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# Spanish National Plan for Photographic Heritage Conservation

Pablo Ruiz

*Presented at the 2015 PMG Winter Meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

## 1. Introduction

This article details the creation of the broadest and most meaningful study done in the field of Photographic Heritage Preservation in Spain.

Titled “Spanish National Plan for Photographic Heritage Conservation”, the study was made by professionals from various disciplines related to management, cultural diffusion, legislation, training, and conservation of photographic materials.

The study was finished by February 2015, but needed to be formally signed by the Heritage Council: this happened in March 2015. The project involved more than 30 people, working together over the course of a year.

## 2. The Spanish National Plans

The Spanish Institute of Cultural Heritage creates the National Plans for Conservation. There are currently thirteen plans, which were initiated in the 1980s. The first plan was for cathedrals and, from then on, plans were created for other types of cultural heritage.

The existing plans were reviewed in 2010; those already drawn-up were updated and studies were done to identify if more plans needed to be developed. In 2013 the decision to make a plan for photographic heritage was taken. This plan is number thirteen, and it is the most recent to be initiated.

That public cultural entities considered it necessary to create a framework to define and organize all the needs and actions to improve conservation, management, dissemination, and training in photographic heritage is an important moment of national awareness. The plan provides a framework that reports and proposed how things should be done to safeguard, with best practices, all Spanish photographic heritage.



Fig. 1. Unknown author (Spain). Lady with fan. Illuminated Daguerreotype, 1850-1858. Fernandez Rivero Collection.

### 3. Development

In early 2014 the General Administration of Fine Arts and Cultural Assets called representatives from autonomous communities, central government, and experts in the field to a first meeting. Many questions came up. Where to start, what kind of raw materials is available? What is it possible and practical to include within the plan? How is it going to be done?



Fig. 2. Chema Madoz. No title. Giant Polaroid Project Collection, 1994. 20x24 Polaroid Dye Diffusion Transfer print. Andalusian Center for Photography.

It did not take long to realize that three preliminary questions needed to be answered: What has been done so far? How has it been done? What are the strength and weaknesses of what had already been accomplished? In answering these questions the committee was able to write a “status of the issue” from which the rest of the plan could be built.

The plan, however, was not begun from absolute scratch, but in order to determine what existing material should be included and what areas needed improvement, objective self-criticism was necessary. To do this, the team was split into different working groups. Six groups were formed:

- 1) Conservation and digital preservation,
- 2) Description of collections,
- 3) Use and dissemination,
- 4) Training,
- 5) Acquisition policy,
- 6) Intellectual property.

The author participated in two groups, conservation and training, and had been selected for the committee by the Andalusian Government through the Andalusian Agency for Cultural Institutions, which encompasses the Andalusian Center for Photography.

The six groups worked independently on components of the plan, but reviewed all text together. Thus, a consensual text resulted. Before work began the different components of the plan were outlined. The groups worked establishing the status of the issue, formulating goals, setting criteria, and defining the course of action.

The plan will be effective for a minimum of five years. During that period the results will be analyzed and the programs will be adjusted depending on what is successful and what needs are identified during the project. To accomplish this task, an Oversight Committee for Photographic Heritage will be created.

#### 4. Goals

Although each group outlined its own specific goals, all of the goals were based on the same five overarching aims, which are described below.

##### ***Promote Systematization***

*Establish ethical and methodological standards for photographic heritage preservation, preventive conservation, restoration, inventory, cataloging, and dissemination.*

This first goal stems from the idea to help institutions work with organized protocols so that actions will be structured into flexible programs designed to maximize output. When there are no resources, one must make the most of what there is.

##### ***Stimulate Cooperation***

*Foster communication and coordination for policy development, aimed at exchange of information between professionals and cultural institutions.*

In Spain communication between administrations needs to be improved in order to better protect photographic heritage.

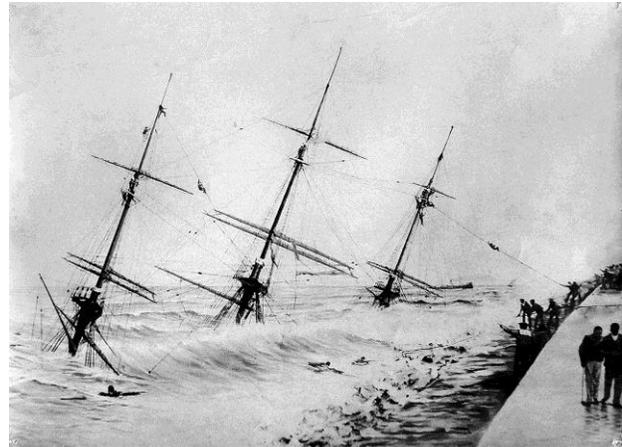


Fig. 3. Unknown author. German frigate school Gneisenau Sinking at Malaga port. Gelatin POP print, 1900. Fernandez Rivero Collection.

##### ***Encourage and Improve Training***

*Support training initiatives, as part of formal and informal educational systems, related to the knowledge, skills, and professions that work with photographic heritage.*

This is fundamental. Education in understanding the photographic medium and in the concepts, approaches, techniques, and working methods that facilitate photographic heritage preservation must be improved.

##### ***Activate Research***

*Stimulate research on the management, preservation, and dissemination of photographic heritage, and support the development of innovative techniques and good practices.*

Research is a feedback action, and in Spain research related to photographic preservation is currently limited. This goal aims to provide institutional support for research programs.

##### ***Enhance the Social Status of Photography.***

*Create guidelines for raising awareness of the relevance of Spain's photographic heritage.*

As with education, it is essential to find methods to shift the paradigm in the social understanding of photography.

## 5. Key Points of the Plan

Beyond these five main goals, several key points must be kept in mind in order for the plan to succeed.

Preserving photographic heritage involves considering variables, and those of the 21<sup>st</sup> century pose novel challenges.

- It is an era of continual evolution of information, digital systems, and the online environment.
- An effective plan must work within a constantly changing scene. Making resources flexible is a way to deal with these continuously shifting circumstances.
- Resources are limited, so they must be used to their maximum potential.



Fig. 4. Jorge Rueda. Miramar 5. Imagina Project Collection. Silver Dye Bleach print, 1991. Andalusian Center for Photography.

To meet these aims, under these circumstances, it was necessary to keep these three key points in mind: sustainability for systematization, improvement for training, and communication for cooperation.

### *Sustainability for Systematization*

In the current poor economic situation, many Spanish institutions lack monetary resources to undertake large preservation projects as were done in the past, so it is necessary to change the way in which preservation is done. The highest standards of preservation may seem unreachable. Therefore, it was necessary to have flexible plans to accommodate economic challenges, helping to enable more institutions to have policies for photographic preservation and to avoid discontinuities within those preservation programs.

Continuity is especially important for the conservation of large volumes of photographic objects, which involves making informed decisions while creating plans for preservation, restoration and/or digitization. One such decision may be the following: is it necessary to have a climatization system in a dry place like Madrid if the equipment cannot be regularly maintained due to a lack of funding? What is worse, to not have climatization or to have a malfunctioning system? The answers depend on many variables.

### *Improvement for Training*

In Spain there are significant gaps in teaching the history of photography and photographic collections management, and in creating strategies for conservation and restoration of photographic heritage.

Education programs for specialized technicians in photographic heritage are almost nonexistent, excepting for a few honorable exceptions. This is in contrast with the demand for trained professionals and for further training for those already working in institutions. Long-term actions, like activating educational policies, creating specific programs, and developing tools for knowledge dissemination, are necessary to strengthen the knowledge base.

### *Communication for Cooperation*

Spain lacks a central organization for analyzing and sharing the work that different institutions do in management, conservation, restoration, and dissemination of their collections. This makes it difficult to know what colleagues and affiliated professional are doing and creating inefficiencies within the field. To ease and enhance cooperation between professionals and cultural institutions, an effective network for professional exchange is essential.

## **6. Actions**

How will these ideas take form? What will be their shape? These are not easy questions. Their solutions are complex because a broad field had to be covered. The answers will come through legal and administration changes, better resource management, and improved collaboration and training.

Each of the six working groups wrote their lines of action, some of which are detailed below.

### *Conservation Group*

A program will be set up to develop individual conservation plans for participating institutions, adjusted for the specific types of collections at each institution. This will be combined with training programs to help each institution work in an organized and coordinated way. The institutions will receive guidance in establishing and organizing the tasks necessary to improve how they go about preserving their photograph collections. A project website will enable the sharing of information between institutions and with the Oversight Committee.

There will be three sections of the Conservation Project:

- 1) Enable information sharing and analysis through the website portal,



Fig. 5. Joaquin Oses. Malaga Girl with guitar. Unmounted Cabinet Card. Albumen print, ca. 1880. Fernandez Rivero Collection.

- 2) Develop practical training programs focused on creating photograph collection preservation plans,
- 3) Allow the Oversight Committee to track progress and set goals for each institution.

This is an ambitious project. The Oversight Committee needs to be selected and the website and training programs must be developed. Institutions have yet to be contacted and invited to participate, and staff must be trained. Once the project is underway the work will not cease, as the results must be regularly examined and plans reorganized as required.

### ***Training Group***

Partnership programs between universities for training in photographic preservation according to the guidelines issued in the plan will be developed. The national and regional governments will fund the training component.

This aspect of the project will begin with three training programs for description, preservation, and diffusions of photograph collections. If the initial programs are effective, they are going to be introduced through all of Spain's autonomous regions.



Fig. 6. Ilan Wolff. Bullring of La Maestranza Sevilla. Andalusia Project Collection. Pinhole Camera. Fiber-base Silver Gelatin DOP print, 2010. Andalusian Center for Photography.

### ***Description Group***

A national map or guide of institutions that have photographic collections will be established and maintained, and made accessible through an easily updatable website.

A manual of best practices for the description of photographs, emphasizing standardized terminology for the technical aspects of photography, will be developed. The manual will also address descriptions of any background information, including context and copyright, use, and intellectual property rights. In Spain, technical terminology is not standardized, and important information such as formats, supports, and deterioration, is often omitted.

### ***Dissemination Group***

There will be official aids for the dissemination of any digital repositories of photograph collections. The content of these aids will be open to libraries, archives, and public and private museums.

This project will also involve the use of open licenses, in the same way that Europeana has guidelines that all the images in its repository will be freely accessible by 2020 (<http://www.europeana.eu/portal/rights/public-domain-charter.html>).

The idea behind this is to enable access to all photographs without rights so that they can be used to produce derivative assets, such as history books or photography-based research projects.

### *Intellectual Property Group*

Related to the efforts of the Dissemination Group, a pilot project will be created to identify authors, owners, and managers of intellectual property rights in the field of photography. It will focus on criteria for identifying orphan photographs.

Spain has an unusual legal concept - that of the “ordinary photograph” - meaning a photograph without rights. This unclear concept has led to many misunderstandings in the past and needs to be clarified.



Fig. 7. Dubois. Courtyard of the Lions at Alhambra, Granada. Albumen print, ca. 1865. Fernandez Rivero Collection.

### *Acquisition Group*

In Spain, the Law of Patronage, which is practically non-existent at the moment, will be supported and lobbied for by the Acquisitions Group. Allowing the donation of photographic collections to cultural institutions to be tax deductible is an important step in increasing the perceived value of photographs. This is a primary goal of the Acquisitions Group, even though changing the law may not be possible at the present time.

## **7. Conclusions**

The Oversight Committee must be created to carry out this National Plan. Spain needs to build a solid foundation to sustain the actions of the National Plan for Photographic Heritage, and the Oversight Committee will serve as a place of consensus, act to promote and disseminate the results and projects, and analyze the effectiveness of the many interlocked components. This will take time to correctly establish, but promises to be a crucial step in preserving Spain’s photographic heritage.

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Fig. 8. Krzysztof Pruszkowski. Easter, Almería. Imagina project Collection. Fiber-base Silver Gelatin DOP print, 1991. Andalusian Center for Photography.