

Heritage of the Basque Settler in La Araucanía, Chile: A Study of Cultural Identity and Historical Preservation

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ABSTRACT: *La Araucanía is a region in Chile that was historically influenced by European migration since the mid-19th century, giving rise to a local cultural identity influenced by various cultural currents. Among these, we find the Basque influence. A historical contextualization of Basque migration to La Araucanía will be presented, highlighting the social and economic factors that led to the arrival of Basque settlers and their settlement in the region. Next, the various aspects of the Basque settler's heritage will be analyzed, such as the architecture of their homes, traditional agricultural systems, and cultural traditions that contribute to the construction of the local community's cultural identity. The Basque settlers have left a mark on the region's culture, influences that continue to be valued and transmitted to this day. Conservation practices for architectural elements, historical objects, and cultural traditions linked to the Basque heritage will be proposed, along with the challenges and opportunities that arise regarding the preservation of the Basque settler's heritage in La Araucanía, in order to assist decision-making related to heritage management.*

KEYWORDS: *Cultural Heritage; Basque Settler; La Araucanía; Cultural Identity; Historical Preservation.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, a significant number of Basque settlers arrived in Chile, ranging from important conquerors to peasants in search of new opportunities, establishing themselves on the land and leaving a mark on local history and culture. [1] The first Basque settlers participated in expeditions organized by Diego de Almagro and Pedro de Valdivia between 1553 and 1540, and they were joined by increasing numbers of immigrants who gradually stopped using their native language, with their Basque origin only reflected in their surnames. However, the influence began to be seen in architecture, traditions, and cultural heritage.

In the context of La Araucanía, Chile, the cultural heritage of the Basque settlers holds a prominent place, serving as a living testimony to migration and the influence of Basque culture in this region. Their cultural significance was significant among Jesuit contingents, which included individuals from Navarre and Guipuzcoa. In the commercial sphere, the Basque community had a strong presence, particularly in agriculture and livestock farming. The immigrants establish themselves in the new lands they have arrived in and come together out of the natural need to connect with their peers, evoke the spirit and customs of their common race, support one another, and demonstrate their presence in the new nation. [1] The context in which Basque migration to La Araucanía unfolded, as well as the factors that influenced the formation and development of their cultural heritage, highlight the Basque heritage in the construction of the local community's cultural identity, its historical value, and its significance today.

Currently, there are challenges in preserving the cultural heritage of the Basque settlers in La Araucanía, such as public awareness, the conservation of their architectural heritage, community participation, and archive management. However, there are also opportunities that can contribute to its preservation, such as cultural tourism, research and dissemination, international collaboration, community involvement, and economic valorization.

This article seeks to emphasize the importance of preserving the cultural heritage of the Basque settlers in La Araucanía as an integral part of the region's cultural identity and history, aiming to foster the continuity and legacy of this cultural heritage for future generations. It aims to contribute to academic knowledge about the cultural heritage of the Basque settlers in La Araucanía and its significance in the construction of the local cultural identity.

II. BASQUE HERITAGE IN LA ARAUCANÍA

2.1 Historical Context

The historical contextualization of the Basque settler's heritage in La Araucanía dates back to the 19th century when a significant number of Basques immigrated to Chile in search of new opportunities. These Basque settlers primarily established themselves in the region of La Araucanía, which was then a rural and sparsely populated area.

The Basque migration to La Araucanía was motivated by various factors, including the system of entailment that compelled some children to seek a future beyond Basque borders, the desire for economic prosperity, mass exile during the Spanish Civil War and subsequent dictatorship, or emigration in search of new opportunities, as seen throughout Basque history. [2]

The search for fertile lands and the possibility of engaging in agricultural and livestock activities led many Basques to seek a new life in La Araucanía. Once settled, the Basque settlers faced various challenges. They had to adapt to a different geographical and cultural environment, as well as harsh climatic conditions in the Araucanian jungle, which led to the establishment of supportive relationships with the indigenous Mapuche population already inhabiting the region. This gave rise to two major groups: Chilean-European families, who focused on a national development project, and indigenous-origin families who served as labor for the settlers and Chileans. [3]

The Chilean state gradually consolidated itself through the construction of railways, land auctions, colonization, and the foundation of urban centers. This process of occupying Mapuche ancestral lands brought about changes in the landscape, land ownership, and population, consolidating the country economically, politically, and administratively. [4]

2.1.1 Architecture

One aspect of the Basque influence in La Araucanía is architecture. In 1920, a Basque settler family built a Neo-Basque-style house in the coastal lands of Nehuentúe, La Araucanía region. The house is characterized by the chalet-style of the Basque coast, replicating the vernacular forms of Basque farmhouses through facade elements in a traditional layout. This construction has become a distinctive symbol of the Basque presence in the region. (1)



Figure (1). Photograph of the Basque house in Nehuentúe

Lagarreta [2], citing Emilio Beltrán from 1907, wrote: "*Far from my homeland, I cannot help but dedicate myself to remembrance; enchanted remembrance of the ancient farmhouse, white and visible on the*

hill, I see in my imagination the walnut tree, which, like a sentinel, hides the facade in its branches; I remember the fruit trees surrounding the farmhouse, the grapevine clinging to the walls of the farmhouse, as if wanting to protect it. I see and hear in my dreams my beloved grandmother, sitting by the hearth, watching the fire burning in the chimney, and in our blessed language, narrating events of past grandeur and sorrows, followed with great interest in every detail." Through these words, we understand how the Basque settler evokes their roots, which are passed down from generation to generation, shaping their identity.

2.1.2 Agriculture

In addition to architecture, Basque settlers also introduced innovative agricultural and livestock practices. It is estimated that 51% of Basque settlers were engaged in agriculture. [89] They introduced cultivation techniques and livestock breeding methods that contributed to the development of agriculture in the region. They also transmitted knowledge and traditions related to dairy product production and cider-making, aspects that have endured in the local culture. The agricultural practice of slash-and-burn cultivation originated in the Basque Country. [2] It initially functioned as a nomadic system but transitioned to permanent crops in the 19th century. This system can still be observed in the fields of La Araucanía today. Minister Luis Aldunate stated emphatically in 1883, "I have evidence to believe that the Basques are the most advanced farmers known." [5] They were seen as hardworking people of their word, serious, with Catholic religiosity, and thus, capable of founding a civilized nation in the New World. [6]

2.1.3 Basque Traditions

After Chile gained independence from Spanish colonial rule, between 1894 and 1916, there were 4,001 Spanish immigrants in Chile, of which 13.6% were of Basque origin. At that time, the country had approximately 5% foreign inhabitants, so the cultural impact was more qualitative than quantitative. [6] The marital culture of the time indicates that 45% of marriages were between Basques, likely due to acquaintanceships from their country of origin or neighborhood relationships. This situation helped promote the preservation of Basque traditions and heritage.

In Chile, the first Basque center was founded in 1923 in the city of Santiago, marking the first step towards the unity of the Basque community in the country. [6] Social activities, religious assistance, Basque pelota matches, and club services such as bars and restaurants were developed. [7] Basque press, such as the newspaper EUZKADI in Santiago de Chile, and a radio station can also be found in Chile. Basque festivals, such as the Feast of San Ignacio, the national Basque Day in America, celebrated on July 31st, demonstrate the sentiments of the Basque culture. This collective identity, composed of ideas, images, symbols, and social representations, delimits the collective identity of the Basque community, allowing them to share a common culture that we can still observe today. [8] Traditions create a mechanism for cultural continuity that is embedded in the social system of the community. [9]

Many Basques who arrived in Chile as immigrants experienced upward social mobility due to their connections with strong social networks, which granted them access to business opportunities that were not available to everyone, influenced by their strong work ethic. [4] However, over time, despite the Basque settlers, and European settlers in general, managing to integrate and leave a significant mark on the region, there is currently an ongoing conflict where some Mapuche communities in the area are reclaiming their lands. Between 1873 and 1915, 1,213,816 hectares of land were auctioned in the provinces of Malleco and Cautín. This amount is more than double the land assigned to the Mapuche people. [10].

2.2 Construction and Preservation of Cultural Identity

The Basque settler's heritage in La Araucanía plays a significant role in the construction and preservation of the local community's cultural identity. This heritage has become a connecting element for present generations with their historical roots, allowing them to keep alive the traditions, values, and cultural practices passed down by their Basque ancestors.

The Basque settler's heritage acts as a tangible symbol of Basque history and presence in the region. The Neo-Basque-style house located in the coastal area of La Araucanía, the agricultural structures and processes, and the enduring traditional objects and practices represent physical testimonies of the cultural heritage of the Basque settlers. These elements are an integral part of La Araucanía's cultural landscape and contribute to a sense of belonging and rootedness for the descendants of the settlers. The architectural features, historical objects, and traditions play a significant role in promoting intercultural dialogue and diversity. [11] The local community can understand and preserve the identity of the Basque legacy while fostering respect and cultural exchange with other communities. This contributes to enriching the social fabric and promoting tolerance and mutual understanding, which are particularly important in today's times.

The Basque settler's heritage is also a resource for education and learning. Through the preservation and dissemination of this heritage, younger generations have the opportunity to learn about the history, traditions, and values of their ancestors. This allows them to connect with their cultural identity, strengthen their sense of belonging, and nourish their sense of historical continuity. Basque traditions in Chile, which originated with the aim of providing emigrants with a protective umbrella by creating spaces of sociability where they could recreate the sociocultural mechanisms and environments of their homeland, helped reduce the intensity of the adaptive shock demanded by Chilean society. [12]

The Basque settler's heritage in La Araucanía, along with other cultures present in the region, contributes to the construction and preservation of the local community's cultural identity. Valuing and protecting this heritage ensures its continuity, transmission to future generations, and understanding that we are part of a society that evolves. Just as in the past, European influence was present through colonization, today we have influences from Latin American immigration due to social and political crises, commercial expansions, and other factors.

2.3 Challenges and Opportunities in Preserving the Basque Settler's Heritage in La Araucanía

Preserving the Basque settler's heritage in La Araucanía faces various challenges and offers opportunities to ensure its continuity and valorization. One of the main challenges is the lack of public awareness about the importance and value of the Basque settler's heritage. It is essential to promote awareness and heritage education among both the local community and visitors. This can be achieved through outreach campaigns, educational programs in schools, and collaborations with cultural institutions.

Conservation and maintenance of the architectural elements related to the Basque heritage require ongoing efforts. The lack of financial and technical resources can be a challenge in carrying out proper restoration, repair, and conservation work. It is important to establish partnerships with specialized organizations, government institutions, and local entities to ensure the sustainability of conservation efforts.

In terms of opportunities, there are several that can contribute to the preservation of the Basque settler's heritage in La Araucanía. Conducting academic research and studies on the Basque settler's heritage can provide greater knowledge and understanding of its historical and cultural significance. Disseminating these findings through scientific publications, conferences, and academic events can raise awareness and support for its preservation. Many countries have attempted to create an inventory of heritage, but have failed due to lack of resources, perseverance, or methodology. [13] Azzarate (2003) suggests that to successfully achieve a scientific heritage inventory, it is necessary to build a common methodology, language, interpretation criteria, and valuation. Subsequently, updating the records is fundamental, as new findings may arise or modifications may be documented.

Establishing links and collaborations with international institutions, academics, and experts specializing in cultural heritage preservation can provide opportunities for knowledge exchange, experiences, and best practices. This can enrich the preservation and promotion strategies of the Basque heritage in La Araucanía.

Cultural tourism, on the other hand, is another key element that can be considered to foster the conservation and valorization of a culture. 37% of global trips have cultural motivations, and among them, 50% have corresponded to history and heritage visits in the last decade. [12] In the rural area of La Araucanía, rural Mapuche tourism focusing on learning about the indigenous culture, vernacular architecture, and culinary practices is strongly developed, but there is no apparent approach to the legacy left by the colonization process.

Developing a strategic preservation plan that includes clear goals, measurable objectives, and specific actions in the short, medium, and long term will involve various stakeholders, such as government institutions, local organizations, academics, and community members. By implementing a plan, efforts to preserve the Basque settler's heritage in La Araucanía will be strengthened, ensuring its protection, promotion, and continuity for future generations.

III. CONCLUSION

The heritage of the Basque settlers in La Araucanía plays a fundamental role in the construction and preservation of the local community's cultural identity. Its historical, architectural, and cultural value becomes a legacy that deserves to be protected and valued.

Although there are challenges in its preservation, such as public awareness, conservation, community participation, and heritage management, significant opportunities also arise. Research and dissemination, international collaboration, and heritage valorization are some of the opportunities that can strengthen preservation efforts.

To achieve successful preservation, strategic planning, awareness and education, legal protection, collaboration and partnerships, as well as access to financing and resources are crucial.

By strengthening these efforts, the continuity and safeguarding of the Basque settler's heritage in La Araucanía are ensured, promoting the understanding of local history and enriching the cultural identity of the region. Only through collaboration and collective care can we ensure that this valuable cultural legacy endures and is appreciated by future generations.

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