Understanding the Experience of the Visually Impaired towards a Multi-Sensorial Architectural Design

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Abstract : Visually impaired people, in their daily lives, face struggles and spatial barriers because the built environment is often designed with an extreme focus on the visual element, causing what is called architectural visual bias or ocularcentrism. The aim of the study is to holistically understand the world of the visually impaired as an attempt to extract the qualities of space that accommodate their needs, and to show the importance of multi-sensory, holistic designs for the blind. Within the framework of existential phenomenology, common themes are reached through "intersubjectivity": experience descriptions by blind people and blind architects, observation of how blind children learn to perceive their surrounding environment, and a personal lived blind-folded experience are analyzed. The extracted themes show how visually impaired people filter out and prioritize tactile (active, passive and dynamic touch), acoustic and olfactory spatial qualities respectively, and how this happened during the personal lived blind folded experience. The themes clarify that haptic and aural inclusive designs are essential to create environments suitable for the visually impaired to empower them towards an independent, safe and efficient life.