

LOOKING AT MADRID

Francesc Català-Roca and the Representation of the City in the Destino Guides

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the three editions of the Madrid guide published by Destino in 1954, 1959, and 1971, featuring photographs by Francesc Català-Roca and texts by Juan Antonio Cabezas. The study examines the illustrated book as a cultural artefact of post-war Spain, in which image and text work together to construct a narrative combining monumentality, everyday life, and urban modernisation. Through a comparative analysis of the different editions, the article explores how photography constructs a coherent and controlled image of Madrid under the Franco regime, while progressively incorporating greater attention to everyday life and the human figure, in line with European debates surrounding photographic humanism. The analysis demonstrates that the guides functioned not only as tourist instruments, but also as cultural technologists that fixed a particular representation of the capital within collective memory, shedding light on the relationship between photography, the city, and Francoism against the backdrop of European modernity.

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1. Madrid: The City as Image

The study of the city as a visual representation is central to understanding the relationship between photography, culture, and politics in post-war Europe. Urban images not only document spaces, but also construct narratives surrounding collective identities, ways of life, and projects of modernity. Examining the visual representation of the city in post-war Europe is therefore essential for understanding how photography contributed to the construction of collective perceptions and cultural imaginaries and mediated between culture, politics, and society. In this context, illustrated publications offer a particularly valuable framework for analysis, as they construct discourses in which image and text combine to project meanings associated with urban identity.

The case of Madrid is particularly significant. During the transition towards the gradual opening of the Franco regime, the capital was represented across the different editions of the guide *Madrid* published within the *Guías de España* collection by the publishing house Destino (1954, 1959, and 1971), conceived as instruments of cultural and tourist dissemination under a controlled discourse. Far from being mere reissues, these guides introduced variations in both texts and images, making them a revealing case through which to analyse the political, editorial, and cultural transformations of the period.

This study is based on the premise that images of Madrid in the post-war period not only document the city, but also reveal how photography functioned as a medium of cultural negotiation, subordinated to the discourse of Francoism, yet also permeable to international visual currents. Accordingly, the aim of this research is to analyse the visual construction of Madrid across the three editions of the guide *Madrid* and to examine the role of editing, photographic sequencing, and the relationship between image and text, while assessing Català-Roca's contribution within the framework of European humanist photography. To achieve these objectives, the study adopts a qualitative approach that conceives photography as a cultural artefact embedded within editorial and discursive contexts. The analysis is conducted from both semiotic and cultural perspectives.

Firstly, a formal analysis of the images is undertaken (Marzal Felici, 2007), addressing them from a morphological and compositional perspective. Secondly, an editorial and narrative analysis is conducted (Martín Núñez, 2024), focusing on aspects related to page layout, image sequencing, paratexts, strategies of enunciation, and the materiality of the book itself, understood as an autonomous narrative artefact. Finally, the iconographic and iconological approach allows to identify represented visual motifs — streets, monuments, everyday scenes, social types — and to interpret their cultural and ideological meanings within the framework of post-war Europe. As Margolis and Pauwels (2011) note, visual analysis has drawn upon tools such as iconography, iconology, semiotics, and visual rhetoric in order to address both individual images and broader editorial ensembles. In the same vein, Pasternak (2020) emphasises that these approaches make it possible to situate photography within a broader cultural horizon, in which visual culture is understood as a medium through which social and historical meanings are articulated. The combination of these three levels enables an analysis capable of illuminating the evolution of the representation of Madrid during the Franco period, situating Francesc Català-Roca's work in relation to European photographic modernity and post-war humanist debates.

Studies on post-war urban photography have paid particular attention to the development of photojournalism and the emergence of the photobook as a medium of cultural dissemination. In the Spanish case, the work of Francesc Català-Roca has been analysed primarily in relation to the aesthetic renewal of documentary photography, emphasising his contribution to the modernisation of the country's visual language (Terré, 2024). However, within the specific framework of Destino's tourist guides, his work demonstrates a singular ability to combine formal modernity with the institutional demands characteristic of the early opening of Francoism. To date, no specific studies have

examined Català-Roca's contribution to these guides or the role of his photography in the construction of Madrid's image during the 1950s and 1970s.

In this context, it is essential to mention the study by Arroyo Ilera (2008), which analyses the *Guías de España* collection as a whole from geographical, literary, and ideological perspectives, foregrounding the authors of the texts and their role in articulating a cultural discourse during Francoism. In this work, the photographic dimension is acknowledged through references to Català-Roca and other photographers who contributed to the visual aspect of the guides, although it does not constitute the principal focus of analysis. By contrast, the present research specifically addresses this visual dimension in *Madrid*, considering its three editions (1954, 1959, and 1971), since variations were introduced in both texts and images. This enables to examine how the representation of the city evolved in response to political, editorial, and cultural changes, thereby offering a perspective that connects the Francoist context with European debates surrounding humanist photography.

The research presented here responds to a dual academic gap. On the one hand, it focuses for the first time on the visual dimension of the *Madrid* guides and on the role played by Català-Roca in shaping the image of the city during Francoism, an aspect that has remained unexplored until now. In this way, the study offers an original contribution: it constitutes the first systematic analysis of the visual dimension of the *Madrid* guides and enriches the study of the relationships between photography, the city, and culture within the framework of European modernity.

2. Approaches to Humanist Photography and Cultural Publishing in Post-war Europe through the lens of Francesc Català-Roca

Post-war Europe placed photography at the centre of visual culture, not only as an instrument of documentation but also as an active medium for constructing collective identities and legitimising political and cultural projects. By combining record and aesthetics, these images became a key language through which to narrate the reconstruction and redefinition of European cities, transforming photography into a tool that was both documentary and evocative. In this regard, Allbeson explains how urban photography became a medium of symbolic negotiation and ideological confrontation in post-war Europe:

The image of the city played a vital role as a means of symbolic negotiation between local, national and transnational communities. [...] The image of the city was mobilised to answer the challenges of the psychological task of national reconstruction and, in the absence of armed conflict between the two ideologically opposed blocs, competing representations and meanings of urban space and urban life became part of a proxy battle (Allbeson, 2012, p. 29).¹

From this perspective, cities were not merely physical spaces undergoing reconstruction, but also contested cultural artefacts whose meanings were negotiated through photography and its circulation across different formats. In this context, the city emerged as a laboratory of visual modernity: its streets, monuments, and inhabitants became scenarios in which aspirations towards progress converged with the ideological tensions of the period. The growth of illustrated publications — such as catalogues, photobooks, tourist guides, and cultural magazines — reinforced this editorial transformation by turning photography into a narrative and symbolic medium. Consequently, cities appeared not simply as recorded spaces, but as constructed images charged with symbolic resonances that positioned them at the intersection of local identity, international circulation, and narratives of progress.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations of quotations from foreign languages are my own.

2.1. The Spanish Context Between Francoism, Openness, and the Madrid Guides

Following the end of the Civil War in 1939, photography in Spain became marked by international isolation and the strict ideological control imposed by the Franco regime. During the 1940s, photography in Spain was heavily conditioned by institutional and propagandistic uses, which limited its cultural autonomy (Sougez et al., 2001). The so-called autarkic decade (1939–1951) was characterised by material scarcity and international closure. As Ramón Gabriel and García Álvarez observe:

During the early years of the Franco regime, although also in later decades, official tourism promotion largely served to project an image of normality abroad that would facilitate, alongside the attraction of foreign currency, the international acceptance and recognition of the dictatorship. (Ramón Gabriel & García Álvarez, 2016, p. 386)

A shift in direction took place during the 1950s, when the need for international legitimacy led the regime to instrumentalise culture and tourism as tools of diplomatic openness. The creation of the Ministry of Information and Tourism (MIT) in 1951 constituted a turning point, bringing together within a single structure policies relating to the press, propaganda, cinematography, and tourism (BOE, 1951, p. 3448). As Richards (1998) has pointed out, Francoism quickly understood that culture could function as a diplomatic tool, and publications such as those produced by Ediciones Destino became part of this strategy of international projection (p. 127).

In this context, tourism acquired a decisive role. As Pack (2006) observes, “tourism in the Francoist context functioned as a form of propaganda, since the substantial presence of foreign tourists demonstrated the regime’s acceptance abroad and reinforced the legitimacy of the Spanish economic model” (p. 2). The figures illustrate this dimension: during the 1960s, Spain received an annual average of 13.750 visitors, generating revenues of approximately 884 million dollars (Vallejo Pousada, 2002, p. 213). “In 1965, the 11.1 million foreign tourists were equivalent to 34.3% of the native population” (Vallejo Pousada, 2015, p. 102). Tourism thus became consolidated as one of the principal vehicles of the so-called diplomacy of consumption, in which the country’s cultural and visual experience had to be presented through carefully mediated forms.

Illustrated publications subsequently became established as a major vehicle for cultural dissemination. Among them, the *Guías de España* collection published by Ediciones Destino (1943–1977) stood out for its originality in combining literary texts by renowned authors — Josep Pla, Camilo José Cela, Juan Antonio Cabezas, and Dionisio Ridruejo — with a suggestive graphic representation in which photography played a central role. According to Arroyo Ilera (2008), the *Guías de España* constituted an extensive and carefully produced collection — seventeen volumes across sixteen guides, comprising more than 9,000 pages accompanied by a significant number of photographs, maps, and illustrations — which gradually took shape over three decades, in parallel with the evolution of both the publishing house itself and the country it described (pp. 434–435). During the 1940s and 1950s, when travelling remained difficult due to economic conditions and limited infrastructure, the guides also fulfilled a substitute function for travel itself, offering readers cultural and visual knowledge of the country without the need for physical displacement.

Within the series, *Madrid* — featuring texts by Juan Antonio Cabezas and photographs by Francesc Català-Roca — went through three editions (1954, 1959, and 1971). These were not simple reissues, but volumes that introduced variations in both texts and images, making *Madrid* a particularly revealing lens through which to analyse the political and editorial changes of the period. These guides did not merely describe a territory; they also contributed to reinforcing a cultural narrative aligned with the regime’s objectives of legitimisation.

This panorama was shaped not only by Destino’s guides, but also by a generation of photographers who explored different approaches to the representation of urban and everyday life. Alongside Català-Roca’s editorial work, the figure of Paco Gómez proved

decisive in the modernisation of architectural and urban photography. His collaboration with the journal *Arquitectura* introduced a renewed visual language characterised by restrained framing and particular attention to built forms. Through his work, architectural photography ceased to be merely a technical record and acquired expressive and cultural value, in line with the modern aesthetic that was beginning to consolidate in Spain during the 1950s. Gabriel Cualladó, an active member of the *Agrupación Fotográfica de Madrid* and a central figure in the so-called “Madrid School”, contributed a humanist perspective situated between the popular and the intimate. Ricard Terré, initially linked to the *Agrupación Fotográfica de Cataluña* and later to the AFAL group, likewise developed a sensibility marked by lyricism and everyday life. Oriol Maspons, for his part, consolidated a form of reportage photography attentive to contemporary life and open to international influences. Although these photographers did not constitute a homogeneous movement, they shared the desire to move beyond the limits of official rhetoric. In this regard, López Mondéjar (1999) notes that Spanish photography in the 1950s found itself at a genuine crossroads: it remained marked by its pictorialist inheritance while simultaneously being pressured by an urgent need for modernisation. Català-Roca’s work, situated within this panorama, clearly reflects this tension, since while responding to institutional commissions within the *Destino* guides, it also deployed a compositional and narrative sensibility close to the European humanist tradition, adapted to the editorial and cultural framework of Francoism.

2.2. Francesc Català-Roca’s Gaze

Francesc Català-Roca (1922–1998) trained in the studio of his father, Pere Català-Pic, one of the pioneers of advertising photography in Spain during the Republican period. From the late 1940s onwards, already working independently, he began collaborating with publications such as *Destino* and *La Vanguardia*, developing a visual language that combined compositional clarity, formal rigour, and a sustained interest in everyday life. His work has been regarded as fundamental to the modernisation of Spanish photography, insofar as it introduced an aesthetic closer to European neorealism than to the pictorialist tradition that still predominated in the post-war period. Català-Roca should therefore be understood as a key figure in photographic modernity in Spain. His work succeeded in combining documentary vocation with a personal aesthetic search that went beyond mere illustrative function, generating an innovative visual language within the cultural and political framework of Francoism. Furthermore, in a context lacking specialised educational institutions, his figure became a point of reference for several generations of photographers, exerting a decisive influence on the evolution of Spanish photography. In his gaze, the city appeared not only as a setting, but also as the protagonist of a delicate balance between architectural modernity, popular life, and official symbols, a characteristic that gave his work a distinctive identity within post-war Spanish photography.

In this sense, the notion of the “most eloquent moment”, formulated by Català-Roca himself, situates him within European debates surrounding humanist photography, in which value was attached to the capacity of a gesture or situation to condense meanings beyond literal description. Although, in post-war France, authors such as Cartier-Bresson, Doisneau, Ronis, and Boubat articulated these ideas with greater international visibility, in the Spanish case the restrictions imposed by Francoism hindered their direct reception.² Català-Roca’s proposal functions as a parallel and autonomous sensibility, one that brings him close to these visual languages without depending on them.

Català-Roca’s position within the history of Spanish photography must also be understood in light of the generational narratives that emerged from the 1960s onwards. In *Fulls de contactes. Memòries*, Miserachs recalls how, during the defence of Maria Dolors Tàpias’s doctoral thesis on his work, the limited recognition granted to many photographers

² Personal interview with Andreu Català Pedersen, son of Francesc-Català Roca, conducted in July 2022 (unpublished).

of the previous generation became evident. In recalling that episode, Miserachs quotes Tàpias, who observed that these authors “have been silenced, swept aside from the landscape of creative photography” and that “our knowledge of history is largely shaped by photographers’ need to justify and lend prestige to their own tendencies” (Tàpias, cited in Miserachs, 1994, p. 110). This reflection reveals the extent to which the historiographical construction of photography in Spain has been conditioned by dynamics of legitimisation and visibility, and how photographic memory was frequently built through processes of exclusion. This dynamic can also be observed in the transition towards more radical proposals, such as those associated with *Nueva Lente*. Pere Formiguera expressed this clearly: “We raised as the banner of our position an attitude of rejection [...] towards everything that had been produced in photography in our country over the previous forty years” (Formiguera, 1988, cited in Miserachs, 1994, p. 115).

Against this backdrop of erasure, Català-Roca’s work acquires even greater relevance today, positioning him as a link between European humanist documentary photography and the renewal promoted by later generations. His contribution to editorial projects such as the *Guías de España* reveals the capacity of his photography to combine formal modernity with the institutional demands of Francoism, offering a gaze that, beyond illustration, helped shape a cultural representation of the city.

2.3. Guides and Photobooks as Editorial Frameworks

It is also necessary to explore the differences between tourist guides and photobooks, since although both rely on photography and editorial design as tools of representation, their logics of production and reception differ. The photobook has generally been understood as an autonomous project, often associated with the visual essay and open both to formal experimentation and to more conventional documentary registers. Having developed strongly during the interwar period —“a period of experimentation and technical maturity, in which new modern themes emerged alongside an entire network for the dissemination and distribution of images and publications resulting from advances in the publishing industry” (Fernández, 1999, p. 20)— the photobook became consolidated in the post-war period as a key medium for articulating visual narratives. Joan Fontcuberta defines it as follows:

Unlike the album or the catalogue [...] it is no longer understood as the simple support for a set of works, but rather becomes a work in itself. A collective work involving design, graphic composition and typography, the sequencing of images, layout, and text—that is, a conjunction of conceptual and material qualities. (Fontcuberta, 2011)

Guides, by contrast, more closely resemble the traditional catalogue format and fulfil a practical function of orientation and cultural dissemination. In the Spanish context of the mid-twentieth century, this purpose became conditioned by institutional and propagandistic objectives linked to Francoism. Within this framework, the editions of *Madrid* (1954, 1959, and 1971) make it possible to observe how the editorial construction of the city gradually adapted to the political and cultural changes of the regime, reinforcing a national imaginary consistent with its interests.

The contrast between the two formats is therefore less a rigid opposition than a difference in the ways photography, text, and editorial structures are articulated. The photobook explores the autonomy of photography as a language and its potential to construct an independent discourse, whereas the tourist guide combines a combination of text and image aimed at orienting the reader and shaping their experience of place. As Vega notes (2019), “the principal message of the photobook is conveyed through photographs” (p. 44). In the case of guides, however, prominence is shared between textual information and photography, understood here in its function as visual illustration.

Within this panorama, the *Guías de España* published by Destino should be understood as a hybrid editorial product situated between travel literature and the conventional tourist

manual. Their distinctive character was reinforced through the collaboration of prestigious writers and photographers who, like Francesc Català-Roca, granted these publications a singular cultural status beyond mere practical function. Moreover, within the context of Francoism, these guides functioned as genuine “paper journeys”, projecting an image of the territory that responded both to objectives of cultural dissemination and to the construction of a national imaginary (Arroyo Ilera, 2008).

From this perspective, both formats — photobook and guide — must be analysed as editorial frameworks. In them, photography is not understood in isolation, but as part of an ecosystem that includes typography, design, page layout, and the relationship with the text. As Vega recalls, drawing on Roland Barthes:

The text holds responsibility for the use of the message in relation to the projective power of images; with regard to the freedom of signification of the image, the text assumes a repressive value, and it is understandable that society should impose its morality and ideology primarily through the text. (Barthes, 2019, pp. 91-92)

In a similar vein, Victor Burgin (1982) emphasises that “the polysemy of the image is controlled through its juxtaposition with verbal text” (p. 92). This tension becomes particularly visible in Català-Roca’s *Madrid* guides, where editorial structure decisively shapes the interpretation of the images.

3. Looking at Madrid with Francesc Català-Roca

The analysis of the corpus focuses on the three editions of the guide *Madrid* (1954, 1959, and 1971), making it possible to trace the evolution of the visual representation of the capital across two decades of Francoism. The study does not merely describe images but also examines the narrative strategies characteristic of the illustrated book, analysing how photography interacts with text, sequencing, and editorial structure.

To this end, a comparative table has been produced in order to systematise variations in images, ordering, and titles. Although it cannot be reproduced in full here, it serves as a key tool for understanding the modulations of the visual discourse. The analysis is structured in two phases: firstly, the formal, narrative, and iconographic study of each edition; secondly, a diachronic comparison revealing continuities and transformations. This approach demonstrates how Català-Roca’s photographs, although embedded within an institutional editorial project, activate innovative visual languages that anticipate debates surrounding European humanist photography.

3.1. Design, Materiality and Cultural Discourse

The collaboration between Francesc Català-Roca and Juan Antonio Cabezas in *Madrid* stands as one of the most ambitious editorial projects of post-war Spain in the field of illustrated tourist guides. Published in 1954 by the publishing house Destino and reissued in 1959 and 1971, the work was conceived more as a reference volume than as a travel notebook: each edition exceeded five hundred pages, featured a 22 × 17 cm format, hardback binding, fold-out maps, and an unchanging cover design that reinforced both the continuity and the authority of the editorial project. This consistency in design contributed to positioning the guide as a prestigious work and to reinforcing the credibility of its cultural discourse.

This dense materiality conditioned the reading experience — slow-paced and characterised by frequent returns — and corresponded to the work’s ambition as a reference text on the capital. Not only were the images themselves significant, but also their arrangement on the page. *Madrid* is characterised by the predominance of vertically formatted photographs, which allow maximum use of the available surface. Double-page spreads devoted exclusively to the image are rare, limiting spectacularity and maintaining

editorial restraint. This approach contrasts with the model of the European photobook, in which photography generally acquires greater autonomy and visual prominence.

The body of the text is organised almost like a novel, with uniform typography and discreet headings, so that the photographs are inserted within a narrative rather than an ornamental framework. In this sense, the guide establishes a balance between text and image that responds to the functions of cultural dissemination and ideological legitimisation characteristic of Francoism.

The volumes originally included a dust jacket illustrated by Federico Lloveras — now rarely preserved — while the cloth binding, designed by Ricard Giralt Miracle, and the interior maps by Francisco Fontanals — including a general map reproduced from that of Madrid City Council — reinforced the sobriety and reference-work character of the project, linking design, cartography, and photography within a unified cultural framework. The absence of creative licences or supplementary visual resources concentrates attention on image and text, which are sufficient in themselves to sustain the narrative.

This effect is further reinforced by Cabezas's own discourse, characterised by a meticulous and erudite style that combines historical precision with an almost encyclopaedic tone. His narration functions not only as a cultural repertoire of the city, but also as a framework guiding the interpretation of the photographs, situating them within a vision consistent with the cultural and political objectives of the regime.

Figure 1. Cover of *Madrid* (1st ed., 1954)



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

3.2. The City and Its Strategies of Representation

3.2.1. Spaces of Centrality and Monumentality

As several film historians have pointed out, Madrid lacks a single architectural icon comparable to those of cities such as Paris or Rome (Deltell, Gemir, and Valdés, 2024). Perhaps for this reason, the spaces of centrality and monumentality within Francesc Català-Roca's visual itinerary are multiple and varied. Puerta del Sol, the symbolic kilometre zero of radial Spain, is presented as the symbolic centre of the capital and as the starting point of the urban narrative. The panoramic photograph taken in 1954 from the Hotel París (Figure 2) organises the square into a series of visual layers: in the foreground, pedestrians crossing the space; along the central axis, the fountain acting as a point of convergence; and, in the background, the monumental architecture that frames and lends coherence to the scene. This layered structure gives the image an almost cartographic clarity. The overall sharpness of the photograph, with focus extending from one end of the frame to the other, reinforces this aspiration towards total legibility. At the same time, the diagonal shadows crossing the pavement introduce rhythm and guide the viewer's gaze towards the heart of the square, transforming the composition into a synthesis of monumentality and urban life.

Figure 2. *Puerta del Sol viewed from the Hotel París, between Alcalá and San Jerónimo*
(1st ed., 1954 and 2nd ed., 1959)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

The photograph does not merely record a central urban space but transforms it into an emblem of the city. Català-Roca's technique — broad depth of field, elevated framing, and geometric order — constructs a representation of Madrid as a legible, organised, and stable space, an attribute that aligns with the Francoist narrative of the capital as the heart of the nation. In a context in which the regime needed to project an image of continuity and order following the years of autarky, this representation of Puerta del Sol becomes a visual metaphor for control and for cultural and political centrality.

This repertoire is further developed through by images that alter this spatial hierarchy. In a slightly high-angle view (Figure 3), Català-Roca shifts attention towards the entrance to the underground station. Here, passers-by gather around the access point while cars move through the square in different directions. The composition, less ordered and characterised by overlapping visual layers, produces a fragmented visual experience and conveys the accelerated rhythm of the square. In contrast to the previous image, in which visual order conveyed stability, this second photograph introduces dynamism, noise, and circulation, revealing another facet of urban modernity. Both images, however, complement one another within the editorial sequence: the first secures the monumentality of Puerta del Sol, while the second transforms it into a living space and a crossroads of modern life.

The 1971 edition adds a significant layer to this narrative through a rephotograph taken from the same vantage point as the 1954 panorama (Figure 4). The composition is almost identical, although the square now appears saturated with cars and buses that densify the space. The use of rephotography, recurrent throughout the guide, does not merely document change. By repeating the original framing, it stabilises transformation, presenting modernisation as a variation upon a constant motif. Technique here ensures continuity: the increase in traffic does not disrupt the image of the space, but is instead incorporated as another element within a stable compositional framework. In this way, modernisation appears as harmonious continuity rather than traumatic rupture, in keeping with the official narrative of Francoism.

Figure 3. *The centre of Puerta del Sol after the latest renovation*
(1st ed., 1954 and 2nd ed., 1959)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 4. *View of Puerta del Sol*
(3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

Plaza Mayor extends this logic of permanence and transformation. Català-Roca represents it as a stage upon which monumental solemnity, everyday life, and signs of modernisation converge. The general views of the square and, especially, the low angle shot of the statue of Philip III (Figures 5 and 6) reinforce monumentality through a play of verticalities. The low vantage point elevates the figure of the monarch above the surrounding space, transforming him into symbol of Madrid's role as the historical capital. Compositional symmetry and frontal framing contribute to consolidating the image of a Madrid ordered and legitimised through dynastic tradition.

Figure 5. *Plaza Mayor as a stone chronicle: A history of Habsburg Madrid*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 6. *Statue of Philip III in Plaza Mayor to which Tacca, Pantoja, and Giambologna contributed*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

However, this solemnity is nuanced by images that introduce humanist registers. The mistletoe seller in the foreground (Figure 7), outlined against a blurred architectural background, restores the scale of everyday gesture to the monumental space. Likewise, the passers-by crossing the arcades (Figure 8) insert the ordinary experience of city dwellers into an environment steeped in history. Here, Català-Roca articulates what he himself called the “most eloquent moment”: the condensation of a meaningful gesture that humanises and balances the monumentality of the scene. Plaza Mayor thus becomes a space in which different temporalities coexist: the dynastic past, the everyday present, and the signs of transformation emerging in the post-war period.

Figure 7. *Plaza Mayor, mistletoe seller and holm oak for Christmas decorations*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 8. *Arcades beneath the porticoes of Plaza Mayor*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Modernisation becomes visible in images documenting urban reforms, such as the entrance to the underground passage or views following the post-war interventions (Figures 9 and 10). These elements could have fractured the historical image of the square, yet Català-Roca frames them with frontal composition and compositional balance, integrating them into the overall harmony of the ensemble. The editorial sequence reinforces this reading by juxtaposing solemnity, everyday life, and modernisation in order to configure Plaza Mayor as a living stage in which different temporalities coexist without apparent conflict.

Figure 9. *Entrance to the underground passage in Plaza Mayor*
(3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

Figure 10. *A view of Plaza Mayor*
(3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

Cibeles and the Prado–Alcalá axis complete this repertoire of symbolic centrality. In the panoramic view of Calle de Alcalá (Figure 11), the fountain occupies the foreground as a visual anchor, while the Telefónica building rises on the horizon as an emblem of modernity. The street's vanishing lines direct the gaze towards the background, integrating Baroque monumentality and contemporary architecture within the same visual field. The flow of traffic and the passers-by crossing the scene introduce dynamism and update the monument, inscribing it within the modern life of the city. A second, closer shot (Figure 12) concentrates on the iconography of the goddess and the lions, framed by the Palacio de Comunicaciones. The low-angle composition intensifies the monumentality of the sculptural ensemble and reinforces its symbolic character, with the fountain in the foreground and the institutional architecture in the background. The composition thus underlines both the monument's centrality within the urban space and its representative function.

Figure 11. *Calle de Alcalá with the Cibeles fountain in the foreground*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 12. *Cibeles and her symbolic Castilian lions.*
In the background, the pinnacles of the Communications Palace
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

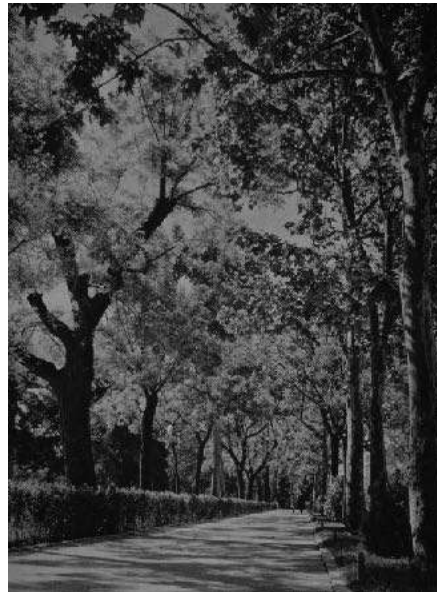
The images of Paseo del Prado (Figures 13 and 14) introduce a different register. The alignment of the trees guides the gaze into depth and generates a visual corridor that softens the presence of the architecture. The inclusion of passers-by, reduced in scale, humanises the space and transforms it into a place of shared experience rather than a merely monumental setting. Here, Català-Roca introduces a lyrical tone in which the city is represented as a shared landscape, balancing solemnity and everyday life.

Figure 13. *Paseo del Prado: the Fountain of Apollo after the latest renovation*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 14. *Paseo del Prado in spring*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Taken together, these series — Puerta del Sol, Plaza Mayor, Cibeles, and the Prado — constitute the symbolic core of Madrid as represented in the *Destino* guides. Català-Roca employs a coherent formal repertoire composed of deep panoramas that ensure legibility, solemn low-angle shots that monumentalise, close-ups that humanise, and rephotographs that stabilise change. The combination of these resources not only organises the city visually but also translates a political and cultural narrative into images. The capital is presented as a stable, legible space undergoing controlled transformation, in keeping with the Francoist discourse of historical continuity and harmonious modernisation.

3.2.2. *Scenarios of Modernity and Developmentalism*

Madrid's modernity, as represented in Català-Roca's guides, materialises through a series of spaces and infrastructures that embody the imaginary of Francoist developmentalism. In contrast to sites of historical centrality, these images shift the narrative towards a city in transition, where traffic, architectural verticality, and new facilities shape the physiognomy of the urban landscape. Particularly prominent within this repertoire are Gran Vía and Callao, transformed into showcases of consumption and leisure; Plaza de España and the Torre de Madrid, symbols of expansion and vertical ambition; together with a range of infrastructures such as La Cebada market, Barajas Airport, the Eisenhower interchange, and the cable car in Parque del Oeste, all of which position Madrid in line with international discourses of mobility and openness.

Gran Vía functions as the principal axis of this register. In the daytime photographs (Figures 15 and 16), Gran Vía condenses the transition from an incipient modernity to a regulated one. In the first and second editions, cars circulate without marked lanes, while two pedestrians stand in the middle of the roadway, emphasising the undefined nature of the traffic space. The composition guides the viewer's gaze along the diagonal formed by the vehicles, introducing dynamism but also a certain provisional quality. In the third edition, the rephotograph taken from the same vantage point already shows painted lane markings and regulated circulation. Modernisation is thus translated into visual ordering. Traffic becomes a rhythmic sequence, in keeping with the late Franco regime's attempt to project stability. The contrast between both images reveals how urban evolution itself becomes an ideological sign: from a city in transition to a regulated metropolis.

Figure 15. *Gran Vía. Cars travel along the asphalt of Madrid's newest district*

(1st ed., 1954 and 2nd ed., 1959)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 16. *Traffic along one of the first sections of Gran Vía*
(3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

The night-time images (Figures 17 and 18) add another dimension: neon lights and blurred crowds transform the avenue into an electric haze in which the glamour of cinema becomes part of the everyday landscape. Through these images, Català-Roca seems intent on capturing the spirit of his time: “The drive of this street, its sense of enthusiasm, emerged because, alongside its growth, a new form of spectacle was developing throughout the world: cinema” (Deltell Escolar et al., 2023, p. 9).

The isolated figure in the foreground contrasts with the bustle in the background, creating a tension between anonymity and collectivity. Through this dual perspective — orderly by day and vibrant by night — Català-Roca transforms Gran Vía into an emblem of modernity in dialogue with other Western capitals.

Figure 17. *At night, Gran Vía becomes an electric haze*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 18. *One might say that on Gran Vía everything — architecture and atmosphere alike — has passed from the cinema screens gathered there into the street itself, without the slightest mediation*
(2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1959.

This same visual language extends into Callao. Comparisons between 1954 and 1971 (Figures 19 and 20) reveal a space evolving from an irregular crossroads into a square organised around consumption. The appearance of Galerías Preciados symbolises this transformation and connects Madrid to the international scale of commercial modernisation. The compositions emphasise the convergence of passers-by, automobiles, and illuminated signs, so that the square comes to be defined as a new urban centrality. In this way, Callao is presented as a node of leisure and consumption that reinforces the cosmopolitan image Francoism sought to project abroad.

Figure 19. *Plaza del Callao, old and new, depending on the direction from which it is viewed*
(1st ed., 1954 and 2nd ed., 1959)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

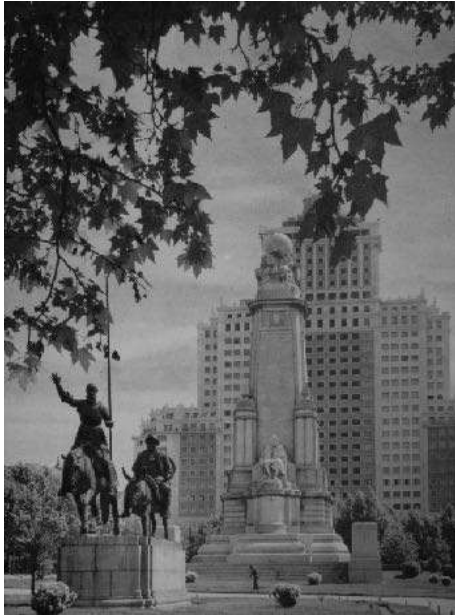
Figure 20. *The newly developed Plaza del Callao. In the background, Galerías Preciados*
(3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

Plaza de España offers another facet of the same process. The composition combining the monument to Cervantes with the Edificio España (Figure 21) integrates tradition and modernity within a single frame. The low-angle shot monumentalises the sculptural ensemble, while the verticality of the skyscraper projects a horizon of expansion. The visual confrontation between Don Quixote and Sancho before the architectural mass articulates the dialectic between historical legitimacy and the developmentalist present. Torre de Madrid reinforces this imaginary through an extremely vertical framing (Figure 22) that emphasises its rupture with the surrounding low-rise cityscape. The sculptural presence at its base acts as a symbolic anchor and balances the novelty of the tower, which emerges as a visual metaphor for a vertical Francoism projected towards the future.

Figure 21. *Plaza de España: the monument to Cervantes and, in the background, the Edificio España (1st ed., 1954 and 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)*



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 22. *Torre de Madrid, a vertical axis within Madrid's urban landscape (2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)*



Source: Català-Roca, 1959.

Modernity also becomes embedded in functional and everyday spaces. La Cebada market (Figure 23), with its brick and concrete façade, appears alongside cars and pedestrians that inscribe it within the daily life of the neighbourhood. Its inclusion in the 1971 edition legitimises this type of architecture as part of Madrid's cultural landscape, integrating the modern without disrupting the traditional urban narrative. As noted in Cabezas and Català-Roca (1971), "around two years ago, the old La Cebada market was dismantled and replaced by a larger concrete structure on the adjacent site in the same square. On the site of the former market there is now a large swimming pool" (p. 261).

Figure 23. *New Cebada Market (3rd ed., 1971)*



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

A similar logic operates in the images of Barajas Airport (Figures 24 and 25), where the contrast between propeller aircraft and jet planes articulates a visual narrative of technological progress. The airport becomes a symbol of international openness and a gateway to a capital seeking to integrate itself into global networks of mobility.

Figure 24. *Storm clouds over the Barajas plateau*
(1st ed., 1954 and 2nd ed., 1959)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 25. *New Madrid-Barajas International Airport, with jet aircraft arriving from all over the world*
(3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

Road infrastructures complete this repertoire of modernity. In the photograph of the Eisenhower interchange (Figure 26), the low-angle perspective magnifies the motorway, presenting it as a monumental stage of circulation. The moving cars reinforce the idea of fluidity and speed, serving as a metaphor for a city in motion. Something similar occurs in the image of the cable car in Parque del Oeste (Figure 27), where the cabins suspended above the Rosaleda combine leisure, nature, and aerial technology, offering an image of modernity that extends even into spaces of recreation.

Figure 26. *Detail of the Eisenhower junction, Barajas motorway. Carretera de Barcelona*
(3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

Figure 27. *The cable car passes over the rose garden of Príncipe Pío*
(3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

Taken together, these images construct a visual narrative in which Madrid appears as a city in transformation, capable of integrating tradition, consumption, and emerging infrastructures within a coherent framework. Modernisation is presented as a harmonious extension of history, in keeping with the Francoist discourse of stability and legitimacy, while also remaining aligned with international visual languages of the modern city. Català-Roca stabilises change through clear compositions and balanced framings, so that progress is perceived as a natural evolution of the urban landscape.

3.2.3. *Everyday Life and Urban Sociability*

Català-Roca's gaze upon Madrid is not limited to major monuments or the infrastructures of developmentalism. A fundamental part of his work in the tourist guides focuses on people, their gestures, and the occupations that shape the pulse of the city. Within this register, the photographer constructs a visual inventory of everyday life that transcends the anecdotal and becomes representative of the social sphere. These are not accidental portraits, but carefully framed scenes that present vendors, passers-by, and young people as urban figures embedded within a narrative combining tradition, modernisation, and sociability.

The sequence devoted to the underground is particularly significant. In *The Hour of the Typists* (Figure 28), published in 1954 and 1959, a group of young women ascend the staircase in a uniform movement. The slight low-angle perspective reinforces the sensation of ascent, while the orderly arrangement of the bodies transforms an everyday gesture into a social typology. The caption confirms this interpretation by situating them within a narrative of labour discipline and controlled modernisation. In the 1971 edition, the same staircase is reused with a different meaning in *Schoolgirls in Miniskirts Also Travel on the Underground* (Figure 29). The framing is tighter and the shot closer, accentuating individuality. Two young women descend with a relaxed attitude, while the caption underscores the generational signifier of the miniskirt. The photographic technique remains unchanged — overall sharpness, clear composition, and precision in spatial composition — but the narrative meaning shifts. Women become especially revealing indicators of cultural transformation, visual witnesses to the distance between the disciplined 1950s and the social openness of the 1970s.

Figure 28. *The Age of Typists*
(1st ed., 1954 and 2nd ed., 1959)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 29. *Schoolgirls in miniskirts also travel on the underground* (3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

Continuity can also be found in the representation of occupations. The young wafer seller (Figure 30) appears leaning against his metal container, captured with frontal sobriety. The shoeshiner (Figure 31), bent over before a client, is arranged diagonally, reinforcing the relationship between manual labour and social position. The lottery ticket seller in Callao (Figure 32) appears seated in a restrained posture, while the customer, leaning towards the table, introduces the movement that completes the scene. The architectural background and the side wall guide the gaze towards the act of exchange, the true focal point of the image. These scenes, grounded in documentary clarity and formal economy, transform labour into a sign of permanence and present a traditional, stable Madrid through the repetition of recognisable occupations.

Figure 30. *The classic wafer maker*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959
and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 31. *The street shoe-shiner, a popular Madrid institution*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959
and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 32. *Lottery ticket seller in Plaza de Callao*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959
and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

In other cases, the photographer establishes a dialogue between the popular and the monumental. The ice-cream stand in front of Puerta de Alcalá (Figure 33) depicts an adolescent in profile, outlined against the monument in slight backlighting. The cart is organised around vertical axes that echo the architecture in the background. The result is a harmonious coexistence between ephemeral commerce and historical symbol. Something similar occurs with the churro seller on Calle de Toledo (Figure 34), seated beside her table in a lateral framing that privileges measured gesture. The urban background, softly out of focus, acts as a counterpoint and reinforces the centrality of the figure. In this way, Català-Roca dignifies popular labour, representing it with compositional balance and without caricature.

Figure 33. *An ice-cream stall opposite the Puerta de Alcalá*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959
and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 34. *A churros seller*
churros on Calle de Toledo
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959
and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

The young seller of singing birds on Calle de Alcalá (Figure 35) introduces a different register. Here, proximity dominates: the face appears in three-quarter profile, the act of blowing the whistle is captured in detail, and the light falls upon the profile and the basket of figurines, creating a marked contrast with the background. The scene moves away from costumbrista typification and approaches individual portraiture charged with intensity. The documentary technique dignifies the subject, yet at the same time reveals an evident contradiction, as the presence of child labour is normalised within a Madrid that seeks to present itself as modern.

Figure 35. *A friendly seller of singing 'birds' on
Calle de Alcalá*
(1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959
and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Everyday life is not limited to labour. Català-Roca devotes a broad repertoire to sociability and leisure, capturing generational scenes in parks and promenades. El Retiro occupies a central place. A couple in a contemplative pose beneath the trees (Figure 36) is photographed in a composition that emphasises intimacy against the lushness of the park. In another image (Figure 37), a boy is shown driving a pedal car while another boy plays the role of traffic officer, regulating the passage of his female companions. The scene provides a significant example of the gender-role assignments characteristic of the mid-twentieth century (1954 and 1971), in which boys appear associated with functions of action and control, while girls are represented as pedestrians. This childlike representation of traffic transfers the norms of modern circulation into the realm of play, making childhood a symbolic protagonist of urban life. The photograph of the group of young people beside the pond (Figure 38) reinforces this logic. The young women sit casually along the railing, without forced poses, while the horizontal framing accentuates a sense of generational freshness. The water in the background lends lightness to the image, transforming the scene into a synthesis of shared leisure.

Figure 36. *Love flourishes in the foliage of the Retiro* (1st ed., 1954, 2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1954.

Figure 37. *Playing at being traffic wardens is a sign of the times* (2nd ed., 1959 and 3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1959.

Figure 38. *Close-up of youth by the pond in the Retiro* (3rd ed., 1971)



Source: Català-Roca, 1971.

A particularly significant detail is that those portrayed rarely look directly at the camera. The absence of frontal gazes reinforces the naturalness of the gesture and turns the viewer into a discreet observer of urban life. Only occasionally does a glance meet the lens, though it never becomes the compositional focus. This strategy connects with the visual languages of European photographic humanism, in which the dignification of everyday life was achieved precisely through the capture of spontaneous and seemingly casual moments.

Català-Roca's repertoire of everyday life is organised around two major registers. On the one hand, popular trades and street vendors sustain a traditional imaginary inherited from *costumbrismo*, inscribing the capital within a recognisable and stable identity. On the other, scenes of leisure, childhood, and youth project a city undergoing cultural transformation and opening itself to new forms of sociability. Both registers are balanced through constant formal resources — clear framings, overall sharpness, and compositional economy — that stabilise change and transform social diversity into a legible repertoire. The tourist guide not only documents everyday practices but also transforms them into signs of collective identity. In this gesture, Català-Roca's photography articulates a vision of Madrid in which work and leisure, tradition and social modernisation coexist within the same human landscape.

4. Discussion: Synthesis of a Visual Discourse

The analysis of the three visual registers structuring the guide *Madrid* — spaces of monumental centrality, scenarios of developmentalist modernity, and scenes of everyday life — helps to understand the way in which Francesc Català-Roca develops a complex visual discourse. This is not a simple illustration of the city, but rather a photographic and editorial construct that balances political demands, cultural expectations, and the international visual languages of post-war photography.

The first axis, monumentality, consolidates the representation of Madrid as a historical capital. The panoramas of Puerta del Sol, the low-angle shots of Plaza Mayor, and the solemnity of Cibeles inscribe the city within a narrative of continuity and stability. Here, these images provide visual support for Francoism that legitimises its project by associating itself with a tradition projected without rupture. Yet these images never become purely monumental, since Català-Roca always introduces an element of movement or human gesture that softens institutional rigidity. Monumentality thus appears humanised, in keeping with the tendencies of European photographic humanism, in which the everyday subject becomes a mediator between past and present.

The second register, urban modernity, shifts the gaze towards traffic, verticality, and new infrastructures. Gran Vía, Callao, Plaza de España, and Torre de Madrid function as showcases of developmentalism, though never as violent ruptures. The photographic technique — ordered framings, overall sharpness, and the stabilising effect of rephotography — domesticates change and transforms it into a natural evolution. At this point, Català-Roca's work offers a double reading. On the one hand, it legitimises the Francoist narrative of controlled progress and harmonious integration between tradition and modernity. On the other, it places Madrid visually in dialogue with other Western capitals, inserting it into a symbolic geography of international modernity. Much of the guide's analytical value lies in this ambivalence, combining local discourses of political legitimacy with global visual languages.

The third axis, everyday life, unfolds a repertoire of workers, street vendors, children, and young people that constructs a social image of the city. These figures are not mere costumbrista additions, but narrative devices anchoring the urban discourse in the human sphere. Popular labour appears dignified, childhood occupies a central role in the construction of public space, and women become generational indicators of change. Within a Francoist context marked by ideological control, these images situate social transformation within a framework of continuity and stability. The photographic technique — compositional economy, absence of theatricality, and naturalness of gesture — connects here explicitly with photographic humanism, whose influence can be perceived in the dignification of the ordinary and in the insistence on everyday gestures as cultural signs.

5. Conclusions

The articulation of these three registers reveals that the project developed by Català-Roca and the publisher *Destino* does not merely fix an image of Madrid for the tourist but rather

constructs a visual discourse operating on several levels. On the political level, it legitimises Francoism as the guarantor of continuity and harmonious modernisation; on the cultural level, it inscribes Madrid within a horizon shared with other European capitals, avoiding symbolic isolation; and on the photographic level, it deploys a visual language rooted in the international currents of photographic humanism, endowing an apparently institutional project with aesthetic depth.

This triple anchoring transforms Català-Roca's guides into a visual laboratory in which representational strategies that extend beyond the purely touristic are explored. The balance between monumentality, modernity, and everyday life offers an image of Madrid that is stable and recognisable yet also open to the tension between tradition and change. The photographer's ability to articulate this tension through legible and narratively cohesive images constitutes his most valuable contribution: a visual discourse that, from within Francoism itself, engages in dialogue with photographic and cultural debates of international scope.

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