



Original Article

Place branding, embeddedness and endogenous rural development: Four European cases

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ABSTRACT This article deals with place branding on the regional scale, in the rural context of food and tourism networks in Europe. Place branding is linked to the concepts of endogenous rural development, territory and embeddedness, by analysing how the valorisation of specific rural assets takes shape. The overall objective is to provide more understanding of how the branding of rural regions can contribute to endogenous rural development. Four European regional rural cases on place branding are explored, two from France, one from Ireland and one from Germany. Described are pre-conditions for branding, brand management, cooperation forms and development outcomes. The analysis is based on interviews as primary data and various secondary data. The cases all involve multiple stakeholders, and integrate the capacities and needs of local people. The findings show different levels of societal, structural and territorial embeddedness, and that higher degrees of

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embeddedness contribute to a successful branding process. The results indicate that place branding can support endogenous rural development and benefits from the adoption of common values and joint reflections on brand extensions, although there remains a need for more consistent impact measurement methods.

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INTRODUCTION

Rural regions are facing ecological, social and economic vulnerabilities and competition, embedded in wider processes of globalisation. Globalisation is the dominant force reshaping rural economies and societies at the start of the 21st century, which has a transformative impact on rural regions (MacDonagh *et al*, 2015). For many rural regions, an obvious choice is to compete with other regions for global mobile capital and labour, for example via ‘smart specialization’ (McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2015). These strategies are targeted towards gaining some form of economic advantage over other regions (Bristow, 2009). This has been criticised as a competitiveness discourse, littered with the language of ‘winners and losers’, which lacks sensitivity to critical issues of context and place and the interdependencies between places (Bristow, 2010).

On the other hand, and as a counterforce to these global logics, new strategies for rural regions are being developed, which are more place-based, such as the construction of identities or images around new rural goods and services (Horlings and Marsden, 2014). These strategies can be seen in the context of the ‘New Rural Paradigm’ (OECD, 2006) challenging regions to valorise their local assets and exploit hitherto unused resources. The attention for the unique qualities and potential of areas is also mirrored in other policy-related documents such as OECD reports on regional development (OECD, 2009, 2011), the European cohesion policy (Barca, 2009) and the EU territorial Agenda 2020 (EU, 2011).

In this article, the focus is on the valorisation of regional rural assets via place branding. Here,

place branding is not considered in a narrow sense as merely the promotion or the marketing of a place, but – referring to Pedersen (2004) – as the construction of territorial ideas, signs and practices and devising new ways for a local society to identify itself. This includes the valorisation of unique qualities of rural regions which can be tangible (natural, agro-climatic or cultural, patrimonial resources), intangible (skills, know-how, traditional recipes, lifestyle) or temporal (historical, e.g. family tradition linked to generations) (Rastoin, 2012).

Place branding in research has paid attention to different scales, e.g. nation branding (Anholt, 2002; Dinnie, 2008; Fan, 2010), city branding (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005; Kalandides *et al*, 2011) and, more recently, regional branding, showing how regions can distinguish themselves from others based on their unique qualities, cultural story-lines and the image they communicate (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010; Kavaratzis *et al*, 2015; Oliveira, 2015a, b, c; Zenker and Jacobsen, 2015). Place branding strategies have also become increasingly part of the regional public agenda (Pedersen, 2004; Pasquinelli, 2010).

With regard to specifically the branding of rural regions, it is argued here that despite interesting research in for example the North of Portugal (Oliveira, 2016a, b), the River Minho estuary in the borderland of Portugal and Spain (García *et al*, 2013), the Shetland Islands (Horlings and Kanemasu, 2015), Catalonia (Eugenio-Vela and Barniol-Carcasona, 2015) and the Netherlands (Horlings, 2012), this topic is still under-researched in the field of place branding (Vuorinen and Vos, 2013).



Therefore, in this article, four European regional rural cases on place branding are explored and analysed which aim to valorise their food and tourism assets, in order to understand how the process of rural place branding takes shape in the context of embeddedness and neo-endogenous rural development. Empirically, attention is paid to the pre-conditions for branding, brand management, forms of cooperation and development outcomes, and to the links between the branding of rural regions and localised food and tourism networks. This has become relevant as the system of food provisioning has become increasingly 'place-less', disconnected from the particular socio-cultural and ecological settings of places, and creating various sustainability problems which require a 're-embedding' of the food provisioning system (Wiskerke, 2009). A regional strategy of re-orientation on territorial capital via the development of culturally embedded food products which reflect the 'story of the region' and offer experiences to citizens can support tourism (Horlings and Marsden, 2014).

Theoretically, as only a few studies consider place branding from a rural sociological perspective (Rausch, 2008; Horlings, 2012; García *et al.*, 2013), the overall aim is to link place branding to the concepts endogenous development, territory and embeddedness, in order to provide more understanding of how place branding of rural regions can contribute to rural development.

Four cases were selected, two from France (*Sud de France* and *Produit en Bretagne*), one from Ireland (*A taste of Cork*) and one from Germany (*Echt Schwarzwald*). The research questions are:

- What can be learned about the process and working mechanisms of place branding and the valorisation of food and tourism assets in these four rural regions?
- How are the analysed place brands societally, structurally and territorially embedded?
- What are the outcomes in terms of endogenous rural development?

It should be mentioned that the notion of territory is not unproblematic (Paasi, 1995; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 2006; Elden,

2013). Territory in Anglo-Saxon literature often refers to territorial settlements and administrative or organisationally bounded areas. Others have referred to notions of territorialisation as a process which constructs places including the making of borders (Raffestin, 1986; Raffestin and Butler, 2012; Horlings *et al.*, 2016). Here we apply the French definition of territory as a delimited area which results from a social construction of private and public actors who search for solving a common problem while sharing a common identity (Pecqueur, 2001).

The article is structured as follows. First, neo-endogenous rural development will be defined. Then, the analytical framework on embeddedness will be outlined and the methodology described. Finally, results will be presented in terms of a comparison and analysis of the relations between regional rural brands, embeddedness and endogenous rural development.

ENDOGENOUS RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PLACE BRANDING

The valorisation of rural assets is central in endogenous rural development (ERD). In rural sociology, (neo-)endogenous development has been defined as the utilisation and celebration of local and regional characteristics as the basis of its economic activity and livelihood (Oostindie *et al.*, 2008). The emphasis in most sociological approaches to ERD is in understanding the (natural, human and cultural) characteristics of a place that makes it special and/or distinctive (different from other regions), and how these may become the focus of sustainable economic activity (Vanclay, 2011). Endogenous development is based on local resources, control and a re-distribution of economic gains (Oostindie *et al.*, 2008). The focus is on a reorientation of activities within the local territory to maximise the retention of benefits by valorising and exploiting local resources, and on the needs, capacities and perspectives of local peoples (Dessein, 2016).

Endogenous development does not imply that external or global factors are not important

influential factors, rather, these external factors are transformed into a self-constructed model, creating autonomous capacity (Oostindie *et al*, 2008). Extra-local factors are recognised and regarded as essential, while retaining the belief in the potential of local areas to shape their future (Ray, 2006). The term neo-endogenous development has been introduced to emphasise the art of balancing exogenous (global) forces and external resources and endogenous resources and local control – thus reducing the vulnerability and exchangeability of rural areas (Ray, 2006). (Neo-) endogenous development implies a co-production between humans and their environment, expressed in practices (Van der Ploeg and Marsden, 2008), and refers to the interaction of the social and the natural, society and environment, or man and living nature.

Endogenous development can contribute to a re-embedding and ‘re-grounding’ of rural practices in territories. This re-grounding takes place at the level where endogeneity, that is “*the degree to which a regional economy is grounded on regionally available (and regionally controlled) resources*” (Van der Ploeg *et al*, 2008: 8), can be managed and controlled. Specific (re-)localised networks may be part of endogenous rural development strategies.

In this article, the focus is on place branding for endogenous rural development, which is built on the resources and values of a rural territory, its name and (historical) reputation, to enable the promotion and sales of local food products and tourism services through strategic branding, joint marketing and quality management. Despite the increasing number of place branding practices, there is no widely accepted scientific definition, due to its cross- and multidisciplinary characteristics (Hankinson, 2010). Authors have for example defined place branding from a geographic perspective (Ashworth, 2009) as well as from a marketing perspective (Govers and Go, 2009). Here, place branding is understood as the application of a brand *strategy*, supporting the economic, social and cultural development of places, more specifically rural regions. In contrast to the country-of-origin (COO) literature (for an overview cf. Dinnie, 2004; Papadopoulos and

Heslop, 2014; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999), which analyses the ‘made-in’ effect (buy-domestic) on the consumers’ perception and/or buying behaviour and has often been applied to agricultural products due to their intrinsic origin value, place branding incorporates a strategic marketing and brand management approach. Its main instrument is a collective umbrella brand, applying the same brand name, identity and logo for different product or service categories (Iversen and Hem, 2008; Horlings, 2012). With regard to the food sector, the approach incorporates the French concept of *terroir*, which links local actors, typical characteristics of agricultural products (quality, taste) and physical assets of a territory like geography, geology and climate (Bérard and Marchenay, 2004; Casabianca *et al*, 2005). Local food products reflecting urban consumers’ ideas of the countryside are considered as particularly interesting for developing a place brand (Tellström *et al*, 2006).

A challenge of place branding is the creation of a strong common brand identity, which incorporates the core values of the labelled territory and fits to the different sectors as well as different product and service categories (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Stakeholders’ involvement is an integral part of the branding process, since stakeholders co-construct, give meaning to, and share identities of a place (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015; García *et al*, 2013). A challenge is to co-create an ‘inner brand’ or joint storyline with stakeholders in order to add value to local products through innovative ways of promoting, and to support sustainable perspectives for rural regions (Horlings, 2012; Horlings and Marsden, 2014).

Other challenges described in literature are: how to find an appropriate marketing-mix (Braun and Zenker, 2010), to keep a coherence of quality within the portfolio of products and services to avoid damaging the brand image (Wernerfelt, 1988; Iversen and Hem, 2008) and to create a strong governance structure, such as a public-private partnership (Rainisto, 2003); and finally, the challenge to orchestrate the cooperation between different actors (Therkelsen and Halkier, 2004).



In the cases of regional branding presented in this article, we take into account how these challenges can be faced by developing rural regional brands. As place branding capitalises on local assets, strategic domains and place-specific values and calls for specific governance and multi-stakeholder cooperation models, a link to the socio-economic concept of embeddedness will be made. The concept of embeddedness in its three dimensions allows us to analyse the specific (territorial, network and societal) context in which place branding occurs.

BRANDING AND EMBEDDEDNESS

There are different meanings of embeddedness; therefore, it has been characterised as a ‘confusingly polyvalent concept’ (Jones, 2008). In the original sense, described by Polanyi (1944) in ‘The Great Transformation’, the economy is related to a social, cultural and institutional context (societal embeddedness). The author emphasises the historical pathways of economic actors and gives embedding an evolutionary character. Polanyi argues that the great transformation to a modern and capitalist market economy is inextricably linked to social and political changes (Castles *et al.*, 2011). While Polanyi does not connect the concept directly to social networks, a subsequent seminal work on embeddedness by Granovetter (1985) describes relations between individuals or firms as embedded in actual social networks (structural embeddedness) (Granovetter, 1985). Both ideas of Polanyi and Granovetter disapprove neoclassical economic thoughts which under-socialise economic behaviour and postulate a dominance of pure market forces.

A third dimension of embeddedness, which emerged in line with the new regionalism from the beginning of the 1990s, is linked to a specific geographical or spatial aspect: territorial embeddedness. It has been defined as “*the extent to which an actor is anchored in particular territories or places*” (Hess, 2004:177) and asks about the relevance of the spatial dimension of the process of embedding. In the context of food and agriculture, embeddedness emphasises

connectivity between a food product or food system to a place in a territorial, cultural or geographic sense. These understandings are constructed, negotiated and reinforced (Hinrichs, 2003) in the social conditions of a particular place.

Figure 1, below, is an adapted version from Hess (2004). At the interface of each two embeddedness dimensions – as indicated by the arrows – various socio-economic concepts are located that investigate either social-structural (New Economic Sociology, Organisation and Business Studies), structural-territorial (Economic Geography, New Regionalism) or social-territorial (Business Systems) linkages. As a whole, the figure illustrates the three interrelated dimensions of embeddedness, which, combined, form the spatial (territorial) and temporal (historical) context of socio-economic activity (composition and structure of networks) and allow considering developments over time in the configuration of localised networks. Figure 1 serves as analytical framework to investigate possible links between embeddedness and regional branding.

Analysing regional brands with regard to the theory of embeddedness seems adequate for several reasons. First, branding geographies intersect economic (products and services in markets), social (collective action), historical-cultural (cultural heritage, traditional know-how, values) and political (public policy and governance) worlds (Pike, 2011). Second, place branding is based on relations and interactions between different stakeholders (Hankinson, 2004), including chain (farmers, processors, retailers, consumers) and non-chain actors (governmental institutions, intermediary organisations). It shows the vertical and horizontal interrelations in a local business system, including cooperation and competition (co-opetition; Pasquinelli, 2013) in local clusters and networks (Kasabov and Sundaram, 2013; Uzzi, 1996; Halinen and Törnroos, 1998). In this context, the question of the role of public policy interventions is also important, as the state may influence the formal and informal institutional environment in which firms operate (Helmsing and Vellema, 2012). Place branding can be a strategic spatial

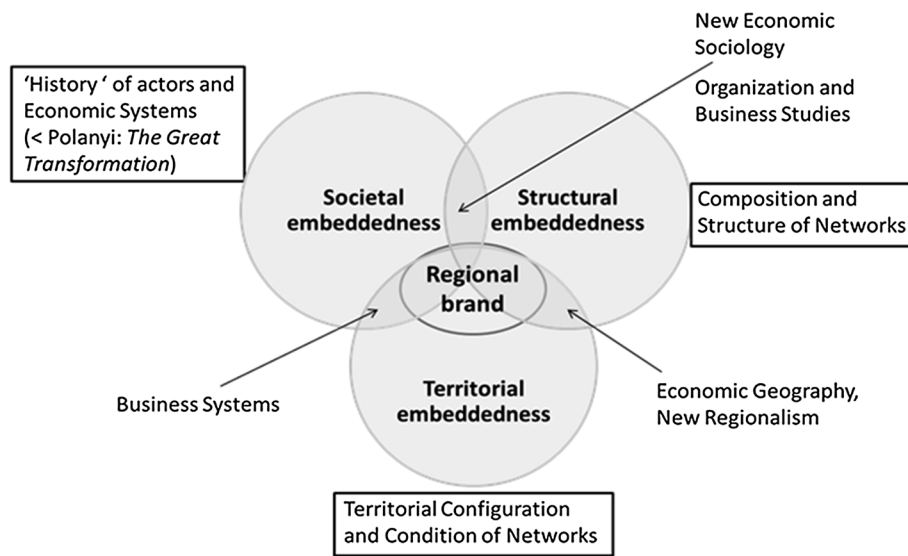


Figure 1: Regional brand linked to embeddedness. Source: Hess (2004), adapted by the authors.

planning instrument to improve the economic and social structure of places and reshape responses to contemporary challenges faced by places (Oliveira, 2015a). Third, place branding also shows the ‘dialectical tension between embedding and dis-embedding forces’ (Sonnino, 2007), i.e. activating local resources for going global (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009). In our view, analysing a series of rural regional brands and their diverse territorial contexts allows one to demonstrate how place branding strategies and cooperation processes are connected to local as well as trans-local consumer markets.

The analysis of the cases is based on branding and marketing aspects (objectives and strategy, brand identity and extension, distribution, product quality), the concept of embeddedness (pre-conditions, socio-economic, institutional and territorial context, cooperation and governance structure), and development outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

In the past few years, an increasing number of regional branding strategies have been applied in Europe. Four cases of rural regional branding were selected, two from France (*Sud de France* and

Produit en Bretagne), one from Ireland (*A taste of West Cork*) and one from Germany (*Echt Schwarzwald*). With the term region, we refer here to a sub-national territory, not necessarily an administrative area.

The first reason for this choice was that France has a long tradition and a lot of experience with the valorisation and commercialisation of local food products. The INAO (*Institut National de l’Origine et de la Qualité*) is the oldest institute for legal food protection in Europe and has been the basis for the elaboration of the European legal framework for geographical indications.¹ France has the highest sales value of products with geographical indications², and French retailers such as Carrefour and Leclerc have, for more than a decade, successfully promoted own brands for local food such as *Reflets de France* and *Nos régions ont du talent* (Beylier et al, 2012). Thus, France strongly capitalises on local food products and food culture to attract national and international tourists.³ This is also reflected by the number of regional brands building on local food products in France.⁴

The second reason was that the cases from Bretagne (*Produit en Bretagne*; launched in 1993) and Ireland (*A taste of West Cork*; since 1998) are two of the oldest rural regional branding



initiatives in Europe, already in a mature phase, and often cited as successful examples⁵; therefore, they were considered as good references by the authors. *Sud de France* (2006) and *Echt Schwarzwald* (2008) are more recent⁶ and have not been researched before. The empirical analysis of these cases revealed valuable information on the conditions for place branding.

The methodology used was qualitative in nature, which allows describing and interpreting new or under-researched issues, theory development and policy evaluation and advice (Bitsch, 2005). Various secondary data, such as policy documents, press and academic articles as well as data from internet sites, were collected for all the cases in order to trace the branding processes, their history and development. Process tracing in social science allows studying decision making and causal mechanisms as well as revealing information about evolutions (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). The origin and management of the brands were explored, events in time, related problems, and the value added by the brands for the place and its stakeholders, including network effects. In addition, primary data in the form of twelve semi-structured interviews with public and private key stakeholders were collected, but only for the two more recent rural regional branding cases (*Sud de France*: eight interviews and *Echt Schwarzwald*: four interviews); the two older brands being already well researched as isolated cases, but not in a comparative way. All interviews were done face-to-face and lasted between half an hour and one and a half hour. Notes were taken during the interviews and reviewed and completed immediately after. Questions with public stakeholders and brand managers concerned the strategic goals, the governance, the financing and the marketing-mix as well as benefits and critical issues of the brands. Brand members such as food enterprises or tourism providers were asked about their motivation for the brand adherence, the kind of cooperation and perceived benefits. The interview data were analysed according to the thematic method, as proposed by Berg (2009). First, a basic coding was done in order to identify

overall themes, followed by an interpretation of the more specific patterns.

The purpose of the comparative case analysis was to develop a deeper understanding and to get more generic insights into the process and working mechanisms of rural regional brands, of how public-private interactions around them are formed and evolve; to explore whether and how territorial and societal embeddedness generate novel partnerships and synergies (structural embedding), and how regional brands can support rural development.

INTRODUCING FOUR EUROPEAN CASES OF RURAL REGIONAL BRANDING

In this section, the four different European cases of rural regional branding are presented in a chronologic order, to show how local food and tourism are marketed via place branding (Table 1).

Produit en Bretagne (PeB)

Produit en Bretagne is one of the oldest regional brands for food in Europe.⁷ It has evolved from a difficult economic context. In 1993–1994, Brittany – situated in the North-West of France – suffered from a heavy crisis concerning one of its most important sectors, fishery. This went together with the general tendencies of de-industrialisation and de-localisation, giving the habitants a feeling of being marginalised.⁸ As a consequence of this socio-economic context, four entrepreneurs from the Finistère department took the initiative to develop a regional brand in order to keep and create local employment, to enable people living in this territory and to contribute to the regional economic development (hence territorial embeddedness, as discussed later). The collective strategy was based on such ethical principles as solidarity and sustainability, inviting consumers to buy responsible, to buy ‘Breton’.⁹ Such a purchasing incentive was possible as regional identity and solidarity are strongly rooted in Brittany’s culture, due to the specific history of the region (societal and territorial embeddedness).¹⁰ In the 2010 report *L’Etat social de la*

Table 1: Review of the 4 cases

	<i>Produit en Bretagne</i>	<i>A taste of West Cork</i>	<i>Sud de France</i>	<i>Echt Schwarzwald</i>
Year of creation	1993	1998	2006	2008
Governance structure; main stakeholders	<i>Produit en Bretagne</i> is a private association of about 370 local enterprises from various sectors (44 per cent from agri-food)	' <i>Fuchsia Brands Ltd.</i> ' incorporates the West Cork LEADER Co-Operative, the West Cork Food Producers Association, West Cork Tourism, Cork/Kerry Tourism	<i>La Région Languedoc-Roussillon</i> is the owner of the brand; management support is given by Sud de France Development. Other stakeholders are: food producers and processors, tourism service providers	<i>Echt Schwarzwald e.V.</i> is an association of local farmers and butchers. Other stakeholders are: local communities and the Naturpark Schwarzwald Mitte/Nord
Geographical scale	The region Bretagne in the North-West of France	The West Cork region situated in the County Cork, South-West of Ireland	The region Languedoc-Roussillon in the South of France	The Black Forest region, a large forested mountain range in the state of Baden-Württemberg in southwestern Germany
Objectives	Maintain and create local employment, support sustainable development of Bretagne	Stimulate local development; promote West Cork by developing a branded identity through collective action	Increase the awareness of the region and its assets as well as facilitate wine export	Preserve the traditional, cultural landscape by adding value to high quality regional food products in order to keep farming attractive and valuable
Main targets	Residents and (inter-) national consumers	Tourists	International consumers and residents	Local consumers and tourists

Source: Authors.

France, realised by the *Observatoire du dialogue et de l'intelligence sociale* (ODIS, 2010), Brittany was ranking as the second French region regarding social ties linked to economic performance.

The brand PeB soon became institutionalised via an association with the same name, which started with thirteen food enterprises but now has 370 members from many different business sectors (44 per cent from the agri-food sector, but also hotels, restaurants, financial and logistics services, cultural and creative sectors...).¹¹ The association constitutes the largest economic network in the region and is still growing. Together with the regional chamber of commerce and industry and the higher school of commerce *Bretagne Brest*, it also successfully created, in 2006, a business incubator, *Incubateur Produit en Bretagne* (Merieau, 2011), which stimulates and supports innovative projects and the creation of new local enterprises (structural embeddedness). It is particularly interesting that the PeB network was the first to be set up in France by enterprises, not from a

public or governmental side. However, the geographical extension from Finistère to other departments within the region has created tensions between brand members, who see their differential advantage threatened with an increasing number of (competing) brand members (Stervinou et al, 2006).

In 2013, about 3900 different products carry the logo PeB (Baldos, 2013). While these were in the beginning mainly food products, the brand has over time been extended to other product categories (such as typical regional textiles, crafts, books or discs etc.) and various services. If enterprises want to sell products under the brand name, they must be members of the association, respect its values and ethics and pay an annual contribution fee. They are evaluated via audits by an independent agency, *Bureau Veritas*. Furthermore, each product is separately checked with regard to its origin and quality before it can be labelled. Concerning distribution, there is a strong interrelation between the association and the



regional as well as national retail groups, but also alternative channels are used as bars or restaurants, special boutiques, e-commerce and also collective restaurants are foreseen.

The outcomes of the brand have been measured differently. Foutrel (2012) explored the meaning of the brand for different key stakeholders and concluded that the brand dimensions are going much further than a simple 'made-in' effect, but are mainly centred on three interrelated concepts: employment, solidarity and the brand itself. In 2010, a consumer study was done by the market research institute TMO whose results showed that 97 per cent of the consumers within the region and 49 per cent in Ile-de-France (Paris) know the brand and that they identify it with its values and commitment for quality, regional employment, economic development as well as environmental respect.¹² Although there are no exact figures, the brand is supposed to have significantly contributed to the creation and maintenance of local jobs (Baldos, 2013). Moreover, the regional cooperation and network efficiency is considered as a key success of the brand. The capacity to cooperate is in general regarded as the main reason for a higher independency of Bretagne, compared to other French regions: "*Brittany is far less dependent from foreign countries than other French regions, and this strong autonomy results from an important density of its regional groups*".¹³

A taste of West Cork (ToWC)

The Irish case of regional branding has been documented in detail (O'Reilly, 2001; Woods and Deegan, 2006; Crowley, 2004; Dempsey and O'Reilly, 2008; Messely *et al*, 2009). In 1994, West Cork, a rural agricultural region in the South-West of Ireland, made a bid for financial support from the European LEADER II programme with a positive outcome. Accordingly, the West Cork Leader Co-operative (WCLC) analysed regional strengths and weaknesses (EU LEADER European Observatory, 1999). It became clear that the area on the one hand had valuable assets such as beautiful and diverse landscapes, friendly hospitable people and food

specialties, but on the other hand, there were no cooperative marketing initiatives and only a fragmented services sector (lack of territorial embeddedness).

Therefore, the WCLC decided to promote the region by creating a strong umbrella brand for high quality local food products and tourism services. The main objectives of this strategy were to develop a branded identity and to stimulate collective action by bringing together key stakeholders into a single organisational structure. The *Fuchsia Brands Ltd.* was set up, incorporating the WCLC, West Cork Tourism, Cork/Kerry Tourism and West Cork Food Producers Association (WCFPA). This organisation was responsible for the brand management and provided infrastructure to network activities of various public agencies and private firms.¹⁴ Operations of the WCLC were later been taken over by *West Cork Development Partnership*.¹⁵

In 1998, the brand was launched commercially for food products (*A taste of West Cork*) and tourism services (*West Cork, a place apart*), and was later extended to crafts. It was set up to attract tourists on a regional, national and international scale. The logo carries the typical fuchsia flower, which has a strong association with the region and is easily recognisable (McCutcheon, online document). Promotion is done via trade fairs, tourism brochures, media, the publication of a guide showing the best and most typical West Cork products, in-store tasting etc. The brand is based on high quality and safety, guaranteed through internationally recognised *Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points* norms and reinforced by *Fuchsia Brands Ltd.* training programmes for product quality, customer care, marketing, food hygiene and safety (O'Reilly, 2001). Since 2003, a special Fuchsia Retail Affiliate Scheme has been developed, which includes a listing of Fuchsia branded products in qualified, labelled regional retail stores.

The West Cork Fuchsia brand produced a number of positive outcomes for regional development (O'Reilly, 2001; Dempsey and O'Reilly, 2008; Ryan *et al*, 2004). The results are considered to be related to the European Leader+ programme initiated by the West Cork Leader

Co-operative. Among these outcomes, perceived benefits are increased knowledge of brand members (through information and training), a high consumer awareness and a positive image of the place, improved market access and cooperation. In addition, the impact studies confirm the brands contribution to the regional economy in terms of total direct value creation, employment rate and multiplier effects on jobs and expenditure within the region. Furthermore, the brand has created a strong territory-based network with inter-sectoral synergies between the food and tourism sector, such as multifunctional agriculture (structural embeddedness). In his case study, O'Reilly (2001) shows that the institutional support and cultural environment have been key factors for the emergence and identity of the network, as they provide a basis for solidary economic behaviour among enterprises (societal embeddedness). Another study of Messely *et al* (2009) confirms that people in West Cork have a strong sense of belonging to the region and a strong regional identity.

Sud de France (SdF)¹⁶

The region Languedoc-Roussillon is situated in the South of France and bordered by the Pyrenees Mountains and the Mediterranean Sea; its capital is Montpellier. Geography and culture are deeply contrasting due to different historical origins; the economy is still at the bottom of all French metropolitan regions, with a high percentage of unemployment (13.9 per cent in 2013).¹⁷ Tourism and agriculture are economic key sectors – Languedoc-Roussillon is the world's largest wine producing region (territorial embeddedness). Compared to Provence or Côte d'Azur, the region has remained for a long time relatively unknown, despite its beautiful landscapes, cultural heritage (such as the Pont du Gard or the city of Carcassonne), and hundreds of kilometres of coast with sandy beaches.

The brand *Sud de France* was launched in 2006 due to the influence of the former president of the regional government, Georges Frêche (2004–2010), who wanted to bring the region out of its seclusion, activating resources for

internationalisation and creating a common identity (1, brand manager of *Sud de France Development*, 14 June 2013; societal embeddedness). He initiated the brand together with a new institution for wine professionals, *Inter Sud de France*, regrouping all different winemakers of the area for the first time (structural embeddedness): “the brand has grouped different organisations within the wine sector which did not communicate before” (2, director of a wine organisation, 22 January 2013). Even though SdF was firstly intended to be a common export label for wine producers, which were in crisis due to a worldwide increasing competition, it was extended to other food companies and tourism service providers in 2008.¹⁸

The marketing strategy has, since its beginning, a strong focus on promotion, with enormous advertisement campaigns financed by the regional government as brand owner – a fact which has been critically regarded.¹⁹ The promoted image builds upon the values of the Mediterranean art of living, as expression of a convivial lifestyle, with authentic, diversified, healthy food and wine. These values are shared by member enterprises: “The brand corresponds exactly to our own firm policy” (3, marketing director of a food enterprise, 3 April 2013). Using the brand is free of charge and entrance criteria are defined in a catalogue of specifications, which until 2014 has not been subject to strict audits. However, problems concerning food provenance and quality were leading to dissatisfaction among brand members: “A problem is the enormous increase of members, which not always have typical products of the South or good quality” (4, director of a cooperative, 14 February 2013). Therefore, product specifications were redefined in 2014 and external quality controls were introduced (5, brand manager of *Sud de France Development*, 14 June 2013). Since then, the number of brand members and labelled products from the agrifood sector has considerably decreased (approximately by half). In 2015, *Sud de France* counted 4163 registered agricultural and food products from 1332 member enterprises and 1100 labelled quality tourism providers.²⁰ The brand related activities are coordinated by *Sud de France Development*, which defines



collective strategies for distribution, export and business development: “*Sud de France Development gives an enormous support for export*” (6, wine grower, 24 April 2013). This organisation is financed by the regional government and supported by other public institutions. It plays a strategic role as interface between producers and buyers, principally the big retail groups. In addition, it cooperates with the international *Maisons de la Région Languedoc-Roussillon*, which give commercial and logistic support to exporting enterprises in key markets (embedding – dis-embedding).

Regarding the outcomes of SdF on rural regional development the interviews revealed two major brand values: “*An economic one for enterprises, as communication and commercialization tool and an institutional one that gives value to the region as a whole, by increasing the awareness and creating a common strong identity. This includes an extension of the brand to other sectors*” (7, member of the regional council, 7 February 2013). For tourism, the brand helps to attract visitors: “*The value of the brand is enormous, seen the number of visitors per year due to the promotion*” (8, manager of a tourist organisation, 4 April 2013). An indicator for the attractiveness of the brand was also the constantly growing number of brand members. However, this increase was most probably partly due to the fact that access to public support was only possible if one becomes a brand adherent. There is not yet a formal network among brand adherents: “*There is not yet a cluster or a network of enterprises around the brand, but it is in development, and there are several initiatives, like trade fairs, meetings etc.*” (9, project manager of the regional industrial food enterprise organisation, 25 January 2013; structural embeddedness). Particularly, a stronger cooperation between wine, food and tourism is desired by brand members: “*The region has an enormous potential for oenotourism, e.g. wine routes or wine cellars with tasting wine and food products for consumers*” (10, director of a wine organisation, 22 January 2013).

Echt Schwarzwald (ES)

The brand *Echt Schwarzwald* was initiated in 2006 by the *Naturpark Schwarzwald Mitte/Nord*, which is

situated in the South-West of Germany and belongs to the Bundesland Baden-Württemberg. Covering an area of 3750 km², this natural park is the largest one in Germany. The typical Black Forest (Schwarzwald) landscape is diversified, with deep valleys, rivers, grassland and pastures with animals, and dark mixed forest with the typical white fir. A key feature, furthermore, is the alternation between natural and cultivated landscape. However, the use of agricultural grazing areas has decreased in a sense that “*the image of traditional cultural landscape, which is very important for the tourist attraction, is threatened*” (11, project coordinator of *Ecozept*, the supporting consultancy, 7 August 2013). This is due to difficult cultivation conditions (e.g. steep hill farming) combined with low incomes for farmers, who are searching for other job opportunities (territorial embeddedness).

In the light of a growing demand among farmers for forestation of unprofitable grassland, the Natural Park, together with the central Ortenau community, started to think about developing a collective strategy to preserve the traditional landscape. The idea was to develop a marketing concept for high quality beef products. This niche strategy should create added value (via price premium) for local farmers to keep grassland farming attractive and profitable (Koch, 2008). In 2007, the association *Echt Schwarzwald e.V.* was founded as a steering organisation, coordinating both production and commercialisation.²¹ This association now has about 100 members, principally farmers, but also butchers, restaurants, local communities and the two natural parks Schwarzwald Mitte/Nord and Südschwarzwald. With the support of the consulting firm *Ecozept* the brand was launched in 2008 and was rapidly extended to other typical local food products. Only extensive cooperation and a public-private partnership made it possible to create and expand the regional marketing project (Koch, 2008). On the other hand, “*the motivation among farmers was initially low, as they were convinced to already have their own valuable products*” (12, chief executive of *Echt Schwarzwald e.V.*, 5 August 2013). Additionally, “*the communication between the different partners was difficult, because of strong discrepancies*

between consultancy, administrative and an entrepreneurial culture and way of thinking” (13, project coordinator of *Ecozept*, 7 August 2013). According to the project coordinator, another problem was that brand management and financing had to be assigned from the public to the private sector after four years (societal embeddedness). This is why at present, all brand activities are handled by a single chief executive of *Echt Schwarzwald e.V.*, which is not without its financial and managerial risks.

The basket of goods currently comprises mainly beef and beef products, but also lamb, typical fruit schnapps and liquor, honey, milk and finally also pork products, such as the famous *Schwarzwälder Schinken* (Protected Geographical Indication since 2010). The brand is related to local tourism in the natural parks, but the promotion is done with a different logo. ES stands for healthy, qualitative and authentic food, guaranteed through high quality requirements and audits for producers. The commercialisation is effected by short distribution channels, preferring local sales at farms, farmer markets, butchers or restaurants, but also by an online shop.

The economic impact of the brand for farmers' incomes is “significant, with on average a 10–12 per cent price premium” (14, chief executive of *ES e.V.*, 5 August 2013) and a 50 per cent sales increase from 2009 to 2010.²² However, one interviewee who joined the initiative as it corresponded to his own beliefs, criticised the fact that the brand does not yet clearly shows its values: “the brand does not bring off the ecological value and animal welfare, but focuses too much on economic goals” (15, restaurant owner, 5 August 2013). Furthermore, “cooperation among brand participants is important and exists” (16, chief executive of *ES e.V.*, 5 August 2013), but can be attributed to normal business exchanges rather than directly to the brand (structural embeddedness). According to the project coordinator of *Ecozept*, “at present, the brand has not yet led to increased solidarity or a common identity among members, but it has the potential to create a strong local network” (17, project coordinator of *Ecozept*, 7 August 2013). In particular, a stronger cooperation with the tourism sector is pursued: “Such a cooperation would be ideal as

tourism is extremely well developed here” (18, chief executive of *ES e.V.*, 5 August 2013).

ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF THE CASES

In order to answer the three research questions, the cases will first be compared with regard to the main branding and marketing aspects. Then, the findings will be analysed along the three dimensions of embeddedness, and finally, the outcomes of the brands on endogenous rural development will be assessed.

The *objectives* of the four cases show similarities: place branding supports regional economic actors (employment, competitiveness, incomes) and local sustainable development (common identity, quality of life, preservation of cultural and natural heritage). All cases follow a niche strategy, based on specific cultural and/or qualitative differentiation and exploiting unique territorial assets, as landscapes, local products, or people's traditions and know-how. Consequently, the brand identities are strongly rooted in the territories and their values, highlighting geographic origins and characteristics. In the case of SdF it is notable that this origin does not correspond to the political, administrative term of the area, Languedoc-Roussillon, but rather profits from positive connotations related to French food and the South, in general associated with Côte d'Azur and Provence.

In the four cases *brand extensions* have been performed, i.e. the original portfolio has been enlarged by adding other products or services from the territory to the brand. This seems not to be negative for the brand images, if these newly entering products or services are in congruence with existing brand values and are included in a transparent way. However, in two cases, an influx of new brand members has been considered as a threat by interviewed participants, because of either inconsistency in product quality (SdF) or increased level of internal competition (PeB).

Distribution channels are primarily operating at the local level, which may correspond to the predominant consumer's idea that local food is linked to short distribution channels. An



exception is SdF, which required a global strategy in order to find new markets for its abundant wine production. Since 2011, Brittany has also started to export selected products under the sub-brand *Bretagne Excellence*.

By comparing the cases, it can be observed that strategic as well as operational marketing aspects are important. The development of a strong brand identity and related values are essential, incorporating a territorial unique selling proposition. Here, a future challenge will be to differentiate and highlight the uniqueness and distinctiveness of a place among an increasing number of competing place brands. Furthermore, a well-balanced choice of products and services is important, with possible brand extensions already in mind, whereby originality and coherence of quality are imperative in order to avoid damage to the brand's image.

A key research question was till what extent place brands can be linked to the three dimensions of embeddedness.

First, regarding *societal embeddedness*, the analysis confirms that each brand has its origin in a specific socio-cultural, natural, institutional or economic context. All initiatives started as reactions to a concrete threat – and not an opportunity: an economic (loss of competitiveness, sales decreases due to globalisation: PdB, SdF), social (marginalisation, rural depopulation, brain drain: ToWC), or natural (loss of cultural landscape: ES) threat. In three cases, brands were initiated by institutional actors, as a top-down strategy involving different public and private stakeholders. This public role in development is illustrative for ToWC and SdF; the first was financed by the EU Leader+ programme and the second was created by a local politician using public subsidies. However, PeB was developed in a bottom-up way and is uniquely governed by private entrepreneurs, leading to a strong network. This was feasible within the specific socio-cultural conditions of Brittany, i.e. a territory with a strong regional identity and solidarity among residents. ES is a particular case, as the brand was supported by public institutions from the start, but after a relatively short time, the responsibility has been handed over to the private

sector; a fact which has been critically observed by the project coordinator of the supporting consultancy.

Territorial embeddedness deals with the spatial aspect of the embedding process and the anchorage of actors in a particular place. An illustrative example is the creation and management of the brand PeB by local entrepreneurs intended to develop their own territory. In a similar way, the founding father of SdF, Georges Frêche, has for a long time advocated his region and its territorial capital, being a political actor with strong economic interests – as highlighted by one of the brand managers. Furthermore, the spatial aspect of embeddedness becomes evident considering the specific territorial determinants functioning as building blocks for the brands. This means e.g. the traditional landscape in the Black Forest, the 'friendly character of people in Cork', the Mediterranean atmosphere in the Languedoc-Roussillon and the strong historical independency features of Brittany.

The third analytical dimension is *structural embeddedness*. Considering the cooperation and network aspects, this is a kind of emerging outcome preceded by territorial and societal embedding. All cases have shown a need for a leading organisation as orchestrator to ensure various stakeholders' involvement (*Echt Schwarzwald e.V.*, *Association PeB*, *Fuchsia Brands Ltd.*, *SdF Development*). The cooperation forms are horizontal and transversal; they all include chain and non-chain actors, mainly within regional business systems. In all cases, branding results at least in some common activities such as seminars, workshops, trade fairs, platforms as well as in business agreements between producers and distributors. Thus, creating durable partnerships between various stakeholders is a key element of these place branding processes, but its strength is a question of time. In the older cases, ToWC and PeB, a regional network has already become more deeply rooted than in the case of ES and SdF.

The analysis of the four empirical cases confirms our initial assumption that place brands in rural regions are linked to the three dimensions of embeddedness as shown in the overview in

Table 2. This includes their way of financing, governance forms, identity and values as well as cooperation structures. Regional brands are influenced by the level of embeddedness, but at the same time can also stimulate it. Therefore, the relation can be characterised as reciprocal. The cases also show that the dimensions of embeddedness are intertwined and interdependent, thus revealing a kind of blending or continuity pattern. For example, structural embeddedness in two of the cases has been influenced by the societal and/or territorial context (PeB, ToWC). SdF, however, partly building on extra-territorial partnerships, gives an example of forces of dis-embedding. Altogether, the concept of embeddedness with its three dimensions is useful to understand rural regional brands within their specific context.

Finally, reviewing the various outcomes of the brands on *endogenous rural development*, it can be stated that different methods and indicators have been applied by varied stakeholders and researchers for measurement, thus complicating a direct comparative assessment. Quantitative indicators have shown the level of brand awareness and perception among consumers (PeB, ToWC), increased

sales figures (SdF, ES) and tourists (SdF), the employment rate (ToWC) or the added value in financial terms as price premium (ES, PeB, ToWC). On the other hand, qualitative measures have revealed insights in individual stakeholder opinions (SdF, ES, ToWC), brand impact on local knowledge and innovations (PeB, ToWC) as well as on novel networking schemes (ToWC, PeB, SdF).

In addition, branding outcomes reflect endogenous aspects, such as the use and control over rural resources and qualities (agriculture, landscape, cultural heritage and values), local activities (farming, food processing, small-scale tourism) as well as the retention of benefits (price premium, employment) in the place itself. Table 3 highlights the outcomes in terms of endogenous rural development for each of the four cases. While the two older brands (PeB, ToWC) show a high degree of exploitation and control over diverse local resources and qualities and keep economic benefits within the region, ES could profit from combing diverse local resources under its brand name. In addition, both SdF and ES could improve the way of cross-sector organisation, especially between food and tourism as stated by the respondents.

Table 2: Overview of the rural regional brands and dimensions of embeddedness

	<i>Produit en Bretagne</i>	<i>A taste of West Cork</i>	<i>Sud de France</i>	<i>Echt Schwarzwald</i>
Origin (territorial, societal embeddedness)	Crisis of fish sector, de-industrialisation Private initiative	Bid for LEADER II funding Public initiative	Crisis of the wine sector, due to worldwide competition Public initiative	Need for protection of cultural landscape Public initiative
Funding (societal embeddedness)	85 per cent private funding by members' contributions, 15 per cent public subsidies	EU LEADER II funding 50 per cent; remainder invested by the private sector. From 2006, transition to a fee-paying scheme	100 per cent public funding by the Languedoc-Roussillon government	In the beginning supported by local communities, now financed by participants
Identity and values communicated by the brands (territorial embeddedness)	Traditional gastronomy, local know-how Values are based on ethics, solidarity and strong historical ties	Clean unspoiled environment, friendly people, and diversity of the culture and landscape	Mediterranean and convivial lifestyle, authentic, tasty and diversified food and wine	True (echt) = authenticity What is outside (packaging, logo) should be inside 100 per cent regional, quality and taste
Cooperation (structural embeddedness)	Largest economic network of the region	Strategic cooperation between tourism and food	Policy aim to develop a sustainable network	No formal network until now

Source: Authors.

**Table 3:** Regional branding and endogenous rural development

	<i>Produit en Bretagne</i>	<i>A taste of West Cork</i>	<i>Sud de France</i>	<i>Echt Schwarzwald</i>
Type of outcomes	High brand awareness and recognition of the brand values by consumers Positive effect on local employment Largest economic network of the region, business incubator	Better access to markets Increased local employment Improved use of natural resources	Increased awareness of the region and its local products Better access to export markets and increase of sales Creation of a common regional identity	Price premium and sales increase for farmers
Use of (different) local resources and qualities	Use of multiple local resources: History, culture, language, human values, agriculture	Multiple resources: Landscape, food products, friendly people	Wine, but also other food products. Mediterranean climate and Sea exploited for tourist attraction	Mainly beef Natural landscape used to emphasise the product quality
Control over local resources (organisation, models for resource combination)	High level of control and organisation by the Association <i>Produit en Bretagne</i>	Strong intersectoral cooperation between food and tourism	Cross-sector cooperation not yet fully developed	Brand only covers food, while multi-functionality (agritourism) well organised within the region
Economic redistribution	Retention of benefits (innovations, employment) in the region	Retention of benefits (incomes, employment) in the region	Farmers, food processors, tourism providers profit from the collective brand, but also the large national distributors	Price premium goes directly to farmers

Source: Authors.

Altogether, these results suggest that place brands (potentially) can have a positive influence on (local) rural development, although there remains a need for a more consistent method to measure their impact, especially in terms of qualitative outcomes. It can also be concluded that the (rural) regional brands are strongly directed towards supporting the capacities and needs of local people, including entrepreneurs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Governments in rural areas are challenged to develop new strategies to stimulate rural development, to support agency on the ground, and to ensure welfare and well-being of their population, in the context of globalisation and an increased worldwide competitive economy. The concept of endogenous rural development highlights the interaction and co-creation between the natural environment, unique and distinctive territorial resources and capacities of local people. Typical local food and tourism assets

can play an important role as identity markers, expressing a specific culture and way-of-life.

Place branding strategies are increasingly implemented in Europe to stimulate regional and rural development, by valorising and promoting territorial assets based on distinctive identities. However, it was argued that until now in place branding literature, links between place branding, embeddedness and endogenous rural development have not sufficiently been addressed.

The comparison of four European cases has shown that the branding of rural regions is not only a matter of marketing a territory and its assets, but can be an endogenous development strategy, which should be interpreted in an integrative manner, including different dimensions of embeddedness. Branding rural places does not just incorporate marketing products and services or the development of a brand, but also the anchorage of actors in a particular place and its identity (territorial embeddedness) and public-private interactions

(societal embeddedness), which may result in new synergies and partnerships (structural embeddedness). It is the intertwining and interdependency of these three dimensions of embeddedness which supports the success of place branding as development strategy for rural regions.

The analysis of the four cases has demonstrated that local development outcomes of rural regional brands are various and reflect endogenous aspects, such as the exploitation and control over rural resources and qualities (agriculture, landscape, cultural heritage and place-specific values), local activities (farming, food processing, small-scale tourism) as well as the retention of benefits (price premium, employment) in the place itself. This indicates that rural branding in our cases seems to be directed towards the capacities and needs of local people and development 'from within', in contrast to nation and city branding which often focus on the attraction of immigrants, investors and tourists.

Hence, using concepts from rural sociology has enabled us to gain new insights into the process and working mechanisms of rural regional brands and their outcomes. Place branding of rural regions is a collective process fostering cooperation, in which the exploitation and control over local resources is considered as more important than competition between areas. These brands depend on their specific social, institutional and territorial context. This includes their way of financing, governance forms, identity and values as well as cooperation structures. The relation between rural regional brands and embeddedness has emerged to be reciprocal and dynamic: on the one hand, rural regional brands can stimulate structural, societal and territorial embeddedness; on the other hand, the branding process itself is influenced by embeddedness expressed via its three dimensions. This leads us to conclude that embeddedness (potentially) can be a driver as well as an outcome of place branding processes.

Thus, place branding strategies can offer a basis for rural development plans for their strategic positioning in the long-term. This is even more relevant in the context of the increasing attention for place-based regional development in

European policies, seeking for a greater resilience and competitiveness of rural areas by building on territorial capital and promoting cross-sector synergies.

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NOTES

- 1 <http://www.inao.gouv.fr/Les-signes-officiels-de-la-qualite-et-de-l-origine-SIQO/Appellation-d-origine-protgee-Appellation-d-origine-conrolee>, accessed 11 July 2016.
- 2 FoodDrinkEurope (2012): Data & Trends of the European Food and Drink Industry 2012; [http://www.fooddrinkeurope.eu/uploads/publications_documents/Data__Trends_\(interactive\).pdf](http://www.fooddrinkeurope.eu/uploads/publications_documents/Data__Trends_(interactive).pdf).
- 3 "Food culture is a major element of the French identity and appeal... For many tourists, France not only evokes romance but culture in its broad sense... France has a special relationship with food, a unique importance on which it has capitalised for years in order to make itself better known, better appreciated and to export more" (Fouassier, 2012:159).
- 4 In 2011, about 20 of these regional brands existed in France, i.e. in nearly all of the (former) 23 metropolitan regions. Cf. <http://www.leparisien.fr/economie/chutier/les-francais-retrouvent-le-gout-des-marques-regionales-20-06-2011-1499854.php>, accessed 11 July 2016.
- 5 Cf. for Produit en Bretagne: http://lentreprise.lexpress.fr/mieux-que-le-made-in-france-le-produit-en-bretagne_1532583.html; A Taste of West Cork: <http://www.regional-products.eu/en/best-practise/detail/8/from-community-to-cluster>, accessed 11 July 2016.
- 6 Cf. for Sud de France: <http://www.sud-de-france.com/marque-sud-de-france/>; Echt Schwarzwald: <http://www.suedkurier.de/region/>



- schwarzwald-baar-heuberg/schwarzwald-baar-kreis/Naturpark-setzt-auf-bdquo-echt-Schwarz-wald-ldquo;art372502,3684199, accessed 11 July 2016.
- 7 Cf. Jacques Bernard, president of the association *Produit en Bretagne*, about the origins of the brand: “The association *Produit en Bretagne* takes shape from 1993 on in order to promote employment and sustainable development... At that time, this brand is the only regional brand in Europe.” <http://www.utl-morlaix.org/2016/01/29/produit-en-bretagne/>, accessed 11 July 2016 and translated by the authors.
- 8 www.produitenbretagne.bzh.
- 9 https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Produit_en_Bretagne, accessed 11 July 2016.
- 10 <http://www.construirelabretagne.bzh/produit-en-bretagne-pour-la-reunification-de-la-bretagne>, accessed 11 July 2016.
- 11 Press release of the Association *Produit en Bretagne*: <http://www.lemoci.com/media/produit-en-bretagne>.
- 12 Cf. www.produitenbretagne.bzh/les-chiffres-cles and <http://www.lemoci.com/media/produit-en-bretagne>, accessed 20 January 2016.
- 13 www.insee.fr/fr/regions/bretagne, accessed 15 December 2015 and translated by the authors.
- 14 www.westcorkaplaceapart.com.
- 15 www.wcdp.ie.
- 16 The Sud de France case has been topic of a previously published article in this journal (Donner *et al*, 2014).
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