

Cooperativization of the social services: more democracy and participation inside the public administration?

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Summary

This article 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 historical territory. With this in mind, the structure of this article is in two different parts. The first part 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 concerns itself with the presentation of the field research results. To this end, the methodological notes concerning the preparation process for the Delphi analysis are presented first and this is immediately 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.

1.-Theoretical Framework

1-1.-Who is responsible for the provision of social services?

(Brandsen and Pestoff, 2008), (Ostrom, 1999), (Walzer, 1988)

1-2.-The “welfare mix” as a framework for action

(Ascoli and Ranzi, 2002), (Evers, 1991), (Evers and Svetlik, 1993)

1-3.-Alternatives to privatization: coproduction, governance and co-construction

(Brandsen and Pestoff, 2008), (Pestoff, 2005), (Osborne and McLaughlin, 2004)

2.-Case study:

The cooperativization of social services in the historical territory of Gipuzkoa

2.1-Methodological aspects

- Delphi study to present the opinions of the various policy makers of the Department of Social Policy
- Group of experts: 13, 8 of Whom had a political profile and 5 had a more technical profile.
- Battery of 26 questions, classified in 5 sets and almost all of them to be answered on a Likert scale of 1 to 5.
- The research process took place in three phases: Focus Group, answer the questionnaire twice in two consecutive rounds, the return of results before the participants.

2.2-Main results

2.2.1. Management 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%) was partial to 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.

2.2.2. The co-construction model

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.

2.2.3. Formalization of indirect management

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.

2.2.4. Positive discrimination measures

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.

2.2.5. Cooperativization strategy

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.

3.-Final Conclusions

As for the working hypothesis regarding the gradual cooperativisation 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.