

Beyond economics -

Regional engagement of small and medium organic enterprises in the Berlin-Brandenburg region

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1. Research Questions

Hypothesis:

The societal benefits of unpaid work are far from being sufficiently appreciated in their potential for a socio-ecological transformation of society.

Research questions:

- What kind of motives drive the work of entrepreneurs in the organic agriculture and food sector?
- How are market and non-market-activities related to each other?
- What are the reasons for the entrepreneurs for engaging in networks, non-profit organisations etc.?



2. Results

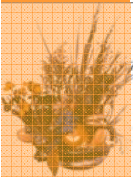
a) Motivation of the entrepreneurs in the organic sector

“I do it out of conviction, because I think it is the only way for the children to live sustainably and to pass on other values to them. They should learn more than just making money and they can learn this best on an organic farm.”

“It’s not the main goal to make profits. The main thing is what kind of work we have. That was our motivation for starting this business in the first place.”

“I’d like to stress the political impact of this whole ‘organic’ sector, to explain in more detail what’s behind it. What are the consequences of consuming in one way or in another?”

“I am fully convinced about this work – just money making is not my thing. Working with organically produced grains comes directly from my heart.”



2. Results

b) Non-market activities

- Some of the processors are active in saving water (45%) and energy (62%).
- 61% of the farmers are engaged in preserving the variety of habitats and species by planting hedges, installing wetlands or certain methods of mowing.
- About one third of the entrepreneurs (36%) are active in non-profit organisations; 58% support NGOs with financial or material aid.
- 45% of the entrepreneurs help other regional enterprises in difficult situations with advice, manpower, technical help or leaving bills open.
- About one third of the enterprises organise open house days or guided tours, participate in local events, or offer information via flyer or internet



2. Results

Motivation for carrying out non-market activities

- idealistic background: contributing to environmentally sound agriculture and healthy food
- self-realisation, satisfaction with work
- being a pioneer, improving the enterprise's image by being progressive in ecological and social terms
- communicating the special benefits of organic products, spreading knowledge and experience

Most of the activities are motivated by idealistic and economic motives; the boundaries between market and non-market activities are rather fluid.





Photos: Martin Romeis



Photos: Martin Romeis

Wilhelm Schäkel, Bioland Ranch Zempow

- extensive beef production on 700 ha with 800 animals,
- energy production with wood pellets, apartments for vacation
- 20 employees

- measures of natural protection, re-naturation, environmental education
- participative landscape development
- festivities on the farm, guided tours
- participation in village events
- engagement in grassroot movements
- organisation of events like „nature on the plate“



Photos: Martin Romeis



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Thorsten Pelikan Organic store „Globus“

- 4 employees
- Efforts for purchasing regional products
- Delivering service for remote areas
- Participation in regional festivities, cultural events etc.
- Engagement in the local association of traders
- Engagement in the civil society - foundation with „regional bananas“
- lectures at the local technical college



GLOBUS

Naturkost & Naturwaren



Photos: Martin Romeis



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2. Results

c) Reasons for engaging in non-profit organisations or networks

- ***Common interests with NGOs:*** e.g. preservation of the natural resources, spreading knowledge about agriculture and healthy nutrition, criticism of genetic engineering etc.
- ***Embedding entrepreneurial activities in local and regional processes:*** realisation of joint projects with other regional actors (regional marketing, tourist projects, projects of landscape cultivation, etc.)
- ***Gaining public acceptance and networks of support:*** linking to actors like NGOs, administrators, politicians or other regional enterprises helps them lose the status of being “exotic”



2. Results

d) Limitations on non-market activities

- Due to global competition and conventional supermarkets and discount shops entering the organic market, the economic pressure on organic farms as well as on small-scale processors and retailers is growing.
- Increasing economic pressure endangers non-market activities, even if there are long-term synergies. The enterprises concentrate on their “core business” because of limited financial and time resources.
- Prices and politicians have yet to acknowledge the ecological and social benefits of non-market activities and regional engagement.



3. Conclusions

- In the pioneering sector of organic agriculture and food production, there are many transitions and synergies between market and non-market activities. Orientation toward business matters **and** on public welfare are not necessarily antagonistic if there is an overarching motivation for both of them.
- For a socio-ecological transformation of society, entrepreneurs should be enabled to continue with their ecological and social engagement. Measures of support could be:
 - “just” prices (internalisation of external effects)
 - change of subsidy politics
 - regional politics that take advantage of this engagement
 - co-operation with other actors (schools, health insurers, etc.)

