

# Embedded Absorption: The Institutionalization Logic of Urban Community Governance Communities

## -- A Case Study of the "Shared Stairwells" in Ningbo's C Community

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### ABSTRACT

The institutionalization of urban community governance communities is key to unlocking fragmented grassroots governance and activating residents' endogenous motivation for participation. While there has been ample policy discourse and diverse practices concerning the construction of urban community governance communities, the internal "institutionalization" mechanism remains a theoretical "black box" that has yet to be fully unpacked. This study argues that "embedded absorption" effectively addresses challenges such as fragmented actors, structural rigidity, and unsustainable actions in community governance through mutual shaping and coordination across three dimensions: actors, structures, and actions. The research reveals that the essence of governance communities lies in the reproduction of social relations, and their institutionalization pathway illustrates a form of creative integration between the state and society within the field of grassroots governance.

### KEYWORDS

Embedded Absorption; Urban Community; Governance Community; Institutionalization; Shared Stairwells.

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## 1. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

"Governing a large state is like cooking a small fish." Urban communities are one of the main carriers of grassroots social governance space and the basic units of state governance. The degree of modernization of community governance directly affects the overall governance performance of the state. The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China clearly stated that it is necessary to "improve the urban and rural grassroots governance system led by Party organizations that combines self-governance, rule of law, and rule of virtue, and perfect the social governance system of co-construction, co-governance, and sharing." The *Opinions on Strengthening the Modernization of the Grassroots Governance System and Governance Capacity* further emphasized the need to "build a grassroots governance community where everyone has responsibility, everyone fulfills their responsibility, and everyone enjoys," providing top-level design guidance for community governance practices. As the micro-units of state governance, urban communities are both the "last mile" of policy implementation and the "frontline laboratory" for testing governance effectiveness. Their level of governance modernization is not only related to the reshaping of grassroots social order but also directly reflects the resilience of the overall national

governance capacity. In recent years, guided by the logic of Party building leadership, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and resident empowerment, various localities have seen innovative practices such as Shanghai Pudong's "co-governed landscape," Wuhan Jiangnan's "four integrations and five linkages," and Chengdu's "community partners," gradually exploring community governance paths with local characteristics through spatial renewal, resource integration, and rule reconstruction.

The construction of community governance communities, from theory, goals to practical approaches, has also entered the view of researchers. Academic research on community governance communities mainly focuses on three dimensions: value and goals, dilemmas and challenges, and paths and mechanisms.

The first is the value and goal dimension. The community governance community is the basic unit of the social governance community. The people's stance of Chinese-style modernization endows the community governance community with the characteristic of being people-oriented in theoretical logic [1]. "Putting the people at the center" is the core concept of the modernization of the socialist governance system and governance capacity with Chinese characteristics, and also the value orientation for the construction of urban community governance communities [2].

The second is the dilemma and challenge dimension. The construction of community governance communities still has its practical constraints. On the one hand, there is an endogenous dilemma in residents' participation in governance, namely apathy or fragmentation in participation caused by the decline of public spirit, divergence of interests, and lack of trust [3,4]. The spatial function and administrative meaning of "district" in the community still exist, but the interactive function and cohesive value of "society" have declined. The community has the form of a community but lacks its soul, presenting a strange phenomenon of "district but not community," facing the weak participation dilemma of "government acting, society weakly acting, residents not acting" [5]. On the other hand, there is a coordination dilemma in the community governance structure, where multiple actors find it difficult to form effective synergy due to ambiguous rights and responsibilities, scattered resources, and conflicting goals, presenting an "atomized" state [6,7]. At the same time, as one of the main actors in community governance, the neighborhood committee has long been undertaking heavy administrative tasks, and its self-governance function has been seriously weakened, showing the characteristic of community administration [8].

The third is the path and mechanism dimension. At the current stage, China's community governance communities highlight the characteristics of "state-society integration." The triple logics of "the political logic of Party building leadership, the management (administrative) logic of governance decentralization, and the life logic of selective participation" intertwine to jointly produce the form of community complex [9]. From this perspective, a governance model of "social participation under Party building leadership" can be constructed and standardized and institutionalized [10,11]. Further, starting from the multiple actors of community governance, "inclusive integration" of multiple actors in community governance can be achieved through the construction of institutionalized relationships to promote the overall effectiveness of relational community mobilization [12]. Positive interaction among residents is the micro-foundation of community governance communities. Interacting around tacit rules, flexible emotions, and solidarity intention to enhance residents' authentic interaction helps form community governance communities [13]. More specifically, the institutionalization of resident participation can be achieved by improving the internal management rules of resident self-organizations and establishing supervision and linkage mechanisms [14].

However, a review of existing literature reveals that research mostly focuses on discussions of the desirable goals, actual dilemmas, and scattered construction paths of urban community governance communities, yet neglects a continuous core process to some extent: how are these dispersed governance elements systematically connected, activated, and integrated into an organic and dynamic "governance community"? In other words, existing research clearly depicts the starting point and

destination of the journey, but the dynamic “institutionalization” process of “how to go from the starting point to the destination” remains a black box that has not been fully opened. This process involves micro-mechanisms such as how actors are mobilized, how structures are shaped, how actions are coordinated, and how rules evolve endogenously.

To address the above theoretical gap, this study introduces “*institutionalization*” as the core analytical perspective. Different from the static concept of “organization,” “institutionalization” emphasizes a dynamic, continuous process that makes social action possible, focusing on how urban community governance communities are generated through a series of strategies, interactions, and institutional arrangements rather than merely existing. Based on this, this study takes the “Shared Stairwells” practice in Ningbo's C Community as an empirical sample, extracts the analytical framework of “embedded absorption,” and attempts to answer the following questions: In the grassroots governance field led by Party organizations, how does state power provide frameworks and resources for social autonomy through “embedding,” and at the same time transform endogenous social dynamics into an orderly governance synergy through “absorption”? What institutionalization logic does this process present in the three dimensions of actors, structures, and actions? Through theoretical construction and empirical thick description, this study aims to provide a new analytical dimension for the typological study of community governance communities and contribute theoretical grounds for the adaptive promotion of grassroots governance innovation.

## **2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Theoretical Origins: From “Embedding” and “Absorption” to an Integrated Framework.**

Research on urban community governance has mostly conducted practical analyses based on theories such as social capital theory, co-production theory, and collective action theory. However, the author finds a lack of “institutionalization” elements in these studies. That is, research on urban community governance communities often focuses on the phenomena and practices of collective action in community building, but lacks a deeper, systematic analysis of “why collective action becomes possible.” Further, starting from the study of behavioral legitimacy basis and governance discourse system, the author introduces the concept of “embedding” to explain the “presence” of political forces in community governance. From the perspective of action effectiveness and path construction, the concept of “absorption” is introduced to explore the dynamic mechanism of collective action in urban community governance [15]. This constitutes the integrated theoretical framework of “embedded absorption” to explain the institutionalization logic of urban community governance communities.

Polanyi first proposed the core proposition of “economy embedded in social relations” in *The Great Transformation*, criticizing the illusion of market independence and laying the foundation for embeddedness thinking. Granovetter deepened this theory, distinguishing two dimensions: relational embeddedness emphasizes that individual action is constrained by trust and reciprocity rules of social networks, while structural embeddedness reveals the deep constraints of macro-cultural and institutional structures on economic behavior, breaking the economy-society dualistic divide. Zukin and DiMaggio further extended it into a four-dimensional framework—structural, cognitive, cultural, and political embeddedness—referring respectively to the shaping of economic practices by network position, group cognitive paradigms, value symbol systems, and power institutions. As the object of embeddedness research has broadened, its connotation has gradually shifted towards the embedding of external environments such as politics, economy, culture, and capital into organizational behavior and value concepts [16]. The concept of “embedding” originated in economics and was further developed in sociology, political science, and other fields. “Embedded governance” is another derivative concept introduced into the governance field. In China's governance context, embedded governance mainly emphasizes the sinking and penetration of party power into society, manifested as the state power

embedded in social structures, relationships, and norms at different levels, as the “seeping into every crack” of state power in social governance. Some scholars define it as the ruling party using its own organizational resources or those of social elites to influence the entire society and its groups and individuals through penetration, mobilization, propaganda, etc., thereby incorporating society into an orderly political process [17].

Jin Yaoji proposed the concept of “administrative absorption of politics,” emphasizing that the government integrates social elites and political forces into the administrative system through institutionalized channels, achieving “elite co-governance.” Its essence is a flexible upgrade of authoritarian governance: the state grants elites symbolic participation rights through institutional absorption, defines action boundaries through normative constraints, forming elastic control that combines control and release. This mechanism not only dissolves confrontational tensions but also transforms elite capabilities into governance resources, maintaining the order resilience of a transitioning society. From this theoretical perspective and combined with China's context, this theory is localized as “administrative absorption of society.” It emphasizes that the relationship between state and society is not separation or opposition, but mutual integration. The core interactive mechanism is “support” and “coordination.” In the power distribution pattern between state and society, the state occupies a dominant position, and society is subordinate to the state.

However, a single emphasis on “embedding” can easily fall into a “state-centered” narrative, ignoring social agency. A one-sided emphasis on “absorption” may reduce governance to a one-way accommodation of society to the state, making it difficult to explain the complex reality of two-way mutual construction in governance communities. Therefore, this study proposes “embedded absorption,” aiming to focus on a relational process of two-way mutual construction and mutual conditionality between state and society in the community governance field. Its core argument is that an effective community governance community depends both on the state providing order, resources, and legitimacy for social participation through institutional, organizational, and cultural “embedding,” and on the urgent need to transform internal social interests, professional elites, and emotional identification into endogenous driving forces of the governance system through “absorption” mechanisms. The two together constitute the “two sides of the same coin” of the institutionalization process.

## **2.2. Analytical Framework: Three-Dimensional Co-shaping of “Actor-Structure-Action”.**

Based on the above theoretical review, this paper constructs an integrated analytical approach. Specifically, this paper regards “institutionalization” as the core perspective and analytical object for understanding the generation of urban community governance communities, i.e., focusing on its dynamic process from disorder to order, from fragmentation to integration. To systematically explain this process, we further propose “embedded absorption” as the core mechanism for its realization. This mechanism consists of a two-way interaction between “embedding” and “absorption.” Further, this mechanism is “operationalized” and analyzed under the three dimensions of “actor-structure-action.” These three dimensions together constitute the basic facets of the institutionalization process: the institutionalization of actors answers the question of “who does it,” the institutionalization of structure answers “according to what rules and relationships to do it,” and the institutionalization of action answers “how to do it sustainably.”

### **2.2.1. Actor Dimension**

The actor dimension answers the questions of “who governs” and “how to integrate dispersed individuals into an organic whole.” This study argues that the institutionalized integration of governance actors can be achieved through “embedded absorption.” Multiple governance actors are key elements of community governance, but their roles vary. They usually include grassroots government agencies and community Party organizations with statutory authority, responsible for

policy transmission, resource allocation, and order maintenance. In addition, resident self-governance organizations, social organizations, and property management companies also constitute the main actors in community governance, whose action logic follows more contractual relations or volunteer spirit. The former mainly expands the governance network through administrative absorption, political mobilization, etc., to improve governance efficiency; the latter influences the decision-making process through interest expression, resource feedback, etc., or dominates a certain governance process driven by interests. In the process of community governance, the role positioning of multiple governance actors is not fixed; different actors can lead governance actions in different contexts, collaborating with each other to achieve governance goals.

### 2.2.2. Structure Dimension

The structure dimension answers the questions of “according to what rules governance activities unfold” and “how actors connect with each other.” This study focuses on how governance structure evolves from rigid administrative frameworks to flexible relational networks. The structure of urban community governance consists of three parts: institutional, organizational, and cultural. The institutional structure refers to a clear system of rights, responsibilities, and norms centered on the statutory organizational system of “community Party committee - owners' committee - property management company.” The organizational structure refers to different organizational types delineated according to the roles different actors play in the governance process, built on social capital such as geographical ties and interest groups. For example, actor-absorption type takes the community Party as the core, absorbing capable elites from inside and outside the community; resident-cohesion type refers to residents spontaneously connecting from a certain interest trigger point and actively engaging in community governance affairs. The cultural structure refers to the dual-driven structure composed of common interests in community governance and the cultural identity of governance actors including community Party committee, owners' committee, property management company, and residents regarding community governance affairs, providing support for coordinated action.

### 2.2.3. Action Dimension

The action dimension answers the questions of “how governance happens” and “how to ensure the sustainability of governance actions.” This study attempts to trace how governance actions evolve from one-off project-based sprints to normalized co-governance practice. The action of urban community governance is a dynamic process that can be divided into three stages based on action development: connection, operation, and outcomes [18]. “Connection” refers to governance actors cooperating for a certain purpose or interest drive, aiming to eliminate the atomization of governance actors and fragmentation of actions and resources. There are various ways to promote the connection of multiple actors, such as political authority, interest coupling, and emotional resonance. The “operation” stage refers to the specific implementation of a target task by multiple actors, emphasizing the power allocation of the community to promote the sustainable development and evolution of the governance community. “Outcomes” refer to the effects produced by the actions of the governance community, which can be evaluated from two perspectives: whether governance problems are solved, and whether governance culture is reshaped, including whether the enthusiasm and cohesion of multiple actors in community governance have been enhanced, and whether residents' cultural identity and sense of belonging to the community have been improved.

The following section will use this analytical framework to analyze the “Shared Stairwells” case of Ningbo's C Community in depth, specifically showing how the “embedded absorption” mechanism unfolds sequentially and reinforces each other across the three dimensions of actor, structure, and action, ultimately driving a governance community to complete its institutionalization process.

### **3. CASE PRESENTATION: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION LOGIC OF URBAN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE COMMUNITIES**

#### **3.1. Origin of Ningbo C Community's "Shared Stairwells"**

Zhejiang Province, as a national demonstration zone for common prosperity, shoulders the responsibility of reform exploration and practical implementation. Ningbo's C Community actively responded to the policy call of "everyone has responsibility, everyone fulfills responsibility, everyone enjoys" and took the lead in actively exploring the governance model of "co-construction, co-governance, and sharing" in community governance practices. The F residential area under its jurisdiction was the pioneer of this innovative governance model. C Community is a high-end neighborhood adjacent to a commercial district, with three high-end residential areas under its jurisdiction, consisting of multi-story buildings, small high-rises, and villas, with a total of 3,364 households. It is a typical commercial housing community. Among them, F residential area was delivered in 2009. The residents of this area generally have a high level of education and pursue high quality of life. Over time, public areas such as stairwells have gradually aged, forming a sharp contrast with the comfortable environment inside residents' homes. The residents' demand for improving the stairwell environment has become increasingly urgent. The commercial housing environment of C Community is different from traditional community communities based on geographical and kinship ties. Due to property rights attributes, spatial structure, and other factors, the relationships among residents here exhibit characteristics of a stranger society, posing many difficulties for the construction of community governance communities.

On the one hand, the weakening of residents' agency leads to a deadlock in public action. In F residential area, high-income homeowners and mobile tenants constitute the main residential groups. Homeowners are busy with work and often regard the community as a "living container," more enthusiastic about investing in private space than public life; tenants lack a sense of belonging to the community due to their temporary residence. This atomized state makes emotional connections within the community fragile, public spirit difficult to condense, and public affairs neglected, falling into an embarrassing situation of "no response."

On the other hand, the lack of administrative dependence and endogenous motivation seriously restricts governance effectiveness. Current community governance highly depends on the vertical management model led by Party committees, but this administrative operation mode can hardly stimulate residents' enthusiasm for participation. Although the community Party committee invests a lot of resources in organizing activities, due to the lack of trust among residents and the failure to form a consensus of interests, the activities encounter a cold start. The deeper contradiction lies in the lagging development of community self-organizations and the lack of effective incentive mechanisms to transform individual demands into collective action goals. Residents have long been in the role of "passive recipients of services," and community governance innovation faces severe sustainability challenges.

However, it was precisely in such difficulties that the "Shared Stairwells" project emerged, bringing hope to the governance of C Community. After the project started, residents actively participated and became the main force of transformation. An enthusiastic party member in F residential area took the lead in forming a four-person "core group" for the stairwell renovation and quickly carried out a series of tasks such as creating a WeChat group, conducting door-to-door visits, and signing authorization letters. During the door-to-door process, they identified and absorbed a group of elite talents with expertise in landscape design, engineering management, construction, financial supervision, legal consulting, etc., collectively forming the stairwell renovation team. In 2020, the 36 households of Building 92 in the residential area raised 420,000 yuan through crowdfunding and spent more than three months comprehensively renovating the public areas of the stairwell. Through

institutionalized project action, they resolved “public grievances” with crowdfunding, aiming to promote the construction of a community governance community, achieving significant results .

In January and March 2025, the author conducted multiple field visits to the case community and residential area to collect relevant case information. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the community secretary, representatives of the owners' committee, stairwell agents, and resident representatives. At the same time, using both online and offline methods, the author searched and collected relevant institutional documents issued by C Community and its subdistrict to ensure the authenticity and comprehensiveness of the case materials.

## **3.2. Operational Practice of Ningbo C Community's “Shared Stairwells”**

### **3.2.1. Actor Dimension: Consolidating Multiple Governance Actors**

First, through Party and government embedding, providing action framework and impetus for institutionalization. C Community, guided by the construction of a Party building community, builds a collaborative governance network of “vertical integration and horizontal linkage.” At the top-level design level, C Community adheres to Party building leadership, relying on the “1+3+N” three-level Party mass work management system, implementing the responsibilities of multiple actors, sinking Party organizations “down to households and individuals,” leading the broad masses of residents to participate in co-governance and co-construction, and actively coordinating various types of organizations. It clarifies the coordinating functions of Party organizations in every link such as demand collection, plan co-discussion, and conflict mediation, forming a closed-loop mechanism of “grid discovery - Party mass deliberation - coordinated handling - effectiveness evaluation.” At the same time, community organizations further improve the governance structure. The neighborhood committee, owners' committee, and property management company strengthen their linkage, building a three-level governance system of “community - stairwell - resident,” extending the governance tentacles to every corner of the community. In the dimension of resource integration, the grassroots Party organizations where C Community is located play a role as a red hub, establishing a sustainable input model of “financial rewards and subsidies + resident crowdfunding + social feedback.” The subdistrict where C Community belongs innovated an incentive mechanism of “reward instead of subsidy” and issued the Measures for Reward Instead of Subsidy for Co-creation Projects in 2021, stipulating that for shared stairwell projects that pass acceptance, the subdistrict will give a reward of “20% of the renovation fund, up to 50,000 yuan” based on the renovation effect and resident satisfaction. The entire subdistrict has completed rewards for 10 residential area stairwells and 1 commercial building, with a total reward fund of 1.262 million yuan, leveraging more than 3.7 million yuan of resident self-raised funds. In the dimension of value co-creation, Party organizations stimulate governance vitality through “scenario-based Party building.” To further enhance the progressiveness and purity of the majority of party members in the community, the C Community Party Committee launched the “Party Member 365 Pioneer Action” series of activities — party members displaying their identity and household, assigning posts and responsibilities, pioneer index evaluation, etc., organizing community party members to serve as stairwell renovation observers and quality supervisors. This practice of Party building leadership not only enhances party members' sense of responsibility and mission but also strengthens the cohesion of community residents, jointly promoting community governance innovation and becoming an effective exploration of grassroots governance in the new era.

Second, through explicit interest drive and flexible value infusion, achieving elite absorption. In the “Shared Stairwells” practice, residents achieved a leap in governance effectiveness from “passive response” to “active creation” through multi-dimensional role participation and institutionalized collaboration mechanisms, becoming the core driving force of the community governance community. First, residents are resource contributors. They not only invested a lot of time and energy but also supported the renovation through self-raised funds. In the stairwell renovation of C

Community, facing the need for fundraising, residents actively responded, and 36 households raised over 420,000 yuan in a short time to purchase construction materials, update water and electricity lines, etc., providing solid material support for the stairwell renovation. At the same time, this investment of funds and energy also makes residents cherish the renovation results more. In addition, residents are collaboration practitioners and value creators. In the stairwell renovation initiated by F residential area of C Community, residents worked together, not only improving the living environment but also enhancing community cohesion. Through the door-to-door work of the preparatory group, some residents were absorbed into the practice team of the stairwell renovation, using their respective expertise to help optimize renovation details and promote continuous improvement of service content and methods, so that the “Shared Stairwells” better meet residents' needs. Resident participation achieved an upgrade from “financial contribution” to “everyone's presence.” At the same time, residents actively conceived the “Shared Stairwells 2.0” plan, forming a “Shared Stairwells Manager” team, adopting a service model of “1 grid member + 1 manager + N volunteers,” connecting with resources from party and government organs, universities, social organizations, and voluntary service institutions to provide residents with more efficient and convenient services. This not only enhanced the fit between the stairwell renovation and residents' needs but also made residents an indispensable key force in community governance.

### 3.2.2. Structure Dimension: Shaping a Flexible Governance Network

First, emphasizing institutional embedding, establishing contractual governance and procedural regulation. C Community formed a governance community during the implementation of the “Shared Stairwells” project, ensuring action order through triple institutional design: First, contractual governance. Before the stairwell renovation, residents jointly signed a stairwell renovation authorization letter to ensure the legality of the renovation team's actions and the renovation process. At the same time, stairwell residents jointly signed the Shared Self-Governance Convention for the activity room, clarifying space usage rules, maintenance responsibilities, and default disposal clauses. Second, procedural norms. The stairwell renovation team informed residents of fund usage, design plans, and other aspects during the renovation process through “online + offline dual disclosure” via WeChat groups and bulletin boards. At the same time, the community Party Committee closely supervised the renovation actions, making the process transparent and democratic. Finally, incentive systems. The subdistrict where C Community is located, to encourage the promotion of the grassroots governance innovation action of “Shared Stairwells,” issued the Measures for Reward Instead of Subsidy for Co-creation Projects, providing material support for stairwell renovation and sustainable development. This incentive mechanism both stimulated residents' participation and community governance innovation and retained an elastic space for governance innovation actions.

Second, through grid absorption, linking capable individuals and building hierarchical collaboration. The stairwell renovation of C Community exhibited a mobilization structure of “professional elites - mass backbone.” The community Party Committee focused on organizational construction, incorporating some party members and owner representatives with professional skills in architectural design, law, and organizational leadership into a “capable persons database,” building a bridge for the community Party Committee to carry out in-depth mass work. Residents focused on follow-up management, spontaneously launching the “Shared Stairwells 2.0” plan, forming a “Shared Stairwells Manager” team, actively linking external professional resources from party and government organs, universities, and social organizations, forming a hierarchical governance system of “professional guidance, organizational coordination, and daily management.” This organizational structure not only ensured the professionalism of the renovation plan but also greatly increased the participation rate of residents in community governance affairs through the localized mobilization of grassroots leaders, demonstrating the governance effectiveness of “informal operation of formal organizations.”

### 3.2.3. Action Dimension: Promoting Normalized Co-governance

First, through the construction of a participation closed loop and spatial reproduction, achieving collaborative embedding. Under the background of community spatial reshaping, “Shared Stairwells” became a new governance model. The innovation of the “Shared Stairwells” model in community governance lies in activating residents' agency through spatial functional reconstruction, elevating the transformation of physical space into the reproduction of social relations. This practice takes “co-presence” and “continuous interaction” as the core logic, forming a dual-dimensional dynamic governance path: “Shared Stairwells” reshapes the relationships of multiple actors in community governance by constructing a closed-loop mechanism of “participation - empowerment - action.” First is participatory decision-making. In the early stage of renovation, a resident consultation mechanism was introduced, matching residents' needs with renovation supply through process disclosure. At the same time, residents with skills in architecture, design, etc., were absorbed into the planning process, breaking the traditional “top-down” decision-making inertia. Second is processual collaboration. An action pattern of “shared responsibility” was established during the renovation implementation, with the community Party Committee coordinating resources and supervising, the property management company providing technical advice and guidance, and resident groups responsible for specific execution, forming an action network of “division of labor - complementarity - supervision.” Finally is relationship reproduction. The renovated stairwell transformed into a “frontline position” for community governance. Regular meetings and cultural activities are organized in the transformed shared space, developing shared book bars, shared tea rooms, shared gardens, and other venues. At the same time, residents spontaneously established “Stairwell Management Committees” by stairwell unit, responsible for discussing and deciding daily affairs. These committees hold regular meetings covering a wide range of topics such as community greening maintenance and public activity organization, becoming important platforms for residents to directly participate in community governance. For example, stairwell residents regularly hold “community deliberation meetings” in the shared tea room to discuss issues such as book updates in the stairwell library corner and maintenance of public plants, forming a new model of resident self-management, transforming the stairwell from a functionally single physical space into a “third place” for emotional connection and public affairs discussion, promoting the evolution from temporary participation to normalized co-governance.

Second, through promoting internal resource circulation and rule self-evolution, completing mechanism absorption. To avoid governance outcomes falling into short-term project effects and the collaboration of multiple actors becoming empty, this model improves the sustainability of actions through resource integration, endogenous rules, and governance adjustment. First, C Community and F residential area did not end their governance of the stairwell after the renovation was completed. Instead, they continued to use the emotional connections and action organizations formed during the renovation process to establish a “community capable persons database,” dynamically matching residents' skills with public affairs needs, realizing the recycling of internal resources. Relying on this resource, F residential area, led by the C Community Party Committee, carried out the restoration and reconstruction of a landscape garden under the slogan of “self-governance renovation, co-creation.” In this process, a municipal model worker and community capable person, Brother F, actively participated with his skilled engineering knowledge, leading party members and volunteers in the community to repair the “Lotus Heart Garden,” which not only became a place for residents to relax and communicate but also became a community integrity education base, spiritual civilization education base, and democratic deliberation venue. Second, after the stairwell renovation was completed, residents formed the Shared Self-Governance Convention for Activity Rooms through collective consultation, transforming responsibilities such as sanitation maintenance and facility management into actionable detailed rules, and establishing a “rotating supervisor” system to ensure rule implementation. Further, the community micro-renewal project of stairwell renovation was formalized through the Standardized Operation Procedure for Stairwell Crowdfunding compiled by the community and the “Shared Stairwells” Construction Guide formulated by the subdistrict,

clarifying the implementation path of “government guidance, grassroots direction, mass leadership, and multi-participation,” laying the foundation for the replication of “Shared Stairwells,” and the community further moved towards the stage of outcome sharing, letting the concept of sharing deeply enter every resident's heart. Finally, during the renovation process, the stairwell renovation team considered the sustainable development of the stairwell, using intelligent devices to build an “early warning - response” dynamic governance system. For potential risks of facility aging and resident conflicts discovered by party members during door-to-door visits, they developed response plans in advance through joint meetings, forming a governance capacity of “problem identification - collaborative response - experience sedimentation.” After the renovation, they also held discussion meetings on the division of follow-up management responsibilities, clarifying the transfer of responsibilities between residents and the property management company.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

The study of the institutionalization path of urban community governance communities is essentially a concrete practice of the state-society interaction in the grassroots governance field. From a theoretical perspective, this process is not only about the reconstruction of governance structures but also points to the reproduction of social relations. Its core logic lies in bridging the tension between individual atomization and collective action through the two-way interaction of institutional power embedding and social absorption.

### **4.1. Conclusion**

This study takes the “Shared Stairwells” practice of Ningbo C Community as a case, proposes the theoretical framework of “embedded absorption,” and systematically explains the institutionalization logic of urban community governance communities. The main conclusions are as follows:

First, “embedded absorption” is the core mechanism for building community governance communities. Grassroots political power grants legitimacy to governance actions through political embedding, while at the same time activating the deep motivation of resident participation with flexible absorption strategies, forming a synergistic effect of state presence and social autonomy. The theoretical value of this model lies in its breaking through the traditional binary opposition narrative of “state-centered” or “society-centered.” Through the dynamic coupling of “embedding-absorption,” it organically integrates bureaucratic logic with endogenous community order, providing a new perspective for understanding the complexity of China's grassroots governance. Specifically, political embedding, through institutional sinking and resource integration, builds a governance network led by Party building, which not only strengthens the coordinating capacity of grassroots political power over community affairs but also incorporates resident self-organizing behavior into an institutionalized track through mechanism design. Social absorption, through interest drive and emotional mobilization, transforms scattered individual demands into collective action goals, promoting residents' role transition from “passive participation” to “active creation.”

Second, the institutionalization path of urban community governance communities follows the logic of three-dimensional co-shaping of “actor-structure-action.” This study breaks through a single perspective and reveals the realization path of institutionalized community governance communities from three core element dimensions: In the actor dimension, through Party and government embedding and elite absorption, the integration of governance actors from atomized dispersion to functional complementarity is achieved, shaping a multi-stakeholder collaborative pattern. In the structure dimension, through institutional embedding and grid absorption, the governance structure is promoted to transform from rigid bureaucracy to flexible network, forming an organism where formal institutions and informal relational networks are mutually nested. In the action dimension, through collaborative embedding and mechanism absorption, governance actions are promoted to

evolve from “project-based sprint” to normalized co-governance, constructing a sustainable closed loop for community governance.

Third, the essence of governance communities is the reproduction of social relations and the reshaping of governance culture. The success of the “Shared Stairwells” project is not only reflected in the renewal of physical space but also, through continuous collective action, reconstructs trust, reciprocity, and identity among neighbors, transforming a “stranger community” based on property rights into an “emotional community” based on shared values. This indicates that the modernization of community governance is not only technical and institutional but also social and cultural.

## 4.2. Further Discussion

Based on the above conclusions, this study suggests two issues worthy of further exploration. The first is a discussion on the applicability and promotion boundaries of the case model. It must be acknowledged that C Community in this case is a high-end community with residents of relatively high socioeconomic status. The material basis and human capital underlying its success are not available in many ordinary old communities or affordable housing communities. Therefore, although the “embedded absorption” model presented in this case is theoretically illuminating, its specific practical form is difficult to simply replicate. Future research and practice need to focus on the adaptability and spectrum of the model: in communities with weaker resource endowments, the government and Party organizations may need to undertake more “embedding” responsibility while more finely mining and “absorbing” micro-social capital within the community, exploring a path for constructing community governance communities with “low cost and high emotion.”

The second is a discussion on the long-term mechanism of urban community governance communities. This study focuses on the “institutionalization” generation stage of urban community governance communities, but the long-term survival of the community faces challenges: how to avoid the dilemma of “project ends, community dissipates”? This requires future community governance to transcend the short-sighted logic of problem-response and shift to constructing a systematic long-term thinking. Future research can explore the institutionalization path of urban community governance community construction more deeply and systematically at both theoretical and practical levels. At the theoretical level, perspectives such as “spatial justice” and “emotional governance” can be incorporated, focusing on the equitable enjoyment of governance outcomes and the continuous nourishment of residents' emotions. At the practical level, a “process-outcome” dual evaluation system can be established, focusing not only on the effectiveness of hardware renovation but also on soft indicators such as social capital accumulation, resident capacity improvement, and rule self-evolution capacity, ensuring the vitality and resilience of the community through institutional construction. Through the “integration of three forces” - multi-stakeholder synergy, structural shaping power, and action execution power - the fragmentation dilemma of community construction can be solved, promoting urban communities towards a new governance pattern of “everyone has responsibility, everyone fulfills responsibility, everyone enjoys.”

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