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Nina M. Ray
Boise State University

Nere Lete
Boise State University

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Nina M. Ray

Boise State University

Nere Lete

Boise State University

**BASQUE STUDIES: COMMERCE, HERITAGE,
AND A LANGUAGE LESS COMMONLY TAUGHT,
BUT WHOLE-HEARTEDLY CELEBRATED**

ABSTRACT

The Basque Country (Autonomous Basque Country in Spain) has a population of over two million, with both Spanish and Basque as official languages. Basque is used as a language of commerce both in the Basque Country and in locations around the world where Basques immigrated throughout history. One such location is Boise, Idaho, which has the only Basque Museum in the United States. In this article, the authors discuss the commercial importance of Basque as one of the world's less commonly taught languages. Results from a survey of delegates at a recent Basque Studies conference are reported. The findings emphasize the importance of the Basque language as an integral part of one's personal identity and the "connection with place" felt when considering one's Basque heritage. Suggestions are provided for universities and centers wishing to explore studies of other less commonly taught languages (LCTL).

Many European Union watchers are not familiar with Europe's Assembly of European Regions comprised of 250 members from 32 countries, many of whom have official delegations of representation in Brussels (Assembly of European Regions). The Assembly has recently launched an "agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism." The Basque Country is one such region with broad implications for securing peace on the continent of Europe. This has very local commercial implications to the authors of this article and the community in which they live. The Basque Country maintains a delegation in Brussels to represent its interests there, as well as in Madrid, New York City, Mexico City, Santiago, Buenos Aires, and Caracas.

Marketers know that preparation of a marketing plan begins with an analysis of environmental trends that affect an organization's marketing mix (typically said to consist of Product, Price, Promotion, and Place). Typically these environmental forces are categorized as economic, competitive, technological, political/legal, and cultural forces. Sometimes geography and

infrastructure forces are added to the list. A discussion of the environmental forces in, and related to, the Basque Country will serve as the starting point for a discussion of the region's importance and help to explain why Basque Studies majors are part of many US university curricula.

The Basque Country (Autonomous Basque Country in Spain) has a population of over two million, with both Spanish and Basque as its official languages ("The Basque Country in Figures"). It lies between Spain and France along the Cantabrian coast, and its inhabitants have either Spanish or French citizenship. This historical fact has caused tremendous turmoil between the Basques and the governments of Spain and France. The right to have elections to decide self-determination is continuously denied by the Spanish government.

In 2000, eight European countries had a GDP higher than the Basque Country; in 2005 only Luxembourg and Ireland did ("The Basque Country in Figures"). It makes up about 4.9% of the population of Spain and 6.2% of Spain's GDP but accounts for 90% of Spain's steel, and 80% of machine tools. Twenty-eight percent of its tourism monies (5.2% of GDP) come from abroad, contributing 2,786 million euros in 2004. Its exports have continually grown from 1993 to 2005. While the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) countries make up a small percentage of its overall trade compared to Europe, the Basque Country saw 1,365 million euros of exports to NAFTA and 559 million euros in imports from the NAFTA countries in 2005, larger than export and import figures to and from Latin America. There are almost 5,000 Basque Country businesses with ISO 9000 certification (2006 figures), and the area is first in a list of "Eco-management certificates per 1000 million euros GDP" ("The Basque Country in Figures").

The Basque Country plays an important role in the state of Spain, in the European Union (as part of the European emphasis on "regions"), and in historic, cultural, and commercial ties to modern day locales that served as points of immigration. The conflict with ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna—Basque Homeland and Freedom) is part of the political and legal environment and affects trade with and investment in the region.

SOCIO-CULTURAL FORCES:

EUSKALDUN—ONE WHO POSSESSES BASQUE

Within the past half century (under the Franco dictatorship), the Basque language was suppressed. The objective of this political decision of Franco was to attack the Basque culture through its core, the language. The use of

Basque was reduced to the family environment in the home. The public use of the Basque language was prohibited, and young and old who did not follow this mandate were punished. At the same time there was a great effort to impose the use of Spanish, as this was the language of prestige and official status. Today Basque and Spanish share official status in the Basque Country. This law has very tangible consequences in the every day life of Basque men and women. All official documents need to be issued in Basque and Spanish. The Basque Government and grass root groups are trying to disseminate the use of the Basque language to all aspects of life. This is still a challenge in the Basque society. There is a saying by the Basque poet Artze that today is still true; “Hizkuntza bat ez da galtzen ez dakitenek ikasten ez dutelako, dakitenek hitz egiten ez dutelako baizik” (“A language is not lost because of the failure of non-speakers to learn it, but because those who know it choose not to speak it”; author’s translation).

Today only Basque speakers are uniformly bilingual. There are no Basque monolingual speakers but there are significant Spanish monolingual speakers on the streets of the Basque Country. Many opportunities exist for those who want to learn the language, and the Basque government refunds registration fees to students who pass their classes in Basque language academies. State workers can take Basque language classes during their work schedule without losing their salary. The biggest challenge facing the Basque Government is to encourage all those who know Basque to use it in general social interactions.

Basque has definitely become a language of commerce, even though less than a third of the population speaks it (600,000 speakers of Basque). While in the Basque Country the knowledge and use of the Basque language is seen as the main marker of one’s identity (*Basque News*), members of the Basque diaspora, such as those in Boise, Idaho, do not always agree with that definition of Basque identity. In Boise, personal Basque identity is achieved through dance (Corcostegui), which has been a very important activity in the Boise Basque community since the 1960s.

Language classes are taught at Boise State and at the Basque Museum and Cultural Center but a minority of people see the studying of the language as a marker of their Basqueness. Of course learning a language requires dedication and time and is perceived as harder than folk dancing. Even so, Boise, Idaho has the only Basque language immersion preschool program in the United States. It was created eight years ago under the Basque Museum and Cultural Center by a group of young parents who understood the importance of teaching Basque to their children at an early age.

Basques came to Boise at the turn of the twentieth century and they brought the Basque language with them. Their children learned Basque at home and English at school. Little by little all those families got “Americanized” as they were very successful integrating into the greater American society. Now many of those pioneers have died and there is not an influx of Basque immigrants. If Basque will survive in the Boise area, children and the youth are the key. Schools offer after-school programs for older children who attend American schools. Boise State University offers Basque language classes integrating the latest teaching pedagogical tools and materials, where students can take the first, second, and third year of Basque language courses. Once they have completed their studies at Boise State University they can study abroad. The Basque language curriculum follows the guidelines of Basque language acquisition established by the official institution HABE (Helduen alfabetatze eta euskalduntze erakundea / Basque Government’s Organization for Basque Language Teaching and Literalization of Adults) to ease the transition for those students continuing their studies of the language abroad. Many of these language students travel to the Basque Country with their families, and in many cases they are the ones who can communicate in Basque with their relatives because their parents were immersed in American society and never learned Basque in the United States. The Euzkaldunak, Basque Center of Boise, offers dance classes for children 4 to 14. The little ones learn how to sing in Basque.

The Basque Government would like to see Basque being taught more often and provides some funding to see that it is. The Basque Government supports Basque language and culture programs in nine countries, and in seventeen universities around the world. The program at Boise State University is the largest due to its course offerings, student enrollment, and credit hours produced.

MODERN COMMERCIAL RESULTS OF PAST MIGRATION

The earliest Basques in the United States did not come from Europe but from South America, where they had heard of the California gold rush in the mid-nineteenth century. Few Basques succeeded in gold mining in California, but many decided to stay in North America and, drawing upon their herding experience in South America, benefited from a boom in Idaho’s sheep industry (Bieter and Bieter 27). Many Basque men returned to the Basque Country looking for a wife, then brought their wives and children to America once they were established in Idaho. Single women came as help with their relatives’ families or as help in Basque boardinghouses. Juanita

“Jay” Hormaechea says about Basque women in Idaho: “. . . even those not employed in boardinghouses, were the cement that held the Basque community in Idaho together” (Bieter and Bieter 49). These women built a very close knit community among themselves and helped each other.

Basques have not always had the good reputation they have today in the West, as John and Mark Bieter mention in their book *An Enduring Legacy: The History of the Basques in Idaho*, “Despite the potential wealth it offered, sheepherding carried a stigma. Sheepherders were outcasts and ne’er-do-wells, shifty characters too undependable to be hired in the mines or by cattlemen” (Ethel A. Roesch, qtd. in Bieter and Bieter 35). Today Basque-Americans have prominent roles in the communities where their ancestors settled. The mayor of Boise, Idaho, David H. Bieter, is of Basque descent as is a prominent former Secretary of State of Idaho, Pete Cenarussa. Both have received the Sabino Arana Basques Throughout the World Award (CityofBoise.org).

While it is difficult to generalize regarding the relationship between the Basque Country and each location of Basque communities in North America, one location of emphasis, Boise, might help illuminate the commercial importance of this lesser-known culture and lesser-taught language.

Regarding the “place” issue of a marketing mix, the city of Boise has an entire city block known as the “Basque Block.” It is where the original Basque rooming house and fronton court are located. It is also home to the Basque Museum, Basque Market, and a couple of Basque restaurants. The colors of the Basque flag are included in a sculpture that stands at the entrance to the block from the busy street that leads to the state capitol. One of the Basque restaurants is “Bar Gernika” in honor of the important city in the Basque Country. A local distributor named Basque Country Imports provides authentic products for all citizens of Boise, not just the Basque community. There are also Basque restaurants and important historic sites in many other smaller communities nearby.

The “product” part of the marketing mix mostly involves food and drink items, but other typical representations of cultural identity (flags, books, jewelry, music recordings) can be purchased in the gift shop of the museum. Another “product” to be emphasized is that of tourism. Local travel agencies have historically been experts at getting the local population from Boise to Bilbao on numerous individual and group trips (such as for the local Oinkari Dancers who perform around the world). Often, the distribution of these “products” involves the use of the Basque language. Certainly the Basque Studies Conference involved the travel of conference delegates from many parts of the US and several foreign countries and contributed to the consumption of

Basque products. Therefore, even though Basque is a lesser-taught language, it certainly is a language of world commerce and one that forms an important part of the curriculum at some American universities.

AMERICAN BASQUE STUDIES AND BASQUE CENTERS

Boise State University now has a Basque Studies minor. The language courses are taught in Basque, although some (Basque Cinema and Literature) are taught in Spanish while others (Basque Cuisine, Dance, Politics, and History) are taught in English. Two internship opportunities are offered to students, either with the Basque Museum and Cultural Center or with the Basque preschool. In conjunction with the Basque Studies offerings, several faculty members have received grants to incorporate Basque Studies into their department's curriculum. The International Marketing class is one such course. One of the assignments in this class is to explore the Idaho / Basque Country link, investigate an Idaho product that could be sold in the Basque Country, and write a marketing plan for achieving it. The French part of the Basque Country should be included, but does not need to be emphasized, since most Idaho Basques came from Bizkaia (Vizcaya) in Spain.

In addition to Boise State University, the University of Nevada at Reno has had a Center for Basque Studies for the past forty years. Boise has the only Basque Museum in the United States, but there are numerous Basque Centers in the United States and around the world that concentrate on the social aspects of the community and folklore of the Basque culture. The Basque Centers in the United States have formed NABO, the National American Basque Organization. Many of these Basque Centers are making significant efforts to include language and culture classes for their members. In July 2007 representatives of the Basque Diaspora met at the Fourth World Congress of Basque Communities in Bilbao to present and compare experiences and initiatives, and to discuss the next four-year plan of action. One organization in San Francisco organized a "Remembering Gernika" event in April 2007 to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the largest aerial bombardment (at the time) of a town; this attack was, of course, immortalized by Picasso ("Gernika Gogoratz").

TOURISM

The European Union refers to tourism as "the world's largest industry" (e.g., "Agenda 2010"). The World Tourism Organization predicts world tourism growth to continue in 2007 at a rate of about 4 percent ("2007 to be Fourth Year of Sustained Growth"). Therefore, it is good marketing strategy to better

segment the world tourism market to capture that growing market. Tourism accounts for 5.2 percent of the Basque Country's GDP, and many people with a Basque heritage travel to the Basque Country. These travelers form part of an increasingly important segment of the world's tourism industry, that of "legacy" or heritage tourism.

Research on heritage/culture tourism has generated numerous definitions (Balcar and Pearce), such as "visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution" (Silberberg 361). One can also recognize Pat Yale's observation that:

... the fashionable concept of "heritage tourism" really means nothing more than tourism centred on what we have inherited. (21)

Certainly one's family history and one's language are important parts of cultural inheritance.

There is an emerging literature exploring the typology of tourism from "general travelers" to "specialized tourists" such as "heritage specialists" who differ according to education, visitation behavior, motivations, and overall satisfaction (Kerstetter, Confer, and Graefe 267). Sarah Nicholls, Christine Vogt, and Soo Hyan Jun identify specific types of heritage tourism, including legacy tourism (travel related to genealogical endeavors [McCain and Ray]).

What is remarkable about heritage [tourism], however, is its power of working in the present in a way that has recourse to the past, in a way that interprets the past into something that we learn to understand as "history." (Câmpeanu 357)

For many tourists, what they have learned "to understand as history" is their own family history.

Nicholls, et al., citing the Travel Industry Association of America, estimate that around 81% of American adults taking a trip in 2002 could be classified as heritage or cultural tourists. This is a 13% increase since 1996. One only has to look to Salt Lake City, Utah, to discover the importance for tourists of the Family History Library. Many of the Library's daily 1,900 visitors (only a minority of which are of the Mormon faith) come from other countries (Eastman). Basu's research from Scotland reports that visitors to their ancestral homeland are sometimes ridiculed and considered to be "emotional cripples" by the locals. The community of focus in this article, the Basques, does not seem to consider Americans of Basque heritage as emotional cripples or

guilty of “ethnic amnesia” (Brown, Hirschman, and Maclaran) as evidenced by the strong welcome those of Basque descent living elsewhere in the world receive when they visit the Basque Country.

THE BASQUE STUDIES CONFERENCE AND SURVEY

The Basque Studies Conference was organized to conclude the two-year Title VI grant Boise State University received from the United States Department of Education (USDE). Boise State University also received a three-year grant from the Basque Government, so that students at Boise State University could obtain a minor in Basque Studies by taking courses in three languages, Basque, English, and Spanish. The conference had both a strong academic and a community focus. On the first day, a meeting was held to discuss the creation of a consortium for universities, Basque educational organizations, and individuals interested in Basque Studies. A total of eight universities and their representatives, six educational organizations, and six individuals gathered to talk about future opportunities for collaboration involving:

- creation of a peer-reviewed journal on Basque Studies
- development of language courses via video conferencing
- foundation of a consortium lecture series
- establishment of a visiting professor program

Mr. Ibon Mendibelzua, delegate of the Basque Country in Brussels, spoke on “The Basque Country within the European Union.” Mr. Alec Reid, Director of the Redemptorist Peace Ministry and facilitator of the peace process in Ireland and the Basque Country, spoke on “Peace-Making in the Basque Country.” The keynote speakers attracted a total of 200 people. The main idea behind the invitation of these two guest speakers was the desire to present a contemporary portrait of the Basque Country as it tries to achieve peace and claim its place within Europe.

Two well-attended (30–35 delegates each) panel sessions had seven Basque scholars present their research on a variety of topics. All participants gathered with the Boise Basque community at the Basque Center for a tribute dinner to Jimmy Jausoro, a popular local figure. The dance performances (both on the university campus and in the downtown Basque Center) were organized as a Memorial tribute for him as well.

Conference attendees were invited to participate in a survey. Twenty-seven completed surveys were collected (eight men and nineteen women), which total 12% of the total data set (n=220) that includes responses from other cultural

groups as well. The average age of the Basque Studies group is 47 (ranging from 16 to 75). This group is significantly (t-test, $p=.00$) younger than an average age of 60 representing previous respondents from other cultural groups. The sampling of a broader, on-going project comes from organizations that give permission to survey their membership and attendees at events. To date, preliminary data have been collected at events sponsored by the Ulster Historical Foundation in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the Ulster-American Heritage Symposium, the Indiana Historical Society, and the Society of Indiana Pioneers.

Many of these events delivered approximately 50% response rates (about 30 out of 60 attendees, on average). While no claims of probability sampling can be made, carefully considered relevant judgment samples provide the data set. For the Basque Studies sample, a written pen-and-paper survey was administered in person at two key events of the Basque Studies Conference. Some survey questions ask about motivations for genealogical interest and are based on research by P. Basu. Additional Likert-type items (“very important” to “not at all important,” 1 to 5 scale) come from eco-tourism heritage research by P. F. J. Eagles and have been used in previous research on heritage tourism. They include statements such as “visiting friends and relatives” and “being together as a family.”

Specific questions addressed by the general research are:

- What are the demographic characteristics of those who are interested in pursuing genealogy and traveling to geographic places relevant to said genealogy? What is the depth of that interest (Are respondents active members in participating organizations or simply attendees with less active interest)?
- What are the main motivations for the research and travel interest?
- What is the nature of this interest (research for one’s own family or friends, professional role of leading legacy tours, professional role as family history researcher)?
- What is the frequency and how extensive is the legacy travel, and does the extent differ depending on the respondent’s interest?

Questions that are addressed specifically to those respondents who participated during a Basque Studies Conference were:

- What are the primary native languages of the conference attendees, what are additional languages they speak, and how important are these languages to their personal identity?

- What similarities exist between the Basque Studies participants and those who responded to the survey while attending events at very different cultural groups? Some interesting “cross-overs” occur, such as an Irish keynote speaker at the Basque Studies Conference who responded to the survey and is included in the same data set as the others at the Basque conference.

RESULTS

Seventy-four percent of the twenty-seven respondents indicated English as their native language, others listed Basque [four of them], Spanish, and Italian. All but two were citizens of the United States. They are not any more or less likely than those respondents from other cultural groups to be members of any historical, cultural, or family history society (chi-square test, $p=.08$). Spanish was listed as a second language by 45% of respondents, Basque by 10%, French by 10%, and other languages such as Russian, German, Japanese, Icelandic, Italian, and Irish also amounted to 10%. Ten percent indicated English as a second language. Eighty-five percent said that their native language is important or very important when defining their personal identity. The rest are neutral or indicated their language is not very important. Of the native Basque speakers, all four said it is “very important” (the highest response possible). Of those with Basque as a second language (eight in total), all but one said it is important or very important to their personal identity. Unfortunately, these questions concerning language were not asked on versions of the survey administered to other groups, therefore, no comparisons with these groups can be made regarding the importance of one’s language to one’s personal identity. However, as can be seen from the small sample of those attending the Basque Studies Conference, speakers of Basque believe the language is an important part of their personal identity. After all, the word for a Basque person in the Basque language, *Euskaldun*, means “one who speaks the Basque language.”

Respondents were asked to pick the top three reasons why they might have interest in ancestral-based (“Legacy”) travel or research. Table 1 presents the complete list of possible reasons, and most are derived from Basu’s writings. It also shows the differences between respondents attending the Basque Studies Conference compared to those from previous studies using the same set of questions. For all sample groups, respondents were asked to indicate only the top three motivations for their possible interest in researching or traveling to the land of their ancestors. However, it is valuable to discuss the top four motivations as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: REASONS FOR ANCESTRAL INTEREST:
COMPARISON OF BASQUE STUDIES RESPONDENTS TO OTHERS

| Reasons for Ancestral Interest | %Basques (N=27) | %Other (N=193) |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Crusade | 0 | .2 |
| Pilgrimage | 2.7 | 1.7 |
| Homecoming | 1.4 | 2.6 |
| Finding oneself | 1.4 | 4.5 |
| Quest | 0 | 6.9 |
| Personal identity | 18.9* (rank of 2) | 11.8 (rank of 3) |
| True home | 1.4 | 1.9 |
| Sacred | 0 | 1.7 |
| Discovering continuities | 6.8 | 9.9 |
| Connection with place | 24.3* (rank of 1) | 14.4 (rank of 2) |
| Recovery of social identity | 4.1 | 3.2 |
| Obligation to ancestors | 9.5 (rank of 4) | 10.6 (rank of 4) |
| Community | 12.2* (rank of 3) | .9 |
| Magical feeling | 4.1 | 1.5 |
| Inward journey | 4.1 | 1.7 |
| Completing the circle | 2.7 | 6.3 |
| Closing the gap | 1.4 | 3.7 |
| Intellectual challenge | 5.4 | 16.6* (rank of 1) |

*Chi-square test; significant at .05 level

While “connection with place” and “personal identity” are ranked high by both groups, larger percentages of Basque Studies respondents chose these motivations. The difference in percentages between the two groups for these two motivations is significant. “Community” is ranked third with the Basque group while it is ranked very low with the others. “Obligation to ancestors” is ranked high by both groups, with no significant difference between the Basque group and the others. The Basque group does not see “intellectual challenge” as a reason for interest in their ancestors, while others do.

All respondents were asked to rate the importance of several general motivations for typical leisure travel (based on Eagles): meeting people of similar interests, being together as a family, going places where they feel safe, visiting places where family lives, visiting friends and relatives, and creating long-standing friendships or relationships.

Those at the Basque events rate all of the above items as “important” or “very important” and significantly different from a “neutral” point. Two of the above showed major differences between respondents at the Basque Studies Conference and others:

- Basque Studies respondents were significantly more likely to say being together as a family is very important (t-test, $p=.001$), although both groups rated this motivation as important or very important.
- Basque Studies respondents were significantly more likely to say creating long-standing friendships/relationships is very important (t-test, $p=.001$) and both groups rated this motivation as either important or very important.

All respondents were asked to indicate if they have ever traveled in order to find a specific location relevant to their ancestors, to research information in libraries and other sources, and to find other living descendents of ancestors. Basque Studies respondents were significantly less likely (chi-square test, $p<.05$) than other groups to travel for these purposes. However fourteen Basque Studies respondents (almost one-half of the group) had traveled to learn more about their own ancestors (mostly to find a specific location relevant to them), ten had traveled to learn more about an ancestor of a spouse or friend (mostly in order to research in libraries and to find living descendents), and five traveled to engage in professional genealogical services for others (researching information in libraries).

SUMMARY

Basque is a language of commercial value, both in the Basque Country and in certain geographic areas of historic Basque migration. Based on the research reported in this article, it appears that those interested in Basque Studies feel a strong connection with the Basque Country and that connection is an important part of one's personal identity and sense of community. However, other cultural factors, such as dance, could be equally or more valuable to personal identity. The Basque language helps to define connection, identity, and community. While those with Basque heritage may be less likely than others to visit places of their ancestors, they are more likely to be motivated to be "together as a family," which creates long-standing relationships. In this way, they have a sense of place, attempting to find specific locations relevant to their family, partly due to a sense of obligation to their ancestors. Those marketing tourism to the Basque Country, its foods, and other cultural items should emphasize these feelings of family connection, identity, and community. The use of the Basque language can help do this also.

Universities and cultural centers in locations with ties to specific regions of the world where a less commonly taught language is spoken have opportunities for grants. In the case of Basque Studies, grants from both the United States Department of Education and the Basque Government have helped to develop university curricula and to strengthen ties with local Basque communities. Universities and Centers might find help from the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages or from organizations devoted to the specific culture and language, such as the National American Basque Organization.

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