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## Original Research Article

# Analysis of Non-Feasibility Factors of Master Plans for Small Cities (Case Study: Sangar Khoshkebijar City-Shaft City in Guilan Province)

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## Abstract

**Problem statement:** The evaluation of the feasibility of urban development plans, which has been carried out in various studies, suggests their failure and reveals the urgency to review and find out the main causes of the impracticability of such plans in urban planning.

**Research objective:** This research investigates the main factors affecting the feasibility of master plans for small cities. For this purpose, three small cities were selected as a case study in Guilan Province.

**Research method:** This qualitative study employed the grounded theory method to obtain reliable information and opinions using semi-structured interviews. Thus, 23 experts in the field of the urban management of small cities were interviewed to achieve theoretical saturation. Each interview lasted from one hour to one hour and thirty minutes. The research process included multiple iterations.

**Conclusion:** Seven main themes were extracted for the non-feasibility of master plans based on the code analysis of the interviews. These themes are weaknesses of the management system, problems of the legal system, problems of the executive system, financial problems, substantive problems of the plan, lack of constructive participation, and problems with the plan preparation process system. For each theme, appropriate solutions were proposed according to the initial open codes and their frequency. The findings of this study show that different factors of the non-feasibility of master plans are closely related to each other, in other words, they can be connected like a chain. Some factors can also be improved by modifying other factors.

**Keywords:** *Evaluation, Master Plan, Grounded Theory, Coding, Small Cities.*

## Introduction

Traditional master plans have frequently failed,

according to a 1995 report from the UN Center for Human Settlements, which examines and evaluates urban planning experiences around the world (Qaraci, 2013, 3). In most Iranian cities,

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the master plan is currently being developed and approved as one of the most basic executive tools for policymaking, management, and urban planning (Hosseinzadeh Dalir, Sadr Mousavi, HeidariChianeh & Rezatabeh, 2011, 194). These plans are traditional, physical, and static and do not pay attention to social, economic, and managerial dimensions. In addition, these plans are inflexible and long-lasting in practice; therefore, in the end, they do not have much feasibility and the realization of the goals envisaged in them is insignificant. In other words, they cannot solve the current needs of cities (Salaripour et al., 2021, 145).

After a half-century of master planning in Iran, analysis of the factors that make these plans impracticable is required due to their inadequacies in preparation and implementation (Qorbani, Jame Kasra & Mirzabaki, 2014, 191). Despite the importance of discussing evaluation in the planning and urban planning processes, Iran has yet to reach its full potential on this issue. As a result, no comprehensive research has been conducted across the country in content evaluation or theoretical urban development plans (Vahidi Borji, Nourian & Azizi, 2017, 6).

On the other hand, small towns have received special attention in recent years in urban and regional development policies because of their importance in balancing regional development. Because they are cities, small towns, no matter how small, face numerous management challenges. These cities will be much more difficult to manage than large cities if they lack adequate tools and facilities (Ziyari, Rezaei & Masoudi Rad, 2014, 39).

Master plans have been prepared in many small cities in Guilan province, as well as in other cities across the country. Of course, a master plan may be prepared instead of a master plan in many small cities, depending on factors such as population and city size. However, all three cities investigated in this study (Sangar, Khoshkebijar and Shaft) had a master plan. In this study, the term "master plan" refers to both master plans and details. However, it refers to the methodology of plans based on a holistic model, which is based on positivist and rationalist approaches

and prepared through a linear process, with a blueprint as their main product. Thus, the findings of this study can be applied to any plan that is developed using this method.

The majority of master plans have failed miserably. However, it must be recognized that this problem is more acute in small towns, and the problems caused by the failure to implement master plans in small towns are less visible. This is because large cities have a higher level of specialized knowledge than small cities, and problems in large cities are addressed more quickly. Small towns, unfortunately, are more neglected in our country's planning system, and consultants' performance in these cities is less closely monitored. Furthermore, the research team for this article encountered a wide range of errors and problems in these plans while preparing urban plans in several small cities in Guilan province and reviewing master plans for these cities in depth. This issue has caused numerous problems for municipalities and citizens, and it explains a large portion of the conflict of interest between citizens and city managers, according to field experience. The persistence of many avoidable and manageable conflicts in recent decades has increased people's distrust of city managers, a reduction in their level of participation in urban affairs, and, as a result, a reduction in quality of life and a negative impact on small-town development.

Citizens' attitudes toward urban management institutions, especially municipalities, are influenced by various factors such as accountability of the urban management institution, observance of justice and inclusion, fight against corruption and rent-seeking, refraining from appearing instead of real participation (Salaripour, Mehrjou & Khil Kordi, 2019, 94). As a result, the researchers began the process of forming the research problem in their minds by examining the various dimensions of grounded and attempting to find a suitable answer in the form of qualitative research based on the field.

The role of small towns in regional development balance in Guilan province is far greater than in

other parts of the country due to climatic, natural, and demographic conditions. Avoiding major changes in agricultural uses is critical for the food security of the province and the country, avoiding the spread of pollution in natural areas such as sea, rivers, and forests, balancing various economic sectors, especially agriculture, tourism, and migration management from other parts of the country to the northern regions, and avoiding the migration of young indigenous populations to other populated centers are among the sensitive issues indicating the need for proper planning for small towns in Guilan province. In light of the foregoing, three small towns in Guilan province were chosen for an in-depth study. They had several problems with their viability and the implementation of master plans in them, which had caused tensions between the people and the municipality. Sangar, Khoshkebijar, and Shaft are the three cities in question.

In addition, because the purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence the feasibility of master plans in small cities, the following questions are raised:

- 1) Why are urban master plans infeasible in small cities?
- 2) What role does special management of small towns play in the failure of master plans?
- 3) How can the infeasibility issues of master plans be addressed?

Various internal and external studies have been conducted on the feasibility evaluation of urban master plans. The following are a few of the most significant.

Khalifa (2012) employed the qualitative method (self-evaluation) in his study "Critical review of current methods of monitoring and evaluation of the preparation of Egyptian SUPs." This research aims to show how current monitoring and evaluation (M & E) methods are being used in Egypt to prepare strategic urban plans (SUPs). Neamtu (2011) investigated the role of master plans in advancing the goals of sustainable development at the local level using a qualitative research method and semi-structured

interview in another study titled "Methodology of evaluating the participation of master plans to achieve sustainable urban development." Finally, it was discovered that one of the factors affecting sustainable urban development is planners' lack of full understanding of their specialized role in the preparation of plans and effective guidance of development plans. Furthermore, master plans alone are not a good indicator of how serious a community is about sustainability. "Master plan, planning, and reality of urban development under the transfer of the Chinese market (case study: Nanjing)" was the title of an article published by Qian (2013). This study aims to use a quantitative research method to look at the differences between master plans and actual urban development, as well as the barriers to main program implementation and the true reasons for urban development.

In one of the research in Iran which was carried out by Vahidi Borji et al. (2017), the researchers used grounded theory to investigate the reasons for the non-realization of professional uses in Iran's urban development plans. Azizi and Arasteh (2012) used a quantitative approach to investigate and analyze the accuracy of forecasting population and land use, the feasibility of the main communication network proposals, and forecasting the directions of city development in an article titled "Assessing the feasibility of land use forecasts and suggestions for development directions in the master plan of Lar city." In a separate study, Zangi Abadi, Abdollahi, SalekGhahfarkhi & Qasemzadeh (2014) examined the factors that influence the feasibility of urban master plans in Iran and the challenges that come with it in Tabriz's historical-cultural axis. This research aimed to find out how well the proposed master plan was being implemented per capita in the current situation. Most previous studies have used quantitative methods to assess the feasibility of land use predictions, with only a few using a qualitative approach and grounded theory to assess the feasibility of urban development plans. Large cities and metropolises have also conducted evaluation plans; however, the

current study used a qualitative approach, grounded theory, and snowball sampling to investigate the feasibility of urban development plans in small cities. As previously stated, the current study's problem-solving process began with field exposure and experience with the phenomenon. The research process was thus formed using grounded theory to achieve conceptual constructions and theoretical approaches for thick description and verification of the answers and ideas formed during the field experience. It was also noted that one of the most significant consequences of master plans' unreliability is the resulting conflict and tension between city management and the public. As a result, unlike many other studies, the issue of urban plan non-feasibility in this study is a phenomenon with many aspects crystallized and expressed in the form of human experience. As a result, the current article focuses on the perspectives of professionals and individuals who have encountered the potential complications, problems, or benefits of these plans in their daily professional lives, have comprehended, and experienced their impact on their lives and the lives of citizens.

With regards to the goal of the study, qualitative research is the best strategy to explore a new area and develop the hypotheses being investigated. Individuals or events in their personal or professional lives are the focus of qualitative research. As a result, this method is primarily useful for eliciting people's views on events, processes, and structures in their personal or professional lives (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 10). Grounded theory is a qualitative approach that relies heavily on inductive analysis (Bowen, 2006, 12). This method is primarily used in studies that aim to research the direction of conceptual thinking and theories (Khan, 2014, 224). This method was used to facilitate conceptual thinking in the current study.

## Literature review

Thinkers like Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford laid the groundwork for the master plan to become

the most planned urban planning model in developed countries in the first half of the twentieth century. It became fully codified and widely used after the publication of the Athens Charter. The emergence of urban master plans and their subsequent implementation in developed countries differed significantly from that in developing countries, particularly Iran. As a result, such plans have never been realized (Hojjati, Pourmohammadi & Qorbani, 2018, 2 & 4). The city master plan, according to the second paragraph of Article 1 of the Renaming Law, is a long-term plan that determines land use and zoning, as well as the rules and regulations that govern them (Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture of Iran, 2009, 69 & 119). The dynamics of cities, changing conditions of cities, and influential and constructive factors of cities have all been ignored in this definition, and cities have been treated as inanimate beings. As a result, if this clause is followed, the proposed per capita figure will not be realized (Pourahmad, Hatami Nejad & Hosseini, 2006, 168). To put it another way, predicting a city's growth, decline, or death is extremely difficult (Pleshkanovska, 2019, 40).

Lack of inter-sectoral coordination, comprehensiveness rather than paying attention to the city's main problems, one-sided decision-making system, closure of urban planning after preparation, approval, and communication of the plan, lack of realism in plan goals, and their inconsistency with the city's real dynamics, the inefficiency of the practical plan, and obsolescence of its implementing plan are among the issues mentioned by Ahmad Saeednia (an expert on urban issues in Iran) (Moradi Masihi, 2005, 149). Paksaz (Director General of Tehran Municipality's Urban Planning and Urban Plans) has emphasized the importance of the plans' content, the long hierarchy of the planning, review, and approval process, and the lack of communication and cooperation in the planning, approval, and implementation of this process, as well as serious attention to participatory approaches in the decision-making process, decision-

making, and implementation while maintaining independence. The lack of ideas and solutions for the system of reviewing and reviewing the plan and program, according to Jahanshahi (Managing Director of Farnahad Consulting Engineers), is one of the master plan's flaws (Paksaz, 2009, 70 & 72). Regarding the master plan, Charles E. Lindblom, a renowned urban planner, claims that the general concept of this model does not conform to human intellectual limitations, is unprepared to adapt to a lack of available information and possible failures, and ignores the breadth of variables that will be encountered in the city, as well as the intersection of facts and values in the decision-making process (Faludi, 1977, 151). According to Nourian (a University of Tehran faculty member), the lack of plans and programs that are indigenous to Iran's economic and political structure has inevitably led to the half-century late copying of First World models, plans, and programs, resulting in flaws in the theoretical and methodological framework for preparing master plans and detailed plans (Paksaz, 2009, 73).

Dembich et al. discovered that only 7 to 15 percent of master plans were implemented in their study (Dembich, Mutallapova & Sayfutdinova, 2021, 1). As a result, using a qualitative method, this article investigates the impracticability of master plans through the lens of experts. Figure 1 depicts the current study's conceptual model.

## Research method

Due to the multifaceted nature of the problem in the current study which focuses on process, grounded theory, a qualitative research method, was used.

In grounded theory studies, the researcher's analytical focus emerges during the research process than being determined in advance. Grounded theory researchers believe that this method is a way of thinking, constructing, and interacting with data during the research process; in other words, the theory, which is driven from the data, is more realistic (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020, 2). The

production, collection, and analysis of simultaneous data are one of the grounded theory's main features (Bryant, 2017). Using semi-structured interviews is a common method for gathering data in grounded theory studies (Magaldi & Berler, 2020, 3). As a result, an expert group used a specific and accurate research background to prepare the semi-structured interview questions for this study. The questions included three sections: 1) goal evaluation and achievement, 2) implementation of the approval process, and 3) results. Specialists were also chosen using the snowball method. First, several purposeful examples in the field of research are interviewed using the snowball method. They are then asked to introduce qualified and knowledgeable people in the same field to collaborate and interview at the end of the interview (Calvert, 2019, 11). The reason for this is that in grounded theory, the interviewees should be the most well-understood. Issues and questions for research are beneficial (Liu & Kang, 2016, 29). The concept of saturation is used in grounded theory to refer to the endpoint for data collection by determining the adequacy of sampling (Zamani & Babaei, 2021, 80). In other words, similar code cases exist, but no new code is discovered, and new data does not result in new content (Saunders et al., 2018, 1895). Thomson stated that the average number of samples in grounded theory is 25 in a study titled "Sample size and grounded theory." This researcher reviewed 100 articles that used grounded theory and interviews to conduct their research (Thomson, 2010). In essence, qualitative research differs from quantitative research in terms of sampling method and sample size. To put it another way, unlike quantitative methods, the grounded theory requires a small number of participants, but it also necessitates extremely precise and detailed interviews (Joudi, 2020, 9).

As a result, theoretical saturation was achieved in the current study after in-depth interviews with 20 experts. However, the interviews were extended until the 23rd person due to increased confidence and confirmation of data saturation. Among the experts

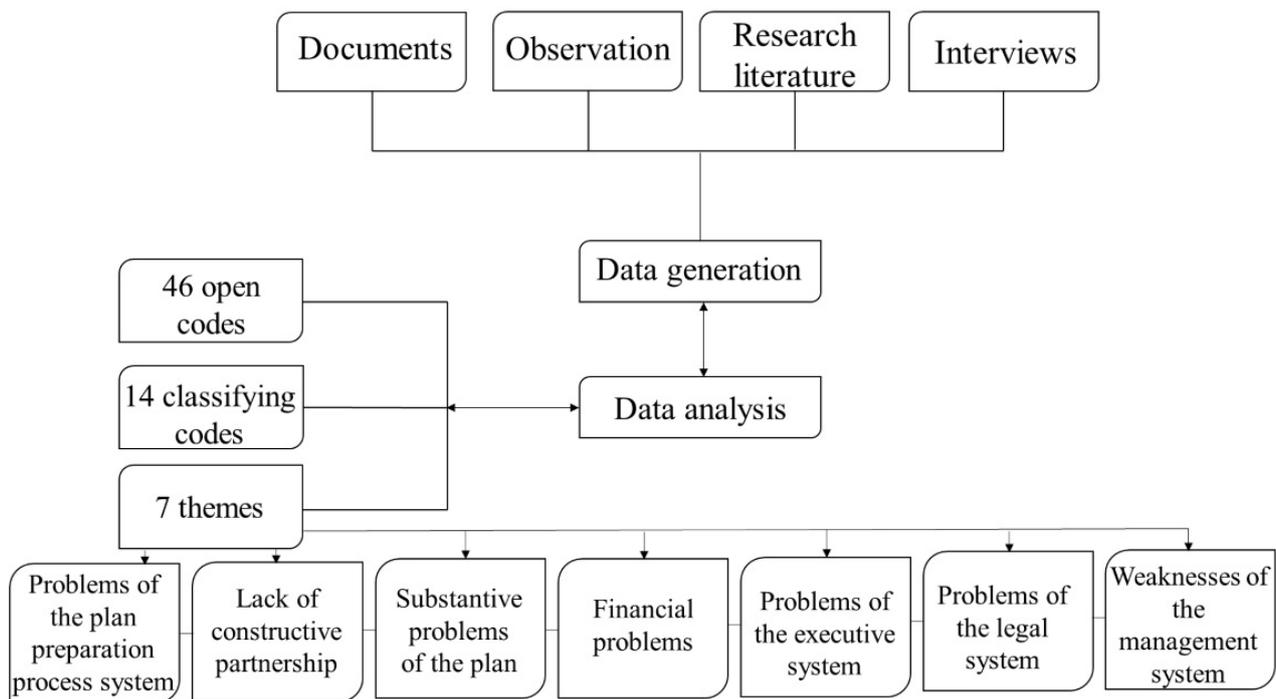


Fig. 1. The conceptual model of research. Source: Authors.

were groups from Rasht city, Guilan province governorate, Sangar city municipality, Khoshkebijar city municipality, and Shaft city governorate’s road and urban development departments. Each interview lasted between an hour and a half and an hour and a half. The conflict of views and differences of opinion were identified to conduct in-depth interviews using the opinions of some experts working in different organizations. The reason for this is that these individuals were purposefully chosen, and some were involved in the planning process, while others expressed their opinions without having a direct role in the planning and implementation process. As a result, the master plans’ flaws were examined from each group’s perspective, resulting in more comprehensive and realistic outcomes.

It’s worth noting that the interviews were taped with the listeners’ permission and then handwritten in a verbatim fashion so that the researchers could record what they learned about the phenomenon in the form of a detailed report of the participants’ statements. The interviews’ texts were then coded and analyzed. Researchers should use open-ended keywords in the text for the first stage of the grounded theory coding

process. Then, by comparing the codes in terms of similarity and difference in concepts, classes and subclasses are constructed, with their respective attributes and dimensions determined. The classes and codes are compared in the axial coding step for a more accurate interpretation, and the relationships between the classes and subclasses are determined. The classes are combined in the final stage, and the primary class’s interaction with other classes is refined (Yin, 2015, 208).

### Research findings

The results of the interviews show that the factors influencing the unreliability of urban master plans in small cities can be classified and described in seven thematic areas: legal system problems, executive system problems, financial problems, management system weakness, substantive plan problems, lack of constructive participation, and problems with the plan preparation process system. The primary open codes, frequency, classifying codes, and themes are listed in Table 1.

- **Weaknesses of the management system**

The “weakness of the management system” theme

is one of the most significant reasons for the non-feasibility of master plans in the studied samples. “Short tenure of municipal executives”, “lack of integrated management,” and “poor performance of council members” are the three main classes in this theme. One of the most significant classes, according to [Table 1](#), is “poor performance of council members.”

We can see a kind of self-centeredness among the organizations involved in urban management when looking at the lack of an integrated management axis. As a result of this lack of integration, municipalities have come to be regarded as the sole institution responsible for implementing urban plans.”The city is like a house that we’ve given to the municipality, but the key to all of its parts is in the hands of the council and other municipal bodies, and the municipality is gradually running into limitations in implementing the plan,” one interviewee explained. However, if the organizations involved collaborated with the municipality, synergy would emerge, and many barriers to the plans’ implementation would be removed.

Regarding the role of councils in the impracticability of master plans, some experts were quoted as follows: “Non-involvement of councils in the drafting process causes them to become more involved in the implementation process and to take non-specialist actions because they are often politically motivated. According to several experts,”councils play a role in the infeasibility of master plans: This is more acute in small towns because people know each other, and councils act on personal preferences and interests. When it comes to changing land use, for example, councils are more concerned with the credentials of the landowner than with specialized and technical issues. This problem has been exacerbated by poor urban management in small towns. “In other words, because of stronger ethnic and familial ties, small-town councils prioritize personal interests.

An expert on “poor performance of council members” acknowledged that:”Our small towns deal with councils in the same way that our big cities

do;we have a municipal council, not a city council”. People’s roles in urban management have been weakened rather than strengthened by city councils. The deliberate removal and appointment of mayors by council members, for example, has resulted in the instability of urban management and the short tenure of municipal executives in many cases. This is a decision frequently made behind closed doors and without the necessary transparency. Instead of serving as a liaison and facilitator in the city, the council members in these cases cause chaos in urban affairs. They lack a constructive and appropriate relationship with the public and the mayor. The council’s responsibilities are frequently defined in terms of the municipality rather than in terms of public participation. The goal of forming councils was to reduce the size of government while increasing public-private partnerships.

Thought it seemsthat other cases have overshadowed this important issue, the law has marginalized it. Article 71 of the third chapter of the Law on the Organization, Duties, and Elections of the Country’s Islamic Councils, as well as the election of mayors, approved on May 21, 1996, can be used to support this claim. According to this article, only 6 clauses directly refer to the discussion of partnership with the people, out of 34 tasks of the country’s Islamic councils. Clauses 5, 6, 7, 10, 25, and 31 are the ones in question. According to the same article, clauses 2, 3, 11, 23, and 34 are all directly related to the subject of urban plans. The disregard for the law and non-compliance with the limits of their powers and duties by council members frequently results in illegal or indifferent law approvals. Such rash approvals waste time and lengthen the process of planning and implementing strategies.

To address such issues, the stability of urban management and the selection of local managers play a critical role in implementing plans and urban plans, as these two elements work together to increase executives’ sense of belonging and responsibility to the city. Councils in cities where the necessary coordination exists have promoted

Table 1. Coding the causes of the impracticability of master plans in small cities. Source: Authors.

Themes	Classifying codes	Frequency	Open codes
Weaknesses of the management system	Juniority of municipal executives	13	Juniority of urban management and rapid replacement of urban managers
		10	Lack of cooperation of organizations
		2	Lack of cooperation of the Agricultural Jihad Organization
	Lack of integrated management	1	Interference between the performance of the engineering system and the municipality
		6	Lack of integration between organizations
		8	Person-centered thinking in program preparation by the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development
		30	Inefficiency and passivity of councils on different scales
		4	Lack of council thinking
	Poor performance of council members	1	Low legal rights of council members
		6	The obedience of the mayor to the members of the council
		2	Selection-based performance and council-centric advertising
		19	Lack of expertise and knowledge of council members in the urban area and the limits of authority and duties
		Problems of the legal system	Uncertain relationship of the master plan with the legal system
25	Lack of a clear legal system regarding the allocation of development rights		
2	Interference of judicial mechanisms regarding civil rights		
Uncertain position of master plans in the urban planning system of the country	2		The opaque legal status of urban plans in the Iranian legal system
	8		Parallel work in preparing plans and urban plans
Problems of the executive system	Lack of proper executive structure	21	Non-uniform distribution of responsibilities of executive organizations
		8	Multiple ongoing programs
		26	Selective view of municipalities in monitoring the implementation of the plan
	Lack of proper land acquisition and land value management system	12	Lack of attention to the interests of the people and the devaluation of their property
		8	Speculation and brokerage
		16	Legal restrictions on land acquisition for the municipality due to private ownership
Defective monitoring and evaluation system	7	Incorrect evaluation of plans	
	3	The feasibility evaluation of the city master plan solely through the balance of services	
Financial problems	Financial incapacity of municipalities	21	Shortage of funding for organizations, including small-town municipalities
		15	Shortage of sustainable municipal revenue to cover expenses
Substantive problems of the plan	Substantive weakness of urban plans	21	One-dimensional approach and quantitative view of the master plan to city issues
		3	Priority of the construction of cities over the preparation of master plans
		15	Overlooking the executive and operational dimension of the plan
		3	Top-down planning
		7	Same scale plan for different cities
		8	Regardless of ecological potential, public spaces, services, etc.
		16	The long process of preparing and approving the plan and city changes in the plan period
Lack of constructive partnership	People's disbelief in the body of urban management	17	Non-compliance of proposals with the current situation
		9	People's distrust of the municipal body
	6	Inevitable involvement of people in the implementation process and after the approval of the plan and not in the plan preparation stage	
	City managers' distrust of people's participation	33	The disbelief of the urban management body in the practical participation of the people as owners and stakeholders in the process of preparing and implementing the plan
28		Lack of active and effective participation of people in the implementation of plans and attention to purely personal interests	

Rest of Table 1.

Themes	Classifying codes	Frequency	Open codes
Problems of the plan preparation process system		2	Lack of legal status for municipalities to prepare urban plans
	Lack of role of municipalities in the process of preparing plans	10	The imbalance between the responsibilities of municipalities in the process of preparing and implementing the plan
		9	Lack of authority of municipalities in the selection of consultants
		3	The non-proposing role of municipalities
		4	Do not visit non-native consultants in person in the city
	Low-quality consulting services	1	Unreasonable suggestions of municipalities to consultants
		4	Communication and unhealthy work of native consultants

urban goals by making appropriate decisions because council members in such cities represent the interests of all city residents by their legal status. Positive changes in the city have occurred due to such wise decisions. However, many interviewees, particularly in small towns, mentioned changes to council law or the restriction of their powers was associated with council members' poor performance. The proposed public urban management meetings with the public instead of councils. This is because they believe that the current council law is out of step with our society's cultural and social conditions and capacity. Many of the prerequisites for council thinking in today's Iran, particularly in small towns, have yet to be met. As a result, it appears that building social capacity, such as strengthening civil society and non-governmental organizations, forming political parties with clear views on urban management, and gradually increasing council powers in urban management, could be a better strategy than the current situation.

• **Problems of the legal system**

According to the interviews, two classes of codes are defined as “unclear relationship of the master plan with legal system” and “unclear position of master plans in the urban planning system” in the theme of the legal system. Among the other cases, open-source “Municipalities Violations and Illegalities” is the most common. It is also worth noting that this problem falls under the heading of “unclear master plan-legal system relationship.”

One expert said, “The nature of master plans is not a problem, but illegality and a lack of monitoring

in their implementation have caused problems. It is necessary to adhere to the legal hierarchy of development plans. The law is not a comprehensive blueprint for today and yesterday. It is not a matter of the nature of the plan, but of lawlessness when a municipality issues a five-story permit and then, under their guidance, it becomes seven floors.” One solution to this problem is to treat law enforcement personnel with justice. Moreover, the denial of master plans encourages more municipalities to break the law. Inflexibility has resulted in disenfranchisement and the loss of civil liberties in many cases. “When places are considered educational uses in the master plan, those same places must necessarily become educational uses,” explained one of the interviewees. “While the benefactor may be willing to use the land he already owns for this, he is not willing to spend the same amount of money to purchase additional land. According to the proposal, urban land use forecasts should be done with limited public participation. This means that good people, powerful people, and investors are identified, and decisions are made through joint meetings about process proposals and the presentation of various options. Finally, the decisions' outcomes should be assessed and evaluated by a panel of experts.”

• **Problems of the executive system**

This theme shows that obstacles to the feasibility of urban master plans include “lack of proper executive structure,” “lack of a proper system of land acquisition and land value management,” and “defective system of monitoring and evaluation plans.” “As the executor of the master plans, the municipality is

facing several problems regarding land acquisition,” one of the interviewees said. “The municipality faces significant financial challenges. People usually have to take the initiative; for example, they must retreat if they want to build something. On the one hand, most owners are unwilling to compromise. As a result, many plans are either abandoned or undergo a lengthy implementation process. There is an 18-month for land acquisition, but there are issues. The land in question, for instance, needs to be documented. However, many undocumented land plots exist in small towns. On the one hand, because municipalities deal directly with people’s private property in the implementation of master plans on land use and roads, and on the other hand, the possibility of ownership for municipalities is extremely low, tension will inevitably arise between people and municipalities.”

In addition, “executive system problems” are linked to “management system weakness” and “lack of constructive participation,” according to Fig. 2. In Iran’s urban development plans, a flawed system of monitoring and evaluation plans is frequently overlooked, which is one of the executive system’s problems. “In many cases, there is no critical-corrective view of master plans, and criticisms are unconstructive,” according to one of the interviewees. The evaluation should take place at the end of the plan, not at the start of its implementation, to provide accurate feedback.” The reasons for plan failure can be deeply rooted, especially when considering the reciprocity mode and flexibility in the plan implementation process. An important part of the executive problems related to the monitoring and evaluation system can be solved in this way. The energy and time spent planning and implementing the plan can be planned and managed more effectively.

#### • Financial problems

According to the law, the municipality must acquire land to carry out the master plan. Municipalities face difficulties acquiring the land identified in the plan because they lack sufficient funds, particularly in

small towns. According to one expert: “Ever since municipalities moved toward self-sufficiency, the problem of a lack of financial resources for them has arisen across the country. The proceeds of the offense are now used to run the city. Municipalities use the Article 100 Commission to generate more revenue in city areas with higher land values. True, municipalities did not receive adequate financial resources during these years, but they could have found new ways to generate long-term revenue. Many of these issues might be solved if municipalities were looking for a steady source of revenue.” Unauthorized construction and revenue through the payment of tolls have resulted from a lack of budget, as well as a lack of a clear legal system regarding the allocation of development rights, as a result of municipal violations and illegality. Part of the problem can be solved by allocating more provincial funds to municipalities, particularly in small towns with low revenue. However, proper budget management must be acknowledged as well. According to Fig. 3, the most important way to solve municipalities’ financial problems is to generate long-term revenue by attracting investors, as this is the only way to achieve financial self-sufficiency.

#### • Substantive problems of the plan

The essential problems of master plans are one of the most important aspects of their infeasibility. The master plan is one-dimensional and quantitative, focusing only on the physical aspects of the city (land use and road network). In other words, regardless of the social, cultural, economic, or other structure, master plans are presented in the form of a map and a booklet of criteria by determining the levels and per capita. The structural and content differences between cities are not considered in master plans. “It is not necessary to prepare master plans for small towns with small populations and sizes,” one interviewee said. There are issues for land uses in reopening roads for land acquisition. It is generally not appropriate for the context of the region, and only the issue of per capita supply is considered. The appropriate location of land

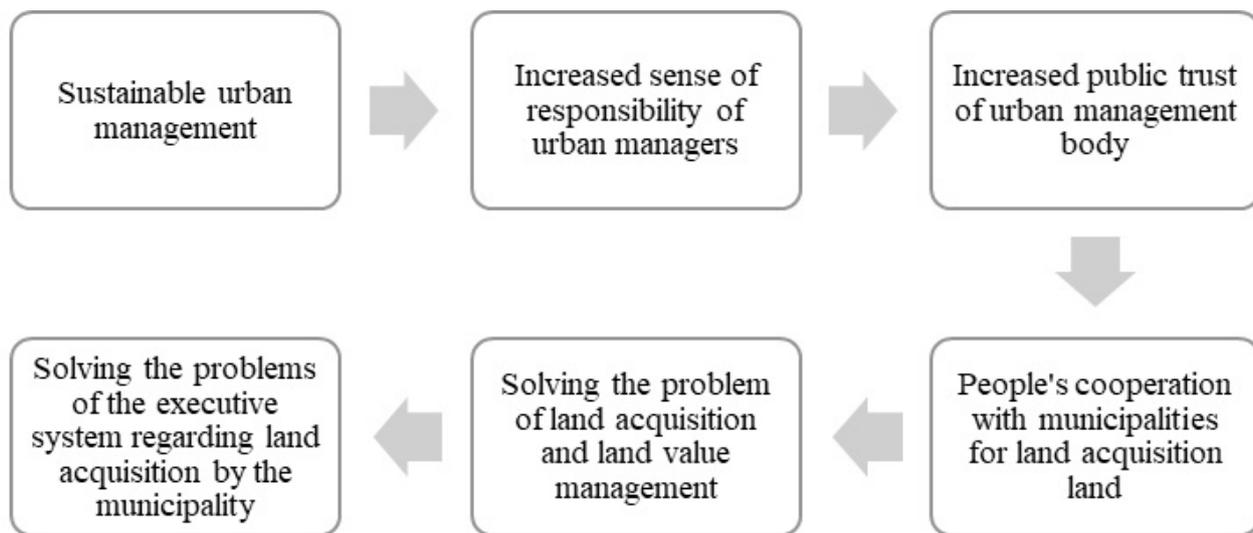


Fig. 2. Relationship between the themes of weaknesses of the management system, lack of constructive participation, and problems of the executive system. Source: Authors.

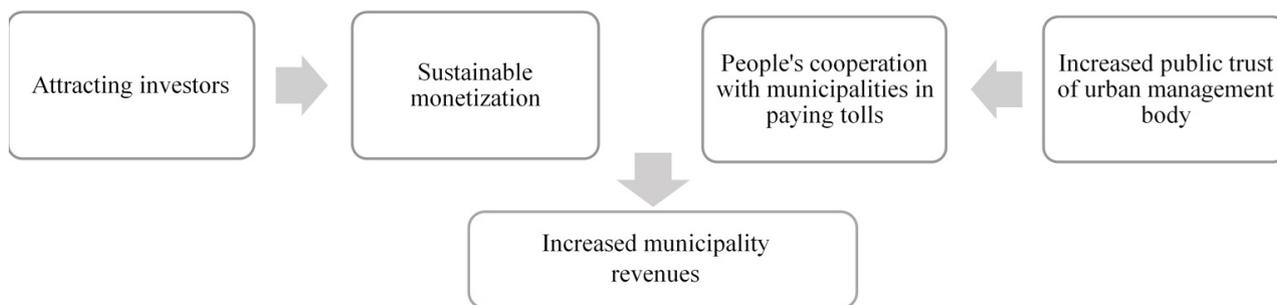


Fig. 3. The effect of public participation and investor attraction on increasing municipal revenue. Source: Authors.

uses is not important”. “To put it another way, the sole purpose is to provide this space. On the other hand, building density forecasting does not take infrastructure into account. The street population, for example, is 150 people according to the family dimension, but when there is a violation, and the density rises, the street population rises to 400 people. As a result, the Article 5 Commission’s infrastructural facilities have not been designed to accommodate 400 people in a passage, for example, with a density of two floors. Consequently, various traffic issues, public services, water, and electricity issues are unavoidable. Because we have not implemented the program according to the master plan, violations occur, and the city’s polarity is quite obvious. The land is very expensive in the upper part of the city, and this trend is expected to continue, resulting in the city being completely divided into a

polar city between the rich and the poor,” one of the interviewees said.

The lengthy process of developing and approving the plan, as well as changes in the city during the master plan period, are examples of factors that contribute to master plans not being realized. “The administrative cycle and approval of our plans have many problems, and this process is very long,” according to one expert.” It takes about four to five years to prepare a plan, and the city has changed during that time, and the plan may no longer be relevant.” Furthermore, the content of these plans is rigid. When the plan’s content is very negative and has been prepared and compiled, it will inevitably face numerous problems and obstacles in its implementation. Master plans have become increasingly inefficient due to this deprivation content, among other factors. The existence of deprivation content, combined with a

lack of a proper land acquisition system and land value management, has resulted in the owner's rights being overlooked in many master plan provisions. "We are not accustomed to considering the interests of the people," as one of the interviewees put it. Property rights appear to be receiving more attention due to the development of appropriate laws in the field of urban land ownership. As a result of this, owners will feel more financially secure and will have more faith in the city management body. People's participation will be more colorful due to the development of trust. On a small scale, increased social interaction and participation lead to a sense of belonging to the neighborhood and the city on a larger scale.

#### • Lack of constructive participation

As can be seen in Table 1, the two main categories of "lack of constructive participation" are: "People do not believe in the body of urban management," and "City managers do not believe in people's participation," are the two main classes of "lack of constructive participation," as shown in Table 1. "People are not involved in the master plan process, and constructive participation will not be implemented in Iran at this time," according to one of the interviewees. One of the city officials expresses his disbelief in the public's participation with this phrase. "Councils play an important role in people's distrust of practical participation," the respondents acknowledged. Many times, people elect council members solely based on propaganda and personal interests. In urban management, mistakes are made when non-specialists are brought in to work. Public participation in city affairs is currently limited to the election of city council members. People should understand that their votes and opinions are extremely important as citizens and that their votes should not be misinterpreted. More than 20 years after the first term of Islamic city councils in Iran, the culture and thinking of the councils have not progressed (1998). "If bottom-up planning is important and people's participation in plan preparation is taken into account," one expert

said, "people will be aware that they were involved in the plan's proposals. So maybe they'll assist in putting it in place." Today, people in many small towns are unaware of their important role, and council members do not see themselves as dedicated to the city and its interests. In other words, only personal and financial interests take precedence in such a situation. The theme of urban management system weakness is closely related to the theme of constructive participation, as shown in Fig. 4.

Problems with the plan preparation process system

This emergent theme includes two main sub-themes:

"Municipalities do not participate in the planning process" and "Low-quality consulting services."

The municipality is a private body governed by government law that is solely responsible for putting the master plans into action and has no involvement in the planning process. As a result, they should be satisfied with consultant services. One interviewee stated, "Municipalities expect councilors to meet all of their mindsets and demands."

In terms of consultant selection, some argue that "consultants should be local because the lack of face-to-face consultation of non-native consultants in the city under study is one of the major reasons for master plans' infeasibility." The approved road and urban planning consultant must do a proper study when preparing the plan. And this is very effective in the implementation of the plan. One interviewee said, "in the Sangar city master plan, the consultant envisions alleys where the current buildings are not visible in aerial photographs, and the consultant assumes the land is open. They linked Shahid Fathi Alley to Daniel Alley, for example. In the 200 meters between these two alleys, however, there are buildings. As a result, the aforementioned proposal lacks executive status, and the alley should be closed and replaced with a roundabout." Others believe that councilors who are not native are more productive at work. "If a local consultant is chosen, the health of the work may be questioned," Municipalities can work more easily with local consultants because of this extensive communication," one interviewee

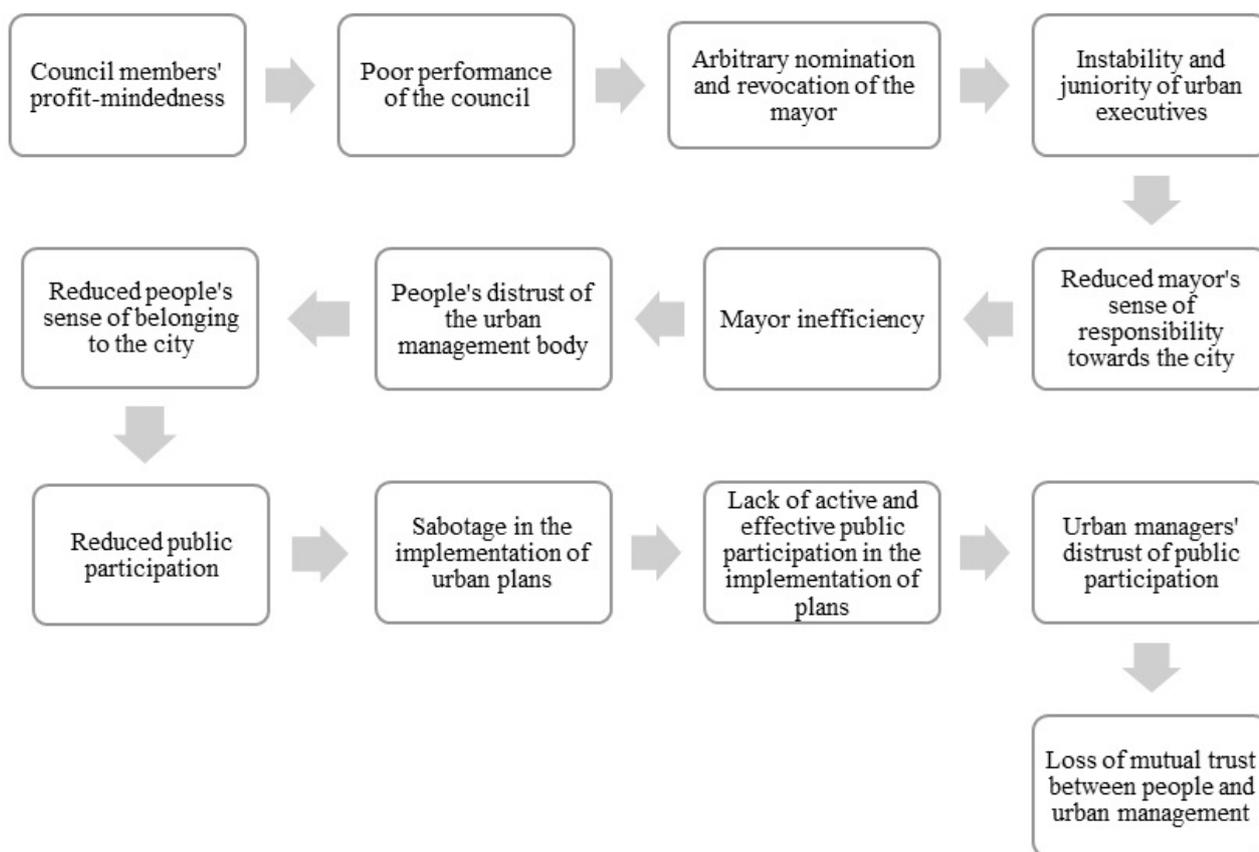


Fig. 4. The relationship between the weaknesses of the urban management system and the theme of constructive participation. Source: Authors.

stated. Some experts believe “whether consultants are native or non-native is not a measure of the quality of work,”

### Conclusion

The main goal of this research was to identify and analyze the factors that contribute to the incompatibility of master plans of small towns (i.e. Sangar, Khoshkebijar, and Shaft). This is because the problem of unreliability is more acute in small towns, and the issues that master plans lack in small towns are frequently overlooked. The use of qualitative research methods and grounded theory is also a unique feature of this study. This method considers qualitative data analysis; thus, the current study focuses on the qualitative analysis of codes between classes and themes. However, the frequency and repetition of the codes were used to prioritize the importance of the classes within each theme when comparing them.

Although the subject of this article is similar to that

of Vahidi Borji et al. (2017) in terms of general research method and, to some extent, the subject of research, there are significant differences in scopes and conclusion between this article and this research. According to Vahidi Borji et al. (2017)’s findings, there are eleven main and direct causes of non-realization of uses. However, seven main axes in the non-feasibility of master plans in small cities have been identified in the current study: a weak management system, legal system problems, executive system problems, financial problems, substantive plan problems, lack of constructive participation, and issues in the plan preparation process. Fourteen experts were chosen for an interview in the study by using the snowball sampling method (Vahidi Borji et al., 2017). While, 23 informants and experts from various groups working in the municipality, Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, and other organizations were chosen for in-depth interviews in the current study using this sampling method. By incorporating more

viewpoints, the goal was to clarify the conflicts and differences between them. As a result, the master plans' flaws were examined from each group's perspective, resulting in more comprehensive and realistic outcomes. The SWOT method was used to analyze the effective data in the non-feasibility of master plans in another study (Zangi Abadi et al., 2014). The failure of this plan has been attributed to three factors: incorrect demographic changes, non-realization of the hierarchy of urban centers, and non-realization of population density in urban areas and neighborhoods, as well as non-realization of the proposed densities. It's worth noting that these cases fall under the heading of the plan's substantive issues. Six additional axes were obtained and examined in this study in addition to this one. With a comparative approach that differs from the current research method, Hojjati et al. (2018) concluded that master plans have several flaws, including inflexibility, extensive service descriptions, and a focus on the body. As a result, one of the research's innovations is the use of grounded theory in the current study because the lack of a pre-defined structure and classification of factors based on grounded data has prevented the researcher's personal opinions and preferences from being applied thus increasing the research's validity.

In their study "Beyond a Master Plan: Oman 2025," Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina (2011) noted that strategic plans differ from master plans in terms of the planning process. Short gaps between planning and implementation, as well as stakeholder participation, are two of the most significant of these. According to the two researchers, the master plan's main flaws are the lengthy process of developing it, the lack of attention to implementation, and limited citizen participation. However, several other codes are mentioned in this article in addition to these.

The findings of this study show that different themes related to master plan infeasibility are linked in a chain and that by correcting some cases, other themes can be improved. The problem of council inefficiency, which has a significant impact on

the stability of urban management and the lack of constructive participation of the people, is one of the major reasons for the non-implementation of master plans in small towns. Article 44 of the Constitution prohibits the removal of councils, which many interviewees referred to as "poor performance of council members." In terms of bureaucracy, the elimination of councils results in the government's expansion and the reassignment of affairs to the government. In other words, the civil aspect of the constitution is obliterated as a result of this. Given the importance of the issue, it appears that delegating the dismissal and installation of mayors to governorates is a viable solution. To put it another way, confining the council's powers to monitor rather than the removal and installation of mayors promotes urban management stability.

Increased city executive efficiency, which stems from the restoration of managerial stability, leads to increased public satisfaction and trust in the body of urban management, as well as more active and constructive participation among stakeholders and influential people in the city. Increasing this participation, particularly in the small towns studied, could help solve some of the executive system's problems, such as the municipality's land acquisition problem. This is because delegating authority to the people brings the urban management body closer to the city's lowest level of participation, i.e., the citizens. To put it another way, the process of putting the plans into action will be aided by people's cooperation and participation.

In addition, establishing a specialized and technical working group in urban planning will greatly assist municipalities in putting the plans into action. This is because illegal approvals have been seen in many cases as a result of disregard for the law, and in some cases, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the law, as well as council members' and mayors' lack of knowledge about the limits of their authority. Violations of the law motivated by benevolent or compassionate motives, all considered violations of the law, can lead to this problem.

On the other hand, many of the existing rules governing the master plan's implementation are both negative and positive. Negative cases can also be properly implemented if personal interests are not allowed to be exercised. However, the master plan has a flaw when it comes to positive aspects of development. It is proposed that liability be removed from the positive parts of the equation and, as a result, legal liability be created in the negative area. To put it another way, master plans can be maintained by making some changes and eliminating some cases, as well as emphasizing negative viewpoints, though they require flexibility in the positive field. Negative and positive processes must be identified to accomplish this goal. In the negative context, it is suggested that basic service use, strategic development projects, construction governance criteria, density, and overall city structure be considered. It is also suggested that we can assist urban development goals by using strategic-operational plans and the relationship between master plans and strategic-operational plans. Because operational projects emerge from strategies, they are formulated with scientific and practical support. As a result, the legal position for strategic-operational plans in the city budget documents should be considered.

It's also worth noting that the current study's findings, thanks to qualitative methods' ability to generalize, can reveal the reasons for the impracticability of master plans in Guilan province's small cities. To put it another way, these findings are valid and inductive, at least for other small cities in Guilan province, based on the cities studied in the current study. However, caution and greater attention to context should be used when applying these findings to cities in other provinces with different climates and management environments.

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