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Public relations before “public relations” in Spain: an early history (1881-1960)

Public relations
in Spain

279

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the origins of Spanish public relations from the end of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Although the term “public relations” was an export to Europe by the end of the second world war (with some exceptions), its philosophy had already been practised in some countries, and countries not always under a democratic regime, as the Spanish case shows.

Design/methodology/approach – The approach taken is a literature review of the first Spanish communication journals, oral interviews with the pioneers in the field and documentary research of the unpublished professional archive of the first Spanish agency, established in 1960.

Findings – The first “public relations” campaigns did not appear until the very late 1950s. However, a closer look reveals the existence of precedents in the first half of the century though under other names such as “educational” and “prestige” advertising, or “propaganda” campaigns. Despite being considered as isolated experiences, they prove the phenomenon precedes the name of “public relations”.

Practical implications – This paper places special emphasis on two lines of emergence for public relations. First, the profession in Spain naturally evolved and stemmed from advertising and, due to historical reasons, it was also related to communicative initiatives known as “propaganda”. Second, once the practitioners heard about the American term “public relations”, the precedents seemed to be ignored and were replaced by the influence of other countries’ experiences, thanks to the wide vision of the pioneers.

Originality/value – There is little research on the origins of public relations in Spain and none on the precedents. This paper fills in some of the gaps.

Keywords Public relations, History, Spain

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The area of public relations (PR) in Spain is experiencing an identity crisis that has grown over the years. Nowadays it is struggling between its true identity and the identity it would wish to have: a communication discipline not fully understood even by many of its practitioners, and a highly regarded profession. At such a critical moment, it might be good for PR to accept itself just as it is, to make peace with itself, to redefine and continue adapting to the present moment. A fundamental point for this reconciliation might be found in clear understanding of what it was in the past, in its origins. Thus, now more than ever before, it needs to return to the historical concept of PR. Only if we know and understand our roots can we comprehend their true meaning.

It was not until the 1950s that the term “public relations” appeared in Spain, and even then it was not immediately used by the professionals of the times. The *Sociedad Española de Relaciones Públicas* (SAE de RP) was founded in 1960. It was the first Spanish company with full-time commitment to PR services. Nothing has been



published on precursors of this business with different designations at earlier dates in Spain. Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) was certainly an obstacle in finding such information.

Consequently, this article is an attempt to point out the precursors of this activity in the private sector in Spain in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. The aim is to investigate whether the reality of the term existed before the 1950s, under different names, and therefore to understand the true origin of the profession in this country. Up to now history took the arrival of the term "public relations" in Spain as the starting-point for historical study. Undeniably, the act of giving something a name implies its recognition, but it also hinders the search for precursors to that activity. What this work offers, then, is original, as, up to the present moment, no research has been published on these first important initiatives.

Literature

The USA was the first country to consider the origin and development of PR as a professional activity, and certainly under the original designation of "public relations". Many authors have dealt with its historical development in America. However, the fact that the concept of "public relations" emerged in the US and was exported to Europe does not necessarily mean that the historical development of the discipline depends on the history of PR in the USA. In contrast to what is widely believed, Europe has its own tradition of PR parallel to the American one; however this is unheard of as it occurred under different designations or because the American theory prevailed after the second world war[1].

Therefore, having carried out in-depth bibliographical research into the major twentieth-century historical works on the subject, there is a clear predominance of the American historiographical tendencies. This results in a majority belief stating that PR stems from late nineteenth-century America, based on a progressive economic and political climate that emphasized social reform, together with parallel pressure from research journalism. By admitting an American origin for the discipline, we may forget the phenomena in other countries, which, under different titles, were true predecessors (Vasquez and Taylor, 2001, p. 321). In fact, strategic communication has been studied with different designations, which has resulted in a fragmented panorama on knowledge of social communication (Pizarroso Quintero, 2001, p. 485).

Fortunately, since the 1990s, Europe has returned to the study of the roots of the discipline, and this has partially palliated the lack of historical research[2]. What matters is not to establish a standardized European current, in opposition to the American one, but rather to show concern about the authentic roots of the discipline in Europe. This is also the opinion of the editors of the Bled Manifesto. This most complete study yet on European PR states that PR is a cultural element (van Ruler and Verčič, 2002). And, although we cannot consider Europe as a cultural and political unit, it can be differentiated from the USA. We must understand what we have in common and what makes us different. By studying European history we can see that PR is not simply an import from America during the post-war period.

Accepting the American theory, and thus likening the emergence of the activity with the importation of the term "public relations" after 1945, has consequently discarded all and every antecedent in most European countries. Such ideas have led to beliefs that the discipline might have existed in Europe before its "exportation" by the

US, but under other names. Thus the historical study becomes a keystone in the search for PR identity (Szyszka, 1997, 1998).

Specifically, the current state of research into the origin of PR in Spain is precarious. There is no specific research on the precedents of PR in the country nor a review of the widely accepted timeline and campaigns. Those few authors who have dealt with the phenomenon (Arceo, 2004a, b; Arceo, 2006; Checa, 2007; Moreno Fernández, 2004; Noguero i Grau, 2004, 1994, 1995) place its origin in the mid-1950s or even in the 1980s, with the end of Franco's dictatorship and the advent of democracy (Arceo, 2006, p. 115). These scholars underline the scarcity of scientific writing before the 1980s (Arceo, 2006, p. 117), the confusion between the business of sales and advertising, and PR throughout its history (Adecec, 1996, pp. 25-26), ignorance of its true features among those who work in the field (Arceo, 2004b, p. 51) and, as a result, an unfair lack of prestige for the term which makes the true identity of Spanish PR uncertain.

Methodology

Finding the chronological origin and meaning of PR before the use of this term poses certain methodological challenges. The bibliographical sources and traditional methods of the history of ideas can only tell us what people said or believed. The final proof will be to see how these ideas were put into practice. Thus, the study of PR must, simultaneously, be a history of ideas and a history of praxis, an examination of the relationships between ideas and action.

The methodology chosen in this research intends to reflect this anxiety. When we consider the range and quantity of American historiographical sources, we realize the scarcity of scientific sources available to support the historical evolution of PR in Spain. Methodology was designed to collect and check different forms of primary and secondary information. Thus, triangulation was achieved by using different research techniques.

In the beginning, books and articles on the history of Spanish advertising were carefully read and analysed in search of actions and concepts that could be considered as precedents of PR. Bibliography and references in those texts identified some interesting articles in monographs on communication and economic development, and professional and specialized Spanish journals published in that time period. Once identified, all the issues were read for similar articles on the topic. The next step was to check the dates of PR campaigns mentioned by Spanish academic literature in newspaper libraries. All those secondary sources helped to generate a true timeline framework with all the information available on the subject of history of advertising and PR in the country. Pioneers and first PR campaigns were highlighted. In addition, the time span provisionally typified as precedents or "early years" was reviewed at newspaper libraries in order to find other examples of early campaigns in print.

Primary research was also designed to supplement secondary research. The aim was twofold: checking the timeline reliability and identifying historical periods influenced by economic, political and social factors. Within the framework of a more extensive research as mentioned above, qualitative "snowballing" interviews were conducted with the pioneers responsible for the first campaigns, national and international consultancies. A semi-structured questionnaire was designed to steer life histories as narrative stories that could specify facts and interpret the past. Those oral history records and memoirs were personal; so accuracy was checked by conducting

research in the professional archives of the SAE de RP, the first national PR agency. They not only hold registers of the beginnings of PR in Spain from the earliest campaigns, but also records and minutes of professional gatherings and associations.

Hence, the account of Spanish PR history was verified with different research methods to gain validity for new and generally accepted dates and highlights of the profession during the twentieth century. This article focuses on the early history of PR in the private sector from the beginning of commercial activities in the 1880s to the birth of the first PR agency in 1960.

Findings

Strictly speaking, the first “public relations campaigns” were not seen in Spain until the late 1950s. However, this paper will show how, as in other European countries, there were predecessors of this activity, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, which were the equivalent of what was later called “public relations”. Although these were isolated incidents, they are a clear indication that, in Spain, the phenomenon also preceded the international designation of “public relations”, which would be imported from the USA.

The origins of PR in Spain are explained in this work on a chronological timescale divided into three periods. In the first, the beginnings of commercial communication are traced from the late nineteenth century up to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The post-war period influenced by Franco’s dictatorship from 1939 to 1953, is taken as a second framework for the analysis of governmental campaigns as the only samples of communication for the period. And finally, the 1953-to-1960 period is underlined as the foundational stage for PR in this country, from the first writing on the subject to the founding of the first Spanish PR firm.

The birth of commercial activity (1881-1939)

The late nineteenth century in Spain was noteworthy for its scant economic development. However, in the final years of the century, a change in attitude towards the customer came about (Prat Gaballí, 1953, pp. 29-30). If, in view of industrial growth, the final customer or consumer was faceless for the manufacturer during most of the nineteenth century, and business was in the hands of the wholesalers, the industry then realized that it could free itself from the intermediaries. To do so, it simply had to make its products different from those of its competitors, through a brand guarantee that would make the most of the widespread newspapers. This commercial situation coincided with a period of political stability – the restoration – when, after a six-year revolutionary period, the Bourbons had returned to the Spanish throne in 1875.

Between 1910 and 1936, Spain enjoyed a period of industrial growth (Catalán, 1995, pp. 16-17) thanks to the agrarian transformation, the increase in the use of electricity and the expansion of foreign markets. The first five years of the 1930s, however, experienced the impact of the world economic depression. Institutions started to communicate with the general public. Some private sector campaigns include examples from the food and perfume industries. On the public sector, tourism and road safety campaigns bear witness to the uncertain beginnings of PR by the public administration.

On 22 December 1881, the illustrated magazine *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, in the generic section called “Modern industry”, published a drawing of the

Nestlé company factory in Vevey, Switzerland. The picture was framed by two columns of text extolling the characteristics of its star product – powdered milk – and its success in Spain since its introduction in 1879. Although it looked like a newspaper article, what Nestlé was doing was what nowadays we would consider a media relations programme (Nestlé Sociedad, 1992, pp. 30-1). In 1888, during the Barcelona Universal Exhibition, Nestlé even had its own pavilion. This paved the way for the establishment of the company into Spain.

In 1905, Nestlé opened its first factory in Spain. A year later, it created the “*Servicio de Nacimientos*” (Birth Service) in Jerez de la Frontera. This involved obtaining the data on births from the National Registry Office and sending informative material to families and their paediatricians. In this way, the Swiss company managed to set up a good relationship with two publics of extreme importance for their industry. Nestlé’s efforts to increase its presence in the everyday life of Spain had only just begun.

Between 1931 and 1933, Pedro Prat Gaballí, who is considered one of the founding fathers of Spanish advertising, developed several campaigns on “educational advertising”. This was during an economic boom, the result of a favourable economic situation and the astute economic policies of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) (Comellas, 1990, pp. 388-390). Shortly afterwards, the world economic depression would also reach Spain.

Prat Gaballí believed that advertising could educate the consumer. While working in Madrid for Perfumería Gal, the company decided to give greater impetus to its toothpaste “Dens”, which was already on the market. The “Veritas” advertising agency, where Prat worked, drew up a situation analysis on the most important brands on sale and their penetration in rural areas. When this was done, he saw that “in many rural areas the toothbrush was little used and in many others almost unheard of” (Prat Gaballí, 1953, p. 44). The agency decided to start what it first called “propaganda” (Prat Gaballí, 1939, p. 236) and later, “an educational advertising crusade” in favour of oral hygiene (Prat Gaballí, 1953, p. 44).

The “Dens” toothpaste campaign had children as their objective, and schoolteachers as intermediaries. From the start their approach used the advice of teachers and dentists. Once the schools had ordered samples of toothpaste and teaching materials, the children were taught the correct way to brush their teeth. The first means of communication used to transmit these messages was the professional pedagogical journals where the schoolteachers were invited to explain oral hygiene and its advantages to their pupils (Prat Gaballí, 1939, pp. 233-265). The national press also reported on this scheme between November 1931 and October 1933. The very successful initiative even included 17,300 pesetas in cash prizes (Prat Gaballí, 1939, p. 252) and weeks dedicated to oral hygiene.

As a result of the campaign, which Prat called “educational industrial advertising”, “Dens” toothpaste, and also those of its competitors, managed to be accepted in rural areas. Prat Gaballí always referred to this educational campaign as one of the greatest achievements of his professional career. For him, the educational strength of advertising was a great victory for civilization (Prat Gaballí, 1934, p. 354).

In short, this campaign with the proper collaboration of the media is an example of a forerunner of a strategy that could almost be considered of corporate social responsibility in Spain when it was on the brink of a civil war. Despite the fact that the

term “public relations” would not arrive in Spain for another 20 years, Prat Gaballí soon stated:

When a company has achieved a high level of development and has gained great respect, its duties multiply and it is obliged to believe, without ignoring its financial interests (. . .), that its major advertising campaigns should tend towards some kind of social improvement, thus becoming an efficient contributor to parallel social action (Prat Gaballí, 1939, p. 234)[3].

Institutional campaigns as witnesses of an era: the post-war period and the new political situation (1939-1953)

The end of the civil war brought about the need to reorganise and re-build Spain under the auspices of the new Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975). However, the problems of the post-war at home and a world war abroad, made the situation difficult (García Ruescas, 1969, pp. 50-51). Thus the political and historical circumstances undergone by the country between 1939 and 1945 called for state interventionism and control of financial activities. Precedence was given to the economy of rationing which was strict and did not allow exchange with foreign countries; there was also a drop in productivity and a logical fall in per capita income (Clavera *et al.*, 1973, pp. 8-14). Without expenditure or production, economic standstill followed.

After the world war, Spain remained isolated, and above all, uninvolved in the European recovery plan – the Marshall plan – which gave financial aid for European reconstruction (Clavera *et al.*, 1973, pp. 175-176). The fragile political situation led the Franco regime to renew its Cabinet in an attempt to disguise its intentions from the allies. The 1940s in Spain ended with a crisis in agriculture due to bad harvests caused by drought and bad weather, together with an industrial crisis brought about by the standstill in the iron and steel, energy and textile sectors. Until the 1950s, Spain suffered economic problems caused by insufficient agricultural and industrial production, inflation of public finances, lack of investment capital, the aging of industrial equipment, unemployment, under-consumption and government inability to revive exports (Clavera *et al.*, 1973, pp. 191-202).

The international blockade did not help to force internal change. However, the 1950s would offer new opportunities. Little by little, Spain was admitted as a member of several international organizations: FAO in November 1952, WHO in May 1951, UNESCO in November 1952, and, finally, the UN in December 1955. The re-shuffle of Franco’s cabinet paved the way for the signing of a Mutual Security Pact with the US in 1951. The agreements with America, which needed more allies and more military bases closer to the USSR, continued in 1953. Spain received economic, defence and investment credits in aid from the US, in exchange for buying agricultural surpluses and raw materials to be used in our industry (Whitaker, 1961, pp. 240-6).

In spite of the economic growth which was characteristic of the early 1950s, with growth in imports and agricultural production, together with an increase in industrial freedom, there still remained more negative data such as inflation, continuous expenses and a scarcity in income. Within this framework, it is not surprising that Spain was immersed in economic and communication lethargy. The only outstanding positive points at the time were the government so-called “propaganda” programmes for tourism and health[4].

Foundational years: first practical and theoretical steps for PR (1953-1960)

First campaigns: social or prestige programmes

At this time PR was making its first timid steps as a professional activity, together with a similar economic development brought about by the start of the so-called economic stability plans. After a period of complete international isolation, the government could no longer lay the blame for low economic yield on external causes. Their aims to control inflation, liberalize international commerce and the national economy opened up new doors.

Although the economic slow-down had caused a drop in advertising and promotional activities, this kind of initiative underwent a true revolution in the 1960s (García Ruescas, 1969, p. 53). There were many reasons for this revival. Along with a favourable economic climate, the example of successful companies of the same kind in the US and other European countries inspired Spanish genius. Likewise, the first research and study into advertising as an economic factor appeared. Companies' budgets for advertising grew, and, moreover, the media were economically stronger.

Thus, in the mid-1950s, when the economic situation was apparently more favourable than immediately after the war, we find some campaigns which were soon labelled as "public relations". Their conception was, in equal measure, due to the brilliance and personality of some men who should not be forgotten, as they were the pioneers in this activity in Spain, namely, Joan Fontcuberta, Joaquín Maestre and Juan Viñas. The latter two founded the first Spanish PR company, the *Sociedad Anónima Española de Relaciones Públicas* (SAE de RP) in Barcelona in 1960. This year also marked the beginning of a new, more professional, stage that finished with the end of the Franco regime in 1975.

Publicidad Danis: *prestige campaigns. Joan Fontcuberta and Joaquín Maestre.* Captivated by the advertising courses given by Francisco Izquierdo and Pedro Prat Gaballí at the *Escuela de Altos Estudios Mercantiles de Barcelona*, Joan Fontcuberta decided to create his own agency (Fontcuberta, 1998, p. 19). His chosen partner was Daniel Lladó, who he had met at the courses on advertising. As Lladó's nickname was "Danis", this was the name chosen for the company. After Lladó suddenly left the company, Joan's brother, Francisco Fontcuberta, who had been working for *Gráficas Mané*, joined the company.

Once the agency was established in the marketplace, *Danis* accepted the challenge to improve the image of advertising as a profession with a meticulous plan on several levels, among which was "Paying social tribute so that the public would learn and appreciate the value of advertising" (Fontcuberta, 1998, p. 62). These were initiatives that, at the start, were labelled as "social campaigns" or "prestige campaigns", and include those created for *Cadie* cleaning products, entitled "Let's be better", or the "Traffic Campaign" for *Transportes Ochoa*.

One of Danis' first important clients was *Cadie*. The company made products such as Guerrero bleach and Mistol washing-up liquid. As these two products were doing well on the market and were threatened by the launching of similar products by their rivals, Danis created a campaign that was different from traditional advertising. It was constructed as a social campaign and, simultaneously, as prestige for the company. Joan Fontcuberta, the creator of the agency, was exclusively responsible for its

planning and implementation[5]. Under the slogan, “Let’s be better”, the campaign was developed in Catalonia between October 1955 and January 1956.

These initial triumphs, together with the need to make themselves known to advertisers, encouraged the Fontcuberta brothers to hire new staff. These were “Young professionals, with roots in sales. Active people with dreams” (Fontcuberta, 1998, p. 26). In this way they employed Joaquín Maestre, “The only exception to the rule of employing people from outside the world of advertising, as he was an old friend who had a small agency in Alicante” (Fontcuberta, 1998, p. 26).

Maestre joined Danis in July 1956. No sooner had he arrived than he was in charge of some reminder actions for the “Let’s be better” campaign. The next feat that marked Maestre’s career was the “traffic campaign”, also created by Joan Fontcuberta, and sponsored by Transportes Ochoa from Zaragoza. In 1958, the company, with branches in Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Logroño, Madrid and Zaragoza, decided to begin a prestige campaign that continued until 1959. It did not need to sell any more transport services, but wanted to improve the image of its truck-drivers, and, at the same time, to call for care and safety when driving. One of the actions envisaged brought about a chance meeting between Joaquín Maestre and Juan Viñas.

The eye-protection crusade: Juan Viñas. The “eye-protection crusade” involved a well-planned, systematic PR campaign which began towards the end of the 1950s. The INDO company, the most important group of optical product manufacturers at the time, used this means to improve the eyesight of the Spanish public (Viñas Rexach, 2003, p. 241). The campaign, directed by a popular radio reporter, Juan Viñas, with the occasional assistance of Danis, had a big impact.

With the assistance of the authorities, ophthalmologists, school teachers and the media, the “eye hygiene day” was created, eyesight check-ups were added to schoolchildren’s academic records, and operation “Controlvisión” was developed – a check-up with an appliance that took three minutes to find any eyesight problems. The crusade was even responsible for a government Decree which created special teaching for children with incurable reduced visual capacity (Viñas Rexach, 2003, p. 252, p. 256). National competitions in the papers, radio and television were also held. These achievements were completed with the organization of conferences, eyesight check-ups, eyesight protections weeks, scientific meetings to analyse workers’, students’ or drivers’ visual problems, conferences and monograph salons. Evidently, the academic journals of the sector later considered this to be one of the pioneering campaigns in Spain (*Relaciones Públicas*, 1970, pp. 30-3).

As we have already seen, none of the campaigns developed in Spain before 1957 was given the title of “public relations campaign”, but were referred to as “propaganda”, “social”, “educational”, or “prestige” campaigns. Except for those developed by Prat, neither did any of these initiatives apply any specific theory, as they were simply considered as advertising campaigns. Moreover, the well-known campaigns developed for Cadie, Transportes Ochoa or the “eye-protection crusade” were developed either completely or partially by an advertising agency. But they all appeared within a context that was optimistic about economic growth in a country that, because of the Franco’s regime, had been isolated from other countries.

In fact, the use of the term “public relations” for this professional practice would not take long. In 1958, Joaquín Maestre travelled to Antwerp to attend an advertising conference, and as he was close by, he decided to visit the Universal Exhibition in

Brussels. He there met someone else who, like Fontcuberta, helped him to change the direction of his career: the Frenchman, Lucien Matrat[6]. The father and philosopher of European PR was in Brussels attending the International Conference of the IPRA. Matrat had carried out an in-depth analysis of the process of communication and PR, and his conclusions had an enormous influence on a young and eager Maestre.

Hence, Joaquín Maestre was the first person to use the label “public relations” in practice. And so, this man could be considered the supposed father of PR in Spain, as he was the one who imported the expression towards the Clavera *et al.*, 1973, if it were not because other Spanish authors had already referred to the term in their writings. Thus, rather than the father of PR in Spain, Joaquín Maestre may be considered the pioneer of its practice in this country.

First writings on “public relations”

Astonishingly, the term “public relations” in the academic field was used before the above-mentioned campaigns. Likewise, the first monographs on PR were published simultaneously with these campaigns. Moreover, the historical context meant that during the Franco’s dictatorship the studies and writings published were marked by doctrinal weakness, explicit ideological-political censure and primacy of the state system (Jones, 1997, p. 104).

The first author to present the concept of “public relations” in Spain was Prat Gaballí. This master of Spanish advertising made a free translation of the American term “public relations”. In 1953, Prat introduced the term briefly in his book, *Publicidad combativa*, as an observable fact:

To make the most of any situation offered by personal relations in order to foster affection and confidence and prestige in relation to the company and its products (Prat Gaballí, 1953, p. 194).

At the same time as he recognised its novelty value in Spain and almost all over Europe, he pointed out that in the USA:

Big businesses, apart from their Advertising and Sales Departments, have well-funded public relations departments, whose role is to foster cordiality in the company’s human relations, both within the company itself and in the public opinion arena (Prat Gaballí, 1953, pp. 60-61).

Juan Beneyto, a professor of Law and university lecturer in communications, was the second academic to mention the term “public relations”. In his 1957 book, *Mass Communications. Un panorama de los Medios de Información en la Sociedad Moderna*, one chapter was dedicated to “public relations”. This publication gathered and re-worked the material that was the basis of a seminar he gave on the means of contemporary information at the Instituto Social León XIII in the spring of 1954. In six short pages, he defined “public relations” as “A modern version of propaganda, of advertising psychology” (Beneyto, 1957, p. 211). In this first chapter on PR in Spain, although it was considered a means of communication, its technical nature was also emphasised. According to Beneyto, its objective was simply to contribute to the improvement of relations between the company and the public, bearing in mind the management and employees. And indeed, its almost exclusive labour was to win the friendship of the public for the company. So it comes as no surprise that, following the American bibliography of the period, he links its appearance to the rise in the

importance of public opinion and the need to keep the customer informed (Beneyto, 1957, pp. 211-12).

After this first short sketch by Beneyto, other titles were published, such as the first book written in Spanish on PR in the local arena, by Luis Marqués Carbó and Luis G. Marqués Canós. This publication was the fruit of a stay by the latter author in the US to study the subject. Its content, then, is dominated by the American experience of municipal PR, although the authors also used information from the local European area, and more exceptionally, from Spain. At the same time, they enriched this experience with an introduction that compiled the historical and theoretical roots of PR, an innovation in the theoretical beginnings of PR in Spain in 1958.

In the same year as the two Marqués published their work on PR, the monthly bulletin *Documentación Administrativa* was launched. Edited by the Technical Secretary General Office of the Presidency of the Government, this bulletin dealt with issues of Law and Administration Science. In its third issue, March 1958, it published two articles on PR.

And the bibliographical contributions do not end here. In October 1958, the first translation of an American book on PR was published. Written by William A. Nielander and Raymond W. Miller it had been first published in English in 1951. In its 411 pages and five sections, this volume endeavours to cover general and specific aspects of PR. In the translation by Fernando Ruiz, the preface to the Spanish edition presented by Prat Gaballí is very thought-provoking. Here, Prat agrees with other authors that the application of PR in Europe has been somewhat insubstantial and excessive. The professor warns about adopting American principles in other countries without an in-depth study of psychological and economic characters that are very different from American models:

Nowadays, ideas, methods, tendencies and innovation travel from one country to another at the speed of sound and are responsible for real madness among those who delight in echoing or offering the latest fashions and profiting from them. But ideas, methods, tendencies and innovation lose shape on crossing frontiers. Logically, we learn their form long before we understand their substance. Moreover, their application to practical life is frequently biased and unilateral, because many interpret them as it suits them, without worrying about prior analysis and examination in the light of the realities of each case, place and surrounding circumstances, and even less putting them through the eternal filter of experience. These days we are living a complex of masses, of insecurity and of impatience to find the last word and shout it in the streets. This mad impatience, in the area of promotion creates sensationalism, but also new techniques in countries with a high economic level. In semi-developed countries it often creates, for the moment, contagious and economically dangerous confusion (Nielander and Miller, 1961, p. VIII).

Prat seems to include Spain in this latter group and he admits that he does not dare to write a book on PR because of lack of experience. In his last few lines, the professor gives a warning and reminds us that PR does not merely mean organizing spectacular events to increase sales. PR needs prior analysis and control of the results. It is not a question of increasing sales, but rather of creating prestige, goodwill and confidence.

Discussion

To sum up, although the first PR campaigns in Spain began towards the end of the 1950s, there were earlier initiatives based on the philosophy and aims inherent to the

term. Thus, I have mentioned precursors of the profession in the first half of the twentieth century and have divided them into three time periods.

The earliest stage began with the emergence of commercial and institutional communication and ran from the last third of the nineteenth century to the end of the Spanish civil war (1881-1939). Several cases during this period highlight the need to set up communicative relationships between institutions and the general public. Although they did not use this terminology, these social or educational campaigns had a cultural role to play in Spain.

The post-war era (1939-1953) features a second stage where public health and tourist campaigns bore witness to the new political situation, the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. In the following years, Francoist Spain saw the first PR campaigns, which were then called “prestige” campaigns and were based on the personal genius of men who worked for an advertising agency or in the world of broadcasting.

Consequently, the third stage laid the foundations for the origins of “public relations” in a non-democratic Spain (1953-1960). It was in 1953 that a Spanish book about the theory of advertising first translated the English term “public relations” into “general relations with the public”. Nevertheless, the theory and scant literature on the topic seemed to run parallel to practice because they did not meet. The first campaigns developed in the late 1950s under the name of “prestige advertising” and were known as “public relations” only after Joaquin Maestre, the pioneer of the practice, happened to meet Lucien Matrat, the father of European PR, in Brussels. It was Maestre who founded the first agency fully devoted to offering services of PR in Spain in 1960. It was a historical context of censorship for the media and for social innovation but also a period of economic opening. The private sector naturally became interested in establishing communicative links with their public.

During the late 1950s, Western Europe was experiencing economic growth. Meanwhile, Spain was on the threshold of developing basic industries thanks to the Plans for Stabilization and Development (*Planes de Estabilización y Desarrollo*), which began to bear fruit with the 1960s. These Plans set down the essentials for economic growth within an authoritarian system although they did relinquish some control. The closest origins for PR can be found precisely here, in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, which was the changing-point for Spain’s economic reality within the Franco regime. The time conjunction makes the author of this article wonder whether it was industrial development that favoured the dawn of PR, or vice versa.

After the creation of the first Spanish PR company, the 1960s were a decade in search of professional PR associations. That was a challenge in a post-civil war country neither socially used nor politically allowed to hold assemblies of any kind. As the profession was growing in vitality, the 1970s sought in vain for social and official recognition from a fading and mortally injured state system. They also brought a certain acknowledgement and institutionalization for PR. It was then that the subject was included together with advertising as a university degree in the curricula of the only three, newly-created Faculties of Communication Science in Spain: Barcelona, Madrid and Navarra (Jones, 1997, p. 103; Barrera, 2002, pp. 7-8, p. 32). In 1975, an Official Register of Public Relations Technicians was finally created. This register defined the profession and set out the conditions demanded to appear on the list, thus

avoiding professional fraud. That same year the 40-year dictatorship ended with Franco's death and the coming-of-age of PR with democracy.

To conclude, I can state that, differently from what happened in other countries, where advertising and PR developed as different fields, Spain is different. Here, it is difficult to separate the historical precursors of advertising and PR in the origins of the activity in the first half of the twentieth century. When, through historical research, PR campaigns were found, it turns out that they were created by advertising agencies or by advertising professionals, and were, at times, hidden under the designations of "social", "educational" and "prestige" advertising or "propaganda". Perhaps this lack of clarity of its roles and content has, in turn, led to the notion that PR is merely a secondary tool in advertising, and that its application is limited to media relations – sending press releases, setting up press conferences and keeping up good relations with journalists – and events planning. This may help to explain the profession's present identity crisis.

Secondly, the theory and practice of PR in Spain started out separately. The first practitioners were detached from the first theoretical writings on PR in Spain, and took their references from foreign bibliography. In turn, the PR theorists in this country were uninterested in its praxis. This fact may have caused a certain misunderstanding between theorists and practitioners. At present however, we see greater connections between academia and PR professionals (Arceo, 2006, p. 117). Simultaneously, Spain can envisage a promising future for PR (Rodríguez Salcedo and Gutiérrez García, 2007).

Finally, I can conclude that the history of PR is part of the general history of Spain, and shows that, although the term "public relations" was imported from the USA during a period of growth and economic progress, in Spain it developed under a dictatorship. However, the discipline adapted and fitted into the reality of Spain, and on occasion, failed to remember earlier experiences. This modification goes to show that innovative professions develop by adapting to their economic, social and political contexts.

To some extent, this historical itinerary has shown how the history of Spain and that of PR overlap. Therefore PR follows a line of development that is linked to the country where it is established and does not follow the dominant theories. This article has explained the first phases of PR development in Spain. Research has unveiled a discontinuous timeline and the lack of a narrow definition for PR throughout the years. This may have led to an identity crisis, deteriorated by a flawed image of the profession as seen by other colleagues, such as journalists.

But even practitioners are divided on the use of the term "public relations". While the pioneers advocate for the use of the name "public relations"[7], many practitioners admit the bad image of the term and prefer "communication", immediately preceded by different adjectives, namely "corporate", "strategic", "institutional"[8] when referring to the profession. The latter group tends to regard PR as only a part of strategic communications dealing with event planning and media relations, as it was in the first steps of its history. In the meantime, Spanish universities are still granting degrees on "advertising and public relations". If, as it is believed, the identity crisis derives from the past, or at least, can be explained by history, a comprehensive study of this history would be worthwhile to understand what PR was, is and could be, not only as a name, but also as a profession.

Notes

1. To learn more about academic trends dealing with the existence of a European PR tradition in contrast with an American tradition (see Nessmann, 1995, 2000; Moss *et al.*, 1997; Rühl, 1994; Szyszka, 1997).
2. To have a look at European PR parameters, see Sriramesh and Verčič (2003). The aim of this book is to contextualize the practice of public relations in different countries, according to four socio-cultural variables: culture, political system, economic system and informative system. Jacquie L'Etang also published a book on the history of public relations in Great Britain (see L'Etang, 2004). And finally, for a history of public relations in some European countries, thanks to the EBOK (European Body of Knowledge) project by EUPRERA (European Public Relations Education and Research Association) (see van Ruler and Verčič, 2004).
3. I have translated into English all subsequent quotes by Spanish authors.
4. These campaigns are not subject of this article which focuses on private sector initiatives.
5. Interview with Francisco Fontcuberta, February 11th, 2004.
6. Interview with Joaquín Maestre: September 6th, 1999 (Barcelona); December 1st, 2003 (Barcelona); May 23rd, 2006 (Pamplona); May 5th, 2008 (Pamplona).
7. Interviews with: Joaquín Maestre (May 5th, 2008), Jesús Ulled (May 5th, 2008), Agustín de Uribe (May 5th, 2008), Teresa Dorn (October 20th, 2006), Luis Viñas (December 2nd, 2003), Jordi Garriga (May 8th, 2007).
8. The two professional associations in Spain, Dircom (Spanish Association for Communication Managers) and Adecec (Spanish Association for PR and Communication Consultancies) refer to this issue in some of their reports (cfr. Adecec, 2002; Dircom, 2004).

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