The role of leaders in shaping urban movements: a study of community mobilisation in Lithuania

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of leaders in shaping post-communist urban community mobilisation. It analyses the motivation of 40 leaders in volunteering for the community. Building on Ganz's definition of "strategic capacity", the Balsiai community organisation, in which the leader's role is most prominent, is scrutinised in detail. The findings show that community mobilisation is highly dependent on a devoted leader who sacrifices his/her own resources for the community's good. This study demonstrates that in countries with a weak participatory culture, a leader can play a crucial role in mobilising a community and challenging prevailing social norms and institutional structures.

Introduction

Numerous studies have stressed the importance of political, economic, and cultural opportunity structures in shaping urban movements (see, e.g. Hamel, Lustiger-Thaler, and Mayer 2000; Pickvance 2003; Jacobsson 2015). Few studies (Ganz 2000; Nepstad and Bob 2006; Morris and Staggenborg 2007), however, claim that the political opportunity structure and resource mobilisation are not enough to understand the movements and their strategies; social movement theories must consider the human factor and explore leadership in social movements. The topic of leadership and leaders in social movements was present in sociological writings between the 1960s and 1980s (see, e.g. Gusfield 1966; Eichler 1977). The focus later shifted towards resource mobilisation theory (agency) and political opportunity structure (structure). A study by Morris and Staggenborg (2007, 174) claims that neglect of the human aspect has obscured the proper understanding of social movements' structure and agency. They highlight the importance "to examine both the structural limitations and opportunities for social movements and the ways in which leaders make a difference within structural contexts". In other words, they invite an examination of the ways leaders shape and change the structure and agency for the participants. It is believed that "by taking leadership into account, we can improve explanations of key issues in social movement theory" (2007, 171). On a similar note, Ganz (2000, 1010) emphasises that "failure to bring attention to the important influence of strategic leadership on social movements is an important theoretical shortcoming".

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Studies seeking to explore leadership in urban movements are rare. The major body of literature on mobilisation in Central and Eastern Europe focused on resource mobilisation and political opportunity structure for urban participants (see, e.g. Pickvance 2003; Jacobsson 2015). Studies exploring urban mobilisations in Lithuania are even more rare. Few recent studies (Aidukaitė 2013; Nefas and Narkevičiūtė 2013; Aidukaitė and Jacobsson 2015) that exist explored the types of urban community mobilisations and their strategies, as well as the political opportunity structure for their mobilisations, and how the European Union's (EU) support (resources and cognitive influences) fostered community mobilisation for urban activists. A previous study (Aidukaitė 2013) briefly pointed out that successful urban communities are centred around a charismatic leader who devotes his/her time and non-material and material resources to attain results. However, this issue has never been explored more in depth.

This article seeks to analyse the role of leaders in shaping urban community mobilisation in two major Lithuanian cities: Vilnius and Kaunas.[1] Post-communist societies are especially interesting for studying leadership, since they experienced the authoritarian communist party's rule and have a relatively brief experience with democracy. The Lithuanian case is interesting as it is a former Soviet Union Republic that experienced 25 years of democratisation and marketisation. However, a previous study (Žiliukaitė et al. 2006) claims that the norms that could encourage and facilitate civil participation had not yet been developed in Lithuania. The key question is whether the characteristics and actions of leaders account for urban community mobilisation in Lithuania.

Community organisations were chosen for the analysis, since they are among the most important civil actors in Lithuania's urban environment (see Aidukaitė 2013; Aidukaitė et al. 2014; Aidukaitė and Jacobsson 2015). According to the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (2011), community organisations are defined as associations that are founded by the residents (who are members of the organisation) of the local residential area (neighbourhood) for the purpose of implementing local initiatives related to the neighbourhood's public interest.

This article is organised as follows: first, the theoretical literature on leadership in social movements will be reviewed; second, the methodology and data of the article will be briefly presented; and third, the background information on community organisations in Vilnius and Kaunas will be discussed, followed by the analysis of the community organisations in two cities building on Ganz's (2000) definition of "strategic capacity". Then, the case study of the Balsiai community of Vilnius, in which the leadership role has been the most salient, will be scrutinised. The article ends with the conclusions drawn from the analysis.

Leadership in social movements

Leaders matter to social movements. They devise strategies, mobilise resources, inspire movement participants, recognise opportunities, and create outcomes (Morris and Staggenborg 2007). Leaders in this study are defined as individuals or teams of individuals who exercise authority within a movement (Ganz 2000; Nepstad and Bob 2006). Extant studies (Onyx and Leonard 2010; Etuk et al. 2013) show that in most instances communities with more effective leaders have greater capacities. Onyx and Leonard studied small rural town communities in Australia. They found that communities that had a

leader with strong management skills were much more successful in achieving their goals. Another study (Etuk et al. 2013) evaluated the leadership development programmes for rural communities in the USA (in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California), which primarily focus on the development of skills and capacities within individuals, namely, the development of leaders for the communities and their skills. Their findings show that, in most cases, the programme increased human capital and network resources of rural communities, resulting in increased community capacity. In their study, capacity is understood as a sense of community (or cohesion) and ability to solve problems. Communities with high cohesion are characterised by qualities such as a high level of trust among its members; willingness to help each other and work for the community's goals; and a high frequency of interactions among community residents on the community's economic, cultural, and social issues. Communities that can count on their inhabitants to work together to solve local issues, and have sufficient skills and knowledge to accomplish their goals, are characterised as able to solve problems. In addition, effective collaboration between community organisations and the local government is also important (Etuk et al. 2013). The leader's power to create a community with higher capacity is indispensable. As stated by Morris and Staggenborg (2007, 188), "the success of the movement depends on the creativity, imagination, and skills of the leaders"; leaders determine movement outcomes and are primary decision-makers within social movements. Yet, Morris and Staggenborg emphasise that regardless of structural conditions, there exist a variety of choices to be made in terms of devising the right strategy and approaching the right people and institutions. Some choices can be more effective than others, and this can be crucial to the movement's success or failure.

Ganz (2000) examined differences in the strategies of two California unions (United Farm Workers (UFW) and Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC)) from 1956 to 1966. The UFW union was much more successful in achieving its goals and attracting participants than the AWOC. The UFW was a newly formed union and characterised by a lack of material resources, while the AWOC was well established with stable resources. The success of the UFW was explained by the adoption of effective strategies, which compensated for the lack of resources. Ganz's findings show that the political opportunity structure or resources fail to identify mechanisms for creating an effective strategy. Rather, differences in the strategies (and consequently in outcomes) of two unions "were due to differences in leaders' access to salient information about the environment, heuristic use they made of this information, and their motivation" (Ganz 2000, 1005) – what Ganz calls their "strategic capacity". Variation in strategic capacity, again, derives from differences in leaders' life experiences, networks, and repertoires, and organisations' deliberative processes, resource flows, and accountability structure (Ganz 2000, 1019). Thus, an organisation that has a greater strategic capacity is more likely to achieve positive outcomes. The strategic capacity mainly depends on the leader of the organisation. If we examine Ganz's definition "strategic capacity" in more detail, it will help us explore the success and failure of urban community movements in Lithuania.

According to Ganz (2000, 1012–1014), the strategic capacity consists of three elements: motivation, salient information, and heuristic processes. "Salient knowledge" means access to information on the domain. Leaders who have a strong knowledge of a domain within which they work, and have good local knowledge, are better equipped to solve problems

that arise within the domain. "Heuristic processes" show the leaders' abilities to use salient knowledge to devise novel solutions, generate innovative ideas, and make conceptualisations and periodic assessments of the situation. "Motivation" is especially important as it influences the actors' ability to be persistent and to take risks. Leaders can be motivated by their personal commitment or by intrinsic rewards.

It is important to notice that strategic capacity is greater if a leadership team incorporates insiders and outsiders, relies on strong and weak network ties, and has access to diverse repertoires of collective action. Strategic capacity also depends on the structure of the organisation. The organisation is more likely to develop an effective strategy if it holds regular meetings, is open to diverse perspectives, pulls resources from multiple constituencies, and holds leaders accountable to those constituencies and to each other. Organisations are more likely to succeed if their leaders are selected democratically or if they rely on entrepreneurial or self-selected leaders rather than bureaucratically appointed ones (Ganz 2000).

Thus, strategic capacity of the organisations and their leaders can explain why some social movements survive and achieve incredible results while others fail even with stable resources. The leader's position in generating strategic capacity is crucial.

Methodology

This article employs qualitative methodology to study the role of community mobilisation leaders in Vilnius and Kaunas. The analysis is based on 40 interviews conducted with community activists, community association leaders (Lithuanian community association, Vilnius communities association, and Kaunas communities association), officials of Vilnius and Kaunas municipalities, and the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. In Vilnius, 21 community leaders were interviewed; in Kaunas, 12 interviews were conducted with community leaders. The interviews were carried out with those community organisations that are institutionalised (officially registered), and seek to influence urban culture or political life in the city. The interviewees were selected to represent as many neighbourhoods of Vilnius and Kaunas as possible.[2] The 40 in-depth interviews were analysed to reveal the commonalities and differences in the strategic capacity of the community organisations. As it is argued in the theoretical section above, the higher strategic capacity of the community organisation will lead to a better strategy and consequently to a more favourable outcome for the movement. The strategic capacity mainly depends on the experience, skills, and motivation of the leaders of the organisations.

As stated by Nepstad and Bob (2006), the best way to explore the extent to which the characteristics and actions of leaders matter for urban community mobilisation is to find an outlier – a case in which the role of leader stands out sharply. "It is important to select movements in which leaders appear to have played a central part – cases in which it is difficult to conceive of the movement or certain aspects of the movement without its leader" (Nepstad and Bob 2006, 2). For our purposes, the case study of the most successful community organisation in Lithuania (the Balsiai community organisation), which stands out for its remarkable achievements compared to the other community organisations, will be examined in more detail to see whether the leader's motivation, salient information, and heuristic processes can change the political

opportunity and agency for the movement. A case study is particularly useful to explore the mechanisms that may help movements to succeed. The analysis of the case study will be based on the in-depth interview with the leader of the community, media coverage (newspaper articles about the community), the annual reports of the Balsiai community organisation, and other documents and events posted at the community's official website.

Urban community mobilisations in Lithuania

Urban community mobilisations emerged as a response to the liberalisation and privatisation of housing and urban policies in Lithuania. Since the 1990s, remarkable state withdrawal from urban and housing policies has been observed, as well as the decline in public welfare provisions (see Aidukaitė 2014). This triggered community mobilisations around environmental issues, infrastructure development, and local welfare. However, the number of urban community organisations in major Lithuanian cities grew mostly before 2001–2003, and after the EU accession from 2004 to 2006[3] (Figure 1). This is particularly evident for the largest cities such as Vilnius and Kaunas. The development of community organisations in smaller cities such as Panevėžys, Šiauliai, and Klaipėda has been far less impressive. Twenty-five community organisations were registered in Vilnius from 2001 to 2003, and 26 were formed from 2004 to 2006. The corresponding figures for Kaunas were 11 and 15. A previous study (Aidukaitė and Jacobsson 2015) demonstrated that the increase in urban community organisations in Vilnius and Kaunas was stimulated by EU resources through the European Structural Fund that was devoted to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community building.

Currently, community organisations fight illegal construction close to their vicinity, solve various environmental issues, provide social services, bring a sense of community to the neighbourhood, and perform social and cultural activities. Many community organisations initiate campaigns for roads in the neighbourhood to be asphalted, parking lots to be built, street lights to be put up in walkways, children's playgrounds to
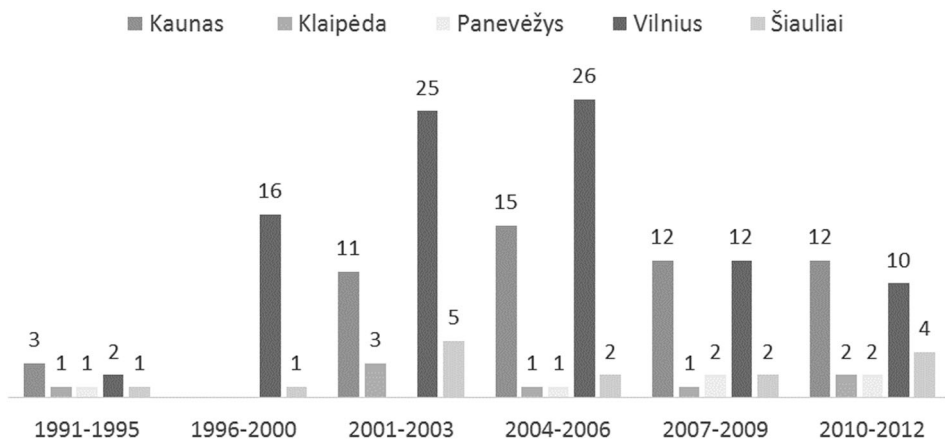
Figure 1. Numbers of registered community organisations in major Lithuanian cities (1990–2012). Source: State Enterprise Centre of Registers (2013).

be built, and so on. These initiatives are the responsibility of the local municipality and the district.[4] Nevertheless, community organisations make their own efforts in addressing the need for infrastructural development, negotiating with the municipality, and also turning to other potential sponsors to find possible financial and political means to solve issues (Aidukaitė 2013; Nefas and Narkevičiūtė 2013; Aidukaitė et al. 2014; Aidukaitė and Jacobsson 2015).

It must be noted that community organisations in Lithuania managed to form alliances and build umbrella organisations (Aidukaitė and Jacobsson 2015). The Vilnius Communities Association (established in 2009) and the Kaunas Communities' Centres' Association (established in 2004) unite community organisations on a city-wide level. The Šiauliai Communities' Confederation was established (in 2011) to unite the city of Šiauliai and other rural community organisations from its surrounding areas. In addition to the above efforts to form alliances, the Lithuanian Union of Local Community Organizations (LULCO) was established in 2011 to unite all community organisations, both urban and rural. LULCO coordinates activities of community organisations on a national level, represents and defends the common interests of its members, promotes the development of local communities, and encourages them to strengthen self-government.[5] Within one year of existence, LULCO achieved significant results: a co-operation agreement was signed with the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania, a national community development programme 2011–2013 was approved, and an opportunity to communicate directly with the parliament (Seimas) and government representatives was established.[6] In 2009, the Department of Community Affairs was established at the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, which co-ordinated the community social development programme of 2011–2013. This programme aimed to promote the development of community organisations, their social activities, and mutual assistance towards local communities to provide more social services, and in their delivery to engage more community members (LR socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija 2011). In 2014, the new "Action Plan of Development of Non-governmental Organisations and Communities 2014–2016" was approved. This plan was drafted after accomplishing two programmes of development of NGOs and communities during 2011–2013, which were allocated about LTL 200,000 (58,000 euro) and LTL 800,000 (232,000 euro) to each programme every year. The budget of the new Action Plan for 2014 was also LTL 1 million (290,000 euro), whereas the 2015 and 2016 budgets will be considered and approved in accordance with the appropriate procedure (the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania 2014, 59).

All in all, the development of community organisations has been gaining substantial attention from governmental bodies. However, the leaders and activists of community organisations work for the community and solve vital problems on a voluntary basis, they are not paid for their activities, or rewarded by the government in any other way. The budgets, which national and local governments direct towards community development, are envisaged for the development of local services, for the organisation of social events and sports activities, for training and retraining courses, for community centres' buildings, and so on. No money has been allocated to pay salaries for the work of the local activists. The question naturally arises: Where does motivation of the leaders to volunteer for the community come from? The analysis of the 40 in-depth interviews will help us to answer this question.

Leaders and their motivation

The 40 in-depth interviews revealed that all community organisations rely on strong, often charismatic leadership. There was no gender bias in the distribution of the community leaders interviewed. Both men and women equally took on leadership roles in the community. The leaders interviewed in this study were mainly middle-aged and highly educated people. Some of them were of retirement age, yet were still very active and seeking meaningful activities in their lives. Very few leaders were young people aged 35 years or younger. Many of them have been active their whole lives and even come from families where social activism has always been valued and present. For instance, the leader of the *Senamiesčio* community organisation of Vilnius was born and raised in the United States. Since her childhood, she has always been an active member of various organisations:

> I was born and raised in America and from a very young age, I have been involved in various social movements, and my parents were also very active in all kinds of Lithuanian-American communities. I have attended Catholic and Scout organisations and also participated in all kinds of communities; I was also very active at the University … It is impossible to compare that with what I found when I came to Lithuania … . (The leader of the Senamiesčio community association)

The leader of the *Senamiesčio* community organisation compares civil activism in two very distinct societies from the point of view of a newcomer from the USA. She points out some of the problems of low levels of civil society activity/activism in Lithuania. The quotation below, however, mostly expresses the individual attitude of the leader and explains why civil activism is so important in her life:

> Since childhood I have seen how active my parents have been. They would return home after work and would not watch TV, but instead, after having dinner, would go to meetings like women's union meeting, etc … I grew up in such an environment … Therefore, for me, participation in public life is the norm. And here, in Lithuania, there is no such attitude, because people did not have such experience in their childhood … People in Lithuania do not understand why they should volunteer and do something for the public good just because they care, without any selfish purposes or for compensation, just to help someone … . (The leader of the Senamiesčio community organisation, Vilnius)

The opinion expressed above has a resonance with the scientific literature. The study by Žiliukaitė et al. (2006) has shown that in Lithuania "non-participation is the 'norm', while involvement in some kind of civil activity is considered unusual and deviant behaviour" (277). The study claims that up to now, Lithuanian society has not developed norms that could encourage and facilitate civil or political activities. However, recent studies (Aidukaitė 2013; Aidukaitė et al. 2014; Aidukaitė and Jacobsson 2015) on community organisations somewhat contradict these assumptions and show that civil initiatives are taking place on a grassroots level.

Leaders of Lithuanian origin had similar reasons for civil activism as those expressed by the leader with the foreign background, although probably not shared in such an explicit way:

> I still remember my childhood days when I lived in a five-storey building. All the neighbours in our staircase knew one another and would greet each other when they met. I grew up in a family that was very social. When the neighbours had to leave to go somewhere, they

would always leave the apartment keys to my parents. Today the situation is different. The neighbours do not communicate and hardly know each other. (The leader of the Justiniškių community organisation, Vilnius)

Thus, the quotations above confirm assumptions found in prior literature (see Morris and Staggenborg 2004), that activists learn relevant values for activism from their parents, which are then reinforced by the experiences and skills gained through education. They also acquired leadership skills in their prior places of employment. Many of the leaders interviewed have been in leadership positions for their entire professional lives. Without any doubt, all of them possess good organisational skills and are able to effectively communicate with people and authorities. Moreover, due to their long-term experience in the leadership positions, they have much social capital, know many influential people, and thus use their social capital to advance the community's affairs. These leadership traits are crucial in building the movement's strategic capacity.

The majority of leaders of the community organisations are self-selected or democratically selected by the community members. However, there are a number of community leaders who were appointed bureaucratically by the municipality or the district. Previous studies show that some districts promoted the establishment of community organisations by directly recruiting volunteers or indirectly promoting European initiatives (for details see Aidukaitė 2013; Aidukaitė and Jacobsson 2015). The bureaucratically appointed leaders were more common in Vilnius. In Kaunas, the overwhelming majority of the leaders were activists with a deep knowledge of the neighbourhood and were greatly appreciated by the inhabitants:

I was talked into becoming a community leader since people trusted me and wanted to be led by me. "Come, we trust you, we know you, please help us. You won't escape us". Even until then, people always turned to me with any problem. (The leader of the community centre "Girsta", Kaunas)

The majority of the leaders explain their activism by their internal state of being, by their human nature:

I am a patriot of Lithuania. I feel like this is my problem. I love people, especially people who live in my community. Such people are always going to exist. If there were no such people, this world would no longer stand. (The leader of the Grigiškių community organisation, Vilnius)

"If I came to this world, I have to tidy my backyard" (the leader of the *Salininkų* community organisation, Vilnius). "I am a civic man who actively participates everywhere and all the time – I am a journalist" (the leader of the *Žvėrynas* community organisation, Vilnius).

Thus, for the majority motivation comes from personal commitment and intrinsic rewards. "I am a pensioner, have time, so my time is devoted to the community. I wanted some activity for my soul, to do something meaningful for others … " (the leader of the Šilainiai community centre, Kaunas). Activists view community as their own family, as their own project, spend their own money to pay for the activities. "So much work, forget your own life. We contribute from our own pocket to the activities and we do not count money … " (the leader of the community centre "Dainava", Kaunas). "Community for me is like my own child. As soon as I will work, I will be the sponsor of my centre" (the leader of the Palemonas community centre, Kaunas). The leaders use their own material resources and sacrifice their personal lives to promote the activities of the community.

However, the motivation of the bureaucratically selected leaders is different. Their motivation is often driven by the professional commitment, or their interest is solely instrumental; they have no strong ties to constituencies and have little salient local knowledge. They often only carry on a few activities for which financing is envisaged from the district. The bureaucratically selected leaders often narrow their activities to the organisation to such events as basketball tournaments and the annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony. They report on low civil society, passivity, indifference, lack of solidarity, and economic difficulties faced in attempting to carry out certain activities.

The educational or professional background of the leaders is an important element that determines which community-building areas will be emphasised and which strategies will be used to pursue the community's goals. The leaders of *Justiniškės* and *Grigiškės* community organisations (Vilnius) actively pursue the organisation of environmental campaigns, because both of them are very concerned with environmental issues and have a background in environmental protection. The leader of the *Baltupiai* community organisation (Vilnius) is a former teacher. Therefore, she is very active in promoting various interest clubs and after-school activities for children. The leader of the *Viršuliškės* community (Vilnius) promotes various infrastructure development programmes, because his background is in the construction industry. Community leaders who come from artistic backgrounds promote cultural events in their neighbourhoods, building sculptures and putting effort into preserving cultural monuments from decay. Obviously, leadership in the community is an expression of one's own identity in many cases.

It is important to note that, despite the fact that the motivation for activism is driven by the desire to express one's own identity and altruism, the need to improve one's own well-being is also important, and some leaders expressed this idea more explicitly. For instance, the leader of the *Užupis* community (Vilnius) stated that he became actively involved in community building because he was not pleased with his own well-being and was concerned with the high criminal record of the neighbourhood. In a similar way, the leader of the *Balsiai* community (Vilnius) stated that the only way to improve his own well-being and to develop infrastructure in the neighbourhood was to form alliances with other neighbours in the community.

Strategic capacity of community organisations: overview of the situation in Kaunas and in Vilnius

Based on 40 in-depth interviews, it is possible to review the differences and similarities in strategic capacities of community organisations in Kaunas and Vilnius. The interviews revealed that community organisations in Kaunas have a higher strategic capacity. The overwhelming majority of their leaders are self-selected or selected democratically and promoted by the community. They possess very good knowledge of the neighbourhood and its issues, they are well embedded into the community's life, and very devoted to the community's issues. They have strong ties to constituencies. Although the community organisations have stable financing from the municipality of Kaunas, which is distributed through the project applications, all of them rely on multiple sources of support. The majority of the community organisations/centres are well integrated into their neighbourhood lives, and they have good communication with the schools (often use their facilities for gatherings and community activities), the district, the police, and the church, and thus

manage to attract long-term sponsors. Community organisations collaborate with restaurants and cafes and receive food aid, which they distribute to poor families and children in their neighbourhood. But behind of all this good collaboration, the personality of the leader of the community organisation plays a crucial role. In many cases, it is a leader of the community and some most active members who manage to keep good collaboration going and use their own contacts to settle neighbourhood issues.

Thus, community organisations in Kaunas also look for long-term or short-term sponsors and collaboration partners. Some of them have social partners, which can be pharmacies, leisure and recreational activity centres, theatre, insurance companies, and food and textile factories. Some community organisations have applied for financing not only from the municipality and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (from which financing is available for all urban communities since 2012), but also from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Culture.

All community organisations in Kaunas keep in contact with the Kaunas Communities' Centres' Association and believe the activities of the association as very useful as they often turn to it for advice. This shows that they are open to diverse points of views and ways of doing things by learning from other community organisations. As a result, the leaders of community organisations in Kaunas are involved in multiple contacts, possess good salient knowledge, and are open to the generation of new ideas. The organisational capacity is also higher in Kaunas. The majority of community organisations in Kaunas have a permanent meeting place, and many of them have their own facilities. The activists meet regularly and are accountable to the municipality and the community.

The situation in Vilnius is different. There are only a few community organisations with the same capacity as Kaunas. The situation of the community organisations is much more diverse in Vilnius. Only a few community organisations in Vilnius have their own facilities where they can meet regularly. If a community organisation is established on a grassroots basis, it is led by the self-selected or democratically elected leader. Many community organisations in Vilnius rely on a bureaucratically appointed leader. However, even if the leader is self-selected, it is common that some community organisations disappear as soon as they reach their goals. Others continue to perform social and cultural functions and become visible in the political arena only if new pressing problems arise. Only a few community organisations in Vilnius have developed close contact with the local residents. As pointed out by Bartuškaitė and Žilys (2011), community organisations are often not able to maintain close contact with local residents. This is due to residents' poor political trust of local authorities who usually do not initiate any communication with the inhabitants. Another reason is the fact that the range of activities (cultural functions) performed by the community organisations is too narrow, and they focus on narrow social networks (with an emphasis on communication with members within but not outside the community). Thus, as emphasised in the study of Bartuškaitė and Žilys, community organisations in Lithuania are relatively homogeneous and small, and their activities are fragmented and highly dependent on the leader and a small circle of active members of the community. The 40 in-depth interviews reveal that such qualities are especially common for the organisations that were established on the initiative of the local municipality or the district and have a bureaucratically appointed leader. The situation is more prevalent in Vilnius than in Kaunas, as noted.

The bulk of the community organisations in Vilnius survive on their members' donations and 2% of income tax redistribution.[7] Usually, it is community members who donate 2% of their income tax. Few community organisations in Vilnius survive on project money coming from the EU or receive private sponsors' support. Yet, fewer community organisations in Vilnius keep in contact with the Vilnius Communities' Association compared to Kaunas, where the majority reported attending the meetings of the Kaunas Communities' Association.

In sum, the overall strategic capacity is higher in Kaunas than in Vilnius. This can explain why community organisations in Kaunas have a better local opportunity structure, while in Vilnius the situation is fairly unfavourable for local activists. As a previous study (Aidukaitė and Jacobsson 2015) revealed, community organisations in Kaunas have been more successful in building alliances with the wider community and accomplish their desired outcomes more often as a result. They have better political opportunities (communication with the local authority being positive and supportive) and resource opportunities (the organisations have stable, though modest, financing from the municipality and some have other long-term local sponsors) compared to the city of Vilnius, where the local authorities are far less responsive to community organisations. The community organisations in Vilnius must rely on their members' donations or EU resources and get little help from local authorities.

However, paradoxically, the best community organisation in Lithuania, which achieved extraordinary results, and is often mentioned as a role model for other organisations, is in Vilnius. Thus, having similar national political and resource opportunities from the outskirts, some community organisations have developed a better local opportunity structure and achieved better results. The question is whether the leader can reshape the opportunity structure for the movement and to what extent. The case of the Balsiai community organisation will now be examined in detail.

A case study of the Balsiai community organisation

Balsiai is a remote district of Vilnius. It was formed in 1989, when Lenin's District Executive Committee distributed land plots to factory workers so they could build their own houses. The *Balsiai* community organisation was institutionalised in 2002. It is noteworthy that the community had already been active in developing its infrastructure even before its institutionalisation. Currently, it is a modern and wealthy neighbourhood with private houses. One of the most significant achievements of the community is a new secondary school. In the *Balsiai* community, local residents were so active that they managed to receive the approval and funding for a new secondary school, which was nearly a unique occurrence in the post-Soviet Lithuania. To achieve this, *Balsiai* activists had to disrupt the plans to privatise a nearby public land plot for the new school to be placed there instead. The activists wrote letters to the municipality, the Ministry of Education, the president, and members of the parliament to prove that the land plot belonged to the community and could not be sold by the municipality to private investors. To get approval to build a secondary school in the neighbourhood, the activists even conducted a scientific survey, calculating how many children and inhabitants would be in the neighbourhood in the years to come. In 2005, the land plot went from the Vilnius county governor's possession to the full ownership of the Vilnius municipality, and in this way it was assigned to the construction of the new school

in Balsiai. Community activists prepared the plan for construction of the school and found a private investor. Then, they convinced the municipality to finance the construction.[8] The idea to build a new secondary school started in 2002, and the construction began in 2010. Within one year (in 2011), the most modern school in Lithuania was opened to schoolchildren. The Prime Minister of Lithuania attended the school opening ceremony and gave a public speech.[9]

The Vilnius municipality committed to pay LTL 6.61 million (1.7 million euros) plus VAT annual fee, within 25 years, to the private company "Merko statyba" for the construction of the new school in Balsiai. This price included not only the construction of the modern school building, but also the maintenance of the building, inventory, the price for the utilities, insurance, and full responsibility for the longevity of the building. The school was built through a public–private partnership (PPP), which can be found elsewhere in the world. However, it had not been used in Lithuania until now. The Balsiai community successfully adopted the PPP practice in the construction of the new school. At present, it serves as a model of education on how PPP projects can be implemented in Lithuania (Balsių bendruomenėje 2010).

Another triumph of the community mobilisation is a new park. Ten years ago, the community organised a meeting and planted pine trees in the place where the current "Mythological Sculpture Park" stands today. To strengthen the community's sense of belonging and common identity, it was decided to place mythological sculptures in the park, since the streets in *Balsiai* are named after Lithuanian ancient mythological deities. Each mythological sculpture was given a name of one of the streets of the neighbourhood of *Balsiai*. The funding for the development of the park came from various projects. Members of the community also made personal donations for building sculptures. Moreover, residents of different streets competed in building a better and more beautiful sculpture. This way, a new park of Vilnius was born, and currently even the people from remote neighbourhoods come to visit the park. The leader of the community states:

> I was thinking of what was needed to be done to make the park appealing to the residents of the community so they could identify themselves with the park. Then I decided to encourage the community to make sculptures and name them after the names of the streets in Balsiai.

The Balsiai community is also proud of successfully implementing the project "Security in Balsiai". The policeman with a car is on duty in the neighbourhood for 12 hours a day. If something happens, he responds to the call within three minutes. The project "Security in Balsiai" also has a social service package whereby there are volunteers who can check if everything is OK if seniors or children are left at home alone. It is possible to get help in case of health emergency, to have the dog fed when going on holiday, and so on. This kind of project has not been implemented in any other neighbourhood so far.

There were no complaints concerning passivity, indifference, or financial constraints expressed by the leader of the community. On the contrary, the leader emphasised significant achievements in an attempt to build a common identity and future plans for the community:

> Our biggest achievement is not the school but building common identity. Children who attend our school are proud to live in the Balsiai neighbourhood. All residents who live here are proud. This is one of the top achievements that cannot be measured in material

terms. It is a perception: I am happy to live here, because it is good to be here. If I do contribute to the common good, I feel even better. (The leader of the community organisation of Balsiai)

Leadership and motivation. The leader of the Balsiai community is a 48-year-old self-employed entrepreneur. His background is in engineering, and he worked as an entrepreneur for his whole life. He was also among the pioneers who settled in the neighbourhood, as he claims. So he devoted his life to improving the neighbourhood, as it coincided with the possibility to improve his own well-being. "I have built the house in an open field in Balsiai. There were no streets, no roads, or water, or sewer system and lighting. I started to think how I could create a more beautiful environment and convenient life."[10] As emphasised by Ganz (2000), insiders personally committed to constituencies with whom they identify are likely to be more motivated than those whose interest is solely instrumental, and they are more likely to find their work intrinsically rewarding. The motivation of the Balsiai community leader comes from the desire to improve his own living conditions, but also from intrinsic rewards, the desire to do something meaningful for the community, and to leave something for future generations:

It feels so good to know that I made or did something that other people can enjoy and experience, too. I want people to feel that it is good to live on this earth and that people come to this world for a purpose … . (The leader of the Balsiai community organisation, Vilnius)

In 2010 he received an award, "Christopher's statuette",[11] for improving the well-being of the Balsiai community. Since 2011 he has been a council member of the Lithuanian Local Union of Community organisations (Vilnijos vartai 2014b). He is also a vice-president of the Vilnius Communities' association.

The leader has strong entrepreneurial and leadership skills. He uses positive frames in communicating the community's needs and problems, while at the same time appealing to the identity and benefits for the inhabitants. Being a successful entrepreneur, he developed his own network of supporters and used this network for the benefits of the community:

I have a lot of acquaintances, I know many influential and not very influential people. I just know that all depends on how you ask … how you ask and whom you ask. Sometimes very close friends refuse to help. Sometimes, strangers help. (The leader of the Balsiai community organization, Vilnius)

Thus, the leader of the Balsiai community possesses a significant amount of "leadership capital" – a term coined by Nepstad and Bob (2006). The term, to some extent, coincides with Ganz's definition of a leader's strategic capacity. Leadership capital includes "localized cultural capital" (a deep understanding of its community's needs and circumstances), "universalistic cultural capital" (knowledge of cultural principles and political trends, media skills, and persuasive abilities), "social capital" (social networks, personal relationships, trust, and reciprocity), and "symbolic capital" (prestige, honour, social recognition, and charisma) (Nepstad and Bob 2006, 4–5).

Salient knowledge and heuristic processes. Being an insider, the leader has very good local knowledge of the community. As emphasised by Ganz (2000, 1016), "leaders with 'strong ties' to constituencies are more likely to possess salient information like, where to find resources, whom to recruit, what tactics to use and how to encourage these constituencies to identify with the organization". The leader as well as the council members of

the community organisation are involved in various outside organisations and associations. This allows them to interact with diverse points of view and different ways of doing things, and this facilitates the innovation process in problem-solving.

It has to be mentioned that community members are actively involved in public commissions in the Vilnius municipality. These are environmental, business development, urban development, and community affairs commissions.[12] It helps the community activists gain information about the city's development, and is also an opportunity to present their own initiatives.

Organisation. The community organisation was established in 2002, and has held regular meetings since then, and also issues annual reports in which they present activities carried out, problems, and achievements. The organisation is stable, is accountable to the inhabitants and municipality, and has its own webpage. The community organisation consists of 16–17 council members, which are elected democratically every second year. The council members take part in regular, open deliberation of the community's needs and problems. Regular deliberation facilitates initiatives by encouraging periodic assessments of the organisation's activities, encouraging innovation, and enhancing the leadership group's capacity to perform tasks more creatively and effectively (Ganz 2000).

The organisation relies on membership donations and on the redistribution of 2% of the income tax. However, the community organisation seeks money from outside sources to finance various projects: EU funding, the municipality, private sponsors, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

Strategic capacity. All in all, the strategic capacity of the community of Balsiai is very high. But it would be difficult to deny that, compared to other neighbourhoods, *Balsiai* consists of young, well-educated, and relatively wealthy people, which makes it easier to mobilise. Positive achievements shape a sense of common identity and solidarity among the residents and helps to continue to work towards further improvement of the well-being of the community. The leader of the community relies on the community for both human and financial resources. All in all, the community is centred on a leader with strong managerial skills who has managed to raise the reputation of the neighbourhood to such a degree that local authorities of Vilnius are proud of the achievements of the neighbourhood and present the case as a "success story" in their own attempts to implement a positive dialogue between the municipality and inhabitants.

Conclusions

This article has provided an overview of the Lithuanian case of community mobilisations focusing on the role of leaders, which has been somewhat overlooked in the literature. It shows that community leaders play a crucial role in mobilising a community, setting goals, and choosing collaborative strategies. The Balsiai community is an exceptional case of successful mobilisation in Lithuania.

The special emphasis was put on leaders' motivations, as this is an important factor that makes the leaders persistent and affects their ability to take risks, and to be willing to learn and be creative in solving problems. The findings show that the motivation of self-selected or democratically selected leaders is higher than for those who were bureaucratically appointed to lead the community organisation. Leaders who are personally involved in

the community affairs are most motivated. The Balsiai community leader is highly motivated to improve the well-being of the community as this coincides with the improvement in his own comfort and welfare. However, other intrinsic rewards are also visible, such as pride of doing something for the common good and the desire to leave a better world for future generations. Being a leader who is closely connected to its constituencies, while at the same time having connections to elite allies, he was able to produce frames and generate ideas that were appealing to the residents of the Balsiai neighbourhood, and to the local institutions. The positive results shaped a sense of common identity and belonging in the community, and this further enhanced cohesion and problem-solving. In this way, he has changed the opportunity structure for his movement. The local authorities are proud of having a neighbourhood with distinguished results.

The findings show that community mobilisations rely on leaders who devote their time and non-material and material resources to attain results. Many community leaders have been active their whole lives and even come from families where social activism has always been valued and present. Education or professional background of the leaders is an important element that determines which community-building areas will be emphasised and which strategies will be used to pursue the goals of the community.

The political and economic structure creates constraints and opportunities that influence the leader's abilities to mobilise a community (Morris and Staggenborg 2007). On the one hand, the state's withdrawal from investment into local infrastructure and lack of collaborative relationships with local authorities provoked community mobilisations in Lithuania. On the other hand, the Europeanisation through the availability of EU structural funds devoted to community building and also cognitive mechanisms that promote partnership models and local collaborative strategies created favourable conditions for local activists (Aidukaitė and Jacobsson 2015). However, as emphasised by Morris and Staggenborg (2007), it is up to the leader of the movement how he/she interprets the relevant political and economic context and makes decisions on how the context is to be exploited for the movement purposes. This study shows that in a country with weak participatory culture, the leader can play a crucial role in mobilising a community and challenging prevailing social norms and institutional structures.

The article contributes towards a better empirical understanding of the role of leaders in urban movements in a post-socialist context. Future studies should employ a comparative approach and explore whether the role of leaders in urban movements vary within post-communist countries. The questions to explore are: Whether post-socialist urban movements succeed only with a strong leader; and how and why the post-socialist political and economic environment create the need for strong leadership in social movements to emerge.

Notes

1. Vilnius is the capital and largest city in the country with a little more than 500,000 inhabitants. Kaunas is second largest in Lithuania according to its size with about 300,000 inhabitants (Lietuvos Statistikos Departamentas 2012).
2. There are 21 neighbourhoods in Vilnius and 11 in Kaunas. The interviews were carried out with the community organisations from the following neighbourhoods in Vilnius: Viršuliškių, Žvėrynas, Senamiesčio, Antakalnio, Karoliniškių, Baltupių, Žirmūnų, Naujamiesčio, Pilaitė, Balsių, Užupio, Šnipiškių, Justiniškių, Grigiškių, Naujosios Vilnius, Jeruzalė, Pašilaičiai, Vilkpedė,

Salininkai, and Aukštieji Paneriai. The interviews in Kaunas were carried out with the leaders of community organisations representing the following neighbourhoods: Dainavos, Gričiupio, Palemono, Petrašiūnų, Eigulių, Kalniečių, Šilainių, Aleksoto, Sargėnų, and Žaliakalnio.

3. Lithuania joined the EU in 2004.
4. The district is an establishment subordinated to the municipality, which has direct and closer links to the community's inhabitants and is financed from the municipality's budget. There are 21 districts in Vilnius and 11 in Kaunas.
5. Based on Lietuvos vietos bendruomenių sąjunga (n.d.).
6. Based on Kauno bendruomenių centrų asociacija (n.d.).
7. According to the Lithuanian Law on Personal Income Tax Act, permanent residents of Lithuania have a right to support the selected entity by 2% of their income tax, which could be transferred each year to the selected entity.
8. Based on the interview with the leader of the Balsiai community and on the annual reports of the Balsiai community organisation (Balsių bendruomenė 2014).
9. Based on Grigalūnienė (2011).
10. Interview from the newspaper article by Valevičienė (2010).
11. The bronze Christopher's statuette is awarded by the Mayor of Vilnius for notable contributions to the city in the areas of education, culture, law, medicine, science, sport, business, etc. It may be awarded to persons (citizens and foreigners), as well as institutions and organisations (Vilnijos vartai 2014a).
12. Based on Balsių bendruomenė (2014).

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