



Revisiting the EU's social exclusion discourse: Residential segregation, Greek Roma and the participatory governance lock in



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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss the controversy over the EU's social policy goals and the vibrant debate about the means through which they are promoted. In particular we explore the “citizenship rights” and the “participatory governance” pillars of the EU's “social exclusion” approach. The paper examines the Roma population in Greece; a *de facto* minority experiencing multidimensional, material and discursive exclusion that has recently attracted the attention of the EU's social policy makers. We interrogate the Greek city of Komotini's attempts to administer an integrated intervention aimed at ameliorating the disadvantaged state of the city's Roma community. The EU's interpretation of “social exclusion”, it is argued, examines the ways in which citizenship rights are exercised and brings to the surface longstanding social exclusion problems. The EU's mode of anti-exclusion intervention, however, based on participatory governance schemes, is primarily concerned with improving the effectiveness of policy delivery. In the case of minorities, it overlooks discrimination as the root cause of exclusion. In the absence of provisions mitigating power asymmetries among participants, underprivileged groups are often left with no alternative but to scale up political pressure against governing institutions or risk being ignored.

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1. Introduction

The spatial dimension of social exclusion is primarily noticeable in residential segregation processes, a key venue for prejudice and discrimination (Sibley, 1995). “Excluded” inner-city neighborhoods are associated in the literature with constrained job opportunities, marginal participation in the fields of education and politics and differential access to urban amenities and social support services (Bolt et al., 2010; Musterd, 2005; Harrison et al., 2005). At EU level, concerted attempts to understand and address socio-spatial deprivation have been made since the early 1990s. Exclusionary processes are conceptualized in the EU “in terms of the denial – or non-realisation – of citizenship rights” (EC, 1992a: 20–21). In dealing with the spatial dimensions of exclusion, the EU's predominant *modus operandi* promotes integrated urban interventions that build on participatory governance¹ initiatives

(EC, 2006). EU mobilization exerts a significant degree of influence on national policy responses (Mangen, 2004; Phillips, 2010). In this paper, we discuss the EU's social exclusion paradigm in the area of ethnic residential segregation, concentrating on the Roma. Our examination focuses on the Greek city of Komotini.

In recent years, EU organisations have provided an increasing amount of information about the poor conditions of life and violations of the fundamental rights of a substantial proportion of Roma (FRA, 2013). Discriminatory practices against this ethnic group have been recorded in all member states, triggering a Roma-focused EU social policy response (EC, 2011). Greece is no exception to this discriminatory reality, yet it provides a particularly challenging policy case (FRA, 2012). A legacy of arbitrary citizenship practices exercised in the country tests the efficacy of the EU's rights-based approach to exclusion (Tsitselikis, 2006). Also, forms of anti-Roma prejudice verging on “institutional racism” question the capacity of Roma communities in Greece to represent their interests in power-laden participatory governance settings. The EU's perspective on socio-spatial exclusion is therefore strained in the case of Greece.

Komotini is a city with an ethnically diverse population: Muslim (viz., Turkish and Roma) communities enjoy a distinct set of minority linguistic, educational and religious rights. In the early 2000s, the underprivileged state of the city's Roma led to a local

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¹ “Governance” is an umbrella term that portrays the shift in the nature and role of governing institutions from hierarchies and control to networks and regulation. “Participation,” in turn, takes into account the processes in which formalized government structures reach out to “civil society” actors and private sector interests, initiating an interaction that (potentially) allows these actors and interests a degree of influence over policy making (Newman, 2004).

intervention attempt that centered on addressing residential segregation. The anti-exclusion policies implemented in Komotini were co-financed by the national authorities and the EU and adhered to the EU's method of "participatory" socio-spatial intervention. This initiative was explored in detail. Research involved a series of semi-structured interviews with key local policy-making authorities and leading community members (2008–2012). Also, "polyphonic" open-ended group interviews were conducted in the community's settlement, exploring the perceptions of Roma of the intervention scheme (Fray and Fontana, 1991: 178). As suggested by our research findings, the EU's conceptualization of "social exclusion" is focused on the *de facto* rights enjoyed by a particular population in a specific area. It interrogates and presents in official periodic reports the social reality that defines access to citizenship rights and thereby brings to the surface longstanding problems of social exclusion (Smith, 1995). The governance mode of anti-exclusion intervention, however, as devised by the EU, falls short of promoting the interests of disadvantaged communities.

In the initial phases of Komotini's programme, power asymmetries among actors confined the participatory role of the Roma to a consultative one, curtailing their capacity to articulate their views. Instead of abandoning the programme, however, the community distanced itself temporarily from the respective processes, regrouped and claimed an effective participatory role. The community's reaction informs the controversy in the deliberative literature concerning the response of disadvantaged groups' to participatory processes that fail to engage them as "core partners" (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Taylor, 2007; Davies, 2007). In decidedly non-ideal participatory circumstances, we argue, activism directed towards counterbalancing participatory power asymmetries can assert the influence of underprivileged groups in affairs that matter to them. As decisions in participatory structures cannot be reached in the absence of key stakeholders, the governance requirement for intersubjective agreement may offer the necessary room for maneuver, enabling the exertion of such political pressure.

The paper is organized in three parts. In the first part, we discuss the process through which "social inclusion" was defined as a policy goal at EU level, underscoring the controversy over policy traits and the methods of promoting inclusion through participatory governance. Subsequently, we look at Greece; the divisive conceptualization of citizenship exercised in that country challenges the rights-based approach to exclusion adopted by the EU. In this frame, we outline the multiple and overlapping exclusions experienced by the Roma communities in Greece. The capacity of the EU's approach to address the Roma's disadvantaged state is explored in the third section of the paper with respect to the city of Komotini.

2. The EU conceptualization of social exclusion

The varied views espoused by member states with respect to "social need" in the 1990s deterred the formation of social policy objectives at the level of the EU (EC, 1992b). However, by propounding "...the right to social and housing assistance" (EC, 2000: 16 – Article 34), the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) re-opened the debate on EU social policy actions (Hantrais, 2007). The reference to the Charter in the Lisbon Treaty (2007) and the ensuing creation of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2007) are strong indications that the concept of "rights beyond the workplace" will be actively pursued in the EU in the years ahead (EC, 2007; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2007: 36). A further sign of the open-ended nature of EU social policy comes from the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) (EP, 2000). The OMC is a governance platform aiming to steer member states' social policy

actions. In the Nice European Council (2000), member states agreed to define common aims in the fight against social exclusion and to develop common indicators to measure progress and compare good practices (Adnett and Hardy, 2005). In parallel, they decided to present biannually at the EU level detailed National Action Plans against social exclusion and joint reports on social inclusion, along with regular monitoring, joint evaluation and peer review (European Council, 2000). The "Social Protection Committee", made up of representatives from the Commission and the member states, co-ordinates the respective processes (O.J., 2001: 18).

As the OMC approach does not include sanctions for unsuccessful performance, change is expected to occur through exposure to comments and criticism (Trubek and Trubek, 2005). Regarding policy implementation, according to the EU's notion of "subsidiarity" the national authorities are exclusively responsible for carrying out anti-exclusion plans. In the case of programmes co-financed by the EU, however, policy implementation has to comply with the commonly reached intervention principles agreed upon by the member states (O.J., 2012). The OMC process, based on member state-specific strategies and their discursive diffusion, has gradually shaped the EU's social exclusion agenda.

According to the European Commission, social exclusion refers to individuals who are "...prevented from participating fully [in society] by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination" (EC, 2004: 10). "Social inclusion" is viewed as a process aiming at ensuring that disadvantaged individuals "...gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life, [...and] in decision-making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights" (EC, 2004: 10). The EU's social exclusion discourse, therefore, propounds a normative citizenship type—one that explores an individual's status *vis-a-vis* a political entity. Emphasis, however, is also placed on "socio-cultural" forms of citizenship, focusing on societal "participation," the underdeveloped state of which is associated with inequalities in opportunities and prospects (Ghose, 2005; Murie and Musterd, 2004). The emphasis on "participation" in decision-making processes draws from the contemporary EU narrative on "European governance," encouraging a shift from the linear and centralized policy-making model toward a less hierarchical approach "...based on feedback, networks and involvement [“of people and organizations”] from policy-creation to implementation at all levels." EU policies, it has been argued, "...can no longer be effective unless they are prepared, implemented and enforced in a more inclusive way" (EC, 2001: 10). The aforementioned definitions of "exclusion" and "participatory governance" feed into a vibrant debate over the policy effects of the EU's response to social need. Two major viewpoints are recognized in the literature.

2.1. "Social exclusion": A neoliberal policy shift

In approaching the EU mobilization on social exclusion, a number of authors have commented on the stigma attached to the EU's discourse around the "socially excluded" (Davies, 2005). The policy focus on particular population groups, it is stressed, diverts attention from increases in socio-economic disparities, the underlying cause of social exclusion. Moreover, the representation of the welfare state in the "social exclusion" reasoning as in need of reform (see Deacon, 2002), may justify retrenchment and curtail the available means with which to tackle disparities (Levitas, 2005). From this perspective, the emphasis placed on "social inclusion" policies of reintegrating the long-term unemployed into the labor market serves as evidence of the neoliberal nature of EU intervention (Fletcher, 2002). The search for "security" in the marketplace forced upon individuals in need is, according to authors who are skeptical

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