

SCIENTIFIC POLICY IN CATALONIA



OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN CATALONIA: PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN PROGRAMMES, CONSOLIDATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN INDUSTRY AND UNIVERSITIES, AND THE MANY SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS NOW UNDER WAY.

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In fostering and carrying out research, the *Generalitat de Catalunya* meets with serious obstacles of a juridical and especially financial nature.

Article 9.7 of the Statute of Autonomy states that the *Generalitat* has exclusive responsibility for "research, without prejudice to the dispositions of No. 15, section 1, article 149 of the Constitution". If we read this article, we see that the State has exclusive responsibility for the "fostering and general co-ordination of scientific and technological research". The State cannot therefore claim a monopoly over direct research

but it can quite well feel that it is under no obligation to hand over research funds to the *Generalitat*. This explains the present dispute over the transfer of research centres which the State runs in Catalonia through the CSIC. The only centres transferred so far are those that are run by the Institute for Agroalimentary Research and Technology (IRTA), which the State has handed over to the Department of Agriculture.

The legal framework for state competence in matters of research is laid out in Act 13/1986, covering "Fomento y Coordinación General de la Investigación Científica i Técnica". This law provides a very

restrictive interpretation of Catalonia's legal capacities and for this reason it was the subject of an appeal by the Catalan Parliament before the Constitutional Tribunal. The case is now awaiting sentence. The problem of legal competence would have no importance if the system by which the *Generalitat* is financed allowed it sufficient funds to carry out its own research policy. Unfortunately, this is not the case, since funding is decided according to the effective cost of the service transferred, at the time of transfer. If there is no transfer, there are no funds, and since in matters of research hardly anything has been transferred, the

Generalitat has no funds reserved for research and can only lay out what it can afford from its meagre funds for unrestricted use. Nevertheless, and in spite of the fact that its direct financial contribution is necessarily smaller than that of the State, the sum total of the *Generalitat's* activities through its different departments already amounts to an appreciable percentage of its overall budget.

In fact, in spite of the scarcity of funds, the autonomous government has always shown interest in promoting research. In November 1980, with the object of deciding the best possible scientific policy for Catalonia, the *Generalitat* set up the "Interdepartmental Commission on Research and Technological Innovation" (CIRIT). According to the founding decree, its chief aims are to establish guidelines for action in matters of research, to co-ordinate the *Generalitat* departments' various activities and programmes in this field, and to make proposals for the distribution of the total funds available.

To back up the CIRIT, the same decree also created the Scientific and Technological Council" (CCT), made up of people of proven competence in the different spheres of activity. The CCT's job is to advise the *Generalitat* as regards scientific policy, to examine scientific and technological objectives and research priorities, to assess scientific and technological activity and in general to carry out any studies that might lead to a more rational distribution of funds, closer co-operation between the different research organisms and a greater efficiency and financial stimulation of basic and applied research. In Catalonia, as in the rest of the world, research is carried out through a variety of different organisms. First of all, there is the work done by the universities, which, traditionally, are the most important research centres. Then there is the research carried out by other public institutions, that is to say, the Catalan centres belonging to the "Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas" (CSIC), run by the State; the centres run by the *Generalitat*, such as the Experimental and Research Laboratory and the IRTA; the hospitals, thanks to the Health Research Fund (FIS), provided by the Social Security; in centres belonging to the Barcelona City Council or the Deputations, etc. There is also the research carried out or promoted by academic institutions, such as the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans*, and the private



research carried out by companies, which is growing steadily and which, in some sectors, is of a remarkably high quality.

We do not yet have anything like a full and detailed picture of all the work being done in Catalonia in research, development and technological innovation. The *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* has signed an agreement with the CIRIT to undertake this work, and we shall soon have a relatively exhaustive inventory which will be kept permanently up to date with the help of a data bank.

The CIRIT's own activities include a variety of different tasks. Worth mentioning are the provision of grants for research and for further study abroad; financial assistance to young researchers; the CIRIT young people's awards; the encounters with science for young people; the subventions to scientific congresses; the technological innovation agreements; the teledocumentation service; the CIRIT courses taken by foreign researchers; support for publications; assistance to investigation centres in the purchase of research equipment or the maintenance of essential services, etc. Generally speaking, we could say that, within the limitations of its budget, the work undertaken by the CIRIT is aimed at stimulating and supporting the work of the Catalan scientific community, facilitating contacts abroad and stimulating new vocations.

It is impossible to make a balance of the results so far in the space available. Our researchers have already achieved international recognition in a number of fields, and the overall progress made in the last few years is quite considerable. Participation in European programmes, the increasingly sound relations between industry and the universities, and the many scientific and technological innovations now under way allow hope for the future. Economic growth and research act as a mutual stimulus for one another, and the urge for modernization in all fields leads to a generalized interest in research. At the moment, the chief cause for optimism must surely be the growing awareness of the importance of research in today's world.

Investigative activity—that is to say, the scientific application of scientific method to knowledge—is probably one of the most effective forms of human training, and in a country like ours, poor in natural resources, human potential is, undoubtedly, our greatest, our true wealth. ■