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Branding Basques, Bilbao, and Boise: Marketing as Metaphor for History

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Abstract

Purpose – Naturally occurring brands combine history, anthropology, sociology and marketing to explain the phenomenon of communities defined by a sense of place. Focusing on both the Basque Country and Basques in Boise, Idaho, we discuss the naturally occurring brand of the Basque people throughout history into the modern day. We explain who the Basques are and how they have branded themselves through language, place, industry, food, drink and culture with mention of similarities to other communities and the lessons that other ethnic/cultural communities can learn. The purpose of the paper is to address the “marketing and imagined communities; nations and cities as brands” suggestion in this conference’s call for papers. In particular, this paper reveals instances where Basques, consciously or not, branded themselves through products and artifacts that simultaneously serve as windows into this often overlooked culture, hence the “metaphor for history.”

Approach – Both a marketer and a historian join efforts to discuss branding and a people’s history. A variety of branding issues are discussed in relationship to the Basque people via a history timeline and marketing branding literature. Photographs are included to highlight key points.

Research Limitations – This paper is descriptive, not empirical. It introduces many different branding topics without, by necessity, much elaboration of each topic. Other marketers and historians, with equally good knowledge of the Basque community, might choose other branding issues to highlight and still other researchers might verify by a quantitative study of perceptions of agreement from Basque communities.

Key Words – naturally occurring brands, Basques and their history, cultural communities

Paper Type – Conceptual paper

Introduction

“Basque? Is that the group of people that speaks a mixture of Spanish and French?” “Basque? They were shepherds in the American West just like they were in the Old Country weren’t they?” “Basques? Are you talking about the fish (Bass)?” If only we had a dollar for every time we heard variations of these inaccurate questions about the identity of the Basques! The purpose of the paper is how to address the “marketing and imagined communities; nations and cities as brands” suggestion in this conference’s call for papers, using the Basque community as example.

We briefly explore how the Basque region of Spain and France (the historical Basque Country is located in both modern-day nations) has branded itself throughout history. The branding of Basques both in the Basque Country and in a segment of the Diaspora (Boise, Idaho) serves as a metaphor to understand major movements in Basque history.

The authors (one a marketer and one a historian) live in a city in the United States which because of its Basque population has close ties to the Basque Country and many local Basque politicians and businesspeople have reached high levels at regional businesses and in local and state politics. But even within our local community, it is sometimes necessary to explain who the Basques are. The paper will present a brief historical analysis of the Basque Country, its overseas population, and will discuss how this history is reflected in the branding and marketing efforts created intentionally or unintentionally by the Basques themselves and others.

Hidden in Plain Sight

In ‘The Wealth of Non-Nations’ chapter of *The Basque History of the World* (1999, p.103), Kurlansky quotes the first secretary of the Basque Academy of Language in 1910 “To be a true Basque, three things are required: to have a name which bespeaks Basque origin, to speak the language . . . and to have an uncle in America.” All of these (the name, the language, and the relative in America, and to some degree the “non-nation” status) are addressed in this paper.

Sadly, little is commonly known about the Basques. History books regularly identify individuals such as Juan Sebastian de Elcano who completed the circumnavigation voyage for Magellan or Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order as either Spanish or French, however both harkened from this region and spoke *Euskera* (the Basque language) as their native tongue. Above all it is *Euskera*, which linguists have not linked with any other Indo-European language, which defines Basques. They refer to themselves as *Euskaldunak* (those who have the Basque language).

One of the most common words found in the language is *harri* (rock) which coincides with evidence that points to continuous human occupation in this area that straddles the Pyrenees Mountains from at least the Cro-Magnon era. Even the most conservative estimate places the Basques in this region of northern Spain and southwestern France from 5,000 to 3,000 B.C.E. - making them the oldest permanent residents of western Europe. Traditionally, the area has been comprised of four historical territories on the southern (Spanish) side and three on the northern (French) side. Basque anthropologists found human skulls in area caves that they claim to have Basque features, and blood type studies revealed an unusually high proportion of Rh-negative blood type found in Basques which points towards a lengthy, continuous occupation in the region. (Douglass and Bilbao, 1975, pp. 10-11)

While Basques have an ancient record in this area, they also have a long history of leaving it. Since the 7th century, Basque whalers hunted in the Bay of Biscay and fished their way across the Atlantic eventually reaching Newfoundland as linguistic and archeological evidence points to a Basque presence there in the second half of the 16th century. From a significant portion of Columbus’ crew to colonizing and missionary efforts in what would become Mexico, Uruguay, Colombia, and Venezuela, Basques played a noteworthy role throughout the history of settlement in the New World. One Basque explorer founded the northern Mexican province of Nueva Vizcaya, naming its capital after his Bizkaian birthplace, Durango. Another Basque descendant became even more famous: Simon Bolivar, the liberator of South America. (Douglass and Bilbao, pp. 72-73)

In the 1800s, Basques became involved in the Latin American sheep industry, especially in its earliest developments in the pampas of Argentina. Indeed, it was a secondary migration for Basques from this region that brought the earliest Basques to California after the discovery of gold. While few had success mining, their efforts in the booming livestock industry provided an opportunity. From this region, they fanned throughout the American West trailing sheep in the open range and providing further opportunity for family and friends from the Basque Country. Chain migration created a pattern of settlement with French and Navarese Basques establishing themselves in California while Spanish Basques, predominantly from the province of Bizkaia, concentrated in Nevada and Idaho. (Bieter and Bieter 2000, p. 31)

While American Basques may be “hidden in plain sight,” occasionally they have been portrayed in American culture. Ernest Hemingway (who spent the last few years of his life in the state of Idaho) wrote extensively about Basques and often visited the Basque region in both Spain and France. In 1955 the BBC asked Orson Welles to complete a “quaint series of documentaries which were labeled ‘Around the World with Orson Welles’” (see Orson Welles on the Basque Country, 1955). So, to some degree the wider world has been exposed to the “Basque Brand” for some time.

However, often the connections to Spain and France overshadowed this brand, particularly regarding the terrorist organization ETA an acronym for “Euskadi ‘ta Askatasuna,” [The Basque Country and Freedom]. Originally founded to preserve Basque culture, a splinter group radicalized and formed a retaliatory response to Fascist dictator Francisco Franco’s oppression; “a clandestine revolutionary organization with three fronts: cultural, political and military.” The first ETA-related death was actually the killing of one of its own members by Spanish Civil Guards in 1968, initiating a cycle of violence that took hundreds of lives over the next decades. Spain’s establishment of a democracy coupled with increasing autonomy in the Basque Country gradually weakened support for a violent response to negotiate freedom. With a peace settlement in Ireland and the post 9/11 War on Terrorism, pressure grew for a cease fire agreement in the Basque Country which ETA declared and maintained since January 11th, 2011. Nevertheless sadly, this brand remains one of the identifying trademarks of this region (Douglass and Bilbao, 1975, p. 150).

The Basque Country is not the only nation to deal with this branding problem. For example, the island of Ireland is divided into two modern day entities, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK. For some branding efforts (island tourism), the two have joined together, but with continued (even if lessened) political animosity, it is valuable that the two sides can work together to brand their common nation while also promoting their separate geographic divisions.

Nation and Supra-nation branding

Of course, destinations can be branded. Hankinson (2012) found that brand culture, departmental coordination, brand communication, stakeholder partnership, and brand reality have a strong, positive impact on brand performance. The findings also suggest that leadership by senior management is an important determinant of destination brand orientation; therefore for nation branding, top governmental support is important.

There are many reasons why nations may brand themselves, such as economic development but also because negative international stereotypes, perhaps because of local terrorism. In Ireland's case, the North and the Republic have crossed borders for economic and tourism endeavors and have publicized the peace dividends from the Good Friday Agreement, the Queen's recent visits to both Irelands, etc. While a cease-fire with ETA seems to be holding in the Basque Country, no apparent individual and cooperative proactive nation branding efforts seem to be coming out of the Basque Country. Many authors have researched if and how nations can be branded often finding that nation-branding is far from a cure all. "If economic development in a country is like completing a gigantic jigsaw, nation branding is probably the last piece" (Fan, 2006).

Therkelsen and Gram (2010) considered the brand role of the Nordic countries as part of the brand of Europe and found that "physical place-making in terms of cross-national product development, thereby getting a share of the product resources of other places and at the same time developing new offers, would seem to make supra-national place branding efforts attractive to individual national actors" (p. 127). Their discussion of Scandinavia could well apply to the Basque Country, which spans the border of two modern day nations, as well as being an important component of Europe. Discussing cultural identity is complex. The historian, Linda Colley (1992, p. 6) said it well, "Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time."

Basques as a Naturally Occurring Brand [1]

Wright-Isak (2012) discussed communities forming NOBs (naturally occurring brands), combining anthropology, sociology and marketing to explain the phenomenon. However, Wright-Isak's research based the sense of "community" on the categorizations of suburbia, small town, and city, not on ethnicity. Some characteristics of NOBs are:

- They are not commercially created and their imagery is not deliberately managed by a corporate actor. No entity owns or has trade-marked, copyrighted, or otherwise exclusively appropriated the terms . . . Instead their meanings have arisen and persist as a result of consistent patterns of social interactions and shared meanings. Thus, they are naturally occurring labels . . .
- They are widely recognized to the point of being understood as more than a one-dimensional taxonomy applied to a geographic type of place. As symbols each has visual characteristics and stands for a cluster of specific human norms and enacted values.
- These sets of meanings . . . shape the behavior of the individuals who dwell in or visit them. They draw like-minded residents together in agreement on meaning and they are judged by outsiders on these same meanings. Thus, they are brands.
- They affect consumer choices . . . They operate on consumer judgments just as intentionally created and marketed brands do in affecting consumer preferences and actions. This third characteristic may be the strongest indicator that they are brands (p. 134).

We argue here that ethnicity (and hence the Basque community) is therefore, a "naturally occurring brand." And while the brand is not defined by city versus small town, the geographic sense of place serves a very strong role in this branding. To demonstrate this, we will use two "Basque Blocks/Zones" – one in the Basque Country and one in Boise.

Basque Blocks/Zones: Modern Locations from Ancient Auzoak (Neighborhoods)

In the vista that surrounds the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao one sees three of the major eras in Basque history: the farmhouses that dot the hillside, the cranes along the Nervion River that harken back to the heyday of industrial shipping and the modern revitalized urban core that accommodates tourists and visitors to the Museum. For centuries, the “*baserriak*,” Basque chalet-like farmhouses, formed the heart of the rural Basque identity and in many cases provided the names for individual Basque families (See Figure 1).



Figure 1: *Baserriak* (Basque Farmhouses)

The adage remains, ‘you don’t name your farm, it names you’. In fact, the surnames that Basques carried to the New World and which helped expand the Basque brand, often came from the location of a family farm, such as one finds for the following Basque names:

- Goikoetxea—“upper house”
- Etxebarria—“new house”
- Uberuaga—“by the warm spring”
- Elizondo—“by the church”

First built in the late Middle Ages and still common today, these *baserriak* formed to the geographical surroundings but generally consisted of two or three stories, with steep roofs and exposed beams. Oftentimes, these farmhouses contained living quarters as well as a stable and other working areas built as one unit. Because there is so little arable land, the property around each *baserri* is small, usually six to 10 hectares, and frequently right up the side of the hill. (Douglass, 1976, “*Serving Girls*”, p. 48)

Until the 20th century, these *baserriak* offered subsistence living for farmers struggling to grow a variety of crops in the wet maritime climate. Through the centuries, Basques in rural areas developed a practical, yet ingenious, system of self-sufficiency. They drank cider made from apples grown on their own orchards, ate eggs and cheese produced by their own animals, sweetened their food with honey from their own beehives and wore clothes made of wool sheered from their own sheep. Cash, always in short supply, usually earned from the sale of animals or the surplus from their small gardens, was spent frugally, and used exclusively for dowries or for rent on the *baserri* property. Traditionally, the “*baserritarrak*,” peasant farmers, were easy to identify, with their “*abarketak*,” heavy-soled leather shoes that laced up almost to the knees, the women in long, dark dresses and scarves tied down to their heads with two tight knots peeking out at the top. This identity formed an iconic image in Basque culture: one of the founders of Basque nationalism, Sabino Arana, identified in the Basque farmer the essence of Basqueness. (Douglass, “*Serving Girls*”, p. 48) Today, many of the traditional and artisanal

products of these *baserriak* are marketed and sold throughout the world. For example, Idiazabal sheep cheese earned the world's highest awards designation at a competition in 2007 ("A Total of 46 Medals . . .", n.d.) and this cheese actively engages in the international protection of its name. ("Designation of Origin Idiazabal was created in 1987 to defend the Latxa and Carranza breed shepherd and the authentic IDIAZABAL cheese maker, while guaranteeing to consumers the origin, quality and artisanal care used in the making of the CHEESE and in its maturing and refining" ["Designation of Idiazabal" n.d.]). Basque farmhouses also serve as rural guesthouses that offer accommodations to tourists ("Rural guesthouse and Farmhouse accommodation in Euskadi", n.d.). Called *Nekazalturismoa*, this popular form of agritourism builds upon this historic past, and offers a way for the rural sector to remain viable in an ever globalizing economy (see for example www.nekatur.net).

Sloping down from the farmhouses along the hillside, one sees reminders of the industrial port of Bilbao. Although since moved out of its inner city core, these cranes ("Carola Crane," n.d.) testify to the long maritime tradition in the Basque Country which culminated in the Industrial Revolution. [2] The port of Bilbao became "the most important commercial and financial hub of the Spanish north coast during the Spanish Empire era. The swords exported from Bilbao were known in England as "bilboes", and are mentioned by name by William Shakespeare" ("History of Bilbao, n.d.). Between 1520 and 1580, almost 80 percent of ship traffic to the New World was controlled by Basques (Haddingham, 1992, p. 36).

Today, the port of Bilbao continues to play a significant but declining role. Unimaginable during the height of pollution connected to this industrial past, today cruise ships offer stays in Bilbao. For example, Bilbao Cruises offers dozens of options with departures from all around the world with port stops in Bilbao. Many come to enjoy the latest engine of economic development – the Guggenheim Museum and the renovation it brought.

"Hailed as an 'instant landmark,' Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim (see Figure 2) brought a new sense of relevance to architecture. . . . amid Bilbao's post-industrial ruin [it] has become an icon of what architecture can do for a city in decline" Guash (2005). This success means many cities have "dreamed of its own Guggenheim effect."



Figure 2: The Guggenheim at night. Photo taken by delegate at the annual meeting of the Association of European Migration Institutions, September 2010, which one of the authors attended.

The Bilbao Effect

The Director of the only Basque Museum in the United States often tells the story to museum patrons of how visitors from the Basque Country, specifically the city of Bilbao, have changed dramatically in pride of their homeland. She relates that in the past when someone from Bilbao would admit where s(he) was from, that person did so grudgingly, with not much pride in the city. All of that changed, the Director says after the Guggenheim (Figure 2) opened in Bilbao. Now natives of Bilbao brag about their city and definitely display their hometown pride. She is not imagining things; many authors and researchers have noticed it too.

An article in *Museum News* (2007), “The Bilbao Effect,” reminds readers however, that one museum will not by itself save a city. “The museum has brought hope to citizens and city officials and has united political parties, trade unions and civic associations in a gigantic urban regeneration still under way” (p. 13). But, it can be “the icing on the cake.” Betsky (2012) argues that the Bilbao Effect did not truly exist. “It may be the case that the Bilbao Effect was actually a name for a different phenomenon: cultural attractors. In an era of instantly consumable images, etherizing communities, and lack of either social or societal identity, we actually want places in which to gather, to contemplate, to be immersed, and to be part of a history” (p. 120).

But Kurlansky (1999, p. 337) described it as follows, “It is what has always been on their minds: nation building. The leadership is well aware that if Euskadi is a nation, it is a tiny nation, and while half the struggle is building the nation, the other half is getting it recognized in the world. The size of their land and their population never seems to moderate Basque ambitions.” In other words, Basques recognize and are good at the importance of branding their small nation, especially evident in erecting the Guggenheim museum there.

The Basque Block

McClinchey (2008) investigated the marketing strategy behind and the economic impact of urban ethnic festivals. “Heritage of cultural groups and migrant communities increasingly jostles to be recognized” (p. 261). “Place marketing that includes festival promotion should be able to answer questions pertaining to image, political influences and agendas, authenticity, social identity and cultural representation.” McClinchey also notes that ethnic festivals can bring positive economic and social impact to local communities. Basques in Boise would agree, as they host an every five year *Jaialdi* (festival), which brings visitors from around the world who wish to celebrate Basque culture and heritage (Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 3: *Jaialdi*, the international Basque Festival held in Boise, Idaho



Figures 4: *Jaialdi*, the international Basque Festival held in Boise, Idaho

Not only does an entire street block (Figure 5) in Boise, Idaho (the “Basque Block”) help promote the city’s image, but authenticity, social identity and cultural representation are maintained in the heart of the city center.



Figure 5: Main image on thebasqueblock.com

Just after the turn of the last century, on a small plot on Grove Street in Boise, a Basque boarding house owner planted a vegetable garden to help supply food for the hungry crowd filling his tables. On the same site in the late 1940s, some first- and second-generation Basques constructed a no-frills building, the Basque Center, for cultural activities originally done in the boarding houses. By 1972, Basques gave the building a facelift, a stucco, beamed farmhouse facade resembling an old world baserri. Grove Street, one of Boise’s oldest streets, always seemed to mark changes in the Idaho Basque community; this was still evident at the dedication of the Basque Block in July 2000, part of the larger *Jaialdi* celebration.

The block offers a mixture of old and new branding. Most of the buildings on the Basque Block exhibit historical markers that remind tourists of the boardinghouse era for Basques. One on the Basque Museum and Cultural Center shows some of the "brands" left by Basque sheepherders as they carved into aspen trees during idle time while in the hills. See Figure 6 for an example of such historical branding.



Figure 6: Basque Arboglyphs from Idaho Mountains

The Basque Center, built almost 40 years earlier, still serves as a gathering place for Basques for most social events. The Basque Center hosts the Shepherders' Balls, the Basque Bazaar, countless Basque wedding receptions and monthly *Euzkaldunak* dinners. Next door to the Basque Center stands the Basque Museum & Cultural Center. In the mid-1980s, the museum's founder acquired the red-brick house, built in 1864 and operated for decades as a Basque boarding house, as a spot to preserve information about Basques' immigration to Idaho. In 1987, officials dedicated the building, and planted an oak sapling from the Tree of Gernika in the Basque Country. [3] The Museum also acquired the building next door, which was remodeled to include a gift shop, an exhibition room, a library and classrooms. Older Basques volunteered to assist visitors in the main exhibition, which featured photographs of early immigrants and an actual sheep wagon as part of a display of the herding life. Countless tourists along with schoolchildren from around the state are offered presentations on Basque history and culture. Basque language courses for adults also continue to be taught.

Continuing down the block past the Museum, the old Anduiza boarding house building, sports a Basque handball court, a *fronton*. Today, three leagues play throughout the year. This building, in the very heart of downtown Boise serves as another symbol of Basque identity that few know about. Numerous Boiseans, when touring the Basque Block upon entering the downstairs court remark, 'I've lived here my whole life and had no idea that this was here.'

At the corner of a major intersection stands Bar Gernika, founded in 1991 by a third-generation Basque. In the town of Gernika there was a Bar Boise, so it "seemed logical" he said, "that there should be a Bar Gernika in Boise" (Ansotegui, 1992). In many ways, the Bar Gernika had become the Basque Center of the younger generation, a place to gather on a regular basis with Basque friends. But it was frequented by non-Basques as well, from college students to state legislators taking a lunch break from their meetings in the nearby Capitol. On the brick wall, the owner hung pictures from the Basque Country, photos of old farms, dancing groups and rural picnics. He hung peppers, garlic, a jai-alai basket, and the tambourine his father used while playing with the local Basque dancing group for 25 years.

Like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the Basque Block in Boise represents three major eras. The shepherding and boardinghouse era provided immigrants with a livelihood and a home away from home. As Basques settled in America, they moved out of the ethnic enclave but still wanted a

place to maintain ethnic ties so they built a club *Euzkaldunak* Basque Center of Boise. Although open to the public, it has very few windows and generally “faces inward” representative of those early generations. In 2000, Boise inaugurated the Basque Block, with the Center, a Basque Museum and Cultural Center, a renovated handball court and a Basque Pub and later a Basque restaurant and an accompanying streetscape filled with Basque symbols. It represents the branding of an ethnic culture to the broader American culture and their embrace of it as their own. Today, Idahoans from around the state organize dinners, gatherings, and festivals and reunions of all sorts on the Basque Block. (Bieter and Bieter, 2000, pp. 153-155)

Routes and Roots: Tourism’s Role in the Basque Country Brand

McCain and Ray (2003) refer to “roots” tourism as legacy tourism defining it as “those that travel to engage in genealogical endeavors, to search for information on or to simply feel connected to ancestors or ancestral roots” (p. 713). As Brown, Hirschman, and Maclaran (2006) point out, “the past is certainly a distant land and getting there is a difficult and imperfect undertaking” (p. 87). In their 2000 article, they reiterate that the past is “a foreign country” (p. 174) as did Hartley in 1953 (p. 9). The Basques are a good example representing attempts of “getting there” (both figuratively and actually) to the “foreign country” from which ancestors left. “The present . . . can never quite escape the past” (Delaney 2008, p. i). All present-day legacy (or “ancestral,” “diaspora,” “roots,” etc.) tourists need to get to that distant land and the Basques are no exception. And Ray (2012) discusses how more and more with the increase of the roots tourism subsegment, migration institutions are finding that they need to provide language help to their patrons, such as translating old documents, to explaining what a family surname means and for example, what “being Basque,” is all about. Especially for Basques, this unique language identity can play an important role in roots tourism and recently there have major efforts for signage throughout the Basque Country to be in Basque, Spanish and English.

Of course, not all tourism in the Basque Country has to do with those returning to the land of their ancestors. Tourism on the French side of the Basque Country (e.g., Biarritz) has a long tradition with wealthy Europeans and other international visitors (for example, Hemingway used to vacation there) and was clearly marketed for the world elite. Donostia-San Sebastián, on the Spanish side of the Basque Country was also marketed with tourism in mind and to this day is an important tourism destination. Franco even used to spend some of his summers there, which of course is ironic, given the former dictator’s animosity towards the Basque region.

Further supporting its appeal, official designated Donostia-San Sebastián as the 2016 European Capital of Culture in Europe. It gained the honor partly “to express and promote the cultural diversity of Europe, bring tourists from other European countries and, achieve the mutual understanding” (Ansorena, 2012). One of the activities for 2016 is that the city will be hosting, along with Tolosa (Toulouse), France, the International Puppet Festival, emphasizing the cross-border nature of the Basque Country. This prized designation builds upon the regional tourism industry established in the 19th century in the coastal towns of Donostia-San Sebastián coupled with Biarritz (Biarritz) and Baiona (Bayonne).

In regard to tourism in Spain, Fernandez Sabau (n.d.) discussed marketing at the national as well as at a regional level (with particular emphasis on the Basque Country) and whether consumers are confused with multiple marketing messages and that “tourists are not typically interested in political boundaries” (p. 22). While some may wonder if the Basque Country and Madrid can work together for tourism marketing synergy, it is important to not present mixed tourism messages. If the two Irelands can do it (i.e., work together via TourismIreland), surely it can be done in Spain.

It certainly is convenient for Basque branding that there are well known tourist sites in the Basque Country for those who do not have legacy tourism as their travel motivation. Specifically, the Camino de Santiago has seen increased international visits lately (perhaps most recently because of the Martin Sheen film, *The Way*). The discussion of such tourist roots has become important in the tourism literature (Murray and Graham, 1997; Barke, 2004; Lourens, 2007). Barke, in particular, discusses rural tourism in Spain, mentioning that for years, rural tourism in Spain, referred to farm tourism. This certainly relates to the *Basseri* and *Nekazalturismoa* discussed elsewhere in this paper.

Brand-It Basque

Of course, there are modern day and traditional products and services marketed from the Basque Country. The internationally known cooperative, Mondragón, represents the historic Basque spirit of neighborhood in a successful modern day capitalistic entity. The energy company, Iberdrola, is

internationally known especially for renewable energy and has investments around the world. BBVA (Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria), traditionally a Basque financial institution, provides sponsorship for the U.S. NBA (National Basketball Association) and other sports.

The Basque cider brand Zapiam, which claims to have been founded in 1595, is being repositioned for the UK market, with a label “designed to reference the brand's cultural heritage” (Basque Cider, 2010, p. 6). The bottle is the same as that sold in Spain and buyers will be supplied with a plastic pourer “to encourage the traditional pouring process” (p. 6). The region is home to many well-known wines, cheeses, and other foods, as well as known for the origin of many popular sports, such as jai-alai.

Reconstructing the Political Brand -- Basques and Beyond

In Spain's regional elections on October 21, 2012, the Basque Country's moderate separate party won, with a more extreme separatist party coming in second. These were the first elections held in decades without the shadow of ETA, the terrorist separatist fighting for an independent Basque Country, during elections (Román, 2012). With upcoming elections in nearby Cataluña (Moffett, 2012), also a hotbed of separatism, some are predicting that Spain may be the first European nation in many decades to break up. In fact, the results of the elections in the Cataluña region were mixed, with two separatist parties gaining the majority of votes. Both regions claim that they send more money to Madrid than they get in benefits from the capital. The Spanish government does not want to see these two major industrial regions break off from the whole of Spain. Madrid tries to put a national (i.e., within the borders of modern day Spain) campaign together to encourage tourism and investment, but the autonomous Basque Government does as well; a metaphor of the larger story.

At the end of one of the workshops offered by Boise State University's Basque Studies Program, one of students commented, “After taking this class, I can't believe I knew so little about the Basques, it's as though they are ‘hidden in plain sight’.” Many agree. In January of 2007, the Basque Museum in Boise in collaboration with the Basque Government and the Basque Studies Program at Boise State inaugurated an exhibit at Ellis Island and titled it “Hidden in Plain Sight.” After a very successful time there, the exhibit continues as a traveling educational effort to expose people to the Basques who may be “hidden in plain sight.”

Limitations and Conclusions

This paper is descriptive, not empirical. It introduces many different branding topics without, by necessity, much elaboration of each topic. Other marketers and historians, with equally good knowledge of the Basque community, might choose other branding issues to highlight and still other researchers might verify by a quantitative study of perceptions of agreement from Basque communities. This paper also did not expand in detail the distinction between the current day Spanish part of the Basque and the French part. Kurlansky (1999) in his “The Basque Beret” chapter explains some of the history of the commonalities and differences of the two Basque Countries, and others may wish to pursue into modern times. And, not much was made here of the obvious point that not all Basques or members of the Basque diaspora are alike in their attitudes and commitments to community. There is a joke that says “if you have four Basques in a room, you will have at least five opinions.” And, while discussed much in this paper, Basque communities, of course, can learn from natural occurring brands of other communities and groups. For example, the authors know contacts in the Basque Country and in Northern Ireland who have quite a bit of contact with each other because of similar issues faced by both locations.

This paper attempted to expose people to the Basques. From major points in Basque history, we offer examples of how Basques (both in the Basque Country and in America), a “naturally occurring brand,” branded themselves through language, place, industry, food, drink and culture. While the composition of this “brand,” (i.e., the Basques) may be hidden in plain sight, the explorers, religious figures, athletes, politicians, and others will continue the long tradition of successful historic and marketing impact on the global economy. Perhaps these branding lessons can help other cultural groups who may struggle with identity branding.

Notes

[1] We wish to thank one anonymous reviewer who pointed out that throughout the paper, we discuss how, in addition to being a “naturally occurring brand,” the Basques have certainly taken an

active role in branding themselves and their products. We like to think that the two can coexist (natural vs. active branding) and both certainly shape communities.

[2] Interestingly, once again a comparison to Northern Ireland surfaces. Two cranes remaining from the heyday of Belfast ship building, “Samson and Goliath,” are major modern day tourist attractions in that nation.

[3] The Tree of Gernika represents Basque independence. Traditionally, the kings of Spain came to the Basque Country and under the tree swore allegiance to uphold the ancient *Lege Zaharrak* (*Old Laws*) under which Basques governed themselves.

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