The 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Local Government "Leadership for Digital Governance: Building the Teams to Implement the Technology"

## **Action Strategy**

### Executive Summary

#### Final Report

November 18-19, 2022 Pullman Arcadia Hotel, Phuket, Thailand

Host: College of Local Administration, Khon Kaen University Chair of Organizing Committee: Peerasit Kamnuansilpa

Platinum Sponsors: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Eastern International University

Conference Rapporteur: Professor Bruce Gilley



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# Action Strategy: Digital Transformation for Local Government

On governance services:

- Design platforms to allow users to shape and define services.
- Design services that incorporate citizen feedback and supervision.
- Design services that are anticipatory and responsive.
- Use the "Visit One Site at Most" standard for user experience.
- Phase out redundant or unnecessary analog tasks.
- Invest in digital tools for access and inclusion by informal and disadvantaged sectors.
- Invest in digital tools to enhance social resiliency amidst natural and man-made disasters.
- Support economic innovation through new digital government services.

On digital organizational transformation:

- Build flexible platform-based IT infrastructure and running on open, non-proprietary systems.
- Build scalable and secure platforms that are resilient to change.
- Invest in data quality and services.
- Create integrated geographic information systems (GIS) for local government functions.
- Establish in-house training systems for digital literacy.
- Encourage a "start-up culture" with a "digital mindset".
- Develop services based on user needs research.
- Launch in limited alpha and beta settings first.
- "Start small, learn fast, build teams, be bold."

On the public values of digital governance:

- Build in values of fairness, trustworthiness, and user satisfaction.
- Consider household-based accounts and other non-individual approaches.
- Ensure two-way interactions with citizens and shared control over platforms.
- Avoid AI in citizen-facing applications.
- Focus on marginal as well as median users to address the "digital divide".
- Bring non-digital representatives of traditional public administration onto digital governance teams.

## กลยุทธ์การดำเนินการ: การแปลงเป็นดิจิทัลสำหรับรัฐบาลท้องถิ่น (in Thai)

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- ลงทุนในเครื่องมือดิจิหัลเพื่อเพิ่มความยืดหยุ่นทางสังคมท่ามกลางภัยพิบัติทางธรรมชาติและที่มนุษย์สร้างขึ้น
- สนับสนุนนวัตกรรมทางเศรษฐกิจผ่านบริการใหม่ของรัฐบาลดิจิทัล

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- ลงทุนในคุณภาพข้อมูลและบริการ
- สร้างระบบสารสนเทศภูมิศาสตร์แบบบูรณาการ (GIS) สำหรับการทำงานของรัฐบาลท้องถิ่น
- สร้างระบบการฝึกอบรมภายในองค์กรสำหรับความรู้ด้านดิจิทัล
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- สร้างคุณค่าของความยุติธรรม ความน่าเชื่อถือ และความพึงพอใจของผู้ใช้
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- ตรวจสอบให้แน่ใจว่ามีปฏิสัมพันธ์สองทางกับพลเมืองและควบคุมแพลตฟอร์มร่วมกัน
- หลีกเลี่ยง AI ในแอปพลิเคชันที่ติดต่อกับพลเมือง
- มุ่งเน้นไปที่ผู้ใช้ส่วนเพิ่มและค่ามัธยฐานเพื่อจัดการกับ "ความเหลื่อมล้ำทางดิจิทัล"
- นำตัวแทนที่ไม่ใช่ดิจิทัลของการบริหารราชการแบบดั้งเดิมเข้าสู่ทีมธรรมาภิบาลดิจิทัล

# Executive Summary: Leadership for Digital Governance

On **digital governance services**, the primary mission was to allow users to drive and even define the services expected of government. Digital governance needed to be simple and easy for citizens. Whole-of-government approaches would be needed to bring together resources from different departments. Digital meant phasing out redundant or unnecessary legacy tasks and investing in new ones. Informal and disadvantaged sectors could gain access and inclusion through digital tools. Social resiliency could also be enhanced with services that anticipated natural and man-made disasters. Citizen feedback, supervision, and communications were a necessary aspect of all digital services. Economic innovation was also ripe for support by new digital government services such as rural ecommerce infrastructure. Governments should be designing services that are anticipatory rather than reactive and responsive rather than passive. Citizens should be able to follow a life-cycle of changing needs without changing apps or platforms.

On **digital organizational transformation**, IT infrastructure should be flexible platform-based and running on open, non-proprietary systems. The platforms should be scaleable and secure. It should be resilient to change and interoperable with other departments. Building up data quality and services was a key function. So too was the creation of integrated geographic information systems (GIS) for local government functions. Governments needed to create their own in-house training systems to offer digital literacy and skills training. A "start-up culture" based on risk-taking and flexibility would attract talent. Individuals across the civil service needed a "digital mindset". Services should be rolled out driven by user needs research and then alpha and beta tested.

On the **public values of digital governance**, systems needed to be fair, trustworthy, and satisfactory. The national and local values of each place needed to be embraced. This might mean non-individual accounts, and non-residential inclusion. Cyber governance networks should include all relevant stakeholders. To avoid digital dictatorship, governments needed two-way interactions with citizens and shared control over platforms. Citizen control, accountability, monitoring, and democracy were key. AI was not appropriate in citizen-facing applications because of specifically human value judgements. Bridging the "digital divide" meant attention to marginal as well as median users. Digital teams needed non-digital members of traditional public administration for both organizational and values reasons.

## Final Report for Conference Stakeholders

The 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Local Government hosted by the College of Local Administration of Khon Kaen University (COLA-KKU) was held from November 18-19, 2022 in Phuket, Thailand.

The theme chosen for the conference in consultation with ICLG sponsors and stakeholders was "Leadership for Digital Governance: Building the Teams to Implement the Technology." The purpose of the theme was both to attract contributions specifically on the nature and challenges of digital governance as well as to add a focus layer to other conference contributions on general questions of local government.

This Final Report summarizes the values, goals, academic activities, outputs, and expected outcomes associated with this conference. The purpose is not to summarize all the various conference contributions but to provide a selection of key insights and an overall review of the key learning outcomes of the conference as a whole.

#### Conference Values and Goals

The holding of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Local Government was intended to ensure the continuity of the ICLG series that was initiated by COLA-KKU in 2010.

The Organizing Committee of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Local Government maintained and expanded the core values of the ICLG series in 2022. The values of public service, academic integrity, international cooperation, and management efficiency remained the core of the undertaking as in past iterations. In addition, the Organizing Committee considered post-COVID resilience and continued institutional capacity building of the ICLG to be important values for this conference. Questions raised at the opening of the conference by the opening remarks framed these values in terms of specific goals for conference participants. As a practice-oriented academic conference series, the ICLG aims to deliver policy-relevant findings from each conference that can be measurably applied to public settings. In this case, the goal of the conference was to generate knowledge and propose solutions specifically relevant to the challenges of digital governance in the public sector.

As conference Organizing Committee chair and COLA-KKU dean Peerasit Kamnuansilpa and conference rapporteur Bruce Gilley wrote together in an opinion essay in the *Bangkok Post* on November 12, the convening of the conference was intended to "share experiences about solutions to the challenges of digital governance" in order to "facilitate this shift" for governments in Thailand and across the broader Asian region.



Thus, the goals of the conference can be described as the organizational goals of institutional continuity and conference

management and the outcome goals of public policy outputs and impact on digital governance.

#### Conference Academic Activities

The conference met over two-days. It featured three sets of opening remarks by Khon Kaen University leaders, one keynote speaker, two plenary lectures, and 47 separate conference papers organized into 12 panels by a total of 92 scholars. In all, there were 116 participants at the conference from 12 countries participating both on-site and remotely.

Digital governance was internalized in the conference itself. The conference <u>website</u> was created to encourage digital registration, participation, and dissemination of the results. The opening session, keynote and plenary lectures were livestreamed on the COLA <u>Facebook</u> <u>page</u>. Participants who took part remotely had access to enhanced technology at the conference site allowing them to view and interact with on-site participants. A digital participant survey was used to gather feedback.

#### Three Questions for Conference Participants

As early as 2006, Dunleavy and colleagues were predicting that the scope and intensity of digital transformation would usher in the era of "digital governance" as a new paradigm for public administration.<sup>1</sup> That is, digital governance would entail a wholesale redefinition of public administration and public governance, not merely the transition of governance from analog to digital. This was due to its profound effects on both internal organization and external activities.

What is digital governance? What are the potential benefits as well as costs? Why does it often fail? And how can it be implemented effectively and ethically? These questions and more were set out to conference participants in the opening and keynote addresses. The various topics can be divided into three basic areas:

- i. The User Content of Digital Governance
- ii. The Internal Organization of Digital Governance
- iii. The Public Values of Digital Governance

i. The first question about user content is what precisely it means for local and central governments to govern digitally. What is to be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Patrick Dunleavy, Helen Margetts, Simon Bastow, and Jane Tinkler, *Digital Era Governance: IT Corporations, the State, and E-Government* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

built and what it so be unbuilt? While there is a general consensus on what we mean by digital government services and governing by digital means, the details often remain a mystery. What sorts of systems and what sorts of approaches to users make sense?

ii. A second question concerns the internal organizational challenges of implementing "governing through the use of digital technologies." On organizational questions, central and local government departments in Thailand and elsewhere face basic practical challenges of building the capacity and the will power, as well as the incentives at the individual, team, department, and government-wide levels. The capacity here includes not just the "hard" skills of technical competence as well as the basic "hard" resources like budget and staff, but also the "soft" skills of a positive work culture and the trust and accountability needed to move digital transformation forward. This challenge is widely noted. In a November blogpost, the World Bank noted that governments face skills shortages, organizational challenges, and whole-of-government obstacles to successful digital transformation.<sup>2</sup>

iii. The third question pertains to the values to forefront while making the transition, in other words "the governing of digital technologies." This refers to digital transformation that is aligned with the values and expectations of the community – such as safety, privacy, fairness, transparency, cost-effectiveness, humility, and accountability. To implement the governance of the digital means to implement values and procedures that ensure that digital government is implemented in a manner consistent with social values. How can the leaders who are building the teams to implement digital technology make sure that rapid rollouts do not come at a cost of major cybersecurity vulnerabilities? How is privacy and personal data going to be protected if more and more data about individuals is held by government in easily accessible digital form?

The remainder of this report will follow this three-part typology in drawing out lessons learned from the conference.

Conference Lesson I: The User Content of Digital Governance

The most basic question for governments at all levels is what user services will be provided via digital means. Since digital delivery is potentially transformative of the functions of government, this cannot

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Tiago Carneiro Peixoto, Kai Kaiser, and Olivia Rakotomalala, "Governments Aren't Getting Enough Digital Skills," *World Bank Governance for Development <u>Blogpost</u>, November 02, 2022.* 

be a mere replication of analog government in digital form. Instead, it should involve a complete rethink of the tasks and responsibilities of a given agency as it transforms to digital.

Many **legacy tasks**, such as providing information on where to find health clinics, have been made redundant in the digital era. By contrast, many new tasks, such as remote service appointments, have been made possible by the digital era.

Keynote speaker Andrew Greenway shared a memorable anecdote about the digital transformation of UK government services. It was found that the UK Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs had annually generated information on how to keep bees. However, with the increased role of voluntary and professional organizations in this task, such services were phased out as part of the digital transformation.

Greenway noted that a transformative shift was caused by the reorientation from department-driven to **user-driven services**. The gov.uk portal replaced 1,882 different websites with a single-entry point. This in turn forced government to reorganize itself internally, seeing how digital transformation could spur innovation and break down departmental barriers.

Digital transformation would fail, Greenway noted, if governments saw it as merely implementing technology on top of existing services. This would simply lead to costly replication of inefficient analog services in digital form. Instead, it was about "stopping old ways of doing things." The failed attempt to build a specialized digital platform for the UK's Universal Credit scheme, replaced in 2018 with an integrated system, serves as an example. Rather than starting with user needs, the system began with bureaucratic needs. The traditional "waterfall" style of public management (policy first, users second) would fail in the digital era.

The key point was that digital government consumers were not like digital government producers. They were likely to be less educated, less tolerant of cumbersome process, and more skeptical of government. A relentless focus on "users first" was critical because citizens now expected the same "simple and easy" digital services from government that they obtain from the private sector. Done right, this could show that government can function well and gain such performance legitimacy. Better services for citizens are the bottom line. The setting of standards for digital delivery would hold government to account. The "user first" principle was highlighted by Phoolcharoen and colleagues' paper on health services for diabetes in Bangkok.<sup>3</sup> While the transition to digital has been good in terms of palliative and therapeutic care, the preventive care that overlaps with other government services – physical activity, diet and consumption, and social and educational resources – was insufficient. In part, it is because these are siloed in other departments. Digital presents an opportunity for a whole-of-government approach to such citizen needs, where access to say, healthy eating resources is not held in any single department.

On a brighter note, Saechang showed how China's "Visit Once at Most" (*zuiduo pao yici*) or VOM approach to digital government made China a regional and global leader.<sup>4</sup> The idea was that for any government service, a citizen should need to visit only one website or mobile app, no matter how many departments were involved. A critical decision, as Saechang showed, was to follow **user-generated definitions** of the government service to be facilitated. For instance, "buying a house" was a user-generated service definition. Thus, governments were forced to reorganize to create a single app under the VOM mandate, forcing three different government departments (land, registration, and taxes) to collaborate on the service. The Zhejiang provincial government coined the phrase "the data, not the people, should visit multiple sites" to reflect these internal imperatives. The process also reduced corruption and administrative inefficiencies. For instance, it was found that in Zhejiang construction permits and fire safety approval letters for new buildings each required the other in order to be issued.

Plenary speaker Ashok Das told the conference that digital transformation was possible even for the **informal sector**, relating how digital services such as financial technology, digital business registration, and digital traffic management had been possible in an informal urban settlement in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup> Conference papers on the governance of Burmese migrants seeking COVID resources in Thailand and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Wiput Phoolcharoen et. al., "The Governance of Coverage Health Service Supply Chain for Diabetics in Bangkok Metropolitan Administration: A Local Health System Analysis for Digital Transformation." (ICLG7, Panel 8)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Orachorn Saechang, "Digital Technologies and Enhancing of Public Services: A Review of the 'Visit Once at Most' Administrative Service Reform in China." (ICLG7, Panel 11)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ashok Das, "Of Individuals, Institutions, and Innovations: Transformative Leadership for Progressive Local Planning and Governance." (ICLG7, Plenary Lecture); also, Ashok Das and Bambang Susantono (eds.), *Informal Services in Asian Cities: Lessons for Urban Planning and Management from the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Manila: Asian Development Bank (2022). https://dx.doi.org/10.22617/SPR220359-2

on homeless street children in Indonesia in accessing public services both showed the potential for digital solutions to service inclusion via language and social network tools.

Other conference papers also showed how digital governance was not simply replicating government in digital form ("e-government" or "eservices") but using digital to redefine what and how a public agency did. In higher education, for instance, Wang and colleagues argued that digital governance was changing the nature of student, faculty, and administrator interactions so that departmental silos were weakened and new forms of **bottom-up supervision and feedback** were created.<sup>6</sup> In the same vein, plenary speaker Brady Deaton showed how the digital transformation of higher education services would lead to fundamental restructuring of what higher education entailed.<sup>7</sup> Students would be engaged in "anytime, anywhere" learning, usually team and project-based, rather than the traditional class and classroom model. Every university department needed to be included.

The aim was also to create more **resilient government** that could continue to function amidst exogenous shocks – both natural and manmade. During COVID, villages in China blocked urban outsiders and returnees from entering, in part because of poor information levels. At the same time, many villagers fled to city health clinics since they lacked information on rural alternatives. Improving rural digital governance might reduce these incentives in the case of future natural, social, or economic crisis, as Peng showed.<sup>8</sup>

Digital governance also meant **new forms of communication** to inform citizens of government policies via social media platforms. Bajouk and Ferré-Pavia reported positive effects of interactions with the Lebanon government's Ministry of Public Health Facebook page on citizen public health awareness and behavior during COVID.<sup>9</sup> Conference papers showed how the redevelopment of the bus terminal and the rebuilding of rural roads in the in Khon Kaen municipality of Thailand, as well as water governance in Kerala, India might depend on **stakeholder input** gathered via digital means.

Public sectors should go beyond service delivery to create new platforms for "digital politics" as the necessary democratic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Yujiao Wang, Chunyu Li, and Haiyun Lin, "Research on the Implementation Strategy of Digital Governance in Chinese Universities." (ICLG7, Panel 1)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Brady Deaton, "Higher Education in the Digital Era." (ICLG7, Plenary Lecture)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Xiaoyuan Peng, "Research on Digital Governance Model of Rural Revitalization Under the Post-Pandemic Situation." (ICLG7, Panel 4)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Hussein Bajouk and Carme Ferré-Pavia, "Government Social Media Exposure and Health Behavior During the COVID-19: The Case of Lebanon." (ICLG7, Panel 12)

complement and check on the "digital administrative state." Li and Li found that the use of the popular messenger application WeChat in China during COVID lockdowns forced local officials into several revisions of decisions.<sup>10</sup> This created some collaborative space because the government's Healthy QR Code policy, as Li and Wang show, was a top-down and non-participatory use of digital governance that tested, tracked, managed, and punished citizens with no possibility of citizen feedback.<sup>11</sup>

Digital governance also meant governing in future time. As Tan and Crompvoetse recently argued, external services may be quickly overtaken by shifting technologies.<sup>12</sup> An initial focus on "fast and simple" e-government services may no longer enough, they argue, since users expect "anticipatory and responsive" services. Wang, in his paper on digital urban governance in Kunming (population 4.4 million in 2020), showed how the city's digital platforms could be customized for each person to make use of their personal information and to predict the services they would need over the course of life, or what he called the "life cycle" approach to designing user services.<sup>13</sup>

Digital governance also means government policies that promote and govern the **digital economy**. As Bi and Wang show, the private ecommerce company Alibaba depended on close local government support to set up its chain of Taobao.Com e-commerce service centers throughout China (like Amazon lockers).<sup>14</sup> Through them, rural residents can both ship rural products and accept delivery of urban ones. Government involvement built the trust that stimulated e-commerce in rural areas, and this provided an easy way for governments to give loans to rural SMEs and offer easy tax payment services, as well as to subsidize ecommerce workers at the service stations. This has led to a new phenomenon of "Taobao Villages" which are "a new generation of lowcost manufacturing or factor endowment clusters" in rural China.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Yinan Li and Yujia Li, "Digital Mass Politics During the COVID-19 Era: A Case Study of an Urban Community." (ICLG7, Panel 12)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Chunyu Li and Yujiao Wang, "Research on Innovation Mechanism of Digital Governance: A Case Study of 'Healthy QR Code' Against the COVID-19 Pandemic in China." (ICLG7, Panel 12).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Evrim Tan and Joep Crompvoets, "A New Era of Digital Governance," in Evrim Tan and Joep Crompvoets (eds.) *The New Digital Era Governance: How New Digital Technologies Are Shaping Public Governance* (Wageningen Academic, 2022).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Guocai Wang, "The Path and Practice of Digital Governance to Drive Modernization of Urban Governance Capacity." (ICLG7, Panel 4)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Chuanchen Bi and Wei Yang, "Rural Taobao: An E-Commerce Channel for Precision Poverty Alleviation in China." (ICLG7, Panel 11).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Jiaqi Qi, Xiaoyong Zheng, and Hongdong Guo, "The Formation of Taobao Villages in China," *China Economic Review*, 53:1 (2019).

Conference Learning II: The Internal Organization of Digital Governance

Several conference papers and speeches addressed the internal organizational challenges of implementing digital governance.

The starting point is **procuring the IT infrastructure as well as associated firmware and software** on which digital governance depends. In China, the period in which local governments each rolled out their own IT platforms and apps to boost their digital credentials and indiscriminately apply the latest technology was known derisively as the "horse-racing" (*sai ma*) phase of digital governance.<sup>16</sup> By the mid-2010s, this had caused confusion and non-interoperability and the need to start over.<sup>17</sup> Large countries with decentralized governance are particularly prone to such non-integrated platforms and unnecessary duplication. In Indonesia, village affairs digital platforms have proliferated, with each province choosing or building a different one. West Java has "Desa Digital", South Sulawesi has "Iron Desa", while others have adopted the private DIGIDES platform.<sup>18</sup>

A key conference insight here was provided by keynote speaker Andrew Greenway who noted the importance of building **platforms that can be constantly repurposed** rather than constantly rebuilt from scratch. This especially meant avoiding long-term commitments with sunk costs with major IT suppliers that limited the options for government. This meant that government's relationship to IT vendors would be different, but not worse. It would be a good customer for vendors willing to work on the basis of serving the goal of **open, non-proprietary systems**. Thus, public procurement systems needed to be designed to ensure the conditions for this sort of IT infrastructure purchase.

Plenary speaker Brady Deaton noted how his university had made sure that the IT infrastructure supporting digital transformation of higher education relied on scaleable platforms, cloud storage and computing, and strong security.<sup>19</sup>

http://www.news.cn/tech/20220712/cc2b6b6d230d4eae8c9e745ecb02a41f/c.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Fang Liu, "The Practical Paradoxes of 'Digital Going to the Countryside' and the Generation of Governance Logic." (ICLG7, Panel 4)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Longping Xiao and Xue Kong, "Digital Government Development in China Starts Over." (In Chinese), *Beijing News*, July 12, 2022.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Suhardiman Syamsu, Muhammad Chaeroel Ansar, and Saharuddin, "Does the Community Adopt Mobile Application-Based Public Serices? Lessons from Maros Villages, Indonesia." (ICLG7, Panel 2)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Brady Deaton, "Higher Education in the Digital Era." (ICLG7, Plenary Lecture)

Thus, just as digital governance should be flexible and user-defined in terms of its external dimension, it should be **flexible and technologically change-oriented** in terms of its IT dimension. Local governments should build IT infrastructure that is resilient to change and interoperable with other departments. The platforms should not be designed with a fixed prediction of the future needs of government digital services. Instead, they should be designed to be flexible with regards the future.

A second insight that Greenway noted was the importance of being aware of the rapid pace of technological change. This echoes a point made by Tan and Crompvoetse that IT strategies could be quickly overtaken by shifting technologies.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the recent shift to **cloud-based and blockchain-based storage and computing** for government services has reversed the initial centralizing impulses of digital government. Governments that invested in centralized internal integration may be overtaken by the shift to **"smart" dispersed data** and technology, they note. Also, since data is the key asset for digital governance, **data quality and services** have become a key new government function, going well beyond traditional information sharing.

Beyond IT, the hard technical skills needed for digital governance transformation were in short supply, especially at the local government level. Governments needed to create their own **in-house training systems**, such as Thailand's Digital Government Academy, to offer digital literacy and skills training.

Greenway allayed fears that governments could never compete for hard skills with the private sector because of pay and benefit gaps. Talent can be attracted with long-term career trajectories, positive work cultures, public sector benefits, as well as a **"make a public contribution" opportunities** that the private sector did not offer.

Greenway said that creating a "start-up culture" was key not only to attracting talent but to delivering the services. Governments needed to recruit developers, programmers, and those with user-research skills. But, he cautioned, digital teams also needed traditional bureaucratic members who could make the case and prevent the emergence of an "us versus them" mentality towards digital transformation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Evrim Tan and Joep Crompvoets, "A New Era of Digital Governance," in Evrim Tan and Joep Crompvoets (eds.) *The New Digital Era Governance: How New Digital Technologies Are Shaping Public Governance* (Wageningen Academic, 2022).

**Building teams** for digital transformation, the theme of ICLG7, thus became a central task. As the Vice Chairman of the Khon Kaen University Council, H.E. Surapon Petchvra, noted in his opening remarks: "The success of implementation begins with the leaders and



the teams they build. Leadership for building the teams to implement the technology in this sense means leadership that is mission-oriented, performance-minded, and aligned with the idea of delivering public value."

Individuals across the civil service needed a "digital mindset". Teams needed to be "multi-disciplinary" and "quality" oriented. Organizations needed to be supportive of the digital team mission and capable of attraction private sector talent. At the whole-ofgovernment level, governments needed to have collaborative relationships with the IT sector, educational institutions, and civil society in support of the digital transformation mission. The capacity here includes not just the "hard" skills of technical competence as well as the basic "hard" resources like budget and staff, but also the "soft skills" of a positive work culture and the trust and accountability needed to move digital transformation forward.

Rather than begin with a department-wide policy roll-out, departments could select a limited set of users (such as one city or municipality) for the iterative process of **user needs research**, **alpha launch**, **beta launch**, and finally live launch.

Organizations and governments that built effective digital infrastructure would reap large positive externalities in the form of new human capital, local economic innovation, and physical capital upgrading. Countries like Thailand could aspire to be more than "fast followers" but instead global innovators.

"Start small, learn fast, build teams, be bold." This was Greenway's summary advice.

#### Conference Lessons III: The Public Values of Digital Governance

To govern is to engage in collaborative and network-centered exercises of authority where values are plural, multiple actors interact, and implementation occurs through norms and trust. The shift from technology-driven and top-down "digital government" or "e-government" to value-driven and networked "digital governance" raises critical questions about the social values that will be used to govern.

Work by scholars such as Claire McLoughlin of the University of Birmingham tells us that legitimacy is often judged by citizens based on things other than objective service outputs: they want to know that service is delivered **fairly**, that the interface with the state is **trustworthy**, and that the public sector is aware ahead of time of **public expectations**.

As the World Bank report noted: "Any effective design and ownership of public sector digital services, whether insourced or outsourced, should be based on standards that reflect **inherent values and principles** that the government wishes to infuse throughout its services such as putting users first, working in the open, and protecting data privacy-which are the building blocks for greater trust and uptake by the public. Additionally, leadership skills are required to enforce these standards through a coordinated approach, as well as an organizational culture that closes the **empathy gap** between public service providers and users."

Keynote speaker Andrew Greenway noted the importance of **digital sovereignty** at the national level. A key reason for countries like Thailand to aspire to be more than "fast followers" was in order to protect national values and digital sovereignty. He cited the example of Estonia which has branded itself as a digital governance leader globally as a form of branding and **soft power**. In Asia, South Korea had emerged as a global leader in digital government.<sup>21</sup> The government of New South Wales in Australia embraced a "digital re-start" of government so that it would spur broader innovation.

Liu provided an example of how the legitimacy of digital governance requires attention to **unique cultural values**.<sup>22</sup> Dominant digital platforms are individual-based, but many in rural China think in terms of **household not individual**. Handing out free smartphones to the elderly and poor through anonymous donations was ineffective because they needed household support to use and problem-solve on the devices. "No one gave it to me, and no one is here to help me with it," is the oft-heard refrain. Therefore, China's new digital social security cards that launched in 2022 have a household-based sign-up option.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Choong-sik Chung, Developing Digital Governance: South Korea as a Global Digital Government Leader (Routledge, 2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Fang Liu, "The Practical Paradoxes of 'Digital Going to the Countryside' and the Generation of Governance Logic." (ICLG7, Panel 4)

In addition, many people in large countries retain a sense of identification with their hometown even if they live elsewhere. Government digital services, especially those related to community outreach such as donation drives, volunteer activities, and contribution by non-profits in areas like road and drainage works and temple building, need to be able to include those who do not reside in but still identify with their hometown or village. This **cyber governance network** also spurs the shift from administrative government to networked governance in rural affairs.

While international sovereignty was the responsibility of the state, domestic sovereignty was owned by the people. Many conference papers dealt with the threat of **digital dictatorship** emerging as a result of digital governance. Machmud and colleagues showed how the use of Twitter by Indonesia's anti-corruption agency has failed to embrace any user-responses, becoming in effect a **one-way form of state information** with most interactions coming from other anti-corruption units of the state rather than from society.<sup>23</sup>

As Liu and Shan noted that the embrace of digital governance as "social management" in China carries risks to public values. In particular, government needs to **share power with social actors** rather than delegitimating them through **digital incorporation** and it needs to **protect personal data** from private vendor partners and vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

China's digitized and informationized "community grid management" concept of social control that integrates sensors, cameras, and the digital tracking of individuals alongside deployment of security services, when re-branded as a "smart city" tool, has proven illegitimate because of its **anti-democratic consequences**.<sup>25</sup> Wang reports that less than 15% of the residents of China's "digital pilot district" of Chenggong in Yunnan province make use of its smart city applications while expressed satisfaction is below 30%.<sup>26</sup> Citing the work of James C. Scott on **"everyday resistance"**, Liu warns that such

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Muslimin Machmud, Salahudin, and Iradhad Taqwa Sihidi, "Social Media as Communication Tools for Anti-Corruption Campaign in Indonesia." (ICLG7, Panel 1) <sup>24</sup> Tao Liu and Juan Shan, "An Analysis on the Problems and Countermeasures of Multi-Governance of Digital Governance in China." (ICLG7, Panel 2)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Jean Christopher Mittelstaedt, "The Grid Management System in Contemporary China: Grass-Roots Governance in Social Surveillance and Service Provision," *China Information*, 36:1, (2022).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Zixuan Wang, "Smart Community Construction Under Smart City System: A Case Study of Chenggong Urban Area of Kunming City China." (ICLG7, Panel 5)

non-cooperation by citizens "will dissolve the [digital governance] policy, and make the attainment of policy goals impossible."<sup>27</sup>

Several papers from China directly addressed the threat of "digital dictatorship". Bao, Meutia, and Zhang warned of how the transition from simple approach of e-government and digital management to a more all-embracing and data-driven digital governance in which the state constantly monitors and directs citizen behavior risked creating a "digital Leviathan" where "the rule of technology seems to replace the rule of people" which has "helped totalitarianism to some extent."<sup>28</sup> A growing phenomena of "digital refugees" who sought to escape the system would result. That meant as a policy matter that every new digital governance platform or service needed to mainstream the question of citizen control, accountability, monitoring, and democracy. These could not be added on later only as problems arose.

In a similar and more striking vein, Bai and Bao argued that the use of artificial intelligence in the public sector was in many cases inappropriate.<sup>29</sup> AI could be effectively used in internal operations to reduce costs, expand audiences, streamline processes, and detect fraud and errors. To overcome barriers to this, the main challenges were to improve data quality, data sharing, and data security. But in citizenfacing applications, AI was inappropriate because it could not cope with specifically human value judgements over things like rights, privacy, ethics, social imagination, accountability, and dehumanization. Determining the "scope and boundaries" of AI in the public sector was critical. Their paper echoes the central concerns with AI in the newly-issued Oxford Handbook of AI Governance.<sup>30</sup> The bottom line: AI should not be used in digital governance any time that value judgements are involved. Further, digital governance should steer clear of any situation that appears to be creating Max Weber's nightmare of an "overly rational and mean-spirited" administration.

Governments also need to be aware that platforms with a relentless focus on "the user" need to pay attention to both the median user as well as the marginal one. This is important from the standpoint of user equity, so that the elderly, the poor, the uneducated, the timeconstrained, and the migrant can all access the services. The "digital

<sup>28</sup> Haixu Bao, Intan Fitri Meutia, and Xiaohui Zhang, "From Digital Management to Digital Governance: Theory, Practice, and Reflection." (ICLG7, Panel 7)

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Fang Liu, "The Practical Paradoxes of 'Digital Going to the Countryside' and the Generation of Governance Logic." (ICLG7, Panel 4)
<sup>28</sup> Haixu Bao, Intan Fitri Meutia, and Xiaohui Zhang, "From Digital Management to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Yiran Bai and Guoxian Bao, "Bureuacratic Renewal? The Strategy Border of AI in the Public Sector." (ICLG7, Panel 7)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Justin Bullock (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of AI Governance* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

**divide"** refers not just to access but also "willingness to use" since the costs of use will often be higher for the poor, for instance due to data charges, as shown by Syamsu and colleagues in their study of the uptake of the "Irondesa" mobile app for digital village affairs in South Sulawesi in Indonesia.<sup>31</sup>

In their paper on the problems of the digital divide faced by the 264 million over-60 elderly in China, Mao and Zhao noted that the initiative to address the problem came from **focusing events** widely reported such as elders being criticized for boarding public buses without smartphone-based health codes and others forced to walk long distances on foot because of the lack of a health code.<sup>32</sup> Local governments lacked the autonomy to act, and feared taking risks, until the central government issued a directive in November 2020.

Whether traditional public administration is compatible with digital transformation is a question that needs to be confronted. The skills, workstyles, career trajectories, and expectations of digital governance must be firmly embedded in a traditional, hierarchical, and risk-averse civil service. That is why Greenway stressed that "digital teams" needed to have **non-digital members**, representatives of traditional public administration who could both advocate for and act as a check on the transformation.

#### Conference Outputs

The conference delivered to participants a stimulating and informative two-days of reflection and debate on digital governance. Conference participants in their response to a conference survey, reported high levels of satisfaction with the two-day proceeding.

This report represents a summary output of the conference. (A separate report for accounting and funding purposes has been produced). In addition to the conference learning report, it includes an executive summary as well as an action strategy for local governments.

The conference achieved its institutional and organizational goals in a manner consistent with the stated values.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Suhardiman Syamsu, Muhammad Chaeroel Ansar, and Saharuddin, "Does the Community Adopt Mobile Application-Based Public Serices? Lessons from Maros Villages, Indonesia." (ICLG7, Panel 2)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Xuewen Mao and Luy Zhao, "From Local Government Response to Central Government Promotion: The Solution to the 'Digital Divide' for the Elderly Based on a 'Two-Stge Multiple Streams' Framework." (ICLG7, Panel 7)

# Creation of Action Strategy on Digital Transformation for Local Governments

In order to align the conference findings with the needs of local governments in Thailand and beyond, the conference Organizing Committee consulted members of local governments as well as technical experts such as Mr. Greenway to elicit a current set of pressing needs and concerns.

At the central level, we consulted the Digital Government Development Agency (DGA). It has created a Digital Local Government Platform that local administrative organizations in Thailand can use for both internal organization as well as citizen-facing services. However, the three main challenges identified – training a new generation of digital government personnel, reorganizing government to be citizencentric from a digital point-of-view, and ensuring the integration and sharing of government resources were identified as outstanding issues.<sup>33</sup> This highlighted a first item missing from academic discussions that is a critical concern of governments at both central and local levels, namely the need for **dedicated training for digital personnel.** 

We also consulted the Ministry of Interior's Digital Action Plan 2020-2022.<sup>34</sup> This main needs emphasized in this report were the internal mobilization of resources, primarily skilled personnel, senior leadership buy-in, and organizational transformation via both technology adoption and performance-oriented monitoring, to achieve 100% internal and external digital government.

A second item missing from academic discussions that was a priority in this document is the imperative of local governments implementing **geographic information systems (GIS**) across all their digital platforms, which was a critical tool for land use planning, property taxes, public safety, citizen engagement, and much else.<sup>35</sup> Conference papers on protecting urban green spaces in Patna and building national park communities in China might be assisted by GIS monitoring (details??). Conference papers on evaluating the cost-effectiveness of a community sanitation program in Indonesia, managing the greenhouse gases of a waste-to-energy power plant in Thailand, and governing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> https://www.dga.or.th/document-sharing/dg2021/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> <u>http://www.ict.moi.go.th/PDF/แผนดิจิทัล%20มท.%2063-65%20(ฉบับสมบูรณ์).pdf</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> David Holdstock, *Strategic GIS Planning and Management in Local Government* (CRC Press, 2017)

transnational locust plague prevention in China all might be assisted by digital monitoring.

We also consulted the Ministry of Interior's Department of Local Administration's Five-Year Digital Plan (2023-27).<sup>36</sup> This document highlighted the major organizational challenges for local governments in digital transformation. This included both the procurement of suitable IT, the creation of data, and the cultivation of personnel with both hard skills of "digital skills and literacy" and soft skills of "digital mindset". Organizational systems would need to become flatter because of data-sharing and collaboration.

A third item missing from academic discussions that was deemed critical to local governments is the importance of **digital governance for local economic development**, business services, and technical innovation both in digital and non-digital sectors. This is a key goal set for local governments in the DLA document because of the responsibilities placed on local governments to pull Thailand out of the "middle income trap". The paper by Bi and Wang directly addressed the critical role of local governments in facilitating rural ecommerce services. Financial support, venue or siting support, personnel support, and explicit policy support in local government economic development strategies were key to the China rural e-commerce boom, they show.

Along with the Final Report and Executive Summary, the Action Strategy on Digital Transformation for Local Government was the third major output of the conference.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> <u>http://www.dla.go.th/upload/ebook/column/2022/1/18833\_22251.pdf</u>

# ICLG Institutions Role and Follow-Up

In order to deliver the "last mile" of public service connection from ICLG conference to local government action, it is imperative for ICLG institutions to go beyond the confines of the conference to engage in direct post-conference outreach and engagement with local governments. The lessons learned must be disseminated and implemented with the help of ICLG institutions.

As the anchor institution of the ICLG and of ICLG7, COLA has taken the initiative in this respect. Leading up to the conference, COLA in collaboration with the College of Computer Science at Khon Kaen University, launched a Master of Public Administration program focusing on digital governance. In 2022, it also organized a series of workshops for local administrative organizations on Thailand's new personal data protection act. It also held a one-day conference partnering with the Khon Kaen provincial government and the national DGA to discuss digital local development in Khon Kaen Province. The month before the conference, a COLA team was in the field in Muang Phon Municipality to advise local leaders on upgrading public service to become a digital government according to the Thailand 4.0 national strategy.



COLA leaders attend the opening of a Digital Government Learning and Development Center under the "Digital Government Platform" Program of the Digital Government Development Agency (DGA) of Thailand, November 28, 2022, Chiang Mai.

Less than two weeks after the conference, COLA leaders were in Chiang Mai to initiate along with the DGA and the National Municipal Association of Thailand the first regional Digital Government Learning and Development Center under the DGA's "Digital Government Platform" Program. A second center for northeast Thailand is planned to be located at COLA. The centers will provide a curriculum that covers technology, risk management, cybersecurity, administrative systems, and user needs, as well as specific examples of e-government services covering topics like one-stop service centers, construction permit applications, fee payments, and electronic record-keeping. COLA's engagement with government on digital transformation will also include outreach to the third partner in the Digital Government Learning and Development Centers, namely the Office of Public Sector Development Commission (OPDC).

Other ICLG member institutions likewise share a responsibility take the findings from this conference and put them into action through direct follow-up with local and national government units responsible for digital transformation. The ICLG partner universities in Vietnam, China, and Indonesia will be consulted on how to deliver the conference learning outcomes to relevant government units.

# Expected Conference Outcomes and Impact

Consistent with the values and goals of the conference, the ultimate objective of ICLG7 was to achieve measurable outcomes and impact on digital governance transformation in Thailand as well as the broader Asian region. By sharing experiences and solutions on digital governance, ICLG7 participants generated novel and practical solutions. These have been explained in general form and summarized in executive form in this report. The lessons have in turn been translated into a list of actions that should guide digital transformation strategies for local and central government departments. The ICLG partner institutions have undertaken direct and specific activities to communicate and advocate these strategies to responsible government units.



In the coming year, COLA and its ICLG partners will monitor and evaluate the outcomes associated with this effort. The expectation is that ICLG7 learning outputs will be incorporated in an explicit and fundamental way into digital transformation strategies. Monitoring and measuring the extent of this incorporation will provide a critical

measure of conference success.

Beyond the one-year time horizon, the expectation is that the lessons of ICLG7 will have an enduring and positive impact on digital transformation in Thailand and beyond. In the three main lesson areas of user services, internal organization, and public values, the ICLG7 strategy aspires to be a significant impact factor on digital transformation.

"Start small, learn fast, build teams, be bold."