

Reviving Rural Areas

Compendium of International Learning Partnership



2012–2014



Lifelong
Learning
Programme

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1. Introduction

Rural areas cover 77% of the territory of the European Union (47% is farm land and 30% forest) and is home to around half its population – farming communities and other residents.

While people in towns have usually quite wide choice of opportunities, inhabitants of rural areas are much more depended on the economic situation of the region, changes of the agricultural policy at both macro and micro levels, and also the nature and its developments caused by the climate and human influences.

Rural living is endangered by decreasing competitiveness of local agricultural and industrial production. The countryside has been depopulating, in better case changing to holiday resorts, in worse becoming desolate. Return to traditional ways of farming, household, and crafts or implementation of new methods of environment-friendly exploration of the countryside and local resources (both natural and human) can bring a number of positive impacts. It can directly influence the local economic climate by creating new jobs, and also act as a tool of enhancement of the attractiveness of the area as a tourist destination what can imply demand for additional services. Environment-friendly sustainable management of the countryside has multiple positive influences to both local people and visitors and – in a broader context – to keeping of cultural and natural variety.

The idea of the project stemmed from a previous experience of the local branding community in the Czech Republic (gathered under the roof of the Association of the Regional Brands of the Czech Republic) with educational projects and international exchange of experiences. The rural areas represent majority of the European territory and the European Union pays enormous attention to its development nevertheless the gap between the service-oriented urban population and vivid rural areas with proudly kept tradition and effectively used modern technologies might be wider than ever.

The aim of the learning partnership project called “Reviving Rural Areas” is to share positive experiences with restoration of traditional methods and way of everyday life in European rural areas that have the potential to survive in present economic environment and help to revive the European countryside not only as a nature preserve but as a vital space.

2. Project partners

2.1. Místní akční skupina LAG STRAKONICKO, o.s., Czech Republic



<http://www.strakonicko.net>

MAS LAG Strakonicko was established in 2004 as a civil association with an objective to support the development of rural areas. It has 34 members (municipalities, NGOs and entrepreneurs), 5 employed members of the staff. It currently covers 55 villages and 2 towns with total population over 41 thousand inhabitants. Its action area is situated in South-Western Bohemia in a countryside suitable for agro-tourism activities and rich in cultural heritage and traditions but also suffering by the lack of working opportunities, less developed small scale entrepreneurship, weak marketing for local traditional production, and insufficient and non-coherent promotion of the area. MAS LAG Strakonicko has a long-term cooperation with the Faculty of Economy of the University of South Bohemia that guarantees its educational activities. A very important current project is the coordination of a specific brand for local produces PRACHEŇSKO regionalni produkt (under the roof of nationwide Association of Regional Brands), one of good examples of activities that link up support of local production, revival of traditions, educational, cultural and social activities. The local brand has been so far awarded to 65 producers and 12 service providers.

2.2. Stichting Streekeigen Producten Nederland, The Netherlands



www.erkendstreekproduct.nl

The Foundation for Regional Products the Netherlands was founded in 1999 with the aim to support small scale local producers and organisations with the production and marketing of sustainable regional products. SPN is a roof organisation with associated partners in 10 provinces (out of 12), representing over 400 small producers and family farms. During the last decade, SPN has been organising projects, workshops, training courses and promotional activities for and with the associated members. Besides that, SPN has supported various groups with the development of their organisations and development strategies. SPN is working together with educational institutes and schools for vocational training.

2.3. Stowarzyszenie Lokalna Grupa Działania i Lokalna Grupa Rybacka

"Partnerstwo dla Doliny Baryczy", Poland



<http://nasza.barycz.pl/>

Local Action Group and Fisheries Local Action Group "Partnerstwo dla Doliny Baryczy" (Partnership for the Barycz Valley) was found in 2004 in the Milicz where this organisation is based till now. LAG is situated

in the territory of one of the most beautiful nature protected areas in Poland, connecting 8 municipalities along the river Barycz. It is a partnership of three sectors covering public administration, enterprises (mainly farmers and fishermen), and non-profit organisations. Activities of the LAG are determined by the uniqueness of the countryside with large ponds areas, meadows, and rare bird species habitats. Most of the Barycz valley is categorized as the Naturally Sensitive Areas, one of four located in Poland. For this reason the LAG focuses on the support to the eco-tourism and the local food and handicraft production. LAG and FLAG 'Partnerstwo dla Doliny Baryczy' coordinates its own regional brand that is intended for support to local producers of quality products and providers of environment friendly tourism services. The main result of the work of Partnership can be seen in the successful revival of the carp fishery that is demonstrated especially during the annual Carp Days – a 2 month culinary and culture festival.

2.4. AGROEDUKA, Slovakia



www.agroeduka.sk

AGROEDUKA is an association based in Trenčín with objectives to educate the professionals in the fields of agriculture and environment on different aspects of these disciplines and its mutual influencing. It is implementing five educational programmes under the Slovak Programme of Rural Development that are focused not only to the professional skills but also to a general increase of managing skills of farmers. AGROEDUKA also created and manages a web portal intended to educate farmers in a wide range of topics and competences needed for their business. Another project is intended to a specialised training aimed at preparation for public – private partnerships in rural areas. The target groups are mayors, entrepreneurs in agriculture and tourist services, and unions of municipalities who being educated in communication skills and knowledge needed for creation of cross-sector partnerships. A separate educational programme is provided for training of the management of agro-tourist businesses. AGROEDUKA is also involved in several other projects aimed at the support to the local production and regional branding.

3. Project activities

Main project activities planned and accomplished during the two year partnership project were the educational programmes taking place in all partners' countries. These programmes were focused on learning on the best practices, sharing knowledge by personal meetings, workshops, and debates.

All the partners' countries organised one educational programme, the coordinating partner even three. The third programme in the Czech Republic included also a conference that summarized experiences learned during the whole project enriched by academic approach represented by an expert from the South-Bohemian University.

3.1. Czech international visit 31/10 – 2/11/2012

The visit in the Czech Republic took place from October 31 to November 2, 2012. The kick-off meeting started at the Štěkeň Castle with the introduction of the hosting organisation LAG Strakonicko and its activities in the field of the rural development. Participants learned about the region, its specifics and also about local action groups and other entities involved in the rural development in the Czech Republic.

Successful projects from the region supported by the LEADER program were presented during an in-deep presentation. These projects were mainly focused on maintenance and recovery of the tradition, development of agro-tourism, keeping of cultural heritage, care about countryside and other similar topics. The meeting place – Štěkeň castle was also granted a support from the LEADER program for the investments aimed at the tourist services.



The second day of the visit was dedicated to the introduction of partner organisations and working meeting where representatives of the partner organisations debated about project issues. They confirmed the division of thematic focuses among partners of the project, agreed on ways how to organise the international visits and on their themes. They also discussed about the outputs of the project and about administrative things

connected with the project.

The main theme of the field trip was the support of the local producers via the regional brand. The brand is dedicated to local craftsmen, farmers, producers of food and services of tourist industry. The coordinator of the local brand (called PRÁCHEŇSKO regional product) is LAG Strakonicko, the hosting organisation and one of the partners of this learning partnership project. Participants of the visit had also chance to meet the holders of the regional brand.

The first opportunity they had on Thursday when they have lunch at the awarded restaurant 'Hradní sklípek' in Strakonice and tasted there



the regional food. Next stop was in Hoslovice on a cattle farm which holds the regional brand both for the beef from a freely bred cattle and the tourist services (a restaurant and a boarding house) as well. The owner of the farm provided the participants with a guided tour through the farm and explained them the specific situation of farmers in the Czech Republic after the communist period. After dinner a presentation of the agro-tourism offer on the farm followed – e.g. cattle rodeo or lessons and festivals of horse riding. The farm is also involved in a horse tracks building project.



The last day the participants saw another example of products with a regional brand. They visited the lace making cooperative in Sedlice where they could hear not only about the long tradition of lace making in the region but also about the present situation of this handicraft and problems related to the handwork in general. The non-profit organisation 'Sedlická krajka' helps to market works of dozens of local lace makers. It runs its own store and an e-shop and takes parts at

different fairs and exhibitions. But to keep this very time consuming handicraft is very difficult even if it is still attractive for the young generation.

Participants acknowledged the variety of different examples of bridging the tradition and today economic activities. They enjoyed also the opportunity to share their experiences and discuss about differences among their countries during the whole visit.

3.2. Czech international visit II 13 – 15/03/2013

The second visit in the Czech Republic took place from March 13 to March 15, 2013.

The main programme of the visit took place at a guest house Penzion Mlýn Kostřata which holds the regional brand Prácheňsko regional product dedicated to tourist services. The participants had opportunity to test a typical local accommodation as well as a home-made food there.



The aim of the local branding is mainly to support local producers, the preservation of traditional crafts in the region and to make visible the former historical territory of



Prácheňsko. The brand serves as a marketing tool for local producers, but it also provides the opportunity for mutual cooperation. The other added value of the brand is the organization of common events where producers can present and sell their produces.

The first site visit was in village Závěšín, where the participants could take a look to a family owned water mill. The mill has a big potential for rural

tourism thanks to its history which dates back to the 16th century and is connected with a famous Czech painter Mikoláš Aleš and his family. The participants of the visit discussed the current situation of the mill and tried to seek for options of its optimal usage. The want for money, lack of visions and not always sensitive reconstructions were appraised as the main problems of this site. Among proposals there were some ideas how to continue: to stress the connection to the famous painter, to focus on groups of young people or people who want to experience farming life, to create a clear vision of the renovations and create a house in a specific but united style.



Next stop was at a glass manufactory owned by Mr. Vlasák and his family located at a village called Bělčice. Man can find here the replicas of historical glass from ancient times to Renaissance. Glass products are made by traditional handmade technology. Besides of producing methods there were questions about promoting and marketing.

Another visited holder of the regional brands was Miloslava Laiblová and her company UMKERA. She has revived the tradition of ceramic buttons. She showed to the participants not the production step by step and also spoke very interestingly about development of demand for her products, export to distant countries or attendance at foreign ceramic festivals. She also emphasized the importance of the regional brand for her.

The national coordinator of the Association of Regional Brands presented the system of regional branding in the Czech Republic. Regional brands for local products guarantee not only the quality of the products and their consideration to the environment but mainly their origin in the region and some specific relations with the place. The whole system is unique both with united criteria for awarding the brand certificates and for its united graphic style. The logos of particular regions have similar layout but vary in the main symbol based on something typical for the particular region. This is something what is quite unparalleled within Europe.



The last presentation was dedicated to the local folk architecture and its impact to the life of the South Bohemian population. The typical architecture style for this region is called “Rural Baroque” and comes mainly from the 19th century. There are many examples of the typical houses in the region but also a lot of problems connected with the maintenance of the historical and cultural monuments.

3.3. Slovak international visit 29/04 – 01/05/2013

The meeting took place from April 29 to May 1, 2013 in Kopaničiarský region. The main theme of the visit was the relation between the organic agriculture and agro-tourism.

Kopaničiarsky region is an important ethnographic site with its own folk culture and folk tradition, which is today presented by folklore ensembles and groups. Both young and old people still maintain the traditions of their ancestor. The folklore of the region attracts visitors both from Slovakia and abroad. This represents a treasure that disappears from many Slovak sites. Local people are still proud on their traditions. The region is a favourite holiday place for those who adore nature and folklore. The diversity of the terrain and abundance of natural sceneries, historical sites and cultural events as well as suitable conditions for sports activities and relaxations attract visitors of this region.

Eco-agro-tourism is a special form of rural tourism, which is closely connected with the agricultural production. The role of rural tourism is to bring people closer to nature and motivate them to act in accordance with the requirements of environmental protection. The upward trend of staying on farms, guest houses, small hotels, and holiday apartments, individual camping and caravanning indicates the growth of opportunities for the development of tourism and comeback of traditional values.

The participants of the visit experienced a homemade pig-slaughtering. It was an essential necessity in the past and up to now it is still a big event. Preparation for a butchering begins several days in advance. Slaughtering begins early in the morning. When the butcher comes, hot water is already boiled in a caldron. Everyone is enjoying all-day work, because it brings time of opulence with big amount of delicacies. Karmina (typical evening celebration) is a great experience and also a social event for family, neighbours and friends.

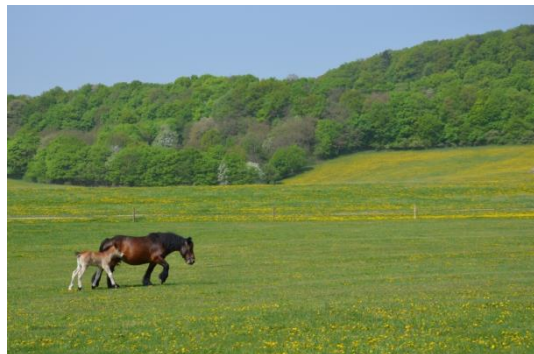


Company Ekotrend Myjava presented how to grow and process organic crops food produces in its own mill, pasta factory and tea factory. The company produces altogether more than different 40 kinds of products. The main product of the farm is spelt. This ancient grain has retained a higher proportion of fibres, gluten, vitamins and important minerals than standard bred wheat. Thanks to its soft cover, spelt is suitable for the production of whole grain products. Flour, various kinds of pasta and dried apples have been awarded by the regional brand Traditions of the White Carpathians. This brand ensures the regional origin, quality



and complying of some other stern criteria. Products with brand are characterized by local materials and higher proportion of manual work, using traditional methods and consideration of environment.

Participants of the visit attended also a popular event “Opening of the grazing season” at the farm Charolais in the village Podkylava. This farm is managed as the organic farming. Cattle are grazed in natural conditions without any use of fertilizers, chemicals and artificial feeding. Particular attention is paid to regional cuisine and activities associated with its presentation. Exceptional is offering of thirty plum dishes, based on the traditions of local cuisine using homemade products. On this farm you can learn how to connect of organic farming and agrotourism.



3.4. Polish international visit 11 – 13/10/2013

The visit to Poland took place from October 11 to October 13, 2013 in the Barycz Valley. The main topic of the visit was “how to involve public” to reviving rural areas.

The Barycz Valley is one of the most valuable nature parts of Poland. It consists of a mosaic of ponds, wetlands, forests, fields and meadows. This region is an example of a place where a unique and valuable natural ecosystem has been created largely due to human activity. Currently, much of the area of the Barycz Valley is covered by the Natura 2000 network and there is also situated the largest Polish Landscape Park. The region provides great opportunities for the development of tourism thanks to its close position to Wroclaw and Poznan. There is a strong effort to



enhance the tourist image of this region and primarily to support the environment friendly ways of tourism, including ecological education and developing of appropriate infrastructure (cycling, kayaking, horse riding, birds watching).

Local brand “*Barycz Valley recommends*” is a crucial tool for managing the relations with local businesses. It supports local producers and the development of the region which is based on the unique nature, traditions, small business and culture. Labelling of products or services guarantees their high quality and positive impact on the environment. The brand is coordinated by Barycz Valley Foundation and Partnership for the Barycz Valley. They support the brand users by education and promotion programs (e.g. training courses, workshops and study tours, publishing of promotional materials and organising of common events). As a good practice example, we can



mention the stress on the cooperation among the brand holders and also the candidate status of applicants for the brand.



The visit took place during the major event of this region, the Carp Days. It is a series of public events set during September and October aimed at promotion of this region. This popular festival helps to promote the nature, to pro-long the tourist season, to develop the environmentally friendly tourism offer, to make fish offer in the gastronomy more interesting and regional specific, to support local fish farmers and to make carp simply cool.

This festival has been held since 2006 in all seven municipalities covered by the Barycz Valley and growing constantly. In 2013 it brought around 30 different events (harvesting of the fish ponds, education events, gastronomy offer, competitions, fairs, concerts, etc.).

The first evening was dedicated to both introduction of the hosting partner – Partnerstwo dla Doliny Baryczy – and also to a **brainstorming session** focused on identification of the important features of the region for local people and visitors.

Seeking for the values of the region from the tourist perspective

Participants (divided to 4 “national” groups) were seeking answers to following questions:

- 1) *What are our priorities when we are coming to a new region as tourists?*
- 2) *What does our region offer and does it meet the expectations?*
- 3) *Which negatives does our region suffer?*
- 4) *What we could change and what we need for it?*



Summary of answers:

Poland:

- 1) Flowers, gardens, fields, animals; architecture; people; restaurants, food, cuisine; regional crafts, potteries, ceramics; nature; leisure time inside and outside cities; Where can we buy regional food; quality of tourist information;
- 2) Horse tourism – infrastructure; Unique beauty of nature; Well prepared tourism information; biggest export of carp in Europe, largest ponds area in Europe; restaurants, camps and local food. Bird-watching, bird-watching towers; representatives of crafts; strong representatives of regional brand Barycz Valley recommends and strong cooperation among them – totally helpful; Canoes, roads on rivers.

- 3) Marketing – weak side; bad conditions of local roads; Missing navigation – signs for local places of regional brand; Websites – no categorization, no information for foreigners what to see, where to sleep, where to eat; Readiness for foreign visitors; Not enough effort to bring people from abroad.
- 4) Getting money; Put more effort in marketing; Local roads without holes; Less fish bones in carps; More national events organised in this region (to promote it).

The Netherlands:

- 1) Hospitality – nice welcome; Attractive; Information; If I get and find what they offer; Get to know new experiences; Convincing promotion; Accessibility.
- 2) Tops bicycle paths; Protestant religion; Typical landscape; Historical cities; A lot of places for walking and cycling.
- 3) No real/strong identity. Not well known; Different sub-regions; No touristic tradition; Lower pride of the local people on their region; Unsatisfactory cooperation among regions; No open shops on Sunday; Absent centre of the region.
- 4) Be proud and sell it.

Czech Republic:

- 1) Landscape; Architecture; Job opportunities; Historic sightseeing; Culture; Transport services; Tidiness; Sport; The way of living of local people. What is typical for the region (products, services, nature etc.); Learn as much as possible about my interests; History.
- 2) Culture; Folklore.
- 3) Deficiency in accommodation. Bad transport services, roads etc. Unpleasant train stations (often the first what you see from the region); Using money for other things that we really need.
- 4) Orientation on the problems of normal people. Better financing from the state to the villages; Supporting of people; Larger politic engaging of all people and horse sense. More personal meetings of local action groups; Taxes should stay in the region. Bigger responsibility of state administration; Change of the system.

Slovakia:

- 1) Local food. Good services; Typical things of the region and what is it unique there; Traditions; People; To get to know different things that we have; Conditions for development of business and civic activities.
- 2) Agro-tourism; Hiking; Tourism in wintertime; History of the region; Traditional folklore; Offer of services for rural tourism; Offer of local food in guest houses, restaurants and farms; Culture; Sports; Regional branding within the region.
- 3) Transport services; Promoting; Lack of finance; Lack of interest by local people.
- 4) Financial funds; Destination management; Cooperation; Strengthening of financial help from the state and regional authorities; Supporting of the local economy; Supporting of the local identity. Change of legislation.

The next day participants of the international visit met several local producers to learn about their experiences with the local brand and activities that have been offered to them through the brand membership. They can also enjoy the atmosphere of the Carp Days festival at the ceremony of opening a village community hall with restaurant facilities built in a former barn.



The visited places included a farm with eco-friendly bred sheep and kept ecological education, a fruit manufactory, a sports camp and a fish farm. The accommodation facility which was used by the participants had also the right to use the logo of the regional brand.



The visit was closed by a walk to the bird watching tower – a symbol of the local nature. The Barycz Valley is one of the most valuable bird areas in Europe. The region is home for a lot of rare species as well as a stop for migrated birds. Bird watching attracts tourist and increases their ecological knowledge at once. It is a great opportunity how to support sustainable tourism in the region.

3.5. Dutch international visit 10 – 13/04 2014

The next visit of the Learning Partnership took place in the municipality of Ede, situated in the centre of the Netherlands, part of one of the main tourist destinations 'De Veluwe'. The main objective of the visit was to exchange ideas and learn about organisational structures for the marketing of local products and the possible interaction and synergy between the marketing of local products and tourism, as part of the reviving of rural areas.

The municipality of Ede is announced as Capital of Good Taste 2014. This means that during the entire year a large number of activities will be organised and structural solutions for the marketing and sales of local products will be developed.

Stichting Streekeigen Producten Nederland (SPN – Foundation for Regional Products the Netherlands) was the host organisation for the visit, in collaboration with the regional tourism board 'Veluws Bureau voor Toerisme' (VBT). SPN and VBT developed the local brand Erkend Veluws Streekproduct as a hallmark for local products.

The hosting organisation prepared an exhausting programme:

Touristic biking tour (in collaboration with the project team of Ede Capital of Good Taste), visiting:

- Wijnhoeve de Veluwe, Ms. Nanny Schut (wine producer with small-scale camping facilities)



- Ecofields. Mr. Bart Boon (Organic veal producer and butcher)



Encounter with Mr. Breunis van de Weerd, alderman for the municipality Ede and responsible for the campaign 'Ede Capital of Good Taste 2014'.

- Remeker BV, Mr. Jan Dirk van der Voort (organic dairy farm and artisan cheese maker)
- Makandra, Mr. Christoph (care farm)
- Veluwse Heidebrouwerij, Mr. Gerrit Hammink (local microbrewery)



Dinner at 'De Hooilanden', dairy farm with cooking studio. Mr. Lodewijk Pool. Preparing dinner with local ingredients, explanation by local Chef Mr. Christian Weij

Workshops / presentations

- 'Veluwe-fund' (new forms for financing rural activities) Mr. Jan van Muyden
- Marketing and logistics for local products, an example from the Green Heart of Holland (Groene Hart coöperatie) Ms. Lies van Weverwijk and Ms. Marijke Booij

Visit to National Park 'De Hoge Veluwe' <http://www.hogeveluwe.nl/>

- Ms. Emilie Fokker (Executive Officer Communication and Marketing) Success en function of the National Park for the Veluwe as tourist destination.
- Free visit to National Park and Kröller-Muller Museum

3.6. Czech international visit II 12 – 14/06 2014

The visit to Czech Republic took place from June 12 to 14, 2014.



The final international conference of the Grundtvig project took place on Strakonice castle on Friday, June 13. The main theme of all presentations was interpretation of traditional values of rural areas in sustainable tourism. The first session was consisted by review of the project and presentation about regional brands. The final summary of the project 'Reviving rural areas' was presented by Magda Sedmíková and Martina Kozáková from MAS LAG Strakonicko. They

informed the audience about main project aims and activities, mainly about international study visits. Iveta Pavezová from the South-Bohemian University in České Budějovice presented an academic view to the regional branding based on her thesis "Model of regional brand introducing and spreading".

The floor was given also to project partners sum up their main themes. Michal Michalička from Slovak organisation AGROEDUKA spoke about preservation original crops and breeds and their application for agro-tourism services. Marta Kaminska as a representative of Polish partner Partnerstwo dla Doliny Baryczy focused on their flagship event called Carp Days in Barycz Valley as a good example of promotion nature and natural/culinary heritage conservation. René de Bruin from Stichting Streekeigen Producten Nederland had presentation about marketing of local products. Kateřina Čadilová from Asociace regionálních značek presented the Czech system of regional branding and added the reflections from inside and outside including international scope.



The conference was followed by a local fair at castle yard. The traditional event focused mostly on selling of fresh food and vegetables was enriched by several craftsmen with the regional brand Prácheňsko regional product. Participants of the visit had opportunity to meet the producers and taste and buy traditional jam, cakes, bread and other local products.

In the afternoon, participants of the visit were provided with a guided tour to the brewery Dudák. It is the only brewery in the Czech Republic

owned by the municipality. It's continuous history goes back to the 17th century, nowadays it has been producing around 60 thousand hectoliters of beer per year. The dinner was dedicated to tasting local food at the restaurant Hradní sklípek. Both the restaurant and the brewery are holders of the regional brand Prácheňsko.

Participants discussed about possibilities of business activities in the region and about enterprise promotion. They also experienced a bit of local culture thanks to the local bagpipers group evening performance.



On Saturday a trip to the area of the oldest regional brand in the Czech Republic "SUMAVA original product" was organised.

The first visit was organised at a Wound glass beads manufacture at village Nezdice. Šumava is

a traditional area where glass was blown for hundreds of years. Ms. Jana Wudy, who is the holder of the local brand, provided the group with the opportunity to try the lampwork technique and create own glass beads. Prior to this practice, Mr. Wudy tried to explain the history of the glassmaking at this region, its own story, as well as the benefits of the local brand for her business.

The lunch was prepared by the restaurant Nebespán at Kašperské hory. The main motto of this restaurant is "more home, less hotel."

The owners told the visitors about the main vision and concept of their business. The next visit was at Café Charlotte which has gained three times the title "the best confectionary shop in the Czech Republic" for its top quality products and careful services.

The last stop was at hotel Belveder and its own mini brewery that carries on the tradition of



brewing at Železná Ruda that dates back to 1787. Nowadays the brewery produces four kinds of beers. The owner explained the history of this brewery, typology of beer, the methods of brewing, and advantages of being part of local brand.

3.7. Project website

All project activities were documented at the project website www.reviving.eu that will serve as an archive and a disseminative tool also after the end of the project.

Czech Dutch Polish Slovak

REVIVING RURAL AREAS

Grundtvig Learning Partnership Project

How to... market rural areas certificated rural products involve the public revive the local proud

Rural living is endangered by decreasing competitiveness of local agricultural and industrial production. The countryside has been depopulating, in better case changing to holiday resorts, in worse becoming desolate. Return to traditional ways of farming, household, and crafts or implementation of new methods of environment-friendly exploration of the countryside and local resources (both natural and human) can bring a number of positive impacts. It can directly influence the local economic climate by creating new jobs, and also act as a tool of enhancement of the attractiveness of the area as a tourist destination what can imply demand for additional services. Environment-friendly sustainable management of the countryside has multiple positive influences to both local people and visitors and – in a broader context – to keeping of cultural and natural variety.

Polish international visit

4.11.2013 Maqda News

The visit to Poland took place from 11th October till 13th October 2013. The visiting delegations consisted of eleven representatives from the Czech Republic, five from the Netherlands and two from Slovakia. The visit was organised by Partnership for The Barycz Valley and the main topic of the visit was how to involve public to reviving rural areas.

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4. Case studies

4.1. How to certificate rural products (Regional branding in the Czech Republic)

Regional branding

The main goal of local product branding is to promote traditional regions, well known e.g. for their preserved nature, folk traditions and history. The regional brand was established for products to guarantee their quality and friendliness to the environment, but most of all their origin and relation to a certain extraordinary territory.

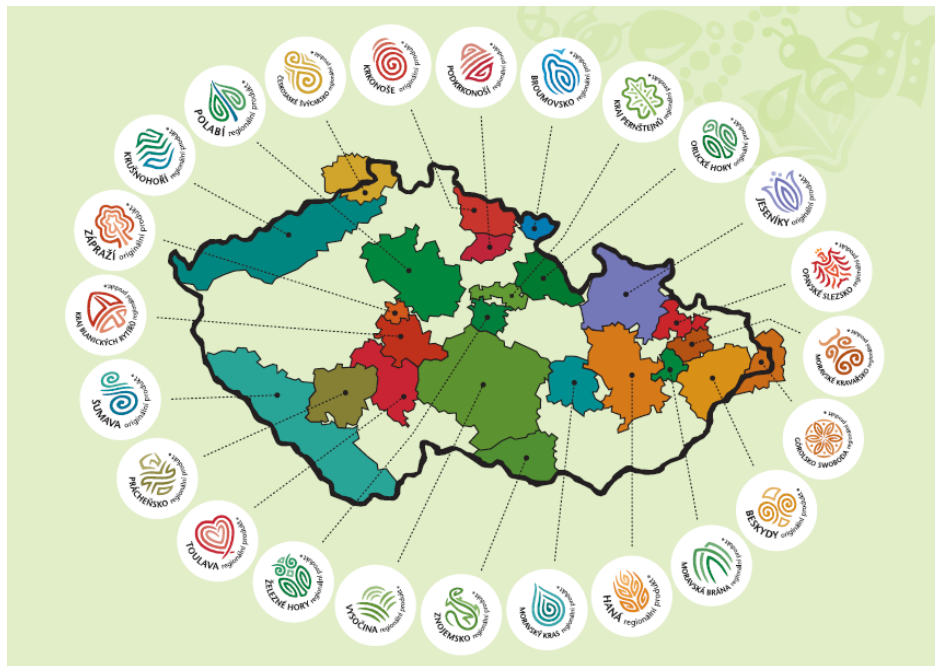
Regional branding meets all three pillars of sustainable development. It brings economic benefits through supporting local small businesses (making visible and enhancing the prestige of their products), reviving local economy and diversifying economic activities. The social dimension consists both in awaking of local pride and uprising feelings of values of local natural and cultural heritage. It is also supported by an active cooperation between businesses (manufacturers and retailers), public administration, non-profit sector and nature protection. The environmental pillar of sustainable development is carried out by reducing the traffic burden in the local production and by preferring environment friendly production. Beyond the three pillars, branding has also regional aspect increasing visibility of the region and protecting its specifics (traditions, culture and landscape).

Regional brands help entrepreneurs and small businesses to not only promote their products, but also increase the prestige of the products through the reputation of the region and try to resist the cheap products from multinational companies. Regional brands are focused on consumers in the region, both local residents and tourists. They are intended for those who are looking for uncommonness, originality and personal approach. Other reasons for buying local products are quality and reliability of these products, awareness of environment and local patriotism.

System of regional branding in the Czech Republic

The regional branding of products and services in the Czech Republic is coordinated nationally by the Association of Regional Brands, which is an association of regions that run their own brand. 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 Kravařsko, 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 – e.g. brands in region Bílé Karpaty, Český ráj, Jizerské hory, Lužické hory and Máchův kraj or Zápavní Čechy.

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 coordinate all the regional coordinators. 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 particular regions have similar layout but vary in the main symbol based on something typical for the particular region. In its symbol, every brand 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 a 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)

The regional brand 'Prácheňsko regional product'

MAS LAG Strakonicko, which is the coordinating organisation of the Grundtvig project Reviving rural areas, has been implementing since 2011 a project of own regional brand intended for support to local producers of quality products. You can find variety of crafts from typical hand crafts as lace or ceramics to farming products as milk and meat and finally also the accommodation and catering services among them.



The brand serves as a marketing tool for local producers but it also provides the opportunity for mutual cooperation among them. The other added value of the brand is the organization of common events where producers can present and sell their produces. For this purpose specific exhibition

stands in the style of typical local architecture were made. They are used for fairs or other special events of the brand, e.g. for ceremonial events at the castle courtyard in Strakonice or for fairs throughout the region.

During the international project visits in this region, representatives from the hosting organisation presented not only the regional brand and lessons learned during its maintenance but mainly the holders of the brand. You can also get to know some of them on the following lines.

Restaurant with medieval atmosphere

Restaurant called 'Hradní sklípek' got the brand for its pleasant atmosphere and wide offer of traditional dishes from local ingredients. Stylish restaurant is located on the courtyard of Strakonice castle, right below a majestic castle tower. Šárka Kůsová and her staff organise also special events there as dance evenings or celebrations with traditional bagpipe music.

Overnight stay at the mill

Accommodation at The Mill Kostřata is another example of a tourist service that holds the regional brand. It is situated in the middle of nature in beautiful South Bohemia countryside. It has cosy home atmosphere and offers Czech cuisine from local ingredients.

Beef meat from the farm

Company EKOCHOV s.r.o. represented by Terezie Daňková holds the regional brand both for the beef from freely bred cattle and runs a restaurant and a boarding house. On the farm there is a wide agro-tourism offer including cattle rodeo, horse festival or lessons of horse riding. The farm is also involved in a horse pathways project.



Region of the lacemaking

Lace making has a really long tradition in this region, especially in town Sedlice, where a lace making cooperative is also located. The non-profit organisation 'Sedlická krajka' helps to market works of dozens of local lace makers. It runs its own store and an e-shop and takes parts at different fairs and exhibitions. But to keep this very time consuming handicraft is very difficult even if it is still attractive for the young generation.

Green historical glass



In a small village Bělčice we visited a glass manufactory owned by Václav Vlasák and his family. Here you can meet with the glassmaker right during his work and see the procedure of the glass making. Their specialization is replicas of historical glass from ancient times to Renaissance. Glass products are made by traditional handmade technology. They offer their stuff through an e-shop but many costumers use it only as a catalogue and usually prefer to go directly to the manufactory and buy some remarkable pieces that they could see and hold in their hands. And it is not only the case of people from the surrounding but most of customers are coming often from bigger cities even quite distant.

Buttons with a lot of shapes

Another holder of the regional brand who the project participants could meet was Miloslava Laiblová and her art studio UMKERA. This studio situated at Strakonice has more than twenty years of history. Mrs. Laiblová has revived tradition of handmade ceramic buttons. These buttons are made by traditional technology with contemporary design and they are created mainly for original fashion manufactories, knitters or also for individual customers who want to enrich their clothing. Buttons are exported also to distant countries or presented on the foreign ceramic festivals.

Just next to this manufactory there is an art gallery and shop where you can buy or just admire products both from UMKERA company and other Czech and foreign artists as paintings, graphics, sculptures, decorative and utilitarian ceramics, porcelain and historical glass. Mrs. Laiblová also runs a modern accommodation facility which has regional brand as well.

Brooms as from the old times

Blanka Matoušková was one of the participants of the Grundtvig project who attended the studying visit in Poland. Apart from learning new things there she also brought her equipment for the production of birchen brooms and showed the others how to make them and allowed them to try it themselves. She is settled at a small town of Radomyšl and her costumers can buy brooms of different size, shape or handle.



Visit to the Municipal brewery at Strakonice

Participants of the closing visit had an interesting opportunity to visit the Municipal brewery at Strakonice as a typical example of a middle size brewery with long and continuous history. The participants learned about the whole technology, the marketing strategy and they also tasted all the types of beer being produced at the brewery.



A short visit to Šumava

The regional brand 'Šumava originalní produkt' is one of three founding brands of the system that today represents the Association of the Regional Brands. This Brand covers very popular mountain area which is intensively visited by tourists in both summer and winter seasons.

Nowadays Šumava takes pride in a broad variety of both handicraft and food products, as well as the tourist services and experiences. The study trip was able to cover only a very small sample, but the participants were given a unique opportunity to try themselves the craft of making of the glass beads under the supervision of the brand holder Jana Wudy, and tasted several examples of the genuine Sumava hospitality at the restaurant "Sedmé nebe" at Kašperské Hory, and Cake shop Café Charlotte and Mini brewery at Železná Ruda.

4.2. Story of marketing of local products in the Netherlands

The development of regional products and regional branding

Although food and agriculture in the Netherlands is mainly focussing on large scale intensive and export oriented production, during the last 20 years many farmers and small scale food producers took the initiative to develop and sell regional products. Apart from the production and marketing of regional products, numerous other new economic activities have been developed on agrarian farms, like small scale tourism, education, health care for elderly or mentally disabled people, cooking workshops, thematic diners etc. All these 'multifunctional' farmers are looking for opportunities to establish new relations with their costumers and are looking for alternative marketing channels to create a higher added value on their products and services.



Parallel to this development, a growing number of consumers question the industrialised production methods and show interest in the origin of their food and how it is produced. A growing demand for more authentic food products is witnessed. 'Alternative' supply chains, like farm shops, farmers markets, web shops and box schemes tend to grow and do not seem affected by the recent economic crisis. According to recent market research, the estimated market potential for organic, local and other authentic quality products is € 5 billion.

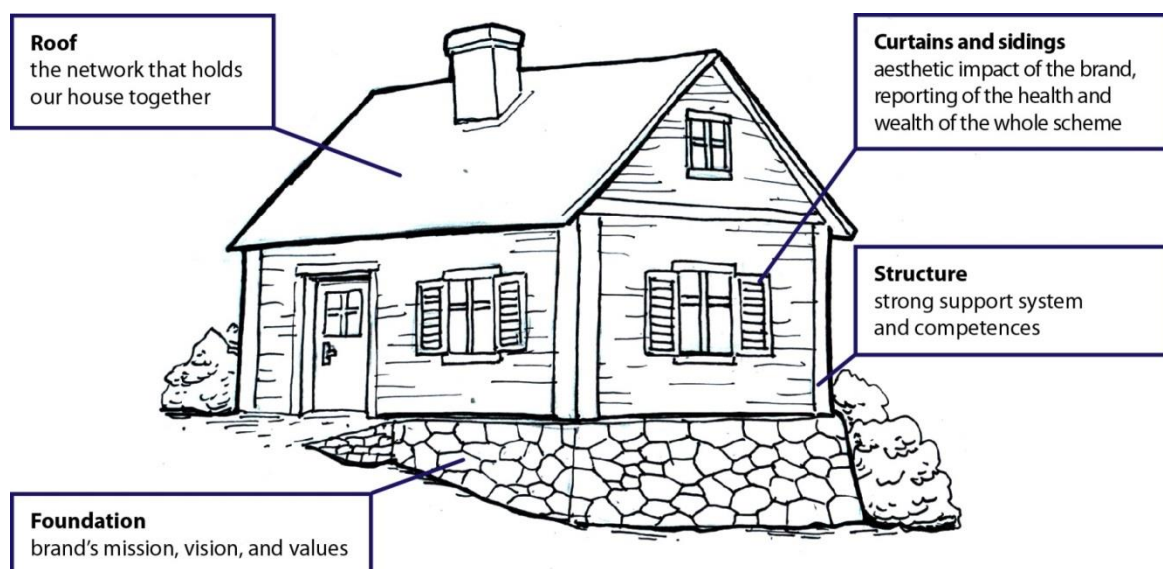
The conclusion that there are good chances and possibilities for the development and sales of regional products in the Netherlands seems justified. For individual producers or craftsman however it is often very difficult to build up a market for their products successfully. Besides that, there are many products on the market that have regional connotations on the label, but in fact are no real regional products. Often these products are regular products with no ingredients from the region whatsoever.

Regional brands might offer solutions for these problems of individual producers and craftsmen. Regional brands, or better regional branding,

- is a tool to distinguish between real and fake products
- offers the opportunity for collective marketing activities, in order to have better access to new market channels and to reach a larger consumer group,
- offers the opportunity to connect people and organisations at regional level
- and finally regional branding offers a valid framework for regional development activities and support for producers and other small scale businessman.

In the following sectors of this chapter, the above will be illustrated with some examples from the Netherlands. Before doing so, we briefly introduce the concept of the 'branding house', which helps us to understand and identify the different aspects of regional branding. This can be used to programme training and education activities and support local producers and small scale businessmen to improve their businesses within the general framework of a regional brand.

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, reporting of the health and wealth of the whole scheme
- Roof – the network that holds our house together.

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.

The development of the national hallmark 'erkend streekproduct' - the common values



In 1999 the national organisation Stichting Streekeigen Producten Nederland (Foundation for Regional Products the Netherlands), in short SPN, was founded by 6 regional organisations for sustainable regional development. The main objective was to create and develop a national hallmark for regional products, in order to be able to distinguish 'real' regional products from fake. Because the 'founding fathers' of SPN had their roots in sustainable regional development, the criteria for the hallmark 'Erkend Streekproduct' (certified regional product) reflect the goals of the founding organisations, i.e. sustainable regional

development. The criteria are as follows:

- raw materials / ingredients are produced or harvested in the region (a well-defined geographical area with clear boundaries)
- the processing of ingredients is taking place within this region
- production methods are sustainable and in balance with nature and landscape

Besides the development and management of the national hallmark, SPN gives support to regional organisations (i.e. for the development of regional brands), organises exchange of knowledge and experiences and organises a lobby for regional products at national level.

The hallmark criteria illustrate the 'shared values' – so the foundation – of the partners working together in SPN. We think that local products and regional branding must support and stimulate sustainable development and economic activities at local and regional level,

and that it has to empower local entrepreneurs. We ask from our partners to be co-operative and be transparent (tell the truth) about their activities and how products are produced.

Regional branding in practice

At present, 9 regional brands are connected with SPN and use the criteria of 'Erkend Streekproduct'. The system is to a large extent decentralised. The regional brand-organisations are in direct contact with producers and certify the products. They are also responsible for the control activities that are carried out by external agencies. SPN audits the regional organisation at 'system level' and checks whether the regional organisations fulfil the requirements of certification and control.

For promotional and communication purposes mostly the regional brands are used, although producers are also allowed to use the logo of the national hallmark on their certified products.

Waddengoud – home for regional development



Waddengoud (which means Gold from the Wadden area, the by the UNESCO recognized wetland area in the north of the Netherlands) is one of the best known regional brands in the Netherlands. The brand Waddengoud is developed and managed by the regional development organisation 'Waddengroep'. Waddengroep is active in the area for over 20 years and has developed an extensive network of farmers, small scale food processors and craftsmen, trade organisations, restaurants,

tourism service providers and fishermen. Approximate 150 small businesses in the region use the Waddengoud brand on over 300 products and services. Waddengroep is very successful in the development of new sustainable initiatives and small businesses in the region. These initiatives vary from sustainable fishery to energy generating techniques, from small processing plants to farm shops and touristic packages.

Waddengoud tries to communicate the 'Wadden-feeling', which is familiar to a large part of the Dutch population. The islands in the region are hotspot for tourists and the majority of the population has visited the area.

A good example of the Waddengoud activities is the development of the Texel lamb case. Texel is the largest island in the region and the name Texel is worldwide known for the local sheep breed. Still at present, Texel is a sheep island par excellence.

However, until a few years ago most of the lamb that was sold on the island was cheap import lamb from New Zealand. At the same time the farmers on the island themselves had difficulties selling their product and the local slaughterhouse almost had to close due to a lack of income. In 2003 the 'real Texel lamb' project was started under the umbrella of Waddengoud. The aim of the project was to create a market for lamb meat from the island, in order to provide better income possibilities to the farmers, restaurants and the local butcher and slaughterhouse. Only lamb that meets the criteria of SPN is certified with the

Waddengoud regional brand. The certification involves all partners in the local supply chain: farmers, the slaughterhouse, the butcher and the participating restaurants. Together with the local tourism board and the municipality, and with support of the provincial authorities and the Leader+ programme, various promotional activities and campaigns have been developed, like a yearly culinary lamb event.

At present, 28 sheep farmers are participating at the 'real Texel lamb' project, together with one butcher and slaughterhouse, 2 processing firms that make local specialities like a lamb croquet and 36 certified restaurants on the island. Apart from the restaurants, the products are sold in the local butcher shop, local supermarkets, butchers and restaurants on the mainland and through internet with a home delivery service in tempex boxes.

The Texel lamb case shows us that a regional brand not only can provides guarantees for the origin of the products, and not only serves as a tool for communication and promotion, it also provides a good framework for regional development activities. Regional branding is in other words mainly a regional development strategy. In this respect, the results of the 'real Texel lamb' project are convincing. Based on the evaluation that was made for the Leader+ programme, that co-financed the project, we can conclude that the 'real Texel lamb' project strengthened local entrepreneurship and employment. Altogether, in 2008 over 300 lambs were certified with the Waddengoud label and sold on the island, or through the dedicated market channels. This resulted in an extra added value on the island of € 400.000, which is the equivalent of 11 full time new jobs, or the conservation of 26 jobs in agriculture. But there is more to it. The project has a significant positive effect on tourism on the island and stimulates the farmers to maintain the characteristic landscape on the island with its typical sheep sheds (schapenboeten) and landscape elements.



Although Waddengoud started mainly with the branding of local products, more recently the focus has shifted towards tourism, accommodations, crafts and art. These products and services also have to fulfil special requirements related to quality and connection with the typical 'Wadden values'. Hotels and other accommodations that apply for the Waddengoud brand have to follow hospitality training courses, to be sure that they will be able to communicate the Wadden feeling to their consumers.

So, the regional brand itself becomes a relevant house (or home) for all kinds of region related activities. The brand gives the opportunity to connect the various activities and create synergy between tourism, local products, art and other services. It also provides a structure to organise education and training activities.

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 sales¹. 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 members, each of them has to fulfil and subscribe the criteria and values of the national hallmark.

¹ 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.

Veluwe – a long road ahead

The Veluwe is a forest-rich ridge of hills (1100 km²) in the province of Gelderland in the Netherlands. The Veluwe features many different landscapes including woodland, heath, some small lakes and Europe's largest sand drifts, alternated with agricultural areas, mainly with animal production and some horticulture. Apart from the Wadden region, the Veluwe is the main tourist destination in the country.



In order to give impulse to the production and sales of local products from the Veluwe, SPN developed the regional hallmark Erkend Veluws Streekproduct, using the same criteria and values as for the national hallmark. This hallmark was developed in 2012 in collaboration with the Regional Tourism Board (Veluws Bureau voor Toerisme). The idea behind this development is to distinguish real local products from fake products that often are sold to tourists and i.e. produced in lower wages countries. This should give an impulse to the local products that are produced in the area itself and grown in a sustainable way. Besides that, it also should create more

opportunities for restaurants and producers themselves to communicate their specific connection with the region, and make their business more attractive to tourists and other costumers.

The development of the regional hallmark is slow. Up to now it proved to be difficult to create real added value for producers and restaurants, due to a lack of finances, but also because the big majority of tradesman and restaurants is not willing to make specific choices and subscribe to the common values of the regional brand. Looking for solutions, in the autumn of 2013 collaboration with a regional wholesale organisation for the hotel and catering industry has been started, to promote local products to restaurants in the area. Also co-operation is started with the 'Veluwe Fund' a local NGO that tries to generate financial means to support sustainable local activities and will be able to fulfil a strong network function and connect organisations and companies from various backgrounds. This also may help to build the 'branding house' on the Veluwe. Finally, one of the largest municipalities in the region, Ede, is announced 'capital of good taste 2014', which means that there will be a large number of activities to promote and support local products from the Veluwe. This also might give an impulse to the further development of the brand and local produce in general.

Conclusions and learning experiences

The above examples show that regional branding is not only about the promotion of a region and its typical characteristics and local products. Regional branding provides a valid development strategy to support producers and to create new local businesses. The different examples show that a regional brand can be a framework that stimulates local businessman, farmers, local organisations and even the consumers to work together and to create new opportunities for the region. The Texel Lamb case shows that is it important to have a strong product concept, which is truly connected with the area and local culture. Conditional for

success is a strong engagement between the partners involved, and an added value for all participants. The concept of the Branding House helps us to understand the functions of regional brands and provides us an itinerary for the development of new regional brands. It also gives a structure to all educational activities and training courses to help and support people to better run their businesses.

Websites:

www.erkendstreekproduct.nl

www.waddengoud.nl

www.groenehartkloppendhart.nl

www.groenehartstreekproducten.nl

www.develuwe.nl

4.3. Creation of a region (the Barycz Valley and its carps)

Carp Days in the Barycz Valley

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. We are dealing here with a unique in the world character of nature, the diversity of flora and

fauna and the specific 'pastoral' landscape, forming a mosaic of ponds, forests, fields, meadows and wetlands. Low population density, well-preserved traditional architecture – both sacred (churches, roadside small shrines) and residential, make Barycz Valley an area of magical power of attraction, which is a unique tourist destination for lovers of nature and active recreation.

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.

Inhabitants of Wrocław and Lower Silesians have widely associated Milicz and Milicz carp but they haven't visited it. And the name 'Barycz Valley', which refers to a wider area than just Milicz (from Odolanów and Przygodzice in the east, through Sośnie, Twardogóra,

Krośnice, Milicz, Cieszków in the center to Żmigród in the west, where close to Głogów, Barycz river flows into a larger and better -known Oder River) wasn't very well-known even among inhabitants who hadn't been too appreciative towards the unique natural and landscape values of their small homeland.

Growing of common carp in the Barycz Valley was initiated in the Middle Ages, probably by the Order of Cistercians. Over the centuries, this tradition was continued by successive rulers of these lands, located on the border of the current Lower Silesia and Greater Poland (Wielkopolska): Kurzbach, Maltzan, Hatzfeld, Hochberg, Reichenbach and Radziwiłł families. Before the World War II carp had reigned on the tables of rich burghers of Breslau (now Wrocław) and Berlin. Currently, Milicz carp is a favorite fish for the Christmas Eve table in Lower Silesia and Greater Poland (Wielkopolska).



Milicz carp owes its fame to the traditional growing in the largest ponds in Europe (approximately 7000 ha). Thanks to continued through centuries traditional fisheries management that was taking into account environmental needs in the Barycz Valley, the worldwide unique natural landscape has been created. Barycz Valley is primarily a paradise for birds building nests and raising offspring in ponds, bushes or stopping for a rest in the Spring and Autumn migration.

Great support in building the identity of the inhabitants and the recognition of the region among tourists, played an 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. Carp Days has proved to be a hit. Positive comments about the participation in the event in nature, next to fishermen, with fish at one's fingertips could be heard for a long time. The residents were happy that after so many years of celebrating Carp days on the market have finally come by to see events showing what actually fish farming is, and what is actually Milicz carp, so well-known in the Lower Silesia region and beyond it. In subsequent editions new ideas for interesting events and recreation were popping up – education with carp as main character, more and more partners involved, including many fish farms, schools and restaurants.



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 km²) 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. 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).



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). 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).

Carp Days from the initially provincial event over the seven years suddenly grew to a two-month cycle of dynamic and diverse events taking place during the traditional fish harvest (September and October), promoting the unique beauty of the Barycz Valley, cultural and culinary heritage (fish cuisine), products and services of the Barycz Valley Recommends brand users as well as a wide range of tourism offer of the region – biking, hiking, canoeing and horse riding. The role of the Association as the coordinator of events is to bring together initiatives and ideas in a coherent program of 'Carp Days' as well as their comprehensive promotion.

An important message of Carp Days is to spread the fashion for consumption of carp from Barycz Valley throughout the year and not in accordance with the prevailing custom in Poland, only during the Christmas season. Thanks to the promotion of carp dishes at local

events, offers of local restaurateurs and organization of the annual culinary competition for professionals and amateurs 'Master of Carp', succeeded in a short time to extend the tourist season in the Barycz Valley until the end of October. Increased interest in carp caused that the fresh fish is available in catering throughout the year and not only sporadically and now it is in a bad taste to order for lunch fish other than coming from the ponds of Barycz Valley.

Currently Carp Days is already close to as many as 40 parties and events on various topics and specifics, but having a few things in common – the promotion of nature around the ponds, active, environment-friendly tourism in the Barycz Valley, local products, of which the most important is the carp. In September and October, among the events held within the Barycz Valley area are: fish harvest demonstration shows combined with family picnics, educational events that promote



conscious consumption and ecological basics, health campaigns to increase consumption of native freshwater fish, including carp, photo workshop, ornithological workshops, races promoting various forms of active tourism in the trail of attractions by Barycz river, open days in fishing plants, culinary competitions. Recently, fish dinners organized by numerous restaurants became extremely popular. These feasts and exquisite dinners laden with fresh fish tables are the opportunity to share the culinary artistry of chefs. On the tables reigns traditionally served fried carp in onion or mushroom sauce, stuffed or in jelly, but more and more often there are also new arrangements of carp in jam with pears, honey sauce or as a tartare of smoked carp and other fish – pikeperch, pike, grass carp or catfish. Increased, thanks to the Carp Days, interest in local fish caused that they are present in restaurants every day and not just on holidays or special occasions.

Every year close to 50 partners and sponsors take part in organization of the events. Carp Days raises a strong commitment of the local community, because carp ponds, tradition and nature is our precious common good and the greatest reason to be proud of!

Local restaurants that until now relied on the organization of weddings and corporate events, experience a big bloom with the invasion of tourists interested in participating in a fish feast at the lavishly set table. The guests, to a large extent, are inhabitants of local area, but a significant portion come from even 100 km distant cities. This proves huge popularity of the local cuisine, the attractiveness of the offer, the demand for events and gastronomic offer in line with the idea of slow food – high-quality products, processed or prepared in the traditional manner, with a documented source of origin. Thanks to investments restaurateurs give their places new splendor with a traditional color, actively take part in culinary competitions, unearth the old recipes, create new culinary variations and train their staff. Restaurants with better menu and perfect service according to old Polish saying 'through the stomach to the heart' are gaining new customers all the time.

Contrary to earlier fears, Carp Days are not promoting only the fish itself, fish farms and fish restaurants. Everyone benefits – guests of the restaurant come for longer stays, they use accommodations, recreational activities, they visit monuments and other attractions as well as local producers. A great support here is a promoting system 'Barycz Valley

Recommends,' which provides visitors with reliable information about the most valuable offers, food recommended by the sign of 'Barycz Valley Recommends', crafts and tourism services with guaranteed quality. Satisfied tourists recommend places to their friends and share their experiences on networking communities like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, what brings new fans to Barycz Valley.

Growing popularity, involvement of the public, social, economic partners, real growth in the number of tourists and revenue resulting from the cooperation for sustainable development of Barycz Valley, developed with the support of EU funds, have a high chance to be continued also in the new financial perspective. The creation of infrastructure and sustainable partnership bonds of cooperation shows that in subsequent years, Carp Days will become more and more independent venture and will not require much support from the Association 'Partnership for Barycz Valley'.

Carp revived in the consciousness of inhabitants of the Barycz Valley and is no longer noticed only during the Christmas season. Thanks to the promotion of local fish, organizations of culinary competitions during the Carp Days, collaboration with professional chefs, organization of trainings, publications issued, the quality of the offer increases from year to year which contributes to increasing tourist traffic and recognition of the offer of this unique area.

In 2010, the event 'Carp Days in Barycz Valley' took the first place in the 'Best Lower Silesia', in the category of 'the best event promoting the region' organized by the Lower Silesian Tourist Organization.

4.4. Preservation of original crops and animal breeds

Preservation of original crops and animal breeds

Since the beginnings of agriculture the man selected among crops the bigger ones, more profitable, more vital, and then he used their progeny. Older varieties retreated to new, more powerful. Nevertheless, certain varieties proved successful and be grown for decades.

These varieties are generally very well adapted, resistant to pests and diseases. They are better able to compensate for unfavorable environmental conditions and have a stable income. As the holders of unique genes they are an important resource for cultivation of new varieties.

Important crops such as sweet potato, bean, buckwheat, millet, rowan or chokeberry have been replaced by more efficient crops. Nowadays there is a renewed interest in these types of crops, particularly in the field of health food.

Why to deal with the original crops and breeds of animals?

They taste like they should taste

Foods contain less water and more aromatics. Therefore, they are more delicious – they have strong, distinctive taste. This is confirmed by tastings – wildlife also prefers these fields against new varieties.

Original crops and breeds of animals give us what they should – a lot of vitamins, minerals and bioactive substances

They contain more magnesium, iron, and vitamin C, which are important for resistance to diseases and stress and help to prevent of cardiac failure. They also contain more fiber and bioactive substances, thereby reducing the risk of lifestyle diseases. A biological quality is also higher they give us much more vitality.

We will be, what we would like to be – healthy and viable

Children are exposed to a hundredfold dangerous consumption of residues of dangerous substances in food. Let's offer them a safe food from the original crops and animal breeds! Pregnant women should consume quality food to provide the best nutrition for their babies before birth or while breastfeeding. By eating of quality food we contribute to reducing the risk of various forms of allergies of our children and their children etc.

Do not contain, what they should not contain

Genetically modified materials do not appear in products. Genetically modified materials are absurd and do not have a place in nature.

They store, as much they should be stored

Products don't wilt as quickly as it often happens when buying a nice looking chemical food.

They grow how they should grow

They are environmentally friendly. Biological resources are used for the cultivation of crops. It isn't needed a lot of energy inputs to the cultivation of crops, for example fuel and energy for the production of chemical fertilizers.

They live, how they should live and eat, what they should eat

Animals are bred in natural conditions according to their interests and needs, with plenty of movement and natural food. Ruminants must have the possibility of grazing. Stabling animals need plenty of fresh air, daylight and sufficient areas with bedding.

They love diversity

Growing of native crops is a practical step to the protection of biodiversity. By selecting of traditional landraces and measures of the countryside we contribute to increasing biodiversity. Studies have shown more invertebrates, birds and increased soil microbial activity.

They take as much as they should take

Cultivation of indigenous crops represents sustainable system which does not take from nature more resources than can be naturally restored. It doesn't produce a waste which it isn't able to process. Its aim is to produce enough quality food, to maintain a good environment, rural development and its affordability for everyone. It uses mainly local and renewable and environmentally friendly technological processes that minimize environmental damage.

They cost, as much they should cost

Somebody would say that they are too expensive. For the cultivation of new crops varieties we all are paying a high toll on unhealthy population, rural depopulation, environmental pollution and depletion of non-renewable energy sources.

They give a livelihood to those which should have it

For farmers, it is typical to offer their products and their processed foods. This means that you can buy them directly from the farmer. Many farms now offer also services in tourism.

They are natural and normal, but now they have to be protected with a guarantee that they are as they should be

Regional and old varieties are our cultural heritage and represent the variety and diversity that so often fades from our increasingly uniform world. It is necessary to strive for their protection, as well as we protect castles, rare books and works of art.

Original crops, fruits and vegetables

Many of these varieties are well adapted to local conditions and because they are durable and easy to grow, they are also more resistant to pests, diseases and frost. In practice, this means that the adaptation to local conditions creates conditions to minimize the use of chemical protection instruments or nutrition.

Original plants excel in spectrum of flavors, characteristics and utilization, so they carry the local uniqueness. With the disappearance of the old varieties of fruit and vegetables we lose not only those varieties, but often also regional products and special dishes. Impacts of landraces' disappearance thus often have a social character.

Trees with traditional shape strains create aesthetic and landscape function. They can serve as a source of valuable properties for cultivation of new varieties. Many varieties are used in extensive and ecological agriculture. Many of the original varieties of fruit trees can be used in arboriculture for example as a source of seed for rootstocks.

Specific role in the retention of gene pool have an old and regional varieties, whose specific use is linked with man from the very beginning. Therefore they are rightly regarded as an important part of genetic diversity. They are also found as the natural heritage of each country and the cultural heritage of each nation. To this issue with the advent of intensive agriculture is no longer paying attention. Expanding a small number of intensive varieties of each plant varieties caused a significant restriction of diversity on the level of other genetic forms of the concerned varieties.



An illustrative example is the protection of the gene pool of apple trees. More than 300 varieties of apple trees were cultivated in Slovakia, at the turn of the twentieth century. Currently is widespread a cultivation of only about 50 varieties of apple trees, mostly foreign.

Indigenous breeds of livestock

Many old breeds hide valuable genes that are not nowadays fully recognized. In the future, they can be an extremely valuable source of properties that are for the survival of mankind on this planet decisive. Old breeds are the traditional, historically-based value of a certain

region. Animals are connected with the local culture and social impacts of this area. These are mostly populations of individuals constitutively hard with extremely good health and durable and easy to breed. The existence of indigenous genotypes of livestock in some regions represents a 'landscape-element' with beneficial effects on agro-tourism. Old breeds, due to its undemanding have very good conditions for enforcement in organic food production. Why endangered breeds? The best and actually the only effective protection of animals from their extinction is the breeding. The more farmers will breed endangered breeds, the less they will degenerate and will suffer fewer negative symptoms of inbreeding (mating close relatives – siblings, parents with cubs), which include the reduction of viability, deterioration of exterior and performance characteristics. Unfortunately, for animals are not yet developed methods for long-term preservation. Therefore, the only protective option of endangered animal breeds is to breed them.

One of the ways to return our country of its original character and sustainability is the breeding of indigenous breeds of animals which are a part our cultural heritage. Animals are adapted to our climatic conditions, have good character traits and do not cause undesirable changes in the country such as soil erosion.

Use of indigenous crops and animal breeds in agro-tourism

Conservation of indigenous crops and their spread within regions where originally grown is of particular importance for the development of rural tourism and for support of the local economy.

Slovakia, picturesque landscape with a high tourist potential, can still surprise visitors during all four seasons.



Agro-tourism is the latest trend that follows logically from the last world styles in order to diversify the activities of farms and the return of man to nature and to environmental protection. Agro-tourism is often associated with active recreation on the farm or farms for the purpose of application of natural farming work practices and animal welfare. Soil protection and promotion of food without chemical intervention and demand for healthy products in shops, go hand in hand with the health of human beings. Therefore, more and more people want to gain knowledge of the cultivation of indigenous spices, herbs, fruits and vegetables. Not only crop production is the main article of the agro-tourism, attention is also paid to the livestock and its breeding. Young animals like chickens, ducks, cows and sheep are very close for families with children who these animals do not meet in everyday life. Breeding and sale of products from the yard gives an opportunity to tasting and selling of fresh products. Linking own production also affects the associated catering facilities, where mainly local recipes, traditional food, or 'food of grandmothers' are applicable. To these special dishes fit also a good entertainment in style of folklore, local customs and handicraft demonstrations. Tourism trips are often accompanying animation program, which comes from ancient legends and local traditions. Slovak rural tourism and agro-tourism can be recommended as and unforgettable kind of staying in the Slovak countryside.

As a part of the educational programme within the Reviving Rural Areas project, we had the opportunity to experience life and activities in the countryside, crop cultivation and animal breeding.

The program was held on two main locations: **Farm guest house Adam Podkylava and Pension U Juhása Košariská.**

Agro pension Adam is an example of the connection of organic farming and agro-tourism. Pension U Juhása Košariská shows the link organically produced crops and breeding animals for gastronomy and cooking traditional dishes from local sources.

Kopanice region is an important ethnographic location with its own folk culture, the folk traditions, folk ensembles and groups. Both elder and young people still maintain the traditions of their ancestors. Thanks especially to local folklore, the region attracts visitors not only from Slovakia but also from abroad. Local people preserve a treasure that is disappearing from many regions in Slovakia. Inhabitants are proud of their traditions. They have a huge potential and become the favorite holiday destination of those who adore nature and folklore. The local tradition inherently includes the traditional plum drink – *slivovica*.

Diversity of terrain, amount of natural scenery, historical sites and cultural events make enough temptations for visitors of this region. There are also suitable conditions for sports activities and relaxation.

Eco-agro-tourism is a special form of rural tourism, which is closely linked to agricultural production. The role of rural tourism is to make people feel closer to the nature, inviting them to behave with respect to nature and to encourage them to behave in accordance with the requirements of the environment.

Trend towards agrotourism, small hotels, holiday apartments, individual camping and caravanning indicates an increase in opportunities to develop the tourism and a return to the traditional values of life.

Kopanice region has a high quality natural environment, part of which belongs to the protected area the Small and White Carpathians.

Ekotrend Myjava – presentation of the project about cultivation and processing organic crops

Ekotrend Myjava operates in organic farming on an area of 156 ha. This enterprise grows spelt wheat, common wheat, rye, buckwheat and herbs. It cultivates apple trees too. Ekotrend processes its products in a mill, pasta production facility, prepares herb teas, all packed and distributed as food products.



Ekotrend Myjava possesses its own brand of organic food BIOMILA. Under the BIOMILA brand, product lines of teas (portioned), grains, flour and semolina, cereal products, pasta (especially whole grains), bakery products (chopsticks), dried apples, spelt drink and

sunflower oil have been manufactured. Overall Ekotrend produces by more than 40 kinds of own products.

The main production program is the spelt wheat. This ancient grain has retained a higher proportion of fibre, gluten, vitamins and important minerals such as standard bred wheat.

Thanks to the soft packaging of the grain, the spelt is suitable for the production of whole grain products. Such products help digestion and improve immunity. Moreover spelt products have a pleasant nutty flavor, warm up and give a lot of good mood.

Brand products BIOMILA received several times the award 'Organic food of the year'. This award is granted by consumers voting thanks to the initiative of the Centre of environmental activities in Trenčín and the Union of organic farming Ekotrend Slovakia.

2005 – Spelt semolina

2009 – BIOMILA wholemeal spelt chopsticks

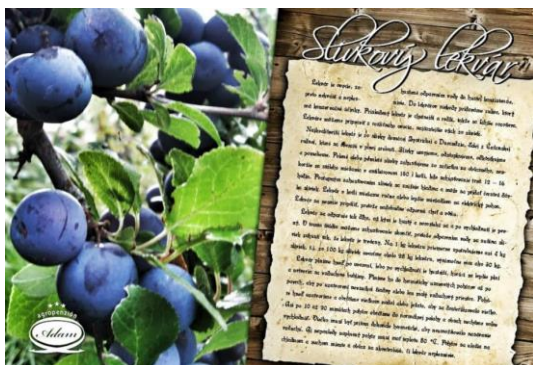
2010 – BIOMILA dried apples

2011 – BIOMILA spelt pasta – tarhoňa.



In addition, in 2012, BIOMILA spelt flour and pasta, wheat and rye and dried apples were granted the registered mark the regional brand Traditions of the White Carpathians (tradiciebk.sk). This cross-border label guarantees that it is a regional product which is not only good, but also meet other strict criteria. In addition to local origin of the material, it is characterized by a higher input of manual work, using traditional methods and the environment friendliness.

Farm guest house ADAM – agro-tourism experience in Slovakia.



Farmers offer a rest for the people from the city by staying at the peasant yard. They are popular for their friendliness, live animals, peasant cuisine and fresh air. All this we can experience in Myjava Kopanice region where visitors are not enough wondering if they discover another face of their homeland – full of forgotten, but also new experiences.

A walk through Kopanice refreshes both your body and spirit. Everything seems natural, this is the way the agricultural countryside where you can relax should look like. There are lots of meadows with smelling herbs what people like but first of all they provide abundant pasture for livestock. You can meet a cow with a calf on each hectare of the ground. It's natural and also economic phenomenon of a bio farm in Kopanice.

Cuisine is based on specialties of Kopanice. People love to eat plum balls and plum butter pirogs topped with poppy seeds or nuts. Visitors buy and take away plum butter as a souvenir. Plum butter is cooked directly at the farm in electrically heated cauldrons.



The popular specialties include marinated vegetables which neighbouring farmers order at the ADAM farm. Cabbage with peppers, cauliflower, carrots and other eight vegetables has been laid up to special carriage. After a miraculous process of fermentation, an extraordinary of salad is coming into existence.

Guest house U Juhása

At Košariská – in the birthplace of Milan Rastislav Štefánik, is a museum. It symbolizes a remembrance of a great man. But only a few people know that between the museum, the former rectory, church and pension U Juhása is an old fruit garden called 'Pod Úbočou'. Several original apple trees still remain. It was a favourite place of young Štefánik. Dissolute area got a new, more beautiful face. This area offers a fruit that has never known chemistry. Nevertheless apple trees bear fruit and keep the original flavour of this region.

The cuisine is interesting as it supports regional ingredients and consequently also the regional farmers and traditional local crops producers. There are strict rules for selection of suppliers. It is allowed to use only what comes from an immediate vicinity of the restaurant, the production should not be distant more than 40 kilometres. Trout is from Piešťany, which is not far away. In addition, trout is fished by the people from the guest house. Everybody needs assurance that the food is fresh. Beef cattle graze a bit behind the pension. Veal and lamb is from a local breeder. It is flavored by herbs from an own garden. Chicken must be from the farmer, who lives in the village, beekeeper delivers a real honey from the flowers that grow in the meadows nearby. There is also a small mill. Flour is fresh as the chef needs. The aim is to revive crop cultivation and cattle breeding in the surrounding villages and to develop local economy through consumption in the restaurant.



As a part of the educational programme within the Reviving Rural Areas project, we had visited several other places that combine the production of food from local resources, maintaining the cultivation of traditional crops and their use in rural tourism facilities with traditional architecture.

As an examples are guest houses **Holotých víška** and **Slukých chalupa**. Both offer an accommodation in rooms with the original folk architecture.

Dishes of Kopanice cuisine have been served in the restaurant. Great chefs, brought up on traditional dishes of their grandmothers, prepare unique goodies 'brezofskej' and 'Košariská' cuisine. But also very strong (52%) Slovak fruit spirits Slivovica, Jablkovica and Hruškovica must not be missing.

The main source of livelihood of the former population was grazing and farming. Among crops the old millet, rye (also for the straw), wheat, oats, barley – as scrap for pigs were grown. Beans, peas, lentils, broad beans, chickpeas were grown from leguminous plants. Fruit growing has also been developed, for example apples, pears, plums and nuts. Livestock farming has mainly concentrated at raising cattle and sheep.

Local farmers have been trying to continue with these traditions. They are coming back to original land maintenance and use the land mostly for grazing livestock and meat production that they try to process at the farm and offer to visitors as delicious dishes.

By buying products coming from various local sources we support the reviving of the rural areas and enable their inhabitants and visitors of this region to enhance the natural character of the rural landscape with its unforgettable scenery.



5. Conclusions

The Learning Partnership project among 4 partners from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and the Netherlands, set the following objectives:

- networking of organisations and institutions dealing with educational activities aimed at support of traditional farming and crafts in rural areas
- exchange of experiences with organising information and educational programmes and campaigns for both potential bearers of these traditional disciplines and a general public.
- analyse transferability of best practices
- sharing ways of raising the awareness of the traditional production methods in rural areas.

At the end of two years of cooperation we can confirm that all these objectives have been met. The participants of visits enjoyed unique meetings with people dedicated to their work, and proud of their homes and regions. The participants learned about dozens of different approaches to rural living – spanning from revoking of traditional techniques, breeds, and crops, to exploration of high tech technologies; different scale of production, different approaches and target groups, including children and handicapped people who are finding their employment in specific activities.

People of different nationalities, background, and personal experiences had opportunity to communicate, to share their knowledge and feelings, to taste together local food and culture, and to refresh their motivation for facing different challenges.

The common theme of all the visits and most of the debates was the local brand or branding as a tool for boosting the rural economies and supporting sustainable development of rural areas. These brands are usually seen as a marketing tool. It is right as the capacity to use properly this marketing tool is the first condition for the success of any brand. But local or regional branding has a bigger potential.

It represents the region and its values, it is based on clear and strict rules, it can communicate these features and spread a positive image, and it can and must network all its stakeholders.

The participants of the partnership learned about differences and similarities of their approaches, experienced plenty of good practices but first of all they confirmed the hypothesis that the mutual cooperation is the key; the key to facing the globalisation, loss of local identity and proud, the key for reviving of rural areas.

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