



The Problems Facing the Organization and Operation of City Governments under the Central Government in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

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This article delves into the intricate challenges confronted by city governments operating under the central governance framework in Vietnam. Examining the organizational and operational aspects, the study sheds light on the multifaceted issues inherent to the configuration and functioning of these city-level administrative bodies. By critically assessing the dynamics of central-local power dynamics, decision-making autonomy, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the role of urban planning, the article elucidates the complex landscape in which these city governments operate. Drawing from a comprehensive analysis of legal provisions, government resolutions, and policy implementations, the study highlights the pressing concerns and barriers faced by city governments. In doing so, the article contributes to a nuanced understanding of the governance structure in Vietnam and offers insights into potential avenues for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of city governance within the overarching framework of the central government.

KEYWORDS:

City Governance;
Central Government;
Organizational Challenges;
Operational Issues;
Urban Administration;
Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of Vietnam's political and administrative framework, the organization and operation of city governments under the overarching umbrella of the Central Government have taken center stage (Anh, 2016; Chien & Thanh, 2022). As urbanization accelerates and cities emerge as hubs of economic, social, and cultural activity, the intricate interplay between central authority and local governance has become a subject of paramount significance (Nghi, Thu, & Dinh, 2022). This article delves into the multifaceted challenges that confront city governments within the prevailing centralized governance structure of Vietnam.

The distinctive political landscape of Vietnam is characterized by its centralized political model, wherein the Central Government exercises significant control and decision-making authority (Nghi, Thu, & Dinh, 2022). Against this backdrop, city governments are tasked with the formidable responsibility of managing urban development,

public services, and the welfare of their citizens, all while navigating the intricate web of policies and directives emanating from the central corridors of power (Chien & Thanh, 2022). As the country strives for sustained economic growth, social progress, and harmonious urban living, understanding the issues that impede the efficient organization and operation of city governments is of paramount importance (Anh, 2016).

This article aims to shed light on a spectrum of challenges that collectively shape the landscape in which city governments in Vietnam function (Nghi, Thu, & Dinh, 2022). From issues related to decentralized decision-making and resource allocation to concerns about infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, and citizen engagement, the complexity of managing urban centers under the guidance of the Central Government is undeniable (Anh, 2016). By examining these challenges, we seek to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the dynamics at play, thereby facilitating informed discourse and potentially paving the way for solutions that harmonize central authority with local needs (Hue & Tung-Wen Sun, 2022).

2. CITIES DIRECTLY UNDER THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN VIETNAM

In the dynamic landscape of Vietnam's urbanization, the governance of centrally-run cities emerges as a

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captivating narrative at the intersection of central authority and local management. Hanoi, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, and Can Tho, the keystones of this urban governance model, represent vibrant microcosms where the central government's directives intricately intertwine with the diverse needs of their urban populations (Hue & Tung-Wen Sun, 2022). The urban governance paradigm in these cities reflects both the challenges posed by centralized decision-making and the innovative strategies employed to ensure effective local governance under this unique administrative framework (Nghì, Thu, & Dinh, 2022).

In Vietnam, the urban governance model in centrally-run cities is characterized by a delicate dance between the authoritative directives originating from the Central Government and the localized decision-making required to address the specific needs of their urban populations (Hue & Tung-Wen Sun, 2022; Nghì, Thu, & Dinh, 2022). The central government's mandate provides a unifying framework, aligning the cities' trajectories with national development goals. However, this centralized approach can also introduce complexities in decision implementation, resource allocation, and responsiveness to the unique challenges faced by each city.

The unique roles these cities play in Vietnam's socio-economic landscape further enrich the narrative. As the political, economic, and cultural epicenters of the country, these cities shoulder the responsibility of driving innovation, fostering growth, and sustaining societal progress (Nghì, Thu, & Dinh, 2022). However, they must also navigate urbanization's unintended consequences, such as environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and disparities in quality of life. The challenges are multifaceted, and the strategies for tackling them require an intricate balance between central directives and local ingenuity (Anh, 2016; Chien & Thanh, 2022).

The 2013 Constitution delineates the structural composition of local governance, comprising the People's Council and the People's Committee, tailored to the specificities of rural and urban domains, islands, and specialized economic zones as outlined in Article 111, Clause 2. This organizational configuration is expounded upon by the Law on Organization of Local Government in 2015, which expounds that urban local governance encompasses the municipal echelons of centrally administered cities, districts, towns, provincial cities, and cities under central authority, encompassing wards and towns (Thanh & Canh, 2019). To address the exigencies of urbanization, the Law supplements the Urban Committee for the People's Councils of centrally run cities, thereby advancing the state's urban management prerogatives (Nghì, Thu, & Dinh, 2022).

The symbiotic interplay of the 2013 Constitution and the 2015 Law on Organization of Local Governments has engendered a legal framework that provides the latitude for adaptable local governance structures, congruous with

managerial imperatives and reflective of the nuanced sociogeographic fabric (Thanh & Canh, 2019; (Nghì, Thu, & Dinh, 2022)). In effect, this framework has ushered in a contextualized paradigm of local governance, characterized by a discernible demarcation between urban and rural governance, underscored by explicit functional, task-oriented, and authoritative distinctions germane to these administrative units.

The Law amending and augmenting select provisions of the Law on Organization of the Government and the Law on Organization of Local Government in 2019 has established the underpinnings for the National Assembly's discretionary determination of urban governance models within certain cities directly under the purview of the Central Government (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022). This legislative impetus is tailored to the intrinsic attributes and managerial prerequisites peculiar to each urban locale. Building upon this foundation, the XIV National Assembly promulgated three resolutions pertaining to the urban governance configuration:

Resolution No. 97/2019/QH14, dated November 27, 2019, delineates a pilot urban governance framework for Hanoi city. In consonance with this resolution, the urban governance model for Hanoi comprises a comprehensive municipal administrative hierarchy, encompassing citywide, district, town, commune, and township levels of governance, each composed of both a People's Council and a People's Committee (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022). Furthermore, the resolution designates the People's Committee as the governing body for wards within a district or town.

Resolution No. 131/2020/QH14, enacted on November 16, 2020 by the National Assembly, pertains to the organizational configuration of urban governance within Ho Chi Minh City. In consonance with this resolution, the urban administrative apparatus in Ho Chi Minh City is structured around the integral entities of the People's Council and the People's Committee. Within the nested hierarchy, the governance of districts and the wards thereof is vested in the People's Committees of respective districts and wards. The functions and powers vested in the district and ward People's Committees are executed in alignment with the stipulations outlined within this Resolution, while concurrently adhering to the principles of decentralization and delegation, as prescribed by the Chairman of the City People's Committee, the City's People's Committee, and the Chairman of the District People's Committee. This framework further extends to the organization of local governance within districts, cities, communes, and townships of the City, which are mandatorily governed by the provisions articulated in the Law on Organization of Local Government (Anh, 2016; Chien & Thanh, 2022). Subsequent to this, the National Assembly Standing Committee promulgated Resolution No. 1111/NQ-UBTVQH14 on December 9, 2020, concerning the administrative unit arrangement of districts and communes,

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coupled with the establishment of Thu Duc city, predicated upon a distinct delineation. Thu Duc city, materialized by amalgamating three districts, namely District 2, District 9, and Thu Duc District, embodies an exclusive urban governance model distinguished by its idiosyncratic attributes within the contemporary urban landscape of Vietnam (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022).

Furthermore, Resolution No. 119/2020/QH14, endorsed on June 19, 2020 by the National Assembly, enunciates the pilot framework for urban governance and a suite of specific mechanisms and policies for the developmental trajectory of Da Nang city. In tandem with this resolution, the urban governance construct within Da Nang city, as well as Hoa Vang district and communes, embodies a comprehensive local administrative echelon encompassing both the People's Council and the People's Committee (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022). Within the spatial ambit of districts and their constituent wards, the governance architecture is embodied in the People's Committee, encapsulating the administrative organs of the district and ward, in congruence with the principles enumerated within this Resolution (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022).

In conjunction with the aforementioned paradigm of urban governance, the cities of Hanoi, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City have embraced an array of specific mechanisms and policies tailored to ensure congruence with the delineated urban governance constructs. Notably, these measures encompass Resolution No. 115/2020/QH14, underscoring the pilot implementation of precise financial-budgetary mechanisms and policies tailored to Hanoi city. Furthermore, Resolution No. 54/2017/QH14 has delineated specialized mechanisms and policies catering to the developmental trajectory of Ho Chi Minh City. This encompasses domains spanning land management, financial administration, state budget management, investment oversight, authorization modalities, and the remuneration structure of city-managed cadres, civil servants, and public employees. Similarly, Resolution No. 119/2020/QH14, dated June 19, 2020, articulates explicit mechanisms germane to the developmental course of Da Nang city, particularly concerning the localized recalibration of urban planning and the administration of financial undertakings linked to the state budget (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022).

In a recent development, on June 24, 2023, the National Assembly issued Resolution No. 98/2023/QH15, heralding the initiation of specific mechanisms and policies aimed at propelling the development of Ho Chi Minh City. This resolution supplants its predecessor, Resolution No. 54/2017/QH14, with the intent to foster bespoke mechanisms and policies that furnish a legal bedrock to harness potentials, catalyze advantages, surmount hurdles, and engender transformative outcomes within the socio-economic sphere of the nation's largest metropolis. This resolution embodies a comprehensive repertoire comprising 44 precise mechanisms

and policies. Among these, 7 mechanisms are inherited from the antecedent Resolution No. 54/2017/QH14, 4 mechanisms have been delineated for other regional entities, 6 mechanisms are encompassed within bills currently undergoing National Assembly scrutiny, and 27 mechanisms and policies are uniquely pertinent to Ho Chi Minh City, earmarked for exclusive application within its territorial confines (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022).

In the context of Hai Phong city, guided by Resolution No. 45-NQ/TW dated January 24, 2019, promulgated by the Politburo to shape and advance its construction and development until 2030 with a foresight to 2045, a strategic objective for 2030 has been articulated to establish an urban administration characterized by efficiency, effectiveness, and lean governance. This impetus finds further operationalization through the enactment of National Assembly Resolution No. 35/2021/QH15 on November 13, 2021, which paves the way for the piloting of specific mechanisms and policies tailored to the developmental trajectory of Hai Phong city. At present, the city is actively engaged in formulating a project aimed at researching and presenting a comprehensive blueprint for organizing a streamlined, efficient, and effective one- and two-tier urban administrative structure. This undertaking concurrently seeks to augment the quality of public services offered by the administrative machinery and to advocate for the delegation and decentralization of authority to the urban governance of Hai Phong city, in consonance with the tenets outlined within Resolution No. 45-NQ/TW of the Politburo (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022).

In the case of Can Tho city, its administrative architecture remains predicated on a three-tier structure comprising the City Government, district administration, and local governance units within wards, communes, and townships, each endowed with a People's Council and a People's Committee. Particularly noteworthy is the resemblance of the organizational arrangement governing urban governance within districts and wards to the administrative constructs observed in cities, towns, districts, communes, and townships situated within the province. In addition to the preceding, the National Assembly has introduced Resolution No. 45/2022/QH15 on January 11, 2022, delineating a comprehensive suite of specific mechanisms and policies calibrated to propel the developmental trajectory of Can Tho city (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022). This resolution spans domains such as financial management, state budget oversight, the decentralization of state managerial prerogatives within the domain of land and urban planning, the regulation of cadre, civil servant, and public employee remuneration under city management, as well as the articulation of preferential policies and investment support mechanisms targeting specific projects. Notably, these projects encompass endeavors such as the revitalization of the Dinh An - Can Tho

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waterway through dredging and recuperation initiatives, alongside the establishment of a nexus for the interlinkage, production, processing, and consumption of agricultural produce within the Mekong Delta region (Thanh, Thuy, Hoa, & Thien, 2022).

3. URBAN GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES FACING THESE CITY GOVERNMENTS

Vietnam stands distinct for its entrenched centralized political framework, a configuration wherein the levers of power are significantly concentrated within the Central Government. This structural hallmark begets a suite of challenges that reverberate across the spectrum of local governance, wherein municipal administrations find themselves ensnared within a nexus of constrained autonomy that debilitates their capacity to effectively grapple with exigent local concerns.

The intricate tapestry of bureaucratic processes intertwined with a proliferation of regulations further compounds the challenges confronting city governance. This intricate interplay introduces a ponderous impediment to the nimble process of decisional formulation and operational execution. The consequential ramification is often manifest in the struggle of city governments as they endeavor to nimbly navigate the convoluted maze of bureaucratic intricacies, thereby engendering an impediment to the prompt and efficacious implementation of pivotal projects and the unfettered enforcement of progressive policies.

An equitable distribution of financial resources emerges as a cornerstone in the trajectory of urban development. The discordant allocation of funds portends the potential for disparate developmental trajectories among diverse cities and regions, engendering a scenario wherein certain urban enclaves bask in heightened attention and resource allocation, while others languish in comparative neglect.

The crescendo of urbanization, propelled by swift demographic shifts, places immense strain on extant infrastructure, instigating a host of predicaments encompassing traffic gridlocks, inadequate housing provisioning, and the dearth of essential public amenities. Consequently, the confluence of propelling economic growth alongside sustainable urban development emerges as a central tightrope challenge that city governments are compelled to navigate (Tung, Thanh, Thuy, & Hang, 2023).

Invariably, urban environs are beleaguered by an array of environmental quandaries, spanning from pollution burdens to the efficacious management of waste, all compounded by the lamentable scarcity of verdant spaces. Striking an equilibrium between the impetus for economic expansion and the imperatives of environmental conservation encapsulates an intricate and often vexing concern (Tung, Thanh, Thuy, & Hang, 2023).

The provisioning of quality education, healthcare, and social services within the urban matrix engenders a multifaceted conundrum. City administrations grapple with the formidable task of ensuring the equitable dispensation of these fundamental services to all denizens, inextricably tethered to the aspiration of nurturing an inclusive and flourishing urban populace (Tung, Thanh, Thuy, & Hang, 2023).

Corruption assumes a pernicious role in undermining the bedrock of effective governance, eroding public trust in city administrations (Berman et al., 2021). The imperative of ensconcing transparency and accountability within the precincts of local administration remains an enduring challenge, requiring a perpetual commitment to the augmentation of governance efficacy.

Central to the edifice of accountable governance is the imperative of entwining citizens within the tapestry of decisional processes. The arduous endeavor to kindle substantive citizen engagement and to seamlessly assimilate public feedback into the policy calculus embodies a challenge fraught with complexities (Tung, Thanh, Thuy, & Hang, 2023).

Disparities in economic growth trajectories across cities engender a milieu of income inequality, precipitating incongruent standards of living (Thanh et al., 2021). The pursuit of harmonized developmental trajectories assumes paramountcy in the endeavor to circumvent these disparities, ensuring an equitably prosperous urban mosaic.

The cultivation of a proficient and adept local government workforce underscores a pivotal requisite for effective governance (Thu, Thi, & Nghi, 2023). The challenge of nurturing leadership acumen and administrative prowess among local officials stands as a formidable task demanding sustained commitment.

Urban habitats metamorphose into crucibles of diversity, hosting variegated demographics characterized by divergent cultural mores and requisites (Thu, Thi, & Nghi, 2023). Ensuring that policies and services resonantly encapsulate this diversity while remaining attuned to the needs of all residents represents a confluence of intricate considerations (Tung, Thanh, Thuy, & Hang, 2023).

Centralized within the fabric of prudent urban management lies the art of efficacious urban planning and judicious zoning regulations. The absence of coherence or the ossification of planning norms can precipitate the specter of chaotic urban expansion, necessitating a perennial commitment to orderliness and foresight.

4. SEVERAL KEY INSTITUTIONAL SOLUTIONS

Maintaining a centralized governance framework, the proposition of incremental administrative decentralization emerges as a potential mechanism to endow local governments with discernible degrees of decision-making authority, particularly pertaining to matters directly

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relevant to their respective communities, thereby engendering an ameliorated degree of responsiveness (Cities & Governments, 2008). Concurrently, the establishment of robust accountability mechanisms, exemplified by recurrent performance evaluations and public disclosures, assumes a pivotal role in ensuring the judicious exercise of local administrative autonomy (Chien & Thanh, 2022).

The implementation of comprehensive bureaucratic reforms designed to streamline administrative processes and ameliorate regulatory complexities stands forth as an avenue conducive to the expeditious facilitation of decision-making (Nghị, Thu, & Dinh, 2022). The constitution of task forces or review committees tasked with periodic assessment and recalibration of regulatory frameworks stands as a prospective strategy to forestall the emergence of bureaucratic impediments.

Substantial investments directed toward digital infrastructure are advocated, aimed at fostering the instantiation of e-governance platforms that efficaciously orchestrate online service dissemination, citizen engagement, and inter-agency data exchange (Chien & Thanh, 2022). This digitization thrust is envisioned to be conducive to the streamlining of procedural modalities, while simultaneously elevating transparency benchmarks and curbing instances of malfeasance.

The initiation of targeted training initiatives and workshops, tailored to amplify the leadership, administrative, and technical proficiencies of local administrative functionaries, occupies a critical niche within the purview of strategic interventions. By fortifying the skill sets of these officials, the formulation and execution of efficacious policies, projects, and programs can be perceptibly advanced.

The gradual devolution of fiscal resources to local governance entities, accompanied by the concomitant delegation of augmented authority in the realm of revenue collection, emerges as a potent instrument for conferring mettle upon cities to fund and actualize projects that cohere with their distinct exigencies (Chien & Thanh, 2022). This stratagem is paralleled by the encouragement of local revenue mobilization avenues encompassing property levies, fees, and allied mechanisms, thereby curbing overreliance on central funding sources.

To ensure methodical urban expansion and judicious land usage, there is a compelling need to bolster the capacities of urban planning agencies (Nghị, Thu, & Dinh, 2022). This imperative encompasses the orchestrated deployment of integrated infrastructure blueprints, strategically calibrated to grapple with challenges precipitated by rapid urbanization, embracing facets such as transportation, housing provisioning, and public amenity provisioning.

The cultivation of collaborative frameworks binding local administrative bodies with private enterprises, as exemplified by Public-Private Partnerships, emerges as an apt conduit for steering infrastructural undertakings and

service dispensations (Nghị, Thu, & Dinh, 2022). This synergistic rapport holds potential for infusing specialized expertise and resources, concurrently catalyzing efficiency enhancements and innovative trajectories.

The orchestration of participatory forums that solicit the meaningful engagement of citizens within the decisional edifice holds currency as a formidable instrumentality. Regular convocations such as town hall assemblies, citizen advisory panels, and public consultations assume the mantle of promoting a sense of co-ownership and inclusivity within the ambit of governance paradigms (Nghị, Thu, & Dinh, 2022).

The imperative of combating corruption resonates prominently, underscoring the indispensability of rigorous anti-corruption measures instantiated through the agency of autonomous oversight entities, provisions for safeguarding whistleblowers, and the implantation of transparent procurement frameworks (Thu, Thi, & Nghi, 2023). Augmented transparency paradigms, such as the advent of open data repositories and the public dissemination of budgetary information, accentuate the contours of accountability.

The incorporation of performance-based incentives within the operative frameworks of local administrations, devised to recognize accomplishments aligned with developmental milestones and the adept resolution of challenges, emerges as a salient strategy (Chien & Thanh, 2022; Thu, Thi, & Nghi, 2023). Tangible rewards encompassing augmented funding allocations or honorary distinctions hold the promise of galvanizing local governance efficiency.

The impetus toward regional collaboration merits accentuation, envisaging the fostering of synergies amongst contiguous municipalities to grapple with shared challenges spanning the gamut of waste management, transportation networks, and ecological preservation (Nghị, Thu, & Dinh, 2022). This collaborative impetus capitalizes on the pooling of resources and the confluence of expertise to proffer solutions marked by heightened efficiency (Thu, Thi, & Nghi, 2023).

In the pursuit of coherent and sustainable urban development, the strategic blueprints enshrining long-term visions, goals, and actionable strategies assume paramount significance (Chien & Thanh, 2022; Thu, Thi, & Nghi, 2023). Regular reviews and updates to these comprehensive schemes stand as indispensable to ensure the requisite nimbleness and adaptability in the face of dynamic contextual shifts. By embracing these aforesaid institutional paradigms, Vietnam is poised to navigate a trajectory toward an enhanced, accountable, and agile city governance framework, harmoniously addressing the kaleidoscope of challenges instigated by processes of urbanization and centralization.

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