

Exploration of Embedded Service Models in Urban Communities from the Perspective of Good Governance

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Abstract: With the acceleration of urbanization, the service system of urban communities plays an increasingly crucial role in enhancing residents' quality of life and promoting sustainable urban development. This study, based on social embeddedness theory, constructs an analytical framework from four dimensions: structural embeddedness, relational embeddedness, functional embeddedness, and cognitive embeddedness. Using S Street's pilot community as an example, this study delves into the operational logic, main challenges, and optimization paths of embedded service models in urban communities. The research reveals that this model faces issues such as insufficient resource integration, coordination difficulties, weak trust, and imprecise demand response. Therefore, it proposes measures such as strengthening party organization leadership, promoting multi-subject collaboration, optimizing resource allocation, and disseminating value concepts to provide theoretical and practical references for modernizing grassroots governance.

Keywords: Community services; Social embeddedness; Embedded services; Operational challenges

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1. Introduction

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, from 2000 to 2023, China's urbanization rate increased from approximately 36% to 66.16%. The growing urban population has made community service demands more diverse, personalized, and refined. However, the traditional community service model is gradually revealing its limitations in meeting these new demands, becoming a bottleneck restricting residents' sense of gain. To deepen urban refined management, in December 2021, the State Council Office issued the "14th Five-Year Plan for Urban and Rural Community Service System Construction", explicitly proposing to improve the urban and rural community service system, promote the socialization, professionalization, and marketization of community services, and encourage the development of embedded community services. By integrating various services within or around the community, it aims to achieve precise alignment between service supply and residents' demands.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. Literature review

China's early community services were mainly undertaken by neighborhood committees, focusing on basic welfare services ^[1]. With social structural changes and residents' demand upgrades, community services began to emphasize professionalization, diversification, and personalization ^[2]. The government's role gradually shifted from "comprehensive provider" to "guide, purchaser, and supervisor", encouraging social organizations, market forces, and community residents to jointly participate in service provision ^[3].

As a new type of service model, embedded services transcend the singularity and fragmentation of traditional community services, emphasizing the "embeddedness" of service facilities ^[4]. They integrate multi-functional, multi-layered services within or around the community, achieving seamless connections between services and residents' daily lives ^[5]. This model is not only an innovation in service supply but also an exploration of community space utilization, resource integration, and social relationship reconstruction, aiming to enhance community resilience and residents' well-being.

2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. Social embeddedness theory

Social embeddedness theory emphasizes that economic behavior and social behavior are not isolated but deeply embedded in social structures and relationships. In community governance, Evans' (1995) "embedded autonomy" theory reveals the dynamic balance between government and social forces ^[6]. Zukin and DiMaggio's four-dimensional framework divides embeddedness into cognitive, cultural, structural, and political dimensions, providing a tool for multi-dimensional analysis. Then, many scholars have also begun to build a framework to study community service from multiple dimensions ^[7-9].

2.2.2. Good governance principles

Good governance principles emphasize cooperation and coordination among multiple subjects, including the government, market, and society, aiming to enhance the effectiveness, legitimacy, and fairness of public governance and achieve the maximization of public interests ^[10]. Its core elements include responsiveness, participation, transparency, accountability, and fairness. The embedded service model, as an innovation in public service supply, aligns closely with the concept of good governance.

3. Case analysis

3.1. Structural embeddedness dimension

In terms of party organization construction, various community party committees in S Street actively play a leading role, establishing multiple specialized service teams and coordinating the participation of enterprises, social organizations, and other forces in embedded services, jointly creating a community medical and nursing service center. Some developed social organizations, such as the "Shunhua Care" volunteer service team, play an important role in community elderly care and disability assistance. In terms of resident self-governance organizations, communities universally establish neighborhood committees and residents' councils, strengthening residents' self-service and self-management.

3.2. Relational embeddedness dimension

In terms of trust relationship building, some service providers have won residents' trust through long-term stable services. In terms of interaction mechanisms, communities actively design various online and offline interaction activities, providing a platform for residents to communicate and interact. In terms of emotional connection cultivation, communities promote exchanges and interactions among residents through various themed activities.

3.3. Functional embeddedness dimension

In terms of resource integration, S Street has established a community resource-sharing platform, comprehensively sorting out and integrating fields, funds, and talents within the jurisdiction. In terms of service precision, communities have established a resident demand research mechanism, regularly understanding residents' needs through questionnaires and home visits. In terms of functional coordination and synergy, the government, social organizations, and residents actively play their respective advantages in community services.

3.4. Cognitive embeddedness dimension

In terms of value concept dissemination, communities propagate good governance concepts and the value and significance of embedded services through various channels such as propaganda columns, public accounts, and community broadcasting. In terms of cultural identity shaping, communities deeply explore and inherit their own cultural characteristics, transmitting excellent traditional culture. In terms of consensus formation, communities have established a residents' deliberative consultation system, fully discussing and democratically deciding on important service matters through residents' meetings and hearings.

4. Operational challenges of embedded service models in urban communities

4.1. Structural embeddedness imbalance

Community party organizations and social organizations rely heavily on government resources but often face uneven resource allocation. Some communities located in remote areas receive relatively few government funds and policy support, affecting the implementation of embedded services. The participation of multiple subjects in community governance increases the complexity of organizational coordination. Different subjects have different interest demands, leading to coordination difficulties and low governance efficiency.

4.2. Relational embeddedness deficiency

Service providers and residents often face information asymmetry, with residents being unfamiliar with service content and processes, leading to misunderstandings and distrust. Communities may also face communication barriers when introducing new service projects due to inadequate publicity. Communities lack activities and platforms to promote emotional exchanges, resulting in weak emotional connections among multiple subjects. Although communities organize some cultural and sports activities, their forms and content are relatively single, unable to meet residents' diverse interests, making it difficult to form deep emotional connections.

4.3. Functional embeddedness difficulties

Community resources are scattered among different subjects, lacking a unified coordination mechanism, leading to low resource integration efficiency. Some idle commercial properties within the community, due to property rights belonging to enterprises and individuals, face difficulties when communities coordinate their transformation into

public service venues. Although communities adopt various methods to research residents' needs, they still lack professional talent and data analysis tools, resulting in an inaccurate grasp of residents' needs. When organizing community cultural activities, they fail to fully understand residents' preferences for activity types, leading to low participation.

4.4. Cognitive embeddedness insufficiency

Communities have insufficient propaganda and education efforts in value concept dissemination and cultural identity shaping, resulting in low resident awareness and a sense of identity. The forms of community propaganda activities are relatively single, mainly focusing on distributing leaflets and posting posters, lacking interactivity and interest, making it difficult to attract residents' attention. Then, communities lack the excavation and inheritance of local culture and are relatively backward in cultural innovation, making it difficult to form a distinctive community culture. Some historical buildings and cultural heritage within the community have not been fully protected and utilized, and their historical and cultural values have not been effectively excavated and inherited.

5. Optimization paths for embedded service models in urban communities

5.1. Optimizing structural embeddedness to solidify governance foundations

Establish a Sound party organization-led, multi-party participation, deliberation, and coordination mechanism, incorporate service projects into the party organization's key task list, and establish a party member volunteer service team to strengthen the party organization's leading role in services. Establish a long-term and stable cooperation mechanism between communities and social organizations, clearly define cooperation models, rights and responsibilities, and evaluation mechanisms to ensure effective service alignment with community needs. Then strengthen the standardized construction of neighborhood committees and other resident self-governance organizations, and enhance residents' awareness and ability to participate in public affairs through community education and cadre training. Build residents' deliberation halls and online deliberation platforms to safeguard residents' rights to information, participation, and expression in the design, implementation, and supervision of embedded services.

5.2. Deepening relational embeddedness to enhance community vitality

Adhere to the principles of openness and transparency, regularly disclose service information, and fund usage. Establish a smooth resident feedback and complaint handling mechanism to promptly respond to residents' concerns and resolve misunderstandings. Leverage modern information technology, develop community apps or mini-programs with user-friendly and information-rich features, providing information dissemination, service reservation, feedback, and online deliberation functions to enhance residents' convenience in participating in community affairs. Then encourage and support the formation of resident informal groups and social networks: Strengthen emotional connections and community identity through joint actions.

5.3. Optimizing functional embeddedness to improve service efficiency

Build a multi-party participation resource-sharing platform, comprehensively sort out and register fields, talents, funds, and information within the community. Establish a regularized community demand research mechanism, use questionnaires, home visits, and big data analysis to accurately identify the personalized and diverse needs of different groups. Then clarify the functional positioning, rights and responsibilities, and cooperation methods

of the government, community organizations, social organizations, market entities, and residents in embedded services. Establish a regular negotiation and communication mechanism to promptly resolve conflicts during service provision.

5.4. Strengthening cognitive embeddedness to build community consensus

Integrate good governance concepts and the value of embedded services into community propaganda, cultural activities, and resident education. Use platforms such as community propaganda columns, broadcasting, public accounts, and short videos to disseminate service concepts, policy information, and typical cases in a vivid manner, raising resident awareness. Organize cultural activities with community characteristics: Enhance residents' cultural identity and pride. Encourage residents to participate in the creation and dissemination of community cultural brands, forming a positive and cohesive community spirit. Then, establish and improve the community deliberative consultation system, discuss and democratically decide on important embedded service matters through residents' meetings, hearings, and roundtable meetings, forming a broad consensus on community development and service optimization.

6. Conclusion and prospects

This study analyzes the embedded service model in urban communities from the perspective of good governance, using social embeddedness theory's four dimensions. The research shows that the model faces many challenges in practice, covering structural, relational, functional, and cognitive levels, which restrict service efficiency improvement. Based on this, the study proposes a series of optimization paths based on good governance principles.

However, this study has certain limitations, mainly relying on theoretical analysis and literature review, and lacking systematic empirical data support. Future research should focus on conducting empirical studies through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and case analysis to deeply validate the challenges and optimization paths proposed in this study. Additionally, close attention should be paid to the implementation effects and influencing factors of relevant policies to provide a more solid theoretical and practical basis for constructing a new urban community service system.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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