Theme: Tourism and Access to Historic Patrimony

TOURISM IN BRAZILIAN CITIES:
ACCESSIBILITY CONDITIONS FOR MUSEUMS DECLARED AS HISTORIC PATRIMONY
IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

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SUMMARY

National committees and federal agencies of “Persons with Disability (PWD)” recognize that the vast majority of Brazilian tourist cities still have accessibility barriers in transportation, hotels, theaters, restaurants and museums. This is a political and physical reality of barriers found in Brazil, despite the quest for better accessibility to urban spaces. There is a distance between the discourse and the reality and our recent “National Plan for Tourism” doesn’t mention those persons. It was about these tourist areas, specifically the museums that we deepened our researches on access to national historic patrimony, provided by the cities and for PWDs. Although their chairpersons and the responsible authorities have been made some efforts, we noticed in our studies that much work remains to be completed before the museums, declared as historic patrimony, could be considered accessible. When it comes to accessibility and universal design, we understand that, much more than on the concern of elimination of barriers, we should think on the inclusive space as one that allows, as well for the PWDs, the option to try and experience the spaces. In this context, there is a temptation to believe that “inclusive spaces and museums” are those able to provide the PWDs with a feeling of security, competence and freedom in their limit mobility in order to direct their actions, enabling them to establish a harmonious relation with their museum visit. To analyse the accessibility to museums in Rio de Janeiro, the Pro-Access Group (Proarq/ School of Architecture of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) is developing and applying a methodology based on the meaning of Access specificities for the different difficulties and their interfaces. The methodological steps consist in photos, route footage and interviews with users with and without disability, enabling a more consistent development of proposals that fulfil the use of cultural environments for all persons. Furthermore, we would like to highlight the research of access routes considering the potential barriers for persons with disability – persons in wheelchairs, persons with reduced mobility, blind persons, deaf persons, obese persons, elderly persons, short persons, persons with intellectual disabilities and temporary disabled persons (pregnant women, for example). The article presents the results of the analyses of accessibility at various museums of Rio de Janeiro, listing the major failures of planning and operation of the museum buildings. Thus, our analysis serves as a basis for a more practical approach, where we apply the acquired knowledge to develop project guidelines to improve accessibility and universal design for the museums. Hopefully, with these results, we can contribute to the democratisation of culture and the equalization of opportunities for access, museum experience and understanding of its collection.

Key Words: Accessibility, Tourism, Museums, Historic Patrimony, Rio de Janeiro.
OUR STUDY: Talking about cultural tourism and universal design in Brazilian museums

Our article is part of a research for post-doctoral in architecture and a partnership with the Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM). It is one of our projects on accessibility done by the Pro-Access Group at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. The concept of 'universal design and access to museums' involves an interdisciplinary approach, with emphasis on understanding the concept of atmosphere as a cognitive factor on the movement of the disabled body. The fundamental theory rethink some of the ideas used internationally: the "design for all", "universal accessibility" and "inclusive architecture", working on what the environment brings out in the level of emotions. We are also working in the context of environmental perception based on the access of persons with disability to the museums and the emotional connection with places which they visit. Some of these persons will answer both to the perceived world as to the real world through their sensations.

This museographic perception will be influenced by a previous experience of its sensitive environment. Our cultural tourism perspective based on “universal access” to a museum includes the important concept of atmosphere and the relationship between people and places, their affections, pleasures and desires, their senses and their feelings while walking through a cultural environment. Rather than focusing on the physical barriers to accessibility, we remove the responsibility of not being able to move through spaces, away from the person, realizing that some museological areas can be deficient by themselves if they do not permit the motricity and mobility of people. What this person identifies or selects is part of this museological experience, and that will be the result of this person’s environmental perception.

We’ve also used on this project the work already done in Brazil by Cohen and Duarte (2006) and some French researchers who follow the same line of investigation involving these features along pathways that are made in museums and cultural centers (Mariani-Rousset, 2001; Thibaud, 2001). We intend to move forward on the issue of Accessibility to Museums, following a new sensorial and emotional perspective from a person with disability while moving and perceiving with its object of action: the museographic universe to be visited.

Our methodology involved several research procedures: the unveiling and deepening of new concepts such as atmosphere, planning tours with people with disability through museums, monitoring and mapping pathways in a museum, the evaluation of these pathways and access to museums, filming these pathways and experiences while conducting interviews in order to collect evidence, with both users of museum spaces and directors or other people directly involved with the management of these institutions.

As researchers working with cultural tourism for all, universal access to museums and an anthropological perspective of investigation, we also make the most of our active observation about our own museum experiences, even though in a simple way, our own field journal leads us to get more and more involved in our research on a daily basis.

Thus, we have broadened our horizons, expanded the network of concepts to be addressed such as: memory, culture, identity, ownership, equity, sites inscribed as historic patrimony, senses and sensations, topics that go beyond the question of accessibility.
Likewise, what was only meant to be a one case study, eventually developed to become an analysis of museums declared as historic patrimony in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The data already collected is amazing and diversified, but still unique and not transferable to a more general assessment of all that we have already been able to observe and participate. Many of the testimonies of people with disabilities who took part in our field research were surprising, revealing the importance of a more holistic and motorial experience that also involves universal access, route, touch, smell and feeling. We believe we are still in a trend that certainly has a lot to evolve into a more dynamic global design for all to the Atmospheres of the Brazilian museums located in the State of Rio de Janeiro.

**BRIEF THEORETICAL APPROACH ON ACCESSIBILITY AND PATRIMONY**

*The ongoing threats that weigh on patrimony does not preclude a broad consensus in favour of its conversation and its protection, which are officially defended on behalf of scientific, aesthetic, memorial, social and urban values, represented by this patrimony in advanced industrial societies*.  

Patrimony assets are constituted in material and immaterial legacies left by cultures, such as architecture, historic and archaeological sites or popular manifestations. Whatever the example is, it should be accessible and available to all. For Françoise Choay, the fact that they are protected does not mean distance or isolation, since these works, exposed and revealed in the light of day, “become accessible to all” (Choay, 2006). Still according to the author of “The Allegory of Patrimony”, today the great works of humanity become accessible to a much larger number of people.

“But what is accessibility? (…) The “real presence” is useless if you do not meet the conditions of its reception, beginning with the collection over time and the silence: exceeding a certain threshold, both in the museum and in front and inside the monuments, the flow of visitors reduces or kills the pleasure of art”.  

We can say that the statements in our research about the acquired experiences transformed our informants and individuals with disability into true interpreters of accessibility conditions found in our museums protected by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Patrimony (IPHAN) and belonging to the Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM).

The idea of historic patrimony, according to Françoise Choay (2006) – adopted by many countries in the world – makes us confront our questions and concerns about accessibility to properties declared as patrimony. It is worth mentioning that the criteria used to select examples of our research in museums of the State of Rio de Janeiro, supported by FAPERJ, empathize the importance of the preservation and protection of listed edifications in Brazil.

Through interviews, we learned about the problems and difficulties that both directors and responsible architects are facing to legally protect and preserve our patrimony.

“The problem of a listed building is exactly this: you have to reconcile the two laws. The law for patrimony sites that does not allow great changes of the original design of the edification and the law that provides accessibility”  

Taking into account these factors as an initial reason that deserved to be searched, we started our project in 2008 with some fundamental questions: What are the real
concerns related to aspects of physical and sensorial access to museums? How is it possible after great achievements – the improvement of legislation and international regulation of accessibility – that we still have not found concrete solutions in respect to the moving body, touching, hearing and development of positive sensations in edifications declared as patrimony.

The museums that were part of this research – National Museum/UFRJ, Museum of Traditional and Religious Art, Cabo Frio, Museum of Sacred Art and Fort of the Perpetual Defender of Paraty, House of Hera Museum in Vassouras, Imperial Museum and Rio Negro Palace, Petropolis, House of Benjamin Constant Museum, National History Museum, Museum of Archaeology of Itaipu in Niteroi, Açude Museum, Chácara do Céu Museum and Villa-Lobos Museum – are quite singular to be distinguished, but rather general to be observed or applicable to a large number of expositions. We faced a lot of surprises to explore or to understand them.

![Figure 1 – Our Research](image)

**MUSEUMS DECLARED AS HISTORIC PATRIMONY IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL**

**RESEARCH METHODS**

*The construction of the tours from pre-established procedures reflected the division of the routes, the everyday logistics and the experimentation of working instruments, with a view to meeting and confrontation between different perceptions, attitude adaptations, interdisciplinary discussions and everyday evaluations*.


We did accompanied tours and guided tours; we carried out the mapping of theses tours; we interviewed users with disability, managers and employees of the museum and filmed the diversity of experiences, as well as our own observation, participation and involvement in the research.

Our research pointed to the need for a preliminary survey of the place that would be searched for the recognition of the accessibility framework that we would find. Our methods were constantly tested and improved through tours in the museums declared as historic patrimony in the State of Rio de Janeiro and through tours in each of the ambiances of the museum.

The visit of each institution involved a participation of the museum’s director, architect, art educators and other employees. Through theses meetings, it was possible to find out the perspective of the museum regarding the adaptation of its installations.
There was also the participation of people with disabilities through a partnership with the group “Breaking Barriers” from the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), but first we did our own tour with scholarship students from the Pro-Access Group at UFRJ to understand the dynamics of the museum operation, finding and confronting beforehand different specialized perceptions and related statements. This knowledge was essential before participating in guided tours and the perspective of the visitors with disability.

PATRIMONY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN BRAZIL AND IN THE WORLD

Based on the performance of different groups that have long been excluded from the access to culture, there was a movement of worldwide pressure for access to the museums and, in particular, to museums declared as patrimony. In this perspective, there was the recognition of the importance and the challenge of a universal design defined by occidental art museums.

The concern over access to museums has grown in importance worldwide. Many countries have invested in the adaptation of their cultural properties. The examples that we found during our research make us see that there are wonderful solutions, designed with a lot of creativity, ensuring accessibility without compromising the architecture.

We also believe that the museum or any historical monument are not isolated edifications or separated from the urban context in which they operate. Even historical towns with their traditional ambiences protected by Brazilian and international historic cultural patrimony presented conflicts in the dialog of the museums with their surroundings. Clear examples of this reality are the cases of Paraty and Ouro Preto (declared World Patrimony by the UNESCO), as well as Vassouras. Thus, we understand that both the listed museum and the way to get to it must have externally and internally fully accessible routes.

DISCUSSION – ACCESSIBILITY CONDITIONS FOR MUSEUMS DECLARED AS HISTORIC PATRIMONY IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

In Brazil, the Institute of Historic and Artistic Patrimony (IPHAN) has developed specific actions aiming at adapting the accessibility conditions to the property declared as patrimony on the federal level, guided by the local possibilities. These interventions are often limited to adaptations of bathrooms, elevators and ramps depending on the installation possibilities of these equipments. The systematisation of the actions for accessibility to cultural patrimony started more or less ten years
In 2005, the 6th Regional Superintendence of IPHAN developed a significant experience of diagnosing existing barriers in the properties declared as patrimony in the State of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo. The Department of Museums and Cultural Centres of IPHAN (DEMU/IPHAN) in partnership with the Pro-Access Group at UFRJ started the project “Accessibility to Museums”, combining the question of access to the building of the museums with the paradigm of democratisation of access to culture.

The Pro-Access Group at UFRJ, through its coordinators Regina Cohen and Cristiane Rose Duarte, and the collaborator Alice de Barros Horizonte Brasileiro participated in the Edict for the Construction of Citizenship for People with Disabilities of the Research Support Foundation of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ) carrying out a Diagnosis of the Condition of Accessibility in our museums declared as patrimony in partnership with the Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM).

We believe that these results are of great importance for the comprehension of the cultural context of accessibility much refined in Brazilian terms. For this reason and due to countless acts of resistance, the actions related to the inclusion of this group of people in the museum ambiances of the State of Rio de Janeiro were generally little or postponed. In the process of restoration and revitalization of the patrimony, the prevention of the accessibility has always been placed at the end of a huge list of other challenges to overcome.

“What I am saying is that it is a very delicate relationship, because certain interventions in the building eventually changing, in one or another way, the character of the monument. It is obvious that there are solutions, the most diverse possible. What happens is that there is a conflicting legislation and this is the relation of a law that requires a special care with the building on behalf of the protection of the patrimony”.

M. V. G. J. - architect of Cabo Frio.

RESULTS OR EXPECTED RESULTS

Some initiatives have sought to stimulate the intersensoriality so fundamental in the constitution of a museum ambiance. Our research is supported by the Research Foundation of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ) and through a partnership with other institutions, such as the Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM) and the group “Breaking barriers” at UERJ, sought to follow this tendency for the elaboration of a Diagnosis of the Accessibility to Museums, declared as patrimony and located in the State of Rio de Janeiro.
In a few cases during these visits, the valorisation of the experience of the other senses to identify plants in the garden of the museums, some sculptures or objects by touching the proper architecture that could sometimes be recognized by people with visual disabilities were allowed. We wanted to stimulate accessibility and the experience through movement, smell, shape and texture, which was not always possible.

They were extraordinary sensorial experiences that people with disabilities were able to sense when a very strong emotion emerged from their environmental perceptions and from their feeling in the studied museums. But, what is an ambience with theses characteristics and potentials? For Jean-François Augoyard (2008), an ambience is the foundation of the sense and emerge from the exchange between the physical characteristics of a place with the conscious corporeality of the movement of the people and an affective tone.

We believe that only by following this approach we succeed in establishing guidelines for the inclusion of these people in the cultural spaces, incorporating the notions of a full accessibility that can generate satisfactory corporal, sensorial and emotional experiences, giving a signification for the construction of the real identity.

We believe that these results are of great importance for the comprehension of the cultural context of accessibility, much more refined in Brazilian terms. Due to countless acts of resistances, the actions related to the inclusion of this group of people in the museum ambience of the State of Rio de Janeiro were generally little or postponed.

Our visits, together with other people with disabilities, helped us to set up the proper environment of the studied museums. We tried to observe all possible perceptions – audible, visible, tactile, mobile – seeking understanding from the perspective of what could be perceptible or memorable for our visitors. Above all, we tried to follow their attentions, motivations and intentions according to their sensitivity or sensorality – visual, sonorous, tactile, kinesthetic or olfactory.

“This explanation (narrated by pictures) was good, but this explanation varies a lot from the perception of the person who explains and from our understanding. When depending on a third party interpretation, I think that this exists because it does not exist accessibility.”

Research participant with visual disabilities

If we think of buildings declared as cultural patrimony as support of social memory (Messentier, 2005), our listed museums should also serve to support the construction of social and cultural identities of people with disabilities in these locations. Given the few measures taken to meet the accessibilities of this people, what happens actually is the “commitment of the potential of the patrimony for the social development for the construction of social identities and, therefore, for the construction of citizenship ((Messentier, In Vivência, nr. 28, Natal, UFRN/CCHLA, 2005, p.168).

CONCLUSION

We also studied the way people with disability can reach the museums and their relation with the town where they are located. We understand that the construction of a town is carried out by the users and has marks left over time.

As part of our analysis methodology, we incorporated the concern how to evaluate the urban context in which the museums, declared as patrimony, are inserted, as we understand that they are not isolated edifications and that they block a strong dynamic and dialogue and vice versa through this relationship between people with disability, the “museum in the town” and the “town in the museum”. The urban
surroundings of these ambiances provide the dialectic in its essential relationship with the museums.

In the case of the accessibilities to the ambiances of the museums, declared as patrimony by IPHAN, that we are analysing, some of them are located in the historic towns, as it is the case of Paraty and Vassouras, which are not only stages of a passed life preserved in the memory. The valuable theoretical contribution provided by José Guilherme Cantor Magnani (2007) indicates the fact that life is still pulsing in these places and to preserve a patrimony also means recognizing and selecting universal criteria, which can be shared by people with disability in their equal enjoyment of these cultural properties.

However, as expressed by some of the collected testimonies, there seems to be a lot of resistance due to character-destruction that most adaptations can cause to the museum and the protected property. This relation between the users and the preservationist bodies is, for Magnani, conflicting “regarding the criteria of choice or the intervention of the State through the mechanism of protecting patrimony” (Magnani, 2007, In Abreu, Chagas and Santos, 2007, p.283).

This article, which our research project originated, counts on some important partnerships and presents some very significant results, which are far from representing a positive experience of our informants in their relationship between their ambiances of the museums, declared as patrimony, and the city.

With the large amount of collected data through our field research that included a variety of methodological procedures, a more detailed analysis would not fit in this short article. We can briefly say that it does not exist a real concern about the guaranty of access for all to the ambiances of the museums of the State of Rio de Janeiro, declared as historic and cultural patrimony. The initiatives that we found were insufficient for the promotion of the accessibility to the museums due to their specific actions.

We found good intensions and willingness to adapt the spaces of these museum institutions to spatial necessity, desires, dreams and desires of the people with disabilities.

Some museums are already executing minor interventions. Despite these many efforts, the action are still very modest to actually allow creating an affective relationship between the visitors with disability and the museum or the patrimony. The resistance regarding the museums declared as patrimony are still enormous. Among the principal identified problems are the following: poorly adapted bathrooms, if adapted; isolated accessibility without predictions of accessible routes to the museum; very inclined ramps higher than recommended in the Brazilian Standard of Accessibility; no replicas, models or other tactile resources for the people with visual disability, lack of sub-titles or Braille signs; lack of trained staff to communicate in Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) with people with hearing impairments; lack of equipment for audio description for blind people or for guided tours for groups of people with disabilities; physical barriers as inappropriate furniture or not signalled, etc.

Several national or international experts, researchers and museum professionals have discussed and analysed what has been done in this area and what can be done in the future with respect to the listed museums, creating partnerships with institutions responsible for the cultural patrimony and for the museographic spaces in Brazil. This is the case of this research, which has been developed by Cohen (2008) and the Pro-Access Group at UFRJ with support from the Research Support Foundation of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ) together with IBRAM.
Museums are inexhaustible sources of information through all senses working together. There are museum ambiences formed by all of these sensorial, corporal and emotional spaces and images of museums that are in each one of us. It is the understanding of these sensitive ambiences that transform themselves in places, which surround us and envelope our body and our senses we live in and through and find our shelter and home.

Although there is the question of protection of patrimony, we found some works that well represented this dimension of museums and expositions that are for those who can not see or hear. The tour, listening, seeing and touching of these bodies and of these disabilities are enriching both the theoretical and the practical level; it is the access, the tour, seeing, listening, smelling, feeling, touching, understanding and describing in infinite different ways as it is human nature itself. We understand that these interdisciplinary researches only have meaning if they allow to understand the realities of groups of people who use the spaces that we architects or other professionals, with or without disabilities, are preparing for us for them.

A research about inclusion of people with disability and about their sensorial and emotional experiences in the accessibility to the museums, in the sense how we currently defining it, gives all its meaning. It is not anymore an intellectual approach that meets one or another. It is an attempt to understand what explains our everyday live and feelings, what leads our actions and our museum practices. The comparative analyses using ethnography that we propose through other investigations are indispensable and should be multiplied.

This article and a moderate evaluation of accessibility of museums listed by IPHAN, located in the State of Rio de Janeiro, is just the beginning and a threshold of a much larger work. The results of the commented tours, the participant observations and the ethnographic video will certainly be much more gratifying and illustrative than just a brief and modest report. Lets go to the field with the main interested parties through guided and scheduled visits. Hopefully in the near future, we help to broaden horizons to create new paradigms in the planning of sensitive-physical, sensorial and emotional ambiences in our museums declared as patrimony in the State of Rio de Janeiro and in Brazil.

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