

# Sustainable regional food marketing in German biosphere reserves and other model regions – from grassroots projects to professional organisations

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## 1 Boom of Regional Food Marketing

Regional food marketing is a boom sector in Germany today. A central databank of initiatives shows over 500 projects, most of them in the field of agriculture and food supply ([www.reginet.de](http://www.reginet.de)). Many projects for sustainable regional development and sustainable quality economy dealing with regional food marketing are located in model regions like the 14 german UNESCO biosphere reserves, the five PLENUM-programm in the land Baden-Württemberg or the 18 “regionen aktiv” programm of the federal ministry of agriculture (BMELV).

There´s a broad variety in projects: Many nature conservation projects and regional landscape associations use regional marketing to valorise the products coming out of sustainable landuse. One can find cooperative farmers marketing organisations, running farmers markets weekly or continuously in a market hall, as well as regional shops combining food and handy craft marketing. In almost every region one can find touristic activities for regional food in restaurants, and, more and more, regional products can also be found in supermarkets, e.g. in “regional shelves”. Besides traditional cooperatives to market bundled goods of one kind, e.g. beef meat from extensive grazing (Kullmann/Gräbener 2000), one also can find more and more complex projects to sell many different goods in different channels. One new field for regional products is the growing lunch supply in whole-day-schools ([www.frankfood.net](http://www.frankfood.net)).

## 2 Outstanding examples

Some examples:

- Four of 14 german biosphere reserves (BR) developed regional brand so far. One can finde these in the BR Rhön (most famous, many projects!) as well as in the BR Schorfheide-Chorin, Spreewald and Schaalsee. In some further BR´s regional brands are in development (BfN/EUROPARC 2006; Kullmann 2007a,b; [www.nationale-naturlandschaften.de](http://www.nationale-naturlandschaften.de)).
- In the Bodensee-region a lake wide regional brand has been established under ccoordination of the Bodensee foundation, based on years of earlier activities in two PLENUM-regions located on the western and eastern lake shore. A large group of organic and conventional

farmers, processors and distributors have joined the label so far, e.g. the famous “Isle of Mainau” ([www.gutes-vom-see.de](http://www.gutes-vom-see.de)).

- In three of four further PLENUM-regions lead projects have been developed, two in the field of gastronomy/tourism ([www.landzunge.info](http://www.landzunge.info); [www.kulinarischer-kaiserstuhl.de](http://www.kulinarischer-kaiserstuhl.de)), and other to market extensive grain as bread, noodles etc. ([www.alb-dinkel.de](http://www.alb-dinkel.de); [www.plenum-bw.de](http://www.plenum-bw.de); Kullmann 2005; Kullmann/Gehrlein 2005; Kullmann et al. 2007).
- Within the federal program „Regionen Aktiv“ a lot of different smaller and bigger marketing projects have been supported. The building of “value chains” has been a key target in the years 2006/7. In two regions, the Bliesgau biosphere reserve (in foundation) as well as in the bavarian Chiemgau, regional shelves in supermarkets have been installed, which develop successfully. In the Eifel region as well as in Ostfriesland “all purpose” regional brands have been established to run an integrated regional marketing ([www.modellregionen.de](http://www.modellregionen.de), [regionalmarke-eifel.de](http://regionalmarke-eifel.de), [modellregion-ostfriesland.de](http://modellregion-ostfriesland.de)).
- But also out of so called model regions one can find outstanding projects which have set standards in regional food marketing since middle of the 1990ies (Kullmann 2003). It’s the projects “Unser Land” (our land) and “Artenreiches Land” (land of biodiversity) which have reached outstanding levels of organisation, distribution and profitability.

„Unser Land“ goes back on “Brucker Land” in the Bavarian district Fürstentum Bruck near Munich, which was based on the principle of an „solidarity association”. In this different kind of economic (farmers, processors, retailers), ecologic (NGOs) and social partners (churches, politics) are involved. As a spin off from the catholic church, all doors were open for this professionally managed project in Bavaria. After multiplying the concept in the neighbour districts the „solidarity association” joined to conquer the Munich food market ([www.unserland.info](http://www.unserland.info)).

„Artenreiches Land – Lebenswerte Stadt“ (land of biodiversity – towns with quality of life!) was once established as protection project for the grey partridge (hunnable bird). This project - although also in Bavaria having to fight against the establishment of politics and administrations – has finally - after new alliances with different socio-economic interest groups and support from federal level - become the heart of the Germany wide “day of regions” as well as the new regional movement association ([www.artenreiches-land.de](http://www.artenreiches-land.de); [www.tag-der-regionen.de](http://www.tag-der-regionen.de), [www.regionalbewegung.de](http://www.regionalbewegung.de)).

Looking at this “first league” of regional marketing projects in Germany one can see that many crucial success factors have been fulfilled (Kullmann 2003, 2005). Further more these projects have build up more or less professional marketing organisations, reaching from product development over fair price policies and logistics to communications. In many other projects and regions there are still very different professional levels of marketing organisations.

### 3 Current Trends

There´s a trend to take greater landscapes which already have a „regional identity” in the mind of people as scenery for regions and regional brands. One can see this for example in the German regions Rhön, Eifel, Ostfriesland, Bodensee and others. The underlying landscape sceneries are consisting of at least 3 up to 5 or 10 Landkreise (districts). Although the Landkreise are politically very important for the success of regional projects, even their chief politicians and executives seem to realise, that a county today is too small to set up successful regional development processes. One reason for this is the aimed strategy of so called cross marketing between labeled products and touristical destination marketing, or combined with enterprise orientated location marketing as integrated regional marketing. The regions Eifel and Ostfriesland have set up broad strategies like this, for example ([www.modellregionen.de](http://www.modellregionen.de)).

For regional food brands and their marketing organisation greater regions mean more producers, processors and retailers as well as more social and politic groups and active persons can be involved. The whole thing becomes bigger, faster and more profitable, which is good, because regional brand projects are often too small and need public support for 5 to 10 years anyway. There is almost no regional marketing project in Germany today which is not supported by public funding in any form. But there are a few regional brand projects now, named before, which have become big, professional enough to refinance their activities more and more, which do make enough money to cover their every day costs.

With growing density of regional development culisses and regional marketing projects a growing competition goes along. Within the regions a growing amount of different levelled regional governance processes is established competing for political and financial support as well as leadership in regional identity building or (re-) inforcement.

There´s also growing competition in the regional food market, because different and stronger regional brands compete for consumers and retailers. Competition rises while supermarkets open themselves or copy regional marketing strategies which happens all across Germany. Supermarkets so probably will become the biggest driving force for the development of the regional marketing sector, like in the organic sector before. Other and smaller supply chains like gastronomy will probably remain dependend on public support or cross financing from the profit of the main (super-) market strategy.

Some supermarket chains of middle size and quality level use regional marketing to create a new and higher quality image and new image as partner of farmers and consumers. They use this as survival strategy in the stronger and stronger competition in the food market, especially forced by discounters which made more than 40% of total food turnover in Germany 2006 with rising tendency. So small and medium sized retailers have discovered organic and regional food, supporting, using or copying the grassroots strategy of regional marketing projects.

The two family based retailers Tegut (Fulda, 400 Outlets) and Feneberg Kempten, 80 Outlets) have combined organic and regional marketing very successful already, bigger associations like REWE and EDEKA follow. While REWE in Hessen opened itself for farmers products from each nearby region, EDEKA Südwest established an own regional brand “Our homeland – genuine and good”) while copying typical organic and regional communication strategies ([www.unsereheimat.de](http://www.unsereheimat.de)). The EDEKA supply of products is based on eu-certified regional food programmes of the Bundesländer Baden-Württemberg, Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz und Saarland. This shows that also eu-certified labels force the competition.

But still there´s a lot of space for growth in this niche which is developing very dynamically today, a little bit similar like the organic food market 20 years ago. The booming organic market is and will be the relevant lead market for regional products. There will have to be a professionalisation in regional marketing like in the organic sector before.

On the other hand, regional marketing strategies represent a new chance for the marketing of organic food which potentials are not yet fully discovered and used. The ongoing globalisation and conventionalisation of the organic sector (Kratochvil et. al. 2006) brings also up the new demand of consumers for regional products with high transparency of origin, freshness because of short ways, less traffic and less climatic impact. Another up coming issue is fair prising in regional food supply chains, similar to fair trade with countries in the south. Outstanding examples for this is the fair prize policy of “Unser Land“, the fair-milk-project of Upländer farmers dairy ([www.bauernmolkerei.de](http://www.bauernmolkerei.de)) and the marketing of Lammsbräu Organic Beer ([www.fair-zum-bauern.de](http://www.fair-zum-bauern.de)).

Federal policy in Germany has supported regional development and marketing strategies for years. The ministry for the environment e.g. supported projects of national non-governmental organisations to empower and present regional initiatives in a central databank ([www.reginet.de](http://www.reginet.de)). The ministry for agriculture supports the “day of regions” ([www.tag-der-regionen.de](http://www.tag-der-regionen.de)) as well as the federal programm “Regionen Aktiv” ([www.modellregionen.de](http://www.modellregionen.de)). The central policy coordinating programm between federal state and Bundesländer (Gemeinschaftsaufgabe Agrarstruktur und Küstenschutz, GAK) has been changed along the EU-LEADER-philosophy as well as nature parks and federal nature conservation projects.

Within LEADER 2007 – 2013 there will be a stronger emphasize on economic clusters and supply chains as well as an ongoing fusion of agricultural-, regional- and economic development policy, says as an in charge federal ministry employee. In fact this fusion is still very few while facing political, administrative and budgetary barricades. The Bundesländer policies vary as in any other field of policy – some of them supporting regional food strategies very well, others nearly fail at all. But it seems sure that enterprises and supply chains will play a bigger role in regional development and regional marketing strategies in future.

### 3 Needs for actions and research

As shown above there are some different programmes and policies to support integrated rural development, and within these, regional food marketing projects and food supply chains. First of all the currently 13 German UNESCO biosphere reserves are to name here (3 others in development) which have sustainable development as a mission since the world conference of Sevilla in 1995, and to develop a sustainable “quality economy” since Pamplona Conference in 2000. With this the mission and duty of the BR-administrations has changed and grown a lot.

The challenges and experiences in the different model regions in trying to reach these targets, looking for useful instruments and running projects are never the less quite similar. Because of this an exchange of concepts and experiences about success factors, best-practice-examples and lessons learned can be organized to aim an efficient know-how-transfer – if the regions use it. An outstanding theory based, instrument testing and methods reflecting management can be found in the programmes PLENUM and Regionen Aktiv.

The fulfillment of success factors and professional management, in projects as well as in regional management, is crucial. In some of the projects named before, like “Unser Land” und “Artenreiches Land” one can see clearly how success factors should be fulfilled (Kullmann 2003, 2005). Experiences out of evaluations of regional food marketing projects, especially in biosphere reserves (Kullmann 2005; 2007a,b), of the PLENUM-programme (Kullmann et al. 2007) as well as from a current project to further develop strategies for sustainable economy in biosphere reserves ([www.ifls.de](http://www.ifls.de)) show that success of projects is in most cases (not always!) strongly related with the management quality of regional management or BR-administrations. Besides central internal factors the quality of management is strongly influenced by political and administrative framework conditions, which means well designed programmes and good cooperation with top of ministry and middle administrations as well as county politicians.

For biosphere reserves as state administrations this is sometimes harder than for so called intermediate organisations as regional managements in PLENUM and Regionen Aktiv, which have been formed upon the experiences with LEADER<sup>1</sup> administration. On the other hand biosphere reserves are established to stay while programmes change every few years and end somewhen. Because of this local politicians discover BRs as stable frameworks which will probably always get some money and which can coin regional identity in the long run. This again has very variable impacts on management quality and success of regions and projects. Never the less the principles of success factors say that even the political and administrative framework conditions can be changed in the long run if somebody is working on this strategically (Roberts 1998, Brendle 1999, Kullmann 2003). Regional development policy and

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<sup>1</sup> Liaison d'entre actions pour le developement economique rural (EU programm for regional development)

regional marketing projects are political strategy games with their own rules to be fulfilled! For this strongly engaged individuals have to form alliances with other interest groups - which has been very successful in Germany in the last few years ([www.regionalbewegung.de](http://www.regionalbewegung.de)).

The performance of sustainable development processes, especially in biosphere reserves, will stay challenging and sometimes difficult (vgl. Stoll-Kleemann 2005, 2007). Beside specialist knowledge e.g. for marketing social competences of project managers and leaders are crucial. Problems often appear in communication and cooperation with other institutions and individuals. A high quality of inner organisation, management processes and leadership through the use of instruments for quality management, controlling and steering as well as systemic interventions can be useful to establish a high culture of organisation which will show good results in the long run.

Like one can see looking at successful enterprises as well as some nature conservation institutions a high level of leadership and management culture is influencing the whole surrounding. The observance and knowledge of principles like leadership and the use of instruments like mission and vision, targets and strategy, controlling and steering can help for this. The use of instruments like quality management and controlling tools is yet mostly still unusual in regional management and nature protection administrations.

As instrument to control the inner management quality of regional management teams the EFQM-system<sup>2</sup> is used in the PLENUM-programme from the Landesanstalt für Umwelt Baden-Württemberg (LUBW), for example (vgl. Reck-Hog/Böhm 2002; EFQM 2003a,b). As instrument for the target and strategy based controlling and steering of projects the balanced scorecard (BSC) can be adequate. The BSC, developed at Harvard University, Boston, and is a broadly used tool in enterprises world wide (vgl. Kaplan/Norton 1991, 1997). In Austria the BSC has now been adopted as steering instrument for LEADER-processes (Baumfeld 2006).

As systemic instruments in regional development processes there are to name “regional constellations”<sup>3</sup>, coaching and mediation. Theses instruments are called systemic after the system theory (Luhmann 2002 and others) which base on the idea of functional principles within systems (organisations, enterprises, administrations, families, teams) which must be observed and fulfilled to have positive processes and reach successful results. Systemic instruments are now invented in innovative regional development processes and will probably become common in future (vgl. Hummelbrunner et al. 2002; Gothe 2003, 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> European Foundation for Quality Management

<sup>3</sup> System constellations have been developed by famous family therapists like Virginia Satir (USA) und Bert Hellinger (Germany). They have been adopted for business consulting years ago and are broadly used in organisation development processes in business enterprises as well as non governmental organisations.

More exchange of experiences between model regions, more qualifications of specialist and leading staff of regional institutions, especially in marketing and management instruments and the use of systemic instruments in organisational development and project processes would be useful. Further more “Principles of good governance, leadership and quality management of model regions” should be developed and implemented. EFQM or BSC could be used to control results in a periodic benchmarking to give feedback to politicians, ministries and staff leaders.

Research results about regional food marketing, regional supply chains and interactions between regions, projects and enterprises are still few. Reality is further than research in these issues. There is a total lack of research about economics of regional marketing projects. Especially the role and benefit of small and medium enterprises (SME) in these projects, which is crucial, has not yet been looked at. Small and medium sized processors and retailers are the most important partners for farmers and regional management to reach profitable projects.

Research about this could be useful to further develop regional marketing and management strategies in model regions, especially in UNESCO biosphere reserves. Further more: What is sustainable “quality economy” beyond typical regional development projects? Can and shall regional (BR) managements start to develop enterprise focussed strategies and projects? What do enterprises need and want? Some answers on these questions could be useful.

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