Inclusion and Accessibility of Persons with Disability in Brazil: Senses and Sensations in the Access to Patrimonial Historical Museums in the State of Rio de Janeiro

Regina Cohen, Cristiane Rose de Siqueira Duarte and Alice de Barros Horizonte Brasileiro
Inclusion and Accessibility of Persons with Disability in Brazil: Senses and Sensations in the Access to Patrimonial Historical Museums in the State of Rio de Janeiro

Regina Cohen, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil
Cristiane Rose de Siqueira Duarte, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil
Alice de Barros Horizonte Brasileiro, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

Abstract: This paper will show some partial results from a research on accessibility developed by both the Pro-Access Research Group in the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro together with the Brazilian Historical Patrimony. It aims at an interdisciplinary perspective of the theme “access to museums”, considering the understanding of atmosphere as an important tool for the mobility of the disabled body. We quickly discuss the concepts of “universal design” and “inclusive architecture” used internationally, working with what environment makes evident on the level of primary emotions, our leading thematic at Pro-Accesso. What does a person with disability feel when moving into the exhibition halls? The context of the environmental perception is usually built based on the level of access and on the affective relationship people develop towards the spaces they visit. We all agree that a person with disability will answer to the perceived world and also to the real world through their sensations. In this way, the notion of sensitive “atmospheres” is an important aspect in the relation between disability and museums, putting on evidence all the senses and sensations they experience during a walk through a museum. Rather than being concentrated on the behavioral theories or the physical barriers of accessibility, this research is based on the principle that atmospheres of museums are themselves disabled when not allowing mobility. This article also uses the works which have already been developed by the Department of Museums of the Historical Patrimony, the works of Cohen and Duarte (2004, 2008) about the developing of affection towards a place and by the senses and feelings spread on the routes of exhibitions (Mariani-Rousset, 2001; Thibaud, 2001). Our main objective is to enhance the theme of ‘Accessibility to Museums’, working with sensorial and emotional perspectives on environmental perception; in addition to this, we make use of a person with disability through its action-object: the museographic universe she wants to know. We work with a methodology that is concentrated on the ethnographic participant observation and on the analysis of routes made by persons with disability in the museums. Making use of guided visits, we map and shoot the experiences and, afterwards, interview the subjects of our research and the chairmen responsible for those institutions. As a researcher with disability, Cohen – one of the authors of this paper – is naturally enrolled in the anthropological perspective of investigation, living her own museographic experience, full of senses and sensations.

Keywords: Inclusion, Accessibility, Persons with Disability, Museums, Historical Patrimony
Introduction

This research was conducted with the support of Carlos Chagas Aid Research Foundation (FAPERJ) of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. We hope to broaden the debates concerning the way Brazilian museums should be built, as well as stimulate the adaptation of their spaces in order to make them as accessible as possible to people in general, and, with a particular focus on disabled persons.

The accessibility to cultural premises and museums involves all the actions performed by a visitor, starting with his entrance into the building up to his museographic exploration. We highlight the importance of physical, informational and sensitive accessibility in the process of democratizing the access to culture, which means, to provide pleasure, as well as, create positive emotional bonds to the museum spaces.

Thus, we have started working towards inclusion through the perspective that users of the museum atmospheres need more than accessibility in order to feel included and develop affection for the museum. Based on our investigations we have come to the conclusion that during a visit to a museum our emotional perceptions, as well as all our senses are triggered throughout the course of the visit, senses which may or may not be satisfactorily fulfilled through sight, touch, hearing, and mobility.

Penetrating a museum; walking through its spaces; grasping the creations housed therein, and feeling confident about it are some of the issues outlined by our research. It is a fundamental factor to democratize culture, guarantee the rights achieved in international conventions, regional decrees and laws, in order to make each country aware of its responsibilities.

It has come to our knowledge that there are some organized groups - running museums around the world – that take into consideration a ubiquitous spacial inclusion and work towards providing a sense of affection, belonging, identity, and “appropriation” of cultural assets. Nevertheless, in spite of some innovative initiatives, it is common to see persons with disabilities being prevented from having full independence in their sensorial, intellectual, and physical activities in Brasilian museums. Consequently, persons with disabilities end up being excluded from these atmospheres.

In this sense, and aware of their responsibilities, the National Historic and Artistic Patrimonial Institute (IPHAN) has, for some time, been concerned with this matter. In 2003 IPHAN edited its first normative syllabus which endeavored to establish criteria, methods and analysis tools in order to evaluate the accessibility conditions to federal cultural facilities. This would also help in formulating better diagnosis charts, improving the implementation of interventions and in generating diversified programs and practices (IPHAN, 2003).

We should emphasize that in spite of having evolved in terms of laws, we are still far from transforming total accessibility from discourse into practice. Due to this, IPHAN has made a great effort to transform ideas into actions by seeking successful experiences and establishing partnerships with research groups of excellence in Brazil. “Núcleo Pro-acesso” from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) (run by the authors of this paper) have had the honor of being called upon to develop basic accessibility parameters for museums and cultural institutions and to develop “Diagnosis of Accessibility Conditions for Museums administered by IPHAN in the State of Rio de Janeiro” (FAPERJ Project, Edict for the Assistance in the Development of Citizenship for Persons with Disabilities). Therefore, we believe to be contributing in some way to the creation of a new paradigm in inclusive architecture and universal design for museum atmospheres.
Theoretical Basis

In order to introduce some aspects that have guided our actions in the study of museographic atmospheres, we hereby aim at presenting the main concepts that are the groundwork of our ideas: accessibility, universal design, inclusive architecture, atmospheres, routes and passageways. In the item below we will present some experiences throughout Brazil and especially in the State of Rio de Janeiro, adding our first results in the research of protected historical facilities to our analysis under the perspective of senses and sensations.

Accessibility, Universal Design and Inclusive Architecture

Based on the concept of Spacial Inclusion (Duarte & Cohen, 2002), we are in possession of results from previous studies which aim at generating strategies for improving the accessibility of people as a whole, favoring the inclusion of persons with reduced mobility, the elderly, and persons with physical disabilities, be they, sensory or neurological.

We believe that even if just one single citizen is prevented from having access to a museum, the function of its social and cultural spaces must be questioned. The research developed in this field have made the need to investigate barriers, architectural or urban, for all types of disabilities explicit. And, above all, the importance of studying the interrelationship between these barriers and their spacial solutions. We have seen, for example, the grave mistake of building a ramp access for people on wheelchairs without remembering that a blind person who is guided by the curb by using a cane, may lose all sense of direction when faced with such a ramp. Similarly, some solutions used for deaf or blind users, are items that must be addressed globally, as a group which belongs to the environment of museums, the free areas, and their surrounding buildings. Thus highlighting that the accessibility to the constructed space should not be understood as a set of measures favoring solely persons with disabilities - which might even lead to the increase of spacial exclusion and segregation of these groups, but technical and social measures to accommodate all potential users (Duarte and Cohen, 2004).

After a gradual change in some planners’ vision, the concept of “Accessibility” was introduced in specialized literature. The term, Inclusive Architecture, inclusive design and inclusive planning, have been found much more frequently, having evolved into the concept and philosophy of the Universal Design, a term that turns design and planning into a more comprehensive and universal concept. Accessibility and Universal Design, comprises much more than the concern with the elimination of barriers. We should envisage inclusion and the Inclusive Space of a Museum as one that allows (including persons with disability) the option of experiencing all of its atmospheres. In other words, the understanding of the concept of atmosphere also involves the awareness that it is possible (or not) for one to enter, and circulate in all the areas of a museum. In this context, one may understand that “Inclusive atmospheres” are those which by directing a Person with Disability’s (PD) actions, are able to provide the PD with a sense of security, power and freedom in spite of their limited mobility, and consequently establish a harmonious relationship with their museum atmosphere.
The concept of Atmospheres

“Atmosphere is the foundation of sensibility, because it associates the one who perceives with the perceived object. An atmosphere is born from the encounter between the physical surroundings, my corporeity with its ability to feel, move, and become an affectionate tonality “.
Jean-François Augoyard. La construction des atmospheres quotidiennes: l’ordinaire de la culture.
In CULTURE ET RECHERCHE No. 114-115

Scholars of the spacial characteristics which influence people’s behavior have long abandoned a purely Cartesian approach, one which analyzes solely the physical constraints of the environment. Thus, a search for a new concept and paradigm associated to it has begun. One which also involves the body in motion, its motor expressions, its sensorial and kinesthetic paths, its ability to feel, being enveloped by these emotions and sensations in its search for identity and ownership of these spaces. The concept of atmospheres expresses the material and moral environments which include the thermal, light and noise sensations. (Amphoux Pascal, 2004). Its first academics sought interdiscipline in the development of their research, thus seeking to show that architecture and the city are based on interdependencies between the built and the perceived shapes.

Atmospheres can be perceived through a special light or a particular sound when we approach or reach a certain space. This space, according to the perceived sensations, may present itself as a calm and peaceful atmosphere, or, on the other hand, a confusing and disturbing one.

According to Nicolas Tixier (2007), an atmosphere is always unique and irreducible, varying according to the day, time, people and our actions. Despite all of these variations, there are characteristics that bestow it with an identity, making it possible for us to recognize it. According to Tixier, the notion of atmosphere contradicts any strict definition. “Our perceptions, senses, actions, and representations are perceived in a singular way, as a whole, not as individual entities.” (Tixier, 2007, p.10). To Jean-François Augoyard (2007), one of the first academics to work with this concept, the activities or materialization of life are already possible, but include many more feelings. “From subject to object, subject to subject, body to body, empathy is our first primitive and irreflective way of being a part of the world” (Augoyard, 2007, 60).

Firstly, according to his conception, we meet with the other, the atmosphere, and we become involved and affected by those around us, “we become part of it”. This is a process in an intuitive world. The atmospheres proposed by Augoyard strive to take into account the perceived sensorial qualities of the environment, such as light, sound, tactile matter and spaces that call for kinesthesia and posture. Seen from this point of view, the museum atmospheres that will be discussed here fit with precision in the context of disabled people, absorbing the intersensorial dynamics.

Following this trend, the French sociologist Jean-Paul Thibaud (2004) works with a pragmatic perspective of urban atmospheres, taking into consideration the need to look for ways in which the city can be approached in a sensitive manner. He proposes an interdisciplinary approach that is based on the phenomenology of perception - which searches for a way in which to position the body so that it may learn the world.
Thus, this concept resembles the notion of space presented in a large number of contemporary essays on a variety of disciplines, which criticise the abstract space and goals. Furthermore, Thibaud (2004), states that orientation, paths, and the mobility of individuals through or along spaces and atmospheres embrace the corporeal advancements in a character’s perception of time and space context.

**Mobility and Routes**

Mobility and routes are concepts which are extensively studied by Jean-Paul Thibaud (2001, 2004), with the argument that not only the organic aspects of people’s characteristics, but also the sensations, are involved in the dynamics. Seen from this perspective, mobility can be considered more than a physical condition. Therefore, affections and emotions are a part of the the act of moving, going through, and perceiving a museum atmosphere. And this is the way in which is we hope this research will be analyzed.

Some Brazilian museum administrators have shown concern towards the adaptation of their spaces and atmospheres. And, what we are interested in is the relationship between the accessibility discourse and the perspective of a PD going into a museum, the route the PD takes to get there and the implementation of these concepts. In other words, the way this mobility occurs in the IPHAN-protected museums in the State of Rio de Janeiro and their urban surroundings.

**Our Methodology: How to Research Brazilian Museums?**

We started our research with random explorations on accessibility in some museums in Brazil and around the world. Later on, because of a demand from IPHAN, we decided to study the accessibility in protected patrimonial buildings which expresses different collective representations. The research outlines the position of those with disabilities as they walk through the spaces of museums and become real interpreters of the accessibility conditions of their own patrimony.

As part of our methodology we investigate the conditions of ‘Having access, Walking-through, Seeing, Hearing, Feeling and Touching’. Besides that, we evaluate the interpretations and mental reconstitutions given by visitors with disabilities as they ‘travel’ along their imaginary visited sites.

We have defined that all the phases of our museum research, are part of a museographic experience developed in a specific context which analyzes the pieces of art in relation to its users. Therefore, besides the recognition of conditions and singular characteristics of accessibility, the results have led us to incorporate the ‘Guided Tour’ methodology. To accomplish that, we have begun working with the group ‘Rompendo Barreiras’ of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), which organized the guided tours with PD, after the field surveys.

“I was really well guided; people gave me the right instructions, everything I needed to know… it was really good for me, it was a gift, since it is the first time I come to the Imperial Museum”.

Report from a Down syndrome person about the Guided Tour to the Imperial Museum.
In order to accomplish the analysis, we followed the routes made by many visitors with the aid of art-educators or simply someone from the staff that knew how to explain the route. They were sometimes permitted to touch a piece and being able to do so would surprise and delight our visitors.

As the tour ended, we searched for a quiet place to take some notes and record the reports about their experiences and the perception they grasped from that atmosphere. With all this material coming up as thoughts and memories, the PD started recollecting and reconstructing their experience as a way to explain the sensations and perceptions which evolved during the tour.

“In fact, I enjoyed everything... it was a pleasure to hear all I heard, I did not think it would be so nice to visit a museum. I enjoyed this museum very much... I had always wanted to come here; the explanations were awesome”.

Report from a user. ‘The pleasure of Experience’.

Although we worked with informal interviews it was necessary to find a schematic plan to guide our main questions during the process of recollecting. This would help us solve problems of non-registered situations that came up during the tour such as, physical characteristics, images that had appeared in their minds, comparisons to other museums, influences on walking, and emotions or feelings that had arisen during relevant points, as well as the interference of the disability during the tour.

According to John Zeisel (1981: 137) informal interviews help researchers find out what people think, feel, do, know and wait. In our case, they have contributed to the analysis of the locomotion of Persons with Disability in museums, with the environmental practice and experience (experienced environment), with the definition of environmental characteristics (situations) and situational perceptions (perceived environment).

We have been working with museographic atmospheres which are run by IPHAN in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The methodology is, though, pretty vast to be presented in a few lines. We prioritized the idea of routes and reports that users have offered us. However, as speeches sometimes betray the real sensation about the places, we decided to incorporate the use of ethnographic videos in order to analyze the relation between people and their sensitive atmospheres.

**Accessibility to Atmospheres of Protected Museums Administered by IPHAN**

“The cultural heritage, when well understood, expresses different collective representations, which provide multiple connections, and in research situations what stands out is the transformation of the informant into an interpreter of his own heritage.”

Mariza Velozo. **The Fetiche Heritage.**

In Regina Abreu, Mário de Souza Chagas and Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos. **Museums, Collections and Patrimony: polyphonic narratives.**

The examples hereby placed are part of our finest research in Brazil and we think the partial results are of great concern.
According to Françoise Choay (2006), the idea of historical patrimony derives from a singular mentality which is embraced by many countries in the world. It makes us confront our interrogations about the accessibility and difficulties we have been facing throughout our investigations in Brazilian museums.

“Núcleo Pro-Acesso” started its first project with a wide survey of physical barriers found in the spaces of the university: The Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Later on, our team started surveying some public and private schools in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

It is worth mentioning that our criteria for selecting the examples were based on the location of buildings, the range of choices they offered to the community, and the eventual recognition of its excellence.

In the first mentioned project titled “Accessibility to Atmospheres of Museums in the State of Rio de Janeiro”, supported by FAPERJ, we decided to adopt the same criteria and roughly analyze some institutions with the same characteristics. It would also be necessary to focus on the relevance of these institutions in the cultural context of protected buildings by IPHAN in our state.

Within this small context, regarding the problems and difficulties of our cultural system and taking into consideration the process of preserving and legally protecting our patrimony, some actions related to the incorporation of a group of people known as ‘Persons with Disability’ (PD) have always been delayed or postponed. It has been hard to see any effective measures being taken towards PD.

Taking these points as a starting motif for research, we began our project in 2008 considering some questions that have led us ahead: What are the real concerns regarding accessibility in physical and sensorial aspects in museums? How is it possible that after a great victory – the improvement of a regulation on accessibility – we still find no concrete solutions for matters related to body in movement, touching, hearing and the development of sensations in preserved buildings?

We will present some of our results in the following lines and conclude with an evaluation of the routes, interviews and our own participant observation at the end of this presentation.

The National Museum of UFRJ

The National Museum of Rio de Janeiro is one of the oldest museums in the country and belongs to the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). It is protected by IPHAN and linked to the Ministry of Education. The building is known as a historical, architectonic landscape sample of the period when the Imperial Portuguese Family lived in Brazil.

In relation to the matter of accessibility, the museum has already started some physical adaptations to ease the entrance and experience of PD in its inner premises. It is the beginning of a process to solve sensorial hindrances related to other disabilities (vision and hearing). According to the artist and educator Beatriz Falcão, these were some of the actions which were recently developed by the National Museum: exhibition of pottery manipulated by blind people from Benjamin Constant Institute (IBC); Alternative Educational Program (PREA) – ‘Knowing the Museum through TOUCHING’; TACTILE access to part of the scientific works developed by professors and students in the National Museum-UFRJ; GUIDED TOURS to the Princesses’ Gardens: some syllabi made in Braille and also printed ones (on capital letters) have been handed in to PD in order to emphasize the knowledge
acquired during the event; celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Imperial Family arrival – some actors were selected to perform and interact with blind people from IBC.

The visit to the National Museum provided for a group of blind people and one deaf girl was quite interesting, due to the fact that they were able to report their knowledge of the pieces in the museum through touching.

The testimony of a person with visual impairment is quite revealing:

“It was a very good experience, because we were allowed to touch several pieces”
“I have no words to explain how delighted I was.”

However, this experiment is inconsistent with the actions taken by museum administrators, which still offer strong resistance because the pieces are protected by the Brasilian Patrimony. This is what the manager for planning and architecture of the museum had to say:

“Accessibility is a concern everyone who works with public property has and we would like to apply it to our work. But the difficulties are many due to the building and its pieces being protected”.

The Museum of Religious and Traditional Art of Cabo Frio

The Museum of Religious and Traditional Art of Cabo Frio – MART – had its opening in 1982 in the courtyard of Nossa Senhora dos Anjos Church – a valuable sample of the Franciscan architecture from 1686 – and an important figure in the stage of the colonial history of the city of Cabo Frio. Because of its importance, IPHAN decided to turn it into a protected monument in 1957.

Well known for its work with the local community, MART is distinguished for encouraging many kinds of cultural manifestations that utilize the idea of patrimony as a source of inspiration. The collection of MART is composed of sepia images and polychromed wood from the XVII and XVIII century. MART has been a benchmark in trying to establish a fine relationship between patrimony and society.
The Museographic Experience – Acess and Routes

Even though the city has a large number of active people with disability, the museum has never committed itself to the necessity of improving the access and quality of spaces, neither physically nor scenically.

Because of the many obstacles and stairs which hinder their mobility, few persons with disability and the elderly visit the museum, according to the Museum’s director’s opinion.

Furthermore, the architect we interviewed believes that it is difficult to adjust the building due to its characteristics, and the fact that it is a protected monument. He says the legislation is contradictory and controversial; while it requires that the demands of these people be met, it does not allow any adjustment in its architecture. Decharacterization of its architecture and any adjustments in its building are a delicate matter and a great challenge for any planner.
Santa Rita Church – The Museum of Sacred Art of Paraty

The goals of this museum are to research, conserve, and exhibit the collection of sacred art that once belonged to Religious Fraternities of the city as well as culturally promote festivals, encounters and parties related to the religious local immaterial heritage. The Museum of Sacred Art of Paraty exhibits its collection of wooden imaginary animals, pottery, silver and royal crowns from the XVII, XVIII, XIX and XX centuries - used in the religious festivals and service reunions in the ceremonial celebration of Easter.

The city of Paraty presents several mobility difficulties due to the characteristics of its historic paving, the uneven and irregular stones used, and also because of the fact that the city itself is protected by the Heritage of Humanity.

According to the persons with disability who took part in our research, the feelings experienced were daunting, and deterred many from taking in the rich culture of the museums we visited. One of the people in a wheelchair gave the following testimony:

“This is a moment where I have been beaten by the difficulties, having to ask to be carried in all the time, wears me down.”

The Museographic Experience – Access and Feelings

The Perpetual Defender Fort – Paraty

Built on the top of Vila Velha Slum or ‘Ponta da Defesa’ Slum, this monument is part of the primitive dwellings established in 1630, during the process of the construction of Paraty – which is celebrated in August 16th. In 1793 a fort was built to protect the city; which with the economic decay of the city, came to ruins in no time. It was left in ruins up to 1822 when the local government decided to reconstruct the fort and name it after the Emperor and Perpetual Defender of Brazil, D. Pedro I.
“The museum doesn’t appeal to me due to the difficulties that I encounter. It’s not that I don’t like coming to the museum, but the difficulties prevent me from doing so.”

Despite the importance of this cultural area which is situated in a prime location - a hill with beautiful views, surrounded by the ocean and a landscape full of beautiful, historical homes, the Perpetual Defender Fort of Paraty is not an appealing place for people with disabilities. The statement above is just one of many which show the frustration experienced by those who are not able to fully appreciate the place.

Though Paraty has become a Patrimony of Humanity we find it necessary, at the same time, to find a way of presenting this Fort to Brazilian and foreign visitors, students and anyone wishing to truly experience Paraty. The local community is eager for a especially designed place to receive their ‘narratives’ of the city’s history, in an educational and enriching manner, which is not, at moment fulfilled by “Casa de Cultura de Paraty”.

Home of Ivy Museum – Vassouras

Construction dating from the first half of the XIX century, the Home of Ivy Museum is one of the most significant monuments of Vassouras; Joaquim José Teixeira Leite’s (1812/1872) family lived in it for many decades and influenced the history of the coffee economy in Rio de Janeiro. The mansion has lost its natural simplicity due to many adaptations which have given it a very fancy appearance. Among the many dwellers we find Eufrásia Teixeira Leite (1850/1930), a woman known for her strong temper and a fine taste acquired from her many trips to Paris. Before dying, she decided to donate all her possessions to philanthropic institutions, one of them, the Home of Ivy Museum – legally protected by IPHAN in 1952. The Ivy Museum is one of the most expressive samples of the golden times of coffee in Brazil.

With respect to the routes and accessibility to the Home of Ivy Museum in Vassouras, among the many testimonies given by limited mobility users, we highlight that of a little people:

“I am a little people and have difficulty walking, however, apart from the stairs, the rest of the museum was easy to walk through. I did not have access to the outside area. The canebrake area is a place I wanted to go to, but the difficult access impeded me
from doing so. I loved coming to the house, I hadn’t imagined how it would be, and apart from the difficulties of accessibility, I enjoyed the visit immensely”.

**The Imperial Museum – Petrópolis**

In 1822, D. Pedro I tried to get some social and military support to promote the movement towards the Independence of Brazil. Meanwhile, he started a trip to familiarise himself with the natural beauties of the country and ended up falling in love with the Atlantic Forest and the chilly weather from the upper regions. The result of this trip was the acquisition of a great farm. When he died in 1834, his son, D. Pedro II inherited the land and started building his favorite summer resort in Brazil. In order to get the construction started a decree was released in March 16th, 1843, creating the city of Petrópolis. Therefore, a great number of European immigrants came to Brazil and were responsible for building the city, and the Royal Palace.

The construction of this sample of neoclassic architecture dates from 1862 and went through an adaptation in order to receive the collection of the Royal Imperial Family in 1943. The museum, also has a beautiful garden which is frequently visited.

The testimony of a person with a hearing impediment, regarding the route taken in the gardens and the explanations provided, give us an overview of what must be taken into consideration when taking persons with disability through an atmosphere which hasn’t been adapted to their reality:

“I questioned the guide about the way he presented the history of the park during the walk-through. He should not turn his back to the deaf while speaking. When people talk, they must do so slowly so that people with hearing impediments may understand what is being said.”
**Rio Negro Palace – Petrópolis**

This Palace was built by the Rio Negro Baron a few months before the proclamation of the Republic of Brazil, in 1889. Its elegant lines and traditional eclectic style offer a good sample of the civil architectonic characteristics from the end of the XIX century. The building’s abundance of richness and good taste in the interior decoration left some profound impressions in the collective memory of the Petropolitan society, in the beginning of the XX.

In 1896, The Rio Negro Palace became the official residence of the State Government of Rio de Janeiro, and in 1903, the official summer Presidential residence.

In November 2005, the architectonic group of buildings that compose the Rio Negro Palace was given in guardianship to the Department of Museums and Cultural Centers of IPHAN (DEMU-IPHAN).

This museum has not provided any physical adaptation to the reception of persons with disabilities, be they physical, visual, hearing etc. In a research trip taken by our group, participants with special mobility demands (one in a wheelchair and another a little people), had to be carried up in order to have access to the building.

**The Museographic Experience  Touching and Accessing**

**Conclusions - Senses and Sensations on Access to Culture and Museums**

“To speak of perception is to speak of the body. The perceived world is a combination of the meanderings of the body. The body is the fabric of all the objects it comes into contact with. And it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument used for our understanding. The body knows, the body understands, and it is in it, that the meaning of things manifests itself.”

“Having all the organic senses is completely different from lacking one. The perceptive experience deals with the how, rather than the object, and offers itself as a way of getting to know the reflective individual. Everyone understands the world based on their own personal views and experiences, without which the mechanisms of science would have no meaning.”
“Every aspect of the perceived object is an invitation to see beyond.”
Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The Phenomenology of Perception. 1984

Taking into consideration the importance of the senses and sensations, we believe that these dimensions are essential to the understanding of any proposal for a museum. The museum is a plural entity, it is aimed at the same time, to the individual as well as to a collective group. If the scope of sensorial, emotional and poetic discoveries are endless, how must one find their way? No one should be neglected, most importantly those which speak the sensorial language. He is a player and not only a spectator.

In our ethnographic quest, as Laplantine François (2008), we have made many mistakes in the field, mistakes which resulted in information for our research. This universe of sensations and emotions have brought us face-to-face with some very unexpected events. However, it is safe to say, that the people with whom we shared our routes and speeches throughout the museums we analysed - through a ethnographic prism, were eager to use their bodies to participate, talk, touch, smell, feel and move. The museum atmospheres that were part of this research are quite unique in their characteristics, but have enough general details which could be observed and applied to a large number of exhibitions. By exploring and understanding them, we were able to come face-to-face with many unforeseen situations described by Laplantine (2008).

The visits we have made along with persons with disabilities, have aided us in shaping the atmosphere of the museums we have investigated. We tried to observe all the possibilities for perception - audible, visible, tactile, and mobile - seeking an understanding of what may be visible or memorable through our visitors optics. Above all, we endeavoured to monitor their perceptions, motivations and intentions according to their sensitive or sensorial abilities - visual, audible, tactile, kinesthetic, or olfactory.

By using these resources, we accompanied our visitors during the journeys made throughout the exhibitions, and analysed the extent of the events and offers presented to them along the way. A museum and its exhibitions bring into evidence not only spaces and objects, but also bodies and movement.

The Pompidou Center in Paris yields tactile pathways which offer great opportunities for the “discovery” of its many pieces. For each new presentation exhibited by the museum, new pathways are organized. The Pinacoteca of the São Paulo state in Brazil spearheaded, and is at the forefront of the catering to the fascinating, sensorial and emotional experiences in museum atmospheres.

An arresting testimony from a visitor with visual impairment:

“My experience at the Pinacoteca of São Paulo was amazing. Touching an embossed Monalisa thrilled me because it brought back the memories I had of the reproductions I had seen of the painting when I still had my eyesight. The interesting part was that no one in the environment I was in could determine if the piece was good or not and I felt euphoric, because for me, it was perfect! I recovered for a second, the visual arts, something I had lost when I became blind at 21. Art and sculpture. Yes, they brought back through my hands what I had already seen and remained in my memory, as well as new memories which will be imprinted in my mind”.
It is plain to see, that this is a project which is being developed with the support of many witnesses, many positive experiences in Brazil and abroad, and in partnerships with other institutions. We have provided some examples of atmospheres which were collected throughout our research and participant observation in ethnographic museums protected by IPHAN, and located in the State of Rio de Janeiro. However, our research is far from being over, all the museums we have visited still need a deeper analysis of their accessibility conditions. What was shown in this article is a sign of how Brazil, and more specifically Rio de Janeiro, finds itself in dire need of inclusion when it comes to the fundamental spaces necessary for cultural growth in a society, such as museums.

References

Amphoux, Pascal; Thibaud, Jean-Paul et Chelkoff, Grégoire. Ambiances en Débats. Bernin : À La Croisée, 2004


IPHAN. Instrução Normativa nº 1. 2003 (www.iphan.gov.br)


SARRAF, Viviane Vista Cansada, artigo publicado no site do Fórum Permanente: http://forumpermanente.incubadora.fapesp.br/portal/painel/critica/viviane_sarraf/.


About the Authors

Post PhD Regina Cohen
Architect, Community Psycho-sociology and Social Ecology DSc. (EICOS/IP/UFRJ), Associate Researcher at DTC/FAU/UFRJ and Coordinator of Núcleo Pro-acesso/PROARQ/FAU/UFRJ

Cristiane Rose de Siqueira Duarte
Architect, Territorial Planning DSc. (Sorbonne - Université de Paris-I), Titular Professor at FAU/UFRJ and Coordinator of Núcleo Pro-acesso/PROARQ/FAU/UFRJ

Alice de Barros Horizonte Brasileiro
Architect, Architecture DSc. (PROARQ/FAU/UFRJ), Teacher at FAU/UFRJ and Researcher of Núcleo Pró-acesso/PROARQ/FAU/UFRJ
EDITORS

Amreaswar Galla, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.
Bill Cope, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Corazon S. Alvina, Director, National Museum of the Philippines, Manila, Philippines.
Ann Davis, Director, The Nickle Arts Museum, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada.
Shahid Vawda, Programme on Culture, Heritage and Tourism, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.
Adi Meretui Ratunabuabua, Principal Cultural Development Officer, Department of Culture and Heritage, Ministry of Fijian Affairs, Culture and Heritage, Suva, Fiji Islands.
Laishun An, China Friendship Museum, Beijing; Secretary General ICOM 2010, Shanghai.
Christine Hemmet, Responsable de l’unité patrimoniale des collections Asie, Musée du quai Branly, Paris, France.
Henry C. (Jatti) Bredekamp, Chief Executive Officer, Iziko Museums of Cape Town, South Africa.
Lina G. Tahan, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Tourism and Cultural Change, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, UK.
Lucia Astudillo Loor, Directora, Museo de los Metales, Cuenca, Ecuador.
Pascal Makambila, Conservateur en chef des musées, Brazzaville, Congo.
Tereza C. Moletta Scheiner, Coordinator, Postgraduate Program in Museology and Heritage, Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro – UNIRIO, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
W. Richard West, Jr., Director, Founding Director Emeritus, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., USA; Adjunct Professor, Museum Studies, the University of Queensland, Brisbane.
