THE COMPUTING INFORMATION CENTRE

THE "CENTRE DIVULGADOR DE LA INFORMÀTICA" WAS CREATED IN 1984 AS A WAY OF INTRODUCING COMPUTING TO ALL THOSE INTERESTED IN THE SUBJECT.

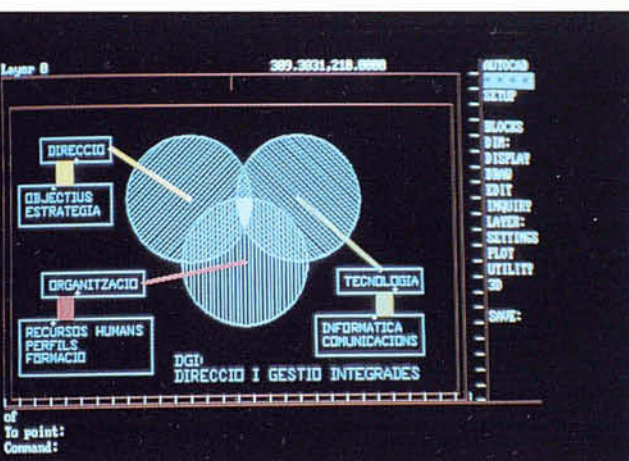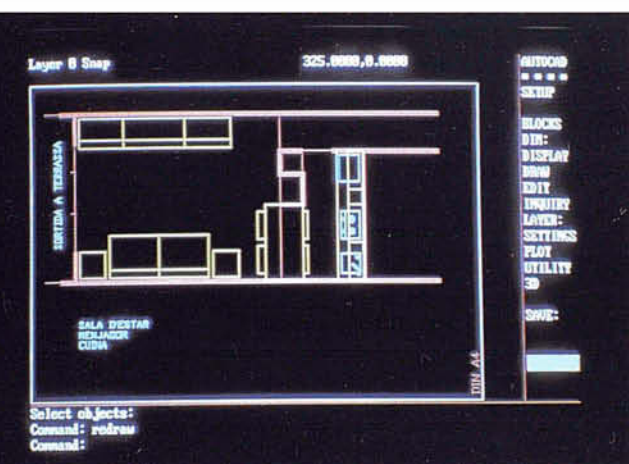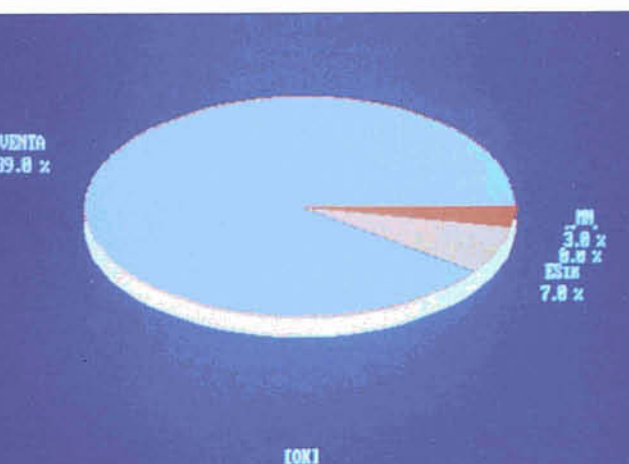ÀNGEL MAURI AND SANTIAGO GUILLÉN JOURNALISTS

Computer technology today is one of the most important factors in competition, since it is a revolutionary tool in the running and management of a new kind of firm characterized by the fact that it operates as an integrated information system. For young people not yet at work, an understanding of computers is vital for their working future. It was the wish to introduce computing to anyone interested in the subject, and not only to specialists, that led to the creation of the Generalitat's "Centre Divulgador de la Informàtica" in 1984.

One of the activities taking place at the CDI centres consists of courses covering a range of subjects that over the past six years has gradually grown and diversified. Approximately 50 % of the courses have been directed at young people without a clearly defined professional vocation, 34 % to employees in firms working with computers and 16 % to executives who have to take decisions about computing. The classes for companies deal with aspects such as management and accounting, design and projects, marketing, etc. Every year, over 5,000 people attend these courses, in which self-teaching methods play an important part.

The "Centre Divulgador de la Informàtica" has reached a series of agreements with different organisations (universities, professional associations, cham-

bers of commerce, hospitals) by which it offers them a service suited to their specific needs. At the same time, there have been agreements with hardware and software suppliers, by which the CDI is able to use their equipment or programs. The "company and local authority diagnoses" integrate technology, organisation and strategy, and provide a bridge between top-level decisions and the practice of the clients. The workshops and software library allow clients short sessions in small groups on particular subjects or else individual consultation, both on specific programs and on the software available on the market.

Decisions relating to the centre's activities are taken on the basis of the supply and demand of the market. In April each year, the CDI publishes the Castilian and Catalan versions of its *Guia de l'Usuari d'Informàtica*, which provides a guide to the standard software available, based on information coming from suppliers. As regards demand, the centre carries out a market survey covering 500 Catalan companies and analysing the implantation of computer technology —in terms both of software and of hardware—, the use to which it is put and training and information needs.

The income from diagnoses and sales of publications covers a third of the CDI's expenses. The other two thirds are covered by a direct subvention from the Generalitat de Catalunya. Fees for the courses aimed at young people are lower and there are grants available, while fees for those courses aimed at managerial staff are higher.

The CDI is made up of a network of eight centres in different parts of Catalonia. Each centre has at least one receptionist and two specialists, and the total workforce is made up of forty people. Each specialist devotes about a third of his or her working day preparing teaching material, a third dealing with the public and a third to visiting computer applications suppliers. The "Centre de Divulgació de la Informàtica" has established agreements with non-profit-making organisations, the so-called Clubs, which also organise teaching activities and receive technical assistance from the CDI. Each year, thousands of pupils attend the forty or so Clubs at present operating in Catalonia.

Six years ago, only a few large companies used big computers or mid-range equipment with tailor-made programs. Computers were used for administrative tasks and the preparation of invoices, wages or files, and these services operated separately from the offices. The personal-computer invasion took management by surprise, and companies could not decide whether to incorporate them or not. The tendency today is to mix: large or medium-sized computers are connected to the desktop computer, and applications extend to the field of production, marketing, etc. The "Centre de Divulgació de la Informàtica" has evolved from work with the personal computer to medium-sized systems, networks, company organisation and telecommunications. In the last few years, the CDI has gone from being an organism belonging to the President's Office to the category of public company, having changed its activities to fit private-sector regulations. Time has shown that the computer is not a machine for use only by specialized technicians, but an instrument for non-specialists, like a telephone or a car. ∎