The Feasibility Mechanism of the Property City Model: A Multi-Case Analysis under the Guidance of Empowerment Theory

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Abstract: *With the acceleration of urbanization, traditional urban governance models encounter challenges such as fragmentation, inefficiency, and insufficient participation. The property city model emerges as a potential solution to these issues. Utilizing empowerment theory, this study conducts a comparative multi-case analysis to thoroughly investigate the feasible implementation mechanisms and inherent logic of the property city model. The research reveals that the feasibility of various property city models is rooted in the cross-empowerment among three principal actors: government, enterprises, and citizens. The government provides structural empowerment through institutional supply and functional integration, addressing the fragmentation inherent in traditional governance. Enterprises facilitate resource empowerment through technological innovation and process reengineering, thereby overcoming inefficiencies in conventional urban governance. Citizens promote collaborative empowerment by articulating their needs and exercising their rights, thus addressing the lack of participation in urban governance. The fundamental mechanism underpinning the feasibility of the property city model is the functional complementarity resulting from the empowerment processes of these three parties: the hierarchical authority of the government ensures the legitimacy of governance direction; the market efficiency of enterprises imparts flexibility to governance methods; the social vitality of citizens ensures the accuracy of governance response. Through this functional complementarity, these three actors achieve governance effectiveness that surpasses that of any single groups. The research confirms that the property city model provides a feasible path for solving the problems of traditional urban governance and promoting governance modernization, and has important reference significance for building a governance pattern of co construction, co governance and sharing.*

Keywords: *Property City, Structural Empowerment, Resource Empowerment, Collaborative Empowerment*

1. Introduction

The modernization of urban governance systems and capacities is integral to the broader modernization of national governance systems and capacities. As urbanization progresses rapidly, cities are expanding in scale, and population density is increasing, presenting traditional urban governance models with unprecedentedly complex situations and formidable challenges. There is an urgent need to innovate governance models to enhance the effectiveness of urban governance. In this context, the property management city model has emerged. This model involves the introduction of market mechanisms into urban governance processes, facilitating comprehensive management, service, and operation of urban public spaces, resources, and projects. Its objective is to employ market mechanisms and introduce professional expertise to achieve more specialized, refined, and intelligent urban governance, effectively addressing key challenges and pain points in city management, while improving the overall quality of the city and residents' quality of life.

The property management city model, as an innovative governance framework, has significantly enhanced urban governance, thereby garnering substantial academic interest. In theoretical discourse, scholars have examined this model from diverse perspectives. From an integrated governance standpoint, some scholars argue that the property management city model consolidates fragmented areas into cohesive geographical entities, offering a comprehensive regional strategy for urban renewal[1]. Others, drawing on smart government theory, assert that under the aegis of a smart government focused on integrated and collaborative governance, the property management city model facilitates a well-ordered environment where governments, citizens, social organizations, and various stakeholders collaborate

effectively in precise urban governance[2]. Additionally, scholars analyzing best practices in urban services propose that spatial integration, element integration, and technical standardization constitute the three essential components of the property management city model, with their interaction collectively advancing the integration of urban service governance[3]. On the practical research front, numerous Chinese cities have actively implemented the property management city model, yielding notable outcomes. In Futian District, Shenzhen, guided by the holistic governance concept, the district engaged property service enterprises to coordinate public space management, achieving intelligent and refined urban management through a unified online platform[4]. In Jianghan District, Wuhan, the district is managed as a "large or small compound" by property companies, facilitating a shift from administrative to market-based and from traditional to intelligent management[5]. Despite the model's impressive results, it faces several challenges. In some instances, the model's reliance on outsourcing services through labor contracts, coupled with workforce restructuring and fiscal constraints, raises concerns about sustainability and the objective evaluation of service outcomes[6]. Furthermore, scholars have highlighted potential issues of monopoly risk in the public service sector and challenges in restructuring interest relationships within this model[7].

Although existing research has provided a relatively comprehensive analysis of the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of the property management city model, certain limitations persist. There is a paucity of theoretical perspectives on the model, necessitating deeper exploration of feasible implementation mechanisms and inherent logic. Moreover, most studies focus on single-case analyses, lacking comparative research across multiple cities. In response, this paper employs empowerment theory to analyze multiple cases of the property management city model, comparing feasible implementation mechanisms across different cities and exploring their common operational mechanisms.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Analytical Framework

2.1 Empowerment Theory

The concept of empowerment, originating in psychology, pertains to the process by which an agent confers power or capability upon another, thereby enhancing the latter's capacity for participation and self-efficacy. Empowerment theory encompasses three principal dimensions: structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and resource empowerment[8]. Structural empowerment involves the enhancement of institutions, rules, and organizational structures to allocate power to those previously disenfranchised, thereby facilitating institutional and opportunity empowerment, enabling the powerless to achieve predetermined objectives[9]. Psychological empowerment affects individuals' cognition, values, and emotions, fostering their initiative and self-efficacy, and transitioning them from passive implementation to active creation[10]. This dimension includes self-efficacy empowerment[11], individual psychological authorization[12], and team psychological empowerment , among others. Resource empowerment pertains to the capacity to acquire, control, and manage resources, including the ability to obtain, integrate, and deploy resources, encompassing technology empowerment[13], information empowerment[14], and more. Existing research on empowerment predominantly focuses on the unidirectional transfer of power from a single agent to the recipient or the enhancement of a single dimension of the recipient's abilities. However, within the governance practice of the "property city" model, empowerment is characterized by multi-agent cross-empowerment and synergistic interaction among various elements. Government, enterprises, and citizens—the three primary actors in governance—function as both empowerers and empowered entities. Their reciprocal empowerment actions facilitate the transformation of governance models from hierarchical bureaucracy to collaborative co-governance.

2.2 Analytical Framework

In the implementation of the "property city" model, the government, enterprises, and citizens engage in mutual empowerment to establish an empowerment chain and a collaborative governance system. Initially, the government employs systematic institutional design to achieve structural empowerment of both enterprises and citizens. For enterprises, the government reconstructs governance rules through policy instruments such as joint ventures and open bidding, allocating operational rights to urban public spaces and public resources via market mechanisms. This approach provides market entities with institutional legitimacy and resources for participation in governance, thereby achieving structural empowerment of enterprises. For citizens, the government prioritizes citizen satisfaction as a core

performance metric, integrating concerns such as environmental sanitation and community safety into governance objectives. This embeds citizen satisfaction into enterprise service evaluations and government departmental assessments, thereby transforming citizens from passive recipients to active participants in governance. Subsequently, enterprises, leveraging IoT, big data, and other technological advantages, establish digital hubs for urban governance, thereby realizing resource empowerment for both government and citizens. On one hand, they supply the government with real-time data collection and decision support, collectively promoting precise public service delivery. On the other hand, they enhance citizens' capacity for participation through mobile applications, promptly responding to citizen needs and optimizing service provision. Finally, with support from technological platforms, citizens engage in urban governance through methods such as problem reporting and evaluation of governance outcomes, achieving information feedback and oversight. This process transforms governance demands into motivation for improvement by government and enterprises, while also enhancing citizens' sense of self-efficacy and encouraging their active involvement in urban governance—thus achieving both internal psychological empowerment and external collaborative empowerment. The empowerment pathways of the three primary actors intertwine, facilitating the transition from government-led to multi-stakeholder collaborative governance and enhancing overall governance effectiveness.
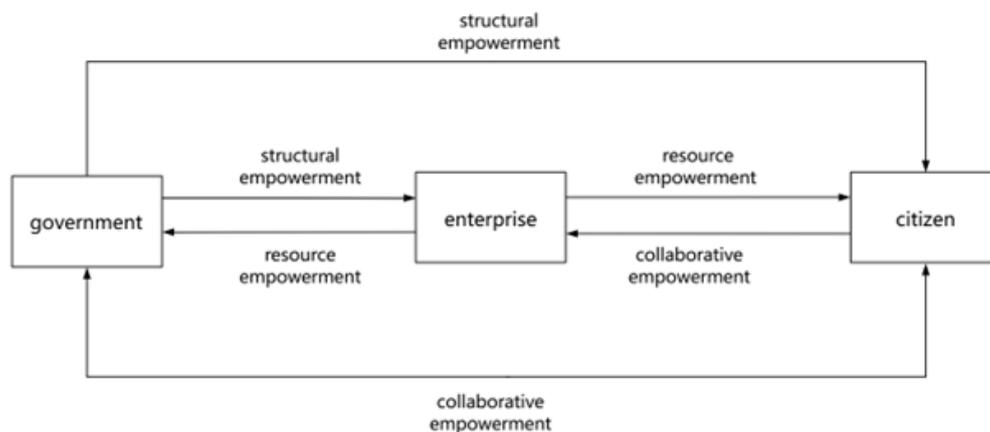

Figure.1. Analysis framework of property city model from the perspective of empowerment

Based on the aforementioned analysis, this paper constructs an analytical framework for the property city model from the perspective of empowerment (see Figure 1). This framework is advanced by different empowerment agents, forming an empowerment chain within the property city model—namely, government structural empowerment, enterprise resource empowerment, and citizen collaborative empowerment. The framework aims to analyze how this model, through multi-agent cross-empowerment, establishes a governance community and achieves effective urban governance.

3. Research Methods and Current Situation Analysis

3.1 Selection and Processing of Case Texts in the Property City Model

This study employs the qualitative analysis software Nvivo11 to systematically code and analyze texts from representative cases, with the aim of investigating the operational mechanisms of property-based urban governance practices. Through coding clustering and node analysis of policy documents, news reports, and other relevant materials, the research seeks to preliminarily delineate the fundamental characteristics of the property-based urban model. This will establish a foundation for subsequent in-depth theoretical validation and mechanism analysis.

All case samples were sourced from the official government websites of regions implementing the property city governance model, as well as from news reports by local media with significant social influence. Using keywords such as "property city," "large property," and "integration," searches were conducted on government and news media websites, resulting in a total of 42 cases and 258 related news texts collected. Of these, 221 texts were deemed valid.

The 221 refined case texts were imported into Nvivo11 software for word frequency statistics. The minimum word length for frequency statistics was set to two, so that the results would better fit the conventions of expression in the Chinese language. High-frequency words were selected and filtered in

order of their rankings. The filtered word frequency results were then imported into Excel for further statistics and processing, allowing for the categorization of high-frequency words into several groups, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Word Frequency Classification Statistics

Category	Word Frequency Statistics (Occurrences in Parentheses)
Participants	Property management(3767)Residents(1088)Enterprises(724)Companies(519)Government(425)Citizens(409) Public(377)Departments(296)Committee(56)Neighborhood Committee(40)
Scenes	City(5413)Residential compound(1566)Community(1387)Street(1318)Grassroots(387)Urban area(250) Park(180)Scenic area(124)Block(107)Parking lot(85)Economic zone(78)Ancient city(71)Industrial park(69)River channel(62)
Content	Sanitation(488)Garbage(476)Inspection(444)Cleaning(411)Roads(364)Greening(355)Municipal(351) Parking(321)Safety(266)City appearance(213)Operation(194)Hygiene(192)Maintenance(185)Upkeep(180) Traffic(166)Monitoring(160)Dispatch(151)Supervision(150)Sweeping(147)Command(131)Mediation(118)Clearing(108)Emergency response(98)
Techniques	Service(4021)Management(3854)Governance(2544)Smart(1294)Operation(1064)System(418)Refined(409) Intelligent(388)Integration(380)Consolidation(352)Groups building(271)Cooperation(233) Overall planning(196) AI(194)Co-construction(192)Coordination(151)Monitoring(106)App(94)Patrol Vehicle(85)Camera(69)
Background	Reform(270)Demand(223)Problems(174)Planning(135)Rectification(122)Tasks(93)Difficulties(58)Hidden risks(56)
Outcomes	Effective(225)Optimization(143)Intelligent(185)Digitalization(114)Improvement(110)Standardization(110)Happiness(92)Convenience(91)Cleanliness(91)Orderliness(90)Resolution(83)Sense of happiness(59)Sense of securit(35)

Based on the categorization of word frequency statistics, a three-round coding process was conducted using Nvivo11 software to further explore the underlying meanings within the case texts. The first round was free or open coding, where the original wording from the case texts was used as much as possible to ensure semantic accuracy without deviation, laying a solid foundation for subsequent analysis by allowing for more direct understanding of the text content. This was followed by the second round, core coding, which allowed for a clearer identification of connections and logical relationships between different themes in the texts. The third round, selective coding, was then carried out to summarize the final tree nodes. The tree nodes identified in this paper are governance background, governance content, and governance methods. The coding results are presented in Table 2.

3.2 Analysis of the Case Texts on the Operation of the "Property City" Model

There has been a shift in governance philosophy. For a long time, urban governance in China has been influenced by an extensive management mindset, which led to superficial management and a low degree of standardization. In the new era, people-centered and refined governance have become the core ideas of urban management. The government's role has shifted from a mere executor to a guide, joining hands with enterprises and citizens to jointly participate in urban affairs. Second, local governments, based on their own circumstances, have adopted precise policies from multiple dimensions such as top-level design, resource integration, and institutional innovation, striving to implement and root this city management model and achieve fruitful results. Finally, in the long-term practice of urban governance, the emergence of problems such as fragmentation, overlapping administrative bodies, inefficiency, and lack of participation has driven the birth and development of the "Property City" model.

In the practice of the "Property City" model, the government, enterprises, and citizens have formed an organic whole of collaborative governance. The government, driven by Groups-building, fully integrates the organizational advantages of Groups organizations into the governance system, anchoring the direction for the development of the "Property City." By relying on a multi-departmental coordination mechanism, the government breaks down administrative barriers, achieves precise allocation of governance resources through service integration and grid-based management, and ensures the effectiveness of enterprise services through an assessment mechanism. As the main suppliers of resources, enterprises use IoT devices

such as AI patrol vehicles and smart cameras to build a comprehensive sensing network. Operational digitalization is realized through city smart operation centers, and devices such as unmanned cleaning robots and unmanned cleaning boats are used to improve work efficiency, while tools like electronic work badges and GPS positioning strengthen personnel management. Citizens participate in collaborative management via channels like mobile reporting systems and smart steward apps, jointly promoting urban governance.

4. Comparative Analysis of Multiple Cases

A comparative analysis of property city construction practices in the Langfang Airport Economic Zone, Chengdu High-Tech Industrial Development Zone, and Suzhou Old Town reveals both similarities and differences in property city models from an empowerment perspective (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Property Management Models in Different Cities from the Perspective of Empowerment

Dimension	Case Study	Distinctive Features	Common Features
Government Empowerment	Langfang Airport Economic Zone	1.Focus: Industrial support services & refined urban management 2.Mode: Establishment of government–enterprise joint venture companiess	1.Institutional guidance: Issue special policy documents for institutional support 2.Business integration: Lead smart platform construction, unify business management 3.Coordination Mechanisms: Breaking down departmental silos ,promoting collaborative governance
	Chengdu High-Tech Zone	1.Focus: Addressing administrative fragmentation and promoting integrated transformation 2.Mode: Participation through public bidding	
	Suzhou Gusu District	1.Focus: Protection of historic and cultural heritage and renovation of old residential communities 2.Mode: State-owned enterprises as primary implementers	
Enterprise Empowerment	Langfang Airport Economic Zone	1.Scope: City-wide management including road, sanitation, emergency, municipal facility monitoring 2.Technology: City-level digital twin CIM platform	1.Technology: New tech improves efficiency, apps link with citizens 2.reengineering: Establish new work-order management system, optimize processes 3.Human resources: Divide governance grids, assign grid staff
	Chengdu High-Tech Zone	1.Scope: Five sectors including sanitation, greening, municipal services 2.Technology: Municipal environment monitoring	
	Suzhou Gusu District	1.Scope: Old community renovation & basic property services 2.Technology: Monitoring of old communities, livelihood response systems	
Citizen Empowerment	Langfang Airport Economic Zone	1.Participation: Mobile applications	1.Collaborative participation: Citizens engage via digital platforms & offline activities 2.Supervision: Citizens can evaluate services, affecting enterprise assessments
	Chengdu High-Tech Zone	1.Participation: "Cloud Reporting" applet, urban governance partners, volunteers	
	Suzhou Gusu District	1.Participation: Homeowners'committees, mobile apps, volunteers, democratic councils,	

While all three cases have adopted property city governance models, variations in regional governance objectives have resulted in differentiated models. Regarding government empowerment, the Langfang Airport Economic Zone prioritizes industrial support services and refined urban management, employing a government-enterprise joint venture model. Chengdu emphasizes collaboration, introducing professional enterprises through public bidding to dismantle administrative barriers and achieve integrated smart management of various tasks. Suzhou focuses on ancient city preservation, utilizing the leadership of state-owned property enterprises.

In terms of enterprise empowerment, the Langfang Airport Economic Zone prioritizes comprehensive urban management, employing a city-level twin CIM platform to support intelligent decision-making in the complex scenarios of the airport city area. Chengdu utilizes municipal monitoring technology to

address fragmentation caused by multiple managers in sanitation and landscaping sectors. Suzhou focuses on the renovation of old residential communities and basic property services, establishing a digital cockpit to monitor key areas in old communities and respond to livelihood services.

In the citizen empowerment stage, Langfang residents engage through mobile applications; Chengdu mobilizes enthusiastic citizens and groups members through volunteer teams and urban governance partners; in Suzhou's Gusu District, homeowners' committees conduct democratic councils to guide citizens' in-depth participation in the renovation and governance of old communities.

Despite the differing regional backgrounds and development needs of these three cases, their property city models exhibit common features. From the perspective of government-structured empowerment, all governments have introduced special policies for top-level design, constructed digital platforms to achieve business integration and unified dispatch, and established collaborative governance mechanisms to dismantle departmental barriers. From the perspective of enterprise resource empowerment, enterprises actively apply new technologies such as AI and IoT to optimize service processes, implement grid-based governance, and establish work order closed-loop management systems to enhance governance efficiency. In terms of citizen collaborative empowerment, governments and enterprises stimulate citizen participation through diverse channels, with citizens engaging in governance via digital platforms and offline activities, supervising and rating enterprise services according to actual governance conditions.

5. Feasibility of the Property Management City Model

Upon examining three representative cases of the property management city model, it is evident, through the application of an analytical framework, that the successful implementation of this model in enhancing urban governance is contingent upon the empowerment and collaboration of three principal stakeholders: government, enterprises, and citizens. This collaboration occurs across the dimensions of structure, resources, and cooperation. Through empowerment mechanisms, these stakeholders collectively form a synergistic force characterized by "authority-efficiency-dynamism," which addresses the fragmentation, inefficiency, and lack of participation prevalent in traditional urban governance, thereby improving its effectiveness.

In the initial phase of the property city model, governmental structural empowerment seeks to provide institutional support and integrate functions by enhancing governmental structures, thereby addressing the issue of fragmented traditional governance. On one hand, the government utilizes the authority of its hierarchical system to establish a regulatory framework through specific policy documents. For instance, Langfang City implemented a tiered, categorized, and phased management mechanism, clearly delineating the responsibilities and rights among the government, enterprises, and citizens in urban governance. Similarly, Chengdu regulates multi-groups collaboration processes through its "Management Plan," incorporating disparate urban functions into a unified institutional framework to minimize overlapping responsibilities and the passing of accountability among departments. In various regions, special policy documents transform the consensus of co-building, co-governance, and sharing into quantifiable rule systems. These regulatory frameworks clarify the boundaries of responsibilities and rights among diverse stakeholders, converting the traditionally ambiguous relationships between vertical and horizontal departments into manageable principal-agent chains. On the other hand, the government spearheads the construction of digital platforms to dismantle administrative barriers, centralizing data, human resources, technology, and other functions that were previously dispersed across different levels and departments into collaborative hubs, thereby facilitating the transformation of governance models toward intelligent management. This approach not only mitigates the chaos of multi-headed management but also prevents the emergence of responsibility vacuums. Governmental structural empowerment establishes the institutional foundation for subsequent enterprise resource empowerment and citizen collaborative empowerment, promoting the transformation of urban governance from a government-led model to one characterized by diversity and co-governance.

The empowerment of enterprise resources signifies a developmental phase within the property management city model, aimed at fostering technological innovation and process restructuring. This is achieved through the empowerment of enterprise resources, which addresses inefficiencies inherent in traditional urban governance. Enterprises, on one hand, utilize emerging technologies such as big data and the Internet of Things to develop smart governance platforms, transforming accessible information within the governed area into digital resources that facilitate decision-making. For instance, AI patrol cars deployed in Chengdu High-tech Park are equipped with high-definition cameras, lidar, and environmental sensors, enabling real-time identification of various urban management issues and the automatic

generation of work orders, which are subsequently dispatched to responsible parties. Similarly, the Langfang Smart Center Platform employs intelligent cameras to monitor parking space usage in real time, synchronizing information on available spaces to mobile applications for citizens, thereby enhancing parking turnover efficiency. These technological applications convert enterprises' technological advantages into regional perception and decision-making support capabilities for urban governance, encouraging both government and citizens to transition from passive response to proactive decision-making.

Conversely, enterprises leverage their experience and efficiency advantages acquired through market competition to redesign governance processes, positioning urban management needs as both the inception and conclusion of these processes. By eliminating redundant intermediate steps, they directly link demand with supply, thereby enhancing the efficiency of urban governance. For example, in Gusu District, Suzhou, citizens can submit requests via a mobile application, which automatically matches the request with the nearest enterprise repair team. Upon completion of the repair, citizens can directly rate the service quality within the application. Through process reengineering, enterprises transform their service capabilities into governance efficiency. The empowerment of enterprise resources aids governments in enhancing governance effectiveness and scientific decision-making, while simultaneously providing citizens with avenues for participation in urban governance.

Citizen empowerment through collaboration constitutes the advanced phase of the "Property City" model. This model aims to address the deficiency of public participation in urban governance by facilitating citizens' expression of their needs and activation of their rights and capabilities through collaborative empowerment. Citizens can articulate their needs via digital platforms such as the YunBaoshi APP and community WeChat groups, as well as through offline channels like community forums. This enables the government and enterprises to accurately align with citizen demands, thereby preventing the inefficient use of governance resources. Concurrently, as positive outcomes in urban governance become apparent, the government delineates citizens' governance rights through structural empowerment, while enterprises enhance citizens' governance capabilities via resource empowerment. Motivated by the activation of rights and tangible incentives, citizens begin to recognize and appreciate their roles. At this juncture, citizens actively engage in the city's governance. For instance, in the Chengdu High-Tech Zone, enthusiastic residents and retired groups members have formed urban governance partnerships, deeply integrating into decision-making processes through regular communication with enterprises. Empowering citizens aids enterprises in optimizing service delivery and operational efficiency, provides a robust foundation for precise policymaking by the government, and continuously invigorates urban governance.

The internal mechanism of the "Property City" model is the functional complementarity that arises from the empowerment of the three principal stakeholders. The hierarchical authority of the government ensures the legitimacy of governance direction, the market efficiency of enterprises provides flexibility to governance methods, and the social dynamism of citizens ensures the accuracy of the governance response. Through this functional complementarity, they achieve governance effectiveness that surpasses that of any single entity, realizing a "1+1+1=3" outcome in governance.

6. Conclusion

This study, based on empowerment theory and through comparative analysis of multiple cases, finds that the feasibility of the property-city model stems from cross-empowerment among governance actors. The government provides institutional support and functional integration through structural empowerment, overcoming the fragmented dilemmas of traditional governance and laying a structural foundation for subsequent efforts. Enterprises, through resource empowerment, drive technological innovation and process restructuring, addressing the inefficiencies of traditional urban governance, and assist the government in making informed decisions while encouraging proactive citizen participation. Citizens, through collaborative empowerment, express their needs and activate their rights, resolving participation gaps in urban governance and providing practical grounds for precise government policies and optimized enterprise services. The intrinsic mechanism of the property-city model lies in the functional complementarity that emerges after the empowerment of these three key actors: the government's hierarchical authority ensures the legitimacy of governance direction, the market efficiency of enterprises endows governance with flexibility, and the social vitality of citizens guarantees the accuracy of governance responses. The key to urban governance is collaboration and the proactive engagement of every participant. Only when governments, enterprises, and citizens work together with unified purpose and coordinated action can the effectiveness of governance be significantly enhanced, the people-centered

development philosophy be put into practice, and a new vision of co-built, co-governed, and co-shared urban governance be drawn. The property city model is currently in its nascent development phase, with the balancing of interests among multiple stakeholders and the establishment of sustainable operational mechanisms still requiring refinement. The next step involves strengthening multi-groups coordination through Groups-building leadership to establish a diversified funding mechanism featuring "government subsidies, resident fees, and operational reinvestment." Concurrently, leveraging technological empowerment will optimize service efficiency, while advancing market-oriented reforms in property fee pricing mechanisms will address the imbalance between costs and returns.

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