



European  
Research Area

# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## Tackling Social Exclusion through Social Innovation: Strategy Research Options

Policy implications of KATARSIS, an EU-funded research project involving 20 institutions coordinated by the Global Urban Research Unit, Newcastle University, UK.

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### INTRODUCTION

**An inclusive Europe:  
how social innovation  
research can help**

Building a **more inclusive Europe** is vital to achieving the EU's goals of **sustained growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion**. At a time when inequality and exclusion are on the increase, they must be tackled through **evidence-based action**. So **research** is needed into current responses and their effectiveness.

The **Social Inclusion Process** established by EU leaders in 2000 has encouraged Member States to exchange best practice and create a stronger basis for policy-making. Emphasis has been placed on **involving a wide range of social inclusion actors**, not least those who are experiencing poverty and those who are working with them. The KATARSIS project analyses the **socially creative strategies (SCS) through which people, both individually and collectively, react to conditions of economic, social and political exclusion** – or “social exclusion” for short. SCS often use knowledge and resources in ways that trigger social innovation and effectively promote inclusion, empowerment and socio-economic development. So they open up new avenues for policy design and implementation. KATARSIS is also helping to **identify the best methods for researching into SCS**. And it provides a platform for research teams to **exchange knowledge** and work towards better **integration of research programmes and strategies**.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS

Lessons drawn from KATARSIS surveys of the literature on social exclusion and on socially creative strategies (SCS) to counter exclusion.

### The labour market, employment strategies and the social economy

- Employment in a whole range of socially creative sectors is key to combating exclusion.
- SCS for job creation may concern the public, for-profit and non-profit sectors, as well as the family and community economies, or else more typically the social economy (cooperatives, mutualities and associations). In either case, they should be fostered as they have the potential to meet unmet needs and promote emancipation.
- The success of these SCS is highly dependent on spatial and historical context, so best practices are not necessarily transferable.
- Reliance on the non-profit sector or the social economy may also sometimes take on a regressive character, when it is associated with the rolling back of the welfare state or when institutional leverage fails.
- To promote SCS in the employment sphere, public policy should enable individual and collective actors to build networks, access resources in a sustainable manner and promote diversity of opportunity.

### Education and training

- Three key types of exclusion are identified: exclusion from access to education, from the process of education and from the outcome of education.
- SCS can challenge the dominant neo-liberal rationale within the education system, thus facilitating accessibility, social integration, the reflection of diversity, the meeting of present-day social needs, linkage with the labour market, interaction and new forms of learning.
- The SCS concerned are of three types:
  - Those aiming to adapt excluded groups to the dominant rationale
  - Those that mix activities which are adaptive to the dominant rationale and activities which conflict with it
  - Those that give visibility and relevance to the socially creative values and experiences of different non-dominant social groups, and acknowledge their participation.

- The outcomes of Type 1 SCS show that a macro-level approach does not prevent educational exclusion. Type 2 SCS entail committed partnership with local authorities and social services, associations with the private sector and mainly local-level funding. Type 3 SCS work in two directions at the same time: enhancing cultural diversity and promoting social inclusion in forms of governance, e.g. by creating more customised education and training institutions.
- Researchers adopt different methods for analysing the three types of SCS: evidence-based research for Type 1; a wide range of methods for Type 2, but principally the neo-positivist approach; and mainly participatory action research for Type 3.
- Successful educational SCS tend to:
  - be well integrated into the local community, as regards both financing and content
  - include some element of adaptation to the dominant rationale and the labour market.

KATARSIS expresses a preference for educational SCS that aim at integrating the alternative values of the excluded groups within a more open education system.

### Housing and neighbourhood

- Exclusion *from* housing includes homelessness, overcrowding and living in accommodation which is in disrepair or has inadequate facilities. This form of exclusion may involve discrimination as regards entitlement or on grounds such as ethnicity, as well as such processes as gentrification or housing privatisation.
- Exclusion *through* housing arises from social polarisation between neighbourhoods, the concentration of disadvantages and poor access to transport, opportunities and services.
- These issues provide great scope for mobilising SCS – e.g. through housing cooperatives and the development of grassroots neighbourhood organisations. NGOs, even if large and formal rather than “bottom-up”, also often play a major innovative role here.
- Cut-backs in the State's direct role have left space for more creativity by NGOs and communities, but most of the case studies suggest that bottom-up creativity needs institutional support from a strong welfare state network.

### Health and environment

- By focussing on the local level, innovative SCS were revealed that address health and environmental inequalities and promote well-being.

- In particular, good practices in social innovation were noted in:
  - networks promoting the growing, trading and consumption of local food
  - networks challenging transport policy and producing innovative design solutions to traffic problems and the use of public space.
- A typology of socially creative strategies was developed, placing research results in four main categories:
  - social movements that organise protests across Europe to challenge the dominance of cars and increase pedestrians' and cyclists' access to public space
  - community organisations that work in less contentious ways than the protest movements and focus on the neighbourhood
  - socially creative individuals, whose ideas have been taken up by social movements and local authorities
  - social innovation by local authorities, often inspired by Local Agenda 21 (local implementation of the UN's sustainable development agenda).

### Governance and democracy

- Policy-making should aim to foster democracy as regards both the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in decision-making and their access to social services, via universal social, economic and civic rights.
- Many new governance arrangements are ambiguous. Along with the potential benefits of increased participation, current transformations have led to privatisation, liberalisation, the promotion of private-public partnerships and an emphasis on managerial governance practice. So short-term cost efficiency is often achieved at the expense of long-term efficacy and democracy.
- Bottom-up initiatives risk being caught in the “localist trap”. The most successful ones aim at “scale-jumping” (moving up into a broader context).
- The welfare state continues to exist in various new forms, with uneven participation by the “clients” and the concentration of power in the hands of the primary elite actors. Bottom-up participation can be a step towards socio-economic democratisation of the welfare state, but does also involve the risk that social movements may be co-opted by the state.

## Main KATARSIS outputs

### What KATARSIS has provided

- An overview of the different entry points that have led to social innovation initiatives and processes.
- An examination of the possibility and desirability of putting forward an overarching methodological approach to social innovation inquiries and designs.
- An assessment of research methods on social innovation.
- A shared language for social innovation research.
- An understanding of the policy relevance and dynamics of artistic and creative bottom-up initiatives.
- A complementary and multi-agent approach to combating social exclusion, centred on the arts.
- Better models of communication and coordination among various types of actor (researchers, policy-makers, practitioners), especially through relevant interactive methods that give citizens a voice.
- Links among actors involved in this field from different backgrounds, places and contexts in the EU.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key KATARSIS conclusions about creativity

- Arts and culture should be seen as a key element in urban and local policies, making innovative initiatives effective and sustainable.
- The “effectiveness” of local, socially embedded cultural and artistic projects should be judged on a broad range of inclusion criteria.
- Socially creative bottom-up strategies are usually not sustainable without strong institutional support and leverage. So a balance has to be struck between regulation and support on the one hand and room for creativity on the other. Thus, it is better to promote “bottom-linked” rather than “bottom-up” activities.

### Short-term action

- Make existing local SCS (socially creative strategies to combat social exclusion) **visible to the European research and policy community.**
- **Network and connect research** on SCS at the local, regional and national levels.
- Create a **common theoretical and methodological framework for analysing SCS.**

### Long-term action

- Draw **lessons** from these socially creative initiatives and realise their potential **transferability**.
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- Establish a more encompassing **European research and training network on SCS**.
  - Develop **joint research projects** at various levels (local, regional, national and European).
  - Influence national research programmes by building **national research networks** on SCS.
  - Capitalise on “locally funded” research programmes and strengthen them through the use of a **shared European theoretical and methodological framework**.
  - Contribute to the development of **cooperation networks between local SCS actors** across Europe, preferably in the form of sustainable Social Platforms.
  - Help shape the European social, regional, education, training and youth policy agendas by drawing lessons from local SCS about how to overcome social exclusion.
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### Research methods

Research on SCS against social exclusion requires methods that meet *all* of the following criteria: identification and understanding of the roles of all the actors involved, the social and cultural relations of which they are part, the agendas for change that they pursue, and institutional dynamics that support or hamper their actions. So the following methodological perspectives must be combined:

- **Sociology of knowledge and practice** together with **action research** in order to understand the institutional and socio-cultural context and changes within which the actors operate
  - **Transdisciplinary analysis** of the roles of different types of SCS actor and guarantees of their involvement in the research activity itself
  - **Reflexivity** and **post-structuralist approaches** to understanding the creativity of actors in the search for social innovation within a complex socio-cultural world.
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## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Specialised research teams are studying the consequences of growing inequality and social exclusion, as well as socially creative strategies (SCS) for overcoming them. KATARSIS provides these researchers with a platform for exchanging their knowledge and working towards a better integration of their research programmes and methodologies.

### Objectives

- To provide an **up-to-date review** of the specific consequences of growing inequality in Europe and the innovative and/or creative ways in which groups particularly hard-hit by exclusion have responded.
- To examine how those consequences have been **researched**.
- To review attempts to **integrate various approaches into the analysis of socially creative strategies (SCS)** aimed at overcoming social exclusion, and to link this overview to broader debates about social science methodologies.
- To develop **new methods for analysing SCS and for coordinating ongoing research** in this field. This methodology will later be used to guide a wider scientific discussion of both the policy and the practice of SCS.

### Methodology

- **Survey of the literature** on social exclusion and SCS in five fields:
  - the labour market, employment strategies and the social economy
  - education and training
  - housing and neighbourhoods
  - health and the environment
  - governance and democracy.
- With the aim of integrating policy and collective action approaches, **surveys on three aspects of SCS**:
  - bottom-up creativity
  - governance
  - social innovation.
- **Development of methodologies** for researching into the organisation and impact of socially innovative initiatives.
- **Dissemination of the outcomes**, notably to practitioners and policy-makers in the field of social inclusion, empowerment and participation.

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**Further reading**

Research papers and work-package reports are available at  
<http://katarsis.ncl.ac.uk>