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Let's rehabilitate public services! For public services that are financed and innovative

Both prized for the values that public services bring to life, such as continuity of service, equality of access and adaptability, and decried for their lack of efficiency and the expenditure they represent, public services are at the heart of all debates. As essential tools of the Republic, public services are common services that enable us to bring life to our regions and create de facto solidarity. The health crisis has highlighted a much clearer reality: it is no longer time to defend public services, which are undergoing numerous and very real challenges; there is a need to promote a new vision of public services as collective investments at the service of all.

Public services need to be rethought in terms of the role of local authorities, with investment and management models to be spread out. It is by proposing a credible and sustainable financing model, and by assuming clear public spending choices, that the service provided to the public will make it possible to fully rehabilitate the economic and social usefulness of public services. Public power cannot be decreed; it can be acquired.

Reaffirming political trusteeship

Yes, we have public services that cannot be subject to the same logic of profitability as private services. Yes, we must ensure that certain services, organized by the public authorities, whatever the level of intervention, escape pure profit calculations.

Today, it appears that the neoliberal logic applies to public services according to a pattern that can be reproduced in different sectors, whether it be transportation, health, employment, justice, education or, as a visible example, mail and parcel delivery.

The [pattern](#) described in "The Twilight of Public Services" is clear and applies to all sectors. The neo-liberal logic first of all imposes a requirement of profitability on a service which, by definition, has as its basic principle equal treatment and accessibility for all, taking into account situations that the market cannot and will not identify. Consequently, the public service is not necessarily profitable. This logic of profitability obviously requires cutting back on the greatest expenses and has the direct consequence of less investment in the costly infrastructure that weighs precisely on these expenses. This lack of investment obviously affects the quality of the service provided. This deterioration is often pointed at and the State, as an omnipotent funder, is called upon to act. Faced with the various injunctions, logic dictates that private supply should be the solution found, in order to develop commercial services and thus enable the financing of public services. Nevertheless, this privatization is often partial and separates the unprofitable investment, linked to infrastructure spending. Thus, large private companies, by capturing commercial markets, benefit from the opening to competition, which in this sense accompanies the privatization of the public service.

This vicious circle, beyond organizing competition within the public service system itself, induces a change in the de facto organization and reverses the balance of power. The service remains public because it is organized by the public authorities, but only in appearance. In fact, it is the private actor who, because of its technical and commercial predominance, controls the organization of the public service. However, this equation is not fatal.

The State must regain the strength of its political and administrative tutelage. Political because the Government has a power of orientation that it must assume without abandoning this responsibility to the so-called laws of the economy. Administrative because the State must exercise its power of control, of budgetary supervision, deciding on investments and tariffs.

Moreover, European fatality is too simplistic. If the European Union has indeed put an end to the situation of so-called natural monopolies that concern certain public services such as telecoms or via the various railway packages, it considers energy, transport, water, telecoms, postal services and waste collection services to be of general interest. Very often, the opening up of major sectors of the economy to competition is accompanied by a legislative arsenal that preserves the ability of the State and local authorities to maintain public services. For example, in the rail sector, although several liberalization directives have been adopted, a 2007 regulation known as "public service obligations" (*EC Regulation No. 1370/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on public passenger transport services by rail and by road*) gives public authorities the power to define public service obligations. Thus, obligations clearly weigh on national organization and public policy orientations, and the disengagement of the State - although sometimes encouraged - is not inevitable. It is important to stress the political choice that France can make in terms of the organization, financing and management of public services.

To break out of this vicious circle, it is necessary both to affirm a political choice, which is continuous investment in public services, to rethink the organization of public services by betting on territorial intelligence, and to determine clear orientations for sustainable services.

The financing of the public authority requires to rewrite the consent to taxation

Perceived or actual degradation of service has a direct impact on tax consent. Indeed, the financing of public services has always been a question since they are overwhelmingly financed by the national budget, whether it is the State budget in the first place or the budget of local authorities at the local level. While some would like to leave the financing debate to managers, it is crucial to remember that public services are tools that contribute to a dynamic towards greater equality. It is for this reason that the wealthiest classes have always sought to reduce their contribution to taxes, since public services guarantee freedom of access and the same quality of service for all citizens without distinction. Today, the fragmentation of taxes and the development of fees, based on the notion of the user and not the citizen, are concomitant with tax evolutions that favor non-progressive taxes, while tax rates for the richest - of which the wealth tax is the glaring example - and corporate taxes are constantly falling, deepening inequalities that have been analyzed many times over.

However, article 13 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen affirms that "*for the maintenance of the public force and the expenses of administration, a common contribution is indispensable; it must be equally distributed among the citizens, because of their faculties*". The Socialist Party must thus carry a strong and readable discourse: increasing public spending in order to invest and finance public services is a choice and a political orientation that must prevail. To do this, the tax must be made acceptable. Several proposals to "[RethinkTaxation](#)" have been made, notably in a recent note by Brice Gaillard published by the Fondation Jean Jaurès.

Beyond the necessary rehabilitation of a solidarity tax on capital - the ISF - it is indeed necessary to think about the progressivity of the tax. Wanting to simplify tax brackets provokes, among other things, threshold effects and deleterious exemptions to create collective consent. On the contrary, rethinking progressivity through the creation of new brackets is an avenue to be developed in order to, on the one hand, tax the wealthiest households more heavily and, on the other hand, to reintegrate low-income populations who do not currently participate in the financing of public services.

The attachment to public services is strong, as all studies confirm, whether for national or local public services. However, how can one take advantage of public services as a citizen when the link between the citizen - who is also a constituent - is severed? The fee does not replace the tax. It is therefore necessary for the entire population to be able to participate in the financing of public services to the extent of its means, an old adage that will enable everyone to take advantage of public services as a true community. This economic participation, however modest it may be, will also help to enhance the image of public services, which thus represent a collective investment and not simply a service that is due. The perception of the quality of service - and the role of the agents - will also be positively affected.

Strengthen the power of control of the public authority and local elected officials

Private actors cannot be the guarantors of the principles, the pillars of public service. If the objective of a private company is considered to be that of generating turnover and profits, then it is clear that the public authority must retain control over the public service, the private actor being a mere partner. The weight and capacity of a municipality or EPCI is even very clear when faced with world leaders, even when the State is a shareholder, such as Véolia, Suez - as we have seen recently -, Kéolis or the SNCF. Also, as soon as the operation of a public service is conceded or delegated to a company, the public authority should have the means and tools to control it. This control is all the more necessary because the structures can develop activities outside the scope given at the outset, by developing associated services.

Collaborative models of public service organization must therefore be better controlled by local elected officials. Indeed, transparency must be ensured with regard to shareholder communities and tools for understanding and analysis must be given to deliberative assemblies. This is all the more true when services are entrusted to highly technical mixed syndicates or when they are pooled over a territory that divides and dilutes power between each local authority involved.

This strengthening of the supervisory powers of the public authority that grants the operation of the public service to a private company should enable it to better understand the operating costs and the level of the associated charges in order to better control them. This will also enable it to innovate more effectively, particularly in terms of financial arrangements, as the framework will allow it to do so.

The services of the administration, and especially those of local authorities, must be armed, and they must not be dependent on the guidelines imposed, informally and insidiously, by certain companies. The existing imbalance between the granting authorities and the companies holding public service contracts must be put to an end.

This reinforcement involves training for elected officials. Let's stop thinking that public services, because they would be emanations of a public power, would function like machines. Public service is first and foremost made up of men and women who are its guarantors. If expertise is power, then it must be developed internally or have the means to control it.

With the end of state monopolies in the major sectors of the economy (transport, electricity, gas, telecoms), independent administrative authorities (IAA) were created to accompany the opening to competition and to regulate these sectors. The expertise and knowledge of the major regulated sectors developed in these authorities could be shared and used by the public decision-makers in charge of managing public services. This goes hand in hand with a strengthening of the democratic control that must be exercised by Parliament, a sine qua non for the authorities to be free from budgetary rules and political debates on their scope of action.

Thus, associations of elected officials, in conjunction with these authorities, should set up specialized teams that will be support units for the regions, departments and municipalities, able to help them better negotiate, calibrate and manage public service agreements. This sharing of knowledge and skills would make it possible to equip the conceding authorities to conduct negotiations with a full understanding of all the issues and interests at stake. These teams will thus be responsible for guiding and developing both technical and political dialogue on the preparation of contracts,

the drafting of clauses for public contracts and concessions, either with the partner directly, or with the firm mandated to negotiate the contract upstream.

Finally, it is more than necessary to renew the dialogue with public service users and to strengthen consultation with user organizations and unions present in major public services.

Trusting territorial intelligence: the private sector is not the enemy of public service, it is a partner without being the guarantor.

In order to feed the necessary reflection to be had on the debt, and on the financing of public services, it is essential to use territorial intelligence for an adapted local management of public services.

Thus, the Socialist Party needs to get its act together on the issue of decentralization and the organization of public services at all levels. Local authorities are in the front line in managing this crisis and they are demonstrating their ability to act on their territory more effectively than a state centralized on certain public services. To cite just one example, the regionalization of the public employment service must be implemented, taking into account the specific nature of regional labor markets, by giving autonomy to territorial structures and agents. Thus, beyond the current experimentation, for the voluntary regional councils, and in addition to their key competence in economic development, the latter must be able to direct training towards key sectors in a territorial logic.

Decentralization also makes it possible to develop territorial, local experiences that allow us to think of a public service that advocates its clear principles: continuity, equality and adaptability. While infrastructures such as railways, schools and hospitals need leverage from the State, local models of organization, financing and management of local public services - such as water, electricity and gas management, which are all necessary levers for reducing the energy divide between regions - bring together different players who agree on a common objective and allow the local authority to exercise its jurisdiction. It is thus possible to develop models of society that are tools available to local authorities.

Although the SEM model has evolved considerably in recent years, it can be further developed, on the one hand to make [the model more secure, and on the](#) other hand to ensure that elected officials, particularly in rural areas, have a better grasp of the way these semi-public companies operate and the added value they can bring, in terms of costs (public and private capital) and speed of execution. According to the Cour des Comptes, in 2018, 925 SEMs were listed among the 1,300 local public enterprises (EPLs). Now, other models of local public enterprises exist with local public companies (SPLs) and single-operation semi-public companies (SEMs). This enables local authorities to have better engineering skills while retaining control of their territorial policy. The execution of missions of general interest can thus coexist with the principle of freedom of trade and industry because there is guidance and control by the public authorities. These models carry within them capacities for innovation - and therefore adaptability - at a territorial level, which can be considered as a strategy for organizing public services.

Alternative models can also be developed. In this context of health crisis where public services are prized for their resilience but also despised for their unprofitable nature, the SCOP model is one such model. Similarly, the Société coopérative d'intérêt collectif (SCIC) is a model of shared governance and a tool for implementing local public services. The main interest of these models is the cooperation of the actors brought together in the entity, be they companies, associations, local authorities, to organize a public service. This cooperation thus brings together the needs of all the actors represented and enables the local actors holding power, in this case the local authorities, to determine public policies on service quality objectives. In particular, these models are new ways of organizing the care sector in a sustainable and efficient way, both for people with disabilities and for seniors. These models can be as many management tools as they are levers for political action, fighting against the fragmentation of these neglected areas of service and linked to the often precarious status of workers for reasons of economic rationality.

Public services for an ecological and solidarity-based transformation

Organizational models are a response to this need and to citizens' demand for sustainable and durable services. Public services must be vectors of sustainable public services, both in their organization and in their purpose. Adaptation is thus one of the pillars of public service and it must be a vehicle for social and environmental innovation. This is what socialist elected officials do on a daily basis in their territories. This is what we must develop to ensure that public services are deployed in line with the reality of the regions. This is what revitalization - and reconquest - is all about! - of rural communities, priority urban policy districts and medium-sized cities.

At a time when lifestyles are changing profoundly, particularly in this context of a long-term health crisis that can have a lasting impact on behaviour with real population movements in the area, public services must serve as a benchmark as well as a unit for innovation, fulfilling clear social, economic and environmental objectives. This is already the case for types of service with the development of active and sustainable mobility or proximity mediation services with the famous PIMMS - Point information mediation multiservices. We must also advocate sustainable and social development through the very form of the service, for example through rental services - which are so many proximity services - based on the economy of functionality.

Deserting rural areas should no longer be the norm, while travel times to access the basket of everyday services (schools, postal service, shops, etc.) are constantly increasing in sparsely populated communities. However, replacing physical points with dematerialized services cannot be considered as the same level of service.

While digital is obviously an asset in the distribution of services, it cannot be a solution on its own. There is no shortage of recommendations on this point, and the 2019 Defender of Rights report "[Dematerialization and unequal access to public services](#)" points out the need to preserve access to public services. We cannot dissociate digital from a human service. Also, mutualization structures cannot be a general rule applicable everywhere and without a territorial logic that takes into account the public, i.e. the users, i.e. the citizens.

Furthermore, the [notions of "power", "will" and "knowing" to use digital technology](#) are all questions that remain unaddressed today, and yet are key elements in thinking about the presence of public service and its continuity.

Public services represent a major challenge in terms of territorial attractiveness. Socialists must demonstrate by example that a public service managed by the public authorities in the name of the general interest is still possible and desirable.

Beyond that, improving the working conditions of employees, who are the guarantors of the values of public service, is a priority.

In these times of health crisis, which is coupled with an economic crisis and tripled by a social crisis, promoting public services seems to be a matter of simple common sense. It must be said that this vision, although obvious to us, is not shared by everyone up to the top of the state. However, citing the public hospital is easy because the reality of the last few months has highlighted the lack of investment and brought to light a model that is out of breath, which is essentially based on the dedication and training of its staff. But it would be just as easy to cite the public school, recently touched in its heart by an atrocious attack and which proves once again by the resilience of its teachers its unalterable attachment to the Republic. And it would also be considered obvious to cite the police - despite the blunders of some who must be condemned. We need public services. We need them if we want to make society.

Also, the basis of the latest intersectoral mobilizations, and in particular the strikes of December 2019, are the working conditions of those who provide our public services on a daily basis. These are railway workers, teachers, nurses, doctors, Pôle Emploi agents, firefighters, not forgetting the social services personnel in charge of child protection and the management of domestic violence. Prevention policies are nowadays abandoned or reduced to a mere skin of sorrow (PMI, parental support, etc.). The demand for results, the nibbling away at automation, continuous staff reductions and incessant reorganization, even the changing of permanent computer tools and software, create working conditions that create insecurity for agents, for lower salaries than most of our European neighbors. The managerial logic - the famous New Public Management - leaves a ready-made place for private actors, allowing more and more the recruitment of non-civil servants. While the debate on civil service reform is crucial, the private solution will not resolve the question of performance with a single click, and will surely deepen the misunderstanding of the public service objective. The economic argument is thus combined with a social argument: the professions of the link, the professions of the public service, the professions serving all publics, are devalued. We need to defend them against attacks on their status, because this is a matter of protecting public service and not of so-called privileges. Above all, we must value them, faithfully to the culture of the Socialist Party, also to fight against the real clientelism practiced by some elected officials. Working conditions are one of the primary levers. The agents are the first guarantors of the quality and neutrality of the public service.