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On the Importance of Concept Specification**

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ECMI Issue Brief #19

November 2008

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ECMI Brief #19
European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)
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Economic Exclusion of Ethnic Minorities: On the Importance of Concept Specification

Tim Dertwinkel

Introduction

This issue brief is a plea for a more systematic investigation into the concept of economic exclusion of ethnic minorities.¹ What does “economic exclusion” exactly mean? How does it relate to the broader and more established phenomenon of social exclusion? Is economic exclusion, especially when applied to historical ethnic minorities, worthwhile studying in its own right, or is it just a fashionable reframing of “older” development concepts such as poverty or inequality? It is exactly these questions that this issue brief attempts to shed some light on.

I argue that such an exercise is overdue mainly for the two following reasons: first, there is a recent abundance in the use of the term “economic exclusion”, prominently taken up and further promoted by the work of minority rights related institutions, NGOs and practitioners. Second, and in sharp contrast to fast emerging policy programs and legal frameworks, theoretical or conceptual clarifications of economic exclusion - as well as empirical results on factors promoting or mitigating exclusion - are rare. The main argument put forward here is that so far, working definitions of economic exclusion are broad and extensive, and tend to vary according to institution. No standard definition of economic exclusion exists so far. This lack of conceptual specification makes it almost impossible for empirical work to catch up with recent normative developments.

¹ The issue brief limits its scope to historical or autochthonous ethnic minorities. An ethnic minority is understood here as a real or imagined community with a sense of a certain belonging. Basis for this can be attributed to identity carriers like language, religion, history, territory or other “sticky” markers. In principle, the discussion about the very concept of economic exclusion can be applied to new minorities in the form of migrants as well, and to any vulnerable group in society. However, whether new migrants face more or less economic exclusion than historical ones or other groups is a pure empirical question, not a conceptual one. Furthermore, a growing literature on labor market discrimination against migrants, especially in the UK, has already established itself as valuable research area. It is also true that sociological research on racial discrimination or ethnic segregation has a long tradition, e.g. in the US. In addition to research on migrants, gender mainstreaming has recently established itself as important sub-field of social policy research under the EU welfare state model. Although seen as crucial for the functioning of an expanded EU, research on economic exclusion of historical minorities as well as on indigenous peoples lags far behind other social policy fields as well as political and legal realities.

This paper proceeds as follows: first, several arguments are presented as to why the study of causes and consequences of economic exclusion of historical ethnic minorities should receive greater attention. Second, after a short historic review of how the term social exclusion has developed in Europe, it is shown that the very meaning of social exclusion has always been an economic and less a political or cultural one. Third, the most relevant legal frameworks that try to tackle economic exclusion related to ethnic minorities are presented, in order to more systematically analyze the very concept of economic exclusion, and its relationship to the more codified principle of non-discrimination related to minority questions. This is done with the help of so-called concept specification, a topic that received much attention lately among methodologists in political and social science. A conclusion is presented in the last section.

Why study economic exclusion at all, and why focus on historical ethnic minorities?

It is well known that many states have minorities within their borders. Although no firm statistics exist, estimates suggest that 10 to 20 per cent of the world's population belong to minorities. 40% of the world's independent states have more than five sizable ethnic populations, one or more of which most likely faces serious economic, political and social discrimination. In recent years, domestic conflicts and even civil wars have arisen out of ethnic groups perceptions, whether justified or not, that they are losing out in the competition for limited resources such as land and job opportunities. These problems are even worse for indigenous peoples, whose number exceeds 300 million living in 70 countries, and who often make very specific claims about certain land rights.² Belonging to an ethnic or indigenous minority group in a country makes it much more likely to be less educated, being in poorer health and housing conditions, and residing in a lower socio-economic stratum than dominant groups in a society. Throughout Europe, the case of the Roma and Sinti minority comes to mind, where Roma have the lowest rates of school attendance and the highest dropout rates among all European minorities, and face unemployment rates in some locations as high as 80%. Let us consider another example. A recent GfK-NOP poll for the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Britain found that many individuals have experienced discrimination at some point in their lives, but thought they would not get any help. Respondents when given a list of reasons why people most commonly faced discrimination in Britain today, 66% said the ethnic background; The poll asked respondents where people in Britain most commonly experience discrimination or

² See Michael Todaro and Stephen C. Smith, *Economic Development*, 8th ed. (Longman, New York, 2003).

unfair treatment today, 74% said work or when in a job or applying for a job while 50% said at school, college, university.

Legal argument – anti-discrimination

There are at least three good reasons why to study economic exclusion more explicitly, especially when applied to historic ethnic minorities³. From a legal perspective, discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender or any other identity marker is prohibited both by numerous national jurisdictions and by supra-national instruments such as the EU “Race Directive”, but its presence is nevertheless widespread. The economic disadvantages suffered by members of minorities in Europe are perhaps more often the result of indirect than direct discrimination. The need to ensure the effective participation of members of minorities in economic life is mentioned explicitly in the Article 15 of the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities⁴. This goes beyond the formal provision of prohibiting direct discrimination and aims towards effective economic inclusion and participation in practice.

Economic development argument

The second argument is one of promoting economic growth. If excluded from economic life, minorities will remain an untapped resource in terms of increasing prosperity for entire communities, regions or countries⁵. For example, we empirically know that mixed ethnic work teams help to promote positive group relations, and that an ethnically mixed workplace has a higher impact on positive ethnic relations and productivity than e.g. residential mixing⁶. If minorities remain under-educated, underpaid and under-employed because of discrimination or blocked access, the economy of the entire country or region will suffer, with possible adverse consequences for members of the majority and neighboring countries as well.

³ Jonathan Wheatley, “The Economic Status of National Minorities in Europe: a Four-Case Study”, 6 *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 6 (2007), 1-35. Available at: http://ecmi.de/jemie/download/1-2007_Wheatley.pdf, Access date: 05.05.2008 ; Jonathan Wheatley, “The Economic Dimension of Minority Participation in Europe”, European Centre for Minority Issues, ECMI Issue Brief #15, February 2007, Available at: http://www.ecmi.de/download/brief_15.pdf, Access date: 05.05.2008.

⁴ Alan Phillips, “The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Protection of the Economic Rights of Minorities” In: EURAC/ECMI (eds.) *European Yearbook of Minority Issues* , Vol. 3 (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Leiden, 2005), 287-306.

⁵ Wheatley, “The Economic Status...” ; Wheatley, “The Economic Dimension...”.

⁶ Anthony Oberschall, *Conflict and Peace Building in Divided Societies: Responses to Ethnic Violence* (Routledge, London, 2007).

Security argument

Finally, there is a strong security argument against economic exclusion of minorities because once mobilized, the continuous and systematic economic marginalization of a particular identity group can increase the likelihood of inter-ethnic mistrust, fear and competition for scarce resources⁷. For example, the various political and economic crises in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and before, further exacerbated the exclusion of minorities from effective participation in economic life. During the transition to market-based economies, certain minorities continued to suffer disproportionately from high levels of unemployment and weakened social welfare structures, while experiencing marginalization from the decision-making process. If discriminated groups do not belong to the group in political power (normally, but not always the demographic majority), are relatively small in size and reside geographically concentrated in remote areas of a country, economic exclusion becomes more likely, as does the likelihood of grievance-based mobilization for civil conflict⁸. Various political economy and development studies have shown that low rates of economic growth, inequalities in income level and low per capita income in general increase the risk of such minorities to engage in violent dissent⁹.

From social to economic exclusion

So far, I have briefly outlined the need to focus more on the economic dimension of minority exclusion. However, such a perspective would mean to shift away from the broader notion of social exclusion in general, and to narrow down its various dimensions more systematically. The problem with studies of social exclusion of minorities is that the concept remains an unspecified umbrella term for all possible kinds of discrimination and marginalization minority groups might ever encounter. Such a broad, “one size fits all” concept of exclusion makes it hard to carry out targeted empirical research on the topic, as well as designing policy options. Below, I will present a first step into focusing more on the various dimensions of social exclusion, and argue why the economic dimension should receive greater attention.

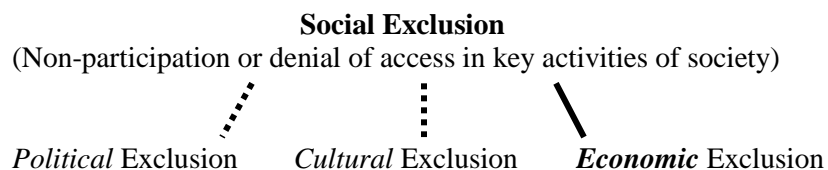
An overview of the relationship between different dimensions of social exclusion

⁷ Susan Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1992).

⁸ Han Dorussen, “Economic and Political Coercion in Ethno-Political Conflict”, University of Essex, Department of Government, Working Paper, 2008.

⁹ Paul Collier, *et al.*, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, World Bank, World Bank Policy Research Report, 2003.

Most scholars agree that social exclusion¹⁰ is multi-dimensional in nature and very much depends on social context¹¹. A working definition of social exclusion would be *non-participation in or denial of access to* key activities of a society. It should be stressed that social exclusion normally means that an individual is not participating in society for reasons beyond his/her control, but that he or she would like to participate. Social exclusion is generally agreed to be a *relative* concept – relative to time, place/location and society as a whole. The working definition refers to participation, which is central to the concept of exclusion. Which activities are regarded as “key” is left open - although contested categories and often used in interchangeable and rather confusing ways, political engagement, cultural interaction and economic participation are the most obvious dimensions here, as indicated in the schematic overview below:



In the figure above, social exclusion consist of the three dimensions of political, cultural and economic exclusion. I will turn to each of these dimensions below.

To start with, *social* exclusion in general can be broadly understood as exclusion or marginalization of one group by another group in society because of different group identity. Recently, the Lisbon Summit committed EU member states to adopt the promotion of social cohesion and social inclusion as strategic goal for sustainable economic growth¹². The well-known Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has further pointed out the need for a legal framework for the effective participation of minorities in public life¹³. Thus, it is worthwhile to start with a brief historical review on how the term of social exclusion entered academic and policy discussions.

Social exclusion: changed historical understanding of the term

¹⁰ I am using the negative connotation of the term here, as it is more common than its positive counterpart “inclusion“. I do the same for the other proposed dimensions of social exclusion. Absence of economic exclusion would then be the same as speaking about “equal economic opportunities” or “economic enfranchisement”.

¹¹ Tania Burchardt, Julian Le Grand and D. Piachaud, “Introduction”, in J. Hills, J. Le Grand and D. Piachaud (eds.), *Understanding Social Exclusion* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002).

¹² Tove H. Malloy, “The Lisbon Strategy and Ethnic Minorities: Rights and Economic Growth”, European Centre for Minority Issues, ECMI Issue Brief # 13, April 2005, Available at: http://www.ecmi.de/download/brief_13.pdf, Access Date: 05.05.2008.

¹³ Phillips, “The Framework Convention...”.

In general, definitions of social exclusion abound and vary according to national context, time period and academic anchoring¹⁴. Social exclusion research has its roots in classical sociology rather than in political science or economics, which explains why it is usually defined as more than simple lack of material resources such as low income. To be socially excluded means to be deprived from social recognition and social value, and to remain an outsider in contrast to an in-group. Max Weber¹⁵ identified exclusion as one form of “social closure”, which he saw as an attempt of one status group to secure for itself a privileged position at the expense of another group, through a process of subordination. For Weber then, social exclusion is neither a condition nor an outcome, but rather a dynamic process, meaning that individuals or groups can slip in and out of such marginalization.

The very idea to speak of social exclusion is a continental Western European one, closely related to values such as solidarity or the social contract in modern welfare state societies. Social exclusion then is defined as rupturing of the social bond, lack of social cohesion or lost solidarity. The term originated in France in the 1960’s and has many affinities with French Republican thought¹⁶.

The original meaning of social exclusion stressed social distance, marginalization, inadequate integration and lack of participation¹⁷. In France, the socially excluded were those who were administratively excluded by the state, especially from the social insurance system: the disabled, young adults and parents, and the uninsured unemployed. Later on, social problems originating mainly in increasingly and unequal growing cities led to a broadening of the understanding: the disaffected youth and isolated individuals suffering from long-term unemployment were additionally subsumed under the category.

This new concern with long-term unemployment as correlated with social exclusion was picked up by more and more European states, and has been brought in relation to possibly negative effects of globalization on domestic labor markets. This concern with a possible decline of the western welfare state model finally resulted in the adoption of various legally binding social inclusion resolutions at the EU level¹⁸.

¹⁴ Burchardt *et al.*, “Introduction”.

¹⁵ M. Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. by G. Roth and C. Wittich (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978).

¹⁶ J. Hills, J. Le Grand and D. Piachaud (eds.) *Understanding Social Exclusion* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002).

¹⁷ Burchardt *et al.*, “Introduction”.

¹⁸ Phillips, “The Framework Convention...”; Malloy, “The Lisbon Strategy...”.

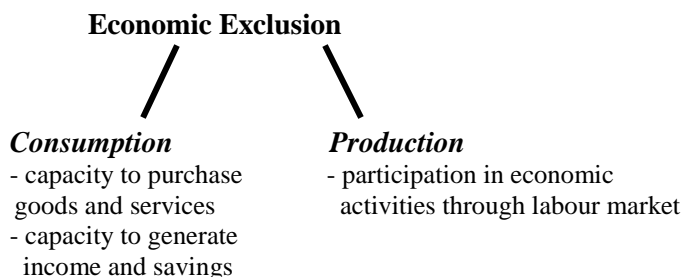
Political and cultural exclusion

From a rights-based perspective, *political* exclusion would mean e.g. the lack of equal voting or political participation rights as compared to the majority of the population. Political exclusion as a form of social exclusion is usually overcome by full citizenship or political minority rights in the case of racial or ethnically based group marginalization. Full and effective political engagement would then mean the involvement in local or national decision making bodies.

Cultural exclusion might be present if minority groups are excluded from society because they speak another language as compared to the one spoken by the ethnic group that controls the state. Integration with family, friends, neighbors and the broader community is blocked if language barriers persist. Cultural exclusion most likely becomes a matter of education and adequate educational opportunities for all groups in a society. Needless to say, this overlaps in large degrees to economic exclusion as described below. Cultural exclusion because of language differences becomes especially severe for new minorities in the form of migrants, because language distances are normally large between these groups and the ethnic group that forms the majority in a state.

Economic exclusion

Finally, economic exclusion can be broadly understood as non-participation in or blocked access to the labor market, public services, finance, housing, educational and health sector, among other possibilities¹⁹. Labor market exclusion, that manifests itself in long-term unemployment and a low standard of living, is in most studies seen as key point to address for ethnic minorities. As indicated below, economic exclusion can be further be analyzed through looking at the two basic ingredients of economic activity in general, consumption and production:



¹⁹ Wheatley, “The Economic Status...”; Wheatley, “The Economic Dimension...”.

The consumption side of economic exclusion would then highlight the capacity of an individual to purchase goods and services, as well as income and savings. Each of these two dimensions represents an outcome considered important in its own right, although there are of course interactions in between. However, exclusion in one of the two dimensions is enough to speak of economic exclusion, and can not be substituted by the other dimension (hence it is a necessary condition). So, for example, lack of participation in production is problematic even if the individual has a reasonable level of consumption, and is politically and culturally well integrated. Inclusion and exclusion in consumption and production is clearly a matter of degree.

Some economists point out that a certain degree of (income) inequality in a society is in itself nothing to worry about, and that it can spur growth because of an increase in competition. Accordingly, labor segregation and income polarization become rather the rule than the exception in more industrial and globalized societies, because these depend very much on job specialization. However, the optimal amount and effects of such inequalities are disputed, especially against the background of recent concerns with rising figures of income inequality in the US and most developing countries. For example, in the US this development has gone hand in hand with a sharp decline in social capital, social cohesion and trust among people²⁰.

However, as poverty and inequality are still understood more in terms of vertical redistribution of wealth between individuals, economic exclusion is a relational, group-level phenomenon. For example, income poverty can lead to economic exclusion, as well as the reverse, but excluded members of societies do not necessarily have to be poor. Self-exclusion of certain groups in society is a common observation. Thus, economic exclusion is never strictly a question of insufficient material resources. Exclusion is an issue of being in or out, rather than rich or poor. Because it is about broken social relationships, there are always two groups to consider: the excluded as well as the group who does the exclusion. In this respect, the very meaning of the concept of economic exclusion comes close to Amartya Sen's famous idea of capability poverty or human well-being²¹, which is about the real quality of human lives and thus subjective rather than objective.

To sum up, social exclusion has expanded its meaning over time to capture more or new social problems, and to maintain being applicable to discriminated groups in society, depending on

²⁰ Robert Putnam, "Bowling alone: America's declining social capital", 6 *Journal of Democracy* (1995), 65–78.

²¹ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999).

which social problems rank highest on the political agenda. From the discussion above, it follows that social exclusion has gradually developed more and more towards what we would call economic exclusion today. One could also make the point that the very meaning of social exclusion was always an economic one, based on rising levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality among different groups in society facing modernization processes. From such a perspective, political or cultural participation are seen only as secondary dimensions of social exclusion/inclusion. The question whether one has the formal possibility to vote or not, to join a political party, a trade union or a language association is probably less relevant for people when compared to very basic needs such as to generate an income for food, health and housing, or to get basic education for one's children.

This might be the case why in the late 1990's, the EU adopted the term as part of the European Social Model, mainly driven by raising concerns of racism against ethnic migrants and high long-term unemployment figures. Economic growth was seen as key solution to overcome these problems, as more growth means in theory less unemployment rates, higher incomes and in turn more social cohesion. However, these assumed causal links become more and more contested²².

Outside Europe, especially in the US and the major international donor organizations such as the World Bank, the term economic exclusion has not fully emancipated itself from the classical notions of poverty, and is often seen as more or less equivalent to it²³. Terms such as ethnic or racial ghettoization, marginalization and relative deprivation are much more common among US scholars and policy makers alike, often pointing to a positive correlation of these factors with higher crime rates and urban violence. The emphasis in the US is on individual, behavioral factors and personality traits as well as on geographic or structural antecedents rather than on group level characteristics or legal aspects.

Different views as to the causes, consequences and policy recommendations to fight social exclusion correspond to different views about agency: who is doing the exclusion becomes the central question. Answers may include: the state or public sector and its formal institutions as indicated above, e.g. through lack of constitutional political rights in the case of political exclusion; the individual himself, e.g. through voluntary or self-exclusion in the case of migrants not willing or not being able to learn the majority language; the private firm or simply the

²² Burchardt *et al.*, "Introduction".

²³ Hills, Le Grand and Piachaud (eds.), *Understanding...*

geographic locality; e.g. for the dimension of economic exclusion through residing in rural, ethnically diverse areas of a country cut off from urban or industrial economic growth.

Existing legal frameworks related to economic exclusion of ethnic minorities: an overview

In the following, I am interested in two issues: first, what legal policy frameworks related to economic exclusion applied to ethnic minorities exist at all, and second, how economic exclusion is defined and understood therein. This allows me to point to similarities and possible differences in their respective understanding of the term economic exclusion.

The broader international legal framework for minority participation and minority rights includes legal documents and advisory recommendations adopted by the United Nations (UN), The Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).²⁴

Regarding European legal instruments, The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR)²⁵ was the first legal non-discrimination provision adopted by the Council of Europe in 1950. It does not talk about exclusion, though, but about discrimination. the CoE Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM)²⁶ was adopted in 1994 and is the first legally binding multilateral instrument concerned with the protection of national minorities in general. It seeks to promote the full and effective equality of national minorities by creating appropriate conditions enabling them to preserve and develop their culture and to retain their identity. The effective participation in economic life is mentioned explicitly in Article 15, as well as the principle of non-discrimination in Article 4.

Regarding the European Community level, the EU has decided to focus on combating discrimination. The basic principles of the EU anti-discrimination approach are stated in the Treaty Establishing the European Community.

The UN continued this non-discrimination approach in 1965 when it adopted the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).²⁷ Racial discrimination is explicitly defined in terms of exclusion here, among others, and the importance of the economic sphere of public life is also mentioned in the text. In 1992 the UN adopted the Declaration of the rights of persons belonging to

²⁴ For a detailed overview of the international legal framework body, see: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *United Nations Guide for Minorities* (2001), Available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/minorities/guide.htm>, Access Date: 05.05.2008

²⁵ See <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/005.htm>, Access Date: 05.05.2008.

²⁶ See <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/157.htm>.

²⁷ See <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cerd.htm>, Access Date: 05.05.2008.

National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Again, discrimination is mentioned, as obstacle for effective (not further defined) participation in economic life, among other dimensions.

Table 1. below gives an overview of the most important legal instruments related to economic exclusion of minorities, the relevant articles and their formulations used.

Table 1: Economic exclusion of ethnic minorities, legal instrument

The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms	<i>Article 14:</i> The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status	<i>Discrimination</i> in general	No
International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination	<i>Article 1:</i> The term "racial discrimination" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.	Racial <i>discrimination</i> in general	Yes, as form of discrimination
Declaration of the rights of persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities	<i>Article 2:</i> 1. Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination. 2. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life.	<i>Discrimination</i> in general <i>Economic Participation</i>	No, but effective participation
Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities	<i>Article 4:</i> 1. The Parties undertake to guarantee to persons belonging to national minorities the right of equality before the law and of equal protection of the law. In this respect, any discrimination based on belonging to a national minority shall be prohibited. 2. The Parties undertake to adopt, where necessary, adequate measures in order to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and those belonging to the majority. In this respect, they shall take due account of the specific conditions of the persons belonging to national minorities. <i>Article 15:</i> The Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them.	<i>Discrimination</i> <i>Economic equality</i> <i>Effective participation</i> in economic life	No, but equality and effective participation
Treaty Establishing the European Community	<i>Article 13:</i> 1. Without prejudice to the other provisions of this Treaty and within the limits of the powers conferred by it upon the Community, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.	<i>Discrimination</i> in general	No

Specifying further the concept of economic exclusion

What is concept specification?

The proper construction of complex, multilevel and multidimensional concepts has recently come to the forefront in methodological discussions in political science. Concepts lay at the core of social science theory and methodology. They provide the substance to theories; they form the basis for measurement, indicators, case selection and any further empirical work²⁸.

Concepts are theories about ontology, about what really constitutes a phenomenon. They are theories about the fundamental building blocks of an object, in order to find out their core characteristics and their interrelationships.

According to Goertz²⁹, there are different ways how one can build concepts. The structure of concepts is crucial. Thus, different concept structures have important methodological implications for the construction of quantitative measures, which comes only at a later stage of the research process. A concept needs an *a priori* theoretical and empirical analysis of the object referred to. This implies that their semantics change as our understanding of the phenomenon also changes. The debate of economic exclusion then would become not a debate about the definition of exclusion per se, but about the real life and observable phenomenon of exclusion. If a concept is not related to the empirical analysis of the phenomenon, then there is nothing one can anchor it to, then it becomes more of a subjective matter.

According to Goertz³⁰, the most important concepts we use in social science are multidimensional and multilevel in nature. Most have three levels and two dimensions to consider. The basic or first-level of a concept is what we use in more general theoretical propositions, when discussing democracy, welfare state, economic/social exclusion, etc.

The next level down is the secondary level, at which the concept becomes multidimensional. This level is really about ontology, the fundamental meaning of the concept or the parts that belong to it. The third level becomes the indicator/data level. It is known as the level where operationalization takes place. At this level we have to be so specific that data can be gathered. Goertz³¹ points out that almost all of the prominent concepts we use in social science have such a basic three-level character.

²⁸ G. Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

Applying concept specification to economic exclusion of ethnic minorities

From the above discussion and mapping of the most important legal documents related to economic exclusion, we can summarize the following:

i) Economic exclusion can affect all groups in society. It seems that economic exclusion is a most severe and present problem for ethnic minorities and indigenous people, although we still lack adequate empirical evidence, especially for a widened EU. It is related to geographic location as well.

ii) Key components of our ontological understanding of the concept of economic exclusion are lack of participation through denied entry access and discrimination (if these excess hurdles have already been taken). Denied access might be present in the labor market, public services, finance and housing, among others³². Discrimination based on group or non-group status might be the observation we encounter more often than denied or blocked entry access. However, this also implies a more subjective way of dealing with economic exclusion.

iii) Exclusion is a relational statement. A category X cannot be excluded in and of itself. It has to be excluded in relation to some other category or control group Y. In many cases, Y is thought of implicitly as “the rest of society”, the “rest of economy”, or simply “the average”. This might have different implications for our understanding of the basic level concept.

iv) The reality of economic exclusion is continuous rather than discrete. A binary categorization into two groups (“the excluded” and “the rest”) is not *per se* more or less appropriate than say the divide into three, four or more categories. Accordingly, groups can be ranked alongside a continuum degree of exclusion at a given point in time, with intermediate steps of vulnerability in between. At one extreme end of this continuum we might then find “gated communities” that shield their in-group status against all forms of alienation, whereas less extreme but far more common exclusion manifests itself in individual and/or group-based, direct or indirect discrimination. Examples for the latter include restricted access to higher education rather than having no access to education at all or reserved high-status, high-paid jobs in the public or private sector rather than being long-term unemployed.

Table 2. The three-level conceptualization of economic exclusion

Basic level: <i>Concept</i>		Economic Exclusion	
Second level: <i>Dimensions</i>	Non-Participation; Denial of Access	<i>OR</i>	Discrimination
Third level: <i>Indicators</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No access to higher education <li style="text-align: center;"><i>OR</i> • No access to labour market <li style="text-align: center;"><i>OR</i> • No access to land, housing, finance, credit 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under- paid job <li style="text-align: center;"><i>OR</i> • Mobbing at work due to ethnicity

³² Wheatley, “The Economic Status...”; Wheatley, “The Economic Dimension...”.

Note: Lack of participation and discrimination are sufficient conditions for being economically excluded. Listed are possible indicators for the two dimensions, which are also sufficient to measure its presence.

For economic exclusion to be present, however, it is enough if one of the second-level dimensions of lack of participation *or* discrimination becomes true. Hence, we mean that someone or a group is excluded from a society if he/she has no access to the labor market, probably because of the law. But we would also speak of economic exclusion if the same group/person had no access to higher education, independent of other present or non-present restrictions. Thus, the indicators to measure or operationalize “non-participation” become sufficient conditions themselves, and there is no need for an empirical study on the topic to collect data on all the possible ways how this can be operationalized. The same logic applies to the second-level dimension of discrimination, which also can be measured differently. Again, collecting data on all possible manifestations of discrimination is not necessary for an improved empirical understanding of economic exclusion of minorities.

Conclusion

I have started this paper by stressing the fact that social and economic exclusion are confusing and contested terms that have taken different meanings over time and depend very much on context, place, and on “who is doing the exclusion to whom” - or on agency for short.

The initial purpose of this issue brief was to find a clear definition in one of the legal frameworks about what exactly is meant by economic exclusion, and how it differs to the related but somewhat less ontologically contested dimensions of political and cultural exclusion. Further, a key component in almost all the legal frames is the reference to the principle of non-discrimination. If discrimination based on group or non-group status is understood as the most pertinent and urgent form of economic exclusion, then this would imply a more subjective way of dealing with these issues. As discrimination is almost always present in some latent form and to some degree, the question is of the thresholds and the “amount” of discrimination. Especially empirical research geared towards finding good indicators and measures of the degree and consequences of economic exclusion must be aware of this. Whether the prohibiting of discrimination should be regarded only as a first step on the way to further protection of national minorities is a rather delicate question – one could argue that non-discrimination is already sufficiently legally defined internationally, and is also internationalized at the EU level.

Quite the contrary, an exercise in concept specification allowed me to point to the many similarities. This is good news for further empirical research, not least because the use of a three-level, two-dimensional concept structure for economic exclusion seems empirically and theoretically justified, especially with sufficient rather than necessary second level conditions.

Key understandings of the concept of economic exclusion thus include a lack of effective or non-participation in economic activities, although it remains rather vague what “effective” means and what those activities are. In principle, all economic activities in the informal sector are subsumed as well under such an understanding, as well as criminal activities which can be very effective in terms of generating an income for some people. A sense of further caution and conceptual clarification is still needed though, which can only be achieved by relating the legal definitions to socio-economic theories of exclusion/inclusion, or to empirical studies on the issue.

I have also pointed out to the necessity to apply the concept of social/economic exclusion to autochthonous minorities rather than to new ones. However, this shift in group emphasis does not mean that the concept of economic exclusion, as developed in research on labour migration into western European welfare states, has to be abandoned or re-formulated.

One should also not forget that minority inclusion and participation can be tackled from various perspectives. Within the human rights-based approach, all individuals should be treated equally in the economy, in politics and in society, because this is the law. Whether the provision of formal rights alone is a sufficient condition to overcome poverty and discrimination is at least questionable. It is certainly the beginning, but must be accompanied by local and national economic growth, the creation of more and better paid jobs both in the public and private sector as well as financial investment and cross-border trade.

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