

**“Life in Lithuania is Getting Better, even if Not Everyone Feels It”: The Narrative of Progress
in Lithuanian Economists Discourse on Income Inequality and Social Welfare**

by

Gabija Būtaité

Student no. 707834

Master thesis in Sociology - Social Inequalities program

School of Social and Behavioral Sciences

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Supervisor: Dr. Rogier van Reekum

Second reader: Prof. Dr. Willem Schinkel

June 23, 2024

Abstract

The political and economic landscape of Lithuania is characterized by significant influence from private banks, an oligopolistic banking sector, a neo-conservative political atmosphere, and a lack of progressive taxation, despite having one of the highest growing income inequalities in Europe.

The research aims to understand how the chief economists from the leading Lithuanian private banks - Nerijus Mačiulis (“Swedbank”), Žygimantas Mauricas (“Luminor”), and Tadas Povilauskas (“SEB”) - construct their discourse on income inequality and social welfare. This study is grounded in E.P. Berman's “Thinking Like an Economist: How Efficiency Replaced Equality in U.S. Public Policy” (2022) and A. Hirschman's “The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy” (1991). The research method involves a thematic and critical discourse analysis of statements published in major Lithuanian news portals.

The results indicate that Berman’s theory is inapplicable in this context but is useful for highlighting the relevance of Hirschman’s theory. Instead of political ideas being translated into economic arguments, the reverse is observed: economic principles are transformed into mostly neo-conservative moral, social, and political lessons. Economists enhance their authority within Lithuanian public discourse, by assuming roles as guides to progress and moral experts. As a key tool for minimizing the perceived need for social welfare and downplaying income inequality the narrative of “Progress and Good News” emerges. This narrative shifts the focus to increasing opportunities, framing personal unproductiveness as a major issue, and portraying progress as the primary objective. Consequently, income inequality is also framed as a personal issue. Economists create a discourse, in which, distinguished from morally invaluable, unproductive, and undesirable members, only productive-type members are desired. Moreover, the phenomenon of progress is often presented as beneficial for all, while implicitly defending the interests of businesses and investors.

Keywords: Economists, Inequality, Neo-conservatism, Progress, Social Welfare.

Table of contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Theoretical framework	6
3. Methodology	9
4. Analysis.	10
5. Evidence of progress	11
5.1. <i>Poverty levels</i>	12
5.2. <i>Increasing opportunities and population surveys</i>	12
5.3. <i>Pathos of productivity</i>	14
6. Impediments to progress and their instrumental use	16
6.1. <i>Social welfare measures</i>	16
6.2. <i>Minimum wage establishment</i>	17
6.3. <i>State interventions to the market: profit and income taxes</i>	18
6.4. <i>Social factors hindering productivity</i>	20
7. The place of income inequality in the “Progress and Good News” narrative	21
7.1. <i>Solving “natural” inequality will interfere with the progress</i>	21
7.2. <i>Solving inequality is unnecessary – the progress is ongoing</i>	21
7.3. <i>Solving inequality is unnecessary – it is a personal productivity problem</i>	23
8. Conclusion.....	24
9. References	28
10. Appendixes	34

1. Introduction

Lithuania is a country with one of the highest income inequalities in the European Union, surpassed only by Bulgaria (Eurostat, 2023). The population income gap has continued to grow over the last decade, and the main reason for this has been non-progressive taxes and low public transfer rates compared to the rest of the EU (Černiauskas & Čiginas, 2020). Research demonstrates that economic equality determines many other states' socioeconomic indicators and is an important denominator when measuring the well-being of the state's residents (Wilkinson, 2011; Berg and Ostry, 2011; Rodrik, 1999, as cited in International Monetary Fund, 2020). Therefore, numerous sociologists and policymakers advocate state interventions in the free market as a necessary measure to reduce economic inequality. However, opposers claim that we should not overemphasize inequality as a fact but delve into its causes and try to prevent only illegitimate ways of getting rich. Proponents of this view also consider many redistributive and social welfare policies to be redundant because they reduce economic inequality itself, rather than the causes of unfairness. (Henderson, 2018). All in all, there is an ongoing controversy over the proper means to address inequality, but the reasoning against progressive welfare policies is mostly being used by neo-conservatives and neo-liberals. Researchers have noticed that such argumentation is also very often used by economists, whose voices in the contemporary public discourse are hugely salient.

Many reasons contribute to such authority of economists in contemporary society, for example, usefulness for the media (Rafter, 2014; Pelsmaekers, 2016), high demand in the market, the support of the most influential sections of society, generous rewards (Fourcade et al., 2015), the persuasiveness of economic language (Almeida, 2023) and others. Colander's (2005) and Gross & Simmons's (2007) studies show that a big part of economists consider economics to be the most important science among all social sciences. Therefore, some representatives of other social sciences criticize the excessive confidence of economics representatives in their point of view. They claim that economists often publicly express an overly lax and purely economic approach to various complex social problems, thus reducing it (Soyer & Hogarth, 2012; Fox, 2014; Hood, 2017; Holst & Molander, 2019; Kozłowski & Van Gunten, 2023). Moreover, the influence of neo-liberal economists is particularly amplified by their representation and membership in one of the most influential contemporary "thought collectives" (a concept described by Ludwik Fleck (Sady, 2012)) – neo-liberalism (Mirowski, 2014; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2015; Plehwe, 2020). This membership manifests itself mainly through the commonalities of thought among its members, which helps to reproduce their influence and widen the collective.

When talking about contemporary Lithuanian society, two facts should be stated: firstly, the authority of economists is also valued very highly. Secondly, a rather neo-conservative

atmosphere dominates politically. This atmosphere can be deduced from several facts: since regaining its independence from the Soviet Union, Lithuania, and the other Baltic States chose an abrupt transition to liberal capitalism, with the main economic goal of growing the economy over the path of a slower transition with stronger social protection of the population (Samonis, 1995). Also, Kuokštis (2011) states that the Lithuanian capitalist regime is a flexible market economy with few powerful labor unions, low unemployment benefits, and overall weak political left but much stronger liberal and center-right (or neo-liberal/neo-conservative) parties, which dictate public climate. Moreover, Lithuania also recognizes the lack of banking diversity and the partial bank oligopoly, thus control of the economic sector (Rimavičiūtė & Vilys, 2014; TV3, 2023).

The influence of this climate, together with the authority of economists especially of the main Lithuanian private banks became particularly evident during the 2019 presidential elections, in which Gitanas Nausėda, the former chief economist (hereinafter - CE) of “SEB” bank won with a large majority of votes. Nausėda built his authority by actively participating in the Lithuanian public discourse, manipulating the undefined concept of the “welfare state” (Žuolytė, 2018; Mundeikis, 2019). However, the authority of such economists is best reflected by the list of the most influential businessmen and economists in Lithuania compiled by the main online news portal “Delfi”. In the 2023 expert-voted list, Nerijus Mačiulis, the CE of the main bank operating in Lithuania (“Swedbank”), took second place, surpassing most multimillionaire businessmen. In the society-voted list: the second place was also given to Mačiulis, the fourth - to the CE of “Luminor” bank Žygimantas Mauricas (ELTA, 2023). This is not a one-time phenomenon. In the 2022 experts’ list, Mačiulis was declared the most influential among all Lithuanian businessmen and economists, while Mauricas was assigned the 8th place. In the opinion of the public, Mačiulis was in the 2nd position, Mauricas in the 3rd (Rakauskė, 2022). Positions in the 2021, 2020, and 2019 lists were also very similar (Savickas, 2019; Rakauskė, 2020, 2021).

However, as the comments of the chief economists of the banks, which have enormous influence in the state, continue to appear in the media, they are often presented or present themselves simply as “experts” (Lrytas.lt, 2023; 15min, 2014). This shows that their power, influence, and representation of the interests of private banks in the public discourse are underestimated (Zeddies, 2023). All in all, the political and economic reality of Lithuania consists of the high power and authority of banks’ interests’ representatives, oligopolistic banking situation, states’ neo-conservative political climate, the lack of progressive taxes and other inequality-tackling social welfare policies. However, it also comprises one of the largest growing income inequalities in Europe. This creates a significant need to study how these economists shape the public discourse on the topics of income inequality and social welfare.

Important to note, that the electronic bank “Revolut” is third by market share but does not have a famous person or CE representing it in the public discourse. Key actors were selected as follows: as mentioned before, Mauricas, but especially Mačiulis in 2023 (but also in the lists before) were included as the most influential people among Lithuanian businessmen and economists. Nevertheless, Povilauskas is also worth including in the analysis because the growth of his popularity is probably hindered by the shortest period as CE, but he also comments on the vicissitudes of the Lithuanian economy. Nausėda’s discourse was also considered for inclusion but declined because of the scope of the work. This study most directly aims to contribute to research on what arguments and narrative techniques economists’ discourse consists of, but the observations should also provide insights into the relationship between rhetoric and the creation of economists’ authority. Selected research theory and literature will help to achieve this.

2. Theoretical framework

This research is based on E. P. Berman’s book “Thinking Like an Economist: How Efficiency Replaced Equality in U.S. Public Policy” (2022) and A. Hirschman’s “The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy” (1991). The research question of this thesis is how do the main Lithuanian private banks’ chief economists create discourse about income inequality and social welfare? I observe whether and how the economists of the main Lithuanian banks: 1. used the neo-conservative argumentation techniques discussed by Hirschman, 2. used economic language techniques described by Berman, 3. used other discursive tools complementing or refuting Berman and Hirschman's theories.

Hirschman was an economist and professor at Princeton University. In “The Rhetoric of Reaction” (1991) he presents three styles of argumentation he claims are the most used by conservatism against social changes. He describes the arguments from a neo-conservative angle, but often when talking about criticism of the welfare state, he presents actors who were considered liberals/neo-liberals. However, this is not surprising, knowing that the representatives of these two ideological directions often overlap in economic reasoning (Kiely, 2004). Thus, in this work, these concepts are also used interchangeably. Moreover, a large part of the thinkers he presents are also economists.

By the first Perversity thesis, Hirschman (1991) means the discourse created by specifying the perversity and backfiring of each pursuit (pp. 11-42). Firstly, the author notes that such argumentation is often being used against change-seekers, as it highlights only the negative outcomes. But at the same time, he observes that the grant of greater rights to the public usually means a risk

only to the elite position of the narrative creators. He notes that the Perversity thesis is mostly used against the welfare state through the idea of a self-regulating market. Interventions to the market processes are indicated as actually stopping the processes of profit accumulation. Various risks are highlighted, such as alleged conflict with market outcomes through the promotion of laziness, reproduced poverty, and many more. According to Hirschman's critique, economic parameters are never self-evident, and interventions often even stimulate the economy, also, the most important aim of such policies - the establishment of justice - is forgotten. Finally, the perverse effect is the rarest side effect of welfare policies. Therefore, he considers such a perversity-highlighting attitude a sign of one's elitist stance and emphasized authority.

Second - the Futility thesis - states the non-existent result or only illusory positive outcomes of pursuits (Hirschman, 1991, pp. 43-80). It is used to discuss existing and future results as being minimal, smaller than they appear, or changing only the structural form. The Futility thesis became very strengthened in modern economics through Pareto's thoughts, stating that the situation of the poor can only be improved by increasing total wealth. Futility argumentation against the welfare state includes doubts about the efficiency and reach of the recipients of social policies. Also, it is marked by often use of a sarcastic and insulting manner, simply writing off the possible or achieved results, as well as focusing the narrative only on the weakest parts of the change plan. Hirschman criticizes this approach as unproductively critical because every process has weaknesses, which are revealed only after its start, but this does not mean that it does not contribute to the desired results at all. According to Hirschman, the Futility thesis can become self-fulfilling, as it preemptively discounts good intentions as misguided.

Finally, the Jeopardy thesis states the unintended results of each pursuit that will cancel already achieved results (Hirschman, 1991, 81-132). Those who argue in this way indirectly ask: is it worth sacrificing the progress achieved in the past for a new one, opposing it? In other words, that action for change would mean the disruption of the already existing best possible result. According to Hirschman, F. Hayek used jeopardizing argumentation against the welfare state, by contrasting government interventions to the economy with liberty. Also, while denying welfare policies by jeopardizing argumentation, the roles of the state as a capital accumulator and as a welfare provider are often opposed. Hirschman observes that when the concept of the welfare state was first introduced, its support was perceived as necessary to save capitalism from its mistakes. However, users of the Jeopardy thesis against welfare policies highlight only the conflict with capitalism, democracy, and liberty (Hirschman, 1991).

E. P. Berman is Professor of Organizational Studies at the University of Michigan. In "Thinking Like an Economist" (2022), she presents how, in the context of US policies, the economic

style of reasoning has gained such authority, mainly through power-seeking economists and presumed ideological neutrality. Talking about economic language exceptionalities, firstly, Berman (2022) describes how it elevates markets as sufficient redistributors - the role of the government is seen only as the creator of a strong legal system. Also, it brings market-like elements into discussions about areas that are not normally perceived as markets. Arguments on various topics use microeconomic concepts, translating political theory into economic one. Berman (2022) states that in economic language equality and rights no longer appear to be concepts loaded with universal value, they are replaced by incentives, choice, cost-sharing, and means-testing, which are presented as universal ones. Social policies are also basically evaluated by econometric methods, paying very strong attention to the problem of abuse. Finally, economic language gives the greatest importance to the value of efficiency. It is presented as a unifying and politically neutral merit, and the users of this style derive their influence and epistemic authority from it.

However, Berman (2022) notes that although it seems that the pursuit of efficiency can be perceived as rational and the pursuit of inefficiency as irrational not only in economic thinking but universally, in fact, the possibilities of political reality are rarely limited to dualisms. So, putting efficiency as the basis of policymaking pushes out many other political values, and even the political reality itself. Moreover, with its assumed neutrality, efficiency starts to clash with other values, but these become more difficult to defend in the unequal fight against the supposedly “neutral” perception.

Berman and Hirschman's theories help to highlight processes, evolving in different directions: Hirschman's theory shows how moral argumentation can be exploited in political or economic debates. Berman's theory demonstrates how by using economic language, political and social debates can be depoliticized, neutralizing social and moral meanings. I observed if any of the theories were applicable in the analyzed discourse. Firstly, I did that by looking for what was used as examples of negative backlash in Perversity arguments, what process results they tried to portray as invalid in Futility's argumentation, and what progressions were described as lost in the name of social welfare policies in Jeopardy argumentation? Also, how it was being done, and did the subjects' self-perception as experts manifest through such arguments? I also observed how the studied economists used the attributes of economic language: limited government and the market as sufficient redistributor statements, market-like concepts and explanations in moral discussions, efficiency as universal value statements, and through all of this - political neutrality construction.

3. Methodology

In this thesis, I analyze written statements by the already mentioned economists on the topics of social welfare policies and income inequality on the three main Lithuanian news portals (“Delfi.lt”, “Lrytas.lt”, “Lrt.lt”), whose search engines were suitable for the study. This type of discourse and websites were chosen as the object of the research because of its maximum reach and highest relevance for contemporary Lithuanian audiences, as they are the most popular and read Lithuanian news and affairs portals (BNS, 2021; Statista Research Department, 2023; Gemius Baltic, 2024). Different opinion articles and comments by three analyzed economists were found in all of them.

The periods of the analyzed discourses of the three current chief economists vary depending on their time in office: Povilauskas texts are examined from September 2018, after he officially replaced Nausėda as CE of “SEB” (Blekaitis, 2018). Mauricas became the CE of “Nordea” bank in 2010. This bank later merged with “DNB” to become the current “Luminor” bank. However, his participation in the public space before becoming the “Luminor” CE in 2017 was blurry. For this reason and the scope of the work, the texts are examined only from October 2017 (Mauricas, n.d.). Mačiulis has worked as the CE of “Swedbank” since 2010. However, his high public activity began around 2013. For this reason, and the scope of the work, only his texts written since 2013 are analyzed.

Firstly, in order to gather material for analysis, I searched for the articles with direct quotations of the already mentioned economists by typing their last names into the websites’ search engines. All engines showed me articles where economists’ last names appeared in the title or in the text itself. Then, the text inclusion and exclusion process began. Only texts that 1) directly address income inequality or 2) discuss social and welfare policies that most expediently help to tackle inequality were chosen for the research, thematically including texts discussing these policies and laws: progressive taxation, redistribution, tax relief, income support, and transfers, governmental programs, employment schemes and employees’ rights, minimum-wage, parental and other care support, free and universal education, anti-discrimination, and COVID-19 support (Peterson Institute, 2020; Bachelet, 2021; Carter & Howard, n.d.; Gentilini, 2022). Even though there are more of less substantial policies and laws affecting income inequality, this work is limited to the already mentioned ones because of the scope and time limits of the thesis. For the same reason, articles were included or excluded from the research depending on their correspondence to the already defined topics by the title. It means, that I only read the entire content of articles with ambiguous titles and included them in cases where I found at least a line about determined topics. A total of 140 examples of discourse with direct quotations were found and analyzed based on the established criteria: 92 from

Mačiulis, 27 from Mauricas, and 21 from Povilauskas. Sometimes comments from two or all three economists were found in the same article.

I started with a thematic analysis of arguments and coding. It was carried out to find out how arguments were made about social welfare policies and economic inequality. After that, a critical analysis of the discourse about its applicability according to Hirschman's neo-conservative argumentation, Berman's economic language techniques, and other narrative-constructing techniques was carried out. According to Gill (2000), discourse analysis is "a careful, close reading that moves between text and context to examine the content, organization, and functions of discourse" (p. 188). Critical discourse analysis is based on the idea that discourse is a socially constructed and influenced object of power (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). It aims to explore authority, prejudice, power, and control structural interplay as they emerge through the language (Wodak, 2022). It was chosen for the research as the most suitable method to answer this research question and to examine how the discourse on socially sensitive issues was created by three persons in a position of power. Also, to understand how they used their authority and power to shape it. Finally, all texts were written in Lithuanian language and all the quotations were translated to English by me, as Lithuanian is my native and English - my second language.

4. Analysis.

During the analysis, it became clear that the clean economic language as described by Berman, without social and ethical considerations, is not often found. Since macro and microeconomic forecasts were not examined, economists rarely positioned their opinions from the pure economics point of view. The most often and constantly found motif of economic language is the concept of efficiency. This criterion was used constantly for evaluating policies but still not as the main or the only one, as Berman presents it, but often reinforced by mentioning other values like justice.

Talking about Hirschman's theory, it turned out to be much more in line with the discourse under consideration, the deliberations of economists were usually morally, socially, and sometimes openly politically engaged. The Perversity thesis was the most distinctly used out of the three. The Futility thesis was used much less prominently. Finally, almost no Jeopardy thesis examples were found: in the context of only 34 years of free, post-Soviet Lithuania, it would be difficult to argue that perfection has been achieved in any political or economic sphere and that there is a risk of losing it with current changes. However, the lack of use of the Jeopardy thesis in such a context, together with other points of Hirschman's and Berman's theories served to highlight another

important narrative of the discourse. This narrative connects economists' (especially Mačiulis and Mauricas) arguments, their outlook on income inequality and social welfare, and finally, the correspondence of Hirschman's theory and the inapplicability of Berman's theory. I have named it the "Progress and Good News" narrative.

Explicitly it was used in 28 texts on various topics, many of which had the main purpose of reviewing and highlighting achieved and projected progress and optimistic forecasts (for example, Mauricas's economic review 15 years after joining the EU, as well as two of Mačiulis's reviews written 20 years after joining the EU (materials no. 4, no. 26, and no. 27¹). However, this narrative was used not only for informational purposes but also as an implicit part or idea of the arguments. The narrative of progress - achieved, ongoing, and future - emerged as the main measure to minimize social welfare needs and the importance of income inequality. True, it is important to mention that between the economists there were also found internal differences, especially in the discourse of Povilauskas. He was far less outspoken, in general, wrote fewer texts, and in some ways, they diverged from the other two economists, which is why he is less important in my research. However, discourse commonality and similarities are what I focus on in this analysis. Next, I will develop my central point by explaining how and what Lithuanian economists described as "progress" and as obstacles to it. Finally, how in this context they described income inequality and how this narrative helps to summarize the entire discourse created around "progress" and the goals it helps to achieve. Throughout the work, I will consistently integrate how the applicability of Hirschman and weaknesses of Berman's theories emerge in this context.

5. Evidence of progress

As evidence of an ever-progressing situation, economists use many indicators. First and foremost, the narrative of progress is crafted by constantly reminding various positive social and economic indicators, for example, the growth of GDP and wages. Although these indicators are objectively improving, efforts are always made to highlight them. For instance, to strengthen the impression of progress, the negative factor of the shadow economy is sometimes inverted, noting that because of it, the real figures are much more impressive than those shown in the statistics (no. 18). Also, the impression is being reinforced by drawing attention to more negative examples, such as other Eastern, Central or Southern European states that Lithuania has somehow already surpassed since independence. Very often, Lithuania's past is chosen as a negative example.

¹ In the following text, cited and described research materials will be marked with the numbers indicated in the Appendix A.

5.1. Poverty levels

In articles since 2016, one of Mačiulis constantly most used indicators of progress is the reduction of absolute poverty. He often highlights the fact that when Lithuania joined the EU, 1 in 3 Lithuanians lived in absolute poverty and provides figures on how many times the situation has improved since then (no. 19, no. 23, no. 26). Nevertheless, while he elevates the concept of absolute poverty as a key indicator of progress, Mačiulis attempts to downplay the concept of relative poverty, whereby a much larger portion of Lithuanians would be considered impoverished. In one of the articles (no. 1), other economists state that the issue of poverty in Lithuania remains significant because in economically developed countries the concept of absolute poverty no longer carries as much weight, as the concept of relative poverty, which indicates the real number of struggling people. Mačiulis disagrees and brings up the example of Switzerland. He ironically suggests that according to the concept of relative poverty in Switzerland earning three average Lithuanian salaries could be considered poverty. He minimizes the concept by comparing the Lithuanian economic context with the Swiss one using the useful context - different salaries but keeping silent about the useless one - different costs of living.

It is also important to mention that the figures for increasing social benefits, such as the minimum wage and others, are also used as indicators of progress. In one of his texts (no. 24), while supporting his idea that we are successfully building a welfare state because, after joining the EU, Lithuania progressed from 1 in 3 people in absolute poverty to 1 in 10, he adds that this is slightly more than the EU average, but with indexing the minimum wage and other measures, even greater progress awaits in the future.

5.2. Increasing opportunities and population surveys

Very often, statements about the rise in societal well-being, such as reminders of decreasing emigration, crime rates, and increasing immigration are used to define economic progress. Nevertheless, the most frequently mentioned is the abstract of ever-increasing “opportunities”, explicitly or implicitly referencing the period since the Soviet era, joining the EU, or NATO. The impact of these opportunities is emphasized even when contradicting the results of Lithuanian surveys, from an expert perspective irrationalizing and devaluing the respondents' answers. For instance, when commenting on Lithuania's 135th place in the World Happiness Index for “Freedom to Control your Life” criterion, Mačiulis first reduces the significance of the survey result, stating

“It is difficult to pinpoint the reasons why many surveyed Lithuanians do not feel they have full control over their lives. Nevertheless, since regaining independence, in a quarter of a century, the opportunities for Lithuanians <...> have fundamentally changed.” (no. 20)

Then he ultimately reduces the survey responses to irrational feelings - lingering sentiments from Soviet times and overly high expectations. Commenting on a survey where one-third of Lithuanians believed that the economic situation in the country has worsened, Mauricas shapes his narrative similarly. He claims that “this is more related to people's psychology” (no. 6) and speculates on a range of possible factors - envy, the influence of social media, insufficient quality of public services, inflation, increased needs, and even the feeling of insecurity due to robotization - dismissing the sentiments’ objectivity.

Mauricas expresses even greater disagreement with the responses from young people. He is frustrated that they have not noticed the economic growth:

“If anyone, young people are certainly living in their golden age. In terms of wage distribution, Lithuania is one of the few countries where younger people earn more than older. <...> Such things have never happened in Lithuanian history.” (no. 6)

He also adds that Lithuanian youth live better than Southern European youth, where pensions are often much higher than initial salaries:

“In Lithuania, it is completely the opposite - it turns out that a young person earns more than an older person with 10 years of experience.” (no. 6)

It cannot be denied that contemporary Lithuanian youth do live better than previous generations did. However, the importance of this argument is exaggerated because previous generations did not even live in a market economy, not to mention totalitarian regime, poverty levels, inapplicable qualifications, and other completely different factors of their situation. That is why unlike in Southern Europe, surpassing pensions even with a minimum wage is not a difficulty. Mauricas discredits and rejects young people’ who do not feel the economic prosperity answers’ validity with such a comparison of the two completely different historical contexts, together with a misleading claim that a young person would earn more than someone with 10 years of experience.

He exaggerates the significance of his narrative to paint a more persuasive picture of economic progress.

Mačiulis and Mauricas present the responses of such respondents as the result of psychological problems and weaknesses - Soviet-era traumas, excessive expectations, or insecurity. Most importantly, these comments highlight that by denying the rationality of people's experiences, economists elevate the phenomenon of Lithuania's progress in their narrative beyond the boundaries of the residents' experiences and daily lives. In the narrative, residents who do not feel in control of their lives or the economic growth are rhetorically placed in the position of the unjust, the irrational, or those who have failed to jump onto the opportunity train.

5.3.Pathos of productivity

Such an emphasis on vast opportunities serves to create an atmosphere or pathos of productivity. Highlighting relentless progress and great opportunities in the public sphere leaves no room for discussing problems. Thus, the roots of the issues faced by residents are rhetorically shifted to the personal sphere. In this context, the phenomenon of productivity and self-sufficiency becomes highly significant. Arguing that the formation of the market economy and the state apparatus has already created an abstract combination of “progress” and opportunity, the unsuccessful who lag in the economic race are the only ones to blame for their lack of productivity, insufficient efforts, or, sometimes, the state's inadequately created conditions for a market economy. For instance, even after COVID-19 and the global energy crisis, the negative impacts on the economy or people are discussed minimally. Instead, Mauricas celebrates that

“This crisis can certainly become a great opportunity for businesses, and consequently for the entire country to rise. <...> We still have opportunities to catch up with Western Europe, even just from inertia, not to mention if the necessary solutions are implemented.” (no. 12)

He thereby specifies having in mind the improvement of business conditions - creating an attractive investment environment, not applying profit taxes, and fostering closer business cooperation with the state. Aid to citizens is mentioned only from the perspective of workforce improvement, such as better education and training opportunities (no. 12). Additionally, in this narrative, a parallel is drawn between business success and the encouragement of productivity, which is then extended to the success of the entire state and its historical alignment with Western Europe. In doing so, from his position as an economist, Mauricas also steps into the role of a guide leading the state toward progress.

People who are unproductive or who do not belong to the labor market for several possible reasons are often discursively merged into one category, often characterized by derogatory epithets. For example, when talking about the additional amount of non-taxable income for each child, Mačiulis states that

“The application of such a measure, instead of increasing direct one-time payments, would be much more effective because it would encourage births in working and productive, not asocial families.” (no. 14)

This quote helps to highlight the inapplicability of Berman's theory in the analyzed context. Although the concept of efficiency is utilized, it is very distinctly connected with, rather than detached from, the social context. Efficiency in this discourse is not the primary value - economic language is rarely used in a dry manner. The concept is used but only in conjunction with other values like justice, or in this context – sociality, and productivity.

Moreover, Mačiulis highlights this contrast of “productivity” and “asociality” as two sides of the same concept and calls all those who are not “productive”, antisocial (even if they do not work because they choose to raise children, have health or other problems, addictions, or simply can afford it). In this way, he divides imagined Lithuanian society into two parts and transforms the economic concept of "productivity" into a moral one - “sociality, normality”. Also, he calls effective policy the one that promotes productivity.

However, by further examining this whole text titled “Why Are So Few Children Born in Lithuania and How to Change It?” (no.14), it becomes evident that Mačiulis' narrative is even more politically and morally charged, quite unlike the economic language described by Berman. When discussing the effectiveness of the proposed tax policy, Mačiulis highlights birth rate regulation as a positive feature. Hence, the narrative is not solely about tax policy, just as Mauricas' narrative was not solely about COVID-19 financial support. Instead, it implicitly sketches a more ideal Lithuanian society where, according to Mačiulis' narrative, the birth rate of unproductive members should be discouraged. In this text, he narrows down the broader issue of declining birth rates mainly to parents' reluctance to leave the workforce. Thus, he defines as problematic only the decreasing number of the “productive” segment of society and immediately suggests reducing the tax burden on working individuals as a solution. Before this, Mačiulis preempts by explaining that promoting birth rates through allowances would not only be ineffective, because of the minimal population increase but also due to “the side effects of such policies - families deciding to have another child when they need to repay debts or want to buy a new car.” (no. 14)

With this citation, Mačiulis appeals to the birth rate of the poorer segment of society, who take advantage of social welfare incentives without first earning it productively, and the undesirability of such “side effects”, even with the increased birth rate. Ultimately, he also reduces the significance of maternity leave periods, arguing that research shows it does not have an impact on encouraging childbirth but rather hinders women's return to the workforce, i.e., to a productive state. All in all, the moral weight of this text is much stronger than the economic one, and Mačiulis' narrative of progress, primarily based on the growth of societal productivity, is more drawn from the position of a moralist than of an economist.

6. Impediments to progress and their instrumental use

To understand what is meant by the narrative of the constantly mentioned and created phenomenon of progress, it is also important to comprehend what is presented as the antithesis of it - the obstacles of progress. Here, Hirschman's theory gains influence, as arguments against undesirable phenomena are often formed from the perspectives of the Perversity or Futility theses, suggesting that good intentions in a certain area may not contribute to improvement or may even turn into regression.

6.1. Social welfare measures

Firstly, it was often stated that various social welfare measures, such as benefits, hinder progress. From the perspective of the Perversity thesis, all three economists extensively reproduced the view in their discourses that introducing various forms of social welfare would stand in the way of progress by promoting already described unproductiveness and creating negative incentives to work. For example, Mauricas asks:

“Are we heading in the direction of welfare or the “good” state? <...> What I see is that we are going in the direction of that “good” state, which just imprisons people in such, I would not like to use that word, state of *“pašalpiniai”*², state of beggars” (no. 11).

Here, according to Mauricas, overly generous state social welfare provision is equated with imprisoning, which means that in his narrative, reducing social welfare would equate to liberating people from a degrading state. Again, this narrative, like many others, is constructed from the position of a social or political moralist. As already shown, such words and slang to describe the regress of people who get social welfare were common in Mačiulis discourse as well. From the

² Author's definition: a degrading Lithuanian slang, for people living mostly on social welfare and allowances

Futility thesis perspective, the weaknesses of the reforms were often highlighted, questioning the reach and effectiveness of welfare measures. Its necessity is often questioned by using examples of wealthy and supposedly more progressed countries with even lower taxes and redistribution, such as Switzerland (no. 7). However, state-provided social welfare is often positioned as an obstacle to progress by rhetorically placing businesses in a vulnerable position. Compared to the state or even people claiming social welfare, business is portrayed as powerless and in need of protection. For instance, Mauricas admonishes state leaders, stating that

“Lithuania <...> is no longer setting its priorities right. Just a few years ago, attracting investments and creating jobs were the top priorities. Now, there is a shift towards reducing inequality and increasing redistribution, which raises concerns among investors about the future and whether this will come at the expense of the investment climate.” (no. 28)

First, it is criticized that the priorities are too disorganized, but later it becomes clear that what is truly unsatisfactory is the changing order of these priorities, ultimately specifying that investors are not concerned about how their environment will change, but whether their priority position will change in relation to social welfare. Moreover, the progress of the entire state is depicted through the assurance of business interests, while the reduction of inequality is portrayed as an impediment to the state's progress.

6.2. Minimum wage establishment

Even though, as already mentioned, risen minimum wage and pensions post factum were used as indicators of already happened progress, almost before every minimum wage increase, Mauricas and Mačiulis actively campaigned against it, mostly from the Perversity thesis perspective highlighting its various risks for the smooth functioning of businesses and the state. Usually, concerns that the required productivity has not yet been achieved and the economic opportunities of the business are too limited were expressed. The issue of the minimum wage is another one where it is the business sector, rather than the lowest earners, that is often rhetorically positioned as the vulnerable party. However, concerns are raised about the potentially slowed development of the society too: braked pension growth, job loss, the threat of a deepening shadow economy, fewer employment possibilities, higher prices, decreased national competitiveness, and even the bad feelings of qualified workers. Sometimes these arguments are presented from the so-called “What about it?” rhetorical perspective, where one possible solution to a social problem is rhetorically minimized by raising another problem that this solution does not address. For example, when

discussing the increase in the minimum wage, Mačiulis states: “Unfortunately, amidst all the advantages and disadvantages of raising the minimum wage, one of the most important aspects is forgotten – the growth of unemployed who cannot enter the labor market, neither at the minimum nor at the average wage level” (no. 19), refocusing attention on the importance of increasing productivity.

The minimum wage is questioned as a concept even by asserting that knowing you earn the least in the country can make you feel bad (no. 17). Finally, Mačiulis also uses his authority and claims that even discussions about the minimum wage confine us to the “traps of minimal incomes” (no. 9) and that he is convinced that “in the most developed European countries where the minimum wage is regulated, the majority of workers do not know what the minimum wage is and are not interested in it” (no. 9) because this question is relevant there only in the first job, thereby drawing a parallel that even discussing this question hinders Lithuania's development and progress. Here insensitivity, especially to the plight of the lowest earners, is shown as a positive quality. As an alternative to minimum wage, most often higher non-taxable income amount was proposed, shifting the responsibility from businesses to the state.

6.3.State interventions to the market: profit and income taxes

Another concept that was actively narrated as hindering progress often using the Perversity thesis was interference with a market economy, together with profit and income taxes. Numerous other detrimental effects for the state and its residents were identified as potential progress-slowing outcomes of the profit tax (increased prices for consumers, reduced wages, capital flight to lower-tax countries, and fewer job opportunities created) and of the income tax (distorted behavior, lost productivity, encouraged income concealment). As Hirschman defined, in many cases, only the negative and rare effects of these taxes are mentioned and shown to be inevitable. Interestingly, when discussing the shadow economy and tax evasion, within the population, these phenomena are condemned, and the state is encouraged to find ways to stop it (no. 2). Meanwhile, when discussing corporate tax evasion opportunities, it is only mentioned that companies have “three legal, but not necessarily moral” (no. 13) ways to avoid profit taxes. Population income concealment is presented as more reprehensible, whereas when talking about profit and corporate relocation to tax havens or other tax avoidance methods, an image of the inevitability of such behavior is created, portraying the naturalness of corporate actions.

Through the given examples, efforts are made to show that the primary taxpayers of will be ordinary residents, thereby demonstrating concern for them, while the direct impact on the wealthy or companies is omitted. For instance, when discussing income tax, Mačiulis chooses a rather rare exception as the main example of the harm caused by tax reform - a five-person family of two

parents supported by a single earner who receives slightly above-average income (no. 3). Such an example is, first of all, extreme, because in the conditions of the contemporary market economy, it is rare for a five-person family with two parents to choose to survive on the average income of one person, as this means choosing to live in poverty. Secondly, under normal circumstances, neo-conservatives would describe such a choice as blameworthy or irresponsible. Quoting Mačiulis himself:

“Can a person really be happy knowing that they earn the least possible in this country?” (no. 17)

However, in this text, Mačiulis creates an image as if such families are one of the main groups that will have to pay income tax. Even more so, the state's policies are criticized from the perspective of insufficient aid for such families.

In another text, Mačiulis chooses to portray those earning higher incomes from the perspective of another sensitive group of society – young university graduates. It is said that if the income tax is applied, they would no longer be motivated to stay in Lithuania or continue to improve because postponed income generation would not pay off as quickly as expected (no. 15). Finally, when arguing for the retention of the profit tax relief for banks, Mačiulis paints the situation from the perspective of a small bakery, thereby reducing the profits in numerical terms and highlighting that despite different profits, the economic progression and proportions remain the same (no. 16). However, this minimizes the power, influence, and range of decisions of banks and the different situations and profits of small businesses and oligopolist banks.

These examples illustrate that the obstacles to progress are often chosen, highlighted, and opposed based on factors that most hinder the profit accumulation interests of private businesses and their shareholders. However, officially, they are not positioned this way; instead, the main reasons emphasized are the harm these decisions cause to societal interests and progress.

Nevertheless, the facts used against market intervention are also sometimes employed quite instrumentally rather than economically. For example, Mačiulis urges the government not to try to lower the prices, as he does not see them as problematic. According to him, the real issue lies in the low purchasing power and incomes of the population. Therefore, here he considers encouraging competition to be the only commendable measure for reducing prices (no. 29). Legitimacy of this narrative logic is problematized by the frequent mentioning of rising incomes and purchasing power in the “Progress and Good News” narrative as evidence of increasing possibilities. For instance, in another text published four months later, Mačiulis states:

“Looking at the real wage growth and considering price changes, <...> Lithuania is in the first place in terms of real income growth among its residents, surpassing all other countries.” (no. 5)

Thus, it appears that the rhetoric concerning Lithuanian wages is being used instrumentally: in this case, negatively - to oppose state intervention in the market, and positively - to highlight the ongoing progress.

6.4.Social factors hindering productivity

Finally, the last group of phenomena actively problematized are social factors hindering people's productivity. I have already discussed how social welfare measures and raising the minimum wage are often presented in this context, but economists do not hesitate to express their opinions on non-economic and social structure issues too. A common idea that unites these expressions is the possibility for Lithuanians to better utilize their potential - both physical and psychological. Speaking of physical potential, criticism is directed towards the state of Lithuanians' health, and insufficient physical activity (no. 5). Mačiulis actively advocates for the introduction of a sugar tax as an appropriate measure to increase the state budget, akin to increasing the corporate tax, while also educating the public (no. 10). When it comes to psychological potential, strong criticism is directed towards Lithuania's education system, arguing that university education is of poor quality and too mass-produced. For instance, when discussing what is needed to reduce regional disparities, Mauricas mentions improving the quality of education in the same paragraph as creating a favorable business environment, reducing capital and labor taxes, and strengthening business and state cooperation (no. 12). This reinforces the argument that often-raised concerns about education are expressed mostly from the perspective of profit accumulation.

It is also intriguing how the concept of lifelong work is depicted as crucial not just economically and politically but also in terms of quality of life. In his article “We will work until 72 years old, and if we're lucky - even longer” (no. 25) Mačiulis almost does not discuss economic issues at all but exclusively emphasizes the importance of long-term work and productivity for personal happiness, self-expression, and self-realization. Mačiulis writes this article from such a personal and authoritative perspective that he even uses his family members - his mother and uncle - as positive examples of the concept. Such articles further highlight not only the frequent departure of economists to political and moralistic positions but also help to understand how these positions are used to construct the image of desired and undesired citizens in the narrative of progress. This positive narrative is constructed around values of productivity, work, strength, resilience, and self-sufficiency, with the public being educated on why they should become such citizens and the state - why it should

support these values. Those who do not meet the criteria are made to understand that this may have happened due to their wrong attitude and choices.

7. The place of income inequality in the “Progress and Good News” narrative

7.1. Solving “natural” inequality will interfere with the progress

After understanding through which phenomena, obstacles, and human attributes the Lithuanian progress is characterized, it is important to clarify how the concept of income inequality is described and how precisely the essence and goals of the progress narrative are best revealed in the characterization of this phenomenon.

Firstly, inequality is not presented as inherently harmful. Using an argument of the Futility thesis type, in his text “How to Level Income Inequality?” (no. 22), to which I will also return later, Mačiulis distinguishes between two types of inequality – natural and unnatural – and argues that natural inequality should not be given much attention. Instead, the focus should be on helping those living in the most impoverished conditions. The only reason to pay attention to inequality as a phenomenon, according to him, is the tendency of dissatisfied citizens to vote for populists, which “usually has negative consequences for the entire state and societal well-being” (no. 22). Many other consequences for those on the poorer side of the inequality spectrum identified by scholars are never mentioned. Mačiulis describes unnatural inequality as arising from corruption and discrimination. Commenting on this, he adds that these issues “cannot be eliminated through tax policy or greater redistribution” (no. 22). The Perversity thesis was also mentioned directly in the context of solving income inequality. The narrative often used was that the solving process should be done very minimally and gradually, as any significant intervention in the economy through welfare measures could become “the road to hell paved with good intentions” (no. 22) by equalizing incomes but reducing the overall income/well-being of everyone. Here social welfare is also constructed as a hindrance to progress, but the issue of income inequality is not.

7.2. Solving inequality is unnecessary – the progress is ongoing

As already mentioned in Mačiulis’s example (no. 22), when discussing significant income inequality figures, the problem is minimized by stating that poverty is indeed a problematic denominator and should be evaluated instead. However, as discussed earlier, the significance of relative poverty is also minimized, with emphasis placed solely on the indicator of absolute poverty. Yet, while reminding of the drastic decrease in its numbers over the past couple of decades, this is one of the most frequently cited signs of progress in Mačiulis discourse. Thus, by redirecting attention

from income inequality to indicators of absolute poverty, the phenomenon of inequality is indeed minimized by focusing on the narrative of Lithuanian progress. Mauricas behaves similarly (no. 4), first identifying insufficiently attracted investments to Lithuania's regions as the main cause of inequality, then immediately specifying that everything will improve soon and that there is no need for greater redistribution, citing increasing social benefits, growing employment opportunities, and people moving to cities as contributing factors. After discussing the cause of inequality (like the earlier discussed issues, indicating that the real problem is not a lack of redistribution but rather unfavorable conditions for business and investments), he anticipates by emphasizing that the problem solves itself. He highlights spontaneous progress, thus implying that greater redistribution is unnecessary (no. 4). The cause of the problem here is also distinguished from its solutions. None of the listed - increasing pensions, wages, employment opportunities, and migration to major cities - directly address the improvement of investment conditions in the regions, but rather highlight the second point that redistribution is unnecessary.

Since income inequality still is one of the most incompatible indicators with the narrative of economic and social progress in Lithuania, various other methods and criteria are employed to minimize it. It is worth noting that concerns about inequality are not entirely dismissed. In a 2014 text, Mačiulis emphasizes that the limited consumption potential of some residents is worrying, adding: "Life in Lithuania is good, especially if you are living well" (no. 18). In 2015, it was even mentioned that economic inequality and social exclusion would be the main issues of that year globally (no. 8). But in a 2016 text while discussing the happiness inequality index ranking, Mačiulis starts to employ the "Progress and Good News" narrative. Here, he minimizes the concept of income inequality by stating that the small gap between the happiest and least happy indicates that income inequality does not significantly impact happiness inequality in Lithuania, and consequently, the happiness of Lithuanians (no. 20). One of Mačiulis's articles title - "Life in Lithuania is Getting Better, even if Not Everyone Feels It" (no. 21) - effectively combines his narratives of progress and inequality: first, he establishes ongoing progress, then acknowledges existing inequality. However, by merging these two parts, as in his reaction to the results of the polls, it becomes clear that Mačiulis's concept of progress exists independently of those who do not feel it. For progress to exist, in the author's opinion, everyone does not need to experience it, and this does not negate its existence as a phenomenon. Although this does not deny inequality, it is nonetheless seen as secondary and less important. Such a statement, along with the previously discussed emphasis on productivity as a key attribute, suggests that progress is not presented as a process belonging to all citizens of the state, but only to those who catch up to it. Naturally, in such a narrative, income inequality becomes merely a personal problem for those who fail to keep up with the „productive“ individuals.

7.3. Solving inequality is unnecessary – it is a personal productivity problem

The picture of progress and income inequality created by economists, as well as the content of the definition of progress, obstacles, and goals, the imagined society, and the roles economists assume in the public sphere are best connected and reflected in Mačiulis article “How to Equalize Income Inequality?” (no. 22). In this text, the author writes less about how to equalize it and more about why this phenomenon should not be overemphasized. Firstly, taking the first step in the de-problematizing of the phenomenon, he reminds the reader that there are rich countries that are much more unequal than Lithuania. He then presents his reasons for inequality rates and warns that the numbers can be misleading. First, according to him, the statistics on Lithuanian incomes are distorted due to the shadow economy and other reasons, and second, the concept itself does not necessarily imply poverty since more equal incomes can also mean lower incomes, and so on. Both reasons minimize the severity of the situation for those at the bottom of the income inequality scale. He then addresses only forms of inequality that he considers unnatural, such as corruption and discrimination, acknowledging that such inequality is unjust, and its causes should be eradicated, also adding, that it is impossible to eradicate it by tax policy or redistribution. The impact of the phenomenon is further minimized by reminding that income inequality in Lithuania was at its lowest when the economy was the most sluggish, indirectly linking income equality to a negative concept of economic crisis.

Then, from minimizing the phenomenon of inequality, the focus shifts to highlighting the achieved and ongoing progress, while also emphasizing the importance of productivity. Mačiulis notes that inequality has decreased among a certain social group - workers - and highlights various statistics that further underscore the progress made over the decade, from the growth of the middle class to the decrease in the proportion of those earning more than double the average wage, although the change in some indicators, including this one, amounts to only a few percent. Finally, he provides a sort of answer to the question posed in the article's title in two sentences:

“It is necessary to address social exclusion and poverty issues, but merely feigned or abstract concern over income inequality is insufficient. For many people, the main concern is not unequal but low incomes, which are better raised not by receiving social benefits but by offering better jobs and more effective retraining programs.” (no. 22)

First, social welfare benefits are equated with superficial concern, thus initially minimizing their importance. Then, speaking on behalf of the “majority of people”, it is claimed that

inequality as a phenomenon is not the real problem and that the true issue, poverty, which he in other contexts presented as markedly declining, can only be addressed by increasing people's productivity and integration into the labor market, thereby minimizing the significance and purpose of social welfare for a second time.

Ultimately, the text concludes by minimizing the issue of income inequality one last time merging it into the concept of progress. The reader is rhetorically shamed and asked what message it sends to future generations if it is claimed that they do not live in a welfare state and that income equality does not depend on their efforts. This implies that even if this is the opinion, it should be kept to oneself for the sake of the younger generation's self-esteem. Finally, this perspective, which does not align with the progress narrative, is negated:

“This is not true - we live in an independent Lithuania, where no previous generation had such great opportunities for self-realization.” (no. 22)

Again, as was done in Mauricas's lessons for youth, the argument is constructed by elevating the state's contemporary well-being at the expense of a very poor past and a completely different context. The article begins with the question of how to equalize inequality, but throughout the article, the significance of the problem is continually minimized, together with Mačiulis's turn from economist to historical and psychological moralist. This is being done until income inequality is not only de-problematized and personalized as (un)productivity is made the core issue, but also turns the mentioning of the concept to almost blasphemous by reminding the reader of the state's achievements and personal progress opportunities that stem from them. In this way, all reasons for the lack of personal success among those on the darker side of income inequality are rhetorically shifted to their lack of effort, establishing an indisputable narrative of progress in the Lithuanian public sphere.

8. Conclusion

The narrative of progress highlighted by private bank economists in Lithuania is characterized by an overall discursively created image of the country's journey toward progress. This image is most easily discerned through the consistent emphasis on improving social and economic indicators, especially the reduction of absolute poverty, while downplaying or ignoring worsening or stagnant indicators, such as the minimization of the concept of relative poverty. Additionally, there is a consistent reinforcement of the narrative of increasing opportunities, wherein personal unproductiveness is portrayed as one of the main problems facing Lithuanian people. Thus, alongside

the overall narrative of progress, the roots of socio-economic issues are shifted specifically to the personal sphere of individuals.

The progress is depicted not only as spontaneous but also as a process that needs to be fought for and encouraged further. It has become clear that hindrances that explicitly and implicitly have been portrayed as redundant mostly were social welfare measures, government intervention in the free market through minimum wage regulation, income, and profit taxes, as well as the overall surplus of the tax system, along with socio-economic factors that prevent the full utilization of people's productivity. So, it primarily appeals to ensuring the best conditions for businesses and investors within a liberal market framework and persuading the public of its importance. This conclusion is further confirmed by the finding that although the phenomenon of progress is often presented as accumulating the welfare of the entire society, indirectly it is sometimes perceived as existing above society and potentially not even affecting all citizens.

In this progress narrative, economists indirectly depict the envisioned future of the state, as well as the imagined ideal society. While doing this, they often step beyond economic arguments into political, social, or moral realms. This imagined society distinctly separates those who are morally valuable - productive members, from those who are morally invaluable - unproductive members. Productivity is defined not only by various metrics but also through the image of a specific type of person who, when faced with economic, political, or moral pressure, would not resist but be motivated to work harder, improve in all possible ways, take care of themselves, and continue to sustain the theoretically established "progress". Conversely, unproductive members of society, who do not align with the image of progress, are not desired in the future state. This implies not only a change in their characteristics or lifestyle but also a discouragement of their birth rate.

The role of the state in this process is described quite clearly - by assisting the morally invaluable members of society, the state hinders their understanding of the importance of productivity as the path to progress, thus impeding progress itself. Similarly depicted are state intervention in the free market processes, which are also described as accumulating the "progress" of the entire state. By maintaining this narrative, economists dictate that the market operates almost without flaws. Thus, with the help of Hirschman's Perversity and Futility theses, they shape the discourse around the idea that state interventions to market or social welfare would achieve nothing or even reverse the progress. However, intervention is still shown as encouraged when suitable for the ethos of productivity, i.e., when discussing ways to raise society's productivity, adjustments to business interests, or creating the necessary conditions for business.

Finally, all these worldviews are reflected in the discourse on income inequality, which is presented as a phenomenon that should not receive too much attention. By portraying that

attempting to create a more equal society would make everyone poorer, it is argued that attempting to solve it will hinder progress. By suggesting that poverty should be addressed instead of inequality, and simultaneously emphasizing that poverty is decreasing, and that inequality does not affect happiness, it is claimed that it can be ignored because progress is happening anyway. Ultimately, while elevating progress as the main goal, but discursively separating it as independent from society and leaving personal productivity as its main, sometimes only, cause, inequality is generally pushed out of the realm of social problems into the personal sphere.

Berman's theory turns out to be inapplicable in the analyzed discourse but helps to highlight its neo-conservatism and the importance of Hirschman's theory. This happens as instead of finding political ideas turned to economic or technocratic argumentation, the reverse process is highlighted: the translation of economic laws and the concept of efficiency into moral, and social lessons and expertise. Hirschman's theory significantly contributes to the understanding of this discourse and serves as the basis for analysis. However, the usage of the narrative of progress aids in a deeper knowledge of the detachment of such discourse from societal issues and the instrumentality of argumentation. In his book, Hirschman mentions that the use of the Perversity thesis often highlights an elitist stance among its users and portrays consequences as regress, indeed attempting to safeguard their elitist position. Similarly, in the narrative of progress, this phenomenon is often presented from the standpoint of benefitting everyone, implicitly often defending the positions of businesses and investors in positions of power. This is done not only in the basic framework of the capitalist principle of economic growth and benefit for all but also in more subtle ways: by denying or minimizing the harm of income inequality, the need for social welfare, and its effectiveness. The Jeopardy thesis could not be exploited - mainly arguing that progress is an ongoing process, the focus is usually on showing that the process is jeopardized, rather than already achieved or desired outcomes. Moreover, to justify the progress that has already occurred or is underway, in a post-factum context social welfare measures and state regulations, such as the minimum wage, are de-problematized. Finally, the analyzed Lithuanian economists not only operate outside the boundaries of economic language defined by Berman but also construct their narrative in a contrary manner - entirely stepping out of the confines of economic reasoning and political neutrality. They assume the roles of guides to progress, as well as political, social, and moral experts, thereby elevating their authority and strengthening their influence.

Overall, I hope that with this work I contribute to understanding how discourse on income inequality and social welfare is formed from a neo-conservative perspective. Also, how the issue of income inequality and the need for social welfare are minimized by emphasizing the importance of productivity and pushing the narrative of endless progress and how this can be

exploited to create a business-friendly, imagined ideal environment conducive to investments and productivity at the expense of social welfare. When deciding to present comments from representatives of private banks on socially sensitive issues, Lithuanian media representatives should consider the likely advocacy of businesses and banks interests and the narrative-building methods employed for this purpose. Such comments should be presented as one opinion from the spectrum, broadcasted by politically and economically high-powered speakers, rather than an expert position more appealing to scientificity or neutrality.

9. References

- 15min. (2014, April 11). *Vyriausiasis „swedbank" Ekonomistas Nerijus Mačiulis: Išdrįsk Padaryti Tai, Ko Bijai*. [Chief „Swedbank“ Economist Nerijus Mačiulis: Be Brave To Do What You're Afraid Of]. 15min.lt. <https://www.15min.lt/verslas/naujiena/kam-to-reikia/vyriausiasis-swedbank-ekonomistas-nerijus-maciulis-isdrisk-padaryti-tai-ko-bijai-677-418929>
- Almeida, R. M. (2023). Economics as a rhetorical language game. *Economia*. 24(1), 24-43. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ECON-11-2022-0161>
- Bachelet, M. (2021). (rep.). *Deepening inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic - Statement by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 28 September 2021*. OHCHR, UN HRC. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/deepening-inequalities-exacerbated-covid-19-pandemic-statement-michelle-bachelet-un>.
- Berman, E. P. (2022). *Thinking like an economist: How efficiency replaced equality in US public policy*. Princeton University Press.
- Blekaitis, L. (2018, September 7). *G. Nausėda baigia darbą SEB banke* [G. Nausėda ends his career in SEB bank]. Kauno diena. <https://m.kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/lietuva/politika/g-nauseda-baigia-darba-seb-banke-879522?komentarai>
- Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical discourse analysis. *Annual review of Anthropology*, 29(1), 447-466. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.447>
- BNS. (2021, October 2). *Lietuviams Svarbiausias Informacijos Šaltinis – Internetas* [The Most Important Source of Information for Lithuanians – The Internet]. vz.lt. <https://www.vz.lt/inovacijos/technologijos/2021/10/02/lietuviams-svarbiausias-informacijos-saltinis---internetas>

Carter, V. J., & Howard, M. V. (n.d.). *Reducing inequality*. Encyclopædia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/money/income-inequality/Reducing-inequality>

Colander, D. (2005). The Making of an Economist Redux. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 19(1): 175–98.

Černiauskas, N., & Čiginas, A. (2020). Measurement and decomposition of Lithuania's income inequality. *Baltic Journal of Economics*, 20(2), 139–169.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1406099x.2020.1780693>

ELTA. (2023, August 23). *Įtakingiausi Lietuvos Verslininkai ir ekonomistai: Skelbia APIE*

Pokyčius – 10-tuke neliko dviejų Garsių Pavardžių [Most Influential Lithuanian

Entrepreneurs and economists: changes announced – two famous names are gone from the top 10]. Lrytas.lt . [https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-](https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-pulasas/2023/08/23/news/itakingiausi-lietuvos-verslininkai-ir-ekonomistai-skelbia-apie-pokycius-10-tuke-neliko-dvieju-garsiu-pavardziu-28110296)

[pulasas/2023/08/23/news/itakingiausi-lietuvos-verslininkai-ir-ekonomistai-skelbia-apie-pokycius-10-tuke-neliko-dvieju-garsiu-pavardziu-28110296](https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-pulasas/2023/08/23/news/itakingiausi-lietuvos-verslininkai-ir-ekonomistai-skelbia-apie-pokycius-10-tuke-neliko-dvieju-garsiu-pavardziu-28110296)

Eurostat. (2023, October). *Living conditions in Europe - income distribution and income inequality*.

Eurostat Statistics Explained. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_income_distribution_and_income_inequality&oldid=528159)

[explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_income_distribution_and_income_inequality&oldid=528159)

[_income_distribution_and_income_inequality&oldid=528159](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_income_distribution_and_income_inequality&oldid=528159)

Fourcade, M., Ollion, E., & Algan, Y. (2015). The Superiority of Economists. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 29(1), 89-114. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.29.1.89>

Fox, J. (2014, July 23). *Economists are overconfident. so are you*. Harvard Business Review.

<https://hbr.org/2012/06/economists-are-overconfident-s>

- Gemius Baltic. (2024, March 4). *Gemiusaudience: Vasario Mėnesio Apžvalga* [Gemiusaudience: Overview of February]. Gemius . <https://www.gemius.lt/interneto-ziniasklaidos-naujienos/gemiusaudience-vasario-menesio-apzvalga-7063.html>
- Gentilini, U. (2022). *Cash transfers in pandemic times: Evidence, practices, and implications from the largest scale up in history*. World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/37700>
- Gill, R. (2000). Discourse analysis. In M.W. Bauer and G. Gaskell (eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound*. (pp.172-190). Sage Publications.
- Gross, N., & Simmons, S. (2007, October). The social and political views of American professors. In *Working Paper presented at a Harvard University Symposium on Professors and Their Politics* (p. 41).
- Hardy, C., Harley, B., & Phillips, N. (2004). Discourse analysis and content analysis: Two solitudes. *Qualitative methods*, 2(1), 19-22. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.998649>
- Henderson, D. R. (2018, February 20). *Income inequality isn't the problem*. Hoover Institution. <https://www.hoover.org/research/income-inequality-isnt-problem>
- Hirschman, A. O. (1991). *The rhetoric of reaction*. Harvard University Press.
- Holst, C., & Molander, A. (2019). Epistemic Worries About Economic Expertise. *Towards a Segmented European Political Order: The European Union's Post-crises Conundrum*.
- Hood, K. (2017). The science of value: Economic expertise and the valuation of human life in US federal regulatory agencies. *Social Studies of Science*, 47(4), 441-465.
- International Monetary Fund. (2020, July 5). *Introduction to inequality*. Imf.org. <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/Inequality/introduction-to-inequality>

Kiely, R. (2004). What difference does difference make? reflections on neo- conservatism as a liberal cosmopolitan project. *Contemporary Politics*, 10(3–4), 185–202.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1356977042000316673>

Kozlowski, A. C., & Van Gunten, T. S. (2023). Are economists overconfident? ideology and uncertainty in expert opinion. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 74(3), 476–500.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13001>

Kuokštis, V. (2011). What type of capitalism do the Baltic countries belong to? *emecon Employment and economy in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2(1), 1-16.

Lietuvos Bankas. (2023, July 1). *Bankai | Lietuvos bankas* [Banks | Lithuanian Banks]. Lietuvos Bankas. <https://www.lb.lt/lt/bankai>

Lrytas.lt. (2023, November 15). *Kone perpus brangęs maistas ir lietuvių akcijų medžioklė: ekspertai tiki – laikai keisis* [Almost by half more expensive food and Lithuanians hunt for discounts: experts believe – times will change] [Video].

Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTUMMIUSTJE>

Mačiulis, N.[@NerijusMaciulis]. (n.d.). *Experience* [LinkedIn profile]. Retrieved January 18, 2024, from <https://www.linkedin.com/in/nerijus-maciulis-27219123b/>

Mauricas, Ž. [@ŽygimantasMauricas]. (n.d.). *Experience*. [LinkedIn profile]. Retrieved January 18, 2024, from <https://www.linkedin.com/in/zygimantas-mauricas-9781296/?originalSubdomain=lt>

Mauricas, Ž. [@ŽygimantasMauricas]. (n.d.). *Experience*. [LinkedIn profile]. Retrieved January 18, 2024, from <https://www.linkedin.com/in/zygimantas-mauricas-9781296/?originalSubdomain=lt>

- Mirowski, P. (2014). The political movement that dared not speak its own name: The neoliberal thought collective under erasure. *Institute for New Economic Thinking Working Paper Series*, (23). <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2682892>
- Mirowski, P., & Plehwe, D. (Eds.). (2015). *The road from Mont Pèlerin: The making of the neoliberal thought collective, with a new preface*. Harvard university press.
- Mundeikis, J. (2019, December 3). *Ekonomistas Mundeikis: Kas Yra „Gerovės Valstybė“?*[Economist Mundeikis: What is the „Welfare State“?]. Delfi verslas. <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/nuomones/ekonomistas-mundeikis-kas-yra-geroves-valstybe-82394799>
- Pelsmaekers, K. (2016). The construction of economic expertise. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 11(1), 110-117. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/17447143.2015.1079205>
- Peterson Institute for International Economics. (2020, November 17). *How to fix economic inequality?*. Peterson Institute for International Economics. <https://www.piie.com/microsites/how-fix-economic-inequality>
- Plehwe, D. (2020). Revisiting and revising world-wide neoliberalism. *Ideologies in world politics*, 103-124.
- Rafter, K. (2014). Voices in the crisis: the role of media elites in interpreting Ireland's banking collapse. *European Journal of Communication*, 29(5), 598-607.
- Rakauskė, R. (2020, August 12). „Lietuvos įtakingiausieji 2020“: verslininkų ir ekonomistų sąrašas [“Most influential Lithuanians 2020”: list of entrepreneurs and economists]. Delfi. <https://www.delfi.lt/apps/itakingiausieji2020/verslininkai>

- Rakauskė, R. (2021, August 18). „*Lietuvos įtakingiausieji 2021*“: verslininkų ir ekonomistų sąrašas [“Most influential Lithuanians 2021”: list of entrepreneurs and economists]. Delfi.
<https://www.delfi.lt/apps/itakingiausieji2021/verslininkai>
- Rakauskė, R. (2022, August 24). *Verslininkai IR Ekonomistai. Lietuvos įtakingiausieji 2022* [Entrepreneurs and Economists: The Most Influential Lithuanians 2022]. Delfi.
<https://www.delfi.lt/apps/itakingiausieji2022/verslininkai/komentaras>
- Rimavičiūtė, S., & Vilys, M. (2014). Assessment of competition in the banking sector of Lithuania. *Mokslas–Lietuvos ateitis/Science–Future of Lithuania*, 6(1), 56-63.
<https://jau.vgtu.lt/index.php/MLA/article/view/3501>
- Sady, W. (2012, March 19). *Ludwik Fleck*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/fleck/>
- Samonis, V. (1995). Transforming the Lithuanian economy: From Moscow to Vilnius and from plan to market. *CASE Network Studies and Analyses*, (42).
<https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1479500>
- Savickas, E. (2019, August 21). „*Lietuvos įtakingiausieji 2019*“: verslininkų ir ekonomistų sąrašas [“Most influential Lithuanians 2019”: list of entrepreneurs and economists]. Delfi.
<https://www.delfi.lt/apps/itakingiausieji2019/verslininkai>
- SEB. (2018, December 30). *Gitaną Nausėdą Seb Banke Pakeis Tadas Povilauskas* [Gitanas Nausėda in SEB bank will be replaced by Tadas Povilauskas]. SEB.
<https://www.seb.lt/naujienos/2018-12-30/gitana-nauseda-seb-banke-pakeis-tadas-povilauskas>
- Soyer, E., & Hogarth, R. M. (2012). The illusion of predictability: How regression statistics mislead experts. *International Journal of Forecasting*, 28(3), 695–711.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijforecast.2012.02.002>

Statista Research Department. (2023, December 21). *Social media in Lithuania - statistics & facts*.

Statista. <https://www.statista.com/topics/10657/social-media-in-lithuania/#topicOverview>

TV3. (2023, July 28). *Didžiausi Bankai Lietuvoje skirtingi, BET jų savininkai – tie patys: Kam atitenka Lietuvių Pinigai?* [Biggest Banks in Lithuania are different, but their owners – the same: Who gets Lithuanians Money?]. tv3.lt.

<https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/verslas/didziausi-bankai-lietuvoje-skirtingi-bet-ju-savininkai-tie-patys-kam-atitenka-lietuviu-pinigai-n1250734>

Wilkinson, R. (2011, July). *How economic inequality harms societies* [Video]. TED.

https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson_how_economic_inequality_harms_societies

Wodak, R. (2022). Critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis. In *Handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 426-443). John Benjamins.

Zeddies, L. (2023, December 14). *Money creation and inequality – an underexposed topic*. Positive Money. <https://positivemoney.org/2018/01/inequality/>

Žuolytė, J. (2018, August 14). *Lietuvos įtakingiausieji 2018: ekonomistų ir verslininkų sąrašas* [Most influential of Lithuania 2018: list of economists and entrepreneurs]. Delfi Lietuvos įtakingiausieji 2018.

<https://www.delfi.lt/apps/itakingiausieji2018/verslininkai>

10. Appendixes

Appendix A: Analyzed materials, cited or directly discussed in the text.

No. 1: Alonderytė, E. (2019, October 20). *Ekspertai Nesutaria, kiek žmonių Lietuvoje Skursta* [Experts Disagree How Many People in Lithuania are in Poverty]. lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1108483/ekspertai-nesutaria-kiek-zmoniu-lietuvoje-skursta>

No. 2: Aušra, M. (2019, June 9). *Lietuva – Gerovės Valstybė: Ko Reikia, Kad Saldus Nausėdos pažadas taptų realybe* [Lithuania – The Welfare State: What is Needed, that the Sweet promise of Nausėda would become reality]. lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1065507/lietuva-geroves-valstybe-ko-reikia-kad-saldus-nausedos-pazadas-taptu-realybe>

No. 3: Bardauskas, J., & Gilytė, R. (2015, October 26). *Progresiniai Mokesčiai Tik rinkėjų Simpatijoms Sukelti?* [Progressive Taxes Just to Win Voters' Sympathy?]. lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/117628/progresiniai-mokesčiai-tik-rinkejų-simpatijoms-sukelti>

No. 4: Blekaitis, L. (2019, May 1). *Mauricas: 15 metų ES Davė Daug, bet investuotojų Pamiršti Regionai Paskatino pajamų nelygybę* [Mauricas: 15 years in the EU Gave a lot, but investors Forgotten Regions encouraged income inequality]. lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1054911/z-mauricas-15-metu-es-dave-daug-bet-investuotoju-pamirsti-regionai-paskatino-pajamu-nelygybe>

No. 5: Elta, & Lrytas.lt. (2019, January 28). *N. Mačiulis: Būtinios investicijos į Sveiką Gyvenimo Būdą ir kokybinis lūžis švietime* [N. Mačiulis: Investments in Healthy Lifestyle and qualitative breakthrough in education is Necessary]. Lrytas.lt .

https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-pulsas/2019/01/28/news/n-maciulis-butinos-investicijos-i-sveika-gyvenimo-buda-ir-kokybinis-luzis-svietime-9020299#google_vignette

No. 6: Elta. (2019, March 25). *Mauricas: Jaunimas Gyvena Savo Aukso Amžiuje* [Mauricas: The Youth Lives in their Golden Age] . lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/924396/mauricas-jaunimas-gyvena-savo-aukso-amziuje>

No. 7: Jockus, A. (2013, January 12). *Kuo Didesni Mokesčiai, Tuo Sunkiau Juos Surinkti* [The Higher the Taxes, The Harder it is to Collect Them]. lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/10231/kuo-didesni-mokesciai-tuo-sunkiau-juos-surinkti>

No. 8: Jursevičius, D. (2015, January 21). *N. Mačiulis: Tarp 1 proc. Turtingiausių Pasaulio žmonių Yra IR Lietuviai* [Among 1 percent of Richest People in the World there are Lithuanians]. lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/90577/n-maciulis-tarp-1-proc-turtingiausiu-pasaulio-zmoniu-yra-ir-lietuviai>

No. 9: Karaliūnaitė, U. (2016, June 22). *Džiaugsmą dėl minimalios algos temdo pavojai* [The joy of the minimum wage is clouded by dangers]. lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/140668/dziaugsma-del-minimalios-algos-temdo-pavojai>

No. 10: Klimaševska, Ū. (2024, April 18). *N. Mačiulis Siūlo įvesti cukraus mokestį: Galėtume Surinkti Papildomus 100 mln. Eurų Gynybai*. [N. Mačiulis Suggests introducing a sugar tax: We could collect an additional 100 million. Eur. for Defense]. lrytas.lt .

<https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-pulsas/2024/04/18/news/n-maciulis-siulo-ivesti-cukraus-mokesti-galetume-surinkti-papildomus-100-mln-euru-gynybai-31463559>

No. 11: Lapėnienė, J. (2017, December 17). *Vyriausybės Politika – Dauginti „paprąšinių“ ir „pašalpinių“* [Government Policy - Increasing the number of beggars and "pašalpiniai"]. lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/197106/vyriausybes-politika-dauginti-paprasiniu-ir-pasalpinu>

- No. 12: Mauricas, Ž. (2021, January 28). *Žygimantas Mauricas. šis laikotarpis – aukso Amžius Lietuvos regionams* [Žygimantas Mauricas. This period is the golden age for Lithuanian regions]. lrt.lt. <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslo-pozicija/692/1331493/zygimantas-mauricas-sis-laikotarpis-aukso-amzius-lietuvos-regionams>
- No. 13: Mačiulis, N. (2013a, February 28). *N.Mačiulis. Kokius Mokesčius Nori Mokėti Gyventojai?* [N.Mačiulis. What Taxes Do Citizens want to Pay?]. Delfi verslas. <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/verslas/nmaciulis-kokius-mokescius-nori-moketi-gyventojai-60797273>
- No. 14: Mačiulis, N. (2013b, June 4). *N. Mačiulis. Kodėl Lietuvoje Gimsta mažai Vaikų Ir Kaip Tai Pakeisti?* [N. Mačiulis. Why are so few children born in Lithuania and how to change it?]. Delfi verslas. <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/verslas/n-maciulis-kodel-lietuvoje-gimsta-mazai-vaiku-ir-kaip-tai-pakeisti-61542908>
- No. 15: Mačiulis, N. (2013c, June 21). *N. Mačiulis. Progresinių Mokesčių Gynėjai Mulkina visuomenę* [N. Maciulis. Defenders of Progressive Taxes are Fooling the Society]. Delfi verslas. <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/verslas/n-maciulis-progresiniu-mokesciu-gynejai-mulkina-visuomene-61683539>
- No. 16: Mačiulis, N. (2013d, October 30). *N. Mačiulis. Ar Tikrai Bankai Nemoka mokesčių?* [N. Mačiulis. Do Banks Really Pay No Taxes?]. Delfi verslas. <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/verslas/n-maciulis-ar-tikrai-bankai-nemoka-mokesciu-63158914>
- No. 17: Mačiulis, N. (2013e, December 12). *N. Mačiulis. Keli (retoriniai) Klausimai, siūlantiems 1500 lt minimalų atlyginimą* [N. Mačiulis. Several (rhetorical) questions for those offering a minimum salary of 1500 litas]. Delfi verslas.

<https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/verslas/n-maciulis-keli-retoriniai-klausimai-siulantiems-1500-lt-minimalu-atlyginima-63515756>

No. 18: Mačiulis, N. (2014, June 20). *N. Mačiulis. Lietuviai Gyvena Geriau Nei Portugalai* [N. Mačiulis. Lithuanians Live Better than Portuguese]. Delfi verslas.

<https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/verslas/n-maciulis-lietuviai-gyvena-geriau-nei-portugalai-65091255>

No. 19: Mačiulis, N. (2016a, January 18). *N. Mačiulis. iš Materialinio Skurdo Beveik išsivadavome, Dar Liko idėjinis* [N. Mačiulis. We have almost freed ourselves from material poverty, but the conceptual poverty is still there]. Delfi verslas.

<https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/nuomones/n-maciulis-is-materialinio-skurdo-beveik-issivadavome-dar-liko-idejinis-70057084>

No. 20: Mačiulis, N. (2016b, March 24). *N. Mačiulis. Kodėl Lietuviai (ne)laimingi?* [N. Mačiulis. Why Lithuanians are (un)happy?]. Delfi verslas.

<https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/nuomones/n-maciulis-kodel-lietuviai-ne-laimingi-70788808>

No. 21: Mačiulis, N. (2017, August 14). *Nerijus Mačiulis: Lietuvoje Gyvenimas Gerėja, Net Jei Tai Jaučia Ne Visi* [Nerijus Mačiulis. Life in Lithuania is Getting Better, even if Not Everyone Feels It]. Lrytas.lt . <https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/izvalgos-ir-nuomones/2017/08/14/news/nerijus-maciulis-lietuvoje-gyvenimas-gereja-net-jei-tai-jaucia-ne-visi-2221584>

No. 22: Mačiulis, N. (2019a, July 18). *Nerijus Mačiulis. Kaip Išlyginti pajamų nelygybę?* [Nerijus Mačiulis. How to Equalize Income Inequality?]. Delfi verslas.

<https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/nuomones/nerijus-maciulis-kaip-islyginti-pajamu-nelygybe-81754195>

- No. 23: Mačiulis, N. (2019b, July 26). *Nerijus Mačiulis: Pasakos Apie didėjančią Skurdą Bei atskirtį IR Yra Pasakos* [Nerijus Mačiulis: Fairytales about Increasing Poverty are Fairytales]. Delfi. <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/nerijus-maciulis-pasakos-apie-didejanti-skurda-bei-atskirti-ir-yra-pasakos-81829585>
- No. 24: Mačiulis, N. (2019c, August 7). *Nerijus Mačiulis. Kokią Gerovės Valstybę Kursime?* [Nerijus Mačiulis. What Welfare State are we going to Create?]. Delfi verslas. <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/nuomones/nerijus-maciulis-kokia-geroves-valstybe-kursime-81928983>
- No. 25: Mačiulis, N. (2021, October 29). *Nerijus Mačiulis. Dirbsime Iki 72 metų, O Jei Pasiseks – Tai Ir Dar Ilgiau* [Nerijus Mačiulis. We will work until 72 years old, and if we are lucky - even longer]. Delfi verslas. <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/nuomones/nerijus-maciulis-dirbsime-iki-72-metu-o-jei-pasiseks-tai-ir-dar-ilgiau-88551647>
- No. 26: Mačiulis, N. (2024a, March 14). *Nerijus Mačiulis. mums labai pasisekė, Pirma Dalis: Pinigai*. [Nerijus Mačiulis. We are very lucky, First Part: Money]. Delfi verslas. <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/nuomones/nerijus-maciulis-mums-labai-pasiseke-pirma-dalis-pinigai-96114715>
- No. 27: Mačiulis, N. (2024b, March 28). *Nerijus Mačiulis. mums labai pasisekė, Antra Dalis: žmonės* [Nerijus Mačiulis. We are very lucky, Second Part: People]. Delfi verslas. <https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/nuomones/nerijus-maciulis-mums-labai-pasiseke-antra-dalis-zmones-120001311>
- No. 28: Mykolaitytė, K., & Baužytė, M. (2019, December 28). *Ekonomistai Mano, Kad neišdiskutuotų mokesčių įvedimas Lems Prastesnius ateinančių Investicijų Rezultatus* [Economists believe that the introduction of non-discussed taxes will result in poorer results for future investments]. lrt.lt.

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1128776/ekonomistai-mano-kad-neisdiskutuotumokesciu-ivedimas-lems-prastesnius-ateinanciu-investiciju-rezultatus>

No. 29: *Nerijus Mačiulis Apie Kainų tramdymą: „reikėtų per Daug Neįsisiūbuoti“* [Nerijus

Mačiulis About Traming of Prices: We should not get too carried away”]. Lrytas.lt .

(2018, September 10). [https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-](https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-pulsas/2018/09/10/news/nerijus-maciulis-apie-kainu-tramdyma-reiketu-per-daug-neisisiubuoti--7521440)

[pulsas/2018/09/10/news/nerijus-maciulis-apie-kainu-tramdyma-reiketu-per-daug-neisisiubuoti--7521440](https://www.lrytas.lt/verslas/rinkos-pulsas/2018/09/10/news/nerijus-maciulis-apie-kainu-tramdyma-reiketu-per-daug-neisisiubuoti--7521440)

Appendix B: Ethics and privacy checklist.³

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: “Life in Lithuania is Getting Better, even if Not Everyone Feels It”: The Narrative of Progress in Lithuanian Economists Discourse on Income Inequality and Social Welfare

Name, email of student: Gabija Būtaitė, 707834gb@student.eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Rogier van Reekum, vanreekum@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: April 5, 2024 – June 23, 2024

Is the research study conducted within DPAS **YES** - NO

If ‘NO’: at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES - **NO**

If ‘NO’: skip to part V.

³ Shortened checklist version is added, according to its parts, that were applicable to this research (part I, first question of part II and part V).

PART V: DATA STORAGE AND BACKUP

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

My data is public and openly accessible in chosen mainstream media sources. It will be retrieved and kept in word and excel files in my computer and Atlas.ti account.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I am.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Every day while doing the research.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

My data is public.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Gabija Būtaitė

Name (EUR) supervisor: Rogier van Reekum

Date: 2024-03-24

Date:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Gabija Būtaitė', written in a cursive style.