BASIC RESEARCH OF BARRIER-FREE COASTAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES IN JAPAN

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Abstract: This research comprehensively examines the actual situations on the barrier-free marine recreational facilities by means of questionnaires to the local governments and users, as on-site surveys at the representative beaches and marine facilities in the Kanto region from the viewpoint of the handicapped.

There are three types of barriers: physical barriers with machines, buildings or town environments, physiological barriers in the human conscience or attitude, and social barriers as a part of the social system.

With this study, the physical barrier at the beaches and marinas, and the psychological barrier of the local government and aged or handicapped as the users were examined.

Keywords: barrier-free facilities, marine recreational facilities, aged, handicapped

Introduction

The increase in the aged generation in the Japanese population has advanced at a very rapid rate that cannot be observed in any other country in the world. It is expected that Japan will be an aged society in the year 2000, in which 65 years or older persons would account for one-fourth of the total population. At the same time, the number of handicapped in Japan is estimated to be as great as approximately three million, and various assignments are currently imposed which include the promotion of self-supporting the society, upgrading the quality of living, and so on.

Since more advanced town and living environments have been achieved in European and American countries than in Japan, the interest in leisure activities and education are much higher among those people because of the upgraded living quality. Accordingly, many facilities based on the barrier-free concept are now being built on the seaside areas in those countries for which considerations have been made for the handicapped as well.

Since Japan is surrounded by the sea, many people participate in marine recreational activities such as sea bathing, camping, gathering sea shells, and yachting. The number of participants tends to increase every year.

However, the environment has not yet been fulfilled in actuality that enables the Japanese nationals to participate in other marine recreational activities. Accordingly, further fulfillment of such marine recreational activities and measures thereof would be required in the future as the number of the aged increased and living quality improves.

Purpose of Research

The barrier-free concept in Japan is mainly applied when designing residential or public facilities. However, it has been rarely applied to the seaside space such as the coastal areas. Accordingly, the application of the barrier-free concept to such areas is believed to be indispensable when designing the seaside facilities that take the uses of the handicapped into consideration.

This research has been conducted in order to comprehensively seize the current barrier-free situations at the respective marine recreation facilities. The survey was conducted based on the following three points:
1. Survey by means of the questionnaires which were sent to all the prefectures in Japan and cities specified by the government ordinance,
2. Survey by means of the questionnaires on the conscience for the seaside among the aged and handicapped as the users, and
3. On-site survey on the current fulfillment situations of the sea bathing and marina facilities.

Research Method

Survey by means of the questionnaires which were sent to all the prefectures in Japan and cities specified by the government ordinance

A total of 59 questionnaires were sent by mail to the attention of the civil section of the respective local governments in Japan which included 47 prefectures and 12 cities specified by the government ordinance having the population of one million or greater.

Forty-nine questionnaires (100%) were returned from the prefectures and eight (66.6%) from the cities. Since two questionnaires were sent in duplicate to the two prefectures, a total of 57 questionnaires were returned from the 61 parties (93.4%).

The following questions were included in the questionnaires:
- Are there any manuals provided for the barrier-free facilities?
To what extent does the local government think that a Japanese national understands about the barrier-free facilities?

Importance of the barrier-free facilities for the aged and handicapped at the public water-side facilities.

Adopted considerations and future measures for the aged and handicapped at the public water-side facilities.

Survey by means of the questionnaires on the conscience for the seaside among the aged and handicapped as the users

Aggregate survey questionnaires were sent to the aged who are living in the seaside or inland areas. Survey questionnaires were also sent to the welfare center for the aged and the handicapped who are living in the seaside or inland areas or belonged to a group for the handicapped.

In the case of the questionnaires for the aged, a total of 190 answers were returned (100 for the seaside and 90 from the inland areas). Further, in the case of the same for the handicapped, a total of 197 answers were returned (150 for the seaside areas and 47 from the inland areas).

The following questions were included in the questionnaires:

- Frequency of the visits to the seaside by the aged or handicapped,
- Purpose of the visits to the seaside by the aged or handicapped, for future requests, and
- Recognition of information and utilization of the seaside facilities.

On-site survey on the current fulfillment situation of the sea bathing (51 places) and marina facilities (29 places)

The survey was conducted on the 51 beaches with high utilization rates and 29 relatively large marinas in the Kanto region. Note that the beaches were selected in Ibaraki prefecture (27 of 92 places) and Kanagawa prefecture (24 of 37 places).

In order to seize the current situations on the facility fulfillment for the uses by the aged or handicapped, the survey was conducted on the following points mainly from the viewpoint of the handicapped who have difficulty in moving by themselves (wheelchair users). The degree of fulfillment was determined by comparing the actual situations with the average figures according to the acts or guidelines as specified by the local governments:

- Accessibility (to seize the actual situations on the accessibility to the beach or facility by the handicapped),
- Convenience of the facilities (to seize the actual situations on the parking lots, public toilets, and public phones), and
- Service and recreational facilities (to seize the actual situations of the club house and beach houses).

Research and Considerations

The research comprehensively examines the actual situations on the barrier-free marine recreational facilities by means of the questionnaires to the local governments and users, as on-site surveys at the representative beaches and marine facilities in the Kanto region from the viewpoint of the handicapped.

The following conclusions were obtained by the research:

- Currently, considerations have been made for the uses by the aged or handicapped at few public beach facilities. However, the barrier-free facilities are expected to increase in the future since approximately 90% of the local governments have the policy to partially fulfill them.
- A difference in the behavioral will was noted for the beach between the aged and handicapped. The handicapped showed more positive behavioral will for the beach. Further, the aged or handicapped living in the inland showed more positive behavioral will for the beach.
- There were seven beaches out of 51 places at which considerations have been made for the uses by the aged or handicapped. However, it was noted that only three beaches can actually be used by the aged or handicapped in view of the considerations after the fulfillment and provisions of the sloped walkways.
- There were only three public marinas out of 29 places at which considerations have been made for the uses by the aged or handicapped.

There are three types of barriers: physical barriers with machines, buildings or town environments, physiological barriers in the human conscience or attitude, and social barriers as a part of the social system.

With this study, the physical barrier at the beaches and marinas, and the psychological barrier of the local government and aged or handicapped as the users were examined.

As stated above, elimination of the barriers at the public water-side facilities and marine recreational facilities in Japan are currently far behind European and American counties. However, barrier-free facilities are expected to increase in number in Japan in the future due to the positive attitude by the local governments, and the need for access to the beaches by the aged and handicapped.