

## Article

# Regional Labelling as a Tool for Supporting Rural Development: A Slovak Case Study

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**Abstract:** Regional product labelling has become a trend in recent years, with the goal of being able to stimulate and support local economies; increase the sales of quality local products and services; preserve and maintain traditions, local cultural values, and the character of rural landscapes; and promote the use of local resources, potential, and raw materials. The existing Slovak studies deal primarily with the perception of consumers and tourism. In this article, we analysed forms of rural development in connection with regional product labelling and the Slovak regions of Kopanice and Záhorie. This theme is a relatively new phenomenon in Slovakia, and that is the author's main contribution. The research was conducted using an online questionnaire administered between May and July 2022 in each district of the region, with a total of 283 respondents participating. The results obtained from the questionnaire survey were statistically processed using Pearson's correlation coefficient. We used STATISTIC 109 software (Tibco software, Palo Alto, California). The questionnaire method is the most suitable method for determining the perceptions of the respondents. The goal was to analyse rural development in connection with regional product labelling and to identify areas of the application of regional product labels. The term regional product was associated with production in a specific region (50.5%) and with the customs and traditions of the region (43.8%). Supporting employment and entrepreneurship in the region were considered by 43.1% of the respondents as the most important in the region. From the perspective of the application of regional labelling in connection with rural development, we confirmed gender and education dependence. Women with first- and second-level higher education saw regional labels as the main element in the development of the region and the local economy.

**Keywords:** rural management; regional label; regional product; agricultural development; rural areas in Slovakia



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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, place is considered to be one of the qualitative aspects of production. This is best represented by regional product labelling schemes. The region of origin and its uniqueness thus has become the very essence of product quality and a guarantee thereof, while also being a source of competitive advantage [1]. Regional product labelling schemes are designed to guarantee—usually through certification—a direct link between a particular product and a particular region, allowing the producer to use a label representing this relationship. We can see regional product labels as a phenomenon of a marketing mix that emphasises the external attributes (appellation, name, and graphical expression) that differentiate a product from its competitors on the market. The experience of Adalja et al. [2] and other sources indicates that consumers typically prefer local products because they perceive them as fresh, trust their source, and attribute health positives and environmental sustainability to them. Furthermore, they are able to support small farms and the local

economy in this manner. Consumers also tend to identify local production with “more friendly” production methods and the perception of higher product safety [3].

In the literature, regional foods are conceptualised as a form of cultural capital with the potential to leverage wider social and economic benefits for local rural areas, and several empirical studies have indicated that regional foods can indeed play this role (e.g., [4,5]). Often, the key leverage mechanism employed in this approach is a territorially based qualification or certification scheme that defines standards of production and supply that are beneficial to the socio-economic status of the area, signalled clearly to buyers by way of a mark or brand. In recent years, much has been written about the contribution that regional foods can make to rural development, and an established body of literature now exists concerning these products [6–13].

Therefore, regional product labelling may be understood as an integral part of the process of regional identity formation in terms of the theory of regional institutionalisation introduced by Paasi [14]. Paasi [14] understood regions as social constructs that penetrate into the spatial and mental structures of each society through a process of institutionalisation comprising four notional stages. The first phase consists of the spatial shaping of regions, i.e., accepting boundaries that are not necessarily tangible. The second stage is characterised by a process of symbolic shaping, during which regions acquire more symbols in addition to their name (e.g., specific products). In the third stage, the region takes on an institutional shape, with newly established institutions helping solidify the existence of the emerging region (starting from voluntary associations and ending with self-government). The supreme phase of the institutionalisation process rests in the region’s anchoring in the spatial structures of society (mostly by acquiring certain administrative or self-governing powers) and in its perception as a consolidated unit by its inhabitants as well as outside of the region.

Regional labels also contribute to the development of tourism. What tourist regions offer for visitors is differentiated through labels [15]. With regard to local residents, a label can strengthen solidarity with the region, encourage public participation in events in the region, and mediate contacts between producers and other local participants [16]. The results of successful labelling are reflected in the increasing numbers of visitors to a particular destination; a higher demand for products and services; increasing real estate prices; better tourist outcomes; and, finally, in the contentment of the local residents. Successful region labelling should result in maintaining and attracting all interest groups and influential groups in accordance with the established label strategy of the region [17].

The research gap in the regional label studies is related to rural development in connection with a regional label. Little attention has been paid to regional foods and rural development [18–20]. We found a similar study focused on regional labels and rural development in the Czech Republic. This study identifies the factors determining how sustainable and beneficial complex regional development labels are [21]. Our research maps the forms of rural development in connection with regional labels in two regions of Slovakia because this theme is missed in the literature.

In this article, we focus on the regional development of rural areas in connection with regional labelling. We are inclined to agree with Tregear et al. [18], who suggested that regional product labelling is aimed at developing rural areas with natural and cultural diversity. We selected rural areas for the following reasons in reference to Torrea, Wallela [22]:

- Rural areas are constantly changing; represent a major part of the world’s surface area (including 37.7% of all agricultural land); and are home to approximately 3.4 billion people, or 46% of the global population. These facts make them essential players in terms of the present and future of humanity and Earth.
- They are characterised by high diversity between and within regions and countries, are highly coveted, and are the object of fierce competition between nations and regions.
- They contain almost all the resources necessary for human existence, such as daily food requirements, sources of energy, the metals and polymers necessary for manufacturing,

and the oxygen people absorb. Therefore, they are central to the public policies and strategies of interest groups and nations.

Tregear et al. [18] assert that regional, especially food, products have a direct impact on rural development. They identified two rural development strategies. First, regional products contribute to socio-economic well-being through the existence of a strong producer network, increased employment opportunities within that network, and increased revenues from the effective management of the supply chain and marketing the product. A regional product is important to the local economy. Second, regional products offer a breadth of interlinked resources, including environmental (e.g., distinctive landscapes, local animal breeds, and plant varieties), cultural (e.g., techniques, know-how, myths, and stories), and economic (e.g., skilled employment). Many researchers empirically document evidence that justifies the imperative of financial credit for economic growth and development [23]. Regional foods are thus seen to potentially contribute to a wide range of initiatives that encourage diverse activities and novel interactions between multiple types of actors (e.g., tourist trails, markets, festivals, educational initiatives, and community events). In this paper, we study both regional rural development strategies using a Slovak case study.

Each country has its own regional labelling network. The Regio Danubiana Quality Label was among the first regional labelling initiatives in Slovakia. In 2008, the NGO Regional Environmental Centre of Slovakia started product labelling in Kysuce, Záhorie, and Malé Karpaty (Little Carpathians). At the end of this initiative, regional product labelling was transferred to Local Action Groups [24]. We currently register 17 active regional labels (Figure 1) with a uniform logotype with a folklore motif, and these incorporate over 300 unique local products. The latest label is the regional Horný Šariš label, which was added in 2021 and is the first regional label in eastern Slovakia [25]. The Horný Šariš label has two food products (fir honey and natural fruit juices), one natural product (natural soaps with herbs), one event (the Dukla Peace Run), and one accommodation facility (the cultural and tourism centre in Bardejov) [25]. In 2022, the second regional label, Horný Zemplín, was added in eastern Slovakia. As of 2023, it has no certified products, services, accommodation, or events [26]. In 2020 and 2021, another two regional labels were established (Piešťansko and Podhorie-Hnilec-Sľubica); however, by 2023, these had not announced calls for the submission of applications or a single certified regional product.



**Figure 1.** Established regional product labels in Slovakia. Adapted from the Regional Environmental Center, own authors.

All regional products in Slovakia must meet the following criteria: they must be unique to the region; they must maintain traditional production methods, local resources, and the share of manual labour; and they must be environmentally friendly [24]. Nemčíková

et al. [27] assessed Slovakia as a country just beginning to employ a labelling concept (including regional product labels) in individual geographic dimensions. The goals of this paper were to use a questionnaire survey to analyse rural development in connection with regional product labelling and to identify areas of application of regional product labels for the rural development of the selected Slovak regions. We chose two regions, which were created as a part of a joint project called “Support of Regional Products from Kopanice and Záhorie”. Rural development is progressively becoming a major EU policy objective. Both widespread literature and EU policy stress the importance of supporting typical products to attain this objective. As a matter of fact, typical products are strictly tied to their area of origin [28].

## 2. Materials and Methods

The area of the research was the Kopanice and Záhorie regions (Figure 2). The territory was defined by the territorial scope of the regional label (the Myjava, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Malacky, Senica, and Skalica districts). For this paper, we selected two labels created through a joint project called “Support of Regional Products from Kopanice and Záhorie” from the call “Rural Development Programme 2007–2018, Slovak Republic”. The aim of the project was to promote local people in the regions engaged in traditional crafts or producing products using preserved traditional methods that save natural resources and are environmentally friendly. A secondary aim was to support the development of regional tourism and employment. Kopanice and Záhorie are geographically, ethnographically, and geomorphologically different regions. The Záhorie label was not a new label as it was one of the first created in the Slovak Republic as part of the “Green Belt” pilot project (2006–2008) together with the Malé Karpaty and Kysuce labels. However, the label had stagnated, and the initial initiative needed to be revived. The Kopanice label was a new label created as part of the “Support of Regional Products from Kopanice and Záhorie” project.



**Figure 2.** Demarcation of territory regional labels Kopanice and Záhorie. Adapted with permission from Ref. [29].

The Kopanice region is a typical region with dispersed settlements. In the region itself, there are several hundred dugouts, often in very remote places with traditional houses and an architectural style typical to the turn of the 20th century. The Kopanice region is typical for the strong preservation of cultural heritage in the form of folklore groups, traditional folklore festivals, and many other cultural and social activities [29]. The first regional label was awarded in 2014. In this region, the widest range of regional labels is found in the food and agricultural products category (e.g., milk, meat products, fruits and dried fruits, and bakery products). The Kopanice region has a specific category of services, namely, distilleries (distilling fruit for alcohol, Table 1).

**Table 1.** Division of certified regional products by product category in the Kopanice region. Adapted with permission from Ref. [29].

Category	Products				Services	
Subcategory	Craft Product	Food and Agricultural Product	Natural Product	Accommodation and Food Services	Events	Specific Category
Number of certified products	4	8	4	1	0	2 *
% share of all certified products	21.1	42.0	21.1	5.3	0.0	10.5
Total				19		

\* Specific category of services, distilleries (distilling fruit for alcohol).

The Záhorie territory is in the west of Slovakia. It neighbours Austria and the Czech Republic. Almost 300,000 people live in the relatively small area of Záhorie (just over 2500 km<sup>2</sup>). The region has a typical dialect. Záhorie is divided into Horné, Dolné, and Stredné Záhorie and is characterised by favourable climatic conditions for wine growing, with Horné Záhorie being the traditional wine region of Slovakia. Stredné Záhorie is typical for asparagus, while Dolné Záhorie is a paradise for mushroom growers [29]. The first regional label was awarded in 2014. There is a balanced representation of regional products in the handicraft product (Table 2, 34.8%) and the food and agricultural product (Table 2, 34.8%) categories. Certified products include products made from ceramics; wire and textiles; and meat, milk, cheese, wine, fruit juice, and jam products. The Záhorie region also has a certified museum of agriculture (Table 2, special categories).

**Table 2.** Division of certified regional products by product category in the Záhorie region. Adapted with permission from Ref. [29].

Category	Products				Services		
Subcategory	Craft Product	Food and Agricultural Product	Natural Product	Accommodation Services	Food Services	Events	Specific Category
Number of certified products	8	8	3	1	0	2	1 *
% share of all certified products	34.8	34.8	13.1	4.3	0.0	8.7	4.3
Total				23			

\* Specific category private museum of agriculture.

In the research related to regional labelling, we analysed the perception and opinion of consumers regarding regional labelling in the Kopanice and Záhorie regions in Slovakia in line with the development of the region. The subject of the survey was regional products

(food, craft products, accommodation and catering establishments, and regional events). The survey was conducted in May to July 2022 in each district of the region. The respondents were divided in terms of gender, age, education, economic activity, the locality where they lived, and territorial classification. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Docs. The survey was conducted on Slovak men and women aged 18 or older who were likely to buy regional products, with a total of 283 respondents (Table 3). The survey participants were informed about the study and that by filling out the questionnaire, they agreed to its publication.

**Table 3.** Socio-demographic profile of respondents.

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	112	39.6
Female	171	60.4
<b>Age</b>		
18 to 25	35	12.4
26 to 61	226	79.9
More than 62	22	7.7
<b>Education</b>		
Primary	9	3.2
Secondary	123	43.5
University (1st, 2nd)	147	51.9
University (3rd)	4	1.4
<b>Locality</b>		
Urban	166	58.7
Rural	117	41.3
<b>Region</b>		
Kopanice	181	64.0
Záhorie	102	36.0

The following questions were used in the analysis (Table 4): (1) Which statement do you associate with the term “regional product”? (2) Indicate a logo you have noticed when shopping for food: (3) Where have you seen a regional label? (4) How important do you think product labelling is in the region?

**Table 4.** Questionnaire questions.

Questionnaire Questions					
1.	Which statement do you associate with the term “regional product”?	a handcrafted product	a product that follows the customs and traditions of the region	a product produced only in the region	I do not know
2.	Indicate a logo you have noticed when shopping for food.	regional product Kopanice or Záhorie	quality from our regions	a non-existing regional product logo	I do not know
3.	Where have you seen a regional label?	in a store	at a public event (for example: fair, village day)	directly at the producer	nowhere
4.	How important do you think product labelling is in the region?	it supports employment and entrepreneurship in the region	it promotes tourism	it supports the region’s sustainability and development	the product is better than other products on the market none

The representativeness of the sample was guaranteed by including geographic location. To verify the representativeness of the sample, we used a nonparametric chi-squared test. The results of this test indicated that we could assume the sample is representative by region ( $p$ -value = 0.456). The questionnaire survey results were statistically processed

using the STATISTIC 109 software (Tibco software, Palo Alto, California). We established several hypotheses: H1: we expect that urban respondents pay more attention to regional labels; H2: we expect that urban respondents buy regional products; and H3: we expect that respondents with higher education consider rural development the main element of a regional label. We used Pearson’s correlation coefficient method and tested at a significance level of 0.05. Using Pearson’s correlation coefficient method, we determined the dependence on gender, age, education, and locality, including selected factors on consumer behaviour. The coefficient had values in the intervals from <0,1> or <1,1>. A value of 0 indicated independence [30].

### 3. Results and Discussion

Women were predominant in our survey (60.4%, Table 3). We assumed that they shop more often due to the fact that they take care of the household and that the regional products are mainly food. We state that the sample was not representative in terms of gender. The age range was generated on the basis of purchasing power, as people aged 18 and over have their own income. In our survey, respondents of productive age (between 26 and 61) predominated (79.9%). In terms of the population’s age structure, we state that this was an unrepresentative sample. In terms of education, respondents with secondary education (43.5%) and first- or second-level higher education (51.9%) were equally represented. We state that the sample was not representative in terms of education.

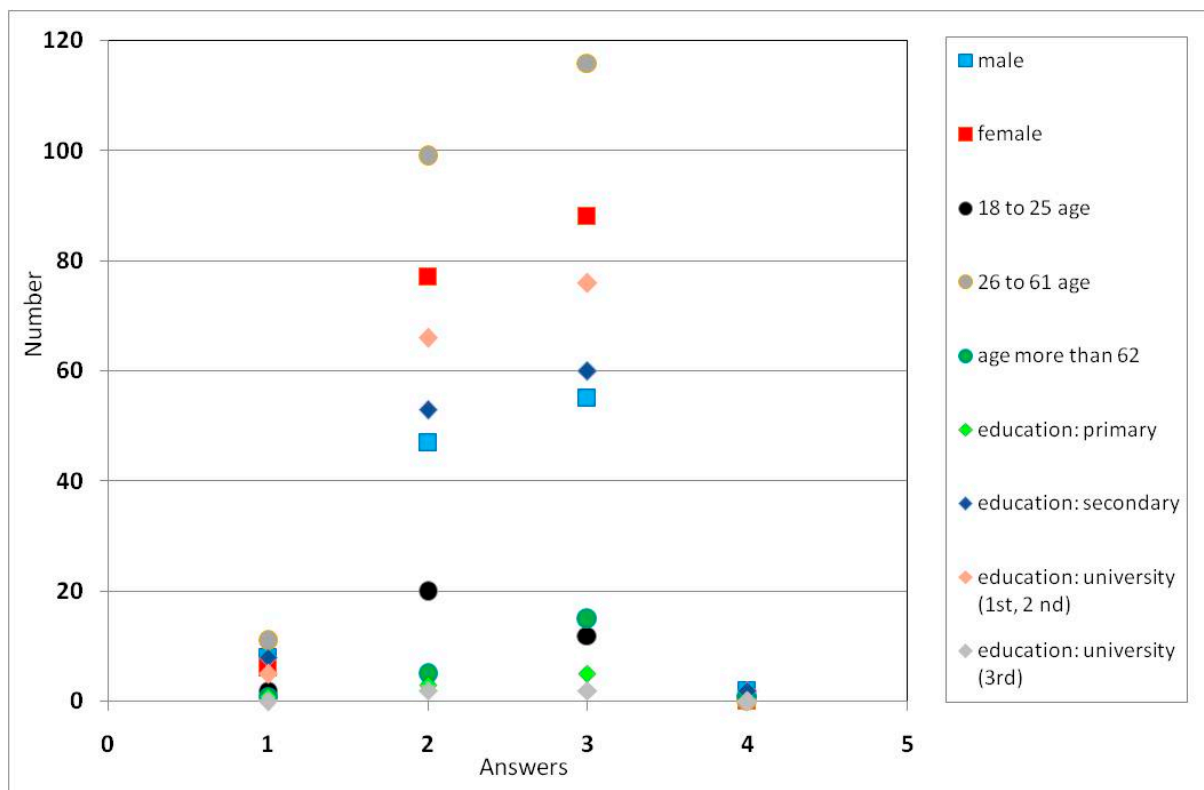
In addition to demographic characteristics, we also examined consumer attitudes. As consumer behaviour is related to several factors, we included many aspects of regional development and regional labelling in the survey. Using Pearson’s chi-squared test of independence, we analysed the questions in the questionnaire in relation to certain variables (gender, age, education, locality, and region). Our analysis showed a slight dependency between age and the concept of regional products (Table 5,  $X^2 = 15.3909$ , sig.  $p = 0.017425$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 5.** Dependence between gender, age, education, and the term regional product.

Which Statement Do You Associate with the Term “Regional Product”?						
	Handcrafted Product	Product that Follows the Customs and Traditions of the Region	Product Produced Only in the Region	I Don’t Know	$X^2$	$p$
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	2.9%	16.6%	19.4%	0.7%	5.07959	0.166061
Female	2.1%	27.2%	31.1%	0.0%		
Total	5.0%	43.8%	50.5%	0.7%		
<b>Age</b>						
18 to 25	0.8%	7.1%	4.2%	0.3%	15.3909	0.017425
26 to 61	3.9%	35.0%	41.0%	0.0%		
More than 62	0.3%	1.7%	5.3%	0.4%		
Total	5.0%	43.8%	50.5%	0.7%		
<b>Education</b>						
Primary	0.3%	1.1%	1.8%	0.0%	5.2776	0.809454
Secondary	2.9%	18.8%	21.1%	0.7%		
University (1st, 2nd)	1.8%	23.2%	26.9%	0.0%		
University (3rd)	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%		
Total	5.0%	43.8%	50.5%	0.7%		

The respondent age group of over 26 (target group, potential consumers) associates the concept of regional product with its exclusive production in a specific region (41%), representing the customs and traditions of the given region (35%). Srinivasan and Blomquist [31]

state that interest in purchasing regional products decreases with age, with older consumers less willing to pay extra for such products. Madaleno et al. [32] conducted an empirical study in Portugal in 2015. They found that authenticity, as well as the appearance of local food, has a positive influence on consumer decisions. Our research led to the same conclusion (Figure 3). The production of a product exclusively in a region is also dominant in terms of gender and education (Figure 3). Regional products are mainly bought by respondents with a university education, first and second (regional products are more expensive). A surprising finding was the fact that the respondents did not consider the handmade origin of the products as the most important (answer 1, Figure 3). Answer 4 (I don't know) did not have a high representation in the respondents' answers (Figure 3). All of the respondents had an opinion concerning regional products. This was a positive finding.



**Figure 3.** Interaction between gender, age, and education from the term product. Legends: Answer 1—a handcrafted product; Answer 2—a product that follows the customs and traditions of the region; Answer 3—a product produced only in the region; Answer 4—I don't know; Answer 5—all answer (1–3).

On the basis of a literature review, Kwil et al. [33] defined a regional product as one associated with a specific region with its production located in that region. We agree with this view. The uniqueness of a region in terms of its natural and cultural aspects was also demonstrated in the investigated Záhorie and Kopanice regions (Table 5). The respondents tended to associate a product with a specific region. In a supplementary open question, they indicated a sweet food product (skalický trdelník) as a traditional regional product of the Záhorie region and alcohol (distilled fruit) with the Kopanice region. These products are characteristic of these regions. We did not see gender or education dependency in relation to the concept of a regional product in terms of the Kopanice and Záhorie regions (Table 4).

We assumed that urban respondents would pay attention to product labels and prioritise purchasing such products (H1 hypothesis). The questionnaire showed that 16.6%



of urban respondents noted the regional Záhorie or Kopanice logos and 30.4% the quality from our regions' logos. We did not confirm a direct dependency between locality and product logo (Table 6,  $X^2 = 5.94631$ , sig.  $p = 0.11452$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). We thus rejected the H1 hypothesis. Jad'ud'ová et al. [34] came to the opposite conclusion in the Hont region. In their analysis, products bearing the regional logo were mainly noted by rural respondents. In their research carried out in the Czech Republic, Chalupová, Prokop, and Rojík [13] confirmed a strong correlation between an awareness of the Vysočina regional label and the place of residence of the respondents ( $X^2 = 7.68$ , sig.  $p = 0.02149$ ). In our research, we noted a high percentage of respondents that ignored product labelling (16.6%). In total, 8.5% of the respondents noted the fabricated logo created by the authors. These were women of working age with first- and second-level higher education from the Záhorie region living in urban and rural areas. This finding was a surprise as we are more inclined to agree with the opinion of Jad'ud'ová et al. [34,35], namely, that men with a secondary education level from rural areas do not pay attention to product labelling. This claim was also confirmed by research by Loureira and Umbergera [36].

**Table 6.** Dependence between locality, region, and the logo of regional product.

Indicate a Logo You Have Noticed When Shopping for Food						
	Regional Product of Kopanice or Záhorie	Quality from our Regions	Non-Existent Logo, Created by Authors	I Don't Know	$X^2$	$p$
						
						
<b>Locality</b>						
Urban	16.6%	30.4%	3.9%	7.8%	5.94631	0.11452
Rural	10.6%	17.3%	4.6%	8.8%		
Total	27.2%	47.7%	8.5%	16.6%		
<b>Region</b>						
Kopanice	12.7%	28.3%	6.4%	16.6%	38.9354	0.0000
Záhorie	14.5%	19.4%	2.1%	0.0%		
Total	27.2%	47.7%	8.5%	16.6%		

Chalupová, Prokop, and Rojík [13] stated that urban dwellers are generally more aware of the existence of regional labels but do not pay attention to them. In Hungary, Szakály et al. [37] found that 35.5% of the respondents do not pay attention to product labelling. We confirmed the strong regional dependence (Záhorie, Kopanice) on awareness of regional labels (Table 6,  $X^2 = 38.9354$ , sig.  $p = 0.0000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). We recorded the lowest preference for regional products in the Záhorie region. Our findings were confirmed by Chalupová, Prokop, and Rojík [13], who demonstrated that the recognition of labels depends on the place of residence within districts ( $X^2 = 31.78$ , sig.  $p = 0.0015$ ).

We investigated where the respondents saw and purchased regional products (H2 hypothesis). We assumed they would be purchased at social events specialised by the region in question. We confirmed a weak dependency between the locality of the respondents and the purchasing of regional products (Table 7,  $X^2 = 9.44545$ , sig.  $p = 0.023919$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Urban respondents mainly purchase regional products at social events (22.3%, Table 7). In terms of region, the respondents from Záhorie mainly purchase regional products (42.8% of the respondents). The respondents prefer purchasing regional products directly from the producer rather than at a store (this is partly related to the lack of stores that offer this type of good). The research performed by Kiss et al. [3] in Hungary showed that the most important location for purchases of regional products is stores (supermarkets have

an average rating score of 3.67). For this group of consumers, the most common forms of sale for small producers are fairs and festivals, while directly from the producer is the least preferred (average ratings score 2.12–2.13). We do not agree with this statement, as public events and sales directly from the producer's premises are an appropriate form of regional development that consumers should prefer. In our research, sales directly from the producer represented the second-most-frequent response (Table 7, 15.9% total).

**Table 7.** Dependence between locality, region, and the purchase of regional product.

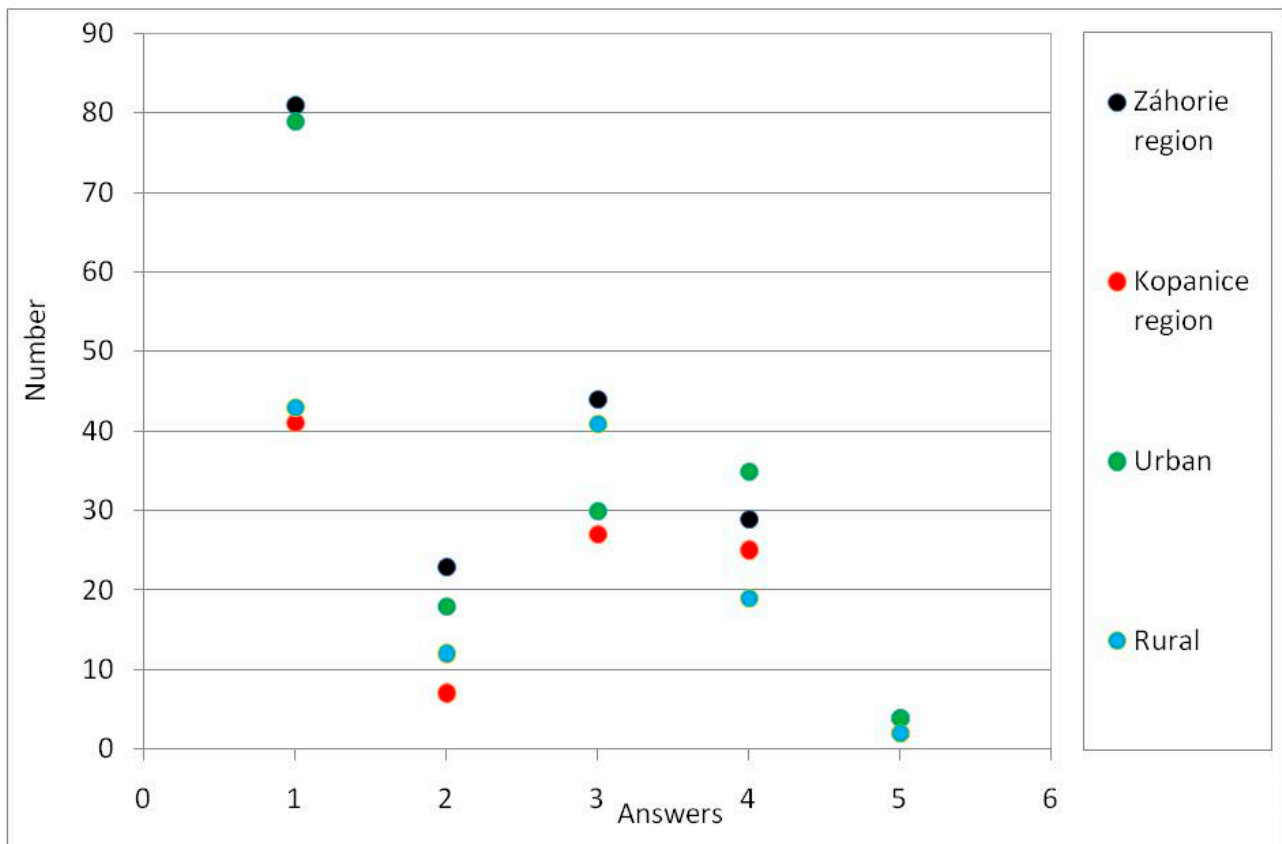
	Where Have You Seen a Regional Label?				$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	Store	Public Event (Fair, Village Day)	Directly at the Producer	Nowhere		
<b>Locality</b>						
Urban	11.3%	22.3%	6.7%	18.4%	9.44545	0.023919
Rural	3.9%	15.1%	9.2%	13.1%		
Total	15.2%	37.4%	15.9%	31.5%		
<b>Region</b>						
Kopanice	9.2%	20.5%	13.1%	21.2%	11.1279	0.011054
Záhorie	6.0%	16.9%	2.8%	10.3%		
Total	15.2%	37.4%	15.9%	31.5%		

We examined how respondents connect regional products with rural development. Our testing showed gender and educational dependence (Table 8). Gender showed weak dependency ( $\chi^2 = 9.49753$ , sig.  $p = 0.049798$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Women more often associate regional products with regional development and support than men. The most common response was support for employment and entrepreneurship in the region (43.2% total) and support for the region's sustainability and development (25.1% total). Hall and Wilson [38] reported that the local economy can profit from the production and sale of local foods, as less money goes to national and multinational companies, agriculture and local entrepreneurship develop, new jobs are created, tax income and reinvestment in the region increases, links with tourism are strengthened, and regional labels are promoted. In terms of education, we assumed that respondents with higher education would state rural development as being the main element for the regional labelling of products (H3 hypothesis). We confirmed moderate dependence (Table 8,  $\chi^2 = 31.1601$ , sig.  $p = 0.001862$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Respondents with first- and second-level higher education considered support for regional employment and development as crucial in relation to regional labelling (22.6%) as well as support for regional sustainability and development (16.3%). Our research did not confirm age dependence (Table 8,  $\chi^2 = 15.4840$ , sig.  $p = 0.050390$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), even if the result was just above the 5% significance level.

Mutual interactions between the regions (Kopanice, Záhorie) and the forms of rural development (Figure 4) showed an even distribution in terms of responses. Respondents from both Kopanice and Záhorie saw the significance of regional product labelling in support of employment and regional development (response 1, Figure 4) and overall regional development (response 3, Figure 4). They saw the development of tourism as the least important of the options provided (response 2, Figure 3). This finding surprised us, as regional labels are considered to be an effective tool in terms of regional tourism development [24,39–42]. The locality (urban, rural area) copied the distribution of the forms of rural development by region (Figure 4). The Záhorie region is more of an urban environment than the Kopanice region, where the rural-to-fragmented type of settlement predominates [29].

**Table 8.** Dependence between gender, age, education, and rural development.

How Important Do You Think Product Labelling Is in the Region?							
	Supports Employment and Entrepreneurship in the Region	Promotes Tourism	Supports the Region’s Sustainability and Development	Products Is Better than Other Products on the Market	None	X <sup>2</sup>	p
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	16.3%	4.2%	7.4%	10.2%	1.5%	9.49753	0.046798
Female	26.8%	6.4%	17.7%	8.9%	0.6%		
Total	43.1%	10.6%	25.1%	19.1%	2.1%		
<b>Age</b>							
18 to 25	4.6%	2.1%	3.2%	2.5%	0.0%	15.4840	0.050390
26 to 61	35.3%	6.4%	21.6%	14.5%	2.1%		
More than 62	3.2%	2.1%	0.3%	2.1%	0.0%		
Total	43.1%	10.6%	25.1%	1.91%	2.1%		
<b>Education</b>							
Primary	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.7%	31.1601	0.001862
Secondary	18.4%	6.0%	8.5%	9.9%	0.7%		
University (1st, 2nd)	22.6%	4.2%	16.3%	8.1%	0.7%		
University (3rd)	0.7%	0.4%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%		
Total	43.1%	10.6%	25.1%	19.1%	2.1%		



**Figure 4.** Interaction region and locality from the forms of rural development. Legends: Answer 1—it supports employment and entrepreneurship in the region; Answer 2—it promotes tourism; Answer 3—it supports the region’s sustainability and development; Answer 4—the product is better than other products on the market; Answer 5—none; Answer 6—I don’t know.

#### 4. Conclusions

The regional label is a marketing tool that supports the presentation of regions. One goal of introducing a regional label is to support local producers and service providers who create values that are characteristic of the region and have a tradition in that region. A regional product label develops agriculture and local business, initiates the creation of new jobs, increases the volume of taxes and reinvestment in the region, and strengthens tourism.

In this paper, we analysed the areas of application of regional product labels in connection with the development of the Kopanice and Záhorie regions. Through a consumer questionnaire, we demonstrated a weak-to-moderate dependence between age and awareness of the concept of a regional product, as well as between region and awareness of regional labels. The locality (urban, rural) was shown to not be a crucial factor in regional product labelling. From the perspective of the application of a regional label in connection with rural development, we confirmed gender and education dependence. Women with first- and second-level higher education saw regional labels as the main element in the development of the region and the local economy. These forms were shown to be crucial when also taking into account the region and locality. The forms of rural development in connection with regional product labelling were the same in both regions, as they were based on the “Support of Regional Products from Kopanice and Záhorie” joint project. The significant forms of rural development marked the support for employment and regional development.

The Kopanice region is a typical rural development, with the fragmented type of settlement predominating. In this region, the development of tourism was considered the least important in terms of rural development. This region is more closed to consumer society, which was reflected in the ignorance of product labels (16.6% of respondents answered “I don’t know”). The people of this region grow their own products (21.2% of respondents did not purchase regional products). The Záhorie region is a rural environment with small urban settlements. The support of employment and entrepreneurship is a more significant form of regional development than in the Kopanice region. The main way to purchase regional products in the Záhorie region has become social events and rural markets organised by regional label coordinators. Another sought-after way is the purchase of products directly from the premises of the producer. The sale of regional products through retail networks is less important in terms of consumer preferences, resulting in a lack of such products in retail chains or a lack of specialised stores offering the range in question. Through statistical testing, we confirmed the H2 hypothesis (we expect that urban respondents buy regional products) and the H3 hypothesis (we expect that respondents with higher education consider rural development the main element of a regional label). We rejected the H1 hypothesis (we expect that urban respondents pay more attention to regional labels).

The existing Slovak studies deal primarily with the perception of consumers and tourism in the context of regional labels. In this article, we analysed forms of rural development in connection with regional product labelling and the Slovak regions of Kopanice and Záhorie. This theme is a relatively new phenomenon in Slovakia, and this is our main contribution. Further research could examine interviews with producers of regional products, allowing us to obtain additional information about rural development.

We are aware of some limitations of this study. Firstly, the analysis was carried out in only one European country and should therefore be replicated with other labels to provide additional evidence. It is reasonable to monitor and compare countries that differ in their rural development. Secondly, we only used one method (questionnaire) and only looked at basic consumer characteristics. The innovation of the paper is in the presentation of two geographically, ethnographically, and geomorphologically different regions (Kopanice, Záhorie), each of which has its own quality label for regional products.

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