

# SOCIOCULTURAL ACTIVITY GROUPS



SOCIOCULTURAL ACTIVITY GROUPS IN OUR COUNTRY MATERIALIZE IN A NUMBER OF INITIATIVES TO STIMULATE THE PERSONAL GROWTH OF THE YOUNG WITHOUT FORGETTING OTHER PEOPLE.

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**T**he structure of Western society means that children and young people tend to suffer from a series of severe shortages: in mobility, in spaces for play or social relations, in free time in its creative sense, in their relations with the natural environment. At the same time, these same children and young people suffer from an excessively sedentary lifestyle and from isolation. To put it briefly, passive leisure, of which television is the perfect example, plays an inordinate part in the life of our youth. Sociocultural activity groups arose to cover this deficit and make up for these excesses, their objective

being to encourage attitudes, thinking and actions that provoke a reaction –as individuals and as a community– against passivity and routine.

The general features of these sociocultural activity groups are to educate for action, the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood or village, the importance of nature, coeducation and a series of values such as solidarity, responsibility, a critical sense and creativity. In Catalonia, sociocultural activity groups are flourishing and there are a large number of initiatives. For reasons of space, we shall concentrate on the most active groups,

that is the “esplais”, the scouts and the local associations. The following are the most representative organisations in each of these groups.

*Coordinació Catalana de Colònies, Casals i Clubs d’Esplai.* Youth Camps and Clubs. Their slogan is “Meaningful free time”, and is put into practice from a very early age. The central office, set up in 1967, coordinates four training schools for young group leaders, 2 camp sections and 7 federations of youth clubs, which form a total of 320 confessional centres, located mainly in parish halls and also in





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premises lent by religious schools. All together, the Coordination is in charge of the activities of 30,000 young people and children of ages ranging from six to eighteen, coordinated by 5,000 group leaders, most of them young people.

*Esplais Catalans (Esplac).* Catalan Youth Clubs. An organisation set up in 1982 to offer an alternative to the religious youth clubs and based on values of laicity and progress. Esplac understands laicity as respect for all beliefs and, in the final instance, for the freedom of the individual, and progress as a move for change in society in favour of freethinking, tolerance, difference, human rights and civil and social citizenship. The internationalist vocation of Esplais Catalans does not prevent a sense of belonging to the immediate community (neighbourhood, village, etc.). At present, this movement consists of 6,000 children between the ages of six and fourteen, directed by 1,000 young group leaders in 95 centres, located mainly in Barcelona's metropolitan area.

*Minyons escoltes-guies de Sant Jordi de Catalunya.* Scouts and Guides. Five years after Baden Powell held his first scout camp, the first steps to set up a scout movement in Catalonia were already taking place. The Scouts and Guides of Sant Jordi make up the largest scout movement, with some 14,500 members, of which 3,000 are leaders and the rest children and young people between the

ages of six and eighteen. The aim of this movement is to train boys and girls in Catalonia as committed citizens and conscious Christians. More specifically, it aims to form responsible members of local, national and international communities and retrieve the festive aspect of life. To achieve their objects, they follow the scout method adapted to the situation in Catalonia today.

*Escoltes Catalans.* Catalan Scouts. Laicity –understood as respect for all beliefs– is the chief difference between this group and the previous one, with which it shares the general aims of training children and young people for a better future. Escoltes Catalans was formed in 1974 through the unification of different organisations and at present has some 4,000 members, of which 500 are group leaders. One of its slogans is “Action is our option”. This action materializes, for example, in international cooperation (six projects begun in Africa) and in nature workshops. Escoltes Catalans also stress the integration of differences.

*Movibaix.* Baix Llobregat Children's and Young People's Free Time Educational Movement. This is the broadest Catalan sociocultural initiative to have arisen spontaneously, with the help of higher infrastructures such as the scout movement. It defines itself as an educational movement for children's and young people's free time and covers the area of l'Hospitalet, a town just outside Barcelona, and the Baix

Llobregat, a region of Barcelona's industrial belt. Movibaix arose in 1984 on the initiative of a group of educators convinced that free time is fundamental in the formation of young people and children. At present, Movibaix consists of 40 lay and religious organisations in 18 towns and organises activities for 7,000 children and young people between three and eighteen years of age, coordinated by 800 young group leaders. Their various activities include youth clubs on Saturdays and weekdays after school, holiday activities, holiday camps and the training of educators. One recent initiative was the campaign in aid of street children in Brazil. Movibaix, for whom the territorial aspect (neighbourhood, region) is basic, concentrates its activities around four leading values: utopia, solidarity, initiative and happiness. Like most of the activity groups, Movibaix's educational action is based on interrelation with the environment, experimental and creative activity, group spirit and personal autonomy. Experiments like those described in this article stimulate the personal growth and development of our youth, without forgetting or leaving out other people. Dialogue and communication are one of the basic objectives of the sociocultural activity groups. The development of deep individuality –being– as opposed to the consumer urge –having– centres a large part of these group's efforts. Efforts which, to be sure, need to be complemented in ambits such as the family or the school. ■