



IMAGINATION WIDE OPEN: ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT IN BRAGANÇA'S CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM

Cláudia Martins (claudiam@ipb.pt), **Ingrid Freitas** (ingridfreitas94@hotmail.com)

School of Education – Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Bragança, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Museums are intensely visual places and traditionally not accessible to people with impairments, although many cultural institutions have made it their job to go the extra mile so as to include ALL people. These have been a source of inspiration for a myriad of professionals, trainers and visitors. The new millennium stands for the mushrooming of multisensory experiments, participatory exhibitions, all of which attempt to heed people's concerns, needs and views. It is in the light of these principles that we aim to report on an ongoing accessibility project, within the master's degree in Translation, at a local museum of contemporary art in Bragança – the Museum of Contemporary Art Graça Morais (CAC-GM). The first stage intended to ascertain the willingness of the museum to develop a project for the blind and visually-impaired and then the museum's accessibility conditions, by means of a diagnosis form. This was followed by the pilot test for an exhibition, named "Humanity" (painter Graça Morais, 2018; curatorship Jorge Costa, 2018; production City Council of Bragança, 2018), which consisted of an audio visit for a group of three blind men, including orientation audiodescription through the 7 rooms of the exhibition and replacement audiodescription for the selected pieces. The second stage of this project will be directed to a new exhibition – "Blue Eyes of the Sea" (painter Graça Morais, 2005; curatorship Jorge Costa, 2019; production City Council of Bragança, 2019) – which shall offer an audiodescribed visit by means of a QR code, in Portuguese, English and Spanish.

OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Promote accessibility for people with visual impairment;
- ✓ Disseminate the audiodescription resources within museums in Bragança;
- ✓ Increase access to culture and information.

ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

This project was born out of the course in Audiovisual Translation of the master's in Translation, when students have contact not only with interlingual subtitling, but also with subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing and film and museum audiodescription for the blind and visually-impaired. The trainee researcher sought to develop an audiodescribed visit for the Centre of Contemporary Art (CAC) as her master's final project. However, the first major drawback we encountered was related to the fact that this centre's work is mainly based on temporary exhibitions, which justified some initial resistance from the responsible.

The pilot study aimed at providing audiodescription (AD) for the exhibition "Humanity" (painter Graça Morais, 2018; curatorship Jorge Costa, 2018; production City Council of Bragança, 2018) put forth for the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the CAC. Before actually writing down the AD script, it was paramount to ascertain the accessibility conditions of the CAC, for which we used the diagnosis form proposed by Colwell & Mendes (2004). This form encompassed the access to the museum and the museum itself, namely the Reception, the exhibition spaces, the shop, the cafeteria and the garden, both in terms of space and of information. The information

collected from this diagnosis enabled us to conclude that, although physical access is at an optimal state (since the CAC is only 10 years old), the remaining dimensions of accessibility have been continuously overlooked, especially sensory and information access.

The second stage comprised getting to know the physical space of the exhibition "Humanity", studying the artwork and observing their numerous details, selecting the pieces that would be included in the visit and writing down the AD script. The script was based on the various recommendations put forward by a myriad of authors (e.g. Axel et al., 1996; Neves, 2001; ADLAB, 2014; Martins, 2015; Fryer, 2016) and was to include audiodescription for spatial orientation and for replacement of 6 pieces. We intended to test the AD script with a focus group of three blind men, though only one person appeared. In spite of the rather limited feedback, our informant emphasised the need for tactile materials, insisted on the repetition of the mainstream colours and even questioned aspects related to the organisation of the space.

Presently, "Humanity" is no longer under exhibition in Bragança and has been transferred to Lisbon, to the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Chiado, and thereafter shall be exhibited at the National Museum of Soares dos Reis (Porto). Due to this, it has been decided that the initial script shall be recorded and sound mixed so as to be provided there.

FINAL REMARKS

Taking into account the pilot study, the audiodescribed visit for new exhibition "Blue eyes of the sea" (painter Graça

Morais, 2005; curatorship Jorge Costa, 2019; production City Council of Bragança, 2019) has moved forward: firstly, the new texts have incorporated more details, not only in terms of the pieces of art, about the exhibition rooms and the views from the windows, but also the use of clock position for spatial orientation; secondly, tactile materials for 6 pieces are under construction, mainly based on relief and the use of different textures, which will later require AD for tactile exploration; thirdly, the acquisition of seashells and ram horns has been suggested so that it can be used throughout the visit; at last, the sound design will include an array of sounds, such as the sea and the waves, seagulls, seaman shouting, among others. The first test was carried out on 14th March with three blind people and 4 viewers, which was highly positive, though allowing for further improvement.

REFERENCES

- Audio Description: Lifelong Access for the Blind. (2014). *Pictures painted in Words: ADLAB Audio Description Guidelines*. Retrieved from: <http://www.adlabproject.eu/Docs/adlab%20book/index.html> (accessed 15.02.2019).
- Axel, Elisabeth Salzhauer, Hooper, Virginia, Kardoulis, Teresa, Keyes, Sarah Stephenson & Rosenberg, Francesca. (1996). *Art Beyond Sight's Guidelines for Verbal Description Adapted from Making Visual Art Accessible to People Who Are Blind and Visually Impaired, Art Education for the Blind*. Retrieved from: <http://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-guidelines.shtml> (accessed 12.02.2019).
- Colwell, Peter & Mendes, Elisabete. (2004). *Temas de Museologia: Museus e Acessibilidade*. Lisboa: Instituto Português de Museus.
- Fyer, Louise. (2016). *An Introduction to Audio Description – A Practical Guide*. Oxon/ New York: Routledge.
- Martins, Cláudia. (2015). *Longe da vista, perto da imaginação – análise de audioguias em museus portugueses* [Far from sight, close to imagination – analysis of audioguides in Portuguese museums]. Non-published PhD thesis. Aveiro: University of Aveiro, Portugal.
- Neves, Josélia. (2011). *Imagens que se ouvem – Guia de Audiodescrição*. Leiria: Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação & Instituto Politécnico de Leiria.