Original Research Article

Narrative Review of Pertinent Theories on 'Public Space' in Cities*

Hamideh Abarghouei Fard[1], Seyed Amir Mansouri[2**], Ghasem Motalebi[3]

1.Ph.D. Candidate in Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, University of Tehran, Iran.
2. Associate Professor, School of Architecture,College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran.
3. Associate Professor, School of Architecture,College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran.

Abstract

Problem statement: The problem of space in the public domain of the city extends beyond the simplistic definition used as "opposite of private space". This issue is associated with the socio-spatial structure of urban life and has multiple dimensions formed under the influence of various social, economic, and political dynamics and the agency of city managers, designers, and citizens. Despite the growing concerns about the performance of public spaces in recent decades, there is no consensus among researchers about the different dimensions of "public space". This issue has made it difficult to develop theoretical perspectives and propose practical solutions for this interdisciplinary concept.

Research Objective: This study attempts to shed light on the various dimensions of the concept of "public space" and show the contradictions and theoretical gaps in the existing theoretical literature. By combining and criticizing the views, this study aims at developing a new conceptual model and contributes to theory development and reconceptualization of public space.

Research method: In line with the purpose of the research, a integrative literature review method was used to develop the theoretical foundations of public space. The data was collected by the bibliographic research method and analyzed through content analysis and meta-analysis methods.

Conclusion: The conflicting definitions of public space are tied up with the concerns and interests of multiple stakeholders and influenced by human, contextual, and institutional agencies contributing to human actions. Publicness is a relative, abstract, and dynamic quality and, at the highest level of performance, is the common denominator of the specific characteristics of each space and the response of a multivariate equation, including the role of man, space, city, and time. Public space is a multi-dialectic system, a contested entity with a wide range of meanings and uses. It does not lend itself to a single definition because it is based on the relationships shaped between agencies, over time, and across space. Different manifestations and possibilities are available to different stakeholders, including citizens, designers, specialists, city managers, and power institutions. The substantive and functional dimensions of public space change under the influence of a series of relationships as a chain reaction and butterfly effect. A minor change in metropolitan processes, the context of public space, human actions, or even the transformation of public space in another part of the city can have far-reaching and unexpected consequences for the publicness of the space. The publicness of space should be explained as a holistic value through an adaptable model by considering the set of factors involved in each specific example and realized with larger strategies and long-term processes.

Keywords: *Urban space, Public space, Public sphere, Social space, Content analysis.*

Introduction and Problem Statement

For a variety of political, social, and economic reasons, public spaces are a critical component of urban sustainability (Tonnelat, 2010, 1). They represent the characters and qualities of cities as a whole and signify the social and spatial relationships embedded within them. Though the loss of public space is the demise of the city's concept, it has often been treated as a luxury rather than a necessity (Madanipour, 2010, 3-4). Public space, which is a social and civil necessity, can serve as a political tool to impose or subvert institutional control; or it can play the role of an economic driving factor and set a platform for daily life and the individual and collective experience of urban life. It has always been a strategic location in cities and is used by powerful people and institutions in different ways. Today, due to developments such as the strengthening of the market-based paradigm, the structural intervention of the government in the form of development plans, and the emphasis of the private sector on the return of investment in projects, we are facing a wave of interest in public space as a social and political concern and an issue of academic research.

Part of the future of cities depends on their public spaces, and we should pay attention to cities based on the evolution and transformation of public spaces. The ambiguities of public space as a place, idea, ideal, and contested concept are many and have led to disagreements among different authors (Mitchell, 1996, 128). In such a way that there is no unity in explaining the essential and functional features, the factors involved, and the process of forming the public space, we see a wide, diverse, and sometimes contradictory conceptual scope. Theorizing different conceptual dimensions of public space is a necessary issue to solve many social, economic, and civil problems in the city and to develop other study axes such as pathology and efficiency criteria of public space. Based on this, the current research seeks to clarify the various dimensions of the public space concept in such a way that it includes various factors involved in its formation and answers the following basic questions:

- What conflicts and divergence areas can be revealed through the definition of public space by reviewing the academic literature on the concept of space in the public realm of the city?

What are the existing conflicts and divergence areas in the definition of public space based on pertinent literature on the concept of space in the public realm of the city

- What comprehensive definition can be given for public space that covers its functional dimensions and prevents the mistakes and contradictions of the previous theories? What is the role of different agencies in the formation of the concept of "public space"?

Research method and strategy

Reviewing the literature is a more or less systematic method to examine and integrate previous studies, which helps to provide an overview of interdisciplinary research by integrating different perspectives (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Tranfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003; Snyder, 2019, 333). A semi-systematic or narrative review[1] is an appropriate method to investigate topics that have been conceptualized in different ways in different disciplines (Wong, Greenhalgh, Westhorp, Buckingham & Pawson, 2013; Wong et al., 2013). Because the concept of public space is interdisciplinary, narrative review is an effective method for reviewing the research literature in this field. The main purpose of a narrative review is to challenge the existing theories to re-conceptualize the investigated phenomenon (Frank & Hatak, 2014, 101-102). Based on this, data collection was carried out using do

cumentary and bibliographic methods. To maximize coverage of various theoretical positions about public space, the keyword "public space" was used. A total of 145 articles and books on the subject of public space were selected from reliable databases and published from 1962 to 2022 and analyzed.

• **Data analysis**

The data gathered through a literature review method describes how to conceptualize the phenomenon of public space. The content analysis method was used to analyze the data in a meta-analysis process. The process of organizing data and reporting the emerged patterns

in the content analysis method includes coding, placing codes under sub-themes or potentials, and comparing the coded clusters with each other and the whole data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016, 101; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013, 5; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on this, by usingdeductive reasoning, the collected real and concrete data were transformed into more abstract concepts, and from the relationship between the concepts, a theoretical system was structured around the concept of "public space".

• **The conceptual structure of the review**

According to the research objectives, the main focus of the research in the data collection stage and the main subsets of data analysis include the following:

-Convergence of views and discovery of points of divergence in the definition of public space

-Material characteristics of public space

-Functional dimensions of public space

Theoretical Framework

• **Tensions between perspectives on public space**

The term "public" is a key concept used for interpreting human collective life. In the public realm, citizens develop their deliberative capacities and identities by turning self-concern thoughts into recognized common benefits (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1962; Sennett, 1977). Many scholars consider a causal relationship (Ryan, 1990; Matthews, 1992; Zukin, 1995) between the public realm and the public space and introduce the public space as the material expression and factor of continuity and the development of the public sphere (Castells, 2008, 79). However, the concept of public space has been through a dynamic and variable process in its semantic evolution. Thinkers have defined it differently. Discovering conflicts and points of divergence in the definition of public space may be useful in redefining it.

- **Public vs. private? Disagreements about the duality of public and private space**

In some idealistic definitions, public space has been tied up with historical phenomena such as agoras, or the conflict between public and private space; public space is a free space for the public that is not controlled by private individuals or organizations (Madanipour, 1996, 144). It is different from private space in terms of access rules, source, nature, access control, allowed individual and collective behaviors, and access rules (Low & Smith, 2006, 3-4). Based on this, criteria for measuring the publicness of the space have been defined, including the commonality of criteria such as access, agency, interest, ownership, management, user's use, control, and the existence of attributes such as intersubjectivity, civility, and dynamics (Madanipour, 1999; Kohn, 2004, 9-12; Németh & Schmidt, 2011a; Johnson & Glover, 2013, 193; Varna & Tiesdell, 2010, 678).

In the contemporary era, in contrast to private space, the definition of public space is simple and impractical. The relationship between these two opposite attributes is binary. We are facing a hologram of public and private spaces. Public space is a cluster concept (Kohn, 2004, 9-12), a vast gray area of "social spaces" with different degrees of functionality (ibid., 6), including a range of intersecting and overlapping types (Dovey & Pafka, 2020,234), and is used interchangeably with the term "pseudo-public" (Langstraat & Van Melik, 2013, 1). The public-private distinction is not unitary and malleable and includes a complex family of entities that are neither reducible nor totally disconnected (Weintraub, 1997, 2).

Public space has never been homogenous, and instead of an absolute concept, publicness is a relative quality and has a different meaning in each space (De Magalhães, 2010, 563; Smith & Low, 2006, 3). Publicness originates from individual and collective actions and is framed within a specific context and time and cannot be romanticized or simplified (Karimnia & Haas, 2020, 40).

Current developments indicate there is no clear distinction between public and private space, and the emergence of hybrid spaces is related to public, semi-governmental, semi-private, and private realms (Nissen, 2008, 1129-1130; Gałkowskia & Antosz, 2022). The success of hybrid social spaces in promoting contact with strangers and stimulating public life, which is the product of proper planning by private sector developers, suggests that judging the relevance of public space is a

one-sided, negligent, and prejudiced view (Sennett, 1977; Sorkin, 1992; Mitchell, 1995; Pojani, 2008; Kohn, 2004, 150). Scholars have shown interest in the emergence of new classifications of public space based on the supervisory role of the government and multi-purpose collaborative management between public and private partners (De Magalhães, 2010, 563; Langstraat & Van Malik, 2013, 1; Johnson & Glover, 2013, 19; Blackmar, 2006; Leclercq, Pojani & Van Bueren, 2020, 9). At the same time, the distinctions, clashes, and dynamic balance of the private and public spheres are a function of the rights, meanings, and values governing society and are a basic principle in organizing the space of cities and the social lives of citizens (Madanipour, 2006, 1; Carr, Francis, Rivlin & Stone, 1992, 3 & 22). Space management in today's cities requires determining new functions, meanings, and relationships between private and public realms. It also needs to create a porous and elaborated boundary that protects individual and collective interests and rights (Madanipour, 2003, 211).

- Idealistic or realistic view? Disagreement about the democratic nature of public space

In idealistic definitions, public spaces are places with unrestricted access and serve as a context in which all people can carry out individual and group activities (Carr et al 1992, 50; Jalaladdini & Oktay, 2012, 666; Atkinson, 2003, 1830).On the opposite side, realistic definitions emphasize romanticizing public space because privatization, spatial segregation, and various forms of exclusion in the historical process of its formation have limited free and democratic access for all (Jackson, 1998, 176; Amin, 2008; Francis, 1989; Gholamhosseini, Pojani, Mateo-Babiano, Johnson & Minnery, 2018; Luger & Lees, 2020, 74; Nissen, 2008, 1144-1145; Koch & Latham, 2012, 4). . A clear example of this difference can be seen in different views about Agoras. Those who believe in the ideological importance of public space in democratic societies have defined Agora as a place of citizenship and direct interaction (Hartley, 1992, 29-30; Mitchel, 1995, 116). However, others note that

the Agoras were not fully democratic since women and minorities were excluded (Ruddick, 1996). Paying attention to publicness and spatial practices as an assignable component among people with different ideas and desires questions the absoluteness of publicness (Karimnia, & Haas, 2020, 40). In reality, upstream policies determine where, how, and who or what is considered "public" and/or "political" (Lees, 1998, 232). The question "whose public space?" casts a negative light on the design practice of democratic public space by highlighting different forms of systematic exclusion (Madanipour, 1995& 2010). The democratic meaning of public space contains paradox and abstraction; the public attending the space is historically but carefully selected and homogeneous in composition (Mitchell, 1995, 116). Therefore, the concept of public space is a "profoundly problematic construction." (Marston, 1990). While some might feel that a space full of homeless people is really public, users may alienate themselves from the space due to such a perspective (Németh, 2012, 813). Also, in some cases, exclusionary public space helps urban development by increasing social marginalization ideologically and materially in favor of higher economic classes (Van Deusen, 2002, 154-155).

The concept of public space has become a nostalgic fantasy over time; the concepts of publicness and public are not universal and fixed. They are formed through the continuous conflict between multiple agencies attempting to own "space". Although exercising control over space, such as state ownership, is considered a method to guarantee access and free use (Madanipour, 2003), in many cases, the strategies used to keep order and improve the security of places are discriminatory (Blomley, 2010; Flusty, 2001; Lees, 1998; Raco, 2003). The concepts of revitalization and revival are "highly selective and systematically discriminating" and occur by marginalizing some social groups (MacLeod, 2002, 605; Mehta, 2019, 16; Abarghouei Fard et al, 2022, 18). Nonetheless, the idea of an inclusive and accessible public space can be ideal,

even if the space cannot accommodate all activities and behaviors or be available to individuals from all walks of life (Mehta, 2014, 58).

- Social space or individual leisure space? Ambiguity in the sociality degree of the public space

Some scholars emphasize the social role of public space and argue that "public space is an essential arena that provides opportunities for individuals and communities to develop and enrich their lives" (Thomas, 1991, 222). On the contrary, some argue that the sociality of the public space portrays a fake and exaggerated image. Brill (1989) considers writings related to public space as "literature of loss" and infected with nostalgia and mourning, and claims that a large part of public life has not been lost because it has never happened. Even when public space is fully accessible to everyone, most users isolate themselves from others in time and space to minimize conflict (Mehta, 2014, 54). Active and passive social communication in the public space is the field of " learning of cosmopolitanism' space", education of urbanism, tolerance, social interaction, and unstable social interactions with different people in the process of daily life (Lofland, 1998, 243).

Some believe that the non-social nature of contemporary public spaces is a part of the city's historical transformation process. Public spaces are a mirror reflecting the complexities of urban societies, and with the changes in social bonds between people, they have turned into agglomerations of atomized people (Madanipour, 2010, 1) and are considered a place of private life experience (Kumar & Makarova, 2008). The exaggerated sense of loss caused by dimming the social dimension of public spaces questions the importance of experiencing leisure time in public as well as private spill-over in public spaces (Banerjee, 2001, Johnson & Glover, 2013, 193). The personality differences of people and the way they interact with the environment and others are the reasons for the failure of space socialization theories. The most imaginative attempts to engineer social interaction in space are normatively ambivalent;

some people may seek to create solidarity with others and the city, while other people may not (Amin, 2008, 7).

- Ambivalent metamorphosis or decline? Disagreements about the evolution and future of public space

The decline of life and public space in the contemporary era has been discussed under various metaphorical titles, such as " Fall of Public Man" (Sennet, 2017), " Bowling Alone" (Putnam, 2000), "Alone Together" (Amato, Booth, Johnson & Rogers, 2009), "The End of Public Space" (Sorkin, 1992) and "The Rise of Fortress Cities" (Christopherson, 1994; Low, 1997). A group of scholars claims that changes in public space are being made by creating new forms of space, such as virtual space, and emphasizing private spaces rather than public gathering spaces (Hatuka, 2020, 364). They maintain that the realm of public space is removed from social life when private life is chosen consciously by contemporary man and commonalities under the headings of "autonomy-withdrawal syndrome" and "agoraphobia" are ignored. Another group believes that the new public spaces are being dissociated from the discourses of democratization, citizenship, and self-development, and are connected to consumption, commerce, and social surveillance. Such places represent " publicness without democracy" (Madden, 2010, 187).

This assumption that public space is in decline comes from a limited theoretical perspective that criticizes the changes of a limited number of public spaces by ignoring different types of space. This perception originates in extremely narrow and normative definitions of both "public" and "space" (Crawford, 2021, 26). In a critical review, Carmona (2010b) uses different arguments, such as changes in society and space, different purposes of using space, and even the improvement of space due to changes, to explain why the recent developments in public spaces are not necessarily negative (Carmona, 2010b, 160-164). Not all theories support the possible end of

public space. The contemporary public sphere is a different kind of place, created through new forms of governance, capital flows, and technology (Low, 2009, 1640-1641). In contemporary societies, many public functions have been transferred to private, virtual, and constitutional territories and spaces (Brill, 1989; Rybczynski, 1993; Banerjee, 2001; Castells, 2000).

Public space is growing rather than shrinking. People are increasingly using various public spaces without paying attention to ownership or management systems (Worpole & Knox, 2007). People not only passively utilize space, but they also implement performative codes, implicitly monitoring public space appropriations in a self-regulating process (Van Oostrum, 2022). As a result of recent geopolitical changes and the global rise of movements, both autocratic and liberal-democratic public spaces are being revived (Luger & Lees, 2020, 74; Smith & Low, 2021, 54). Public space is constantly expanding. Changes such as the emergence of hybrid spaces, cutting-edge technologies, and the evolution of use create new opportunities for the production, improvement, evolution, or expansion of public space (Mehta & Palazzo, 2020, 513).

From the clashes of viewpoints on problematic public space, it can be concluded that there are two absolutist approaches (partialist, idealistic, nostalgic) and relativistic (holistic, realistic), which are the roots of the formation of different and contradictory definitions of "public space". Most absolutist views have considered public space as a fixed concept and independent of variables such as the profile of audiences and background forces. In the relativist view of public space as a legal institution, political theory, and material space, it is produced from the dialectic between public and private interests; exclusivity and inclusiveness; leisure and social and civic action; order and disorder; rationalism, and idealistic feelings. Therefore, public space has a contradictory nature and a multi-functional structure. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the substantive and functional characteristics of public space as points

of divergence in definitions to arrive at an accurate and comprehensive definition (Table 1).

Nature of Public Space
• Claiming space and its contested nature
Public space as a specific concept is a historical product formed by the distinction between the representative state, civil society, and the market (Habermas, 1991), and the space used by people is perceived as a whole, which is regulated and managed by the state (Madanipour, 2003, 98 & 204). Public space is a hybrid and contradictory concept of space (Mitchell, 2005, 137). It has a contested nature influenced by the complex socio-economic and political context (Carmona, 2014b, 4). It is a place to launch moral disputes and social values and is the result of social negotiation and competition, as well as multifaceted forces beyond individual or group formation.

Public space is often treated as problem space in which institutions and citizens make claims to get recognition (Goheen, 1998, 479). Public space is a medium and a catalyst through which many actors contribute to the production of publicness. It is the place of complex interactions between several stakeholders (Zamanifard, Alizadeh & Bosman, 2018, 1), and a repository of collective memories generating cultural and, at the same time, dialogical and dialectical practices (Kirby, 2008, 78-79). The dispute about public space means the difference between the ways of conceptualizing public space by the members of society. This phrase reflects clear ideological positions that relate to one of the two poles [people and managers] (Mitchell, 1995, 127).

Public spaces are known as environments with multiple stakeholders (Majidi, Mansouri, Sabernejad & Barati, 2019, 54). In the operational arena of municipalities, citizens, consumers, and developers are involved in a continuous struggle to define and control space (Kohn, 2004, 11). Planners pay attention to the maximum return on investment and spatial potential, and designers pay attention to aesthetic and practical issues (Carmona, 2014b, 21). Citizens look

Table 1. the problematic construction of the public space where opposing views clash. Source: Authors.

Public space problems	Absolutist approach	Relativistic approach
Binary public space and private space	The definition of public space as opposed to private space based on criteria such as ownership and access	- The emergence of hybrid and quasi-public spaces and the success of some of them - The dynamic, malleable, and non-confrontational difference between private and public space - The existence of a spectrum and a gray area from the most private to the most public - Conceptualization of space publicness as a relative and cluster concept
Scope of inclusivity and democratic character	Equality in unrestricted access for all Consecration of spaces such as agoras	- Failure to support all activities, people, and different behaviors of spatial segregation and different forms of exclusion and discrimination - Privatization and the formation of exclusionary spaces Abstract, non-absolute and contradictory nature of space publicness
Sociality degree of public space	The positive influence of public space on the development of social life Public space as a place of cosmopolitan learning, tolerance, recognition, and unstable social interactions	- Experiencing leisure time in public and the overflow of private life in public space - The importance of personality differences of people, how they interact with the environment - Attention to being social as a choice and possibility
Howness of the developments and the future of public space	The negativity of developments and deterioration of public space as a result of privatization and conscious choice of modern man The formation of publicness without democracy as a result of the connection between space and consumption, commerce, and social control	- Changing the shape and adaptation of the public space to the change of society, context, and... - The emergence of new forms of public space such as private, virtual, and constitutional space - Evolution, increase, and expansion of public space with a global increase of movements and updating of technologies

at public space as a place to display their collective rights, shows, and expressions and attribute the social and political values that are agreed upon and disputed to the public space (Goheen, 1994, 430-431). On the other hand, different groups of stakeholders are not unified in their entirety because they come from different social strata and there are many individual differences in such strata (Madanipour, 2010, 9).

Different claims, uses, and purposes associated with public space contribute to its formation and give it new meanings and dimensions. For this reason, the nature of the contested public space is regarded as hybrid and sometimes contradictory; the lack of consensus among the main beneficiaries has made competition for space intensive and enhanced the dialectic among the influential components, and has resulted in monopolizing and privatizing space, even claiming space.

• **Dynamic and alternating nature**

The city is a container of many "publics" and various actors who identify themselves with the public space (Mehta & Palazzo, 2020, 333). Given that there are different levels of publicness, public space is the place where power and collective actions are shaped and its being is constantly changing (Karimnia, & Haas, 2020, 38). Public space represents the socio-political dynamics of a particular time and place (Hatuka, 2020, 358). Accordingly, "in-between" publicness (Aelbrecht, 2016) and public space are dynamic concepts that change our perceptions of agreed-upon meanings through ever-changing meanings and moments of revision (Hatuka, 2010).

Regardless of the origin of public space, its status as "public" is formed by the constant opposition of two groups' views on the value of space; those who are looking for order, control, and the show of daily life; and those who are looking for political activity and unmediated interactions (Fraser, 1990; Mitchell, 1995, 115; Michell, 2006, 87-97). Public space is the space of participation and declaration of collective and common interests, and at the same time, the formation of differences between different groups (Mehta, 2014, 58). Public space reflects the socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions of the city or country within a specific context. Based on the characteristics of the context, it may be a symbol of democratic values or the

power of governments controlling people (Pojani & Maci, 2015). This space is a common and often amorphous arena that endures over time, adapts, and creates a sense of community and place (Kullmann, 2020, 57). The formation of an effective public realm based on the sustainability of cities is achieved only by understanding the completely open, porous, and dynamic nature of public spaces (Haas & Mehaffy, 2018).

Power institutions and different people, through their physical and institutional changes, either in softer or temporary forms, influence the dynamic nature of public space to create safety in the space. Even most public spaces have different flavors and characteristics that do not lend themselves to a fixed identity in a certain part of society. Public spaces are formed not only by claiming but also by withdrawing from the public realm (Madanipour, 2010, 237-238). Society is both diverse and changing; On this basis, the public space also changes to reflect this issue (Carmona, 2010b, 172). Public space is more than a common commodity to be described by physical features; it is also related to time, and its meaning, role, and activity are defined with time (Mehta & Palazzo, 2020, 333).

Public space is an experience created under the influence of several factors, including historical trends and norms; different modes of governance; laws and regulations; cultural traditions; political priorities; and the balance between political forces and the market. Even though space structure remains constant in the design and development processes, the pattern of use, nature, and meaning of public space for the urban population changes (Madanipour, 2010, 239). The nature of public space, affected by different demands and goals of the stakeholders, evolves over time and shapes based on changes in the conditions and characteristics of the context, which are the source of the formation and transformation of the use patterns and cultural characteristics of society. Different users' needs result in different definitions and perceptions of public space. That might explain why the public space has a bipolar nature and is an intermitting being that can be placed between publicness and exclusivity and inclusiveness and cannot fit into a fixed pattern.

- **Meaningful, symbolic, and expressive nature**

Public spaces where social, cultural, and political narratives are displayed and commemorated serve as a reminder of the power of a group (Hatuka 2012). The use of public space is a cultural practice that simultaneously reflects and shapes mundane ways in which our collective culture is changing (Rishbeth, 2020, 32). This issue shifts the discussion of public space from an object to a physical-social process of the built environment and a process of changing meanings as a socio-spatial chain of actions (Hatuka, 2010). The publicness of the space is a function of the lack of control of the individual or a small group and the collective use of the space for diverse and symbolic purposes (Madanipour, 2003). Public spaces have always had a symbolic collective value for citizens since they play a role in ceremonies and festivals as well as protests and conflicts (Madanipour, 2006, 187). Public space has symbolic importance and contains collective values. Citizens create meaningful public spaces by using space for their purposes. As a result, the space becomes a public resource containing dynamic and negotiable meanings (Goheen, 1998, 479).

Amin (2008) believes that the link between public space and public culture should be traced to the overall dynamics (human and non-human) of a public place. The collective motives and impulses of public space are the result of the precognitive response of the human being to "situated multiplicity" and the gathering of masses, uses, and needs in a common physical space. The expressiveness and meaningfulness of public space is a dynamic quality that originates from its two essential characteristics, especially "variability," and multiple meanings can be interpreted based on the diverse purposes of users. The continuity of some events and uses gives the space a constant dimension of expression, such as political meaning, throughout the history of a city. However, in general, the formation of the symbolic meaning of the public space follows a non-linear and evolving process.

Multifunctionality of Public Space

Public space has a multi-functional structure that is not limited to the choreography stage of mundane life. Throughout history, public spaces have functioned as integrated nodes to respond to various instrumental (individual) and expressive (collective) needs. Today,

public spaces are considered places for individual and community growth in political, social, and cultural fields; individual and group expression; dialogue and controversy; spending leisure time; gatherings; festivals; protests and demonstrations; economic provision; and information exchange (Mehta & Palazzo, 2020, 2; Madanipour, 2010, 10; Meta, 2014, 55; Hou, 2010, 2; Barati, Heidari, & Sattarzad Fathi, 2018, 14).

"Public" is perceived by defining the public space based on ownership and public use (Blackmar, 2006; Blomley, 2005, 283-284; Staeheli, 1996, 602), and by its role in the formation and strengthening of social and political affairs shared by its members (Mitchell, 1995, 116; Kirby, 2008, 77). The concept of "public" in political theory is related to citizenship, the public realm, democracy, and civil society. In social theory, it is related to conviviality, life, social contact, and a sense of community (Banerjee, 2020, 500). According to Neal and Arum (2009), the function of public space is to: facilitate civil order and develop social relations; serve as a place for power and resistance by questioning the role of political tendencies; and serve as a stage for display and performance, focusing on the symbolic and social aspects of public space (Neal, 2009, 10 & 208-209).

Public space takes a journey from insight to reality and is developing and changing like a chronology from the moment of formation. Usually, the public space starts as a show with a wide range of uses, but over time it is dedicated to other activities (Carmona, 2010, 171; Lefebvre 1991, 39). According to its dynamic and multiple nature, public space cannot be separated into purely social, absolutely political, and exclusively personal and leisure spaces, and it has a guiding function in the social and political dimensions of urban life. Depending on the circumstances, it may strengthen or limit social and political events.

• **Nature and social function of public space**

The social quality of public spaces is formed under the influence of powerful processes of interaction and human actions, through which all groups of society meet each other and present a mixed concept of the public. Public space is not just shaped by society but responds to it and affects the deepest structures of society. Every public space is a spatial reflection of the social and political order specific to a particular society that it serves (Sucker, 2010; Abarghouei Fard & Mansouri, 2021, 20-21). As a material form of the public realm and a place for citizens' interaction, it has a causal effect on social life (Goodsell, 2003, 363; Soja, 2003; Soja, 1980, 211). People from different backgrounds come together and interact with each other by being in the social situation of public spaces (Lofland, 1998; Sennett, 1978; Watson, 2006; Rishbeth, 2020, 32). Public space facilitates civil order, man's understanding of his position in the world, and society's expectation of his interactions and performance "in public"(Neal, 2009, 4-5 & 201). Different degrees of social relations between people in the public space have been the focus of some researchers (Gehl, 2011; Lofland, 1998; Spierings, Van Melik & Van Aalst, 2016; Mehta, 2019, 2; Stone, 1954; Abarghouei Fard et al., 2019, 24) and include a diverse range of experiences, including;

-Social marginalization: the lowest level of the social function of the public space is social marginalization, which is defined as limiting contact and mutual understanding to make living with others bearable, and it is the factor influencing the lived experience of the urban space in the processes of group formation and identity formation (Iveson, 1998, 30; Kohn, 2004, 158).

-Passive sociability: by defining the public space as a scene of common life and the simultaneous presence of strangers, sociability has a passive meaning. In this situation, the public space provides the possibility of encountering different people, the enjoyable experience of being alone in a group without direct social interaction, and localization through common humanity with strangers (Mitchell, 2003, 131; Mehta, 2019, 25; Carr et al., 1992, 3; Walzer, 1986, 470; Rishbeth, 2020, 32-33).

-Inattention and social tolerance: According to the rule of "civil inattention," public space is the realm of ambiguous interaction between unknown people and plays an important role in the integration, social tolerance, and joint presence of diverse groups. Public space is the clearest expression of the tension between

the physical proximity and the moral distance of citizens, and in the context of social communication, this means shoulder-to-shoulder and unstable communication with strangers (Tonnelat, 2010, 5; Madanipour, 2003; Bodnar, 2015, 2; Lofland, 1998, 243).

-Social spectacle: As a necessary neutral stage in the ongoing drama of social life, public space provides citizens with opportunities to see and be seen; to be noticed and recognized while conducting public affairs. It helps unique identities to be expressed; people and institutions to be understood; stories to be discovered and the nature of specific and sometimes collective identities to be articulated (Mensch, 2007, 31; Paay & Kjeldskov, 2008, 122; Cezar, 2020, 137; Madanipour, 2003, 110; Neal, 2009, 5; Orum & Neal, 2009, 210-211).

-Social and civil integration: the iconography of public space, from space design to usage routines, is a kind of symbolic and continuous expression of cultural currents and states, which by mixing public space with meanings, removing barriers to communication, challenging stereotypes, and routinizing daily life and ephemeral encounters, help to form civil relations, empathy, and civil integration in communities (Amin, 2008, 13; Corcoran, 2012, 8-9; Vertovec, 2007, 4).

- Fleeting social encounters: public space is considered a suitable platform for participation, discussion, free mixing of strangers, and transient sociability. By facilitating unplanned and spontaneous contact between strangers and acquaintances while forming civil responsibility through negotiating differences and accepting diverse attitudes and beliefs, the individual and anonymous subject becomes a social subject(Mehta, 2019, 27; Mehta, 2014, 56; Amin, 2015, 241; Kohn, 2004, 9).

- Sustainable social interaction: with the continuation of social functions such as daily interactions, gatherings, and festivals, the public space is upgraded to a place of sociability and realization of society. Public space is an important aspect of urban culture and an arena for the formation of collective voices and common interests, and it will lead to civilized virtues such as democracy, good citizenship, civic responsibility, and the social

contract by strengthening social capital and empathy (Johnson & Glover, 2013, 190; Inroy, 2000; Glasze 2001, 163; Hou, 2010, 2; Aescheacher & Rios, 1995; Kohn, 2004, 159 & 148; Banerjee, 2001, 10; Mehta, 2014, 58).

- Social cognition: "Knowing" other people is in a continuous relationship with knowing one's inner self and seeing oneself through the eyes of others. Being in the common world of public spaces with spatial experience enables the process of othering, assigning roles to "insiders" and "outsiders," drawing identity marginalization, and intergroup communication of social cognition. In addition to strengthening sociability and a feeling of community, public space makes it possible to meet and empathize with others, communicate with the surrounding world, and imagine oneself and others as citizens (Gehl, 2011, 21; Kohn, 2004, 156-159; Ruddick, 1996, 146; Ruddick, 2021, 81).

 - A shared experience of place: Public space in its most social form is a space that is commonly experienced but can be understood through the lens of behaviors, intentions, and individual experiences, which are shaped through a sense of place. This leads to meaningful intersubjective communication and makes the common experience of the space, which belongs to the "public" or all people, come true as one "whole". The formation of a sense of place, a sense of belonging to the community and space, stable social relations, social capital, civil participation, identification, and common and collective ownership of space are symbolic results of this issue (Relf, 1976: 36; Ramlee, Omar, Yunus & Samadi, 2015, 363; Mehta, 2014, 59& 2019, 29-31; Hester 1984; Oldenburg 1989; Madden, 2010, 190; Kohn, 2004, 11; Mansouri & Atashinbar, 2013, 16).

• **Political performance of public space**

  Democracy is a spatial practice. Some associate the current crisis of democracy with the lack of space to accommodate social complexity and cultural pluralism (Melucci & Avritzer, 2000, 507). Public spaces are the scene of organized or spontaneous political struggles of citizens and provide a stage for the silent people to be seen, heard, and recognized. Accordingly, public spaces

are public as long as they are not "mapped" or imposed by independent powers but are "used" and "instituted" by civic practice and social actions (Balibar, 2009, 201). The transformation of empty space into politicized space delegates the right to the space to the people, and the formation of civic and political activities is one of the necessary criteria for democratic public space (Tonnelet, 2010, 1; Koch & Latham, 2012, 3-4; Lee, 2009, 33).

There is a conflict about the degree of publicness of a space in terms of the right of presence and political activity (Mitchell, 2003, 132), and the political performance of the public space includes different levels of civic actions, including;

- Public access and use: the most basic political use of public space is accessibility and equal physical and psychological benefits for all members of society and the public, regardless of differences, so that people from different ideologies, cultures, and positions can meet and talk (Madanipour, 2010, 242; Joseph, 1998; Berman, 1986, 484; Barati & Khadami, 2017, 20).

- Unbiased narration of opposing views: In the absence of substantive content and with the possibility of identifying liberated discourse far from consensus, public space significantly contributes to the democratization of the public realm, spatial imagination, and political orientation far from coercion. The public space in this sentient and summoning role is a place for relative disorder and acceptance of differences in the form of a microcosm of a more perfect social order (Ruddick, 1996, 134-135; Deutsche, 1996; Amin, 2015, 254-255; Kohn, 2004, 156).

- Inclusion and creation of civil order: By including a wide range of urban lives, inclusive public space makes the negotiation of contradictions possible and facilitates the narration of different ways of observing and interpreting the world, and by strengthening the public tendency, it prevents the balkanized public. In this way, public space is a collection of opposites reflecting and facilitating civic order and the common good, which helps to strengthen the collective identity and society by forming strength and resistance, collective actions, and civilized methods of conflict (Mitchell, 1995, 124;

Sennett, 1970; Mensch, 2007, 44; Orum, 2009, 81-82; Madanipour, 2010, 238; Varna & Tiesdell, 2010).

- Spatial arena for competition and contention: public space is the arena of struggle and contention between society and power about the right to the city. The symbolic transformation of a space in terms of meaning and function empowers marginal groups and contributes to the formation of a sense of citizenship. This evolution provides the opportunity for the competition of subcultures, structures, and social institutions to find spatial identity and control of material resources, and the symbolic messages of the power of the people or the government are transmitted (Mitchell, 1996, 130-131; Mitchell, 2003, 81-82; Staeheli & Mitchell, 2007, 809; Carmona, 2010b, 158; Low, 2016, 75; Carr et al., 1992, 25; Mitchell, 2017, 13).

-Manifestation of power relations: public space is an active media[1] representing the goals, needs, and identity of groups. It is a stage for displaying political life, power relations in society, and the conflict of emerging identities. Public space is the product of the competition of ideologies about ordering, controlling, and liberating components of space; an important site for participation in social order and phenomenal space; transfer; and forgery of identities and meanings at the symbolic level (Mitchell, 2003; Ruddick, 1996, 135; Van Deusen, 2002, 157; Hou, 2020, 339&342; Neal, 2009, 5).

- Civil integration and political actions: with the blurring of the boundaries between members of the public, the public space becomes a space of community and integration in symbolic places and a platform for agonistic competitions between actors with common or different values. In this role, public space is the manifestation of a temporary political society with adaptability and spontaneity, in a potentially subversive and conspiratorial form, which increases the power of the public and transforms the anonymous subject into a deliberative citizen who is a political claimant by enabling political demonstrations (Faster, 1990; Bodnar, 2015, 5; Mitchell, 1995, 115; Amin, 2015, 241; Hou, 2020, 338-339).

-Realization of civil society and democracy: Public space is an important ideological position in democratic

societies; it is the factor in resolving differences of opinion; the place of realization of civil society; the achievement of common and collective interests; and the realization of ideals such as freedom and a good city. At a higher level, public space creates civic identity in the dissolution of the individual place in the collective milieu. It is a tool for gathering residents, users, managers, and elected officials to make decisions about regulating institutional relationships and defining criteria for measuring other spaces and processes (Amin, 2006, 1021; Neal, 2009, 4; Kohn, 2004, 6; Mitchell, 1996, 116; Tonnelat, 2010, 8; Young, 1990, 240; Koch & Latham, 2011, 4; Harvey, 2013, i Rubió, 2021, 371).

From a general perspective, the social function of public space is linked with the civil rights of citizens in such a way that struggle, deprivation, representation, and justice can be explained in relation to the dual use of public space. The political nature of public space fuels its inherent social dynamics and is the potential result of spatial benefit or deprivation. Being a human being in space, with the actualization of collective concerns and the acquisition of political skills, is the axis of the formation of the social and political performance of the public space, which has been redefined by Berman (1986) based on Marx's interpretation of " an egoistical individual" and "communal being" or "a man and a citizen." (Berman, 1986, 476; Hatuka, 2022). In this definition, the relationship between the social and political performance of the public space is interconnected and can be changed and transformed by changing the role of the users of the space (Fig. 1).

Discussion

Underlining the contradictions in defining the interdisciplinary concept of public space and its substantive and functional features, we can conclude that public space is an evasive and ever-changing concept. This can be concluded by the contradictions in defining this interdisciplinary concept and the growing literature on its substantive and functional features. Despite the attraction and historical importance of public space for people, it is difficult to have a clear-cut definition of space since there is no agreement among experts, and power institutions also contribute to this problem. The philosophical roots of this lie in the dynamic interaction between humans and other people as well as humans and space, which is influenced by time. A series of contextual features (e.g., historical, cultural, and social) and macroeconomic and political forces influence this
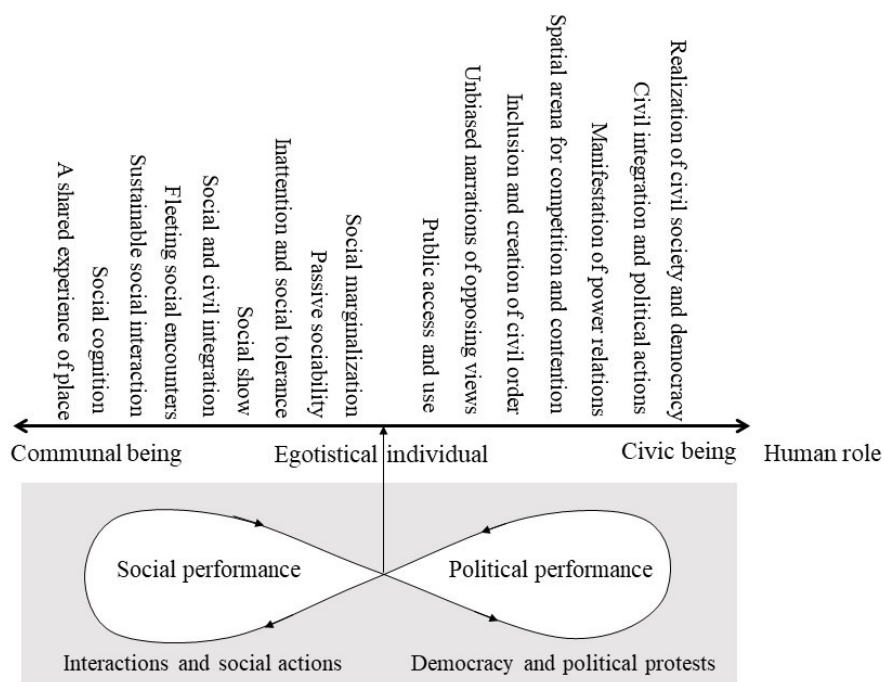

Fig. 1. Intertwined multifunctional structure of public space. Source: Authors.

issue through the evolution of restrictive and compelling structures of social and civil action. As a result, citizens are limited to a certain level of communication with their space and others. They may interact with the public space in different ways, sometimes as passive observers and sometimes as active actors.

The theoretical literature on the city domain has focused on various functions of the public space such as the formation of social interactions, political actions, and the realization of civility and democracy. The political role of public space is often defined in relation to "public" through coping with individual differences and distinctions and equal rights in accessing and using the space, and at the higher level, it combines and encourages homogeneity while weakening identity plurality - comes to the fore in the form of a political or civil totality contributing to political gatherings in the context of space. On the other hand, the social role of the public space becomes meaningful with the realization of "society" and "community"; "Society" with a pluralistic quality and based on diversity at the same time as a general consensus, is the foundation of fleeting and unstable social interactions, and "community" on a smaller scale and in the form of groups consisting of members with similar interests and individual characteristics, enables a continuous flow of social interactions.

Therefore, in tension between binary qualities such as "being political" and "being social," public space has an intermediate and mutable function and can be reduced to one of the attributes attached to it—for example, the term "public" is the opposite of "private" or "always a democratic and social space." It is not the result of absolutist views and is infected with nostalgia and idealism. Public space can be considered as a full-length mirror of urban society with all its various complexities, which reflects the human self in his specific living space or the self in relation to the other and others in a shared ecosystem. Such a reflection depends on the position of users, the characteristics of the context, and the influence of public and external factors and flows.

Adopting a neutral point of view considers public

space as a relative, dynamic entity happening at the moment and defines the contribution of humans as the main users of the space to its nature and function. "Self priority" is a basic principle in the modern life of today's humans. "Recognition of others" affects the process of forming public space through public agreement (the basis of the concept of the public) and the increase of plurality and multiplicity or unity (the basis of the concepts of society and community). Based on Fig. 2, the function and nature (inner and outer ring) of public space are also influenced by the profiles of users in the context of the public space, community, or society (middle ring), whether he/she is a "self-centered person," "civic activist," or "social being."

-Individual use of the space to spend leisure time and experience the space in a personal way can bring along the enhancement of the leisure function of the public space and its daily experience.

-Group use of the space as a member of the "public" and the formation of specific political demands and democratic goals determine the political nature and function of public space.

-By using space as a member of a "society" or "community", the nature of social space and its function will be the formation of transient or continuous social interactions[3].

Public space at the highest level of political and social performance contributes to the realization of democracy and civil society, the experience of intersubjective communication, and the common meaning of the place. For this reason, it has a symbolic and meaningful nature and indicates ownership, identity, and collective valuation at a certain point in the city. The functions of public space can be separated from each other in the form of semantic clusters. However, it is worth mentioning that due to the dynamic and multiple-sided nature of space, cities, and urban society, their functions are continuously changing. The aforementioned functions cannot be fixed because of the transformation of human, spatial, and temporal dimensions of public space. As a person in his personal experience and leisure from space, as a member of

the public and society, he is still experiencing social and civil in a weak way; the simultaneous presence of different people, seeing and being seen as the lowest level of social performance of space and equality of citizens in the presence, access and use of space by all as the lowest level of civic performance, is also meaningful in individual and leisure experience. Social marginalization, as a negative form of being social, provides an opportunity for the development of the city by monopolizing space. It enhances intra-group interactions of the members of a particular community, which is not necessarily considered a negative issue in recent literature.

Based on this, three main agencies affect the function and nature of public space as determining forces;

-The human positions in relation to space formation, including different users, their relationships with each other, and their different claims to space, affect their definition and expectations of public space. Criticisms related to space socialization theories show that different people may be looking for communication with others or an individual and private experience of space in the public domain of the city based on their background, personality traits, lived experiences, perceptions, and knowledge of space.

-Public space experiences changes in the social and political dimensions of its function and nature over time, based on the context. Specific historical, cultural, and social features of the context as forces caused by internal origin affect human actions in space; a potential political space may be merely a passive platform for individual experience under normal circumstances. Similarly, a public space with a strong social function may be valued by the members of the community as common property, but it is not necessarily used in a group by all the members of the society under any circumstances (Fig. 2).

Macro agencies such as power institutions, urban management, the market, government, etc., act as forces caused by an external origin, such as limiting, directing, and controlling factors of human social and civic action. The origin of these agencies may be economic and political goals and considerations at the level of the

city or even the country. In some cases, we witness the conflict between the institutional powers and the people in their efforts to possess, control, and use space.

The publicness of space is a multi-dialectical issue, and the contested, dynamic, and symbolic nature of public space is a reflection of different urban flows and the needs and intentions of stakeholders. In such a situation, depending on the intentions of the institutions in power, the capabilities of the context, and the demands of the human subject in relation to the space, the public space sometimes appears as a neutral stage for the possibility of the joint presence of different members of society, and sometimes as a constructive component for the formation of civil demands and social actions. In this view, the public space, beyond a fixed container for human presence in the city, will be formed as a container affected by the power display and coercion of the three poles of people, context, and institutions. In this way, the multi-functional structure of public space in political, social, and leisure positions is derived from and strengthens the multiple and multi-dialectic nature of public space. Awareness of the different conceptual dimensions of public space depends on a deeper understanding of the role and ratio of the aforementioned different agencies in the formation of a person's relationship with the space in the public domain.

Conclusion

The conflicting views on the definition of public space are the result of the diverse range of stakeholders and the diversity of goals, views, and characteristics of each of the human, contextual, and institutional agencies involved in the formation of human action. The ever-evolving nature of public space as the common denominator of all its specific features turns the amount and quality of publicness into a multivariable equation whose most important variables are humans, space, the city, and time. Based on this, the public space of a multi-dialectical system is a contented entity with a wide range of meaning and function, which is introduced as a result of multiple permutations of the human subject, unstable and elusive from a single definition. Based on
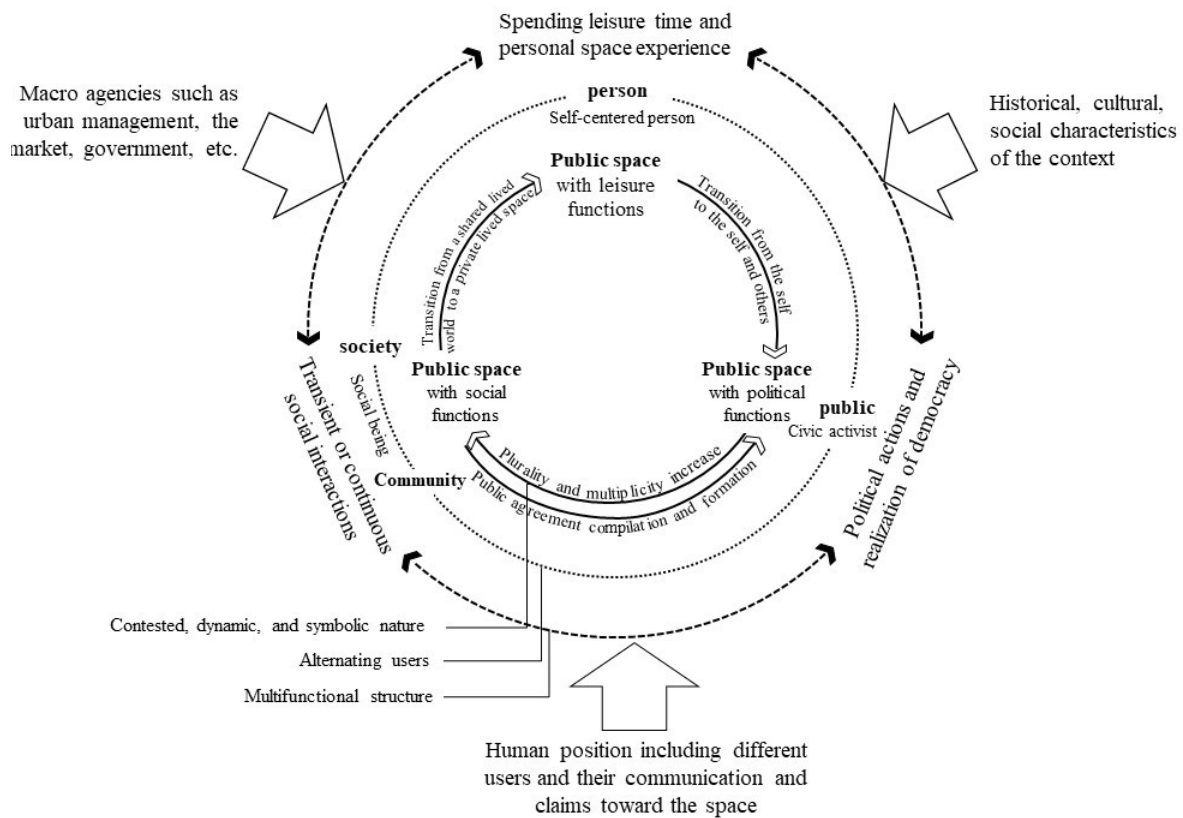
Fig. 2. The formation of public space as a result of multi-dialectical relationships between human, contextual, and institutional positions in the context of human-environment interaction. Source: Authors.

this basis, rather than a single definition that can be cited in different ways based on the relationships between the aforementioned agencies, public space has different manifestations over time and space and has different meanings and functions at the disposal of different stakeholders, including citizens, designers, specialists, and city managers, and power institutions. Every public space may have its own unique political, social, and leisure character and experience different moods and qualities over time.

The substantive and functional dimensions of the public space change under the influence of a series of relationships as a chain reaction and butterfly effect. Vast and unforeseen results in the publicness of the space can be caused by a small change in the economic, political, and social processes of the metropolis or a slight change in the basic conditions of the public space, individual or group human actions, and even the transformation of the context of public space in another part of the city. The publicness throughout the

city in the form of a changeable network resulting from the dynamic tension of spatio-temporal realities and the non-linear and evolving process between multiple factors, and as an in-between, relative, abstract, and dynamic concept, can be interpreted differently in each specific instance. Although publicness is a desirable result in city development processes, it does not always lead to the desired result for all stakeholders. The publicness of the space as a holistic value needs to be explained through an adaptable model by considering the set of factors involved in each specific example and it should be realized using larger strategies in long-term processes.

Directions for Future Studies

Based on the results of the present research, future studies can focus on "criteria of successful public space" or examine " the reasons for the ineffectiveness of public spaces" to see how various human and institutional agencies can influence the dynamic nature

and multi-functional structure of public space. Such studies will provide a clearer picture of the conceptual scope of public space.

Acknowlededement

Endnote

1. A semi-systematic review seeks to identify and comprehend all research traditions, as well as highlight potential implications for the subject under consideration and reveal problems, weaknesses, contradictions, or controversies in a research field (Frank & Hatak, 2014, 99-101; Ward, House, & Hamer, 2009; Wong et al., 2013).
2. Basically, beyond a text, the city as a medium is able to send a message to the mind of the audience (Hemmati, Mansouri & Barati, 2022, 69-73).
3. It should be noted that this classification is not compatible with some views such as individualism, which basically does not consider society as a reality (Hemmati and Saboonchi, 2021, 17) and only considers concrete truth as an individual.

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