

1. Notions of participation and culture in political struggles against exclusion and their consequences: the Catalan case

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-----> Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the idea of social exclusion has become the core of Catalan government social policy.¹ Social exclusion as an intellectual construction implies a way of analysing reality, and impacts directly on the management and orientation of social policies. One of the primary impacts or consequences of this is that having a job is considered to be the central element defining participation in society, and is a priority for governments when fighting poverty. Second, policies based on a social exclusion paradigm have erased structural causes of poverty and unemployment and have instead individualised them. In that sense, in Catalan social policies, situations of unemployment and poverty are not seen as being linked to factors such as labour-market structure and dynamics, but are conceived as being individual problems which require intervention in the skills of the individual. Thirdly, we have identified in our study the emergence of cultural and racial elements in social workers' explanatory discourses of poverty and unemployment situations which are used by those social workers to justify undue discrimination against some individuals identified as "gypsies".

I will argue that the emergence of cultural and racial arguments – which lead to the acceptance by social workers of undue discrimination – have to be understood as a product of the ideological principles of structural social policies – known as "insertion policies"² – undertaken in the name of the fight against exclusion.³

To develop this argument, I will draw on the results of research done in Barcelona, Spain between 2004 and 2005, focusing on social workers' discourse about individuals and their cases. We asked them about the "difficulties" and reasons that propel people to become a user of "insertion services" as a strategy to access social workers' discourse about insertion programme users (programmes for the "fight against exclusion").⁴ Those different programmes have had different names, and their number has increased enormously since 1990, with a variety of actions aimed at youth, gypsy women, the long-term unemployed, and so forth. What matters to us are not the differences and details of each programme but their underlying ideological principles, which I will present further in this article.



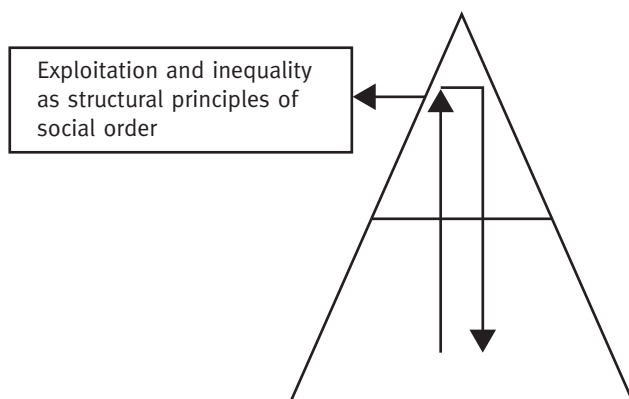
The data used here was collected in two different institutions situated in the Sant Roc quarter in Badalona. The first institution is specialised in “orientation” and “motivation” actions for different administrative categories: long-term unemployed, youth and migrants. The second institution is a foundation which runs a programme of “orientation” and “professional motivation” in different Catalan “poor suburbs”.

This chapter proceeds in the following way. First of all, it will discuss the theoretical model of social exclusion developed by Alain Touraine in 1991 and 1992, a model which summarises key ideas about social order and social structure innate in the policies “against exclusion” which have been implemented in Catalonia since the 1990s. Secondly, I will present the main characteristics of social policies since 1990 to “fight against exclusion” in Catalonia, unified under the concept of insertion policies, and characterised by what can be called the individualisation of social problems. Thirdly, we will describe the ideal individual that those insertion policies try to create, based on an ideological model that we call the “entrepreneur of the self”. Fourthly, I will examine the discourse of culture held by social workers developing insertion policies focused on “gypsies”. Finally, we will focus on one of the effects of those discourses in social workers’ practices: the acceptance of discriminatory practices by some employers towards “gypsies”.

-----> The idea of social exclusion: a theoretical model underlying Catalan social policies

The French sociologist Alain Touraine suggested, in two articles which appeared in the editorial *Esprit*, a new paradigm for understanding the structure of contemporary Western societies. The main concept of this new paradigm is the concept of exclusion. In the first paper called: “Face à l’exclusion” which appeared in the book *Citoyenneté et urbanité*, Touraine opposes two models of society, a model of modern societies in Europe and a new model of post-modern societies. Following his thinking, modern societies could be represented as a pyramid structured by exploitation. The result is a pyramid in which inequalities separate people in the bottom, middle or on the top of the pyramid in a vertical society.

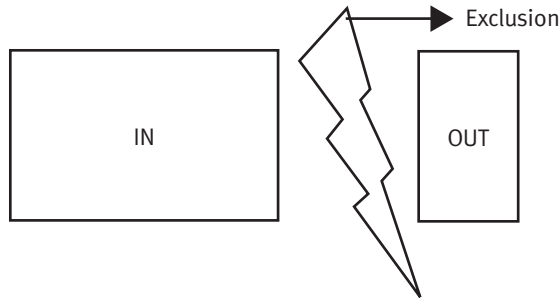
Figure 1: Social structure of modern societies in Touraine’s model



Source: author's elaboration, 2006.

Touraine suggests that post-modern societies do not have this vertical structure any longer, but are horizontal, as the principles which structure society are no longer based on exploitation and inequality but exclusion. The result, according to Touraine, is that some people are “in” and others are “out” of society. The “out” people include suburban inhabitants, young people failing in school and the unemployed: “The problem nowadays is not exploitation but exclusion” (Touraine, 1991, p. 173).

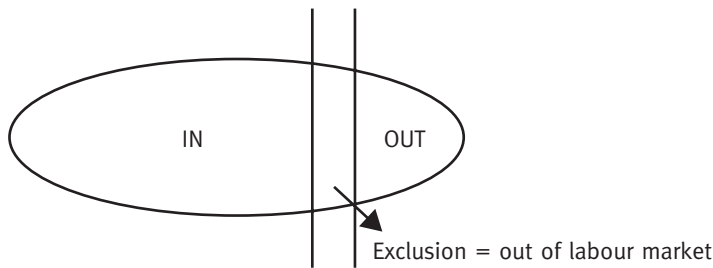
Figure 2: Social structure in post-modern societies



Source: author’s elaboration, 2006.

Touraine subsequently reformulated his proposals of 1991 in the paper “Inégalités de la société industrielle, exclusion du marché” in *Justice Sociale et Inégalités* (Affichard and Foucauld, 1992). In this argument, Touraine continues to oppose these two models but he modifies the model of postmodern societies. He suggests that contemporary social structure is similar to a rugby ball in which we have a huge middle class and some privileged people on the top. This rugby ball is cut through the base, under which one finds the unemployed people who form the excluded segment.

Figure 3: Social structure in post-modern societies



Source: author’s elaboration, 2006.

I do not wish to critique academically his model in this article, although one may find a variety of critical commentaries on it from different authors.⁵ Instead, I outline Touraine’s model as it summarises the conceptual basis of social policies in Catalonia since the beginning of the 1990s, especially the idea that there are people who are “out” of society and the idea that participation in the labour market is the key element to being “in”. Take, for example, the Catalan

government's presentation of its programme against poverty and exclusion in 1995:

"In fact, our society has experienced, due to the process of globalisation of technologies and markets, great transformations. These transformations imply a new work dynamic and demand life-long training to individuals. Those individuals who don't follow these demands have the risk of becoming marginal, excluded from the labour market and from social dynamics." (Departament Benestar Social 1995: 5)⁶

The idea of exclusion is based on a division of social reality into two different elements which function independently of each other. On one side we have the "included" population – with their own problems – and on the other side an "excluded" population who cannot be part of the included world because of unemployment. This division into "in" and "out" as two different realities – or at least as two realities without a link – intellectually allows or legitimises the construction of "exclusion" and "the excluded" as objects of study themselves, as objects of knowledge and intervention. The era of thinking about poverty in a relational way, taking in account labour-market dynamics, wealth distribution and other structural factors, seems to reach an end with the idea of "exclusion". The effects on social intervention derived from this idea of exclusion need to be examined.⁷

-----> The individualisation of social problems

A consequence of this paradigm of exclusion and the excluded, and particularly its dilution of a relational "episteme", is that unemployment is conceived of and presented as a characteristic of the "excluded". That is to say, the Catalan government promotes and projects actions onto "the excluded" to make them employable. The underlying idea in these actions is that unemployment is largely due to a lack of adaptation by individuals to labour-market demands. If unemployment is due to a lack of individual knowledge, and employment is the key to social participation, public intervention is thus focused on improving the skills of the unemployed through individual intervention. It is this process, through which individuals becomes the focus of social policy intervention in combating unemployment or poverty, that can be described as the individualisation of social problems. It is obvious and important to point out that unemployment and poverty during this period can be explained in ways that have nothing to do with individual "failures". Thus we find some authors in Catalonia, such as Garcia Nieto, arguing that technology in advanced capitalist societies has increased to a level which needs less human work to achieve a high level of production. Inevitably unemployment results from such a change in the production system and not from individual "failures or lack of knowledge". This kind of discourse is not present in policy planning.

In fact, insertion policies, as many insertion workers conveyed, focus on the client and their situation before developing what they called the project of insertion. In doing this, it is implied that individuals create social problems instead of the idea that social problems create individual conditions. For example, an individual taking part in an insertion programme will be analysed by the insertion worker through an interview with a methodology not very different from the case work methodology used by social workers at the beginning of the 20th century in the USA (Castel, 1979). In this interview, an insertion worker will try to understand the person and their environment. The aim of this interview is to try to understand

the reasons that make this person marginal to the labour market and to address those reasons. In other words, the insertion worker tries to make this person employable. We cannot detail an exact interview model as we were asked by insertion workers not to use their internal documents; however, what is important to note is the focus on individual subjectivity and narrative in analysing the unemployment situation.

In insertion practices this individualisation of social problems has concrete consequences. A crucial consequence is a “blame the victim” model present in the way “insertion” actions conceive of “un-inserted” individuals. As no connection is established by decision makers between labour-market dynamics and unemployment, all that remains are individuals with “problems” which are inappropriate for the labour market; problems it is precisely the work of insertion workers to correct through insertion techniques. An important element of this process we have witnessed is a pedagogical technique which requires that individuals acknowledge their own “failures” and correct them. For example, one technique involves simulating a job interview where individuals analyse themselves subsequent to the activity. The self-analysis process is complemented by comments from the insertion worker and the other unemployed witnesses to the role play. Another technique consists of working on the perception of the labour market that individuals have in order to reorder this perception and adapt it to “reality”. Moreover, all insertion programmes begin with a process of motivation and improvement of self-esteem. In this model, then, the situation of exclusion has to be understood as relating not only to skills and cognitive failures but also to psychological “failures” which have to be addressed. (It is not a coincidence that most insertion workers we have interviewed have a bachelor’s degree in psychology.)

This process of individualisation has a direct influence on the representation of individuals in insertion as elaborated in social workers’ discourse. Social workers’ image of “exclusion” is not far from notions of deserving poor and undeserving poor popularised by the Charity Organisations Society of London until the 1880s (Topalov, 1994). In this sense, insertion workers express feelings of compassion and empathy with individuals attending insertion programmes when they are considered to be individuals making an effort to change their situation, or when they are considered unlucky. In those cases individuals are legitimated and considered as deserving. In other cases, however, individuals can be considered as undeserving:

“Gypsies have a way of life which makes them be on the edge, there are other people who are excluded because they have had personal problems, but this a completely different situation. One thing is my culture, my family has a way of life which brings me to live from the state, this is not acceptable. Another thing is to be a person addicted to drugs who has given it up and who receives the basic income while looking for a job, that’s normal, but that’s not the case in this quarter.” (Manager of the Basic Income for Insertion programme)

And:

“Me, I have cried [talking about an unemployed migrant whose work permit has been denied] ... politicians don’t have any idea of what’s going on, they don’t understand that politics is made for people’s well-being, not for the politicians’ well-being.” (Trainer in an insertion programme for youth)

In fact, social workers identify with those individuals who show the will to be inserted, “I have cried”, otherwise the process is discontinued and sometimes they will lose the basic income – “this is not acceptable” – they had been receiving. Poor people have to demonstrate their real will to surmount their conditions or they cease to be viewed as legitimately “really poor” and deserving of the compassion of social workers.

-----> The “entrepreneur of the self”⁸ as the ideal objective of insertion processes

The insertion programmes’ engagement with each individual’s subjectivity attempts to promote changes in how the “un-inserted” manage their relations with the world. More precisely, the organisations in which we have conducted our field work try to promote that each individual will become what we could call an “entrepreneur of the self”. The “un-inserted” are supposed to manage their lives as an enterprise, and to learn to manage their bodies and lives following a model of action based on a cost-benefit model. In keeping with this, it is common in motivation seminars for trainers to encourage the “un-inserted” to manage their physical appearance in order to adapt it to labour-market demands. An example of this logic can be seen in the “clues” given by a trainer in a training session to women wearing a veil:

“What you have to do if you want to get the job you have to play, take off this kind of veil you wear and use one which doesn’t seem to be a veil, a nice veil which won’t be problematic.”

Or, another example of training for “gypsy” women:

“No, you can’t wear these kinds of earrings; you must use pearl earrings because pearls are much more neutral and closer to *payos* [non-gypsies] style.”

In both examples the trainers promote a way of thinking and behaviour based on a cost-benefit analysis in which personal decisions are subordinated to labour-market requirements – or assumptions about labour-market requirements – which could be characterised as “I have to change my clothes depending on what I want to get [benefit], otherwise I won’t get what I want [cost]. If I get benefits by changing my clothes and physical appearance – even if they are more than clothes – I have to change”. This reasoning is not only limited to the management of physical appearance, but is considered by many insertion workers as the right model to be applied to all dimensions of “un-inserted” lives. This model of behaviour recalls Foucault’s analysis of the enterprise model in society promoted by the Fribourg School economists:

“D’un côté, bien sûr, il s’agit de démultiplier le modèle économique, le modèle offre et demande, le modèle investissement-coût-profit, pour en faire un modèle des rapports sociaux, un modèle de l’existence même, une forme de rapport de l’individu à lui-même, au temps, à son entourage, à l’avenir, au groupe, à la famille.” (Foucault, 2004, p. 247)⁹

An illustrative methodology for “un-inserted” women features participation in mutual support groups through which some women can explain how they managed to work and take care of their children: by paying a neighbour to take care of children while they work, or by asking female family members, and so forth. It can be argued that one of the main duties of insertion workers is to teach the “un-inserted” to manage their time, money and personal relations in order to be

able to work and keep their jobs. The process of individualisation and individual “responsibilisation” of social problems implicit in “insertion” work is developed in many programmes in Catalonia. Perceived effort as the basis of legitimacy and the typology of the entrepreneur of the self as the ideal to which “un-inserted” individuals should tend are the key elements of the ideological frame of insertion work, a framework close to what Ebersold calls “managerial ideology”:

“Managerial ideology dissociates the self from society, it evacuates structural elements and social factors which affect individual lives. The social is erased; success and failures are a question of individuals.” (Ebersold, 2001, p. 125)

It is through this ideological framework – in which insertion work is developed and invested – that we can understand the discourse of social workers about gypsies and the positive role (for some social workers) that discrimination towards gypsies could have in insertion processes.

-----> **The emergence of culture in insertion processes: you know gypsies!**

This section discusses discourse analysis of insertion workers working in the Sant Roc quarter talking about “gypsies”. The presence of the discourses discussed in the previous section can be seen in the way that gypsies are evaluated in relation to their distance from a profile “adjusted” to labour-market demands, a profile displaying attitudes which insertion workers consider to be the optimal ones for labour-market insertion. I will show that this discourse about gypsies is made possible in these institutions because of the principles by which insertion programmes work. In this first description, it is clear that a “gypsy” is defined through an opposition to that which would otherwise insert him or her:

“Habits, social and personal skills, especially personal are the main problems in finding a job. ... They are not used to schedules or following rules. On the other hand, I have to mention images and communication skills, these are two special dimensions of the gypsy community and they want to keep it everywhere, even in the public sphere of employment, and that ensures that they are excluded from the labour market and finally they are limited to survival. A gypsy when he looks for a job is not looking to live properly but to survive. He doesn't want to have a regular income but to earn 15 euros for a concrete need. Their conception of time is the present moment ... they are not looking to have plans but to live day by day. ... They don't have sentimental education, with all my respects but the concept of family planning doesn't exist for them. They get married and from the second month they have to make kids and they don't stop, a person 18 years old without studies living in his or her parents' house ... it's a question of managing, not only sexuality but feelings too.” (Sant Roc insertion office worker 1)

In this description, a “gypsy” is abnormal, the opposite of someone who can be adapted to the labour market. It is worth noting that most of the descriptive sentences relating to “gypsies” are built through negative grammatical constructions. It follows, then, that a “gypsy” is defined by what he or she is not. In the insertion worker's discourse we can also see that some individual behaviours and attitudes are considered cultural. The insertion worker's perspective assumes a “cultural community” from certain individual behaviours and identifies this community by defining it through what this community is not. The images of gypsy culture are constructed in an opposition between perceived individual attitudes and behaviour and the “entrepreneur of the self” model.

This form of negative definition is clearer still in response to the question of whether all gypsies behave in the same way:

“No, there’s one boy here, he’s different. He has lots of problems, his mother was arrested in a market, but he’s different. He’s very punctual, they – boys in the insertion process – have thirty minutes to be prepared for work and he’s always the first. He’s really different, that’s why he’s succeeding.” (Teacher in insertion programme for youth)

If we read attentively, in this description the “gypsy” discussed is almost a “non-gypsy”. She repeats systematically that he is different, of course different from other gypsies, that is to say he is almost a non-gypsy – or at least he is succeeding because he seems not to be a gypsy. His efforts, and as a consequence his proximity to one of the main elements of insertion ideology, make him a “non-gypsy”. This identification of gypsies because of their non-adaptation to the norm has direct effects, as we shall see, for the ways that gypsies are treated in their insertion processes. An important effect of this is that discrimination towards gypsies in the labour market is seen by some insertion workers as being an integral part of the process of insertion; discrimination is not considered an illegal practice but an opportunity for insertion workers to improve the gypsies’ awareness of the importance of having a job.

-----> **When discrimination teaches the importance of having a job**

In responses to questions about the discrimination encountered in the labour market by “gypsies”, it is interesting to note that discrimination is recognised as an ordinary practice by insertion workers:

“When gypsies complain about the fact that enterprises don’t employ them they are right. The other day a gypsy came and told me, ‘the problem is that when they see me they don’t give me the job’ and that’s true, even if gypsies have a good attitude. Employers have stereotypes, if I receive a job offer I can send a gypsy but when he arrives at the company they won’t employ him. (Sant Roc Employment office worker 1)

The fact that a person is a gypsy that’s a real problem in order to get a job, that’s clear. I’ve got some youth doing an internship in different companies and the employer has shown racist attitudes towards those young people.” (Sant Roc Employment office worker 3)

Despite this recognition, many insertion workers do not consider discrimination as either an important issue or as being their affair. Some of them say that they try to raise awareness in companies about the importance of not being racist or not having discriminatory attitudes, but this work is considered voluntary and not especially important for insertion workers and institutions:

“We try to make employers aware about not having discriminatory attitudes but there are some companies for which things are very clear. They tell us that they don’t want gypsies, or people from the Basque country, no fat people, or... (smile).” (Sant Roc Insertion office worker 1)

This trite reduction means that discrimination or other obstacles that the “un-inserted” encounter are regarded as an injustice – and even experienced as a personal matter – by the insertion worker only when the person concerned is

considered to be someone who has invested in the insertion process, which means that he or she has shown the will to be inserted through individual effort:

“It’s completely unjust and unacceptable when you have been following a person [she’s talking about a young boy from Dominican Republic who had problems getting his work permit], a person who has been working hard and you tell him that the contract will arrive very soon, and when he’s ready he can’t get a contract for administrative reasons. It’s not possible!!!!” (Trainer 2 in insertion programme for youth)

However, discourses elaborated in terms of justice and injustice are not present when the object of discriminatory attitudes is considered to be the undeserving poor. In those cases, some insertion workers consider that individuals who don’t make any “effort” to be inserted should be made aware of the difficulties of obtaining a job and endeavour to make a greater effort in their insertion processes. Discrimination is considered as a opportunity for insertion work instead of as a matter of injustice, and this has consequences for how discriminatory employers may be viewed:

“... when she (gypsy girl) speaks or just for her image, if the employer has stereotypes about gypsies he’s not going to give her the job, but she will find, she has to try, in any case she doesn’t have experience or knowledge, so she has to try and see how she can manage to get a job in her condition.” (Sant Roc Insertion office worker 2)

This suggests that the further a person is considered to be from labour-market requirements – and from the package of the “entrepreneur of the self” and an attitude based on “effort” – the more this person will be exposed to labour-market laws without recourse to criteria of justice and legality. Bluntly, the undeserving poor are not considered as possessing the same level of rights as the deserving poor. Taking into account that discrimination is an illegal practice, but accepted in relation to one part of the population, it can be contended that insertion policies create a double standard in terms of what is legal or illegal.

-----> Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to explain that insertion policies are based on an exclusionary model which is linked to an individualisation of citizens’ life conditions and is stripped of structural processes which could explain individual situations of material need. This individualisation process is reified in concrete techniques of social intervention that postulate that a “scientific” understanding of individual situations will solve people’s situational needs. This supposedly “scientific” social intervention posits as its main solution an education/re-education of poor unemployed people in order to adjust them to labour-market requirements. In this sense, these policies consider accessing the labour market as the main element for participation in society. This social intervention apparatus leads to an emergence of cultural/racial interpretations of positions in the social structure, and to a situation in which illegal practices such as racial discrimination are considered a potential pedagogical positive for the undeserving poor.

Based on this, it seems to me that this approach to social problems is incompatible with democratic principles and those of social justice. Many European democracies are based on the principle of equality, conceived of in terms of having similar living conditions independently of social structure position. Insertion policies tend to establish a principle of equal opportunities as a condition for equality. Equal opportunities in professional training cannot replace real socioeconomic

policies aiming at substantive social equality by attempting to improve the living conditions of the population. In that sense, economic and social elements which could explain individual living conditions cannot simply be erased from public policy, as it seems when insertion policies are taken as the basis for poverty reduction or elimination.

Furthermore, it is not within the professional boundaries of social work to promote equality, but instead to offer services to the whole population in order to improve living conditions. Insertion programmes conceived of as social work confuse levels of action and create a diffusion of responsibility. No social work intervention can replace political and economic decisions to promote equality, and social work is not an element for promoting equality but a product of governmental policies of equality. To emphasise, insertion can not take place at the individual level because poverty, unemployment or precarious labour conditions are not an individual matter but a structural issue. Unemployment will not be solved by adapting people to labour-market requirements, but by improving labour conditions and exploring ways of distributing wealth taking into account different desires, wishes and projects:

“Une instance public de régulation est plus que jamais nécessaire pour encadrer l’anarchie d’un marché dont le règne sans partage déboucherait sur une société clivée entre gagnants et perdants, nantis et misérables.” (Castel 2003, p. 92)

-----> **Acknowledgements**

I want to thank Julia and Gavan for their strategic and precious help. I would like to thank Farah and Sara for their support.

-----> Endnotes

1. The concept of exclusion is also present in other European governments' social policies – France and Belgium for example – however each of those contexts have their own specificities in moving from concept to concrete social policies. Therefore, what is mentioned in this article has to be understood as being limited to the Catalan context. Nevertheless, we think that it is possible to use the results presented here as a hypothesis for other European contexts.
2. I will use the concept of “insertion” because it is the term used in Catalonia to identify policies based on trying to increase individual employability as the main path to a reduction of “poverty” or “unemployment”. These kinds of policies have received different names depending on the context: inclusion policies, *Políticas activas de empleo* and so forth. What matters to us here are the ideological principles implicit in these policies, regardless of their name. That is why the reader will find a detailed description of those ideological principles further in the chapter.
3. Since 1989, what we call “insertion policies” in Catalonia have taken different forms. Insertion policies were born in Catalonia as a strategy by some organisations to create individual and social transformation through education. Those first insertion practices were inspired by Paulo Freire's writings, where insertion was a way to create individual and social transformation by and with the “oppressed”. However, since 1990, insertion practices have changed and lost their original orientation to become work on individuals to adapt them to labour-market demands. We will not describe this process of change as it is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is important to mention that this process has its own history with its own actors.
4. This work is a part of my PhD research which is focused on analysing the emergence and definitions of poverty in contemporary social policies. The field work is based in Catalonia.
5. See for example Fretigné Cédric, *Sociologie de l'exclusion* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999). One of the main critical arguments offered is that this post-modern model tends to present society as being divided in two groups while forgetting the economical and political process and mechanisms which place people “out” or “in”.
6. Those kind of arguments have been present in different arenas in Europe since the 1970s. We have identified the emergence of this kind of reasoning in many documents produced by the OECD in the 1960s.
7. It is important to mention at this point that the idea of exclusion and the consequences that this idea has in terms of thinking about social reality are not only a consequence of Touraine's writings. That the process in Catalonia follows a scheme of thought similar to that developed by Touraine does not mean that Touraine is responsible for these policies. The process is much more complex. In this chapter we use Touraine's model as a way of clarifying the ideas which have structured insertion policies in Catalonia since the 1990s. To detail how, when and why insertion policies in Catalonia adopted a scheme of thought similar to that of Touraine would require another chapter.
8. The concept of an “entrepreneur of the self” has been translated from the French expression, *entrepreneur de soi*.

9. In English: It consists of demultiplying the economic model, supply and demand model, investment-cost model, in order to make it a model of social relations, a model of the existence itself, a model of relations of the individual to himself or herself, to time, to its environment, to the future, to the group, to the family. (author's translation)