



## Conversation with foreign delegates of the Government of Catalonia

# Looking abroad

**ADRIANA DELGADO**

How is Catalonia perceived abroad? Does the country have a sufficiently defined and known identity across the world? In what areas? The foreign delegates of the Government of Catalonia answer these questions knowing the situation. They are Apel·les Carod, delegate in France, Martí Estruch, Germany, Xavier Solano, United Kingdom, Andrew Davis, United States, and Jordi Font, Argentina. Although much remains to be done to consolidate the Catalonia brand, an own image is slowly taking shape, especially in tourism and culture.



Catalan delegations abroad represent the Government of Catalonia and bring together the different sectorial offices to rationalise and deepen the relations with the country they are located in. Since the present legislation period, the Catalan government has five delegations in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and Argentina, which depend on the Department of Vice-presidency. The Government of Catalonia has another delegation in Brussels reporting directly to the President Office. Having an own political representation in the world has been historical at the Government of Catalonia, beginning in the Middle Ages with the sea consulates. Despite difference in history, the task of the delegates is still the same, to deepen Catalonia's presence in the world.

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Although the Catalonia brand has not settled all over, it is being slowly introduced especially in tourism and culture and to a lesser extent business. There is still much to do to consolidate a differentiated image from Spain – not having an own state is a big burden – and Barcelona, which has an own brand since the 1992 Olympic Games that took a firm grip on tourism.

These are generally speaking the main conclusions drawn from a joint conversation with the foreign delegates of the Government of Catalonia. There are many differences and points in common between each country dealt with. There is a first disparity between what is known about Catalonia in Europe and across the Atlantic, where the Catalan identity is more diffuse or restricted to Barcelona or Spain.

In the United States there is general ignorance of what Catalonia is. As delegate Andrew Davis says, those who know Catalonia do so because

they know Europe through culture. The brand they perceive as Catalan «is very good in the sense that those knowing the European culture know Catalonia as a country of architecture, Gaudí, Miró's art, Adrià's cuisine». Mr Davis says that as good gourmets, Americans appreciate Catalan cuisine, so the perception is very positive from this perspective. However, the negative side is that the Catalonia brand is under heavy influence of Barcelona and the challenge is to disseminate the country in a general manner, beyond the brand of the capital.

The same occurs in Argentina. The Catalan delegate in Buenos Aires, Jordi Font, admits that Barcelona places Catalonia on the map for Argentineans, especially in business. He explains that Argentinean businesspeople «love Barcelona. They talk very well of it, they have had Catalan products in their hands, they have tried them and know they are of good quality, appreciated and seeking excellence». However, Catalan products are associated with high prices as the currency exchange is unfavourable to them.

In France and Germany, the Catalonia brand is more powerful and better known thanks to geographical proximity, tourism and long-standing business relations. Like across the ocean, Catalonia is not only related with Barcelona – not the other way around – but to a larger extent also Spain. The delegate in Paris, Apel·les Carod, points out that «given proximity, Catalonia is better known» but the information arriving in France, except in the South, «comes from Madrid, so it may be biased». From a business perspective, Mr Carod states that Catalonia is viewed as a «denomination of quality, but the French hardly differentiate it from the Spanish brand».

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As far as Germany is concerned, Martí Estruch states that the Catalan identity «is quite known and associated with positive things» there. Economic relations between both countries are long-standing, and Germany is currently Catalonia's second largest trade partner after France. Regarding Catalan companies, Mr Estruch adds that their knowledge is perhaps lower. One cause could be «shyness, fear by Catalan business from exporting the brand». Mr Estruch believes that Catalan entrepreneurs are afraid of defending and using the Catalonia brand as they fear losing market share, without being aware that if they really have a bold international policy, the Spanish market is minimal compared with the share they can reach in Europe and the rest of the world.

Fortunately, some change is slowly being felt in other countries where Catalonia is officially represented. For instance, Xavier Solano, the delegate in the United Kingdom, remembers one symptomatic case: the *Financial Times* published a yearly supplement on Catalan economy on 6 May that had so far focused on Barcelona only. However, this year, it was titled for the first time *Doing Business in Catalonia*. The special issue introduced Catalonia as a region concentrating a network of talents from all over the world and leading business schools at global level.

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According to Mr Solano, the reaction to this change is that «Catalonia is becoming considered a brand and Barcelona its capital». The delegate in London believes that «it is obvious that the Catalonia brand is still in the creation process. There is much to do, but the Catalan economy is seen as one of opportunities.» He specifies that «Catalonia is perceived to be working in areas of excellence and a strategic economic place in the European context».



▲ Apel·les Carod, delegate in Paris, points out that Catalonia is viewed as a denomination of quality.

## The Catalan tourist and cultural brand

Catalonia is recognisable in tourism. One thing to consider is that 52% of French visitors to Spain come to Catalonia. Mr Carod thinks that «this is enough to state that the French are able to differentiate between territories, but they are not fully aware of where the one ends and the next begins due to the biased information they get from Madrid». In southern France, the Catalonia brand is clearer due to proximity and «they are able to associate it with excellence and quality». The most negative image of Catalonia in France is related with the burst of the real estate bubble and the economic crisis. Negative reference, Mr Carod explains, comes from the fact that Catalonia is placed in the same box as Spain, while creating a positive image of Catalonia is done based on specific events, individual persons... and Barça, «which is associated with qualities the Spain brand doesn't have».



▲ According to Jordi Font, it is Barcelona what places Catalonia on the map in Argentina.

Along the same lines, Martí Estruch considers that in tourism, cuisine, design, architecture and culture in general, «the Catalonia brand is very well known in Germany, and here Catalan businesspeople don't need to dare to place the label» on the according product. Coming back to the Barça example, German media refer to it exclusively as a Catalan and very seldom as a Spanish club. But this is not always the case, as while **Joan Manuel Serrat** is undoubtedly acknowledged as being Catalan in Buenos Aires – even Messi is related with Catalonia through Barça – **Pau Gasol** is a Spaniard to the American press. According to Mr Estruch, the key lies in selling Catalan identity as such.

## Catalan or Spanish products?

Explicit identification of a product as being Catalan because it is stated as such – e.g. in labelling – is indispensable to create a brand image. The delegate in the United Kingdom agrees with his

colleague in Germany: Mr Solano says that «much work needs to be done to have products identified as Catalan that are so typical like cava», which is known as Spanish sparkling wine in London as it is labelled as a Spanish product. The same occurs with **Seat** cars.

The delegates suggest to take four or five commonly used products of high quality to compete all over the world. These products should be given priority and a strong institutional campaign be made. The wish of the country to sell abroad as a brand is vital to meet this target.

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Catalonia needs to struggle for its identity, fighting appropriation of its own products and values by the Spain brand. The clearest case among all delegations is Argentina, where the relevance of the Spanish brand is appalling. Delegate Jordi Font explains it: «Spain works very strongly with its brand relating it with certain companies settled in Argentina. The Catalan identity is much better sold by Serrat in culture and **Messi** in sports than a Catalan product as such, which is difficult to identify.»

Identifying celebrities as Catalans is an advantage to create a brand. In France it is thanks to certain persons that the Catalan identity is perceived more strongly. Mr Carod gives the examples of chef Ferran Adrià and actor **Sergi López**, «of whom nobody says they are Spaniards as if they are in France and talk as Catalans, they will be called Catalans». Nevertheless, the formula is not always that easy as Spain, which is the country being recognised internationally, sells its own brand and promotes persons or products considered Spanish wherever they are sold. But the delegate in France believes that when Spain seizes Catalan products, celebrities or values, Catalonia

is also responsible «for not promoting them as being Catalan» or providing them with the necessary platforms and sponsorship to appear to the world as being Catalan. However, an example of good identity policy is tourist promotion in Catalonia through the Perpignan **USAP** rugby team.

Another positive case in sports is the Dragons rugby team, the Catalan team playing in the English Super League. How can this winning formula be applied beyond culture and sports? The delegate in the United Kingdom is clear about that: «We need to get rid of our complexes in all areas and start with sports and culture, but Catalan business needs to understand the benefits related with a brand of quality and excellence.» Hence the will of entrepreneurs is crucial, which should come together with action by Catalan public authorities. The idea all delegates agree with is that the Government shall give support to those products identified with Catalonia. So «when the rest of entrepreneurs see the benefits, they will join» in promoting the Catalan brand.

## The disadvantage of not being a state and the shadow of Barcelona

Not having an own state makes it difficult for Catalonia to promote its own brand. The effort to create this image is double-fold considering that being a small country without political independence requires an additional effort by celebrities, organisations or companies to recognise or make known their identity (and if anybody doesn't do it, they cannot be forced). Mr Estruch states that we need to be aware that «whether we like it or not, Catalonia is a part of Spain, and when Gasol goes abroad, either he makes a clear statement or it is normal that he is considered Spanish».

This struggle at a disadvantage of the Catalan identity against the Spanish brand is real and especially felt in South America, from where many migrants come. This is the case of Argentina. According to delegate Jordi Font, the

singularity and the difference with Spain are unknown, and this helps the Spanish brand to become more powerful or to raise confusion. Mr Font explains that «many people do not even know that Catalan is spoken here, but there are also people calling the Catalan Cultural Centre to learn Catalan because they are moving to Madrid! But those able to differentiate between Catalonia and Spain believe that the former is more dynamic and European.»

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Spain's bad reputation earned in the course of the crisis does not serve abroad to consolidate a different brand as the information reaching out comes from Spanish centralist media. Moreover,



▲ Xavier Solano believes that not having an own state does not prevent from having a powerful identity, as Scotland shows.

Mr Carod insists that when a negative event affects Spain but not Catalonia this is not singled out, but it does when it affects Catalonia only. The Autonomy Statute process has always been explained negatively in a centralist country like France, as have independence claims or demands of more self-rule. The same occurred with corruption cases: those occurring in Catalonia have been highlighted, like **the Pretoria case**.

According to Mr Carod, such attitudes shall be encountered by deactivating criticism and picking out the advantages, for instance that Perpignan is not looking to Paris but south. Catalonia shall be identified with positive items and success. The Catalan culture is very renowned in France, as are cinema people like **Isabel Coixet**, **Marc Recha** and Sergi López, so this prestige needs to be extended to everything related with Catalonia.

In the United States, the media perspective of the Spanish crisis is very negative and the bad reputation very focused on the economy, according to



▲ According to Andrew Davis, the US media perspective of the Spanish crisis is very negative.

Mr Davis. In Argentina, economic news generally do not make any difference if coming from Catalonia, and Spanish companies have an overall bad reputation. This has always existed and attacks increased with the crisis. Mr Font explains that following the arrival of Spanish companies in Argentina in the 1990s, when national companies were privatised, «chauvinistic Argentines, not patriots, saw an invasion and looting there, a business of president **Carlos Menem**».

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The crisis also hit Catalonia in Central Europe. According to Mr Estruch, Germany, one of the countries believing most in building a united Europe and a single market, has «paid in practice the effort with the economic contribution it made, even before reunification». He believes that Germans «feel betrayed to a certain extent as they believed that the economic effort to strengthen and regenerate structures in southern Europe would later benefit Germany, but they feel that the money has been spent on corruption in Greece and real estate speculation in Spain».

This idea has spread and had a negative effect on Spain's global and undifferentiated image. Could Spain's bad reputation be used by Catalonia to state its difference? The doubt is, as the delegate in Berlin claims, «if we are in a position to demonstrate that Catalonia has done things different and better».

The delegate in the United Kingdom believes that not having an own state does not prevent a powerful identity from being developed, as occurs in Scotland and is beginning to do so in Wales. In Scotland, he explains, «they very clearly state that they are Scots and their lifestyle is Scottish, which has nothing to do with staying or not in the United Kingdom. They simply consider that Scotland has different properties from England that both do not share.» In the United Kingdom it is London that creates the British brand, while Barcelona created its own, not the Catalan.



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The brand of Catalonia's capital sometimes overshadows Catalonia rather than Spain. Its power «makes it difficult for us to explain that there is a country called Catalonia and Barcelona is just its capital», Mr Carod talks about what is occurring in France. The Barcelona brand became consolidated with the success of the 1992 Olympic Games and has been especially related with modernity, design and innovation since, although it has been declining in recent months.

## Catalonia and business

Despite the difficulties in creating an own brand, there are fortunately items associated exclusively with Catalonia (or Barcelona). In business, seriousness, politeness, timeliness and good practices are guiding concepts. As the delegate in Argentina, Jordi Font, points out, «if a Catalan gives his word in an agreement, it is assumed that he will fulfil it».

Martí Estruch, delegate in Germany, fully agrees with that. «Germans are very careful in their business relations, they don't like informal people always changing things or being late; such are reasons to quit an agreement. So they acknowledge that they like to deal with Catalans, be they companies or public authorities.» Potentialities like these need to be highlighted and improved.



▲ To Martí Estruch, Germans like to deal with Catalans for their seriousness in business.

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This advantage should be enhanced in Catalonia as there is no direct relation between Catalonia and positive values yet. The Olympic Games showed that Catalonia has a potential to become a reference brand of well-done work and excellence. The delegate in the United Kingdom, Xavier Solano, explains that representatives of the **2012 London Olympic Games** and the 2014 Commonwealth Games visited Barcelona, admired by what was done and nobody else managed to do later.

In the United States, where knowledge of Catalonia is rather restricted to those who have visited the country, the high quality of cuisine and especially wine, seriousness in business and entrepreneurship are highlighted, but they also state that what is needed is to unite all individual items in a concept under one name and flag. It is

very difficult to place Catalonia on the map in the United States, Mr Davis admits, complaining that Italy has been able to create a powerful brand to the point that everything related with the Mediterranean is associated with that country. A similar case is Scotland, with which the best whisky of the world is associated, although there are other countries making an equally good product.

In Argentina, Catalonia stands for quality of life. Barcelona is a city with a similar climate to that of Buenos Aires, well placed in Europe and culturally close. However, the presence of Catalonia in the Southern Cone is minimal, except in Chile and Uruguay. Catalan businesspeople are regarded as being serious and entrepreneurs, somebody you can do business with. And Barcelona is considered a strong trade fair and congress focus with a strong Argentinean participation.

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▲ Scotland has been working on an own brand for years, acknowledged for the quality of whisky.

Talking of economy and business, the delegates agree that despite the COPCA office structure extending all over the world (COPCA and CIDEM merged into the ACCIÓ Catalan business agency), it is the Catalan Tourist Board that sold the Catalonia brand abroad. With ACCIÓ, the goal is also to attract foreign investment to Catalonia and advertise the Catalan economy to build up Catalan identity.

The representation resources of the Catalan government shall serve to break up stereotypes, like believing that Catalan companies will sell more abroad if they appear as Spanish. To the delegate in France, Apel·les Carod-Rovira, a Catalan company can sell more amidst Spain's bad reputation in Europe. He agrees with Mr Solano that «it is not so much about a fight between two brands but thinking of what brand will allow a company to sell more».

## The Scotland case

One example Catalonia can learn from due to the power of its recognisable identity is Scotland. This is well known to the delegate in the United Kingdom, who explains that Scotland has been working on an own brand for years, acknowledged for the quality of whisky but also progress in biomedical research (Dolly the sheep), renewable energies (train spotting) and Adam Smith's modern economics. Has the moment come to advertise oneself like Scotland? According to Mr Solano, the formula is «to insist, insist and be very clear about it».

Not so clear about it is the delegate in Germany, who considers that Scotland states a different brand within the United Kingdom but not abroad. As Martí Estruch says, not having the structure of an own state makes it very difficult to create an own profile. Nevertheless, Mr Solano points out that «one thing does not exclude the other». Despite being British, a Scottish product is Scottish, but a Catalan product, which can also be considered Spanish, is not identified with Catalonia.

## The future of the Catalonia brand

One option to consolidate and expand Catalonia's identity is support from the Barcelona brand, which has a stronger footprint in certain areas and countries, and based on that strengthening the country brand. Barcelona places Catalonia on the map and is leading in areas like design.

The delegates also demand a campaign to identify Catalan products. According to the delegate in the United Kingdom, «the problem is not that Catalan products like *cava* say Spain but that you don't find Catalonia anywhere». They agree that Catalonia cannot depend on a brand, Spain, with a bad reputation due to the crisis and not reflecting Catalonia as it is. Catalonia needs to create a brand according to its values and potential, talent, dynamism and entrepreneurship, leadership in research and identity tourism and many more items. All these factors need to be exploited to fill the Catalonia brand with added value.



The message will get through in business as, like Mr Carod says, companies that wish to have a benefit will understand that it is with this Catalan brand that they will reach it.

Entrepreneurs will join the Catalonia brand progressively as it will become increasingly known and stronger all over the world. The international image of persons like Joan Manuel Serrat, Ferran Adrià and Pau Gasol shall also be used to promote Catalonia. Although much remains to be done in order to expand Catalan identity abroad, everything shall add so the potential becomes a tangible reality.

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