

The EU's social and urban policies from the perspective of inclusion

History and usage of the concept

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Over the past few years, we have gone through a major evolution of our political view of society's structure, creation, and organisation, with the *social question* now seen through the prism of the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy. Such an evolution is not neutral in terms of how it translates into social policy, as it injects specific processes and perspectives into all social measures. With this new inclusion/exclusion angle, we are evolving towards new ways of approaching social topics.

What is the contribution of this perspective to urban social policies? What are the socio-economic implications of this shift in the public policy framework? In order to better examine these topics, it appears necessary to offer a theoretical clarification of the concept. The researcher's goal will therefore be to approach these questions from a long-term perspective, breaking them into categories and examining their empirical effects, e.g. through European Union (EU) social policy.

Inclusion as a reaction to exclusion

The discourse on inclusion, in the area of public policy, was only made possible by the prior emergence of a new perspective, namely that of exclusion as a prism through which to view social issues. This 'new grammar of social risks' (Fransen, 2008) first appeared in the French-speaking world in the 1980s, and scholars are now calling for a new ontology of social problems. The requalification — whether actual or perceived — of social risks, which are becoming 'life risks' (Ewald, 2002) as a result of their increasingly individual nature, combined with the lower emphasis placed on exploitation in the public discourse, naturally results in the adoption of a new perspective of the inability to manage an integrated society. In this context, the *social question* consists in the multifaceted set of processes involving the pathological desocialisation of members of a society, in economic, civic, and cultural terms. The concept of inclusion serves here to requalify a heterogeneous series of tragic situations (Castel, 2010).

This heterogeneity is probably the first problem with the concept of exclusion as a cognitive tool to approach social issues, especially with a view to acting *upon* social issues. Robert Castel even notes that exclusion is a sort

of ‘negative theology’ in which reflections on absence take precedence over reflections on the actual topic (Castel, 2010). However, when a definition of exclusion is provided, this definition includes a list that covers quite a broad spectrum: ‘one-parent families, elderly women, minorities, Roma, people with a disability and the homeless’ (European Commission, 2010), with other scholars also including drug addicts, isolated people, and children (Di Nardo, Cortese, McAnaney, 2010). As a result, the term *exclusion* struggles to identify, and even less to define, the phenomenon it is meant to describe. The concept is therefore an unstable and fluctuating theoretical notion, covering situations that are so diverse in terms of their nature, causes, and effects, that it would be difficult to move beyond a nominal(ist) category.

Another issue with the concept of exclusion is its rigidity: a fundamental problem with approaching the social question from the perspective of exclusion is that it is primarily centred on factuality. Exclusion as a social phenomenon is a *fact* rather than a *process*. This is an especially fixed and *necessitarianist* view, which postulates the existence of two groups that are non-dynamic and, mostly, mutually exclusive: the inside and the outside, seen as opposites. Weber notes that exclusion and inclusion remind us of set theory, which is actually where this rigid view originates from (Weber, 2004). The processual aspects of exclusion, as well as its nuanced and gradual nature, are completely obliterated by a restricted perspective focused on well-delimited sets.

However, this dualistic and exclusionary approach of the social question is inherently impossible: each individual is an integral part of the social question, which invalidates the binary relationship between inclusion and exclusion (Furri, Guillibert, Saint-Saëns, 2014). Society must be defined as a continuum of positions, rather than as a series of discrete sets: individuals are never outside of society, but they are included in various ways, each with its own status and value. Postulating an exclusive opposition means viewing social realities as binary, resulting in the essentialisation of the condition of *insider* and *outsider* in social entities. This means society is seen as necessarily having a fixed exclusive structure, which invalidates any true causation and goes against history and contingency.

A situated genealogy

While the concept of inclusion is opposed to that of exclusion, it can be difficult to agree on a conclusive definition. Many have noted that definitions of inclusion are changeable (Bauer, 2015), and that there is a certain terminological vagueness (Jaeger, 2015). It is necessary to highlight this structurally opposite concept, yet this is not enough to define precisely what is covered by this new category of public measures. This is why the new category must be considered independently, by tracing its genealogical origins. By showing that the concept of inclusion is grounded in history, and that its birth and development maybe determines its stakes, and its potential, both visible and hidden.

The concept of inclusion is inherited from a specific field: medical-social work. Despite its obvious link with current policies fighting poverty and exclusion, it was initially used in education, more specifically in the context of disabilities

(Bouquet, 2015). Only later did it extend to other issues, and it still should be seen as potentially carrying traces and patterns related to how inclusion was viewed in the context of disability at school. A careful analysis of the issue of including pupils and students with disabilities can yield more general insights, especially with regards to the implementation and environment of inclusive policies, and help to avoid overly general conclusions.

The medical-social field: an inclusive, not integrative, approach

The inclusive model has emerged in the medical-social field as a step beyond the integration model. Integration places the burden on individuals, who must adapt to their social and physical environment; this approach views society as a homogeneous whole perpetuating a single and necessary form of normality. In order to leave the margins of society, one must adapt unilaterally. Deviance — or rather deviation — is seen from the angle of normalisation, where the goal is to bring individuals closer to the norm: taking part in society means giving up one’s identity (Pillant, 2014).

The inclusive paradigm, on the other hand, calls upon collective, not individual, responsibility; the adaptation process is in contrast to that of the integration model. With inclusion, the ‘targets’ of public policies are diluted into the rest of the relevant environment’s population: this paints policy targeting itself as illegitimate, and emphasises a certain indifference toward difference (Gillig, 2006). As a result, the responsibility of being *welcoming* lies on the environment, and thus on the social group as a whole.

Inclusion as the main driver for the social model of disability

This perspective calls upon the social model of disability. In this context, the approach centred on inclusion involves a new cognitive paradigm that accounts for the social dimension of disability, defined as an obstacle to participation and resulting from the interaction between individual characteristics and the environment’s requirements (Plaisance, Belmont, Vérillon, Schneider, 2007). This inclusive model has been applied with some success outside of education, for instance in the areas of architecture and urban planning.

The approach centred on obstacles that people with disabilities must overcome in the educational environment can be derived and broadened to a number of hindrances outside of that specific environment. For instance, this approach was adopted when dealing with the question of access, especially physical, to locations. Thus emerged inclusive design, as a response to the strong emphasis placed on exclusion when designing and organising spaces (Reed, Monk 2011). This movement has launched a fruitful reflection on how to create or transform spaces, keeping one objective in mind: how to view the environment as the main determiner of inclusion of *all* citizens into society.

The most obvious area that takes into account the physical dimension of exclusion is that of access for persons with reduced mobility (PRM), but this can be broadened to all issues of mobility, infrastructure, and equipment: there are a number of concrete factors, such as public benches, street lighting,

or cleanliness, that have an effect on how accessible and welcoming a given place is. The inclusiveness of physical factors is clear in this case, but it can also be more subtle. Other aspects should also be taken into account, related to experiences and perception, e.g. how safe one feels in a certain space, while exposed to noise, pollution, the visibility of certain cultural or religious manifestations, or vehicle traffic.

As society takes on the responsibility of including individuals with their specificities and particularities, reframing *deviance* as a mere *deviation*, it is displaying more cognitive openness — and normative neutrality — to difference. The goal of this approach is to remove the stigma and make disability a neutral condition, so that all people can be included, each with their own specificities.

Broadening the concept: public policy as seen through the prism of disability

However, this particular genealogy does raise a number of questions. With this focus on a specific area of the social question, which cannot be easily transposed to other targets of inclusive policies (e.g. migration, job insecurity, homosexuality, single parenthood, youth), the topic of inclusion seems to have been taken over by that of disability. The concept of inclusion was initially used in the medical-social area, which ties it to a specific approach of people who are excluded because of their disabilities or capabilities.

However, as we have seen, the approach of *disability* is a fairly specific one: the idea is not to close the gap between individuals' characteristics and society's *norms*, but to make deviances/deviations irrelevant. From the very start, emphasis should be placed on the affirmation of a legitimate feeling of belonging to society, regardless of any differences (Jaeger, 2015). While this perspective is commendable in the context of medical disabilities, it becomes much more problematic with other individuals who are victims of exclusion. The approach is less violent, as it — at least in theory — no longer uses all the normalising measures enforcing social conformity, and a person can experience difficulties while still being acknowledged as a legitimate member of the social group (Jaeger, 2015). Another hurdle that this view of inclusion might encounter is the possibility that exclusion criteria might themselves become normalised.

With the concept of inclusion comes a certain risk that differences might become a matter of appearance, resulting in minimal public measures that simply integrate differences while still recognising them as such. Social inclusion subtly promotes a philosophy whereby it is normal to be different (Johnson, Clarkson, Huppert, 2010). While this perspective is appreciated in the context of physical disabilities, it is highly problematic in the context of the fight against poverty, since it implies there is no need to change the situation. The political neutrality of an exclusion diagnosis once again appears, along with a lack of perception of the social question and its pathologies in terms of disability. Society must ensure persons with disabilities to feel welcome, but it should never attempt to treat the disabilities themselves. The problem is that a series of phenomena that society would previously treat as social risks — in the tradition of providentialist philosophy — are now being reclassified as disabilities.

The universalist goal of creating a climate of benevolent indifference removes the need for compensatory measures for the weak, the poor, the helpless. It is important to ground these hypotheses in empirical observations, and to take a closer look at the potential effects of social action on these assumptions. We will therefore examine urban social policies that openly adopt the perspective of inclusion.

Inclusion as a policy

The primary place where inclusion is thematised at an institutional level is the EU, which has a structuring influence as one of the main sources of funding for inclusion policies. With an increasing integration at the EU level, characterised by an ideological convergence and concrete limitations (Surel, 2000), we tend to consider this level as an essential one in the cognitive structuring of public policies even at a local scale, which chose — or had to choose? — the inclusion framework.

The term's first appearance in EU texts was in the Lisbon strategy (European Parliament 2000), and the topic has always been approached from an economic point of view. This first step was the beginning of an EU process intended to coordinate initiatives against poverty and exclusion, and the introduction into the language of EU social policy of a concept that would then become increasingly important (Jaeger, 2015). In 2010, the European Commission establishes the term in its general work programme, defining the EU's post-crisis strategy for the following decade: economic growth must be green, smart, and inclusive (European Commission, 2010b). Social inclusion is integrated into the policy agenda of the EU and, by extension, of each member state. Still, definitions of the term are rarely provided. One of the few extensive definitions, outside of indicator descriptions, can be found in (COM (2003) 773):

“Social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live”. (European Commission, 2004)

Economicism and individualism

As these policies attempted to focus on social exclusion in order to develop a multidimensional and complex perspective of the processes involved in desocialization, it appears though that they have been unable to avoid being too reductive. The development of indicators is a good proof of this trend towards simplification: inclusion is essentially defined in terms of contribution to productive processes and of consumption capacity (Atkinson, Marlier, Nolan, 2004).

Inclusion is defined as a process through which people overcome exclusion, and the indicator used to measure it is the rate of people *at risk of poverty or social exclusion*. This indicator is based on a combination of three sub-indicators, all of which are strongly linked to the economic aspects of social life. The first sub-indicator is the *risk of poverty*, with the poverty line defined

as 60% of a country's median income. The second measures the percentage of households with low work intensity, i.e. where fewer than 20% of working-age household members have worked during the year. Finally, the third sub-indicator measures material deprivation and is based on nine items: a situation of severe material deprivation occurs when people have access to fewer than six of these items. While the indicators used are not just economic in nature, they remain tied to material aspects of life and, as such, cannot be used to measure cultural participation — except by measuring who owns a television set —, social participation — except by measuring who has access to a telephone — or civic participation — except by measuring employment.

The way in which these indicators are designed strongly implies that a specific lifestyle is being promoted. Thus, there is a risk that policies intended to fight exclusion might have an unintended yet central normalising component. Inclusion simply means following this 'normal' lifestyle, which is essentially focused on consumption. Those who are seen as excluded, and who therefore should be included, are those who *deviate* from this standard where consumption and a focus on material goods are the standard. In this sense, it is worth noting that the issue of social exclusion could be solved — by the European Commission's definition, that is, and according to the goal of reducing the number of people in poverty or social exclusion by 20 million — simply by providing a few million households with televisions or washing machines. This caricature is not meant as a genuine argument, but it does highlight the deeply restrictive nature of the EU's perspective on social exclusion and, therefore, inclusion.

It should be noted, however, that alongside this main indicator, the European Commission has added a limited series of indicators related to education. In the more comprehensive list of thirteen inclusion indicators, three are related to illiteracy, school leaving, and poor educational performance. While these are not directly tied to economic participation, a relationship still exists: the ability to read is not seen as an obstacle to citizenship as it is a major obstacle to being a productive worker. Again, the end goal is the same: what matters is inclusion in the economic sphere, based on production and consumption, which takes over the entire social question. As a result, most policies intended to reduce social exclusion are approached through the angle of job creation, which is especially visible in strategic documents published by the EU (European Commission, 2004; Wolputte, 2010). In this perspective, the fight against exclusion and poverty is always reduced to productive aspects (Lebrun, 2009). In theory, of course, the concept of inclusion covers more than just an economic perspective — relevant texts also refer to cultural and social aspects —, but an analysis of the issue reveals the central role of economic participation in how inclusion is thematised at the EU level.

The emphasis placed on the concept of *social investment* confirms this tendency, and demonstrates the EU policies' focus on individual abilities. The European Commission defines social investment as a series of measures seeking to 'strengthen people's current and future capacities, and improve their opportunities to participate in society and the labour market'. Upon closer scrutiny, it seems that the term actually covers all operations aimed at empowering and enabling individuals so that they can join the productive

sphere, with consequences on policies: '[s]ocial investment helps people to adapt to societal challenges' (European Commission, 2013). By looking at the European Social Fund (ESF), for instance, which is the EU's main structural fund and the one that is closest to social inclusion policies, we realise that two types of policy are considered: one provides direct assistance to people, and the other targets systems and structures (Di Nardo, Cortese, McAnaney, 2010). A closer analysis of the details of the ESF's significant investments reveals that most policies deal with helping individuals in order to enable them and improve the employability of excluded people. Measures supported by the ESF, which are intended as responses to the specific needs of excluded people, consist in little more than coaching, training, or personal growth activities, always with an emphasis on entering the labour market, which is seen as the main vector for people's inclusion.

What does this mean for cities?

In 2016, under the Dutch presidency, during an informal meeting of EU ministers in charge of urban issues, the European Council made a commitment to adjust the cross-cutting objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy to urban policies. This adjustment was requested by the European Parliament, as this process is essential (Van Lierop, 2016). The meeting resulted in the 'Pact of Amsterdam' (Netherlands Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2016)', providing guidelines for the EU's urban agenda. This document reaffirms the priorities defined in the European strategy, applying the three key words 'green, smart, inclusive' to urban policies. Based on a proposal by the European Parliament, who intends to make urban policy one of its central tools, a European urban agenda must be perfectly aligned with the EU's overall strategy and objectives, and in particular with the *Europe 2020* strategy (Westphal, 2015).

In this context, once again, social inclusion is primarily considered from an economic perspective, the goal being to allow people living in poverty or exclusion to live with dignity and play an active role in society: urban development policies often use workers as a point of reference, rather than citizens or simply residents. Kerstin Westphal, explains the need for adequate urban equipment, in a rather striking way: 'lack of appropriate infrastructure can cause psychological pressure and stress on workers' (Westphal, 2015). So is urban planning mostly intended for workers? In any case, the EU's urban policy agenda does not look beyond an economic perspective.

The policies launched with European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding for Brussels-Capital Region are in line with this perspective. The ERDF call for projects included an inclusive aspect, consistent with the guidelines defined in the Europe 2020 strategy. A series of projects were selected for funding in this context. The projects selected covered three kinds of concrete initiatives: child care, increased cultural activities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and increased participation of residents to planning projects in their neighbourhood. These initiatives consist in making infrastructures, equipments and services available so as to reinforce individual abilities, provide social support for empowerment. This can involve making resources available to individuals, e.g.

child care facilities — which are seen as a way to eliminate factors preventing women from working —, or launching cultural projects with potential to produce a ‘leverage effect’. As these projects are influenced by the EU’s idea of inclusion, economics permeates the various approaches of social intervention and there is a constant underlying link between this type of urban development and the economic dimension. This strong presence of economics is also present in policy-making, as (one of) the main driver(s) of inclusion policies.

However, another perspective of inclusion appears in the ERDF Operational Program, covering — though with a lower budget — increased participation of residents to the urban initiatives and projects in their neighbourhood. Despite the lower priority given to such measures, their mere presence is extremely significant, as it reveals the appearance of an alternative conception of social inclusion: it is not only a means to an end, and it takes into account principles that build upon a different idea of social issues, involving a collaborative dimension. Still, despite these encouraging principles, none of the projects selected were based on this idea of inclusion: this means the funding body’s intention to promote collaborative initiatives was not followed.

What public policies in favour of inclusion?

We can offer three areas of reflection following out analysis: the quantitative and rational approach that emerge from this thematisation of inclusion; the reduction of social issues to mere economic terms and the disappearance of political considerations to the profit of pragmatic initiatives; and the development of a functional model of social inclusion.

Measuring inclusion with numbers

The approach of inclusion seems to necessarily be very quantitative: ‘[w]hen measuring social inclusion, studies tend to rely on objective measures’ (Cobigo, Ouellette-Kuntz, Lysaght, Martin, 2012). This is typical of the processes involved in developing indicators used to assess ERDF projects; the Fund has a very strong tendency to reduce factors to relatively superficial metrics. For instance, projects involving cultural improvement of neighbourhoods are assessed in the most quantifiable way possible, but also in a way that is very removed from the residents’ actual daily experiences: simply by counting the number of additional cultural institutions installed in the areas covered by the project. A finer analysis might involve the surface in square meters of additional cultural spaces (Brussels-Capital Region, 2014).

This is a striking illustration of current public policies, which are characterised by a quantitative abstraction that is all the more concerning that the perspective of exclusion/inclusion was intended to move beyond economics when analysing poverty, by integrating it into a broader experiential and qualitative view of social marginalisation. Obviously, it is difficult to assess results using factors that are not objectively measurable, but it is nevertheless surprising that policies that are meant to promote social life are evaluated with no regard for people’s qualitative experiences.

As we can see, the view of inclusion demonstrates a holistic rationality. Social life is seen as a binary issue with each individual being either ‘in’ or ‘out’. There is no room for medium-term approaches, or for semi-inclusion. This perspective is what leads to numbers-based measures and objectives. Additionally, mathematical rationality results in a technical approach where those who fulfil the criteria to be considered ‘in’ are full members of society. The kind of interventions developed based on this view simply seek to help people enter the spheres from which they are excluded: once this is achieved — meaning inclusion is a matter of access policy —, the people are included and a social goal has been reached. As a result, the only social policies that are promoted are purely technical ones, aiming to facilitate access, streamline mobility and limit obstacles.

Apoliticism and reduction

In terms of public policies, the opposite of technicity is politics; and the development of strictly technical interventions could end up obliterating any room for political orientations. Rather than political decisions, the approaches we have seen promote technical measures. Social belonging and participation are seen as problems in the mechanisms of society, which can be solved through local measures focused on specific problematic issues. Yet exclusion is a highly political topic, calling for more than a purely pragmatic response (Jaeger, 2015). *Realistic* responses to inclusion problems only tackle the effects of exclusion. Once these are solved, the problem of social exclusion appears to be over. In the current fight against exclusion, we are witnessing the emergence of public policies that only deal with situations that have already deteriorated. Focusing on exclusion means resigning oneself to trying to repair tears in the social fabric without taking into account the factors that cause the tears (Caster, 2009).

The objective defined by the European Commission is that ‘people experiencing poverty and social exclusion [should be] enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society’ (European Commission, 2010). This is a concerning approach, as it seems to consider the issue of social exclusion to be a result of the obstacles it creates. The problematic factor is the consequences of exclusion and poverty on social participation, which should be shared taking into account the unequal distribution of material, territorial, and symbolic resources, so that people who are *experiencing poverty* can play an active and dignified part in society instead of just no longer *experiencing poverty*.

According to the European Commission’s objectives, the dignity that poorer people should have access to can be reduced to a handful of consumption and leisure practices: getting 20 million people out of social exclusion is simply a matter of money, employment and access to consumer goods. Our goal here is not to diminish the considerable importance of measures intended to provide excluded people access to jobs and consumption. Still, we believe that this reductive view of exclusion fails to take into account a series of aspects, and that it prevents the implementation of a genuine poverty reduction policy. Officially, poor people can remain poor provided they are active and have dignity.

The functional model of inclusion

As we can see, inclusion policies at the EU level are built around a specific

view of inclusion. The end of marginalisation is no longer sought based on a causal approach of the social experience, as was the case for instance in the providentialist philosophy, but is rather seen as a by-product of economic performance. When the European Commission is required to justify the cost of social investment policies in its communication, it mentions a number of benefits for society: ‘higher productivity, higher employment, better health and social inclusion, more prosperity and a better life for all’.

This model of social inclusion refers to societal performance in an individualised and vertical view. The only of empowering individuals is to help them integrate into a system that already functions based on rules, regardless of individual contributions. Society exists outside of the individuals that inhabit it, and who are simply included into society following an adaptative rather than a contributive approach. They can only adjust to existing conditions, and have no potential for participation: there is no room for a horizontal approach of social issues that might offer a genuine alternative to the functional solitude of people.

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