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Original Research Article

The Conceptual Framework of Civic Landscape*

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Abstract

Problem statement: The present study was conducted to answer how the concept of civic landscape can be realized. The civic landscape has incorporated democratic attitudes into urban landscape design and planning. Civilization, as a political-social discourse, is a way of creating a shared space for individuals to communicate on the basis of differences and disagreements. Landscape, as an interdisciplinary nature, inherently reflects the extent and limitations of social justice in space. Thus, explaining the concept of civic landscape does not mean providing an absolute definition, but seeking the factors that make the concept of civilization in space in general, and landscape in particular meaningful.

Research objective: The purpose of this study is to explain a conceptual framework of civic landscape based on ideas and concepts of civilization in landscape architecture.

Research method: This is a descriptive-analytical study which has used the library method in collecting information. With the help of content analysis, the main concepts of the research are categorized and adapted to the concepts of landscape. Thus, at the first stage, the relationship between space and dimensions of civic society, and then the opportunities and constraints that may strengthen or weaken political-social discourse in the process of space planning are analyzed. Next, the place of society in the landscape design process is questioned by how democratic and social activities along with professional knowledge of environmental planning are needed. Finally, inspired by the three principles of civic society, the dimensions of the civic landscape are explained.

Conclusion: Inspired by the three dimensions of civic society (public opinions, institutions, movements), the civic landscape is divided into three characteristics that are compatible with the principles of civilization in terms of purpose, structure and concept. From this perspective, the purpose of civic landscape is the act of civilization, its structure is social construction, its concept is the concerns and ideals of civic society.

Keywords: *Civic Landscape, Civic Society, Socio-Political Discourse, Public Space, Green Democratic Policies.*

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Introduction

The concept of civic landscape is a new paradigm in urban landscape design and planning¹. This concept is an interdisciplinary topic that deals with how civic society and its ideal goals influence the process of production and operation of urban spaces. To understand how and why the burden of civilization is added to the landscape, we first examined the concept of civic spaces. The civic space is formed in the process of interaction of the political and social levels through the act of public participation. The concept of “the right to the city” with its two pillars, i.e. the right to “participation” and “appropriation”, is derived from the conceptual relationship between civilization and space. Evaluating the realization of these concepts or their denial in the produced spaces reflect the designer’s standpoint about it. In the second stage of explaining the civic landscape, the position of civic society in professional views of landscape design is examined. “Green policies” as a general concept of democratic action in relation to green space issues argues that decision-making to determine and regulate a socio-environmental metabolism requires both expert knowledge and collective judgment. Civic environmental movements and civic ecology solve environmental issues with the help of spontaneous popular coalitions by means of public participation and social planning. The character of the landscape is defined not only in the sense of natural processes, but also in the interrelationship between the society and the environment around it. In other words, the landscape encompasses both “nature” and “culture”, where culture is a very important, complex and multilayer dimension. Therefore, in order to explain the concept of civic landscape, it is necessary to examine the relationship of civic society with space in general terms and then with landscape in a particular way.

Literature review

Landscape architectural studies have been conducted on a social shift since the late 1990s, bringing new

issues, including justice and democracy, to the concept of landscape. Some studies cited on this area are “Justice, Power and Political Landscape” (Mitchell, 2003; Olwig, 2005), “The Right to Landscape: Contesting Landscape and Human Right” (Egoz, Makhzoumi & Pungetti, 2011), and The International Conference on “Defining the Democratic Landscape in Norway” (2015) (Jorgensen, 2016; Mels, 2016). In order to survey how the concept of civilization was added to the landscape, we needed three groups of studies:

The first group is the political science studies aiming at examining the relationship of civic society with space for the realization of social-political discourse. Judith Lazar in “Public Opinion” (Lazar, 2016) presented the structure and mechanisms of public opinion as an important dimension of civic society in a gradual development from the Greek era to the earliest press releases. In the political science studies, civility is defined as areas of social life in which social movements and non-governmental institutions are formed with the aim of influencing thought and philosophy of the social level on the governance level. In this view of civic society, the concept of participatory democracy was introduced as a type of discursive, argumentative, and consultative rotation which was recognized as discourse coalition (Hajer, 1993, 43). Discourse coalition first needs to overcome the space of discourse, and then reflects on the action of civic society. In other words, not only is it the case that democracy requires physical space for its performance, it can also be the case that only certain kinds of spatial arrangements will do, or that certain arrangements amplify or mute particular behaviors that democrats find valuable. John Parkinson in his Book, “Democracy and Public Space” (Parkinson, 2012), emphasized the necessity of physical space for the realization of democracy.

The second group is Urban-Social science, which analyzes how public space is controlled and defined and represents the performance of democracy

in a city by the criterion of “social production of space”. In his research series (Mitchell, 1995, 2003a, 2003b, Mitchell & Staeheli, 2006), Don Mitchell indicated the death of public space and presented two perspectives of “social activists” and the “academic” community on the production of “Truly public space” and “Pseudo public space”. The concepts of “the right to the city” and the “social production of space” in Lefebvre’s Research Series (Lefebvre, 1991) and the scholars following his views set such criteria as the right to participation, appropriation, access, occupation and the use of space in order to evaluate urban projects in line with civilization perspectives.

In the third group of studies, the relationship of civilization to landscape design has been examined. Cranz (1982) in the book, “The Politics of Park Design”, specified four types of urban parks identifiable in American landscape history including: “Pleasure ground” (1850-1900), “Reform Park” (1900-1930), “The Recreation Facilities” (1930-1965), and “Open space System” (1965-?). Each of these urban parks was designed to meet the prevailing social needs of the time and offers many ideas about nature. Lawson (2005) pointed out in the book, “city Bountiful”, that providing a place for people to garden had been an inventive strategy since the 1985s, aiming at improving the urban conditions of the American people. Most notably, the “community gardens” refers to green spaces that are open to anyone at all times, collectively managed by various interest groups in civic society, and in which formal obstacles for immediate participation by the public are absent to low. Numerous articles had been carried out on the effects of the civic virtues of these social gardens. Civic participation in fields related to nature such as civic agriculture, civic ecology, civic environmentalism and democratic ecology has been incorporated that seek to create a sustainable society for future generations using democratic principles. Fig. 1 illustrates the research questions and processes.

Civic society and space

The concept of civic society can be explored through three philosophical, legal, and sociological perspectives. In a general sense, this concept refers to civic and civilization. Citizenship is a way of communicating with others that is different from one’s own benefits and interests, while being personal, shared and public (Ghazi Moradi, 2012). Civic society in the West is identified by four approaches: “Liberal, Collective, Republican and Discursive”. In Iran, “liberal civic society” and “religious civic society” are the most known. The evolution of Iranian civic society discourse corresponds to two important events in the political life of the Islamic Republic: the end of Iran’s eight-year war with Iraq (1988) and the presidential election of (1997) which shifted the civic society from small circles to international political positions. Apart from the structural conditions that occur at the governmental level, at any social level, one can classify “public opinion” and its motivational and consensus factors in the cognitive dimension also, “civic institutions” and “social movements” are classified in the structural dimension of civic society, which are strengthened or weakened according to the structural and political conditions. The “cognitive” (conceptual) dimension of civic society is the mental, dynamic and conducive dimension; the “structural” aspect is a relatively objective and facilitating action of various societies to achieve the common benefits (Ghafouri & Jafari, 2008). The three dimensions of civic society are manifested in different spaces and sometimes with shared aspects.

The question regarding the proportion of civic society to space actually points at how political-social discourse is realized in space. Political and urban-social science studies have identified two areas of “Public sphere and Public space” as two important areas in political-social discourse. The public sphere as an arena of political discourse and political action between government and society (Habermas, 1991) has been increasingly seen in

the form of cyberspace at billions of mobile phones and computers in recent years (Parkinson, 2012, 1). The media (audio, videos and press), in addition to virtual networks in the role of mediators, as “communication models” (Miège, 2010, 91) constitute the public domain where “public opinion” in this domain is organized, presented or conceived. However, this social-political discourse, after using digital tools, occupies, shares, and disputes over the control of physical spaces (Parkinson, 2012). Formation and orientation of “public opinion” is the basis of any socio-political phenomenon in the process of civic activism. What is important in relation to the proportion of public opinion and physical space in a city is its communicative and collective character, which requires communal spaces to be realized. “Cleanness, awareness, ample scope” are the three characteristics of

public opinion that emphasize its communicative quality (Lazar, 2016). Assuming public opinion as a process of communicating with collective characteristics², “interactivity, lack of control, and limitation in the production and distribution of messages” have made social networks more central to directing public opinion than classic media. The orientation of public opinion in social networks takes place in two stages: “virtual networking” and “real-world participation” (Aghaee, Sadeghi & Hadi, 2012, 2). In addition, what emphasizes the need for physical space beside the cyberspace is the second and third pillars of civic society. Social movements, in order to achieve their goals, occupy and reconfigure public spaces in the city, and this is impossible without the production and control of physical space (Mitchell, 1995). Social movements can be described as providing the basis for important developments³. The 1979 revolution

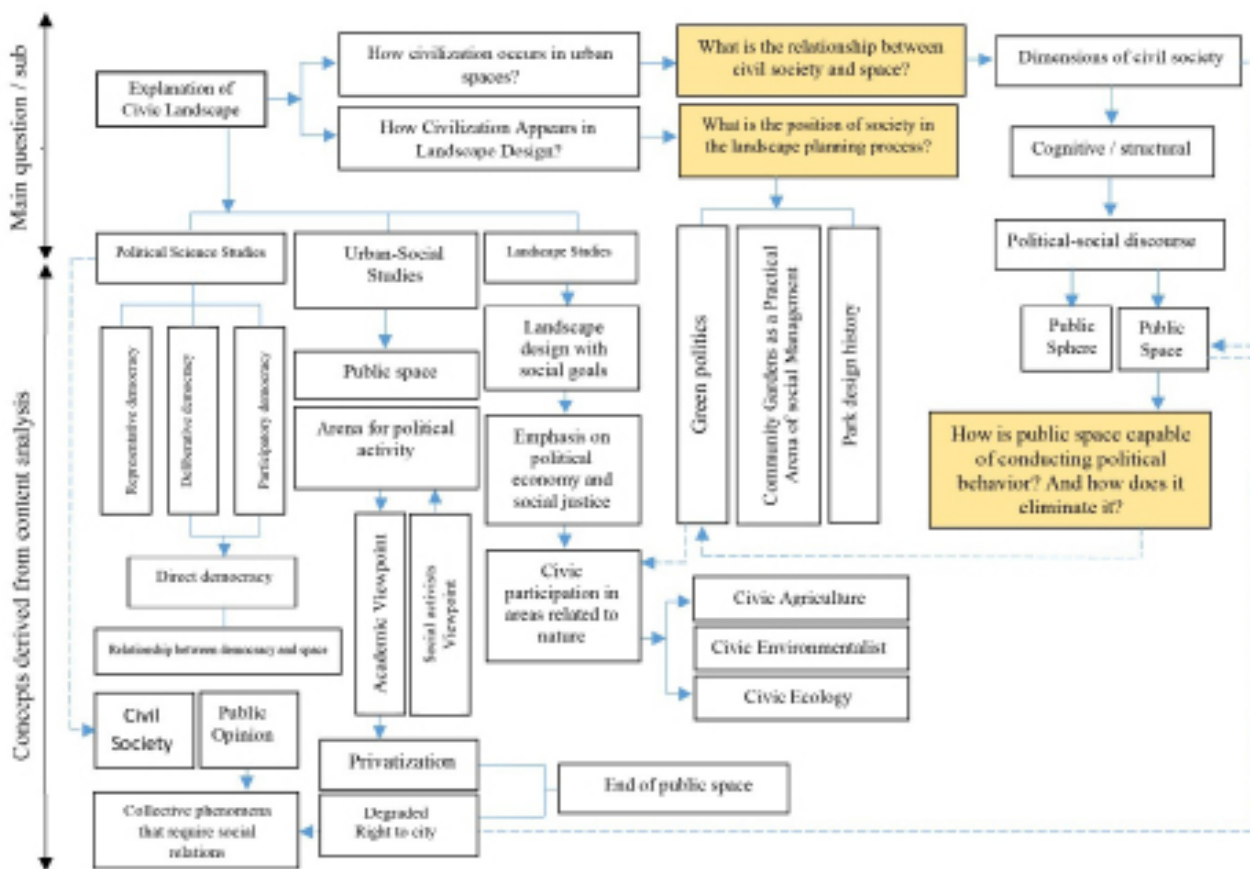


Fig. 1. Main and sub questions/ concepts from literature review. Source: Authors.

in Iran can be described as an example of a long public movement that took place on the streets, and all official, sacred and even private places became a public sphere for political debate, organization, resistance and participation. The conquest of space, its change and adaptation by the general public, is evidence to the extraordinary power of the “placeless movements” to create space with a new and credible revolutionary path (Irazábal, 2008). Public space is the second most important area in the formation of social-political discourse which has the potential to create opportunities or constraints for political actions. How public spaces are defined and controlled in a city is a significant result of the functioning of democracy in that city (Vander Ploeg, 2006). According to the classification of democracies into “socialist, representative and participatory”, civic society has a positive relationship with participatory democracy. Democracy does not necessarily mean civic society, rather civic society is indispensable for democracy (Hariri Akbari, 2001). The public space, as a context for political activity along with the potential for increasing interactions, has limitations. The problem in which public space design policies are close to the ideals of civic society reflects the views of designers and planners.

Public space as political space

At the same time, the public space offers opportunities that include communication channels, a source of commerce and livelihoods, an environment for social interaction and an arena for political activity. It also has the potential to represent the economic, political and cultural health of society as a context for public life (Pugalis, 2009, 281). “Privatization of Public Space” is an approach that deprives people of full access and use of public space to the extent that a group of scholars call it the “death of public space”. Regulation laws to provide security directly or indirectly removes certain groups of people from this space. This action not only damages the immigrant class, children, minorities, homeless people and youths opposed to the ruling culture, but also distorts the true meaning of democracy and the nature of civilization (Vander Ploeg, 2006, 5). From the view point of civilization, “Truly public space” is a political space that encourages immediate interactions and margins the state power and the right to freedom of opinions and expression (Lynch & Dietz, 1991, 20). In this regard, two views of “social activists” and “academic community” in relation to public space and political actions are presented in table 1. These two perspectives on public spaces can be

Table 1. Public space from social activists and the academic community viewpoint. Source: Mitchell, 1995.

Public Space elements	Academic Community Viewpoints	Social Activists Viewpoints
Functional sphere	Open space for fun and entertainment	The occurrence of free interactions
	Controlled and orderly; where a well behaved group will experience a beautiful view of the city.	Lack of operational prohibitions by powerful organizations
User Groups	The public space is planned and safe.	An unrestricted space in which political movements can be organized and extended to wider areas
	Can be used by a good group of people who have access to it.	In essence it is political. It includes political movements as a central function.
Production process	Space users should feel at ease and not be harmed by unwanted political activities or unpleasant scenes of homeless people.	It tolerates the risk of “disorder”.
	Unification and integration of the community; Create perspectives in which each interaction is carefully planned.	Conquer and rebuild by political activists.

conformed to the separation of “Lefebvre” from “Representations of Space” and “Representational Space”. Lefebvre claimed that public spaces are often produced as representations of space, when people use and adapt it to become spaces of representation. The representation space is passively experienced by users, as people modify their spaces and strategically customize it (Lefebvre, 1991). Hence, the origin of any public space defines its position to the public through two completely opposite views: on the one hand, those who seek to regulate this space and, on the other hand, those who seek a place for political activities and immediate interactions (Mitchell, 1995, 130). The death of public space in specialized literature is determined by analyzing the following two concepts:

- Loss of Publicity;
 - Decline in the right to the city (Mitchell, 2003b).
- The concept of “right to the city” has attracted the attention of many urban theorists over the past few decades and has led to the formation of numerous social movements and issuance of legal charters in practice. In Lefebvre’s words, citizen is a term that applies to all residents of the city and provides them with two rights: “the right to space appropriation” and “the right to urban participation” in the city. The right of participation provides urban dwellers the opportunity to be involved in decisions that lead to urban space production. And the right to appropriation also includes the right to access, occupy, and use of space, and to produce new space

that suits people’s needs (Kofman & Lebas, 1996, 23). Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual dimensions of the right to the city. The greater the amount of citizen participation, appropriation and allocation of space in public spaces, the closer we are to the concept of the right to the city. If this concept is ignored by urban decision-makers, experience has shown that, over time, groups that have been excluded from everyday urban life and its spaces have begun to conquer urban spaces in many ways (Friedmann, 1995, 75).

Community Position in the Process of Landscape Design and Production

In the history of landscape architecture, a dialectical interaction has been seen among the three principles of “beauty”, “nature” and “social interests”. Each of these dimensions has gained more power at some points in the history of landscape design than the others. For example, the “Beautiful City Movement” in the first decade of the 20th century emphasized the aesthetic dimension, while the “Community planning model” (CPM) sought to achieve a comprehensive framework aiming at protecting the natural resource systems, in addition to improving the social lives of residents (Mackintosh, 2005). In exploring why the landscape design profession is formed, “social concerns” is one of the most important topics. By the end of the nineteenth century, the profession, following the economic and the social changes, (the industrial revolution with the shift from

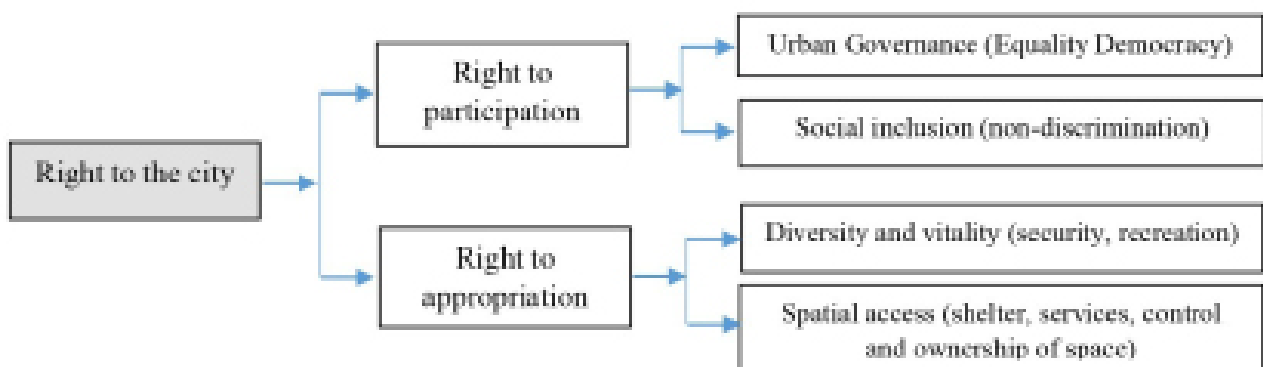


Fig 2. Conceptual dimensions of the right to the city Source: Authors.

agriculture to industrial economics) was being evaluated to improve urban living conditions. What is significant here in the history of landscape design and urban parks is “social concerns”. As the patterns of park formation in the US were generational, each generation of parks presents a set of ideas on how to help the city and society⁴. The situation in Iran is a little different. Much of the urban nature of Iranian cities has been historical gardens, which appear not to have been intended for social or public purposes (Heydar Nattaj & Mansouri, 2009). Design and Formation of Parks in “Qajar” Period were according to Western Park’s Structure (not Content Structure)⁵. Thus, the analysis of the structural reasons for early parks in Iran has been out of the prevailing socio-economic situation of that period.

The purpose of green space planning and design at the contemporary era is to engage natural ecosystems in different aspects of urban life and increase community participation which is a response to the process of decreasing access to green space (“extinction-of-experience”) (McDaniel & Alley, 2005). Parks are known as a source of qualitative (aesthetic) and quantitative (increasing capitation of green space) features. However, a new perspective on urban green spaces beyond its traditional values (recreation and visual resource) is emerging. This viewpoint focuses on how policymakers, planners, and the public approach to green spaces can be a valuable contribution to political and social goals such as “job opportunities”, “public health”, and “social construction”⁶. Practical examples include “community gardens with public access”. In a holistic sense, it can be described as an illustration of the forms of sustainable urban growth that “spring from below” where active participation of citizens plays a key role (Bendt, Barthel, Colding, 2013, 28). “Community gardens” refer to green spaces that are open to anyone at all times, collectively managed by various interest groups in civic society, and in which formal obstacles for

immediate participation by the public are absent to low (Colding, 2011, 101).

The role of civic society in decision -making, planning, designing and implementing the landscape projects can be investigated in a range of functional areas (from small neighborhood parks to environmental protection). The term "Green politics" is a general term used as an umbrella for democratic actions on green space issues. It is claimed that the application of expert knowledge in the process of environmental science planning is necessary, but not sufficient, for environmental decision making (O'Neill, 1993). Green policies are part of the “democratic project”. Attempts to access scientific information and data, in addition to creating practices and forms more open to public policymaking, are examples of environmental group actions (Doherty, 1992). In fact, environmental policies emphasize “grassroots activities” and “bottom-up organizational principles”. The question is how far public involvement (awareness or participation) should be allowed on decisions of environmental issues. Among the movements that have put green democratic thoughts into practice are “civic ecology”⁷ and “civic environmentalism”⁸. Those actions which are based on social activities and community participation improve green infrastructure and ecosystems, human well-being in the city, and human-dominated landscapes. One critical aspect of these actions is the limited scope of participation by a specific group of individuals (Knopman, Susman, & Landy, 1999). “Public participation” is a key element and “social planning”⁹ is a tool for realizing the concepts of these movements.

The concept of civic landscape

According to the study of ideas and concepts that examine the relationship of civic society with space and landscape, key points are categorized; then, to answer the research question of “why and how the concept of civilization is added to the concept of landscape” inspired by the three

dimensions of civic society (public opinion, institutions, movements), we divided “the civic landscape” into three characteristics that are consistent with the principles of civilization in terms of “purpose, structure, and concept”. (Fig. 3) From this perspective, if the “purpose” of civic landscape is the act of civilization, “structure” is social construction, and “meaning” is conceptual concerns and ideals of civic society; then, the civic landscape can be explained as follows and its dimension can be seen in figure 4.

• **Civic landscape as a meaning**

The civic landscape can be expressed as justice in produced spaces because the landscape is a “spatial form” that “social justice” takes (Mitchell, 2008, 17). Landscape, as a context for social relations and as a basis for the further development of these relationships, identifies the spatial scope of social justice. The spatial form of landscape is a product and the process of social relations. There is a real degree of spatial equality, environmental justice, positive (but not destructive) possibilities for cultural differences, and so on. The study of landscape, as a reflection of everyday life, illustrates the reality of world crises, the reality of daily life, and the interruption or destruction of

daily life (Olwig, 2016, 253). What is needed is a concept of landscape that points to ways for any intervention that can create more social justice, and we refer to it as civic landscape. The civic landscape in its semantic dimension is a concept that contributes to the development of the idea of social justice. “The right to access, to participate in urban life, and to enjoy the urban spaces” (Pugalis, 2009, 216) are among the rights that are referred to as social justice.

History does matter; the civic landscape that shows the history illustrates the conceptual roots of landscape formation. The history of the landscape belongs to the people who made it. Everyday history (long-term development decisions, specific struggles with living conditions, and thousands of small and large events in daily life) and unusual events (wars, disasters, major technological innovations, etc.) shape the earth and the potentials of the future. There is also a second form of history. The landscape is a container of memories in both individual and collective forms. This is a site of identity and is intended for identity. It is, in fact, a product of the struggle for meaning, a meaning that is bound to the landscape (Egoz, Jorgensen & Rugerri, 2018, 16).

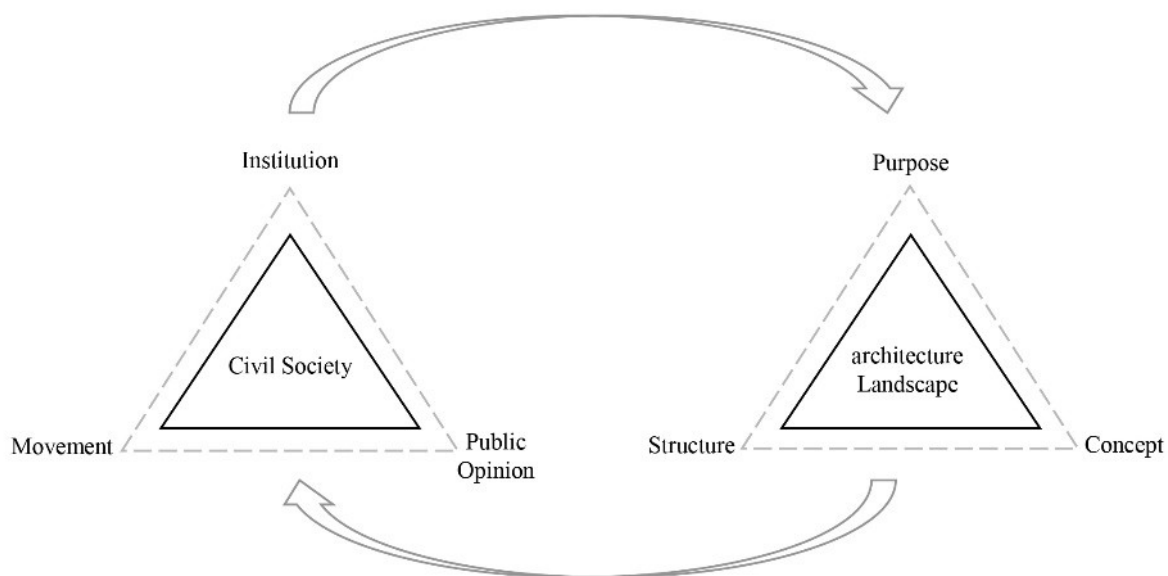


Fig 3. Adapting the dimensions of civic society and civic landscape. Source: Authors.

• **Civic landscape as a structure**

The civic landscape is a social construction. Landscape production, as a social action, is a physical intervention in the environment that is actively taking place, so landscape is “a description of our lives by ourselves unintentionally and unknowingly”. Production relationships are widespread in both broad (social) and narrow (designer) aspects. Experts, the local community, and policymakers are the triple factors in landscape production. The production relationships are influenced by social needs, the context in which the landscape is produced, and the commercialization power. Therefore, landscape production analysis requires the analysis of the production networks and the relationships that support them. Voluntary participation in environmental programs and physical landscape structures

(grassroots movements) are among the most effective social structures in landscape production (Jones & Stenseke 2011).

Landscape is power. It has the power to define the concepts attached to the landscape and to determine the physical structure of the landscape. This power can be measured through myriad of ways and countless locations. Deciding on what and how to investigate, choosing the final plan, approving the land use plan, and granting the licensure all acts of power that are incorporated into the landscape and define the concept of landscape structure. Acceptance, opposition, and resistance to these acts of power by members of society are called social acts, and understanding them requires the psychology of symbols and the language of social power. Therefore, it shows the power of the

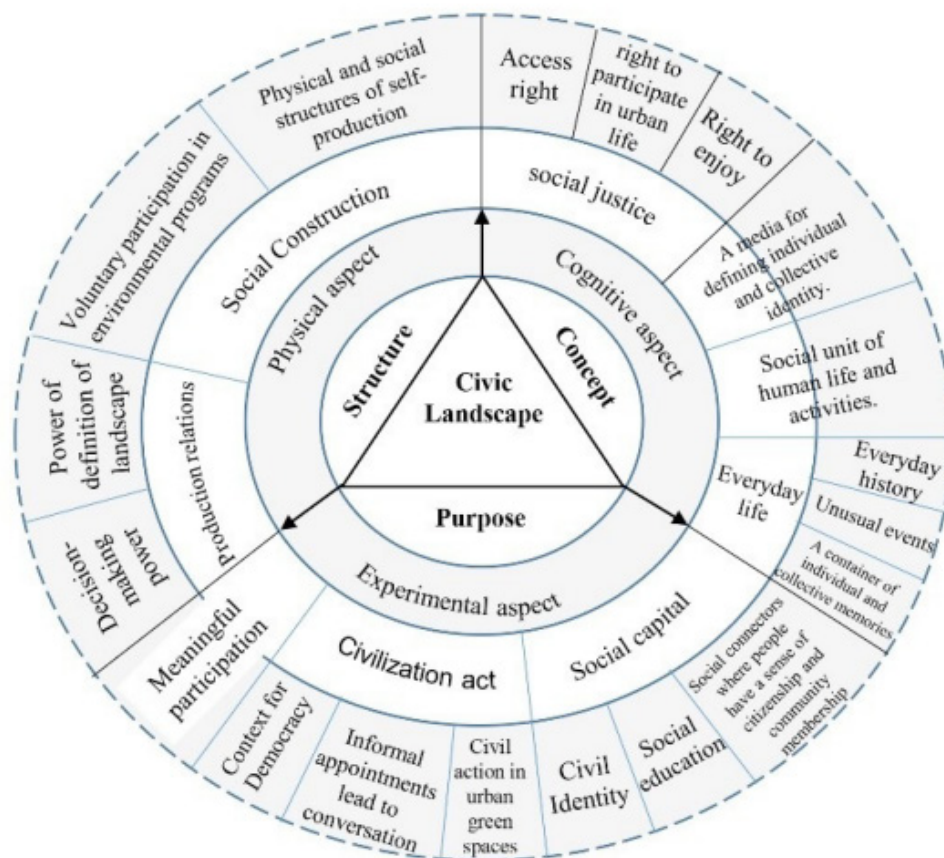


Fig 4. The dimensions of the civic landscape. Source: Authors.

decisive group. To understand the landscape as a power, we need to pay close attention to the process of production relations, which are internalized (Mitchell, 2008, 43-45).

• **Civic landscape as a purpose**

The purpose of civic landscape is to provide a framework for meaningful participation of all social groups. Seeking frequency and quality of actions lead to increased civic actions in urban green spaces. Informal appointments lead to discussion and consultation on local issues and are capable of delivering results (Egoz et al., 2018, 28).

The civic landscape is functional and practical. In addition to its impact on production relationships, it creates the conditions for value realization. Ideologically, landscape is a means to say, “how they live and what they need” (Mitchell, 2008, 35-41).

The civic landscape acts as a social capital which, in addition to providing social education and civic identity, has capabilities in the context of social connectivity where individuals have a sense of citizenship and community membership (Bendt et al., 2013, 19).

Conclusion

The civil sciences are used as an umbrella for various efforts aiming at increasing public participation in the production and use of scientific knowledge. From this point of view, citizens and the general public have a stake in the relationship of science with politics, which can no longer be counted exclusively for science professionals and policymakers. The civic landscape can be explained as the space for the possibility of political experience in the city (interaction of the social and political levels) as well as the space created by social construction. The civic perspective on the cognitive (meaning) dimension reflects the breadth and spatial limitations of social and environmental justice; in addition to being a representation of everyday history, it is the media for defining individual and collective identity. Its physical dimension refers to the extent of social

participation in the relationships of landscape production and environmental programs. Finally, the empirical (objective) aspect of the civic landscape is the act of civilization: strengthening the social capital and creating meaningful participation.

Endnotes

1. In the Western tradition, the city is known as the venue for two completely different types of activities and ethical opportunities. At a glance the city as “Urban” is the center of commerce, market exchange and social individualism. In another view of the city, “Civitas” reveals that the space for active democratic citizenship is legal equality and civil virtue. Thus, the difference between the two terms, urban and civic landscapes, is due to the differences in the political perspective of the concept of civilization.
2. A social construct expressed by different social channels is related to a topic that matters to everyone, including behaviors that are spoken by a large number of people, with the intention of participating, and are powerful enough to be effective in achieving that goal (Lazar, 2016).
3. Contemporary history of Iran has been influenced by the constitutional movement, the nationalization of the oil industry, and the Islamist movement. Each of these sweeping movements has led to the emergence of different political and intellectual currents.
4. Galen Cranz proposed a sustainable park model in her research. She pointed out that environmental problems were becoming one of the biggest social concerns today. It, therefore, introduced a new type of urban park called sustainable park that began to emerge in the 1990s. It focused on social solutions to environmental problems.
5. Bohler’s plans for expansion of Tehran during the “Nasserian” period include three parks, namely Conte de Monte Forte, ZellooltAn, and Amin al-Dowleh, all of which are designed based on the modern Western parks and structurally opposed to the Iranian campus model (Heydar Nattaj & Mansouri, 2009).
6. Social construction is an area of activity that is created to foster or reinforce a sense of community between individuals in a local area (such as a neighborhood) with a shared interest (shared purpose). This concept can be subdivided into social development. A wide range of community-building activities from simple events (such as small book clubs) to large-scale efforts (such as festivals and construction projects where local participants are active rather than external contractors) include “Community gardening” which falls under the category of “social construction” activities.
7. Civic ecology is defined as governance by the people; it refers to direct participation. Actions are guided by understanding natural processes and social relationships within the local and larger environmental context. Among the principles of design, we can mention centrality (face-to-face civic participation), solidarity, justice (in civil rights), seeking tangible status, respect, and accessibility.
8. It is a process of traditional design responses to environmental issues. Civic society actions cannot succeed without the participation and support of government agencies. However, this is basically a bottom-up process, based on the achievement of people’s participation in environmental management. The three forms of environmental policy are rational, populist, and civil, which differ in their view of nature, problem-solving approach, early activities, types of change, and key actors. In civil politics, nature is seen as an opportunity for intervention. Problem-solving approaches are called consultative and citizen participation as key actors.
9. Social planning is the process of identifying the community, its issues and its assets, deciding what they want in the future and how to succeed.

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