

# Research on the Practice Path of Flexible Governance Mechanism in Grassroots Communities in the Age of Aging: Taking Xuzhong Village, Huaxin Town, Shanghai as an Example

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**Abstract.** With the continuous development of China's aging population, elderly care services have become an important topic of community governance, which has led to the trend of elderly friendly community transformation and Healthy Village construction in the process of urban community governance. This article is based on the construction and transformation practice of community governance in Xuzhong Village, Huaxin Town, Shanghai. It analyzes the current situation of urban grassroots community governance, summarizes the characteristics and related behaviors of flexible management systems, and focuses on the mechanism of soft norms. Research has shown that the phenomenon of adaptive aging in the governance process of urban grassroots communities is mainly related to two factors: institutional and cultural factors; Compared with rigid management, community governance under flexible management has a trend towards aging. Flexible management emphasizes a "people-centered" approach, emphasizing interaction, culture, and humanistic care. It pays attention to the needs of the elderly population in the community and the rapidly changing social environment, making it easier to form emotional oriented action strategies in grassroots community governance; Through the accumulation and institutional role of flexible management elements (soft norms and culture), promote the governance process of grassroots communities in community development, enhancing elderly care services, and promoting elderly participation.

**Keywords:** Population aging Community governance; Flexible management; Elderly care services; Elderly participation.

## 1. Question raising

The aging population is a severe and urgent reality challenge that China is facing. It is expected that the national elderly population (aged 60 and above) will reach 26.733 million by 2023, accounting for 31.2% of the total population. As the basic spatial unit of a city, community governance is a systematic project, and both the foothold and starting point should be attributed to people. To answer the above questions, we must pay attention to the phenomenon and trend of urban population aging[1]. To enhance the governance capacity and level of grassroots communities, sufficient guarantees should be provided from institutional, human, and financial aspects. The traditional management model lacks flexibility and adaptability, while the flat and non bureaucratic characteristics of community governance promote the attributes of participation oriented, process oriented, and emotional oriented in community governance, highlighting the advantages of flexible management[2]. The goal of improving residents' living conditions and ensuring urban safety and order has further influenced the functional orientation and action logic of the community.

Why has flexible management become a new way of community governance in the aging era? This is the research topic that this article focuses on. There are two core concepts in this topic: "aging population" and "flexible management". These two concepts emphasize the existence of adaptive aging and flexible orientation in the object and action logic of urban community governance issues[3]. One important theoretical support behind them is the theory of flexible management.

The biggest characteristic of flexible management is people-centered, emphasizing the establishment of effective communication mechanisms based on equality and trust, and adopting non mandatory and collaborative methods to achieve governance goals, rather than relying on the influence of power[4]. The theory of flexible management originated from the field of western

management science. In the research of foreign flexible management topics, it mainly focuses on the two basic concepts of "adaptability" and "flexibility", emphasizing the adaptability and adaptability of organizations to improve their flexibility and adaptability. In China, emphasis is placed on humanization, which is essentially a people-centered management approach. The research topic of flexible management in community level governance mainly includes two aspects: firstly, taking flexible management as the research object, exploring the role and formation process of soft norms beyond rigid management such as morality and value in community governance; The second is to use flexible management as a means of community governance, complementing rigid management to enhance the level of community governance.

This article will use the theory of flexible management to interpret, taking the renovation of Xuzhong Village community in Huaxin Town, Shanghai as an example, focusing on measures to adapt to aging in grassroots communities, and analyzing the impact of flexible management on community development[5].

## **2. Two Factors of Community Flexible Governance**

Most social governance still focuses on rigid management. However, with the development of the economy and society, the role of soft norms in social management is becoming increasingly prominent. How to improve management level at the grassroots community governance level? Why is flexible governance more suitable for use within grassroots communities? In recent years, community governance has increasingly emphasized the collaborative participation of multiple entities, reflecting a decrease in the mandatory dimension of community governance measures and an increase in the service-oriented dimension. Compared with other management fields, grassroots community governance has demonstrated a clear service nature. As the last "Free nerve ending" of social management, the grass-roots community has an arduous task to deal with in terms of public service supply. Firstly, grassroots communities play an important role in the aging era. With the increasing diverse needs of the elderly, communities need to provide customized elderly care services and care, undertaking tasks such as providing elderly care services, social support, and combating loneliness[6]. Strengthening the construction of exemplary elderly friendly communities, creating diverse opportunities for social participation, and reshaping the social value of the elderly. Secondly, the rapid changes in the social environment require communities to have adaptability and innovation to cope with constantly changing needs. Carry out practical service projects for the elderly, and regularly take the initiative to care for elderly people with special difficulties such as living alone, empty nests, and disability. Finally, the increasing expectations of elderly people in community decision-making and management require the creation of more opportunities and channels for participation[7].

### **2.1 Institutional factors**

In recent years, the social and economic population of our country has been developing continuously, and the governance transformation process of grassroots communities is also changing constantly. On a macro level, community governance at the grassroots level requires the diversification and service of community governance subjects. In terms of system and structure, flexible management is constantly changing with the change of strategy and policy of community management in our country. Our social policy practice exists in the policies to solve various basic livelihood issues, reflecting the people-oriented and equitable government concept. Therefore, our social policy is more welfare and compensatory in nature.

### **2.2 Cultural factors**

At present, the main body of grassroots community governance has become more diversified. Communities are no longer governed by a single entity, and completely mandatory and materialistic methods cannot adapt to the current process of community development. Therefore, the importance

and necessity of flexible community governance are highlighted. The emergence of flexible social governance is a combination and supplement of the government's "law based" rigid social management, opening up broader development space for social management. Flexible governance emphasizes the exchange and interaction between the subject and the object of "people first, equality, freedom and democracy", uses incentives and inducements to drive development, and respects the rights and freedoms of residents in grass-roots communities. Flexible governance is of great significance for grassroots communities, which are multifunctional collectives facing the masses. Secondly, the culture of filial piety is not only a fundamental part of traditional Chinese culture, but also an important factor in modern social civilization. Elderly care and happiness are in line with the values of grassroots community governance. Concepts guide practice, and the practices of actors will in turn affect social structure and national governance strategies[8].

### **3. Analysis of the New Model of Community Governance in Xuzhong Village, Huaxin Town**

This study is based on the background of Shanghai Municipal Health Commission and Shanghai Elderly Affairs Office's proposal to build a batch of national demonstration elderly friendly communities in March 2021. One consideration for selecting Xuzhong Village as a case study point is that it is located at the junction of urban and suburban areas, which not only explores urban and rural transformation, but also has the characteristics of mixed community management. As one of the first batch of happy community construction pilots in Qingpu District, it was rated as a friendly community for the elderly in Shanghai in 2022, and successfully created a Healthy Village in Shanghai in 2022.

#### **3.1 Basic situation of Xuzhong Village**

Xuzhong Village is located in the southwest of Huaxin Town, covering an area of 3.24 square kilometers. It has 11 villager groups and a central farmer community, a total of 421 households, and 5299 permanent residents, including 1370 registered residence, 672 registered residence over 60 years old, accounting for 49%, and 98 people over 80 years old. Among these elderly people, there are 91 special elderly groups.

#### **3.2 Policy "hardware" support**

In order to actively respond to the aging population, in accordance with the spirit of the "Notice on Establishing Demonstration National Elderly Friendly Communities" issued by the National Health Commission and the National Office for Aging (Guo Wei Lao Ge Fa [2020] No. 23), Shanghai has started the creation of elderly friendly communities since 2021. All levels of elderly care offices focus on the goals, tasks, processes, and requirements of the creation work, focusing on the needs of the elderly in terms of living environment, transportation, healthcare, community support, and social participation. They carry out in-depth publicity and mobilization, coordinate with various members of the aging committee, integrate resources, and fully promote the creation work. According to the relevant work plan, by 2035, Shanghai's elderly friendly communities will achieve full urban-rural coverage.

#### **3.3 Practical Analysis of Community Governance for Aging in Xuzhong Village**

As one of the first batch of happy community construction pilots in Qingpu District, Xuzhong Village has adopted a parallel approach from government affairs, community environment construction, community health care service diversification and other measures:

In terms of government affairs and office work, the village committee will return the original office space to the general public, creating a "public living room" at the doorstep of residents' homes, and various digital machines such as "One Network" self-service terminals will be linked to promote the transformation of communities from administrative to intelligent and digital upgrading. The

community hall is divided into comprehensive social governance "for the people", beautiful rural industry "for the people", party mass service "for the people", leisure and entertainment "for the people" according to its functions. Through the rational configuration of the "Happy Cloud" smart community application system, self-help acceptance machines, it promotes the participation and communication of local registered residence residents, especially the elderly population. Strengthen the connection and interaction of community groups, weaken the barriers between participating entities, and provide new paths for responsive issues that cannot be solved by traditional governance. On the other hand, port governance is implemented, including village party branches, party branches, party groups, property management, and co construction units. Guided by party organizations, community governance is highly institutionalized, leveraging the complementary advantages of hard and soft, and weaving a network environment to support the construction of elderly friendly communities.

In terms of community environment construction: Xuzhong Village community construction aims to create a new type of community that is "beautiful, livable, happy, and harmonious", guided by the needs of the masses, highlighting the core concept of "co construction, co governance, and sharing", and presenting a trend of flexible governance. Provide public services and activity spaces at the doorstep for nearly 4000 people, addressing daily life needs such as studying, nurturing, eating, and playing, and achieving full coverage of the "15 minute life circle". By effectively shortening the spatial distance in life, we strengthen the spiritual bond between communities and people. Making elderly care in their original homes and communities more preferred, maintaining social relationships with their original lifestyles, and improving the quality of life for the elderly.

In addition, the village committee has also launched diversified health and wellness measures to actively face the aging process: community centers are equipped with "4+1" service positions and "8+X" service functions, with four major functional areas and eight major positions, based on the concept of "friendly, for the people, convenient, and beneficial" modern services. In response to the needs of the public, a new community cafeteria will be built, with a focus on elderly people who are elderly, difficult, and empty nests. Various methods such as community dining and home delivery will be adopted for the elderly to improve the quality of community elderly care services. Provide 10 yuan box lunch for the elderly in the jurisdiction, changing the traditional elderly care model. The newly built day care center provides on-demand services for the elderly, disabled, and rehabilitation patients in the community.

Practice has shown that relying on rigid governance methods such as rules, systems, and laws for grassroots governance is clearly not enough. It is also necessary to build a governance community with flexible governance mechanisms such as emotional belonging, emotional driving, and emotional cohesion, to help build the most needed relationships of mutual trust, respect, and understanding in grassroots social governance.

#### **4. The role of flexible management in elderly care services**

Flexible management provides a more flexible and personalized way of providing elderly care services. At the same time, it provides more opportunities and channels for the elderly, encourages their participation in decision-making, and stimulates their enthusiasm and creativity. By fully utilizing community resources and the capabilities of community teams, flexible management based elderly care services can meet the needs of elderly people at different levels[9]. Flexible management also encourages communities to establish cooperative relationships with other relevant institutions and social organizations to jointly provide high-quality elderly care services.

#### **5. Summary**

Through the analysis of the case of aging adaptation transformation of Huaxin Town community in Shanghai, it is not difficult to see that the governance methods and action strategies of urban

grassroots communities tend to be from the overall perspective, while the heterogeneity of community population and the triviality of community life require more in-depth research on whether differentiated services can be implemented. In the age of aging, China's urban grassroots community governance faces many challenges, but the community governance model based on flexible management provides a new way to solve these challenges. Through flexible management and empathy, people's trust in public authority is enhanced, community management that is close to people's actual needs is built, and community residents' sense of identity is enhanced, so as to promote community development and improve the quality of elderly care services. The government, the community and all sectors of society should actively promote the implementation of the flexible management concept and strive to build the urban grass-roots community governance system that ADAPTS to the aging era.

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