

Fact Sheet 12 Administrative Reforms: Changing Scales and Limitations to Planning

by GABI WAIBEL

Due to population growth and administrative reforms, planning and state management administrative units are continuously changed and adjusted in Vietnam. For all of these administrative units, data on socio-economic development is collected by the state apparatus throughout the country. Local administrative staff submits local statistics to higher authorities, and then provincial and national offices compile the data and produce annual reports, which serve as a database for the definition of planning targets. Moreover, these data are also used for monitoring activities and the analysis of long-term change and development processes. Changes in the scale of reference might therefore have a number of (un)expected effects.

In the course of the adoption of the Northern Vietnamese administrative system in the South after the war in 1975, a significant number of new provinces and cities were created. Large and highly populated provinces with more than one million inhabitants were restructured into several smaller provinces, since when their numbers have increased.

Increase of number of provinces / cities in Vietnam

	1978	1990	2000	2009
No of provinces	38	46	57	61
No of cities	3	3	4	5

Source: Kerkvliet (2004:5) updated by author with data from GoV (2009)

Today, there is still a constant readjustment of administrative units.

Referring to existing legal provisions, provinces can be awarded the administrative status of a city, rural districts are transformed into urban districts and commune boundaries are shifted.

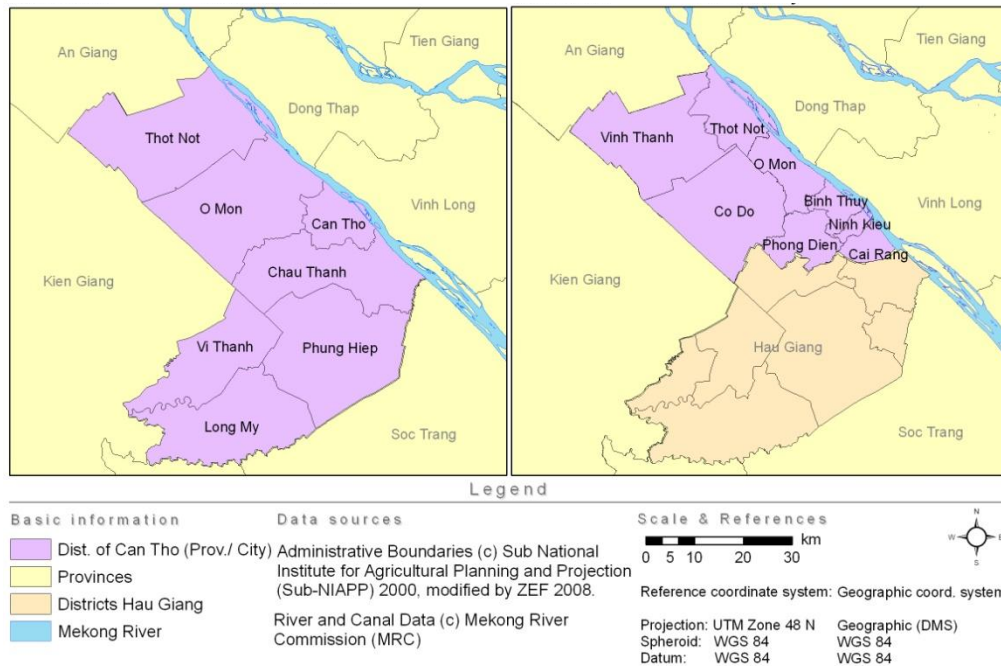
In the following, one example of the rearrangement of administrative boundaries is presented for the case of Can Tho City.

At the end of 2004, the province of Can Tho was divided into two separate entities, namely Can Tho City and Hau Giang Province. This division increased the total number of provinces in the Mekong Delta from 12 to 13. The existing organisational division into districts was practically maintained for Hau Giang, with just a few adjustments made along the new provincial boundary. The districts of Can Tho City, however, were modified – new districts were established and old boundaries shifted. Out of the eight new districts of Can Tho City, four were classified as rural (Thot Not, Vinh Than, Co Do and Phong Dien) and the others urban (Cai Rang, Binh Thuy, Ninh Kieu and O Mon). This administrative distinction has several practical implications, amongst which is that water supply in urban districts is privatised, whereas rural water supply is managed by the state.

In 2009, another administrative reform was implemented when the district of Thot Not became urban, and the district of Co Do was equally affected by the creation of an additional new district, Thoi Lai district. The district of Phong Dien went through a transition in 2010 as well. All together, a high frequency of change in scales can be observed.

Each of these changes goes along with a shift in decision-making, a change of planning units and most likely movements of staff and infrastructure.

Vietnam – Mekong Delta Provinces. Administrative Reform of Can Tho City, 2004



Source: Statistical Yearbooks Can Tho City
 Map: Sven Genschick (2011)

Additionally, new local government agencies have to be set up when provinces and/or districts are split. One can assume that such changes do not happen without contestation, since resource allocation patterns and power structures are equally affected. From a historical perspective, these processes also reinforce bureaucratisation and lead to an increase in state management personnel.

Institutional changes are often difficult and lengthy processes, so as a consequence it may take some time before the respective 'new' agencies reach a level of satisfactory performance according to the expected standards. Furthermore, most of the reforms will affect existing planning processes in a negative way, as respective administrations' databases cannot easily be adjusted to the new planning units because existing plans may lose their validity. Moreover, monitoring becomes a particularly difficult task and local transformation processes can hardly be traced, because there are no statistical datasets, such as on the number of domestic wells, public water supply

stations or hygienic latrines, available for comparison.

The transfer of responsibilities from one local administration to another may lead to new challenges; monitoring and evaluation as well as decision-making processes may become a difficult task. The creation of new boundaries may therefore negatively impact on water resources management – although this aspect often seems to be overlooked.

Further Reading

WAIBEL, G., BENEDIKTER, S., REIS, N. GENSHICK, S., LOAN NGUYEN, PHAM CONG HUU & TRAN THANH BE (2011) Water Governance under Renovation? – Concepts and Practices of IWRM in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. In: *The Mekong Delta System*. Springer. (forthcoming)

WAIBEL, G. (2010) State Management in Transition: Understanding Water Resources Management in Vietnam, ZEF Working Paper Series No 55. Bonn. Center for Development Research (ZEF). University of Bonn.

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