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# PHENOMENOLOGY OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION. AN ESSENTIAL TASK OF POLITICAL COLLECTIVE AGENCY

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## *abstract*

*In this paper the author is going to talk about an essential task of political agency: social integration. He analyzes it from a phenomenological perspective, identifying its essential elements in order to achieve an eidetic view of it. The author roots the analysis of social integration in a stratified view of the social world that appears essentially composed of four different forms of social interaction: community interaction, characterized by solidarity relationships; territorial interaction, characterized by “conflicting” relationships (polemos); social interaction, based on standard models of behavior; and institutional interaction, based on laws that govern the public life. Social integration is stratified into these four forms of intersubjective life and is fully achieved only if it allows a real state of belonging and an actual participation in each of them. The policy plays a crucial role because integration is often a critical process that can cause social conflicts and that can not simply be left to the sensibility and will of those who live in the various contexts. Political agency should coordinate normative and cultural actions, so that norms are not simply imposed, but are assimilated by a citizenship aware of the social, ethical and political value of integration.*

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## *keywords*

*social integration, social phenomenology, community, territory, society, integration policy*

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Matter of Research

In this paper I am going to talk about “social integration”. This is an issue that covers many different situations and that can be investigated from various different points of view. I will focus on the situations in which single persons, or groups, need or desire to become part of a new social context, or a new wider group. So, not only the typical situation of foreign immigrants, but a general condition in which anyone might find themselves during the course of their life.<sup>1</sup>

My purpose is to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the subjects of integration?
2. What are the possible social contexts in which they can be integrated?
3. In what circumstances can we recognize a fully successful social integration?
4. What is the role played by political agency?

### 1.2 The Research Method

I will analyze social integration from a phenomenological perspective, identifying the essential elements and dynamics of this process in order to achieve an eidetic view of it, namely a general theory that goes beyond the multiplicity of contingent situations. The eidetic research is not a simple description of essential features. Indeed, if we take the essential features of social integration out, then we discover the essential conditions that make it what it is. From the phenomenological perspective, the eidetic level of the reality is intrinsically normative, because it shows the ontological constraints on an object, beyond which that object ceases to exist.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, eidetic understanding shows us what we should do to fully achieve social integration. Therefore, I develop my research in a radically different perspective from the current prevailing orientation that confines understanding to descriptive level and conceives social reality as a mere historical construction, which is the contingent result of conventional attributions of status.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The purpose of this paper is not to focus on why it is right, or otherwise, for a society to be open to contaminations and diversity. Rather, I focus on a social problem that, in spite of a policy that is more or less inclined towards hospitality, appears to be generalized (perhaps unavoidable), because there are many different kinds of integration processes that develop at different levels of intersubjective life.

2 “In its broadest sense, reason is the willingness to meet adequately the needs that reality shows us’. In this proposition is contained the phenomenological challenge to a conviction that is one of the most rooted in modern philosophy, from Hume to Kant to Weber to Kelsen and neopositivism: the mutual independence and irreducibility of descriptive and prescriptive, thesis and norm, theoretical and practical, reason and will”. (De Monticelli, 2018, p.118, my translation). On this point see also De Monticelli (2018, pp. 73-97).

3 I use the notion of “*status*” following the concept of Searle (2010). He maintains that the “things” of the social world

We can synthesize the multiplicity of possible subjects that can be socially integrated in two essential types:

- a. An individual subject.
- b. A group of individuals.

When we talk about social integration, we are speaking primarily about processes of personal change, in which the subjects involved have to find a way of living together. Along their path of integration, persons have to find a balance between safeguarding their identity and what the new context requires of them.

In the case of single persons several kinds of conflict may arise: between personal and collective values, individual and collective habits, etc. It is not the aim of this paper to develop a phenomenology of the possible forms of conflict, but it is at least necessary to highlight that the issue of social integration must not be reduced to the negative perspective of the problems. The term “integration” itself means a mutual enrichment of the parties and this perspective should guide political strategies.<sup>4</sup>

The social integration of a group within another collective is more complex because it entails also the meeting and comparison between the group constraints and the norms that have to be accepted in order to become part of the new collectivity.

We can recognize two essential cases:

- b.1 The partial integration of a group;
- b.2 The integration of whole group.

In the first, the integration of one or several members of a group within another group may give rise to conflict between the old and new collective, to the extent that the latter may impose constraints that are incompatible with the conditions of belonging to the previous one. In the second, the integration could raise conflict between the groups and their members, insofar as new joint commitments between groups may undermine the membership of their members.<sup>5</sup>

In general, *the actors of integration are intentional subjects that can freely decide to become part of a new context within the possible compatibility between their personal or collective identity and the collective bonds (norms, rules, duties) that define the conditions of belonging to new collectivity.*

A. Schütz (1944) identifies two essential levels of knowledge that guide social interaction. An explicit level of competences, which concern everything that a subject learns on the basis of his own interests, needs, desires, etc.<sup>6</sup> An implicit level of competences, which concern everything that a subject learns from others, seeing the sense of their social behaviors.<sup>7</sup> The first lets persons achieve their aims within a shared horizon of meanings. The second

## 2. The Subjects of Social Integration

### 2.1 Individuals and groups

### 2.2 Types of compatibility

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assume deontic powers because there is an intersubjective agreement to assign a Y function to an X object. Moreover, on the limits of a naturalistic approach to the social world see Husserl (1936); and on the flaws of historicism see De Monticelli, (2018, pp. 109-118).

<sup>4</sup> The term “integration” comes from the Latin term “*integratio*” that means: “to make whole, full, perfect, what is incomplete and insufficient to achieve a certain purpose, adding what is necessary or remedying the lack by means of appropriate instruments” (Encyclopaedia Treccani, 1995, my translation).

<sup>5</sup> About the fundamental role that joint commitment plays in order to assemble collective subjects, see Gilbert (2013).

<sup>6</sup> Schütz (2013, pp. 14-15).

<sup>7</sup> Schütz (2013, p.13, 17, 26).

makes them behave efficiently within a system of social interactions, which are based on stereotyped models of behaviors.

We can consider the first as the level of *social personality*, because it is the result of a growth path within which persons decide who they want to be in connection with the surrounding world. We can consider the second as the level of *social subjectivity*, because it is the result of a routine that is assimilated by the subjects in a manner that is mainly passive.

According to me, we can associate these levels of competences with two types of compatibility between persons and frameworks of integration: 1. The *intersubjective type*, which regards the compatibility between different stereotypical models of thinking and acting; 2. The *personal type*, which regards the compatibility between personal projects and social normativity. The degree of *intersubjective compatibility* is essentially connected to the *temporality* of the process: the longer we are inserted in a certain routine, the more our degree of compatibility can grow.

The degree of *personal compatibility* is instead essentially connected to the *flexibility* of the actors involved: the more we are willing to change our interests and our goals in connection with the new social context and the people who live there, the more our degree of personal compatibility can grow.

### 3. The Contexts of Social Integration

In an eidetic account, I propose to recognize at least four essential dimensions of intersubjectivity, which are characterized by four essential types of social interactions.

#### 1. Community.

A. Schütz (1932) divides the social world into two different types of social interaction: the living environment, which is the context of face-to-face relationships, and society, which is the context of relationships between subjects that live in the same social system, at the same time, without knowing each other. The first kind of social life, in which an intimate sharing is possible, is the place of interpersonal bonds and social feelings (i.e. solidarity).<sup>8</sup> In the second kind of social life, in which the subjects act according to collective patterns of behavior, the persons and their interpersonal relationships evaporate within stereotypical forms of joint action.

Following A. Schütz's account, I propose to use the expression "community" for every kind of intersubjective context that is characterized by interpersonal bonds: emotional, sentimental, friendly and existential. They are sources of solidarity interactions that create, in general, a climate of intimacy. I use the expression "existential bond" to define the type of bonds between persons who, by sharing the same values and cooperating in upholding them, develop a deep sense of mutual belonging.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, I do not propose to use the expression "community" only for families, or groups of friends, but also for every kind of collective subject in which the social relationships have a high degree of solidarity and intimacy.<sup>10</sup> For these same reasons, I consider wrong to use the term "community" with reference to wider collectives in which is not possible to create these conditions, as in the case of "European Community".

*"Community", in eidetic sense, is every collective whose identity is essentially characterized by solidarity relationships between its members, namely a collective in which each member is interested for*

<sup>8</sup> On the topic of face-to-face relationships and on the crucial role that the empathy plays in them, see: Scheler [1916, 1923-1925] and Stein [1925] Husserl [1921].

<sup>9</sup> In our tradition we have called some bonds of this kind "fraternity".

<sup>10</sup> On the topic of community see also: Tönnies [1887]; Scheler [1916] and Stein [1925].

the “sake” of others.<sup>11</sup> In a real community there is such a particular degree of intimacy that the well-being, suffering, success etc. of one, is the well-being, suffering, success etc. of the others.

## 2. Society.

Following A. Schütz’s account once again, I use the term “society” for every kind of social context within which several subjects can interact in meaningful and coordinated ways, without knowing each other.

This interaction is possible because each of us follow general models of behavior that are the same for all.<sup>12</sup> These models are the result of a long process of typification that, generation after generation, establishes what is a socially correct way of acting in a given situation. From an eidetic perspective, the actors of these stereotypical actions are not persons, but *typical subjects* that know how to act in different situations, knowing how each one has to act in them.<sup>13</sup> Every member of society learns these models by living in it, by means of the example and education of others.

As P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann (1966) highlight, they are the result of consolidated routines which are continually reinforced by the repetitiveness of joint actions that achieve their aims. For example, when a subject enters a post office, he does not go directly to the help desk, because he knows that *normally* there is an order of arrival that *has to be respected*. He equally expects that the others do the same. If nobody breaks the routine, then social life *flows* in such a satisfying way that this model of behavior becomes a more and more deeply-rooted way of acting within the collectivity.

The members of society are *typical subjects* to the extent in which they are involved in this flow of normality, reinforcing it.<sup>14</sup>

“Society”, in an eidetic sense, *is every intersubjective context driven by typical models of behavior that establish the regime of normality. The minimum condition for belonging to and participating in it is thinking, feeling and acting in typical ways, as typical subjects.*

## 3. Territory.

By sharing everyday life, persons and communities can establish habitual social contexts, in which it is possible to recognize a particular set of local customs and traditions. I call this defined social habitat “territory”.<sup>15</sup>

In general, we can conceive the territory as an intermediate social level between community and society. It is not a community because it is not essentially characterized by solidarity relationships between its members. It is not merely a part of society because the interpersonal relationships between social actors protects them against anonymity.

The places of territory are all those workplaces, public spaces and social events, in which each one of us meets the larger context of society without disappearing as personal being.

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<sup>11</sup> The term “sake” has various connotations: well-being, health, happiness, etc.

<sup>12</sup> On these fundamental level of social life, which I introduced into the paragraph 2.2, see: Schütz [1932]; Berger and Luckmann [1966].

<sup>13</sup> “Within the group, the member carefully examines normal situations [...] and immediately grasps the right prepackaged recipe for solving them. In those situations his actions shows all the signs of habituality, automatism and half-consciousness. This is possible because the cultural model provides typical solutions for typical problems, by means of recipes that are available to typical actors” (Schütz, 2013, p. 27; my translation).

<sup>14</sup> On the ideas of normality as flow see Schütz [1944]. The stranger is a subject who interrupts the fluidity of collective experience, because he comes from another system of social and cultural pertinences.

<sup>15</sup> This dimension of the social world is a new topic for philosophy and it is probably the principal news of my research. The territory is not only a geographical entity, namely a piece of land, but it is a complex entity, namely a social environment in which social interactions play a crucial role.

Territory is a common reference framework that puts together many persons and several communities.

The territorial identity, which is recognizable by means of a particular set of local customs and traditions, depends essentially on two factors: 1. The particular way in which the local collectivity transforms the reference framework; 2. The particular way in which the reference framework influences the lifestyle of local collectivities and their mutual interactions.

While society is essentially characterized by the rigidity of its models, in which there is no place for different ways of acting, the territory is a dynamic context, in which different persons and groups, with different perspective, can interact each other.<sup>16</sup> While the unity of the communities is essentially rooted in solidarity relationships, the unity of territory is rooted in a particular reference framework that attracts the interest of many.<sup>17</sup>

From my phenomenological perspective *polemos* is the essential feature of local interaction and may be essentially of two types:

- *Conflictual polemos*: a conflict between enemies that fight to prevail. In this case the winners occupy the territory, push out their enemies and take possession of resources.
- *Cooperative polemos*: a conflict between persons and communities that belong to and are equally interested in the same framework, but have different perspectives on territory management.<sup>18</sup>

Since the *cooperative polemos* ought also to be a characteristic feature of democratic policy, then we should reassess territories also from a political perspective. Indeed, people can mature a personal interest in a wider common good and make their concrete contribution to the *res publica*, just within the territorial interactions, which connect private and public interest. “*Territoriality*”, in eidetic sense, *is the essential feature of every intersubjective context in which persons and communities become social actors, without being cancelled by the anonymity of stereotypical roles and rules. Territory is the geo-social framework in which the social players achieve networks of relationships in which a certain local tradition takes shape.*

#### 4. State and Nation.

The last level of the social world is constituted by the institutions, namely the complex of laws that govern the life of persons, communities and territories.

In a democracy, the entire institutional system should maintain a state of public justice, security and order, in which all citizens are bearers of the same rights and duties. In this case, the institutional homogenization of persons is necessary in order to protect this equality. The classic expression “Everybody is equal before the law” exactly states this concept.<sup>19</sup>

“*Statality*”, in eidetic sense, *is the essential features of every system of laws that is capable of governing a wide plurality of persons, communities and territories by means of a set of governance bodies.*

Moreover, we normally use the expression “*nationality*” to indicate the ethnic union of every person born in the same state, regardless of her/his sense of belonging to the population and institutions. However, the expression “*nationality*”, in its most meaningful sense, ought to

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<sup>16</sup> The general model of normality does not determine the social interactions through and through. In everyday life, people play their roles and interact with each other in eccentric ways, deviating from the normality within the limits of a tolerability that itself is part of the routine.

<sup>17</sup> There are conflicting relationships even in communities and solidarity relationships in the territory, but in both cases they are not the essential element. If they become such, then the community is subject to an ontological dynamism that transforms it into something different, just as the territory ceases to be such, becoming a community.

<sup>18</sup> I use the term “*polemos*” in the sense that seems to emerge from the fragments of Heraclitus, in which the opposites appear as joined parts that equally contribute to the existence of the whole, just through their contrast.

<sup>19</sup> For a phenomenological study of the State see Stein [1917].

indicate *the collective identity of a wide plurality of subjects that participate in public life, feeling part of a population.*

According to Husserl, a whole is such if it can be isolated and distinguished from the surrounding entities and phenomena by means of evident criteria that must be constitutive of the same kind of wholes of which this whole is a sample.<sup>20</sup>

Since the social interaction between persons is the essential feature that allows us to distinguish and isolate the different layers of the social world, then each of these layers can be considered a whole. Communities are social wholes composed of persons who are joined by interpersonal bonds and solidarity interactions. Territories are social wholes composed of persons and communities that interact in the same reference framework. Society is a systemic whole composed of several models of behavior, a complex set of social roles and a traditional system of intersubjective rules. States are juridical wholes composed of complex sets of laws and governance bodies.

The State is the most complex form of social context, because it unifies the other types of social interaction in a system of bonds that stretches from the interpersonal bonds of community type to the collective bonds of institutional type.

In the absence of an institutional system, the most complex social context is a certain territory in which a smaller number of persons and communities interact with each other, fighting or cooperating within the same reference framework. Finally, in the absence of external subjects and communities, the social world is reduced to the community alone.

Communities, territories, society and states are “pregnant wholes”, namely entiresities composed of parts that are linked to each other by bonds of co-variation.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, if the laws change, then there are also changes in the life of individuals, communities, territories and society; if a new custom or practice becomes a collective habitualness, then it can influence the life of people and become the content of new laws; finally, if several individuals, or communities, collectively act to change their lives within their territories, then their actions can influence both the set of social customs and practices and the system of laws. Moreover, the levels of the social world are not mutually independent dimensions. Each one of them is connected with the others and this mixture makes their bonds of co-variation even stronger. Again, I consider community, territory, society and institutions depending on and necessary parts of every complex social world, which would be otherwise impossible, without society and institutions, and inhuman, without communities and territories.

#### **4. The Essential Interconnections of the Social World**

##### **4.1 The social world as whole**

##### **4.2 Bonds of co-variation**

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20 On the whole-part relationship see Husserl [1900-1901].

21 On the concept of “co-variation”, F. De Vecchi (2017, p.8) explains: “According to Edmund Husserl eidetics is the “science of essences” [*Wesenswissenschaft*] (Husserl, 1913/1950, Introduction) and essences are the bonds which define the possibility of co-variation of the parts constituting any entity as a whole. The fundamental idea is that such bonds can be more or less binding and that any type of entity is specifically defined by the degrees to which its parts are bound-constrained: some of its parts can be varied to the point of being suppressed, while others of these parts cannot be varied because otherwise the entity would cease to exist”. In other words, there are necessary parts, which are characterized by the maximum degree of constraint and which must be necessarily bound together with other parts in order for a certain type of entity to exist”.

On the concept of “pregnant structure”, R. De Monticelli (2018) explains: “A pregnant structure is precisely an entity equipped with its intrinsic inner cohesion that is determined by dependency relationships, which are capable to distinguish it in a functional and substantial manner from all other elements that are contained in the same environment in which it is located. In a pregnant structure even every part of it is pregnant, since it plays a role that contributes to determine the nature or identity of the structure, its permanence, continuity and survival as a unit”. (p. 185, my translation). “The pregnant structures [...] are abstract structures, but they describe real dependency relationships like those that occur within an environmental niche” (p.191, my translation).

Since the social world is a whole composed by wholes that are bound each other by dependency bonds, then the social integration is fully accomplished if the persons are integrated in every parts and if this integration does not cause conflicts between them. *Since the social world is a stratified whole, then the social integration is a stratified process through which persons become members of communities, actors of a territory, subjects of a society, members of a nation and citizens of a state.*

Finally, I would like to stress the fundamental role of communities and territories both in order to assemble a social world and in order to achieve the social integration, because the persons learn to act together, in the collective horizon of “we”, just within them.

### 5. Belonging and Participation

If persons, or groups, are fully integrated in the social world, then they become full-fledged members of it.

A true membership has to have at least two essential characteristics:

1. An actual *state of belonging*, which bonds new members to the new social context.
2. An actual *participation* in collective actions. A new member is really integrated in a new social context if he/she can take part in its collective actions.

This membership is fulfilled if the individuals cease to develop only individual beliefs, assessments and decisions, and begin to mature stances that are motivated also by the beliefs, assessments and decisions of others. In this case the individuals can take part in collective convictions, assessments and decisions, which are the motivational sources of the collective actions. According to Husserl (1921), the communication that takes place in the course of shared experiences establishes “higher-order personal units”, in which the individuals become parts of collective subjects and actions, without ceasing to be the authors of independent stances.<sup>22</sup>

Belonging without participation would be suspect, because it generally characterizes kinds of collectivity in which persons are marginalized.

At the same time, without membership we cannot consider the actions of subjects as real forms of participation. Indeed, also external individuals may collaborate with a group, but their actions are not part of its collective agency.

Individuals, or groups, who are not fully integrated, can become vulnerable parts of the collectivity. A person is alone without community; he/she is socially isolated without being a recognized member of the territory; he/she is marginalized without social competences; he/she is vulnerable without institutional recognition. In eidetic sense, the exclusion from the *bonds of co-variation that characterize the status of member* is an essential feature of the social exclusion.

In summary: *persons and groups are fully integrated in a collective if, and only if, they are recognized parts of it. Collective approval makes the sense of belonging to possible and, consequently, enables new members to participate in collective agency.*

### 6. The Essential Levels of Social Integration

After having explained the essential reasons for which it seems phenomenologically reasonable to stratify the social world in four dimensions, we can now better understand also what are the essential conditions to be integrated in each one of them.

1. If interpersonal bonds of solidarity type are the essential conditions for belonging to and participating in community life, then community integration is fully achieved if new members are capable of binding themselves to the other members and vice versa, i.e. by means of friendly or sentimental relationships.

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<sup>22</sup> On this topic see also: Scheler [1916] and Schütz [1932].



2. If social competencies are the essential factor for acting within the society, then a fully achieved integration depends on the capacity to adopt a system of stereotypical behaviors.
3. If the territory is the place in which persons and groups become social players, who act in a social horizon that exceeds the delimited circle of the community, then territorial integration is fully achieved if new members are capable of interacting with the other local actors, giving their social, professional, etc., contribution.
4. Integration is finally completed when new members, having received the same rights and duties as every other citizen, can participate in public life, giving their political contribution to the common good.

In summary: *the new members are fully integrated only if all these conditions are satisfied. This is possible if, and only if, the political agency lets them live in legally recognized communities and territories within a state that gives them the sufficient resources (educational, economic, working) to take part in social and political life.*

Every path of integration has a political and collective relevance. Indeed, the failed integration of new subjects may have a deep negative impact on the life of communities, on the flow of social interactions and on the order of legality. Since the collectivity is not made up of isolated subjects and the intersubjective levels of the social world are all strictly interconnected, then acting against every form of social exclusion means acting in the interest of the whole collectivity. Therefore, the social integration must be always a priority of the political agenda. If we conceive political agency as referring to all types of actions that are motivated by the *res publica* and aimed at *res publica*, then we should consider the policy of integration as referring to all types of actions that are motivated by the interest in the social integration of persons and aimed at overcoming situations of social exclusion.

The policy plays a crucial role because integration is often a critical process that can cause social conflict. Since it cannot be fulfilled regardless of the sensibility and will of people that live in the various contexts, then the first step must be the promotion of a culture for integration within communities and territories by means of focused education and correct information.

According to me, there are at least three compelling reasons for considering social integration as a primary task of every democratic policy:

- The first is of a functional nature, because a society that is inhabited by foreign bodies (isolated individuals, marginalized groups, etc.) is more subject to social disorders;
- The second is of an ethical nature; because every marginalized subject is a problem of social justice as such;
- The third is of a political nature, because every subject that is not capable of finding a place in the collective life, although he wishes it, is the sign that current social and political order is not capable of being fully inclusive.

Considering the complexity of the processes, which entail structural relationships between different levels of intersubjectivity and interpersonal relationships between subjects that are bearers of different perspectives, aims, values, sensibilities, etc., the political agency for integration should have at least the following features:

1. It should not be merely a technical action, which is reduced to bureaucratic practices and imposed rules. It should be primarily a cultural action aimed at educating persons.
2. At the same time, cultural education paves the way for a normative action that should be directly addressed to the various different contexts of social life, in order to make them open and welcoming.
3. The policy should not be guided by bureaucracy and economy. This is possible only if we do everything possible to educate a class of public officials and politicians capable

## 7. The Central Role of Political Agency

of addressing complex situations, defending the person from an excessive bureaucratic rigidity and being independent of financial pressures. Otherwise, the individuals person disappear in the face of bureaucratic blindness, or in the reduction to economic models, becoming a generic subject, or a mere cost center, without history, existential goals and individual suffering.

4. Finally, policy should be cleansed of every form of populism and idealism, which blinds us to the complexity of social reality, namely to the stratification of dimensions, problems and values that characterize social interactions between human beings.

**8. Conclusion** Integration is the encounter of different identities and systems of behavior. Their compatibility is the result of a temporal process in which the flexibility of the parties plays an essential role. It is an articulated process that occurs at as many levels as the essential stratification of intersubjective life. The core of this process is the integration of persons within the community and territorial life, in which they find protection against loneliness and social isolation. Successful completion of this process occurs when persons mature a real sense of belonging to and become players in public life. The task of policy is to act on the cultural and normative level in order to realize all these conditions and prevent social integration from downgrading to a mere social-cultural homogenization. If political agency overcomes social exclusion by making a plurality of personal pathways possible, then the persons can find new opportunities for identity development and the integration contexts can benefit from their unique and unrepeatable contribution.

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