

Challenges in strategies for socioeconomic democratisation. Assessing solidarity economy policies in Barcelona

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Abstract:

To understand how policies for the social and solidarity economy can contribute to economic democratisation and identify the challenges linked to this, we examined the impetus plan which Barcelona city council implemented between 2016 and 2019. Based on semi-structured interviews with policy actors, social entrepreneurs and engaged activists, and on participative observation of two city council assessment workshops, we explore the limitations of the social and solidarity sector from a political economy perspective. Barcelona's approach has previously been acknowledged as an outstanding and innovative strategy that confronts the lack of transversality across public administrations and the complexities around co-construction within the social sector itself. In this examination, we observe how sector actors address issues of cultural tensions around economic thinking and stress the need for a plural and transformative approach towards economic activity. We conclude that, to couple social and solidarity economy policies with economic democratisation goals and enable tracking of changes in cities' socioeconomic governance, it is necessary to work with an integrative perspective that takes into account other policy fields besides social entrepreneurship, and other types of actors, while also considering the connections between public bodies and the social and solidarity economy sector.

Keywords

social innovation, social and solidarity economy, democratic governance, urban commons

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Introduction

Solidarity economy ecosystems are likely to arouse renewed interest as an approach to overcome the multidimensional crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Spain, related practices were adopted as policy goals by the municipalist and anti-austerity political movements that took office in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crash and ensuing Great Recession, with a promise of democratising both political representation and economic development policies. Today, in an even more critical context, initiatives fostering social and solidarity-based economies (SSEs) will doubtlessly draw attention as a means towards economic development based on sustainable goals. In fact, inquiries into social economy from a regional planning perspective raise the challenge of devising desirable futures where socially creative strategies can be adopted at a larger scale. However, the desire to foster social entrepreneurship might be ambivalent in a context of expanding domains of conflict where social economy initiatives are apt to act as sweeteners that tone down social friction. This determines the need to continue to focus on and discuss how cities consider fostering the popular economy and SSE to change their economic development models.

Our basic premise is that there is a need to critically assess the link between fostering the social economy and enhancing socioeconomic transformation. Much research has already been done on the challenges arising from public administration efforts to promote SSE, and the new generation of transformational policies takes these challenges as indicators of sought-after outcomes: the need for change in the mindset on the economy, the fight against urban divides, and the advancement of a co-constructive view on public policies.

However, we suggest that the alignment between SSE actors and public bodies is not sufficiently effective to overcome the residualisation of SSE initiatives to certain types of activities. By studying how these issues were addressed in Barcelona’s plan, we may

understand how to couple promotion of the social economy with democratisation of cities' economic governance.

Reading guide

First we explore the main findings of the literature, particularly how public policies foster SSE practices locally and engender economic democratisation. The review highlights the tension between efforts to promote the local social economy and the counterforces of capitalistic governance. SSE practices strive for workplace democracy, ensure economic procedures focus on quality of life, and enhance democratic governance and communitarian property dynamics. However, the literature also highlights their limited impact in terms of broader social change and the many difficulties related to their support.

Secondly, we describe our work methodology and approach to the case study of Barcelona's Impetus Plan. We also detail our analytical framework, the documentary research, the interviews and the participant observation events.

The third section reveals the perspectives of various actors on three broad challenges Barcelona's plan faced. We analyse the communication problems around the way the plan advanced the acknowledgement of SSE practices and tried to counteract the residualisation of those practices to certain sectors and public bodies. We also highlight the differences between neighbourhoods, which hinder a bottom-linked territorial approach to governance. Then, we consider how the strategy aims to broaden the solidarity economy movement, observing that most assessments quote a lack of transversality across public bodies and the complexity of co-constructive architectures as the main problems.

We conclude with a discussion of how structural conditionings in the assessment of SSE policies may inform us about the link between the promotion of the social economy and the dynamics of democratisation, and we note that alliances with actors outside the social sectors or the public administration may be considered particularly influential in promoting socioeconomic democratisation.

Current situation

Moving from the social economy to plural and transformative economies

The literature on local development and solidarity economy has been especially fruitful with regard to Latin America, exploring popular economic practices in response to neoliberal globalisation (Singer, 2009; Guerra, 2010; Coraggio, 2005), but the European context has been marked by an emphasis on the social economy, third sector business and mixed forms of governance against social exclusion (Estivill, 2018; Laville, 2010). In this regard, it is important to clarify the ambivalences around the notions of *social economy* and *social enterprise* when considering social economy policies, particularly for the European context.

Until recently, studies centred on economic organisations engaging in non-mainstream market-driven strategies, giving priority to stakeholders over shareholders, and reinvesting

trade surpluses in projects with altruistic objectives. Social enterprises are identified as organisations offering benefits to a local community, such as a neighbourhood, or to wider communities of interest, including those with many different vulnerable groups, such as the long-term unemployed, homeless people and people with disabilities. Pinch and Sunley (2019) highlight that the types of goods and services offered by social enterprises tend to be related to sectors providing specific services, such as integration in the labour market, employment training, recycling, social care, cooperative housing, and others related to the environment, fair trade, finance and business.

The sectorialisation of the social economy into this range of services may be seen as one of its main weaknesses in terms of potential for societal transformation. Since 1990, social enterprises have grown in importance and scale around the globe, and have, therefore, attracted the attention of many researchers, but their confinement to only certain types of activities remains under debate. This underlines some disagreement around the definition of *social enterprise* and its potential for democratic transformation. *Social economy*, and derived concepts such as *third sector*, *social enterprise* and *social entrepreneurship*, may be considered a domain where social sciences in general, and economic theory in particular, are currently involved in what Nichols (2010) suggests may be a pre-paradigmatic fight.

Research and policy monitoring have highlighted the potential of social enterprises to provide social services and public solutions in areas related to welfare programmes in a context of externalisation and public spending retrenchment. Productivity and profitability have been underlined as key objectives driving policy and research into a quest for the most effective funding arrangements and market-oriented practices for social enterprises. One of the top priorities of social entrepreneurship policies is boosting profitability through financing strategies, including access to credit as a means of enhancing scalability. Consequently, social economy furtherance typically centres on providing financial support for social entrepreneurs (Dey & Teasdale, 2015). Policies generally encourage small-scale initiatives in a start-up phase to respond when the local administration is looking for special providers to fulfil a particular need.

In this regard, the SSE movement itself, and the research on popular economy encompassing it, have underlined the unexpected consequences of promoting a narrow entrepreneurial approach to social economy. The term *institutional isomorphism* is used to describe the undesirable tendency for social enterprises to emulate capitalist organisations. The research has observed a de-politicisation of economic organisations, affecting the pursuit of democratic goals which are at the core of many SSE activities. Therefore, all SSE sector organisations actively defend the identification of economic democracy as a political aim.

According to Zirakzadeh (1990), the concept of *economic democracy* relates to Robert Dahl's work on democratic theory which contains many references to the absence of workplace democracy in liberal democracies. Dahl observes how, despite unprecedented levels of democratic development, authoritarian relationships prevail in the economy. The more recent analysis by Johanisova & Wolf (2012) stresses the operationalisation of economic democracy as an "antidote concept" to be used to counter the dynamics of economic concentration and advocates increasing support for social enterprises, among other concrete measures. These authors stress the key role of re-distributive measures, including market mechanism regulation, non-speculative currencies, and re-imagining and re-claiming the commons. These

measures serve as indicators of economic democratisation processes that may complement socio-entrepreneurial policies.

It is also worth noting that the SSE movement made the claim for economic democratisation in parallel with a shift in its discourse towards "plural and transformative" economies. Particularly given its use in the economic policy domain of certain local or regional public administrations, this concept can be applied to strategic economic thinking, and combined with complementary and heterogeneous schools of economic thought, such as ecological economics, de-growth perspectives (Cruz et al., 2009; Martínez-Alier et al., 2010; Guillen-Royo, 2016) and feminist approaches (Carrasco-Bengoa, 2013; Herrero, 2014, Pérez-Orozco, 2014). The emphasis on "plural and transformative" enables an allusion to economic activities other than those strictly represented by the social and communitarian sector, thereby allowing public administrations to mainstream managerial transformation from a perspective of socioeconomic and ecological transition.

Summing up, we observe that the SSE movement is currently using the emphasis on plural and transformative economies as a means to mainstream its perspective on a socioecological transition of economic activities; it aims to achieve alliances beyond the strictly economic domain. Therefore, we might argue that the current emphasis on "plural and transformative" is not only a move that stresses the limitations and ambivalences that are associated with ambiguous definitions of social economy and that lower the political dimension of economic activity (Laville, 2009); it is also an attempt to foster socioeconomic and ecological transitions in the management dynamics of common small and medium-sized enterprises.

Challenges in fostering SSE from a local public policy perspective

To understand the broadening of the conceptual map of social economy, it is interesting to observe how the literature qualifies the promotion of SSE from a local public policy perspective. According to Fraise (2013), public initiatives fostering SSE may be classified into two main categories: 1) those enhancing responsible consumption; and 2) those promoting concrete measures through the choices of the public administration. An important initial strategy combining both categories is the organisation of events aimed at collective mobilisation. Exhibitions are useful to promote responsible consumption, visualise the SSE sector's functions and roles, and develop complementary socio-economic initiatives that involve actions of sector organisations. However, if such events are organised as isolated measures, Fraise warns of the risk of folklorisation, meaning that initiatives developed in the socially transformative sector are looked upon as exotic or abnormal (Fraise, 2013).

Another crucial strategy being highlighted is the study and parametrisation of the socially transformative sector (García-Jané, 2014; Fernández & Miró, 2016). When aiming to build a public policy for SSE for a concrete region or urban area, an important step is to acquire an enhanced and quantifiable understanding of its situation in terms of size, number of organisations and jobs, sectors involved and total turnover. This is where the complexity and ambiguity emerge around the various categories of organisations and transformative dimensions that define the sector. Again, the question of the extent to which social economy initiatives contribute to democratic governance is not always clearly addressed, especially with regard to the internal management of economic organisations. In addition, as the literature on

co-construction has stressed (Vaillancourt, 2011), territory-based analyses of the transformative sector require taking into consideration participative diagnosis processes.

In addition, administrative stimulus plans and public sector laws and regulations have been analysed as crucial for development of the SSE sector. Introducing social clauses in public procurement is one of the most substantive strategies for transforming official procedures to democratise public management systems (Bernete, 2013). Defourny and Nyssens (2013) point to the related difficulty of the need to adapt calls for tenders to a specific size of enterprises. In many cases, this will imply changing the scale of the required service and providing technical support to ensure companies can respond to the public administration's needs.

Other public measures shown to further the SSE sector are related to localised exchange networks and the domain of complementary currencies. Ample research has uncovered and analysed various initiatives which address the sector's lack of financial resources through complementary currency systems that may be used to promote the revitalisation of local businesses (Place & Bindewald, 2015). These initiatives include localised projects dedicated to cooperative consumption and collaborative dynamics, and social currency schemes with a non-speculative perspective which aim to retain value in the territory. They adopt a *socio-communitarian* approach to local development policies with clear democratisation effects. Unfortunately, such policies are easily detached from the public procurement initiatives mentioned above, which are identified as pro-growth strategies for *socio-entrepreneurial* initiatives.

Summing up, the literature reports that SSE offers opportunities to enhance social innovation dynamics within public management systems if a socio-communitarian approach is followed in socio-entrepreneurialist policies. According to Lévesque (2013), democratic innovation in public management systems occurs when social economy policies include experimentation with hybrid forms of governance. Those policies may apply the combined logic of multiple stakeholders by setting up quasi-public, cooperative, non-profit or communitarian associations. This requires willingness to accept complexity and co-creation as policy principles. Lévesque describes how policymakers are expected to become interpreters capable of translating new languages into public policies, while policy managers should focus on the exploration of public solutions and complex equilibriums for thorny social problems. These serious challenges also pose the question of how citizens and civil society organisations should become co-producers of public policies, rather than mere customers using public services. A phrase that Lévesque used to express the key idea, serves to outline this broad, multi-faceted challenge: assure “public-value orientation” in all public decision-making processes (Lévesque, 2013: 35).

Promoting a bottom-linked perspective on social economy.

As mentioned above, a renewed interest in social economy practices was awakened during the window of opportunity when *New Municipalism* candidates took office in many important Spanish cities in 2015 (Eizaguirre et al, 2017; Blanco et al., 2019, Russell, 2019). A progressive shift in numerous municipal governments opened the door for a new wave of social economy policies integrating entrepreneurial and communitarian approaches.

The emphasis on including the socio-communitarian dimension has also been present in the debate between social innovation studies, critical urban perspectives and economic policy analysis during the last three decades (Moulaert et al., 2010). In many cases, initiatives labelled as *socially innovative* are simple examples of citizenship strategies driving particular parts of urban economies to develop alternative and integrated social relationships. At the same time, there are other models of economic activity which have been labelled by several authors as *transformative*, *foundational*, *alternative*, *grass-roots driven* and *green* (respectively: Suriñach, 2017; Bentham et al., 2013; Bolger et al., 2019; Sánchez-Hernández & Glucker, 2018; Sortauta & Suvinen, 2019). These appear to be key to the construction of “resilient places” (Mehmood, 2016). Micro-spatial urban practices focussing on the local and urban scales are trying to reshape social boundaries and have attracted the interest of growing numbers of researchers who have introduced concepts such as *do-it-yourself urbanism* (Iveson, 2013) and *urban commons* (Castro-Coma & Martí-Costa, 2016) as crucial components of the democratisation of urban economies. Their views explore initiatives within the interstices of dominant ownership models in response to neoliberalisation and austerity measures (Thompson, 2018).

Related to this, achieving the flourishing of social innovation initiatives in vulnerable territories has been stressed as a challenge for urban democratisation processes. This is because such initiatives are typically developed in middle-class areas, which have higher rates of business creation and more engaged actors capable of spurring social innovation (Parés et al., 2018). Studies on the agglomeration of socially innovative initiatives suggest that a fruitful approach is to pay attention to their ecology, and particularly to the way shared solidarity networks have emerged historically. Asymmetries in civic capacity, organisational governance and political culture within territories in a single city raise challenges for policies trying to foster SSE practices. This highlights the importance of creating spaces for social innovation, understood as milieus where socio-communitarian dynamisation occurs (Garcia et al., 2015; Sánchez-Belando, 2017) and where it is possible to enhance a bottom-linked perspective on public policies (Eizaguirre et al., 2012).

In line with this debate, Chaves-Avila and Gallego-Bono (2020) have highlighted current social economy policies as a new generation of public initiatives that aim at transformative change, focus on a public-community partnership approach and emphasise a complex systematisation of strategies. Their in-depth analysis of three similar policies promoted in Valencia, Madrid and Barcelona since 2015 notes they might be labelled as *innovative* because of their degree of complexity and the existence of specific instruments designed to integrate the policy into general governmental strategies (2020:17).

Both institutionalised organisations and newly created initiatives, or informal platforms with close ties to the domain of social economy, are involved in the process of policy formulation. That is to say, not only the socio-entrepreneurial organisations representing the social economy sector, but also the myriad of socio-communitarian strategies active in the territory. Lack of confluence among different families of actors within the social economy, or exclusion of certain actors such as trade unions and universities are reported as limitations that the new policies have found while developing a broad, co-constructive approach. Moreover, the integration of the social economy sector into social dialogue remains an unsolved matter (Idem, 2020: 23).

The search for transversality across public bodies is another crucial concern, according to studies by Chaves-Avila and Gallego-Bono. The promotion of new social economy laws and the boosting of social markets through public procurement mechanisms have revealed the need to emphasise the challenge posed by the required high level of technical sophistication. The technical qualifications of the policymakers involved and the general prioritisation of the social economy as a field with increasing budgetary resources are stressed as indicators of the institutional compromise to tackle its marginalisation. In the turn towards transversality, the identified limitations point to bureaucratisation and institutional inertia as problems that hamper implementation of the social economy and its development towards becoming a mainstream approach. The low level of awareness and acceptance of social economy principles among policymakers and public administration employees is problematic and highlights the impact of inconsistencies between different policies and the lack of coordination between the multiple public bodies involved (Chaves-Avila & Gallego-Bono, 2020: 19).

Building on the literature mentioned above, we have studied how a sample of actors involved in Barcelona's SSE plan assesses its transversalities and co-construction approach, and how they relate this to the broader aim of economic democratisation. Our hypothesis proposes that, while the technicalities of developing a bottom-linked approach are usually highlighted as challenges for this type of policies, other aspects linked to counteracting capitalist practices from a public policy perspective are not as often underlined. We suggest that this might be relevant in understanding the equation of fostering the social economy and enhancing democratisation processes.

Materials and methods.

We performed a case-study with the city and a concrete policy as units of analysis. It observed governance relations between the SSE movement and the municipality of Barcelona from 2015, when the newly elected city council included several representative actors from the domain of SSE. Aiming to understand the tensions between promoting the social economy and the dynamics of economic democratisation at the city level, our fieldwork involved examining the formulation, application and evaluation of the city council plan PIESS (*Pla d'impuls de l'Economia Social i Solidària, 2016–2019*).

As with many other social innovation studies, our methodological approach is subject to the limitations and contradictions of engaged partnership-based research. The proximity of the researcher to a particular ideological environment might result in an idealisation of the object studied, and in being divorced from reality in the presentation of its deficiencies (Fontan, 2010).

The methodology for data collection combined three qualitative techniques: 1) semi-structured in-depth interviews with SSE practitioners and public managers working in economic promotion and local development; 2) participant observation at meetings and activities organised by the SSE movement; and 3) document analysis.

The eleven interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2020 with two groups of actors which are interrelated and not always clearly separated: local development policy managers and engaged activists defending economic democratisation. As for the first group, three interviews were carried out held with public officials working as policy managers in the Local

Development Agency. They were asked to participate because of their involvement as activists in the core of the SSE movement and because they had been hired to draw up and promote the SSE plan when the political party *Barcelona en Comú* took office in 2015. The interviews explored the plan's main proposals, the goal of co-construction in public policies, and the question of how the public administration can respond to the needs of the SSE movement.

The second set of interviews took place with eight social activists committed to the SSE movement. Of these, five combined their activism with social entrepreneurship, two were full-time researchers and also held educational positions, a one was employed as a civil servant. The questions were meant to facilitate analyses of the institutional attitude towards SSE, the challenges the SSE sector is facing, and the possibilities and needs of the sector as to public policy promotion. Apart from individual views on the plan, the issues discussed included co-construction of public policies from the perspective of a social movement, limits and contradictions of the institutional struggle for economic democratisation, and the dialogue between institutions and social movements for change.

Since autumn 2018, the exploration has also benefited from the researchers' active involvement in the Training and Knowledge Commission of the Catalan Network of Solidarity Economy. This commission spreads knowledge about the SSE movement and monitors the implementation of the city council plan. We were able to participate in two evaluation sessions on the PIESS plan achievements in February 2019. The first was a participatory workshop attended by thirty social activists, social entrepreneurs, representatives of non-profit organisations, researchers and public managers working in socioeconomic development. They assessed how the plan had developed over its first three years, considering its main challenges and limitations. In the second session, the team responsible for the plan's application presented quantitative results and opened a discussion of its achievements.

The document analysis focussed on municipal policy documents about economic development (Ajuntament, 2016a, 2016b) and the plan's evaluation report (Ilabso, 2019), and also looked at a wide range of journalistic reports, including in-depth critical analyses of the *Barcelona en Comú* policies published between 2016 and 2019 (Bellver, 2017; Corominas et al., 2016; Faber & Seguin, 2016; Gesen, 2018; Hancox, 2016; Mata et al., 2016).

Results: implementation of the social and solidarity economy plan in Barcelona

When *Barcelona En Comú* took office in May 2015, the SSE sector became a recognised actor in economic governance. This recognition crystallized into a policy instrument in the form of the PIESS. Between 2016 and 2018, the plan managed 11 million euros in ongoing expenses and received 1.9 million euros in investments. In line with the aims of co-creation and co-responsibility, around fifteen entities representing the SSE sector were officially acknowledged for their participation in the plan's definition phase, thereby giving birth to a participatory platform of first- and second-degree SSE organisations which pursued and fostered implementation of the plan.

Despite several claims that the joint work could have been executed more horizontally, political recommendations previously formulated by the SSE sector had been formally incorporated into the followed procedures (XES, 2015; REAS, 2015). In many respects, the plan went a step beyond operationalising those strategic lines. The municipal plan (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016) started up actions in six working areas:

- 1) SSE training for various target groups, from the unemployed to social business entrepreneurs and public managers;
- 2) financing of SSE practices and awareness campaigns for ethical financing;
- 3) strengthening of the local social market and promotion of cooperation, favouring the creation of networks and second-degree cooperatives, and encouraging public procurement in the SSE sector;
- 4) fostering communication and storytelling with a view to creating a sense of identity and targeting broader audiences;
- 5) provision of facilities and resources for the SSE sector;
- 6) actions in the field of territorialisation and community development, promoting resources for socio-economic development in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

All working areas are in line with the SSE sector requirements for public policies for enhancing economic democracy (XES, 2015; REAS, 2015).

From a managerial outsourcing perspective, the externalisation of a considerable part of actions featured co-production as a key aspect. According to an implementation assessment commissioned by the municipality (Ilabso, 2019) externalisation meant that 82.9% of the plan's budget was managed by SSE enterprises (Ilabso, 2019: 26). The only area where the externalisation to conventional enterprises exceeded outsourcing to SSE-based initiatives was investment. The difficulty for SSE enterprises to access and compete in public tenders for large projects has been pointed to above.

Entering into a cultural debate on economic thinking

Along with support for responsible consumption, the promotion of a particular narrative on plural and transformative economies played an important role in the SSE strategy. Quoting the SSE Commissioner, the communication strategy entailed

entering into the cultural debate on what may be considered a modern and realistic way of conducting economic activity and, specifically, entering into the semantic debate on what should be considered collaborative economies (public statement of SSE Commissioner Alvaro Porro).

The organisation of knowledge-related events, whether targeted at citizens, civil servants or specialised actors, was one of the PIESS plan's main dissemination strategies. Since October 2015, the municipality had been placing more and more emphasis on divulging an annual SSE event in Catalonia. Other noteworthy efforts include support for the SSE-themed Christmas fair in the city centre, and for specialised events, particularly those which discussed the idea of modernity in plural, transformative and collaborative economies. In cooperation with experts from the SSE sector and academia, several events were used to engage public

managers and policymakers, including the 2018 Sharing Cities Summit, the 2017 Smart Cities Congress, and the 2015 and 2016 International Encounters on Municipalism and the Solidarity Economy. Consequently, the search for a new meaning for economic modernity may have become linked to certain measures which, as described by Calzada (2018), promote both citizen sovereignty in relation to platform capitalism and digital democracy through technological innovation.

But the public actors responsible for the plan's implementation soon faced a difficulty formed by the gap between concrete pro-growth indicators and the more conventional and hegemonic economic language associated with large infrastructures and extensive macroeconomic data:

Our own communication services required us to be able to run headlines reporting short-term results, but listen here, what we are proposing is a transitional economic policy with all its structurally transformative potential; its success and proper functioning will not be visible until the medium or long term at least . . . we took office making structurally transformative proposals and now we find ourselves completely repeating conventional logic. What I want to say is that writing headlines always refers to quantity, hardly ever to quality. I have become used to hearing from the municipal communication services that "journalists will not understand this" (interview with Jordi Via, former co-operative economy commissioner of the city council).

Storytelling around the sector involved accepting the fact that there were contradictions in quantification and addressing questions such as the number of organisations, initiatives and related jobs, employment rates, and the range of opportunities offered. From 2015, attempts at measuring were developed by various partnerships within public administrations and by important actors from the sector². However, efforts to parametrise the sector often run into methodological difficulties stemming from the multidimensionality and the gradual nature of the struggle to foster economic democracy, both in the workplace and through economic activities. These difficulties generally lead to profound considerations on the role of the solidarity economy in promoting political transformation and its struggle to counteract *depolitisation* dynamics (Laville, 2010, Estivill, 2018).

Within the XES Network of Solidarity Economy, created in 2003, and with relative autonomy from public administrations, Catalonia's SSE sector is developing several tools to evaluate and disseminate economic initiatives, focussing on their social and politically transformative roles, and their communitarian perspective. These tools are meant to establish indicators, ranging from work-life balance to shared ownership, which socially concerned enterprises can take into account in their efforts to measure their systemic impacts. The indicators can be used to improve many processes, including redistribution efforts and democratic decision making, and also serve to enhance managerial self-assessment.

However, according to SSE activists, attempts by the city council to measure the sector have, until 2019, tended to be lax, and failed to pay sufficient attention to concrete democratic dimensions which offer room for the inclusion of many organisations operating in the social

² Garcia Jané (2014) of the cooperative l'Apòstrof estimated that the SSE in Catalonia comprises more than 27,000 organisations employing around 130,000 people (4.6% of employed population). These are rough figures because the sector is composed of different types of initiatives with varying degrees of commitment to its democratic and transformative principles. Fernández & Miró (2016) quantified the sector in Barcelona, calculating around 4,718 socioeconomic initiatives, or 2.8% of all registered enterprises, employing over 53,000 (8% of local employment).

economy's grey zone. Several foundations labelled as non-profit organisations and functioning as charities in social policy domains have been counted as SSE entities, even though they are not necessarily committed to collective forms of ownership or the political aim of economic democratisation. In consequence, sharp criticism has been voiced by some activists who are fully committed to those principles:

It is necessary to prioritise public procurement with SSE entities and to stop giving substantial amounts of public money to entities that sometimes wear the SSE mask but actually do capitalist jobs (SSE activist).

Other difficulties in measuring efforts are related to the city's territorial disparities and to timeframe discrepancies. The asymmetry between the long-term perspective required for SSE assessments and the electoral cycle is an obvious limitation. In all, quantification attempts have been more accurate with regard to identifying social inclusion activities than in measuring the magnitude of their socially innovative or politically transformative character.

Counteracting *residualisation* with a co-constructive approach.

The PIESS plan assumed the goal of making it easier “to live with the SSE”, and “to make a living within it” and launched a broad range of support and training activities. In line with this, the city's development agency Barcelona Activa set up a new public facility under the name InnoBA. This centre for socioeconomic innovation aims to support social entrepreneurship in a broad sense: it has an advice service for projects and organisations, it holds workshops on organisational strengthening and social entrepreneurship, it runs several specific support programmes for socially creative start-ups, and organises events to promote cooperatives and draw the attention of young people. While InnoBA offers ongoing training programmes to support socially engaged economic activities, the creation of a dedicated facility fuelled speculation in the SSE sector. Some viewed it as an example of incrementalism by the public administration:

This new building devoted to business guidance activities is often presented as the latest bit of good news. Maybe it is too early to make that claim. This type of measure might be underlying a sectorialisation of public policies on solidarity economies. It may be a way to avoid addressing one of our big challenges — the involvement of other types of economic actors (SSE activist).

Public officials deny this, presenting the facility as a broader transversal strategy that gives institutional consideration to social entrepreneurship. With an initial investment of just over €740,000 InnoBA was inaugurated in 2018. Offering physical space for a wide range of guidance and training activities, it received 34.7% of the entire PIESS budget between 2016 and 2019 (Ilabso, 2019). Collective entrepreneurship is furthered in various ways, all involving training to strengthen integral management of existing organisations and promoting new projects. Tailored programmes for start-up phases are combined with others that focus on business support in terms of communication, management and internal democracy. There are also specific programmes for the leverage of economic assets of civic associations.

Thanks to the implementation of the plan, social entrepreneurship has gained importance in the local development agency. Previously, it dealt with the social economy from a strictly palliative perspective, and only served a very small group of organisations which referred to

social economy as the world of inclusion in relation to groups with certain problems. All the interviewed actors agree that the plan has served to broaden that narrow conception. Nevertheless, from a plural and transformative perspective, it remains difficult to achieve transversality across public bodies, specifically those devoted to economic development:

Given the variety of political equilibriums in the governing coalition, there was an unmistakable division of responsibilities among virtually disconnected spaces. For example, the city council business department and the SSE commissioner never agreed on sharing work plans . . . and certain members of the new government did not fully perceive the transformative potential of the SSE. Put simply, in the world of the more conventional left — the nineteenth century left, so to speak — the understanding of SSE and cooperativism did not reach much further than the palliative dimension. According to that view, SSE deals with issues of social inclusion, and is perhaps also considered useful as a resource to create jobs for highly disadvantaged groups... though only to a limited degree (Jordi Via, former co-operative economy commissioner of the city council).

Actors from outside the municipal structures have also developed guidance projects under the PIESS plan. Substantial funding has been devoted to enhancing training activities, and specific actors from the SSE sector itself have provided resources and developed facilities. Coòpolis, for instance, a cooperative cultural association in Can Batlló (a former industrial complex in La Bordeta neighbourhood, Sants district) represents an ambitious networking effort in this regard. Driven by an alliance between neighbourhood activists and democratic cooperative actors, and functioning as a particular socially transformative development agency, it was born around 2015 in an area with a long-standing anarcho-syndicalist tradition.

However, it is not easy to replicate this kind of initiatives in those parts of the city where socially transformative movements are not that well developed. From a perspective of territorialisation and community action, the PIESS plan sought to introduce SSE practices “where they are most needed, and where it is more difficult to promote them”. It designed tailor-made SSE promotion plans for the city’s ten districts which identify the potential of each one to facilitate socio-communitarian economies. But despite the pertinent efforts exerted, collaboration with local entities was, in some areas, not as fruitful as expected. The official PIESS plan evaluation recognises that the plan fell short of its initial aims (Ilabso, 2019) and sees territorialisation and communitarian action as one of the lines that require further development.

Taboos about approaches to broadening the movement.

Critical concerns about oversizing the SSE sector existed prior to the plan’s inception and resurfaced during our assessment interviews and in the implementation evaluation commissioned by the municipality. The number of cooperatives doubled over the 2017–2018 period, thanks to the combination of the wide range of training programs, the availability of funding, and the opening of calls for grant applications directed at social entrepreneurship initiatives. Consequently, there has been a clear increase in the outsourcing of training services to a group of business consultants specialising in social innovation. Some of the people involved in working out the practicalities of local development have linked the expansion of SSE policies to the growing influence of this new group of economic consultants.

The risk of oversizing the SSE sector also appears in its stereotyping as a closed or not particularly accessible sphere of marginal and non-capitalistic economic practices. This often goes hand in hand with the consideration that social economy policies are designed *by* the sector *for* the sector. In response, many interviewed activists and public managers recognise that difficulties in reaching beyond established circles of committed groups are a challenge that needs to be addressed: there is a serious lack of SSE activity in the commercial, industrial and infrastructure sectors. The interviewees question whether the PIESS planning was done with a broad enough perspective:

We have not given a concrete boost to productive projects in strategic sectors. The policy has mainly dedicated resources to promoting several platforms that are not directly and clearly addressing the generation of employment (public manager and SSE activist).

The plan is assessed as effective when it comes to providing instruments for the identification of companies and entities that apply SSE principles, promoting differentiated practices from a public administration perspective and supporting the sector's coordination processes. But it has not yet made the more fundamental step of ensuring the scalability and transferability of SSE practices to all economic sectors. Bringing about change in economic organisations that are not inherently related to the SSE sector is reported as one of the recurrent challenges. Between 2016 and 2019, subsidies and small grants for the promotion of SSE initiatives proved more effective than public tenders whose conditions contained social clauses. SSE sector initiatives are not powerful enough to compete with conventional private corporations providing services to public bodies. In this regard, the interviewed actors stress the need for further action to ensure the SSE sector can access public bidding processes through collaborative inter-cooperation strategies. In addition, shortcomings in public administration publication practices and in the promotion of interaction and transversality across public bodies are frequently identified as conditioning factors of the aimed-for transformation. In debates on the limitations of and challenges for SSE policies, bureaucracy is frequently mentioned as a problem hindering transversal introduction of new principles in public administrations. In contrast, very few allusions are made to the negative influence of corporate interests which block strategies for economic interventions meant to promote the solidarity economy.

The introduction of cooperative practices into the industrial sector's way of functioning is a recurrent topic that was raised in all our interviews and in the two assessment workshops. The consulted actors agree that for certain sectors an ambitious, medium or long-term financial strategy is lacking. They highlight the city council's Social Procurement Guide (Ajuntament, 2016b) as a valuable instrument to ensure the administration is able to establish a truly social market. Considering the important role that public administrations can play as commissioners of concrete products and services, the PIESS plan confronted the challenge of increasing the number of SSE-based procurement agreements in all municipal departments. Advocates of social transformation reason that there is a need to have more energetic economic actors in the sector who are able to fulfil the requirements of public bodies. However, the market regulation and top-down economic planning required for this still appear to be taboo subjects. When discussing the limitations affecting broadening of the sector, the limits of and resistances to regulation and planning are also named, but the most frequently proposed explanations are again bureaucratisation of public administrations and lack of technical

knowledge among public managers and policymakers. The need for broader economic strategies for market regulation is hardly ever mentioned.

Conclusion

Around the globe, Barcelona is considered a reference for social transformation analysis because of its pioneering experiences of democratic inter-cooperation, its rich history of social movements and its previous experiments with municipalist governance. This section briefly presents three final observations that may serve as generalisable lessons for other local experiments geared towards fostering socioeconomic democratisation.

Our research assesses the approach of policies for socioeconomic democratisation by looking at how they emphasize transformative and plural economies. For the urban setting, this requires analysing their application of an overall programme to achieve such economies; it must include a narrative of economic thinking that places SMEs in a context of socioecological awareness. However, our findings show that assessments of policy success in this regard must also consider the way policies overcome the divide between macro and micro-economic dimensions in the language informing cities' economic governance. The tension stemming from the imbalance between democratic inter-cooperation and liberal hegemonic thinking means economic indicators become detached from their social implications — which is precisely the opposite of what the economic democratisation movement strives for. The fact that economic democracy is a policy goal specifically pursued by the SSE movement underlines the crucial aspects of linking economic governance to its social implications from an integrative point of view. In their initial phases, social economy policies clearly dispute the cultural framework of economic modernity, but, when the time comes to assess their implementation, there is a tendency to ignore the concrete indicators of change in socioecological awareness about the urban economy as a whole. Then, the regulation of market mechanisms, the impact of multilevel governance arrangements on economic planning or the way redistribution dynamics tend to revert to previous approaches must be taken as especially important indicators in evaluating the link between social economy policies and democratic innovation. If they are not, the effect is residualisation, and the social economy remains relegated to the palliative sphere.

The definition of *social economy* is blurred, in both politics and the media, by preconceived notions that sectorialise it to activities around social inclusion and usually also to the creation of labour opportunities for specific disadvantaged groups. The SSE literature has already discussed this, and today's new social economy strategies are reacting by requiring a transversal allocation of social economy actors to all kinds of activities. This effort includes considering how public bodies may produce transformative change in economic practices through tailoring their demand. This is especially relevant in sectors such as infrastructure or industry, where the notion is hardly present. Our evaluation of SSE policies indicates that the problem of residualisation of social economy activities is usually related to difficulties stemming from a lack of transversal communication inside public administrations. This, in turn, is caused by bureaucracy, institutional inertia of public bodies and a lack of technical knowledge among public managers and policymakers. Without disregarding this reality, it is important to highlight that even political organisations which uphold the ideals of the new wave of social economy policies are still echoing stereotypes that downplay the social sector as

palliative. Because of this, the transversalisation of socially transformative strategies inside public administrations and over all policy domains deserves to be more tightly linked to a cultural debate on macro-economic discourse and strategical thinking around policies. This debate does not necessarily have to take place inside public administrations or the transformative sector itself.

With regard to the challenge of democratising socioeconomic relationships, we can conclude that the SSE movement has created awareness of the notion of co-construction and conducted experiments of bottom-linked governance to design and implement relevant policies. These experiments require technical sophistication while ensuring that policy deployment assign a fundamental role to the social economy sector as a whole, including its sociocommunitarian entities. However, according to some private sector actors, no major changes can be observed following the substitution of public-private partnerships with new partnerships involving the social sector. This biased view has created mistrust which must be overcome by monitoring progress and giving more prominence to the transitional gains in the development of a public-cooperative-communitarian approach. The key issue is to offer room, not only to the social, communitarian or cooperative sectors, but also to other types of entities representing civil society and its bonds. It is in this sense that the new SSE policies must try to move forward. Previous research has already identified mutual misunderstandings among the various families in the sector of social and communitarian organisations and defined how these organisations may fit together with public administration bodies. We must now move on and try to solve the challenges around understanding what social economy means, considering other types of entities and promoting a debate with relevant actors that also have a stake in the equation. We must look beyond the core of engaged activism and involve the media, universities, cultural and civic associations, and trade unions, among many others.

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