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Collective Immersion by Affections: How Children Relate to Heritage Sites

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Swedish elementary schools have a twentieth-century history and strong tradition of field trips to heritage sites in local areas.¹ A core component in the commemoration and understanding of history is actually visiting the sites where events occurred and where people lived and worked. This motivates research on how children relate to heritage sites.

This article explores how elementary pupils in group interviews relate to cultural heritage when visiting heritage sites. The article investigates how pupils collectively in the peer culture charge the heritage site with values reflected in a variety of affections, drawing on research into historical empathy and critical heritage studies. The following research questions are asked: How do the pupils position themselves in relation to the past and present? What kind of affections are evoked? Which situations and circumstances, during the site visit, mold impressions and immersion in the collective recalling? The article strives to add to and nuance the field of history education by underlining the agency of the schoolchildren by introducing the term ‘heritaging’.

Experiencing the Past: Overall Standpoints

At the core of our interest are the tensions that exist between the ways in which the past is put to use in a school context as compared to how this is done in other societal contexts such as at heritage sites. An important strand of research has shown an interest in educational aspects of museums, heritage and historical sites, emphasizing the potential that heritage may have for young people.² These and other studies have demonstrated the complex links between the sensory and cognitive systems³ and the importance of historical empathy and thereby the relevance of affection and emotions in learning processes.⁴ In addition to the studies mentioned, other researchers have investigated sensitive pasts or traumatic experiences in relation to heritage⁵ and the making- processes of heritage by experiences.⁶

Our contribution to the existing field is to broaden the perspective by exploring heritage sites not only as complementary teaching aids but as important resources for experience and learning. So far, explorations of historical empathy and affections in relation to encounters with the past have primarily been made in steered situations and laboratory-like environments in order to measure in which ways or to what extent the pupils have learned history.⁷ Teachers have consequently been considered as axiomatic leaders and authorities on educational methods and applied regulatory documents.

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By contrast, our study questions the traditional way of examining teachers as the outspoken leaders – who define the heritage site – and the children as followers – who learn history at the heritage site. Instead, we include the agency of children as equally defining and exploring the past. We hereby take a starting point in the theoretical fields of agency-driven theory embodied in the material, affective, performative and haptic aspects of the field trips. David Crouch has even invented the term ‘heritaging’ to catch the activity of meaning-making at heritage sites.⁸

Method

This study was conducted as part of a broader project investigating the uses of heritage sites in school education. In that project, researchers observed the visits of elementary school classes to a variety of historic sites such as cottages, churches, noble palaces, industrial sites and a monastery ruin, all located in the region of Östergötland in south-eastern Sweden. Pupils, teachers and on-site educators were interviewed. Site materials and student-produced materials were collected. In addition, an online survey with several hundred teachers was conducted.⁹

THE SITES

This article is based on interviews made with pupils visiting three heritage sites: a castle, a forest and a cathedral. Vadstena Castle is a former royal castle built as a fortress in 1545 and is closely connected to the royal dynasty of Vasa. The castle is now the responsibility of the Swedish National Heritage Board. Part of the castle is now used as an archive. Other parts are preserved as a museum. There are guided tours and in summer the castle is a concert venue. Vadstena Castle is located in the small town of Vadstena, near the Abbey of Our Lady and of St. Bridget, more commonly referred to as Vadstena Abbey Church, which includes the remains of St. Bridget, an important political actor during the 1300s.

Witches’ Forest was a site where in 1617 nine women accused of witchcraft were interrogated, tortured and executed. The site does not have any architectural remains but consists of a cave where the witches hid, the pool where the water torture took place and finally the rock from which the women were thrown to their death in a fire.

Linköping Cathedral was erected in the Middle Ages and is still used as a cathedral. Among the visitor programs is the ‘Middle Ages in the Cathedral’, a reenactment of everyday lives of nuns, stoneworkers and medieval students in the building.

PARTICIPANTS AND LEARNING SESSIONS

All pupils in the study were preadolescents of mixed gender and ethnic background, from as many urban as rural areas and ten to twelve years of age. They were recruited from school classes that had booked a visit at one of the three sites. The learning sessions taking place at the sites were in the form of guided walks – Vadstena Castle and Witches’ Forest – and as a re-enactment program – Linköping Cathedral. At Vadstena Castle a full class was accompanied by their teacher and a guide. At Witches’ Forest three classes were split and divided in two groups. Each was accompanied by teachers and a guide. At Linköping Cathedral one class was split in three groups. Each was accompanied by a teacher and a site educator who led them through the re-enactment session where additional adult site actors participated.

INTERVIEWS

The interviews were conducted by David Ludvigsson up to one week after the field trip. In the cases of Vadstena Castle and Linköping Cathedral, all pupils were interviewed. In the case of Witches’ Forest, five pupils from each of the three classes participating were interviewed. The selection was made by picking the

first from an alphabetic list of the classes. The Witches' Forest interviews were made on the last day of the semester. While the pupils had agreed beforehand to be interviewed some changed their mind, probably due to the general atmosphere at school with summer vacation approaching.

The interviews were semi-structured with follow-up questions on the experiences and remembrances from the field trip. All interviews were conducted at school. Altogether eleven interviews (ten to nineteen minutes) were conducted, with four to five children in each group. The interviewer deliberately avoided questions that might be associated with a homework quiz. He referred to the excursion in broadly formulated questions in order to invite all kinds of starting points for the conversation. The interviews started with 'What did we do last week?' or 'We went on an excursion last week. What happened then?'

The interviewer used three different strategies to identify in what way the pupils had received common components in the stock of knowledge. The first was to ask about how the guides acted and what they said. The second was to ask to what extent the class had been prepared before the excursion. The third aimed to find out if the children assessed that they knew more about the period and place after the visit.

The interviews were transcribed in full. In order to achieve a nuanced and rich basis for the analysis all sounds, such as laughter, sighs, cries, and similar non-articulated verbal expressions and noises, were transcribed. These were, alongside verbalized communication, analyzed in terms of reactions that reflect affections. The interpretative context of the interviews is defined as acts of peer culture including social strategies during the interviews and how sounds, comments and laughter steer the communication. Furthermore, the exploration of the peer cultural activities was related to affections and emotions that lead to immersion. Finally, the reactions were related to the specific places in order to see how the materiality at the heritage site influenced the negotiation of experience.

PEER CULTURE

We evaluated pupils' chats and communication during interviews in terms of peer culture, which means that we did not analyze elements such as sniggers, soundings and jargon as less 'heritaging' than accurate references to the guide or briefs from schoolbooks. We considered the communication as a collective calibration, in order to make sense of the encounter with the heritage sites.

Peer culture is a sociological term with its starting point in the idea that children are active agents who produce routines, artefacts, values and concerns. Activities where they participate should be regarded as cultural interaction on its own terms and not be reduced to mirroring adult culture. Doing things together is a crucial element in children's peer cultures.¹⁰ When talking, sounding and moving while playing, children produce and reproduce social categories such as friendship and gender, appropriated from adult culture in ways that make sense in the specific context, reflecting the personalities and agendas in the culture of peers.¹¹ Based on the assumption that making sense of the past is a process and a correlation between the past and the present, steered by the realm of practical life,¹² we interpreted the experiences at the heritage sites filtered by collective recalling in the interviews as an ongoing negotiation within the peer group. This reflected life-world references which affect how children relate to the past.

THE STOCK OF KNOWLEDGE, IMAGINATION AND IMMERSION IN PEER CULTURE

By broadening the interpretations of learning with the focal point on how affections and moods steer impressions at heritage sites, we strove to get insights into how emotions are expressed and become part of the peer culture displayed in the interviews. This can pave the way to understanding the relationship between affections, visits to heritage sites and the development of pupils' historical understanding. Martin Selby presents a model of how the encounter between the group and the heritage sites should be understood. He uses the concept 'performance' to explain what is happening when people experience heritage sites. Drawing on the concept 'stock of knowledge', Selby suggests that the visitors carry layers of

knowledge that are mobilized during the visit in order to make sense of the visual and interpretive material at the site.

In familiar situations, previously proven formulas for acting are activated and socially transmitted within the group of other visitors. Selby argues that the individual experience glides between mediation, leaning on the stock of knowledge and mediated in representation at the site, and the immediate experience, steered by expectations based on earlier experiences. When the representation at the heritage site contradicts the stock of knowledge, the visitor strives to confirm or reject the message by accumulating further information. This negotiation is a collective entangling of stocks of knowledge within the tourist group or school class that visits the site.¹³

Selby's discussion is a fruitful starting point when analyzing the interviews with school classes in the present project. The stock of knowledge is gathered by preparation in school before the excursion, and furthermore by expectations from earlier visits to similar sites and every-day knowledge. The immediate experiences at the site might be peculiar, odd and even frightening, not because the children have other interpretations of the historical representation, but because they confront unexpected and unknown areas at the heritage site. We define the interviews as collective negotiation and, as David Crouch puts it, as a way of 'heritaging'.

Just as central as the idea of experiences and stock of knowledge is the function of imagination while connecting the dots and filling in what is missing, in order to make sense of what was happening during the excursion. The practicing of imagination is present in the research on historical thinking and historical empathy. Yeager and Foster argue that historical empathy is interleaved with imagination in learning processes and historical interpretation.¹⁴ The need for imagination is furthermore connected to place- and identity-making. Benedict Anderson, as a critique of nationalism, initially raised the idea of imagined communities in relation to places. However, the function of imagination has become a tool to explore remembrance processes when people collectively make meaning of places and the past. As Sarah de Nardi puts it in her studies about imagination and visualization of places, the 'realm of the imagination bridges the inner and outer nuances of place-making and place understanding and influences knowledge-building in myriads of ways.'¹⁵

We also employed the idea of immersion, a concept used in game studies to catch immersive systems of embodied cognition through multimodal, kinesthetic and somatic media, to formulate situations when affections result in reflections.¹⁶ Immersion is a condition where a person's undivided attention is directed to the ongoing experience, to the present moment. Being in an immersion, the individual starts to ponder, reflect and – in this case – ask questions about the past. Immersion is understood as associated with specific events and episodes highlighted by the pupils in relation to their visits to heritage sites, or rather when retelling these visits. Different kinds of affections had a prominent role that set the tone of the group interviews in the study. We focused on how affections evoked during the conversation put them in a state of immersion, that is, an affective and collective commemoration practice.

Findings

The interviews should be considered as a collective process of the remembrance of the excursion, dominated by negotiation of what was happening and what the excursion actually presented in terms of knowledge of the past. The analysis of the students' peer culture also suggests that evolution of a historical understanding is a process that takes place on an individual as well as a collective level.¹⁷ Pupils talked mostly one at a time in dialogue with the interviewer or in conversations with each other. They seemed eager to understand what was asked of them and answered carefully – sometimes even literally. For example, when the interviewer asked if they, considering the cruelty of the act, believe that the witch hunt actually took place:

'I: Did they really do that [burn witches]?

P: Well, they burned people, but I don't know if they were witches.¹⁸

The difficulties in interpreting the exact meaning of 'understanding' appear in particular in one response. The pupil tries to cover both possible perspectives in the following line:

'I: Is history weird? [Is it hard] to understand what it used to be like?

P: No, it's not hard to understand, but it's hard to understand how they thought.¹⁹

The pupils referred to common public culture – for example, such as television documentaries or common knowledge – when comparing the green and verdigris copper roof at the cathedral with the likewise verdigris Statue of Liberty in New York City.²⁰ Typically, there was a sense of learning related to the status of the experience. In a group from the Witches' Forest a pupil found that a TV show she had seen was more informative than the excursion:

P: And I think that I learned more from 8 minutes [in the show] than in the forest!²¹

The children supported each other in the retelling. Previous research into peer talk on school-related communication underlines the differences between academic talk outside school with peers and family and that of schooling.²² Peers tend to turn the teaching talk 'into a collaborative knowledge exploration'.²³ When the interviewer asks about what was happening at the re-enactment in the cathedral, the pupil answering was unsure about the status of the person who met the class:

P1: We were met at the castle yard by the Pope, I think.

P2: No, the bishop!

[Everyone agrees in chorus]: Yes, the bishop it was!²⁴

They furthermore helped each other to navigate between the present and the past by adding details or by correcting each other. A schoolmate corrected the pupil who express disappointment over the size of the pond at the Witches' Forest:

P1: The lake... I thought it would be a normal lake. It was a mega-weird lake, without a jetty!

P2: It has grown [since then]!²⁵

Whether the pupils defined the interview as a place to play or to listen and answer the questions, they showed different strategies to get in and out of the referred events. When using expressions and words that are familiar to the group of peers, they mediated what the guide or the school had taught, but translated it into apprehensive terms. For example, when recalling the hats of workers during medieval times, pupils compared them with a mushroom.²⁶ By using words such as 'sort of', 'kind of' or '-ish', they tried to catch the supposedly correct term yet also connected to their own experiences to fulfil the answers. When trying to find the word for tapestry a pupil used 'sort of fabric'.²⁷ King Albrecht of Mecklenburg was referred to as 'King something of Mecklenburg'.²⁸ Bodily references were used when recalling physically complex situations, such as how the women, accused of being witches, were tied during the water torture. Gestures and bodily illustrations were verbally confirmed in the interviews by the phrase 'like this'.²⁹

There were different strategies of re-telling: the fragmented presentation when the narrative is steered by the mediation of separate associations; the teller oscillates between different layers of the past; the recalling of the excursion; and the past that was highlighted at the site. There were also retellings that are coherent and consistent and quite in line with the guide. The discrepancies appeared when the complexity of the

witch trials was retold in order to explain both the ideas of witchcraft, the story of the specific events in the Witches' Forest and the recalling of the excursion:

Pupil 1: 'They knew a lot about diseases, kind of doctors who can cure. And one day (this is what we learned)... that a cow... they thought they were witches at first but they weren't quite sure (that's what we've heard)... and then a cow had dropped all milk... they couldn't get milk from the cow. And then, they thought that it was them next door (it was the neighbor's cow) who stopped giving milk, and then they thought that the doctors (so to say) had prepared the milk. They hid in a cave. Then it was winter, and they were starting a fire. They [people] saw the smoke and then they did the water test.'³⁰

In the next example, the pupil had a meta-perspective that contains both the field trip and the historical event:

Pupil 2: We were at the so-called witchcraft forest, and we learned what happened when women were accused of being witches, and what they did and such ... (Another pupil): Three women, one elderly, one a little younger, found out that the authorities were looking for them...³¹

By using the terms 'so-called' and 'we learned', the pupil marked a distance between the subject (the pupils) and the past (the 1600s) while pupil 1 shows how the teller in terms of inserted or discontinued sentences did not position the subject from the past (neither the 1600s nor the excursion).

The parallel spaces of today in the recalling of the excursion and the past were highlighted in the re-enactment in the cathedral when the interviewer asked about the drama in which the king tried to kill the bishop during the ceremony when the 'nuns' were consecrated:

I: You did not try to save the bishop then, like to overturn the king?

P1: Sure, we used* have to run forward with a karate chop against the king... (in a theatrical voice)

P2: No, he had weapons!

P3: I do not think it was meant for us to move forward.³²

The three parallel answers show that the pupils were moving between different standing points while speaking with the interviewer, both the past in terms of last week during the excursion (pupil 3) and the past in terms of the medieval times (pupils 1 and 2). Pupil 1 played with the situation. Pupil 2 answered from a position as the nuns.

LAUGHTER, NOISES AND VOICES AS MARKINGS OF POSITIONS

An overall occurring activity was laughter. It appeared as a means of 'packaging' and communicating different affections, positive as well as negative. Laughter became a social marker within the group. However, in this context, laughter also expressed an interpretation or understanding of the site visited on the field trip. A humorous approach was also useful when relating to arrangements that occurred odd or enigmatic in relation to the children's definition of normality. Children used dramatic effects and humorous substitutions. They performed collaborative storytelling and related humorous stories. Gossip was important in their roles in the peer group.³³ Asa Berger suggests no less than 45 reasons for laughter when analyzing humorous plays.³⁴ He notes that the techniques can be combined and refers to Robert Provine who argues that most laughter comes from banal remarks. Research has shown that there is no clear-cut case between laughter and the presence of humorous discourse. Laughter, for instance, can be present in talking about difficult things.³⁵ Shared laughter is common in setting boundaries, terminating topics and moving on to a new

matter.³⁶ By noting in which situations laughter occurs and if the laughter is shared or not, one can interpret how the situation, both during the interview and when recalling the visit to the heritage site, affected the group and individuals.

In the interviews, the children were giggling and laughing in different situations. When the interviewer asked: 'How did it feel to get to these places?' a pupil answered: 'It felt as if there were a lot of gnats'. This comment aroused laughter because it was obviously not what the interviewer referred to.³⁷ Laughter can also underline a statement. When the interviewer asked: 'Did it look like you thought it would?' the children laughed, responding: 'No, absolutely not, absolutely not!'³⁸

When talking about the king who wanted to kill the bishop, the children giggled indicating that the attempted murder was a cross-border action.³⁹ Another group dramatically vocalized this when recalling the conflict between the bishop and the king:

P1: Because the bishop hasn't paid the taxes!

P2: So, he thought he could get more taxes! But he had already received everything the church would give. [In a deep voice] And then the king got angry!⁴⁰

The pupils who used the interview to initiate or to try to initiate play often responded with audio references. The sound of a sword in action, the creaking of a heavy door or the sounds of a falling stone are rewarding ingredients for acoustic images.⁴¹ They also used their body or voice to illustrate events, for example by using expressions similar to those used by the guide or transformed into their own sphere of experiences. They also used types of jargon such as catchy comments in English. For instance, a group that re-enacted medieval characters referred to the mantles they wore in terms of "Superswag" [expressed in English], like you know... Superman!⁴² The voices were used to underline a feeling or to create a mood. In some situations, pupils used their voices and sounds to illustrate the story. And they used voices and sounds that might sound corny. They related to child labor when discussing the re-enactment in the cathedral, commenting that the workers did not get paid. The fact of not getting paid for work, which differs from values of contemporary times, was expressed dramatically by a pupil using a mincing voice: 'They never got paid!' The children laughed and the teller added with a dramatic voice: 'It was child labor... It's horrible... It's awful, it's fraud!'⁴³

IN FRONT OF PEERS: EMBARRASSMENT

Embarrassment, often guided by laughter was, not surprisingly, present during the interviews. The group situation provoked self-conscious emotions. Being embarrassed is not necessarily connected to negative emotions such as shame or guilt. More likely it is accompanied by blushing, smiling and feeling foolish.⁴⁴ The feeling was present among the peers when sexuality – in this case nudity – was the focus of discussion. The pupils reacted to paintings of naked people at Vadstena Castle, distancing themselves and saying: 'They thought it was elegant then... during the Stone Age.' The pupil who made that comment certainly knew that the painting was from the renaissance. But in order to put distance between the group and the embarrassing nudity the pupil exaggerated the time span.⁴⁵

Embarrassment in coping with the social situation within the peer group was, similarly, mixed with insight into how it would be to live in a convent during the Middle Ages. The re-enactment seemed more challenging. For instance, handling the situation when dressing up like a medieval person, especially the group of nuns which required gendered cross-dressing for some boys.

You face the class in a rather unusual costume [giggling] and then you answer 'yes' to a lot of strange questions from an old bishop, who you do not even know the name of. And then the king enters and is going to kind of kill the bishop!⁴⁶

SENSATIONS: MULTISENSUAL REACTIONS

Affections are embodied in multi-sense experiences such as fear provoked when a child recalls the inside of the Vadstena Castle and describes the dark interiors of the basement, including the real-size figure of a soldier standing by a canon: '[It was] a bit dark and a little scary inside the castle. The stuffed man was scary.'⁴⁷ It is not clear whether it was the experience of standing close to the stuffed man in dark surroundings that caused the child to express these feelings, or if the child did physically touch the soldier. But this quote indicates that the pupil did have an emotional experience. In a similar way, but not negatively, there were sensations from multi-sense experiences that made impressions on the pupils. When recalling the excursion to Vadstena several pupils highlighted the echoes and sounds at the Abbey Church.⁴⁸ In this case, experiencing the historical building activated not just the pupils' eyes but also their ears, adding to their total experience.

The sensational idea that evoked potential fear was not only aroused by physical experiences but by the idea of a situation. When talking about what would have been scary in relation to the torturing and killing of women accused of witchcraft, one pupil argued that the lack of sensation of fear felt during the visit was due to the fact that the information was orally mediated by the guide. The interviewer asked whether it would have been different if they had heard the women, and the children confirm this with laughter and a 'yes!'⁴⁹

The marking of a potentially scary scenario with collective laughter happened when a pupil expressed a wish to return to the Witches' Forest 'Ideally at night! [Everyone laughs] You say that night is the ghost time.'⁵⁰ The comment was directed to the group rather than to the interviewer. The pupil's supposed courage, evoked by the imaginary nocturnal visit to the site, was confirmed by the others by their laughter. Here, imagination filled in the gaps and the sense of fear was provoked after the excursion when recalling what it might have been like at night.

IMAGINATION WHEN RECALLING THE TOUR

The examples above show how these positions are embodied. Yet there is another ingredient in the collective heritagizing – imagination. The imaginary plays a central role when making sense of the past. It also put words to affections and reactions during the interview when recalling the tour, for instance when the pupils expressed potentially scary experiences. Imagination was typically in action when pupils responded to the question: 'Did you feel what it was like to live at that time?' They used 'images' in the answers. For instance, 'You got your head full of little images of what it looked like then'.⁵¹

Imagination was further mobilized when pupils reflected on their future lives as adults. When they discussed the interrupted ceremony of consecration by congratulating the nuns, the interviewer asked: 'How come?' One pupil gave a lengthy explanation by arguing that if they had become nuns, they would not have been allowed to live a free life. When saying 'free life' the peers responded simultaneously with: 'Why?' and 'What do you mean?' The statement was followed by a discussion about the meaning of lack of freedom, and was exemplified by the fact that the nuns never got married.⁵² Imagination is thus not contradictory to historical facts but is a crucial act of practicing insights and knowledge of, in this case, life in a medieval nunnery. The act of imagination includes comparisons with an expected future life in adulthood.

CONFRONTING THE STOCK OF KNOWLEDGE: EXPECTATIONS

Expectations can confirm already acquired knowledge. There is somehow a friction or gap between expectation and experiences in conversation that evokes reflections on the past. Surprise is an emotion that can possess either bad or good valence. The response to an unexpected event can be preceded by either positive or negative starting points. Such emotions were expressed by pupils when commenting on the cave

in the Witches' Forest and how cramped the crevice was, and therefore how difficult it must have been to live there. This insight was connected to their physically experiencing the site and crawling into the cave. Surprise was further discussed in order to draw lines between cognitive and emotional expressions. Barbara Mellers et al. support the thesis that surprise should be regarded as an opportunity to learn, arguing that we learn more from surprising information. Based on investigations in decision-making in a wide range of situations, they claim that results stemming from expected or non-expected results of actions lead to a stronger feeling regardless of negative or positive results.⁵³

Frustration is another reaction found in the interviews. When talking about the witch hunts, one child exclaimed:

I don't understand, why did they hide in the cave? Did they decide that before? Why did they hide right where all the witches were killed? Right at the pool!⁵⁴

This is an important comment as it signals that pupils wanted to feel that they understand things. Yet often the past is a foreign country, colored by the mysteries of the adult world, and is difficult to understand. A clash between the past and the present can be seen when the differences between real and false are caused by replicas in relation to originals. When re-enacting stonecutters at the medieval times in the cathedral, pupils reacted to the clothing the workers used when building the cathedral. During the re-enactment, the pupils used fabric hats and they argued that such a hat could not possibly protect the workers from falling stones when building the cathedral. The perceived incongruity between the soft fabric that they wore during the re-enactment and the original hats that they did not actually see made the pupils delve into thoughts of the risks that the medieval workers were exposed to.

It is possible that peer cultures include similar effects even without the experiences at the heritage site, or that a reaction such as fear could be evoked by a movie or a story in the classroom. Are there any significant affections and reactions connected to material sites? What triggers immersion by affections at heritage sites?

MATERIAL INTER-REFERENTIAL POINTS AT THE SITE AND IMAGINATION

There is a good chance for immersion and reflection when there is a distance between expectations and experiences. The result is quite in line with research on cognitive-emotional phenomena within the affections caused by surprise, defined as 'the sense of astonishment and wonder one feels toward the unexpected'.⁵⁵ Studies show that surprises, regardless of negative or positive outcomes, improve learning.⁵⁶ That is, even when disappointed, pupils do experience and reflect. This happened when there was a gap between what they thought should happen at the site and what actually happened, or when replicas were used instead of original artefacts, where frictions occur when expectations were let down in the Witches' Forest.

Authenticity is not necessarily similar to historical correctness in terms of originality. But it is created in inter-referentiality between material points at the site. Materiality is mediated by the guides and by signs, for example by heights in meters and by function. But materiality also creates immersion in relation to stories told or experiences during the tour. Connections between physical points at the site create the opportunity to develop and immerse insights.

Affections related to material and inter-referentiality within the space seemed to evoke collective reflections and imagined scenarios. The tour guide at Vadstena Castle showed the canons and told the class about their functions and positions, which evoked positive feelings in terms of impression. The canons' weight, the way they were transported by oxen and the method by which the heavy cannons were lifted by ropes from the ground to the tower were retold in every group. The combination of the concrete canons, the challenging freight by oxen and ropes and the fact that the children could easily relate to all elements in the story attracted the class' attention.⁵⁷

Another example is the place of the chamber pot in the queen's bedchamber in Vadstena Castle. The guide told of the servants who emptied the queen's chamber pot in the moat at night, using the slippery stairs from the chamber down to the ground floor. Visualizing the process, and intrigued by thought of managing the content in the chamber pot, the pupils discussed the consequences for future foes who, when attacking the castle, would have to cross the disgusting water in the dirty moat. Pupils also talked of the conditions of the stairs, if the servant was lazy and perhaps decided to empty the pot not in the moat but on his way down. The procedure with the pot, which did not actually figure as a physical artefact during the tour, became incarnated by the physical way from the chamber, by the stairs and to the water in the moat.⁵⁸

Conclusion

This article has investigated the ways in which children negotiate experiences from school excursions to heritage sites. The study belongs to the growing research field on historical empathy that focuses on whether and about what pupils learn by affectively connecting to the past. Attention has been paid to the relation between the pupils and the past, as represented by the curriculum mediated in schools or museums. Our current investigation has widened this to include ways in which historical empathy is mobilized with an emphasis on the agency of pupils when relating to the past.

By drawing on affection, peer culture and the critical heritage studies' term 'heritaging', we have examined how pupils collectively load the heritage sites with values reflected in immersion by affections, and what significance immersion of affections can have on pupils' process of historical understanding. The analysis of the pupils' peer culture also suggests that evolution of a historical understanding is a process that takes place on both an individual and a collective level.⁵⁹ We have explored different circumstances of immersion to understand how heritage sites – in terms of being material and physical places loaded with narratives of the past – affects children.

Pupils' experiences of the heritage site are characterized by social interaction within the peer group; their interpretations of the heritage site; and the interview as social arenas set the frame for the investigation. Emotions are part of the pupils' peer culture and affections are associated with specific sites. The affections are connected to immersions, a condition of profound mental involvement. The interviews indicated how pupils circulate between three time frames: the interview situation, the past in terms of the excursion and the past in terms of history. The norms of the peer culture steer the experience into a collective remembrance process in which individual and collective contribution shape understandings of the heritage site. Immersions are seen as positive 'windows' for learning processes because they attract attention and make the past come alive. From the interviews, it seems that the multi-sense experiences from visiting sites have stimulated the pupils' emotional response.

In the interviews, six different types of affections were linked to immersion. Three of them – fear, sensation and embarrassment – have a pre-reflective and embodied dimension. The fear pupils encountered in the basement of Vadstena Castle was undoubtedly intense. However, if a sense of fear is to contribute to historical learning, pupils must be able to free themselves from the egocentric position and connect to a historically specific experience, thereby building a historical understanding.⁶⁰ The three other affections expressed in the group interviews were: anticipation, frustration and surprise. These are affections that are formulated in relation to what is expected, or at least mirrored in the pupils' frame of reference. This frame of reference can be an everyday experience. But in this case it also activated a historical frame of reference.

A notion of one's position in relation to the past is built into these affections. It is the meeting, or the collision, between the experiences created on the site and the frame of reference that generates the affections leading to immersion. This approach can be related to the development of historical perspective recognition,⁶¹ a concept that captures the awareness of one's own temporal anchoring in relation to the

relevant past. Affections and immersions can be triggered by visits to historical sites and thereby function as tools for pupils to deepen and broaden their historical understanding.

We localized three situations that led to surprise and thereby friction between the expected – the stock of knowledge – and what was experienced at the site – the immediate experience – namely conflicts caused by expectations and experiences at the site and conflicts caused by replicas in relation to originals – and finally conflicts between lived experiences and insights at the site.

The results of this study contribute to the research field of history education and the use of heritage sites and that of affections and haptics in learning processes. By studying pupils as active agents in their own cultural context, the article has demonstrated that experiencing heritage sites is a complex communication which includes cognitive and affective senses on both individual and collective levels, steered by expectations at the site and social actions in the peer culture. Thus it is important to include the children at heritage sites as far more than vessels for and objects of communication when exploring the position of heritage sites in school contexts.

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