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Full Length Research Paper

Problems faced by users with disabilities in access to urban outdoors: Kocaeli sample

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Cities are the places that have structural and equipment capabilities for housing, social, cultural, economical and recreational activities for various user groups. Since user groups in cities vary, it increases urban service requirements as well. The aim of this study is to investigate the urban outdoor sites in Kocaeli where disabled users, as a user group in cities, face problems and their expectations, and to determine spatial and equipment facilities the city offers for people with disabilities. For this purpose, a face-to-face questionnaire comprising 19 close-ended questions was administered to 80 participants including users with disabilities. The data was analysed by using SPSS 13.0 statistical program, the results were obtained and evaluated. According to the results, urban outdoor sites in Kocaeli offer very limited facilities for disabled users in Kocaeli and 62.6% of the participants completely or partially experience problems within urban outdoors. The most problematic urban outdoor sites for each of the disability type are; vehicle roads and pedestrian pathways, and parks and recreational areas. The most important expectation of the participants is the arrangement of equipment elements in the city in general and in parks according to their own needs as well.

Key words: City, disabled user, urban outdoor, Kocaeli.

INTRODUCTION

In cities different user groups live with regard to age, gender, physical characteristics etc. These user groups in cities are mostly categorized as children, older and disabled people (Bayraktar, 2006). Within this group, disabled people are those who have lost their physical, mental, emotional and social abilities in various degrees congenitally or adventitiously and who are not able to adjust to normal life and need specific physical arrangements in buildings and outdoors to be able to act independently (Özdener, 2006).

Besides individuals with permanent disabilities, each person can also experience temporary impairment some time during his/her lifetime or there may be individuals with multiple disabilities. Additionally, even a healthy person can experience disability for some reason such as daily fatigue, insomnia and attention deficit (Kalayci et al., 2006). Particularly elderly individuals are most likely to continue their lives like disabled people due to old age (Anonymous, 2008).

Physical barriers and inadequacies of transport facilities of city plans that do not consider the disabled hamper disabled urban-dwellers from urban services and activities as the other urban-dwellers (Özdener, 2006). In several cities, people with physical and mental disorders can not easily participate in social life due to the conditions of urban outdoors (Abberley, 1986; Manley, 1996; Gleeson, 1996). Most of the disabled people have impossibilities and difficulties in using public transport including railway access (Anonymus, 2008).

These barriers in cities restrict disabled people's ability to act individually and independently and therefore they feel themselves excluded from social communication (Bariş and Uslu, 2009). Due to the mistakes done during the process of city planning, mobility of individuals is restricted and the city loses its ergonomic nature. At the same time an inaccessible environment means it does not have ergonomic characteristics (Kalayci et al., 2006). In the use of urban outdoors equal opportunities should be promoted for individuals with disabilities and other people (DDA, 1995).

Urban outdoors that can provide service for the disabled

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as well are identified as a social model (Abberley, 1986; Gleeson, 1999; Sapey et al., 2005). The functionality of urban outdoors enhances the quality of life and liveability of the city. This creates social areas for those causing problems not only to the disabled or because of their disabilities, but because of the architectural and outdoor designs surrounding them. Also, it creates social areas to those with no disabilities in accessing urban outdoors that are known as architectural design for the disabled.

In this social model it is emphasized that society is the principal disabling force, marginalizing impaired people socially, economically and politically. Disability according to the social model is all things that impose restrictions upon disabled people, especially in the character of the built environment, which can be seen as oppressive (Bromley et al., 2006). This social model is of concern for temporarily disabled individuals who live like a disabled person due to pregnancy, being a child, old age, an illness and an accident apart from the permanently disabled individuals.

Disabled users are generally ignored in urban planning and implementation. However, when the statistics about the disabled are considered, it is seen that there is a considerable amount of disabled people in Turkey. According to the results of Turkey disability research (DIE, 2004) made by the Turkish statistics institute, about 10% of the population are disabled. Total incidence of disability in Turkey is 12.29% and it is 11.10% in men and 13.45% in women. In the age group from 0 to 19 years there are 871336 disabled people constituting 10.3% of the total disabled population. 23.9% of orthopedic-impairment, 20.4% of hearing impairment, 46.6% of tongue and speech impairment and 47.9% of mental impairment are congenital (Ozcebe, 2008).

Across Turkey, despite the high number of disabled people, planning and implementation examples for the disabled in public or private spheres are quite inadequate when compared to developed countries (Yilmaz et al., 2006). In order for disabled individuals to continue their lives in a healthy manner, there needs to be suitably designed surroundings in line with their physical, psychological and functional losses.

When geographical distribution of the disabled population in Turkey is considered, the densest region where the disabled live is the Marmara Region, which also includes the Kocaeli city. In our sample, 13.13% of the population in the Marmara Region consists of individuals with disabilities (DIE 2004). After the Marmara earthquake occurred on 17 August 1999, the number of physically disabled people in Kocaeli increased to nearly 300% (Kanbak, 2008).

It is very important to investigate vital and spatial facilities of the city regarding the disabled as a user group in Kocaeli. In the study conducted for this purpose, the suitability of the urban outdoors of Kocaeli for the use of the disabled and the problems faced by users with disabilities when using outdoor sites were determined and and evaluations were made about reducing and removing physical barriers in urban outdoors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main material of the study involves face-to-face questionnaires administered to 80 disabled people of various types of disabilities, age, gender, income and education levels.

The participants were asked 19 close-ended questions and analyzed by using frequency and crostabs in SPSS 13.0 statistical program and the results were obtained. Within the study, domestic and foreign literature was investigated and evaluations were made about the topic by using individual observations as well.

RESULTS

General profile of participants

Cities have different people regarding their age, education, income, occupation, physical and mental structure and socio-economic status.

In this study, 30% of the participants were female and 70% were male. 35% of those were married, 56.25% were single, 5% were widowed and 3.75% did not want to give information about their marital status. The other information about the general profile of the participants is shown in Table 1.

According to Table 1, it was determined, when considering the highest proportional distributions in each category, 27.50% of the disabled participants consisted of people between the ages of 11 to 20 years, 37.50% had an income between 351 to 700 TL, 35% continue their education, and 45% were workers.

All the disabled individuals with different age groups have problems while using urban outdoor sites; however, the age group that has problems most is determined to be those between the ages of 11 to 20. This age group uses urban outdoor sites to go to school, shopping and the recreational areas. Difficulty in accessibility to the recreational areas and feeling of discomfort by the looks of other people are the main problems of the disabled between the ages of 11 to 20. But however, it has been determined that the disabled between the ages of 41 and above do not go out much, and as they get older the frequency of their going out decreases.

Education level of the disabled individuals does not have any effect on the use of urban outdoor sites; individuals with disabilities in any education level have nearly the same problems. Individuals with disabilities such as workers, students, self-employed people and public workers who use urban outdoor sites to go to work or school have more problems in urban outdoor sites. As the level of income of the disabled individuals increases, the frequency of going out for recreational purposes increases and the frequency of having problems in outdoor sites decreases. Individuals with medium-level

Table 1. Information on general profile of participants.

Age range (%)					
11-20 years	**21- 30 years**	**31-40 years**	**41-50 years**	**50 and over**	**Unanswered**
27.50	21.30	22.50	15.00	2.50	11.30

Monthly income (%)				
Less than100 TL	**101-350 TL**	**351-700 TL**	**700 TL and more**	**Unanswered**
21.30	5.00	37.50	17.50	18.80

Education level (%)					
Continuing education	**Primary School**	**Secondary School**	**High School**	**University**	**Postgraduate**
35.00	23.80	15.00	17.50	8.70	-

Occupation (%)						
Student	**Civil Servant**	**Self-Employed**	**Housewife**	**Worker**	**Unemployed**	**Unanswered**
28.50	5.00	8.80	1.30	45.00	6.30	5.10

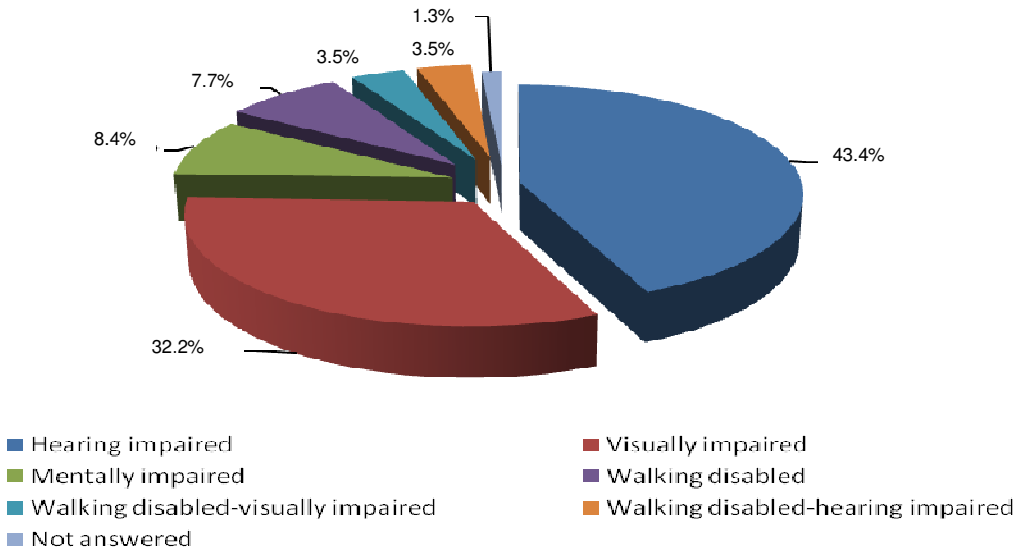

Figure 1. Proportional distribution of participants according to their type of disability.

income are inclined to go out in obligatory cases.

Proportional distributions regarding the type of disability show that 43.4% are hearing-impaired, 32.2% are visually-impaired, 8.4% are mentally impaired, 7.7% are walking disabled, 3.5% are walking disabled and visually impaired, 3.5% are walking disabled and hearing impaired. 1.3% did not give any answer about it (Figure 1). Majority of the disabled individuals in Kocaeli, which is 47.50%, is congenitally disabled. The rate of the permanent disabled after the disaster was determined to be 1.3%. It was also determined that 26.3% of the disabled individuals in the city were disabled due to an illness, 17.5% due to accident, and 6.3% due to other reasons (Figure 2).

The way the participants spend their free time

Free time refers to time available for an activity one would like to engage in willingly being free of obligations for both oneself and others. Briefly, it is a period of time spent out of work providing a person complete independence and freedom (Tezcan, l994). Spending free time is a need for people. It provides an individual with an opportunity to express himself and develop his personality by means of it (Gökmen et al., l985). Almost all of the free time activities directly or indirectly require the use of urban outdoors.

Although recreation is a human need, 32.79% of the disabled individuals in Kocaeli prefer spending their free

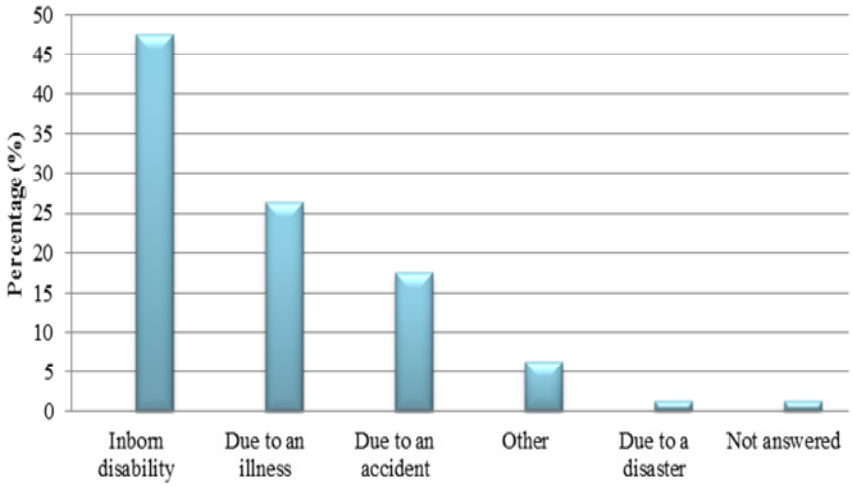

Figure 2. Reasons for disability.

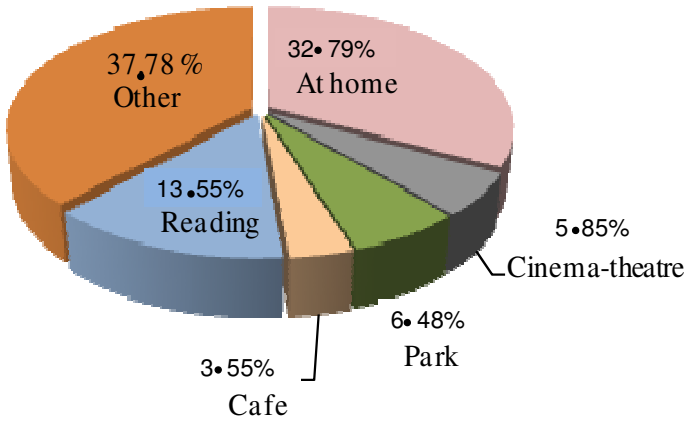

Figure 3. The way participants spend their free time.

time at home. Additionally, 5.65% prefer going to the cinema-theatre, 6.48% prefer going to the parks, 3.55% prefer going to the cafes and 13.55% spend their time reading books, newspapers and magazines while 37.78% answered 'other' option without preferring going out (Figure 3). In this case, proportional distribution of those who spend their time at home is accepted as 70.57%.

Of the individuals with disabilities who prefer going to the park in their free time, 50% are visually-impaired and 50% are hearing-impaired. 50% of the disabled individuals who prefer going to the park include students between the ages 11 and 20 years. It has been found out that individuals with walking disability do not prefer going to parks.

Urban outdoors in which participants experience problems and problems

Urban outdoors are places that are situated within settlement areas and open to the entire community and that offer opportunities for several uses of individual and social life (Hepcan and Ayhan, 2004). Roads, parks, squares, pedestrian pathways, zoos, botanic gardens, cemeteries, market places and play grounds can be shown as examples to these places. Disabled urban-dwellers like the others have to use urban outdoors for some reasons such as force majeure, participation in recreational and socio-cultural activities.

The primary reason for going out for the disabled living in Kocaeli is going to work with a ratio of 33.43%. It is followed by going out for a walk with a ratio of 23%, shopping 19.51%, relaxing in the park 1.94%, going to school 9.24% and going out without a reason 1.3%. The ratio of those who did not share their opinion on the subject is 3.8% while 7.78% marked 'other' option without any explanation. 38.8% of disabled urban-dwellers in Kocaeli stated that they had problems while using urban outdoors. 37.4% did not have any problems while 23.8% partly did. The total ratio of those stating they had problems and they partly had problems is 62.6%.

In this study urban outdoor sites in which disabled individuals living in Kocaeli had problems most were investigated and the participants were asked to express their three options. The relationship between the most preferred problematic urban outdoors and disability type is given in Table 2.

According to Table 2, for each of the disability type, the most problematic urban outdoors was determined to be vehicle roads and pedestrian pathways, and parks and recreation areas. Additionally, urban outdoors such as bus-stops, market places, car parks and school gardens were among the problematic areas for disabled people.

When disability type is considered, urban outdoor causing trouble for each kind of disability was determined to be pedestrian walks. While hearing-impaired people had problems mostly with vehicle roads, parks and

Table 2. The relationship between the type of disability and problematic urban outdoor.

Urban outdoors		Percentage of disability types (%)					
		Walking	Visual	Hearing	Mental	Walking-visual	Walking-hearing
Vehicle roads	1	6.25	23.75	28.75	5.00	5.00	-
	2	26.31	23.75	23.71	28.57	57.14	-
	3	9.09	34.54	41.81	7.27	7.27	-
Pedestrian pathways	1	6.25	28.75	20.00	7.50	3.75	2.50
	2	26.31	28.75	16.49	42.85	42.85	33.33
	3	9.09	41.81	29.09	10.90	5.45	3.63
Parking areas	1	1.25	5.00	5.00	-	-	-
	2	5.26	5.00	4.12	-	-	-
	3	11.11	44.44	44.44	-	-	-
Parks and recreational areas	1	3.75	15.00	31.25	5.00	-	-
	2	15.78	15.00	25.75	28.56	-	-
	3	21.11	90.84	256.92	31.11	-	-
Market places	1	-	7.50	18.75	-	-	2.50
	2	-	7.50	15.46	-	-	33.33
	3	-	26.08	65.21	-	-	8.69
Bus-stops	1	3.75	18.75	11.25	2.50	-	2.50
	2	15.78	18.75	9.27	14.28	-	33.33
	3	9.67	48.38	29.03	6.45	-	6.45
School gardens	1	-	-	2.50	-	-	-
	2	-	-	2.06	-	-	-
	3	-	-	100.00	-	-	-
I have no problem	1	1.25	1.25	3.75	-	-	-
	2	5.26	1.25	3.09	-	-	-
	3	20.00	20.00	60.00	-	-	-
Unanswered	1	1.25	-	-	-	-	-
	2	5.26	-	-	-	-	-
	3	100.00	-	-	-	-	-

(1) Proportional value within the questionnaires, (2) proportional value within its own disability type, (3) proportional value within other disability types.

recreation areas, market places and school gardens, visually-impaired people had problems with pedestrian pathways, car parks and bus-stops. Cities should provide trouble-free accessibility to everywhere for urban-dwellers of all user groups. The disabled individuals living in Kocaeli were asked to determine three main problems they had while using urban outdoors and the responds were given in Table 3 associated with disability type.

According to Table 3, the disability type that has problems with all of the urban outdoors is determined to be visually-impaired people. When the place is considered, each of the disability type, mainly people with walking-disability and those with walking disability and visual-impairment, has trouble with using steps. While people with visual-impairment and people with walking disability-hearing-impairment have problems with using transport means, mentally and hearing impaired people are determined to be the ones who get disturbed by the looks of people. Also, use of toilets, access to recreation areas and the problem of walk around park areas are among the

Table 3. The relationship between the problems in urban outdoors and the type of disability.

Problems in urban outdoors		Percentage of disability types (%)					
		Walking	Visual	Hearing	Mental	Walking-visual	Walking-hearing
Problem of accessing to recreation area	1	2.50	17.50	25.00	5.00	-	-
	2	11.76	21.21	24.09	36.36	-	-
	3	5.00	35.00	50.00	10.00	-	-
Problem of using park equipment	1	2.50	10.00	22.50	-	-	-
	2	11.76	12.11	21.67	-	-	-
	3	18.18	56.68	125.12	-	-	-
Problem of using transport vehicles	1	2.50	20.00	11.25	-	-	2.5
	2	11.76	24.24	10.84	-	-	33.33
	3	6.89	55.17	31.03	-	-	6.89
Problem of walk around park areas	1	1.25	10.00	7.50	-	1.25	-
	2	5.88	12.12	7.22	-	20.00	-
	3	6.25	50.00	37.50	-	6.25	-
Problem of using steps	1	3.75	6.25	3.75	2.50	2.50	2.50
	2	17.64	7.57	3.61	18.18	40.00	33.33
	3	17.64	29.41	17.64	11.76	11.76	11.76
Problem of using toilets	1	3.75	5.00	8.75	-	-	2.50
	2	17.64	6.06	8.43	-	-	33.33
	3	18.75	25.00	43.75	-	-	12.50
Feeling uncomfortable by the looks of people	1	-	7.50	25.00	5.00	2.50	-
	2	-	9.09	24.09	36.36	40.00	-
	3	-	18.75	62.50	12.50	6.25	-
I have no problem	1	3.75	3.75	-	-	-	-
	2	17.64	4.54	-	-	-	-
	3	50.00	50.00	-	-	-	-
Unanswered	1	1.25	2.50	-	1.25	-	-
	2	5.88	3.03	-	9.09	-	-
	3	33.33	66.66	-	33.33	-	-

(1) Proportional value within the questionnaires, (2) proportional value within its own disability type, (3) proportional value within other disability types.

among the main problems for the disabled users.

Arrangements participants demand for urban outdoors

Physical environment that is not available for the use of disabled individuals decreases self-confidence of the disabled individual, narrows their living space and impede their integration with community. In city life, views of the disabled individuals should be given attention in urban structuring and establishment of common areas. For this purpose, the arrangements which the participants would like in urban outdoors were examined and concrete values were obtained and shown in Table 4. As seen in Table 4, users of each disability type primarily wanted to have equipment elements in proper standards in the city and parks. Also, specially designed toilets, suitable steps, suitable ramps and specially designed shuttle buses were among the arrangements preferred by the disabled users, mainly by visually-impaired ones. Especially people with walking-disabilities demanded battery-powered cars to

Table 4. The effect of type of disability on the necessary arrangements that should be arranged.

Necessary arrangements		Percentage of disability types (%)					
		Walking	Visual	Hearing	Mental	Walking-visual	Walking-hearing
Toilets specially designed for the disabled	1	2.50	15.00	7.50	-	-	2.50
	2	8.00	13.33	11.32	-	-	40.00
	3	9.09	54.54	27.27	-	-	9.09
Shuttle buses specially designed for the disabled	1	5.00	12.50	5.00	-	-	-
	2	16.00	11.11	7.54	-	-	-
	3	22.22	55.55	22.22	-	-	-
Suitable steps	1	5.00	12.50	-	3.75	2.50	2.50
	2	16.00	11.11	-	23.07	33.33	40.00
	3	19.04	47.61	-	14.28	9.52	9.52
Suitable ramps	1	2.50	13.75	-	1.25	2.50	1.25
	2	8.00	12.22	-	7.69	33.33	20.00
	3	11.76	64.70	-	5.88	11.76	5.88
Appropriate width in urban roads	1	-	5.00	6.25	1.25	-	-
	2	-	4.44	9.43	7.69	-	-
	3	-	40.00	50.00	10.00	-	-
Appropriate equipment	1	12.50	45.00	32.50	8.75	2.50	-
	2	40.00	39.99	49.04	53.83	33.33	-
	3	36.57	146.93	178.20	32.20	6.06	-
Specially designed transport vehicle within parks	1	1.25	-	3.75	-	-	-
	2	4.00	-	5.66	-	-	-
	3	25.00	-	75.00	-	-	-
Use of fragrant plants	1	2.50	2.50	11.25	-	-	-
	2	8.00	2.22	16.98	-	-	-
	3	15.38	15.38	69.23	-	-	-
Unanswered	1	-	6.25	-	1.25	-	-
	2	-	5.55	-	7.69	-	-
	3	-	83.33	-	16.66	-	-

drive around the parks. Although the priorities of the disabled users who demanded arrangements in urban outdoors change according to the disability type, their expectations remain the same. 53.8% of the participants in this study said that they went out for parks and recreation areas everyday, 8.8% once every two days, 22.4% once a week. Fifteen percent of the disabled urban-dwellers marked “other” option. In order to eliminate the problems faced by the disabled users regarding using parks and recreation areas, construction of parks only for disabled people has been brought to the agenda in recent years and some cities has done this. Other than the arrangements given in Table 4, the disabled people were asked for their opinions about the construction of parks for the disabled. 85% of the participants stated that already existing parks should be re-arranged in a way to be used by the disabled and new parks should be designed and constructed accordingly. 8.7% of the participants wanted parks to be used only by the disabled while 6.3% did not share their opinions about it. 83.8% of the participants said that they would use such areas more often if the problems they faced were eliminated.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Places should be offered to the disabled people in cities to enable them move freely and benefit from all facilities of the cities. For this, the first thing to be done is to investigate the problems and expectations of the disabled people living in cities as a user group and carry out planning, design and implementations to solve them. This study was carried out to determine the problems and expectations the disabled individuals living in Kocaeli experience in urban outdoors and the following results were obtained:

(a)The percentage of the disabled individuals living in Kocaeli that has problems of using urban outdoors was 62.6%. In this case, one of the main problems for the disabled in cities is inaccessible urban outdoors.
(b) An important part of the population in Kocaeli includes disabled people and they live in a physically less active way than those without disabilities. The percentage of disabled individuals in the city do not want to go out in their free time was 70.57%, they spend their time at home.This is because it is impossible for the disabled to use urban outdoors without getting any help. Those with walking disabilities prefer not going to the parks and recreation areas in their free time because of the problems they face in urban outdoors.
(c) For each type of disability the most problematic urban outdoors in the city are vehicle roads and pedestrian pathways, and parks and recreation areas. For this reason, the disabled individuals in Kocaeli should be offered more participation in active life by re-arranging urban outdoors in Kocaeli and using additional equipment to improve accessibility, and access to urban outdoors and recreation should not be a luxury way of life for the disabled people anymore.
(d) People with each disability type, mainly those with walking disability and visual impairment, have problems with steps. In addition, the user in each type of disability demanded suitable equipment in the city and parks. For this reason, urban outdoors in Kocaeli should be improved and equipped in a way to be used by the urban-dwellers from each of the user group safely. The entire urban outdoors in the city such as vehicle roads and pedestrian pathways, pavements, squares, steps, ramps, market places, parks and recreation areas, bus-stops, sports areas should be improved for the access of the disabled. New projects should be designed suitable for the use of the disabled individuals.
(e) The disabled group that experience problems in all urban outdoors is those with visual impairment. Visually-impaired people mostly have difficulty in using transport means. The disabled urban-dwellers, particularly those with visual impairment, demand specially designed toilets, suitable steps, suitable ramps and specially designed transport vehicles within parks. Perceptible navigators and audible warning signals should be used to ensure safe access for those with visual impairment.
(f) The disabled people, mainly those with mentally disabled and hearing-impairment, feel uncomfortable by the looks of other people. The public should be informed about it and be tolerant of the disabled.
(g) Disabled people should not be seen as a separate part of the society. They should be integrated with society and the places and equipment should be re-arranged accordingly as well. For this reason, parks should be designed in a way to integrate the disabled with all the urban-dwellers. No parks should be designed only for the use of the disabled. The same public transport means should be used with the other urban-dwellers. They are the demands of the disabled people living in Kocaeli.
(h) The percentage of the disabled people in Kocaeli who stated that they would use the urban outdoors more often if the problems of accessing to parks and recreation areas were eliminated was 83.8%. They also demand smaller transport means specially designed for the disabled people within big parks.

Despite the laws, physical and moral conditions surrounding the disabled individuals in Kocaeli do not offer equal opportunities to the disabled when compared to the other individuals. The rate of those with permanent disabilities after the disaster in the city is 1.3%. When temporarily disabled people are also considered, urban outdoor arrangements in Kocaeli, which is located in an earthquake zone, are of great importance.

Rearranging urban conditions suitable for everyone is possible by implementing city plans to be prepared by a group of experts decidedly. In these implementations, the disabled should also be represented in the decision

making bodies of the local governments. Views of the disabled individuals should be paid attention in urban structuring and establishment of common areas in the city.

Being disabled should not hamper access to educational life, health services, and urban outdoors such as parks and recreation areas. Arrangements to be carried out anywhere in open public spaces should be conducted in accordance with the standards of the Turkish standards institute in such a way to enable the transport needs and use of the disabled people.

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Abstract: Cities are the places that have structural and equipment capabilities for housing, social, cultural, economical and recreational activities for various user groups. Since user groups in cities vary, it increases urban service requirements as well. The aim of this study is to investigate the urban outdoor sites in Kocaeli where disabled users, as a user group in cities, face problems and their expectations, and to determine spatial and equipment facilities the city offers for people with disabilities. For this purpose, a face-to-face questionnaire comprising 19 close-ended questions was administered to 80 participants including users with disabilities. The data was analysed by using SPSS 13.0 statistical program, the results were obtained and evaluated. According to the results, urban outdoor sites in Kocaeli offer very limited facilities for disabled users in Kocaeli and 62.6% of the participants completely or partially experience problems within urban outdoors. The most problematic urban outdoor sites for each of the disability type are; vehicle roads and pedestrian pathways, and parks and recreational areas. The most important expectation of the participants is the arrangement of equipment elements in the city in general and in parks according to their own needs as well.

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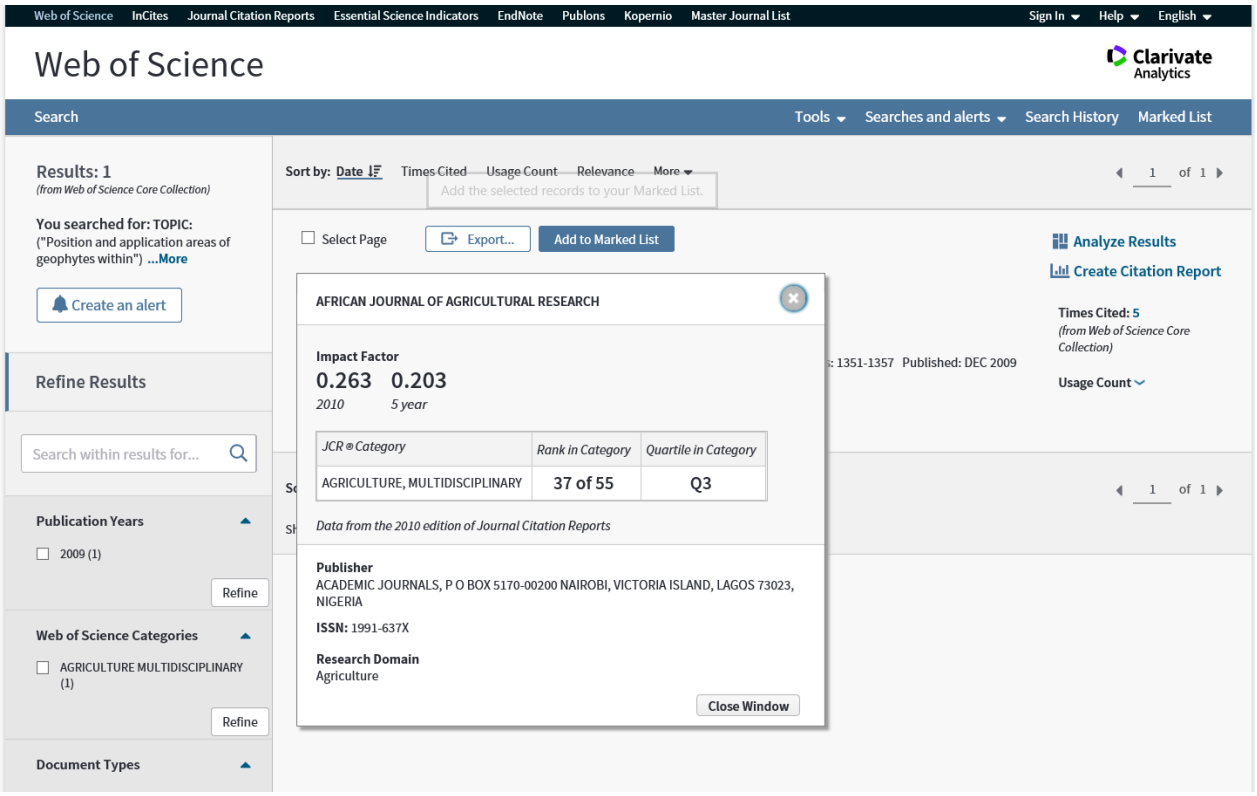
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