The Concept Of "Disability" In Architecture As A Power And Ideology Problem

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Abstract

The concept of disability, which is well accepted around the world and seems to be a statement of positive discrimination at first, requires becoming a current issue as an equality problem in architecture and society today. In fact, the definition of disability and its intellectual basis are major and still invisible obstacles to obtain equal rights for everyone regarding architectural accessibility and participation in social life.

In this study, the intellectual basis of the concept of disability in social understanding has been explored to identify the main problem. It has been realized that this understanding, which is to be seen also in architectural practices, has occurred as an issue of power and ideology. On one hand, the society itself generates the definitions, classifies people and creates hegemony based on

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consent, and on the other hand speaks up for resolving the problems caused by this classification with a total inactivity. Strong ideologies, which ignore the problems of existing definitions, forms absolute truths and minds unable to question. Therefore, the definition of "disabled" becomes approved by the entire society, although it does not include inseparable parts of society such as children, patients or elderly. These ideologies result in a communal power created by free will instead of enforcement. In this manner, even individuals classified as "disabled" accept the legitimacy of this authority. However, existing of such an accepted definition causes etherizing and ignorance in society. It also affects architectural perception and plays a significant role in creating isolation projects such as "disabled-friendly houses" or "libraries for disabled". These projects show that people defined as "disabled" are the dark sub consciousness of society willing to be forgotten.

When it is realized that the unity of differences creates the society, the classification will be forgotten, environments and mentalities will be shaped accordingly and designs will be created for everyone instead of designing for disabled. Bringing an accurate and fair point of view into existence, which is based on the mentioned facts, is the only way to solve the current problems in architectural practices and social inequalities.

50

INTRODUCTION: THE CONCEPT OF "DISABILITY"
Public Perception

In order to understand the concept of disability and being restricted generally in our country, the current dictionary of Turkish Language Institution, as being one of the basic sources provide us with important data. In online dictionary, the word "disabled" is explained as "someone having something missing or defected in his body" and in public language the word "crippled" that is used as having the same meaning with "disabled" means "someone having some diseased or missing part in his body, disabled" and "defected or missing". These definitions are the outcome of seeing one type of human model as normal while seeing all other varieties as "other". In other words, the concept of "disabled" does not reflect the situation of the individuals but reflects the approach of public to the subject matter. The publishment made by Turkish Standards Institute as dated for year 2011 also reflects this opinion: "Being disabled is the condition of a person's not being able to fulfill his public roles as regards to age, gender, social and cultural factors and the condition of being restricted." (TS 9111, Article 3.2). As this definition is truly analyzed, the concept of "disabled" also changes. Pregnant women or women having children, people carrying loads, sick or old people, or children are also included in

this group. Therefore, the definition of a healthy individual needs to be reviewed once again.

Relationship of a Healthy Individual and Disability

As per the definition made by World Health Organization which is also being used as current, health is defined as: "not only the situation of not having any disease or weakness but also being in good condition physically, mentally, and public wise." (1948). But this definition which is also used by Turkish Language Institution for the word "Health" has been subject to many debates from the beginning. As the Netherlander researcher Machteld Huber has stated on his article titled as "How should be define health?", this explanation requires a new formulation and especially with the expression of "a complete state of wellness", most of the people are included in the "unhealthy" classification (2011).

In line with the definition of "health" worldwide, in our community there is also an acceptation subject to debates relating to the concept of "healthy individual". In the researches made by Turkish Statistics Institution in the field of health, a relative concept of "healthy individual" attracts our attention. Because it is seen that the criterion set as part of the researches conducted cannot be clearly specified due to the requirement to revise the definitions. In many tables provided in Health Statistics Annual, the percentages of individuals with good and bad health situation are given but it is not defined as per which criteria they are seen as good or bad and it is not clear as to which factors who shall be seen as having good or bad health and this situation creates ground for debates. (2013)

The concept of "disabled" which is used together with the concept of "Health" symbolizes people using wheel chair and people who are visually or aurally disabled. The definition of "Health" remains mainly within the limits of physical health. At this point, it is crucial that many topics to be analyzed should come out. For example, isn't a woman having children who need to get outside with a pushchair also faced with similar disabilities that a person using wheel chair faces? Is it possible to evaluate an individual who does not show up in public life because of his phobias as being healthy? Similarly, if a person who does not have any physical problems takes part in public life but disturbs others because he cannot control his anger, won't this create a disability to himself and his surroundings? As Prof. Dr. Mehmet Özyürek has stated in his book, an individual using wheelchair has defined being disabled with the following

statement: "An individual is disabled for the things he cannot do. For example, if a person cannot turn a lathe dog, then this person is disabled for this task. For example, selfish acts of a teacher are the signs of his being disabled. With this idea in mind, there would be very few people left who can be seen as healthy." (1988) As a simple example that explains the cliche and limited perception, when we write "disabled" in the search motor of internet, we are faced with numerous pictures of wheelchairs. (Look at Figure 1) In this way, a community that cannot realize that similar problems are faced with either permanently or temporarily is seen through a mind reflecting itself as being "abled" or "normal".

With this respect, the infrastructure of the concept of "disability" that is rooted in public perception needs to be reevaluated and interpreted with a new point of view.

Figure 1.
A segment showing the visuals obtained from the searches made in Google for the word "Disabled" (Date obtained: 30.05.2015)

MENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE CONCEPT OF "DISABILITY"

On the basis of view point for the perception of disability lies a dense and tight conceptual network. This trisome network composed of power, ideology, and hegemony gets linked with the concepts of othering and neglecting while remaining in our minds as such. Concepts that are formed with a conscious reflex as reflected through the public shape up the attitudes and social relations of individuals.

Power, Ideology, and Hegemony

The concept of power is described as "the ability to conduct a work" in its most plain form. Even though this concept is linked with politics by the public as linked to an institution or an individual, it is also used in different areas in literature. Foucault, who has made notable studies has said : "Power can be seen everywhere and power relations are valid in all areas of life". According to Foucault, power is not a capacity, a situation to own something or to extort a commodity. (Merquior, 1986).

Hardy & O'Sullivan state that power can be attained by "directing
the meanings shaping the lives of others in a deep level" (1998).
This dominant power named as power can only get activated
with the ideology it is linked with. Because what forms the
meanings shaping lives is in fact ideology.

Ideology is a concept to which very different meanings
are attached as per the areas for which it is used. Eagleton has
mentioned sixteen different meanings attached to this concept in
his book titled as "Ideology". One of these definions is "ideas
legitimating the ruling political power" while another definition
is "a set of ideas belonging to a specific public group" (1996). As
these definitions show it is not possible for an individual, a
community, an institution or an action to exist without any
ideologies. This set of ideas, in other words ideologies, to which
positive or negative meanings could be attached, support
potencies as independent from the definitions made.

The concept of "hegemony" which is directly linked to
power forms the third component of conceptual network.
Hegemony which means the dominance or pressure a person has
on another one, is also seen as "natural dominance myth" or
"legitimation of a status organisation". In fact, hegemony means
"creation of consent"(Marshall, 1999). In other words, the
difference of this concept which does not have any force or
pressure :" with independence is its being conditional and not
institutional and its difference from dominance is establishment
of power in less precise form having more ideology and
convincing instead of military intervention or force." (Gümüş,
2011). In this organisation, there is a segment that forms power
and there is another segment seen by them as the secondary
party who themselves accept this situation either consciously or
unconsciously.

In the light of these concepts, the formation of the
concept of "disability" is being made clear. The community that
strongly emphasize the right for equal reachability for everyone
as one of their most powerful ideologies, has established a
hegemony over the people described as "disabled". In other
words, one segment of the community gets in power being
supported by the ideologies not rejected by the others while
directing the lives of the other segment. Although there is no
party that is oppressed or complaining, this system supports
one-sided advantages. Despite the fact that individuals are aware
of the problems trying to put their efforts in, since they can not
reach the roots of the problems, ideology to be based on uniting
principles and not othering to come to power is left uneffective.

53

As stated by Hardy & O'Sullivan, the current conception that :"creates information while establishing a structure to use this information for controlling, managing or disciplining others" show up as a power characteristic (1998). But this power problem expressed lightly also blocks the way for critisizing the system and for changing it from the roots. In fact with a mind that is correctly shaped, it will be clearly seen that the most plain truth in the community is variability. In this way, all of the definitions and classifications made for people will be lost and each individual from architectural point of view will be seen as "abled". The way to get these architectural practices into life is not to be realised by the laws or rules but by creating an awareness as regards to this ideological problem. Or else it will be inevitable to be faced with social ruptures arising from discrimination.

Othering and Neglecting

As regards to classfying the community relating to the health status, the leading power forces part of the individuals to obey with a polite and refine language. As no other option can be seen, the situation is accepted voluntarily which gives rise to another concept named as "Othering"

The insufficiencies in social system and/or the system itself gives rise to discrimination. As a result, the community which makes up a whole with its varieties gets disintegrated as "we" and "them". As per the quotation of Marilyn Fyre mentioned by Levent Şentürk, all of the people in the community look at where they stand so very closely that they can neither see that they are in a cage nor can they see their surroundings: "Cages. Think of a bird cage. If you look at one of the wires of the cage closely, you can not see the other ones." (2008). Şentürk stated that the cage example of Fyre marks to: "the existence of a network which serves to diactivate, degrade and reshape the lives of others. And this opinion causes the community to get blind, to get standardized, and for the varieties to be seen as others. In architectural sense, establishing a logic as "designing for the disabled" is by itself a way of creating social discrimination with the assertion of making a useful work.

The habit of othering is growing in the public mind just like an insidious disease. Even the associations whose main purpose of existence is to enable people to carry out their lives under equal conditions, accept and declare othering even without being aware of it (Look at Figure 2-3). For an individual who sees such visuals not to feel himself as "the other" is not possible. Groupings made as "We" and "them" are the reflection of discriminating and othering language.

Figure 2.

Figure 2,3.
Another example of othering (Campaign visual for Turkish Paraplegia Association).

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 4.
A "Social Responsibility" Project Advertisement (with the contribution of Turkish Paraplegia Association and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality)

Classification of community brings with it problems to be solved. Ideologies that are expressed intensely in the speeches are not actually applied as seen to require a lot of effort, which leaves the problems as unsolved. At this point, keeping the people who are discriminated away from us looks like a wise and pitiless solution. Wheelchair entries and elevators built away from main entry points, ramps built just because of legal obligations that have no possibility to be used are all examples that one segment of the community sees the other segment as if it is nonexisting. Similarly, in the field of football which attracts a

lot of attention, while all kinds of details relating to league matches can be easily available, the name and achievements of Turkish aurally disabled Football A National Team have not been heard of. These people who are seen as a different class by the community have been completely left aside by their isolated schools, teams, libraries, and hospitals. On the advertisements and campaigns made in the name of social responsibilities the the expressions and the body languages used are as if there is a fear about wheelchair and a desire to escape from it. (Look at Figure 4) This shows that the people defined as "disabled" reflect the dark subconscious mind of the community which they don't want to remember. In other words, the individuals who are restricted and discriminated reflect "the area of differences and the place of fears and worries." (Sönmez Selçuk, 2012)

DISABILITY AND ARCHITECTURE AS REGARDS TO REACHABILITY TYPES OF PAPER

"Why are we creating designs if they are not made for the people? Let's design everything for everyone at all times. This is the point where we are. This last stage is a design policy that is extremely logical and more humanitarian." (Dunlap, 1997)
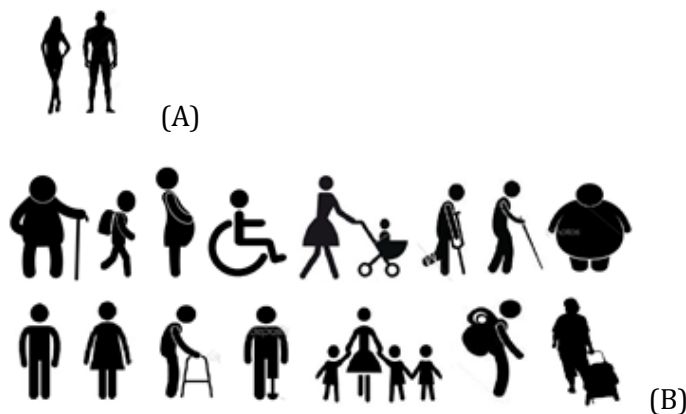
In 1997 during the Global Reachability Conference organised in Washington, Ronald L. Mace, who is an architect himself, has spoken about the basis of the subject matter by using a very plain language. If we will talk about a search for an honest way of reachability, realistic and required designs should be shaped just at that stage. Because all of the places in our social life and the social life itself are directly related with architecture. Only in this way it can be possible to compose a social community with the contribution of each and every individual. But in today's world, when places, buildings, and even furnitures are designed, only a single type of consumer is in the minds. As a reflection of a perception which downgrades, discriminates and neglects, the community design which comes out could only be described as "Utopia".

Utopia

Platon, who is said to be the originator of utopia also reflecting the modern utopic literature, presents us with an ideal city definition in his expression of an ideal state. This city is where there is a big variety.(1988) Social varieties began to exist starting from the early stages of the concept of utopia. In the part of this period which is reflected in our time, a desire to change the community structure from its roots is also seen so as not to be limited with the spaces. On the other hand the concept of utopia in architecture is mostly related with the spaces and environment and not with the community.

When utopia and architecture are used together, most of the time they reflect something positive. "Establishment of an ideal life where everything goes well on its way, where each detail is thought of, the actions of people are foreseen, determined and designed and where nearly all of the problems are solved is being the subject matter." (Alver, 2012) "Anti-utopia on the other hand is the architecture of discomfort or the architecture designed not to be realized at all as reflecting the mission and ethics of architecture." (Riot-Sarcey, Bouchet & Picon, 2003). In this respect, establishing an architecture that separates the community from its unique varieties and creating a single type of individual, is more of an anti-utopia rather than utopia. The designs created today are in fact the reflection of a discomforting architecture. Architectural features created just for a single user profile eliminating the old people, the people using wheelchairs, mothers walking with pushchairs, people who are over weighted, and even children, either knowing or not knowing assumes as if all of these people are no existing. At this point architecture turns to be functionless except for a single segment in the community. As long as there won't be designs having titles as "for children, for the disabled, for the old people etc), they will be places that cannot cover the whole community. In this way "disabled projects" in terms of architecture appear like "library for the disabled" and "school for the disabled". To put it in other words, all of the architectural designs in general are created for "normal" individuals having no physical restrictions and only some additions are included for the "others" like entries or sections. To say it in a simple way, while the target group of the designs is (A), the real community is (B). (Look at Figure 5)

Figure 5.
As per the current architectural understanding: (A) Utopic public perception and (B) Real community profile (Saltoğlu, 2015).

Disabled Architecture

It is possible to see the perception of "disabled" as reflected on the architectural understanding. In almost all of the different projects in different fields, it is clearly seen that there is a discrimination starting from the first design stage till the application.

Architectural design competitions to support creativity are good examples. In these competitions there is a discriminated section as "disabled category" and unique competitions are organized with the title as "design for the disabled". The fact that bigger awards are given for these categories is as if architects are trying to cover for their sins.

In addition to the competitions, designs with titles like "Disabled friendly architecture" or "Disabled friendly projects" are discriminating but are reflected to the community as the fulfillment of social responsibilities. Instead each project needs to be "human friendly" not targeting at some specific segment. These projects aiming not to unite the whole community but to unite the so-called "disabled" individuals among themselves get positive critics from the majority. Another similar example could be given from a news provided by RAF product magazine: "RAF product magazine began working for creating an environment for the disabled where they can live better lifes". With this expression, it is accepted that the environment is not suitable for the so-called "disabled" individuals to live and it is as if it is aimed to grant "a little bit more space for them to live" with the project mentioned. If the word "to the disabled" was omitted from the news and if only "an environment that is more suitable for living" was stated, the project to be started would be a more humanitarian one.

Architects and designers who are the creators of many structures and environmental organizations, are not aware of the social problems this perception creates although they are part of the whole process. This subject matter to which no search to find a solution exists for it is not thought of, should be the agenda of both the designers, the community, the administrators, and the authorised parties.

As long as the designers themselves see children, sick people, old people or the   so-called "disabled" people as the minorities, it is impossible for this design perception and the project concepts realized to change. All of these examples give support to disabilities being disabled projects themselves instead of intending for the support of disabled individuals.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the information and findings reflected, it is seen that the definition of "disabled" is in fact a power and ideology problem. This definition is the biggest but the least visible disability in front of creating an environment and architectural structure that is reachable by everyone. In order to change the current perception, it is obvious that awareness should be created in the minds of the public. As it is the individuals making up the community who create this differentiation and discrimination, the change in the perception can only be done by changing the mental status of the individuals rather than making a change from the very top. Any efforts in this respect are to be supported and widespread. For example, in the project named as "I was restricted here", the architectural disabilities faces in daily life are determined and photographed by the people witnessing them. These kinds of studies are important for the establishment of control and awareness in the community. In this way, a perception like "global design for everyone" will be established and the architectural designs will be shaped in this line.

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She was born in Trabzon. She graduated from Ankara Gazi Anatolian High School in 1996. In 2001, she graduated from Karadeniz Technical University, Department of Architecture. In 2004 she received master's degree in Yıldız Technical University in Institute of Science from the Architectural History And Theory Post-Graduate Program. In 2011 received his doctorate degree in the same program. In 2012, she began her academic career as an Asisst. Prof. Dr. at Karadeniz Sea Technical University Department of Architecture in the history of architecture branch.

61