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# Toward a History of Urban Social Movements

## ABSTRACT

There is a striking gap in the historiography of social movements. Over the past few years, historians have started to lay bare the roots of various social movements that fought for the protection of the environment, the rights of women, or global peace. Against the backdrop of present-day mobilizations against high rents and neighbourhood displacement, historians have also begun to explore past movements that centred on or actively engaged with cities. Studying the conservationists, squatters, students, and ordinary residents who struggled for access to and control over urban space, these historians have shown that urban contention became a central element of social mobilization in post-war Europe and North America. But in so doing, they have contributed to the widely shared impression that urban social movements appeared out of nowhere in the rebellious 1960s. Thus, despite the growing interest in the urban movements of the second half of the twentieth century, there has been very little research so far into the historical evolution of these movements. This paper explores the reasons for this lack of attention. In so doing, it suggests why long-term historical analysis will prove fruitful for research on past and present urban mobilization alike.

Keywords: *urban studies; urban movements; social movement history; new social movements*

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## Introduction

Challenging the novelty attributed to the new social movements (NSM) of the post-war era, Craig Calhoun argued in a widely read 1993 article that central elements of NSM definitions—such as the prevalence of identity politics, lifestyle choices, and post-material values over economic issues—had already fuelled social movements at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Calhoun suggested that proponents of the

1 I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers who have provided very helpful comments.

NSM paradigm were able to construct a clear distinction between old and new social movements only by over-emphasizing the presumably all-encompassing impact of class on older forms of social mobilization. For periods before the Second World War, NSM proponents considered class *the* central category of social stratification and collective mobilization and saw all other social ills as subordinate to the dominant experience of class. To the old social movement, which usually appears in singular form and as equivalent to the labour movement in NSM discussions, salvation would come only once the exploitation and alienation of wage labour that was inherent to the capitalist mode of production was swept from the face of the earth. But although ending class rule was, as Calhoun stressed, a powerful motif for 'old' social movements, it was one among others. Drawing on traditions that often went back to the early nineteenth century, historical social movements also struggled for temperance and vegetarianism, spiritualism and religious awakening, nationalism and nativism.<sup>2</sup> Not unlike NSM, these social movements embraced and promoted non-material values and identity politics, but they did so long before the late twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

While still an emerging field, the history of new (or not-so-new) social movements has received considerable attention over the past few years, not least in this very journal. As a result, today there exist important empirical case studies as well as broad surveys that provide in-depth analysis and general overviews.<sup>4</sup> The comprehensive *The History of Social Movements*, for instance, covers a vast field that ranges from environmentalism to the peace movement, from feminism to the global justice movement, from populism to mobilizations of the radical right.<sup>5</sup> What is missing from this survey, but also from research on the history of social mobilization more generally, is a movement that has lately sparked great interest among scholars and the wider public alike. Rising inner-city rents, the spectre of gentrification, and the impact of

- 2 Craig Calhoun: "New Social Movements" of the Early Nineteenth Century, in: *Social Science History* 17:3 (1993), pp. 385–427. The author developed this argument in greater detail in *Craig Calhoun: The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements*, Chicago 2012.
- 3 See also Chris Pickvance: *From Urban Social Movements to Urban Movements: A Review and Introduction to a Symposium on Urban Movements*, in: *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27:1 (2003), pp. 102–109, p. 104; Michel Wieviorka: *After New Social Movements*, in: *Social Movement Studies* 4:1 (2005), pp. 1–19.
- 4 For good overviews, see María Dolores de la Calle Velasco/Manuel Redero San Román (eds.): *Movimientos Sociales en la España del Siglo XX*, Salamanca 2008; Olivier Fillieule/Guya Accornero (eds.): *Social Movement Studies in Europe: The State of the Art*, New York/Oxford 2016; Immanuel Ness (ed.): *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements*, 4 vols., Armonk (NY) 2004; Jon Piccini: *Transnational Protest, Australia and the 1960s: Global Radicals*, London 2016.
- 5 Stefan Berger/Holger Nehring (eds.): *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective: A Survey*, London 2017.

automobile traffic on public health have put the spotlight on urban social movements. It is thus no surprise that the latter feature prominently in urban sociology and the analysis of contemporary social movements. Discussing the evolution of urban social movements, entries in academic handbooks of the field show how urban movements emerged against the backdrop of dramatic inner-city transformations in the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> This has thus contributed to the widespread impression that urban social movements somehow appeared out of thin air in the rebellious 1960s. The fact that the social sciences have largely ignored the long-term trajectories of urban social movements is particularly striking given that one of the foundational works of the field was rooted firmly in the past. In *The City and the Grassroots*, Manuel Castells developed a theory of urban contention by drawing on various historical predecessors such as the Paris Commune and the Tenant Movements of Mexico in the early 1920s.<sup>7</sup> While the theoretical framework formulated by Castells has had a long-lasting impact on urban social movement studies, the historical trajectory he presented apparently has not.

Interestingly, to the extent that historians have studied urban social mobilization at all, they, too, have concentrated on the post-war decades that are most closely associated with the birth of NSM. They have begun to explore the local movements of conservationists, activists, and ordinary residents who struggled against urban planning and inner-city development in Europe and North America between the 1950s and 1980s.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, they have shown that post-war urban space was (re)appropriated through organized action, but also through everyday routines and spontaneous or unorganized intervention.<sup>9</sup> A particularly transgressive form of spatial intervention, the squatting

- 6 Massimiliano Andretta/Gianni Piazza/Anna Subirats: Urban Dynamics and Social Movements, in: Donatella Della Porta/Mario Diani (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, Oxford 2015, pp. 200–215; Anna Domaradzka: Urban Social Movements and the Right to the City: An Introduction to the Special Issue on Urban Mobilization, in: *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 29:4 (2018), pp. 607–620; Pierre Hamel: Urban Social Movements, in: Hein-Anton van der Heijden (ed.): *Handbook of Political Citizenship and Social Movements*, Cheltenham/Northampton (MA) 2014, pp. 464–492.
- 7 Manuel Castells: *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1983.
- 8 Sebastian Haumann: “Schade, daß Beton nicht brennt...”: Planung, Partizipation und Protest in Philadelphia und Köln 1940–1990, Stuttgart 2011; Andrew G. McClelland: A “Ghastly Interregnum”: The Struggle for Architectural Heritage Conservation in Belfast before 1972, in: *Urban History* 45:1 (2018), pp. 150–172; Tim Verlaan: Mobilization of the Masses: Dutch Planners, Local Politics, and the Threat of the Motor Age 1960–1980, in: *Journal of Urban History*, online first, 1 October 2019, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144219872767> (accessed on 15 October 2019).
- 9 Christoph Bernhardt: Städtische öffentliche Räume im 20. Jahrhundert im Spannungsfeld von Planung, Stadtgesellschaft und Politik, in: Christoph Bernhardt (ed.): *Städtische Öff-*

movement of the 1970s and 1980s, has taken a front seat in recent urban historical scholarship.<sup>10</sup> Squatting was promoted by urban youth and counter-culture movements that have likewise elicited considerable attention among historians over the past few years.<sup>11</sup> So have the communes of the 1960s to 1980s, which in some cases provided a sense of belonging and home in the big city, while in others they developed an explicitly anti-urban utopia.<sup>12</sup> Historians have also started to analyse the changing responses by governments and state authorities toward urban mobilization from the 1960s onwards.<sup>13</sup> Others have fruitfully explored the impact of and interaction be-

fentliche Räume/Urban Public Spaces: Planungen, Aneignungen, Aufstände 1945–2015/ Planning, Appropriation, Rebellions 1945–2015 (Beiträge zur Stadtgeschichte und Urbanisierungsforschung 19), Stuttgart 2016, pp. 9–30; Michael James Miller: *The Representation of Place: Urban Planning and Protest in France and Great Britain, 1950–1980*, Aldershot 2003; Elena Vacchelli: *Gender and the City: Intergenerational Spatial Practices and Women's Collective Action in Milan*, in: *Les Cahiers du CEDREF 21* (2014), URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cedref/1001> (accessed on 15 October 2019).

- 10 Freia Anders/Alexander Sedlmaier: "Squatting Means to Destroy the Capitalist Plan in the Urban Quarters": Spontis, Autonomists and the Struggle over Public Commodities (1970–1983), in: Martin Baumeister/Bruno Bonomo/Dieter Schott (eds.): *Cities Contested: Urban Politics, Heritage, and Social Movements in Italy and West Germany in the 1970s*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2017, pp. 277–300; Bart van der Steen/Ask Katzeff/Leendert van Hogenhuijze (eds.): *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present*, Oakland (CA) 2014.
- 11 Linus Owens: *Amsterdam Squatters on the Road: A Case Study in Territorial and Relational Urban Politics*, in: Knud Andresen/Bart van der Steen (eds.): *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s*, London 2016, pp. 53–66; Natasha Vall: *Doing Their Own Thing: Squatting Movements in Copenhagen and Stockholm during the 1970s*, in: *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements 48* (2012), pp. 89–110, also available online at <https://moving-the-social.ub.rub.de/index.php/MTS/article/view/7525> (accessed on 18 February, 2020).
- 12 Steven Conn: *Back to the Garden: Communes, the Environment, and Antiurban Pastoralism at the End of the Sixties*, in: *Journal of Urban History 36:6* (2010), pp. 831–848; Joachim C. Häberlen: *Feeling at Home in Lonely Cities: An Emotional History of the West German Urban Commune Movement during the Long 1970s*, in: *Urban History*, online first, 30 August 2019, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926819000841> (accessed on 15 October 2019); Matthias Möller: *Marginalised Neo-Rurals and Alternative Trailerists: Self-made Housing as a Counter Concept of the 1970s and 1980s in Germany and France*, in: *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements 58* (2017), pp. 29–50.
- 13 Pedro A. Regalado: *The Washington Heights Uprising of 1992: Dominican Belonging and Urban Policing in New York City*, in: *Journal of Urban History 45:5* (2019), pp. 961–986; Ian Rocksborough-Smith: *Analyzing Urban Uprisings in the Global West: Recent Interpretive Challenges*, in: *Journal of Urban History*, online first, 27 August 2019, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144219871545> (accessed on 15 October 2019); Klaus Weinbauer:

tween the ‘old’ labour movement and the urban movements of the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Common to all of these approaches is the underlying assumption that, as Astrid Mignon Kirchof, Carla MacDougall, and Peter Ulrich Weiß put it in their introduction to a special volume on protest in European cities, urban social movements have a relatively recent history: “Since the student protests of the 1960s,” the authors suggest, “cities have been key sites of competing claims and struggles over urban space and the meaning of the city.”<sup>15</sup> But were cities not key sites for these claims and struggles before then? And if not, why was it only in the second half of the twentieth century that activists apparently started to perceive an inherently urban quality that was worth fighting for, considering the fact that historians largely agree that the breakthrough of new urban mentalities, lifestyles, and identities occurred in the late nineteenth century? Focusing on historical cases from Europe and North America, the following pages will explore the reasons why urban social movements seem to have emerged out of nowhere in the 1960s—or, put differently, why there is no ‘pre-history’ of urban social movements. Throughout this article, I use the term urban social movements (rather than urban movements) in what Chris Pickvance has termed a ‘generic’ sense, thus referring to urban mobilizations irrespective of their effect or outcome.<sup>16</sup>

## Is There a Pre-History of Urban Social Movements?

The most straightforward explanation for why scholars have focused on the second half of the twentieth century is that urban social movements simply did not exist before. Let us call this the empirical explanation. According to this line of thought, there were of course social mobilizations ‘in’ cities before, but they were not ‘about’ cities. Cities were much more likely to see social movements emerge because of their density and size, or because of everyday interactions and socio-economic constraints that ranged from neighbourhood interaction and housing to public transport and work. But earlier struggles were not primarily concerned with experiences of urban space, urban (counter)culture, urban aesthetics, or participation in urban politics and

From Social Control to Urban Control? Urban Protests, Policing, and Localization in Germany and England (1960s to 1980s), in: *InterDisciplines: Journal of History and Sociology* 4:2 (2013), pp. 85–118.

- 14 Christian Wicke: Arbeiterbewegung und urbane Bewegung in den 1970er-Jahren: Das Ruhrgebiet und Sydney im Vergleich, in: *Arbeit—Bewegung—Geschichte. Zeitschrift für historische Studien* 17:3 (2018), pp. 57–73.
- 15 Astrid Mignon Kirchof/Carla MacDougall/Peter Ulrich Weiß (eds.): Introduction: Protest in the City: Democracy and Dissent in 1980s Europe, in: *Journal of Urban History* 41:4 (2015), pp. 603–606.
- 16 Chris Pickvance: From Urban Social Movements to Urban Movements, pp. 103f.

civil society. To paraphrase the late Michael B. Katz, before the 1960s, European and American cities were *sites* rather than *places* of social mobilization.<sup>17</sup> If we want to put this explanation to a historical test, we should start by looking at how urban social movements are defined in social movement studies. Castells, who is credited with having coined the term, defined urban social movements as transformative, city-based mobilizations that centre on collective consumption, cultural identity, and bottom-up participation.<sup>18</sup> Although the transformative aspect has become less prominent over the years, Castells' approach has had a long-lasting impact on social research. Thus, Hans Pruijt defines urban social movements as "social movements through which citizens attempt to achieve some control over their urban environment. The urban environment," he adds, "comprises the built environment, the social fabric of the city, and the local political process."<sup>19</sup> And although Massimiliano Andretta, Gianni Piazza, and Anna Subirats suggest that what qualifies as an urban social movement can only be determined on an empirical case-by-case basis, they insist that our

understanding of urban social movements should be limited to conflict-oriented networks of informal relationships between individuals and groups/organizations, based on collective identities, shared beliefs, and solidarity, which mobilize around urban issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest.<sup>20</sup>

In light of these definitions, there can be little doubt that urban social movements already existed in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. Think, for instance, about urban housing. By the early twentieth century, many European and North American cities had given birth to powerful tenant movements. While opposition to rising rents constituted a central element of tenant agitation, these movements did not merely strive to defend material interests. Rather, they also fought to achieve some control over the urban environment. Demands addressing what Pruijt calls 'the built environment' typically centred on the location of housing within the city and its outskirts, housing conditions and amenities, and the positive impact of air, light, and greenery. In his comprehensive study of lower-class Barcelona, Chris Ealham suggests that the provision of affordable housing was a prime motor of the vibrant tenant movement that emerged in the Catalan capital in the early twentieth century. Among the first demands of the *Sindicato de Inquilinos*, or Tenants' Union,

17 Michael B. Katz: From Urban as Site to Urban as Place: Reflections on (Almost) a Half-Century of U.S. Urban History, in: *Journal of Urban History* 41:4 (2015), pp. 560–566.

18 Manuel Castells: *The City and the Grassroots*, *passim*.

19 Hans Pruijt: Urban Movements, in: George Ritzer (ed.): *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Malden 2007, pp. 5115–5119.

20 Massimiliano Andretta/Gianni Piazza/Anna Subirats (eds.): *Urban Dynamics and Social Movements*, pp. 202f.

that was established in 1918, was the improvement of Barcelona's housing stock.<sup>21</sup> This shows that organized tenants insisted on the construction of affordable housing, but they also expressed preferences on *where* to build. Ruth McManus has demonstrated that tenants in early-twentieth-century Dublin fought bitterly over the location of new lower-class housing. While the Dublin Tenants' Association demanded construction of single-family homes on the undeveloped outskirts rather than flats in the centre of the city, the working-class tenants who populated Dublin's dilapidated inner-city areas loudly protested suburbanization and insisted on central housing.<sup>22</sup> This indicates that in the eyes of organized tenants there existed a clear connection between the built environment and access to urban space. Frustrated by the severe lack of inner-city housing and rocketing consumer prices, many tenants began building makeshift cottages in the vicinity of Vienna in the aftermath of the First World War.<sup>23</sup> Long neglected in social and urban historical research, this movement not only mobilized tens of thousands of supporters, but also significantly influenced the discourse about urban and suburban space.<sup>24</sup> Even minor aspects of the built environment often served as markers of internal differentiation. Karl Christian Führer has pointed out that to the more conservative branches of the tenant movement that emerged in turn-of-the-century Germany, visual representations of respectability—such as adequate lighting in building entrances and hallways—helped middle-class tenants distance themselves (and their associations) from the more radical elements of the movement.<sup>25</sup> Tenant movements in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century cities struggled to gain control over not only 'the built environment' but also 'the social fabric of the city'. They did so by campaigning against urban segregation, forced mobility, and neighbourhood displacement. Already in the late 1860s, working-class New Yorkers protested urban development plans that promised cheap housing on the urban outskirts. Calling for a massive expansion of affordable inner-city housing, they argued

- 21 Chris Ealham: *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona 1898–1937* (Routledge/Cañada Blanch Studies on Contemporary Spain 7), s.l., 2014, p. 38.
- 22 Ruth McManus: *Blue Collars, "Red Forts", and Green Fields: Working-Class Housing in Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 64 (2003), pp. 38–54.
- 23 Alfred Georg Frei: *Die Arbeiterbewegung und die "Graswurzeln" am Beispiel der Wiener Wohnungspolitik 1919–1934* (Vergleichende Gesellschaftsgeschichte und politische Ideengeschichte 7), Vienna 1991; Klaus Novy/Wolfgang Förster: *Einfach bauen: Genossenschaftliche Selbsthilfe nach der Jahrhundertwende, zur Rekonstruktion der Wiener Siedlerbewegung*, Vienna 1991.
- 24 Marcel Bois: *Kunst und Architektur für eine neue Gesellschaft: Russische Avantgarde, Arbeitsrat für Kunst und Wiener Siedlerbewegung in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, in: *Arbeit—Bewegung—Geschichte. Zeitschrift für historische Studien* 3 (2017), pp. 12–34.
- 25 Karl Christian Führer: *Deutsche Mieterbewegung: Von der Kaiserzeit bis zum Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts, 100 Jahre Deutscher Mieterbund*, Cologne 2000.

that industrial workers belonged in the big city.<sup>26</sup> Half a century later, the American metropolis was home to a plethora of tenant associations, leagues, and councils that struggled against the forced mobility of lower-class residents.<sup>27</sup> As the number of evictions increased during the Great Depression, so did organized and spontaneous forms of resistance that aimed to prevent or undo them.<sup>28</sup>

New York's "frenetic housing history," as Daniel Wishnoff puts it, shows that tenants' movements also struggled for control over what Pruijt calls 'the local political process.'<sup>29</sup> Robert M. Fogelson has demonstrated that persistent organizing during the 1920s put considerable pressure on local authorities. Tenant movements contributed to the introduction of rent control and the legislative protection of tenants,<sup>30</sup> and they relied on a wide repertoire of action. Rent strikes became a crucial—though heavily contested—tool of the movement between the 1910s and 1930s. The Glasgow rent strikes of 1915, a signature mobilization of Red Clydeside, are probably among the best-studied historical cases.<sup>31</sup> They are also, we might add, considered one of the most successful rent strikes, certainly in comparison to those that erupted in cities like Berlin and Barcelona in the following decades.<sup>32</sup> Given that rent strikes represent such an important but controversial element of tenant mobilization, it is surprising that

- 26 Philipp Reick: *Desire or Displacement? Working-Class Notions of Urban Belonging in Late-Nineteenth-Century Germany*, in: *Journal of Urban History* 45:6 (2019), pp. 1193–1211.
- 27 Joseph A. Spencer: *New York City Tenant Organizations and the Post-World War I Housing Crisis*, in: Ronald Lawson/Mark D. Naison (eds.): *The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904–1984*, New Brunswick (NJ) 1986, pp. 51–93.
- 28 Philipp Reick: *A Poor People's Movement? Erwerbslosenproteste in Berlin und New York in den frühen 1930er Jahren*, in: *Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 1 (2015), pp. 20–36.
- 29 Daniel Wishnoff: *Two Tales of One City: Rent Strikes and Tenant Activism in Twentieth-Century New York*, in: *Journal of Urban History* 46:1 (2020), pp. 193–198.
- 30 Robert M. Fogelson: *The Great Rent Wars: New York, 1917–1929*, New Haven 2013.
- 31 Manuel Castells: *The City and the Grassroots*, pp. 27–37; Matthew J. McQueen: *The Glasgow Rent Strikes, 1915: Their Contribution and that of John Wheatly and Patrick Dolan to the Longer Struggle for Decent Working-Class Housing*, M.A. Thesis, McMaster University (Ontario) 2017, URL: [https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/23109/2/mcqueen\\_matthew\\_j\\_2017july\\_MA.pdf](https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/23109/2/mcqueen_matthew_j_2017july_MA.pdf) (accessed on 15 October 2019); Joseph Melling: *Rent Strikes: Peoples' Struggle for Housing in West Scotland 1890–1916*, Edinburgh 1983.
- 32 Simon Lengemann: "Erst das Essen, dann die Miete!" *Protest und Selbsthilfe in Berliner Arbeitervierteln während der Großen Depression 1931 bis 1933*, in: *Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 14:3 (2015), pp. 46–62; Nick Rider: *The Practice of Direct Action: The Barcelona Rent Strike of 1931*, in: David Goodway (ed.): *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice* (History Workshop Series), London/New York 1989, pp. 79–108.



there are still rather few historical single case studies,<sup>33</sup> let alone comparative studies of either a synchronic or a diachronic character.<sup>34</sup> But rent strikes were just one tool in a much broader repertoire. As in other European or North American cities at the time, tenant movements in interwar Scandinavian cities like Gothenburg and Stockholm also relied on confrontational strategies like strikes, occupations, and blockades of evictions. But, as Hannes Rolf has shown, they also offered popular education and organized local theatre productions that helped not only popularize the movements' frames, but also strengthen collective identities and movement solidarity.<sup>35</sup> In short, this brief discussion of the historical evolution of the tenant movement indicates that the empirical explanation is not fully convincing.

If we cannot explain the lack of historical research on urban social movements prior to the 1960s by empirical recourse alone, we should look for answers in the epistemological underpinnings that inform research. Urban struggles often appear in historical scholarship as driven by political parties or the authorities themselves, rather than by collective actors from the sphere of civil society. This might have contributed to the fact that historians rarely conceive of these struggles as social movements. Take the phenomenon of municipal socialism. Municipal socialism is usually associated with socialist party politics and urban reforms implemented by municipal agencies. At the height of the Progressive Era in the U.S., and against the backdrop of the growing strength of socialist parties in Europe, social democrats on both sides of the Atlantic pushed to bring urban services under public control as a crucial step on the reformist path toward a socialist future. Municipal socialism thus appears to be a political rather than a social movement. Yet when we take a look at how municipal socialism took shape in the early decades of the twentieth century, we see that it resulted from a close interplay between party officials, municipal authorities, and local movements that were comprised of independent activists, organized labour, academic experts, and urban professionals.<sup>36</sup>

- 33 John Gilderbloom: *Rent Strikes*, in: Andrew T. Carswell (ed.): *The Encyclopedia of Housing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Los Angeles s.l. 2012, pp. 600f.
- 34 For an interesting exception to this trend, see Lucas Poy: *A Tale of Two Cities: The Tenants' Strikes of 1907–1908 in Buenos Aires and New York* (paper presented at the Conference: *Tenants Organizing—Precarization and Resistance*), Stockholm 2019, URL: <https://tenantsorganizing.blogspot.com/2019/09/updated-program.html> (accessed on 15 October 2019).
- 35 Hannes Rolf: *Hyresmarknadens bortglömda konfliktrepertoarer*, in: Johan A. Lundin/Emma Hilborn (eds.): *Mot ljuset: En antologi om arbete, arbetare och arbetarrörelse*, Landskrona 2019, pp. 86–103.
- 36 Daniel J. Johnson: "No Make-Believe Class Struggle": *The Socialist Municipal Campaign in Los Angeles, 1911*, in: *Labor History* 41:1 (2000), pp. 25–45; Richard William Judd: *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism*, Albany (NY) 1989.

The history of municipal socialism in the American Midwest illustrates this very clearly. Members of the Socialist Party of America in early-twentieth-century Milwaukee proved particularly successful in implementing what orthodox critics dismissed as 'sewer socialism'. The party was able to not only get a socialist candidate re-elected to the mayor's office from 1910 until the late 1950s (with short breaks in-between), but also push through significant urban reforms such as improvements in urban hygiene and recreation and the introduction of municipally owned utilities.<sup>37</sup> While these successes have been credited to an unusually pragmatic leadership, the party did not achieve them singlehandedly. As Elizabeth Jozwiak has shown, the urban social centres that were opened in Milwaukee, for instance, were the product of close cooperation between elected officials, municipal agencies, and a broad social movement struggling for recreational spaces and educational services in the city.<sup>38</sup> This kind of cooperation was not without conflict, but it contributed to the fact that, at least initially, Milwaukee's social centres were not perceived as either recruitment offices for the Socialist Party or philanthropic institutions promoting ideals of charity and moral betterment widely associated with the settlement movement. Similarly, William J. Reese has shown that educated professionals and progressive thinkers were not solely responsible for transforming the schooling system of early-twentieth-century America. Rather, it was a broad coalition of social movements that enforced educational reform in the cities Reese studied.<sup>39</sup> Against this backdrop, Gail Radford has come to the conclusion that the struggle for greater democratic control of urban politics was waged by actors ranging from populists to trade unionists to progressives and socialists. "Thus," Radford suggests, "the agenda of public ownership was central to what might be called the broad Left of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century America."<sup>40</sup> The example of municipal socialism indicates that historical urban social movements were heavily intertwined with political parties, municipal agencies, local government, and expert groups. This does not make them any less of a social movement, however. In fact, Margit Mayer stresses that cooperation with other actors has been a persistent feature of more recent urban social movements. While cooperation might help advance claims and contribute to the success of a movement, it also bears the risk of co-opta-

37 Douglas E. Booth: *Municipal Socialism and City Government Reform: The Milwaukee Experience, 1910–1940*, in: *Journal of Urban History* 12:1 (1985), pp. 51–74.

38 Elizabeth A. Jozwiak: *Politics in Play: Socialism, Free Speech, and Social Centers in Milwaukee*, in: *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 86:3 (2003), pp. 10–21.

39 William J. Reese: *Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements during the Progressive Era* (*Critical Social Thought*), Boston/London 1986.

40 Gail Radford: *From Municipal Socialism to Public Authorities: Institutional Factors in the Shaping of American Public Enterprise*, in: *The Journal of American History* 90:3 (2003), pp. 863–890, p. 866.

tion and the depletion of resources.<sup>41</sup> Regardless of its success or failure, the close interaction between historical urban movements and political institutions has likely contributed to the fact that research has so far neglected the historical roots of urban social movements.

What might additionally have contributed to this neglect is that it was only around the 1960s that urban social movements seem to have started highlighting the urban quality of their struggles. Drawing on prominent idea givers, activists in 1968 (and thereafter) coined popular slogans such as ‘Under the pavement, the beach’ and ‘Let’s take the city’ that epitomize that the city had become an important reference point and central resource for collective action and identity formation.<sup>42</sup> Put differently, the city was no longer primarily an analytical tool for social research. Yet, if we look more closely at urban mobilization in the early twentieth century, we see that the city already featured prominently in movement frames and slogans. Reporting from Vienna in the mid-1920s, the socialist writer Bruno Schönlink stressed in the social-democratic paper *Vorwärts* that what the local movement had achieved over the past few years could not be measured in terms of new housing or public pools alone. Rather, Red Vienna epitomized a city that had ceased to belong to property owners, local politicians, and urban dignitaries—nay, “the city belongs to the working people”.<sup>43</sup> The idea that the city—or, more often, a particular borough, neighbourhood, or even a set of streets and backyards—belonged to a particular group was in fact characteristic of many social movements at the time. References to possession, belonging, and control of urban space represented not only dominance over rival political groups, but also entitlement *vis-à-vis* municipal authorities and middle-class critics who opposed the movements’ claims or their very presence in the city. This indicates that social movements started to highlight the urban character of their struggles long before 1968. In any case, self-reference is an awkward criterion for research. After all, social movements and social movement studies do not have a principal-agent relationship. Whether social movements speak of themselves as social movements or highlight a particular aspect in their struggle (such as the urban condition) cannot determine scholarship. The fact that many urban movements of the past did not explicitly refer to ‘the city’ does not automatically disqualify them as urban social movements. It is the task of the historian to analyse whether and why social mobilizations had an urban context or frame.

41 Margit Mayer: *Städtische Soziale Bewegungen*, in: Roland Roth/Dieter Rucht (eds.): *Die Sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945: Ein Handbuch*, Frankfurt a. M./New York 2008, pp. 293–318.

42 Margit Mayer: *The ‘Right to the City’ in the Context of Shifting Mottos of Urban Social Movements*, in: *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 13:2/3 (2009), pp. 362–374, p. 363.

43 Aus Berlin, in: *Vorwärts*, 18 May 1924, p. 6.

As mentioned above, many instances of urban mobilization in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries centred on political rivalry and violent struggles for neighbourhood control. Yet, the same movements fought for their right to make use of, redefine, or quite simply enjoy the city. Think about the proletarian and sub-proletarian youth groups that emerged in interwar Germany. These adolescent cliques—or *Wilde Cliquen*, as they were referred to—are commonly studied as either semi-criminal organizations of depraved youth or urban strike forces that engaged in street fights with Nazi squads. Although violent clashes with political opponents were indeed part of the cliques' experience and identity, studies of the few testimonies these groups left behind indicate that their everyday routines evolved around the bars, amusement parks, dance halls, and fairgrounds of cities like Berlin, Cologne, and Hamburg.<sup>44</sup> Faced with grim warnings about moral decay and political upheaval put forward by a united front of pedagogues, clergymen, and the security apparatus, these young urbanites defiantly insisted on their right to indulge in the (sub)cultural pleasures that cities provided. In so doing, they struggled for equal access and representation in the city—both of which middle-class critics struggled to prevent. While considering themselves part of the left, clique members resented and resisted efforts by socialist and communist parties to organize their ranks. This does not mean, however, that they were apolitical. Clique members regularly attended marches and demonstrations. They performed acts of civil disobedience that emphasized a specific grievance they harboured or an injustice they suffered. And they expressed their quintessentially urban identity—often in contrast to the hiking youth movement, which tended to idealise nature—through extravagant dress, music, and demeanour.<sup>45</sup> While their social base differed considerably, these urban youth movements were not so different from later urban mobilizations with regard to the central position that cities played in their mobilization. Not unlike the Situationists of Paris or the Provo movement of Amsterdam, the Wild Cliques considered the city their playground, their meeting place, and their stage for political communication.

Movement autonomy also characterized adult groups in cities in interwar Germany. Local organizers for the Communist Party regularly expressed frustration about the loosely organized neighbourhood groups that resisted efforts to bring them under

44 Jonas Kleindienst: *Die Wilden Cliquen Berlins: "Wild und Frei" trotz Krieg und Krise—Geschichte einer Jugendkultur*, Frankfurt a.M. 2011; Hellmut Lessing/Manfred Liebel: *Wilde Cliquen: Szenen einer anderen Arbeiterjugendbewegung*, Bensheim 1981; Detlev Peukert: *Die "Wilden Cliquen" der Zwanziger Jahre*, in: Wilfried Breyvogel/Joachim Hirsch (eds.): *Autonomie und Widerstand: Zur Theorie und Geschichte des Jugendprotestes*, Essen 1983, pp. 66–77.

45 Werner Tammen: *Kreuzberg 1933: Ein Bezirk erinnert sich [Ausstellung vom 29. Mai bis 29. September 1983 im Kunstamt Kreuzberg]* (Verein zur Erforschung und Darstellung der Geschichte Kreuzbergs), Berlin 1983, pp. 78–82.

communist control. These groups stoutly defended a community culture that was based on play, drink, and folksiness, and which constituted an urban counter-culture to not only the refined middle-class urban lifeworld, but also the militaristic rigour of the communists.<sup>46</sup> From the late 1920s onwards, these groups were often drawn into struggles against unemployment. The nascent unemployed movements that emerged in the 1920s and early 1930s thus had an explicitly urban quality. From Germany to Great Britain, from France to the U.S., activists regularly organized marches and demonstrations that directly addressed municipal bodies responsible for welfare services (or the lack of them).<sup>47</sup> These groups often forced their way into city hall meetings, where they interrupted hearings and debates. Others occupied local welfare offices, where they occasionally succeeded in enforcing demands.<sup>48</sup> Working hand-in-hand with tenant groups, unemployed activists also struggled to prevent or undo evictions and thus defend residents' "right to stay put."<sup>49</sup> In short, unemployed movements protested the exclusion and marginalization of vulnerable residents in cities under economic crisis. These movements are thus not so different from the urban mobilization that European and North American cities witnessed in the 1980s.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that while the history of urban social movements predates the 1960s by far, the historiography of these movements does not. Discussing examples from American and European cities, the article has argued that this lack of attention is a result of historians' failure to appreciate both the social-movement

- 46 Eve Rosenhaft: *Organising the 'Lumpenproletariat': Cliques and Communists in Berlin during the Weimar Republic*, in: Richard J. Evans (ed.): *The German Working Class, 1888–1933: The Politics of Everyday Life*, London 1982, pp. 174–219; Pamela E. Swett: *Neighbors and Enemies: The Culture of Radicalism in Berlin, 1929–1933*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 188–206.
- 47 Alan Campbell/John McIlroy (eds.): *The National Unemployed Workers' Movement and the Communist Party of Great Britain Revisited*, in: *Labour History Review* 73:1 (2008), pp. 61–88; Frances Fox Piven/Richard A. Cloward *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*, New York 1979, pp. 41–95; Richard Croucher: *We Refuse to Starve in Silence: A History of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, 1920–46*, London 1987; Philip. H. Slaby: *Violating the "Rules of Hospitality": The Protests of Jobless Immigrants in Depression-Era France*, in: Matthias Reiss/Matt Perry (eds.): *Unemployment and Protest: New Perspectives on Two Centuries of Contention*, Oxford 2011, pp. 175–198.
- 48 Cheryl L. Greenberg: "Or Does It Explode?" *Black Harlem in the Great Depression*, New York et al. 1991; Philipp Reick: *A Poor People's Movement*.
- 49 Kathe Newman/Elvin K. Wyly: *The Right to Stay Put, Revisited: Gentrification and Resistance to Displacement in New York City*, in: *Urban Studies* 43:1 (2006), pp. 23–57.

character of earlier urban struggles and the urban quality of past social movements. The following concluding remarks suggest why a ‘pre-history’ of urban social movements will prove fruitful for future research. A better understanding of the legacy of urban social movements is important in its own right, because it sheds light on a neglected aspect of the history of social mobilization. But the analysis of urban social movements prior to the second half of the twentieth century also raises new questions for urban and social history and, in so doing, contributes to larger debates in the field. It will, for instance, advance discussions about the history of Western modernity. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Western cities became ever more strongly associated with not only industrial growth, material wealth, and advancement in technology and science, but also new life worlds, aesthetics, and mental conditions. Historians thus consider this transformation as the breakthrough of ‘urban modernity’.<sup>50</sup> As a result, we know a lot about the urban vision of architects, planners, political decision-makers, investors, academics, and middle-class observers—or, put differently, about the growth of urban bourgeois culture in the Western world. However, our knowledge of the urban visions of marginalized social groups is much more limited and tends to rely on overgeneralizations. For instance, working-class notions of the urban between, say, 1890 and 1930 are associated with either misery and want or ideas about neighbourliness and collective power through shared living and housing. While this dichotomy reflects the rhetoric of socialist and/or communist leaderships, it does not necessarily convey the breadth of ideas and feelings about the urban condition that working-class residents expressed at the time. Such urban historical research ‘from below’ will be facilitated greatly by recent efforts to digitize the workers’ press.<sup>51</sup> Reports about neighbourhood meetings, portrayals of ephemeral tenant groups, coverage of local demonstrations, letters to the editors—sources that have long been hidden in the back pages of the workers’ press—are now accessible in digital form for the first time, including full-text search features that allow time-effective findings. Shane Ewen has recently postulated that urban historians need to pay closer attention to how marginalized and lower-class urban communities “defined and articulated their own individual identities [and rooted these in space], rather than continuing to focus on elite representations.”<sup>52</sup> Studying the history of urban mobilization has the potential to reveal such deviant urban identities and thus contribute to discussions about the

50 Miriam R. Levin/Sophie Forgan/Martina Hessler et al.: *Urban Modernity: Cultural Innovation in the Second Industrial Revolution*, Cambridge/London 2010; Richard Dennis: *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840–1930* (Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography 40), Cambridge/New York 2008.

51 See, for instance, the ongoing digitization project “The Historical Press of German Social Democracy online” by the library of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, URL: <http://fes.image-ware.de/fes/web/> (accessed on 15 October 2019).

52 Shane Ewen: *What is Urban History?* Cambridge/Malden 2016, p. 54.

ambivalence and friction that accompanied the birth of urban modernity from the start.<sup>53</sup> The ‘pre-history’ of urban social movements, in short, will reveal that ‘multiple’ urban modernities existed not only between Western and non-Western societies, but also within Western society itself.<sup>54</sup>

Closely related to debates about urban modernity, historical research into urban social movements will also contribute to the study of collective violence. In recent years, historians have argued that urban violence in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century cities often served as a ritualized means of political communication.<sup>55</sup> Rather than challenging the observation that collective violence was a central element of urban conflict, the historical study of urban social movements will shift attention to the repertoires of contention that encouraged civil disobedience while rejecting violence against people. This change of perspective will help us analyse how notions of respectability, rationality, and thus modernity influenced social-movement rhetoric and strategy at the time. Finally, research on the collective identities and ideologies of urban social movements in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries will also contribute to contemporary debates about the 1960s and 1970s as a watershed moment in Western history. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, historians have recently turned to the study of new social movements. In so doing, they have suggested that urban contention became a central element of social mobilization during the turbulent 1970s.<sup>56</sup> Studying earlier instances of urban struggle will provide a yardstick against which to measure the alleged novelty and turn toward post-material values and identities that are usually ascribed to this new generation of social movements. Historians of the post-war era, for instance, have demonstrated that ur-

53 Philipp Reick: *Desire or Displacement*.

54 Joseph Ben Prestel: *Paris Everywhere? The Challenge of Eurocentrism in Global Urban History*, in: *Global Urban History (Blog)*, 5 April 2016, URL: <https://globalurbanhistory.com/2016/04/05/paris-everywhere-the-challenge-of-eurocentrism-in-global-urban-history/> (accessed on 15 October 2019); Philipp Reick: *Gentrification 1.0: Urban Transformations in Late-19<sup>th</sup>-Century Berlin*, in: *Urban Studies* 55:11 (2018), pp. 2542–2558; Jennifer Robinson: *Comparative Urbanism: New Geographies and Cultures of Theorizing the Urban*, in: *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40:1 (2016), pp. 187–199.

55 Sharon Bäcker-Wilke/Florian Graff/Friedrich Lenger: *Gewaltgemeinschaften im städtischen Raum: Barcelona, Berlin und Wien in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, in: Winfried Speitkamp (ed.): *Gewaltgemeinschaften: Von der Spätantike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2013, pp. 317–342; Klaus Weinbauer: *World War I and Urban Societies: Social Movements, Fears, and Spatial Order in Hamburg and Chicago (c. 1916–1923)*, in: Stefan Rinke/Michael Wildt (eds.): *Revolutions and Counter-Revolutions: 1917 and its Aftermath from a Global Perspective*, Frankfurt/New York 2017, pp. 287–306.

56 Lutz Raphael: *The 1970s—a Period of Structural Rupture in Germany and Italy?*, in: Martin Baumeister/Bruno Bonomo/Dieter Schott (eds.): *Cities Contested: Urban Politics, Heritage, and Social Movements in Italy and West Germany in the 1970s*, Frankfurt/New York 2017, pp. 31–52.

ban (and suburban) space provided individuals with a measure of personal choice to exercise greater autonomy, privacy, and freedom (which were in fact criticized by the nascent collectivism of 1968).<sup>57</sup> Exploring the history of urban mobilization before 1945 also means improving our understanding of the hopes and fears that ordinary residents associated with urban living throughout the twentieth century. Even studies challenging the urban quality of earlier social movements will contribute to this debate. After all, they will have to address why urban residents in the early twentieth century apparently cared less about ‘their’ city as a social, political, and emotional space and what exactly caused this to change in the post-war decades. This will also facilitate further comparative discussions about what earlier mobilizations lacked that keeps us from conceiving of them as urban social movements. Historical studies of urban mobilizations, grievances, and demands might also push scholars in other disciplines to rethink what makes a social movement urban in the first place. Thus, the kind of research proposed here will help to not only historicize the phenomenon of urban social movements, but also lay the foundations for future diachronic comparisons and promising interdisciplinary research on the fiercely contested concept of value change (or *Wertewandel*) and social opposition in the aftermath of 1968. These are, I believe, just a few reasons why the study of past urban movements has great potential for both historical and social research.

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57 Moritz Föllmer: Cities of Choice: Elective Affinities and the Transformation of Western European Urbanity from the mid-1950s to the early 1980s, in: *Contemporary European History* 24:4 (2015), pp. 577–596.