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Synergies between Schools and Rural Museums: Insights from the Spanish Pyrenees

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was conducted in Espacio Pirineos,
Aragon and in Ecomuseu dels
Valls d'Àneu Catalonia,
both located in Spain.

Abstract This paper analyzes synergies between two rural museums and schools in the Spanish Pyrenees: Ecomuseu dels Valls d'Àneu and Espacio Pirineos. The foundation, organization, and development of these museums, neither of which has an education department, are examined via qualitative fieldwork (documentary analysis and interviews). Documentary analysis reveals differences in the conditions under which the museums were founded: Ecomuseu dels Valls d'Àneu was a collective initiative by local agents based on the new museology of the 1980s, whereas Espacio Pirineos was a political initiative by the town council with the aim of promoting tourism. These differences can be seen in each center's relationships with schools, the Ecomuseu dels Valls d'Àneu's network being more developed. Nonetheless, in both museums, activities and exhibitions to attract schools are of fundamental importance. The findings show that, in the absence of education departments in rural museums, it is vital to establish networks between museums and educational entities to consolidate relationships and museum education.

INTRODUCTION

According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM, 2021), museums are educational institutions at the service of society, integrated into a structure that contributes to the consolidation of knowledge and disciplines by preserving and displaying heritage, both tangible and intangible. Schools, a fundamental agent of socialization in the Western world, second only to the family, enable the youngest members of society to prepare themselves for life. Schools and museums play different roles in relation to education. School is the formal educational institution par excellence and is compulsory in most countries; most children go to school, and attendance is mandatory until at least

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adolescence. Museums also play a role in education, but attendance is optional, and they have a secondary status in the learning process of the members of a society. They allow school curricular content to be worked on in non-traditional ways in disciplines such as natural sciences or art. For example, in 1969, the museographic and educational proposal of the Exploratorium in San Francisco focused on experimentation and interaction, aiming at a “true pedagogical revolution” that would bring the natural sciences closer to the public in general and to young people in particular (Díaz Balerdi, 2008, p. 95). Similarly, following World War II, art museums took responsibility for the transmission and teaching of art, providing emotional and intellectual benefits to society in general and to students in particular (Pringle, 2018).

This paper analyzes the synergies between schools and museums from the perspective of professionals in rural areas of the Spanish Pyrenees. We define synergy as a type of relationship that involves “cooperative or combined action. It occurs when diverse or disparate individuals or groups of people collaborate in a common cause. The objective is to increase effectiveness by sharing perceptions and experiences, insights and knowledge” (Harris, 2004, p. 359). The objectives of this study are (1) to analyze the scope of rural museums in relation to schools in the county, province, and region, and (2) to clarify how rural museums complement local schools.

Fieldwork was carried out in two Pyrenean enclaves: the Ecomuseu dels Valls d'Àneu (hereafter, the Ecomuseu), located in Valls d'Àneu, Catalonia, and the heritage center¹ Espacio Pirineos, located in Graus, Aragon. Both museums, together with nine other museums located in Catalonia, Aragon, the Basque Country, and Midi-Pyrénées, are part of the international Spain–France PATRIM network. The project reported on here focused on the development of rural museums that are part of the PATRIM+ network.

Although the Ecomuseu and Espacio Pirineos are both located in rural areas of the Spanish Pyrenees and are both notable for their relationship with and care for local heritage, they differ in their foundation and development: whereas the Ecomuseu is an initiative promoted by local associations and organizations with the support of provincial and regional institutions, Espacio Pirineos is the result of a political initiative on the part of the town council. The museums' relationships with schools and other types of educational organizations also differ in form and content.

The academic literature has studied the relationship between schools and museums for decades (Ateş & Lane, 2019; Cox-Petersen et al., 2003; Parisi et al., 2021), particularly since Dewey identified their pedagogical potential (Hein, 2004). The interrelation of institutional logics in the creation of museums and heritage centers has also received attention (Sancho Querol et al., 2020; Svensson, 2017). However, it remains unclear how the formation and development of a museum affects its relationship with schools. This paper addresses this question by analyzing the formation of the aforementioned rural museums and their history, development, and relationship with schools from the perspective of museum and education professionals. Accordingly, and in line with the study objectives, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What is the scope of rural museums in relation to schools in the county, province, and region?

RQ2: How do rural museums complement local schools?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Luna and Ibáñez-Etxeberria (2020), the educational function of museums is fundamental, even if this fact has been recognized only belatedly. Since the 1970s, museums have educated the various social groups that visit them. The relationship between schools and museums can be understood from the perspective of museum education, which emphasizes the transmission and learning that takes place within museums (Ateş & Lane, 2019). As Dorfsman and Horenczyk (2018) argued, museum education is based on constructivist precepts that advocate the importance of experimentation for learning (see also Badger & Harker, 2016; Lacoé et al., 2020). Museums have the potential to be excellent tools for the transmission of learning (Young et al., 2022), as they provide direct encounters with issues that can be addressed only theoretically in the classroom. In other words, they enable the social learning (Kisiel, 2003) and so-called interpellant experiences that schools cannot provide. Interpellant experiences may include the use of humor, which ignites a sense of agency and group belonging (Ash, 2014).

However, not all museums have the same educational perspective, and not all of them are attractive to school audiences. Accordingly, some studies have focused on the potential of museum apprenticeship programs as a stimulus for students' academic careers (Rose, 2016) and on the synergies they generate among museum leaders, students, and the academic institutions that send students to museums (Clarke-Vivier et al., 2021; Rivero et al., 2018; see also Okvuran & Karadeniz, 2021; Williams & Zimmermann, 2020).

An example of such synergies and partnerships between schools and museums in relation to specific tasks and content is provided by Badia-Solé and González Soto (2017). They consider the case of the secondary school Quatre Cantons, Barcelona, in relation to the Design Museum, also in Barcelona. In collaboration with the museum, the school carried out a project that challenged students to design and prepare an exhibition. The project started by focusing on the objectives and values of the school's own heritage, continued by encouraging the students' interest in preparing an exhibition, and ended with an evaluation of the process itself. During the project, the students took on the role of museum managers, creating working groups and preparing exhibitions for the museum. The educational value of the proposal lay in its experimental aspects, which allowed the students to make the heritage their own and internalize the learning process through the joint creation of exhibitions.

Ziebell and Suda's (2020) example of school–museum collaboration highlights the role of curriculum content in museum visits. In the collaboration they studied, a local primary school, an educator and researcher from the Melbourne Museum, and a researcher from the University of Melbourne designed strategies and activities to support curriculum content. They found that three elements are

essential for optimal learning and a successful educational experience for students: (1) connecting museum experiences with curriculum content; (2) interactivity, experience, visibility, and the ability to communicate what is seen in the museum; and (3) resources and training for teachers.

When we think of collaborations involving museums and educational institutions, the contents of the museums are important, and never more so than when it comes to connecting with school audiences (Cornish et al., 2021). When museums host heritage exhibitions that present identifying elements of local culture and the natural environment, school visits promote the interest of local students in those elements in relation to their territory (Madariaga-Orbea et al., 2018; McLean, 2016). Specifically, museums can explain, from an experiential point of view, ways of life, aspects related to norms and citizenship, defining and constitutive issues, and relationships within and between cultural groups and with nature (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2020), thereby linking the educational public with its own territory. Examples of Spanish museums that encourage student interest in local heritage have been presented by Fontal et al. (2021); they include the programs developed at the Rezola Cement Museum, the Igartubeiti Farmhouse Museum, and Peracense Castle. The educational offerings of these museums qualify as examples of good practice, since they follow the criteria established by the Observatory of Heritage Education in Spain (2021), promoted by the Government of Spain, whose objective is “to teach and learn with, about, from and for heritage” (2021, p. 1). Thus, the activities carried out in these museums include student participation in research and in the design of exhibitions, and the use of comic books produced in heritage centers for educational agents to work on emotional education or creativity.

However, many museums face financial obstacles due to a lack of resources for their development and promotion. Some museums find it challenging to promote their services to schools where teachers lack knowledge of and interest in their exhibitions. Ateş and Lane (2019) analyzed the relationship between schools and a local museum in Turkey. They observed that the relationship depends on proper communication between the two parties so that mutual needs can be identified. It also requires dissemination of the museum’s program of activities, and the training of teachers in how to make use of the museum’s resources. In short, for the relationship between museums and schools to work, both institutions must communicate adequately and must collaborate in the preparation of visits so that the museum content can be put to good use (see also Anderson et al., 2006).

METHOD

The PATRIM+ project adopted an ethnographic approach to two case studies, namely those of the Ecomuseu and Espacio Pirineos, chosen from the nine centers that make up the network. The project focused on identifying and describing the creation and development of these network centers by analyzing the relationships between museums and other institutions, including schools.

Initially, the researchers visited each enclave to make contact with the people in charge of the centers, and a documentary search was begun in the corresponding documentation centers. In each

case, the documentation necessary for analyzing the development of the center was made available by the museum archives and the town council. The documentary requisitions provided fundamental contextual information about the development of each project, clarifying the origins of the center and the decisions that conditioned its subsequent development as a rural museum.

After retrieving the documents and sorting the information, the researchers designed a battery of questions in accordance with the project objectives and the information collected. A total of 22 interviews were carried out in Graus and 34 in Valls d'Àneu. Interviewees included political agents involved in the creation or development of the centers and their workers; technicians and managers of municipal, provincial, and autonomous institutions; managers of associations and organizations related to the centers; members of the press; and managers and teachers in schools and educational organizations that work in, collaborate with, or are otherwise related to each of the centers. The interviews focused on the relationships between school institutions and museum centers.

This paper relies on interviews and documentary analysis. It is part of a larger ethnographic study from which interviews have been selected that refer to the relationships between schools and museums. Hence, the interviews presented here were conducted with research participants who either had a direct relationship with the school (teachers, school leaders, or informal educators) or served as museum directors and assistants (Table 1).

As Table 1 shows, four interviews were conducted for Espacio Pirineos and another four for the Ecomuseu. The informants were (1) professionals from the museums themselves, including directors and an administrative assistant, and (2) professionals from schools or organizations in charge of facilitating relationships between museums and educational bodies. Professionals in charge of infant and primary education, secondary education, and vocational training at both sites took part, as did a representative of the public educational service Learning Camp (Camp d'Aprenentatge, CdA), a pedagogical service offered in Valls d'Àneu by the Generalitat de Catalunya.

Table 1.
Informants in the interviews

	Graus	Valls d'Àneu
Museum workers	Director Administrative Assistant	Director
Educational leaders	Deputy Headmistress of the Infant and Primary Education Center Teacher of Secondary Education at the Secondary Education and Vocational Training Center Teacher of Mountain Studies at the Secondary School and Vocational Training Center	Director of the Camp d'Aprenentatge (CdA) ^a Director of the Infant and Primary Education Center of Esterrí Director of the Secondary School of Esterrí

^aThe CdA is an educational service offered by the Generalitat de Catalunya with the aim of raising awareness of the cultural and natural heritage of the valley (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2021).

A total of 4 weeks was spent in each enclave, which included cohabitation with the local population. During this time, the researchers observed the different dynamics in play and took part in organized activities. Some of the activities were part of the PATRIM project and involved meetings and discussions on how to approach and develop the project, with a focus on certain important aspects of heritage management and the relationship of each center with the local community. By living in the enclaves, and by means of consistent participation in activities and development of the relationship, the researchers were able to observe at close quarters how the projects operate. The educational function, a basic element of the transmission function of museums, was a continuous underlying presence.

In line with the recommendations of the Spanish State Anthropology Association (2014), the researchers informed each participant of the objectives of the research, as well as their rights as participants. Oral informed consent was obtained, and the confidentiality of the data provided by each participant is respected. The data collected were transcribed, analyzed, and classified into different categories corresponding to the research questions.

The following section presents the ethnographic context for each case and reports the results in relation to the RQs. An inductive analysis of the material selected for this paper was made based on the conceptual framework and the categories corresponding to the RQs.

It should be noted that, even within the category of rural museums, the variety of contexts makes it necessary to understand the specific origins and development of each center under study. Each case study therefore begins with a description of the enclave, with the aim of better contextualizing the possibilities of establishing synergies between museums and schools.

CASE 1: ESPACIO PIRINEOS

Research context

Espacio Pirineos is located in Graus, in the Ribagorza region, 82 km from the provincial capital, Huesca. As of January 1, 2020, Graus had 3365 inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2021). Espacio Pirineos is located very close to the town center, in what used to be the church of the Society of Jesus, which was consecrated in or around 1722 (Espacio Pirineos, 2021). In 1993, the consistory of Graus bought the church, which was in a poor state of repair. In 1996, the idea of creating an interpretation center in the building began to take shape, starting with the formation of the Heritage Committee by the Bishopric of Barbastro and the town council of Graus. The aim was to create a heritage center, largely as a tourist attraction for the municipality.

Since 1998, Espacio Pirineos has been promoted by the consistory of Graus, led by its mayor, who applied for aid to different entities, notably the government of Spain, the government of Aragon, and a range of private entities such as the financial services company Ibercaja. For some time, renovation work on the building was at a standstill, since the costs considerably exceeded the initial

budget and the town council had to seek additional financial support. The suspension of the work, as well as the removal and replacement of certain original architectural elements of the church, provoked debate among citizens and local politicians. Nevertheless, funding was obtained to complete the work, and the project continued.

The contract for the museographic elements of the project was awarded to a private company that produced a design in conjunction with the mayor and with the support of the culture technician (who was responsible for the center for more than a decade). The contents deal with the local cultural and natural heritage: different aspects of flora, fauna, and life in the Pyrenees and Ribagorza. For example, an audiovisual installation and a mural depicting the biodiversity of the Pyrenees are located where the altar used to be. The initial objectives of Espacio Pirineos were to stimulate local development through a range of exhibitions, conferences, and activities, as well as through the development of a heritage center for the purposes of education, knowledge, and research, for which there would be a documentation center and a local historical archive. For this reason, the center, which was inaugurated in December 2006, was initially called Espacio Pirineos, Center for Culture, Research and Leisure in the Pyrenees. The *leitmotiv* of the project was the promotion of tourism for the development of the local economy, based on a popular premise during the 1980s that investing in culture in general, and in museums in particular, would boost tourism, leading to economic and social development (Gray, 2015; Greffe & Krebs, 2010).

The center is not a legal entity in its own right, and it is funded by the town council of Graus. This dependence on specific budget allocations from the council hinders the center's autonomy, making it difficult for it to develop as a museum. Most of its funding goes to cover the cost of personnel and the maintenance of the building. In spite of these constraints, the center has continued to be very active at the level of the local community, establishing continuous or ad hoc relationships with different local agents, associations, and groups. It has two permanent (albeit not full-time) employees, namely the director of the center and an administrative assistant.

In 2011, the center changed its name to Espacio Pirineos, Center for Creation and Culture of the Pyrenees; the name change reflected the removal of research and leisure (and tourism) from the offering and represented a move toward being a cultural center rather than a heritage center. At the same time, there was a change in the municipal government in Graus, where the mayorship passed to a different political group, resulting in a change of perspective with respect to Espacio Pirineos. A reduction in budget, motivated in large part by the economic crisis of 2008 and the costs of maintaining Espacio Pirineos, which were considered very high, called the center's future into question. Ultimately, however, it was decided that the center should continue to operate.

Results

We first present the results in relation to RQ1: What is the scope of rural museums in relation to schools in the county, province, and region?

The interviews carried out with the two people in charge at Espacio Pirineos revealed a tension in respect of the center's scope. On the one hand, the director of the museum mentioned a lack of support from the administration for the development of the museum's education offering, which would have made it possible to reach a wider educational public. The director, who was trained in history and museum education, had tried to promote this aspect of the center's work. However, he admitted that he had not been able to develop it fully:

[In the permanent exhibition] we lack someone in education . . . [The permanent exhibition] is something we have but we know we can't develop any further. [. . .] We need to outsource this service [but] nobody is going to hire them [. . .]. It's a vicious circle: we can see that we don't have enough public for the permanent exhibition, but we don't have a person in charge of the education area, because we don't have anything to offer them either. And it doesn't depend on Espacio Pirineos either, it's Graus's problem. If you offer only the permanent exhibition in Espacio Pirineos, schools are not going to choose Graus.

A lack of time and resources, as well as the fact of not having an education department, means that the educational-pedagogical elements of the center have not been developed and, therefore, there is a lack of activities that are likely to attract schools.

This view is borne out by the fact that few schools visit the Espacio Pirineos center. This has not always been the case; at first, the center sent publicity letters and emails to schools in the Aragon region and neighboring Catalonia, Navarre, and the Basque Country. Some schools attended the center soon after it opened, but after 4 years the number of visits had decreased. According to the person in charge of administration at Espacio Pirineos, there was a "moment of stagnation [that] was no longer possible. [The centers that had already visited Espacio Pirineos] no longer came. [Then I continued] the distribution of emails." In the interview, he admitted that these efforts had not met with much success.

Local schools, however, come to Espacio Pirineos regularly, probably because of its proximity and its relationship with the territory. Here, we present the results in relation to RQ2: How do rural museums complement local schools?

Two public schools are located in Graus: a combined nursery (for ages 0–3) and primary school (3–12), and a secondary school (12–18). In contrast with the schools in neighboring towns and provinces, the relationship between these schools and Espacio Pirineos is close and involves regular contact.

For example, pupils from the infant and primary school of Graus visit the center at least once during the school year, as the deputy headmistress of the school explained:

Espacio Pirineos, when it was founded, for us it was a positive thing, because it was a building that was in poor condition and it gave a little light and brightness to the village. At the beginning, what we did was to visit the building with the schoolchildren so that they could get to know the resources available in their village.

We visited it with all the classes [. . .]. Then they started to offer us some activity, [. . .] about 8 or 9 years ago, [. . .] they offered us the dance activity to the school [. . .]. Then, if we wanted to do talks, conferences, even a short film screening, or something like that, we asked the town council to use Espacio Pirineos. It is one more resource that the town offers.

With regard to the educational role played by the museum's contents, the teacher noted: "Normally, we prepare [the pedagogical material before the visit], we already know what we are going to focus on and we exploit the content of the visit here [back at school], when we return." In other words, at the curricular level, the museum content is worked on at the school itself rather than at the museum.

In general, the teacher places great value on what Espacio Pirineos offers, although she thinks that more interactivity would help to motivate the pupils. For example, exhibition elements that the pupils could manipulate or experiment with would make it easier to internalize some of the conceptual elements that the museum seeks to transmit.

The secondary education and vocational training center of Graus has a different relationship with Espacio Pirineos, in which the following dynamics can be identified: (1) courses of compulsory secondary education (ESO), which are ad hoc and sporadic, and (2) specific activities run by certain areas of the center, notably vocational training for the role of sports technician in mountain sports and climbing.

With regard to the compulsory courses, a teacher of Spanish language at the school described how there were no fixed or regular visits to Espacio Pirineos, although there were occasional visits if the theme of an exhibition was relevant. When asked what activities had been carried out at the center, this teacher responded, "What have we done? We have been aware of what Espacio Pirineos offers and have taken advantage of it whenever it has been useful and interesting." As in the case of the primary school's use of the museum content, in-depth treatment of the curricular elements takes place after the exhibition, at the school rather than at the museum.

In addition to the compulsory courses, teachers and pupils are brought together with Espacio Pirineos in ad hoc activities. The Spanish language teacher described an ongoing short-story competition in which pupils from the school take part:

The jury is always made up of the members of Espacio Pirineos, some members of the town council, and the teachers of the language department [of the secondary school]. And every year we collaborate with that and we participate by being part of the jury of the contest. And there we do advertise in the school so that the kids can participate. And that is a permanent collaboration.

Another example of ongoing collaboration is the vocational training for sports technicians, described here by the person in charge of the program:

The International Mountain Day in December and the Pyrenees week . . . are two very key events that somehow . . . that they [Espacio Pirineos] would not celebrate without us and we would not celebrate if it were not in Espacio Pirineos, [. . .] [because] in the end Espacio Pirineos works as a global call to an activity that has to do with the world of the Pyrenees in general and the theme in particular.

This teacher sees the work of Espacio Pirineos and its dissemination in a very positive light. In contrast to the secondary school pupils of Spanish language, for the mountain sports students, going to Espacio Pirineos, which the teacher refers to as the “small conference center in the territory,” rather than to their usual school provides “a stimulus [that goes beyond] the extracurricular activities.”

It is worth mentioning that both the primary school and the secondary school in Graus can make a request to the town council to use Espacio Pirineos if they need extra space.

CASE 2: THE ECOMUSEU

Research context

The Ecomuseu dels Valls d'Àneu is located in the valley of that name, which currently has 1873 inhabitants (Instituto d'Estadística de Catalunya, 2021). Two local agencies were involved in its creation: Esterri d'Àneu town council and the Cultural Council of the Valls d'Àneu, which was created in 1983. The former was considering the possibility of creating an ethnological museum, and the latter was planning how to manage the cultural heritage of the valley, which consists of the municipalities of Esterri d'Àneu, Alt Àneu, Espot, and La Guingueta d'Àneu.

When the first project was drawn up in 1987, it incorporated the idea of an ecomuseum as a way to manage and stimulate the valley's cultural and natural heritage, thereby reinforcing the active role of the local population. This project adopted the approach of the new museology advocated by Rivière (1989), according to which the local community should become the main actor and beneficiary of the museum. Hence, an ecomuseum should become a “mirror” in which the local population sees and recognizes itself (Rivière, 1985). In 1994, the Ecomuseu dels Valls d'Àneu was opened in the Casa Gassia, a traditional Pallaresan house restored for the purpose. The Ecomuseu also has several “radials”: different heritage areas of the valley to which the museum offers visits. Radials currently include the Gavàs Rosette cheese factory, the church of Sant Joan d'Isil, the sawmill at Alos, the monumental complex of Son, the monastery of Sant Pere de Burgal, the church of Santa Maria d'Àneu, the church of Sant Julià d'Unarre, and the urban itinerary of Esterri d'Àneu.

The Ecomuseu is managed by a consortium that consists of the Consell Comarcal de Pallars Sobirà, the Consell Cultural dels Valls d'Àneu, the town councils of the valley, the University of Lleida, the Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park, and the Generalitat de Catalunya (Ecomuseu dels Valls d'Àneu, 2021). The management of the museum is the responsibility of an anthropologist who was initially part of the technical team and who worked in collaboration with the

anthropology department of the University of Lleida to carry our research, assess the acquisition of movable property, create a specialized library, and help to disseminate the project.

The funding of the Ecomuseu depends on municipal and supramunicipal public institutions, as well as on sales of tickets, products, and services. It has five permanent employees, with temporary employees contracted to work during the summer period. It collaborates with different entities, including a Learning Camp (CdA) for young people that is run by the Generalitat, and the nursery, primary, and secondary schools located in the municipality. Since it opened, efforts have been made to strengthen links with the local population and to build a closer relationship with the territory by offering numerous activities, including research, oral history projects on life in the territory, heritage conservation, and (since 2005) the exhibition and marketing of Pyrenean artisan products.

Results

We first present the results in relation to RQ1: What is the scope of rural museums in relation to schools in the county, province, and region?

When the Ecomuseu was founded, its contact strategy was carried out in collaboration with the CdA. In the 1980s, the CdA and the Ecomuseu were both young institutions, and they decided to create a network to make their educational offerings better known. Later, the Ecomuseu opted to broaden its dissemination strategy by contacting tourist companies that offer activity packages to schools outside the county. However, a museum professional interviewed for this study noted that the services offered to the schools via tourist packages have less depth and are of lower quality than those offered to the schools that come through the CdA:

With the more external schools it is more difficult for us to work before and after. Normally, we offer an activity, they hire it, but being aware that there is no dialogue, no return [. . .]. But when these schools come through the CdA, it is more thought out.

These differences in depth and quality imply a close and continuous relationship between the Ecomuseu and the CdA; it is the synergies between the two institutions that allow the services provided to schools to be of higher quality. According to the director of the CdA, the Ecomuseu tries to transmit to visiting students “how people lived and still live in the valley; what are its cultural, social, and economic characteristics, as well as the natural ones,” thereby helping them to understand how the present is conditioned by the past and by memories of the past. The director was trained in education, and this background shapes her collaboration with the Ecomuseu; she studied “teaching and pedagogy [. . .] and when the Ecomuseu needed some didactic guides, I am going to collaborate with the subject, with the curricular materials.” The Ecomuseu, whose workers come from the fields of education and environmental sciences, also supplies elements in relation to history and anthropology that the CdA cannot provide.

The intermediary work and networking of the CdA between the school and the Ecomuseu is important, as they adapt their offerings to the needs of the school. More than 30 schools a year come to the CdA, several of which also visit the Ecomuseu. If the weather is bad, the Ecomuseu makes its facilities available to the CdA. According to the informant:

When it's raining, snowing, if the weather is bad . . . [for] an indoor activity, there are days when [the Ecomuseu] ends up being a resource for bad weather. If I had planned a visit [. . .] but the weather is bad, there are schools that say, "no, no, no," well, then Casa Gassia ends up being a resource too.

This informant also emphasized the Ecomuseu's contribution to the village:

The Ecomuseu gives a lot of cultural life to the village [. . .]. I think Esterri has cultural richness thanks to the fact that the Ecomuseu creates things: book presentations, talks about things [. . .], it is also a quality tourist-family resource.

In short, the director of the CdA highlighted the positive contribution of the Ecomuseu to local development. The two organizations have a symbiotic relationship, each contributing and offering elements from which everyone benefits.

Here, we present the results in relation to RQ2: How do rural museums complement local schools?

In Esterri d'Àneu, a public school and a secondary school are located in a building attached to the Ecomuseu. According to the director of the Ecomuseu, the relationship with both schools is simple and natural: "What projects can we develop together? There is a very basic thing: every time we have an exhibition, they come." This kind of close relationship also exists between the Ecomuseu and the schools in the village and elsewhere in the valley.

In her interview, the headmistress of the primary school in Esterri explained that collaboration between the school and the Ecomuseu takes three different forms. First, the Ecomuseu offers programs, events, and activities that the school can attend. In other words, it makes its program known, and the school uses what it finds interesting. Second, the Ecomuseu and the school collaborate on joint projects that are carried out without funding or institutional support beyond the willingness of the two parties; thus, "the relationship is human capital and time." In using this expression, the headmistress of the primary school emphasizes that the value is based on common human interest and collaboration, and that it does not fall within an economic or institutional network. Third, the Ecomuseu allows the school to use specific spaces if the school needs them. The headmistress explained this aspect of the relationship:

I have always found the Ecomuseu to be very cooperative. In such a way that the whole [Ecomuseu] is seen as if it were an extension of the school. Because we need a classroom for dance, [. . .] can we use this classroom?

Always yes. The Ecomuseu has always been open to the school. [And, at the same time, the workers of the Ecomuseu] have a great capacity to adapt to the demands.

The director also stated that the Ecomuseu functions as a kind of cultural center that offers a series of after-school activities, including sports, yoga, theater, and English classes. Thus, almost every cultural activity in Esterri involves the Ecomuseu, and this involvement strengthens its links with the local community.

The director values the themes that the Ecomuseu works on, because “it helps to understand where we come from and to create identity.” He believes that the Ecomuseu greatly enriches the school, because people regard it as their own, and they transmit the idea that culture and heritage belong to everyone. However, he believes that the museum project should be revitalized to include more didactic and interactive elements that allow children to experiment with different aspects of the museum’s content.

The director of the secondary school in Esterri also sees the relationship with the Ecomuseu very positively, although he admitted that the relationship has been rather sporadic:

We have been collaborating relatively little [with the Ecomuseu], having a very good relationship [. . .] it works very well the theme of giving the spaces to do activities ourselves, but our [current] idea is to take more advantage of the activities that they have [in the Ecomuseu] for groups. In addition, we want to improve that ratio of activities that is a bit low. We want the boys and girls to get to know the Ecomuseu better. In secondary school it is a bit more distant for them and we want to break this stereotype. Last year we did a collaboration with some TikTok videos [. . .] mixing a bit of that, social networks and Ecomuseu and the students. We then made a positive evaluation [about the intervention].

It is important to note that the Esterri Secondary School Annual Project expressly includes the promotion of relations with local organizations, including the Ecomuseu. The objective is to carry out one activity per year per group, which implies a certain degree of willingness to consolidate the relationship between the secondary school and the Ecomuseu. Three of the activities are as follows:

1. Students visit the museum, where they select an object, research it, and make a video about it based on the information obtained from their research. Finally, the video is disseminated through social networks.
2. Under the auspices of a local radio station, students make a program on topics of interest to them. Among these topics are the activities carried out by the museum, such as an exhibition. In this case, students present the theme of the exhibition and conduct an interview with museum staff to explain the issues related to the design of the exhibition.
3. Students create exhibitions on issues related to curriculum content that they are working on at school. Their exhibitions are later shown at the museum.

CONCLUSION

This paper has analyzed the synergies between schools and museums as institutions that serve young members of society in two Pyrenean enclaves from the perspectives of the main professionals involved. Given their rural locations, both the schools and the museums face the challenge of attracting an educational public. Coordination between schools and museums is also difficult (Anderson et al., 2006). Among the difficulties are a lack of recognition of the educational value of visiting a museum; doubts about the appropriateness of museum teaching materials to school needs; the work necessary to organize visits and to ensure student safety when traveling to and visiting the museum; and a lack of fluid communication between school teachers and museum staff beyond the visit itself. In addition, museums in small rural municipalities, as we have shown in the two case studies, face a significant lack of the economic resources and personnel necessary to carry out the full range of museum functions, not least the educational function. In rural contexts, the difficulties identified here in relation to communication, adequacy of educational material, and specific training in education for museum personnel are even more complicated.

The analysis in this paper clarifies the differences in the origins, organization, and development of the museums. Espacio Pirineos was an initiative of Graus town council, on which it remains administratively dependent, and was originally intended to boost tourism. In contrast, the Ecomuseu was formed as an initiative on the part of several associations and local entities, with an independent board of trustees for its management and the aim of carrying out the objectives of the new museology.

In relation to RQ1, which concerns the scope of rural museums in relation to schools in the county, province, and region, each of the cases presents a different reality, despite the fact that neither has a developed pedagogical offering. In Graus, the scope is small for two main reasons. According to workers at the center, the primary reason is the lack of qualified pedagogical staff, and the secondary reason is the lack of interest from schools that have been sent information about the museum via post or email.

Although the Ecomuseu does not have a pedagogical department, its educational function is supplemented through the structure of the CdA, which has also helped to generate educational materials. In addition, the dissemination of the center's activities is carried out not by email or post but by direct contact with tourism companies that offer packages of different activities in the valley.

In relation to RQ2, which concerns how rural museums complement local schools, the cases have more in common. In Graus, the relationship with the local primary school is close, as the pupils visit at least once a year, although the curricular exploitation of the museum contents takes place back at the school. In the case of the secondary school and the vocational training center, visits are sporadic and directed to topics of interest to a specialized educational public. Thus, secondary school students occasionally collaborate in activities or visit specific exhibitions, whereas sports technician students, who have a vocational interest in the Pyrenees, attend more frequently.

In Esterri, the relationship between the schools and the museum is even closer, as they are located in the same building. The link between the primary school and the museum is consolidated in specific joint projects created through a network, and the activities are normally based at the museum. However, the relationship between Esterri secondary school and the Ecomuseu has been more sporadic over the years, and it is only now that the school is considering how to consolidate the relationship through joint projects.

In line with the findings of Ateş and Lane (2019), these cases show that in order for museums to establish lasting relationships with schools, coordination, good communication, and close relationships with professionals and school leaders are necessary. Efforts must be made to connect the school's knowledge with the experience that takes place in the museum (Ziebell & Suda, 2020). In the cases under study, the local heritage legacy and its connection with the museum experience is vital (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2020), which demonstrates the importance of relating identity elements to the educational experience offered in the museum. In other words, the aspects of heritage related to belonging and cultural identification are of key importance in these museums. It is therefore essential to network with educational institutions; the wider the network, the longer-lasting the relationships.

The main difference between the two cases lies in the system of relationships and networks created by the Ecomuseu, which, given its more autonomous constitution, is in a position to establish key connections. In addition, the structure of the CdA provides a counterbalance to the lack of a pedagogical department in the museum. At Espacio Pirineos, there is no such developed network, and school visits are mostly limited to local schools. Nevertheless, the similarity between the two cases is visible in the symbiotic relationships that they foster with local schools and that develop the educational function of each museum.

In summary, this paper has analyzed the perspectives of museum and educational professionals on the synergy between schools and museums in two rural areas of the Pyrenees in the PATRIM network. The findings show that, in the absence of pedagogical departments in rural museums, establishing networks between those museums and schools is vital if relationships are to be consolidated. Symbiosis between schools and museums occurs when both parties contribute to the relationship, and it is easier to establish a network with local schools than with supralocal ones. This has direct implications for museum education, as rural museums can become key institutions for the transmission of local heritage, encouraging collaboration and networking with schools, and creating synergies that benefit all parties in terms of student learning.

The main limitation of this study is its small scale. Comparable research in other locations would help to verify this study's characterization of the reach of rural museums to schools and its emphasis on a symbiotic relationship as the result of joint work between the institutions. The information gathered in this research indicates that online initiatives have not been developed in the two cases presented. However, as a consequence of COVID-19, such initiatives may have been undertaken in the meantime; if so, future research could focus on these. Finally, the objective of the PATRIM project is to analyze the relationships between rural museums and local institutions, including schools. It

could usefully be followed by an action-research project that draws on the findings so far to strengthen the relationship between museums and different institutions, including schools. **END**

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

NOTE

1. According to Beech (1992), the term “heritage center” may be used to soften the concept of museum in cases where the conservation of objects is not a primary function. According to the ICOM definition, a museum is an institution dedicated to the conservation, research, communication, and exhibition of tangible and intangible heritage. Espacio Pirineos fulfills the functions of research, communication, and exhibition. However, although the center has a small collection, the conservation function has not been central to its activity, and the term “heritage center” is therefore more appropriate.

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