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Regional branding

European Parliament resolution of 14 January 2014 on regional branding: towards best practice in rural economies (2013/2098(INI))

(2016/C 482/10)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 174 et seq. of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which lay down the objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion and specify which structural financial instruments are to be used to achieve this objective,
 - having regard to Article 39 TFEU, which lays down the objectives of the common agricultural policy,
 - having regard to the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to the Regulation (eu) no 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the opinions of the Committee on Transport and Tourism and the Committee on Regional Development (A7-0456/2013),
- A. whereas the concept of territorial development has taken on increased importance in recent years, in particular as a result of the inclusion of a more explicit reference to it in the Treaty of Lisbon;
- B. whereas European rural development policy, which is the second pillar of the CAP, was officially recognised in the context of the Agenda 2000 reform; whereas that reform gave rural development policy a status beyond that of a social and structural policy implemented merely as an adjunct to policy on agricultural markets;
- C. whereas the future framework regulation on regional policy calls on the Member States to employ integrated planning and programming in an effort to achieve greater consistency among the multiannual programmes implemented under the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the EAFRD (and the European Fisheries Fund) through the use of a common strategic framework which avoids duplication of funding and double initiatives, is geared to the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and is set out in a partnership contract drawn up by the Member States in cooperation with the economic and social partners and representatives of civil society; whereas territorial development measures and initiatives, particularly those concerning rural areas, should consequently be part of a global and cross-sectoral approach;
- D. whereas the border between urban and rural is becoming more and more blurred and peri-urban agriculture is expanding; whereas it is important that as an adjunct to rural development policy, regional policy is also geared towards rural areas in order to support innovative and formative projects there;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 487.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.

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- E. whereas the rural development instruments available to the Member States under the current rural development regulation offer them and their regions many development possibilities, and whereas existing rural development programmes do not make sufficient use of these possibilities, because they are short of budget resources;
- F. whereas the regulation for the rural development programming period 2014-2020 will broaden the range of measures available to Member States, examples being the measures to support high-quality food production, the measure focusing on cooperation among territorial actors with a view to exploiting resources to the full through the provision of high-quality goods and services, the strengthening of producer organisations and the measures concerning innovation and economic diversification in rural territories;
- G. whereas better integrating primary producers into the food chain through quality schemes, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits was established as a rural development priority for 2014-2020;
- H. whereas, as far as rural development is concerned, the 'LEADER' approach best encapsulates the concept of cooperation involving a diverse range of actors, without, however, altering the central focus on farming, and whereas the actors involved could pursue a shared sector-based territorial project seeking to emphasise the specific features and best practice of a given homogeneous area;
- I. whereas the choice of the practical arrangements and the type of support to be provided under rural development programmes should be left to the Member States or to their regions, if they opt for regional programming; whereas Member States are in the best position to determine the appropriate emphasis of such programmes at national or regional level;
- J. whereas methods can be used to mobilise and involve, through joint approaches, all the relevant public and private actors, irrespective of the levels at which they are active, with a view to developing cooperation in a wide range of areas and exploiting the full potential of each territory on the basis of a shared project, whereby attention should be drawn, in this case in particular, to the importance of local development associations, producer associations and cooperatives, which may act as privileged partners with a view to access to local, regional, national and international markets;
- K. whereas successful and comprehensive rural development programmes can have a concrete positive impact on employment rates and on the competitiveness of businesses in rural areas, and thus reduce the risks of unemployment or of abject poverty in the countryside resulting from low rural incomes;
- L. whereas territorial excellence brandings can contribute to the resilience and development of territorial economies, particularly in the most vulnerable regions, mountain regions and the outermost regions, by coordinating sets of high-quality goods (food and non-food) and services which are inextricably interlinked and which embody the specific characteristics of each territory and in particular its heritage (historical, cultural, geographical, etc); whereas assembled together within sets these goods and services are unique and generate revenue at territorial level opening up new opportunities on local and international markets and may also act as an 'umbrella' for promoting regions as tourist destinations; whereas the aim of these territorial brandings is to identify those territories that have worked together to create common partnerships and synergies in order to exploit their resources in the long term, encourage local/regional producers and stimulate their economies, which is vital to quality of life in the countryside and a balanced development of rural and urban areas; whereas they should not be confused with the quality labels (protected designation of origin (PDO), protected geographical indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialities Guaranteed (TSG)) used for food products, with which far from being incompatible they are on the contrary fully complementary; whereas they should contribute to the promotion of these schemes both within and outside the EU and help to improve the competitiveness of rural economies whilst at the same time opening up employment opportunities;
- M. whereas the system of protected designations of origin (PDO) and protected geographical indications (PGI) is an effective one, contributing greatly to rural and territorial development through the creation and distribution of added value, through collective action by producers and all parties concerned, and through the way they promote the region in question on local, regional and international markets; whereas regional branding should therefore never replace or undermine in any way the PDO-PGI system;

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- N. whereas measures to encourage and support regional and local interaction between the primary and tertiary sectors could ensure the sustainable development of agriculture and tourism in the EU;
- O. whereas there is a need to create and apply an effective marketing tool to help boost the competitiveness of regional products, encourage local producers, and contribute to the development of a regional identity, not just as regards agriculture but also in other areas;
1. Welcomes the integrated approach to territorial development outlined in the regulation on the common strategic framework for European funds; notes the need for coordination and consistency between the various European funds as a way of guaranteeing harmonious, sustainable and balanced territorial development;
 2. Notes that territorial development is explicitly included among the objectives of the CAP, complementing two other objectives, namely food security and the sustainable management of natural resources, and the fight against global warming;
 3. Emphasises that agricultural regions play a multifunctional role involving not only agricultural development but also other economic and social activities revolving around local capacity- building in terms of skills, know-how and investment in the pinpointing and harnessing of all local assets and valuable and latent potentials and resources;
 4. Welcomes the concept of 'community-led local development' and calls on the Member States to implement this concept and to remove any hindrances to this among the ministries and other administrative bodies involved in managing this innovative new approach; stresses that administrative procedures should not be burdensome, nor create additional costs for the competent authorities within the Member State;
 5. Calls on the Member States and their regional authorities to promote more dynamic forms of participatory governance as a way of implementing common territorial development projects able to cover all economic sectors, including tourism and, within the farming sector, the food and non-food industries, such as regional supply chain projects (concerning short supply chains, food chains, local slaughterhouses, methane production from agricultural biomass projects, green chemistry, bio-based materials, etc), with a particular focus on micro-businesses and new start-ups, on the basis of the gradual recognition of the identity of each territory, as defined and informed by its heritage; notes that these forms of governance are based on complex partnerships between actors and bodies, whose work may be coordinated around the concept of territorial excellence branding; therefore, calls on the Member States to create a platform for sharing best practice, using in particular the tools provided by the LEADER approach to rural development programmes;
 6. Points out that closer coordination of local actors could help strengthen rural economies, especially in the most vulnerable regions, including the mountain regions, and in the most distant among them, such as the outermost regions; emphasises that territories could benefit from a better organisation with a view to identifying the full potential their resources (including latent resources) offer, in the interests of all the actors linked by a relationship of interdependence and solidarity (i.e. those involved in the agriculture sector, handicrafts and craftsmanship, tourism, heritage, and including producer's organisations, associations and chambers of commerce, etc); notes that the purpose of this strategic coordination is to tap resources by incorporating and going beyond a sectoral or single- industry approach and instead call for the employment of territorial approaches which generate new revenue at territorial level through the marketing of sets of complementary goods and services which reflect the specific characteristics of each territory; stipulates in this regard that this territorial governance shall back firmly the creation, development and improvement of work to promote farm and food products covered by existing quality schemes based on defence of intellectual property, and at the same time as promoting high quality services (which do not benefit from official European recognition), with enhanced mutual promotion of farm produce and services, and all parties demonstrating solidarity so that all goods and services from their own local area are promoted;
 7. Notes that, although territorial quality branding is intended to drive a territorial value creation process seeking to encompass products and services within a perspective of identity and social responsibility and to complement, by forming a unified whole and generating synergies with, the existing origin-related agri-foodstuff quality labelling schemes, branding of this kind goes further in that it applies across the board to all products, goods, and services in a given territory and to the management model used by businesses, institutions, and local actors in that territory;

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8. Stresses the need to promote forms of association between different regions and a cross-sectoral partnership, so as to be capable of competing; recognises the role of representative bodies, such as associations, at regional, national and European level which provide for the promotion of regional brands and enhance and strengthen the growing region's visibility; calls for greater attention to be paid to regional branding initiatives as a possible common theme in European territorial cooperation and European funding initiatives, and as a tool that represents an investment in the long-term vitality of the region's competitiveness;

9. Considers that regional quality branding must help to preserve the image of Europe as a high-quality destination for tourism, on the basis of various fields of regional tourism, such as agri-tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism and gastro-tourism, as well as industrial, historical, natural and cultural heritage, and also including cycle routes to be combined with public transport; stresses that there is currently no European brand for services linked to a particular location which can enable customers to identify quality tourist product; recommends, in this connection, assisting in the introduction of a quality-related dynamic in the tourism sector, particularly in relation to rural tourism and small enterprises; believes that it can help to provide an alternative for traditional sectors such as agriculture and livestock farming; considers that any quality brand linked to a specific location must reflect a set of specifications providing a guarantee of quality and must respect and build on existing branding, such as food product designations, avoiding any confusion with EU quality-labelled agricultural products;

10. Considers that initiatives such as the EDEN (European Destinations of Excellence) network promote competitiveness, help to bring about sustainable and high-quality tourism in a region, thanks to the potential of micro- and small undertakings, and contribute to the involvement of local institutions, the establishment of partnerships and the diversification of participants in the creation of the regional quality brand; calls on the Commission to include various forms of tourism involving rural activities in related measures and programmes such as EDEN, Calypso, etc; stresses the need for targeted initiatives and programmes to promote rural tourism activities;

11. Urges the Commission and the Member States to ensure that future rural development programmes provide for appropriate measures and sufficient resources to facilitate good governance and sustainable forms of territorial governance by drawing on and strengthening the measures based on collective operations: measures concerning cooperation (including on systems of sustainable production), coordination, exchanges, networks, innovation, training, producer groups, promotion, information and investment, provided for in the new rural development regulations; calls on Local Action Groups (LAGs) under the LEADER+ programme to provide the support necessary to set up cooperation networks linking local and regional producers, service providers, and cultural institutions such as universities, libraries, and research centres, so as to enable the cultural and historical aspects of territories to be encapsulated in regional brands serving to forge lasting links between training, research, and production, thereby also creating sustainable jobs;

12. Maintains that those programmes should cover many sectors, without, however, detracting from the overriding importance to be accorded to farming, and that they should be assessed by the managing authorities responsible for development plans;

13. Invites the Commission to support Member States' efforts in recognising and promoting new forms of cooperation for rural areas, around the territorial excellence branding, with the aid of tools included in the CAP reform such as the Union's LEADER initiative, the technical assistance and networking tools, the European Innovation Partnership (EIP), the European network for rural development, as well as all other tools and means that may prove necessary; these new forms of European territorial cooperation shall be based on an objective assessment of regional synergies, taking into account the social, economic and environmental dimensions, sustainability, the diversity of the economic and social actors (including those from the tourism sector) involved in promoting regional identity, and the set of specific goods and services able to be developed in each territory, in order to create and maintain an added value;

14. Considers that, in the context of these new forms of territorial cooperation, Member States should be able to use all measures of rural development linked to a quality policy for food products, with the aim of developing in particular sales in local markets and short supply chains and improving the sustainability as well as the knowledge of production methods, while fully respecting the EU rules and without affecting, undermining or weakening the existing Union quality schemes,

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such as protected designation of origin (PDO), protected geographical indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialities Guaranteed (TSG); considers that, in the agri-food sector, the territorial excellence branding should be confined to promoting the PDO-PGI-TSG quality schemes where they exist or to supporting their creation where they do not yet exist; calls on the Commission, taking account of the proliferation of multiple labels and regional brandings regarding food products in Europe, to draw up an inventory of brands with specific regional features, in order to avoid any possible negative effects on the quality schemes; maintains that the concept of regional branding should be clearly defined, taking into account the favourable experience with existing quality labels (PDO, AOC, PGI), and that coordinated strategies should be drawn up to avoid duplication and overlapping, proceeding from a shared common approach based on a framework to be laid down at EU level;

15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
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