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FRAMING LOCAL WELFARE: ANALYSIS OF WELFARE DISCOURSE IN PAMPLONA, SPAIN

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INTRODUCTION

Navarra is an atypical case amongst Spanish regions or «autonomous communities». It is small (606 thousand inhabitants in 2008), relatively wealthy (in 2010, its GDP per capita in PPS was 126% of the EU average). The larger urban area of its main city, Pamplona, amounted to two thirds of the regional population.

Technically, it is not exactly a «comunidad autónoma» but a «comunidad foral», and in fact it is the only one. This means that its autonomy derives from a right to self-government that predates the Spanish constitution, and has its origins in the way the region lost, in the mid-nineteenth century, its status as a separate kingdom.

In practice, Navarra has an institutional arrangement that allows it to collect almost all taxes, and then pay a fixed contribution to the national government to cover «common expenses». This gives the regional institutions of Navarra (and of the Basque country as well) a large degree of economic autonomy other regions lack, and leaves both regions out of the intricate and disfunctional interregional transfer system that has become a key political problem in Spain. A transfer system to which Navarra would have to contribute significantly being as it is a wealthier than the average regions.

The political and institutional reform in Spain after the death of Franco and during the transition to democracy kept the old «self-governing province» status of Navarra and incorporated the new status of autonomous region. As a result it has become arguably the most autonomous region in Spain. Navarra had a long standing tradition of developing its own educational, health and social, and even industrial development policies before it became an autonomous region in the modern sense, and it integrated the old national policies in these fields into its own during the 1980s and early 1990s.

These institutional and historical peculiarities have effects on the political debate as well. The Spanish party system has been often termed as an «imperfect two-party system», with two main right-of-the-center (the Popular Party, PP) and left-of-the-center (the socialist PSOE) parties, plus a smaller party to the left of the PSOE (IU, or Izquierda Unida). Catalonia, the Basque country and to a lesser extent Galicia have more complex systems due to the presence of right and/or left nationalist parties.

The party system in Navarra is significantly different. There is a strong cleavage between parties who uphold the existing autonomy of Navarra as it is, and parties belonging to the Basque nationalist area, who defend closer ties and, eventually, the integration into the Basque country. The existence of political violence has made this separation wider. This has brought together the two main parties in the «Navarrist» part, the right-of-the-center regionalist UPN and the socialist party. While UPN is an independent party as regards regional politics, it is a solid partner of the PP at the national level.

This means that the two main competing parties at the national level are in fact partners at the regional level, and have been working more or less together for most of the last 30 years. This has reduced to a great extent the political debates between these two main actors, who have shared the basic orientations in employment and social policies for decades, at least in most fields. On the other hand, the fact that the confrontation with the Basque nationalist part has to do with very basic aspects of the institutional configuration of Navarra (relations with the Basque country, language) makes it difficult to develop political debates on the specific orientations of social and employment policies.

Both main parties tend to present a very positive view of the region. The description of the region as an advanced, relatively wealthy even in European terms and cohesive society

may be found in the programs of both PSNi and UPN. UPN's program for the 2011 regional election mentions once and again the idea of how differences between left and right are not especially relevant.ⁱⁱ

The right-wing UPN tends to put the goals of social policies either in terms of the competitiveness and modernization of the region, or (for more residual social policies) as «protecting the weakest, with a global sense of justice. Institutions and society have a responsibility for the weakest and less protected persons: from migrants to people with severe disabilities, from unborn children to families that survive on minimum income.»ⁱⁱⁱ The left-wing PSN on the other hand, describes Navarra as a «cohesive region, with good educational, health and social services. A region in which the social benefits our party has been traditionally advocating for, together with family solidarity, very present in our social structure and character, has reduced the impact of the economic crisis». The goals of education appear clearly linked to competitiveness and economic development, but equal opportunities appear as well. In the more limited field of social welfare key concepts are equal opportunities, inclusion and more coordination between social and employment services. At the same time, it has promoted a minimum income reform that limits the entitlement to benefits, based on the need to increase incentives to work.

As a result, it is difficult to find debates in the regional parliament, the local councils or the media that have oppose articulate alternative visions of employment, childcare and housing policies. Criticisms tend to focus on how intensive the policies are, or to what extent are they really carried out, without proposing clearly different approaches. In any case, most debates tend to focus on ideologically relevant issues (public responsibility, the role of family) but with little effect in orienting policies. Innovations that may be linked to values and approaches quite different from the dominant ones tend to enter the system as long as they fit into a «niche» that doesn't change the whole orientation, and without opening a debate on the main orientations. This may be seen quite clearly in the cases of the social integration centers and housing analyzed in the WP5 report.

2. EMPLOYMENT

2.1. Actors

The responsibility for labor market policies in Navarra is shared as follows: General labor market regulation is established by the national level. «Passive» protection for the unemployed is in the hands of the national social security system, although access is done through employment centers managed by the regional government. This includes both unemployment insurance and unemployment assistance, but not minimum income benefits, in the hands of regional social services. Active labor market policies are in the hands of the region. This includes the register of job seekers, the training of both employees and the unemployed, and equal opportunity actions, among other activities.

This institutional arrangement took shape during the mid 1990s, when active labor market programs were transferred by the national government to the region. Before that full responsibility was in the hands of the central government. Nevertheless, since the crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, local councils and the regional government, although not formally responsible for active policies, did set up a series of relatively innovative programs to fill the numerous gaps in national provision. They did so initially with their own budgets, but they were able to make the central government to include some of these programs in the national employment plans, so local and regional authorities were able to secure some funding from the national level.

The transfer of services to the region in 1998 brought about important changes. It set up a very strong political actor at the regional level, that integrated existing national and regional programs at a level so close to the local one that it reduced the need of different local policies. While local authorities still manage certain employment programs, mostly funded by the region, the need for local autonomous policies has been very much reduced. In a way, the region takes over the role of local authorities since it becomes «local» itself, at least if by «local» we mean the «metropolitan» or «large city» level.

Active labor market policies are managed through the Servicio Navarro de Empleo (Navarra Employment Service), a public regional agency. This agency is run with a strong participation of the two largest trade unions (UGT and CC OO) and the regional entrepreneurs' association (CEN). Two other relevant trade unions (ELA and LAB) do not participate and have a critical stand towards the agency.

This peculiar situation has to do, on the one hand, with the fact that the two first trade unions have been keeping since 1995 a stable policy of social agreement with the CEN and the regional government, a policy the other two unions have criticized. On the other hand, it also reflects the cleavage between Basque nationalism (a political field to which both ELA and LAB belong) and Navarrese regionalism/Spanish unionism. The declared aim of this social agreement policy has been «facing, through agreements and trust, the challenges of the economic and social development of Navarra»iv.

Social partners (two of the trade unions and the business confederation) have a significant role in the management of active labor market policies in Navarra. Most of the policies are set in the regional employment plans (Planes de Empleo de Navarra), which are agreed by the regional government and the aforementioned social partners. Four of such plans have been agreed for 1999-2001, 2002-2004, 2005-2007 and 2009-2012.

These Plans are not discussed and passed by the regional parliament, although they are mentioned in some general policy debates and occasionally some members of the regional parliament propose specific measures to be included. This means political parties are not very relevant actors in this field, at least not as such. The two basic parties in the regional consensus (UPN and PSN) as well as the left-wing IUN accept and uphold this neocorporatist model of policy management, while political parties belonging to the Basque nationalist spectrum are globally critical of the model from which Basque nationalist trade unions are excluded. So criticisms may affect the whole management model, or focus on the request of some very specific additions, but it's hard to find a clear debate with contrasting policy positions.

This policy field is, thus, openly conceived in terms of social partner co-management. At the same time, these three social partners are the main providers of the training that the regional agency funds, something that has raised some questions on possible conflicts of interest by the regionallv comptroller.

While social partners tend to focus on mainstream labor market problems and programs, trade unions have been open to giving some space to policies aimed at the labor market integration of disadvantaged populations. Here we can find some additional actors. Programs for the labor market integration of migrants have been run mostly by organizations connected to the trade unions and by Caritas. Employment centers for people with disabilities, which are supported by the Servicio Navarro de Empleo, have been run either by specialized enterprises or by associations of users, and are organized into two federations. Employment centers for socially excluded people are run by a different set of TSOs, that are organized into a federation, and funding is also managed by the SNE.

2.2. Policies

Mainstream employment policies are expressed by means of the regional employment plans (Planes de Empleo de Navarra). Four of such plans have been established since 1999, namely for the 1999-2001, 2002-2004, 2005-2007 and 2009-2012 periods. The plans are approved by the social partners and by the regional government, but are not debated nor passed by the regional parliament.

The policy discourse that may be found in the employment plans is basically a translation of the European Employment Strategy. The 3rd plan set as its key aims: «consolidating full employment for all Navarrese men and women, improving its quality as well as productivity to maintain the competitiveness of our enterprises, without forgetting the needed social cohesion that a solidaristic society like Navarra has to develop» Navarra, 3er Plan de Empleo de Navarra 2005-2007, Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2004.. Although the fourth plan acknowledges the growing employment problems at the start of the financial crisis (while stressing that the situation in Navarra is not as dramatic as elsewhere in Spain), the basic discourse is the same.

The fact that policies are designed on the basis of the EES gives them a strong legitimacy and reduces public debate on their orientations. Even the fact that two relevant trade union organizations have remained excluded of employment policy design only seems to open some minor debates on whether they should be excluded or not, rather than on the content of policies.vi Trade unions and left wing political parties may emphasize the «employment quality» dimension (which refers mainly to reducing temporary employment) and the social inclusion and cohesion aspects, while entrepreneurs and right wing political parties may stress the need for competitiveness, but the overall design is shared.

The space for innovative or, simply, non standard approaches seems to be limited to certain niches. The discourse on social inclusion and enhanced opportunities for people with special difficulties has opened up a field in which secondary actors (mainly TSOs) have been able to develop some actions and innovative approaches (see WP5), while sticking to a niche and avoiding a spill over of their discourses (adapting employment to people rather than the other way round, accepting the low productivity of some people) into the mainstream.

3. HOUSING

3.1. Policies

The framework for housing policy is set at the national level (see WP2). This means that the basic overall orientation and the key concepts are set nationally and that regions and local authorities have autonomy to develop more or less the diverse tools that the framework offers. They may invest more or less in subsidizing new homes, they may put more or less pressure on the availability of land to build protected housing, but the key elements are set from the start.

Housing policy has been for years first and foremost an economic policy, aimed at expanding a profitable and job-creating economic activity sector. Its main elements are aimed at helping and encouraging middle-income families to buy newly built flats, both by encouraging developers to offer flats at prices that are affordable for the middle classes and by offering tax incentives.

Both things explain that debates on access to housing for disadvantaged and low-income groups haven't been central to housing policy debates in regions like Navarra. Information is scarce, and the analysis we can provide is therefore quite limited.

During the 2000s two regional laws on housing were passed in 2004 and 2010. The key issues that may be found in the debate have to do with whether the regional government was ready to set an ambitious target of building 13 thousand subsidized homes between 2004 and 2008^{vii}, or with the suppression of limitations on the re-selling of subsidized homes after a certain period of time^{viii}.

During the 2004 debate on the housing act, a spokesperson for one of the parties supporting the government said that a new single access process for all new housing developments would allow a «fair development and way to distribute protected [subsidized] housing amongst those who really need them in this region, not for the poor that have no place to go, for whom the Social Welfare Department has a program, but for those who don't earn a lot, and those who earn a lot but not enough. Because we also have to care for the middle classes who cannot afford to buy a free [non-subsidized] home, because it's very expensive...»^{ix}.

The 2011 regional election program of the governing party, the center-right UPN, identifies 6 challenges in housing policy, none of which has do to with access to housing nor with low income families. Out of a total 23 proposed actions, only 4 have to do with access. These are the idea of helping the young to access rented apartments «as an initial and temporary way of accessing housing»; keeping the existing policy of reserving a quota of new homes for certain groups (people with disabilities, victims of terrorism, etc.); offering additional subsidies to low income families and «working together with non-profit organizations to help people at risk of exclusion access to housing, preferably rental homes, as a means to integrate them socially».

Criticism by opposition parties tends to focus on whether the new subsidized home targets are accomplished, and on the importance of expanding the rental sector.

4. CHILDCARE

4.1. Actors

The basic institutional layout of childcare has been described in WP2. Framed by national regulations, education, including infant schools for children under 3 are a responsibility of regions. Nevertheless, in many cases, regional governments have set up an arrangement that leaves in the hands of municipalities the management of most infant schools, with about two-thirds of the cost being subsidized by the region and the municipality, and about one-third being paid by parents. This setup is an option, since regions could opt for a direct management of these schools, and some (see below) seem to find in this arrangement a certain de-responsabilization of regions.

The key actors in the field of childcare policy in Navarra are Government officials and political parties. The issue of how should these services be developed has been discussed several times in the regional Parliament during the 2000s. By the end of the decade, it's no longer a relevant element in the party programs. In their 2011 regional election programs, UPN and PSN mention the issue with a very low priority. UPN boasts having trebled the number of posts and having achieved a coverage of 90 per cent of the «demand», but it doesn't propose any specific measures in this field, except for a mention of the need to adjust demand and provision in some places. PSN gives the issue a bit more of attention (but less than one page out of 200), insisting in the need of further extending provision and in its role as a means of preventing early school leaving and educational inequalities. Other left-wing parties insist in public responsibility and making it free of charge (Bildu, NaBai, IU).

There has been another actor with some presence in the debate during the 2000s. The Plataforma del ciclo educativo 0-3 (Coalition to defend the 0-3 educational phase) is a coalition of education professionals, care centers, trade unions, parents associations and other stakeholders that insist in the need for high quality educational services for children under 3. Their discourse emphasizes quality, which is linked to the concept of institutional education (as opposed to both to care and informality) and professional qualifications of practitioners (interview with Alfredo Hoyuelos). They have been very vocal against anything that might be understood as a middle ground between formal and informal care (such as Casas Amigas) or any definition in terms of care instead of education.

4.2. Policies

The general debate on childcare in Spain shows a basic agreement on the need of developing services. The basic differences between left and right wing parties are to what extent the under 3 infant schools should be generalized or more selective, allowing for other arrangements, what's the emphasis in its educational or care nature, and the degree of full public responsibility for such services. This has led to several changes in the way these services are regulated by law (see WP2). This overall situation is basically the same in Navarra, where a strong development of care services has been accompanied by familistic nuances defended by the right.

The discourse we find in representatives of the right wing parties in Navarra doesn't oppose the overall model of establishing a infant school system for children under 3. In fact they claim to be clearly for it. The main nuances have to do their definition as family services rather than children's services, with whether all children are expected to use such services, and the idea that families should be able to choose.

Answering a question posed by an opposition member of the regional parliament in 2004, the at the time regional minister for education (a member of the center-right UPN) stated that «the general establishment of the educational cycle 0-3 promoted and helped by the Government of Navarra, and non-compulsory for families, is a target for this termxi». The wording carefully indicates this idea of infant schools as an option for families, and a role of promotion and support, rather than of full responsibility, for the regional government.

During the same debate, his colleague the regional minister for social welfare insisted in the framing of infant schools a services to support families and help them conciliating work and family responsibilities. He went on to state that his department was exploring other alternatives to help with conciliation, and that should respond to «the needs that are being expressed and demanded by all the families that wish to take into their hands the care of children at such young ages, that is, that don't want their children to leave their home so early and want them to be cared for in their own family environment.»xii

The member of parliament who posed the question replied in a way that shows the different view that left-wing parties usually have on the subject. After showing his overall agreement with the government's policy of developing care services, he nevertheless indicated that «we believe that they should be educational services, and I'm a bit worried at hearing Mr. Campoy insisting, every time he mentions these services, that they should be mainly educational, for he doesn't say the same thing of schools for other age groups, which are clearly educational; this mainly looks to me as a watering down of its educational character».

He goes on to stress some other conceptual differences between right and left. «We would like it to be educational and a direct responsibility of the Department of Education (...). We would like to have a sufficient provision of infant schools and not only to make possible the conciliation of work and family life Mr. Palacios has mentioned repeatedly, about which we agree (...)but also because we think not only in parents but in children as well, so we ensure children have equal opportunities starting at that age, that is, so that we don't let a gap open between those children who have been able to attend school between 0 and 3 years of age and those who haven't, and thus prevent the gap from going on into their educational and work lives».xiii

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- i. See [Unión del Pueblo Navarro], *Muévete por Navarra. Programa electoral 2011-2015* (Unión del Pueblo Navarro, Pamplona, 2011).
 - ii. See *Ibid.*
 - iii. *Ibid.*, page 6.
 - iv. [Comisiones Obreras de Navarra], *Informe de evaluación de los Planes de Empleo de Navarra. Resumen* (Comisiones Obreras de Navarra, [Pamplona], 2008).
 - v. Navarra, Cámara de Comptos, *Informe de fiscalización sobre el Servicio Navarro de Empleo*, Pamplona: Cámara de Comptos, November, 2012.
 - vi. Just as an example, see the question posed by the Nafarroa Bai parliament group to the regional government on economic policy, in February 2009: «We should analyze how the employment plan has been designed, and once again 33 per cent of the unions have been excluded. No effort has been made to obtain the support and the synergies that 33 per cent could offer.» *Diario de Sesiones del Parlamento de Navarra*, num 44, 26 feb 2009, p 10.
 - vii. See *Diario de Sesiones del Parlamento de Navarra*, 2004, num 24, p. 19.
 - viii. *Ibid*, p. 20 and 22.
 - ix. Mr Pérez-Nievas López de Goicoechea, *ibid*, p. 21
 - x. Unión del Pueblo Navarro, *Muévete por Navarra...*, p. 81.
 - xi. Luis Campoy, Consejero de Educación, in *Diario de Sesiones del Parlamento de Navarra*, 17, 6 may 2004, p. 4.
 - xii. José Ignacio Palacios, Consejero de Bienestar Social, in *Diario de Sesiones del Parlamento de Navarra*, 17, 6 may 2004, p. 8.
 - xiii. Miguel Izu, member of the regional parliament (IU), *Diario de Sesiones del Parlamento de Navarra* 17, 6 may 2004, p.11.