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Access of wheelchair users in sportive mega events: the case of Confederation Cup

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Abstract

This article aims to evaluate the Access conditions for wheelchair users in sporting mega-events. It will show the characterization of some attributes related with the walk, as the variables that express them, showing the studied group particularities. The data collect was made in June, 2013 by questionnaire application during the competitions of The World Confederation Cup realized in Rio de Janeiro on the Maracanã Stadium. This paper establishes the principal attributes identified based on the literature review and the exploratory field research, signaling the satisfaction with the security and comfort attributes, and also the main infrastructural problems at surroundings, that are the ramps leveling the streets to the sidewalks and the flowerbeds along of the public footpaths. Reinforcing the necessity of rethink the planning of the public spaces focusing in the Universal Design, but contemplating explicitly the studied group perceptions by the Service Quality concept.

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1. Introduction

Holding sporting events on an international stage notably gives the host city the responsibility to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for spectators who come to attend the game (in itself) as well as enjoy the peripheral

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elements, be they at the stadium or in its surroundings (Theodorakis *et al*, 2013).

Moreover, so-called mega sporting events represent an opportunity for local transformation, due to incoming investments linked to such activities. The allocation of these resources can contribute to cities becoming both better-structured and more attractive, or at the very least meeting the requirements of the International Olympic Committee (promoting specific changes). It is worth noting in this case, the concern with creating environments that meet the diversity of individuals who reside in or visit the city in question. In this context, it is worth mentioning the example of the city of Barcelona where, according to Cohen (2006), the 1992 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games had a special significance in the struggle for the rights of Persons with Disabilities - DP. According to the author, nowadays, it is an inclusive city, signaling that events of this size can mean substantial change in the urban territory.

The DP are, generally speaking, those who have some limitation which may cause set-backs in performing one or more daily practices. These can be physical, intellectual, sensory or multiple order and, in turn, directly impact the infrastructure and social conditions in which these individuals are live. Thus, expanding the notion of disability beyond the body and incorporating an individual's surroundings (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010; Brazil 2001 *apud* Cosenza & Resende, 2006). According to the World Health Organization - WHO (2011), there are more than 1 billion people in the world with some form of disability, about 200 million of whom have severe functional difficulties. Within this scope, this work will concentrate on a specific group within the DP, that being wheelchair users (chosen for being the most affected by what could restrict getting from one place to another). According to the Census (2010), 23.91% of the Brazilian population is said to have some type of disability, while 0.39% are considered permanently physically disabled (defined as: an individual who, "...cannot in any way, " or who is, "permanently unable, because of physical disability, to walk and/or climb stairs without the help of another person" [IBGE, 2010]). The values presented show the necessity of measures being taken, beyond emergency situations, to give the disabled access to both cultural and leisure activities in everyday city life.

With the goal of creating inclusive spaces, there emerged in the United States of America, in 1985, a philosophy of "Universal Design" with the purpose of creating environments to be egalitarian, adaptable, obvious, known, safe, inclusive and effortless. Thus, for all people and respecting their differences, according to the vision brought about inclusion in this study (Pinto, 2012; Fonseca & Silva, 2010). And, with the aim of coming close to this group's expectation (with specific needs that usually are considered through technical manuals), this approach to the service quality proves interesting, since it considers the opinions of users to indicate the main focus of carrying out and proposing measures. Cardoso (2012, p 17) citing Portugal (1980) considers that:

"The service quality is an overall measure of all characteristics of service, whose perception of the system is made by the user. The perception and the consideration of its attributes vary according to socio-economic and locational characteristics and the purpose of the trip."

The service quality is expressed in dimensions pertaining to the service offered, and these dimensions are given their own attributes. It is believed that these boundaries, along the knowledge of their impact on how a DP gets around, can be used as a functional tool for urban planning, reducing the space between users and planners, and bringing about the creation of actually inclusive environments.

The City of Rio de Janeiro, where this research is being conducted, will receive two of the most important sporting events: The World Cup Soccer FIFA 2014 and the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Summer Games. With this in mind, this work intends to define some attributes of the mobility of wheelchair users.

Therefore, the research performed has been divided into two main parts: a) the bibliographical research; b) questionnaires about the infrastructure around the Maracanã stadium. Its application was achieved on location during the three games of the FIFA Cup of the Confederations – held in the Maracanã – and, posteriorly, via email from contacts made while the event was occurring.

The literature review related to walking environments were taken into account focusing on those using wheelchairs - without failing to consider, however, pedestrians (where the discussion about the service quality is at a more advanced level). In this way, it was possible to know the relevant attributes to wheelchair users, defining what importance the attributes have for them. This contribution is meant to motivate art and stimulate measures which

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