

Antonio Javier Chica Núñez y Silvia Martínez Martínez (eds.)

**ACCESO AL PATRIMONIO CULTURAL, CIENTÍFICO Y
NATURAL
CONTRIBUCIONES DESDE LA TRADUCTOLOGÍA**

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Multisensory experiences in museums

Cláudia Martins¹

ACCESSIBILITY IN CULTURAL SPACES COMES across a myriad of barriers, which prevent people with impairments to fully enjoy these venues, such as galleries and museums, cinemas, theatres, stadiums, churches or graveyards, among others. Attempts to overcome these obstacles to social inclusion have been developed in the past decades with considerable progress in the US, the UK and a handful of European countries. Portugal is not yet among these countries, though some experiments have been carried out in terms of sensory accessibility. It is worth mentioning the *Museu da Comunidade Concelhia da Batalha* (Museum of the Community of Batalha) and *Museu Nacional do Azulejo* (National Tile Museum) as Portuguese hallmarks for the access for all. My PhD research project focused on the analysis of the accessibility conditions of 20 cultural institutions which offered audio guides. Concurrently, I also examined the commentaries comprised in these audio guides. Both stages of analysis followed technical, institutional, macrostructural and content-oriented criteria, centred on the elements that should be found in the audio guide structure and in the commentaries so that they could cater for the needs of people with sensory impairments, particularly the blind and visually-impaired. By drawing on some examples collected from the abovementioned research project, I aim at providing an insight into museum accessibility in Portugal and putting forth recommendations for best practices within museums, taking into account the urgent need to engage our different senses in cultural experiences.

¹ Polytechnic Institute of Bragança & CLLC-UA & CICS.NOVA.IPLeiria, Portugal; claudiam@ipb.pt

KEYWORDS: Cultural accessibility; museums; audio guides; audio description; blind and visually-impaired visitors.

1. Introduction

After the World War II, the pressure of the soldiers who returned impaired from the war and the organisations that represented them accomplished something undreamed of —reintegrating disabled people into society after the appropriate rehabilitation process—. This fact opened the door to a new understanding of disability and impairment and introduced another dimension to the civil rights movements that were under development around the world, particularly in the US and in Europe. Accessibility, inclusion and universal design became catch words and the events dedicated to impaired people multiplied, such as the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992)². Nonetheless, people's mindsets and society do not usually follow as swiftly and, consequently, cultural and leisure venues took their time to catch up, emphasising more the most visible part of accessibility: physical access for people on wheelchairs, for example.

Despite this, the discussion on the various dimensions of accessibility moved on and physical access became only one among others. Cultural access for everyone was paramount and this required a more comprehensive approach to social events, with an emphasis on cultural venues, such as museums. Worldwide, cultural institutions began rethinking their stand on their visitors, particularly those with impairments, and redesigning their exhibitions and activities in accordance.

It is in this context of cultural accessibility where our research is framed. Hence, we aim at reflecting on the numerous barriers that people are faced with in cultural venues, referring to Dodd & Sandell (1998) and Sasaki (2005), and on the ways these sensory obstacles have been overcome, using the Portuguese examples of the Museum of the Community of Batalha and the National Tile Museum. After

² Cf. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/united-nations-decade-of-disabled-persons-1983-1992.html> [Last access: 20th February 2019].

this first section, we will delve into our doctorate research, eliciting the work conducted in the museum context from the standpoint of audio guides as an accessibility tool both for general visitors and for visitors with impairments, namely the blind and visually-impaired. Finally, I will put forth some final remarks and recommendations for best practices in museums that may foster multisensory experiences for all visitors.

2. Accessibility in cultural venues

The issue of accessibility has become a burning topic in the second half of the 20th century, particularly from the 1980s, a decade that stands as a milestone not only for a timely paradigm change (from the medical to the [bio-psycho-] social model), but also for the upsides that stemmed from these changes. All this concurred to bring about a ripple effect and what was once a mere concern with access for people on a wheelchair in a public building was no longer sufficient, thus accessibility spread to all dimensions of social life, cultural venues included, such as galleries and museums, historical, archaeological or religious sites, cinemas, theatres, stadiums, churches or graveyards (i.e. weddings³ and funerals, respectively), for all people with impairments —physical, sensory, intellectual, mental, language and speech (depending on the framework you choose to follow)—.

It is commonly accepted that accessibility in cultural venues comes across a myriad of barriers. Dodd & Sandell (1998) mention some in the context of museums particularly, i.e. physical, information, cultural, emotional, financial, intellectual and sensory access, and access to decision-making, whereas Sasaki (2005) approaches accessibility from a broader perspective, namely architectural, communicational, methodological, instrumental, programmatic and attitudinal access.

³ Watch the Brazilian audiodescriber's, Lívia Motta, video on the description of a blind couple's wedding: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N96lbyVId2I> (without AD) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DntjTA7Th3o> (with AD) [Last access: 27th February 2019].

Despite the seemingly distinct standpoints, there are parallels to be made: for instance, architectural and physical access are both concerned with attempting to make the buildings (e.g. museums) physically accessible to people with reduced mobility, such as people on wheelchairs, families with children, pregnant women, the elderly or obese people. Communicational access may equate to access to information, whether institutions reach their audiences and communicate with them at various levels, be it in written or interpersonal communication or digitally. As for cultural access, it may coincide with Sasaki's concept of instrumental access which means the elimination of barriers in a wide range of cultural and leisure activities, from school to daily routines, cultural venues or sports. One last possible match lies on emotional and attitudinal access, since the bottom-line is to change people's attitudes towards disability, sensitising them to diversity and tolerance, and ultimately turn the museum environment into a welcoming place with open-minded staff.

The remaining dimensions propounded by Dodd & Sandell (1998) cover: sensory access, whether museum exhibitions, events and facilities can be used by people with vision and hearing impairments; intellectual access, if people with learning difficulties or simply those with limited background knowledge can apprehend and enjoy the exhibitions; financial access related to the affordability of the entrances, the cafeteria and the shop for families or people on low incomes; and access to the decision-making process, whether museums consult visitors about their exhibitions and activities and appreciate their input (e.g. by means of questionnaires). On the other hand, Sasaki (2005) also covers methodological access that aims at eliminating the obstacles found in the learning and teaching process (particularly in the methodologies and strategies used) that is carried out at school, in communities or families, and, finally, programmatic access which refers to the suppression of invisible hurdles in public policies, rules and regulations and legislation in general.

Therefore, as Sasaki (2005) defends, inclusion requires preparing social systems for all these barriers to be obliterated, in a continuous and concomitant process that enables all people to feel welcome regardless of their individual differences. Overcoming the abovementioned obstacles

implies a quantum leap in people and institutions' mindset and the provision of financial resources that may cater for specific needs and can, in fact, benefit the wider population. Among those needs, we could mention a few translation aids that aim at people with sensory impairment, namely Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (SDHoH), Sign Language Interpreting (SLI) or Audio Description (AD).

In this regard, the US and the UK have taken great strides, not only in spreading AD in museums (e.g. Joel Snyder, regarded as a pioneer in the description of cultural events, namely at theatre houses and in museums, having started in 1981), but also in making these institutions accessible to all, providing visitors with a vast range of resources, as the Victorian & Albert Museum, the British Museum and the Imperial War Museum, in London. There is also a handful of European countries that enhance this worldwide tendency, of which we could mention Spain (e.g. the Prado Museum or the Reina Sofía National Art Centre), Italy (e.g. the Galleria degli Uffizi, founded by the Médicis family and the first to introduce labels on artworks, and the Vatican Museums, one of the oldest in the world) or the Netherlands (e.g. Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam). However, Portugal does not yet belong to this group, even though we should highlight two inspirational examples in the country – the Museum of the Community of Batalha (*Museu da Comunidade Concelhia da Batalha, MCCB*) and the National Tile Museum (*Museum Nacional do Azulejo, MNA*).

As described elsewhere (Martins 2015, 2016), the Museum of the Community of Batalha, a small town 100km from Lisbon, resulted from a project coordinated by the City Council of Batalha (with Joséia Neves's accessibility supervision) that intended to design a space where the history of this community could be discovered without neglecting physical access, mobility, comfort, security, autonomy, multimodality, continuity and creativity (cf. museum's official website⁴). Despite being a small-scale museum, it invested greatly in a variety of accessibility resources to pro-

⁴ Check: <http://www.museubatalha.com/accessibility-resources-inclusive-solutions> [Last access: 20th February 2019].

vide for the needs of a broad range of visitors, such as foreign or national visitors, children and people with impairments. To being with, people with reduced mobility are granted designated parking spaces, lowered floors and access ramps, ergonomic furniture with adaptable heights to serve those on wheelchairs, rest places and accessible toilets. On the other hand, people who are visually-impaired are provided with directional lighting, multimedia kiosks (with options of large print and high contrast texts), numerous hands-on experiences and an audio guide. For those who are blind, to allow for an autonomous visit, there is a sensory trail on the floor, Braille displays, a multimedia kiosk with a screen reader and space for guide dogs. As far as the deaf and hard-of-hearing are concerned, the museum has made available video guides in Portuguese Sign Language, films with closed captions, texts and space for the hearing guide dog. Finally, those with intellectual or cognitive impairment are provided with clear language texts based on pictograms, game and exploration activities, kinesthetic experiences and guided visits.

Furthermore, the added value of the MCCB is two-fold: the fact that its audio guide includes AD —replacement, orientational and exploration AD (Neves 2011)—, as well as its permission to touch the pieces on display. All visitors may touch a considerable number of pieces, the first of which is the tactile map of the museum at the entrance. Along the visit, there is the opportunity to access a limestone block with fossils and a number of replicas for a stegosaurus tibia, three human skulls from different moments in history, a tomb stone, a balcony marble stone and a weight and measure system from the king D. Manuel I (15th-16th century). For all these reasons, the MCCB won various prizes, namely the Kenneth Hudson Award of the European Museum Forum, in May 2013, the Museum of the Year Award, in June the same year, and, in December 2014, the honorary prize for the Most Accessible Council in Portugal, promoted by the Portuguese National Institute of Rehabilitation.

As for the National Tile Museum, it is situated in the old Monastery of Madre Deus (i.e. the Mother of God), in Lisbon, founded in 1509 by the Queen Leonor, and has served many different purposes throughout the centuries, such as being an annex for Casa Pia (charity for young-

sters created by the Portuguese Queen Mary, the Pious, following the 1755 earthquake) and for the National Museum of Ancient Art. In the 20th century, so as to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Queen Leonor's birthday, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation sponsored in-depth refurbishment works which ultimately led to the independence of the Tile Museum in 1980. Nowadays, after the implementation of the accessibility project "Treasures for all"⁵ developed by Joséia Neves and Clara Mineiro in 2010, it does not only offer new access for people with reduced mobility, namely ramps that enable these visitors to enter the exhibition spaces and the church, but also enhanced information access by means of multimedia guides for the blind and visually-impaired (in Portuguese and in English), video guides in Portuguese Sign Language and International Sign Language and a set of 17 high relief replicas with Braille captions. These replicas include, for instance, the tile panel with a grasshopper pattern, the piece named Labyrinth by Maria Keil (designed for the Lisbon Subway) and Querubim Lapa's work, also a tile panel (cf. Martins 2015).

In the Portuguese context, this type of inclusive approach is still rather uncommon but highly enriching for all visitors, taking the museum visit to greater heights because it also relies on other senses, apart from sight, namely hearing and touch, ultimately leading to a more meaningful and holistic multisensory experience.

3. Museum audio guides as a gateway to multisensory experiences

My doctoral research, conducted between 2010 and 2015, aimed to characterise Portugal's state of the art as far as accessibility is concerned by means of the offer of audio guides within the context of museums. We also intended to ascertain the extent to which these audio guides could comply with the needs of blind and visually-impaired visitors. In order to accomplish our objectives, research was organised into two stages: the

⁵ A joint project of the National Tile Museum and the Portuguese Institute of Museums and Conservation (merged in 2011 with another institute, which makes up the General Direction of Cultural Heritage), with the patronage of the Millennium BCP Foundation.

first consisted in collecting information about audio guides made available by Portuguese institutions, such as museums, national palaces, historical sites, interpretation centres and aquaria (in line with the classification put forward by the National Statistics Institute in Portugal); and the second focused on the selection of a sample of 20 audio guides to be analysed from a macro- and a microstructural perspectives.

As a result, 20 Portuguese institutions from north to south were visited and we used their audio guides and proceeded to the transcription of a sample of their texts. Afterwards, this sample of audio guides was analysed from a broader perspective, according to technical, institutional and macro-structural criteria (based in part on Gebbensleben et al. 2006) that sought to examine the institutions' overall attitude to accessibility and, in particular, to blind and visually-impaired visitors. Finally, we carried out the content-oriented analysis of a corpus of 35 texts pertaining to three different typologies: texts related to spatial orientation (e.g. maps and plans, outdoor and indoor spaces), two-dimensional works and three-dimensional pieces. This analysis was based on a "cocktail" of several sources relevant to the area of museum AD, namely Art Beyond Sight (Axel et al. 1996), Snyder (2004, 2007), the Spanish UNE 153020 (2005), De Coster & Mühleis (2007), Audio Description Coalition (2009) and Neves (ADLAB 2014).

In terms of the data retrieved from this project, we can remark that, between 2010 and 2015, 83 audio guides were being offered in Portugal—54 in museums, monasteries and palaces, and the remaining for sight-seeing city tours, which were discarded for the purposes of this study. In 2013 (INE, IP 2014), only 353 museums complied with the National Statistics Institute's strict criteria, and thus the number of audio guides offered at that time represents a mere 15% of the total number of museums in the country. However, a survey undertaken by the Cultural Activities Observatory (*Observatório de Atividades Culturais*, OAC, which was closed down in 2013) presented a significantly higher number of museums open in 2010: 1123 museums scattered throughout the country, which makes the 83 audio guides on offer a quite residual figure (cf. Neves, Santos & Lima 2013).

The audio guides under study were offered in institutions that are geographically organised as follows: 8 in the north of the country, 8 in Porto, 10 in the centre, 20 in Lisbon and the remaining 8 found in Alentejo, Algarve and the Azores. From the macrostructural analysis performed, it is possible to state that only the MCCB and the MNA presented themselves as accessible to all, clearly directed to the needs of blind and visually-impaired and deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors, whereas the remaining institutions aimed at general audiences. As mentioned above, both the MCCB and the MNA intentionally integrated AD in their commentaries, whilst there were other institutions which could eventually meet the needs of these patrons, especially those with texts that make use of a more poetic and suggestive (and ekphrasistic, cf. Pujol & Orero 2007) language, and were supported on a variety of sound resources and tactile materials, such as the case of the Museum of Douro⁶, Peso da Régua (north), the National Palace and Park of Pena⁷, Sintra (south), or the National Museum of Machado de Castro⁸, Coimbra (centre). However, access for people with impairments was never their initial intention and thus the impact was merely incidental.

In this sample, the most used sense is in fact hearing, due to richness of sound, e.g. alternation of female and male voices, music and various sound effects (bleating of sheep, water running), voice dramatisation of historical figures and real voices, such as directors or curators. No commentary directly activated the senses of smell or of taste, but there is a number of examples where touch was actively engaged: tactile plans or maps for the institutions, replicas of objects, maquettes, tactile illustrations, Braille materials and hands-on sessions. Therefore, in line with Guigue (2010) and Confino-Reheder (2010), museums should strive for sense convergence or the activation of the triad object–sound–text so as to bring forth a truly multisensory museum experience.

6 Official website: <http://www.museudodouro.pt/> [Last access: 20th February 2019].

7 Official website: <https://www.parquesdesintra.pt/parques-jardins-e-monumentos/parque-e-palacio-nacional-da-pena/> [Last access: 20th February 2019].

8 Official website: <http://www.museummachadocastro.gov.pt/en-GB/default.aspx> [Last access: 20th February 2019].

4. Final remarks

Accessibility practices still have a long way to go, though many important steps have been made in several countries around the world, namely the US and other European countries, where Portugal is not yet inscribed. Nonetheless, there are good practices being undertaken, such as in the cases of the Museum of the Community of Batalha and the National Tile Museum, both of which present themselves as accessible to all and offer a variety of resources that engage visitors in meaningful experiences. As a consequence, both museums do not only use audio guides, but also AD as a tool to enhance museum visits. On the one hand, AD comes forward as a descriptive and narrative technique that makes use of suggestive and vivid language (often more subjective and poetic than some scholars and practitioners uphold) and thus triggers off mental images that are strong enough to make up for the absence of sight. In spite of this, this type of language and text can also be of great value for viewers and thus beneficial for all visitors. To accomplish a truly multisensory experience, AD must be complemented by other elements by means of which all senses are engaged, namely hearing and touch, in a real sense convergence. As a result, smell and taste should not be neglected since they play a significant role in consolidating memories and bringing about meaningful knowledge.

In a nutshell, the overall policy defined by museums and the ensuing investment they make in their resources, namely audio guides, replicas, various information materials, AD, among others, will determine their approach to the whole issue of access for all and thus serve as a barometer of their accessibility conditions.

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Subtitulado para Sordos del musical *La ciudad de las estrellas (La La Land)* (Chazelle, 2016)

Clara Puerta Capa¹

PARA LA COMUNIDAD DE SORDOS, la música resulta ser un lenguaje complejo del que queda inmediatamente excluida al no poder ser partícipes de la misma forma que los normoyentes. En el presente estudio se ha llevado a cabo una investigación para ahondar en la importancia del papel que juega la música en el Subtitulado para Sordos (SpS) dentro del género cinematográfico de los musicales, concretamente del musical *La ciudad de las estrellas (La La Land)*, y así facilitar el acceso a esta por parte de la comunidad de sordos.

A partir del análisis del lenguaje simplificado, las cualidades del sonido y la semiótica musical, se ha elaborado un SpS del discurso musical presente en la escena *Planetarium*. La norma UNE 153010 (2012), que es de las pocas que reúne en la actualidad una serie de directrices para realizar un SpS accesible de calidad en los audiovisuales, afirma que la música debe subtitularse cuando ayude al usuario a comprender el argumento. Sin embargo, esta información resulta ser superficial al no abarcar toda la riqueza semántica que la música puede transmitir.

El presente trabajo se completa con un estudio de recepción en que la comunidad sorda ha podido participar. Los sujetos contribuyeron a esta investigación de forma voluntaria visualizando el SpS anteriormente mencionado y realizando posteriormente una encuesta. Con ello, se pretendía ver si la posibilidad de aportar más información relativa a la banda sonora dentro del género cinematográfico de los musicales permitiría una mayor comprensión y un mayor grado de accesibilidad.

1 Universidad de Granada; clara.puerta.capa@gmail.com