
Co-operatives, Democracy and Education: the Basque *ikastolas* in the 1960s and 1970s

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ABSTRACT This article analyses the process of creation of *ikastola* schools throughout the Basque Country from the 1960s onwards. These were schools whose major characteristic was to teach the majority of subjects in the Basque language in the adverse context of the final years of Franco's regime. This article deals with the social and political context in which these educational initiatives arose in the 1960s and 1970s. It describes, first, how these schools were created by a strong social movement and how it worked during that period. Secondly, it pays attention to the internal conflicts of these institutions, derived from the strong political mobilisation of the Basque society in the last years of Franco's regime and transition to democracy.

Recent developments in the English education system have brought under the spotlight, in the public as well as the academic sphere, research and debates about different issues affected by actual and proposed changes in educational provision. In this context, the role of co-operation in the educational system has attracted attention. Although this concept can be understood in various ways (teaching practices, the curriculum), what interests us here is its relevance to systems of governance. The growth in the number of co-operative schools in Britain, which has been quite rapid, has attracted the attention of a sector of the educational world (Thorpe, 2011; Facer et al, 2012; Woodin, 2012) to the extent that co-operatives have been put forward as a valid option for the academy programme in Britain (Mansell, 2011). The organisational characteristics of co-operation have also brought into the limelight the different ways of understanding existing relationships between democracy and education (Gandin & Apple, 2002; Beane & Apple, 2005). Here, however, we focus on school administration and management undertaken by those involved in the educational process. This aspect is intrinsic to schools under co-operative

governance because the direct involvement of parents, teachers, other staff, and pupils in decision-making – with different forms of integration and intervention in school policy – is their defining characteristic. In the English context, co-operative schools have been put forward as a democratic educational alternative to the current vogue for privatisation and marketisation (Audsley & Cook, 2012).

To provide a comparative framework for understanding these themes, and the internal dynamics of their working out, this article presents an interpretation of the development of the *ikastolas* of the Basque Country during the 1960s and 1970s. The object is not to compare the English and Basque cases, given that their political and institutional contexts and historical conjunctures were completely different. Nor is the intention to present a model or reference point for co-operative and democratic school management for application in other settings. The aim is rather to demonstrate the existence of two distinct dimensions to this theme. On the one hand, would be the application of democratic and co-operative criteria to the schools, and on the other, the ways in which they were followed in the operation and development of these institutions. To understand the second aspect, it is essential to examine the political and social context, because it provides the key to understanding the internal relationships between the actors involved in the educational process. There was no reason for these actors to share the same objectives and interests. The basic criteria of co-operative schools entailed co-operation and collaboration between all – or some – of their staff and stakeholders, for which it was necessary to integrate and manage a variety of opinions and sensibilities if they were to function well. Often the management of such discrepancies was anything but simple, and conflicts were generated. Over and above the particularities of each individual case, or the personal characteristics of the individuals involved, the socio-political context in which they developed could offer explanations and analytical tools to understand such situations.

Ikastolas as a Social Movement

The use of the Basque language (*euskera*) in teaching has been a constant demand ever since a nationalist movement emerged in the Basque Country at the end of the nineteenth century. The strength of this political pressure, and, more importantly, its power to generate concrete educational initiatives, fluctuated according to changing political circumstances. From the beginning of the twentieth century there have been examples of such initiatives, which were especially important during the Second Republic (1931-37), although it was not until the 1960s, with the formation of the *ikastolas*, that they became established on firmer foundations.

The Franco dictatorship was not the most promising context for the achievement of this aspiration. As is well known, one of its characteristics was its repressive nature – demonstrated from 1936 onwards and not abandoned until the end of the 1970s – directed against anything that opposed its core

values, as was the case with peripheral nationalisms which were seen as threatening the unity of Spain. Cultural and educational proposals, when understood as stirring up nationalist sentiment, met the same fate. It is therefore not surprising that although there was no explicit prohibition either of speaking *euskera*, or of organising Basque cultural events, the language disappeared from the Basque educational system, and other settings, and Castilian Spanish was imposed as the only official language. The imposition of Spanish, often identified with authoritarian and violent teaching practices, caused innumerable problems for Basque-speaking children in their early years of schooling. In spite of all this, however, and although the homogenising project remained in operation, from the end of the 1950s a series of changes took place and a supportive context emerged for educational initiatives which protected the use of the Basque language in schools.

From this point onwards, the policies of planning and economic liberalisation which were developed by the technocratic governments of the 'second Francoism' released a powerful current of economic development, albeit confined to particular regions of Spain, including the Basque Country. This uneven economic development brought into being strong migration flows from poverty-stricken agricultural areas to the growing urban and industrial districts. In the Basque Country this process achieved great intensity, and in a relatively short time immigrants from outside its borders grew considerably as a proportion of the population, reaching around 40% of the total during the 1970s (García-Sanz & Mikelarena, 2002). From the 1960s, a new generation also grew to adulthood, born during or immediately after the Civil War, who had no direct experience of the war itself. Their arrival on the social and political scene brought about a change in the anti-Franco movement and an increase in political opposition to the regime, while the traditional republican parties in exile had lost credibility because of their internal squabbles and ineptitude. A strengthening of the anti-Franco opposition movement within the country took place, together with a reconstruction of the labour movement and a growth in workplace conflict and social mobilisation involving students, neighbourhood organisations and environmental campaigners among others. On top of all this came the intensification of the cultural and political demands of peripheral nationalisms (Martínez, 2003; Riquer, 2010).

The Basque Country did not remain on the margins. Although there is no room to articulate all the aspects of socio-political change, we must pay basic attention to the development of a cultural mobilisation and social effervescence under the 'vasquista' [1] label from the 1960s, because it was in that context that the *ikastola* movement and the campaign for a Basque education system developed. Various kinds of cultural expression began to make their presence felt in Basque society, all with a strong element of political protest. Painting, sculpture and writings in *euskera* acquired modern characteristics and became more widely known. A publishing sector developed which, in spite of the censorship of the time, published growing quantities of books in *euskera*, as well as several magazines and journals, predominantly on religious themes. The

same can be said of the studies of euskera under the auspices of the Real Academia de la Lengua Vasca or *Euskaltzaindia*, and the process of unifying the different Basque dialects in a unified language or *batua*, which was the source of much argument and debate. Nor should we omit to mention the development of modern Basque singer-songwriters. Their songs had a strong vein of political protest, together with a powerful social impact. This was illustrated by the numerous audiences at their concerts or *kantaldis*, which often ended in confrontations with the police, as these were moments of political action and the assertion of rights which were used to fly the Basque flag or *ikurriña* and to shout political slogans (Aristi, 1985; Gurrutxaga, 1996; Fusi, 1997; Zuazo, 2005; Eskisabel, 2012).

To understand the social reach of this cultural movement we must take into account the massive numbers of immigrants to the Basque Country. Their arrival changed its social, cultural and linguistic composition, and affected social perceptions of euskera and Basque culture. As time went on, broader and more politically heterogeneous social sectors, rural and urban, Basque-speaking or otherwise, considered them to be in danger of disappearance. In the face of this situation they recognised the need for a firm response which required the broadest possible social mobilisation given that it was evident that the Franco regime was not going to change its policies spontaneously. Education was one of the areas which these 'vasquistas' saw as crucial in turning round the Basque cultural and linguistic situation during these years. If children and young people were neglected, and were not afforded the opportunity to become familiar with Basque language and culture from infancy, and if the descendants of the immigrants who had taken root in the Basque Country were also denied access to them, it would be difficult to preserve and maintain them in the future. The consequences of neglect were clear to many: the Basque nation would disappear along with its distinguishing features, especially its language. It was therefore necessary to work towards the establishment of 'Basque' schools. This perception was quite widely diffused in Basque society towards the end of the Franco regime, and enabled the creation of a broad social movement in support of *ikastolas* from the 1960s onwards.

Ikastolas have been regarded as part of a social movement, the product of an intense social mobilisation during the last years of the Franco regime (Fernández, 1994; *El Movimiento de las Ikastolas*, 2011). Without denying the validity of this perception, we should also emphasise that the movement responded to a social mobilisation which was marginal to political parties, and aimed at bringing about a particular outcome: not a change of government policy, but the establishment of a new educational system in civil society. In the repressive context of the last years of the dictatorship this was the only way to organise this kind of educational initiative, as party political activity outside the structures of the regime was forbidden. We might regard these schools as the form of 'protest' chosen by that movement. We can also suggest that this lack of direct connection to political parties was a key to the movement's success, allowing as it did a broader and more heterogeneous social mix. Thus the

heterogeneity and lack of unity in the movement, beyond its core aim of protecting and promoting Basque language and culture through schooling, was another defining feature.

From the 1960s, this educational movement must be situated in the context of an increase in association building of various kinds, including cultural, recreational, sporting, folkloric and dancing activity. It developed within the restrictive frameworks of associational legislation and under the umbrella of the Church and *Acción Católica*. The existence of this tapestry of associations was very important for the foundation of the *ikastolas*. Firstly, they brought together the most dynamic people in Basque localities, and perhaps also the ones who were most aware of the current state of Basque culture. In many cases they combined several affiliations and activities, political and trade unionist, creating a dense network of connections across the whole social fabric. For many members of the various cultural associations their participation was not only a form of sociability and entertainment, but also a path to 'nation-building' and a way of confronting Francoism through daily cultural activities. This was one of the few available channels for self-expression – without the risks of anti-regime politics and on the margins of its official channels – on which many young people depended in the oppressive but rapidly changing years of the 1960s and 1970s. Secondly, during these group activities, such as mountain walking or Basque dancing events, activists made contact with people and groups from other localities who shared the same concerns and were becoming interested in school provision. In addition, individuals deeply involved in the development of the *ikastola* movement in its beginnings used to go to small localities to meet with people well-known for their 'vasquist' tendencies and propose the creation of the new schools (*BIE*). This helped to spread ideas and encourage initiatives in new places, and promoted mutual aid and advice in how to deal with early problems of school provision, such as how to find suitable teachers for the first cohorts of children. Efforts were made to formalise this kind of informal collaboration by the creation of embryonic federations of *ikastolas* in Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia from the mid-1960s, in spite of problems arising from clandestine meetings, political states of emergency and similar issues. A network of social and political contacts was established across the whole of the Basque Country. Thirdly, there is another reason for the importance of such associations to the foundation of these *ikastolas*: in many cases their members were the founders and promoters of the *ikastolas* themselves. It is easy to find evidence that members of recreational societies, gastronomic societies or *txokos*, Basque dance groups, walking and climbing organisations, scouts and so on, were among those who took the first steps to defend their culture through educational activity (*El Movimiento de las Ikastolas*, 2011).

The identity of *ikastolas* as a social movement is also observable in the mechanisms used to gain social support. In the process of formation they mobilised all the resources at their command to persuade other people to send their children to the new school, as well as to attract the active involvement of

new people. A decisive role was played by the networks of personal relations which took root in medium-sized towns, or urban neighbourhoods. The initial setting for the recruitment of parents was the friendship groups or *cuadrillas* of the people we might describe as the entrepreneurs of this movement. A second recourse was to people who were believed to be attracted to Basque culture and political attitudes, understood in a general sense and not necessarily entailing attachment to activism for a specific party. Belonging to and participating in such activities showed an interest in Basque culture which made them suitable potential recruits. Nationalist political affiliations might be added to this, but not always. Several studies mention the campaign undertaken among 'padres abertzales de confianza y que pudieran tener interés en el proyecto' [trustworthy nationalist parents who might take an interest in the project] (Ander Deuna Ikastola, 1993, p. 19) to find families who were open to sending their children to the ikastola. Despite the official prohibition on Basque nationalist or anti-Franco political activity, the social relationships which developed in small towns and city neighbourhoods made it possible to identify people from nationalist families or those who had a sympathetic outlook – within the spectrum of political diversity which characterised worlds like those of Basque nationalism – compatible with that of the promoters of the ikastola (*El Movimiento de la Ikastolas*, 2011). Even so, sharing this political sensibility did not imply that all contemporary parents agreed with sending their children to ikastolas: it was necessary to explain what they were and what the schools intended to achieve, while sidestepping the questions and preoccupations of many families about the 'quality' of the education provided, or whether their children would be held back when transferring to the next stage of their schooling. In spite of all efforts directed at parents, the desired result was often not achieved (Pérez Urraza et al, 2009). The final step in the search for pupils was to pass beyond the two inner circles and look for possible parents with children of suitable ages in the rest of the population. In the case of the small Bizcayan town of Trapagaran (with a little over 10,000 inhabitants in 1970), a circular was issued to the parents of children between two and three years old to inform them of the initiative and sound out their willingness to send their children to the ikastola (Itxaropena Ikastola, 1997). In 1966, in Gernika-Lumo (a town of similar size), 2000 copies of a leaflet entitled 'Euskaldunok euskeraz!' – 'Basques speak in euskera!' – were circulated to spread information about the plan to create an ikastola (Arana, 1992, p. 7). In such cases it is likely that the promoters counted on the support of the parish priest, which allowed them to campaign openly in public, although it is certain that they only approached people whom they knew to be potentially supportive or at least not hostile to the idea.

Internal Democracy

One of the characteristics of ikastolas was their popular and participative nature, in large measure because they could not function otherwise at the start. They emerged from the grassroots and needed popular support in order to function,

all the more so because they could expect no support from government. The necessary underpinning came from the families who paid the costs, especially the salaries of the teaching staff. Resources could also be tapped from the rest of society by contributions from 'collaborators' who supported the movement's objectives even though they had no children in the schools; and money was gathered in from raffles, parties, folk concerts and dances, and other activities in the various localities. The participatory nature of the movement was also demonstrated by the work done by families and collaborators on buildings and repairs, care of pupils, and extra-curricular activities.

A consequence of this participatory character was the function of the schools as expressions of community. As all the promoters, families, staff and collaborators took part in their maintenance and activities, it was logical that all would also take part in decision-making and management. It would be hard to justify any alternative. Even in the 1960s, when the parish priests became the official managers of many ikastolas – to avoid compulsory closure for not meeting legal requirements, from which the Church was exempt – this form of organisation remained in place. The new decade saw all ikastolas obliged to meet legal requirements: the educational reform of 1970 imposed conformity, including the meeting of minimum standards of buildings and equipment. In this context many ikastolas opted for co-operative forms of organisation. This was the best way of maintaining the participatory and communal character of the schools through the institutionalisation of democratic management. These were mainly co-operatives of parents, with those that combined parents and teachers much less common, while those composed solely of teachers were almost unknown.

The ikastolas emerged from the grassroots, and as such they pulled together many characteristics of Basque society at the end of the Franco regime and the transition to democracy. The most relevant aspect for understanding their internal workings is the theme of politicisation. We have already mentioned the political and cultural effervescence of this period, which expressed itself in the different levels of political involvement and militancy of the opponents of the regime, as well as through the existence of a spectrum of political parties with a nationalist component, from Catholic conservatism to radical Marxism. An illustration of this is the confluence in the ikastolas movement of people from the conservative nationalists of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco with the radical nationalism of the left that was associated with ETA, its sympathisers and its splinter groups, and to a lesser extent with Basque socialism and communism. But although the movement included parents and collaborators who were active in different political groups, it is clear that none of them controlled or directed its activities in any exclusive sense, however much they might have wanted to do so. It was a heterogeneous movement in which Basque nationalists predominated, but without organic connections with any political party. In fact, any such connections would not have been viable, and would have been a burden to the whole movement in the repressive context of the 1960s and 1970s.

The politicisation of Basque society was thus reflected among participants in the ikastolas movement. Behind the shared project of defending the Basque language and culture in schooling, there were contrasting political outlooks and not everyone shared the same views on the path to follow. And on many occasions this political diversity, which might be considered an asset in itself, was a source of discord and conflict. This was not the case in every ikastola, but nor was it unusual, sometimes leading to schools being divided or groups of teachers and/or parents abandoning a school.[2] Although these problems might have various roots, their causes can be identified with conflicting ideologies and political opinions, at least among the leading and most active members of the groups. The main axis of conflict followed the differences between conservative and left-wing tendencies, usually within Basque nationalism. These divisions normally split schools vertically, as they affected parents, collaborators and teachers alike, rather than particular viewpoints being identified with specific groups. Finally, these conflicts did not affect all schools equally, with different solutions being adopted in different settings, not always presenting a direct correlation between ideology and outcome. This leads us to suggest that the personal, individual characteristics of the members of the groups made an important contribution to this diversity.

The arguments about ikastolas passed beyond their internal affairs and appeared in the Basque language media of the time. In these articles, even though the internal conflicts within the schools have left little trace, we can identify the kinds of debate that emerged in the ikastola movement in the 1970s. In these years the schools were initiating the process of legalisation and redefinition, within the context of the intense social and political mobilisation at the end of the Franco regime. They did not remain marginal to the fierce debates, which was logical given the importance of the ikastolas to the survival of Basque language and culture. The debates of the 1970s can be summed up by the question 'Ikastolak norenak diren' or 'to whom do the ikastolas belong?' (Ugarte, 1973). A related question was whether the children belonged primarily to their families or to the Basque people (Lasa, 1971). That is to say, who made the decisions in these schools? Not all the people involved in the ikastolas answered these questions in the same way. For many, over and above the assumed right of families to make decisions about the education of their children, wherever the schools had become parents' co-operatives, the parents claimed the right to decide how they operated and what they should teach. In these respects the ikastolas considered themselves to be private schools. But another school of thought regarded the ikastolas as belonging to the 'people', who had brought them into being in the previous decade. According to this perspective, they should be seen as community schools run not only by parents, employees, collaborators and teachers, but also by 'interested groups within the community' who were entitled to their say about educational content and teaching styles. They should therefore maintain the communal management which had characterised the previous decade. Moreover, if the ikastolas were to be converted into private fee-paying schools this would reduce their social reach

and confine their educational impact to those who could afford the fees. This might convert the ikastolas into schools for the 'bourgeoisie' (Berasain & Haramburu-Altuna, 1975). This argument, which had more general implications, came to the fore in various debates within the ikastolas. In the absence of detailed research on this kind of conflict, we can offer an introductory thematic analysis using some of the cases described by I. Fernández (1994) and the study of *El Movimiento de las Ikastolas* (2011), taking into account that they are not mutually exclusive and they are not presented in order of importance.

The first fault-line that generated conflict within the ikastolas was the role of religion in teaching content. There is no room to develop this here, but we need to keep in mind the extensive involvement of the Basque Catholic church in these schools. Help from the clergy was displayed by making parish buildings available for the schools when they began, and, in the second half of the 1960s, in the conversion of many into parish ikastolas. These came under the shelter of the church to deal with the problems created by the Law on Primary Education of 1965. This law made individual school record cards obligatory for entry into primary education, which could only be obtained in legally recognised schools, which did not include the ikastolas. They sought to solve the problem by recourse to the church, which from the beginning of the Franco regime had been able to run schools without any state intervention. Taking advantage of this privilege, and responding to the sentiments of part of the population, many parish priests agreed to the conversion of ikastolas into church schools. But this support was conditional on the teaching of Catholic doctrine in these schools. Nevertheless, Basque society was changing, and one of the most intense aspects of this was the declining importance of religion and the growth of secular social sectors influenced by the Marxist thought of the period. This broke up the traditional picture of the Basque people's identification with the Catholic Church – an assumption reflected in the traditional tag of *euskaldun fededun* or Basque believer – which, in spite of everything, still retained its relevance in Basque society. The solution, which entailed acceptance of the demand of the church and some of the families for the maintenance of doctrinal teaching in schools, was therefore not straightforward. It highlighted the conflict between two contrasting visions of Basque society, the religious and the secular. There was no universal solution to the problem: some ikastolas integrated religious doctrine into their curricula, while others left doctrinal religious teaching to the parish for those families that wanted it. But this debate certainly provoked conflict between many members of ikastolas.

Secondly, as mentioned above, when obtaining legal recognition many ikastolas were set up as co-operatives of parents, leaving the teachers outside or on the margins of school governance. Two kinds of situation resulted. On the one hand, among the teachers were groups who had been strongly influenced by new teaching philosophies with a Marxist component. The first teachers in ikastolas were young women who learned to teach in the schools, on the job.

But the reform of 1970 obliged the schools to provide full primary education, which entailed hiring qualified teachers. This allowed many seminarians, who abandoned their religious careers, and university graduates to find a new vocation in the ikastolas. Such people, mostly men, tended to be more politicised by the progressive and left-wing ideas which were so widespread in the universities of the time (Fernández, 1994). The arrival of this teaching workforce, the almost complete lack of modern teaching materials in euskera, and their rejection of the authoritarian teaching styles associated with the Franco regime, meant that it was necessary to improvise resources and adopt new teaching methods. In this context the ikastola teaching staff began to apply new pedagogical theories and practices. Although many of these novelties have now become normal, at that time, whether owing to rumours, misunderstandings or inadequate communication of ideas, not everyone considered them appropriate, and some saw them as a way of indoctrinating children with Marxist or other subversive ideas. This created unease and confrontation within the schools.

On the other hand, as the schools passed under the legal umbrella at the beginning of the 1970s, the teaching body became increasingly 'professional'. Until then militancy had prevailed. Even salaries and working conditions had been less than adequate and working for this project or ideal made the situation more bearable. But their alienation from school management was upsetting for many, and teachers increasingly came to see themselves as workers, to demand improvements in their working conditions, and to establish an incipient trade union movement. All this resulted in the sacking of several teachers in different ikastolas from 1971 onwards, which had hitherto appeared impossible. 'Las razones alegadas en todos los sitios no son las mismas, pero siempre aparece la cuestión religiosa, la cuestión política, la vida privada de los profesores y en algún caso la cuestión pedagógica' (The reasons given were not the same in every location, but religious issues, political matters, the private life of the teachers and sometimes pedagogical questions were all in evidence) (Garín, 1978). But we must draw attention to the vertical dimension to these conflicts, as they affected groups within the movement, rather than a particular collectivity. Thus in Zumaya (Gipuzkoa), dismissals were avoided because of popular support for threatened teachers, (Berasain & Haramburu-Altuna, 1975) and in Deusto (Bizkaia), around 15% of the families and 70% of the teaching staff left the ikastola due to irreconcilable differences (*Deustuko Ikastola*, 1988).

Conclusions

This article has sought to demonstrate the importance of taking the socio-political context into account in order to understand the development of democratic and co-operative education. It is essential to understand, on the one hand, the social, political and legal context in which these schools emerged and the way in which they were established. This allows us to understand their characteristics, which social sectors promoted them, how this was done, and to

critically assess their democratic and co-operative aspirations. But, on the other hand, we must also pay attention to the way in which they interpreted and applied principles over time. As we have seen, in the 1970s the democratic and communitarian assumptions which had been associated with the ikastolas in the previous decade sometimes became transformed into sources of conflict. To understand that reality it is necessary to recognise that those schools were created through a process of intense social mobilisation, and to understand the heterogeneous political groupings which lay behind them. During the 1970s, these characteristics became a source of conflict amid the powerful politicisation and mobilisation associated with the movements against the Franco regime, with the confrontation between traditional and radical Basque nationalism, and with the various schisms within the militant nationalists of ETA.

The development of the ikastolas was significant for the whole of Basque society in this period. An empirical analysis of an educational movement such as this also has relevance for understanding democratic and co-operative schools more widely. Indeed, the Basque ikastolas can genuinely be regarded as a point of reference for English co-operatives. Along with similar movements in other settings, they demonstrate the validity of, and potential for, co-operative and democratic principles in schools. After the conflicts of the 1970s, these schools established themselves and developed their educational work within the educational mainstream. They became one of the educational pillars of the Basque Country in a context of democracy and institutional decentralisation through regional autonomy. In this way they demonstrate the viability of such ideas and practices in a democratic environment.

Notes

- [1] The term 'vasquism' refers to the sentiment of attachment to the Basque language and culture by the Basque population. During the period researched, the defence and promotion of Basque cultural manifestations found a remarkably wide social support, an example of which were the ikastolas. 'Vasquism' exceeded the Basque nationalist sphere and was also extended, at least in part, to the Basque socialist and communism movements.
- [2] Although this is not the place to present a detailed study of this theme, G. Arrien's study (1993) of the ikastolas of Bizkaia between 1957 and 1972 can be used as an indicator of patterns, though with no pretensions to mathematical accuracy. It shows that there were internal conflicts of one kind or another in 7 of the 16 centres analysed in this province.

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