

Tourist promotion of Portugal and the Arts in the Ibero-American Exhibition of Seville of 1929¹

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1. National, international and universal expositions, the arts and the promotion of Portugal as a tourist destination

Exhibitions at the national and international level and universal expositions provided countries with the opportunity for raising their profile and self-promotion, extending also to contemporary political regimes, and this trend was most marked especially from the second half of the 19th century.

Progress in the field of transport led to an increase in the number of visitors to exhibitions² and news published in the press meant that there was an unprecedented level of dissemination of information about these events among increasingly broad sectors of society.

The extent to which Portugal was represented at these events varied over the years, as did the emphasis given to exhibition resources. As was the case with other countries, Portugal sought to present aspects of its economic activity, technical and scientific innovation, and features associated with the regions and customs regarded as having an important role to play in the strategy of promoting the country.

Art exhibitions and cultural events held by Portuguese artists and cultural figures were also a regular feature of such events. The contribution of architecture and the arts was evident at the Portuguese pavilion in Seville, witness the sculptures, paintings, tapestries and other exhibits selected for the purpose of adornment and to draw attention to the aesthetic and artistic wealth of the country³.

Authors and plastic artists were recruited for the production of a range of materials for the dissemination of exhibitions, including posters, photographs, collections of illustrated postcards and travel guides. These guides included texts and images of an apparently utilitarian and illustrative nature, while decisions as to what was to be emphasised or omitted were based on the aesthetic and ideological choices made both by those who were responsible for commissioning them and the authors themselves.

Artistic creation in its various manifestations was thus an integral part of the process of the building an image of the country that was sought to be projected at the international level.

The aim of this paper is to show how artistic creation was harnessed for the construction of discourses of identity and promotion for the purpose of the stimulating tourism. We do that through the study of the contribution of Portugal to the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929 by examining some of the most important means and resources used for the purposes of dissemination and propaganda of the country.

¹ This paper is written in the context of the project CIDEHUS - UID/HIS/00057/2013 (POCI-01-0145-FEDER-007702).

² On this subject cf. with regard to Portugal, A.C. de Matos, M.L.F.N. dos Santos e M.A. Bernardo, “Transport, tourism and technology in Portugal between the late 19th and early 20th centuries”, *HoST – Journal of History of Science and Technology*, Vol. 4, Fall 2010. [URL <http://www.johost.eu/?oid=8&act=&area=6&ri=1&itid=>]

³ On the subject see M.H. Souto, *Portugal at Universal Expositions*, Lisboa, Ed. Colibri, 2011.

2. The Portuguese contribution to the Ibero-American Exposition held in Seville

The Ibero-American Exposition in Seville was inaugurated on May 9, 1929 and closed on June 21, 1930.

The idea for holding the event had emerged several years previously and planning carried out during the intervening period and was affected by a number of contemporary circumstances. In the 1920s, in the aftermath of World War I, important decisions were taken that drove the project forward.

In 1922 it was decided that the exposition would be designated Ibero-American rather than Hispano-American thereby taking into account the participation of Portugal and Brazil. Following the Spanish *coup d'état* of 1923, Primo de Rivera, the head of the government, enthusiastically supported the project. The concept of an international exposition involving the participation of Spain's American continental ex-colonies served its interests in forging a new overseas policy.

According to the event organising committee, the inclusion of Portugal and Brazil was associated with patriotic motives. It symbolized the "reciprocal feelings of fraternity and friendship shared by Spain and the neighbouring Portuguese Republic" while welcoming the contribution of the former Portuguese colony of Brazil⁴.

In the climate of political instability in Portugal, although the advantages of Portuguese participation at the exposition were highlighted in public discussion, it was not until April 1926 that official acceptance of the invitation was sent. The following month, the military coup of 28th May established a dictatorship in Portugal.

The military and conservative and anti-liberal civilian groups that assumed responsibility for governance welcomed the chance to take part in the exposition as providing an opportunity for establishing the new regime at the international level. Moreover, the Portuguese and Spanish dictatorial regimes identified with each other, enabling the adoption of a harmonious discourse on the meaning of the event. Their central arguments were the historical role of the two Iberian countries in the discovery of new worlds and the colonisation of the American continent, and the importance of consolidating economic ties with "brother" nations⁵.

The Portuguese authorities and media also disseminated the idea that the Ibero-American Exposition would provide a unique opportunity for the promotion of the country as a tourist destination abroad. Besides the efforts Portugal made to achieve this aim at the exposition, it also took advantage of its geographical proximity to Seville and its history to raise the profile of the country among the participants at the event.

The organisational work to provide for Portugal's participation at the event was carried out by three government agencies: the Ministry of Interior, the National Tourist Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, in the expectation of benefits deriving from an increase in the number of visitors to the country, several municipalities and event-organising committees developed strategies to promote their cities and regions, while Lisbon, the capital, would take on the role of the great "maritime gateway to Europe", in particular for transatlantic travellers⁶.

⁴ A. Souto, *The Ibero-American Exposition in Context*, Nottingham, University of Nottingham, Vol. I, pp. 143-152.

⁵ T.J.B. Neto, *Arquitecturas Expositivas e Identidade Nacional: os Pavilhões de Portugal em Exposições Internacionais entre a Primeira República e o Estado Novo* (Master's Dissertation), Lisboa, Instituto Superior Técnico, 2016, p. 43.

⁶ Official Guide to the Portuguese Exhibition in Sevilha, Lisbon, Comissariado Geral da Exposição Portuguesa em Sevilha, 1929, p. 5.

3. Means and resources for the dissemination of Portugal at the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929

Participation at international and universal expositions required organisational resources being harnessed with the aim of enhancing the standing of the respective countries at the event and disseminating information to visitors and other stakeholders. The specific profile of each event, and the strategy adopted by each country in this respect, meant that some aspects assumed more importance than others⁷.

Portugal had a wealth of experience of participating at such events and was aware of the means and resources which were normally used⁸. In the case of the Ibero-American Exposition, as already noted, one of the major features of the Portuguese initiative was the dissemination of the potential of the country as a tourist destination. In this paper, we examine this point and its relation with the arts taking as examples three key resources for the promotion of Portugal at the event: the Portuguese pavilion, the official guide and the official poster.

3.1. *The Portuguese pavilion at the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929*

Portugal always engaged renowned architects to design its pavilions at the exhibitions at the national and international level and the universal expositions it took part in.

The rules of the competition for the design of the Portuguese pavilion at the 1929 exposition called for architectural proposals of a "national character". The winning entry adopted a historicist discourse with a "genuinely Portuguese" style dating back to the 17th century, evoking a period in which "Portuguese trade developed most rapidly with the colonies, especially Brazil", in the words of the winning architects⁹.



Pavilion of Portugal, Ibero-American Exhibition of Seville, 1929.

⁷ P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas. The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939*, Manchester, Manchester University, 1991.

⁸ M.H. Souto and J.P. Martins, "Pavilhões Portugueses nas Exposições Universais do Século XIX", *Arte Efêmera em Portugal*, Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian/Museu Gulbenkian, 2000, pp. 352-379.

⁹ T.J.B. Neto "Projetar para expor coleções: os pavilhões de Portugal em exposições internacionais entre a Primeira República e o Estado Novo", *Coleções de Arte em Portugal e Brasil nos séculos XIX e XX: perfis e trânsitos*, M.J. Neto and M. Malta (eds.), Casal de Cambra, Caleidoscópico, 2014, pp.322-324; idem, *Arquitecturas Expositivas e Identidade Nacional: os Pavilhões de Portugal em Exposições Internacionais entre a Primeira República e o Estado Novo*, Lisboa, Instituto Superior Técnico (MA dissertation), 2016, pp. 135-142.

The Rebello de Andrade brothers had a proven record of success in the field of exhibition design. Jointly with Alfredo Assunção Santos, they designed the *Pavilhão Português das Indústrias* (Portuguese Industries Pavilion) for the Independence Centenary International Exposition held in Rio de Janeiro in 1922¹⁰.

The design for Seville was praised widely in the national press and, praise was also extended to "the illustrious engineer, Jácome de Castro, who has directed works and demonstrated his great talent"¹¹. In the interior of the pavilion building, in addition to paintings, sculptures and ceramics exhibits belonging to Portuguese museums, on display were paintings, sculptures and *azulejo* glazed-tile panels produced for the exhibition by renowned artists of the period. Some works were historical and erudite in nature while others focused on regional themes and evoked customs and traditional practices from around the country¹².

On the walls of the sections of the pavilion building designed to display agricultural and industrial products from the metropolis, allusive paintings added an artistic note to the economic purposes and sharpened even more curiosity of the visitor. The same orientation was followed for the extensive display of colonial products.

It was intended that, after the Exhibition, the fixed part of the pavilion would be used as the Portuguese Tourism Office in Seville

Even the dictatorial government praised the event: "Everyone who visited the exposition [...] describes our pavilion with real enthusiasm. [...] and Portugal, in Seville, at least, is no longer merely the country of revolutions. In the space of six months it has created the most attractive, welcoming pavilion at the exhibition."¹³.

3.2. The Official Guide to Portuguese Participation at the Ibero-American Exposition

The edition of guides and catalogs had already a long tradition. The organizers of the exhibitions were usually concerned with publishing guides that gave the visitor information about the various countries represented at the exhibition, the layout of the various spaces and the products that were exhibited.

For their part, the countries who participated in the exhibitions often published their own guides, in which they sought to promote the country, and their catalogs which indicated the different products they exhibited.

In the Official Guide of Portugal, the promotion of the country as a tourism destination is very clear, particularly for visitors who crossed the Atlantic towards Seville. The book included detailed information on all routes, means of transport and accommodation from Portugal to



The Official Guide of Portuguese participation in the Ibero-American Exhibition, 1929

¹⁰ On the pavilion, see A.C. de Matos and A. Malveiro, "The travels of the *Pavilhão Português das Indústrias*, from the International Exhibition of Rio de Janeiro (1922), and its different uses", in this book.

¹¹ *Ilustração* review, 4th Year, no. 83. June 1, 1929, p. 20.

¹² *Ilustração* review, 4th Year, no. 83. June 1, 1929, p. 20; n. 84, June, 16 pp.18-20; n. 85, July 1, pp. 18-20; no. 87, August, 1, pp.17-20.

¹³ *Diário de Notícias*, June 4, 1929.

Seville. And in articulation with the various routes, the natural and monumental beauties of Portugal were described and illustrated with photographs and engravings.

The introductory text to the guide stated that "[Portugal's] past is the most brilliant and proudest page in the history of nations, [and] its future will see the progress of the Motherland with all its modern and useful manifestations" [1]. Art, in particular works depicting the discoveries on display at the Portuguese pavilion, and also the various national monuments described and illustrated in the guide, linked the glories of the past and the future potential of the nation in which tourism clearly had a role to play.

3.3. The official poster of Portugal at the Ibero-American Exposition

From the second half of the 19th century, the dissemination of major events was accompanied by the production of images in articles published in newspapers and magazines. New technologies enabled the graphic reproduction of posters, transmitting a succinct message which served as a symbol and future memory of exhibitions in the field of the graphic arts.

Aware of the importance of visual language in the dissemination of information about exhibitions, the organisers looked for an artist to design the official poster of Portugal for Seville and chose Almada Negreiros, a young artist on the rise. The poster, was designed in Modernist style with a popular female figure proudly boasting symbolic elements of the national flag representing Portugal.



Poster of Almada Negreiros. Portugal at the Ibero-American Exhibition, 1929

4. Conclusion

The case presented in this paper was aimed at demonstrating the contribution of the arts to the strategy of the Portuguese government during a period of important political change. Although the official decision on the participation of Portugal at the exposition was taken by a Liberal government, it was the Military Dictatorship that made preparations and took major decisions on policy and the features of the Portuguese contribution.

Regarding the perception of the importance of the event for the promotion of the country as a tourist destination abroad, in particular targeted at those from the American continent, the change of regime did not lead to a lack of continuation.

The use of the arts and culture for enhancing the country's image and asserting power was in keeping with the actions of previous governments on the occasion of Portugal's participation in events of a similar nature in

the past. The positive portrayal of Portugal as a colonial country also provided an element of continuity during the First Republic and the Military Dictatorship.

The adoption of a nationalistic aesthetic, associated with historicist and regionalist motifs characterising the artistic creations included in the exposition is probably the distinguishing feature and most singular element of the mark of the dictatorship in the profile of Portugal at the Seville exposition of 1929. Thus, the event may have started out as an attempt to identify a nucleus of artists, themes and an aesthetic quality, which ended up being associated with the authoritarian regime of the Portuguese New State.

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