Theoretical Basis and Path Exploration of Mass Participation in Social Governance in the New Era

Xuezhong Zhou*, Xuanxuan Cheng

School of Law, Ningxia University, Yinchuan, Ningxia, 750021, China
*Corresponding author

Abstract: In the context of the new era, the participation of the masses in social governance has become an important driving force for promoting social harmony and modernization of national governance. This paper explores the necessity and importance of mass participation in social governance in the new era by analyzing the theoretical basis of mass participation, including civil society theory, collaborative governance theory, and participatory governance theory. At the same time, this paper studies the diverse paths of public participation and proposes specific measures such as improving participation mechanisms, enhancing public awareness of participation, utilizing modern technological means, and promoting cross departmental collaboration. This paper aims to explore these paths to enhance the transparency, efficiency, and credibility of social governance, and to strengthen the public's sense of participation and gain. This paper believes that establishing a sound mechanism for mass participation is the key to achieving effective governance and promoting social development, and research and practice in this field should be continuously promoted and deepened in the future.

Keywords: the new era, mass participation, social governance

1. Introduction

In the context of the new era, the complexity and diversity of social governance are increasingly prominent, and traditional governance models are gradually revealing their limitations. In the face of new challenges brought about by economic transformation, social change, and globalization, how to effectively integrate social resources and enhance governance capabilities has become a common focus of attention for governments at all levels and all sectors of society. Among them, mass participation, as an important governance method is gradually recognized as an important way to achieve modernization of social governance. The broad participation of the masses can not only enhance the democracy and transparency of governance, but also increase public recognition and satisfaction with policies, thereby promoting social harmony and stability.

In theory, the necessity of mass participation in social governance is reflected in multiple dimensions. Firstly, social governance theory emphasizes the diversification and synergy of governance, believing that a close interactive relationship should be established between the government, market, and society. Secondly, democratic theory points out that active citizen participation is a core element in achieving democratic governance, which can effectively enhance the quality and legitimacy of public decision-making. In addition, the new public management theory emphasizes that public participation can not only improve the efficiency of public services, but also enhance the trust relationship between the government and the public. Therefore, exploring the theoretical basis for the participation of the masses in social governance in the new era is of great significance for promoting innovation in social governance and enhancing governance efficiency. At the practical level, China has achieved certain results in the participation of the masses in social governance, but still faces many challenges. On the one hand, the awareness and ability of the masses to participate urgently need to be improved; On the other hand, the existing participation mechanism still appears to be inadequate, resulting in many social governance activities not fully incorporating public opinions. Therefore, exploring practical and feasible paths to promote effective participation of the masses in social governance is not only an important task of academic research, but also an urgent need in practice.

This paper aims to explore in depth the theoretical basis and path exploration of mass participation in social governance in the new era. By analyzing relevant theoretical frameworks and practical cases,

the importance of mass participation in social governance is revealed, and specific suggestions are proposed to improve the mechanism of mass participation, in order to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for promoting the modernization of social governance.

2. Theoretical basis

2.1 Social governance theory

Social governance is a comprehensive concept that encompasses the interaction between government, market, and society [1]. Its core lies in the effective management and coordination of social affairs through the joint participation of multiple stakeholders. The characteristics of social governance are mainly reflected in the following aspects: firstly, the diversity of governance subjects, no longer a single government, but including multiple participants such as market entities, social organizations, communities, and the public. Secondly, the flexibility of governance methods emphasizes the formation of a broad social consensus and cooperation mechanism through negotiation, cooperation, and co governance. Finally, the multidimensionality of governance goals not only focuses on economic benefits, but also emphasizes social equity, environmental sustainability, and public welfare.

Mass participation is an important component of social governance, aimed at encouraging and guiding the broad participation of the public in various aspects of social governance, and enhancing the democracy and effectiveness of governance. Mass participation can not only provide important grassroots opinions and suggestions for policy formulation and implementation, but also enhance the public's sense of identity and belonging to the governance process. Through participation, the public can to some extent supervise government actions, promote policy transparency and accountability, and thus promote a virtuous cycle of social governance.

2.2 Democratic theory

Democratic theory emphasizes the importance of citizen participation, believing that only when citizens actively participate in public affairs can true democratic governance be achieved [2]. Citizen participation is not only a manifestation of rights, but also an important means to promote policy transparency and improve policy quality. Through participation, citizens can express their needs and expectations, and the government can better grasp social dynamics and formulate policies that are more in line with public opinion, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of policies.

Democratic governance emphasizes the interactive relationship between the government and the people, and the participation of the masses plays a bridging role in this process. Effective public participation can enhance the transparency of government decision-making and promote citizens' trust in the government. At the same time, the public decision-making process in democratic governance needs to fully consider the opinions and interests of different groups in order to achieve fair and reasonable policies. Therefore, the participation of the masses is not only a core element of democratic governance, but also an important guarantee for promoting social fairness and justice.

2.3 New public management theory

The new public management theory advocates market mechanisms and efficiency as the guide, emphasizing the introduction of enterprise management concepts into the field of public management to improve the efficiency and quality of public services [3]. This theory emphasizes result orientation and performance management, advocating that the government should learn from the flexibility and competitiveness of market mechanisms when providing public services. At the same time, new public management also values the needs and experiences of citizens, regards the public as the main body of services, and enhances the responsiveness of public services through market-oriented means.

Under the framework of new public management, public participation is regarded as an important means to improve the efficiency of public services. By encouraging public participation, the government can better understand the needs and preferences of the people, thereby optimizing the supply of public services. At the same time, public participation can improve the transparency of policy implementation, reduce resource waste and inappropriate behavior, thereby enhancing the overall efficiency of public services. Especially in the field of social services, public participation can bring more creativity and solutions, helping the government to address complex social issues.

2.4 Social capital theory

Social capital refers to the social relationship resources formed by individuals or groups through the establishment of trust, networks, and norms [4]. This theory emphasizes that social capital is not only an important supplement to economic and human capital, but also an important driving force for promoting social development. The key characteristics of social capital include trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and social networks, which can enhance the cohesion and willingness to cooperate within the community.

The impact of social capital on public participation is mainly reflected in the following aspects: firstly, high-level social capital can enhance public awareness of participation and promote more people to actively participate in social governance. Secondly, the trust and network relationships formed by social capital can improve the efficiency of participation, reduce the costs and obstacles of participation. In addition, social capital can promote the diversification and deepening of social governance by enhancing community cohesion and mutual aid spirit, facilitating the development of various social organizations and volunteer activities.

3. Analysis of the current situation of mass participation in social governance

3.1 Current situation of mass participation at home and abroad

In recent years, the concept of mass participation in social governance has been widely spread globally and has become a common concern for governments and social organizations around the world. In foreign countries, especially in developed nations, public participation has become an important component of democratic governance [5]. For example, Nordic countries such as Sweden and Denmark actively advocate for citizen participation in policy formulation and implementation, encouraging community residents to speak out in the decision-making process. The government extensively collects public opinions and suggestions through organizing citizen hearings, community discussions, and online voting. This not only enhances the transparency and credibility of policies, but also increases residents' sense of participation and satisfaction. In the United States, many local governments have also realized the importance of public participation in improving governance effectiveness, actively utilizing social media and online platforms to create conditions for citizens to participate in key decisions such as budget allocation, community development, and environmental protection. For example, the city government of San Francisco has established the "Citizen Participation Budget" program, allowing residents to directly decide the direction of a portion of the budget. This participation model gives the public more say in policy-making and promotes a positive interaction between the government and citizens. In China, with the rapid development of the economy and society and the acceleration of urbanization, the awareness of people's participation in social governance is gradually awakening. The government encourages residents to participate through various channels, such as community autonomy, volunteer services, and policy consultation. For example, many cities have established resident councils, holding regular meetings to solicit residents' opinions on community affairs and address hot issues of concern to residents. In addition, the popularity of the Internet makes it easier for the public to express their demands and opinions through online platforms, and social media has become a new channel for participation. This transformation not only enriches the forms of public participation, but also provides a more direct way for the government to understand public opinion.

3.2 Typical case analysis

Abroad, Sweden places emphasis on extensively soliciting public opinions in policy-making. The government encourages residents to provide suggestions through forms such as citizen hearings and community forums. On some issues involving major policies, the government will organize multiple rounds of discussions to ensure that the voices of various interest groups can be fully expressed. This mechanism not only enhances the scientific and rational nature of policies, but also strengthens residents' trust in government decision-making. In many American cities, the government establishes resident participation groups during urban planning, allowing residents to directly participate in the design and implementation process of projects. For example, the Los Angeles City Government invites citizens to participate in opinion solicitation and scheme design in urban transportation planning, ensuring that transportation facilities construction meets the actual needs of residents. This participation method not only enhances residents' sense of belonging, but also improves the overall

level of urban governance. In China, Jiangsu Province actively explores the "community council" model in promoting community governance, encouraging residents to participate in community affairs decision-making together. At the meeting, residents discussed issues such as community development and environmental improvement, and put forward their own suggestions and opinions. The government adjusts service content and management methods based on residents' opinions, making community governance more in line with public opinion and enhancing residents' sense of participation and satisfaction. Beijing has achieved significant results in promoting government transparency and citizen participation. By establishing a government information disclosure platform, citizens can easily access policy documents, government meeting minutes, and budget information, and even submit feedback online. This information disclosure mechanism not only enhances the transparency of the government, but also inspires people's enthusiasm for participation and promotes interaction and communication between the government and the public [6].

3.3 Existing problems

3.3.1 Insufficient awareness of public participation

Although the trend of mass participation is gradually developing, many people still lack awareness of the necessity and importance of participating in social governance in practical operations. On the one hand, due to the lack of emphasis on participation for a long time, many people tend to view social governance as the responsibility of the government, while neglecting their own role and value. This mentality leads to public apathy and indifference towards public affairs, missing opportunities to enhance their own interests and social welfare through participation. On the other hand, the lack of effective publicity and education has led to many residents having a limited understanding of the channels, methods, and importance of participation, resulting in a negative attitude towards participation. The widespread existence of this phenomenon significantly reduces the enthusiasm and initiative of the masses to participate, thereby affecting the effectiveness and fairness of social governance.

3.3.2 Incomplete participation mechanism

At present, the mechanism for the participation of the masses in social governance still appears to be incomplete, especially in terms of channels, methods, and feedback mechanisms. On the one hand, in many regions, the participation of the masses in activities is mostly one-time or temporary, lacking sustainability and institutionalization, resulting in poor participation effects and difficulty in forming systematic feedback and improvement. On the other hand, the design of some participation mechanisms is not reasonable enough, which fails to effectively motivate and guide public participation. For example, although some places have established resident councils and consultation platforms, in actual operation, many residents feel that their opinions cannot be fully valued and adopted, resulting in a decrease in participation enthusiasm. In addition, the connection between the participation mechanism and government decision-making also needs to be strengthened. How to effectively transform the opinions of the masses into policy measures remains an important challenge facing current social governance.

3.3.3 Information asymmetry and communication barriers

In the process of social governance, information asymmetry and communication barriers are the main factors hindering effective participation of the masses. Many people lack understanding of the relevant policies, implementation processes, and impacts of social governance, making it difficult for them to provide practical and feasible suggestions and opinions. At the same time, the government also has shortcomings in information dissemination and communication, leading to misunderstandings or resistance from the public towards policies. In addition, the singularity of communication channels makes it difficult for some social groups (especially vulnerable groups) to express their demands, forming an "information island" of participation. This information asymmetry not only affects the effective implementation of policies, but also weakens people's confidence in participation, which affects the effectiveness of social governance.

In short, although the participation of the masses in social governance has made certain progress in recent years, it still faces many challenges in terms of awareness, mechanisms, and information communication. In order to better promote public participation, enhance the efficiency and fairness of social governance, all parties need to work together to establish a more comprehensive participation mechanism and communication platform, and stimulate the enthusiasm lf the public to participate. The government should increase its publicity and education efforts on public participation, raise public

awareness of participation, build a good communication environment, and enable every citizen to become an important participant and promoter of social governance.

4. Exploring the path of mass participation in social governance

4.1 Improve the participation mechanism

To achieve effective participation of the masses in social governance, it is necessary to establish a sound and scientific participation mechanism. This mechanism should not only cover multi-level and multi-channel participation methods, but also ensure the continuity and effectiveness of participation.

Firstly, local governments should establish specialized platforms for public participation, such as "community councils" or "resident representative assemblies," to regularly convene meetings to discuss community affairs and public policies. This can involve residents in the early stages of policy formulation, thereby enhancing the transparency and credibility of the policy. In addition, the government should clarify different levels of participation methods, such as symposiums, hearings, online questionnaires, and other forms, to meet the participation needs of different groups of the public and ensure that the voices of various groups can be heard. Secondly, the government should establish a feedback mechanism to organize and respond to the suggestions and opinions raised by the public, forming a closed loop of "suggestions feedback improvement". This can not only enhance public participation, but also improve the transparency and credibility of government work. Meanwhile, by summarizing and evaluating the effectiveness of participating in activities, data support and practical basis can be provided for subsequent improvements.

4.2 Enhancing participation awareness

Enhancing public awareness of participation is the foundation for strengthening public participation in social governance. Firstly, the government should increase its publicity efforts through various channels to popularize the importance and necessity of participation to the public, so that they realize their role in social governance. Various forms such as community activities, brochures, and social media can be used to promote successful cases of citizen participation and stimulate public enthusiasm for participation. Secondly, targeted training and publicity activities should be carried out in grassroots units such as schools and communities to cultivate the public's ability to participate. By organizing lectures, symposiums, and other activities, we aim to popularize practical knowledge to residents on how to participate in social governance, how to effectively express their opinions, and enhance their participation literacy. In addition, by organizing volunteer services and community practices, residents can be encouraged to actively participate in social governance and create a good social atmosphere.

4.3 Utilizing modern technology

The rapid development of modern technology has provided new opportunities for people to participate in social governance. The government can use big data, artificial intelligence, the Internet and other technical means to establish an information sharing and interactive platform for the public to access policy information and feedback. For example, by building a government information disclosure platform and an online questionnaire survey system, the public can easily access policy information and participate in opinion collection. At the same time, the government can use social media to interact with the public in real-time, collect public opinion, and respond to public concerns in a timely manner. This approach not only improves policy transparency, but also enhances public participation and satisfaction. In addition, data analysis techniques can be used to analyze the collected public opinions, extract common problems and needs, and provide data support for government decision-making. This technology-based participation model can enhance the scientific and effective nature of social governance, and promote positive interaction between the government and the public.

4.4 Promote cross departmental collaboration

In social governance, promoting cross departmental collaboration is an important way to achieve effective governance. Government departments should establish a linkage mechanism, form a joint force, and jointly promote public participation. Firstly, each department should clarify their respective responsibilities, form a working force, ensure coordination and cooperation in social governance, and avoid resource waste and policy conflicts. For example, in urban governance, multiple departments

such as community, environment, and transportation can jointly carry out themed activities to encourage public participation in specific affairs such as environmental protection and traffic management. During the event, various departments can jointly collect public opinions, form targeted solutions, and achieve efficient allocation of resources. In addition, the government should encourage cooperation with social organizations, non-profit organizations, etc., leveraging their advantages in grassroots governance to promote public participation. By collaborating with social organizations, the government can gain a deeper understanding of the needs of the people and enhance the targeting and effectiveness of policies. Meanwhile, social organizations can also play their role in mobilizing and organizing public participation, promoting broader social engagement.

5. Conclusion

In the context of the new era, the participation of the masses in social governance is not only an important way to promote harmonious social development, but also an inevitable requirement for achieving modernization of national governance. Through the study of the theoretical basis and path exploration of mass participation in social governance, the following conclusions can be drawn: Firstly, the theoretical foundation of mass participation in social governance is profound, covering theories such as civil society, collaborative governance, and participatory governance. These theories provide rich ideological resources and practical guidance for mass participation, emphasizing the subject status and initiative of citizens in the governance process, and advocating for the scientific and democratic implementation of governance through diverse participation. Secondly, social governance in the new era faces complex challenges, and a single governance model can no longer meet the diverse social needs. Therefore, exploring diverse paths for public participation is particularly important. This includes measures such as improving participation mechanisms, enhancing public awareness of participation, utilizing modern technology, and promoting cross departmental collaboration. These paths not only help improve the transparency and efficiency of governance, but also enhance social cohesion and centripetal force. Finally, the effectiveness of public participation in social governance is not only reflected in policy formulation and implementation, but also in enhancing government credibility and public satisfaction. Through effective participation mechanisms, the voices of the public can be better heard and respected, thereby promoting the scientific and humane implementation of policies. In the future, the government should further strengthen its emphasis on public participation, establish long-term mechanisms, encourage and guide the public to actively participate in social governance, and contribute to the realization of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and promoting the modernization of national governance.

Therefore, this study believes that the participation of the masses in social governance in the new era is a systematic and complex issue that requires in-depth exploration and research from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Only through continuous innovation and improvement of the ways in which the masses participate can the effectiveness and sustainability of social governance be truly achieved, laying a solid foundation for building a harmonious and beautiful society.

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