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**SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AND IMMIGRATION. THE CASE OF THE WORK INTEGRATION
SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY.**

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Resumen

Esta comunicación pretende poner de relieve el papel jugado por las Empresas de Inserción dentro del contexto alternativo que representa la Economía Social y Solidaria, como mecanismos que ofrecen un contrato de trabajo a personas en situación de desventaja social y con graves dificultades para integrarse en la sociedad y en el mercado laboral ordinario a través de su oferta de empleos tutelados que promocionan la empleabilidad de sus beneficiarios, entre ellos, ciertas personas de origen extranjero. Este tipo de dispositivos, como empresas híbridas en tránsito, favorecen la activación laboral y la inclusión social de un perfil de inmigrantes internacionales desempleados que aglutinan una acumulación e interrelación de factores de vulnerabilidad social (escasa cualificación, falta de hábitos laborales, pobre conocimiento del idioma,...) que conllevan obstáculos que suponen tremendas limitaciones para poder integrarse no solamente en el terreno laboral sino también en un ámbito social más amplio. Este trabajo analiza esta tipología de empresas que por su metodología de actuación son herramientas que contribuyen a la consecución de una sociedad más justa, inclusiva y cohesionada.

Abstract

This paper aims to highlight the role played by the Work Integration Social Enterprises inside the alternative context that represents the Social and Solidarity Economy, as mechanisms that offer an employment contract to people in a situation of social disadvantage and with serious difficulties to enter the society and the regular labour market. These kind of companies hand in supervised jobs that foster the opportunity for employment (“employability”) of their beneficiaries, including certain persons of foreign origin. These devices, such as hybrid transit companies, enable labour activation and social inclusion of a profile of unemployed international migrants who draw together an accumulation and interrelatedness of social vulnerability factors (low-skilled, lack of working habits, poor knowledge of the language,...) that involve obstacles posing tremendous limitations that hinder their integration not only in the labour field, but also in a broader social context. This essay will analyse these enterprises that due to their methodology of action, are tools that contribute to the achievement of a more inclusive, fair and cohesive society.

Palabras-chave: Activación Laboral, Inclusión Social, Migración Internacional, Empresas de Inserción, Economía Social y Solidaria

Keywords: Labor Activation, Social Inclusion, International Migration, Work Integration Social Enterprises, Social and Solidarity Economy

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The aim of this paper is to reflect and debate on a couple of meaningful issues relative to certain forms of social intervention which address the social exclusion of underprivileged groups. We should think over the role played by the Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs), within the framework of the entities of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), as useful elements in the work market regarding the employability of the population of foreign origin. Taking the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (ACBC) in Spain as context, the goal is to highlight the task of the WISEs, regarding their offer of employment contracts for people at risk or potential risk of social disadvantage with serious obstacles to get integrated in the ordinary market through supervised jobs which foster the employability of their beneficiaries, among them, certain people born beyond our borders. These persons, despite having overcome the figure of 150.000 in the Basque Country on January the 1st 2012 (INE, 2012) make up, however, a group specially exposed to social risks and poverty levels. Their inclusion in the society is a priority in the successive European agendas and therefore, in the member states making up the European Union (EU), since they are considered to be a priority group for the social cohesion (European Commission, 2010a).

Therefore, we shall approach the challenges meant by the socio-labour integration of those immigrants of foreign origin within the phenomenon of those social enterprises, WISEs, as a sample of the reality of the Basque SSE. Hence, the topic of our paper would like to contribute to reinterpret and reveal the reality in the ACBC of the pair made up by the consolidation of the international migration and the development of the SSE in order to debate in a fruitful way, contributing initial data of a research developed in that sense¹.

1. PECULIARITIES OF THE PHENOMENON OF THE INTERNATIONAL IMMIGRATION IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

The Basque Country, together with the Spanish State and just like most Western societies, faces a time of transformation and uncertainty with several outstanding issues awaiting for a solution. To mention but a few, we can name the deep economic, financial and debt crisis that has been perceived for months due to its devastating effects, such as an exceptional increase of the levels of poverty and social exclusion, high job losses, an outstanding increase of the unemployment rates, the slow and complicated economic recovery, and the remarkable socio-demographic changes that implies the ageing of the population and the accommodation of the ever increasing volume of people coming from other countries since beginning of 21st century. These transformations, that reveal a set of social problems of huge relevance, are taking place as a consequence of the worldwide globalisation. This means an *enlargement, deepening and acceleration of the worldwide interconnection* in every aspect of the present social life (Castles, 2008).

This high speed of the globalised world is confronting citizens with the challenge of adapting quickly to new global contexts identified by the *need of diversification*, both in the societies and in the modern economies in fast evolution, where the mobility of goods and capitals, information and people is a maxim. *International migration* is one of the multiple facets. Traditionally seen as a problem, however, it can be considered one of the ways of achieving talent, services, competences, as well as the way to gain a big diversity of aptitudes and experiences and better conditions to encourage citizens' growth.

Specifically, in Spain, the reality is defined by two phenomena of a big significance at an economic and social level (Martínez, 2010). On the one hand, the consolidation of the Spanish territory as a settling land for people coming from the international migration flows from the start of the current century. On the other hand, the sudden variation of the economic cycle in 2008 after a boom period in production and employment which has ended up in extraordinary policies of cuts and austerity with budget adjustments and a reduction in the social security benefits. This has brought about important consequences and have positioned Spain as the country of the Eurozone with the highest increase in risk of poverty or social exclusion between the years 2009 and 2010, having reached the 25,5% of the population, that is a figure of 11,6 million people (Eurostat, 2012).

Focused on the first phenomenon mentioned, in the first decade of the third millennium, many Spanish regions, being the ACBC one of them, have experienced a significant metamorphosis regarding their inhabitants, mainly brought about by the constant arrival of an important volume of people coming from other countries. The progressive increase of waves of international migrants to the Basque society means that their volume reaches 6,9% of the Basque population as a whole against the 1% shown in 2000 (INE, 2012). This has made the Basque society a melting pot where people from 165 different nationalities live together (Ikuspegi, 2012). This panorama of an increasing arrival of an abundant volume of international immigration of people coming from other countries, essentially in the last twelve years, has transformed the *Basque society into a complex, plural and diverse one*, since it has meant not only a quantitative increase of the population, but it has also generated a qualitative plurality with an increase of diversity that has changed the Basque social tissue in a deep way and with almost no possibility of a turning point.

Therefore, the international migration to the ACBC is *extraordinarily heterogeneous* because it includes a mosaic of immigrants of very different origins and geographical locations, cultures, religions, traditions and so on that settle in absolutely not homogeneous in the different provinces and/or rural/urban areas of the basque map. Thus, it is *a phenomenon unquestionably decisive both socially*, due to the diversity and complexity implied, and *demographically and economically*, owing to its undeniable contribution to the increase of the Basque population and very specific to its rejuvenation. On the other hand, the national immigration is also a decisive factor due to its contribution to the economy (Caldera et al., 2011; Moreno and Bruquetas, 2011).

In the case of the immigrants, there is a big contrast between their significant contribution to economy and society and the unequal treatment and the discrimination some of them suffer from (Cachón, 2009 and 2011; Izquierdo, 2011). In fact, the group of international immigrants make up a population group which is specially exposed to social risks due to their difficulties in their social and labour integration and because they have more probabilities of being affected by unemployment- in the year 2010, 29,8% of the active population of foreign origin was unemployed, opposed to the 18,0% of the native workers (IVIE, 2011)- and also to the labour ⁱⁱand wage precariousnessⁱⁱⁱ owing to the less time spent in our territory and to the fact of having less accumulated rights, since both the labour vulnerability and their exclusion from the citizenship are factors against them^{iv}.

The transformation of the new residents in citizens with full rights, in such a way that they become an integral part of the society, while they keep the specific features of their culture, is the objective to be achieved. Together with the challenge of their *integration^v something essential for their inclusion and social cohesion* (European Commission, 2010a). We should highlight too, that the process of becoming a member of a new society is something very complicated and multifacetic, demanding efforts in different fields and not only efforts made by the migrant population, because it comprehends the access to the labour market, housing, public services (specially the welfare and educational ones), the private services (banks, insurance companies and so on), the establishment of social and cultural relationships with the community, the participation in the political processes and, in some cases, even the learning of a new language. It often means too, to leave behind a whole private and relationship's universe which is the familiar one. Some of these persons present a wide range of difficulties of social and labour integration (in some cases, due to their problems with the language or their less training compared to the native population or the difficulties in the acknowledgement of the qualifications they already could have, ...) and turn out to be more vulnerable^{vi} owing to the accumulation of situations of social vulnerability, that can lead to exclusion owing to the difficulties they have to participate in the different fields of the social life.

In this challenge, the most outstanding issue is the fact that the integration to the labour market appears as a huge motivation for the arrival of the immigrant population and the importance of employment is such, that the work insertion is highlighted as the beginning and pillar of their normalization, since employment is the best safe-conduct against exclusion and the main mechanism of acquisition of rights in our society. Therefore, it is urgent for the immigrants to achieve a job, not only to get income, but also in order to achieve a regular administrative situation (Cáritas, 2011).

However, the labour market shows specific features within the reference framework for the work insertion of the international immigrants, since if we analyse the concrete features of the jobs they have, not all of them though, of concentration on some branches of activity with worse work conditions or a bigger labour accident rate (Cachón, 2011). All these factors contribute to the discrimination of the foreign workers and their lack of possibilities of developing their capacities on equal conditions basis with the native workers to achieve a successful social and labour insertion. (Pajares, 2010). Hence their vulnerability in the labour context enables and launches the immigrants to fall in the social exclusion^{vii} and, no wonder, therefore, that the populations with immigrant origin have a rate of poverty considerably higher than the one of the native population^{viii} (Moreno and Bruquetas, 2011). We should not forget, either, the huge difficulties of those international immigrants who do not even access the ordinary labour market due to their low level of employability or other circumstances.

2. WISEs AS THE DOOR TO SOCIAL AND LABOUR INTEGRATION

Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) plays a main role in this scenario, offering an original and innovative method of active inclusion to the socially underprivileged groups. SSE generates jobs and fosters employability from a different space to the State and to the traditional market. Specifically, SSE embodies new and caring concepts, concepts with a social commitment, and despite the fact that the term Social Economy is in common usage, there is a wide debate about its meaning and extent (Pérez de Mendiguren et al., 2009).

This sector of the economy gives new answers to the social needs which cannot find a suitable solution in the traditional economic stakeholders, neither public nor private, since in the principles orienting the companies of this sector we find the priority of people and social goals over the capital. In fact, this differentiated field of the economy has become a crucial element, regarding both social and economic innovation and a vehicle of active inclusion and creation of jobs.

If, as we have pointed out at the beginning of our paper, the inclusion of migrants in the society is a priority in the successive European agendas since they are one of the so-called priority groups for the social cohesion (Comisión Europea, 2010a.), the EU has also shown interest for this way of ruling a company, mainly defined by the incorporation of social components, such as cohesion, inclusion, anti-discrimination, integration, participation and so on, fostered from the organisations of the SSE. This has happened because this economic field is based on a paradigm according to the main principles of the European social and welfare model and plays a key role in the preservation and strengthening of this model. One of the most recent proofs of this acknowledgment can be found in the Resolution of the European Parliament dated September the 8th 2010, which prompts the EU and its Member States to take into account the WISEs and the diversity of their company's shapes in future policies of employment (Monzón Campos et al., 2010). Besides it is also encouraged to make the most of the potential of the Social Economy from the action fields of the emblematic initiative of the "European Platform for Fighting against Poverty and Social exclusion" defined by the European Commission within the Europe Strategy 2020 to achieve an *integrative growth* in Europe, since the initiatives of the Social Economy have given innovative solutions to emerging social needs and problems to which neither the State, nor the traditional markets were able to solve, reinforcing the construction of more *inclusive societies* (European Comission, 2010b).

Thus, the acknowledgement granted by several international bodies allow us to declare that WISEs perform also an institutional role as a factor of endogenous development and are entrepreneurial inclusive models which promote the generation of opportunities with the goal of improving the standard of living of those individuals who suffer from the risk of social exclusion. The social enterprise must be understood in a general sense as an organization looking for the creation of social value through the performance of an economic activity (Fonteneau et al., 2010). Moreover, the importance of the social enterprises is increasing at European level, because the social economy enterprises comprehend 2 millions of companies, that is 10% of all the European enterprises. They employ more than 11 million people, the equivalent to 6% of the active population of the EU and the policy of this institution has as goal to create a favourable normative

environment for those enterprises to grow and prosper together with other type of enterprises (European Commission, 2012).

In Spain, the pioneering Law 5/2011 of Social Economy defines it as the set of economic and entrepreneurial activities which are carried out on private basis, by those entities which are pursuing either the collective interest of their members or the general social or economic interest or both. Moreover, there are four big families included as entities of the Social Economy like the Cooperatives, but also all those economic stakeholders, such as, the WISEs or the Special Job Centres.

Specifically in many cases, the WISEs^{ix} are the mechanisms through which the underprivileged people can have access to a job. They develop socio-labour integration programmes which enable persons socially underprivileged (drug dependent people or people with other addictions in rehabilitation processes, inmates and ex-inmates, young people who have not completed the period of compulsory school, ethnic minorities, international immigrants or people with family burdens they cannot share) to acquire abilities and responsibilities.

WISEs can be defined as those productive structures of goods or services whose goal is the integration of groups at risk of the social exclusion into a normalised market. The Spanish Law 44/2007 contributed their legal regulation. To fulfill their main goal, WISEs offer people at risk of social exclusion a work contract with a maximum duration of 36 months, together with a customized supervision that includes the necessary support needed for the improvement of their employability as an essential condition to achieve their social-labour inclusion in a normalised way.

The methodology of these WISEs complements a customized itinerary with different stages having the aim of accompanying this person in his/her insertion process with the practical training in a real work environment. This fact is the main innovation of the WISEs, since this means, therefore, initiatives creating synergies in the society and helping to integrate the vulnerable groups, but at the same time, generating an impact in the economic tissue. Thus, they exceed the guidelines of the entrepreneurial and economic standard model, having installed in their DNA the will of preparing vulnerable people for the ordinary labour market (Veciana, 2007). Therefore, their beneficiaries stop being passive and dependant, in the best cases, on the social protection systems.

They mainly work on sectors where the labour force is intensive and not highly qualified: hotel trade, recycling, residues, carpentry, bricklaying, courier services and so on. They are as “linking companies” where people with difficulties of social and labour insertion develop the necessary skills to perform a job through the method “learning by working” (Salinas and Herranz de la Casa, 2004). They represent an *original model of performance in labour activation and social inclusion opposed to what we could designate as a “passive model” offered from the systems of social protection*, since they focus on the social exclusion from an “active” approach and from the point of view of the own responsibility for those groups specially sensitive to be excluded from the social and labour network (Aguilera, 2009).

As a consequence, the WISEs stand for the development of efficient specific actions, favouring the most vulnerable groups, since they are contributing to the rescue from the social exclusion of the marginalised groups and making feasible their transit to the ordinary employment (Marcuello et al., 2008). Therefore, the appearance of this entrepreneurial typology, sets up in a wide range of branches of the economic activity, means a huge transformation for the most underprivileged groups and a big transformation in the field of the access to employment and to society in general (Monzón Campos, 2008). It is having remarkable repercussions too on the migratory phenomenon, since, as we have mentioned before, the labour vulnerability, the low employability and social inequality constantly affects certain international immigrants as they are a group more prone to the exclusion and social disadvantage due to the accumulation and interrelation of factors of social fragility (Cachón, 2011; Izquierdo, 2011).

Although the WISEs in Spain emerged in the eighties, they have received a new boost from the new century onwards (Aguilera, 2009; WISE, 2009). Specifically in the ACBC, the emergence of WISEs takes place in the favourable breeding ground existing at the level of those companies fostering the social initiatives and opting for the insertion through the economy in the nineties. It was materialized in the Decree of the Basque

Government 305/2000, for the rating, access and registration of WISEs. From 2002, the subsidy programmes for the setting-up and maintenance of those enterprises started up and were regulated. That shows that prior to the State law of 2007, the ACBC had already specific autonomous normatives in this matter, partially due to the important structure of social protection and the strategy of active integration carried out from the own Basque autonomous government and the own Basque society.

In both legislations, at a state and at an autonomic level, it is acknowledged the situation of exclusion experienced by certain people- among them a certain profile of foreign origin- and the WISEs are proposed as one of the suitable instruments to make easier a process whose ultimate goal is the labour insertion in the ordinary market and, in short, its social normalisation. This is, therefore, the main mission of this kind of enterprises, which, apart from fulfilling the entrepreneurial objectives in the specific activity sector where they are operating, develop the social objective of fostering the development of the persons as such in the insertion, in order to achieve the challenge of his/her normalised integration.

Moreover, we should highlight within the specific features of the WISEs that they must be fostered by stakeholders who are not-for-profit entities which also guarantee for them the offer of measures of social monitoring. They must maintain an annual calculation, from its rating as such, of the maximum and minimum percentage of working people within a process of insertion compared to its whole staff. Thus, the WISEs acting in the Basque Country are based on the social initiative and are a support pillar for all the people who are undergoing difficulties (Gizatea, 2010).

In order for a person to have access to a WISEs, the requisite required in the ACBC is to have an Insertion Agreement signed by the corresponding basic social services^x. These people are not any more receivers of the so called “guarantee income benefits” or a periodical economic benefit offered by the Basque Administration assigned to persons integrated in cohabitation units who do not have sufficient income available. Therefore, the WISEs is an outstanding and innovative *hybrid entrepreneurial model* for the achievement of the active inclusion through the training and the real employment (Gizarteratuz, 2010).

The WISEs have got an increasing weight. In the year 2010, a total of 200 had been registered in the Spanish State (3,6% more than in the year 2009, when there were 193), being the communities of the Basque Country and Catalonia the ones which lead the list of Autonomous Communities with the highest volume of WISEs in Spain with almost half hundred in each region (FAEDEI, 2011). The data reflect too, the increase in the figure of Basque WISEs, because if in the year 2010 there were almost 50. This figure is substantially higher to the 10 registered before in the year 2004. On the other hand, we should highlight that these enterprises are unequally distributed by the Basque territory, being mainly concentrated in the Biscay province, 66% of the total of the Enterprises registered (Gizatea, 2011).

During the year 2010, 1.204 workers were counted in the staffs of the Basque WISEs. The 52,3% were people immersed in an insertion process, being the percentage of people not included in insertion processes of a 47,7%. We should also remark that, from those persons who finished their insertion process in the year 2010, 51,3% of them found a job, a figure remarkably lower than the 75% of success in the integration of those people to the ordinary market, reached in the year 2009 (Gizatea, 2011). These data illuminate the reality offered from the WISEs, being their insertion jobs a link to reach a regular and normalised situation for persons excluded at a social and labour level and who are the core of their task, being among them a certain number of people of foreign origin that we analyse below.

3. WISES AS A FAVOURABLE FACTOR FOR THE LABOUR ACTIVATION AND THE SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR INTERNATIONAL IMMIGRANTS

We wish to state part of the results obtained in a research whose aim was focused on the original solutions adopted by the Basque WISEs, regarding the social and labour integration of the most vulnerable international immigrants living in this territory. Thanks to the use of quantitative methods, the enterprises of the sector and the employees of immigrant origin have been characterised, using a closed survey for all the WISEs (44), as members of its Association in the Basque Country at that moment. Within the qualitative

methodology used, the very international immigrants who work in the Basque WISEs and also their managers and promoters were interviewed. Likewise, some words extracted from the deep interviews will be shown to support our argument.

Within the alternative framework set up by the WISEs within the stakeholders of the SSE sector like an entrance into the labour market to those groups which find themselves in a precarious situation of social disadvantage or in risk of social exclusion with serious difficulties to have access to an ordinary job, it is recommendable to highlight the specific case of its task and good experiences in their contribution to fostering the social inclusion through the facilitation of a job to the most underprivileged international immigrants, both young and adult, men and women, with disabilities and low levels of employability. In the own words of one manager and one promoter of the Basque WISEs:

“In the case of immigrant people, they usually migrate because there are no jobs in their country. The fact of being outside their home, outside the family creates several problems...The first thing.....is to try to stabilize their lives in a private way. Once that part of the process is already done, the first stage of an insertion itinerary would start up, an itinerary of social skills, when you talk about social skills you talk about things such as comply with a schedule, to be able to talk to his/her workmates, and we do not mean only a language issue, but about the interpersonal relationships.....After this stage we have the so called productive issue and the training too. These are the three stages that can last a minimum of one year, a maximum of three.” (E18)

“This is not a static photo, it is more of a video. This is changing as time goes by.... We really have realised that there is an increase of immigrant people in what has to do with the labour sphere. At this moment I reckon that a third of the people we are assisting now are immigrant people. Many of them come from Africa, There are essentially difficulties regarding the language, occasionally there have been also some regarding religion and culture, there are different environments, but the differences are not significant. I'd say that there is a determinant factor which is the following one: many of them work where they can and very often without taking the conditions into account They make an effort to find a job and their level of activity is very high.” (E08)

The evidence of the increase of volume of international immigrants in a less favourable situation in the Basque territory has had an impact on the group to which the WISEs, expanding their scope and contributing an important diversity to them. On the other hand, they maintain the scheme of methodology used by the different groups they work with: they help them to achieve a stable private situation with several stages within the monitoring processes where, apart from having access to a job and obtaining income, they get trained and acquire skills step by step for a maximum period of 36 months. So that, they can exert their rights and achieve a normalised social –labour integration.

Having as starting point the specific problems of the people with foreign origin (difficulties in their origin country, obstacles to settle in a new environment where they do not normally have the whole familiar support, or the support of other relationships, etc.) what can imply differentiated communication, cultural and habit-problems, there has been an evolution in the Basque WISEs until they have been considered, somehow, to be in a similar situation to the native inhabitants at risk of exclusion. That is, the trend has been to empower them and have been treated in a similar way to other socially underprivileged groups, from a customised monitoring and training plan which allows them to achieve the improvement of their personal, social and labour competences.

The consideration given to the people of foreign origin within the course of this type of Basque institutions has been transformed and reached a situation of:

“....overcoming .. those stages of reception and start to work in other ways of participation and been seen as persons who come not only as users but can highly contribute to this society” (E33).

Moreover, regarding the volume of WISEs with international immigrants, we'd like to remark that out of the 44 enterprises subject to the survey, almost 7 out of 8 had foreign workers in their staff (86,36%).

Besides, we would also like to emphasize that, although they are present in the rural municipalities, most of the WISEs with workers of foreign origin are located at the capital of the provinces. This means, 19 out of 20 WISEs located in Bilbao – the capital of Bizkaia- have got workers of foreign origin, all those 6 located in Vitoria – the capital of Araba- have got this kind of workers within their staff and in San Sebastian – the capital of Gipuzkoa-, just 1 out of 3 has got international immigrants among their employees.

If we specifically pay attention to the figure of people of foreign origin employed in the Basque WISEs, the data indicate that it reaches approximately 35% of the totality of workers in this kind of Basque enterprises in the year 2011. Therefore, there has been an evolution from the approximately 5% at the dawn of the present millenium, according to the sources of the Basque WISEs Association, to represent more than 3 out of 10 employees.

This can be the reflection too, partially and in turn, of the growth of the volume of the population of foreign origin present in the Basque society as such, where we only had 1% of its population (year 2000: 1%, year 2001: 1,3% and year 2002: 1,8%) while in the year 2011 it is set in the 6,6% and at the beginning of 2012 in the 6,9%. All these persons, born in other countries, were unemployed before prior to being contracted by these enterprises and thanks to this work contract they receive a salary and an opportunity to develop their skills, apart from regulating their administrative situation.

Therefore their volume has been set in an approximately 35% of the totality, being most of them young people under 35 years, coming mainly either from two African countries: Morocco and Algeria, or from other two from Latin America: mainly Bolivia and Colombia. They used to be unemployed and thanks to this insertion job they show a favourable opinion regarding the improvement processes of competences that have been carried out, both about the ones of training and the ones of support and practical work they have received. To finish this section, let's include the testimony of the two immigrants interviewed during the qualitative stage of our research in order to show their feelings towards the task developed by the Work Integration Social Enterprises where they are carrying out their jobs in order to improve their level of integration both at social and labour level:

"I think I have received a lot of help until now and they keep on supporting us too with the training and learning so that when we one day we leave this place we have already acquired a good experience and be contracted." (EI06)

"... All of us are in the same situation, almost all of us undergo the same process, almost all of us are here by ourselves, almost all of us have got family problems, we are not telling about our problems.....or has been very positive for me, basically in every aspect,... since I'm working, when you are not working you feel the most useless person you can imagine, as people say, work dignifies man and it really does.....it's been good for me in every aspect: social, labour and familiar one." (EI17)

As we can deduct from the speech of these two persons of foreign origin, the help they have received for their personal development through their participation in these entrepreneurial activities is a kind of help that has supported them in multiple facets, from the more private level of the feelings, to the more social one of the relationships and even the familiar field.

Therefore, we should highlight the important role played by certain forms of social intervention fostered by the social initiative and supported somehow by the public administrations, as the WISEs in order to achieve an improvement in the employability and life conditions of the people of foreign origin in a situation of social inequality, contributing to their normalisation and integration not only in the work field, but also in a wider social environment.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to conclude this paper, we would like to point out the considerations where we highlight the main features of the WISEs in the Basque Country within their tasks for the labour activation and the social inclusion, also for the international immigrants in a more serious situation of social fragility:

- ✓ They represent a *consolidated tool for fighting against the social labour disadvantages, also the ones of the international immigrants*: This is a tool that has not only been maintained as time has gone by, but even its figures have grown in the course of the 21st century, as it is reflected in the Basque official registry until reaching almost 50 entities. These enterprises have succeeded with their method of learning while working in a supervised way. They are spaces managed in the right way and offer both economic and social benefits with positive results in the social and labour insertion of their beneficiaries, a certain volume of international immigrants among them. Although they count on public subsidies, they do not consume social resources “in a non-refundable way”, but the public investment on the WISEs produces a return for the society of a big part of the investment, both at tax (regarding the taxes on the economic activities, societies’ tax in the payrolls and so on) and at socio-economic level (reducing the perception of social benefits and unemployment money, activating the economy in society and so on) (Gizatea, 2011).
- ✓ *They set up hybrid, instrumental and transitory structures*: From the WISEs there has been a reaction to the social phenomenon of migration, enabling the acknowledgement as persons equal to the native inhabitants and articulating and developing a series of actions of active inclusion which help them both at training and learning level of skills and competences (“skills for jobs”) and at a personal side, helping them to get integrated at a social and labour level, contributing to their social and labour normalisation and to their integration in the society where they live in. They combine the economic objectives of productivity and competitiveness in the market with social objectives of commitment with the people, since those are organisations working in a market producing goods and services in multiple economic activities with the goal of integrating people at risk of exclusion as certain persons of foreign origin.
- ✓ The first data of our research allows us to declare that, specifically, more than 260 workers of foreign origin were employed in the Basque WISEs at the end of the year 2011. For these people, these entities included within the framework of SSE are a key factor to achieve their social and labour integration in the Basque society since, starting out from a situation of unemployment and having undersigned with the corresponding basic social services an Insertion Agreement, as reflection of their social disadvantage, they have got a work contract in an environment where they receive support, not only at the level of the development of real work, but also with a customized itinerary in order to achieve personal qualifications. Apart from obtaining income, they are trained and individually supported thanks to the methodology developed by those work centres, what also benefits them in the regularization of their administrative situation, a circumstance which is indispensable for this group.

Hence, these kind of entrepreneurial devices enables the achievement of a bigger cohesion because they facilitate the possibility of achieving a job and practical training, what, no doubt enhances the environment and the social justice within the ACBC. Therefore, it is showing what an efficient and effective device regarding the social insertion and the labour activation of underprivileged groups, among them a certain fraction of the most vulnerable international immigrants, whose percentage in the territory of the Basque Country is, as we have mentioned before, almost 35%.

To sum up, the intrinsic features of the WISEs grant them special characteristics, making them different to other economic stakeholders in general and to the SSE in a specific way. They enable the access to a normalised employment of groups with special difficulties after a monitoring period and through the real performance of a job position, the most underprivileged immigrants among them who are increasingly becoming insertion workers, in a bigger percentage and not only, but mainly, in this kind of enterprises in the Basque Country. Therefore, these enterprises must be understood as useful mechanisms to reach optimal levels of social and labour integration from an active participation, what has an impact on the achievement of

social justice related to the construction of a more inclusive, cohesive and fair society, being a favourable factor for the integration of the group of the most vulnerable international immigrants.

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ⁱ The title of the research, directed by Ms. M^a Esther Aretxabala, PhD, was “The Social and Solidarity Economy as lever for social integration through the employment of the group of the most vulnerable immigrants in the historic territory of Biscay” and was funded by the Provincial Government of Biscay, through their initiative ‘BizkaiLab’.

ⁱⁱ Specifically, the immigrant labour force reflects a high rate of temporary contracts and a low occupational mobility compared to the native inhabitants (Izquierdo, 2011); what, likewise, increases the big probabilities for them of falling into poverty.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the year 2008 there was a difference in the annual average salary close to the 8.500 euro between the Spanish and immigrant workers, amounting the annual average salary of a Spaniard to 22.485 euro and around 14.000 euros the one of immigrants (INE, 2010a).

^{iv} In Spain, every citizen is subject to the Constitution, and the foreigners, moreover, are subject to the Organic Law of Rights and Freedom in Spain (LODYLE), dated 14/2003 (Izquierdo, 2011:601).

^v The term integration has been accompanied by controversy from the very beginning (Malgesini and Giménez, 1997), having debated a lot about the conceptualization of the term integration, since it has been conceived as a complex and above all slippery (Penninx and Martiniello, 2006). However, after its differentiation of the assimilation and its approach to the cultural pluralism in Europe, it has been consolidated as the way of mentioning the adaptation process of the immigrants. We will not go into depth in these debates, since it is not the core of the present document and we’ll

take as basis the assumption that the term integration alludes to a process through which the person gets integrated in the society, under the same conditions enjoyed by the people belonging to the same society (Iglesias de Ussel, 2010:21).

^{vi} The concept of vulnerability makes reference to the fragility and helplessness and every person can face it. From an academic-scientific perspective, the vulnerability has become from the end of the XX century in its social dimension, in an approach that poses the research about underprivileged people who have to face unexpected situations (Pizarro, 2001).

^{vii} There are two features in the situation of migrants in the receptive societies which expose them to potential situations of social discrimination. First of all, the fact of not being a national citizen. Secondly, since they are often workers in unfavoured sectors of the economy are extremely affected by the non fulfilment of the labour rights. (De Guchteneire and Pécoud, 2008: 11-12, in Iglesias de Ussel, 2010:20).

^{viii} In Spain, 11,4% of all the employees suffer from the risk of falling into poverty. This risk is higher for those people with a temporary work contract (12,6%) than for those with permanent ones (5,3%) (European Commission, 2011).

^{ix} From 2007, there is an own law, Law 44/2007, for Work Integration Social Enterprises, but, likewise, the following Regulation is available: Law 27/2009, of urgent measurements for the maintenance and fostering of employment

^x This process is nowadays being revised, since the new Lanbide- Basque Service for Employment – flagship of the Basque Government for the defence of employment and whose activity started in January 2011, has considered the creation of a specific service of WISEs and will channel all the aspects relative to them.