

Optimizing the Pathways of Government-Guided Community Governance Modernization: A Case Study of Chengdu, Sichuan Province

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid advancement of new-type urbanization, this study aims to systematically optimize governance pathways by focusing on practical dilemmas in urban community governance, such as systemic fragmentation, lagging efficacy, and weakened community identity. Using Chengdu, Sichuan Province as a typical case, it systematically examines innovative practices such as "government-guided dual-line integration," "refined grid management," and "trust-based property management." Chengdu has effectively enhanced governance efficacy and residents' sense of gain by strengthening the coordination and organizational role of local governance institutions, extending the reach of grid governance, and reconstructing trust-based relationships in property services. The study proposes a synergistic governance "concentric circle" model with local governance institutions as the "center," advocating four pathways—core empowerment, collaborative operation, supervision guarantee, and cultural identity—to systematically transform community governance toward multi-stakeholder co-governance, proactive prevention, and a spiritual community. This provides an optimized path with both theoretical and practical significance for modernizing grassroots governance.

KEYWORDS

Government-guided leadership; Community governance; Path optimization; Refined grid management; Trust-based property management

1 Introduction

Chinese society is currently undergoing a profound transformation, and urban community governance faces new challenges. With rapid urbanization, community demographics and interests are becoming increasingly complex, making traditional governance models less adaptable. Fragmented governance systems, lagging service responses, and weakened community identity are becoming increasingly prominent, necessitating an urgent need for innovative governance models.

Against this backdrop, strengthening the coordinating role of grassroots local governance institutions and promoting government-guided modernization of community governance is of great significance. National-level guidance has emphasized the importance of grassroots work for community governance innovation.

As a megacity, Chengdu has made valuable explorations in community governance. By establishing a "government-guided, dual-track integration" mechanism, innovating a "micro-grid, real-time" governance system, and promoting service models such as trust-based property management, Chengdu has accumulated practical experience in addressing the challenges of large-scale urban governance. This study analyzes the Chengdu case to extract the underlying logic of governance innovation, aiming to provide a reference for similar cities.

2 Theoretical foundation and historical evolution of government-guided community governance

2.1 Theoretical basis and historical evolution

The theoretical foundation of government-guided community governance is profound, primarily stemming from the adaptation of three major governance theories. First is the localized innovation of organizational governance theory. This theory emphasizes the core leadership role in governance structures, providing the fundamental basis for local governance institutions to embed and coordinate grassroots society (Han, 2022) ^[1]. Second is the localized adaptation of collaborative governance theory. Western collaborative governance theory emphasizes the equal participation of multiple actors, while in China, it has been innovatively developed into a "core-institution collaborative governance" model (Jing, 2020) ^[2], where the local governance institutions plays the role of integrator, leader, and coordinator among multiple actors, ensuring the direction and effectiveness of collaboration. Third is the deepening of embedded governance theory. This theory posits that local governance institutions deeply integrate into social networks through

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organizational, functional, and value embedding, forming an "embedded governance structure" with the local governance institutions at its core, thereby achieving effective leadership and integration of grassroots society (Cai & Dong, 2023)^[3].

2.2 The reference and adaptation of collaborative governance theory

Collaborative governance theory emphasizes that multiple actors achieve public interest maximization through consultation and cooperation (Song & Wang, 2018)^[4]. It argues that complex public problems require a diversity of governance actors, meaning stakeholders such as the government, enterprises, social organizations, and citizens should share resources and cooperate through negotiation to establish public rules (Li & Chen, 2014)^[5]. However, classic collaborative governance theory often presupposes a relatively equal status among multiple actors, which differs from the Chinese governance reality that emphasizes the coordinating role of governmental institutions. In the Chinese context, government-guided collaborative governance faces challenges in practice due to the complexity of governance actors, processes, and the collaborative environment (Jin & Tang, 2023)^[6]. Consequently, a "core-institution collaborative governance" model has been developed in both theory and practice. This model incorporates the rational elements of actor diversity and collaborative cooperation from collaborative governance theory while emphasizing the local governance institutions's core leadership and coordinating functions among multiple actors. It represents an important localized innovation of governance theory in the context of Chinese grassroots governance.

2.3 Theoretical explanation of embedded governance

The concept of "embedded governance" provides a key theoretical perspective for understanding how local governance institutions deeply integrate into and lead grassroots society. Its core principle is that the actor maintains its autonomy while establishing close connections with the social sphere through various means, thereby achieving effective leadership and integration of society (Jing, 2019)^[7]. In the context of Chinese community governance, embedded governance specifically refers to the systematic embedding of local governance institutions into the grassroots society to achieve the goals of leadership and governance (Zeng, 2025). Recent research has further enriched its connotation, particularly achieving new progress in the dimension of technological embedding^[8]. Through the multi-layered integration of organizational networks, institutional participation, and technological platforms, institutional capacity building has achieved deep integration of local governance institutions in community governance. This not only achieves comprehensive coverage in form, but also forges local governance institutions into the strong core of community governance through functional collaboration and data-driven development.

2.4 Theoretical basis and historical evolution of government-guided community governance

The evolution of Government-guided community governance profoundly reflects the transformation of China's grassroots governance model. During the period of the unit system (1949-1978), urban grassroots organizations achieved social integration through the unit system, but this also stifled social vitality. After the reform and opening-up era (1978-2012), with the dismantling of the unit system and the transition to a community-based system, community Government-guided governance began to explore new paths for integration with governance.

Since the new era (2012 to present), Government-guided community governance has entered a phase of innovation. A 2017 national policy document emphasized the coordinating role of grassroots government organizations, leading to the emergence of innovative practices across the country, such as Chengdu's "government-guided, dual-track integration" and Beijing's "street and township whistleblowing, department reporting." This historical shift not only demonstrates the innovation of governance models but also reflects a profound shift in the relationship between the state and society.

2.5 Practical requirements for government-guided community governance in the new era

Current profound changes in China's social structure, with new social strata continuously emerging and interest demands becoming increasingly diverse, necessitate innovation in grassroots governance models to enhance social integration capacity. As the most organized and cohesive core force in governance structures, local governance institutions play an irreplaceable role in integrating diverse interests and building community.

The accelerating urbanization process has significantly increased the complexity of urban governance. Issues in public services, public safety, environmental hygiene, property management, and other areas are intertwined, making it difficult for a single actor to address them effectively. Government-guided collaborative governance can effectively integrate forces from the government, market, and society to form a synergistic governance force to tackle complex challenges.

The rapid development of digital technology provides new tools and means for community governance innovation.

The application of big data, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things enables precise and intelligent governance. The modernization of Government-guided community governance requires local governance institutions to proactively embrace digital transformation, use advanced technologies to enhance governance efficacy, and ensure technology develops and is applied on the right track.

3 The overall context of community governance in Chengdu

3.1 Urban development and governance challenges

As an important central city in western China, Chengdu faces multiple governance challenges brought by rapid development. By the end of 2023, Chengdu's permanent population exceeded 21 million, characterized by a large management scope, numerous governance units, and a complex social structure. Rapid urbanization has led to "big city diseases" such as population pressure, traffic congestion, environmental pollution, and insufficient supply of public services, posing severe challenges to traditional governance models.

Meanwhile, as a famous historical and cultural city, Chengdu has old urban areas, new districts, and rural communities coexisting, resulting in significantly different governance needs. How to achieve refined and people-oriented governance in such a megacity has become a pressing issue for Chengdu's community governance innovation.

3.2 Policy environment for governance innovation

The Chengdu municipal authorities attach great importance to community governance innovation. They have successively issued policy documents such as the "Opinions on Deepening Urban and Rural Community Development and Governance to Build High-Quality, Harmonious, and Livable Communities" and the "Chengdu Urban and Rural Community Development and Governance Master Plan," establishing a relatively comprehensive policy support system. Particularly since 2017, Chengdu has made urban and rural community development and governance a "top-leader project," establishing the urban and rural community development and governance committee to coordinate and promote community governance work citywide, providing strong organizational guarantee for Government-guided community governance innovation.

3.3 Analysis of characteristic practical models in Chengdu

Chengdu promotes innovation in community governance with a core mechanism of "Institutional capacity building and dual-track integration." This mechanism strengthens the core leadership of the local governance institutions while achieving dual-line coordination between administrative management and mass services. In practice, Chengdu has effectively integrated the forces of multiple parties by establishing a four-level linkage between local governance institutions and promoting systems such as community local governance institutions secretaries serving as directors of neighborhood committees, thus forming a governance structure of "integration to promote coordination." Taking Hongmen Street in Wuhou District as an example, the community core committee took the lead in establishing a joint meeting to coordinate resources from various parties, including district-affiliated units and social organizations. It successfully promoted the installation of elevators in old communities and the resolution of parking difficulties, among other livelihood issues, effectively improving residents' satisfaction and sense of gain.

3.4 "Refined grid management" governance system

To address the pain points of large governance scope and complex units in megacities, Chengdu innovatively constructed the "refined grid management" system. This system divides the city into three-level governance units: "community - general grid - micro-grid." Among them, 136,000 micro-grids cover 50-100 households each, ensuring the governance reach extends to every building and household. More critically, Chengdu systematically establishes governance workstations or liaison units on the grid, establishing core branches in general grids and core groups or designating central households in micro-grids, achieving "dual coverage of local governance institutions and governance grids" (Jiang, 2022) ^[9]. Each micro-grid is staffed with full-time or part-time grid personnel responsible for information collection, dispute mediation, service agency, etc., forming a rapid response mechanism where "small matters are resolved within the grid, major issues within the community." Statistics from 2023 show that over 2 million public demand requests were handled through this system, with a completion rate of 98.7%, fully demonstrating its efficacy in refined governance.

3.5 Innovation in the "trust-based property management" model

Property management is a focal point of community conflicts. The "trust-based property management" model explored and promoted by Chengdu is a revolutionary reconstruction of traditional property relationships. This model clearly defines property fees as trust property belonging to all homeowners. The role of the property company shifts from manager to trustee providing services according to the trust contract, entitled to open and transparent remuneration. Community local governance institutions play a key guiding, coordinating, and supervising role in this process, ensuring the fair establishment and stable operation of the trust relationship (Chen, 2021) ^[10]. Practice shows that this model effectively addresses issues like information asymmetry, service inequality, and frequent conflicts. In pilot areas like Jinniu District Jiulidi Street, property dispute complaints significantly decreased, while property fee collection rates notably increased, reconstructing the trust cornerstone between homeowners and property companies.

3.6 Effectiveness and shortcomings of Chengdu's practices

Chengdu's community governance practices have achieved remarkable results: the leading role of Municipal authorities has continued to strengthen, with residents' satisfaction with the work of local governance institutions increasing from 78.3% in 2017 to 92.6% in 2023. The "Microgrid Real Grid" governance system has significantly improved governance effectiveness, shortening emergency response times by over 60%. Collaborative governance has effectively addressed a number of livelihood challenges, with community service satisfaction reaching 87.5 points in 2023, ranking among the highest in the country.

However, the practice still faces three challenges: at the governance system level, the boundaries of power and responsibilities among multiple entities are unclear, and coordination mechanisms need to be improved; regarding the talent pool, community workers are underpaid, face limited development opportunities, and face a shortage of multi-talented professionals; and in digital governance, data barriers, incomplete system functionality, and insufficient digital literacy among grassroots workers are among the constraints.

4 Path optimization: constructing the "concentric circle" model for government-guided community governance

Based on the "concentric circle" governance model refined from Chengdu's practical experience, with community local governance institutions at its core, four major systems are employed to establish a coordinated and progressive governance framework. This model transforms political and organizational strengths into governance effectiveness through institutionalized approaches. Its core principle lies in achieving an organic unity of organizational structure, functional coordination, and value-driven leadership, with the local governance institutions at the center. In governance practice, the central role of the community local governance institutions determines the fundamental direction of governance, while the degree of perfection of the governance mechanism directly influences the scope and development potential of governance effectiveness.

In terms of specific implementation, the core empowerment system focuses on establishing a concrete community governance Municipal authorities alliance, granting it the power to review and veto major matters, and cultivating multi-faceted talent through the establishment of a professional development system for community workers. The collaborative operation system focuses on building a "three lists" mechanism and a grid intelligence system, promoting the transformation of the governance model to a demand-oriented and data-driven one. The cultural identity system continuously fosters residents' sense of belonging and community by developing community cultural IP and improving incentives for volunteer service.

The continued expansion of the "concentric circle" model not only symbolizes the systematic improvement of governance capabilities, but also embodies the synergy between organizational leadership and multi-faceted collaboration achieved by local governance institutions in community governance. This model provides a valuable implementation path for promoting the modernization of grassroots governance.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

This study analyzes Chengdu's innovative practices in government-guided community governance and draws key conclusions. Government-guided governance is the fundamental institutional assurance for the modernization of community governance in megacities. Only by strengthening the core leadership role of community local governance institutions can resources be effectively integrated, interests be coordinated, and political and organizational advantages be transformed into governance effectiveness. Chengdu's exploration of a "concentric circle" governance model reveals

the logic of the transformation of Government-guided governance from "physical coverage" to "chemical fusion," achieving an organic unity of organizational embeddedness, functional coupling, and value resonance. Furthermore, digital technology has become a key enabling tool for transforming governance models, driving the shift from "experience-driven" to "data-driven." Chengdu's practices not only provide replicable "local experience" for similar cities but also contribute "Chinese solutions" and "Eastern wisdom" to global urban governance.

To build a more resilient governance community, we propose a series of policy recommendations. At the institutional level, we should promote the legalization of community governance committees and pilot the establishment of specialized positions to optimize the operation of public resources. At the technical level, we need to build a city-level community operating system while also prioritizing digital inclusion to ensure universal access to technology. At the cultural level, we can strengthen identity through community memory projects and establish incentive and feedback mechanisms for volunteer service. The talent pool requires a professional system and specialized training support, while resource sustainability relies on diversified funding models and demand-driven service provision. Ultimately, comprehensive digital governance can be achieved through an integrated smart platform integrating data and services while retaining offline channels.

Looking forward, research prospects can focus on several key directions. First, promoting the intelligent upgrade of grid governance systems, leveraging AI predictions to shift from passive response to proactive intervention. Second, developing standardized community diagnostic toolkits to scientifically categorize community types and accurately match them with governance models. Furthermore, a networked community governance innovation laboratory can be established to systematically incubate and iterate grassroots innovation initiatives. Furthermore, comparative research with similar cities should be conducted. Through systematic theoretical refinement, Chengdu's practical experience can be elevated into a "Chinese paradigm" with global reach, transforming it from local knowledge into public knowledge.

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