

Towards Elder -Friendly City: Evaluation of Istanbul Urban Environments

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All around the world, population profile has been subject to a rapid change, and the rate of the elderly within the general population has been increasing. Parallel to the increased average of life expectancy and the growing number of the elderly, psychological, social, cultural, and economic problems concerning the elderly population have also increased, calling for immediate action.

“Aging” remains as a serious issue inflicting most countries, especially the developing ones. Within the process of global aging, which is called the demographic transformation, the decrease in birth and death rates have led to a decrease in the rate of children and youth within the general population, while a remarkable increase is observed in the elderly population. It is estimated that, especially in 20-40 years’ time, developing countries will rapidly undergo the process of aging. The number of people aged 60 years and over as a proportion of the global population will double from 11% in 2006 to 22% by 2050, by which time there will be more older people than children (aged 0–14 years) in the population for the first time in human history. Developing countries are aging at a much faster rate than developed countries: by 2050, 79% of the world’s older people will be living in those countries.

The elderly are faced with difficulties not only because of the problems that occur as a result of the process of getting old but also because the urban space is not designed for them. It is of great importance for the elderly that they live in places where they feel secure. Many organizations also, emphasize the importance of environmental conditions as a factor affecting the life satisfaction and quality of life among old people and when the subject is elderly, it is obvious that the environment is mostly limited to the caring and accommodation conditions as well as the socio-physical aspects of the environment in which the person ages.

Developing what has been termed ‘elder-friendly’ cities has become a significant issue for public and social policy, embracing questions covering different types of communities. In an elder-friendly community, the policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to help seniors "age actively." In other words, the community is set up to help seniors live safely, enjoy good health and stay involved.

Data was gathered using a questionnaire survey selected through a stratified random sampling in Istanbul. In the scope of this study, 410 face to face questionnaires have been carried out with elderly people in residential areas, in the districts of Bakırkoy, Kadıkoy and Besiktas. While selecting these samples, questionnaire quota has been applied in proportion with the population of each district and its elderly population. The reason why these districts were selected is the rate of the elderly population in the related areas which is twice as much as the average of Istanbul.

Cities produce advantages for older people in respect of easy access to medical services, provision of cultural and leisure facilities, shopping and general necessities for daily living. In aging societies, knowledge of the factors affecting life satisfaction of the elderly is highly beneficial for the institutions providing services. In this study, the determinants that affect life satisfaction of the elderly will be evaluated in the rate of physical activity, participation in social activities, and the frequency of socializing with friends and relatives and Istanbul urban environment will be evaluated in respect to criterias of elder-friendly city.

Key Words: Elder-friendly city, Elderly, Life Quality, Life satisfaction, Istanbul