

Abstract of the paper

“Spatial and Historical Patterns of the Formation of French Administrative Division”

In the modern world there is a complex set of different systems of administrative-territorial division, which differ in their structure, size, numerous levels of hierarchy and depend on the state structure (unitary or federal) of their territory and the history of formation and development, as well as on the relief, hydrographic networks, populations, and settlement systems.

Administrative division is conservative, and any attempt to reform it causes widespread debate in the society. The stability of administrative division is often in conflict with the dynamism of social development, socio-economic factors such as urbanization, significant shifts in population settlement, evolution of communication means, changes in the identity of local or regional communities, and structural changes in the distribution of functions between different administrative levels. There reasons provide to the administrative division reforms.

The stability and spatial structure of administrative division is inextricably linked to its complex history of changes in regional and local governance, as well as expansion and contraction of the territory. Therefore, the studying of administrative-territorial division requires an analysis of the transformation of administrative grids over a long period of time. It makes possible to identify the stability of many administrative units, to understand the long history of them and the key factors of their development. Therefore, the paper linked with several areas of knowledge: regional geography, history, and political science.

The territorial scope of the study covers European France. It is a large unitary state, whose political development is characterized by a strong centralization of power in Paris. It sought to control all aspects of the life of the regions and level their differences. The traditions of the modern administrative division of the country date back to the time of the French Revolution, when a unified administrative grid was created, but the first administrative division on French soil was created by Romans.

The **aim of the paper** is to reveal spatial and historical features of the formation of the modern administrative division of France. To achieve this goal, the research solved the following **tasks**:

- to study French and European literature, maps and statistics about history of the administrative division and its reforms;
- to analyze the course of transformation of the administrative division system in France from Antiquity to Modern times;

- to study the variability of territorial entities and their stability;
- to identify the main reasons for the transformation of the administrative division network.

Contribution of the paper. The results of the research, the proposed methods and approaches can be used to analyze the spatial structure and dynamics of the administrative division of other countries in Europe and the world as a whole. Given the diverse structures and the principles of their change in the countries of Europe, as well as strong regional disproportions, the conclusions obtained can play an important role in developing recommendations for improving the existing grid of administrative division, as well as in assessing its possible changes in the event of administrative reforms at both the national and regional levels. The results can be used when reading courses on political geography, historical geography, regional studies. They can also be of scientific interest to specialists in socio-economic geography and regional policy of Europe, researchers of European countries, historians, specialists in related scientific fields.

The **theoretical and methodological basis** of the study is served by French and European geographers, regionalists, historians, political scientists, lawyers, specialists in administrative-territorial division. The research is based on statistical materials provided by French Statistical Department. In addition, historical administrative division maps, statistical data for different periods published in various national and regional atlases, were used.

In the paper **it is used** historical-geographical, cartographic, typological **methods**, as well as methods of spatial analysis. The historical-geographical method implied the identification of a comparison of the territories of old and modern administrative units and the identification of stable political-territorial cells over a long period of time. The geographical one consisted in the study of the reasons for the location of stable units. The typological one was used for constructing a typology of administrative units according to the time and causes of formation, stability. The methods of spatial analysis consisted in the calculation of various indices, for example, the index of the spatial configuration of the territories of units and their comparison in dynamics.

It was produced several historical and geographical maps in QGIS.

The use of various methods made it possible to comprehensively consider the problems of the paper, which led to significant **scientific conclusions**.

The main spatial feature of ***French departments*** considered the basis of the administrative territorial division of France, is its stability. Over the past 235 years (from 1790 to 2025), the number of departments was increased only by 13%, their median area decreased by 4%, which speaks of minor changes in the spatial structure of the system of these units. Of the 83 departments formed in 1790, 78 still exist, most of them have retained the configuration of their territory, and if it changed, it was mainly due to the formation of new units.

The stability of the system of departments was determined by the established public administration system and administrative and economic relations. The rejection of these units or their enlargement was contrary to the interests of both the departmental elite and the central authorities. If the leaders of the departments were afraid to lose their rights, powers, and privileges established by the Revolution, then the central government did not want to share its power with enlarged units, lose control over them, and was afraid of the growth of separatist sentiments.

The long history of their development contributes to the sustainability of the territories of the departments. Half of all departments (44 out of 96) were created within the boundaries of the previously existing feudal and ancient political-territorial formations. According to the author's calculations, the provinces and pays of absolutist France became the historical predecessors of 25 departments, feudal appanages – 33, civitates of the Roman Empire – 29, territories of settlement of Gallic tribes – 29 units. As for the modern centers of departments, 43 (45% of the total) were already in the Roman era the centers of administrative units, and 61 centers (64%) were the capitals of feudal appanages in the Middle Ages. Despite the changes in the state system of Gaul and France (from tribal to republican) and frequent shifts in borders, most of the territorial cores and centers of these cells remained. The stable structure of the settlement system, which was formed in the Roman Time, and in some places during the time of the Gallic tribes, became an important factor in the identified stability of territorial units.

An analysis of the degree of variability in the cells of modern departments revealed the 12 most stable ones that continuously existed as a separate political entity for more than 2000 years, since the time of the Roman Empire. These cells are located on the periphery of the country: the Brittany peninsula, in the Lower Loire valley and in the region of the Massif Central.

The main reason for this stability is a peripheral position. Neither feudal fragmentation, nor numerous wars and invasions, nor migrations of the population almost affected these territories located outside the zones of the main trade relations and fertile lands, and therefore had little effect on them, contributing to the conservation of settlement, foundations, life, traditions, ties, and, together with them, the territorial management structure.

Almost all departments without historical predecessors are located in the lowland regions or in the Alps. These departments were formed by redrawing the old borders. The absence of previously stable political and territorial cells in them is explained by the fact that constant wars on the plains of France, the invasion of Germanic tribes in the 5th-7th centuries and their settlement of these fertile lands, then feudal fragmentation, etc. often changed the political landscape, contributing to the instability of political and social ties, the emergence of new and the disappearance of old centers of settlement and trade.

Only 21 new departments and Metropolis of Lyon arose among 97 existing units during 1791-2025. The least resilient departments are located in the Paris region, around Lyon and along the eastern border. They were created in the course of local administrative reforms: the separation of peripheries or centers, the division of departments, the formation of units in the annexed territories or as a result of the loss of territories.

In the 1950-1980s, *French region system* was formed to support the economic development of the country and stimulate cooperation between the prefects of departments. During periods of growth in economy and living standards, the government intended to form economic regions to improve the organization of the country's economy, since the authorities of the departments did not have sufficient financial resources and were not able to cope with problems of regional significance. The new regional administrations were able to accumulate more tax and extrabudgetary revenues, which gave them a sufficient financial base to carry out the functions of the central government (from above) and departments (from below) transferred to them and to pursue a unified social, infrastructural and other policy in the entrusted territory.

In 2015-2016 a nationwide reform was carried out to enlarge the regions. In European France, 1 territorial community (Corsica) and 12 regions were formed instead of the previous 22. The main motives were saving money for management in the conditions of the economic crisis, the tasks of accelerating growth, increasing the efficiency of regional administrations and reducing gaps between regions in terms of population, area and volume of GDP. Giving the authorities of the regions new functions (development of infrastructure, school education, control over entrepreneurship and employment of the population, management of local transport and roads) required the creation of units with a large economic and demographic potential.

Most of regions were based on preserved cores and blurred contours of historical and cultural areas. Thus, the former regions of Limousin, Franche-Comté, and Auvergne traced their history back to the Gallic tribes, and Normandy, Corsica, and Lorraine to the Antiquity, 8 regions to the Middle Ages. We repeat that with changes in the state system (from a tribal system to an absolute monarchy) and frequent shifts in borders, many territorial cores and centers of the predecessor regions have not changed. For example, on the territory of the Roman province of Lugdunensis Secunda, the duchy of Normandy was formed, which then became the governorate of the same name, and it is now a region. The center of these units has always been Rouen, in ancient times called Rotomagensium.

In the conclusion, the territory of most departments has been remaining stable for all 235 years of their existence. 78 departments created in 1790 exist unchanged to this day. Many regions were formed in the 20th century on the preserved cores and blurred contours of historical and cultural areas. A lot of units and their centers trace their history back to the Middle Ages, Roman

time and even settlement of Gallic tribes. This is the evidence that a spontaneous distribution of Gallic tribes and well-established division of Roman Empire and then feudal fragmentation became the stable spatial foundation of French modern administrative division.