Regional Products as the Expression of Preservation of Regional Individuality in the EU

Krystyna Magda-Zabinska

University of Silesia
Poland

Abstract

The paper concerns the problem of regionalism in theory and practice. A region is set against globalism. Traditions, customs and food products are a strong symbol of a given region. This paper shows the essence of regional products in Poland in the context of other countries of the EU.

Key words: regionalism, Poland, tradition

The Essence of a Regional Product

In the European Union production of high quality food is getting more and more important. Much attention is paid to the protection and promotion of regional and traditional products. The EU rules, which protect these products, have been in effect since 1992, when the Common Agricultural Policy was established. France was an initiator of legislative actions concerning quality of food products, drawing on its own legislation of the 1930s, which first concerned the protection of wines (paradoxically, in the modern European legislation, wines are subject to other regulations). Regional products are goods produced only in some regions of the EU, and their name and production technology are protected by law.

Regional food ensures a deep relation between a product and its territory, which means a geographically defined area with its geological, climatic and agro-technical features. These products join natural features with human features. The system of protection and promotion of regional and traditional products is one of the most important factors influencing sustainable development of rural areas and the realisation of assumptions of the Common Agricultural Policy.

The protection of regional and traditional products aims to
1. Improve the quality and security of food products,
2. Provide consumers with reliable information about the origin of products,
3. Diversify agricultural production,
4. Develop rural areas by introduction of new jobs, development of tourism, and increase of farmers’ incomes.

The following measures are applied to individualise products:
1. Protected Designation of Origin – PDO.
   This mark shows the quality of a product by geographical name of its origin place and connects characteristic features of a product with soil, micro-climatic, historical and social conditions of the place of its origin.
2. Protected Geographical Indication – PGI.
   This mark determines a product quality by applying the geographical name of the product’s place of origin, whose association with the place of production is clearly established. Three conditions have to be fulfilled:
The name of a product uses the name of a region or a specific place where this product is made.

A product enjoys a good reputation, possesses special features or qualities resulting from or attributed to its geographical origin. The properties of a product may be associated with local climate, vegetation, land relief, soil, local skills, production methods and traditions (the so-called local know-how).

There is a relation between a product and the area of its origin. The relation may not be as strong as in the case of the Protected Designation of Origin. It is required however, that at least one of the stages of the production process takes place in the geographical area, which the product’s name refers to. This may include raw materials production, product manufacturing or sale preparations.

The definitions given above sound similar. The difference between them consists mainly in the fact that a product with the “Protected Designation of Origin” mark has to be manufactured, processed and prepared in a given, defined region. Thus, the whole production process takes place in this region. On the other hand, in the case of a product marked by the “Protected Geographical Indication” only one of these three phases of production (manufacturing, processing or preparing) has to take place in this area.

3. Traditional Speciality Guaranteed – TSG.

This mark determines a product which is distinguished among other similar products by its composition, manufacturing method or traditional processing method. Features of Traditional Speciality Guaranteed include:

- The product’s name has to be specific (e.g. Mozzarella) or it should express a specific character of an agricultural or food product (e.g. Belgian beer Lambic produced with application of Lambicus yeast).
- A product has to show a specific character i.e. a feature or group of features which distinguish it from other products of the same category. This difference has to be based not only on qualitative or quantitative composition of a product, but also on the production method established in the state or EU legislation.
- A product shows traditional character which may be expressed by traditional raw materials, traditional composition or traditional manufacturing method.

Products which show regional origin or traditional manufacturing methods include cheese, fresh meat, fruit, fruit preserves, baking products and beverages. Specificity of production, limited range of occurrence and appropriate taste values cause these products to be more expensive than products from industrial manufacturing. On the other hand, regional and traditional products, especially if they are commercially successful, run the risk of adopting the same name for other products manufactured inconsistently with the traditional recipe or beyond the area of original occurrence. In such cases, regional and traditional products are protected by the European system of registration and protection and by distinguishing these products by special marks. The essence and procedure of food products registration according to their origin or traditional method of production are regulated by acts of the European Council. They include:

- Council Directive (EU) no 510/2006 regarding the protection of geographical designations and names of origin of agricultural products and food products,
The EU member countries do not have free choice in compliance with these directives; they have to adopt them in the whole and strictly comply with them. Moreover, the directives impose an obligation on the member countries to appoint institutions empowered to keep control on production and distribution of products which obtained the protection of origin name, geographical designation or specific character.

**Regional Products in the EU Countries**

The system of protection, identification and differentiation of high quality agricultural and food products has been functioning in the European Union for over 16 years. These products owe their exceptionality to specific geographical origin or traditional manufacturing method. The main reason for the creation of separate regulations concerning these products in the EU legislation was the need to ensure their comprehensive protection. This protection aimed to fight against the falsification of names. It was also important to set up mechanisms of development and welfare increase in the areas of production of regional products. These products are provided with symbols which are uniform in all countries of the EU. Their recognisability among European consumers reaches dozen or so percent.

Legislative regulations dedicated to regional and traditional products are derived from the French system of protection of geographical names dating to the first half of the 20th century. The number of registered products in the French system as well as the value of their sale gradually increased for several decades. French solutions as well as the French success were adopted for the whole Union.

**France**

In France in 2000, the value of the total turnover of products with PDO and PGI marks was estimated to 2.5 billion euro, and in 2003 - 3.15 billion euro. The production of these goods generates directly about 53 thousand work places (some data say that as many as 65 thousand). Over 21 thousand producers, 765 processing factories and over 25 thousand distributors and wholesalers take part in the production of goods with PDI mark. In 2003, at least 23 thousand new producers (farmers specialising in milk production) were directly engaged in the production of dairy products signed with PDO and PGI. France is a world-known producer of numerous types of cheese, wine and cognac including those of traditional method of production and derived from a specific region which gives these goods a specific and exceptional character. For example, in the structure of all cheese production in France registered in the EU as PDO and PGI in 2003, four most popular cheese brands - **Comte**, **Rocquefort**, **Santal** and **Reblochon** – represented 51.3%. Comte cheese with production of 44.7 thousand tonnes represented in this structure 23%; **Rocquefort** occupied the second position (production – 18.5 thousand tonnes, share – 9.7%); the next one was **Cantal** with the share 9.4% (production – 18 thousand tonnes) and **Reblochon** – 9% (production – 17 thousand tonnes). Export of these products in 2000 was estimated at over 10 thousand tonnes, i.e. about 5.3% of supply, whereas in 2003 total export of PDO cheese was 11 thousand tonnes (5.8% of total production). About 32% of total export of cheese was represented by **Rocquefort** and **Comte** was at the second place in cheese export – 25%.

**Spain**

In Spain, similarly to other EU countries, there is territorial differentiation and scale of the discussed products. Large producers with mass production dominate, but in local markets there are also small producers which provide goods in small amounts. In the period of 1993-2002 the value of PDO and PGI products turnover increased twice in Spain (by 198%) from the value of 182.2 million euro to 542.6 million euro. The biggest increase – by 6.5 times – from the sale of traditional and regional goods was recorded from the sale of meat products
and processed goods; the value of vegetables turnover increased by 267%, cheese – 199%, olive oil – 170%, and other PDO and PGI products – 238%. The turnover value in 2002 was the largest for PDO and PGI processed meat products and amounted to 176.4 million euro; in case of cheese - 109.4 million euro. The third place was occupied by production of nougat – 83.6 million euro. Among traditional and regional food products manufactured in Spain about 14% was exported and the rest was distributed in the home market. The structure of the exported goods is as follows: fruit – 39% of total production, olive oil – 29%, cheese – 20%, nougat - 12%. On the other hand, fresh meat, ham, other meat products and vegetables were the most popular PDO and PGI products sold in the home market.

Italy

Production of regional and traditional goods in Italy is territorially scattered all over the country. They come from over 420 sources and about 300 of them concern wine production (VQPRD). A typical feature of most of Italian regional products with PDO and PGI designation and one traditional product with TSG designation is the fact that they are produced by small local companies, usually on small scale. Because of this, Italians applied appropriate marketing actions and distribution channels which comply with the structure and size of production. The small size of production of some goods is an essential difficulty for wider export and forms of sale. Export of regional products is limited to small amounts and most of them are processed meat and cheese. Almost the whole export (98%) of ham and salami sausage with PDO and PGI designations represent three products: Parma hams, San Daniele and Alto Adige Speck. Among cheese, Grana Padano, Permiggiano Reggiano and PecorinoRomano dominate representing 78% of Italian export of cheese. The turnover value of Italian PDO and PGI products amounted to 7.8 billion euros in 2002 and was higher by 26% as compared to 1999. The sum 7.8 billion euros represented 7% of total value of agricultural production in Italy. Four products had the highest share in this value (altogether 65%): Prosciutto di Parma, Prosciutto di San Daniele, Grana Padano and Permiggiano Reggiano. Assuming 100% of the turnover value of regional products with PDO/PGI mark, cheese represented 58.1% and meat products – 39.7%. In the case of olive oil, fruit, vegetables and other products, none of these products individually exceeded 1% in this structure. In 2002 the total value of the analysed meat products amounted to 3.1 billion euros. Producers of ham: Prosciutti Parma and Prosciutto di San Daniele are unquestionable leaders on the market of processed meat. Their production amounted to 110 thousand tonnes and ham export in 2002 was 421 and 90 million euros respectively. The following cheese producers have the largest share: Grana Padano (1.5 billion euros), Permiggiano Reggiano (1.4 billion euros), Gorgonzola (392 million euros), Mozzarella di Bufala and Pecorino Romano. In 2002, the value of Italian cheese export amounted to 639 million euros (over 52% beyond the borders of the EU). The olive oil sector shows the most rapid increase among exported goods with PGO/PGI mark. The sale value of olive oil in 2002 amounted to 54 million euros, including 38% of Toscano oil, 18% of Umbria oil, 12% Riviera Ligure, Garda and Tierra di Siena.

Poland

Since joining the European Union in 2004, Poland has been trying to introduce Polish regional products to the European market. This is directly associated with the character of Polish agriculture - non-industrial methods of agricultural production, natural rural landscape, large biological diversity and cultural wealth influence the production of high quality food. Negative elements, like too high employment in agriculture, considerable fragmentation of farms and low effectiveness of labour are not significant difficulties. The systems of protection of geographical names of agricultural and food products are an excellent form of
promotion of not only products themselves but also of areas where they are derived from. Since entering the EU five years ago, Poland has registered 8 products as PDO/PGI. The list of these products was established by the act of 17.12.2004 regarding registration and protection of names and designations of agricultural and food products and traditional goods. The list includes such products whose quality or exceptional features result from the application of traditional production methods, represent an element of cultural heritage of the region where they are produced, or represent an element of identity of local community.

Traditional methods of production are considered those which have been used for at least 25 years. A registration at the List of Traditional Products does not protect products in any way but only informs that the above mentioned requirements have been fulfilled. The registration is also not connected with any additional control of products nor does it give the producers any additional rights. The registration is not a certificate. The List of Traditional Products includes 585 products. They are divided into the following categories:

- Cheese and dairy products
- Fresh meat and meat products
- Fishing products including fish
- Vegetables and fruit (fresh and processed)
- Baking products and confectionery
- Oil and fat (butter, oil, etc.)
- Honey
- Ready-cooked food and dishes
- Beverages and alcohols
- Other products

Eight Polish products registered as Protected Designation of Origin and Protected Geographical Indication include:

- Oscypek Cheese
- Bryndza Podhalanska Cheese
- Heather Honey from Bory Dolnośląskie
- Półtorak Mead
- Dwójniak Mead
- Trójniak Mead
- Czwórniak Mead
- St. Martin’s Crescent Roll

Oscypek is a type of smoked sheep cheese. Its name is connected with production process and it is derived from two meanings: “crumble” – part of production process, and “small spear” - shape of the cheese. It is an old product of Wallachian shepherds. It came to Poland to Podhale region together with whole Wallachian culture, sheep pasturage organisation, method of flock-master’s hut maintaining, milk processing. First information about cheese production in Podhale and adjacent areas comes from 1416 – the location of Ochotnica village. Milk for oscypek production comes from Polish mountain sheep, which is an improved type of the original sheep breed that lived in the Eastern Carpathians and Balkans. This breed is closely associated with the history and tradition of Podhale, it is perfectly adapted to climatic conditions and traditional systems of pasture in mountain areas. The breed “Polish mountain sheep” eats really varied but specific plants which occur as endemic species in Podhale. This gives the milk products a specific taste and flavour.

Bryndza Podhalanska is a type of cheese which belongs to the group of soft rennet cheese. This cheese is also produced from the milk of the “Polish mountain sheep” with some
admixture of the milk of the “Polish red cow”. The tradition of bryndza production comes from 1527. There are some records saying that bryndza in this area was used as a legal tender or tribute payment.

Meads in Poland have over 1000-year tradition. The history of their production reaches the beginning of Polish statehood. In 966 in the records of a Spanish diplomat, merchant and traveller there is a note saying: “the country of Mieszko I – the first king of Poland - abound in food, meat, fields, and Slavonic wine and the intoxicating drinks are called meads”. In source materials describing cooking traditions of Poland in the 17th and 18th centuries, not only general information about meads can be found but their types are described in details. Depending on the production method the meads were divided into półtoraki, dwóźniaki, trójniaki, czwórniaki. Each of the names refers to different type of mead which is produced in different proportions of honey and water or juice, and different periods of mellowing in storage.

Heather Honey from Bory Dolnośląskie shows special features. First information concerning honey production in this area comes from the records of the rules of the Charles the Great from the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries. The records say that subjugated tribes were imposed with tribute in form of honey and wax. In Bory Dolnośląskie, there are over 10 thousand hectares of heather fields priced by bee-keepers (their area increased after forest fires in 1990). High mean yearly temperatures and good insolation in this area ensure abundant nectaring of heather. Heather honey contains the highest content of heather pollen as indicator pollen (59-98%).

St Martin’s crescent roll is a type of confectionery. Its name is used for a popular crescent roll baked in the capital of Wielkopolska region – Poznań and surrounding areas. St. Martin’s crescent roll comes from the custom of baking and eating rolls with special stuffing on the day of St. Martin (11 November). The celebration of St. Martin’s Day comes from the 17th century and is connected with the end of farm works in a given year. This day is celebrated every year in this region and this custom is the heritage of the whole community of this region. Every year, for 150 years, bakers from Poznań have been presenting the inhabitants of Poznan with this product. Characteristic features of St. Martin’s crescent roll are connected with the skills and knowledge of bakers and with the use of a special raw material – white poppy-seeds to produce the stuffing.

Conclusion

At present, 840 products are registered in the European Union as PDO and PGI. Registration system started in 1992. Different regional products are classified into 12 categories. The most numerous categories include: cheese, plant products and fresh meat with pluck. Total share of these categories in all regional products accounts to about 60%. Taking into account two further categories – processed meat products and edible oil – this share exceeds 80%. This is an evidence of the differentiation in the number of the distinguished categories. However, the share of the most numerous categories shows a decreasing trend. The highest increase dynamics occurs in the case of fish and sea food and cereal products. Among these products, 58% are protected due to origin name and the rest due to geographical designation. Before the EU enlargement, over 60% of products were protected in consideration of origin name.

Each country specialises in different regional products. In the German market, mainly mineral and spring water is protected; in the Belgian market - beer; in France and Italy – wine, cheese and meat; in Greece – cheese, vegetable and fruit. The largest shares in the EU

194
market of regional goods have: France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and Germany. The number of regional products from these countries accounts for over 90% of all the registered products. Italian and French products represent about 42% which results from rich traditions in applying special designations of products. The highest increase of the number of protected products occurs in Spain and Italy. In these countries the rate of increase reaches a higher value than in the whole European Union. Among new member countries of the EU, only the Czech Republic obtained the protection of geographical designations PGI 3 of its products – regional kinds of beer. A year after joining the European Union, the Czech Republic submitted almost 52% of all new products, whereas Poland only 5%. Also Slovakia and Hungary submitted more products than Poland.

The differentiation of agricultural production and support of high quality food production are one of the most important elements of rural areas development. Many of the accepted designations concern goods produced in difficult soil and climatic conditions like mountain cheese, or goods connected with laborious production methods. Concession of regional designations increases competitiveness of products and may be an important element influencing the behavior of the potential consumer. A product which is safeguarded by the EU participates in creating the picture of a given region and encourages people to visit this region influencing development of tourism. Regional traditions are an important element of cultural heritage. Regional products considerably influence the promotion of each region due to their differentiation and special character.

References


