

Community Chief Steward System Embedded in Urban Social Governance: Practical Logic and Mechanisms

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Abstract: Urban governance faces structural characteristics such as large spatial spans and uneven density distribution, and urgently needs micro-institutional carriers with embedded adaptability. The Community Chief Steward System, as a governance unit that combines institutional attributes and action capabilities, exhibits an embedded logic that is manifested in a hierarchical progression of cognition, structure, and function, as well as a polycentric network restructuring, and it embeds the grassroots practical path of socialist core values. Its operational mechanisms encompass nested synergy with self-organizing networks, trust transmission based on reputation pledge, and dynamic calibration driven by composite feedback, while also incorporating the cultivation of civic morality and public spirit. Ecological adaptation focuses on the elastic matching of governance density and carrying capacity, the reduction of friction coefficients across cross-domain boundaries, and the positive feedback loop between institutional resilience and social capital. This paper reveals the intrinsic mechanism chain of this system's embeddedness in urban governance.

Key words: Community Chief Steward System; embedded logic; operational mechanisms; institutional resilience; social capital

Introduction

Communities, as basic units of urban governance, possess characteristics such as high heterogeneity, diverse self-organization, and uneven resource distribution, which make traditional structural arrangements difficult to adapt to dynamic contexts. The Community Chief Steward System, as a micro-unit that combines institutional carrier and action subject, realizes the integrated functions of rule adaptation, resource mobilization, and conflict pre-processing, and also bears the function of cultivating grassroots public spirit and the concept of rule of law. Existing studies have focused heavily on macro-structures and have paid insufficient attention to mechanisms such as embedded processes, tension adjustment, and dynamic calibration. This paper adopts a three-stage progressive framework of embedded logic, operational mechanisms, and ecological adaptation, and aims to reveal the structural adaptation conditions and effectiveness transformation laws of this system.

1. Embedded Logic and Structural Adaptation of the Community Chief Steward System

1.1 Institutional Attributes and Functional Positioning of the Role of Community Chief Steward

The role of Community Chief Steward is not merely a simple coordinator of community affairs, but rather a governance unit that possesses the dual attributes of institutional carrier and action subject. Its institutional attributes are manifested in its integration into the existing normative system of the community while mobilizing external institutional resources to form a structured interface. The legitimacy of the role derives from the dynamic balance between the accumulation of internal trust within the community and external institutional authorization, thereby avoiding one-sided dependence. From the perspective of ideological and political education, the Chief Steward bears the function of value guidance, transforming mainstream values into actionable behavioral norms. The Chief Steward undertakes the composite functions of information conversion, rule interpretation, and interest aggregation, and its action boundaries are jointly delineated by the density of community social capital and the flexibility of institutional rules.

The core value of this system lies in filling the micro-response gaps within conventional governance structures. The Chief Steward plays a bridging role in highly heterogeneous settings, transforming discrete individual demands into collective action agendas. Resource identification, conflict presupposition, and consensus refinement constitute its three fundamental functions: resource identification focuses on the matching assessment between existing stocks and external resources, while conflict presupposition emphasizes the construction of buffer zones before the intensification of contradictions. The above functions dynamically adjust their weights according to community contexts, so as to maintain the adaptive capacity of institutional operation^[1].

1.2 Embedded Tensions and Adaptation Paths in the Field of Urban Governance

The field of urban governance possesses structural characteristics such as broad spatial spans, multiple hierarchical levels, and uneven governance density, and the Community Chief Steward System encounters multiple tensions during its embeddedness. The most prominent tension stems from the contradiction between institutional uniformity and community diversity, namely the difference in rule adaptability. Another type of tension manifests as the dislocation between the logic of action resource allocation and the community's self-generating logic, with the former favoring explicit indicators and the latter relying on implicit relationships and trust capital. In the absence of effective adaptation, the role of Chief Steward would fall into the dual predicament of "embeddedness failure" or "suspended implementation." The adaptation process needs to incorporate the flexible guiding function of ideological and political education, and to reduce the resistance to institutional introduction through the condensation of value consensus.

The adaptation paths should be developed from two dimensions: structural flexibility and process reversibility. Structural flexibility means that the system reserves variable parameters at the design level, such as establishing a mapping relationship between the Chief Steward's scope of authority and response frequency on the one hand, and variables like community size and population mobility rate on the other. Process reversibility emphasizes that partial rollback and path correction are allowed during embeddedness, so as to avoid lock-in effects. Specific measures include establishing a multi-level chain of delegated authority and responsibility, introducing community-based consultation and calibration procedures, and setting up dynamic adjustment points for embedding density, thereby alleviating the friction between institutional normativity and community heterogeneity without undermining the overall framework of urban governance.

1.3 Hierarchical Progression and Spatial Restructuring Mechanisms of Institutional Embeddedness

Institutional embeddedness progresses sequentially through three levels: cognition, structure, and function. At the level of cognitive embeddedness, institutional concepts and rules need to be internalized as shared understandings among community members through repeated interactions, relying on the Chief Steward's low-threshold contact and high-frequency informal communication with residents, and embedding value elements such as integrity and friendliness into the interactive process. At the level of structural embeddedness, the Chief Steward System forms intersection nodes with existing community organizations and decision-making processes, such as establishing institutionalized information exchange channels with homeowners' committees and building-level liaison systems. At the level of functional embeddedness, which is the most in-depth, the system becomes deeply coupled with the daily operation of the community and evolves into an organic component of the community's self-operation^[2].

The spatial restructuring mechanism is manifested as the capacity to reshape the distribution of power, information flows, and resource retention points within the governance space. Traditional urban governance space features a radial structure centered on administrative nodes, whereas the introduction of the Chief Steward System gives rise to a polycentric, short-radius network topology. As intermediary nodes, Chief Stewards shorten the communication distance among heterogeneous groups and transform vertical resource allocation into horizontal flow paths. Spatial restructuring also manifests in the descent and convergence of decision-making nodes, with some high-level coordination functions being decomposed and moved forward to Chief Steward nodes. Through the superimposition of a new node network, this restructuring enhances the responsiveness and adaptive regulation capacity of the overall governance space to local disturbances.

2. Operational Mechanisms and Coupling Paths of the Community Chief Steward System

2.1 Nested Synergy between the Chief Steward System and Community Self-Organizing Networks

Community self-organizing networks typically form informal structures bonded by neighborhood trust, shared interests, or common risk prevention, and the intervention of the Community Chief Steward System does not replace these networks, but rather establishes multi-level interactive relationships with them through nested means. The core mechanism of nested synergy manifests as mutual recognition of roles and mutual integration of rules, meaning that the Chief Steward simultaneously appears in the dual identity of institutional agent and member of the self-organizing network, which enables the Chief Steward to mobilize institutional resources within the network on the one hand, and to feed the social norms generated by the network back into the institutional framework on the other. This dual identity reduces the boundary rigidity between the system and self-organizing networks, and avoids the squeezing effect of external rules on internal order. In the process of synergy, the Chief Steward needs to focus on transforming the spirit of collectivism and the tradition of mutual assistance into actionable contractual rules, so that the spontaneous order of the self-organizing networks and the goal orientation of institutional design can form a joint force.

The depth of nesting is constrained by the degree of closure of the community self-organizing networks and the embedding density of the Chief Steward. In networks with higher openness, the Chief Steward System tends to adopt a weak intervention strategy, which focuses on information provision and lightweight mediation, so as to maintain the autonomous evolutionary capacity of the networks. In networks with stronger closure and rigid internal rules, nested synergy needs to be achieved through node replacement or functional superposition, for example, by absorbing key liaisons from the original networks into subsidiary roles within the Chief Steward System. The improvement of synergy effects depends on the functional complementarity of the two types of structures in such areas as resource aggregation, information verification, and conflict pre-processing, rather than on simple merger or hierarchical overlay.

2.2 Trust Transmission and Multilateral Integration Mechanisms in Resource Mobilization

The primary constraint faced by the Community Chief Steward System in the process of resource mobilization is not an absolute scarcity of resources, but rather the trust fracture between resource owners and demanders. The trust transmission mechanism achieves cross-group trust transfer through the position of the Chief Steward as a credible intermediary, and the specific paths include the triple superposition of reputation pledge, behavioral traceability, and default exposure cost. By virtue of the relational capital accumulated within the community, the Chief Steward transforms the abstract credibility of externally introduced resource parties into tangible credibility perceptible to the community, while simultaneously transmitting the willingness of community participants to fulfill commitments back to resource providers, thereby forming a two-way trust bridge. This process is deeply embedded in the dimension of integrity building in ideological and political education, namely, through institutionalized incentives for trustworthiness and constraints for untrustworthiness, it strengthens the moral self-discipline awareness of community residents.

The multilateral integration mechanism refers to the technical path for the combined reallocation of different types of resources (material resources, information resources, skill resources, and time resources) at the community level. The Chief Steward System does not simply aggregate resource inventories, but rather constructs an executable set of matching rules by identifying the complementarity and substitution elasticity among resources. For example, idle space resources can be combined with residents' skill resources to form a "site-lecturer" exchange pairing, thereby reducing reliance on external monetary resources. The integration process is accompanied by a redistribution of transaction costs, meaning that the Chief Steward bears the coordination costs of resource discovery, matching verification, and performance supervision, thus reducing the direct negotiation burden among all participating parties. This change in cost structure makes it possible to facilitate resource exchanges that could not previously occur due to insufficient trust or excessively high coordination costs^[3].

2.3 Feedback Loops and Dynamic Calibration Models in Institutional Implementation

The accumulation of deviations during institutional implementation constitutes the primary operational risk faced by the Community Chief Steward System, and simple end-point correction is often delayed and costly. The construction of feedback loops requires the installation of signal

collection points at the front-end, mid-term, and back-end stages respectively. The front-end collection targets include the distribution of community acceptance of institutional rules and types of resistance, the mid-term focuses on the degree of deviation between the Chief Steward's implementation behaviors and institutional norms, and the back-end attends to the residual gap between institutional outcomes and expected goals. The three types of signals form a composite feedback indicator through weighted synthesis, so as to avoid noise interference from any single indicator. The feedback loops should incorporate the assessment dimension of ideological and political education, such as the degree of enhancement of residents' responsibility awareness and the trend of willingness to participate in public affairs as value-oriented indicators.

The dynamic calibration model differs from static institutional revision, and its core lies in establishing a mapping function between feedback signals and institutional parameters. The parameters that can be calibrated include the Chief Steward's scope of authority, the approval threshold for resource allocation, the granularity of information disclosure, and the flexibility in handling violations. The calibration process follows the principle of minimum intervention, which prioritizes the adjustment of parameters that contribute more significantly to institutional performance, while maintaining the relative stability of the remaining parameters to ensure the continuity of institutional operation. The model incorporates a damping coefficient to prevent oscillatory implementation caused by excessive feedback sensitivity: when the deviation signal falls below the preset tolerance interval, the current parameters are maintained; when it exceeds the interval, a phased parameter adjustment is triggered. This design enables the Community Chief Steward System to make reversible and traceable adaptive responses to the dynamic changes in community contexts, while preserving the stability of its core structure.

3. Ecological Adaptation and Effectiveness Transformation of the Community Chief Steward System

3.1 Matching Logic between Governance Density and Institutional Carrying Capacity

Governance density refers to a composite measure of information exchange frequency, relationship connection intensity, and the probability of collective action triggering within a unit community space, while institutional carrying capacity reflects the upper limit of governance load that the Community Chief Steward System can effectively handle without causing structural overload. The matching logic between the two constitutes the basic judgment criterion for the ecological adaptation of the Community Chief Steward System. When governance density falls below institutional carrying capacity, the Chief Steward System may fall into a state of resource idleness and functional redundancy, manifesting as idle information channels, ineffective occupation of mediation nodes, and the like; conversely, when governance density continuously approaches or exceeds the carrying capacity threshold, the system will exhibit overload symptoms such as response delays, signal omissions, and declining decision quality. Distinguishing the governance density spectra of different community types helps to identify the starting conditions for carrying capacity allocation. For example, although high-mobility communities have high information exchange frequency, their relationship strength is relatively weak, while old communities have high relationship connection strength but low information update rates, and the demand structures for carrying capacity in the two types of contexts are essentially different^[4].

The optimization of the matching relationship does not pursue a static equality between governance density and carrying capacity, but rather establishes a flexible tracking mechanism. This mechanism achieves synchronization by adjusting the resource input intensity of the Community Chief Steward System (such as the number of Chief Stewards allocated, the scope of authorization, and the bandwidth of information processing) in tandem with the dynamic fluctuations of community governance density. Specific paths include tiered response, which allocates different levels of carrying capacity resources according to the urgency and complexity of affairs; and density prediction, which calculates leading indicators such as community population mobility rate and complaint type distribution to forecast the trend of governance density and adjust institutional configuration parameters in advance. This matching logic avoids the two failure modes of institutional rigidity and overload, and maintains the structural stability of the Community Chief Steward System within its operational environment. The introduction of the concept of a carrying capacity reserve coefficient, which reserves a certain proportion of flexible redundancy on the basis of daily configuration to cope with sudden density surges, can further enhance the adaptability of the matching mechanism.

3.2 Mediation and Boundary Dredging Mechanisms of the Chief Steward in Cross-Domain Affairs

Cross-domain affairs refer to those types of matters that extend beyond the boundaries of a single community and involve interest coordination and resource circulation among multiple communities or between communities and external functional units. The core contradiction lies in the structural conflict between the continuity of affairs and the discreteness of governance units. The Community Chief Steward System faces dual challenges when dealing with such affairs: first, the Chief Steward's scope of authorization is usually bounded by the community, and cross-domain actions lack institutional support; second, the differences in rules and the asymmetry of trust among different communities increase the costs of coordination. The key to the mediation mechanism lies in transforming the Chief Steward from a fixed node of a single community into a temporary connecting node for cross-domain mobility, and achieving the temporary extension of authority through horizontal agreements or joint authorization among Chief Stewards. Cross-domain mediation also requires the establishment of rapid judgment rules for the attribution of affairs, so as to avoid delays in response windows caused by unclear initial classification. In this process, the Chief Steward needs to uphold the principles of fairness and justice, coordinate the interests and demands among different communities, and avoid parochial tendencies.

The boundary dredging mechanism focuses on the softening and reconstruction of three types of boundaries: administrative boundaries, information boundaries, and responsibility boundaries. Administrative boundaries refer to the dividing lines of jurisdictional scope among different communities, and the dredging methods include establishing a Chief Steward joint meeting system and rapid referral channels for cross-domain affairs. Information boundaries are manifested in the closure of internal information systems within each community, and selective sharing can be achieved through the information-bridging role played by the Chief Steward. Responsibility boundaries concern the problem of shirking when the attribution of affairs is unclear, and they are clarified through a pre-signed accountability matrix for cross-domain affairs and post-hoc allocation rules. Boundary dredging does not mean eliminating boundaries, but rather reducing the friction coefficient that boundaries impose on the continuous flow of affairs. Under this mechanism, the Community Chief Steward System is able to achieve functional coverage of cross-domain affairs without altering the existing division of governance units. Furthermore, trigger thresholds and escalation paths for cross-domain affairs can be established, so that when the frequency or complexity exceeds the set standards, the joint mediation mode is automatically activated, thereby balancing the costs of routine coordination and the efficiency of responding to unconventional events.

3.3 Institutional Resilience and the Reproduction Paths of Community Social Capital

Institutional resilience refers to the ability of the Community Chief Steward System to maintain its core functions and achieve self-repair when subjected to internal and external disturbances, such as drastic changes in population structure, interruption of resource supply, or impacts from emergency events, and its measurement indicators include the rate of functional retention, recovery time, and post-reconstruction adaptability. Unlike the disturbance-resistance capacity of mechanical systems, the source of institutional resilience does not lie in the rigid reinforcement of structures, but rather in the co-constitutive relationship formed between the system and community social capital. Social capital, as the sum total of trust networks, normative systems, and information channels within the community, plays a dual role of buffering absorption and repair assistance in institutional resilience. When the system faces disturbances, social capital can temporarily substitute for some institutional functions, thereby buying time for the Chief Steward to make adjustments^[5]. From the perspective of ideological and political education, the deep support for institutional resilience comes from the internalized public spirit and value consensus of community residents, and these soft elements are more resistant to interference than rigid rules.

The reproduction paths of community social capital constitute the dynamic support for institutional resilience. Unlike the consumption of existing social capital, reproduction emphasizes the formation of a net increase mechanism for social capital during the process of institutional operation. The Chief Steward System reduces the uncertainty of cooperation among community members through the design of verifiable fulfillment of reciprocal commitments, public accumulation of reputation, and low-cost exposure of violations, thereby incentivizing the formation of long-term trust relationships. Specific paths include introducing a time bank-style mutual aid points system, establishing intergenerational skill transfer contracts, and setting up small-scale rapid arbitration rules to reduce the continuous depletion of social capital caused by unresolved grievances. These paths enable the Community Chief

Steward System to not only complete functional outputs in each transaction but also simultaneously accomplish the re-precipitation of social capital. More importantly, the Chief Steward System should consciously cultivate residents' civic virtue, transforming altruistic behavior, rule awareness, and sense of responsibility into the conscious practice of community daily life. A positive feedback loop is thus formed between institutional resilience and the reproduction of social capital: resilience provides a stable environment for reproduction, and reproduction provides callable relational resources for resilience. Furthermore, the speed and scale of social capital reproduction can be explored as leading early-warning indicators for institutional resilience: when the reproduction rate consistently falls below the depletion rate, it signals that the system faces a potential risk of resilience degradation^[6].

Conclusion

The Community Chief Steward System achieves structural adaptation to the field of urban governance through a hierarchical and progressive embedded logic, and its operation relies on the threefold mechanisms of nested synergy, trust transmission, and dynamic calibration, ultimately accomplishing ecological adaptation and effectiveness transformation in the matching of governance density, the dredging of cross-domain boundaries, and the maintenance of institutional resilience. This study constructs a complete analytical chain from embedded conditions to operational processes and then to ecological constraints, and reveals that the Community Chief Steward System is not a static set of rules, but rather a dynamic system that is mutually constitutive with community social capital and possesses self-regulatory capabilities. The embedding of ideological and political education in this system is manifested as an organic integration of value guidance, moral cultivation, and public spirit cultivation with governance mechanisms, so that the system operates with both an efficiency dimension and a meaning dimension. Future research directions can be extended to the extraction of differentiated adaptation parameters of the Chief Steward System in different types of communities (such as high-mobility communities, old communities, and new commercial housing communities), as well as the development of quantitative measurement methods for the threshold of institutional resilience. At the same time, the synergy mechanism between the Chief Steward System and digital platforms, that is, the substitution and supplementation relationships between information channels and trust transmission in virtual spaces, is also a topic worthy of in-depth exploration.

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