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## **MIDDLE CLASS IN THE BALTIC COUNTRIES SINCE 1991**

The article presents the analysis of social identifications of Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) population with middle class position between 1991 and 2012. The forms of social identification in different periods of formation of the Baltic countries are analyzed in the context of the dominant ideologies or theories and national self-identification complexity is investigated. The class structure in all Baltic countries is changing. The analysis of social structure in different countries moves mainly in parallel to each other but the data is not strictly comparable neither by themes, nor by sample for each country. Sociologists are no longer surprised of the efforts of researchers in various countries undergoing rapid transitions or transformations to provide new meanings to the concepts of the middle class taking into account peculiarities and history of their respective countries. This article also aims at analyzing social identity of the people of the Baltic countries at the beginning of their formation and further as well. Different surveys are discussed in this article. Since 1991, until now, after the restoration of the independence of the Baltic countries, a number of sociological studies has been carried out to analyze the emerging post-Soviet social structure of society. In practice, every research carried out differed both in methodological and method's approaches. The aim of this article is to analyze the existing social stratification in the Baltic countries on the basis of sociological studies of the middle class, emphasizing the middle class as the main guarantor of creating a modern society. The novelty of the article is that it makes an attempt to use the data of different, multi-dimensional researches to discover commonalities or peculiarities of the middle class formation and self-identification with middle class position in the Baltic countries. The analysis has also shown that the identity of the middle class remains the strongest on all stages of formation of the Baltic countries, while only the content and the understanding of the middle class differ. Dominant tendencies of the middle class formation in the Baltic countries are connected with transformations and changes taking place within working class and intelligence. It has been revealed that the Baltic countries middle class is far from being homogeneous.

**Key words:** social stratification, social class, middle class, Baltic countries.

### **Vidusšķira Baltijas valstīs kopš 1991. gada**

Rakstā tiek analizētas Baltijas valstu (Igaunijas, Latvijas un Lietuvas) iedzīvotāju sociālā identifikācija ar vidusšķiru laika posmā no 1991. līdz 2012. gadam. Sociālās identifikācijas formas, raksturīgas dažādiem Baltijas valstu veidošanās periodiem, tiek analizētas dominējošo ideoloģiju vai teoriju kontekstā. Šķiriskā struktūra visās valstīs mainās. Sociālās struktūras analīze dažādās valstīs tiek realizēta paralēli, bet dati nav precīzi salīdzināmi, ne pēc pētījumu tēmām, ne pēc izlases apjoma. Sociologi vairs nav pārsteigti par dažādu valstu, kuras piedzīvo straujas pārejas vai transformācijas, pētnieku centieniem piedāvāt jaunas interpretācijas vidusšķiras jēdzienam, ņemot vērā pētamo valstu īpatnības un vēsturi. Šī raksta mērķis ir analizēt sociālo identitāti gan Baltijas valstu neatkarības atjaunošanas laikposmā, gan mūsdienās. Tiek apspriesti dažādu pētījumu rezultāti. Kopš 1991. gada, līdz ar Baltijas valstu neatkarības atjaunošanu, līdz šim laikam ir veikti vairāki socioloģiskie pētījumi, lai noskaidrotu jauno postpadomju sabiedrības sociālo struktūru. Praksē katrs veiktais pētījums atšķiras gan ar metodoloģisko, gan metodisko pieeju attiecīgajai problēmai. Raksta mērķis – balstoties uz veiktajiem

socioloģiskajiem pētījumiem, analizēt šķirisko situāciju Baltijas valstīs, uzsverot vidusšķiru kā galveno garantiju mūsdienu sabiedrības attīstībai. Raksta novitāti veido autoru mēģinājums atklāt vidusšķiras veidošanās un iedzīvotāju pašidentifikācijas ar to kopīgās pazīmes un īpatnības Baltijas valstīm, izmantojot dažādu daudzdimensiju pētījumu datus. Empīrisko datu analīze atklāja, ka identificēšanās ar vidusšķiru ir visspēcīgākā visos Baltijas valstu veidošanās posmos, atšķiras tikai vidusšķiras saturs un izpratne. Baltijas valstu vidusšķiras veidošanas tendences ir saistītas ar transformācijām un izmaiņām, kuras notiek strādnieku un inteliģences šķirā. Tas izpaužas Baltijas valstu vidusšķiras sastāva neviendabīguma.

**Atslēgas vārdi:** sociālā stratifikācija, sociālā šķira, vidusšķira, Baltijas valstis.

### **Средний класс в странах Балтии после 1991 года**

В представленной статье авторы исследуют социальную идентификацию населения стран Балтии (Эстонии, Латвии и Литвы) со средним классом в период с 1991 по 2012 год. Авторами проанализированы различные формы социальной идентификации со средним классом на разных этапах формирования стран Балтии в контексте доминирующих идеологий или теорий. Классовая структура меняется во всех странах Балтии. Анализ социальной структуры различных стран проводился параллельно, но данные достаточно трудно сопоставимы как по своей тематике, так и по объёму выборки. Социологов больше не удивляют усилия исследователей различных стран раскрыть новое значение и содержание понятия среднего класса с учетом трансформаций, особенностей и истории изучаемых стран. Данная статья также анализирует социальную идентификацию населения Балтийских стран как сразу после восстановления их государственности, так и в более позднее время. В данной статье обсуждаются результаты различных исследований. Начиная с 1991 года, после восстановления независимости стран Балтии, был проведен ряд социологических исследований, анализирующих возникающую постсоветскую социальную структуру общества. На практике каждое проведенное исследование отличалось как методологическими, так и методическими подходами к рассматриваемой проблеме. Целью статьи является анализ существующей социальной стратификации в странах Балтии на основе проведенных социологических исследований среднего класса, акцентируя роль среднего класса как основного гаранта создания современного общества. Новизна статьи заключается в попытке использовать данные разных многомерных исследований для того, чтобы выявить общие черты или особенности формирования среднего класса и самоидентификации с ним населения в странах Балтии. Анализ эмпирических данных показал, что идентификация со средним классом доминирует на всех стадиях формирования Балтийских стран, но контекст и содержание понятия среднего класса различается. Преобладающие тенденции формирования среднего класса в странах Балтии связаны с переходом и изменениями, происходящими в классе рабочих или интеллигенции. Это выражается в том, что средний класс в странах Балтии на данный момент далёк от гомогенности.

**Ключевые слова:** социальная стратификация, социальный класс, средний класс, страны Балтии.

## Introduction

Almost every one of us thinks he knows what “middle class” means or even identifies himself with it, or right away denies the existence of such class by saying that “there is no middle class at all”. However, it is obvious that a number of important social science concepts addressing middle class often turn to be misleading or are very vague. Therefore, the first question to ask is “What do we really know about the middle class”?

If we are the middle class, what are our duties towards other classes and the entire state / society? If we are not, how should we identify the other being the middle class, and what is the way to establish good relations with them (in the case we deem it desirable or necessary)?

An interesting question that is relevant for nowadays Baltic countries would be when and how working class and intelligentsia representatives become the middle class members? We will try to grope these transformation or formation trends at this stage. How does the working class transform into the middle class (if any)? Are there any other criteria except for average income? How important in this context are the national, cultural, religious or other differences? Are there any marginal classes and how many of them?

Description of the middle class in modern societies is usually sought through defining its position in social stratification, typically by using classical doctrines of classes developed by Erik Olin Wright (1997) and John Goldthorpe et al. (1980), as well as criteria for distinguishing (or dividing) them.

### Different definitions and surveys of the middle class

The concept of a “social class” encompasses numerous theoretical and methodological approaches. Social transformations which have occurred in Eastern Europe over the past decades push boundaries and demand new traditional and alternative perspectives describing social stratification (Marxian, Weberian, race- / class- / sex-based, postmodernist, etc.). Therefore, sociologists today discuss both the structure of classes and the impact social classes have, for instance, on policy, identity or lifestyle. Issues under consideration include distribution of classes, stratification, labour movement, other organisations based on the class principle, participation of classes in elections, relationship between classes and consumption, economic outlook for classes. The concept of social classes calls for discussing their interaction with other social groups based on racial, gender or educational characteristics. Most of the latter are affiliated as non-class movements, for instance, for women’s rights, the Green movement or advocates of consumers’ rights.

On the other hand, a social class is a sociological concept which defines the position of an individual or a social group (in terms of ownership of the means of production and control over work of others) and in that context the middle class cannot be considered a social class at all.

Three main “attributes” of a social position – power, privilege and prestige – quite often are incongruous, existing in different systems of stratification in parallel. However, there are two things – occupation and class – which form the basis for sociological studies of social stratification: inequality, power and different perception of this by individuals. When merged into a whole, they form the frame, the invisible skeleton of society, covering many areas of our social lives. It is very important that the analysis of the structure of social classes and changes thereof is not limited to the national level but viewed in the context of other countries.

Sociologists, therefore, are no longer surprised at the efforts of researchers in various countries undergoing rapid transitions or transformations to provide *new meanings to the concepts of the middle class* taking into account peculiarities and history of their respective countries. “There are different quantitative data on the biggest social groups in the society; various estimations on both the presence and the absence of the middle layer in the society are given. There are different opinions considering the legitimacy to apply the notion “middle class” in conformity with the present Latvia. The authors use different methods to find out the most appropriate analysis methodology in appliance to the formation of social stratification under the new conditions. The authors draw a conclusion that, for the time being, it is too early to consider the middle layer the main biggest unit in the social stratification of the present Latvia (Menshikov 2016; Mensikovs, Lavrinovica 2011) and Lithuania (Matulionis 2014). There are several “historical” and well-established socioeconomic definitions of the middle class referring to it as a group of people who fall somewhere in between the groups of people with the weakest and strongest social status in society (in social, economic and cultural terms; those who more or less have middle social status, middle income and education level, middle taste, etc.). On the other hand, this class is traditionally located somewhere between elite (or aristocracy) and working class.

General principles to define the middle class in various countries obviously differ from country to country. Criteria to describe the middle class in the United States probably would not suit for former USSR countries and many eastern European countries or even western European countries. Notwithstanding this, citizens of different countries have all grounds to identify themselves with the middle class: many of them have permanent jobs, decent cars, access to appropriate holidays, appropriate housing and property (also, frequently, access to health care services and education of an appropriate level).

Data from a wide range of social research and middle class studies conducted by researchers in different countries or regions (Eastern Europe, USA, Latin America, China or Middle East) reveal one common trend: the emergence of two different groups of people. The first one is distinguished on the basis of economic criteria (income level adequate to educational attainment, apartment, retirement, etc.). The second one refers to the groups of people who self-identify themselves as the middle class. For instance, a middle-class standard of living in the United States has come to mean having “a secure job, a safe and stable home, access to health care, retirement security, benefits for vacation, illness and the birth or care of a child, opportunities to save for the future and the ability to provide a good education (including a college education) for at least one child” (Tarkhnishvili A., Tarkhnishvili L. 2013). At the

same time, in accordance with the results of the study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago (Tarkhnishvili A., Tarkhnishvili L. 2013), this standard of living belongs no more to the middle class of the American population. More and more families of the country think they still are the middle class but in fact, they are a “paycheque-to-paycheque group of people” that has to save on almost everything in almost all areas, from toll calls to shopping. And that’s the economists’ conclusion. Both sociologists and economists in the United States agree that there is no more American middle class in the usual sense. Although economists are still estimating income levels and sociologists are still analysing labour market and the focus-group survey data, they all provide quite different numbers and distinguished paradigms / parameters (ibid.).

One of the first attempts of this sort was Social Changes in Baltic and Nordic Countries, an international project launched in 1993. Coordinated by the University of Tampere (Finland), the project brought together Finnish, Swedish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian research centres. In 1998, Bulgarian sociologists organised an international conference called “The Middle Class as a Precondition of a Sustainable Society (supported by the Open Society Foundation, East-East Program, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation) (Tilkidjiev 1998) which addressed the issues of becoming the middle class. Likewise, in 2014, Ukrainian sociologists raised the issue of actualisation of the concept of the middle class in their project “Middle Class in Ukraine: Life Values, Readiness for Association, and Promotion of Democratic Standards” implemented by the Razumkov Centre (Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom in Ukraine – Kyiv 2014) and sponsored by the Government of Canada through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD). Great attention has been paid to Russia: the middle class developing under conditions of new social reality in Russia has been researched both by Russian sociologists (The Russian Middle Class: Dynamics of Changes, a project implemented by the Complex Social Research Institute in 2003, sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation) and Finnish researchers (Tekes team (Finland) 2013). The latter are interested in the post-Soviet middle class in order to highlight the trends of this class which should be considered by Finnish industries and businessmen in the light of the Russian middle class as a growing consumer: “Booming consumption expenditure of the Russian middle class stipulating overall economic growth; the largest consumption market in Europe; higher needs for intangible products – leisure, entertainment, service, etc.” (Tekes team (Finland) 2013). Therefore, papers and publications analysing and studying the middle class in the worldwide or global context are no longer surprising. “According to economists, the existence of the middle class indicates the level of development of a country, and this is what Lithuania cannot boast of. On the contrary, when asked to define the boundaries of the middle class, many experts shrug their shoulders and claim that there is actually no middle class left in Lithuania” (Povilaityte 2012).

Where reasons for respondents’ self-identification with the middle class in one or another study are rather stereotypic, efforts to find out the arguments of those who do not identify themselves with the middle class have been anticipated to reveal new aspects. However, everything seems similar here, too (Balakirieva 2014): low income is mentioned first, owning no expensive or luxury property is mentioned second, and

holding no managerial position – third. The access to means and resources is quite an important criterion in that case. Responses like “my relatives / parents have never belonged to the middle class” or “I do not have higher education” are mentioned less frequently.

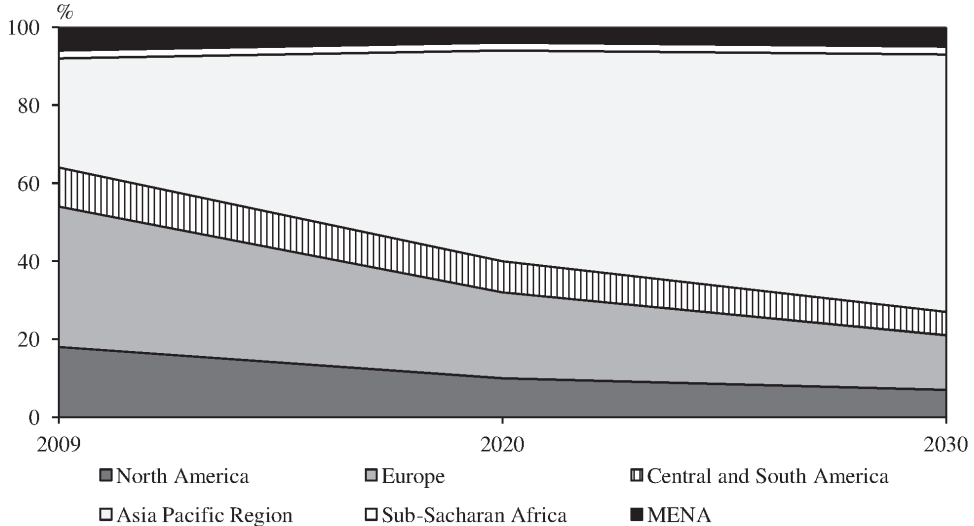
### Middle class in global perspective

After the onset of the global economic crisis in 2008, almost half of the world’s population now belongs to the middle class, as a result of rapid growth in emerging countries. The middle class as having a reasonable amount of discretionary income, so that they have roughly a third of their income left for discretionary spending after paying for basic food and shelter. This allows people to buy consumer goods, take care of their health, and provide for their children’s education. Basing on those indicators, Asian countries had considerably more representatives of the middle class in 2007 and 2008 compared with Western countries.

Economists are mainly focused on the financial position of the middle class (consumption standards / peculiarities of economic behaviour and economic awareness) (Pezzini 2014). The increase in average incomes and the fall in levels of absolute poverty in the world suggest that an increasing proportion of the world’s population is neither rich nor poor by well-established national standards but finds itself in the middle of the income distribution. According to Pezzini (2014), in 2009, the middle class included 1.8 billion people, with Europe having 664 million, Asia – 525 million and North America – 338 million, accounting for the highest number of people belonging to this group. Pezzini (2014) argues that even in Africa, where middle class’ growth has not been very robust, it has nonetheless been noticeable and contributed to increased domestic consumption in many countries: sales of refrigerators, television sets, mobile phones, motors and automobiles have surged in different African countries in recent years. Possession of cars and motor cycles in Ghana, for example, has increased by 81% since 2006. As the expansion continues, the size of the “global middle class” is forecast to increase from 1.8 billion in 2009 to 3.2 billion by 2020 and 4.9 billion by 2030 (ibid.). The bulk of this growth will come from Asia where the middle class will represent 66% of the global middle-class population by 2030 (see Figure 1). This expansion continues.

Lithuanian researchers note that “low wages represent a very high job insecurity risk factor in Lithuania. Employed people can save little from their salaries. Losing a job affects their standard of living to a great degree. This could be to a certain extent compensated by social guarantees. That’s why atypical forms of employment are not widespread in Lithuania (in particular, fixed term and part-time employment contracts. In 2016, individuals employed under fixed-term contracts and part-time accounted for as few as 1.9% and 8.0% of the total employed respectively). This risk is encountered by many self-employed individuals (especially in agriculture), seasonal workers and undeclared workers. In 2016, there were 155.4 thousand self-employed individuals in Lithuania, and this figure has been steadily growing since 2011” (Gruzevskis, Braziene 2017).

Figure 1  
Global middle class consumption, by % of global total, 2000–2030



Source: Kharas 2010.

Many economic research studies point to a direct link between income inequality and a decrease in social groups with average income, thus highlighting the need to measure and record the limits of inequality in order to understand what is going on with the “middle class”.

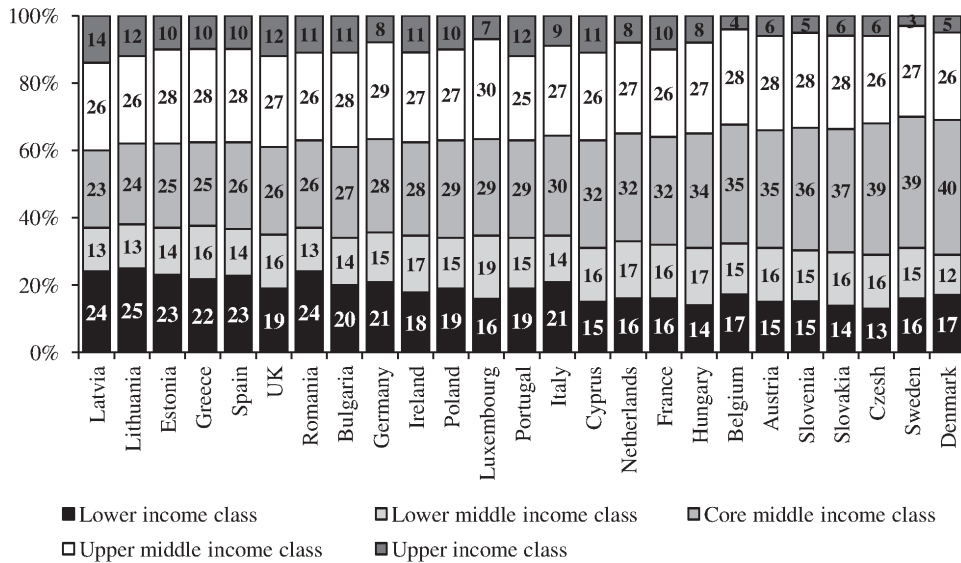
In 2017, an economist from Danske Bank, relying upon findings of Rokas Grajauskas’ research, argued that 36% of total households (458 thousand) could fall within a middle-income group in Lithuania; lower income group accounts for 38% of total households (488 thousand) and 19% of total households (243 thousand) are living in poverty. The rest 86 thousand accounting for 7% of total households in Lithuania fall within a higher income group (Savickas 2017). According to the economist, Lithuania’s middle class is one of the smallest in Europe. Accounting for 36%, it is the third from the bottom after Romania and Bulgaria (*ibid.*). European countries with the largest middle classes are Scandinavian countries which are not only rich countries, but also have evenly distributed incomes.

The European Household Survey 2011 (International Labour Organization, Vaughan-Whitehead (ed.) 2016) showed that Lithuania was ranked just ahead of Latvia by the number of households with median income (24% and 23% respectively) and fell almost twice behind Denmark (40%).

This study is aimed at understanding why the middle class could or should become the centre of interests or attention of any political party (or all of them?) rather than focusing on the middle class / participation in policy, public administration or civic society.

Figure 2

Size of income classes based on net household income,  
selected EU countries, 2011



Source: EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2011 (EU-SILC).

We are not sure whether it would be possible in today's Baltic countries to analyse only hypothetical, potential types of middle-class policy or real policy. It is difficult to explain a diversity of real middle-class policy both within parties and movements, merely because the drawing of boundaries of the middle class is problematic and unstable. The analysis of political attitudes, however, is necessary, as the governments will sooner or later encounter competing groups of interests within the middle class itself manifesting in various relations with the state. And such interests will require balancing. Developed countries believe that small middle classes determine, inter alia, election results, because they support a mood of frustration and protest.

There are some arguments that the term "middle class", although useful for social sciences, is more political or journalistic than sociological. Namely policy representatives are supposed to be the most interested in how the middle class is living or feeling, what their satisfaction levels are and what ratings the middle class give to political figures. It has become a stereotype to assume that better assessment of a financial or material situation a priori means greater support for the government (whatever it is), greater support for the market economy and also greater support for democratic norms and values. All this relates namely to the middle class. Countries attempting to define the middle class anew have first of all to do with the criteria of distinguishing it. As a result, they sometimes arrive at the question whether the middle class exists in reality or whether it is a theoretical construct or an imaginary community. Stable or more or less shaped social communities are considered to be those that could be statis-



tically defined in a certain way. This requires a particular view as to what or who should be considered middle class or its representatives: whether it depends on a certain level of income, possession of a house or a car, etc. Is subjective self-identification within the framework of those criteria enough?

The existence (or formation) of middle class as a certain social community undoubtedly requires old, well-established and clear criteria for distinguishing the middle class and identification thereof in the public opinion. We believe this could be the focus of further studies in the Baltic countries.

The reproduction of the middle class can be characterised by significant differences in income levels (by 1.5–2 times) compared with other salaried groups, level of education and motivation, and unemployment experiences and consequences. Therefore, sociological theories consider the following criteria as well-established, or rather classical criteria for the identification of the middle class:

- College or higher level of education;
- Above-median income (closely associated with the economic approach to the middle class);
- Managerial positions;
- Autonomy at work to the extent it is necessary to organise one's own work and perform it independently. *Types of autonomy at work* are defined by the content of work rather than by the professional title or job title. Therefore, qualitative methods are also used for this purpose.

### Criteria for measuring the middle class: problem of objectivity and subjectivity (or self-identification)

Many researchers agree with the existence and importance of the problem of self-identification with the middle class, as well as with the importance of definition and justification of self-identification criteria. In the case at issue, researchers tend not to confine themselves to the criteria of financial or material standing; rather, they extend the criteria to cover lifestyle characteristics, not just a summer holiday, entrepreneurial activity, values or attitudes.

A study carried out in Ukraine (Paniotto 2014) singled out the following criteria of self-identification with the middle class:

- Respondents identify themselves as representatives of the middle class;
- State that their standard of living is adequate or higher (*above the indicator of "overall, it is enough for a living"*);
- Mention or describe their level of education as higher than vocational or secondary education;
- Express common interests with middle-class representatives;
- Mention that representatives of the middle class are dominant in their immediate social environment.

Some researchers (Paniotto 2014) argue that the division between the objective and subjective is not a dichotomy, since the subjective criteria we use are not exclusively subjective. Likewise, we cannot always claim that data provided by statistics depart-

ments represent purely objective data. The statistics are often based on sample method of data collection. Thus, in addition to objective and subjective data, he introduces the term “subjective facts”. Researchers often have to decide which data to rely upon: statistics or specific sociological survey. Paniotto (2014) suggests that the latter should be regarded as subjective facts rather than purely subjective data.

Combinations of objective criteria and criteria of self-identification with the middle class reveal the following criteria pattern (probably even without a definite theoretical approach, because it cannot be asserted that understanding or opinions of the researcher and the informant coincide):

- Stability of self-identification with the middle class;
- Adequate level of education (higher than secondary and/or vocational);
- Relatively higher level of wellbeing.

Sociologists have almost reached a consensus that criteria like income or social wellbeing alone are not accurate enough unless accompanied by more a detailed specification as to the sources of income, the social situation regarding the structure of income and expenditure. With no clarification of this aspect, it would be a mistake to define the concept of middle class, especially for those countries that are still at the stage of market formation.

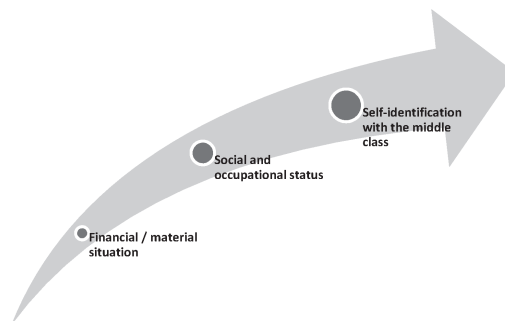
We have chosen this scheme for linking and singling the main indicators of the middle class out of a variety of its definitions, moreover that the concept of the middle class started developing in the Baltic countries just a few decades ago. Usually, there are three main criteria of the middle class:

- Financial / material situation;
- Social and occupational status;
- Self-identification with the middle class. Building a theory of the new middle classes some authors are “somewhat sceptical of the theories which conceptualize the new middle classes primarily on the basis of their consciousness” (Kivinen 1989).

We are trying to contextualize different definitions in some right (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

**Contextualization of different definitions of middle class**



Source: elaborated by the authors.

The key problem when analysing the social class structure in post-Soviet Baltic States is the (un)ability to compare social structure studies, as well as studies addressing social stratification issues along with other research problems. Actually all the study sources analysed 1991, 1993, 2001 etc. (Taljunaite, Sviklas 2018) were based on different methodological and methodical assumptions. The study aimed at answering the question whether bringing people from highest and lowest classes together into a common society as a certain organisation of citizens is an exclusive prerogative of the middle class. It reveals the origins of the shaping of the middle class in the Baltic countries and of its sociological surveys, current situation and future perspectives.

### The social class structure of the Baltic countries in 1991–2012

The structure of social classes was first analysed in more detail after the re-establishment of Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) independence.

There are some (sometimes common) studies, where was analysed social structure:

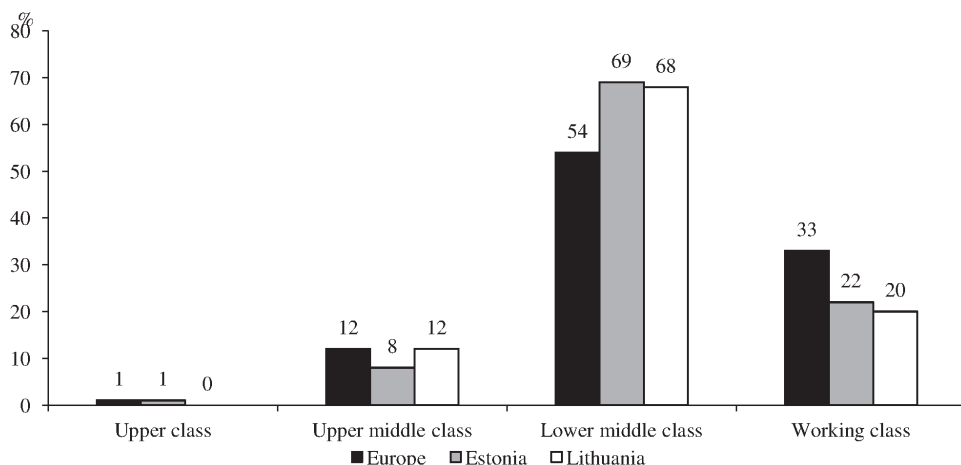
- “Consolidation of Democracy in Central and East Europe 1990–2001” (Wave I – 1990–1992, Estonia and Lithuania participated in the study, II wave – 1997–2001, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania participated in the study);
- “Social Change in the Baltic and Nordic Countries” (1993, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania participated in the study);
- European Social Survey (ESS) (Round 4 – 2008), Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania participated in the study);
- European Social Survey (ESS) (Round 6 – 2012), Estonia and Lithuania participated in the study).

**Main results of the survey “Consolidation of Democracy in Central and East Europe 1990 – 2001” in 1991.** At this stage, the study identified 4 major classes:

- Upper class – high society, elite;
- Upper middle class – representatives of the upper group of the middle class;
- Lower middle class – representatives of the lowest group of the middle class falling between the middle class and working class;
- Working class – people employed for wages, especially for industrial work. The working class by jobs includes blue-collar jobs, some of white-collar jobs and most of service jobs.

To analyse the study of 1991, we took for comparison the Europe’s average and data of the neighbouring countries which participated in the study. In fact, Lithuania and its neighbours Poland and Estonia have similar class structures with minor differences. However, the differences are rather significant in the lower middle class and working class compared with the European average. The upper class is omitted from the analysis due to a very small number of respondents (see Figure 4).

Figure 4  
Distribution of respondents into classes in 1991 study, by %\*



\* Europe: n = 12365, Estonia: n = 943, Lithuania: n = 918.

Source: elaborated by the authors.

The analysis of the respondents' current social status and their parents' class status reveals a certain relationship between the respondents' social status and their class origin: the lower is the class the respondent belongs to, the more it is dependent on the parents' social status. In Europe, 45% of respondents in the upper middle class belong to the same class as their parents; in the lower middle class, respondents in the same class as their parents account for 66% and in the working class – even for 82%. The situation is similar in Lithuania and in other countries, although the latter (except for Estonia) demonstrate greater differences compared with the average in Europe (see Table 1).

Table 1  
Respondent's social class and social origin, by % in each social class, 1991\*

Country	Respondent's social class	Parental social class		
		Upper middle class	Lower middle class	Working class
Europe	Upper middle class	45	38	13
Lithuania		58	38	3
Estonia		44	43	10
Europe	Lower middle class	9	66	24
Lithuania		12	74	14
Estonia		7	71	22
Europe	Working class	3	14	82
Lithuania		8	33	58
Estonia		3	24	72

\* Europe: n = 12365, Estonia: n = 943, Lithuania: n = 918.

Source: elaborated by the authors.

**Main results of the survey “Social Change in the Baltic and Nordic Countries” in 1993.** The comparative six-country project “Social Change in the Baltic and Nordic Countries” (involving Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden) (carried in 1993) was an attempt to describe the characteristic features and determinants of social transition. The quantitative survey data (1500 respondents in each country) provided comprehensive background information on the economic, political and social conditions in the countries concerned. Sociological class theories mainly described advanced capitalist countries. In the Baltic countries capitalist social relations were still more or less non-existent in that period. They had large numbers of wage labourers, but the majority of them were state employees. There were only few real private employers who hire more than a couple of employees, not to mentioned major employers with hundreds of employees. The majority of the new private enterprises in the Baltic countries were small, typically one-man companies. The wage-labouring middle class was also lacking from the Baltic States. Although there were engineers, doctors and teachers who occupy a middle class position, they do not constitute a social class proper. The Baltic countries were described as class societies in their making.

The Project analysis drew on Erik Olin Wright’s class theory to highlight the structural cleavages that could be found in the Baltic countries. Wright defines the new middle classes on the basis of control over three types of capital: financial capital, physical capital, and labour (the labouring activity of wage workers (see Kivinen 1989).

What did the Baltic countries look like in the light of Wright’s typology (see Table 2).

Table 2

## Classes in the Baltic countries, by %, 1993

Classes	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Petty bourgeoisie	6	8	9
Managers	11	14	11
Middle management	12	14	12
Supervisors	5	5	4
Working class	62	60	64
Total	100	100	100
n	724	791	944

**Note:** Operationalization of Wright typology was made by Raimo Blom (1992, p. 46): *Petty bourgeoisie*: under 10 hired employees, control over (minor) investments and physical capital and worker’s labour power. *Managers*: wage earners with decision-making authority in matters concerning the whole organization (including authority to suggest approval of matters). *Middle management*: authority to give advice in matters concerning the whole organization, or decision-making authority in matters concerning the whole organization but no control over other people’s labour. *Supervisors*: no decision-making authority but influence on the pay, promotions and discipline of other workers. *Working class*: excluded from control over investments, use of physical capital and other people’s labour power.

**Source:** Blom 1992; Blom et al. 1996.

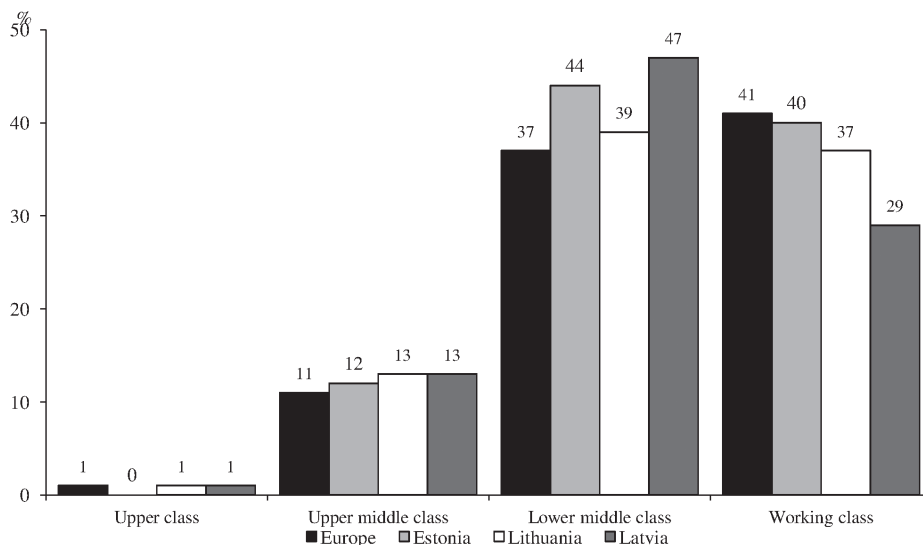
The following conclusions were drawn:

- The Baltic countries were wage labour societies. They had a very small petty bourgeoisie. This feature was reflected in the formation of the middle class(es). Baltic societies were working class societies; the working class was the biggest social class group in every country. The new middle classes were also quite large in comparison with the Nordic countries, for instance.
- There were also some important differences between the countries. In Lithuania, the share of petty bourgeoisie was bigger than in Estonia or in Latvia. In Latvia there were more people in managerial positions than in the other Baltic countries. In Estonia there are more people in autonomous/professional positions than in the other two countries.

Finally, researchers agree that this class typology represented abstract empiricism. In that period classes in the Baltic countries could be defined on the level of “classes as such”, but it was hard to speak about “classes for themselves”. Classes were not actors, there were hardly any class organizations, and class consciousness was virtual non-existent in the Baltic countries.

**Main results of the survey “Consolidation of Democracy in Central and East Europe 1990–2001” in 2001.** In 2001, at the second stage of the study, one more class was added to the classes identified in 1991. It was called the peasants class consisting of small landowners and agricultural workers. This, to a certain extent, reflected the specifics of the post-Soviet epoch involving large-scale restitution of private property expropriated by the Soviet system in the agricultural sector.

Figure 5  
Distribution of respondents into classes in 2001 study, by %\*



\* Europe: n = 16561, Estonia: n = 1000, Latvia: n = 1099, Lithuania: n = 1005.

Source: elaborated by the authors.

In 2001, the Lithuanian class structure was basically in line with the European average, except for insignificantly higher portions of the upper middle class and lower middle class (by 2%) and a lower portion of the working class (by 4%). Differences in individual classes were considerably higher in some other Lithuania's neighbouring countries (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 demonstrates the class status of the respondents and the social status of their parents in Lithuania and in the neighbouring countries.

With regard to social mobility, the analysis shows that Lithuanian indicators, as compared with the European average in 2001, were more or less consistent with the European indicators with some minor exceptions. The situation was similar in other neighbouring countries. Differences in intergenerational mobility were more significant in the lower middle class and lower classes.

In order to analyse intergenerational mobility and to compare surveys representing different periods and methods, we could single out two classes for the analysis and comparison purposes, in particular, the upper middle class and the lower middle class. One trend is clear right away: the higher is the social status of respondents, the smaller is the difference between their social status and that of their parents. Almost all respondents positing themselves in the upper middle class have the same or higher social status compared with their parents. Both in 1991 and 2001, as few as 3% of respondents on average in Europe reported having a lower social status than their parents; every second of them indicated having a higher social status than their parents. Naturally, this indicator varies from country to country within the limits of few percentage points. Table 3 and Table 4 present relevant indicators for Lithuania's neighbouring countries. The situation is similar with regard to the lower middle class, except that respondents who thought their social position was lower than that of their parents account for 10% or even more in some individual countries. This particularly refers to the 2001 survey.

Table 3

## Intergenerational social mobility in 1991, by %

Country*	Respondent's social class	Respondent's social position is		
		...higher than parent	...practically the same	...lower than parent
Europe		51	45	3
Lithuania	Upper middle class	41	58	1
Estonia		53	44	2
Europe		24	66	10
Lithuania	Lower middle class	14	74	12
Estonia		22	71	7

\* Europe: n = 12365, Estonia: n = 943, Lithuania: n = 918.

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Table 4

## Intergenerational social mobility in 2001, by %

Country*	Respondent's social class	Respondent's social position is		
		...higher than parent	...practically the same	...lower than parent
Europe		54	43	3
Lithuania	Upper middle class	59	39	2
Estonia		61	36	3
Latvia		50	45	5
Europe		46	43	11
Lithuania	Lower middle class	50	33	17
Estonia		47	39	14
Latvia		48	40	12

\* Europe: n = 16561, Estonia: n = 1000, Latvia: n = 1099, Lithuania: n = 1005.

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Analysis of the situation in Lithuania shows a rapid increase in the relative weighting of respondents in the upper middle class believing their social status is higher compared with their parents. In 1991, such respondents accounted for 41% and increased up to 3/4 in 2012. At the same time, just a small portion of respondents in this group assessed their social position below that of their parents (only 1 or 2 %). The situation is slightly different for the lower middle class. The number of respondents who think their social status is lower than that of their parents is growing over time. This could be explained to a certain extent by the economic situation existing in Lithuania. One of indicators in this context could be respondents' employment in the labour market. Although the level of unemployment was not measured in Lithuania in 1990, statistical data suggest that over 90% of Lithuanian people were employed with state-owned enterprises. The year 2001 saw a considerable improvement in the labour market. The level of unemployment that year was the lowest in Lithuania compared with the neighbouring Baltic countries – Latvia and Estonia. According to Statistics Lithuania, the rate of unemployment stood at 4.3% in Lithuania, 4.7% in Estonia and 6.0% in Latvia (Savickas 2017).

### Main results of the survey “European Social Survey (ESS)” (Round 4) in 2008

Analysis of the results from the European Social Survey Round 4 (2008) (Mauritti et al. 2016) presents an analogous picture. Although the model of the class structure is different, the situation remains the same as in 2001. The lower is the social status, the higher are indices for Lithuania vis-à-vis the European average. This is indicative of certain backwardness in the formation of the middle and upper classes.



Table 5

**The class structure of the countries participating in the ESS 4,  
Class 5 scheme, 2008**

Country*	Class position				
	White collar	Small bourgeoisie	Skilled workers	Unskilled workers	Peasants
Estonia	48.8	3.7	16.6	25.4	5.5
Latvia	44.1	3.1	16.2	27.1	9.5
Lithuania	43.1	3.3	17.1	28.2	8.2
Europe	50.8	7.3	12.8	23.5	5.6

\* Europe: n = 61004, Estonia: n = 1661, Latvia: n = 1980, Lithuania: n = 2002.

Source: Mauritti et al. 2016.

Compared to the European average, we can see that Estonia is in the most favorable situation among the Baltic countries. It is closest to the European average of these countries, while Lithuania and Latvia occupy roughly the same positions.

### Main results of the survey “European Social Survey (ESS)” (Round 6) in 2012

Analysis of the results from the ESS Round 6 (2012) (Mauritti et al. 2016) which, again, used a different model of class structure also demonstrates that Lithuania has a different situation which is actually the same as in the ESS Round 4 (2008) (Mauritti et al. 2016), i.e. the problem of middle-class formation still exists.

Table 6

**The class structure of the countries that participated  
in the ESS 6 survey, 2012**

Country**	Class position*				
	EE	PM	SE	RE	IW
Estonia	17.1	30.7	2.8	21.1	28.3
Lithuania	7.8	22.2	3.4	28.8	37.8
Europe	13.5	31.1	5.7	28.1	21.6

\* EE – Entrepreneurs and executives, PM – Professionals and managers, SE – Self-employed, RE – Routine employees, IW – Industrial workers.

\*\* Europe: n = 54673, Estonia: n = 2380, Lithuania: n = 2109.

Source: Mauritti et al. 2016.

Because the ESS databases are organized by country, the nationality variable was operationalized directly. Anyone who was 25 to 64 years old and had valid responses to ESS 2012 from the selected countries was included in the analysis. The operationalization of the social class variable was performed using the ACM typology.

This typology of class locations, which was proposed by the Portuguese sociologists João Ferreira de Almeida, António Firmino da Costa and Fernando Luís Machado, was used in several European analyses (Costa et al. 2002, 2009; Carmo, Nunes 2013; Nunes 2013). The operationalization of this typology uses occupation (ISCO 08) and employment status as primary variables, combining them in a matrix of class locations. The ACM typology incorporates the analytical dimensions and classification criteria of several noteworthy contemporary sociologists, such as Bourdieu (1979), Goldthorpe et al. (1980) and Wright (1997), for class analysis. It is well known that the theoretical connections and operationalization proposals of these authors differ greatly in many ways. However, they also converge in several aspects, particularly in the relational and structural features that are attributed to social classes. As far as analytical dimensions are concerned, this convergence only occurs up to a point. All of the authors emphasize socio-occupational relations, although Goldthorpe et al. (1980) and Wright (Wright 2015) formalize employment status or location in production relations to a greater extent than the others. Bourdieu's theoretical framework is highly multi-dimensional, particularly in the integration of culture, education, and lifestyles in his analysis of classes. Some of these dimensions, specifically qualifications, are explicitly included in Wright's analytical framework (Wright 2015) and are implicit in Goldthorpe classificatory scheme (Goldthorpe et al. 1980). Similar consideration can be given to more recent typologies of classes – whether they are the classifications of a micro-occupational character developed by Grusky and Sørensen (1998), the socio-economic categories proposed by Rose and Harrison (2007), which is essentially a new version of Goldthorpe's scheme (Goldthorpe et al. 1980), or the class typology developed by Savage et al. (2013), which was strongly inspired by Bourdieu but updated to reflect new social circumstances (Mauritti et al. 2016).

## Conclusions

To reach a deeper understanding of the structures of the Baltic societies, we need to take further analytical and theoretical steps. We understand middle class analysis as a research field involving multiple levels. Middle class analysis can be understood as a series of steps, with analysis of class structure representing the first step, from which we proceed to the next, higher steps of analysis (class situation, collective interest organizations, classes and the state).

The class structure in all countries is changing. The changes can however not be set in relation to another. The analysis of social structure in different countries moves mainly in parallel but is not strictly comparative nor by themes, nor by a large numbers for each country.

The greatest problems for the professions in the middle and higher categories (specialists and managers) are disproportion between their professional skills and the tasks they are given.

A recently observed trend is that a significant portion of people living in poverty tend to elevate their status rather than to lower it. According to the researchers, it's gradually becoming a shame to recognise publicly that you are poor.

Where the first studies (around the 1990s) addressed the issue of “discovering” the middle class, it has become obvious in recent studies that there are many social groups in society which way of living or lifestyle is close to, or approximates, the well-established standards of the middle class. The share of such people by self-identification with the middle class is also increasing in studies and surveys. The issues relevant for the Baltic countries today are those relating to the transformation of the working class or intelligentsia into the middle class and the trends of such transformation or formation.

It has been revealed that the Baltic countries middle class is far from being homogeneous. This group of people is greatly socially differentiated by age generations, urban / rural divisions and occupational groups. The middle class has many public-sector employees and grows on account of professionals, officers and highly-skilled workers. However, representatives of private business (newly established private business undertakings) are not much contributing to the growth of the middle class. Therefore, the current middle class in the Baltic countries represents the groups of people capable of having adapted to the new social reality. A social portrait of the middle class becomes more and more diverse, with people from different social strata and growing diversity of their occupational affiliation. This is blurring the line between representatives from the private and public sectors.

Thinking about future changes in middle class structure in the Baltic countries and considering middle class as a group of people with common social and economic features (level of income, education and professional status), we suppose (and agree with other authors in different countries (Tekes team (Finland) 2013) that in the future two subgroups will differentiate:

1. *Those that currently belong to the middle class i.e. the maturing middle class.* For this group, investments will become priority rather than consumption: investing in future, in extra sources of income and development of next generation. Most desired services will be education abroad, leisure for teenagers and family entertainment. As soon as the representatives of this segment have already purchased real estate, they will be primarily interested in home improvement, furniture, indoor design, and countryside real estate and apartments for their growing children.
2. The ‘wanna-be’ middle class or *new entrants*. Those who currently cannot qualify for the middle class due to early phase of career which is limiting income today but who have good educational background combined with ambition. Within soon they would need to solve the same challenges and tasks as the “current middle class”: finding a balance between work and family leisure, lack of free time, allocating a part of family income for investing in real estate and future of the family, finding products and services of best quality for themselves and for children.

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