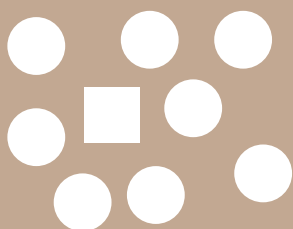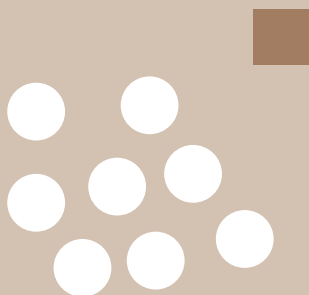# Social Exclusion, Social Inclusion and Social Innovation. An overview of their conceptualization and relations

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Notes.

This article aims to provide a literature review of some of the key concepts used in the P-CUBE project and game development: Social Exclusion, Social Inclusion and Social Innovation.

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CONTENT

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1. Introduction

This article aims to provide a literature review of some of the key concepts used in the P-CUBE project and game development: Social Exclusion, Social Inclusion and Social Innovation. These three concepts, though intrinsically linked, are as diverse as the academic debates they have fostered and their application at the institutional and policy development level. Obviously, the feat of summarizing several decades of debates concerning three different but often related concepts in the same article is not an easy one, but we feel that an attempt to do so is necessary in order to better contextualize the development of the case studies dealt with through the P-Cube educational game.

The article will be divided into four sections, which, like these concepts, are closely related to each other. The first section will be devoted to the concept of social exclusion, which will be analyzed starting with a brief introduction on its emergence in Europe in the 1970s and its subsequent spread and development. Some of the main definitions, model debates and limitations concerning this concept and its applicability will also be analyzed. The second section will focus on the concept of social inclusion, again starting with some of the main definitions and the link with the concept of social exclusion. The third section will consider the concept of social innovation, again analyzing the birth and evolution of this concept, possible definitions and the main paradigms developed in Europe. In the fourth and final section, we will re-examine what conception of each of these terms inspired the development of the case studies and 'missions' featured in the game.

1.1 Contextualizing social exclusion

The concept of social exclusion emerged in Europe in the mid-seventies, more specifically in France, in 1974 when the Secretary of State for Social Action of that time, René Lenoir, referred to the status of some groups of people excluded from the services provided by the French welfare state (Rawal, 2008). According to Lenoir (1974), these groups represented around the 10% of the French population and were people with mental or physical disabilities, individuals grappling with suicidal ideas, older adults with restricted mobility, children who suffer from abuse, individuals fighting against substance addiction, those with a criminal background, single parents, households navigating multiple difficulties, marginalized individuals on the outskirts of society, and other individuals who deviate from societal norms.

Since its first appearance, the concept of social exclusion has largely evolved over time and has been influenced by various academic, political, and social developments.

Silver (1995) and Sen (2000) contributed to the concept by identifying numerous aspects from which people may be excluded, as for example employment, property, education, credit or land, housing, healthcare, basic or prevailing standards of consumption, equal citizenship and legal rights, participation in democratic processes, access to public goods, identification with the nation or dominant ethnicity, and the experience of humanity, respect, fulfillment, and understanding.

In this sense one of the novelties of the concept it's the fact that, differently for example from the concept of poverty or deprivation, it goes beyond the pure material aspects linked to the lack of something. In this sense, Sen (2000) underlines the importance of focusing on the role of relational features of deprivations.

Although interconnected, poverty and social exclusion are distinct concepts. Poverty primarily refers to a state of economic deprivation, whereas social exclusion encompasses both a result and a process. It is possible for individuals to be socially excluded without experiencing economic disadvantages. Factors such as disability or sexual orientation can lead to exclusion, even in the absence of poverty.

Levitas et al. (2007) noted that social exclusion is often differentiated from poverty based on its multi-dimensional, relational, and dynamic nature. Unlike poverty, which is typically measured in monetary/material terms, social exclusion adopts a more comprehensive perspective on human development. It recognizes that exclusion extends beyond financial limitations and encompasses various aspects of an individual's life and relationships.

The historical progression of the concept underscores the importance of recognizing various types of exclusion and enacting inclusive social policies that foster fairness, inclusivity, and the removal of barriers that hinder that all individuals have equal opportunities for active participation in society.

In the 1990s, the European Union, following the lead of the European Commission, replaced the

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concept of poverty with that of social exclusion as a fundamental component of its social policy. This shift aimed to address the limitations of poverty in capturing the multifaceted challenges individuals face in contemporary society. In the following years, the UE has extensively incorporated the concept of social exclusion into its policies and initiatives, recognizing its significance in addressing inequalities and fostering inclusive societies. The concept of social exclusion gained global attention and has been increasingly used beyond the European context, also thanks to its adoption by other supranational organizations and in particular the UN. Indeed, the United Nations has consistently emphasized the significance of social exclusion as a key concern in its declarations and reports, including the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development[1] or the 2000 Millennium Declaration[2], recognizing the need to create an inclusive society, eradicate poverty, and promote social integration and sustainable development (United Nations, 1995, 2000).

The widespread adoption and diffusion of the social exclusion concept beyond its original European context, which is rooted in a specific historical, social, and economic framework and welfare state model, has sparked concerns about its potential to redefine established approaches to social issues and impose a predominantly Northern perspective on Southern realities, as highlighted by Kabeer (2000) and Silver (1995). Saith (2001), question the suitability of the social exclusion framework in lower income developing countries, citing contextual factors such as informal employment, limited social protection, and inadequate education. However, Sen (2000) contends that the concept of social exclusion, with its focus on relational dynamics, offers valuable insights into the common processes of poverty and capability deprivation across different regions and stages of development, encompassing issues such as the marginalization of migrants that impact both developed and developing nations.

Moreover, the concept itself is not without ambiguity, as its definition has evolved over time, initially referring to individuals struggling to conform to mainstream society and later expanding to include additional groups such as school dropouts, unemployed youth, and immigrants. This dynamic nature complicates the precise understanding and application of social exclusion (Aasland and Flotten, 2000).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the scope, constraints, and potential applications of the social exclusion concept, the next subsection summarize some relevant definitions and models developed through academic discussions and from international institutional actors.

1.2 Social exclusion: Definitions, models, and debates

One key debate revolves around the definition and conceptualization of social exclusion. Scholars discuss the varying definitions, dimensions, and scope of social exclusion, including the extent to which it is distinct from poverty or inequality. As stated by (Silver 1994, 536):

Clearly, the expression is so evocative, ambiguous, multidimensional, and elastic that it can be defined in many different ways. Yet the difficulty of defining social exclusion and the fact that it is interpreted differently according to context and time also can be seen as an opportunity.

Silver (1994) pointed to three different paradigms of social exclusion linked to as many conceptions of what social exclusion means based on different theoretical but also ideological approaches turn related to specific contexts. The first is the 'Solidarity Paradigm', inspired by French republicanism, which sees social exclusion as a result of the weakening of social bonds between individuals and society rather than a consequence of economic inequalities and the impact of cultural and moral boundaries on the division of society. It recognizes that exclusion can both threaten and strengthen social unity and that integration is the opposite of exclusion. To address social exclusion, the state should promote moral integration through 'insertion', which may involve assimilation into the dominant culture or foster intercultural exchange, depending on the approach chosen.

The 'specialization paradigm' is influenced by Anglo-American liberalism and suggests that the social structure is based on voluntary exchanges among independent individuals who compete in a free market. The division of labor and the development of specialized economic roles in society can foster the marginalization and exclusion of specific

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1 Available at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_CONF.166_9_Declaration.pdf

2 Available at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_55_2.pdf

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individuals or groups. To address these exclusionary consequences, the specialization paradigm advocates for policies and interventions that strive to ensure equitable opportunities for employment, training, and education. The ultimate objective is to decrease inequalities and promote social inclusion within specialized economic systems.

The 'monopoly paradigm' argues that social exclusion is related to the emergence of monopolistic groups that, by controlling resources through exclusive networks, are able to amass huge fortunes, acquiring a high social status and therefore also the capacity to greatly influence political power and policy design. Drawing on the works of Weber and Marx, this paradigm sees the social order as being imposed by these monopolistic groups through coercive hierarchical power relations, which they control through their economic, social, and political power.   Therefore, exclusion arises from the interplay of class, status, and political power, benefiting those who are included while simultaneously dominating and marginalizing the excluded. According to this approach the guarantee of social rights and inclusive citizenship can at least mitigate the consequences of social exclusion. Silver (1994) demonstrates how different paradigms have influenced the interpretation and discourse within European institutions over time. Notably, while earlier official documents, like the Community Charter of European Social Rights of Workers, emphasized the importance of solidarity, more recent documents have increasingly highlighted the centrality of social rights to overcome social exclusions.

Levitas (1998), contends that the monopoly paradigm encompasses a moral discourse centered on redistribution, seeking to foster inclusivity through citizenship rights and striving for equality. Nevertheless, this notion of utilizing rights as a catalyst for societal transformation has encountered resistance from neo-conservative factions and commentators who prioritize the discourse of responsibilities.

Later, based on an analysis of the policies developed by the Labour Party in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, Levitas (2005) proposed an alternative set of three categories, in turn based on specific discourses, to understand social exclusion:

1. The *Redistributionist* discourse, influenced by the monopoly paradigm of Silver (1994), sees poverty as the main cause of social exclusion and aims to address power imbalances and redistribute wealth through measures like increasing social security benefits and progressive taxation.

2. In contrast, the *Moral Underclass* discourse, rooted in neoliberal thinking, blames individuals for their own exclusion and emphasizes personal responsibility. It criticizes welfare benefits as fostering dependency.

3. The *Social integrationist* discourse recognizes both individual responsibility and structural factors in contrasting social exclusion, with a particular emphasis on promoting paid work as a tool of integration.

A possible definition proposed by Levitas et al. (2007, 9) underline the complex and multidimensional nature of social exclusion:

> *Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.*

Another relevant work on the concept, limits and application of the concept of social exclusion has been done by the Social Exclusion Knowledge Network established as part of the WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (CSDH).

In the final report entitled 'Understanding and Tackling Social Exclusion' Popay et al. (2008, 2) define social exclusion as follows:

> *Exclusion consists of dynamic, multi-dimensional processes driven by unequal power relationships interacting across four main dimensions—economic, political, social and cultural—and at different levels including individual, household, group, community, country and global levels. It results in a continuum of inclusion/exclusion characterized by unequal access to resources, capabilities and rights which leads to health inequalities.*

The economic dimension focuses on the presence and allocation of essential material resources like income, jobs, housing, land, working conditions, and means of making a living, and it evaluates the accessibility of these resources and their equitable distribution among individuals and communities. The political dimension examines how power dynamics within relationships create unequal distribution of rights, as defined by laws, constitutions, policies, and practices. It includes the conditions in which these rights are exercised, considering also access to fundamental needs like water, sanitation, shelter,

transportation, power, and essential services like healthcare, education, and social protection. This dimension sheds light on the disparities in opportunities to engage in public life, express one's desires and interests, and obtain necessary services. The social dimension encompasses the intimate connections and networks that provide support and solidarity, including friendships, family bonds, community ties, and involvement within social movements, which foster a sense of belonging. The cultural dimension considers whether and how diverse values and ways of life are accepted. It ranges from a complete acceptance and celebration of diversity to extreme situations of stigma and discrimination (Popay et al. 2008).

Another possible definition of social exclusion that consider its multidimensional features is proposed by Gonzalez et al, (2010, 54):

Social exclusion may refer to material needs (poverty, lack of housing) but also social (limited access to education and health), political (no citizenship, no access to decision-making) and existential (no access to self-expression and creative capacities) deprivation.

A relational approach to social exclusion, which acknowledges its multidimensional and dynamic nature rooted in unequal power dynamics across cultural, economic, political, and social dimensions, offers more comprehensive advantages for investigation and action.

The adoption and emphasis on the concept of social exclusion vary in different regions. According to Popay et al. (2008, 36) in Europe, where the concept was initially developed, it has been adopted by the European Union with a gradual shift towards social inclusion. In Sub-Saharan Africa, international aid agencies gradually introduced this concept although alternative discourses like poverty, vulnerability, basic needs, and sustainable development remain more significant. In Southeast Asia, development agencies and the Asian Development Bank combine social exclusion with a focus on multiple dimensions of poverty, capability, and resource enhancement, aligning with longstanding development discourses and practices in the region. In South America, social exclusion is embedded within a 'social management of risk' discourse promoted by World Bank in some countries.

Another ongoing question pertains to the practical application and utilization of this concept, along with the development of indicators and tools that can quantify social exclusion. Challenges arise in terms of indicator selection, their relevance, and capturing the multidimensional and qualitative aspects of social inclusion (Labonté et al 2012). Due to the multifaceted nature of social exclusion, data for its measurement are typically sourced from multiple and distinct origins with varying scopes and objectives. Indeed, while national population censuses and standardized surveys, such as labor force surveys, demographic and health surveys, multiple indicator cluster surveys, living standard measurements, and selected opinion polls, are available for numerous countries and offer some degree of comparability, each of these sources is tailored for specific purposes and does not alone enable comprehensive international assessments of social exclusion.

From this brief exploration of influential works on social exclusion, it becomes evident that there is not a singular, universally accepted definition or use of this concept. Instead, social exclusion gave rise to different interpretations and has sparked various interpretative frameworks. One of the most influential outcomes of the debates around social exclusion, especially in Europe, has been the development and use of the 'mirror' idea of social inclusion as a tool to overcome and contrast social exclusion. Therefore, the next section considers the concept of social inclusion, how it is related to social exclusion, and how has been increasingly adopted as a central concept in the development of social policies.

2. From social exclusion to social inclusion?

Social inclusion refers to the process of ensuring that all individuals or groups, regardless of their social or economic circumstances, have equal opportunities to participate fully in society. It involves creating an inclusive society where everyone feels valued, respected, and able to contribute meaningfully.

The concept of social inclusion gained prominence in the policy discourse as societies became more aware of the exclusion and marginalization faced by certain individuals or groups, such as those experiencing poverty, discrimination, or disabilities. According to the United Nation (2010) social inclusion entails enhancing the opportunities and terms of participation in society for individuals facing disadvantages based on various factors, such as age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or socioeconomic status. Social inclusion is both a

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process and a goal, encompassing the removal of barriers to participation and the proactive facilitation of inclusionary measures.

The European Union has also played a significant role in promoting this concept adopting policies and frameworks to address social exclusion by promoting social inclusion. Following the Lisbon European Council's request in March 2000, Member States and the Commission were directed to take significant actions towards eliminating poverty by 2010. It was agreed that Member States should coordinate their efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion through an open method of coordination, which involves shared goals, national action plans, and common indicators. The objective was to foster more ambitious and effective policy strategies for social inclusion. As a result, Member States have developed a second generation of National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion, commonly known as NAPs Inclusion. In the 'Joint Report on Social Inclusion'[3] published in 2003 that summarized the results of the examination of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (2003-2005) the different concepts of Poverty, Social Exclusion, and Social Inclusion are defined as follow:

Poverty: People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalized from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted.

Social exclusion: Social exclusion is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from job, income, and education opportunities as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often feeling powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day to day lives.

Social inclusion: Social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in 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. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights.

Other international organizations like the World Bank have recognized the significance of social inclusion for sustainable development. In the report entitled *'Inclusion matters. The foundation for a shared prosperity'* (2013, 3-4) the World Bank defines social inclusion both as:

"The process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society" [4]

and *"The process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society.*

As for many other institutions, also for the World Bank the concept of social inclusion is strictly linked to social exclusion. Indeed, on the World Bank website just after the definition of social inclusion there is the following reference to social exclusion:

In every country, some groups confront barriers that prevent them from fully participating in political, economic, and social life. These groups may be excluded not only through legal systems, land, and labor markets, but also discriminatory or stigmatizing attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions. Disadvantage is often based on gender, age, location, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), among other factors.

The most revealing part of the world bank's interpretative approach to the concept of social inclusion is found a few paragraphs later:

Social inclusion is the right thing to do, and it also makes good economic sense. *Left unaddressed, the exclusion of disadvantaged groups can be costly. At the individual level, the most commonly measured impacts include the loss of wages, lifetime earnings, poor education, and employment outcomes. Racism and discrimination also have physical and mental health costs. At the national level, the economic cost of social exclusion can be captured by foregone gross domestic product (GDP) and human capital wealth.* ***Exclusion, or the perception of exclusion,***

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3 https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/final_joint_inclusion_report_2003_en.pdf
4 https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/114561468154469371/pdf/Inclusion-matters-the-foundation-for-shared-prosperity.pdf

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may cause certain groups to opt out of markets, services, and spaces, with costs to both individuals and the economy. [5]

The concept of social inclusion, like that of social exclusion, gives rise to different kinds of interpretations and definitions that focus on the issue of access to resources but also participation in social life and recognition of rights. In many cases, social inclusion is conceptualized as a mirror and a form to overcome social exclusion. According to some authors, this implies a problem because social inclusion is defined unclearly and often based on an equally ambiguous and broad concept of social exclusion. As illustrated for example by Cameron (2006, 397):

much of the discussion of social inclusion is conceptually dominated by exclusion – social exclusion is the datum point against which social inclusion is both empirically measured and conceptually defined.

This criticism is connected to the question of measurability (criteria, indicators, etc.) of social inclusion. Moreover, in the context of globalization, the questioning of the territorialized form of governance based on a well-defined space - the nation-state - makes it increasingly difficult to understand and define:

- Who are the excluded and from what they are excluded?

- How to include them?

- In what kind of identity and with what kind of public policies?

According to Cameron (2006, 403):

what prevents the terms becoming merely banal and/or redundant is their historical and geographical contingency. When and where such concepts are applied, implicitly or explicitly, matters. It matters because their powerful boundary-setting role has a determinant effect on the societies within which they are mobilized.

Therefore, it is crucial to contextualize, also geographically and spatially, the definitions and applications of the concepts of social exclusion and inclusion.

This section briefly analyzed the trajectory, conceptualization and some of the theoretical as well as practical limitations of the concept of social inclusion, also considering its relationship with the concept of social exclusion. The next section focuses on the concept of social innovation, again analyzing how it is linked to different interpretations and definitions as well as its relationship with the concepts of social exclusion and inclusion.

3. Social Innovation: Countering social exclusion and fostering social inclusion?

The other central concept in this literature review is social innovation. The idea of social innovation has deep historical roots, but the term itself became more widespread and understood during the 20th century. Scholars including, for example, Mumford (2002) and Moulaert et al (2014) link the origins of social innovation to works by thinkers such as Benjamin Franklin, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim or Joseph Schumpeter who addressed issues of social change and development without, however, using the term social innovation. Indeed, it has only been in recent decades that the concept of social innovation has emerged as a specific discipline of study.

As with the concept of social exclusion, the term social innovation began to be used more systematically in Europe in the 1960s in the context of the social uprisings that had affected many countries on the continent. Chambon, David and Devevey (1982) then related social innovation to the pressure exerted by various changes and crises going through society, which intensified old social needs, and fostered the emergence of new ones, calling into question the ability of both the market and the state to respond to societal change.

Social innovation has thus been recognized as a driving force for tackling complex social challenges and promoting positive change in society. Mumford (2002, 2) defines social innovation as:

the generation and implementation of new ideas about how people should organise interpersonal activities, or social interactions, to meet one or more common goals.

According to Moulgan (2006) in an increasingly

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5 https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion

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globalized world, social innovation can be about introducing new ideas, processes, products, or organizational models to address issues such as poverty, education, or access to resources. Distinguishing it from business innovation he relates social innovation to:

innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social. Business innovation is generally motivated by profit maximization and diffused through organizations that are primarily motivated by profit maximization (Mulgan 2006, 146).

Social innovation can be the result of the efforts of individuals but also of collective organizations. Mulgan therefore identifies three main actors that can promote social innovation: individuals, social movements, and organizations. Although the figure of the social entrepreneur is generally used, Phillips et al. (2015) emphasize that social innovation is an interactive process that takes place through a relationship between people, organizations and individuals who can continuously influence its development. Thus, it becomes central the relational and continuous learning capacity of the social innovation actors, as well as the ability to relate to the institutional and governance system(s).

As in the case of the concepts of social exclusion and inclusion, there is no single definition of social innovation, because the concept has been on the crest of a wave in academic debates as well as in the world of governance for years and is therefore used and applied in different contexts. Moreover, the concept itself is constantly evolving. As illustrated by Moulaert et al (2014), social innovation refers to significant changes in society concerning the evolution of its ethical structures and norms. Furthermore, the concept of social innovation can be linked to those of social exclusion and inclusion and can be considered as a tool to guarantee and promote social inclusion and therefore overcome social exclusion. For example, Moulaert et al (2014, 16) associate social innovation with:

finding acceptable progressive solutions for a whole range of problems exclusion, deprivation, alienation, lack of wellbeing, and also to those actions that contribute positively to significant human progress and development. SI means fostering inclusion and wellbeing through improving social relations and empowerment processes: imagining and pursuing a world, a nation, a region, a locality a community that would grant universal rights and be more socially inclusive.

Social innovation is also tightly related to power relations, institutional and governance processes and therefore to different political perspectives. In a context of international, economic, social, political and ecological overlapping crises, the concept of social innovation remains a tool for social movements and organizations engaged in progressive struggles to promote social inclusion and change. In this sense, another possible definition of social innovation that considers its potential in providing empowerment and challenge power relations is provided by Gonzalez et al. (2010, 54):

social innovation occurs when the mobilisation of social and institutional forces succeeds in bringing about the satisfaction of previously alienated human needs, the relative empowerment of previously silent or excluded social groups through the creation of new 'capabilities', and, ultimately, changes in the existing social – and power – relations towards a more inclusive and democratic governance system.

However, as it can be seen from a progressive point of view, this concept can also be used to justify processes that could instead maintain or even increase social exclusion. An example in this sense according to Moulaert et al. (2014) is the subsumption of the concept of social innovation by the so-called 'caring neoliberalism' to refer for instance to practices of 'rationalization', downsizing, deregulation, privatization and consequently dismantling of the welfare state. There emerges the necessity to consider the bearing of political ideological alternatives in evaluating social innovation initiatives.

3.1 Alternative approaches to social innovation

As argued by Martinez et al (2019), two main approaches can be identified that have developed the concept of social innovation based on different visions of society, on how social changes occur and, on the influence and relationship of social innovation processes and actors with power and the institutional system. The first approach is related to a vision centered on technological progress and innovations as a possible answer to the multidimensional and complex challenges posed to contemporary societies. The protagonists of this type of social innovation are often individuals - social entrepreneurs - or private enterprises that aim to respond to the emergence or growth of new needs by simultaneously creating and seeking new business opportunities. An example of this can be the development of new technologies,

with the difference that to be considered social innovations these must also produce added value for society as a whole. The focus with regard to social innovation is placed on the results achieved, be it a product or a new type of service, and how these contribute to providing answers to the needs of individuals while benefiting the wider society. This vision of social innovation does not imply a questioning of current forms of power or institutional organization, and in this sense, it seems more compatible with the existing economic and political model. This vision or approach to social innovation, which Martinez et al (2019) define as managerial or technical, was inspired but also applied by Mulgan (2006, 2007, 2017) who was also director of NESTA, the United Kingdom's innovation agency for social good. NESTA is an independent organization founded in 1998 with the aim of promoting social innovation, research, and development through investment in creative, scientific, and technological projects.

In an article published in February 2017 and titled *'Social innovation - the last and next decade'* [6]Mulgan assesses that many of the different strategies to promote social innovation, in the decade between 2006 and 2016, have made significant progress. In fact, new innovation-focused funding sources, more open markets for social solutions, incubators and accelerators for promising models, empowerment of the users involved, and new institutions for systemic change and adaptation of new technologies have been created, albeit unevenly.

Leadbeater (1997) in his work for the British think tank DEMOS entitled *'The rise of the social entrepreneur'* emphasizes the central role of social innovation in responding to the crisis and restructuring of the welfare state through a wave of social innovation is redefining the very essence, methods, and structure of social welfare. The transition to an 'active welfare' model that enhances people and activates social capital is fostered by social entrepreneurs who can develop innovative, flexible, and inclusive welfare services. The role of the state and local institutions is therefore to simplify the regulatory framework and involve social entrepreneurs in the development of public policies.

As illustrated by Mulgan (2017) the concept of social innovation has been enormously successful and widespread. Many governments have established social innovation funds and adopted specific programs. The European Commission has included social innovation in various programs, such as the European Social Fund and the Horizon 2020 scientific research program. In addition, the United Nations international non-governmental organizations, and research centers are also applying the concept of social innovation in various fields.

And if not alternative, a yet significantly different approach to social innovation is the one developed mainly by Moulaert, (2010) and Oosterlynck et al. (2013) and which Martinez et al. (2019) define as institutional-territorial. In this approach, social innovation is considered not so much as an outcome in terms of new products or services, but as a process, produced by collective rather than individual actors. Moreover, the focus shifts further towards the role of institutions and social innovation is understood as a dynamic process affecting the existing institutional system and balance of power.

Considering the urban development dimension, Moulaert et al (2007) propose, for example, social innovation as a possible alternative to the dominant neoliberal model that supports market-led urban development. Social innovation as an alternative view of urban development focuses on satisfying human needs and empowering communities through innovative governance. This alternative view integrates various discourses and strategies for rebuilding and re-socializing cities and neighborhoods.

As illustrated by Blanco et al (2017), the SINGOCOM project funded by the European Commission and coordinated by Moulaert (2010) has contributed significantly to the development of an alternative view of social innovation, which they call the 'grassroots' approach. According to this approach, developed also by Oosterlynck et al. (2013) social innovation goes or should go beyond the creation of products or services to meet specific needs and becomes a process of empowerment to respond to social exclusion. Indeed, through collective processes of learning, empowerment and mobilization, social innovation aims to redistribute power between social groups, levels of government and sectors of society, benefiting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and organizations. This approach focuses on local forms of social innovation that combat social exclusion and promote social inclusion, harnessing the transformative potential of neighborhoods as sites of social change and empowerment (Blanco et al, 2017).

Another fundamental aspect of social innovation is how it relates to the grassroots welfare initiatives that

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6 Available at: https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/social-innovation-the-last-and-next-decade/

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have developed and spread as a response to the crisis and the dismantling of traditional welfare state structures, especially in time of crises and austerity (Cruz et al, 2017). Grassroots welfare experiences often run into different kinds of limitations that Martinelli (2013) categorizes as economic, legal, and universalistic. The risk is that these initiatives, which often develop at a micro and local level, do not have access to the necessary resources to make the qualitative leap that would allow them to be integrated into institutional welfare programs. Several authors (Moulaert et al 2013 and 2022, Kazepov et al., 2020, Oosterlynck et al., 2020) have therefore theorized through the bottom link approach to social innovation, a direct intervention by institutions to support bottom-up welfare initiatives from material, legal and visibility points of view.

Bianchi (2022), integrating the literature on the bottom-linked approach and the empowerment of grassroots welfare initiatives, suggests that bottom-up welfare initiatives can contribute to the diversity and innovation of welfare, while at the same time fostering the empowerment and direct participation of the communities that promote these initiatives. By promoting diversity and innovation in welfare provision, and empowering communities, grassroots initiatives can play a significant role through a bottom-up approach that supports the integration of grassroots initiatives into the broader public welfare administration.

As illustrated by Bianchi (2022) referring to the bottom-link approach:

> According to this approach, state support for grassroots social innovation initiatives should be inscribed within a broader vision that rethinks the governance of welfare institutions, where the relationship between these initiatives and public welfare is defined in a more imbricated way: together they co-produce, co-learn and negotiate more democratic welfare institutions (Oosterlynck et al., 2020).

The bottom-linked approach to social innovation emphasizes the importance of the involvement of directly interested/affected people, and the need for institutional support to ensure the durability of such initiatives. Social actors contribute to develop internal governance mechanisms and relationships with institutions, which in turn must be able to offer different types of support to grassroots proposals and initiatives. In this sense Garcia and Pradel argue that (2019 108):

> A bottom-linked approach can involve allocating

> budgets, forming teams and providing support through legislations. A further step is the constitution of social rights, although social innovation may not always achieve this. Outcomes can be recognition and support from public authorities for innovative civic practices, or recognition of cultural diversity or empowerment of the socially excluded. Other possible impacts of bottom-linked social innovation on policy-making can lead to changes in: (1) the definition of a policy problem; (2) policy-making processes; and (3) policies and their results. Most of these processes often take place at the local level.

However, as analysed by a literature recently developed mainly, but not exclusively, in the field of urban studies, there is also the risk that these initiatives, whose potential is recognized through the bottom-link approach, are co-opted by jeopardizing their autonomy and their potential to empower the people and communities involved (Arampatzi, 2021, Bianchi, 2022).

The bottom-link approach to social innovation is also seen as a possible antidote or cure to some of the 'failures' of representative democracy linked to the assertion of the neoliberal discourse and the subsequent questioning and gradual dismantling of the welfare state (Oserlink et al, 2020).

As explained by Moulaert in his introduction to the book by Osterlink et al (2020), the rise of mixed economies and the welfare state that he identifies with the period of the Glorious Thirties in Europe, was made possible by the post-war reconstruction economy and the extraction of resources and wealth from what remained of the colonial and post-colonial system. The crisis and exhaustion of both these factors contributed to the development and affirmation of the neo-liberal theories which, with an aura of scientific discourse, preached the re-intervention of the market and the commodification, deregulation, and privatization of a whole range of goods and services. The result was that:

> Neoliberal economic recipes have systematically carved out cavities in the Keynesian welfare states, many of which were filled (with varying degrees of success and failure) through socially innovative initiatives (Osterlink et al 2020, IX).

Therefore, social innovation emerges also as a possible way to counter these long-term trends and as a process to involve and integrate grassroots initiatives and proposals within the public policy development and implementation. Indeed, Moulaert et al, (2019) and Galego et al (2021) underline how the influence of Social Innovation initiatives is increasingly related with governance and attempts to reform it.

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4. Social exclusion, inclusion, and innovation in the P-CUBE policy game

As we have seen in this brief literature review, social exclusion, social inclusion, and social innovation are complex and dynamic concepts, which have given rise to different definitions and have been applied differently depending on the context. Moreover, they are intrinsically related. The idea of 'mirrors' can help to understand how the concept of social inclusion has often been thought of and applied in relation to, and as a possible response to, social exclusion. In turn, social innovation can be seen as a process that allows social exclusion to be overcome, or at least curbed, often by fostering social inclusion processes at the same time. In their various possible applications, these concepts are also linked to the process of public policy development and implementation and - especially social innovation - also to participation in public administration governance. Against this background, the P-CUBE game project developed several case studies, inspired by real social contexts and issues, which can facilitate the understanding of how these concepts are used in real life. All these case studies are set in hypothetical European countries, with a democratic-parliamentary form of government, with a rather high level of prosperity of the population but with important parts of society affected by social exclusion linked to certain political/social problems. In each case study, a different type of political entrepreneur triggers a path to promote social innovation initiatives to solve a certain problem. The P-CUBE game simulates the process behind the development of a public policy promoted by these entrepreneurs, that can be for example a minister, a politician, but also a social actor such a member of an NGO, a social movement, or a grassroot organization.

To introduce new policies, the promoter of the social innovation initiative must choose between two or more different strategies and to consider the relationship with the actors involved in the negotiation process that is necessary to obtain a consensus around the new policy. In this way, the P-CUBE educational game helps to better understand how public policies are developed, considering the complexity of the process and challenges behind the development of a social innovation initiative.

In each case, consideration is given to the distribution of certain key resources (economic, legal, political and knowledge) among the various actors involved and how through negotiation processes the balance of these resources can be altered, affecting the chances of success of the social innovation initiative.

In the first case study entitled '*School meals for vulnerable children: service provision in times of crisis*'[7], a social entrepreneur (in this case a famous football player), wants to promote a policy to guarantees school meals for vulnerable children. This case study is emblematic of how social innovation initiatives can arise in response to the economic crisis, which in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic has caused a substantial increase in the number of families applying for free meals at school. In addition to linking social innovation with an element of social exclusion (poverty and consequent problems in accessing food), this case considers how key actors such as majority and opposition political parties, ministers, mass media and social organizations influence the process of new policy development. This case also shows how non-institutional actors can put fundamental and sometimes decisive pressure on policy makers.

The second case study, entitled '*Artificial intelligence and automated decision making in welfare*'[8], focuses on the role of artificial intelligence in the management of welfare policies in a country where there is a problem of racism and discrimination against migrants. The use of artificial intelligence to detect cases of welfare fraud, besides being problematic in terms of privacy, affects especially vulnerable groups, such as low-income people, migrants, and certain ethnic profiles. The policy entrepreneur in this case is a female migrant lawyer who wants to change this policy, which is considered negative. To achieve this, the policy entrepreneur liaises with actors in the institutional arena, but also with unions and human rights associations as well as with the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. Moreover, in this case, one of the possible strategies is to legally resort to the courts, and to involve supra-state actors.

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7 Available at: https://igop.uab.cat/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/PCUBE-01-School-Meals-IGOP.pdf

8 Available at: https://igop.uab.cat/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/PCUBE-02-Artificial-Intelligence-and-Decision-Making-in-Welfare-Policies-IGOP.pdf

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The third case study, entitled '*Labour rights regulation and the digital platform-based economy: the case of riders*' [9], concerns labour rights regulation in a digital platform-based economy, and focuses on the need to regulate the position of the so called 'riders'. The political entrepreneur in this case is the labour minister of a coalition government who must deal with different actors both in the institutional arena and in the broader societies, and who must choose between a strategy based on hard regulation for all the digital platform workers and soft regulation limited to the riders. This case shows how sometimes to promote new policies it is necessary to negotiate with a multiplicity of actors with different goals and needs. One solution to unlock a complex negotiation can be to opt for less ambitious proposals (soft regulation) to reduce the number of actors involved and consequently also the difficulty in reaching a compromise. In this case study it also emerges how technological innovations (digital platforms) can imply deep challenges from the point of view of guaranteeing rights, in this case of workers, hence the need to adapt the legal framework.

The fourth case study, entitled '*The externalisation of asylum and the reception of people seeking international protection*' [10], focuses on the process of externalization of asylum procedures promoted by the government of a European country. The prime minister argues that the answer to the issue of increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers must pass through a large-scale, transnational system of migration control. In this case, therefore, the political entrepreneur is the prime minister who frames her proposal as a social innovation initiative. The two available strategies are a legislative proposal in the national parliament or the construction of a transnational coalition of EU states to promote further processes of externalization of asylum requests. In this case, supranational actors such as a Pan-European Alliance of NGOs, the European council, The UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency and the European Parliament are particularly relevant. The question that emerges from this case is whether policies such as the one proposed, which would reduce and threaten the protection of vulnerable people (in this case asylum seekers), should or should not be considered social innovation initiatives.

5. Conclusion

This article provided a brief and obviously incomplete literature review on the concepts of social inclusion, social exclusion, and social innovation. Indeed, due to the extension of the academic production related to these concepts as well as their fame and wider use in different contexts and debates (e.g. academy, institutional arena, welfare programs and public administration), it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to accurately summarize the complexity and diverse interpretations, definitions, and applications of each of these concepts. This paper therefore aims to offer a framing and contextualization of these concepts and how they can be related to each other and how they have been included in the prior reflections and development of the P-CUBE educational game case-studies. From this work it thus emerges how each of these three concepts has given rise to multiple definitions and in some cases different interpretative models. Consequently, the translation of these concepts and their application within society, and in the development of public policies, is also always linked to a series of political, social, economic and ideological factors that are in turn closely connected to the context. These premises form the basis of the work done with the P-CUBE educational game, which aims to be a simple tool to explore these concepts and how they influence the processes behind the development and implementation of public policies without trivializing their complexity.

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9 Available at: https://igop.uab.cat/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/PCUBE-03-Riders-IGOP.pdf
10 Available at: https://igop.uab.cat/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/PCUBE-04-Asylum-IGOP.pdf

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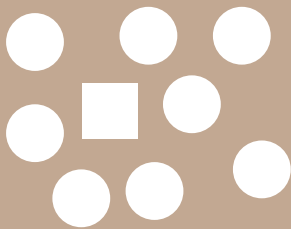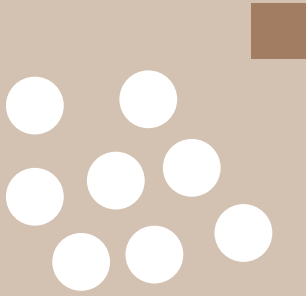# References

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