

# REGIONAL PRODUCT LABELLING AS PART OF THE REGION FORMATION PROCESS. THE CASE OF CZECHIA

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## ABSTRACT

Regional product labelling can be described as a part of 'alternative food networks' since both of them share the idea of 're-connecting' spatially and socially separated production and consumption. This article situates the issue of regional products in the broader context of region formation. It aims to the factors essential for the implementation of a labelling scheme in a given region in order to cast light on the relationship between regional labelling and the process of a region's institutionalisation. By analysing a set of 22 labelling schemes of the Association of Regional Brands we seek to find answers to the following questions: Which regions have been introducing regional labelling schemes and what do they have in common from the geographic point of view?; What is the place of a regional product label in the process of the region's institutionalisation? Data on individual regions obtained through an analysis of electronic and printed sources was confronted with specialised literature and thematic maps. We studied spatial characteristics as well as features determining a region's place in the process of institutionalisation. The most striking common features of regions, which are decisive factors in the implementation of a labelling scheme, include the rural character and a certain degree of problem occurrence the motivate regional stakeholders to overcome those difficulties, but do not impede further development. Another important factor is an attractive natural landscape. Labelling schemes become involved in the institutionalisation process both at its early and later stages, having part in building the identity of a region.

**Keywords:** regional products, labelling schemes, region formation, regional identity, region, regional development

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Regional product labelling schemes, regions and their formation

Regional products can be understood as products associated with a particular, relatively bordered territory – with the region of their origin – constituting a deliberate component of their quality (Winter 2003). Beside agricultural products or foodstuffs, consumer goods and services are concerned as well. Local product labelling schemes are designed to guarantee – usually by way of certification – a direct link between a particular product and a particular region, allowing the producer to use a label representing this relationship.

The issue of regional products has a markedly interdisciplinary character and its different aspects are studied by many scientific disciplines including geography. Regional products are most intensely studied by geography of consumption (Feagan 2007), namely in connection with commodity chains, and by rural geography (Winter 2003), which looks into the impacts of regional labels on the development of rural areas. Tourism geography, on the other hand, deals with regional products in relation to the development of tourism particularly in rural areas (Williams 2009). Geographical aspects of the use of labels and logos are studied by territorial marketing and branding (situated at the interface between geography

and economy; see e.g. Anholt 2010), and by the emerging field of branding geography (Pike 2011).

In Western Europe and North America the interest in regional products began to grow in the early 1990s; this subject has thus been part of academic debates for three decades. In Czechia, however, it constitutes a relatively new phenomenon. That is why regional products and their labelling have so far received little attention from academic circles. The existing studies deal primarily with rural development (Lošťák, Kučerová 2007). In the field of geography, one of the rare undertakings is Spilková's and Fialová's research (2013) focusing on regional product labelling schemes in the context of rural tourism development. Little attention has also been paid to the significance of regional product labelling for the process of constructing the region labels are attached to. Hence, in this article we relate the subject of regional product labelling to the formation of regions and regional identity. By researching selected labelling schemes we try to find out whether regional product labelling constitutes an integral part of this process. The subsequent analysis of the regions' character aims at evaluating the potential of individual regions for the implementation of a regional product labelling scheme, from the perspective of both spatial characteristics and the process of region and regional identity formation, and at unveiling the relationship between labelling schemes and regional institutionalisation. The study thus attempts to answer the

subsequent questions: Which regions have introduced regional labelling schemes and what do those regions have in common? What is the place of a regional product label in the process of the region's institutionalisation?

The treatise is divided into five sections. The first one deals with the conceptualisation of terms in the fields of regional product labelling schemes and region and regional identity formation. The following section presents the methods employed, including the choice of model labelling schemes integrated in the Association of Regional Brands (ARB) and provides a description of the latter. The third section presents the most interesting results of the analysis of the selected labelling schemes. It is divided into two parts: one analysing spatial aspects of the examined labelling schemes (and regions) and the other examining their relation to the institutionalization process. The two concluding sections discuss the results obtained and draw conclusions.

#### *a) Regional product labelling schemes*

Regional product labelling schemes can be seen as part of alternative food networks (AFN). Yet classifying labelling schemes (not only for regional products, but also for e.g. organic food) as an AFN is quite controversial. Some authors term labelling schemes as 'weak' alternatives that fail to fulfil the main idea of the AFN. In contrast to 'strong' alternatives, which permit direct consumer-producer relationships, the former ones have a tendency towards commercialisation – they can easily be used or even abused by grocery store chains (Watts et al. 2005; Goodman, Goodman 2007). However, labelling schemes and AFN share some basic attributes (Fonte 2010b). Primarily, it is the idea of 're-connecting' spatially and socially separated production and consumption while 're-localising' production, i.e. restoring the link between production and its location (Fonte 2010b; Watts et al. 2005; Renting et al. 2003). It is all about creating alternatives to conventional food supply chains which lead to alienation of production from a particular place.

Likewise, regional product labelling schemes represent a new approach to the traditional use of the link between product, i.e. product quality, and its place of origin. The place of origin played an important role in product labelling as far back as in the period of industrialisation (Tregear 2003). Despite divergent attitudes toward product origin in the era of dynamic growth of international trade, it has remained important till today. Even though globalisation was expected to wipe out the diversity of places it has rather amplified the existing differences among them (Lury 2011). Nowadays, place embodies one of the qualitative aspects of production. This is best represented by regional product labelling schemes. The region of origin and its uniqueness thus become the very essence of product quality and a guarantee thereof while being a source of competitive advantage (Renting et al. 2003; Ilbery et al. 2005; Wiskerke 2009).

#### *b) Region and regional identity formation*

The relation between regional product labelling and a given region is closely connected with the region's image and with regional identity in general. Image is a factor determining quality. Besides, the ways of using the image for the purpose of product branding are largely influenced by social construction of space. In order to 'ensure' product quality, any particular place must have a widely perceived positive value. By contrast, the fact that a region is presented by way of labelled products has an impact on its image in the eyes of both local and non-local inhabitants (Williams 2009; Lee et al. 2005). Building the quality of regional products is implicitly intertwined with regional identity.

Regional product labelling may therefore be understood as an integral part of the process of region and regional identity formation in terms of the theory of regional institutionalisation introduced by Anssi Paasi (Paasi 1986, 2003). Paasi understands regions as social constructs that penetrate into spatial and mental structures of each society through the process of institutionalisation comprising four notional stages. The first phase consists of spatial shaping of regions, i.e. accepting boundaries that are not necessarily tangible. The second stage is characterised by the process of symbolic shaping during which regions acquire other symbols apart from their name (e.g. specific products). In the third stage the region takes an institutional shape; newly established institutions help solidify the existence of the emerging region (starting from voluntary associations and ending with self-governments). The supreme phase of the institutionalisation process rests in the region's anchoring in spatial structures of the society (mostly by acquiring certain administrative or self-governing powers) and in its perception as a consolidated unit among its inhabitants as well as outside the region. The region forming process is accompanied by a simultaneous formation of regional identities, i.e. "collective narratives about who and what 'we' and 'our region' are and how these differ from others" (Messely et al. 2014, p. 319). Apart from people's sense of belonging to and identification with a particular region ('regional consciousness') regional identity is also constituted by the region's image in the minds of local inhabitants and residents of other regions alike ('image of region'). However, regional identity might not be understood as an implicitly positive concept, since it is frequently used particularly in the context of regional development (Semian, Chromý 2014; Süssner 2002). Besides several positive implications (i.e. acting as a driving force for regional growth), it may also inspire ultimately negative self-delimiting initiatives turned against other regions. Regional identity as a 'manipulable and power-laden concept' (Messely et al. 2014, p. 319) may even become a means for struggling for power both at the inter-regional and intra-regional level (Paasi 2003; Siwek 2011; Siwek, Bogdová 2007).

The region as a social construct is not stable over time; it can disappear just as easily as it appeared. The

**Tab. 1** Types of Czech regions regarding the region's and its regional identity's formation.

Type of regions	Examples of ARB regions*
1. Regions with newly acquired autonomy but no traditional identity	Vysočina
2. Regions with strong regional identity but no autonomy	Haná, Podkrkonoší, Górolsko Swoboda, Beskydy
3. Regions with lost identities	
3a. Regions that experienced a change of their traditional character due to industrialization or agricultural intensification in the 19th century	Polabí
3b. Regions important for the formation of Czech national identity and losing their significance after the constitution of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918	Kraj blanických rytířů
3c. Regions that lost their identity carrier due to the displacement of German speaking inhabitants after World War II	Šumava, Krušnohoří, Českosaské Švýcarsko, Krkonoše, Broumovsko, Orlické hory, Jeseníky, Znojemsko, Moravské Kravaňsko
4. Regions with new identities	
4a. Frontier regions with a new wave of colonisation after World War II	Šumava, Krušnohoří, Českosaské Švýcarsko, Krkonoše, Broumovsko, Orlické hory, Jeseníky, Znojemsko, Moravské Kravaňsko
4b. Hinterlands of large cities with a massive inflow of new residents due to suburbanization after 1989	Zápraží
5. Regions searching for their new identity, often intentionally built for distinct purposes	Toulava, Polabí, Prácheňsko, Železné hory, Kraj blanických rytířů, Moravská brána, Moravský kras

Sources: Chromý, Janů 2003; Chromý et al. 2009; elaborated by the authors.

\* For explanation see following sections.

institutionalisation process is a dynamic process (Paasi 1986, 2013; Raagmaa 2002; Zimmerbauer 2011) that mirrors not only social changes but also political interests and power practices (Kučera 2011). Empirical studies of Czech regions (Chromý 2003; Chromý, Janů 2003; Chromý, Kučerová, Kučera, 2009) have made it possible to identify several types of regions depending on the way of their formation and the formation of regional identity. The issue is not just about institutionalisation, but in some cases also about 'de-institutionalisation'.

Regions falling into the first-type group (1) acquired autonomy prior to forming their regional identity; some of their areas must first cope with much older identities. The second type (2) includes regions with traditionally present regional consciousness both within and beyond regional boundaries. However, they do not constitute autonomous units. Typical examples are ethnographic and cultural regions. The third category (3) encompasses regions whose regional identity is lost for one or more reasons (for the three subtypes see Table 1). The next group (4), which overlaps to some degree with the previous one, comprises regions where entirely 'new' identities have formed following substantial population changes caused by migration (for two subtypes of these see Table 1). The last group (5) consists of regions that are 'searching' for their identity. Key stakeholders are only striving to find common elements that could serve as a basis for the newly built regional identity. Frequently, new identities are built on reminders of older regions and their distinctiveness (see type 3). This group comprises a broad array of regions including regions intentionally built for economic, marketing or other purposes.

## 2. Research

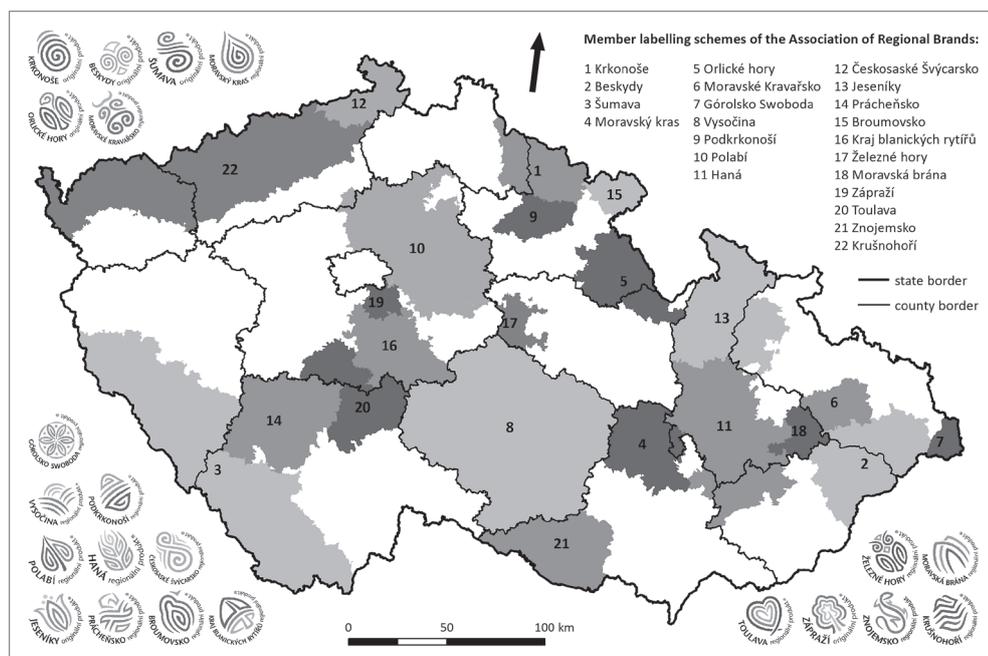
### 2.1 Selection of case study labelling schemes

In Czechia about fifty labelling schemes have been identified operating at different scale levels: from supranational (the EU labelling scheme), national (the product's origin is specified at state level) and regional to micro-regional (Kašková 2013). The interrelations between regional product labelling and the formation of regions and their identities can be studied best at the micro-regional level. The main reason is that bottom-up initiatives take part in the implementation of regional labels exactly at this level. This is crucial for evaluating the role of such schemes in the institutionalisation process because they best reflect the importance of regional identity in the process of labelling implementation.

For the purpose of our analysis labelling schemes associated in the Association of Regional Brands (ARB) were selected out of more than 30 micro-regional initiatives operating in Czechia (Kašková 2013). The reason was that the ARB's uniform rules facilitated side-by-side comparison of those schemes in all examined regions. Moreover, they cover Czechia's entire territory in a relatively equal manner, giving us the possibility to compare how labels function in different geographical conditions (for the overview of ARB member regions see Figure 1).

### 2.2 The Association of Regional Brands

The regional labelling project was born in 2004 as an initiative of the Czech Office of the Regional Environmental Centre. Its original goal was to support the



**Fig. 1** Regional labelling schemes associated in the Association of Regional Brands (1. 7. 2013).  
Sources: ArcData Praha 2006; ARZ 2014.

development of the Natura 2000 system of protected areas (Kaźmierski 2006). In order to help extend the offer of products and facilitate sales promotion of regional products in the tourism sector (Kaźmierski 2006) the sphere of the labelling schemes' impact was delimited according to the existing touristic regions (defined by the Czech Tourism agency) that encompass broader surrounding environs of protected areas.

The 2005–2006 period saw the emergence of first three regional labels: 'Krkonoše Original Product', 'Šumava Original Product' and 'Made in Beskydy'. The launching of the next label, 'Moravský Kras Regional Product', was initiated by the Moravský Kras Local Action Group<sup>1</sup> (LAG), which asked to get involved in the project. In a similar manner, four more labels had gradually been launched owing to the initiative of various institutions. In 2008, the Association of Regional Brands was founded to group the existing eight regional labels. In the following years, the ARB had successively been joined by sixteen additional labels (ARZ 2014).

As the number of regions involved in the labelling project increased their character progressively began to differentiate; they were no longer identical with Natura 2000 areas. Certification has successively been extended from the original labelling of foodstuffs and hand-crafted items (Kaźmierski 2006) to also embrace services and most recently even exhilarating experience (ARZ 2014). While the purpose of the initial projects was to draw attention to potential values of protected natural areas (Kaźmierski 2006), their focus has gradually shifted more

toward regions disadvantaged in one way or another (Čadilová 2011). The range of project goals and motivations has thereby substantially broadened. Nevertheless, making regional labels visible, i.e. conceiving regional labelling as part of regional marketing, continues to be the general purpose of the ARB (ARZ 2014).

Even though the ARB coordinates the whole labelling framework at the nationwide level, individual labelling schemes remain independent and are managed by regional establishments. ARB's particularity resides in the use of a uniform visual style (including a logo, a website and promotional materials) which resolves the problem of fragmentation of regional product labelling (Ilbery et al. 2005; Wiskerke 2009) while making it easier to convey positive customer experiences from one region to another (see logos in Figure 1).

### 2.3 Research methods

All the ARB's 22 member regions active by the beginning of July 2013 (further referred to as 'ARB regions') were examined through research and analysis of available materials obtained primarily from the ARB (online presentations of ARB and individual regions; printed publications). The selection of characteristics most suitable for the evaluation of ARB regions was based on the comparison with thematically relevant studies (e.g. Ilbery et al. 2005; Messely et al. 2009). The chosen characteristics can be divided into two groups; the first one is constituted by spatial conditions whereas the second one involves attributes relevant for the determination of a region's position in the process of institutionalisation.

The first group incorporates geographic position of regions in the sense of the traditional West-East gradient in socio-economic development and their position in

<sup>1</sup> Local Action Groups constitute a tool for EU's rural development policies based on cooperation at the micro-regional level (LEADER+ program); they assemble representatives of public administration, business sector and non-profit sector with the aim to implement own development strategies (Perlín, Kučerová, Kučera 2010).

the hierarchical system of settlements (e.g. Hampl 2005; Novák, Netrdová 2011; Hampl, Gardavský, Kühnl 1987), scale level, i.e. the size of regions, and their natural environment. The location of the regions was then examined in relation to population density, types of rural areas (Perlín, Kučerová, Kučera 2010; Chromý et al. 2011) and population stability (Chromý, Kučera 2009; Čermák 2009). The aforementioned data allowed us to deduce the degree and types of problems that ARB regions face.

The second group involves the typical elements defining a given region (e.g. natural conditions, dominant landscape types, cultural features). What was also taken into account was the labelling scheme's own presentation consisting of its name, logo and its verbal and pictorial representation (see e.g. Kučera 2012). Additionally, we studied the type of subjects that initiated the introduction of a labelling scheme, or those who are in charge of it at present. Internet presentations, various publications (Čadilová 2011; Kaźmierski 2006) and press releases published by the ARB and its members provided us with information concerning the nature of individual subjects and their scope of activities at different scale levels. Based on the above-mentioned characteristics the examined regions were categorised according to the typology related to the institutionalisation process (Chromý, Kučerová, Kučera 2009; Chromý, Janů 2003; see Table 1).

The thereby obtained data were confronted with the second major source in the form of specialised literature relevant to the subject matter. In the majority of cases ARB regions do not precisely match with administrative units. Thus, the most suitable method was to compare the ARB's regional map with relevant thematic maps. In particular, we used maps contained in the Landscape Atlas of the Czech Republic (Hrnčiarová, Mackovčín, Zvara et al. 2009). The data were subsequently entered in a table of ARB regions. Its assessment made it possible to reveal common features among the given group of regions as well as their mutual relations. Finally, an interview with the ARB's chairwoman and national coordinator, Kateřina Čadilová (realised in July 2012), served us to interpret the results of our research.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Association of Regional Brands: Spatial attributes

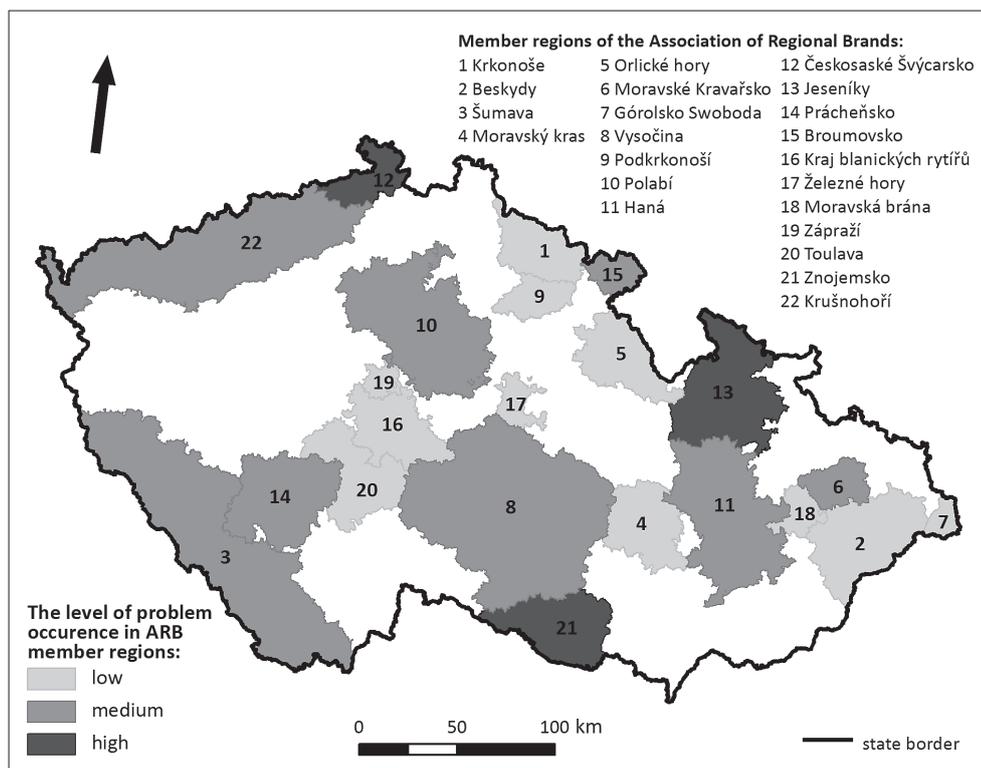
Although there are no significant differences among the examined ARB regions in terms of **geographic position** (see Figure 1), the remarkable differentiation of their **position in settlement and regional hierarchy**, i.e. their relations toward core areas, deserves attention. A vast majority of the regions are situated beyond regional capitals (of self-governing NUTS III regions) and encompass smaller cities. Three regions containing a regional capital are a case apart, just as the Zápraží region, which is located in the immediate hinterland of Prague, belonging to

the Prague metropolitan area (Ouředníček 2009). Nearly all of the regions lie on the borders of self-governing NUTS III regions, some of them even extend beyond these borders. Thus, ARB regions cannot be considered as metropolitan areas (Hampl, Gardavský, Kühnl 1987). By comparing several studies addressing periphery delimitation in Czechia from multiple perspectives (see e.g. Musil, Müller 2008; Hampl 2005) we were able to identify a certain degree of peripherality in nearly all examined regions even though the degree varies significantly. Peripheral regions clearly identified by several researchers include Jeseníky, Znojensko and Vysočina. By contrast, regions showing no signs of peripheral areas (e.g. Zápraží) are rather exceptional. Moreover, the regions studied are relatively strongly diversified in terms of their **area**. Most of them (approximately 2/3) have an area of no more than the size of an average district (i.e. approximately 1000 km<sup>2</sup>). In the Czech context they rank among smaller territories corresponding with the micro-regional level. Only a few regions may reach the size of a NUTS III region.

Given the low **population density** of ARB regions (density values above the national average are rare and never apply to the entire region) we can classify them as predominantly **rural areas** (Chromý et al. 2011). This constitutes one of the primary attributes of ARB regions. However, we can discern three types of rural areas according to the typology of rural space in Czechia (Perlín, Kučerová, Kučera 2010). They are as follows: (1) predominantly economically weak rural areas with a low potential for development (e.g. Toulava, Vysočina); (2) recreational rural areas that include non-development areas mostly used as second-home locations (e.g. Jeseníky, Šumava) and touristic areas with a high development potential (e.g. Krkonoše, Beskydy); (3) rural zones with a good infrastructure and a good potential for development (e.g. Zápraží, Moravská brána).

An important characteristic that might affect the development potential as well as the process of regional identity formation in the considered regions is the temporal **continuity of settlement**. More than one-half of the examined regions were affected by the post-war displacement of German inhabitants (Chromý, Kučera 2012; Kučera, Kučerová 2012; Šerý, Šimáček 2012) and their recent population can be described as *alochthon*. Similarly, regions affected by suburbanisation processes, e.g. Zápraží and Polabí, are relatively unstable. By contrast, Vysočina, Górolsko Swoboda, Beskydy, Moravský kras and Toulava are numbered among continuously settled regions with *autochthon* population.

Departing from the above mentioned characteristics three groups of ARB regions can be discerned according to the **extent of problems** they encounter (see Figure 2). Relatively problem-free regions (showing problems merely in one of the assessed areas) are the most numerous. More than one problematic sphere (e.g. alochthon population, economic weakness) were identified in roughly one-third of the examined regions. This



**Fig. 2** Level of problems of member regions of the Association of Regional Brands in 2013. Sources: ArcData Praha 2006; ARZ 2014.

second group is, however, quite heterogeneous. It encompassed the largest regions highly differentiated in terms of their problems which needn't necessarily concern the entire region (e.g. unemployment). The smallest group is composed of regions facing substantial problems in the majority of the monitored categories, yet there are only three of them (Českosaské Švýcarsko, Jeseníky, Znojensko). Aside from their low potential for development and a low population, high levels of unemployment and economic weakness rank among the identified disadvantages of ARB regions.

A significant factor which also affects the formation of regional identity and image is the **natural character** of a region (Chromý, Kučerová, Kučera 2009; Chromý, Semian, Kučera 2014). Approximately one half of ARB regions are situated in mountainous areas (given the country's relief this comports largely with border areas) and even the remainder of the regions offer particularly attractive natural features. Nearly all regions cover one of the protected natural areas or at least a part of it (Kučera, Kučerová-Kuldová, Chromý 2008). Thus, attractive natural and landscape conditions can be viewed as another common feature of ARB regions.

### 3.2 Association of Regional Brands: Region a regional identity formation

Partly based on the above mentioned assessment of the regions we attempt to analyse the process of constructing these regions and their regional identities. Firstly, we attempt to isolate the crucial element defining a given

region and expressing its uniqueness, i.e. the region's identity (Paasi 2003). As an easily graspable property such an element might form the basis for individual identification with a particular territory (Chromý 2009). In this sense, we were particularly observing natural features, landscapes and cultural-historical background (Chromý, Kučerová, Kučera 2009; Fitjar 2010; Paasi 2003). However, these elements cannot be simply drawn from the 'given characteristics' of the regions. They are much more dependent on the selection and way of using these characteristics by distinct actors. Thus, in order to get closer to real fundamentals of regional identity, these externally obtained types of definitions were confronted with an analysis of the regions' own presentation and the results of Spilková's and Fialová's research (2013) conducted among certified manufacturers.

The largest and most clearly identifiable group of ARB regions is defined on the basis of **significant natural units** (9 regions). These regions usually cover mountain complexes whose names they bear (e.g. Krkonoše, Železné hory). This proportion becomes yet more remarkable when the regions' own presentation is taken into consideration. Only three regions do not mention any specific landscape or nature in their presentation (ARZ 2014). A similar tendency, albeit less distinctive, was affirmed by the survey among certified producers (Spilková, Fialová 2013). Nearly 75% of them consider valuable natural and landscape features to be the main attributes of their region. The group of **regions with distinctive cultural character** (5 regions) is not as homogenous as the first one. The 'cultural element' (e.g. popular customs or a

specific dialect) is seldom the only one typical feature of the given region. **Prevailing agricultural character** (including agricultural landscape) is decisive for a single region (Polabí) and constitutes an important element in the case of two others. Delimiting regions on the basis of their **administrative borders** is equally exceptional; this group includes merely two regions, Vysočina – a self-governing region (NUTS III), and Znojensko – a district area.

By far the most interesting, and the most heterogeneous group, comprises four regions sharing one important feature – all of them are **newly delimited**. Whereas the previous groups point to regions that might have already acquired their territorial and symbolic shape, this last batch of regions seems to be at the very beginning of their individual institutionalisation processes. However, merely one of them, Toulava, lacks any other characteristic feature; this region has been delimited as a new touristic destination simultaneously with the introduction of its regional labelling scheme. The Zápraží region, which seems to follow a similar path, nonetheless builds upon its former activities (e.g. publishing a magazine of the same name). The region called Kraj blanických rytířů, too, carries on its former activities, using the name by which it has been known as a touristic destination. More important, though, is that it takes inspiration from the historical region 'Podblanicko' (Jeřábek, Vařeka, Woitsch 2009). The last region, Prácheňsko, on the contrary, bears the very name of the historical county (Burda, Jeleček 2009) even though it covers a much smaller area today.

An analysis of the key **stakeholders in the field of labelling schemes** allows us to look into another stage of the institutionalisation process: the formation of institutions. Within the group of stakeholders engaged in the creation of regional labelling schemes our research concentrates on those subjects that initiated the introduction of individual schemes, and on entities that presently coordinate it; both of them are crucial for the functioning of regional labelling systems (Frisvoll, Rye 2009). All of these entities are non-governmental and non-profit organisations. They can be divided into four clearly discernible groups. The largest group (1) consists of LAGs; the next group (2) includes subjects similar to regional development agencies. The third group (3) is composed of subjects focused on the implementation of environmental projects. The last and at the same time the least homogenous group (4) embraces civic associations either set up to manage a particular labelling scheme, or originally designed for another purpose.

A closer look on the structure of institutions shows that in terms of **scale level** new labels do not always have their origins at the micro-regional level. The initial impulse for the introduction of the regional labelling project came from the Regional Environmental Centre with a nationwide scope of activity, i.e. from above, even though their founders strived to engage as many local stakeholders as possible (Kaźmierski 2006). This implies

that the institutional shape of these regions might have been rather weak at the time of introducing the label. In many cases the labelling scheme was launched as one of the first projects of a LAG. This refers to the use of labelling schemes as a way of solidifying not only the territorial and symbolic shape of the LAG's region, but also its own position.

Departing from the above-presented analysis we can finally ascribe ARB members to the **types of regions in relation to region and regional identity formation** (Chromý, Janů 2003; Chromý, Kučerová, Kučera 2009; for the types and list of regions see Table 1), which helps us identify the links between labelling systems and the process of institutionalisation. Most ARB regions (9) rank among regions where the sense of regional identity got lost in the aftermath of post-war displacement of their German population (type 3c). The alochthon character of the population affects the activity of local inhabitants and regional stakeholders (Pileček, Jančák 2010). With the arrival of new inhabitants, however, the regions acquired a new identity, mostly linked to their natural characteristics and dominant landscapes (Šifta, Chromý 2014). This region type matches considerably with the naturally attractive mountainous areas. Respondents participating in Siwek's and Bogdová's survey (2007) even classified some of the mountain areas (e.g. Krkonošsko, Šumava, Krušnohoří) as ethnographic regions, i.e. regions with a distinctive identity. In this perspective, the above-mentioned regions fall into the category of regions re-settled after World War II which have developed a new sense of identity (type 4a).

The second largest group comprises seven 'new' regions many of which have been purpose-built (most often they coincide with areas where LAGs are active) and which continue their quest for identity (type 5). This group largely overlaps with the above mentioned 'newly delimited regions'. Such regions frequently try to build upon former territorial units, either completely extinct or almost forgotten; three such regions can be discerned within the set of ARB member regions: 'Prácheňsko' (which builds on a historical region), 'Kraj blanických rytířů' (revitalising the former Podblanicko region), and 'Polabí' (developing ancient farming traditions of the region). In terms of spatial aspects, the second group ranks among relatively small inland regions which had not suffer any population displacement.

A much smaller group includes four regions that have not yet attained the final phase of the institutionalisation process even though their conception in the minds of their inhabitants is relatively consolidated (type 2). The most explicit example is the region 'Haná, which figures among ethnographical regions most frequently evoked by respondents (Siwek, Bogdová 2007) and is depicted on the map of ethnographical regions (Jeřábek, Vařeka, Woitsch 2009).

The remaining two regions are specific, each of them belonging to a different category. Vysočina is an

administratively delimited region with a certain level of autonomy which entered the fourth stage of the institutionalisation process prior to accomplishing the earlier stages and building its regional identity (type 1). Zápraží is a suburban region with a high inflow of new residents that creates its new identity (type 4b).

#### 4. Discussion

Which regions have been introducing regional labelling schemes and what do they have in common? The analysis of the 22 labelling schemes grouped in the ARB revealed just a few common characteristics that could be described as typical for all of the examined regions. From the geographical perspective, rural character has been identified as a common feature. Thus, together with a naturally attractive character of the regions it can be concerned as an important factor determining the regions' engagement in regional labelling. Another common feature is a certain level of problem occurrence, even though most of the examined regions are not highly problematic. The difficulties we could identify do not represent an insurmountable obstacle to development. Getting involved in regional labelling schemes can thus be understood as an effort to overcome many of the problems.

While striving to define common characteristics of the regions in order to answer our first research question, our analysis revealed that the group of ARB labelling schemes can be better described as 'splitting into two halves'. These two smaller, relatively clearly defined groups of regions exhibit common features in more aspects. Simultaneously, this division helps us to answer our last research question: What is the place of a regional product label in the process of the region's institutionalisation?

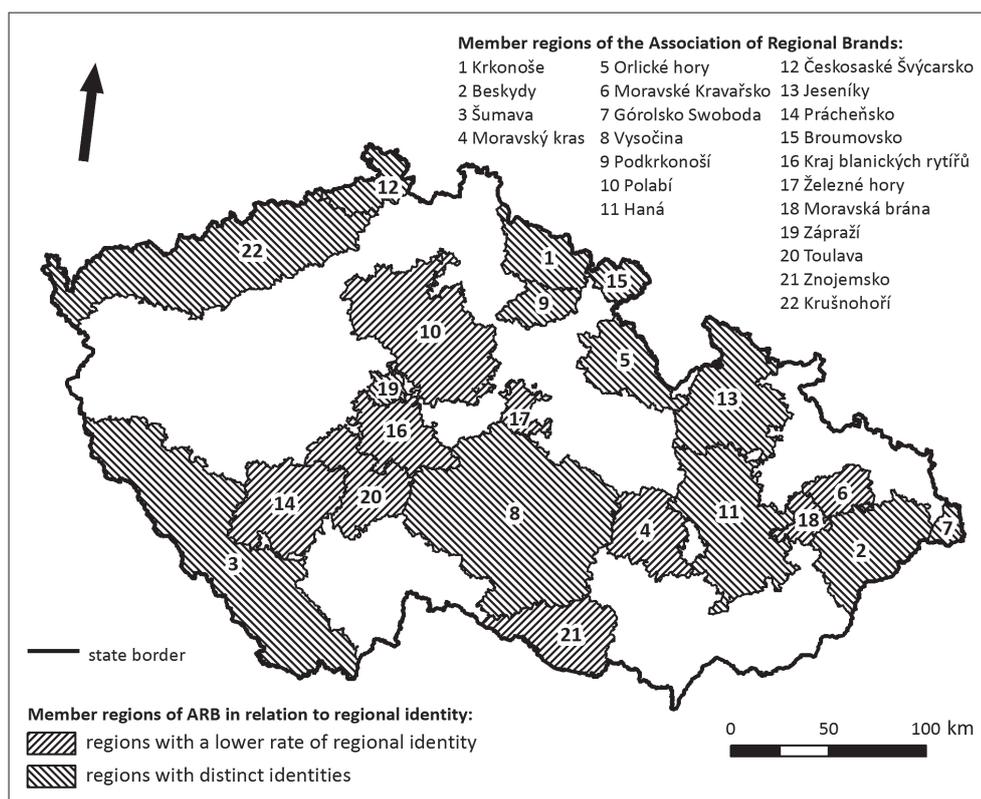
The first of these two groups encompasses mountainous borderlands of high natural value and attractive landscapes (Kučera, Kučerová 2012). These regions developed new identities after the arrival of new inhabitants into depopulated areas; their identities are thus based on natural characteristics. Together with several culturally delimited regions (11 in total) they constitute a **group of regions with relatively distinct identities** (see Figure 3). Considering the institutionalization process, these regions already exhibit a relatively clear territorial, symbolic, and in some cases even institutional shape. Hence, the labelling scheme is employed to stabilize these shapes and to invigorate the region's identity and its acknowledging. However, there are still substantial differences among the regions in this group.

The mountainous region **Šumava** situated along the border with Austria (see Figure 1) has got a vital regional identity based on its natural beauty and a landscape rich in 'dense woods and meadows interwoven with gills' (ARZ 2014). It is known as a serene touristic destination and acknowledged by the Czech population as a clearly defined region (Siwek, Bogdová 2007). However,

its traditions and cultural identity was partly lost due to the displacement of its German inhabitants after World War II. The introduction of a labelling scheme is aimed at restoring these lost, particularly handcraft traditions, and at supporting regional consciousness of local inhabitants that seems to be weaker than 'outward' acknowledgement. Similarly, this new institution buttresses the institutional power of the region that is divided into two administrative regions. **Podkrkonoší** is an example of a 'culturally defined region'. However, its identity based predominantly on specific architecture, traditions and agricultural production seems to be acknowledged, in contrary to Šumava, more by its own inhabitants than people outside the region. Thus, the initiators of the labelling scheme attempt at 'strengthening the region's image' (ARZ 2010, p. 1). In order to enhance the outlines of the region's symbolic shape they focus on the tradition of fruit-growing (which matches with the original function of the labelling scheme; ARZ 2014). Simultaneously, the labelling scheme is seen as a tool to preserve regional traditions, traditional production and handcrafts by encouraging local producers.

The second group is formed by smaller regions located in inland Czechia. Most of them lie in stagnating rural areas and their population can be described as autochthon. LAGs are the predominant key stakeholders in these regions which continue to develop their identity, often building on the image of older regions while striving to deepen regional consciousness among resident and non-resident populations. Together with the remaining regions (11 in total) they represent areas **with a lower rate of regional identity** (see Figure 3). From the institutionalisation point of view these regions are rather at the beginning of their institutionalisation process. Frequently, labelling rules are used as a tool for delimitating a clearly bordered region; through the label itself as well as the certified 'typical' products symbols are established or reproduced; the role of the labelling scheme coordinator is to induce the establishment of a new institution or to secure the position of a recently launched one. These newly formed regions, i.e. the key actors pushing the institutionalization process of these regions, though, very often have to deal with older identities. According to the chosen strategy, labelling schemes serve as tools either for reviving these identities (see Prácheňsko, Kraj blanických rytířů and Polabí mentioned above), or for their suppression.

The region **Toulava** represents a case of an entirely new region which is at the very beginning of its institutionalisation process. Toulava is situated in a peripheral area on the border between two regions. The original idea of establishing a new region might have helped the area get acknowledged by the new law concerning touristic destinations and, among other things, receive appreciable subsidies (ARZ 2014). Since the labelling scheme for this particular region is being created simultaneously, it takes part in all of the institutionalisation stages. It helps



**Fig. 3** Member regions of the Association of Regional Brands in relation to regional identity.

Sources: ArcData Praha 2006; ARZ 2014.

outline the region (the area where products are certified), reproduces the chosen symbol of the region (a 'heart' in Toulava's case) and consolidates the position of the leading institution (LAG) which initiated the region's creation. To avoid the problem of older identities still present in the territory the initiators opted to suppress them. An example of this is the very name of the region (and of the related labelling scheme) that arose from a public competition and has no connotations regarding older names established in the area.

The interconnection between regional product labelling and the institutionalisation process is clearly evident in the case of all of the examined regions. Regional product labelling schemes are engaged in the initial phases of institutionalisation. They play a part in the definition of the regions' spatial form, in the acquisition of their symbolic shape and its reproduction, as well as in establishing and consolidating regional institutions. Additionally, labelling schemes are active in enhancing the embeddedness of a particular region in the minds of people living both within and outside the region and participate in the supreme stage of the institutionalisation process. It is obvious that labelling schemes can also be launched in regions that either lack regional identity or have difficulty finding it. In these cases, the 'institutionalising' role of labelling schemes is particularly visible. However, their importance ought not to be overestimated. Labelling schemes are just one of a whole array of sociospatial processes contributing to the construction of regions, serving as tools that miscellaneous actors use to construct regions.

## 5. Concluding remarks

Our research affirmed a close relationship between regional product labelling and the formation of regions, and hence the formation of their identities. At the micro-regional level, labelling schemes take a direct part in forming a new region, being involved in all phases of its institutionalisation including the development of regional consciousness and image. As such regional product labels can become suitable tools for supporting the emerging relation of local inhabitants to their own region on the one hand, and for creating a positive image externally on the other hand. This can further contribute toward regional development, even though the importance of regional product labelling schemes should not be overemphasised in this sense. Moreover, it is necessary to take into account the negative effects of excessively emphasised regional identity.

This article embodies an 'outward' perspective on regions, assessing ARB member regions on the basis of data mostly acquired through an extensive research. In any research to follow it is therefore necessary to enhance the analysis of regions with a perspective 'from the inside', namely by examining the standpoints of key stakeholders directly involved in both implementation and operation of labelling schemes in individual regions (particularly with regard to their motivations and exercise of power), as well as the perspectives of engaged producers and targeted consumers. Their experience could help us cast more light on the background and the interdependencies revealed by the above-presented research of

micro-regional labelling schemes. Broadly speaking, it could also deepen general knowledge of regions, the process of their forming, the role of power in this process, and the meanings that different stakeholders in the field of regional formation attribute to their own region.

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## RESUMÉ

### Značení regionálních produktů jako součást procesu formování regionu. Příklad Česka

V Česku se v posledních letech objevila řada systémů značení regionálních produktů, které garantují místní/regionální původ produktu a zároveň jeho kvalitu. Značení regionálních produktů lze chápat jako součást tzv. alternativních potravinových sítí, s nimiž sdílí ideu „znovu-propojení“ prostorově i sociálně oddělené výroby a spotřeby. Zároveň je lze vnímat jako nové pojetí využití spojení mezi produktem, resp. kvalitou produktu a místem jeho původu. Článek zasazuje téma značení regionálních produktů do širšího kontextu formování regionu a regionální identity. Opírá se přitom o koncept institucionalizace regionu Anssi Paasiho. Cílem článku je odhalit faktory podstatné pro zavedení systému značení v daném regionu a osvětlit vztah mezi značením regionálních produktů a institucionalizací regionu. A to prostřednictvím analýzy 22 systémů značení, resp. regionů sdružených v Asociaci regionálních značek (ARZ). Hledá odpověď na otázku, které regiony zavádějí systémy značení,

co mají tyto regiony společného z geografického hlediska a jaká je jejich pozice v procesu institucionalizace. Údaje o regionech jsou získány analýzou elektronických zdrojů i tištěných publikací ARZ a následně konfrontovány s odbornou literaturou a tematickými mapami. U každého regionu jsou sledovány prostorové charakteristiky a charakteristiky určující pozici v procesu institucionalizace.

Z výzkumu 22 systémů značení je zřejmé, že mají jen několik základních společných rysů. Z geografického hlediska je společným znakem, a tedy zároveň faktorem zapojení regionů do systémů značení, jejich venkovský charakter. Typická je určitá problémovost; nejde však o silně problémové regiony a identifikované potíže nepředstavují nepřekonatelnou bariéru pro rozvoj. S jistou mírou opatrnosti lze konstatovat, že ve sledovaných regionech existují vnitřní zdroje rozvoje, tj. aktéři schopní participovat v sítích. Typické prvky, jimiž se regiony vymezují a které představují podstatu jejich identity, jsou nejčastěji přírodní prvky a krajina.

Soubor zkoumaných regionů lze rozdělit na dvě skupiny, které vykazují mnohem více společných znaků. První z nich je skupina pohraničních horských regionů. Patří sem přírodně hodnotné oblasti, ležící při státní hranici, s identitou získanou po příchodu nových obyvatel do vysídlených oblastí a založenou na přírodních znacích regionu; sem lze zařadit například Šumavu. Spolu s několika kulturně vymezenými regiony, např. Podkrkonoší, tvoří skupinu 11 regionů s poměrně zřetelnou identitou, které se nacházejí v pokročilé fázi procesu utváření regionu. Druhá skupina se skládá z menších regionů, ležících ve vnitrozemí Česka, stabilních

z hlediska vývoje osídlení a spadajících do nerozvojových venkovských oblastí. Klíčovými aktéry jsou zde místní akční skupiny. Zčásti se snaží navazovat na starší regiony, ale v zásadě teprve hledají svou identitu a usilují o zakotvení regionu ve vědomí obyvatel; typickým příkladem je region Toulava. Spolu se zbývajícími regiony (celkem 11) se jedná o oblasti, které stojí teprve na počátku procesu institucionalizace.

Propojení s procesem formování regionu a regionální identity je tedy zřejmé u všech zkoumaných systémů značení, jde však o různé fáze tohoto procesu. Systémy se zapojují do počátečních fází institucionalizace, kdy pomáhají formovat prostorový a symbolický tvar regionu (např. vymezením území působnosti značky a výběrem jména a znaku pro region). Zároveň ale mohou přispívat i k upevnování pozice regionálních institucí (zavedení značení posiluje význam instituce) a zejména zakotvení regionu ve vědomí obyvatel ve vrcholné fázi institucionalizace. To odpovídá nastíněnému rozdělení souboru regionů na dvě skupiny. Výzkum potvrdil úzký vztah mezi značením regionálních produktů a formováním regionu, tedy i regionální identity. Systémy značení na mikroregionální úrovni jsou často přímo součástí utváření nového regionu. Mohou se tak stát i vhodným nástrojem jednak pro podporu formování vztahu obyvatel k vlastnímu regionu a jednak pro utváření pozitivního image regionu navenek. To může dále přispět k rozvoji regionu, ačkoli význam značení regionálních produktů v tomto smyslu nelze přeceňovat a je třeba zohlednit též negativní efekty přílišného důrazu na regionální identitu.

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