

Research on the Optimization Path of Urban Community Consultation Mechanism

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Abstract: This article focuses on the optimization of urban community consultation mechanisms. By integrating policy requirements, the governance predicaments of urbanization, and the practical foundations of various regions, it analyzes the achievements that have been formed, such as the participation of multiple subjects, diverse consultation forms, and the focus on livelihood issues. It also points out the current problems such as significant regional differences and insufficient consultation depth. Further analyze the core problems such as the imbalance of participating entities, non-standard operation processes, insufficient integration of online and offline, and weak guarantee systems, and propose countermeasures to activate participating entities, standardize operation mechanisms, optimize platform support, and strengthen guarantee systems, providing practical support for the modernization of grassroots governance.

Keywords: Urban community consultation mechanism Grassroots governance Participants

DOI: 10.69979/3041-0843.26.01.019

1 Research Background

1.1 Policy Orientation: An inevitable requirement for the modernization of grassroots governance

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the state has repeatedly emphasized the need to "improve the mechanism of grassroots self-governance led by grassroots Party organizations and promote the institutionalization, standardization and proceduralization of direct democracy at the grassroots level." The "14th Five-Year Plan for Promoting Modernization of Agriculture and Rural Areas" clearly states that "the community consultation system should be improved and channels for the public to participate in grassroots governance should be broadened." In 2023, the "Opinions on Strengthening and Improving the Party Building Work at the Grassroots Level in Cities" further regarded community consultation as a key approach to solving urban governance problems. From the perspective of policy evolution, community consultation has evolved from a "supplementary means" to a "core mechanism", becoming an important carrier for modernizing the grassroots governance system and governance capacity.

1.2 Social demand: Forced by governance predicaments in the process of urbanization

With China's urbanization rate exceeding 66% (data from the National Bureau of Statistics in 2024), urban communities have gradually become the core units where population concentration and interests are intertwined. On the one hand, community conflicts are showing a trend of diversification. Issues such as property disputes (accounting for 38.2%), public space allocation (22.5%), and elderly care service supply (19.3%) occur frequently (according to the 2024 Community Conflict Statistics Report of the Ministry of Civil Affairs). On the other hand, residents' awareness of their rights has awakened, and their demands for "the right to know, the right to participate, and the right to make decisions" have significantly increased. The traditional "administrative-led" community governance model has become difficult to cope with complex demands, and there is an urgent need to optimize the consultation mechanism to achieve "the matters of the people should be discussed by the people".

1.3 Practical Foundation: Exploration and accumulation of community consultation

In recent years, various regions have carried out diverse practices: In Beijing, the "Small Courtyard Deliberation Hall" has addressed the issue of renovating old residential areas through a process of "residents' proposals - classified consultation - on-site supervision". Hangzhou's "Future Community" relies on a digital platform to collect consultation topics online and implement them offline. In Chengdu, "courtyard self-governance" has introduced social organizations to participate in consultation and mediation. Although these practices have achieved results, there are still problems such as unbalanced regional development and insufficient stability of mechanisms, providing a realistic basis for systematic research on optimization paths.

2 Analysis of the Current Situation of Urban Community Consultation Mechanism

2.1 Existing achievements: The consultation system has taken initial shape

Diversified negotiation subjects: A multi-subject framework has been formed, featuring "leadership by the Party organization + dominance by the neighborhood committee + residents as the core + participation of property management, social organizations, and units stationed in the area". According to a survey by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, in 2024, the participation rate of residents in urban community consultations will be 58%, while that of property management and social organizations will reach 23% and 19% respectively, an increase of 15 to 20 percentage points compared to 2020.

The forms of consultation are diversified: offline, mainly through "deliberation meetings", "discussion meetings" and "public hearings", while online, consultation channels are established by relying on community wechat groups, government affairs apps and mini-programs. For instance, the "Suihao Ban" APP in Guangzhou has set up a "Community Consultation" section. In 2024, it handled a total of 42,000 resident issues, with a resolution rate of 89%.

The negotiation content has been focused: The negotiation topics have extended from basic matters such as "environmental hygiene and

neighborhood conflicts" to complex public affairs like "elevator installation, community elderly care, and parking management", covering all scenarios of residents' lives.

2.2 Existing deficiencies: The effectiveness of consultation needs to be enhanced

There are significant regional differences: The coverage rate of community consultation platforms in first-tier cities is 92%, while in third - and fourth-tier cities it is only 68%. Newly-built commercial housing communities, due to their complete supporting facilities, have a 30% higher operational efficiency of the consultation mechanism than old residential areas (Report of the China Community Development Association in 2024).

Insufficient depth of consultation: Most community consultations remain at the level of "problem feedback", with insufficient coverage of key links such as "solution design, resource integration, and long-term supervision". About 45% of consultation topics only form "preliminary consensus" and have not been translated into concrete actions (same as the above report).

3 Problems Existing in the Urban Community Consultation Mechanism

3.1 Participants: Imbalance between enthusiasm and representativeness

Uneven participation rate among residents: It shows the characteristics of "three more and three less" - the elderly participate more (accounting for 62%), while the young participate less (the proportion of those aged 18-35 is less than 20%). The participation of stakeholders is high while that of ordinary residents is low. There are many passive responses and few active initiatives. The reasons for this are as follows: First, young people lack time due to their busy work schedules. Second, the negotiation topics have a low match with the needs of young people (such as child care and employment). Third, the participation channels lack convenience.

The lack of discourse power among vulnerable groups: The proportion of floating population, low-income groups, people with disabilities and other groups participating in negotiations is less than 10%. In some communities, due to problems such as "household registration restrictions" and "insufficient expression ability", the needs of these groups have been ignored. For instance, a survey in a provincial capital city shows that the satisfaction rate of the floating population with community public services is only 48%, significantly lower than the 76% of local residents.

Insufficient collaboration among multiple subjects: The "administrative tendency" of neighborhood committees still exists. Some communities use consultation as a means to "implement tasks", neglecting the subjectivity of residents. There is a conflict of interests between the property management and the residents. During negotiations, the property management often refuses the residents' demands on the grounds of "cost". The participation of social organizations lacks a stable mechanism and is mostly "project-based intervention", making it difficult to play a long-term role.

3.2 Operating mechanism: Unstandardized processes and difficulty in implementing results

Fragmented negotiation process: Most communities have not established standardized procedures. The collection of topics lacks extensive mobilization (only 30% of communities collect topics through multiple channels), and the negotiation process lacks rule constraints (such as speaking time and opinion integration mechanisms), resulting in low negotiation efficiency. On average, each negotiation takes more than 2 hours, and it is still difficult to reach a consensus.

The transformation of consultation results is weak: About 55% of communities have not established a tracking mechanism for consultation results, and the phenomenon of "discussing but not making a decision, making a decision but not implementing it" is widespread. For instance, in 2023, a certain community agreed through consultation to "add community elderly care service stations", but due to the lack of clear responsibility subjects and time nodes, it still had not been implemented by the end of 2024.

The absence of a supervision and evaluation mechanism: The lack of supervision over the consultation process (such as whether the right of expression of vulnerable groups is guaranteed) and assessment of the implementation of results (such as residents' satisfaction and problem resolution rate) makes it difficult to improve the quality of consultation, and in some communities, consultation has become "formalism".

3.3 Platform support: Insufficient integration of online and offline

The coverage of offline platforms is limited: In old residential areas, due to the lack of fixed negotiation venues, negotiations are mostly held in "open-air squares and neighborhood committee offices", which are greatly restricted by weather and space. Although the newly-built residential areas have supporting facilities, their opening hours do not match the residents' daily routines (for instance, they are open during the daytime on weekdays, and young people cannot participate).

The functions of online platforms are limited: The existing online negotiation tools mainly focus on "information release and opinion collection", lacking interactive functions such as "topic screening, online debate, and voting". Some platforms have the problem of "information lag", with the proportion of those who do not respond within 72 hours after residents' feedback reaching 40%.

Data separation between online and offline: Most of the offline negotiation records are "paper archives" and have not been synchronized with the online platform, making it difficult to track issues and trace results. The consultation data among different departments (such as neighborhood committees, property management, and sub-district offices) are not shared, resulting in "information silos".

3.4 Guarantee System: Insufficient resources and capabilities

Insufficient financial support: 80% of the community consultation funds rely on "temporary allocations from the sub-district office", lacking a stable budget, which makes it difficult to carry out consultation activities (such as expert consultation and venue arrangement) on a regular basis.

Shortage of professional talents: Community workers mostly lack professional capabilities in "negotiation skills and conflict mediation". Only 15% of communities have full-time negotiation instructors, making it difficult for them to handle complex negotiation issues (such as conflicts of interest among multiple parties).

4 Optimization Countermeasures for Urban Community Consultation Mechanisms

4.1 Activate the participants: Build a "full participation" pattern

Precisely match demands and attract young people to participate: Design topics based on the needs of young people (such as community childcare and employment assistance), and adopt the "online live consultation + offline discussion on weekends" model to reduce the time cost of participation. Establish a "Youth Consultative Representative" system, with each community selecting 5 to 8 young people to participate in core consultations.

Guarantee the right to speak for vulnerable groups: Set up "special seats for Migrant Population Consultation" and "Barrier-free consultation channels for people with disabilities", and provide sign language interpreters and text assistance tools; Carry out "negotiation skills training" for low-income groups to enhance their expression and participation abilities.

Promote multi-subject collaboration: Clarify the role of the neighborhood committee in "organization and coordination", and strip away unnecessary administrative tasks; Establish a regular consultation mechanism among property management, residents and neighborhood committees, and incorporate the participation of property management in the consultation into the service evaluation system. Through government procurement of services, social organizations are introduced to be stationed on a long-term basis to participate in negotiations and provide professional support.

4.2 Standardize the operation mechanism: Achieve "closed-loop management"

Establish a standardized consultation process: Clearly define the full process time limit of "issue collection (7 days) - issue screening (3 days) - consultation preparation (5 days) - consultation implementation (1-2 times) - result announcement (5 days) - implementation tracking (30 days)", and publicly disclose the process nodes through community announcements and online platforms.

Establish a mechanism for the transformation of achievements: For the consensus reached through consultation, clearly define "responsible entities (such as neighborhood committees, property management), completion deadlines, and resource demands", and sign the "Commitment Letter for the Implementation of Consultation Achievements". Set up a "Consultation Results Publicity Board", update the implementation progress monthly, and accept residents' supervision.

Improve the supervision and evaluation system: Establish a "resident supervision team" to supervise the fairness of the consultation process and the implementation of the results. Establish a "consultation effectiveness evaluation index", and conduct quarterly evaluations from four dimensions: "participation rate, consensus achievement rate, outcome implementation rate, and resident satisfaction". The evaluation results will be linked to the assessment of community work.

4.3 Optimize platform support: Promote the integration of online and offline

Upgrade offline negotiation Spaces: Old residential areas should transform "idle Spaces (such as elevated floors and idle garages)" into standardized negotiation venues, equipped with seats, projectors and recording devices. Newly-built residential areas will incorporate negotiation venues into their planning and implement "staggered opening hours (evening on weekdays and all day on weekends)".

Build a smart consultation platform: Develop a community consultation APP integrating "topic collection, online debate, voting, and outcome tracking", and add functions such as "voice-to-text" and "visual integration of opinions". Establish a "72-hour response mechanism" and implement a "first-contact responsibility" system for residents' online feedback.

Break down data barriers: Promote the connection of "community consultation data" with sub-district offices and government service platforms to achieve the online transformation of offline consultation records and the offline implementation of online opinions. Establish a "negotiation topic database" to categorize and analyze high-frequency topics (such as property disputes), and form standardized solutions.

4.4 Strengthening the guarantee System: Consolidating the "Operational Foundation"

Establish stable funding channels: Incorporate community consultation funds into the district-level fiscal budget and allocate them at a standard of "20 to 30 yuan per household per year". Encourage social forces (such as enterprises and public welfare organizations located in the area) to make donations and establish a "Community Consultation Special Fund".

Strengthen the cultivation of professional talents: Regularly carry out "Community Workers' Negotiation Skills Training", inviting experts from universities, lawyers and senior mediators to give lectures; Establish a "consultation talent pool", and recruit retired cadres, teachers and professionals as volunteers to provide technical support for community consultation.

5 Conclusion

The urban community consultation mechanism is the core carrier of modernizing grassroots governance. Its optimization not only concerns the quality of life of residents but also affects the effectiveness of social governance. At present, urban community consultation in our country has formed a basic framework with the participation of multiple subjects and the support of various forms. However, it still faces problems such as unbalanced participation, non-standard mechanisms, insufficient platforms and weak guarantees.

By activating the participating entities, standardizing the operation mechanism, optimizing the platform support, and strengthening the guarantee system through four major paths, a new community consultation mechanism featuring "full participation, standardized processes, integration of online and offline, and strong support" can be constructed. In the future, it is necessary to further promote the in-depth

integration of the consultation mechanism with grassroots Party building. Based on the differentiated demands of different communities (old residential areas, new residential areas, and communities in urban-rural fringe areas), personalized optimization plans should be explored to truly achieve "consultation for the people and consultation for the people", providing solid support for urban grassroots governance.

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