CURRENT BIOPOLITICAL ON DISABILITY:
INCLUSION STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes a limited tour of what currently means inclusion strategy in relation to the problem of the disability, taking as a reference the public policy held in the city of Rosario, Argentina. On this basis questions were raised in relation to biopolitics and governmentality. This tour was finally oriented to interrogate the same status of disability, a complex and diffuse problematic in itself, which outlined some basic coordinates to propose to think of it in terms of what M. Foucault called «device»; that is, as a complex and heterogeneous political construction based on the normal-pathological dichotomy, which naturalizes the notion of deficit, it presents it as a personal tragedy that works at the same time promoting the sustainability of the economic policy of neo-liberalism.

Key words: Disability, inclusion, biopolitics, governmentality
Current scope of public policies on disability inclusion

The concept of inclusion is present in various fields (marginality, poverty, work, health, education, etc.) and has spread suspiciously fast as a priority strategy in the search for greater equity in each of those territories. Taking only the inclusion as public politic with regard to the issue of disability and to the way of an introduction, the position of Belgich (2007) is presented who on school integration considers:

Inclusion requires inventiveness, Audacity, and subjective conditions to withstand unexpected results; calls itself also to be amazed by the capabilities of children, for their powers, for their questions, for their fears, but also by our mysteries, by our problems before failure or unproductive repetition of the quagmire; (e) and demands equally for us to be amazed by our sadness. (p 14)

Inclusion, far from involving only some specific barriers that would prevent to overcome what currently excludes, is a complex problem that covers a whole multiplicity of aspects.

Note that to analyze the issue of the scope the care has not focused on the effects, the results or the efficacy of such strategies, but rather, the multiplicity of options and the wide variety of areas in which arose the need –or obligation?– to consider it an inclusion in the city of Rosario.

In the documents of municipal management, it refers that it can be understood by public policy to «a course of action, a definition of principles regarding a public goal defined in a democratic way (...) which should be subject to interventions by public institutions», which implies that «public policy has as antecedent the perception of a problem or a situation that forwards to the pursuit of a balance» (Ferrero & Diodati, 2008, p. 11). This definition shows a particular correlation with which several authors argue, as for example Kauffer (2002),which says that they «relate to material or symbolic activities that the public authorities manage» (p. 3). Public institutions must remedy the failed aspects or the cracks not yet addressed by the democratic administration.

Holding therefore the assumption that the State covered with public policies some collective social problems requiring solution, it can be observed with respect to disability a very significant question: in accordance with a line which, in any case, exceeds the scope of our city, it is proclaimed every moment the inclusion, almost in the manner of a magic spell. It is striking that the two major government agencies dedicated to addressing disability in the city of Rosario, are one provincial and the other municipal. The provincial is called underseretary of inclusion for the people with disabilities, while the other is the Municipal authority for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

At the same time, in official documents, it can be explicitly found the mode in that since these public policies the issue of disability is conceived so as to require to be addressed in this way (through the strategy of inclusion). In the Manual of accessibility: guidelines and requirements for an architectural inclusion project (Municipalidad de Rosario, Ct), which establishes guidelines for every enterprise and/or building construction, it specifies that it makes reference to «those people with different types and degrees of limitation on their capacity for locomotion and manual skills». I.e., disability is located as a functional limitation of the person, which all the environment can remedy through certain rules of construction.

For the Government of the province of Santa Fe (Ct) the guideline is also clear, as stated on its web site: «the problem of disability specifically addressed from the State, is a health problem [by which] the Ministry of health developed a menu of inclusive policies». There is evidence as well that the issue is specifically the health agenda, responsibility for its resolution is in the State, and the chosen strategy is –once again– the inclusion.

For its part, the Universidad Nacional de Rosario (Ct) also has its own initiative of this nature since 2007. It is the Area of integration and Inclusion of people with disabilities seeking to promote, manage and facilitate the entry and stay of persons with disabilities in the area of the university, through a series of specific activities in the different faculties of the same, as well as in the Instituto Politecnico Superior (Ct).

Finally, there are some businesses that are located in the boundary between public and private, of which only
two are mentioned. The first of these is the case of a diploma in management and policy on disability, in a private university, but whose teaching staff is the same staff that works in the above-mentioned provincial undersecretariat. To explain its main guideline, they refer in the Web site that one of its main objectives is «to foster new inclusive approaches which, coming out of rehabilitation, facilitate access to education, work, and sport as cornerstones of social integration». As you can see, it is through the rehabilitation of that deficit body which will provide the key to allow its inclusion. The second example refers to a venture called Club of companies committed to the employability of persons with disability (Cec Rosario), whose objective is to strive for the successful inclusion of people with disabilities in the framework of a socially responsible business management and that has established agreements with the Government of the province of Santa Fe.

Beyond the differences between each of the aforementioned policies and regardless of the field from where they think (whether the municipality, the province, the university, or private entrepreneurship), these attempts to demonstrate what a naturalization of everything that has to do with disability, requires a public policy or specific training by those who are in position to carry out an inclusive action always referred to a professional function or the sphere of Government.

So it could be that it is not for nothing casual that the notion of inclusion appears as an axis of all the policies mentioned, as well as those which are not just public. According to what some authors are working, inclusion as a main road of any public policy relating to disability that boasts of such, is not new, but it has been developed over the last half century and it has gained greater importance in the last three or four decades.

For example, the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons in 1971; the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons in 1975; the Warnock Report referred to the Special Education in 1978; the World Declaration on the International Year of Disabled Persons by the United Nations in 1981; the World Conference on Special Needs Education, Access and Quality, Salamanca in 1994 organized by UNESCO; (de la Vega, 2010), they demonstrate a significant link with the inclusion model and serve as a model for everything that one can think in relation to disability.

However, the important is to emphasize two central aspects with regard to the strategy of inclusion, on the one hand that, both by official statistical data by independent investigators, can note that promoted effects by these inclusive proclamations, are generally far from expected and in general are in clear opposition (de la Vega, 2010). On the other hand, that all public inclusion policies are justly characterized being formed for «disabled» people, from which it can be inferred a dichotomous thought from which a way of strategy thinking is organized, based on well cleared differentiation, there are people with disabilities and people who are not. And who are entitled to address this issue, are some and not others. As says Emmanuele (2002), «the binary logic, far from being admitted as a mere transit of human thought, is promoted as a goal of arrival from numerous social discourses: pedagogical, legal, medical, scientific, philosophical, technological, etc.» (p. 19).

Inclusion as biopolitics

The notion of inclusion as new surpassing strategy of the situations of exclusion in which persons are in a situation of disability, is not supported only by the novel use of an already existing word, but it acquires a theoretical, ideological and political consistency depending on frames from where it is justified. As observed, mainly from the 1970s –decade in which the category disability emerged as a politically correct concept– slow but at the same time the notion of inclusion is formed. Both processes will not be taken without continuous references to the principles of human rights and civil law, to achieve a progressive formal immersion in the drafting of laws, constitutional reforms and even international conventions.

So much so that in our country, in the early 1980s, in the context in which the United Nations declared the «International Year of Disabled Persons», it was promulgated the first national law specifically regulating the basic benefits that would any person with disabilities would require (22.431/81). In the 1990s, this law is supplemented, improved and deepened (24.901/97). And in the first decade of the third millennium, the State adheres to the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities – of a supraconstitutional character– drafted by the Organization of the United Nations a few years earlier. Of course, these legal efforts have on the horizon the idea to include «persons with disabilities», as a primary mode of
trying to solve the contradiction of a society that excludes some of its members.

At the same time, other frameworks which sustains the notion of inclusion, is multiculturalism, position that stands out from de la Vega (2009) in one of its analysis that specifically reflects on the difficulties of school integration. However, the mentioned author denounces a radical distrust relative to the position of multiculturalism, since what is observed in the school environment is that beyond the renewal of concepts, epistemological and theoretical improvements in laws or ministerial documents and even in the new frame of references that are beginning to build public policies, the effects of exclusion remain intact. As if what was brought forth such exclusion it would not have been affected by these suggestive transformations. Now, this apparent paradox is not surprising if you think like Žižek (2003), as follows:

The ideal form of the ideology of this global capitalism is the multiculturalism, that attitude which—from a sort of empty global positioning- treats each local culture as the colonizer treats the colonized people: as «natives», whose majority must be studied and «respected» carefully. (…) Respect for multicultural specificity of the other is precisely the way to reaffirm one’s own superiority. (p. 172)

I.e., diversity, inclusion, integration strategies have been promoted by new educational and multicultural narratives in the context of the expansion of the neoliberal model (de la Vega, 2010).

The position being held here is that if such difficulties continue happening, it is not founded so much in details that would have to keep on refining, but precisely that as long as the basic structure of the world’s capitalist system is not affected, the apparent battles around the excluded minorities will only be a transient escape valve and destined to fail. «True capitalist utopia consisted in believing that you can—in principle at least, although in the long term—finish these ‘exceptions’ through appropriate measures» (Žižek, 2003, p. 177).

It’s about «New euphemisms that are used to design the current circuits of segregation» (de la Vega, 2009, p. 23), among them, the concepts of diversity, inclusion, integration, etc.; the inclusion would be a new way to legitimize the support of unique and exclusive circuits.

Various authors (Almeida, Angelino, Priolo & Sanchez, 2009; Vallejos, 2009) present a significant concordance with this line, speaking of «exclusive inclusion». This expression refers precisely to «forms of inclusion that mark once again the feeling of being inside, but differentiated from the other disabled. (…) Public policies for disabled persons differentially from other actions of the State» (Almeida et al., 2009, p. 59).

Therefore, inclusion as a public policy involves paradoxically, not a true entry into the system, but the construction of a new marginal spaces or the legitimization of existing exclusive and exclusionary circuits. Both alternatives are anyway always possessed of a distinctive character, with exclusive and alternative mechanisms built specifically for people in situation of disability.

Synthesizing what was said here, it is possible to say as de la Vega (2009) that «despite of inclusive proclamations, [the] vague outlines were expanded and were reformulated for segregation strategies» (p. 210).

Now, such inclusive proclamations are made usually from territories governed by professionals or political officials, but almost never by people in a situation of disability. This is not a minor detail, since it invariably keeps the asymmetry between some that will be entitled to speak and others whose speech will be restricted to circulate under the status of the individual, valuable, exciting, sensitizing, moralizing, but mandatory individual reference. Asymmetry in this case rises from the development of inclusion policies, but as one of a series of examples that also manifests. And any of these examples always encloses a same and unique point of origin: the political construction of the category of normality (Foucault, 2008a). From the construction of a standard based on the healthy and individual adult, without flaws, which is established as the ideal, is that it justifies a division between the healthy, normal, expected, and the pathological, abnormal, different. Qualifying will re-update this asymmetry over and over again, whenever it emerges on the basis of any State or private strategy.

Asymmetry that far from producing the desired effects, generated by contrast «the parameter of a single normality
invented in the context of relations of asymmetry and inequality. Asymmetrical relationships that produce both exclusion and exclusive inclusion» (Angelino, 2009, pp. 51-2).

Now, how could practical continuity, theoretical reformulation and the tactical proliferation of any proposals made from this public policy of inclusion, be justified when what that apparently generates is the legitimacy of the existing segregation?

A possible hypothesis would be that the category’s inclusion seems to satisfy all loose points of the current situation of disability, i.e., responsible to the society of exclusion leaving the beneficial place officials in the benefic place to counter such injustice. It raises the proposals in terms of collective social, but in practice focuses on a case-by-case work. It arises from the logic of human rights, but his approach becomes medicalized as are mainly realized by professionals of health, etc.

Public policies in relation to the inclusion of persons in situation of disability, only addresses the problem from the individual question of each of such persons concerned (through the construction of ramps, the granting of individual treatments, facilities of transportation, free services, etc.). Statistics are taken to know the magnitude of the situation, but the resolution of each appearance is individual by individual. It is a magnificent example of the way that biopolitics and the anatomical politics are precisely articulated to try to resolve a problem without questioning or affecting the form of governmentality that produces and sustains it. In the words of Emmanuele and Cappelletti (2001):

Thus, individual and population are assembled in these microscopic meshes of networks of power through an array of innovative strategies dealing with the mechanics of other hidden and subtle coercions. Statistical control of population movements (...) conveys population regulation. (p. 65)

Mechanisms inherent to biopolitics develop more resources increasingly, both legislative and of public policies aimed at counteracting the exclusion of this sector of the population. But these attempts should not be conceived as incomplete or imperfect ways of thinking about the problem, but as the maximum change possible if done without touching the political-economic foundations of current society. Therefore, it is expected that they never achieve the proposed objectives, as the limit of their actions is given to leave intact the current political-economic structure, even at the expense to not modify at all the situation of those who are going through the problematic of disability. I.e., it could hold that these public policies are in line with a midpoint between the anatomical politics, biopolitics and governmentality, so that they occur with the alleged intention of solving certain social injustices, but the most that they’ll accomplish is to reduce its impact by regulating the circulation of such problems. This strategy of inclusion perpetuates the current social and economic functioning, but through interrogation of the addressed issues would be too costly for the current system.

Considerations of closure for other possible openings

The inclusion strategy, in both biopolitical governmentality service, is oriented to think about proposals that seek to address some of the problem of the day, provided they do not question the institutional dimension of the field in question (labor, architectural, education, etc.) looking for, however, that some of the specific problem we are trying to solve is relatively addressed. In this way, the social production of disability would obey to the strategic role of nominating a problem that should be conceived as an individual problem, thus addressing the urgency of an entire sector of the population that shows difficulties to participate in society in the same way as the rest. In function, it can be thought of disability in terms of device, in the sense that Foucault (1985) understands this category:

A strongly heterogeneous group, comprising of discourses, institutions, architectural installations, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical propositions, morals, philanthropics; (...) elements [belonging] to what was said as what was not said. The device is the network that can be established between these elements (...). Among those elements, discursive or not, it exists as a game, of position changes, of the modifications of functions that can be, also, very different. (...) A kind of training which, at a given historical moment, had as the greater role the responding to an emergency. The device has thus a dominant strategic position. (p. 128)
The identification of the problem, by reducing it to a single manifestation, becomes a characteristic feature of the disability device generating a series of speeches, practices, and policies that far from producing the effects posed by them, only reproduced the situation of exclusion and oppression that the people in a situation of disability are denouncing. Oppression then will be just one of the veins of the social disability device production, as well as the others are the pity of society, the solidarity of the political officials and the asymmetry in the development of strategies.

Where is the validity of the disability device despite its apparent paradoxes? All devices not only have an obvious utility, but it also has unforeseen benefits, disability is instituting to be addressed by the discourse of medical, psychological, psychiatric, legal, political, educational, religious, etc. It is measured carefully in its mental manifestation, building alternative pedagogical systems and parallel chords; It is a matter of courses, specializations, workshops, seminars, conferences, masters, postgraduate degree and postgraduate level; It is pillar of a wide range of care and treatment carried out by professionals and individuals in specialized schools both public and private. Barnes (1996) says that «'disability' and 'rehabilitation' have become merchandise and have therefore become a commercial initiative» (p. 61). I.e., an impressive «business disability» (Barnes, 1996), a formidable industry of rehabilitation (Vallejos, 2009). Across a multiplicity of approaches, always characterized by being exclusive and therefore requiring exclusive circuits entangled in dichotomous opposition «normal-disabled» as fundamental sustenance of a very complex mounting worldwide, a machinery who has a tendency to aim to adapt, to classify and oppression that the people in a situation of disability are denouncing. Oppression then will be just one of the veins of the social disability device production, as well as the others are the pity of society, the solidarity of the political officials and the asymmetry in the development of strategies.

Thus it updates the analysis that makes Foucault (2004) of the prison device, when asked if this, «by apparently failed nonetheless doesn’t stop achieving their objective» (p. 282).

Therefore, a possible way of thinking the problem of disability will not be already to try to counter the negative or not yet discussed effects of the current public policies, through strategies such as the inclusion. A different position is to think of disability in terms of device, which would allow mapping the conditions of the possibility that allowed the political construction of normalcy and the current social delimitation of disability. It would thus be the attachment of individuals crossed by this problem, linked to the construction of the rehabilitation device, so requiring the naturalization of the existence of disability as an undoubted individual condition, which affects randomly and tragically to some and not to others. In turn, this would open the possibility of mapping strategies that can be seen as «instruments and tools that can be used (...) to (...) carry out these fights» (Foucault, 2008b, p. 123), fights that the professional or public official will not have to fight reproducing the own asymmetry of power/knowledge of the binary system of social discourses, but the same group involved in the aforementioned problems.

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