Experience in Performing Historical—Geographical Zoning of Russia

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Abstract—Grids of economic zoning of Russia proposed by different authors since the 19th century and various methods of geographical zoning have been considered. Specific features of the historical—geographical approach to zoning have been demonstrated. A hierarchy of historical—geographical areas, which takes into account differences in terms of the taxonomy of physical—geographical, cultural, and economic zoning, has been suggested. A method of historical—geographical zoning of Russia at the macrolevel has been proposed. The composition and a brief description of the identified historical—geographical countries and oblasts have been presented.

Keywords: zoning patterns of Russia, method of zoning, hierarchy of regions, historical—geographical zoning of Russia

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Historical—geographical zoning represents an integral type of zoning, since it simultaneously takes into consideration the natural, cultural, and socio-economic aspects of zoning. Such a combination makes historical—geographical zoning a rather difficult task, as the complex approach requires the selection of a great number of criteria for identifying units of different ranks.

Zoning normally passes through several stages, the first of which consists in evaluating a country’s zonability. Zoning as a method of geographical analysis has always attracted the special attention of Russian geographers. To date, considerable experience has already been achieved in performing physical—geographical and economic—geographical zoning of Russia. The experience in the natural zoning of both the entire territory of the former Soviet Union and modern Russia is reflected in numerous charts of physical—geographical and landscape zoning by different authors, i.e., D.L. Armand, N.A. Gvosdetskii, A.G. Isachenko, A.N. Mil’kov, N.I. Mikhailov, G.D. Rich- ter, etc.

Charts of economic—geographical zoning were created by national scientists much earlier than charts of natural zoning. The most famous works on the subject are those of K.I. Arsen’ev that date back to the first half of the 19th century [23]. The zoning maps of Russia created in 1848 especially highlighted the link between nature and the economy.

The most comprehensive list of zoning essays during the prerevolutionary period appears in the works by B.A. Balshaia [4, 23], published in Voprosy geografii from 1948 to 1953.

In 1877—1878, the first census of land ownership was conducted in Russia under the supervision of Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky. To demonstrate the characteristics of the land distribution in the aftermath of the 1861 reform, he divided the European part of Russia into 12 oblasts (regions) [23]. This division of Russia suggested by Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky was preserved in most editions of the Central Committee for Statistics until the beginning of the 20th century and was also used for creating a 12-volume edition of Picturesque Russia (1881–1901) [12] and the fundamental multivolume work Russia: A Complete Geographical Description of Our Fatherland (1899–1913) (24). Basically, this integral zoning performed by Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky is the closest one to historical—geographical zoning.

According to Picturesque Russia, the country was divided into 20 oblasts. We take into consideration only those analyzed in our paper, i.e., (1) the Extreme North of European Russia and (2) North Russian Lake and Old Novgorod oblast, (3) Finland, (4) Moscow, (5) Moscow industrial area, (6) Central Black Earth oblast, (7) Don–Caspian steppe oblast, (8) Middle Volga oblast, (9) Priural’skii krai, (10) the Caucasus, (11) Western Siberia, and (12) Eastern Siberia, Primorye, and Amur oblasts. Picturesque Russia was published between 1881 and 1901. The number of printed sheets reached 880. A total of 93 authors who created 220 essays were engaged in its creation [23].
According to the multivolume work *Russia: A Complete Geographical Description of Our Fatherland*, the country was divided into 20 “natural and cultural oblasts.” Here we present a list of the regions that were reflected in our chart: (1) Moscow industrial area and Upper Volga region, (2) Central Black Earth oblast, (3) Lake oblast, (4) Northern oblast, (5) Urals and Cis-Urals, (6) Middle and Low Volga oblast and Trans-Volga oblast, (7) Finland, (8) the Caucasus, (9) Western Siberia, (10) Middle and Eastern Siberia, and (11) Amur River and Pacific outskirts [23]. The first volume of *Russia: A Complete Geographical Description of Our Fatherland* appeared in 1899. Conceived as a 22-volume edition, this work came out in 1914 and contained only 11 volumes.

In the Soviet Union, economic zoning truly proliferated, since it was constantly solicited for the purposes of exercising state control over the national economy. It is no wonder that zoning became a focal point of Soviet economic geography. It was also during the Soviet period that a historical—geographic approach, which uses the historical—ethnographic or historical—cultural areas (HCAs) [16] as units for zoning, was developed within ethnography (M.G. Levin and N.N. Cheboksarov [19]).

In the post-Soviet period, due to the transition of developed countries towards a postindustrial era, the Russian zoning research community started to pay more attention to the sociocultural aspects of development. Papers appeared on social [27], historical—cultural [17, 22, etc.], and cultural—landscape zoning [5, 15, 30, 34, etc.]. In cultural geography, efforts are made to perform integral cultural (cultural—geographical) zoning [22, 32, etc.].

In recent years, the interest in historical—geographical zoning has grown, which is primarily explained by the involvement of professional geographers who deal with physical, socioeconomic, and cultural geography in the development of theory and methodology and historical geography. By contrast, during the Soviet period, historical geography developed more due to the efforts of historians than geographers; therefore, it was mainly viewed as a secondary discipline (Ya.E. Vodarskii, V.M. Kabuzan, V.K. Yatsunskii, et al.) [31]. However, it was V.K. Yatsunskii who suggested its division into historical—physical, historical—economic, and historical—political geography [35].

At the same time, rapidly developing historical cultural geography has appeared to be a connecting link between studies on the historical geography of landscapes that became classical in the second half of the 20th century (V.S. Zhekulin [10], G.A. Isachenko; etc) and historical geography of the population and economy (7, 8 et al.). A cultural—landscape approach became the most popular in national cultural geography [6, 18, 29, 33, etc.]. Studies in the area of historical political geography, namely, of the dynamics of previous administrative and political borders, play a considerable role in the modern development of historical geography [9, 21, etc.].

The second stage of zoning consists in identifying regions, i.e., recognizing the specific characteristics of every region, revealing their nature [26]. The coherence and internal unity of a historical—geographical unit of every rank is determined by the homogeneous development of its environmental conditions, population (ethnic and confessional composition and settlement patterns), and the economy (a certain form of exploitation of natural resources and special characteristics of traditional farming) [3].

However, it is hardly possible for all regions of various ranks to display all these specific features. Therefore, in our opinion, the identifying of historical—geographical regions of different ranks and their delimitation should follow the method suggested by L.V. Smirnagin [28], which is reflected in his theory of “floating characteristics” in zoning. While delimiting regions, one can apply not only the method of “floating characteristics” but also more traditional methods of zoning, i.e., the methods of overlapping and leading characteristics. The method of overlapping means the identification of historical—geographical regions by aligning the borders of physical—geographical regions with those of historical and modern political—administrative units, areas of compact habitation of ethnic and confessional groups, dialect areas, historical—ethnographic areas, etc. (Fig. 1).

On the other hand, the method of leading characteristic, which is aimed at identifying historical—geographic units according to one certain component, not only allows for putting into practice one of the variants of industry—specific zoning but also taking a step closer to solving the problem of hierarchization of historical—geographical regions. After determining the leading characteristics at the macro—, mezzo—, and microlevels of historical—geographical zoning, one can proceed to analyzing the zoning in its entirety, namely, to hierarchizing the system of historical—geographical zoning.

Stiff methods of overlapping and identifying a leading characteristic transform into methods of “floating characteristics” while passing towards a more flexible system of zoning, namely, the system of integral historical—geographical zoning. From our point of view, this method allows one to distribute leading characteristics at different hierarchical levels of historical—geographical regions and, on the other hand, consider both zonal and azonal characteristics of historical—geographical zoning.

One of the crucial aspects of historical—geographical zoning consists in determining the hierarchy of regions. At the present time, the reality in historical geography is that both the system of taxonomic units and the strategy of zoning directly depend on the profile of a researcher. Thus, the highest unit of zoning according to V.S. Zhekulin [11] is a historical—geographical oblast. He proposed to divide oblasts into...
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In addition to V.S. Zhekulin, an analysis of taxonomic units of historical–geographical zoning in physical geography was performed by V.V. Riumin [25] who pointed out that, for the sake of convenience, hierarchical levels of zoning should correspond to the system of time-tested physical–geographical zoning; i.e., one should apply units, such as a historical–geographical country, oblast, province, district, and region.

The authors have no downright objections against such a system of taxonomic units. However, firstly, the subject of historical–geographical survey does not always correspond to a physical–geographical taxon of a certain rank [1]. Secondly, the taxonomy of historical–geographical zoning should be understandable for researchers in the area of cultural and socioeconomic geography. Therefore, we propose using double or even triple names of taxa for historical–geographical zoning that would be familiar to researchers of physical, cultural, and socioeconomic geography [20].

At the highest level of hierarchy within the system of historical–geographical zoning (at a macrolevel), we propose using the following taxa (an equivalent taxon in cultural and socioeconomic geography is given in parentheses): (1) historical–geographical countries (cultural world), which largely coincide with the borders of physical–geographical countries. They reflect the principle of belonging to a common geographical area and correspond to the historical names of large Russian regions; (2) historical–geographical province (historical–cultural province) as a part of a historical–geographical country, with its particular environmental conditions, area of settlement of indigenous population, and the type of their traditional natural resource management; and (3) a historical–geographical oblast (or historical–cultural oblast) as a part of a historical–geographical province with its particular environmental conditions, area of settlement of indigenous population, and the type of their traditional natural resource management; and (3) a historical–geographical oblast (or historical–cultural oblast) as a part of a historical–geographical province, identified primarily based on the period of time when the territory was populated and developed due to the forming of a certain ethnic group. The further division of a historical–geographical oblast into smaller taxonomic units (mezo- and microlevels) to a great extent depends on the specific features of a particular territory [2, 20].

Historical–geographical zoning is performed based on the principle of complexity, which takes into

Fig. 1. Physical–geographical, historical–ethnographic, and economic borders as markers of the historical–geographical zoning of Russia at the macrolevel.

Physical–geographical countries: (A) Arctic Islands; (B) Fennoscandia; (C) East European (Russian) Plain; (D) Caucasus; (E) Urals; (F) West Siberian Plain; (G) Altai–Sayan area; (H) Baikal; (I) Amur–Sakhalin area; (J) Koryak–Kamchatka–Kuril area; (K) Northeastern Siberia; and (L) Middle Siberia.

Historical-ethnographic oblasts and suboblasts (according to modern areas of peoples’ settlement; the names are based on (16): (1) Central Russian; (1a) South Russian; (2) White Sea–Baltic Sea; (3) Volga–Kama; (4) North; (5) Caucasus; (6) Yamalo–Taymyr; (7) West Siberian; (8) South Siberian (Altai–Sayan); (9) East Siberian; (10) Chukotka–Kamchatka; (11) Amur–Sakhalin.

Economic regions: (I) North; (II) Northwestern; (III) Central; (IV) Central Black Earth; (V) Volga–Viatka; (VI) Povolzhye; (VII) North Caucasus; (VIII) Ural; (IX) West Siberian; (X) East Siberian; (XI) Far Eastern; and (XII) Kaliningrad oblast.

Suboblasts within which historical–geographical regions could then be identified.

Borders of:
- economic regions
- historical–ethnographic oblasts and suboblasts
- physical–geographical countries
- natural zonal borders
account the specific link between a landscape and an ethnic group, which is reflected in the types of historical natural resource management under different zonal and azonal conditions in accordance with a particular historical period. The historical–genetic principle takes into consideration the temporal aspect of the genetic liaison between an ethnic group and a landscape and shows whether the analyzed landscape is ancestral and hosting for a particular ethnos. This principle also reflects the period of the relations between the nature and the society both for a unit of zoning in general and a particular temporal context. The zonal–provincial principle is used for identifying regions of distribution of homogeneous patterns; every natural zone corresponds to the distribution area of one or several ethnic groups. The historical principle (historical surveys, comparative–historical, retrospective, and historical reconstruction) is important for zoning, since different hierarchical levels require historical information for reconstructing the previous landscape and the ethnic and nature management characteristics of the area and identifying the settlement areas of ethnic groups, language specifics, and landmark events, which allow for revealing the ethnic and linguogeographical borders between units of historical–geographical zoning.

Only three upper taxonomic units were used while creating a general map of the historical–geographical zoning of Russia. The largest taxon is represented by the historical–geographical country identified as a large coherent orographical unit (the territory next to the physical–geographical country), which is characterized by a landscape diversity due to the existence of several natural zones or altitudinal belts, several ethnic groups and subethnic groups, and various types of natural management, which form systems of natural management related to zonal landscapes. A historical–geographical province is the most important middle stage of taxonomic zoning. It is identified within a country and represents an area with the dominance of certain landscapes which determines the orogeomorphological belonging. A province is characterized by traditional natural management of indigenous ethnic groups which is determined by the zonal factor. A historical–geographical oblast is a part of a historical–geographical province. It is mainly identified based on the moment when the area was populated, developed, and witnessed the formation of a certain ethnic group within its borders. The question is about forming an entire set of conditions, the combination of which allows for revealing regional specifics of the historical–geographical situation and its transformation over time. The existence of a historical–geographical oblast is accompanied by certain events that give rise to a taxon on the map which will not be forgotten, since the event was significant.

A final stage of zoning consists in overviewing the grid of regions. While performing historical–geographical zoning of Russia, we revealed nine historical–geographical countries, which are different in terms of the landscape and ethnic and economic characteristics. Three countries were identified in European Russia, i.e., East European Plain, North Caucasus, and Urals (Fig. 2). However, the major unit of historical–geographical zoning of Russia at the macrolevel is a historical–geographical oblast (HGO).

East European Plain is a multizonal polyethnic historical–geographical country, the development of which dates back to ancient times. Within these area, three latitudinal historical–geographical provinces were revealed based on the zonal characteristics, i.e., northern, middle, and southern. These provinces reflect the existing frontiers.

The northern historical–geographical province embraces the tundra, forest-tundra, and taiga areas of European Russia and only partly penetrates into the area of mixed forests. The province is comprised of four HGOs, i.e., Kola–Karelia oblast, Northwestern oblast, Russian North, and Northern Cis-Urals. These territories were developed by the Slavs in the middle ages. They are also inhabited by the indigenous Finno–Ugric peoples (Saami, Karelians, Vepsians, and Komi) and the Samoyedic peoples of the Uralic family (Nenets). Hunting, farming, forest exploitation, and mining represent the main areas of natural management for these peoples. The northern province of the East European Plain corresponds to the territory of two Russian economic regions, namely, North and Northwestern.

The middle historical–geographical province was developed in the middle ages and to a large extent corresponds to the natural zones of mixed and broad-leaved forests and forest–steppes. It is populated by Russians, indigenous Finno–Ugric peoples of the Uralic family (Nenets). Hunting, farming, forest exploitation, and mining represent the main areas of natural management related to these peoples. The northern province of the East European Plain corresponds to the territory of two Russian economic regions, namely, North and Northwestern.

The development of the southern historical–geographical province dates back to ancient times. It mainly embraces the steppes (the southern part of Russia inhabited by the Cossacks) and semidesert areas and includes two historical–geographical oblasts, i.e., Middle and Lower Volga and South Russian HGOs. This area has been inhabited from the early middle ages by Russians, and the steppe nomads have almost completely assimilated with Russians, with the exception of the Kalmyk people of the Mongolian group (eastern part of the province). In general, the southern province of the East European historical–geographical country corresponds to the territory of the Volga
North Caucasus is a high mountainous, altitudinal, and polyethnic historical–geographical country developed in ancient times. It possesses various landscapes and is inhabited by very diverse ethnic groups. In the presented chart, it was not divided into smaller taxa. Seven republics are inhabited by peoples of the North Caucasian family, a Turkic group of the Altaic family, and an Iranian group of the Indo-European family (the Ossetians, descendants of the ancient Alans), who were only slightly assimilated by Russians. The territory of the North Caucasus historical–geographical country corresponds to the southern part of the North Caucasus economic region.

The Ural historical–geographical country is located in an altitudinal zone with typical midmountain landscapes and includes two HGOs, namely, Russian industrial Urals and Bashkiria. The Urals is generally inhabited by Russians and the assimilated Finno-Ugric and Turkic peoples (including the less assimilated Bashkirs). The area that was developed by Russians years and years ago is referred to as the Russian Industrial Urals. The territory of the country almost completely coincides with the Ural economic region (with the exception of Udmurtia in the west and Kurgan oblast in the east).

Based on the specific combination of natural and ethnic characteristics, we identified six historical–geographical countries in the Asian part of Russia.

**West Siberian Plain country**, which was developed in the late middle ages, is divided into two HGOs. The first one is the Lower and Middle Ob HGO located in the northern part of the tundra, forest tundra, and northern taiga and inhabited by peoples of the Uralic family (Khanty, Mansi, Nenets, and Northern Selkup). The second is the Upper Ob HGO, located in the southern part within the southern taiga and forest steppe and is mainly populated by Russians. The West Siberian historical–geographical country corresponds to the northern and central parts of the West Siberian economic region and also includes Kurgan oblast from the Ural economic region.

**Altai–Sayan** is a high-mountain, altitudinal, and polyethnic historical–geographical country with various landscapes. It is divided into two HGOs, i.e., Kuznetsk–Altai and Sayan HGOs inhabited by the Altai, Khakas, Shors, Tuvans, and Russians. The territory of the country includes the southeastern part of the West Siberian economic region and the southwestern part of the East Siberian economic region.
The Middle Siberian historical—geographical country is also divided into two HGOs based on the zonal factor. These HGOs include Taymyr-Putorana oblast located in the tundra and northern taiga and inhabited by the Ngasans, Kets, Dolgans, and Evenks, who practice traditional natural management, and the Angarsk–Upper-Lena HGO, which is located in the taiga and forest steppe and was developed by Russians. The Middle Siberian historical—geographical country corresponds to the northern and central parts of the East Siberian economic region.

The East Siberian historical—geographical country was developed in the middle ages. It is located in the tundra and taiga area and is inhabited by Russians and Yakuts and in the recent past was populated by the Yukaghirs—an ancient indigenous people of the northeastern part of Siberia. The country includes two HGOs, namely, Sakha and Indigirka-Kolyma oblasts. The existence of Sakha HGO is certain. As for Indigirka-Kolyma HGO, its mountain and forest landscapes in the upper part of Kolyma were previously inhabited by compact groups of Yukaghir hunters, while fishermen and reindeer herders populated the tundra areas. The Yukaghirs represent an ethnic layer, which laid the foundation for the development of an anthropological type of the East Siberian Evenks. The Yukaghir ethnic element plays a crucial role in the evolution of races in the Paleosiberian context. Yukaghir tribes occupied the territory that spread out from the Lena River to the Anadyr River. The East Siberian historical—geographical country corresponds to the western part of the Far Eastern economic region.

The Baikal historical—geographical country is a high-mountain polyethnic country, which is characterized by a great diversity of landscapes (taiga, steppe, and altitudinal belts). The development of this country dates back to ancient times. Together with Russians, this territory is inhabited by the Buryats—a people of the Mongolian group, Altaic family, who practice Tibetan Buddhism. The northern part of the country is populated by the Baikal Evenks. The country corresponds to Trans-Baikal HGO. Historically, the exploitation of natural resources was performed by hunting: fishery was widespread in the north, while the southern part was populated by nomadic herdsmen and a limited number of farmers. The Baikal historical—geographical country is spread over the southeastern end of the East Siberian economic region.

The Far Eastern historical—geographical country is comprised of altitudinal, tundra—taiga, taiga, meadow—swamp, and broad-leaved dark coniferous areas and includes two historical—geographical oblasts. Northern Far Eastern HGO is populated, along with Russians, by peoples of the Chukotka-Kamchatka and Eskimo-Aleut language families. Amur-Primorye HGO is populated by the indigenous Nivkhs and Manchu-Tungus peoples, largely assimilated with Russians. The Far Eastern historical—geographical country embraces the eastern part (excluding the Sakha Republic) of the Far Eastern economic region.

Thus, the units of historical—geographical zoning represented in the chart reflect a fair spatial and temporal differentiation of Russia. Many borders coincide with already known zoning maps which confirms the credibility of the authors’ judgment. HGOs are mostly identified based on the event, which incited the formation of a particular historical—geographical oblast. The segregation of every HGO is related to a certain event, which gives the region its name and status. For example, the Wild Fields had become the Black Earth region by the 16th century; the White Sea coast was renamed as Pomorye in the 15th century; etc. HGOs do not represent territorial complexes and do not form a single complex. It is not a case of junction point but rather a homogenous space-differentiated unit. In every particular case, the territory is identified based on some specific characteristics.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that the suggested grid of historical—geographical zoning of Russia was created as map material for a multivolume edition as part of the project “Historical Geography of Russia.” Several volumes are supposed to cover the subject of historical—geographical oblasts in the European and Asian parts of Russia.

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