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Spain's nation branding project *Marca España* and its cultural policy: the economic and political instrumentalization of a homogeneous and simplified cultural image

Joaquim Rius Ulldemolins* and Mariano Martín Zamorano

Facultat d'Economia i Empresa, Teoria Sociològica, Universitat de Barcelona, Edifici Principal, Torre 2 – 4a planta, Tinent Coronel Valenzuela, 1-11, 08034 Barcelona, Spain

Cultural diplomacy is being increasingly considered the medium in which nation states can instrumentalize their cultural production and accomplish soft power goals. Analysts have repeatedly underlined the importance of culture in place branding in globalized economies, where culture can singularize products and assign them greater value. Both foreign and cultural policy have made the international projection of cultural industries a strategic goal, and this has simultaneously transformed the goals and networks of these policies. Although the literature addresses this phenomenon, certain effects of brand policy-making have become evident and require further attention: the simplification of cultural diversity, the elimination of non-coherent characteristics within brands and the limitation of internal dissension and participation. In this paper, Spain's nation branding project *Marca España* (Spain Brand) is critically analysed as a process of economic and political instrumentalization conducted by large companies who promote a simplified and homogeneous image of national culture.

Keywords: foreign cultural policy; nation branding; nation building; cultural diversity; *Marca España*; Spain Brand

Introduction: from place branding to nation branding

In recent decades, the symbolic content of products has gained relevance and this can be explained by the growing importance of consumption in post-industrial society (Bell 1976). The increasing importance of the symbolic – and, therefore, of branding as a strategy to differentiate products and create an emotional bond with the consumer (Klein 1999) – has come hand in hand with the expansion into the affairs of society and the economy of different nations' cultural domain, as observed by Rodríguez Morató in his description of a 'society of culture' (Rodríguez Morató 2007). But while they have gained social centrality, the activity and production of culture have also lost their autonomy in public and economic domains, where they have been instrumentalized by business and politics (Gray 2007).

In line with these transformations, national and regional governments have become active promoters of local development (Blanco 2009) and the design of 'creative cities' to attract highly qualified professionals and investors (the 'creative class' (Florida 2002)). Creative cities require public policies that generate suitable

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*Corresponding author. Email: joaquim.rius@ub.edu

environments for the 'creative class' and the exhibition of 'creative images', meaning elitist and gentrification policies (Peck 2005), and they require strategies framed within the 'entrepreneurial turn' of local policies (Harvey 1989) revitalizing urban spaces by developing architectural projects and cultural institutions (Bianchini 1993), organizing spectacular events (García 2004) and creating successful creative and cultural clusters (Scott 2000, 2010). These strategies serve a common goal, which is to enhance the image of a creative city (Landry and Bianchini 1995), i.e. the institution of a city brand. This consists in the holistic promotion of a city through its association with a global cultural icon (Evans 2003) and the diffusion of the features that form a city's social character and infrastructure so that it can be designated as 'creative' (Vanolo 2008). City branding projects are typical of large capital cities and medium-sized cities seeking to compete in the global economy by attracting tourists and investors (Castells 1989).

In territorial and national development, the singular value that can be assigned to products by culture is increasingly important for economic players. The more specific a narrative is, the more symbolically charged it becomes and the greater the monopolistic power of space that it can be used to exploit. This is the power that allows one city to gain a competitive advantage over others (Harvey 1989) and obstruct products coming from competing cities (Power and Scott 2004). One of the goals of urban and cultural policy-making, therefore, has been to promote the distinguishing (authentic) features of a territory to facilitate place branding strategies (Jones and Smith 2005); and in the course of this promotion, cultural policies are progressively instrumentalized to serve the international promotion of a nation's cultural industries so that they are associated with a territorial brand (Volkerling 2001), even at the risk of making the brand banal and repetitive (Evans 2003). In some image-building processes, states have succeeded in establishing clear and simple images, even while the images themselves may risk losing value in medium and long term (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011).

During the 1990s and documented by papers such as 'Marketing Places: Attracting Investment, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States and Nations' (Kotler *et al.* 1993), place branding in its broadest sense ceased to be the exclusive prerogative of governments and became a national concern. And although the modern state gradually acquired the monopoly of national representation and the authority to define the state's general notion of common interest, private sector analysts and companies became increasingly involved in the definition of nation branding, effectively establishing a private approach to the management of national image (Aronczyk 2008) even while national image was deemed to be a public good (Leonard 2002). Today, nation branding is a central mechanism of public diplomacy. However, this practice involves applying marketing tools to the representation of identity, which is an innovation with regard to previous developments, allowing the creation of the concept of 'brand states' (Van Ham 2001).

First published in 2005 and still annually reprinted, the consultant and scholar Simon Anholdt's *Anholt Nations Brands Index* measures worldwide perceptions of nation states using the dimensions culture, governance, population, exports, tourism, investments and immigration (Anholt 2006). In this index, Spain has come within the top 10 nations in culture, heritage and tourism but not in the other categories (Anholt 2009), and this has prompted various proposals that Spain's own nation branding project *Marca España* (Spain Brand) should be more associated with culture and arts, that *Marca España* is itself a cultural brand or that culture

should be considered part of the project's essence (Marco 2012). Based on documentary research and interviews with Spanish cultural policy-makers in national and international policy,[1] this paper will analyse and assess the process of construction of the *Marca España* project, its networks of actors and its various narratives, goals and examples of cultural and symbolic content. The paper will also describe how a simplified and uninational nation brand has been built by a political and economic elite and consider how culture can be economically and politically adapted to serve goals that go beyond cultural policy.

Cultural and identity diversity in Spain

Spain's highly diverse linguistic and cultural character was partially recognized in the Spanish Constitution of 1978. The state's official and main language is Spanish and that the four languages Basque, Catalan, Galician and Occitan share co-official status in 6 of the country's 17 first-order political and administrative divisions, called autonomous communities. Beyond these five languages, there are also the Astur-Leonese languages and Aragonese, which receive moderate levels of regional-government protection in three of the country's administrative divisions[2] but which are not supported by the Spanish state's *Administración General del Estado* (Spain's governing body at a national rather than regional or local level). In this respect, the Spanish state protects its cultural diversity less than federal or constitutionally plurinational states like Switzerland or Canada (Pla Boix 2010).[3] Authors have also proposed that this trend can be observed in three separate arenas: the institutional arena, the public power arena and the symbolic-linguistic arena, i.e. in the international recognition and projection of internal diversity (Requejo 2001).[4]

Spain's cultural, political and linguistic diversity comes from the beginnings of its history as a nation state and, at the same time, is linked to the Basque and Catalan political nationalist movements which first appeared in the nineteenth century. These movements have continued to determine the course of events in the twenty-first century, having endured long periods of dictatorial Spanish rule during which Basque and Catalan were banned and the use of these languages was persecuted. Ethnic-national tension persisted even once the dictatorship was over, but during the Spanish transition to democracy in the late 1970s, the nation's left-wing political parties, its centre-right *Unión de Centro Democrático* (Union of the Democratic Centre) and the parties representing the Basque and Catalan territories reached the political agreement that produced the *Estado de las autonomías*, the model of state which combined a unitary state structure with a system of decentralized power assigned to the nation's first-level political and administrative divisions (called *comunidades autónomas*) in a variety of areas mostly associated with the social arena and which has been described as quasi-federal (Aja 2007). The *Estado* model has generally served to facilitate the country's modernization process and its convergence with Europe, which was achieved with Spain's entry to the European Community in 1986 and to the Eurozone in 2002.

In the cultural arena, the nation's commitment to the transition to democracy was expressed in Article 2 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 in its recognition of the existence of 'nationalities and regions' and in Article 3 in its recognition of the state's cultural and linguistic diversity. Accordingly, the constitution promotes the state's active participation in safeguarding its citizens' access to culture (Articles 25.2, 44.1, 48 and 50) and assigns local, regional and national government bodies

varying degrees of authority in this area. This convergence has been described as a balance of the forces of centralization and decentralization in cultural policy (Bonet and Négrier 2010). However, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the consensus that produced the *Estado de las autonomías* has been undermined in two basic ways. First, Spain's national government increasingly perceives its regional governments' activities in the cultural arena as a burden on the country's international projection and territorial performance, and has therefore begun to recentralize political authority by endorsing a monolingual and centralist state model in education and language use, which are two sectors that Spain's regional governments have had authority in until now (Requejo 2009).[5] Second, minority nationalities have developed cultural policies oriented to nation building and advancing their own cultural and media industries (Zallo 2011, Villarroya 2012) and also cultural paradiplomacies – those mechanisms by which regional governments pursue international relations – to promote their own identities and cultures and their own position regarding political conflicts with the national government.[6]

Public diplomacy and the instrumentalization of culture

There is a certain consensus that Spain's image abroad still does not clearly reflect the reality of the modernization process that both its economy and Spanish society have experienced since the 1970s (López de Abiada 1996, Kelly 1997, Noya 2002, Martínez Lillo 2003) and that this dissonance could hinder the country's economic expansion (Noya 2003a). Those who defend this argue that certain images of Spain shaped abroad are clearly negative and that 'the basic archetypes that have historically prevailed […] are the "Black Legend" and the decline of the empire that considers Spain as a European country, arrogant and haughty, ineffective and badly governed, intolerant and profoundly religious' (Diez Nicolás 2003, p. 13) or that Spain has been given the image of:

> an exotic country of oriental cultural traditions, more pre-modern than decadent, integrated by men and women who love freedom, who are passionate but incapable of rational behaviour […] and which, however, presents Spain as a non-European country or radically different from European ones. (ibid.)

In this regard, culture and marketing (Noya 2002) have been considered resources that remove this stigma and create a positive content for the country's image and for exporting its products (Espinosa 2002).

On the one hand, it is true that Spain's international image improved significantly after 1992, when the Universal Exposition of Seville and Barcelona's Olympic Games gave the country's international agenda new importance and helped to project an image of its rising modernity. In the case of Barcelona, this was especially successful because the projection combined a sporting event with urban regeneration and the dissemination of local cultural creativity (Subirós 1998) and also led to the 'Barcelona model', meaning the model of an entrepreneurial city that could significantly manage culture to serve the purposes of city branding (Degen and García 2012, Sánchez *et al.* 2013). These events broke with the post-regime image of Spain as a grey, authoritarian country; they also put Barcelona and Spain on the map, place branding both city and country at an international level[7] and contributing to substantial growth in tourism in Spain (Balibrea 2004).

Closer to present times, however, a new current of Spanish nationalism that is particularly characteristic of the country's political elite and the conservative *Partido Popular* (People's Party, PP) considers that Spain's process of decentralization has weakened its international image (Creus 2005). Defenders of this current are now intent upon building a homogenous and uninational state (Delgado 2010). In this context, top–down policy-making has divested regional governments of their powers to practise public diplomacy and seeks to recover uninational presence and competitiveness in the international arena, especially Latin America. This process was intensified during the second term of the PP's Aznar government (2000–2004), when the party used its absolute majority in parliament to pursue agenda programme that intensified public and cultural diplomacy and launched the *Marca España* project (and also created a number of different cultural organisms that could support the new system of public diplomacy).[8] The programme as a whole, which adopted a centralist design and recovered the use of nationalist-oriented practices predating the Spanish transition (e.g. the study of the literature and culture of the Spanish-speaking world known as Hispanism) (Marzo 2004, Balfour and Quiroga 2007) has come under fire in different parts of Spain but especially in Catalonia and the Basque Country, where its pronounced Spanish nationalism and monocultural worldview marginalizes minority languages and cultures (Cortes Generales 2013).

And although in the 1980s, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, PSOE) had taken a more relational approach to international relations in its cultural diplomacy and cultural cooperation for development (Vicario 2007, Delgado Gómez-Escalonilla and Figueroa 2008),[9] when the party returned to power in 2004 it continued the main lines of the PP's *Marca España* project and followed these through its two terms of office (2004–2011). However, it is also true that the party pursued these policies more moderately, especially where the project's centralist strategies were concerned; that while the PSOE chose to develop *Marca España* uninationally, it also facilitated foreign activity in other dynamics and created a series of national–regional multilateral cooperation organs to operate as channels between different levels of government in different public sectors. One such channel was the *Conferencia Sectorial de Cultura* (Sector Committee on Culture) (see the map Actors and networks in the *Marca España* project, p. 14), which brought regional government representatives together with the national government's Ministry of Culture in the coordination of the state's cultural management activities, including its cultural diplomacy abroad (Spanish Ministry of Culture, MECD 2008). During the PSOE's second term, the MECD made an unsuccessful attempt to occupy a key position in the international cultural arena and hereby change the trend towards the instrumentalization of culture that had been encouraged by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Constenla and González 2008). In 2010 and against the backdrop of the Spanish financial crisis, however, an initiative to coordinate both these ministries led to the *Plan Nacional de Acción Cultural Exterior* (National Plan for Cultural Diplomacy, PACE), which was designed to boost the creation of *Acción Cultural Española* (Spanish Cultural Action, AC/E) (see Map 1), a public company that might centralize all the previous government's cultural diplomacy agencies in one organization. This also brought the promotion of Spanish culture overseas closer to the goals of Spanish foreign policy and reinforced the Spanish government's perception of culture as a resource or instrument for other goals.
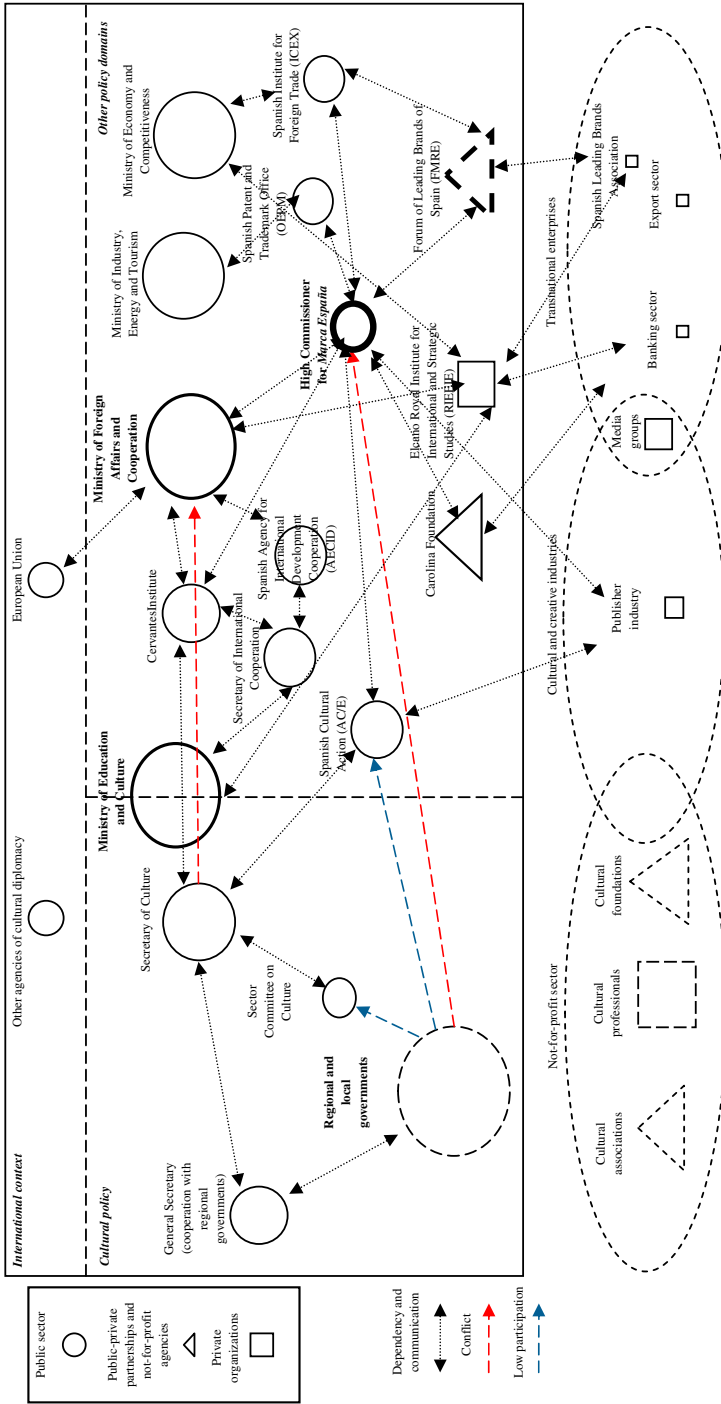
Map 1.   Actors and networks in the *Marca España* project.

Finally, it should be noted, the PACE's mission statement made and makes no provision for Spain's regional governments to participate with a culture and language of their own and does not envisage the promotion of languages other than Spanish. Indeed, the text makes no mention of other languages:

> Cultural diplomacy must reinforce *Marca España* abroad, which must include all the elements that define the new Spanish reality. Today, the democracy that is Spain is deeply plural with regard to values such as gender equality, renewable energies, creativity, and innovation and cooperation for development, and the nation seeks to promote the growing external projection of its companies and an active presence in every international organism. Spain's cultural diplomacy must follow this projection and transmit those values of modernity. (Translation of the text written by the Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Ministerio de Cultura 2009)

In spite of what the text says, however, we will now see that in the development of the *Marca España* project, the notion of plurality is being used not to refer to pluricultural, plurinational or plurilinguistic identity but only to bolster the description of an advanced society, so placing culture at the service of country-image building.

The *Marca España* project: origin and programmatic content

Marca España's public institutionalization began in 2000, during the second term of Aznar's PP government. From this moment onwards three interrelated factors changed the nature and direction of state activity in the nation-building–foreign projection equation: first, that the PP had a political majority in parliament and could implement a style of what might be called 'state capitalism' in their economic policies; second, that with these policies the government could boost its level of intervention in the foreign policy of Spanish multinationals in Latin America (which, indeed, had been formidable at an earlier period in history); and third, that a degree of confluence between the national government and Spanish nationalism contributed to the consolidation of the conservative, uninational and constitutive character of state policy (Balfour and Quiroga 2007, Delgado 2010).

In 1999, the year before Aznar was elected, 17 prestigious Spanish corporations joined forces to create the *Foro de Marcas Renombradas Españolas* (Forum of Leading Brands of Spain, FMRE), whose objectives were to promote member companies as a strategic asset of competitiveness and share expertize in internationalization processes. Weighted down by the interventionist and monopolistic economic model that their country had been subjected to during the dictatorship (Bonet and Négrier 2010), they argued, Spanish companies were still lagging behind the world's globalized economy and the FMRE was needed to speed things up. What it essentially meant was that the first step in the creation of the *Marca España* project as we know it today was completed by a group of multinational corporations who sought to improve their sales strength by gaining strategic representation abroad, flying on the wings of a new 'brands-nation' equation. And just three years later, in 2002, this first initiative became a public–private partnership and foundation in which the corporations were joined by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Industry, the *Oficina Española de Patentes y Marcas* (Spanish Patent and Trademark Office) and the *Instituto Español de Comercio Exterior*

(Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade, ICEX) and which, to date, comprises over 80 different organizations (FMRE 2008).[10]

Another important player which had begun to participate in *Marca España* in 2001 was the *Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos* (Elcano Royal Institute for International and Strategic Studies, RIEEIE), a private, mostly FMRE-financed foundation comprising different councils and managed by a board of representatives of these[11] and state agents including personnel from the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economy, and politicians in the PP and PSOE. A think tank designed to generate ideas about policy-making (especially foreign policy) and to analyse Spain's image abroad, the RIEEIE took as its mission the examination of Spain's strategic interests and reported on these to the Spanish media and to different players through papers, forums and congresses.

In 2002, the RIEEIE, the ICEX, the *Asociación de Marcas Renombradas Españolas* (Association of Leading Brands of Spain), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the *Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación* (Association of Communication Directors, Dircom) created a platform to design the *Marca España* project. In the mission statement for this platform, which was organized by the RIEEI and was to be financed by different companies, the following declaration was made:

> [Our] common goal consists in joining efforts to deliver clear messages regarding the constitution of a new image of Spain which will not only improve the country's economic projection but transmit Spain's new political, social and cultural reality, its modernity, artistic creation, dynamism and economic and cultural power. (Diez Nicolás 2003)

Note that in the context of growing economic globalization the diagnosis was not entirely positive:

> This goal is of vital importance at presence because although Spain's image is progressing positively, it remains mostly confusing, stereotyped and insufficient, and does not offer competitive strength. (ibid.)

And note that the project indirectly referred to the country's internal plurality and declared the state's desire to reflect this reality, albeit in a non-plurinational manner:

> It connects to an ample political problematic of our national being and is inserted in the commitment to a consensual and innovative future and in the building of a brand image that is an accurate reflection of the reality of our country. (ibid.)

The regional governments of the Basque Country and of Catalonia were not represented in the round-table conference on intergovernmental cooperation but when the role of regional governments was discussed, it was said that they 'positively appreciate the importance of the *Marca España* project' and that they 'prefer to be presented either only under the coverage of Spain's national brand or else by association of the *Marca España* with their own regional brand rather than being represented by that regional brand alone' (ibid.). This notion of the need to unify and centralize the image of the regional governments under the *Marca España*

umbrella would be repeated from then onwards in every document and declaration of this kind (Noya 2003a, *El País* 2012, *ABC* 2013) and the simplification of internal cultural diversity and the aspiration towards uninational character prevailed in the conceptualization and strategic approach to the branding project. The RIEEIE conference concluded that it was necessary to create an organism to coordinate the activity at a core level because the *Marca España* was a 'state issue' and it emphasized the importance of coordinating the efforts of the state and of the private companies involved. Even though the report proposed that there would be 'efficient mechanisms of coordination with competent organisms of the different Autonomous Communities [regional governments]' (Diez Nicolás 2003, p. 101), in the final event this did not occur and the initiatives around the plan were established according to a public–private, top–down design of governance.

Marca España: the actors' network and intra-elite consensus

The map describing the network of actors that participated in the *Marca España* brand-building process shows the complexity of the organization as well as the connections between certain combinations of actors and the absence of connections between others (see Map 1).[12] First, note the sector's significantly transversal nature, characterized by the participation of official bodies in wide range of administrative areas: cultural affairs, foreign affairs, industry, tourism and the economy. However, also note that at the time of writing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation plays the most prominent role in the network.

At the end of 2000, tensions began to emerge between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over the question of which agency was to have authority and be assigned resources in the area of cultural diplomacy (Rubio Arostegui 2008). The conflict was finally resolved in 2012 with the PACE, which gave the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation the lion's share of the diplomacy package, including the promotion of *Marca España*. Note that since June 2012 the project has actually been coordinated by a senior diplomatic officer who depends upon the ministry (namely, the high commissioner for *Marca España*).

Map 1 also indicates the large number of state agencies involved in the project, including legally and financially independent bodies working in cultural diplomacy. Examples are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation's *Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo* (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation), which is in charge of cultural cooperation, the Ministry's *Instituto Cervantes* (Cervantes Institute), which provides international projection for Spanish language and culture, and the agencies AC/E and ICEX (already described above in the sections 'The *Marca España* project: origin and programmatic content' and 'Public diplomacy and the instrumentalization of culture', respectively). Map 1 also describes the private agencies in the network, including the RIEEIE, the public–private partnership the *Fundación Carolina* (Carolina Foundation), which works in education and international scientific cooperation, and *Marca España*'s main partner the FMRE.

On the other hand, the relationships between agents involved in cultural policy are centred on the Ministry of Education and Culture and, in general, there is no participation of cultural agencies or other cultural administration levels. This is especially the case of Spain's regional and local governing bodies (its first- and second-order political and administrative divisions, i.e. its *comunidades autónomas*

and municipal offices), which are responsible for most public cultural manage-ment.[13] Note here that there are two points of tension in public diplomacy dynamics in the *Marca España* project, the first emerging in the rivalry between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, who would both wish to command greater control of how Spain's cultural diplomacy is defined and implemented, and the second reflected regional government agencies' resentment that they are allowed so little control of the *Marca España* system and the high commission that manages it.

These, then, are the main actors in the *Marca España* project, their relationships with one another and their structural dynamics of interaction. Although the official literature abounds with descriptions of the importance of culture in the creation of *Marca España*, the processes cited show that cultural agencies play only a second-ary role in the project as technicians or content providers. Essentially, regional government agencies do not participate in the definition of nation branding in any multicultural manner and any decentralization of power that might allow them to do so is hampered by the national government's insistence on the need to control this policy. Finally, as Map 1 indicates*, Marca España*'s centre of gravity is repre-sented by a combination of public and non-cultural agents (foreign affairs and economic promotion) and private agents (exports multinationals and creative indus-tries with international projection). These interaction dynamics are reflected, as we describe below, in the discursive dimension regarding two aspects: international representation and interior political control.

Marca España: the promotion of a homogeneous cultural image

One could argue that the language and layout on the 'Spanish history' page of the *Marca España* website are in some way reminiscent of that old catch phrase 'Spain is different'[14] and of the baggage that accompanied it: the myths about Spain's colonization of America which recover, albeit with certain variations, Spain's pre-democratic narrative about its national identity (The personality and idiosyncra-sies of Spain are nourished and manifested in phenomena like the discovery of America, the long Arab presence or its neutrality in two world wars.[15]). The homepage carries no reference to the nation's cultural diversity, either, and in this we see the workings of two conditions or prerequisites for the project: first, that Spain's nation branding must be connected to the essentially Spanish characteristics of national culture and be expressed in Spanish (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012); and second, any institutionalized cultural plurality will necessarily weaken this representation (Lassalle 2011).

The *Marca España* project declares that culture and Spanish language are first-order assets that the country has underutilized (Diez Nicolás 2003, p. 103). In this way, it focuses its attention on pedagogic and promotional activities that portray Spanish identity in a positive light but one that is also qualified by two filters: first by the proposal that what needs to be promoted is 'Spanish culture' rather than 'culture produced in Spain'; and second, by the proposal that what needs to be promoted is the Spanish language, thus relegating Catalan, Galician, Basque and the other languages of a state to obscurity. Accordingly, the document recommends subsidizing translations and text books about Spain or writing in Spanish and these text books must follow certain requirements regarding image: they should describe

positive aspects of Spanish culture and history (ibid.) and therefore critical or controversial books that do not fit this bill should be discarded.

The increasingly widespread perception of the Spanish language as a common identity factor and a resource for economic development (Noya 2003b)[16] has led to the promotion of the slogan 'Spain, the best place to learn Spanish' (ibid., Footnote 10). At the page titled 'Linguistic heritage' in the English-language view of the Spanish website 'España és cultura', this asset is highlighted in the introductory sentences 'Over 450 million people all over the world speak Spanish. The national language of Spain and Latin America is currently undergoing a moment of great popularity'.[17] And is then further detailed as follows:

> In addition to Castilian Spanish, there are another four official languages spoken in Spain: Catalan (in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands); Valencian (in the Region of Valencia); Galician (in Galicia); and Euskera (in the Basque country). This is just one more indication of the cultural, historical and social richness to be found in Spain. (ibid., Footnote 12)

In this regard, the text supports the thesis that differentiates the Catalan of Catalonia from the Catalan of Valencia, a position that is much questioned by academic and linguistic specialists. And finally, the text does not mention the fact that Catalan is also spoken in Aragon and that Basque has been spoken in Navarre since as far back as the fifth-century BCE (Apalauza Ollo 2012). If we add to this the fact that the main content of the webpage is aimed at endorsing Spanish, then its presentation of the state's cultural diversity is nothing if not oversimplified.

Similarly, the cultural policy of the state's national-level governing body the *Administración General del Estado* as currently implemented by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not informed by an intercultural or plurinational approach. Instead, it offers an image of cultural homogeneity based on Spanish language promotion and on maintaining a series of identity myths, such as the notion of *la fiesta nacional* epitomized in bullfighting. In fact, in 2011 the state's responsibility for the administration and management of the sport of bullfighting was transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Culture, making it possible for promoters to subsidize the sport with money reserved for cultural budgets (and giving bullfighting the status of a cultural asset). In opposition to this, the Government of Catalonia formally prohibited bullfighting in 2010 by putting a ban on the sport to a popular initiative which was signed by 180,000 citizens and subsequently approved in parliament. In this regard, it is clear how central cultural policy has been instrumentalized to serve a process of nation building which conflicts with the state's own internal cultural and political diversity. However, this use of non-conformist social practices (not only by nationalist powers, but also by organizations defending the environment and animal rights) is developed even though it may be detrimental to the image of a country abroad. A RIEEIE study observes that in those respects in which Spain is perceived to be traditional, rural, religious and underdeveloped, the association between *Marca España* and bullfighting only makes this negative perception worse (*Observatorio de la Marca España* 2013, p. 21). To sum up, the *Marca España* project and the national government's cultural policies are not taking a plurinational approach to identifying and projecting state culture and have understood the task of nation branding as a process of homogenizing and instrumentalizing the country's cultural heritage.

Economic and politic instrumentalization of culture in nation branding

Since the year 2012, when the PP re-launched the project against the backdrop of Spain's financial crisis, *Marca España* has become the core of Spanish foreign policy and a strategic goal for culture. And this has happened in spite of the serious reductions in cultural development cooperation and in cultural policy which have caused discomfort within the cultural sector and taken citizen's cultural rights a number of steps backwards.

In this regard, the *Marca España* brand building process has gained significant political and financial support from different government sectors (and also a substantial degree of private investment through the FMRE) and has led to the creation of new organisms and financial resources. The process has also been useful for government action in home policy, as observed by the PP's current State Secretary for Culture at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport José Maria Lassalle, back in 2011:

> Regardless of who governs, from 2012 onwards Spain must pursue […] a state policy that provides us with new global visibility and a national brand that shows us as we are: one of the most creative countries in Europe, a people characterized by their multifaceted physiognomy and their tolerance; a nation that can attract creative innovation from the Ibero-American and Mediterranean regions and improve an institutional network to empower our role as cultural crossroad and strategic link between Europe, America and the Mediterranean. (Translation of Lassalle 2011)

In effect, this is why the government chose a strategy that was based on Richard Florida's 3T approach (Florida 2002) – technology, talent and tolerance – and adapted to soft power (Nye 2004). On the other hand, although the third of those Ts (tolerance, or plurality) has been presented to the outside world in Spain's cultural diplomacy, it has not actually featured in Spain's domestic strategy. What have been promoted are 'creative industries embedded in an external action that empowers a country brand image associated with culture in Spanish and the commercial and economic exploitation of the Spanish language' (translated from Lassalle 2011). Thus, the interest in cultural diversity and 'hybrid' branding is limited to the core of Spanish cultural nationalism: the Spanish language. Similarly, Lassalle recommended the implementation of 'the coordination of powers in cultural policy development that transform our country by stimulating network environments and cultural exchange that transcends the territorial fragmentation we currently endure' (ibid.). This was interpreted by regional governments as an attempt to recentralize power and promote cultural assimilation (Mascarell 2012).

That this indeed was the government's will subsequently became evident in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport's *Plan Estratégico General de la Secretaría de Estado de Cultura 2012–2015* (Strategic Plan of the Office of the State Secretary for Culture), where Minister José Ignacio Wert proposed that in the years to come Spanish culture must be made to act as an essential ingredient in Spain's projection abroad of the *Marca España*' (La cultura debe consolidarse en los próximos años como un elemento esencial de la proyección exterior de la marca ESPAÑA) and where State Secretary Lassalle observed that in a period of history when far-reaching changes were taking place and where global information was of the essence, culture had become a highly effective ambassador for projecting a favourable image of the Spanish and for securing the country's much-needed international trust, and that for

these reasons culture had to be an essential ingredient in the *Marca España* project. This strategic goal, Lassalle went on to say, would be achieved in activities of foreign promotion of cultural industries and tourism, originating in a definition of Spanish culture as culture in Spanish and recovering the 'Spanishness' of discourse now legitimized by economic arguments; and Project 3.3.2 of the *Plan* summarized this as follows: 'Apoyo al español como lengua de oportunidad económica en el ámbito de las industrias culturales en la Red, poniendo en valor su papel en el espacio cultural común iberoamericano como acervo compartido' (The support of Spanish as a language of economic opportunity in the field of cultural industries online, and the assignation of value to its role in the common cultural arena of Ibero-American heritage).

Finally, it is clear how branding has been used as a process to legitimize the economic shift in projecting national identity. In this manner, during the last government the detriment in cultural action can been explained by the centrality given to economic and public diplomacy. The significant cuts made to the budgets of Spain's main institution for cultural diplomacy its *Instituto Cervantes* (from 103 million euro in 2010 to 83 million of euro in 2013) and also in the AC/E has made this clear (Europa Press 2010) and has also revealed that the cultural factor in itself is not the central interest in image building, given that it generally involves a relational perspective and long-term effects; and that, in its place, features such as sporting events (football), the media projection of an image that transfigures the representation of social and political effects of the financial crisis[18] and the settlement of the heavyweight trademarks are the real core of this policy. In addition to the instrumentalization of culture with an economic agenda, the concept of *Marca España* is also being used to cultivate a repressive form of discourse that will not counter difference and growing dissidence, which in turn are direct results of the country's current economic and sociopolitical crisis. In general terms, the idea that certain facts can damage a country's image have been used to accuse citizens and movements in social or political dissent and even judicial systems of not being supportive of this allegedly 'common' cause. Indeed, the political strategy that has been used most is to present the national government as defender of Marca España from internal and external attacks, including the political use of expectations of international investors (*Diario de Sesiones* 2013, p. 14).[19]

Conclusions

The notion of culture is being increasingly adopted as a highly regarded component of various products because it can be used to attribute singular and positive values to those products (Molotch 2002). This perception originally emerged in local and regional territorial frameworks and became a strategy for urban promotion during the 1980s. During the 1990s, it reached a point of paroxysm with the ideas and strategies of urban development around the concepts of the 'creative city' (Landry and Bianchini 1995) and the 'creative class' (Florida 2002). The notion of the importance of image or territorial brand for products and product export was initially associated with cities and led to the practices of local branding (Balibrea 2004), but was later extended to the debate about the image of a state abroad and provided the basis for nation branding (Aronczyk 2008). While local branding focuses on creating an attraction (tourism and creative actors), nation branding attempts to 'sell outside' by favouring export, market expansion and multinational companies.

In the course of this process, the nature of cultural policy experienced a change and what had previously been the object of intense instrumental utilization by local governments in their urban and economic agendas (Bianchini 1993) and in image promotion (Evans 2003) became a new tool for creating positive images. In answer to the profound transformations that were taking place in international systems and the global economy, cultural policy assumed a new role in the competition between nations and transnational corporations (Leonard 2002). The policy of country-image building became associated with the development of a more transversal public policy which combined tools for domestic cultural policy with cultural action abroad. However, cultural actors were then required to work within (and serve) a network directed by public and private agents who were pursuing their own agendas and for whom cultural promotion was secondary. Therefore, cultural policy not only became instrumentalized by being used for goals in other public sectors (Gray 2007) but ceased to be an independent sector itself. Effectively, cultural policy becomes a resource for other policies and the means to legitimize a series of nation-related arenas managed by agents who were not themselves managers of culture.

This paper has proposed that Spain's nation branding project is an intra-elite and centralized process and that this has come about as the result of an alliance between Spanish government politicians, national government authorities, academics and prominent, mostly Madrid-based business professionals and consultants. Regional government representatives and executives, union representatives, regional social movements, professionals, cultural sectors and other intellectual, political and social agents have all been excluded from this network. When we analyse the discourse that describes *Marca España* and directs its activities, the process is reminiscent of the nation-building processes of the nineteenth century. In this case, however, instead of founding the process on flags, anthems and historical myths (Hobsbawn 1991), Spain's branding strategy has been made visible through marketing tools like surveys, media diffusion and new technologies. Likewise, the political instrumentalization of a public asset has led to the obstruction of social and public participation, advocacy and governance processes, all of which are considered core elements of twenty-first-century democracy.

The result of the exclusion of broad sectors of the population is reflected in the concealment of cultural and linguistic diversity and in the ostracism of minority national groups, who are merely conceived of as examples of the country's internal diversity but who can serve no purpose in projecting a national brand. The desire to create an appealing brand for exports certainly explains much of this exclusive and simplifying management. However, it does not account for everything: as we have seen, the Spanish government and its *Marca España* managers are willing to associate the national brand with bullfighting, despite the price Spain then has to pay by being seen to embrace practice customs that are considered to be archaic. In contrast, in the construction and brand outreach traditional symbols of 'Spanishness' such as bullfighting and flamenco have been emphasized, although they are cultural characteristics that do not create feelings not of unanimity but of growing resentment and discomfort. In addition, this use of simplistic images can affect the representation itself, exacerbating the stigma created by social and political backwardness, corruption and economic crisis. Furthermore, inward branding has often been used as a political tool to discredit social and economic protest, to undermine arguments against unreasonable economic or social measures and

counter public condemnation of institutional corruption by equating protest with the desire to damage the country's image.

Various authors and consultants have called for a modernization of the image (Noya 2003b), more plural diagramming (Ansorena 2006) or greater social participation through social networks (Gutiérrez-Rubi 2013). However, in no case have authors actually identified the (possibly unavoidable) risks involved in putting the creation of a national brand in the hands that nation's political and economic elite. As discussed by Aronczyk (Aronczyk 2008), such processes are usually carried out with the help of private consultants specializing in the area and promoting the simplification and manipulation of a common asset. To sum up, we believe that Spain's nation branding project has become a double risk: on one hand, it has led to what has been described as 'the production of culture' (Aronczyk 2008), meaning the dissemination and local reaffirmation of predesigned and stereotyped images of national or local political identity (Zukin 1995); and on the other, it has become a threat to plurality and to the control of power by democratic means. In this regard, the Spanish nation branding is being symbolically used to suppress political dissent and social protest, to disallow recognition of national and cultural plurality and to prohibit campaigns against corruption or political processes of democratic reform.

Nation branding may be used to disseminate a nation's heritage and national history in ways that preserve national complexity (Kotler and Gertner 2002) but the Spanish case is a clear example of a trend that has already been observed in other countries: elitist brand management at service of multinational corporations, the instrumentalization and simplification of culture in the creation of a national brand and, finally, the privatization of a public asset. (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011) If we are prepared to consider Elinor Ostrom's theories on common resources and their application to knowledge and cultural assets and if we are ready to accept nation branding as a common good (Hess and Ostrom 2006), then we can only conclude that this practice must be managed by institutions that are independent from official political parties and private corporations. We must conclude that genuine nation branding can only take place if it involves the real participation of that nation's citizens and represents the national, social and cultural diversity existing in their territory.

Notes

1. This paper reports research on the Spanish cultural policy system conducted between 2008 and 2011 and it was financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (National R&D Plan, Ref. CSO2008-05910/SOCI). The paper reports from documental sources and institutional reports, administrative budgets and documents and semi-directed interviews with government personnel participating in the cultural policy of Catalonia and of the national government. A total of 28 interviews were conducted with a selection of national- and regional-level (politically appointed) government officers and civil service specialists (high-level public administrators and personnel in public agencies and institutions). The research was conducted by one of the authors as part of his doctoral thesis on Spain and Catalonia's cultural diplomacy. Finally, the paper uses Arturo Rodríguez Morató's methodological principles for the sociological analysis of cultural policy '(a) The study must illustrate and be bound by the two institutional contexts that constitute it: culture and the state; (b) The institutional contexts analyzed must be considered from a procedural and socio-historic approach; (c) the analytical horizon of cultural policies must be determined by the social relations that constitute it and that shape specific, open and dynamic systems of action' (Rodriguez Morató 2012).

2. According to a survey conducted in 2005, Spanish was the first language for 89% of the Spanish population, followed by Catalan for 9%, Galician for 5% and Basque for 1%, while the 3% of the population had a different first language (European Commission 2006). Note that the total equals more than 100% because respondents could choose several options simultaneously if they felt they had more than one mother tongue.

3. Unlike multinational federal states like Switzerland or Canada where different languages are constitutionally assigned the same status, in Spain the Spanish language is the national government's official language and all Spanish citizens have the responsibility to speak it. In contrast, Catalan, Basque and Galician are only regionally co-official and knowledge of these languages is not mandatory at a national level. Spanish citizens cannot use the languages of national minorities to communicate with the Spanish state's *Administración General del Estado* (Spain's governing body at a national rather than regional or local level), its courts of justice or its businesses, even in their own region. The language rights structure of the Spanish state is therefore asymmetrical, and this has generated numerous situations characterized by inequality and substantial levels of grievance between language communities. It has also weakened the position of the languages of national minorities with regard to Spanish (the second most widely spoken language in the world) (Government of Catalonia 2007).

4. Catalan is one of the most important languages in Spain and the mother tongue of more than four million people. More than nine million people are able to speak it. This puts Catalan above other official EU languages, like Danish (Government of Catalonia 2007). In spite of this and the fact that the Government of Catalonia and Catalan representatives in the EU have repeatedly demanded this supranational organism's official recognition of Catalan, the *Administración General del Estado* has refused to promote their petition.

5. In 2013, the Spanish government promoted a new education law which devaluated the teaching of the Spanish state's minority languages by making classes in those languages optional. In addition, the new law allows the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports to apply a centralist approach to the presentation of the teaching contents of the subject of History. Note that in its declarations on this subject in the Spanish Parliament the Ministry has announced that it intends to foster a sense of Spanish identity among Catalan students and that this law is designed to help them 'begin to feel proud of being Spanish' ('Wert quiere "españolizar" Cataluña', *El País*, 10 Oct 2012).

6. This political and institutional tension has become especially intense in Catalonia since 2010, when the Constitutional Court of Spain declared that various powers recognized by the Government of Catalonia's Statute of 2006 were unconstitutional and promoted recentralization in the areas of education and culture (Carrasco Nualart 2010). This tension was reflected in the substantial presence of demonstrators in the pro-independence demonstration of 11 September 2012 and in the Catalan Parliament's declaration of sovereignty and petition to conduct a referendum of 23 January 2013 (Fossas 2010).

7. In 1999, Preston named Spain as one of the most successful examples of nation branding (Preston 1999).

8. These institutions are the *Sociedad Estatal para Exposiciones Internacionales* (State Society for International Exhibitions) of the Ministry of Economy and Property (created in 2000); *the Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior* (State Society for Spanish Cultural Action Abroad), coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (created in 2001); and the *Sociedad Estatal para Conmemoraciones Culturales* (State Society for Cultural Commemorations) of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (created in 2002).

9. We consider that there are certain difference between the approach to cultural diplomacy and the cultural objectives of Spain's two main political parties the PP and the PSOE. However, the scope of these differences lies beyond this paper. In second place, we observe that the *Marca España* project maintains its continuity independently of the political party that is in the power and that this is reflected in the project's refusal to promote non-Spanish rooted cultures.

10. These include Zara, Real Madrid, F.C. Barcelona, Banco Santander, BBVA, Repsol, El Corte Inglés, MoviStar and NH Hoteles.

11.   These include Inditex, Repsol, Telefonica and Santander.
12.   The map reflects an approach to the institutional configuration of *Marca España* inspired in the public policy network analysis (Porras Martínez 2001).
13.   In 2010, the biggest investors in culture were local government bodies (59%) followed by regional governments (26%) and then the national-level *Administración General del Estado* (15%) (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura 2012). Different institutions are supposed to operate as inter-level coordinators of cultural action abroad, like the Sector Committee on Culture. This organization aims to coordinate the cultural policies of the national-level *Administración General del Estado* (with international actors), with Spain's regional government agencies but although it should hold annual meetings with the Ministry of Culture and representatives of Spain's different regional governments, these meetings were never carried out during the entire period of PP's 1996–2004 term of government.
14.   This formed part of one of the many campaigns used to reinforce a policy of traditionalist conservatism during Franco's dictatorship.
15.   The English-language page on Spain's history at the *Marca España* webpage http:// marcaespana.es/ (http://marcaespana.es/en/instituciones-historia/historia/) [Accessed 5 June 2013].
16.   A study conducted in 2003 and financed by the Spanish multinational Telefonica and Santander Banc concluded that the Spanish language contributed to 15% of Spain's GDP, reinforcing this idea (Martín Municio 2003).
17.   'España es cultura', www.españaescultura.es/ (http://www.spainisculture.com/en/temas/ patrimonio_linguistico/) [Accessed 14 June 2013].
18.   For example, *Marca España* High Commissioner Carlos Espinosa de los Monteros criticized the *New York Times* for using its cover to run an article titled 'Spain Recoils as Its Hungry Forage Trash Bins for a Next Meal' (*New York Times*, 24 Sep 2012). The article reported on the increase in extreme poverty in Spain.
19.   The government has accused social protests, vindications around of Catalonia referendum or judicial resolution of weakening the Marca España project. PP President Mariano Rajoy described the general strike of 2012 as damaging to the country's image (No ayuda para nada a la imagen de España) (*Público*, 19 Oct 2012) and Foreign Affairs Minister José Manuel García-Margallo opined that the exhibition of a giant Catalan flag and pro-independence demonstrations during a football match between the teams Barcelona and Real Madrid in Barcelona was also detrimental to Marca España (*El País*, 8 Oct 2012). García-Margallo also proposed that the furore over the Bárcenas affair (the possibility that the PP had engaged in irregular bookkeeping) was out of proportion and that it was damaging *Marca España* (*El Periódico*, 18 Feb 2013) as were the court's investigations into the role of Infanta Cristina of Spain in the corruption enquiry regarding members of the Spanish royal family (*El Mundo*, 4 Apr 2013).

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