

Original Research Article

Democratic Actions in Everyday Life: Rethinking the Urbanscape Using a Bakhtinian Approach*

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Abstract | Modern cities are typically characterized by three features: place, interactions, and people. However, a distinct issue of crucial significance is the organization of power, that is, the degree to which a space is authoritarian or open. This research, therefore, seeks to explicate how the experience of a democratic space is realized in the perception of urban spaces. In this context, the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin can provide a critical framework for rethinking the relationship among space, social action, and the urbanscape, understood as the citizens' perception of urban space. Carnivals, by temporarily disrupting established orders, facilitate dialogue among pluralistic ideas; this dialogue unfolds within a specific time-space setting, and the linkage of these two forms the structure of the chronotope. The central question of this study is: What is the urban equivalent of Bakhtinian freedom, and how can his theories on carnival space, dialogue, and the chronotope serve as a basis for explaining the democratic urbanscape? The objective of this research is to redefine the urbanscape as a polyphonic space where carnivalistic moments allow for a rupture from the established order and enable the emergence of creative and democratic actions. This study employed a qualitative approach using a critical discourse analysis (CDA). Initially, conceptual analysis was utilized to critically re-read the key concepts in the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin. These concepts were subsequently redefined in relation to urban space and everyday life. Following this, discursive interpretation was applied to examine the linkage between Bakhtin's theory and the urbanscape. The findings of this research indicate that the carnival is not an exceptional event, but rather a dynamic capacity that is inherent and ongoing in the fabric of everyday urban life. Micro-carnivals, by generating temporary ruptures in the established order, provide citizens with the opportunity for spatial recreation, self-expression, democratic action, and polyphonic dialogue. Within this framework, the urbanscape is understood as a narrative field that is unfinished and open to events, offering the capacity to host creative and emancipatory experiences at the heart of the city.

Keywords | *Carnival, Bakhtin, Urbanscape, Dialogism, Democracy.*

Introduction | The problem addressed by this research is the experience of democratic space. This involves investigating how spatial events must be experienced to provide a foundation for the realization of democracy as a way of life. The core concern of this study is the enhancement of citizen well-being mediated by the urbanscape, as the environment where citizens spend a significant amount of their time daily. Democratic spaces possess spatial parameters that are arranged in a specific relationship with one another, and this is manifested in the behavior of the spaces' users. The objective of this research is to explicate what events and

occurrences, and in what particular proportion, must be combined to ensure that the experience of urban space is perceived as democratic by its perceivers.

Our understanding of democracy in this research is defined as deliberative democracy (or dialogic democracy), conceptualized as a "way of life." This notion encompasses dimensions beyond merely a political system and constitutes a lifestyle aimed at allowing the expression and manifestation of both the Self and the Other. The virtue and ultimate goal of deliberative democracy is to provide the individual and civic foundations for the growth of polyvocal, pluralistic, heteroglossic, differentiating, authentic, and autonomous

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Selves. From this understanding of the concept of the Self, democratic aspirations such as freedom, equality, and participation are born. This theory emphasizes that the experience of democracy creates better individuals, an idea termed democratic self-realization. This means that human autonomy flourishes through participation within the democratic public sphere. Democracy is thus a mode of social existence, and the public sphere is the primary site for the emergence and operation of this democracy, accessible to all citizens (Ansari, 2005). This research, therefore, seeks to explicate the experience of democratic life within the public sphere and in the context of everyday life in the city.

Such a space relies above all on the perception and subjective experience of its users, as it is this lived experience that imbues the urban environment with soul and meaning. The perception of urban spaces is the product of an active interaction between objective space and human subjectivity, not merely a quality embedded within the physical body of the space. From the perspective of everyday life studies, Michel de Certeau, with his concept of “walking in the city,” demonstrates that metropolitan planning sets a collection of possibilities and constraints, but it is only through the act of walking that citizens actualize some of these possibilities and even “invent” new ones as a matter of course (de Certeau, 1984). Through their bodily movement and perception in space, the pedestrian transforms the official narrative into a dynamic experience; while following pre-designed paths, they add unanticipated meanings to the space or choose to disregard certain existing meanings. This process of the space being experienced is precisely what gives life to the urban environment, transforming the spatial narrative from a static, imposed state into a living “text” that each individual interprets based on their own perception (ibid.).

Therefore, the designed coherence or narrative for a space is a necessary condition for its meaningfulness, but it is not sufficient. The spatial narrative must overlap with the layer of users’ perception and memory to be fully realized. Otherwise, the narrated space may not be “read” by the public and will fail to establish an organic connection with everyday life. Only when an individual can reconstruct or complete the fragments of the urban narrative in their mind, as if experiencing the city like a personal story, will that space truly be considered narratable and meaningful. This necessitates that the design of urban spaces allows for the sensory-cognitive perception of individuals, engaging their subjective space. Ignoring this human dimension can lead to spaces that, despite their formal coherence, are perceived by citizens as lifeless and unlivable, because they have failed to create a tangible and memorable experience in their minds. The users’ understanding and imagination must intertwine with the structure of the spatial narrative for the space to acquire meaning and social vitality. In line with

this, Sara Witesman emphasizes that the perception of public spaces is formed based on memory, cognition, and a sense of security, elements that are manifested not in functional programming, but in scenic and narratable mechanisms (Clark et al., 2025). The citizens’ perception of the city is its urbanscape (Mansouri, 2010). Far beyond a mere visual composition of buildings and open spaces, the urbanscape is a complex text that contains multiple narratives. These narratives are the product of historical, social, and cultural interactions that have formed over time. Narrative also serves as a powerful tool for the understanding and interpretation of the urbanscape, and this process directly influences how people experience and interpret spaces (ibid.). The urbanscape serves as a conceptual framework that allows the urban space to be investigated as a stage for perceived and meaningfully accepted experience. If we view space merely as a top-down, physical order, a single dominant narrative (often the official narrative of power) usually prevails, and other voices are denied the opportunity for expression. In contrast, the landscape perspective (or urbanscape view), which recognizes the diversity of perceptions and memories, opens the space to a plurality of meanings. Social geographer Doreen Massey argues that space is fundamentally the “simultaneity of different trajectories and stories,” and for this reason, it is considered the “sphere of the political,” as it is the arena where diverse processes can coexist (Massey, 2005). Simply put, if every individual or group can hold their own reading and meaning within the urban environment, without these plural meanings being eliminated or denied, then the space acts as a democratic field. Urban space facilitates this plurality and coexistence of meanings, and in this way, the city’s space transforms into the urbanscape.

The landscape acknowledges the knowledge and values of every individual who experiences it (Vik, 2017) and is the product of pluralism; this is because every observer encounters the landscape through the lens of their own experience, finding the opportunity to participate in the construction of the place’s meaning. Furthermore, the landscape, as a democratic institution, is always an “Open Matter” (Majidi & Hashemizadegan, 2025). The use of the adjective “open” for the landscape points to a holistic system designed to accommodate the unconventional, the strange, and the possible (Sennett, 2018/2023). The landscape is a whole; it is not a totality that merely has parts. The “whole” prevents any set from closing in on itself and compels it to extend itself infinitely into a larger set. In other words, the whole is always the “Open Matter” because, by its nature, it continuously produces or creates the “New Matter.” The landscape, as a whole, follows this principle (Majidi, 2022). The adjective “open” also features as a key term in modern political thought. Karl Popper, the Austrian philosopher, contrasts the open society with the closed society in “The Open Society and Its Enemies” (Popper, 1945), defining

the former as a community where the possibility of critique, change, and the acceptance of different viewpoints is always available. Continuing this line of thought, Hannah Arendt contends that no matter the similarities, differences are fundamental and impactful. According to her, differences are essential because they form the basis of human freedom and diversity. For Arendt, freedom is not merely the option to choose among existing alternatives, but the capacity to create and begin something completely new, an act intrinsically linked to the concept of natality (birth). She states that every human birth is potentially the beginning of innovation and something unexpected in the world: "Action, in so far as it is able to do the infinitely improbable, is miraculous. And this it can do only because every human being is unique, so that with each birth something unique and new comes into the world" (Robeyns & Byskov, 2025). Arendt (1998) further notes that the attempt to create a homogenous and uniform society leads to the destruction of creativity and diversity, thus hindering the creation of the "New Matter". On the other hand, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari expand the concept of openness in relation to "becoming", meaning that being open is not only about accepting differences but also the ability to produce new connections and possibilities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In this very vein, the "Open Landscape," by virtue of its multi-valued nature, constantly produces or creates the "New Matter" and counts the uncounted, allowing all variables (such as human, nature, history, society, politics, etc.) to generate new possibilities within a whole that is pluralistic, diverse, and dissimilar (Majidi & Hashemizadegan, 2024).

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), the Russian philosopher and theorist, views democracy as stemming from linguistic intersubjective relations. By examining it as a cultural category, he links democracy to the domain of individual and social existence (Atariani & Najafzadeh, 2018). Bakhtin plays a central role in the theoretical guidance of this research. His theories of Dialogue (polyphony and dialogism), Carnavalesque, and the Chronotope (time-space continuum) all move along a trajectory that supports democratic principles. His effort was aimed at articulating and presenting a democratic language. This language is precisely dialogue, and only through dialogue can the attainment of freedom and equality be possible. Democracy can be defined as a dialogue among various world-voices, following which consciousness and truth are formed. The concept of the carnival, from Bakhtin's viewpoint, is evocative of democracy under special circumstances because it embodies all the indices of democracy: participation, equality, freedom, and dialogue. The concept of the Carnavalesque in Bakhtin's writings emphasizes the carnivalization of ordinary life. In Bakhtin's view, traces of carnivalesque characteristics exist within modern art, literature, and everyday life (Ansari, 2005). By utilizing concepts such as carnival, dialogism, the union

of heterogeneous voices, and the chronotope (time-space continuum), Bakhtin sketches a democratic society, one in which hierarchical orders are suspended, and the possibility of inter-discursive dialogue is provided. This interaction occurs within a specific time-space setting, and the linkage of time and space gives rise to the structure of the chronotope. All these concepts operate in an integrated manner within his intellectual system (Ramazani & Yazdani, 2015). The central question of this research is: What is the urban equivalent of Bakhtinian freedom, beyond a programmatic, physical, and prescriptive translation, and how can Bakhtin's ideas and his theories on Carnavalesque, Dialogue, and the Chronotope serve as a basis for explaining the democratic urbanscape?

Literature Review

This research aims to rethink the concept of the democratic urbanscape by reviewing and analyzing several theoretical and empirical domains. These domains, on the one hand, clarify the philosophical foundations of democracy and its link to the urbanscape, and on the other hand, reveal the capacity of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories to explicate the micro-mechanisms at work within the urbanscape.

In modern political thought, democracy has consistently been a subject of debate. Philosophers like Popper (1945), by introducing the idea of the "open society" and emphasizing pluralism, provided theoretical foundations for democracy that understand it as far more than merely the "rule of the people." Rousseau (1762) more often defined democracy as an encounter with social uncertainty and plurality. Arendt (1998) likewise stressed that political freedom is contingent upon difference, and democracy is only meaningful in the realm of the appearance and collective action of citizens. Rancière (1999) views democracy not as a system for the distribution of power, but as an event that brings the possibility of radical equality into history. These approaches align with the theories of Laclau & Mouffe (1985), who characterized democracy as a discursive construct and insisted on the necessity of reopening the dominant discourse to allow for the entry of the excluded element. Mouffe (2005) specifically proposed that democracy must be understood as a space for encountering conflicts, not for eliminating them. Butler (2015) extends this idea into the realm of the body and space, seeing the occupation of public places by bodies as a form of democratic action that resists policies of exclusion. Subsequently, contemporary theorists such as Agamben et al. (2019), Nancy (2010), and Vik (2017) have also emphasized openness, suspension, and incompleteness as the fundamental characteristics of democracy.

This philosophical outlook on democracy has, in recent decades, become intrinsically linked with the concept of landscape. The landscape is no longer understood merely as an aesthetic or physical phenomenon but is instead treated as a political and democratic institution where the

knowledge, experience, and values of all users are recognized (Olwig, 2005; Setten & Brown, 2009; Vik, 2017). In this context, plurality and heterogeneity are not viewed as threats but are considered a positive value for the landscape (Jones, 2007). Mitchell (1996, 2007) has demonstrated that the landscape is not merely a passive backdrop but an active agent in the reproduction of social structures, and it is transformed into a democratic institution through social conflicts and contradictions. At the international level, scholarship such as the book *The Right to Landscape* (Egoz et al., 2011) has identified the urbanscape as a ground for social justice and citizen participation. Furthermore, Calderon & Butler (2020) argue that the urbanscape can only be a democratic institution when pluralism, local identities, and the reduction of power structures' dominance are recognized in urban planning. Till (2002) frames the landscape as an arena for the negotiation of collective identities, centering lived experiences in the analysis. This connection has also become more pronounced in domestic research. Habibi (2000) links the realization of civil society to public arenas such as the urbanscape. Mansouri (2010) identifies the urbanscape as a complex text of historical, social, and cultural narratives. Sattar zad Fathi et al. (2020) have integrated the social and environmental indicators of democratic urban spaces. Imani & Arab Solghar (2020) have explicated the civic urbanscape across three dimensions: objective, structure, and meaning. Majidi (2022), using the concept of the "Urbanscape: The Open Matter," emphasizes the incompleteness and possibility-creation of the urbanscape. He defines the urbanscape as an open threshold and a process of "becoming" between humans and the environment that challenges fixed boundaries and creates new possibilities for interaction, freedom, and civic participation. Building on this, Majidi & Hashemizadegan (2025) view the political nature of the urbanscape as the result of the clash and conflict of forces, proposing the dimensions of democracy, the plurality of values, collective and individual identities, modes of representation, and the understanding of power as key components in the explanation of the political urbanscape. This body of research indicates that a democratic urbanscape must not only be accessible and diverse, but must also provide the capacity to host conflicts, dialogues, and civic actions so that it can be transformed into an incomplete, dynamic, and open space for the democratic recreation of everyday life.

Continuing this discussion, the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin provide an interdisciplinary framework for analyzing the micro-mechanisms that realize such openness and plurality within the urbanscape. Bakhtin's fundamental concepts, such as dialogism and polyphony, the carnival, and the chronotope (Bakhtin, 1975/1981), all emphasize the production of meaning through the interaction of independent and equal consciousnesses. Dialogism highlights the dynamic process of meaning production; Polyphony insists on rejecting the

dominance of any single voice over others; the Carnival is introduced as a space for the suspension of established orders and cultural resistance; and the Chronotope reveals the time-space embeddedness of lived experience. Collectively, these concepts provide a theoretical vision for the linkage among space, community, and democracy, possessing a high capacity for analyzing the urbanscape.

The application of Bakhtin's theories in Iran has predominantly been within the domains of literature and art. Research has focused on the concepts of Carnival and Carnavalesque, applying them to the analysis of popular culture, paintings, and literary texts (Featherston, 1992/2001; Ecotourier, 2004; Arabzadehetal., 2015; Ramazani & Yazdani, 2015; Daneshgar, 2016; Aghapour & Hesampour, 2016; Oskoui, 2017; Afarin, 2018; Atariani & Najafzadeh, 2018; Allahyari et al., 2022; Farid, 2023). Another group has concentrated on dialogism and polyphony within literature, miniature painting, and visual arts (Namvar Motlagh, 2008; Najafzadeh, 2013; Hosseini & Moharramzadeh, 2014; Pourazar & Sokhanvar, 2015; PanjehBashi, 2018; Rahbarnia & Namazalizadeh, 2021; Shahkolahi & Fahimifar, 2021; Taheri & Hemmati, 2023). A third category has addressed the chronotope and related concepts, examining the temporality and spatiality of experience within artistic and cultural contexts (Mesbah & Rahbarnia, 2011; Hashemy et al., 2014; Afarin et al., 2017; Fazeli, 2018; Mashahirifard et al., 2020).

However, the application of Bakhtin's theories is still limited in space-related fields. Khademian & Ghabel Rahmat (2015) have shown that carnivalesque actions in public spaces such as Istanbul's Taksim Square can provide a ground for the formation of dialogue and collective action, although their research is mostly focused on specific urban movements. Mohammadi et al. (2016) considered *flânerie* as a carnivalesque action that redefines urban spaces through the creation of new meanings, but its connection to Bakhtin's other theoretical dimensions remained limited. Haghighi Boroojeni et al. (2017) utilized Bakhtin's novel theory in analyzing Isfahan's Chaharbagh Street, but their analysis leans more towards urban design. Ameri (2018) applied the concept of the carnival in the pathology of crime-ridden neighborhoods such as Rahmani & Aminzadeh (2017) also framed the concept of dialogue as a framework for urban planning, although their focus was restricted to the ethical dimension of dialogue.

The existing literature review indicates that the trajectory of research begins at the philosophical level of democracy, then proceeds to the linkage between democracy and the landscape concept, and subsequently introduces the capacity of Bakhtin's theories in cultural and textual domains. Finally, a limited number of studies have attempted to apply these concepts within the context of the city and the urbanscape. This entire process is summarized in Table 1 as an analytical procedure.

Table 1. Analytical Process of the Research Background. Source: Authors.

Area/ Phase	Dominant Approaches in Research	Achievements	Implications for the Present Research
Philosophy of Democracy	Democracy as possibility, openness, event of equality, and arena of conflict (Rousseau, 1762; Popper, 1945; de Certeau, 1984; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Arendt, 1998; Rancière, 1999; Mouffe, 2005; Massey, 2005; Nancy, 2010; Butler, 2015; Agamben et al., 2019; Vik, 2017)	Critique of the traditional understanding of “rule of the people” and emphasis on plurality, suspension, and subjectivity.	Theoretical Foundation: Democracy as a possibility in relation to space and everyday life.
Linkage between Democracy and Landscape	Explaining the landscape as a political/democratic institution (Mitchell, 1996, 2007; Olwig, 2005; Jones, 2007; Setten & Brown, 2009; Habibi, 2000; Egoz et al., 2011; Vik, 2017; Mansouri, 2010; Calderon & Butler, 2020; Sattarad Fathi et al., 2020; Imani & Arab Solghar, 2020; Majidi, 2022; Majidi & Hashemizadegan, 2025)	Introducing the landscape as an arena for plurality, participation, and conflict that recognizes the varied values and experiences of users.	Highlighting the urbanscape as an open and unfinished arena for the emergence of democratic actions and everyday conflicts.
Capacity of Bakhtin's Theories in Literary/ Cultural Fields	Carnival, dialogism, polyphony, chronotope (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, 1929/1984, 1993) in literary and artistic texts (Featherstone, 1992/2001; Ecotourier, 2004; Namvar-Motlagh, 2008; Mesbah & Rahbarnia, 2011; Najafzadeh, 2013; Hashemy et al., 2014; Hashemy et al., 2014; Hosseini & Moharramzadeh, 2014; Pourazar & Sokhanvar, 2015; Arabzadeh et al., 2015; Ramazani & Yazdani, 2015; Daneshgar, 2016; Aghapour & Hesampour, 2016; Eskouei, 2017; Afarin et al., 2017; Afarin, 2018; Fazeli, 2018; Attariani & Najafzadeh, 2018; Panjeh Bashi, 2018; Mashahirifard et al., 2020; Rahbarnia & Namazalizadeh, 2021; Shahkolahi & Fahimifar, 2021; Allahyari et al., 2022; Farid, 2023; Taheri & Hemmati, 2023)	Revealing the capacity of Bakhtinian concepts for critiquing established orders and producing pluralistic meanings.	Transferring Bakhtinian concepts from the textual-cultural level to the spatial and social level.
Limited Application in Space-Related Studies	Analysis of squares, flânerie, neighborhoods, and dialogue (Khademian et al., 2015; Mohammadi et al., 2016; Haghighi Boroojeni et al., 2017; Ameri, 2017; Rahmani & Aminzadeh, 2017)	Demonstrating the potential of Bakhtinian concepts in redefining space and strengthening civil society.	Rethinking the democratic urbanscape based on Bakhtin's theories.

In total, these studies have revealed the high capacity of Bakhtin's theories for analyzing social spaces and the urbanscape; however, significant limitations remain evident: the scattered and limited nature of the research; the inattention to everyday life; and, critically, the lack of studies that have directly analyzed the linkage between Bakhtin's theories and the concept of the landscape or urbanscape. The present research endeavors to bridge this gap by utilizing Bakhtin's theories to open a new horizon for the rethinking of the democratic urbanscape.

Research Method

This research is theoretical and fundamental in nature. It employed a qualitative approach utilizing a critical discourse analysis (CDA). In the first phase, conceptual analysis was employed to critically re-read the key concepts in the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin, including the carnival, dialogism, and the chronotope. These concepts were subsequently redefined in relation to urban space and everyday life. Next, relying on discursive interpretation, the link between Bakhtin's theory and the urbanscape, as the field of citizens' multi-

layered experience, was investigated. The analysis process was based on gathering, synthesizing, and reframing concepts from authoritative theoretical sources in the fields of the philosophy of language, literary theory, urban studies, landscape architecture, and social critique. An effort was made to present a novel theoretical formulation, providing a conceptual framework for understanding micro-carnavalesque events at the heart of everyday urban life. In this path, the research does not seek to test a hypothesis, but rather to generate meaning, explicate the relationship between theory and spatialized experience, and open new analytical horizons in the understanding of the contemporary urbanscape.

Theoretical Foundations of the Research

• The carnival: From exception to ongoing matter / The carnivalization of everyday life

The carnival is a celebration, or one could say, a public procession in the street. In the Dehkhoda Dictionary, the term “carnival” is defined as a “caravan of joy” (Dehkhoda, n.d.). In the social sciences, the carnival is conceptualized as a

subculture that stands in opposition to, and temporarily dismantles, the official space and ruling power. The origin of the carnival concept traces back to the literature of medieval Europe, a phenomenon that served as an opportunity for the public's temporary liberation from social pressures and the established order (Ahmadi, 1991). Clark & Holquist (1984), by tracing the term throughout history, argue that the carnival played a crucial role in the lives of people during the Middle Ages. They described European life during the carnival as such: the unique feeling of time and place during the carnival leads the individual to feel that they are part of the collective. The distinguishing feature of carnivals was their exuberant atmosphere and their enthusiastic and ecstatic rites, which were often held in public squares and passageways, and sometimes in private spaces in ancient Rome and Greece (Oskoui, 2017).

Carnivals are all-encompassing and public arenas that organize the people's "second life" as a type of pseudo-festive existence. This phenomenon, going beyond mere joyous and collective rites, constitutes a social and symbolic moment in which hierarchical and official boundaries are suspended, even if temporarily, and individuals from different classes and statuses gather in a relative position of equality. The carnivalesque language and forms, with their playful, fluid, and indeterminate characteristics, challenge the dominant "truths" and established social structures (Bakhtin, 1929/1984). Therefore, the carnival is not just a "time of rest," but an idealistic and symbolic arena that, with a joyful approach, points out the relativity of dominant authorities and truths (Pourazar, 2024).

Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian researcher, was the first to use the concept of the carnival systematically (Goldman et al., 2013). Bakhtin transformed the conventional and historical meaning of the carnival, offering a distinct narrative of it (Oskoui, 2017). He first introduced this concept in the book *Rabelais and His World*, considering the novels of François Rabelais as a manifestation of the carnival concept through a fresh reading (Ansari, 2005). Based on Bakhtin's perspective, the carnival is more than a protest event in the contemporary sense; this phenomenon functions as a critical subculture that challenges the dominant values and common norms through its rites and customs (Goldman et al., 2013). The carnival, from Bakhtin's viewpoint, is filled with free popular participation aimed at challenging the ruling official and serious culture. During the celebrations and carnivals of the Renaissance, people who were barred from the political arena would gather at these events and collectively create a form of democratic life (Attariani & Najafzadeh, 2018).

In the context of popular culture, the carnival provides an opportunity for the emergence of creativity and a space for transcending the boundaries of hierarchical value systems (Afarin, 2018). During carnivalesque actions, all members of society, regardless of their economic, social, or cultural

standing, are placed in a state of equality, and a form of intimate communication free from hierarchical constraints takes shape among them. This is a place where everyone benefits from the possibility of equality in dialogue and can express their thoughts and viewpoints freely and without concern (Ansari, 2005). All elements and phenomena that were previously closed off, separate, and detached from one another under the dominance of a non-carnavalesque, hierarchical worldview, now become connected and interact with each other in the form of carnivalesque linkages and combinations (Jones, 2008).

Another distinguishing feature of the Bakhtinian carnival is the absence of finality (or certainty). In the carnivalesque space, everything is in a state of becoming and transformation; no fixed state exists. This fluidity and emphasis on instability are a reflection of Bakhtin's thought on the openness of meaning and the unfinalizability of the world (Arabzadeh et al., 2015). The open and unfinished carnivalesque body, which is perpetually undergoing change and metamorphosis, also impels society to participate in a continuous cycle of evolution and recreation; a process that brings it closer to the realization of a democratic society, as envisioned by Bakhtin (Ramazani & Yazdani, 2015).

The carnival life possesses the very characteristics that define democratic life; however, when encountering limitations, it adopts a comic and theatrical form. In this context, what lends meaning to this mode of existence is a democratic laughter that penetrates the depths of human everyday life (Attariani & Najafzadeh, 2018). Carnavalesque laughter grants people a sense of agency and empowerment, an experience of power that allows them to fantasize, hope for the future, and take steps toward achieving an egalitarian society (Clasen, 2011). This laughter is destructive, constructive, and critical, standing against the official culture to create a space for critique, thereby becoming emancipatory and creative. Bakhtin wrote about laughter: Laughter does not only have an external appearance; it also reveals an internal truth. This laughter not only liberates humans from external censorship but, prior to that, rescues them from internal censorship, from the fears that have taken root in their being over centuries, such as the fear of the sacred, of forbidden matters, of the past, and of power (Ahmadi, 1991). This carnivalesque laughter incites the audacity of invention and aids in liberation from the dominant worldview concerning the world (Bakhtin, 2001).

Bakhtin's desirable laughter, as a central concept in his thought, functions beyond a simple reaction and singularly represents a type of worldview. This laughter, with its conscious and joyful characteristics, negates the status quo and, in this process, establishes a new order. This laughter also stands firm against whatever opposes natality and emergence, thereby aiding the appearance of new ideas (Attariani & Najafzadeh, 2018). In the carnival, the monologic

space is broken, and a polyphonic society (multivoiced, multi-sounded, and laughing) emerges, accompanied by diverse dialogues (Allahyari, et al., 2022). When freedom is established and individuals are liberated from constraints and restrictions, dialogue takes shape, and free, informal contact is created among people. In this state, individuals who were separated in everyday life due to social, political, or religious barriers establish intimate and unrestricted communication within the carnivalesque space (Bakhtin, 2018). Essentially, within the framework of the carnival, class distinction is abolished, time and space are dedicated to social interaction, and the people assume the most important role in the flow of dialogue. Consequently, everyone becomes equal, and intimate communication is established between individuals who are ordinarily differentiated by age, occupation, and other factors (Bakhtin, 1929/1984).

He explains the meaning of these carnivalesque images by emphasizing their connection to a way of life. From Bakhtin's viewpoint, carnivalesque characteristics manifest not only in carnival events but also in literature, art, and everyday life. In fact, the concept of "grounding life" is proposed as the central core of the carnivalesque idea (Ansari, 2005). The carnival flows within the heart of everyday life, and everyday life cannot be separated from its counterpart, the carnival (Khademian & Ghabel Rahmat, 2015). The carnival is situated at the core of everyday life such that elements of daily existence are present within it, albeit in a carnivalized form. Stated differently, the social activities present in the carnival create a form of "secondary life" for individuals, which is based on specific interpretations of the social order (Makaryk, 2005). The carnival and everyday life provide a space in which democratic language is clearly and prominently manifested (Ansari, 2005).

The roots of the concept of "everyday life" can be traced back to the theories of classical sociologists who expressed concern over the dominance of large-scale systems and structures of the modern world on the domain of daily life. Concepts such as Max Weber's "formal rationality" and Marx's "fetishism" and "alienation" were employed to explain this phenomenon. Consequently, the historical processes of "increasing differentiation and the colonization of everyday life" and the paths to liberation from it became one of the central axes of contemplation for thinkers and sociologists (Featherston, 1992/2001).

The basis of all these theoretical frameworks is the separation of the two spheres: everyday life and the transcendental world, which has formed through a historical process and has ultimately led to the colonization of the lifeworld. Nevertheless, everyday life is the most fundamental domain for the formation of human beings' horizon of meaning. In this sphere, human abilities and capacities come to the fore and are objectively manifested (Heller, 2015).

In everyday life, subjects do not remain passive in the face

of dominant discourses; rather, they continually display a dynamic and multifaceted resistance. Actors of everyday life employ creative methods to create novel rearrangements of consumption patterns that do not align with the initial intentions of the producers of space. These tactics allow them to seize control of the space for their own purposes without leaving it (Hashemy et al., 2014).

Consequently, it can be posited that, contrary to the common interpretations of the carnival as an exceptional and anti-structural phenomenon, where people, in pursuit of freedom and joy, temporarily break and invert all rules only to return to the original structure in their everyday lives after this rupture, any new event or unexpected occurrence can lead to the carnivalization of moments, revealing the instability and unfinalizability of dominant structures. The Bakhtinian carnival can be understood as a set of accessible micropolitics that flow within the structure of everyday life. By creating temporary ruptures within daily existence, it adds new and playful layers, offering people possibilities for transcending planned frameworks.

• Dialogue as event

Mikhail Bakhtin seeks to formulate and present a democratic language, which he terms dialogue. From his perspective, dialogue plays a role in the linguistic system and the structure of the novel that is analogous to the carnival (Noles, 1998/2012). Bakhtin maintains that the attainment of freedom and equality is possible only through a dialogic approach (Atariani & Najafzadeh, 2018), and based on this, he considers dialogism to be the most important characteristic of the free and democratic public sphere (Najafzadeh, 2013). He was the first in the twentieth century to introduce Dialogism into the field of literary criticism. Dialogism refers to the free interaction of voices within a text. Polyphony is considered a prerequisite for dialogism and refers to the equal distribution of voices in a text, such that all voices have the possibility of presence without one dominating the other or the others (Zarghani, 2005). Based on the degree and manner in which texts utilize dialogism, Bakhtin divides them into two categories: first, texts in which the monologic feature is dominant; and second, texts in which the polyphonic feature is prominent (Namvar Motlagh, 2008). Bakhtin terms polyphonic texts popular or carnivalesque literature and contrasts them with classical or official literature, which is generally monologic (Ducrot, 1984).

Bakhtin maintains that language in certain literary works, especially the novel, and particularly Dostoevsky's novels, possesses multiple layers in each of which distinct voices from various social strata, professions, genders, and age groups are manifested. He emphasized that in these polyphonic novels, the fictional world is formed through the diverse narratives of the characters, narratives that are retold mediated by the narrator's transformative perspective (Danishgar, 2016).

Based on his studies, the characters in Dostoevsky's novels are situated in a distinct space; thus, within the logic of accepting the "Other," multiple voices are clearly heard. These voices are present in the conversation based on a dialogic logic, responding to one another without dominating the other (Makaryk, 2005). It must be emphasized that the mere existence of dialogue or interaction among the characters of a literary text does not, by itself, render it dialogic. The dialogism of a literary text is realized only when no dominant voice or monolithic worldview governs the text, and the prominent feature of the text is the preservation of the autonomy and freedom of expression of the diverse voices or worldviews (Salimikouchi & Sokoutjahromi, 2012). In explicating the concept of polyphony, Ducrot (1984) writes: Bakhtin believes that there exists a group of texts, especially literary texts, which must be credited with the characteristic that multiple voices speak simultaneously within them, without any one voice prevailing over or judging the others. Dialogue is considered the central core of Bakhtin's thought in the field of philosophical anthropology. From Bakhtin's perspective, individuals recognize their identity through the gaze of the other and rediscover the moments of transformation and change in their own thought through their connection with the [A2] other. Stated differently, individuals perceive the reflection of their life in the consciousness of others. In reality, the "I" can never perceive itself directly in its own external realm, but rather recognizes the reflection of its presence only in the existence of others; hence, the ontological significance of the "Other" for consciousness. From Bakhtin's viewpoint, conversation is counted as a way to communicate with others. Therefore, life is a conversation, and to be alive means to participate in that conversation (Ahmadi, 1991).

From Bakhtin's perspective, conversation occurs among a number of people and is not always confined to two individuals; indeed, a single person can establish an internal dialogue. Dialogue leads to the emergence of a novel understanding that is original and creative. Fundamentally, dialogue requires no guiding individual or instruction manual. The purpose of dialogue is not to reach any specific decision; rather, it merely creates an empty space, a space that is completely open and free; a space empty of any constraint. It is only in this empty space that a conversation can be established. While an objective may exist, other participants are left free to accept or reject that objective (Taheri & Hemmati, 2023). Openness and endless continuation are considered essential prerequisites for dialogue and polyphony. No single discourse can be deemed the final word or dominate other discourses; instead, the various voices interact and participate in a continuous and uninterrupted dialogic process (Khademian & Ghabel Rahmat, 2015).

Bakhtin also established a link between dialogism, polyphony, and political and social concepts (MashaheriFar et al., 2020),

seeking to create a new discourse of freedom through this path (Frazer, 1890/2003). Dialogism in Bakhtin's thought stands in contrast to monologic discourse. He rejects monologism due to its authoritarian and undemocratic nature. Conversely, as previously mentioned, dialogism signifies the intermingling of diverse ideas and voices that form the foundation of Bakhtin's democratic thought. From his perspective, heterogeneous voices and ideas gain meaning and come to life through dialogic interaction with one another (Ramazani & Yazdani, 2015). A free and democratic society, according to Bakhtin, is one in which diverse voices find the possibility of expression and being heard without the dominance of one over the other (Bakhtin, 1984).

This Bakhtinian dialogue is of the nature of the Event. Alain Badiou (2009) has offered multiple definitions of the Event: sometimes characterizing the Event as something entirely contingent and dependent on chance, sometimes viewing it as the creation of something *ex nihilo* (from nothing), and sometimes defining the Event as a structural necessity that will inevitably occur. The most salient characteristic of Events is their unpredictability within the context of the existing situation. This feature stems from the inability to comprehend the Event based on the knowledge of the status quo: "unpredictable, incalculable, beyond what is, and outside the current conditions" (Parandoush, 2018). The Event of truth appears, first and foremost, as a rupture in the knowledge of the situation, something outside the customary actions, rules, and conventions, and beyond established meaning, which, when placed in the appropriate conditions, is capable of creating a new meaning and a new rule (Sheyda, 2017). "The Event is a real change" (Badiou, 2006/2009). However, the Event alone does not create any change in the situation; its occurrence is dependent on the subjectivity of individuals. They act in the situation based on the Events, and in doing so, something new is perpetually produced within the situation (Hosseini Komeleh & Namvar Moutlagh, 2022).

The "Dialogue-Event" functions as an unprogrammed, yet emergent, possibility; it is a democratic and emancipatory occurrence. The Event-nature of this dialogue signifies a fissure and a cut that occurs beyond the status quo and the order of its reality, thereby furnishing a possibility for the formation of conversation both around and beyond a priori planning.

• The time-space continuum (chronotope) of the event

At the core of Bakhtin's theory, alongside the key concepts of dialogism, polyphony, and the carnival, the analysis of the temporal and spatial dimensions present in the text holds considerable importance. Bakhtin utilized the concept of the Chronotope (or the time-space continuum) in various forms. In the introduction to his essay, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel" (Bakhtin, 2001), which is considered one of his four

major essays in the book *The Dialogic Imagination*, he offers a comprehensive definition of the Chronotope: “We shall give the name Chronotope (literally, ‘time-space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.” This concept shapes the structure of the narrative plot by creating the appropriate setting for the occurrence of events, and it makes these events representable through temporal signs and elements.

In his theory, the concept of Dialogue shapes the process, action, and relationship between individuals or objects, while the concept of the Chronotope (time-space continuum) explains the space-time relationship in which life exists and the emergence of creativity becomes possible (Bakhtin, 1975/1981). Within the framework of the Chronotope in literary and artistic fields, the elements of time and space are precisely and objectively linked into a cohesive combination. This interaction is such that time manifests as a compressed and living concept, becoming perceivable in an artistic manner. Similarly, space exhibits specific sensitivity and responses in reaction to temporal changes, the plot structure, and the historical texture. It is this characteristic intersection of distinct axes and linkages between time and space that forms the essence of the Chronotope in artistic works (Bakhtin, 1981).

Through the concepts of the Carnival, Dialogism, and the Chronotope, Bakhtin elaborated on the linkage between temporal and spatial structures and the formation of the human image within a specific time-space setting, thereby depicting a democratic society. These concepts operate simultaneously and continuously: The Carnival, by disrupting established orders, provides the ground for polyphonic dialogue among diverse thoughts and voices from various social classes. Such a process occurs within a specific time and place, the continuity of which forms the Chronotope (Ramazani & Yazdani, 2015). In carnivalesque chronotopes, time is usually conceived as momentary (or instantaneous), as if detached from the natural and continuous flow of time, with its continuity somehow interrupted (Bakhtin, 2001). It is within this time-space continuum that Events occur: temporary ruptures in the order of reality take place, and possibilities for the arbitrary consumption of time and space are provided.

Discussion

In most interpretations of Bakhtin, the Carnival is treated as a space of exception, and Dialogue is viewed as a programmed affair. However, the idea of this research is predicated on the assumption that this space of exception should not be seen as a large exteriority, and that any new event or unexpected occurrence may lead to the carnivalization of moments. We contend that the Carnival is a set of accessible micropolitics that flows within the

structure of everyday life in the urbanscape, and whose incompleteness and openness provide the possibility for the space to be filled with Events. These urban micro-carnivals create temporary ruptures in everyday life, offering people possibilities for transcending planned frameworks and adding new, playful layers to the city. In these moments where the order of reality is broken, integrity and totality are shattered, and the authority of the dominant world is called into question. Consequently, for a moment, people are left to their own devices. This is the very moment when people rediscover the power of their own realization. In such a situation, individuals behave not within the framework of established rules and regulations, but in a pure and unmediated manner, free from all imposed customs and constraints. Each person, by freely utilizing time and space, reveals their true and authentic self. This is the Event that occurs in the carnivalization of the urbanscape, placing the city’s public space under the control and authority of its citizens.

The three key Bakhtinian concepts, the Carnival, Dialogism, and the Chronotope, play a determining role in explaining this process. Firstly, in the elaboration of the Carnival concept, Bakhtin describes it as a space for the temporary suspension of social hierarchies and the emergence of opportunities for equal relationships (Bakhtin, 1929/1984). In this sense, the Carnival is an arena where individual and distinct voices are simultaneously heard and fostered within an interactive space; participants are no longer merely a mass of people, but each forms an independent personality that influences others (Khademian & Ghabel Rahmat, 2015). The findings of this research indicate that this suspension is discernible not only at the scale of large-scale events but also at the micro and everyday level. Micro-carnivals, such as spontaneous *flânerie* or sudden interactions in squares and passageways, are examples of this phenomenon, inviting citizens to the arbitrary consumption of time and space. Secondly, Bakhtin’s (1975/1981) concept of Dialogism, which emphasizes polyphony and the interaction of independent consciousnesses, shows that these moments only transform into a democratic Event when the process of mutual listening and the creation of meaning are realized within the dialogic space. The urbanscape, as a complex text of pluralistic narratives (Mansouri, 2010), possesses the capacity to generate such a dialogue. This implies that the desired freedom is not merely a choice among existing options, but the production of something new in the interactive process (Arendt, 1998). This reading aligns with contemporary political philosophy approaches that view democracy as the scene of engagement with conflict and the birth of meaning (Mouffe, 2005). In this vein, the urbanscape can transform into an open threshold for the process

of “becoming” (Majidi, 2022). Thirdly, the Bakhtinian Chronotope, the time-space continuum, provides the narrative basis for explaining how micro-carnivals emerge in space. When spaces are related in a way that produces open and unfinished narrative plots and linkages, more situations are furnished for the emergence of dialogic and polyphonic Events. Stated differently, the Chronotope is not an abstract feature but a mechanism in which the intersection of urban routes, thresholds, and temporalities sets the stage for the occurrence of micro-carnivals.

Since the concepts of the Carnavalesque Space, Dialogue, and the Chronotope are interconnected, and since Dialogue as Event occurs at a specific time and place whose continuity forms the Chronotope, the urbanscape must possess a narrative foundation to facilitate the emergence of these Bakhtinian micro-carnivals in everyday life. The narrative nature of the urbanscape’s foundation implies that these Events are made possible as a result of the interaction and relationship between spaces within the city. Urban spaces must be positioned alongside each other in such a way that the plot they constitute proposes openness and a possibility for a free civic life. Freedom is that which is not planned, but rather becomes possible around the existing reality and as a result of a certain sequence and causal relationship, and a narrative plot in the contiguity of spaces. This freedom functions as a hidden invitation for the taking over and arbitrary consumption of place and time in the city. In this context, the urbanscape is not merely a visual or physical entity, but a living, narrative field that provides the possibility for these ruptures to occur. When spaces form open and unfinished plots in relation to one another, the possibility for dialogue, polyphony, and the emergence of democratic Events is provided. In this way, democracy takes shape not within the established order, but precisely in these scattered, untimely, and playful moments; moments in which people are not merely observers, but the temporary creators of meaning, space, and self.

Conclusion

This research, through a critical re-reading of Mikhail Bakhtin’s key concepts, the Carnival, Dialogism, and the Chronotope, and their linkage to the philosophical concept of democracy, demonstrates that the democratic urbanscape is not a static, merely planned physical entity, but rather a narrative, unfinished, and dynamic field. This field possesses the capacity to generate micro-carnavalesque and dialogic Events in everyday life. These Events transform the city into an arena that is perpetually in a state of becoming, redefinition, and openness. The main findings of this research can be summarized across three domains:

1. The Carnival as an Ongoing Capacity

Contrary to the conventional approach that views carnivals

as planned and exceptional events, this research argues that the carnivalization of moments can be manifested as unforeseen and accessible occurrences within the texture of everyday urban life. Examples include spontaneous flânerie, sudden dialogues in public and semi-public spaces, and creative users who take control of the city’s public spaces through the arbitrary consumption of time and space.

2. Dialogue as a Democratic Event

Bakhtinian Dialogism is realized when pluralistic voices are mutually heard and the process of meaning creation flows in the form of polyphonic conversations. Urban micro-carnivals, by creating temporary ruptures in everyday life and through their inherent openness, form hidden possibilities for the actualization of dialogue and polyphony as an unprogrammed event that is additive to the existing reality.

3. The Chronotope as the Spatial-Temporal Mechanism of Events

The relationship between time and space (the Chronotope) determines which spaces, and in what linkages, possess the capacity to host micro-carnivals. When spaces are situated alongside each other in narrative, open, and unfinished relationships, they furnish situations that enhance the possibility of creative ruptures and polyphonic dialogues. Ultimately, by synthesizing and integrating these three concepts, this research redefines the democratic urbanscape not as a fixed and pre-designed entity, but as a “narrative, open, and polyphonic field” that:

- a) possesses the capacity to generate carnivalesque ruptures within the heart of everyday life;
- b) makes dialogues as events (Rukhdād) possible; and
- c) Its chronotopes furnish the times and places in which the new can be born.

This urbanscape, as an open totality, is a continuous process that, through these Events, has the capacity to host diverse narratives and facilitate the emergence of the new. Such a definition of the urbanscape emphasizes the political potential of everyday actions and introduces the urbanscape as a democratic institution capable of hosting the plurality of voices and creating innovative opportunities for civic participation. Based on this, the Conceptual Framework of this research introduces the democratic urbanscape as a dynamic, living, and processual system in which the concepts of the Carnival, Dialogism, and the Chronotope interact with one another to provide the possibility for the realization of democratic actions in everyday life. This framework, which is presented in Fig. 1, illustrates the linkage between these concepts and the urbanscape as a theoretical model.

Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

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

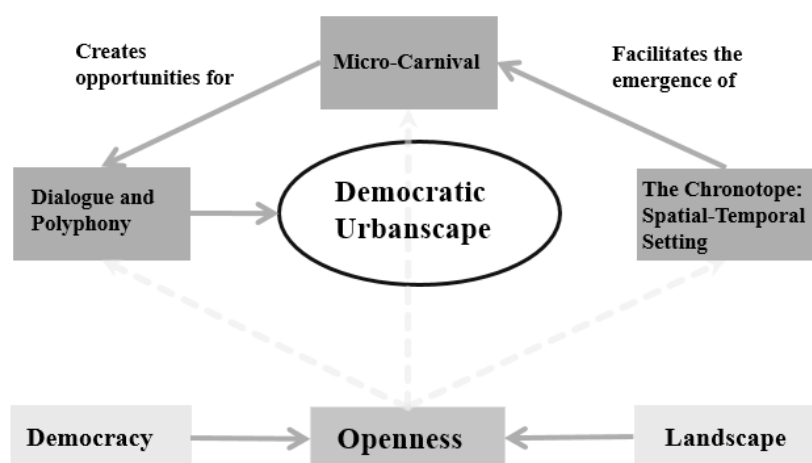


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the Democratic Urbanscape. Source: Authors.

Endnotes

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