



Kulturaren  
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## Executive Summary

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# Culture and Social Exclusion

Conceptualisation of  
the Relationship and  
Identification of Work  
Experiences

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# Executive Summary

This report aims to foster reflection on the intersection between cultural participation and social exclusion. Advancing in this direction requires moving from diagnosis (the study of cultural inequalities and their causes) to proposal (the identification of culture's social benefits and the design of actions). At its core, it involves a shift from viewing culture as a "problem" to seeing it as a "solution", based on the idea that cultural participation can help alleviate situations of social exclusion, thereby improving social cohesion and overall levels of social well-being.

Organised into three sections, the first addresses a conceptual and empirical approach to social exclusion, exploring what and whom it affects. Based on the understanding that social exclusion is a multidimensional concept, it identifies the foundations upon which it rests. It involves processes and situations of non-participation in society (in areas such as politics, community, the economy, etc.). In practical terms, it refers to groups that find themselves relegated to the margins of society. This means that they lack access to the opportunities, capacities, and/or resources needed to fully exercise their rights.

Social exclusion encompasses situations of exclusion due to poverty as well as social discrimination, forming a highly heterogeneous and often invisible reality. Beyond the economic and material dimension (strict poverty), social exclusion involves a political and social citizenship dimension (where "cultural citizenship" fits, although it is currently not part of the studies) and a dimension related to social relationships (where cultural participation, despite being currently overlooked, is a key factor). In this sense, social exclusion is a structural phenomenon within our societies. In the Basque Country, in 2021, one-sixth of the population (16.3%) was in this situation of exclusion, with a further 26.1% in precarious integration. Compared to 2018, the number of people in severe exclusion had doubled, with nearly 1 in 10 people affected by 2021.

The second section highlights the role of culture in the context of social exclusion, shifting the focus from the issues surrounding cultural participation to its benefits. First, it is necessary to acknowledge that culture is, in itself, an area of social exclusion, structurally shaped by lines of inequality. Cultural participation data historically supports this. Even though severe exclusion tends to be beyond the reach of most surveys (with profiles that are not captured in sampling or fieldwork), the analysis shows that cultural participation is influenced by social variables. Thus, there are many instances where a lack of cultural participation is not a free, uninfluenced choice. Consequently, these cases can be seen as violations of cultural rights.

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Inequalities in cultural participation represent a problem because culture has the potential to generate positive effects for participants and society. However, culture alone does not naturally generate widespread and equitable social benefits. Culture is inseparable from the social environment in which it exists, an environment intersected by pre-existing lines of inequality. For culture to generate equitable benefits, work must address inequalities and the risk of social exclusion faced by certain groups, whether through designing specific opportunities for participation or reformulating existing ones so that they are genuinely (and not only formally) accessible to all.

The aim is for culture to act as a lever for overcoming social exclusion. In this context, promoting access to institutionalised forms of culture (the so-called “legitimated culture”) becomes meaningful, as does fostering active and expressive participation (beyond “access” seen only as “consumption”) and extending the recognition of cultural practices that are not usually acknowledged or supported publicly. All these dimensions pose challenges for culture in its role in promoting inclusion and social cohesion.

The third section delves into the key areas of work within the intersection of culture and social exclusion, to better understand projects in this field and how to advance in designing new actions.

It identifies eight keys to developing projects and policies at the crossroads of cultural participation and social exclusion:

<b>1</b>	<b>Person-centred and interdepartmental collaboration approach</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Projects and measures balancing focus and universality</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Importance of the third sector</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Significant role of public administration</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Social inclusion as a field for social innovation</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Flexibility and proximity: adaptability and impact potential</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Specific professional roles and competencies</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Art as both medium and process</b>

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Considering all the above, exploring the intersection of culture with social exclusion will become an increasingly relevant area of cultural policy. The EU's strategic interest in social exclusion, alongside the rise of the cultural rights perspective, places this issue at the heart of public debate.

For this work to be successful, it is essential to understand the diversity of this phenomenon and its structural roots and to carefully consider each key and its implications for designing projects and policies.

Ultimately, this study complements recent reports on [Culture and health](#) (2022) and culture and education (2024, forthcoming) from the Basque Culture Observatory. This topic, undoubtedly, as already implied, fits seamlessly within the framework of [Cultural rights](#) (OVC, 2019).

This line of studies, focused on emphasising the connection between culture and other areas of public intervention such as social, educational, and health policies, is based on the belief in culture's contribution to individual and community improvement. It draws on European strategic documents and studies that provide evidence for policy design, contributing from foundational concepts to advance in this field of work. Its purpose is to encourage reflection, clarify concepts, and provide evidence, without aiming to set standards or pass judgement, convinced that the emancipatory potential of culture is an essential tool for building more inclusive and equal societies.



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