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GABRIELA SOUZA RIBEIRO, LAURA BEZERRA MARTINS AND CIRCE MARIA GAMA MONTEIRO

The challenge of physical accessibility on the sacralization of Historic and Cultural Heritage

Gabriela Sousa Ribeiro graduated in Industrial Design from UFMA, is currently a doctoral student in Urban Planning at PROURB/UFRJ and completed her MSc. in Design from UFPE.

Laura Bezerra Martins graduated in Industrial Design from UFPE, has an Architecture PhD from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. She is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Design at the Federal University of Pernambuco, where she conducts research in the Laboratory of Ergonomics and Universal Design (LABERGOdesign) and also in the research group Ergonomics and Usability of Products and Production Systems.

Circe Maria Gama Monteiro is graduated in Architecture and Urbanism from UFPR, has a Urban Sociology PhD from the University of Oxford and post-doctoral internships at the Bartlett School of Architecture - UCL/London and at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Sydney. She is currently a Full Professor in the Department of Architecture from UFPE, where she coordinates Lattice - City Investigation Technologies Laboratory.

ABSTRACT

Historic sites and other places of historical and cultural preservation of a city are part of a complex system formed by urban diversity, associated with multicultural and multi-social aspects, which are then translated into multiple activities; thus it is necessary to allow the access and use of all these places to everyone, including people with mobility restrictions. When people have no access to historical and cultural values, which is what makes these spaces worthy of protection, these spaces then lose their usefulness. Consequently, with its life abandoned, such a space becomes nothing more than a building, an unused space, without care, meaningless. To discuss how physical accessibility can act as a preserving agent in environments recognized as Historic and/or Cultural Heritage, with access, use and sociocultural appropriation for as many people as possible, increasing the interest of all segments of the population to conserve them, this paper presents a critical analysis through literature and document-searches on the concepts that underlie this discussion and examples of projects that consider intervention to spaces, fostering accessibility without spoiling them. The results show that such actions allow broad access and use by different types of users regardless of their abilities or limitations, expanding conservation of these spaces by making it possible for more people to use them. Hopefully, this discussion will help to make these spaces available to a larger part of the population, so that activities related to culture, leisure, tourism, education; among others may in fact be part of the sociocultural experience of more people, helping them to feel part of the same nation, the same culture.

Keywords: Historical and cultural heritage. Physical accessibility. Cultural integration.

Introduction

Historic sites and other spaces of historic-cultural preservation are a part of a complex system configured by urban diversity, associated with a diversity of multicultural and multi-social aspects that are translated into multiple activities.

Some questions arise when considering that these places are of historic-cultural value and should deserve special attention in relation to the elements of the city, as well as also being governed by specific legislation that would preserve them, so that among other things, they will be bequeathed to future generations:

How can people with reduced mobility, which would include people with disabilities, seniors, dwarfs, and pregnant women among others, have access to such important historic-cultural assets if most of the time these places, mainly due to the time they were built, do not allow them access?

The argument is usually based on it being impossible to modify these sites due to the fear of the modifications altering the historical and cultural distinctions. However, a site which cannot be used also loses its uniqueness.

Based on Avrami el al (2000) and Lira (2009), we support the thesis that when people do not have access to constructions and ambiences held as Historic and Cultural Heritage, these places lose their use, their life; they become abandoned, and are then reduced to being mere edifices, spaces which have no use, no care, no meaning. They occupy space but have no life nor defined function.

Avrami et al (2000) argue that we must always keep in mind that objects and places are not in themselves what constitute a Cultural Heritage; it is the meanings and uses that people attribute to these material assets and the values they represent that give them importance.

If the population does not take possession of these ambiences or assets, they lose their symbolic function, the historic-cultural characteristics which add value to them.

Lira (2009) reinforces this idea by linking the use, the "life" of the space as way of maintaining its authenticity. The author believes that authenticity is in people's minds and it's harmed if the space does not have life, because it does not allow for past lives, nor that a current life be created. Thus, there is no use in "freezing" the building, not allowing any alterations to its façade or interior in the hopes of keeping it authentic if the "lack of life" also mischaracterizes it and interferes with its authenticity in addition to contributing to its degradation.

In order for the population to take possession of these places with the objective of maintaining and preserving them, it is necessary that their use be accessible to a wide range of users, including people with reduced mobility, which will allow its authenticity to be maintained due to the continuity of the "life" of the space. Thus, allowing people to get to know the building as whole, to seize its

historical-cultural value, to feel integrated into culture, inspires them to want to preserve ***their*** history, ***their*** culture, ***their*** cultural heritage. The physical accessibility to these places is fundamental to this appropriation, since it is due to this that a greater variety of people may enjoy them.

Article 7 from the International Charter on the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, established in 1964 in Venice, supports the possibility of making changes to ambiences by stating that "the removal of all or part of a monument should not be allowed, except when it is needed for the conservation of the monument or **for reasons of great national or international interest**" (IPHAN, 2007, bolded by the authors).

According to data from the 2010 Census (IBGE, 2011), there is a constant growth of the population of senior citizens and people with disabilities in Brazil. The current estimate is a quantitative growth of between 12% and 23.91% respectively, and since according to Feijó (2002) more than half of the people with disabilities around the world are part of the economically active population, there is a significant contingent of people who need to have their rights as citizens established, with the possibility of being able to participate with safety and comfort in the activities related to education, work, culture, habitation, tourism, as well as all of those that take place in spaces of historic-cultural preservation.

Inclusion of people with reduced mobility in these spaces fosters their maintenance as stated by Florissi and Valiati (2009) and Mourthé (1998): the valorization and preservation of public and private assets are related to the sensations of belonging, happiness and respect.

From the sense of belonging that a community feels in relation to a property and/or cultural activity that surrounds it, is it possible to identify the value in this relationship, although not from an economic perspective. The occupation of the space creates bonds of belonging that add value to the urban framework through places destined for cultural practices as symbols of the recognition of the agents that transit there. (FLORISSI; VALIATI, 2009).

Based on this, we intend to discuss how physical accessibility can act as a preserving agent in ambiences that are recognized as Historic Heritage and/or Cultural Heritage. By making the access, use and cultural appropriation available to more people, there would be increased interest by a larger part of the population in conserving them.

Literature and document research offer a critical view on the issue. First, we expose matters that encompass heritage and authenticity concepts and then move on to how physical accessibility may be inserted in this context.

Authenticity of the historic and cultural heritage

Aguirre et al (1997) states that it is hard to define the heritage concept because this term encompasses different and broad fields. "Patrimony" used as *heritage* in this paper - and "patrimonial" or "assets" are terms used by experts[1]. The common man, when wanting to give a sense of value to something, calls it a heritage. However, there is a common point where all the conceptual possibilities converge: heritage is something of value that is transmitted and that all may partake of, be it individually or collectively.

From the anthropological perspective, heritage is equivalent to culture. It takes on a globalizing function; it is the main witness of the historical contribution to the universal civilizations, of the contemporary creative capacity.

To Choay (2001), Historic Heritage is an asset destined for the enjoyment of a community that has expanded to global proportions, composed of the continuous accumulation of various objects brought together due to sharing a common past: works and masterpieces of the fine and applied arts, works and products that comprise all human knowledge. The term refers both to the institution as well as a mindset.

In order to corroborate the author, we question how this type of asset will be used by the community when they do not have access to it due to its physical and spatial configuration, which due to being "frozen" in time, does not allow modifications which would facilitate its access to people with reduced mobility.

Choay (2001) also states that heritage is no longer limited to individual buildings. This statement is supported by the World Heritage list established by UNESCO, which includes building conglomerates and the urban framework; house conglomerates and neighborhoods; towns, and entire cities.

Gutierrez (1989) adds that the concept of history with regards to urban areas acquires a broader dimension where not only are the mere events from the past valued, but also, and in particular, the affidavits of a cultural formation that will become enriched with time. Therefore, history is the component of the cultural aspect and the criteria for valorization of an area takes into account the historic, artistic, and aesthetic values, as well as the condition of the urban landscape and the quality of life offered to its residents, or the uses that give it its specific qualities.

Thus we reiterate the questions: how can cities limit the use and access of some people, due to their capabilities and limitations if the right to equality is a basic conquest of every citizen? And how can people feel part of the same nation when they can't fully enjoy its historic and cultural assets?

These questions are even more controversial when Martins' (2006) point-of-view on the evolution of the term Historic Heritage is taken into account. To the author, the Cultural Heritage concept has been gradually taking the place of the

historic and artistic Heritage concept, which has been used since the twentieth century. It has become a broader concept, and was introduced due to the update in research, which allows a more comprehensive view of the matter in line with the anthropological concept of culture.

To Martins (2006, p. 42), Cultural Heritage:

> *means in large-scale, human accomplishments linked to a context. Since every space occupied by man presupposes some activity which means a search for survival and well-being, the natural geographical space is imprinted by the result of the actions of men, which leads us to infer that everything that represents this imprinting, whether it is in the material or symbolic level, represents human interference, which means culture, which in turn is also Cultural Heritage.*
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> *Thus, the Heritage, is not unimportant, nor the result of social conventions. It is dynamic, and helps to provide more detailed knowledge of social, historic, and economic contexts, etc.*

Within Brazil, national historical and artistic heritage is established based on the value assigned to them. While they are cultural events and symbols of the nation, these assets then deserve protection, so that they can be passed on to future generations. The policies of preservation basically act on the symbolic level, aiming at reinforcing a collective identity of citizenship, education and formation. (FONSECA, 2005). In other words, not only do these past cultural material objects serve as way of getting to know our past, they are also witnesses to experiences one goes through, collectively and individually. They also allow people to remember and expand the feeling of belonging to the same space, of partaking of the same culture and develop a perception of a combination of common elements, which provide a sense of group identity and which composes the collective identity.

We consider, based on Brasil's (2005) point-of-view, that although all heritage is a representative of the past, it has its function attributed to the present, since it is in the present that its existence occurs, with many activities being able to take place in such places, such as the ones related to housing, work, leisure and tourism, which are not restricted to the survival of a traditional order. Thus the importance of these places lies in allowing use and access to a wide and heterogeneous range of users, regardless of their capabilities and limitations.

Legislation aims to protect these assets based on their authenticity, since authenticity is a fundamental requisite for any patrimonial interest in a cultural asset. On the other hand, to what extent will the "freezing" of an asset, that is, impeding or preventing changes to its physical characteristics in order to avoid interference with its authenticity, in fact, contribute to maintaining it intact, or will it rather expedite its degradation process, since part of the population has no access to it and therefore does not appropriate it and loses interest in its conservation?

Zancheti et al (2008), when talking about the authenticity of cities supports that its validation takes place through a collective recognition, in other words, it is inter-subjective, a way through which society seeks its authenticity. Based in Lowenthal (1999), the authors emphasize that the generations see authenticity in different ways, which reflects their need for truth, standards, and belief in the uses of their heritage.

Thus, space and time are two essential aspects needed to contextualize and define authenticity. The space-time relativity of this concept, which is present in many author's approach is equally valid when dealing with letters of equity. When analyzing letters of equity, Zecheti et al (2008), verified that even with the advances of the last two decades in the construction of the theoretical-methodological understanding of authenticity, there is still a need for more profound studies. The gaps are present in the complexity of its conceptualization and in the operational difficulties.

However, in this present article, it is important to highlight the San Antonio Declaration (1996), which, due to having ideas similar to the ones in the Nara (1994) and Brasília (1995) documents, reaffirms that transformations are an intrinsic part of a heritage and do not necessarily diminish its importance. The Declaration also emphasizes the importance of taking into account the values that the communities attribute to these places when judging authenticity.

Based on the aforesaid, it is clear that the uses and customs, the cultural factors cannot be disassociated from the concept of authenticity. And, culture can only exist in a space if it is "alive" when this place allows the population to carry out activities which represent a culture, be it related to their past or their present, contributing to the cultural preservation not only of the asset, but of the activities held there as well.

In this sense, not only can traditional customs and uses be preserved, but new uses and users, who throughout their lives will have different needs with regards to an asset or an ambience, may arise as well. Therefore, physical accessibility allows users from a wide range of anthropometric, functional, and age groups to take advantage of historic and cultural assets and ambiences with safety and equality without mischaracterizing them in their authenticity.

Thus, one can link physical accessibility to Historical and Cultural Heritage to one of the two major schools of thought regarding Restoration: object-centrism and functionalism, with the latter being the interest of this paper.

> *While object-centrism focuses on the cultural object and its protection as a value in itself, Functionalism maintains that the objects that make up the cultural heritage cannot even be identified if there is no society reference attached to their meaning. (MÜLLER, 1998, p. 400).*

To Viñas (2003), the point-of-view of the traditional Conservation and Restoration Theory is that restoration should only be done to the intangible functions

of the asset; when restoration is done to functional parts, they should be considered **refurbished**. While, on the other hand, the Contemporary Theory for Conservation and Restoration is **primarily functional.**

> ***Restoration is the mending of ethereal mechanisms, taking the treated object to a point where it can work better than it did in the past, so that it may be useful in many different ways, so that it may operate as a symbol or as a document better than the way it currently is operating, much with the same goal as conservation – which is that of ensuring effectiveness. Thus, we can say that the Contemporary Theory for Restoration is primarily functional. Unlike other approaches, it does not establish the truth as the ultimate goal, but the effectiveness of functional objects, which with regards to these objects also includes symbolic or historiographical effectiveness. (VIÑAS, 2003, p. 159).***

The author admits as acceptable the introduction of contemporary elements to assets that are being restored. He questions whether it would be acceptable to return the Tower of Pisa to its vertical state, whether the Greek statues could be painted in vivid colors, or whether the Venus de Milo should be completed, for example. And, states that according to the classic theories, the answer would probably be negative. However, according to the functional interpretation of the Contemporary Theory, the answer could be affirmative if that would contribute to the object working better as a symbol or document; and negative if it made it function worse than before.

Thus, we defend the possibility of interventions being carried out with the intent of improving physical accessibility to areas regarded as historical and cultural heritage on account of such actions contributing to the use of said spaces, allowing ample access to the population, enabling a greater number of people to apprehend the cultural and historic meanings of a nation through the use of the ambiances and the elements that are part of them, which will in turn strengthen them as symbols of a nation.

Physical accessibility in historical and cultural heritage

A well-known example of a project for physical accessibility to a Cultural Heritage and which brought enormous benefits to the monument was the intervention carried out in the Cristo Redentor (*Christ the Redeemer*), in the city of Rio de Janeiro – RJ.

Protected by IPHAN (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional)[2] in 1973, by the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1990, and in 2007 elected as one of the seven new wonders of the world, the Cristo Redentor Monument is a space where physical accessibility was incorporated without it compromising the historical and cultural characteristics of the place. On the contrary, the easier access to the belvedere contributed to the increase in visitors to this important monument.

Three elevators and four escalators were installed as an alternative to the 220 steps of the old staircase that gave access to the Cristo Redentor statue. The new mechanical system not only benefits visitors, such as seniors and the obese, who in the past went up the steps with the difficulty, but also allows access to people with physical disabilities. (PROJETO CRISTO REDENTOR, 2008)

The conveniences that were installed on the way to the feet of the statue did not have a negative impact on the landscape nor on the monument itself. The first view of the city is unveiled by a 33m tower, with panoramic elevators that can carry up to thirteen people or one ton. The trip up takes about twenty seconds and both the speed as well as the capacity of the elevators were calculated so that the maximum wait, at peak times, would not exceed six minutes.

Picture 1 show how the escalators are at harmony with the whole, and do not mischaracterize nor interfere with the landscape. Four escalators were installed, two going up and two coming down. They are 16m long, 30° inclination, with steps that are 80 cm long, 50 cm deep and 13.5 cm tall, and reach a speed of 0.5 m/s. Each pair of escalators takes people up a 6 m gap and is connected by walkways which take visitors to the monument. The size of the steps and the speed of the escalator allow it to be used, with safety, by people on wheelchairs.

PICTURE 1

escalators which make the access to the Cristo Redentor monument easier.

Source: MOREIRA (2008).

It is important to stress that in spite of the physical accessibility interventions with regards to the escalators at the Cristo Redentor monument, wheelchair users still require trained professionals to help them access the site. Thus, it is not the ideal solution since total autonomy for those visitors was not taken into consideration. Despite this fact, according to the Projeto Cristo Redentor (2008), there was an increase in the number of visitors with locomotion difficulties after the interventions were completed.

Physical accessibility encouraged visitation from cariocas[3] and tourists, making it easier for all of them reach the monument. More people were able to come

into contact with the monument, which helped to reinforce the cultural and historical value attributed to it. Furthermore, the renovations contributed to new uses for the site, such as masses celebrated on Sundays, allowing the local community to benefit from the monument, rather than it serving only as a tourist spot.

Urban areas of patrimonial value are historical, cultural, aesthetic, social and economic facts that are produced collectively through a long construction process. Masson et al (2000) suggest that areas that are considered as Historical and Cultural Heritage are traditionally polifunctional. Monofunctionality unbalances and atrophies the places as well as its surroundings.

Based on Brazil (2005), the functionality and conservation of these ambiences is possible through the various activities which give life to them. According to the author, these sites can be understood as an organically functional body, having a variety of functions, which encompasses public and private, sacred and religious, commerce, industry and habitation, elite and popular, autochthonous and exogenous. Hence the importance of allowing ample access and use to everyone.

However, when surveys were conducted using bibliographical and documental research on the physical accessibility conditions in spaces deemed Historical and Cultural Heritage around Brazil and abroad, Ribeiro (2008) concluded that the right to come and go of people with reduced mobility is still hindered due to ambiences which disregard the variety of characteristics, abilities and limitations of the users. She also reported the small number of studies on this type of interaction.

In order for autonomy and accessibility in historical and cultural properties to be achieved, careful planning, expert consultation and a project respecting the peculiarities of the property and its surrounding must be carried out. Jester and Park (1993) recommend identifying and executing physical accessibility modifications which protect the integrity and historic character of the property based on 3 aspects:

- review the historic meaning of the property and identify its characteristics;
- evaluate the existing property and the required level of physical accessibility; and
- evaluate the physical accessibility options within a preservation context.

Furthermore, according to the same authors, solutions regarding physical accessibility in historic properties should provide everyone with as much autonomy as possible, as safely as possible, without threatening or destroying material characteristics which make the property significant. To this end, they suggest forming a team composed of people with disabilities, professionals who are specialized in accessibility, historical preservation and construction, to be con-

sulted regarding the solutions that will be developed. Changes must be visually compatible with the historic property and whenever possible, reversible; that is, if the new resource is removed, the essential, the integrity of the property would not be harmed. The design of new resources should also be differentiated so that the evolution of the property is evident.

Among the changes proposed by the authors, we highlight: accessible routes between the parking lots, pedestrian circulation areas and buildings; entrance to the building from the same route used by people without disabilities which may be achieved through the installation of ramps, elevators, platforms, as wells as handrails and guardrails along the ramps and stairs; furniture which may be used by people with and without disabilities, accessible public restrooms.

In order to fully rehabilitate a cultural and historical heritage, Ubierna (1996) highlights that a joint action between the government, the community, and development agencies is needed.

Ribeiro (2008), in her research, gives examples of historical sites and historically and culturally preserved places that were able to reach physical accessibility, both indoors and outdoors. She highlights the interventions in Spain, which addressed this issue as a key factor for improving the urban environment, where physical accessibility provided quality of life to everyone. The projects carried out in Madrid, Spain, are examples of the satisfactory results that can be achieved when the right players are involved in a collective project.

To Ubierna (1996), the rehabilitation of the historic area in Madrid show a noticeable improvement to the infrastructure and pavement treated. Regarding the Plaza del Dos de Mayo and its surroundings, in the neighborhood of Maravillas, the accessibility measures that were implemented focus on different elements of urbanization, such as, sidewalks, longitudinal and transverse inclinations, ramps, gaps, handrails, adequate disposition of the urban furniture, protection and signalization on public highway roadworks, and signposts.

Among the actions taken, there is the preference given to the pedestrian rather than the vehicles. On streets that were 7m wide, parking was eliminated and the sidewalk was evened out to level with the street, with the separation between the two being the different types of coating material used for the paving and the concrete paddocks aligned along the sidewalk which protect the pedestrian circulation area (picture 2). Pedestrians can move about without worrying about transposing different levels between the sidewalk and the street.

In the case of streets that were 10m wide, parking was organized single file, aligned in the same direction of the street furniture and was moved from the sidewalk to the street, allowing the former to be unobstructed so that the pedestrians could circulate more freely. Picture 3 shows the way the sidewalks used to be before the intervention, illustrating the disposition of the street furniture and the pavement of the sidewalks which was done with irregular coating making it difficult for people to move about easily.

PICTURE 2

Elimination of the barriers to the transposition between the street and the sidewalk in the surroundings of the Plaza del Dos de Maio

Source: MARTÍNEZ-CAMPOS (2000).

Pictures 4 and 5 demonstrate the improvements after the interventions that took place in the area. In picture 4 you can see that the unobstructed sidewalk, along with the substitution of the flooring materials, makes the movement of the pedestrians easier. While picture 5 shows the details of the street furniture which is aligned in the same direction of the space destined for the parking of vehicles, which even helps in the demarcation of this space.

According to Ubierna (1996), the transformations that took place in the Plaza del Dos de Mayo were not only of a formal order, but qualitative as well, and opted for more discreet actions, integrating physical accessibility to the assemblage, however, without putting efficiency aside. Among the improvements made, we highlight the harmony between the different pavement levels, linked by a smooth path along the ramp, which not only provides access and free circulation to everyone, but also helps to create a more welcoming and balanced space, establishing a dialogue between the center of the plaza and its perimeter (picture 6).

PICTURE 3

Before the intervention.

Source: MARTÍNEZ-CAMPOS (2000).

PICTURE 4

unobstructed sidewalk.

Source: MARTÍNEZ-CAMPOS (2000).

PICTURE 5

reorganized street furniture

Source: MARTÍNEZ-CAMPOS (2000).

Another project in Madrid, the surroundings of the Plaza Mayor, located in Arrabal, which is a shopping and leisure area with a lot of tourist circulation, also underwent renovation interventions in order to improve physical accessibility (Ubierna, 1996). Among those, we highlight the elimination of the barriers in Rua del Arco del Triunfo, a covered alley street that is linked to Plaza Mayor. Steps which made circulation more difficult, not only to the pedestrians with disabilities, but also to seniors, people carrying children, strollers, people carrying load, etc. were eliminated. Picture 7 shows the situation before the intervention.

PICTURE 6

Plaza del Dos de Mayo: integrated ramp.

Source: MARTÍNEZ-CAMPOS (2000).

In addition to the steps, another barrier at the site was the inappropriate design of the water runoff grids, which as shown in picture 7 increases the risk of falls due to the possibility of the wheels of a wheelchair getting stuck in the free span, for example.

To provide users with an accessible route, the steps were eliminated by leveling the sidewalk in front of the crosswalk with the street, and replacing the water runoff grids used at the time with others with a suitable design, which allowed for a safer and more accessible itinerary in the crosswalk between Rua del Arco de Triunfo and Plaza Mayor. Picture 8 shows the improvements and the improved accessibility brought about through the intervention.

PICTURE 7

unevenness and inappropriate grid design

Source: MARTÍNEZ-CAMPOS (2000).

In Brazil, according to data from the Ribeiro (2008) research, some steps regarding physical accessibility were taken in some cities of the country. (Pirenópolis-GO, Manaus-AM, São Francisco do Sul-SC, Recife-PE, São Luis-MA, among others). We highlight the analyses performed in Pirenópolis in Goiás (SOARES, 2003), in the historic center of São Luís, Maranhão (RIBEIRO, 2008), and in the Recife Antigo neighborhood in the capital of the state of Pernambuco (MELO; SILVA, 2006).

PICTURE 8

accessible itinerary

Source: MARTÍNEZ-CAMPOS (2000).

Among these projects, one that stands out in the national scope is the historical site of Pirenópolis-GO. The project, executed in 2000, was called "Pirenópolis sem Barreiras – Patrimônio para Todos" (Pirenópolis without Barriers – Heritage for All). According to Soares (2003), the objective of the project was promoting urban interventions throughout the city in order to allow for comfortable, secure and independent access to people who suffered from some type of mobility restriction.

It can be said that the project was a milestone with regards to physical accessibility in Brazilian historical sites due to its seeking to promote unrestricted access to people and involving the whole community in solving this challenge. However, some of their results are questionable. In a project aimed at the autonomy of people with mobility restrictions, some things that are considered facilitators, such as handrails and guardrails were not considered and the installation of some ramps were poorly executed and / or poorly designed, obliging people, especially wheelchair users, to use the ramp, even when they were not going to enter the building, as shown in picture 9.

When you compare it to Picture 10 (the same building, before the intervention), one realizes that, although it was difficult to access the City Hall due to the barrier, the sidewalk was unobstructed and clear for the passage of pedestrians, be they with or without locomotion difficulties. This is an example that when making spaces more accessible, interventions should be made having a universal design in mind, making life easier for everyone and not just one group.

PICTURE 9

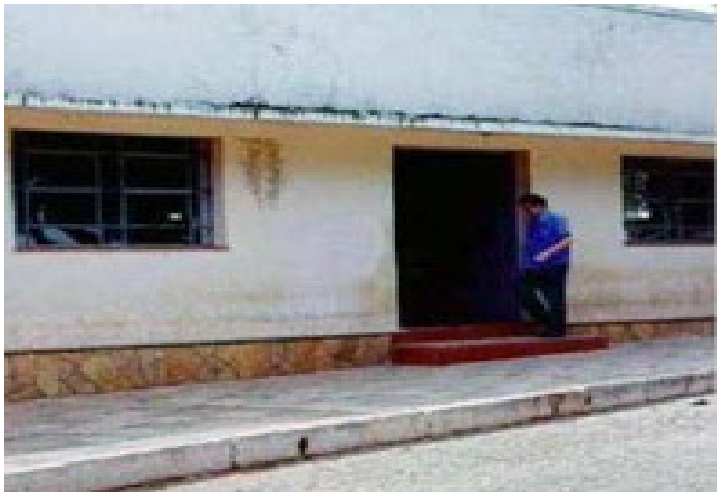
situation after the intervention in the City Hall of Pirenópolis/GO: the ramp ended up becoming a barrier along the sidewalk.

Source: SOARES (2003).

PICTURE 10

situation before the intervention in the City Hall of Pirenópolis/GO: barrier in the access to the building.

Source: SOARES (2003).



At the historic site of São Luís, Maranhão, physical accessibility was only considered in some of its streets, with the installation of access ramps between roads and sidewalks (RIBEIRO, 2008). That is, the accessibility factor was seen as an isolated situation; while access to sidewalks was facilitated, several barriers are still found in access to public and collective buildings, such as museums and craft shops.

Melo and Silva (2006) conducted a study on physical accessibility in the neighborhood of Recife Antigo (Recife-PE), in order to try to understand social and legal issues in relation to accessibility, sustainable development and preservation of historical heritage. They realized that, even while attempting to implement accessible tourism and service routes, physical accessibility was not addressed comprehensively, which resulted in a less than ideal outcome, since little was done in favor of global accessibility and when it was done they were isolated cases. That is, some barriers were eliminated with the installation of ramps on sidewalks, but they did not result in free access for people with disabilities, which still prevents them from enjoying historically preserved property as well as the cultural events that take place in those ambiences. To the authors, accessibility is, above all, a social practice, and its promotion, having everyone in mind contributes to making urban mobility conditions more adequate, since each one has different capabilities, limitations and needs.

Hence, it is clear that interventions based on physical accessibility conducted in places of historical and cultural preservation in Brazil are isolated cases. Designers do not worry about regarding these projects systematically, encompassing in their projects public transportation, free circulation areas to public building entrances and the movement of people within those buildings. If this is not regarded in a systematic way, people, especially those with restricted mobility, will not enjoy real, safe and comfortable conditions of autonomy.

In contrast, the interventions that took place in a systemic level in Spain, preserving the historical and cultural spaces, confirm that allowing the access and use of these places to an anthropometrical range of people is possible. They also corroborate the premise that the higher the number of people using such environments, the more life they will have and consequently a higher feeling of ownership from the population, increasing the number of individuals wanting to preserve them.

Allowing physical accessibility to all sites, including the ones with historical and cultural characteristics, is more than just installing ramps. People with mobility restrictions need to truly feel integrated to the activities of their culture and history.

This integration can be seen as a humanization of environments. As Bins Ely (2004) states, this humanization consists of the modification of the constructed space in order to provide the user, who is the central focus of every project, the physical and psychological comfort from environmental attributes that bring a sense of well-being. These attributes lead to sensory stimuli and evoke responses in the behavior and attitudes of the users.

If a user who is on crutches is traveling with his family and decides to visit a particular museum, his physical limitations should not impede him from taking full advantage of the whole collection in the same manner of his relatives who have no mobility restrictions. If a user in a wheelchair decides to wander alone into a particular historical site, the paths and access routes should allow him to take advantage of the ambiences and historical and cultural assets with full autonomy and safety. If he needs to ask for constant help to climb a poorly designed ramp, if he needs to be carried up the stairs, if he cannot pass between the tables of a restaurant to get to an empty table, he will possibly give up visiting the place and will not wish to return.

The sense of limitation perceived by people with restricted mobility depends on their conditions of movement and access to spaces. When these places allow people to conduct their activities on par with the others, their disabilities and limitations, although still present, are for the time being eliminated. On the other hand, when the environment is hostile to people with limitations, the disabilities stand out. Therefore, the humanization of the space must encompass aspects which eliminate barriers and that are consistent with the capabilities and limitations of a wide range of the population.

Final Considerations

Although there are Historical and Cultural Heritage areas that have managed to have physical accessibility without sacrificing the historical and cultural values of those spaces, people with mobility restrictions are still segregated in many of these places. In Brazil, we noticed a lot of projects that commit themselves solely to the application of the NBR 9050 (ABNT, 2004), which perceive the installation of ramps, no matter how badly executed, as the solution to the problem. It is necessary to realize that the guidelines in the Regulatory Norm (NBR 9050) are the minimum standards and that much more than that has to be done.

To achieve physical accessibility at historical and cultural preservation sites, without threatening the characteristics that make them unique, it is necessary to examine each one according to its peculiarities and have specialists, managers and users working together so that the greatest number of people may be able to perform their activities with autonomy and safety. This will also help in the preservation of these places by the population, since everyone will feel as an integral part of the same space. Just as the spaces that are not consistent with the characteristics of its users tend to be modified so that the area will meet the user needs and standards.

Based on the Contemporary Theory of Restoration and the principles that for assets to have Heritage and Cultural worth they must have their value recognized by their users, we emphasize that the physical accessibility to these areas and properties allows a wide range of users to enjoy these historical and cultural sites to the full.

We want to highlight that there is still much that needs to be done with regards to the accessibility to Historical and Cultural Heritage spaces. Besides the physical accessibility, it is necessary to consider solutions that cover full accessibility, humanizing the spaces and indeed allowing wider access and use to everyone, indiscriminately.

It is not our intention to exhaust discussion on the subject. However, we suggest that the research done on this area contribute to improving the quality of life of a larger share of the population, since this fosters a more inclusive society, allowing the use and access to historical and cultural values on an equal basis to persons with and without disabilities.

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