Identifying the Challenges Rasht Citizens Face for Walking Using Grounded Theory

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction
The structure formed in cities throughout time and creation supporting elements of the cars in cities do not fit new urban approaches, and this issue has manifested more often in the cities of developing countries where overlapping pattern of tradition and modernity have been more pronounced. Somehow, these cities were not strong enough both in terms of walking or using vehicles. This inability is the result of social, economic, cultural, physical, and management features in these cities, which ultimately lead to a decrease in citizens' desire to walk in the urban space. It is therefore important to be aware of factors that decrease citizens' interest in walking in urban spaces. In the present study, we investigated this matter in Rasht, and various layers associated with it have been analyzed. As one of Iranian northern cities, Rasht is located in Guilan province. The city has a temperate climate and is considered as a tourist attraction point in the country. Its green environment as well as the climatic characteristics and attractive places and spaces are all among the potentials of the city in encouraging citizens to walk. In this study, we tried to investigate walking problems of citizens from various aspects and to determine the factor which has the greatest impact on decreasing the citizens' interest in walking in the city.

2. Theoretical Framework
Given the purposes of urban planning, this study examines the issue of walking in cities. For this purpose, in the physical section, the major point of discussion is the compact city approach that pays particular attention to pedestrians. Since the purpose of this study is to identify bottlenecks of hiking for Rasht citizens, given the non-physical purposes of urban planning in social, economic, cultural dimensions, grounded theory is used to determine physical and non-physical bottlenecks.

3. Method
To identify barriers to walking in Rasht in the present study, grounded theory method is used. Grounded Theory is a qualitative research method to study social

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processes in human interaction. This method was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and is rooted in symbolic interaction interpretation school. This research method is a field method that investigates and describes phenomena in their natural contexts. It involves a five-step process: first stage is the research design (i.e., technical literature review and selecting items); second stage is data collection; the third stage is setting data and writing items and concepts; the fourth stage is analyzing the data (the major section), and the fifth stage is designing and validating the model. By research design, we mean questions and scope of research. Based on purposeful and theoretical sampling, 430 residents were selected as sample. Techniques used for data collection focused on semi-structured interviews and field observations. The interviews went so far as theoretical saturation was reached.

4. Findings and discussion
The results of open coding, as the first stage of analysis of collected data, included 117 codes extracted from interviews with immigrants. Sixteen concepts were announced from denoting codes, and other codes were directly taken from the interviewees' verbal report. At this stage of the scientific coding, several broad categories were identified by analysis of data and concepts, and accordingly, 19 broad categories were formed. In selective coding phase, via a cohesive process, the main categories were elected. In this study, according to the results of broad categories, seven major categories including influential factors related to social, cultural, physical, personal and natural issues together with management, facilities and rules have been detected.

5. Conclusion and suggestions
Various factors account for challenges faced by pedestrians in urban spaces. After the formation of these factors they interact internally and enforce one another, and as a result, they jeopardize walking planning in cities. As the study showed, Rasht, despite having high potential for urban walkability, has failed to make citizens tend to walk in the city due to problems in various dimensions. These problems are derived from a variety of plausible and abstract sources, sometimes manifested in real forms and sometimes in the mind of the citizens. All in all, there are two sets of objective and subjective factors that cause barriers for the people to walk or at least reduce their walking route. In general, basic challenges Rasht citizens face for walking in the city are majorly influenced by various social, cultural, physical, personal and natural management, facilities and constitutional factors. All of these factors can be categorized to influential factors and confounding conditions. Features of the city and citizens, and conditions affecting the citizens' lack of desire to walk play a role respectively in the former and latter.

Key words: Walking, Walkability, Grounded Theory, Rasht.

References (in Persian)


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