GREEN GROWTH IN HUE: POLICIES AND URBAN GOVERNANCE SOLUTIONS

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on examining the orientations and policies for promoting green growth in Hue City, in the context of its recent designation as a centrally governed city. Using secondary data combined with qualitative analysis, the study investigates the implementation of green growth across three dimensions-economic, social, and environmental-during the period 2022 - 2024. The analysis highlights key achievements and existing limitations that have hindered overall progress toward sustainable development in this transitional phase. Based on these findings, the paper proposes a set of policy recommendations to support the city in realizing its green growth objectives and in building Hue into a "Green – Cultural - Smart City" in the near future.*

Keywords: *Public policy; Sustainable development; Urban management; Green growth; Hue City.*

1. Introduction

Currently, countries around the world, including Vietnam, are facing severe impacts from climate change and the degradation of natural resources. In response to these challenges, Hue City has been adopting a development orientation based on the "green - cultural - smart" model, which aligns with the national strategy for green growth in the 2021- 2030 period. Notably, from January 1, 2025, Hue is officially become a centrally governed city under Resolution No. 175/2024/QH15 (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2024), operating under a two-tier local government model (city and ward/commune levels), and doesn't have any changes after Resolution No. 202/2025/QH15 (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2025). This transition presents a critical opportunity to redesign the urban governance system, with green growth established as a central pillar of Hue's distinctive urban development strategy. To realize this vision, the local government has issued and implemented various policies, plans, and action programs to promote economic restructuring toward a "green" model, upgrade infrastructure, improve environmental quality, and foster active participation from both the community and the business sector. Although initial achievements have been recorded, the implementation process has revealed several challenges and limitations, including insufficient funding, slow progress, a shortage of qualified human resources for the green economy, and limited public consensus. These issues highlight the need to conduct a systematic assessment of Hue's green growth orientation and policies as a foundation for proposing sustainable local economic management solutions in the coming period.

2. Research overview

A review of both domestic and international studies reveals that sustainable-oriented economic management has emerged as a relatively new approach in recent years.

At the international level, an OECD report (2016) on Hai Phong recommended that the city integrate green objectives into urban planning, transportation, and eco-industrial zone development. However, the report did not explore specific implementation mechanisms or assess the social and environmental justice implications. Later, Hermelin and Andersson, in their study of ten medium-sized cities in Sweden, emphasized the importance of energy efficiency and environmental protection in urban green growth policies but noted the lack of institutional

depth and clear performance indicators (Hermelin and Andersson, 2018). Similarly, Mee Kam Ng analyzed the green urban governance model in Shenzhen, China, underscoring the need to balance economic growth with social equity (Ng, 2019).

In Vietnam, Nguyen Thi Hanh proposed, in her doctoral dissertation in economics, principles for managing green spaces and improving the legal framework (Hanh, 2017). However, her work did not delve deeply into the economic management dimension associated with green growth policies. Pham Van Thanh and Pham Xuan Anh examined the theoretical foundations and both international and domestic practices of urban management oriented toward green growth, deriving several lessons for promoting sustainable development in Vietnamese cities. Nevertheless, the study remains conceptual mainly and does not provide an in-depth assessment of specific local policy implementations (Thanh & Anh, 2022). Meanwhile, the study conducted by Nguyen Quang Phuc and Le Thi Hoa Sen mainly described the Green Growth Action Plan of Thua Thien Hue Province without providing an in-depth analysis of the implementation process or an objective evaluation of policy effectiveness and the governance capacity of provincial authorities (Phuc & Sen, 2023).

Although both international and domestic studies have explored various aspects of green growth at the urban level, several important research gaps remain. Globally, works by OECD, Hermelin & Andersson, and Mee Kam Ng have offered valuable recommendations and analyzed policy trends related to green growth. However, these studies generally lack empirical investigations into implementation mechanisms, social impacts, and environmental justice - factors that are critical to sustainable transitions in developing urban contexts. In Vietnam, existing research tends to approach green growth primarily through spatial planning, action plans - as seen in the works of Nguyen Thi Hanh, Pham Van Thanh and Pham Xuan Anh; Pham Quang Phuc and Le Thi Hoa Sen. Yet, there remains a lack of comprehensive analyses focused on local governance frameworks, policy instruments, and the actual effectiveness of implementation at the provincial or municipal level. Notably, Hue - an emerging locality with a clear orientation toward green transition - has not yet been the subject of in-depth research in this regard.

Building upon this body of research, the present paper aims to analyze the orientation and policy content of green growth in Hue City, assess the relevance and effectiveness of policy implementation in practice, and propose innovative solutions for local economic management. The ultimate goal is to contribute to improving the mechanisms for implementing urban green growth policies, thereby fostering sustainable development and preserving Hue's distinctive cultural identity in the current context.

3. Research methods

This study primarily employs methods of synthesis and analysis of secondary data sources, including the *National Green Growth Strategy*, provincial *Green Growth Action Plans*, and officially published statistics from the *People's Committee of Thua Thien Hue Province* and relevant local departments and agencies. In addition, qualitative analysis is utilized to evaluate the orientations, policies, and outcomes of green growth implementation in Hue City. Based on these analyses, the paper proposes a set of solutions to enhance local economic management toward sustainability, in alignment with current development goals and contextual challenges.

4. Research results

4.1. Analysis of green growth orientation and policies in Hue city

4.1.1. Analysis of green growth orientation and objectives

Hue City has oriented its socio-economic development toward a green and sustainable growth model, consistent with the national strategy and long-term development goals. The restructuring of the economy toward an innovative growth model - aimed at building a nation that is economically resilient, environmentally sustainable, and socially equitable, while advancing toward long-term carbon neutrality - is emphasized in Vietnam's National Green Growth Strategy for the 2021-2030 period, with a vision to 2050 (Government

of Vietnam, 2021). In line with this national direction, Thua Thien Hue Province has been designated to become a centrally governed city under Resolution No. 54-NQ/TW of the Politburo, based on the principles of heritage preservation, cultural identity, ecological and landscape development, environmental friendliness, and smart governance. This orientation aims to "green" the development objectives at the provincial and municipal levels (Central Executive Committee, 2019). On January 1, 2025, Thua Thien Hue is officially be recognized as a centrally governed city according to Resolution No. 175/2024/QH15 of the 15th National Assembly, adopted on November 30, 2024. To implement these strategic orientations, the People's Committee of Thua Thien Hue Province issued an Action Plan to gradually execute the National Green Growth Action Plan for the 2021 - 2030 period. The plan ensures the integration of green objectives into urban planning, public investment, sustainable economic development, and waste management, while concentrating resources on priority projects (Thua Thien Hue People's Committee, 2022).

At the city level, Hue's core development orientation focuses on restructuring its economy following a new pattern of "Services - Industry - Agriculture," replacing the previous "Industry - Services - Agriculture" model. This transformation seeks to capitalize on the city's comparative advantages in cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, and environmental governance (Thua Thien Hue People's Committee, 2022) (Thua Thien Hue Department of Tourism, 2022). Concurrently, the city has prioritized the expansion of green spaces, improvement of water and waste management infrastructure, development of public and non-motorized transport systems, reduction of single-use plastics, and promotion of circular economy initiatives at the local level to foster the formation of green and smart urban models (UNDP, 2023) (WWF, 2024).

In summary, Hue City has clearly identified its development orientation toward achieving moderate economic growth in tandem with environmental protection, cultural heritage preservation, and continuous improvement in citizens' quality of life, thereby advancing toward a future urban model characterized by being green, cultural, and smart.

4.1.2. Analysis of green growth policy content

From an institutional perspective, Hue City has concretized its green economic growth orientation through a system of legal documents, various programs, action plans, and socio-economic development plans. These efforts have provided a solid legal foundation for policy implementation.. Accordingly, green growth objectives have been integrated into almost every dimension of development, including urban planning, public investment, and production, while mobilizing all available resources to achieve emission reduction and climate change adaptation goals.

Restructuring economic sectors toward "greening" is a core element of Hue's green growth policy. Within this framework, the city identifies green tourism as its spearhead sector, while promoting information technology development, digital transformation, and the application of advanced technologies in agriculture as key foundations. The policy emphasizes that tourism development must be sustainable, accompanied by cultural heritage preservation and environmental protection, and must minimize adverse impacts on the socio-cultural environment. In the industrial sector, attention is given to developing high-tech, clean, and environmentally friendly industries, thereby moving toward "green industry." Priority sectors include information technology, electronics, agricultural and aquatic product processing, food and beverage manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and high-quality handicrafts. In the agricultural sector, the policy outlines specific directions to increase farmers' income while maintaining soil resource integrity through incentives for organic agriculture, circular agriculture, and agriculture integrated with eco-tourism development.

Environmental protection is also a key consideration in Hue's investment attraction and industrial development policies aligned with green growth. Mandatory environmental standards have been established for project selection and approval, focusing on waste

discharge systems and green space requirements within project premises. Based on these criteria, projects posing environmental pollution risks are rejected, and resource-extractive industries are gradually phased out. Conversely, clean production industries with high technological content are prioritized, and industrial zones are being gradually transformed toward ecological models. For example, the Chan May - Lang Co Economic Zone has been planned as a high-tech and clean industrial area, while other industrial zones such as Phu Bai, Phong Dien, and Tu Ha are oriented toward high-tech, environmentally responsible development. This policy framework ensures a rigorous screening process for investment projects, aligning with the city's green growth objectives.

Furthermore, to progressively realize the green urban development policy by 2030, Hue has issued an Urban Green Growth Development Plan that promotes the transition toward a green urban economy, enhances competitiveness, and supports sustainable urban development. The plan outlines several specific directions:

(1) Expanding and protecting urban green spaces through the construction of new parks and the planting of more trees.

(2) Investing in and upgrading waste treatment systems to minimize environmental pollution, prevent flooding during the rainy season, improve canals and waterways, and enhance water quality for better living conditions.

(3) Implementing plans to renovate low-income residential areas and increase social housing projects to ensure equitable access to urban amenities.

(4) Prioritizing green, energy-efficient, and clean-technology-based buildings in urban planning and design.

(5) Promoting public and non-motorized transport systems within the city.

These measures represent concrete policy steps aimed at transforming Hue into an environmentally friendly and smart city in the near future.

The final component of Hue's green growth policy emphasizes raising public awareness and encouraging active participation from communities and businesses in the city's green development process. To this end, the local government has planned extensive communication campaigns supported by clear regulations and guidelines to disseminate green growth principles across all socio-economic sectors. Initiatives promoting green lifestyles, sustainable production and consumption, reduction of single-use plastics, energy conservation, and corporate environmental responsibility have been designed to engage both local communities and businesses.

Overall, Hue's green growth policy has been comprehensively designed, providing a solid foundation for the city's sustainable development in the future.

4.2. Assessment of implementation: achievements, limitations, and underlying causes

As of January 1, 2025, Hue City officially becomes a centrally governed municipality under Resolution No. 175/2024/QH15, operating under a two-tier local government structure (city and ward/commune levels). This institutional transformation presents both opportunities and challenges, necessitating a comprehensive restructuring of urban governance in which green growth must be identified as a central pillar of development. Accordingly, assessing the policy implementation outcomes during the 2022–2024 period is essential to inform strategic planning for the upcoming phase of development.

During the implementation of the green growth strategy, Hue City has achieved several notable results.

In terms of socio-economic performance, between 2022 and 2024, Hue maintained a relatively high GRDP growth rate alongside stable environmental indicators. In 2022, despite the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city's economic growth rate exceeded 8.5%, with most targets met or surpassed, and state budget revenue reaching VND 12,781 billion (Thua Thien Hue People's Committee, 2022). In 2023, however, Thua Thien Hue Province experienced fluctuations in key economic indicators: the GRDP growth rate fell to 7.03%, below the target of 9–10%, while state budget revenue reached VND 11,000 billion, 10.8% higher than the initial projection (Thua Thien

Hue People's Committee, 2023). By 2024, despite global economic uncertainties, the province achieved a GRDP growth rate of 8.15%, ranking among the top-performing localities nationwide, with total state budget revenue of VND 12,900 billion, exceeding the planned estimate by 9% (Thua Thien Hue People's Committee, 2024). The economic structure has shifted in the right direction toward the "Services - Industry - Agriculture" model. These outcomes indicate that the local economy has sustained a stable recovery post-pandemic and is gradually transitioning toward a greener, more sustainable development model.

Over the years, Hue has also remained one of the leading provinces nationwide in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), particularly in the sectors of tourism, services, and high-tech manufacturing. This demonstrates that the city's investment policies targeting green and clean industries have begun to yield positive results. Moreover, Hue's economic structure has shown a clear transition consistent with the established "Services - Industry - Agriculture" orientation, while its cultural heritage system has been well preserved through restoration and conservation projects such as the Imperial Citadel (Dai Noi) and Bao Vinh Ancient Town. These developments suggest that Hue has, to some extent, succeeded in balancing economic growth with environmental protection.

In the field of environmental and urban management, Hue has effectively materialized its green growth policies through various concrete actions. Initiatives such as the "Green Sunday" campaign, the "Say No to Single-Use Plastics" movement, and the "Plastic Smart Cities" project in collaboration with WWF have helped eliminate most pollution hotspots in the inner city. Waste segregation at source has been piloted in several localities, producing promising results. Urban solid waste collection and treatment rates have reached over 95%, while plastic waste decreased by 15% in 2024 compared to 2023 (Thua Thien Hue People's Committee, 2024). The local government has also imposed strict penalties on enterprises causing environmental pollution-such as cement and woodchip factories near urban areas-which were required to upgrade technologies or relocate.

To strengthen environmental management, Hue has installed real-time environmental monitoring systems in major industrial zones to track waste and wastewater quality. Several wastewater treatment plants have been constructed, significantly improving the urban living environment. Additionally, the city has planned pedestrian streets and public spaces, including Ngo Mon Square and the riverside parks along the Perfume River, with increased greenery coverage and expanded bus services to reduce emissions. These achievements indicate that Hue has progressively met key environmental criteria for a green city.

The tourism and service sectors have also advanced in a green and sustainable direction. Between 2023 and 2025, Hue's tourism industry, in collaboration with WWF, implemented a Plastic Reduction Action Plan consisting of seven key tasks - such as reducing single-use plastics in hotels and tourist sites and promoting recycling - based on a voluntary commitment model. More than 40 enterprises have signed participation agreements, 12 hotels have developed plastic reduction plans, and pilot "plastic reduction" destinations have been established in community-based eco-tourism areas such as Thuy Bieu and A Luoi. Educational and communication activities, including the "Plastic Reduction School Model" and "Hue Plogging," have helped raise public awareness and transform community behaviors (WWF, 2024; 2025). As a result, 80% of the planned tasks were completed by the end of 2024. Owing to these efforts, Hue City was recognized three consecutive times as an "ASEAN Clean Tourist City" during 2022–2024, reflecting effective implementation of environmental sanitation, green infrastructure, and urban safety standards (ASEAN Tourism, 2024). These outcomes demonstrate that green growth principles have gradually become embedded in the city's development mindset and gained strong support from local communities and businesses.

Despite these encouraging achievements, Hue still faces several challenges and limitations. Some economic sectors have yet to develop in

the intended direction, and a number of major urban planning and environmental projects remain delayed, notably the "Hue - Smart and Environmentally Friendly City" project. The implementation of certain environmental infrastructure projects has been hindered by delayed public investment disbursement. Furthermore, parts of the local community and the private sector remain passive in their participation due to limited awareness of the benefits and entrenched behavioral and business habits. The shortage of skilled green technology professionals-in both quantity and quality-also constrains the city's transition toward a green growth model.

Overall, the analysis shows that Hue City is moving in the right direction toward green growth, achieving encouraging results such as steady economic performance, stable environmental indicators, and a strengthened image as a green urban center. However, in the coming years, Hue must urgently address existing shortcomings, particularly the delays in green projects, the limited availability of green human resources, and the need to foster broader participation from both the community and the business sector in achieving its green and sustainable growth objectives.

4.3. Green growth-oriented urban management solutions

To address existing limitations and accelerate the green growth agenda, Hue City needs to implement a comprehensive and synchronized system of solutions as follows:

(1) Improving institutions and policies to support green growth

Hue City should strengthen its institutional framework for green growth by integrating green objectives into the socio-economic development plans of each sector and locality. In addition, it is essential to establish a set of "green" criteria for the service, industrial, and agricultural sectors as a basis for monitoring, supervision, and performance evaluation. Notably, from January 1, 2025, Hue will officially operate under a two-tier local government model (at city and ward/commune levels) after becoming a centrally governed city. This transformation is not merely administrative but also opens up the opportunity to redesign the urban economic governance framework in a more modern, flexible, and efficient manner. In this context, mainstreaming green growth as a central pillar in both city-level and grassroots development programs becomes increasingly imperative. In addition, the city should also establish dedicated task forces to monitor and oversee the progress of key green projects, promptly identifying and resolving implementation bottlenecks.

To attract and encourage investment in clean technologies and green production, the local government should introduce preferential policies on taxation, land use, and credit, while simultaneously reforming administrative procedures to accelerate the disbursement of public investment capital for green projects. Moreover, it is important to mobilize financial resources from diverse sources such as Official Development Assistance (ODA), public–private partnerships (PPP), and green bonds to achieve identified objectives.

(2) Strengthening investment, upgrading green infrastructure, and fostering technological innovation for sustainable development

The local government should expedite delayed environmental infrastructure projects by prioritizing funding allocation and addressing technical obstacles, particularly for wastewater treatment, solid waste management, and flood prevention systems. Efforts should focus on developing an integrated public and non-motorized transport network, including the expansion of bus services (with a priority for electric buses), the construction of dedicated bicycle lanes to encourage modal shifts, and the enlargement of pedestrian areas in the city center to reduce transport-related emissions.

At the same time, the city should continue developing parks, increasing tree coverage, and enforcing strict standards for green and energy-efficient buildings. The implementation of the "Hue – Smart and Environmentally Friendly City" project should be accelerated, applying digital and IoT technologies in urban management - such as real-time environmental monitoring, intelligent traffic management, and flood warning systems - to enhance monitoring efficiency and responsiveness. Furthermore, the

government should introduce supportive policies to help enterprises upgrade production technologies toward cleaner methods, promote circular economy models, and expand the use of renewable energy in industrial zones and residential areas.

(3) Focusing on training and attracting high-quality human resources for green growth

To ensure the feasibility of these solutions, Hue City should strengthen coordination with universities and vocational training institutions to design and implement specialized programs in renewable energy, smart urban management, and environmental technologies. This will help develop a green workforce that is both sufficient in quantity and high in quality, meeting the demands of the city's new development phase.

Alongside local training, the municipal government should introduce preferential policies to attract highly skilled professionals in green sectors through competitive remuneration packages and incentives to encourage them to work and start businesses in Hue. It is also necessary to organize regular training workshops for local government officials at all levels, focusing on green topics such as climate change and sustainable development. In addition, the city should promote innovation through "green entrepreneurship" initiatives, providing financial and technical support to start-ups in clean technology, organic agriculture, and sustainable tourism.

(4) Enhancing public awareness and promoting community and business participation in the green transition

To effectively implement this solution, concrete actions should include expanding communication and educational campaigns on green growth objectives, such as organizing more frequent "Green Sunday" programs across sectors and residential areas, hosting recycling fairs and exhibitions of eco-friendly products, and developing practical green living manuals for households and enterprises covering waste segregation, energy conservation, and sustainable consumption.

Recognition programs should also be introduced to honor pioneering businesses in green production and environmental protection, while regular public-private dialogues should be held to provide platforms for local communities and enterprises to exchange ideas and feedback, thereby enhancing transparency and social consensus. Once awareness among communities and businesses is raised, they will actively support and participate in realizing the city's green growth goals.

In general, these four groups of solutions must be implemented concurrently. The integration of institutional improvement, infrastructure and technological advancement, human resource development, and social awareness promotion will generate a synergistic effect, enabling Hue City to overcome current challenges. If effectively implemented, these measures will not only help Hue address existing shortcomings but also strengthen its transition toward a "green - cultural - smart" urban model, achieving economic growth in harmony with heritage preservation and environmental protection in the future.

5. Discussion

Although the implementation of green growth initiatives in Hue City during the 2022-2024 period has yielded positive results, the effectiveness of a synchronized system of solutions still depends on multiple practical factors.

In terms of institutional and policy implementation, Hue faces major challenges in intersectoral coordination and the absence of specific mechanisms for execution across sectors and localities. In practice, despite the issuance of comprehensive strategies, many green and smart projects have been delayed due to disbursement bottlenecks and limited implementation capacity at the local level.

Similarly, investment in green infrastructure and technology requires substantial financial resources and efficient management mechanisms. However, at present, public-private partnerships remain underdeveloped, and consensus among stakeholders is limited, leading to difficulties in mobilizing private capital. Moreover, technical and financial support from the local government for circular economy models and clean technologies remains insufficient.

From a social perspective, community and business participation in the green transition remains low, revealing a significant gap in environmental communication and education. Although several proactive initiatives, such as the "Green Sunday" campaign, have been launched, the dissemination of green behavior still requires more creative communication strategies that emphasize the tangible benefits for citizens.

Based on these challenges, the study recommends enhancing incentive policies, fostering conditions for green entrepreneurship, developing pilot models of innovation, and strengthening implementation capacity at the grassroots level. At the same time, further in-depth research should be conducted on institutional frameworks, public–private partnership models, community behavior, and intersectoral collaboration to improve the overall effectiveness of green economic governance in Hue City.

6. Conclusion

The continuous achievements attained in recent years have reaffirmed the appropriateness of Hue City's green growth orientation, which aligns well with the city's cultural, economic, and social characteristics. However, Hue must further capitalize on its regional advantages, address existing limitations, and strengthen institutional reforms while fostering broader stakeholder consensus to ensure the coherent implementation of green solutions.

By doing so, Hue City can not only sustain its strong economic growth but also advance toward becoming a model "green - cultural - smart" city, where economic development harmonizes with heritage preservation and environmental sustainability in the new development era.

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TĂNG TRƯỞNG XANH Ở HUẾ: CHÍNH SÁCH VÀ GIẢI PHÁP QUẢN LÝ ĐÔ THỊ

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Tóm tắt: *Bài viết tập trung nghiên cứu định hướng và chính sách tăng trưởng xanh của thành phố Huế trong bối cảnh địa phương vừa được công nhận là thành phố trực thuộc Trung ương. Với nguồn dữ liệu thứ cấp kết hợp phân tích định tính, nghiên cứu đã phân tích thực trạng triển khai tăng trưởng xanh trên ba khía cạnh: kinh tế, xã hội, môi trường trong giai đoạn 2022-2024. Qua đó đánh giá những thành tựu nổi bật cũng như những hạn chế còn tồn tại làm chậm tiến độ chung của lộ trình phát triển thích ứng với giai đoạn mới. Trên cơ sở đó, đề xuất hệ thống giải pháp góp phần giúp địa phương hiện thực hóa mục tiêu tăng trưởng xanh, xây dựng Huế trở thành thành phố "xanh – văn hóa – thông minh" trong tương lai.*

Từ khóa: *Chính sách công; Phát triển bền vững; Quản lý đô thị; Tăng trưởng xanh; Thành phố Huế.*