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# The role of socially creative strategies to overcome social exclusion

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## WHAT ARE SOCIALLY CREATIVE STRATEGIES?

Their features:

- Experience of locally embedded, bottom-up initiatives...
- ... often organised around themes of arts and culture as platforms to overcome conditions of exclusion and as innovative dynamics fostering change
- They originate from a variety of theoretical standpoints and political priorities
- They include complex practices and mobilize a multiplicity of skills

**Contextual differentiation is determinant for understanding priorities, practices, organizational structures and activities of SCS.**



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## **THE PERSPECTIVE OF “KATARSIS”**

Recognize that local, bottom-up initiatives (SCS) create the conditions and mobilise the resources that help individuals, groups or communities to overcome situations of exclusion:

- SCS can have an empowering potential
- SCS can act as transferable examples (“good practices”?)

**Understand the dynamics and policy relevance of artistic and creative bottom-up initiatives**



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## **TERMINOLOGY (1): ARTS, CULTURE, CREATIVITY & INNOVATION**

Culture, arts and creativity have acquired a central place in the debate on urban development as means of successfully combating social exclusion and marginalisation of deprived neighbourhoods

→A multi-faceted and ambiguous debate

Culture, arts, creativity, innovation are terms which are often used interchangeably in local initiatives and, to some degree, in the broader context of EU discourse and policy towards a Knowledge Based Society

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## **TERMINOLOGY (2): ARTS, CULTURE, CREATIVITY & INNOVATION**

**Complex & intertwined meanings in academic and policy discourses**

### **Culture**

- Collective sensitivity, collective social imaginary
- Perception, practice or habit
- “Cultures of change”, “Communicative culture”, Urban culture...

### **Art**

- Distinguished between high art and (bottom-up) social art
- Spontaneous artistic expression (rap music, graffiti, urban arts, popular events)

### **Bottom-up Creativity**

- Not only related to arts and culture
- Creativity in the sense of inventiveness, imagination
- Socially innovative practices, material practices of survival etc.,
- Creativity as a social process



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## METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES (1)

Qualitative methodologies and relevant methodological tools have been used in KATARSIS for the study of bottom-up creative strategies

- a “practice-rooted” approach in order to provide an overview of different experiences
- involvement of a group of practitioners in innovative initiatives from many EU countries
- interactive techniques (guided focus group session based on physical co-presence, informal discussion, direct exchange)



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## METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES (2)

It is methodologically opportune to promote qualitative research and multiple ways to disseminate its findings, while at the same time “invent” shared learning processes which favor interaction among different environments and initiatives, and thus contribute to the production of new knowledge.

**In this way, practice oriented research and qualitative methods not only enrich academic knowledge but also contribute to develop connections, new ideas and practices among those involved in the field.**

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## **THEMES / LINES OF ANALYSIS**

Four sets of generic attributes are used to structure the analysis and might contribute to policy development

**1. Artistic & cultural dimension and the special role of the artist**

Pivotal role: artists as initiators / catalysts in “bottom-linked” projects

**2. Relations with the neighborhood/ locality – democracy and empowerment**

Territorial bonds, linkages with locality, openness & empowerment

**3. Internal organizational forms**

Democratic procedures, networking, bottom-up coalitions and exchanges

**4. External relations**

Relations with public/private institutions, autonomy vs. dependency, “incorporation”



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## **CONTEXT, INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK, PATH-DEPENDENCY, “TRANSFERABILITY”**

These "sets" of generic attributes used in the analysis of SCS become tangible through the specificities of each particular initiative and acquire different forms in relation to each sociopolitical context.

**Differences in socio-political histories and systems, in welfare state regimes and in civil society formation co-determine if, where, when and how socially innovative initiatives develop in each case.**

Contextual differentiation and multiplicity might be a valuable asset for research and policy-making.



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## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 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 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. In this way it is better to mobilize in favor of ‘bottom-linked’ rather than ‘bottom-up’ activities.