

THE HISTORY OF REGIONALIZATION IN FRANCE

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Abstract: France is still the example of a centralized state for everyday people. Indeed, high rate of centralization has been a constant element of the French state and public administration for centuries. Regional efforts observable in the Middle Ages were always suppressed by the central power of France.

Key words: regeneration, decentralization, region, history

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THE MIDDLE AGES / ANCIEN RÉGIME

The French state has been strongly centralized since its formation. Many French researchers think that survival of France has been helped by the strong centralization of the power (Duby, 1968; Mandrou, 1999; Pinchemel, 1980).



Figure 1. The Provinces of the Ancien Régime

France was formed following the partition of the Frank Empire in 843 around the centre of the royal estates of the Capeting House in Paris and its surroundings drawing in this way the silhouette of the later France. One of the main characteristic of royal administration was that it ceased nothing even if a new public administration system was created the old one remained untouched. This caused that until the Revolution several public administration systems in force simultaneously in France (*Province, Rate province, Electoral province, different tax districts/Jurisdictional districts*).

THE REVOLUTION / LA REVOLUTION

As early as 1787 a tax reform organised the county network that had the task to determine tax shares. One of the major achievements of the Revolution was the formation of the *département*, i.e. the county. Several unsuccessful attempts were performed in the 1770s and 1780s. Principle blocks in the way of reforms were the privileges of provinces that were swept away by the declaration of resigning the rights issued on 4th August 1789. In this way creation of the county network became possible. Constituent National Assembly established 83 *départements* (counties) in the country. Large historical provinces – maybe not accidentally – were cut into several parts and around 2-5 *départements* in average were formed in their area in accordance to the principle that any settlements of the county should be reached there and back by a day's continuous ride (Revel, J. 1992).

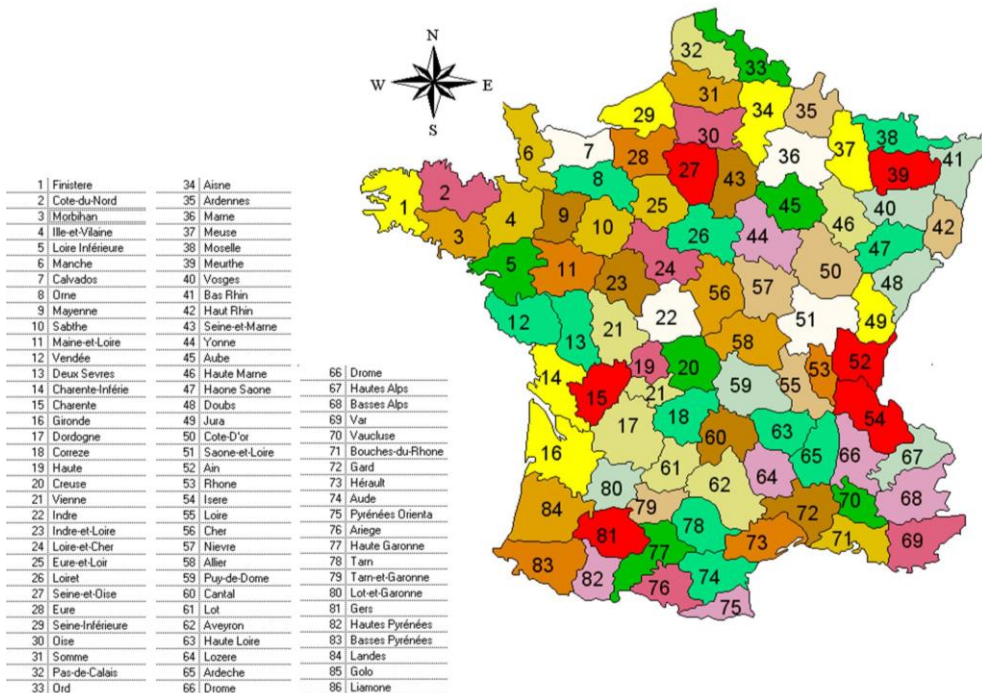


Figure 2. Counties of France in 1791

Boundaries of historical provinces were respected when counties were formed. The aim was to establish a modern administration. The act issued on 22nd December 1789 established 75-83 counties in the country and then the act issued on 26th February 1790 created 83 counties and the constitution issued in 1791

consecrated them and thus the public administration chaos so characteristic in France was swept away by the Constituent National Assembly (Sobul, 1961).

They established system decentralized the power to some extent and the original aim creating the counties was to establish a real local self-administration according to the requirements of the age. According to the original plans, a council elected for 2 years would have led the counties. Representatives of the central power could have not sentence the counties but the Jacobins started and Napoleon completed the centralization of the counties. The act issued on 17th February 1800 stated that the central government names all the administrative organizations of the county. (Federalist revolution in 1793 was not against the county system but the overgrowth of the power of Paris.) This act served as the basis for the public administration system of France until the end of the III republic.

Region disappeared from France for 150 years and although numerous regionalist tendencies occurred, their ability to enforce interests against the centralist state was very limited.

BEGINNING OF REGIONALIZATION (XVIII CENTURY)

In this strongly centralized situation occurrence of regionalism was postponed until the time of World War I. Regionalism was induced by the demand for economic development in France therefore it advanced haltingly. Regionalism in modern sense occurred only in the middle of the 20th century in France. First steps towards regionalism were taken at the end of the 18th century. In 1871 the inter-county conference was institutionalized with the aim to give more effective solutions to problems occurring in several counties. This conference was voluntary as counties were not obligated to take part. However, the county system serving the central power became exploded gradually. In 1900 the Fédération Régional France (Regional Federation of France) was founded (Marignier-Oozuf, 1992). Its founder and leader, Charles Brun recommended to create 20 regions with retaining the republic. These regions would have a certain extent of separateness (would have elected general assembly). He imagined the creation of regions with the elimination of the counties. Central power would have been represented by the prefect who would have supervised the decisions and measures of the regions as well. His ideas were not realized. Occurrence of regionalism was prolonged until the end of World War I.

FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY (1900-1944)

In April 1919 the French government established a regional economic organization for fulfilling the tasks of military management. This alignment of 17 regional economic groups was based on the union of trade chambers of the counties forming the county. These regions are named Clémentel regions after their creator (Minister Etienne Clémentel). Their main task was to develop industry, trade and the economic life, they were not legal entities, they had no separate organization and they had no adequate financial support to meet the requirements of their tasks thus they cannot be regarded as real regions. In 1922 based on the 17 Clémentel regions, 19 economic regions were created that were legal entities and their responsibility in industry and trade was extended (associations of counties founded in 1926 were substituted by inter-county institutions in 1930 and this system was operated parallel to regions).

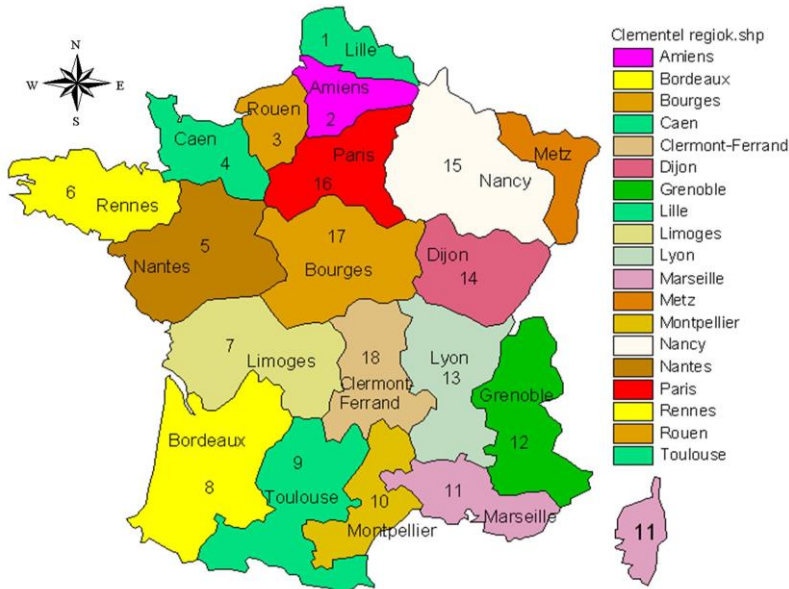


Figure 3. The Region of Clementel (1922)

In 1938 twenty economic regions were established with uniting the trade chambers forming the regions into a public institution (act issued on 14th June). Their task was to enforce regional interests by public power (Sipos, 1993; Navracscics, 1996). During World War II the majority of regionalists backed the Petain system against insubordinates therefore after 1945 regionalism as a political trend turned out to be “unpopular”. Unsuccessful regionalization attempt of the Vichy republic wished to form twenty regions based on the old French provinces (act issued on 19th April 1941). Despite its lack of success the act established the institute of region prefect. Economic, police and public functions were covered for several counties by the region prefects who were chosen from the county prefects (12 in the “obsessed” and 6 in the “free” areas). Police and economic intendants helped the work of region prefects. Undoubted benefit of the Petain system was that certain regions – even if for only a short time period – broke away from the influence of Paris. Certain level of separateness developed that was not lost following liberation either.

SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY (1944-1982)

Successor of the region prefect system was the system of republic commissioners established by the decree of 10th January – 6th June 1944. Task of republic commissioners was to co-ordinate and control the work of region prefects. In 1947 an act was prepared on handing the rights of prefects over to elected representatives but it was not submitted when as a result of a strike series throughout the country the institute of emergency administrative major inspectorate (21st March 1948 → I.G.A.M.E) the task of which was to keep order (Gravier J.F. 1970). From 1964 this task was covered by the region prefects. In the 1950s changes happened in economic development that had major influence on French regionalism and on creating the later French regions. The idea was raised to perform regional development in the framework of economic planning – control. As a result it was necessary to create regional economic control districts

and their regional institutions. In 1955 counties were squeezed into 22 program regions in accordance with regional development policy (decree of 30th June 1955 → 21 regions + Paris). In the case of regional institutions, inter-county conferences (meeting of the prefects of the counties that formed the region) were established (decree of 7th January 1959) but there was no harmony in this regional dissection of the country. In 1958 the new constitution acknowledges the region, however, only as means of economic development (4th September 1958). In 1960 program regions of 1955 were substituted by 21 regional operational (action) districts (21 regions + Paris). Between 1955 and 1960 regions were formed mainly as a result of pressure from the EEC. These were organised on economic basis and every other aspects important in regionalization were subordinate. To the recommendation of Charles deGaulle the DATAR was established in 1963 in order to eliminate economic differences and to harmonize regional development (Noin, 1984, 1996; Merlin & Choay, 2010).



Figure 4. The program regions



Figure 5. The action districts

This was an organization between ministries and it was lead directly by the Prime Minister. Then decree No. 64/251 was issued entitled “*on the structure of state administration in the regional district*” (14th March 1964) (Fonyó, 1976; Balázs, 1981). This public administration reform established 22 regional public administration districts. The region was lead by the prefect, he was the only one with decision rights and he was the representative of the state. The prefect enforces economic policy of the state and has control and governing rights as well. Prefect of the central county of the region was also the prefect of the region itself. This reform forms no new regional authority with legal entity rights. This is in reality an administration deconcentration and not decentralization. Three new agencies were formed: The region prefect who is the representative of the state power and has decision and control rights; the regional administration conference that is the assistant organization of the region prefect, its task was to help and co-ordinate the work of state public service in the region; and the regional economic and development committee that represent local interests in regional economic development (CODER)

(Joseph, 1967). It has consultation rights and is entitled to submit recommendations for regional planning (decree No. 64/252). The region of Paris was reorganised in 1964 (decree of 10th July 1964). The new region was formed from 8 counties located in 3 areas along the Seine and Oise, the Seine and the Seine – Marne rivers: Paris Seine et Marne, Ivelines, Essonne, Hauts-de Seine, Seine-Saint Denis, Val-de-Marne, Val d’oire. Then from 1964 Paris have a special right as it becomes a county and a city together. (1932: Planning and development borders of the Paris region were 35km away from the city 1941: Planning and development area of the Paris region were extended and transformed into county and district borders as well 1961: Paris capital region is established (Gravier J. F. 1972) (decree of 2nd June 1961 that is transformed into the Île de France region (decree 6th May 1976) in 1976).

In 1969 president deGaulle submitted a reform plan that would have made the regions real administration units. The reform plan was rejected by a referendum (46.83%) and deGaulle resigned. Thus significant changes did not occur in the history of French regions until 1972. Except for the separation of Corsica from the region Provence Cote d’Azur. In 1972 at the time of president Georges Pompidou the region becomes a legal entity in the status of a public institution (act No. 1962/6. 5.). Its authority remained mainly economic and regional development (regional development and economic issues affecting the region). This measure can be regarded only as deconcentration as executive power remained in the hands of the prefect but he has to consider the consultation right of the newly formed Regional Council as well. Economic and social committee was also established that included the tasks of the regional economic development committee as well formed in 1964 (CODER). Regional administration conference became a consultation organization after 1972. The region was an economic-administration agency controlled by the state. Its tasks were preparing and executing economic plans. The region as a public institution has an own budget voted by the regional council.

DECENTRALIZATION AND REGIONALIZATION – DEFERRE REFORMS

In the program of the socialist party winning the elections in 1981 reforming public administration had an important role. One aim was to start decentralization for which further three aims were set. Regions have to be transformed into territorial communities; elected executive boards have to be formed in the regions and in the states and state supervision has to be ceased. This reform package reformed all of the regional governments.

Regions became fully territorial local government authorities as a result of decentralization but they operated as public institutions until the first regional election in 1986. Regions as a result of reforms became “adults”, i.e. had free self administration similarly to counties and settlements. Regional councils formed in 1972 were elected for 6 years by general and direct elections. Rights of county and regional general assemblies were extended in 1982, executive rights were handed to the presidents of these bodies therefore prefects had only control rights (act of 2nd March 1982).

As a consequence of the Deferre reforms regions were transformed from public institutions into “regional governments”. In July 1982 role of regions in the field of technological research development was decided and public administration classification of Paris, Marseille and Lyon was reorganised, i.e. districts were formed. Authority share among settlements-county-region was regulated by an act in 1983 (acts of 7th January 1983 and of 22nd July 1983). Regions’ responsibility: continuous professional training, skilled worker training, public education

(lyceums), onshore fishing and the issue of marine cultures company (Vital-Durand E. 2004). In 1984 the region receives rights regarding physical education and sport management (act of 16th July 1984). In 1985 reform of the election system planned long before was performed – changing the act of election was necessary due to the first regional election in 1986. Decrees regulated the issuing of mandates for members of the regional council. Regions have an authority block including all authorities regarding economic planning, economic activity and education ***.

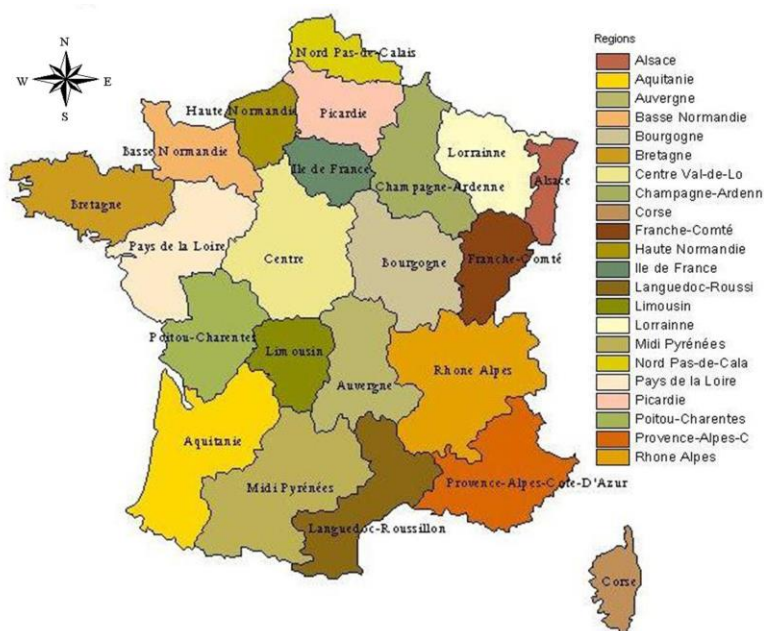


Figure 6. The regions of France in 2010

NEW MOMENTUM FOR DECENTRALIZATION (2002-2003)

In 2002, 20 years after the Deferre reforms the opinion was that French decentralization has to have a new direction. For this the basis was prepared by several acts on regional planning and regional development in the 1990s involving inhabitants as much as possible. These were topped by the modifications of the constitution in 2002-2003. Constitutional review act plan of 2002 wished to create a specific state model in order to intensify decentralization that declares decentralized organizations while it differs from both regionalized and federal states with that a decision making centre remains although decentralization is declared. This declaration has two important elements: subsidiarity and regional co-operation of equal parties. It was ensured that no public administration unit controls another one. The plan was accepted on 6th November 2002 and the constitution was modified in 2003****. The first paragraph involved that the state was decentralized. Paragraph 72 was modified in several points (principle of subsidiarity was included into the constitution, situation of the representative of the state was solved, principle of not establishing authority without adequate financial measures was included in paragraph 72/2, no local government can regulate another one, however, co-operation is possible, i.e. this contained the right of trial and right of citizen petition was introduced as well). The part regarding overseas territories was also modified in chapter XII. Modifications were

accepted on 17th March 2003. In that year further four constitutional acts were accepted and regions received new authorities regarding economic development and professional training. However, the issue of Corsica still waits for settlement.

SUMMARY

Regionalization and parallel decentralization in France achieved significant success in the past 50 years as not only economy but political power was decentralized as well. However, central power still remains strong. Cities in the French hexagon function as counter balances against Paris regarding economy. Role of départements was reduced in the favour of regions both in public administration and in economy. The region has proved to be successful as a separate regional unit. Way of successful future for France is in a regionalized state therefore continuing regionalization is necessary considering both economic-social-cultural and political aspects.

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