

# Policy Responses to Social Exclusion towards inclusion?



edited by

**Janie Percy-Smith**



**POLICY RESPONSES TO**



**SOCIAL EXCLUSION**



TOWARDS INCLUSION?



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OPEN UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Buckingham • Philadelphia

Open University Press  
Celtic Court  
22 Ballmoor  
Buckingham  
MK18 1XW

email: enquiries@openup.co.uk  
world wide web: www.openup.co.uk

and  
325 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA

First Published 2000

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A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 335 20473 2 (pb) 0 335 20474 0 (hb)

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Policy responses to social exclusion / edited by Janie Percy-Smith.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-335-20473-2 – ISBN 0-335-20474-0

1. Marginality, Social–European Union countries. 2. European Union countries–Social policy. 3. Social work administration–European Union countries. I. Percy-Smith, Janie.

HN380.Z9 M265 2000

305.5'6'094–dc21

99–088206

Typeset by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong  
Printed in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn



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# INTRODUCTION: THE CONTOURS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

*Janie Percy-Smith*

## Introduction

This introductory chapter provides a context for the discussion of policy responses to social exclusion in the subsequent chapters. It begins with an overview of the origins and development of social exclusion as a concept and discusses the ways in which social exclusion is defined. From this discussion of definitions I then derive a series of dimensions of social exclusion which are related to the subject matter of the subsequent chapters. In the final section I begin the discussion of policy responses to social exclusion by drawing out the cross-cutting themes and issues which characterize and inform the policy initiatives discussed in the later chapters of this book.

## The origins and development of social exclusion as a concept

The term 'social exclusion' originated in the social policy of the French socialist governments of the 1980s and was used to refer to a disparate group of people living on the margins of society and, in particular, without access to the system of social insurance (Room 1995; Jordan 1997; Burchardt *et al.* 1999). However, when the term began to be used in the European context it referred more to the European Union (EU) objective of achieving social and economic cohesion. Economic cohesion has been a key goal for the EU since the early treaties establishing the European Economic Community, but social cohesion really came to the fore with the negotiations around the Maastricht Treaty. The term social cohesion refers to the 'reconciliation of a system of organisation based on market forces, freedom of opportunity and enterprise with a commitment to the values of internal solidarity and mutual support



which ensures open access to benefit and protection for all members of society' (Geddes 1998: 20). Social cohesion therefore requires improvement in the living conditions of those regions or groups within the EU that are worst off so that they are closer to those of the regions that are better off (European Commission 1997).

Social exclusion is now written into the Maastricht Treaty and is an objective for the European structural funds (Room 1995: 1). Some writers have commented that the term social exclusion was preferred to the term poverty in European circles because of the difficulties on the part of some member states at that time to apply the term poverty to their own countries (see Lee and Murie 1999: 3). Indeed the EU poverty programmes which had been in existence since 1974 were brought to an abrupt halt in 1994 when the Council of Europe rejected a new poverty programme. Since then, it has been argued, social exclusion rather than poverty has been the main focus of EU social policy and, furthermore, the approach to social exclusion has, in practice, reflected a more limited concern with labour market exclusion (Geyer 1999: 161).

### *The Social Exclusion Unit*

In the UK the concept of social exclusion came to the fore with the setting up by the government in 1997 of the interdepartmental Social Exclusion Unit. The Social Exclusion Unit only encompasses England: social exclusion and poverty are devolved responsibilities and, in Scotland, there is a separate 'Scottish Social Inclusion Strategy'; in Wales, 'Building an Inclusive Wales'; and in Northern Ireland, 'Targeting Social Need in Northern Ireland' (see Northern Ireland Office 1998; Scottish Office 1999; Welsh Office 1999). The Social Exclusion Unit was charged with reporting to the prime minister on how to 'develop integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown, and bad schools etc.' (Social Exclusion Unit 1997: 2). Since then a range of policy initiatives have been developed by the Social Exclusion Unit and other policies have been redirected towards the social exclusion agenda.

The Social Exclusion Unit (1998: 9), in developing new policy responses to social exclusion, noted the failure of previous attempts to deal with the problems and identified the reasons for failure as follows:

- The lack of effective national policies to address 'the structural causes of decline'.
- A failure to effectively engage local communities.
- Too great an emphasis on physical regeneration at the expense of creating opportunities for people.
- The failure to develop a 'joined up' approach to the issues.

The Social Exclusion Unit's report identifies three 'strands' to its response to social exclusion. The first strand comprises the 'New Deals' for the unemployed, lone parents and the disabled together with actions to address failing schools, crime and public health. The second strand comprises new funding programmes to support the regeneration of poor neighbourhoods, in particular

the New Deal for communities, but also the latest round of the Single Regeneration Budget and Sure Start. The third strand is aimed at ensuring coherence and a 'joined-up' approach and involves the work of 18 cross-cutting Policy Action Teams involving cross-departmental groupings and outside experts. The work of the teams falls under five broad themes:

- 1 Getting the people to work: focusing on maximizing the contribution of the New Deal in the poorest areas; addressing barriers to employment; and developing innovative ways of assisting re-entry into the labour market.
- 2 Getting the place to work: focusing on effective neighbourhood and housing management so that issues such as crime and antisocial behaviour are addressed.
- 3 Building a future for young people: focusing on Sure Start to provide more integrated help for children at risk and other measures to motivate children and young people in relation to education.
- 4 Access to services: focusing on ensuring access to services in the poorest areas.
- 5 Making the government work better: focusing on improving the way government at all levels responds to social exclusion.

The government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion is summed up in its first annual report on poverty and social exclusion, *Opportunity for All*, using the language of universalism: 'Our strategy is based in the principle that everybody has the right to participate in society, and the opportunity to achieve their full potential' (Department of Social Security 1999: 30). This statement raises issues around how social exclusion is defined, to which we now turn.

## Defining social exclusion

Social exclusion has been defined in a number of different ways which may include all or some of the following elements: disadvantage in relation to certain norms of social, economic or political activity pertaining to individuals, households, spatial areas or population groups; the social, economic and institutional processes through which disadvantage comes about; and the outcomes or consequences for individuals, groups or communities. The following, quite comprehensive, definition comes from the European Commission:

Social exclusion refers to the multiple and changing factors resulting in people being excluded from the normal exchanges, practices and rights of modern society. Poverty is one of the most obvious factors, but social exclusion also refers to inadequate rights in housing, education, health and access to services. It affects individuals and groups, particularly in urban and rural areas, who are in some way subject to discrimination or segregation; and it emphasises the weaknesses in the social infrastructure and the risk of allowing a two-tier society to become established by default. The Commission believes that a fatalistic acceptance of social exclusion must be rejected, and that all Community citizens have a right to the respect of human dignity.

(Commission of the European Communities 1993: 1)

This definition is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it emphasizes the multiple factors associated with social exclusion; second, it refers to the dynamic nature of exclusionary processes; third, it includes within its scope policy failure to adequately address social exclusion and its consequences; and finally it endorses the view that citizens within the EU have 'the right to a certain basic standard of living and to participate in the major social and occupational institutions of the society' (Room 1995: 6). Thus, social exclusion occurs when citizens are denied these social rights or they are not fully realized and, furthermore, in such circumstances citizens are likely to experience more generalized disadvantage.

Burchardt *et al.* (1999: 230) offer the following, more restricted, definition of social exclusion: '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'. In developing this definition they consider including a condition relating to the issue of 'agency' – that is, whether or not the exclusion is self-imposed or voluntary. Ultimately they decide not to do so because of the difficulties associated with deciding when self-exclusion is really voluntary. For example, individuals may decide to exclude themselves as a result of a history or previous experience of exclusion or discrimination. Can this, then, really be deemed self-exclusion? Burchardt *et al.* then raise the question of whether individual choice should in any case be paramount, especially when self-exclusion has negative consequences or is problematic for society more generally. Examples here might include those who decide to 'opt out' of paid work and are dependent on state benefits or those who choose alternative lifestyles which are regarded as problematic by mainstream society. This issue relates to the moral agenda which is widely perceived as underpinning policies to address social exclusion (see below).

The way in which the Social Exclusion Unit has defined social exclusion does not refer to citizenship rights, rather it utilizes a definition that is much closer to the concept of disadvantage: 'Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown' (Social Exclusion Unit 1997: 1). This definition is very much focused on outcomes and makes no reference to the processes that create the problems identified in the definition.

The term 'social exclusion' is sometimes taken as being more or less synonymous with poverty or disadvantage. However there are important differences. The concept of poverty is, as noted by Burden in Chapter 3, primarily concerned with the distribution of resources: a poor household is one in which the resources available, especially income, fall below a particular level. Policies to alleviate poverty are typically focused on the redistribution of resources to individuals or households in need. The concept of disadvantage is arguably more complex, focusing on the interaction between lack of material resources and the provision of social services and supports. Thus, policies to address disadvantage are typically concerned with the distribution of a range of goods and services as well as resources (Oppenheim 1998: 12).

By contrast, social exclusion is generally defined in such a way as to include a number of characteristics which are not usually referred to in definitions of

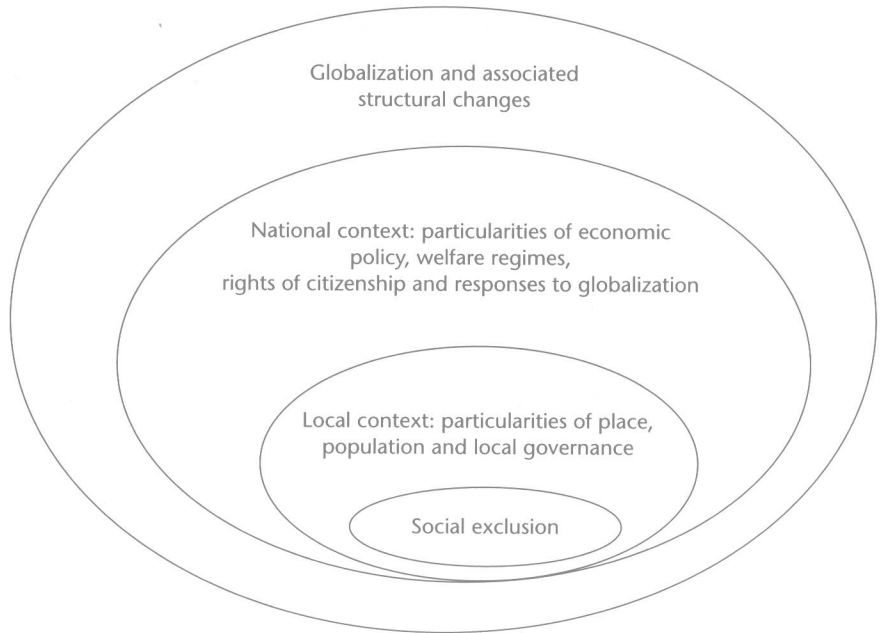


Figure 1.1 Social exclusion in context

poverty or disadvantage. The first is that social exclusion is seen in a wider context. In particular it is seen in the context of globalization and the structural changes brought about by globalization. Parkinson (1998: 1) describes these processes in the following terms:

Rapid changes in the economic environment caused by internationalisation and industrial and corporate restructuring have transformed the character of local economies. They have brought a more fragmented labour market, a decline in manufacturing and a rise in the service sector, high levels of structural unemployment, an increase in part time, insecure and low paid employment, a shift in the balance of male and female employment and a growing gap between the highest and lowest household incomes. These changes are not only found in cities where the economy is in decline or during periods of recession. They are also a feature of booming economies.

However, although social exclusion can be seen as a consequence of global phenomena, it is nevertheless affected by the *national* context, notably the particularities of national economic policies, welfare regimes and rights of citizenship, and indeed the *local* context – particularities of place, population and local governance (see Figure 1.1). Madanipour *et al.* write:

Welfare regimes in each country reflect different principles of social organisation and normative bases. Different cities are differentially placed within the European economic and social space, some experiencing growth

and others in long-term decline. Urban socio-spatial structures vary. In some, social exclusion and spatial segregation are virtually synonymous. Others exhibit a more fine-grained pattern of differentiation. In some places, ethnicity and race form fundamental dividing lines in socio-spatial structures. In other places, cultural and kinship networks are more significant. Finally, specific patterns of local governance and welfare state provision affect local patterns of social exclusion.

(Madanipour *et al.* 1998: 9; see also Cousins 1998: 130–1)

While the causes of social exclusion may be structural, its effects can be ameliorated or exacerbated by the attitudes, activities and policies of governmental bodies. For example, despite the increasing importance of combating social exclusion within the EU and the focus on unemployment as a key part of the overall strategy, at the same time the push towards economic cohesion is resulting in some member states reducing social expenditure and thereby increasing the risk of poverty and exclusion.

The second key feature of social exclusion is that it can be seen as a process or set of processes rather than a static condition and, moreover, a set of processes largely outside the control of the individual. This avoids the 'trap', typical of at least some policies aimed at addressing poverty, of blaming the individual for their own plight. This has important implications both for the analysis of social exclusion and also for policy development.

The third key feature of social exclusion is that it is necessarily a 'relational' concept. Groups and individuals are socially excluded from other groups and individuals, and society as a whole. Thus:

structural processes affect the whole of society in ways which create barriers which prevent particular groups from forming those kinds of social relationships with other groups which are essential to realising a full human potential. It is not that some groups 'exclude' other groups, but that processes affecting the whole of society mean that some groups experience social boundaries as barriers preventing their full participation in the economic, political and cultural life of the society within which they live.

(Madanipour *et al.* 1998: 17)

This has the advantage of allowing a broader focus, not only on those who are excluded, but also on the systems that they are excluded from (Oppenheim 1998: 14). In particular it allows for policy responses which seek to change institutions and institutional processes rather than solely seeking to change socially excluded individuals, groups and communities.

Social exclusion can also be defined in terms of a lack of 'social capital' and, increasingly, the idea of developing social capital is being incorporated into policies and programmes to address social exclusion. Putnam (1993, 1995) defines social capital in terms of four features of communities: the existence of community networks; civic engagement or participation in community networks; a sense of community identity, solidarity and equality with other community members; and norms of trust and reciprocal help and support. There is increasing interest in, and research evidence relating to, social capital as an 'antidote' to social exclusion. In other words, there is evidence linking the extent and strength of community networks, the degree of

community and civic participation and norms of trust and reciprocity with good health (see, for example, Gillies 1997; Kawachi *et al.* 1997; Campbell *et al.* 1999), effective and responsive public services and strong political institutions (see, for example, Boix and Posner 1998) and local economic development and economic prosperity (see, for example, Putnam 1993; Wilson 1997). Thus, developing social capital can create the conditions in which it is easier to address other aspects of social exclusion. This might be achieved by devoting resources to community development or by managers of public services considering how their activities in particular localities contribute to or negatively impact on social capital (Corrigan and King 1999: 15). However, Boix and Posner (1998: 687), in an article discussing the origins of social capital, note that 'a community's co-operative capacity is a function of the degree of social and political inequality that the community has experienced over the course of its historical development'. The implication is the obvious, but nevertheless important, point that social capital is more difficult to develop in those communities where there is little tradition of trust or reciprocity.

The growth in the use of the term social exclusion has not been universally welcomed. In particular Levitas (1996) has argued that the social exclusion discourse treats as abnormal the social divisions which are endemic to capitalist society, since the aim of policy is reintegration, primarily, to the labour market. As a result, Levitas argues, unpaid work is devalued and inequalities between paid workers are obscured. She goes on to identify three different approaches to social exclusion: the 'integrationist' approach which focuses on reintegrating those without work into the labour market; the 'poverty' approach which links the causes of exclusion primarily to low income and lack of resources; and the 'underclass' approach which blames the excluded themselves for their situation and goes on to link this to individual moral failings. Aspects of all these approaches can be found in various strands of UK policy towards social exclusion.



## Towards an analytical framework

A framework for analysing social exclusion needs, therefore, to take account of these key features: that social exclusion occurs as a result of structural change but is played out through and affected by the specificity of local circumstances, policy frameworks and welfare regimes; that it connotes a process or set of processes rather than an 'end-state'; and that it is a relational concept. In addition, social exclusion is a multidimensional phenomenon and, furthermore, the various 'dimensions' of social exclusion are typically mutually reinforcing. Thus an individual or group is more likely to be vulnerable to exclusionary processes when they experience difficulties in relation to more than one of the dimensions of social exclusion.

### *Dimensions of social exclusion*

In the first annual report on poverty and social exclusion (Department of Social Security 1999: 24–6), the 'key features of poverty and social exclusion' are identified. These are as follows:

- lack of opportunities to work;
- lack of opportunities to acquire education and skills;
- childhood deprivation;
- disrupted families;
- barriers to older people living active, fulfilling and healthy lives;
- inequalities in health;
- poor housing;
- poor neighbourhoods;
- fear of crime;
- disadvantaged groups.

A rather different approach is adopted by Burchardt *et al.* (1999: 231) who identify five dimensions of social exclusion in terms of the 'normal activities' in which it is important that citizens participate. These dimensions are as follows:

- 1 Consumption activity: relates to traditional measures of poverty.
- 2 Savings activity: includes pensions, savings, home ownership.
- 3 Production activity: defined in terms of 'engaging in an economically or socially valued activity, such as paid work, education or training, retirement ... or looking after a family'.
- 4 Political activity: defined as 'engaging in some collective effort to improve or protect the immediate or wider social or physical environment'.
- 5 Social activity: defined as 'engaging in significant social interaction with family, or friends, and identifying with a cultural group or community'.

Burchardt *et al.* go on to note that an individual's ability to participate in these activities will be affected by a range of interconnected factors including: their own personal characteristics and life histories; the characteristics of the area in which they live; and the social, civil and political institutions with which they have to interact. Furthermore, they recognise that participation or non-participation on any one of these dimensions is likely to have implications for participation on the others (Burchardt *et al.* 1999: 232).

In Table 1.1 I identify a number of 'dimensions' of social exclusion which are similar to those discussed above but incorporate other aspects which I consider to be important. These dimensions are discussed briefly below but are elaborated on in the subsequent chapters of this book.

### *The economic dimension*

While social exclusion cannot be reduced to economic factors, economic factors are undoubtedly a key aspect of social exclusion. Economic factors are taken as encompassing not only poverty, defined in terms of lack of an adequate income, but also exclusion from the labour market. This, in turn, has a number of different aspects to it that go beyond unemployment. It will certainly include length of unemployment and households in which no working-age adults are in employment. But it might also include other changes affecting the labour market such as casualization, decreasing job security and fragile attachment to the labour market. The chapters by Campbell (Chapter 2) and Burden (Chapter 3) in this volume address the issues of labour market exclusion and poverty respectively.

**Table 1.1** Dimensions of social exclusion

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
Economic	Long-term unemployment Casualization and job insecurity Workless households Income poverty
Social	Breakdown of traditional households Unwanted teenage pregnancies Homelessness Crime Disaffected youth
Political	Disempowerment Lack of political rights Low registration of voters Low voter turnout Low levels of community activity Alienation/lack of confidence in political processes Social disturbance/disorder
Neighbourhood	Environmental degradation Decaying housing stock Withdrawal of local services Collapse of support networks
Individual	Mental and physical ill health Educational underachievement/low skills Loss of self-esteem/confidence
Spatial	Concentration/marginalization of vulnerable groups
Group	Concentration of above characteristics in particular groups: elderly, disabled, ethnic minorities

### *The social dimension*

It is along the social dimension of social exclusion that the Social Exclusion Unit has, thus far, largely focused its attention. This dimension can be taken to include: the breakdown of traditional households, the rise in the numbers of unwanted teenage pregnancies, homelessness, crime and disaffected youth. One of the interesting questions here is the relationship of these social variables to the economic ones identified above. The issue of housing and homelessness is addressed by Hawtin and Kettle (Chapter 6) and other social aspects are addressed in the chapter on health by Moran and Simpkins (Chapter 5) and the chapter on socially excluded groups by Burden and Hamm (Chapter 10).

### *The political dimension*

The main issue here is individuals' ability to participate in or influence decision making which affects their lives. This may happen in a number of



different ways. Individuals may be excluded from having political rights because of their immigration status. They may exclude themselves from formal processes by not registering to vote. This may be due to inertia, apathy, transience or the wish to evade officialdom. Of those who are registered a significant proportion fail to vote in local and national elections. However, formal political processes do not encapsulate political activity in its entirety. Other forms of political activity include participation in community fora of various kinds such as tenants' organizations, school governing bodies, pressure groups, service user groups and so on. All of these bodies will have some impact on decision making and the quality of local life. Non-participation contributes to disempowerment. Disengagement from socially acceptable forms of political participation and distrust of formal channels of communication can combine with a sense of frustration and anger to create the potential, if not the actuality, of social disorder. The issue of political exclusion is addressed by Percy-Smith in Chapter 8 and community activity is discussed by Chanan in Chapter 11.

### *The neighbourhood dimension*

Analysis of the neighbourhood dimension of social exclusion is clearly related to both the social and spatial aspects. At the level of the neighbourhood the indicators of social exclusion might include environmental degradation, a decaying housing stock, the withdrawal of local services (e.g. shops, public transport), increasingly overstretched public services and the collapse of local support networks (related to the political aspects of social exclusion, namely low levels of participation in community and voluntary activities). The neighbourhood dimension of social exclusion is addressed by Sanderson (Chapter 7) in relation to access to services on the part of excluded communities, by Hawtin and Kettle (Chapter 6) in relation to housing, and by Percy-Smith (Chapter 8) and Chanan (Chapter 11) in relation to community involvement.

### *The individual dimension*

All of the aspects of social exclusion discussed so far impact upon the individual. The form that this impact typically takes is in terms of increasing levels of physical and mental ill health, educational underachievement and failure to acquire or update skills, and low self-esteem. Walton (Chapter 4) discusses educational underachievement and low levels of skills, and Moran and Simpkins (Chapter 5) analyse the relationship between health status and social exclusion.

### *The spatial dimension*

The spatial dimension of exclusion is important since it typically results in large numbers of disadvantaged people living together in a decaying area. This can lead to the area itself being defined as disadvantaged irrespective of the characteristics of the individuals who live there, and becoming subject to further exclusionary process (e.g. withdrawal of local services) as a result. It also results in the area becoming highly visible which can be double-edged – on the one hand resulting (perhaps) in the area becoming the focus for policy initiatives, and on the other resulting in 'place discrimination' by employers. A focus on place also results in the large numbers of socially excluded individuals scattered throughout the rest of the population becoming