

What about Middle Class? Theoretical Approaches and Realities

Andreas N. Lytras¹

Abstract

This article regards a systematic, but selective, searching in a big pool of ideas, terms, data, and ideologies. The middle class is a part of the “trinity” of class and social analysis, for two (or more) centuries. Its official birth is done in the “place” of liberal political economy. In the common empiricism of the British Empire or of the Anglophone counties, every person, who isn’t an aristocrat, is a member of middle class. A serious question is the next: where and why the boarders between the three classes are been located? The classic analysis has developed discussable, but explanative, criteria for the description of economic or social classes. The contemporary theories have delivered more complexity of answers, but have not overcome the initial empirical image. The middle class remains a phantom. It is a spiritual inhabitant of beliefs, but we can find it only in shadows, as an active social subject. Is it a real social class, an intellectual problem, or a distortion? In this article the elaboration of the different approaches and their confrontation with data are the first steps for the creation of a brief, but systematic, description for the trajectory of middle class.

Key words: Classes, middle class, realities in employment, recent theories, social structure

1 Motivations and targets of the analysis

The middle class is the most ambiguous social class (or stratum) in modern theories. Its ambiguity is one of the reasons for alternative using of the term within social and political analysis. Many times, the flexibility of the term permits the motion easily from a meaning to another meaning (such as the income ranking, the position in production, the role in organizations of labor or according cultural variations). Some recent analyses (scientific or official) insist strongly that the middle class covers a wide social spectrum of society (US Department of Commerce et al., 2010; Kharas 2010). Other theories express the approach, that the modern society is a more complex structure (Savage et al. 2013). According different criteria, the interim categories (the alternative and shadow meaning of middle class) of the abovementioned complexity have the potential for the theoretical overcoming of the idea of absolute social polarization. We are going to elaborate the classical and the modern theories and accordingly to compare their estimations with recent data. The systematic discussion on the orbit of contemporary middle class within the social structure is our final attempt.

2 In the beginning of all modern class theories: A. Smith on the wealth of nations

Before any other analyst, A. Smith (1887, pp. 50-54) has invented classes as groups of agents of particular kinds of incomes, which participate in every economic transaction. Therefore their incomes are fundamental parts of every price. The fundamental incomes are the profit, the wage and the ground-rent. The profit is the income of stock holders (capitalists), the wage is the income of workers, and the ground-rent is the income of landlords. Undoubtedly, the wage workers are the sole source of profit for stock holders, according to A. Smith’s perception (ibid, pp. 48-50). There isn’t any clear approach on the hierarchy of these three classes. We should considerate that, in this perception, the upper class is composed by landlords, the middle class by stock holders and the lower class by workers. The concrete analysis includes, of course, two other groups with complex incomes, namely the farmers and craftsmen.

¹ Professor at Panteion University (Department of Sociology).

The farmers² and the craftsmen are autonomous producers, but they are at the same time partly entrepreneurs and partly wage laborers. They have to use their own small capital and exploit or use their own labor. After the last explanation, we could understand two alternative meanings of the A. Smith's elaboration. The old upper class (landlords) is a leaving but still active social class in the era of his writings, due the special phenomena of the English paradigm (the landlords are the owners of land, the yeomen use the land for profit in markets and hire workers who are the wage-earners) of the transition to capitalism [c.f., Brenner 2002 (1985)]. That's a possible (and initial) explanation for an image of the capitalists somehow as a middle class of A. Smith's social hierarchy (during the early industrialization). In a less clear sense, the more strange social groups, those with complex incomes, are the basic corpus of the real middle class of capitalist society.

During the industrial revolution, the capitalists seem to everybody as the new prevailing and dominated class. Despite this reality, it is regular, that the nominal strength of some common slogans (as the middle class) of the past remains strong for long time after the overcoming of the relative realities. The official institutions are indifferent on the changing of the terminology of past time (c.f., Hobsbawm 1999, pp. 154-157). The capitalists have no interest to lose their mental connection with the wide social masses. In USA the slogan, that all the people of the state are members of middle class, reminds to everybody its social unity. In this official sense, the independence was the result of revolution against the English upper class (aristocracy) and its tyranny. The unity of people, through middle class is a valuable instrument for the political stability and continuity (Moskowitz, 2012). In this peculiar unity the real participants are rather ambiguous. At the end of the day, all the entrepreneurs, employers, owners, and wage-earners (with stable employment or income) are possible members of middle class. All the people participate in the "middle class", but this group isn't a class. Alternatively, it is the other name of a new-born nation. The insisting to this special terminology is an official dogma for the social conditions in U.S., too. But there is a question: who are included in nowadays upper class and who are included in lower class? Otherwise, the middle class isn't an intermediate class and the term is an unbelievable slogan.

Table 1: Pre-industrial social structure according A. Smith

Theory or Approach	Upper Class	Lower Class	Middle Class	Holders of Complex incomes	Criteria
A. Smith	Landlords	Workers	<i>Stock holders</i>	<i>Farmers and Craftsmen</i>	Fundamental and/or Complex Sources of Incomes

3 Classical Marxism and early Marxists' debates

For K. Marx and classical Marxism, at the time of the conclusion of industrial revolution, is absolutely clear that the upper class of the old regime is been in dramatically fast procedure of degradation of its role. On the one hand, the capitalist class is then, due to its unstoppable increase of wealth and power, the real established ruling class. On the other hand, the working class is the object of exploitation as the sole source of surplus-value (in the terms of A. Smith's perception: the whole amount of profit) and the lower class of capitalism. The class polarization is firm and the future is going to be a social tragedy, with extremely large inequalities between the two classes. In the Marxian model, some middle strata exist, too. They include the farmer and the craftsman of the A. Smith's analysis and also the small merchants and the small owners of the towns. Their name is peculiar, but well known in continental Europe: "la petite bourgeoisie" (more common: "petty bourgeoisie", in English). The aforementioned peculiarity is something like their description by K. Marx: (the petty bourgeois) "as capitalist he therefore pays himself his wages and draws his profit on his capital; that is to say, he exploits himself as wage-labourer, and pays himself, in the surplus-value, the tribute that labour owes to capital" (Marx, 1863). This class or these strata are going to be timid or to be abandoned during the development of capitalism: (the petty bourgeois) "...will either gradually be transformed into a small

² The land is for them only an instrument.

capitalist ...or he will suffer the loss of his means of production and be transformed into a wage-labourer” (ibid).³ For some decades the term of petty bourgeoisie⁴ was a well established synonymous of “middle class” or “middle strata”.

Table 2: Marxian approach and Marxists’ debates on social structure

Theory or Approach	Upper Class	Lower Class	Middle Class	Criteria	Prognosis
K. Marx	Capitalists	Proletariat	<i>Petty Bourgeoisie</i>	Relations within Production and therefore Social Relations	Social Polarization between Capitalists and Proletarians
E. Bernstein	Capitalists	Proletariat	<i>Petty Bourgeoisie</i>	Relations within Production and therefore Social Relations - an emphasis on income differences	Non Confirmation of Marxian prognosis. <i>Petty Bourgeoisie</i> is living class at the end of 19 th century
R. Luxemburg	Capitalists	Proletariat	<i>Petty Bourgeoisie</i>	Relations within Production and therefore Social Relations	Two trends: 1) Instant compression of <i>petty bourgeoisie</i> and 2) an evolution with survive of <i>petty bourgeoisie</i> for some time (due the innovation of small units). At the end confirmation of social polarization between Capitalists and Proletarians
K. Kautsky	Capitalists	Proletariat	<i>Petty Bourgeoisie- New Middle Class of Intellectuals</i>	Relations within Production and therefore Social Relations	Confirmation of Social Polarization between Capitalists and Proletarians

³ K. Marx ibid, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/add1.htm#s12d>. C.f., Lytras 2016b, <https://books.apple.com/us/book/wage-labour-in-modern-society/id1108352456>, unity: 1.2.

⁴ The groups are determined by the criteria of the status in employment, the position within production system and ownership of capital, as, at least, own-account workers (and some of small employers), small producers, and small owners of capital.

The Marxian prognosis for the future of petty bourgeoisie has created a dispute among Marxists, during their debates. According E. Bernstein (1899), the middle class didn't disappear and did not become a part of proletariat, until the end of nineteenth century. R. Luxemburg (1899), in her answer to E. Bernstein, makes an alternative management of Marxian ideas. She estimates that two tendencies coexist in the case of middle class. A first trend is their compressions as a result of the functions of the concentration of capital. A second trend is the maintaining of their numerical strength or even their growth, due to the innovation of small units. At the end of the abovementioned procedure, of course, their time is limited.

During the first decade of twentieth century, a new more extensive division of labor has replaced that of the "industrial revolution". The radical thought has included in its perception the initial formations of the new division. K. Kautsky (1902) understands the birth of a new significant social group and suggests a term to conclude the concrete group in class analysis, namely the "new middle class of intellectuals".

4 Different perceptions on social structure

M. Weber has given too few indications of theoretical analyses on the structure of capitalistic society. However, we could glean a very important description, which regards a structure of classes that meet either the positive or the negative exercise of the privilege of doing business. In the privileged stratum there are the industrialists, the merchants, the landowners-businessmen, the bankers, the brokers, the intellectuals with high qualifications arising from education and the employees based on monopoly of a particular skill (as managers, researchers etc.). The underprivileged stratum includes the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled laborers. The intermediate (something like a "middle class") stratum of this perception is concluded by farmers, artisans, other independent professionals and employees (Weber 1978, Vol. I, pp. 303-305).

The similarities to the Marxian model of social structure are obvious. Ironically, the two analysts have extremely different agenda for the future of capitalism. In contrast to Marxian strategy of social change, M. Weber supports strongly the long living of the current social system. The followers of M. Weber more often have by-passed the above sort class analysis and concentrate on his paradigm of social structure, which is based on multiple criteria for gleaning the social groups. M. Weber, in that case, faces the class phenomenon in the context of the fundamental forms of grouping in a community according to the types of the distribution of power (Weber 1978, Vol. II, pp. 926-939). Power is expressed basically as economic power, social power (or prestige), and political power. Each type of power establishes the conditions for recognizing different forms of grouping. There are three categories of groups. These are the class, the status group and the (political) party. Class, which should not be regarded as equivalent to the concept of "social class", is placed in the field of economic situations. In this special case the A. Smith's model is reproduced by M. Weber. Class in the concrete paradigm represents a structure according to the distribution of income and consumption, while the participation to a class expresses a relative degree of personal satisfaction.

Table 3: M. Weber and P. Sorokin for Middle Class

Theory or Approach	Upper Class	Lower Class	Middle Class	Criteria
M. Weber	Industrialists, merchants, landowners-businessmen, ship-owners, bankers, brokers, intellectuals with high qualifications arising from education, and employees based on monopoly of a particular skill (as managers, researchers etc.)	Skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled laborers	<i>Farmers, artisans, other independent professionals and some employees</i>	Positive or Negative Ability/ or Privilege of Doing Business
P. Sorokin	Holders of high income-entrepreneurs	Holders of low income-Workers	<i>Employees of high rank-middle incomes (in general)</i>	Position in Economic and Professional Stratification

During the revolutionary process in Russia, the conditions have had some winners and several political losers. Among the last people was P. Sorokin (a collaborator of A. Kerensky). After his exile abroad he has written a well known study on *social mobility* (Sorokin, 1959). In the first part of his book (and its following editions) he suggests a

new perception on social stratification. The social stratification could be identified through a matrix analysis according to different criteria. With main criterion the income, he has created an economic stratification. The criterion of profession builds up the professional stratification and the criterion political relations the political stratification. In each expression of social structure, there are three strata or classes at least: the upper, the middle, and the lower. In the elaboration of economic stratification he argues with the Marxian theory and especially with its prognosis on the decline of middle class. His findings on income distribution support the opinion that there is a clear enlargement of the stratum with middle incomes (ibid, pp. 23-25, 32, 57). He adds with data from the elaboration of professional stratification. Sorokin believes strongly that the employees of upper rank, namely the members of middle class or stratum (in his opinion) increase and they don't receive any degradation (ibid, pp. 103-106, 121).

A comment has a special position on the previous points. Probably, this analysis regards absolutely different social groups than those of Marxian theory (petty bourgeoisie) and, of course, never K. Marx has referred, that the middle class (or any other class mainly) is been composed by agents of (any level of) income.

5 The (new) middle class during *fordism-taylorism*

There is a symbolic day of a new division of labor at the beginning of 20th century. It is the 1st of October, 1908, namely the day of appearance of the first copy of “T model” in H. Ford’s company. The Ford’s industry (Lytras, 2016b)⁵ has embodied the model of scientific management of F.W. Taylor (1911). The synthesis of *Fordism-Taylorism* represents a successful type of organization of production and labor for nearly 70 years. One of the famous characteristics of *fordism-taylorism* is the formation of a large administrative pyramid in the company (and at the same period in the public administration).

Table 4: Perceptions of social structure and middle class during *fordism-taylorism*

Theory or Approach	Upper Class	Lower Class	Middle Class	Criteria
C. Wright Mills	Entrepreneurs- American Elite (400 major families, industrialists and bankers, politicians, army’s senior officers, and celebrities)	Workers	<i>New Middle Class</i> (office’s clerks, middle management, and public servants)	Organizational Change-Economic Relations
R. Dahrendorf	Entrepreneurs- Senior Managers	Working Class	<i>New Middle Class</i>	Domination- political class struggle- industrial conflicts
N. Poulantzas	Capitalists- Senior Managers	Working Class (composed by manual workers- wage earners)	<i>New Petite Bourgeoisie</i> (composed by intellectual workers- wage earners) The using of the term: Petite Bourgeoisie, reflexes their description within ideological relationships	Position in economic, political and ideological relationships- Distinction of productive and non- productive work- Fission or disintegration between manual and intellectual work

The two main groups of the new formation are the managers and the middle personnel (intellectual workers). It isn't strange that the modern theory has given particular attention to these groups. J. Burnham (1941) estimates, that the managers have the real (day to day control) power of corporations, and predicts their future prevailing on any modern society too. C. Wright Mills gives a special attention to the “white collars” who as a “new middle class” are been distinguished in the modern societies. They represent great differences from the known classes. They don't own means of production. The “white collars” are wage-earners, but their work has a great distance from the labor of manual workers. Their (usually well educated) expertise has as a return a better income and a higher status than the members of working class. They are the agents of a new life style and an innovative type of consumption. Their collective life is some kind of absent or timid activation.

⁵ The *fordism-taylorism* is the object of the unity: 1.4.

It is extremely interesting the C. Wright Mills' [2002 (1951)] approach on the new middle class' future. He argues that they are ready to deliver more self-subordination to the upper class, but nobody really cares for them (ibid, pp. 353-354). Their already subordination is enough. Definitely, the upper class, in this perception, is a complex of four hundred metropolitans, very rich and corporate rich, chief executives of enterprises, politicians, military officers of higher ranks, and some of the celebrities [Wright Mills 2000 (1956)]. R. Darhendorf's (1959) analysis on social conflicts is a synthesis with elements of both the aforementioned approaches on social structure.

N. Poulantzas' [1984 (1974)] theoretical modifications on capitalistic social structure have their origins upon the general framework of structural Marxism. In this perception, there is an equal effect of economic, political and ideological relationships, on capitalistic social formation and classes. Therefore, classes are determined by all the kinds of relationships at the same time. The real innovation of this analysis is the redefinition of "middle class", in my opinion. According N. Poulantzas' view, a broad set of wage-workers' groups who are active in clerical or non-manual work participate in "new petite bourgeoisie". "New petite bourgeoisie" is definitely a part of petite bourgeoisie. The description of "new petite bourgeoisie" is been generated, initially, from the analysis on the distinction of productive and non-productive labor. The manual workers (productive workers), solely, contribute to the creation of surplus-value in material production and therefore are the real members of working class. The wage-workers, who work with intellectual work (non-productive workers), produce surplus-labor, but they don't contribute to the creation of surplus-value and for this reason they don't participate in the working class. They are members of new petite bourgeoisie, according their definition within economic relations. From the framework of political and ideological relations, the intellectual workers express and then execute the transmission of organizational power (with orders and controls or checks) on the body of manual workers.

As a symptom and as a result of organizational (political) implementation of power, the differences between the agents of intellectual and the agents of manual work are the real and symbolic substrate for their separation. The term "new petite bourgeoisie" reflexes the (rather) negative characteristics of (old) petite bourgeoisie's ideological subset. N. Poulantzas' analysis creates a very large middle class, with an innovative name. I disagree with this theory on the Marxian origins of the analysis for the productive and the non-productive labor.⁶

The opinions and the positions on political relations have a special value only for the era of *fordism-taylorism*. The same approaches have a continuously reducing power during the period of *post-fordism*. The analysis on the ideological relations is discussable but provokes a theoretical skepticism. It seems, in my view, as a subjective explanation, without any empirical element. It is of course a respective argument.

6 Innovative views on middle class within recent theories

Capitalism has changed rapidly, some years after the publication of N. Poulantzas' survey. The crucial field of change was the radical reorganization of companies. In the new model of production and work, the administrative pyramid has given its place in more and more flexible (and rather flat) forms of organization of labor (Hirschhorn 1988; Ohno 1991; Hammer and Champy 1993; Sandberg 2007). At the end of the long and complex procedure, the (often self-directed) working (or process) groups prevail in productive model (Bedwell et al. 2010; RW3 Culture Wizard 2012). The old experts and managers have faced the most serious degradation of their role and numbers. Their diffusion is parallel with the general reduction of expertise or specializations, namely from 200 to only 3, in American car-factories (Holden 1986). At the same period, a more autonomous role (Malone and Laubacher 1998) of workers is obvious in several work statuses, as the teleworkers (Eurofound 2010; WorldatWork 2011). The previous theories on new middle class or new petite bourgeoisie lost much of their explanative importance. The theoretical embarrassment has been continued for several years. A real spasm for the using of middle class could be positioned the period after the economic crisis of 2007-8. Despite the last estimation, there is an early theoretical correspondence on the problems which are results of the new formations. E.O. Wright (1985) suggests a totally innovative view of social structure and of middle class.

⁶ According Marxian analysis, every employee (wage-earner) either in material or in non-material production, within capitalist system, is a productive worker, if he produces surplus-value, which is been appropriated by capitalists. See, K. Marx, ibid, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/add1.htm.#s12d>. C.f., Lytras 2016b, unity: 1.2, <https://books.apple.com/us/book/wage-labour-in-modern-society/id1108352456>.

E.O. Wright considers that the class structure within the capitalist society is described by the two main classes of the capitalist mode of production, the capitalists and the working class, as well as the traditional petty bourgeoisie. In his view, additionally, there are three “contradictory class locations”⁷, namely the “contradictory class location” of managers and supervisors, the contradictory class location of semi-autonomous workers and the contradictory class location of small employers. The analysis on managers and supervisors, as well as on semiautonomous workers represents the perception, that the “new middle class” has been diffused and some of its previous groups are now small and contradictory groups, with less and less social importance

E.O. Wright also intervenes on the determination of the limits of the petty bourgeoisie class and the small employers with a strange manner. The petty bourgeoisie according to the theoretical elaboration is the social group of own-account workers. Small employers are the entrepreneurs who are employing one to nine employees. In contrary to the above definitions, during the empirical research, “the petty bourgeoisie is defined as any self-employed person employing no more than one employee...” while “...employers employing between two and nine employees (are defined) as small employers” (ibid, pp. 150-151).

The two different conceptualizations (the theoretical and the *de facto*) make weaker the analysis, but this approach on capitalistic social structure hasn't lost automatically its importance for the consideration of the orbit of new middle class. After about a quarter of century, the E.O. Wright's notifications meet an additional confirmation for the further minimizing of middle management, namely of an integral part of middle class. G. Dumenil and D. Levy (2011) understand that the middle managers (managers of personnel) are in a continuous degradation, while the much fewer top managers have become even powerful. The top managers make more and more money by their intervention in financial transactions of companies and they have crucial role in decision making. At the end of the process, they suggest in social analysis that these indices show the formation of new hybrid upper class. The hybrid class is synthesis of capitalists and top managers.

In 2010 has been published an official report of U.S. Administration (U.S. Department of Commerce and Office of the Vice President of the United States 2010) on *Middle Class in America*. The interesting points of the report are too few. In my opinion, they are the two alternative definitions of middle class and some sections of final conclusion. The first definition regards the taxonomy of the single parent households (from 17.300 USD up to 75th percentile) and two parents families (from 21.800 USD up to 75th percentile), according to the distribution of incomes in USA. The second definition figures out that in the middle class are been included all the members of households who have defined themselves as such. They have some similar aspirations, namely for a private home, the ability to cover medical expenses, a car for every adult member of the family, the ability to cover the costs of higher education of their children, the ability to cover the costs of family holidays, and the social security or the ability to have the resources for a decent living after retirement.

I read with many automatic doubts the abovementioned descriptions of middle class from the governmental group of writers. In the place of any other comment on their thoughts, I would easily keep in mind their final estimations, with their specific words: “Yet, it should be clear that only a few unplanned expenses can dispossess any of these families from their middle class dreams”.... “Unfortunately, not all families are able to afford the sort of expenditures that we lay out in this report. Even those families that can afford a middle class lifestyle must make regular sacrifices and may be one unexpected event away from disaster” (ibid, pp. 25-26). The dreams are the real meaning of the referred aspirations, which have as possible prospect the disappointment of the daydreamers. The final explanations give to me a sense of an absolutely circular way of thinking. It could be, of course, just a disclaimer. The believers to the above definition shouldn't be careless.

⁷ “Contradictory class location” is a new theoretical construction on the social groups. It is not a “class”, but it looks like (somehow) with the “strata” in Marxian theory. “Contradictory class location” expresses one single (personal) class position, but its definition comes from contradictory (or opposite) characteristics and interests of classes. E.O. Wright understands the existence of three absolutely peculiar groups, between the classes of capitalistic social structure. It creates an automatic scientific interest that the approach (with strong Marxian influence) uses methods and data, which hardly could be bridged with Marxist analysis (c.f., Lytras 2017, <https://books.apple.com/us/book/a-radical-policy-for-combating-unemployment/id1213798305>, unity: 1.2).

Table 5: Modern theories on social structure and middle class

Theory or Approach	Upper Class	Lower Class (-es)	Middle Class	Criteria
E.O. Wright	Capitalists	Proletarians	<i>Petty Bourgeoisie-Diffusion of New Middle Class-Contradictory Class Locations:</i> 1) Managers and Supervisors, 2) Semi-autonomous Workers, 3) Small Employers (a part of them)	Autonomy and/or Exploitation
G. Dumenil-D. Levy	New Hybrid Class Capitalists and Senior Managers	Workers (wage-earners)	Degradation of <i>Middle Managers</i> (the personnel managers)	Ownership, organizational skills, financial expertise, and high rank of incomes
U.S. Administration (U.S. Department Of Commerce and Office of the Vice President of the United States)	Ambiguous Holders of High Income (over the 75 th percentile of income scale)	Ambiguous and narrow-Poor People	Nearly the absolute majority of citizens [with the exception of poor people] (with income from 17.300 USD up to 75 th percentile of income scale)	Rank of Income-Aspirations of middle class households (a house, a car, yearly vacancies etc.)
H. Kharas	Absolutely Ambiguous	Absolutely Ambiguous and small	(Nearly the total population of advanced countries) <i>Global Middle Class (Non-Poor and Non-Rich People)</i>	An Income of 10-100 USD (in PPP's) ⁸ daily
M. Savage et al.	Elite [rather ambiguous (6% of the sample)] The analysis refers that its members are basically salaried managers	(with ambiguity for the <i>new affluent workers</i>) Traditional working class, Emergent service workers and Precariat [48% of the sample; with new affluent workers: 63%]	<i>Established middle class, Technical middle class</i> (with ambiguity for the <i>new affluent workers</i>) [31% of the sample; with new affluent workers: 46%]	A synthesis of criteria: i.e., P. Bourdieu's criteria (<i>The forms of capital: economic, social and cultural</i>), G. Standing's theory (on <i>Precariat</i>), etc.

H. Kharas (2010) has adopted an ambiguous definition of middle class, too. The writer argues that the “global middle class” is been composed by every person with a daily income from 10 to 100 USD (PPP's). The most interesting conclusion of this analysis is that almost the total population of the advanced countries (North America, Japan, and Europe) participates in the main corpus of “global middle class”. If this opinion is not a result of a mistake of counting, then it deliberately distorts the social realities in modern societies.

In a survey of a wide team of researchers (Savage et al. 2013) there are everybody and everything of the social and modern class analysis. We can find a partial distancing from the elaboration of J.H. Goldthorpe (1987; 2016). The team adopts the P. Bourdieu's (1986) suggestion on the distinction of economic, social and cultural capital. Then it tries to construct and record indicators for measuring their impact on the different professional categories (in this survey are meant as classes). The researchers complete their taxonomy with the “precariat” of G. Standing's (2011) recent intellectual construction, which is a substitute of proletariat, but it represents a smaller proportion within the nowadays social structure, than the working class of the past. There are also two categories of middle class: the established middle class and the technical middle class.

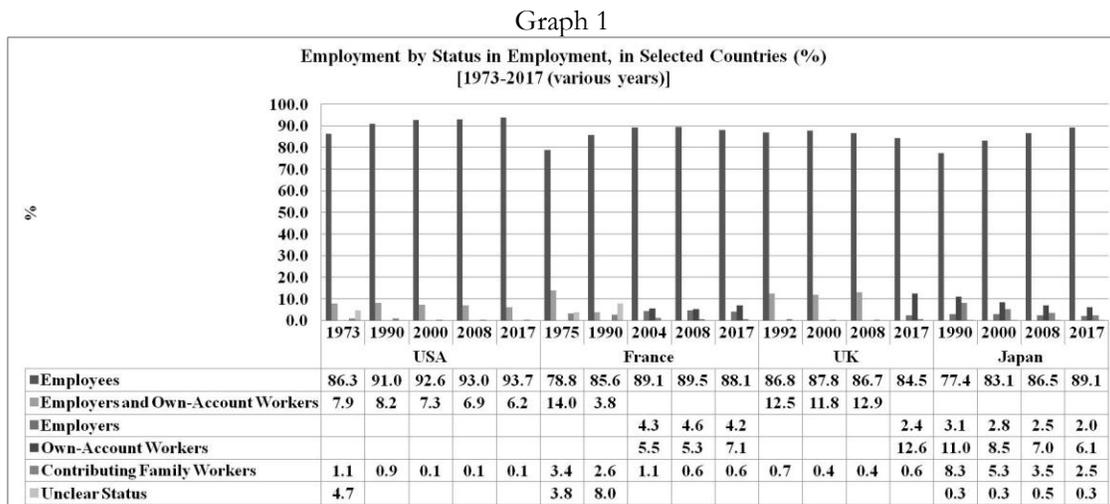
⁸ P.P.P.: Purchasing Power Parity.

There is a doubt on the real social location of affluent workers. The three lower categories (the traditional working class, the emergent service workers, and the precariat) are more close to the notion of working class. The whole construction looks to me like as a patchwork. I can understand that the main problem of the survey is the lack of a solid scientific discipline in contrast to the view of the well known theoretical analyses on classes [i.e., inter alia, the elite doesn't look similar to classical descriptions or the C. Wright Mills' (1956) elaboration]. I can't see anywhere a clearly class of capitalists. The arbitrary terminologies are connected with several professionals who "participate" in ambiguous "classes" (the number has no meaning but they are seven).⁹

The type of the sample and the recording of the answers allow me not to proceed in the evaluation of the validity of the classification, according to economic, social and cultural capital. Nevertheless, I understand that this survey has provoked at least a strong theoretical objection. C. Mills (2014) has examined, briefly, the methodology of the elaboration and has ended up to an impressive conclusion, which gives to us a further confirmation for the problematic character of its findings: "My conclusion is that for the reasons I outline here, and for others that space limitations prevent me from mentioning, the GBCS is a fiasco. It is so theoretically and methodologically flawed that it can contribute little of value to our understanding of the structure of systematic social inequality in the UK". I couldn't adopt fully the above opinion, but I could argue that my deep skepticism is greater than any other thinking.

7 Some contemporary realities

Class analysis or analyses ought to confront the main indices of realities and then must correspond with a close relativity of their arguments to the actual social phenomena. One way or another, the status in employment is a common (direct or indirect) point of every approach in classical and contemporary class theory. According the measurements of I.L.O. the situation in employment is the following in Graph 1.

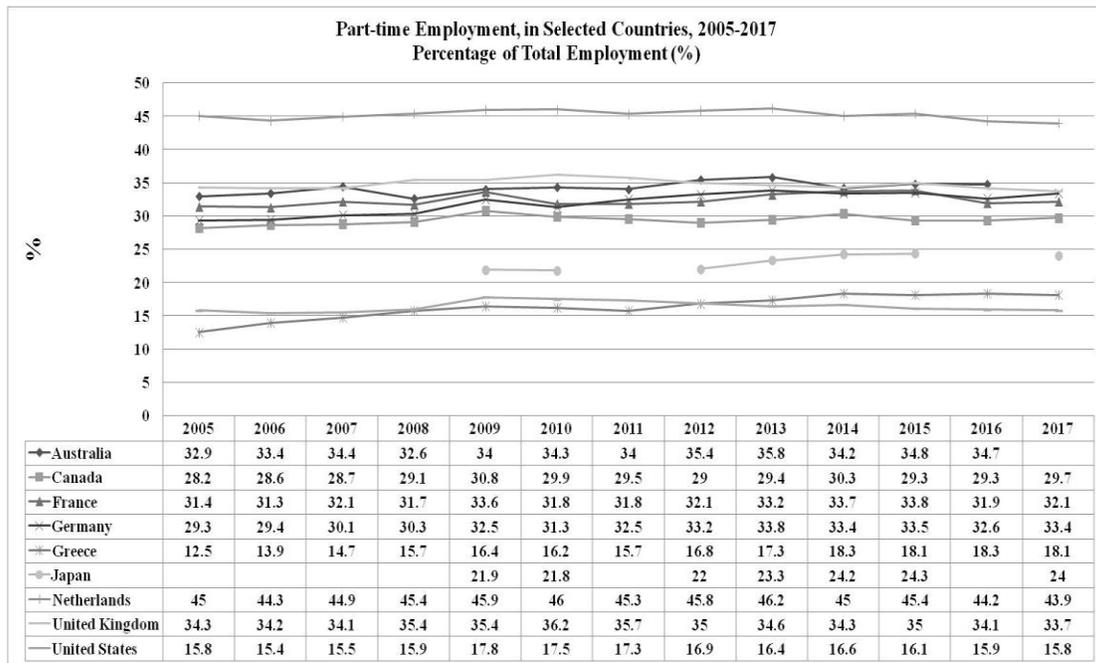


Sources: ILO, LABORSTA (Database); ILOSTAT (Database); Lytras (2016a, pp. 333-353; 2017¹⁰).

Graph 2

⁹ The seven classes are the followings: Elite, established middle class, technical middle class, new affluent workers, traditional working class, emergent service workers, and precariat.

¹⁰ In the unity: 2.

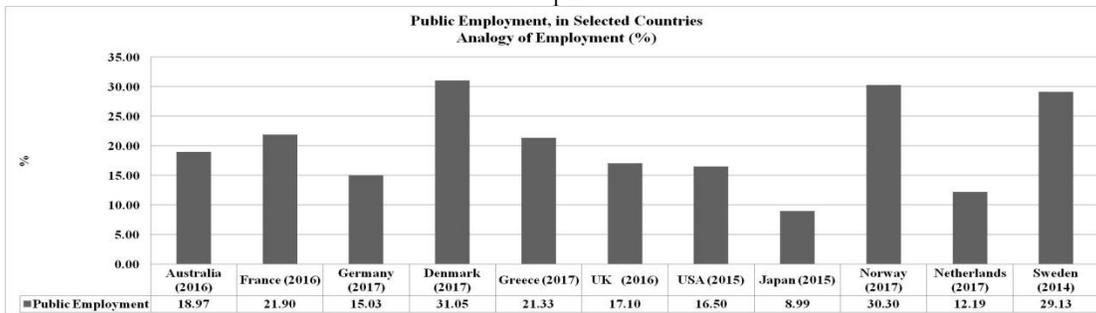


Source: ILO, ILOSTAT (Database).

The easy conclusion from the data of the first Graph (1) is that the structure of employment is definitely polarized, with the even fewer employers (small and big) than in recent past and the extremely great majority of employees of every kind (over 84.5%, in 2017).

The data (Graph 2) on part-time workers (a wide section of employees)¹¹ reinforce the image of the extremely intensive polarization in employment. The part-timers are the cheaper and most insecure group of workers and it is huge (in UK are the 33.7% of total employment). There is no doubt that they are a part of working class. Despite the strong beliefs of some of the aforementioned analysts, K. Marx’s prognosis was accurate (according to the very meaning of his words). That prognosis is confirmed on the decline of petty bourgeoisie, too. For the traditional middle class (from own-account workers’ data) there are all the indices that show its reduction in USA and Japan, but there are of course contradictory data for its trajectory in France and UK (in the long duration). Probably, the creation of new professionals (freelancers and workers in out-sourcing procedures, and teleworkers), without ownership of the means of production, explains (at least partly) the relative recovery of the own-account workers (in France and, basically, in UK).

Graph 3



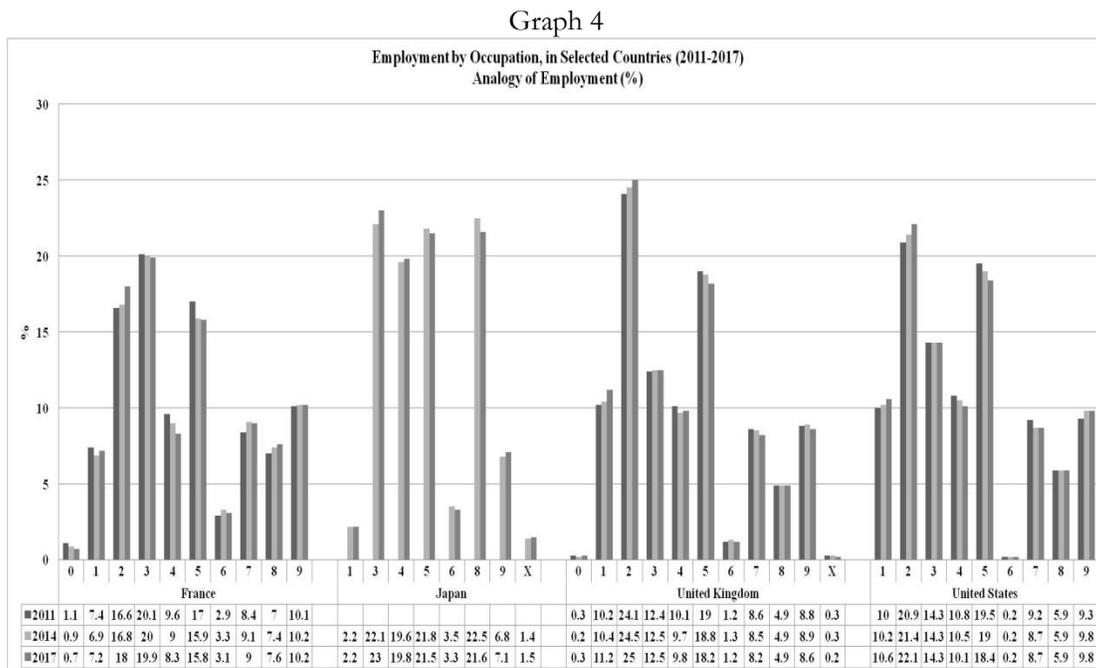
Source: ILO, ILOSTAT (Database).

New middle class (or strata) is definitely a present class in our era, but, according some theoretical approaches on organization of labor and social structure is smaller, more degraded, and fragmented than in sixties or seventies. A part of the nowadays new middle class works as public servants in advanced countries (Graph 3).

¹¹ The part-time workers of Graph 2 are a percentage of total employment. This evidence means that they are a larger proportion of employees.

Nevertheless, all the public servants are not members of new middle class (or middle strata). Many of them are regular workers (i.e. cleaners, workers in public factories etc.) or have an elementary specialization (office supporters, low level servants, assistants etc.) in public service. In combination with the data for status in employment and the data for the distribution of occupations (Graph 4) we could suppose that the public directors and supervisors is a poportion of the (general) category of managers, given that the two categories overlap each other. Probably, the categories of professionals and technicians etc. (with a minority of clerical support workers) content the basic corpus (but it isn't the total of the categories) of new middle class (with the exceptions of the employers and own-account workers). All the other categories [(4), 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9), with the exceptions of the employers and own-account workers, are very close to the objective characterization of working class. The different locations of the members either of working class or of new middle class (or strata) are the strong indications of the multiple fragmentations of wage-earners, in contemporary society.

Despite, the aforementioned fragmentations the social polarization is firm, according the wide empirical data on income, globally. Oxfam International (2016) argues that “in 2015, just 62 individuals had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people...” (ibid, pp. 12-13). The organization adds that the 46% of the total increase of global income growth, during a period of twenty three years (1988-2011), went to the 10% of the richer people (ibid). Credit Suisse Research Institute (2015, p. 3) notes that only the 0.7% of global population owns the 45.2% of international wealth. The measurements of incomes in a national level have several methodological differences. Beyond their variations, we can seek some connections with the global analyses. In a recent report (Pew Research Center 2016) the group of middle incomes has had a significant shrinking during the period: 2000-2014, in metropolitan areas of USA (ibid, pp. 18-19, 56-63). Once again, we argue more strongly that the middle class isn't the same with the group with middle incomes.



Source: ILO ILOSTAT (Database).

Note: The occupations are the followings: 0 Armed forces occupations; 1 Managers; 2 Professionals; 3 Technicians and associate professionals; 4 Clerical support workers; 5 Service and sales workers; 6 Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers; 7 Craft and related trades workers; 8 Plant and machine operators, and assemblers; 9 Elementary occupations; X Not elsewhere classified.

8. Conclusion

The above brief theoretical review has had its focus on the recent approaches. All the classical theories, beyond their significant differences, have had references to solid and clear social groups and clear criteria for the inclusion of these groups into classes. The recent analyses haven't the same characteristics with the classical theories. They have preferred, despite the existence of the continuously broader inequalities, to recognize new middle strata,

based on ambiguous criteria, from the masses of wage-earners. Their theoretical paradox is that they conclude many groups in middle classes, but there isn't neither an obvious capitalists' class nor a working class. The immediate question from such approaches is the next: what is the real meaning of middle class, without an upper and a lower class?

The well founded modern approaches for new middle class regard the salaried people in services' sector and especially (but probably only for them) in the administrative pyramid of *fordism-taylorism* or/and in the bureaucracy of the state, during the post-war era. The same analyses have rather degraded the decline of small enterprises and the own-account workers. Those groups of workers represent the main corpus of the traditional middle class. The more and more decline of traditional wage-laborers gave the impression that the whole new reality was an improvement for the work and social organization.

The economic conditions have changed from middle seventies. The overcoming of *fordism-taylorism* has characterized the degradation of regular wage-labor and the increase of flexible statuses in employment. According some recent surveys, middle classes are here, but are transformed in several alternative social categories, due to the ranks of income, the aspirations, and the cultural tastes of their "members". Their methodology is discussable. Nevertheless, there is serious critique on the quality of methods and the validity of empirical results.

In our era, the absolute majority of workers are, definitely, wage-laborers in western world, while the own-account workers and small employers have fast declined, the after war period. Today the own-account workers, after a long period of a continuous proportional reduction, are rather stable in social structure and in some countries show a small recovery. In some cases (UK and Japan) the proportion of (small and big) employers decreases or they represent extremely small percentages in employment.

The supporters of the idea that enhancing entrepreneurship is the only way for economic growth, social progress and growth in employment must think twice about their confidence. The resilience of the recent theories to the comparison test with the findings in modern employment data is limited. Social polarization and inequality are even more intense in today's advanced societies, as has been shown by analyzes of the global distribution of incomes. Is it a contradiction between different kinds of data, or is it the result of the distortion of current realities?

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