

POSTERS, ADVERTISING AND SPAIN: THE CREATION OF SPAIN'S TOURIST IDENTITY, 1929-1936

María Dolores Fernández Poyatos

José Ramón Valero Escandell

Universidad de Alicante

dolores.fernandez@ua.es, jose.valero@ua.es

Nowadays, vintage tourism posters are nostalgic mementos of many of the most beautiful places on earth. Besides their artistic value, they can sometimes encapsulate an era, and therefore historians and advertising agents endeavour to characterise them within a specific context. Since their inception, tourism posters have helped shape the international image of many countries, images which have later proved impervious to the passage of time.

As in other countries, the main purpose of these posters in Spain was to publicise the country's attractions, and they thus contributed to establishing Spain's international tourist identity. The aim of this paper is to examine whether they were also able to systematically establish a *national* tourist identity and, if so, how this was achieved.

On a different scale, the cultural identity of any place is founded on commonly shared values, symbols that reflect a community and traditions that it holds dear and preserves. The complexity of any society creates a multifaceted reality, and thus characterisation is inevitably multifarious due to the existence of many groups, although it privileges dominant values and interests. Meanwhile, tourist destination advertising highlights the features that will be positively valued by potential tourists. Thus, the concept of tourist identity emerges at the confluence between cultural identity and the search for features that will attract visitors.

Although there are numerous examples in Spain of local posters produced before the creation of the Spanish National Tourism Board (SNTB) in 1928, we analysed those printed between 1929 and 1936. These were obtained from various sources, although primarily from the Institute of Tourism Research (ITR). Our analysis of this material combined two complementary perspectives, those of advertising and geography, to define the expressive characteristics and regional resources deployed by the poster artists, who were also responsible for the posters which appeared during the Spanish Civil War.

It should be noted, however, that the late nineteenth century also witnessed a considerable proliferation of posters in Spain that were primarily aimed at promoting local festivities, chocolates and confectionery, and in which tourism was barely addressed. The same

was the case in press advertising, where desultory advertisements occasionally appeared for hotels, shipping companies and travel agencies. Neither did the creation of the first state tourism organisations, the National Permanent Tourist Commission (1905) and the Royal Tourism Commission (1911), provide an impetus to the use of posters - or practically anything else - to promote tourism in Spain. It was not until the Spanish National Tourist Board was created that the production of constant and copious advertising began.

As soon as the SNTB was launched, it began publishing posters, which appeared in a specific context and with a clear short-term objective: to promote attendance at the upcoming international exhibitions in Seville and Barcelona, due to open in 1929. Beyond this specific need, but also underpinned by both events, a further aim was to present Spain as one of Europe's flourishing states by highlighting the process of modernisation that Spain had witnessed in the previous two decades, which had led to a clear improvement in infrastructures, considerable industrial development and marked growth of the larger cities.

The SNTB was responsible for several different tasks, including development of the hospitality industry, the creation of tourist agencies and the foundation of schools, and was endowed with autonomous funding for this purpose obtained from Compulsory Passenger Insurance. The SNTB continued in existence through two very distinct regimes: the monarchy (until the spring of 1931) and the Republic (until the Civil War). In the latter of these, it coexisted with the first regional organisation, the Catalonia Tourism Office, which also began to publish posters. Operationally speaking, the SNTB employed a geographically distributed structure, with regional sub-headquarters, almost fifty information offices and branches in major foreign capitals.

The SNTB was essentially aimed at promoting tourism by disseminating knowledge about Spain through the publication of guides, catalogues, tourism routes and, of course, posters. It implemented a strong tourism communication strategy, with a variety of activities that ranged from press trips to a general plan for tourism advertising abroad.

The SNTB's most prolific period in terms of publishing posters was during its first campaign, launched on the occasion of the Latin American Exhibition in Seville in 1929, when it commissioned numerous illustrators and artists to produce posters representing the different provinces of Spain. No constraints were placed on style, but a set of guidelines were established: vertical arrangement, uniform dimensions, unobtrusive use of figures, slogan, etc. Rather than merely advertising beauty, the Board sought to transmit the advantages offered by the product and to show potential tourists the benefits they would obtain: ancient art, modernity, climate, romanticism, exoticism, mystery, and so on. The SNTB used modern, contemporary advertising, prioritising the commercial purpose of the message. Afterwards, the Board continued to publish new posters by the same artists who had participated in the Seville campaign and by famous photographers or artists who had been awarded prizes in *ad hoc* competitions. For instance, the competition held in 1935 was based on promoting the attraction of a country with a bright, southern climate, bearing the simple slogan *Sunny Spain*. Written in English and referring to the sun in Spain, this slogan formed a precursor of Spain's "sun and sand" tourist identity in the 1960s.

The inventory of SNTB posters is far from being definitive. There is evidence of posters depicting Alicante or Galicia's Rías Bajas (estuaries) that are not listed in official publications but are accessible on the Internet. Nor is it easy to determine all those

based on photographs, because sometimes these were only published in pamphlets about certain areas. For example, among those which do not appear in the ITR catalogue is the one bearing the slogan *Spain is different*, the precursor of a much later campaign. To this incomplete list should be added those issued by the Catalonia Tourism Office, including a poster about Sitges by Josep Morell, the great poster artist of the 1940s.

As for the messages conveyed by the posters, we examined the types of composition and linguistic message used, which appeared in several languages, tailored to the different tourist markets. In addition, we analysed the slogans in terms of the number of words used, identification of the brand with the slogan, and other aspects. We also explored the type of composition, which almost always included text and image, and was never exclusively text. The most common design was a combination of text - a header and footer - and image, almost always a single illustration. In subsequent years, it was common practice to retain the visual element of a poster but to modify the header and slogan. Almost all posters in Spanish preserved the original design structure: "Spanish National Tourist Board" was the header, with a central image and a slogan at the bottom starting with the name of the destination. In other languages, the visual element was maintained but changes were made to the text, replacing the header with *Visit Spain*, *Visitez l'Espagne* or *Spanien*, according to the target country. Slogans were almost always kept short (three to six words), to make them easy to remember. In general, the posters were simple and clear, bearing out the assertion that advertising posters are about communication rather than art.

These images allow us to assess what it was thought would attract foreigners to Spain and what places were considered ideal for such a purpose. Through this process, a more or less conscious selection was made of those aspects which best represented the essence of Spain, the most enticing image of the country and a true tourist identity.

The SNTB posters depict a number of the country's physical features - its climate, landscape and flora - illustrating the diversity of Spain. It soon became evident that the warm climate, especially on the Mediterranean coast, held a strong attraction for most northern Europeans. The campaigns began to specialise in succinct messages about a warm, sunny country. They also focused on the variety offered by abundant sunshine and snow, where these occurred in close proximity in places such as Granada and Tenerife. The same variety can be seen when analysing representations of the landscape and flora, especially when sea and mountains or different altitudes were combined, as in many of the islands or the Cantabrian coast.

As regards human resources, the aim was to depict a striking contrast between tradition and modernity. Attire was among some of the new customs portrayed - especially that of fashionable young women - and sports, encompassing everything from hiking the St. James' Way to polo in Puigcerdá. To combat Spain's external image of being a backward country, repeated emphasis was placed on the modernity of infrastructures, and the car played a prominent supporting role in many posters.

Whereas modernity, and even cosmopolitanism, predominated in the image of larger cities and the north, in the south of Spain, traditional aspects were highlighted. The best example of this was Granada, one of the leading tourist resorts of the time, with its streets of white-washed caves looking out over the old Muslim palace; the most exotic, the Spa-

nish Morocco, symbolised in the old medina of Tetouan. Traditional and unique aspects were conflated with exoticism and combined with the guarantee of a minimum of comfort.

Variety appeared again in references to artistic movements from different historical periods. Evidently, religious buildings and those associated with civil power or cultural activities predominated, but small details of streets and squares and general views of areas with a wealth of monuments were also used, as well as some of the Board's own buildings.

A combined analysis sheds light on the basic approach employed to promote tourism in Spain. The most effective example is where a given image was used to illustrate the attractions, variety and contrasts contained within a single country. Emphasis was placed on the depiction of climatic contrasts and a pleasant climate. Refuting the disparaging view of Spain as backward, priority was given to portraying the great advances made in Spain in the 1920s, whilst at the same time promoting the image of Spain as a bridge between cultures. The posters not only transmitted messages about tourist attractions, but also political messages: to the outside world, that of Spain as a modern country, and for domestic consumption, as a pleasant place to be. They conveyed a national image linked to the contemporary parameters of a time of upheaval in Europe, merging the memory of past glories with the ambition to restore the image of a medium colonial power, lost after the disaster of 1898. Naturally, each political regime - the monarchy and the Republic - attempted to identify this image with their own political interests.

Not all regions were represented, nor were some aspects which could have potentially been linked to Spain's tourist identity, such as emblematic local festivities, or bullfighting, reflecting an attempt to move away from stereotypical, Carmen de Merimeé type images of Spain. The SNTB's posters were particularly innovative in areas such as urban tourism, going beyond mere monuments, or in the promotion of warm coastlines. In one of them, which depicts Leon cathedral but does not mention the name of the place, the French text reads "*Un Voyage en Espagne est une date dans la vie*", marking a completely new concept of tourism centred on the visitor's personal life experience.

These poster artists, who generally played a leading role in the production of posters for both sides during the Spanish Civil War, made use of the full range of heritage resources to portray an extremely varied country proud of its authentic past and engaged in a rapid process of modernisation.