

**The Russian minority in the Baltic capitals
Examining marginalisation in the context of urban dynamics**

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LEARNING FROM EASTERN EUROPE

Edited by

Filip Alexandrescu, Ryan Powell and Ana Vilenica



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Learning from Eastern Europe

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8 The Russian minority in the Baltic capitals

Examining marginalisation in the context of urban dynamics

Rūta Ubarevičienė and Donatas Burneika

Introduction

Over the last 30 years, urban areas in Eastern Europe (EE) have undergone substantial changes and have become increasingly integrated into the global network of economic, social, cultural, and political relationships. This integration has been driven by the increased movement of people, goods, capital, information, and ideas across national borders and within countries. As a result, the urbanisation processes in EE cities have been profoundly shaped by these global flows, resulting in new socio-spatial patterns and dynamics within the urban areas (see, for example, McElroy, this volume and 2024, on Romania's connections to Silicon Valley). One of the most prominent features in EE, but also around the world (van Ham et al., 2021) is increasing residential segregation, which means that people with high and low status (or incomes) are increasingly separated in different neighbourhoods. This phenomenon significantly impacts the most vulnerable or marginalised groups, as they often reside in the city's least favourable areas in terms of geographical location and other associated disadvantages (Musterd et al., 2017). Such patterns of residential segregation increase the challenges faced by these groups, further limiting their access to opportunities and perpetuating cycles of inequality (Tammaru et al., 2021). The interplay between global factors and urban processes leads to socio-spatial changes,¹ as evidenced in the Baltic countries: Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

The historical development of the Baltic countries has led to distinct ethnic differentiation, distinguishing them not only from those in the West but also from other EE countries. At present, ethnic diversity in Western Europe in many cases may be regarded as a result of post-colonial processes, while ethnic diversity in the Baltics can mostly be deemed the result of recent colonialism, which was not evident in other EE countries outside the former Soviet Union. As Republics of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states operated within a "self-enclosed" communist system where decision-making power, including regional planning and economic development, was centralised in Moscow. The absence of internal borders, both political and economic, facilitated the movement of the labour force within the Soviet Union. In the Baltic states, rapid industrial growth (initiated by the central Soviet government) was followed by a substantial immigration of labour force

from various Russian-speaking regions of the Soviet Union. This influx generated an urgent need for new housing, prompting the rapid construction of high-rise apartment blocks to meet the demand (Hess & Tammaru, 2019). Initially, ethnic minorities (or, indeed, majorities, considering the entire Soviet Union) migrating to Baltic cities did not encounter socio-economic disadvantages. However, after the 1990s, post-communist reforms, property restitution (see Zamfirescu, this volume), deindustrialisation, and the rise of business and government sectors in the Baltic capitals reshaped the status of the Russian-speaking population in relation to local Baltic residents. This encouraged a portion of the Russian-speaking population to return to their countries of origin, although many chose to stay in the Baltics (Kirch et al., 1993; Simonyan, 2022). Furthermore, despite the overall population decline in the Baltic states since the 1990s,² the capital cities have consistently attracted highly skilled residents and new service-related economic sectors, leading to their growing dominance within the national city systems, a trend that continues to endure (Ubarevičienė, 2018; Lang et al., 2022; Ubarevičienė et al., 2024). As a result of these changes, the relative position of Russian minorities undergoes a continuous decline in the Baltics.

The aim of this chapter is to assess whether the Russian-identity population could be characterised as increasingly marginalised in the Baltic capitals: Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius. This study examines whether individuals with a Russian identity tend to experience residential segregation processes that could be associated with their increasing marginalisation over time within the evolving urban context. The study's central hypothesis posits that the Russian minority has been experiencing declining societal status in relation to the general social context in Baltic capitals since the 1990s, which creates conditions for deepening processes of urban segregation and marginalisation. Notably, segregation and marginalisation of other ethnic and linguistic minorities, such as Roma communities or asylum seekers from Asian and African countries, are likely more pronounced in the Baltics, but the limited statistics on these minorities and their relatively small numbers prevent a reliable quantitative analysis, thus requiring alternative study designs not employed in this analysis.

In this study, we use census data from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania covering two decades (2001, 2011, 2021). By mapping the changes in the distribution of Russian identity residents in Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius, we conduct a comparative three-city study. This approach attends to a sizeable gap in existing research, given the scarcity of comparative urban studies on the Baltic states. Based on the spatial patterns observed through the mapping, we make assumptions about the evolving societal status of the Russian population. We expect that while the Baltic states share similarities in political, economic, and social development, the differences in their ethnic composition (as well as different types of city systems) may result in varying processes and patterns of segregation and marginalisation within their capital cities. Noteworthy, in this study, the terms “segregation” and “marginalisation” refer to socio-spatial differentiation and are occasionally used as synonyms. However, while social segregation implies a gap between two groups, marginalisation should be perceived as an intensified form of exclusion, negatively

affecting one of the groups (see Alexandrescu et al., this volume). Although both processes can be studied without a spatial dimension, spatial effects are inevitably intertwined in both cases. In this chapter, we specifically focus on the spatial dimension and trace shifting patterns of urban settlement at the city scale over time. This provides a useful complement to qualitative and ethnographic accounts centred on the micro spaces of the city and/or on the affective dimensions of urban marginality (Lancione, 2016).

Transformation of urban space: effects of global, regional, and local processes

Changes in socio-spatial organisation, involving processes of segregation and marginalisation, are closely connected to the overall dynamics of urban transformation – historical, social, and physical. This transformation results from the interplay of processes occurring at the intersection of global, regional, and local scales.

As cities and countries evolve, the social status of different social groups might undergo a significant shift. The development of urban physical and social space cannot be comprehensively understood without acknowledging processes unfolding across various scales (see Brenner, 1998). The Baltic states are no exception to this trend. Cities, especially capital cities, are increasingly interconnected not only with their traditional functional regions, which have historically played a pivotal role in their development, but also with an expanding network of global influences and interdependencies (Scott & Storper, 2003; Scott, 2001; Derudder & Taylor, 2018). Consequently, the ability of any city to attract residents and grow is influenced, in part, by processes occurring elsewhere – often far away from spaces that could be controlled or shaped by local or national governments. There is no doubt that city growth and urban transformation are influenced by prevailing liberal economic and trade policies worldwide. While opinions may vary on the impact of globalisation, particularly on global inequalities, and actual consequences can be influenced by local circumstances, there is little doubt that globalisation and inequalities on various scales are interdependent (Basu, 2006). Sassen (2014) provides a critical account of these interdependencies.

As for the regional scale, the persistence of country-wide polarised development is a prominent concern, even in economically prosperous countries. Numerous researchers assert that the neoliberal economy has accelerated urbanisation and polarisation in EE countries, leading to some regions undergoing rapid peripheralisation and marginalisation in comparison to the capital regions (Lang et al., 2022; Lang & Görmar, 2019; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Ubarevičienė et al., 2016). Typically, the capital areas experience heightened economic activity and attract the most “successful” people from other parts of the country (Ubarevičienė & van Ham, 2017; Ubarevičienė et al., 2024). Examining this scenario reveals the widespread policy orthodoxy of city-regions in Europe, where “winners” and “losers” in development are readily apparent (Hoole & Hincks, 2020). Understanding the impact of such policies on various regions adds a crucial dimension to comprehending the inequalities and their consequences within economically prosperous

nations. Nevertheless, the development trajectories of capital cities are influenced by various national-scale factors as well, such as differences in size, physical geographies, and regional policy implementations, which in turn affect population inflow to these urban centres. Moreover, the level of urban and economic centralisation differs across countries, with monocentric countries seeing capital cities as hubs for significant growth, drawing migrants nationally and internationally, while polycentric countries distribute growth potential across multiple cities (although, the polycentric model retains a higher potential for future centralisation). The Baltic states, despite their many similarities, are characterised by different types of city systems – polycentric in Lithuania, monocentric in Latvia, and partly monocentric in Estonia. Therefore, when comparing urban processes in the Baltic states, it is important to account for the different city systems and the distinct patterns of change associated with these urban frameworks (Ubarevičienė, 2018). For instance, each Baltic capital has unique potential for attracting internal migration, which leads to varying changes in population composition, including ethnicity, education, professional status, etc. As a result, the proportion and relative social positions of Russian minorities may change differently in Baltic capitals over time. This could lead to different patterns of ethnic segregation and marginalisation, even if the relative size and social status of the group/s remain unchanged.

Lastly, the significance of the local dimension in urban development should not be underestimated. Even cities that appear similar might have urban spaces characterised by distinct variations in physical, social, and economic attributes, resulting in differentiated urban environments and “in-between spaces” of the city margins (Lancione & Simone, 2021). Potentially, a more differentiated urban environment would result in higher real estate price differences and a more segregated society. It follows that spatial patterns of segregation or marginalisation, along with the factors that drive them, may also diverge between and within cities. Overall, socio-economic segregation is growing in large cities worldwide, including those in Europe, as shown by the systematic comparative studies. Increasing segregation, in turn, worsens social issues within urban environments (van Ham et al., 2021; Tammaru et al., 2016). This trend is also observable in the capital cities of the Baltic countries, albeit with variations in spatial patterns and the intensity of these processes (Krišjāne et al., 2016; Tammaru et al., 2016; Valatka et al., 2017). Noteworthy, segregation (along with marginalisation) not only arises from social and economic inequalities but also plays a role in perpetuating and intensifying these disparities. Segregation is often analysed based on income, socio-economic status, ethnicity, education, and other individual characteristics. Additionally, historical, cultural influences, sense of belonging, ancestral ties, or place attachment can also cause segregation, and in particular, marginalisation. And in some cases, like the US for instance, cities are characterised and indelibly shaped by histories of racialisation, ghettoisation, and confinement, as these have been documented in Milwaukee (Desmond, 2016), LA (Gibbons, 2018), and Chicago (Wacquant, 2008).

Urban development is inseparable from economic development within globalised urban economies. Until the early 2000s, the Baltic states were profoundly economically marginalised, characterised by some of the lowest GDP per capita

figures in the EU (Eurostat, 2023) and correspondingly low income levels among their residents (OECD.Stat, 2024). However, starting from the 2000s, the economies of the Baltic states experienced the most rapid economic growth across the entire European Union (Eurostat, 2023), although still in the context of significant (and selective) out-migration. One might expect that this would have a positive impact on the “social climate”, overall well-being, and migration patterns (i.e. reducing emigration and encouraging return migration), thereby potentially curbing social segregation and marginalisation in the Baltic region. However, the GINI index in the Baltic states remained persistently high (World Bank, 2024), implying that not all groups have gained the same advantages from economic growth, which was spatially concentrated in the metropolitan cities. It also suggests that segregation and marginalisation are likely to increase further – a trend that has already been observed (Tammaru et al., 2016).

In summary, it is evident that the ongoing urban, regional, and global processes are contributing to an increasingly differentiated society in the Baltic capital cities. Crucially, the urban transformation and the advantages of economic growth have not been uniformly distributed across society, resulting in specific segments of the population being marginalised, both socially and spatially.

Socio-spatial marginalisation in the Baltic states

Social marginalisation occurs when specific groups of individuals are pushed to the margins of society (in all aspects – economically, socially, spatially, and symbolically). This is commonly associated with factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, social class, gender, sexual orientation, political beliefs, disability, or age. Marginalisation typically arises from discriminatory practices, societal stigma, or structural inequalities. Some scholars link marginalisation to the inherent contradictions of international capitalism (Wacquant, 2008). Marginalised individuals often face restricted entry to opportunities, resources, and participation in decision-making, resulting in disadvantages across areas like education, employment, healthcare, and civic engagement. Consequently, they are left out of the mainstream social, economic, and political activities (Sardelic, 2021). Spatial marginality results from processes of social, economic, and political exclusion and stigmatisation (Mohan, 2002). In this study, we discuss the spatial dimensions of marginalisation for the Russian minority, presuming a strong correlation with their social, educational, and potentially cultural marginalisation.

In the Baltic states, as in numerous other EE countries, the Roma population could be regarded as one of the most marginalised groups. However, unlike other EE countries, historically and presently, the known Roma communities in the Baltic region are relatively small, with approximately 1,250 Roma in Estonia, 3,000 in Lithuania, and 5,600 in Latvia (European Commission, 2023). Roma communities tend to reside in informal settlements or substandard housing conditions which, coupled with a reluctance to self-report due to fear of stigma or discrimination, may result in an underestimation in these official population counts. Similarly to other countries, the Roma in the Baltics confront significant social exclusion,

evidenced by notable segregation, social challenges that they encounter in everyday life (Petrušauskaitė, 2010; Roht-Yilmaz, 2020a, 2020b) and widespread anti-Roma racisms, which extend across Europe (see, e.g., Platūkytė, 2021; Picker, 2017; Powell & van Baar, 2019; Sardelic, 2021). Stigmatisation and marginalisation of the Roma population are well-documented in EE, including the Baltic region. For example, a survey conducted in Lithuania in 2022 highlighted notably negative attitudes towards Roma people – 59% of respondents expressed hesitation about having a Roma neighbour, the highest among all population groups surveyed (Blažytė, 2022). Additionally, 16% of respondents expressed a reluctance to live next to Russians. Against the backdrop of the historical and current geopolitical situation, this chapter focuses on the Russian identity population in the Baltic states, aiming to determine whether we can classify Russians as (an increasingly) marginalised group in the region overall, or in specific and nuanced instances. The historical legacy of the relations between the Baltic states and the Soviet Empire continues to be a challenging aspect for the Baltic states. The current geopolitical situation (i.e. Russian military aggression and invasion in Georgia and Ukraine) exacerbates the difficulty of overcoming this historical burden. It could have been anticipated that in the decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union, much of the Russian-speaking population would become more integrated within the Baltic society. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine (in 2014 and 2022) fundamentally altered this trajectory, making the divide between “locals” and “Russians” more pronounced. In this context, discussing racialisation or whiteness³ (Krivonos, 2024) may not be accurate – it is more about people’s attitudes and their “hidden” animosity or at least antipathy towards Russians. However, except for sporadic and isolated incidents, the viewpoints of the Baltic majority are not publicly conveyed in actions or words.

Nowadays, Russians constitute the largest ethnic minority group in the Baltic region, consisting of approximately 700,000 individuals across the Baltics. In Riga and Tallinn, they comprise as much as 40–50% and in Vilnius around 10–15% of the total population. Though this group has not been considered marginalised in the Baltics, in this chapter we show that the shifting societal status of the Russian diaspora may lead to marginalisation-like processes. Two key factors contribute to this shift: a decline in the socio-economic status of the Russian identity population since the 1990s, and a decline in a public attitude towards Russians, intensified by the Russian invasions of 2014 and 2022. Seventy-five per cent of Lithuanian residents indicated that their attitudes towards Russians had become more negative over the last five years (Blažytė, 2022). Moreover, these changes occur amid intense urban and political transformations. In general, the Baltic countries align with the “Western world”, while at least part of the Russian-speaking population holds prevalent anti-Western views. We recognise that the Russian community in the Baltic countries is highly diverse, encompassing varied world views, socio-economic statuses, levels of integration, and more. At the same time, we do acknowledge that Russian minorities may not see themselves as marginalised to the same extent or that not all of them may experience the same degree of marginalisation in the Baltics. Moreover, there is room for questioning whether marginalisation is possible for

such a sizable segment of society, particularly considering that this group had certain advantages until relatively recently as newcomers from a state of great power.

Historically, the situation of Russian minorities in the Baltic countries has undergone significant shifts, and their situation today is particularly uncertain. During the Soviet era, many Russian speakers migrated to the Baltics, primarily engaging in industrial and administrative roles. A network of Russian schools was established during this time, contributing to widespread Russian language usage, a legacy that persists to this day. Consequently, their integration through learning local languages (Lithuanian, Latvian, or Estonian) was not actively pursued. The societal status of Russian speakers was relatively favourable in the Baltics during the Soviet era. A sudden change occurred in 1990–91, when the Baltic countries regained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While a substantial number of Russian speakers returned to their home countries, a significant portion chose to remain within the Baltics (see Simonyan, 2022). Upon gaining independence, the Baltic countries oriented themselves towards the Western world, politically and economically. This shift gradually transformed their economic structure, leading to the reshaping and downsizing of the older (Soviet-built) industrial sector. Furthermore, job prospects for Russian speakers diminished, resulting in a decrease in their access to work-related opportunities. Language barriers have also hindered (and continue to hinder) the retraining options for first-generation Russian immigrants as well as the educational attainments of later generations, particularly when Russian-language education is favoured. Additionally, as younger individuals who belong to the ethnic majority in the Baltic countries distance themselves from learning Russian as a secondary or tertiary language, it may contribute to the deepening of social and spatial divisions. Families who primarily speak Russian often select Russian-language schools for their children, which commonly provide lower-quality education compared to schools in the national languages. Later, this choice creates obstacles for individuals seeking admission to universities that typically instruct in the national language (or, as is increasingly the case, in English). Consequently, Russian-speaking minorities often face lower educational attainment, which translates into disadvantaged positions within the labour market, characterised by lower-skilled employment and lower income. This noticeable pattern gives rise to an escalation in the prevalence of ethnic and linguistic-based segregation within the Baltic states.

In light of the discussed historical and current circumstances, this chapter aims to provide insight into whether the Russian minority can be characterised as experiencing growing marginalisation in the Baltic capitals. Multiple studies have already shown that in the Baltic countries the socio-economic status of Russian minorities is disadvantageous compared to the majority population, and it is further worsening. For example, there is a growing convergence between ethnic and socio-economic segregation patterns in the Baltic capitals, indicating that minority groups, primarily Russian speakers, are more prone to having lower educational achievements and being employed in lower-skilled occupations, leading them to reside in less desirable urban areas (Burneika & Ubarevičienė, 2016; Leetmaa et al., 2018; Kalm et al., 2023; Krišjāne et al., 2016). Research by Hess and Tammaru (2019) and Tammaru et al. (2016) reveals a common trend among ethnic

minorities, mainly Russian speakers. In the Baltic capitals there is a tendency to cluster in neighbourhoods dominated by Soviet-era apartment blocks, meanwhile ethnic majorities increasingly concentrate in city centres, post-Soviet apartment buildings, and suburbs. Although authors suggest that Russian identity residents may prefer Soviet housing stock (Tammaru et al., 2016), it is important to note that the clustering of ethnic minorities in specific neighbourhoods is not solely based on personal preferences but is also influenced by broader social and economic factors. Furthermore, the recent study by Kalm et al. (2023) has shown that Russian speakers in Estonia have opted to live in Russian minority-dense neighbourhoods and to choose Russian-language schools. This leads to limited exposure to the majority population, as well as other cultural and linguistic influences, and contributes to a sense of isolation reinforcing cultural divisions. The question of whether this phenomenon is primarily a result of “self-segregation”, societal factors, or imposed circumstances is a complex one, involving historical context, individual choices, and broader societal dynamics.

Data and methods

In this study, we draw on quantitative and Geographic Information System (GIS) techniques and use census data from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania for the years 2001, 2011, and 2021. Our focus is on individuals associated with Russian ethnicity and/or mother tongue,⁴ a distinction derived from self-reported characteristics in the population censuses of the Baltic countries. Ethnicity (or language) signifies a sense of belonging to a certain ancestry or origin, constituting a fundamental aspect of ethnic identity (Liebkind, 2006; Mägi et al., 2020). It has been acknowledged that the Russian minority in the Baltic region has a strong sense of belonging, affirming the importance of cultural and ancestral ties (Mägi et al., 2020; Matulionis & Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, 2014). It is expected that a portion of the substantial immigrant population, or their descendants residing in the Baltic states for an extended period, may alter their self-reported ethnicity or mother-tongue over time. While this aspect is not the focus of this chapter, we acknowledge that the observed results might be somewhat influenced by this phenomenon.

We examine residential patterns characteristic of Russian-identity individuals in the three Baltic capitals. We create maps visualising the spatial distribution of those identifying as Russian, as well as the proportion with primary or lower secondary education. We document changes in these patterns between 2001, 2011, and 2021, providing a temporal dimension to our analysis. We analyse educational attainments for individuals aged 25 and older, as by this age, most have completed formal education, including higher education or vocational training, offering insight into their educational levels upon workforce entry.⁵ This approach ensures a stable snapshot of a population’s educational achievements beyond the typical age of completing formal schooling.

This analysis is restricted to the Russian-identity population, focusing on a comparative examination of their residential patterns across three Baltic capitals and over time. It is important to note that while our empirical study specifically delves

into the Russian-identity population, we recognise the broader dynamics of urban transformation. Both social and physical aspects play a crucial role in influencing changes in the socio-spatial organisation of any ethnic group. Thus, our empirical analysis contributes to a more nuanced perspective that must be understood within this broader urban context.

We encountered some data constraints impacting the full comparability of the results: i) unavailability of 2001 data for Vilnius; ii) Tallinn's data uses self-reported mother tongue, whereas Riga and Vilnius employ self-reported ethnicity; and iii) varied average sizes of spatial units across cities (Riga – 10,500, Tallinn – 1,920, Vilnius – 640 residents, in 2021). Table 8.1 provides a concise summary of key figures for the analysed cities.

Results

Residential patterns of the Russian-identity population

Figure 8.1 depicts the distribution of the Russian identity-population in Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius. The maps present the absolute numbers of individuals, with darker colours indicating a larger number of individuals associated with Russian identity. Therefore, it is important to exercise caution when making straightforward comparisons, as there are significant variations in the numbers of the Russian population between the Baltic capitals (see Table 8.1); variations in the size of spatial units should also be considered (see Data and methods). Nevertheless, the deliberate choice of absolute numbers was made for analysing the changing residential patterns of the Russian population, as this approach allows us to focus specifically on this demographic group while intentionally disregarding other changing demographic contexts, such as total population change, urban densification, and sprawl, etc. Consequently, our focus remains on the Russian-identity population and the urban areas where their presence is either growing or declining.

Figure 8.1 shows a highly uneven distribution of Russian-identity individuals within the city spaces, ranging from their complete absence in certain neighbourhoods to their dominance in others. In Riga and Vilnius, the overall number of individuals identifying as Russian has been decreasing since 2001. While there is a decline in Russian-identity individuals in many areas, they are increasingly concentrated in some specific parts of the cities. These areas are predominantly situated on the outskirts of the cities and in less attractive neighbourhoods, often dominated by large, Soviet-era housing estates. Simultaneously, the presence of Russian-identity individuals is diminishing most significantly in more central, prestigious locations, as well as in new residential developments. In contrast, in Tallinn, the population of Russian speakers has been steadily increasing since 2001, with minimal change observed in their residential patterns over the course of two decades. The increase in the Russian-speaking population in Tallinn is primarily attributed to internal migration; Tallinn's growth as a metropolitan area attracts residents from other regions of Estonia, particularly North Estonia, where the Russian minority population is particularly large (Mooses et al., 2020).

Table 8.1 Descriptive summary statistics.

	<i>VILNIUS</i>			<i>RIGA</i>			<i>TALLINN</i>		
	<i>Total pop.</i>	<i>Number and % of Russians</i>	<i>Number and % of Russians with low education</i>	<i>Total pop.</i>	<i>Number and % of Russians</i>	<i>Number and % of Russians with low education</i>	<i>Total pop.</i>	<i>Number and % of Russians</i>	<i>Number and % of Russians with low education</i>
2001	553,904	75,920 13.7%	-	762,443	335,069 44.0%	37,201 15.4% (Latvians: 15.1%)	399,651	172,893 43.3%	16,955 14.3% (Estonians: 14.2%)
2011	533,340	63,708 12.0%	6,180 11.8% (Lithuanians: 7.2%)	658,637	250,554 38.0%	22,422 10.8% (Latvians: 9.5%)	392,662	173,222 44.1%	13,132 10.0% (Estonians: 8.7%)
2021	556,430	53,881 9.7%	5,230 11.6% (Lithuanians: 7.1%)	612,588	220,601 36.0%	13,521 7.3% Latvians: (6.7%)	437,812	185,127 42.3%	9,637 6.8% (Estonians: 6.7%)

(Source: Authors, based on census data)

Note: Russians = individuals identifying as Russian

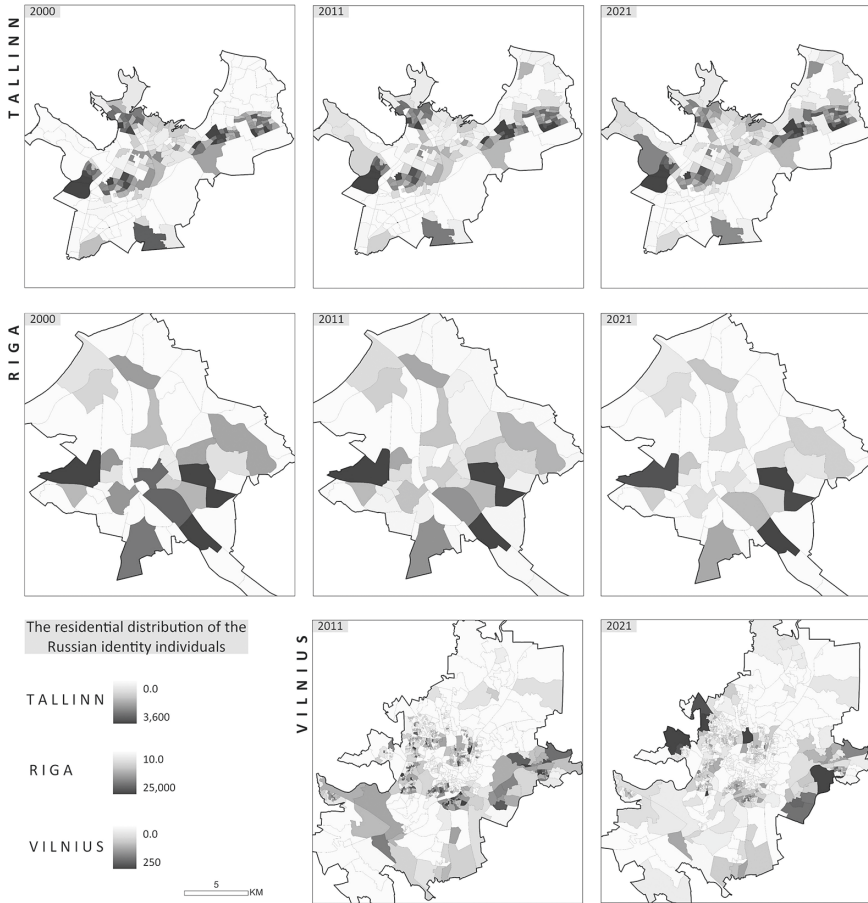


Figure 8.1 The residential distribution of the Russian identity individuals in Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius.

(Source: Authors, based on census data)

To gain additional insights into the residential patterns and their change, we have used location quotient (LQ) maps. This statistical measure evaluates the relative concentration of the Russian-identity population within each neighbourhood compared to the average concentration across the entire urban area. In other words, it assesses the relative degree of segregation. Figure 8.2 highlights areas where the Russian-identity population is either overrepresented ($LQ > 1$) or underrepresented ($LQ < 1$) relative to the overall population, disregarding differences between cities. While high LQ values are present across all maps, indicating a relatively high Russian presence, Riga and Tallinn exhibit pockets of Russian dominance, while Vilnius does not to the same extent. The observation of “pockets” may also be related to the different sizes of spatial units in different cities. Furthermore, Riga

and Tallinn feature extensive areas with a notable Russian presence, while Vilnius has fewer Russians, resulting in a more dispersed distribution yet still exhibiting some level of segregation in specific areas.

Figure 8.2 confirms the trends observed in Figure 8.1, highlighting a rising concentration of Russian-identity individuals in specific areas across all Baltic capitals. A pattern emerges: areas with higher LQs in Figure 8.2 correspond to areas with an increasing concentration of Russian minorities depicted in Figure 8.1. Overall, the distribution of Russian minorities is becoming less uniform across cities, with clustering observed. Additionally, Russian minority concentration tends to increase with distance from the city centre, leading to an ethnic division between centres and peripheries. In the case of Tallinn, LQ maps reveal with this

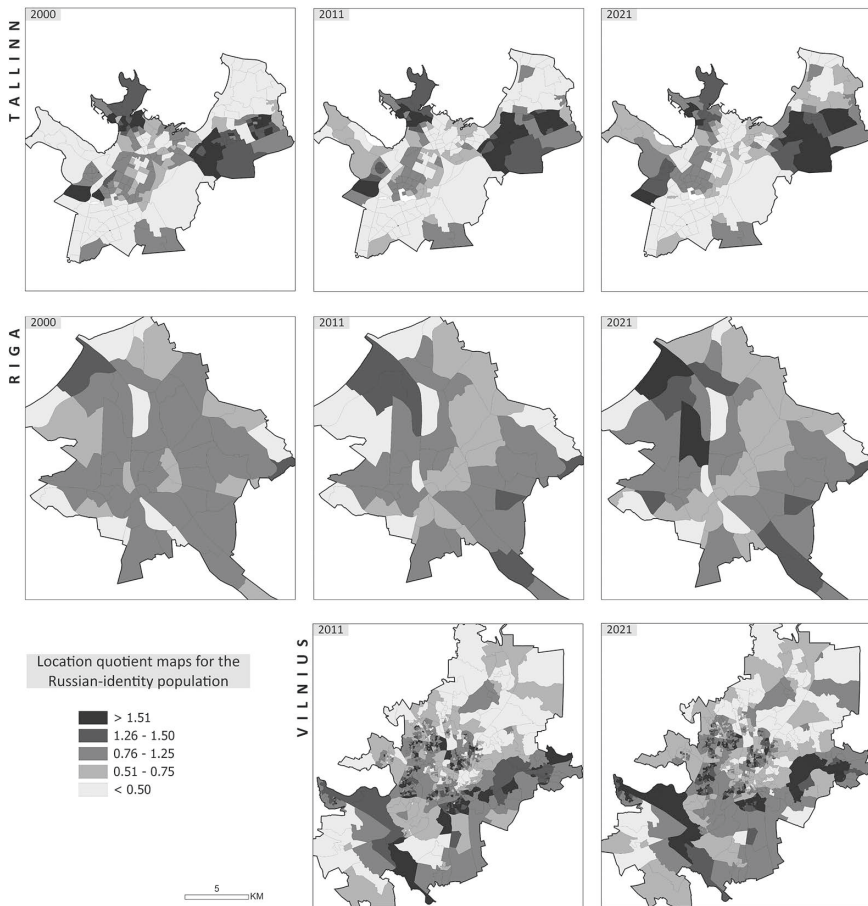


Figure 8.2 Location quotient maps for the Russian-identity population in Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius.

(Source: Authors, based on census data)

phenomenon particularly clearly (note the light colours in the centre and the darker on the outskirts), which is noteworthy given the growth of the Russian-speaking population.

Residential patterns of low-educated Russian-identity individuals

The results from the previous section indicate that there is a tendency for the Russian-identity population to cluster in specific urban areas, despite an overall decrease (in Riga and Vilnius) or increase (in Tallinn) in their population. This physical clustering, where individuals from a particular group settle in distinct geographic areas, is indicative of residential segregation. While the literature on ethnic enclaves indicates some positive aspects of this phenomenon (see Fernandez, this volume; Powell, 2013), and the current situation in the Baltic capitals is not considered an extreme form of segregation (neighbourhoods remain ethnically mixed), the observed trend of increasing segregation is nonetheless a cause for concern. The findings of this study are in line with the previous studies (Hess & Tammaru, 2019; Tammaru et al., 2016), suggesting that ethnic minorities, predominantly Russian speakers, in the Baltic capitals tend to cluster in neighbourhoods that are increasingly viewed as less desirable, particularly Soviet housing estates (this is often a result of the intensive gentrification of the centrally located former working-class districts). The studies also note that there is an increasing convergence between ethnic and socio-economic segregation patterns in the Baltic capitals: minority groups, with lower educational achievements and employed in lower-skilled occupations, tend to reside in less appealing urban areas (Burneika & Ubarevičienė, 2016; Leetmaa et al., 2018; Kalm et al., 2023; Krišjāne et al., 2016). This trend of displacement from central areas is often driven by economic pressures and gentrification, potentially resulting in limited access to resources and opportunities as well as increased social isolation.

To better understand the residential patterns of Russian minorities and the factors influencing these patterns, we turn our attention to their educational attainment. Specifically, we explore the residential patterns of lower-educated Russian identity individuals and how these patterns have evolved over time. Figure 8.3 depicts the percentage of the Russian identity individuals who have primary or lower secondary education⁶ in each spatial unit (note that these maps exclusively represent the Russian identity population). The maps in Figure 8.3, along with the descriptive statistics in Table 8.1, show that the proportion of lower-educated Russian individuals is notably decreasing. This trend is particularly evident in Riga and Tallinn, where this percentage has more than halved between 2001 and 2021 (in Riga, representing nearly a threefold decrease in absolute numbers). In Vilnius, where the Russian-identity population is considerably smaller, the percentage of lower-educated individuals among them has shown almost no change. It must be noted that, overall, the education level of residents in the capitals of all Baltic countries is increasing. However, despite this positive shift for both the majority and minority groups, there remains a gap to the disadvantage of minorities. In Vilnius, 11.6% of the Russian-identity population had lower levels of education compared

to 7.1% of Lithuanians, in 2021. Interestingly, this gap was much smaller in Riga and Tallinn.

Figure 8.3 shows that lower-educated Russian-identity individuals predominantly tended to reside in less central areas of the Baltic capitals throughout all the years studied. Not surprisingly, areas with a higher concentration of Russian minorities also exhibit the highest proportion of low-educated individuals within that group. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Russians with higher levels of education tend to reside in areas where the majority population is dominant. This suggests that the clustering of minorities in less prestigious neighbourhoods is closely tied to their socio-economic status. Moreover, the decline in the percentage of lower-educated individuals was relatively uniform across different city areas, although it was more pronounced in the central areas of Riga and Tallinn, where the total Russian-identity population has significantly decreased. In Vilnius, Figure 8.3 shows minimal changes, as the proportion of low-educated Russian minorities remained stable. Nonetheless, both years indicate a notable concentration of (low-educated) Russians in zones linked to industrial employment on the periphery of Vilnius, predominantly in its southern areas. Interestingly, the contrast in education levels between areas is more pronounced than the distribution of the Russian

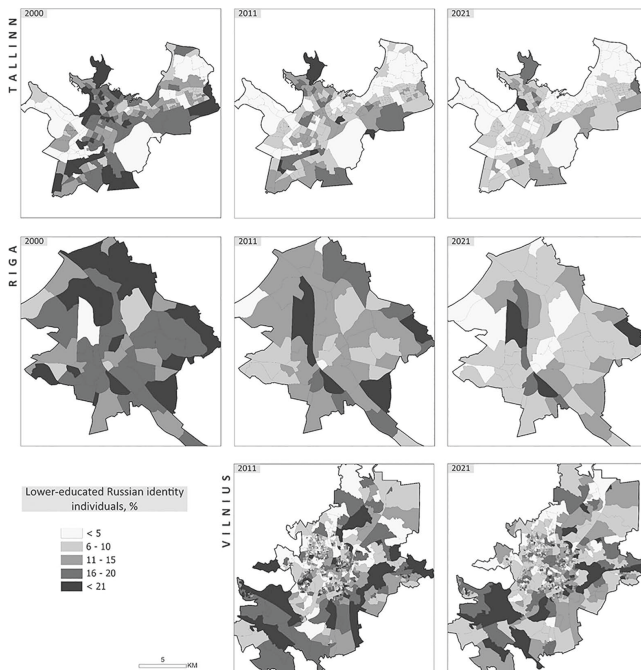


Figure 8.3 The proportion of the Russian-identity individuals (age 25+) with primary or lower secondary education in Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius.

(Source: Authors, based on census data)

Note: The maps exclusively represent the Russian-identity population.

minority alone (see Figure 8.1), suggesting the presence of inner differences within ethnically Russian neighbourhoods. In general, with increasing housing pressures, such as rising costs and limited affordable housing options, it becomes increasingly challenging for less educated individuals to maintain residence in the city centres of the Baltic capitals.

Discussion: segregation and marginalisation

Ethnic and social segregation has been a longstanding concern in urban studies, dating back to the Chicago school in the 1920s. Traditionally, segregation is seen negatively, as it limits opportunities for certain societal groups, such as children having fewer educational prospects (Ballard, 1990). More recent studies (e.g. Karsten et al., 2006; Kalm et al., 2023) indicate that educational segregation is closely linked with residential segregation. However, some studies highlight advantages of ethnic concentration in certain areas, such as facilitating social contacts and networking (van Kempen & Özüekren, 1998), finding a job (Klinthäll & Urban, 2016), protecting from stigma and harassment (Wacquant, 2012; Powell, 2013), or building solidarities and self-determination (Fernandez, this volume). Understanding ethnic segregation requires examining both micro- and macro-level perspectives. At the micro level, households face choices and constraints, with ethnic minorities often having fewer resources and limited access to housing. Meanwhile, macro-level theories offer insights into broader structural factors such as social policies, demographic trends, and cultural or economic developments. Discrimination in the housing market may further restrict housing options for ethnic minorities (Bolt & van Kempen, 2010; Semyonov & Glikman, 2009). In the Baltic capitals, ethnic segregation is influenced by context-specific macro-level factors, including the historical role of ethnic minorities in the industrial labour market, the multilingual education system, internal migration towards metropolitan regions by more “successful” populations, and the sudden transition to a capitalist neoliberal economic system (Burneika & Ubarevičienė, 2016; Hadjimichalis & Hudson, 2014; Harvey, 1982).

This study adopts a macro-level perspective and examines the changing societal positions and residential distribution of Russian-identity population in the Baltic capital cities. While micro-level factors may also play an important role here, shared historical experiences and similarities in education, occupation, and world views suggest similar personal choices among Russians in these cities. The observed relationship between the place of residence and the level of education indicates that external constraints, rather than personal choices, primarily shape the residential patterns of Russian minorities. However, the increase in education levels does not necessarily translate to better opportunities or higher incomes for Russians, who continue to concentrate in less prestigious areas. Consequently, ethnic segregation continues to increase.

The position of Russian-identity individuals in the Baltics is rather unique and has evolved over time. This evolution differs from that in Western European or North American countries, which initially attracted lower-educated and less

wealthy minorities through post-colonial development. During the Soviet era, as immigrants from Russia, Russians held a relatively favourable societal status. However, in the decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Russians showed limited interest in adapting to the societies of the independent and Western-oriented Baltic states, such as obtaining citizenship or learning the language. Over the long term, the achievements of Russian-identity individuals, including educational attainments, socio-economic status, and housing careers, became less advantageous compared to the majority populations in the three cities. While individual choices and historical context undoubtedly play crucial roles here, broader urban and societal dynamics increasingly shape the societal status of Russians in the Baltic countries too. In what follows, we delve into the reasons that we consider important in explaining the observed patterns and trends depicted within the maps. These reasons also align with the contextual overview provided in the first part of the chapter.

Economic progress

The Baltic states have undergone rapid economic progress since the 1990s, contributing to overall well-being but also exacerbating disparities in wealth distribution. This has resulted in the concentration of prosperity in specific urban areas and among particular social groups, and the concentration of deprivation in other urban areas and among different social groups. Consequently, spatial and social divides inevitably widen. In Baltic cities, like many cities globally, ethnic minorities often face increased disadvantages. While various opportunities are in principle available to everyone, the reality is that not everyone accesses them equally. For example, emerging industries are increasingly knowledge-based, demanding diverse skills and higher education (Kunzman, 2009; McElroy, this volume). Segregation based on educational attainment is pushing certain population segments to the margins, both socially and spatially. The findings of this study support this observation.

Metropolisation

In recent decades, the economic growth of the Baltic states has been increasingly concentrating in their metropolitan cities (Ubarevičienė, 2018). As both affluent and disadvantaged individuals tend to seek opportunities within these urban centres, population segregation and marginalisation intensify here, and the Baltic capitals are no exception. Notably, despite their many similarities, the Baltic countries have different types of city systems – polycentric in Lithuania, monocentric in Latvia, and partly monocentric in Estonia. Therefore, when comparing urban processes in these countries, it is important to consider their distinct city systems and the associated patterns of change. For instance, each Baltic capital possesses a unique potential for attracting internal migrants, leading to diverse shifts in population composition, including ethnicity, education, or professional status. Consequently, distinct patterns of segregation and marginalisation emerge in the Baltic capitals. However, the results of this study suggest that metropolisation is contributing to

increasing levels of segregation (and potentially marginalisation) in all Baltic capitals. The redistribution of population along the centre-periphery axis is evident, with capital regions accommodating a growing proportion of the national populations while peripheries shrink as people migrate towards cities or abroad (Lang et al., 2022). Concurrently, a more successful, predominantly native-speaking population is relocating to suburban areas, often beyond city limits, leading to increased separation between different ethnic groups.

Professionalisation

Along with economic progress and metropolisation, the professionalisation of the workforce is evident in the Baltic states,⁷ also in many other large cities around the world (van Ham et al., 2020, 2021; Hamnett, 2024). This phenomenon involves a shift in the occupational composition of the workforce, marked by a growing proportion of higher-income occupations and a declining proportion of lower-income occupations. As metropolises tend to attract individuals with higher occupational status, it places individuals with lower status at a relative disadvantage. In the Baltic capitals, a significant portion of the latter group comprises ethnic minorities, thus they are likely to be disproportionately affected by this trend. Furthermore, this process may push lower socio-economic status groups to the urban margins, affecting residential segregation patterns. Again, the findings of this study support this observation.

Considering the discussed factors, we anticipate a continued increase in the residential segregation of the Russian-identity population in the Baltics. Additionally, the growing visibility of marginalisation among Russians, particularly those with lower education and professional status, is anticipated. On the other hand, the varied life trajectories and world views of Russian-identity individuals, combined with distinct societal attitudes towards Russian minorities, result in diverse experiences of segregation, marginalisation, or integration in the Baltics. Marginalisation should be a concern, given potential societal shifts and geopolitical events. Ultimately, the situation is dynamic and complex, making it challenging to predict a singular outcome for Russian minorities in the Baltic states. In this study, we focused on the Russian-identity population, but the issues of segregation extend beyond them. It is noteworthy that other ethnic and linguistic minorities, such as Roma communities or recent asylum seekers from Asian and African countries, may currently face more pronounced challenges of marginalisation in the Baltics.

Conclusions

This chapter illustrates how sizable ethnic minority communities, despite sharing cultural ties with the majority population, encounter segregation and marginalisation. In urban areas, ethnic segregation leads individuals from different ethnic backgrounds to isolate themselves within their own communities. While this isolation may help preserve the cultural identity of minority groups, it also fuels fragmentation within the education system and job market. This dynamic does not

necessarily prevent individuals with a Russian identity from succeeding, but it sets up a situation where many of them end up in the same professions or professional statuses as their predecessors. This is one of the mechanisms that lead to the deterioration of minorities' positions, potentially resulting in their increasing marginalisation over time.

In this chapter we employed a quantitative approach and analysed the patterns of residential segregation characteristic of the Russian-identity population in Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius from 2001 to 2021. This study stands out as a comparative analysis of three Baltic capitals, contributing to a limited body of comparative urban studies on the region. Generally, the literature shows that segregation as well as marginalisation are increasingly associated with socio-economic status (whether it is high, as in gated communities, or low, as in ghettos), a factor profoundly influenced by education and income levels. In the Baltic countries, these indicators are closely linked to ethnicity, as ethnic minorities, particularly those with Russian identity, tend to have lower educational attainments and are more commonly employed in lower-status occupations, resulting in socio-economic disadvantages. Given the substantial proportion of the Russian-identity population, these concerns are likely to intensify in the future. In the cities where ethnic minorities make up half of the population, segregation can lead to the formation of dual cities, where different communities live not only separately, but also far from each other. Our results provide evidence that Russian-identity individuals are being pushed to the margins of urban space, indicating signs of marginalisation-like processes. While we acknowledge the plausibility of the coexistence of social integration and spatial marginalisation processes, our findings predominantly support the hypothesis that the Russian-identity population in the Baltic capitals is experiencing a relatively declining societal status, contributing to a gradual increase in social segregation and marginalisation. These processes are not solely a matter of personal preferences but are also influenced by larger social and economic forces. The complex interplay of processes at global, regional, and local scales are contributing to an increasingly differentiated society in the Baltic capital cities. Consequently, the transformation of urban space (both physical and social) and the benefits of economic growth have not been uniformly distributed across society, resulting in some segments of the population being marginalised, both socially and spatially.

The results of this study provide a broad overview, shedding light on overall spatial patterns and changes of Russian-identity residents in the Baltic capitals. However, this study did not delve into the nuanced causal explanations behind these patterns. To gain deeper insights into the evolving societal status of the Russian-identity population and assess the potential marginalisation of the Russian minority in the Baltic capitals, it is necessary to continue research in this direction. This involves examining more specific aspects and employing qualitative research methods. For example, understanding the reasons behind educational, occupational, or residential priorities of ethnic minorities requires detailed micro-level studies. While there are no legal or economic constraints on choosing a language of instruction in the Baltics, it remains a matter of personal choice. Whether these choices are still influenced by the former privileged position of the Russian language or by

other cultural factors is uncertain. However, it is evident that living in predominantly Russian-speaking neighbourhoods and attending Russian-language schools are factors hindering the younger generation of Russian speakers from effectively competing in higher education and later in the labour as well as housing markets (Kalm et al., 2023). Our study makes an important contribution by initiating a debate on the potential rise of marginalisation within the Russian-identity population amidst broader urban transformations and a changing geopolitical context.

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Notes

- 1 Socio-spatial changes refers to changes in the composition, interactions, and dynamics of different social groups within a given space. It can result from migration, urbanisation, economic changes, cultural shifts, or other societal factors.
- 2 The Baltic states have experienced one of the highest rates of population decline in the world: between 1989 and 2021 the population of Latvia decreased by 30%, Lithuania – 19%, and Estonia – 15% (based on their census data).
- 3 See, for example, the comprehensive analysis provided by Krivonos (2024) regarding the concepts of Russian whiteness and racialisation in Finland.
- 4 Lithuanian and Latvian data is based on self-reported ethnicity, while Estonian data is based on self-reported mother tongue. In both instances, the data refer to the Russian-identity population.
- 5 The obligatory secondary education in the Baltics was implemented in the mid-1970s, and the share of people with higher education was increasing slowly but steadily all the time. Therefore, some differences of education levels between different ethnic groups could be related to their different age composition because of the recent inflow of younger non-Russian populations to the ethnically mixed capitals. However, the indicated level of education shows differences in the general education level of Russian communities.
- 6 In Lithuanian data, primary and lower secondary education together spans ten years, while in Estonian and Latvian data, it covers nine years.
- 7 The author of this study is presently engaged in ongoing research to substantiate this claim.

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