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Museu do Ipiranga: challenges of a museum outside the walls of the university

Abstract

The Museu Paulista of the University of São Paulo, housed in a building constructed in 1890 to celebrate the Independence of Brazil, has been characterized as a research institution since its foundation. Its creation predates USP's foundation (1934), to which was incorporated in 1963 and remains until today. Known as Museu do Ipiranga, due to the proximity to the homonymous river where Independence would have been proclaimed, it seems not to be recognized as a university museum and a research center by the population that visits it, and even to the university community. Its location almost 15 km away from the University campus seems to contribute to this perception. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the role of the institution and its relationship with different audiences that attend it and even with those who do not, even considering its potential attractions (academic research and leisure space). Another relevant aspect relates to its exhibition plans. The last restructuring of the institution (1989) reaffirmed it in the field of history and defined three lines of research, which would also be conceptual axes of the expositions and these, in turn, would be ways of socialization of the knowledge produced from the collections. The systematic evaluation of this proposal began in 2001, with the formation of the Educational Activities Service (SAE) and the definition of lines of action to guarantee the full access of different publics to the space, contents and collections of the Museum, among them: exhibition's evaluation; elaboration of inclusive mediation strategies and resources; and participation in the design process of exhibitions. In this presentation, we will present the results of the surveys carried out over the years, especially those related to the exhibition « Images Recreating History », as well as the accessibility strategies designed for these projects.

Keywords : closed museums, museum education, museum audiences.

Résumé

Le Museu Paulista de l'Université de São Paulo, installé dans un édifice construit en 1890 pour célébrer l'indépendance du Brésil, est un centre de recherche depuis sa fondation. Sa création est antérieure à l'Université de São Paulo (1934), à laquelle il a été ajouté en 1963. On le connaît comme Museu do Ipiranga en raison de la proximité avec le ruisseau Ipiranga où l'Indépendance du pays aurait été proclamée. Il semble que l'institution ne soit pas reconnue en tant que musée universitaire ni comme lieu de production de recherche par la population qui la visite et même pas par la communauté universitaire. Sa localisation, à 15 km de la cité universitaire, semble contribuer à cette vision. Il est alors nécessaire de discuter du rôle de l'institution comme musée universitaire et de son rapport avec les profils variés des publics qui le fréquentent ; mais également des liens avec ceux qui ne le visitent pas en raison de la proximité avec la production scientifique, ni en le voyant en tant qu'espace de loisir distinct. Il y a une autre question à considérer : les plans d'expositions. La dernière restructuration de l'institution (1989) l'a confirmé dans le domaine de l'histoire et a aussi défini trois axes de recherche (Quotidien et Société, Univers du Travail et Histoire de l'Imaginaire) qui constituent également les axes conceptuels des expositions et les moyens de socialiser le savoir produit par leurs exploitations. L'évaluation systématique du succès de cette proposition a commencé en 2001 avec la création du Service des activités éducatives et la définition de différentes lignes d'action afin de garantir un accès total des différents publics à l'espace, au contenu et aux collections du musée. Évaluation des expositions, élaboration de stratégies de médiation inclusives, participation au processus de conception d'expositions et développement de ressources de médiation accessibles constituent les principales lignes d'action. Dans cette présentation, nous présenterons les résultats des recherches menées au fil des ans, en particulier celles qui ont des rapports avec l'exposition « Images Recreating History », ainsi que les stratégies d'accessibilité conçues pour ces projets.

Mots-clés : musées fermés, éducation muséale, public du musée.

Museu Paulista - or is it Museu do Ipiranga?

The Museu Paulista of the University of São Paulo (MP/USP), installed in a monument-building constructed between 1885 and 1890 to celebrate the Independence of Brazil and the memory of D. Pedro I¹, has been characterized as a research institution since its foundation. Its creation predates the University of São Paulo - USP's, which occurred only in 1934, to which it was incorporated in 1963 and whose link remains today. The Museum is one of the largest and oldest museological institutions in the country, with more than 400.000 items in its collection and 27 million visitors received over 125 years of history.

Widely known as « Museu do Ipiranga », due to the proximity to the homonymous creek where the independence would have been proclaimed, the Museum does not seem to be recognized by the population it visits and even by the community of students, employees and professors of the university as a research center. Although it was opened to the public in 1895, as a Natural History Museum, with collections of zoology, botany, mineralogy, arts and history², what permeates the social imaginary is its connection with the events of Independence and characters associated with the Brazilian empire³. Its location, almost 15 km from the university's main campus - with 7.443.770 square meters, called « Cidade Universitária » and located in Butantã, another São Paulo's neighbourhood - seems to contribute to this perception. On the other hand, over the years the Museum has built a strong relationship with the inhabitants of the city, which materializes in a very forceful way, mainly in the month of September, when the celebrations of the Independence Day of Brazil occurs (fig. 1 and 2).

¹ First Brazilian emperor, he was one of the protagonists of the separation process between Brazil and Portugal - a throne of which he was also the heir. The memory of Brazilian independence was object of regional disputes throughout the 19th century, with the predominant symbolic landmark on September 7, 1822 when, while passing through the Ipiranga region in São Paulo, D. Pedro I would have shouted the scream « Independence or Death! », after receiving correspondence about the worsening of portuguese pressure over him.

² The museum's initial nucleus was constituted from a private collection that belonged to Colonel Joaquim Sertório.

³ The monumentality and richness of the ornamentation elements of its building and the ambience created by the gardens around it - whose current feature dates back to 1923 - have, over the years, created a series of narratives about the museum. The best known - and perhaps most curious among them - claims that the building would have been used as a residence for the Royal Family, with royalty rooms spread across its wide corridors. The institution's history, however, is quite different from this imaginary, as explained throughout this text. The visit of D. Pedro I and his entourage to Ipiranga, in 1822, took place 63 years before the construction of the building began. In addition, the emperor died in 1834, in Portugal.



Figure 1 - Celebrations on September 7th, 1912.

Photo: Unidentified author, Revista Careta. Archive of the Museu Paulista of USP.



Figure 2 - Celebrations of the Independence of Brazil on September 7th, 2012. Photo: Hélio Nobre / José Rosaél. Archive of the Museu Paulista of USP. The photograph was taken in the last year that the museum was open during the Independence Day celebrations.

Throughout its more than century-old history, the Museum has undergone several reconfigurations, with transfers of collections more directly linked to the natural and biological sciences. On the other hand, efforts were gradually made, at different times, which sought to reinforce the historical character of the institution. Two moments were decisive in this process: the term of office of director Affonso d'Escragno Taunay,

between 1917 and 1945, in which new celebratory collections of the country's history were formed with the protagonism of São Paulo characters, with relation to the celebrations of the first centenary of Brazil's Independence in 1922; and the management of Prof. Ulpiano Toledo Bezerra de Menezes, between 1989 and 1994, in which the last transfers of collections took place for the formation of the Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia of USP (Archeology and Ethnology Museum) and in which a new master plan for the institution was established, centered on research in history and culture between 1850 and 1950, predominantly in São Paulo. Although the first major change took place almost a hundred years ago, it seems to have contributed significantly to the image of a museum where the « traditional » history was crystallized, constituting a challenge for the later administrations - mainly after 1989 - to enlarge and problematize the views of history involved in this imaginary⁴.

Thus, it is necessary to discuss the role of the institution as an university museum and its relationship with the different audiences that attend it (teachers, students, residents of the neighborhood, tourists, the elderly, among others) and even those who do not, considering none of its potential attractions: to be a possibility of getting closer to the academic production of the main university in the country, or to visit a differentiated leisure space - inserted in one of the main parks in the city, which houses, in addition to Museu Paulista itself, the Museu de Zoologia of USP (Zoology Museum) and one of the units of the Museu da Cidade de São Paulo (São Paulo's City Museum).

Another relevant aspect refers to its exhibition plans. The last restructuring of the institution (1989) reaffirmed it in the field of history and defined three lines of research: Daily life and Society, Universe of Work and History of the Imaginary. Linked to the research of the professors who are part of the staff, which was quite numerically restricted, the exhibitions were being revisited based on the theoretical and methodological references of the field of History, especially those related to the understanding of the dimension occupied by materiality in human societies. The exhibitions, therefore, sought to constitute a way of socializing the knowledge produced by the university through the work of the Museum's

⁴ The exhibition created by Taunay constructed a narrative that was both national and regional, in which the state of São Paulo figured as a protagonist in the processes of occupation and territorial expansion, in economic activities and in the political processes of emancipation - culminating in the very episode of Brazilian's Independence in São Paulo soil. Such an impactful and controversial discourse persists in the memory of generations of visitors to the present, and over the years the teams that worked at the institution have faced the challenge of working with the explanation of this constructed narrative, using added expographic elements and a series of educational actions. Taunay's exhibition cannot even be altered, as it was considered by the country's preservation agencies as a kind of « three-dimensional narrative of history », typical of the beginning of the 20th century, and which must be understood as a heritage to be preserved. Criticizing the exhibition, which represents extremely problematic indigenous groups and black populations in extremely problematic ways, with a brand new expography is a major current challenge in the Museum's new exhibition plan.

researchers in the collections of the institution. The systematic assessment of the success of this proposal began in 2001 because, although the Museum has been closely linked to formal educational institutions since the beginning and for decades it has been the most visited museum in the city, only at this moment an area dedicated to this work was created with the establishment the Educational Activities Service (SAE). Different lines of action were then structured to guarantee full access by different audiences to the Museum's space, contents and collections. This commitment unfolded on several fronts of work, among them:

- the evaluation of exhibitions;
- the elaboration of inclusive mediation strategies for different social groups;
- the participation in the exhibition design process; and
- the elaboration of accessible mediation resources in different formats.

Closed doors. A Closed Museum?

It is essential to address in this text the process that the Museu Paulista has been going through since 2013. On this year, the institution hired the services of an architecture firm specialized in restoration in order to assess problems found in the lining of some rooms in the building. In August 2013, a technical report informed that there was an imminent risk of detachment of two of the liners evaluated. For safety precautions, on the following day the board decided to ban the building for both visitors and employees, and a long renovation process began. For years the technical team had been preparing projects that would allow restoring, adapting and expanding the Museum spaces, meeting the demands of visitation, accessibility and conservation of collections. In this way, since this day the museum has been closed for a wide process of restoration and modernization and its reopening is scheduled for 2022, the year when the bicentenary of Independence of Brazil will be celebrated.

The planning process for new exhibitions, in progress, takes into account the experience of years of research carried out by SAE, especially those related to exhibitions. In this text, we will highlight the experience of the exhibition « Images Recreate History », as well as the accessibility strategies designed for these projects, and initiatives for listening different audiences currently underway.

Audience survey at the Museu Paulista: evaluation of exhibitions and dialogues with the public

The public surveys developed at the Museum over time addressed different issues, covering both visitation profile surveys (Who are the visitors of the Museum? How old are they? What is their education level? How do they usually visit it? Among other questions) and surveys on exhibition resources (in the planning phase or already implemented).

In 2007, the Museum opened an exhibition called « Images Recreate History », whose objective was to demonstrate how some historical paintings in the collection created, over time, a specific point of view about the past, with a series of new information provided by our researchers⁵. One of the objectives was to encourage the public to read these images critically, understanding them as a dated construction and with specific intentions of their original context. Then, some surveys were created to investigate how we could achieve this goal. The exhibition reconfigured an entire wing of the Museum's exhibition space, which was occupied by large-format paintings (fig. 3).



Figure 3 - Exhibition « Cartography of a history - colonial São Paulo: maps and reports », 2005.
Photo: Hélio Nobre / José Rosael. Archive of the Museu Paulista of USP.

The results of the surveys showed that the majority of the public believed that the images of the paintings were similar to faithful portraits of the past and the exhibition intended to criticize this social perception, demonstrating its construction process, objectives and implications from its circulation. Another discovery of the research was the close relationship that the public built when an object and a painting were placed in close proximity. The interpretation effect was that the physical object was the same represented in the painting and that the painting was a real record of the past - even when produced 300 years after the represented event. The team also found that when the same exhibition

⁵ Based on new researches, the exhibition will be updated for the reopening of the Museum in 2022, with the title « Passados Imaginados » (Imagined pasts). Surveys carried out by the education team after the opening of the first exhibition on some of the showcases will also be considered in this new formulation.

room had objects and images, the objects used to « win » the contest for the visitors attention, and the paintings always ended up in the background. Based on this information, the education team discussed with the curatorial group new strategies to encourage new understandings of the rooms - choosing, for example, to treat the images separately from the objects and to insert resources for reading the images, such as projections below the paintings. In addition, the exhibition was the first in São Paulo to include accessibility features in the exhibition space itself, such as tactile reproductions of paintings and texts in braille and enlarged ink (fig. 4). Such resources were used autonomously, in order to promote visiting experiences that equally involved visitors with and without disabilities.



Figure 4 - Exhibition « Images Recreate History », Room « Imagine the beginning », 2007. Photo: Hélio Nobre / José Rosael. Archive of the Museu Paulista of USP. The image records the moment when the original painting was darkened and the projection below it addressed its elaboration. Ahead, there are accessibility features.

Other examples are related to the Museum's reopening process, scheduled for 2022. Is it essential to understand, after such a long period of interdiction, who are our visitors? What do they think about the Museum and its best-known items? What do they understand from the design of the exhibitions we are preparing? Then we started a process of listening to audiences in a very organic way. In 2018, we started with cycles of conversation with members of neighborhood institutions and some members of the Museum's staff. Then we left for a group of young people participating in theater workshops held in the neighborhood, using the methodology of producing podcasts to conduct the discussion⁶. At the same time, we started a partnership with a research group on urban anthropology at the university (NAU/ USP), in order to initiate approaches with other groups, such as young

⁶ The pilot project was carried out in partnership with a process facilitation company called Entrelinhas.

MCs from the periphery of the neighborhood⁷, using their own artistic expression to discuss the Museum's themes, and groups of female leaders of popular housing movement in the city. This effort is based on the idea that the museum and its expography need to be intelligible and to dialogue with all audiences – since the whole society contributes to its sustainability and, of course, has the right to visit it and enjoy this experience. In 2020 – and even with the social distance measures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic –, this process was extended and we started a broader collective listening process with different social groups, working with age, ethnic and gender cuts⁸. The selected groups involves teachers, tourism professionals, LGBT people, members of indigenous and black movements, people with various disabilities, among others. We intend to establish a broader dialogue with society, understanding the expectations of the public in relation to the Museum and building new guidelines for themes and approaches for exhibitions, educational and cultural actions that can be developed from 2022 onwards.

Such actions are consistent with the understanding that public institutions of culture, such as the Museu Paulista, must act in accordance with national and international premises on cultural rights, explained in normative documents and specialized bibliography in the field. The permanence of actions with the public, either during the closing period of the Museum, or after the opening of exhibitions, therefore, are not characterized as mere circumstantial options, but as a political and institutional position to fulfill the Museum's mission and understanding access to cultural heritage as a fundamental human right.

This is our main objective: to build a museum accessible to all audiences – not only from a physical and communicational point of view, but also dialogical.

⁷ The project was carried out at the Battle of Brasirima, which meets weekly in a square in the neighborhood of Vila Brasilina, in São Paulo.

⁸ The ongoing project is carried out in partnership with a process facilitation company called Entremeios.

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Biographical notes

Isabela Ribeiro de Arruda is graduated in history from the University of São Paulo (BR). She has a Specialization course in Cultural Project Management (USP, 2017). She has been working in museum education since 2010 and worked as educator in Butantan Institute's Historical Museum and in São Paulo Resistance Memorial, among other experiences in cultural institutions. Since December 2012, she has been part of the Educational Activities Service of the Paulista Museum (University of São Paulo), where she currently holds the position of Education Supervisor. She's a member of the Committee for Education and Cultural Action (CECA) of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the Group of Studies and Research in Accessibility in Museums.

Denise Peixoto is graduated in history from the University of São Paulo (BR). She has a specialization in environmental education and teaching methodology and a master's degree in archeology with emphasis in education. She worked as an educator at the Museum of archeology and ethnology and since 2001 she has been an educator at Paulista Museum. Between 2001 and 2016, she was supervisor of the educational activities service of this Museum. In 2009, she received an honorable mention from the « Darcy Ribeiro Award » from the Ministry of Culture for the project « Educational Programs of the Paulista Museum: awareness raising kit and inclusion experiences ».