

BALTIC READINGS

REGIONAL BALTIC SOCIOLOGY CONFERENCE'2026

15 MAY 2026

Lithuanian Academy of Sciences
Gedimino Ave. 3, Vilnius, Lithuania

ABSTRACT BOOK

Conference Organizers:

Lithuanian Sociological Association
Institute of Sociology at the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences
Lithuanian Academy of Sciences

Sponsored by:

International Sociological Association



B

1

Aistė Balžekienė (Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania) **Sociological Research on Risk, Environment and Resilience in Lithuania**

Sociological research at Kaunas University of Technology focuses on the following topics: civil society and social innovation; democracy and political culture; societal resilience; environment and society; social transformations in the context of the climate crisis; risk and security studies; citizen science; and sustainable human development.

Projects and researchers' profiles are available at: https://en.ktu.edu/research/research-at-divisions/rg_civil-society-and-sustainability/

Research at KTU fosters interdisciplinary dialogue and places a strong emphasis on social research methodology. The Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities hosts the Lithuanian Data Archive for Social Sciences and Humanities (LIDA) (<https://lida.dataverse.lt/dataverse/lida>), which serves as a platform for open-access survey and other types of data.

Jānis Daugavietis (University of Latvia, Latvia)

Political Attacks on Science in Latvia: Examples from the Humanities and Social Sciences in Recent Years

Similar to several other countries over the past 10–15 years, Latvia has experienced an intensification of attacks and efforts to subordinate science to particular political ideologies, especially in the last five years. Given that Latvia has one of the lowest shares of R&D investment in the EU – and that the contribution from the business enterprise sector is also among the smallest – the dependence of science on the state is particularly significant.

As the power and representation of populist actors in public administration increase, such political pressure is becoming increasingly suffocating. Arguments rooted in conservative and less informed strands of *vox populi*, as they rise to the highest political levels, begin not only to hinder scientific freedom but also to call into question the very need for fundamental science. Research that enables Latvian sociology to align with contemporary Western scholarship is frequently challenged.

So far, the relatively fair and transparent science funding system established about a decade ago has withstood this pressure. Alongside outlining the broader landscape of Latvian science policy, I will also present several micro-level examples drawn from the experiences of humanities and social science scholars in recent years, whose work has been targeted by traditionalist criticism.

G

Kaja Gadowska (Jagiellonian University, Poland)

Academic Freedom in Times of Democratic Decline

Democratic erosion has become a defining global trend, reshaping knowledge production and the autonomy of academic institutions. Governments across regions – authoritarian, hybrid, and democratic alike – use legal reforms, funding mechanisms, and ideological pressure to centralize power and suppress dissent. Academic freedom is increasingly targeted, as controlling knowledge becomes integral to consolidating political authority. Universities face direct political intrusion, delegitimization of expertise, and campaigns designed to weaken critical scholarship. These processes undermine the public sphere and accelerate democratic backsliding.

Drawing on comparative data and cross-regional sociological perspectives, this presentation examines academic freedom as a frontline struggle in contemporary politics. It argues that defending the autonomy of knowledge producers is essential for safeguarding democratic futures, and that sociologists must take an active role in resisting authoritarian drift, building solidarity networks, and reinforcing institutions that protect critical inquiry.

Merili Jürgenson (University of Tartu, Estonia)

Students' Perspective: Building a Sociology Student Community Through SÜLEM

This presentation explores the student perspective on sociology through the example of SÜLEM, a sociology student organisation at the University of Tartu. The presentation discusses the organisation's history and reactivation, its goals, and its role in building a stronger student community. It also highlights how student initiatives can create networking opportunities, practical experience, and greater visibility for sociology. In addition, the presentation reflects on the challenges of maintaining activity and continuity within a smaller academic field. The aim is to show how student-led organisations can strengthen both sociology and student participation in the Baltic region.

K

Liutauras Kraniauskas (Klaipėda University, Lithuania)

Lithuanian Sociology and the Production of Contested Knowledge

The presentation briefly reviews the configuration of the Lithuanian sociology field and examines how sociological knowledge emerges within it. Drawing on various administrative data sources, such as long-term publication patterns and competition for research funding within the broader national social sciences and humanities (SSH) research ecosystem, it aims to demonstrate the dynamics of this field between 2010 and 2023. The process of generating sociological knowledge is characterized by several trends: the overall institutional system has remained stable; disciplinary reproduction has become routinized; sociology continues to function as a relatively competitive scholarly community in the struggle for research grants, although in recent years it has slightly lost its leading position. Around 2019, the field also entered a period of stabilization in academic publishing.

One of the major challenges of national sociology is not knowledge production itself, but the tensions that emerge at the intersection of sociology with other social fields that in different forms challenge its authority and legitimacy (politics, administrative control, the market, the managerial university system, self-help experts, and influencers). Although sociology has traditionally competed with other forms of knowledge about society, another process has also become noticeable within the academic field: the erosion of sociology's disciplinary boundaries. Administrative systems increasingly classify various studies that cannot easily be identified as pure psychology, law, public health studies, or similar disciplines as sociology. As a result, administrative systems often use sociology as a residual category (like a bin for unsorted waste) for otherwise difficult-to-classify SSH knowledge.

M

Arvydas Virgilijus Matulionis (Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Lithuania)

Remembering the Baltic Readings Conferences

Andrius Marcinkevičius (Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Lithuania)

Sociological Research on Ethnicity in Lithuania: Current Trends and Future Perspectives

This presentation outlines the spectrum of sociological research on ethnicity conducted at the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences over the past two decades, highlighting key topics and methodological approaches. It also discusses the significance of these findings within the context of national ethnic minority integration policies. Finally, the presentation identifies the global and local political and social factors that will shape the future direction of sociological research in this field.

N

Zenonas Norkus (Vilnius University, Lithuania)

Baltic Countries as a Laboratory for the Theory of Modern Social Restorations

In analyzing modern social macrosystems, two types of systemic change should be distinguished: revolutions in the proper sense, driven by the new ideas of social justice, and restorations, driven by the idea of reversal to the past. In the last case, there is a sequence of three systems or alternative equilibria: original (A), intermediate (B), and restored (C), where the restored system C constructs continuity with the original system (A). The Baltic countries qualify as paradigmatic cases of the second wave of modern restorations (the first one occurred in 1815-1848) because the most recent systemic change here involves a triple restoration of the national state, capitalism, and democracy.

O

Klara Öberg (Halmstad University, Sweden)

And What About the Job? From Sociology Degree to the Labour Market: Geographical and Political Contexts

This paper discusses higher education in sociology in the Swedish context and its transformation for the past thirty years. In particular, it examines how higher education in sociology has been and is affected by increasing demands for education programmes with profiles that correspond more clearly to labour market needs and broader geopolitical developments. The paper thus further explores the transition from higher education to the labour market for graduates in sociology. As universities are increasingly expected to demonstrate employability, professional relevance, and alignment with labour market demands, sociology occupies a complex position between critical academic inquiry and employability expectations. The study therefore reflects how sociology education is framed and understood as irrelevant/relevant knowledge within contemporary labour market discourses

P

Pille Petersoo (Tallinn University, Estonia)

Teaching sociology in Estonia – Resilience or Survival?

International Sociological Association, European Sociological Association, and various national organisations have all highlighted the challenges faced by sociology as a discipline, and teaching sociology in particular, in today's world. What are the challenges faced by sociology teaching in Estonia in 2020s? Dr Petersoo will discuss the state of teaching sociology in Estonia in this context.

Eve-Liis Roosma (Tallinn University, Estonia)

Situating Estonian Sociology in the Baltics: The Evolution of Education and Labour Market Studies

The presentation provides an overview of the education and labour market studies conducted by researchers at Tallinn University over the past 20 years. These comparative and collaborative studies involve researchers from different European countries and bring together various social science disciplines. The presentation highlights some of the larger research projects, mostly financed by the European Commission, that have enabled the study of education and labour market issues, which are among the main research areas of sociologists at Tallinn University. In addition, the presentation addresses related fields of research, including life course studies, social mobility, gender and family sociology, the sociology of nationalism, interethnic relations, and integration.

V

Agota Vaitkienė (Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Lithuania)

Sociology in the Baltics: Locality vs. Internationality

The Baltic countries share many similarities in the development of sociology. The well-known tension between locality and internationality has persisted for more than 50 years—initially shaped by their position on the periphery of the Soviet Union, and later by competition within the international arena of social science.

Sociology in the Baltics can be seen both as a means of defining local identity and as an opportunity to participate in the international scholarly community. The Baltic Readings (conferences), which bring together researchers from across the region, have created a space for shared experiences and the development of new scientific ambitions.

The emergence and decline of Baltic collaboration reflect an ongoing struggle to maintain local relevance while engaging internationally.

Ž

Oksana Žabko (Foundation “Baltic Institute of Social Sciences” and University of Latvia, Latvia)

Does the Common Agenda Exist in the Baltic Sociology? Research Topics and Networks

This paper analyses the main research areas in which Latvian sociologists have been active since 2010, as reflected in publications indexed in the Scopus database. The results indicate that Latvian sociologists frequently collaborate in interdisciplinary teams, leading to a higher number of publications in areas that span the broader social sciences (such as sustainability, innovation, migration, memory studies, and political behaviour) rather than in topics more traditionally associated with sociological theory (such as stratification, social mobility, inequality, social inclusion, and values). An analysis of co-authored publications with other Baltic sociologists shows that collaboration exists in certain areas, while new networks are emerging slowly and remain fragile.

Round table discussion

Development of Social Sciences Research Infrastructures in Lithuania: Building Resilient and Collaborative Ecosystems

Discussants:

Aurelija **Stelmokienė**, Vytautas Magnus University | European Social Survey

Antanas **Kairys**, Vilnius University | Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe

Aušra **Maslauskaitė**, Vytautas Magnus University and Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences | Generations and Gender Program

Rūta **Žiliukaitė**, Vilnius University and Vytautas Magnus University | Lithuanian Longitudinal Social Survey

Ainė **Ramonaitė**, Vilnius University | Lithuanian Longitudinal Social Survey

Audronė **Telešienė**, Kaunas University of Technology | Lithuanian Data Archive for Social Sciences and Humanities

Eglė **Vileikienė**, The Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania | Longitudinal Sociological Research in the Ministry of Interior

As an integral part of the science and research system, research infrastructures (RI) are essential for providing continuous, high-quality data that enable evidence-based policy decisions. However, establishing and maintaining a durable RI is a demanding process that requires tenacious commitment, persistent efforts and substantial resources. The round table discussion aims to overview the development trajectories of social sciences RIs in Lithuania, identifying the key factors for a successful development of an RI and reflecting upon the challenges or struggles encountered in the process.

The discussion brings together representatives from the following social sciences RIs: Lithuanian branches of international RIs of European Social Survey (ESS), Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), and Generations and Gender Program (GGP); nationally-based RIs of Lithuanian Longitudinal Social Survey (LIST) and Lithuanian Data Archive (LiDA); and a longitudinal sociological research program under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania.

These RIs feature diverse development paths, ranging from solid continuity of the ESS, which has functioned in Lithuania for nearly two decades, to the recently launched LIST. By exchanging these varied experiences, the participants will discuss future expectations and strategies for building up the added value for the scientific community, policy making, and society at large.

Conference Organizers:

Lithuanian Sociological Association
Institute of Sociology at the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences
Lithuanian Academy of Sciences

Sponsored by:

International Sociological Association