



DISCOVERING THE PAST,  
A REFLECTION FOR THE PRESENT

## Air-raid shelter

SANT JUST DESVERN

### Summary

In the context of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Sant Just Desvern City Council commissioned the construction of the “Les Escoles” Shelter, which was 165 metres long and could accommodate up to 200 people. There are records of at least four bombings of the town of Sant Just between June 1938 and January 1939 by the Francoist army (followers of Francisco Franco, who had risen up against the democratically elected Spanish Republican government on 18 July 1936, thus commencing the Civil War) and its allies (specifically, Mussolini’s Italian air force).

During the post-war period, in times of famine, the shelter was used as a chamber for growing mushrooms, until it was closed, for fear of collapse, in 1954. **The shelter was buried and forgotten about until 2009**, when it was discovered during work to reorganise municipal facilities, leading the Municipal Council to consider its recovery, with the support of some local residents.

Coinciding with the 80th anniversary of the bombings, in October 2018, the doors of the shelter were opened to the public; a **testimony to civil resistance that allow us to learn**

**from the past** and reflect on the dangers and consequences of armed conflict. Further, it contributes to the creation of a collective identity by discovering and recovering forgotten aspects of local and national history.

**City:** Sant Just Desvern

**Country:** Spain

**Inhabitants:** 19.370

**Topics:** History, Identity, Heritage, Museums, Architecture, Fine arts

# Context

Sant Just Desvern is a municipality located in the Baix Llobregat area of Catalonia (Spain). It is around 10 minutes from Barcelona and has an area of 7.81 km<sup>2</sup>. It has a privileged environment, as more than half of the municipal area falls within the Collserola Natural Park. It is a green municipality, with more than 30 parks.

The promotion, development and dissemination of art is a distinguishing feature of Sant Just Desvern. It has municipal visual arts workshops available both for children and adults, and organises annual calls for artistic creation.

Works by Jaume Plensa, Montse Sastre and other renowned local artists are displayed across its various parks and gardens.

The air-raid shelter is located in the basement of the municipal facility of “Les Escoles”, dedicated to lifelong learning, which generates a continuous transit of people and ensures its integration into the municipality’s cultural services. The project is open to all residents of the municipality, and offers specialised visits for school groups.



# Goals

- Build a **responsible civic identity**, based on respect for and conservation of the environment, architecture, historical and social heritage.
- Provide visibility to the **immaterial and intangible heritage of the town**, and provide visitors and pupils with experiential knowledge.
- Develop critical thinking about armed conflicts and their consequences for individuals and communities.
- Address themes such as **identity and belonging, peace, war, human rights and art**. The shelter works with past realities that resurface in the present.
- Strengthen **historical and social knowledge and awareness** through the historical investigation of primary sources. The values underpinning the project are timeless and can be translated over time.

# Methodology

## IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

What does a bombing mean for a **girl**? And for a **young man**, who has already been injured by a bomb? What future can a **pregnant woman** envisage? How does an **elderly person**, who has lost everything they had, experience it? And what does a **history teacher** think? In addition to visiting the air-raid shelter in person, the project also offers the option of a **360-degree virtual reality** visit, guided by five characters who shared a historical moment and space, created based on the experiences told by the witnesses who occupied the shelter during the shelling in January 1939.

## ART AND MEMORY

The project also incorporates **sculptures and murals by local artists** outside of the shelter. The works are associated with the five characters who tell the story, and allow visitors to reflect on the impacts of any war.

## EDUCATIONAL TOOLKIT

An educational toolkit has also been developed; it contains **four games**:

1. Building a shelter.
2. Wartime food menu.
3. Effects of the war on the territory.
4. The residents of Sant Just during the bombing.

This toolkit is used to enable students to access questions related to the existence of the air-raid shelter, and to better understand and approach certain concepts related to the Civil War.

## DISSEMINATION OF THE PROJECT AND NETWORKING:

The entire project has been brought together on a **website**, created to disseminate this local historical memory, together with elements that make up the architectural ensemble and the geographical surroundings. This project, led by the Municipal Council, has brought together different collaborations and initiatives by **local organisations, artists, schools and civil society**.



# Evaluation

The greatest impact of this project in Sant Just Desvern was the recovery of a historical heritage element that had fallen into oblivion, and which is a generator of identity.

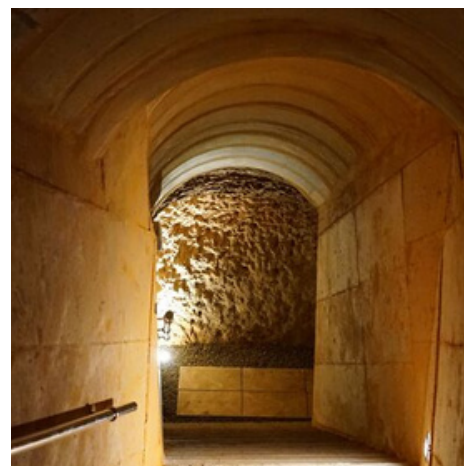
## KEY STRENGTHS:

- An innovative and timeless project with a high local and territorial recognition and value.
- A continuous demand for visits, which amounts to around 1,000 per year.
- The number of visits arranged and events held in connection with this project have exceeded initial expectations, and continue to emerge on a regular basis.
- The project offers five versions of the visit through its five characters. The characters enable different kinds of identifications and for visitors to empathise with each of them.
- The shelter is a project that is able to generate an infinite number of educational experiences, such as sponsorship, adapted visits, talks and debates, among other proposals.

- It is an intergenerational experience.

## CHALLENGES:

- The characteristics of the site do not allow for mass visits, due to the risk of disturbing the conservation work.
- It is important to design an evaluation and continuous improvement plan for the project.
- The cost and management of visits make it impossible to promote the service. It only responds to spontaneous citizen demand.
- Dependence on funding from various external sources can put the sustainability of the project at risk. At present, due to lack of budget, it has not been possible to complete the last sections of the route through the shelter, which are not accessible to the public.
- The lack of consolidation of the complete route through the air-raid shelter leaves a significant section of it at the mercy of the natural degradation of the terrain.



## OPORTUNITIES:

- The design of a virtual experience allows visits to be carried out without the need to descend into the air-raid shelter.
- The opportunity to find out further information is offered by way of QR codes.
- The toolkits were officially presented in schools, which generated a great deal of interest and enthusiasm. The potential local population of the educational toolkits is 500 pupils per year from four to five schools.
- This material can be lent to organisations or other groups, and the activity can be developed autonomously thanks to the instructions provided.

# Contact

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