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## Museums, Tourism and Interpretation of the Heritage

Museus, Turismo e Interpretação Patrimonial

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### ABSTRACT:

The relationship between the museum and tourism is underpinned by specific dynamics and is inseparable from the development of society. The present-day museum dissociates itself from the museum of the 18th century, as tourism nowadays presents different characteristics from those it had in the past. The increasing importance of cultural tourism and the growing interest in museums on the part of visitors impose various challenges on museums as tourism resources. In order for tourists to visit the museum, it has to be appealing, providing a unique and enriching experience to the visitor. For this purpose, the museum should invest in the interpretation of heritage. The present study aims to point to the principles underlying the interpretation of heritage and emphasise the relevance that this interpretation may have as a means to draw visitors, notably the tourists visiting the museum. The interpretation of the heritage is considered to be an absolute priority in the organization of the museum and in the public display of the heritage to be highlighted. It should be noted that tourists now expect from the museum the necessary changes that will make it more appealing and worthy of another visit. A captivating experience will make them convey to pass to others the message the museum succeeded in communicating to them.

**KEYWORDS:** Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Museums, Heritage Interpretation, Interpretative Techniques.

### RESUMO:

A relação entre o museu e o turismo é sustentada por dinâmicas específicas, inseparáveis do desenvolvimento da sociedade. O museu atual dissocia-se daquele do século XVIII, assim como o turismo também apresenta características diferentes daquelas do passado. A crescente importância do turismo cultural e do interesse dos visitantes pelos museus impõem desafios aos museus como recursos turísticos. Para que os turistas visitem um museu, este precisa ser atrativo, proporcionando uma experiência única e enriquecedora para o visitante. Para isso, o museu deve investir na interpretação patrimonial. O presente estudo visa apontar os princípios subjacentes à interpretação patrimonial, enfatizando a relevância que a mesma pode ter como meio de atrair visitantes, notadamente os turistas. A interpretação patrimonial é considerada como de prioridade absoluta na organização do museu e na exibição pública do patrimônio a ser destacado. Deve-se notar que na atualidade os turistas esperam que se façam as mudanças necessárias para que os museus se tornem mais atraentes e dignos de nova visita. Uma experiência cativante fará os visitantes transmitirem a outras pessoas a mensagem que o museu lhes apresentou.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Turismo, Turismo Cultural, Museus, Interpretação Patrimonial, Técnicas de Interpretação.

### INTRODUÇÃO

Museums incorporate a vast array of assets; they are spaces of memory, collective memory and identity, key spaces in the tourist offer of countries. But for the message of museums to be appealing, it is crucial that museums convey meaningful messages to the visitors and engage them in their visit to the space. Therefore, museums should promote dynamic activities that lead to an interpretation of the heritage and be a space of training and enjoyment for visitors.

## MUSEUMS AND TOURISM

The relationship between the museum and tourism is the result of a development process. If until the 20th century the museum was appealing to a learned public, with specific knowledge about the objects on display, after the Second World War, museum policies changed. Centred on the object until then, the museum policy shifts its focus to the public. This change occurred due to, among other factors, the ‘democratization’ of access to education, and museums tried to meet the challenges that those social transformations entailed. This fact gave rise to a wide public in possession of certain cultural and educational standards. “‘This learned and wealthy generation’ not only added to the number of visitors to museums, but also ‘built’ an educational system and activities designed for their children, in which visiting museums became a compulsory complement to the traditional classroom activities” (Garcia, 2003, p. 48). The dialogue between the School and the museum became closer: the museum begins to organise events with an eye to the school sector. The School accepted the challenge and incorporated the museum in its syllabi.

On the other hand, the emergence, in the second half of the 20th century, of a “middle class with money to spend, free time on their hands, longer and longer holidays, “tired” of the city’s humdrum and busy life, was the main drive behind the increase in tourism, especially international tourism” (Garcia, 2003, p. 49). As highlighted by Garcia, between 1960 and 1995, the number of international tourists rose from 70 million to 500 million a year. Consequently, cultural tourism became increasingly important “vis-à-vis the *sea, sun & sand* package holiday” (p. 49). In fact, as pointed out by Gonçalves (2010), “particularly during the second half of the 20th century, the following happened: an increase in the demand for museums; an increase in the number of museums, [...]; the growth of a wider public, coming mostly from a more educated middle class” (p. 95).

This relevance of museums to the tourism sector was accentuated in the late 20th century, at which time new museological practices emerged. Museums gradually began to incorporate leisure and consumption areas: restaurants, cafés, shops and interactive showcases. A *new museology* emerges, “a multidisciplinary notion of museology that facilitated the appearance of technical and industrial museums, eco-museums and other museological realities thus far ignored or non-existent” (Paiva, 2001, p. 32). Accordingly, a new museum paradigm asserts itself in contrast to the traditional museum. The ‘new museum’ no longer identifies specifically with the exhibits on display in a building aimed at a given public. Instead, the ‘new museum’ has a decentralized structure comprehending a territory that belongs to a community. The members of this community are active and participating elements who interact with the museologist, whilst becoming aware of the values of their culture, the need for their preservation and hoping for the heritage that was part of their daily lives to be acknowledged as worthy of being represented in the museum. As a result, the ‘new museum’ will be at the service of a given community and contribute to the “cultural, social and economic development of a given group” (Fernández, 2002, p. 94).

These museological practices, which “broke with the conventional museological routine” (Nabais, 1993, p. 46), became appealing for tourism and posed new challenges to museums. However, the relation between museums and tourism is not a peaceful one; it may even be of a conflicting nature. As regards the heritage property, museums and tourism take different stances: “Tourism looks at the asset from the user’s perspective and values it for its intrinsic draw and extrinsic to consumption. The tourism sector tends to maximize the number of visits to the asset, whereas museums are concerned about the welfare of the asset and may limit their access (Gonçalves, 2010, p. 89).

Despite this somewhat inconstant relationship between museums and tourism, the increasing demand for museums on the part of tourists has been taking place and is associated with the growing importance of cultural tourism and the emergence of the ‘New Tourist’ and ‘New Tourism’. “‘New Tourism’ appeals to highly qualified products capable of meeting the tourists’ demand for making dreams come true, having unique experiences, learning from other people’s culture, in a pleasant and reinvigorating way” (Gonçalves,

2010, p. 86). On the other hand, “cultural tourism carries a vast set of benefits not only for destinations but also for culture itself” (Cunha, 2017, 232). Among these, and according to Cunha (2017), the following should be highlighted: “Drawing visitors with a higher purchasing power and a more developed cultural and educational level; preservation of the local culture and traditions; increase in the investment in historical resources” (p. 232). Because of the benefits afforded by cultural tourism, which are pertinent to museums – whose reason for being is inseparable from visitors – museums must meet the challenges that tourism poses and rethink themselves, if need be.

## MUSEUMS AND INTERPRETATION OF HERITAGE

Faced with the new challenges and the relevance that the visiting public present to museums, these must put into practice strategies that will create interest for visitors. Consequently, investing in the interpretation of their heritage is a way for museums to achieve this goal. The term interpretation surfaces “in the late 19th century, associated with the twofold concern of public fruition and the conservation of North-American natural parks” (Moiteiro, 2010, p. 143). As mentioned by Moiteiro (2010), with the “publication in 1957” of the book *Interpreting Our Heritage* by North-American author Freeman Tilden, “for the first time the key ideas of this area of study” (p.144) are systematized.

“After the 1970s, the practice of interpretation developed and included monuments, historic buildings and sites” (Murta & Goodey, 2005, p. 15). On the other hand, in the 1980s, the 1<sup>st</sup> World Congress of Interpretation of Heritage is held in Canada. At the time, the notion of heritage was a broad one and included the natural and cultural, tangible and intangible heritage (Hernández & Tresseras, 2001). In the 1990s, the idea of the interpretation of heritage takes root in Europe following the “debate between the traditional museum theories and the ideas of a new museology” (Zamora, 2006, p. 86).

According to Piñol (2013): “Interpreting is a concept that goes beyond information; in fact, it involves attributing a significance to something, providing versions and ascribing meanings to things” (p. 29). It implies enhancing the heritage property by promoting “a coherent method of presentation, communication and exploration of the heritage” (Castells, 2002, *apud* Lizana, 2007, p. 227). As stated by Murta and Goodey (2005), “interpreting is revealing meanings, is causing emotions, is stimulating curiosity, is entertaining and inspiring new attitudes in the visitor, is affording a true quality and memorable experience” (p. 14). While it may have underlying objectives within the scope of knowledge, emotional reactions or behaviour “the interpretation provides keys for an understanding of the heritage that enables visitors to have a meaningful experience” (Hernández & Tresseras, 2001, p. 174). It opens ways for the understanding of heritage and the context of which is part.

Tilden (1967 *apud* Murta & Goodey, 2005, p. 18), identified the six principles that guide the interpretation of heritage. As follows:

1. Interpretation assumes a relation between what is described and the visitor’s experience.
2. Despite involving information, interpretation should not be merely informative; it must reveal meanings based on information.
3. Interpretation combines visual arts with animation, although it may also rest on other materials.
4. The main objective of interpretation is to be provocative, not merely instructive. It should arouse people’s curiosity and cause in-depth exploration of the subject being interpreted.
5. Interpretation means presenting the whole story and not just part of it.
6. Interpretation should be “accessible to the widest possible public, taking special needs into consideration” (p. 18).

With a view to successfully communicating with the visitor, the interpretation of heritage should involve the adoption of a certain number of criteria. Penyfather (1975 *apud* Murta & Goodey, 2005: pp. 34-35) identified those criteria. As follows:

- Encouraging participation – Objects should be displayed in such a way that they cause visitors to wish to handle them to have an experience.
- Being provocative – Challenging visitors to look at the heritage and convey their own interpretation of the objects, which may cause them to be curious about their surroundings.
- Being relevant – “Whatever the approach, the reconstruction of the past should relate the history introduced with the very existence of the visitor, thereby opening a channel between the past and the present.”
- Being connected with their surroundings – The visitors should be encouraged to become aware of the reality around them.
- Choosing a theme – “The choice of a central theme and the resulting stories will decide the lay-out and planning of the exhibitions.”
- Showing flows – A sequential presentation facilitates the comprehension of information.
- Using charts – “Creative graphical and typographical techniques add interest to an exhibition that displays written or illustrated material.”
- Enhancing the environment – The creation of an environment suitable to the information to be conveyed makes visitors curious.
- Using humour – “The careful choice of words in signs and notices may be valuable to capture the visitor’s attention” (pp. 34 and 35).
- Working with a timeline – Using graphical presentations and colour codes may contribute to highlight the evolution of, for instance, historical processes.

As the above-mentioned authors state (Murta & Goodey, 2005), “the spoken or written word, the models and reconstructions, the computer simulations, the visual, sound or motion effects – may and should be combined between them to liven up and bring variety to a presentation” (p. 34). Hernández and Tresserras (2001) mention the existence of interpreting techniques that “allow to help shape new strategies to present the heritage” (p. 194) emphasizing, among others, the following:

- Publications, educational writing books with games, aimed for audiences of different age groups, “monographs about specific contents and specialized guidebooks designed for teachers” (p. 194).
- Audio-visual media, such as slide shows, audio guides and other interactive devices.
- Dramatizations and historical re-enactments.
- Guided tours in which the guide plays a crucial role in the presentation of the heritage.

In fact, when the visit is accompanied by guides, their role is crucial as mediators between the heritage and the visitor. As Alderson and Low (1996) point out, the guides should be in possession of set of skills that go beyond academic qualifications. They should embrace the job with enthusiasm, showing that what they are doing is important, and welcome the visitors in an affable way, regardless of the time of day in which the visit takes place. The performance of the guide may be decisive in the visitor’s wish to come back or encourage others to visit the same space.

## CONCLUSION

The interpretation of heritage guides the attention of the visitors towards a given asset, thus affording them an active and enriching participation in their visit to the museum, a long-lasting experience. By stimulating the senses and the critical spirit, the interpretation of the heritage should be something for museums to invest in today. By motivating visitors and creating interest among tourists, the interpretation of the heritage may render the visit to the museum more appealing. It will encourage visitors to return to the site or convey to third parties the memorable experience they had, thus creating in others the desire to visit the museum.

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