

The Basque Presence on the Internet: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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1 Introduction

The Internet promises to completely change the way we interact with one another. We are already seeing this in the economic sector, with more and more people shopping, banking, and investing online. And, the Internet has spawned many new sub-cultures such as gaming groups and hackers, among others. However, the role the Internet will have in the future of well established groups – large, cultural and ethnic entities – is not clear. How can the Internet help or hinder the struggles of Latin American minorities? Will the Internet give lesser used languages such as Welsh a better chance at survival? Beyond how we spend our money, and possibly socialize, will the Internet affect our daily lives in any significant way? And, if so, what does this mean for the Basque people and their language and culture?

To be honest, the answer may be that the Internet will have little, or even a negative, influence on the Basque culture. Luis Fernandez has found that even in forums whose purpose is to discuss Basque issues, Basque use is almost viewed negatively [1]. Another important technology, the printing press, does not seem to have immediately helped the Basques preserve nor strengthen their language. Rather, the neighboring languages became

more standardized and stronger, until the point that the Basque language was threatened. The advent of radio and television, however, have given new outlets for minority languages and cultures. While I do not believe the Internet will harm the survival or continued growth of the Basque culture, there are fears in some corners that the Internet will continue the global expansion of American culture and the English language, homogenizing the world at the expense of other cultures.

I will not pretend to be able to answer the questions posed above, as the Internet is, in some sense, still in its infancy in terms of the potential impact it can, and likely will, have on our lives. However, I will try to look at the current state of the Basque presence on the Internet, in an effort to determine what progress has been made and what might come next. I will begin by looking briefly at the history of the Basques on the Internet. I will also give some history on the creation of Buber's Basque Page, the Internet site that I created and maintain. Finally, I will try to give my views on what I think can be done in the future to strengthen the Basque presence on the Internet, and how this effort might assist in preserving Basque culture away from cyberspace and in the real world.

2 History of Basques on the Internet

The dates of the various events discussed here were supplied to me by Luis Fernandez.

The Basque presence on the Internet has had a short, but relatively tumultuous, history. Basque-L marks the first appearance of Basques in an organized way on the Internet. Created in December of 1993 by Marta Llordes Llanos, Basque-L is a mailing list intended to facilitate the discussion of Basque related topics. Over the years, it has been a forum for spirited discussions on politics, linguistics, and what makes a person Basque, as well as other themes. Today, the readership of Basque-L is dwindling, and newer, more topic or region specific lists are appearing. eGroups.com has several mailing lists in English. @Euskadi is a service that sends out information about Basque related Internet news. Etxera! gives information about Basque prisoners in Spain. basques is a general list for people wanting

to learn more about the Basque people and culture while `basque` is an email list used by the University of Nevada, Reno, to announce Basque related items of interest. In addition, eGroups.com has a number of Basque related lists in Spanish, French, and, most importantly, Euskara.

It is difficult to pinpoint the creation of the first Basque related web page. Two of the first pages were Buber's Basque Page (originally <http://students.washington.edu/buber>, now <http://www.buber.net/>) and the homepage of the University of the Basque Country (Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, EHU) (<http://www.ehu.es/>). Buber's Basque Page first appeared in the Fall of 1994 and the EHU homepage appeared around that time as well.

An important event in terms of the Basque history of the Internet (to paraphrase Mark Kurlansky) occurred in October 1995. It was at this time that the web page of Euskadi Information (EI) first appeared. EI was an alternative news source, reporting on events in the Basque Country from the opposing point of view from the official Spanish media. It was not long until they were discovered by that same media. In February 1996, the Spanish periodical *ABC* wrote a piece about them, discussing perceived ties to Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA). EI was immediately mailbombed by Spanish students, causing the site that hosted them to crash and forcing them ask EI to find another host. This was one of the first incidents of what could be called cyberterrorism, the use of some type of force, here the flooding of the EI site with email, to censor a voice that was unpopular. This also shows that the Internet is not the completely free forum for speech that it is often portrayed as, but rather, if people find a site offensive, they can find ways to censor that site.

February 1996 also saw the creation of the first web page by a Basque organization outside of the Basque Country. The then recently formed Zazpiak Bat club of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, put basic information about their club on the Internet. They were the first of several clubs to do so.

The following month, headlines from the only daily newspaper written in Basque, *Egun-karia*, appeared on the web. This was not an official effort on the part of *Egunkaria*, but was rather the effort of an individual to help inform Basques not living in the Basque Country

of current events there.

It was quickly followed, in July of 1996, by the creation of the first web site written entirely in the Basque language, the Basque language magazine *Ttipi-Ttapa*.

July 1996 also saw the creation of an alternative to Basque-L. Using the existing framework of Usenet, `soc.culture.basque` was created by some members of Basque-L who felt a need to find another outlet for their views. In some ways, `soc.culture.basque` was a split from Basque-L. This may be another example of how difficult it is to get Basques to hold discussions on important topics in a relatively supportive environment for any length of time. `soc.culture.basque` still exists today, though, in contrast to Basque-L, where the majority of items are written in English, Spanish is the preferred language.

Nearly two years after the appearance of the first Basque related web site, the government of the Basque Autonomous Community joined the effort by creating their official homepage in October 1996. This site offered some basic information about the government and statistics on the people of the Basque Country at a community level.

October of 1996 also saw the appearance of two other Internet entities, both of which were important in terms of the Basque presence on the web. First, **EuskaraZ** was born, the first Basque-only mailing list. The idea behind this mailing list is that, in order to strengthen the Basque community, Basque issues need to be addressed in the Basque language, not English, French or Spanish.

At the same time, Euskal Herria Journal (EHJ) went online (<http://members.freespeech.org/ehj/>). EHJ is an alternative to the mainstream news sources about the Basque Country. A year later, in July of 1997, after the killing of Miguel Blanco, a Popular Party member of the Ermua city council, EHJ was mail bombed for what was viewed as their sympathetic stand on ETA, the group responsible for Blanco's death. The organization hosting their site, the Institute for Global Communications (IGC), was forced to remove them from their servers, as they posed too much of a risk to IGC's other clients.

In July, 1998, **Badator** went online. Badator is an online database of Basque archives and represents the first effort to give access through the Internet to Basque historical information.

Since 1998, the Basque presence on the web has continued to grow. New sites appear all of the time. Various towns of the Basque Country have put web sites online, giving brief histories, calendars of events, and contact information. Several groups of the Basque diaspora¹ have done the same, following the lead of Zazpiak Bat. However, as we will see, the current state of the Basque presence on the web is still woefully short of where it could potentially be.

3 Web Presence of the Basque Country

Though things are dramatically changing, the official web presence of the Basque Country is still very small. Of course, the government of the Autonomous Basque Community (Comunidad Autonomia Vasca, CAV) has several official web sites where one can learn about details of the Basque legislature as well as general information about CAV, ranging from tourism and economy to scientific research and the current situation of the Basque language (<http://www.euskadi.net/>). The three provinces composing CAV (Bizkaia, Araba, and Gipuzkoa), all have official provincial government web pages (<http://www.bizkaia.net/>, <http://www.alava.net/>, <http://www.gipuzkoa.net/>). Nafarroa, not part of CAV, also has an official presence on the web, where similar information can be found (<http://www.cfnavarra.es/>). On the French side of the Basque Country (Iparralde), the situation is much worse. None of the three French-Basque provinces has an official web presence. They do share a site promoting tourism of the region (<http://www.cotebasque.tm.fr/>), but there is no site that gives information at a government level for any of the three.

As political units becomes smaller in size and scope, the chance of finding any web presence, much less an official one, becomes correspondingly much smaller. The capitals of the Spanish-Basque provinces do have official web pages (Donostia: <http://www.donsnsn.es/>, Bilbao: <http://www.bilbao.net/>, Vitoria-Gasteiz: <http://www.vitoria-gasteiz.es/>).

¹By using the word diaspora, I mean nothing more than a group of people who have dispersed from their original land of origin.

org/, and Iruna-Pamplona: <http://www.pamplona.net/>). Of the capitals of the French-Basque provinces, Donibane Garazi, Baiona, and Maule, only Baiona has an official page (<http://www.ville-bayonne.fr/>), and this one is geared more toward the tourist than to someone wanting to learn about the city and its inhabitants.

Of course, there are several other cities and towns that have created an official presence on the web. Some examples are Abadiano (<http://www.abadiano.org/>), Getxo (<http://www.getxo.net/>), Sestao (<http://www.sestao.net/>), Eibar (<http://www.eibar.org/>), Mondragon (<http://www.arrasate-mondragon.net/>), Zarautz (<http://www.zarautz.com/>), Lekunberri (<http://www.animsa.es/navarra/lekunberri>), and Bera (http://www.animsa.es/Bera-Vera_de_Bidasoa/), among others. However, these pages are all independent in that they do not acknowledge one another. There is no mention of the neighboring villages and cities. A virtual net, linking cities that lie near one another, would allow a visitor to conduct a virtual tour of the Basque Country, going from one town to the next. This is the kind of interconnected web that would greatly enhance the quality of these web sites.

However, the rate of growth of Basque related webpages has been very fast. A search on the key word “basque” produced 26,000 matches in 1998. Today, that same search retrieves 1,020,000 matches. For the keyword “basques”, there were 6,000 matches in 1998 and there are 39,700 today. This gives an estimated growth of between 600 to 4000%. While the numbers themselves may be meaningless, this does illustrate the fast pace at which the Basques are expanding on the web. ²

While the relative rate of growth has risen quickly, the total number of Basque-themed pages is still small. It is still difficult to find information on a large number of Basque topics on the web. The reason for the limited Basque web presence is the fact that Internet access is still very rare in the Basque Country. In 1998, only 3.2% of the people living in CAV were connected to the Internet. This is to be compared to the 4% for all of Spain and the

²It should be pointed out that the searches were conducted with different search engines. The searches conducted now were done with Google (<http://www.google.com/>) and those conducted in 1998 were done with a different search engine (likely AltaVista or HotBot).

8% for Catalunya. Today, this number is probably between 10 and 15% [2]. However, this is still a small number compared to the nearly 50% enjoyed by the United States. With so few people connected to the Internet, the possibility of personal development of Basque information sources is small.

One reason that Internet access is so rare is because of the prohibitive costs of connecting to the Internet in the Basque Country. Though the costs of Internet service providers (ISPs) seem comparable to the United States, local calls to access the Internet are not free. Thus, time spent on the Internet must be kept to a minimum in order to keep costs from escalating.

This lack of access is reflected at the university level, where students are not given the same level of access to both the Internet and computer resources that exists in the United States. For example, at the University of Washington, any student can create a web page with 20 megabytes of space for storing files. The students in the Basque Country do not have these resources available, as evidenced by the abundance of Basque related webpages hosted by GeoCities, a provider offering free web space at the cost of having to carry their advertisements. Students do not have the resources to create personal pages that could, and would, be a great source of Basque information. As an example of the possibilities open to students, take Buber's Basque Page, arguably one of the more popular English-language resources on Basque culture. It started out as the personal homepage of a university student.

As pointed out by Jonmikel Insausti Mercero, one of the biggest problems in developing a larger Basque presence on the web is the complete lack of tools in the Basque language [3]. The first Basque language email hosting service appeared only recently (<http://www.euskalerrria.org/> on October 23, 2000). There are no useful Basque indexing tools. Basque spell-checkers need to become more wide spread. aurki.com, a Basque language indexing tool for the Internet, has been created and is growing, but it is one of the few such Basque language Internet tools in existence. Basically, these kinds of tools must exist so that a Basque person can interact with the Internet – both passively and actively – in Basque, not in Spanish or English. This is critical in making Basque a vital language in the twenty-first century, a living language that people use in all aspects of their daily lives, not a language

that is simply spoken about.

This same theme is the subject of a paper presented at the First International Symposium on Basque Studies by Luis Fernandez [1]. He examines the use of Basque in various Basque related forums and comes to the conclusion that the language is seldomly used unless its use is mandated. In addition, he finds that the use of Basque in forums even where the issue of Basque use is discussed is viewed in a negative way, since not all of the participants can speak Euskara. If Basque issues cannot be discussed in Basque, what kind of future can the language possibly have? Thus, it is imperative to make interacting with the Internet in Basque a possibility, an interaction that is not mediated through Spanish, French or English, if Basque is going to be a viable language in the next century.

Finally, there has not been a concerted effort from the government to create a multi-level presence on the web. It may be this is not the place for government. There is also the complicating fact that the Basque Country, as a whole, does not fall under one political jurisdiction, making it very difficult for the government of CAV to assist the Basques of Iparralde. However, it seems that, in the case of the Basque Country, a governmental push to create a multi-level web presence – from province to valley to town – would be ideal, as small towns probably cannot afford neither the hardware nor the programming expertise needed to create such a presence. This may be the perfect project for a university computer science or communications department. To have photographs, the history, and contact information for every town in the Basque Country would both facilitate communication between the Basque Country and the outside world, as well as help Basques of the diaspora to learn more about the places their ancestors came from.

It should be noted that the Basque Government has tried to increase the interconnectedness of the diaspora by encouraging all of the Euskal Etxea to go online with electronic mail and a web presence, to the point of donating computers to most of the clubs. The results of this effort, however, have not been very fruitful, as very few clubs still have any presence on the web. Many of the clubs associated with the North American Basque Organization (NABO) have at least a small presence on the NABO site (<http://www.naboinc.com/>).

Many of the clubs in other parts of the world, however, have no presence at all. One list of Euskal Etxeak of the world (<http://bsd.gk.net/portal/portal9.htm>), shows only six clubs, out of sixty, as having web pages. Even with the support of the Basque Government, very little has been done by most clubs to create any kind of web presence. The clubs must take some initiative to create this presence, in order to strengthen the Basque culture worldwide.

4 About Buber's Basque Page

As mentioned, Buber's Basque Page (BBP) was created in the Fall of 1994. Originally, it was meant to be a personal project through which I could learn HTML (HyperText Markup Language), the language that is used to create web pages. At first, BBP consisted of nothing more than some notes taken from Basque language classes I had attended in Donostia as well as some articles that had been posted to Basque-L. However, as the number of visitors grew, so did the contributions by these very same visitors, until BBP grew to what it is today.

Through Buber's Basque Page, I met Xabier Ormaetxea, a member of the Basque parliament who, like myself, has an interest in genealogy. Most of the people who visit BBP are Basques of the diaspora who want to learn more about their ancestry. Often, they know nothing more than that, maybe, their surname is Basque, usually suggested to them by some friend familiar with the Basque people. (It is truly remarkable to me how prestigious having a Basque surname must be to the average person. As soon as a person hears that his or her name might be Basque, he or she is really excited to verify if it is true.) Xabier and I started a surname research service, through which a visitor could enter their surname and Xabier would consult the various tomes on Basque surnames for the meaning, history, and localization of the name, for no fee. This service proved to be immensely popular, so much so that we had to limit the number of surnames we accepted each week. Soon, we were joined by Susan Ybarra, who used the extensive genealogical library in Salt Lake City to assist Xabier in looking up names. However, as personal work loads increased, none of

us had the time to work on the service and it had to be discontinued. The work that was accomplished is archived at <http://www.buber.net/Basque/Surnames/surlist.html>.

One of the most frustrating periods for me personally in working on Buber's Basque Page occurred during January and February of 1996. It was during this time that *ABC* had published an item on EI, suggesting that the EI site was pro-ETA. Written on January 28, 1996, this article said:

Among the Web pages to which CSE refers [CSE=Solidarity Committee of Euskadi, referring to those at Euskadi Information], the so-called "Buber's Basque" also distinguishes itself, in which appears, at the top of its presentation, a saying that goes: "The vigor and energy that the Basques put in all that they do is almost impossible to equal." In the same page there also appears a section called "The Basque Country", in which it is affirmed that "studies of genetics and of blood show that the Basques are a distinct people from any other in Europe." In addition, pleasure is taken in the explanation of the oppression to which the Basques were subjected under the Arab, Roman, Visigoth and French empires and a territorial description is offered of the Basque Country similar to that of the CSE. There is also talk of a supposed "diaspora" of the Basque people.

BBP was mentioned again in a follow up article published on February 13, 1996:

On the other hand, Blas Pedro Uberuaga, maintainer of the "Buber's Basque Page", another of the servers in the Internet that, next to others such as those called "Marxism" and "Chomsky", are recommended by the CSE, has accused *ABC* from Washington of "attacking" his project. As will be recalled, *ABC* informed the past 28 of January that, together with various information about the society and culture of the Basques, "Buber's Page" presents an interested and partial vision of the history and territorial demarcation of the Basque Country, while offering a direct connection with the CSE and provides information similar to that of the pro-ETA committee.

(the poor wording in these quotes is due to my poor translation of the original Spanish).

As these quotes illustrate, *ABC* was attempting to link EI, and by extension, my page and any Basque related pages, to ETA, in order to discredit them in the eyes of the general public. It should be noted that the articles *ABC* mentions as containing information about the genetic studies and the history of the Basque people in Arab and Roman times were taken directly from *Grolier's Encyclopedia*.

This was the only real threat to Buber's Basque Page. I have also received various emails containing hatred toward the Basque people, usually coinciding with the mailing bombings experienced by other sites, these, in turn, occurring at times of high tension in the Basque Country due to violence.

One of the largest obstacles in creating and maintaining BBP is the fact that all Basque related topics are highly politicized. Any statement about the Basque Country immediately draws criticism. For example, by adding Nafarroa as a traditional Basque province, I have offended many Nafarroans. In addition, it is difficult to find English sources of Basque information that are not limited to one side or another in terms of their point of view. This, and the overall lack of English information sources about the Basques, have, at times, made maintaining BBP more difficult than it might otherwise have been. Especially bothersome to many visitors is the one-sided view of the history of the Basque Country given on BBP. Many visitors criticize the recounting of Basque history as being overly nationalistic and being blind to many facts that reduce the strength of historical arguments for the historical existence of a Basque nation and Basque nationalism.

In any description of Buber's Basque Page, thanks must be given to the many contributors who have really done the larger amount of work in adding content to the pages. Basque-L and its members have been invaluable in both supplying content through their conversations and their postings from other sources as well as their readiness to allow me to use their words on my site. BBP is entirely composed of outside contributions, without which there would be no site. As the membership of Basque-L subsided, other sources stood up and took their place in supplying me with new and original content. Much of this has been

from outside the United States, with major contributors coming from Argentina (Martin Urionaguena, Alberto E. Azcona, Alberto P. Lassus Deppahille), Colombia (Pieter Hartog), England (Larry Trask), and the Basque Country (Xabier Ormaetxea). Various people have also submitted articles on various topics, including Food (Maite Arnaiz Aranzasti, Juan Carlos Lopez Duque) and History (Peter Miller). Finally, I would like to thank those that have helped with translations, including Javier Herrera for helping with Euskara and Xavier Guesnu for helping with French.

5 Influence of the Internet on the Basque Community

An important question that arises during this discussion is “what is the impact of the Internet on the Basque Community?” This question can be asked separately for both the Basque community in the Basque Country or the Basques in the diaspora. It can be further extended to include all Basques, world-wide.

The larger influences that the Internet is having on the Basque community, much less any community, are hard to gauge at this time. The Internet is still in its relative infancy and, though it has already had a profound impact in the economic sector, its presence is less strongly felt in the daily life of traditional cultures. That is to say, while the Internet has spawned many sub-cultures of its own, the influence the Internet has had on cultural groups already well established is not as easy to see.

The first obvious benefit the Internet has had on the world in general, and the Basque community in particular, is a greater level of communication. Before the digital age, communication was by either telephone or mail. While both of these are excellent forms of communication, they have one major disadvantage as opposed to electronic correspondence: the ease with which one can meet strangers and develop a discourse with them. More importantly, these strangers can come from anywhere in the world. They are not limited to one’s local neighborhood. I, for example, have met many people from Central and South America, Spain, the Philippines and Australia, who have not only helped me extend my knowledge of

other cultures, but also learn more about the Basque culture we share in common. Without the Internet, through great effort, I may have met one or two of these people, but I would not have had a chance to sample the great smorgasbord of diversity that one finds through the Internet.

On a larger scale, this greater communication – greater interconnectedness – allows groups within, for example, the United States to have a greater awareness of the goings on of one another. A group in Reno is able to see what the group in Seattle is planning and to participate at some level previously not available. This was recently demonstrated when the Zazpiak Bat Basque Club of Reno, Nevada, was able to contact Seattle Euskal Etxea and arrange a mini-tour of the txalaparta group, the Ugarte brothers. This is extended further, as groups in South America and North America share information and ideas with one another as well as with other groups in the Basque Country. Through this exchange, we learn that Argentina has a very large and strong Basque community and that the Basque experience there has been very different from that of the sheepherder in western Idaho. Some of this communication existed before the digital age and organizations such as NABO and the Fundación Vasco Argentina Juan de Garay (<http://www.juandegaray.org.ar/>) are testaments to this. However, the level of interconnectedness is much greater now that information and ideas can be shared daily via electronic mail and the web.

The Internet facilitates research into one's past, by allowing a person to find remote cousins or other people from an ancestor's home town. This creates a stronger sense of connection to the Basque Country, a connection that may be of benefit to both sides through increased communication, entrepreneurial opportunities, and cultural exchanges.

In the end, this all leads to a greater sense of unity among all of the Basques of the world. If the Basques of Idaho feel a stronger connection to the current day Basques of Euskal Herria, and not just to the Euskal Herria of their ancestors, then this can only help ensure that the Basque culture and language will continue to endure and thrive for many years to come.

The recent book by John and Mark Bieter, *An Enduring Legacy*, describes how increased

communication between the descendants of Basques in Idaho and their “cousins” in the Basque Country helped revitalize the Basque community of Idaho during the last quarter of the twentieth century[4]. This greater communication took the form of cultural exchanges and trips to the Basque Country. While this is still the best way to learn about the Basque culture and language, it is also an expensive proposition that only allows for infrequent contact by a relatively small number of people. Now that digital communication can be added to the options for the exchange of ideas, the opportunity for continued growth and development of the Basque culture in Idaho, as well as other parts of the world outside of the Basque Country, is correspondingly much greater.

6 The Future of the Basques on the Internet

What does the future hold for the Basques and their use of the Internet? It is hard to predict how technology will transform our lives, as anyone born before the computer age would readily testify. However, one can think of some possibilities that are worth consideration. These suggestions come from the point of view of the diaspora, or from a Basque living outside of Euskal Herria. The needs of the Basque Country itself may be very different and I am not intimate enough with the situation of Euskal Herria to comment on those needs.

The most pressing need at this time, in the eyes of the Basque diaspora, is to put more genealogical information online. The average member of the Basque diaspora, in many cases, is hardly aware that he or she has some remote Basque ancestry. Once he or she learns that possibly his or her surname is Basque, he or she immediately desires to learn more. However, there are no resources to turn to: there are no books about Basque surnames written in English and books written in Spanish are hard to find outside of the Basque Country. If the contents of some of these tomes could be put online, so that a visitor could search for a surname and find its meaning and origin, it would greatly enhance the sense of connectedness and unity the Basque diaspora has with the Basque Country. The Irish, for example, have created an extensive system of bulletin boards and surname specific email

lists to assist members of the Irish diaspora in learning about their genealogy.

An official presence of all Basque towns and cities would greatly add to this effort. If people are able to “visit”, online, the towns of their families and ancestors, it will also give them a more direct connection to the Basque Country. Of course, there is no replacement for an actual visit, but for many, this is as close as they may be able to achieve. In addition, it may give some youngster the push he or she needs to actually choose to visit the Basque Country. In any case, to take a virtual tour of the Basque Country, where one could visit points of interest in a given city and then move on in any direction to the next city, would be an enjoyable way to learn about the Basque Country in a way that is not currently possible.

I feel that more information, in general, about the Basques needs to be made available. There are two sources of information that I have in mind. First, a general information source, such as an online version of the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Basque Country*, would give all people interested in any Basque topics a starting point. This would encourage children, for example, to do more school projects on Basque topics. It would help the Basques of the diaspora to learn more about the culture of their ancestors. It would allow them to learn about the important figures of Basque history, the details of Basque pre-Christian religion, the complex issues behind the independence movement, and many other facets of Basque culture that are currently unknown and, practically, unknowable for most Basques of the diaspora.

Secondly, the Internet would be the perfect venue to make research into Basque topics available to a wider audience. Because of the unique history and situation of the Basques and their culture and language, they are often the focus of indepth linguistic and archaeological research, work which is inaccessible to the average Basque. The papers that result from this research should be put online to make it access easier for all Basques. For example, the contents of this journal would reach a much wider audience if the articles were placed online. The same is true of the proceedings of the conference held in Reno, Nevada in June 1998: *Basque in the Contemporary World: Migration, Identity and Globalization*. This information is both very interesting and also very important in learning about and promoting Basque

culture. This already occurs in the natural sciences. Most natural science journals have an electronic version and many authors appearing in them also post their papers on personal websites, making their research much more accessible. If Basque research papers could also be put online, either by the journals they are published in or by the authors, after the paper has been published in a journal, then this research too would reach a much wider audience.

There should come a day when students throughout the world will be able to sit down at their computer and sit in on a class of Euskara taking place in the Basque Country. This is the true potential of the Internet and the place where it can have the largest impact. Imagine a child from Buenos Aires, attending Euskara classes held in Gernika with other students in Boise, Manila, and Sydney. The friendships and interconnectedness that would arise from such a classroom would have a truly profound effect on the Basque community. There would no longer be a Basque diaspora, as all Basques would truly be connected and living, in some sense, together in the same world. At the same time, they would bring together the perspectives of many different regions of the world together to address the future of the Basque Country and the Basque world community. This will only strengthen the foundation of Basque culture and Euskara as we move into the twenty-first century.

The need for such a virtual classroom is indirectly pointed out by the Bieters in their book. They discuss how Basque-Americans have to choose which aspects of the Basque culture are convenient to incorporate into their lives. At the moment, it is very difficult to incorporate the language and history of the Basque region. While aspects such as dancing and singing are an integral part of the Basque culture, will the Basque culture survive if the language is not also learned and passed on to children? A virtual classroom would help in that it would be more convenient for a larger number of people, something they could do from home with a relatively small cost. That such a classroom would be highly successful is shown by the success of the Basque correspondence class offered by the Center for Basques Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, a less interactive version of what I am envisioning here. Of course, finding a way to teach such a class without a prohibitive tuition will be difficult, but it can and must be done.

I would like to end this section by saying that the great potential of the Internet for promoting and preserving Basque culture can only be tapped through the hard work of volunteers. Much as Buber's Basque Page has grown because of the many submissions of its visitors, the next stage in the evolution of the Basque presence on the web will only occur through similar, but more coordinated, efforts. I would like to propose the creation of a forum that would be composed of individuals from all parts of the greater Basque community that would work to build the next generation of the Basque presence on the web. This forum would be unofficial, that is, not linked to any directing agency. It would not be exclusive in that it should not prohibit other Basque related projects from occurring, if others felt it necessary to create other forms of expression. What it would entail is a group of people who work to create a cohesive experience for the Internet visitor, an experience that can only be created by the dedication of many people who love the Basque culture. Members of the forum would do tasks such as translation of documents, researching subjects (this would be facilitated by someone with access to a large Basque library), taking photographs, designing the look of the pages, writing both HTML and CGI code, and being innovative and creative with the possibilities offered by the Internet. Something like BBP might be the kernel, the starting point, but such a project would go far beyond what pages like BBP have been able to accomplish, and this can only be achieved by taking all of the individual efforts of all of the people currently working on their own projects and pooling that energy and knowledge together to compliment one another, to create something more than any of us can do alone. It is only in this way that the true potential of the Internet can be developed. Anyone interested in working together on such a project, please contact me.

7 Conclusion

We have seen how the Internet has witnessed a quick rise in the presence of the Basques within the last seven years. Scattered information has become available on a variety of subjects. However, it is because of the lack of a central, organizing effort that the current

situation is limited in what it offers. The potential is so great and, currently, it is not being utilized. The Basques have a chance to really lead by example in this area, to show the world how the Internet can be used to truly enhance a culture, to enhance the lives of a large group of people in a concerted way. The current models of Internet use offer important, but limited and, more importantly, isolated services to users. A larger, more coordinated effort to create a truly revolutionary model for Internet use and the way it adds to our lives is possible. We must find a way to make such a possibility reality.

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