

BASQUES IN AMERICAN PRESS.
Compilation and Digitalization of News
about the Basque Country and the Basque Communities.

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Recover History, Preserve the Memory

During the last few years, we have been visiting the Basque Country with a renewed interest to understand the present and past realities of foreign Basque communities, especially those emerging from migratory processes towards the Americas. This interest can be appreciated with references to said communities in the media (press, radio, television or internet), like in its own civil society, with the emergence of initiatives and associations dedicated to boosting relations and the mutual consciousness of Basques within and outside the country (i.e. Euskal-Argentina Association, Zortzigarren Probintzia Elkarte, Euskosare, the Basque-American thematic restaurant Allent or the Family Reunion Program).

In parallel, we do not know if this is the cause or the consequence of it, in the last two decades we have witnessed the consolidation of studies centred on the study of Basque communities abroad by historians, philologists, anthropologists or specialists in other social sciences. In the last twenty years, as we have pointed out, not only has the number of studies carried out and publications on the subject multiplied, which has permitted us to expand our knowledge; but the possibilities to analyse have also become more diverse, and above all, an incipient, but promising, group of investigators centred on the investigation of Basques abroad has been developing. Even the terminology has changed in scarcely two decades: contrary to old concepts we used in the 90s, the idea of “the Basque emigrants” as the preferential subject of analysis, now we are studying the education of Basque communities, their social, recreational, cultural and political institutions, the Basque-American press, the culture, the economy and even questions such as image and identity.

Consequently, we do not talk as much about Basque emigrants, as much as the Basque diaspora or the “eighth province”. This terminology is not trivial, because of the underlying idea: we must consider the historical projection of the Basque people towards the exterior, not as an exotic tale, but as one more chapter in the history of the Basque Country, inextricably interwoven with the historical events that developed in each historical moment of the Basque geography.

However, this challenge to recuperate its personal and collective projection and its relation with other territories, demands added effort: to preserve all those documents that permit us to retrieve the memory of past events of Basque communities abroad.

This is, besides being a question of great urgency, something that we have been reflecting on for some time in the academic and investigative circles. In general, three problems have been highlighted concerning the state of historic documentation of Basque communities abroad: its knowledge, its accessibility and its conservation. The historical reality of the structure of said communities explains these problems: the *Basque Centres*, that

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have represented the only institutionalized collective presence of Basques abroad over decades, do not have as one of their objectives to become historical archives. Time has affected the documents that said Basque Centres generated in their activities and only the admirable and voluntary work of some leaders and those responsible, who knew the importance of saving the historical memory (and had the means and opportunity to do it), have avoided greater damage. Certainly, a lot has been lost, but it is also true that we still have many means of information to reconstruct the Basque communities' past. Even so, problems persist:

- *Knowledge.* That is, know what documents we have, where they are and what they contain. The task of cataloguing the document sources serves to, in addition, to establish in a way the content of the historical archives, give them significance and relevance and avoid their disappearance.
- *Accessibility.* That is, that they be available in the best possible manner for use by the investigator. The Basque Centres are not the only source of document information on the history of Basque communities. Relevant information can also be taken from, for example, civil or church archives in host countries; businesses created by Basques; and above all the very families, who usually have and keep authentic family archives with personal documents (identity documents, correspondence, photographs...). The newspaper and periodical library and the memory of the elderly (recorded through oral testimony) are also interesting means. In all these cases, the investigator's access depends on things as fortuitous as the will of those that own the documents.
- *Conservation.* All the above leads to the big question: How do we ensure the conservation of said collections? In a country that still does not have a National Archive or specific archive (even though the project to create both is well under way), we lack one of the basic instruments, which can take care of this task of locating, cataloguing and managing the accessibility to the documents.

Nevertheless, not everything has been negative up to now. In addition to academic and scientific institutions that have volunteered, in the last few years the Basque Government has joined in forming a document compilation corpus that could be made easily accessible to investigators. They have certainly been unconnected initiatives in many cases, but on the one hand it has prevented the deterioration and loss of materials that otherwise would have disappeared, on the other hand, it has now generated what economists call synergies. Boosting cooperation between investigators in the Basque Country and those in several countries where Basque communities can be found; all this without mentioning that they can be the initial step to create that future memory archive of Basque communities that so many of us desire.

There have been various prior experiences. Between 1988 and 1990, the History of America department of the University of the Basque Country, along with bachelor students, analyzed the references on America (in addition to those about American Basques) in newspapers and magazines from Álava, Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, Navarra and the Northern Basque Country. In the field of oral sources, Eusko Ikaskuntza (in 1995), and a few years later the Centre of Basque Studies at the University of Nevada-Reno and the Basque Museum and Culture Center of Boise, Idaho, started up both programmes to compile interviews with Basque emigrants. In fact, the North American project is accessible through its own web page. In addition, at the end of the 90s, the Sancho el Sabio Foundation carried out digitalization of Basque-American press, particularly some unique examples that are preserved at the Zazpirak Bat de Rosario Basque Centre, Argentina, and the University of the Basque Country microfilmed the contents of Ekin Publishing of Buenos Aires. Eusko Ikaskuntza started up (between 1997 y 2003) a team to compile the bibliography of Basque-

American communities, which was integrated into a larger project compiling historiography on the Basque Country. Finally, between 2001 and 2003, the University of the Basque Country developed the creation of an iconographic virtual archive that is currently in the process of being catalogued.

Although the project we are presenting today in fact implicates various universities, it is within the larger framework of the Urazandi program begun by the Basque Government's Office of Relations with Overseas Basque Communities in 2003. In its various phases of execution, the Urazandi programme has carried out:

- a) The publication of unedited investigations about the history of various Basque Centres in the world. In 2003, on the occasion of the World Congress on Basque Communities, the first fifteen studies on other Basque Centres were published, a collection that continued to be completed as can be seen in the previous paper.
- b) The digitalization of Basque-American magazines, those periodical publications edited and/or managed by Basques in the communities. The first Basque-Argentinian magazine was *La Baskonia*, of which 50 years of its existence were edited on two DVDs, along with the histories of Basque Centres previously mentioned that same year, 2003. In 2005, the Euskal Erria Basque Centre of Montevideo did the same with a magazine of the same name, also published close to half a century. In both cases, the results of the editing are equally encouraging. Previously, few investigators could truly conduct a complete investigation of this data, scattered around various libraries and repositories in Europe and America; now, a complete collection can be consulted from any personal computer. Therefore, since 2003 there has been an increase in investigations that have used the rich contents in both publications as their foundation. The expansion of the task of digitalizing all the magazines created by Basques outside the Basque Country, as it has been presented in this very Congress, will undoubtedly serve to spur new investigations.
- c) The cataloguing and digitalization of Basque news published in American press, which is to say the general press in the host societies, not in those periodical publications directed specifically at Basque society. This is the project we are presenting here.
- d) There are foreseen programs for the future that have yet to be developed, such as the compilation of oral testimonies of first generation Basques; digitalization of Euskal Etxeak archives (stressing the pioneering work that the Charitable Basque-Navarre Society of Havana's historical archive has recovered) and other institutions (family archives, business archives...); and the compilation of audio, photographs, letters and other personal documents. In short, this document corpus will be the starting point of a future document hub, virtual archive, a centre of studies or a Basque Emigration Museum, whatever we wish to call it.

Urazandi III. Basques in American press, Basque-Americans in Basque press.

This project of digitalizing references of Basques in American press emerged at the end of 2005, initiated by the Office of Relations with Basque Communities, an organization that from the very start contacted the University of the Basque Country for its interpretation and start-up. In fact, this is precisely one of the most prominent characteristics of this project: that the Basque Government, the Basque Centres and through these the university world have been implicated in its start-up and development, a three-sided collaboration

Due to this, the project's *objectives* can be defined on two levels. From the point of view that we are most familiar with, the University, the digitalization presents itself as an opportunity to show the investigators a great volume of documentation, which by its own characteristics (scattered, difficult to locate) demand preliminary heuristic work that this project, once it is underway, will alleviate greatly. Second of all, from its operation dynamics we obtain a relation between said Basque Centres and the universities in their community, as a means to generate scientific relations among those universities and the Basque Country.

The *operation* mechanics are simple. Once a database is designed, which will have the description of the content of each reference obtained in the press medias that will be selected for analysis; various work groups, made up of American university students under the direction of their professors, will carry out the exhaustive research task, filing and obtaining photographic copies of each and every note, article, piece of news, report and even advertisements that make reference to the presence and activities of both local Basque communities and others, as well as in the Basque Country: current events, geography, language and history. However, this effort would be incomplete without the reverse view, the way in which public opinion, published in the Basque Country, collected and reflected Basques abroad.

The American universities are in charge of supervising the collection work in their respective spheres of action, while the University of the Basque Country will act as advisor in cases where doubts arise whether to include a reference or not, or doubts on a person, place or institution's Basque character. The University will also act as recipient and compiler of all the references obtained. Once they are treated and added to the general database, they are sent to each and all of the participating universities. This way the universities implicated will obtain, in addition to their own investigations, the complete sum of all the references obtained by all the universities that take part in the project.

The National University of the South pilot scheme (Bahía Blanca, Argentina)

The project was initially implemented as a pilot scheme in the city of Bahía Blanca, with the collaboration of the Memory Archive of the General Secretariat of Communication and Culture and the Department of Humanities, both dependent on the National University of the South (UNS). To give it a formal framework, on September 18, 2006, an agreement between the University of the Basque Country, the Basque Government, the Federation of Basque-Argentine Entities and the UNS was signed. All parties committed to conduct a comprehensive investigation of references and mentions of the Basque Community in the Bahía press.

It was decided to conduct the project in only one of the Argentine universities that showed interest in the project, with the intention of refining the methodology, perfect the protocols of document analysis, draw up the calculations on number of newspapers/years that each investigator could go through within a stipulated time. In general, answer all those questions relative to executing the project, before beginning the project in other universities.

The task of going through references about the actions of the Basque community in the Bahía Blanca press was initiated. In accordance with the criteria stipulated by the University of the Basque Country; which was two years before the creation of the local centre, in this case the Basque Union of Mutual Assistance of Bahía Blanca, which initiated its activities in January of 1899, which means the compilation began in the same month of 1897.

The implementation began in December of 2006 and a group of three students who are advanced in their Bachelor of History degree supervise its execution, they were selected because of their qualifications and experience with journalism sources. The group of students initially received specific training on the operation of the database as well as the history of the

Basque community, particularly in Argentina and Bahía Blanca. This last training was done through the reading of articles and books and constituted the necessary resources to understand the subject matter and problems that the notes reviewed would present.

Once the start date for the investigation and the work team were established, the following aspects that had to be decided were the criteria to follow in the selection of the newspapers, the time period to cover and the type of press releases to consider.

With respect to the first issue, the most significant newspapers were chosen for their print run and continuity². Eight newspapers were selected and considering the number of assistants and the programme's tasks for the one year period, it was determined that the time period would be defined from 1897 to 1920³.

On the issue of press release selection, it was opted to include all journalistic references (news, reports, articles, editorials, interviews, advertisements, notices, etc.) pertaining or relating to things Basque, including facts or situations that occurred both in America and the Basque Country. This exhaustive criteria requires the search of everything that refers to the Basque community so that the personal criteria of each investigator does not fall into play in the investigation a reference. However, this requirement slows down the investigation since it obligates the examination of articles that only refer to things "Basque" in a passive manner and, on occasions, do not have any connection at all with the community's actions or any of its members⁴. Likewise, the attention to detail required in the burden of information made it necessary to transcribe extensive lists of people linked to institutions, businesses or signup lists for Basque celebrations, whose names were loaded one by one onto the corresponding index cards.

The implementation of the program experienced some difficulties and complications of any project in its initial phase. These originated from two main points: the need to adjust the database to the specifications found in the Bahía press and the conditions of the material to review.

With regard to the first issue mentioned it was understandable that the software required some adaptations to optimize its performance in the initial phases of a project. In this case, the proposed fields were not altered but additional measures were established to overcome the database's limitations. Such as to include transcriptions of the texts from the notes of digitalizations that were completely or partially illegible, a possibility that was not contemplated in the database.

Concerning the second point, an important part of the newspapers were on microfilm which delayed the investigation since the reading process as a result becomes slower than when being read from paper. So that the initial objective of going through the newspapers corresponding to the 1897-1920 time period in the timeframe set will probably not be possible.

The subjects that can be studied from these articles investigated are as diverse as the disciplines that can be interested in their use. The notes referring to businesses and shops give an idea of Basques' integration in the labour force. The existence of consumer goods with references to the Basque people was also detected. The mention of events occurred in

2 The selection took into account studies dealing with local journalism, and the availability of the local archives. The city has the advantage of having one of the main libraries of the Argentine interior: the Bernardino Rivadavia Cultural Association Library, that has a complete newspaper and periodicals library of local publications (<http://www.abr.org.ar/>)

3 The newspapers considered were: *La Nueva Provincia* (1898-1920), *El Porteño* (1897-1901), *Bahía Blanca* (1906-1920), *Brisas* (1898), *El Comercio* (1902-1908 with interruptions), *El Tribuno* (1909-1912), *El Censor* (1909-1920) and *La Opinión* (1899-1900).

4 An example of this consists of the notes or references that mention a business or hotel with a name that refers to things Basque in any of its meaning, but only when referring to a fact or event that occurred in its vicinity.

the Basque Country permits one to know the presence of the Bahía press in the region, as well as the type of news that was considered by the local newspapers.

The editorial notes, unusual in the period selected, are extremely interesting to analyze the vision that the press had on emigration from the Basque Country and the characteristics of people of this origin. In other cases the news recorded make reference to the creation and the evolution of Basque immigrant associations in Bahía Blanca and the region, the important figures that are pointed out as being Basque and Basque traditions that are carried out in the city of Bahía Blanca.

Undoubtedly, the options that the investigation presents are broad and provide multiple perspectives of analysis to study the Basque presence in Bahía Blanca in particular, and the Province of Buenos Aires in general, as well as the processes inherent of the Basque provinces.

Future proposals

Unlike other cultural projects included in Urazandi, the cataloguing and digitalization of references on Basques in the American press is presented as a very long-term project. In the first place, it does not have a definite end date, or better said, there have existed so many newspapers throughout the history of the countries that have hosted Basque immigration, that the hope to be exhaustive and compile all the references is simply impossible to carry out. For this reason, both geographic and chronological criteria were established to prioritize the compilation work: focus on the municipality where Basque Centres existed or exist, and the already cited work of investigating references from two years before the creation of the first Basque Centre created in the municipality.

The base will be accumulative, since the incorporation of new universities to the project will allow the addition to a collection that is richer in data, news and images that permits us to offer unedited and unknown aspects on the presence of Basques in the world. We believe that this database will represent, with time, an inescapable reference, which will permit and encourage the emergence of new investigations, above all for studious youths interested in recovering the history and memory of the Basque influence on the world. It will undoubtedly be an indispensable addition to that archive and centre of studies of diaspora that the Basque Country owes all those who, for a long time, have contributed to spreading the Basque name beyond its borders.

Finally yet importantly, we must point out the social function of this cultural and academic effort in the heart of the Basque communities. This project rests on two fundamental issues: the implication of Basque Centre youth in an effort to rediscover their origins and the connection with the cultural elements in their surroundings. This way the Basque communities themselves will also take care of the recovery and assessment of their own historical memory and identity, offering themselves, their surroundings and all the Basques of the world, all the riches of their own way of maintaining, developing and projecting the reality of being Basque in a globalized world.