

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF DISABLED TO THE CITY: CREATING ACCESSIBLE SPACES IN ÇANKAYA, ANKARA

1. INTRODUCTION

It has been agreed in the European Congress of "The City and the Disabled" held in Barcelona in 1995, and signed as Barcelona Declaration that, the deficiency and disability are matters that affect not only individual persons and their family members but the society as a whole. Disabled people experience many forms of marginalisation, including barriers to the labour market, lack of access to social and cultural resources and lack of physical access to buildings, transport and so on. Thus, it is the responsibility of the community and of its social organization to promote more favorable conditions for the full development of persons, avoiding or removing all causes that hinder or prevent such development. Regarding this approach the city, as being a common form of social organization must equip itself with the necessary means and resources to promote equal opportunities and the well-being and participation of all its inhabitants.

Local authorities have the main responsibility to consider the differences between citizens and to design services and structures so that they can be used by everyone. They have to enhance opportunities for the disadvantaged by regulating the provision of accessible spaces, thus tackle their social exclusion and promote equality. In doing this they are being encouraged to create participatory mechanisms whereby several actors including the disabled as well are given the opportunity to shape local services (Edwards, 2001).

This paper addresses to participatory actions of Çankaya Municipality which is one of the biggest district municipalities in Ankara. The municipality has strong views about a sustainable future of its district and tries to realize urban planning and design principles due to participatory planning aims. One of the projects of Çankaya Municipality is the inclusion of disabled people to the city by creating employment opportunities and reorganizing the public spaces for them. Çankaya's local councils are working with residents, community groups, universities, NGO's and other associations in Ankara to reach this goal. Increasing the accessibility and mobility of disabled, raising the awareness of citizens and creating common platforms with many local organizations are new and crucial subjects for Ankara that can lead to other districts and cities to develop a vision for sustainable solutions.

The study comprises two main parts: the first is on geographical understanding of disablement and production of distinctive spatialities of exclusion for disabled people. Legal frameworks for the access of disabled to the built environment are discussed in this part also. Following this, the results of a survey in Çankaya Municipality focusing on the participative approaches, initial projects and initiatives are exposed in the second part.

2. GEOGRAPHICAL UNDERSTANDING OF DISABLEMENT AND SPATIALITIES OF DISABILITY

Considering the emerging sub-streams of enquiry, Gleeson (2001) classifies the new 'geographies of disability' into four groups: the phenomenology of disability, concentrating on the interpretation of everyday life experiences of people with impairments; the socio-spatial production of 'difference', focusing on embodiment; the geography of service provision, with particular attention to the process of deinstitutionalisation; and examinations of accessibility and mobility that have largely focused on built environments of cities.

The issue of physical accessibility is a well-established sub-stream that has been a focus of discussion amongst spatial scientists, including geographers, urban planners and architects.

The accessibility problems have mainly focused on policy dilemmas and the everyday mobility challenges faced by disabled people and built environment exclusion (Gleeson, 2001).

As Oliver (1990) notes, disabled people have been perceived as dependents, or individuals with a specific problem which marks them out as different from the rest of the 'normal' population. An important part of disabled people's lives relates to their ability to gain access to particular places. However, various features of contemporary cities—including physical design, institutional policies and mobility systems— have prevented disabled people from participating in the mainstreams of urban social life. Evidence suggests that the physical construction of urban space -including both macro landuse patterns and the internal design of buildings- often (re)produces distinctive spatialities of exclusion for people with a range of physical and/or mental impairments, and it serves to reinforce their 'incomplete citizenship' (Imrie, 2000; Imrie and Hall, 2001).

The absence of adequate public facilities, the lack of access to public transport systems, the absence of visual clues or guides in towns to enable vision-impaired people to move with ease, and so on all reinforce the social, economic and cultural exclusion of disabled people. Hahn (1986:273) puts it briefly "the built environment is basically designed for the average human being, plus or minus half a standard deviation. From the perspective of a bell-shaped curve, persons with many types of disabilities that place them in the tails of the distribution are effectively isolated by their environments".

According to Gleeson (2001: 256), the 'disability discrimination' takes the form of:

- (1) physical barriers to movement for disabled people, including broken surfaces on thoroughfares (streets, guttering, paving) which reduce or annul the effectiveness of mobility aids (such as wheelchairs, walking frames);
- (2) building architecture that excludes the entry of anyone unable to use stairs and hand-opened doors; and
- (3) public transport modes which assume that passengers have a common level of ambulence.

The problematic physical configuration of the built environment for disabled people also influences the social and economic opportunities for them. In addition to the problem of inaccessibility within public urban spaces, disabled people also experience barriers to choice in their preferred living and working environments. Disabled people are often denied employment opportunities because of inaccessible workplaces (Imrie and Hall, 2001). Considering all of these dimensions it can be concluded that, inaccessibility and exclusion define a city of enclosurement, a social space marked by institutional and physical barriers that separate disabled people from the mainstreams of social and economic life (Gleeson, 2001).

In recent years, a number of Western states have enacted various forms of national disability rights legislation, and planning and building regulations with the aim of improving disabled people's access to built environments and to social life in general. However these regulations are often poorly enforced and the legal frameworks underpinning property development have emerged as a potential source of disabled people's estrangement or exclusion from land and property.

Exclusion of the needs of disabled and other people is evident at all stages of the design and development of the built environment. Property development and its drive towards standardisation have not necessarily sensitised the development process to the needs of disabled people. As property developers have limited knowledge of disabled people and their needs, they regard them as a minor consideration in building projects. The evidence suggests that the needs of disabled people are poorly understood by developers and their

agents, partly because potential tenants and clients rarely express a demand for accessible buildings and the regularity controls are not strong enough (Imrie and Hall, 2001).

Many researchers have highlighted the absence of strong regulatory controls over the actions and operations of developers as the key to understand the design and development of disabling environments. Indeed, most research has focused on the attitudes, values and operations of planning regulators, yet, in doing so, has generally ignored the role of property development in contributing to the physical barriers that disabled people have to confront (Gleeson, 2001).

Like in many western and non-western states, also in Turkey disabled people “are often trapped in restrictive living units and are unable to gain access to a city’s resources by transportation systems not adapted for them”. A range of socio-institutional structures and relations which are insensitive to and ignorant of the needs of disabled people, the attitudes and practices of property developers and professionals maintains the exclusion of disabled people and impede the production of disabling environments. However, recently there have been some legal arrangements trying to recover the disability problem. Law for Disabled (No: 5378) was put in force in 2005 which brought implementary obligations for central and local authorities. Besides these legal arrangements, there are some local initiatives trying to overcome the disability exclusion. Çankaya Municipality is one of these leading municipalities that has started some actions to provide the access for disabled and to reduce the production of inaccessible built environments.

3. PARTICIPATORY PLANNING ACTIONS FOR DISABLED IN ÇANKAYA MUNICIPALITY

The built environment of Ankara like in many cities prevents disabled from participating to the city life; the elevations, the height of the pavements, under and upper pedestrian passages inevitably lead the disabled unable to use the urban spaces and become enslaved in their homes. When the case is considered on social contexts; shops, cinemas, theaters and other public buildings, it appears that spatial arrangements for disabled are almost neglected. The fact that no vehicles enabling the transport and access of disabled is another defect. Also, in the subway, as the arrangements for disabled could not be performed, they can not utilize subway stations. In a car-centric transportation system upper pedestrian road crossing passages, traffic lights, barriers and fences create significant obstruction in the central business district (CBD) of Ankara.

In such an undisabling built environment, Çankaya Municipality which is one of the largest district municipalities of Ankara Greater Municipality with a population of 769.331 in 2000 has initiated some participatory actions for the access of disabled. These initiatives are quite new for traditional planning process that may lead to other districts and cities in Ankara-Turkey to develop a vision for disabling environments.

3.1. Çankaya Healthy City Plan

Starting from January 2002, Çankaya Healthy Cities Project Office was established and Çankaya Municipality joined World Health Organization (WHO) Healthy Cities Project. This project’s aim was to act by a participatory and scientific understanding in order to achieve a healthy and livable urban context and to realize an urbanization process which is environment-friendly. In line with this aim, Çankaya City Health Development Plan was completed with the contributions of the universities, chambers of professions, associations and citizen initiatives on the basis of democratic participation. Then a series of urban health indicators were produced in order to go on the way of implementation of so-called health plan.

Çankaya City Health Development Plan is divided into eight parts; environment, education, culture and sports, health, urban planning, crime and violence in the city and inequalities (Çankaya Municipality, 2002a).

In the urban planning part of the plan, there are some objectives directly or indirectly related to the disabled in Çankaya District:

- to reorganize public transport systems,
- to increase pedestrian road surface area and design bicycle roads in CBD and its environs,
- to increase the average green level from 2.5 m² per person up to 10 m² per person,
- to provide safe, viable, accessible and comfortable accommodation for everyone,
- to support public participation to planning process with local administrations, chambers, universities, meetings and interviews, and at the end to introduce plan drafts

In the inequalities part of the plan, it can be seen that 1.4 % of Çankaya's population is disabled. The 55% of this disabled population is males and 45% is females. Among that nearly half of them (41%) are physically disabled, the next is mentally (12.7%), visually (10.59%), hearing and speech disabled (8.6%).

The problems of the disabled appear as:

- insufficient opportunities for the employment
- inability to utilize the urban spaces
- difficulties to participate the social life

So the plan gives the priority on such subjects like:

- maintaining a serious inventory such as collecting data of disabled where they live and work and plot a map of their location,
- bringing solutions to enable them to be benefited from urban services equally like commuter vehicles, pedestrian zones suitable for them, equipping sound warning system in the pedestrian crossings,
- using new urban furniture and urban design elements,
- modifying existing living spaces and establish buildings for them,
- making special programs in social and cultural life of these people
- arranging courses and medical treatment support program

It is suggested that cooperation can be realized among municipalities, neighborhood service units, trade unions, association of human rights and disabled people. Financial opportunities of related institutions and loan opportunities from abroad can be searched (Çankaya Municipality, 2002a).

3.2. Department of Disabled Affairs of Çankaya Municipality

The Department of Disabled Affairs of Çankaya Municipality was founded on 19th May 2003 and started to work on 11th May 2004. Head of the department Mr. T. Ozkan stated that this is a unique department for disabled in Ankara and one of the first initiatives in Turkey among local governments. The duty of the department can be described as; to realize and to manage the municipality services in a systematic, effective and efficient way for the people (and also for their families) who need safeguarding, care, rehabilitation, consultancy, orientation, personal improvement, and deserving support because of the lack of physical, mental, psychological, sentimental or social abilities (Sarıaltın, 2006). The department supply some services like; equal participation of the disabled people to the social life, improvement

of the capacity of self-help in daily life, taking the decisions which affect the disabled's economic and social statutes, and improvement of the information, services and physical environment conditions with the plans and programs.

3.2.1. Participatory Projects for the Built Environment

The law of disabled which has been accepted recently will be an important breakthrough in urban dweller consciousness in Turkey. With the enactment of this law, disabled who can not go around in the center, can not utilize vehicles and can not take the advantage of cultural activities will have the chance of access (Çankaya Municipality, 2002b). According to the law, every municipality has to build a department of disabled like in Çankaya Municipality. Public Works and Parks & Recreation Departments have to be in corporation with the Department of Disabled Affairs before starting a project or implementation.

Çankaya Municipality has started a project creating of barrier free streets for disabled people with the cooperation of Turkish Disabled Confederation (Çankaya Bulletin News, 2005). With the contribution of two sides a movable platform for disabled was constructed in Karanfil Street which has many stairs. (Figure 1) (Çankaya Bulletin, 2006; Sarıaltın, 2006).



Figure 1 Platform in Karanfil Street

Head of Department of Disabled in Çankaya Municipality Mr. T. Ozkan emphasized that platform had not been used yet because of financial problems, but it would work on the coming month with electronic ticket equipment. He also mentioned that an inventory has been created for disabled, that they would a call center for them in order to transport them whenever they want. After calling the center, a vehicle would be served for the disabled.

Last activity has been realized together with Çankaya Municipality and Gazi University, Department of City and Regional Planning. An exhibition for barrier free design of urban spaces was organized in Municipality Cultural Center (Çankaya Bulletin News, 2006). A group of city planning graduate and under graduate students made some barrier free designs in four streets of CBD in the context of CRP 429 Pedestrian Space and Pedestrian Area Design course (Sarıaltın, 2006). The instructor of the course Assoc. Prof. Dr. H. Kaplan told that in order to understand the problems of the disabled, one should live the experience by himself. Thus, students were accompanied by visually and physically disabled persons and walked together in selected streets and recorded the urban design problems. Then they suggested urban design solutions like ramps, special street patterns and surfaces, special urban furniture in 1/500 and 1/200 scaled urban design projects (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Barrier free urban design project exhibition

Head of Department of Disabled Affairs stated that in order to realize one of these projects a protocol would be made by Gazi University, Department of City and Regional Planning. He emphasized that the Mayor was willing to implement the project of Zafer Park barrier free design together with the students in the near future.

3.2.2. Socio-Economic Projects for the Disabled

Spatial planning is just one of the parts of participatory planning process. Creating the new job opportunities, social atmospheres, places for personal improvements for disabled people are also important. Çankaya Municipality generated some projects for employment and integrating the disabled to the community. One project is about training to the disabled. For this aim the municipality is working on a career centre for educating them according to the

expectations of local labor market. This project was accepted by European Union and being put into practice. The scope of the project is giving the vocational knowledge and skills to the people who have different handicaps.

Turkish Disabled Confederation has started two collective projects with Çankaya Municipality. The first one is educating of physically disabled people with the Java Program as software developers. This goal of this project is to educate 60 disabled people in the age of 18-35 on the advance technologies. The importance of this project is providing a business that can be carried out from home, because the physical conditions of the environment, transportation systems and designs of the buildings are not suitable for the access of disabled people in Turkey (Sarıaltın, 2006). The second project is educating voluntary people for caring old, sick and disabled people. These people have the responsibility of accompanying to the disabled, sick and old people at their homes.

Another important initiative of the Department of Disabled Affairs is “Çengel Café” project which started on the 1st July 2005. In this Café, mentally disabled young people are employed and their social rehabilitation is ensured. It gives the opportunity of meeting and understanding the mentally disabled young people by the other parts of the society. Also this project provides the meeting and communication chance for disabled people with the non-disabled (Çankaya Municipality, 2005).

In Çengel Café there are 13 young people who are able to be educated make all the services. In the Café, all is regulated by the colors and the employees learned all by the means of colors. The table clothes and objects on the table are in the same colors and the responsibilities are distributed according to these colors for providing the order (Figure 3). This project has been awarded by Local Governments Association in November 2005.



Figure 3. Çengel Cafe

Besides these efforts, the Municipality also gives the opportunities to disabled for participating to the social events. There are some clubs and groups for the disabled under the structure of Municipality like visually-impaired sports club, visually-impaired athletics club, wheel chaired basketball team that has taken some degrees at the leagues, and a wheel chaired dance group named “Joi de vivre dance group”. Turkish Sport Federation of Physically Disabled organizes some sport competitions for these teams and groups. (Sarıaltın, 2006).

As a result, not only the spatial projects, but also these socio-economic projects play an important role in the participatory planning approach.

4. CONCLUSION

Disabled persons are entitled to receive attention for their individual and social needs in the context of the provisions for the general population, as well as to promote their development as persons, allowing them to interrelate with the rest of the population, respecting their individual circumstances. They have the right for equal opportunities as citizens recognized in a society which is plural and respectful of the difference and diversity of the individuals who make them up. They are also entitled to participate in the social affairs of their community without restriction and to the enjoyment of the welfare that the development of this community may generate.

Local authorities/municipalities have crucial roles to provide access for disabled. They should promote better awareness of disabled persons, their rights, their needs, their potentials and their contributions among the general public. They should stimulate the integration of disabled persons and the normalization of their relations with their physical and social surroundings which may allow them to optimize their relationship with them. Within their area of competence, they should promote and ensure the access of disabled persons to cultural, sporting, and recreational activities and, in general, to the participatory coexistence with the community. They should establish permanent skill-providing and training systems aimed at city personnel in order to ensure adequate comprehension and attention to the needs of the disabled.

Another important dimension is the spatial organization for the disabled. Municipalities should adopt measures towards the necessary adaptation of urban spaces, buildings and services of all types, in order to allow full use by disabled persons. They should adopt the necessary measures ensuring free mobility of disabled persons throughout the city, and special care should be taken to adapt regular means of passenger transport for those disabled persons who by reason of their disability are denied access, they should establish alternative services and special economic conditions to ensure their mobility on equal terms with the rest of the population. For the municipalities barrier-free design should not be seen as a type of urban design, as every urban design implementation should be realized according to barrier-free principles.

Last but not the least the representation of disabled in the policy-making is crucial. The Municipal Governments should within their area of competence, promote and ensure the participation of disabled persons and their representative organizations in decision-making processes dealing with affairs which, either generally or specifically, may affect them.

Çankaya Municipality has started such initiatives with the support of several actors; universities, NGO's, associations and citizens. If they maintain their excitement, they may become a model for the other local authorities in Ankara-Turkey.

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