

Sentidos Comunes: Rethinking accessibility in museums.

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How can we make museums more accessible? What happens when we experience museums from the perspective of people who encounter barriers when visiting them? And how can museum professionals and disability communities work together to imagine different ways of experiencing cultural spaces?

These questions shaped *Sentidos Comunes: Rethinking accessibility in Museums*, a three-day workshop held in Lima on 20-22 August. The programme brought together professionals working in museums and heritage management from Lima and from the Amazon and the highlands of Peru.

From the beginning, the project aimed to establish an inclusive platform for cultural professionals and people with disabilities to exchange ideas and share knowledge through dialogue, lived experiences, and practical activities.

In Lima, this collaborative approach was fundamental. We worked with various organisations and networks, including CAPAZ Perú, Braille Perú and the Red de Accesibilidad, while the British Council supported the participation of professionals from outside Lima. These partnerships enabled us to bring together diverse forms of knowledge: museum practice, accessibility expertise and, importantly, the perspectives of people with disabilities who use cultural spaces.

Day 1: Understanding accessibility from different perspectives

On our first day, hosted by Británico Cultural, we established a shared starting point for the workshop. The morning combined different perspectives on accessibility in Peru. We discussed disability legislation and reviewed local museum case studies to understand what institutions are already doing, the challenges they face, and the possibilities within different contexts.

An important question guided the session: Are our museums accessible? To explore it, we invited members of the blind community to discuss their experiences as users of museums and cultural spaces. Their perspective helped move the conversation beyond what institutions consider accessible towards what accessibility means when someone encounters an exhibition, navigates a museum or tries to access its content.

Participants attended a session to explore examples of accessible museum resources and considered how information normally communicated visually could also be experienced through touch, sound, and other sensory approaches.

We also connected the discussion in Peru with Colombia's National Museum's experience, focusing on accessibility, inclusion, and co-creation with disability communities. This exchange was especially meaningful for *Sentidos Comunes*, a project designed for collaboration between ITP fellows from both nations. It offered a chance to compare experiences and see that accessibility approaches must fit each society's unique context.



Photographic documentation of presentations, accessibility workshops, and collaborative activities involving museums and organizations supporting people with visual disabilities.

Day 2: Testing accessibility in an archaeological site

On the second day, we moved from discussion to direct observation and analysis at the Archaeological site and Museo de Sitio Huaca Pucllana.

This change of setting (an archaeological site) raises different questions than those encountered in a conventional museum gallery. Visitors move through an outdoor heritage environment, explore archaeological remains and navigate routes where terrain, distances and the site's narratives all influence the experience.

Together, we explored Huaca Pucllana and analysed the accessibility strategies developed there. We learned about the museum's experience working with visual disabilities and explored Pucllawasi, their didactic gallery with accessible resources.

The visit encouraged us to view accessibility as extending beyond a single resource. A tactile object may be useful, but how does a visitor reach it? How does it relate to the surrounding space? And how can someone access a site whose interpretation often depends heavily on seeing the landscape and ancient architecture? These questions helped participants analyse accessibility as an interconnected visitor experience rather than a collection of isolated accessible adaptations.



One of the groups exploring the accessible trail at the Archaeological Site Huaca Pucllana.



Participants testing accessible resources at Huaca Pucllana.



A reflective moment and exchange of ideas in the museum's designated quiet space.

Day 3: From analysing resources to creating them

Our final day took place at the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI). After discussing accessibility and testing existing strategies over the previous days, the third day focused on experimentation and creation.

Participants explored accessible resources within the museum galleries and discussed how artworks and exhibition content could be experienced through various senses. Afterwards, they participated in a practical workshop, collaborating to create their own accessible resources with the museum's collection.

This practical component was particularly important. Accessibility is easier to discuss in theory than to translate into an actual museum experience. Creating a resource requires decisions: What information is essential? What are we trying to communicate? Which senses can be involved? What materials should we use? And will the resource actually make sense to the people for whom it is being developed?

The workshop itself also needed to reflect these questions. Blind participants were part of *Sentidos Comunes*, so we adapted materials and exercises to enable their participation. We incorporated resources that could be explored tactilely and sensorially, and designed activities so visual information was not the only way to participate.

The day concluded with an opportunity to experience a sensory trail, bringing the discussion back to our own bodies and reminding us that visiting a museum is never just a visual experience.



Participants engaging with and exploring the museum's collection.



Participants working collaboratively to conceptualise and sketch their own accessible resources.



Participants exploring the museum through a sensory-based tour.

Accessibility as a conversation

Over the three days, *Sentidos Comunes* moved between different ways of learning: sharing experiences, discussing concepts, observing spaces, testing responses and collaboratively creating new ones.

Collaborating with museums was crucial, but equally important was engaging with organisations and networks connected to disability communities. One pivotal principle of the project was that people with disabilities should not simply be recipients of accessible programs. Instead, their lived experiences should play an active role in shaping how accessibility is understood, designed, and assessed.

This also involves recognising that there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution for making a museum accessible. Since archaeological sites, art museums, and cultural centres each have distinct conditions, accessibility must be tailored to each setting. This necessitates understanding individual contexts while fostering ongoing exchange of experiences among different institutions and communities.

For us, perhaps one of the most important lessons from *Sentidos Comunes* is that accessibility does not begin with a finished solution. It begins with a conversation and with the recognition that “nothing about us without us” is vital to building meaningful museum experiences.

However, the conversation extends beyond Lima. *Sentidos Comunes* was designed as a dialogue between Peru and Colombia, fostering opportunities to share knowledge about diverse museum practices, disability communities, and institutional environments in both nations. The project's next phase will bring us to Bogotá, where we will engage a new group of participants, partners, and museum venues.

What will we learn when the same questions are explored in a different context? We will find out soon. But that is another blog story.