The Maré Museum: an integrated project of community development

Antônio Carlos Pinto Vieira, Cláudia Rose Ribeiro da Silva, Luiz Antonio de Oliveira

Maré neighbourhood

Located between Avenida Brasil and Linha Vermelha, on the shores of the Guanabara Bay, Maré is one of the main places that constitute the Zone of Lepoldina, in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Its geographical location, its landscape dominated by stilts (supporting precarious housing suspended over mud and water) and its contrasting proximity with Galeão International Airport and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, all contribute to the perception of Maré as a proletarian area, occupied by a population which operates under subordinated socio-professional conditions and low educational levels

Part of the 30th Administrative Region, the Maré community encompasses one hundred and thirty-two thousand inhabitants (132,000), with an average figure of 3.4 people per household (1). This average is very close to that in other cities and regions in Brazil. In comparison, however, when looking at the population density rates one may notice that the Mare complex has about 21,400 inhabitants / km ², while the municipality of Rio de Janeiro only has an average of 328 inhabitants per km ². The intense process of occupation of the local land is a defining factor of Maré's landscape. It is accentuated, in the absence of trees, the scarcity of empty spaces, the vertical development of the residences and the intense circulation of pedestrians and transportation

The population is distributed across approximately thirty eight thousand (38,000) households and sixteen communities. The concentration of roads, public buildings and industrial /

commercial facilities make the borders heterogeneous, with different types of neighbourhood. Also, the rivalry between drug dealer factions is a strong inhibiting factor in the circulation of residents in local spaces.

In terms of educational infrastructure, Maré has fifteen public schools, and seven CIEP (Integrated Centres of Public Education). The neighbourhood also has 7 community day care centers for children between 0-4 years old, besides several small private schools, focused on early childhood education and elementary education. There is only one fulltime high school and two other schools that offer classes in the evenings, although the demand for high schools is growing.

According to the Maré Census, the percentage of illiterate inhabitants above 14 years old is almost 10%. The percentage is slightly below the national average (13.3%), but much higher than the percentage for the municipality of Rio de Janeiro for the year 1999 (3.4%). Regarding income, less than 1 / 3 of inhabitants who live Mare earn more than 2 minimum wages salary per month and as for child labor, 2% of children living in Maré between 10 -14 years old are involved in some sort of work activity while the rate for the municipality of Rio de Janeiro is only 0,6%.

In this context, the Maré Centre for Studies and Solidarity Actions (CEASM) has acted to turn education, beyond the formal system, into a tool for the empowerment of its inhabitants and the construction of new perspectives for social transformation.

The Maré Museum is integrated in a broader project of community development, under the Maré Centre for Studies and Solidarity Actions.

The CEASM

Already working thirteen years in Maré, the CEASM – Maré Centre for Studies and Solidarity Actions, was constituted through the articulation of a number of inhabitants who were born and / or lived in the Maré communities. A peculiar characteristic of the founders of CEASM is that they, in their totality as a collective, have each achieved university level education, and have a long history of involvement with collective grassroots movements. Aware of their exceptional socio-professional positions and the need to contribute to improve the quality of life for Maré inhabitants, the group founded the organization with the aim, among others, to break away from the tradition of uprooting and rupture within the home community, a tendency which is common among youth that achieve university-level education.

The core of CEASM actions is guided by the understanding that changing the local reality implies the production of articulated initiatives that involve the inhabitants in its construction, and encouraging a sense of identity and belonging to the Maré community. This has required the construction of a new social network, which offers opportunities for local inhabitants to understand the local space as free of prejudices and stigmas, providing access to various cultural and educational products and stimulating new ways of living.

The formative component of these actions is the fact that they relate to various fields, beyond the formal learning space.

In this context, among the activities currently undertaken by CEASM, are the following:

Maré Community College Preparatory Course (CPV-TIDE): Currently has 280 students divided into four classes, one in the morning and three in the afternoon. During thirteen years of activity the CPV-Maré has helped approximately 750 young people to be accepted in the main universities in Rio de Janeiro.

Preparatory Course for the 5th Grade of the Elementary School and High School: This initiative currently enrols about 105 children and adolescents per year. The goal is through systematic study, to provide this age group, , with access to high quality public Elementary Schools and High Schools.

Computer Courses: These courses are developed in two laboratories with the latest technical equipment, designed for different levels, with a special focus on teenagers and young inhabitants of Maré. This course enrols approximately 200 students per month.

Language Courses: A project that offers English and French classes to 120 inhabitants of Maré.

Center for Image and Communication: Develops professional courses in the areas of video production, photography and visual arts, and aims to offer the local youth professional basic training so they can produce new cultural expressions, enter into the labor market and expand access to other aesthetic languages.

Newspaper "O Cidadão" ("The Citizen"): Local community newspaper, printed in magazine format, and

distributed for free every other semester in the 16 communities of Maré, with a circulation of 20,000 copies.

Maré Museum: Heritage education program that aims to record and preserve the daily practices and tangible and intangible heritage of Maré communities. The museum functions as a central receiver, producer and broadcaster that works in partnership with schools and local institutions

All the actions taken by CEASM aims at involving teenagers, young adults and other local inhabitants, at different levels, according to their education level and personal characteristics. The initiatives undertaken are not an end in itself, but are developed from the premise that they are means to stimulate the participants in different social areas in Mare and in other areas of the city.

The Maré Museum

The Maré Museum, founded on 8 May 2006, arose from the desire of the inhabitants of the community to have a place of memory, a place that is immersed in the past and looks to the future, a place that reflects on this community, on their conditions and identities and on their territorial and cultural diversity. The intention of the Maré Museum is to break with the tradition that the experiences to be recollected and the places of memory to be remembered are those elected by the official version, the "winner" version of the story that restricts the representations of history and memory of large portions of the population. The Maré Museum, as a pioneer initiative in the city scene, proposed to expand the museological concept, so that it is not restricted to intellectual social groups and cultural spaces that are not accessible to the general population. The museum has established recognition that the slum is a place of memory and so has initiated a museographic reading of the Mare community. ..

Maré Museum is defined by a set of actions aimed at registration, preservation and dissemination of the history of the slum communities of Maré, in its various aspects, whether they relate to cultural, social or economic issues. The Museum develops educational activities complementary to the formal education system, through methodologies cantered in the concept of heritage education, strengthening local memory and history as tools for building identity references, appreciation of the local space and sense of belonging for the Maré inhabitants, who are confronted with the reality of fragmentation and latent conflict between the local communities.

Actions are developed from the museum's various programmes - institutional, collections, exhibition-making, cultural education, research and dissemination. The backbone to the actions of the Mare Museum is the permanent exhibition, which unfolds into document collection, conducting research in oral history, and the development of recreational and educational activities such as storyteller groups; The museum also hosts various events such as travelling exhibitions, temporary exhibitions in the museum's gallery, seminars, workshops, library actions to encourage reading among children.

The projects carried out by the Maré Museum aim to encourage the creation of channels that strengthen community ties among inhabitants, mainly oriented towards a historical and cultural identity and a concept of education based on these values.

Principles and experiences in which our methodology is based

Above all, the main reason for the creation of this museum space is to affirm it as a meeting place. The city of Rio de Janeiro is a place where differences and similarities have the chance to meet, which allows for the creation of plural

identities that are, above all, human. In Rio de Janeiro, as in other large Brazilian cities, however, the majority of the population is gradually narrowing their time and space, thus limiting the possibilities of coexistence and the full exercise of citizenship.

The Museum, therefore, presents a permanent exhibition that advocates the concept of "lived" time represented by calendar and hours. This is why the exhibition is called "Calendar-Museum." Although permanent, everything in the exhibition is changeable. There are twelve "times" represented by expressions and desires that mark the route of community life in Mare. Thus, there is the time of water, festivity, work, children, fear, hope, etc.

The most interesting aspect of the journey of this museum has been the response by the community. It has been incredibly enthusiastic about the idea of being represented in a museum and people wish to express themselves and expose themselves to the city through this museological language. Therefore, many inhabitants have made suggestions, and have brought their personal objects to the museum as a means of participating in its collection. Thus there is an ongoing collective process from which the museum is emerging.

The narrowing of time is associated to the particular spatial condition of the neighbourhood. Life in a restricted physical area without a broader sense of belonging to the city of Rio contributes to this place becoming the point of departure and arrival of one's whole existence. As an inhabitant of the community, the person does not feel, in most cases, a citizen of the polis, of the world.

To overcome this reality it is necessary create a of a virtuous circle, supported by integrated and long term actions, and where the overcoming of local and existential constraints

means continuous improvement of the quality of life for Maré inhabitants.

Thus, it is hoped that the **Maré Museum** can contribute to the expansion of citizenship and democratic practice in the neighbourhood and throughout society, in tune with what the Brazilian **National Museums Policy** advocates: *"In a complex society such as Brazil, rich in diverse cultural manifestations,, the role of museums in the scope of public policies with a broader character, is of fundamental importance to the enhancement (valorisation) of cultural heritage as a strategic device for improving democratic processes. "*

About the authors:

Antônio Carlos Pinto Vieira is Founder and Director of the Museu da Maré, Rio de Janeiro. He is currently President of the Brazilian Association of Museology. Studied Law and holds a masters degree in Social Memory degree from the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (PPGMS/Unirio).
Luiz Antonio de Oliveira is Founder and Director of the Museu da Maré, Rio de Janeiro, where he is also responsible for coordinating various activities. He also teaches teenagers in high school preparatory courses. Studied History and the Pontifical Catholic School of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RJ)
Cláudia Rose is Founder of the Museu da Maré, Rio de Janeiro. She is Head of the Social Museology and Education Division of the Department of Museum Processes of the Brazilian Museums Institute (Comuse/Depmus/Ibram). Historian, holds a masters degree in Cultural Assets and Social Projects from the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV), Rio de Janeiro.