



International Society for Manufacturing,
Service and Management Engineering

received: 30 January, 2016
accepted: 29 February, 2016

CREATING AN IMAGE OF A REGION – EUROREGION BESKYDY AND EUROREGION CIESZYN SILESIA EXAMPLES

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ABSTRACT

In the discussion of communication in management studies, more and more attention is being given to research on an image of a product as well as a brand of an institution. In times when the value of great corporations is mainly based on well promoted and maintained brands, any activity without care of reputation is unimaginable. This rule also applies to cities, communes or regions. Image is currently of strategic significance for these subjects. It can be stated that there is a type of relationship. When an image of a certain region is positive, achievement of complex goals is easier. Therefore, when the region fulfils its goals, it is easier to gain respect of current and potential citizens, tourists, and investors. Thus, a positive image is one of the greatest advantages that a region can have, as it is directly transferred into social and economic development. In the article, on the basis of the literature of the subject, the process of creating an image of a region is presented. According to the survey conducted among Polish and Czech respondents related to Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia, by place of residence, workplace or place of education image of the regions appeared to be one of the most distinguishing of their features.

KEY WORDS

culture, image, Euroregion Beskydy, Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia, tourism

DOI: 10.1515/emj-2016-0010

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INTRODUCTION

In Poland, for about twenty years, practical activities aimed at creation of an image of a region have been undertaken. The current social-economic system, globalisation, reforms and membership of the European Union has forced taking intensified action, not only by commercial subjects, but also by the subjects such as euroregions (for example Euroregion Beskydy or Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia). Among the factors connected to the subject, which image is to be shaped, a fundamental role is played by its identity, which is a group of features characterising the subject. In the case of a region, the identity includes those of its features, that are regarded by the citizens as the most important, distinguishing and unchangeable. These features are also called distinguishing features

or „identity anchors” (Altkorn, 2002, pp. 24-25). However, when describing them, it is important to note, that they are such features which essentially distinguish a region from its counterparts, constituting its uniqueness, individuality and character. Thus the identity reflexes the real features of a region, however, it is not depicted accurately in the image. Hence, the people managing a region have their own vision of how they would like the region to be perceived by its inhabitants, tourists and potential investors.

The aim of this work is to define the distinguishing features of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia (in the perception of certain target groups) and to answer how cultural institution within

a region influences its image. In the first part of the article, on the basis of the literature of the subject, the process of creating an image of a region is described. In the second part, on the basis of direct research conducted in Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia in a group of Polish and Czech respondents, recognition and evaluation of the distinguishing features of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia is conducted.

The research was realized within two projects independent of each other (PL.3.22/3.3.05/13.04010, PL.3.22/3.3.06/13.04201), which were co-sponsored in 85% by the funds of the European Union from the European Regional Development Fund within Poland-Czech Republic Cross-Border Operational Programme 2007-2013 and in 10% by the budget of the country. The research carried out in Euroregion Beskydy was financed through the agency of Euroregion Beskydy and the research conducted in Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia was financed through the agency of Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia. In both projects, the author was a member of the Polish-Czech research team, he was also the manager of a project conducted in the Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia.

1. CREATING AN IMAGE OF A REGION IN THE LIGHT OF THE LITERATURE OF THE SUBJECT

There are many definitions of an image. The definitions differ mainly in the perspective from which members of different parts of social life look at their communication with the widely regarded public. Therefore, giving one appropriate definition that would show the term in the maximally relevant and consistent way is impossible. General definitions often describe an image as a subjective picture of a certain object that stems from an individual process of perception (Hartman, 1992). According to H. Mruk (2012), an image is a synthesis of imagined pictures, feelings and expectations which occur as a consequence of perceived stimuli. It seems that an image is a picture in our heads (Pictures in Our Heads), an imagined picture of certain objects of our surroundings, which helps us categorize and arrange everything we meet. Other definitions describe an image as the full of nuances, relatively unchangeable, communicable whole of objective and subjective, also

false, strongly tinged with emotions imaginings, ideas, attitudes, feelings, experiences of a person or a group towards a certain object, for example a region (Johannsen, 1968). According to Ph. Kotler et al. (1993), an image of a region is the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people associate with a certain place (Kotler et al., 1993). A. Szromnik claims that an image of a region is the whole of subjective imaginings of the reality which originated in human minds as a consequence of perception, influence of mass media and informal information transfer (Szromnik, 2007).

The process of creating an image of a region (Fig. 1) includes the subjects of its origin and change. By definition, it is a relatively permanent category. Hence, once created it is difficult to change in a short period of time. Nonetheless, it is assumed that in a long period of time a change of an image is possible through long-term, well-planned actions. These possibilities result from the factors that cause its origin and change. Therefore, their potential influence on the image of the region should be considered (Żyminkowski, 2003; Szondi, 2007). Creating an image of a region is preceded by an in-depth analysis of the situation, particularly the attitudes of the target group of a designed campaign and their habits involved in using sources of information. At the next stage, the goals of the campaign are established and the means and methods are adjusted. Measurement of the degree to which the goals have been achieved constitutes the biggest difficulty.

In order to obtain a clear analysis, advantages and disadvantages are considered as internal factors from the point of view of the local community, which are influenced by the community, whereas chances and threats as external factors coming from the environment. The environment is divided into two spheres. Firstly, a natural-geographic environment is distinguished, secondly, there is an abstract environment (for example law, political system, social and economic trends and changes, worldwide trends and changes). The analysis of this type makes much easier to recognize advantages and chances which should be seized as well as disadvantages and threats which should be overcome. Through clear definition of advantages and chances, new conceptions and plans can be created and utilized. Sources of disadvantages and threats should also be identified. Some disadvantages can be easily controlled and improved, while other can be out of the social control.

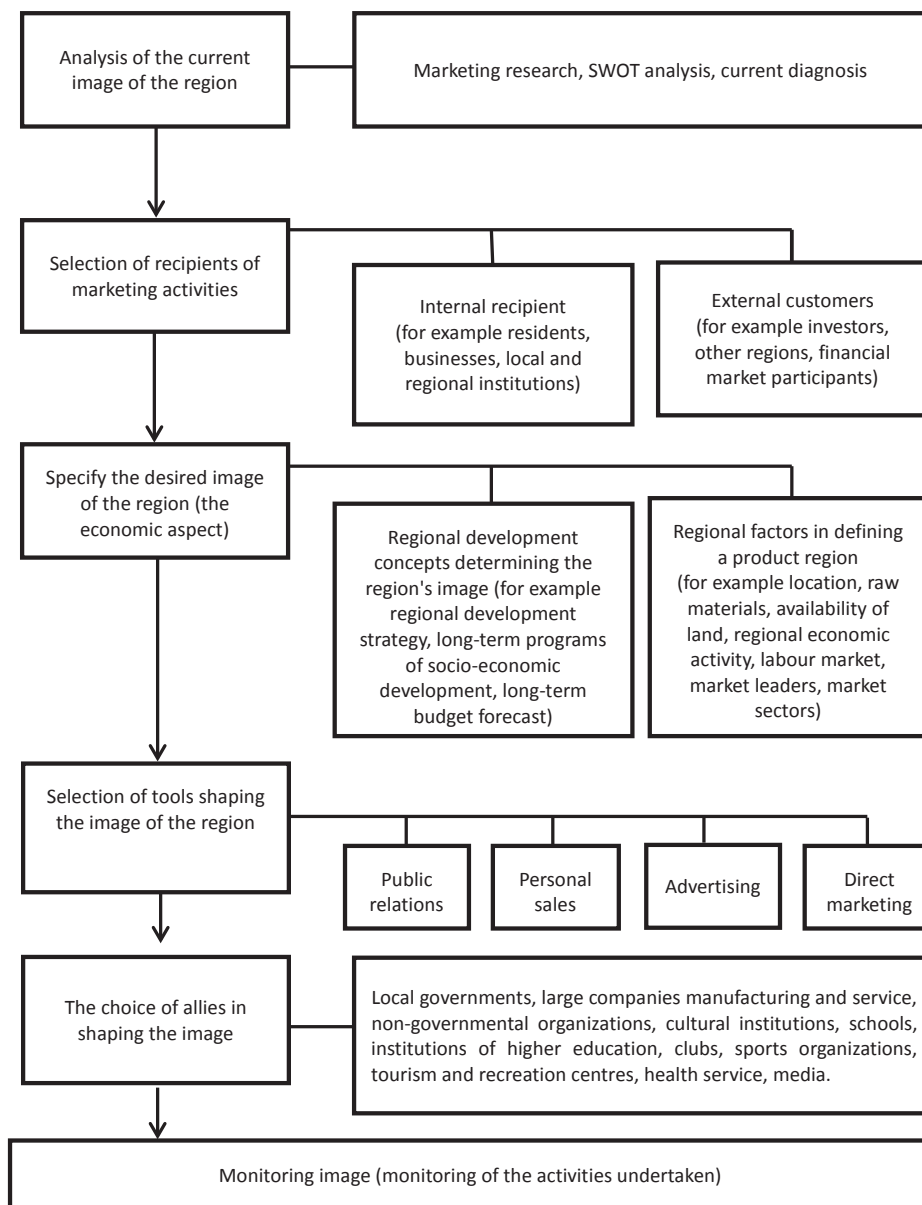


Fig. 1. The process of creating an image of a region

Source: The author's own work on the basis of (Anholt, 2007; Anholt, 2010; Glińska et al., 2009; Kolb, 2006; Scott, 2010; Pike, 2010; Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

The next stage of creating an image of a region is a choice of recipients of marketing activities. A prepared conception of creating an image should involve mainly such target groups as inhabitants of the region, companies and institutions active in the region, local, voivodship and central authorities, domestic and foreign tourists, domestic and foreign investors, international institutions, media (Martineau, 1958; Richards & Palmer, 2010).

An equally important stage of creating an image of a euroregion is determining a target image. W. Budzyński distinguishes four types of an image (Budzyński, 2003, pp. 16-17):

- a real image (foreign) which is defined as the real image of a region among the people who have had a contact with the region (for example tourists);
- a mirror image (local), which is the image of a euroregion among its inhabitants;
- a desired image, describing what a euroregion wants to be like and how it would like to be perceived by its surroundings;
- an optimal image is a compromise between the images above, which is possible to be achieved.

The desired target image should be a positive image (for example a touristic region, an investor-friendly region, a region friendly for its citizens and

so on). Very often it is defined, described in a regional development strategy. It is achieved after a long period of time as a result of a defined marketing strategy, because people's attitudes change slowly and the process requires a large amount of work and needs regular controls.

Choice of tools for creating an image is the next stage. In these tools there are included classical tools of marketing promotion such as: public relations, personal sale, advertisement and direct marketing. Well-conducted promotion campaign of a region often decides about its economic development, thus it determines a place for investments. A promotion succeeds only if it is realised in an efficient coordinated way by authorities of voivodships, districts, communes, cities and regional institutions. It is also very important to change random, single promotional initiatives into cyclic and repeated actions.

One of the most important elements of a strategy creating an image of a region should be identification of allies in creating the positive image. It takes origin in a complicated process in which the participants are citizens, local authorities as well as private and public institutions. All of them have an influence on such elements of the image as being recognizable, investment offers, quality of life in the region, social capital, touristic and cultural offer (Białecki, 2010, p. 69). Activities promoting a region are organized both for obtaining support of the citizens for actions undertaken by the authorities of the region and in order to encourage customers (potential investors, tourists) to choose the prepared market offer.

Although an image can be formed freely as it

consolidates through subjective perception, it is worth remembering that the consolidated picture is not permanent. It is not homogeneous either, because it takes origin in the minds of single persons, who constitute the environment. Thus constant monitoring of the undertaken actions is necessary.

2. THE RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

The main aim of the direct research was to identify the most important distinguishing features of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia (distinguishing features, which have an essential influence on the image of the euroregions) and to determine the effectiveness of activities related with the formation of the desired image of the euroregion. These studies were carried out in the framework of the first stage of the process of creating an image – analysis of the current image of the region. The following subjects were examined in detail:

- knowledge about basic information relating to Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia;
- areas of activity in Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia and their assessment by the respondents;
- differences in perception by respondents;
- the distinguishing features of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia;
- influence of particular subjects and institutions on

Tab. 1. Basic information on the conducted research

CATEGORIES	EUROREGION BESKYDY	EUROREGION CIESZYN SILESIA
Research method	Survey	Survey
Research tool	Survey questionnaire	Survey questionnaire
Sample selection	Targeted	Targeted
Criteria of selection of people for the sample	People connected to Euroregion Beskydy (habitation, work, school, university)	People connected to Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia (habitation, work, school, university)
Size of the sample	236	237
Spacial range of the research	Euroregion Beskydy (Żywiec district, Karvina, Ostrava-city and Cieszyn district – bordering Euroregion Beskydy)	Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia (Cieszyn district, Karvina, Nowy Jicin, Ostrava-city and Frydek Mistek district – bordering Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia)
Time range of the research	May-July 2014	May-July 2014

Source: author's own work on the basis of the research assumptions.

Tab. 2. Chosen characteristics of the respondents [%]

CATEGORIES		EUROREGION BESKYDY N=236	EUROREGION CIESZYN SILESIA N=237
Sex	Female	65,68	62,03
	Male	34,32	37,97
Education	Elementary school	-	-
	Lower secondary education	0,42	2,11
	Secondary education	2,54	4,64
	Middle school	72,88	47,58
	Higher education	24,15	45,57
Age	from 18 to 24 years old	50,42	35,44
	from 25 to 34 years old	24,58	27,0
	from 35 to 44 years old	19,49	21,52
	from 45 to 54 years old	5,08	13,50
	from 55 to 64 years old	0,42	1,69
	over 64	-	0,84
Location (country) fill in the questionnaire	Surveys completed in Poland	52,54	54,85
	Surveys completed in the Czech Republic	47,46	45,15

the image of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia.

On the basis of the available data and the author's own observations the hypothesis was assumed that culture is the most important distinguishing feature of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia and plays an essential role in creating the image of these euroregions.

People connected to the Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia (through habitation, work or education) were subjected to the research. For this purpose, the survey method was utilized and a survey questionnaire was the research tool. The research was conducted in both Polish and Czech parts of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia. Basic information on the conducted research is shown in Tab. 1.

Euroregion is a region located on both sides of the border, with its own coordinating institutions, which are anchored in the existing agreements concluded between public organizations (local government), appointed for the implementation of joint projects of social, economic, cultural. Euroregion Beskydy has been the first euroregion in the history that has connected borders of three post-communist countries – the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. It originated when representatives of the three border regions signed an agreement on 9 June 2000 in the Czech Republic in Frydek-Mistek. The presidium of the euroregion is constituted by 15 members –

5 delegates from each side, members of three associations. The headquarters of the associations are located in Bielsko-Biała (Poland), Frydek-Mistek (the Czech Republic) and Zilina (Slovakia). Euroregion Śląsk Cieszyński – Těšínské Slezsko was created on 22 April 1998 in Cieszyn with signing an agreement of regional cooperation by Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju i Współpracy Regionalnej „Olza” from Poland and Regionální sdružení pro esko-polskou spolupráci Těšínského Slezska (Regionální sdružení územní spolupráce Těšínského Slezska since 2008) from the Czech Republic. The headquarters of the associations are located in Cieszyn (Poland) and Český Těšín (the Czech Republic).

3. DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF EUROREGION BESKYDY AND EUROREGION CIESZYN SILESIA – RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the first questions of the survey questionnaire was to check whether the respondents were aware of the existence of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia. To the question: have you ever heard about the existence of Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia? Over 60% of the respondents gave the positive answer – Fig. 2. The same question

concerning the two years younger Euroregion Beskydy was also asked to a similar group of respondents from Euroregion Beskydy, obtaining 52% of positive answers.

In the next part of the research, the respondents were asked to point what areas of activities they matched to Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion

Cieszyn Silesia. It was an important question as the process of creating an image of a region should be started with a „stocktaking” of distinguishing features of the region. The distribution of answers is displayed in Fig. 3.

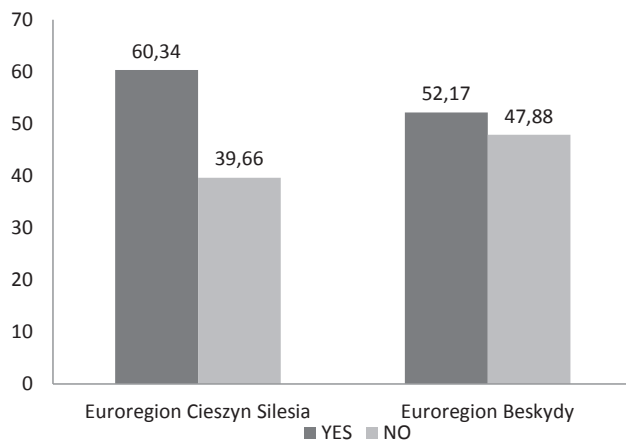


Fig. 2. Awareness of the existence of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia among the respondents [%]

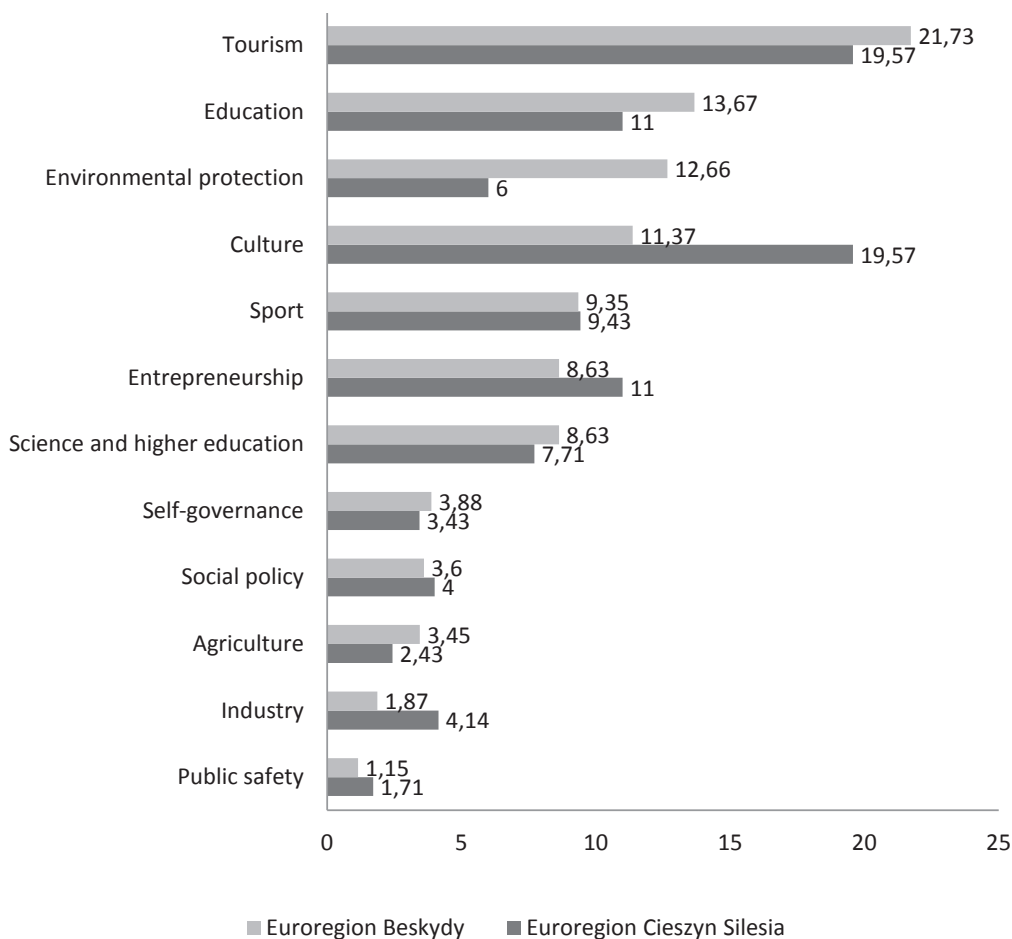


Fig. 3. Areas of activities matched to Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia [%]

On the basis of the data gained from the respondents, it can be noticed that Euroregion Beskydy is usually associated with such activities as: tourism, education, conservationism and culture. The lowest ranks were given to public safety and industry. For Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia the most frequent matches were culture and tourism, followed by education and business, while the fifth rank was given to sport. Much lower number of respondents pointed at public safety and agriculture.

The respondents were also asked to evaluate the condition of the areas (scale from 1 – very poor, to 5 – very good). Considering the results above, it is not surprising that the highest marks (above the average) were given to tourism, sport, and culture for Euroregion Beskydy. The following gained marks lower than the average: social policy, industry, social activity, and self-governance. The results of the research confirm the importance of tourism and culture as the main distinguishing features of Euro-

region Beskydy having large influence on the image. The evaluations for Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia were very similar, but culture not tourism had the highest rank – 3.62, tourism was second with the result of 3.57, whereas sport and education gained the third rank. The worst marks were given to: industry, social policy, self-governance, and agriculture. The results confirm the importance of culture as one of the most significant distinguishing features of Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia. The distribution of the answers is displayed in Fig. 4.

In the subsequent part of the survey questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate the subjects they considered essential for the image of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia. According to them, institutions of culture and centres of tourism and recreation have the biggest influence on the image. The wealthy cultural heritage, the interesting, well-developed cultural offer of the euroregions, the mountainous terrain shape and the environmental

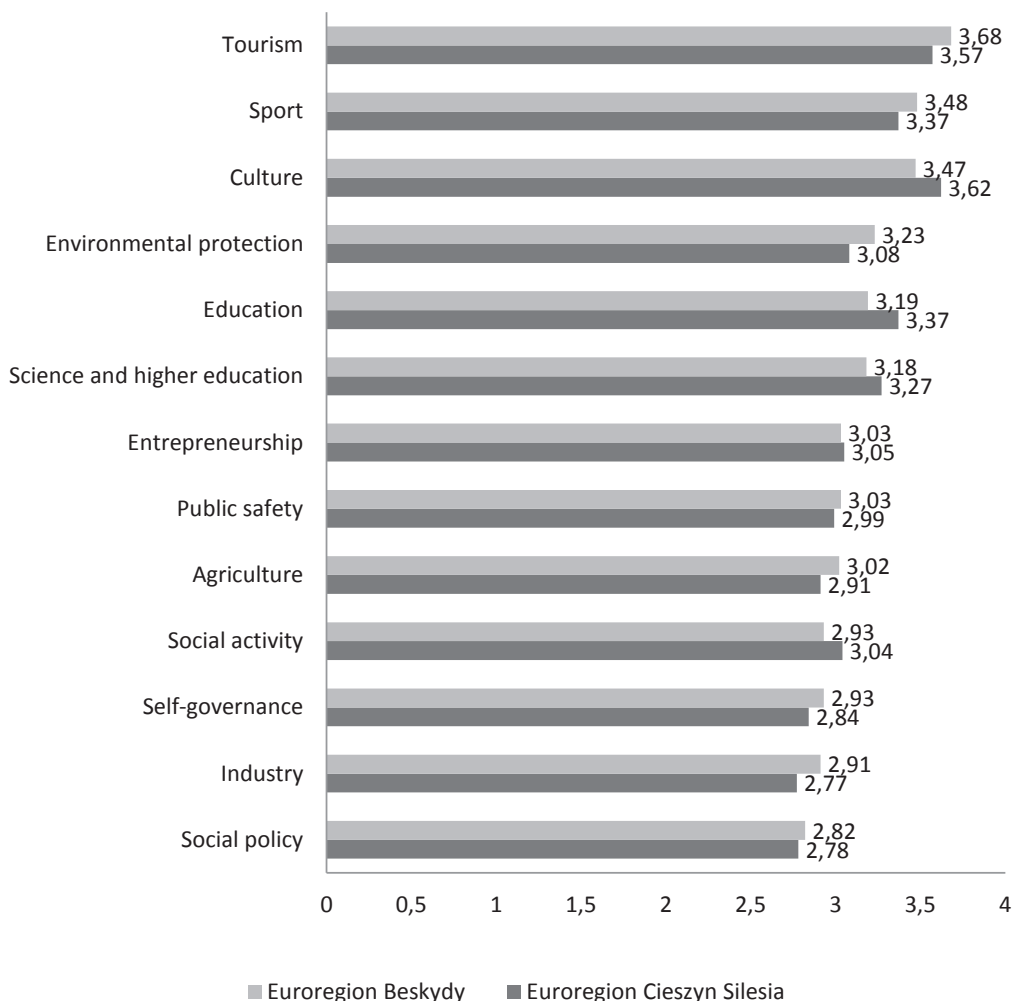


Fig. 4. The distinguishing features of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia in scale from 1 to 5

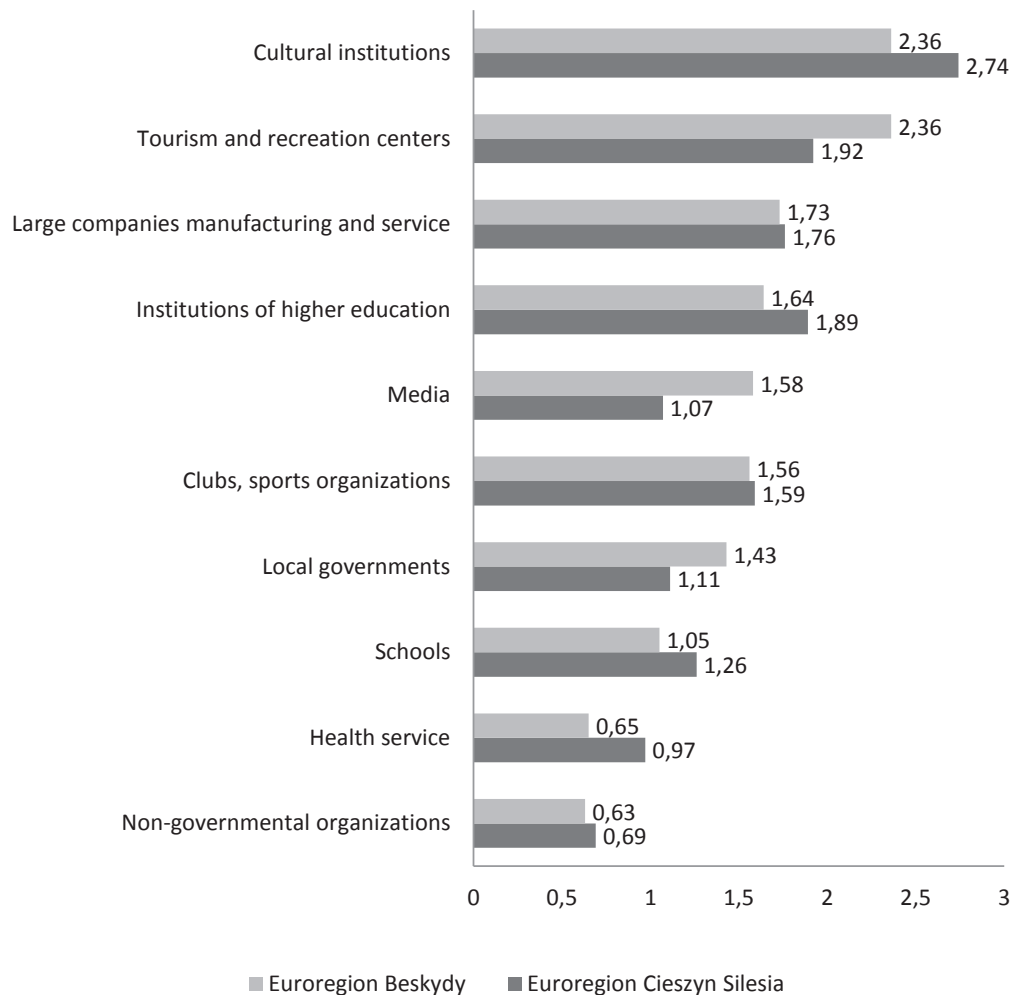


Fig. 5. Subjects influencing the image of Euroregion

advantages are the main magnet that attracts both tourists and investors to the euroregions. Thus it is not a surprise that the biggest role in forming the image of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia is attributed to institutions of culture and centres of tourism and recreation. According to the respondents, the smallest influence on the image of the euroregions have non-governmental organisations and medical subjects. The distribution of the answers is presented in Fig. 5.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Concluding the conducted research on the image of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia it must be stated, that the respondents from Poland and the Czech Republic identified the main

distinguishing features of the euroregions influencing the image similarly. Tourism and culture were primarily included into the distinguishing features. It was reflected in the mission of Region Cieszyn Silesia: „Cieszyn Silesia cultivating the cultural heritage of this land cares of education and culture as the fundamentals of further development and preserving the extraordinary attractiveness for investments it improves standards of conservatism, health service and welfare” as well as in the mission of Euroregion Beskydy: „Euroregion Beskydy is a land of wildlife and landscape of great value, clean environment and balanced development inhabited by a safe community, having guarantee of good material status based on local resources, the community, which cultivates tradition and culture and is open for cross-border cooperation and innovations”. The mission formed in this way is consistent with the expectations of the inhabitants of the euroregion. On

the basis of the conducted research an assumption can be made that the real image of Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia is consistent with the expected image, described in their strategy of development.

Numerous cultural institutions active in the euroregions (particularly in Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia), a rich and in many cases unique cultural offer, as well as a large community of creators of culture in comparison with the rest of the country, make these territories incredibly attractive. Many cultures, a rich cultural heritage, history and interesting location of the both regions constitute a very good opportunity for organisation of cultural enterprises, unique not only for the country, but also for Europe. The potential of the both regions is also a consequence of advantageous natural and climatic conditions, which contribute to many forms of tourism, particularly cultural tourism. The cultural wealth of the euroregions and their amazing on a European scale architecture have a great impact on their image. A high standard of the offer of the area is an incentive for tourists, investors and organizers of for example cultural or business tourism: trainings, conferences, scientific seminars, business meetings, integrating and motivational stays.

The high status of institutions of culture acting in Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia, association of the both euroregions with culture and cultural activity by most of the respondents is a good starting point for wider Polish-Czech cross-border cooperation as cluster or network cooperation. However, learning the mechanisms of origin of Polish-Czech cross-border cultural cluster acting in Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia and Euroregion Beskydy requires further, deepened studies.

CONCLUSIONS

Local authorities more and more often are aware that every city, commune or a whole euroregion has an image, which they can influence. If it is negative, an attempt to improve it can be undertaken, if it is unclear, it can be strengthened by a choics of appropriate methods of promotion. Moreover, an increase in interest in formation of a positive image among representatives of a euroregion stems from understanding of the function that the image fulfils and advantages that it can give to inhabitants of the euroregion. The presented research shows that culture

and tourism are the main distinguishing features of the Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia and the process of creating the image those euroregions should be based on these aspects.

The influence of institutions of culture, tourism and recreation centers on an image of the Euroregion Beskydy and Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia is methodologically poorly recognized so far, but it has already been noticed in activity of local and regional authorities. However, many regions are still unable to communicate their image successfully. It is caused by a lack of conceptions, which would contain distinguishing features such as vibrant institutions of culture – promotional campaigns based on generalities still exist. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that in order to succeed in this scope being organizer or host of distinguished and respected institutions of culture, tourism and recreations centers is not sufficient, skilful presentation of their advantages and offer is also necessary.

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