Region Branding in the Netherlands:
A comparison of 3 innovative case studies

Els Hegger, Henk Oostindie & Henk Renting
What is region branding?

- Basket of products and services
- The region as the aggregate ‘product’
- Telling the region’s story
- Wide network of actors

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Diagram:
- Product A
- Service A
- Public good A
- Product B

Wide network of actors in the region.
Why region branding?

- Three significant historical processes
  - Agriculture and its changing role in society
  - The alteration of the countryside
  - Wider societal trends

- Region and branding as key conceptual categories

![Diagram showing the relationship between place branding, societal trends, agricultural changes, and regional developments.](diagram.png)
Conceptual framework (1)

- Culture Economy as starting point
  “attempt by rural areas to localise economic control; to (re)valorise place through its cultural identity” (Ray, 1998)

- Strong focus on connection between local and extra-local

- Identity as central connector
Conceptual framework (2)

- Connecting culture economy to branding
- Central role of identity within branding
- Creating strong, multiple level networks
Internet Research: Results (1)

- Rough idea of regional differences
- Some historical roots visible
Internet Research: Results (2)

- Not aim to draw rigid conclusions
- Combination of functions low, except T and RF

### RSO Research: 65 Collective Initiatives

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Initiatives</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>T</td>
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### VVHP Research: 170 Collective Initiatives

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<td>T/RF/N</td>
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Internet Research: Results (3)

- Institutional setting not favourable
- Co-operation still largely within sectors
- Policy development towards regional co-operation
Case Studies: Vallei & Boerderij (1)

Name: Vallei & Boerderij
Foundation date: 1998
Status: Association
Founders: Agrarian entrepreneurs in the area
Members: 65 entrepreneurs with an agrarian background
Emphasis: Recreation and agrarian characteristics
Region: The area between the ‘Utrechtse Heuvelrug’ and the ‘Veluwe’
Target area: National and international

Broadened agriculture → Agrarian tourism & regional products → Future?
Case Studies: Vallei & Boerderij (2)

- Network development

- Future challenges
  - Establish quality criteria
  - Develop a clear identity for imaging
  - “Our biggest challenge is to just keep breathing”
Case Studies: Vechtdalproducten

Name: Vechtdalproducten
Foundation date: 29 June 2004
Status: Foundation ‘Dianthus’
Founders: Farmer and consultant/researcher (not from the area)
Members: 37 farmers, restaurateurs, butchers, nature organisations, municipalities, entrepreneurs
Emphasis: Environmentally friendly and regional quality food and services
Region: The basin of the Vecht (in the province Overijssel)
Target area: National

Ecological farming \rightarrow Broadening activities regionally \rightarrow Region branding
Case Studies: Vechtdalproducten (2)

- Network development

  ![Diagram of network development]

- Future challenges
  - Establish quality criteria
  - Larger selling points
  - “People should come for the product Vechtdal rather than for Vechtdalproducten; that would be ideal!”
### Case Studies: Het Groene Woud (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Het Groene Woud</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation date:</td>
<td>1992/1993 but more concrete in 2005 with ‘Streekfestival’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Founders:</td>
<td>Farmer and consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members:</td>
<td>Farmers, entrepreneurs, government bodies, nature organisations, various other organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status:</td>
<td>Foundation ‘Streekfestival’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis:</td>
<td>The region’s nature, landscape and economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region:</td>
<td>The triangle between Eindhoven, Tilburg and Den Bosch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target area:</td>
<td>Citizens in the triangle Eindhoven, Tilburg and Den Bosch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Existing initiatives** focused on broadening
- **Region identified as National Landscape**
- **Region branding**
Case Studies: Het Groene Woud (2)

- Network development

- Future challenges
  - Develop the rest of the ‘bus’ (driver, ticket,..)
  - Establish a new legal status
  - “Until now we have made many plans, but this year we will know how they will work out in practice.”
Case Studies: Comparative Analysis (1)

- Different combinations of T, N, RF
- Focus and development stage varies

Diagram:

- Vallei & Boerderij
- Vechtdalproducten
- Het Groene Woud
Case Studies: Comparative Analysis (2)

- Differences in dynamics and network trajectories

- Strong vertical networks
  - External market outlets
  - Relationships with external buyers, processors, institutions etc.

- Successful culture economy

- Strong horizontal networks
  - Local market outlets
  - Trust-based relationships between local producers, consumers and institutions
  - Knowledge flows
  - Use of place-based promotional schemes

- Weak horizontal networks

- Weak vertical networks

V&B
VP
GW
Case Studies: Comparative Analysis (3)

- Differences in life-cycle dynamics and organisational strategies
  - Diversity of members
  - Financial and organisational support
  - Quality standardisation
  - Difficulties in identity creation
  - Cultural differences between regions difficult to recognise
Main Conclusions

- Region branding response to variety of factors in the field of agriculture and society at large
- Co-operation result of blurring boundaries between disciplines and fields
- Historical roots in emergence of initiatives visible
- Main difference is size and variety of members
- Importance of strong leadership
- Quality as main issue determining brand
- Culture delicate issue: discrepancy theory and practice
This research has resulted in 11 recommendations for a research agenda:

- Region branding as a concept is ill defined → there is a need for a conceptual classification of region branding.

- The concept of region branding creates a new kind of competition among regions → how to deal with the lack of distinctive power of some regions?

- Identity is a key issue in region branding but largely absent in the empirical data → how can an identity be constructed in a setting where it has largely disappeared?
Thank you for your attention!

Please feel free to ask questions.