

Expanded abstract

A Comparative Study of Regional Social Economy Strategies in Spain

Objectives

The Spanish Social Economy Strategy (EEES 2023–2027) updates its predecessor with a renewed vision that incorporates the lessons learned from previous evaluations. This strategy aims to position the Social Economy (SE) as a transformative force within the broader socio-economic context of Spain. At the regional level, many autonomous communities have developed their own strategic plans, aligning with national and European frameworks, to strengthen local SE ecosystems and address specific territorial challenges. However, these strategies are not uniform. This study departs from the research proposition that distinct models of SE promotion exist within the Spanish regional sphere in line with contemporary theories supporting the existence of two differentiated models for promoting the SE: a conservative-administrative model and a reformist-transformative model. The main objective is to analyse the regional SE strategies in force in Spain up to the end of 2024. For this purpose, it is undertaken a comparative analysis, assessing their structure, thematic focus, and strategic orientation through a qualitative lens.

Design / Methodology / Approach

A qualitative research design was employed using thematic analysis supported by ATLAS.ti software. A total of 10 strategic plans were reviewed from regions including Andalucía, Aragón, Asturias, Baleares, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y León, Galicia, Murcia, Navarra, and País Vasco. The analysis was developed in two phases. First, a deductive phase based on established thematic axes (“people”, “territory”, “inclusion”, “future”) commonly found in strategic planning for SE. Second, an inductive phase allowing new themes to emerge from the data itself.

Findings / Research limitations / Implications

The deductive analysis confirmed the prevalence of the four classic strategic pillars but also revealed the importance of additional categories such as governance (with emphasis on public-private partnerships, and inter-cooperation between SE entities), and visibility (increasing recognition and dissemination of SE initiatives emerged as a major concern). The inductive analysis highlighted the centrality of sustainability and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), showing strong integration in many plans. Financial resources, capacity-building, digitalisation, and inclusion (notably gender) also featured prominently. Regarding the research proposition and the objective of this study, the analysis reveals the

presence of two distinct models for promoting the SE in Spain, broadly consistent with the academic literature. While the division is not absolute (public policies inevitably display hybrid features), the differences in thematic density and strategic orientation are sufficiently clear to distinguish a conservative-administrative model, more operational and continuity-oriented (with Castilla y León as the clearest example), from a reformist-transformative model, adopted by regions where the SE plan is conceived not merely as a sectoral policy but as a lever for structural change (with Navarra or Murcia as examples). The empirical evidence gathered not only confirms the continued analytical relevance of the distinction between the two models but also refines it by demonstrating how both approaches coexist and remain in tension within the design and implementation of public policies. The study is limited to current plans within the Spanish context, excluding other documents and stakeholder perspectives, which, while enhancing methodological focus, leaves broader aspects unexplored.

Practical Conclusions / Original Value

Regional SE strategies in Spain display both shared values and diverse approaches. While they generally align with national and European directives, each region adapts its plan to local needs and opportunities. This comparative analysis, addressing a gap in the existing research, underscores the relevance of: Ensuring real participation in strategy development; Embedding gender and inclusion across all measures; Establishing measurable objectives and accountability mechanisms; Aligning with SDGs for long-term impact. The findings contribute to ongoing debates regarding the objectives and intentionality of regional governmental action in the field of SE, by offering a conceptual, yet also practical, analytical tool that enables a more precise understanding of the normative orientations and horizons of change underpinning public interventions at the regional level.