

CHALLENGES IN HISTORICAL COMMEMORATIONS

Balancing Authenticity and Contemporary Values: The Case of the 550th Anniversary of Isabella I of Castile in Segovia

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ABSTRACT

Historical re-enactments have become stimulating elements of cultural activity in the places where they are held. The commemoration in Segovia (Spain) of the 550th anniversary of Isabella I's proclamation as Queen of Castile is an example of such events. To mark this anniversary, the city council of Segovia, where the historical event was held, organised a programme of activities. This paper presents a qualitative study of this commemoration through a review of documents and participatory observations related to the organisation of these events. The research highlights the characteristics of such commemorations and the challenges faced by their organisers. The main challenge lies in striking a balance between historical authenticity and adaptation to contemporary values, ensuring that these celebrations remain meaningful for future generations.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context and Relevance of Historical Commemorations

Historical commemorations have become events of great significance for the communities in which they are held. Firstly, a context of revision of the historical moment to which they refer is created. Additionally, the event or person remembered is placed in relation to the identity of the place. Furthermore, these events become elements of tourist and economic dynamisation through the events organised around the celebration. These events serve to enhance the value of memory, yet paradoxically, they also facilitate the act of forgetting, through the selection of events to be remembered and the manner in which they are commemorated (Jelin, 2002).

Such celebrations, therefore, are not merely acts of remembrance, but rather, complex phenomena involving memory, identity, power, culture, education, economics and artistic creativity. The analysis of these events across multiple disciplines enables a more nuanced understanding of how people and nations comprehend their past and construct their future.

Irrespective of the discipline from which the study of historical commemorations is approached, the primary step should be to elucidate several concepts that will be encountered in the study of these commemorations: *collective memory*, *social memory*, *historical memory* and *political memory*. These four types of memory refer to different ways of remembering the past, depending on the actors involved, the aims of the commemoration and the contexts in which it takes place. Each of these memory types occupies a distinct space in the broader study of the connection between the past and the present, ranging from the quotidian practices that sustain *social memory* to the political utilisation of the past that is characteristic of *political memory*.

Firstly, the concept of collective memory is highlighted, as explored by authors such as Assmann (2011), Olick (1999), Halbwachs (1992) and Nora (1989). This concept refers to the set of memories shared by a community or social group, which shape its identity and its vision of the past. In contradistinction to individual memory, then, collective memory is not a solitary act but is formed within the framework of social interactions and the cultural context of the group.

The second concept to be focused on here is that of social memory, understood as the past experiences that are remembered and transmitted within specific social groups (families, local communities, etc.). It focuses on the everyday practices and oral traditions that enable members of a society to create a shared sense of their history and identity. This process of intergenerational transmission, as posited by Connerton (1989), occurs not only within institutional frameworks but also in non-institutionalised contexts, where it is intricately interwoven with bodily and ritual practices.

The third concept that must be considered in a study of these characteristics is that of *historical memory*. This can be defined as the process by which a society remembers and reconstructs its past. The purpose of this process is to facilitate comprehension, interpretation and, in many cases, justice for significant events that have marked its history, especially those linked to collective traumas, conflicts or injustices. This concept has been explored by scholars such as Koselleck (2004) and Ricoeur (2010). This form of memory is influenced by historians and other experts and is structured through formal narratives that aim for objectivity, though these narratives may be influenced by political or ideological perspectives.

Conversely, the concept of *political memory* pertains to the utilisation of the past for political ends, wherein political actors shape and manipulate specific historical events to legitimise or delegitimise contemporary positions. This form of memory is employed in the construction of national narratives, the justification of public policies, and the reinterpretation of historical episodes in accordance with contemporary interests, as Professor Schudson (1993) acknowledges in his work *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*.

A comparison of the four types of memory listed above is presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Comparison between the different types of memory

	Definition	Main features
Social memory	Recollection of past experiences through everyday social practices and traditions	Oral transmission, intergenerational, focused on day-to-day, bodily and ritual practices.
Collective memory	A set of memories shared by a group that builds a common identity.	Social construction of memories; anchored in the social and cultural context of the group.
Historical memory	Interpretation of the past based on recorded facts and verifiable sources.	Mediated by historians; seeks objectivity; linked to documents, archives and places of memory.
Political memory	Use of the past for political purposes, to legitimise or delegitimise current policies or narratives.	Manipulated by political actors; subject to contemporary interests; can be instrumentalised by power.

Source(s): Compilation based on VV.AA., 2024

Two further concepts that require elucidation are those of historical commemoration and historical re-enactment. The former refers to solemn and symbolic acts that serve to reinforce the collective memory of significant events and may take the form of activities of various kinds, including parades, exhibitions, publications of books, conferences, recreational and commercial activities, and theatrical representations of the period or historical figure being commemorated. By contrast, historical re-enactments are active and performative events that seek to immerse participants in the past.

The two types of practice have a fundamental role in contemporary societies' interaction with and understanding of history, but they do so from different approaches: one oriented towards remembrance and reflection, commemoration, and the other towards experience and dramatisation, re-enactment. Authors such as Nora (1989) and Gillis (1996) have explored historical commemoration from the perspective of the construction of collective memory and identity. Conversely, Lowenthal (2015) has examined how historical commemorations are influenced by contemporary perceptions of the past, and how societies construct identities through shared memories and commemorative acts. De Groot (2009) and Agnew (2004) have focused on historical re-enactment, highlighting its role in the immersive experience of the past. Finally, scholars such as Winter (2014) and Connerton (1989) have addressed both concepts, demonstrating how societies construct and experience the past through a variety of practices, from solemn commemorative acts to performative performances.

It is an irrefutable fact that historical commemorations play a fundamental role in the cultural and social life of communities by preserving collective memories and reinforcing collective identity. Consequently, research on commemorations is of great importance in understanding the identity of a society.

Indeed, the study and analysis of commemorations offers the possibility of understanding the various uses of the past, namely the means by which historical events have been employed by those in positions of power to reinforce the identity of a national, regional or local community, and the character of that identity that is being consolidated. (Wasserman, 2008, p. 90).

Commemorative events are of significant cultural and social importance, as they serve to pay tribute to important events and individuals, whilst also reflecting and reinforcing prevailing values, beliefs and historical narratives. The function of historical commemorations is threefold: firstly, they serve to transmit values; secondly, they strengthen collective identity; and thirdly, they promote social cohesion. As Durkheim (1982) asserts, commemorations enable a community to "renew its sense of itself and its unity". The preservation of traditions and the affirmation of cultural identity are pivotal in the construction of shared historical narratives, a process that is further facilitated by commemorations. These practices also have a significant impact on historical memory, allowing societies to revise and reinterpret their past in terms of contemporary values and perspectives. Through these acts, societies construct and reinforce their historical narrative, which directly affects how individuals perceive themselves within a broader context (Santiesteban et al., 2010). This phenomenon is what gives rise to what Anderson called "imagined communities" to refer to how nations and social groups construct their identity through shared narratives (Anderson, 1991).

1.2. The Proclamation of Isabella I of Castile in Segovia

This paper takes as an example of commemoration the proclamation of Isabella I of Castile (1451-1504), an event that took place in Segovia (Spain) on 13 December 1474. This was an event that undoubtedly marked the future of history, given the repercussions of her policies, not only for Spain but for the whole world. During the reign of Isabella I, significant historical events such as the Conquest of Granada, the Discovery of America, the expulsion of the Jews, and the unification of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon occurred, thereby establishing the foundations for the formation of what would eventually become known as Spain.

We should commence by recalling that Isabella of Trastámara was not predestined to accede to the throne, since she had a brother, Henry IV, son of John II and Mary of Aragon, twenty years her senior. Henry recognised Isabella as heir to the throne through the Treaty of Guisando, signed in 1468. The terms of the agreement stipulated that the monarch would not force Isabella to marry anyone she did not want to, but the then princess could not marry without her brother's consent. However, when in 1469 Henry IV learned of Isabella's marriage, behind the king's back, to Ferdinand of Aragon, the Castilian monarch went back on what had been agreed at Guisando and once again designated his daughter Joan as heir.

On 11 December 1474, Henry IV passed away, and Isabella received the news at her residence in the Alcázar of Segovia, in the absence of her husband, who was in Aragon at the time. Del Val Valdivieso notes the following:

Upon hearing the news, Elizabeth was deeply saddened, and she immediately ordered that funeral services be held for the recently deceased monarch. The ceremony, which the princess attended dressed in mourning clothes, is believed to have taken place on 12 December in the church of San Miguel de Segovia. On the 13th, at the foot of the church, in front of the city's main square, Isabella was proclaimed Queen of Castile by her supporters (Del Val Valdivieso, 2005).

In addition to the sister of the deceased king's evident sadness in the immediate aftermath, the rapidity with which she was proclaimed by her followers in the Church of San Miguel in Segovia is of particular interest. The brief interval between the death of the former king and the proclamation of the new monarch has led some scholars to hypothesise that Isabella had been planning this moment for some time. The haste with which she made the proclamation suggests that there was no opportunity for her opponent, her niece Juana, to usurp the throne. Furthermore, the proclamation served to underscore Isabella's claim to the throne, thereby precluding any possibility that Ferdinand could have "any chance of claiming the succession" (Downey, 2017, p. 121). "For personal reasons, Isabella had decided that it was better to take the crown herself and alone rather than risk the complications that might arise if Ferdinand participated, since she may no longer have trusted him" (Downey, 2017, p. 122).

Any potential mistrust between the two monarchs was resolved, at least from a political perspective, approximately one month after the proclamation with the signing of the agreement known as the *Concordia de Segovia*. This accord, which was signed on the 15th of January 1475 between Isabella I of Castile and her husband, Ferdinand II of Aragon, delineated the powers of each ruler in their respective territories and established the foundations for the unification of the two kingdoms.

The proclamation of Isabella in Segovia was the result of a combination of political manoeuvring, the strategic choice of a location with deep symbolic meaning, and the ability to manage the dynastic intrigues of the time. Segovia was more than simply a stage for the proclamation; it also played a crucial role in consolidating Isabella's authority and shaping the political future of Castile. The significance of Segovia during this era was emphasised by Aguado Bleye, who stated the following:

Following the death of her brother Henry, Isabella was crowned Queen of Castile in the city of Segovia. However, the question of her husband Ferdinand's right to inherit and govern the Kingdom of Castile arose. The arbitral award to which we previously alluded, the *Concordia of Segovia*, was pronounced, and the couple accepted it. It was at this point that the highly discreet Isabella addressed her husband with the memorable words that, with more or less material rigour, but with rigour of concept, were recorded by the chroniclers of that reign (Aguado Bleye, 1949, p. 388).

The impact of this Castilian capital was summed up years later by the German engineer Wernher von Braun, one of the architects of man's landing on the Moon, who, on a visit in 1974 to Mesón de Cándido, one of the most famous restaurants in Segovia, wrote in his signature book: "Without Segovia, no Isabella the Catholic, without Isabella no Christopher Columbus, without Columbus no America, without America no Moon" (Amigos de Segovia, 2024). Therefore, "Without Segovia, no Moon" was the slogan used by this Castilian city to promote its candidacy for European Capital of Culture in 2016.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

This study explores the tension between authenticity and contemporary values in historical commemorations, emphasising the necessity for sensitivity, inclusivity, and deliberative consideration of past presentations in the present. It is imperative to navigate the delicate balance between preserving historical integrity and adapting to contemporary norms to ensure that commemorations are respectful, educational, and relevant to all audiences.

The purpose of this research is to explore how historical commemorations, in particular the 550th anniversary of the proclamation of Isabella I as Queen of Castile in Segovia, can be understood from a creative perspective as dynamising elements of contemporary culture. The research seeks to analyse how these events recreate the past with a balance between historical authenticity and adaptation to current values, generating a significant local and collective identity for the population.

In accordance with the aforementioned purpose, the objectives of this work are as follows:

- To analyse the role of historical commemorations in the construction and transmission of the collective memory and cultural identity of Segovia, using the 550th anniversary of Isabella I as a case study.
- To explore the creative strategies employed by organisers to balance historical fidelity with contemporary expectations and values in recreating the event.
- To examine the socio-cultural impact of the commemoration on the local community, assessing how it contributes to the sense of belonging and reinforces Segovia's cultural and local values.
- To assess participants' and community perceptions and experiences of the commemoration, investigating how the event is experienced and what meanings are associated with it.
- Identify the challenges and opportunities faced by organisers of historical commemorations in adapting events of the past to the cultural demands of the present, without compromising historical authenticity.

In order to achieve these objectives, the following questions are posed:

- How do historical commemorations contribute to the transmission of a community's collective memory and cultural identity?
- What elements of creativity are employed to balance historical authenticity with contemporary relevance in commemorative events?
- What are the cultural and social functions of historical commemorations in modern society?
- How do commemorations, such as the 550th anniversary of the proclamation of Isabella I, reinforce local values and foster a sense of belonging in the population of Segovia?

2. Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on the exploration and interpretation of the human experience, perceptions, meanings and cultural implications of historical commemorations, in order to move beyond numerical or statistical measurement. The qualitative approach is deemed the most appropriate for this study, as it facilitates a more profound understanding of the symbolic and creative aspects of the commemoration under study in this paper, and of the manner in which these events are perceived and experienced by the participants and the community. Furthermore, this approach facilitates a detailed analysis of the historical narratives, meaning-making, and cultural interpretation that are at the heart of this research.

This qualitative study employs a range of data collection methods, utilising the press releases issued by the Segovia City Council, the press conference that was convened to present the events held on 6 September 2024, and a variety of documents pertaining to the organisation of this event. In addition to

these primary sources, the study incorporates unstructured conversations with members of the organising team for the commemoration of the 550th anniversary of the Proclamation of Isabella I of Castile in Segovia. This documentary analysis will entail a review of historical documents related to the proclamation of Isabella I and the development of the city of Segovia.

The organisation of the work is structured in the following phases, which are indicated in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Research chronology

Phase	Activities
1	Preparation phase, collection of historical information and methodological design.
2	Data collection through communiqués from Segovia City Council and review of the documents that contextualise the commemoration.
3	Transcription and coding of the data obtained.
4	Final analysis and report writing phase.

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2024.

3. The Commemoration of the Proclamation of Isabella I of Castile in Segovia

3.1 Background to the Commemoration of the 550th Anniversary of the Proclamation

The commemoration of the proclamation of Isabella I of Castile, organised in 2024, is not the first to be held in Segovia. As stated by Rodrigo Peñalosa, vice-president of the Concordia Cultural Association of Segovia, "we know of its celebration in the twenties of the last century" (Martín, 2013). However, it was not until 2004 that events similar to those scheduled for 2024 were organised. This was the fifth centenary of the death of Isabella the Catholic, and the Segovia City Council took advantage of this event to remember the proclamation of the monarch in the city.

The Segovian Consistory, in collaboration with other entities such as the Junta de Castilla y León, the Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones and the Asociación Cultural Concordia de Segovia (Board of Castile and León, the State Society of Commemorations and the Concorde Cultural Association of Segovia), orchestrated a series of events, including the re-enactment of the proclamation of Queen Isabella I of Castile. This event, under the direction of the playwright Manuel Canseco, featured the performance of the actress Silvia Marsó, who assumed the role of the monarch. The events also included other shorter performances in the city centre, a period market and various exhibitions. The dates chosen on that occasion were 10 to 12 and 17 to 19 September, and a budget of 695,462 euros was earmarked for the celebration (Martín, 2004).

The aforementioned cultural association was responsible for this recreation on three additional occasions, specifically in 2006, 2008 and, finally, in 2013. On those occasions, institutional participation was irregular, as Peñalosa himself assured (Martín, 2013). In the 2013 edition, the musicologist Cristina Ortiz was responsible for representing Queen Isabella, and fifty period costumes were utilised, fifteen of which were provided by the Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones, with the remaining costumes being supplied by the Asociación Cultural Concordia de Segovia itself.

Subsequent to this occurrence, the Segovia City Council has organised a variety of activities in commemoration of the event, refraining from the recreation of the 1474 events. In 2022, to commemorate the 548th anniversary of the proclamation, the tourism department of the Segovia City Council incorporated special mentions into two of its most popular guided tours (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2022). In December 2023, Segovia City Council organised a commemoration that coincided with the 549th anniversary of the proclamation. This event took place in the atrium of the current church of San Miguel, adjacent to the bust of Isabella the Catholic (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2023). The core of the event entailed the reading, by the Segovian historian Mercedes Sanz de Andrés, of a segment of the act of the proclamation:

.. she swore an oath to defend the rights of the church and to look after the common good of the kingdoms of Castile, León and the royal crown, while the clergy, nobles and knights recognised her as their queen and promised her loyalty. (García de la Torre, 1974).

The Municipal Archive of Segovia houses a copy of the act in question, which has been employed in recent years to recreate the proclamation of Isabella I. According to expert historians, this document is considered to be a pivotal source for any recreation of the event. This document is regarded by leading historians as a pivotal source for any recreation of the event, as Grau (1949) notes, due to its reliability as a record of the events that transpired. Compiled by Pedro García de la Torre, a notary employed by the Segovian Council in 1974, the account was written from the perspective of an observer present during the events in Segovia on that momentous occasion (p. 20). Consequently, it is regarded as the most authentic account of the events that transpired on that fateful day, in contrast to the accounts penned by various authors (Grau, 1949, p. 20).

3.2 Analysis of the communications from Segovia City Council Regarding the Commemoration

In order to carry out the qualitative analysis of this study, a series of codes have been used to organise and interpret the information collected throughout the research. The process began with the identification of key issues related to historical commemorations, focusing on aspects such as collective memory, cultural identity, historical authenticity and adaptation to contemporary values.

The codes assigned, such as Collective Memory and Cultural Identity (CM-CI), have facilitated analysis of the manner in which commemorations reinforce the sense of belonging in the community and build a local cultural identity. Subsequently, codes such as Historical Authenticity (HA) have been utilised to assess the degree to which historical events are represented faithfully and the accuracy of the details of the re-enactment.

A fundamental element of the analysis has been the utilisation of codes pertaining to Adaptation to Contemporary Values (AVC, Adaptación a Valores Contemporáneos), which have facilitated the examination of historical narratives in relation to contemporary sensibilities. Codes such as Creativity and Artistic Recreation (CRA, Creatividad y Recreación Artística) have also been employed to identify innovations in representations and the involvement of contemporary artists. Finally, the Codes for Organisational Challenges (DO, Códigos para los Desafíos Organizativos), have been assigned to address the difficulties encountered in balancing historical authenticity and modernity, as well as managing different expectations among diverse audiences.

Historical commemorations have been shown to play a crucial role in the construction and transmission of collective memory. They act as mechanisms through which societies remember, re-evaluate and reaffirm their past. In the case of the 550th anniversary of the Proclamation of Isabella I in Segovia, the event not only celebrates a key historical figure in the history of Castile but also contributes to the consolidation of the city's cultural identity. Segovia's commemoration underscores its enduring connection with Isabella I and the profound impact of her legacy on the history of Spain and, consequently, the formation of its national identity.

The Mayor of Segovia emphasised the significance of this event in underscoring the historical importance of Isabella I as a fundamental element of the city's heritage, thereby reinforcing the connection between local history and contemporary cultural identity (Segovia City Council, 2024g). Commemorations of this nature are intended not only to celebrate the past, but also to serve as catalysts that adapt and update historical narratives to the present, thereby reinforcing citizens' sense of belonging and revitalising the social fabric through community participation.

In this sense, collective memory is not static; it is transformed and reinterpreted according to the needs of the present. Historical commemorations function as spaces of encounter between the past and the present, allowing communities to reflect on how their history shapes their present identity. In this process, the figure of Elizabeth I is not perceived solely as a symbol of the past; rather, it becomes a tool for reflecting on contemporary issues such as leadership, social cohesion and the role of women in history.

The organisation of commemorative events thus faces the considerable challenge of achieving a balance between historical fidelity and contemporary relevance. In the case of the 550th anniversary of Elizabeth I's proclamation, organisers have employed a range of creative strategies designed to appeal to both local residents and tourists, while remaining true to the historical integrity of the event.

One of the most innovative elements of the commemoration was the inclusion of a dessert competition inspired by Queen Isabella the Catholic, which was organised by Turismo de Segovia

(Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2024h). Such initiatives not only evoke the historical figure of Isabella I, but do so in a way that resonates with contemporary interests and tastes. Furthermore, it fosters heightened involvement of the local community, providing an accessible and engaging conduit with which to connect with the past.

The exhibition "I, the Queen", hosted in the entrance hall of the Town Hall, is a noteworthy initiative in its efforts to make the history of Isabella I more accessible to the contemporary public. The exhibition featured a painting of the queen owned by the Diocese of Segovia and a replica of the 1474 proclamation. This provided a space for reflection on the life and legacy of the monarch (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2024i). Exhibitions of this nature enable audiences to approach historical figures more intimately and emotionally, while contextualising their importance within the framework of modern history (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2024j). Another creative aspect was the possibility for citizens to rent medieval costumes to participate in the commemorative events (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2024o). This practice fosters greater immersion in history and allows participants to experience the past more intensely. Furthermore, it promotes a sense of community by inviting citizens to actively participate in the events, thereby personalising and collective experience of history. This aspect highlights the active involvement of the community in the event. These opportunities for more direct participation enable attendees to transition from the role of spectators to that of participants, thereby facilitating a more personalised experience of history.

The socio-cultural impact of historical commemorations on local communities is multifaceted, as evidenced by the 550th anniversary of the proclamation of Isabella I in Segovia. This event has served as a significant catalyst for social cohesion, thereby reinforcing the population's sense of belonging. The central commemoration event, which included a theatrical performance by the actress María Castro (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2024j), attracted a diverse audience, thereby fostering a deeper level of engagement with the city's history among the local populace.

The participation of young people has also been pivotal to this commemoration, with more than a hundred primary school pupils presenting works on Isabella the Catholic in the Plaza Mayor (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2024f). Such activities not only foster interest in history among the younger generations but also reinforce the idea that the past is a living and relevant part of local culture.

The events in question have been shown to reinforce local values and strengthen a sense of belonging, not only to Segovia's historical past, but also to contemporary values that the community wishes to promote. The figure of Elizabeth I, for example, can be seen as a symbol of leadership and determination, attributes that continue to resonate in today's society. Concurrently, the commemoration provides a forum for debate and reflection on the values of equity, inclusion and diversity that are central to contemporary society.

The response of the local community to the commemorative events has been predominantly positive, indicating that the commemoration has successfully fulfilled its objective of engaging the population of Segovia. Tickets for the central events sold out rapidly, underlining the population's interest in participating in this significant event (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2024n). This high demand indicates that the commemoration is not perceived as a mere historical reminder, but rather as a significant event contributing to the contemporary cultural landscape of Segovia.

Perceptions of the figure of Isabella I also play an important role in how the event is experienced. In this sense, the choice of a renowned actress such as María Castro to embody the queen in the central theatrical performance of the event not only adds a contemporary touch but also allows for an emotional and relatable interpretation of Isabella I (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2024j). Such creative approaches render history more accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences, providing new ways of experiencing the past.

A significant challenge confronting organisers of historical commemorations pertains to the adaptation of events from the past to align with contemporary cultural imperatives, while maintaining historical authenticity. In the context of the 550th anniversary of Isabella I, the organisers adeptly surmounted this challenge through a judicious balance of historical respect and creative event presentation.

Historical authenticity is a crucial aspect in the planning of commemorations, and the organisers of the event in question have chosen to emphasise key figures and events in order to maintain historical fidelity. For example, the portrait of Isabella I from Prádena was given a central position during the

commemoration (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, 2024e). Simultaneously, the incorporation of contemporary activities, such as the Queen-inspired dessert competition, demonstrates the capacity to adapt historical content to the preferences and expectations of contemporary audiences while maintaining respect for historical facts.

The opportunities provided by these events extend beyond the cultural sphere, encompassing significant economic implications, particularly within the tourism sector. The special programme of experiences promoting religious tourism around the figure of Isabella I exemplifies the utilisation of local history to attract visitors and stimulate the local economy (Segovia City Council, 2024d). This approach enables commemorations to serve not only as a celebration of the past, but also as a means to exert a tangible impact on the present.

4. Discussion

The results of this study on the commemoration of the 550th anniversary of the proclamation of Isabella I as Queen of Castile in Segovia demonstrate the multifaceted and profoundly influential role of such events in the communities that organise and participate in them. By reflecting on the concepts of collective, historical, social and political memory, it is possible to address the complexity inherent in commemorations, and how they function as tools for cultural and economic dynamisation, while consolidating and transforming local and national identities.

Firstly, it is relevant to discuss the role of commemorations in the construction of collective memory and cultural identity. The 550th anniversary of the proclamation of Isabella I in Segovia serves as a case in point. This event not only commemorated a pivotal moment in the history of Castile but also reinforced the historical narrative that connects the city with fundamental events in the formation of the Spanish nation. The proclamation of Isabella I was not only a crucial moment for the history of the kingdom of Castile, but also for the creation of a national identity that, through unification with Aragon, would lay the foundations of modern Spain.

The effective commemoration of historical events by the organisers of the event was achieved through the employment of creative strategies that balanced historical authenticity and contemporary values. This balance was evident in the approach to activities that were not only recreational and scenic, but educational and inclusive. For example, the portrayal of Isabella I from a contemporary perspective emphasised values such as female leadership and strategic decision-making in a male-dominated political context. This approach demonstrates the capacity to adapt historical events to modern sensibilities without compromising the connection to the past. By incorporating re-enactments that maintained historical fidelity, the organisers effectively addressed contemporary issues, thereby ensuring the relevance and impact of the commemoration.

In this sense, it is important to note that historical commemorations are also a form of selective remembering. This means that the aspects of the past that are chosen to be commemorated, and the ways in which they are presented, are both a reflection of the event being commemorated and of the contemporary concerns of the society organising the event. This assertion aligns with Wasserman's (2008) proposition that commemorations frequently serve to fortify national, regional, or local identities by meticulously selecting which elements of the past are to be recalled and the manner in which they are presented. In the context of the anniversary of Isabella I, there is a discernible objective to accentuate her proclamation as a pivotal moment not only in the annals of Castile but also in the historical trajectory of the Spanish nation, and, in a more symbolic sense, in the history of women in power.

The socio-cultural impact of the commemoration is also worthy of consideration, with the participation of the local community in the event's activities serving to reinforce collective memory whilst concurrently promoting a sense of belonging and social cohesion. The revitalisation of historic spaces, such as the Plaza Mayor and the Church of San Miguel in Segovia, has enabled the city's inhabitants and tourists to establish a direct connection with the past in a tangible and meaningful manner. The revitalisation of historic spaces has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on the local economy, attracting tourists and generating income for the hospitality and retail sectors. Furthermore, it has been shown that such immersive experiences can act as a platform for the transmission of historical knowledge from generation to generation, thereby fostering a shared sense of local identity and pride.

However, the findings indicate that historical commemorations are also confronted with considerable challenges, including the question of how to preserve historical authenticity without succumbing to trivialisation or excessive commercialisation. In the context of the Isabella I commemoration, the organisers deliberately sought to avert the risk of the event devolving into an insubstantial or superficial spectacle, a phenomenon that can arise when the emphasis is misplaced on tourist appeal rather than on safeguarding its educational and historical value. This raises a critical question about the role of commemorations in modern society: should they prioritise entertainment or historical education?

The results of the study indicate that historical commemorations, such as that of Isabella I, fulfil a pivotal social and cultural function by enabling communities to reaffirm their values and traditions. In Segovia's case, the event contributed to reinforcing local identity by positioning the city as a historical locale within the national context. Moreover, it provided inhabitants with a forum in which to contemplate their own past and the manner in which it continues to influence their present identity.

A close analysis of this commemoration reveals that such events provide a unique space for the interaction of memory, identity, and culture, which interact in complex ways. Through the careful management of historical authenticity and contemporary relevance, commemorations have the potential to play a critical role in the cultural and economic revitalisation of communities, while reinforcing social cohesion and a sense of belonging. However, it is crucial that these events are approached with sensitivity and respect for the complexities of the past, to avoid simplifications or manipulative uses of history.

The following table offers a summary of the discussion between historical authenticity and contemporary adaptation, as presented in this study. It reflects the balance that organisers must strike in designing historical commemorations. This balance is between maintaining the authenticity of the event and adapting to contemporary values and expectations. It is also about encouraging active community participation and positive cultural and economic impact.

Table 3. Comparison between historical authenticity and adaptation to contemporary values

Aspect	Historical authenticity	Adaptation to contemporary values
Collective memory	Based on documented facts; seeks objectivity in the narrative.	Integration of current values such as equality and diversity.
Creativity and recreation	Faithful recreation of costumes, settings and historical events.	Use of modern artistic elements to connect with the public.
Cultural and local identity	Emphasises the importance of the historic proclamation of Elizabeth I.	It connects with current sensitivities about gender and power.
Socio-cultural impact	Promotes knowledge of local and national history.	Generate dialogue on the relevance of historical figures today.
Organisational challenges	Maintain accuracy and fidelity to historical facts.	Adapt the events to a contemporary audience without distorting the story.
Public Expectations	A desire for authenticity and respect for history.	Preference for a narrative that is inclusive and accessible to all.
Educational function	Transmit historical knowledge in an objective and rigorous way.	Make history attractive and relevant to new generations.
Economic impact	Attracts specialised historical tourism.	It promotes tourism and related commercial activities.

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2024.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to explore how historical commemorations, with particular reference to the 550th anniversary of the proclamation of Isabella I as Queen of Castile in Segovia, can be understood as dynamic elements of contemporary culture, balancing historical authenticity with contemporary values. The analysis of the press releases issued by Segovia City Council has allowed us to examine the key elements of this commemoration, providing answers to the research questions and achieving the objectives set.

Firstly, with regard to the role of historical commemorations in the construction and transmission of collective memory and cultural identity, the analysis shows that these events are powerful tools for

reinforcing a sense of belonging and local identity. The re-enactment of Isabella I's proclamation and the participation of citizens, especially through school activities and guided tours, show how history can be revived and passed on to new generations. This answers the first research question: commemorations contribute to the transmission of collective memory by actively involving the community in reinterpreting its past.

Secondly, in terms of the creative strategies used to reconcile authenticity and contemporary values, an effort was observed to combine faithful recreations of historical events with the use of modern technologies, such as video mapping, and participatory activities adapted to a diverse audience. These elements allow commemoration to be attractive and relevant to contemporary audiences without compromising historical accuracy. The analysis has shown that while authenticity is a priority, the organisers have been aware of the need to adapt the event to modern sensibilities, using resources such as well-known actors and innovative activities to ensure its cultural impact.

The socio-cultural impact of the commemorations is another key aspect of the results and discussion. The activities carried out, from gastronomic competitions to theatrical re-enactments, not only promote cultural tourism, but also strengthen social cohesion and the sense of community in Segovia. The active participation of students and citizens in the celebrations shows that these commemorations are not just reminders of a distant past, but opportunities to generate identity and belonging in the present. This approach answers the third research question, as historical commemorations fulfil social and cultural functions by promoting cohesion and local pride.

In terms of participants' perceptions and experiences, the findings suggest that the commemorations were well received by the participants, who not only relived the past, but also experienced it in an active and meaningful way. The direct participation of citizens in the re-enactment of the Proclamation allows them to take ownership of an essential part of their cultural heritage. In this way, the event becomes a reflection of how the past can be adapted and experienced by current generations, consolidating its meaning in the collective memory.

In terms of the challenges and opportunities of adapting the past to the cultural demands of the present without compromising historical authenticity, the findings and discussion show that this balance remains a key challenge. Although notable successes have been achieved in integrating modern and participatory elements, it remains crucial to avoid excessive 'touristification' or the simplification of history to suit the demands of the tourist market. However, the 550th anniversary celebrations have shown that it is possible to maintain historical integrity while adapting the event to contemporary expectations, making the celebration an inclusive, educational and culturally significant experience.

An analysis of the press releases issued by Segovia City Council to mark the 550th anniversary of the proclamation of Isabella I as Queen of Castile shows how historical commemorations can be cultural and social catalysts in the present. The balance between historical authenticity and adaptation to contemporary values is crucial to ensure that these events are not only respectful of the past, but also relevant and accessible to contemporary audiences. The strategies adopted by organisers, which combine faithful recreations with modern and inclusive activities, show how it is possible to preserve historical integrity while fostering a sense of belonging and pride in the local community. In this sense, the commemoration of Isabella I in Segovia is an example of how history can be used creatively to strengthen cultural identity and promote cultural tourism in the present.

Historical commemoration plays a crucial role in the transmission of collective memory and cultural identity, and its importance increases in contemporary societies that seek a balance between historical authenticity and adaptation to contemporary values. This study concludes that commemorations can be interpreted from a creative perspective, acting as dynamic elements of local culture. By analysing the press releases issued by Segovia City Council on the commemoration of the 550th anniversary of the proclamation of Isabella I of Castile, it is possible to see the strategies used to balance historical accuracy with contemporary expectations, and how these commemorations contribute to strengthening local identity and a sense of belonging.

For all these reasons, it can be said that the case of the 550th anniversary of the proclamation of Isabella I as Queen of Castile in Segovia is an example of how historical commemorations can reconcile authenticity and modernity, contributing both to the preservation of historical memory and to cultural and tourist promotion. The strategies employed, combining faithful recreation and creative adaptation, have proved effective in revitalising local culture and strengthening collective identity. This study

highlights the importance of further exploring how organisers can continue to adapt the past without compromising its authenticity, to ensure that historical commemorations remain relevant, inclusive and culturally enriching for all audiences.

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