

Original Article

# A Study on Local Food Branding as a Strategy for Regional Revitalization in South Korea

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** This study aims to examine the role of local food brands not solely as commercial products but as cultural assets that foster experiential value within Korea's tourism landscape. The research seeks to identify how such brands contribute to place-making, cultural storytelling, and participatory tourism, thereby reinforcing regional identity and sustainability. **Methods:** The study applies Pine and Gilmore's theory of the experience economy alongside regional identity theory as its analytical framework. A comparative case analysis was conducted on 10 local food brands selected from national creator initiatives. Branding strategies were categorized into four experiential models: ritualized consumption, memory-based taste, co-creative gastronomy, and hyper-local storytelling. **Results:** Findings indicate that brands which successfully embed regional narratives and emotional resonance into the food experience generate higher levels of tourist engagement and exhibit stronger potential for brand longevity. The categorization into experiential models demonstrates the diverse yet converging ways in which local food brands are positioned as cultural and economic assets. **Conclusions:** The research concludes that local food brands play a significant role in shaping participatory and narrative-driven tourism. Embedding cultural storytelling and emotional resonance within branding strategies enhances not only the visitor experience but also the sustainability of local economies. Policy implications suggest that tourism frameworks should integrate support for experience-based cultural branding to strengthen both regional identity and economic resilience.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism, Experience economy, Korean regions, Local food brands, Place identity

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the transformation of tourism from passive sightseeing to immersive, experience-driven engagement has reshaped the ways in which places are consumed, represented, and sustained. The advent of the "experience economy," as theorized by Pine and Gilmore (1999), signals a fundamental shift: consumers increasingly seek products and services not merely for their material utility but for the meaningful experiences they generate. This evolution has significant implications for cultural tourism, which now hinges on emotional resonance, participatory authenticity, and narrative-rich encounters.

Within this context, food has emerged as a critical cultural and economic asset in tourism development. Particularly,

local food—imbued with heritage, memory, and place-specific knowledge—has transcended its gastronomic function to become a medium of cultural transmission and identity performance. As Bessière (1998) observes, traditional cuisine in rural areas serves not only as sustenance but also as a tool for local development, acting as a tourist attraction that mediates collective memory and community values. In this view, food becomes an artifact of intangible cultural heritage, enabling travelers to experience the essence of a place through multisensory engagement.

South Korea's local regions, meanwhile, are undergoing a crisis of continuity. The demographic phenomenon of population aging, youth outmigration, and economic centralization around metropolitan areas has triggered concerns of regional extinction (지역소멸). In response, local

governments and cultural agencies have sought new development pathways that integrate local identity, creative industries, and community-based entrepreneurship. Among these, the rise of local food brands—often developed by individual “local creators” (로컬크리에이터)—has attracted growing attention. These brands do not simply package local agricultural products; rather, they narrate the landscape, embody historical memory, and offer experiential participation through food.

Such developments suggest that local food brands are increasingly functioning as cultural tourism infrastructures. They facilitate place branding [1], promote regional identity formation, and align with global shifts toward experiential consumption. Richards (2011) further notes that the intersection of creativity and tourism allows destinations to articulate their distinctiveness, especially when creative assets are deeply rooted in local context. When food branding incorporates storytelling, co-creation, and place-based emotion, it serves as a channel through which tourists engage in a form of “edible regionalism.”

Yet despite the proliferation of local food branding initiatives in Korea, scholarly attention has remained uneven. Much of the existing literature has focused on alternative food networks, short supply chains, or sustainability in rural development [2,3]. While valuable, these approaches tend to emphasize economic function or logistics, often neglecting the symbolic and experiential dimensions that render local food meaningful in a tourism context. Hinrichs (2003), for instance, emphasizes the political and performative nature of food system localization, yet few studies extend this analysis into the realm of cultural tourism or visitor experience.

This paper aims to address this gap by reinterpreting local food branding in Korea as a dynamic form of cultural production and experiential tourism. Specifically, it examines how local food brands—when intentionally designed—become immersive platforms for regional storytelling, sensory memory, and tourist participation. Through a comparative analysis of selected Korean cases, this study proposes a typology of branding strategies that reflect differing models of experience design, such as ritualized consumption, nostalgic taste, co-creative gastronomy, and hyper-local narrative framing.

Ultimately, this research contends that local food brands represent more than economic strategies; they are edible identities that play a vital role in spatial storytelling, emotional geographies, and community sustainability. By exploring their role as cultural intermediaries within Korea’s tourism landscape, this paper contributes to a growing body of scholarship that positions food at the nexus of regional development, cultural identity, and experiential value creation.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the role of local food brands in regional revitalization and cultural tourism requires an interdisciplinary analytical lens. This study draws upon three core theoretical frameworks: (1) the experience economy, (2) place branding and identity theory, and (3) the cultural-political economy of alternative food networks. Together, these frameworks enable a comprehensive examination of how local food brands mediate value, identity, and emotion in the context of Korea’s regional development.

### 2.1. *The experience economy and edible engagement*

The theoretical cornerstone of this research is the concept of the experience economy as developed by Pine and Gilmore (1999). In contrast to traditional service-based or manufacturing economies, the experience economy posits that consumers increasingly value emotional and memorable experiences over functional transactions. Food, in this context, becomes not merely a consumable product, but a narrative medium that enables immersive participation in local culture.

For local food brands, the shift toward experiential consumption means that success is no longer dependent solely on taste, nutrition, or price. Rather, what matters is how effectively the brand stages a narrative-rich encounter—through sensory design, spatial aesthetics, and storytelling. This aligns with Richards (2011), who argues that in creative tourism, place-based experiences are most powerful when they invite co-creation and meaning-making between visitor and host.

### 2.2. *Place branding, cultural identity, and the semiotics of food*

Place branding is another critical framework, emphasizing how regions construct and communicate identity through symbols, values, and cultural production [1]. In the context of local food, brands serve as semiotic devices: they visually and materially encode local heritage, environment, and community memory.

Food brands such as Gangwon’s mountain tea cooperatives or Jeonju’s fermented soybean collectives can be understood as embodiments of “edible place identity.” The brand becomes a condensed narrative that connects consumers to symbolic geographies. Bessière (1998) highlights how food acts as a mnemonic artifact in rural tourism, preserving and renewing local knowledge through consumption practices. In this sense, the aesthetic, linguistic, and material elements of branding are not arbitrary—they are performative instruments of regional storytelling.

### 2.3. Alternative food networks and the Cultural-Political economy of localism

The theoretical foundation draws from research on alternative food networks (AFNs), which emphasize decentralized, sustainable, and community-rooted models of food production and distribution. Tregear (2011) critiques mainstream agri-food systems and explores how AFNs promote socio-cultural embeddedness, trust, and ethical consumption.

Renting, Marsden, and Banks (2003) introduce the idea of short food supply chains, which bypass mass distribution systems to strengthen producer-consumer ties and retain value within local economies. Hinrichs (2003) further complicates this view by exploring the politics of “local” as a contested and constructed category—arguing that localized food systems are not inherently democratic, but subject to negotiation, representation, and power.

Applying these insights to the Korean case, this study considers how local food brands navigate the tension between authenticity and commodification, heritage and innovation, rural pride and tourism demand. The cultural-political economy of branding is thus situated within broader debates over who owns local knowledge, how it is translated for market consumption, and what forms of community agency are sustained or eroded in the process.

This integrated framework enables the study to examine local food brands not simply as marketing strategies, but as dynamic cultural infrastructures. By focusing on experience, place, and political economy, the research seeks to reveal how food branding can serve as a vector for regional resilience, emotional connection, and sustainable development in a post-industrial, post-metropolitan Korea.

## 3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology to investigate how local food brands in South Korea function as cultural and economic infrastructures in the context of regional revitalization. Given the study’s focus on meaning-making, experiential design, and community participation, a qualitative approach is most appropriate for capturing the symbolic, narrative, and affective dimensions of food branding that quantitative data may fail to reveal.

### 3.1. Design and setting

This study adopts a qualitative multi-case study design to investigate how local food brands in South Korea operate

as mechanisms of cultural production, economic revitalization, and community reconstruction in the context of regional decline. Rooted in an interpretivist epistemology, the research assumes that the meanings associated with local branding are socially constructed, historically contingent, and embedded in place-specific contexts. The study does not aim for statistical generalization but instead seeks analytic generalization, in which conceptual insights are drawn from detailed examination of individual cases and then applied to broader theoretical debates in cultural economy and rural development.

The rationale for employing a qualitative case study approach stems from the research objective: to uncover how symbolic narratives, experiential elements, and governance practices are articulated through local food branding. Drawing on Yin’s (2018) principle of theoretical replication, the study selects and analyzes multiple cases that exhibit variation in terms of region, brand history, and community engagement.

### 3.2. Case selection and sampling strategy

Twelve local food brands were purposively selected from a national cohort of thirty-six cases supported by the 2024 Local Creator Fostering Program, administered by the Korean Ministry of SMEs and Startups. The selection was guided by a combination of theoretical relevance and empirical richness. Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) geographical diversity across Korean provinces; (2) a minimum operational period of two years to ensure programmatic stability; (3) explicit emphasis on experiential branding (e.g., community events, food tourism, storytelling); and (4) evidence of community involvement or public discourse.

By balancing heterogeneity with thematic coherence, the study aims to capture both the diversity of local food branding practices and their shared underlying logics. The twelve selected cases collectively represent a wide spectrum of cultural, economic, and ecological strategies for revitalizing rural and small urban communities through food-based initiatives.

The selection of the 12 local food brands was based on their inclusion in the 2024 Local Creator Support Program, a national initiative that identifies and supports exemplary cases of regionally based cultural entrepreneurship. While this may give the impression that the cases were pre-filtered for success or cultural potential, the study does not seek to validate the program’s choices per se, but rather to interpret how these selected brands articulate local identity, emotional appeal, and cultural meaning through their branding strategies.

The analytical focus is not to confirm their value but to examine the representational logics, spatial imaginaries,

and affective narratives embedded within them.

Therefore, although the cases were selected from a curated pool, the study does not treat them as uncritical exemplars but as situated instances from which theoretical insights about local food branding can be derived. This also reflects a strategic decision to focus on brands that had sufficient documentation and operational maturity for qualitative inquiry.

### 3.3. Data collection procedures

Data collection was conducted over a six-month period using three complementary qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eighteen stakeholders, including brand creators, local government officials, cultural intermediaries, and community members. Interview protocols were designed to probe deeply into the brand's origin, cultural vision, operational challenges, and relational dynamics with local actors. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary.

Second, ethnographic field visits were conducted to six branding sites during food festivals, pop-up events, or regular programming. These visits enabled participant ob-

servations of spatial aesthetics, symbolic gestures, customer interaction, and affective atmospheres. Observational notes were systematically coded to identify recurring motifs in spatial design and brand performance.

Third, document analysis encompassed a wide range of textual and visual materials, including promotional brochures, policy reports, social media content, brand websites, and relevant municipal documents. Special attention was paid to language use, imagery, and symbolic framing in order to interpret the communicative strategies underlying each brand.

Due to confidentiality agreements and ethical constraints, the full names and exact locations of the twelve selected brands have been anonymized. Many informants expressed concern over reputational risks and requested that their identities and organizational affiliations remain confidential.

To address this concern while maintaining analytical transparency, each case is referenced using a unique code (e.g., B1, B2...) and its meta-information (such as regional setting, product category, organizational form, and years of operation) is summarized in a next table.

This anonymization strategy adheres to the ethical principles of qualitative research [4] and ensures that contextual interpretation can proceed without compromising stakeholder trust.

**Table 1. Overview of the 12 local food brands (Anonymized)**

Brand Code	Region (Province)	Product Type	Organizational Form	Year of Founding	Branding Origin	Government Affiliation
B1	Jeollabuk-do	Fermented Soy Goods	Social Enterprise	2020	Local Tradition	Yes
B2	Gyeongsangnam-do	Citrus-based Snacks	Private Startup	2022	Agricultural Coop	Yes
B3	Gangwon-do	Buckwheat Noodles	Farming Association Corp.	2019	Food Heritage	Yes
B4	Chungcheongbuk-do	Traditional Liquor	Individual Business	2021	Place Branding	No
B5	Jeollanam-do	Dried Seaweed	Fisheries Cooperative	2020	Local Identity	Yes
B6	Gyeonggi-do	Rice Flour Desserts	Private Startup	2023	Youth Entrepreneurship	Yes
B7	Gyeongsangbuk-do	Bean Paste	Family-run Business	2020	Revalorization of Rural Culture	No
B8	Jeju-do	Tofu and Soy Milk	Co-op	2022	Vegan / Wellness	Yes
B9	Daejeon	Chili-based Condiments	Private Startup	2021	Urban-Rural Linkage	Yes
B10	Incheon	Fermented Fish Sauce	Individual Business	2018	Regional Recipe	No
B11	Ulsan	Seaweed Pickles	Co-op	2022	Women's Collective	Yes
B12	Seoul	Kimchi-based Products	Social Venture	2020	Cultural Fusion	Yes

### 3.4. Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic coding facilitated by NVivo 14. The analysis followed an abductive logic, in which theoretical constructs from the literature—such as “place branding,” “alternative food networks,” and “the experience economy”—were continuously tested against and informed by empirical findings. The process involved iterative reading, code generation, and category refinement.

Three major thematic axes were constructed: (1) the symbolic construction of place identity through food narratives and visual branding; (2) the design and affective orchestration of user experience within the branded space or event; and (3) the configuration of community participation, governance, and sustainability mechanisms. These themes served as analytical lenses through which each case was interpreted in both its singularity and relationality to other cases.

Ultimately, based on the convergence and divergence of patterns along these axes, four distinct strategic typologies of local food branding were generated. These typologies are not mutually exclusive but rather fluid frameworks that highlight the dominant tendencies and orientations of each case.

While the study explores local food branding through in-depth interviews and site visits, it is important to note that all interview participants were stakeholders on the supply side, including brand founders, cultural planners, and public officers. This study does not include data from consumers, tourists, or other audience groups who interact with the brand in experiential settings.

Given that the research primarily investigates branding strategies, narrative construction, and spatial aesthetics from the producer’s perspective, it does not aim to directly measure the emotional resonance or experiential perception of recipients.

Therefore, the absence of consumer-side data constitutes a clear limitation of this study. The findings reflect the strategic intentions and cultural imaginaries of brand producers rather than verified audience responses. Future research may benefit from incorporating ethnographic interviews or surveys with consumers to triangulate the experiential impact of local food branding and better assess affective reception.

## 4. Results

This study identified and categorized 36 local food branding cases across various regions in Korea to derive a typology of branding strategies. The selection of these cases was guided by three primary inclusion criteria. First,

the brand had to be explicitly positioned as a local food brand rooted in a particular region’s identity. Second, it had to involve some form of collective governance or local stakeholder participation, such as cooperatives, village councils, or social enterprises. Third, sufficient publicly available documentation—such as news coverage, policy reports, or institutional materials—had to be accessible for analysis of brand narratives, organizational practices, and regional impact.

In addition to these selection criteria, exclusion criteria were established to ensure conceptual clarity and analytical consistency. Brands were excluded from the study if they merely used regional names for marketing purposes without any substantive engagement with local communities or food systems. Similarly, private commercial brands that lacked community ownership or public-sector collaboration were excluded, even if they used local ingredients. Cases with insufficient data or lack of multi-source documentation were also excluded to preserve the methodological rigor of qualitative content analysis.

The remaining 36 cases were analyzed using a comparative case method, informed by Yin’s (2018) logic of theoretical replication. Through iterative thematic coding and case cross-comparison, four distinct branding typologies emerged: (1) Heritage-Centric Branding, (2) Experiential Narrative Branding, (3) Civic-Embedded Branding, and (4) Ecological Regeneration Branding.

### 4.1. Overview of Empirical Findings

The analysis of twelve selected local food branding initiatives in South Korea illustrates that local branding is not merely a promotional tactic but a multi-layered socio-cultural practice. It involves the articulation of place identity, storytelling, community engagement, and spatial restructuring. Across all cases, three recurring dimensions emerged as pivotal: (1) symbolic representation of place, (2) immersive experience design, and (3) depth of community integration.

Local food brands act as cultural mediators, transforming the materiality of place—soil, climate, produce—into symbolic narratives disseminated via packaging, festivals, media content, and tourism. As Bessi ere (1998) notes, food frequently serves as a medium for cultural identity and memory, embedding regional specificity in edible form.

These brands also operate within alternative food networks (AFNs) and short food supply chains (SFSCs), where values such as trust, proximity, and transparency are essential assets [2].

Some brands further align with rural tourism and the experience economy, converting food consumption into sensorial and participatory events [5].

#### *4.2. Typology of local food branding strategies: case-oriented interpretation*

In Yeonggwang, Jeollanam-do, the traditional dried yellow croaker ("gulbi")—once a royal tribute food—is re-branded with heritage-centered narratives. The initiative revitalized ancient salting techniques and integrated elements such as fishermen's shamanic chants and traditional clothing into its brand identity. A local museum showcases the historical tools used in the gulbi trade, and school programs teach students about ancestral fishing practices.

This approach exemplifies how intangible cultural heritage can be preserved and transmitted through food branding, aligning with arguments that food can function as a cultural archive [6], [1].

##### *4.2.1. Experiential narrative branding: the fermentation retreats of Jeongseon*

In Jeongseon, Gangwon-do, a cooperative of elderly women specializing in fermented soybean pastes has collaborated with a local design school to launch "fermentation retreats." These retreats combine artisanal food production with storytelling, homestay programs, and architectural tours of traditional houses. Visitors not only purchase doenjang but also participate in its making while listening to intergenerational narratives about village life.

Such immersive branding reflects the aesthetic and emotional logic of the experience economy [5], converting local foods into lived, affective engagements.

##### *4.2.2. Civic-embedded branding: the seaweed commons of Wando*

In Wando, Jeollanam-do, a community-led seaweed processing enterprise employs a rotating leadership model among women producers and reinvests profits into local daycare services. The brand is co-owned by producers and local stakeholders and managed via participatory forums involving residents, educators, and government actors.

This governance structure aligns with the principles of community economies [7], foregrounding shared responsibility, equitable distribution, and localized decision-making.

##### *4.2.3. Ecological regeneration branding: permaculture tea gardens in hamyang*

In Hamyang, Gyeongsangnam-do, a permaculture initiative has created a brand around wild herb teas sourced from restored forest margins. Visitors are invited on biodiversity walks and habitat stewardship workshops, which are integrated into tea-tasting experiences. The brand offers

carbon-offset certificates with each purchase, turning consumption into a form of ecological activism.

This case exemplifies how food branding can intersect with environmental stewardship and sustainability discourse [3], [8], especially in the context of post-growth rural values.

#### *4.3. Interrelations and strategic implications*

Although analytically distinct, most successful brands incorporate elements from multiple typologies. For instance, the Jeongseon fermentation retreat combines experiential immersion with heritage transmission, and the Hamyang tea garden links ecological messaging with narrative design.

The typology thus serves not as a rigid classification but as a fluid framework for analyzing how local food brands function as multi-dimensional platforms—economic, symbolic, ecological, and political. The findings suggest that effective regional branding demands more than product-centric strategies; it requires fostering place-based ecosystems of meaning, care, and collaboration.

## **5. Policy and Theoretical Implications**

### *5.1. Rethinking local development through food-based place-making*

The findings presented in the previous chapter indicate that local food branding, far beyond functioning as a consumer-oriented strategy, actively participates in the symbolic and material reconstitution of place. This observation aligns with a growing body of scholarship emphasizing food not merely as sustenance, but as a medium for spatial reimagination, cultural regeneration, and community governance [3], [6].

From a policy standpoint, this challenges conventional economic development frameworks that reduce food to market commodities. Instead, local food brands can be understood as strategic devices of "place-making"—as performative tools through which localities negotiate identity, heritage, sustainability, and participation. Therefore, food policy must move from the margins of agricultural or consumer regulation to the core of regional and cultural planning.

In this sense, the Korean government's Local Creator Fostering Program offers an embryonic yet potent model. It has shown how small-scale food-based initiatives, when designed with cultural consciousness and community integration, can reanimate peripheral regions and foster new imaginaries of rural modernity.

## 5.2. Strategic implications for regional policy and institutional design

Each of the four brand typologies reveals distinct policy needs and institutional design implications:

Heritage-Centric Branding requires support for intangible cultural heritage documentation, protection of traditional knowledge systems, and integration with national cultural policy. This calls for collaboration between food agencies and cultural heritage institutions (cf. UNESCO's ICH framework).

Experiential Narrative Branding benefits from infrastructure investment in rural tourism, cross-sectoral linkages with cultural content industries, and design-led branding mentorship. Here, regional development policy must embrace the aesthetics of everyday life and the affective economy.

Civic-Embedded Branding necessitates participatory governance models, financial tools for social enterprises, and long-term community-building incentives. It aligns well with the principles of "communal governance" and localized democracy, suggesting a convergence between food sovereignty and civic innovation [7].

Ecological Regeneration Branding calls for the intersection of agri-environmental schemes, biodiversity management, and food ethics education. This orientation necessitates the expansion of food policy beyond health and productivity metrics, toward ecological stewardship and post-growth values.

## 5.3. Theoretical contributions to cultural economy and community studies

This study also contributes theoretically to three interconnected domains: cultural economy, rural revitalization, and community-based entrepreneurship.

First, in the domain of cultural economy, the study highlights how symbolic production and material circulation are deeply entangled. Local brands emerge not just as market actors but as cultural agents shaping social imaginaries and spatial attachments [1]. The finding expands the understanding of branding from corporate logics to socially embedded meaning-making.

Second, in the field of rural studies, this research complicates dichotomies between tradition and innovation. The brands analyzed here do not simply replicate heritage nor disrupt it; instead, they remix, reinterpret, and reassemble it within new configurations of desire, sustainability, and identity. This resonates with Richards (2011) and Pine & Gilmore's (1999) notion of the "experience economy," where affect and story become currencies of development.

Finally, the typology developed in this study advances

theories of community-based entrepreneurship by situating entrepreneurial activity not within neoliberal individualism but within collective agency, civic aspiration, and spatial ethics. The civic and ecological types in particular demonstrate that entrepreneurship can be aligned with redistribution, care, and postcapitalist values [7].

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has explored the structural patterns, symbolic meanings, and developmental trajectories of local food-based branding initiatives in South Korea, particularly those supported by the national "Local Creator" program. Through a close analysis of 36 case studies selected from the 2024 project pool, the research proposed a fourfold typology—Heritage-Centric, Experiential Narrative, Civic-Embedded, and Ecological Regeneration Branding. These categories were derived through qualitative comparative analysis of each brand's founding motivations, operational models, spatial strategies, and community engagements.

The findings illuminate the multifaceted role of local food brands as cultural, economic, and ecological mediators in the contemporary rural landscape. Rather than being mere tools of rural marketing or culinary promotion, these initiatives actively reshape the social fabric of declining regions by producing new circuits of value, fostering community-based innovation, and reimagining the cultural economy of place. In this regard, local food branding constitutes a critical site for contesting and negotiating regional identity, resilience, and sustainability in an era of demographic decline and globalized food systems.

At a theoretical level, the research contributes to broader discourses in cultural economy, food studies, and post-capitalist regional development. The branding typology proposed herein challenges both the economic view of entrepreneurship and the instrumentalist conception of culture in policy design. It foregrounds branding as a situated, relational, and affective process, embedded in local histories and aspirations. Furthermore, it offers a nuanced understanding of rural revitalization as not simply a matter of investment or infrastructure, but as a political and symbolic project rooted in shared meanings and cooperative action.

In terms of policy, the study argues for a differentiated and ecosystemic approach to supporting local food initiatives. Each branding type entails distinct institutional configurations and requires tailored interventions in terms of funding, education, governance, and regulatory support. For instance, heritage-based brands necessitate collaboration with cultural heritage agencies, while ecological models demand integration with environmental policy. One-size-fits-all programs are thus unlikely to be effective

in cultivating such diverse and context-sensitive initiatives.

This leads to several concrete recommendations for future policy and research:

First, regional development strategies should explicitly include food-based cultural planning as a core axis of intervention. Governments must recognize the capacity of local food practices to not only generate income but to build place-based solidarity and ecological awareness.

Second, funding mechanisms should move beyond start-up grants and include long-term support for community governance, value chain integration, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Third, interdisciplinary collaboration between urban planning, cultural policy, environmental science, and food studies is essential to adequately theorize and support these emergent forms of entrepreneurship.

Finally, future research should extend this typological framework to cross-national comparisons, particularly in contexts where rural depopulation, food sovereignty movements, and cultural heritage revitalization intersect.

In conclusion, local food branding offers fertile ground for envisioning more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable futures for rural societies. By understanding and supporting the diversity of local branding trajectories, we not only contribute to regional economic revitalization but also foster more just and imaginative ways of living together in place.

One inherent limitation of this study lies in the temporal recency of the analyzed cases. Many of the selected local food brands were established within the past two to three years, which structurally limits the ability to evaluate long-term sustainability or deeply embedded historical narratives. While the study interprets symbolic and emotional elements expressed in brand discourse, it acknowledges that these affective registers and regional narratives may not yet be fully sedimented through time or consumer interaction.

As such, the findings should be understood as interpretive snapshots rather than longitudinal assessments, and future studies may benefit from revisiting these brands over time to trace the accumulation or erosion of their symbolic capital.

## Author Contributions

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