

Branding of rural regions and autochthon agricultural products linked to their terroir

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Abstract

Europe possesses a high diversity of rural areas with specific culinary traditions and production methods often resulting from local expertise or special ingredients. The image or reputation of rural regions may be used in marketing of products and services originating from these regions and vice versa. Sustainable rural tourism strategies may therefore be supplemented by the concept of (a) regional identity brands (b) quality certification schemes with designation of origin and (c) geographic indications according to the EU-Scheme on PDOs/PGIs. Geographic indications may support the generation of added value from tourism in rural areas, by establishing cultural events and improvement of the public image and reputation of the region after registration. Vice versa rural tourism may play a major role in supporting the collective promotion of geographic indications as a culinary ambassador of the rural region.

Key words: geographical indication, regional identity brand, quality certification scheme

Introduction

Rural areas account for 80% of European territory and therefore represent an essential part of the European agricultural model. The rural development policy, corresponding to the 2nd pillar of the European Common Agricultural Policy aims to introduce a consistent and lasting framework for guaranteeing the future of rural areas and promoting the preservation of employment, the environment and the rural heritage. For over 15 years, foodstuffs and agricultural products originating in these territories where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of the product is essentially attributable to its geographical origin, can be registered under the EU agricultural product quality scheme. A major aim according to the preamble of the scheme is to improve the incomes of farmers and to retain the rural population in these areas. Specific forms of rural tourism which combine marketing tools for products originating in these territories like geographical indications, in this perspective, represent a suitable approach to generate a regional added value with positive benefits for the whole community and enhance local development (FAO, 2009).

Region of origin effects

The image or reputation of a rural region may be used in marketing of those products and services originating in the rural region and vice versa the image or reputation of those products may be used in marketing the region of origin (van Ittersum et al., 2003; Profeta, 2006; Profeta et al., 2008). According to von Alvensleben (2000) the relationship between the image of the region, the image of the product and the purchasing intention can be basically characterised by five processes (Figure1): 1st the *cognitive process* in which the reputation of the region affects the perception of the product characteristics. The origin of the product determines the perception of other product characteristics; 2nd the *abbreviated cognitive process* in which the origin of information plays the role of a *key information* ("cue") for the overall assessment of the product; 3rd the *affective process* in which the image of the region is straightforward - without the

intervention of cognitive processes - transferred to the regional product (*image transfer*); 4th the *enhanced affective process* in which the image of the region is directly transferred to the regional product and halo effects influence the perception of product characteristics; and 5th the *normative process* in which the purchasing intentions are dominated solely by personal or social norms relating to product origin (e.g. such as commitment to support the local economy) regardless of the product image.

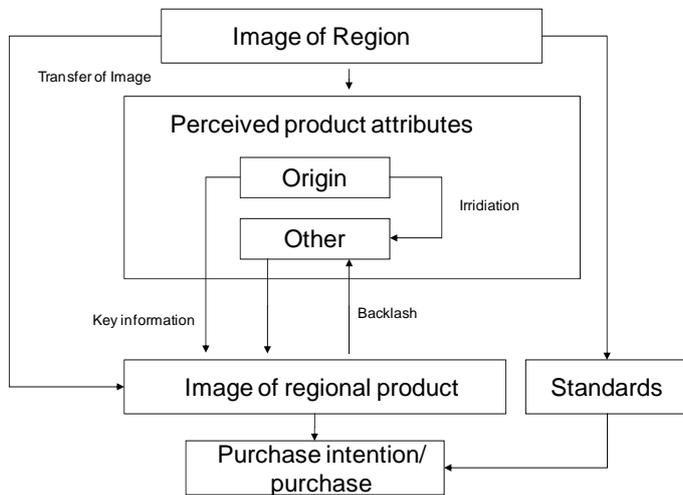


Figure 1. Relationship of image of region, image of product and purchasing intention. Source: von Alvensleben, 2000.

Regional identity brands

Regional identity brands use the distinctive image or reputation of a region to promote it and differentiate it from those of others, whereby the region as a whole becomes a brand or a product and offers a “basket” of regional services and products (Messily et al., 2009). In the regional branding process a wide variety of attributes and qualities associated with the identity of the region and the regional identity such as cultural or natural landscapes, the culinary heritage, indigenous species, traditional or local knowledge e.g. are used to promote the region under a common brand. Functioning networks and close cooperation among the actors which involve local organizations and residents in the region are crucial for the success of regional identity brands (Messily et al., 2009). An evaluation of the objectives of various regional identity brands by Banik (2007) showed that global objectives between the initiatives may be very different and do not necessarily focus on economic objectives but rather on sustainability goals in agricultural production and processing of food in the region. Figure 2 illustrates exemplary the objectives of the regional identity brand ‘Eifel’ from a rural region located in a low mountain range in Western Germany and its cross connections (Banik, 2007).

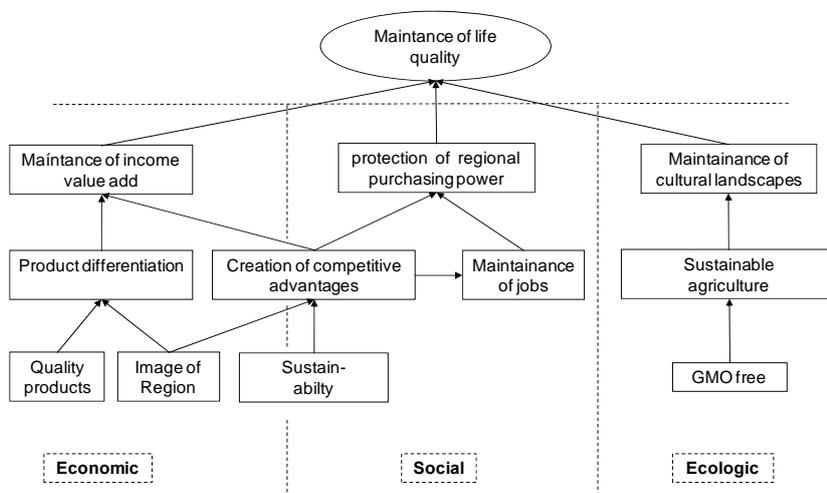


Figure 2: Economic, social and ecological objectives of the regional identity brand ‘Eifel’. Source: modified after Banik, 2007, p. 9.

Protected geographical indications according to regulation (EC) no. 510/06

In Europe more than 900 traditional geographical indications for food and agricultural products are protected against misuse and imitation by regulation (EC) no. 510/06 (Profeta and Balling, 2007; Profeta et al., 2010). The goals of the EU-Scheme is to improve the incomes of farmers and to retain the rural population in these areas, to encourage diverse agricultural production, to protect names from misuse and imitation and to help consumers to understand the specific character of the products (c.f. regulation (EC) no. 510/06). According to estimates, a total annual sales volume of approximately 14 bn. Euro is generated with protected geographical indications (PGI) and protected designations of origin (PDO) (Profeta et al. 2009). There are three schemes (for wines, for spirit drinks, and for agricultural products and foodstuffs) and two instruments, the PDO (protected designation of origin) and the PGI (protected geographical indication) which are considered to bring together the three systems into a single regulatory structure, while preserving the specificities of each system (European Commission, 2009). The protection of geographical indications under regulation (EC) 510/06 offers food producers the possibility of maintaining traditional and regional food regulations and subsequently even food culture and customs (Williams and Penker, 2009). According to regulation (EC) no. 510/06 only those geographical indications of agricultural or processed food products can be protected that possess a long production tradition (minimum 20 years). The other main criterion is that these traditional products must have a tight quality or reputation connection with their region of production. This link can be climate or soil conditions as well as traditional production processes or indigenous breeds or seeds which have a proved impact on product quality or reputation (Thiedig, 2004; Wirsig et al., 2010).

Implications for rural communities and regional rural initiatives

Rural tourism may be supplemented by the concept of (a) regional identity brands (b) quality certification schemes with designation of origin and (c) geographic indications according to the EU-Scheme on PDOs/PGIs (Figure 3). An example of a successful synergy between both measures to promote rural tourism and measures to promote autochthon agricultural products linked to geographical origin, is the case of the regional identity brand ‘*Südtirol*’ of the autonomous Italian province Bolzano-South Tyrol. Along the separate national food quality certification scheme with designation of origin ‘*Qualität Südtirol*’ autochthon agricultural products linked to geographical origin under the EU agricultural product quality schemes (e.g. ‘*Südtiroler Apfel PGI*’, ‘*Südtiroler Speck PGI*’) are communicated together as integral part of the regional branding strategy.

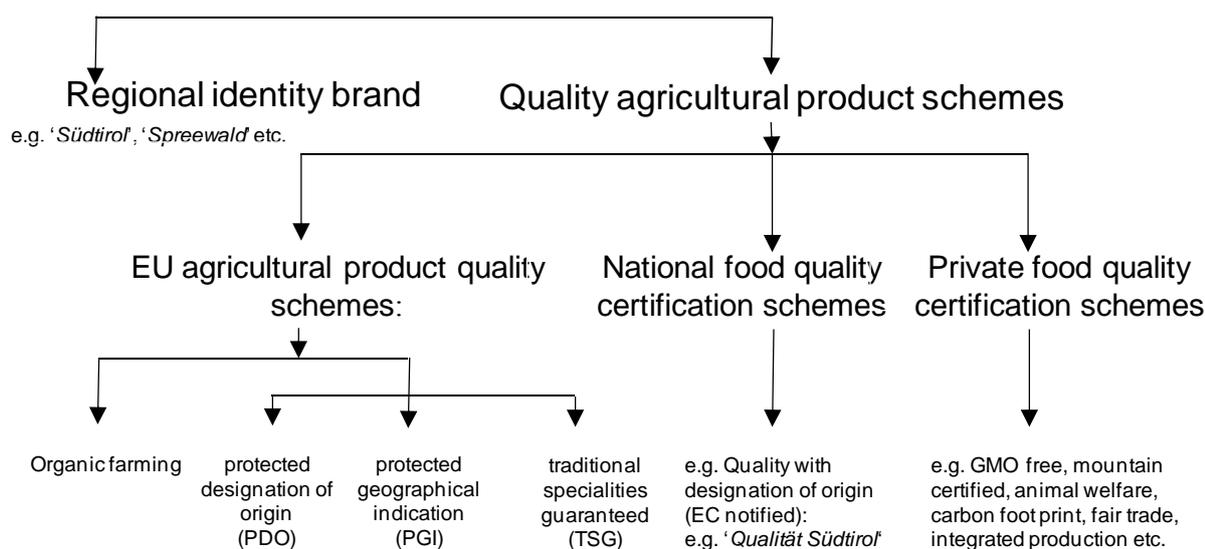


Figure 3: Geographical indications, quality certification schemes with designation of origin and regional identity brands. Source: own presentation.

Along the separate national food quality certification scheme with designation of origin 'Qualität Südtirol' autochthon agricultural products linked to geographical origin under the EU agricultural product quality schemes (e.g. 'Südtiroler Apfel PGI', 'Südtiroler Speck PGI') are communicated together as integral part of the regional branding strategy. Another example constitutes the PGI 'Spreewald gherkins' - a speciality produced in the German rural tourist region 'Spreewald' according to traditional recipes - the PGI contributes strongly to the image and identity of the region of origin. Apart from creating a significant number of jobs in the agricultural and food production sector, 'Spreewald gherkins' helped to maintain jobs in the tourism sector. The PGI contributes strongly to the popularity of the Spreewald region and constitute an essential element of the regional image due to its widespread popularity (Ecologic, 2006).

Conclusions

The reputation of GIs and their specific local resources linked to them (production know-how and traditions, landscapes shaped by agricultural systems over time, specific native animal breeds or plant varieties, etc.) can be used as vehicles to attract consumers and tourists in the production area to important tourist locations and attractions (particular museums, archaeological sites, etc.) and to promote a differentiated basket of local products and services based on the use of local resources. Vice versa rural tourism can play a major role in supporting the collective promotion of GI product as a culinary ambassador of the rural region, by organizing itineraries for tourists and disseminating information such as gastronomic stopovers in restaurants or at production site and combination of scenic routes (FAO, 2009). GIs may support the generation of added value from tourism in rural areas, by establishing cultural events linked to GIs, integration of local associations linked to these products, and improvement of the public image and reputation of the region after registration (London Economics, 2008).

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