

The middle class: the new convergence Paradigm

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Studiul își propune elaborarea unei paradigme noi cu caracter de sinteză asupra clasei de mijloc. Se susține că, în societatea modernă, clasa de mijloc este tot mai mult privită ca o precondiție a stabilității în structurile sociale, un mijloc de atenuare a inegalităților, ca o modalitate de reproducere a statu-quoului, ca un instrument al încrederii în viitor.

Modern society and its development can be – in a wider perspective – interpreted in terms of the emergence, evolution and – qualitative and quantitative – growth of the middle class strata. Figuratively speaking, the last century witnessed a large-scale swelling of the middle of the stratification pyramid, that is to say, a massive increase of the middle-part layers of the stratification body. The process has been particularly intensive in the West-European countries. Throughout the 1900-1980 period the share of white-collar workers – clerks, shop assistants, specialists, (salaried) managers, etc. – in Britain grew from 17,5% of the economically active population to 52% (Edgell 1993, 66). Accordingly, within the 1911-1991 period the percentage of blue-collar workers fell, in the same classical case of Britain, from 74,6% to 32,8% of the economically active population. The groups of the professionals, civil servants and managers have been on the growth too. Their portion grew from 7,5% to 29,2% at the end of the 1970's. The large decrease in the

share of manual workers has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the percentage of low-qualified non-manual workers – clerks, shop assistants, etc. (Li 1997, 2-3). The same tendencies have been typical of other contemporary societies too.

In a nutshell, the distance between the “top” and the “bottom” of the stratification pyramid has been undergoing a process of shortening and fragmentation. As a result, a brand new situation occurs, involving a restructuring of the framework social groups, economic actors and power players used to function within. And the “new” middle class has been the epitome of this completely new development. And, even more importantly, it has been the driving force behind it.

Now that we are at the turn of a new century, nothing suggests that the importance of the “middle class” is to diminish. The very breadth of the subject gives it an added interest – the “middle class” is to remain interesting in an ontological, epistemological and practical perspective. If we are to understand the ongoing pro-

cess of structural unification of the different societies, the middle class certainly must be a priority. Indeed, the principles and mechanisms of social differentiation and mobility have been manifesting a growing degree of structural similarity. The tendency is a global one, hence the ubiquity of modern social stratification.

Shortly, the middle classes have a strong potential for development and change. That is to say, the middle classes will continue to be the driving force behind modern society. Hence the importance of the middle class as a topic of interest. Researchers will continue to look into the issue, especially from a comparative perspective. Clearly, it is the comparative data from different parts of the world that provide us with additional evidence of the growing importance of the middle strata in the separate countries. Research experience from the 1990's speaks for itself. Again, not only have researchers found out that the comparative perspective can come in very handy in terms of grasping the global tendencies. They have also realised that comparative research can be very helpful in defining and understanding stratification on a national level. Indeed, current stratification processes and tendencies are complex ones. If we are to find a regular pattern in the diversity separate countries present us with, a focus on the middle class can prove very useful. Truly, social differentiation and inequality take new dimensions from the perspective of the convergence of stratification structures. And, not unexpectedly, it is the middle class that is at the centre of the process of stratification convergence.

Defining the middle class

The core concept

What is the underlying meaning of the concept of a "middle class?" What is it that makes the perspective of the middle class important? What is it that makes the very notion of middle class and middle class strata structurally and functionally important?

The middle class is, essentially, a macro-social group embracing individuals, or rather categories of individuals, marked by a unique general attitude towards life. Those are people who owe everything to their own efforts, resources, qualification, education, etc. Self-made as they are, middle-class people are furthermore self-employed and relatively free and autonomous in their work. Their knowledge and qualification, property and managerial skills are intentionally acquired and so is their social status. Hence the specific medial stratification status of the group, in terms of the existent social, economic, political, cultural, etc. inequalities. Indeed, it is status hierarchy – in terms of occupation, education, income, property and social prestige – that reveals the unique medial position of the middle class people. And the status of the middle class within that hierarchy is clearly a unique one – in-between the "upper-class" elite and the "lower-class" workers, in-between the upper crust and the wage earners, in-between the envy of the world and the pitied ones.

No doubt, people who are middle class are relatively well off, the absolute amount of property owned and income received being conditioned on the well being of the specific society as a whole. Good or even high prestige is another

important component, accordingly, characteristic, of the middle class status. Next comes the specific value system and culture, embracing a pro-active attitude towards life and a tendency for rational and modern consumption. Hence the individualistic middle class life style, innovative behaviour, realism, devotion to work, etc. No wonder, success and prosperity are the rule, rather than an exception among middle class people. Indeed, middle class actors are enterprising. This makes them active, flexible and adaptable in situations of uncertainty and quickly changing conditions. Hence the broader stabilizing effect the middle class brings into society as a whole. In a word, if society is to be genuinely coherent and integrated, a prosperous middle class is indispensable. Moreover, being a crucial factor for both stability and development, the middle class is to continue to play a vital positive role in society.

In concrete, empirical terms, there can be identified three basic middle class strata :

First comes the stratum of enterprising people running small or medium-size businesses, or what is known as small or medium enterprises – SMEs. These are people relying on resources of their own – money, property and possessions. The stratum embraces, in the first place, shopkeepers and traders, craftsmen and small-scale manufacturers. Most of the businesses in consideration are self-employed and family-run. The rest of the enterprising middle class stratum comes from the small-scale and medium-size agricultural sector. Farmers, accordingly, SMEs in the farming sector, are an important component of the middle class.

Then comes the stratum of public servants, administrators and managers (service class).² Those are well-qualified employees of the state and local administra-

tion, as well as people with administrative and supervisory positions in the private sector. The authority of this category of people, accordingly, their responsibilities, vary from the national level to the local one, from the chief or deputy chief of a department to the rank-and-file supervisors, from the mayor or deputy mayor of a major city to the small local official.

And, finally, there comes the intelligentsia, whose main resource is knowledge, culture, education, qualification and intelligence. The stratum embraces the various professionals and experts. Such are the specialists with higher education and genuine professional experience in their corresponding fields of expertise. Lawyers, doctors, architects and designers are intelligentsia too. So are also artists, writers, etc.

As regards leaders of the various local non-profit making organisations and initiatives, they belong to all three strata of the middle class. This is no surprise, considered that, as bread earners, public-spirited people are employed or engaged in the various public services and local business. Nevertheless, it is the local post-communist intelligentsia that has been the main driving force behind the “awakening” of the local non-governmental sector.

In my definition of the middle class three basic differentia are employed – the economic one (property), the organisational one (power) and the cultural one (education, qualification, expertise). These specific types of capital, resource or assets especially for “service class” have been differentiated and explicated by Austro-neo-Marxist Karl Renner (in 1953 and 1978) and then further developed by John Goldthorpe (1982), N. Abercrombie & J. Urry (1983), M. Savage (1992), Butler &

Savage (1995 : 27). E.O. Wright writes also about expertise (accordingly, education, culture), organisation (accordingly, power) and property. He sees them as the three basic axes of exploitation and power (Wright 1985 : 10,153). In his study *Property, bureaucracy and culture : The formation of the middle class in Britain*, Savage makes an even clearer distinction between the three types of resources or assets, accordingly, between the three subcategories of the middle class. He distinguishes between the economic, organisational and cultural dimensions of the middle class status, accordingly, between the enterprising middle class (embracing the petty bourgeoisie and the self-employed), the managerial middle class, and the expert middle class, or the professionals (Savage *et al.* 1992, 221-223). A distinction which, for its part, is close to Pierre Bourdieu's conception of there being three basic types of capital – economic, social and cultural (Bourdieu 1998, 466-484 ; 1985, 196-217). Similar, even though in somewhat less explicit terms, is B. Bruce-Briggs' distinction between a/ people with an independent source of revenue, such as a rent ; people running a business of their own ; the professionals ; b/ salaried managers ; salaried engineers, etc. ; and c/the salaried intellectuals and/or intelligentsia. Bruce-Briggs sees all three categories as comprising the new class (Bruce-Briggs 1979, 16-17). In *Class structuralisation and class consciousness*, Anthony Giddens too sees the three “marketable qualities” as respectively underlying the three basic social classes. Ownership of real estates and means of production is seen as underpinning the upper class, education and technical qualification – as underlying the middle class and, finally, work force – as

making possible the working class (Giddens 1984, 158).

Still, whatever the variations in interpretation, all presentations of the three basic types of resource come down to Max Weber's three-dimensional interpretation of the status and correlation of the different lines of stratification. It is a perspective that differentiates between three basic types of inequality : an economic one (in terms of property), and organisational and political one (in terms of power), and a cultural one (in terms of prestige). This is in essentials what experts in the field see as Weber's “multi-dimensional approach to stratification.”

In this regard, how do we distinguish a “small” business from a “medium-size” one ? Accordingly, how do we distinguish a “medium-size” business from a “big” one ? Qualitative distinctions may be deep but hard to quantify. Under the present Bulgarian circumstances, an enterprise employing – on a permanent basis – up to 10 workers can be considered a small business. Middle-size businesses, accordingly, employ from 10 to 50 workers or employees. If we take a look at the respective criteria used by sociologists in different countries, we see that they vary. E.O. Wright's classification seems to be the most common one – one or two persons make a micro-business, up to 10 workers make a small business, a middle-size business involving more than 10 workers and/or employees (Wright, ed. 1998). For John Goldthorpe the critical number of workers/employees distinguishing small businesses from medium-size ones is 25 (Erikson, Goldthorpe 1992 ; Goldthorpe 1997). Indeed, one can argue about the relevance of the different qualitative criteria, but, after all, it is the qualitative distinctions that really matter. Hence a couple of basic questions : Does

the owner directly participate in the work of the firm? Is he using resources of his own? Is he self-employed? In other words, as W.L. Warner and P.S. Lunt put it, is there a “direct economic involvement” (Warner, Lunt 1941)?

The “middleness” of the middle-class

Nothing is coincidental about the medial position of the middle class. If the middle class is situated in-between the “up” and the “down”, the “top” and the “bottom,” it has nothing to do with any conjunction of circumstances or a temporary configuration of factors. The distinction runs deep and transcends day-to-day social occurrences. Group characteristics and interrelations are underpinned and driven by deep-running societal structures and undercurrents. Here is an indirect evidence of that: the medial position of the middle class, accordingly, its three-dimensional composition and structure is a cross-border occurrence. It does not vary from region to region. Whatever the specifics of society, it is always the same social groups that are “in the middle.” Moreover, the social strata situated “above” and “below” the middle class are identical too. But then comes another question – how can this universality or ubiquity be explained?

The answer lies in the common basis and mechanisms of social group differentiation. Really, regardless of the specifics of modern societies, that is to say, irrespective of the specific historical background, cultural setting, current political and economic development, etc., the basic mechanisms of differentiation and reproduction of the specific social groups and strata remain the same. And it is the specific mechanisms of differentiation and reproduction of the small and medium-size business, the intelligentsia,

the professional and experts, and the public servants and employees, etc. that predetermine the role and position of the specific middle class categories in society. The sub-classes under consideration are nothing of an elite or upper crust. They do not run society. The middle class may be indispensable in terms of the administration and management its members provide, but it is not middle class persons that take the strategic decisions. In the final analysis, the middle class serves the upper class. On the other hand, though, middle class people are no riffraff either. By no means are they at the bottom. In economic terms, as well as in terms of culture and prestige, the middle class status is superior to the working class status. Middle class people may not as a rule employ hired labour, but they do as a rule run hired labour, such as white-collar and blue-collar workers. This is a crucial characteristic that distinguishes the middle class strata from the lower class strata. Indeed, nothing is middle class about manual and non-manual workers. The very essence and specifics of the small and medium-size business, the intelligentsia, the professional and experts, the public servants and employees, that is to say, their power, cultural and consumer status, predetermines and underlies their general stratification position, their medial status, their being a middle class. But then, the reiteration of the intermediate character of the middle class – of its being “in-between” the “upper class” and the “lower class” – is something of a vicious circle. And the only way of getting unchained from it is to concentrate on the middle class as such, accordingly, on the specific middle class strata as such.

After all, the “medial character” of the middle class, its middleness is only a consequence from its wider stratification

specifics. Shortly, it is not that the observation of the middle class being “in-between” is unimportant. Rather, the very concept of the middle class and its strata should be developed and specified in terms of the latest developments in social stratification studies.

***An arranged multidimensionality :
It is not enough to be well off to be
in the middle class***

The concept of the “middle class” has evinced a remarkable sustainability. One of the possible explanations for this is the sustainability of the social phenomenon itself. Indeed, the preservation and reproduction of social hierarchy have always been at the very heart of social organisation. Social differentiation and stratification have accompanied the very transition from a traditional to a modern society. After all, the transformation of medieval estates into classes did not annihilate social hierarchy. In a word, stratification and differentiation go hand in hand with social change.

Consequently, the “middle class” should not be thought of in terms of social classes alone. The perspective of social hierarchy related stratification is much more complete. In a word, the concept of “middle class” designates a relation – with the “upper class”, on the one hand, and with the “lower class”, on the other hand. But then, what is the dominant criterion along which social hierarchy functions? Or is there a single dominant criterion at all? Clearly, income and property, that is to say, welfare, differ from power and political influence. Culture and prestige, for their part, differ from life style, etc. Or maybe a synthesis can be the answer to the complexity of social hierarchy?

I would like to think that, indeed, there could be a comprehensive hierarchic system of stratification elements. That is to say, I believe there can be a comprehensive social status. Indeed, the middle class in general, accordingly, the specific middle class strata in particular have emerged at the intersection of a unique combination of specific social inequalities. No doubt, social inequality has many faces. Hence the need for a broader consideration of the specific implications economics, politics, culture, prestige, consumption, etc. have in terms of social inequality.

But then, a social group’s, respectively, a social strata’s multidimensionality is not a matter of eclectic accumulation of specific statuses and sub-statuses. What we witness in the case of social stratification is an arranged multidimensionality, a synthesis of different specific dimensions. Drawing on Max Weber’s three-dimensional notion of stratification, social status is not just a basic criterion of inequality, but rather a unifying underlying characteristic on which stratification hinges. That is to say, a social status is not just a matter of the level of prestige, authority, honour, respect, etc. This is the way Reinhard Bendix and John Scott, for instance, have been interpreting Weber’s understanding of stratification (Bendix 1960, 85-86; Scott 1996). Naturally, such a “synthesis” often faces the limitations of methodology. There are different hierarchies of inequalities, accordingly, different respective “status inconsistencies” (in the sense of Gerhard Lenski). But then, specific hierarchies of inequalities are only different aspects of an identical social reality.

The social-economic dimension is central to the understanding of stratification as a synthesis of different specific social

statuses. Still, the centrality of economics is understood not in a Marxian, but in a neo-Weberian perspective. The all-pervasive character of the economic dimension of social stratification is conditioned on the unity of the occupational status, on the one hand, and the property and financial (income) status, on the other hand. From this perspective, the occupational status, in particular, reflects the position of the individual within the system of work involvement, character and contents of work, ownership of the enterprise, work organisation and structure, management, etc.

In my approach I stick to a tradition in social stratification inquiries best represented by Warner and Duncan, Goldthorpe and Heath, Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portokarero, Treiman, Ganzeboom, Paul de Graaf, etc. And synthetic status indexes are at the very heart of all stratification classifications within this tradition. Moreover, it is the economic principle of social differentiation that all aforementioned authors see as being the underlying one. Hence the ubiquity of the “occupational status,” accordingly, the omnipresence of its basic material and empirical dimension – people’s “basic occupation.” Peter Blau and Otis Duncan have often stressed that: “The hierarchy of prestige and social class hierarchy are both rooted in occupational structure; the same applies to hierarchy in terms of political power and authority” (Blau, Duncan 1967, 7). In a word, occupational structure, accordingly, people’s mobility in terms of occupation, is a key to the understanding of stratification and class differentiation.

The accent on a single dominant principle of differentiation does not imply an underestimation of the other stratification criteria. The two types of criteria are

intertwined both in theory and reality. Indeed, social differentiation in terms of authority is directly dependent on economic power. Power and economics are just two sides of the same coin. And since stratification status in modern societies is dependent on the amount of both economic power and political authority, the degree of economic freedom acquired is dependent on both politics and economics too.³ Truly, a remunerative occupation is freedom. And so is an interesting occupation with even better prospects for the future. The middle class status gives you more independence. Indeed, middle-class work conditions and style of life are rooted in economic freedom. But then, power and authority related statuses can be autonomous. And so can culture and prestige related statuses. Positions related to power and authority, or culture and prestige can have a central leading role. The former socialist society is a good example of the predominance of power and authority over economics, culture and prestige. But now that society is in a state of post-communist transformation, the equilibrium is to be restored. The process is part of the wider global tendency of unification and convergence of the social structures in modern societies, modernization and post-modernization being strongly influenced by this specific aspect of globalization.

Within this context, a clear distinction can be drawn between the analytical class model expounded by John Goldthorpe and others, and the synthetic approach embraced here. In the first case much importance is attached to the “occupational status” as a stratification criterion. Still, no attempt is made at linking it to the other possible dimensions within a single stratification hierarchy (see G. Evans; P. Robert). Quite the opposite is the tradi-

tion going back to E. Laumann (Laumann 1966) and W.L. Warner (1941), and further developed by R. Blackburn, Ken Prandy, etc. at the Cambridge University, as well as by some French sociologists. Yet, in the second case there is a catch – “the co-ordination of incoherent” – in terms of research practice – dimensions of the status. My sympathies lie with the second approach. Still, I am fully aware of the methodological difficulties involved. Clearly, there are different autonomous status hierarchies whose unification into a single unambiguous synthetic hierarchy is practically unfeasible. Rather, the synthetic scale of statuses should better be looked upon as an “ideal type,” as a research projection, or, as Pierre Bourdieu puts it, a “median projection.” Regardless of all the limitations, the effort to replace the various specific classifications by a single multiple classification can prove worthwhile. The alternative is the presentation of social reality “in pieces.” This would contradict our understanding that reality itself is not fragmented. So we better put the different “pieces” together, “assembling” them into a comprehensive recreation of reality. In short, if the status of the middle class, and the “upper” and “lower” class too, is to be adequately explicated, this has to be done within the context of a multiple synthetic stratification hierarchy.

Here is an ongoing argument concerning post-communist reality: Is it enough to be well off to be middle class? It is often wrongly assumed that having a relatively high income makes you middle class. Yet, whatever the significance of income differentiation, money alone is not sufficient for a middle class status. An unemployed person or a pensioner in needy circumstances is no middle class, for sure. But then, a well-off criminal or mobster

is no middle class either. Indeed, can a wealthy landlord be considered middle class? Or is a young loafer or playboy middle class? Can your parents’ money make you middle class? Can spending alone make you middle class? Can easy living be equated with middle class identity? Can a shadowy business be part of the middle class? Those are important identification questions that concern modern society as a whole. But then again, even greater is their relevance to modern post-communist society.

In my opinion, only the landlord can be seen as middle class. But even in this case an important precondition must be fulfilled – the landlord must be personally involved in the process of renting out his property. That is to say, he is to invest his own ingenuity, initiative and efforts in finding customers, breaking deals, collecting rentals, etc. As for the other two cases, nothing is genuinely middle class about them, for sure. The loafer, in particular, does not work all, naturally. So, even if he does share his parents’ status, his own middle-class status is highly questionable. As for the shadowy businessmen, the black marketeers, etc., what disqualifies them from being middle class is there being no legal framework for their work. Of course, a shadowy businessman may have a legal business of his own. This does not make his criminal activities less illegitimate, though. All these marginal figures are a good illustration of the fact that money alone can not buy you a middle class status. However essential, property and income as such are not even an indispensable precondition for a middle class status. Shortly, income is not the most important prerequisite and criterion for being middle class. Again, wellbeing alone can not make you middle class.

Middle class people are typically law-abiding. They can be enterprising, but within the framework of law only. Middle class people are no frauds. Surveys have it that the “informal” post-communist economy of the 90’s has not been started by typically middle class people, but rather by qualified workers and people from the service sector. This finding applies to other Central and East-European countries too. As Claire Wallace and collaborators have found out, the “new people of enterprise” have typically no middle class background (Ringen, S. and Wallace, C. eds. 1994, 168).

the monopolization of scarce resources at the expense of other social groups.

However, no cut-and-dried distinction between legitimate and illegitimate activities can yet be drawn, now that society is still undergoing a process of transformation. On the one hand, formal legitimacy is often just a façade aimed at covering up an illegal business. On the other hand, though, bureaucracy in the post-communist world is still so strong that delinquent economic behaviour often happens to be the only way out of the bureaucratic labyrinth. Even lawyers find it frequently hard to tell right from wrong. Civil servants are often corrupt or at least disobliging.

Tab. 1. People involved in the informal economy – social group identity⁴

Social groups	Share
Qualified workers	44,6
Routine workers	15,7
Foremen, technicians	10,6
Agricultural workers	10,6
Unqualified workers	8,2
Intelligentsia, specialists, professionals	5,8
Self-employed	3,3
Managers	1,2
Total	100

Apropos of “well-being,” Max Weber has said that it is much easier for a man to acquire or lose a fortune than to change his education, manner, or style of life. Economic status may be alterable, but social background is forever. This is how a social stratum gets constituted, i.e. differentiated from other social strata. Hence social strata closure (Schliessung). Hence

Still, this difficult environment is a blessing in disguise for people who have always been good at dealing with it. Indeed, the readiness to grease somebody’s palm or make the best of the various loopholes in the legislation can only make you stronger.

The importance of income in the post-communist world has been often over-

stated in a yet another perspective. People use to say: "What kind of middle class are teachers, engineers, doctors, artists, etc. if their pay is so meagre. How can someone in such a squeeze be called middle class?" Indeed, cab drivers, guards, bouncers and even labourers in prosperous firms are better off in terms of pay. Still, high wages can not make you middle class. A labourer's money can be good but the labourer himself is working class nevertheless. And, vice versa, a university professor does not cease to be a professional only because of being underpaid. In both cases it is the broader social-economic and cultural status that underlies man's true position in society.

Still, the problem is more complicated than it seems. Indeed, how come that underpaid teachers and doctors hang on so hard to their middle class status? They do not go for the better-remunerated working class positions, for sure. Teachers and doctors driving taxis are just prominent exceptions to the rule.⁵ How come that in a situation of mass impoverishment and contrary to all expectations the share of the middle class in the country has not diminished. Looking at the figures from 1986, 1990, 1993-2002, we can easily see that the middle class has not shrunk either in absolute or relative terms. Henryk Domanski's comparative analysis suggests that the situation in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe is no different (Domanski 2000). Again, how come that regardless of all the layoffs, restructuring and emigration the middle class has neither disappeared nor shrunk? In a word, how come that social hierarchy is so stable?

The answer to this problem has been there in specialists' literature for quite a time. Whatever its significance as such, the financial (income) status has never been all-important, even though everyday

consciousness would presume otherwise. Even under post-communism, with all its contradictions, the financial status has been just an integral part of the broader social-economic status. And it is occupation that is at the centre of the social-economic status. But then, occupation is a complex phenomenon itself. Occupation is not merely a matter of the kind of work done. In its complexity, occupation reflects the character of the specific profession, i.e. the individual's place and role as defined by labour relations (character and contents of work). Accordingly, occupation reflects the individual's position as defined by market relations, i.e., as defined by social-economic relations as a whole. An individual's work position, i.e. authority, is another important aspect of occupation. Indeed, it does matter whether you are an owner, manager or ordinary worker, whether you are involved in the private or public sector, whether your position is with a local, national or foreign company. For their part, work relations reflect the basic elements of the cultural status – the degree of education, one's cultural level, etc. It is this set of dimensions that the form and size of one's pay, respectively, one's income, are determined by.⁶ However important, the financial (income) status is by no means the only social stratification factor in modern society. Income status may be indicative of how we survive and live, of what we buy and what are our pastime activities, but it does not really predetermine our being working class, middle class or upper class.

At first sight, modern society seems to be a tangle of non-transparent hierarchies and social contradictions. Yet, even under post-communism there is a reliable point of reference stratification researchers can focus on – the occupational sta-

tus. Surely, people are heavily underpaid. But, on the other hand, people do get paid, after all. Wages and salaries are meagre. Qualified, well-educated specialists do not get decently paid. Still, these facts alone create a somewhat distorted picture of post-communist reality. Indeed, the economy may not be functioning well. The system of wealth distribution is clearly unjust. This does not mean, though, that qualified well-educated people do not have a role in society. After all, our society does not consist of bodyguards and cab drivers only. At the very start of the political and economic transformations there were expectations that the middle class would largely disappear dissolved in the lower class. Nothing like this happened, though. Survey data have proved the pessimists wrong. Regardless of the ongoing process of brain drain, well-educated qualified people have retained their share in the total population. Actually, many young people go abroad with the sole purpose of getting top-notch education. Consequently, the pursuit of a higher social standing is still there.

My judgement of the current status of the middle class is substantiated by data from surveys conducted by different agencies at different times with different methodologies on different samples of the population. Again, social structure as a legitimate differentiation of society into social groups and in spite of all the transience of the current social-economic situation manifests a considerable degree of stability in terms of both self-reproduction and share in the total population. Henrik Domanski's analysis of the data from the 1993 "Social Stratification in Eastern and Central Europe after 1989" survey (conducted by Ivan Szelenyi and Donal Treiman in six post-communist countries) speaks for itself. Domanski has it that

during the 1988-1993 period (preceding and following the proverbial velvet revolution) and compared to the 1983-1988 and 1952-1963 periods Bulgaria had a mere 4-5% rise in the social mobility of men. It is remarkable that in Russia the rise in social mobility was just as insignificant, quite unlike what happened in countries like the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, where social mobility rose by 11-15%.⁷ Even more interestingly, during the 1948-1952 period (under a transition from capitalism to socialism) the four countries went through an even bigger (compared to the 1988-1993 transition from socialism to capitalism) social mobility (Domanski 2000, 32-43, 165).

Shortly, post-1989 processes of restructuring of the middle class have by no means been earth shattering. Actually, both journalists and even some sociologists have been inclined to exaggerate the intensity of the process. Stratification structures turned out to be rather conservative. It appears that they tend to reproduce along the same pattern, regardless of the type of modern industrialized society.

Moreover, whatever its stability and sustainability, the middle class is certainly not in a standstill in terms of internal dynamics. Neither is social structure as a whole in a standstill. Actually, the very consolidation of the middle class strata is a manifestation of the broader process of convergence, unification of the social structure. The tendency of formation of a new modern social structure is not a new one. It started in the previous society but is even more evident now. Hence the new tendencies in the development of social stratification studies. Since the beginning of the 1990's researchers have been increasingly preoccupied with the new tendencies of convergence in modern

social stratification. Different societies in the industrialized world have evinced similar patterns of social differentiation and class reproduction, which is to suggest that a common underlying tendency has indeed been there for a long time now. This fact has resulted in the emergence of a broad consensus on the issue (See: Treiman, Ganzeboom 2000, 126; See also: Parkin 1979, 42; Lipset 1981, 230; Langlois et al. 1994, 1-6, 20, 39-42; Hsiao ed. 1993 and 1999; Marshall 1997, 1-9; Kivinen ed. 1998; Tilkidjiev ed. 1998; Frizzell, Pammatt eds. 1996, 31-86, 165-182; Evans 1997, 215; Evans, Mills 1999, 23-42; Tos, Mohler, Malnar eds. 1999, 43-72, 111-191; Domanski 2000, 17-172; Hanhinen 2001, 13-16, etc).

Inter-group borders: “genuine” middle strata and “intermediary” strata

A number of specific questions arise regarding the borderlines separating the middle class strata from their neighbours. In other words, how do we distinguish between the “lower” elite and the upper middle class, accordingly, between the lower middle class and the “upper” working class? Those are questions that pop up every time a social group classification is attempted at. And the answers are frequently difficult and ambivalent. There are always borderline strata in any stratification hierarchy. Neighbouring groups tend to overlap, indeed. Moreover, forms of borderline overlapping vary from country to country. Hence the need for a case by case consideration of each inter-group borderline. Such an approach involves a great deal of ingenuity and intuition on the part of the researcher, though. Professionalism and experience in the field are crucial too. Truly, the risk of subjectivism is always there. But then, that is

what good unified qualifications are there for. Indeed, a good stratification theory can always come in handy.

Borderline cases are an important aspect of the broader problem of stratification fusion and diffusion. But then, representatives of what occupations can be considered borderline? Writers are divided on the issue. There are those who claim that typical representatives of the “new middle class” – highly qualified professionals and experts, managers and officials, etc. – are turning into a new “privileged class,” or almost a part of the ruling elite (neo-Weberians like John Goldthorpe, etc.). On the other side, though, there are those who argue that routine non-manual workers in the service sector and even qualified manual workers and technicians should be included in the middle class (neo-Marxists like Nikos Pulantzas, Erik O. Right, etc.).

Clearly, in the first case the elite and the upper middle class are confused. No doubt, representatives of the middle class can get incorporated in the upper class. Still, this is simply a case of social mobility, and not a structural anomaly. In the second case, quite the contrary, the incorporation of non-manual workers equates the middle class with “non-manual workers” as such. This “enlargement” blurs the specifics of the middle class and is largely due to the neo-Marxist tendency of overstating the distinction between hired labour and employers. Just the way the interpretation of upper middle class statuses in terms of the elite is more or less explainable with the neo-Weberian tendency of understating the distinction between hired labour and employers.

The problem stands otherwise: Because of the absence of clear-cut distinction lines in stratification and society as a whole, many segments of social hierar-

chy have a “floating” intermediary status. Routine white-collar workers and qualified blue-collar workers and technicians are a good example of such a borderline status. By no means are they low-status in terms of education and qualification. This makes some researchers consider them “lower middle class.” Nevertheless, routine white-collar and qualified blue-collar workers cannot be a middle class per se. In the final analysis, they are at least a jot below what might be considered genuine middle class position. These relatively sizeable groups are, indeed, in many ways reminiscent of the middle class. Consequently, they can well be seen as intermediary strata of the lower level.⁸

Such a stricter interpretation of the middle class is quite in line with developments in social stratification theory. Indeed, 40-50 years ago the middle class used to be looked upon as a mere conglomerate of all kinds of people performing non-manual work. Nowadays the concept is much more streamlined, of course. It embraces only middle class proper, i.e. professionals, civil servants, managers, as well as small businessmen and entrepreneurs.

Hence Goldthorpe’s stress on the intermediate characteristics of lower status non-manual workers’. Quite unlike the better educated and better qualified “service class,” non-manual workers are not that well paid. More importantly, they do not have the job security or career prospects of the service class (Goldthorpe 1982, 171). In Mike Savage’s assets theory routine workers are explicitly excluded from the “three middle classes” – the entrepreneurs, the managers and the professionals (Savage 1992; Li 1997, 48).

Data from surveys conducted in different countries have it that routine non-manual workers are a specific intermedi-

ary stratum not only in terms of their objective status characteristics, but also in terms of their own self-perception. Routine non-manual workers may not see themselves as a working class, but they do not consider themselves middle class either. On the other hand, data on Bulgarian society from surveys conducted within the 1977-2000 period have it that routine non-manual workers – as a truly intermediate stratum – easily make it to the middle class.

The lack of a clear notion of the middle class made some experts give up on the problem (Holmwood, Stewart 1983). Now that the intermediate strata have been excluded from the analysis, we can focus on the “genuine middle class,” namely the aforementioned three middle classes – the entrepreneurs, the managers and the professionals. Hopefully, this will give the analysis a much clearer perspective, thus avoiding any ambivalence.

The rational and enterprising social actor

The middle class is a unique social-group actor. Indeed, it is the realization of the fact that the middle class is epitomised by a specific rational enterprising actor that makes the problem of the middle class interesting and promising. Here is what makes the middle class actor indispensable:

- he is more active and enterprising;
- he is more educated and qualified;
- he is more rational and flexible.

Hence his good acquaintance with culture, his good (in material terms) prospects for the future. Indeed, it does really make a difference whether you are lower, middle or upper class.

Always have social theories defending “equality” and “social homogeneity” been supportive of an equal start. What they

actually stand for is social equality regardless. The approach of those who see the importance of the middle class is completely different. Indeed, there is no point in trying to achieve equality at any cost. All people cannot be equal all the time. There is no such thing as “equal chances.” Like it or not, people are born different and brought up different. Social circumstances vary and so do family backgrounds, ethnic origins, cultural milieus, etc. Doing away with poverty is a good thing but eliminating social differences altogether is nothing but an ideological mantra. You better accept that there is a hierarchy of social inequalities and see that adequate action is taken accordingly.

Middle class studies do not by any means deal with social classes as a whole. It is the educated, qualified, enterprising, pragmatic members of society students of the middle class are focused on. Those are persons whose life prospects are bright enough to strive for the preservation of a “positive” status quo. Hence the indispensability of the middle class groups, strata and categories. But then, the middle class is also a sort of vanguard, a major contributing factor to growth and modernization. No wonder, the “middle class paradigm” may sound like an ideology.⁹

In a conceptual perspective, and not in terms of individuals themselves, the middle class is a matter of there being an active enterprising social-group subject. As a social-group actor the middle class embraces people that are active, enterprising, rational above the average. In a word, the middle class actor is above the average in every possible respect. The realization of this fact is central to the very notion of the middle class. Again, pro-activity and rationality are a funda-

mental common denominator for an extremely diverse aggregate of people and groups. And the spirit of enterprise is quite typical not only of entrepreneurs proper, but also of the other two segments of the middle class. As Mike Savage puts it: “The activity of managers and professionals is conditioned on their ability to be entrepreneurial, while physical workers’ status is increasingly dependent on the overlying strata” (Savage 2000, 156).

The notion of rationality and entrepreneurship as a common generic feature of all middle class people can be traced down to Max Weber. To Weber “intellectuals are by definition, and the business circles (traders and craftsmen) – at least potentially, bearers of theoretical, in the first case, and practical, in the second case, rationalism, that can take different forms” (Weber 1916/2001, 161).

Hence the considerable potential for interpreting middle class functioning, accordingly, the middle class strata themselves, in terms of the rational choice theory, accordingly, the rational action theory. A number of sociologists have successfully applied this perspective in the 1980’s and 90’s.¹⁰ Goldthorpe, for instance, points out that while all individuals act rationally, representatives of the different classes act differently nevertheless. Indeed, identical attitudes result in different actions. The thing is that the specific possibilities and restraints that go with the particular class status bring about the emergence of different types of rationality.¹¹ In a word, rational choice and rational action are, in a way, epitomised by the middle class. However truthful, though, such a position must not be overstated. Again, the middle class does not need to be idealised.

Moreover, it does not seem right a social group to be looked upon in “posi-

tive” or “negative” terms only. There is always some ambivalence about social groups. Their functioning is dependent on the confluence of various factors. Political and economic structures vary, and so do political, economic and cultural contexts. Fr. Hayek, as well as D. Bell and A. Gouldner later, have been, for instance, keen to stress the “ambivalent nature” of both the “technical intelligentsia” and the “humanitarian intellectuals” (See: Gouldner 1979, 8-20). Still, none of these writers has ever questioned the basic positive qualities of the middle class – its ingenuity and willingness to take risks.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that the elite too is made up of enterprising persons. It is no accident that the elite is in many ways superior to the middle class. The case of the elite is too specific, though, because its representatives:

- rely on means that have been inherited, and have not been earned, quite unlike the case of middle class people;

- have been as a rule recruited from the middle class strata, which makes middle class people potential members of the elite, as has been the case with many entrepreneurs, specialists, experts, public servants, party officials, etc.;

- often, within a reverse “circulation of the elite,” lose their upper class position and become members of the middle class.

In *The Quiet Revolution*, his best-seller, and *Modernisation and Post-Modernisation: Cultural, Economic and Political Changes in 43 Societies*, his later major opus, Ronald Inglehart makes an attempt at explaining the changes social structures in modern societies have been going through. And a key to the problem is, as the author sees it, the replacement of the former material value system dominance

with a “post-materialistic” immaterial value system dominance (Inglehart 1977; 1997). Quite in line with Inglehart’s finding is the realisation that a change of middle class perception of work has occurred in the last two or three decades. Indeed, no more is work just a means of earning money and survival. It is work for the sake of work itself that is increasingly pursued. Interesting, autonomous work is valued higher than solely lucrative work. Middle class people enjoy what they are doing. Work is fun to them. Hence the new role of work for the middle class. Work is increasingly seen as a challenge, as a means of self-realisation. And if a person is to make a career and enjoy what he is doing he must be a professional. Hence the need for more knowledge and more qualification. Middle class people are highly motivated and very enterprising. But more importantly, they like it being that way, which is only to emphasise the key importance of characteristics such as rationality and enterprising for the understanding of modern middle class strata.

Autonomy in terms of resources and work

Middle class people reproduce their social status through their own work and efforts mainly. This is a point that has been repeatedly made in specialist literature. Indeed, self-sufficiency is probably the one key social characteristic an analysis of the middle class should proceed from. Again, the independent way middle class people go about work and occupation is crucial for their status.

Still, middle class independence must not be overstated. Nobody is absolutely self-sufficient. There are only degrees of individual freedom. No total autonomy is

there in society. You do not own freedom. But then, you do in a sense own your skills and willingness for work. This makes work a precious possession of yours. In a word, if you are a middle class person pro-active life strategy is your most important asset. Indeed, skills and qualification make you independent. But so do also ambition and the spirit of enterprise. Apropos of ambition, middle class people's determination to provide for their families is a vehement factor for work and enterprise. Indeed, you cannot explain a story of success in terms of inherited or acquired wealth only.

Independence and self-sufficiency is not necessarily synonymous with either self-employment or ownership of the enterprise. Even though, of course, both owners of small firms and the self-employed are typical representatives of the middle class. Middle class people are their own masters. This is their broadest possible definition. As Melvin Kohn and Karmi Schooler have shown, independence and ingenuity play a crucial part in acquiring a middle class status. Indeed, it is middle class people that are independent, flexible and adaptable enough to turn out a success (Kohn, Schooler 1983). These assumptions have been corroborated a couple of years later in a comparative analysis of social structures in the USA and Poland (Kohn, Slomczynski 1990).

Hired work force constitutes a considerable portion of the "new middle class" in the developed world. Still, these are no ordinary workers. Middle class employees have a unique qualification and training. Their experience, skills and responsibilities make them really special. Truly, employed middle class persons are highly regarded by their employers. This makes their qualification and training a precious asset for both the employer and

the employees. Again, in the case of the middle class experience and skills are often more valuable than purely material assets. Indeed, personal characteristics can bring in a bigger income than, say, realty or movable property. Moreover, people in good positions can expect a further progression in their careers. Prospects at work are of fundamental importance to middle class employees. Truly, it does pay to be educated and qualified. People in well-paid middle class positions are, moreover, well insured and get good pensions, not to mention the various perks that go along with their jobs. John Goldthorpe has been very keen to stress that the form of employment of the service class has little in common with the form of employment of the working class. In the case of the service class employment is more than a work contract. Managers and experts are highly valued by their employers. And what employers esteem most is, in the case of managers, proper managerial skills, and, in the case of experts, proper competence and expertise. Clearly, managers and specialists are considerably independent at their workplace. Moreover, they are also in a distinctively "privileged" position, not only to other non-manual employees, but also compared to small entrepreneurs and the self-employed (Goldthorpe 1982; 1997; 2000).

The problem of independence is also a matter of form and degree. In his article "The Russian middle class - dying away or re-emerging?" the Finnish sociologist Markku Kivinen pinpoints the social developments underlying the emergence of a new middle class. These are professionalism and independence at work, the institutionalisation of new formal hierarchies at work and in the business structures, the strict division of labour

between clerks and management proper, the emergence and development of a strong public service sector. From this points of view the “core” new middle class strata embrace all employees that fit the description of being independent and self-sufficient in terms of professional skills, having a free hand at work, and/or scientific and technical information (Kivinen 1998). These are actually the three basic types of functional autonomy that can help identify a new middle class status.

Independence at work, accordingly, through work, can help make new middle class identification more reliable. Indeed, specific social classes have different degrees of autonomy. New middle class autonomy differs – in terms of both degree and substance – from both working and upper class autonomy. For instance, the distinction between big and small business is not only a matter of money and ownership. Participation in the process of work at the enterprise, accordingly, in the process of running the enterprise, is crucial too. Of course, the functioning of a person is largely dependent on whether he has a share in the enterprise he is employed at or whether he has to work part-time in other places too. In a word, ownership does give a greater independence. Accordingly, serving different masters does lessen your capacity to express yourself.

Agent of collective action

The notion of social stratification is important not only with regard to arriving at a mere classification of the existent social strata. Even more important is the subordination of the different social statuses in terms of wealth, power and prestige. It is this commonality of interests that prompts members of the same strata act in a consistent and coherent way.

Again, it is social strata as a collective agent of activity that make it possible for people to generate stability, instability or change. As Nicholas Abercrombie and John Urry have been keen to stress in relation to the “service class,” the problem of a social group’s borderlines is inferior to the problem of how the class itself got constituted as a moving force in society (Savage 1992, 5-18).

If an aggregate of individuals is to be treated as a specific social group strict social-stratification criteria must be employed. Following Marx and Weber, the individual’s position within society’s economic, political and socio-cultural structures must be established. This involves specialist argumentation as to what are the basic socio-class positions in society. The commonality of specific economic, political and cultural interests is a key to the understanding of modern stratification structure. Indeed, it is interests social groups differentiate and consolidate along. This leads to purely demographic implications such as an increase in the incidence of intra-group marriages. Increased intra-group mobility is another consequence. A growing sense of socio-cultural group identity too is a result from there being a specific social-group structure. Friends and relatives, as well as the various intra-group institutions contribute greatly to the emergence of a unique group consciousness among individuals (Goldthorpe 1982, 167). This entails the need for tracing down the corresponding common models of behaviour, accordingly, the necessity of studying the ensuing unique group ideology and political identity in each group. Only thus the potential for collective class action can be explained (McAdams 1987, 24).

In other words, to differentiate between macro-social groups is equivalent

to grasping their “activist” “super-individual” nature. But how real are social macro-groups? Are they not merely an invention aimed to serve the analysis? Are there really group agents differentiated along specific social statuses and unique behavioural patterns? Those are questions that are extremely relevant to the economies and societies in transition. Indeed, are there middle class group agents in former Eastern Europe? A positive answer would corroborate the very existence of a vibrant middle class in the region.

It would be an oversimplification to regard collective action as a co-ordinated public activity only. There is a long-standing sociological tradition (Dord Lukac, Eduard Thomson, Erik O. Right) of considering collective action on different levels. First come strategic collective action – practices and activities representing group interests. Then comes normative collective action – convincing, moralising, justifying, and legitimizing, underlain by unified evaluation models and standards, as well as by similar visions of the future. Next comes traditional collective action – practices of regression, resistance and suspicion, underpinned by common traditions, norms and customs. And finally comes expressive collective action – identification with leaders and symbols, the result of shared feelings and memories.

The underestimation of the “activist” perspective has often led to serious miscalculation on the part of the ruling class with regard to the middle class. Middle class social actors contribute greatly to stability in society. But they can be the moving force behind social change too. That is to say, not only the status quo, but also the changes in the status quo are largely in the hands of the middle class.

Middle class strata have both the intellectual and organizational potential to promote alternatives. Many historic upheavals in modern history could be interpreted in terms of middle class activism. For instance, it was no other than the intelligentsia, the experts and the newly emerging enterprising class that were the driving force behind 1989 political transformations. Not unexpectedly, though, since they had an interest in the development and modernization of society.¹² Again, it was the highly qualified and highly educated strata of the population that were active in toppling down Suharto’s regime in Indonesia. Jacek Kurczewski provided convincing evidence that the emergence of the glorious “Solidarity” trade union in Poland was essentially a work of the middle strata (Korzhev 1999, 130). In all former socialist countries it was the middle class strata and especially the urban intelligentsia that needed and initiated change (Elster, Offe, Preus 1998, 6).

In relation to post-communist Eastern Europe the term “middle strata” seems more adequate than “middle classes.” The reverse could create misunderstandings, considered the ambivalence of the term “classes” in New Europe. Moreover, the heterogeneity and fragmentation of East European middle class strata is quite specific. People in Eastern Europe are in a difficult economic situation yet. A real market economy is still not there. Neither is there a genuine labour market. Unnecessary regulations and the bureaucracy hamper free initiative. The state budget is very restrictive. The shadow economy is growing. Incomes are still very low. There is a general sense of insecurity. Small and middle businesses get suffocated. In this situation the term nominal middle class seems quite relevant. Indeed, middle

class groups and strata in the East are still middle class only by name. Again, the middle class in Eastern Europe has not been able to realize its true potential. The major categories – experts, managers and entrepreneurs – are already there, but they have not still been given a chance to manifest their true capacity. In a word, the middle class is still undersized not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of influence.

Then, what is the use of the general notion of a social class? What good does it do to generalize about macro-social groups? Why do we have to go beyond the specific level of the social strata? What is the use of the “middle class” if most of the analysis is done in terms of the “middle class strata?” After all, would it not be better to stay on the level of the middle class strata alone? This would, in theory, streamline the analysis, making it possible for the researcher to focus on the managers, entrepreneurs, specialists, etc. Thus the “meso-level” could, hopefully, supersede the “macro-level.” Is not after all simplicity a good thing? But then, where would this lead us in the long run? How do we end up if we do away with the “classes?” Will we do better with the strata alone? The thing is that any reduction can lead to another reduction, only to make yet another reduction possible. So, we can end up facing the mere sensory reality of the individuals comprising the managers, entrepreneurs, specialists, etc., this fragmentation of the “social structure” making stratification analysis completely pointless. In a word, we do not

gain much by doing away with generalisation and conceptualisation. Quite the contrary, indiscriminate reductionism can lead to senseless nominalism.

As a macro-group, the middle class relates to a relatively broad “median” sector of the social pyramid. This makes it a basic element of the highest possible level of stratification generalisation, the highest possible level of group synthesis, the highest possible level the social inequality hierarchy. The middle class functions within the highest possible – societal – level of society. Truly, as elements of this most abstract aspect of society as a whole, the basic – upper, middle and lower – classes may in themselves look somewhat obscure (as “poor abstractions,” as Marx has it in his “Economic Scriptures”). Nevertheless, these abstractions are very useful when it comes to getting a view of the big picture of social differentiation and inequality. They help us avoid overlooking crucial distinctions in social theory and reality.

In a nutshell, the concept of the middle class is completely relevant. It does a very good job, indeed. Not so much by itself, though, as through the specific “groups” and “strata” the concept functions through. Still, this does not diminish the importance of the broader concept itself. The macro, meso and micro levels of stratification analysis are, indeed, so intertwined – in both real life and theory, history and current events, the world as a whole and each separate country and region in particular.

Note

1. Prof. Dr. Nikolai Tilkidjiev is the head of the Department “Communities and Social Stratification” at the Institute of Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. This article is a very small part from his monography *The Middle Class and Social Stratification* (Sofia: LIK Publishing House, 508 p. – in Bulgarian). For contacts: nikolai.tilkidjiev@gmail.com
2. Including public servants ranking just below high officials.
3. In the spirit of classical social thought, “freedom” is meant in the broader sense of conditions favouring the development of personality.
4. The “informal” economy is assumed to be the realm of tax-evading economically active persons. The specific categories of the “informally” economically active are differentiated as shares of the totality (Chavdarova, 2001, 125-126).
5. Stories of professionals eking out a miserable existence as taxi-drivers have been blown out of proportion by the press. In fact, the actual frequency of such cases has been relatively small.
6. One can argue that along with one’s legal income there can be also illegal, shadow revenue. But then, what I see as stratification is only the *legal, official, legitimate* one. It is this type of social differentiation the bulk of the population is involved in. This is not to say, though, that I deny the existence of widespread informal, unofficial, illegal stratification. Neither is it to say that I am inclined to understate the existing contradictions and conflict between official and unofficial stratification.
7. Colleagues have been stressing the difference between the so-called “prize students” and “poor students” in the former Eastern Block. The four countries in Central Europe are seen as having neo-liberal regimes and “capitalism without capitalists,” while countries in Southeast Europe and Russia are considered to have neo-paternalistic regimes and “capitalists without capitalism” (See: *Making Capitalism without Capitalists* – Eyal, Szelenyi, Townsley 2000).
8. Not only do writers such as John Goldthorpe distinguish between middle and intermediary social strata. They also employ different specific terms for the purpose.
9. The middle class is no vanguard proper, though. No analogy can be there with the idea of “the leading role of the proletariat.” Nevertheless, the danger of the middle class paradigm turning into an ideological doctrine must not be understated. A good example of overstating the “mission” of the middle class is Hungary in the 1930’s, as Tamas Kolosi has been keen to stress (Evans, Kelley, Kolosi 1992, 462).
10. I mean classical works by authors such as John Elster, James Coleman, Neil Smelser, Peter Hedstrom, Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Gerald Prein, etc. (See: Elster 1986; Coleman 1986; Smelser 1992; Hedstrom, Swedberg 1994). I mean also the *sociological social-stratification* reconsideration of “rational choice” and “rational action” by John Goldthorpe, Antony Heath, etc. (See: Blossfeld, Prein eds. 1998; Goldthorpe 2000).
11. For instance, it has been pointed out, the finding being backed up by data from various surveys, that *environmental concerns* are characteristic of post-modern Western *middle class culture* (Skogen 1996, 452-471). This comes as no surprise, though. Education, intelligence and culture make middle class people natural environmentalists.
12. In 1979 Frank Parkin wrote that in Soviet Russia the main conflict was between the strivings of the intelligentsia and the total dominance of the apparatchiks.

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Abstract

Throughout the modern world the middle class is increasingly looked upon as a precondition of stability in the social structures, as a means of softening social inequalities, as a way of retaining the status quo, as an instrument of achieving confidence in the future. And the noteworthy thing is that neither the perspective, nor the contexts vary a lot, whatever the regional and cultural specifics, regardless of the historical and political background, irrespective of the degree of economic development, etc.