

## ***A Survey on Economic, Social and Geographical issues of Rasht Metropolis of Iran***

*İran'ın Raşt Büyükşehirinde Ekonomik, Sosyal ve Coğrafi konular Üzerinde Bir Araştırma*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Rasht metropolis is located in north of Iran, being located on the transit road of Tehran – Astara, and is the capital of the Guilan province. All metropolises, generally, have similar characteristics, because they are areas involving the most important and advantageous activities. This research studies a framework of spatial, skeletal, administrative, economic, and social factors in Rasht city of Iran. Studies have shown that because Rasht is located in the center of the region and as a result of delivering administrative, business, educational, cultural, medical, etc. services, it hosts a huge population from the suburbs and other cities and towns of the province. Consequently, the need for different services also increases. Further, 40% of business and residential buildings are located in the old, timeworn and outworn parts of the city, which has physical and skeletal triteness, need repair and reconstruction, but the reconditioning ratio has not exceeded 10% annually as a result of financial problems and uncertainty in building possession.

**Keywords:** Metropolis, Rasht, spatial growth, economic, social.

### **ÖZET**

İran'ın kuzeyinde yer alan Raşt Büyükşehir, Gilan ilinin başkenti olan Tahran – Astara'nın transit karayolu üzerinde bulunur. Tüm büyükşehirler, genellikle, benzer karakterlere sahiptir bu yüzden onlar en çok önemli ve avantajlı faaliyetleri içeren alanlardır. Bu araştırma, İran'ın Raşt şehrinde mekânsal, iskelet, idari, ekonomik ve sosyal faktörlerin bir yapısını inceler. Araştırmalara göre Raşt bir bölgenin merkezinde olduğu için idari teslimat, ticaret, sağlık, eğitim, kültür vb hizmetleri sunmasının bir sonucu olarak, ilin varoşlarda ve diğer şehirlerden ve kasabalardan büyük bir nüfusu barındırmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, farklı hizmetler için ihtiyaç da artar. Ayrıca, fiziksel ve iskeleti tahrip olmuş, onarım ve yeniden inşaya ihtiyacı olan iş ve konutun % 40'ı eski yerlerdir, eskimiş ve çağdışı parçaları bulunmaktadır, ancak yenileme oranı bina sahibinin kararsızlığı ve mali problemlerin sonucunda % 10'u aşmamıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Büyükşehir, Raşt, Mekânsal büyüme, sosyal, ekonomik.

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## Introduction

During the history of city and urban life in the world, until the middle of 20th century, state capitals. Metropolises and city centers always had the highest value of city feature and increasing urban organization power. State capitals usually form the heart and the center of each state and most businesses, social, cultural, etc. activities are performed there.

Central areas of each city are the most important skeletal and spatial factors. These areas are among locations which, in comparison with other urban areas, have various performances, including business, in an extended level. Because most economic activities are intensive in these centers, the price of land and goodwill is very high. Moreover, studying this area is highly valued and important since most malls and markets, and other valuable cultural and historical locations, are established in it. Metropolises are a space having compressed and separate activities and functions in the whole functioning space of the city, as well as the centralization of most of prior urban activities and performances as the symbol and main area of occurrence of social interactions, expression of collective memories, and urban life and social identity of citizens. While studying the physical structure of an urban environment it can be seen that urban morphology is a long and extended branch of urban geography (Knox and Pinch, 2000: 432). It is referenced to urban perspective elements (Johnston, 1991: 397), and also is an inter-field area of research about urban design, architecture, sociology, archeology, and chronology (Chan Lee, 1999). Urban morphology concerns evident results, cultural applications and functions, and morphological processes. As a result, factors such as building, street plan, garden, park and historic buildings are the main components of this area. Therefore, emphasize is always on both production and conversion processes (Moudon, 1997: 7).

In the past, urban plans and form were mostly a result of urban and rural economic growth. But this is vice versa today. It seems that, in the highly competitive social environment, urban plans are mainly used as a tool for economic developments. Now a day, cities are being reconditioned and urban perspectives move increasingly toward globalization to take part in the competition among cities (Beriatos and Gospodini, 2009).

In a research titled "Planning to improve urban life quality in city centers", Afshin Kokabi, emphasizing on social and economical aspects (case study of Khorram Abad city), used population, functional, societal, visual, and aesthetic and traffic criteria to define and identify considered area. Finally, it was concluded that, based on proposed criteria, urban life in the city center of Khoram Abad indicates a low level of urban life, and such issues as traffic, pollution, residence, spending free time, economic and social security are identified as the most important problems in the central area of this city (Kokabi, 2006). Nafiseh Marsous in a research titled "A survey and analysis of Qom city's central area" concluded that the city center of Qom is not empty of (or having low) population and, regarding the limited capacity of land, high aggregation of activities and function results in increase pressure on this area. Moreover, social and

economic functions of this part of the city are consistent with its current needs and, despite physical and economic changes of the city, its religious functions remained intact and unchanged. In another research titled "Factors and variables effective on determination of city center in middle cities" (case study of Boukan city), Khedr Farajkardeh concluded that the most important and most advantageous activities of the city are embedded in the central area. Therefore this central area involves a wide spectrum of various activities and its span differs significantly from other parts of the city, respecting this.

All metropolises, generally, have similar characteristics, and this is because they are areas involving the most important and advantageous activities. This research studies a framework of spatial, skeletal, administrative, economic, and social factors in Rasht city. Then, the city's role, functions, and forming factors, as well as its problems, are studied by the spatial analysis of the city.

The radial form and development of Rasht city resulted in an increase in positioning on the main road and city's radial extension. Consequently, the city structure is affected, the land price increased and population concentration in this area is high. Traffic and lack of accessibility to other parts of the city are the consequences of this mass population. Rasht metropolis has encountered a great deal of problems and troubles during formation and skeletal configuration. While facing these problems, skeletal components broke down and were reconstructed many times, but maybe there was again another historical event. This geographical body, despite all surrounding problems, reconditioned environmental, cultural and skeletal problems of the city through its cultural integration and a pure and original identity.

## **1. Material and Methods**

### **1.1. Study Area**

Rasht, located on the eastern longitude of 49 degrees and 36 minutes and northern latitude of 37 degrees and 16 minutes, is the capital city of Guilan province (Guilan planning and management and organization, 1382: 63). Rasht is located about 329 km northwest of Tehran in Iran, and is limited from north of Khomam borough, Anzali city and the Caspian Sea; from south to Lakan village and Roudbar city; from east to Kouchesfahan borough and Lahidjan city; and from west to Fouman and Some'e Sara. The altitude from sea level is different, with the maximum of 9.30 and a minimum of 0 meters. The legal border area of this city is 9250 ha. The area of its frontage is also 15050 ha. Summing these together, a total area of 24300 ha is estimated by the municipality and its consultants (Hoseini, 2005: 23).

### **1.2. Study Method**

Descriptive – analytical method is used in this research in which required data and information are gathered by field and documentary method.

### **1.Documentary and library-based method:**

To gain information for the present research, these resources are used:

Statistical Almanac of Home and People Census for 1355-1385 (1976 – 2006); books, articles and theses; information available from different departments and administrations, including health care centers, government, municipality, power and electricity, water, gas and telecommunication firms, and Education department of the city.

### **2.Field method**

The data in this method are gathered by reference to understudy environment and direct contact and communication with considered individuals. Finally required data were collected through observation, conducting questionnaires, statistical almanacs, computer networks, plan and aerial photos. Sampling was done by random classification, since there was no information available about the composition of investigated population, and because population task are divided into some subsets so that there is no common member available among them. Each of these subsets is called a “class”. Then a sample is selected from each class and a random sample is formed by members chosen from these classes. This method (first, classification, then, selecting a random sample from each class) is called random (simple) sampling and is achieved by the equation  $[N_n]$  (Vahidi Asl, 2006).

For the sake of data analysis, this research uses computer software, manually "Bojoguarniett" method as business in Rasht, and SWAT technique to analyze more data. Swat matrix or technique is a tool used to identify threats and opportunities in the external environment of a system and to recognize its internal weakness and strength in order to evaluate the present status and conduct guidelines to control them. Concepts such as “strategy”, “internal environment”, “external environment”, “strength”, “weakness”, “opportunity” and “threat” are considered as basic and principal concepts of this technique. Strategic planning, that SWAT is one of its techniques, means to evaluate present and future status, to determine organizational orientation and perspective, and to develop tools to achieve these goals, but it is a complicated process practically, and a systematic approach to identify and analyze it is required.

## **2.Results**

Rasht city’s social, economic and physical attributions were studied using the questionnaire method.

### **2.1.Family and Residential Buildings’ Attributions**

Questionnaire number 1 relates to residential buildings of which the total number of 2000 one are responded. This questionnaire was aimed to access family information from different aspects, including social, economical, cultural, neighborhood, and available problems and deficiencies. 38800 families lived in considering region. With

the family coefficient of 3.6, the population of this region was estimated to be 141000 people.

Considering Table 1, it is observed that the most abundance belongs to free jobs which have the ratio of 53.5%. Perhaps the result for such a great figure is the huge number jobs which are considered in the category of free jobs.

Table 1: The job type of family headman

Job	Abundance	Percentage
Free	1070	53.5
Administrative	410	20.5
Farmer	100	5
Retired	260	13
Unemployed	80	4
Other	80	4
Total	2000	100

As for Age Group, the abundance belongs to the range of 30 – 52. Considering the fact that more than a half of the studied region is composed of old textures, residents are also of older age (Figure 1).

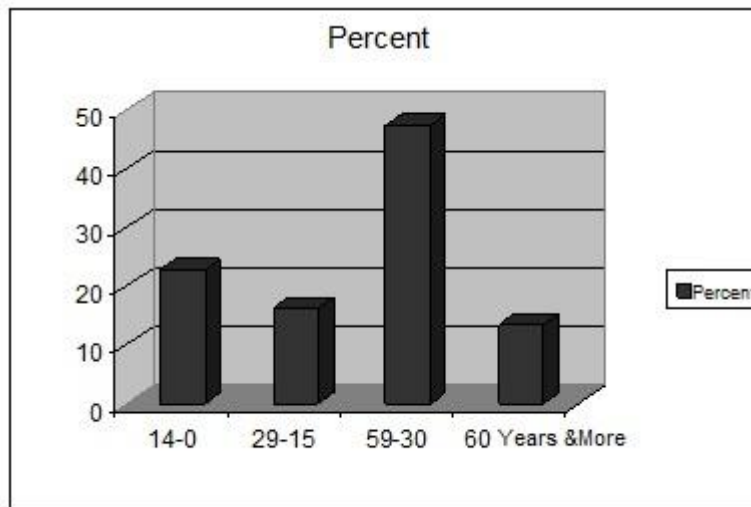


Figure 1: Age groups of the studied region

Considering resulted statistics, Students are the most abundant and elementary school-graduated people are the least abundant. 18.8% are 5<sup>th</sup> - graduated and 0.8% did not respond. Among the total number of people living in central district, 28% are native, 62% immigrants, and 8% did not respond. It is observed that most residents are native (Table 2).

Table 2: Literacy status in central district of the city and the reason for the family's residence in the neighborhood

Literacy Status		Abundance	Percentage
	Elementary	658	10.53
	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	1175	18.8
	Student	1370	21.92
	Diploma	812	12.99
	Higher diploma	985	15.76
	BA and higher	1200	19.2
	No answer	50	0.8
Reason of family residence	Native	560	28
	Immigrant	1280	64
	No answer	160	8
	Total	2000	100

Based Table 3, most abundance belongs to those who migrated to the central district because of accessibility to superior services. The least percentage belongs to those who emigrated because of appropriate prices. Of course, it is noteworthy that the low rent price belongs to old textures which are at a low level of life quality. Of course, it is noteworthy that the low price of land belongs to old textures which have a low quality if life. 53.7% of immigrants to this central area came from surrounding villages, and the least percentage belongs to those who immigrated from other neighborhoods or districts of the city. With respect to the gained statistics, one can observe that among all immigrants, 43.6% have immigrated more 10 years ago 24.07% between 5 and 10 years ago (Figure 2).

Table 3: Reason and the origin of migration to Rasht

Reason for migration to city center		Abundance	Percentage
	Access to service	180	36
	Suitable rent costs	40	8
	Residence of relatives	50	10
	Proper position and convenient neighborhood	---	----
	Easy access to work place	170	34
	Other	60	12
	Total	500	100
Origin	Another city	150	27.8
	Surrounding villages	290	53.7
	Other neighborhoods	40	7.4
	Other	60	11

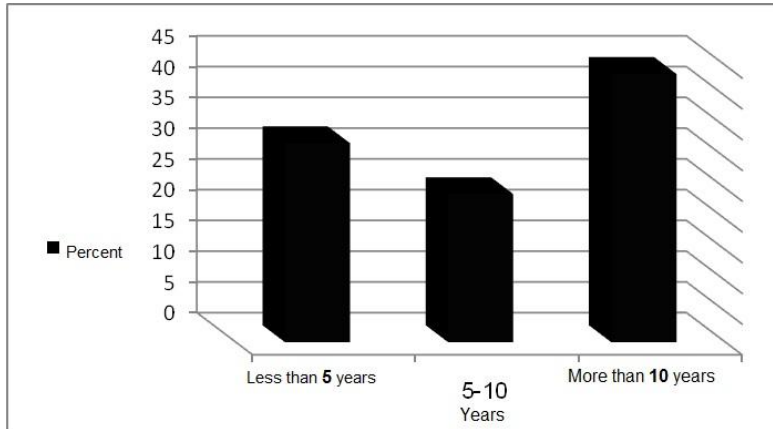


Figure 2: The time length of immigration in this district

The average family revenue is presented in Table 4, based on the respondents' statements. Accordingly, the most abundance belongs to those who have the revenue of between 1– 4 million Rials; the least is attributed to those having the revenue of less than 1 million Rials. In field observations it was found out that families having low income live in old and outworn textures, whose income is less than 500,000 Rials. Among them is the Women headman of the family who are more than 70 years old.

Table 4: The average revenue of family headman (million Rials) in studied region

Income	Abundance	Percentage
Below 1	180	9
1-4	840	84
4-10	630	63
10 and more	260	26
Not said	90	9

Based on Table 5.62% of buildings are permanent and stable, 11% are old and timeworn and 4% are desolate. The most prevalent type of ownership is a possession which has the ratio of 60%, rental houses have the ratio of 37% and the remaining 3% are considered as "other".

Table 5: Building status in central district

Building Status		Abundance	Percentage
	Stable	1240	62
Capable of repair and maintenance	460	23	
Very old	220	11	
Ruin	80	4	
Total	2000	100	
Occupation type	Ownership	1200	60
	Rental	740	37
	Other	60	3

Based on field observations, the highest abundance belongs to the item of “lack of welfare facilities” in residential textures. The next highest abundance belongs to “Texture exhaustion” including buildings, alleys and pathways. Gangsters live in some neighborhoods, especially those of old texture, and sell drugs, etc. and result in the lowest level of security (Table 6).

Table 6: Problems of residential places from the viewpoint of the respondents

Problems from the respondent viewpoint	Abundance	Percentage
Texture Exhaustion	560	28
Lack of safety	20	1
Pathway inundation	170	8.5
Lack of on time waste discharge	20	1
Car park in the street	500	25
Lack of welfare facilities	730	36.5

Another important issue facing residents in the city center is parking of cars in the streets and alleys, in front of the door of buildings. Most attendants to the city center, including clerks or people who came because of administrative, business, etc. tasks, inevitably park their cars in front of doors, and these results in residents’ complaint.

## 2.2.Characteristics of the Central Business District

Information related to this section is gathered using questionnaire number 2. Based on statistics gained from the Society of Syndicate Affairs, the number of business units was not achieved accurately; hence the total numbers of 1000 questionnaires were responded as a sample. This questionnaire was aimed to study market status from skeletal, economical aspects, ownership of business units and tightness and problems available in the city. According to gathered information, 39% of business units are rental, 30.9% of had ownership at the time of study. 79% of these people have a tendency to reconstruction and 76% of them believe that reconstruction leads to economic growth and prosperity.



Considering the achieved information, of 1000 business units, 30.9% have the possessive ownership, 29.1% have goodwill, and 39% were rental. As can be seen, the highest percentage belongs to rentals, and this indicates that most of original owners leased their business units (Figure 3).

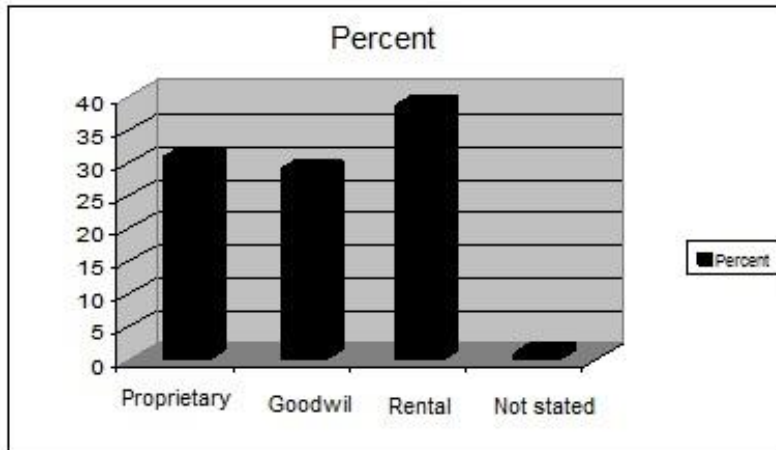


Figure 3: Occupation manner of business units

As can be seen in Table 7, in all questionnaires, 33% of people are satisfied with their income, 60% are dissatisfied, and the remaining 7% did not respond. Among reasons for dissatisfaction are the market being seasonal, the high rent of business units, and the low revenue of the city, which is mentioned in field studies.

Table 7: Revenue satisfaction

Satisfaction	Abundance	Percentage
Satisfied with the income	330	33
Dissatisfied by the income	600	60
Not said	70	7
Total	1000	100

Based on information gathered questionnaires, it is observed that 19% of owners have a plan for reconstruction in the future, and 16% don't have such a plan. Based on the table below, 65% of respondents did not answer this question, the most important reason of which is that buildings are rental and they do not know anything about the owner's plan. Also goodwill (or if the building is hereditary) is another reason for the ambiguity of the owner's plan.

Table 8: Respondents' future plan for reform and reconstruction of business units

Future plan	Abundance	Percentage
Have a plan	190	19
Don't have a plan	160	16
Not said	650	65
Total	1000	100

Among all respondents, 78% believed that Rasht has enough capacity to develop new business units, and 17% did not believe so. It is observed that most people believe in the existence of such capacity. Considering potential capabilities of Rasht in tourism, it seems that developing new tourism equipments and facilities, increasing tourist attractions in the city and in the suburbs, and developing new markets have a direct influence on city's revenue and the evolution of the region.

Table 9: The capacity for developing new business units in Rasht

The capacity to construct new business buildings	Abundance	Percentage
Have the capacity	780	78
Don't have the capacity	170	17
Not said	50	5
Total	1000	100

Based on field studies and information achieved by questionnaires, it is observed that the highest abundance belongs to public services such as parking lot, public restrooms, public zones to spend free times, proper green zones, movie theaters, and appropriate entertainment places which result in attraction from other regions. The low width of the main pathway is another problem the city faces. The increasing number of cars and the huge number of vendors around the main market, who occupy a great area of the sidewalks, is a factor leading to slow movement of people and the crowdedness of sidewalks.

The low width of the main pathway, improper parking of cars, the increasing number of cars, lack of proper public transportation system, not using available public transportation, not respecting traffic rules, and high accumulation of activities, cause trouble for some districts of the city. Since the ownership type of 39% of business units in the bazaar, at the time of this research, was said to be rental, and also because of the dependency of the market to the dominance scope, and consequently seasonal markets, and the economic problems of renters, the market faces dormancy. The obsolescence of buildings and lack of delivering needed equipments in central district, low area of some business units, inundation of some streets while raining, lack of suitable sidewalks to meet passers' needs (specially in holydays and off days which passengers come to this city), all together put the city in a severe tightness. Goodwill ownership of some business units is a factor which faces the owners with problems. This happens when the owner is intended to repair or reconstruct the building and faces the complaint of the

original owner. Another problem of Rasht city is the lack of floored public parking in the central district.

Table 10: Problems of the central district from the point of view of tradesmen

Problem type	Abundance	Percentage
Low width of main pathway	220	22
Abundance of vendors in sidewalks	180	18
Lack of accessibility	170	17
Expensive rent of business buildings	30	3
Building exhaustion	110	11
Goodwill	50	5
Lack of public service(parking)	240	24

### Discussion and Conclusion

Studies have shown that because Rasht city is located in the center of region and as a result of delivering administrative, business, educational, cultural, medical, etc. services, it hosts a huge population from suburbs and other cities and towns of the province. Consequently, the need for different services also increases. Further, 40% of business and residential buildings are located in the old, timeworn and outworn parts of the city, which has physical and skeletal triteness and need repair and reconstruction, but the reconditioning ratio has not exceeded 10% annually as a result of financial problems and uncertainty in building possession. Rasht metropolis plays an important and vital role as the heart and capital city of Guilan province, and having a limited area in comparison with all cities of this state, delivers most applications and performances in business, residential, administrative, medical, entertaining and cultural fields, to a great scale.

Tourism plan can improve this industry in the city. It means an advance in social and economical abilities and the transference of facilities to villages and touristy places. And also, this could prevent increasing immigration and crowdedness in the city. It is hoped that applying accurate research methods and proper management by using available tourism potentials of this province and also increasing the capacity to develop new tourism attractions provide suitable conditions to transform potential tourism abilities of the city and suburbs to actual, to compensate for the decreased labor force in agriculture and prevent reduction in city's actual power by job creation, so that efficient and effective steps are passed in the process of the development of Rasht metropolis.

In the present study factors affecting urban changes in the past are specified. Then, changes in main morphological elements of the city, including street layout, house building pattern, architecture style, land usage pattern, intercity structure, and social separation in Rasht city, are analyzed. The main findings of this research are as follows:

- Street layout in Rasht changed with widening streets and developing new streets in the city center. The overall transportation network, also, transformed from an irregular plan for a radical plan.
- Old architecture methods are replaced with new models and imported (non local) materials such as iron, cement, glass, etc. took the place of local material, such as wood. These new architectural methods are not consistent with the culture and life conditions of this city.
- As a result some various factors, the villas are substituted with apartments.
- As a result of villagers' immigration to the city, especially in the past three decades, Rasht has expanded.
- The internal morphology of the city changed from old houses to new and multi floored ones. These changes are still continuing and increasing.

Studying the formation process of Rasht, based on hydraulic and economic (market) theories it is deduced that the main base of this city was a small service point as a market core, which was located in the present location of Rasht's bazaar, between Gohar Roud and Zarjoub rivers, and consequently, city's neighborhood developed in the median between the rivers, in gardens and farms.

The main core of the city was located on the highest point between the rivers, and was first established as a periodic, daily and then weekly bazaar. Considering the population growth, surplus accumulation and the trade of products, a new skeletal and spatial organization was founded in the region. The city had such advantages and preferences as agricultural economy, proper job distribution, regular social and administrative organization, access to global markets and political cores. Having these preferences and also social economical acts with the powerful northern neighbor in order to transfer of surplus, in a historical competition, led the city to become dominant on whole Guilan and be established the capital city of the province.

Social – economical evolutions of Rasht and Guilan is always influenced by proceedings and commitments of the government and its approach to the state's capacities and preferences, administrative and managerial structure and interactions between, power, wealth and information. Most spatial evolutions in Rasht took place after Pahlavi era, and especially after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. As to social evolution of Rasht metropolis, finally, these suggestions are proposed: To make planners to change their viewpoint and to anticipate justice-directed plans of tomorrow's privation, to speed up incomplete projects and to plan in order to abolish differences in urban services, to consider the needs of people in different regions and to reform rules in order to help deprived classes of the society, permanent respect to wealth growth and to improve public education and culture for all society members, to neglect special plans based on social priorities, to destruct timeworn and depopulated residential buildings.

The pattern for the theory of Rasht's development is a combination of following 3 patterns:

- Multi-core construction (with Bazaar, Zarjoub, Motahari Street, Pirsara and Golsar as cores).
- General construction of the city (the establishment of services based on city's geographical position).
- Sector construction (cross construction) (resulted from development of radial streets such as Imam Khomini, Shari'ati, Lahidjan, S'adi, Shahid Ansari, Bisotoun, Lakani – Fouman).

Therefore, the main evolution in Rasht's urban structure occurred after the Islamic Revolution, exiting from radial or multi core structure and being captured by the radial – annulled structure (since installing numerous traffic lights with low distances on conjunction points of these lines, such as crossroads, is one of the negative consequences of this pattern, in the rush hour). Finally, considering Rasht's main problems, followings are suggested for the main evolution in the structure of this metropolis: To prevent city division and to create dynamics in all districts, to reinforce sub ordinal cores in different regions of the city, to separate central district, by an annulated street, from the urban network of streets, to revise in urbanism plans (descriptive and comprehensive plan) in order to reform city's skeletal structure and to determine the status of estates and lands included in urban plans, to present reports as published books or official reports using accurate annual statistics, by service provider entities, for the sake of people awareness, To increase residential application in order to decrease travel rate, and to increase green zones, neighborhoods and pathway per capita, to improve and modernize public transportation and to decrease air and sound pollutions, to develop rows and places to produce and supply traditional goods and services to enhance city center's cultural and economic prosperity, to develop and expand cultural and entertaining zones, to found scientific and cultural exhibitions and fairs, to take activities and traffic into depth in all districts, to encourage owners to construct business centers, to inform residents of residential zones in timeworn textures, to necessitate contribution and participation of residents and owners of the region, to consider pathway, green and open zone applications, to increase urban facilities and equipments.

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