

Expanded abstract

Social markets and inter-cooperation in the Social and Solidarity Economy as a way to regain sovereignties: the case of the Basque Social Market

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) as a result of the rapprochement between the Social Economy and the Solidarity Economy has gained wide acceptance in recent years. In general, the SSE brings together different economic activities from commercial initiatives such as associated and self-managed work organizations, savings and credit cooperatives, agro-ecological productions, consumer and distribution cooperatives etc., to non-commercial and/or non-monetary initiatives such as exchange networks, social currencies, time banks and so on. All these initiatives are incorporated into society through what have been referred to as social markets.

Social markets are spaces where companies and organizations that are governed by the logic of democratic solidarity meet responsible consumers and savers to exchange products and services, and thus be able to satisfy their needs outside the capitalist market. But, in addition, they are also relational spaces where the organizations that share similar values can cooperate at different levels to undertake shared projects. This is because they are spaces where agents, experiences, resources and learnings can be brought together around relations of production, distribution, financing and consumption based on social and environmental justice, reciprocity and mutual aid. Therefore, as they are experiences that promote inter-cooperation between the different organizations that revolve around them, these markets combat one of the main weaknesses of the SSE: its lack of coordination.

Furthermore, due to the democratic and open nature of the SSE organizations that are linked to these markets, the productive processes can be democratised and control of them placed with the people most closely involved. In this way, social markets facilitate the recovery of sovereignty over some economic sectors that produce essential goods and services to sustain our lives.

This article, therefore, starts from the hypothesis that the productive inter-cooperation at different levels that these markets facilitate allows productive cycles to be closed in the SSE and more goods and services to be produced outside the capitalist market and logics. Thus, it is possible to advance in the recovery of sectoral sovereignties that, today, are mainly in the hands of large capitalist companies whose sole objective is the maximisation of their profits, but which, in turn, are essential sectors to sustain the life of people. In other words, cooperation between different organizations facilitates the recovery of democratic control by citizens and access to products and services, since the SSE prioritises the satisfaction of needs, the so-

cial utility of its products and services, and democratisation and access to them from a socially and environmentally more sustainable point of view.

To this end, this article theoretically delves into the definition of a social market, the inter-cooperation between organizations of SSE and the urgent need to regain sovereignty in strategic sectors. An empirical analysis is also carried out that collects various experiences of the Social Market of the Basque Country where, thanks to the inter-cooperation between various organizations, it has been possible to advance in food, energy and financial sovereignties.

Methodologically, a mainly qualitative analysis is used where a descriptive analysis of various experiences is carried out. However, the analysis of these experiences is also supported by some quantitative data that allow us to understand the dimension of the Social Market of the Basque Country and the experiences analysed.

The choice of experiences to be analysed is made around several criteria. First, they must be experiences where, through inter-cooperation between various organizations, they have been able to advance in the recovery of some sectoral sovereignties; they must therefore be qualitatively remarkable experiences. In this sense, as has already been mentioned, the experiences analysed advance in food, energy and financial sovereignties. In addition, the diversity of the experiences has been prioritised. For this reason, although social markets are tools promoted mainly by the Solidarity Economy linked around the territorial networks of the Alternative and Solidarity Economy Network (REAS), the experiences to be analysed in this study include organizations belonging to the two networks of the Solidarity Economy or the Transformative Social Economy of the Basque Country, and one of the more consolidated groups of the Basque Social Economy, the *ikastolas*, which are education cooperatives. Diversity also prevails in terms of the level of inter-cooperation shown in the experiences (from a more basic level that integrates the supplier-client relationship, to a higher level where long-term shared projects have been carried out), and in terms of the way to articulate them; through worker cooperatives, associated consumption, education cooperatives, ethical banks or a financial services cooperative.

After analysing the different experiences, we can conclude that the SSE, due to its democratic, cooperative and open nature, its ability to distribute the wealth generated more equitably and its socially and environmentally more responsible values, can contribute to recovering some sectoral sovereignties. The experiences analysed show how through inter-cooperation it is possible to undertake projects that individually would be unviable, and how these projects have made it possible to gain sovereignty quotas in the food, energy and financial sectors. In addition, they show how the various ways of organising within the SSE make greater diversity possible through different ways of operating, either through associated work, associated consumption or savings, to name a few.

A further conclusion is that social markets are an important strategy for the strengthening and growth of the SSE since the more closed productive cycles within it, the stronger and bigger the SSE becomes, allowing the generation of experiences that complete new productive sectors outside the capitalist market and its logics.

However, the article also presents some limitations or factors that could slow down the development of social markets. One factor to be taken into account is that many of the SSE organizations are small in size and fully immersed in their day to day functions, so it is sometimes difficult to undertake long-term strategic projects such as those proposed here. Furthermore, we cannot overlook the fact that the social market coexists in a capitalist context, so SSE organizations have to develop mechanisms that guide them away from adopting this prevailing logic. Finally, SSE organizations need to overcome certain comforts or vices that could result in social markets not developing properly.

A future line of research could be an analysis of how the capacity of the SSE to regain sectoral sovereignty is linked to local development processes within the framework of public-cooperative-community collaboration.