

***Cooperativisation of the social services
in the province of Gipuzkoa (Basque Country)¹***

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Summary

This paper shows the main results obtained from the Delphi study, which was made of politicians and technicians from the Department of Social Policy in the County Council of Gipuzkoa, concerning the possibility of cooperativizing the provision of social services in this province. The first part of the paper develops the theoretical framework which serves as inspiration for the empirical work, where note is made of the main theoretical proposals that have a bearing on the collective dimension of citizen participation in the management of public services. Among the various models, those which prioritise public participation through social and solidarity economy entities stand out. The second part presents the field research results. To this end, the methodological notes concerning the preparation process for the Delphi analysis are presented, followed by a synthesis of the main results obtained in this study. The paper ends with a section of conclusions and future lines of action.

Key words:

Co-construction, Co-production, Welfare Mix, Social and Solidarity Economy, Social Services.

¹ This study has been focused on the province of Gipuzkoa, which is one of the three provinces (or historical territories as called officially) that comprise the Basque Autonomous Community.

1. The theoretical framework

1.1. Who is responsible for the provision of social services?

What is the State's role and what is that of the market with respect to the provision of welfare services? Must the State, as in the social democratic model, be the main provider or must these services be privatized and supplied by the market as upheld by the neoliberal thesis? Today, these are key questions in most European countries and the generalized reply in recent times points towards the gradual privatization of services.

However, neither of these two possible strategies deals appropriately with the question of public participation in the provision of these services. Or rather, each of them responds in a different way to this aspect. The social democrats situate public control in the use of the mechanisms of the representative democracy and the neoliberals situate this control in the purchasing power of the individual on the market. However, neither one considers the role that civil society must play as an active agent in the provision of the aforementioned services and not as a mere user of such. Nor do they bear in mind the collective dimension beyond the individual intention (regarding voting or purchasing), of civil society itself, which, articulated through various entities of the third sector, needs to be taken into account in these matters.

And the fact is that this third sector has always behaved in a highly integrated manner both with the State and with the market as far as the provision of public services is concerned (Brandesen and Pestoff, 2008). In countries where third sector plays a major role, such as Germany or Holland, third sector have been fundamental in the construction of the post-war welfare states. In others the third sector has stood out as a result of the wave of liberalization of the last three decades, as is the case in the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, and although the literature regarding public management has ignored it for a long time, initiatives based on direct citizen-based participation in the provision of basic services have always existed. As Ostrom concluded (1999), no market can survive without a government-based provision of public goods, but, by the same token, no government can be efficient and fair without a considerable input on the part of the citizens. This input, this greater implication of the "users", can be canalized through a democratic system of state supervision or through entities of the third sector (Walzer, 1988).

This strategy of providing more decentralized and participative social services brings the local dimension in territorial terms to the foreground and the third sector or the social economy in terms of governance, as both spaces (in principle) are prone to democratizing and re-socializing the social structures.

In essence, the strategy is to rise to two challenges at the same time using the same tools: the democratic regeneration of the public structures on the one hand and the reform of the welfare state on the other, through a greater participation of the social economy. Thus it is considered that the participation of the social economy *"could play a significant role in the renovation of the democratic political systems and of the configuration of the Welfare State"* (Pestoff; Osborne; Brandesen, 2008: 593)

1.2. The “welfare mix” as the framework for action

Since the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, a number of political policies were implemented in all European countries which still condition to a great extent the framework for action regarding public decisions. These policies sought to solve a problem which was raised in the following way: how to face the reality of new emerging social risks from the public institutions, taking into account the restriction imposed by a hypertrophic, inefficient public sector, with no possibility of organizational expansion?

At the same time, the nature of these new risks radically questioned the efficiency of the traditional mechanisms of income transfers offered by the welfare states (for example the social security, the pension system, etc.) and reoriented policies towards the priority of deploying a wide network of social services (Ascoli and Ranzi, 2002).

The solution to this dilemma was to adopt privatization policies which, as Ascoli and Ranzi pointed out (2002) ran in two directions: i) the reorganization of the public system through the introduction of market mechanisms in public management (*New Public Management*), and; ii) the intense, direct incorporation of private, non-profit-making agents into the offer of welfare services. A second set of privatization policies, complementary to the aforementioned policies which have an influence on the offer, was oriented towards directly financing the demand (via direct aid or tax incentives), offering a wider choice in the face of an ever more diverse offer.

All this is gradually giving shape to a new institutional framework, which is known as *welfare mix* (Evers, 1991; Evers and Svetlik, 1993), *mixed economy of welfare* or *welfare pluralism* (Johnson, 1999). These welfare systems, which, according to Johnson (1999), have always really been mixed, will reconsider the central elements of the European welfare systems: the State ceases to be the principal provider of services and delegates those functions to private lucrative and non-profit entities but at the same time maintains a central role in all that concerning the financing, regulation and inspection of these services (Evers, 2005).

Questioning the centrality of the State leads to the acknowledgement of a plurality of actors, two of whom stand out and who, among the welfare state theorists, had barely been taken into account: the informal sector and the third sector (Johnson, 1999). Consequently, these new currents acknowledge the value of the work carried out both in the domestic environment and through non-profit entities in the provision of welfare services, explicitly recognizing the essential contribution made by these two sectors (Evers and Svetlik, 1993).

Finally, as well as acknowledging the plural nature of the welfare systems, the theorists of *welfare mix* establish the role and influence of each of these agents in the welfare systems that have arisen as a result of the crisis in the welfare state. So, as a general tendency, they indicate that the State will gradually withdraw from its responsibility for the direct provision of services in favour of private entities while at the same time reinforcing its function as regulator, funder and assessor of the quality of the service offered. The public sector ultimately becomes responsible for the public service provided, no matter how little it has participated directly in any provision. And, at the same time, as a driving force and facilitator, it will also guarantee the user's “freedom of choice”, opening up the provision of public services to competing private entities and endowing the user with solvency through demand policies.

Well beyond the discursive value of this plural or mixed character of actors, the fact is that this new reorganization has been resolved basically by a “*rolling back the state*” scheme, where private entities, mainly of a profit-making character, have gained ground in detriment to entities of the third sector.

1.3. Alternatives to privatization: coproduction, governance and co-construction

The crisis of the welfare state and the progressive configuration of mixed models (or privatized models) in the public services has given rise to a profusion of literature on different ways of understanding this collaboration between public and private agents.

One of the first approaches was that which the American theorists adopted in public management in the 70s and the 80s under the concept of co-production (Parks, et al, 1999). At that time, the debate over the most efficient way of providing public services was largely dominated by those who proclaimed the need to create centralized and bureaucratic structures. However, through the proposal for co-production, these authors sustained that the most efficient system was that which enabled civil society to produce, at least in part, the services that they would later consume.

This first approach had a very limited vision, focusing only the role of the individuals or groups of individuals in the production of the aforementioned services (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2008). However, in the United Kingdom, co-production has been used more recently to study the role of voluntary or community entities in the provision of public services (Osborne and McLaughlin, 2004). And, from a more European standpoint, co-production has also referred to the growing organized implication of the citizens in the production of their own welfare services (Pestoff, 2005). They all conclude that the participation of the third sector (understood as groups of citizens or groups of organizations) transforms the manner in which public services are provided, at the same time as the third sector is also transformed by the very service that it provides (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2008).

But beyond conceiving this collective action on the part of citizens in the provision of services, there are those who analyze the participation of civil society before provision, that is, in the phases concerning planning, design or articulation of the services. Following the classification proposed by Osborne and McLaughlin (2004) at least three forms of cooperation between the third sector and the public sector should be distinguished:

- co-governance, where the third sector participates in the planning and provision of the service
- co-management, where the third sector collaborates with the State in the provision of services
- co-production, in the strict sense of the word, means that citizens produce their own services at least in part.

This classification enables us to identify two analysis variables: the collective or individual nature of the relationship on the one hand and the policy cycle phase, on the other. Therefore, with respect to the former, co-production would signify participation of an individual nature whereas the others signify interaction between organizations (both public and private). And as far as the phase is concerned, a distinction is made between planning and provision.

On the same lines is the contribution of the concept of co-construction as opposed to the concept of co-production. As Vaillancourt established (2011: 40): “...*En suma, la*

*coproducción de las políticas públicas se desarrolla sobre el plano organizacional (en la organización de productos y servicios), mientras que la co-construcción se desarrolla sobre el plano institucional (en la fijación de orientaciones generales y de elementos fundadores de la política*². This first notion of co-production is also very close to the notion of *welfare mix* or *mixed economy of welfare*, which has previously been analyzed (Evers, 1991, 1993; Pestoff, 1999; Johnson, 1999). Therefore, the notion of co-construction would go further, as Vaillancourt says (2011: 43): “*la co-construcción se relaciona con las políticas públicas en el momento de su elaboración y no solamente en el momento de su implementación*”³.

Vaillancourt (ibid.) distinguishes four types or models of co-construction: i) the first one, known as mono-construction, is that in which the State does not have a share but is the sole protagonist when it comes to decision-making; ii) neoliberal co-construction, (now in fashion in many countries, notably with the popularity of the mainstream of *New Public Management*), where the State is motivated to create public policies in cooperation with the dominant socio-economic actors in the market economy; iii) corporate co-construction, certain sectors of socio-economic activity and actors from the field of trade unions and management are included in dialogue and deliberations concerning the State, while others are excluded and finally, iv) democratic, solidarity-based co-construction.

This final model of co-construction is characterized in the following way: i) the State remains as a partner that is different from the others – it converses, interacts and deliberates with the non-State actors and, at the same time, is “over” but “close” to them; ii) although the State is a partner of civil society, it does not stop being a partner of the market economy actors (it forms part of a general perspective of plural economy); iii) it implies a deliberation between the best of representative democracy and participatory democracy, and iv) it implies the recognition of the participation of the social economy actors, as well as a partnership-based relationship between the State and the aforementioned actors (Vaillancourt, 2011).

As it considers social economy to be the principal ally, this model of “democratic and solidarity-based co-construction” fully coincides with the “partnership-based governance” model proposed by Enjolras (2008). This author contrasts this model with the current hegemonic model, which he refers to as “competitive governance”, and which is based on the extension of market regulatory mechanisms (Enjolras, 2008:19).

Before this model, previously referred to as *New Public Management*, Enjolras favours the partnership-based model, where the public sector does not play such a coercive role, but rather a role of coordinator between various agents of civil society and the State itself. Here, the local sphere appears as a privileged space as it is the space where social capital makes it possible to develop institutional links and enhance the territory. In this network of agents, the social (and solidarity-based) economy plays a central role in the implementation of this model of governance as it enhances the local dimension in the territorial policy and the democratic structure in the organizational aspects.

Once the review of the theoretical models of relationship between the State and the economy has been carried out, we will present the results obtained in the case study

² “...All in all, the co-production of public policies develops at an organizational level (in the organization of products and services), whereas co-construction develops at an institutional level (in the establishment of general guidelines and founding elements of the policy”.

³ “Co-construction is related to public policies as they are drawn up and not only as they are implemented”.

carried out in the province of Gipuzkoa. This study has endeavoured to collate the opinion of a number of experts in matters of social policy regarding the strategy of cooperativizing the social services sector.

2. Case study: the cooperativization of social services in the province of Gipuzkoa

2.1. The basque welfare system

As established by Moreno (2009), the Spanish welfare system is characterised by three main elements: the decentralised structure of the design and application of social policy, the important participation of third sector institutions in the provision of services and the “over-exploitation” of family resources for the upholding of these policies. Therefore, it is clear that the family and social environment is the main support for social needs in Spain, while public policies reveal a decentralised territorial model and a management model based on coordination between the public and private sectors.

As far as the classification of “welfare systems” established by Esping Andersen (1993) is concerned, the Spanish model would respond to its own model (Mediterranean), which is based on the hybridisation of characteristics of the three regimes referred to. The fields of health and education based on universalistic programmes (the social democratic model) complement each other with a guaranteed income system within the social security (the continental model), whereas, in the field of social assistance, that which prevails is the liberal one (Noguera, 2000).

The Basque Country falls within this context with full competence for the development of social policy (both for its financing and application) and with a social structure also based on the strong participation of the family in the satisfaction of social needs.

However, comparatively, the public sector and the third sector are significantly more developed in the Basque Country (Gallego, Gomá and Subirats, 2003). Although there are significant differences between various sub-sectors (senior citizens, disabled people, children and social exclusion), it could be said that the management model of Basque social services is a public-social collaborative model.

This greater public performance in the Basque Country is supported by data that show the increasing scope of the public sector in the provision of social services. Between 1988 and 2006 the number of public workers in this sector has quadrupled while the social spending per capita has multiplied by 8.7 points (Gizarte.doc, 2009).

Nevertheless, this important development in public intervention has based itself on various policies which, ultimately, have increasingly limited the real scope of the public sector. Three main public policies have been developed over the last few years: i) increased social payments, derived largely from the opening of new aids contemplated in the Dependency Law in Spain approved in 2006; ii) financial support for the opening of private centres and; iii) the opening of new state-owned centres managed, in most cases, by private sector entities (Arrieta and Etxezarreta, 2012).

These strategies have ultimately reinforced the greater contribution of the family circle and private entities in the provision of social services. The greater presence of private entities is reflected in the data referring to the evolution of social services centres between 2001 and 2009: the centres managed by private entities have increased by 57%. However, this increase has also gone hand in hand with a significant increase in

the management of centres on the part of the third sector (42%) and, on the part of the public sector, (31%) (SIIS, 2012).

Finally, despite the recent tendencies towards privatisation, the composition of all the centres still shows a clear public-social structure in the Basque Country: 49% of social service centres are managed by third sector entities, 39% are publicly managed and only 12% are privately run (SIIS, 2012).

2.2. Case study

2.2.1. Methodological aspects

The aim of the Delphi study below is to present the opinions of the various policy makers of the Department of Social Policy in the County Council of Gipuzkoa with respect to the strategy of cooperativizing the management of the social services in their territory.

It has been chosen to apply the Delphi methodology as it is a technique used in social research which makes it possible, with a group of experts, to obtain the most reliable group opinion possible. It is a repetitive method (each expert is asked the same question at least twice), which respects the anonymity of the participants and includes controlled feedback as it is the coordinator of the study who is in charge of the return of the most important contributions and of omitting irrelevant information (Landeta, 1999). The ultimate aim of this technique is to try to narrow the initial differences between the experts, with a view to obtaining a group opinion with the greatest consensus possible while carrying out the survey in a personalized way in order to try to avoid group dynamics, which annul or exert a certain pressure on the opinion of each participant.

To this end, a panel of experts has been created. The study has been narrowed down to the province of Gipuzkoa due to the fact that the public institutions with the highest degree of responsibility in the management of social services in the Basque Autonomous Community are the County Councils themselves. After opting for the nearest one, that of Gipuzkoa, contact was made with experts who, besides having a deep knowledge of the sector, have an influence on it as the majority of them are government policy makers. In this Delphi study, there were initially 16 participants, 11 of whom had a political profile (elected representatives, the majority playing a leading role or an advisory role in the main sections of the Department of Social Policy) whereas the remaining 5 had a more technical profile (all of them were area heads of services). Of the 16 experts who initiated the process, 13 finished the whole process satisfactorily.

The survey was based on a battery of 26 questions, classified in 5 sets and almost all of them were to be answered on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 represents total disagreement, 5 total agreement and 3 neither in favour nor against). A great effort was made to formulate the questions in such a way that they were clear and comprehensible, adapting the language used from one academic register to another of more common usage. Finally, each set of questions ends with an open question which consists of a space in which the experts may write down any observation related with the previous questions.

In this way, the idea is to combine the quantitative results with the qualitative results. On the one hand, the answers have been objectified by means of averages and standard deviations, and the level of alignment between the first round and the second round was analyzed through the comparison of these two variables. On the other hand,

in the event that the answers should not show a clear consensus or that there may be no clear significant movements towards approximation between experts, the analysis of the qualitative contributions has led to the search for arguments that might justify the nature of the answers obtained.

The research process, the results of which can be seen below, took place in three phases. In the first phase, a Focus Group with the participation of various policy makers from the department together with social agents and researchers was organized and it was here that the most significant variables and those which gave rise to more intense debate regarding the proposed object of study were detected. Having drawn up the questionnaire which included the aforementioned variables and having contacted the experts who were to form the panel, in the second phase the experts were required to answer the questionnaire twice in two consecutive rounds, knowing in the second round the averages obtained in the first round for each question and also the most significant contributions made by the experts (controlled feedback). The research process ended with a seminar organized by the authors of the study themselves and in which the return of results (detailed below) was carried out before the participants.

2.2.2. Main results

a) Management model

A first set of questions analyzed the position of the experts as far as the ideal model of social services was concerned and allowed them to opt for a strictly public model, a strictly private model or a concerted model.

Three important aspects of the results obtained should be noted: i) an overwhelming majority showed itself to be against the private model (92%); ii) a solid majority (62%) supported the public model, and; iii) a significant number of experts did not rule out the concerted model (38%), as they believed that this was the model that really prevailed nowadays in Gipuzkoa. However, the answers regarding the suitability of the concerted model showed a significant dispersion, as the experts were divided in the same proportion of those for and those against (31%), while a third part of the experts took no sides.

The process of approximation between experts has not changed the initial answers significantly, the only aspect worthy of note is a greater concentration of views opposing the private model in the second round.

As far as the qualitative analysis is concerned, a large part of the contributions underline the importance of keeping these services under public responsibility although later, the management model may not be shared on the same level. There have been experts who have recognized the value of the contribution of the entities of the third sector in the management of these services and there have been those who believe that the management model is not a determining factor in the final quality of the services.

b) The co-construction model

A second set of questions referred to the issue of the level of participation of the social economy in decision-making as far as the design itself of the social services was concerned. The questions covered three types of participation models: the informative, the consultative and the decision-making models. In the informative model, the third sector is only taken into consideration when it comes to revealing the decisions

adopted. At a consultative level, its opinion is included in the final decision as the third sector is considered to be an agent with a voice of authority in the sector. At the third level, the third sector is co-decision-maker together with the public administration, which could be matched with the model of co-construction previously theorized.

The results obtained in this section are as follows: i) a significant majority (76%) is against the third sector being taken into account only at an informative level; ii) the consultative model fully convinces almost nobody as practically the majority of the experts positions itself in the intermediate values, i.e., there is not a vast majority that supports it or rules it out; iii) however, over half the experts (54%) looks favourably upon co-construction, provided that the public administration has the final word. It must be noted that there also exists a significant percentage of experts who are against this last aspect.

The analysis of the degree of approximation between the experts yields some interesting results in this set of questions, as it can be clearly seen that the opinion of the participants has gradually veered towards the consultative model and moved away from the co-construction model.

This process may have been motivated by the contributions made, as many of them emphasize that the decision in case of difference of opinion or conflicting interests must ultimately fall on policy makers as they are ultimately responsible for the quality of the services provided. In this regard, it is worth noting that the participation of the third sector and other social agents also caused some experts to have misgivings when considering that this space may also accommodate a number of private interests which are not particularly compatible with the common interest.

c) Formalization of indirect management

The third set of questions refers to the way in which the relationship between the public administration as the contracting party (and responsible) for the service and the social economy as manager or provider of same should be formalized. Three different formulas have been considered: the establishment of concerted partnerships, in which the administration gives financial support to a private service; the externalization, where the administration puts out to tender the management of a public resource to a private agent, and; the collective bargaining agreement, through which the administration establishes on a discretionary basis a financial commitment with a private entity to the provision of a particular service.

The general result of this set of questions is that the experts are not sure which of the three formulas should be the general norm. None of these three options achieved sufficient majorities neither in favour nor against. More than half of the opinions are at an intermediate point in the three questions (54%, 62%, 54%, respectively), and there are hardly any opinions that can be found at either of the extremes (i.e., I totally agree or I totally disagree).

The level of approximation between experts simply reinforces this indeterminacy: in the concerted model, as in that of externalization and collective bargaining, the variations appreciated between rounds all tend towards an intermediate point, moving away from totally favourable or unfavourable positions. There may have been a consensus when it came to moderating the initial answers.

This lack of clear positioning on the Likert scale makes the qualitative analysis essential for the understanding of these results. Most of the experts point out that the nature of the service to be provided is what determines the way of formalizing this

relationship, whether that may be through the concerted model, public contracting or collective bargaining. There is no perfect model which is valid for all types of service. However, there are those who hold that contracting is the formula that offers greater guarantees, although the social services law⁴ favours a concerted model with respect to the future. According to another participant, collective bargaining should be reserved only for those services that are not covered in the catalogue of services (and, therefore, are not public responsibility). Finally, there are those who play down this aspect and point out that the important thing is for the objectives and the catalogue of services to be well defined.

d) Positive discrimination measures

A fourth set of questions puts on the table the use of measures of a discriminatory nature to the advantage of the entities of the third sector as a whole and, more specifically, to that of the cooperative forms.

This question obtained perfectly clear responses: i) a vast majority (69%) was in favour of positive discrimination towards the third sector as opposed to the capitalist private sector; ii) an even greater majority (85%) holds that the “social clauses” are the most efficient tool for this type of measures, and; iii) a consistent majority (61%) also believes that the cooperative formula is that which most particularly should be preserved although this extreme also accounts for a significant percentage (31%) against this.

The analysis of the approximation of the experts also reinforces this feeling of consensus in the three responses, as those positioning themselves in favour of the first two questions did not alter and, in the suitability of the cooperatives, this partisan stance becomes stronger in the second round.

However, we believe that the experts’ contributions in this case are of special interest as they give a more detailed insight into the apparent consensus reflected by the quantitative results. The majority of the comments point out that the important thing is the quality of the services provided, beyond the legal forms (being for profit or non-profit) of the provider, and once the first is guaranteed, the use of discriminatory measures make sense. There are other comments warning that the legal form is not a guarantee of anything, nor is it a guarantee that the service is of the necessary quality, or that everything really works in a democratic, non-profit-making manner.

Therefore, it may be concluded that the majority positions itself in favour of discriminatory measures.

e) Cooperativization strategy

The last set of questions deals with the validation on the part of the experts of the cooperativization strategy of the social services, proposed as a working hypothesis, since this strategy has not been implemented to a great degree in the territory yet.

This validation hinges on three fundamental questions: i) consider whether this cooperativization process is in favour of or in detriment to the public nature of the social

⁴ Law 12/2008 on Social Services of the Basque Autonomous Community was approved in 2008. This law points out among other aspects that for the development and maturation of the social services is necessary to walk towards a concerted model surpassing the inefficiencies created as a consequence of different contractual relationships between public administration and private providers.

services; ii) value whether cooperativization is an objective in itself or an intermediate step towards a different scenario (or towards a public model or a privatization model), and; iii) identify which would be the most suitable model regarding the cooperativization of the sector.

The global result of this set of questions is that the experts show significant doubts and disagreement with respect to these three questions.

As regards the cooperativization strategy as a way of increasing public and social control, there is a wide variety of opinions, distributed almost equally among supporters, detractors and those who remain neutral. A similar distribution is obtained from the question of whether cooperativization is a way of privatizing the social services since a higher percentage of experts reject this hypothesis (46%), although a significant number supports it (31%) or does not rule it out.

Neither are clear results obtained with respect to whether it is a desirable objective or not. Most experts believe that it could be an option (69%), although not to alleviate occasional problems of management (16%), nor as an intermediate objective towards the publication of the system as a whole (16%). Nor is it regarded as an end in itself or as a desirable model towards which social policies should be oriented as only a third adopt a positive position on this aspect.

Finally, as regards the model which is preferred for the cooperativization of the sector, a choice of four models has been given: create associated work cooperatives (with no additional characteristic), promote public utility cooperatives, encourage social initiative cooperatives or form part of the social capital of mixed cooperatives⁵. The model with the greatest support is that of the social cooperatives (an average of 3.91 in the second round), followed by that of the mixed cooperatives (3.33), that of public utility (3.18) and finally that of normal cooperatives (2.16).

This order of preferences could indicate certain characteristics that the experts regard as being essential guarantees of the cooperativization process of the social services: i) that these cooperatives should be non-profit-making; ii) that they should be compatible with greater public control, and; iii) that they should be regarded, like the educational cooperatives in the education sector, as integral parts of the public/concerted model of social services.

3. Final conclusions

Through the review of the literature, it has been seen that the greater implication of the social economy in the design and provision of the social services could be regarded as being a valid strategy in the attempt to socialize (and not privatize) public services, i.e., in the attempt to open them up to public participation and self-management. Thus, note has been taken of theoretical proposals which, beyond the individual nature of citizen participation, (Co-production), value the collective dimension of this action through entities of the social economy. The “democratic and solidarity-based co-construction” proposed by Yves Vaillancourt, or the “partnership-based governance” theorised by

⁵ The first three options are purely private cooperatives, where the social capital is the exclusive property of the worker-members. The second and third are legal acknowledgements offered by the Basque Government to cooperatives that perform a public function and to non-profit cooperatives respectively. And finally, the mixed cooperative formula, though as yet unknown in the Basque Autonomous Community, would be that which allowed for financial participation of the public sector (as a collaborating partner or in whatever way may be determined) in the cooperative itself.

Bernard Enjolras, could be two theoretical reference points to be borne in mind in this sense.

Moving this concern to a specific territorial sphere, i.e., the Department of Social Policy of the County Council of Gipuzkoa, a Delphi study has been developed regarding the possibility of gradually cooperativizing the social services sector, the main results of which are as follows:

- The department is more inclined towards a public rather than a concerted model with a perfectly clear ideological premise: that, in the final analysis, the responsibility for the quality of the services provided is public and may under no circumstances be privatized.
- As regards the co-construction model, the department believes that the participation of the social economy in the design of the social services, albeit basically consultative, is very important as the public authorities reserve the right to exclusive decision-making power in the event of disagreement or conflicting interests.
- As regards the way of formalizing indirect management, the department believes that each type of service requires a different framework of relationships (concerted, recruitment or collective bargaining), which is why it does not decidedly wager for a generalization of any of them for the system as a whole.
- As far as positive discrimination measures are concerned, it is worth noting that the department values the incorporation of social clauses in public procurement very positively, although these clauses should be applied between entities which firstly certify sufficient technical capacity, in order to endeavour to encourage and preserve certain practices rather than specific legal concepts (such as non-profit-making or cooperative practices).
- As for the working hypothesis regarding the gradual cooperativization of the social services sector, it must be said that, nowadays, this strategy is not shared within the department. Although the majority would not put this process on a level with a privatization process, it is not interpreted as a valid way of expanding the public model. Moreover, it is believed that the strategy of cooperativization should go beyond solving specific situations, although it is not thought to be a final objective in itself. And finally, among the preferred models of cooperativization, support is given for those which encourage the non-profit-making nature of the cooperatives and guarantee greater control on the part of the policy makers.

With respect to future lines of work, it would be interesting to continue looking into the strategic decisions taken by the department, as many of them are beginning to shape a horizon that is different from that outlined so far.

In a territory where the collaboration with the third sector has usually been regarded as the most suitable model, the last government team advocated a re-publication of the services⁶, but the new elected government continues on the same bases of collaboration with the third sector. This is why the strategy of cooperativizing the

⁶ As testified by the recent creation of a regional autonomous body (Kabia) which will gradually take on the management of municipal residences. In the opinion of the political decision-makers, this body aims to be *"an important instrument to advance towards a change in the model oriented towards the direct management of social services in Gipuzkoa"* (<http://www.noticiasdegipuzkoa.com/2014/07/14/sociedad/euskadi/diputacion-de-gipuzkoa-asumira-la-gestion-de-las-residencias-municipales-a-traves-del-organismo-autonomo-kabia> (consultado el 17-07-2014))

management of social service centres does not at the moment appear to be the primary political objective of the Department of Social Policy, although, as can be seen in the study, the favourable positioning regarding the inclusion of social clauses in public recruitment could well open up spaces which would accommodate both objectives.

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