1. Methods of investigation: textual, visual, material

Recovery of Spanish Civil War sites in the Valencia Region: From methodological research to the creation of tourist routes

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Despite the enormous amount of literature on the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) there are still a great many gaps in the record, even where there is relatively abundant information and in the most thoroughly studied fields, such as the political and military aspects of the conflict. There is still considerable ignorance about everyday wartime life, the civilian work carried out by the defeated side, the repression during and after the war. Little has been recorded about most of the sites that played a major role throughout the war and immediately after. In some parts of Spain there were so many sites that they could be said to make up real warfare backdrops. This does not necessarily mean that battles were fought on those sites.

The concept of war sites: memory and evocation of times of warfare

We class as ‘war sites’ all places significantly involved in the conflict, not just those with political and military associations, but production sites and sites of cultural and social relevance. To be included as a ‘war site’ a place of cultural and social relevance must however have undergone significant changes as a result of the war. This means, for instance, that a factory that was manufacturing soap in the years before, during and after the war could hardly be considered a war site, unless there had been relevant and exceptional changes in its operative, structural or complementary uses.

War sites are therefore classified into the following four types:

1. Sites built for wartime purposes, namely, shelters, trenches and bunkers
   Many of these disappeared shortly after being built, due to the unusual and temporary nature of their construction. Some shelters and similar structures were sealed up once the Second World War ended, though many can easily be recovered. As a rule, only those sites located away from urban areas still show evidence of their original use.

2. Sites whose use was changed during the war to meet new requirements
   Examples include recreation centres and schools that were turned into military clinics or field dressing stations, or country estates near urban areas that became school camps for evacuated children.

3. Sites that experienced important events during the war, both military and political
   These include sites of battles, bombardments or strategic positions – for example the location where the Nationalists broke through to the Mediterranean via Vinarós. Sites of political importance include the site of El Fondó de Monòver airport from where the defeated Spanish government left the country.

4. Structures built or altered after the conflict in memory of the war
   Many memorials were erected to remember the victorious side. These include numerous war memorials and the commemoration of buildings, such as the Alicante prison where José Antonio Primo de Rivera – founder of the
Spanish fascist party, the *Falange Española* [Spanish Phalanx] – was jailed until he was finally executed in 1936 by a firing squad. The prison became a place of pilgrimage for Falangist organisations.¹

What has happened to the sites

In all the types of sites mentioned above, both the/their remembrance of the wartime period and their re-use for cultural purposes differ quite considerably. This depends on whether:

- the site essentially is evocative of that time
- the site is properly preserved (regardless of the fact that the activities currently carried out are different from those undertaken in times of war)
- the site has been transformed, to a greater or lesser extent
- memorials have been built at the site

Sites that are evocative could include some defensive fortifications in the interior of the Valencian region, and almost all types of shelters, including municipal, factory and military shelters. Occasionally such sites have been preserved almost untouched after so many decades. They were almost always closed to the public, shrouded in mystery. This is what happened to the last seat of the Spanish Republican government, also the residence of the Republican prime minister of Spain, Juan Negrín, who held office during the last two years of the war, 1936 to 1939. The estate is in the province of Alicante; it is known as Finca El Poblet, in the town of Petrer – or *the Yuste Position* – in the military jargon of the time. It has hardly been altered since the war and was hidden away from prying eyes by a dense thicket (Valero 2004).
Valencia’s City Hall is an example of a site that has been properly preserved, although the activities currently carried out in it today are different from those undertaken in times of war. The building was used during the war as seat of government, parliament or venue for the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals Congress (Aznar 2007).

Sites that have been transformed, sometimes radically, include the port of Alicante, which witnessed a massive exodus of Republicans, and the Campo de los Almendros, an unirrigated grove, also in Alicante, where those who were unable to flee the country by sea gathered. Neither of these two places recall these tragic episodes, as the port is now a recreation area while the grove has become a suburb.

At some sites memorials have been built. Examples include the numerous crosses scattered around all towns and villages in memory of the fallen on the victorious side. Recently, the memory of the defeated side is being recovered, and memorials and commemorative stone plaques in their honour are now more common. Whatever the type of site, preserving, or where appropriate promoting, such sites in memory of the Civil War requires highlighting identifiable traits connected with that point in time, disseminating available information on the sites, explaining their connection with the conflict, and – if necessary – researching fundamental or complementary aspects that may foster knowledge of those places. Depending on their intended use, further data and learning materials will be needed to add to their didactic appeal as well as to promote their cultural potential (even for touristic purposes if integrated in clearly defined projects). Awareness of war sites can be boosted, and a good example to follow is that of Alcoi. There, a visit to a shelter has been complemented by the restoration of an infirmary, with photographs on the walls of bombardments on the town and testimonials of those who survived the attacks.

Factors affecting current public knowledge

Although many structures and places are still today linked to the Civil War in some way, public knowledge of these depends (to a greater or lesser extent) on a number of factors.

First and foremost, the extent of public knowledge depends on how the site is connected to the conflict. People usually know significantly more about sites where notable military and political events occurred rather than about those used for financial, social or cultural purposes. A battlefield is much more likely to be associated with war than a building that was adapted to house refugees.

People are more aware of a site’s connection with the conflict and its original role in cases where its use has been maintained ever since. Some places were used for several different purposes during the war. For example, the Salon La Mundial in Elda, was originally a shoe factory but was used during this period (simultaneously or successively) as a social club run by the Spanish socialist party, a company store, a field dressing station, the improvised premises of the local leisure centre, the main welfare service canteen and a billet for Moroccan occupation troops.

The public may have little awareness of a site if its current use or appearance is very different today from what it was during the war. Unless one is a connoisseur of the Spanish Civil War, it is quite difficult to evoke the events that took place in the old docks in the port of Alicante, which has now been developed into a recreation area, or in the vineyard which in the past used to be the airfield from which Negrín’s Republican government and Dolores Ibarruri, known as La Pasionaria – the most renowned female member of the Spanish Communist Party, member of the parliament and icon of the popular and military resistance against the fascists – took flight in 1939.

Another factor determining the extent of public awareness is whether the powers that be show any wish to commemorate the war. That is something that General Franco’s regime was highly aware of during its first decades in power. Gradually, however, interest in remembering the conflict – which had a role in the foundation, recognition and even justification of the dictatorial regime – waned. With the transition to democracy after Franco’s death, efforts were made to try to forget something that divided a society in which a number of known participants remained alive. Attempts were made to overcome past events, fostering obscurity and removing many symbols without replacing them with others that might evoke the defeated side.

Following on from this factor affecting public awareness, is the issue of whether the site or structure stresses values defended by the powers that triumphed, which in Spain was the armed forces who won the war. The
latter sought to keep the memory alive of both what they considered to be heroic deeds in battle, and the pain suffered by their supporters. In doing so a great number of symbols and gravestones – anything that brought the defeated side to mind – were utterly obliterated.

Levels of public awareness also depend on the extent to which a site or its history is part of what people know about their environment. The role played by emblematic buildings of their city or of places that support their identity is generally remembered. More inconspicuous war sites that are less at the heart of people's everyday lives are for the most part condemned to oblivion.

If a large group of protagonists or direct witnesses in the events connected with a particular site are still alive memory of the connection between historical facts and places is higher.

This memory decreases significantly among the public if witnesses have disappeared, are few in number, had tangential involvement, or are relatives who evoke those episodes. Today there are hardly any direct political participants in the Spanish Civil War still alive. There are also fewer and fewer people who were militarily engaged, and – after seven decades – only the young of the time can bear witness to this. Hence, it is no longer possible to interview important figures – compare this to more recent conflicts such as in Bosnia, Algeria or the Cuban revolution.

The number and quality of documents connected with a site helps inform the public and make them aware of the significance of a particular spot. Archives and collections represent a superb wealth of material and include a great variety of sources, such as press articles, literature, personal writings, photographs, souvenirs and recordings. On the other hand, as one comes down to the daily routine of specific sites – especially in small towns – the number and quality of documents notably decreases. Sometimes, it is simply impossible to learn with any certainty what happened there during the conflict.

Finally, personal memories, hazy or clear, endure when past episodes become legends. This is the case for great battles, important political events or violent incidents. Connections are barely made between major events and daily routines such as work, supply management and culture.

**Researching an issue that remains controversial**

Some features peculiar to the Spanish Civil War prevent much detached objectivity on events and places. One must not forget that the clash was characterised by its ideological nature and conflicting conceptions of the world. It was a civil conflict, although there was a significant foreign intervention: Nazis and fascists supported the ultra-conservatives, while internationalist volunteers and Soviet advisers backed the Republicans. The conflict was a confrontation more between national concepts and understanding of concepts of state role and organisation. This is proved by the great involvement of Catalonia in defending Madrid. The Civil War constituted an internal conflict at the core of each particular territory and society, where supporters of both sides coexisted.

Subsequent generations took on the legacy of the dispute. On 25 May 2006, 68 years after the bombing of Alicante’s market that killed more than 300 people, a commemorative stone plaque was placed on one of the building’s entrance doors. A few days later the plaque was vandalised and has been replaced with another one with a glass shelter. The conflict still generates a lot of attention: it is virtually the main Spanish issue of the 20th century.

In view of all this, one can easily imagine how much reluctance is encountered when attempting to undertake research on the Civil War. In recalling specific events, people express concern about who might benefit or be damaged. There is sometimes distrust because disclosed information could reveal a relative or friend’s guilt. Some people believe that throwing light on these matters only hampers the reconciliation that began following the Amnesty Act, which was actually a piece of legislation intended to bring closure. Crucial subjects remain taboo. Any in-depth study would furthermore touch on the role played by institutions that held effective control, such as the army, the Catholic Church, financial corporations large and small – ranging from main banks to local farming cooperatives, and the most influential families in each area. It is therefore not uncommon to find those who seek totally or partially, legally or to all intents and purposes, to hinder access to archives.

All this obviously has an effect on any museum project or on promoting and bestowing greater status to war sites. Curiously
enough, places where military action took place can be approached with more neutrality. There is especially extensive data about both landscapes where battles were fought and the regional capitals that were controlled by the conflicting sides, including Valencia (Aragó et al 2007), Salamanca (Robledo 2007) and Barcelona. Barcelona’s city archive has not only collected a great many publications, but also allows for online access to a well-stocked photographic collection. When it comes to more day-to-day matters, however, connected with life in small towns and villages, factory environments and social relationships, the coverage of information is nevertheless insufficient, patchy and fragmentary.

In approaching the recovery and preservation of sites linked to the Civil War in specific geographical areas it is first necessary to determine what is meant by war sites, to assess all available resources on the subject matter, as well as to ascertain the basic role played by those places during the conflict. Doing this involves using often uneven data from all sources connected with library collections, newspapers, traditional archives, photographs, cartography and oral testimonies.

In the case of Valencia, sources available include:
- local histories
- local journals
- literary works
- biographies and memoirs
- periodicals and newspapers
- archives
- photographs
- maps
- oral histories

Local histories
Local histories give a general picture of the development of the war in particular territories and studies on specific issues.

Local journals
Several of these – often published annually – are preserved, often featuring festivities focusing on historical events or local customs.

Literary works
Novels, plays and poems enjoyed more or less widespread dissemination, some of which pay special attention to the period’s best remembered episodes (yet often not explicitly).

Biographies
Biographies and memoirs – usually hand-written – are only recently being published, as those who previously feared to express how much repression and hardship they had suffered have now reached old age, and either they or their families have decided to publish their memoirs.

Magazines and newspapers
Various periodicals and newspaper sources with local scope were frequently published by workers’ parties or trade unions, and even though they were prone to an ideological bias, they contain extremely rich information on events and places. Regional papers were published right until the end of the conflict, almost always following the seizure of existing newspapers. The national press enjoyed much greater dissemination – very rarely did it offer data on small towns but it has nonetheless contributed by depicting key events.

Archives
A considerable amount of documents contained in archives are yet to be explored. People studying them usually focus on political and military aspects, at different levels. Local archives confer special importance to town council minutes, which reflect local vicissitudes. These collections, however, also contain a wide range of documents, including plans, lists, inventories and public health-related files. Such information is sometimes extraordinarily valuable to discover how estates and buildings were altered to meet the needs of war.

National collections, such as the section on the Civil War in the Salamanca AHN (National History Archive) or those managed by the army, such as those in Ávila and Segovia, keep military records, maps and information on local political organisations throughout the country. A large number of files on political parties and trade unions are preserved, though not very uniformly. There are also many private archives which are certainly disparate but nonetheless indispensable at local level.

Photographs
Photographs can teach us a great deal about landscapes of war and sudden turning points in people’s lives and environment.
Photographic archives – or specific sections within broader archives, specialised websites (Memoria republicana, guerracivil.org or Alicante vivo, to name a few) and extraordinary collections owned by photographers – portray the conflict. The few aerial photographs that exist arouse particular interest. A recently published book about the air attacks on the town of Alcoi is a good example (Beneito 2007). There are also thousands of private photographs taken by families, some better than others, but all of which contribute something. They are zealously kept as private heritage, however, their owners often make them available to researchers.

Maps
Cartography is extremely helpful for researchers. The pages contained in the Spanish National Topographic Map have proven to be especially useful: more so when combined with modern mapping and aerial photographs using Geographical Information Systems and other computer applications to overlay layers of information. An example of the latter is the so-called 1956 American Flight.4

Pictures show that many towns have remained almost unchanged since 1939 as regards urban planning. There are also numerous military maps. Studies on key issues that had an effect on people’s daily lives can be made thanks to simple notes in the margin of a map or thematic plans. For instance, some maps have survived featuring the places attacked during the bombardment of Alicante and showing how flour was distributed throughout the province.

Oral histories
Finally, although compilations of written transcriptions and tape recordings are available, though often disparate, gathering oral sources is equally imperative and urgent. First-hand witnesses of the conflict can contribute valuable information that may shed light on conventional data or enable us to understand the past better. Since almost all major protagonists have died, ordinary people – usually they were teenagers or young men and women at the time of the Civil War – who have little connection with the conflict but in-depth knowledge of specific sites can provide clarification, anecdotes and clues to continue researching, despite memory lapses and continuing silences due to fear. When approaching interviewees whose relatives were involved in the war, one frequently observes mythologisation and biased information and they tend to be afraid to convey the horror suffered by those closest to them. It is possible, however, to recover typical family histories and gain access to important material, including letters, photographs and objects.

Increasing the number of participants produces a snowball effect that allows many more than expected to be contacted.

Recovering the memory of war sites becomes a simpler task if a conscious synthesis of sources is undertaken. The following case shows what I mean. A book published in New York during the war (SCWAA 1938) contains drawings by evacuated children who had been admitted to school camps around the country. Many portray both disasters of war and the quiet life they were leading in their new homes. A few of those drawings include the stamp of a school camp located in Beneixama (Alicante).

When I visited this town an old man gave me directions unhesitatingly it seemed. He pointed out the farmland where the school camp had been established. He told me about events that had taken place there and came with me to visit the site, which surprisingly preserved features depicted in the children’s drawings. A history of the camp’s evolution was achieved thanks to complementary testimonials.

The school camp was moved from its original location to a beautiful stately home in the centre. Later it was permanently established in a convent located in the nearby Villa de Biar. Cartography, archive documents, new personal testimonials and photography will undoubtedly enable us to reveal more about the history of that school camp.
Fig 1.45 The building that housed Beneixama School Camp as it looks today. (Photo: José Ramón Valero Escandell)

Fig 1.46 (right) The stately home in the centre of Beneixama, to which the school camp was moved, as it looks today. (Photo: José Ramón Valero Escandell)

Fig 1.47 (far right) Eventually the Beneixama School Camp occupied this convent in the nearby Villa de Biar. (Photo: José Ramón Valero Escandell)
Cultural and/or tourist use of war sites

The research presented here has been undertaken in a systematic way. Information from different sources has been synthesised, thus enabling an in-depth study of Civil War sites and suggesting cultural uses for them. Furthermore, a team from the Universidad de Alicante conducted a detailed analysis on four villages in the region of Valle Medio del Vinalopó (Valero 2007). The first step was to produce an individual record for each village, including: its accurate location, using maps, photographs and even geographical coordinates to facilitate access by GPS (global positioning system); land uses before, during and after the war; a detailed description of the site; its possible historical interest to further understand the evolution of the conflict in the site's zone of influence; and information sources to confirm the village's connection with the war.

The aim is to achieve a more detailed picture of life there and to formally add interesting additional comments (see data sheet Figure 1.48). Similarly, a number of supplementary resources – including documentary archives, museum collections, audio recordings, interesting objects and photographs – will need a systematic, detailed inventory to be produced. This will facilitate access to the resources in order to promote the architectural heritage's appeal and understanding.

In those places where the rich cultural heritage is suitable for public interpretation – and even tourist potential, if it evokes general interest – further research should cover potential new uses. The assessment needs to address the value of the resources at hand; the degree of preservation and fragility; accessibility; information signs; available equipment and services both on-site and nearby; the kind of potential use; and closeness to other similar sites which may add to its value. As an example, see datasheet 2 (Figure 1.49), including one such proposal designed by Professor Rosario Navalón who works at the University Institute for Geographic Research at Alicante University. She is a co-director of the study on the region of Medio del Vinalopó. Professor Navalón produced the section on potential tourist interest and creation of cultural routes.

Dissemination of the key role played by these sites during the Civil War inevitably requires strengthening the levels of planning legislation or policies to protect the sites from redevelopment, especially should no such preservation policy be currently in place, or if major construction works are being carried out nearby. It would be even more convenient if...
relevant war sites were officially declared ‘assets of cultural interest’. Interest is undoubtedly fostered by publication, both in the form of specialised academic analysis and articles written in the local media. Further promotion is ensured by holding temporary exhibitions on the most interesting issues connected with the site, more so if rich and appealing period material is available. There are areas that bore witness to major war episodes, including Valencia (capital of the Republic for a number of months) and Vinarós and Maestrazgo (in the province of Castellón), where Nationalist troops chose to drive a wedge between Catalonia and the other Republican territories. The Elda Valley is another significant war site, since it was there that Negrín’s Republican government finally fell. The prime minister’s residence was located in the nearby town of Petrer, close to Monóver airfield, from which his government left the country.

Some very important landscapes of war – where the final defeat actually occurred – are scattered around the province of Alicante. One such site is the harbour area or Campo de los Almendros. Permanent exhibitions or heritage visitor centres may introduce the public to this period of the country’s history and to resources that help to understand this better.

Creating more or less permanent cultural routes on suitably preserved war sites with historical relevance, and various interesting characteristics is anything but nonsensical. People’s interest in these is unquestionable if they are displayed to new generations as a path for reflection upon past mistakes which no country should ever repeat: a clear commitment to peace, tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

**Resumen**

La recuperación de los lugares de la guerra civil en la comunidad valenciana: de la investigación metodológica a la creación de rutas turísticas

Los lugares que protagonizaron la Guerra Civil Española son tan abundantes en algunos espacios geográficos concretos que podríamos hablar de auténticos paisajes de guerra, no sólo en los ámbitos políticos o militares, sino también en los productivos, culturales y sociales. Básicamente son cuatro tipos de lugares: los construidos por razones bélicas – refugios, trincheras, casamatas... –; los que se adaptaron a la situación excepcional generada por la guerra – hospitales de sangre o fincas de recreo reconvertidas en colonias escolares... –; los escenarios de batallas o actos políticos relevantes; y los monumentos conmemorativos de aquella tragedia.

El recuerdo del tiempo bélico y su reutilización cultural depende del grado de conservación del lugar: continúan usos y apariencia de entonces, mantiene sólo la vieja imagen del lugar, ha sufrido cambios radicales o es conmemorativo. Conservar los lugares como memoria del conflicto requiere resaltar los rasgos identificativos del momento, divulgar la información destacable vinculada al tema o investigarla en profundidad, elaborar materiales complementarios que potencien su atractivo didáctico y expositivo.

Su grado de conocimiento público depende de factores como el tipo de vinculación con el conflicto (atrae más lo militar), la pervivencia de funciones, la conservación de la imagen histórica, la divulgación o silencio de la vinculación por parte de los poderes públicos, su carácter de lugares socialmente identitarios o significativos, la supervivencia de testigos, la abundancia de documentación o la mitificación de los hechos a ellos asociados.

Abordar la recuperación implica conceptualizar tales lugares, analizar los recursos disponibles, precisar las funciones desempeñadas. La información es fragmentaria, pero rica y variada. En Valencia las fuentes bibliográficas predominantes son historias y revistas locales, obras literarias, biografías a veces manuscritas. Disponemos de prensa republicana desde la escala local a la estatal y de archivos – locales, nacionales... – parcialmente inexplorados. La fotografía de época, imprescindible, conservada en fondos públicos o colecciones particulares, es accesible en algunas páginas web; además, existen fotografías aéreas, como las de los bombardeos italianos. La cartografía facilita el estudio con mapas temáticos de época – frentes, abastecimiento, siniestralidad... – y su comparación con otros actuales. Finalmente, los testimonios directos, de urgente recuperación. Interrelacionar convenientemente estas fuentes – oralidad, archivos locales, mapas, fotos, biografías... – facilita la recuperación de la memoria de los lugares.
La investigación sistemática profundiza en ellos y permite su utilización cultural. Se requieren fichas detalladas de lugares y edificios —uso, localización, conservación...—, a partir de fuentes informativas diversas, ampliadas con material complementario que potencie el atractivo y su comprensión histórica. Cuando la riqueza patrimonial permita el aprovechamiento cultural, debemos reforzar la protección urbanística y realizar estudios paralelos valorativos sobre fragilidad, accesibilidad, equipamiento, servicios disponibles... Publicaciones, científicas o divulgativas, y exposiciones temporales potenciarán el interés. Sobre territorios ligados a momentos esenciales – Valencia capital, Negrín y el Vinalopó, el puerto de Alicante...— caben exposiciones permanentes y centros de interpretación; incluso rutas culturales, ligadas al fomento de la convivencia pacífica.

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**Footnotes**

1. Members of the fascist group _Falange Española_, were known as Falangists
2. During the civil war, Republicans were supporters of the democratically elected government, fighting against Nationalist rebels
3. Translator’s note: an amnesty act was passed in Spain on 14 October 1977 awarding immunity to those responsible for repression under Franco’s regime with a view to stabilising the country and ensuring democracy
4. Translator’s note: On 17 June 1956 a US military aircraft flew over Spain, taking the first ever aerial photogrammetric picture of the country, including the photo of Finca El Poblet. The operation was known as the 1956 _American Flight_