# FEM P NYA
# pel DRET A DECIDIR
## El discurs polític d'Òmnium Cultural

*TOGETHER on the RIGHT TO DECIDE*
*Òmnium Cultural's political discourse*

**UAB**
Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona

FACULTY OF
**POLITICAL
SCIENCE**

**Alba Guillen Baleta**
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Tutor: Xavier Fähndrich
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and Public Management

*"The function of stories has always been to explore
the conditions of a possible experience"*

*(C. Salmon, 2008:211)*

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**The discourse of Òmnium Cultural[1] is also a political discourse**

The political theory of communication says that politics and communication are related in the sense that the latter affects the former by transmitting symbols among the members of the community. According to the definition of political communication[2], pressure groups and their institutions and organisations also give political discourses[3] when they send slogans, messages and symbols to the community through their campaigns.

The system can be influenced or effects can be produced in several ways. In this paper we will focus on the "*fight for the presence of certain meanings on values and solutions to the problems in play*" (Canel, 2008:24). Canel thus points out the conflictive sense of political discourse. Each actor uses messages[4] to tell a story or to give a particular view of reality which is also expressed in the solutions he or she presents for a certain conflict. Each actor's reality is introduced and gains meaning in accordance with its mental framework, which is determined by ideas through which the discourse is spread among the members of the community.

Òmnium Cultural's discourse gives an opportunity, through the case study of the *Human Towers for Democracy* campaign, which was intended to internationalise (in Europe) the 9N[5], to **analyse a discourse which considers a new mental framework**. Therefore, our initial **hypothesis** is **how Òmnium** has used words to **build a story** that describes independentism as a right to decide **through a series of symbols and values that legitimise a possible independent Catalonia**.

This paper therefore observes the structure[6] that follows: firstly, we will analyse Òmnium's discourse[7] on the story level before going on the see the relationship

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[1] Òmnium Cultural is an association based in Barcelona, originally created in the 1960s to promote the Catalan language and spread the Catalan culture. Over the years it has increased its political nature and as of 2012 it had evolved into a Catalan separatist movement demanding self-determination for Catalonia.

[2] Canel. M. J. (2008) uses the term political communication for any in which the messages are intended to influence and therefore create effects and consequences on the political system.

[3] Van Dijk. T. A. (1999) calls the messages studied by political communication discursive practice or political discourse.

[4] Van Dijk. T. A. (1990) talks about language as a symbolical construction and messages as symbolical objects that have an obvious content but also an underlying content. This approach to the analysis of the discourse is an evolution of the content analysis that considers the field of semiotics.

[5] 9N refers to the citizen participation process on the political future of Catalonia. This was a non-binding vote on the political future of Catalonia that was held by the Government of Catalonia on 9 November 2014. While also known as the Catalan independence referendum, the vote was rebranded a "participation process" by the Government of Catalonia, after a "non-referendum popular consultation" on the same topic and for the same date had been suspended by the Constitutional Court of Spain.

[6] Van Dijk, T. A. (1999) describes a discourse analysis system based on three levels: story, context and ideology.

[7] Consult Appendix 1 when referring to Òmnium's discourse or to its text in the form of textual quotation.

between the story and the also reflected referential context, and we will finally show how the discourse represents a certain view of reality in order to create a new mental framework. Brief conclusions will end the paper.

## Analysis on story level. What is said and why?

In this first section we will analyse how the story, which Dijk, T. A. (1999) says is the basis of the discourse, is expressed. To do this, (a) we will talk about the general context of the story; (b) we will discover what it says to us; (c) we will try to see the reasons behind the message and, (d) we will watch how it tries to convince through persuasion.

(a) General location of the story

The Human Towers for Democracy[8] campaign held its central act on 8 June 2014 in seven European capitals[9] along with Barcelona and several towns of Catalonia, in which human towers were simultaneously erected by 70 'collas', or tower groups, including a total of 5,000 people. In each act, in addition to the reading of the manifesto by a sponsor[10], large banners were unfolded with the motto "*The Catalans want to vote*". The campaign was specifically (formally and explicitly) aimed at the European internationalisation of the consultation and (implicitly) attempted to seek a certain complicity from Europe on the right to decide.

(b) Narrative structure of the story

In relation to the formal structure of the story[11], Òmnium gives its discourse a structure with two main ideas[12]: a call for (A) the holding of a democratic consultation (non-binding referendum) and (B) a search for understanding from Europe.

Both represent an action which finishes, in the first case, and starts, in the second, an alternative that does away with an uncertainty and allows the story to continue. Òmnium therefore tells us what has to be done, what the next step is (a consultation) in the

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[8] This campaign is just one of the many that Òmnium Cultural carried out for the consultation that the Catalonia government had called with large parliamentary support for the 9th of November in order to ask the citizens of Catalonia whether they wanted it to become an independent state

[9] Specifically, Paris, Berlin, London, Brussels, Lisbon, Geneva and Rome.

[10] The sponsors were Catalan figures well-known in different ambits, such as the football coach Pep Guardiola, the musician Jordi Savall, the dramatist Helder Costa, the historian Paul Preston, and the actors Sergi López and Joan Mompart.

[11] We will analyse the structure of the story on the level of meaning as R. Barthes (1977) says, who describes meaning as the criterion of the unit, in other words that what a statement means is what makes it a formal unit.

[12] Van Dijk, T. A. (1999) calls the ideas the principal subjects and Barthes, R. (1977) calls them cores.

"process of national construction", discarding other options, and opens the possibility of a post-consultation alternative, which is its legitimation by Europe.

These principal ideas are based on a cause-effect relationship like in a metonymy, which explains them and gives them meaning. The Catalans have the right to democratically decide on their future as (1) it has long been called for, (2) a large number of Catalans are calling for it, and (3) the state denies the right and does not open up to discussion. Similarly, the search for understanding from Europe is explained through the need for legitimation of the consultation (implicit in the text), for as Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca (1989) say, *"listening to someone is tantamount to possibly being willing to accept their point of view"*.

The main grouped ideas become the backbone to the discourse, which is lead through catalysis[13]: just as the human towers and the values they inspire are used to introduce the claim to be able to decide, the causes are claimed through talk of demonstrations and the State's refusal to allow the consultation, also used as a preamble to appeal to Europe.

Also on the structural level we can say that Òmnium sends numerous signs[14], such as listing the European capitals and adding Barcelona among them or talking about deciding on how the country fits into Europe, making it clear that Catalonia is already a part of it, to refer to feelings (*"the spectacularity or beauty of the human towers"*), characters (*"noble objective"*) and atmospheres (*"massive and peaceful mobilisations"*); but it uses them above all to refer to metaphorical meanings like when it establishes a simile between the human towers and the process of European construction.

(c) Conceptual structure of the story. The action of the story.

The conceptual structure of the story deals with the possibility of its performance, in other words that of the actions[15] and specifically that *"the discourse that shows action and which leads to actions"* (Dijk Van Teun, 1999:133).

As P. Ricoeur (1988) says, the discourse of action deals with the reasons that the author counterpoises over intention[16]. Therefore, when it is said in the discourses that

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[13] Barthes, R. (1977) uses catalysis to name what fills the gap between cores, what we understand as secondary ideas.

[14] Barthes, R. (1977) uses signs to name proposals referring to implicit meanings which also make up the story.

[15] Greimas, A. J. (1990) says that it is the actions which describe the character, who he calls the actant.

[16] Ricoeur, P. (1988) counterpoises the statement of the performative when he says that the intention serves to identify the action whereas the reason has an explanatory function in the sense of clarifying, arguing and legitimating.

"*the Catalans are calling to vote*", the intentional action[17] is a demand for a vote or consultation, but the final reason is the legitimation of the right to decide. Therefore "*on explaining my intention* (that of the actant) *for the reasons, I try less* (the actant) *to give an explanation than to offer a meaning* (…) *this is interpreting*" (P. Ricoeur, 1988: 44).

Òmnium calls for a vote (intention to vote) to decide on the political future of Catalonia (logical cause) but at the same time offers a meaning (reason) when it relates the concept of *democracy* to the fact of deciding, now interpreted as a democratic right that is hard to refuse. In other words, it justifies the consultation in democratic terms.

In addition to using an exercising statement[18] (of the exercise of power) Òmnium also uses promissory statements, or declarations of intentions, when it says that "*we are in favour of resolving*" or that "*the Catalan people want to achieve a so noble objective as the possibility of being able to freely and democratically decide their future*". Once more we are faced with the same logical cause and intention, but the reason this time is to state freedom of action and thought and the intention of resolving, and therefore the will for agreement and dialogue.

Òmnium uses a revealing statement to finish; "*We call to all European citizens: we want to raise the future Europe with you*" with the intention of saying that Catalonia wants to form part of and to build Europe, but also to seek a certain European complicity with regard to the Catalan situation.

Finally, on the level of actions, the decisive statement must be noted which disapproves the position of the Spanish state in order to give one, the weightiest, of the reasons for Europe to legitimise a consultation as a solution to an internal problem which cannot be resolved internally. This interpretation refers us to the following level of analysis where we will talk about the logic of the discourse.

(d) Rhetorical structure of the discourse

As Van Teun (1999) says "*the rhetorical part refers fundamentally to the way in which the discourse is argued*", in other words to the capacity of a discourse to convince and

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[17] An intentional action is one which can be justified with respect to another (allowing or not allowing to vote), but to find the reason behind it, it is necessary to move away from the logical cores and seek the intentions, the reasons, the preferences and the reiterations behind the statements.

[18] To see the classification of the statements, consult *The discourse of action* by P. Ricoeur (1988) page 81-82.

persuade[19]. The presumptions[20], with backing[21], can be accepted just as the objective facts are accepted[22]. Òmnium transmits a series of values through its discourse, the most important of which is democracy, which they hierarchically place over other values such as constitutionality. This democratic value, reinforced by premises[23] such as those of order (the superiority of principles) of quality (values of a higher order), gives meaning to the presumption that the Catalans are pursuing "*a normal claim*" and therefore argues that the Catalans have the right to decide the political future of Catalonia.

Therefore, the key to an effective discourse, rhetorically speaking, is that it should transmit premises which along with other values give meaning to presumptions arguing the thesis to which you want the public to adhere. In democracy, Òmnium has found the value which strengthens the right to decide and which establishes that a consultation is normal and natural.

Further still, Òmnium, instead of talking only about the right to decide the political future of Catalonia (particular value), has called for the right to decide in itself, which takes it away from its particularity and makes it more imprecise, turning it into a universal value[24]. In this way, it is easier to defend the right to be able to decide than to defend the right to be able to decide the political future of Catalonia.

**Analysis on context level. From the mental model to discourse.**

Contexts[25] are cognitive constructions which interfere in the mental process of producing discourses not only in <u>what</u> is said but also, and above all, <u>how</u> it is said. At the same time these work as an interrelationship between the mental models, which we will talk about in the next section, and the structure of the discourse which the author

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[19] Perelman, Ch. and Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1989) add a distinction between both concepts by clarifying that conviction is achieved through reason, whereas persuasion convinces through feelings. The authors do not mean by this that objectives and presumptions backed by values and premises should not be used in arguing

[20] Perelman, Ch. and Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1989) say that presumptions constitute the basis of arguing, are the starting point of it and are related to what is normal and natural based on a reference group.

[21] The backing to which we refer is constituted by the values and their hierarchies which received the support of the general premises. When these values and their order of preference are interiorised, the presumptions appear as *facts* (in the sense of true facts) and the argument therefore gains meaning.

[22] Perelman, Ch and Olbrechts-Tyteca, L (1989) describe the objective facts as true and which do not submit discussion because they form part of the collective *common ground*.

[23] Referring to the concept of premises, the place of what is preferable, consult *Treaty of argument* by Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca (1989) page 1444-167.

[24] Dupréel, E. (1948) says that the role of universal values consists of justifying the options on which there is no unanimous agreement by inserting them in a kind of empty field, but where a broader agreement reigns.

[25] Van Dijk, T. A. (2006) defines context as a subjective mental representation, in other words, as an interpretation of the social situation and cultural aspects of the social environment.

chooses from the criterion of relevance[26], which "*regulates or monitors the transformation of event model information into discourse meaning*" (Van Dijk, 1999a: 134).

We cannot see context in the discourse because it is implicit, it is presupposed. "*Presuppositions tell us something about the knowledge of the author, and the implicit meanings tell us something about what the author does not want to tell us*" (Van Dijk, 1990:133). Context is therefore occasionally and indirectly revealed "*when there is ambiguity, a risk of misunderstanding, or when an element of context needs to be specifically focused upon*" (Van Teun, 2006:164).

Similarly, lexis, syntax and other formal properties of the style of the discourse are a consequence of the context. "*Although the statement in the analysed discourse is one, this is a choice, a strategy to confront its version with that of the others, or rather to legitimise its story*" (Dijk Van Teun, 1999:134).

As Van Teun (2006) says, we have to interpret the structures that appear on the surface of the text in order to find *constraints*: the lexicalisation of the *"right to decide"*, the choice of certain words such as *"normal claim"* or *"noble goal"*; the naming used to hide responsibilities such as talking about the State and not the central government or a specific president; also the expressions *"the Catalans"* which determine social roles and group belonging. Finally, the rhetorical expression such as the metaphors and similes used to persuade, but at the same time as other forms of style, reveal attitudes and emotions. Talking about the future of Europe or of the process of national construction in terms of human tower building leads us, as G. Lakoff (1980) says, to the very essence of the metaphor which makes us understand and experience one thing in terms of another.

Once the structures have been interpreted, they can be organised into categories[27] for understanding. The first example of a component would be the *setting*[28]. This discourse from Òmnium makes sense when we know that two months before the central government had refused to transfer competencies to the Catalonia government to organise a referendum and that the Catalonia government was immersed in the process of drawing up what would be the Law of Consultations. The fact that the discourses should take place in different European capitals explains the continuous references to

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[26] Van Dijk, T. (1997) defines the criterion of relevance as what is relevant, interesting, or which forms part of mutual knowledge with the public that the author considers are relevant aspects of society, of situations… and which selects and determines the social constraints with which the discourse is produced.

[27] Van Dijk, T. A. (2006) says that context includes several kinds of proposals organised by a limited number of categories which define a model diagram. One example of category would be all kinds of event. In our case, a claim which influences the kind of discourse organised in the form of demands.

[28] Van Dijk, T. A. (2006) says that the setting is formed by time and space, categories which regulate the urgency and the priority of including information from the mental model.

Europe which in another context would not have been necessary. Other categories to be considered would be: the role of representing the Catalan people which Òmnium adjudicates to itself; the reasons behind the discourse; their opinions or beliefs; what the receivers of the discourse, in this case the Europeans, think; and finally and above all, the emotions that *"are especially relevant (…) and contribute to context model construction* (Van Teun, 2006:138).

The context therefore tells us why these statements are used, but not only their locutionary act[29], but above all their illocutionary and perlocutionary act. The fact is that *"the stater not only offers their version, but also the steps to working and thinking in a certain way"* (Dijk Van Teun, 1999:136). We will talk about this in the next section.

**Analysis on the ideological level. Referent or reality?**

In this last section, we will talk about the sub-text where Van Dijk, T. A. (1999) says that the meta communications[30]occur. The content of the discourse is based on the subjective representation[31] of reality, in other words the issuer's mental model.

*"Mental models also play a role (…) as the mental point of departure of all text (…) from which relevant information may be selected"* (Van Dijk, T. A. 1997:189) for the construction of the discourse. Therefore, as Van Dijk, T. A. (2002) says, when we write we use mental models as the cognitive bases of the production of discourse, thus establishing its *"necessary referential basis"* (Van Dijk, T. A. 1997:189). This is why Van Dijk, T. A. (2002) calls them the interconnection between social beliefs and the discourse.

Starting with the base that *"Only a fragment of such knowledge is usually expressed in text (…) The obvious metaphor is that, semantically, they are the tip of the iceberg (…) and the models the large hidden part"* (Teun Van Dijk, 1997:198), as Cantero *et al.* (1997) say, every discourse is a partial model of the model of the world[32], which standardises a biased language that only partially defines reality.

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[29] Austin a Van Dijk, T. (1990) defines the aspects of these statements as a locutionary (what is said), illocutionary – the act (a promise, a threat…) and perlocutionary, or the effects on feelings, the thoughts of the receiver public.

[30] Van Dijk, T. A. (1999) describes meta communications as the underlying level we can find through unsaid references such as presuppositions and which at the same time are counterpoised on the level of the obvious, the text.

[31] Van Dijk, T. A. (1990a) says that the subjectiveness of the mental models is typically represented not only by how people selectively interpret and represent facts that communicate, but also by the options they have on them.

[32] Cantero *et al.* (1997) use *world model* or worldview to name what Van Dijk, T. A. (1997, 1999) calls mental models.

In the analysed discourse and on the basis of the *modelling processes*[33] we might say that Òmnium uses extrapolations in the form of universal quantifiers when it uses the values of the human towers and draws equivalences with the Catalan people and Catalonia, telling the Catalans what they are like and what they should be like. This is reinforced by the guesses that say what they want: *"the Catalans want to vote and decide"*.

Universal quantifiers are also used, in this case, as a form of a reiteration, when it is said that *"the state never"* or that *"culture, (…) for centuries"*, which generalise facts and therefore distort reality. These distortions come at the hand of non-specific substantives such as *"overcoming the impossible"* or *"solving this anomaly"* in which the listener can identify anything. Finally, on the level of abstraction we must consider the large number of value judgments in the form of qualifiers and superlatives, such as *"normal claim"*, *"noble goal"* or *"more massive and peaceful mobilisations"*.

On the level of materialisation, we detect the use of substantives with an abstract referent such as *"deciding freely"*, *"State"* or *"right to decide"*, fruit of "*generalisations of different mixed actions, often more imagined than experienced (…) source of socially accepted deceit*" (Cantero *et al.* 1997:152). Other forms of twisting reality are elimination and distortion, which become very difficult to discern here as they are forms of distortion by omission.

**Conclusions**

In this work we follow a route through the process of analysing discourse in order to explain what we have called a new mental framework of the right to decide. If we go through all of the stages, we see that on the level of narrative structure, the discourse presents us with two main ideas (A) and (B). In order to explain the first (A), Òmnium resorts to a series of secondary ideas from which it creates a story which explains that the Catalans want to democratically and freely decide the political future of Catalonia, and that this right has been denied by the Spanish state.

Later, in the conceptual analysis of the story, we see how from the proposed action we are able to decipher the reasons. Therefore, behind the explanation of the right to decide there is not so much a logical cause (deciding on the political future of Catalonia) as the intention to attach a meaning: not only do we want to decide, we want to decide democratically and freely. This interpretation which Òmnium makes establishes a connection between deciding, or making the consultation, and the fact of exercising a democratic right, which is to express oneself freely.

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[33] Cantero *et* al. (1997) say that through the modelling processes and their linguistic indicators it is possible to see the world model come forth from the discourse. The authors establish four processes: generalisation (abstraction), materialisation, elimination and distortion.

Going further into this last point, and now in the rhetorical structure of the discourse, we see that in order to accept presumptions such as "*the Catalans have the right to decide*" these have to be driven by a support given by values and premises. And it is here where we find the key piece which legitimises the right to decide. Òmnium hierarchically situates one value, democracy, over any other. It even disconnects it from all Catalan context and presents it as a universal value. Through the discourse, Òmnium is therefore saying that the Catalans are not being allowed to decide and that therefore an attempt is being made against their democratic right to express themselves freely.

If at this point of the argument we add the context, the whole discourse takes on yet further meaning. At a time when the scenario of a consultation agreed with the Spanish state has already vanished and where the next step towards independence passed through a consultation not legitimised by the State, what the process of national transition needs is a boost of legitimation. The second main idea of the text (B) therefore gains meaning: Europe represents the post-legitimation of the Catalan consultation and this is why both on the narrative level with the signs and on the conceptual level, stylistic resources are used which refer to implicit meanings (Catalonia also forms part of Europe), emotions and feelings (human tower metaphor) and continuous references to Europe (as the cradle of democratic culture), in order to awaken European empathy on the Catalan situation.

Finally, the ideological level has provided the background to the discourse, in other words the mental model of the issuer. The mental models are used both by Òmnium in producing the discourse, and by the listeners in understanding it[34], as *"Event models represent (…) what people later (correctly or falsely) remember of a discourse"* (Van Dijk, 1999a:125). As Cantero *et al.* (1997) say, the world models are in permanent contact and shape each other.

Being aware that *"the information represented in event models provides the basis of socially shared knowledge"* (Van Dijk, 1999a:125), Òmnium constantly repeats phrases which evoke its own. With techniques such as *storytelling,* with which *"the reality is stuck with artificial stories, exchanges are blocked, the symbolic space is saturated with stories; we are explained past experience, conducts are traced and emotions are directed"* (Salmon, C. 2008:38); or *framing*[35]*,* with which important questions are framed to enable the ideas to come out in the form of your mental models[36]; models can be

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[34] Johnson-Laird, P. N (2013) says that the mental models represent what is true at the expense of what is a lie. To accept the facts that describe the discourse, these have to be true for all cases in the mental model of the listener (Validity preserves truth). In other words, as Lakoff, G. (2007) says: in order to be accepted, truth has to fit into the people's mental frameworks. If the facts do not fit into a certain framework, the framework is maintained and the facts will rebound.

[35] Lakoff G. (2007) says that framing refers to choosing the language that fits in with your worldview.

[36] Lakoff, G. (2007) understands mental framework as what Van Dijk, T. A. (1997, 1999) calls mental models, and which Cantero *et al.* (1997) calls world model or worldview. The author says that language is activated by the frameworks, because the new frameworks require new language. Thinking differently requires speaking differently.

transmitted on which to identify, which say how to think and act, and key concepts are framed to fit into man's mental models, turning your mental framework into the dominant mental framework.

A dominant mental framework allows the negotiations of a certain problem to occur on your terms, implicitly bearing your ideas which in your surroundings imply your solutions. Therefore, to talk about the right to decide, and not about independence, allows a story to be made which situates the democratic value of free expression at the heart of the debate, which achieves a much greater adhesion and acceptance. The mental framework of the right to decide legitimises a consultation as the only solution to the Catalan situation, and in this way to possible independence. "*Reframing is changing the way the public sees the world. It is changing what counts as common sense*" (Lakoff, G., 2007:4).

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