

The Formation of „Eco-regions“ in Austria and the Role of the Structural Fund

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The Concept of “Eco-regions”

The concept of “Eco-regions” (or “Bioregionen” in German) entered the discussion on rural development in Austria several years ago. Broadly, this expression means the combination of sustainable farming in particular organic farming practices, and the marketing of their produce with the aim of assisting regional development. As we shall see, this concept can take various forms of expression. It can be restricted to the agricultural sector or extended to a general regional strategy. The common feature is a territorial form of cohesion under the umbrella of organic farming. The very idea comes from two directions: the organic movement on one hand and regional development on the other.

Austria has the highest percentage of organic farms within the EU. Austria is also among the countries in Europe with a rather advanced organic market. Marketing outlets are however dominated by the supermarkets, with one chain in particular holding a share of about 70 % of all supermarket sales and almost 50% of the total organic sales volume. According to a Delphi survey conducted within the framework of the EU- funded research project “Organic Marketing Initiatives and Rural Development” (OMIaRD) in European countries with a developed organic market the combination of organic products of regional origin has once again gained importance. One reason behind this are efforts to maintain a higher producer price by localising and consequently shortening food chains. A second purpose is to retain more control over the food chain and the way organic products are brought to the consumer. This involves the creation of regional producer brands which maintain a certain product-producer identity even when placed in indirect marketing channels. This could reduce the interchangeability of organic producers in a global market situation. A third aspect is the establishment of closer links with the consumers. The organic movement originally set out to change the world of production as well as the world of consumption. The goal of closed cycles is not only restricted to the production side with a cycling of nutrient flows on farm, but extends to the consumer and calls for seasonal and regional patterns of consumption. Obviously in the meantime the world has instead changed the organic movement to a large degree. Today organic products are exchanged world-wide, and the organic inputs for Austrian mountain farmers in terms of animal feed are also partly imported. A part of the organic movement sees a potential danger in this development (supported by the evidence of fraud and contamination along the supply chain) and argues that regionalisation could be a way out of the high levels of control in all stages of production, processing and trading.

While these arguments of the organic movement are mainly producer based, a second strand of arguments proposing eco-regions comes more from the consumer and regional development side. One strand derives from the environmental movement which prioritises the problems of transport ecology and food safety, while an other strand is more economically motivated and holds the view that the combination of organic production base in agriculture with environmentally friendly tourism represents an appropriate and promising development path, particularly in lagging regions. Even EU-Commissioner Franz Fischler has repeatedly recommended the establishment of eco-regions for sustainable rural development in

mountainous regions (e.g. in a forum on development of mountain agriculture in Alpbach/Tyrol, March 2001). Such efforts of combining regional economy, in Austria mainly tourism, with support for small scale farming has quite a long tradition. Endogenous regional development started as early as in the 70s (Dax 2001) especially in the regions along the former iron curtain where the traditional approaches to regional development had failed. Due to this long tradition, Austria is sometimes considered one of the experimental grounds out of which the present LEADER initiative emerged.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This paper examines the notion of eco-regions in Austria in two stages.

First, a list of regions that have chosen the development path of an eco-region in Austria is compiled and analysed using various sources (secondary literature, news clippings, personal communication with actors in the organic scene, internet search). Some of these regions have expressively built their strategy on organic farming, others on various forms of sustainable and environmentally sound farming practices that allow the maintenance of the present cultural landscape. This list is analysed in order to derive a typology of eco-regions and to see the connections with measures supported by the Structural Fund.

In a second stage, three regions are examined with respect to the preconditions for developing their regional image towards the goal of an eco-region, two in so-called less favoured areas (LFA), and one in a more favoured region. The three regional case studies were selected within the frame of the EU-funded research project “Organic Marketing Initiatives and Rural Development” (OMIaRD) already mentioned. The selection criteria tried to capture the widest variation possible of organic marketing initiatives as well as of regional contexts. While the total EU-project included altogether 36 regions in eight European countries (seven EU-countries plus Switzerland), the data presented here are restricted to three regions in Austria only. For LFA-regions Vorarlberg (focusing on the sub-regions of Bregenzerwald and Großes Walsertal) and the Muehlviertel in Upper Austria were selected. The Marchfeld in combination with Vienna was chosen as a reference region in a non-LFA-area. In each of these regions up to four organic marketing initiatives were interviewed, as well as at least three regional key informants. Supplementary data was gathered by screening relevant literature and internet resources to fill out the picture.

The data compiled in each step of the investigation is analysed in a qualitative way. Two concepts increasingly used in rural development analysis were applied:

The concept of Neo-endogenous Development (Ray 2001), derived out of LEADER experiences in recent years is used to structure and classify the development paths pursued in the various regions. It is used to monitor the “reflexive” power of the “eco-region” concept on agriculture and region.

Ray (1998) sets off from the idea of a culture economy as an attempt to revalorise place and to localise economic control. One way to do so is through traditional foods and regional products (from the farming sector as well as crafts).

Essentially he distinguishes four ways or “modes” of this culture economy:

- Mode I incorporates territorial identity in local products or services.
- Mode II elaborates a strategic image through cultural identity in order to promote the territory itself.
- Mode III cultivates local solidarity within the territory.
- Mode IV: this mode can operate within each of the other three modes. It suggests that a local economy may choose “alternative” development paths, rooted in the

indigenous culture of the territory. *“The local culture thus becomes more than an instrument to fuel trade in the global economy, and instead is rediscovered as the source of local wisdom and ethics”* (Ray 1998 p.8). The strategies chosen to deal with the overall economic direction of development may vary from participation in the mainstream competitive pattern to efforts of coping using diversified strategies and resistance promoting self-reliance (Ray 2001).

The first three modes can be thought of as repertoires of strategic action, while mode IV focuses on the strategies themselves. In the following we will restrict ourselves mainly to the first three modes.

The second perspective used is a network perspective using the terminology of the Actor Network Theory (Callon 1986, Murdoch 1994), which serves to capture changing power relations. The three main principles of the analysis with ANT according to Clegg (1989) are:

- **agnosticism:** coming into the investigation without preconceptions,
- **general symmetry:** treating conflicting points of view equal and explaining the natural sphere together with the social sphere and
- **free association of actors:** actors can associate freely over traditional boundaries of local-global, social, technical, natural. According to Latour (1993) the world is composed of hybrids of natural and social entities and every actor is composed again of a network of actors.

The Actor-Network theory is also called a theory of translation (Clegg 1989) because it focuses on the process of extending spheres of power in a network of actors.

According to Callon (1986) the extension of an idea follows four stages:

- **Problematisation:** an actor analyses a situation, defines the problem and proposes a solution.
- **Raising interest:** other actors become interested in the solution proposed. They change their affiliation to a certain group in favour of the new actor.
- **Enrolment:** the solution is accepted as a new concept. A new network of interests is generated.
- **Mobilisation:** The new network starts to operate target oriented to implement the solution proposed.

In order to achieve a stable relation and a target orientation, the actor has to set an “obligatory passage point” to channel all interests to one direction. This leads to the formation of a “macro-actor” who acts as a single entity.

Depending on the actor and the type of problematisation, horizontal and/ or vertical networks can result (Kneafsey et al 2001). Horizontal networks have a more territorial aspect of integration including actors of various economic sectors and interest group in a given region. Vertical networks are built up along the supply chain linking producers, processors, wholesalers, retailers and possibly even consumers.

The formation of networks is supported and influenced by the regulatory system as well as by the incentives given. Particular reference is therefore made to the influence of measures of the Structural Fund for the formation and extension of the idea. According to Murdoch (2000), rural analysis can distinguish vertical networks, which remain rather restricted within the food sector, and others that have a more horizontal (territorial) dimension including different interest groups within a given region.

Towards a Typology for Eco-regions:

In order to specify the idea of eco-region in Austria, we tried to sample from various sources the concepts employed up to now. Besides personal communication and internet search, relevant articles in the Austrian press were analysed. We are sure that we still missed out some, but the number we found already provides a quite a sound overview.

The resulting list in table 1 gives a first indication of the various approaches pursued in Austria. The eco-region approach is found in all regional states of Austria. All in all, 20 regions were identified that stated the eco-region more-or-less as a goal for their development. Seven regions call themselves explicitly “Bioregionen” (eco-regions).

The definition of “region” varies. Essentially it is delineated according to functional criteria or natural boundaries rather than administrative boundaries. In some cases it is only one municipality, in others it crosses administrative boundaries and reaches up to a regional state. In at least one case a protected area serves as a territorial boundary.

Not everywhere is “organic” agriculture explicitly mentioned, some talk about being “close to nature” etc. We therefore also included some approaches where regional agriculture with some component of organic is used as a base for regional development.

Although we cannot always judge clearly from the rather brief descriptions found, we have tried to analyse the list according to the features of a “culture economy” outlined above:

At least ten groups in eight regions try to tie organic products to the region in order to market the product better. This is done partly in connection with marketing in supermarkets outside of the region, partly within the region.

In at least fourteen cases the promotion of the region via an organic image and organic products is an important factor. Some are focusing on tourism only, others try to integrate agriculture with other economic sectors (processors and retailers) to create added value for the region.

In five regions organic farming is more or less explicitly the leading vision for the regional agricultural development.

It does not become clear in all cases whether the promotion of a regional organic image also results in a more coherent picture of the region that also works internally and not merely for tourists coming from outside. The same applies to the impact of organic agriculture as a leading vision for the agricultural development. Also this can, but does not necessarily, lead to a more sustainable development strategy for the entire region.

Some regions use “organic” as a multiple strategy. Three regions try to market their products with a regional image outside the region while at the same time promoting the region itself and using “organic” as a development strategy either for agriculture alone, or even for the entire region. One of them even includes the sectoral lead function of organic agriculture. In part there are different groups involved in the different strategies, and sometimes the cohesion and co-operation between the groups is not very close.

Marketing everywhere serves almost as a triggering effect for the development of an eco-region. The co-operation with tourism seems to be very important (in at least nine cases). This reflects the importance of tourism for Austria’s economic development in general. Also, co-operation with regional processors and retailers is common (eleven cases). In four regions, protection of nature is prominent and the eco-region is linked to a protected area or a national park. In some further regions, the maintenance of the cultural landscape is an important aspect.

The analysis shows that the concept of culture economies can be used to develop a typology of eco-regions. This results in an adapted framework as follows:

- **Eco-region Mode 1:** *product oriented perspective*: organic products are linked to the regional identity and marketed within the region or outside as regional organic products (product oriented eco-region);
- **Eco-region Mode 2:** *regional oriented perspective*: organic production as a major factor for promoting the region itself to increase its competitiveness,
- **Eco-region Mode 3:** *sector oriented perspective*: organic farming as a lead concept for the development of the agricultural sector, which in turn can influence the development path for the entire region. Especially in lagging regions, this is thought to stimulate creativeness in farming and the motivation of young farmers to carry on;
- **Eco-region Mode 4:** the Eco-region approach results in different possible strategies which can be applied in the other three modes:
 - Strengthening the economic position in mainstream marketing channels, such as Supermarkets, and reducing the danger of substitution (e.g. by creating and promoting a regional organic brand)
 - Diversification of marketing channels in order to gain more independence
 - Development of a localised pattern of production and consumption

The importance of the structural fund for the establishment of eco-regions can be seen from the fact that in 12 of the 20 regions identified a LEADER II program was active. Most of the regions continue currently under Leader +. Three areas were Objective 1 in the last program period. Moreover, most of the regions are part of an LFA according to the EU-criteria (virtually all with the exception of Vienna and Laa an der Thaya). Most of these regions were supported by the Objective 5b program between 1995 and 2000. Such support in particular stimulated the formation of organic marketing initiatives that were typically the starting point for the idea of eco-regions.

The Formation of Eco-regions

To find out how the idea of eco-regions is generated and how it is extended on a regional scale we conducted three case studies.

A general brief description of each region is followed by an analysis of the approach of eco-region pursued and of the main actors identified and their strategies of extending their ideas within the actor network.

Region of Marchfeld /Vienna :

The Marchfeld is a region of intensive agriculture in the north east of Austria capital city Vienna. Arable farming and vegetable production are the main forms of farming. Soils are favourable and the terrain is suitable for machinery use. Farms are quite big in the Austrian context. The intensive use of agro-chemicals and heavy machinery has already caused problems of groundwater pollution and degradation of soil structure.

In conventional agriculture, the main market is the processing industry. Very little is sold directly on the regional market, although the capital, Vienna, has an attractive potential.

The importance of organic farming is only marginal in the region. Marketing of the main produce (cereals, potatoes vegetables) occurs partly via indirect marketing channels (the main organic trading company is "Oekoland", which is a daughter of the biggest organic producer association "Ernte"). Substantial parts are sold directly via farm shops, box systems and in

natural food stores as well as on the organic farmers market in Vienna. A growing marketing outlet is the supplying of public canteens.

This last of these marketing channels directly benefited from the regulation by which public canteens must increase their share of organic products by up to 30% by 2006. Meanwhile, the city of Vienna tries to shape its regional development profile as an “eco-city”. Organic agriculture should become the leading concept for the agricultural development within the city limits. One estate belonging to the city administration has already converted to organic, and is now one of the largest organic farms in Austria.

The mode of eco-region proposed here is a sectoral one creating a regional lead concept of organic agriculture. The main development strategy on the conventional, as well as on the organic side, is the participation in the main marketing outlets. It has to be noted, however, that this concept of eco-region comes from the city of Vienna and does not originate in the Marchfeld. However, the “eco-city” approach of Vienna provides an interesting potential for the extension of the idea to the surrounding region.

The most powerful actor proved to be the regional administration in Vienna, problematising along environmental lines. So far the interest of farmers in general is rather low, as the eco-region conflicts with the traditional pattern of modernisation. Within the organic movement, however, this has created some dynamic also resulting in the establishment of new enterprises providing logistics for the supply of public canteens and fostering the network between organic farmers. Here enrolment and also mobilisation is gaining momentum.

The regulation for the supply of public canteens serves as an obligatory passage point focusing the endeavours of the organic scene in one direction. Networking is therefore established more on a vertical level than a horizontal one. As the Marchfeld is not a LFA the measures of the Structural Fund have no influence.

The Region of Muehlviertel:

The Mühlviertel is one of the classical disadvantaged regions of Austria, situated along what was for a long time the “iron curtain”, with a rather harsh climate and unfavourable soil conditions. The major consumer centre is found in Linz, the capital of the regional state, at the southern border of the region. Regional development has a long tradition in the region, the first attempts of endogenous regional development at the end of the 70s already included the Mühlviertel. Equally, there is a long tradition of organic farming. In part there were close interrelations between the two movements. Agricultural production is mixed and includes arable farming (cereals) as well as livestock farming (dairy and beef). In the organic sector, besides sales to supermarkets via Oekoland, the supply of natural food stores is also important. Within the region, organic farmers supply some still rather independent retailers and operate their own farm shops. Two major organic farmers organisations are important in the region. “Ernte”, the biggest producer association in Austria, rivals with the “Österreichische Interessensgemeinschaft für Biologischen Landbau (OeIG)”, which is an umbrella organisation for smaller producer associations. The dominating figures of OeIG come from the region. While Ernte supports as indirect marketing channel rather supermarkets (with Oekoland as its trade firm), the OeIG favours a concept of regionally-based natural food stores. Ernte also co-operates more with the mainstream agricultural institutions (like the chamber of agriculture), while the OeIG views itself as part of an agricultural opposition.

Both product-orientated and regional-orientated concepts of eco-regions are to be found. The product-oriented approach, however, appears weaker than the region-related approach. As already mentioned, there are rival attitudes to the marketing approaches among the organic

farmers associations. While co-operation on the operative level is achieved most of the time, the strategies are strongly divergent between participation in the mainstream direction of globalised development and efforts to find a more localised strategy. This has also prevented so far an unified stance towards conventional agriculture. It has therefore not been possible up to now to promote organic farming as a leading vision for agricultural development, although the percentage of organic farmers is high and the regional profile of the conventional products is rather low.

All efforts to problematise the situation of farming in the region argue on economic grounds. No strong actor is visible within the organic farming movement of the region. There are farmers initiatives with a high number of members (Oekoregion Muehlviertel, Muehlviertler Urkraft), but their leaders were not in the position to involve them deeply into their concept or to mobilise them. These initiatives therefore remain relatively weak. The main actor seems to be the “Euregio”, the regional development agency pulling together financing instruments of LEADER, Objective 2, Interreg and other instruments of the Structural Fund. The importance of measures of the Structural Fund for the development of lagging regions becomes evident in the fact that almost all organic marketing initiatives in the Muehlviertel benefited from assistance out of Objective 5b and/or LEADER programs. A number of interview partners assured us that this assistance has been crucial for the formation of viable enterprises.

Vorarlberg

Vorarlberg is the Austria’s most westerly province [*Land*]. The economic data are quite favourable in general, there are however distinct differences between the subregions within the province.

Industry, commerce and trade concentrate on the Rhine valley, while tourism is concentrated mainly in the mountainous regions around the Arlberg. The rural areas in between are still dominated by agriculture.

Our case study concentrated on the sub-regions of “Bregenzerwald” and “Großes Walsertal” which have important regional development projects. Both regions have only limited employment possibilities and many people commute to the rather urbanised Rhine valley, if not to Germany, Lichtenstein or Switzerland. Both regions are classified as LFA regions where Objective 5b measures were implemented. The Bregenzerwald was in addition a Leader II region. The new Objective 2 includes both regions and they will both be also part of the Leader + programme.

Farming remains the backbone of the regional economy in these areas, though there is also some tourism and small scale industry. Although farms in both regions are rather small, the percentage of full-time farmers is above average. Production is restricted to grassland farming which means animal breeding and dairy. Vorarlberg has a long tradition in cheese making and mountain cheese is closely connected to the traditional ways of alpine summer farming (migrating in stages vertically up and down the mountain slopes). In general, Vorarlberg’s agriculture is developing in two distinct directions: intensification (especially in the lower lying regions and the Rhine Valley) in order to maintain full time farming, and extensification combined with pluriactivity in the more mountainous regions. Market powers are likely to force agriculture into a concentration process especially in the case of milk processing and the marketing of milk-products. The competition with the neighbouring areas in Southern Germany adds to this pressure. The regional demand for the main product of the region, mountain cheese is not matching the production, therefore it is marketed to a large extent in other parts of Austria and increasingly in Germany. Regional brands have been developed (e.g. “Walserstolz”), which incorporate a high regional identity.

Regional development is determined to a large extent by voluntary associations of municipalities, the so called “Regios”. This development started in the Bregenzerwald as far back as the 70s and resulted there amongst other projects in a thematic route focusing on cheese, the “Bregenzerwälder Kaesestrasse” (lit. “cheese route”). The Regio “Großes Walsertal” established an UNESCO Biosphere Park and tries to use this theme to generate sustainable development.

Organic farming started in the early 90s when the a then local consumer-producer association in the Große Walsertal, the KOPRA, turned organic and became a registered organic farmers’ association. At present there are about 400 organic farmers in the province representing about 15% of the total farms. About half of them are members of the KOPRA, while the other half is organised in the main national organic farmers’ organisation Ernte. Until recently the strategies of the two organisations were very different and the level of co-operation was low. But in 2001 the regional government enforced unification by supporting the establishment of a joint marketing co-operative, “Bio-Vorarlberg”, where all organic initiatives are members. This co-operative does not only establish its own marketing projects, but also assists projects developed by its members.

Although an explicit eco-region approach based on organic farming is not to be found, both regional development projects - the Bregenzerwälder Kaesestrasse and the Biosphere Park – use “environmental friendly agriculture” as part of their rhetoric. While the “Kaesestrasse” is focusing more on the promotion of the territory to the outside, the Biosphere Park also aims at developing a more coherent picture for the local population as well. Organic farming is not explicitly used as a lead concept there, but there are significant efforts in this direction as the percentage of organic farming is very high and organic farmers are themselves among the most prominent proponents of the Biosphere Park .

An actor network analysis of the Vorarlberg case can be conducted on different levels. For the organic movement of Vorarlberg the installation of a common co-operative is an obligatory passage point set by the regional government. It has already resulted in a united approach within the organic movement. This new unity also leads organic farmers to start challenging conventional farming and to draw a clearer distinction between regional and organic practices. It may also help organic initiatives in the longer run to enforce a “greening” of the regional projects in which they participate, thus creating a proper eco-regions in the future. Conventional agriculture there, however, is already commonly perceived as environmental friendly and has build up a strong product identity with local cheese production. It will be difficult to top this long established, strong images with organic.

Results of the Case Studies and the Impact of the Structural Fund

The case studies show that there are a number of factors influencing the formation of the coherent development goal of an eco-region. The idea emerges only if organic farming reaches a certain importance or significance in the region. If it is too low, as in the case of the Marchfeld, organic actors cannot challenge the ruling conventional agricultural actors. In such cases the idea is mainly introduced by outside influence; in our case by regulatory prescriptions in the main consumer centre of Vienna nearby. Organic farmers in the Marchfeld can take advantage of this situation, but have little influence on the further development.

If the percentage of organic farmers is high, as in the two other regions, a further prerequisite is a coherent organic movement which speaks with one voice. The case of the Muehlviertel shows that the divergences between major organic fractions (Ernte and OeIG) on the

marketing strategies prevent the emergence of the unified stance needed to take the lead in regional development. But even then success depends on the possibility of distinguishing the organic approach from the regional images created by conventional agriculture. This can be seen in Vorarlberg, where the conventional farming system has a good reputation on the consumer side despite rather intensive practices.

In two of the three case study regions measures of the Structural Fund have been applied.

It appears that the eco-region approach, at least in the case study regions, was not initiated by measures of the Structural Fund. In Vorarlberg the “Kaesestrasse” is less geared towards organic than the Biosphere Park, although the latter had no assistance by LEADER while the former case had.

Although programs of the Structural Fund are not necessarily focusing on the organic sector, organic farmers could make use of them. Only where the organic movement is relatively strong and unified, can it make optimum use of programs of the Structural Fund for their own ends. Until now this is not observed in any of our case study regions. Even in Vorarlberg, where a relatively strong organic movement is now unified, regional players are stronger in the “Regios” than are organic key players.

However it is not only a question of utilising the financial assistance provided by the Structural Fund, the programs and measures itself steer the direction of development in different ways.

Objective 5b was used in Vorarlberg mainly to support local dairies which produce high quality cheese. The main target was to improve the hygiene standards and to install local shops for direct sale complementary to the mainstream marketing outlets. This was also seen as a basis for the further development of the “Kaesestrasse”. In the Muehlviertel Objective 5b measures targeted a wide range of sector-specific projects from organic herbs to farm shops and image building projects such as school projects. Thus, the focus was less sectoral there, probably due to a longer exposure to endogenous regional development projects.

LEADER II in Vorarlberg was restricted to the Bregenzerwald. A key project was the territorial integration of agriculture and tourism via the thematic “Kaesestrasse” route. In Muehlviertel LEADER II was only one possible financing measure besides the INTERREG programme. Moreover, there are two LEADER groups active in the region.

While in Vorarlberg organic initiatives were utilising financial contribution of Objective 5b to some extent, they could not really participate in the LEADER measures. In Muehlviertel participation of organic initiatives was much higher in all programs.

From the activities supported it can be concluded that Objective 5b was promoting in general a more sectoral approach while LEADER is more territorially focused.

General Conclusions

First of all the analysis shows that there are different understandings and approaches to the notion of eco-regions in Austria. We can clearly distinguish predominantly product oriented approaches from region oriented and sector oriented approaches. The framework of the Culture Economy provides a useful starting point for a typology of eco-regions. The regional approach is found most widespread, also product and sector oriented approaches tend to widen their scope to a regional orientation including other economic sectors in the longer run. Thus generally vertical as well as horizontal networks develop.

The main driving force for the formation of eco-regions identified remains the regulatory system. In Vienna as well as in Vorarlberg the most powerful actor is found within the

political arena. In its background consumer interests play a major role. Such political influence is not visible (at least openly) in the utilisation of the Structural Fund.

While the measures of the Structural Fund, especially the LEADER program, has certainly had the effect of generating ideas of sustainable and environmental friendly development of a region, it does not per se lead to the formation of eco-regions. Furthermore, the instruments target different strategies. While the Objective 5b assistance tended to result in strengthening vertical networks, LEADER- projects initiated more horizontal networks. A successful regional strategy however depends on both types of networks (Kneafsy et al. 2001).

In Austria also the institutional handling of the structural fund supports a bias towards vertical integration. Existing knowledge of sectoral handling of the administration most efficiently used Objective 5b support. The development of comprehensive and integrative projects is now assisted by the establishment of so-called regional management centres. The effect of these centres depends however on the previous experiences of endogenous development in the region. As most regional management agencies are organised as associations of municipalities, there are still questions about the integration of innovative persons and groups into structures dominated by traditional representatives from politics and administration (Dax and Hebertshuber 2001). This illustrates the fact that the utilisation of assistance of the Structural Fund and the successful implementation of the projects depends on the regional acceptance and institutional embeddedness of the proponents. This applies of course also to the concept of eco-regions. This regional acceptance depends again on a variety of factors such as the presence of a significant percentage of organic farmers, the united approach of the organic movement and the strength of regional images already utilised by conventional farming in the region.

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Table 1: Eco-regions in Austria:

Region	Action Groups and characteristic features	Mode of Eco-region
Vienna		
Vienna city	organic farming as leading concept, marketing of organic products in public canteens	sector-oriented
Burgenland		
Mittelburgenland	LAG Mittelburgenländisches Hügelland: high density of organic farmers among full-time farmers, marketing of organic products as base for regional development LAG Naturparkbrot: seven bakers and the grain mill want to maintain their competitiveness with organic farmers through co-operation	product-oriented
Oberes Lafnitztal	LAG Weidehaltung im Lafnitztal: focal point is extensive pasturing in the valley bottom and mother cow husbandry, low stocking densities of less than 1,4 LSU per ha and renunciation of agro-chemicals. Ecological regional agriculture should be supported by diversification and small-scale processing in the long term	sector-oriented
Naturpark Raab	The trilateral nature park Raab - Örség - Goricko should be used as a starting point for the renewal of rural economy. Conversion to organic agriculture with targeted co-operations and marketing in tourism are the major issues	region-oriented sector-oriented
Lower Austria		
Waidhofen	Bioregion Waidhofen: GMO-free zone envisaged; co-operation of organic farmers with retailers and canteens LAG Spezialitätenmarkt Waidhofen/Ybbs: organic shop in co-operation with other economic sectors	region-oriented
Waldviertel	Ökologischer Kreislauf -Moorbad Harbach: ecological model on small scale, farmers co-operate with wellness tourism LAG Waldviertler Grenzland: assistance in specialisation on niche products (herbs, berries, etc) in organic quality Bioregion Waldviertel: „Ecoregion“ declared by the supermarket label „natur pur“ of Spar	region-oriented product-oriented product oriented
Land um Laa an der Thaya	LAG Das bäuerliche Spezialitätenland: farmers association with direct marketing has developed common standards based on organic agriculture (vegetable growing, animal welfare)	product-oriented
Upper Austria:		
Mühlviertel	Ökoregion Mühlviertel : farmers association for improved marketing of organic products in supermarkets by regional origin LAG Mühlviertler Sterngartl : broad range of activities not specific agricultural, promotes also organic enterprises LAG Mühlviertler Alm; Projekt: Mühlviertler Urkraft: co-operative of organic farmers, co-operation with regional processors and small regional retailers	product oriented region-oriented product- oriented
Almtal	Ökoregion Almtal: association founded by farmers, marketing in co-operation with local retailers, (shop in shop)	region-oriented

Eisenwurzen	LAG Eisenwurzen: model region for sustainable development, traditional strong base in organic farming since the 80s Biogenossenschaft Schlierbach: organic co-operative own brand (Hofmarke) Regionalforum Steyr Kirchdorf:	region-oriented
Styria		
Ramsau	Bioregion Ramsau homepage: www.bioregion-ramsau.at co-operation between tourism and agriculture	region-oriented
Joglland	LAG Joglland: preservation of agricultural traditions as a frame for innovative organic agriculture, product innovation for a regional demand Quality label Joglland: 50 % of farms should convert to organic, Goals include preservation of biodiversity and high quality regional products for direct marketing and regional gastronomy	sector-oriented
Murau	Bioregion Murau: proposed co-operation between organic farmers, regional bakery and renewable energy	region-oriented
Carynthia		
Gailtal	high density of organic farmers some local farmers groups are active.	region-oriented
Mölltal	Tauernfenster regional farmers shop. LAG Großglockner/Oberes Mölltal maintainance of the traditional cultural landscape via organic farming	product-oriented
Salzburg		
Bioregion Nationalpark „Hohe Tauern	Bioregion Nationalpark „Hohe Tauern: Ecoregion of the ARGE Nationalpark in co-operation with the major supermarket chain Billa (Ja!Natürlich). Billa-Itas travel agency for farms holidays LAG Hohe Tauern : organic farming as lead concept for agricultural development, preservation of old traditional breeds	region-oriented product oriented sector-oriented
Salzburger Seenland	Seeham im Flachgau eco-village, co-operation with “ Bioheuregion ” Trumer Seen: organic farmers in 22 communes supply 6 dairies with silage free milk, co-operation with tourism processors and retailers	region-oriented product oriented
Tirol		
Kaiserwinkl	Bioregion Wilder Kaiser: starting from a regional co-operation tourism and agriculture the Ecoregion idea developed. it resulted in a organic marketing co-operative for the whole of Tyrol.	product oriented
Vorarlberg		
Biosphärenpark Großes Walsertal	Biosphärenpark Großes Walsertal: regional sustainability, agriculture not explicitly organic as lead concept, organic dairy (a village where all farmers converted to organic) as one element	region-oriented
Bregenzerwald	Bregenzerwälder Käsestrasse: regional development organic farming not specifically mentioned, one organic dairy as member	region-oriented