





## Abstract

It is common to find the extensive use of modernist type space in corporate branding: across visual designs of documents; in images that show clean airy spaces; and in building design. In this paper, we look at this use of space as a communicative tool in the rebranding of Örebro University in Sweden, as it was reorganized around marketized principles. By drawing on the perspective of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, we examine the semiotic use of space in externally and internally targeted documents, with a view to showing how this plays an important role in connoting, both to the public and internally to staff, a very specific set of priorities, processes and employee identities. By using Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the chronotope we show how space is fused with time. In these documents time tends to be highly compressed and erases the more complex and inter-related details of long-term, and deeply inter-connected activities both within the university and in society at large. While this might ultimately be detrimental to the core mission of a research/education institution, it serves the purpose of communicating the effectiveness of the university brand's transition.

**Keywords:** MCDA, chronotope, rebranding.

## 0. Introduction

In this paper we are interested in the use of space in modernist corporate-style visual design as an important semiotic resource for communicating the process of re-branding, and for indicating what kinds of identities and actions are part of that process. By using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), we carry out an analysis of multimodal texts introduced as part of the re-organization and re-branding of Örebro University in Sweden. Across these documents, from outward targeted promotional material to inward targeted Vision documents, there is a notable over-determination of modernist space. This is found in the layout where visual and linguistic elements sit isolated from other elements by spacious white borders. It is also found in photographs which are free from clutter, and that often depict large airy interiors. A number of scholars working in multimodality have carried out more systematic semiotic analyses of the meaning of space and borders in visual design (Van Leeuwen 2005; Machin 2007) and in images intended for such corporate use (Machin 2004). In our analysis, we draw on this work. We show how the semiotic use of space in corporate branding can be sketched by connecting it to its role in legitimizing and naturalizing the discourses that underpin universities' marketization. To this end, we also draw on Bakhtin's (1991) concept of chronotope, which suggests that space is fused with time. In these documents, time tends to be highly compressed and erases the more complex and inter-related details of longer term and deeply inter-connected activities both within the university and in society at large. As we show, this plays an important role in legitimizing marketization.

# 1. The branding and marketization of universities

Since the 1980s a new form of public management, adopting principles from the private sector, has been spreading across Europe (Mautner 2014). This involves various initiatives presented as remedies for problems with quality, efficiency, transparency and mounting costs in the public sector, which comprise one part of the marketization of the public realm. As has been argued, this is a way whereby public institutions such as universities can operate effectively and become optimally aligned with the needs of the public and society, while using terms like “accountability” and “value for money” (Ek et al. 2013; Mautner 2014). This shift has entailed universities around the world re-structuring and rebranding around principles of increased outputs, competitiveness, customer-orientation and market relevance.

At an organizational level, these changes have involved shifts in the priorities and work processes of employees. Whereas formerly work was defined in accordance to professionally agreed upon standards (Hall 2012), under the new system a new kind of manager manages from a distance using principles drawn from the private sector, while not sharing necessarily the local expertise of particular professional groups (Waring 2009). In this new regime, employees follow institution-wide strategies governing all parts of their work and identity and continually report back to management. Such monitoring language is implemented across the working environment in the recruitment process, in team meetings and in regularly supplying information about outputs, targets, strategic plans and their facilitation (Kärreman & Alvesson 2004). In sum, this shift entails that work processes in research and teaching are treated as commodities which can be measured and outputs increased.

In terms of the CDA perspective, which is largely endorsed in this paper, a number of key observations have been made as regards the ways that universities communicate and present themselves in this new regime. Our own observations seek to contribute specifically to this discussion.

Fairclough (1993) first observed this shift in university recruitment ads, arguing that language showed that higher education institutions had turned into businesses trying to sell “goods, services, organizations, ideas or people” (p. 14). Other scholars have since pointed to the way that universities, academic leaders and higher education research, in promotional material and on websites, were increasingly using words imported from the corporate sector: buzzwords like ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘entrepreneurial’ (Mautner 2005) or ‘human capital’, ‘innovative’, ‘competitive’, ‘globally engaged’ and ‘enterprise’ (Morrish & Sauntson 2010; Holborow 2013).

Discourse analysts have also observed important shifts in the way that universities have been presenting themselves visually. In prospectuses and on websites we find uses of color, photographs and space that resemble commercial brochures (Teo 2007), and that address readers in a casual but trendy voice. Photographs are used to create a more personal form of address, oriented to presenting students as customers who will acquire a degree, where university is more of a ‘lifestyle’.

rather than about study and learning (Zhang and O'Halloran 2013). These objectives appeared to be replacing any claims to fostering an educated citizenship (Mautner 2014).

What we explore in this paper is how the use of modernist space in university documents communicates discourses both outwards to the public, but also inwards to employees. This analysis allows us to render more manifest the ways whereby the marketization of universities seeks to shape and limit professional identities and practices, as well as furnish an understanding of the communicative techniques deployed to this end.

## 2. Conceptual framework and methods of analysis

We draw on a set of analytical tools from MCDA (Machin and Mayr 2012; Machin 2013) in addressing our research objectives. This is a form of critical linguistic analysis that encompasses visual representations and design, using a specific set of concepts first introduced by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006). Central to this kind of analysis is the notion of discourse. Here, the broader ideas communicated by a text are referred to as discourses (Fairclough 2003; van Dijk 1993). These discourses can be thought of as models of the world (Foucault 1977) and can include participants, ideas, values, goals, and settings (van Leeuwen & Wodak 1999).

In MCDA, texts are analysed as regards lexical, grammatical and other semiotic choices in order to reveal the underlying discourses and the power relations that sustain them. In other words, we ask here, in what ways do these university documents represent participants and actions? What kinds of social relations do they seek to establish, naturalize and legitimize? Whose interests do the models of the world that are represented in the texts support? The ultimate purpose of MCDA is to reveal and challenge such representations (Machin and Mayr 2012).

In the case of Örebro University's rebranding as part of a shift to market principles there is a need, on behalf of the management, to establish, naturalize and legitimize shifts in identities, definitions of priorities, processes and types of social relations. As we will show in due course, this must be understood as a multimodal process, where, we argue, space plays an important part. In MCDA, a range of tools are used for examining the details of semiotic resources such as images, shapes, colours and space. We present these tools as the argumentation progresses in each section. We also draw on the concept of 'modality' from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and the semiotics of space in composition from Machin (2007).

The analysis in this paper, or how we understand space, is influenced by Bakhtin's (1981) theory of the 'chronotope' – literally meaning 'time-space'. The chronotope is a concept used to study narratives in literary works, which emphasises the inter-connectedness of spatial and temporal relationships as a key to understanding the kinds of world view, identities and values conveyed in novels. Scholars have argued that there is considerable scope for the concept's application to

discourses such as cinematic, law (Valverde 2015) and organizational studies (Lorino 2010). Here, we show how this concept can contribute usefully to a MCDA endeavor.

Bakhtin (1981) identified different treatments of time and space in different genres, from which he produced a typology of chronotopes. One example is the chronotope of the road, which is characterized by random encounters between people of diverse social backgrounds who bring their own biographical accounts to social interactions. Another example is the chronotope of the idyll as found in romantic novels of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Idyllic time, Bakhtin describes, is “a time saturated with its own strictly limited, sealed-off segment of nature’s space” (p. 103). The idyll, he adds, “does not know the trivial details of everyday life” (p. 227). An historical chronotope, in contrast, can be dense on references to elements that point to social, political and cultural landmarks. The point is that a chronotope reflects certain types of world-views, emotions, values and, therefore, identities. In this sense, the concept relates closely to that of discourse, but calls us to rethink the way whereby time and space are interwoven in representations.

Our analysis is informed by the fundamental idea that time must be perceived and given meaning in space, and that space has temporal qualities since a movement in space is also a movement in time. Moreover, Bakhtin (1981: 189) notes that “space, or “a locality” can be viewed as “the trace of an event, a trace of what shaped it”. We look at how particular types of space and time are combined into symbolic worlds in which only certain values, identities, pasts and futures can legitimately take place. We put special emphasis on the semiotics of space, which in our documents is visually over-determined and laden with symbolic values. We relate space to time and to what actors are doing, or can do in specific temporal points.

### 3. Discussion of findings

The rebranding of Örebro University began in 2008 with the arrival of a new management and senior administration. At the time, there was increasing pressure by the government to enhance cost efficiency in universities and to demonstrate how they are serving the market’s and society’s needs. New national league tables were to be established, measuring teaching quality and research output. Örebro University was one of the newest universities in Sweden, upgrading from a high school in 1999. Part of the key brand message was to represent the university as modern, fast growing and fast moving, and to distance itself from an identity of being merely a young university with a high school tradition.

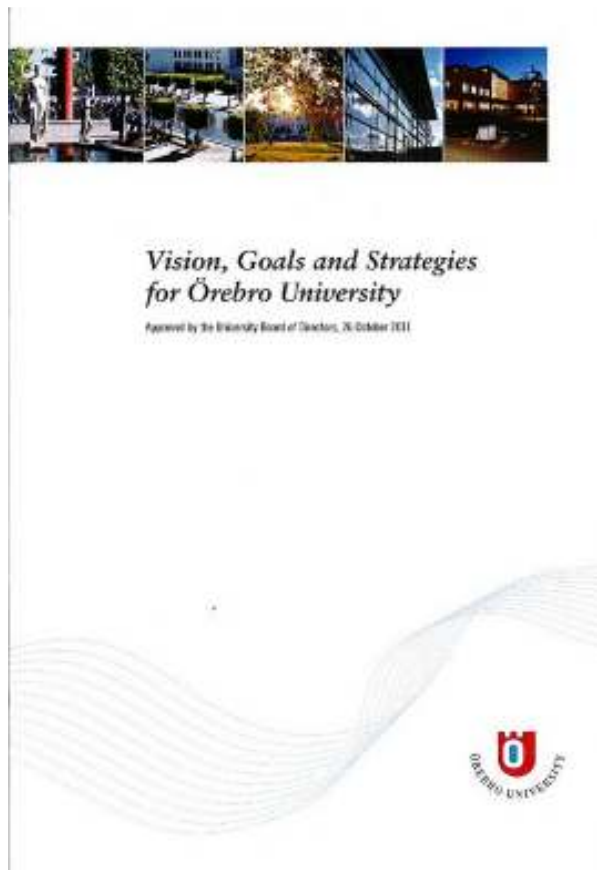
The new brand was established in 2011 and was called “Vision 2016.” A new visual identity was coined communicating what and who the university is and aims to be until 2016. The central document from 2011 is a vision document called “Vision, Goal and Strategies for Örebro University”, produced in both Swedish and English, which constitutes the university’s statute, the reference point for all university work. Also, a Graphics Manual was produced to ensure that the new brand was systematically communicated. Our analysis starts with these two documents, which gives us the opportunity to look at the basic semiotic principles and elements employed. As part of Vision 2016,



new publications including promotional brochures in Swedish and in English were produced in 2012, and a new university magazine was released in 2010 (called *Örebro Universitet Magasin*; see <http://www.oru.se/Nyheter/Örebro-universitet-magasin/> for all editions). We continue our analysis with the magazine's multisemiotic resources. Finally, we analyze a promotional film that was produced in Swedish in 2011 for the university, called "Studera vid Örebro universitet" (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG3Z3DauYkM>)

## 4. Vision 2016: Basic semiotic principles and elements

We begin with the cover of the main document, *Vision, Goals and Strategies for Örebro University* from 2011, produced in A5-size with 8 pages, as shown in Figure 1. This document is predominantly targeted to all university employees.



**Figure 1:** The cover of "Vision, Goals and Strategies" of Örebro University from 2011.

The cover displays many of the semiotic principles that underpin the branding materials. We find bright photos at the top of the design where buildings are depicted, mostly in outdoor scenes. The university, and more exactly its buildings and statues, are related to elements of nature (water, trees and sky), in a harmonious environment.

Furthermore, the photos are boxed, and are co-ordinated or linked in vaguely specified ways. They are surrounded by borders that at the same time separate and bring them together, so that they emerge as parts of a latent order. As we will see, this is highly important for the visual design of our data.

The page composition is dominated by empty space, a feature that recurs throughout the document's pages and which characterizes all of the documents of the rebranding initiative. What is encountered, we suggest, is an over-determination of space. Van Leeuwen (2005) and Machin (2007) argue that the use of spacing and borders in visual compositions are related to elements and features that are represented either as separate units or as related. The degree of flow around a page and of connection between its elements can be indicated by framing or by empty space. This is key to understanding how elements can be presented as ordered, isolated or co-ordinated with others in vaguely specified ways.

At the bottom of the page we find two important design elements, blue wavy lines that run across the cover and over the logotype. We make a few comments on these prior to proceeding with the examination of space in greater detail, as they relate directly to the Graphics Manual, which gives clear instructions as to how design elements should be used.

An important task of the university's rebranding was to update the graphics profile in a modern Graphics Manual. The Manual is introduced on the first page by the Vice-Chancellor, who presents the core of the mission statement: "Örebro University is a prominent university with a broad scientific base, the courage to review and the ability to evolve." Here "prominent", "scientific", "courage" and "evolve" are keywords. Throughout the Manual different elements are related to the values of the mission statement. The Manual explains that the blue wavy motif represents "the flow of knowledge". The wave is, as Figure 1 shows, light with a mild blue colour. It runs through space, and therefore also signifies movement in time, and can be interpreted as expressing graphically what the vice-chancellor in his Introduction calls a "modern, forward-looking university".

It is the task of the logotype, the Manual says, to establish a proud history (see Figure 2). The red shield is explained as heraldic, as a modern version of the medieval university mark and seal, and symbolises, thanks to its tower-like apex, the medieval castle that stands in the middle of the city of Örebro. This visual resource affords connotations of heritage and prestige – the university is "prominent", as the Vision states. The difference between the standard logotype to the left and the one to the right, is that the latter should be used on formal occasions and feasts. This is signalled by another traditional university symbol, the laurel wreath.



### Centrerad med svängd text| Centrerad med svängd text och kran

**Figure 2:** The standard logotype of Örebro University is displayed on the left-hand side, whereas the one used for formal occasions, with the traditional symbol of the laurel wreath, is displayed on the right-hand side (source: Graphics Manual).

The Manual also explains the colours' symbolic meanings. Blue signifies reflection and rationality, which are traditional values of the university, echoing its "scientific base", while red stands for emotions and directness, thus connecting the university to "courage", that was mentioned in the mission statement. The additional colours stated in the manual are sober and include grey, black and gold (which is the colour of the laurel wreath).

The Graphics Manual is very specific about the kinds of images that should be used in university documents and how these are to be used. The Manual states that the portrayed people should preferably be "active", which is formulated as: "think pride, quality and community spirit". In the Vision document, the inside cover is typical of the university's visual approach, which features regularly spacious communal areas and the staircase motif.





**Figure 3:** The inside cover of the Vision, Goals and Strategies document of Örebro University (2011), featuring a visual of a staircase that recurs across branding documents (cf. Figure 12).

The staircase connotes movement, and the possibility to ascend. We see people going up and down the staircase, but through motion-blurring. This connotes “movement”, “mobility”, “lack of stasis” and “lightness”. It also suggests a captured moment. And many of these images suggest a frozen moment, isolated from ongoing activities. This staircase is also important as it depicts a roomy and unconfined area in a modernist building. The material used for the railings is transparent, also suggesting openness. The colors are muted, and the white walls of the building stretch over to the white borders of the paper.

The staircase construes space in a symbolic way which can be related to Bakhtin’s (1986) chronotope of the road, associated with random encounters and facilitating meetings between people from different backgrounds. But unlike the road chronotope, where travelers stop in encounters, people in staircases are on the move, anonymous, and largely goal-oriented, albeit in undefined ways. Time is thus construed as a near future, as if a certain and deliberate activity must be attended to. In other words: spatial proximity, that is connoted by persons’ moving toward different destinations in the building, encodes temporal proximity.

Modality is also key to understanding the modus operandi of these images in design. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) argue that representations appear in different modalities or ‘truth claims’. Naturalistic modality is the truth of what we see. An example would be a photograph of a building



where it appears as we would have seen it had we been there. As regards modality, the images in the university documents tend to be not entirely naturalistic representations, because of the use of colour saturation and low focus in the backgrounds that appear to be more or less out-of-focus. A motif in which the naturalistic modality is comparatively high is when the university is linked to environment and nature, as in the photos in Figure 1.

Technical modality is technical truth based on logic. So, for example, an architectural drawing shows the technical construction of a building, not the building as it meets the eye. This is an abstracted truth which shows the core details.

Sensory modality is the truth of the senses. So, for example, an impressionist painting claims to represent the truth of the senses. Children's toys could be described as having high sensory modality due to colours being simplified and saturated to highlight their sensory experience.

In the university's branding materials we find both a reduced naturalistic modality and increased sensory and technical modalities. Images have reduced backgrounds or no background at all. Details are reduced, and the clutter of everyday life has been removed. Here we shift to a sense of technical truth, where everyday life has been artificially stripped to a minimum. The white walls of the building merge smoothly with the page border, thus conveying a sense of tidiness and logical ordering. We also encounter the sensory modality in high levels of lighting, suggesting slight overexposure, connoting optimism, and creating a clean look. We find sensuous, saturated colors which can be used to coordinate images with other design elements. Blurring is often used – the sensory effect of movement - as does creative cropping, thus affording 'interesting' and more dynamic views. In this manner, images do not document everyday life in the university, but symbolize ideas and values about university life.

## 5. Vision 2016: The mission statement

The Vision document begins with the mission statement, which is often repeated at the beginning of other documents. As Figure 4 shows, it is rendered in bullet-points form, and hence writing has been broken down into separate units that are listed as parts of an alleged logical order. This modality is clearly technical.

## VISION 2016

*Örebro University is a prominent university with a broad scientific base, the courage to review and the ability to evolve.*

### WE ARE CHARACTERISED BY

- ¶ professional degree programmes that are among the best in the country
- ¶ internationally successful research
- ¶ active students and members of staff with high expectations
- ¶ creative knowledge development between teachers and students
- ¶ dynamic interaction with businesses, the public sector and the cultural scene

**Figure 4:** The mission statement, called Vision 2016, from the document “Vision, Goals and Strategies for Örebro University” (2011).

The technical modality co-exists with a more sensory modality, as in the combination of the colors blue for rationality and red for emotions, also expressed in buzzwords. We have already pointed to “courage” and “evolve” in the core statement on the top of the page; in the bullet points we find adjectives like “active”, “creative”, “dynamic”, “successful”.

The assertion that buzzwords are part of a technical order may be substantiated from the use of a repeated grammatical pattern. Each bullet point is a nominal group with an initial modifier, most often a buzzword, to the head noun (in italics): “vocationally-oriented *programs*”, “internationally successful *research*”, “active *students and staff*”, “creative *knowledge*”, “dynamic *interaction*”. We also find many postponed modifiers as part of quite long nominal groups, such as (head nouns in italics):

vocationally oriented

*programs*

belonging to the country’s best

dynamic

*relationship*

with society, business and cultural life

In this manner, everything becomes part of the same logic, even though the processes and the concepts they contain are vastly different.

It is also important for our analysis to think about the kinds of participants and how they act in time and space in these documents. In the above bullet points these actions are

represented in abstract form through the use of nominalizations, such as “training”, “research”, “expectations”, “knowledge development”, “collaboration”. In nominalizations, process verbs are represented as nouns. So a process situated in time and space, like “we know”, “we knew” or “we should have known”, is replaced by the noun “knowing”, by a thing. Fairclough (2003) argues that in language nominalizations are one way of concealing agency, temporality, causality and social relationships. Likewise, we encounter formulations such as “creative knowledge development between teachers and students” which gives little information in terms of real targets, strategy, or about who should precisely do what. Nevertheless, it allows terms like “creative” and “knowledge development” to be freely used as part of connoting “moving forward”, “improving”, “becoming more successful”.

As regards the involved chronotope, we can think of the way that connotations of “moving forward” and buzzwords that suggest “energy” and “working together” function in a way that is dislocated from the actual interrelations between actions and from clear descriptions of who does what. We could, in contrast, imagine a chronotope where a clear connection to historical, social and political issues would exist, where the actual reasons for the recommended changes would be clear, as in a densely represented historical chronotope.

The bullet-list with the identical nominal groups suggests order, a world that consists of separate, discrete components of equal importance. The list claims to present the core details of a process. What goes on in the university is reduced to a bare outline for technical purposes. But it conceals how the different processes are connected. For example, how does “internationally successful research” work alongside the need to have more “vocationally oriented programs”?

We encounter the use of bullet-lists throughout the university documents. Often they are arbitrarily numbered, also connoting some kind of ranking or quantification. They are free from the clutter and complexities that characterize actual processes, which is also true of the images. This is part of the way time is simply represented, a time that can move rapidly forward.

Important in the way this list is represented is the over-determination of space. In Figure 4 all elements are set in generous space. Metaphorically we can say that the mission statement enjoys the luxury of space and room to breathe. In this sense, space itself can suggest importance. By analogy, if we look at the writing on commemorative inscriptions, there is often emphasis on the space between the lines.

Various authors working in multimodality have offered models for interpreting the function of space in visual compositions (van Leeuwen 2005; Machin 2007) that were mentioned in passing earlier. We expand on these models here to enhance our understanding of this over-determination of space and how it relates to time.

There is a high degree of metaphorical associations from the thickness and strength of boundaries in the physical world to borders and dividing spaces in visual compositions. So, in a visual composition two elements could be separated by a thick black border, which might suggest that they are of a very different category, that they are unrelated. A thinner border, on the contrary, or one delineated by a dotted line, might connote a lesser degree of segregation (Machin and Polzer 2015). Elements can also be segregated by empty space without borders. In this case, the elements on either

side display similarities, but also differences since they are kept apart. There are no boundaries to cross, only space, and hence no segregation.

Applying these observations to the compositions in Figures 1 and 4, we may discern that there is extensive separation through spacing. The images at the top of Figure 1 are the exception as they sit together, separated by framing. In Figure 4 the use of space is extensive and affords to separate the bullet points and the graphical elements. This is a clean, uncomplicated space, free from clutter. Even in Figure 3 space is both open and ordered, not in the least since the white walls of the building continue into the page borders.

The chronotope of moving ahead is represented spatially in the staircase movement motif in Figure 3. In this manner, the university is seen to be forward-looking, in an ordered and tidy space, where no clutter hinders this movement. Kress (2010) and Machin and Mayr (2012) have critically addressed this construction of 'looking forward'. It is never made explicit why looking forward is good. It is part of a discourse where 'innovation', 'change', 'the new' and the 'fast' are valued in themselves, whereas 'established knowledge', 'steadily and thoroughly developing ideas', 'traditions of scholarly practice' are not valued.

In this chronotope, processes are represented as abstracted from persons and from their complex interrelationships, as well as from wider socio-political matters. This is a form of space and time that has no history. It is a kind of time with an emphasis on constant movement. The only connection to the past or to history is connoted by the symbolic and abstracted meaning of the castle in the logotype in Figure 2.

## 6. Photographs in the university magazine

We now shift our focus to examine the images that are used in the university magazine, distributed both outwards to the local community and inwards to academic, administrative and technical staff of the university. The magazine contains short success stories about the staff's research activities, teaching innovations or involvement in the local community. The use of space in the magazine's layout is over-determined. For example, in Figure 5 we see how different stakeholders (management, academic, administration and students) participate in the university's Vision. The photograph and the accompanying text for each stakeholder are overlaid on clean, uncluttered, empty space. Each photograph and accompanying text are of the same size, suggesting equality, while, just like the bullet points in the vision statement, they are presented as individual, yet easily comparable components. This layout metonymically represents the parts of the university, again through a technical modality that suppresses complex variations in interests, roles and interconnected processes.



**Figure 5:** Photographs and space with technical modality in the university magazine.

In Figure 6 we see the cover of the magazine. As in every edition, the “flow of knowledge” wave is displayed at the top of the cover. We find the characteristic low naturalistic modality, with sensory high key lighting and saturated colours which resonate with the logo. The blurred background allows the iconic, in-focus, microscope to function as a visual metonymy for “research”. The blue color is, as above mentioned, coded in the Graphics Manual as a signifier of reflection and rationality, which coheres with the portrayal of the woman in the laboratory who is reading. Reading is an uncommon activity in our data, but we can note that the woman performs it while standing, maybe taking dictation or writing laboratory experiment notes, before moving to the next task. Overall, these modally “less real” images render brand values less directly anchored in the everyday reality of university life, while at the same time representing them as technically simplified. The sensory modality also construes the laboratory as if it were energetic and open, not in the least since the “flow of knowledge” wave blends with the sunlight that enters the laboratory from the window, thus blurring the distinction between inside and outside.

This representation of research is important. On the one hand it simplifies. But on the other, it allows space to be represented in a way that avoids closure, confinement and slow pace (usually required in research). Instead, it connotes openness and portrays dynamism and movement through an individual who makes a short stop and checks a list or takes notes before moving on. Once again, the time perspective seems to be focused on the near future, of moving on to the next task. We, thus, obtain a symbolic representation of what research at Örebro University amounts to.



**Figure 6:** Sensory modality on the cover of the university magazine.

How participants are represented in the magazine and what they are depicted to be doing, or not, is also important for the brand and directly related to our observations on space and time. One striking feature is that we find mainly images of individuals, often in close-up, or extreme close-up, as seen in Figures 7 to 10. These images include academic staff, management, students and ex-alumni. In terms of van Leeuwen's (1999) observations on the representation of social actors, here we find high degrees of individualization and personalization. University staff, including lecturers and management (Figure 7), are represented not as distant and distracted intellectuals, but as intimate and warm. This is a work environment of 'openness', realizing a visual identity of both customer orientation and transparency. Academics are not remote and self-absorbed, but communicative. We notice that the lecturer in Figure 12 has stopped moving on the staircase and now is sitting down in order to communicate with the viewer. In other words, openness and interaction are so important as being on the move and being determined to achieve.



**Figure 7**



**Figure 8**



**Figure 9**



**Figure 10**

It is also important that the individuals in Figures 8-10 look directly at the viewer, while engaging him. The exception is Figure 7, portraying a manager, who is looking beyond the viewer, into distant space,



over which she seems to have more control than, for example, the lecturer sitting down at the staircase. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) differentiated between what they called "image acts" that photographs can perform. Where a person does not look at the viewer we can say this is an "offer image". It offers information for us to consider. Where a person does look at the viewer we can say that this is a "demand image".

## 7. A promotional film selling education

The branding of Örebro University included short promotional films that were created against the background of three symbols: packs, balloons and bulbs. Packs signify availability and choice, but also, by virtue of their arrangement, tidiness and orderliness in space; balloons, by virtue of moving towards the sky, eternal space; and bulbs enlighten spaces, either through optimism or illumination where once there was ignorance.

We now look at the most widely disseminated of the commercial films, produced in 2011, in which educational programmes are displayed as separate rectangular boxes, as seen in Figure 11. Choosing an educational program is portrayed in a manner akin to picking up a packaged product. The film starts with a blue rectangular pack labelled "Örebro University". The camera, then, zooms in, while moving from bottom to the top. The movement is dynamic, connoting that the university moves upwards, to success. The supers read (in translation):

17 000 students  
600 teachers and researchers  
140 professors  
800 elective courses  
60 educational programs  
30 advanced level courses

On the one hand, this appears to be an informative commercial. On the other hand, the use of numbers points to the importance of quantification, measuring and logic, connoting that this is a neat, ordered institution where success is carefully calculated. After 5 seconds the scenery changes to the one we see in Figure 11. The camera moves into a sort of infinite space, a locality that has no tangible walls or limits. It zooms in and moves through the packs, thus advancing in space and time. In this image it is clear that space and time have no end, as the packs are endless. As with the abstracted processes set in space in the mission statement, here the courses exist as independent, each holding its own space (they might as well have been represented as books on a shelf), that is like the vast borders that surround the mission statement. Collectively, they are arranged in a vast, isolated space, which separates them from the outside world, illuminated by bright, optimistic light and free from



clutter. It is worth noting that the packs in the foreground carry the names of courses such as nursing, teaching-training and psychology which appear more directly linked to the job market.



**Figure 11:** Educational programs are represented as boxes in an infinite bright space.

After 20 seconds, and until the end of the film, the scenery changes to moving photos. Photos are shown in all kinds of constellations and arrangements. Sometimes the photos move forward towards the viewer, sometimes they move in a circle, and sometimes they are ordered with depth so that the camera zooms in and moves forward in infinite space. In Figure 12 we see an example of zooming in two photos. The photograph on the right shows people in blurred motion, moving on open-plan staircases – a larger version of that analysed earlier in Figure 3. The photograph to the left shows three students engaging in both studies and interaction, where the woman facing the camera appears to be enjoying herself. Foregrounded in the images, again, are the large common spaces, and moments of convivial interaction among a small group's members. Importantly, these images, which move in exciting and dynamic ways, are placed in an open space without boundaries. This is a shiny space with reflective, polished, glossy surfaces, suffused with a soft, yet bright saturated light.



**Figure 12:** An example of moving photos in the promotional film.

As regards modality, although some of the photographs in the sequence appear to be of naturalistic modality (even if highly stylised), there is a high sensory quality to the way that colour and lighting are used to contextualise them, and the way their movement is used to signify ideas and values. The lack of clutter points to de-contextualisation and abstract modality. And the decontextualized setting allows the unrelated images, as in the boxed design of the vision statement, to be juxtaposed in unspecified ways. In the film, too, this is a reality segregated from wider social and historical factors, and free from complexities, where people are on the move, dynamic and largely happy. Again, we find a sense of the chronotope of the idyll. Idyllic time is “a time saturated with its own strictly limited, sealed-off segment of nature’s space” (Bakhtin 1981: 103). As in the idylls of the Romantic novels and poems, this is a space rich in the sensory. While we see the images in Figures 11 and 12, we hear a male speaker:

83% of the students who decide to study at Örebro University find a job within a year after the end of their studies. Better results than you can find across Swedish universities. Some say it is due to our experienced teaching staff. Some say that it is due to the outstanding research we have developed. We believe it is because the people who apply to the University of Örebro share our high ambitions.

This is a typical university promotional statement. It contains buzzwords such as “better results”, “excellent research”, “high ambition”. It departs from a quantification, “83%”, and has a classic three-part structure, connecting “Some say”, “Some say” and “We believe” – all of the voices giving praise to the university. As has been observed in the CDA literature, promotional statements foreground success factors like financial and job payoffs and university rankings, but are uninformative as regards issues of study, of the way knowledge can challenge and aid in critical thinking or in fostering a more humane citizenship (Machin and Mayr 2012). Of importance for us here is that we encounter the same lack of causality and interconnectedness as in other documents. How does research relate to students finding jobs? In fact, at the time of writing this article, over 60% of staff were on part-time contracts and were teaching 70% of their time. Staff were required to attract external funding to generate research. This was an unacknowledged problem at the university. Across the promotional documents, and in those generated for internal use such as strategy and appraisal documents, we find the same level of abstraction as to how parts interconnect, and with regard to how agents are linked to processes. However, as some management scholars observe, the management priorities and the requirement for quantifying and auditing eventually obscure and even replace the actual ongoing practices of organisations (Power 1997). Priorities shift toward promotional activities and ensuring that the vision, strategies and targets, however abstract, are being met (Alvesson 2014).

## 8. Conclusion

In this paper, our aim was to understand the over-determination of space in university rebranding documents. The use of analytical tools from MCDA allowed us to dig into verbo-visual language and

grammar and to analyse aspects of visual design such as spacing and modality. All along we have reflected on how space, in the Bakhtinian sense, also communicates time, and the kinds of social relations, identities and actions are performed as chronotopic representations, that is fused time-space.

The way space is represented in the examined multimodal documents resembles considerably Bakhtin's "road chronotope", in the sense that it allows for encounters and interactions between different people. But here the meeting place is most often modernist and lavish common areas, where people often go up and down staircases. However, the construction of time is not like the road chronotope where people bring their past and join each other on the road. In the university documents, in contrast, people without a past are interacting, but not for long since they are on their way to new tasks. Bakhtin (1981: 224) also speaks of an idyllic chronotope which can include "family" or "craft work", where there is a limited, decontextualized and romanticised historical iconography. This also appears to be the case in these documents where researchers, teachers and students are brought together in tidy and ordered spaces, smiling and enjoying each-others' company in personal interaction – where their actual social relations are suppressed. But there are no large groups or collectives, and once again, time is limited and everyone must be ready for change.

From a critical perspective, which lies at the heart of MCDA, what our analysis reveals is that space is constructed in a marketization discourse, based on market success. It reproduces a short-term horizon in which market success is measured and profits must increase. Here, we encounter the over-determination of space, and the luxury of space. The open spaces, the staircases etc., connote a world in which individuals are constantly on the move, ready for change and working to optimize success. There is a vast openness of space that suggests possibilities for growth and market success. It is a space that the management claims to technically organise, control and monitor. As we have seen, this means that the actual nature of the interconnected world is distorted and suppressed. However, it serves the purpose of communicating the effectiveness of the brand's transition wonderfully and plays an important role in making this discursive shift difficult to challenge. As Power (1996) indicates, it is clear that an employee complaining about these shifts, does so purely out of selfish interest and a misjudged fondness for an outdated and inefficient way of operating.

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