# DEVELOPMENT OF A BRAND IDEA AS THE BASIS FOR REGION BRANDING. A CASE STUDY OF THE JIZERA MOUNTAINS AND THE FORELAND REGION

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**Abstract:** Region branding is a highly complex activity, which suggests the necessity to search for strategic solutions that enable the integration of brand communication in a broadly defined environment. The purpose of the paper is to indicate the possibilities of creating a region brand by developing a consistent brand idea. The paper combines theoretical discussion with the case study of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland region. We describe the concept and challenges of region branding and present a brand idea as the basis for the integration of branding activities. For the case study, we made a diagnosis of region potentials, supported by a review of regional communication activities. In the process of gathering information, we used the content analysis of informational and promotional materials of the region, and the results of qualitative and qualitative research commissioned by the Jizera Partnership Association. We used the mind-mapping method, which enabled the identification of key issues integrating various potentials and defining propositions of a brand idea.

**Keywords:** region branding, region brand, brand idea, place branding, place brand.

## 1. Introduction

Region branding is a planned and systematic process of building a region brand, including: managing an identification system, creating platforms that enable the integration of marketing communications as well as conducting and coordinating projects to increase attractiveness in a broadly defined environment. Region branding is a highly complex activity because we are dealing with a strongly subjective construct, which is affected by communication activities produced by different actors. It suggests the necessity to search for strategic solutions that enable the integration of brand communication in a broadly defined environment. The challenge

is to create brand ideas that will define the directions of activities related to building region brands.

The purpose of the paper is to indicate the possibilities of creating a region brand by developing a consistent brand idea. The paper combines theoretical discussion with the case study of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland region. Based on a literature review, we described the concept and challenges of region branding and presented a brand idea as the basis for the integration of branding activities.

For the case study, we made a diagnosis of region potentials, supported by a review of regional communication activities. In the process of gathering information, we used the content analysis of informational and promotional materials of the region, official websites of territorial units or associations, and the results of quantitative and qualitative research conducted among residents, tourists and potential beneficiaries, commissioned by the Jizera Partnership Association. We used the mind-mapping method, which enabled the identification of key issues integrating various potentials and defining propositions of a brand idea.

## 2.  The concept and challenges of region branding

The theoretical basis of region branding is closely related to place branding, which concerns countries, cities and regions. The concept of place branding is a stage in the development of branding concept and results from the theoretical achievements of marketing, place marketing, international business, urban policy and tourism. These interdisciplinary roots have formed the basis for the development of theories and research, taking into account the achievements of various disciplines (Dinnie, 2004; Hankinson, 2007; Kavaratzis, 2005; Lucarelli, and Olof Berg, 2011).

At the beginning of the development of the place brand concept, places were treated by the authors as branded products, and they were included in the brand definitions along with products and services (De Chernatony, and McDonald, 1992). Theoretical approaches resulting from the product brand theory were mainly represented in studies on destination branding (Hall, 1999; Hankinson, 2005). As the brand concept developed, the understanding of a brand's essence and functions changed from identification, distinction and image based on functional and emotional values and benefits, to a relational and process approach that assumed co-creation of a brand by the involved stakeholders. That was reflected in various studies and publications concerning place branding (Cardinale, Nguyen, and Melewar, 2016; Florek, and Kavaratzis, 2014; Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, Foroudi, and Nguyen, 2016; Freire, 2011; Gertner, 2011; Hereźniak, 2017).

Building a place brand is not an ab initio activity, but rather rebranding (Hankinson, 2007). Due to the historical character of the territories, their brands for a long time evolved in an uncontrolled manner, which distinguishes them from commercial brands, whose development results from the planning process beginning with the emergence of a new product concept. It does not mean a complete lack of influence on the shape of the region's offer, as it can be enriched with new attractions, developed in the process of co-creation and co-production.

Some products and services that operate on the territories are to varying degrees related to place brands, and for many of them the place brand acts as an umbrella brand. Both in the case of countries, cities and regions, we may talk about complex brand architecture composed of sub-brands, endorsed brands, and shadow endorser brands (Daszkiewicz, 2015). Endorsed brands and shadow endorser brands operate within the region, are related to it, but they are subjected to separate management. They are territorial units (cities, towns, etc.) and products (tourist attractions, cyclical events, local products, etc.). Endorsed brands use the support of a region brand due to their image-related benefits. In their case, the role of a region as an umbrella brand is evident. For shadow endorser brands, their regional affiliation is generally known, but usually a region brand is not stressed in their communication activities (Daszkiewicz, 2015).

Pasquinelli underlines that a process of inter-territorial branding should cross administrative borders and consider inter-territorial collaboration (Pasquinelli, 2013). Moilanen and Rainisto emphasise the role of cooperation by saying that a single place may need to be part of a 'larger location' for place branding purposes. (Moilanen, and Rainisto, 2009b). Pooling resources and cooperation may result in a positive sum game (Pasquinelli, 2013), serving region brand and individual place brands.

Contemporary studies suggest that diverse brand meanings across stakeholders build a foundation for developing branding theory by adding a multiple stakeholder perspective to brand co-creation (Merrilees, Miller, and Halliday, 2016; Merrilees, Miller, and Herington, 2012).

As in the case of countries and cities, many entities participate in building a region brand. They differ in their goals and resources and often carry out unrelated marketing activities (Moilanen, and Rainisto, 2009a; Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott, 2003). Recent literature on brand management suggests that strong brands are generated from a co-creation process (Boyle, 2007; France, Merrilees, and Miller, 2015). Therefore, the integration of place brand management and co-creation is a crucial issue (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015). The challenge is to create platforms for integration and brand ideas that will define the directions of activities related to building region brands.

Despite many similarities, some studies point to certain differences in the approach to branding of different types of places, especially between countries when compared with regions and cities. In the case of a country, we have more variables involved in its brand construction than a region, because countries have specific attributes that a region does not possess (national

symbols, political system, etc.). An important variable is the country image, because the way citizens of different countries perceive a particular country can differ widely, but the views regarding a region tend to be more stable (Caldwell and Freire, 2004).

Caldwell and Freire (2004) suggest that countries are so functionally diverse they should leverage the emotive or representational parts of their brand identity, while regions and cities, being smaller in scale, should leverage their more functional facets. However, it should be noted that regions differ in their size, character, and level of differentiation, which is the implication for further research on the possibilities to develop model solutions for region branding.

The big challenge for building stable and consistent region brands is operating in a dynamic environment, in which "the place brand inevitably interacts with the place's constantly changing identities held by insiders and outsiders" (Kavaratzis, and Ashworth, 2010, p. 10). On the other hand, region brand identities are derived from the use of history, which influences both brand building efforts and brand perceptions (Roig, Pritchard, and Morgan, 2010).

Region branding is a highly complex activity because a region is not created by marketers, but constitutes "an existing, living reality that evolves and is based on communities, histories, cultures an identities" (Roig et al., 2010, p. 117). We are also dealing with a social, historical and highly subjective construct, which is affected by communication activities produced by different actors and groups of actors (Bellini, Loffredo, and Pasquinelli, 2010). It suggests the necessity to search for integration platforms that will serve as the basis for creating region brands.

## 3. The brand idea as the basis for the integration of branding activities

A brand idea is the way of thinking and the guide for building and managing a brand (Laidler-Kylander, and Shepard Stenzel, 2014, p. 171). The brand idea may also be defined as a generalisation of the characteristics, values, and vision of development of a brand (Daszkiewicz, 2017, p. 58-59). It summarizes the brand soul while influencing reputation (Robertson, 2018). The brand idea is the driving, unifying force behind a brand's marketing efforts and the indicator of brand compatibility, which accounts for believability and credibility all in one (Hernandez, 2012).

The brand idea is a strategic asset that embodies the mission and values, aligns internal identity with external image, engages internal and external stakeholders and creates ambassadors, leveraging a brand to support partnerships and collaboration (Laidler-Kylander, and Shepard Stenzel, 2014). It may be used to clarify priorities that an organisation should choose to manage a brand effectively.

According to the research, one of the key shortcomings of place marketing is the failure to communicate a consistent message across the various segments which form the target market (Hankinson, 2004, 2007). The brand idea is based on linking the core brand values and the segment-specific brand values together. Establishing a clear brand idea enables communication with different groups of stakeholders in a long-term perspective and facilitates the creation of coherent communication programmes (Daszkiewicz, 2017).

Nowadays, brand communication is not limited to the one-way projecting of an expected image (brand positioning), and has more to do with establishing a dialogue and the process of participative and authentic engagement, in both the development and communication of a brand. Clarifying a brand idea can help in determining the collaborations and partnerships that enable the implementation of a mission and maximising the brand impact (Laidler-Kylander, and Shepard Stenzel, 2014).

The development of a brand idea requires the definition of major characteristics and attributes, which create the potentials of a region. The process involves identifying and creating links between different potentials and searching for a proposition which may constitute a basis for the integration of communication with different groups of stakeholders.

## 4. The Jizera Mountains and the Foreland region – searching for the brand idea

In order to achieve the purpose of our paper, we conducted a case study of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland, which resulted in the formulation of propositions for the region brand idea. We made a diagnosis of region potentials, supported by a review of regional communication activities. In the process of gathering information, we used the content analysis of informational and promotional materials of the region, official websites of territorial units or associations, and the results of qualitative and qualitative research of residents, tourists and potential beneficiaries, commissioned by the Jizera Partnership Association[1]. We used the mind-mapping method, which enabled the identification of key issues integrating various potentials and defining the propositions of a brand idea.

We begin with a short description of the region, and then present the key conclusions resulting from the content analysis of the source materials.

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[1] The research was carried out in 2014 by the IPC Research Institute and included an online survey on a sample of 200 respondents (using the websites of the association and municipalities) and three focus group interviews with 28 representatives of local non-governmental organisations, entrepreneurs, farmers, employees of city halls and representatives of cultural institutions.

The Jizera Mountains and the Foreland region is the area in the south of Lower Silesia (Poland). The region comprises the area of the Polish part of the Jizera Mountains (entirely belonging to the Mirsk Commune in the District of Lwówek Śląski) and the area of the Jizera Foreland (including many territorial units in five districts: Zgorzelec, Lubań, Bolesławiec, Lwówek Śląski, Jelenia Góra). The mountains constitute the westernmost mountain range in Poland[2].To the north of the area, the Jizera Foreland extends.

Tourism enthusiasts will find in the region, among others: cycling routes, routes for kayaking trips, water reservoirs for sailing, hiking trails, hills (from which hang-gliders and motor-gliders start their flights), stops for horse-riding amateurs, etc. There are numerous mountain hostels and tourist stations in the region.

One of the most attractive tourist areas is High Ridge. Tourist can visit: Wielka Kopa (the highest peak of the Jizera Mountains), Smerk (the summit with a lookout tower on the Polish-Czech Republic border), Izerski Stog (Jizera Stack, from which one can admire the view of the Jizera Foreland) and Hala Izerska (Jizera Hall, an extremely valuable natural area of meadows in the Jizera River valley) as well as a number of other attractive places. From the Polish part of the Jizera Mountains, tourists can also get to the Czech side (Łupicki, 2017).

A large part of the region is a natural, forested area, which is slightly affected by man. The Jizera Mountains, the Peat Bogs of the Jizera Mountains, the Meadows of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland are part of the network of Natura 2000 protected areas. The symbol of the richness of nature is also the yew growing in Henryków Lubański – the oldest tree in Poland, which is about 1300 years old. One of the most significant peculiarities of the Jizera Region are the peat bogs (raised, transitional and hanging), which make the vegetation here extremely unique. They did not succumb to human invasion, which makes them the refuge for rare and unusual plant species. In 2000, the "Izera Valley Peat Bog Reserve" was founded. Together with the reserve "RašeliništěJizery" on the Czech side, they create one of the largest European complexes of mountain peat bogs with an exceptional microclimate. There are three other reserves in the area of the Izerskie Mountains and the Foreland: the floristic reserve "Crocuses in Górzniec", the forest reserve "Hornbeam-oak near Posada", the forest-floristic reserve "Castle Mountain" in Wleń. (Góry Izerskie - opis pasma, 2019; Nature in Jizera Mountains, 2019; Partnerstwo Izerskie, 2018; Łupicki, 2017)

There are a number of nature peculiarities in the Jizera, which are difficult to encounter in other regions of Poland or Europe. The Jizera Region is a touring destination for ornithologists, who come to observe a true ornithological rarity – a population of black grouse, which is covered by a protection programme (Nature in Jizera Mountains, 2019).

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[2] Most of the area of Jizera Mountains is located in the Czech Republic, but in the study we focus on the area covering the Polish part of the Izera Mountains.

The region attracts agate and mountain crystals seekers, who can visit a Stanislaw Mine (a closed quartz opencast mine). Mineral collectors may also participate in the earth treasure hunters festival Lwówek Agate Summer- an international, outdoor mineral and jewellery trade fair with over 200 stalls (Lwówieckie Lato Agatowe, 2019). The Sudeten Festival of Minerals in Lubań also refers to the richness of the natural region (Sudecki Festiwal Minerałów, 2019).

One of the attractions of the region is the Geopark, which is tourist and educational "Route of the ancient ways of precious metals mining". The route maintains the ambiance of the old mines and museum exhibits related to mining traditions of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland. The Geopark is a part of the Mysterious Underground Trail (Geopark in Krobica, 2019).

The region has a rich and colourful history, thanks to which we can still admire many monuments, such as town halls, churches or town houses. There are also many castles, palaces, and mansions in the area. Among them, we can name the most famous monument in the region – Czocha Castle.

There are also various artists in the area, such as painters, sculptors, glassmakers, and ceramists. The folk tradition of the region is cultivated by folk groups operating on its territory (Partnerstwo Izerskie, 2018). The culinary heritage of the region consists of dishes officially included in regional and traditional products (Produkty regionalne i tradycyjne z Dolnego Śląska, 2013).

Every year, the Mirsk Municipality organises the Jizera Gala - a two-day event during which we can get acquainted with the culture and tradition of the region (Izerska Gala, 2019). In almost every municipality of the region, at least one festival is organised annually. One of the most well-known examples is the Film Comedy Festival in Lubomierz. Lubomierz uses a thematic relationship with one of the most famous Polish comedies "Sami Swoi"[3] in various ways. In addition to the comedy festival, in the town there is the Kargul and Pawlak Museum dedicated to the main characters of the film.

The regions' promotional activities are mainly carried out by municipalities, which issue materials in the form of tourist guides; maps of routes as well as tourist, bicycle and equestrian trails; albums about forests, minerals and traditional dishes; books related to the history of various places; local newspapers and bulletins; promotional leaflets and postcards. The promotion of the region is provided for by websites and profiles in the social media. Associations such as the Jizera Partnership, the Jizera Association, and the Jizera Cooperative are established to perform activities aimed at the development and promotion of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland. In addition to official entities, private owners of facilities such as castles, palaces, spas, hotels and ski resorts are also involved in promoting the region.

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[3] "Sami Swoi" (translated as All Friends Here or Our Folks or literally "only ourselves") is the first part of the well-known Polish comedic trilogy by Sylwester Chęciński. The movie was filmed mostly in Dobrzykowice, with some scenes in Lubomierz and surrounding areas.

The results of quantitative research indicate a poor assessment of promotional activities in the eyes of the surveyed residents. One-third of respondents (33%) believe that inefficient tourism promotion is one of the barriers to the development of this region and places they inhabit (IPC Instytut Badawczy, 2014).

The respondents of quantitative research perceive the landscape (83%), location close to Germany and the Czech Republic (76%), and rich cultural heritage (56%) as the main assets of the region. The importance of nature in regional identification is confirmed by the results of qualitative research. The respondents claim that the region's most significant asset is: "wildness" and "pristine character" of its areas. They also point to numerous attractions of the region which contribute to the development of tourism (Świeradów Zdrój resort, Czocha Castle, etc.). The areas are attractive, however, their potential is not fully utilised, due to the lack of development of tourism infrastructure. It is necessary to develop and promote various forms of spending free time (e.g., walking, cycling, and trekking paths) so that visitors and residents could enjoy the beauty of the regional landscape. Due to the excellent location, the region is an attractive starting point for trips to other destinations such as Wroclaw, Prague, or Dresden (IPC Instytut Badawczy, 2014).

Participants of the focus groups (representing local non-governmental organisations, entrepreneurs, farmers, employees of city halls and representatives of cultural institutions) noticed the problem with the integration of the regional promotion. According to them, it results from the lack of joint promotional activities of municipalities and traditional approach to the application of promotional instruments. As it results from discussions conducted within focus groups, cooperation in joint planning of development activities and promotion of the region is recommended. It is also essential to build a regional identity and conduct two-way communication with internal recipients, whose engagement and support is key to the success of development activities (IPC Instytut Badawczy, 2014).

The review of the region brand communication activities leads to the conclusion that there is no common idea of a region brand that could give direction to its promotion. Based on the research results, we conducted the mind mapping process that allowed us to create propositions of a brand idea. First, we searched for keywords that reflect the region potential, and then we grouped them in certain themes. Then we produced combinations of themes that allowed us to create some phrases which could express the brand idea of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland region.

The broadly understood potential of the region consists of: the wealth of the landscape and natural beauty (mountains, foothills, peat bogs, protected areas such as Natura 2000, Złotnickie Lake), location (close to the Czech Republic and Germany, an excellent starting point to the Giant Mountains and cities as Prague, Dresden, Wroclaw), tourist attractions (i.e. Geopark), historical monuments, cultural heritage, regional products and local dishes, cyclical events (i.e. Lwówek Agate Summer, Jizerian Gala of Folklore), various possibilities of active tourism

(mountain trails, cycling routes, routes for kayaking trips, water reservoirs for sailing, hiking trails, ski routes, the SKI & SUN resort), spas, accommodation and agritourism base.

In the search for various possibilities to create a brand idea, we have defined the areas that enabled formulating propositions of potential key issues for region identification. These may be associated with:

- name of the region (the Jizerian Mountains and the Foreland, Jizera, Izery, Izerbejdżan)[4],

- landscape and nature (wildness of nature. peat bogs, black grouse, minerals, agates, mountain crystals, Jizera Mountains, Jizera Forests, Jizera Meadows, Natura 2000, nature reserves, lakes),

- location (excellent location, starting point, closeness to the Czech Republic and Germany),

- tourism and touristic attractions (mountain trails, cycling routes, routes for kayaking trips, water reservoirs for sailing, hiking trails, ski routes, the SKI & SUN resort, agritourism, mountain trekking, mountain biking, single-track, Geopark, spas, family tourism, active tourism),

- history and culture (castles, palaces, Czocha Castle, ruins, churches, folklore, folk groups, local dishes, "Sami Swoi", festivals),

- benefits (silence, health and wellness, active recreation, relax).

It should be noted that in the case of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland, we cannot speak of a strong regional identity expressed in such features as language, dialect, symbols, and regional traditions. Therefore, building the brand of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland requires making a synthesis of the region's potentials to propose creative solutions.

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[4] Using the abbreviated region name "Jizera" (in Polish "Izery") could be considered. This could simplify brand communication and increase its visibility. A problem, however, may be associating the short name only with the Jizera Mountains. Besides, the name abbreviations are mostly used for well-established brands. In the case of the Izerskie Mountains and the Foreland, we are dealing with the starting point of creating a uniform brand.
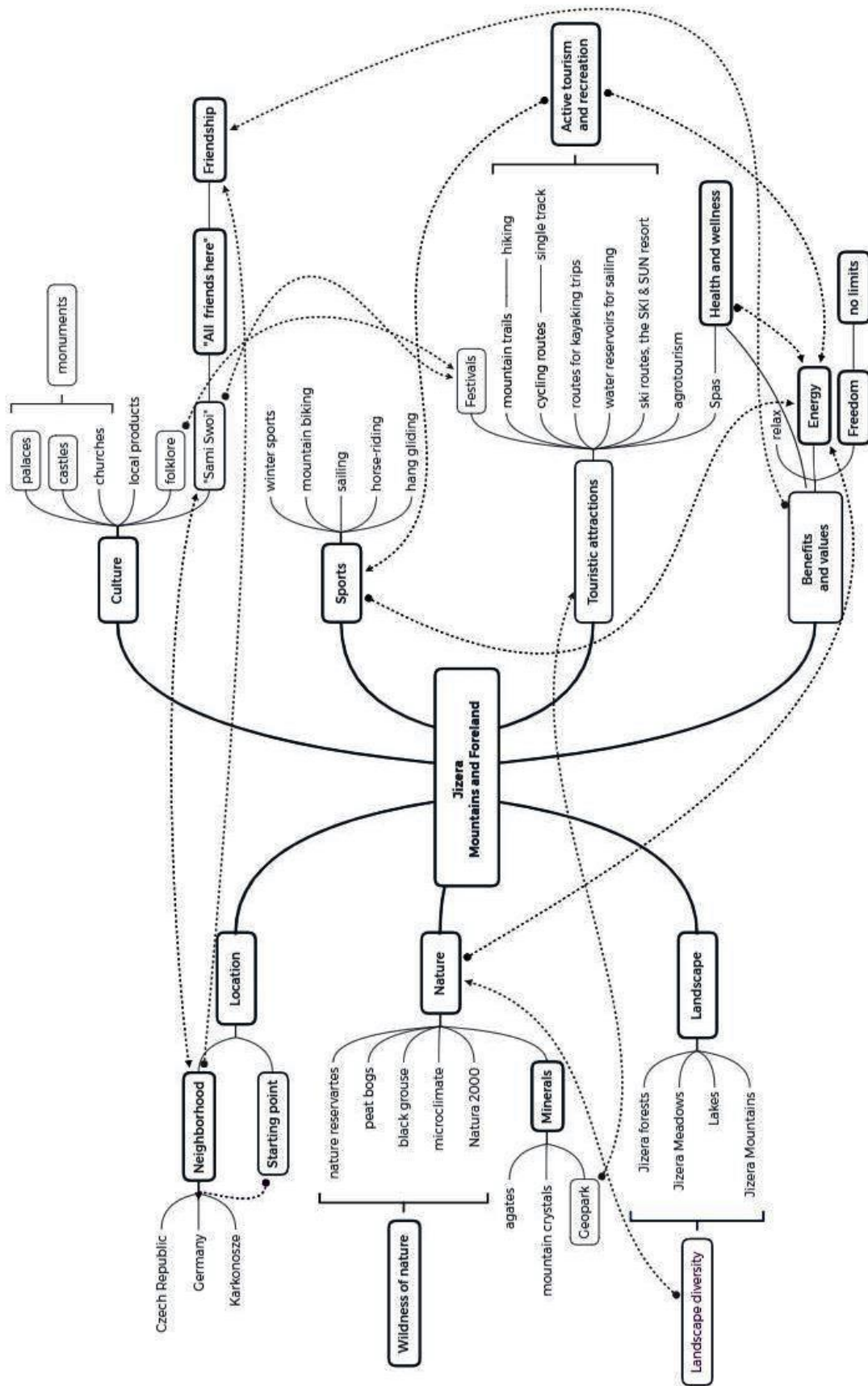
**Figure 1.** Identification of key brand potentials of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland (the Mind Map)

The mind mapping process allowed us to identify links between different potentials and identify key themes which can serve as the basis for building a brand idea (Figure 1). Then we used selected combinations of identified themes, and we created the sentences (slogans), which were to express the region's brand potential in the best possible way. We were searching for propositions which could constitute a basis for the integration of communication with various groups of stakeholders.
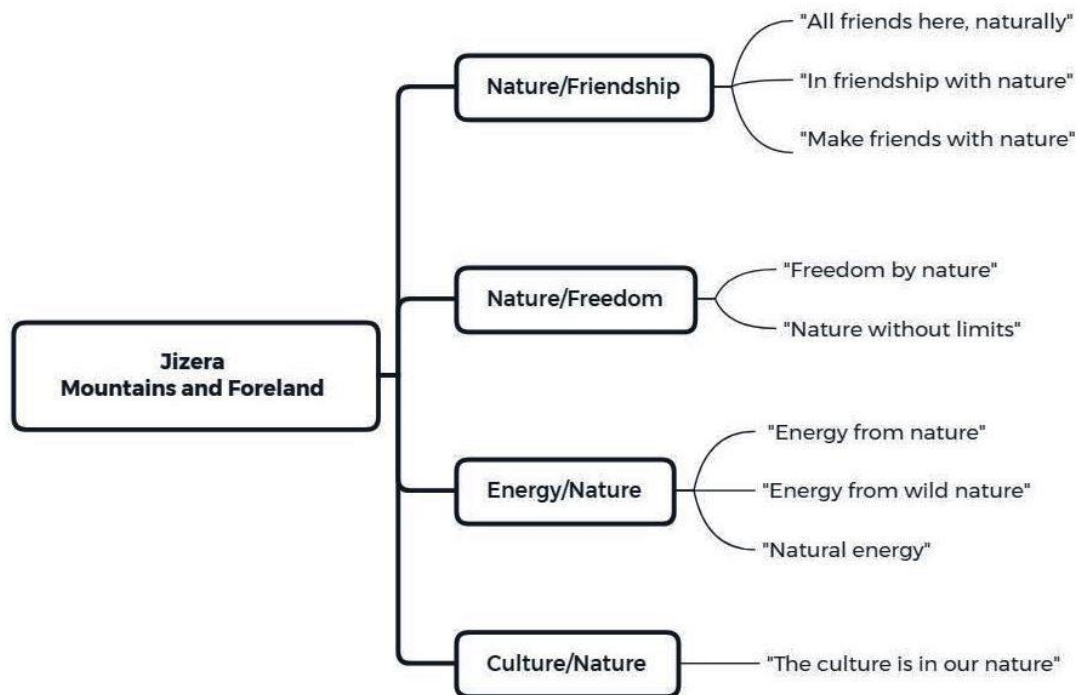


**Figure 2.** The propositions of the brand idea for the Jizera Mountains and Foreland.

Figure 2 presents the propositions of the brand idea for the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland, created for four selected combinations of identified brand themes. They allow for linking various regional potentials and conducting coherent communication activities. Presenting the brand idea in the form of a short slogan makes the message clear and simple.

The theme of nature is part of every combination, referring to natural wealth, landscapes and "wildness". It is by far the greatest potential of the Jizera Mountains and the Foreland. We can link it to the theme of energy, which refers to the benefits that may be obtained through contact with nature, as well as many sport and touristic activities that can be undertaken in the region. We may also use the theme of "freedom", indicating the significant value associated with the wildness of the terrain, the diversity of the landscape, and many possibilities resulting from the wide selection of attractions. Connecting friendship and nature in the brand idea, we point to the chance of getting very close contact with nature, but also to the friendly attitude of people and the value of partnership. The theme of "friendship" and "friends" also refers to the neighbourhood of Germany and the Czech Republic, as well as the English title of the film "Sami swoi" ("All friends here"). Finally, the slogan "The culture is in our nature"

communicates the location of cultural attractions in the natural environment, but also suggests positive attitudes of residents towards visitors.

The choice of a brand idea from the given proposals could take place on the basis of a debate made within the association of municipalities and the regional partnership organisations.

## 5. Conclusions

Nowadays, strong brands are generated in a co-creation process. Therefore, the crucial challenge connected with branding is to create platforms for integration and brand ideas that will define the directions of communication activities. Clarifying a brand idea can help in determining the collaborations and partnerships that enable maximising the brand impact.

The development of a region brand idea requires gathering information about the region, its identity, values and attributes, as well as promotional activities. Conducted research enables defining territorial potentials and mind-mapping process serves to identify the links between different potentials. As a result, we define brand themes and their combinations, which express the region's brand potential and constitute a basis for the integration of communication with various groups of stakeholders.

A brand idea can be the basis for building a strong region brand, but in order to achieve long-term effects, coherence and consistency of branding activities are essential. In the case of regions, the challenge is not only to create a brand idea but to search for ways to implement the adopted assumptions in the partnership network.

Regions differ in their size, character, and level of differentiation, which is the implication for further research on the possibilities to develop model solutions for region branding.

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