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"Where's the Museum?" Reflections on the Impact of the Pandemic on Cultural Spaces and Deaf Museum Educators

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Abstract

We live in a historical context marked by social and educational changes. In this new social scenario, it is increasingly necessary to work on issues that concern the inclusion of marginalized groups. For years deaf people have organized themselves through associations and institutions with different purposes. The diversification in the way deaf groups organize themselves has gained new dimensions in recent years, and, currently, museums and other cultural spaces are places this community has claimed. The number of deaf educators in museums and visits mediated in sign language increases. With this, new strategies are designed for an effective mediation for the deaf public and, mainly, to enable the effective participation of deaf children in cultural spaces to demonstrate the importance of including artistic education in elementary and high schools for deaf children/teenagers. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted these developments by closing museums and other cultural spaces during the period of social isolation. This article aims to investigate how the pandemic generated changes in the dynamics of cultural spaces, especially in the case of Brazil, and how new virtual actions mobilized deaf museum educators.

Keywords

deaf educators, museums, COVID-19, social isolation, virtual space

"Cadê o Museu?" Reflexões Sobre o Impacto da Pandemia nos Espaços Culturais e Educadores Surdos de Museus

Resumo

Vivemos em um contexto histórico marcado por mudanças sociais e educacionais. Nesse novo cenário social, é cada vez mais necessário trabalhar as questões que dizem respeito à inclusão de grupos marginalizados. Os surdos vêm se organizando há anos por meio de associações

e instituições com diferentes finalidades. A diversificação na forma em que os grupos de surdos se organizaram vem ganhando novas dimensões nos últimos anos e, atualmente, os museus e outros espaços culturais são locais que vêm sendo reivindicados por essa comunidade. Cada vez mais aumenta o número de educadores surdos em museus e visitas mediadas em língua de sinais. Com isso, novas estratégias são pensadas para uma efetiva mediação para o público surdo e, principalmente, para viabilizar a participação efetiva de crianças surdas em espaços culturais, de forma a apresentar a importância da inserção da educação artística nos ensinos fundamental e médio para crianças/adolescentes surdos. Contudo, a pandemia de COVID-19 representou um impacto nesses desenvolvimentos pelo fechamento dos museus e de outros espaços culturais no período de isolamento social. Este artigo se propõe a investigar como a pandemia gerou mudanças na dinâmica dos espaços culturais, especialmente no caso do Brasil, e como essas novas ações virtuais mobilizaram os educadores surdos de museus.

Palavras-chave

educadores surdos, museus, COVID-19, isolamento social, espaço virtual

1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2020, we did not imagine the dimension that the new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic would reach. The pandemic was spreading through Asian and European countries. However, there was a certain "tranquility" in Brazil, as the population was skeptical that this would become a big problem. After all, the H1N1 outbreak had already occurred in 2009/2010. Such a pandemic, at the time, did not change the overall Brazilian routine. Brazilians kept going out for work, studying, playing sports, and other leisure activities. There was no constant use of masks or alcohol gel. Despite this, it is important to reinforce the group of researchers led by Coutinho et al. (2021), who states:

> the world had already faced a pandemic and an epidemic due to infection with the coronaviruses SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV, both originating from animal reservoirs, the genus Betacoronavirus, and subgenus Sarbecovirus. The first, which occurred between 2002 and 2003, was caused by SARS-CoV, identified as the cause of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in infected individuals; the second, caused by MERS-CoV, was responsible for the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) in 2011. Then, at the end of 2019, a pandemic was caused by another coronavirus also related to respiratory diseases with high pathogenicity. (p. 2)

Therefore, the flu variants are responsible for several pandemics already fought in history. In fact, all 21st-century pandemics were caused by influenza viruses. However, it is always important to remember the Spanish flu, the most devastating pandemic in history.

> The international medical community faced a great mystery when the Spanish influenza pandemic broke out in 1918. How to explain that such

> an ordinarily mild disease could cause so much disorder and death as it did throughout practically the whole world in the second half of that year? (Silveira, 2005, p. 92)

Analyzing the impacts of COVID-19, it seems that we are experiencing a Spanish flu pandemic déjà vu. The Brazilian, who used to think it was strange that Asians went out wearing masks during the bird and swine flues, soon had to adapt to a new routine. At first, it was said that only those contaminated should wear masks. However, it was soon seen that everyone should adopt protective measures, social isolation, and confinement in case of extreme need.

In the chaotic environment of 2020, several protective measures were taken. Schools and universities interrupted their face-to-face activities and adopted remote teaching. Several companies also adapted the home office, and some do not plan to have physical offices anymore. In a way, the pandemic boosted some changes that were already timidly starting in Brazil. However, among its negative impacts, in addition to the incalculable number of deaths and people with respiratory sequelae, is the closure of one of the largest economic sectors in the country: tourism.

The tourism sector moves a significant number of workers in Brazil: chains of hotels, inns and hostels, gastronomic spaces (restaurants, bars, kiosks on the beachfront, among others), and cultural attractions. Gurgel (2017) points out:

> cultural tourism has been increasingly attracting the interest of national and international visitors traveling through Brazil. The country, which already occupies eighth place in cultural resources in a ranking of 141 countries, has more than 3 thousand museums in operation in all Brazilian states. Only those managed by the Brazilian Institute of Museums (Ibram) received almost one million visitors in 2016. (para. 1)

One of the most famous postcards in Brazil, Christ the Redeemer, receives almost 2,000,000 tourists a year (Gandra, 2020). Thus, the pandemic represented an abrupt drop in the tourism sector of 36.7% (Alvarenga & Silveira, 2021). Added to the fall in other main sectors of the Brazilian economy, this represented a 6.7% drop in the country's gross domestic product (Firjan, 2021). It is the biggest drop in years.

In this way, the COVID-19 pandemic has also significantly impacted museums and other cultural spaces[1]. With the sector closing due to social isolation, several smaller cultural companies could not resist and went bankrupt. As a result, several employees were fired (Balbi, 2020). Even in large institutions, some museums laid off practically all employees in one of the sectors (the most common were cleaning and reception), thus reducing costs. In this sense, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) launched an appeal, still in April 2020, for governments to create a reserve fund for museums

[1] In this article, "other cultural spaces" are cultural centers, libraries, theaters, cinema libraries, and other spaces that promote historical, artistic, and scientific knowledge (such as planetariums and botanical gardens).

(International Council of Museums, 2020b). Shortly after that, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also released a statement emphasizing the importance of the COVID-19 period for documentary preservation (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020).

In addition, the main question involved was: how to keep the museum institution alive to maintain its activities during the period of social isolation? Thinking about these issues, several museums developed activities on social networks. However, a question arises: did these activities include deaf museum educators? It is this issue that we will reflect on in this article. It is worth mentioning that this research finds its ground in the virtual environment. Institutions' social network pages and their respective websites were analyzed to learn whether there was any promotion of accessible activities for the deaf.

To this end, our analysis will consider all museums and cultural spaces with deaf educators. Before, however, it is important to offer a brief contextualization about the importance of cultural accessibility and deaf educators in museums.

2. Contrasts Between the Museum Perspective and the Accessibility of the Deaf to Cultural Spaces

"In museums, deafness is judged" (Ladd, 2003/2013, p. 2). When faced with this phrase, a museologist is immediately affected by immense discomfort because the idea is that the museum is an institution accessible to different audiences. However, Ladd's (2003/2013) phrase is not judging museums. In fact, he uses it as a metaphor to understand their relationship with sign language. The museum, in this case, would be an analogy to society in general. In his museum metaphor, Ladd (2003/2013) introduces the existence of two buildings: the majestic building at the front and the annex at the back. The building in front has different listening technologies: "17th-century ear trumpets, 20th-century hearing aids, (...) in a corner marked 'The Future' there are more models of scintillating operations performed quite close to the brain" (Ladd, 2003/2013, p. 2). The curators of the front building sealed the door to the back building. As Ladd (2003/2013) manages to locate a breach to the back building, he discovers that it housed paintings "that had all been turned to the wall. (...) The paintings spoke of communities from all over the world experiencing the joy of their collective existence, a defiant pride in their sign languages" (p. 3). Ladd (2003/2013) concludes that this content should be displayed in the main building, titled "Deaf Culture", and that the contents in the other building should be moved to the annex, under the name of "Colonial Relics".

When we read this metaphor from a museological point of view, we realise that Ladd (2003/2013) indirectly uses exhibit design to organize his museum. The author separates the items from this museum into two distinct groups: one sees deafness as a disability that must be fixed ("Colonial Relics"), and the other sees the deaf person as an individual belonging to a social group that has its own linguistic and cultural elements ("Deaf Culture"). The two rooms of Ladd's (2003/2013) museum metaphor approach

collections with the same concept/theme but narrate different ideologies and political positions. However, we cannot think about Ladd's (2003/2013) exhibit design without talking about the museum as an institution. The new definition of museums, proposed by the ICOM (International Council of Museums, 2019), clarifies that:

> museums are democratic, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the past and the future. Recognizing and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artifacts and specimens in society's trust, safeguard diverse memories for future generations, and ensure equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. (para. 2)

Mairesse (2012) thought of museums as inclusive institutions and highlighted that the term "inclusive museum" was incorporated into "museum literature, mainly to evoke the relationship between the museum and disabled visitors, but also more generally, the set of publics excluded from the museum" (p. 35). Thus, from the provocations instigated by Ladd (2003/2013), we can ask: do museums offer conditions for the deaf public to visit autonomously? What initiatives are taken to encourage deaf public visits? What are the necessary adaptations in the museums' exhibit design to make them really accessible to the deaf? What positions do deaf staff members hold in the museums? Is sign language mediation performed by hearing translators/interpreters or by deaf staff members?

Thinking about accessibility in museums from the point of view of someone immersed in a marginalized social group can bring to light new understandings and possibilities on this topic. However, before getting into the issue of accessibility, it is worth understanding some peculiarities of the social group that we will deal with in this article. When talking about this group, it is important to understand that "hard of hearing" is often used instead of "deaf". Regarding this fact, Veiga-Neto and Lopes (2006, as cited in Strobel, 2008a) explain that:

> in the relationship with the listeners, the deaf were taught to look at and narrate themselves as hard of hearing people. The mark of disability determined, during the history of the deaf and deafness, the condition of submission to the normal hearing person. From this history of submission, corrective practices were created, derived from the knowledge that informs and classifies subjects within the linguistic, chronological, and hearing loss development stages. (p. 80)

However, we can see in the history of the deaf that the resistance movement against hearing/audism has given rise to many social markers of this community, the main one being to identify themselves as deaf and not as hard of hearing or hearing-impaired since the term "impaired" is impregnated with a pathologizing look at deafness (Garcia, 2011).

> I'm deaf! The way I am makes a difference already! (...) Being deaf, living in the different communities of the deaf, knowing the culture, language,

> history, and representation that symbolically distinguishes us deaf people and the "deaf community" is a hallmark to support the issue at hand. (Miranda, 2001 as cited in Strobel, 2008a, p. 24)

By reflecting on deaf cultures, it is possible to contextualize and understand the main aspirations of this social group regarding access to cultural spaces. As previously noted, deaf people do not consider themselves hard of hearing but rather members of a separate linguistic community. Thus, the approach with a deaf visitor must be different from the contact with a hard of hearing visitor.

Needless to say, just as deaf people do not want to be treated as hard of hearing, the opposite is also true. Therefore, communication in signs is not appropriate for hard of hearing visitors. One such accessibility initiative is that of the Smithsonian Institution. In its museums and cultural spaces, sign language translators/interpreters are available to serve deaf visitors, and all videos have subtitles — although ideally, there should be a sign language window. Sound amplification devices assist hard of hearing visitors (Sarraf, 2013). It is also important to note that most hard of hearing visitors use hearing aids and have a greater command of the written Portuguese language. This is different for the deaf, who use sign language as L1. Garcia (2017) points out that:

> most Brazilian deaf people are illiterate [in written Portuguese], and even among those who have some level of education, it is common not to be proficient in Portuguese. Many have dropped out of school early, maintaining difficult family relationships (communication-wise). Because they do not have adequate professional qualifications for the current market's demands, it is difficult for them to get access to the formal labor market. (p. 414)

Thus, considering the accessibility of the deaf to museums, although there are texts in the Portuguese language explaining the exhibitions' details, deaf visitors are often unable to grasp what is on display. In her degree in museology, one of this article's authors witnessed a peculiar situation during a museum study visit that occurred during one of her degree subjects. The teacher asked the students to fill in a questionnaire about some general aspects, including exhibit design and accessibility. Many students noted that there was no wheelchair accessibility, as there was no elevator and many elements in the exhibit were disproportionately high for this group; others highlighted that there was no accessibility for the blind, as there was no audio description, braille, and tactile flooring. These limitations were certainly there, but an unmentioned element caused the researcher some anguish: where is the mediation in Brazilian sign language (Libras)? As she mentioned it, everyone automatically realized that they had forgotten about the deaf and corrected their answers. It is understandable. After all, wheelchair users and the blind are "identifiable", while the deaf may go unnoticed in a crowd. Furthermore, even accessibility — here in general terms in society — is neglected for "visible" differences, let alone "non-visible" ones. What voice does the deaf person have if the overall society does not even understand their language?

Bourdieu and Darbel (1966/2007) note that the "museums attendance – which increases considerably with higher levels of education – represents a feature almost exclusive to the educated classes" (p. 37). Because of the education challenges affecting the deaf, it is needless to say that access to museums has always been something distant from their reality. Thus, deaf people's accessibility to museums is a relatively recent concern, even if the "theme of democratization and access to cultural goods [is] not new; on the contrary, it is an old topic, which over time has undergone systematic processes of conceptual, political, social, legal and technological renewal" (Chagas & Storino, 2012, p. VII). Aidar (2003) adds that "social inclusion in cultural institutions must be understood as a step beyond the work of public development, seeking to expand its attributions and social implications by provoking qualitative changes in the daily lives of the groups involved" (p. 6).

Uzeda (2018) analyzes the need for "support in different fields of knowledge, skills related to architecture, visual and performing arts and design (...) in order to thrill exhibition visitors" (p. 61). Thus, the inclusion of deaf people in museums must also consider their peculiar way of interacting with the world through their specific linguistic code. It is not enough to think of a mere translation of the contents brought in the exhibitions into sign language. It is essential to think about the exhibition's language: what do you want to convey to visitors? The answer to this question should guide the translation into sign language because — as they are different languages — the words can vary in meaning.

3. The Role of Deaf Educators in Museums

Some Brazilian museums and cultural centers are gradually employing deaf educators who promote different activities to include deaf communities in the environment besides mediating in sign language. It is worth mentioning the work developed at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (MAM/SP) by the deaf art-educator Leonardo Castilho. A member of the MAM/SP team since 2005, Castilho promotes a workgroup called "Corposinalizante" that "received some awards, such as 1st place in the Darcy Ribeiro Award 2009 (IPHAN/MinC)" (Museu de Arte Moderna, 2019, para. 2).

> Corposinalizante is a workgroup of the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo that researches and produces art, open to young deaf and hearing people interested in the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras). Considering the public dimension of art and the constant interest in inventing forms of communication, the group develops cultural projects, documentaries, performances, and poetic interventions that give visibility to the deaf identity and the culture of young people. (Museu de Arte Moderna, 2019, para. 1)

One of the authors of this article has experience as a deaf educator in museums. Throughout his professional trajectory in different cultural spaces, he has noticed the increasingly frequent concern by management of Brazilian museums of rendering local museums accessible. Many of the museums still approach the issue with actions that

restrict themselves exclusively to the educational sector. It is important to emphasize that all professionals working in a museum must know how to deal with the particularities of each social group and definitely they should go beyond the educational sector and reach receptionists and security guards.

As already mentioned, a large part of the deaf community is not proficient even in the written Portuguese language, as sign languages are unwritten, and their phrasal structure differs from an oral-auditory language. Not that one is more complex than the other. They are just different. Sign languages are part of a visual-gesture modality, in which the phrasal configuration is quite different from oral-auditory languages. Moreover, this difference is sometimes reflected in the daily life of the deaf due to the daily communicational confrontation since they live immersed among users of oral-auditory languages who have little or no mastery of sign language. In the case of museums, there is no point in having content written in the Portuguese language if it is not understandable to the deaf public. In an interview with the newspaper *O Globo* in 2014, Castilho highlights:

> people, in general, are used to thinking of the world as if everyone was a listener. Nobody thinks like a deaf person. Society thinks that giving a cane to the blind, installing a ramp for the wheelchair user, and providing an interpreter for the deaf person is enough to solve everything. However, access to life, to art, goes far beyond that. We have the right to enter the museum and have a video guide to accompany the exhibition, as we have at the MAM [Museum of Modern Art] in São Paulo. To go to the theater with sign language interpreting, watch a Brazilian movie with Portuguese language subtitles. Deaf people deserve to have access to art like everyone else. (Vieira, 2014, para. 2)

Thus, regarding the work of deaf educators in museums, Oliveira (2015) explains how positive this deaf/deaf encounter is.

> The experience that the deaf group or individual lives inside the museum is closely related to the experiences of their own daily lives they will have afterwards. They are symbolic references to their own cultural universe. (...) When this group is faced with a deaf interlocutor in the mediation process, the experience becomes more concrete. The possibility of articulating and expressing themselves in their own language – Libras – provides them with a less tense and safer environment, as they know that in this dialogue, they can argue, agree, question, and express their opinion. (Oliveira, 2015, p. 33)

Besides initiatives with deaf educators in museums, some technologies are accessible to visitors with other differences. For the deaf, there is the QR code for the video in sign language next to the texts in exhibitions. Despite the deaf/deaf interaction being greatly encouraged by deaf communities, these technologies also emerge to allow

freedom to the deaf visitor who wants to visit the museum without depending on a mediator. On the use of these technologies, Uzeda (2015) explains that:

> studies in the field of museology, which were traditionally focused on the technical aspects of handling and preserving objects, when faced with the expansion of the communicational emphasis, had to direct their focus directly on the public and became shapers of the museological discourse. Understanding how the message sent to visitors is constructed from the objects on display, through textual information, and through the individual interpretation of each one is now a fundamental concern in museums. (p. 11)

The researchers Chagas and Santos (2007) define these issues in a short sentence: "to think about museums is to embed them in our world" (p. 12). Articulating this statement with the deaf people's challenges, we realize that this group's social movement has made some progress towards their aspirations, though taking in small steps, such as in the formalization of Libras (Decreto nº 5.626, 2005; Lei nº 10.436, 2002) and the regulation of the Libras-Portuguese translator/interpreter profession (Lei nº 12.319, 2010). These and other advances could be considered grand if not for the continued non-compliances with the law, inclusive in public institutions. Thus, Garcia (2017) states that:

> Brazil is slowly moving towards political recognition of the linguistic and cultural differences of the deaf since it still does not effectively encourage the bilingual education of this group. That said, despite it being considered an unquestionable advance in the political recognition of the linguistic rights of the deaf, one should not nurture the misleading and naive belief that the official recognition of LIBRAS in the national territory alone entails tangible changes in social and educational practices aimed at this population. (p. 421)

As the access of deaf people to museums is still recent, these elements must be considered as a guide to the conceptions of deaf people about what their experience of visiting museums looks like. By understanding their views on the field, it is possible to include them in cultural accessibility projects in museums. Deaf people must be able to access cultural spaces to consume the pre-existing mainstream culture, that of the listeners, and be transforming agents of culture. Meira and Silva (2013) suggest that "artistic and creative processes operate hybridisms that trigger transformations in practices and reflection across theory, practice and life context" (p. 48). Thus, before these hybridisms — we could even use Burke's (2000/2003) term "cultural hybridism" here —, it is necessary to consider that the deaf people have a visual culture, a deaf culture.

> Deaf culture and sign languages form one socio-semiotically recognized language with its own particularities. Referring to the theme of deaf culture and accessibility in tourism is, above all, bridging a gap of social crippling created by careless public policies, by the denial of differences, which

> requires work, research, and involvement with movements and with deaf culture. (Soares et al., 2013, p. 3)

The first step in creating a truly accessible environment for this social group is to encourage dialogue with deaf people and demonstrate that they can actively participate in this space. With this in mind, teaching arts to deaf children/adolescents, and promoting visits to museums, is important to provide these students with tools to express and demarcate their cultural and linguistic identity. According to Strobel (2008b):

> deaf culture also involves the deaf art artifact and paintings, sculptures, theater, poetry, among other. Many deaf artists in different contexts, including actors, sign language poets, painters, magicians, sculptors, storytellers, among other. (...) Many deaf people have talents for the art of body expression, and it should be encouraged by the school, family, and deaf people. (p. 64)

Deaf actress Sandrine Hermanse (as cited in Aniceto, 2019) reports in an excerpt from the film *Sou Surda e Não Sabia* (I Am Deaf and I Didn't Know) her experience watching, for the first time, a deaf and hearing people mixed theater: "everyone used [French] sign language[2]. Why wasn't it like that in society? That's what encouraged me to perform theater with sign language. That allowed me to build my identity. I felt proud to show my language" (p. 87).

Bearing all this in mind, it is important to emphasize that the visits to museums mediated in Libras should ideally be provided by deaf educators and that deaf teachers should also provide art teaching in schools. In fact, they should teach art and all other subjects in the curriculum. Firstly, because it avoids "noise": having a hearing teacher teaching with an interpreter will prevent the deaf students from understanding much information, either because of the teacher's methodology or due to the poor training of interpreters. Secondly, and no less important, to allow deaf students to exchange experiences with their peers. Like all children, the deaf also need to have models to inspire them in their development as an individual.

Regarding schools, the oldest educational institution for the deaf in Brazil is the National Institute of Education for the Deaf (INES). INES was founded on September 26, 1857, by the French deaf professor Ernest Huet at the invitation of King Pedro II because there were deaf members in the royal family. This institution went through the prohibition of sign languages with the imposition of oralism, among other milestones in the history of deaf education. As for art, INES has a history of appreciation of its students' encouragement of visual arts. In the 1930s, the deaf sculptor, Antônio Edgard de Souza Pitanga, graduated from the National School of Fine Arts and taught the subject of

[2] "Like any other language system, sign languages differ across the world, including many dialectal variations. Even in countries with the same official oral-auditory language – the case of Brazil – sign languages are different, showing that sign production is separate from the oral system" (Garcia, 2011, p. 14).

Drawing and Crafts. In the 1960s, several renowned artists also taught at the institution, such as Lygia Clark (Zanellato, 2016). Hence, students had classes in different types of handcrafts: painting, sculpture, sewing, and carpentry, among others. These classes no longer exist, as the INES has the same curricular structure as regular schools. However, that legacy is still alive in the memory of the institution. As we walk through its corridors, we can see several sculptures and paintings made by its students.

4. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Relations With Cultural Spaces

As highlighted earlier, drastic and urgent measures were taken for the population's safety due to the highly transmissible virus pandemic. Some of the numerous institutions affected by this scenario were museums. From the smallest to the most famous, no museum was immune to the impacts of this crisis. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (The Met) alone estimated a loss of more than $100,000,000 (Pogrebin, 2020).

However, the closure of important cultural bridges was greater than the financial losses. With this in mind, most museums were restructured to embrace the online format (Beiguelman, 2020). Although this does not mean a significant transfer of funds to museums — given that: (a) most of these activities promoted by museums in the last 2 years were completely free of charge, and (b) the amount received for monetization varies greatly depending on the profile on social networks — it is a way to give the entire population a sign of hope amid the turbulent times we are going through. The assistant director-general for culture of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization states that:

> museums are more than just places where humanity's heritage is preserved and promoted (...). They are also key spaces of education, inspiration, and dialogue. At a time when billions of people around the world are separated from one another, museums can bring us together. (Ottone, 2020, as cited in Roque, 2020, para. 4)

ICOM organized a small handbook on how to interact remotely with the public, listing the following measures (International Council of Museums, 2020a): making collections accessible on the internet[3], organizing mediated visits through lives[4], and promoting public engagement on social networks with polls and hashtags. One of Brazil's most successful hashtag initiatives was the "#pinadecasa" implemented by the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo. The number of likes on their social networks increased by 5,000 followers in just 1 month (Racy, 2020). Another initiative was the promotion of free

[3] The museum web tour initiative started some years ago, but it was restricted to institutions with greater purchasing power. Currently, most institutions have made efforts to make their collections digitally accessible, even if just through photos without requiring more sophisticated resources.

[4] Unlike the web tour, an internet application that provides a 360º view of each room in the museum, in the mediated visit, we usually have staff member of the educational sector promoting a debate with the public through live streaming. That allows for more personal interaction.

workshops and/or certified workshops for a symbolic price on museum-related subjects. One of the researchers in this article followed some such initiatives of the Museum of Sacred Art of São Paulo and Acesso Cultura (Portugal). The Prado Museum is one of the best examples. During the pandemic, its social media engagement increased by more than 120% (García, 2020). Through the Google Arts & Culture application, it is now possible to access online visits to 2,500 museums (Glette, 2020). Internet visits to the Louvre Museum increased from 40,000 to 400,000 in just a few months (*Covid-19: Fechados, Museus Europeus Buscam Novos Públicos na Internet*, 2020).

> The public, confined at home, adheres to these initiatives as a strategy to escape the anxiety caused by isolation and the anguish provoked by the news of illness and death. They visit museums they have never been to before or visit them differently, reinventing routes, observing the works, and seeking readings that give them meaning. (...) It is an optimistic and idyllic vision in a crisis. Reality has a dark and negative side, still poorly understood as to its scope and unpredictable as to its impact. After a fracturing reality like the one we are experiencing, nothing can go back to being as it was before, and, alongside some positive signs, there are worrying signs. A study conducted by NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations, until April 3, with a sample of 650 museums from 41 countries, shows that the impacts of the crisis are hitting European museums hard. Closures led to a huge loss of revenue from tickets, shops, restaurants, and other services. The main museums, located in tourist areas, reported losses between 75 and 80%, totaling hundreds of thousands of euros. (Roque, 2020, paras. 6, 9)

Roque (2020), far from being pessimistic, is just leading us to the following reflection: how to balance the virtual and face-to-face worlds where museums currently live? After all, however optimistic we may be, nothing will be like before the pandemic. As mentioned earlier, some companies have completely abandoned the physical office and will permanently adapt to the home office. From now on, this will reflect on our society: there will be more and more virtual interaction and less face-to-face. There is a real and extremely high possibility that museums will never again have the same flow of visitors as they did before the pandemic.

> At the Florence Cathedral Complex in Italy, which reopened on May 22, visitors receive an electronic necklace, the first of its kind in the world that beeps, vibrates, and blinks, warning when you come too close to another person. In the cradle of Renaissance humanism, this is perhaps a particularly dystopian image of everyday life under the impact of Covid-19. (...) If beeping necklaces and colored sticks illustrate changes that Covid-19 brought to museums, the feature of this new normal that should most impact the visitation experience – and the operation of institutions – is the

> reduction in attendance, at least in museums used to large influxes of visitors. (Fontoura, 2020, paras. 10, 17)

A great example that makes this collective milestone clear is the creation of the Covid Art Museum (https://www.covidartmuseum.com/), which has two main foci: disseminating art made during the pandemic and reflecting on how current events impact the way art is made. That is not the only initiative in this regard. The National Museum of Finland was a forerunner when it interviewed Helsinki residents to find out how they felt amid the chaos of the previous year (Gobbi, 2020).

The Ibermuseus (2020), a cooperation program between Iberian-American museums, surveyed 434 institutions from 18 countries. In this survey, 60% of private or mixed-fund institutions reported having laid-off staff, especially in closed sectors, such as guided tour mediators and outsourced service personnel (search results are available at Ibermuseus, 2020).

A concern during this new adaptation process of museums to a platform that professionals had little command over is the fact that the few initiatives of deaf accessibility have practically disappeared. That is because most deaf educators work in sign language-mediated visits, which were among the sectors that were considered halted. Furthermore, there were reports of deaf educators fired or who had their salaries frozen during the aggravation of the pandemic.

Despite this, Brazil was one of the countries that mobilized the most in this regard. In April 2020, as soon as the pandemic started in the country, MAM/SP launched the "#MAMonline" campaign with different activities, including weekly lives in Libras on subjects such as deaf culture and cultural mediation (*Com Foco em Acessibilidade, MAM São Paulo Promove Lives em Libras*, 2020). In April 2021, the Museum of Tomorrow launched the innovative proposal of the Museum in Libras. Every 2 months, a new temporary exhibition is displayed in a virtual room on a video conferencing platform with a limited number of invitations. According to the São Paulo State Museum System (Sistema Estadual de Museus de São Paulo, 2021):

> thus, recognizing the current complexity experienced by the aggravation of the pandemic across the country and the numerous language barriers experienced by the deaf community in accessing information and knowledge to cope with it, the theme of the first edition of the Museum in Libras had to be the coronavirus. In direct dialogue with the new temporary exhibition, Coronaceno – Reflections in times of a pandemic it seeks to provoke reflections on the concepts and relationships highlighted by the advent of Covid-19. (...) All mediation will be conducted in Libras and rely on interpreters' performance. The activity is committed to the United Nations 2030 Agenda[5]. (...) In partnership with the Museum of Inclusion, the event relied

[5] This agenda has also been encouraged by the Centro Cultural Light (2022).

> on museum educators Bruno Baptista (Museum of Tomorrow) and Harry Adams (Memorial of Inclusion). (paras. 3–6)

Espaço do Conhecimento (Knowledge Space) of the Federal University of Minas Gerais also recently promoted a live activity (September 2021). However, the topic was somewhat peculiar: communication with the deaf in museums. It made people wonder: why emphasize communication with the deaf? Does the museum have a deaf educator? Wouldn't deaf-to-deaf communication be preferable? Furthermore, the news page emphasizes the term "language of signs" when the correct word is "sign language" (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, n.d.). It is also worth mentioning that this is an isolated initiative on the occasion of "Blue September"[6].

Another somewhat questionable initiative was that of the Dragão do Mar Center of Art and Culture. Despite the many highly interesting lives promoted on its channel, it had only one with translation/interpretation from Libras-Portuguese, because the speaker was deaf (Dragão do Mar, 2020). In other words, can the deaf only access what "concerns the deaf"? Can they not access any other content of interest to them? The same occurred at the Museum of Life (Museu da Vida / Fiocruz, 2020). With this in mind, one could also highlight the Oi Futuro initiative with a Libras-Portuguese translator/interpreter in all the videos of *Papo de Futuro* (Talk About the Future; Oi Futuro, 2021), giving the deaf the access to subjects beyond those of cultural accessibility. In this regard, Savedra (2021, as cited in Rodrigues, 2021) warns that accessibility through subtitles and sign language windows "will only be effective if the deaf is part of the production and post-production process, just as there is no way to plan access ramps without wheelchair users testing them" (para. 4). The old — but rarely respected saying — "nothing about us without us". A museum that has sought to subvert this logic by introducing the "all about us with us" is the Museum of Inclusion, founded in 2009, which will soon have virtual exhibitions, but for now, has promoted several fully accessible lives in Libras designed with the entire education team, which also includes deaf educator Harry Adams (previously mentioned; https://portal.museudainclusao.org.br/).

5. Final Reflections

We think that the museum institution did try to reinvent itself and adapt to this new moment we are experiencing, but even so, the institutions' efforts do not seem to have had a specific focus for a given social group. It was not clear whether the educators of these museums were involved in the activities reflecting on how to extend accessibility to different social groups. Thus, through very initial research, it was possible to verify that

[6] "As a result of the international movement, the deaf have created a symbol-mark of this struggle. Strangely, it's the same used by the world movement to fight HIV/AIDS, only in blue. (...) Also, arising from the partnership and formal link between different institutions for the deaf with the WFD [World Federation of the Deaf], the mobilization around the National Day of the Deaf grows every year. (...) WFD celebrates the date on the September 30. However, Brazil chose September 26 to promote a connection with the institution that holds much of the history of the deaf in the country: INES" (Garcia, 2011, pp. 115–116).

museums grope about the virtual space, but also the initiatives that concern the deaf public were incipient to supply a series of very relevant contents that museums have promoted.

Nevertheless, we hope this pandemic moment is one of deep reflection by museum professionals to have more initiatives and not just think about using deaf museum educators in mediated visits. It is undoubtedly fundamental, but several other initiatives can be developed: soirees, workshops, among other. May we use these times of uncertainty (International Council of Museums Brasil, 2020) to reinvent our practices. After all, museums have already overcome other crises and stood firm as institutions ready to safeguard memories and narrate such events to future generations (International Council of Museums, 2020c).

We also hope that our brief reflections can help all the social actors involved in museums and cultural spaces, whether they are museologists, educators, among other professionals, to gather strategies so that these places can effectively comply with the new definition of ICOM as spaces where there is full democracy and access to information.

Authors' Contribution

Maria Izabel dos Santos Garcia developed the methodology and she was responsible for collaborating on the conceptualization and investigation of the proposed article. She was responsible for the project administration, supervision and she participated in writing – original draft. Rebeca Garcia Cabral was responsible for the data curation and collaborated in the conceptualization and investigation of the proposed article. She participated in the overall writing process (writing – original draft; writing – review and editing). Bruno Ramos da Silva collaborated in the conceptualization and investigation of the proposed article. He participated in writing the original draft.

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