

## Presentation

# The brand of a country with a future

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Under economy of identity we understand that productive business the competitiveness of which is to a larger or lesser degree, yet significantly based on the intangibles driven from the territory where such production occurs. As immaterial properties of a product or service become more relevant and the latter becomes less of a commodity, the value of identity increases as a differentiating asset.

Resorting to difference is becoming an increasingly relevant tool in competing in a global market. And it is especially so in countries with an industrial tradition that cannot compete with emerging countries in terms of price and need to make up for it by providing their products and services with immaterial properties. An especially relevant segment of such properties is that related with the identity of the manufacturing country or the company's country of origin, where the tasks with the highest added value (e.g. R&D&I, design, quality control) are done, while raw materials or a substantial part of manufacturing come from or are done in third countries.

It is no random that upon interviewing the consuls of many countries from all over the world, the most receptive ones to the concept of economy of identity were the representatives of countries with an industrial tradition, especially Europe, or a millenary culture like Japan. Despite a few cases in which opinions are numbed by burdens from the past, it is the European countries that use their brand image in a more or less explicit, systematic and organised way to provide their products and services with a relevant point of differentiation.

Such differentiation is based firstly on an appropriate degree of self-esteem and loyalty of

the domestic market to own products and services, and secondly on managing this difference, this country brand in a systematic and organised way to maximise its potential through cooperation between the public and the private sector.

However, identity is not only relevant in providing products and services with an immaterial value that differentiates them from the rest. It is also in attracting and seizing talent and raising investment. Identity is also the historical substrate that led to the current setting of economic and social stakeholders of an economy rendering it more or less attractive in a global world, although many thought it would become homogeneous and undifferentiated. Montserrat Pareja-Eastaway and Josep Miquel Piqué remind us so in analysing the importance of the territory in the knowledge society.

Following the teachings of Manuel Castells, who also contributes to this monograph, the relevance of identity in economics is not just limited to the current setting of a productive and social fabric resulting from a historical legacy, within which any company, professional or researcher looking for a vantage location will take grip more or less easily. Identity is and needs to be preferably a common project for the future.

The current economic recession has come, especially in Catalonia, with a feeling of pessimism and disorientation among most of the population and hence economic and social stakeholders. It is true that many companies from any branch and of any size decided to take or enlarge their international footprint as a reaction to the downfall of the domestic market and uncertainty in the Spanish one. Deterioration of the economy and the Spain brand we are currently mostly

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identified with has harmed our companies and increased the feeling of lack of protection.

Relevant sociologists claim that the main difference between the deep crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s and the current one lies in the fact that despite difficulties and painful restructuring, those were times of hope and collective fellowship based on recently achieved democracy, consolidation of the first steps in home rule and the wish for European integration. However, now we are lacking such a collective undertaking, this future tale taking the best of our capacities for a common project.

There are events or decisions that, without intending to do so explicitly, place our country at the forefront at international level and contribute towards creating our country brand. Just to mention two recent ones, the massive demonstration on 10 July claiming our nation's right to decide its own future and the decision by the Parliament of Catalonia to ban that cruel butchery that is bullfighting placed our little country in the world's

headlines and strengthened its image as a pacific, firm and modern nation. They contributed towards creating in the collective mindset our brand image for millions of individuals, potential consumers of our products or users of our services. However, these two events will not make for themselves the future tale, the common project we need.

In my opinion, this common project that is shared by increasingly more people, more entrepreneurs, workers and professionals, is that of full sovereignty – full sovereignty to handle our resources, set our priorities, take our decisions and organise ourselves as we believe to be most convenient according to our interests, as a society of its own that distinguishes us from our neighbours.

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