

EXPLORING KEY MOMENTS OF EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH THEIR OWN LIFE STORIES

EXPLORANDO MOMENTOS CLAVE PARA EL EMPODERAMIENTO DE JÓVENES A PARTIR DE SUS RELATOS

EXPLORANDO MOMENTOS-CHAVE PARA A CAPACITAÇÃO DE JOVENS A PARTIR DOS SEUS RELATOS

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the stories of six young people who shared their perceptions of what they believe has empowered them. The aim was to identify those moments, places and processes that have contributed to this empowerment. The starting point for their stories was the definition of empowerment provided by the HEBE project. After briefly discussing the complex nature of the concept of empowerment, the methodological strategy used will be explained, followed by a description of the narrative process and of how the young participants were selected. Then the most important findings regarding the moments, places and processes identified will be discussed. These include the contributions made by the young participants, together with the analysis and extracts selected by the researchers. Each story will be examined in depth and linked to the others, thus triangulating the data provided by each participant. Places such as family and work environments and community life are particularly emphasized, as are moments and periods such as the gaze of others, critical incidents, and adolescence, together with processes such as decision making, the recognition of others and action. The article concludes with a number of important elements that arose in the stories, as well as some questions that still remain to be answered.

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<p>PALABRAS CLAVES: relatos de vida empoderamiento juventud espacios de empoderamiento momentos de empoderamiento</p>	<p>RESUMEN: En el presente artículo se presentan los relatos de seis jóvenes que han comparado su percepción sobre lo que ellos creen que les ha empoderado, con el objetivo de identificar los momentos, espacios y procesos que han contribuido a él. Hemos compartido con ellos la definición de empoderamiento construida en el proyecto HEBE como detonante para su relato. Después de hacer una breve referencia a la complejidad del concepto de empoderamiento, se presenta la estrategia metodológica utilizada y se detalla el proceso de selección de relatores, el proceso narrativo y se presentan los resultados más relevantes respecto a los momentos, espacios y procesos identificados. Se integran las aportaciones de los jóvenes con el análisis y selección que hacen los investigadores de los contenidos de los mismos, a partir de una mirada en profundidad de cada relato pero también poniéndolos en relación, triangulando la información que nos ofrecen los diferentes relatores. Destacan espacios como son la familia, la formación, el trabajo o la vida asociativa. Momentos tales como la mirada del otro, los incidentes críticos o la adolescencia y procesos como la toma de decisiones, el reconocimiento de los otros o la acción. Se concluyen con algunos elementos relevantes que emergen de sus relatos así como algunas cuestiones aún pendientes.</p>
<p>PALAVRAS-CHAVE: relatos de vida capacitação juventude espaços de capacitação momentos de capacitação</p>	<p>RESUMO: No presente artigo, apresentam-se os relatos de seis jovens que partilharam a sua percepção sobre o que acreditam que os capacitou, com o objetivo de identificar os momentos, espaços e processos que contribuíram para isso. Partilhámos com eles a definição de capacitação criada no projeto HEBE como catalisador do seu relato. Depois de uma breve referência à complexidade do conceito de capacitação, apresenta-se a estratégia metodológica utilizada e detalha-se o processo de seleção de relatores e o processo narrativo e apresentam-se os resultados mais relevantes em relação aos momentos, espaços e processos identificados. Integram-se os contributos dos jovens com a análise e a seleção que os investigadores fazem dos conteúdos dos mesmos, a partir de um olhar aprofundado de cada relato, mas também relacionando-os, triangulando a informação que nos oferecem os diferentes relatores. Destacam espaços como a família, a formação, o trabalho ou a vida associativa. Momentos como o olhar do outro, os incidentes críticos ou a adolescência e processos como a tomada de decisões, o reconhecimento dos outros ou a ação. Conclui-se com alguns elementos relevantes que emergem dos seus relatos, bem como algumas questões ainda pendentes.</p>

1. Introduction

The study presented here forms part of a wider research project entitled *HEBE: The empowerment of young people*, which is discussed in this monograph. Some ideas, such as the concept of empowerment used, and the results of this study should therefore be read in light of the preceding articles.

The particular contribution of the study¹ is that it aims to produce knowledge about those moments, places and processes that young people themselves have identified as empowering. They are understood as generators of learning and resources that have enabled them to grow as people and improve their life situations. The findings will be used in the collective construction of empowerment indicators in the HEBE project.

A key starting point for the young participants' stories was the conceptualization of empowerment as defined within the HEBE project. Youth empowerment is seen as "a process or result from an interaction, negotiated to a greater or lesser degree, between the abilities for action a young person possesses, and the options available to them in their physical or socio-cultural surroundings. The term generally refers to the efficient growth of the young person by the overcoming of specific situations through the acquisition or

development of competences^{2"} (Proyecto HEBE, 2016; Úcar, et. al., 2016). This study also relies on the various dimensions resulting from the documentation reviewed during the research project, as reported in in Úcar *et al.*, (2016). The proposals made by Agudo and Albornà, (2011), Garriga Tella, (2014), Hope, (2012), Russell *et al.*, (2009), and Wagaman, (2011) will be taken as a starting point. All of these authors consider empowerment to be multidimensional and have made contributions regarding the range of dimensions involved (enabling, related to growth and well-being, relational, political, transformative and emancipating). Peterson (2014) also described empowerment as multi-level (individual, collective and organizational), and stated that all these dimensions and levels are inter-related (Pearrow and Pollack, 2009; Checkoway, 2011). It is precisely in the relational aspect where the complexity of this concept lies. Our review of a number of studies on the subject led us to conclude that authors have different views as to how power is accessed and which are the most favorable contexts for this to occur. This study contains an in-depth analysis of the participants' perspective on their own empowering process.

In order to gain knowledge about the young participants' viewpoint the life story was chosen as a qualitative strategy, as it captures the process of interpretation and endeavors to see, understand

and comprehend the phenomenon from the perspective of people who are continually interpreting and defining themselves in different situations (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998; Pérez Serrano, 2000).

Some researchers believe life stories to be subjective and arbitrary; others even reject them because they feel they lack an initial theoretical discourse. The findings obtained using this technique have also been questioned on the grounds that they cannot be generalized. Furthermore, the credibility of the production process has been challenged, since the contextual situations in which they occur are difficult to replicate (the mood, the specific circumstances surrounding the narrator at the time, and the interpretation of the story).

Nonetheless, the validity of life stories has been widely argued and defended (Valles, 1997; Bertaux, 1980; Sarabia, 1985; Pérez Serrano, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Cornejo *et al.*, 2008; Ruíz Olabuenaga, 2012, among others). The authors who support their use acknowledge that social phenomena are constructed from meanings and symbols, interactions and the interpretations that the actors make of their own experiences; this provides knowledge about significant facts and events in the lives of young people (Ruíz Olabuenaga, 2012).

Our study uses life stories as discussed in Bisquerra (2004), who differentiated between the concepts of *life story* and *life history* found in research conducted in the English-speaking world. The first term is understood to be part of life, while the second covers a wider meaning. The life story refers exclusively to the biographical reconstruction made by the narrator and does not take into account other views; it does not construct the narrator's history, but tells part of the story, that part related to the subject under study: youth empowerment.

Narration is based on the individual's subjectivity and experience. Narrators need not be particularly special persons; they just have to be young people willing to share their perceptions, values, representations and subjectivities of those moments, places and processes that have made them feel empowered throughout their lives. The narrator's story opens up a myriad of relationships, actors and situations that come together at a certain time and in a certain place.

Aim:

The study aims to:

- identify the moments, places and processes that the young participants reported as having contributed to their empowerment, and
- explore those elements that, according to the young participants, come into play in the moments, places and processes identified.

The aim here is to present the subjective testimony of the young people selected regarding the events themselves and the assessments they make of their own existence. This leads to conclusions regarding how the image is constructed and the assessment made of those moments, places and processes that are significant in personal growth and have, in their opinion, contributed to their empowerment³.

In this study, the term 'moment' means a specific period when an action or situation arises, connected to an individual's life cycle, in everyday life, when a critical incident occurs or in collective social periods. Places' are understood as those places where the empowerment of young people occurs: the "contexts", "settings", "surroundings" and "institutions". The term 'processes' is linked here to the interaction between the individual and their context, methods, systems, techniques, procedures, programs and activities that promote, foment or facilitate the empowerment of young people at the macro-, meso- and micro levels (Solter-Masó *et al.*, 2017)

2. Methodology

This is a qualitative research project that uses the life story as its methodological strategy. In this type of research reliability and validity are vital; reliability is achieved through the "multiplicity of narrators and narrations", and validity through the use of "the words of the people themselves".

We are fully aware that life stories can be subject to the tricks that memory can play, it can falsify some information and omit other. How can this question be approached, then? We will focus on meanings, assuming that what individuals possess perception and memory, both of which contribute to development. We aim to identify moments, places and processes that facilitate the empowerment of the young participants involved. To this end, this project is interested in their involvement in the stories, and how they attribute meaning within them

The methodological process followed is fundamental to the study, since it has determined its rigor, validity and its credibility. Details are provided below of how the narrators were selected, and of the narrative and analytical process.

Choice of narrators

A purposive sample was used based on the researchers' criteria, which were aimed at finding individuals who felt that they had been empowered during their life process and were willing to tell their stories. A range of profiles was ensured to

enable the identification of moments, places and processes that favored empowerment.

Opinions differ as to the ideal sample size. According to Bertaux (1980), 1 to 10 narrators are sufficient to ensure a wide variety. Other authors, such as Vallés (1997), have highlighted that it is not so much a question of size, but rather of the pertinence of the narrators and the quality of the narrations. Placing emphasis on the pertinence of narrators, it was decided to choose 6 participants, with the option to increase the number at a later stage, should insufficient pertinent information be produced.

Initial criteria were established, the aim being to choose young people who had become empowered and who came from a range of settings in order to identify moments, places and processes that may contribute to empowerment, regardless of the context, origin or situation. It was then decided how to approach the young people and, finally, the candidates were chosen.

Narrator selection criteria

The young participants were selected using a range of variables; age was one of them: young people aged between 25 and 29, ensuring that candidates had had a certain degree of life experience. Other variables were gender, type of residence (rural or urban), and a range of educational and professional backgrounds. Other questions, such as origin or life experience were taken into consideration. This diversity helped ensure that the narrations provided variety of experiences and places. Nonetheless, the analysis was not intended to be based on the selection criteria (see Table 1).

Other questions were considered when selecting the narrators, such as their willingness to tell and share their story, their oral ability, their

availability (time and place), and their commitment to the research itself.

Narrator selection process

A number of bodies and associations that work with young people were asked to recommend young people who, in their understanding, were empowered, according to the project's definition of empowerment. These are people who, through their personal and social trajectory have gained greater control, autonomy and responsibility over their own life and who were willing to participate in the research.

Preliminary interviews were held with these young people, and those who were willing to participate, had better memory and greater narrative ability were selected. They were told that they had been recommended by people who knew them and thought that their life experience would be of interest to the study. The project, aims and research team were presented to them, they were thanked for their availability and willingness to participate, and their life was explored to a certain degree. They were told that sufficient time would be needed in order to create an atmosphere of trust that would facilitate later work.

As a way to explore the possibilities of narrative, we shared the concept of empowerment with them, and asked if they thought they could share with us their memories and perceptions of moments, situations and processes that they felt had contributed to their empowerment.

Interviews with 11 young people took place in order to compile this information that was then checked by the research team. From these 11 young people, six profiles were selected, as can be seen below:

Table 1: Description of narrators

Narrator	Age	Gender	Surrounding	Level of studies	Professional situation	Observation
R1	29	F	RURAL	INTERMEDIATE	EMPLOYED	Young mother
R2	24	M	URBAN	HIGHER	EMPLOYED	Associationism
R3	26	F	RURAL	HIGHER	EMPLOYED	Socially mobilized
R4	29	M	URBAN	SECONDARY	EMPLOYED	Country of origin: Uruguay. Casual work
R5	26	M	URBAN	HIGHER	EMPLOYED	Permanent contract
R6	25	F	URBAN	HIGHER	EMPLOYED	Family of Moroccan origin

Of the 11 young people interviewed, 3 were unavailable, 1 did not wish to share their story, and 1 was kept in reserve should the study be widened. Once the profiles had been selected, the participants were contacted and details finalized. They were informed of the research aims and content, the procedures that would be followed (type of interview, informed consent, recording of interviews), what their participation would involve (the chance to opt out if so wished) and questions regarding ethics and transparency.

Narrative process

Two in-depth interviews were carried out with each of the 6 young people selected, each of around 90 minutes; time was allowed to contextualize or collect any points that arose before or after the recording. Before the narration began, the definition of empowerment used in this project was explained:

We want you to tell us about those situations, moments, people or places that you feel have helped you become autonomous in your decision making, develop your personal and social abilities and have helped you gain control over your life; those that have allowed you to make choices and act consistently and coherently with them; that have enabled you and helped you influence your life and your context.

We asked them to explore those situations, moments and processes that had, in some way, facilitated or contributed to the development of certain abilities, attitudes and competences that have served to increase their possibility to take decisions and act accordingly in areas that affected them and the group they formed part of.

Each narrator was asked to give as much information as possible in order to identify the importance that different places, moments and processes had played in their personal growth and development. They were encouraged to remember points that they felt had had a certain impact on their life and that had enabled them to become empowered in line with the above-mentioned definition.

When asking the narrator to tell us about their life or part of it, there was an explicit request regarding the contents we wished to research; but there was also an implicit one, where the narrator took a stance and decided what to explain and how to explain it, as mentioned in Martín García (1995) who stated that, while history cannot be changed, one's position towards it can be changed.

The participants were not asked to produce an exhaustive retelling, but one that was focused on those moments in their lives that they considered relevant and pertinent to their empowerment process; elements chosen because they were deemed to be valuable and their connections became clear as the story unfolded. The focus was not on the truthfulness of the story, or on whether or not things had happened exactly as the narrator said; what was important was the interpretation they made and that underpinned their current actions. Nonetheless, there was a risk that the narrator would not focus on what was of interest for the researcher. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the study by Lucca and Berrios (2009), who suggested that, should the narration be superficial or diverge from the aims of the study, questions could be asked that would redirect the process to obtain the desired information.

The interviewers shared a list of such questions.

Table 2: Questions intended to help organize the narrative

What do you think have been the most important decisions in your life?
What led you to make this decision?
When did you make this decision? What was happening in your life at that time?
How did you feel when you made the decision?
What were the constraints you found? What aspects encouraged you?
How did you make the decision?
Who helped you make your decision?
What is your assessment of this process? How did you feel?
What obstacles and opportunities have you come across?
How did you overcome the obstacles?
How did you use the opportunities?

Ethical criteria involving confidentiality and informed consent were applied for the participation, recording, transcription and publication of the narratives; in order to guarantee anonymity, all interviews were transcribed and coded.

Analysis of the narratives

A categorical-thematic analysis was used to analyze the narratives; the trustworthiness and validity of the analysis was guaranteed through triangulation by the researchers. Once the interviews were transcribed, the steps described below were taken.

Firstly, a coding system was established to organize and classify the documentary body; it identified the participant's profile (see Table 1) and the interview number (1 for first interview, 2 for second, etc.). Code R11 thus corresponds to the first interview held with participant number 1 and R62 refers to the second interview with narrator number 6.

In order to analyze their perceptions, analysis review was carried out across several phases. The first phase was the intra-narrative analysis, made by the researcher who conducted the interview. This phase served to identify the main empowerment situations that the participant referred to. A situation of empowerment was defined as that in which a change, a decision, or an action that contributed to the implementation of one or more of the indicators of empowerment was observed⁴. Every situation was organized in a file that systematically classified key elements (agents involved, moment, place, processes). The relational and procedural aspects of each situation were analyzed, i.e. how the individual's reciprocal interaction processes were defined at a specific time and place.

The second phase consisted of an inter-narrative analysis, in which the intra-narrative analyses were pooled by triangulating the view of the researchers and the different narratives, thus

enabling us to discover those elements that had contributed to their empowerment that were common to all narrations. A more detailed analysis was also carried out of each of the situations, based on the understanding that an interaction occurred in the dynamic relation of participants established with the context at a specific time, which produced changes. The aim was to detect which of those changes led to empowerment.

In order to analyze the narratives, the views of researchers that used the definitions of moments, places and processes (Soler, *et al.*, 2017), and the theoretical dimensions employed during the research process were triangulated (Úcar *et al.* 2016). As stated at the beginning of the article, empowerment requires the inter-relation of a number of dimensions. A selection was made of those moments, places and processes that the participants identified as having been where such inter-relation had taken place, which were mentioned repeatedly. This was not related to how the themes that arose in connection with the moments, places and processes were related to the characteristics of each participant. Instead, the aim was to bring out these moments, places and processes which, regardless of the situation and characteristics of the participants, they considered to be relevant to their empowerment process.

3. Results

Those moments, places and processes that the narrators identified in relation with the themes explored in each narration are presented first. The 11 categories identified through the intra-narrative analysis were:

Table 3: Intra-narrative analysis. Categories of themes		
Places	Moments	Processes
Family	Others' viewpoints	Decision making
Work	Critical incidents	Reinforcement and recognition of agents
Education	Adolescence (12/13 to 18)	Relational (trust, support, conflict)
Membership of associations and community life		Action

With the aim of visualizing the content of each category identified, a content analysis of themes

was undertaken. The sub-categories in this analysis are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Thematic analysis

Places	Moments	Processes
Family	Gaze of others	Decision making
Value Influence in changes Structure Expectations	Meaning they provide Interpellation they produce Value Reactions Impact	Elements of process Value Impact
Work	Critical incidents	Agents of reinforcement and recognition
Value accorded to place Gender relations Contributions to construction of personality Development of responsibility	Losses Moving neighborhoods Flare-up of acne Wearing headscarf First day at university Class notes stolen	Value they provide Impact Positioning of agents
Education	Adolescence (12/13 to 18)	Relationships (trust, support and conflict)
Decisions that had to be made Changes Relationships developed in training stage Attitude to education	Changes Decisions Relationships Position taking	Value they provide Impact Agents of interaction Expectations
Membership of associations/community life		Action
Elements that triggered participation Value they provided Interactions occurring Meanings given to travel, organization of free time and sport		Value Influence in changes

Places:

When talking about places, the participants referred to the other two variables, moments and processes. Place, context and the interactions that occurred played an important role.

Family

Family was a highly relevant 'place' that was present in all of the narratives. The family structure, whether it was wide or nuclear, served young people as a reference point, it made them feel good and helped them visualize themselves, regardless of the conflicts that could arise. Those family structures with the greatest difficulties, which demanded an understanding of more or less adverse contexts, were those that strengthened, drove and empowered the young participants. The absence of some functions or family members was substituted by other agents that helped them overcome difficulties. As R32 explained:

"Well, I think that was also a bit what..., of course, I think that instability has marked me the most. One of the things that marks this emotional instability was his absence" (*Absence of the father figure*) (R32)

They all agreed in the role played by the family when making decisions or at times of change, and they reflected on the tensions and/or complicities between the different members of the family nucleus. They highlighted the influence of family in the choice of university studies, a personal vocation and the link to the world of work (when they started working, the pace or intensity involved and the value accorded to work).

Participants reported that it is vital for the family space to be respectful. It was also highlighted that it was important to have the trust of those adults within it, and their support when exceptional circumstances so required. Even when this was not the case, the young person decided to carry on and "show" (with effort and, above all, greater

pressure and responsibility) that “they could”. Inter-relations within the family facilitated the recognition of oneself, one’s own limits and potential.

“Everyone around me thought differently and I decided to convince them, in this case, the family, by saying: ‘No, trust me...I can do this’” (R51)

Education

Education puts young people in a place where they have to make decisions and act consistently with them. It is a context that forces them to ask questions related to their experiences, their present and their plans for the future.

“... I remember that I enrolled on the last day, it took a long time to think what I wanted to be. What? What? What? That was one of the first times I decided for myself” (R61)

“Luckily, of course, being somewhere you didn’t like also serves as a learning process, so you know what you don’t like or don’t want to be. A negative event can be positive.” (R11)

Another of the subcategories examined was linked to education-related changes. These are fomented and sustained by the individual’s own self-questioning and that of other agents, but also by the guidance of those whose opinion is important. Education may also lead to changes in relationships, friendships, residence, personal changes, etc. that contribute to making decisions and raising awareness.

“They said to me ‘So, what are you going to study then? What degree are you going to do?’ And I said, ‘Look I’m not going to do a degree, I’m going to do a course in administration for healthcare’, and he said ‘Well... and that silence, that pause...it’s ok, but...you don’t really like that, I can’t see you in this’...I always say that I changed my mind because of him” (R61)

They recognized that the diversity of relationships and new opportunities that took place allowed them to take advantage of new perspectives and that the difficulties they faced in this new place could help them grow. Although not all teaching staff managed to create and maintain trusting, supportive relationships, when they did, young people saw their learning improve and very much welcomed this.

This was a place of maturing and growth, not only because of the content that it provided, but also for everything involved in decision-taking,

opening new relationships, taking a stand and having an awareness of the present and future and acting accordingly.

“Knowing how to say ‘I won’t go out’ when you’ve got stuff to do, when... S***, I’ve got an exam on Wednesday...I changed my way of thinking, had to stop doing a lot of things, had to really get down to it...” (R51)

Work

The young participants referred to work as a place of self-fulfillment that satisfied them and that they enjoyed. The most commonly mentioned value provided by work was that it enabled them to be independent and enjoy greater autonomy. This autonomy was twofold; economic (greater autonomy from the family, being able to buy things), and related to learning and personal growth (being able to make decisions that only depended on them, managing things by oneself). Some participants also saw work as somewhere to create networks and relationships that have enabled them to find new jobs.

“Being more... more financially independent. More than anything...and ...being able to make my decisions and change them depending only on me and not on...others” (R41)

“That you look after yourself. Yes, you learn to manage things yourself.” (R32)

Work was seen as somewhere to learn, but also as a place where training needs are detected.

“I decided to work because I was curious; I wanted autonomy and wanted to learn” (R31)

“And working in the playgroup, well, it motivated me to study more, because I knew I didn’t want to spend my life working just as a childminder in a playgroup at weekends, I wanted a job from Monday to Friday, a job that I liked and I knew that’s why I had to finish my studies” (R11)

Some of the young participants saw work as somewhere to exercise responsibility, as a place where decisions are made, and this helps develop assertiveness and self-confidence.

“...And another step, right? Another one...is work, when you start to work, when you’ve got responsibilities that aren’t just about passing, you know, an exam, but you’ve...you’ve got to get results... you know you’ll get paid at the end of the month, right?, it’s like a... reward...” (R51)

"I think that it also makes you assertive and self-confident. It makes a big impact on you in many ways. It also guides you in what you do or don't want. I don't know..." (R41)

Membership of associations and community life

The concerns of the young participants and the support of relatives and friends led them to become part of associations. They valued community life and the role played by associations, and recognizing that they provided opportunities to do things and get involved; they are seen as places of learning. Having the option of becoming part of these groups was seen as a positive thing that could increase their desire to contribute to the group, establish social networks, discover vocations and make them feel good; they could also become leaders and take up decision-making roles.

These were places to develop abilities, use the ones they already possessed, and value things that they would not otherwise have experienced. Sport, leisure, voluntary work, working at a youth club and taking part in organized leisure activities or community activities were considered to be the most empowering aspects.

"You also learn values such as solidarity and the like... It gives you more options. I don't really know if you learn a load of things. The more activities you do, the more you can take on" (R21)

Non-institutionalized places, such as the street, public transport and leisure facilities such as a café were also identified; the participants referred to them as open places of interaction that could be positive or negative and allowed them to make their own decisions or face situations where they could put their abilities to the test.

Moments in time

The following are the most commonly-mentioned 'moments':

The gaze of others:

Their perspectives were occasionally constrained by macro-contextual elements, such as ethnic origin or socio-economic level, which were underdeveloped in the narratives. The impact of the gaze of others was, however, directly proportional to how it was seen, the value and meaning that young people accorded to it. This involved, one the one hand, those gazes that questioned them through

lack of trust and fear or questioning that made them improve. On the other hand, there were also those gazes that provided value and trust. When the participants stated that those gazes pushed them to act and take a stance, they were seen as something that promoted empowerment.

"Being from Badía, and the stereotype they can have of you for having grown up here and having your friends here, and having studied here limits you. But it doesn't mean that you can't do it" (R21)

Critical incidents:

Exceptional or one-off experiences can play a highly relevant role in empowerment; these included those negative moments that, after time, positively contributed to the participants' empowerment. They also referred to critical incidents that involved the loss of a loved one, a difficult situation involving friends, an illness or one-off event that, because of its timing or particular complexity meant that they had to use their capabilities and resources, etc. At these times, the support of others, as well as their own personal skills, helped in dealing with these situations, making them feel strong and capable which also fostered their empowerment.

I went to the market and people stopped me to ask what had happened, to say I was brave...that they wouldn't have been able to leave the house (R31)

there's anger, sadness, loss, a deep feeling of loss, you talk to yourself because at times we get involved in dialogue with other people, but it's when you ask yourself the questions that you encourage yourself, you even tell yourself off a bit, 'could have said' or 'could have done' or 'could have decided' and they're no longer there... it's years, it's after time, a long, long, long of time, that extreme situations can make a bit of your real personality come out. (R61)

Adolescence (13-18 years old)

Stages of life that should be highlighted were adolescence and, above all, those moments of transition or decision-making that implied a change that meant that they had to put in place a range of strategies. Nonetheless, the young participants did not mention specific moments, such as weekends or time limitations or other points in time. R32 referred to meeting those friends who had marked her in adolescence again.

After dinner we went to a bar and talked about how cruel we'd been (...) it was a moment ... I was 12/13 (R32)

Processes:

The processes are complex and occur in the places identified at different moments.

Decision making

Making decisions and acting accordingly were key processes in which the family, friends and some educational mentors were supportive in aspects related to education, situations arising in daily life as well as critical situations. This can be seen in the findings regarding places.

Decision-making included assessments, information, self-questioning, assuming responsibilities, acting accordingly.

"It was a moment that was: I'm not Moroccan, I've got an Arabic name, but I don't feel Moroccan, right... people did their stuff and like, but it was this teacher who said 'and how about you deciding for yourself?' she only asked me this, 'and what if you let your legs take the next steps?'" (R61)

The role played by peers as highly-influential agents for the young participants was important; friends provided support, encouragement, listened without judging, shared moments and helped in making decisions. Friendships were key not only in finding motivation finishing their education, but also in their choices.

"My friends from Lleida. They were people who knew nothing about my background, I could really get things off my chest with them, nobody judged me, and I called them and said I needed them. They were a huge help. You realize that, at moments like that, you realize who's there for you and who isn't" (R32)

Reinforcement and recognition of agents

Closely linked to the gaze of others, being recognized by others as a capable person provided a beneficial effect that contributed to self-image, self-esteem, the ability to assess one's own abilities, and increasing confidence and satisfaction. This then led the participants to reinforcement, reaffirmation, checking or modifying their attitudes, their way of being in the world and interacting with it. Recognition was one of the elements that serve as support for other processes, such as decision making, action, etc.

"Luckily, I've got parents who've always encouraged me, always kept my feet on the ground, if they've thought I was doing something stupid, they've always told me, of course. But whenever I've wanted to do anything, they've encouraged me to do it. I've always felt comfortable with them, and they give me the confidence to do it" (R11)

Trust, support and conflict in relationships

Relationships were generally seen as a key element in feeling safe, they were perceived as being essential in decision-making, action and continuation. Those relationships that arose in the various places and with the various agents that supported, questioned or gave them confidence, were factors that allowed the different dimensions of empowerment to come into play.

"That the others in other departments trust you, because they speak well of you, they trust you, because they want to be involved in projects with you..." (R51)

Conflicts were seen as moments of learning and personal growth, even of becoming stronger. Conflicts with friends were regarded to be particularly important.

"Apart from having good friends, you've also got to have bad experiences to realize who your friends really are, who you value, who's going to help you and who isn't..." (R11)

Action

Places provide opportunities for action, meaning that abilities can be put into practice. The young participants noted that experimentation enabled ways of being, abilities and competences to be brought into play. It helped them feel good about themselves and develop their confidence. All of this contributed to make them feel more secure and capable of making decisions, and allows them to explain some of their decisions.

"I think that friendships are also very important, you can feel you're the leader of the group, or the one who's always in the background, friendships are a reflection of society, I reckon."(R51)

The participants believed that having the chance to do things and get involved, form part of organizations and welcome these experiences promoted a greater desire to contribute to the group and establish social networks. Action that had a positive result is what gave them a feeling a security and boosted their autonomy.

4. Conclusions

Despite the difficulty in breaking down those places, moments and processes that contributed to empowerment, were able to observe the precise inter-relationship between them that fostered empowerment. Places in which to be and evolve. Places that provided opportunities and became reference points, offered security, allowed the development of trust and encouraged the different dimensions that promote empowerment. As noted by the authors quoted in the introductory sections, places contribute to the growth and well-being of young people, the development of their abilities, autonomy, transformation and emancipation. Moments and processes occur in places, contexts that can facilitate or limit action and interaction.

Nevertheless, it is not only the place that facilitates such development. This occurs in relation to the various moments that happen there, and critical events and their resolution are also particularly important. Adolescence and the relationships and actions that occur during this period promote the development of factors that contribute to empowerment, such as security, trust and self-esteem.

Being questioned by others in the young people's environment, as well as the gaze of others, all contribute to trust, security, and a feeling of well-being, but they can also be challenges that facilitate or impel decision making, action, etc. The

presence of opportunities provide young people with the choices to put their skills into practice.

When conflicts are resolved, they are seen as a source of empowerment. They are situations in which young people can use the competences and abilities they have been developing over time, as well as some new ones. It should be remembered that the participants were only asked about those situations that had contributed to their empowerment, so those situations that have had a negative effect were not mentioned.

It may also be thought that it was precisely the successful overcoming of challenges, conflicts and events that contributed to their empowerment. That is, being able to prove that they possessed the tools and abilities to positively resolve or manage conflicts, questioning, overcoming a negative situation or critical incident; these are all opportunities to use those abilities that strengthened them and provided proof of their capabilities.

Contrary to what was thought at the beginning of the study, new technologies were not seen as a place, but rather as an instrument that facilitated relationships. It would be interesting to investigate this area further.

Some issues that remain to be completed are reporting the analysis to the participants, comparing our viewpoints as researchers and analyzing a number of elements that relate to the macro- and micro- processes left unclear in some narratives.

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Notes

- ¹ Other members of the research team have participated in the analysis of the life stories: Judit Font, Pilar Heras, Héctor López and Anna Planas. We thank all of them, and also the young participants, for their commitment to the study.
- ² The empowerment process was defined and characterized during the study, as can be seen in the article by Soler-Masó et al. (2017) in this monograph. It was this initial concept that served as a basis for the stories.
- ³ A more detailed definition of what is meant by moment, place and process can be found in the article written by Soler-Masó, P., Trilla, J, Jiménez-Morales, M & Úcar, X. (2017) *The construction of a pedagogical model of youth empowerment: places, moments and processes* in this monograph. In *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria*, 30, in press.
- ⁴ Constructed at an earlier stage of this project.

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