

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILD AND URBAN SAFETY: CHILD-FRIENDLY SAFE CITIES

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Abstract: The main concern of this study is urban areas open to risks despite the child's need for a safe and healthy environment in the childhood, lack of urban safety in the streets which are the socialization area and playground of the child and failure to develop child-friendly urban policies that can solve this safety problem. The aim of the study, on the other hand, is to identify the lack of safety for children using urban areas full of dangers during their developmental period, their needs of protection, failure of urban areas to provide safe environment for children and the shortcomings of child welfare system in this regard. This study handles current academic publications, current news and data from the international non-governmental organizations through children's rights and child-friendly perspective within the scope of literature review.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Child-Friendly Cities, Urban Safety, Child Welfare,

Introduction

In the scope of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Child Protection Law, it is an obligation to protect each child within the borders of Turkey against all risks, support their developmental processes, ensure child welfare under the modern childhood paradigm beyond the basic needs and provide safe living environment on the basis of rights-based approach and social justice approach. Despite these obligations in the legal legislation, policy processes and on paper, it is known that the situation is not quite like this in practice and on the contrary, the majority of children are facing serious problems such as poverty, abuse, drug addiction and violence, and that urban areas trigger these problems.

Literature Review

1. About Childhood

1.1. Childhood Concept and Modern Childhood Paradigm

In accordance with Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is described as; "For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." Although the age of majority varies depending on the country, each person under the age of 18 is generally considered a child. Children are individuals; they have equal status with adults as a part of humankind. They are not the property of parents and the government. Healthy development and active participation of children are quite important for the future of all cities or communities. Children start the life as fully dependent individuals; however, they grow and develop with the assistance of adults to gain independence. They do not have only physical needs but also cognitive, emotional, social, psychological and physiological needs. Their dependence and developmental situations make them more sensitive, and therefore; they are affected more by the environmental conditions, poverty, insufficient sheltering, environmental pollution and other negative conditions compared to adults (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2004, p. 5).

According to Uçar (2013), prevailing child paradigm of the 20th century is based on three basic assumptions:

- a. Children are different from adults; or children constitute a special biological category.
- b. Children need to be prepared -raised- for adulthood or adulthood is an acquisition.
- c. Child raising responsibility belongs to adults or the government (Uçar, 2013,p. 36).

1.2. Children's Rights

Turkey put the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which grants rights to "each child" without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, political, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status, into effect in 1994. Protection of children against discrimination, ensuring their participation and looking after high benefit of children are under the responsibility of the Government. There are 4 fundamental rights including "*living, participation, protection and development*" that should be granted to children.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ensured quite significant developments such as

- setting the ground for the preparation of Child Protection Law,
- meeting the needs of children, supporting their socialization, ensuring the improvement of their skills, recognizing and valuing their rights, preventing violation of their rights, strengthening their capacities, protecting children against dangers/risks and supporting their bio-psycho-social development.

1.3. Children's Needs

Being aware of children's rights is important in terms of designing and identifying the features of a child-friendly urban space.

Each child needs feeding, sleeping, moving and to be protected in order to develop as of the moment they were born. In addition, children have basic spiritual needs such as loving, to be loved, to be looked after, feeling successful and sufficient and gaining freedom like other individuals (Uçar, 2013, p.15). During their development, children have certain needs such as dependency, socialization and obtaining information regarding their environment (1st Istanbul Child Congress, Istanbul Child Report, 2000, p. 65).

Researchers such as Piaget, Montessori and Werner emphasize in their studies that interaction of children with the environment constitutes the basis of development, and the environment includes measurable physical components on cognitive-perceptual development. Considering that children use observation, exploration, trial and error methods while learning, it is a widely accepted truth that they need a physical environment with various resources (Kirazoğlu, 2012, p. 16).

Furthermore, while reviewing the literature to analyse the needs of children, it is observed that Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs model, Max-Neff's (1991) human scale development, Peet and Bossel's (2000) ethics-based system model regarding basic needs as well as conceptualizations for gender needs are of crucial importance.

2. Child-Friendly Urban Design

2.1. Relation between the Child and Space

Child-friendly environment concept does not only refer to the natural environment or constructed environment but also to the physical, psychological, economic, political and cultural environment. These environmental criteria determine the outline of children's lives based on physical, psychosocial, cultural, economic and even political existence. On the other hand, they are based on human rights and democracy to a certain extent (Horelli, 2007, quoted by Tandoğan, 2011).

Spaces hosting daily life and particularly housing areas do not only serve as shelters but they also determine the life quality in terms of differences between spaces people live in and accessibility or inaccessibility to public services. Repetition of opportunities and lack of opportunities in the spaces and their results bear important consequences for children living there (Erder, 2002:26-30; Ümit,2007:103). Physical environment and urban

spaces (particularly open areas) that children interact with play an important role in child development and growing to be healthy individuals (Zomervrucht, 2005). Experiences, emotions, hopes and concerns of children are shaped through spaces (Philo, 2000). Relation of children with the spaces refers to their socialization area beyond a physical space where they establish social relationships and gain social experiences (Moss and Petrie, 2002).

2.2. Child-Friendly City

All people, social interactions, economic, political and social structures determining the wellbeing of children are experienced in certain spaces. Well-being of children is limited with the spaces they are interacting with. Children's living areas and neighbourhoods represent a space where they establish social relationship networks and experience cultural interaction beyond just a physical environment they reside in. Therefore, physical and social features of the residence have a determining role in the wellbeing of children (Semerci et al., 2012).

Children need areas where they can gain and reflect their unique experiences in the urban spaces. Existence of children in urban spaces is an inevitable element in creating healthy, lively and happy urban spaces as well as it is a requirement for their physical and mental development (Aitken, 2001). In other words, child-friendly urban area is a space supporting physical and social development of children so that they would become adults looking after their urban spaces in the future. In physical terms; children should like and feel safe in the urban spaces and in symbolic terms; urban design, planning and behaviours of adults should convey the message that children are an equal part of the society along with other individuals (Churchman, 2003, quoted by Kirazoğlu, 2012, p. 59).

Kytta (2003) developed a model with two fundamental criteria to identify whether a space is child-friendly. These criteria are free movement of children and meeting their desires, needs and expectations. Nordström (2010) identified that children rather conceptualize child-friendly city concept in these 3 aspects: "safety and security", "urban and environmental qualities" and "basic services such as health and education". (quoted by Severcan, 2015, p. 146,149).

Haikkola and Horelli (2002) determined 10 aspects of child-friendly urban spaces in their study through the eyes of children:

- 1) Housing and sheltering
- 2) Basic services such as health, education and transportation
- 3) Participation
- 4) Safety and security
- 5) Family, relative, friend and neighbour circle
- 6) Urban and environmental qualities
- 7) Existence and distribution of resources
- 8) Ecology
- 9) Sense of belonging and continuity
- 10) Good governance (quoted by Severcan, 2015, p. 145-146)

Child friendly city foresees a good administrative system looking after children's rights and is obliged to realize organizations and activities required to ensure active participation of children in the city management and decision-making mechanism through all service units in the province, to evaluate all relevant decisions through the perspective of children's rights and to grant the right of equal access to all basic services (Çocuk Dostu Şehir Projesi Uygulama Yönergesi, 2006:2). Child-friendly city refers to a city where voices, needs, priorities and rights of children become an indispensable part of public policies and implementations. Actually, it is possible to consider such a city also as a human-friendly city. (Korkmaz, 2006, quoted by Topsümer, 2009, p. 9).

Furthermore, the most important issue in the relation between child and city is games. Urban outdoor areas such as playgrounds play a crucial role in the physical, perceptive and mental development of children. When there are even common parking lots of buildings, there should certainly be common playgrounds and recreation areas allocated for children. Children's desires should be listened and their opinions should be taken into consideration while making decisions affecting them. If children would not be aware of the results and impacts of their opinions, then their participation in urban design would not be realistic and meaningful.

However, urban spaces pose dangers for children as a result of decrease in open areas and increase in traffic density and safety problems due to disordered housing caused by rapid and unplanned urbanization. Due to these dangers, children are deprived of open areas and streets where they freely move and develop. This spatial deprivation

negatively impacts the development process, personality formation, behaviours, attitudes and reactions of children.

2.3. Child-Friendly Street

Child-friendly cities should include child-friendly streets. Streets are one of the public spaces used by children the most. Therefore, child-friendly streets should be organized to be able to think about a child-friendly city. Streets are the social centres of towns and cities, meeting points for protests, stages of oppression and places where children acquire their very first knowledge about the world and neighbours meet each other (Appleyard, 1981, p. 1). Streets are common living spaces. Social behaviours are formed in outdoor spaces more than indoor spaces. In outdoor spaces, individuals have the opportunity to feel that they belong to a certain community; streets, squares and arranged spaces serve also as communication areas (Bal, 2005, p. 3).

3. Child, Safety and Urban Safety

"Safety" criterion formed using (Kiss 2.0) is handled in two parts as social safety and traffic safety. *Social Safety*: Social safety can be ensured with the existence of people on the streets or with the direct view of streets from houses. In this way, children would feel safe. Jacobs (1993) underlined the relation between the number of people using streets and social safety as follows: A properly used street is a safe street. An empty street is generally unsafe." (Jacobs, 1993, p. 54).

Regarding "urban safety", there are two different aspects to be taken into consideration. First of all, urban safety concept recalls safety need arisen during the urbanization process and the relevant strategies developed. Looking through this perspective, urban safety, first of all, includes an urban safety perception different from the rural one and relevant services (Kosiak 2003: 7). "Safe city" concept has always been considered as an indicator of civilization, and "urban rights" were born with the improvement of human rights in modern times. Safe cities can be seen as spaces where crimes are actively fought, offenders cannot take shelter, opportunities for committing crime are not provided, unplanned housing does not exist, people show determination and will to reach the level of contemporary civilizations and feel happy, meet their needs and have high living standards (Derdiman, 2014: 273).

Regarding these points, safety engineering should focus on the issues related to ensuring the highest possible protection of each space, either open or closed, against crimes, implementing procedures and measures to minimize the possibility of committing crime in line with safe architectural designs and then, warranting a structure or habitation approval/license (Derdiman, 2013: 47, 48). On the condition that it is safe, allowing children to go to the grocery store or spend time on the streets increases their self-esteem and sense of belonging while ensuring socialization with their peers and inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

In addition, trust rather than safety concept should be placed in the centre in cities, and trust-building policies should be aimed rather than safety policies.

Conclusion and Discussion

As a result of the literature review conducted, it was identified that safety level of urban areas is insufficient, they pose many risks and children suffer from urban safety deprivation the most in the society.

For children feeling the challenges of living in urban spaces the most, it is quite important to build child-oriented structures and conduct policies, implementations and designs in urban planning in line with children's needs. Therefore, child-friendly city concept is frequently emphasized and relevant activities are conducted with the aim of making urban spaces more habitable for children. Realizing required arrangements and practices to make children's living environment more "child-friendly"; in other words " *informative, guiding and advocate* " is important in terms of creating spaces that can answer the needs and desires of children.

A child-friendly city refers to an urban area or local government system endeavouring to reflect children's rights in urban daily life. Urban areas where children's voices, needs, priorities and rights become an indispensable part of public policies and implementations are child-friendly. Therefore, such an urban area is also a human-friendly space.

It also refers to a space with qualities contributing to the physical, psychological and social development of children so that they would become self-valuing individuals in the future. In physical terms, urban spaces should arouse positive feelings among children, provide opportunities for game activities, make them feel safe and an equal part of the society along with other individuals through the behaviours of adults (Churchman, 2003). Their aim is to ensure that children participate in family, society and social life; meet their basic needs such as health and sheltering; benefit from healthy water and health services at the maximum level; are protected against abuse, exploitation and violence; walk on the streets safely; meet and play with their friends; have green areas with animals and plants; live in a clean environment; participate in cultural and social activities; and have access to all services regardless of their race, religion, income, gender and disabilities. (Unicef, 2004, p. 1; Sivri Gökmen, 2013, p. 822).

Urban areas should provide spaces supporting social interaction, equal opportunities, accessibility, self-esteem and cultural identity where children can meet their basic needs such as social justice, equality, sheltering, education, health and playing in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and they should ensure that safe environments meeting the needs, expectations and desires of children are available.

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