베트남 당-국가 체제에서의 전자정부 집행

Implementation of e-Government in Vietnam's Party-State System

Dao Hung

Ph.D. Candidate, Graduate School of Public Administration

From June 16 to July 5, 2024, I embarked on an enlightening trip across Vietnam to delve into the nuances of e-government implementation for my PhD dissertation. *I was selected for the Asian Studies Institute's local research support project*. My research took me through the provinces of Daklak, Ben Tre, and Hue, each representing different stages of digital transformation within the country. This trip, a blend of rigorous academic inquiry and cultural immersion, provided profound insights into Vietnam's digital future.

Daklak: The Emerging Frontier

My adventure began in Daklak, a province in the Central Highlands known for its coffee plantations and vibrant culture. Daklak, rated as having a medium level of e-government development, also faces unique challenges in implementing e-government initiatives. the first week was spent for interviewing key officials from the Departments of Home Affairs, Information and Communications, and Transport. Despite limited resources and infrastructure, their dedication to digital transformation was evident.

Picture 1. First day at Daklak Department of Information and Communication

One memorable interview was with the Deputy Director of the Department of Information and Communications. His deep understanding and analytical perspective on the formation and development of e-government in the locality were striking. He described the ongoing, sometimes redundant, processes of implementing various IT policies in the public sector, leading to a fragmented system of policies, software, and hardware.

A week of working closely with Daklak's civil servants gave me a clear sense of the local leadership's determination to develop e-government. However, this determination has not yet translated into concrete action plans. Additionally, the lack of a clear central government roadmap for e-government development has forced localities like Daklak to adopt experimental policies, leading to repeated trials and wastage before achieving the current successes.

Ben Tre: Bridging Tradition and Innovation

In the second week, I traveled to Ben Tre, a province in the Mekong Delta, famous for its coconut groves and riverine landscapes. Ben Tre showcased a low-level development in e-government, blending tradition with technological advancement. Here, I had the pleasure of meeting the staff at the People's Committee Office and the Department of IT, where discussions revolved around the coordination between departments and the lessons learned in digital transformation.

I also had the opportunity to work directly with the team responsible for developing online public service software (i-gate) and electronic office software (i-office) at the Ben Tre branch of the Vietnam Posts and Telecommunications Group (VNPT). This meeting provided me with a comprehensive view of how i-office software is used to connect, manage, and monitor the activities of government agencies, as well as how i-gate software is employed to track, process, and circulate public service records. The visit to VNPT Ben Tre was enlightening, offering valuable insights into the technology and rationale behind the current software used in local digital transformation efforts in Vietnam.
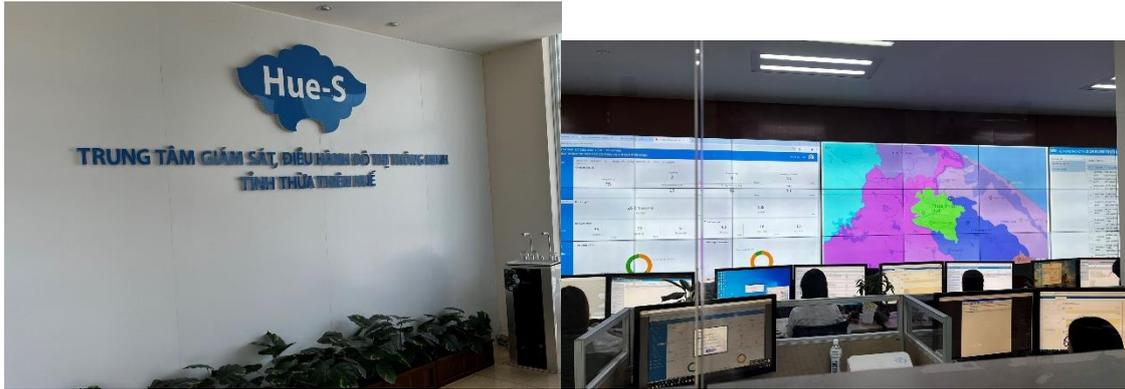
Picture 2. Ben Tre VNPT, agencie take in charge of software for e-government

However, a significant challenge in Ben Tre is the digital divide – the gap in understanding and applying information technology between different population groups. This disparity creates a pronounced difference in the development of e-government between urban and rural areas. In other words, while the central area of Ben Tre has made notable achievements in e-government, just a 10km journey into the rural regions reveals a stark absence of digital transformation in both public and residential sectors.

Hue: The Beacon of Progress

My final destination was Hue, a city steeped in history and culture, and a shining example of e-government progress. Hue's proactive approach to digital transformation was palpable. The Department of Information and Communications and the Smart City Center showcased advanced e-government initiatives driven by strong political will and a clear vision. The field trip began with an interview with the Director of the Department of Information and Communications of Thua Thien Hue province. His insights into locally developed software systems underscored the importance of innovation and local solutions in driving digital transformation. Hue's success is a testament to what political determination and strategic resource allocation can achieve.

Picture 3. The Smart City Center in Hue

A highlight of Hue's e-government development is the local independence in using IT personnel to develop e-office software and e-service portals as early as 2006, long before central government policies were officially introduced these ideas. This vision of Hue's leadership, repeatedly emphasized by interviewees, has been pivotal to the province's sustainable and stable digital infrastructure. Over the past 20 years, this vision has been consistently implemented, resulting in a user-friendly system that meets the practical needs of the local citizens.

One of the most enlightening experiences was interacting with the Hue-S application, a smartphone app developed to facilitate convenient interaction between citizens and the government. Using Hue-S, residents can report issues in their neighborhoods, track personal and family information related to education and insurance, or even quickly connect with local officials for public services. After a decade of development, Hue-S has evolved into a comprehensive social network for Hue's residents, providing everything they need from the government. Currently, Hue faces the challenge of maintaining its leading position by continually improving and surpassing its own successes.

Reflections and Insights

This field trip was more than just an academic pursuit; it was a journey through the heart of Vietnam's digital evolution. Each province offered unique perspectives and challenges, painting a comprehensive picture of the country's e-government landscape. The central role of the Communist Party in policy-making, the varying degrees of political determination among local leaders, and the adaptability of frontline workers were pivotal in shaping the outcomes of digital initiatives.

The disparity in e-government development across provinces highlighted the need for tailored approaches that consider local contexts. The proactive strategies in Hue serve as a model that could potentially guide other regions towards successful digital transformation.

Moving Forward

The findings from this trip will significantly contribute to dissertation on e-government policy và cách thức các chính sách được thực thi tại địa phương in Vietnam. Kết quả nghiên cứu sẽ được dùng để inform policy recommendations for enhancing e-government implementation in Vietnam. Emphasizing political determination, resource allocation, and adaptive strategies will be crucial in overcoming existing challenges.

In conclusion, this field trip was a deeply enriching experience, blending academic rigor with the vibrant culture and resilience of Vietnam. It provided invaluable insights and unforgettable memories, shaping both my research and my appreciation for the dynamic interplay between technology and governance in a rapidly evolving landscape.
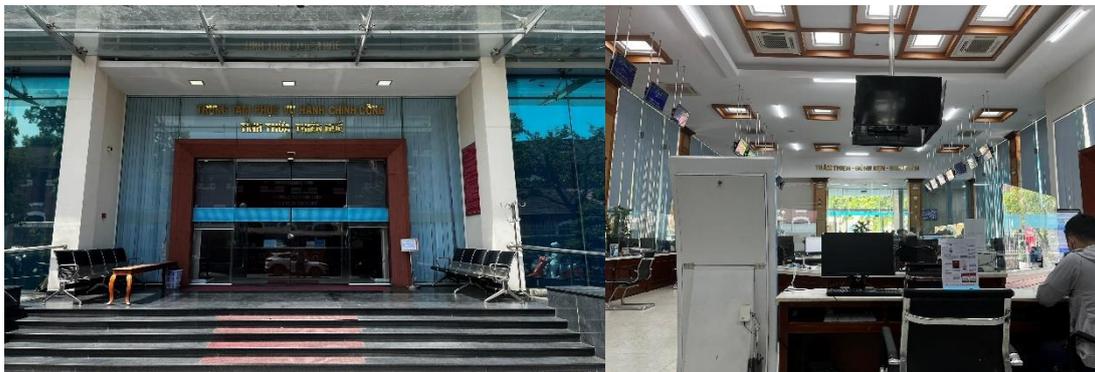
Some pictures from the trip

The Public Service Center in Daklak

Administrative building in Ben Tre

The Public Service Center in Hue

People's Committee of Daklak, Ben Tre and Hue