

## FOREWORD

This year the Gabinet d'Estudis Socials (GES) is celebrating its sixteenth birthday. At the very beginning, there were just three people, now there are twelve; GES was an association, now it is a cooperative. But what it has always been is a centre dealing with research, training and assistance, design and evaluation of projects, documentation and publications. GES is independent of any ideological, academic, political or economic influences. As it has grown, it has not been oblivious to the needs arising from social exclusion or to the interests of public and private institutions it has been working for.

GES has used all the available methodologies of applied research in trying to understand both the biggest socioeconomic processes and daily life. Analyses have benefited from the cooperation of grass roots organisations and its active participation in federations, platforms and networks.

This report is a look at GES' history, a reflection on internal and external progress. In the former case, since GES has done its best to find an organizational structure which respected both individual autonomy and collective decision-making in accordance with cooperative principles. GES began in Catalonia and opened to the whole of the Spanish State, and step-by-step, to the rest of Europe. In fact, GES has worked broadly for Community institutions, has taken part in or has organized more than one hundred meetings and conferences and has acted as «turntable» and mediator. As a result, it is currently networked with similar centres and has a good relationship with public and private institutions all over Europe.

GES' continuous challenge has been to prove that it is possible to exist and grow through interdisciplinary professional work, to improve services and to innovate critically. GES has dealt with a broad range of subjects: promoting partnership, social planning, quality of services and auditing, advising associations, cooperatives and trade unions. It has also contributed to European social policies through the examination of social problems such as poverty, exclusion, the labour market and special needs of the young and the elderly, children, women, ethnic minorities, migrants and ex-offenders, the unemployed and the disabled.

Throughout these years GES has made many friends. All of them deserve to be thanked for their encouragement, their sincere cooperation, their open criticism and their collaboration. As for the future that GES is building with every step, it is constantly adapting itself to computer and technology changes and will improve its documentation and information. It will also achieve a better link with the institutions it works with and a better knowledge of the external reality, which must be transformed.

***Jordi Estivill – Director***

## GES IN A FEW WORDS

The chronicle of the activities that GES has developed over the years, together with the list of territories where it has worked (Catalonia first, but later most of the Spanish

Autonomous Communities, several European countries and European institutions) make it possible for any reader to achieve a comprehensive picture of its work in sixteen years. Such a large amount of information needs to be dissected into the diverse work areas in which GES has become gradually involved, which is done below. As this happened, it has needed more diverse personnel to treat each area so it has expanded its capacities by recruiting sociologists, economists, historians, documentalists, computer experts, social workers and so forth.

**For a more complete picture of GES' activities, please consult the Catalan or Spanish sections of this report.**

## WORK AREAS

**Research** is GES' «raison d'être», understood not as a theoretical or «pure» subject but as a first-stage working tool previous to planning and intervention. As for **Training**, GES regards it as a vital tool for research and so as a necessary foundation. **Documentation** is another key piece for any research agency and GES is no exception. Its will is that its broad documentation on social economy, the labour market, migrations, social integration and social policies, poverty and exclusion, etc., can also be of external use, besides providing its own members with the necessary information for their research and training works. In recent years, GES has got involved gradually in two other work areas: **Consultancy** and **Evaluation**. Both have evolved in parallel with the increasing awareness about European funds and programmes and the requirements to be met when submitting social projects to them. The last challenge faced by GES is **Intervention**, which has meant creating another association (*Associació per la Cooperació, la Inserció Social i la Inteculturalitat ACISI*), which is already working and mediating with Moroccan migrants in a Catalan county.

## EUROPE

In speaking of work areas, it is necessary to mention that **Europe** has always been something far beyond a mere territory. For GES, it is another «real» work area. Moreover, it is also important to emphasize that this work area includes many jobs. These are:

- First, dissemination of information about European experiences in fields such as the fight against long-term unemployment, social economy initiatives, etc., into Catalonia and Spain.

- Second, the opposite job: transferring Catalan and Spanish experiences into Europe.

- Third, broad cooperation with Community institutions since 1986 and active presence at all seminars which some of the European Presidencies have specifically devoted to social subjects.

- Fourth, familiarization with the European Commission's «modus operandi» in order to assume a role of *turntable* between Catalan and Spanish public and private institutions and the European Commission's requirements.

- Fifth, networking with many commonly interested European organizations, which has helped to meet mutual needs of transnationality when designing a social project.

- Sixth, creation of the *Euroges Inform* and the *Eumigre* newsletters and the *Accessing Europe* course as tools to strengthen European awareness among Catalan and Spanish citizens and institutions.

- Seventh, publication of a number of GES' works in languages such as French, English, Italian and Portuguese.

Concerning the third point (cooperation with Community institutions), it is important to list GES' contributions:

- Collaboration and research for the book *Labour Relations in Europe* (1986), which was published in the United Kingdom and the United States.

- Cooperation with the Community **Poverty 2** Programme (1988).

- Cooperation with the Community **Poverty 3** Programme (1990-1993), in which GES was responsible for the coordination of Spanish projects.

- Evaluation of the Community Programme **Ergo**, aimed at the solution of long-term unemployment (1990).

- Participation in the *PACO project*, dealing with comparability of poverty panels at the European level (1991).

- Evaluation of Spanish policies against long-term unemployment, which GES carried out for the European Commission as a result of its previous involvement in the above mentioned Ergo programme (1991).
- Submission of a paper to a seminar organized by the Council of Europe on *Poverty and Human Rights* (Estrasburg, 1994).
- Participation in the *Green and White Papers of European Social Policy* (1995).
- Evaluation of a number of Spanish projects that had been selected during the Community Initiative **Horizon** (1995-1997).
- Evaluation of initiatives undertaken at the European Union level aimed at the reintegration of ex-offenders (Community Programme **Ex-Offenders**, 1996).
- Completion of research for *The Role of Partnerships in Promoting Social Cohesion in Spain*, a comparative survey conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (1996).
- Evaluation of three social projects developed under the auspices of **Integra**, **Youthstart** and **Leonardo da Vinci** Community initiatives.
- Coordination of the evaluation of activities promoted by the **European Year Against Racism** (1997).
- Involvement in five projects selected by the Community Programme **Third System and Employment** (1998).
- Participation in the design of a standard evaluation model to be applied to any social project at the European level (1999).
- Participation in the research project untitled *Social Public Services: Quality of Working Life and Quality of Service*, conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions (1999).
- Involvement in four transnational studies dealing with various subjects. The projects are entitled: *Migrants and bank services: Facilitating migrants' access to bank services*; *The contribution of social capital in the social economy to local economic development in Western Europe*; *Civil Dialogue and Social Economy: from the local level to the European space*; and *Towards a policy relevant European database on forms of social exclusion* (2000) Each of them was selected in the framework of a different Community initiative.

## **TARGET POPULATIONS**

It is well known that Community social policies aim at gradual integration. European authorities are increasingly aware that such phenomena as poverty and exclusion cannot be reduced to a unique dimension. Their effects hit more than one population, so Community programmes and initiatives are, little by little, becoming more «transversal». GES thinks this approach is quite consistent and has also applied it to a number of its own studies. However, it does not wish to betray its own history and «forget» that another way to approach its biography is through the target populations it has studied. GES feels linked with the elderly, children, youngsters, women, migrants, ethnic minorities, ex-offenders, the disabled, the unemployed and drug addicts.