city" was adopted by Polish activists and soon became their common conceptual framework. Initially, the activists' network met through the Internet forum where local groups came together to debate various topics, building a loose coalition around temporally and spatially limited issues. Later, a more permanent alliance was forged and sealed during a national gathering in Poznań in 2011. What was then called the Urban Movements Congress became an official label and a name for the national network. In 2017, after four national meetings (in 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2015), the Urban Movements Congress Federation was registered as a formal organization. The goal of this organizational platform is to support the wide network of local initiatives with know-how and official representation at the governmental level.

Over the years, the Urban Movements Congress has brought several changes to the narratives concerning urban policies, strengthening the mobilizing capacity of new initiatives but also influencing the strategies used by other actors in the urban field. Both local municipalities and private investors started to subscribe to the "right to the city" narrative, underlining the importance of residents' needs and preferences and opening new spaces for consultations and participation around urban issues. Led and coordinated by the Congress' umbrella construct, the local organizations in many Polish cities were able to successfully lobby for changes in local development plans as well as for the introduction of participatory budgets and public consultation mechanisms. At the same time, urban movements' know-how and the Congress "brand" became an important political resource for activists running in local elections.

In *Spatial Anti-Helplessness Guide: Right to the City in Action* (Mergler et al., 2013), originating from the Poznań movement, the authors consider the policy of scale in this context. The emergence of new actors in the public sphere is, in their opinion, a consequence of the globalization of urbanization, that is, the transition from the local to the national and

then the global scale. As a result of this change, the local residents (whose protests the media initially described as a strictly local phenomenon) became social experts who, thanks to many years of engagement for the sake of their neighborhoods and cities, had gathered extensive knowledge of spatial processes.

The phases of urban movement development in Poland can likewise be described by means of categories proposed by Diani and McAdam (2003). The initial stage was connected with the presence of three important factors: (a) feelings of danger and frustration on the part of city residents who realized that they had no influence on spatial decisions in their immediate environments; (b) the emergence of a leader—a broker—who acted as a node of the network, creating connections between individual activists; and (c) external inspiration in the form of experiences brought from New York, Budapest, and Berlin by student activists acting as norm entrepreneurs. All three elements contributed to the gathering of people interested in the right to a city into one group. Thanks to the arranging of subsequent meetings of the Urban Movements Congress, the network of local organizations had the chance to achieve a kind of critical mass and become a significant force in local as well as national spatial policy. Through the first congresses, the movement also gained awareness of its scale and strength and transformed from the "movement in itself" to the "movement for itself," in which the sense of solidarity and the community of interests is manifested by organized forms of struggle (Domaradzka, 2018, Pluciński, 2018). At this stage, the representatives of the movement began to negotiate goals and priorities that they considered to be shared, thus building a collective identity.

Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (2009, p. 15), analyzing key moments for the crystallization of movements, conclude that "[t]he social movement arises when the feeling of dissatisfaction becomes widespread, and inflexible institutions cannot remedy this." Particularly important in the context of urban movements are specific rhetoric, slogans, and metaphors as well as the emotions associated with them. Observing Urban Movements Congress meetings and online message exchanges allows us to see how solidarity between cities was built and a common identity and desirable emotions maintained. The analyses conducted in this chapter suggest that one of the factors conducive to cooperation in the network

of urban movements is a shared and constantly communicated ethos based on tolerance for different views and a pragmatic attitude toward solving rather than creating problems.

As McAdam (1982) pointed out, in order for circumstances to lead to an actual protest movement, "cognitive liberation" must occur: movement activists must believe that they have the power to make changes and must also define the system as being at fault for the existing situation. Analyzing the perceptions of activists in terms of agency, we find urban movement leaders indicating the importance of key events that gathered a larger group of urban activists, as well as successful protests, as having triggered their sense of agency (see also Mergler, 2008). The idea of overcoming obstacles as a learning experience and as fuel for further engagement is reflected in *Spatial Anti-Helplessness Guide* (Mergler et al., 2013), which uses examples of both successful and failed urban interventions to prove urban movements' capacity to introduce change.

The collective feature of a social movement is a collective identity based on the awareness of common goals and a commitment to achieving them. This, in turn, allows various actors to define themselves as elements of a larger whole or as links connected with other organizations or individuals within a wider (often supranational) chain (network). As Melucci (1996) posited, building collective identity is conducive to uniting certain events into broader, shared narratives thanks to which movement actors perceive themselves as part of a larger process, a common history with which they can identify. In this case, the narrative was built upon the descriptions of different urban conflicts by organizations gathered around the Urban Movements Congress and the authors of *Spatial Anti-Helplessness Guide*.

The assignment of specific collective identities to particular movements is not tantamount to a claim of homogeneity of the actors involved in a given movement. It is, rather, the general goals that are shared and that become the basis for understanding beyond divisions. A good illustration of this issue is the concept of the "concrete narrative." This concept, conceived by Mergler, represents urban activists' focus on the real problems of a city's residents and stands in opposition to strictly political activities that remain in the symbolic (non-concrete) sphere. The transition to the level of the specific problem enables people who differ on ideological matters to formulate common postulates and strategies. This

"community of interests," moreover, usually turns out to be strong enough to enable cooperation across divisions. The use of a concrete narrative yields greater tolerance for differences of opinion as well as an attitude focused on the common good and on having an effect regardless of symbolic or ideological divisions. Following Ostrom (1990), I consider a concrete narrative to be a tool for constituting a community around a common good such as a public space, a building, or another element of urban life valuable to residents. Reflecting on the ability of the Polish urban movement to produce a concrete narrative, it is particularly important to recognize the role of increased online resources.

E-Resourcefulness—The Role of the Internet in Urban Mobilization

Nowadays, access to the public or political sphere entails technological competences and the ability to use the tools offered by the Internet, especially social media portals. During the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in digital forms of participation employing different Internet tools (Foth et al., 2015). This includes the relatively new phenomenon of participatory budgeting (Martela, 2013), based on e-voting on municipal budget allocation. Importantly, in participatory budgeting, the residents not only choose specific projects to implement but also prepare and promote them themselves. This allows residents to decide on the allocation of funds while also promoting involvement in the affairs of the local community (Martela, 2013). Creating a cooperation network has become much easier thanks to information and communications technology (ICT), and information management can thus be carried out on a regular basis. Furthermore, because political representatives and public administration increasingly use interactive Internet tools, the path to people directly responsible for the implementation of specific policies is shortening. Even if the activities that policymakers carry out on the Internet are focused on improving their own images, the very fact that they have begun to make use of virtual forms of communication generates another point of entry into the political system.

More importantly, in recent years, websites, blogs, and social media profiles have become a significant tool for managing the activities of neighborhood groups as well as wider networks of urban activists in Poland. It is through the Internet that residents obtain information, local activists try to mobilize their communities to act, and coordinators announce various types of local activities and events. On the grassroots level, the Internet helps to maintain relations between the involved neighbors and to build a common identity related to a given place. As the presented case study of the Urban Movements Congress illustrates, on the supra-local level, the role of the Internet as a networking tool is particularly crucial for knowledge sharing and the coordination of lobbying activities nationwide.

One of the main challenges in networking between geographically dispersed urban movements is physical distance. When opportunities for face-to-face interactions are scarce, processes of self-organization and trust-building can be difficult if not impossible to set in motion. However, the example of urban movements shows that, with the right mix of virtual and real interactions, a strong and effective activists' network can emerge and be sustained in the long term. This confirms Castells' (2013) identification of a new model of networked movements emerging around the globe. Such a multimodal form of activism, based on the use of the Internet and mobile devices, allows for coordinating activities in "free space" while rooted in the physical public space. According to Castells, the hybrid of cyberspace and urban space becomes a "space of autonomy" for networked social movements (Castells, 2013). Their decentralized structure provides broadened opportunities for participation, smooth reorganization, and dynamic responses to new obstacles.

In terms of the spatial dispersion of Polish urban movements, communication channels based on new technologies have proven to be key to movements' deliberative decision-making and information-sharing. The basic tools employed by urban activists are fanpages and closed groups on Facebook. The groups gather members of urban networks, including organizations, informal initiatives, and supporting individuals or institutions. Despite the importance of other, more traditional means of communication such as telephone calls and face-to-face meetings, the most frequent and intensive everyday communication takes place via the

Internet, with particular emphasis on social networking sites. Some documents are circulated via email or created in the cloud to allow for joint collaboration. Most of the activists referred to in this chapter combine regular strategic meetings with phone and Internet communication on urgent matters.

Urban movements' social media profiles serve a number of functions in communications with the external world: (1) sharing information about current activities; (2) posting invitations to organized events (meetings, protests, happenings, conferences, discussions, etc.); (3) organizing support for specific initiatives (through crowdfunding campaigns or petition-signing); (4) commenting on current issues concerning urban policies or local conflicts; (5) inspiring and moderating discussions on topics relevant to residents and cities; (6) educating residents about new trends in urban development; and (7) promoting engagement and civic attitudes by encouraging residents to become involved in different local activities (see also Sowada, 2018, 2019).

Citizen education and mobilization are often accomplished through sharing of media materials, infographics, videos, articles, interviews, memes, or cartoons. Facebook is the most commonly used communication platform among the urban movements, and individual organizations tend to manage several Facebook groups and fanpages focused on different projects or topics. Using posts within groups, participants may join a discussion at any time, read previous reviews, and add their own comments (Sowada, 2018). These functions make Facebook an extremely flexible communication tool with many layers of possible uses and levels of privacy/publicity. Facebook also allows participants to become engaged on a plug-in/plug-out basis without the expectation of constant engagement or physical presence (see also the concept of the "plug-in citizen" in Nawratek, 2008). This versatility helped the Urban Movements Congress during several stages of its development. Through different Facebook forums and mailing lists, the informal network of contacts and relationships could be maintained, even once the Congress became a formal organization. The exchange of ideas within Congress groups was thus not limited to close internal contacts: current issues, and especially the most important or controversial aspects of their operations, were discussed

through open Internet platforms that were accessible to supporting activists and non-affiliated organizations.

The Urban Movements Congress network is a good example of della Porta and Diani's (2009) thesis that, in the case of modern social initiatives, maximal effectiveness can be achieved by combining a bottom-up initiative with the communication possibilities offered by the Internet. Social movement groups operating in both the real and virtual worlds appear to have the highest recruitment effectiveness and to allow for long-term networking despite constraints related to geographical distance, time, or money. They are partially based on the previously built trust and pleasure that come from spending time together in the real world, but they also have mechanisms of virtually supported social control that sustain engagement. The mailing lists of the Urban Movements Congress and its social media fanpage exemplify such self-regulating forums, where strategies, priorities, and principles of inclusion and exclusion are discussed and implemented between bi-annual Congress meetings.

The activists communicate with each other on social media platforms to coordinate protests, keep track of each other, and spread the message of the "right to the city" and urban change. Cyberactivism springing from grievances about local problems or unwanted development have often led to more organized efforts to represent the needs of residents or improve the quality of the local environment; Internet outlets have been a successful tool for neighborhood mobilization because of their accessibility, which encourages people to start discussions and move toward common goals. In other words, resource mobilization applies to urban movements because (1) the websites themselves are an existing resource that is accessible to Internet users, which helps mobilize the goals of the organization, and (2) that mobilization is essential to urban movements' success. The fact that the people who founded the movements knew how to utilize the available technical resources, enabled others to easily access different forms of participation—whether sharing information on Facebook, taking part in an Internet forum discussion, or signing a petition.

While an urban movement is a geographically dispersed network of local organizations, the Internet is a perfect tool for upholding norms, organizing and sharing resources, and instrumentalizing a greater impact

on the national level (Grzechnik, 2019). Observing the trajectories of leading activists' engagement, we can see that their cyberactivism was crucial in terms of producing a common narrative for similar initiatives around the country. However, the shift from local to digital was not a unidirectional one: the narrative co-produced in the cybersphere has been continuously applied in the local context through concrete actions answering specific local needs.

At the time of this research, social media were the most frequently used networking tool, while at the initial stage of the movements' development, Internet forums around urban issues were more commonly accessed. Among social media outlets, Facebook maintains a dominant role, while Twitter and Instagram are less frequently used but also present in some activists' practice. Traditional websites and blogs are being used to a lesser extent and are updated less often. Webpages are diminishing in importance as primary channels of information transfer; in approximately 2011/2012, their function began to be taken over by public profiles on Facebook and other social media platforms. The main strengths of these platforms are that they allow interaction with a wider audience in real time and give activists an opportunity not only to broadcast, but also to receive feedback. Users of a given platform can express support or criticize posts and proposals in a way that resembles an e-voting mechanism (giving "likes" on Facebook or Instagram) and share their thoughts via comments. According to Sowada's (2018) respondents, the key advantage of this form of contact is that it facilitates decision-making and discussions.

Despite the popularity of social media profiles among activists, the reach generated by content published on social media and the intensity of online exchanges taking place there remain limited. Social media discussions usually concern the most controversial and current topics at a given moment, and the engagement of the audience is often temporary and based on ad hoc emotional reactions to a particular topic. The sheer quantity of posts on social media makes it difficult for users to remain visible to others, and a so-called scrolling culture hinders users' ability to spend significant time reading the posts and reflecting on the issue being considered. Additionally, social media users' demographics may limit a movement's capacity to reach a wider group of residents. This is especially

true of less digitally savvy members of the community. Some of the activists I interviewed mentioned that too much activism had moved to the Internet during the development of the urban movement, leading to "clicktivism" and leaving little time for real contacts with other residents and face-to-face meetings (Mencwel, 2012).

While no form of remote communication can replace face-to-face meetings and conversations, Internet tools and resources have become an indispensable tool for urban activists over the years. However, it seems that knowledge about the movements among the general public is most often generated by traditional media such as local newspapers (and their Internet editions) and radio (as well as TV, to a much lesser extent). Residents' knowledge about local organizations is also shaped by personal meetings with activists, observing activists' activities in public spaces (such as happenings, posterings, or protests), and by their own participation in organized events (including neighborhood festivals, residents' meetings, and consultations). While most residents remain unengaged or express their support by giving virtual "likes," the presence of urban movements in e-communication channels allows for ad hoc grassroots commitment. When asked for help in a specific situation or support in a single action, the virtual community of urban movement supporters has the capacity to transform digitally mediated relations into tangible outcomes.

Conclusions

In an analysis of the situation of Polish civil society, Makowski (2012) pessimistically labeled it an "empty shell" consisting of organizations that fail to root themselves in an active society and that enjoy neither social trust nor financial stability. This assessment appears to be partly upheld by mainstream quantitative data, especially in international comparison. However, I would argue that we have seen some new "collective effervescence" (Kearney, 2019) among civil society groups in the last few years, mainly in the form of new urban movements and other local groups taking responsibility for making Polish cities and villages better places to live. In addition, the number of people who believe that they can

influence their environment and help those in need by working with other people appears to be growing. According to World Values Survey data, between 2005 and 2012 the percentage of "altruistic optimists"—those who believe in their capabilities to work with other people in order to help the needy or change their environment and also think that it is important to be sensitive and help others—increased from 40 to 46%. At the same time, the percentage of "egoistic optimists"—who believe in their capabilities to change the environment or help the needy, but also declare that it is important to focus on their own lives first—grew even more, from 11 to 19% (Domaradzka, 2014).

In this context, the basic dilemmas facing urban movements as they continue to develop are connected with the existing narrative concerning civil society and social capital. The activity of urban movements remains in the sphere of civil society, which, as proven by the previous processes of co-opting, can become a tool for maintaining the existing order and for filling gaps in market and state activities. Participation in urban movements alone can help to relieve frustration and weaken political postulates, but organizations themselves can become co-creators of the social compromise, or "producers of consent" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Implementation of some postulates of the movement may contribute to acceptance of half-solutions and encourage compromises; for example, the success of tenants' organizations may promote gentrification. In addition, the co-opting of urban movements by political groups and processes of loss of legitimacy (see Hamel, 1991; Uitermark, 2004) are becoming increasingly recurrent topics.

These smaller failures do not seem to have influenced the development of the urban movement, which remains a recognized civil society actor in the Polish urban policy field. What was once a field organized around two dominant logics—the logic of profit, represented by private capital and the global economy, and bureaucratic logic, represented by local administration and focused on procedures and ensuring the status quo—is now changing into a more diverse arena of struggle. The right to the city invoked by activists questions both logics: it demands the restoration of residents' impact on the political and spatial processes that shape their everyday lives, thereby cultivating not only their quality of life, but also their sense of social dignity and political subjectivity. The most important

influence that Polish urban movements have had thus far concerns the narratives and norms guiding urban policies and urban development in Poland. As Kubicki (2016) remarked, the development of the autonomous sphere of the Internet has opened up opportunities for shaping new, alternative urban narratives which, over time and thanks to the symbolic resources of activists, have begun to penetrate to the main discourse.

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