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CONDITIONINGS OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT FOR SELLING REGIONAL PRODUCTS IN THE WIELKOPOLSKA FOOD PRODUCTS MARKET

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ABSTRACT. Theoretic conditionings of development the sale of regional products have been presented in this article. The chances of development of those strategies in the Wielkopolska food articles market, considering the demand conditions, have also been discussed.

Key words: globalization, region, regional products, consumers' behaviour

Introduction

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the current one is a period of increasing globalization in world markets. The effects of this phenomenon have also reached Poland, one of them being the liberalization of the country's economy and creation of the foundations for free operation of foreign companies in Poland, what caused significant changes in the offer of products on the consumption market. This situation concerned many markets, one of them being the market of food articles. In the first years of transformation and stabilization of Polish economy, consumers, who were given new market choices, new foreign products previously hardly accessible, reacted very positively, what resulted in a high demand for those articles. However, after some time a significant change of attitude of Polish consumers was noticed – they started to react negatively to the presence of foreign products in the Polish market. (**Karcz and Kędzior** 1993, 1999). So after only a few years since the opening of the borders, a contrary tendency of consumers switching to products of domestic origin appeared. This attitude results from the presence in the abundant food articles' market, of many offered products, that are often illegibly or inaccurately marked in their selling point. Nowadays, clients mistrusting products of unknown or dubious origin, more often choose articles of domestic producers, well known and personally checked by themselves.

In Western European countries, a significant increase in the interest in domestic products was noted in the 80's (**Balling** 2000). Research performed in Western European countries, at the same time show, that consumers prefer not only domestic products but even food articles originating from the region where the customers live (**von Alvensleben** 2000 b, **Balling** 2000, **Hensche** 1993). In the Polish market, which more and more gains the features of European markets, one can expect, apart from the preferences concerning domestic articles, also an increasing interest in regional products.

Due to the flow of capital, goods and services, the competitiveness in global, domestic and local markets increases. The market rules are set by big companies and international corporations, who meanwhile take over a large segment of the market. While facing those changes, local entrepreneurs are in a very difficult situation, because they cannot meet the requirements set by their competitors, what results in problems with selling their products. It also regards the representatives of the agricultural-food sector, including producers, that cannot sell their products or the possible price makes their effort worthless.

The phenomenon of intensifying consumer preferences regarding domestic food products, especially the interest in products originating from the closest environment, may be used to increase the share of regional products in the general sales of food products. The development of regional products and brands, can eventually contribute to strengthening the position of producers not only in the regional market but also domestically.

The fact of consumers' turn towards the products made in our country has been backed up by research. In previous years more and more attention has been paid to the subject of regional and local products, which due to their specific features, ways of production and recipes are promoted in different parts of our country and in Europe. We lack however, definite research on "regional awareness" of Polish consumers.

This is why the research concerning the clients' interest in regional origin of food products and the conditions and possibilities for developing regional sales strategies in Wielkopolska were performed. The Wielkopolska Region was chosen due to high importance of high goods agriculture and the whole agricultural-food industry of the region, that have a beyond regional character. This particularly concerns their share in the food balance of the country, and the up-to-date achievements of the agricultural sector in this field have often been and still are an example for other Polish regions (**Wawrzyński** 2000).

Another assumption of choosing Wielkopolska both as a place and subject of the research was the positive image of the region that sticks in the opinion of its inhabitants, stated strong bonds of the inhabitants to their region and their high identity with their place of residence. It has been proved that the strongest local identification (affection for cities/villages) in Poland was in the Wielkopolska voivodship. Moreover, basing on other results of domestic research, performed among secondary school youth, the strongest regional identification (affection for the region) was discovered (Oblicza... 1996).

In the case of Wielkopolska one can observe a certain sense of identity based mainly on territorial bonds and real or mythical collectivity features of this region, which differentiates with higher civilizational level and diligence, economy, the ability for critical thinking and restraint from expressing one's feelings (**Domański** 1990, **Kwaśniewski** 1986).

On the basis of the above data one can come up with a preliminary thesis that the features characterising the inhabitants of Wielkopolska and big importance of agriculture and the whole agricultural-food industry of Wielkopolska, its tradition and constant development, will also favour the development of consumer preferences towards regional food articles, thus can be a basis to implement a successful sale strategies connected with the region of origin.

Globalization versus regionalization

The whole essence of globalization is clearly presented in the definition stated by **Parker** (1998). According to the definition, globalization is an increasing crossing different kinds of borders, such as physical borders (time and space), national, economic, brand and organization borders and less tangible borders such as cultural norms and assumptions concerning "how things are done here". Therefore we can state that globalization is not a purely economic process. It is also a cultural, civilizational and, for many, an ideological process. Sociologists associate this concept with global integration, and the effect of this process are transformations of social awareness, what can result in a growing sense of interdependence and complementing between people all over the world.

In the modern world a certain split can be noticed. On one hand, together with the advancing globalization process, the interest in international lifestyle and management style constantly increases, which results in the developing exchange of products, services and information between countries. Thanks to that people have a higher sense of unity, because due to mutual management they are bonded by common aims, for example, solving of global problems concerning the global economy, such as environmental safety issues, fighting malnutrition and hunger, ensuring world peace, and so on. (**Perczyński** 1989). On the other hand, one can notice a strive for keeping independence and conflicts between different ethnic and cultural groups, both inside the countries and between them, are more and more visible (**Besch** 1999).

As a result of all problems and consequences that come with globalization, a new trend, called regionalization, appeared in the 80's and 90's of the 20th century. Regionalization is connected with the development of a limited economic, cultural and political independence of a regional individual, seen as a countermeasure for a commonly understood globalization (**Besch** 1999).

Processes, that are a result of globalization, such as increasing internationalization, proceed in a diverse way and at a diverse pace, in the case of different social, cultural, economic and political groups, what results in a diverse intensity of an opposite trend, that is regionalization. Apart from social and cultural diversity, one can also separate spheres of life, branches or article groups, that have been especially influenced by the process of internationalization or widely understood globalization. These are for examples airplanes or building machines but also jewellery or sport and photographic articles. On the other hand, one can also distinguish product groups, in which consumers prefer their regional origin. Food products are a typical example. The performed research shows that regional food article markets have a chance of development, even in the conditions of growing globalization and the internationalization of lifestyle (**Besch** 1999).

Theoretic bases for the success of regional concepts

The concept of increasing sales of food products in a region, uses negative results of globalization, such as confusion and mistrusting of consumers towards the surplus of offered products and helps to ease the economic effects of this process. Very important is the regional patriotism among many customers from particular regions, because, as stated by **von Alvensleben** (2000 a), consumer preferences regarding regional products are determined mainly by emotional attitude of buyers towards their region. Thus, the citizens have to identify with the region, and the familiarity with place of residence gives self-confidence and creates a bond of sympathy with the region. The presence of a positive image of a given region is an indispensable condition of forming this regional identification, and furthermore of the success of the discussed concept. This positive image may be later transformed onto products produced in a given region, what may be the base for choosing these articles from the offer of other non-regional origin (**von Alvensleben** 2000 b).

Different works specify, confirmed by performed research, the country of origin effect – Country of Origin (COE), which means the influence of domestic origin of products on the consumers' behaviour (**Obermiller** and **Spangenberg** 1989). **Von Alvensleben** (2000 b) thinks that there is a possibility for transferring this model into the region of origin effect – Region of Origin, which shows a similar influence, with the exception that it is of regional origin. COE research results can basically be transferred onto the regional aspect. According to **von Alvensleben** (2000 b) and (**Wirthgen** 2003) a requirement for buying a regional product is the combination of region's image, regional product's image and features of the product considered when buying, and the relation between these elements is greatly dependent on people and situation.

Reasons for development of the concept of selling regional products

The basis for the success of the concept of selling regional products and brands is the existing interest of consumers in the regional origin of the purchased articles.

Wanting to thoroughly determine the reasons of development that strategy, we need to look at the factors influencing the increase of the clients' interest in this feature of food products. As was stressed in previous analysis the direct factor causing a consumer's turn towards domestically or even regionally made products are the processes of globalization and Europeanization, which lead to an increase in the anonymity of offered food products. Together with an increase in exchange of international goods, we know less and less where the products come from and where they were produced. Introducing an internal market with the reduction of order controls and a mutual admittance into trading – at least from the consumer's point of view – still diverse standards of food products, substantially influence the increase of consumer interest in the origin of the purchased products.

The consumers are intensively encouraged by institutions, which represent the side of supply to buying their products, as a result of what we can observe an overload in appearing information. In the promotional campaigns the potential clients are not al-

ways informed about the usable features of the products and the way they are made. The persuasion is often connected only with, for example, reducing the process for those products. The consumer, on one hand overloaded with promotional information, on the other hand may feel uninformed. In such a case the attention of a client who does not have sufficient information about the offered products, may be directed onto, for example, their origin (on the condition that it is precisely labelled in the selling place), what causes that feature to become a more important information for the evaluation of the product's quality.

The described situation causes, that the attitude of the present-day consumer may be characterised by uncertainty and confusion. These feelings may be additionally determined by information appearing from time to time, about different food scandals, using hormones or antibiotics during the production process or about the presence in the market of genetically modified products. If you add standardization of production, which leads to a common use of production methods based on mineral fertilizers, plant protections materials, components, substrates or emulgators, one cannot wonder where such an attitude towards food products comes from. In connection with the increasing distrust for the foodstuffs offer, information about the origin may be of a significance for consumers and to a large extent influence their decision about the purchase.

Conditions of developing sales of regional products in the food articles market in Wielkopolska

In order to distinguish the conditions of selling regional products in the Wielkopolska food market, the research covered both, side of demand representatives – consumers and side of supply representatives – owners of retail sale units and producers.

In this analysis, the results shown are those of the research performed among consumers, aiming at finding out their attitude towards food articles coming from Wielkopolska. The analysis material was the data obtained through a survey performed on a group of 450 citizens from Poznań – the biggest agglomeration in the region.

The basis for the analysis of consumer preferences was to find out the importance of criteria that influence the clients when buying food articles. Above all the aim was the determination of importance of regional origin of products in confrontation with other features.

The results shown in Table 1 state that the main criteria for purchasing food articles are freshness and taste (5.6 and 5.4) of the purchased products, while regional origin does not highly influence the purchasing decisions of the clients and that feature can be treated as a secondary purchase criterion. The grade of 3.3 points out of 6 means that a particular customer group takes the region of origin under consideration when purchasing and given information about the region where the product originates, may influence the clients decision about the purchase. Simultaneously the primary criterions have to be met: freshness and taste, moreover, the representatives of supply have to meet them so well, or even better than the competitive companies. Region of origin over a longer period of time may become the determinant of quality of a given product.

Table 1

The importance of criteria for purchasing food products
Ważność kryteriów zakupu artykułów spożywczych

Criteria Kryteria	Grade Ocena
Freshness – Świeżość	5.6
Taste – Smak	5.4
Price – Cena	4.6
Country – Kraj	3.9
Well known company – Znana firma	3.6
Region	3.3

The scale from 6 = very important to 1 = unimportant.
 Skala od 6 = bardzo ważne do 1 = nieważne.

Taking under consideration the primary purchase criteria shown in the research, that came to be freshness and taste, an important element of further analysis was to find out the consumer's opinion about a widely understood quality of food products coming from Wielkopolska. Apart from the two already mentioned features, the respondents evaluated the appearance and packaging of the products.

The results (Table 2) allow us to come up with the statement that the quality of food products from Wielkopolska in respect of freshness and taste, the features being primary choice criteria, is high in the eyes of consumers. This fact increases actual chances for creating a positive image of the regional products, what can results in them being chosen among the offer of some other, of non-regional origin.

Table 2

Evaluation of the quality of food products from the Wielkopolska region
Ocena jakości artykułów spożywczych z regionu Wielkopolski

Evaluated feature Ocena jakości	Grade Ocena
Freshness – Świeżość	5.3
Taste – Smak	5.1
Appearance – Wygląd zewnętrzny	4.7
Packaging (including the information on the label) Opakowanie (w tym zawartość informacji na etykiecie)	4.1

Additional confirmation of the high quality can be seen in the consumers' motives for purchasing food articles from the Wielkopolska region (Table 3).

Main motives of selection were their high quality (chosen by 39.3% of those surveyed), good taste and freshness (25.7% and 24.6%).

Table 3

Reasons for buying food products from the Wielkopolska region
Motywy zakupu artykułów spożywczych z regionu Wielkopolski

Purchase motive Motyw zakupu	Answer percentage Odsetek odpowiedzi
Quality – Jakość	39.3%
Freshness – Świeżość	24.6%
Price – Cena	12.6%
Taste – Smak	25.7%
Supporting businesses from Wielkopolska Wspieranie wielkopolskiej przedsiębiorczości	9.3%
Local patriotism Lokalny patriotyzm	12.0%
Tradition/Habit Tradycja/Przyzwyczajenie	8.7%
Healthy products/Clean region Zdrowe produkty/Czysty region	4.9%

Emphasizing by consumers the quality of the products from Wielkopolska as a motive for buying them, proves that this feature is highly ranked and considered when buying. Among other reasons chosen by consumers, particularly important for implementing regional sales strategy are the motives connected with local patriotism or the will to support the development of food producers from Wielkopolska (12% and 9.3%).

Discussed aspects concerned the whole group of food articles. Each of the product groups has however its own specifics and one can assume that in the case of particular products region of origin may be of different importance for the consumers. The questioned people have been asked to specify how much attention they pay to region of origin of the bought products, belonging to five distinguished groups: milk and milk products, meat and meat products, fruits and vegetables, sweets and alcohol.

The biggest importance of regional origin has been noticed in the case of milk and milk products and meat and meat products (Fig. 1). Over half of the consumers (52.2%) declared that when buying milk and milk products they tried to choose only products of producers from Wielkopolska, while when buying meat and meat products such was the case with 42.4%. In the case of the three remaining groups, the interest in the region of origin was significantly lower.

An important point in the analysis of consumer preferences was to prepare a segmentation, that is distinguishing consumer groups with a different approach towards products from this region. Eventually three segments of customers were distinguished (Fig. 2), which characterise the biggest, medium and lowest interest in regional offer.

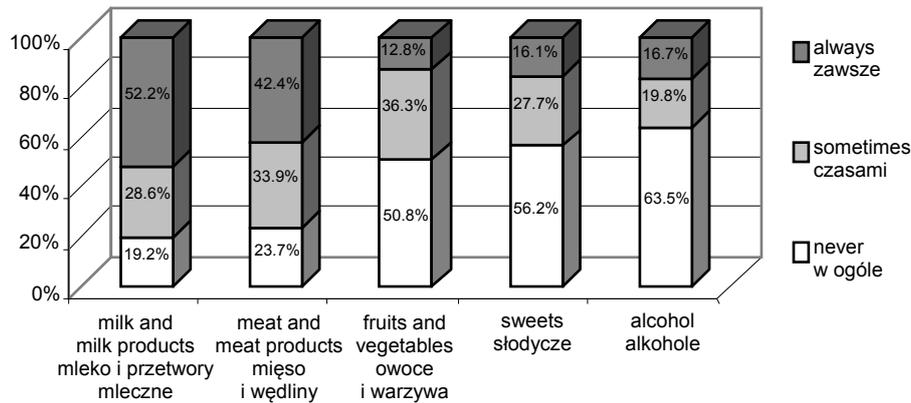


Fig. 1. The importance of regional origin in chosen groups of food articles
Ryc. 1. Znaczenie regionalnego pochodzenia wybranych grup artykułów spożywczych

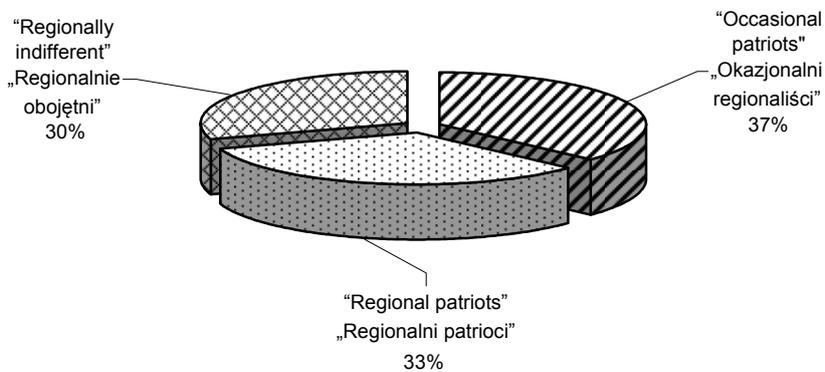


Fig. 2 Consumer groups distinguished in respect of preferences regarding regional origin
Ryc. 2. Grupy konsumentów wyodrębnione pod względem preferencji dotyczących regionalnego pochodzenia

“Regional patriots”

The first group constituted to 33% of the examined whole, and they were the consumers showing the highest interest in regional offer. Almost 1/3 of the clients of this segment, while buying regional food articles always pays attention to the place of origin and tries to choose articles from local producers. The consumers of the discussed segment choose milk, milk products, meat and meat products the most often. “Regional patriots” buy products from Wielkopolska, due to their high quality and the good way they taste. Moreover, among a big part of the consumers from this group, bought products are connected with a local patriotism and a strong identification with the place of residence that characterises them. A very important reason for choosing domestic prod-

ucts is the will to support food producers from Wielkopolska by buying food products made by them.

Consumers from the „regional patriots” group are mainly people over 50 years of age. These people have mostly secondary education and their income fluctuates around quite a high level.

“Occasional regionalist”

A second distinguished segment covers the biggest consumer group, 37% of the whole.

Clients from that grup show an average interest in food articles from the region. Almost all consumers from this segment declare that they choose products from Wielkopolska only from time to time. Motives which they choose when buying regional products are connected, similarly to “regional patriots”, with high quality and also with freshness and good taste of the bought products. Motives based on local patriotism or connected with the will to support local businesses are of lesser importance.

Clients from that segment, alike “regional patriots” are people from the highest age group with secondary education. Income of this group is at a medium or low level.

“Regionally indifferent”

A third segment is the smallest consumer group and it amounted to 30% of the examined people. The people from this group show the smallest interest in the regional offer, while most of them, when buying food products, do not at all pay attention to the region of origin. These consumers, similarly to the people from other distinguished groups, the most often choose products of regional origin when buying milk and milk products, meat and meat products. They buy products made by producers from Wielkopolska, mainly due to their freshness, good taste and a lower price. People representing this segment, as purchase motives do not specify local patriotism, though some of them sees the need for supporting regional businesses by purchasing articles from local producers. One can assume that such an attitude results from the fact, that the main representatives of this group are young people, who through buying regional products, want to support local businesses thus putting their share in creating new job vacancies.

Consumers from this segment, as has already been said, are mainly young people with secondary and higher education. The income of these consumers is usually at a medium or low level.

Summing up, it is worth noticing, that consumers show a diverse interest in regional offer and their attitude towards them relies on such socio-demographic factors as, among others, age, education and income.

Conclusions

Reports in literature and the results of the research performed among consumers in the region of Wielkopolska allowed to formulate the conclusions below:

1. Regional food articles' markets have a chance of development also in the conditions of increasing globalization.
2. The foundation of a successful concept of selling regional products and brands is the increasing consumer interest in the regional origin of products they buy, which is determined by a positive image of the region, which can be assigned to products manufactured in a given area.
3. A direct reason for the increase of the consumer interest in the regional offer is the globalization process, which, among others, leads to the increase of anonymity of offered food articles.
4. In the Wielkopolska region, there are conditions (created by demand representatives) for the implementation of sales strategies based on regional origin, what results mainly from the positive image of this region and a strong regional patriotism of its inhabitants.
5. Regional origin, despite the fact that as a choice criterion is a secondary feature, is considered by clients when they buy food products. The features of freshness and taste, shown in the research as primary, in the case of products from Wielkopolska, are highly rated by consumers and at the same time are the main motives for choosing these food articles.
6. The biggest chances of developing regional sales can be seen in the case of milk and milk products, and also meat, because when buying those products, the customers try to pay the biggest attention to regional origin.
7. Consumers that show the biggest interest in regional offer are people over 50 years of age, with secondary school education, whose income is quite high. This group may be the target while implementing sale strategies based on regional origin.

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UWARUNKOWANIA ROZWOJU KONCEPCJI SPRZEDAŻY PRODUKTÓW REGIONALNYCH NA WIELKOPOLSKIM RYNKU ARTYKUŁÓW SPOŻYWCZYCH

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W artykule zostały przedstawione teoretyczne uwarunkowania rozwoju koncepcji sprzedaży produktów regionalnych. Szczegółową analizą objęto szanse rozwoju owych strategii na rynku artykułów spożywczych w Wielkopolsce, przedstawiając uwarunkowania ze strony popytu. Stwierdzono, iż regionalne rynki produktów spożywczych mają szanse rozwoju także w warunkach wzrastającej globalizacji, a podstawą powodzenia koncepcji sprzedaży produktów i marek regionalnych jest istniejące zainteresowanie konsumentów regionalnym pochodzeniem nabywanych artykułów, uwarunkowane z kolei istnieniem pozytywnego wizerunku regionu, który może zostać przeniesiony na produkty wytwarzane na danym obszarze.

Dowiedziano także, iż na terenie Wielkopolski istnieją – ze strony przedstawicieli popytu – warunki do wprowadzania strategii sprzedaży, opartych na regionalnym pochodzeniu, co wynika przede wszystkim z istnienia pozytywnego wizerunku tego regionu i silnej identyfikacji regionalnej jego mieszkańców.