



“THERMALISM IS A TRUE EUROPEAN VALUE”

What does the future of thermalism look like? José Manuel Baltar Blanco, President of the Provincial Council of Ourense and chairman of the European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA), knows all about it

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Photo: Private archive

The EHTTA was created in Brussels on 10 December 2009 as a European network of thermal towns which boast distinctive pre-nineteenth century architectural heritage and mineral waters recognized across Europe. Aware of their exceptional heritage and their continuing importance as health resorts and centers of well-being, the thermal spa-members of EHTTA have come together, in order to develop a policy of tourism development based on a strategy of promoting this rich cultural heritage. José Manuel Baltar Blanco, President of the Provincial Council of Ourense and chairman of the European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA) is a true champion of this cause.

EHTTA was founded by six historic thermal towns – Acqui Terme, Bath, Salsomaggiore Terme, Spa, Vichy, and the town of Ourense. Which achievements are you the proudest of, seeing as it is one of the EHTTA’s core beliefs that Europe’s unique thermal heritage deserves to be more widely known?

- Our first major achievement as a new network was to become certified as a “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe”. Cultural Routes such as ours act as channels for understanding our shared European cultural identity, and we are proud to be a part of this network.

We want to share the story of thermalism, which has shaped modern medicine and tourism, as well as Europe itself, and which has a huge potential for enabling future generations to ensure their health, well-being, and prosperity. Our waters, our towns, our culture, and heritage all deserve to be more widely known, and I have an enormous responsibility to take European Historic Thermal Towns Association into a new era.

You have become President at a historic

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moment for the Association, as it is being restructured in order to strengthen it so that it can carry out a wide variety of goals.

- You are right. This includes the economic development of spa towns and the safeguarding of their cultural and architectural heritage, as well as research, and the development of a European tourism product that can generate economic benefits for our members.

Is thermalism a true European value?

- Of course, it is. The way our towns developed around our unique, almost magical health-providing thermal springs; the way they developed infrastructure – beautiful and functional buildings designed to provide care for people as well as to entertain them; and the way the towns drew people from far and wide across all levels of society to meet, inspire each other and to create new forms of society - that is thermalism.

You are also the President of the Provincial Council of Ourense. What would you say to someone who has never been to Ourense and never heard of it? What could they expect to see there?

- Ourense is one the most important thermal destinations in Europe and it’s full of potential because we have an abundance of hot springs and thermal baths. Basically, there is a large thermal sea underground. Ourense is a place where you can disconnect and a place of health, thanks to our wellness and thermal water.

How do you see the future of the EHTTA?

- The EHTTA is ready to embrace the future and to continue to work to promote the concept and values of thermalism throughout Europe, and at the highest levels. We will continue to give voice to thermalism, which is the voice of tradition and well-being, as well as the voice of future generations.

