

# Spain's Activity in the European Cultural Initiatives

Katerina G. Papaioannou

## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to highlight the way in which Spain has functioned since its accession to the European Union in 1986 in the field of culture. After completing the process of transition to democracy, and having fully recognized the importance of culture, Spain began to be active and to participate with success in most European cultural programs. The interest between Spain and the European Union has been mutual from the beginning. Spain was interested in promoting Spanish culture in Europe and the European Union in highlighting the cultural diversity that characterized Spain. New resources were arriving at the country and Spain tried to use them in the best possible way to promote the sector of culture. Spain has been actively involved in almost all cultural initiatives developed by the European Union. In this study we aim to present an analysis about Spain's activity in the context of European cultural initiatives in order to enter a new era. More particular, we aim to identify the activity of Spain in the institution of the European Capital of Culture, the European Heritage Label, the European Days of Cultural Heritage and the Digital Libraries Initiative. We address and analyze how Spain eventually created a new image of the country both at a European and at an international level. Moreover, is presented an analysis on the cultural policy pursued by Spain after its accession to the European Union.

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**K. G. Papaioannou\***

University of Patras, Greece.

(e-mail: papaioannou.kat@gmail.com)

*\*Corresponding Author*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Spain, since 1986 that joined the European family, has been an active member of the European Union's cultural policy. The rich cultural heritage and the strong cultural elements and characteristics have often brought Spain to the center of European cultural interest. At the same time, Spain tried to exploit the new resources that came to the country through European cultural programs and furthermore to promote Spanish culture in Europe. The European area has always been a challenge for Spain and now it was given the opportunity to conquer it. Its cultural diversity was an attraction for Europe as it was interested in building a European identity of the Member States while cultivating their particular cultural characteristics.

## II. SPAIN IN THE EUROPEAN CULTURAL ACTIVITY

The presence of Spain in the institution of the European Capital of Culture was remarkable. The aim of this action was to highlight the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe, as well as to highlight the commonalities of cultures in Europe. This action also aimed to encourage mutual understanding between European citizens and to stimulate the long-term development of cities based on culture. Moreover, this action the aim of this action was to strengthen the cooperation between cultural institutions and artists in Europe, as well as the involvement and participation of local (and foreign) citizens in culture. In 1988, Madrid was selected as the European Capital of Culture for 1992. Other Spanish cities, including Cordoba, Granada, Santiago de Compostela or Salamanca, were among the candidate cities. Since then, a new cycle of preparation for the city begun in order to be able to host the various cultural events in the future. It is worth noting that this year was particularly important for the promotion of Spain in the rest of Europe, but also around the world, not only for the selection of Madrid as European Capital of Culture, but also for hosting the Olympic Games in Barcelona, as well as hosting the EXPO '92 World Exhibition in Seville. The reason that the city of Madrid was chosen and the other candidate Spanish cities were not chosen was the fact that Madrid had more transport infrastructure and a better offer in hotel facilities. This provoked the reaction of other cities such as Salamanca, which expressed its disagreement with this decision, as it considered that the cultural value of other cities was not recognized and that the city that was chosen had already a significant visibility abroad. However, the Mayor of Madrid tried to calm the spirits by claiming that he would try to highlight the culture of all regions of Spain and not focus only on

the promotion of Madrid. In any case, with the proclamation of Madrid as the European Capital of Culture, various activities and investments were announced, that were planned to be completed until 1992. Some of the works could not be completed in time, such as the remodeling of the Royal Theater, for which the works began in 1991 and were completed in 1995 due to various difficulties that arose during the process. However, most works were completed within time limits, such as the so-called "Golden Triangle of Art" which is consisted of the National Museum of Art "Reina Sofia", the "Museum del Prado" and the "Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum". The "Casa de America" in the Linares Palace, one of the most active cultural institutions in the city, was also inaugurated, and the "Monkloa Lighthouse" opened its doors, a project which brought with it great changes to this area of the city (Ríos, 2019).

After 1992, other Spanish cities were awarded the title of European Capital of Culture and were given the opportunity to showcase their culture, but also to create new cultural infrastructures that would attract a steady stream of tourism and provide a steady source of income. In 2000, to celebrate the millennium in a special way, nine cities were selected to hold the title of European Capital of Culture, including the Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela. An extravaganza of music and fire was planned for the occasion and was entitled "The Burning of the Century". Three musical spectacles followed concerts which completed the opening of the curtain with complete success. Santiago de Compostela focused its initiatives on music, dance, cinema, theatre, thought and art, as well as on activities that highlighted the region's special traditions. The Mayor of Santiago presented at the beginning of the year a plethora of cultural events planned to take place, covering a wide range of culture, for which about 24 million dollars would be invested, with half of the amount covered by private funds. Particularly sensational was the musical programme which included one hundred performances to suit all tastes. However, excellent initiatives were also shown in the field of cinema, where the Compostela Prize was created to be awarded to a European filmmaker. The theatre also featured an extensive programme of Spanish artistic groups with prominent names. Media support for Santiago's European Capital of Culture initiatives was extensive and Santiago certainly managed to find a place among the world's great cities (Ribeira, 2000).

The next Spanish city that won the title of European Capital of Culture was Salamanca in 2002. In order to successfully support this title, a programme of investment in infrastructure was drawn up, which would also allow the future cultural development of the area by establishing Salamanca as a cultural and leisure tourism destination. The general coordinator of the activities stressed the need for a longer period between the time a city is designated as a Capital of Culture and the time it is called upon to support its title, as it was not a symbolic title but an event with content and many investment requirements. The programme that Salamanca was to develop in 2002 was a special programme designed to last throughout the year, to include all areas of creativity and to satisfy both the specialised and the general public. In addition to the official programming which included about 700 activities, special programmes were also organised by other institutions, the largest being the programme established by the University of Salamanca with more than 150 activities. Throughout its history, the University of Salamanca had particularly developed its relations with other countries and was generally characterised by a tendency towards internationalisation, a fact that it was deemed appropriate to highlight in the present phase. Throughout its history, the University of Salamanca had particularly developed its relations with other countries and was generally characterised by a tendency towards internationalisation, a fact that it was deemed appropriate to highlight in the present phase (Francia, 2002).

The next Spanish city to be awarded the title of Capital of Culture was Donostia San Sebastian in 2016. The programme with which it applied was entitled "Culture for Coexistence" and was characterised by a strong local focus. It was the result of a participatory process that started in 2009 and reflected the city's past. A city with multiple and diverse identities that for a long time had been affected by violence, first because of the civil war, then because of the Franco dictatorship and later by acts of terrorism. A city that for many years experienced problems of coexistence and which had two official languages (Basque and Spanish). The vision of the project included a more open society where diversity would be respected and valued as a source of wealth and equality; a society where citizens would participate more actively and responsibly in order to live together in peace; a more cosmopolitan society connecting the local element with Europe and the world; a creative society capable of inventing new foundations for economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainability. The self-imposed objectives went beyond the traditional nature of culture and sought to create a culture of lasting peace, celebrate the diversity of the region (linguistic, religious, cultural and culinary) and appreciate the geography and unique landscapes (bays, cultural parks, trails and coastlines).

As the city's cultural offer and the capacity of its cultural sector were already well developed at the time of the application, greater emphasis was placed on adopting qualitatively different projects that addressed sensitive issues such as violence or terrorism, with the aim of helping citizens to find a sense of reconciliation with their past. The foundations of the project were two concepts: 'coexistence' and 'the city'. The first was structured around three axes: the "Lighthouse of Peace" on integration and

coexistence; the "Lighthouse of Life" on health, work and the environment; and the "Lighthouse of Voices" on communication (San Sebastian Turismo, 2016). The second concept worked transversally, providing methodologies in the areas of sustainability, linguistic diversity, critical thinking through contemporary art, active citizenship, the relationship between culture and technology and the development of interaction in cultural spaces, all of which were intended to help the individual projects achieve their own objectives (Insausti, 2016). Donostia San Sebastian has successfully implemented the long-term objectives it had set, and also the implementation of extensive and innovative cultural programmes with a European dimension and with a high level of citizen participation. It supported activities that were clearly different from its pre-existing cultural offer and used the European Capital of Culture to address the complex and sensitive issue of past violence and the differences between the city's communities.

Another initiative developed within the European Union where Spain played a leading role, along with France and Hungary, was the European Heritage Label. While this 'intergovernmental initiative' was launched in 2006 in Granada of Spain, and was formally recognised by the European Union in 2013, when specific quality criteria were defined that had to be met in order for a site to be awarded the European Heritage Label, with this initiative acquiring its own financial resources. The European Heritage Label aimed to give added value to cultural sites, based on their contribution to European history and culture. In terms of outreach, it also had an educational dimension, aimed mainly at young people, through the creation of communication networks between the sites that had been awarded the label, with a view to achieving an exchange of experience and good practice. This action focused mainly on promoting these sites and improving access to them, which were sites of European heritage interest and milestones in the creation of Europe. They represented and symbolised European history, integration, ideals and values from the roots of European civilisation to modern Europe. In Spain, the sites that have been awarded the European Heritage Label are the archive of the Crown of Aragon located in Barcelona and the Student Residence located in Madrid.

The Archive of the Crown of Aragon was founded in 1318 and served as the central archival system for the administrative, economic and political memory of the monarchy of the Crown of Aragon. In the following centuries, the Archive drew on documents created by the state and other entities, which today allows the reconstruction of the history of the region and major events in European history. The Crown Archives of Aragon is one of the oldest archival institutions in Europe and contains some of the most valuable collections of documents from medieval Europe (European Heritage Label). The Student House in Madrid was founded in 1910 by the Council for the Extension of Studies and Scientific Research. The pioneering ideas that had begun with the establishment of the Free Educational Foundation in 1876 played a decisive role in its creation. It functioned as a residence, a conference venue and a place for the exchange of ideas, as many leading personalities gathered in this space to exchange their ideas. Upholding the values of free thought and cooperation, the Student House in Madrid is a renowned centre throughout Europe for encouraging the exchange of ideas, dialogue, communication and understanding between generations, cultures and disciplines. In 2007, it was awarded the European Heritage Label.

Spain has also shown particular interest in the conservation and restoration of its cultural heritage and has developed very important projects which have been awarded the 'Europa Nostra' prize by the European Union. In 2018, three important Spanish projects were among the winners. One of them was the project for the conservation and restoration of the facade of the College Mayor de San Ildefonso of the University of Alcalá de Henares. This college, founded by Cardinal Thisnerio in 1498, is the heart of the University of Alcalá. The construction of the facade, the work of the Spanish architect Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón, began in 1537 and has been a National Monument since 1914. The restorations carried out in the 20th century have allowed its preservation, with the last restoration taking place in 2016-2017. Throughout the facade, characters who struggle to spread knowledge and achieve salvation through wisdom and through the study of the texts of the Bible come to life (Colegio Mayor San Ildefonso).

The 'Europa Nostra' prize was also awarded for the work of restoration and conservation of the sketches created by Joaquin Soroya in his painting series "Vision of Spain", also known as "Visión de España", which belonged to the Spanish Society of America in New York. This difficult and very interesting project was carried out by the Valencia Institute for Conservation, Restoration and Research. This series of paintings resulted from a meeting between Archer Milton Huntington, the founder of the Hispanic Society of America in New York, and the painter Joaquin Soroya, who was already recognized and established as an international painter. In 1911, Huntington commissioned him to create these works, which were based on the different regions and traditions of Spain, and stipulated that, in addition to the paintings, the entire creative process, including the sketches of the paintings, would be part of the collections of the Spanish Society (Contreras Zamorano & Gandía Guijarro, 2019). The Institute for Conservation, Restoration and Research in Valencia undertook the restoration of 32 sketches, which was carried out between May 2013 and December 2014. This project was a clear reflection of the evolution of a work of art, placing the focus on the process rather than just the end result. It also reflected North

American interest in an artist fundamental to 20th century European culture (Hispania Nostra).

The third project to receive the 2018 'Europa Nostra' Award was in the category of Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Long-term Contribution and was awarded to the private water owners of the Argual and Tazacorte regions of the Canary Islands in Spain. The award was the highest European recognition for the historic management of water and its conservation and current use in agriculture through a private organisation. 'Heredamiento de las Haciendas de Argual y Tazacorte' is a group of private water owners in the Canary Islands, whose heritage dates back to 1502. After more than 500 years of history, the water and the environment are now managed by 1.540 participants working on a non-profit basis. Both water collection and distribution and ecosystem conservation have been the two axes on which this group's activity has evolved since its inception.

Another European initiative that Spain has adopted to promote respect for cultural heritage and develop citizen contact with historical sites that are not usually allowed access is the European Heritage Days. This institution is coordinated by the Spanish Heritage Institute in collaboration with the autonomous communities. Each year, different programmes are organised under a different title, which include free guided tours of certain points of interest and activities of a different nature, with the aim of bringing citizens into direct contact with their cultural heritage (Jornadas Europeas de Patrimonio, 2019)

In 2020, the European Heritage Days will be celebrated during November and December and will be entitled "Education and Heritage". The role of education is indisputable in order to enable citizens to acquire knowledge and develop the necessary respect and sensitivity towards the cultural values inherent in the elements of cultural heritage. For this reason, the development of a teaching-learning strategy around the values of this heritage is one of the most effective methods for the preservation of cultural assets. Spain has planned an ambitious programme of free activities throughout Andalusia this year, including guided tours, workshops, conferences, music concerts in heritage-related venues, interactive games, trails, etc (Jornadas Europeas de Patrimonio, 2019).

The 2019 European Heritage Days were entitled "Art and Leisure" and the presentation in Spain was held in Almería. The aim was to highlight the many aspects of heritage and art as a source of recreation, which allow people to escape from their daily lives. It was a wide-ranging theme, covering the visual arts, cinema, the circus, exhibitions, dance, reading, games, music, photography, radio, television, theatre, tourism and sport. The programme included about a hundred activities aimed at the general public with children's workshops, historical re-enactments, poetry and music recitals and guided tours. This programme underlined the role of cultural assets in the leisure and entertainment time of citizens. The activities were to take place in the eight provinces of Andalusia, and it is worth noting that this year's programme included an increased number of activities compared to previous years (Celebración de las Jornadas Europeas de Patrimonio, 2019).

In general, Spain develops many different activities each year as part of the European Heritage Days, depending on the theme each year. Its constant aim is to raise awareness of the richness and cultural diversity of Europe, to promote appreciation of European cultures, to promote intercultural dialogue, to combat racism and xenophobia and to invite Europe to face the new social, political and economic challenges that arise. This institution has a dual dimension, a local and a European one. The local dimension is linked to the exploitation of the cultural resources of each region. The European Heritage Days provide an opportunity to learn about and promote the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of each region. At the same time, they highlight the role of cultural heritage in the sustainable and economic development of a place. Cultural heritage is a source of development and it is essential that it be passed on to future generations, both by the relevant administrative bodies and by society as a whole. The European dimension focuses on the promotion of a common European heritage enriched by European cultural diversity. This common heritage is not only an economic resource, but also a factor of social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding between the population groups of different origins that make up Europe's cultural wealth (Jornadas Europeas de Patrimonio, 2018).

In addition, the Digital Libraries Initiative emerged in 2005 and was part of the i2010 strategy, which was the European Commission's new strategic framework for setting the broad policy orientations for the information and media society. The aim was to ensure that all cultural resources and scientific documents in Europe are accessible to all and passed on to future generations. In the context of cultural heritage, the aim was to digitise collections held in libraries, archives and museums across Europe, so that they could be digitally accessible and preserved for future generations. Prominent among the projects to digitise cultural heritage was the creation of the European digital free-access library Europeana, which would bring together digitised contributions from recognised cultural institutions in the European Union (Europeana).

Spain's participation in Europeana was achieved through the creation of the Spanish digital library Hispana, which brings together digital collections from archives, libraries and museums in Spain (Hispana, Acceso en línea al patrimonio cultural). Among the collections gathered by Hispana are the repositories of Spanish universities and the digital libraries of the autonomous communities, which offer



access to collections of all kinds of Spain's bibliographic heritage (manuscripts, books, photographs, maps, etc.). The Hispana digital library also integrates content from the Digital Collections Network of Museums of Spain (Red Digital de Colecciones de Museos de España). This digital network brings together museums that share a unified system for documenting and managing their collections. The Hispana library also includes a catalogue of digitisation projects being carried out in Spain. It is thus a tool that allows coordination, avoiding the digitisation of the same project twice or more. Since its launch in March 2006, it has been the first service in this category to be developed in Spain, allowing the development of a joint strategy between the various administrations and private bodies with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport for participation in Europeana and the various European initiatives. Hispana implements the European regulations on digitisation, online accessibility of cultural material and reuse of public sector information (Hispanapro-Centro de Recursos Profesionales de Hispana).

### III. CONCLUSION

In general, it is clear that Spain is actively involved and shows its interest in European cultural initiatives. In this context, it can showcase its great cultural wealth and present to the other European countries the unique elements that make up its culture. The development and evolution of Spain's cultural strategy in the European area is being developed with respect for the European institutions, following the rules and standards of the European Union. Since joining the European family, Spain has been vigorously asserting its rightful place on the cultural map.

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