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How Can Party Building Leadership Promote the Sound Governance of Owner Committees?--A Case Study Based on the Three-Dimensional Framework of "Institution-Commitment-Supervision" in Self-Governance Theory

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of accelerating urbanization and increasingly complex community governance structures in China, the Owner Committee, as an important part of grassroots mass autonomous organizations, plays an increasingly prominent role in coordinating owners' interests and improving governance efficiency. However, in practice, the Owner Committee still faces multiple dilemmas such as imperfect system construction, vague power and responsibility relationships, and lack of supervision mechanisms, which restrict the full play of its governance functions. Based on this, combined with Ostrom's public pool resource self-governance theory and multiple practical cases, this paper systematically explores the mechanisms and paths of Party building leadership in promoting the effective governance of Owner Committee organizations from three dimensions: "institutional supply", "credible commitment" and "mutual supervision". It provides theoretical reference and practical guidance for building a new community governance pattern of "Party building leadership, multi-party coordination and resident participation".

Keywords: Party building leadership, Owner Committee, institutional supply, mutual supervision, credible commitment

1. Introduction

With the development of urbanization and the complexity of community governance structures, the standardized operation and role play of the Owner Committee have increasingly become a key link in improving the level of community governance. The Owner Committee, referred to as the Owners' Committee, is a non-governmental organization composed of representatives elected by house owners (owners) and established on the basis of personal interests. Its purpose is to promote the self-management of owners and safeguard the legitimate collective interests of owners through this organization, which is a product of the social transformation period [1]. In 1991, Shenzhen Tianjing Garden spontaneously established China's first Owner Management Committee, which became the predecessor of the Owner Committee. In 2003, Article 10 of the "Regulations on Property Management" clearly stipulated: "Owners in the same property management area shall establish an

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Owners' Assembly and elect an Owners' Committee under the guidance of the competent real estate administrative department of the people's government of the district or county where the property is located, or the sub-district office or town people's government." The promulgation of the "Regulations on Property Management" means that the organizational name of "Owner Committee" has been officially recognized at the national level.

However, at the same time, the Owner Committee still faces many challenges in its actual operation.

First, disordered interactions among stakeholders. The homeowners' committee suffers from weak ties with residents and has failed to establish a collaborative network with diverse actors such as sub-district offices, neighborhood committees, and property management companies. Instead, relationships often devolve into competitive struggles over interests. Despite poor service quality, replacing property management companies remains difficult, and homeowners who withhold fees in protest often face unfavorable rulings in court, resulting in a governance deadlock.

Second, ambiguous boundaries of authority and responsibility. Low homeowner participation impedes the establishment of homeowners' committees, and even when formed, their authority is often overshadowed by grassroots quasi-governmental bodies or property management firms. The tenuous or even adversarial relationship between the committee and homeowners undermines its legitimacy as a representative body.

Third, absence of robust organizational mechanisms. Homeowners' committees are prone to monopolization by a minority of elites, leading to oligarchic governance, or fragmented by factional disputes that neglect the collective interest. The widespread lack of oversight mechanisms not only exacerbates managerial chaos and corruption risks but also deepens residents' distrust, further eroding the committee-constituent relationship. These structural challenges collectively constrain the effective functioning of homeowners' committees in community governance [2].

The above problems together constitute the "triple dilemmas" of the Owner Committee's governance, namely institutional deficiency, trust crisis and supervision failure. Various dilemmas not only restrict the play of the Owner Committee's functions, but also affect the overall efficiency of grassroots governance. How to solve these problems and promote the Owner Committee to move towards a standardized, efficient and transparent governance track has become an important issue in the current reform of community governance. To sum up, the problem that this paper aims to solve is: how can Party building leadership solve the governance dilemmas of the Owner Committee? In the following, an empirical analysis will be carried out based on Ostrom's self-governance theory's three-dimensional analytical framework of "institution-commitment-supervision" combined with cases.

2. Theoretical basis

Through the study of public pools, Elinor Ostrom proposed that institutional supply, credible commitment and mutual supervision are the three major problems of self-governance [3]. The public pool resource self-governance theory breaks through the traditional "tragedy of the commons" and "collective action dilemma", and proposes that under certain conditions, user groups can realize the sustainable governance of public resources through self-organization without relying on the mandatory intervention of external authorities or complete privatization. Through a large number of empirical studies, Ostrom summarized eight design principles for successful self-governance, but its theoretical cornerstone lies in the profound insight into the three core problems in the process of self-governance: institutional supply, credible commitment and mutual supervision.

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Firstly, institutional supply; it refers to how user groups establish a set of commonly observed behavioral rules from a state of disorder. Ostrom emphasized that effective institutional supply is a gradual process, forming a "nested rule system", including operational rules, collective choice rules and constitutional choice rules. This process must be compatible with the attributes of the community and the characteristics of the resource system, and oppose a "one-size-fits-all" system design.

Secondly, credible commitment; it refers to how participants believe that others will continue to abide by the rules. Ostrom pointed out that the credibility of commitment depends on effective supervision and sanctions mechanisms, as well as the reputation mechanisms and moral norms formed within the community. She proposed the concept of "graded sanctions", that is, sanctions should start with mild and educational measures and gradually escalate to maintain the authority and fairness of the rules.

Thirdly, mutual supervision; it refers to how to realize the supervision of the implementation of rules in a low-cost and sustainable way. Ostrom found that many successful self-governance systems use the physical characteristics of resources or social networks to achieve low-cost supervision, thus avoiding supervision itself becoming a burden of collective action.

Ostrom's thinking on the three major problems of self-governance constitutes an interlocking and in-depth theoretical system. Institutional supply solves the "existence" of governance rules, emphasizing the endogeneity, gradualness and context dependence of rules; credible commitment solves the "effectiveness" of rules, internalizing external rules into behavioral constraints through supervision, sanctions, reputation and other mechanisms; mutual supervision solves the "sustainability" of rule implementation, striving to build a low-cost, built-in and reciprocity-based supervision model. The three dimensions together reveal the micro-mechanism for the success of self-governance: it does not rely on the altruism of members, but through sophisticated system design, reshapes the incentive structure of individuals, making cooperative behavior the most beneficial rational choice for individuals in a specific social-ecological context.

Owner groups are collectively faced with public pool resource issues such as the preservation and appreciation of community real estate and the maintenance of public living environments. It can be seen that the Owner Committee, as a typical public pool resource governance organization, will inevitably face problems of institutional supply, credible commitment and mutual supervision in its self-governance. At present, with the prominent contradictions in urban community governance and the shortcomings of the Owner Committee's self-organization governance, strengthening the leading role of Party building in the work of the Owner Committee has become an important path in practice to solve governance dilemmas and consolidate the grassroots foundation.

3. Case analysis

3.1. Party building drives institutional supply

"Institutional supply" is the primary problem faced by the self-governance of the Owner Committee, that is, the transition from an initial state of lack of effective rules and individualistic behavior to an order with common behavioral norms. Ostrom emphasized that effective institutional supply is not the one-time establishment of a perfect set of rules, but a gradual process of forming a "nested rule system". This system usually includes three levels. Firstly, the bottom-level rules: directly regulate daily resource occupation behaviors and supply activities, such as who obtains how many resources, when, where and in what way. These rules are the most specific and easiest to adjust according to the actual situation. Secondly, collective choice rules: the middle-level rules that stipulate the

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procedures for formulating and revising operational rules. It clarifies who is eligible to participate in decision-making and what processes are followed in decision-making. This level of rules endows operational rules with legitimacy and adaptability. Thirdly, constitutional choice rules: the highest-level rules that stipulate how collective choice rules themselves are formulated and revised. It involves the most basic principles of the governance system, such as the definition of membership qualifications and the protection of basic rights.

At present, the motives of owners to run for the Owner Committee can be summarized into five types: profit-seeking participation, voluntary participation, novelty-seeking participation, mobilized participation and anger-driven participation [4]. The general lack of enthusiasm among homeowners toward establishing such committees further exacerbates organizational challenges. According to institutional analysis theory, effective institutional supply must align with "community attributes" and "resource system characteristics," opposing a one-size-fits-all approach to institutional design. In this context, community Party organizations, leveraging their organizational authority and public credibility, can serve as key governance actors in integration and empowerment.Party organizations can reduce collective action costs by mobilizing homeowner Party members to participate in elections; enhance the institutionalization of committee governance by leading the development of regulatory templates consistent with legal principles; and strengthen procedural fairness and outcome legitimacy by overseeing election and deliberation processes. In terms of rule internalization, Party organizations help clarify boundaries of rights and responsibilities through multi-channel communication and foster a compliance culture by demonstrating exemplary conduct through Party members. To address the committees' lack of enforcement power, Party organizations can employ mechanisms such as counseling sessions, Party member evaluations, and community integrity records to establish effective constraints.Furthermore, through initiatives like establishing "Red Deliberation Halls" (For example, Building 6, Lane 601, Nujiang Road, Changzheng Town, Shanghai)and promoting "cross-position appointments"(For example, the exploration and practice in Pudong New Area [5]), Party organizations enable embedded supervision within the governance process and provide homeowners with external channels for accountability. In resource coordination, Party organizations can assist committees in accessing government support and, when necessary, activate mechanisms such as "streets/townships blowing the whistle and departments responding," thereby introducing cross-level governance resources to alleviate the committees' challenge of "a small horse pulling a big cart."

Based on the pivotal role of Party building in guiding community governance, the practice of Neighborhood Y in Street H, City G offers valuable insights. Constructed in 1999, the neighborhood faced deteriorated infrastructure, environmental disorder, and other governance challenges after the original property management company withdrew in 2010 due to poor service. To address the governance vacuum following the company's exit, the sub-district and community Party organizations adopted a "resident self-governance" approach, systematically advancing governance restructuring under the guidance of Party building. The Party organizations first conducted household visits and resident meetings to extensively gather public opinion, identifying key issues such as sanitation, security, and parking. They then identified community leaders and facilitated the establishment of a homeowners' committee. Retired teacher Mr. M actively participated in the preparatory work leveraging his organizational experience, while Mr. P, with an engineering background, contributed professional advice. Collaboration among multiple stakeholders enabled the smooth establishment of the committee, which became the core of self-governance. In terms of institutional development, the community Party committee guided the homeowners' committee in formulating the "Homeowners' Committee Management Regulations" and "Financial Management

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Regulations," strengthening procedural standardization and financial transparency. Regular training sessions were organized to enhance members' capabilities, while deliberative mechanisms and public notification systems ensured homeowner participation. The Party organization actively encouraged residents from diverse backgrounds to engage in community affairs, facilitating a shift from passive management to proactive governance.Confronted with initial homeowner skepticism and difficulties in revitalizing resources, the committee focused on specific issues of concern to residents, adhering to the principle of "resource sharing and benefit distribution" to gradually build trust. For instance, during the elevator replacement project, the committee organized multi-stakeholder hearings, compared ten different proposals, and combined homeowner fundraising with real-time disclosure, weekly progress updates, and resident supervision. The successful replacement, with costs reasonably allocated based on floor levels, gained broad homeowner acceptance. This case demonstrates that institutional development driven by Party building, coupled with the involvement of capable individuals, can provide a sustainable pathway for the effective operation of homeowners' committees and sound community governance.

Thus, Y Community has gradually realized the protection of residents' and owners' rights and interests through systems, established a governance system led by Party building, with owners as the main body and systems as the guarantee, and achieved a transformation from "governance vacuum" to "orderly autonomy".

3.2. Party building leads credible commitment

Credible commitment and rights protection activities are the second part of Ostrom's self-governance problems, and also the second key challenge faced by the self-governance of the Owner Committee. "Credible commitment" means how to make all participants believe that others (including themselves) will continue to abide by these rules? Supervision is the foundation of credible commitment. The design of an effective supervision mechanism needs to consider the low cost of supervision, the transparency and dissemination of information. Detecting violations is only the first step. The key is whether the violation information can be quickly and accurately disseminated within the group. A transparent operating environment and an effective information transmission network are crucial. At the same time, Ostrom emphasized that effective sanctions are often "graded": the mildness and educational nature of initial sanctions. For first-time offenders or minor violations, sanctions are usually mild, such as oral warnings, social condemnation, and small fines. Its purpose is not only to punish, but also to remind and re-educate, reaffirm community norms, and give offenders the opportunity to correct their mistakes. This avoids intensifying conflicts and undermining community unity due to overly severe sanctions; the gradual escalation of sanctions: for repeat offenders or those with serious circumstances, sanctions will be gradually escalated, which may include heavy fines, suspension of resource use rights, and even expulsion from the community in the end. This graded system sends a clear signal: the community has the determination and ability to maintain the rules, and the cost of violations will increase with the severity of the behavior, thus forming a strong deterrent to potential serious violations; the enforcers of sanctions can be specialized supervisors or the collective of community members. The key is that the power to enforce sanctions must also be restricted by rules to prevent abuse, thereby ensuring the fairness and legality of sanctions and maintaining the "credibility" of commitments. In addition to external supervision and sanctions, the credibility of commitments is more profoundly rooted in the internal norms and reputation mechanisms of the community. When rules are practiced for a long time and integrated with the community's morality and fairness, they will gradually be internalized into behavioral norms that individuals consciously abide by. At this time, abiding by the rules is not

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only out of fear of punishment, but also out of inner recognition and sense of honor. This kind of commitment based on morality is the most stable.

Therefore, the Owner Committee needs to form a trusting relationship with residents and owners. The formation of estrangement will affect the work and even lead to the collapse of order. For the protection of owners' rights, it is even more necessary for the Owner Committee to establish a good relationship with residents, effectively understand their needs and problems, and serve the owners. Strengthening Party building leadership, giving play to the vanguard and exemplary role of Party members, and establishing a trusting relationship with residents can better protect rights. The General Party Branch of X Residential Area in P Town of J District took the activity of "learning ideas, strengthening work style and making new achievements" as a powerful carrier to guide Party members to temper their Party spirit, promote the coordinated efforts of the three carriages of the Community Residents' Committee, the Owner Committee and the Property Service Company, gain the trust of residents, and effectively resolve the thorny problem of property fee adjustment that plagues old communities. The two communities, Lane 3332 and Lane 3308 of Changzhong Road, under the jurisdiction of X Residential Area, are typical old public housing sold after the reform. The property fee has been kept at the standard supported by the government. With the continuous rise in costs, the property company has been losing money year after year, leading to frequent occurrence of various problems and conflicts. In 2025, led by the General Party Branch of X Residential Area, the Community Residents' Committee, the Owner Committee and the Property Service Company participated in the coordination and set up a special working group to effectively gather the strength of multiple parties. They adopted a preheating mode of "home visits + forums" to collect residents' opinions, carried out more than 300 home visits, and simultaneously established a "problem rectification list" to classify and rectify the problems. Through this "rectification while price adjustment" method, residents truly felt the warmth, laying a trust foundation for the property fee adjustment. After the property fee was raised, the General Party Branch of X Residential Area launched a series of service upgrade measures, making the community environment take on a new look and residents' lives more comfortable.

Through Party building leadership, this process not only successfully resolved the problem of property fee adjustment, but also enhanced the owners' trust in the Owner Committee and the Party organization, forming a positive cycle of "trust-cooperation-win-win".

3.3. Party building ensures mutual supervision

Mutual supervision is the guarantee of credible commitment and the foundation for the sustainability of self-governance. Community empowerment and mutual supervision are the last part of Ostrom's self-governance dilemmas. Ostrom emphasized that the supervision mechanism must be low-cost, built-in and based on reciprocity. Through organizational advantages and technological empowerment, the Party organization can build an efficient, transparent and low-cost supervision network. In the supervision mechanism, the Party organization realizes real-time supervision in the governance process through mechanisms such as "cross-appointment" (Party organization secretaries or members entering the Owner Committee) and "Red Council Hall". At the same time, it promotes the construction of a "smart community", using tools such as cameras, the Internet of Things, and community APPs to realize intelligent monitoring and management of public areas, property services, and owners' behaviors. Technical means not only reduce supervision costs, but also enhance the objectivity and fairness of supervision. Among the masses, the Party organization can establish a "Red Inspection Team", mobilizing Party members, building leaders, and enthusiastic residents to participate in daily supervision, forming a governance atmosphere of "everyone can

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supervise and everything has a response". In today's information and intelligent society, it is inevitable to empower Party building to lead the Owner Committee with science and technology. Science and technology can make supervision more transparent and fair, helping to improve the governance efficiency of the Owner Committee. Party building leadership should empower governance, strengthen the integration of science and technology into the community, and further practice the policy of serving the people, better standardize behaviors, and promote owners to supervise the Owner Committee and the Owner Committee to accept supervision. The Party Branch of P Community in F Town has actively explored a new governance model of "Party building leadership, intelligent and legal joint governance, and multi-party coordination". Through Party building leading community property governance, it has effectively solved the "persistent problems" of property governance such as small bags of garbage falling to the ground in high-rise residential areas. By installing high-definition cameras in key areas, a monitoring and prevention network has been built to capture violations in real time for precise management. Led by the secretary of the residential area Party organization, a "Red Inspection Team" has been organized, including members of the community Party branch team, backbone Party members, building leaders, and Party member volunteers. During the peak hours of garbage disposal, the method of "fixed duty + mobile inspection" is adopted to promptly correct residents' uncivilized behaviors and take the lead in participating in community environmental improvement. At the same time, a "triple education and guidance mechanism" is implemented. For residents who violate the rules for the first time, warm reminders are given by phone, WeChat, etc., giving them the opportunity to correct; for those who violate the rules for the second time, the community residents' committee and building leaders jointly conduct home visits for legal popularization and persuasion to enhance their legal awareness; for those who violate the rules for the third time, they are transferred to the urban management department for punishment, forming a closed-loop management model of "education-rectification-punishment". At the same time, Party member volunteers are organized to carry out publicity activities such as "garbage classification entering the community" to popularize garbage classification knowledge and relevant laws and regulations to residents, and jointly create a civilized and harmonious community environment.

Through Party building leadership, this model not only effectively improved the community environment, but also enhanced the owners' sense of rules and public spirit, realizing the unity of the educational function and governance function of supervision.

4. Conclusion

Hence, to further enhance the governance efficacy of the homeowners' committee in practice, attention should be paid to the following issues: On one hand, capacity building of the homeowners' committee should be strengthened. The committee should serve as an organic platform for mobilizing residents and coordinating the public, thereby improving its functions in effectively organizing residents, fostering homeowners' governance capabilities, expanding channels for service oversight, and enhancing collaborative governance. On the other hand, the integrative advantages of grassroots Party organizations should be leveraged, while establishing a relational network that organizes, coordinates, and operates with the homeowners' committee, residents' committee, and property management company as the three core entities, effectively incorporating other relevant governance bodies to form a multi-stakeholder framework [6]. If Party building leadership is effectively embedded at the grassroots level, community elites realize resource integration, and the Owner Committee and property companies cooperate with each other, then the Owner Committee can mobilize resources to achieve good owner autonomy. Based on Ostrom's self-governance theory,

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this paper systematically analyzes the mechanism of Party building leadership in the governance of the Owner Committee from three dimensions: institutional supply, credible commitment and mutual supervision. The analysis shows that through institutional construction, trust cultivation and supervision guarantee, the Party organization can realize resource integration, thereby effectively solving the "triple dilemmas" of the Owner Committee's governance and promoting the Owner Committee towards sound governance.

Combined with the empirical analysis of cases, to further deepen the Party building leadership in the governance of the Owner Committee, this paper puts forward the following suggestions:

Firstly, strengthen the legal responsibilities of Party organizations in the establishment and operation of the Owner Committee, clarify the guiding responsibilities of sub-district Party working committees and community Party organizations in the preparation, election, supervision and other links of the Owner Committee, and endow them with procedural supervision and system review rights.

Secondly, promote the integration of "Party building + Owner Committee". Encourage cross-appointment between members of the community "two committees" and the Owner Committee, establish an evaluation mechanism for the "Red Owner Committee", and incorporate Party building work into the assessment system of the Owner Committee.

Thirdly, build a digital platform of "smart Party building + community governance". Relying on the platform, promote the data sharing of Party affairs, government affairs and property services, and realize the whole process of online and transparent discussion, decision-making and supervision.

Fourthly, strengthen the capacity building of members of the Owner Committee and backbone Party members. Incorporate the training of the Owner Committee into the training system of grassroots cadres to improve their legal literacy, negotiation skills, financial management and conflict mediation capabilities.

Fifthly, improve the "graded sanctions + credit linkage" mechanism. Establish a community integrity file, link violations with personal credit and Party member evaluations, and form a restraint mechanism.

In the future, we should further deepen the theoretical research and policy innovation of the integration of Party building and the governance of the Owner Committee, so as to provide solid support for building a community governance community where "everyone has responsibilities, everyone fulfills their responsibilities, and everyone enjoys the benefits".

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