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## Original Research Article

# Landscape and Politics (Conceptology of the Nature and Political Aspects of Landscapes)

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## Abstract

**Problem statement:** Landscapes always showcase visible and invisible signs or traces of power structures. Actions such as development plan, sustainability programs, agricultural policies, national and international plans, and their underlying policies form landscapes. As such, landscapes, the main sites of conflicts and disputes, are always subject to recurrent and unpredictable transitions and create new landscapes under the influence of external factors. Thus, the political aspect, which is at the center of all relationships, seems to be overlooked in most landscape studies. Therefore, it seems that recognizing the site of these conflicts and disputes as the 'political' nature of the landscape is essential for decisions about transitions in landscapes. This research attempts to answer the following questions: what is the political nature of the landscape? In what aspects does it manifest itself? How can understanding such aspects influence the shaping of landscapes (by the designer)?

**Research objective:** This research aims to investigate the political and power-based nature of landscapes and ultimately understand how such nature affects landscapes.

**Research method:** This research employed qualitative design and the data was collected using the desk research method. For this purpose, valid domestic and foreign databases were examined and the data were analyzed based on the content analysis of pertinent discourse.

**Conclusion:** The findings show that the political nature of the landscape, that is, the landscape is not merely the place where forces are present, but the result of the encounter and sometimes even the conflict of forces. Democracy, a plurality of values, collective and individual identities, various ways of the landscape illustration, perception of the concept of people, and finally power were identified as political dimensions of the landscape. Even though they are not the same as the common definitions, they are derived from them. If the landscape designer aspires to construct the 'new thing,' which is the core of the landscape, in a way that is not imitative, he/she must construct a layout that minimizes the relationship of sovereignty and slavery and allows for the emergence of uncounted forces.

**Keywords:** *Landscape, Politics, Contradictions and conflicts, Power, People.*

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## Introduction and Statement of the Problem

As landscapes reflect wider social influences, they can present visible and invisible signs or traces of power structures. However, some invisible signs intensely affect landscapes. Measurements including development plans, sustainability plans, agricultural policies, national and international programs, and their underlying politics can influence landscapes (Butler, 2014). For that reason, landscapes are subject to frequent and unpredictable transition and, under the influence of external factors, new landscapes emerge and competition between invisible powers against local and indigenous areas also causes conflicts and creates differences between the experienced landscape and the perceived landscape. Despite this, the landscape, a phenomenon that should offer the necessary space for a set of values, is still perceived as a purely visual and physical entity in practice. However, the landscape is a product of society and is shaped by power, coercion, and collective resistance (Mitchell, 2007). Moreover, the production and reading of a landscape are both literally political (Duncan, 1990). This article attempts to understand how power and politics influence landscapes and seeks to draw attention to the 'political' nature of the landscape. Aligned with this aim, this article seeks to answer the following questions: What is the political nature of a landscape? In what aspect does it manifest itself? And how can understanding such aspects affect the shaping of the landscape (by the designer)?

## Research Method

This study is fundamental in terms of its purpose and qualitative in nature. Data were analyzed in an inductive manner using qualitative content analysis. For this purpose, the existing literature on the concepts of 'landscape' and 'politics' and associated concepts. The data collection method was desk research which was carried out in two main stages. In the first stage, the data were gathered from a wide range of sources related to the concepts of landscape, politics, landscape and politics, landscape and participation, and landscape and power in reliable databases. The keywords used for searching the databases included 'Landscape',

'Political landscape', 'Landscape and polity', 'Politics of landscape', and 'Landscape and Power', and the content analysis of discourses was carried on the available sources (in books and articles) on landscape and politics. In the second stage, those relevant concepts identified as politically relevant based on the content analysis were examined and analyzed, and their relationship with politics was detailed. Finally, the data from the two stages were analyzed using inference then conceptualized, summarized, and concluded.

## Background of the Study

This qualitative research attempts to scrutinize the nature and political aspects of landscape, and examine several categories of studies from the field of politics in landscape and political landscape (Mitchell, 1994; Olwig, 1996, 2002, 2005; Till, 2004; Conrad et al., 2011; Gailing & Leibenath, 2015 & 2017; Calderon & Butler, 2020), participatory development of landscapes (Buchecker et al., 2003; Butler & Berglund, 2014), participation in landscape (Javedani & Parvin, 2015; Majidi et al., 2021; Jones, 2006; Selman, 2007), urban space, landscape and power, civic landscape and the concept of democracy, public space, and landscape (Imani & Arab Solghar, 2020; Abarghouei Fard et al., 2023; Vik, 2017). For example, Olwig believes that the burgeoning interest in landscape and law is closely related to significant changes in the meaning of landscape. Currently, there is a change in the definition of landscape from a scene to a political community and place (Olwig, 1996; 2002). Till (2004) argues that political landscapes should be an 'everyday practice'. That is, an approach that pays attention to the specific contexts in which social relations exist and multiple identity positions are enacted, acted out, challenged, and negotiated. Gailing and Leibenath (2017) highlight the importance of a political perspective on landscapes, arguing that a political landscape is a perspective or way of seeing that can be found in almost all landscapes because landscapes are inevitably infused with politics and power. They identify four essential aspects of political landscapes: manifestations, democracy, identity, and power, and

maintain that political landscapes are not reducible to any one of these dimensions. In contrast, when studying landscapes from a political perspective, several of them must be considered simultaneously. Duinevelda et al. (2017) contend that landscapes are shaped by power/knowledge configurations, which are known through discourses, and emphasize the role of powers in landscapes. Calderon (2020) argues that landscapes and public spaces are inherently political and therefore often challenge participatory processes. He accentuates that there is a need to recognize and engage with the political and clashing aspects of participation in public space projects. He argues that such engagements lead to a fundamental understanding of differences, conflicts, and power, in other words, the political aspect. He highlights the lack of theoretical engagement and fundamental understanding of the 'political' in urban design as the source of most urban designers' inability to anticipate and address the challenges caused by differences, conflicts, and power. In his treatise 'The Concept of the Political,' Carl Schmitt claims that the most intense and extreme conflicts, or in other words, 'the permanent possibility of conflict,' lie at the core and center of the concept of the political. He believes that the essence of politics lies in limiting conflict, not in intensifying it (Yari, 2018). Calderon and Butler (2020) also examined the theoretical contribution of politicizing the landscape in the development of participation in landscape planning in their study and believe that to advance the development of participation in landscape planning, there is a need to move from existing normative and procedural rhetoric to participatory decision-making methods in landscape management and planning. They also believe that the political nature and political dimension of landscape, although acknowledged in more general discussions about landscape democracy, have been significantly ignored in landscape planning research.

### **Explaining the Political Nature of Landscape**

Mouffe (2005) argues that the term 'political' refers to the existence of fundamental conflicts and divergences in society that cannot be easily eliminated. Schmitt

believes that the concept of 'political' should be defined by its specific distinctive features. The distinction between friend and foe is the most important. In his view, the first characteristic of life is its 'conflicting characteristics.' This is the fundamental fact that creates politics. In his view, the most intense and extreme conflicts, or in other words, the 'permanent possibility of conflict,' lie at the core and center of the concept of the political (Yari, 2018). Therefore, researchers believe that whether landscapes are political or not is more a matter of perspective than a matter of essence (Gailing & Leibenath, 2017). So far, landscapes have not been considered a political concept in landscape literature, and researchers have not seen them as the results and constructs of political processes (Till, 2002), because the word 'landscape' usually evokes images of beauty, harmony, nature, recreation, belonging, and a sense of home; in contrast, 'politics' and the adjective 'political' are often associated with conflicting interests and power games, concepts that seem to be diametrically opposed to 'landscape.' In this regard, some researchers in fields such as landscape ecology or landscape architecture ignore the political dimensions of landscapes and use 'landscape' as a completely non-political concept. Others acknowledge the existence of political landscapes and introduce them as one type of landscape among others (Gailing & Leibenath, 2017). Landscape is thus understood as places that are represented by political or cultural entities or institutions, creating a combination of places that can be understood as a landscape (Mitchell, 2002; Olwig, 2002). Jones (2006), however, introduces 'political landscape' as an approach to the study of landscapes, or as a concept of landscapes, similar to 'landscape as a scenery and 'landscape morphology'. For Olwig and Mitchell, it is also the social, material, and economic processes that produce what we call the political landscape (Olwig & Mitchell, 2007).

In the past, despite the acknowledgment of the role of human processes and activities in the production of landscapes, these processes were often used to be labeled 'cultural' rather than 'political.' Landscapes express and create many meanings about political space.

The different discursive and materialistic meanings and functions of landscapes – as social environments, scenes, ways of seeing, representations of identity, nodes of capitalism, workplaces, metaphors, and settings of everyday practice – are often used strategically by different actors to structure power relations and create ‘political’ understandings. Landscapes are theoretically understood as ‘fields of discourse and political action in which cultures are continually reproduced and challenged’ (Duncan, 1990; Graham, 1998). Scholars analyze how human practices, discursive practices, economic relations, and everyday practices lead to the formation (and challenge) of the particular material and symbolic landscapes that in turn structure social and political space. Furthermore, by examining how landscapes are constructed, used, and circulated, they reinforce and create meanings related to the political sphere and social identities (Till, 2002). In line with Mels’s argument that ‘landscape is caught between the spatial ambitions of states in a process of globalization,’ Butler argues that landscape continues to be a burgeoning and serves as a reminder of long-standing issues of political power (Butler, 2014). Mitchell argues that the labor and economic relations involved in the creation of the material and symbolic aspects of landscapes are obscured by dominant ways of understanding them. Such concealment allows landscapes to function as symbolic systems that reproduce unequal social relations. From this perspective, Mitchell’s argument suggests that landscapes are not simply passive backdrops, but active elements in the reproduction of social structures. Landscapes maintain and reinforce existing power dynamics by concealing underlying labor and economic relations (Mitchell, 1996).

Various approaches offer analysis of the way particular landscapes become dominant representations of how the world works, legitimizing state and elite hegemony. For instance, Cosgrove (1984) and Daniels (1993) describe the ‘landscape as a way of seeing’ approach. Furthermore, this way of seeing material and social arrangements legitimized the emerging ideology of capitalism and the people-centered bourgeois ruling

class (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988; Rose, 1993). Another approach is the poststructuralist ‘landscape as text’ model developed by James and Nancy Duncan (Duncan & Duncan, 1988). This approach emphasizes how landscapes function as one of the cultural texts through which political values are created and discourses are enacted in particular societies. What all these approaches have in common is the view that the ‘national’ landscape is a powerful idea that captures the dominant image of how elites see the ‘a country’ and perhaps even how ‘a people’ see themselves (Till, 2002). The nature of politics in landscape therefore seems to point to the divisions, contradictions, and conflicts between states and people, and people and themselves regarding -places and approaches to political landscapes, while highlighting the conflicts within state and national institutions and by elites with access to resources. However, it pays little attention to the histories and experiences of the people who actually construct those landscapes. A review of the landscape literature in the areas mentioned in the background highlights several aspects relevant to the issue of politics in a landscape, which will be discussed below.

#### • **Democracy and landscape**

Is landscape a democratic institution? One of the most significant and frequently mentioned aspects related to the political aspect of the landscape is democracy in landscape and the emphasis on the landscape as a democratic institution (Olwig, 2005; Setten & Brown, 2009; Egoz et al., 2011; Mels, 2016). Since the end of the twentieth century, ‘landscape’ has changed from a specialized field of practice to a democratic institution. Landscape as a democratic institution recognizes the knowledge and values of everyone who experiences a landscape (Vik, 2017). In landscape studies, there is an approach to democracy through the concepts of ‘landscape as a right’ or ‘right to landscape’ (Egoz et al., 2011), ‘discourses on landscape as a commons’ (Olwig, 2005), ‘justice in landscape’ (Mels, 2016), and ‘landscape and social justice’ (Setten & Brown, 2009), all of which underscore the democratic nature of landscape. Academic debates and political rhetoric also tend to

be based on the conceptualization of the landscape as a democratic entity (Calderon & Butler, 2020). This concept arose from the fact that democracy requires tangible spaces provided by landscape for communities to form, and thus landscape is seen as a backdrop for the exercise of democratic rights, and for engaging with the multiplicity of values of individuals who are constantly constructing and reconstructing its meaning. On the other hand, in the academic literature, there is an emphasis on public participation in landscape issues that enhance democracy (Vik, 2017). In democratic theory, participation is only one of many key elements and outcomes of democracy. Vik also argues (2017) that even emphasizing public participation in the landscape as a means to achieve the goal of creating a genuine democracy is simplistic and may lead to the neglect of important aspects of democracy. That means that despite the active participation of people, landscape processes may contribute to alienation, exclusion, and powerlessness, which is different from the conditions usually considered as landscape democracy.

Therefore, it has been almost proven in the literature that democracy is an aspect of the political nature, but in modern political thought, the concept of democracy is seen differently. According to Giorgio Agamben in his book 'The Present and Future of Democracy' (Agamben et al., 2019), democracy often refers to a 'skill of governance' and can be used in two senses: 1. The form through which power is legislated and 2. The aspect in which this law is applied. The public believes that the public will and the ability to legislate are sovereignty, and this definition refers to 'the sovereignty of the people.' However, Agamben further highlights what is considered in modern political thought today, such as law, public will, and popular sovereignty, as empty abstractions and believes that popular sovereignty has been emptied of all meaning today. It is a misconception to say that the government is merely an executive power. Ultimately, he adds that the central mystery of politics is not as sovereignty but as government, and therefore, in this sense, concepts such as 'democracy' and 'participation' would be meaningless. Rousseau also believes that while 'the general will is right...

its guiding judgment is not always clear.' 'When all will the good but do not recognize it, then they need guides who can show the right path to it.' That is, the general will [incidentally] lead to a 'democratic impasse' (ibid., 83). Therefore, democracy is not simply about paying attention to the general will. From this perspective, the issue of democracy in the landscape also faces complexity. To clarify the discussion, it is necessary to address the plurality of values, differences, and conflicts existing in the landscape as another aspect of the political nature of the landscape and related to democracy. In this regard, although paying attention to the public will in perspective is considered a value, in reality, achieving democracy in perspective, and subsequently participation, seems impossible in practice, as it may create challenges related to exclusion, inclusion, and rejection.

#### • **Plurality of values and the existence of differences and conflicts**

As mentioned earlier, attention to the plurality of values and the existence of differences in societies is a fundamental aspect of democracy. To Mouffe (2005), the lack of understanding of the nature of the 'political' means the contradictory dimension that constitutes society and democracy. According to him, 'political' is the existence of fundamental conflicts and differences in society. He believes that instead of trying to eliminate them, they should be confronted constructively. Mouffe also argues that the lack of understanding of this contradictory political dimension can lead to the formation of unhealthy and unequal democracies. Instead of trying to create a complete and universal agreement, he suggests that democracy should provide a space for confronting conflicts and differences.

Manuel Castells's treatise 'The Information Age' also states that shared values are declining and that conflicts and tensions increase with the increasing diversity of values. Competing values are considered based on technological advances, increased mobility, and communication between cultures. Landscapes are one of arenas where these values can conflict with each other as a result of the diversity of users and the interests that cause them to compete for limited

resources (Bulter & Berglund, 2014). The landscape is an arena for the manifestation of heterogeneity, plurality, and difference. Heterogeneity in the landscape is a 'value' (Jones, 2007). However, when decision-making is opened up to the multiple and diverse values, experiences, and interests of all those involved in the landscape, several challenges emerge. In this sense, the different identities and values of landscape audiences are not always compatible. These different values can lead to potential conflict, for example, when considering the types of landscapes that are 'liked' or preferred, or when specific changes are proposed (Scott et al., 2009). In this context, two types of differences and conflicts are mentioned in the research that are important to understand for understanding the political nature of the landscape: 'intergroup differences' and 'state-citizen' differences (Calderon, 2013; Calderon & Butler, 2020). Intergroup differences draw attention to the conflicts and challenges arising from the overlapping and contrasting uses of landscape by different social groups. State-citizen differences and conflicts, on the other hand, point to the conflict between the hegemony of market-oriented discourses in many political systems, and the planning, values, and everyday experiences of people. Decisions that follow financial logic often lead to strong conflicts with non-financial interests and values, including environmental performance, everyday social relations, and local identity. Thus, challenges arise that are tied to the gaps between governments, experts, and those who have a role in the landscape and who have different understandings of development or progress. The existence of these conflicts and disagreements causes many individuals, values, interests, and specific programs to be excluded from the decision-making process. It should be noted that many of these differences and conflicts are permeated by 'power'. Therefore, understanding the way power operates in planning and decision-making for the landscape is essential to better understand the differences and contradictions that constitute the landscape and its political nature.

• **Discussion: Is the landscape a democratic institution?**

The landscape as a democratic institution can be the

subject of complex discussion and analysis. It should be noted that 'there are contradictions and plural values that constitute the world. According to Alain Badiou, every world is only illuminated by the differences constructed within it and the singularity of difference. However, within the horizon in which all things are equal to each other, the horizon of procedures, supports, and limitless manifestations of no world can appear. This is exactly what Plato thought when he declared democracy to be a form of government 'pleasant, autocracy, and unfamiliar, which establishes a kind of equality without distinguishing between equal and unequal' (Agamben et al., 2019, 38). 'The equality imposed between equals and unequal is nothing other than the same pecuniary principle, the general equivalence that prevents everyone from accessing any real difference and genuine heterogeneity, and whose model is the asymmetry between a procedure of truth and freedom of opinion. This equality is abstract, subject to numerical quantity, which prevents the stability of a world, imposing the rule of what Plato calls 'anarchy'. This anarchy is achieved when value is mechanically attributed to that which is without value' (ibid., 39). According to Arendt (1998), regardless of the similarities, differences are essential, because differences have an impact. She believes that differences are not only inevitable but necessary, because they constitute the basis of human freedom and diversity. Similarities may exist on the surface, but differences go to the depth and basis of human identity and experience. Arendt points out that the attempt to create a homogeneous and uniform society leads to the elimination of diversity and creativity, in other words, it prevents the creation of 'the new'. It seems that democracy seeks to create a homogeneous society, while the perspective favors heterogeneity and plurality, and heterogeneity is considered a value in the perspective. This is because the landscape is a whole and in Deleuze's words (2017) the whole is not a collection of parts. The whole prevents each collection from closing in on itself and forces the collection to continue itself within a larger collection to infinity. In other words, the whole is always 'the open thing', because, by its very nature, it

constantly produces or creates 'the new'. In this respect, the landscape is the establishment of previously non-existent relations between some variables (such as man, nature, history, society, politics, etc.), to the extent that all of them create new possibilities in a singular and, of course, heterogeneous whole. Pre-existing criteria and connections will never lead to the creation of new ones. Therefore, it is the existence of multiple values in the landscape that leads to the creation of the new. If this heterogeneity is eliminated, the landscape acts contrary to its nature, and its meaning is distorted. Therefore, the landscape can only be a democratic institution when its goal is to create the new and to count the uncounted.

#### • **Landscape representation**

Another aspect associated with the political nature of landscape is the representation of landscape. The logic of representation in landscape studies refers to the way landscapes are depicted and understood through various forms of representation, such as art, photography, maps, and literature. This concept examines how representations shape our understanding of landscapes and affect our interactions with them. Representation is essential for any understanding of: maneuvers of discursive power, hegemonic ways of seeing, and the formation of identity (Mels, 2016). Thus, an emphasis on the contrasting ways of seeing and mediating the world through texts and images, including maps or spatial designs, is on the agenda of this logic. Previous studies of representation in the landscape show that representation is increasingly understood in various ways within the context of social and political struggles over the right to representation in space, society, and political life. In that sense, the landscape is not just a cultural representation but a material expression of struggles for justice, politics, and people's demands for a place to represent (Olwig, 2002; Mitchell, 2003b; Olwig & Mitchell, 2008). Representations can also determine what is visible and understandable in a space and distribute power in such a way that some places are highlighted and others are ignored (Foucault, 1972). As landscapes emerge from people's perceptions and engagement with the world around them (Bender, 2002), landscapes are relational phenomena that emerge when

people engage with their physical environment. The physical and representational aspects of landscapes are intertwined and inseparable. Landscapes cannot be separated from the social relations reflected in both the physical environment and how they are represented. Landscapes never have a single meaning. They are always open to interpretation. Both the production and reading of landscapes are political because they are inextricably linked to the material interests of different classes and positions of power in a society. Even seemingly 'neutral' scholarly approaches to the representation of landscapes are highly political because they privilege one particular perspective over another. In short, the physical manifestations and representations of landscapes are not only mutually constructive. They often become instruments and objects of political struggles over domination and resistance, as well as exclusion and inclusion, and are linked to processes of inclusion and exclusion by privileging particular values, interests, and practices over others.

#### • **Entanglement between landscape with identities**

Identity is an important aspect of the political nature of landscapes. Landscapes are not only physical spaces but also arenas for the representation and reinforcement of collective identities and power. They construct identities and are generally 'part of the process by which identities are constructed and contested, whether as individuals, groups or nation-states'. Individual, collective, cultural, and political identities can all be affected by landscapes. Individual and collective identities, like the physical manifestations and representations of landscapes, are dynamic and subject to change. Although individual identities may seem apolitical, they play an important role in shaping and interpreting landscapes and can also be shaped through interaction with landscapes. Personal memories and experiences associated with specific places can help define individual identities. For example, a place that an individual visits as a child can become an important part of their identity. These memories and experiences can also profoundly influence how individuals perceive and interpret landscapes (Tuan, 1977). However, scholars have shown that seemingly individual and personal issues

such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sense of belonging to a subculture can only be understood in the context of cultural, social, and political processes and identities. For example, the interplay between gender and racial roles in the allocation of different places in the material landscape and its representation in colonial settlements, and how colonialism and colonial discourses influenced Indigenous identities (Smith, 2021). Issues such as gender, ethnicity, and the like are tied to socio-political structures. For example, recent research by feminist scholars shows how socio-political struggle cannot be understood without discussing everyday uses of landscape. Mitchell (1998) argues that 'both individual paths of action and political-economic structures (such as the state) shape nature-society relations, landscapes and identities' because 'public' and 'private' political actions are intertwined and interdependent. This statement emphasizes the importance of interactions between individual activities and macro-political-economic structures in shaping relations between nature and society, creating different landscapes and constructing identities. Mitchell emphasizes that the complex relations between nature and society are influenced by individual decisions as well as by larger economic policies and structures (Till, 2002).

Collective identities are also crucial for the construction of politics of belonging in landscapes. It is always dominant groups that codify landscapes and define the terms of belonging to these local landscapes. The physical boundaries of landscapes and the boundaries of identity between self and others are often manifested simultaneously. Collective identities, landscapes, and political positions are thus highly interdependent. Finally, landscapes can be intertwined with national identities as 'a relationship between people' and 'a part of the natural world to which they are attached by interest', 'Landscape' represents a vital force in national identity. This transforms landscapes into 'homelands'. 'Landscape' is a central strategy for interpreting the relationship between a national political community and its people (Gailing & Leibenath, 2017). Homeland, as a space influenced by social and political relations, includes the power structures, political discourses,

and local policies that help shape and define it (Lefebvre, 2012). Homeland is a 'land'. There is an inextricable link between the collective spirit of people and their land. The formation of a collective spirit and society depends on land. Therefore, the land is also a concept related to identity and also a political concept, and as a result of it (Maghsoudi et al., 2024), the land is a space that is controlled and politicized by institutions or the participation of a group of people and is mostly related to government actions. Therefore, it seems that land is the physical basis for objectifying political institutions and the institution of power plays a central role in the creation of land, in such a way that the existence of land is fundamentally not possible without the presence of the agent of power. As Foucault explains, 'Land is undoubtedly a geographical concept, but above all, it is a juridical-political area: an area controlled by a certain type of power...' (See Maghsoudi et al., 2024).

#### • People

By defining landscape as an area perceived by 'people', rather than as a category perceived by biologists, the focus is on restoring natural areas as the heritage of local people who have shaped and structured them. But who are these people and whose perceptions should be the criteria for action in the landscape? This seems to be the same issue that Olwig (2005) calls 'justice, morality, and the law of the land'. People are part of the place and their perceptions shape the place, but decisions made at the national, regional, and, to a lesser extent, urban levels are the result of the thinking and actions of governments at the top; therefore, it can be said that these decisions, and consequently the plans and projects that result from them, reflect the way government's view people. It seems that the monotony of policy-making and the lack of recognition of the place of 'the people' are important factors in creating dissatisfaction among the audience. What is evident in these decisions is the deliberate exclusion of a part of 'the people'. People who are socially perceived as 'out of place' may consciously express their presence to challenge dominant discourses about 'who belongs in the landscape?' Cresswell (1996) describes such acts and

policies of transgression through graffiti, protest sit-ins, or political demonstrations (Till, 2002).

Therefore, the questions arise: is there a correct definition of 'people' in states? Or are we allowed to include some and exclude others when the word 'people' is used? 'People' is in no way racial, or a concept appropriated for the benefit of a particular group; and on the other hand, 'people' is not a particular matter or minority. According to Deleuze, people are lost because they exist in the status of a 'minority'. In the political context, there is no quantitative difference between minority and majority; the majority is defined not by its large number but by an ideal constant or standard measure by which it can be evaluated, such as black, or white, ... From this perspective, minorities often outnumber the majority (Deleuze, 2017). What defines a minority is not its number, but the internal relations of that number: a majority is defined by a countable set, while a minority is defined by an uncountable set, regardless of how many elements it contains (ibid., 79). Thus, the concept of the people, in essence, emerges concerning the counting of the uncountable and the attention to the minority, and in this respect, it also engages with politics. In fact, the correct recognition of the people and stakeholders in landscape issues is one of the sensitive points, the lack of attention to which exposes landscape issues to the risk of exclusion.

• **Power, the most key element in understanding the political nature of landscape**

The literature on politics and landscape shows that the political nature of the landscape is most closely associated with the general concept of power. All of the above-mentioned are created through the exercise of power. Foucault sees power as both a negative concept that relies on the exercise of force and a positive and empowering concept, that produces knowledge and believes that knowledge and power are mutually exclusive (Nezhadbahram & Jalili, 2021). Scholars have long considered the landscape to be a contested product of society, shaped by power, coercion, and collective resistance (Mitchell, 2007). Thus, a landscape is not simply 'an expression of the values, conventions, customs, and practices of a state' (Olwig, 2007), but

rather the values of the dominant group(s) in any given country. Duncan believes that political elements can be discovered in almost all landscapes because landscapes are inevitably involved with politics and power (Duncan, 1990). According to Foucault (2000), one of the most important manifestations of power in landscapes is the physical control and access to spaces, which includes restrictions and rules regarding the use of spaces and places. For example, fencing and restrictions on access to certain areas can be important tools for control and power. The 'privatization of public spaces' is an approach that leads to the deprivation of individuals from full access and use of them. The establishment of rules aimed at creating security directly or indirectly leads to the exclusion of specific groups of people from these spaces (Fig. 1). This action harms the immigrant class, children, minorities, the homeless, and young people who oppose the dominant culture (Vander Ploeg, 2006) and leads to the subjugation of people/places. As a result, urban public spaces and landscapes can act contrary to their existential philosophy, not only failing to attract people but also repelling, repressing, and even subjugating them. 'Spatial exclusion' is the result of this subjugation. In landscape planning, the influence that powerful actors have on the knowledge, information, and ideas that guide landscape decisions and actions is also important. Knowledge is power, but power supports knowledge that aligns with its goals and ignores or suppresses knowledge that contradicts it. Thus, by including or excluding certain forms of knowledge, powerful actors may create specific ways of understanding problems, creating the conditions for possible solutions, and determining how outcomes are evaluated during landscape planning processes. This inextricably affects the interests or values that are included or excluded

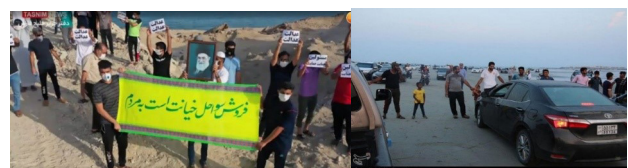


Fig. 1. Right: People of Souza port protesting against the ownership transfer of the southern coast and left: Human chain objecting to the privatization plan of the Naz Islands coast. Source:www.tasnimnews.com

from landscape decisions, with desirable effects for some parties but less desirable outcomes for others (Calderon & Butler, 2020). Foucault also reminds us that power is never about a simple dichotomy between those who dominate and those who are dominated; Rather, power is internalized and transmitted through material and discursive practices that construct normative categories of belonging (such as race and gender). Power is transmitted not only structurally but also through human actors. The presence of these actors in particular settings can define social relations. From this perspective, people do not act as passive consumers, but rather as regulated transmitters of power (Till, 2002). This analysis suggests that landscapes function as dynamic, multifaceted sites that are influenced and controlled by human actors. These sites are not only spaces for the representation of identities, but also stages for struggle, protest, and social change. In this regard, Harris (2002) explains how individuals with particular capacities are personified in particular societies, bodies, and operations that in turn lead to differential access to, use of, and transfer of power.

One area that is strongly linked to the issue of power is the development of the landscape. The development of the landscape based on the values of elites or ethnic majorities who have more power leads to the exclusion of minorities or underrepresented groups. For example, given dominant political discourses that prioritize economic interests, the interests of actors whose values are related to such economic priorities are reinforced, while the values of those with a social and environmental focus are subordinated (Figs. 2 & 3) (Calderon & Chelleri, 2013).

An ontological understanding of power suggests that the landscape is constructed through the interaction of a wide range of stakeholders who have access to different levels and sources of power. This includes economic or political power, knowledge, and social/cultural capital. When making decisions about or acting on a landscape, different stakeholders, consciously or unconsciously, exercise power to achieve their desired goals. Thus, planning, changing, and managing a landscape are inextricably linked to the different classes and positions



Fig. 2. Construction of fish farming ponds in the Tangeh Shiraz Geopark in Lorestan Province, under the pretext of development regardless of the characteristics of the location and environmental conditions, and in the direction of the economic interests of the dominant power. Photo: Authors' Archive.



Fig. 3. The disappearance of nomadic life and the resulting destruction of the lives of nomads in the process of the development of the Pahlavi state and the homogenization of nomads. Source: Authors' archives.

of power in a society. The important issue in relation to power in a landscape is 'how power is exercised' and what the 'levels of power exercise' are. Powerful actors take action to influence decisions that are in their interest. Accordingly, power can be exercised by directly acting, conditioning, or manipulating others toward decisions that they would not normally consider. By setting agendas or practices that limit the scope of a decision-making process and/or by influencing and shaping the perceived interests and values of others (Bachrach & Baratz, 2012). For Mouffe, power is the constitutive of order because it privileges some of these possibilities and suppresses others. Thus, in this social order, power satisfies the needs of groups and interests and values associated with market rationality, while excluding or marginalizing others who may focus on environmental performance or local identity (Calderon, 2020). Landscapes can be indicative of social and economic disparities, including differences between rich and poor areas, affluent and low-income

neighborhoods, and public and private spaces. These disparities reflect the unequal distribution of resources and power in society (Harvey, 2010). Landscapes can be sites of resistance and defiance against dominant forces. For example, public spaces can be used as venues for political gatherings, demonstrations, and protests (Fig. 4). These spaces allow people to resist the policies and decisions of existing powers (Javedani & Parvin, 2015; Pile & Keith, 1997). Landscapes can be sites of identity and cultural conflicts. For example, disputes over ownership and management of public spaces can lead to conflicts between different identities. These conflicts can have important impacts on local policies and decision-making (Low & Smith, 2013). Finally, governments and policymakers play an important role in shaping and managing landscapes. Decisions related to urban development, environmental protection, and resource distribution are directly influenced by government policies and power relations (Scott, 2020). Power, therefore, either through interpersonal relationships or social structures, satisfies the needs of certain groups and excludes and marginalizes others. Landscapes are agents of power, manifestations of latent power, and mediators, they are the result of power, and the traces of power in landscapes can often be identified in five areas: landscape creation, landscape resource distribution, landscape development, landscape management, and landscape representation.

## Conclusion

The political nature of the landscape is more about highlighting fundamental differences and the adjustment of power in the sense of a constant redistribution of forces. The political aspect of landscape does not simply refer to a type of landscape but is deeper and about the nature of the landscape, that is, an inseparable and often implicit aspect of the landscape. If we succeed in understanding the language of landscape, we can discover the power in which is implicitly located. The landscape is created by power, creates power, and can be destroyed by the exercise of power. The need to emphasize the 'political' aspect is because the political aspect is

at the center of all relations, but most studies of the landscape are indifferent to it. While the importance of understanding landscapes as spaces that embody and reproduce power relations is essential. The political nature of landscape refers to how landscapes are not simply passive backdrops, but are active elements in shaping and reflecting political, social, and economic dynamics. They are arenas where powers are contested, identities negotiated, and representations revised, but at the same time, landscape is not alone in any of these. On the other hand, the political nature of landscape examines how power relations and politics affect places. This concept is analyzed in such a way that landscapes are not only arenas of the presence of opposing forces, but also the result of the collision of forces (political, economic, and social). And since politics is the power to redistribute power, this change in understanding landscape leads to two important principles for dealing with it, both for recognition and expression and for the role of landscape designer. First, the work of the landscape designer must count the uncounted forces to reduce the dominance and imposition of one force over others and to allow other forces to collide or confront and form new forms of life, which is the 'continuously renewing landscape' and producer. If not, given the disproportionate nature of a dominant force instead of a synergistic force, the landscape no longer exists and we will be faced with a lifeless place. The landscape designer must carry out a redistribution that goes beyond the duality of monarchy and slavery. That is, in which forces, not as particular and general, but as part and whole,



Fig. 4. Azadi Street and the Islamic Revolution of Iran, 1979. The landscape has changed as a place for the forces in favor of counting the uncounted. Source: <https://www.iichs.ir>

continuously engage in politics with each other and, by becoming organic, create a renewed landscape; a renewed landscape whose organs or dimensions are not simply based on democracy, the plurality of values but are derived from it and rely on territorial difference. Second, the landscape is a milieu, not an environment. That is, it is a space of encounter with the other. The other here does not mean simply individuals, but forces. So it is not neutral and depending on where the forces stand spatially and theoretically and what relationship they support in the overall arrangement, leading to the emergence of a relationship of monarchy and slavery, the landscape becomes a non-productive, renewable, or imposed-

imitative one. It is no longer a landscape but simply an XYZ that is not a producer of life but a consumer of it and is therefore weak. Fig. 5 shows the dimensions related to the political nature of the landscape.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Due to the broad nature of the subject, this article has been limited to the theoretical aspect of the concept of politics in landscape. Future research should use the findings of this study and focus on practical examples.

### Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

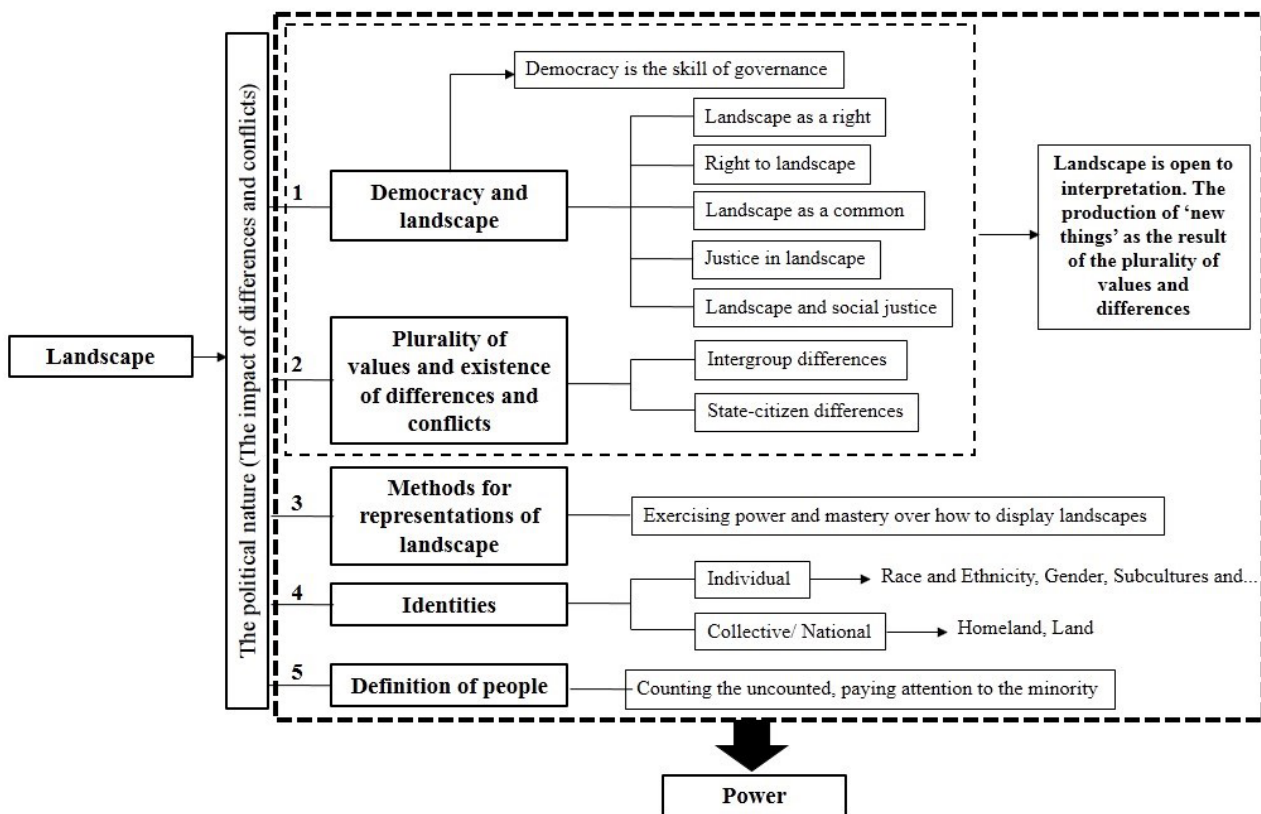


Fig. 5. Conceptualization of the political nature of the landscape. Source: Authors.

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