

## REGIONAL IMAGE - A PREREQUISITE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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**ABSTRACT.** The regional image is a set of properties created by interested subjects to create a certain image of a region. As a result of their activity, we are dealing with a set of associative ideas about the region. The regional image has a number of important features. It aims at meeting strategic objectives that are usually directly related to the economic development of a region. Typically, it takes into account the interests of the main economic players in a given region (internal and external). The regional image must take into account social expectations and related core values and regional economic interests. It should be understandable for the population inside and outside the region. The state image must be fully built up, without contradiction between historical, cultural, civilization and political-geographic factors. The image of the region should be professionally managed through international, commercial, open or latent communication channels and technology to influence public opinion and target users to a region or product. A number of quality products and services, often serving market niches, connect to certain regions. This geographic association proves to be important in influencing consumers' mentality, their behavior and hence the demand for such products. The positive or negative image of the region should be the mechanism between the social expectations, the existing behavior and the state of the region. For this reason, in the positive image, it is necessary to reflect these features of the region that correspond to the social expectations of its own population and the interested groups and allies of the other regions. The formation of the region's image by the mass media reflects its economic potential, the availability of infrastructure, the level of social and cultural development, the quality of life, the degree of economic and political stability.

**Keywords:** Regional image, regional development, economic development, regional economic interests

### РЕГИОНАЛНИЯТ ИМИДЖ - ПРЕДПОСТАВКА ЗА ИКОНОМИЧЕСКО РАЗВИТИЕ

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**РЕЗЮМЕ.** Регионалният имидж представлява комплекс от свойства, създавани от заинтересувани субекти с цел създаване на определена представа за даден регион. В резултат на дейността им, ние се занимаваме с комплекс от асоциативни идеи относно региона. Регионалният имидж има редица важни черти. Той цели изпълнението на стратегически цели, които обикновено са пряко свързани с икономическото развитие на даден регион. Обикновено той отчита интересите на основните икономически играчи в даден регион (вътрешни и външни). Регионалният имидж трябва да отчита социалните очаквания и свързаните с тях основни ценности и регионални икономически интереси. Той трябва да бъде разбираем за населението в и извън региона. Държавният имидж трябва да бъде цялостно изграден, без противоречие между историческите, културните, цивилизационните и политико-географските фактори. Имиджа на региона трябва да бъде професионално управляван чрез международни, комерсиални, открити или латентни комуникационни канали и технологии с цел въздействие върху общественото мнение и насочване на потребителите към даден регион или продукт. Редица качествени продукти и услуги, често обслужващи пазарни ниши, се свързват с определени региони. Тази географска асоциация се оказва важна при влиянието върху манталитета на потребителите, тяхното поведение и следователно търсенето на такива продукти. Положителния или отрицателен имидж на региона трябва да бъде механизма между социалните очаквания, съществуващото поведение и състоянието на региона. Поради тази причина в положителния имидж е необходимо да се отразяват тези черти на региона, които да съответстват на изгодните за него социални очаквания на собственото му население и заинтересуваните групи и съюзници от другите региони. Формирането на имиджа на региона от средствата за масова информация отразява икономическия му потенциал, наличието на инфраструктура, нивото на социално-културно развитие, качеството на живот, степента на икономическа и политическа стабилност.

**Ключови думи:** Регионален имидж, регионално развитие, икономическо развитие, регионални икономически интереси

### Introduction

Regional policy in its essence represents state regulation of regional development. These are the activities of the state authorities in managing the political, economic and social development of the country in a territorial (regional) aspect. Regional policy is an integral part of the national strategy for long-term socio-economic development. In principle, it has to be built on the principle of decentralization of power. Structurally, the elements of regional policy are economic, social and environmental policy. The basis for the implementation of the regional policy is the territorial-state

structure of the country and, on the other hand, its economic (economic-geographic) zoning. The regions (and their regional markets) are regional policy subjects. A region is generally understood to mean a part of the territory of a country that has common natural, socio-economic, national-cultural and other conditions. Different aspects of the relationship between the state and the territory - economic, financial, legal, national and others - are among the most pressing and complex problems. Their solution depends on the success of market reforms implemented in one territory. These relationships are largely disrupted when there is spatial disintegration of the economy. These relationships are broken by breaking the relationship

between economic interests and political action. One of the possibilities for getting out of this situation is the development of the regional image. The regional image is a complex of properties created by interested subjects to create a certain image of a region. As a result of their activity, we are dealing with a set of associative ideas about the region. The regional image has a number of important features. It aims at meeting strategic objectives that are usually directly related to the economic development of a region. Typically, it takes into account the interests of the main economic players in a given region (internal and external). The regional image must take into account social expectations and related core values and regional economic interests. It should be understandable for the population inside and outside the region. The state image must be fully built up, without contradiction between historical, cultural, civilization and political-geographic factors. The image of the region should be professionally managed through international, commercial, open or latent communication channels and technology to influence public opinion and target users to a region or product. A number of quality products and services, often serving market niches, connect to certain regions. This geographic association proves to be important in influencing consumers' mentality, their behavior and hence the demand for such products. Considering that the purpose of geographical promotion is to change the image of geographical entities like cities and regions, it is evident that its chances of success partially depend on the extent to which such images are subject to change. (Pellenbarg P. H., W.J. Meester, 2009)

## Regional image

The regional image is shaped as the strategic goal of the region's development. It must be realistic and contain features that are unambiguous. The regional image is varied. It may contain several subdimensions depending on which users are targeted and depending on specific regional interests. We can claim that the formation and management of the regional image is done in the following standard procedure: (Supplemented and adapted - Kapitonov, E. A., A. E. Kapitonov, 2003)

- Developing and explaining the region - its advantages and differences from the competitive regions;
- Identification and fixation of the resources for the development of the image (budget and material-technical);
- Developing a concept of company standards and their assessment (including verbal and visual aspects);
- Taking into account the economic interests and the socio-psychological and subconscious sides of investors with the help of experts, psychologists, focus groups, etc.;
- Constructing several images that are interrelated and identifying the highlights in view of the peculiarities of potential investors;
- Creation of background, context and details that provide and reinforce the perception of the regional image;
- Studying and processing the image in the context of emergency and crisis situations that could threaten it, and testing the readiness to engage in effective counter-advertising;

- Implementation of the plans (strategic and operational) or transition from a constructed to a real-life model for the functioning of the regional image;
- Monitoring the way the regional image works and making (if necessary) a correction of the plans, actions and highlights.

Identifying target markets to apply the regional image includes the following steps:

- Develop a strategic plan that takes into account global and sectoral visions;
- Defining objectives and shared and integrated regional and local development policies;
- Defining structural programs and projects;
- Determination of responsibilities and clarification;
- Definition of Integrated Communication Policy;
- Tools for evaluation and modeling.

The main features of the region's image (in economic terms) are:

- Nominal - the image designates, differentiates the region, demonstrates and highlights its merits and distinctive qualities;
- Aesthetic - the image is designed to enliven the impression that the region creates in the potential investors;
- Address - the image links the region and the target stakeholders, responds to the demand for the business;
- Communicative - perhaps the most important and constant function of the image.

The communicative properties of the image are an advertising component that provides information efficiency, facilitates its perception by investors, and prepares the ground for shaping the attitude of choosing this investment region.

There are several criteria for assessing a region's image:

1. History of the region. Survey of the region's history and its socio-economic development.
2. Geographical location of the region (including reporting of natural resources)
3. Exploring the popularity of local authorities - are there any key figures contributing to the development of the region at national and supranational level - Deputies, European deputies, etc.?
4. Demographic indicators
5. Tourist attractiveness of the region.
6. International Economic Relations of the Region. Trade with neighboring regions, incl. And international
7. The investment attractiveness of the region.

The positive or negative image of the region should be the mechanism between the social expectations, the existing behavior and the state of the region. For this reason, in the positive image, it is necessary to reflect those features of the region that are in line with the benefits for the region. They also have to match the social expectations of a region's population and interested groups and allies from other regions. In the case of negative features, it should be taken into account that there are relatively fewer opportunities for impact on them. As a rule, they appear on inaccessible planes on the regional field. Along with the positive expectations between the rival competitors and opponents, there will be negative expectations. Competitors and opponents of the regions exist

both in it (economic competitors, separatists, etc.) and beyond. It is important to distinguish between competitors and opponents. For competitors, the image contains a "hint" on the way of co-operation in dispute resolution. For the opponents a version of the image aimed at destroying the opponents is being developed. An example of this is the national documents of a country related to its fight against terrorism.

The regional image as part of territorial marketing is an essential element from the point of view of the interregional competition for attracting investments. Also in terms of adding local distinctive elements to global production systems.

An important feature of the regional image is social expectation. It has to be very precise. This happens in the processes of socio-psychological and sociological monitoring related to certain basic values and regional interests (sympathy, antipathy, expectation, fear, etc.). This is a very important stage in the formation of a positive and the neutralization of a negative image. In order to expand the attractive regional image, it is necessary to understand correctly what the needs and expectations of the general public are. This understanding will allow the territory to know what its core values should be - which are the specific products the area can offer (residential buildings, tourism, labor, the environment, heritage, etc.)? In addition, monitoring provides information on the main threats facing the territory and for which prevention and mitigation tools should be built. As a rule, monitoring is done on a proposal from regional authorities as well as by independent commercial organizations. The main development of the territory is the adoption of procedures for control and evaluation and systematic monitoring of the marketing information system. The results are taken into account in the region's orientation to the political and / or economic (internal and external) course of the region. The preliminary stage of designing the positive or the beginning of neutralization of the negative image starts with the formation of the positive expectation regarding the positions, interests or behavior of the regional authorities. In this situation, positive expectations are intensified and maintained, and negative ones will fade, weaken and dispel.

It is of the utmost importance for the region's regional image to be simplified and to contain a limited number of characteristics or parameters. It must be sufficiently accessible for most residents and neighboring regions. The positive image of the region is formed purposefully through the "main corridors" of positive regional information. The stigma of developing a regional image can make it ineffective. Combating the negative image is also conducted purposefully and relatively coordinated, as instinctive uncoordinated actions make the fight ineffective.

The image of the region is formed on the basis of: population, economy, education, science, culture, media, public health, sport, politics, power structures, regional leaders, regulatory framework, transport sector, architecture, geographic features, historical past. (Rassadina, T. A., 2015) The formation of the region's image by the mass media reflects its economic potential, the availability of infrastructure, the level

of social and cultural development, the quality of life, the degree of economic and political stability.

There are image-building technologies that clearly differentiate the region from competitors.

- highlighting those characteristics that make the region accepted into the notion of investor system as "its own";
- selecting these region characteristics that match investors' perceptions of the ideal location for their business;
- Using other channels of perception, the main one of which is visual, as a more influential and memorable;
- Active use of accompanying symbolism in particular to the creation of a visual feature of the region (branding, flags, events, etc.);
- Active management of the mass communication processes;
- Fighting autonomous information flows (such as rumors, for example).

The tools for building the regional image are many and varied, and we will look at some of them. One of the instruments is the emphasis on information about the region. It aims to give priority to the important features of the region and to downplay its shortcomings. It is also rarely used the technique related to binary positions. Examples are "own-strangers," "America for the White," "Germany for the Germans," etc. The verbalization of information related to the region is crucial to the success of his image. The precise selection of words for constructing and recreating regional processes is key to the better performance of the region. Verbalizing often also serves as a fake representation of the region. Also important is the visualization of the region's information. Very often, specialists use old font for letters. Gothic for France and Germany, Old Slavic for Russia, hieroglyphs for China and Japan, Kufic and Naskh for the Arab countries. All this aims to show and highlight the antiquity of the region and its cultural traditions. Another interesting technique is the use of visual information in the name of the region. Examples are Slave Coast and Ivory Coast. In the world practice, the technique associated with the name of a particular historical person has also been used very often. Examples are Alexandria, Washington, St. Petersburg, and so on. An important element of the visualization is the use of regional flags, coats of arms, emblems, etc. The Nepal National Flag is the only national flag that is not rectangular. It is one of two such unconventional flags - the other is in Ohio, USA. The National Flag of Paraguay is borrowed from the French tricolor and symbolizes freedom. The unusual flag is that the emblem is different from both sides. The symbol of the sun is present in many flags, but the most famous is the flag of Japan. It depicts both the "Country of the Rising Sun" and the fact that the Emperor's family starts from the sun. The US flag has the most stars and has been changed many times. The largest animal is the Sri Lankan flag, a lion. Butan's flag has a giant black and white dragon. The biggest bird is the flag of Albania - the two-headed eagle. And with Canada's largest plant - maple leaf. Some flags depict religious beliefs and philosophies. In many of the old European flags was the cross, the flag of Israel - the hexagonal star of David, the Islamic

countries - star and crescent, the flag of India - Wheel of the Dharma. The flag of South Korea, also known as the Taegukgi, has three parts: a white rectangular background, a red and blue Taeguk, symbolizing balance, in its center, and four black trigrams selected from the original eight, one toward each corner. Interesting is the flag of Mozambique, depicted by its capercaillie - the only banner in the world with modern weapons. The only flag with inscription is that of Saudi Arabia. Coat of arms is also interesting - we will give a regional example from Bulgaria. The main part of the coat of arms is a shield - the classical symbol of a fortress or any fortified place. In the upper part of the shield is an architectural element *kobilitsa* (a yoke-shaped ornament) - very popular during the Bulgarian National Revival. The shield is purple - a color symbolizing the glory of Bulgarian kings and sovereignty. In the middle of the shield is a sheaf of wheat ears - a symbol of the unity and glory of the Bulgarian people. Here, in Dobrudzha, 1,300 years ago, Khan Asparuh established the first Bulgarian settlements. The ears also symbolize the fecundity and generosity of the Dobrudzha plains. Above the sheaf is the name of the town written in an old calligraphic Bulgarian font type. The sheaf, the name, and the shield contour are gold, which symbolizes the welfare of the townspeople.



**Coat of arms of Dobrich**

When it comes to passing certain stereotypes into the minds of investors, the term "implementing a model of regional information" is used. Communication is at the heart of promoting the image of the region in the minds of investors. Changing the content and intensity of communication can lead to a change in the perception of the region in the mass consciousness. This, in turn, can lead to social change. The best environment for advertising and building a region's image is visual. In this environment, the most widely used television and the Internet. It should not be forgotten that, in addition to providing information, these communication channels may also hide such channels.

## Conclusion

In order to build a successful regional image and to achieve economic development in a given region it is important to bear in mind that investors will be based not on the real qualities of the region but on those who are imputed to them. From this point of view, even the pictures of the regions are crucial for the success of the measures taken to stimulate economic development. While spatial and organisational measures are aimed at improving the actual situation in the place or region, the primary goal of geographical promotion is to change its image. (Pellenberg P. H., W.J. Meester, 2009) The regional image is considered as one of the marketing techniques and concepts used for the purpose of strong economic development and popularization of territory. It takes into account the regional economic base, its capabilities and occupations in order to attract labor and potential investors. The Strategic Marketing Plan gives the territory the tools and capabilities to address this challenge. Territorial marketing offers the necessary tools to "sell" the image of the territory to reach the pre-selected target audience, using advertising, direct and web marketing, sales promotion, and so on.

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