

Barcelona: identity and cosmopolitanism

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Barcelona's drive as an international metropolis and its ability to be recognised as such stems from a strong and genuine identity provided to a large extent by the fact of being the capital of a country, Catalonia, and thus its take-off and landing platform to and from the world.

Economic development in Barcelona is based on labour as a value, talent as a capacity, innovation as a concept and activity and people mix as an attitude. These items are the result of a tradition and a lifestyle, that is, an identity coming with the city's undeniable cosmopolitanism ever since the Middle Ages, providing added value to the Barcelona brand..



International recognition of the Barcelona brand is in my opinion explained by its ability of combining a strong visibility of its identity with living its cosmopolitan drive as a great international metropolis. The economic yield of the Barcelona identity is very relevant as it makes it grow and develop together with its cosmopolitanism as expected from a modern city.

Cities creating a strong dynamic link between their own personality and internationalisation develop solidly and consistently over time, with a significant economic result. Barcelona's Catalan identity makes it internationally visible as it becomes unique, and its intrinsic cosmopolitanism places it among the other great cities of the world.

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Just compare Barcelona's identity and cosmopolitanism in 2010 and in 1960. From being considered Spain's second city to being acknowledged as the capital of Catalonia – and increasingly also of the Mediterranean – has enlarged the city's value regarding both its singularity and its **cosmopolitanism**. The latter is part of the identity the same way as the particular identity helps in creating an international one. This is how big cities are.

Today, neither Tokyo, New York, Singapore, Barcelona nor any city in the world can be understood without the others, without the economic bonds linking them with each other and without cosmopolitan interrelation made of singular identities. A big city only can be so in a sustainable and sustained manner over time if it manages to deepen into its own soul and project it all over the world while taking over other identities and assimilating them. Catalan Barcelona is a success story comparable to French Paris or Chinese Shanghai.

The Barcelona brand, the reflection of a country

Among the big international metropolis, Barcelona has a strong personality making it singular as an attractive brand. In a difficult balance between identity and cosmopolitanism, its city branding process is completed successfully, making it today a city that is a brand and an economic value of its own thanks to this dynamic balance. The different business areas consider the Barcelona brand an added value generating objective benefits for a myriad of private and common interests. It is a solid growth factor creating trust on the territory and beyond. This territory could be defined as that of the city of Barcelona but also its metropolitan area, and even a brand raising an interest for Catalonia, being as it is its capital; or even as the natural capital of the Western Mediterranean Arc megaregion **Richard Florida¹** calls **Eurosunbelt**, an area reaching from Alicante to Lyon. The Barcelona brand is thus the big take-off and landing platform for the city and Catalonia, but increasingly also for a territory going beyond. It serves as a take-off of the main business initiatives of the region, territories or areas of which it is the capital and that are strong, daring and vital enough to try to go international and global. Plus, it is the landing platform of ideas, projects and people looking for the necessary substrate and conditions in Barcelona to develop. Barcelona is thus the tie between bonds. Its international positioning has been achieved by combining identity and cosmopolitanism.

This position has been reached thanks to being the capital of Catalonia, that is, a meeting point (capital) with an own identity (Catalonia), both in constant change. Barcelona has benefited from Catalonia to bring together capital and people coming from all over, and Catalonia has used Barcelona to have an international platform for its own visibility. The one cannot be understood without the other, and this circumstance, at a point at which half the nearly 7 billion people living in the world do so in cities, means that urban areas like Barcelona can be represented as well or even better than the nations they belong to.



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It is in this respect that Barcelona is the capital city of Catalonia as both share a set of values, a lifestyle and an idiosyncrasy Barcelona can disseminate at international forums more easily than Catalonia, which has more difficulties in finding international platforms adapted to its peculiarities. As a consequence, Barcelona has to contribute to expand the positive values associated to its brand to the whole of the Catalonia brand, thus creating synergies and a genuine win-win situation for both. Although this task does not yield immediate results, there are essential values typical of both brands shared by them. Modernity, hospitality, climate, industrialisation, innovation and entrepreneurship are points in common of both brands and their association extends Barcelona's good reputation to all of Catalonia.

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Singularisation, an option for economic strength

The current economic situation, which is certainly very difficult and lasting longer than initially predicted, suggests some new challenges that can only be overcome by optimising the most positive factors of the own idiosyncrasy. Not everything is

allowed to overcome the crisis. Considering the own personality, the points that will be decisive for the next decades will need to be strengthened instead of hastily following the latest trend imported from the most recent fashionable place with no reference to be successful. Barcelona has an economic development based on four quite dynamic items of responsibility: labour as a value, talent as a capacity, innovation as a concept and activity and people mix as an attitude. With these four constructive properties – which might be completed with others – Barcelona intends to define itself and appear as a consolidated area with an economic record and an emerging territory regarding ICT, the new industries and new forms of productive economy. Barcelona is constantly reinventing itself following its long historical tradition of economic malleability, always watchful of change that may mean an opportunity of improvement and further development.

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The capital of Catalonia is looking again for a combination of business, specialisation in the diversity of productive areas, a diversified specialisation allowing it to be globally competitive and solid in time, far from improvisation and occasional competition, going for quality and top level. Barcelona is today on the way towards singularity as a brand meaning economic strength, quality and creativity as a result of the strong personality conferred by its economic history.

A city is not just a recipient containing business but an economic producer in itself. The main experts in urban economy believe that the symbolic and affective dimension is very relevant. «Looking from very close, the value only reflects and follows the flows of community, identity, ethnic and professional exchange bearing a collective meaning. It is social exchange what

provides value for places», Evelyne Perrin² says. Cities having this intangible value are those creating wealth, that is, they receive investment with the establishment of new companies and new skilled workforce. They are the cities entering economic competition with other big cities that also aspire to have the brand values of a city recognised internationally.

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Citizens, receivers and beneficiaries of growth

Barcelona needs to go on telling a consistent story about what it is and what it wants to be. It needs to go on elaborating a city model recognisable to its residents, who are in charge and the top beneficiaries of its economic growth. This model needs to be renewed along a clear direction, the more so in current times, but not only in economic terms but also in a socially legitimate way. It has to be based on a given urban landscape and a quality of public space of its own, defined within the symbolic, emotional and value domain of its inhabitants, while considering a whole set of basic services and infrastructure.

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To make headway towards this goal, Barcelona needs to define and keep a strong identity generating a strong economy, for a strong economy in turn generates a strong identity. These two ideas feed each other, as do identity and cosmopolitanism. Kwame Anthony Appiah claims that modern cosmopolitanism feeds on diversity and

difference between local personalities. The strength of the own personalities makes the world richer and more dynamic as dialogue and international social and economic synergies can only occur between solidly defined players. The global resources we are enjoying for the first time in history just strengthened worldwide cross-connections into all directions. Growth resulting from economic exchange stems from the singularity of other territories as a stimulus of the own singularity and is comparable to the dynamic principle of competitiveness. The capital of Catalonia fulfils most of this premise and has been an important economic centre from the Middle Ages to the different industrial and technological revolutions. However, it had never been able to define a model based on its own most genuine identity and determined cosmopolitanism until two decades ago. In fact, Barcelona's tourism success story is made of harmonious and shared public-private management together with a practical demonstration that the own identity is also a very profitable economic asset. Tourism is the first example of the fruitful combination of identity and cosmopolitanism.

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Cosmopolitanism marked by an own genuine identity

Barcelona is a prime urban tourist destination in the First World as it has a strong distinctive, unmistakable and positive personality of its own. Its identity is completed with being a cosmopolitan and attractively diverse city with a high degree of conviviality and identifiable as a big city with a service offer for residents and tourists. The identity of all big cities of the world is at the same time local, national and cosmopolitan,

multicultural with different shades and complexities. The merit of Barcelona is that without being the capital of an independent state, it is recognised by other capitals as one of the world's leading cities as it competes economically with them but also because it is among those being the top cultural reference of their territories.

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This has been possible because the dialectic opposition between identity and cosmopolitanism has been overcome, which John Frow³ characterised in the area of tourism as a «creative tension mistrusting tourism as a legitimate business, an industry able to create benefits without harming the local idiosyncrasy». Barcelona has a specific singularity, an identity that is very



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relevant in Europe and the Mediterranean and impossible to copy or swap with any other city in the world as it is a genuinely Catalan identity, being as it is the capital of that nation.

Tourism is successful in Barcelona as it provides the visitor with the most essential in the business: authenticity. It allows to know a reality, a specific personality it has been able to preserve against international levelling as threatened by massification. This is what provides tourist and thus economic value. It is along these lines that Dean MacCannell⁴ defines tourists as «the paradigm of modern times», as they are part of an egalitarian and massified international identity on the one hand and look relentlessly for the authenticity of distinctive and recognisable personalities on the other. What provides Barcelona its own distinctive identity is what cannot be copied even if you wanted to. What cannot be copied is what has left its footprint on the territory as a result of the particular historical development of each area. In our case, this is the result of development occurred in Catalonia, which expresses particularly in its capital in a different way from the territories that do not belong to our nation. And within the nation, its singularity is being the capital.

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Creativity and open-mindedness, items for progress

This is the typical case of the Industrial Revolution in Catalonia. It was one of the first such phenomena in Europe, allowing not only an economic and material perspective for Catalans but

also cultural strengthening of the Catalan identity. Upon extinction of the Spanish colonial empire they were dependent on, Barcelona and Catalonia managed to reorient their productive economy and counteracted the lack of basic raw materials with an effort in foreign trade and cosmopolitan relations with the rest of the world. Catalonia is the only country in southern Europe and the only area in Spain that went through the Industrial Revolution at the same time as the then giants of world economy, taking good notice of English international dynamism, completely opposed to Spanish or Portuguese colonialism, following the British pattern together with France and Germany and developing a powerful textile industry that characterised the whole 19th and part of the 20th century. All this led to an own distinctive footprint in Catalonia compared to the rest of Spain. As the Catalan industry became more cosmopolitan, the movement of national and cultural recovery called **Renaixença** burst out.

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Modernism, a synthesis of identity and cosmopolitanism

A clear example of this applied to tourism is Modernism: Antoni Gaudí is one of the biggest attractions of the Barcelona brand. And this is so precisely because of his singular and genuine personality reflected in his architecture, as occurs with many other prominent Modernist architects who were able express their art because the benefits of the Industrial Revolution went hand in hand with culture.

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The **UNESCO** declared some of the main works of the times of Antoni Gaudí and Lluís **Domènech i Montaner** World Heritage sites. Again, this strengthens cosmopolitanism. This is our singularity within a common period throughout Europe generally known as **Art Nouveau**, which has two common denominators in all territories that took part in it: the wish of renewing previous artistic movements and doing so based on the own roots, on particular experiences. This is why Modern Style, Secession, Liberty, the École de Nancy and Jugendstil are so similar and different at the same time. Because again, they are identity and cosmopolitanism. In Barcelona, Gaudí, Domènech i Montaner, **Jujol**, **Puig i Cadafalch**, etc. give personality to the city and, to a larger extent, Catalonia in general. We are not talking of abstract but well tangible items. In Brussels it is the footprint of **Victor Horta**, and it is different from ours, while in Scotland it is that of **Mackintosh**, and it is not the same either.

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Investment in plastic arts and creativity, which sometimes has been reckoned as a luxury expenditure, becomes however a mechanism to reevaluate the city and an economic safe value, as it used to be for instance in Italian cities during the **Renaissance** where there was constant investment in art. Singular artistic productivity gives a political and social prestige that always ends up creating an economic capital. This is a bond shared with the visitor. The visitor's well-being is intricately related with well-being of Barcelona locals. This is why it is so important that Barcelona has key services working well for its residents, like shops and health care facilities, that mobility in the city is easy or having urban planning rationalised to the maximum, clean, safe, attractive and of course good international connections through e.g. ports and airports.



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Going for the own values, a success strategy

In this respect, as opposed to the cosmopolitan discourse that wilfully pretends to detach identities to the benefit of some undetermined stateless nebula (which is nothing else than an attempt of perpetuating abusive monopolies), the public and private effort to turn **Spanair** into a reference airline in Catalonia makes sense. Spanair is an initiative that believes that an international and intercontinental airport connecting us with the rest of the world is needed for internationalising the Catalan economy. A big city like Barcelona needs at least one airline wishing to get as far as

Catalan cosmopolitanism and economic globalisation demand, to carry as many people from other countries as we are able to attract with our personality. If nobody paves us the way, it is the push of our own needs, based on the own values of labour and consistency, that shall try to solve it. The identity of a Catalan and Barcelona airline demonstrates that only internationalisation of our economy and strengthening the own identity can make us appealing and competitive in the world market.

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These premises apply to this or any other industry. There is another example, that of universally

accepted sports and leisure by means of FC Barcelona, one of the city's big assets, not only in terms of identity but also economically. A big city has at least one big football team in Europe. Barça helps present Barcelona as a big capital. Its value is related with an economic pattern that believes in the effort of investment and the importance of everyday work above forms of speculative, spectacular one-off economics. This is the economic model related with La Masia football academy at FC Barcelona, a form of serious medium and long-term investment. And it is also related with a given use of advertising. As opposed to other clubs in the world looking for immediate pecuniary benefit, FC Barcelona turns the usual upside down and sponsors UNICEF on its shirts without earning any direct money but undeniably a big indirect benefit from it. Of course, it is also economic benefit that clearly states that Barça is not a club like the others, it has a certain way of experiencing cosmopolitanism thanks to a defined, strong and atypical, an objectively positive identity. The club's image wins much more than it loses by not raising sponsorship money. Barça hence goes for its own identity from the club, city and country perspective. It is a team with an undeniably Catalan identity despite having been founded by a Swiss national and many of its members being scattered across the world. This is why it is a cosmopolitan, different and attractive club.

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The identity of nations is neither pristine nor unchangeable but constantly sketched and resketched, just like human identities are so much subject to change as well as to keeping the most distinctive features. Direct relation and competition between the different national identities consolidate and enlarge each one's distinctive characteristics as long as citizens are ready to do it.



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<http://www.portabella.cat/>



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