

# Place habitus in the city and suburbs: The politics of middle-class education and the perspective of elite decisionmakers

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores differences in the politics of urban and suburban communities. It specifically concentrates on decisionmakers' perspectives regarding their constituents' agency in formalizing local education policy. Drawing upon the writings of Pierre Bourdieu and related work on (place) habitus and local politics of education, the study hypothesizes that the more divided the class structure of a place, the greater disparity between the demands of the elite and a given municipal education policy. By means of an Israeli regional case study that includes a medium-size city and its suburbs, the research demonstrates how a local political milieu is formed, and how its formation shapes local educational policy. The findings raise significant doubt regarding efforts to diversify cities, as a policy goal that strives for fairness in a metropolitan area.

## 1. Introduction

There is increasing attention on the cultural and social processes that forge the location of different social classes in space, and especially of the middle-class, as well as in exploring how these processes create inequalities in contemporary urban areas. These processes are characterized by what [Savage \(2010\)](#) describes as the 'spatialization of class.' This boundary-making process explains how urban segregation contrasts sharply to spatial developments occurring in better-off communities that inhabit distinctive spatial enclaves, such as gentrified urban neighborhoods, gated communities, and suburbs ([Duncan & Duncan, 2001](#); [Elwood, Lawson, & Nowak, 2015](#); [Watt, 2009](#)). The current study focuses on the distinct processes of spatialization in suburban and urban communities.

While there are several factors behind suburbanization, education and schooling achievements are seen as primarily responsible for accelerating this process ([Baum, 2004](#); [Beadie et al., 2017](#)). Research on cities has long emphasized the role of a place's politics in enlarging spatial (educational) gaps ([Davies & Msengana-Ndlela, 2015](#); [Fischel, 2009](#); [Hastings, Bailey, Bramley, Croudace, & Watkins, 2014](#)), as well as the role that a person's social class of origin has on educational attainments (e.g. [Dixon-Román, 2012](#); [Putnam, 2015](#)). This paper further contributes to these bodies of literature in two ways. It concentrates on incumbents as a key feature in any local polity. These incumbents' perceptions regarding their electorate's social class, and the significance

of that class stratification for municipal politics has until now been largely neglected in the literature ([Stren & Friendly, 2019](#)). Secondly, this article contributes to the literature that integrates place in the study of class formation ([Hanquinet, Savage, & Callier, 2012](#); [Shani, 2019](#)) by emphasizing the fundamental role of a place's polity in shaping not just social reality, but political outcomes that relate, for example, to school attainments. The study advances these two contributions by fostering a perspective of a place's polity that reflects a communal habitus. It analyzes the perspective of municipal incumbents vis-à-vis interactions with local constituency (i.e. electorate, subjects of different classes) in the city and in the suburb. The current study deliberately concentrates on democratic and liberal settings, where relationships between public officials and local constituencies have heightened importance.

For Bourdieu, the habitus manifests a person's generative scheme and dispositions, the result of a process that reflects the interaction between their endeavors to seize social positions within specific social spaces ([Bourdieu, 2000](#)). The social space is located in actual places, and thus expresses subtle reflection of the place's social structure ([Israel & Frenkel, 2018, 2020](#)). This study explores the role of place habitus in shaping class politics, and that in turn affects that place's (educational) policies.

Suburbs under the current research participate in what [Waters and Brooks \(2015\)](#) termed as functional isolation, aimed to enhance middle-class domination. The study hypothesizes that a place habitus reflects a generative process, a result of amalgamating political and civic forces

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(and conditions) regarding demands of constituents, and the respective response of political and non-political incumbents. While acknowledging the growing diversification of suburbia when it comes to features of class, ethnicity, density, and politics (Keil, 2018; Ohashi & Phelps, 2020), the study highlights a comparison between affluent suburbs on the one hand, and cities which contain a diversified class structure on the other. The study concentrates on an Israeli regional test case that includes a medium-size city and eight of its affluent suburbs. The study's findings indicate how a place habitus is formed in light of local politics which shape educational policies of place, thus potentially enlarging inequality in a given regional setting.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Suburbanization, educational attainments, and Bourdieu's social space

Suburbanization is a diverse, multi-scalar phenomenon which has occurred globally. In the North American and Israeli contexts, suburbanization most often involves a low-density pattern of development which can be both residential and non-residential (Frenkel & Ashkenazi, 2008), while in western European contexts, suburbs were built with much higher densities (Keil, 2017). Similarly, in countries which rapid urbanization has occurred, as in China or Turkey, suburbanization is often sponsored and driven by state-level programs, and thus involves denser physical forms. In other parts of the world, such as in Africa, India and Eastern-Europe, the traditional low-density pattern of suburban development continues to prevail (Kasemets, Rammo, & Palang, 2019; Keil, 2018; Kovács et al., 2019).

From a social perspective, suburbs in North America have become the home of growing and diverse socioeconomic, racial and ethnic populations (Beck, 2019; Garrison & Huxman, 2020; Holloway, 2016; Jargowsky, Rog, & Henderson, 2014) — a refuge for those who cannot afford to live decently in the city (Kotkin, 2018). In other regions of the world, suburbs are recognized as the choice for rising numbers of the middle-class (Jun, Kim, Kwon, & Jeon, 2013; Modarres, 2010), and 'vulgar' places of consumerism and excess (Knox, 2005, 2008). The current study concentrates on this last form of the phenomenon, where suburbs are often depicted as hotbed of distinction and conservatism (Williamson, 2010).

Recent theories in sociology and geography have emphasized the role that suburbanization has played in community coherence (Savage, 2010; Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2005). There is growing evidence that big and ethnically diverse cities negatively affect inhabitants' social solidarity, and therefore social capital (Putnam, 2007). Conversely, where the creation of homogenous suburbs still prevails, it seems to produce the opposite effect; their residents' experience enhances social interaction and strengthens trust relationships (Brueckner & Largey, 2008).

One possible source for strong suburban social capital lies in schooling commitments that stabilize social networks, allowing for the formation of out of school-based relationships that grow in tandem with those commitments (Fischel, 2009). Historically, education has been a main factor in spurring (the American) middle-class flight from decaying cities to suburbs (Baum, 2004). In western Europe, education as a push factor for city to suburb migration has been increasingly documented as well (Bacqué et al., 2015). In France, middle-class parents moved out to urban peripheries with high-performing schools (van Zanten & Obin, 2010). In North-America, the high educational performance of suburban schools can be partly explained by social networks that enable suburban residents to effectively monitor local officials (Fischel, 2009).

The flight from the urban core to the suburban tier did not occur by chance, as it was strongly affected by peoples' dissatisfaction with urban life (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978, 2008). That is, many dissatisfied middle-class subjects fled to suburban havens in pursuit of better conditions, conditions they may have been interested in improving (Hirschman,

1970). Under the current study, the concept of subjects' dissatisfaction is central in explaining how people exercise their political voice, a voice that manifests a political action that forges a place's polity.

Within the context of a liberal-democratic regime and its class-based divisions, there is a small, yet growing body of evidence that demonstrates how the provision of services at the local level is influenced by the dominating social class, namely the middle-class (Avigur-Eshel & Berkovich, 2018; Hastings et al., 2014). This middle-class aims, and succeeds in using political power for its benefit, compared to lower classes, whose voice is much less heard in local government institutions (Rousseau, 2009). In this literature, there is further room for empirical evidence indicating how these class differences lead to the advantage of the privileged. A promising direction is that which uses Pierre Bourdieu's concepts to theorize the dispositions and different actions of the middle-classes in variegated fields (e.g. Hastings & Matthews, 2015).

Bourdieu (1986a, 1986b) depicts class structure as being involved in the production, accumulation, and transmission of three forms of mutually commutable and inter-dependent capital; economic, social, and cultural (Bourdieu, 1986a). Capital determines socio-spatial or class stratification (Aharon-Gutman, Schaap, & Lederman, 2018). This space is composed of structural fields (e.g., the economic, education, parental and the housing fields), that function as sites of strategy and conflict, structured in terms of power relationships, in which individuals and groups act in order to gain dominance and avoid subordination (Bourdieu, 1985). *Symbolic capital*, the fourth form of capital, shapes how capital forms create symbolic relations of power that reinforce the structure of the social space (Bourdieu, 1989). The habitus, the internalization of the capital compound (Sayer, 2011), expresses a set of dispositions that a person developed to act in the world. The habitus equates to a 'feeling for the game,' or a practical sense of the expected and desired behavior in accordance to his or her position in the social space (Hillier, 2005).

Although Bourdieu's theory was criticized (Rancière, 2004), among other things, for dis-emphasizing the plurality of non-field entities that shape people's habitus, and thus their dispositions (Lahire, 2003), it has received a growing attention in studying location-choices (Savage et al., 2005). The housing field, a cornerstone in people location-choices, manifests how "experiences and expectations are differentiated ... according to ... the position occupied in social space" (Bourdieu, 2005: 25). Accordingly, the selection of residential locations is the outcome that expresses a fit between a person's dispositions, determined by actor's social class, and the physical and symbolic properties of the settlements' environment (Israel & Frenkel, 2018, 2020; Benson & Jackson, 2013). Suburbs, and other distinctive enclaves in space (e.g. gentrified urban neighborhoods), develop as people with a more or less fixed habitus reside in places where they feel comfortable with their neighbors (Watt, 2009). Those places provide them a positive identity, a 'membership group' of people with similar lifestyles (Hauge & Kolstad, 2007), that often relate to local schools' performance (van Zanten, 2013; Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007).<sup>1</sup>

As explained below, places such as urban enclaves or other distinctive settlements preserve advantages secured through the sorting mechanisms, such as those that relate to local politics of education (Fischel, 2009).

<sup>1</sup> Suburbs are often associated with the same social class that is identified with the 'traditional middle-class' (Shani, 2019), favoring low density, uniform-traditional suburban entities in the metropolitan fringes (Butler, 1997; Kaplan, 2013). In contrast the 'new middle-class,' sometimes referred to as the creative class (Florida, 2003), are richer in economic and cultural capital, and often prefer to live in old urban centers (Bacqué et al., 2015), or alternatively in rural or rural-like settlements (Benson & Jackson, 2013).

## 2.2. Elective belonging and a place's habitus

The ability to choose a place of residence to maximize comfort is highly influenced by a person's accumulation of capital, as the lack of capital 'chains one to a place' (Bourdieu, 1999: 127). The higher a person's position in the social space, the stronger the ability to choose a belonging to a community (Watt, 2009), and thus exercise a political voice of dissatisfaction (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978, 2008). Affluent suburbs, in this regard, are the outcome of a person's acting in accordance with their elective belonging (Savage et al., 2005) in a way that transforms urban space, further shaping class processes, preferences, politics and identities in a place (Benson & Jackson, 2013). That is, in the terms of the present study they shape a place or local habitus.

The very same idea that a place carries its own habitus was investigated in several studies (e.g. Mosselson, 2020; Simpson, 2016; Zhong, 2015). This research aimed to unravel the processes of formation of a place's social, cultural, and political identity. They conceived how the habitus, as a manifestation of this identity, continues in the course of its history to re-enact the place, and to be embedded further into the bodies of its inhabitants, thus affecting their dispositions and actions, that is their habitus (Casey, 2001). Hillier and Rooksby (2005), in their seminal book, identify the habitus as 'a sense of a place,' while Casey (2001) theorizes habitus as an 'internalization of social practices in its origin, in its actual performance a given habitus is a reaching out to place, a being or becoming in place' (p. 687). The concept of a local habitus implies that places exist separately, but by no means autonomously from their inhabitants (Lee, 1997). The current study further contributes to this novel theoretical direction.

The place habitus evolves as a site where external forces blend with each other, as well as with local conditions and history, influencing local-level patterns of action and meaning (Kaufman & Kaliner, 2011; Molotch, Freudenburg, & Paulsen, 2000), personal identities (Brown-Saracino, 2015), and exceptional social realities (Molotch et al., 2000; Simpson, 2016). A 'place habitus' is a communal spirit (defined by its ethnicity, class division, gender, and so forth), or the residents' shared dispositions and social practices (Easthope, 2004; Pain, 2008; Simpson, 2016). A place habitus manifests a location's conscious, and at the same time unconscious that act independently of the place reflecting a contentious cultural disposition 'which is lived through and expressed... in its citizenry and public and private institutions' (Lee, 1997, p. 134). This disposition is overlaid and engraved into the landscape, thus, accumulating what Lévy (1994) identified as spatial capital, as well as local and regional infrastructures (e.g. schools) that affect people and their accessibility to life-chances (Bartho & Monfroy, 2010).

As it is generative in its nature (Shani, 2019), the habitus acts as a classifying system of functional distinctions rooted within aesthetic values of 'us and them.' It enables the creation of boundaries between groups and their respective habitus. Past studies have demonstrated, for example, how affluent white residents in the suburbs (mainly in the US and Britain) strive to secure social reproduction, to ensure that they and their children retain their class identity (Bacqué et al., 2015), thus preserving 'landscapes of privilege' (Duncan & Duncan, 2001) against spatially proximate class and racialized 'others' (Watt, 2009). Suburbs, in line with Waters and Brooks' (2015) observation regarding educational strategies of British elites, demonstrate middle-class functional isolation, aimed to enhance the domination of an already privileged social group. Affluent suburbs provide a sense of local autonomy, and imbue residents with a greater sense of control over their lives, through the provision of mechanisms by which they can fight off threats—perceived or real—to their quality of life and personal values (Erkip, 2010; Fischel, 2009).

In the context of school politics, parents' commitment or loyalty to their children's school facilitates collective action (Fischel, 2009). This action, for example, potentially marks the beginning of a local political career for middle class parents (Bacqué et al., 2015). Politics can be expressed in an action — citizens can voice dissatisfaction or can exit the

schools. This dissatisfaction could be directed at school performance or any other element of the school system (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978, 2008). Strong school communities form the foundation of strong political coalitions (Fischel, 2009), with different cultural values that may affect educational policy in a democratic polity. Wirt, Mitchell, and Marshall (1988) identified four such polity types, that in accordance with Bourdieusian terminology, buttress the place habitus: choice, quality, efficiency, and equity. These types compete with or reinforce one another, producing a reflection of three political cultures: meritocratic (professional, especially bureaucratic, control—quality- and efficiency-oriented), democratic (non-professional or citizen control—choice-oriented), and egalitarian (orienting any system of control towards remedying the maldistribution of resources—equity-oriented).

This paper takes these reflections of local politics, and further investigates them through the concept of a place habitus. While past studies have focused on how places act as a socializing apparatus for middle-class identities (Benson & Jackson, 2013; Butler & Robson, 2003), little is known about these identities' political consequences in terms of policy change, or the incumbent perception. Given the saliency of disparities between cities and suburbs, it is necessary to examine the nature of educational demands in both types of settlements, as well as the local political response and its consequences.

## 3. The research framework

### 3.1. Theoretical setting — the political milieu of a place in the context of local habitus

This paper explores how the place habitus of cities and suburbs are manifested in local schooling politics. The place habitus is the product of a place's political milieu in a specific democratic polity and social space (Fig. 1).

The political milieu of a place is defined by the pattern of interactions between the municipal elected (and non-elected) leadership and its public. Both are affected by their position in the social space. The social space of a place defines the ability of the public to affect the ways in which political and administrative officials (i.e. incumbent/ruling elite<sup>2</sup>) decide upon a given policy, and thus its potential outcomes, and vice versa. In other words, policy's outcomes reshape and define the social space, and are in their turn defined by that social space. These policy outcomes include the accumulation of what Lévy (1994) defined as spatial capital, including investment in different fields which both the public and decisionmakers value, such as education (John, 2009).

The municipality's expenditures on a bundle of services is shaped by the responsiveness of elected municipal leaders to the demands of their public (Fischel, 2009; Hastings et al., 2014). The social structure (i.e. social space) that reflects a given public (as a potential electorate) defines its ability to shape policy outcomes. The ability to affect and amend municipal policy depends on the ability of this public to access municipal leadership, and on the will and ability of the leadership to meet their demands (Fischel, 2009). This bilateral synergy is sensitive to the division of power among the social classes. The power to choose a space in which an individual feels a sense of (elective) belonging reflects this distribution. It forges the pattern of interactions that characterizes the

<sup>2</sup> While the concept of elite may fold within it different and broad meanings (Zannoni, 1978), here it concerns the political strata that governs indirect democratic structures — that is, aggregative-pluralist Democracies (Körösiényi, 2018), where political leaders are as "deputies" who transmit the preferences of constituents into policies, or authority is exercised by 'proxies' charged with articulating the people's 'general will'" (Körösiényi, 2018, p. 42). From a Weberian point of view, the mentioned ruling elite leans on bureaucratic hierarchies of modern states (Pakulski, 2018), and carries out a policy or policy agenda that is consistent with the incumbents' promises to their electoral constituencies (Manin, Przeworski, & Stokes, 1999).

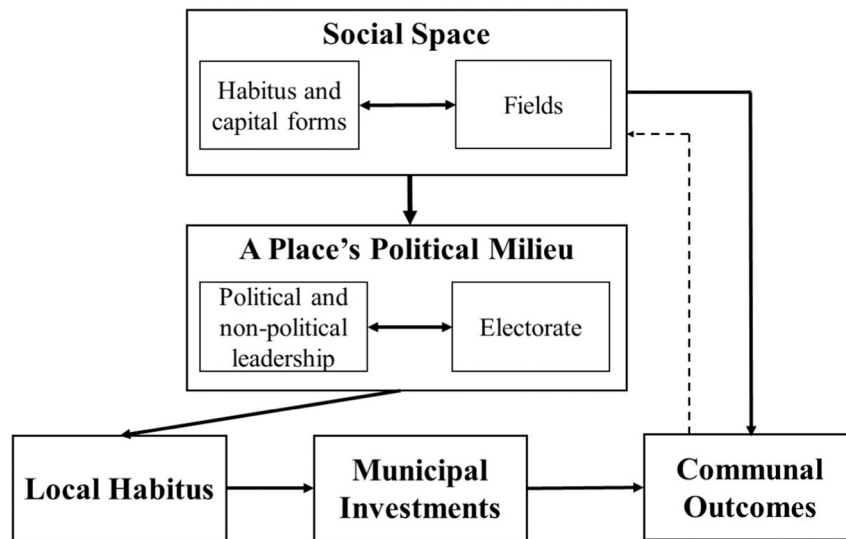


Fig. 1. The effect of the social space on a place's habitus and communal outcomes.

political milieu of a locus, thus of the place habitus.

Savage et al. (2005) suggest that as a person accumulates various forms of capital, the ability to benefit from elective belonging increases. Wealth, poverty or the presence of absence of any variety of capital, may facilitate or erode the community's ability to influence its leadership to make choices be consistent with people's ambitions and aspirations (Welch, Charles, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005). City-suburb differences are shaped by the ability of the middle-class, a population with high levels of elective belonging, to express its aspirations and dissatisfactions to the incumbent or ruling elite. The role of the social space in this interaction is central.<sup>3</sup>

As Israel and Frenkel (2018) indicates, a social space can be described as a continuum that exists between two distinctive poles: dominating and dominated. The first pole is characterized by those who enjoy a wealth of economic, social, and cultural capital. The second is populated with excluded individuals and groups who are relatively poor (Israel & Frenkel, 2018). The continuum between those two poles expresses different combinations of capital, thus different textures of elective belonging. According to Israel and Frenkel, it is expected that a given public in a democratic polity will be situated within this continuum. This potential electorate could be urban in its nature (Varady & Raffel, 1995), or suburban (Fischel, 2009). The continuum along the two poles creates different options of place habitus, which in line with Wirt, Mitchell, & Marshalls' (1988) observations, can range from a highly democratic to a less democratic polity, or one less open to democratic engagement.

The place habitus constantly evolves in an iterative manner (Fig. 1), where places' politics are the outcome of the shifting balances of the conditions of the place and its community (Lee, 1997). As the place habitus is a generative scheme that manifests the local class structure as well as peoples' class dispositions and tastes, it is possible that a given habitus can form different political outcomes, outcomes that are "relatively enduring (pre)dispositions to respond to current social, economic, political or even physical circumstances in very particular ways, ways in which in which other [places], with different habitus formations, may respond to very differently" (Lee, 1997, p. 127).

<sup>3</sup> While more subtle divisions of the middle class are intriguing (e.g. Shani, 2019; Frenkel and Israel, 2018; Bacqué et al., 2015; Butler & Robson, 2003), the present study focuses on the perspective of municipal decisionmakers towards the middle class as such, without distinctions between different elements of this class.

For example, as people who experience a high degree of elective belonging became the majority of a given public, class homogeneity increases, such as in affluent suburbs (Bacqué et al., 2015) or desirable urban centres (Benson & Jackson, 2013). This homogeneity ensures a better match between the middle-class's interests and the municipal investment policy. It creates a place habitus that confirms with dominant agents' interests and aspirations. The opposite effect is expected in a diverse municipal democratic polity; the more fractured a social space, the larger the expected disparity between dominant agents' interests and municipal policy.

The rest of the paper explores the above theory, bringing together the Bourdieusian framework with the latest theories of place and evidence on the local politics of education. Although the political milieu and the place habitus are complex, the present study highlights one major dimension of incumbents' and constituents' interactions. The study concentrates on the incumbents' perspective, which has not been widely explored until now.

### 3.2. The research area

In order to test the theory, the study focuses on a medium size city and eight of its wealthier suburbs, located in Israel's Sharon region (Fig. 2). This region is part of the Tel-Aviv metropolis, Israel's largest and intensifying metropolitan area (Mualam, Salinger, & Max, 2019). The Tel-Aviv metropolitan area has 3.8 million inhabitants, containing 45% of Israel's population (CBS, 2017). In the past thirty years, this metropolitan region has expanded its territorial spread significantly, a manifestation of its accelerated economic growth, growth which has resulted in ongoing suburbanization. The selection of the case study is based on previous research that has initially defined a spatial typology through which it was possible to differentiate between urban and suburban entities within the Tel-Aviv metropolis (Israel & Frenkel, 2015). This differentiation assisted in identifying clusters of cities and their suburbs.

Among the various clusters, the Sharon region was found to be the most established and integrated. It is comprised of a city, Netanya, surrounded by wealthier suburbs: Even-Yehuda, Kfar-Yona, Tel-Mond, Pardesiya, Kadima-Tsoran, Bat-Hefer, and Kohav Ya'ir-Tzur Yigal (called Kohav Ya'ir). Netanya, which was established in 1929 as a rural settlement, developed into a gateway city, the hub of many new immigrant waves throughout Israel's history. Although their cultural backgrounds and economic status vary, many of the city's immigrants are low-income, further constraining the city's ability to achieve social

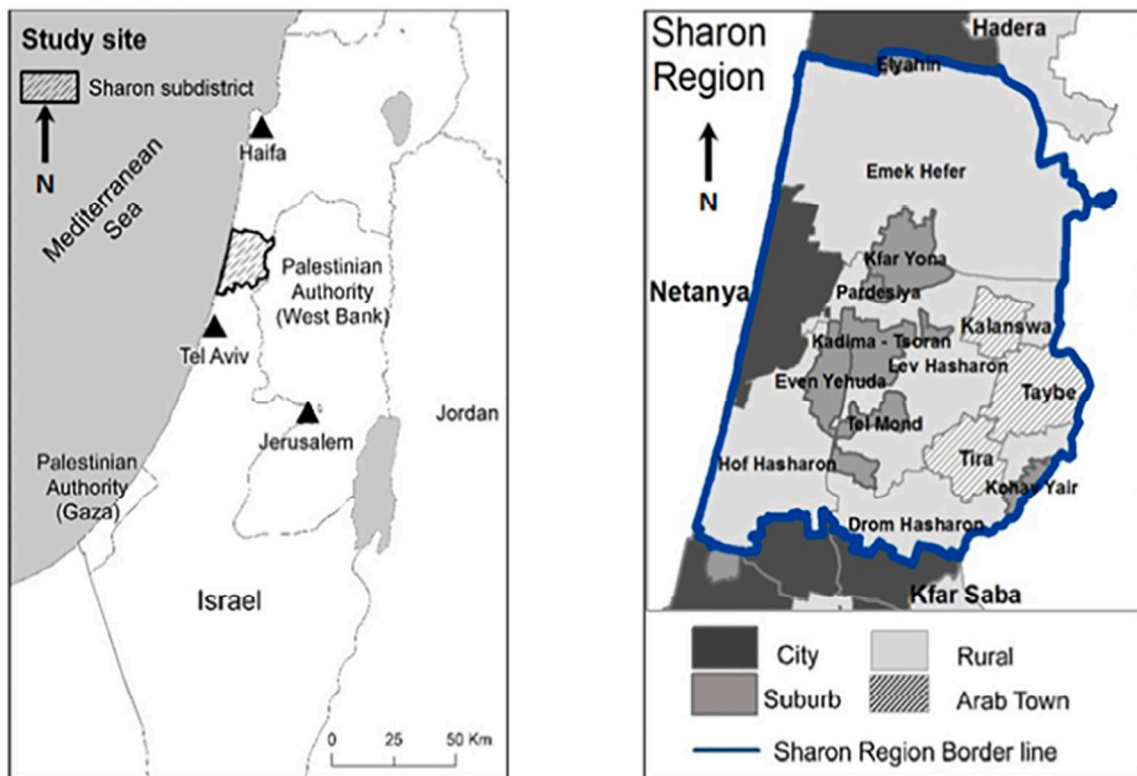


Fig. 2. Map of study area.

coherence. In 2015, Netanya had 208,000 inhabitants, while the suburban sector of the region contained more than 87,000 inhabitants (Table 1).

The suburban residents benefit from rural tranquility, access to open spaces, attractive views, as well as the availability of relatively inexpensive detached housing. Part of these suburbs were established at the same time as Netanya, but kept their rural character until a quarter of a century ago, when most small towns and rural communities in the region have become classic residential suburbs (Israel & Frenkel, 2015). Because of their attractiveness, new suburban communities were established in response to the demand for suburban residences.<sup>4</sup> The demand reflected the emigration of large portions of affluent social groups from the metropolitan core to its fringes, altering the lower-middle class characteristics of the region (Israel & Frenkel, 2015; Gonen, 1995). Comparing the regional suburbs to Netanya reveals that the suburban areas have populations with higher levels of wealth and education (Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

These regional gaps have been measured in Frenkel and Israel (2018), which shows how suburban families benefit from better capabilities to improve housing conditions compared to those in Netanya. This study shows significant differences in the accumulation of the tripartite capital compound that Bourdieu theorized, in which suburbanites benefit from a larger amount of capital forms than city dwellers, and thus attain better positions in the social space. The current study assumes then that many of the suburban newcomers are middle-

<sup>4</sup> In the current study, the new suburbs in the region are represented by Tsoran (which was later consolidated with the rural settlement of Kadima), Bat-Hefer and Kohav Ya'ir-Tzur Yigal.

<sup>5</sup> The study assumes a similarity between the investigated suburbs, although there are possible differences among them, as indicated in Tables 1 and 2. Nevertheless, the dynamics that were depicted in the current inquiry showed similar patterns of political-civic organization, accommodating the study's objectives.

class households who experience a high degree of elected belonging. Therefore, it explores how the identified gaps reflect the politics of suburbs and the city, and through the formation of a place habitus, further affect local and communal outcomes.

### 3.3. Research methods

The study explores the experiences of powerholders in the field of education, either in the city or in the suburbs. A subset of individuals with a substantial political power are investigated. The study emphasizes the interaction that those municipal leaders experienced with citizens, relevant to the locus's policymaking process. The study's concentration on individuals rather than, for example, on organizations, aligns with recent trends of personal politics in which traditional political parties and other political players (such as labor unions) have become weaker (Balmas, Rahat, Sheaffer, & Shenhav, 2014).

Politics that concentrate on individuals is particularly evident in local government in Israel, as in many developed countries. Israel adopted direct mayoral elections, further enhancing the role of the local leadership (Brichta, Vigoda-Gadot, & Pade, 2010; Dery, 1998). One of the consequences of the personalization of politics is decentralization, and the devolution of power towards citizens, processes meant to enhance the mayor's responsiveness to his or her constituency's expectations and demands (Brichta et al., 2010).

The research starts with an investigation of local budgets and investment patterns, revealing political-normative priorities in education and related fields. Secondly, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with decisionmakers at the municipal level, urban and suburban, including elected leadership (i.e. mayors) and professional/administrative bureaucrats (i.e. education superintendents and community centers' managers<sup>6</sup>). All of the interviewees are anonymously detailed in

<sup>6</sup> In Israel, community centers play a key role in after school education, as well as in adults' cultural and recreational activities.

**Table 1**  
Socioeconomic characteristics of the city of Netanya and its suburbs.

	Population size 2015 <sup>1</sup>	1990 onward immigrants out of the total population 2015 <sup>1</sup> (%)	Inhabitants that earn more than four times the average wage (%) 2014 <sup>2</sup>	Households with 2+ cars 2008 <sup>3</sup> (%)	15+ aged holding a second or higher academic degree 2008 <sup>3</sup> (%)	15+ aged holding professional and academic occupations 2008 <sup>3</sup> (%)
Netanya	207,900	27.3	1.2	15.3	8.5	29.6
Kfar-Yona	21,600	8.4	2.0	50.2	8.0	39.5
Kadima-Tsoran	20,500	7.4	4.9	56.2	14.0	45.5
Even-Yehuda	13,200	5.4	3.3	61.1	12.5	46.4
Pardesiya	5600	3.5	4.7	58.6	4.5	35.5
Tel-Mond	11,900	6.1	9.1	63.1	15.8	59.7
Kohav	9100	7.0	8.7	75.4	18.7	57.5
Ya'ir						
Bat-Hefer	5448 <sup>4</sup>	4.5 <sup>5</sup>	3.5	66.1	11.3	48.3

<sup>1</sup> C.B.S. — Local Authorities in Israel 2003–2014.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Rosenberg (2016).

<sup>3</sup> C.B.S. 2010 Israel's Population Census 2008.

<sup>4</sup> C.B.S. 2016 – Settlements in Israel – 2015.

<sup>5</sup> The figure represents the municipality of Emek-Hefer regional council, in which the suburb of Bat-Hefer resides within its jurisdiction.

#### Appendix A.

This analysis at the center of the study does not ignore the diverse set of ways in which educational inequalities are produced and reproduced, as already observed, for example, in Frenkel and Israel (2018). Rather, it untangles this complexity, shedding some light on the local politics that shape it. The semi-structured interviews uncovered political and administrative officials' philosophies towards education and local cultural policy, their experiences of interactions with its public, and their ability to influence political outcomes (see the interview protocol in Appendix B). Analysis of the interviews follows the methods and inductive approaches of interpretive investigations that theorize qualitative data (Elwood et al., 2015; McKian, 2010). This analysis specifically emphasizes linking mechanisms, relationships, and practices that connect public and political officials. Extracts from the interview transcripts are incorporated into this text. They serve to represent narratives, as well as illustrations of perspectives and interactions (Pain, 2008).

#### 4. Setting the scene: local education policy

Education seems to be a cornerstone in the political life of Netanya and its suburbs. Between the years 2003 and 2014, the suburban areas invested more than one third of their total municipal budgets in education. The city of Netanya did not invest a significantly different proportion; its average over this time period was 37.3%, while suburban areas directed 36.5% of their budgets to education. Similar patterns exist for educational investment per student in the suburbs compared to in the city (Table 2). In both sectors, there was a positive linear trend that indicated a constant increase in educational investments in the time period in question.

In spite of the similarity in levels of investment, the historical trends depicted in Table 2 indicate that suburban students benefited from higher levels of achievement in education than those in the city of Netanya. The percentage of students that received their matriculation diplomas averaged 73% in the suburbs and 60% in the city of Netanya. Having a high percentage of students who received a matriculation certificate demonstrates both the locality's standards for education, and potentially indicates the attractiveness of the place's schooling system. 67% of the suburban students met matriculation standards that satisfied university entrance requirements, as opposed to 47% of the students from Netanya. Table 2 shows the difference in education investment and outcomes in Netanya and of its suburbs.

What, then, underlies the observed differences if both Netanya and its surrounding suburbs invest similar shares of their resources? An initial explanation lies in Netanya's urban policy, which has historically

attempted to address urban social stresses. For example, its welfare expenditures express the urgent need to assimilate Jewish immigrants. Almost 30% of its current population are immigrants who immigrated to the state of Israel in the last 30 years (Table 1). One decisionmaker describes that:

One of the most annoying things in our regional reality is the localities that surround us and are characterized by homogeneity and segregation ... Unlike the suburbs, here you must juggle the needs of different groups. (Urban bureaucrat 1, translation by the author).

The passage above demonstrates how as a city of immigrants, Netanya's investments in education require decision-makers to cope with different, and sometimes opposing social and educational needs. Many of the city's efforts aim to strengthen social inclusion and cohesion.

Netanya has the largest concentration of Ethiopian immigrants in the country. To date, many of these are difficult to integrate into the Israeli lifestyle. The municipality act to upon this challenge by the allocating large chunks of its municipal property taxes, with minimal support of the national government. (Urban politician 1, translation by the author).

This passage further elucidates how the city's political atmosphere is fully subjected to its fractured social space. In turn, this social space determines what urban practices are implemented in order to enhance immigrants' cultural capital, practices that are intended to ameliorate hardship. Putnam (2007) has observed that immigration and ethnic diversity tend to reduce social solidarity and social capital, and Netanya seems to be an example of this phenomenon (Israel & Frenkel, 2018). Consequently, the city's welfare expenditures seem to indicate, it's efforts to bridge diversity and cohesion in order to relieve the hardship of poor urban residents.<sup>7</sup>

The suburbs are in a different situation, as they have not absorbed large numbers of immigrants in the past decades (Table 1). Unlike the city, the suburbs use welfare expenditures to empower the already privileged, further enhancing their cultural capital. The following extract describes this process:

<sup>7</sup> Netanya's average expenditure on welfare (out of the total municipal budget) stands at approximately 16%, compared to 9.5% in the suburbs (between 2003 and 2014). Furthermore, Netanya's welfare investment per capita is 35% higher than that of the suburbs (638 NIS and 447 NIS respectively).

**Table 2**  
Educational investments and outcomes (suburbs and Netanya).<sup>1</sup>

	Municipal additional transfers for education (%) 2003–2014 <sup>2</sup>	Per student educational expenditures (NIS) 2003–2014 <sup>3</sup>	Expenditures on education out of total municipal expenditures (%) 2003–2014 <sup>2</sup>	% of pupils entitled a matriculation 2003–2014 <sup>3</sup>	% of pupils entitled a matriculation meeting university entrance requirements 2003–2014 <sup>3</sup>	Index of school's achievements in science and technology 2009–2015 <sup>4</sup>	Index of school's achievements in math 2009–2015 <sup>4</sup>
Kfar-Yona	59.3	9868	35.3	56.6	49.0	6.0	4.0
Kadima-Tsoran	71.5	9146	35.9	71.7	64.9	8.0	8.0
Even-Yehuda	75.3	4512	26.0	73.5	68.0	7.0	8.0
Kohav Ya'ir	66.1	8207	32.3	85.8	82.3	8.5	8.7
Tel-Mond	24.7	9115	45.9	72.7	67.1	9.0	8.5
Pardesiya	67.0	23,277	36.6	77.2	70.9	5.5	8.5
Bat-Hefer	26.0 <sup>5</sup>	10,325 <sup>5</sup>	43.4 <sup>5</sup>	71.3 <sup>5</sup>	66.6 <sup>5</sup>	4.5	6.0
Suburban Average	55.7	10,636	36.5	72.7	66.9	6.9	7.4
Netanya	44.1	9888	37.3	59.7	47.0	6.3	6.0
Linear trend in suburbs <sup>6</sup>	0.8	785	1.6	1.4	0.6	–	–
Linear trend in Netanya <sup>6</sup>	1.1	587	0.2	1.3	0.8	–	–

<sup>1</sup> The reported data refers to calculated averages of reported years.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Interior — Local Authorities Annual Audit Reports, from 2003 to 2014.

<sup>3</sup> C.B.S. — Local Authorities in Israel 2003–2014.

<sup>4</sup> The score is based on Israel's Ministry of Education exams that measure efficiency and growth (MEIZAV) in schools in different years between 2009 and 2015. The locality's score indicates students' achievements in a given subject as calculated by a weighted average that represents the locality's schools' scores, taking into account the number of students in each school. The scale is from 1 to 10, with 1 the lowest score and 10 the highest. The data was retrieved from: <http://www.madlan.co.il/education>.

<sup>5</sup> The figure represents the municipality of Emek-Hefer regional council, in which the suburb of Bat-Hefer resides within its jurisdiction.

<sup>6</sup> The Excel's function of LINSET enabled to calculate a linear trend. By employing a least squares methodology, the function allows to examine, for example, a data time series.

Our town almost does not invest in welfare budgets. The town's welfare department is called 'the department for social services.' Much of its budget is spent on projects that educate students to be involved in their community, and less on classic social relief. Our desire is to establish a community whose members are active and involved. (Mayor of suburb A, translation by the author).

Both civic engagement and low welfare needs assist in further strengthening communal cohesion in the suburbs. The ability to develop a cohesive communal atmosphere in the suburbs relies upon their racial-cultural (Jewish) and class (middle-class) homogeneity. It enables a broad political consensus about which social fields need to be further emphasized and empowered within a town's social space, thus reflecting the community normative values (Collins & Coleman, 2008).

Education and culture seem to be cornerstones in the valorized normativity of the suburbs studied in this research. Table 2 indicates, for example, the municipal supplemental transfers added to governmental allocation for education.<sup>8</sup> Suburbs such as Even-Yehuda, Pardesiya and Kohav-Ya'ir supplement their budgets by more than 60% of what was originally allocated by the government. In these municipalities, as was indicated by some of the study's informants, the localities' additions go towards a variety of purposes, including school expenditures (i.e., class size reduction, teacher compensation, additional classes, or any other direct school expenditure) and spending money on educational programs outside of the schools (like projects that get students involved in their communities).

<sup>8</sup> In Israel, the national government is obligated to fund education, with the amounts relative to the size and socio-economic needs of each municipality. Municipalities are entitled to supplement the governmental transfers according to their needs and abilities.

## 5. Place habitus, adaptability and public-policymaker interaction

An analysis of the place habitus in relation to the political milieu of suburbs and the city of Netanya can further elucidate the political outcomes regarding education. This analysis emphasizes how the ruling elite perceives the expectations of their political electorate on the one side, and the incumbents' response on the other.

### 5.1. The paradox of the suburban polity: parenthood and professional-driven habitus

The suburbs are an arena of elective belonging (Benson, 2014; Savage et al., 2005). This elective belonging becomes apparent from the interviews with the elected officials. As they describe it, education in the suburbs is a field of contention, with parents as the main actors (whether as individuals or as well-organized pressure groups, such as school committees). Activism in the suburbs is encouraged by communal engagement; the community expects and promotes civic engagement:

People that move to our small town are expected to take a significant part in the community life. The ideology here strives for their involvement, ...thus taking responsibility for his or her living environment. There is a hidden message here that implies 'do not complain but be involved. Come and influence your community from the inside.' (Suburb B's Secretary of the Community, translation by the author).

The passage above taken from a suburban decisionmaker reflects almost full correspondence between the cultural disposition of the settlement's parents and their social practices, aligning those parents with the suburbs' social space. As implied in the theory that buttresses the study, it reflects the community's class homogeneity, and a place's habitus that manifests the local class structure as well as peoples' class

dispositions and tastes. A large number of the involved parents hold prestigious jobs where they are professionals, deeply rooted in globalized labour markets, whether as employees, managers in public companies, or as entrepreneurs.<sup>9</sup> These are jobs that are categorized as dominant in the employment field of the region's social space.<sup>10</sup> The next passage, for example, indicates how decisionmakers perceive the involved parents:

In each school you will find a significant leadership, which is at the same time professional, savvy, and deeply involved... Many of the parents experience this for the first time, thus lacking meaningful knowledge of how the system works. However, they seem to overcome this. The community that works with us knows how to manage the school's budget, surly more than we do sometimes. They are accountants, lawyers and engineers. They benefit from managerial abilities, as they are professional managers. This enables them to contend successfully with data and new disciplinary skills. They rapidly acquire new skills, and then prompt the school's interests. (Suburb F's Superintendent of Education, translation by the author).

Through activism over education policy, suburban parents express their dominant positions in the social space. Wealth of capital enables parents to take chances and deepen their involvement in social fields that were previously alien to them, like education. Their involvement enables them to gain expertise about the municipal educational system. Their acts, in line with the theorization of [Savage et al. \(2005\)](#), allow a reflexive coordination between the habitus in various fields in which the parents operate in the social space, which in this research, are mainly the fields of employment and childrearing. As implied in the conceptual framework, the subjects' operation in these fields moulds the place's political milieu, the result of the same interaction between the leadership and the electorate depicted in [Fig. 1](#). The following lines, for example, describe how this is done. Following their professional status, informants describe how students' parents have contacted them, revealing a tendency to voice complaints, dissatisfaction or advocate for change. The following extract of a suburban decision-maker describe this tendency:

Our community is constantly unsatisfied. People are always pressing my colleagues, politicians, and me personally... parents complain that: 'we lack this and that,' 'you are not letting us have this or that,' and 'you took this and that from us'... I mean, there is a terrible custom in which everything is so relative. That is, people can be very unsatisfied with excellent service... we are providing the best infrastructure for classes and they are still not satisfied... I honestly do not understand, where does their criticism lie? (Suburb F's Superintendent of Education, translation by the author).

The bureaucrat's testimony lines up with [Hirschman's \(1970\)](#) argument that schools in the suburbs enable parents to exercise their voice by deepening their commitment or loyalty to their offspring's schools ([Lutz & Iannacone, 1978, 2008](#)). Much like [Fischel's \(2009; 2001\)](#) quasi-market conceptualization of the suburbs, where schooling is conceived of as a private good that needs to meet public expectations, public goods in the suburbs in this research are perceived by middle-class parents, that is political constituents, as consumer products that are to be changed as needed in light of constant dissatisfaction. This mentality, from the perspective of the suburban decisionmakers interviewed, often brings their constituents, suburban residents, to think that public goods

are not attractive or innovative enough given the parents' (or other suburban residents) high expectations. For example, a municipal politician in the suburbs acknowledges how his term of office is perceived as one of many fungible products. That is, how the dissatisfaction of the constituents means that he is consistently threatened to be replaced by a new, better and far more innovative 'good'; a fresher, attentive and more accountable option:

They [the community] see you as a product that needs to be replaced, a cloth. Like a T-shirt... sometimes I have this feeling that they do not see you as a person, but as a vessel to serve them. From what I know, this is different from Netanya, for example. There, you would help one of the Ethiopian [immigrants], and they will vote or assist you in the Election Day. In my town, you will be rewarded by him or her assisting your political opponent... I cannot explain this. It is driving me crazy! (Mayor of Suburb C, translation by the author).

Such an interviewee could see herself being evaluated more positively in different, more urban surroundings, but as long as she operates in a suburban environment, the mayor is feeling too ill from the local political culture, and as opposed to her image on the political climate in the city. However, the perceived lack of satisfaction of the suburban constituents manifests, as the decisionmaker above indicates, in an agency to replace or change the policy. The mayor's testimony indicates, as emphasized in the theoretical section, the bilateral synergy that forges the pattern of interactions that characterizes the political milieu of the locus as a sensitive arena where which the division of power among the social classes shapes of the place habitus. The suburban place habitus seems to be consistent with 'modern publics' of places that emphasize values of transparency, active participation in decision making, and the demand for higher quality and diverse services ([Greener, 2008; Stoker, 2011](#)). Suburban middle-class parents claim for themselves the 'right' to offer a definitive assessment of what the proper public benefit to provide for their children should be, including education. From the interviews with the elite decisionmakers, it seems that parents slip from the role of simply being the ruled. In order to fulfill their ideal conditions of their place of living, parents, as managers in the (global and local) employment field are prone to steer and direct the town's political discussions and, to some degree, to monopolize the agenda:

We are dealing with a population that benefits from high levels of ability, economic and cultural. Parents here are aware of the importance of cultural activities. People understand how to evaluate ballet, dance... or even a music center, and what could be achieved with it. (Suburb A's Director of the Municipal Community Center, translation by the author).

The ability to demand change according to a parent's dominant position in the social space indicates how their symbolic capital, relative to that of the ruling elite, is associated with differences in the authorial position that forms a contest over pedagogical and managerial authority, thus, communicating with Paretorian dynamism that regards political elites.<sup>11</sup> As described in the next subsection, and consistent with the conceptual framework of the study, this seem to generate a form of political habitus, one lead by the incumbent elites in the suburbs, that is responsive and democratic in its nature.

## 5.2. The adaptability of the suburban ruling elite

The demand for educational excellence and the feeling of

<sup>9</sup> The observed profile is well documented in [Table 1](#). The table indicates the share of professional and academic occupations among the suburban population, as well as the large proportion of people that possess academic degrees. The high level of education among suburban residents stands out compared to that in the city of Netanya.

<sup>10</sup> The interviewees' observation is, as mentioned, confirmed under [Frenkel and Israel, \(2018\)](#).

<sup>11</sup> That is, the existence of at least two rival elites, the ruling elite and the non-ruling elite. These two groups constantly compete over political power and influence, and as the ruling elite is replaced occasionally by challengers ([Pareto, 1935](#)). The elite acts in in response to anticipated reactions of the public, and according to their evaluation of the previous behavior of elites and other leaders ([Higley & Pakulski, 2012](#)).

dissatisfaction can destabilize municipal politics by undermining the popularity of elected officials, and thus their chances of being re-elected. Note how the next passage expresses the feeling of a political officeholder who describes how the public devalues her and her professional position, a consequence of an expanding and sophisticated middle-class electorate:

In a type of a town like ours, there is an aggressive approach towards the leadership. That is, community members want to feel they control the municipal system. If they want to replace the mayor, just to feel that they're updating this position, they will replace the mayor, regardless of his achievements. They want something else, new, although you are good. (Mayor of Suburb C, translation by the author).

In efforts to be responsive to the demands of the electorate, a key characteristic in developing political milieu (see Fig. 1), the suburban ruling elite paradoxically appear to be more corruptible and inefficient from the standpoint of the politically active middle-class. For example, one respondent, an administrative manager in the educational system of the suburbs, describes how a negative perception develops in the eyes of the public, who express feelings of contempt and animosity towards the local political system:

The strong parents, who are part of the global economy, constantly compare the municipality to his or her working environment abilities. They feel ill when they think about municipal politics. To be frank, I think they despise it, they do not take it seriously ... they perceive the public realm as an inferior product and as corrupted... For them I am just an insect... my existence is only to serve them, supplying what they want. (Suburb A's Municipal Superintendent of Education, translation by the author).

This testimony indicates how municipal leadership feels that its location in the occupational hierarchy is challenged by parents. Their status notwithstanding, municipal leaders are not fully recognized as 'professionals' or 'leaders' (which they deem themselves to be) by parents who are active in the local public sphere. Suburban decisionmakers feel that they are treated in ways that do not agree with their self-image — such as that of a manager or professional. From their perspective, their constituents, suburban parents, seem to grant more status to themselves (i.e. upper-middle-class professional parents) than the status of the elected (or appointed) incumbents.

With coordinated acts of a well-organized and cohesive parental leadership (mainly elected representatives in parents' committees), the town's political and administrative managers are constantly under pressure and find themselves unable to comply with the demands of parent-activists. One political option that could serve the municipal leadership is a strategy of confrontation, in which mayors and their professional appointees refuse the demands of their potential electorate. Appealing as this may be, this tactic is highly risky in the typical suburban political milieu. Refusal under a political habitus that despised politicians will probably result in losing a political official's seat. Mayors understand this, and thus often develop a reflexive relationship with the activists who challenge their leadership. This interviewee describes these dynamics:

Unfortunately, I cannot be allowed to keep my ethical principles. In fact, I do not have an independent vision, but a war I am managing in order to politically survive ... as a mayor you are totally influenced by popular demands, and not by your own vision. The bottom line is that the public is evaluating you with results that accommodate their expectations, and therefore in realpolitik of 'here and now' you are exploring what sells best to them. You are always evaluating the critical mass you need to be re-elected. That is, how many votes a specific policy will bring in ... because I want to survive as mayor, you must manoeuvre between different tactics to meet the municipal budget and demands of different stakeholders in the community. I do

not have any values here... a community member or the potential voter is not interested in the municipal budget's constraints. (Mayor of Suburb A, translation by the author).

The mayor's frustration matches her understanding of the local political milieu (see Fig. 1) – that her own electorate undervalues against her instead of evaluating her for her achievements. Her frustration conflicts with the fact that her ethical principles cannot be met under the suburban political milieu. The will to politically survive helps this incumbent to resolve this dissonance. As a tactic of appeasing local and constant dissatisfaction, suburban ruling elite develop high levels of political accountability, a tactic which is a product of ad hoc adjustments to aggressive electoral demands, and which is consistent for example with the theoretical argument in the study. That is, the constituencies' accessibility to the municipal leadership and the latter's ability to meet the demands (i.e., the Places' Political Milieu, Fig. 1). The next excerpt, taken from a suburban mayor testimony, indicates how suburban elected officials respond to demands from their electorate:

Usually, a citizen of the city does not come to the mayor. And if it does happen, the person represents a large neighbourhood with probably a serious problem. Here in our town, if you are addressed by one of the inhabitants with a query or a problem, and you have not answered or not resolved it within a month, or alternatively not met with the person involved, you will be politically finished and not relevant anymore for this person. Thus, my phone and the one of the lieutenants are available all the time. (Mayor of Suburb E, translation by the author).

Revealing the mayor's phone number is an act that reflects the intimate interactions that exist between the suburban electorate and the elected decisionmakers within the volatile polity of the suburbs. There, officeholders are very limited in their ability to resist electorate demands:

Here, the political leadership well understands the meaning of lack of satisfaction in local public services, and especially the school system... This is a vicious cycle, as a consistent resentment towards the leadership further damages a town's image, thus reducing its attractiveness for good families to come. And for that reason, education and culture are top priorities here. (Suburb E's Superintendent of Education and Director of Culture Division in the Municipality, translation by the author).

The passage above demonstrates the highly generative characteristic of the place habitus of the suburban political milieu, where the local polity reinforces the possibility of middle-class families to channel and reshape the political agency of the elites decisionmakers in the municipality. As this is fundamental to city and suburbs differences (that will be further discussed), where the ability of the middle-class to express its aspirations and dissatisfactions to the incumbent or ruling elite is strong, the resulting relationships (given the theory posited in the conceptual framework, Fig. 1) are not of governed and governing, or of partnership, and not even of fully symmetrical relationships. Rather, politics in suburbs formalize an intense friction between municipal and civic-communal leaderships. The struggle of the elected municipal leadership to secure its future re-election leads to efforts to consistently improve the supply of services to meet the expectations of the public, and thus further cultivate the place habitus. That is, the result of a suburban political milieu on the one hand, and the place habitus that shapes municipal (-educational) investments on the other (Fig. 1). Improvement of services in the education realm notwithstanding, these efforts are effective only in satisfying voices of dissatisfaction in the short term, which in turn evoke new dissatisfaction among suburban constituents. This dissatisfaction must also be articulated by the public, and then dealt with by decisionmakers.

Suburbs, in line with the typologies of Wirt et al. (1988), benefit from democratic political cultures driven by citizen influence (especially by

the managerial/professional classes). This influence primarily promotes the value of quality, which is highly desirable among those with a high level of elective belonging. Suburbs create a sense of a place that secures and upgrades a person's future opportunities through cycles of (dis)satisfaction, further strengthening a democratic habitus of a place (as implied in the conceptual framework, Fig. 1). This is very different from Netanya's schooling system, as will be described below. With larger number of school districts that contain different socio-cultural groups, a distinct place habitus evolves in Netanya's urban political arena.<sup>12</sup>

### 5.3. The city's polity in light of class diversity

According to the research we conducted, Netanya's political milieu is different from that of its suburbs. The subset of urban interviewees indicates that in education there is a 'top-down' structure (that contrasts with the 'bottom-up' model from the suburbs). This top-down structure is apparent in the ways in which the urban decisionmakers steer the dominant discourse and monopolize it vis-a-vis working-class and poor inhabitants. The interviews indicate that the disadvantaged groups (i.e., within the Social Space, Fig. 1) tend to accede to a 'top-down' form of interaction, implying a substantial degree of deference on their part (i.e., the city's Political Milieu, Fig. 1). This interaction supports the theory at the basis of this research.

It was common for urban interviewees to testify that the city's lower classes do not effectively press municipal-political leadership to meet their interests. Part of this failure to exert political pressure is related to the poor residents' lack of understanding of the game of municipal affairs. This explains, in a large extent, their diminished role in the local polity. For example, one respondent, an ex-manager in one of Netanya's community centres who had later moved to work in the suburbs, described how the impoverished did not forcefully raise political demands:

Although much of Netanya's community members were active and well aware of their rights, and are willing to take some actions to change their current position, I found it very challenging to do this. The positions which people held were inferior in the first place. They were docile, not ever complaining, and usually accepting of what they were given or offered. From what I can remember, there wasn't any criticism among them, nor systematic pressure directed to the city's managers. Here [in the suburb] parents are pushy. That is, they have an opinion on just about everything. In Netanya, for example, I, in vain, urged many of the community members to yell and raise their voices in order for the municipal leadership to hear them. But this was rarely done. (An Ex-Manager of an Urban Community Center, translation by the author).

From the perspective of the informant interviewed, lower levels of Bourdieu's forms of capital cause many of Netanya's dwellers to not articulate their demands, forgoing actions that would improve their position in the social space (Fig. 1). In Netanya, there are fewer clashes of authority over the municipal education policy. The urban informants describe asymmetrical relationships with their residents that display those residents' distinct location in the occupational hierarchy. Unlike what has been witnessed in the suburban public, the disadvantaged urban public seems to be less prone to question the legitimacy of the leadership's authority, and instead accept, or at most react to the officials' policy.

Referring to the conceptual framework of the study, the analysis indicates that lower levels of interaction between the municipal political leadership and its constituents partially explains the city's lower level of

<sup>12</sup> Israel's Compulsory Education Law defines the status of school districts within local authorities. Municipalities delineate those district boundaries, thus obligating students to attend public schools to which the municipality directs (Hoshen, 2000, in Hebrew).

response to civic demands, including those that relate to education. A number of interviewees paint a picture of the nature of civic demands vis-a-vis education and cultural policy:

There are not many demands that come from our parents. Don't forget that Netanya is ... not a small town where you meet the people in the grocery store ... Each population has its requirements ... and they come directly to me through parent conferences and less directly ... (Urban bureaucrat 3, translation by the author).

The feedback we receive from the public comes through public complaints (Urban bureaucrat 4, translation by the author).

The city's inhabitants don't come to me directly. But I talk with people... I see and hear... The decision about what to invest in and who to bring is done by the Executive Committee (Urban bureaucrat 2, translation by the author).

These excerpts above indicate how the city's diverse challenges result in the decentralization of the municipality's administration, with the transfer of power towards the lower ranks. This interaction indicates the nature of friction between the local political leadership and the electorate, an interaction that establishes what is described in the 'Political Milieu' box in Fig. 1. In Netanya, political power is scattered between intermediate levels of the municipal bureaucracy. The distance created by layers of bureaucracy between citizens and their representatives reduces the ability of the governed to exert political demands and to apply 'blackmail strategies' on the governing. This diffusion of power dilutes the importance of interactions between civic-communal leadership and elected and non-elected decisionmakers. The diffusion of decision-making points in the city's larger bureaucracy, and its effect on the urban level of interactions further constrain the poor's ability to turn their dissatisfaction into a political pressure.

Of particular interest is the ability of middle-class parents to imagine a change and then to make the necessary demands of Netanya's municipal leadership, and specifically the mayor. Here, an interviewee describes frustration due to Netanya's social mix policy<sup>13</sup>:

Strong parents do not want integration with the lower classes. The strong are very satisfied in our elementary schools, where the school districts are very homogeneous. The problem starts with moving to high school where the school districts are much more heterogeneous, with children from weaker neighborhoods. And here they don't want to be mixed ... People want their children to benefit from have a good population, just like them. Paradoxically, parents from disadvantaged neighborhoods also want their children to be in these classrooms that reside good kids from a good neighborhood. (Urban politician 1, translation by the author).

The desire of the unprivileged to attend high achieving urban schools is consistent with Barthon and Monfroy's (2010) description of spatial capital that in France, for example, inspired urban parents from all over the social space to act for the benefit of their children's education. In Netanya, similar efforts by parents motivated them to establish special school districts. These districts bring together outstanding students from all over the city, and thus enabled the city to equally distribute its spatial capital of elite education among the urban middle-class, thus preventing their possible exit. This meritocratic practice notwithstanding (as indicated for example by van Zanten, 2001), the parents of the middle-class seem not as politically organized as those of the suburbs:

The strong parents' requirements are more technical, like renovating... putting up storage sheds. Not something that regards content. There is more demand for small classes, which is a difficult

<sup>13</sup> In order to promote egalitarian outcomes in Israel, this mix is mandatory, especially in high schools.

problem for us to provide. But this does not translate to political pressure ... The city has a formal education committee...parents' committees can come and hear, but rarely come (Urban politician 1, translation by the author).

While this evidence contradicts other testimonies, like that of Bacqué et al. (2015), regarding Parisian parents who organized in order to prevent social mix in schools, it can imply an inherent ineffectiveness of the urban middle class in Netanya. The formation of special educational districts might have increased this weakness. According to Fischel (2009), education districts which exceed the boundaries of a neighbourhood may weakened social networks at the neighbourhood level. Such social capital could have put effective monitoring and thus pressure on municipal politicians and school officials to act for the benefit of the neighbourhood community.

For the most part, the city's education policy prioritized basic needs of impoverished social groups:

... there is a necessity to prevent school dropouts and to have many of the students complete their studies. Most of our resources go to these purposes. The poor benefit from larger budgets than other parts of the population, giving them extra value, for example, providing them with longer days in school, and financing their after-school activities, where pupils do their homework. The city's poor are getting much more money than the strongest neighborhoods. (Urban bureaucrat 4, translation by the author).

The urban investment in the poor's education is not the result of their organized political pressure, but of the basic and urgent necessity of the city to provide basic goods for its residents. These policies can also help politicians get reelected. Through their efforts to be responsive to the demands of an expanding urban electorate (much of which belongs to the working class), urban municipal leaders are less focused on appeasing the middle-class. Conversely, they are responsive to the dissatisfaction of other constituents whose interests are not satisfied by middle-class demands. This is a very different political milieu than the one that arose in the suburbs, and so the local habitus (as shown in Fig. 1) is also different.

In line with the theory proposed by Wirt et al. (1988), Netanya seems to benefit from some egalitarian commitments that manifest the value of equity in the city's habitus (as mentioned, the result of the relationship between the Social Space and the Local Political Milieu in Fig. 1). That is, the city makes efforts to overcome its inequities where a non-democratic habitus is also observed (minimizing civic control and devaluing the choices of the middle-class), and unlike the suburban politics, by effectively denying (some of the) interests of the dominant parents. In this regard, the politics of a suburban milieu enable suburban residents to better able articulate dissatisfaction, as one of the interviewed suburban mayors describes:

... they feel empowered [in the suburbs] to politically achieve and do. An urban individual barely influences his or her building committee, not to mention the elected leadership. But here, in our town [a suburb] they find themselves leading different struggles, in school and in the neighbourhood, understanding that they can produce effective political pressure. (Suburban mayor, translation by the author).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper aims to contribute to literature that deals with the social effects of suburbanization. It looks at spatial changes and the formation of municipal educational policy through the lens of the spatialization of class, and how place habitus is formed in a case study located within the boundaries of Israel's main metropolitan region. The examination relates to contemporary neoliberal regimes, where growing inequalities shape families' abilities to secure resources for the education of their

children (Waters, 2017). Despite the growth of the suburbs (Berger & Kotkin, 2018), the role of incumbents'-electorate's interactions in generating local life-chances remains largely understudied. Concentrating on policymakers and their perceptions regarding their electorate's social class in an Israeli context, which is less familiar test case, the study pushes the boundaries of knowledge on cities and their suburbs' habitus, as well as on political practices employed by middle-class parents in regard to their offspring's education.

Within each of the spatial entities examined, the study observes different social dynamics of place habitus. The basic roots of these differences reflect the position of the majority group in the social space: dominated or dominant. Unequal life-chances in the studied area are related to economic, social, and cultural gaps between Netanya's inhabitants and those of its suburbs (Israel & Frenkel, 2018). The differences in the class composition between both tiers of settlement create a fractured political milieu that reflects two distinctive place habitus.

Within the confines of our sample of interviewees, it was found in the suburbs, middle-class subjects are described as much more active citizens than their urban counterparts. That is, they exert personal and political pressure more effectively, and overtly challenge the authority of the municipal leadership more than their urban, working-class and poor counterparts. Middle-class parents in the suburbs are more capable of and effective in securing tangible benefits for their children from municipal politicians than urban parents of all classes. This 'feel for the game' that contributes to parents' effectiveness in the suburbs indicates their capacity to assert themselves vis-à-vis the municipal leadership. Suburbs develop a political milieu that is highly responsive to activism by constituents. In this setting, the electorate's demands are often met by their elected decision-makers. By identifying this pattern, it is possible to understand how the aggressive political milieu that characterizes the polity of small, distinctive, and homogenous suburbs creates advantages for its members, compared to a heterogeneous and complex city.

Diversity in cities is considered a key element for achieving urban justice (Fainstein, 2005). This is probably a fair perspective from a normative analysis of politics. In a macro-economic viewpoint, diversity ensures better advantages in the face of global and local changes. But what about the micro level, where we deal with people and their needs and abilities? Fainstein's model, for example, better fits cities that are atomistic spatial entities, and thus do not interact with a broader regional context. This model assumes a well-structured metropolitan governance that effectively regulates social and economic resources. But what if this is not the case? The study indicates the challenges for diverse cities with limited global capital, and weak metropolitan governance, as in the case of Netanya. There, diversity seems to be creating a barrier to the city's ability to meet its residents' needs.

The study's findings are consistent with previous research that emphasizes the advantages that occur due to non-school factors such as parental engagement with education at home (Putnam, 2015), as well as with studies that explore the creation of the inner cities' underclass, and the development of the relatively affluent suburbia (Gadsden & Dixon-Román, 2017; Jargowsky, 2001; Watt, 2009). The city examined in this research exists within a large metropolitan context, similar to many other Western cities (Frenkel, 2007; Razin, Dijst, & Vazques, 2007). It has the potential to represent dynamics of other metropolitan regions in the developed world. However, the findings in this study stress the need to carefully consider the study's insights, as the mutually constitutive nature of Bourdieu's theory is a two-sided approach. As such, future studies could further investigate constituents' perspectives, including municipal stakeholders such as non-governmental civic leaders, parents, and others who provide testimony as to how local school politics work, their (dis)incentives for political and electoral participation, and their reasons for (dis)satisfaction with how their schools are governed. Such future examinations may well buttress the study's findings, and the theory behind the current paper.

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## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Emil Israel:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration, Supervision.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare regarding the current manuscript.

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