

Chapter 12

Branding a Cluster of Regions: The Eastern Poland Macro-region Case Study

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Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and provisionally evaluate the Programme of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland, implemented within the framework of the EU funds in the territory of a macro-region of five regions in Eastern Poland in 2009–2015. The Programme of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland is the first programme to present in a systematic and coherent way the economic potential of the entire area of five regions among the least developed in Poland. Its main goal is to increase interest in the Eastern Poland new brand and its economic offer and subsequently to boost the rate of its social and economic development. In this chapter, the authors will make an attempt to evaluate the validity of the entire idea of joint economic promotion of regions which compete with each other in many aspects but at the same time present similar offers and have limited resources to promote themselves separately. The authors also try to provide an answer to the question if the midterm synergy effect has been achieved after the programme's implementation.

Keywords Branding • Cluster of regions • The Eastern Poland macro-region

Interregional Brands: The Specificity and Challenges

It is accepted in literature and practice that branding of places is more complex and difficult than that of traditional products or services (Hankinson 2001; Blichfeldt 2005; Kavatzis 2005; Zenker 2011). Cross- or interregional branding might pose even greater challenges at the stage of planning and implementation alike.

When the process covers several units, place brand identity (defined here as the internal view on places) which serves as a platform for building up place brands

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(including also the external view on the place), is much more difficult to define. The sources of place brand identity (in our definition: a unique combination of the functional attributes and symbolic values) are identified in the place's actual resources and features (including the organic image). It is the "content" of the place product that affects a brand's possible growth as it identifies the functional and emotional benefits for the brand to satisfy. The features of a place, especially the intangible ones, are the basis for determining the values represented by the brand and brand personality which explains the nature of interaction between a brand and its users. Like any brand, an interregional brand should communicate uniqueness and importance to the consumer. In the case of place brands, its cultural heritage, the characteristics of the local population and tradition are of special importance as they become the brand's specific emotional distinguishing mark. Each region might differ due to its underlying culture. While certain regions may be culturally alike, one should bear in mind that delimitation of regions consists in a regions' diversity, also with respect to its culture and the subsequent diversity of values, social identity and so on. Therefore, establishment of a shared identity is hindered especially in situations when none existed before or in which identities are contested (Burnett and Danson 2004) highlighting identity to be the precondition for branding regions (Kaufmann and Durst 2008). As the process of collecting shared features and values for various regions under a single umbrella poses a special challenge, the identity of an interregional brand is not always the basis for communication-related activities. It is frequently replaced with a shared goal to achieve in a specific area (e.g. attracting investors to the regions) for which adequate, shared differentiating features are sought.

Different interests of particular regions and different types of stakeholders make coordination of the emergence of a shared brand and subsequently management thereof an extremely difficult task. While these challenges are part of any place brand management, in the case of regions, the issue is even more complex. On the one hand, regions compete with each other. On the other hand, they share interests and goals and they are mutually related. In this sense, interregional cooperation is reminiscent of a cluster where creating a network of relations and preference for shared goals over particular ones determines the growth of a place brand. According to Keating (2001), there is a widespread agreement that all relevant stakeholders of a region are required to build networks, although their single objectives are different. As such, interregional brand requires a higher level of integration of all relevant stakeholders since they all represent the region (Kirchgeorg 2005). This integration should also last long as the brand is built and its success is measured over a long time.

The complexity and multilayered factors indicate the challenges when creating a common, interregional brand and managing its implementation and maintenance. These challenges are demonstrated in the case of the Eastern Poland Macro-region in which it has been decided to integrate branding-related activities, especially in marketing communication.

Fig. 12.1 The Eastern Poland Macro-region
(Source: www.polskawchodnia.eu)



The Case of the Eastern Poland Macro-region

The Eastern Poland Macro-region consists of five autonomous regions: Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Podlaskie, Lubelskie, Świętokrzyskie and Podkarpackie (Fig. 12.1). It covers an area of 99,039 km² (31.7 % of Poland's area and 2.3 of the total area of the EU) and is inhabited by 8,145,903 people (21.3 % of Poland's population and 1.6 % of the EU population) (STAT 2010). The Eastern Poland regions border directly with Russia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Slovakia and represent the eastern border of the European Union and the Schengen Area.

Eastern Poland is considered the poorest region in Poland, with a very low (at times, the lowest in the EU 28) GDP per capita, with an economy dominated by agriculture.

The region has been relatively underdeveloped since the Middle Ages; the process of modernisation (in particular urbanisation, technological changes in agriculture and industrialisation, all of which came to Poland from the West) did not reach the eastern border of the country. Thus the backwardness of this region is deeply rooted and consequently very difficult to overcome in a short-term perspective. This is an example of what is referred to as "long persistence" with reference to the material, social and institutional structures (Gorzela 2007, p. 103).

Another of the Macro-region's idiosyncrasies is the fact that it has not gone a complete phase of industrialisation and urbanisation. The largest numbers of the region's economically active residents are employed in agriculture. This happens to be several times less productive than agriculture in other (Gorzela 2007, p. 103) Polish regions.

The regions of Eastern Poland are further characterised by a low investment rate and a small inflow of foreign investment. This should be attributed chiefly to an underdeveloped economic and social infrastructure and poor market absorption, while the regional authorities do not try hard enough to attract investors and promote exports.

Poland's accession to the European Union has opened up a new perspective for the development of Eastern Poland, mainly due to the incoming aid funds. During the financial perspective for 2007–2013, one of the Operational Programmes (the Development of Eastern Poland) was solely dedicated to this Macro-region (2.3 billion EUR was allocated to the implementation of this programme). This programme provided the basis for many initiatives that have contributed to the development and economic activation of the Macro-region, including branding and promotional activities.

Strategic Promotional Activities Initiated by Eastern Poland

One of the activities funded by the EU under the aforementioned Operational Programme, *Development of Eastern Poland*, is a project called the *Programme for Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland* (Programme), which is being implemented by the Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency. Eighty-six million PLN (approx. 20.5 mill euro) has been allocated to the project for the period of 2009–2015.

It is the first programme which shows the economic potential of Eastern Poland's five regions in a systematic and coherent manner. Its main objective is to increase the interest in Macro-region's economic offer and thus to increase the rate of the socio-economic development of Eastern Poland in a sustainable way.

The programme's priorities include (Polska Wschodnia 2012):

- Increasing the inflow of direct foreign investment to the Macro-region
- Encouraging Polish companies to invest in Eastern Poland
- Increasing the export of products and services from Eastern Poland
- Development of business tourism in the Macro-region

The programme is implemented through long-term and consistent communication activities aimed at a systematic increase of economic competitiveness and attractiveness of the Macro-region, that is, of its companies, products, services, capital, cities and locations.

The starting point for the programme's implementation was to develop a strategic document setting out the promotion's goals and direction called Marketing Communication Strategy for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland for the years 2009–2015 (Strategy).

This document is of fundamental importance to the process of building the inter-regional brand of Eastern Poland, to attracting the interest of targeted communities and promoting the region's economic development. This is because the document

identifies the characteristic and distinguishing features of the Eastern Poland Macro-region which serve as the basis for creating its desired image and defining its identity in an effort to shape it into one consistent brand, in accordance with the accepted vision of its development. In addition, this document clearly and precisely defines the goals and direction of marketing activities. It specifies the target groups as well as the information and promotion tools to effectively communicate with such groups. These activities employed in compliance with the Strategy prevent confusion and ensure complete coordination of efforts. Finally, the document allows for effective budget management, that is, planning funds for promotional activities and avoiding high and inefficient spending.

An Analysis of the Prospects and Image of Eastern Poland

At the beginning of the Strategy's development, a precise analysis was carried out pertaining to all attributes and resources enjoyed by Eastern Poland, using both quantitative and qualitative research. The main research issues were related to (Marketing ex-ante evaluation as part of the Program of Promotion of Eastern Poland 2010):

- The perception of Eastern Poland by potential investors
- Differences in the perception of the five separate regions of the Eastern Poland Macro-region
- The evaluation of Eastern Poland as an economic partner
- Associations related to Eastern Poland in business circles
- An evaluation of the investment ambience in the Macro-region
- Opinions about the most important barriers to invest in the Macro-region
- Opinions about the most important barriers to exports
- Estimated declarative level of investment interest in Eastern Poland
- Estimated declarative level of trade interest in Eastern Poland markets
- Opinions regarding channels/tools of Eastern Poland promotion

As mentioned above, the research presented the baseline situation of the Eastern Poland regions in terms of their economic conditions, investment potentials and verification of their images. In addition, the study revealed the strengths of the area which may serve as the basis for creating marketing messages. These strengths include high quality of human capital (education, academic centres), cheap workforce, unique natural value, a clean and unpolluted environment, a potential of qualified tourism, the cultural heritage, proximity to Eastern markets, multiple investment areas and attractiveness of the special economic zones (Marketing ex-ante evaluation as part of the Program of Promotion of Eastern Poland 2010). The study also included an analysis of various promotional strategies devised by the five regions to ensure that the final communication activities that are related to the entire area are consistent and based on the synergy effect.

The research offered an added value in the form of establishing a benchmark for further evaluation studies carried out when implementing the programme and after its completion in order to analyse the effects of promotion, introduce possible changes and evaluate the final results. The image of Eastern Poland has also been verified. The study has clearly shown that many negative stereotypes and stigma are attached to the name of Eastern Poland. Due to its geographical location, the Macro-region has been referred to by entrepreneurs as unsophisticated and rustic, thus offering poor economic potential. These perceptions reflect a stereotypical image of the Macro-region as an area stricken by poverty, “B Poland”, backward in economic terms. In their replies, the respondents resorted to the following expressions: “an area of unmet expectations”, “missed opportunities”, “neglected by the previous system” (Marketing ex-ante evaluation as part of the Program of Promotion of Eastern Poland 2010).

The main conclusion was that one consistent economic, interregional brand of Eastern Poland should be created to serve future needs, and combined promotional efforts should be made for the benefit of the five regions. Therefore, it was recommended to undertake the following activities (Marketing ex-ante evaluation as part of the Program of Promotion of Eastern Poland 2010):

- Spreading the name of Eastern Poland as a market interregional brand
- Creating awareness of the Eastern Poland Macro-region as an innovative form of interregional cooperation
- Creating the Macro-region’s image as an area of increasing competitiveness and high economic, tourist and social potential, creating favourable conditions for investment
- Changing the image of the Macro-region and its inhabitants from unqualified and uneducated agricultural workers to well-qualified, talented workforce
- Adopting a dual strategy to promote the Macro-region, aimed at highlighting the tourist attractions and economic potential of the ecologically friendly sectors of the economy
- Interregional lobbying at the national and EU levels to raise aid funds for development

It is worth noting that in the context of branding, the project did not include defining the brand of the Macro-region in a systematic way. Brand identity and the related elements (values, personality) have not been directly expressed; however, the brand was positioned to make its position clear and distinctive. According to brand coordinators, at time of crisis profit is crucial to businesses and as such it should be discussed with investors. Their curiosity should be aroused and they should receive a message about new opportunities availing themselves somewhere in Poland. Therefore, the campaign’s chief message should be “invest because it pays off”. It was imperative to position Eastern Poland as a reminder that Poland is a part of the European Union, while her eastern regions, subsidised by EU funds, are the best investment sites. This message was reflected in the campaign’s claim: “New Investment Sites in the European Union”. On the one hand, the word “new” was used

to encourage the audience to learn about the offer and, on the other hand, to show that since these are “new” investment sites, they necessitate a bigger contribution, effort and commitment. However, they will be translated into genuine profits. The intention was to present Eastern Poland as a region facing a good time in terms of investment while audacious and determined investors may be big winners there (Sadowski 2013).

With reference to the aforementioned recommendations, the policy adopted as part of the Strategy involves a number of communication tools tailored to the overriding goals and recipients of the promotional activities.

The main focus of the project was to indicate the promotional tools to be implemented first as well as to identify the target groups at which the media messages would be directed. Business communities and opinion leaders were indicated as the main recipients, including in particular: potential foreign investors and foreign investors operating in Poland; domestic companies with a developed network of regional agencies; international opinion leaders (including economists, experts in foreign investment and in marketing of locations); foreign chambers of commerce; organisations and business associations; bilateral chambers of commerce; business leaders of Polish communities; the international and national public opinion; potential importers; local, national and foreign media; managements; decision-makers and CEOs of international corporations and institutions; international consulting companies; and business travellers.

A decision was made to develop an interregional visual identification system for the Macro-region, conduct a domestic and international media campaign, develop a website devoted to Eastern Poland and organise seminars, conferences and economic forums, trade fairs, exhibitions and more. While putting forward specific solutions, extensive efforts have been made to ensure their consistency and thus effectiveness. The strategic projects have been spread out over time in such a manner as to ensure the most effective implementation of the adopted goals and promotion of Eastern Poland within the planned promotional period 2009–2015 (Marketing Communication Strategy for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland for the years 2009–2015 2010, p. 3).

Implementation of the Marketing Communication Strategy for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland

The overriding goal of the *Marketing Communication Strategy for Eastern Poland*, as pointed out above, is to develop a consistent image of Eastern Poland as a place of high economic and investment potential. Creation of such an image consists in, among other things, creating the Macro-region’s distinctive identity by means of visual communication, hence the need for creating and implementing a complete visual identity system for Eastern Poland. The system would serve the purpose of increasing recognition of the Macro-region by associating its specific features with

Fig. 12.2 The logo of Eastern Poland (Source: The Book: Visual Identification System for Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland, Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency, Warsaw 2010)



the logo's adopted graphics and colours (Fig. 12.2). The task was challenging and involved identification of features shared by the five regions in question.

The Eastern Poland logo consists of geometric elements circumscribed to a circle. Each of the elements represents an arrow pointing to one of the five regions, unique parts of Eastern Poland. The varied colours highlight each element's diversity and uniqueness. The colour red, used for the name and the largest arrow, forms one consistent and clear symbol of going eastward, towards a place of great social, cultural and investment potential. The circle representing the logo base symbolises the long-lasting unity and cooperation between the five regions, which jointly develop and achieve their goals. The overall structure of the logo reveals the true nature of the eastern part of Poland, a region of diverse and rich culture, immutable values and, most of all, unlimited investment opportunities. The keynote – *Macroregion, Macrofuture* – is an essential part of the entire logo, revealing new and wide-ranging perspectives for the present and future, as well as current and prospective investors. This well-worded slogan conveys the concept of a modern region that is ideal for bold and creative people with passion (The Book Visual Identification System for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland 2010, p. 4).

Building the interregional brand of Eastern Poland as a region of high economic and investment potential requires implementation of different, integrated marketing activities involving a variety of promotional tools to ensure that specific audiences are reached with a good effect. This is because some promotional tools allow for direct communication with the audience. The same mechanism is at play in personal selling or public relations when two-way exchange of information takes place. The remaining tools enable interaction in an indirect manner by means of one-way communication, as exemplified by advertising and sales promotion. The main advantage of integrated marketing communication is that it allows generating a transparent, consistent and eye-catching media message about Eastern Poland and its territorial offer.

The promotional activities carried out to date include development of multiple information and advertising materials as well as publications, organisation of many conferences, seminars, trade and investment economic missions and, last but not least, participation in trade fairs, exhibitions and study visits. Moreover, a dedicated special economic website (www.polskawschodnia.eu) was set up.

The next step was launching an international marketing media campaign for Eastern Poland under the banner “Why Eastern Poland” with a budget of about 2.5 million euro. The campaign was primarily targeted at the heads of multinational companies, opinion leaders and international consulting firms providing services to foreign investors. The campaign’s main purpose was to encourage entrepreneurs to start up businesses in Eastern Poland and to increase the inflow of direct foreign investment. The campaign was intended to promote exports of products and services and to develop business tourism.

In the campaign, a child, a father-in-law and a psychoanalyst ask potential investors the following questions: *Why didn’t you invest in Eastern Poland?* A question posed in this manner shows that it is not too late to reverse the situation (Fig. 12.3). The campaign relied on advertising in newspapers, television and the Internet as well as an outdoor campaign at airports in Paris, Frankfurt, Dubai, New York and London. The commercials were placed in Polish and foreign media, including CNN, “The Economist” and “Financial Times”.

The Impact of the Promotional Activities for Eastern Poland

While the implementation of the Programme of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland is only halfway through, the effects of its implementation are already noticeable.

The results of a midterm evaluation research indicated that the promotional activities have resulted primarily in increased investors’ awareness and their changed perception of the Macro-region, as the percentage of respondents who associate Eastern Poland with the economic Macro-region started to grow (Mid-term evaluation for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland 2012). The number of queries about the Eastern Poland Macro-region increased by 20 % barely 6 months after the campaign’s launch. The queries came from the Asian, Arab and European markets (Sadowski 2013). Furthermore, a slight increase (from 27 to 29 %) was noted in the percentage of people who perceive Eastern Poland as an attractive place to do business. However, a significant increase (from 4 to 14 %) was noted in the percentage of people who consider the Macro-region an attractive location for investment (Mid-term evaluation for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland 2012).

The great majority of the surveyed entrepreneurs evaluated the activities promoting Eastern Poland as positive, as much as 90 % of them responded that they planned to participate in the subsequent promotional events under the programme. Eighty-four percent of the examined companies said that they established business contacts during events organised as part of the programme. Among these events, the most effective were trade fairs (81 % participants established business contacts) and field missions (77 % participants) (Mid-term evaluation for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland 2012).

Fig. 12.3 Campaign press posters “Why didn’t you invest in Eastern Poland?” (Source: (a) DEMO Effective Launching archives, *The Economist*, December 22nd–January 4th 2013, (b) DEMO Effective Launching archives, *The Economist*, January 5th–11th 2013, (c) DEMO Effective Launching archives *The Economist*, December 1st–7th 2012)



In conclusion, as of halfway through the programme, 80 exhibition and promotion events have been organised, attended by 1,133 businesses and 338 representatives of regional institutions. The vast majority of events were trade fairs and trade missions which offered opportunities to conclude 100 contracts and negotiate subsequent agreements (Mid-term evaluation for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland 2012).

In the evaluation report, the companies declared in total (Mid-term evaluation for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland 2012):

- Conclusion of 264 contracts for a total amount of 78, 888,250.32 PLN (approx. 19 mill euro)
- Investment in new equipment for the implementation of new contracts amounting to PLN 12, 326,081.65 (approx. 3 mill euro)
- Investment in construction of a new factory: 10,800,000.00 PLN (approx. 2.5 mill euro)
- Investment in the development of jobs such as construction of new lines or production facilities amounting to 6,332,400.00 PLN (approx. 1.5 mill euro)
- Employment of 136 new employees, of which 133 are locals from the Eastern Poland Macro-region
- Average export growth of 54 %
- Average sales growth of 17 %
- Average production growth of 14 %
- Average time of negotiated contracts: 4.22 months

By reference to the evaluation of the campaign itself (it was not included in the evaluation report as it had been in progress when the report was being drawn) in the media, “Why Eastern Poland” presents itself as the first Polish campaign so clearly acknowledged and appreciated outside Poland. The campaign’s success can be attributed to the following facts:

- The campaign has made a name for itself and has been covered in Polish and foreign media alike. *Adweek*, the American industry magazine, recognised the series of commercials advertising Eastern Poland as the best commercial of the week (Nud 2013). On the other hand, *The Atlantic* advises to invest in Eastern Poland “because it is bound to catch up after years of neglect” (O’Brien 2013). On top of that, an article placed on Slate.com referring to the campaign bears a telling title *The Greatest Economic Development Poster of All Time* (Yglesias 2013).
- Owing to its original nature and visibility in the official channels, the campaign has had an alternative mode of circulation. Namely, it has stimulated a plethora of posts in the Internet. They seemed abundant enough to interest the renowned *Business Insider*. What is more intriguing, rather than join the critics, the service decided that “the kid could be right” and the reproachful question in the advertising may be the right question to ask, chiefly because of Poland’s growth potential, her aptitude for combating the crisis better than the neighbouring countries and the fact that the *Bloomberg Markets Magazine* recognised Poland as one of the best emerging markets with 21 % GDP growth projected from 2013 to 2017 (Lubin 2013).

Conclusions and Managerial Implications

The implementation of the Programme of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland has not been an easy task at any stage. The five regions, different in terms of their endogenous potential and area characteristics, competing with one another for investors, operate in the market under a common interregional brand of Eastern Poland. It seems obvious that, because of the area's difficult socio-economic situation, no initiatives to build a shared interregional brand would have been carried out, and all five regions would have focused solely on their autonomic promotional and image-related goals and activities. However, the need for collective effort has been recognised in order to achieve the synergy effect of marketing activities carried out for the benefit of Eastern Poland and to increase the rate of the region's economic growth.

Seemingly, an attempt at combining different regions into one is questionable due to the contradictory interests of respective regions. Considering this idea in the light of possible gains and losses in relation to the midterm evaluation research, it should be noted that although the current profits may not be very high, a lot of pro-development initiatives have been undertaken whose importance cannot be diminished.

Gradually, the image of Eastern Poland is beginning to improve and the stereotypical perception of the region as backward and poor give way to its perception as a place of huge potential and unlimited economic opportunities, boasting of many natural values and unpolluted environment. Research results suggest a slight increase (from 27 to 29 %) in the number of people perceiving Eastern Poland as an attractive business venue and a distinct increase (from 4 to 14 %) in the number of people who regard the Macro-region a definitely attractive investment site. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents regarded the Macro-region attractive (Mid-term evaluation for the Program of Economic Promotion of Eastern Poland 2012).

Eastern Poland, struggling to overcome its economic backwardness and marginalisation in the national regional policy and, until recently, the European Union's policy, must be open to all kinds of initiatives, sometimes even risky ones, to stimulate its economic development. The shared economic, interregional brand of Eastern Poland is a good example of such an initiative.

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