



The Internal Logic and Practical Pathways of "Disembedding" and "Coupling" in Public Services—A Case Study of Bazhong City in the Context of Rural Revitalization

Rong Zheng*, Shiyan Xiong, Fachun Wu, Jing Chen and Zheng Xiang

Chengdu University of Information Technology, Chengdu, Sichuan, China

*3497210061@qq.com

Abstract. Under the rural revitalization strategy, ensuring public services for the "three left-behind groups" is crucial for strengthening the foundation of people's livelihoods. As an agricultural prefecture in the Sichuan-Shaanxi Revolutionary Old Base Area, Bazhong City faces prominent bottlenecks in regional revitalization due to issues like the "disembedding" of public services for these groups in its rural areas. Studying this problem holds significant reference value for similar regions. This study adopts a rural revitalization perspective to construct a coupling pathway analysis framework. Focusing on six key townships for rural revitalization in Bazhong City, it employs multi-source triangulation to collect data and integrates case analysis methodology. Findings reveal that public services for the "three left-behind groups" in Bazhong face constraints in fiscal, human, and technological resources. Based on these findings, this study proposes a coupled closed-loop mechanism featuring Party-building leadership, precise demand response, multi-resource coordination, and support from local rural entities. It further outlines a tiered optimization strategy tailored to rural revitalization, providing theoretical underpinnings and practical pathways to address the service challenges faced by the "three left-behind" groups in similar regions.

Keywords: rural revitalization; left-behind groups; public services; disembedding; coupling First Section

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Core Issues

Rural revitalization and grassroots governance capacity building have charted the course for upgrading rural public services in Bazhong City, the core area of the Sichuan-Shaanxi Revolutionary Base. With a high proportion of rural residents and pronounced mountainous terrain, ensuring rural public services is crucial for improving people's livelihoods, consolidating poverty alleviation achievements, and advancing rural revitalization. In recent years, Bazhong has expanded coverage of basic service facilities

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through initiatives like the “Shortfall Supplement Project” and “Integrated Urban-Rural Governance,” establishing a preliminary three-tier public service network spanning counties, townships, and villages.

However, constrained by geographical limitations, population outflow, and resource endowments, Bazhong faces prominent “disembedding” issues in rural public services. Discrepancies exist between supply and demand, institutional design and effectiveness, and resource allocation and contextual suitability, falling short of requirements for high-quality, inclusive public services. This study, grounded in rural revitalization theory, focuses on the “disembedding” phenomenon of rural public services in Bazhong City. It explores its manifestations, mechanisms, impacts, and pathways for institutional innovation, aiming to construct practical solutions tailored to local contexts and needs. By upgrading public services, it seeks to bolster rural revitalization in this revolutionary base area.

1.2 Analytical Framework and Research Approachs

This study constructs a three-tiered analytical framework encompassing practice patterns, generative mechanisms, and coupling pathways. It views the "disembedding" and "coupling" of rural public services in Bazhong City as a dynamic evolutionary process adapting to rural revitalization needs, as shown in Figure 1.

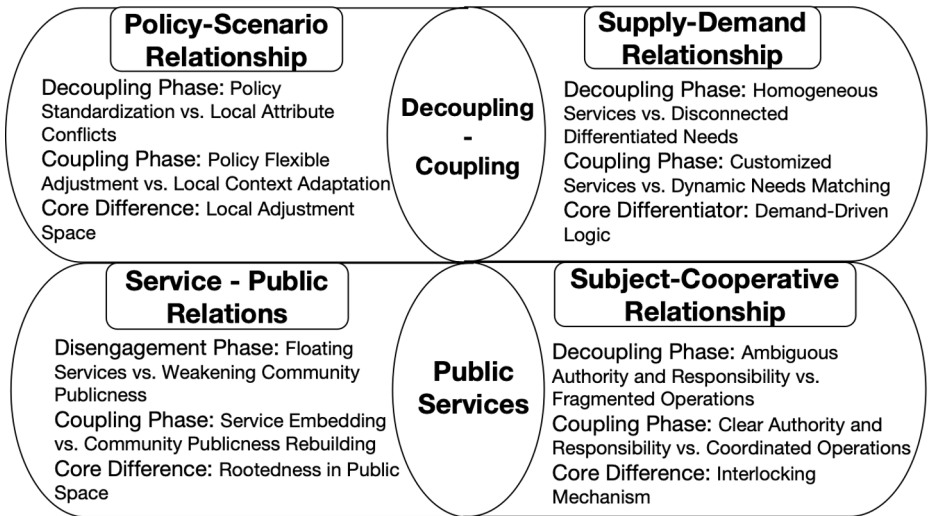


Fig. 1. A figure caption is “Decoupling-Coupling” Scenario Relationship Analysis

Theoretical Construction Aligned with the public service requirements of the rural revitalization strategy, this study identifies the core dimensions of "disembedding-coupling" in rural public services in Bazhong City, providing theoretical support for the analysis. Case validation selected key rural revitalization townships in Tongjiang County and Nanjiang County [1], Bazhong City, as research areas. Through in-depth

interviews, policy text analysis, and participatory observation, primary data on public service provision for the "three left-behind groups" was collected to validate the theoretical framework's applicability and uncover locally specific service contradictions and governance experiences. Coding analysis of case data will extract the generative mechanisms of public service "disembedding" in Bazhong City. This will lead to the construction of a coupling pathway characterized by Party-building leadership, precise demand identification, multi-stakeholder coordination, and local support. Actionable policy recommendations and practical solutions will be formulated to inform the optimization of rural public services in Bazhong City and similar revolutionary base areas [2].

2 Theoretical Foundation and Research Design

2.1 Construction of the "Disembedding-Coupling" Analytical Framework

Public Service Disembedding: Drawing from Polanyi's concept of "economic disembedding from society," this refers to public services becoming detached from grassroots contexts, public needs [3], and community publicness foundations. This manifests as policy idling, ineffective supply, and suspended services, encompassing three dimensions of disembedding: policy-context, supply-demand, and service-publicness [4].

Public Service Coupling: Achieves dynamic alignment between public services and local contexts, public needs, and community publicness through institutional innovation [5]. Its core lies in establishing a closed-loop system of demand sensing-resource integration-service delivery-outcome feedback, aiming for policy flexibility, precise supply, and service warmth.

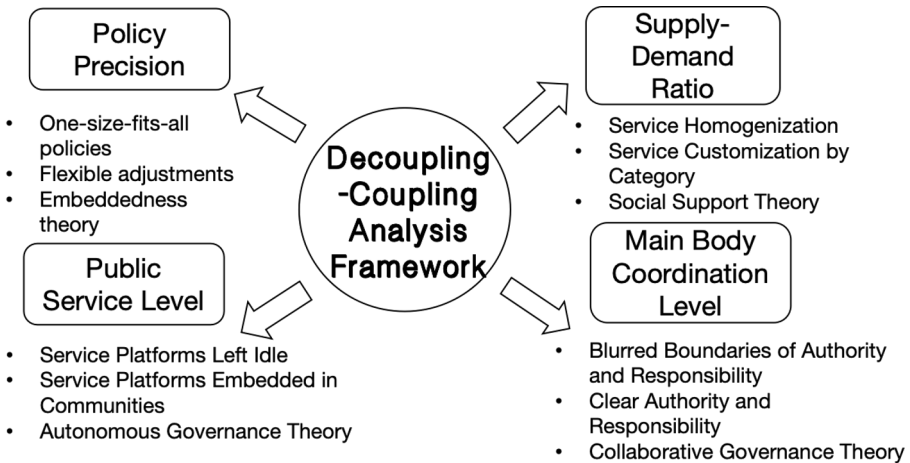


Fig. 2. A figure caption is "Decoupling-Coupling" Four-Dimensional Structure

The framework is underpinned by three major theories: Polanyi's "Embeddedness Theory" emphasizes that services must be embedded within social structures; Ostrom's

"Autonomous Governance Theory" provides a basis for multi-stakeholder collaboration; and Wang Sibi's "Social Support Theory" highlights the core role of demand responsiveness. Based on this, the "Disembedding-Coupling" framework is decomposed into four dimensions as shown in Figure 2.

2.2 Case Selection

Following principles of typicality, diversity, and feasibility, key townships for rural revitalization in Tongjiang County and Nanjiang County, Bazhong City, were selected as study areas. These regions exhibit concentrated populations of the "three left-behind groups" (left-behind children, elderly, and women) and distinct mountainous terrain. They face typical challenges in public service provision, including geographical constraints, resource scarcity, and diverse demands. These areas represent emblematic scenarios of "disembedding" in Bazhong's rural public services and offer practical feasibility for field research.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data collection employed a "multi-source triangulation" approach: - Primary sources included policy documents on rural revitalization and public services from Bazhong City and its counties^[6], statistical data on rural population structure and service facility allocation, and relevant academic research^[7]. Secondary sources comprised field materials such as in-depth interview records with township officials and the "three left-behind" groups, participatory observation notes from rural service stations, and service provision ledgers^[8]. Secondary data includes publicly available updates from the Bazhong Municipal Government website, annual reports from local social organizations, and records of public feedback.

3 Practical Manifestations of Public Service "Disembedding"

Community publicness forms the foundation for service delivery, but the current weakening of grassroots publicness leads to service "suspension," manifesting in three specific dilemmas as shown in Figure 3.

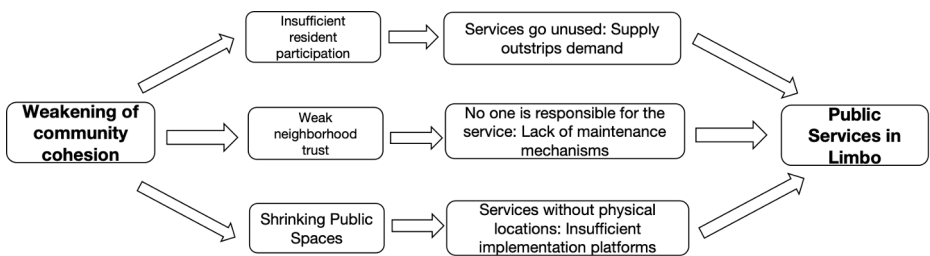


Fig. 3. A figure caption is service-Demand Mismatch Analysis

Rural public services in Bazhong City face a "service suspension" dilemma due to the decline of community publicness. Service design and implementation lack participation mechanisms for the "three left-behind groups" and villagers, with inadequate feedback channels. Services often rely on administrative directives for advancement, and some operating hours conflict with farming schedules or elderly residents' routines, resulting in underutilized facilities^[9]. Population outflow and relocation projects have diminished neighborhood interactions and weakened community trust. Services lack community-driven maintenance mechanisms, resulting in high facility damage rates and difficulties in implementing mutual aid services. Relying solely on township cadres and village committees for management has led to ineffective oversight. Mountainous villages inherently possess limited public space. Compounded by population outflow, this leads to facility idleness and misuse. Services often rely on temporary venues, with rudimentary and functionally inadequate facilities, further exacerbating the "suspended" nature of services^[10].

4 Mechanisms Generating Disembeddedness

The core causes of the disconnect in rural public services in Bazhong City stem from multiple intertwined factors: On one hand, the administrative logic of hierarchical accountability conflicts with the practical logic of delivering services to the grassroots. This leads to policy designs that overlook the unique conditions of mountainous villages and the needs of the "three left-behind groups". Implementation squeezes out public participation, while evaluations emphasize visible quantitative metrics, resulting in a disconnect between supply and demand as well as efficiency. On the other hand, triple constraints—fiscal investment prioritizing construction over operation, difficulties in attracting and retaining talent in rural areas, and insufficient technical and digital literacy in remote villages—create a predicament where facilities lack maintenance, platforms lack expertise, and online services lack tangible results. Simultaneously, inadequate mechanisms for expressing needs—limited offline outreach due to mountainous terrain constraints, low utilization of online channels by elderly populations with weak digital literacy, fragmented departmental handling, and absent feedback loops—break the cycle of demand transmission, resulting in unaddressed appeals and unanswered feedback. This further exacerbates the mismatch between supply and demand.

5 Building Pathways Toward Coupling

5.1 Establishing Precise Demand Sensing and Response Mechanisms

Aiming to adapt to mountainous rural areas and cover the "three left-behind groups," this approach addresses the core issue of who rural public services in Bazhong City serve. Offline, it implements coordinated visits by township cadres, grid workers, and volunteers, establishes demand collection stations, and embeds demand collection within agricultural contexts. Online, optimize the senior-friendly mini-program to enable demand submission and progress visualization. Integrate cross-departmental data to

build a demand database, shifting from passive collection to proactive sensing. Categorize demands into three tiers based on urgency, beneficiary scope, and resource alignment for differentiated responses: establish a 1-hour response and 24-hour resolution mechanism for urgent needs^[11]. Incorporate common needs into specialized plans for coordinated, bulk funding solutions in older districts; address individual needs through government-purchased services delivered by local social organizations.

5.2 Promoting Resource Integration and Collaboration Among Diverse Stakeholders

Guided by Party building, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and resource sharing, we establish a multi-stakeholder coordination system to address resource sourcing as shown in Figure 4.



Fig. 4. A figure caption is Multi-stakeholder collaborative integration

Prioritize the development of social organizations in rural elderly care, child welfare, and related fields, providing support through repurposing idle village dwellings, dedicated funding, and tax/fee reductions. Outsource market-based services such as rural domestic care and specialized nursing to local enterprises via government procurement, with relevant departments overseeing and evaluating the entire process^[12]. Encourage enterprises specializing in locally distinctive agricultural products and cultural tourism to participate in public welfare services. Offer tax incentives and brand promotion support to businesses that employ left-behind women or aid left-behind children, achieving mutual benefits for public welfare and industry. Establish a credit rating system for market entities providing rural public services, incorporating service quality and contract fulfillment into credit records to standardize market conduct.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Research Limitations and Outlook

This study has limitations: the cases only cover key rural revitalization areas such as Tongjiang County and Nanjiang County in Bazhong City, excluding villages surrounding Bazhou District. Consequently, the conclusions may not fully reflect regional disparities within the municipal area. The research focuses on sectors like elderly care and childcare, with insufficient coverage of core livelihood areas such as rural education and healthcare. The generalizability of the conclusions requires further validation.

Future research may expand in two directions: First, broaden the case scope to include diverse rural areas such as plains and urban-rural fringe zones, integrating education and healthcare into the analytical framework to explore the contextual adaptability of the “disembedding-coupling” mechanism. Second, deepen research on distinctive mechanisms, particularly examining integration pathways between revolutionary heritage and public services in the Sichuan-Shaanxi Revolutionary Base Area, and addressing challenges in implementing digital technologies in mountainous rural areas. This would provide more contemporary support for upgrading public services in revolutionary base areas.

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Disclosure of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this paper.

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