KATARSIS WP4: Health and Environment

Executive abstract

This report presents an overview of the literature on the consequences of inequality and exclusion in Europe, as well as the creative strategies to overcome these, in the existential field (EF) of health and environment. It will provide a synthesis of the separate issues relevant to what are essentially two distinct fields and will recognise the interactions between them.

The history of European policy responses to health inequalities suggests that it is through neighbourhood or area based initiatives (ABI) that the most innovative actions to address health and environment inequalities have developed. With the welfare state withdrawing from traditional arenas and globalization presenting new challenges we suggest that state institutions are no longer, on their own, able to manage social inclusion in a world that is increasingly diverse. Therefore it is to the richness of civil society that we should look to find new and different socially creative actors. Socially creative strategies (SCS) in this EF are extremely diverse. The examples of SCS highlighted here represent important responses based on and networked into broader social movements that like many in the post-Fordist world are concerned with reproduction and consumption and not just production. Some are pan-European or even global in coverage, but they remain local in impact and development. SCS also tend to involve bottom-up creativity giving voice to groups that have not only been traditionally absent from the politico-administrative systems at the local and other institutional and spatial levels, but have never even been included in the state's evolution into its welfarist and post-welfarist forms.

It is clear from our analysis that neighbourhoods matter because they are open, dynamic and adaptive systems that do not have simple cause-effect relationship with national or global drivers of economic, social or policy change (Blackman, 2006). Thus by focusing at the local level it is possible to begin to discover innovative SCS to address health inequalities and promote well-being. The pan-European drift to ABIs has been appropriate because in local neighbourhoods people often find spaces to address health inequalities and environmental issues in socially creative ways. Neighbourhoods can therefore provide charismatic individuals and community groups with creative spaces in which to develop.

Figure 1: Exclusion dynamics (ED) and Socially Creative Strategies (SCS)

Key Exclusion Dynamics

Global political economy generating: -

Persistent social inequalities expressed in reduced well-being and life chances in deprived neighbourhoods
- partial withdrawal of state and increased private health costs
- expert domination in the planned environment
- socially differentiated health practices and conditions
- dominance of orthodox professional practices and subordination of complementary approaches and food production solutions
- exclusion through class, gender, ethnicity and age

Persistent environmental injustice through:
- Global control of food supplies by trans-national companies
- Unequal impact of environmental damage on population
- Detrimental land usage increasing environmental risk factors for more disadvantaged populations
- Decision process too narrow and technocratic excluding community awareness, understanding and participation
- Exclusion of local-regional agents from global issues
- Static and elitist knowledge and attitudes, professional protection of knowledge and expertise

Dominance of motor vehicle based economies and car cultures leading to:
- withdrawal to privatised lives
- enhanced obesogenic environment
- demise of public spaces
- lack of popular participation in addressing issues of health and well-being

Socially Creative Strategies

Organizational forms networks based on:
- Social movements
- NGOs and community based organizations
- Local governance organizations (including ABIs)
- Socially creative individuals / leaders

Foci

- Neighbourhood well-being initiatives supporting community participation, involvement and empowerment to improve access to healthier lifestyle choices and health care provision.
- Shared community spaces- initiatives that seek to reduce dependence on motorised transport and establish creative spaces to support social interaction and social capital
- Local food networks - instances of social innovation, in that they are creative in using local resources in new and unexpected ways

Practices
- Multi-scalar participatory strategies
- Promoting social, mental and physical well-being not simply addressing health inequalities
- Linkage of quality of life, health care and environment
- Cooperation between life-style, preventive medicine, medical service
- Ownership of new local environmental and sustainability strategies
- Bottom up development of community and voluntary groups

Links/interaction
- Neighbourhoods - importance of social capital, social networks and shared space
- Health - increasing people's control over their lives and developing social, mental and physical well-being
- Environmental impacts – environmental injustice
- Sustainability: global ecology, natural resources, local environment, social provision, social sustainability
- Participation in alternative lifestyles
- Overall the SCS contribute to multi-scalar participatory development strategies that link health, social and environmental dynamics together, at the level of information, policy and planning.

Lessons from the case studies

SCS Case Studies

- **Critical Mass** is a social movement which organises protests across Europe with the aim of reducing the dominance of cars to increase access to public space for pedestrians and cyclists. Adopting CM techniques cyclists gather in city streets on the last Friday of every month to raise the profile of eco-friendly transport, pollution, safer routes and global environmental issues. CM events 'have different flavours city to city; have no leaders; no central organization and simply assert the right to ride' . The biggest CM event in Europe saw 35,000 cyclists take to the streets in Budapest in the Autumn of 2005.

- **Shared Space** Based on Hans Monderman's ground-breaking designs, the development of Shared Spaces a planning practice mixing vehicular and pedestrian use of the same space, has been taken up by local authorities in several neighbourhoods across Denmark, Sweden, UK and The Netherlands. It reflects the French programme Ville-plus and adopts many of its key principles. They are all aimed at bringing people from neighbourhoods back into public spaces.

- A **Car-free neighbourhood** was created in the **Vauban** district in Freiburg, Germany when an NGO / community based organization convinced the local authority to support a development that excluded cars, enabling the streets to be taken over by pedestrians and cyclists.

- **GRAIN** is an international NGO based in Barcelona campaigning, is a key node in a network of NGOs campaigning at European and global scales to support local control of agricultural genetics (seeds) by farmers and gardeners to maintain agricultural biodiversity and the attendant local knowledge and opposes the concentration of ownership of this key resource by transnational companies.

- **Sho Nirbhour**, a community based organization in Bradford, England, bringing together Bangladeshi women, who as a social group, tend to have a high susceptibility to diabetes and heart disease, as well as lack of English language skills and consequential experience of social isolation. Sho Nirbhour focuses on growing food, healthy eating and physical activity, contributing to physical well-being. The produce grown is shared among participants. In addition there is a strong focus on mental and social well-being, by working together women are encouraged to come out of their immediate family circles and homes, share an enjoyable activity with their peers and challenge the isolationism that Asian women sometimes endure.

- A health education **ABI in São Brás de Alportel**, Algarve, South Portugal, consisting of a partnership of the local education authority, the local Clinic Health Centre, the schools and the City Hall have developed a project based on the rediscovery and promotion of the traditional Mediterranean diet, now considered as a healthy way of eating. Young people and families from local schools were invited to compile traditional, local recipes. Teachers and caterers have been trained to rediscover and cook the Mediterranean recipes thus encouraging young people to move away from the excessive consumption of sweets, soft drinks and fried foods towards healthier meals which are rich in fibres, vegetable and fruits.

Developing bottom up approaches to environmental issues is important because in recent decades nation states have resisted increasing taxation and regulating trans-national externalities in order to provide international public goods, or to assign property rights, or to redistribute income to address key environmental issues like global warming. Engaging with environmental projects has been seen as a creative response to the hegemonic assumption of global market capitalism based on the mechanistic scientific assumption that nature can be pillaged. Across Europe there are clear indicators that neighbourhoods are seeking alternative methods, philosophies and strategies of procuring and securing sustainable food and the projects cited here show that community participation in the development of food production strategies like *plot to plate* can ensure ownership and participation in a community's struggle to tackle food deserts and promote their own well-being. Similarly, we will also show in our case study selection that it is also important to acknowledge that poor neighbourhoods endure more involuntary injury, environmental threats and higher obesity rates than other spatial areas and analysing our local spaces is vital if we are to build safe and sustainable futures for neighbourhoods.

It is the fusion of the two distinct fields of health and environment that make these case studies so pertinent. Making links between health and the environment has enabled many individuals and neighbourhoods to discover the importance of the need to embrace both agendas. Because environmental problems are global in nature it is important that local ABIs make trans-national creative links. This can be seen in the Critical Mass (CM) movement. Using the internet to develop networks, the CM movement has inspired thousands of people across Europe to be physically involved in challenging car cultures and global warming in their towns and cities. Local CM events have global links which means that participants learn about other SCS on a global scale. Local food also combines health and environment, but this is less of an area for protest, rather one in which symbolic resistance to global hegemony is inscribed in the practices of everyday life, pursuing what is both a healthy lifestyle and a low carbon lifestyle through a series of micro-sociological decisions. Like the CM movement the *localistas* dramatise their oppositional identity in a series of presentations of alternative SCS which range from farmers' markets to collective dig-ins. Regeneration ABIs are also beginning to develop effective strategies to promote exercise and develop healthy eating in the pursuit of increased social, mental and physical well-being.

In a globalized world we will show that young vulnerable road users, co-operative food producers and road activists are challenging the exclusionary dynamics posed by Europe's global development and its shift to an increasing marketization in social policy. Knowing that they and future generations will carry the health and environmental burden of this generation's excess these SCS seek to reclaim Europe's public space, promote local real food and develop an ability to live healthily and sustainably in a world that has excluded many people from experiencing well-being. The in-depth case studies focus on neighbourhood based SCS in a search to promote and achieve well-being through, shared community spaces and local food networks. As such they illustrate the interconnectedness of well-being in terms of both health and environmental dynamics and the importance of thinking holistically about the ED that people face, particularly those who are young and from Black and/or minority ethnic identities.