Research on International Experience and Local Adaptation of Public Affairs Standardization in Urban Governance

Xingguo Jiang*

Hong Kong Association for Promoting the Integration of Emerging Technologies,Hong Kong,China, 999077

Author's email:Xingguo Jiang,kfbcqp@163.com

*Corresponding to: Xingguo Jiang, Hong Kong Association for Promoting the Integration of Emerging Technologies, Hong Kong,China, 999077,kfbcqp@163.com

Abstract

Against the backdrop of accelerating global urbanization, urban governance faces multiple pressures, including dense populations, resource constraints, and diverse public service demands. Managing public affairs efficiently, equitably, and sustainably has become a core issue for governments worldwide. In recent years, public affairs standardization has emerged as a crucial tool for enhancing urban governance. By establishing unified technical specifications, service processes, and management guidelines, standardization helps reduce administrative costs, improve service consistency, and enhance public trust in government. However, standardization is not a one-size-fits-all governance model. Significant differences in political systems, administrative cultures, and social structures exist across countries, leading to diverse standardization practices in different contexts. Therefore, while drawing on international experience, it is crucial to prioritize local adaptation to avoid incompatibility. This article aims to analyze the public affairs standardization practices of representative international cities, identify valuable lessons, and explore their applicability and optimization paths in urban governance in China.

Keywords: urban governance; public affairs; standardization; international experience; local adaptation

Competing Interests:

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1.Introduction

As my country's urbanization enters a stage of high-quality development, densely populated, multifunctional cities are placing demands on refined public affairs governance. Public affairs standardization, a crucial tool for improving governance effectiveness, can effectively address challenges such as fragmented governance and delayed response by clarifying process specifications, boundaries of authority and responsibilities, and evaluation criteria. However, urban public affairs standardization in my country is still in its exploratory stages, plagued by issues such as an inconsistent standards system and insufficient implementation flexibility. In contrast, countries like Europe, the United States, Japan, and South Korea have developed distinctive standardization models through long-term practice. This article, by reviewing international experience and integrating it with the local characteristics of urban governance in my country, explores adaptive paths for public affairs standardization, providing a reference for improving the level of modern urban governance.

2. The connotation and significance of public affairs standardization

Standardization of public affairs is the core institutional design for improving efficiency and regulating behavior in the modern urban governance system. Its essence is to incorporate multiple governance scenarios such as public service provision, daily urban management, and emergency response into a unified standard framework through systematic rule construction, thereby achieving a fundamental shift in governance logic from "relying on experience" to "following rules." Specifically, this system includes three interconnected dimensions: at the technical level, it establishes unified standards in areas such as public facility construction, data collection and analysis. For example, community elderly care service centers must not only specify hardware parameters such as the height of elderly-friendly handrails and the friction coefficient of anti-slip floors, but also unify the collection indicators and formats of elderly health data to ensure that data from different institutions can be compared and shared; at the service level, it defines the supply process and quality bottom line of public services. For example, the "one-time visit at most" standard of the government service hall not only clarifies the handling procedures and the list of required materials for various matters, but also details the service terms used by staff, the first-question responsibility system and other details, so that the public can get a consistent service experience in different areas and

different windows; at the management level, it clarifies the boundaries of rights and responsibilities and the linkage mechanism of cross-departmental collaboration. For example, in responding to public health emergencies, the standards will clarify the case screening time limit of the health and medical department, the flow investigation and coordination process of the public security department, the control and implementation requirements of the community, and even detail the time limit and method of information transmission to avoid overlapping or gaps in responsibilities [1] .

From the perspective of practical value, the role of public affairs standardization is reflected in many aspects: through the standardized design of processes, it can reduce the execution deviation caused by excessive "discretion" of grassroots staff. For example, unified guidelines for the categories of garbage to be put out and the frequency of collection and transportation can avoid the confusion of "some strict and some loose" due to different understandings in different communities; with the help of the rigid constraints of service standards, the balance of public services among regions is guaranteed. Even in remote townships, the curriculum setting and teacher allocation of compulsory education can refer to unified standards, so that rural children can enjoy the same educational resources as urban children; transparent operating procedures provide a basis for public supervision. When every link and every requirement of government services are clearly disclosed, the public can not only know the way to do things, but also be held accountable for violations, forcing government departments to perform their duties in a standardized manner; more importantly, unified standards build a "common language" for cross-departmental collaboration. For example, the risk level classification standards shared by various departments in emergency management enable fire protection, civil affairs, transportation and other departments to quickly reach consensus and efficiently work together in emergencies, fundamentally solving the problem of inefficient collaboration caused by "information islands".

3.International Experience in Standardization of Urban Public Affairs

3.1 European and American countries: rule of law and diversified collaboration

The standardization of urban public affairs in European and American countries is based on the rule of law, forming a mature model of "government guidance and deep participation

of multiple subjects". The core of this model is to clarify the authority and implementation path of standards through legal systems [2] .

① The United States has incorporated public service standards into the legal system, using the Government Performance and Results Act as a guiding principle to achieve a deep integration of standards with the administrative system. New York City's 311 non-emergency hotline, for example, offers a model for the implementation of legal standards. The law explicitly mandates that the hotline cover over 2,000 public issues, ranging from broken manhole covers to community noise nuisances. Each category has a corresponding response standard—for example, housing repair complaints must be dispatched within one hour, with repair personnel dispatched within 24 hours; stray animal rescues must be handled by animal control within four hours. Crucially, the effectiveness of standard implementation is directly tied to administrative resources: Municipal departments' annual budget allocations and official performance evaluations are based on hotline response rates and citizen satisfaction as core indicators. Departments that fail to meet standards for three consecutive months face budget cuts and public accountability. This "legal empowerment + interest-based integration" model ensures the enforcement of standards throughout the governance process, resulting in a consistent problem resolution rate of over 85% for New York City's 311 hotline.

Germany focuses on "precisely matching technical standards with governance needs." Led by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, it collaborates with industry associations and social organizations to develop standards, balancing professionalism and social adaptability. The Federal Ministry of the Interior is responsible for establishing the top-level framework for public service standards, while detailed regulations are developed jointly by industry associations, social organizations, and resident representatives, ensuring that the standards are both professional and rigorous while also being relevant to people's livelihoods. Berlin's standardized waste sorting system is highly representative: the standards not only detail operational details such as "glass products must be sorted by color" and "kitchen waste must be packaged in biodegradable bags," but also clearly define the boundaries of responsibility through a "three-party list of rights and responsibilities": communities are responsible for maintaining sorting facilities and promoting awareness and guidance, businesses are responsible for classified transportation and recycling, and residents are required to complete

source sorting in accordance with regulations. To ensure compliance, supporting mechanisms combine rigid constraints with flexible incentives: illegal dumping is fined €50 to €500, and households that meet sorting standards for three consecutive months can redeem public transportation discount vouchers or community service points. This "fine-grained standards + diversified incentives" model has enabled Berlin's garbage classification accuracy rate to remain stable at 92% for a long time, with a public recognition rate of 89%, fully demonstrating the standard's inclusiveness of the interests of different groups.

3.2 Japan and South Korea: Refined Orientation and Technological Empowerment

As models of high-density urban governance, Japan and South Korea have formed a unique path in the standardization of public affairs with "fine-tuning orientation" as the core and "technological empowerment" as the support. Their experience is particularly suitable for urban governance scenarios with dense populations and limited space.

① Japan's public affairs standardization has always been closely aligned with regional adaptability. Leveraging the local legislative power granted by the Local Autonomy Act, it has established a flexible system of "national standards + local regulations," ensuring that standards address both common needs and local variations. Tokyo's disaster prevention and emergency response standardization system, for example, is remarkably sophisticated. First, disasters like earthquakes and typhoons are categorized into five levels of destructive power, each with its own corresponding response criteria. A magnitude 3 earthquake requires all community shelters to be opened within 15 minutes, while a magnitude 4 or higher automatically triggers a coordinated cross-departmental response plan involving fire, medical, and the Self-Defense Forces. Second, the standards are implemented even further down to the "neighborhood associations" (community self-governing organizations). Each neighborhood association is required to develop a customized disaster prevention manual based on its jurisdiction's characteristics, such as the proportion of the elderly population and building density. This manual specifies evacuation routes and emergency supply inventory for each household. To improve implementation efficiency, Tokyo has developed a "community disaster prevention app" that delivers standardized guidance in real time. For example, after an earthquake, the app automatically displays the nearest shelter's availability and supply

status based on the user's location, improving emergency response efficiency by 40% compared to traditional methods. This "national framework + grassroots refinement + technical assistance" model not only ensures the uniformity of standards, but also takes into account the complexity of governance scenarios.

② South Korea, with "digital-driven standardization" at its core, uses technology to transform abstract standards into actionable processes, achieving a leap in governance effectiveness. Seoul's "Smart Municipal Platform" embodies this concept. The platform integrates standardized modules across the entire public affairs process, transforming standards from "paper regulations" into "system-automated rules." For example, regarding the management of street-side business, the platform uses digital maps to delineate "permitted, restricted, and prohibited business zones" and incorporates a standardized application approval process. Merchants submit their online applications for operating hours and areas, and the system automatically compares them to the regional functional planning standards. Eligible applications are immediately approved, while non-compliant applications trigger alerts and receive corrective action recommendations. Furthermore, the platform is linked in real time to the urban management law enforcement terminal, allowing law enforcement officers to access merchant compliance information on their mobile devices, avoiding duplicate inspections and enforcement conflicts. This "standardized codification and digitized process" model has not only reduced complaints about street-side business by 65% but also reduced administrative costs by 30%. In addition, Seoul also widely uses digital technology in public transportation, garbage sorting and other fields. For example, the real-time arrival information system at bus stops is based on the use of standardized data interfaces to achieve real-time synchronization of information between transportation departments, operating companies and passengers, allowing standards to be integrated into citizens' lives in the form of "seamless services."

4.Local Characteristics and Adaptation Challenges of Urban Public Affairs Standardization in China

4.1 Characteristics of local governance

my country's urban public affairs governance presents distinct local characteristics. First, it is reflected in the coordinated coexistence of multiple governance subjects. Urban

governance not only involves the overall coordination of government departments at all levels, but also covers the grassroots implementation of community committees, the service supply of enterprises, and the public welfare participation of social organizations. For example, in community elderly care services, the civil affairs department is responsible for policy formulation, the community committee coordinates site resources, the elderly care enterprises provide professional services, and public welfare organizations carry out volunteer services. This collaborative model of multiple subjects requires standardization to ensure the efficiency of administrative-led coordination and reserve space for participation of social forces to avoid excessive rigidity. Secondly, there are significant differences in regional development. There is a huge gap between first-tier cities and third- and fourth-tier cities in terms of population density, economic level, and resource endowment. For example, Shanghai's community governance needs to deal with a population density of more than 10,000 people per square kilometer, and its standardization focuses on The focus of the standardization of public affairs is on refined services and intelligent management, while the prefecture-level cities in the central and western regions may focus more on the standardized coverage of basic public facilities, such as the equipment configuration standards of township health centers. This difference makes it necessary to avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach to the standardization of public affairs, and to reserve space for local adjustments based on local conditions. At the same time, the accelerated advancement of digital transformation has provided important technical support for standardization. The popularization of government cloud and big data platforms in the construction of "digital government" has made it possible to share cross-departmental data such as social security and medical insurance. For example, Hangzhou has achieved standardized dynamic adjustment of traffic signal timing through the "city brain", but the data barriers between departments have not been completely broken. For example, the format differences between real estate registration data and tax systems still require manual verification. Such problems still restrict the implementation of standardization to a certain extent. These characteristics together constitute the unique background of China's urban public affairs standardization [3].

4.2 Adaptation Challenges

The first is the fragmentation of the standard system. This problem stems from the

“independent” formulation of departmental standards. In the same governance field, due to different formulation bodies, there are often conflicts in definitions and fragmented indicators. Taking community elderly care as an example, the civil affairs department focuses on hardware indicators such as “number of beds”, the health and medical department focuses on medical requirements such as “health record establishment rate”, and the human resources and social security department takes “service time” as the core of subsidies. As a result, elderly care institutions need to meet multiple sets of standards at the same time, increasing operating costs and causing waste of resources. Cross-departmental data is also difficult to communicate due to incompatible indicators, which seriously restricts collaborative efficiency [4].

The second is the lack of flexibility in implementation. Some public affairs standards are divorced from the actual situation at the grassroots level due to excessive pursuit of "uniformity" and lack adaptability to complex governance scenarios. Some places simply copied the experience of advanced cities in the formulation of standards, ignoring key variables such as regional differences and population structure, resulting in a large deviation between the implementation effect and the expected effect. For example, a central provincial capital city copied Beijing's garbage classification standards, requiring residents to "break bags" and use designated colored garbage bins, but did not take into account the "multi-family sharing and small space" living characteristics of urban villages - tenants sharing kitchens lead to unclear classification responsibilities, and narrow alleys are difficult to accommodate multiple types of garbage bins. In the end, residents can only mix garbage, and the standard implementation rate is less than 30% [5] . Similar problems are common in grassroots governance: for example, rural areas copied the city's "community discussion hall" standards, requiring village committees to set up fixed venues and electronic voting systems, but many villages have difficulty implementing them due to population outflow and insufficient funds. The standards have become "wall systems", which have increased the burden on the grassroots.

Third, public participation is weak. Standard-setting is often led by government departments, and the opinions of businesses and residents often remain at the level of "symbolic solicitation," lacking a substantive participation mechanism. For example, when a

new first-tier city formulated shared bicycle parking standards, the draft was only posted on the government website for seven days, and no public hearings were held with cyclists, businesses, or community residents. The final "no-parking zones" designated by the standard included numerous office building entrances and bus stops. While this reduced road occupation, it caused inconvenience for office workers on the "last mile" of travel, sparking public controversy and forcing an emergency revision one month after implementation. More critically, there was a lack of a feedback mechanism after the standards were implemented. For example, in the community property service standards, such as the "frequency of greenery maintenance" and "time limit for repair of public facilities," residents had difficulty submitting modification suggestions through convenient channels, resulting in the long-term rigidity of the standards and their inability to respond to changes in people's livelihood demands.

5. Local Adaptation of International Experience

5.1 Establishing a standard system for “layered classification”

To build a "layered and classified" standard system, we need to learn from the "inclusiveness" of German standards and the flexible experience of "local adaptation" of Japan, and establish a hierarchical framework of "national benchmark + local supplement", which can ensure the uniformity of core standards while leaving room for differentiation for local areas. At the national level, we should focus on the basic and general areas of public affairs, and formulate bottom-line standards covering the basic process of emergency response, the definition of core terms of public services, and the general caliber of data statistics. For example, we should unify the evaluation dimensions and calculation methods of "public service satisfaction", standardize the response time limit and linkage rules of various departments in major emergencies, and provide a "common language" for cross-regional and cross-departmental collaboration [6] . At the local level, we need to combine local characteristics such as population structure, industrial characteristics, and geographical environment, and refine the standard content within the scope of the national benchmark. For example, Shenzhen, as a highland of scientific and technological innovation, can focus on formulating special standards in the fields of "smart community construction" and "science and technology enterprise services". Xi'an, as a historical and cultural city, can strengthen

special standards such as "historical and cultural block business management" and "traditional building repair technology" based on the national cultural relics protection standards. Through this hierarchical classification model, an organic balance between "bottom line unification" and "characteristic development" can be achieved, avoiding the extreme problems of "one-size-fits-all" or "fragmentation" of standards.

5.2 Promote the integration of “technology empowerment + process optimization”

Drawing on South Korea's advanced experience in digital governance, we should focus on promoting the deep integration of "technology empowerment" and "process optimization," using scientific and technological means to solve the problems of difficult standard implementation and implementation, and improve the level of refined and intelligent urban governance. This can be achieved in the following two aspects:

(1) Constructing a “standard database” for urban public affairs

Integrate the standards and specifications of various functional departments in the fields of urban management, public services, environmental governance, etc., and build a unified "urban public affairs standard database". Through unified data interfaces and format standards, realize cross-departmental and cross-level data interoperability and sharing. On this basis, promote the construction of a closed-loop linkage mechanism of "standards-data-assessment". For example, embed the classification standards and disposal requirements of garbage classification into the smart sanitation system, collect community disposal data in real time, automatically compare the implementation status, and directly incorporate the results into the performance assessment system of grassroots units to improve the rigidity and transparency of standard implementation [7] .

(2) Develop “standard implementation assistance tools” to empower grassroots governance

In order to address the problems of inconsistent standards among grassroots staff and cumbersome implementation processes, a lightweight and easy-to-use "standard implementation assistance tool" [8] was developed. For example, a standardized workflow guidance module was embedded in the community governance app, which guided community workers to carry out their daily work in accordance with the standards through flowcharts,

checklists, smart reminders, etc. At the same time, combined with AI recognition, voice input and other technologies, the automated processing of problem reporting, rectification feedback, and data archiving was achieved, significantly reducing the burden on the grassroots and improving work efficiency and standardization.

5.3 Improve the “multi-participation” standard-setting mechanism

Improve the "multi-party participation" standard-setting mechanism, fully absorb the experience of the American public in deeply participating in the design of public affairs standards, break the traditional model of "government-led and society passively accepting", and build a collaborative formulation system covering multiple parties such as residents, enterprises, and industry organizations, so that standards are more in line with actual governance needs [9] .

First, establish a regular "standard hearing" system, focusing on areas closely related to people's livelihoods, such as elderly care, education, and healthcare, and invite stakeholders to directly participate in decision-making at key stages such as standard establishment and revision. For example, when revising community elderly care service standards, a hearing committee can be formed by randomly selecting elderly resident representatives, elderly care institution leaders, and community workers to discuss details such as the "frequency of meal assistance services" and "home care programs." Elderly residents can request "increased evening bathing assistance services," and institutions can provide feedback on "feasible frequencies under manpower constraints." Ultimately, a standard solution that balances the interests of all parties can be formed through negotiation, avoiding the risk of standards being divorced from reality due to closed-door development.

Second , give full play to the professional advantages of industry associations and social organizations, encourage them to take the lead or participate in the formulation of standards in specific areas, and improve the professionalism and implementation of standards. Industry organizations are rooted in grassroots practice and have a more intuitive understanding of the complexity and diversity of governance scenarios. Standards formulated by them are often more operational. For example, the formulation of community parking management standards can be led by the property association. The association will formulate detailed clauses such as "time-sharing parking" and "temporary parking guidelines for visitors" by investigating the

parking space ratio, travel habits, and surrounding traffic conditions of different communities. It takes into account the reality of "parking space shortage" in old communities and the needs of "intelligent management" in new communities. Compared with the standards formulated by the government alone, it is easier to obtain the recognition of owners and property management [10] . In addition, a "public consultation platform for draft standards" can be established to collect opinions on areas of high public concern such as garbage classification and shared bicycle management through online questionnaires, community discussions, etc., so that the standard formulation process becomes a process of building consensus and resolving contradictions, thereby improving the public's recognition of the standards and their willingness to implement them from the source.

5.4 Establishing a “dynamic adjustment” optimization mechanism

Drawing on the practical wisdom of Tokyo's "flexible standards", we will break the inertia of public affairs standards being "once established, solidified for a long time" and build a closed-loop system of "evaluation-feedback-optimization" to ensure that standards are always iterated in sync with governance needs.

First, a scientific "standard adaptability indicator system" should be established, and core dimensions such as public satisfaction, implementation costs, and problem-solving rates should be incorporated into the evaluation framework. A systematic evaluation should be conducted every two years. For example, in the evaluation of community property service standards, questionnaires should be conducted to survey residents' satisfaction with "greening maintenance and facility repairs." The human and material costs of implementing the standards by property companies should also be calculated. At the same time, the "percentage of complaints not covered by the standards" should be counted to comprehensively judge whether the standards have problems such as "overly high requirements leading to uncontrolled costs" or "ambiguous indicators leading to implementation loopholes." The evaluation results should serve as a rigid basis for the revision of standards. For example, if a certain place finds that the requirement of "daily collection and transportation of kitchen waste" in the garbage classification standard easily leads to an increase in the vacancy rate of garbage collection vehicles in winter, the frequency will be adjusted to "daily in summer and every other day in winter" based on actual conditions, which will reduce costs while ensuring

effectiveness.

Second, local governments should be given appropriate authority to fine-tune standards, allowing them to refine details based on their local characteristics and governance scenarios, without exceeding the national baseline. For example, remote communities with low population density and inconvenient transportation could apply to relax the national "garbage collection and transportation frequency" standard to "twice a week," supplemented by a supplementary plan for "resident-appointed door-to-door collection and transportation." Rural areas could also consider adapting the "public toilet construction standards" from "flush" to "three-chamber septic tanks with regular collection and transportation," aligning with local living habits. This approach, combining "rigid benchmarks with flexible fine-tuning," not only prevents standards from becoming overly rigid and out of touch with reality, but also provides practical experience for national standard revisions through grassroots exploration. For example, a mountainous county's innovative "small-class teaching facilities" solution in the compulsory education school construction standards was evaluated and incorporated into the provincial standard supplement, achieving a virtuous interaction between "grassroots innovation" and "top-level optimization."

6.Conclusion

In summary, promoting the standardization of urban public affairs is a complex and long-term systematic project. Its core lies not in simply copying international experience but in deeply integrating institutions and practices based on my country's diverse governance landscape, regional development disparities, and digital transformation, among other local characteristics. The rule of law in Europe and the United States, as well as the refinement and digitalization efforts of Japan and South Korea, offer valuable insights for reference. However, these experiences still need to be tested and continuously adapted in specific governance contexts. The hierarchical classification system, technological empowerment pathway, multi-faceted participation mechanism, and dynamic adjustment plan proposed in this article provide only a preliminary framework for exploring adaptable approaches. Their effectiveness requires further validation in practice across a wider range of cities. In the future, as urban governance continues to evolve, public affairs standardization may face new challenges and propositions. This requires both in-depth theoretical research by academia and continuous empirical analysis and iterative optimization by practitioners.

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