



A territorial approach to organic farming – the case of eco-regions in Austria

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Background of the Concept

Definition:

- Eco-Region (Bioregion) in the Austrian context means a sustainable regional development approach where the principles of organic farming are transferred and applied also to other economic sectors.

Empirical evidence:

- 2002 a survey of regional development initiatives with organic farming as a component resulted in over 30 groups in 23 (micro-)regions

Background of the Concept

Eco-regions meet the interests of different stakeholders:

- Organic farmers hope to reduce the exchangeability of their products in indirect marketing channels.
- The institutional agricultural sector wants to avoid the separation of food production and maintenance of a cultural landscape
- Retailers want to increase trust into their products
- Environmentalists support the decrease of food miles, the integration into protected area management,
- Regional development agencies want to increase the regional added value and strengthen regional identity
- Tourism managers seek possibilities to single out their destination from the increasingly exchangeable range of attractions offered.

Scope and Material

Scope of the presentation:

- To analyse the processes of transforming the farm approach of organic farming into a territorial approach

Material used:

- A national funded Austrian project monitors four regions 2005-2006
- The regions vary in structure, geographic location, size and degree of development. Two of the regions use the term "Bioregion" already the other two were still in the preparatory phase.
- Material from
 - ➔ workshops to discuss the specific objectives and scope of the concept.
 - ➔ Monitoring of concrete actions to follow the processes of social network development.

Results: Preconditions

- The presence of a high percentage of organic farmers (above the national average)
- A regional organisation of the organic farmers is necessary to defend their interests against regional or conventional farming actors
- This organisation should be a networking organisation in order to team up with non agricultural stakeholders.
- The delineation of the region has to be clear. (administrative, cultural historical or natural boundaries)



Results: Process

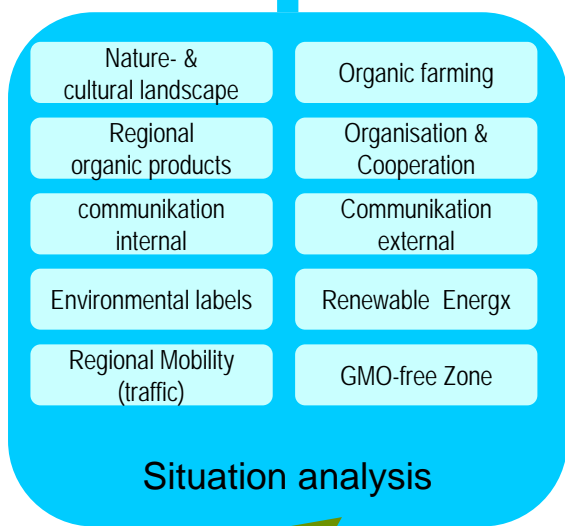
- Organic farmers have to develop a clear, commonly shared vision not only for the development of the organic sector, but for the development of their region.
- Based on the organic value system the farmers group can work out a territorial vision for development.
- Building on this vision other stakeholder groups can be actively involved.
- New networks are forged not only vertical along the supply chain but also horizontally to actors who are not primarily market partners.

Activities for the implementation of Objectives

(with constant self-monitoring and periodical evaluation)

Development of common objectives and visions for the region

Development of **konkret Objectives** according to criteria



Tourism

Commerce

Gastronomy

Policy

Civil Society

Etc.

Establishment of **Cooperations with Actors from other economic sectors**

AIM: Contribution to territorial Regional Development (Basis: value of organic farming)

Organised organic farmers in a Region



Results: Strategies

- Eco-regions can be proposed to provide a framework for sustainable regional development across various economic sectors or
- Eco-regions can be placed into an existing territorial development frame (e.g. a Leader region or a biosphere reserve).

Conclusions

- Eco-regions have a potential for farmers to integrate more into RD
- Eco-regions have a potential to make sustainable RD operational
- Eco-regions need clear visions
- Eco-regions need a strong organic community on regional level
- Eco-regions depend on networking structures

