



Experience Report: Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Tourism through University Extension

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RESUMO: Este relato de experiência trata da inclusão de pessoas com deficiência (PcD) no turismo por meio da extensão universitária, destacando a importância das atividades extensionistas para promover a acessibilidade. O estudo analisa as atividades do programa de extensão Mais Acesso, desenvolvido na Universidade do Estado do Amazonas – UEA, que visa sensibilizar a sociedade e capacitar profissionais para atender às necessidades da PcD nas atividades turísticas, educacionais e culturais. O objetivo geral é analisar a eficácia das iniciativas do Programa Mais Acesso na promoção da inclusão de pessoas com deficiência no turismo. A metodologia utilizada é descritiva, com uma abordagem qualitativa baseada na análise das atividades realizadas pelo programa entre 2022 e 2024. Foram desenvolvidos cursos, palestras e atendimentos psicológicos para PcD, além de ações de turismo pedagógico e sensibilização sobre direitos da PcD. Os resultados mostram que o programa impactou positivamente a inclusão de PcD, melhorando a conscientização e o atendimento a esse público. Além disso, contribuiu para o desenvolvimento acadêmico dos alunos e para a formação de profissionais capacitados. Conclui-se que as atividades de extensão são fundamentais para a inclusão social de PcD e para a promoção de uma sociedade mais inclusiva e justa.

Palavras-chave: Extensão universitária; Acessibilidade; Turismo pedagógico; Pessoa com Deficiência.

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ABSTRACT: This experience report addresses the inclusion of people with disabilities (PwD) in tourism through university extension, highlighting the importance of extension activities in promoting accessibility. The study analyzes the activities of the Mais Acesso extension program, developed at the University of the State of Amazonas (UEA), which aims to raise societal awareness and train professionals to meet the needs of PwD in tourism, educational, and cultural activities. The general objective is to analyze the effectiveness of the Mais Acesso Program's initiatives in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in tourism. The methodology is descriptive, with a qualitative approach based on the analysis of activities carried out by the program between 2022 and 2024. Courses, lectures, and psychological support for PwD were developed, along with pedagogical tourism actions and awareness campaigns on PwD rights. The results show that the program positively impacted PwD inclusion by improving awareness and services for this audience. Additionally, it contributed to the academic development of students and the training of skilled professionals. It is concluded that extension activities are fundamental for the social inclusion of PwD and the promotion of a more inclusive and equitable society.

Keywords: University Extension. Accessibility. Pedagogical Tourism. People with Disabilities. More Accessibility Program.

INTRODUCTION

University extension has been the subject of academic reflections and debates due to its potential in promoting the social role of universities (Koglin; Koglin, 2019). This theme has been gaining ground in university agendas, as these institutions are spaces for sharing worldviews and understanding the various realities present in cities. Universities bear an ethical and social responsibility to develop ways to improve the communities in which they are embedded.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must provide resources and guidance to the communities in which they are embedded. Far beyond a mere economic return, the responsibilities of HEIs to society are based on the democratization of knowledge through the triad of "teaching, research, and extension," as well as the material, technological, and educational solutions developed within the university

environment. These solutions should prioritize accessibility for the society that supports them (Eidt and Strieder, 2015).

One way to fulfill these responsibilities is through extension activities combined with teaching and research, which are grounded in education and utilize various methodologies (Cruz, 2015). Extension is aimed at addressing the needs of both the external and internal community, focusing on social well-being through actions and activities developed by academics and faculty members (Kaio Silva Nunes et al., 2021).

On the other hand, there has been noticeable progress in the debate on promoting accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities (PwD) within public and private initiatives. This progress extends beyond viewing disability solely as an

individual health condition, embracing the biopsychosocial model described in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF). This model considers dysfunctions from biological, personal, and social perspectives, allowing for comprehensive understanding and support of this population's needs.

Official data indicates that the population with disabilities in Brazil reaches 18.6 million people. On the other hand, 74.4% of people with disabilities over the age of 25 have not completed basic education, compared to 29.9% of people without disabilities, highlighting social inequalities between these groups (IBGE, 2023). Additionally, according to the Atlas of violence, people with disabilities are at greater risk of victimization due to power imbalances, societal stigmas, and barriers that prevent their equal participation in society (IPEA, 2023).

However, the Statute of Persons with Disabilities states that "Every person with a disability has the right to equality of opportunities with others and shall not suffer any form of discrimination" (Brazil, 2015). This legal framework contrasts with the reality experienced by people with disabilities. This antagonistic situation raises questions about the real inclusion of people with disabilities and how society has been addressing and promoting accessibility. From this context emerges the following question: How can university extension activities contribute to the inclusion of people with disabilities in tourism?

Given this, the central hypothesis of the research arises: extension activities

promoted by the university contribute to the inclusion of people with disabilities (PwD) in tourism and other significant social sectors.

Considering that barriers include any type of impediment, obstacle, attitude, or behavior that restricts or prevents a person's social participation, as well as their right to accessibility, freedom of movement, expression, communication, access to information, understanding, safe mobility, among others (Brazil, 2015), this experience report aims to analyze the effectiveness of the Mais Acesso Program initiatives in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in tourism. The specific objectives are: i) To characterize the national guidelines for university extension; ii) To describe the data and objectives of the Mais Acesso Program; iii) To relate the activities of the Mais Acesso Program to the national guidelines for university extension.

This experience report provides a theoretical contribution by detailing the specificities of university extension in accordance with the Ministry of Education's legislation. As a practical contribution, it aims to facilitate the replication of adopted practices and demonstrate the importance of extension programs in universities for promoting the development of students' skills and competencies, as well as the economic and social development of the Amazonian community.

NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Regulated by the Ministry of Education (MEC) through Resolution No. 7, dated December 18, 2018 (Brazil, Ministry of Education, 2018), university extension in

Brazilian higher education, as defined in Article 3 of the Resolution, is an activity integrated into the curricular structure and research organization. It constitutes an interdisciplinary, political-educational, cultural, scientific, and technological process that promotes transformative interaction between higher education institutions and other sectors of society through the production and application of knowledge, in constant connection with teaching and research (Brazil, Ministry of Education, 2018).

Resolution No. 7/18 regulates the objective outlined in Goal 12.7 of Law No. 13,005, dated June 25, 2014, which ensures that at least 10% of the total curricular credits required for graduation are allocated to university extension programs and projects, prioritizing activities in areas of significant social relevance.

The theoretical and historical approaches to extension practices in universities encompass three ideological concepts: i) Assistance-oriented, focused on addressing social demands through community service. ii) Transformative, emphasizing social change through dialogic relationships between the university and society. iii) Service-oriented, where society demands services to be provided by the university (Garcia, Brazil, Ministry of Education, 2018).

Thus, the goal of university extension, according to the MEC and articulated in Opinion CNE/CES No. 576/2023 (Brazil, 2023), is to enhance the student's education, transforming them into an agent capable of intervening for the benefit of society, with the aim of promoting social transformation,

particularly in the region where the higher education institution is located.

DATA AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MORE ACCESS PROGRAM

The Mais Acesso Program: during the work, for better understanding, will be referred as PMA, in accessibility was approved by the Dean of Academic Extension from the University of Amazon State (UEA). UEA aims to promote teaching, research, awareness and training actions to enable accessibility and inclusion: in tourism, formal education and in the job market for people with disabilities. The PMA has four axes of operation as shown in Figure 1.

The PMA's activities began in 2020, with content shared on social media about the rights of people with disabilities, accessibility and barriers, as well as training courses on how to serve tourists with disabilities. These efforts aimed to raise awareness within the community by disseminating information on these issues. However, it was in 2022 that PMA developed an organized internal structure through the University of the State of Amazonas (UEA) extension program calls, which is why the results presented here cover the period from January 2022 to April 2024.

Considering the national university extension guidelines, PMA aligns with the concept of extension practices, as students

Figure 1 – Axes of operation.



Source: Prepared by the authors 2024.

engage in practical professional activities while providing essential services to society. This is consistent with the Pedagogical Political Project (PPC) of the courses offered by UEA, as well as its Institutional Development Plan (PDI), which emphasizes inclusion and social responsibility as core pillars.

It is also important to highlight that PMA supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 4 (4.4 and 4.7), 10 (10.2), and 16 (16b). This is achieved by raising awareness of the rights of people with disabilities, thereby contributing to ensuring that students with disabilities not only have access to education but also experience full participation and respect for their rights within the academic community and society at large.

Moreover, through the qualification courses offered to the academic community and

society, it is possible to develop technical and professional skills for employment and decent work, contributing to sustainable development.

The awareness and educational tourism initiatives promoted by PMA also contribute to achieving SDG 10, as they promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities. Finally, SDG 16 is addressed by contributing to a peaceful and inclusive society.

Regarding awareness actions on social media, these are essential to spreading knowledge on the subject and changing the prevailing societal paradigm that views people with disabilities as incapable, ill, or subject to other stigmas that must be overcome to achieve true social inclusion.

Finally, the proposal to offer psychological support to students with disabilities aims to ensure their retention at the University. This contributes not only to the state-level goals

outlined in the Multi-Year Government Plan of the State of Amazonas but also to achieving the United Nations' SDGs 4, 10, and 16.

Thus, PMA's overall objective is to promote research, awareness, and training initiatives to enable accessibility and the inclusion of people with disabilities in society, specifically in tourism, formal education, and the labor market.

The activities carried out fulfill the purpose of university extension by promoting integration between the University and society, addressing an emerging social demand, and valuing citizenship and the promotion of human rights across various community sectors. In this sense, they meet the extension role highlighted in the literature (Leite; Hellmann, 2023, p. 14): "to deepen the relationship between higher education institutions (HEIs) and society; to produce knowledge democratically; to recognize the expertise of non-university actors; and, thus, to contribute to overcoming inequality and social exclusion."

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This experience report is descriptive in nature, set within the context of the PMA conducted at the University of the State of Amazonas (UEA) from February 2022 to April 2024. Its goal is to promote research, awareness, and training to enable accessibility for people with disabilities (PwD) in various social spheres.

Descriptive work, also known as non-experimental, involves studying a specific phenomenon and analyzing the associations between two or more of its variables (Köche,

2010). Hernandez Sampieri et al. (2015, p. 102) emphasize that the utility of descriptive studies lies in demonstrating—with precision—all the proportions of a given phenomenon. The scientific investigator must skillfully determine what will be measured and who or what the subject will be (individuals, groups, communities, animals, events, etc.). In this research, this approach was applied by analyzing PMA activities such as lectures, cultural tours, training courses, and live digital platform events to identify the impact of PMA's activities on the social inclusion of PwDs.

Part of the activity reports comes from the authors themselves, as they are members of PMA and have direct knowledge of the activities' development. Feedback from participants was also collected through comments and messages recorded in attendance forms and on PMA's social media platforms.

This study employs a qualitative approach, specifically a single case study. This research method is frequently used in practical investigations as it enables a more detailed analysis of a specific phenomenon within a defined context (Yin, 2015; Eisenhardt, 1989). Here, it is applied to demonstrate PMA's activities and their outcomes in the academic and external communities, encompassing both people with and without disabilities.

The bibliographic and documentary methods were used in this research. The documentary analysis included reports from the Ministry of Higher Education, which established the University Extension Program, the National Education Plan (PNE),

and other key laws supporting the implementation of university extension in Brazil. Meanwhile, the bibliographic research focused on reviewing existing materials on university extension and people with disabilities, consolidating knowledge on both topics and their relevance to the study.

RESULTS E DISCUSSION

As previously highlighted, the University Extension Program in Accessibility aims to promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities (PwDs) across all social environments, particularly in tourism, education, and the labor market.

To implement the program, PMA relies on a team of student grantees and volunteers, including individuals with and without disabilities, who are responsible for content production. Together with the project coordinators, they conduct courses and lectures, aligning with a key extension directive. According to Negrini et al. (2021, p. 53), "it is the practice of activities that allows the development of academic skills, and through extension, one can discover their aptitudes during the execution of the action, emphasizing the challenges posed by the labor market."

Among the activities developed by PMA are digital teaching and learning solutions, which include online training courses on serving PwDs, made available on the program's website and via Android and iOS apps. These courses were developed based on extensive academic research conducted by the program's team and people with disabilities, adhering to the principle of "nothing about us without us" (Sassaki,

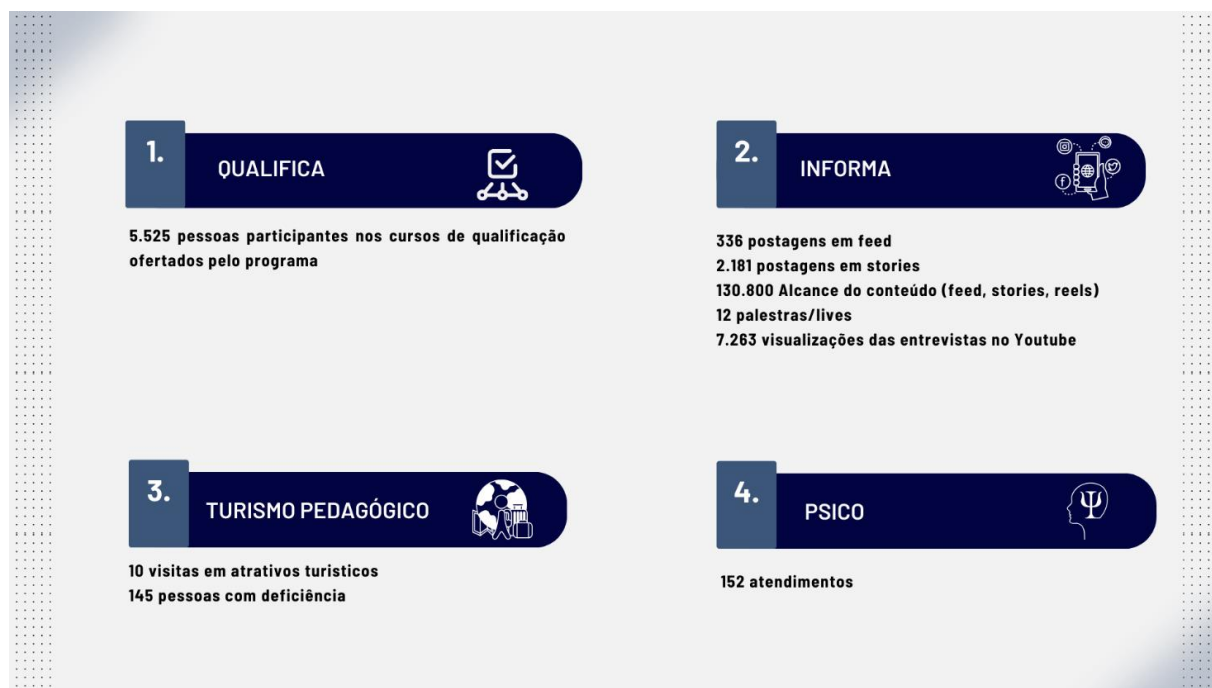
2007). They offer guidance on best practices and activities that facilitate the inclusion of PwDs in society.

Lectures on serving tourists with disabilities were delivered to the academic community and the public. Additionally, interviews under the title "Accessible Talks" were conducted with PwDs who shared their experiences in tourism and leisure, providing guidance on best practices for accessible tourism and the benefits of social inclusion for PwDs. The courses were conducted in-person and streamed live on the program's YouTube channel, while the interviews were held online with disabled tourists from across the country.

To further train professionals working in tourism services, PMA organized various external training sessions for employees of regional and national companies and public agencies. One example is a training course for employees of the Amazonas State Department of Culture and Creative Economy on how to serve tourists with disabilities.

The program also focuses on promoting pedagogical tourism by organizing monthly cultural visits to attractions in Manaus. These visits are conducted in partnership with local organizations that work in the social, cultural, educational, and welfare development of PwDs, enabling the true consumption of cultural products by people with disabilities. Jazine (2001) underscores the importance of university extension in representing the university's social dimension, as social responsibility emerged within the context of education policy as a form of social policy.

Figure 2 –Quantitative data of individuals directly impacted by the Accessibility Extension Program, categorized by area of activity.



Source: Prepared by the authors 2024.

More recently, PMA introduced the “PMA Psych” initiative, which provides free psychological support to students with disabilities at the university. This initiative seeks to build a support network that helps ensure the retention of disabled students at the institution.

It is important to note that over the past two years, PMA has directly impacted more than 13,000 people. Additionally, it has significantly contributed to the academic development of both disabled and non-disabled students involved in PMA activities. This aligns with the goal of university extension to foster the application of skills and competencies acquired in curricular components and to “provide the opportunity to experience unique situations throughout the learning process, making students better equipped to face professional challenges” (Leite; Hellmann, 2023, p. 20).

As demonstrated, PMA has positively impacted the community in tourism, cultural, intellectual, training, and communication activities. Participant feedback—whether from PwDs and their families, or from attendees of cultural activities and training sessions—reinforces the program’s effectiveness. This supports the notion in the literature that extension promotes the social development of all involved in these activities (Cassanello; Sánchez; Cano, 2022).

The integration of society and the university underpins all actions proposed by the program, which already has partnerships with the Amazonas State Department of Culture and the Department of Justice and Human Rights. These partnerships enable the development of various initiatives.

Furthermore, PMA addresses the environmental and economic interests of

the society in which it operates. Training courses empower PwDs to enter the labor market, while courses for non-disabled individuals improve service delivery to PwDs and tourists with disabilities. By raising awareness of this group's needs, stakeholders learn how to foster more inclusive environments.

By developing skills and competencies among its target audience, the program contributes to the economy. Its initiatives facilitate income generation by enabling PwDs to join the labor market and improving the services offered to this group in various products and services.

CONCLUSION

The PMA described in this experience report carries out activities that align with the purpose of university extension by fostering integration between the university and society. It promotes the practical application of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired by students during their academic courses. The program addresses an emerging social demand, encouraging citizenship and the defense of human rights in various sectors of the community.

The impact of these activities on the academic community and the Amazonian society has been demonstrated. By eliminating barriers in services and products, the inclusion and participation of people with disabilities (PwDs) in society can be achieved. It is essential to highlight Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which underscores the need for reasonable accommodations. These are necessary modifications and adjustments that ensure PwDs or individuals

with reduced mobility can exercise all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others. These rights include access to education, health, tourism, culture, and leisure, all of which should be implemented under the principle of universal design (UN, 2019).

Feedback collected through questionnaires administered at the end of activities, comments from participants from social entities for PwDs in Amazonas, and feedback from the academic community confirm the central hypothesis of this study: the extension activities promoted by the university contribute to the inclusion of PwDs in tourism and other key social sectors by raising awareness and empowering these individuals.

Through training sessions, cultural activities, and the dissemination of information on social media, many stigmas associated with disability are dismantled. These efforts reinforce the need to promote accessibility in education, tourism, and society as a whole.

Similarly, the program seeks to enhance the safety of PwDs by leveraging the strategies to make the community more welcoming and secure for them. This is particularly important as violence against PwDs often arises from attitudinal barriers such as ableism. Ableism, whether intentional or not, involves discrimination against PwDs and can lead to physical or emotional harm. Dysfunctional power dynamics, which assume that PwDs are incapable of taking an active role in their own lives, further contribute to this issue.

By adopting a multidisciplinary approach to inclusion, raising awareness of the rights of PwDs, and training professionals to serve this demographic, the PMA fulfills the constitutional triad of teaching, research, and extension. In doing so, it contributes to the advancement of a less ableist, safer society while fostering the development of ethical and socially responsible professionals.

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