

COMMENTARY

BY MIQUEL PAIROLÍ, Journalist

The power of water

Is it some sort of divine joke that Barcelona boasts a beautiful new landmark in the form of the Agbar tower, when there isn't actually any water? You could be forgiven for sensing an ineffable, biblical purpose behind the raising of the tower – built by Barcelona's water utility – and the fact of the drought, but in reality the relationship is more mundane and has more to do with political and economic interests.

Now that we have little water and seemingly less to come is the perfect time for someone with a sharp pencil to write the 25-year story of Agbar. It would be a worthy undertaking because it would pinpoint exactly what has happened to this country in

the last few decades.

It would be interesting, for example, with drought as the backdrop, to observe the marvellous evolution and expansion of Agbar. Its story contains the key to understanding the way Catalonia has developed in recent times. It would tell of the policies decided in the heart of board meetings, of political and economic convergence. The story of this collusion, guided by a firm hand and grand strategies, has produced splendid economic results. All of this is encapsulated in a symbol that can be seen from all over the city. The tower, dominating the skyline, with its diaphanous curves, is an expression of power. The situation is simple: Agbar has its tower, but Barcelona has no water.

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Recycled water to enter homes

Scientist says the water quality will be no worse than the current supply

BRADEN PHILLIPS

● When the Generalitat first announced that it planned to re-direct water normally limited to industrial and agricultural use into Barcelona homes, the reactions of most people ranged from extreme uncertainty to "That's disgusting!"

The measure is one of four the Generalitat is relying on to manage existing supplies and help get the city through the drought (the siphoning of River Ebre water is a separate source). The other three are rehabilitating disused wells, reducing consumption and desalination.

But if the idea of drinking, cooking or showering with water meant for, say, a chemical factory, is a little off-putting, scientists say stay calm. The additional supply of water from the River Llobregat's water-treatment plant that will start entering Barcelona's taps in June or July will be no worse than the water coming out now, says Cristina Villanueva, researcher at Barcelona's Centro de Investigación en Epidemiología Ambiental and Institut Municipal d'Investigació Mèdica.

Villanueva says the water from the water-treatment plant used for industrial or agricultu-



The Llobregat water-treatment plant

ral purposes will be returned to the River Llobregat before passing through the same treatment given to all drinking water.

"The water from the Llobregat that's used for drinking is already pretty poor to begin with, but I don't think this is going to make it worse," she says. "It will still have to meet the same mini-

Ebre pipeline set for BCN

● The Spanish and Catalan governments agreed on a plan for the emergency transfer of water to Barcelona from the River Ebre, beginning in October. The plan is to run a pipe above ground along the AP-7 highway to carry three cubic hectometres of water a month. Combined with the renovation of disused wells – and the use of water from the Llobregat water-treatment plant – the flow from the Ebre should meet Barcelona's water needs until 2009 when a new desalination plant is due to start up.

mum standards."

Recycling such water for human consumption dates back to the 1970s, Villanueva says, and is common practice in parts of the US, such as California, and in Australia, where water is in short supply. In some cases, the water is returned to aquifers, rather than rivers, which provide a natural filtration process.

ROSER CLAVELL, FOREIGN AFFAIRS SECRETARY

Worldwide Catalans to meet in Tarragona

The fourth convention of Catalan ex-pat communities takes place in Tarragona from April 21 to 25

CATALONIA TODAY

● What role do Catalan communities, or *Casals*, play in the promotion of Catalonia abroad?

They not only promote and spread Catalan culture abroad, but also play an important diplomatic role. Due to the social relationships they develop, they provide an important service in making the reality of the culture, history and society of Catalonia known to the outside world.

Does Catalonia owe a debt of gratitude to this diaspora?

It is undeniable that recognition must be given to those Catalans who, for some reason or another, left Catalonia. The Catalan ex-pat communities

have worked hard and patiently to conserve and spread our language, culture and identity around the world. This task was especially worthy of praise in the dark days of the dictatorship when our institutions were kidnapped and our cultural and national symbols persecuted. It was then that our diaspora represented Catalonia, more than ever, by publishing magazines, holding events and organising political resistance. It is in this sense that the Generalitat has worked on recovering the historical memory of the diaspora. A clear example is the book *Història dels Casals Catalans* that will be presented during the fourth convention being celebrated next week. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning the Estatut, which explicitly recognises Catalans abroad.

Could the *Casals* take on the task of officially representing Catalonia abroad?

We need to clearly differentiate between governmental and civil representation. Each has clearly defined functions and so it would make no sense lumping these two spheres together. The foreign delegations will not only fulfill the role of representing the establishment but in time they will have spread to other areas. As for the Catalan communities, they have to continue with their task, which focuses mainly on the cultural field, without forgetting about the bridges they can build between Catalan civil society and the host country.

What is the future of the *Casals* now that Catalans are not emigrating as much?

It is true that the great migratory movements of the 19th and 20th centuries that led to the establishing of the majority of the Catalan communities abroad will not come about again. But today there is another type of emigration that

also, in some cases, produces newbodies. Students or professionals working for multinationals are becoming more common, and that ensures that the presence of Catalans around the world is growing every day. Moreover, a Catalan community is not a clique; it has to be a place open to the host society and a place where the locals of these places can actively participate.

There are more than 100,000 Catalan voters abroad. Is it feasible for them to have their own constituency, as in Italy?

The creation of a new constituency would require changing electoral law and, as we know, for that to become possible a wide political consensus with parliamentary representation is necessary. For my part, I would look favourably on any initiative that leads to the explicit recognition of Catalans abroad and such a measure would be a clear example.



Local gym owners arrested for sale of banned drugs

● Illegal performance-enhancing drugs sold in gymnasiums in Catalonia have been seized by the Mossos d'Esquadra. Eight people were arrested in the operation, including gym owners in Piera and Sant Feliu de Llobregat, and a man in Madrid, who imported the drugs from Bulgaria for distribution in Spain.

The investigation uncovered 12,000 doses of banned substances, along with 171 sachets of Kamagra – a substance akin to Viagra – and €19,000 in cash.

The head of the gang, a 33-year-old Bulgarian, visited his homeland to pick up the drugs for distribution in Spain.