

2004 11 20

Lecture – Adelphi University Nov 11, 2004-10-10

Social Exclusion: A European Perspective

Introduction

By way of introduction I would like to address the president of Adelphi University, Dr. Robert Scott. I would like to direct a very special THANKS to you for making this important conference possible. For encouraging and supporting the organizing group, for them to take upon themselves the tremendous workload which is behind these 2 days. And for having me here. I also would like to use this occasion to thank you, for your personal capacity to keep up the spirits in all of us by showing leadership, framing and expressing visions and for being a true brother! Thank you Dr. Scott!

The aim of my lecture is to introduce you to the concept of **Social Exclusion** and thereby create a framework for the first panel presentations of this conference, under the heading of ***Populations with Special Needs***. I will do so, by presenting some of the analyses from my dissertation in year 2000 (Edgren-Schori 2000) and some more recent updates. The concept of Social Exclusion is accordingly in focus for the lecture! I will try to explain why the concept emerged during the 70's in Europe and I will also argue in favor of the concept as a tool to understand post-modern, social, phenomena in European welfare states. I will also briefly comment on the relevance of the concept in a global context. Briefly, because this issue will require more time than I can spare today. I will hopefully give some fuel for the discussion about the relevance of the concept in general and I will try to dismiss arguments like: Social Exclusion is only *old wine in new bottles??*

The concept of SE was coined in a political context...

The concept of SE was coined in a political context in France. It was invented to highlight a widespread *outsiderness*, a process and a condition, which at the time affected a large number of individuals and population-groups. The strong semantic power of the concept fitted very well into the political context. It spread rapidly in Europe with the aim to highlight the increasing number of people, which were shut out of, or never let in to

the mainstream in various meanings. The attention was drawn to the phenomenon and the processes of deprivation, with new elements, which were defined in many other European countries, beside France.

My attention was drawn to the concept of SE in the midst of 1990, when I was working in a European network of researchers. We were all involved in studies of neighborhoods with a majority of ethnic minorities. We were all puzzled, and we finally decided to apply the concept to explain the processes, which we discovered people were involved in.

What was the situation in Europe? What was the breeding-ground for the new concept?

What was the situation in Europe? What was the breeding-ground for the new concept? During the last decades of the 20th century, Sweden, and most West European countries went through big changes, not the least with regard to the contexts of people's social life. Huge reconstructions in the labor market, so called globalization of economies, increased migration, changes in demography and family patterns. But also a shift in values, away from ideas of solidarity towards more individualism! The role of the public sector was more often debated and questioned in the Scandinavian countries. Unemployment increased substantially. For young people and immigrants the possibility to even enter into the labor market decreased dramatically. The labor-market based social insurance programs for example, presupposed minimal unemployment rates. With a larger proportion of the workforce unemployed, these programs could not support all the needs they were intended for. As a consequence, as you all know, the pressure on other social insurance programs became very strong. Not the least long-term unemployment increased the pressure on various support systems. Tensions between ethnic minority groups (immigrants) and the host country increased. As a result a deepened segregation process in housing areas, schools etc resulted in solid walls between ethnic groups, between rich and poor and between sick and healthy people.

It was in this context of recession with elements that had not been identified during earlier recessions, that a French politician coined the concept of SE. His ambition was to shed light on a process he feared could blow the French society into pieces. Something unheard of and unimaginable in a society glued together with ideas like *liberté, égalité*

and *fraternité* – liberty, equality and fraternity! It was not long before many politicians in Europe adopted the concept to highlight the negative social development in his or her country. And in 1993, when the then commissioner of the European Union with responsibility for social affairs, Pádraig Flynn, wrote the so-called *Greenbook on social policy*, he used the concept of SE like no one had used it before in EU-documents. He motivated his application of the concept by referring to the limitations of the concept of poverty. He argues that SE, beside insufficient incomes, has a bearing on housing, education, health and medical issues, access to service etc. He writes, and I quote him: **SE does not only influence on individuals who have been exposed to serious setbacks, but also on social groups, particularly in big cities and in rural areas, meeting with discrimination, segregation and debilitation of traditional social relations.** (End of quote! Flynn 1993, page 24)

SE is adopted by scientists ...

The concept of SE was very soon adopted by social scientists. It was explored in the paradigm of poverty and related terms: marginality, underclass, and deprivation. The concept is very complex. It goes far beyond *not inviting the other to the party*. Beside the strong semantic power the concept of social exclusion is complex because of its roots in a political context and, now, being much used also by academics. The roots in a political context, and the application in a scholarly context, require clarity and precision with regard to a definition, from someone who uses the concept. A further piece of the complexity concerns the understanding of social exclusion both as a *condition* and as a *process*. In my view it is this double quality of the concept, which makes it useful and at the same time it is the challenge! The dynamic power, thus built into the concept, offers various possibilities to apply it. Sometimes the concept of social exclusion is more relevant in contexts where earlier we had access only to (the concept of) *poverty*.

Ever since the concept of social exclusion was coined and applied in the context of social sciences it has mostly been defined in terms, which are relevant to the industrial world. The original focus of the concept was, as I mentioned before, on specific social

conditions in Western Europe. These circumstances have not prevented authors and speakers in different fields to use the concept with reference to the situation of millions of people living in deprivation in developing countries.

2,8 billion people in the world live in a chronic state of poverty and insecurity. The figure has not changed much since 1990. (WB 1990). In most developing countries being socially excluded involves other issues and processes than those referred to in the European welfare context. There are dramatic differences between most industrialized countries and most developing countries with regard to the prerequisites for the individual's relationship to the society as a whole. The differences are often demonstrated by the **expected role** of the individual. It goes without saying that, for instance, in societies where HIV/AIDS claims many victims every day, leaving behind orphans as well as broken and destitute families, where education is an institution in short supply, where gender issues are not dealt with seriously and where poverty reduces formal social protection to almost nothing; in these countries social exclusion must be understood and defined in dimensions relevant to that context. As we all know, it will not be of any help to understand the very specific difficulties, which are to a high degree determining the developing process, only to adopt interpretations used in Europe or in the industrial world. It can without doubt be argued that the European interpretation is considered a Western product of ideas, of limited value for countries of essentially different social, cultural and economical frames of references, compared to where the concept was coined.

An interesting observation is how the concept of SE is used in the Human Development Report, produced by the United Nations Development Program – UNDP. Since year 2000 three dimensions for developing countries and four for OECD-countries determine the Human Poverty Index. The fourth is SE, measured by the role of long-term unemployment, is not regarded applicable to the developing countries. (UNDP 2000). It is against this background I find it very encouraging that the International Labour Organisation – ILO - has undertaken to explore the concept of SE in general but especially in developing countries. More precise they have initiated studies to work out indicators relevant to the context. (de Haan 1998, 1999)

Buze – an illustration

Let me share with you an experience I had a couple of years ago when I was collecting data for my dissertation. I had arranged a meeting with Buze, a woman who lived in the neighborhood where I carried out a case study for my research. Buze was born in war-torn Eritrea. She had given birth to 11 children. She left Eritrea as a widow with her 8 surviving kids. She thinks her husband died in a combat. She never got an official confirmation of his death from the military power in her home country. When I met her she had spent 8 years in Sweden. 4 of her children still lived with her. 4 had moved out and none of them had settled down in the neighborhood. Her Swedish was very poor. She arrived in Sweden as an illiterate but had learnt to read road signs. We used an interpreter during the interview. In the beginning I felt uncomfortable because she answered my questions with only a few words. It was hard for me to define the role of the interpreter, but I had no choice. We went on! Buze told me that she has a poor health – diabetes, bad eyes, and recent surgery. After more than an hour I had a reasonable good picture of who she was but still I was a bit frustrated; I did not know a lot about how she regarded the life of the neighborhood, her situation as an unemployed, her expectations from the welfare institutions, frail network with countrymen, her dream to learn the Swedish language and to be able to support herself and her constant yearning for her family in Africa. At the end of the interview and after quite a long pause she asked the interpreter if she could tell me something and I listened: **I want you to know that this is the first time in my entire life that anyone has ever asked me of MY OPINON!** You can imagine how I felt that moment! I was very touched by her statement, but also broken-hearted and ever since, she has been inside me as a tragic, and I later sadly learned, typical example of a person who was exposed to the process of SE. She lived in a welfare state. She did not live in poverty (because she was entitled to benefits). She was a mother and a widow! Very few countrymen around! She had never been outside of the neighborhood! She did not know Swedish! She was in poor health and unemployed! She was SOCIALLY EXCLUDED!!!!

In the midst of the 70's when the concept of SE appeared it was meant to define the situations like the one of Buze.

Social Exclusion and Poverty

When the British “welfare-guru”, Seebohm Rowntree (1871-1954), once referred to as “*the Einstein of the Welfare State*”, defined the concept of the poor in 1941 (as *those who are incapable of reaching physical survival*) it reflected the time in which Rowntree served. The concepts of the poor and poverty have constantly been under the magnifier in order for researchers to find a universal definition. But so far everybody failed!

Amartya Sen, who like Joseph Stiglitz (who this morning shared with us his extremely important and interesting views on full-employment), is a Nobel Laureate in Economics (1998), has explored the concept of SE, with a focus on its relation to poverty (Sen 1998). His view is that the concept has broadened the understanding of poverty and that it should be used with restrictions. It should be used to indicate imperfections in various types of relations. We have to distinguish between the agent - the excluder - and the process of exclusion, which is the result of the action of the excluders. What does this mean? To simplify Sen’s line of argument: lack of financial resources result in, not only difficulties in surviving physically, but also to keep you and your family out of most social activities. Put together, this will start a multidimensional process, which runs the risk of leading to SE if none is there to stop the process!

In the spirit of Amartya Sen we need to strive for welfare programs that are preventing active exclusion, but also passive. Sen gives some example of active as well as passive exclusion. I chose to create my own example; WOMEN. (I make this choice, because I regard the inclusion of women on all levels, in all societies, as a prerequisite for a sustainable development.) Too often women are excluded from the possibilities to participate in their own capacity. Too often women’s traditional domestic work, including care for children, elderly and disabled, is not qualifying for welfare programs and benefits. Too often women are excluded because participation creates a conflict in the family sphere; traditional family patterns are challenged. Similar exclusion agents often affect ethnic minorities and immigrants.

Most studies of the poor have an outside perspective. In other words: others evaluate poor people's situation. Poor people are only the objects in most research studies. An outstanding exception is the Deepa Narayan's study *Voices of the Poor* (Narayan et al 2000-2002). In 3 thick volumes the voices of 40.000 poor people are presented. It really gives you a very different and useful insight of how life in poverty is experienced. Not least the studies provide us with a reliable image of the complexity of poverty and SE.

In my dissertation I used interviews as part of the data-collection. I interviewed people in neighborhoods with the great majority of ethnic minorities (in GB and Sweden). I wanted to listen to how people expressed their situation as *outsiders*! I wanted to understand the exclusion mechanism in as many as possible, subjective, dimensions!

From the analysis of the interviews I was able to draw the conclusion that 3 prerequisites were at hand in order to apply the concept of SE:

1. A person **wishes** and is **able** to belong to a defined sphere, but he or she is **not allowed** to! (The obstacle can be active or passive exclusion!)
2. The excluding forces are not necessarily the result of a **conscious act** from an excluder
3. **Ethnic discrimination** is always a dimension of social exclusion

I want to stress that this is not a comprehensive definition; it can only be used for the population I dealt with. However it gives us an idea of how to operationalize the complex concept of SE!

SE a multifaceted process

This conference is about social policy. The panel presentations, which will follow my introduction, will, in one way or the other, address the issue of populations with special needs; needs that exceed those which can be satisfied by universal schemes. You know, as well as I do, that in every society, there are always individuals or groups who can only rely on services provided by others, in order for them to achieve some quality of life. We do not know anything about if or when any of us will become a person with a special

need. The aim must be to create welfare programs, which include as many of us as possible, and as many conditions as possible.

Young people sometimes have special needs. Longer life expectancies than ever result in big quantities of old age people with special needs. Immigrant women are facing gender specific risks, due to exploitation, abuse and sexualized violence: they all have special needs. The authority's ignorance to address illegal immigration, not only in the US, has created a lot of problems and result in large populations of immigrants with special needs. Changing immigration policies and immigration patterns in Europe have created immigrants with special needs. Single mothers have special needs, if universal programs cannot meet them. The list is already long. Most of us face during a lifetime, longer or shorter periods when we have special needs. Many of us will have our needs provided for through a family network or close friends. It is for not taking a single risk of someone falling **through** the net, or **in between** responsible bodies, we need to create very fine-meshed nets, but still maintaining the personal freedom, integrity and responsibility.

Inventing new concepts for addressing new phenomena can eliminate neither poverty nor SE. However, in order to fully understand the complexity of the mechanisms, which deny people to enter into and fully participate in the community, we need to seriously explore every single backyard of the phenomena. The task is not to finally find a universal definition of poverty or to what extent SE includes poverty. The task is to end the downward rotation of the spiral, the process in which people are **not allowed to belong!** In order to fulfill this task we need to do more studies with focus on gender, ethnic minorities, young people, support systems etc. Having said so I am very pleased that this conference will deal with all these important issues. The panel presentations, which will follow in a few minutes, are all addressing Populations with Special Needs, in other words populations, which need to be extra, looked after and cared for in order to avoid the risk of ending up in the process of SE. For all of us, it applies however especially to Populations with Special Needs; we need robust and sustainable welfare programs. Remember: *Exclusion and integration is not only about the outcomes, but also about the agents and institutions that are the carriers of this* (Figueiredo 1998, page 21). We need

skilled and dedicated social workers. We need advocates to give a voice to the most vulnerable. But we also need to build societies, which are characterized by equality, antiracism and solidarity and, finally, we need societies, which fundamentally encourage an attitude of integration, not exclusion. We need societies where people like Buze can feel safe and have a better quality of life! Actually, we need a world in which Buze never had to leave her country of origin!!!

References

De Haan, Arjan (1998). *Social exclusion in policy and research: Operationalizing the concept*. In Figueiredo, José B & de Haan, Arjan ed. (1998) *Social exclusion. An ILO perspective*. Geneva: ILO Research Series 111

De Haan, Arjan (1999). *Towards a Holistic Understanding of Deprivation*. Background paper to the World Bank Report 2001

Edgren-Schori, Maud (2000). *Social exclusion – en kunskapsöversikt och begreppsanalys* (a literature survey and an analysis of the concept) Nr. 98, Stockholm University, Department of Social Work

Figueiredo, José B & de Haan, Arjan (1998) *Social exclusion: An ILO perspective*. Geneva: ILO Research Series 111

Flynn, Pdraig (1993). *Grönbok. Europeisk socialpolitik. Alternativ för Unionen*. Greenbook. European Policy. Alternative for the Union. European Union

Narayan, Deepa et al (2000). *Voices of the poor. Can Anyone Hear Us?* New York: Oxford University Press

Narayan, Deepa et al (2000). *Voices of the Poor. Crying Out for Change*. New York: Oxford University Press

Narayan, Deepa & Petesch, Patti (2002). *Voices of the Poor. From Many Lands*. New York: Oxford University Press

Rowntree, Seebohm (1941). *Poverty and progress: a second social survey of York*. London: Longman

Sen, Amartya (1998). *Social Exclusion: A Critical Assessment of the Concept and its Relevance*. Asian Development Bank

UNDP (2000, 2001, 2002). *Human Development Report*

the World Bank (1990).