

Joint Consultation: Choice of Urban Grassroots Governance Models

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The change from “stasis governance pattern” to “progressive governance pattern” is not only embodied in the changes in the relationship between the state and society, the interaction between the government and social organizations, as well as the active participation of urban residents, but also provides city grassroots a highly imaginative self-renewal, self-innovation platform. All kinds of grassroots governance tests and democratic practices have been carried out, so as to improve government responsiveness, and actively face unavoidable economic and social problems in the post-urbanization.

However, the transition of urban grassroots governance is so quick and unexpected that endless sorts of grass-roots governance models have arisen the moment when grassroots government learnt the difference between concepts of “stasis governance” and “progress governance”. In fact, in the face of urban grassroots governance bearing more work connotation, livelihood expectation and innovation demand, academic and political circles have begun to put forward the deliberative governance paradigm, which pursues non-effective values including true democracy, better public rationality and the legitimacy of public policy, etc.. Therefore, it is considered as a democratic paradigm of governance reform, and accordingly distinguished from other public governance paradigms.

In practice, China's grassroots governance has already existed in the level of consultation in the process of 30 years of rapid development. However, it hasn't been systematized, standardized and normalized from concept to operation owing to its fragmented and specific local consultation. So how to practice joint consultation in urban grassroots governance when the unit consultation is still not perfect? Combined with the status quo of China's urban grassroots governance, there are following six models to choose to advance joint consultation, leveraging the paradigm reform.

I. Snowball Model

At the grassroots level, negotiation often originates from trivia like community environment or security, and illegal housing dismantlement or garden reconstruction, as well as property management fee dispute triggered by contradictions among property and industry authority. Initially, three or five people discuss together and the problem will

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The fast transition of China's urban grassroots governance brings many challenges to itself, and grassroots administrative staffs have to choose among many urban grassroots governance models when they have just learnt the difference between concepts of “stasis governance” and “progressive governance”. The aim of the paper is to analyze and explore those urban grassroots governance models relative to “joint consultation”.

not be immediately resolved, and then more people are engaged in the consultation. As more representative figures or organizations are joined, which pushes the consultation one step further, the scale and legitimacy of the negotiation is increased and enhanced. This is the snowball model, which can also be referred as the link mode. Its joint features are reflected mainly in the snowball rolling process, the negotiation members and negotiation resources being constantly integrated, diversifying the negotiation procedure. The reasonable and legitimate process is the biggest advantage of this mode. Relevant personnel and organizations are constantly involved, which continues the process of rational enlightenment, democratic education and autonomous education. While this model is accompanied with certain disadvantages, such as: long negotiation cycle and high cost. If there is no powerful elite or organization to promote it, the result may end up with nothing.

II. Elite Model

The guiding ideology of this model is in line with "community elite theory". The charisma, resource mobilization ability and problem solving ability of elites play a decisive role in grassroots negotiation. The elite mode seems to be oriented by individuals, however, in fact the elite works as a proponent and an organizer before the consultation, a coordinator and a decision-maker during the consultation, an executor and a promoter after the consultation. Those who really matter are relative members and organizations gathered by the elite. Compared to the leaderless condition, the elite can promote negotiation on a large scale and to a three-dimensional stage, improving the efficiency of negotiation. Of course, there are some difficulties in the promotion of elite governance: whether there is any convincing elite in the community, whether he is willing to assume more responsibility for the community's public affairs, and how long can they stick to it.

III. Council Model

The council mode is the upgrade version of the elite model. There is much urban governance like assemblies in China, such as the Party member assemblies and so on, but the negotiation is always intermittent, which leads to a result that few events could be settled down. Therefore, a benign operation mechanism is needed to improve assemblies. If assemblies can be replaced by the governing councils to implement grassroots consultation mode, directors can participate the grassroots consultative team through the annual signing with grassroots. To participate in consultation, they may submit proposals, or be invited to specialize in the issue at the grassroots level, or hold a regular council to address grassroots public affairs. There is relatively mature council

mechanism for its implementation, which ensures the normalization and orderly operation of consultation. The council mode of joint consultation is featured by its grassroots consultative team consisted of directors with rich professional and educational background, like a joint fleet at the beginning. Any tricky or complex issues can be consulted professionally by appropriate or relevant directors. Sharing the same problem with the elite model, the council mode is troubled by how to select directors, and how to ensure that directors continue to participate in grassroots public affairs consultation.

IV. General Model

The general model refers to that all units and individuals involved in the issue will participate in the joint consultation. This model extends from the outdoor scene deliberative model, a common mode used by the neighborhood committees which is the only power center of the city community in the fifties. It seems difficult for modern urban grassroots to emulate this style. However, if there is a trusted community committee director in the unit community or the old district, the valuable general model works very well. With its unique legitimacy and authority, the general model relies on a long-term rooted grassroots leadership, relative homogeneity of the residents and relatively stable and unchanging grassroots culture. Even in the modernization of urban grassroots, if launched in place, an online general model can be employed. However, how to ensure that everyone's online presence, interest, participation and vote remains a major problem.

V. Cloud Model

With the Internet having fully penetrated daily life, virtual consultation, or cloud negotiation, is possible. As a new mode of negotiation, it has the potential to advance public affair discussions, in addition to more casual veins of communication. However, at the global level, this model is still in an experimental phase. At present, there are few empirical cases of cloud negotiation domestically, though despite this, Weixin, Weibo, QQ, and other free communication platforms have demonstrated high levels of technical competence, and these platforms are capable of easily bridging distances to provide large scale synchronous joint consultation. For grassroots governance, cloud negotiation can break through the long-term problem of public participation in grassroots government and organizations: especially the absence of youth groups in grassroots public affairs. In confronting mid-level social organization, as convenient as mobile internet technology may be, there yet remains the requirement for a strong negotiation organizer and planner, and the deft deployment of consultation skills, lest the majority of possible participants remain

inevitably silent.

VI. Panorama Model

Panoramic joint consultation is a large, multifaceted, multi-platform, simultaneous-use mode. In the context of online negotiation, it is employed to resolve wide range, long-term problems of grassroots governance and management. The model of urban governance presents a multiplicity of challenges, but also the most concentrated in the essence of joint consultative model. Panoramic mode may also combine two or more modes of five modes above. On the surface, contradiction can be solved by transferring many resources in a short, adaptable and fast manner. However, in fact, led by many group negotiations, a unified decision-making is hard to be achieved out of numerous participants, jumbled voice channels, different opinions. Other patterns cannot compete with it in its efficacy of calling upon full participation. The biggest difference between joint consultation and general discussion lies in, not only negotiating for the sake of discussion, but also bearing values of truth, fairness and justice and functions of public enlightenment and propaganda. Only attracting most of the public, even full of them, can pluralistic integration of deliberative governance be realized.

Translator/Wang Hui