

## Presentation

# Going international to be competitive

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Promoting internationalisation of services has been a main focus of the Government of Catalonia in recent years. In a society to be called servindustrial, as professor Joan Ramon Cuadrado-Roura correctly points out in the opening article of this *Paradigmes* monograph, internationalisation of services is inherent to the very process of economic globalisation. In fact, many of these services – such as new information and communication technologies, the transport revolution and many business services – promote and facilitate this globalisation. For all this, nobody doubts that internationalisation of and trade in services in its different modes that are also discussed in the monograph will increase considerably in the next years.

Foreign trade statistics reflect this progress of commercial exchange only partially as internationalisation of services is mostly channelled through foreign direct investment, facilitating proximity that is often required to provide services.

Also, the basically immaterial character on which provision of many services is based has perhaps created the feeling that it is a sector with limited internationalisation. Right now, this perception is increasingly inaccurate. The monograph includes cases of about forty Catalan companies going successfully the way of internationalisation. We find companies and organisations – such as universities – of all sizes and from any area of services, companies with a long-standing international tradition and others having started their way abroad only recently. And we also find many recommendations based on each experience and the specifics of each business and the area they have settled in. Providing some impressions of a wide variety of circumstances and success stories is one of the most successful goals of this monograph.

The authors of this *Paradigmes* issue provide us with a whole set of reasons why service companies, which are traditionally related to the local and regional market, should go for internationalisation – from the need of tackling a new challenge to drive the own organisation to uncomfortable positions allowing to strengthen it to diversifying risk and obtaining higher growth rates; from materialising abroad excellence reached in the domestic market to the need of coaching customers in their international development, including talent exchange as a way towards progress in the home country and abroad.

The commitment of the Government of Catalonia to internationalisation of services has become more intensive and efficient in recent years. As the monograph shows, when having a look at policies implemented in these years to stimulate such internationalisation and compare to what our European partners do, we can state that we have made considerable progress in developing specific programmes for service companies in adapting more general programmes to particular needs of these companies and overall in the efficiency of such support policies.

These support policies stimulate increasingly – and are to do so in the future as well – partnerships and joint projects for both international tenders and settling abroad. In a country with small and medium-sized companies as is Catalonia, size cannot be an insurmountable obstacle to go abroad. Partnerships and joint projects are the most immediate and adequate tool to overcome this limitation.

Catalan companies, particularly in services, are increasingly aware that their world is the world and they cannot hold to their closest environment, either out of tradition, market knowledge or linguistic proximity. As one article points out, architect

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Lluís Alonso reminds the number of companies from the sector taking part in commercial delegations organised by the Government of Catalonia, having increased from only three two years ago to currently thirty. The present economic situation also forces to make the best out of it, though internationalisation cannot be just an occasional solution but a structural strategy.

Today, many companies are created thinking directly of the global market, especially when able to provide their services to the whole world through ICT with an ease still unthinkable not a long time ago. The international drive also requires internal change and improvement regarding the organisation and functioning of the company, from adopting English and multilingualism in general as daily working tools to taking people with a different cultural background into the core of the organisation, including availability of the most skilled employees to expatriate for long periods.

Together with innovation, internationalisation is the key element to competitiveness of the Catalan economy. Catalonia needs to do an effort to increase the number of exporting companies with an international reach, especially in services. The local market is very reduced, and so is the Spanish, besides being unstable, as the last months have proven. Yet the market of industrialised countries is much bigger, though also more mature and with tougher competition. In emerging countries, opportunities are bigger and need to be combined with assumable risk and complexity, but with the genuine conviction that they cannot be left aside in the future.

We trust that information, thoughts and the long list of best practices regarding internationalisation of services included in this *Paradigmes* monograph also contribute to have many more companies and organisations taking up or intensifying their own internationalisation process.



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