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Social Integration through the Prism of Social Inclusion

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Abstract: Social inclusion refers to respecting the status and rights of all people in a society, who must have the opportunity to participate in its life in a relevant way and enjoy equal treatment with others. Social inclusion is a process that provides people at risk of poverty and social exclusion with the necessary opportunities and resources to fully participate in the economic, social and cultural life of society, ensuring them a standard of living considered decent in the society in which they live. The social inclusion research process must take into account that forms of exclusion are interdependent and therefore the exclusion of a person or group in one area could lead to exclusion in other areas. The ultimate goal of social inclusion is to guarantee the integration of each individual into society, regardless of the presence of limiting elements.

Keywords: individual; inclusion; social inclusion; equal treatment; interdependence; exclusion; integration

Introduction

Social inclusion constitutes everyone's access to education, health services, job opportunities, housing, security, etc. within a society; regardless of origin, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, intellectual capacity, gender, financial situation, among others. The research of social inclusion involves first of all the determination of the theoretical concept and its evolutionary analysis. Following the analysis of the

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specialized literature, two approaches regarding social inclusion can be determined from an academic point of view (Munteanu & Malcoci, 2016, pp. 62-78).

Main Part

A first approach refers to the presentation of social inclusion as an active response to situations of exclusion. This approach is based on the theory of integration into social systems and the theory of social solidarity of E. Durkheim (Durkheim, 2000, p. 192) and the research of the american sociologist H. Silver (Silver, 1994, pp. 531-578), according to which the concept of social inclusion was shaped on the basis of three paradigms: *the paradigm of Social Solidarity*, *the paradigm of society based on social, economic and cultural rights* and *the paradigm of monopoly*.

According to the paradigm of Social Solidarity, social cohesion is the basic element in determining social inclusion, which is built around a core of moral values that maintain the bond between the members of a society¹. The rights-based society paradigm treats society's members as holders of rights, responsibilities and interests. According to this paradigm, social inclusion expresses the degree of realization of rights based on the free choice and voluntary relationship of a person with other members of society. The third paradigm, of monopoly, describes that any society is composed of interest groups with different degrees of influence. The main concern of each group is to dominate the others, to have control and to influence the distribution of resources in a society (Silver, 1994, p. 154).

The term of social inclusion can be associated with the terms of "social cohesion", "social solidarity" and "social integration".

Later, H. Silver analyzes the concept of social inclusion from the perspective of three dimensions: the economic dimension, the social dimension and the political dimension. According to sociologist H. Silver, these dimensions contribute to the inclusion or exclusion of a vulnerable group depending on the context of national and neighborhood policies (Silver, 2015).

According to the results of the research conducted by H. Silver, the concept of social inclusion is dependent both on the concept of exclusion and on the context of

¹ Socio-educational inclusion of children with disabilities, Electronic source:
https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/incluziunea_socio-educational_a_copiiilor_cu_dizabiliti_in_grdinia_de_copii.pdf, accessed: 02.09.2022

national and neighborhood policies promoted by one society or another, according to the research dimensions: economic, social, political. As a result of the globalization and democratization of societies, the transition from the concept of exclusion to that of social inclusion is increasingly emphasized, in order to respond to the new tendencies and trends of promoting concepts with positive connotations, in order to combat discrimination and stigmatization.

Another approach from the United States of America to inclusion in response to situations of exclusion is analyzed from the perspective of W. Wolfensberger's theory of valorization of social roles, which emphasizes the advancement of the social image and competencies of devalued persons in the perceptions of others. Valorization actions contribute directly to the process of social inclusion by promoting the image and strengthening the competences in four levels and sectors of the organization of social life: at the individual level; at the level of the primary social system (family); at the level of the intermediate and secondary social systems (neighborhood, community); at the level of the whole society.

In this general framework, the valorization of social roles indicates the comprehensive principles of inclusion at all levels of a system from the perspective of fulfilling social valorizing roles. The conceptualization of social inclusion from the perspective of social valorizing roles is determined by the normal rhythm of life, without creating specialized conditions separately from other members that constitute the general population, following the universal practice of the valorizing cultural analogue, which is frequently encountered and provides positive models to access a better life based on experiences lived by a person in accordance with the ideals, and morals of the culture of the society in which he lives and in accordance with typical, accepted and valorizing experiences for a certain age. Following the analysis of the concept proposed by W. Wolfensberger, it can be mentioned that the relationship between inclusion and valorizing social roles is of major interest in researching the inclusion of people, because, according to this approach, devalued persons, in whose category people with disabilities also fall, are empowered and involved to contribute to inclusion by promoting the positive image, and valorizing social roles help to compensate or even overcome situations of exclusion. The more positive and valuable the roles that a person has, the lower her risk of being socially excluded is (Wolfensberger, 2004).

The approach of inclusion in response to situations of exclusion is analyzed mainly by the Western researchers in relation to the processes of social cohesion, social solidarity, social integration and valorization of social roles. This approach is closer

to the cultural and political context of a society and represents the stage in which the term “inclusion” was used more as a dichotomous notion for the term “exclusion”, without a certain scientifically argued conceptual interpretation (Munteanu, 2012, pp. 120-124).

The second academic approach aims at social inclusion as a process of measuring the impact of social policies on different categories of population. This approach is about analyzing policies through the prism of the participation of excluded people and changing the way of thinking about social policies by outlining a social model of well-being and poverty eradication.

In the early 90s, policy documents of the community institutions, such as the 1993 Green Paper on European Social Policy: Options for the Union, mentioned combating social exclusion as a line of public policy. Integration or insertion were terms frequently used in academia to mean inclusion. The reference moment for the introduction of the term social inclusion is the Lisbon European Council of 2000, the occasion on which a European Union strategy was launched, with the year 2010 as its horizon, known as the “Lisbon Process or Strategy”¹.

Thus, in March 2000, the Lisbon European Council reached agreement regarding, on the one hand, the need to approach an open method of coordinating social policies and, on the other hand, the active role of the European Council in achieving this coordination. Subsequently, an agreement is reached at The Nice European Council on the common objectives and structure of the National Plans for Social Inclusion. These are:

- (a) Facilitating access to jobs and resources, rights, goods and services for everyone;
- (b) Preventing the risks of exclusion, showing the risks that appear in the context of new information and communication technologies, the needs of people with disabilities, personal crisis situations resulting from exclusion and family solidarity;
- (c) Helping the most deprived, in particular women and men facing persistent risks of poverty, children and geographical areas with a substantial incidence of exclusion;
- (d) Mobilizing all individuals and institutions, especially by promoting the participation of excluded people, thus giving them the right to reply, incorporating

¹ Social inclusion, Electronic source <https://www.britishcouncil.ro/programe/societate/incluziune-sociala>, accessed: 04.09.2022.

anti-exclusion measures into all policies and encouraging an active commitment from all citizens to combat exclusion (Arpinte, 2008, pp. 339-369).

Thus, the promotion of social inclusion policies, as a line of public policy, began to gradually replace public policies aimed at combating social exclusion. According to the concept adopted by the EU, social inclusion is a process that offers people at risk of poverty and social exclusion the necessary opportunities and resources to fully participate in the economic, social and cultural life of society, ensuring them a standard of living considered decent in the society in which they live. This will also allow a greater level of participation in the decision-making process, which affects their lives, and their access to fundamental rights according to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

The European Union promotes a threefold approach to social inclusion policies which consists of:

- (a) Increasing access to basic services and opportunities;
- (b) The application of legislation to eliminate discrimination; and
- (c) Developing targeted measures to respond to the specific needs of each vulnerable group.

In this context, at the global, European, and national level, the main development strategies have been reviewed through the prism of inclusion, such as: The European Union 2020 Strategy and the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. At the basis of the development of the Sustainable Development Goals for the 2030 Agenda and at the basis of the European Union 2020 Strategy are the social inclusion's dimensions of economic, political, social, and cultural order¹.

The researchers concerned with social inclusion in the CIS do not give a clear definition of the concept of inclusion, but rather use the terms "social insertion" or "social integration". The approach to social inclusion is mainly analyzed from the perspective of three types of social exclusion: economic exclusion, explained by situations of exclusion from the labor market and limited opportunities to contribute to economic development; social exclusion, analyzed from the perspective of access to public services and utilities, and civic and political exclusion, analyzed from the

¹ 166 European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 approved by European Commission, Brussels 2010. 12 p.

perspective of participation in society and political processes (Rasell & Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2017).

Based on the description of the concept of inclusion as a response to exclusion, researchers E. Iarskaya-Smirnova and M. Rasell present social inclusion as a process and result of social programs. According to the authors' opinion, inclusion, insertion or social integration, depending on the concept agreed and used by the member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, constitutes a main prerogative mainly for socialist or social democratic governments (Moișă, 2012, p. 170).

In Romania, the concept of social inclusion defines the access of individuals and families to a set of social standards, in the form of social rights. In other words, the concept of social inclusion refers to equality in terms of opportunities with the aim of obtaining equal rights. In a more concrete approach, social inclusion refers to the simultaneous belonging of man to four systems: (a) *the democratic and legal system* that presupposes civic integration; (b) *the labor market*, which promotes economic integration; (c) *the welfare state system* which promotes what can be called social integration; (d) *the family and community system* that promotes interpersonal integration (Moișă, 2012, p. 170).

Analyzing the concept of social inclusion proposed by Romanian researchers, we can mention that people who engage in social interactions in all four systems have expectations related to their social inclusion. These expectations seem to be reasonable, given the fundamental human need to feel safe and free, to earn income in order to participate in economic and social life, to establish and maintain social ties, to feel part of family and community to have physical and psychological well-being¹.

Summarizing both the guidelines of researchers from the West, including the European Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States, we will find that social inclusion should be seen as a process that ensures social integration and cohesion in society and which is much more complex than just overcoming the social exclusion of marginalized people.

Social inclusion seeks to address the root causes of social exclusion, such as discriminatory actions, failures in policies and institutions, and structural

¹ Identifying social inclusion and exclusion, Electronic source <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/chapter1.pdf>, accessed: 19.09.2022

inefficiencies, and involves the participation and integration of vulnerable groups in institutions and social networks. Social inclusion is not only the opposite of social exclusion as a status, but also a process that contributes to overcoming exclusion through active participation and involvement.

In the Republic of Moldova, similar to the CIS states, the concept of social inclusion appeared as a response to the concept of social exclusion, complementing the term social insertion or integration. By social inclusion, local researchers defined a set of multidimensional measures and actions in the fields of social protection, employment, living in the community, education, health, information and communication, mobility, security, justice and culture, aimed at combating social exclusion. In other words, social inclusion represents all the measures and actions carried out with the aim of ensuring that all people are able to participate in society, regardless of their origin or specific characteristics, which may include: race, language, culture, gender, disability, social status, age, and other factors. The primary goal of social inclusion is to combat discrimination and social exclusion and, implicitly, to respect the rights of all individuals and groups in a society, accepting diversity¹.

The concept operated by UNDP Moldova falls within the group of researchers who support the approach of inclusion as a response to social exclusion, while the group of authors D. Vaculovschi, M. Vremes, V. Craevschi-Toarta and A. Toritsyn define social inclusion as the participation of people in the activity of institutions and social networks, including those oriented to support disadvantaged people. This definition corresponds more to the approach of inclusion as a process of measuring the impact of social policies through the prism of participation and changing the way of policies' thinking².

The analysis of specialized literature from the Republic of Moldova reveals that researchers were much more concerned with approaching social inclusion from the perspective of exclusion. Less has been researched the process of inclusion and the problems that hinder this process. In the opinion of researchers from the Republic of Moldova, the process of social inclusion needs to be centered on preventing and combating four types of exclusion, namely:

¹ The Sociology of Social Inclusion, Electronic source https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258187424_The_Sociology_of_Social_Inclusion, accessed: 20.09.2022.

² Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion: An Overview, Electronic source <https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v7i1/25121707.pdf>, accessed: 16.09.2022.

(a) *economic exclusion*, which is determined by economic factors with an impact on inequality in property and income, being also caused by the reduction of employment opportunities;

(b) *social exclusion*, which is determined by and results in unequal access to the full range of services: education, health, legal, social security, housing insurance, etc., which causes a negative impact on human development and can lead to a reduced level of education, health status, social inclusion and participation;

(c) *political exclusion*, which is determined by and results in inequalities in the distribution of political opportunities and power at all levels within the group and unequal access to justice, freedoms and institutions;

(d) *cultural exclusion*, which is determined by and results in differences in the recognition of the hierarchical status of moral norms, spiritual-religious values and principles, traditions and customs of different groups-members of society¹.

Based on studies that analyze social inclusion as a process and result, we will determine the factors of inclusion that refer to:

✓ *institutional factors*, which include the mechanisms for institutional support of the population, especially those with a higher degree of vulnerability and exclusion, by creating equal opportunities;

✓ *political factors*, which include discriminatory legal framework or inadequate procedures for its implementation. Discriminatory legislation may aggravate the exclusion of some social groups. Social policies aimed at preventing and combating discrimination lead to increased social inclusion in the education system, the labor market, in the process of participation in political life, participation in demographic processes. Sometimes the legal and normative framework may be inclusive on paper, but barriers and lack of enforcement mechanisms in practice restrict opportunities for social inclusion. The legal and normative framework, the existing decision-making processes can be ineffective in protecting excluded groups due to: misunderstanding in depth of existing problems, lack of commitment, insufficient human and financial resources and lack of social responsibility towards the members of society.

¹ Handbook for the Integrative Approach to Gender Equality, Electronic source
file:///D:/Downloads/manual%20pentru%20abordarea%20integratoare%20a%20egalit%C4%83%C5%A3ii-KE8108293RON.pdf, accessed: 19.09.2022.

✓ *socio-cultural factors*, which include the social values and cultural practices of a society. The tolerance of society members towards certain groups is educated throughout life and is promoted according to the specifics of society. Despite the existence of legal provisions prohibiting discrimination, many people in the Republic of Moldova face multiple forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, age, ethnic origin, disability. The inclusion of people is more difficult to achieve if several discrimination criteria are encountered. This discrimination tends to be systematic in nature towards certain groups of people, especially those with disabilities. Discrimination against women with disabilities of Gypsy ethnicity represent some additional sources of social vulnerability based on multiple discrimination by disability, gender and ethnicity criteria. These people, in addition to experiencing multiple barriers in the process of inclusion, are at risk of being subjected to acts of physical, psychological and sexual violence.

✓ *geographical factors*, depending on which people from rural areas, namely from more remote areas, without access to road and transport infrastructure face greater problems of social inclusion compared to people from urban areas with access to infrastructure and transport. Sociological research carried out in Moldova highlights that “life in rural areas is associated with limited access to the labor market, low incomes, mostly from agricultural activities, as well as limited access to goods and services”.

✓ *personal factors* – some people actively participate in the process of their inclusion, while others may intentionally self-exclude. Some people may self-exclude because they are poor, and adopt behaviors not accepted by society, such as refusing to find a job, in exchange for obtaining social assistance from the state, or in exchange for obtaining income from begging or from committing crimes. Others exclude themselves because they do not share the same moral, spiritual values with the majority population.

✓ *the environmental factors* include the attitude and perception of the population towards a group of people, the environment in which people live, and the opportunities that this environment provides. People with disabilities are considered by the majority of the population to be a vulnerable group with a high risk of social exclusion. The vulnerability of persons with disabilities is explained by non-acceptance, social exclusion and discrimination (Vremeş & alli, 2010, p. 322).

The approach of social inclusion as a process of measuring the impact of social policies in the Republic of Moldova was introduced through the prism of

participation in the National Human Development Reports developed by UNDP by the same group of authors who analyzed the approach of inclusion from the perspective of social exclusion: D. Vaculovschi, M. Vremes, V. Craevschi-Toarta and A. Toritsyn. Initially, the authors, through their studies, promoted the concept of exclusion instead of the classical term “poverty”, and later they introduced the expression “promotion of social inclusion” instead of the phrase “measures to combat poverty” (Vremeş & et.alli, 2012, p. 76).

Conclusions

Analyzing the specialized literature, we will allow ourselves to conclude that in the process of defining the concept of social inclusion, it is necessary to take into account both academic approaches: the approach to inclusion as a response to situations of social exclusion and the approach to inclusion as a process of measuring the impact of social policies through the prism of participation. In this sense, the concept defined by the European Union represents the complex approach to inclusion, encompassing both approaches described above. Namely, the concept of inclusion promoted at the level of the European Union defines social inclusion as a process that provides people at risk of poverty and social exclusion with the necessary opportunities and resources to participate fully in the economic, social, political and cultural life of society, ensuring them a decent standard of living in the society in which they live.

This decision is based on the arguments made by both Western authors and researchers who analyzed this concept in the CIS area, according to which the concept of social inclusion is a multidimensional one and recommends that research in the field include both the analysis of measures taken by the authorities and civil society in order to prevent and combat social exclusion, as well as the analysis of inclusion as a process of measuring the impact of social policies from the perspective of participation.

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