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Public Policies Fostering the Social and Solidarity Economy in Barcelona (2016-2019)

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Acronyms

AESCAT	Social Economy Association of Catalonia (Asociación de Economía Social de Cataluña)
CCC	Catalan Confederation of Cooperatives (Confederación de Cooperativas de Cataluña)
CIRIEC	International Research Centre on Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (Centro Internacional de Investigación sobre Economía Pública, Social y Cooperativa)
COMISSIONAT	(Comisionado de Economía Social, Desarrollo Local y Política Alimentaria)
ECAS	Catalonian Social Action organizations (Federación de Entidades Catalanas de Acción Social)
FCCUC	Federation of Consumer and User Cooperatives of Catalonia (Federación de Cooperativas de Consumidores y Usuarios de Cataluña)
FCTC	Federation of Worker Cooperatives of Catalonia (Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo Asociado de Cataluña)
FCVS	Catalonian Federation of Social Volunteering (Federación Catalana de Voluntariado Social)
FECETC	Federation of Social Work Centres of Catalonia (Federación de Centros Especiales de Empleo de Cataluña)
FESC	Solidarity Economy Fair of Catalonia (Feria de Economía Solidaria de Cataluña)
IUDESCOOP	Research Institute for Social Economy of the University of Valencia (Instituto Universitario de Investigación en Economía Social y Cooperativa - UV)
PA	Participatory area of SSE policy (Ámbito Participado de la Política de Economía Social y Solidaria)
PAM	Municipal Action Plan of Barcelona City Council (Plan de Acción Municipal de la Ciudad de Barcelona)
PIESS	Plan to boost the social and solidarity in the City of Barcelona (Plan de Impulso de la Economía Social y Solidaria de la Ciudad de Barcelona)
SSE	Social and Solidarity Economy (Economía Social y Solidaria)
XES	Solidarity Economy Network (Red de Economía Solidaria)
XMSSE	Network of Municipalities for the Social and Solidarity Economy (Red de Municipios por la Economía Social y Solidaria)

Summary

Barcelona's Pla d'impuls de l'economia social i solidària (PIESS / Plan to Boost the Social and Solidarity Economy) represents a successful new breed of social economy policy. It exhibits specific features of this type of policy: it is transversal in nature, often engages in partnerships and adopts a transformative socio-political perspective. The policy also uses mainstreaming approaches, political innovation and the institutionalization of strategy to achieve its means, and additionally, it mobilizes the local government and its public promotional body, the Comissionat.

A significant characteristic of the PIESS is its Catalan public administration which has for the first time promoted a cross-sectional policy initiative, in that, it holistically acts on SSE, not just part of it. That is, according to CIRIEC (2017), it promotes both social enterprise initiatives and social community ones. It also addresses both the market social economy and the non-market social economy, including economic activities such as ethical financing, fair trade, responsible consumption, the commons, and social currency. In fact, the new Catalan bill for SSE is comprised of the SSE market, which includes companies that operate in the market by selling goods and services, as well as non-market SSE, which obtain their resources from outside the market, for example through donations, property income and fees.

The public-community partnership approach of the PIESS has resulted in both the co-construction and co-production of this policy, fully exhibiting characteristics of the social economy. The application of this public policy partnership approach relied on three elements. First, a space for participation and dialogue of its own, referred to as a *participatory area of SSE policy (PA)*. Second, a public administration adapted to this partnership approach, along with appropriate intragovernmental and intergovernmental coordination. And third, a sector of SSE structured both on the cognitive plane (social imaginary and common identity) and on the organizational one (structures and spaces for inter-cooperation) which can be the administration's partners.

The socio-political perspective of the PIESS in relation to the SSE, which it conceives as a transforming vector and not palliative welfare, has required the government and SSE policy makers to have a systemic and comprehensive vision both of different spheres of public action and of the multiplicity of socio-economic activities that constitute "problems" and need to be addressed. The mainstreaming approach of this policy has sought, with modest results, to integrate this policy and the SSE into the other policies developed by the City Council and policies of other administrations, in order to break down silos.

The PIESS forms a complex political strategy, focused around two major general objectives, six lines of work, 24 specific objectives, 31 instruments and 124 actions. Many of these actions are public policy innovations. At the time of writing the PIESS had been implemented over a period of four years and, from an evaluative perspective, it has above all contributed to increasing public funding for the SSE, to increasing visibility and sensitivity towards the SSE both by citizens and the municipal administration, to providing a cognitive and organizational framework for the SSE, and to the establishment of a stable space for participation of the social economy in public policy.

Introduction

On 13 June 2015 the electoral coalition *Barcelona en Comú*, made up of several progressive parties won the Barcelona City Council local elections. Ada Colau, a social activist, was elected mayor. The election manifesto¹ of the winning political party contained multiple references to the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) which included cooperatives, common goods, participation and partnerships; it even included a specific section on ‘Promoting the social and solidarity economy’. When applying this election manifesto, the new mayor chose an activist from the cooperative and solidarity economy movement to lead the City Action Plan in this sector and to create an inter-agency body, the Barcelona City Council “Cooperative and Social and Solidarity Economy Commission” (hereinafter *Comissionat*), to roll out this new policy.

This unprecedented public policy did not have, until then, any internally or externally recognised government structure in Barcelona City Council. Outside of the City Council, the agents of the SSE sector itself (cooperatives, third social sector and other bodies) were scarcely recognised as members of this sector. Internally the City Council lacked an administrative and regulatory apparatus geared to this new sector: developing and implementing public measures in this new sphere was a challenge for the city bureaucracy, given its existing policy instruments, expertise and institutionalised participatory forums.

The Plan to Boost the Social and Solidarity Economy, *Pla d’impuls de l’economia social i solidària (2016-2019)*, hereinafter PIESS,² lacked precedents which could act as referents and was marked by its innovative approach in comparison with existing public policies and mechanisms. This new policy had two key elements: the first, the decisive political will of the City Council to implement an SSE policy, and the second, a substantial increase in budget allocation (around 800% between 2014 and 2016).

This policy, besides creating a new public policy space, constituted a socio-political innovation on several planes such as the approach to holistically incorporate the SSE sector, the political concept behind the policy, the basis of transformative cultural and socio-economic objectives, the way it constructs and produces policies, based on cooperative public-community consensus, the activation of new instruments to promote the social market and unique pilot proposals and finally the inclusivity and centrality of this policy in mainstream local politics.

This document is aimed at studying this public policy for promoting the SSE at local level from a dual analytical and prescriptive perspective. From the analytical perspective, it aims to identify, firstly, the basic features of the construction process of this policy, such as the vision of this socio-economic sector envisaged by its policymakers, the theoretical concept of the policy, the planning and process method, the actors involved in the ecosystem and the institutional framework of reference, and secondly, the architecture of

¹ Barcelona en Comu (2015): *Programa electoral de Barcelona en Comu elecciones municipales 2015*, https://barcelonaencomu.cat/sites/default/files/programaencomun_cast.pdf

² Ajuntament de Barcelona (2016): *Pla d’impuls de l’economia social i solidària (2016-2019)*, Ajuntament de Barcelona, Barcelona <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/economia-social-solidaria/sites/default/files/Pla%20d%27Impuls%20ESS.pdf>

the policy, by distinguishing the different action lines and instruments articulated following an established typology. From a prescriptive perspective, in assessing this policy and the obstacles and problems identified, this paper aims to learn lessons from this policy which can act as referents for subsequent policies in other territories.

In the drafting of this study, official documents, publications linked directly to this case study have been examined, interviews of privileged witnesses and two focus groups have been set up, one comprising Barcelona City Council members and the other members of Catalanian representative bodies of the social and solidarity economy. The period analysed was 2016-19.

1 Overview of the policy for promotion of the social economy in Barcelona

1.1 *Contemplating the social and solidarity economy sector in the PIESS*

When defining the scope for action of the policy for the promotion of the social economy of the city of Barcelona (PIESS), in a broad sense, both the kind of legal entity and the activity contemplated were opted for. The vision of the social and solidarity economy was adopted, which integrates the two concepts, the social economy on the one hand and the solidarity economy on the other (see CIRIEC, 2017). With the inclusion of the latter, the importance of a social transformative dimension of this socio-economic sector was made explicit alongside the importance of economic activities external to the market.

Regarding the bodies and legal entities to be acted upon, socio-economic initiatives of the third social sector, cooperatives, mutual societies, worker-owned enterprises, work integration social enterprises, special employment centres, community economies (community allotments, childcare groups, time banks...) and the collaborative sharing economy have been considered³. Regarding the activity sector, economic activity not limited exclusively to the logic of product and service availability in the conventional market has also been considered and even broadened to products and services distributed externally to the marketplace, such as those offered by community economies of the commons collaborative economy.

Application of this broad view enabled political action to be addressed to a quantitatively larger population; an aspect which was significant for better internal consideration in local government. In this regard, the risk that some sectors of the SSE would consider themselves excluded, were minimised. Similarly, it was deemed that this approach

³ The study commissioned by the Comissionat in 2016 *L'economia social i solidària a Barcelona*, identified 4,718 initiatives belonging to the Barcelona social and solidarity economy, including 2,400 third social sector bodies (mainly associations), 1,197 worker-owned enterprises, 861 cooperatives and 260 community economy initiatives. The whole sector provides employment to more than 53,000 people and involves more than 100,000 volunteers, more than 500,000 consumer members and 113,000 friendly society members.

allowed reductionist views of the SSE inclined to see it as a merely complementary, palliative and welfare conception to be contested.

This scope-defining criterion enabled some disadvantages and challenges to be handled. The most important were: (1) those concerning the organizational dispersal of the SSE sector as a whole, an aspect which diversified and made dialogue much more complex; (2) the lack of structure and general lack of organization of community economy practices; (3) conceptual discrepancies within and between the various sectors of the SSE in relation to defining activities as belonging to the SSE or not, i.e. if they were deemed a sub-sector of the private market economy or a specific sector; and (4) the strategic discrepancies within and between the various dimensions of the SSE, significantly those referring to an explicitly social transformative strategy and one committed to the development of the social market.

1.2 Design and general aims of the PIESS

Consistent with what was set out in the election manifesto of the new City Council, the design of the SSE policy to be implemented exceeded the previously prevailing reductionist, complementary and welfare design of the role of the social economy, to take on a proactive and transformative design. In the new policy, the SSE was to constitute one of the main focuses of socio-economic and cultural change in the city, contributing to the development of the democratic quality of political action, to the inclusion of social policies, economic policies and to cultural change in respect to the City Council's vision of the public space. Accordingly, this new policy had to be included in the entire economic policy of the city, it had to promote social participation and that of the agents of the SSE in the joint diagnosis, joint construction, joint production and joint assessment of the policies, as well as promoting emerging functional initiatives with this socio-political vision.

The construction of this policy-design of this was based on group reflection at the heart of social and cooperative movements and on reference documents such as the "Barcelona SSE" Report, the "Barcelona Transformative Economies", "14 measures to foster the social and solidarity economy at the local level" of the Solidarity Economy Network of Catalonia (XES), "Transforming territories from a solidarity economy: 30 proposals for local elections on 24 May 2015" of the Alternative and Solidarity Economy Networks, "Measures for promoting the Federation of Worker Cooperatives of Catalonia",

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