

MULTILINGUALISM: THE DEMOCRATIC OPTION FOR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY EUROPE

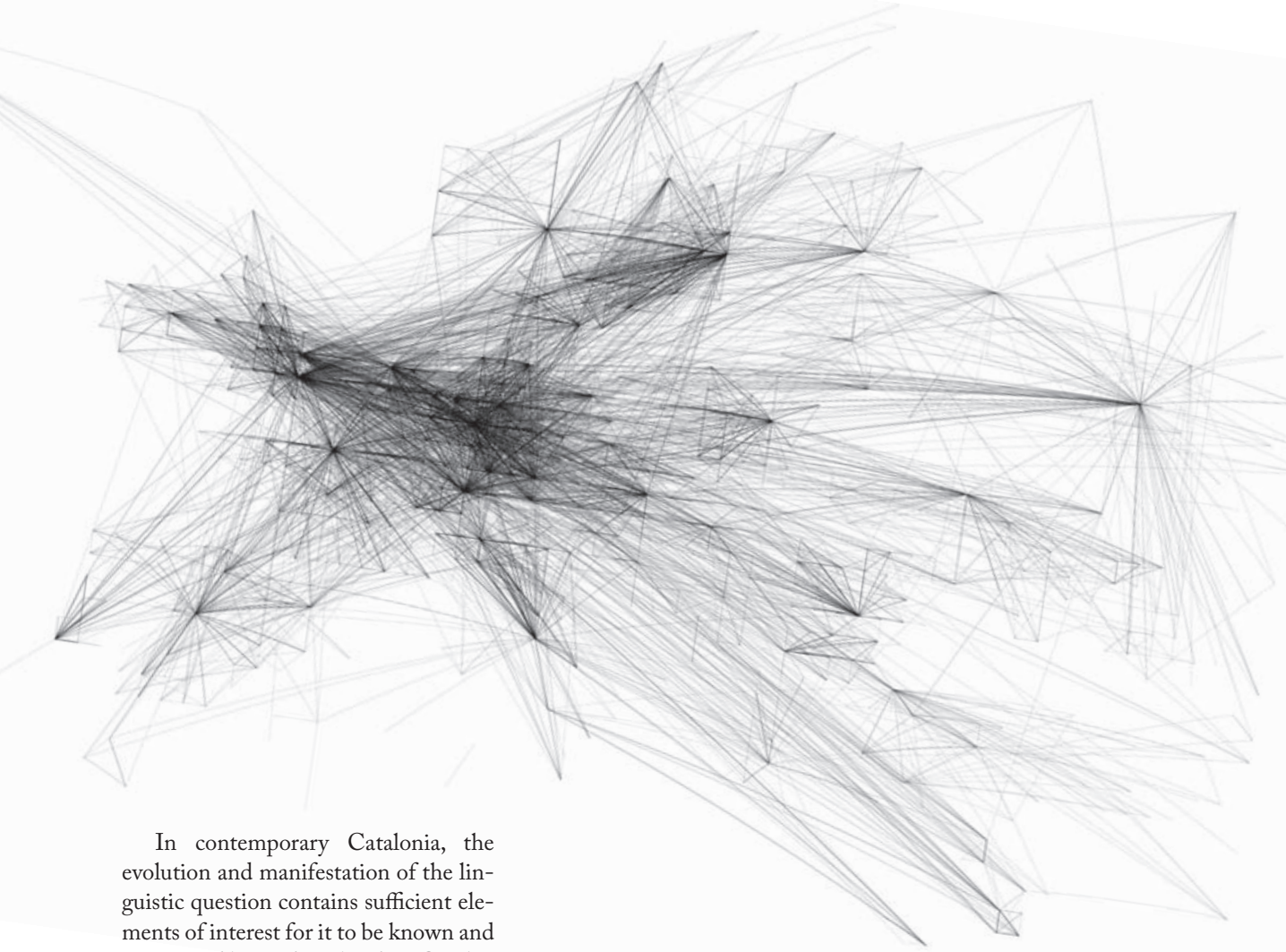
by Francesc de Dalmaes

The French Revolution proposed a model of a nation-state that for two centuries has spread and taken over the political map of the world. This model has brought with it significant advances when it comes to proposing democratic frameworks that themselves have not ceased to evolve. More importantly, it has given the people some inalienable rights. While we are still a long way from respecting and promoting them worldwide, they exist as an ideal reference point for the protection and promotion of the individual.

Nonetheless, it has been precisely the Jacobin, centralist nature of this model of a nation-state that has led to situations we are still experiencing today, at the start of the twenty-first century and which represent a challenge for modern societies. Among those that stand out are the perception, awareness and recognition of collective identities that do not correspond to state boundaries.

The inability of a large part of the world's states to assume a confederal, decentralised model is countered by such brilliant exceptions such as Germany. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go until well-established states accept their own diversity and, where necessary, respect the right to self-determination of citizens of other nationalities.

The linguistic debate should be seen as falling within this collective dimension of third-generation human rights. We need to evolve from monolingual states (which use 'protection' as an excuse to marginalize other languages) to multilingual societies. Societies that are willing and able to identify, promote and legislate to protect their own language, without undervaluing or rejecting the advantages of a future where languages and their treatment become a thermometer and indicator of a society's democratic maturity.



In contemporary Catalonia, the evolution and manifestation of the linguistic question contains sufficient elements of interest for it to be known and scrutinised beyond our borders. Catalan was a forbidden language throughout a large part of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, in the last thirty years it has been able to generate sufficient social connections and advances within a weakened politico-institutional framework in order for it to become a linguistic reference point that should be promoted as a workable model. In effect, half way between the challenges and the achievements, we have been able to construct a much-needed linguistic model that we feel may be of international interest in the construction of new linguistic paradigms founded on the much-needed multilingualism that should underpin modern societies.

**WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CONSTRUCT A
MUCH-NEEDED LINGUISTIC MODEL THAT WE FEEL
MAY BE OF INTERNATIONAL INTEREST**

The articles that follow explain the keys, present the achievements and more than anything outline the challenges facing multilingualism in Catalonia. At the start of the twenty-first century, they are challenges that differ little from those facing all European countries as a whole.