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# Single-province social inclusion models in Spain: similarities and differences in the Autonomous Regions of La Rioja and Region of Murcia

*Salvador Manzanera-Román\**, *Domingo Carbonero Muñoz\*\**, *Manuel Hernández Pedreño\*\*\**, *Esther Raya Díez\*\*\*\**

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## ABSTRACT:

La Rioja and Region of Murcia are two single-province Autonomous Regions that have been governed by the Spanish conservative party (Popular Party) since the mid-90s. Although they have developed different social inclusion models, they share common elements. This paper analyses their social inclusion models by means of a comparative analysis, taking into account the different stages of development over the past three decades. The analysis includes the areas of social services, employment, education, and income. The common elements – similar documentary commitment in law, programmes, and benefits; excessive delegation in the social economy sector; limited planning and lack of coordination – outweigh the differences – Region of Murcia's more unfavourable context; higher social risk, and lower spending on social protection.

**KEYWORDS:** Social inclusion model; documentary commitment; active inclusion; social protection.

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** I38; I31.

## Modelos de inclusión uniprovinciales en España: similitudes y diferencias en La Rioja y Región de Murcia

## RESUMEN:

La Rioja y Región de Murcia son dos autonomías uniprovinciales gobernadas por el partido conservador español (Partido Popular) desde mediados de los años noventa y que han desarrollado modelos sociales dispares, aunque con elementos comunes. Mediante un análisis comparativo, tomando como referencia la política de inclusión, se indaga en las etapas experimentadas en los últimos treinta años. En su análisis se toma como referencia los campos de Servicios Sociales, Empleo, Educación y Rentas. Los elementos comunes (similar compromiso documental en leyes, planes y ayudas; excesiva delegación en el tercer sector; escasa planificación y falta de coordinación) predominan sobre las diferencias (mayor riesgo social, menor gasto en protección social en la Región de Murcia y el contexto más desfavorable de ésta).

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Modelo de inclusión social; Compromiso documental; Inclusión Activa; Protección social.

**CLASIFICACIÓN JEL:** I38; I31.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on social inclusion policies in individual Spanish Autonomous Regions have been performed since the 1990s (Moreno, 2008; Raya, 2002; Cortinas, 2017; Sanzo, 2013; Cornejo, 2001; Hernández, 2014). However, other more ambitious research has approached the study of social inclusion policies from a comparative perspective (Arribas, 1999; Fernández (Coord), 2015; Laparra, 2004; Ayala, 2000; Aguilar et al., 1995; Laparra, 2004; Pérez et al., 2009; Sanzo, 2019). In this study, we aim to build on the latter by performing a comparative analysis of two of the seven single-province Autonomous Regions in Spain: La Rioja and Region of Murcia. To put this in perspective, Spain is divided into 17 Autonomous Regions (political and administrative divisions) seven of which consist of only one province. According to previous analysis, similarities have been identified in the social inclusion models of the two single provinces, in spite of the fact the demographic and socio-economic situation is quite different and similar origin. Last subject has been researched by Aguilar (et. als 1995) or Rodríguez (2011). Thus, the comparative analysis is interesting.

Although the current debate revolves around two questions: reforms aimed at guaranteeing citizen rights, and towards an active social inclusion model linked primarily to employment initiatives (Rodríguez Cabrero, 2011), the two models analysed in this paper focus exclusively on the latter. Notwithstanding, it should be noted that there have also been debates which discuss the possibility of models which are not exclusively aimed at fulfilling employment requirements but also incorporate rights.

This paper is divided into four sections. Section 2 presents the objectives and methodology via territorial case studies (Campbell, 1975): Region of Murcia and La Rioja are contextualised within the context of Spain as a whole, and their individual cases and shared issues are discussed in depth. Section 3 describes the two Autonomous Regions, and identifies inequalities in terms of living conditions and social policy (Ayala & Ruiz, 2017; Índice DEC, 2017). Section 4 highlights the most relevant findings focusing on determining the common stages in the lifecycle of social inclusion policies. This comparative analysis also addresses intersectorality, integrating reforms in social services, employment transfers, and the complexities of the actors involved. In both regions, the social economy (third sector) plays a role in programme implementation, and the EU in programme funding, and social and employment orientation (Rodríguez Cabrero, 2014). Section 5 presents the opinion of the consulted experts on the social models of La Rioja and Region of Murcia, that is, their evaluation taking account features, strengths, weaknesses and the main challenges that both models face. Lastly, Section 6 presents the conclusions which revolve around two very different models in context, yet similar in development. However, we have taken into account the characteristic features that lean towards systems which prioritise social and employment initiatives.

## 2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The overall objective of this paper is to analyse the similarities and differences in the structure of two single-province social inclusion models. We aim to achieve this through two specific objectives: a) identify the documentary evidence in both models (regulations, plans, and programmes), and b) determine the response of public authorities to situations of social risk in both regions, especially after the impact of the recent economic crisis.

We chose the start date of 1982, which corresponds to the year in which the first regulations from both regions were published. This prolonged period of time enables us to distinguish different stages in both regions (background, development, and future perspectives) and to identify similarities and differences between the public and private sectors.

The methodology used to achieve these objectives comprises both secondary sources (official regional social statistics and documentation) and qualitative primary sources (interviews and discussion groups).

First, a statistical analysis was performed using the secondary sources for the period 2007-2016 on the main indicators that reflect the evolution of social conditions in different fields (income, employment, education), the socio-demographic context (elderly and foreign-born population), and the scope of social spending (education, healthcare, and social protection) at an overall national level and then for the two regions. The sources of the indicators are specified in the Tables, the most important being the INE (Spanish Office for National Statistics) – EPA (Labour Force Survey) and ECV (Living Conditions Survey) – the Ministry of Education, and the General Secretariat of Autonomous Region and Local Coordination. A documentary analysis was then performed on the social inclusion policies from each region, taking into account social services regulations, active employment orientation programmes, and social inclusion best practices.

The *primary sources* are qualitative (interviews and discussion groups) and complement the secondary sources in providing data on the social inclusion models, both in their structure and focus on reducing social risk. The two methods were developed in parallel in both regions, in time period and in the selection of the sample of experts. Interviews with experts were performed in late 2016, differentiating professional and technical profiles from political profiles. The policymakers interviewed were social services general managers or managers from the regional public authorities. Three were from La Rioja (I1R, I2R and I3R) and two from Region of Murcia (I1Mu, I2Mu).

The professional and technical profiles also included managers and coordinators from regional employment and social services programmes: three from La Rioja (I4R, I5R, and I6R) and two from Region of Murcia (I3Mu and I4Mu). Three discussion groups were held from late 2016 to early 2017. Three large groups of respondents were asked to give their opinion in different discussion groups; five respondents were in each group. The first group was made up of experts from the public social services network; a heterogeneous sample of managers from different towns and districts (P1FG1R, P1FGMu, etc.). The second group included experts from public employment departments (regional and local), although in La Rioja experts from private entities were also included (P1FG2R, P1FG2Mu, etc.). The third group included experts with extensive experience in the autonomous regions from the employment divisions of social economy entities (P1FG3R, P1FG3Mu, etc.).

### 3. SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT OF LA RIOJA AND REGION OF MURCIA

The comparative analysis of the two social models and their situation in relation to social cohesion requires a comparison of the socioeconomic context of both regions. To this end, indicators were taken into account to measure the demographic, economic, educational, and employment context, together with indicators of situations of vulnerability and social spending in areas such as health, education, and social protection for the period 2007-2016.

#### 3.1. DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Table 1 highlights the different demographic structures of La Rioja and Region of Murcia. Whereas La Rioja has a large ageing population, greater than the national average by almost two percentage points over the whole period, Region of Murcia's over-64 population is much lower than both La Rioja and the national average. In the period analysed, the growth of the over-64 population was higher in Region of Murcia (12.5%) than in La Rioja (11.5%).

The percentage of foreign-born population in La Rioja is higher than the national average, although lower than Region of Murcia throughout the period analysed. Moreover, despite a downward trend in foreign-born population in both regions, regional differences have widened.

TABLE 1.  
Demographic context indicators for La Rioja, Region of Murcia, and Spain 2007 and 2016

|                                       | La Rioja |      |        | Region of Murcia |      |        | Spain |      |        |
|---------------------------------------|----------|------|--------|------------------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|
|                                       | 2007     | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007             | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007  | 2016 | RC (%) |
| Percentage of population over 64      | 18.2     | 20.3 | 11.5   | 13.6             | 15.3 | 12.5   | 16.5  | 18.7 | 13.2   |
| Percentage of foreign-born population | 12.2     | 10.6 | -12.8  | 14.6             | 13.8 | -5.6   | 9.9   | 9.5  | -4.3   |

**Source:** The authors from INE Population Structure Indicators.

Consequently, the distance between the two regions has increased regarding the elder people. In the same way, although the weight of the percentage of foreign born population has become less important in both regions, the overall distance between the two has increased given that the rate of migration has fallen more intensely in La Rioja.

### 3.2. ECONOMIC CONTEXT

With regard to the economic context, the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita of La Rioja is above the national average and, moreover, is much higher than that of Region of Murcia by just over €5,000 in the period analysed (see Table 2). Both regions have experienced a fall in GDP per capita over the last decade (although the GDP is still somewhat higher in La Rioja) unlike the national average, which experienced growth of 0.8%. Therefore, La Rioja has a higher GDP per capita than Region of Murcia, and has maintained the difference over the last ten years.

TABLE 2.  
Economic context indicators for La Rioja, Region of Murcia, and Spain 2007 and 2016

|                    | La Rioja |        |        | Region of Murcia |        |        | Spain  |        |        |
|--------------------|----------|--------|--------|------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                    | 2007     | 2016   | RC (%) | 2007             | 2016   | RC (%) | 2007   | 2016   | RC (%) |
| GDP per capita (€) | 25,492   | 25,317 | -0.7   | 19,923           | 19,865 | -0.3   | 23,893 | 24,080 | 0.8    |

**Source:** The authors based on National Financial Statements.

### 3.3. EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The early school-leaving rate in La Rioja (17.8% in 2016) is somewhat below that of Spain throughout the period analysed (see Table 3). However, it is much lower than the rate in Region of Murcia (26.4% in 2016). In the last decade there has been a fall in the early school-leaving rate in both regions, although La Rioja has improved its relative position with a greater reduction than Region of Murcia.

TABLE 3.  
Educational context indicators for La Rioja, Region of Murcia, and Spain 2007 and 2016

|   | La Rioja |      |        | Region of Murcia |      |        | Spain |      |        |
|---|----------|------|--------|------------------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|
|   | 2007     | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007             | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007  | 2016 | RC (%) |
| Early school leaving rate... (1)          | 30.6     | 17.8 | -41.8  | 39.2             | 26.4 | -32.6  | 30.8  | 19.0 | -38.3  |
| Population aged 25-64 with studies... (2) | 54.1     | 60.3 | 11.4   | 44.4             | 50.1 | 12.8   | 50.7  | 50.1 | 15.0   |

Note: (1) Early school-leaving rate (18-24); (2) Population aged 25-64 who have completed post-compulsory education.

**Source:** The authors based on Eurostat (Population and social conditions. Youth. Youth education and training).

In contrast, both regions have seen an increase in the percentage of the population between 25 and 64 who have completed post-compulsory education. La Rioja reached 60.3% in 2016, slightly higher than Spain in the period analysed, while Region of Murcia reached 50.1% in 2016, lower than the national average.

Consequently, the educational context has improved in both regions in the last decade given that the early school-leaving rate has decreased and the percentage of the population with post-compulsory education has increased. However, this improvement is greater in La Rioja.

### 3.4. EMPLOYMENT CONTEXT

The different indicators reveal a better relative position in terms of employment context in La Rioja. However, the analyses also reveal similarities between the two regions. First, the level of employment (see Table 4) in both regions shows similar figures (59.2% in La Rioja and 59.1% in Region of Murcia in 2016) to Spain. However, Region of Murcia has experienced a greater decrease (around -2.4%) than La Rioja (-0.3%) and Spain (-0.1%) in the last decade. Second, part-time employment does not reveal any regional differences. The growth of part-time workers (see Table 4) increased to 15.4% in Region of Murcia and 15.1% in La Rioja, which mirrors the same levels as Spain as a whole.

However, the increase in temporary contracts has been more intense in Region of Murcia (31.3%) than in La Rioja (21.3%). Third, both regions experienced a decrease in the percentage of workers on temporary contracts of around -12% and -15%, respectively. However, La Rioja shows better results in comparison to Spain and Region of Murcia, whose percentage of temporary workers reached 26.1% and 34.1%, respectively.

**TABLE 4.**  
**Employment context indicators for La Rioja, Region of Murcia, and Spain 2007 and 2016**

|  | La Rioja |      |        | Region of Murcia |      |        | Spain |      |        |
|--|----------|------|--------|------------------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|
|  | 2007     | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007             | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007  | 2016 | RC (%) |
| Employment rate                        | 59.4     | 59.2 | -0.3   | 60.6             | 59.1 | -2.4   | 59.3  | 59.2 | -0.1   |
| Percentage temporary employment... (1) | 25.2     | 22.1 | -12.3  | 40.1             | 34.1 | -15.0  | 31.6  | 26.1 | -17.4  |
| Percentage part-time employment... (2) | 12.7     | 15.4 | 21.3   | 11.5             | 15.1 | 31.3   | 11.6  | 15.2 | 31.0   |

Note: (1) % temporary workers; (2) % part-time workers

Source: The authors based on INE EPA data. Labour Force Survey.

Analysing the unemployment indicators, Table 5 confirms the weaker position of Region of Murcia's labour market. First, although the growth of the unemployment rate has been significant in both regions, it was higher in Region of Murcia. However, the unemployment rate in La Rioja remained at 13.6% in 2016, well below both Region of Murcia (19.8%) and Spain (19.6%). Second, the long-term unemployment rate also increased in both regions between 2007 and 2016, with more than half of the unemployed in 2016 in long-term unemployment. In both cases, long-term unemployment rates are higher than in Spain as a whole. However, the rate in La Rioja has deteriorated to a greater extent due to the greater increase of its relative share. Third, youth unemployment among the under-25s reached higher levels in Region of Murcia (49.1%) than in La Rioja (38.8%). The rate of change in Region of Murcia (325.4%) was higher than in La Rioja (246.5%) and Spain (262.4%). However, Region of Murcia was in a better relative position in 2007 than La Rioja and Spain, and in a worse situation ten years later. Long-term unemployment is usually observed in the section of the population with lower levels of education.

Lastly, the rate of households with all active members unemployed increased in both regions. Although the rate of change is higher in La Rioja, Region of Murcia has shown higher rates throughout the period (2.7% in 2007 and 9.7% in 2016), which confirms its weaker position.

**TABLE 5.**  
**Employment context indicators for La Rioja, Region of Murcia, and Spain 2007 and 2016**

|  | La Rioja |      |        | Region of Murcia |      |        | Spain |      |        |
|--|----------|------|--------|------------------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|
|  | 2007     | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007             | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007  | 2016 | RC (%) |
| Unemployment rate                            | 5.8      | 13.6 | 135.7  | 7.5              | 19.8 | 162.6  | 8.2   | 19.6 | 138.2  |
| % Long-term unemployed                       | 16.9     | 57.0 | 237.3  | 16.8             | 55.6 | 231.0  | 23.8  | 57.3 | 140.8  |
| % Unemployed under 25 (1)                    | 15.7     | 38.8 | 246.5  | 15.1             | 49.1 | 325.4  | 17.7  | 46.5 | 262.4  |
| % unemployed with low level of education (2) | 9.1      | 21.5 | 236.3  | 8.8              | 28.6 | 325.0  | 11.8  | 29.9 | 253.4  |
| % unemployed households (3)                  | 1.6      | 6.7  | 318.5  | 2.7              | 9.7  | 258.4  | 3.3   | 11.1 | 231.8  |

Note: (1) Percentage of unemployment among under-25s. The percentage refers to the total active population under 25 in each region; (2) Percentage of unemployment among individuals with a low level of education. The percentage refers to the total number of active population with first stage secondary education and lower. The low educational level corresponds to studies lower than first stage secondary or primary education, (3) Percentage of households with all members unemployed.

**Source:** The authors based on INE EPA data. Labour Force Survey.

Consequently, it can be confirmed that Region of Murcia's labour market has certain characteristics which make it more susceptible to the ups and downs of the economy, which makes it weaker and with more symptoms of job insecurity.

### 3.5. SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

The indicators that reveal the impact of the socioeconomic contexts that characterise the two regions on situations of social vulnerability were taken into account during the analysis. Table 6 reveals that La Rioja's situation in 2016 was better than that of Region of Murcia and Spain, since the poverty risk rate in the former was 11.9%, while 28.9% of the population in Region of Murcia was at risk of poverty. In addition, the differences between the regions have increased, given that La Rioja reduced its rate (-26.5%), while in Region of Murcia the opposite occurred (18.0%). However, if the rate of change for the AROPE (At Risk Of Poverty and Exclusion) indicator is taken into account, the results show that Region of Murcia achieved a reduction of -7.3% between 2007 and 2016, offset by an increase in La Rioja (2.2%). As a result, although Region of Murcia doubled the AROPE rate of La Rioja in 2007, the difference was reduced to 7.9 percentage points in 2016 (27.5% and 19.6%, respectively).

**TABLE 6.**  
**Social vulnerability indicators for La Rioja, Region of Murcia, and Spain 2007 and 2016**

|                   | La Rioja |      |        | Region of Murcia |      |        | Spain |      |        |
|-------------------|----------|------|--------|------------------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|
|                   | 2007     | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007             | 2016 | RC (%) | 2007  | 2016 | RC (%) |
| Poverty risk rate | 16.2     | 11.9 | -26.5  | 24.5             | 28.9 | 18.0   | 19.8  | 22.3 | 12.6   |
| AROPE rate        | 17.4     | 19.6 | 2.2    | 34.8             | 27.5 | -7.3   | 23.8  | 27.9 | 4.1    |

**Source:** The authors based on INE. Living Conditions Survey data

In conclusion, the analysis of social vulnerability indicators reveals weaker social cohesion in the case of Region of Murcia.

### 3.6. SOCIAL SPENDING

Lastly, a comparison of social spending indicators was performed focusing on the most intense period of the economic crisis (see Table 7) to verify the level of regional commitment to the achievement of social cohesion and solidarity. In the case of social health spending, there are hardly any differences between the two regions and Spain as a whole. Differences appear first in the field of education, given that La Rioja spends less in proportion to the total social spending in Spain and in Region of Murcia; and, second, in the field of social protection, where La Rioja targets greater spending than Region of Murcia.

TABLE 7.

**Social spending indicators for La Rioja, Region of Murcia, and Spain average for 2008-2014 (%)**

|                                   | La Rioja | Region of Murcia | Spain |
|-----------------------------------|----------|------------------|-------|
| Healthcare                        | 53.8     | 53.5             | 52.3  |
| Education                         | 29.3     | 35.1             | 32.5  |
| Social protection and advancement | 16.9     | 11.4             | 15.2  |

Note: Percentage of total social spending

**Source:** The authors based on data from the General Secretariat for Autonomous Regions and Local Coordination (data from both Autonomous Regions' end-of-year Financial Statements); Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality (Public Health Expenditure Statistics); Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (Public Expenditure on Education Statistics) and INE (Population Figures)

In summary, the analysis indicates that both regions maintain few similarities and many differences, but in general terms La Rioja is in a more favourable situation than Region of Murcia. More precisely, La Rioja has a higher percentage of over-64s, although the foreign-born population rate is lower, which could favour higher income per capita. The region's more favourable educational context, a lower early school-leaving rate and a higher rate of population with post-compulsory education, should also be taken into account. Although the labour markets are similar in terms of employment rate and part-time contracts, the percentage of workers with temporary contracts and the unemployed highlight the more accentuated structural weakness of Region of Murcia's labour market. In short, the better relative position of La Rioja in the economic, employment, and educational contexts is confirmed by lower percentages of the population affected by the risk of poverty and social exclusion, as well as higher expenditure on social protection, which is indicative of regional inequalities.

## 4. DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

A documentary analysis was performed on the different regulations pertaining to social services, employment, and social inclusion that shape the social inclusion models. In spite of the inequalities between the regions, a parallel evolution in the form of four stages was detected.

The absence of a Human Right Approach is the main characteristic in the initial stage (middle of 90) in Region of Murcia and La Rioja. In the middle of nineties, these regions had been characterized in the third level of social protection associated to low level of coverage and important restrictions (Aguilar, Gaviria & Laparra, 1995; Rodríguez, 2011).

### 4.1. FIRST STAGE (1982-2001): INITIAL STAGE

The original idea behind social inclusion models began with the 'Statutes of Autonomy' approved in 1982 (De las Heras & Cortajarena, 2014). In both regions, the first social services policies were passed under the socialist regional governments of PSRM (Socialist Party of Region of Murcia) in Region of Murcia and PSOE (Spanish Socialist Worker's Party) in La Rioja. The welfare and social inclusion plans

approved in Region of Murcia were the Regional Plan for Social Insertion and Protection (1991-1995) and the Regional Plan for Social Welfare (1995-1997). These plans were intended to serve as planning and coordination tools for areas of social protection and local authorities, albeit with limited political commitment (Galindo, 2008). In turn, La Rioja approved the Plan of Action against Social Exclusion (1998-2002), which had limited impact and was discontinued.

In this initial stage, local advisory boards with varying powers were created in both regions. In Region of Murcia, the Technical Advisory Council for the Fight Against Poverty and Exclusion was created, which led to the creation of the Regional Support Programme for Social Inclusion and the proposal to create a third Regional Plan. In La Rioja, the Social Exclusion Advisory Board was created. At the time no tangible achievements were perceived, although the fundamental bases were laid for the region's social inclusion policies in successive years.

Best practices and social benefits were used to study the map of resources, using employment orientation as a reference. In Region of Murcia the Socioeconomic Integration Grants (APIS) scheme was approved, while in La Rioja the historical role of local authorities in local employment programmes (Order 24/2009) was capitalised. Resources were mapped using social benefits. The policies of both regions were subject to a series of audits at the beginning of the 1990s, which examined everything from the policies' welfare principles to the provision of funding towards socioeconomic initiatives. This led to the approval of the APIS model in Region of Murcia, whilst the benefit reform in La Rioja was not implemented until the beginning of the next stage.

#### **4.2. SECOND STAGE: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE INCLUSION MODEL (2001-2008 IN LA RIOJA AND 2001-2006 IN REGION OF MURCIA)**

The most relevant debates in this period were linked to the limitation of state expenditure, the redefinition of the welfare state in social policy, and the alignment of social programmes with employment needs (Parlier et al., 2012). In this second and the following stages, both autonomous regions were governed by the conservative party or Popular Party. The 'Third Way' in the United Kingdom is an example of a model characterised by the role of the state as investor rather than protector. The Lisbon Strategy saw the role of the welfare state as a driving force ready to face 'new risks' interconnected with the role of active policies, education, and coordination between employment and social services (De La Porte & Natali, 2012; Van Kersbergen, 2012; Nolan, 2013).

Subsequently, three important aspects were adopted: the implementation of laws to regulate social services and social inclusion; employment transfers, and the implementation of regional programmes linked to groups with low employability.

Both regions implemented new laws to regulate social services. In the case of Region of Murcia, the Social Services System Law 3/2003 was characterised by less stringent regulation and the establishment of simpler rules. Unlike the previous law, infractions and sanctions were incorporated, offering an opening to private initiative. In the case of La Rioja, Law 1/2002 was aimed at adapting its approach to the needs of new groups that previously fell under state competence. The most noteworthy progress was made in user rights and responsibilities, sanctions, and participation and, in particular, the structuring of social services, making specific reference to territorial competences, volunteering, private participation, and funding.

In addition, La Rioja also approved Decree 24/2001 regulating social benefits, and Law 7/2003 on social and employment integration. Benefits were calculated on a scale according to level of employability. Minimum Insertion Income (IMI) was linked to user employment requirements, while Social Integration Benefits (AIS) were targeted at groups with low employability and serious social problems. The law also contemplated the figures of employment tutors and social and employment integration teams who were assigned to the employment services. Their functions included inter-agency collaboration between the

State Employment Services (SEPEE) and social services, and the execution of first (support and protection) and second level (active employment policies and intermediation) functions.

Employment transfers come under regional employment services. In the case of La Rioja, they overlapped with inclusion measures linked to standard employment insertion. Their evolution was limited, and they had a low impact in terms of creating insertion companies and in the development of benefits to encourage the recruitment of social benefit users. In the case of Region of Murcia, measures for the inclusion of individuals in vulnerable situations were limited to training initiatives.

Once the regional programmes aimed at individuals with low employability were approved, the Active Social Insertion Programme in La Rioja, and the Regional Support Programme for Social Inclusion in Region of Murcia, an attempt was made to intervene by means of integral and individualised support by adapting training, employment, education, health, and social support resources to needs. In both cases, it was determined that access to these programmes should be dealt with by the first-level social services team, contemplating actions of a socio-educational, psychological, and personal skills nature. However, implementation in La Rioja was outsourced to Caritas-Chavicar, while in Region of Murcia it was performed by the public authorities.

#### **4.3. THIRD STAGE (2008-2014 IN LA RIOJA AND 2007-2016 IN REGION OF MURCIA): ECONOMIC CRISIS AND PROMOTION OF ACTIVE EMPLOYMENT POLICIES FROM THE EU**

Organic Law 2/2012 on Economic and Financial Stability was introduced nationwide to implement austerity measures aimed at reducing public spending (Del Pino & Rubio, 2013; Moreno, 2016). As a result, the social services and income protection policies in both regions suffered a setback, while the specific development of inclusion policies became part of the Active Employment Policies and, in particular, policies funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). This stage covers the periods 2008-2014 and 2007-2016 for La Rioja and Region of Murcia, respectively.

Three similar processes took place in both regions in the area of social services and income protection: the development of advanced regulations within the framework of social services and inclusion; budget cuts in social benefits, and the implementation of social and employment inclusion measures.

In Region of Murcia, Law 3/2007 on Basic Insertion Income (RBI) was approved to provide economic support to individuals or family units to address basic needs in order to facilitate social inclusion. In La Rioja, Law 7/2009 on Social Services, and Decree 31/2011 on the Public Social Services Portfolio of Services and Benefits were approved. These documents included guidelines aimed at guaranteeing universal and subjective rights. In addition, social inclusion benefits, IMI, and AIS were included in the second-level social services portfolio.

The abovementioned reforms were halted during the economic crisis. In the case of Region of Murcia, the RBI had serious problems meeting demand, especially in 2012, although it continued as a benefits option. In the case of La Rioja, Decrees 4/2010, 31/2011 and 16/2012 introduced limitations and restrictions to IMI entitlement.

Lastly, measures aimed at labour market integration via the usual route were promoted. In the case of Region of Murcia, funding was given to social and employment inclusion programmes from 2008, while in La Rioja, funding was given to private and local firms from 2012 to contact IMI beneficiaries. However, the impact on the inclusion processes was unclear.

Active Employment Policies during this stage were developed by the social economy sector and funded by the ESF. Simultaneously, various employment programmes were approved, such as the 2011-2015 Employment Plan and the 2014-2016 First Lifelong Learning Plan in La Rioja, and the 2014-2016 Employment Creation Plan in Region of Murcia.

European funding was structured around three programmes: ESF-regional 2007-2013, ESF-regional 2014-2020, and the Youth Employment Initiative 2014-2020. The most relevant characteristics referred to the following aspects:

- Lack of and/or gaps in coordination between employment and social services.
- A central role for the autonomous regional authorities in the development of employment programmes. Region of Murcia developed its programmes via the Murcian Employment and Training Services (SEF) and the Murcian Institute of Social Action (IMAS), while the programmes in La Rioja were developed via its training and employment department.
- The social economy sector became an instrument for the development of the policies, leading to the subcontracting of services through social economy entities. This implementation role contrasts with the sector's limited participation in the planning and design of social inclusion policies in both autonomous regions.

Lastly, the map of resources in both autonomous regions was framed within programmes aimed at employment orientation, training, and job creation, *inter alia*.

#### **4.4. FOURTH STAGE (FROM 2015 IN LA RIOJA AND 2016 IN REGION OF MURCIA): INTRODUCTION OF REFORMS IN RESPONSE TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS**

This stage is marked by austerity, structural adjustments, and fiscal consolidation. In addition, social investment as a productivity element replaced social protection. Consequently, the rationale behind employment and training acquired greater importance in the face of new social risks in a competitive and knowledge-based economy (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017; Nolan, 2013; Bovoli & Natali, 2013). At this stage, there was a parallelism between the two regions in that both were rethinking their social inclusion policies.

From 2016, some of the parallels which could be found refer to the following issues:

1. Approach to inclusion policy planning. In La Rioja the Citizen Income Law was approved with the purpose of improving inclusion policy implementation. In Region of Murcia, the Strategic Lines of Social Action (LEAS) policy was approved with the aim of coordinating actions from the area of social services.
2. Implementation of coordination measures between social and employment services. In Region of Murcia, coordination began in 2016 with actions targeted at groups with three levels of employability: low or very low, medium, and high. The first two cases are dealt with via coordinated intervention from IMAS, SEF, and social economy entities. At the highest level of employability, individuals are categorised as professionals and given exclusive access to a tutor from the employment services. In La Rioja, a draft for coordinated action dates from 2018 and, like Region of Murcia, it is differentiated according to level of employability. An analysis is performed by first-level social services, who differentiate between the employable and non-employable population. With respect to the employable population, the employment services perform a personalized study which includes skills, competencies, training, interests, and professional opportunities. Moreover, the personalized plan includes employment, training, and proactive search actions. Collaboration with social services is contemplated in matters relating to the analysis of the socio-family situation.
3. Improvement in the scope of benefits for recipients. Both autonomous regions have improved scope by increasing income benefits. In Region of Murcia, the increase was helped by the approval of the Basic Income Directive. In La Rioja, the approval of Decree 28/2014 was geared towards making entitlement criteria more flexible and increasing the amount of benefits.

Subsequently, Law 4/2017 on Citizen Income and Decree 31/2017 regulating the law gave continuity to the changes.

4. Similar employment policies based on regional plans. The employment measures in both regions use as a reference the national and European plans linked to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee Plan, the Europe 2020 Strategy for training and active employment policy, the Spanish Employment Activation Strategy, the Annual Employment Policy Plans, and the Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment Plan. Actions within the regional plans are targeted at vulnerable groups, using training and active employment policies (entrepreneurship, intermediation, and forward planning) as a point of reference.

In La Rioja, the Vocational Training and Employment Plan covers the period 2016-2019 and the Regional Strategy for Quality Employment covers the period 2017-2020. Both plans include training initiatives for vulnerable groups. The employment plans include a system of competences, vocational training, and the integration of different modalities. In Region of Murcia, the Regional Strategy for Quality Employment 2017-2020 also focuses on training and the improvement of key competencies.

5. Increasing the role of new actors and the relationship with social economy programmes via private funding sources. Best practices in the autonomous regions are conditioned by external funding, mainly from the ESF and private investment. In both cases, employment programme funding is linked to private bank sources such as Bankia or the Fundación La Caixa.

## 5. EXPERT OPINION ON THE SOCIAL MODELS OF LA RIOJA AND REGION OF MURCIA

The two qualitative methods used in this study (interviews and discussion groups) have provided an exhaustive evaluation of both models, highlighting their characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, and the main challenges they face.

### 5.1. DEFINITIVE ELEMENTS OF THE SOCIAL INCLUSION MODELS OF LA RIOJA AND REGION OF MURCIA

In theoretical terms, the experts' comments describe welfare models that have suffered a series of setbacks during the recent economic crisis. Both models share characteristics such as inefficiency and limited political commitment due to the continuous changes and frequent tightening of the regulations in La Rioja, and the long delays with the regional models in Region of Murcia. Similarly, the experts consider that both models have fostered mixed forms of implementation with excessive delegation of intervention actions in social economy enterprises who they believe are not very exacting or clientelist.

*In terms of the work carried out by the social economy sector, our model is assistance-based, which is closely related to lack of resources (P3FG2R, expert responsible for social and employment services in the social economy sector).*

*Right now, we are not adequately planning or organising, but delegating the responsibility for action disproportionately in social economy initiatives (I4Mu, expert responsible for social inclusion policies).*

*There is a clientelist relationship because things are funded that are agreed beforehand (P1FG1R, public social services expert).*

At a fundamental level, the experts consider that the institutional response has been conditioned by the economic cycle, leading to volatile models dependent on the economic context, although more intensely in Region of Murcia. Although policymakers consider that there has been an improvement in

social inclusion resources in recent years, according to the experts consulted, their legacy is limited in both regions.

*Approximately 5,000 families and 16,000 people are going to be reached, so a good proportion of needs are met. Can the region's social services reach the whole population?...I don't think so (I1Mu, policymaker responsible for social inclusion policies).*

*Income support is mostly welfare assistance and, moreover, most of it is insufficient in amount (P5FG1Mu, local employment agency expert).*

*Public resources are too limited to meet all existing demands (P5FG3R, employment expert).*

In both regions there has been a trend towards a reduction in funding from the regional authorities themselves and an increase in EU funding. In Region of Murcia, most of the IMAS budget is focused on the funding of social economy enterprise projects for employability improvement programmes funded by the EU. In La Rioja, the limited funding going to social economy enterprises prevents them from maintaining certain resources such as employment tutors and obliges them to seek funding from the EU or private bank sources such as Fundación La Caixa.

*Salvation has come in the form of social funding because there was a significant decrease in the resources that we could allocate; there were benefits that we thought were going to disappear. ESF funding has allowed us to stabilise resources (I3Mu, expert responsible for social inclusion policies).*

On a practical level, the experts point to low levels of coordination in both regional models, despite improvements in recent years. The lack of political commitment has led to serious shortcomings in the planning of the models, especially in Region of Murcia, as well as little or no evaluation of the inclusion policies in both models.

*The problem is lack of planning; things are delegated without knowing very well what is being done (I3Mu, expert responsible for social inclusion policies).*

*There is a lack of coordination between IMAS and the two department Directorates-General (I3Mu, expert responsible for social inclusion policies).*

*We don't know how to accurately evaluate the cost and final results of the programmes (P2FG2R, employment agency expert).*

With regard to coordination between the authorities and social economy enterprises, the relationship lies more in the area of implementation and information transfer than in planning itself. Regarding this, the policymakers interviewed valued the expertise of social economy enterprises as agents endowed with the flexibility and capacity required to respond to user needs, although the experts criticised the delegation of uncontrolled welfare assistance.

*The evaluation of the relationship between the public employees of IMAS and the social economy sector is very positive (I1Mu, policymaker responsible for social inclusion policies).*

*The social economy sector is involved once everything is decided. It is not involved in the design of social and employment intervention policies; only in the implementation (P4FG3R, social economy enterprise expert).*

Experts from both regions also highlighted the limited coordination between regional and local authorities. This has caused important regional imbalances in La Rioja, and a lack of clear guidelines and information about what resources are available to local entities in Region of Murcia.

*We are informed of the guidelines but are not party to them. We can only go with what is sent. We offer what we have but it might not be what is needed. (P3FG1Mu, social services centre expert).*

The two regions are similar as regards, what always seems to have been, non-existent coordination between social services and employment services. However, while in La Rioja coordination has

traditionally been performed through informal channels, there is a draft protocol for action on the beneficiaries of Citizen Income for employment and social services, in Region of Murcia the coordination plan has changed. In recent year, the concept of institutionalised collaboration spaces has been created via a joint protocol from the employment services, IMAS, and first-level social services.

*There are clashes between the departments of Employment and Social Services and they are not united in having a comprehensive strategy* (P4FG1R, local social services expert).

## 5.2. WEAKNESSES OF THE SOCIAL INCLUSION MODELS IN LA RIOJA AND REGION OF MURCIA

The weaknesses of the social inclusion models have been partly mentioned in the previous section. The experts consulted consider that both models show weaknesses due to the lack of planning and coordination between social and employment services. In general terms, the La Rioja experts consider the lack of comprehensive social inclusion policies as a weak point; on the other hand, they believe that the inequalities with nearby regions such as Navarra and the Basque Country, which have greater benefits and scope, undermine their social inclusion model, something that has not happened in Region of Murcia.

*The absence of comprehensive action is a gap in social inclusion policies on the part of the authorities and affects, above all, vulnerable groups* (P3FG2R, expert responsible for social and employment services in the social economy sector).

*The differences between the benefits in the Basque Country and Navarra, which could reach €941, and those of La Rioja, which are around €300, are shocking* (I5R, social services expert).

In the area of employment, little attention is paid to the most vulnerable users in either model. The experts consulted from this area highlighted the absence of adequate measures to combat school failure, which is more intense in the case of Region of Murcia.

*There is a clear need to develop preventive programmes for young people excluded from the education system. The least prepared are those who enter the labour market first* (P4FG2R, expert responsible for social and employment services in the social economy sector).

In the area of social services, the experts consulted in La Rioja stated that their services were stretched due to the absence of nearby resources. Those consulted in Region of Murcia consider the loss of first-level primary care, as well as the lack of resources and poor adaptation to the needs of users, as important weak points.

*There are important limitations in social services. There are insufficient resources and the social economy sector is reliant on emergency funding* (P5FG1R, local social services expert).

*The problem is that the primary care network is not sufficiently dimensioned. Things like dependency care, minimum income, etc. have improved, but the primary care network has not improved* (I4Mu, expert responsible for social inclusion policies).

*Because we have few resources, people are adapted to the resource and not the other way around and this leads to failure* (P4FG1Mu, head of social services centre).

## 5.3. STRENGTHS OF THE SOCIAL INCLUSION MODELS IN LA RIOJA AND REGION OF MURCIA

The strengths of the social inclusion models focus on the progress made in recent years with the introduction of reforms following the economic crisis. In La Rioja, among other advances, progress was made initially via the approval of the Citizen Income Law, which introduced exceptions to the principles of labour remuneration, making income derived from employment compatible with income benefits. This action implies that benefits cease to be subject to availability of funds. A draft protocol of action for the

Citizen Income beneficiaries for employment and social services was also proposed. Second, the merger of the Ministries of Education and Employment also constitutes an important advancement and a strong point of the social inclusion model, given that it targets dual training systems and vocational training actions at the vulnerable population.

*The merger between the Departments of Education and Employment may help us include and develop measures to address diversity* (P4FG2R, expert responsible for social and employment services in the social economy sector).

In the case of Region of Murcia, the strong points are based on the progress made towards a new Social Services Law whose objective is to better define the structure of social services by specifying roles, types of services, levels of competence and ratio of people served by social workers. And, in turn, on the creation of a coordination protocol between social and employment services that enables individuals at risk of exclusion to improve their level of employability.

*We want to clearly define which professional you should go to when you come through the door, what services are available at a local level, at a regional level, and what your rights are. We want to make a Law of Social Services Rights. We are at that point in time and if it is not about rights, then we won't support it* (I1Mu, policymaker responsible for inclusion policies).

*The aim of the protocol is for local network, in collaboration with IMAS and with social economy enterprises, to make people aware that from the minute they enter the system, from town halls, that they can be referred to any of these associations or through IMAS and, at the same time, make them aware of the entire range of resources available* (I2Mu, policymaker responsible for employment services).

However, there is still some reticence on the part of the experts interviewed.

*The problem is not the protocol, which is positive, but what it's actually being used for. It should be people-oriented and not aimed at ESF objectives* (P1FG3Mu, social economy expert).

#### 5.4. CHALLENGES OF THE SOCIAL INCLUSION MODELS IN LA RIOJA AND REGION OF MURCIA

According to the experts consulted on the social inclusion models of La Rioja and Region of Murcia, the challenges they face are similar, although some distinctions must be considered. In the field of employment, the experts from La Rioja believe it is important to implement measures that are better suited to the needs of users in situations of vulnerability. Whereas the experts consulted in Region of Murcia believe that there is a need, on the one hand, to make the regulations more flexible and repeal the Law on the Rationalisation of Local Authorities in the area of employment and, on the other, to improve regional funding by increasing devolved powers in relation to central government.

*The situation would be different if we eliminated the Law of Rationalisation of Local Authorities in the area of employment. It would allow active employment policies to be made without entering into competitive tendering with other agencies and agents* (P5FG2Mu, employment services expert).

In the area of social services, the experts consulted in La Rioja focused their attention on the need to increase resources and social benefits. This view is shared by the experts consulted in Region of Murcia who also consider it essential to commit to better funding and planning, as well as more balanced ratios of care and professionals between rural and urban environments.

*Care and professional ratios should be balanced between different territories (rural/urban)* (I3Mu, expert responsible for social inclusion policies).

Lastly, in the joint area of social and employment services, the experts consulted in both La Rioja and Region of Murcia stated that one of the most significant challenges of their social inclusion models was focusing attention on the real needs of users. In the case of Region of Murcia, the experts highlight the importance of targeting the recently created coordination protocol at improving the social and

employment inclusion of individuals in or at risk of social exclusion. Intervention should be holistic and not oriented exclusively towards incorporating services users to the labour market.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This comparative analysis of the social inclusion models from two Spanish single-province autonomous regions, La Rioja and Region of Murcia, has made it possible to identify the differences and similarities between the two. The findings confirm the asymmetrical development experienced in social inclusion policies (Sanzo, 2018; Arribas, 1996). This analysis has been validated through the methodology of territorial case studies, which helped to achieve the first specific objective aimed at identifying the documentary evidence in both models, via regulations, plans, and programmes.

The creation of the two regional social inclusion models has run in parallel, which is demonstrated by analysing the evolution of the regulations implemented. The development of the social inclusion policies coincides with the stages framed in the history, development, and future perspectives of the welfare state in Spain (Guillén & Rodríguez, 2015; Moreno & Guillén, 2015).

These stages are framed in very different socioeconomic contexts, which contribute to investigating the problems of cohesion and social policy. Their execution contributes to the development of the second specific objective, aimed at determining the response of the public authorities to situations of social risk in both autonomous regions. The most important findings reveal regional inequalities, with Region of Murcia presenting the most unfavourable context. Despite having a younger socio-demographic structure than La Rioja, the indicators of its economic, employment, and educational contexts reveal a worse structural situation. This leads to higher percentages of the population affected by the risk of poverty and social exclusion. In turn, spending on social protection in Region of Murcia is lower than in La Rioja, which is a result of the more limited political involvement in social inclusion.

The advancement and consolidation of the regional models was truncated by the economic crisis of 2007-2008, which led to setbacks and tightening of social inclusion measures, as well as a reduction in regional funding. Their eventual implementation has served to study the second specific objective, aimed at ascertaining the institutional response, with special emphasis in the recent economic crisis. This crisis was decisive in making the regional authorities in charge of social inclusion policies turn to EU funding and the promotion of programmes aimed at employment activation. Lastly, the end of the economic crisis enabled both regions to introduce reforms to their models aimed at planning social inclusion policies and implementing coordination measures between social and employment services.

Theoretically and practically, both social inclusion models have evolved in parallel. The absence of general planning as well as in the different areas of intervention was caused by limited political commitment to social inclusion. The deficient coordination between different levels of administrative bodies and the social economy sector only improved in the final stage. All has contributed to the creation of vague regional social inclusion models with a deficient response to the needs of the population at risk.

The response of the public authorities and the evolution of legislation have given rise to two regional models in which Active Inclusion prevails over Rights (Rodríguez Cabrero, 2011; 2014). In this respect, it can be concluded that the social inclusion models in this study are targeted at incorporating individuals to the labour market.

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