

AN APPROACH TO THE MODEL OF DISTRICT ORGANIZATION IN ARAGON.

A critical reflection

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The administrative organization of territory is an essential tool for effective government action. In its design and operation must be viewed in addition to formal aspects (legal), the geographic, economic, social, population and political, because, after all, are forced to evolve and policy development.

Aragon (Spain) has created in the 21th century a new administration for its territory: *Comarcas* (district). Its purpose is to address the problems of small municipalities in the provision of services. About 27% of the population of Aragón reside 87% of the municipalities and into one, Zaragoza, live 51% of the population of Aragon. Small towns are a consequence of migration that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. Today there are municipalities aged, and in many cases the lack of terminal biological replacement. But the districts also are public spaces for the exercise of political power.

The legal basis on which rests the creation of district of Aragón in Article 5º of the Law of Autonomy for Aragon approved in 1982 and consists of three specific laws passed in the early 90s of 20th century with a broad political consensus:

- a) Law 10/1993, of 4 November, of «comarcalización» (for create district) of Aragon. Define the geographical area of the region: the territory of each district, comprising all the terms of the municipalities that integrate, to correspond to those geographic areas that are structured basic relations of economic activity and whose population is bound by social characteristics, history and common tradition to define unique bases of coexistence. It provides, among other things, the process of creating the districts, which is left to municipal government initiative, although their approval is for the Parliament of Aragon
- b) Law 8 / 1996 of 2 December, Districts Delimitation of Aragon, which divides the land in 33 district. It is a heterogeneous map. There are boundaries of more than 2,000 km² on par with other not reach 1,000, up some 67 municipalities and others only 6, there are regions and population of over 40,000 inhabitants and others do not reach 10,000.

In its character, some respond to the leadership of a population centre, some have a historical tradition, some respond to economic interests.....

- c) Law 23/2001 of 26 December, «comarcalización» (for create district) measures, completed in 2005 and 2006. List specific skills which are transferred to the districts provide the funding system and take the necessary considerations in personnel for the proper functioning of the newly created institutions. Law 3 / 2006 of 8 June, to amend the Law 23/2001 of 26 December of creation district measures introduced specifications for the districts that collect activities laws adopted after 2001 (laws of Tourism, Civil protection ...).

Have so far been created, established and are responsible managed transferable services from the Government of Aragón (Diputación General de Aragón, DGA), 32 districts. It remains to approve the creation district of Zaragoza, district peculiar, because it is home to half of the population of Aragón.

The districts, unlike other associative experiences municipal, «mancomunidades» are approved by the Parliament of Aragon. The difference with other experiences in association is that the districts are supra local entities defined by the regional parliament. The others are willingness exclusive of municipalities that want to be.

The characteristics of the district of Aragon model are:

1. ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY. (HAVE ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY)

The defining element of the Aragon districts is, without a doubt, the transfer of powers from the regional administration to the region, the territory, against the power delegated to that used other Spanish regions.

Districts for Aragón can manage 19 activities and services for the public administration: Land and country and urban planning; transportation; environmental protection, collection services of garbage and municipal waste treatment; health and public health; action social; agriculture, livestock and forest management; culture activity, cultural heritage and tradition; sport; activity for young; promoting tourism; handicrafts; consumer protection and users; promoting industrial management and energy; districts markets, civil protection and prevention and extinction fire, education, and those which in future could be exercised by the districts. The activities corresponding to the regions can be functionally systematized:

1. The promotion and encouragement
2. Programming and planning
3. Direct management of services district
4. Coordination of services provided by other agents
5. In cooperation with the regional administration
 - A) In the provision of public services
 - B) In scheduling and planning, standard setting and in the conduct of administrative procedures
6. Control compliance

To streamline the transfer process, the powers of the districts to be grouped into three blocks according to the difficulty that may assume its management. The blocks have been

used to sequence in time transfer of responsibility: After assuming the first block for all districts, is the transfer of the second block and then the third. This model assumes that the system of jurisdiction in the districts of Aragon is symmetrical, that all districts receive the same powers and disappear and services and workers of government transferring administration, whit consequent containment of public spending. The purpose was to ensure that the district not create new costs for the Department of Finances of Aragon. So far have only manage the activity of the first block.

2. POLICY MANAGEMENT CAPACITY (POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SKILLS)

Members of parliament of Aragón decided to transfer economic resources globally that correspond to the district (unconditional funding). The criteria of distribution are adopted in 2001. According to the principle of autonomy, the governing of district decides where to apply them in accordance with the principles of effectiveness and efficiency. In vast and sparsely populated areas such as Aragon, efficiency in public spending must pass the background to keep the place of residence is a factor of inequality for different quality of public services. The principle underlying this policy is that the proximity in decision making will lead to a better allocation of resources for the provision of public goods.

The government of the district corresponds to the District Council, composed of the president and counsellors. The number of members is determined by residents of the district in a scale of 19 (up to 10.000 populations) to 39 seats (over 50.001). The allocation of counsellors is made according to the results of municipal elections in the district. The District Council not is elected directly by citizens.

Only can bet on decentralization, compared to other models of organization, whether «social capital» in the land. However, the district to make in Aragón not expressly contemplated the existence of social capital for their development. It has taken two actions to the creation of social capital since 2000:

- a) «Land Policy Program». Its purpose was to reduce transaction costs in the future. Helped change the local mentality of the political class of land by the district and to introduce the culture of the pact.
- b) «Plans for the Promotion of Regional Identity.» The success of the project requires, necessarily, the identification of the population with its new territorial boundaries. The novelty of the constraints forced the development of these plans.

3. CAPACITY-ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT (DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISE PROJECTS)

The ultimate goal of the administrative organization is to optimize the presence of the State, manifested, inter alia, provision of public services. Initially it was believed that the purpose of the districts was only to rationalize the supply of services to small towns survived, in excessive in Aragon. Create economies of scale.

In Aragon, the territory is a factor of social inequality. The new entities, however, no good to revitalize the area: only manager poverty. Leave it to the markets social rehabilitation of

most of the autonomous region territory, was not the solution. No better subsidies policies to hibernate problem, because, many time, reduce some the dynamic potential that could exist in the territory.

Citizens, regardless of where they reside, should have the same conditions, quality of life. The district, by size and political capacity has been the most appropriate intervention in the territory.

According to these ideas there are two complementary lines of action: the politics of land and country use planning and local development. Both have a common goal, improving the situation of less developed areas and reducing imbalances in the whole region.

The land and country has been guided by the regional administration infrastructure (the static) for insertion of the territories in the development axis defining land use. Endogenous development policies for the revitalization of areas in crisis or marginal areas are based on initiatives arising from the same land. The land, in this case, becomes an agent for socioeconomics (dynamic).

The combination of policies of Land and country and Local Development policies in turn implies the combination of public and private initiative for regional development strategies. Both actions require different processes in its design. The challenge is to seize of the same potential of territory and optimize their resources. Under this approach, local development comes from the bottom up, it would be against the spatial planning policies are developed from top to bottom. With this formula occurs the competition among territories within a region to get of balanced regional development.

This third pillar of the district, as an instrument for the endogenous development of the territory through the possibilities of self-government, is the least developed so far.