

21- OR IDEAS FOR EUSKADI. RATIONALIZATION OF THE NUMBER AND ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES

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After the Basque Government, Perhaps the second institution or the second institutional area that best structures society and that best contributes to improving the well-being and personal and collective fulfillment of citizens are undoubtedly the town councils that govern the management of our cities and towns as spaces for where the personal and collective fulfillment of citizens becomes effective.

Society perfectly understands, or at least intuitively, its function and, in general, its existence is considered necessary and useful due to its proximity, the tangibility of its actions and the emotional bond that almost all citizens have with their cities of origin. or of residence and of which the city council is its maximum representation.

That being said, from a rational and effective power allocation point of view, there are some interesting facts to ponder.

On the one hand, the extraordinary number of existing municipalities. In the Basque Country there are 250 town councils in a community of just over two million one hundred thousand inhabitants. The 40 municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants bring together 1.7 million of these citizens, so the remaining 210 municipalities host an average of just 2,000 residents. This meager size makes it very difficult to provide public services efficiently to citizens because the municipalities do not have the minimum critical mass necessary for their effective provision at reasonable prices. The Deputations arise here as executing agents of some of the natural attributions of a municipality and also joint municipal management formulas between several municipalities for the joint provision of certain services.

The result: hundreds of nano-town halls with capacities, in many cases, limited for effective municipal practice, especially at a time of structural crisis that is affecting the financing model on which many have relied in recent years. In advanced countries around us, lower population limits have been put into practice over the last few decades when forming town halls, so that the critical mass is established by law.

Pure logic seems to help us to intuit that it is difficult to guarantee, in a country as meager as ours, that city councils can provide themselves with excellent technical capacities for each of these 251 city councils and that it is also very difficult to have sufficient political capital to cover hundreds of positions for mayors and councilors with the capacity, intelligence and experience necessary to lead the destinies of their municipalities.

Secondly, the territorial structure of this country invites reflection on the opportunity to advance in more rational processes and also more in line with its social and urban reality. In an eminently urban and urbanized country (which some call the Basque City or Euskal Hiria) there are frameworks that make up authentic metropolises devoid of any institutional reference that manages them effectively in the face of a sum of nano-municipalities that are often incapable and overwhelmed by their own reality. . In this case, not because of its smaller size, but because some still contain urban malformations derived from developmentalism that are difficult to tackle alone. Others concentrate within the limits of their municipality enormous problems of social exclusion typical of a large city, the management of which is once again difficult from municipalities that are not large enough to do so. Duplications, comparative grievances and ostensible differences between one municipality and another in the same city emerge before any minimally serious reflection that is made.

Perhaps, due to its size, the most paradigmatic case is that of Greater Bilbao (with an urban continuum around the Ría of more than 900,000 inhabitants) with a world-class metropolitan center

and some residential districts and municipalities that enjoy a privileged quality of life. that coexist side by side with neighborhoods and municipalities with significant urban, endowment and service deficiencies.

Donostialdea (the second metropolis in the country in economic and population importance with approximately 325,000 inhabitants) also presents important socio-urban disparities between some municipalities and others, all forming part of the same urban reality separated by extemporaneous boundaries far from almost all logics.

But there are also other urbanized areas without a solution of continuity that, although they are much more homogeneous in their configuration from the social, economic and urban point of view (read the region of Deba Goiena or also the Gupizcoan Goierri or Tolosaldea), their institutional fragmentation around small and medium-sized municipalities makes them lose a lot of projection, they do not have sufficient capacity to face joint challenges and they often do not manage to equip themselves separately with equipment and public endowments that they could achieve if they constitute a single institutional reality.

Having said all this, it is possible that the integration of city councils into larger entities is not the only option, but it is one that in any case should be valued very seriously due to the advantages of efficiency and rationality that surround it.

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