

## The Problems and Countermeasures of Citizen Participation in Urban Community Governance

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### Abstract

The community as the cells of society is the foundation of building a socialist harmonious society, and also is the basic unit of promoting social progress and development. Community residents as the most widely participants and the most important main body in community governance, its participation is not only the essential requirement of community governance, but also is the foundation, motivation and guarantee of community development. At present, the urban community residents' participation is still in its infancy in our country. There are many problems in practice, such as how to improve the community governance system, how to guide the community residents to participate, and how to arouse the enthusiasm of community residents to participate. These problems influenced the construction and development of community. This paper analyzed the present situation and then put out the performances and existing problems of citizen participation in community governance under the support of basic theory of community governance and combined with the literature research of citizen participation in community governance in our country. According to these experiences and problems of community governance, the paper put forward the countermeasures and Suggestions of improving the residents' participation mechanism from four aspects of

the relationship between government and civil, citizen participation consciousness, legal regulations and compatibility mechanism. Through the practice of these countermeasures and Suggestions, the author expect to really increase the residents' participation enthusiasm and promote the comprehensive development of community.

**Key words:** Citizen participation; Community governance; Government

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### INTRODUCTION

The third party plenary session of the eighteenth proposed “we should to promote the masses' self-management, self-service, self-education and self-supervision according to law when they participate in the urban and rural community governance, grassroots public affairs and public welfares”<sup>\*(Zhang,2006)</sup>. It pointed out that the urban and rural community construction is the basic unit of the development of democracy at the grassroots level. Building a sound community governance, and developing the direct democracy at the grassroots level is the real direction of urban community governance and citizen participation, and is also a basic starting point of theory research. The time of promoting the urban community governance in our country is not long, and still in the preliminary exploration stage at present. The current urban community governance is the “top-down” approach of government-led. But in the long run, the community construction is finally to realize the goal of community autonomy, namely, the community governance mainly relies on the community basic level organizations and community folk organizations. The main part in

community governance is citizens, it inevitably requires the government attaches great importance to the citizen participation in urban community governance, giving full play to their enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of citizen participation in community governance.

## **1. THE CONNOTATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN URBAN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE**

### **1.1 The Connotation of Citizen Participation in Urban Community Governance**

#### **1.1.1 The Citizen Participation**

The citizen participation is an important concept of modern democratic theory. Citizen participation usually referred to as public participation, public participation, is trying to influence public policy and public life.

Citizens as the main body of participation in the law is the concept of “people who possess the nationality of a country, and enjoy the rights and obligations according to the country’s constitution and laws.” According to the concept of citizen participation, participation main body refers to a country’s ordinary citizens<sup>(Zhu,2010)</sup>. The citizen as the main body of participation is the concept of highly generalization which is included both individual citizens and also can be divided into multiple interest groups within a country’s ordinary citizens. The citizen interest groups are the personal collection of common attributes that have common interests, common claims and common functions formed on the basis of common economic and social status.

#### **1.1.2 The Citizen Participation in Community Governance**

Citizens participation in community governance that refers to the course of action that the citizens as the main body of the behavior in the “community” supported by a common goal concern and govern the community public affairs related to the citizens own needs and interests. The “community” “is made up of a certain number of members with the natures of having common needs and interests, forming the frequent social communication interaction, producing the natural emotional connection and psychological identity, and regional community life”.

### **1.2 The Significance of Citizen Participation In Urban Community Governance**

#### **1.2.1 The Citizen Participation Is the Essence Requirement of Community Governance**

“The citizen” explained the connotation of three aspects: firstly, the citizen is the main body of all behavior belonging to the society and country; Secondly, the citizen

precedes all kinds of social activities based on specific areas; thirdly, the citizen participates in social interaction. The three aspects connotation of the citizen meet the basic elements of community governance: the most basic element of community governance is a certain number of people; the second basic element is geography. In modern society, the community has both traditional geographic, and also the function of network; The third basic element is social interaction, namely social communication(Pan, 2004).Only can the social interaction make people into a community to satisfy human needs and functions which cannot be met by a single person. The fourth basic element is a common sense of belonging which is the psychological identity. The anastomosis of concept and essence can be illustrated the close relationship between citizen participation and community governance from the angle of the plane; At the same time, along with the continuous development of political, economic, social and culture, citizen’s participation awareness is enhancing gradually, citizen’s participation level is improving continuously, and the way of participation is increasing. Self-management, efficient-management, scientific division of government functions, and establishment of the civil society are becoming the value concept of modern citizen to participate in social governance. Citizen participation in community governance in many countries, regions and organizations around the world has been successful used in application. This also from the stereo level explained the importance and necessity of citizen participation.

#### **1.2.2 The Citizen Participation Is the Practical Application of New Public Service Theory in the Community Construction**

The new public service theory and governance theory both emphasize the diversification of the governance body; one of the important contents is the comprehensive citizen participation. “The new public service is about a series of thoughts and theory that the public administration plays the role in the governance system that put the public interest, democratic governance and citizen participation into central position”. At the same time, the sources of new public service theory and governance theory are democratic citizenship theory, community organizations and civil society theory, organizational humanism and post-modernism public administration, they are all both emphasize the citizen participation. Therefore, citizen participation is one of the core ideologies of the new public service theory and governance theory. In our country, the implementation of citizen participation with large-scale, scientific and standardization is still need conditions accumulation of a certain amount of time and experience. However, it is feasible to safeguard citizen participation in community construction, and to gradually achieve the high level and degree of the scale citizen participation.

### **1.2.3 Citizen Participation Is the Important Content of Urban Grass-Roots Democracy Political Construction in Our Country**

The construction of democracy politics at the grassroots level requires citizen participation. From the subjective perspective of citizen consciousness, with the continuous development of China's political and economic system reform, citizens more and more recognized that he is the master of the state and society, and it is important to strengthen their subject position in the public policy. Citizens no longer content merely as the object of public policy (object), but have the strong demands to express their interests to the public policy system, and making the public policy represent their own interests. This reflect on the democracy politics construction at the grassroots leve (Hou, 2010). It is easy to find that more and more people begin to care for and participate in formation of community residents' committees, as well as the construction of grass-roots party organizations and represents the interests of the citizens. The trend makes citizen participation to an important content in maintenance, promoting the construction of grass-roots democracy politics. From the objective perspective of social development, the essential core of the scientific development view is people-oriented. The requirement of people-oriented is multifaceted, Including the implementation, development and maintenance of people's economic, political, and cultural interests, promoting the all-round development of human beings. This request in the economic development at the same time, giving full play to the subjective initiative of the broad masses at the grass-roots level to ensure that the people can manage their own business, an realize their aspirations and interests. All these things make the citizen participation very important.

### **1.2.4 Citizen Participation Is Of Great Significance to the Perfection of Social Ethics**

An ethical analysis of community governance is mainly to analyze the moral rationality of community governance system. The institutional ethics value of community governance take the value rationality of the system (moral rationality) as the premise. Otherwise, the system will failure due to the rejection by social majority. That is to say, the community governance structure and governance system itself must be reasonable and impartial. Just only the fair and reasonable system can normalize community behaviors, and shape the community order. Looked from the goal, the ultimate goals of community governance are for the sake of social justice, equality and orderliness, for people to live with a rich civilization, and for promoting the all-round development of all the people. People's happiness and comprehensive development constitute the management system ethics of the socialist and its ultimate value goal. Under the "community", the humanized management is carried out in China, emphasized that the government should delegate their some powers it the

local government, and the governance structure should be diversified. And citizens participation is the best means to achieve the above management objectives and the multiple governance structure. We can see that the citizen participation in community governance is adapt to the development of China's current situation, promoting the all-round development of people and the progress of the society, therefore, it is a good system and pathway with its rationality.

### **1.2.5 Citizen Participation Is Beneficial to the Healthy, Harmonious and Rapid Development of Community**

Comprehensively promoting the city community construction is an important content of socialistic modernization, especially urban modernization in our country. From the discussion above, we can see that there is an intimate relationship between citizen participation and community governance (Cai, 2010). Citizen participation can effectively reach the goals of expanding community service, developing community health, flourishing community culture, embellishing the environment, strengthening community policing, and perfecting community organizations, etc. And it is playing a crucial role to the healthy, harmonious and rapid development of community.

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## **2. THE PROBLEMS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION EXISTED IN URBAN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE AND ANALYSIS**

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### **2.1 The Present Situations and Existing Problems Citizen Participation in Urban Community Governance**

The concept of China's urban community construction is relatively closed to the present western city community development theory. The core concept of community development theory is "participation, autonomy and sharing", namely through the active participation of community members, we take efforts to achieve common development objectives, enjoying the created results. The United Nations in 1955 published "through community development to promote social progress", it regarded community participation as a basic factor in community development. The document indicated clearly: "community development can be defined as the process of establishing a kind of economic conditions and social progress through active participation of the whole community and relying on community initiative." Our government in promoting the construction of urban community also give high attention to community participation and take the "sharing resource, building together" as one of the fundamental principles of community construction. To maximize the realization of community resources sharing, it requires "fully mobilize

community agencies, civil groups, troops, enterprises and institutions and everything powers widely participate in community construction”.

Many domestic cities according to the actual situation of its scale, management system and community construction, creatively put forward a variety of different construction thoughts with the flavor of the local community (Chen, 2009). The four cities, Shenyang, Shanghai, Qingdao, Wuhan, has certain representativeness of community construction. The particular form of these cities' community governance is not the same. The greatest characteristic of Shenyang is the creative construction of the community members representative congress, the community consultation committee and the community residents' committees, and take all them as the main body of community governance organization. Shanghai located community to the street. In the actual, it exists the integration of street and living in the construction of community, and endowed the powers of the participation, graded management and possession management authority in urban construction planning, etc. Qingdao is focusing on community services to start and develop the community construction. Wuhan based on the core of transformation government function to prove the degree of community autonomy.

Community autonomy is being promoted and advanced gradually in recent years. Whether it is the exploring of Shanghai “secondary government and tertiary management” reform in 1995, or is that the ministry of civil affairs in 1999 set up the experimental area of construction and popularized it in various cities in China. As a manager in the ministry of civil affairs said: “all social circles payed unexpected large attention to the community construction, and realized unexpected surprising achievements and effect from in a short time of no more than one year, its momentum unexpected.” Community citizen participation is the core content of city community construction, and achieved good results, mainly manifested in the following four aspects:

### **2.1.1 The Improved Investment Mechanism of Community Participation**

Community citizens participation depends on the material support and hardware facilities. At the beginning of the hardware facilities construction, not only need a lot of financial capital investment, but also take these money for the weak link of the community construction in an accurate way so as to perfect the structure of social service and management, and to constantly improve the residents' satisfaction to the government<sup>(Xu,2009)</sup>. The constant investment for community of government is increasing, the budget of community construction jointly compiled by the bureau of finance, bureau of civil affairs and organization department every year, and with the special supervision at the end of each year.

### **2.1.2 The Enriched Content of Citizen Participation**

With the continuous development and progress of society, the demands of modern city community residents is increasing, urban community construction has carried on the beneficial exploration in many aspects of community service, education, public security, public health and community assistance<sup>(Hua,2008)</sup>. Some members of the community formed the social assistance system through the participation of community services.

### **2.1.3 The Diversified Form for Citizen Participation**

With the development and progress of community construction, many community leaders and citizens have already felt that the original form of citizen participation cannot adapt to the needs of the promoting of community, so we must carry out innovation. Governments from many regions are exploring the pathways of through perfecting the construction of community social participation mechanism and channels, to promote the democratic management and to make streets government affairs public.

### **2.1.4 The Function From Residents' Committee Is Appearing Gradually in Promoting the Citizen Participation**

According to the relevant provisions of “organic law for the residents' committees”, the residents of self-participation, self-education and self-management require important carriers and channels for residents' community participation through the relevant organization construction (Lai, 2007). Residents' committees as autonomous mass organizations at the grass-roots level, plays an important role in promoting participation of residents. so to speak, a citizen of the community participation is better, to a large extent depends on whether the function of community residents' committees play out, whether the work done. Community residents' committees have become important organizer community participation, residents' committees members work also gradually recognized by the residents. The role of residents' committees in the community is gradually strengthened.

## **2.2 The Problems of Citizen Participation in Urban Community Governance**

### **2.2.1 The Low of Participation Rate, and the Imbalance of Participation Structural**

Now a common phenomenon of the urban community governance is that the civic participation enthusiasm is not high, and the consciousness of participation is not strong. Firstly, citizen participation rate is low in general. By analysis of “the citizen participation intention survey report of community governance of Shazitang and Zhuangyuanpo in Changsha city”, we can see that 8.6% of people choose “don't want to participate” clearly, only 15.8% choose “very want to participate”, 59.6% of residents said they want to attend, but have no time,

while 16.0% of residents said they would participate in a different form or a leading way. In fact 75.6% of the residents was not involved in community governance. Residents in overall average level is "low". Secondly, the structure of the participants is unbalanced. Regarding the constitution of the participation proportion, the elder is less than the middle younger, the demission is more than the incumbent, and the female is more than the male. there is a common that they are not tied by their careers and have enough time to participate in the decision-making management with more activity, no matter how to divide the participation and the non-participation in the group of community governance according to age, the demission or not, the gender. Those who are professional bundling group mainly focused on the work, leading to have no time to participate in community activities, and even to think it is little sense to participate in community activities.

### **2.2.2 The Passive of Role, and a Formality of Citizen Participation**

At present, citizen participation in urban community governance is given priority to passive participation. The traditional public power of government still dominates the community construction and development. citizens under the management of government have little say in the community affairs, and often listen to the arrangement of the government. Citizens under the guidance of the government to participate in community activities are just as the role of the participants and spectators, and involve inactively community affairs, so citizens are not masters of participation in community affairs. For instance, the street agencies, the government dispatched institutions, would arrange the contents, themes and participants of the activity as a whole, and let community residents to decide some specific forms when community carry out an important activity. Residents in the subconscious thought that the community affairs are all implemented by the street agencies of the government, all the activities of the community are implemented under the government arrangement, the decision results of discussion have been confirmed, and the results are affect their own interests rarely. citizen participation is just a formality. And in the community election, for example, resident's enthusiasm is high in the beginning, but at the end of the election for the monitoring and evaluation is almost neglected. Many residents said that they will no longer take part in the next election after this election because they think that democratic participation process has become a form of a pattern, they can't realize the intervention and control of the whole.

### **2.2.3 The Single of Participation Way, the Poor of Participation Channel**

In our country, citizens have the right to participate in the urban community governance, the ways and procedures of the residents participate in community

affairs are explained in regulations and rules. Under normal circumstances, the citizens will be participated in community activities in accordance with the institutional arrangements. Participation way, however, is single and the lack of institutional doesn't make them fully express their own aspirations. We don't know the extent that the decisions of the citizen participation in community affairs can affect community governance. citizen participation channels of community governance is not effective, and participants have limited conditions so that some residents were excluded. Therefore, not all residents can participate in the discussion and decision-making of community public affairs, that causes the decision results neglected part of the interests of residents, and citizen participation in community governance will be discounted. The single participation way, and the stuffed channel easily lead to a disorderly problem of citizen participation, namely the subjective and arbitrary of resident's participation.

## **3. THE SUGGESTIONS FOR PROBLEMS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN URBAN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE COUNTERMEASURES**

### **3.1 The Clarifying of the Relationship Between Governments and Citizens in Community Governance**

From the perspective of community construction practice, the government play an important role in the community governance because material resources for promoting the development of community is chiefly handled by the government (Wang, 2008). Due to the imperfection of relevant laws and regulations, the community organizations in community development is not yet mature, and the government become the fundamental guarantee for promoting the development of the current community construction. However, the carte Blanche behavior of government violates the principle of community civil autonomy. To realize the autonomy finally, the community governance parts should be pointed to community citizens, and the government should be reasonably defined functions in urban community governance. The role of government should be mainly embodied in providing money and technology for the community construction (Ou, 2009). The government provides public services for community residents, integrates all the members of the community and resources, and coordinates the relations of various interest groups, so as to make community construction behaviors toward harmony. Citizens of community should identify the subject position and play a major role under the guidance of the government to participate in community construction actively. The role of the residents in community governance includes participants

of community public decision, the participants of community public affairs and the supervisor of community public affairs. The relations between the government and the community civil are partnership rather than administrative dependence, equal consultation cooperation rather than contradictory and competition. The government should keep a constant positive interaction process with civil<sup>(Tan,2009)</sup>. Community citizen self-government organizations should to strengthen the self-building and internal management, to set up the mechanism of democratic supervision, and to efforts to improve their service level, so as to get the social support and recognition.

### **3.2 The Improvement of the Citizens Participation in Community Governance**

The lack of autonomous consciousness and the sufficient of social publicity lead to the low enthusiasm of citizen participation in community governance. Citizens must change ideas, and set up the consciousness of self-determination. We can improve the sense of citizen participation and the sense of belonging from the inner. Government should also be duty-bounded to mobilize the community citizens, expanding community participation, intensifying propaganda and education (Zhuang, 2009). Because the interest is the basic motivation for people, the higher the correlation of community affairs and residents' vital interests, the more attraction of the community citizens, and even the greater of stimulating the community citizens participation. In essence, to strengthen the consciousness of citizen participation is to find the relevance between community activities and the interests of residents, and to make citizens to truly feel this relevance. In addition, if the effect of citizen participation they feel is not obvious, and paying with no rewarding, they will have low enthusiasm to participate in community elections, decision-making, management and supervision. So only to improve the self-efficacy of citizen participation, can stimulate the citizens to participate in the enthusiasm.

### **3.3 The Perfection of Legal Laws and Regulations to Realize the Legalization of Citizen Participation**

Establishing a set of laws and regulations to normanize citizen participation in urban community governance, perfecting the procedure of citizen participation, taking the citizen participation into the orbit of legal system, and forming the environment of participation, are all to realize urban citizen participation in community governance by the law guaranteed<sup>(Zhou,2008)</sup>. Firstly, the right to vote and be voted is required to be realized. The right of community citizens to vote and be voted is the main channel of political participation, and also the main way to reflect the community citizen awareness. Laws and regulations make citizens as the subjects of community governance with the rights of citizen participation in community governance.

To strengthen the construction of procedural law, and to realize the procedural safeguard of citizen participation in community governance, our country introduced some specific conditions for expanding citizen participation in making public decisions, so as to get both the legal basis, and the guidance and the protection of laws in citizen participating in community governance. Under the normal circumstances, the citizen participation in urban community governance through a certain scale of community organizations. Therefore, it is important to give these organizations legal status in law. Laws and regulations are used to determine the rights and obligations of the organizations and the relief ways. Only under the protection of the law and restriction, can these community groups develop in healthy, and better serve the community.

### **3.4 The Improving of the Supporting Mechanism of Citizen Participation**

Perfected citizen participation must be specified, otherwise chaotic participation can only bring chaos and disaster to the community governance, and unable to achieve the goal of governance. Therefore, only to establish and perfect various compatibility mechanism of citizen participation, can guarantee citizens actively and orderly participated in community governance.

#### **3.4.1 The Improvement of the Mechanism of Power Operation**

We should to guarantee transparency of public power operation, and let power under the sun. Openness and transparency mainly refers to the process of assuming and execution of public power, operation result of public power and the working mechanism and the supervision mechanism of public power to be opened and transparent. It is important to public information's, to improve and perfect the procedure of community participation, and to establish the citizen oversight mechanisms of community power operation. It should be pointed out that, the precondition of improving the power operation mechanism is to recognize and positioning them of power owners, that is to say, the government should to define its role, without this clear and definite understanding and positioning, how to establish and improve the power operation monitoring mechanism is just impossible.

#### **3.4.2 The Stablistment of Feedback Mechanism**

The feedback mechanism is an interactive process between community management personnel, administration agency and citizen. Community public management personnels and management institutions must be responsible for the demands of the citizens in a timely manner, and explained policies and answered questions consulted by citizens actively<sup>(Yang,2005)</sup>. It is important to ensure that the currency of information transmission channels, to ensure timeliness and accuracy of information, and to ensure the integrity and authenticity of information content, so as to guarantee the interests of every citizen to be fully expressed. For the

opinions and situations of citizens' feedback, community governance personnels and governance institutions should to give full attention with timely understanding of the investigation, and to give citizens reply without undue delay or perfunctory.

### 3.4.3 The Construction of Innovation Mechanism for Multiple Participation Channels

The eventual power of community development comes from the wide range of community residents' participation. The construction of community participation channels with various forms is beneficial to community governance for absorbing more citizens' participation. There exists significant difference for citizens in political qualities and values. The diversified characteristics of community members objectively require establishing the interest's expression channels with multi-level. In order to further promote public participation, we should to build the multivariate participation channel and the innovation participation pattern. Citizens should to select representative for them that communicate among citizens to collect the opinions of citizens. Fostering community grass-roots organizations is an indispensable way to set up different channels for the participation of different main body such as a natural person, folk organizations and corporate groups. In addition, citizens themselves should to know using various channels to influence community policy formulation, such as public opinion diffusion, collective pushing, lobbying and so on.

## CONCLUSION

The citizen participation is the core of the realization of community governance, and it is related to the intention and the motivation of community governance. To develop community governance is to maximize realize the public interests of community, and the realization of community governance depends on good governance in the participation of community members as a citizen. Promoting the citizen participation in community governance is beneficial to limit the government's administrative monopoly, and to ensure fair, transparent and effective of the government, so as to set up the authority of the government, and improve the image of the government. Promoting the citizen participation in community governance is beneficial to improve the community autonomous consciousness, and the comprehensive quality of citizens, so as to contribute the growth of people in the community. Promoting the citizen participation in community governance is advantageous to the democracy politics construction at the grassroots level in our country, so as to promote the development of social democracy. Therefore, we must pay attention to the

propaganda and education of citizens, and mobilize the citizen participation, so as to increase the cohesion of the community members and centripetal force, and to improve the ability of community autonomy, self-education, self-management and self-service.

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