

## Visiting The Past: A Case Study of Experiential Learning with Young People at Historic Sites

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Learning about the past is becoming a complex issue due to the increasing need to ensure the approaches consider not only the facts, but also the implications for increasingly diverse future societies. This paper studies how experiential visits to memorial sites contribute to young people's understanding of history from a wider and more inclusive perspective. The article presents a case study of two educational activities carried out at two memory sites related to the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) involving various qualitative techniques such as participant- and non-participant observation, expert interviews and focus groups with young people. The results show that an experiential approach to the past that works with emotions, empathy and dialogue with secondary students (17 years old) and older young people (15–25 years old) is a very effective means of offering a touching interpretation of the past and learning opportunity for youth, regardless of level of previous knowledge. Other findings show that the content needs to be reconsidered so new generations can interact with it. Young people's worlds are shaped by cultural diversity, globalisation and the need to connect knowledge with the social environment, which enables them to engage in a critical re-appropriation of the past. This may be a new perspective that could be incorporated into the school curricula, and these types of visits could prove very useful for teachers and historical institutions such as museums or memorial sites interested in including young people's experiences when planning their activities.

*Keywords:* historical empathy, education, memory sites, youth, museums

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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

How do visits to memorial sites help foster young people's interest in the history of the recent past? Do experiential visits enable young people to better understand the facts of the past? Do these experiential visits permit a more critical, inclusive and up-to-date way of approaching the recent past? To answer these questions, the article focuses on the educational experiences of two memory sites that are often visited by schools, particularly secondary schools, in Catalonia. The sites are located in the city of Barcelona and come under the remit of the History Museum of Barcelona (MUHBA)<sup>1</sup> and relate to the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) and the post-war period.

Museums are a very important resource for young people's history education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Scott, 2011; Kratz, Merritt, 2011). They are also important in everyday life and play a central role in citizens' cultural participation and *historical literacy*, especially when one considers the large number of people that visit museums in their leisure time (Eurostat, 2019; Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, 2019). In Spain, around 40% of the population visits museums and some official surveys show that younger people tend to visit museums more (Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, 2019). This may in part be explained by the fact that visits to museums or historical sites are a very popular out-of-school activity in formal education. In this sense, historical sites are one of the most important tools for developing a historical perspective in non-historians (Baron, 2012).

At the same time, there is an emerging consensus that the new educational strategies should focus on the development of a core set of skills, such as critical and creative thinking, learning to learn and social and emotional skills (e.g. empathy, self-efficacy and collaboration) as well as practical and physical skills (e.g. using new information and communication technology devices (OECD, 2018). In this sense, new formats and languages can prove useful in enhancing the learning processes of today's students, often through, but not limited to, the use of new technologies. However, this does not only relate to evolving formats and pedagogical strategies. It also implies the need to adapt content to suit new learning approaches.

As promoted by the OECD Education 2030 project, students need to become active, responsible and engaged citizens. But how can history education contribute to this aim? History learning methods are becoming increasingly oriented to a more comprehensive and critical approach. According to Harris (2016) and Brooks (2011), the application of historical empathy, defined as using historical evidence to reconstruct past perspectives, engenders critical thinking in students. This process often implies the generation of experiential contexts (i.e. visits) in which pupils are given the opportunity to develop analogies between the past and the present day. These analogies facilitate the introduction of emotion and therefore empathy into the learning experience. This approach, based on the connection between the actors of the past and present-day pupils, according to Worden (2008), turns museums into institutions of memory rather than history, in light of the social purpose of their message. Experiential education programmes may therefore stimulate creativity and curiosity and also promote longer term positive outcomes for students, such as the desire to attend college or spark an interest in a broader set of topics (Lacoe, Painter, Williams, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/museuhistoria/en/>.

Given the distinction between history and memory, following Halbwachs (1992), memory represents an approach to history which involves subjective and intersubjective experiences, and the transmission of emotions through commemorative rituals, spaces or museums that express sensations through their architecture, as well as through the stories themselves that make up the transmitted memory. This makes memory a difficult subject due to interpretation conflicts, or new interpretations in the case of new generations of young people who acquire knowledge about the past from new perspectives (Mira, 1990; Ferro, 1992; Billig, 1995; Plantinga, 1992). In the present study, it is necessary to place young people in their context: in a society with great cultural diversity (Spain) and identities that combine local roots with hybrid identities and global references (Feixa, Nilan, 2009; Rovira-Martínez, Ferrer-Fons, Castellví, Hansen, Nuño de la Rosa, 2020). This view, from various cultural identities, challenges history as traditionally conceived by the institutions responsible for official memory sites and stresses the interest in promoting a more inclusive approach to recent history, so as to obtain an accessible understanding of history through different profiles of people and communities.

It is possible to combine two different approaches to learning about history. First, traditional history lessons are based on theoretical and curricular content and are mainly transmitted through textbooks and oral lessons given by teachers. Second, students can learn through experiential and more active tasks that imply moving away from the traditional textbooks and the curriculum content covered in the classroom. For instance, students can learn about history by visiting museum memory sites, watching historical movies, interviewing people from older generations – often relatives who lived in certain periods of the past – and so on. In the present case study, the theme of the past is related to the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), a conflict that is still relatively unknown in some respects by the new generations but still holds a remarkable emotional charge in Spanish society.

In the context of studying the transmission of the past among young people, Popov and Deak (2015) state that “young people are not just passive recipients of historical discourses; they are actively involved in the interpretation and production of the past” (ibid.: 37). This suggests that historical narratives are not accepted unquestioningly by younger generations. In the case of memory sites, this reinterpretation of the past is commonly related to the same experience that young people have during the visit. The feelings and impressions about the past that they gain by visiting a specific site and the memory that it transmits are elements that interact with the history content being transmitted. Keightley and Pickering (2012) call this process ‘mnemonic imagination’ because it involves more than the mere transmission of knowledge. The past that is shared by older generations is not just experienced but also learned and interpreted. In fact, the social projection of history is only possible through its narrativity, that is, through a narrative that explains the facts and structures them around a time and a space (Ricoeur, 2000). Memory fulfils this narrative function in a central way. Each generation’s reinterpretation of the past therefore forms part of the work of memory (Rovira-Martínez, 2011).

The History Museum of Barcelona (MUHBA) is a cultural site of great relevance to the city’s life and history, and is visited by schools from all over Catalonia. In this museum, a comprehensive overview of the history of the city beginning 2,000 years ago is offered through a substantial network of local spaces and activities. In recent

decades, the museum has recovered some sites in the city as spaces for memory, especially with regard to the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) and the post-war period. In particular, we focus on two MUHBA spaces in Barcelona: first, the air-raid shelter in Poble Sec city quarter (known as Shelter 307) and second, the anti-aircraft batteries at Turó de la Rovira, a place where the histories of the Civil War and of immigration merge. Both sites are used extensively as educational resources by primary and secondary schools.

## 2. DATA AND METHODS

The research is a case study that follows a qualitative approach combining expert interviews, participant observation and focus groups with young people. In the first stage of the study, three expert interviews were conducted: first, there was a group interview with those responsible for the educational activities (Expert 1) and the MUHBA communication programmes (Expert 2) respectively; and then, an individual interview with the person in charge of the organisation of the visits to the chosen memory sites (Expert 3).

Fieldwork was carried out during two guided visits with young people to Shelter 307 and the Turó de la Rovira anti-aircraft batteries. After these visits, two focus groups were conducted with the young people who took part in the activities at the heritage sites, with the intention of understanding what they appreciated about these experiences and other questions related to cultural heritage and its transmission. Observations were performed during both guided tours. Field diaries were kept on each of the two educational experiences at the memory sites.

During the visit to Shelter 307, we focused on the groups of second year *Batxillerat* (baccalaureate) students<sup>2</sup> from a secondary school located in the second largest city in Catalonia, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat (261,068 inhabitants in 2020). A researcher joined them on their guided visit to Shelter 307 in December 2019 and did a non-participant observation and took notes. The visit lasted approximately two hours and the main topic was the plans put in place for the passive defence of the city during the Civil War bombings and the civilian response to them. A few days later, two researchers conducted a focus group with students on the school premises. We asked the teacher in charge of the visit to send us volunteers to participate. The focus group was made up of seven teenagers, all 17 years old.

The visit to the Turó de la Rovira anti-aircraft batteries took place on the last Saturday of January 2020. The topic of the visit was the active defence of the city and how the Republican army dealt with the air raids that terrorised the city during the Civil War. It also covered the construction of temporary housing during the 1940s–60s, and the neighbourhood movement that fought for better living conditions and infrastructure.

The guided visit was attended by young adults (18–25 years old). We wanted to select young people who were actively engaged in youth and/or cultural associations. These young people came from different places: some from non-formal education settings

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<sup>2</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> *Batxillerat* year is the second year of non-compulsory secondary education in Spain, the final stage of education before going on to university.

such as scout groups (*agrupament escolta*)<sup>3</sup> or artistic non-profit organisations, while others engaged in informal cultural youth practices such as urban dance. Some of them lived outside Barcelona. Several researchers took part in the guided tour, dividing among them the tasks of conducting the participant observation, taking photographs, accompanying young people from outside Barcelona, and the organisation and logistics of the focus group. The guided tour lasted for approximately an hour and a half. The discussion group was held at a public youth centre near the site following the visit.

In all cases there was variation in gender, social class, family background and, to some degree, place of origin. Some of the limitations in the recruitment process were the voluntary basis of the focus group participation and, as one might expect, a bias towards young people who are more interested in history and the recent past.

The interviews and focus groups were transcribed and anonymised. Following transcription, the data along with notes made during the observation of the sites, were analysed using Nvivo. All the information was analysed inductively and within the framework of content analysis.

### 3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Strategies for Involving Young People in Visits about the Past

The MUHBA has a large number of educational activities aimed at schools, mainly based on visiting the sites located in the city of Barcelona because it is “a unique museum with sites and exhibitions that are spread out across the city” (Experts 1 and 2). The framework for this educational activity is a programme called ‘Questioning Barcelona’. The aim of the programme is “to provide students with the necessary information to enable them to read, interpret and build their knowledge of Barcelona and its heritage, so they can achieve a better understanding of the history and proximity to the city.”<sup>4</sup> Beyond that, from the MUHBA’s point of view, “heritage helps people to take roots in the city” (Experts 1 and 2); by knowing the past they can appropriate it themselves. Despite this, the people in charge of the programme stated that they distinguished between history and memory. They consider history to be interpretative, whereas memory, memories and experiences are more subjective. For them, the focus is more on history than on memory. However, both experts interviewed agreed that the visits to historical sites have a great impact on those who go to see them. Many of the visits to Shelter 307 are from schools and the experts mentioned that the visits have a strong effect on pupils, both in terms of the subject and content analysed and also the space itself. They encourage student involvement in the topics worked on and mentioned that people’s experiences of the shelter helped them understand the present. The relationship between past and present is very important from a pedagogical point of view:

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3 These are voluntary groups of youths who work with children and teenagers in their free time, sharing with them the common values of participation, solidarity, acceptance of intercultural diversity and environmentalism, to mention just a few. It is an important tradition in Catalonia. Although the groups form part of umbrella organisations, they are horizontal, assembly-based and locally rooted.

4 <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/museuhistoria/en/taxonomy/term/432>.

*It awakens an awareness that is facilitated by proximity in time. It serves to make a direct translation and understanding of the present. (...) We did not talk about war but of collective strategies for survival, a story about the empowerment of citizens, a collective effort, building networks of support and care. It is a story of the citizen reaction against barbarism. This is questionable and valid today. It's not work from drama. (Expert 3)*

In this sense, Expert 3 pointed out that during the visits they show the dichotomy between fascism, totalitarianism and the war versus mutual aid, cooperation, democratic values and the struggle for freedom. For instance, the guide emphasised that the Shelter 307 visit was constructed collectively including the related values. Furthermore, during the visit they aim to root the discourse in historical facts, not recreation, but focusing on the root causes of the war. The content is adapted to the curriculum and is very useful for teachers and students. They want students to leave with a deep understanding of the causes and consequences of war, but also with questions and greater interest. Questioning is a strategy that is used during these visits:

*We use the Socratic method, asking the students questions-answers. The answer doesn't matter. It's about coming up with ideas, and as they answer we build the story. We tell them: 'you may be wrong, you come here to learn'. (Expert 3)*

For the MUHBA experts, it is important to break the intergenerational gap and ensure students do not feel detached from what happened 80 years ago. Most of the teenagers and young people involved showed respect and empathy for the place. Some of them were emotionally touched:

*In compulsory secondary education sometimes some guys lack the maturity and tools to understand the content and the reality in which they find themselves. In Shelter 307, the boys who disrupt the group due to insecurity, lack of attention, immaturity, etc., are left alone. The rest are very touched by the story and ask them to stop. There are also students who can become emotional and are very ashamed to show it. These are times when very authentic things appear. Teenagers who see tears well up in their eyes. I tell them it's normal to be overwhelmed, it's normal. (Expert 3)*

In the case of Turó de la Rovira, the MUHBA experts highlighted the impact of the panoramic view of the city of Barcelona and, in parallel, how easy it was to bomb the city and how difficult mounting a defence was.

Within the exhibition section at this site, there are shantytowns that have existed in the area since the 1940s and these are the clearest indication of the human factor. The shantytowns are relevant to the exhibition of the Civil War bombings and defence at two different but interconnected stages: the Civil War and its social effects in the post-war period. In this case, the main question guiding the educational activity is: what did the war and lack of housing mean for the city? There was a neighbourhood involved in the museumification which provided a more subjective interpretation of the facts. However, the MUHBA experts highlighted the need to separate history from subjective memory, which is understood as a subjective approach to a particular story. The barracks section is more oral history-based.



### 3.2. Experiencing History: Young People Visiting the Historic Sites

The guided tours to Shelter 307 and the Turó de la Rovira anti-aircraft batteries were a great success among the participants. Three main reasons for this positive assessment came up in the focus groups. They were: their usefulness in expanding historical knowledge; the fact that they look different to what is taught in the classroom on the Civil War or the Franco dictatorship; and the positive experience of being physically present at the heritage sites, which was highly valued. Some visitors expressed the empathy they felt at the thought of being in the same place as those in the past. That shows how experiential visits touch young people much more and magnify the interest created by the experience. In this sense, the ideological aspects can be considered narrative skills that incorporate the significance into the facts.

*I also liked it a lot. I find it hard to study history because it's so dense. It's not that I don't like it but it doesn't excite me either. And the truth is that I found it very interesting and above all I thought that really there were people like now we are here. Yes, it made me think.* (FG Shelter 307, Ana)

*I liked that the guide explained the political side of [the] context at the time because I had come here on a school trip, about four or five years ago and he only explained to us the parts of the shantytown and of the cannons and the Civil War but didn't explain things about the Civil War, the context of fascism in Europe and all that. And I realise that we know very few things, that we have not gone beyond what I have been told in high school.* (FG Turó de la Rovira, Bernat)

As was mentioned above, the guided tours took place in recognised heritage sites that form part of the heritage site network in the city of Barcelona. These sites were where the related historical events took place, and the visits were hosted by professional guides who were historians accustomed to working with young people. Both of the discussion groups gave a positive assessment of the activities, stressing the idea that the visit was experiential in character as it involved going inside the same place as depicted in wartime. The shelter impressed the pupils very much and that shaped their identification with the past and the lived experiences of the people in the war.

*When I was told we were going on a history visit, I liked the idea because I really like history, like my mother does. Then going in the shelter, I really enjoyed it and the experience was also very enriching. I had never entered a shelter or anything like that.* (FG Shelter 307, Silvia)

*It has been helpful to know where we are and where we come from and to understand where we are at a time when it is crucial to know why we got there (a reference to the rise of the far-right) and I think it is these things that give rise to talk about where we come from, our historical origin and understand many things that are happening today.* (FG Turó de la Rovira, Victoria)

In this sense, and given the fact that young people prefer experiential activities and lived experiences (Bisquerra Alzina, 2010), visiting a shelter that was built to defend the city against the bombing had a very significant emotional impact and was highly

regarded by the majority of the participants in this focus group. In fact, it was the part of the experience that they liked the most.

*You walk into the shelter and you get the feeling of hundreds of people crowding through, running away from the bombs, and your skin shivers... And then as you walk through the different rooms you get to see a bit of what life was like in the basements. And I really liked how the topics crop up, the shelters as they were truly experienced, how the people felt, what they did to hang out, the movies, the nursing work (...) I found the dynamics were excellent. (FG Shelter 307, David)*

Entering the shelter – narrow, dimly lit, poorly ventilated, a feeling of claustrophobia – caught the young people's attention. It gave another perspective on the history learned in the classroom. The guide's experiential explanations helped them empathise even more with the situation, as they learnt about aspects of the shelter such as where the infirmary and the surgery room were located, the destruction of the children's area due to bombing that left behind dead children and babies.

The guide was very active and dynamic and combined detailed historical facts and explanations with references to writers such as George Orwell and Almudena Grandes (Spanish writer), or to films like *The Suffragettes* when mentioning how women gained the right to vote during the Second Spanish Republic. He did the same when explaining the historical context before entering the shelter, adding many references to his account of the causes and effects of the historical past (the Civil War and World War II, in particular) and the present (recent wars involving bombardments, like the wars in the Balkans and Syria). The young people said they liked the guide very much, for both the content of his talk and the dynamism shown throughout the visit. The guide continually asked the students questions to encourage participation. He brought in topics related to other disciplines, including architecture and geology, and also talked a lot about the organisational capacity of civil society and ordinary people in the defence of the city. The guide interacted with young people in a very informal and bidirectional way, adapting his discourse to the young people's questions and answers to the questions he asked.

The profile of the participants visiting the Turó de la Rovira anti-aircraft batteries was different. The young people were older (aged 18 to 25). Most of them were university students, and some were already working. The tour began outside, and then we were led inside the two underground spaces: the command room and the guard room. The latter has been converted into an exhibition room, with many videos, pictures, maps, posters and a few historical artefacts. Many of them were already familiar with the place since it is a meeting point where young people go to enjoy the panoramic views of Barcelona. In addition, some of the young people who belong to the scout group had already taken their groups to visit the place on their own, but they had never visited with the guide. There was a general consensus that the guided explanation had helped them to further their knowledge of the cultural and historical context of the time. As the visitors to Shelter 307 did, the young people expressed the idea that they needed the narration about the context so they could understand what they were seeing, and that it should be in the place where the events occurred to help them feel they understood the personal experiences.



*I liked that he explained the political context of the time. The guide explained things about the Civil War, the context of fascism in Europe and all that. And I realised that I didn't know much more than what I had been taught in high school, very little apart from high school. Realising that I don't know anything makes me angry. I'd like to know more. Why don't they teach us more about things that have happened recently?* (FG Turó de la Rovira, Bernat)

Another thing that captured the attention of the youths was the part about the shantytowns and the citizen's protests aimed at improving the neighbourhood's conditions during the post-Franco period and the transition to democracy. In this regard, two of the girls who did not belong to the scout group were not happy about the excessive weight given to the history of the Civil War in the tour, as they found the aspects of daily life and the subject of the shantytowns more relevant. One of the girls also found fault with the excessive subjectivity of the guide's explanations, which she said reflected his political inclinations. She thought that when explaining history, the focus has to be on the facts, not the ideological interpretation. There was some debate over this issue, but the focus group participants admitted that there was a certain degree of subjectivity in the way the guide explained things, because his was clearly more of a left-wing perspective. In this case the young adults, unlike the pupils visiting Shelter 307, were both more critical of how the facts were explained and had the capacity to discuss it.

During the Turó de la Rovira visit, two participants pointed out that the heritage site was more important to them as a place to meet with their friends than as a place of historical significance. Because of that, there was a discussion in the focus group about what we understand by cultural heritage and what content should be promoted. The first view emphasised the importance of preserving local cultures in the face of the dangers of globalisation. The arguments in favour of this approach were diverse: protecting vulnerable cultures, preserving the country's own heritage and cultural diversity, and promoting historical memory in the face of globalisation. In this respect, Catalan culture was considered to be vulnerable, alongside others.

The second view placed a stronger emphasis on the parochial features and excessive ethnocentricity of culture, referring explicitly to both the Catalan and Spanish cultures, and on the excessive weight given to the history of the Catalan and Spanish societies, taking into account that nowadays we live in much more diverse societies. The strongest criticism came from the two girls whose families are from abroad and who live in culturally diverse neighbourhoods. The other participants in the focus groups were faced with the dilemma of agreeing with these arguments but at the same time accepting the need to preserve local Catalan culture and encourage people to learn about what happened during the Civil War and the Franco dictatorship. In this case, we can see how youths interact with history based on their own conceptions and personal experiences, producing a social debate.

The young people in the different focus groups recognised that formal education is important in the transmission of cultural heritage, especially since education is compulsory until the age of 16 in Spain. However, they stated that it needs to be adapted somehow in order to motivate young people. In the first place, they said there should be more out-of-classroom activities related to cultural heritage. And their historical

knowledge should be broadened by using a bottom-up outlook and approach in explaining ordinary people's lives in specific historical or war periods.

*The problem is that history books talk a lot about the Civil War but they just describe the great battles. So what you see is always the great battles, the great generals on both sides, and you never identify with the person living in the city, the people, those who could have been you in that situation. So it was very inspiring for me to see the shelter, because you really feel how people lived, the people of Barcelona, during the last years of the war. (FG Shelter 307, David)*

In the second place, they pointed out that Spain's recent past is often only barely touched upon, rather than it being a constant theme in the high school curriculum that would allow students to finish compulsory secondary education with an in-depth knowledge of the recent historical past. They also said that, in the two years of non-compulsory secondary education, those students who choose social sciences and humanities end up with a better and deeper knowledge of historical issues than the students who choose sciences or technology. These differences have to do with the nature of the Spanish curriculum. Finally, emphasis was placed on the importance of formal and non-formal education in the development of critical thinking and the promotion of cultural diversity as the basis of a broader view on diverse cultural heritage.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The two sites can be identified as "memory spaces" (*lieux de mémoire*; Nora, 1984). Visitors are invited to relive people's experiences of the past by visiting the place where these experiences happened. This implies that such visits are the most authentic approach to the past: stepping on the same ground, going into the same spaces and thus making it easier for visitors to empathise with the victims of conflict. Hence, during these educational experiences, young people learn about the historical content they previously covered at school, but they also try to connect with people from the past through the experiential visit. Guiding young people in this way incorporates emotive elements that connect us with the past and with lessons drawn from the past.<sup>5</sup> In this way the pupils were able to identify with the history. As pointed out in previous research on education and culture (Carbó, 2015), to reach young people we need to organise activities that are aimed specifically at them. These activities are better appreciated if they are experiential. Young people learn by doing, and through things that touch them emotionally. One such experience was the visit to Shelter 307. Learning through emotional experiences and historical empathy provides positive incentives for young people (Cunningham, 2009). And certain experiences do not necessarily take place in formal education settings (Bisquerra Alzina, 2010). Moreover, the pedagogical and communication methods are relevant and must be tailored to the different groups of young people. We saw how the guides at the MUHBA's sites were quick to adapt the content and explanations upon gauging how the young people interacted with the heritage sites.

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<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the message of the sites is clear: never again.

A relevant point to highlight is that the two heritage sites are open to anyone who is interested, but the educational programmes are mainly targeted at students who attend formal education and are thus complemented by the direct student experiences. Partaking in direct experience allows students to experience moments and recent history in an experiential and close way, developing empathy. This is part of experiential learning methods which are less common in the classroom. Even so, these visits are often accompanied by classroom work, and the experiences do not conflict.

Some young participants in the study were critical of what they saw as an overly ethnocentric view of history. This gives much relevance to the debate on which histories should be given visibility at the heritage sites. Today's societies are continually changing. Many of the young participants had an open and positive outlook on cultural diversity. In this regard, we can see that there is still potential to expand the programmes and activities to offer a broader focus that reflects the cultural diversity present in Catalan society, where 15% of the population was born abroad. As indicated by studies on youth identities (Espín, 2015), it is important to take into account the fact that young people's cultural practices are marked by the cultural diversity that has come about as a result of migration. In fact, as some scholars have pointed out (Feixa, Figueras, 2018), these days youth identities are characteristically culturally hybrid. This was explicitly evident in the two focus groups.

Another theme that emerged was the need to focus more on the lives of ordinary people and less on the great battles, political parties and institutional actors. The exhibition at Turó de la Rovira on temporary housing in neighbourhoods inhabited by migrants during the 1940s–1960s, consisting of many rows of shacks, was regarded positively as an innovative view. This aspect of social memory and the recent past reinforces the idea that the Catalan national identity is an identity made up of different cultural backgrounds.

It is also remarkable that we observed a more critical position among the young adults (18–25 years old) than the teenagers in the discussion after the visit. This shows how visiting historical sites may impact young people differently depending on their age. On the one hand, among the group of teenagers, we could observe a more emotional experience based on the memory (or *story*). The visit to Shelter 307 was more touching and the student' opinions were more focused on the experience. On the other hand, for the young adults, the discussion was related to historical questions and the historical perspective, to issues about how history can reproduce certain biases about identities, diversity and society's current problems. They had a critical approach to these issues. Thus, we are left with the conflictual relation between history and memory and the question of what we know and how it is transmitted to new generations. Or, even more specifically, about the relation between empathy for actors in the recent past and the more relativistic comprehension of the context and the difficulties of each period of time.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The research shows that heritage-site educational activities targeted at students and young people are a good strategy for learning about historical issues and cultural heritage. The article shows us how, for teenagers, the empathy created through memorial experience generates interest and identification with the past. In the case study discussed, they enjoyed learning about the historical past in the places where the events actually

took place and about how ordinary people lived and survived during the Spanish Civil War. The experiential approach seems to be a particularly effective means of offering a touching interpretation of the past and its social actors, through the use of empathy and emotions. In complement to and as an expansion of the school curricula, this type of visit could be very useful for teachers. The evidence confirms other studies, such as Cunningham (2009), that point to the importance of historical empathy and ways of cultivating such empathy in secondary school classrooms. More research is needed to observe the relationships between these activities, in the framework of secondary education, and how teachers actually develop empathy teaching in the classroom, which should complement the experiences obtained during selected out-of-classroom practices. More evidence is also needed to confirm that pedagogical approaches with experiential learning characteristics have the pedagogic benefits of experiential learning and related learner outcomes (Blair, 2016).

However, another conclusion is that historical empathy is not enough on its own as an approach to the recent past. The type of audience and the age and life experiences of young people are important and so it can be good to combine diverse educational strategies. In the young adults at Turó de la Rovira we observed a more distant position on the past and the interpretation given during the visit. By contrast, the youths interacted with the historical narrative transmitted during the visit and this brought out their capacity to be critical from their own point of view. It might be worth museums and heritage sites developing new strategies to provide a more dialogical approach to their contents, in order to include the possibility of discussion within the visit itself. If the new educational strategies are to focus on critical thinking, collaboration and empathy, museums can contribute to this change, although they will need to transform the concept behind site visits with a view to transforming them into participatory and deliberative spaces. Moreover, an intercultural understanding of history that reflects today's diverse societies needs to be incorporated into them.

The final conclusion of the study is that educational activities need to be extended to young people who are no longer in secondary education, and consequently, made more accessible to young adults. Access to the heritage sites needs to be more inclusive so young people of every age and from every background can visit. We have clearly seen that educational programmes are mainly designed as formal educational activities, for schools in particular. As the young participants of the two focus groups mentioned, there is little information on youth-oriented activities, and access to the heritage sites is perceived as difficult. It is therefore necessary to promote new programmes and work on strategies and policies to disseminate information on the heritage sites and their activities, using social networks that are popular among young people as well as other communication strategies. In addition, activities carried out in collaboration with youth leisure groups and non-formal organisations could be useful for making learning about cultural heritage more accessible to both young people and members of the general public outside the education domain.

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