

## **Analyzing the Democratic Public Space to Improve Public Participation Case Study: Yazd City**

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### **Extended Abstract**

#### **1. Introduction**

Having been in a perpetual exchange with the city and their living environments, human communities are always changing and transforming. Humans have various inevitable political, social, and cultural demands relative to their awareness and density of connection which should be responded to, throughout the urban arena (Pasaogullari, 2004). Meanwhile, public spaces have gained particular importance as a significant element on the quality of urban social life; it influences public participation and the expansion of urban democracy as a stimulating, context-building environment. Through various social, physical, and administrative dimensions, public spaces can systematically result in comprehensive participation via a democratic approach. However, what is the meaning of democracy in public spaces and how is it created? Through which dimensions the reinforcement of democracy is possible in public spaces? Has the city of Yazd provided such a context? As a prominent historical city in Iran, Yazd has numerous treasured historical textures which constitute different urban elements. Yet over time, the urban growth at different regions without paying attention to the needs and culture of the people has led to the loss of functions within the present historical textures; there are also weak functions at newer textures. The

presence of people in urban spaces are not considered sustainable and consistent, there are no proper capacities for public participation in public spaces, and urban management has paid insufficient attention to the physical aspect for encouraging more public participation. The present study is conducted to recognize suitable capacities and features of public spaces according to the components of the democratic public space in line with increased public participation. The recognition takes place considering social, physical, and administrative dimensions of public spaces.

#### **2. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework**

The concepts of democracy and participation in urban orientations should initially be explored in the process of looking at notions such as citizen participation, public accountability, consultative democracy, and interference of beneficiaries in urban endeavors, which has been constantly evolving in developed countries for years (Mäntysalo, 2004). From a historical standpoint, concepts and themes of urban democracy can be explored in many theoretical notions such as *the eyes on the street* (Jacobs, 1961), *principle of the second man* (Bacon, 2012), *city collage* (Rowe & Koetter), *responsive environments* (Bentley, Elkek, Murrain, McGleen, & Smith, 2012), etc.

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### 3. Method

The present descriptive inquiry is an applied, developmental study. The theoretical framework of the study was compiled via examining and analyzing both domestic and foreign library references (practical texts and experiences). The required data were collected from studying documents, conducting interviews with people, field observations and questionnaires. Subsequently, the present inquiry seeks to reach a theoretical argument on the process of achieving democracy in public spaces using the survey method.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The central axis of the study shaped by three concepts, including democracy, public spaces, and participation; the primary indices include public participation and empowerment of the people by reinforcing public spaces. Adopting a systemic approach to public spaces, it was shown that to make use of the capacities of democratic public spaces, the three subsystems of management, society and physicality of public spaces should be of democratic features. These features should be under the framework of creating and improving the required factors for the act of participation. These factors may include public cooperation, participative citizens, creativity and innovation, the formation of communities and increased accountability, and creating and managing the environment.

In a physical system: collective spaces should be given to people for the formation of collective identities; authorities should provide the means for responding to people's demands; suitable conditions should be provided for discussion and conversation based upon communications, freedom of speech, and information provision; a balanced order should be provided for the urban spaces.

In a social system: the activity of civil communities and institutions should be made possible; a proper image of civil and social rights should be sensed in expression of ideas; people's level of awareness on presence in public spaces should be elevated.

In the urban management system: the capacity and possibility of the presence of all social, gender, and age groups should be provided (all-inclusiveness); soft control and space management should take place while routine operations are maintained in a way to prevent people from escaping.

### 5. Conclusion

The results obtained from examining public spaces in Yazd city from physical, social, and urban administration dimensions showed that the city is at a proper position given its diverse public spaces, particularly in historical textures, in terms of having the capacity to provide such possibilities. Nonetheless, the public space management system has been weak in building contexts for participation. The social system in Yazd city public spaces are seen as a potential due to the existence of civil foundations and scientific activities which require creating a suitable strategy for their operationalization. As a result, considering the required factors for participation and the features of public spaces in Yazd city through the examined dimensions, a number of suggestions can be offered in line with the provision of necessary capabilities. These suggestions include:

- Offering security in public spaces using public resources;
- Different clothing and equipment for the security forces present at public spaces;
- Formation of trade unions by dividing public space functions for different trades;
- Using local and urban public spaces to inform people of different urban plans;
- Organizing old districts by designing and creating suitable public spaces;
- Creating responsive spaces alongside public offices and organizations that require participation;
- Creating information centers for advertisement, informing, and holding speeches;
- Creating open-air urban public spaces for the presence of people when reacting to religious, national, and economic events;
- Using the hierarchy system of access in the old texture of the city;

- Creating pedestrian routes in city center and districts;
- Using cross-bar systems with high flexibility.

**Keywords:** Public Spaces, Democracy, Participation, Yazd City

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