

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Possibilities of cooperativism in a new public social and health services model and its implementation in the Basque Country

The aim of the article is to reflect on the possibilities offered by the cooperative approach in relation to the provision of public social and health services in the Basque Country, a reflection that has become necessary within a context of growing questions about the provision of certain services by the public authorities, as a result of the economic crisis. Therefore, we have examined the different ways and methods that can be used to approach the provision of social and health services in the public sector, and thus help to maintain the Welfare State that has been characteristic of our western society in recent decades.

For that purpose, the design was based on a scientific protocol with a legal basis, supported by the data that we were able to obtain with the assistance of the Higher Council of Cooperatives of the Basque Country and the Basque Government's Basque Health Service – OSAKIDETZA.

The methodology used was to conduct comparative studies (using two countries – one from the English-speaking world and another from the Latin world), and comparing the practical realities in the aforementioned social and health sector. There is also a detailed analysis of the applicable legislation, both in the Basque Country and the Spanish state.

We have defined the legal concept of public service, taking into account the areas of reform that are currently underway, before examining the latest trends in approaches to public administration, which, in the author's opinion, should be characterised by efficiency and the participation of citizens. Furthermore, we examine the different instruments of public administration and, therefore, of public procurement, before proceeding to discuss the need to justify the cooperative approach as the most suitable tool for the management of public social and health services, starting with an overview before specifically examining it within the scope of the Basque territory (Autonomous Community of the Basque Country).

From the results obtained, we can highlight the following:

- There is currently a trend to reform the public sector in order to improve economic management capacity and efficiency in the provision of its services.
- New Public Management indicates that Public Administration should emulate the best practices of the institutions from the private sector and that, although Public Administration cannot be managed like a company, it can be run with an entrepreneurial spirit.

- It is within this context that the provision of public services by private operators has emerged, more specifically by Social Economy Organisations, because the participation of the citizen/customer in the management of services has been shown to yield good results, for example, in the case of experiences in the field of social health and in social services.
- The Social Economy reveals a business model that is not characterised by size or the area of activity, but by respect for shared values, such as the primacy of democracy, participation of social stakeholders and the individual, and social objectives over personal gain; the defence and implementation of the principles of solidarity and responsibility; the combined interests of its user members with the general interest; democratic control exercised by the members; voluntary and open membership; management autonomy and independence in relation to public authorities; and the allocation of the bulk of surpluses in pursuit of goals such as sustainable development, and service to its members according to the general interest.
- Within the realm of Social Economy, cooperatives are a form of business organisation, based on democratic structure and functioning. They perform their activities while adhering to cooperative principles: the voluntary and open membership of members (door always open), democratic management (one person = one vote), the economic participation of its members (share in the profits, based on the member's work and not their capital), education, training and information (economic democracy school) and interest in the community (sustainable development and local democratic engagement).
- In the Basque Country, the cooperative model, which must be specifically promoted by constitutional mandate, offers safeguards for the public sector, such as the existence of a specific administrative register or a conflict resolution service, also in a public venue, which currently make this approach especially attractive for performing any activity or providing services (including public services).
- There is legislation specific to the Basque Country (Basque Government Decree 64/1999, of 2 February, governing public interest cooperative societies; and Decree 61/2000, of 4 April, governing Social Initiative Cooperatives) which ensures that the cooperative approach is even more suitable for the management of social and health services, even allowing public authorities to be part of the Cooperatives that manage those services to ensure proper control and oversight.
- Regarding the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care of Dependent Adults, and the Social Services in general, there has been strengthening of public accountability, full use of the available resources and cooperation between the different actors through the coordination of public and private actions as a whole. This public/private cooperation means that we see Cooperatives and, more specifically, social initiative and/or public interest cooperatives, as one of the most suitable tools for the management of this type of service.

Regarding the limitations of the research, we can say that there is little specialised literature about the subject of the study, and that there are practical realities that are still emerging, at least within the territory that is the subject of the study. However, all sources consulted have shown us that there are

major implications, to the extent that they all agree that there is a problem with the management of social and health services, and that this will surely become worse over the coming years.

Moreover, with regard to its original value, it is necessary to note that we have found no other study with the same characteristics, as it is undoubtedly highly topical, given the need for care for dependent adults in the current economic climate.

Finally, the article presents unquestionable practical conclusions, insofar as it makes proposals that can be used by the Public Administration, in the form of the different cooperative approaches to the management of social and health services. Although these proposals focus on the Basque Country, they could also be applied in other Autonomous Communities, if suitably adapted.

KEYWORDS: Public services, public administration, health and social services, social economy, cooperativism, health cooperatives.