CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC SPACES FOR REINFORCING DEMOCRACY

DEMOKRASİNİN GÜÇLENDİRİLMESİ İÇİN ÇOCUKLARIN KAMUSAL ALANLARA KATILIM HAKKI

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Abstract

Public spaces are areas that allow people to interact, express themselves, and make them visible. Yet, limited attention has focused on understanding and designing public spaces with regard to children's rights. Grounded in Habermas's deliberative democracy model, the research explores the intricate relationship between children and public spaces. This study aims to the discourse on public spaces, and their significance in facilitating children's interaction and expression. In the study, the relationship between children and public space is established within the framework of deliberative democracy and children's rights, and then the characteristics of accessible public spaces for children are discussed. The study was designed in accordance with qualitative research methodology, and the data were obtained through document analysis technique. Here we show that organizing public spaces as child-friendly environments will make them new actors of democracy by gaining visibility in public spaces and this will guide the making of public policies.

Keywords: Children, Children's Rights, Children Participation, Public Space, Democracy

Öz

Kamusal alanlar, insanların etkileşime girmesine, kendilerini ifade etmesine ve görünür olmasına olanak tanıyan alanlardır. Ancak, kamusal alanların çocuk hakları açısından anlaşılması ve tasarlanması konusuna sınırlı ilgi gösterilmiştir. Habermas'ın müzakereci demokrasi modelini temel alan bu araştırma, çocuklar ve kamusal alanlar arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, kamusal alanlara ilişkin söylemi ve bu alanların çocukların etkileşim ve ifadelerini kolaylaştırmadaki önemini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada, çocuklar ve kamusal alan arasındaki ilişki müzakereci demokrasi ve çocuk hakları çerçevesinde kurulmakta, ardından çocuklar için erişilebilir kamusal alanların özellikleri tartışılmaktadır. Çalışma nitel araştırma metodolojisine uygun olarak tasarlanmış ve veriler doküman analizi tekniği ile elde edilmiştir. Burada kamusal alanların çocuk dostu ortamlar olarak düzenlenmesinin, çocukların kamusal alanlarda görünürlük kazanarak demokrasinin yeni aktörleri haline gelmelerini sağlayacağı ve bunun kamu politikalarının oluşturulmasında yol gösterici olacağı gösterilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocuk, Çocuk Hakları, Çocuk Katılımı, Kamusal Alan, Demokrasi

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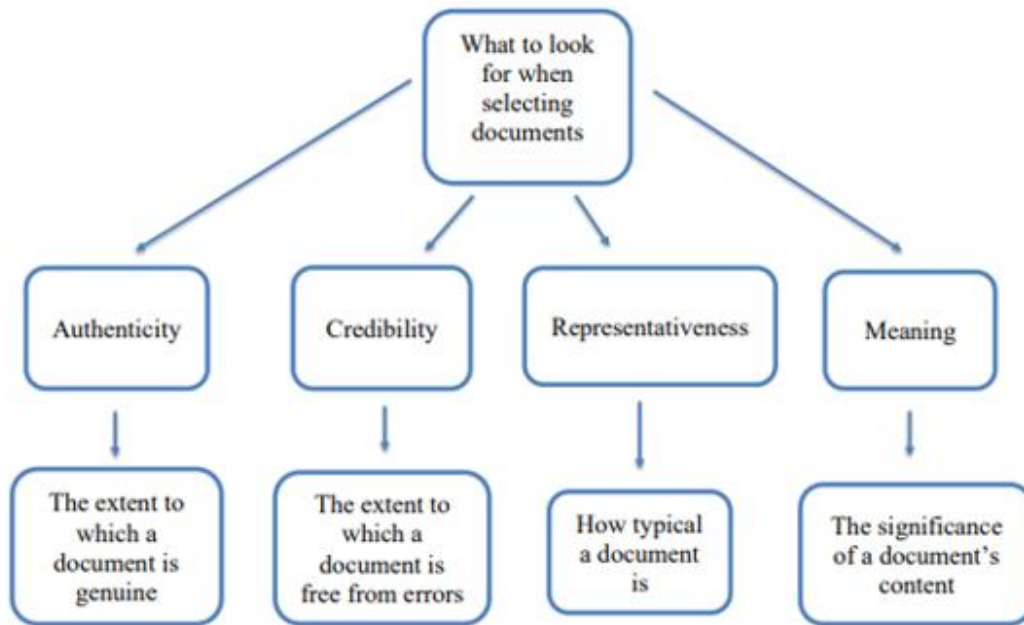
INTRODUCTION

Rooted in antiquity, ideas about the public sphere have been hotly debated at the theoretical level since the 1970's under the leadership of Habermas and Arendt. This concept, seen by Habermas as 'communicative environments' and by Arendt as spaces where 'freedoms and action are exhibited', has been discussed in a way to cover the definition of 'private sphere' and the distinction between 'public sphere and private sphere'. In this process, the private sphere was positioned as 'the sphere of obligation, related to the family and associated with women', while the public sphere was characterized as 'the sphere of freedom for men'. The evaluations of Locke, Hegel and Rousseau were influential in making this distinction (Çaha, 1998, p.78). With the development of feminist movements, women have, in a sense, moved the private sphere into the public sphere, both in the struggle for rights and by opening the hierarchical and unequal conditions that regulate the private sphere to discussion. This development transformed the concept of the public sphere along with changing social and economic conditions. Thinkers such as Habermas and Arendt, who came after the theorists of the Age of Enlightenment, contributed to this transformation by emphasizing "transitivity, display of differences, openness to all, dialogue" instead of the strictly separated private and public spheres. In this way, the definitions of the public sphere, which was previously seen as the sphere of political activity of wealthy, white men, have diversified to include women, the poor and the disabled, who are considered to be the actors of the private sphere, and to include actions aimed at creating an environment for dialogue rather than establishing political superiority.

Thanks to these contributions, public spaces today are defined as environments where people interact (Rappa, 2002, p.7) and form public opinion (Habermas, 2004, p.95), regardless of color, race, gender (Madanipour 1996). Public spaces appear as a type of these environments. Public spaces, which can be exemplified as parks, streets, gardens, avenues, squares and plazas, can be described as gathering spaces where different groups of people can come together and can be used by everyone - in line with the public life order. The most important function of public spaces is that they enable individuals to interact with each other and organize social activities to realize themselves as social beings. As such, public spaces contribute to democratization by making people 'visible'. Because in order for people to communicate their demands and ideas to those concerned, they must first be "visible" and have the support of others. Ideas and demands are shaped through mutual interaction. Public spaces provide individuals with the freedom to 'interact', 'come together' and 'organize'. For social segments that cannot use public spaces, there is a danger that their ideas and demands cannot be carried to public spaces.

This situation also results in the exclusion of those who cannot benefit from public spaces from democratic processes. From this perspective, public spaces should be accessible and usable for 'everyone'. However, it is not possible to say that these spaces are easily accessible for women, the disabled, the elderly and the poor.

"Children" are one of the groups for whom public spaces are not 'accessible'. As Malone and Tranter (2003) implied children worldwide, regardless of location, often reside in crowded, unsafe, and polluted areas that hinder their ability to learn, play, and relax. These conditions pose a threat to their well-being and restrict their potential for growth. Urban children specifically face limited opportunities for personal exploration and engagement with nature. However, public spaces are very important places for the realization of children's rights to 'development and participation' as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a matter of fact, at this point, it should be kept in mind that the state parties to the Convention have a legal responsibility to ensure children's participation in public spaces. In this study, public spaces are evaluated in the context of children's rights. After establishing the relationship between children and public space, the characteristics of accessible public spaces for children are discussed in the context of children's rights.

The study was designed in accordance with the qualitative research approach, and the data were obtained through document analysis method, which is one of the methods based on the literature. Merriam (2009) stages document analysis as (1) finding appropriate documents, (2) checking the authenticity of documents, (3) creating a systematic for coding and cataloging, and (4) analyzing data (content analysis) (Merriam, S. B. (2009). In this study, document analysis was carried out on the documents that were decided to be directly related to the research problem of the documents accessed with the keywords "public space, public sphere, children's rights, children's participation rights, democracy, child-friendly space". In order to reach original and reliable documents, the document search was carried out in Google Scholar, National Academic Network and Information Center (ULAKBIM), Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus databases, and books and related reports frequently mentioned in the literature were also consulted. The data obtained were processed through content analysis under the categories of "public space, public sphere, children's rights, children's participation, democracy, children's rights and public space/public space relationship". The search was limited to "title" and "or" criteria. A total of 1 million 664 thousand documents were revealed. Approximately 512 thousand of these documents are open source.The documents obtained were selected and analyzed within the framework indicated by Morgan.

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                          What to look
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    │ The extent to│   │ The extent to│   │  How typical │   │The significance│
    │   which a    │   │   which a    │   │  a document  │   │ of a document's│
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Source: Kridel 2015 cited by Morgan, 2022, p.71

"Text content" was used as the unit of analysis. The aim of the Interpretivist Approach in general is to understand any expression, meaning, text or work of art (Keat & Urry, 2011). The study is expected to contribute to the field of children's rights as it brings up an issue focused on "children's rights" as a different perspective on public space discussions.

1.   Literature

1.1. Concept of public space

The concept of public space can be defined in many ways. Geuss (2001, p.52) defines public space as a place that can be observed by all, freely entered by all, accessible by all, and inevitably encountered by strangers. According to Rappa (2002, p.7), the public sphere is the space that allows people to interact, where information is exchanged and debates take place between parties, and where policies of state and non-state actors are formed. The public sphere is the space for democratic deliberation between civil society and political society. In other words, public spheres can be defined as democratic platforms where social demands and problems are discussed and then transferred to the political society (Keyman, 2004). In

Erdoğan's (2000, p.35) definition, the public sphere is a civil space where discussions and activities are held to determine the common good of society. These definitions are like the definition of Habermas (1996a), who was the first to work on the concept of publicness, as "areas where public debates about the general interest are held and public opinion is formed". According to the "agnostic" model explained by Arendt, the public sphere is a space where political greatness and elitism are revealed/exhibited and shared with others (Ünüvar, 1998 cited by Demir & Sesli, 2007, p.254).

Häberlin and Furchtlehner define the public sphere as a space of differences and frictions, pointing out that public space reflects the diversity of society. In this respect, public spaces reflect society, a space of representation and expression (Haubman, 2021). Based on the definitions, we can easily say that the most important function of public spaces is to create 'spaces for democratic negotiation' and to 'bring together and reconcile diversity'. According to Habermas (1997, p.47), in these spaces where all parties to the issue/problem voluntarily participate with equal rights, the participants reach an agreement without being pressured. "In this way, the public sphere emerges as a precondition, a principle of democracy. Citizens, by participating equally and freely in common issues, both create this space and act in it with their words, will and actions" (Özbek, 2004, p.32).

Children should be important users of public spaces in terms of representation, which is a fundamental principle of democracy. This is also a prerequisite for the realization of children's political participation rights. In classical democracy models, while adults have the power to influence public decisions with their political rights, children cannot participate in the decision-making process because they do not have the right to vote. However, the UNCRC of November 20, 1989 considers children's participation as a right and states in Article 12 that children should be able to express their views freely and freely in the processes that concern them.

Chawla defines child participation as "a process through which children and young people interact with other people around issues that concern their individual and collective living conditions" (Malone Hartung, 2009). UNICEF (2004) defines child participation as "children and young people demanding a change in the way adults think and behave, so that adults share with children the way the world is defined". These definitions make children important actors in Habermas' deliberative model of democracy.

Deliberative democracy is defined as "political dialogue" occurring in the public sphere. In this model, everyone affected by the decision has the right to participate equally in the debate

(Sitembölükbaşı, 2005). As Habermas' follower Benhabib (1996, p.70) points out, participation in deliberation should be based on equality and symmetry, and everyone should have an equal chance to initiate discussions, ask questions, and question. Deliberative democracy thus re-establishes popular sovereignty through "communicatively generated power" between intrasubject (Habermas, 1996b).

In Habermas' model of deliberative democracy, children, who are denied the right to vote in classical democracy, can interact with each other and with adults in public spaces to effect change on those with political power and become part of popular sovereignty. Therefore, "since children are not generally seen as citizens, it is necessary to create space for children to be truly involved in the decisions that affect them" (Lansdown, 2009). Public spaces are one way to do this.

1.2. The relationship between public space and public sphere

As mentioned above, J. Habermas, the pioneer of this concept, defines the public sphere as the space where discussions between citizens take place and public opinion is formed (Habermas 2003). In order for the public sphere to be formed, there must be a medium and a communication environment where people can express themselves and discuss the issues they are interested in. Public spaces function as intermediary and communication environments that provide this need in the most concrete way (Özgür, 2017, p.81).

In order for democratic deliberations to take place, which is the purpose of public space, the views of different segments of society can be made visible in public spaces to form public opinion. In this way, public spaces allow different segments of society to gain visibility, express themselves and gain legitimacy (Özgür, 2017, p.85). In this respect, the most important characteristic of public spaces is that they "belong to everyone" and their most important function is that they enable individuals or social segments to become "visible". As a matter of fact, according to Arendt, one of the public sphere theorists, the public sphere is a space where political greatness, elitism is revealed/exhibited, shared with others and freedoms are visible (1958, p. 75). Public spaces, which can be considered as a type of public sphere, are places where political capacity and freedoms are tested. In contrast to the private sphere, which is characterized by love, romance, affection, sacrifice and care, public spaces include many political actions such as persuading others, transforming them, cooperating for their own defense, speaking out, and claiming their freedoms for the negotiation environment described by Habermas. Public spaces, on the other hand, gain a political value as the medium of actions

that take place in the public sphere. As Haubmann (2021) puts it, "actions and interactions take place in space, use and structure it".

Similarly, Hoskyns (2014) argues that public spaces enable individuals to engage in democratic actions and social interactions, while at the same time drawing attention to the fact that these spaces are channels for individuals to learn and experience democracy. In his work, Hoskyns discusses how various public spaces such as libraries, theaters, and universities, where democratic activities take place, contribute to individuals acquiring democratic citizenship identities and thus to the democratization of societies. He points out that libraries, in particular, support the freedom of information in society and provide a space for social interaction, thereby fostering the fundamental principles of a democratic society.

Those who are excluded from public spaces, which by definition should be accessible to everyone, are also excluded from democracy and deprived of the freedom of political action that democracy provides. The moment an issue related to the private sphere is discussed in a public space, it becomes a subject of political struggle. Those who cannot access public spaces, who cannot be visible in public spaces, cannot turn their problems, wishes or opinions into an element of political action in the public sphere. Children, like women, the disabled and the elderly, are restricted to the private sphere, which is identified with passivity, while they are excluded from public spaces, which are spaces of political struggle, and are sent invisible along with their problems and demands. However, public spaces are very important places for the realization of children's rights to "development and participation" as stipulated in the United Nations Universal Convention on the Rights of the Child.

1.3. The concept of children's rights and its relationship with public space

Children's rights are the inherent rights of all children regardless of age, gender, race, etc. The "UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" of 1989, which is the most fundamental and detailed convention in terms of protecting children's rights, was adopted by the state parties on November 20, 1989. Turkey signed this convention on September 14, 1990 and put it into force by publishing it in the Official Gazette No. 22184 on January 27, 1995. The Convention, which consists of 54 articles in total, divides rights into four groups: 'right to survival', 'right to development', 'right to protection' and 'right to participation' (UNICEF, 2007).

In relation to the important role that public spaces play in children's lives, two categories of rights come to the fore. Developmental Rights are related to the rights children need to realize their potential, such as education, recreation, cultural activities, freedom of religion and

conscience. Participation Rights, on the other hand, include children's right to have a say in matters affecting their lives and to express their views (UNICEF, 2007, p.18). Children's participation contributes to their development as creative and solution-oriented individuals while developing their freedom of thought and opinion. From this perspective, participation rights support development rights.

Although most of the articles in the Convention are directly or indirectly related to the right of the child to development, this right is particularly visible in Article 31. In this article, it is emphasized that children have the right to leisure time, rest, play in accordance with their age and participate in cultural and artistic activities. It is widely stated that play contributes to the child's psychological development, socialization, creativity and problem-solving skills (e.g. Hesseltine, 1987; Hart, 1992). Blazek (2015) states that ordinary public spaces enable children's activities with their physical and non-physical features. Undoubtedly, public spaces should be organized according to the needs of children so that they can play, rest and have a good time. It is stated that public spaces where children are present should be organized according to the principles of 'representation, independence, safety and participation' (Enşici, 2018) that will enable children to benefit from public services on their own and to be actively and safely involved in society. In other words, the most important feature of these spaces that can be called child- friendly is to allow children to participate in social life and public administration. This approach also includes children in democratic life.

Article 12 of the UNCRC regulates the right of the child capable of forming opinions to freely express his/her views on all matters concerning him/her, Article 13 the right of children to freely disseminate their opinions, Article 15 the right of children to assemble peacefully, and Article 17 the right to access information, thus supporting children's visibility in public spaces. Although the Convention does not mention political rights as an effective method of participation, by granting children the right to 'obtain information, form opinions, disseminate their thoughts, assemble, and express their views', it actually provides children with the power to form public opinion and interact as Habermas mentions. Children, who are excluded by liberal democracy, become actors who can experience democracy in Habermas' 'open and deliberative' public spaces. In order for children to participate in this experience, of course, they need to be visible in public spaces with equipment suitable for deliberation. This visibility can of course only be achieved to the extent of usability. In this case, it can be stated that public spaces should be organized in a way that can be used by children.

1.4. Evaluation of public spaces in the context of children's rights

Various initiatives have been launched to ensure children's participation in public spaces. Undoubtedly, the main factor in these initiatives is the development of policies that maximize children's participation in social life by considering their best interests and transferring them to real life environments. The most important of these is the Child Friendly City project led by UNICEF. As a matter of fact, the Child Friendly Schools project, which was also implemented by the same organization, is one of the exemplary initiatives aimed at making educational environments child-friendly as an area within public life and realizing children's rights through effective participation mechanisms.

The Child Friendly City Initiative (CFCI) was launched in 1996 to implement children's rights in an increasingly urbanized and decentralized world. The initiative brings together local stakeholders and UNICEF to create safe, inclusive and child-sensitive cities and communities. CFCI has been instrumental in this process by encouraging local governments and other stakeholders to place greater emphasis on meeting children's rights and needs and engaging them in local decision-making processes in more than 3,000 cities and communities around the world (UNICEF, 2018). The concept of a Child Friendly City ensures the following rights for every child: participation in decision-making processes regarding their city; freedom to express their views about the city they desire; active involvement in family, community, and social life; access to basic services such as health, education, and housing; availability of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities; protection from exploitation, violence, and abuse; ability to walk safely on the streets independently; opportunities to meet and play with friends; provision of green spaces for plants and animals; living in a clean and healthy environment; participation in cultural and social activities; and living as equal citizens with access to all services regardless of ethnicity, religion, income, gender, or disability (UNICEF, 2004b).

In Italy, where the Child Friendly City Movement originated, there are many child-friendly city practices. For example, in Rome, a "children's master plan office" was established within the scope of the city's master plan, and green areas, playgrounds, safe pedestrian-bicycle routes and meeting areas were specially planned for children in the city. In Milan, artistic and cultural activities are planned in the city based on requests from children. In addition, environments where they can spend their time effectively are created (Wilks, 2010, cited by Kocaoğlu and Mamur Işıkçı, 2020, p.415). In Turkey, the Child Friendly City Movement was launched in 10 provinces in 2014 and as of 2019, it has covered a population of approximately 2 million

children at different levels of participation in 40 provinces and 94 municipalities (UNICEF Türkiye, 2016).

Nevertheless, it is difficult to say that children in Turkey are fully participating effectively in the fast and complex flow of today's urban life. In many cities, children have difficulties in accessing playgrounds equipped for their developmental levels, cannot walk safely on the streets, and have to go to school and shopping almost everywhere by car. The inadequate quality and quantity of playgrounds, open and green spaces in urban areas also feeds this bad situation. As a result, children become more dependent on digital elements and are forced to spend more time indoors. These spaces, which are equipped with standard equipment, are far from developing children's creativity and imagination (Yalçınkaya 2015, p.101).

Children's space for movement, playgrounds or activity spaces that are specifically designated for them are becoming increasingly limited. Building development policies that are not in line with the best interests of the child can be characterized as the main reason for this. This is reinforced by the fact that children can hardly experience space without adult accompaniment (Schneider, 2019, cited by Haubmann, 2021). This determination is also valid for Turkey. While urban areas in Turkey are experiencing a rapid development process that is not sufficiently sensitive to children's needs, the availability of public spaces for children to interact, play and socialize is decreasing due to various financial or distance constraints.

A study conducted by Koç et al. (2015) in Ankara, which has received the title of Child Friendly City, confirms the above-mentioned findings. In this study, children expressed negative opinions on issues such as cityscape; traffic, transportation, road and infrastructure workswork; boulevards and streets; green areas; playgrounds, entertainment and sports areas; social-cultural opportunities; human relations and attitudes towards children; street children, homeless and disabled people; and security.

Children are not often included in the design of cities due to their different perceptions from adults (Alarasi et al. 2016). While the perception that childhood is transient prevents the creation of safe spaces designed for children, it is also the source of another problem in the form of placelessness. However, children need different, larger and safer spaces than adults (Çağlar 2020). Due to their immaturity, children are often not seen as an important element in the development of the city (Kitto, 2000, cited by Aji, Budiyanti and Dijaja, 2016, p.15). The rapid development of the city is dominated by the perceptions of adults and children's needs are often thought to be met by these perceptions (Aji, Budiyanti and Dijaja 2016, p.15). Therefore,

children expect to grow up in spaces designed for adults but do not feel a sense of belonging. The understanding of urbanization based on adult interests and perspectives does not reflect the perception of children and cannot respond to their needs. Although children constitute the majority of users in designed urban spaces, they cannot intervene in these areas organized and designed by adults. Consequently, they remain passive users of the city, directly and long-term affected by these spaces (Çakırer Özservet, 2019). This situation prevents children from being seen as autonomous citizens in public spaces (Valentine, 1996 cited by Elsley, 2004).

The growth of the city along with population and economic activities has led to the clustering of social groups with different income levels in certain areas of cities. The resulting "spatial differentiation and segregation in cities leads to formations such as urban polarization, sharpening of the boundaries between lower and upper classes, while at the same time increasing unequal relations and conflicts between social classes on the basis of power and hierarchy" (İçli, 2013).

This segregation is also reflected in the daily lives of children. This cultural and spatial segregation created between the social classes to which children belong provides the children of the upper income group with elite and structured spaces (pools, children's entertainment centers, cinemas, holiday, fast-food, shopping malls, plazas, etc.), while the children of lower income families are left with neglected playgrounds, narrow streets, unhealthy houses, unsanitary houses, and clandestine factories. In this way, spatial segregation takes especially poor children out of the 'public deliberative spaces' offered by Habermas and Arendt.

In addition, streets play an important role in children's lives as the most important component of urban spaces. Because children can play their games comfortably on a safe street. Play is a means of socialization and preparation for life. In a study conducted by Hareket (2020), it was determined that traditional children's games are mostly in content that can be associated with the development of children's physical and psychomotor skills, language and communication skills, culture transfer and social awareness, and the right to participate in social life and interaction skills. In this context, the necessity of spaces where children can realize their right to active participation and play becomes even more important.

In order to open the streets, which are so important for children, to the use of children, many local governments carry out "children's street / child-friendly street" projects. However, in these projects, adult design and adult labor is often a prominent problem. According to the participation model proposed and recommended by Hart (1992), projects should be initiated by

children and decisions should be taken together with adults. In other words, children and adults should work together on projects and make decisions together. As a matter of fact, children's assemblies established under local government units serve as an example of children's participation in decision-making mechanisms together with adults. Unfortunately, it was observed that only adults were involved in most of the projects analyzed in this study.

A study conducted by Egli et al. (2020) to determine where and what children like to do in their neighborhoods revealed that children like to go to parks and play with their friends in these parks the most. In the same study, children also expressed their safety concerns. Regarding parks that are expected to be accessible, safe, attractive, diverse and socializing (Friedberg, 1982), the biggest problem we encounter in Turkey is the "lack of maintenance" which may also pose a security risk. (Coşkun, 2015; Ballıoğlu, 2015). The fact that the materials are not diversified according to the age of children (Pola 2015; Atıcı and Öztürk 2021), and the lack of investment in parks in neighborhoods where poor people live (Memiş and Gülcan 2020) are other problems.

As another important public space, libraries nurture the imagination, creativity and personal development of local communities and strengthen belonging to a place while enhancing local culture. In this respect, children's libraries that function in the same direction are important for children (Çakırer Özservet and Evrim, 2014). In addition to the insufficient number of children's libraries, the lack of adequate specialized personnel working in these institutions is another problem faced by these institutions. Especially the lack of sufficient and up-to-date books in school libraries is an important problem (Kakırman Yıldız et al. 2018). The fact that libraries are not organized in line with the digital transformation and that additional measures are not taken to ensure that children use digital environments effectively and safely are among the common problems encountered in this regard. This situation creates obstacles to children's equal access to educational opportunities and their right to access information.

One of the most important public spaces for children is undoubtedly educational institutions. As a matter of fact, schools are among the main places that ensure the realization of the "right to education and equal opportunity in education" expressed in many international conventions and declarations that form the basis of children's rights. Child-friendly school environments have recently been characterized as "child-friendly schools".

The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF support this initiative to protect children's rights, improve their conditions and provide a good education. The child-friendly school

initiative identifies key components that define a child-friendly school; each component includes factors related to education, health and human rights. These factors consist of the following ten criteria;

- There is no corporal punishment at school.
- No excessive loads are carried by students.
- Safe and convenient transportation is available.
- Hygienic drinking water is available.
- There is a clean place for children to eat lunch.
- There are at least four sports lessons per week.
- Properly ventilated and well-lit classrooms.
- Periodic health checks and health classes are organized.
- First aid is available in case of emergency.
- Adequate number of toilets (Hedge and Shetty 2008, p.408).

Inclusiveness, sensitivity to gender equality, democratic participation, safety and design appropriate for child development are among the main features that child-friendly schools should have. There is no single way to make schools child-friendly, it may vary from country to country, but in every culture, a child-friendly school promotes child-centered education in a safe, healthy and holistic environment (Ordu et al. 2017). In Finland's education system, which is often noted for both academic success and the happinessit provides to children, students have the right to shape their own education programs in line with their own interests and needs, while individualized - that is, specific to each child's situation - education programs that can vary according to learning speed and individual differences are implemented in schools. In addition, schools in Finland are organized in a waythat children can feel at home (Özdemir, 2017, Özbek , 2021, p.7).

In Turkey, it is difficult to say that children have such friendly educational environments. The centralized structure of education in Turkey (Başdemir, 2012, p.35), inequalities of opportunity due to economic income (Çelik 2016), and frequent accidents (Ergüder and Yertutan, 2005) and violence (Çubukçu and Dönmez, 2012) are the most important obstacles to child-friendly schools.As a matter of fact, Kartal and Bilgin (2007) pointed out that schools are not very safe, especially for primary school children. However, it is possible to make schools child-friendly with small touches. The recent practice of feeding animals in schools is the best example of this (Yılmaz and İçen, 2020). Experts frequently emphasize the positive effects of animal feeding on child development and psychology (Wilkin et al 2016; Kaplan and Kaplan 2020). In this case, it can be assumed that feeding animals in schools makes schools more attractive for children.

Another type of public space that children use the most is hospitals. A child-friendly hospital should place great emphasis on the management and development of patients. Apart from the physical infrastructure, the healthcare environment should include the following key elements:

- Ambience and Safety: The facility should provide a comfortable and safe atmosphere for children. Both ambience and safety measures should positively impact children's therapeutic experience.
- Spaces Appropriate to Children's Needs: Areas within the facility should be designed and decorated in accordance with children's age and needs.
- Privacy and Comfort: In the outpatient clinic, there should be screened or separated areas that provide privacy for children to be examined in a more private and comfortable manner.
- Play and Education Areas: The facility should have special areas to meet children's educational and recreational needs. These areas should support children's development.
- Accommodation for Families: Mothers or caregivers should have access to a 24-hour room where they can stay with their children.
- Natural and Calming Environment: Natural materials, calming colors and natural light should be used in the interior design of the facility which can help children to relax.
- Specialized Equipment: Equipment specifically designed to meet children's learning and developmental needs should be used.
- Age and Size Appropriate Furniture: Pediatric dormitories or areas designated for child care should have beds and furniture that are appropriate for the age and size of children. (King 2017, WHO 2012, WHO, 2015; WHO 2018 cited by Ghosh et all, 2020, pp. 63-65).

In many parts of the world, designs that calm children and appeal to their imagination have started to emerge. Lady Cilento Children's Hospital in Australia (Eko Yapı, 2016), EKA Children's Hospital in Thailand (Göncüoğlu, 2020), Edinburg Hospital in Scotland (Lothian NHS, n.d.), Children's Hospital in Arkansas (Thompson, n.d.), Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital in New York (Mobilya Günlüğü 2013) are just a few examples. These initiatives have recently been reflected in Turkey. Erciyes Pediatric Hematology and Oncology Hospital and Antalya Training and Research Hospital have been pioneers in this field.

Another example of a child-friendly hospital is the King Fahad Medical City Cancer Center. After conducting a survey among pediatric patients and families, the Center implemented a number of interventions based on the results. These interventions included measures such as the use of zoo-themed wall posters, the creation of age-specific playrooms, the provision of quiet patient rooms, the design of attractive waiting rooms, and the provision of child-friendly television channels (Ghost et al. 2020, p.65).

However, from the perspective of Turkey, it is possible to say that there are not enough health personnel specialized in children and that the design and equipment of many children's hospitals are not suitable for children. In most regions, pediatric hospitals are inadequate and

overcapacity. In some hospitals, children's beds are not safe, toilets and sinks are not designed for them. This also shows that even in health services, which children can access safely that concern them, have not become widespread at a sufficient pace.

As a result, planning public spaces in accordance with the participation and development of children within the framework of an egalitarian understanding is a very important issue in terms of establishing the understanding of children's rights. If this is not done, children are pushed out of democracy and the provisions of the UNCRC convention are not fulfilled. As a matter of fact, while the convention begins with the expressions of equality and inclusiveness, its relevant articles and the UN general comments supporting the conventionalso envisage the effective participation of children in the administrative and social processes related to them. Article 4 of the Convention also obliges States to take all administrative and legal measures to ensure the realization of the rights recognized in the Convention.

CONCLUSION

Public spaces are important for all areas of child development (psychological, cognitive and psychomotor). Children can make observations and discoveries in these spaces and prepare for life. Public spaces designed for children are an important element that complements children's right to development.

In terms of democracy, there is a relationship between public space and the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms. As Arend points out, being visible makes it possible to enjoy rights and freedoms more. Although authors such as Holt (1975), Franklin (2001) and Wall (2011) call for giving children the right to vote in order to make them more equal in terms of rights and freedoms, the philosophy on which liberal democracy is based does not support this idea. Moreover, the dominant liberal democracy is far from reflecting not only children but also the demands and interests of various adult minorities. As such, it is obvious that classical liberal democracy, with its current tools, cannot look after the interests of children. The concept of 'deliberative democracy', which criticizes liberal democracy for being exclusionary and proposes different means for the representation of excluded groups, offers more appropriate solutions for the political representation of children. The communicative acts that underlie deliberative democracy, which is based on the interaction of different groups, take place in public spaces where all citizens come together and negotiate.

Today, however, children's visibility in public spaces has decreased considerably, especially due to security concerns. The emergence of children, who have been made dependent

on adultauthority, into public spaces can enable them to establish a new and stronger bond with societyand the state as active individuals with the power to act. This change can be the driving force of a social and bureaucratic cultural transformation shaped around 'respect for children's individuality, subjectivity and abilities', which should be realized as a measure to mitigate the child rights problems of today. The biggest obstacle to this possibility is that the spatial segregation of different socio-economic classes and cultures created by the increasing growth and complexity of cities excludes some children from the public sphere and sends them to the invisible space. Although digital environments offer children a ground for participation that renders these spatial and temporal differences meaningless, they can only have an auxiliary role in eliminating the divisive elements from real life environments and ensuring children's effective participation in public life.

Habermas' model of democracy based on communication, on the other hand, envisages that everyone, regardless of discrimination, comes together in public spaces and reaches a common opinion in the debate process. It is envisaged that this common decision, to which everyone participating in the debate contributes, will guide the making of public policies. Those who do not have access to public spaces will not be able to have a say in policy-making. It must be recognized that children, as much as anyone else, have the right to representation in democracy by gaining visibility in public spaces. Organizing public spaces as child-friendly environments will make them new actors of democracy.

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