

Strategy Recommendations for Establishing “15-Minute Radius Livelihood Service Circles” in Chongqing

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Abstract: This study investigates the development of the “15-minute radius livelihood service circles” in Chongqing, which serve as crucial links in the economic and social microcirculation and are essential for public welfare and business sustainability. The research employs a combination of field research and personal interviews, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and draws insights from case comparisons of pilot projects in Chengdu, Ningbo, Hebi, Xi’an, and Shanghai. The study reveals four key findings: issues in the rational planning and layout of facilities, inadequacies in commercial configurations and community needs satisfaction, and slow progress in smart construction. To address these challenges, strategies are proposed to optimize the layout, innovate institutional mechanisms, enhance market entities, and promote intelligent development, aiming to achieve collaborative governance and improve the overall functionality of the 15-minute radius livelihood service circles.

Keywords: 15-Minute Radius Livelihood Service Circles; Experience References; Functional Formats; Smart Construction

1. Introduction

Since 2021, the Ministry of Commerce has led the consecutive release of the Guidelines for Establishing Urban 15-Minute Living Circles and the Opinions on Promoting the Construction of Urban 15-Minute Living Circles. These initiatives encourage the integration of commercial and property sectors with consumer and community life, aiming for diversified, concentrated, and smart development of urban formats. Subsequently, the initial and second batches of pilot projects were announced, with Chongqing’s Liangjiang New Area and Jiulongpo District prominently featured. The urban 15-minute living circles serve as the

vital “capillaries” connecting economic and social microcirculation, crucial for improving public well-being and supporting the survival of numerous businesses [1]. Chongqing has focused on the “triple transformations”, accelerating the construction of the 15-minute living circles and initially developing some replicable experiences. However, challenges persist, including irrational facility planning and layout, inadequate and under-refined commercial configurations, ineffective alignment with group demands, and slow progress in smart construction, which urgently require resolution.

This paper analyzes the issues in living circle construction in Chongqing, drawing lessons from selected pilot project experiences to provide practical references for Chongqing’s efforts to deeply establish standardized, well-organized, appropriately laid out, fully functional, intelligent, convenient, high-quality service, and harmonious living and business circles.

2. Development of 15-Minute Radius Livelihood Service Circles in Chongqing: Four Key Characteristics

2.1 Irrational Facility Planning and Layout

2.1.1 Incomplete commercial planning laws and policies

The reform of community commercial planning lags behind, with no established mechanisms for departmental coordination in planning, joint review, or collaborative development among enterprises. Some experts believe that market economies should allow the market to operate independently, and currently, there are no specific commercial planning laws and regulations in China (unlike some foreign countries that have specialized commercial laws and regulations, with only a few cities in China having enacted commercial planning

ordinances). The natural resource planning departments only set minimum commercial area requirements for developers, without stipulating commercial layout, facility specifications, format configuration, or overall commercial layout.

2.1.2 Low-level commercial design by developers, operating independently

This has led to disorganized community commercial layouts, insufficient commercial concentration, and a lack of community commercial centers. In some areas, there is inaccurate positioning, oversized community commercial areas with many vacant storefronts, while in others, there are too few commercial facilities, or the facility specifications do not meet the needs of businesses, making it difficult to set up essential formats like community supermarkets or farmers' markets. Few entities are genuinely proficient in commercial design (even among top member units of national associations, expertise in commercial planning and design is rare, and even less so in other entities). Developers operate independently, and while the commerce departments are responsible for commercial planning and development, they lack the authority to participate in the approval of community commercial planning and project acceptance by developers. Principally, the per capita community commercial area should be around 1 square meter, though this may vary across different regions and neighborhoods. The success of Suzhou's neighborhood centers can be attributed primarily to the lessons learned from Singapore's neighborhood center model. In Suzhou Industrial Park, 17 neighborhood centers were strategically planned, with commercial facilities meticulously organized. The planning principle adhered to a standard of allocating 1 square meter of commercial space per capita. A single entity was tasked with both the construction and operation of these commercial facilities, ensuring that the needs of the surrounding residents were effectively met. Shanghai's Lianyang community, on the other hand, features a unique approach where all developers collaborated in the joint development and planning of a community commercial center. In contrast, foreign countries typically conduct demand-based planning and design

before development and operation, a process opposite to that in China.

2.2 Small-Scale and Low-Quality Commercial Configuration

2.2.1 Lagging commercial facilities

In older communities, the pace of upgrading commercial facilities lags behind the rapid evolution of consumer demands. Initially, these communities were not planned with long-term growth in mind, and as the resident population increases and consumer needs evolve, existing commercial facilities are becoming inadequate. However, the lack of available public space limits the construction of new facilities. In some newly developed communities, slow population growth, underdeveloped transportation, and their relative distance from city centers contribute to delayed construction of supporting facilities, resulting in a persistent shortage of commercial outlets. On the other hand, in more established communities where the commercial market is mature, retail businesses compete intensely, leading to an over-concentration of commercial facilities.

2.2.2 Insufficient integration of commercial formats

Chongqing's commercial formats are characterized by their fragmented, small-scale, and weak nature. The current structure remains heavily traditional, with a significant portion devoted to wholesale and retail trade, as well as the food and beverage, and accommodation industries [2]. Chain operations are relatively small in scale, and sectors such as cultural tourism, fitness, household services, and recycling are poorly integrated, often operating in isolation. Additionally, emerging service industries like exhibitions, intermediary services, and logistics are underdeveloped and lag behind the current needs. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the shortcomings of these fragmented services have become even more pronounced, as community residents have faced difficulties in securing essential supplies during public health emergencies.

2.2.3 Insufficient development of community chains

Quality consumption reflects residents' aspirations for a better life, and the trend towards higher-quality community consumption is becoming increasingly

apparent. In Beijing, continuous policy support over the years has led to the establishment of 329 chain convenience stores (or community supermarkets) per million people by 2023. In contrast, Chongqing suffers from limited commercial development funds and insufficient policy support, resulting in a prevalence of small family-run shops and a shortage of chain stores in communities.

2.3 Mismatch in Addressing Community Needs

Insufficient Attention to the Needs of the Elderly and Children: In developed central urban areas, nursing homes are more capable of sustaining operations. However, in suburban or less affluent areas, particularly in communities with a high concentration of working professionals, there is a growing demand for elderly canteens. For children, the most pressing issue is the lack of outdoor activity spaces. Residents frequently express concerns over the insufficient number of playgrounds, with an urgent need for interactive outdoor play areas.

Inadequate Breakfast Supply Coverage and Satisfaction: Breakfast provision is unevenly distributed, with shortages in business districts, industrial parks, newly built large residential communities, and areas concentrated with medical and educational institutions. As citizens' expectations for quality rise, they increasingly prioritize hygiene, nutrition, and convenience. The primary pain point remains the insufficient time available for meals.

2.4 Slow Development of Smart Infrastructure

Insufficient Smart Ecological Supply Chains: Several areas suffer from logistical challenges such as disrupted logistics, supplier shutdowns, inventory imbalances, labor shortages, and rising costs. Community group buying, acting as a "mobile grocery basket", has seen major players from e-commerce, local lifestyle, and real estate sectors venture into this field. However, it is still in an exploratory growth stage, with limited success in effectively linking the achievements of rural revitalization and poverty alleviation.

Slow Progress in Smart Platform Development: There is a lack of smart service platform development within

convenient living circles. Local merchant resources remain fragmented and poorly integrated, failing to offer residents easy access to information searches, geographic navigation, and product and service searches. Moreover, these platforms do not provide value-added services such as online coupon issuance and offline redemption[3].

3. Innovative Practices in Building 15-Minute Radius Livelihood Service Circles

3.1 Chengdu

Chengdu is spearheading institutional and mechanism innovations by enhancing multifaceted service support in areas such as community welfare, culture, government services, health, canteens, and employment, while also integrating commercial services[4]. The introduction of services within commercial sectors has increased traffic and loyalty. A system innovation model using the "Community Governance Committee" has been adopted, with active participation from street communities, the introduction of public welfare, community interactions, and the integration of various business formats, fully revitalizing community life.

3.2 Ningbo

Ningbo has clearly defined "for whom" the trials are conducted, emphasizing "three benefits": satisfying the needs for convenience, benefit, and welfare; creating a high-quality life and enjoying premium services; and establishing identifiable achievements in common prosperity. It also clarified "who conducts the trials": streets are responsible for coordinating and renovating traditional neighborhood-style communities, state-owned enterprises take over and create mixed-use residential-commercial communities, while private enterprises lead the development of plaza-style community commerce.

3.3 Hebi

Hebi has adopted a "one circle, one plan, one ledger" approach, focusing on improving infrastructure across nine aspects: municipal quality, comprehensive services, elderly care, green transportation, convenient schooling, easy consumption, health care, and community culture. The implementation mechanism

includes “collective discussion” for planning and design, “co-construction” for project development, and “circle leader” for community management, ensuring projects are clearly itemized[5].

3.4 Xi'an

Xi'an is advancing the construction of standardized vegetable markets, developing branded chain stores and fresh food supermarkets, promoting the integration of convenient facilities like vegetable trucks and smart mailboxes into communities, and building a multi-layered breakfast supply system. The city is also upgrading community commercial centers and neighborhood centers, perfecting “one-stop” convenient service functions.

3.5 Shanghai

Shanghai has introduced the *2021 Breakfast Project Implementation Plan*, focusing on improving coverage (“do we have it?”) and enhancing satisfaction (“is it good?”). The city is vigorously promoting new service models such as “Internet platforms + breakfast services”, “new retail + breakfast services”, “mobile food trucks + breakfast services”, and “convenience stores + breakfast services”[6].

4. Suggestions for Building 15-Minute Radius Livelihood Service Circles in Chongqing

4.1 Optimizing Scientific Layout and Innovating Institutional Mechanisms

4.1.1 Strengthening the planning and construction of community commerce

There could be value in seeking support from the Chongqing Municipal People's Congress to expedite the formulation of the *Chongqing Commercial Network Regulations*. The leadership role of the municipal government in cultivating Chongqing as an international consumption center might be leveraged to drive commercial planning reforms. Establishing a collaborative mechanism between departments and enterprises could ensure aligned efforts among the planning, natural resources, commerce, and urban-rural development departments. The creation of the *Community Commercial Planning and Construction Guidelines* may help in coordinating commercial planning and project

approval. Initiatives like joint planning and construction of community commercial centers by regional developers might set benchmarks for convenient living circles. Urban renewal efforts could be aligned with community needs, facilitating the coordinated construction of facilities such as comprehensive community supermarkets, vegetable markets, elderly care centers, and community canteens, thereby addressing the gaps in community commercial infrastructure. Additionally, there might be a benefit in encouraging districts and counties to develop *15-Minute Radius Livelihood Service Circle Plans* and implementation schemes, aiming for high-quality planning and construction to create exemplary models, ultimately contributing to Chongqing's efforts to become a national demonstration city for convenient living circles.

4.1.2 Clarifying the responsible entities

Responsibility for construction could be clarified in several ways. For example, street-level efforts might focus on the renovation of traditional neighborhood-style communities through a combined model of “enterprise operation + community management”. This approach could harness the commercial operation capabilities of enterprises alongside the comprehensive management strengths of street communities, fostering the development of convenient living circles. In another approach, state-owned enterprises might take the lead in developing mixed-use residential-commercial communities. By adhering to principles such as unified ownership, unified leasing, and unified management, these entities could enhance commercial formats within living circles, emphasizing convenience and public benefit, supported by the development of online service platforms utilizing digital technologies. Meanwhile, private enterprises might spearhead the creation of plaza-style community commerce. These enterprises could utilize vacant factories and warehouses to develop open, “park-like” themed community commercial spaces, with an emphasis on innovative formats such as children's education centers and community libraries, promoting the upgrading of community commerce.

4.1.3 Innovating institutional mechanisms

Integrating the development of community commerce into the grassroots social governance framework could be explored. There could be encouragement for grassroots

organizations and merchants to establish their community platforms and create community development funds with active participation from residents. This approach might foster the development of a new business environment and relationships within the community.

4.2 Strengthening Market Entities and Enhancing Commercial Functions

4.2.1 Adhering to categorized development

In conjunction with the construction of new residential areas, future communities, the renovation of old neighborhoods, and green community initiatives, efforts should be made to revitalize dispersed transit spaces. By adhering to planned guidelines that outline the foundational development needs of surrounding residential areas, demographic compositions, and residents' consumption habits, the unified construction of various facilities should be pursued, ensuring a balance of social, cultural, and recreational functions. This approach will facilitate complementary advantages and promote differentiated development.

4.2.2 Encouraging the construction of “one-stop” comprehensive neighborhood centers

To enhance facility utilization and overall efficiency, the development of future community living circles should be centered around “one-stop” comprehensive neighborhood centers. These centers can act as vibrant hubs, integrating “Commercial BOX + Public Services” to encompass functional modules within a 10-minute travel radius, thereby attracting community traffic. This dual-purpose approach will not only provide comprehensive living services but also generate significant revenue for community operations. The government should lead in providing public services within these centers while encouraging social participation. Commercial activities should primarily target mid-range consumption, with dynamic adjustments based on community demographic shifts. Pilot projects should emphasize the meticulous planning and design of neighborhood centers, ensuring optimized space usage and prioritizing synchronized construction timelines for simultaneous completion.

4.2.3 Fostering new consumption models

Through innovative business models and policy guidance, a blended “online + offline”,

“goods + services”, and “retail + experience” approach should be adopted to diversify consumption scenarios within convenient living circles. This strategy will foster new consumption trends such as quality and fashion consumption. Firstly, the transformation and upgrading of commercial districts should follow the principle of “government guidance, market operation, and phased implementation”. By leveraging existing commercial facilities, efforts should be focused on developing first-store and first-launch economies, creating high-end, smart, and eco-friendly commercial districts to boost overall competitiveness and appeal. Secondly, the promotion of nighttime economy should be prioritized by establishing city-level “Nighttime Economy Demonstration Zones”, offering diverse nighttime consumption activities to invigorate the evening economy. Thirdly, innovation in fashion consumption, particularly emphasizing the potential of the “She Economy”, should be driven forward. Initiatives like “Women’s Consumption Promotion Month” should be organized to unlock female consumers’ purchasing power, thereby propelling the growth of the fashion consumption market.

4.3 Rationalizing Community Spaces and Innovating Dining Models

4.3.1 Expanding community spaces with a focus on child-friendly and age-friendly needs Capitalize on the inherent “zero-distance” proximity of elevated spaces to residents by actively guiding the integration of terminal facilities from various systems into these areas. Design guidelines for courtyards, elevated floors, and other spaces closely connected to the community should include “flexible blank spaces” that reflect the aspirations for a high-quality modern lifestyle, child-friendly environments, and age-friendly development. These guidelines should balance design orientation with typology, emphasizing values such as safety, accessibility, conservation, ecology, culture, education, and sponge city principles. Tailored strategies should be employed based on the type of construction—whether new builds, renovations, or quality enhancements. The exploration of industrial land use and embedded micro-spaces within living circles should also be prioritized to create more local employment opportunities and provide related services. This could

involve supplementing education and part-time job recommendations for the elderly and offering night schools and weekend training for migrant workers.

4.3.2 Innovating dining models

Efforts should be intensified to address breakfast service gaps, focusing on key areas such as medical and educational clusters, newly developed large residential communities, industrial parks, and business districts. The development of smart breakfast solutions should be advanced, especially in remote parks and large residential areas where breakfast services are insufficient. By leveraging AI and big data to analyze the surrounding population structure and consumption habits, breakfast cart businesses can be directed to service gaps and appropriate product categories, enhancing efficiency through digital traffic optimization. The promotion of shared breakfast services and healthy meal options should be expanded, encouraging community canteens and independent dining establishments, in addition to chain outlets, to participate in shared breakfast initiatives. Centralized breakfast kitchen companies should enhance their research and development efforts, conducting nutritional analyses on new products and offering nutritional optimization recommendations. This will result in the introduction of more low-sugar, low-oil, and low-fat meal options tailored to the nutritional needs of diverse groups.

4.4 Empowering Digital Construction and Promoting Intelligent Development

4.4.1 Encouraging digital empowerment

The optimization of information services could be supported by encouraging professional operators to develop smart service apps or mini-programs. These platforms would integrate functions related to housekeeping, shopping, leisure, culture, dining, and elderly care, allowing users to search, navigate, make payments, and issue coupons online, while also redeeming services offline. This approach could facilitate a seamless connection between smart cities, smart communities, and intelligent concierge services. The expansion of intelligent experiences might be furthered by introducing advanced technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and big data into store layout planning, inventory management, logistics, and product traceability. These

technologies could drive the evolution of innovative models like contactless transactions, live-streamed sales, and smart payment systems.

4.4.2 Expanding e-commerce capabilities

Support could be provided to large e-commerce and chain circulation enterprises to enhance their capabilities through technology empowerment, supply chain integration, and the combination of online and offline services, with a focus on extending channels and services to rural areas. Collaboration with projects aimed at increasing agricultural production and income, as well as other public benefit initiatives, could be encouraged. In partnership with major e-commerce platforms, initiatives such as the “Digital Service Provider Support Program” and the “Digital Empowerment of Physical Retail Assistance Initiative” could be implemented to help community stores develop online marketing, adopt self-checkout and QR code payment systems, and establish and launch the “Chongqing Smart Market”. There could be exploration into the development of new models, such as unmanned retail, contactless delivery communities, and experiential e-commerce, with pilot enterprises being guided to create comprehensive service platforms that blend online and offline conveniences into a unified, community-friendly living environment.

4.5 Building Diverse Participation for Collaborative Governance

4.5.1 Refining dynamic planning processes

In the context of establishing a new national territorial spatial planning system, further in-depth research is needed on the dynamic mechanisms of evaluation, planning, implementation, and governance.

4.5.2 Strengthening multi-stakeholder participation mechanisms

Efforts should be made to actively promote the establishment of cooperative governance organizations, such as business-residential alliances, and to create a robust multi-party governance system involving streets (townships), residential (property) committees, shop owners, market operators, and social organizations. Leveraging big data, AI, and community point systems, there should be an emphasis on increasing the participation of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and

children, in community decision-making. Regular resident satisfaction surveys should be conducted, with a focus on collecting and responding to resident feedback effectively. In ongoing operations, the service spillover effects of high-quality enterprises should be actively harnessed, and innovative public service models should be explored under the goal of light asset development.

5. Conclusions and Future Outlook

This study analyzes the construction of the 15-minute radius livable service circles in Chongqing and identifies issues such as irrational facility layout, inadequate commercial configuration, insufficient alignment with community needs, and slow progress in smart construction. Drawing on pilot experiences from cities like Chengdu and Ningbo, the study proposes strategies to optimize layout and innovate mechanisms, strengthen market entities, rationalize community spaces, promote digital construction, and encourage diverse participation to achieve collaborative governance and enhance the overall functionality and service quality of the livable service circles.

As the development of convenience life circles progresses, future research should delve deeper into how to enhance and upgrade the “10-minute radius community life service circle” and advance the construction and promotion of rural life circles.

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