

YOUTH PERCEPTION ON SPACES AND MOMENTS IN THE PROCESS OF EMPOWERMENT. A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS JÓVENES SOBRE LOS ESPACIOS Y MOMENTOS EN
SU PROCESO DE EMPODERAMIENTO. UNA APROXIMACIÓN CUANTITATIVA

PERCEÇÃO DOS JOVENS SOBRE OS ESPAÇOS E MOMENTOS NO SEU
PROCESSO DE CAPACITAÇÃO. UMA APROXIMAÇÃO QUANTITATIVA

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ABSTRACT: The voice of youth has not been taken into account in the conceptualization of empowerment and related research. The contents of this article contribute to the study of spaces and key moments in the process of youth empowerment through first-person experiences of 890 young. A quantitative approach will be used in order to consider the contribution of specific ambits of everyday life to capacity development and its application. Personal experiences perceived by youth as highly empowering are identified, and the relationship between empowerment and different life stages is studied. The findings suggest that the spaces generating more youth empowerment are formal and non-formal education settings and work environment. The importance of emancipation and life experiences entailing personal overcoming is also illustrated. In essence, the outcomes provide evidence and contribute to the debate and reflection of youth empowerment so as to promote future research and improve youth work interventions, as well as the design and implementation of youth policies.

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FOUNDING SOURCES: Proyecto HEBE El empoderamiento de los jóvenes: análisis de los momentos, espacios y procesos que contribuyen al empoderamiento juvenil. MINECO - PROGRAMA ESTATAL DE I+D+I RETOS DE LA SOCIEDAD 2013. Ref.: EDU2013-42979-R.

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| <p>PALABRAS CLAVES: empoderamiento juvenil espacios empoderadores incidentes críticos etapas vitales</p> | <p>RESUMEN: La voz de los jóvenes no ha sido tenida en cuenta en la conceptualización del empoderamiento y los estudios sobre éste. El presente artículo contribuye a la investigación de espacios y momentos clave en el proceso de empoderamiento juvenil desde la propia vivencia en primera persona de 890 jóvenes. Mediante una aproximación cuantitativa se estudia cómo diferentes espacios de la vida cotidiana contribuyen al desarrollo de capacidades y cómo éstos permiten aplicarlas. Se identifican vivencias que los jóvenes perciben como altamente empoderadoras y se estudia la relación del empoderamiento con las diferentes etapas vitales. Los resultados propician evidencias y contribuyen al debate y la reflexión sobre el empoderamiento juvenil tanto para las investigaciones futuras como para optimizar las intervenciones en el trabajo con jóvenes y en el diseño e implementación de políticas de juventud.</p> |
| <p>PALAVRAS-CHAVE: capacitação juvenil espaços capacitantes incidentes críticos etapas vitais</p> | <p>RESUMO: A voz dos jovens não foi tida em conta na conceptualização da capacitação e nos estudos sobre esta. O presente artigo contribui para a investigação de espaços e momentos-chave no processo de capacitação juvenil a partir da própria vivência na primeira pessoa de 890 jovens. Através de uma aproximação quantitativa, estuda-se como diferentes espaços da vida quotidiana contribuem para o desenvolvimento de competências e como estes permitem aplicá-las. Identificam-se vivências que os jovens percebem como altamente capacitantes e estuda-se a relação da capacitação com as diferentes etapas vitais. Os resultados apontam para o facto de os espaços onde os jovens mais se capacitam serem os da educação formal e não formal e os ambientes laborais. Também visualizam a importância da emancipação e as experiências vitais que requerem uma atitude de superação pessoal. Por fim, os resultados propiciam evidências e contribuem para o debate e a reflexão sobre a capacitação juvenil, tanto para as investigações futuras como para otimizar as intervenções no trabalho com jovens e na conceção e implementação de políticas de juventude.</p> |

1. Introduction

The variety of conceptions on empowerment complicates its study, measurement or classification. As a result, research aimed at those purposes (Holte-McKenzie, Forde and Theobald, 2006; Morrissey, 2000; Pearrow, 2011; Peterson, 2014; Pick *et al.*, 2007; Tromp, 2007, Wright, 2010) do not succeed in, as stated by Mosedale (2003), achieving an accepted method for measuring or monitoring the changes it produces. In the same line, Wagaman (2011) concludes that each definition of empowerment has its particular method of measurement. There are also other limitations to be considered, as the fact that most investigations are based on secondary sources or theoretical approaches without empirical evidence (Hennink *et al.*, 2012; Peterson, 2014).

If we focus on youth empowerment, Morton and Montgomery (2013) also identify a lack of quality research providing evidence of the effects of youth empowerment programs. They insist on the importance of investigating the impact of youth empowerment programs to assess their value in contexts with limited economic resources. The present research aims to contribute in some way in this direction, delving into the spaces and moments in which empowerment is recognized, identified or more determining.

We start from a concept of empowerment based on the systematic analysis of definitions and researches developed in the last 15 years on empowerment and the way that it has been conceptualized and applied in the youth field (Úcar, *et. al.*, 2016). The result of this research suggests

a concept of empowerment from which we compose an educational model approach (Soler *et al.*, 2017). The work made proposes a triple look from the dimensions of spaces, moments and processes specifically found in youth empowerment.

The concept of empowerment used in this text is defined as the process which increases the possibilities of young individuals to decide and act consistently on everything affecting their lives and to participate in the decision-making and to intervene jointly and responsibly in the issues related to the communities they are part of (Soler *et al.*, 2017).

In the aforementioned studies, we based our study in two fundamental dimensions in order to analyze empowerment. The first dimension refers to personal abilities and the means to acquire, develop and implement them. It is directly related to life courses of individuals and their learning and training processes. The second dimension concerns the environment and the possibilities and opportunities for action that it offers or denies. In this sense, it is assumed that the environment or context in which people, groups and communities develop their lives can enable or inhibit the possible actions and decisions to make. We are talking about the possibility to carry out actions in a way that is consistent with the decisions taken regarding anything affecting them. Thus, it is not only a matter of having access to resources, but also of achieving decision capacity to manage them (Sathar & Kazi, 1997; Kishor, 1999 [quoted in Pick *et al.* 2007]).

Fetterman and Wandersman (2007) warn that an individual cannot empower another one;

instead, empowerment is a non-transferable process to be carried out by oneself or the community. In line with this, Boluijt and Graaf (2010) conclude that the idea that has been present in the development of empowerment is precisely to help people to help themselves. This statement invites us to value the importance of contexts, spaces and environments in which young people move and grow. The knowledge of environments and learning and experimentation settings, as well as the moments which they live with special intensity, can be clear determinants to facilitate empowerment. Jennings et. al. (2008) insist on this idea when they propose as a strategy for youth empowerment the generation of opportunities and the planning of challenges in friendly and safe environments. McHale, Dotterer and Kim (2009) address the analysis of environments or spaces for youth empowerment too focusing on the study of everyday activities and daily life within usual and routine spaces. This is a significant dimension given that it tackles the closest or nearest contexts (family, peer groups, etc.) and the macro contexts, such as politics, economics or culture. Other authors, such as Kelly & Carson (2012) and Nolas (2014), include as contexts that improve empowerment youth associations and spaces of participation. Furthermore, Masa (2009) proposes the analysis of different environments for empowerment: family and coexistence, economy, peer group, leisure and free time, emotional, affective and sexual relations and, finally, life project. All of this is a classification of potential spaces for youth empowerment. Stolte et. al. (2014) delve into the idea of environments for youth empowerment proposing rubrics to promote them.

Russell et al. (2009) point out that empowerment is a popular term in the field of youth development programs (Huebner, 1998), although, according to these authors, the studies on youth empowerment blur the concept by considering it equivalent to “youth leadership”, “civic involvement”, “self-efficacy” or “youth activism”. The existing studies highlight some differences between youth and adult empowerment (Peterson et al., 2011) and the role that adults should play (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014). It is also stated that both theoretical and empirical researches on empowerment have mainly addressed adults. There is, therefore, a bias favoring adults that arouses the interest in a deeper, detailed and comparative study of the ways in which empowerment occurs specifically in young people (Kaplan et al., 2009). In this case, the present research is based on the personal opinion and assessment expressed by a group of adolescents in an extensive questionnaire inquiring about spaces and moments for

youth empowerment. In the current study, we focus particularly on the incorporation of their perceptions and interpretations into the study of the spaces and moments for empowerment so as to avoid the slant pointed out by the cited authors.

Objectives:

The purpose of the study is the exploration of the process of youth empowerment taking as the main source of information the subjective perception of young people. Therefore, we propose the following specific objectives:

- 1) Identify the spaces in which youth empowerment takes place.
- 2) Investigate to what extent do critical incidents contribute to youth empowerment.
- 3) Know the life stages of young people in which empowerment occur more intensively.

The ultimate goal of the study is to present data provided by young people, gather evidence and heat the debate and reflection of youth empowerment, so as to promote future research and improve youth work interventions, as well as the design and implementation of youth policies.

2. Methodology

The present research is a synchronic study detailing the characteristics of a group of teenagers in a specific context, Catalonia, and in a significant situation due to the current socio-economic conditions that adversely affect their lives in terms of access to education, housing and labor market, circumstances in which empowerment becomes a particularly relevant concept.

Our methodological approach has a quantitative nature, inspired by the neopositivist paradigm. We used a deductive approach for the empirical verification of the theory previously formulated. The analysis of the existing literature as well as previous qualitative studies on the same research project have been of great significance in order to address this undertaking. This approach enabled a scientific observation and an unbiased and standardized data collection (Corbetta, 2010).

Moreover, it has granted access to the subjectivity of a large number of young people: data collection happens at an individual level but the interest lies in the joint result of the sample in order to finally typify the collective.

Regarding the sample, it is intentional, guided by criteria of accessibility and inclusion of young participants with different profiles. The initial sample size displayed 1067 informants; however, after filtering extreme values and incoherent responses the sample reached N=890 young people between the ages of 19 and 25 years old (22

years average, standard deviation 1.67). For an equivalent random sample, this would be a representative sample of young Catalans within this age group (population 535,706, according to the

INE Population and Housing Census 2011), with a margin of error of 3.3% and a confidence interval of 95%. The detailed description of the sample is shown in Table 1.

| Items | % |
|-------------------------|---|
| Gender | 66,5% Women; 33,5% Men. |
| Region | 68,9% Barcelona; 16,5% Girona; 5,2% Lleida; 9,4% Tarragona. |
| Residential environment | 77,6% Urban; 22,4% Rural. |
| Birthplace | 81,8% Catalonia; 22,4% Europe; 5,5% Latin America; 4,8% Africa; 4,5% rest of Spain; 0,8% Asia; 0,1% North America. |
| Level of education | 39,3% Non-compulsory secondary school; 19,6% Advanced Vocational Training Module; 14,6% Diploma program or Bachelor's degree; 9,4% Compulsory Secondary Education; 6,8% Middle Vocational Training Module; 4,4% Preschool and elementary school; 4% Postgraduate and Master's degrees y 2% Social Guarantee Programmes, initial qualification or adult schools. |
| Work | 57,5% No; 42,5% Yes. Employed youth: 64,3% their income is not enough for a living. |
| Domestic situation | 74,6% Living with their birth family; 15,9% Sharing an apartment; 6,5% Living together in couple; 2,4% Alone; 0,7% Student housing. |

Concerning the design of the instrument, the key task was to operationalize the constitutive concepts of the theory, that is to say, its transformation into observable variables. The process of operationalization, aside from taking into account the existing literature, was based on the research phase prior to this study, where a lexicometric technique was used to identify the conceptual representation of spaces, moments and processes expressed by young people and professionals of youth empowerment (Pineda, Agud and Núñez, 2015). The content of the instrument has been validated by an expert committee of 20 researchers and 15 youth workers; what is more, in terms of internal consistency, the reliability reached .792 (N = 890) Alpha's value of the scales.

Firstly, the questionnaire gathers detailed data on the profile of youth at different levels, such as socio-economic, educational, work, family, emancipation and social participation; secondly inquires about how their different life experiences have contributed to their empowerment process.

The dimensions that shape the instrument are: (1) Important experiences or vital critical moments: the objective is to identify those that have happened in the life of an individual and to indicate to what extent has the learning that took place in those experiences been relevant for life and whether the experience has led the individual

to autonomously make important decisions about life. (2) Spaces: in order to identify spaces that have contributed to the development of abilities and how have these spaces enabled individuals to apply them. (3) Vital stages: the goal is to identify vital stages in which individuals presented abilities to act upon their reality and to what extent did they applied them. Each dimension lists a series of variables configured from the previously mentioned actions. For each item in the list, the youth could value their own empowerment – on an intensity scale from 1 (none) to 4 (high) – using the two dimensions that, according to our theoretical positioning, form this concept (Úcar et al., 2016): (E1) development of capacities to act autonomously and (E2) application of these capacities to act on their own life.

The questionnaire was administered both in paper format and online (using SurveyMonkey platform) from July to December 2015. Collaboration of professionals and institutions working in the field of youth enabled the participation of a diversity of young people at different social and educational level, as well as various professional profiles and diverse origins.

The purpose of the analysis in this approach has been to statistically explain the variation in the values of the variables according to the dependent variables in the subjects. In order to meet the previously mentioned targets, descriptive

statistical analysis and bivariate tests as Spearman's rho and chi-squared test have been carried out with corrected standardized residual analysis by Haberman (1973).

This methodology gives us new information about empowerment, yet it presents some limitations that mark future lines of research, such as the introduction of qualitative strategies for further results or the application of a longitudinal study that allows to track the trajectory of youth.

3. Results

We present here below the most significant findings obtained in this study regarding the specific objectives that we intended to achieve:

- 1) Identify the spaces in which youth empowerment takes place.

We present here the descriptive results (table 2) in relation to the theoretical spaces of youth empowerment. Each dimension corresponds to an empowerment space. This grouping enables a more complete analysis by relating similar environments. For every specific space within each dimension, we display the number of individuals that have been part of it. The following column shows the average (on an intensity scale from 1 (none) to 4 (high) in which that space is considered as contributing to the development of the abilities to act autonomously on its reality (E1) and the last column indicates the average for the capacity of this space to apply this abilities (E2).

Table 2: Youth empowerment spaces. Descriptive statistics

| Dimension 1 | | Have not had the experience N | E1: contributed to the development of my abilities X DE | E2: enabled me to apply those abilities X DE |
|---------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| RELATIONSHIPS | Birth family | 51 | 3,51 .724 | 3,51 .699 |
| | Current friends relationships | 15 | 3,31 .727 | 3,32 .750 |
| | Love relationships | 98 | 3,10 .801 | 3,11 .820 |
| | Friends during adolescence | 19 | 3,10 .787 | 3,10 .825 |

| Dimension 2 | | Have not had the experience N | E1: contributed to the development of my abilities X DE | E2: enabled me to apply those abilities X DE |
|------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|---|
| FORMAL EDUCATION | Higher Education (University studies) | 232 | 3,37 .744 | 3,34 .775 |
| | Post-mandatory Secondary Education (Baccalaureate and Vocational Education) | 104 | 3,18 .806 | 3,16 .830 |
| | Occupational Training | 572 | 3,03 .912 | 3,08 .914 |
| | Adult schools | 692 | 2,85 .993 | 2,85 1.05 |
| | Preschool and Elementary School | 27 | 2,93 .864 | 2,87 .876 |
| | Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) | 34 | 2,85 .879 | 2,81 .878 |

| Dimension 3 | | Have not had the experience N | E1: contributed to the development of my abilities X DE | E2: enabled me to apply those abilities X DE |
|-------------|----------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| EMPLOYMENT | Internships | 242 | 3,25 .819 | 3,19 .875 |
| | Steady jobs | 461 | 3,18 .866 | 3,20 .903 |
| | Temporary jobs | 219 | 3,02 .816 | 3,01 .846 |

| Dimension 4 | | Have not had the experience N | E1: contributed to the development of my abilities X DE | E2: enabled me to apply those abilities X DE |
|--------------------|--|----------------------------------|--|---|
| CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT | Free time associations and groups | 323 | 3,32 .830 | 3,34 .828 |
| | Cultural associations | 414 | 3,01 .902 | 3,02 .918 |
| | Sports associations or organizations | 422 | 3,00 .845 | 2,98 .912 |
| | NGO's or other civic associations | 547 | 2,92 .932 | 3,02 .976 |
| | Child and youth participation councils | 615 | 2,80 .966 | 2,87 .994 |
| | Political parties or organizations | 613 | 2,35 1.01 | 2,29 1.05 |
| | Religious confessions or associations | 656 | 2,31 1.18 | 2,29 1.19 |
| | Trade unions or professional organizations | 696 | 2,19 .985 | 2,34 1.01 |

| Dimension 5 | | Have not had the experience N | E1: contributed to the development of my abilities X DE | E2: enabled me to apply those abilities X DE |
|-------------|---|----------------------------------|--|---|
| LEISURE | Virtual spaces and social networks | 69 | 2,80 .852 | 2,74 .905 |
| | Open public spaces (street, square, park, etc) | 136 | 2,74 .852 | 2,74 .915 |
| | Enclosed public spaces (museum, library, civic center, etc) | 143 | 2,72 .804 | 2,63 .833 |
| | The media (radio, television, etc) | 129 | 2,59 .842 | 2,51 .895 |
| | Recreational centers (bars, nightclubs, etc) | 110 | 2,52 .906 | 2,49 .921 |

Table 2 shows that, according to young people themselves, the most conducive space for empowerment, both in the dimension E1 (development of abilities) and in the dimension E2 (application of abilities to act autonomously and consistently), is the *birth family*. The second space in importance, considering that a quarter of the sample have not attended higher education and more than a third have not participated in free time associations and groups, are *current friends*. At the other end of the scale, the lowest scores were found in *political parties and organizations, religious confessions or associations, and trade unions*.

It also emphasizes that the average evaluations of each space in both dimensions are generally very alike, with a difference under 0.1. The only exceptions are *NGOs or civic, solidarity and environmental associations and trade unions*; the average score in both cases was higher in dimension E2. Some correlations were established among spaces for empowerment in both dimensions (Spearman's rho, given that the variables were ordinal). In the first place, it is noteworthy that almost all spaces are significantly correlated with a positive sign, although the vast majority has a low or very low intensity.

Next, we present the significant correlations ($p < .005$) and those whose intensity is at least moderate (coefficients $rs > .4$):

It is observed that in the E1 dimension (development of capacities to act autonomously), some items present a frequent correlation among them. Political parties and organizations, as a space for empowerment, are correlated with: *child and youth participation councils* ($rs = .518$; $p = .000$; $N = 128$); *trade unions* ($rs = .501$; $p = .000$; $N = 102$); *religious associations* ($rs = .400$; $p = .000$; $N = 93$); and *ONGs or other civic associations* ($rs = .412$; $p = .000$; $N = 130$). In other words, a young person who participates in a political party, the more he/she develops his/her abilities through this space, the more he/she also learns while participating in the other spaces. In the same way, the less empowerment is stimulated in the parties, the less is stimulated in the rest of spaces.

Likewise, *child and youth participation councils* as a space for empowerment in dimension E1 are strongly correlated with: *NGOs* ($rs = .447$; $p = .000$; $N = 132$); *cultural associations* ($rs = .428$; $p = .000$; $N = 161$); *religious associations* ($rs = .443$; $p = .000$; $N = 93$); and *trade unions* ($rs = .516$; $p = .000$; $N = 98$).

Capacity building (E1) through participation in *NGOs or other civic associations*, in addition to the correlations presented above, is associated with: *adult schools* ($rs = .558$; $p = .000$; $N = 47$); *steady jobs* ($rs = .409$; $p = .000$; $N = 146$); *trade unions*

($rs = .549$; $p = .000$; $N = 91$); and *religious associations* ($rs = .443$; $p = .000$; $N = 112$).

There are also significant and moderate correlations between: *compulsory secondary education and post-mandatory secondary education* (Baccalaureate and Vocational Education) ($rs = .502$; $p = .000$; $N = 750$); *adult schools and occupational training* ($rs = .444$; $p = .000$; $N = 66$); *religious associations and adult schools* ($rs = .514$; $p = .000$; $N = 54$); *trade unions and religious associations* ($rs = .543$; $p = .000$; $N = 78$); *the media and virtual spaces and social networks* ($rs = .402$; $p = .000$; $N = 688$).

Regarding dimension E2 of empowerment (the application of abilities developed in order to act autonomously on one's own life), the analysis of correlations points out that the same spaces tend to correlate like they do in E1 dimension. The space *political parties and organizations* is correlated with: *child and youth participation councils* ($rs = .466$; $p = .000$; $N = 125$) and *trade unions* ($rs = .439$; $p = .000$; $N = 96$).

On the other hand, empowerment in *participation councils* showed a moderate correlation with the one given in: *trade unions* ($rs = .505$; $p = .000$; $N = 92$), *religious associations* ($rs = .452$; $p = .000$; $N = 86$), *steady jobs* ($rs = .431$; $p = .000$; $N = 111$) and in *adult schools* ($rs = .401$; $p = .005$; $N = 47$).

In the work environment, the results showed that the empowerment given in *occupational training* presents a moderate correlation to that one developed in *temporary jobs* ($rs = .428$; $p = .000$; $N = 199$) and *steady jobs* ($rs = .479$; $p = .000$; $N = 139$). These last two categories also correlate between them ($rs = .415$; $p = .000$; $N = 310$).

Finally, the processes of empowerment - as application of skills - developed in *compulsory secondary education* are correlated with those in *preschool and elementary school* ($rs = .523$; $p = .000$; $N = 790$) and in *post-mandatory secondary education* ($rs = .512$; $p = .000$; $N = 735$).

2) Investigate to what extent do critical incidents contribute to youth empowerment.

Afterwards, we present the results related to different experiences or critical incidents and the way that they contribute to the development of the required abilities to act autonomously on one's own life (E1) and, on the other hand, how these experiences enable the application of those capacities (E2).

First, the outcome reveals that the most frequent incidents listed by the young people in the sample are *meeting an exceptional person* ($N = 823$), *having a sentimental emotional relationship* ($N = 822$) and *academic success* ($N = 710$), while the most exceptional incidents experienced by

only a very small part of the have experienced are *overcoming an addiction* (N = 159), *making sexual orientation public* (N = 208), and *migrating to another country* (N = 217).

Regarding the value attributed by young people to each experience according to its

contribution to empowerment, the first thing we have to mention is that there is no overlap between the two dimensions of empowerment E1 and E2, except in one of them. In the following table we show the positions (p) of each experience for each dimension.

Table 3: Critical incidents. Descriptive statistics*

| Contribution to development of abilities (E1) | E1 | P ¹ | E2 | Contribution to application of abilities (E2) |
|---|--------------|----------------|--------------|--|
| Living alone, with friends or together in couple | 3,39 .873 | 1 | 3,45 .836 | Living alone, with friends or together in couple |
| Meeting an exceptional person | 3,38 .651 | 2 | 3,30 .989 | International mobility experiences |
| Having a sentimental emotional relationship | 3,34 .715 | 3 | 3,28 .838 | Obtaining a job |
| Illness of a loved one | 3,26 .835 | 4 | 3,23 .788 | Having a sentimental emotional relationship |
| International mobility experiences | 3,25 .998 | 5 | 3,23 .991 | Family breakdown |
| Loss of a loved one | 3,23 .886 | 6 | 3,18 .742 | Meeting an exceptional person |
| Family breakdown | 3,21 .981 | 7 | 3,18 1.11 | Migrating to another country |
| Obtaining a job | 3,20 .825 | 8 | 3,13 .894 | Breaking-up (end of a relationship) |
| Academic success | 3,14 .784 | 9 | 3,11 .865 | Academic success |
| Migrating to another country | 3,13 1.12 | 10 | 3,09 .805 | Suffering from the economic crisis |
| Sporting, cultural or artistic success | 3,08 .827 | 11 | 3,09 .841 | Professional success |
| Breaking-up (end of a relationship) | 3,05 .886 | 12 | 3,05 .943 | Illness of a loved one |
| Suffering from the economic crisis | 3,01 .823 | 13 | 3,04 1.14 | Being a victim of abuse |
| Professional success | 2,99 .856 | 14 | 2,99 1.00 | Loss of a loved one |
| Academic failure | 2,96 .947 | 15 | 2,99 .958 | Academic failure |
| Being a victim of abuse | 2,87 1.14 | 16 | 2,93 .904 | Sporting, cultural or artistic success |
| Participation in political claims or social movements | 2,84 .910 | 17 | 2,78 1.18 | Overcoming an addiction |

| | | | | |
|---|--------------|----|--------------|---|
| Overcoming an addiction | 2,68 1.10 | 18 | 2,77 1.03 | Loss of job |
| Sporting, cultural or artistic failure | 2,66 1.04 | 19 | 2,75 1.05 | Professional failure |
| Loss of job | 2,66 1.02 | 20 | 2,71 .987 | Participation in political claims or social movements |
| Professional failure | 2,62 1.02 | 21 | 2,69 1.17 | Suffering from severe illness |
| Suffering from severe illness | 2,62 1.14 | 22 | 2,64 1.05 | Sporting, cultural or artistic failure |
| Making sexual orientation public | 2,32 1.23 | 23 | 2,40 1.25 | Making sexual orientation public |
| * We present average scores (X) and standard deviation (DE) for each item. † Place in the ranking according to the average of each item. | | | | |

We observe in table 3 that the experience to which young people attribute a higher average value regarding the contribution to their empowerment (both E1 and E2) is the fact of becoming independent from the birth family to live alone, with friends or together in couple. However, only 42.58% of the young people in the sample have had such experience.

The second experience identified as more empowering by order of evaluation in dimension 1 – developing skills – is *meeting an exceptional person*, followed by *having a sentimental or emotional relationship*. However, the experiences contributing to the second dimension of empowerment – application of skills – to a larger extent are: *having an international mobility experiences*, although it is remarkable that only 28.65% of the sample has had the opportunity to have such experience. The third position of events enabling the application of abilities is *obtaining a job*.

On the other side, *professional failure*, *suffering from severe illness*, or *making sexual orientation public* are the least valued events in relation to the possibilities that they offer for developing skills (E1).

The experiences presenting highest differences in favor of E1 dimension are: *loss of a loved one*, *illness of a loved one*, *sporting, cultural or artistic*

success, and *sentimental emotional relationships*. That is to say, these experiences contribute to relevant learning (E1) to a greater extent regarding an effective decision-making (E2).

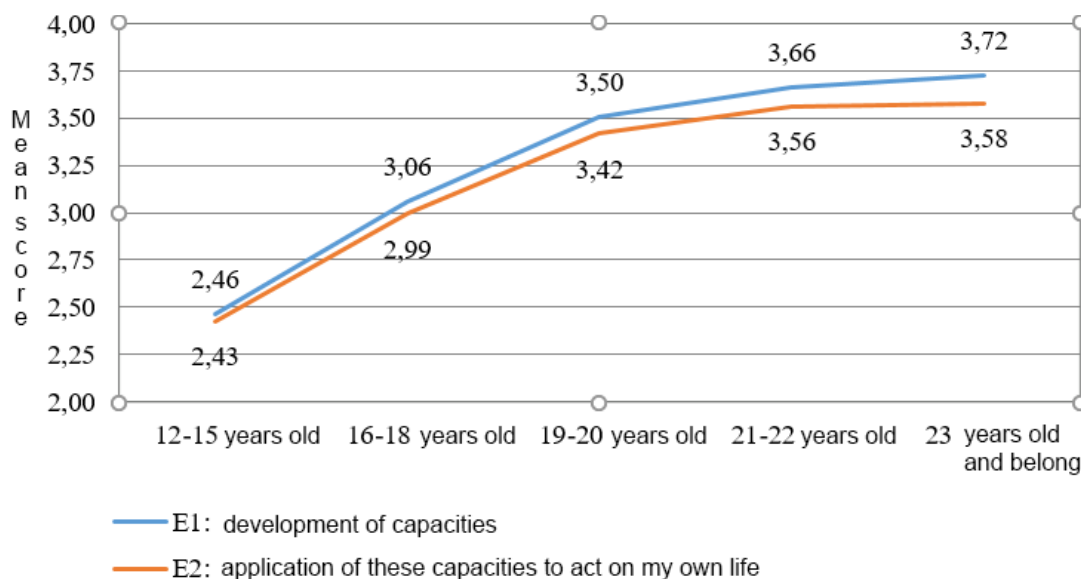
On the other hand, the ones displaying a higher average level in the E2 dimension are: *being a victim of abuse*, *participating in a political claims*, *professional failure*, *loss of job* and *professional success*.

3) Know the life stages of young people in which empowerment occurs more intensively.

The following information shows the results of empowerment in relation to life stages and age of the members of the sample at the moment of responding to the questionnaire.

Firstly, E1 and E2 dimensions of empowerment were analyzed regarding the age of the young people participating in the study and according to their answers in the third dimension of the questionnaire, where they retrospectively assessed the extent in which they had presented the skills to act autonomously and in what degree had the context allowed them to apply those abilities for each life stage. We can observe in Figure 1 a positive trend in both dimensions of empowerment, with the largest increase between stage 12-15 years old and 16-18 years old (from 0.60 in E1 and 0.65 in E2)..

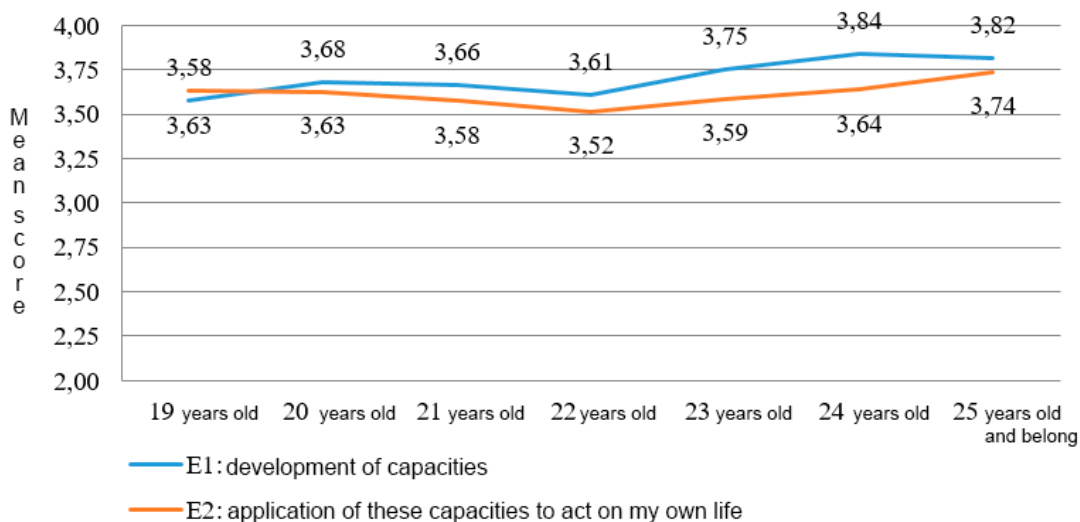
Figure 1: Evolution of empowerment in relation to age



However, when considering the variables of current level of empowerment regarding the age of the participants (from 19 to 25 years old), there is no clear relationship between age and

empowerment. As shown in Figure 2, both dimensions appear to decline at 22 years old, while they increase again at 23 years old.

Figure 2: Evolution of empowerment in relation to age, from 19 to 25



Correlation tests (Spearman's rho coefficient, failing to meet the assumptions for parametric tests) revealed a weak correlation between E1 dimension of current empowerment and age $r_s(754) = .118, p = .001$; and the relationship between E2 dimension and age was not significant, $r_s(739) = .040, p = .279$. In order to deepen into this relationship between age and empowerment, Chi square

tests were performed by associating the variables of current empowerment (E1 and E2) and current age. Regarding E1 dimension, chi square tests reveal that the percentages of 1, 2, 3 and 4 in empowerment are significantly associated with age, $X^2(18, N = 756) = 32.88, p = .017$. In Table 4 we can observe the progressive rise of maximum scores, as the age of youth in the sample increases.

**Table 4: Contingency table:
level of empowerment (E1) and age**

| | Level of abilities to act autonomously (E1)* | | | |
|--------------|--|------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19 years old | 5.0% | .0% | 27.5% | 67.5% |
| 20 years old | 1.0% | 1.5% | 26.1% | 71.4% |
| 21 years old | 1.1% | 2.2% | 26.1% | 70.7% |
| 22 years old | 4.7% | 1.4% | 22.3% | 71.6% |
| 23 years old | 0.9% | 3.8% | 14.2% | 81.1% |
| 24 years old | 0% | .0% | 16.2% | 83.8% |
| 25 years old | 0% | 2.0% | 14.0% | 84.0% |

* 1. None 2. Low 3. Enough 4. High.

Standardized residuals analysis by Haberman (1973) indicates that young people aged 24 reaching 4 at their level of empowerment (E1) are more than we expected, if both variables were independent (2.3 in adjusted standardized residual); this indicates a significant relation between age and the necessary abilities to act autonomously (E1), although it may not be linear; moreover, in this progression, the most significant increase occurs at 24 years.

Regarding E2 dimension, although a progression is observed in the level of empowerment, especially between 22 and 25 years old (Table 5), chi square tests do not reveal a significant relation between age and empowerment, $X^2 18, N = 741 = 16.63, p = .549$.

**Table 5: Contingency table:
level of empowerment (E2) and age**

| | Level of application of abilities to act autonomously (E2)* | | | |
|--------------|---|------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19 years old | 0% | 3.7% | 29.6% | 66.7% |
| 20 years old | 1.0% | 4.0% | 26.1% | 68.8% |
| 21 years old | 1.1% | 6.5% | 26.1% | 66.3% |
| 22 years old | 4.0% | 3.4% | 29.5% | 63.1% |
| 23 years old | 3.7% | 4.7% | 20.6% | 71.0% |
| 24 years old | 0.9% | 6.0% | 21.4% | 71.8% |
| 25 years old | 2.0% | 2.0% | 16.0% | 80.0% |

* 1. None 2. Low 3. Enough 4. High.

In order to explain the result of a high level of empowerment (E1) in young people aged 24, the typical characteristics of this age have been explored according to the variable *job*, given that it was identified as one of the most common characteristics of young people presenting high levels of empowerment in previous studies (Pineda-Herrero *et al.*, in review). It is observed that 64.2% of the boys and girls aged 24 have a job, and this is the highest percentage founded in all age groups. The distribution of working and non-working individuals is significantly different regarding age, $X^2 6, N = 774 = 55.04, p = .000$, and the adjusted standardized residual in that cell is 4.9. It is also remarkable that, for 38% of young people of that age, employment earnings allows their economic independence from their families, being this one the most contributing (4.7 of adjusted standardized residual) to chi square, $X^2 (6, N = 885) = 61.06, p = .000$.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to provide data on youth empowerment, obtained from the perception expressed by the group of young people that contributed to a reflection on the spaces, moments and experiences that are part of the process of empowerment. On the one hand, one of the contributions of this work has been to reduce the bias favoring adults in the study of youth empowerment denounced by authors as Kaplan *et al.* (2009). On the other hand, self-perceptions of young people have been presented in the two dimensions conforming empowerment (Úcar *et al.*, 2016): the development of abilities and their application in order to make decisions and act autonomously on one's own life trajectory, allowing us to analyze in detail the role of spaces and events in the process for empowerment.

In relation to the identification of spaces that encourage empowerment, we first found that the closest contexts, such as birth family and the current friendly relationships are the most valued by young people, as Mc Hale, Dotterer and Kim (2009) and Masa (2009) pointed out. At the same time, those young individuals who have had the opportunity to attend spaces as free time associations are attributed with a high impact on their empowerment, almost as much as their own family.

Secondly, spaces that favor either one dimension of empowerment or another are identified. For example, it is emphasized that participation in NGOs or civic, solidarity and environmental associations contributes to a greater extent to the application of capacities for autonomous action, as well as participation in trade unions or other professional organizations.

The results allow us to verify the value of relational, labor and participation spaces, beyond formal education spaces, in the processes for empowerment, and the importance of promoting participation in leisure spaces such as sports associations, free time groups and NGOs in order to encourage autonomous and conscious decision-making.

The outcomes also show a relationship among all spaces, especially those included in the dimension of citizen participation; both for the capacity development dimension and for its application. This suggests that participation in political and social spaces (cultural associations, NGOs, child and youth participation councils, political parties, religious associations, trade unions) enhances the experience in other spaces and dimensions of empowerment. The capacities that are developed and the competences that are acquired in the spaces of social and political participation are valued significantly both for their formative dimension (we must not forget the opportunity for civic and political training that these contexts offer) and for the possibility to be able to carry out concrete projects that can allow these young individuals to make autonomous decisions, to test and to apply those capacities. These non-formal frameworks become in this case authentic schools of citizenship and social responsibility laboratories.

In relation to vital experiences and their contribution to empowerment we have verified that emancipation (living alone, with friends or together in couple) or an international experience are considered by young people as the most empowering experiences. Both experiences, due to the current socio-economic context, present a great challenge and, as Jennings *et al.* (2008) pointed out, the creation of opportunities and challenges are great strategies for empowerment.

According to the report of the Catalan Youth Observatory (2016) on the employment situation of youth in Catalonia, the rate of emancipation of young people between 16 and 29 is 23.7%, which means a delay in the age of emancipation regarding other European countries. The emancipation of young people has been affected by labor market conditions.

International mobility experiences, conceived as highly empowering by youth, have also been affected by the reduction of subsidies, which have diminished by half the stays abroad of young students (for example, the number has dropped 71% since 2011 - el país 4/11/2013).

It is remarkable that vital experiences that require an attitude of personal growth, such as illness or loss of a loved one, a couple or family breakdown and migrating to another country, are identified by young people as experiences that allowed them to perform relevant learning and make important decisions about their lives. In this case, empowerment is displayed as a non-transferable process that must be carried out individually (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2007), by means of the attribution of meaning and its way of relating to different events.

On the other hand, young people pointed as the less empowering experiences professional, sporting, cultural or artistic failures, the loss of job, suffering from severe illness and making sexual orientation public, which suggests the need to deepen into the work on resilience of young people and their capacity to overcome challenges as a factor of empowerment (Omar *et al.* 2011).

Finally, in terms of vital stages and their relationship to empowerment, we have noted a progressive evolution between the 19 and 25 years old, not always linear, and a greatest increase in the level of empowerment E1 (capacity development) happening in 24 years old age bracket, which can be explained by the greater insertion of this age group in the labor market and its consequent economic independence of the birth families.

In contrast, the application of abilities to act autonomously does not vary significantly in terms of age after 19 years old. We can interpret that training alone is not enough to guarantee empowerment, given that it is necessary that the context enables and eases the application of the acquired skills. Education (formal, non-formal and informal) increases with age; concurrently, so it does the first dimension of empowerment (E1), that is to say, the development of capacities to act autonomously. But if the context does not allow the application of these capacities (E2) hardly will we be able to talk about real empowerment (Soler *et al.*, 2017).

Ultimately, the development of the necessary abilities to act autonomously is conditioned by age (the experience and training that it entails), but the degree to which the context allows the application of these capacities does not have a clear relationship with age.

This study serves as a starting point for further development of the knowledge about processes for youth empowerment regarding spaces, moments and life stages analyzed.

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