

INCLUSION

PAPER



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1 - INTRODUCTION : WHY AN INCLUSION PAPER?

Game On is a Key Action 3 (KA3) Erasmus+ project that develops educational tools for youth workers, educators, teachers to promote **social inclusion** and **critical thinking** through game design learning and educational activities in our local communities.

It has been observed that Game On needs a deeper contextualisation about the needs, challenges and realities of social inclusion as it's one of its special focuses. To address this demand, the consortium impulsed a process of diagnosis and research on the matter.

Hence, this paper serves as both a background document that will have a value of orientation on the meaning of inclusion and as a summary of the situation in the different countries that can support and guide the work done on game design.

In order to produce a simple, meaningful and useful research about the state of art of inclusion realities in each country, two main sources have been used : a desk research on the topic has been carried out by each partner and by the University of Barcelona and a mini entrance questionnaire was submitted to training courses' participants (the focus has been reduced to only young people). Over all, three main elements were highlighted : the main inclusion challenges and discrimination issues, the development of a spirit of critical thinking and the initiatives taken by practitioners to address these challenges and needs.

2 - BACKGROUND ON WHAT IS INCLUSION, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CRITICAL THINKING

2.1 - DEFINITION ACCORDING TO THE GAME ON PROJECT

As a start, let's dive into what the consortium of Game On agreed on as being "inclusion", "social inclusion" and "critical thinking".

I - Inclusion:

In the framework of Game On, inclusion is understood as the promotion of the participation of all people involved in a learning process, removing participation barriers for individuals and groups with lesser opportunities, and taking diversity among them as an asset.

II - Social Inclusion:

Social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society: improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those diverse or disadvantaged on the basis of their identity or condition.

We can talk of social inclusion in Game On when the inclusion, applied and promoted among the beneficiaries of the project activities, is creating the conditions for a wider inclusion impact on other individuals and groups (through actions of dissemination and cascade multiplication of learning processes) that are fostering and improving their capacity to take part in society in the future.

III - Critical thinking:

For the promoters of this project, critical thinking means to widen the perspective of individuals' realities, questioning one's beliefs, ways of acting and given realities.

To promote critical thinking, we assume the central role of empathy, we recognize the importance of questioning oneself and the others, and we consider diversity as a value to be managed by providing a safe space for sharing and exchanging.

2.2 - UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA RESEARCH ON SOCIAL INCLUSION, SOCIAL EXCLUSION, AND POLICIES TO INNOVATE

As we are trying to develop innovative solutions, through game design, to increase social inclusion and reduce social exclusion within the target of young people, it seems important to discuss the meaning of these terms and the framework for policies to be developed.

You will find below the main highlights of a deeper research done by the University of Barcelona which you can find in the [annex](#).

I - Social exclusion

First used in France in the seventies, the concept of social exclusion started to be incorporated in Europe in the 80's as an alternative to the discourses of poverty, but the actual meaning is more complex. Poverty usually refers to a lack of material resources, while social exclusion is usually understood as a synonym of disaffiliation, isolation or loss of social solidarity related with urban poverty (Bachiller, 2010).

For Picker (2017):

Social exclusion and social inclusion refer to material, symbolic, and existential deprivation (social exclusion) or absence thereof (social inclusion). They are processes taking place at the limit of access to resources, solidarity, belonging to and participation in a community.

- **What causes social exclusion ?**

Subirats i Humet et al. (2005) cite three main axes generating social exclusion:

1. An increasing fragmented society. Several migration patterns have generated vulnerabilities at several levels (legal, economic, relational and family levels).
2. Fragmented and precarious labour market. With complex employment trajectories, combining continuously combining employment and unemployment.
3. A welfare state with big gaps of protection. The contributive income maintenance schemes are not designed to those employment patterns. The educational and housing support is also failing for vulnerable youngsters.

- **What are the effects of social exclusion?**

According to Avramov, exclusion is associated with social stigmatization, blame and isolation with consequences of self-esteem, a feeling of not belonging and not having been given a chance to be included in society. As a social process, exclusion is not having access to opportunity and social rights to specific individuals or groups. (Avramov, 2002, p. 26-27).

- **How much exclusion ?**

A better measure may come from the perceived social exclusion. The last Eurobarometer available on this issue, from 2016 noted an increment for all EU citizens, but especially among youth. 57% of European young people felt that youth has been marginalized and excluded in their country from economic life and policies. (Fernández Maíllo, 2019). This figure is substantially higher, more than 78%, between Southern countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Lower figures appear in Denmark, Germany (less than 31%).

II - Social inclusion

The EU sees social inclusion as 'a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in the economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. Social inclusion also ensures that vulnerable groups and persons have greater participation in decision-making which affects their lives and that they can access their fundamental rights' (The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy of the Council of Europe, n.d.).

III - Policies for social inclusion

Subirats & García Bernardos (2015, p. 102-105) offer an interesting framework to social innovation policies for social inclusion. Some of the key issues to think in any policy that aims for a real change are:

1. To have clear objectives. What are the detected vulnerabilities? Are we aiming for the causes? Are we reducing the vulnerability factors or strengthening their capacities or empowering the groups?
2. Do we have specific criteria for diagnostic, implementation and evaluation of the actions we are starting? Are those consistent among them? Are we considering the actors involved?
3. Are these actions sustainable?
4. Are we developing social interventions using social actors? Especially in the process of design, implementation and evaluation, using procedures that strengthen the social and community links.
5. Are we using creative, innovative or new approaches?
6. Are we connecting the similar experiences of other spaces or social groups?
7. Are these innovations transferable and scalable?

3 - YOUTH INCLUSION AND CRITICAL THINKING IN GAME ON CONSORTIUM'S COUNTRIES

Based on a [mini-entrance-questionnaire](#) composed of 3 questions, the results given by the participants of a training course delivered in the frame of Game On have been harvested and analyzed.

For each country, the main elements are structured in the following way :

- Main challenges related to youth inclusion in your area
- Most common factors of discrimination of young people
- Critical thinking: elements that help develop it among young people
- Practices and strategies used in education centers to improve youth inclusion and critical thinking
- Institutions in your area that work on youth inclusion and critical thinking

I - [Italy](#) (*Sardegna/Piemonte*)

II - [Spain](#) (*Barcelona area*)

III - [Lithuania](#) (*Vilnius area*)

IV - [Serbia](#) (*Novi Sad area*)

YOUTH INCLUSION AND CRITICAL THINKING

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Italy

(Sardegna/Piemonte)

Main challenges related to youth inclusion in your area

Young people are continually confronted by the severe conditions of the labour market, conditions that have led to unprecedented youth unemployment rates and consequent brain drain, as well as a more general decrease in expectations regarding the full realisation of their ambitions. Following an interesting study of Elisa Lello that applies well to the outcome of the two surveys young Italians of today risk falling into disillusionment. The tendency is to downsize the scope of their dreams and aspirations even before verifying if they could withstand the impact of reality, just to avoid the risk of disappointment.

In this respect, it is argued that within this generalised loss of trust towards the future, the educational style has deeply changed so that the exhortations to the young – to make them study and commit themselves – are increasingly based on threats rather than on the promise of what they can conquer in their future (Benasayag and Schmit, 2004).

The future has been presented to younger people as a land of hardship and danger, rather than as one of hope and desire.

In the survey, the groups have been clearly identified as challenges for inclusion of youth in the areas:

1. The difficulty to mainstream their dreams and identify their references.
2. Being able to motivate young people in concrete actions that could lead to a change..
3. promote cooperation and discussion
4. Working environment
5. Lack of opportunities for upscale their competencies and skills
6. The related not easy access to the resources

Young people are a scarce resource in terms of their numbers, yet their position in the labour market is highly precarious, and the quality of work they generally receive is uncertain. The structure of the opportunities offered to youths render their transition into adulthood even more difficult, when compared to previous generations. In general, young people are disadvantaged by difficult school-to-work transitions.

Often, the tools available to young people (handed down over time and shaped by historical and cultural factors) are not sufficiently developed and capable of generating a constructive comparison with what is different and which consequently becomes incomprehensible and evaluated as inferior.

At this specific historical moment, certainly marked by the "pandemic" -masks-distancing situation, finding activities that stimulate young and very young people to become curious, participate, and exchange with others is becoming very complicated. My challenge is to create new opportunities for young people, to structure EXPERIENCES together with them that can make them feel free, together, accomplices of their own growth experiences.

Most common factors of discrimination of young people

Inequality has intensified in Italy in the past ten years. The gaps between the rich and the poor have widened and there are more people in extreme poverty.

Lower income groups do not appear to have benefited from the sluggish economic recovery of recent years. Nationally, the proportion of families living in extreme poverty has nearly doubled to 6.9% (2017), with the worst figures (10.3%) being recorded in southern Italy. Average net wealth per capita has declined to €87.451 from €88.625 in 2014. 20.3% of the population, about 12,235,000 people, are at risk of poverty (2017). In 2018 the wealth of the 21 richest Italian billionaires listed by Forbes was equal to the all the assets held by the poorest 20% of the population.

Gender inequalities are persistent: only 38.7% of young women with a high school diploma are employed, compared to 50.8% of men; only 43.3%

women receive an income from work (employed or self-employed) compared to 62% of men – the difference of 18 points is the third highest in the EU after Malta and Greece. There are sharp differences between northern and southern Italy: the female employment rate in the north of 59.4% is close to the EU average while that of the south, 32.3%, is far below. 85% of single-parent families in conditions of extreme poverty are headed by a female wage-earner. Employed women earn 24% less than their male counterparts and self-employed women earn 44% less (2014). All these indicators are worse in southern Italy. The historical divide between the Mezzogiorno and the North remains deep and structural. Other geographical inequalities are also important, between rural areas and small villages and urban centres. Territorial inequalities go hand in hand with environmental ones, especially in areas where weaker social groups are more exposed to agricultural and industrial pollution.

The main factors that have been identified in the training session about Inclusion are the following ones:

1. Physical appearance
2. Belonging to a social class;
3. Being migrant or of a migrant family
4. Disability (physical or mental)
5. Sexual orientation.

Today's society, the victim of a high rate of ignorance, often falls back into the usual stereotypes and prejudices that inevitably spill over to the new generations.

Especially in this particular historical period, the so-called fragile conditions are representative of the various situations in which inclusion has been severely tested: disability and DAD, limited access to resources and disadvantaged economic conditions, etc.

Critical thinking: elements that help develop it among young people

Accordingly the responses that we had collected in the two groups, it is clear that family should be the most important place where critical thinking should be developed and trained. Social movements and social networks are the second in this list. Group and dialogue contexts are indicated as those that most favour the growth of a critical and reflective spirit in complex contexts. Religion is quite controversial as it has been evaluated as high and low context where critical thinking could be developed.

It is quite clear, also from the debriefing that the core of this part is to provide opportunities to the youth to do experiences (practices) in which they put themselves in the condition of upscaling their skills and competencies of debate, see the realities from different perspectives and eventually argue being able to find arguments.

Practices and strategies used in education centres to improve youth inclusion and critical thinking

1. Create contexts in which to meet and have multidisciplinary experiences with experts to then analyse together and develop critical thinking
2. Create aggregation centers that have a playful, training and educational purpose. Where you can develop your creativity and there is ample room for socialization.
3. Make young people participate in the political choices that concern them
4. Among the new generations, critical thinking could find its development through the promotion of spaces (virtual and otherwise) of sharing and comparison in which inclusive, comprehensive and adaptive communication can take place. For example a platform or app that allows a comparison between cultures. On the part of the younger generations there is a profound frustration in not being able to significantly affect decisions that directly and indirectly affect their future. In my opinion it is necessary to promote greater involvement of young people with respect to issues concerning the territory and the opportunities it can offer them, through greater participation in decision-making processes at various levels. Work more with digital to be able to explore the generative potential that this offers and become aware of its limits.
5. The Sustainable Sardinia platform is developing a study on educational poverty in Sardinia. Involving young people in medium-long, well-structured projects with trained teachers. Create an attitude to critical thinking, transforming projects into experiences in which young people are actively included, make decisions, make choices, feel like protagonists.

Institutions in your area that work on youth inclusion and critical thinking

The group was coming from very diverse areas in Italy, so I would say that at general level (national) it depends a lot on the target group of belonging or to which youth can be seen.

- Dipartimento Politiche Giovanili: works on Servizio Civile Universale and promotes national grants for promoting inclusion at national level;
- There is an extensive legislation about inclusion in the schools:
<https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/italy/legislation-and-policy>

There are several programmes that are supporting youth and their families in terms of social assistance and/or financial assistance (as Reddito di Cittadinanza, etc), or there are specific programmes dedicated to migrants, but there is not a national strategy for inclusion.

Regarding critical thinking, there aren't specific lines or strategies that are addressed in a direct way the topic: this part is mainly left to third sector and non formal education initiatives and most of them are under EU programmes as Erasmus + or Citizenship programmes.

Bibliography and resources:

<https://iris.unica.it/retrieve/handle/11584/289817/395663/Intro%20italian%20youth%20published.pdf>

<https://cris.unibo.it/retrieve/handle/11585/762800/646252/9781351039949%20%281%29.pdf>

<https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/8.3.a-report-IT.pdf>

Spain

(Barcelona area)

Main challenges related to youth inclusion in your area

Barcelona City Hall has an [Inclusion and social inequalities' reduction strategy](#) that considers the main challenges for youth inclusion to be: having the basic needs covered, quality employment, access to housing, eliminating stigmatisation and social segregation, and reducing inequalities.

During the local training module testing, we worked mainly with two targets: teachers and youth workers.

According to the 15 high school teachers participating in the local training courses in Barcelona, the main challenge related to youth inclusion consists of the removal of obstacles and barriers that block the participation of young people. Those teachers consider that young people face difficulties in more basic needs, such as economic difficulties, low rate of employment, low salaries that make it difficult to emancipate, high rents... All these barriers have the effect that young people need to address them before they have the time and energy to participate more (politically, culturally, socially). Apart from that, teachers also identified a lack of "culture of participation" in the majority of young people, only having a small minority that are socially participative. Another challenge to address is diversity seen as an obstacle and not as an asset.

The more heterogeneous group of participants in the second local training course in Barcelona (5 people who work on different areas of non-formal education), identify the main challenge for youth inclusion to be the diversity management. The differences in cultural background, origin and socioeconomic context are considered to be the main pitfalls related to youth inclusion in the work environments of those youth workers.

Most common factors of discrimination of young people

The last [Barcelona Health Survey](#), carried out in 2016, identified that 26.1% of teenagers in Barcelona (13-19 years old) claimed to have suffered discrimination (by sex, country of origin or ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability) in the last 12 months. The percentage of women who claim to have suffered discrimination (30.7%) is higher than that of men (21.7%).

The 15 high school teachers participants in the local training courses in Barcelona consider disability to be the most common factor of discrimination of young people, followed by the physical appearance.

According to the 5 youth workers participants in the second local training course in Barcelona, the belonging to a certain social class is the most common factor of discrimination, followed by having a migration background, the physical aspect, and disability.

Critical thinking: elements that help develop it among young people

According to the 15 high school teachers participants in the local training courses in Barcelona, the elements that have the most positive impact in developing the critical spirit of young people are the formal education system, followed by social movements and social networks.

The group of 5 youth workers participants in the second local training course in Barcelona also perceive the formal education system to be the main element that helps develop critical thinking among young people, together with the families.

In both cases, the interaction between groups of young people who are different (cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic contexts...), visibilizing diversity and taking it as an asset, is considered positive for critical thinking development.

Practices and strategies used in education centres to improve youth inclusion and critical thinking

Practices and strategies shared by participants in both local training courses in Barcelona:

- Promote that young people acquire the habit of questioning the information received and consider other scenarios.
- Express (as teacher/educator) the rejection to all kinds of discrimination, acting as a model and making this act as an example.
- Use different role-play games to work on specific discriminations (ex: discrimination of migrants playing "Inmigrantes Clandestinos"), followed by a reflection and conceptualization.
- For disabilities, organise experiential activities in which participants have some functional diversity, followed by a reflection and conceptualization.
- If the discrimination is related to a certain minority group, for instance the Roma community or LBTGQ+ community, organize a presentation by one person belonging to that minority who explains the situation in first person.
- Use the methodology of "Learning & Service", in which young people make a project to cover a certain need socially relevant. This way, participants reflect on the importance of volunteering and improve their participation spirit.
- Address the topic of fake news, either with a presentation, a debate or playing a game that touches this topic.

Institutions in your area that work on youth inclusion and critical thinking

- Barcelona City Hall, by having an [Inclusion and social inequalities' reduction strategy](#). This strategy includes different plans, specific guidelines and concrete actions. It includes the "Barcelona Anti-Rumours Network", Decidim (digital participatory platform), REC social coin, and grants to cover basic needs, among other programs.
- Generalitat de Catalunya, the regional government, has the program "Garantia Juvenil" that is specifically designed to support young people to find jobs.
- NGOs, who usually specialized in a certain type of discrimination (can be gender discrimination, LBTGQ+, Roma community, etc.)

Bibliography and resources:

1. Estratègia d'inclusió i de reducció de les desigualtats socials de Barcelona 2017-2027, Ajuntament de Barcelona
2. Enquesta de salut de Barcelona 2016, Agència Catalana de Salut

Lithuania

(Vilnius area)

Main challenges related to youth inclusion in your area

The most recent and comprehensive account of main challenges related to youth inclusion in Vilnius city can be found in the Vilnius city “Families’ and childrens’ welfare development action plan for 2021-2025”. It refers to several essential problems backed up with research and testimonies of education, social care and youth work professionals.

In Vilnius city, the most challenging situation is with “unmotivated” young people, especially in the age group from 25 years old. Unmotivated youth are considered to have fewer opportunities, do not work or study, are more likely to commit crimes, **experience social exclusion**, do not have safe spaces to develop, do not actively participate, live in families at social risk that experience social, cultural, economical and educational crises.

The percentage of young people involved in committing crimes rises with age especially in the age group between 19-23 years. The transition from obligatory formal education to a new life stage is a critical moment for taking decisions about further life choices.

Families at risk, including young people need to have access to social skills development services, training on problem solving and overcoming conflict situations.

Young people, including those with fewer opportunities, have to have opportunities to participate in group activities to discover themselves and develop skills. Group activities need to create a safe environment that will contribute to confidence building, self-esteem and emotional resilience.

There are two major challenges that young people of 16-18 age face: lack of activities that address their needs and interests and difficulties to find income generating activities. Those working with young people have particular difficulties reaching out and engaging with 16+ young people who are not involved in education or in employment.

Some young people in the age group of 18-24 study, but do not take part in civic life. This group often lacks information about opportunities to get involved in interesting and meaningful activities for them.

Others in this age group do not even study or work. They are most difficult to reach for those providing education, youth work, and social services to young people.

There is a great lack of data about young people in the age group of 24-29. They often lack meaningful engagement activities, legal advice on employment and social security, financial literacy, health system information, family relations, non-formal activities, volunteering, entrepreneurship. Young people lacking access to such opportunities and services often tend to disengage in not only work-related activities, but also social and civic life.

Most common factors of discrimination of young people

Some of the discrimination factors can be found mentioned in the Vilnius city “Families’ and childrens’ welfare development action plan for 2021-2025”

Young people in the age 14-16 for the first time try various intoxicants, psychotropic substances. After some time active consumers become apathetic, lose interest in everything, their achievements and active participation in society decrease. They may drop out from schools. Then they face difficulties to re-enter, since schools are not flexible. There are not many alternatives elsewhere. Parents also play a vital role, especially when they do not take part in the life of a young person.

There is a great lack of non-formal education and extracurricular activities offered to young people above 16 years old, especially for young people who are not in education or employment. Foster young people face challenges of needing to leave care systems when they turn 18 years old. Some open youth work centres do not create sufficient access and support for socially excluded young people or those having fewer opportunities.

Most of the non-formal education and youth work services target young people under 18 years. Young people who are above 24 years lack long-term opportunities to participate, engage, and further develop. They fall “in between” the two worlds: being youth and adults at the same time. Formal education system stops serving them, non-formal education and youth work services do not prioritise this “young adults” group and adult education has very narrow offers, mostly focused on employment and qualification training activities.

Critical thinking: elements that help develop it among young people

The analysis of main education and youth policy documents suggest that “critical thinking” or “consciousness” are explicitly referred to in several competence models that inform and guide educational and youth work programmes.

For example “critical thinking” and “consciousness” are briefly referred to in the European key-competence model. In the area of personal, social and learning to learn competence it is referred to when describing a holistic education that contributes to development of a conscious individual who is fully able to act on their own and with others. It also appears mentioned within the cultural awareness domain, yet limited to arts and cultural express in a creative notion. “Critical thinking” appears in the entrepreneurship, digital competence areas.

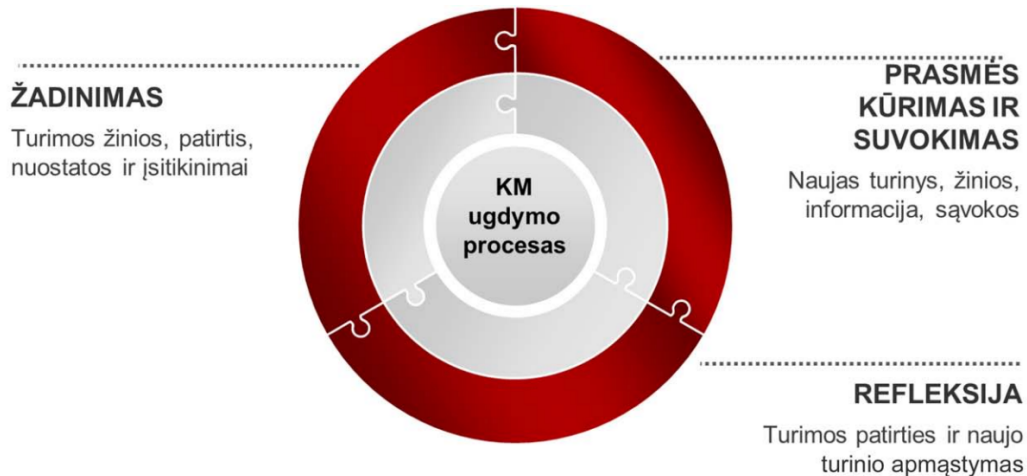
The formal education programmes in Lithuania include attention to personal, social, civic competences development. The civic competence development has two, in some ways opposing dimensions: national identity building and civic engagement elements. In youth work practise the latter is emphasised more than the nation-building dimension. Social competence development includes the “social consciousness” element and refers to capacity development to be able to create meaningful relations with others and engage in wider social and cultural contexts. Discovery competence also includes a “critical thinking” element.

Youth work and non-formal education programmes also mention “critical thinking” in their essential policy documents. EU Youth Strategy also explicitly mentions “critical thinking” as one of the important elements toward employment and civic engagement.

The “Critical thinking education training manual for students and youth organisations’ members” suggest the following non-formal and critical thinking educational principles:

- voluntary participation;
- inclusion of all who want (accessibility);
- responding to personal needs and development aptitudes;
- socially relevant competences development;
- learning from own experience;
- acting together in the group, in an open and free environment;
- learning through practice (theory through practice);
- reflection on individual, group, organisation's activity

It offers the following critical thinking education scheme that is based on the game-play:



Practices and strategies used in education centres to improve youth inclusion and critical thinking

The "Critical thinking education training manual for students and youth organisations' members recommends developing critical thinking skills using experiential learning practice where game play is used as a learning method. Educational games as a tool can be used to learn and discover yourself. Game play helps to relax, reduces physical and emotional tension. During the game play it is possible to look at the problems and questions from another perspective, and this encourages creativity and effective problem solving of various questions. Also, game play gives joy and shared experience to make people come closer.

During the game play people feel alive, authentic, spontaneous and joyful, feel included and engaged with the game development. Such authentic experiences create foundations for creative and intimate relations among people. Games are activities that promote inclusion and foster creativity. While playing with others, participants strengthen interpersonal relations.

In order to make games purposeful and contribute to development of various life skills, including critical thinking, it is vital that game use would follow several other features: have an education goal, learning from experience principle, and educators support.

There are various education games, however in order to ensure their impact on young people's development we need to ensure that activities have a good level of challenge, they are beneficial, enjoyable and attractive.

Besides, the game play enables group members to get engaged voluntarily into the learning process, take responsibility for their own activity. This makes every group member able to feel relevant, contributing to the group work, because everyone participants by expressing their thoughts and ideas.

Institutions in your area that work on youth inclusion and critical thinking

Open and street youth work are seen as two complimentary services that engage with young people at risk. A network of open youth work centres and spaces attracts a growing number of visitors every year. Three street youth work organisations, VšĮ Pal. J. Matulaičio socialinis centras, VšĮ Vilniaus socialinis klubas ir VšĮ „DUKU“ deliver high quality outreach services to young people spending most time in the streets.

Awareness raising, critical consumption, information about consequences and educational activities on the themes of drugs and other substances, for example “Be safe lab” project. It is crucial to work with family-parents, caretakers for them to learn more about drugs, inform about young peoples’ communication, how to recognise consuming behaviours, inform how to communicate with young people on these healthy life themes.

Bibliography and resources:

1. Families’ and childrens’ welfare development action plan for 2021-2025, Vilnius city council, 2021
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3. Critical thinking education. Training manual for students and youth organisations’ members, VšĮ Šiuolaikinių didaktikų centras 2014

Serbia

(Novi Sad area)

Main challenges related to youth inclusion in your area

There is a noticeable change in relation to the inclusion of young people with less opportunities in terms of the emergence of young leaders from different vulnerable groups, who are actively working on self-advocacy and reducing barriers to inclusion of young people from vulnerable groups, but these are still individual examples that do not represent systemic solutions. These examples are important because they build a new image and perception of young people from vulnerable groups as active citizens who make an important contribution to the development of our society and at the same time represent a good model for peers by showing that different social processes and topics are a space where their contribution is important, as well. We have examples of young people with disabilities, young LGBT people or young people from rural areas who are involved in various social processes and show that their contribution is crucial not only on topics of personal interest but also on general social issues. At the same time, a large number of young people from vulnerable groups still do not receive adequate support and there is not enough systematic work to remove barriers to their active participation.

When we talk about educational inclusion as one of the preconditions for later inclusion in society and social processes, and where the process of educational transformation began more than 10 years ago, a large number of young people are still outside of the education system for various reasons.

For example, on the topic of education of young people with disabilities, the First Alternative Report on Youth issued by the Belgrade Center for Human Rights in 2020 states that the application of educational laws and inclusive practices is very underdeveloped, and there is still a tendency to exclude students from the education system, especially when it comes to children and young people in social care institutions. Due to this, it is justifiably considered that children with disabilities are discriminated against on the basis of disability, and children placed in institutions are additionally discriminated on the basis of the fact that they do not live in the family home. The same report on inclusive education of Roma youth mentions that the percentage of children from Roma settlements attending secondary school is only 21.6%, and only 14.9% of girls and 28% of boys. When it comes to young people at risk of poverty, the data are as follows - among the poorest, only 74% of children attend high school (68.2% of boys and 83.3% of girls). The percentage of young people in Serbia aged 19 to 24 with higher education is 39%, but the fact that the rate of completion of higher education is low is worrying.

Therefore, the data from the Alternative Report in 2021 is also important, where as many as 53% of young people were ready to leave the Republic of Serbia for economic reasons. In relation to that, young people from socially vulnerable groups often have no way to leave the country, but try to survive despite not exercising their rights. Their invisibility within society due to reduced opportunities makes it impossible for them to reach even those measures designed to improve the position of young people.

Although youth organizations are the main organizers of inclusive activities and bearers of an inclusive approach, similar obstacles from the formal education system exist in non-formal education. Youth organizations also have significantly less resources for work. Also, the cooperation of institutions and civil society organizations on the topic of inclusion is still not

sufficiently developed and there is no partnership for the benefit of young people from vulnerable groups. According to a survey from 2017, which examined the needs and capacities of youth organizations and for young people to improve work with socially sensitive groups of young people, only 28.57% of organizations have social inclusion as one of their priorities, and at the same time almost every fourth organization (24.24 %) answered that it does not deal with vulnerable groups of young people. Another important insight is that youth organizations in their documents or descriptions often state that they are open to the inclusion of different young people, but without a systematic approach to reach young people from socially vulnerable groups. Also, there are no provided resources to equalize inclusion and competencies of those who work with young people to really reach out and adapt their work to youth from socially vulnerable groups. The described circumstances are further aggravated by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which significantly jeopardizes the funding of civil society organizations.

Additionally, during the Covid 19 pandemic, living conditions and circumstances became more complex for youth coming from rural areas or young people from socially disadvantaged families. The inability to access the internet or the lack of computers largely made it impossible for them to be included in various online contents aimed at young people, and they were also excluded from receiving various types of emotional and psychological support during the pandemic. One of the important initiatives that emerged at that time was the collection and distribution of laptops to children and young people from socially disadvantaged families so that they could follow classes and maintain communication and contact with peers. In this way, only children and young people who are already included in the formal education system received support, which again left a number of them excluded from the possibility of receiving assistance.

Youth participation in Serbia is generally low, and young people state that the most common reasons are that they do not have enough information about opportunities for participation (34.5%). In relation to this data, there is no analysis of the extent to which young people from vulnerable groups were included in the study, so there is no cross-section of data on recognizing participation as an important mechanism, but also on targeting various barriers so that the participation of young people from socially vulnerable groups could be achieved.

Up to now, the participation of young people with disabilities is recognized exclusively by addressing topics directly related to the socially vulnerable group to which they belong to, without a broader awareness of youth organizations, formal education system and society as a whole, that active participation of young people from vulnerable groups can make an important contribution to all topics related to social development and the sustainable future of the community.

Most common factors of discrimination of young people

Return to traditionalism of society and strengthening of right-wing movements in Serbia leads to the creation of an environment in which discrimination against those who are different from the majority is more and more present.

According to the results of the KOMS survey, as many as 66% of young people said that they were exposed to some form of discrimination. Almost the same percentage states that they were exposed to discrimination on the basis of age, which is relevant data for the position of young people in general. About a third of young people were victims of violence motivated by some characteristics such as - race, nationality, gender, identity, sexual orientation and the like. Young people from vulnerable groups such as young people with disabilities, young Roma,

young members of the LGBTIQ population, women and the poor, and more recently young migrants, are most exposed to discrimination.

While discrimination against young people with disabilities in our society is reflected in the principle of compassion and humanitarian attitude towards them, which makes them passive and deprives them of the opportunity to take care of themselves, aggression and violence against Roma and LGBT youth and migrants increases.

Discrimination against LGBT youth is a particular paradox in a country whose Prime Minister is a declared lesbian, and who has not made any effort to improve systemic discrimination against LGBT people during her term.

Strong social and political divisions have led to young people feeling discriminated against in terms of political affiliation or political (in)eligibility, which reflects the inability to exercise various human rights if they do not belong to the ruling political structure - inability to find employment, protection from violence, participation in decision-making processes, etc.

An important data from the research of the organization Sociativa, which depicts the risks of discrimination against young people, is the fact that, unlike demographic processes in the general population, is reduction of the number of children in Serbia, in the social protection system the number of children is continuously growing. In the past ten years, the number of children in the social protection system has increased by 15.8% and this figure indicates an increasing risk of discrimination due to poverty that children and young people may experience.

According to the same research, the recommendations in relation to some of the recognized forms of systemic discrimination are:

- It is necessary to provide accommodation services in shelters for members of the LGBT community, because according to current regulations and procedures, shelters are a refuge given only for women victims of heterosexual partnerships, which is discrimination against members of the LGBT community.
- Introduce, develop and provide more supported housing services for young people leaving the social protection system who are currently at increased risk of poverty as soon as they leave the social protection services
- Introduce personal assistance services throughout Serbia, and not only in particular cities and municipalities, which would equalize opportunities for participation in various activities of young people with disabilities. In relation to this, it is important to note that personal assistance does not recognize young people with mental disabilities as young people for whom this service is available.

Youth organizations that provide support to young people from different vulnerable groups, despite the existence of different laws, are often not able to support young people in protection against some forms of discrimination, such as:

- Lack of adequate services continuously supported by the state, which would eliminate unequal treatment of young people who are systematically discriminated against,
- a system of beliefs in society that sees affirmative and incentive measures towards certain socially vulnerable groups, most often Roma, migrants and women, as discrimination against the majority population and arouses revolt, resistance and increases social distance and exclusion

Critical thinking: elements that help develop it among young people

Young people in Serbia mostly learn and adopt critical thinking through the system of non-formal education. At the same time, not all activities created for the purpose of non-formal education of young people are aimed at strengthening critical thinking among young people.

NAPOR, an association that brings together youth work organizations, recognizes the development of critical thinking among young people as one of the outcomes of youth work. In the curriculum for the education of youth workers, NAPOR focuses on the acquisition of competencies of youth workers for working with young people on critical thinking development. In its research *"The impact of non-formal education in youth work on the acquisition of competencies for better employability of young people"*, NAPOR states that through youth work activities young people develop very important competencies applicable in different situations. In this way they improve proactivity, creativity, critical thinking, ability to see the bigger picture and communities.

Factors that contribute to the learning process in youth work, and thus the development of competencies and critical thinking are the active participation of young people and involvement in all phases of work, from design to implementation of activities; work on practical examples and personal experience; work in small groups to develop a sense of closeness and encourage learning from others and learning, as well as personal development. In this way they also develop a sense of security and trust in learning that supports young people to be open to innovation; and the values that are promoted and encouraged in the activities. One of the important aspects of learning through the non-formal education for young people is the possibility of self-assessment in terms of skill development as well as identifying the aspects that can be improved.

For a long time, the system of formal education did not focus on critical thinking of children and youth. In 2019, the British Council, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, launched the School for the 21st Century project, where critical thinking is one of the priorities, with passionate staff involved in the project. After a national training attended by a large number of school employees in 2019, the project was transferred to the online format due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The project identified the following competencies related to critical thinking - Those who think critically:

1. ask questions that encourage higher-order thought processes;
2. collect evidence from valid sources;
3. express their opinion in an argumentative manner;
4. consider a different perspective;
5. solve problems;
6. understand the causes and consequences;
7. think independently;
8. make decisions based on evidence

The project provides working material for teaching staff, and an important aspect of the project is the development of critical thinking through all subjects that children and young people attend. Its purpose is to connect different subjects in order to further stimulate reflection, connect facts and strengthen critical awareness of the world around them.

In addition, the media in general could be a resource for educating young people on this topic. However, apart from smaller and less accessible media such as "Lice Ulice" magazine, media with greater coverage that are available to a wider circle of young people do not deal with the topic of critical thinking or encourage it, but survive precisely because of uncritical attitudes of society. This is largely related to the covert control of the media by the ruling regime, which is recognized as one of Serbia's problems in the process of joining the European Union.

Practices and strategies used in education centres to improve youth inclusion and critical thinking

An important aspect for improving the conditions for inclusion and critical thinking of young people is the parallel work on educating and empowering those who work with young people and on motivating and encouraging development of new practices offered to young people.

In relation to the education of those who work with young people, the long-standing program of the Belgrade Center for Human Rights, "Live Inclusion", which continuously educated people in various forms about working with young people from vulnerable groups with a focus on individual groups that face exclusion and discrimination more often than others: young women, young people of different sexual orientations, young people with disabilities, members of national minorities, among whom Roma youth are particularly recognized as vulnerable. The five-day course was conducted from 2012 to 2017 and was attended by over 220 coordinators and representatives from the Office for Youth. As a product of the course, a *Guide for Working with Vulnerable Youth Groups* and an *EDU Package for Capacity Building and Advocacy* have been created. These resources deal with the legal framework on non-discrimination, current practices in the youth sector and the integration of diversity.

NAPOR has organized training for its member organizations on two occasions to work with NEET youth, with a focus on NEET youth who additionally belong to one of the vulnerable groups.

Common to all training that involve young people from socially vulnerable groups is encouragement of the field work, abandoning standard spaces while working with young people and developing a value system where inclusion is recognized as necessary for the development of the local community and society as a whole.

When it comes to inclusive practices for working with young people from vulnerable groups, many of them were developed because of this programme.

An important aspect in the development of inclusion and critical thinking is the use of culture in the inclusion of young people from vulnerable groups. Thus, the group "Let's ..." set new standards in the inclusion of young people from vulnerable groups through the *Off frame* art festival. The festival brought together organizations and authors involved in socially engaged theatre practices. It sought to promote examples of practices that involve participants in theatre work or themes of those who are disadvantaged in a particular social context. All festival programs are free for the audience, and the performance spaces are accessible to wheelchair users. The plays are translated into Serbian sign language, as well as a narration for blind and partially sighted people, which is an indicator of how the content is inclusive for people with disabilities. For several years in a row, the organization "Let's ..." has implemented programs that use the Living Library methodology, through which it has empowered and encouraged young people for future volunteer engagement at the festival itself. "Let's..." also

educated other youth organizations and youth for the implementation of the Living Library methodology in their work.

Common to inclusive practices and work on developing critical thinking through available content is:

- young people are treated as a resource, and their differences enrich them and are important for their learning and development
- certain skills, knowledge, abilities and values can be developed only in an inclusive environment and it is an opportunity for young people from vulnerable social groups to express their potential and to create the conditions for young people to learn from their peers who are different from them.
- experiential learning in a hopeless environment is an indispensable form of learning and in addition to the development of empathy allows young people to question their attitudes and beliefs and adopt a new value system
- in order for the activities to be truly inclusive, it is necessary to structure them so that each youth member gives their contribution and the relationship between young people is equal. That means there are no young people doing something "for" some other young people, and none of them is there exclusively "to get support".
- when including young people from vulnerable groups, caution must be taken that they are not subjected to discrimination or exclusion as a parallel process in the learning process of young people from the general population
- working with young people to teach them to take responsibility for themselves and for the conditions in their immediate and wider environment
- open socially sensitive topics with young people, work on various taboos with the awareness that young people in their families can get the opposite information and teach them how to deal with these circumstances

Institutions in your area that work on youth inclusion and critical thinking

The Umbrella Organization of Youth of Serbia (KOMS) is a representative body of youth in Serbia, which brings together 95 member organizations. KOMS recognizes the needs of young people, promotes, encourages and supports youth organizations, supports cooperation between public institutions and young people, promotes youth participation in decision-making processes, analyzes public policies and expresses opinions and statements about them. KOMS has an *Inclusion Council* within its structure. // www.koms.rs

The National Association of Youth Work Practitioners (NAPOR) is a professional and representative association whose mission is to create and develop conditions for quality assurance and recognition of youth work in order to develop the potential of young people and youth workers who contribute to the local community and society. NAPOR has developed: standards for 3 levels of occupations in youth work, quality standards of youth work and a mechanism for their implementation, as well as a mechanism for validation of previously acquired competencies, defined a Code of Ethics in youth work and also created a Council for Ethical Issues. // www.napor.net

The Association of Youth Offices (KZM Association) is an association of cities and municipalities of the Republic of Serbia that have a youth office and are actively involved in the development of local youth policy, currently has 108 members. // www.asocijacijakzm.org

The Ministry of Youth and Sports performs state administration tasks related to: system, development and improvement of youth policy, protection of youth interests and assistance to young people to realize their interests, including young people from various socially vulnerable groups // www.mos.gov.rs

The Belgrade Center for Human Rights (BG Center) is an association of citizens interested in improving the theory and practice of human rights. In addition to publishing, legal and other types of activities, the Belgrade Center for Human Rights is also organizing a human rights school for young people. // www.bgcentar.org.rs

In addition to the above, there are organizations that work with young people from vulnerable social groups or specialize in supporting a specific vulnerable group of young people or conduct activities that reach different young people and include them in educational and volunteer activities for young people in general: organizations working with young people with disabilities mental disability, with Roma, migrants, several organizations working with LGBT youth as well as women's feminist organizations working to support young women

There are also various programs that encourage critical thinking among young people, free Women's Studies, an alternative education program where young people active in civil society organizations or those involved in higher education learn to think critically about the world through a gender perspective. However, the program is insufficiently known to young people, and is often perceived as a program that develops a value system that is not in line with the traditional values of society in Serbia.

Educational institutions are also working to encourage inclusion and critical thinking, most often in cooperation with civil society organizations, and these partnerships are created at the national (British Council and Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development) or local level (schools and local civil society organizations).

The Ombudsman's Office has had a Youth Council for several years, a body that has had the role of educating peers on human rights, social inclusion and protection against discrimination. Currently, the Youth Council is not functioning, but through various activities, the education of young people on these topics by the Ombudsman's office has continued.

Cultural institutions and alternative cultural centers work on the social inclusion of vulnerable groups of young people, on the topic of social inclusion through art, on encouraging critical thinking, especially when it comes to dealing with the past and reconciliation after the wars during the 90's.

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What do we mean by social exclusion and inclusion?

Jordi Sancho

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Introduction

We are trying to develop innovative solutions, through game design, to reduce social exclusion and increase social inclusion in young people. We need then, to discuss the meaning of social exclusion, inclusion and some framework for the policies to develop.

1. Definition of social exclusion

First used in France in the seventies, the concept of social exclusion started to be incorporated in Europe in the 80's as an alternative to the discourses of poverty, but the actual meaning is more complex. Poverty usually refers to a lack of material resources, while social exclusion is usually understood as a synonym of disaffiliation, isolation or loss of social solidarity related with urban poverty (Bachiller, 2010).

For Picker (2017):

Social exclusion and social inclusion refer to material, symbolic, and existential deprivation (social exclusion) or absence thereof (social inclusion). They are processes taking place at the limit of access to resources, solidarity, belonging to and participation in a community.

The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy of the Council of Europe definition (n.d.) is:

"...social exclusion refers to processes that prevent individuals, groups or communities from accessing the rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of society; responsible for social exclusion are often structural forces, such as: laws, public policies, institutional practices, organizational behaviours, and prevailing ideologies, values and beliefs. The list of young people at risk of social exclusion can be extended almost ad infinitum and it includes young people with disabilities, ethnic, sexual and religious minorities, homeless youth or young offenders etc. It is important, however, to be receptive to: (i) the emergence of new groups of young people at risk of social exclusion; (ii) the local particularities of exclusion for some groups; (iii) the intersectional nature of discrimination.

A more simple definition, by Burchardt et al., (1999, p. 230) points that:

An individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society and (b) he or she does not participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society.

This definition requires defining "normal activities", which those authors point in 5 levels:

1. **Consumption activity:** being able to consume at least up to some minimum level the goods and services which are considered normal for the society. This dimension is closest to more traditional measures of poverty or deprivation (Townsend 1979; Mack and Lansley 1985) and, as such, is a key component of social exclusion.
2. **Savings activity:** accumulating savings, pension entitlements, or owning property. This is thought to be important first as a form of participation in growing prosperity; homeownership in particular is the aspiration of many and has come to be a symbol of social inclusion. Second, savings activity is important as a way of providing security for periods outside the labour market.
3. **Production activity:** engaging in an economically or socially valued activity, such as paid work, education or training, retirement if over state pension age, or looking after a family. It thus includes employees, the self-employed, pensioners, students, parents (including single parents) and carers of other dependents. It would exclude the unemployed, long-term sick or disabled who are not working, and the early-retired. From the point of view of the individual, the importance of this dimension lies in the self-respect which being engaged in an activity valued (or at least legitimated) by others is usually taken to generate. For society as a whole, individuals engaged in productive activity contribute economically, while those who are not may act as a drain on resources.
4. **Political activity:** engaging in some collective effort to improve or protect the immediate or wider social or physical environment. This would include voting, membership of political parties, and membership of national or local campaigning groups, the importance of which is emphasized by Barry (1998).
5. **Social activity:** engaging in significant social interaction with family or friends, and identifying with a cultural group or community. The availability of emotional support close at hand, and the opportunity to feel and be part of a broader community, are

considered basic human needs. Conversely, isolation was identified as a key factor early in the development of the idea of social exclusion ("les isolés" in France: see Evans 1998), and the denial of cultural rights emerged as significant in international studies (Gore and Figueiredo 1997)." (Burchardt et al., 1999, p. 232)

1.1. The problem with using social exclusion

The main critics for the use of this concept are: (1) It is not very clear to define, and it is difficult to conceptualize; (2) It is a morally charged concept, as it may suggest in some cases that people are to blame for their exclusion (Sealey, 2015).

1.2. What causes social exclusion?

Subirats i Humet et al. (2005) cite three main axes generating social exclusion:

1. An increasingly fragmented society. Several migration patterns have generated vulnerabilities at several levels (legal, economic, relational and family levels).
2. Fragmented and precarious labour market. With complex employment trajectories, continuously combining employment and unemployment.
3. A welfare state with big gaps of protection. The contributive income maintenance schemes are not designed to those employment patterns. The educational and housing support is also failing for vulnerable youngsters.

1.3. What are the effects of social exclusion?

On a general level, it produces multipliers or layers of inequality (gender, ethnic-cultural, digital, familiar, age related, etc.) that are being attended to in a more subjective or individual way. Personas may have less common identities to promote solidarity.

According to Avramov, exclusion is associated with social stigmatization, blame and isolation with consequences of self-esteem, a feeling of not belonging and not having been given a chance to be included in society. As a social process, exclusion is not having access to opportunity and social rights to specific individuals or groups. (Avramov, 2002, p. 26-27).

On individual terms, Park & Baumeister (2015) explains that individuals excluded can be deprived of social connection and experience depression, emotional distress and low-self-esteem. A lack of social belonging may also produce physical problems (on blood pressure, poor sleep, etc.). When people are rejected, they also show a strong desire to avoid being rejected again, and then social exclusion leads to defensive social responses, making it difficult to access greater social networks and new friends.

1.4 How much exclusion

As referenced before, a concept that is difficult to define, it is almost impossible to measure. It is not easy to define the amount of exclusion. The European analysis of risk of social exclusion (in Europe 2030 objectives) uses the AROPE (At Risk of Poverty and Exclusion) that, by definition, is

a measure of vulnerability or poverty, not social exclusion. It adds people with (1) Severe material deprivation rate; (2) At risk of poverty rate; and (3) Low work intensity indicator (Eurostat, 2021).

A better measure may come from the perceived social exclusion. The last Eurobarometer available on this issue, from 2016 noted an increment for all EU citizens, but especially among youth. 57% of European young people felt that youth has been marginalized and excluded in their country from economic life and policies. (Fernández Maíllo, 2019). This figure is substantially higher, more than 78%, between Southern countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Lower figures appear in Denmark, Germany (less than 31%).

2. Definition of social inclusion

The EU sees social inclusion as ‘a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in the economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. Social inclusion also ensures that vulnerable groups and persons have greater participation in decision-making which affects their lives and that they can access their fundamental rights’ (The European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy of the Council of Europe, n.d.)

3. Policies for social inclusion

Such a broad definition also requires a wide range of actions, on several levels. Galabuzi & Teelucksingh (2010) cite policies and actions should be developed at levels of individuals, communities and institutions. At the same time, different actions can be developed depending on the different actors involved, such as:

1. National and Regional Government
2. Municipalities
3. NGO's
4. Professionals, formal and informal educators, etc.

3.1 Who does what

If we take the 5 levels of “normal life” that fail (Burchardt et al., 1999), it easy to see the different levels of responses:

Activities of normal life	Requires	Actors and responsibilities	Main level
Consumption	It may require regulations and adaptations of welfare support and income maintenance	Usually, public administrations on a national and regional level.	Institutions
Savings			
Production	Help vulnerable	Local administration,	Institutional,

	people to access valued activities (education, paid jobs, etc.)	educational and social sectors. (schools, universities), NGO'S, professionals.	communities, individuals.
Political	Participation in political parties, campaigning, local activities.	Municipalities, NGO's	Communities, individuals.
Social	Increase emotional support through social interactions, identifying with a group, community or cultural group.	NGO's, professionals.	Individual, communities.

This project is aimed at NGO's, professionals and educational sectors, and it seems coherent then to aim at activities on the valued activities (production), political participation and social support, through individuals and communities.

3.2 Framework to social innovations on social inclusion

Subirats & García Bernardos (2015, p. 102-105) offer an interesting framework to social innovation policies for social inclusion. Some of the key issues to think in any policy that aims for a real change are:

1. To have clear objectives. What are the detected vulnerabilities? Are we aiming for the causes? Are we reducing the vulnerability factors or strengthening their capacities or empowering the groups?
2. Do we have specific criteria for diagnostic, implementation and evaluation of the actions we are starting? Are those consistent among them? Are we considering the actors involved?
3. Are these actions sustainable?
4. Are we developing social interventions using social actors? Especially in the process of design, implementation and evaluation, using procedures that strengthen the social and community links.
5. Are we using creative, innovative or new approaches?
6. Are we connecting the similar experiences of other spaces or social groups?
7. Are these innovations transferable and scalable?

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