

# Regional Branding in a Nutshell

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*A brief guide  
for the implementation of a successful regional branding scheme*

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# Regional branding as a tool of sustainable development of rural areas

## Introduction

Regional branding is a specific concept focused on promotion of sustainable regional development with a special emphasis to small / family businesses that contribute not only to local economies but also to preservation of traditions and cultural heritage. The aim of regional brand is to highlight quality local products and motivate various social, cultural, and educational activities related to a specific region.

Despite different historical backgrounds, all European countries have been facing the consequences of globalisation on one side and – on the other side – the recently awaked interests in local products. Healthy eating is fashionable and various scandals of food wholesalers push people to search for alternatives. Regional brands and their managers seem to be at the right place in the right time. But they have higher ambitions than just follow an unpredictable trend.

The regional brands' aim is the **sustainable and balanced development of regions** in terms of economy, culture, and society. The brand itself is a symbol that represents a community consisting of producers and service providers, their customers, authorities, educational and culture institutions and non-governmental organisations from a particular region. It is a marketing tool with strong message of responsibility to preserve environment and culture heritage.

The added value of regional branding and its positive influence especially to rural areas have been proved by **successful implementation of number of projects** throughout Europe accomplished during last 20 years, some examples of them you were documented at the website [www.regional-products.eu](http://www.regional-products.eu) maintained by Czech Association of Regional Brands that serves as a unique comprehensive guide of different European initiatives dealing with local products.

## Strengths and opportunities of regional branding

Ten year history of regional branding in the Czech Republic together with the comparison with other systems of certification and product labelling provide a lot of experiences, most of them transferable also to other countries and regions.

The bottom-up approach is crucial for all brands gathered within the ARZ. Three quarters of them are run by local action groups as the principle of community led local development tunes very well to aims of regional brands.

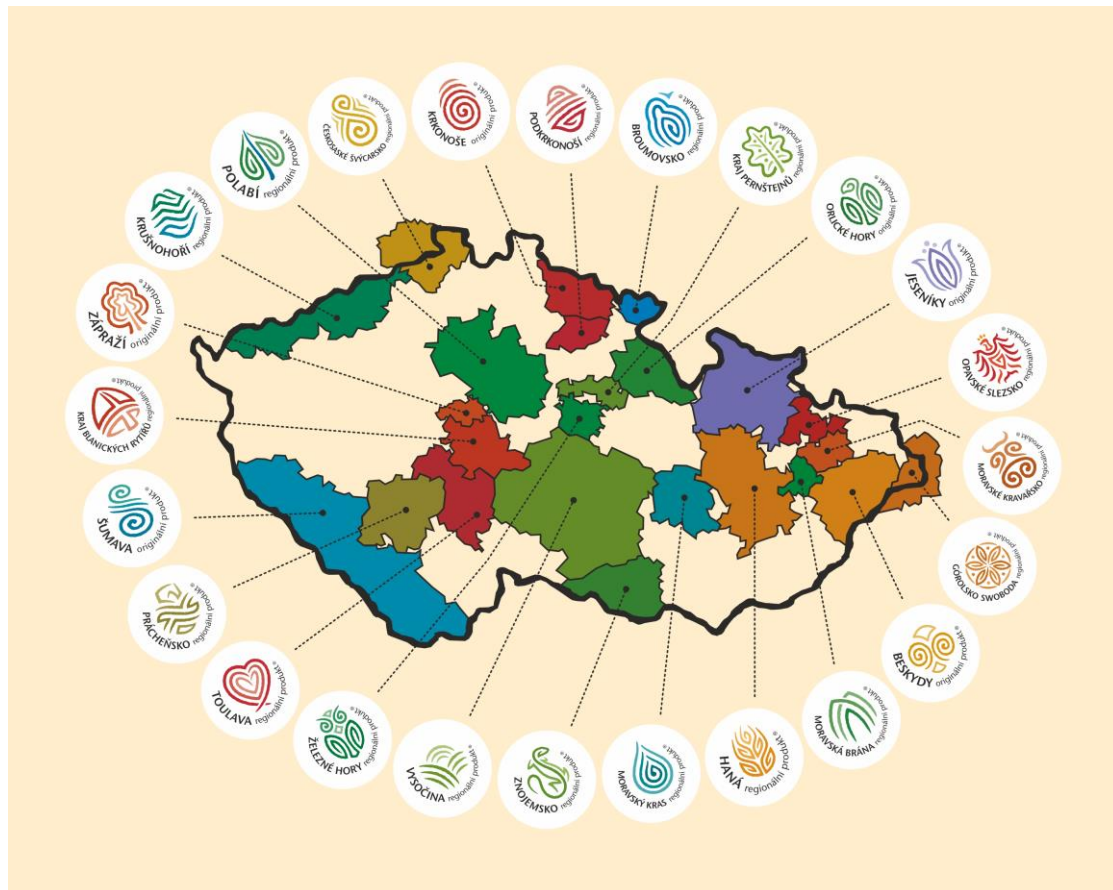
The following SWOT analysis tries to highlight the main features of the brands seen from the Czech perspective.

strengths	weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• single rules and layout</li><li>• scope</li><li>• organisation</li><li>• universality</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• lack of finance</li><li>• dependence on projects</li><li>• discrepancy with official regional division</li><li>• weak criteria</li></ul>
opportunities	threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• interest in quality products and alternative tourism</li><li>• interest of new members (both producers and regions)</li><li>• new media and information technologies</li><li>• games and competitions</li><li>• cross-border potential</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• quantity of other brands and labels</li><li>• low prestige and awareness</li><li>• (non) sustainability of projects</li><li>• non-realistic expectations</li></ul>

## Association of Regional Brands of the Czech Republic

The regional branding of products and services in the Czech Republic is coordinated nationally by the Association of Regional Brands (ARZ), an association of regions that run their own brand for quality local products. The whole system is unique both with unified criteria for awarding the brand certificates and for its common visual style. This is something what is quite unparalleled within Europe.

The system of regional brands has involved 24 (soon 26) regions since 2004 – Krkonoše, Šumava, Beskydy, Moravský kras, Orlické hory, Moravské Kravaňsko, Górolsko Swoboda, Vysočina, Polabí, Podkrkonoší, Haná, Českosaské Švýcarsko, Jeseníky, Prácheňsko, Broumovsko, Kraj blanických rytířů, Železné hory, Moravská brána, Zápazí, Znojensko, Toulava, Opavské Slezsko, Krušnohoří and Kraj Pernštejnů (too more regions are under preparation in North-West Bohemia).



There are some other brands that are not members of the Association but they implement labelling on similar principles except of the visual style (regions Bílé Karpaty, Český ráj, Jizerské hory, Lužické hory and Máchův kraj or Západní Čechy) but they cooperate with the Association on strategic issues.

At the **national level**, the basic promotional materials (common website, information newsletter or leaflets) have been periodically produced. Also some common events have been organised, e.g. crafts fairs in Prague. The main responsibility of the Association is to keep the **unified rules** and moderate the sharing of experiences between regions. The national coordinator supervises the whole process of setting up and functioning of all individual brands, attends the certification committees and advice the efficient promotion of the system since the beginnings of the establishment of a new brand.

Each **regional brand has its coordinator** (a local non-governmental organisation, quite often a local action group) that manages the brand, communicates with local producers and promotes the brand at the regional level in cooperation with other regional institutions and authorities. The rule to use the brand is given to the producers by an independent certification committee after completion of unified rules. The logos of brands have similar layout but vary in the main symbol based on something typical for the particular region. Through this symbol represents uniqueness of the given area, while the unified visual style of all brands indicates wholeness of the nationwide branding system.

A customer who buys the branded product can be sure that this product meets the following criteria:

- origin of within the region
- quality
- consideration of the environment
- unique relationship to the region (traditions, local materials, hand work, region-related theme or other exceptional properties).

At present, almost 800 products and 100 service providers can enjoy the certificate entitling them to use one of the regional brands. You can see the regional brands on the following types of products:

- food and agriculture products (milk, cheese, meat, fish, bakery products, fruit, vegetables, juices and alcoholic drinks)
- handicraft and art (products from wood, glass or metal, lace, jewellery, ceramics and souvenirs)
- nature products (honey, forest fruit, herbs, tea, mineral water)
- tourism services (accommodation, boarding)
- experiences (various activities in the region)

Asociace regionálních značek Napište nám

## Regionální produkty

Každý region v České republice má svůj vlastní neopakovatelný charakter, daný přírodním bohatstvím, kulturou a staletými tradicemi jeho obyvatel. Také výrobky a produkty pocházející z určité oblasti nesou část tohoto charakteru – je do nich vložena práce tamních řemeslníků a zemědělců i část jejich duše. Návštěvníkům pak nabízí specifickou pohostinnost a neopakovatelné zážitky.

Vyhledat

Vyberte si region

- Certifikované výrobky >
- Certifikované služby >
- Certifikované zážitky >
- Prodejní místa >
- Kalendář akcí >
- Novinky z regionů >
- Noviny "Doma v ..."
- Další tiskoviny >
- Pro zájemce o značku >
- O asociaci >
- Naše projekty >
- Odkazy >
- Kontakty >

**Certifikovaný výrobek**

**Uzenářské výrobky z Bušína**  
Region: JESEŇÍKÝ  
Dodává: MVDr. Josef Klimeš  
Obec: Olšany

[Zobrazit všechny produkty](#)

**Certifikovaná služba**

**ATC OLŠOVEC Jedovnice**  
Region: MORAŤSKÝ KRAS  
Provozuje: Olšovec s.r.o.  
Obec: Jedovnice

[Zobrazit všechny služby](#)

**Certifikovaný zážitek**

**Šumavské zastavení se Štěpánkou**  
Region: ŠUMAVA  
Provozuje: Štěpánka a Tomáš Balvínovi  
Obec: Sušice

[Zobrazit všechny zážitky](#)

**Co je regionální značení výrobků, služeb a zážitků?**

Regionální značení je jednou z cest, jak zviditelnit konkrétní region a upozornit na zajímavé produkty, které zde vznikají, a usnadnit návštěvníkům regionu orientaci v nabízených službách.

Regionálních značek jsou v České republice desítky. Podstatná část z nich je sdružena v Asociaci regionálních značek (ARZ). Značky zapojené do ARZ jsou charakteristické jednotným vizuálním stylem značek i propagačních materiálů. Značky s podobnými logy respektují i stejná pravidla udělování, která

## Good practice examples throughout Europe

### The Netherlands: Green Heart of Holland – logistic challenges for local products

The National Landscape ‘Green Heart of Holland’ (Groene Hart) is an open ‘green’ area surrounded by large cities like Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam. The Groene Hart is characterized by its green peat meadows, marshlands and many lakes and canals, which strongly contrasts the urban areas around it. Agriculture, nature and recreation are the primary activities in the Groene Hart, where residents and urban visitors can often find rest and many green spaces. Since 2003 the area is protected as a National Landscape, which means that further urbanisation is restricted and that natural values have to be protected.

Local and regional government agencies took the initiative to develop a brand for the Groene Hart / Green Heart of Holland, in order to develop and promote the touristic values and opportunities of the region. Due to conflicting interests, bureaucratic procedures and other political priorities, the development of this regional brand is slow. Small scale producers, farmers and accommodation providers anticipated this and founded in 2006 the *Groene Hart, kloppend hart* (Green Heart, beating heart) foundation in order to promote rural tourism and local products. Nowadays the foundation has ca. 250 ‘members’. At first the organisation focussed mainly on the promotion of rural tourism, now local products become more and more important.



One of the main challenges for the foundation was to overcome logistic problems for local food products from small scale producers (like farmstead cheese) spread over the area. To solve this problem, the Green Heart Producer Co-operative was founded (with 11 members in 2010) to take care of logistics and marketing and sales<sup>1</sup>. Right from the beginning, the co-operative started collaboration with a regional supermarket organisation and managed to sell local products in about 50 supermarkets in the area. This proved to be an enormous impulse for the sales and other distribution channels were developed and explored, like local markets and shops, hospitals and care homes and catering. For marketing purposes, the co-operative (and the individual members) use both the ‘official’ regional brand and the ‘Erkend Streekproduct’ hallmark for regional products. Nowadays the co-operative has over 30

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<sup>1</sup> The co-operative only takes care of a part of the sales of every producer. So the members are independent and also responsible for their own marketing and sales to other distribution channels.

members, each of them has to fulfil and subscribe the criteria and values of the national hallmark.

For more information see: [www.groenehart.nl](http://www.groenehart.nl)

### **Poland: Creation of a region through product placement**

The Barycz Valley is an area located in the south western Poland, in the basin of the Barycz River. Far enough from the big cities such as Wrocław or Poznań that it is left without any urban bustle but luckily close enough to go there for a weekend in nature. The strength of this region is the traditional fishery management, which dates back to the Middle Ages. This centuries-old tradition of growing carp in large, numerous ponds within the region, determined the character and aspect of the area.

Until recently, the area was renowned mainly due to the ‘Milicz carp’ a fish grown in the region, sold everywhere in Lower Silesia in the period before Christmas. In the conducted in 2011 research among the readers of Gazeta Wyborcza Wrocław (the-most-read nationwide daily newspaper with regional editions) upon the most famous local products of Lower Silesia, ‘Milicz carp’ was on the top.

Great support in building the identity of the inhabitants and the recognition of the region among tourists played the European program Leader+ and then Leader. From the initiative of non-governmental organizations, local organization – Barycz Valley Foundation had been established, which, together with the active groups of inhabitants began the work on defining direction of sustainable development of the area and on creating a strategy of tourism products. In 2007 the first Carp Days in the Valley Barycz were organized, during which took place: amateur culinary competition, bicycle race, fish harvest demonstration shows for schools and one outdoor event by the ponds with tasting of smoked carp.



In 2008, from the initiative of the Barycz Valley Foundation, active residents and other non-governmental organizations, the Association ‘*Partnership for the Barycz Valley*’ has been brought to life, assembling now more than 120 partners representing the social, economic and public sectors, covering with its activities an area of 8 municipalities (nearly 1663 km<sup>2</sup>) from two provinces, inhabited by close to 100 thousand residents. The Association took over authorities and most important responsibilities from the Foundation, and it simultaneously



acts as a Local Action Group (RDP 2007-2013), Local Fishery Action Group, (2007-2013) and the Local Granting Organisation for the 'Act Locally' programme to award mini-grants. Means from European and national funds planned and spent under the LEADER approach (presently CCLD) contribute to the comprehensive development of the Barycz Valley area.

The 'Partnership for Barycz Valley' Association and its members and partners implements strategies with the total budget for 2009-2012 reaching 60 million PLN (15 million EUR). In open competition calls, it selects projects contributing to the sustainable development of the region, especially to keep traditional architecture, development of the environment friendly tourism, entrepreneurship basing on the traditional products and services and those helping to sustain the fishery character of the region. The association undertakes also activities to support and involve local communities. These include the competition for the Barycz Valley most active village, where the rural populations receive complex support for building the village thematic offer through the handicraft workshops, training, study tours, learning skills to promote their activities at the Internet portal of the contest competition participants [www.aktywni.barycz.pl](http://www.aktywni.barycz.pl). The Association supports village initiatives, small organisations and informal groups with the 'Act Locally' grants up to 6000 PLN i.e. 1500 EUR ([www.dzialaj.barycz.pl](http://www.dzialaj.barycz.pl)). The activation programme of the association supports small family enterprises producing and providing services based on the region's specificity, administering and developing the promotion system for the local products and services, called '*Barycz Valley Recommends*' ([www.dbpoleca.barycz.pl](http://www.dbpoleca.barycz.pl)). It also implements comprehensive promotion programme for the whole region, comprising creation of new tourism trails and offers, and, since 2006, the 'Carp Days in Barycz Valley' – annual set of events organised in cooperation with more than 50 partners ([www.dnikarpia.barycz.pl](http://www.dnikarpia.barycz.pl)).

### **United Kingdom: Hampshire Fare – self-sufficient way to promotion**

Hampshire Fare is an initiative that has been working with local farmers and producers across Hampshire for more than twenty years. Its beginnings had been enabled by a start-up support of the Hampshire County Council that financed personal costs of one manager for first three years. In present days the organisation has a team of four dedicated people and is financially independent. Hampshire Fare promotes benefits of buying locally, supports and promotes the unique and talented local produce and craft communities.

Hampshire Fare aims to:

- Raise awareness among the public and trade of the wide range of Hampshire food, drink and craft
- Connect consumers with farming through local food and help secure the future of farming in Hampshire
- Encourage and support the development of sustainable food, drink and craft businesses that contribute to the rural economy in Hampshire
- Organise marketing activities – festivals, meet-the-buyer events, exhibitions and promotions - to promote Hampshire produce
- Support the marketing and PR activities of Hampshire Fare members
- Bring local producers, retailers, hospitality venues and public sector organisations together to encourage the use of local produce

- Attend local and national events to promote Hampshire produce to consumers

The screenshot displays the Hampshire Fare website with the following content:

- Logos:** Corporate Partners, Fullers, Hampshire, Hattingley Valley, Ideal Collection, Sparsholt, The Southern Co-operative, and Wave.
- Tell us your thoughts on the Hampshire Food Festival:** A circular graphic of food items is shown above the text: "HAMPSHIRE FOOD FESTIVAL. Spill the beans on your experience of the Hampshire Food Festival and be entered into a prize draw to win an overnight stay and breakfast at The White Star Tavern, Southampton." A "READ MORE" button is present.
- Featured News:**
  - OSCARS OF THE FOOD WORLD:** Tastes Delicious - members are to be congratulated on being awarded Great Taste Stars.
  - IDEAL COLLECTION'S FIRST IDEAL FOUNDATION PROJECT IS A SUCCESS:** Ideal Collection, a leading group of bars, restaurants and pubs in Hampshire, have reported that their first project, 'Community Roots', has been a great success.
  - A WINNING WAY WITH WINE:** Emma Rice of Hattingley Valley celebrates her Winemaker of the Year award.
- Upcoming Events:**
  - AUG 30 2014 HAMPSHIRE FARMERS' MARKETS BASINGSTOKE:** Sample and savour some of the finest, fresh, traditional produce of Hampshire.
  - AUG 31 2014 HAMPSHIRE FARMERS' MARKETS WINCHESTER:** Sample and savour some of the finest, fresh, traditional produce of Hampshire.
  - AUG 31 2014 HATTINGLEY WINERY AND VINEYARD CHARITY OPEN DAY:** 11- 4.30pm on Sunday 31st August. Enjoy tours, tastings, music, entertainment and refreshments.
- Navigation Buttons:** "VIEW ALL NEWS" and "VIEW ALL EVENTS".
- Footer Buttons:** "Buy local produce", "Find hampshire producers", "Enjoy eat & drink", and "Stay accommodation".

It works with more than 28 members who are dedicated to producing, selling or serving local produce. Its members include wine makers, pig farmers, brewers, leading hotels and independent retailers.

The Hampshire Fare team organises the Hampshire Food Festival to showcase local food and farming. This award-winning festival takes place throughout July and involves more than 80 events which attracted 180,000 visitors in 2013.

Hampshire Fare is a not-for-profit community interest organisation which work is only made possible by the ongoing support of corporate partners and corporate friends.

For more information see: [www.hampshirefare.co.uk](http://www.hampshirefare.co.uk)

## Promotion of local production as an opportunity for Latvian rural areas

### Introduction

For centuries Latvia used its geographic location as an important East-West commercial and trading centre. Industry served local markets, while timber, paper and agricultural products were Latvia's main exports. Conversely, years in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union tended to integrate Latvia's economy with their markets and also serve those countries' large internal industrial needs.

After re-establishing its independence, Latvia proceeded with market-oriented reforms. The economy steadied in late 1994, led by recovery in light industry and a boom in commerce and finance. Until the middle of 2008, Latvia had the fastest developing economy in Europe. The Financial Crisis of 2008 severely disrupted the Latvian economy, primarily as a result of the easy credit bubble that began building up during 2004. By August 2009, Latvia's GDP had fallen by 20% year on year, with S&P predicting a further 16% contraction to come. The International Monetary Fund suggested a devaluation of Latvia's currency, but the European Union objected to this, on the grounds that the majority of Latvia's debt was denominated in foreign currencies. The economic situation has since 2010 improved, and by 2012 Latvia was described as a success showing strong growth forecasts.

Agricultural areas account for 1,815,900 ha (4,487,000 acres) or 29% of the total land area. With the dismantling of collective farms, the area devoted to farming decreased dramatically – now farms are predominantly small. Approximately 200 farms, occupying 2,750 ha (6,800 acres), are engaged in ecologically pure farming (i.e., using no artificial fertilisers or pesticides).

The above described conditions indicates that the Europe-wide trends of boosting smaller scale agro-food businesses and the restoration of traditional crafts have a specific meaning and potential in Latvia.

As both the Latvian economy and society is open and directly influenced by both neighbours and Western European countries (at many levels spanning from trading interests to the fact that Latvia has been facing serious emigration problems with high proportion of workforce seeking for jobs abroad), it is natural that we can see also many initiatives trying to follow the patterns inspired by other EU countries.

There are several initiatives of municipalities trying to promote local producers and their produces without having serious ambitions to introduce any strict criteria. On the other hand we can see initiatives as the Straupe Farmers Market built on the strong idea of exclusivity (organic produces, locality, traditional recipes and crafts using only natural materials).

Comparing with the situation in the Czech Republic, where the first regional brands had been introduced thanks to a project co-financed by the European Commission that had brought completely new ideas and boosted their implementation, in Latvia in 2012 and beyond, we have to face many different initiatives and to try to find the most effective way of their future development. The question is to which extent the Czech experiences can be transferable to Latvia.

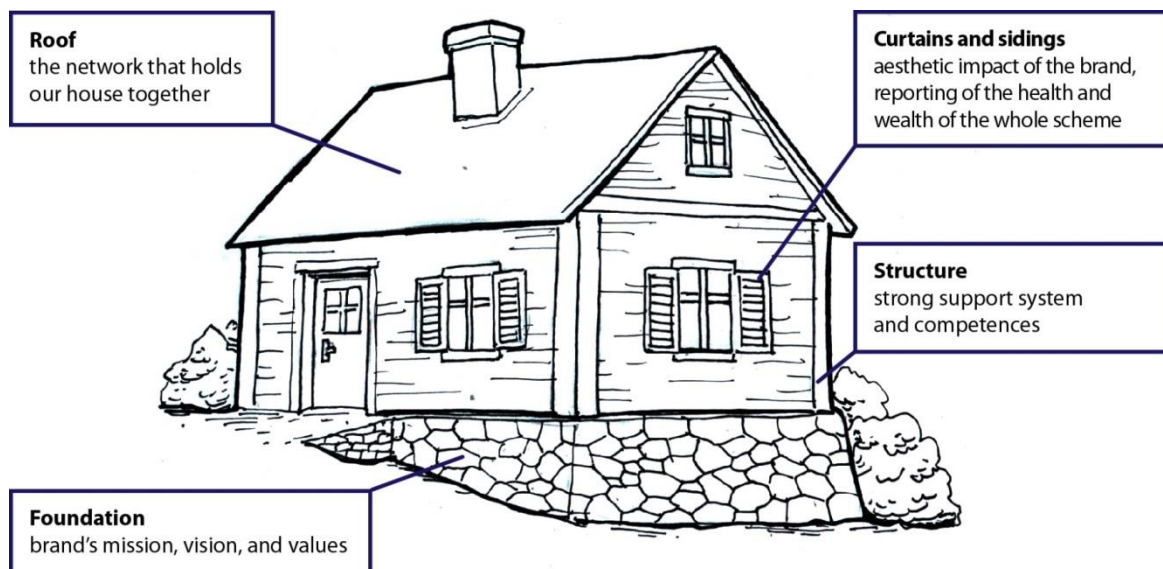
The following chapters try to bring the ‘essence’ of the regional branding, proved not only in the Czech Republic but also in other above mentioned countries. The ‘branding house’ concept explains, what must not be omitted when a new brand is being designed or any existing brands assessed.

### ‘Branding house’ concept

Foreign experiences<sup>2</sup> proved that sustainable regional branding system needs to be complex and carry out many different functions.

For better understanding of different aspects of regional branding we can use the model of the ‘branding house’.

#### *The branding house*



The idea behind the ‘branding house’ concept is that branding is not only about certification or marketing communication. Each well-functioning brand should follow the structure of the ‘house’, consisting of:

- Foundation – brand’s mission, vision, and values
- Structure – strong support system and competences
- Curtains and sidings – aesthetic impact of the brand, its external communication, reporting of the health and wealth of the whole scheme
- Roof – the network that holds our house together.

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<sup>2</sup> Reviving Rural Areas: Compendium of International Learning Partnership, Strakonice 2014, 44 p., [online] <http://www.reviving.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/RRA-Compendium-EN1.pdf>

Each regional brand should be related to the mission of sustainable development of particular area; it provides its members with detailed rules of procedure and ongoing learning and educational activities. The pleasant image of the brands cannot be reached without a sound communication strategy based on transparency and good quality of products that are being communicated. And last but not least the network of all the holders of the brand, as well as other involved people of the region keeps the whole concept together.

### **Mission, vision, and values of the regional brand**

Regional brands throughout Europe stem its goals from the **principles of the sustainable development**. Generally speaking, they are built on three pillars – economic, environmental, and social. The brands can find their roles in all these three areas but every single brand should define clearly its own priorities.

With respect to specific conditions, a regional brand or a branding scheme must clearly define its mission and values that it represents. If clearly defined and declared, the brand has the potential to **contribute to the development of the region**.

### **Strong support system and competences**

To meet its mission, any brand needs a strong system of rules and the structure of bodies that are responsible for fulfilling of these rules. Usually we can talk about Rules of Procedures and criteria of awarding the brand. The brand has to be managed by a coordinator and the awarding process controlled by a certification committee. The rules must be consistent – possibly harmonised within a nationwide organisation. On the other hand they are not unchangeable – they must reflect the developments of the subject of the certification, as well as the external environment.

The rules must be **simple, understandable, strict, and consistent**.

### **Communication of the brand**

As a marketing tool, the brand should be positively accepted by its target groups (both local people – producers, consumers, and other involved organisations and institutions, and visitors of the region).

Positive image of the brand is a wide complex consisting of the visual sign, the values that it represents, measures taken to demonstrate these values, as well as tools for reaching the goals of the brand. A well-designed brand with a nice graphic symbol and detailed rules will not impress the public unless it represents real values (and needs) of the region that are regularly and properly communicated.

**Effective public promotion is a core element for the success of any regional brand.**

### **Network of stakeholders**

Networking potential is one of crucial added values of any regional brand. This **network roofs any activities of the brand** and can effectively support both promotional and marketing aims of the brand and members of the branding scheme.

The producers are cornerstone elements of the network, while the regional co-ordinator is a hub. But there are many other organisations, institutions, and individuals, who can and should contribute to the network and make profit of it.

### **Decalogue of a regional producer**

There are many challenges and opportunities of managing the process of supporting the local production and services. But first of all it is about the product itself. The identification of ‘real’ regional products is not as easy as it can look like<sup>3</sup>. Moreover each regional brand has its criteria that can be too complicated for a newcomer. We need a simple list of recommendations that a local producer could follow to realise if his or her product is eligible for awarding the regional brand.

The following ‘**Decalogue**’ can be used as a practical **checklist for both applicants and the coordinators**:

1. Make your produces yourselves or with help of your friends or neighbours.
2. Respect your ancestors; try to make produces that they would have liked.
3. Do not spoil but keep your home and country.
4. Use the closest – home- or village- or region-made raw materials.
5. Seek for information and learn (about production methods, regulations, and promotion)
6. Be open to both your customers and neighbours; show them as much as possible.
7. Do not forget about the packaging – it really ‘sells’ the goods and it must follow all existing regulations.
8. Keep seeking new ways how to promote yourself – internet, social networks, local or regional media; illustrate your activities
9. Co-operate with all who have similar ideas and dreams as you have.
10. Be proud on your products and your region!

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<sup>3</sup> For more information see <http://www.vip.kompetences.lv/>

## New regional brand step-by-step guide

### The brand establishment process

The regional brand should be an activity of the whole region; that is why its establishment should be decided about by as wide a spectrum of local stakeholders as possible as they will support and develop it. The regional coordinator puts together **a working group** consisting of entrepreneurs and representatives of important organisations from the region – local and regional authorities, NGOs, administration of protected areas, media etc. The optimum number of the working group's members is 15 to 30. The working group takes part in establishment of the brand through **workshops** (there are usually 3 afternoon workshops in about one-month intervals) and in its further development (1 to 2 workshops a year at best). The workshops are organised and managed by the regional coordinator with help from the Association of Regional Brands. Participation in the working group is voluntary and it is not paid, sometimes travel costs are covered.

- *It is important that the **producers are involved** from the very beginning. These active producers form the core of the brand's holders; they know all processes and challenges in detail. They trust the brand and they hand their trust on to their colleagues. This makes the system stable because in a possible problematic situation, the producers will not feel "disappointed by the coordinator" but rather "we have to solve it together".*
- *It is not enough to send an e-mail to be involved in the working group or invited to a workshop. The coordinator should address everybody in person and explain the importance of the activity. It is also better to discuss participation in every event in person or by phone.*

### Delimitation of the region

Concrete delimitation of the region is one of the first questions at workshops. It is necessary to determine the key for delimiting **exact borders** of the region. The delimitation can be geographic, historical, ethnographic etc. or it could be a combination of these. It is not recommended to use the administrative or political borders. The delimitation should be natural so as the local people feel apart of the region and it is comprehensible for tourists as well. The **name of the region** (in case there are more formulations available) should also be simple and comprehensible.

*The region's size: too small regions (less than 1.000 km<sup>2</sup> with rural settlements) have a problem with insufficient potential of the producers. On the other hand, a region can be relatively large (costs of branding are increased only slightly) but its unity and wholeness must be preserved.*

## The brand's logo and name

**The brand's name** is determined for the consumer to understand immediately what the brand means. The name of the region is used always; there can be also a supplement: 'the original product, regional product, made in....' or some other. The option to be used is determined by voting.

**The logo** (the brand's graphic image) is created gradually during all of the three workshops: at the first workshop, a list of possible logo motifs typical for the region comes out of brainstorming. At the second workshop, the participants vote and choose one of three options for the logo that had been prepared by the graphic designer on the basis of a list of motifs or they may formulate requirements for modifications (of colour or shape). At the third workshop, the final logo is approved and the graphic designer works out a graphic manual on using the logo.

- *It is good to choose **general motifs for the logo** that characterise the whole region (e.g. natural, landscape or folkloric elements) not motifs that are linked to a certain type of production (even though typical for the region).*

## Criteria for granting the brand

Generally, the criteria for granting the brand are formed as follows: at the first workshop, very **general requirements** for products to be supported by branding are defined (What kind of products? Will tradition or environmental friendliness be required? Products from local raw materials only? ...). Products can also be divided into groups with different requirements (e.g. food and handicrafts). At the next workshop, the requirements are **developed and quantified** (How long the tradition should be? How strict are the environmental requirements? What should be the proportion of the local raw materials?), including determination of the basis on which fulfilment of the criteria will be assessed. Then the regional coordinator finishes a complete wording of the criteria which is finalised and approved at the third workshop.

- *The criteria must be prepared **with respect to the branding objectives determined**. The criteria in the Association of Regional Brands are defined in a relatively free and general way, that is why the branding objectives is also a guideline for the Committee that evaluates the products and interprets the single requirements.*
- *Because of the fact that branding within the Association aims at a wider support of sustainable business in regions, the criteria are rather loose for the **good producers, not only the best ones**, to be able to get the brand. This, however, may mean that the brand's prestige is a little bit lower than what the best producers would expect and therefore they may not get involved which reduces the brand's prestige even more. To prevent this situation, it is good to invite as many such producers as possible into the working group for them to know the reasons for this setting. Then they usually consider their participation in branding as support for their own region and they motivate their colleagues to join.*



## Rules of the system's functioning

Along with the criteria, another document is formed at the workshops – **Rules for Granting the Brand** that describes the process of granting and using the brand. It is necessary to determine competences and tasks for the branding system's single participants as well as the procedure to grant the brand, the brand holders' duties including the fees for using the brand, or other rules if necessary (see enclosures). It is also necessary to specify the procedure for a possible change in the rules and criteria; they happen relatively often as the document is developing quickly.

- *At the workshops, it is better to discuss **the criteria first** and then to deal with the rules for branding. It is easier for the participants to determine the rules if they know the criteria and understand the brand itself.*
- ***Fees for using the brand:** they are determined in every region and they are approved by the producer. They are between 20 to 200 EUR a year and they often depend on the size of the producer. At least at the beginning the fees cannot be too high because they would discourage those interested in the brand. Therefore, they are rather symbolic as they cover only a fractional part of the costs but they are welcome as a source for co-financing.*
- *One of the rules applied in all regions is **the duty for the producers to mark the certified products with the brand**. It is an important form of the brand's promotion that works directly during sale. This is, however, breached relatively often – due to lack of time, lack of finances, unconcern, negligence.... That is why it is necessary to warn applicants for the brand of this duty and its reason ahead and to discuss with them the form of marking, to incorporate it into the contract and often remind the holders of this duty.*
- *Another important duty of the producers is **to follow the graphic manual for the logo** when using the brand so as the brand's identification and effectiveness are not weakened. Again, this duty is often breached, usually due to ignorance. When signing the contract, the coordinator and the producer should go through the graphic manual and explain the basic and simple rules and importance of their fulfilment.*

## Certification Committee

The **Certification Committee** is elected at the second or third workshop, usually from members of the working group. It normally has 9 to 15 members who should include producers representing different types of production and important representatives of the region. The Committee should have a sufficient **respect**. The regional coordinator is usually one of the members, too. Participation in the working group is voluntary and it is not paid, sometimes travel costs are covered. The Committee meets approximately twice a year.

At its first meeting, the Committee formulates its basic **rules of order** (what number of members is quorate, which majority should decide etc.). The rules are complemented at the next meetings to include the procedure in non-standard situations.

Usually, the Committee evaluates the products from the viewpoint of “informed laymen”. In case the members do not dare to decide about specific issues they can invite a **guest who is an expert** in the given area or ask him/her for a statement. It is also good if the producer is present at the Committee’s meeting as he/she can answer any questions.

In case of a negative decision (this is about 5 – 10 %), the Committee shall formulate substantiation and the regional coordinator then hands it over to the producer. If it is possible, the substantiation will also include preconditions under which the application could be approved at the next meeting.

- *Effectiveness of the Committee very much depends on **preparation of source materials by the regional coordinator**: he/she must check the application for formal correctness and completeness (if necessary, he/she ensures completing of the application) and work-out a summary table with the basic data from the application. The table is available for the members at the meeting or some time ahead if possible. The regional coordinator also prepares further information for the other Committee members as a basis for decision-making after a meeting with the producer or visit to his/her workshop.*
- *If the Committee cannot decide right away due to formal flaws or unclearness but it expects that the flaws can be resolved easily, the brand can be **granted conditionally**: the certificate will begin its validity after the flaws are removed or after the preconditions are fulfilled. The coordinator shall inform the other members about resolving of the situation by e-mail.*
- *In the regions belonging to the Association of Regional Brands, the national coordinator from the Association is always a member of the Committee. The national coordinator supervises the Committee’s procedures and transfers experience from the other regions. An **“outside” member** has another advantage: a detached view and disengagement from links and relations within the region.*
- *Because the Committee meets only twice a year and not every member is present at every meeting, it is useful to **repeat the branding objectives** and explain the single criteria at the beginning of every meeting.*

## **The regional brand and beyond**

We have described how the regional branding works, its rules and challenges. The brand is a strong marketing tool and it is up to all regional brand stakeholders how they will benefit from the opportunities that it brings.

But there are obviously several fields to which all the coordinators responsible for a regional brand should focus:

### **Professional promotion**

Modern technologies offer immense opportunities for fast and powerful promotion but the access to the technology itself does not mean the ability to use it effectively.

The regional brand co-ordinator should have the ambition to follow the progress of new technologies and seek for the ways how to exploit it for the promotion of local products and services. It should also try to facilitate the direct access of producers to various promotional channels.

### **Intensifying of co-operation**

Multiple examples show that well organised co-operation can bring substantial benefits to all members of the scheme. Single marketing, packaging or logistics can solve many problems of small individual producers. But they have to understand that it cannot be done without initial investments.

### **Negotiating and lobbying**

A branding scheme that gathers the very best representatives of the local small-scale production should be strong enough to negotiate about financial and other support of the official bodies at both regional and national levels. The projects are the first step while the direct negotiation about regional development policies should follow.

The other sensitive issue is the regulation of business environment – it is quite ambitious and difficult as the brand is not a professional chamber but it is a part of frequent expectations of the branding scheme members.

The other important task is the protection of intellectual property in which the regional brand can have its important say.

### **International co-operation**

Although the topic of regional branding is obviously limited to a specific area, the challenges and responses and reliefs have much in common throughout the Europe. The project *ABC for local producers*, implemented by 5 Latvian, 2 Lithuanian, and 2 Czech Local Action Groups provides a perfect example of the potential of sharing knowledge and experiences regardless to the distance between partners. The exchange of ideas as well as the feeling of solidarity is refreshing and inspiring for all who are involved in the process of support and promotion of quality local products; simply for all who are delivering the mission a balanced regional development throughout Europe.