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Audiovisual narrative, re-enactment, and historical education: Hospitals in the Spanish Civil War

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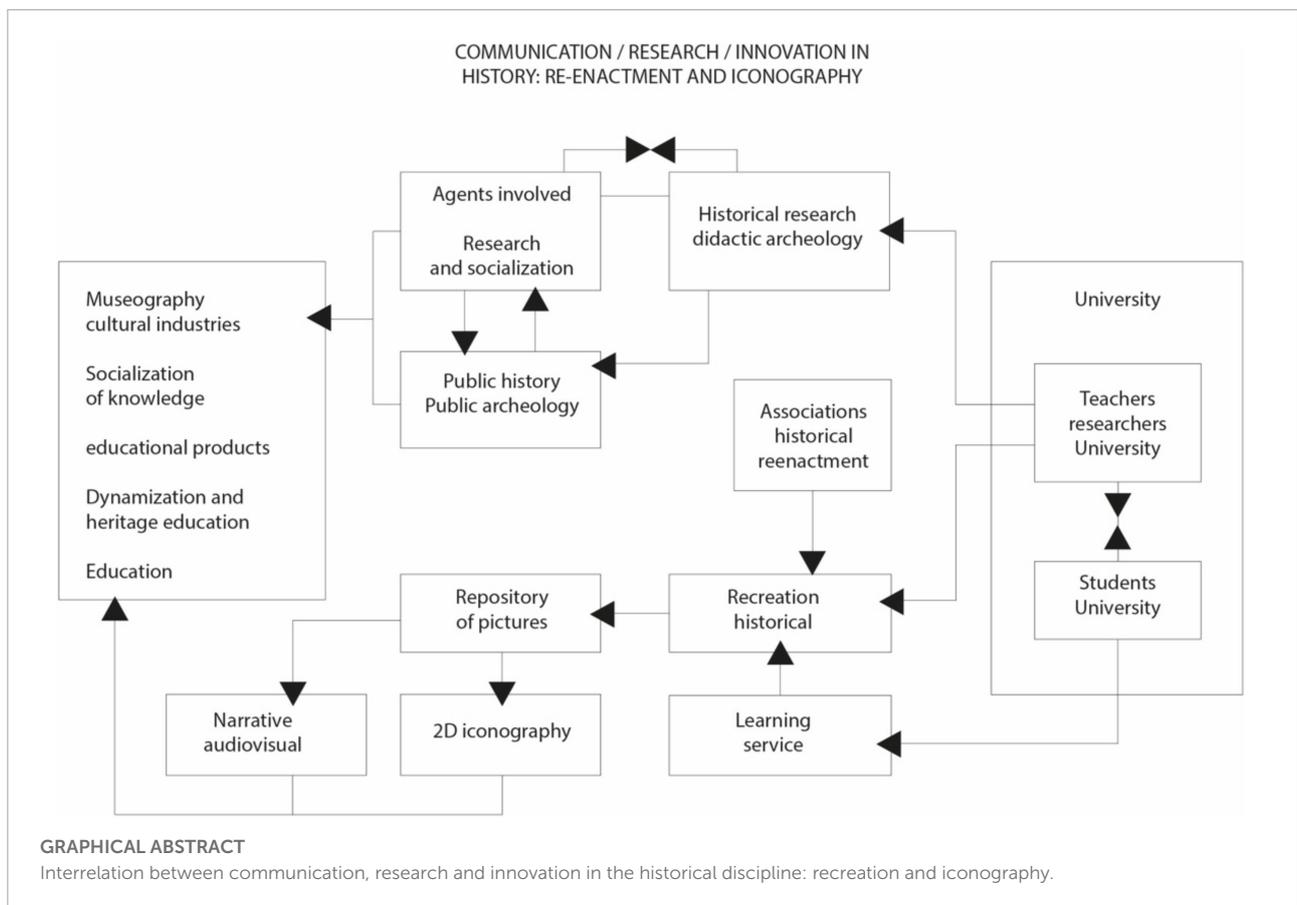
The audiovisual narrative is a widely used resource in the presentation of diverse historical content. Historical recreation, thanks to its ability to generate images of the past, when combined with the use of emerging digital technologies (CGI, computer-generated imagery), allows optimization of audiovisual narratives that present images and contexts of the past and its heritage. From a perspective of promoting historical thought, high school and higher education students can take part in initiatives of historical recreation (in the key to service learning). This process allows its incorporation into the production of educational history products, which can be reapplied in formal and non-formal teaching–learning spaces. The experience developed by the DIDPATRI group (Heritage Didactics) of the University of Barcelona (2017–2021), based on projects set in the health problems of the Spanish Civil War, has generated guidelines for the development of a digital audiovisual narrative of didactic character based on activities of historical recreation and service learning in contexts of public history and archeology.

KEYWORDS

audiovisual narrative, re-enactment events, historical education, learning service, public history and archeology, Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)

Introduction

The health problems of the Spanish Civil War from the audiovisual narrative. The Spanish Civil War, a conflict in the 30s of the 20th century, generated important novelties from the military point of view but also brought important advances in health aspects. Blood transfusions were generalized, techniques for war fractures (based on the Bastos-Trueta method) were used (Trueta Raspall, 1938), sulfonamides were used, hospital emergency services were created, blood hospitals were organized on the battlefield from “autochirs” and health trains, and so on.



These important initiatives influenced the health approaches of World War II (Hervás i Puyal, 2021). In fact, eminent Republican doctors such as Dr. Josep Trueta joined the British war effort.

The study of health aspects and their social and human context (from the didactic point of view of history and heritage) is very important to approximate the Spanish conflict of 1936–1939. This transversal theme implies the consideration and approach to the disasters of the conflict and allows to value solidarity, humanity, and organizational and scientific efforts to reduce its effects. The didactic approach to healthcare during the Spanish Civil War can be carried out from different options: memoirs and biographies, the viewing of contemporary documentaries, graphic and iconographic documentation, heritage spaces, museums, and secondary sources of all kinds. However, all the options have the same problem: they offer us fragmentary visions.

Our experience aims to explore the possibilities offered by a holistic approach to healthcare during the Spanish Civil War, based on an audiovisual narrative based on the use of re-enactment and the consideration of elements of the hospital and healthcare heritage of the 1930s. The proposal has been developed by the research group DIDPATRI (Heritage

Didactics) of the Faculty of Education at the University of Barcelona. This group is interdisciplinary and brings together researchers in history teaching, museographers, historians, and archeologists.

The starting hypothesis established that an audiovisual narrative concretized in a docufiction product of synthesis could help to understand the health problems of the Spanish Civil War. During 2018 and 2019, the DIDPATRI group carried out a museographic intervention on the premises of a field hospital of the People's Army of the Spanish Republic during the Battle of the Ebro, in the town of Molar (Tarragona) (Sospedra-Roca et al., 2020). This hospital became the benchmark for developing the docufiction proposal. We consider the production of a synthesis didactic audiovisual narrative as a good option since it could help in the musealization process of the hospital heritage space and the presentation of health problems in formal or non-formal teaching–learning contexts. Our experience aims to explore the possibilities offered by a holistic approach to healthcare during the Spanish Civil War, based on an audiovisual narrative based on the use of re-enactment and the consideration of elements of the hospital and healthcare heritage of the 1930s. The research group DIDPATRI (Heritage Didactics) of the Faculty of Education has developed the proposal at the University of

Barcelona. This group is interdisciplinary and brings together researchers in history teaching, museographers, historians, and archeologists.

The result had to be credible in terms of image and content. We opted for the use of the historical recreation technique, a field in which the group had satisfactory experiences (Hernández-Cardona et al., 2021). The experience sought to evaluate the possibilities of using re-enactment in the generation of a didactic, fictional, and rigorous product based on data and real cases.

Docufiction and re-enactment in research and innovation contexts

The re-enactment is a useful didactic option

The realization of didactic audiovisual productions during the Spanish Civil War is nothing new (Berthier and Sánchez-Biosca, 2012; Jaeckel, 2013). There are documentaries of different formats, costs, and approaches. The narrative styles used in the generation of these products can use narrators, interviews, tours of heritage spaces, the use of original documents, dramatization, and so on.

With the Molar hospital, a unitary product was sought (in terms of substance and form), which would provide synthetic and clear information, which would be pleasant and have rhythm, and which, although it presented models or figurative examples, would be based on real cases. The production had to be affordable for a university research group and a local small-town museum.

The research and innovation process comprised the development of an agile scientific dynamic (regarding design and execution) to develop a new “doctrine” based on the use of historical recreation in the generation of didactic audio-visual narratives. The production model had to be very flexible to be reapplied to any historical theme. From this perspective, we focused on the aim of the research and innovation process on the generation of didactic models of docufiction in history, using re-enactment, which would allow us to understand and understand spaces, concepts, and facts (Burgoyne, 2009; Ansorg, 2012). The central research technique was based on the design of didactic models and prototypes, complemented and reinforced by experimentation, adding triangulation perspectives (analysis and evaluation by diverse agents in time and space). This method is called “Design and evaluation of teaching materials.” It was a proposal with a vocation to be applied (teaching/learning and cultural industries).

The generation of a model and sustainable praxis was also intended. This implied optimizing the resources. The

DIDPATRI group had a recreation section, made up of students, former students, and professors from the University of Barcelona (“Recreació DIDPATRI”). The recreation section had worked on many projects linked to the Spanish Civil War, from a “service learning” perspective, to promote the presentation and revitalization of heritage, supporting actions to recover historical memory, developing educational workshops, and generating iconographic products that could be integrated into museum proposals (Jiménez and Rojo, 2014; Feliu-Torruella and Hernández-Cardona, 2020). One of the working hypotheses comprised the mobilization of re-enactors and students of the University of Barcelona (UB), in carrying out a service-learning action, for the construction of a narrative about the operation of a military hospital during the Battle of the Ebro; rigorously and credibly.

The participation of volunteers facilitated the low cost of audiovisual production. Normally, as with the Molar, the re-enactors collaborate voluntarily. Their only claim is to get paid for food and transportation allowances. The people come with their own equipment. They use correct costumes and props; they know the historical period they are recreating; they know how to interpret the historical role; and they usually recreate with conviction and motivation (Fischer, 1990). Recreation is a very important asset. Using actors is more problematic: they do not know the historical period and its context, they can generate results that are not very credible, and they have a high production cost (salaries and rental of clothes and accessories). Using re-enactors enables the generation of sustainable products, zero kilometers, and they make a credible and quality product, as long as they well thought the proposal out, and have good post-production (Gaudreault, 1999; McCalman and Pickering, 2010; Agnew et al., 2019).

Educational docufiction and history

Educational docufiction in history has interesting possibilities. The only condition is that the direction and production of the audio-visual project must select what it must explain at the content level. The narrative is the backbone of the process. The images are subsidiary and are used to show the synthetic vision of the past decided by the direction and production. This process does not occur when primary kinetic or graphic sources are used. These are closed. The address and production must be subject to the characteristics of the document. These are useful and fundamental images to explain a moment or a topic, but they do not offer a didactic synthesis of the narrated event (Ricoeur, 1996; Garçon, 2005; Elsaesser, 2019).

Traditional historical films work with a similar logic to docufiction. The writers and the directing team decide on a



FIGURE 1

Teacher training students at the University of Barcelona about to dress up as soldiers of the Spanish Republic during a historical re-enactment session.

style of images that is subsidiary to a narrative. The difference lies in its objectives: didactic docufiction, although structured by narration, pursues the generation of kinetic, holistic, and understandable iconography to explain and contextualize the object of knowledge. Narration structures traditional films by plot; they are not intended to be credible or possess historical accuracy.

When you want to develop an audio-visual product for a heritage space and explain facts, concepts, or conceptual systems, all available historical information resources must be used, including parallels from similar cases. In the Republican's case of healthcare in the Battle of the Ebro and the Molar hospital, an extraordinary document was available: the private notebooks of Dr. Miquel Gras Artero, the young surgeon officer, 27, who ran the hospital during the fighting. He had attended to some cases in the notebook. The identification of the person treated (soldiers), the name of their unit, the context of the wound, the time, the transfer, the diagnosis, and the follow-up of the interventions and treatments were documented. This documentation had

some great possibilities for the final production. However, faced with the need for synthesis, it was decided that the docufiction should deal primarily with the Bastos-Trueta method (treatment of war fractures), one of the most important innovations in Republican healthcare during the Spanish Civil War.

The museum that was under construction in the Molar had contribution of an extraordinary collection of objects related to healthcare and war surgery (the Jordi and Marina Jara collection). The original documentation and the existence of exhibition objects complemented the buildings that had housed the hospital, in a state of ruin and without furniture, but with good exteriors and interiors that allowed us a scenic simulation of its appearance during the battle in 1938.

The docufiction was proposed, considering the complexity of the following variables:

1. Make a video about Republican healthcare during the Battle of the Ebro.
2. Contextualize the video in the Molar field hospital.

3. Produce a video summary to show the contributions of the Republican health; that could be used as museographic support and in various formal and non-formal teaching-learning spaces.
4. Use students from the University of Barcelona in the recording, as a learning-service, and in collaboration with historical re-enactment groups.
5. Contextualize the narration in real spaces.
6. Make the production from limited economic resources and focus the production on 2 days of recording.
7. Integrate and display the collection of healthcare and war surgery (Jordi and Marina Jara).

The discussions between the different agents involved (university, students, museum, recreation groups, and civil society) defined, as a working hypothesis, the possibility of constructing the narrative from the story of a young soldier who, wounded in the leg during an aerial bombardment, was evacuated to the Hospital del Molar. The soldier underwent surgery in the hospital, and the wound was treated with the Trueta method. Later, he was evacuated to the rear, and finally, during the withdrawal of the Republican army, he crossed the border with France.

It was not intended that the narration would focus on a real case. This implied script limitations to provide an overview. Real cases, situations, places, and actions present in Dr. Gras's notebooks were considered. The fictitious character had to allow explaining diverse situations and contexts of the battle and the Republican healthcare.

We decided we would use only historical recreation recordings in the docufiction. The possibility of integrating period iconography (static or kinetic) was declined as this could confuse visitors. The approach, at all times, had to be shown as a docufiction based on recreation. We had to avoid being considered a false historical production (Martínez Rubio, 2014).

Along with this central recording, we propose other complementary narratives: the deployment of health resources to face the battle of the Ebro, and the disquisitions of fictional characters.

Framework and pedagogical considerations

The educational dimension, teaching-learning, was a motor of the audio-visual production of health during the battle of the Ebro. The aim was the creation of a didactic product of history with the participation of teachers and students, and that it was methodologically innovative, both in its definition and realization, as well as in using historical recreation in the generation of understandable scenarios of the past (Champion, 2011). All this from a training and civic education perspective and in collaboration with

civil society. In this sense, we organized the educational and pedagogical framework based on the following variables:

1. Action research, public history, public archeology.
2. Service learning.
3. Method of projects, the realization of a docufiction.
4. Possibilities of the use of historical recreation, reconstruction, and experimental archeology.
5. Didactic strategies, empathy, work with emotions; heritage education, historian's method.
6. Competence development of historical thought.

Research-action: Public history and public archeology

The design and execution project of an audiovisual narrative prototype based on docufiction was embedded in public history and public archeology (Merriman, 2004; Thomas and Lea, 2014; Cauvin, 2016; Moshenska, 2017). The research group has carried out heritage, historical, and archeological research in the heritage context of the conflict since 2009. We carried out projects in collaboration with civil society agents and, from an interdisciplinary perspective, with primary and secondary school teachers, heads of cultural associations with experts on heritage issues, tourism, heads of local administrations, and so on. The concern for didactics has always been a priority, whether in formal or non-formal teaching-learning spaces (Thomas and Lea, 2014).

We embed the initiatives of the research group in action research, a symbiotic concept with the concepts of public history and public archeology.

Service-learning

The need and the will to integrate university students from the faculty of education and history, archeology, and museography forced the use of complementary reference frameworks. At the University of Barcelona, we had contributions from "service-learning" experiences (Puig et al., 2007). We asked students to take part in the project voluntarily. The aim was the creation of a didactic history product that would have the participation of teachers and students; using an innovative methodology in the generation of understandable scenarios of the past, and by the use of historical recreation in its production (Jacoby, 1996; Furco and Billing, 2002). We specified this volunteering in the different phases and aspects of the project and the participation in historical recreation activities (Figures 2, 3).



FIGURE 2

Students of master's studies in cultural and heritage management at the University of Barcelona in a film based on historical recreation for a hospital interpretation center during the Battle of the Ebro, during the Spanish Civil War. Recording set in the Molar hospital. A graduate nurse, members of a recreation group, and several students from the University of Barcelona take part together.

Project method

From an educational point of view, we considered the experience a “project method” (Kilpatrick, 1918; Dewey, 1938; Titone, 1981). In this context, the teaching–learning activities of an educational, instructive, museographic, or audiovisual nature were structured and developed from the design and execution of the docufiction project itself. The project could be based on options similar to graphic stories (García, 2010; Sospedra-Roca et al., 2022b).

Historical recreation and other didactic strategies

The aim was to prospect for the didactic possibilities of historical re-enactment from the perspective of teaching–learning. Incorporating historical re-enactment activities into



FIGURE 3

Students of master's studies in cultural and heritage management at the University of Barcelona in a film based on historical recreation for a hospital interpretation center during the Battle of the Ebro, during the Spanish Civil War. Frame of the video production of the previous scene (Figure 2).

formal teaching environments has been very uneven and presents diverse feasibility problems (Stone and Planel, 1999;

Vaughan, 2012). However, it is an attractive option that can become a real strategy. Historical recreation (a versatile term) could also be considered from other border concepts: historical reconstruction and experimental archeology. The possibilities of historical recreation could be combined with other strategies traditionally linked to the teaching-learning of history: the development of the historian's method, the promotion of empathetic thinking, and the didactics of the object (Goodacre and Baldwin, 2002; Dupré et al., 2020; Español Solana and Franco Calvo, 2021).

Using historical recreation to get didactic and understandable images of the past was conceived in a sustainable horizon since the use of historical recreation meets sustainability criteria: getting quality historical iconography at affordable costs (Hernández-Cardona et al., 2019). We understood historical iconography in a broad sense. Kinetic options were considered, but also static 2D options that would allow their elaboration in combination with 3D proposals, using the matte painting technique (Sospedra-Roca et al., 2022a).

Competence development of historical thought

The applied method, as well as implementing didactic strategies typical of historical research, meets the most ambitious aim of history teaching: the construction of historical thought through the development of competencies (Santisteban Fernández, 2009). To this end, a critical attitude was fostered in the students, which gave meaning to the rules of democratic coexistence and facilitated the understanding of the historical past. Likewise, participation in a common project that addresses the complex context of war, survival, and improvement contributes to better social knowledge and strengthens the bonds of coexistence necessary to face and resolve conflicts.

Teaching–learning environment

The teaching–learning environment of the proposal, which directly involved teachers and students, was integrated into a broader, generic perspective of action research (Elliot, 1990). The learning objectives were raised in various directions, giving priority to procedural aspects. Naturally, it was intended that students learn facts, concepts, and conceptual systems related to health problems during the Spanish Civil War, but this was not the most important thing. The procedural objectives were the ones that gained more prominence. It was intended that the students, from the different specialties, learn and experience the possibilities offered by a historical re-enactment in approaching a certain historical event. The students had to assess whether the recreations were useful for learning various conceptual or

procedural contents, as well as values, emotions, or empathetic thinking (Demantowsky, 2018).

The procedural dimension implied, as a priority, the approach to recreation; a complex dimension affected by various variables: acquisition of materials, organization, dramatization, historical accuracy, artifacts, and so on. The challenge of preparing a synthesis script, in terms of audio-visual narrative, the documentation processes, the problems of the realization in terms of specific recordings (with all its complexity), and the participation in the post-production processes, offered a very diversified training opportunity. However, it was tried that the participation also considered the profiles of the taking part students and teachers; the majority were primary and secondary teacher training students from the Faculty of Education and students from the Master's Degree in Cultural Heritage Management and Museology at the University of Barcelona. Everyone, from different perspectives and interests, had to contribute to the generation of a versatile and versatile product that would allow the approximation of the history and options of the health of the Republican army during the Spanish Civil War (Rojo et al., 2014).

Results and conclusion

The result of the different actions led to the elaboration of a central product of the audio-visual narrative. The proposal explained the alleged story of a young soldier whose wounds were treated using the Trueta method at the Molar hospital. We integrated the video into the audio-visual offer of the Molar interpretation center and it became an important backbone of the museography. But the video was also widely disseminated so that it could be used or considered from various perspectives in formal and non-formal teaching–learning spaces. Work was carried out on the pedagogical activities of the interpretation center. It was distributed among the historical associations, by the recreation groups, and access to the video was facilitated in its use in educational centers.

We carried the qualitative quality control of the product out with the support of a panel of experts (historians, re-enactors, students, local fans, museographers). A focus group was created that considered the films to be developed and their organization, and later pondered the post-production proposals. The production of the video took place between the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019, just before the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic. Visits to the Molar interpretation center, despite being limited, evidenced the positive assessment of the product by family groups and school groups.

The experience of promoters and users was very positive. We developed a quality narrative with low economic investment. We showed it was possible to develop complex historical narratives from the collaboration of historical re-enactment groups. The resulting videos, conceived as



FIGURE 4

Students of master's studies in cultural and heritage management at the University of Barcelona in a film based on historical recreation for a hospital interpretation center during the Battle of the Ebro, during the Spanish Civil War. Recording set. Reproduction of surgical intervention. A surgeon, a nurse, a member of a recreation group, and two students from the University of Barcelona take part.

multipurpose elements, could be integrated into museum proposals, formal teaching-learning dynamics, and different cultural proposals.

The strategies linked to public history and public archeology, and the social commitment implied by the action research options, were positively valued (González-Sanz et al., 2019). In this context, the service-learning approach was revealed as a very interesting possibility for the groups involved, especially for the training of students from a civic education perspective.

The surveys by subjects and groups carried out annually by the University of Barcelona showed excellent results. The students of the subjects where re-enactment and action research experiences were carried out made very positive assessments, both in the empirical aspects (acquisition of content and approach to the method) and the axiological aspects (education for citizenship).

We also considered the proposal significant from the point of view of the construction of a social museography, linked

to local, tangible, or intangible heritage, promoted by the community, and with an important digital iconographic and audio-visual factor. The audio-visual experiences proposed in the Molar were reapplied and merged in other museum projects, such as the musealization of the Trinitat fortress in Roses (Hernández-Cardona et al., 2022) (Figures 4, 5).

Discussion: A complex experience

We can draw very interesting conclusion from the experience. In the first place, the action contributed to corroborate the importance of iconography in teaching-learning and the communication of history, as already advanced by various authors (Gow and Michalski, 2008; Apel, 2012; Feliu and Hernández, 2013).

This principle is valid for any period of work; historical iconography has been practiced in all historical periods: from the Sumerian bas-reliefs to Trajan's column; of the Bayeux



FIGURE 5

Students of master's studies in cultural and heritage management at the University of Barcelona in a film based on historical recreation for a hospital interpretation center during the Battle of the Ebro, during the Spanish Civil War. Frame of the video production of the surgical intervention. Zenith camera.

Tapestry; to Rigaud's engravings; from Goya's paintings to Hurley's photographs, or Coppola's films. The past cannot be directly observed and is therefore abstract by definition. It can only be evoked, imagined, or raised hypothetically from its tangible or intangible remains (sources), which are fragmentary and/or out of context and difficult to understand.

One of the traditional ways of communicating and representing knowledge and historical content has been, and continues to be, iconography, whatever its base or format (Chartier, 1989). We can evoke history from images of the past (that document or plan hypotheses about structures, artifacts, objects, facts) or from iconography generated directly in the past (sculptures, paintings, photographs, engravings, films). But we consider that the iconography that is generated about the past (depending on the time in which it is elaborated, the looks of the past about the past) also makes up a source of the first order (Chartier, 1997).

The experience of the Hospital del Molar focused on the generation of didactic iconography to explain certain facts and concepts from the past. Said didactic iconography, regarding most contemporary iconographies, had the advantage that it allowed integrating all the elements, artifacts, actions, processes, and so on, that we, from our present, understood were important to understand the past.

The elaborated audiovisual narration contains all the elements that have been important to explain the healthcare experience of the Republican army during the Civil War.

Historical recreation was the resource used to generate this didactic iconography.

One of the most interesting conclusion of the project has been the verification of the scarce training of the students regarding the use of analogical and digital CGI (computer-generated imagery) iconographic resources, the techniques of visualization and 3D printing, scanner, photogrammetry, matte painting, concept art, infographics, audio-visuals, and the use of digital resources to achieve credible and understandable representations of the past (Haydn and Counsell, 2003; Vicent et al., 2015).

Probably, the evolution of the teaching-learning processes of history goes through training in using digital resources that allow overcoming the master class. For students of any level, the construction of representations, and especially images, where they can condense existing knowledge, is a fundamental strategy in the development of historical skills and historical thinking. Hence, there is a need to incorporate the digital construction of images into the teaching-learning strategies of history.

The image also has a fundamental role in non-formal teaching-learning spaces, beyond formal education, and it becomes a fundamental element in the construction of new museographies and the most diverse scenarios where an approach to the historical past is proposed (simulation, games, cultural tourism, various graphic narratives, apps, etc.) (De Groot, 2009; Flon, 2012; Haffemayer et al., 2012; Champion, 2015; Ibáñez-Etxeberria et al., 2018).

Conceptual, methodological, environmental, or material limitation

Limitations have been detected in similar experiences that developed in the environment of hospitals in the Spanish Civil War. However, these have not been decisive and have not invalidated the starting hypotheses. The main conceptual problem that arises is an audio-visual narrative, based only on images generated with the use of historical recreation, can be considered a fake. This problem, however, affects any film production on historical subjects, and users of this type of product know how to distinguish between a real image, contemporary with an event, and an image produced later on the same event. The danger can be averted by using diverse technical resources (coloring of the production and incorporation of textures) that mark a distance from those used in the original documentation and, naturally, warn that the images of the narrative have been generated by historical recreation activities.

The perspective of linking production of this type into the teaching-learning processes in higher and secondary education does not present conceptual problems either since it fits perfectly into the project method and a service-learning practice.

The complexity of the process gives the main limitation itself, since different actors are involved, who, at a moment, may have different interests. The complexity is typical of preparing a historical representation since it requires coordinating knowledge and insights of a very different nature, some of which require working on the historical content in some depth.

In this context, teachers must be thoroughly prepared and must be able to respond to the distinct challenges: knowing the facts in depth; representing them in a sustainable, rigorous, and realistic way based on existing resources; they must know how to organize, coordinate, and lead the students; they must direct them in the filming process; they must also have notions of post-production to ensure the objectives of the audiovisual narrative.

Obtaining enough technical equipment for a group class, giving instructions for its correct use, obtaining financing for recording sessions, defining scripts, etc... are complex tasks. Despite all these difficulties, all this work is worthwhile, and constitutes a relevant scenario in the approach to historical education and the acquisition of historical thought.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the current study in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation was not required for this study in accordance with the national legislation and the institutional requirements. All participants have given their consent for the use of their images. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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