

Transforming Rural Communication

Three sociological case studies in a developed and urbanized rural area of northern Germany: regional partnership Lübeck bay, organic dairy farming and nature protection

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Abstract

Marginal rural areas suffer from isolation and a lack of communication with the outside world. The renaissance of rural values and food quality-related issues has brought many urban people to again approach rural areas and actors, sometimes with the intermediation of other more or less professional actors. In an EU share cost project TRUC (EU-QoL: QLAM-2001-00025; 2001-2003), several cases of regional and rural development throughout Europe have been analysed on the topic of transforming rural communication.¹ We present three of these cases in northern Germany: the Model Region Luebeck Bay, Organic Milk and Nature Protection. All of these projects are located in an area where urbanization and the multifunctionality of rural action and development is highly developed.

The general objective of the project was to consolidate a transdisciplinary and trans-sectoral approach to the problem of communication in rural areas, to raise awareness among practitioners and academics of the specificities of rural communication and of the principles of „progressive rural communication“ and to build a core network of academics and practitioners around this topic.

The project has an essentially exploratory function, so its achievements will be the basis for further research agendas and projects. The general objective is articulated into three specific objectives:

- Accumulating information on rural communication
- Creating new knowledge on rural communication
- Turning new knowledge into practice

The fulfilment of this objective will allow all actors involved in rural development to make decisions with more awareness of the importance of rural communication and to embody this awareness into rural development projects and practices.

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Introduction

In recent years it has become apparent that rural areas have to cope with substantial development problems and that the countryside is generally facing deep transformations. In the past, rurality and rural policy had for the most part been regarded as spheres of social stability. Many people were convinced that the countryside should remain a stronghold of inflexibility and a core for conservatism.

In contrast, at the moment many people are convinced that rural policy has to become much more offensive and that a shift is needed to concepts which mobilize people in a very direct manner. On the other hand, no simple way out of the problems the countryside is facing has been identified until now. Instead, it is widely believed that rural problems are of high complexity, that many actors must get involved and that different levels of acting and thinking must be taken into account.

Mere conservatism therefore no longer can be regarded as a good advice - neither for the countryside and nor for rural actors concerned. Put simply, rural actors have to decide whether or not they are prepared to experiment with new concepts and strategies which all in all are more integrative with regard to the social and political development of rural actors and rural institutions. Second, concepts and strategies have to be socially innovative, which means that they must be analyzed in terms of their capacity to experiment with new types and forms of governance and with a more reflexive mind-set on the part of the actors involved.

In this context, two issues especially have to be explored more in depth. Both issues have to be studied within the sphere of discourses as well as on the level of concrete economic, social and political activities.

First, the assumption that a mobilizing and integrative approach is necessary leads to the question of which actors can be won and mobilized for transformation strategies. With regard to already existing social interests and traditions, it must also be clarified whether their interests and traditions can be integrated into strategies of rural transformation in a productive and satisfying manner.

Because any artificial or merely idealistic construction of common values, social interests, as well as cooperative and corporative meanings would lead to poor results, we have to look for concrete activities and the discourses of people who have been won for rural action. There is no other way to explore the difference between realistic concepts and mere fiction. It makes no sense to claim integration, common values and common action without knowing very much about the practical experiences rural actors are having with integrative concepts and strategies today.

In addition, if we assume that innovative concepts have to be worked out, we must answer the question of which types and structure of government and of governance are suitable for this task and which sort of social and political dynamism is really beneficial for innovation.

This points to another problem. Governance is an analytical category and a specific socio-political term used to describe relations between institutions and actors. Sometimes it bears a more political and sometimes a more sociological meaning.

Both meanings are taken into consideration in the following, but it is clear that a social research study concentrates on the social meanings of the word. From a social point of view, governance is a category which is aiming at social networks and tools of communication which (can) help individuals and social groups, diverse social strata and social milieus to find a full or better expression of their aspirations in the already existing fields of social interaction or in fields which have only recently re-emerged. When we are speaking about “progressive rural communication” we are doing so in order to identify practices of cooperation and communication which give rural actors better chances for social empowerment and, mostly at a preliminary stage, better chances of articulating themselves in diverse social interactions.

What we have in mind when using the notion “progressive” are processes of social change which lead to empowerment for individuals as well as for social groups. But whoever longs for empowerment for himself or for other actors has to move and has to explore new fields of activities and thus try out new forms of cooperation and communication.

This domain of thinking and acting, however, implies a great variety of aspects – beginning with concrete and well-documented economic, social and political interests and motivations and ending with more general and in some cases even vague aspects of winning strength or power in social bargaining processes or gaining a larger audience and more influence in public debates.

What is at stake when speaking about empowerment with regard to cooperation and communication therefore is the question of whether actors and groups can get a stronger “voice” in their interactions.

Politically, governance aims at structures which are looser in comparison with structures of government and which rely to a large extent on informal, semi-political or semi-institutionalized practices. According to Savitch and Vogel (2000) the differences between governance and government (or the working programs of consolidated institutions and institutions with lower levels of bindings) can be explained in the following way:

“In sum, whereas government is vertical and firmly institutionalised, governance is horizontal and flexible. Whereas government is formal and directed from above, governance is informal and self-regulating. Whereas higher level government (e.g., states) connects to localities through demarked procedures, lower level governance (e.g. interlocal agreements) is looser and less confined by boundaries. Government emphasizes the centralizing feature of regionalism, whereas governance stresses the decentralizing virtues of local cooperation” (see Savitch and Vogel 2000, p. 161f)

Applied to the subject of rural transformation, rural governance comprises political activities as well as the strategies and logistics of political change which are generally more bottom-up oriented and which are driven by networks of local and regional cooperation.

Those networks should go well beyond the traditional institutional and political framework rural actors have considered as relevant in the past, and to which they have become accustomed, by establishing rural social traditions and genuine political education in the countryside. The networks should cross barriers between markets and other economic driven sectors and spheres, governments and administrations (on regional and local levels), and should also overcome barriers between the civil society and other modes of social organization and social articulation.

The following report is focussed on these topics. It deals with different cooperative experiences and the related communication processes which different rural stakeholders have made recently. It covers a wide range of economic, social and political activities, although we must admit that - with regard to the diversity of problems in rural areas - only a small number of topics has been studied.

The role of agriculture as an economic factor and the importance of the agrarian population with regard to social and cultural traditions have decreased considerably. However, the region studied is also characterized by intensive agriculture, with more than two thirds of the land used for agrarian purposes. The agricultural structures (size of the farms, technical equipment, profits) are among the healthiest in Germany.

The three case studies presented in the following present the topic "Transforming Rural Communication" from the perspective of rural actors, who not only interfere actively in transformation processes, but stand for new approaches to rural problems. These actors are trying to change rural governance and their communication practices in a progressive way. Therefore they are analysed both on the basis of their beliefs and the willingness they express to move in this direction, and on the basis of their real capacities and activities to do so.

This certainly does not imply that our participants characterize themselves as "progressive," or see themselves as a part of a progressive movement. Some of them are convinced that they must depart completely from the traditional course of rural development in their longing for rural transformation. For these actors, "empowerment" is a concept used to describe a more or less radical change in the way things should proceed in rural areas.

Others hope that it might be sufficient to improve or to expand traditional forms of rural politics without taking the risk of radical reforms. For these actors, empowerment has no radical meaning. It is a smooth concept to define gradual changes.

Without doubt, a lot of the stakeholders we met during our field work don't have any far reaching strategy of change in mind, either radical or otherwise. They focus on very restricted, mostly single purposes, in the domain of economic objectives. These actors judge transformation processes from a more or less utilitarian standpoint and put short term perspectives at the forefront.

But despite of the astonishing variety of motives, mindsets and horizons of thinking and acting, all actors we visited and spoke to are on the move and thus making new experiences in cooperation with other actors and in the sphere of communication.

In addition a sometimes experimental character links the three cases and the experiences which are presented in the following. It makes them particularly interesting for the debate about the future of rural areas, because all stakeholders whose activities were observed are not stuck in the mainstream of acting and thinking in the countryside.

On the other hand, in only one of the three cases can we rely on longer lasting developments and thus, through practices with much better developed empirical backgrounds, of satisfying experiences on the part of observed actors.

The first case illustrates the development of a regional partnership in the area surrounding the Hanse City Lübeck in northern Germany. The partnership is called “**Regional Partnership in Lübeck Bay**“. It was forged in connection with a competition sponsored by the German Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture in 2001.

At that time the ministry took the initiative to mobilise more actors in rural areas, particularly actors who were not yet mobilised. Furthermore, regional strategies which are backed by the Federal State, but which rely strongly on a bottom-up political approach should be tested. Ultimately 208 regions and partnerships took part in the competition. Of these, 18 regions won the competition and received special funding from the ministry to implement their genuine plans and concepts of regional development. We consider one of them with an action-research methodology.

The political goal of the partnership in Lübeck is to strengthen rural areas with the help of new economic, social and political cooperation and new relationships in the area of communication. Networks play a decisive role.

The case study demonstrates how regional perspectives have been defined by actors taking part in the process of founding a partnership, what problems emerged in the realization of plans and concepts they are facing, and what progress they have made in the implementation of network-oriented communication strategies.

The partnership is a completely new institution for the region around Lübeck. Although the competition which led to the foundation of the partnership was launched by their federal state, and although the political and juridical framework for the partnership was defined by the Federal Government, the responsibility for the transformation of general concepts and strategies into concrete regional policy concepts, and development strategies were left exclusively to regional actors. So they had, and still have, much freedom in the direction and development of their proper strategies.

The high degree of freedom for regional actors is certainly the most important distinguishing mark of the competition and its partnerships. This is of great importance for the development of CAP (Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union) in the near future. The question of whether such structures can really work is of vital importance for the reform of rural politics and rural political institutions in Europe.

There are three particular problems which must be studied more intensively and therefore have become leading issues for our case study in the Lübeck region.

The first issue is related to the question of whether regional actors are able to cooperate and communicate in a progressive manner. In theory, it is expected that actors act in a progressive manner, implying that they develop social types of cooperation and communication and suitable institutions as well. These should provide room for innovative thinking, respond effectively to local and regional needs and traditions, favour the bargaining processes among actors, and ensure compromises between different interests and traditions. Last but not least, it is expected that progressive concepts for rural transformation stand for participatory concepts. It must be clarified whether actors and the cooperations they build in their partnerships meet these expectations.

The second problem which can be studied in the Lübeck case is the question of institution building in the countryside. What we have in mind is not the establishment of firmly established institutions which already exist in the form of regional administrations, regional branches of political parties and business corporations. At stake are institutions which are flexible enough to integrate principles and structures of government and governance.

As regional strategies must build up an institutional framework which encourages local or regional stakeholders to take responsibility for common goals without being incorporated in traditional institutions; and as these institutions have to be bottom-up oriented without losing effectiveness in the administrative or economic sense, the question has to be raised whether it is really possible to mix different principles and logistics of organisation. The Lübeck Bay partnership gives more insight into such new forms of institutions and their internal structures.

The third problem has much to do with the second one. Although the partnership stands for new political approaches, and although it is searching for its own political course, the question of how to combine new concepts and already existing political structures and institutions remains important. Given that it would be fruitless and counterproductive to ignore already existing political structures and institutions, and as it would even be destructive if regional actors were to develop hostile attitudes towards the established political system, the question of how established and new actors communicate with each other must be answered.

This issue is of central political importance, particularly because the question of whether progressive concepts will succeed depends to a high degree on the sensitivity to reasonable solutions of the on the part of the actors concerned. The danger of exaggregating innovative claims and of becoming too removed from the existing institutions and political communication structures may be just as strong as the danger of retreating to the terrain of the established game of politics as soon as the first difficulties appear.

On the other hand, demands for a middle way are quickly formulated. But such demands, however, do not offer any real basis for the solution of the problems if they are not underpinned with concrete experiences.

Yet in rural politics much importance must be attached to experiments. Studying the way the Regional Partnership in Lübeck is coping with these problems can deliver empirical

evidence of what can realistically be achieved by stakeholders who see themselves as being in accordance with the above formulated objectives.

The idea of the “Regional Partnership in Lübeck Bay” was created in 2001 and established in 2002. We describe the development of the partnership until the end of 2003. One cannot speak of completed processes here nor of secure experiences. The main emphasis of the presentation is therefore the assessment of the starting points and the clarification of its first developmental stages.

An experiment is presented which is certainly in its infancy. But this experiment shows in a very clear manner whether it is possible to bring very different groups of stakeholders together, and where and where not problems can be solved with new cooperative structures (at least from a short term perspective). Among these actors are individuals and groups which have until now not cooperated with each other and which had sometimes even been in disagreement with each other.

This is especially true with regard to conflicts between agriculture and nature conservation. But a “communicative ice age” has also been typical for the relationships between environmentalists and actors in tourism, or between actors with very different ideas for the development of rural identities.

In the Lübeck case, however, not only success stories are presented. We also describe structures, concepts and behaviour patterns which fall under the rubrics: lasting conflicts and regressions to unproductive forms of communication. Sometimes the activities can be classified as half-hearted actions. Maybe these aspects will only prove to be “children’s illnesses.” At the moment, it’s hard to tell.

For the Lübeck case another distinguishing mark must be specified in advance. The case study is located in the northern part of Germany. The area extends across the two German federal states, Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Western Pommern. Because an area is studied which covers both a former West German state and a “new” German state since reunification, the case also falls under the topic “East-West Integration.”

This topic still plays an important political role in Germany. For the Lübeck case study it signifies that observers of the regional situation must take the “historical burden” of separation into account.

The case includes another special feature, this time in the field of methods. We did not only use traditional social research survey instruments to collect our information, because we were actively engaged in the grounding and building of the partnership. Therefore, to a large extent our research approach is based on action research methods.

This is also the main reason why the presentation of the Lübeck case is much more extensive than the presentation of the two other cases. The number of actors who are involved is also very much higher than in the two other cases and so is the variety of issues. We try to show the development of the partnership in a detailed manner. We must admit that we haven’t had such intense access to the other two cases. Nevertheless we are

sure that the importance of the Lübeck case justifies the unevenness in our research program.

The second case deals with economic development and marketing strategy concepts of **two groups of organic dairy farmers**. Both groups of farmers are specialised in organic dairy farming and the marketing of organic milk. The two groups are also located in northern Germany and had already been active for several years. For this reason they cannot be classified as newcomers.

In Germany, the growth of organic farming is one of the most promising transformations to be observed in rural areas. Organic farming has become a very rapidly growing segment of German agriculture. At the end of 2003, more than 16 000 organic farms were registered in Germany (see Agrarbericht 2004, p. 35). They represent 4.1 per cent of all farms in Germany and organic farms are working 4.5 percent of all farm land. (see *ibid*).

Considering the fact that at the beginning of the 1980s the number of organically run farms was only a three-digit figure, and that in 1990 not more than 3 000 organic farms could be counted in Germany (see *Ökologie und Landbau*, Vol. 106, p. 75), it can be deduced that growth trends in the organic sector have been very strong during the past 20 years.

In the organic sector, however, it is not primarily the quantitative aspect of growth that counts and which gives the organic sector its importance for rural transformation issues. Economic innovation and the revitalization of regional agribusiness are very often linked to the development of organic products, production systems and of organic markets. The development of organic business also has to be seen as an effective attempt to capture high-value markets.

Particularly the question of whether it is possible for more groups of farmers to empower themselves economically and socially by going organic is relevant for the evaluation of transformation perspectives of rural areas and the definition of successful strategies for economic actors.

Here, important impulses could be set free for the development of conventional agricultural production systems and for conventionally based value chains as well as for regional development in a broader sense.

Herein, the development of the milk sector plays an important role. On the one hand, dairy farming is still the most important single segment in agriculture. On the other hand, dairies form a strong pillar of the food economy in many regions. Finally, most dairy products have become typical standard products of industrial food production in the past.

Under these conditions, it is of special interest whether and how organic products can compete against these structures and create a specific quality image - a high-value market profile. One important question in this field of activity is the question of the meaning organic dairy farmers themselves give to their economic activities and to their future.

In addition, the dairy sector in Germany is touched by rapid transformations at the moment. Overproduction continues and concentration trends are holding steady. If it is possible to master the future with the help of quality oriented marketing strategies or if it

would be better to choose competition strategies which are focused on cost leadership for mass markets is therefore relevant for the milk sector and the entire milk market.

For the development of rural areas, quality strategies have yet an additional meaning. In Germany, we are experiencing a sharp reduction in milk production in many regions because certain areas and farm structures can no longer compete. Small farmers in mountainous areas are especially concerned.

In recent years, organic milk production seemed to be an exception at this point. But it is not yet clear if this is only a temporary phenomenon or if it is possible to establish a value chain which can remain regionally based in organic markets over the long term and which on the other hand can grow to much more than a niche stature. The case of organic milk illustrates these questions as well and therefore some significant consequences for the overall theme of “transforming rural communication” emerge from it.

The third case refers to regional cooperation structures in another region in Schleswig-Holstein. We look to a region in the middle of the administrative district of East-Holstein county. Because the small town of Eutin lies in the centre of the region which we had observed, the case was named the “**Eutin case**“. The administrative district is largely also a rural one. In this case, cooperative structures and political communication between **actors** are studied which are embodied in **water protection and nature conservation schemes**. Both are vital issues for regional development in the Eutin region. The case can also be regarded as an example for the relevance and the political profiles of grassroots initiatives, which means: initiatives in which the state is not involved or where the state (and its institutions) only plays a minor role. Some parallels to the Lübeck case can therefore be drawn. The question of rural governance is central to both cases.

Parallels can be seen especially with regard to the question of how different actors in rural areas can be motivated to work together and to build up appropriate networks. Similar to the case of the Regional Partnership in Lübeck, the cooperation structures we have seen do not build on long traditions. They have not existed for more than five years. Here too, new methods and new offers of cooperation can be stated, and here too, successes as well as failures must be reported.

At last one general remark to all cases must be formulated in advance. In all case studies the constellations for cooperation and communication can be characterized as innovative and progressive. However, we must admit that progressive rural communication doesn't mean for us that our actors are “radicals” in the meaning of real counterprojects which separate them from the mainstream of rural development.

It must be underscored that the actors and the horizons of change which we have studied in our cases are still bound to the economic, social and political mainstream in the rural areas which we have visited. We describe our actors as pioneers and we characterize their activities as innovative. We are sure that this is an appropriate judgment because they are experimenting somehow and are exploring new development paths. But the pioneers we have seen are not discovering completely new (regional) continents. At the centre of their activities we have found strategies which we interpret as - sometimes even very prudent –

forms of expansion of the existing economic, social and political activities and horizons of thinking and communicating.

Transforming Rural Communication – Theoretical Aspects

Before going into detail, it makes sense to underscore the basic ideas we have in mind. In the public debate, it has often been argued that agriculture and rural areas are facing new realities and new challenges. Both new realities, as well as new challenges, are political questions and they dominate the political debate about agriculture and rural areas. These themes, however, also require more social enquiry.

The “new agrarian question” is often mentioned by sociologists (van der Ploeg 1993). In reality this not only an agrarian problem, but an indication of the social problem of how to integrate agricultural development into broader concepts of social change. These demand a revised concept of rural change from us.

This is especially true for Germany, where significant changes have occurred in the farming sector and in rural areas in the past years, and where we are confronted with a situation in which many citizens (and consumers) regard agriculture very critically. This although Germany no longer belongs to that type of modern society in which - as for example in France – the agrarian sector and agribusiness still form a strong economic pillar. At the moment (2003), 410 000 farms are registered in Germany and agriculture yields about one percent of the BSP.

But in Germany more than 50 percent of the landscape is used for agrarian purposes. This landscape has been shaped and preserved by farmers, and agricultural forms of land use are, for ecological reasons (protection and regeneration of water resources for example), also the best way to use land. The substantial role of agrarian landscapes in meeting ecological goals is, therefore, undeniable. So it would be misleading to minimize the importance of agriculture in Germany and to reduce its importance for society from the number of jobs, the percentage of the BSP and so forth.

Questions of agriculture are certainly very material questions. Moreover ecological concerns often are based on scientific findings which can be summarized with hard facts and figures (pollution levels and so on). But when we talk about landscapes, there are strong cultural and spiritual dimensions to be regarded too. Cultural dimensions play an important role for the stability or for the instability of social structures as well as for the homogeneity of communities. Love of a landscape or the sentiment of being at home in a region can be interpreted as culturally bound social forces which can be mobilized even for economic purposes.

But what kind of new realities and what sort of challenges have taken place? Who are the actors and what do they want? What about the prerequisites for further changes? Which kind of social reality can arise from them?

Challenges and realities for social and political actors

These are the key issues to be discussed in the following. Because of their great variety it is not easy to cluster the problems. Nevertheless there are two principal themes which must be highlighted.

First, solutions for economic actors in rural areas (especially for farmers and the whole food chain) must be found which combine economic success, environmental progress and a lot of other social concerns.

Modern agriculture damages the natural environment in many ways, and this often to a high degree. Although we can notice some progress in the conservation of nature and in the protection of main resources (soil, water and air), many environmental problems caused by agriculture endure (Umweltbundesamt 2002).

This topic is politically hot because a real breakthrough in the ecologisation of agriculture has not taken place although the problems have been adequately researched and there has been no lack of individual initiatives over the past few years.

This topic is socially relevant because the search for sustainable developmental paths cannot ignore the fact that a modern society urgently needs an agriculture which can be maintained into the future in order to maintain the rural areas of society as ecological regeneration areas. In Germany, this particularly relates to the protection of drinking water supplies, but other regeneration issues to the protection of soil, water and air must also be mentioned.

On the one hand, agriculture plays an important role for the maintenance of rural landscapes, especially with regard to biological diversity and the use of the landscape as recreational areas. This role of agriculture must even be reinforced in some regions. The work of farmers is badly needed for sustainable land use. On the other hand, the importance of agriculture for a sound economic and social future is not relevant in many rural areas. This means that agriculture must change, yet it must be accepted and find political support.

The theme of animal protection is another area in which a new or changed agricultural policy is made necessary. On June 21, 2002, the German Parliament added an amendment to the national constitution raising animal protection to a state goal. This means that the animal protection concept can not fall prey to the hierarchical basic right of humans, but rather in cases of conflict, an officially balanced decision must be reached.

The change in the constitution is the conclusion of the general change in public opinion on animal as “co-creatures” rather than subjects. Anyone who wants to prevent animals from pain and suffering would insist on keeping the animals under animal appropriate conditions.

Opinion research can show that these demands are broadly anchored in public opinion and large consumer groups insist on animal appropriate husbandry forms as a basis for their purchasing decisions for animal products. It can be assumed that the demands for high

quality foods will also depend on animal appropriate husbandry, the transport conditions to the slaughter houses and the form of slaughtering to spare the animals unnecessary suffering. This is also a factor which directly affects the future of agriculture and which precipitates in the demands of rural communication processes.

Last but not least, the agricultural change discussions of the past several years have led to the fact that the quality demands on the total process ranging from the agricultural production to the store showcase are affected. Here, the BSE crisis was a catalyst for an intensification of consumer protection, rooted in two basic principles. First, the mobilisation of the personal interest of the economic actors in the total agricultural and food sector for transparent production and marketing. This because only on the basis of transparent processes can consumer trust be strengthened and translated into market successes. Secondly, the institutional frameworks for quality research must be improved and a focus on consumer protection activities of the government must monitor the self-monitoring of the economic actors.

In the current political debate in Germany, the notion of multi-functionality is mostly used to describe the multitude of functions related to a new agriculture. The political problem, however, is not to formulate a comprehensive description of different functions and roles that the farming sector should fulfil. There is no question of the political legitimacy in the abstract. The central problem is how to convince the majority of farmers to change their role and to accept new functions, while convincing a lot of social groups in rural areas that they will not reach sustainability if they ignore the basic economic and social interests of farmers and try to dictate solutions.

What this means for farmers with regard to their income, the perception of their work and their social status in rural communities is unclear. And what this means for communication between farmers and other actors in the countryside is unknown as well.

For instance, it is easy to demand from farmers that they should play a more active and more conscious role as stewards of the countryside. But it is far more difficult to implement concise concepts which take the needs of the farmers into account as well as the prospects of the region and the concerns of many other social groups in rural communities, too.

In the past years, the political debate in Germany has therefore focused more and more on the neutralisation of conflicts and the management of innovative cooperation and communication structures which bring actors together. The debate has shifted from a fruitless confrontation of principles to real experiences on a regional level. How economic and social actors behave under specific conditions and how they interact has become the central question.

The basic idea for our research program is therefore to identify these types of communication in selected fields. We want to locate actors and constellations which we regard as promising. Therefore we want to observe actors who are searching for new ways in economic production, who are innovative in trading and who try to interact with each other in new forms.

In some regions, agriculture and the food sector still play an important role for the rural economy and for social life. Especially in regions with intensive husbandry, agribusiness is a key factor for the economic prosperity of the region. On the other hand, ecological problems often cluster in these regions and we can find widespread displeasure on the part of non- agricultural residents towards the negative effects of intensive farm practices.

A lot of daily social and political conflicts arise from this. Altogether, these conflicts have negative consequences for the social cohesion in villages and they affect farmers too. This is also true for the suburban fringe around bigger cities where the situation has worsened for farmers because there are more and more conflicts about the use of land. In some cases we find two, three or more claims to be satisfied on one piece of land at the same time. Production of food (agriculture), land use for streets, motorways or new settlements (central or local government and the citizens who want them), protection of nature for endangered species (government and / or associations for the conservation of nature), production of drinking water (government and water industry), recreational interests and so forth are typical for such situations.

This means that the neutralization of conflicts is of vital importance in these regions. One cannot imagine a sound development of these regions as long as most of the rural actors are absorbed with these conflicts and use their political influence to fight each other instead of working together for a common future.

The very opposite of this situation is found in regions which suffer from spatial and economic specialisation and concentration processes in agriculture and in the whole food chain. In these regions, there can also be conflicts about land use. But they are of minor importance because land is not scarce. The main problem in these regions is the lack of land users with personal long-standing economic and social interests in the region. If existing trends continue, we will even have landscapes without farmers in the near future. In addition, the local economy must function without the jobs and resources which were formerly generated in the food sector and by other firms which previously provided goods to farmers.

With respect to these differences, the debate about the future of rural areas must remain very aware of regional differences and in some ways must try to find different answers for different situations.

In Germany, however, people who care about these problems must be aware that there are great differences between the western part of Germany and most often the rural regions in the eastern part.

Twelve years after reunification we still find many regions in eastern Germany where the main problem is not a crisis in agriculture. In comparison with industry and the service sector, agriculture is doing quite well in these regions although some problems remain. In these parts of eastern Germany, the main problem is a high unemployment rate (around 20 percent), a problem stemming partially from the decline of the food-industry, agriculturally oriented industries, and services too.

In these regions, young people with better skills are leaving their hometowns and villages to go to western Germany, while the older people are staying so that we have an age structure which undermines the economic prospects of the regions and leads to new social problems.

To put it in other words: industrialisation does not create the main problems in these regions, rather, de-industrialisation does. The villages are changing their character in rural areas because people are leaving them, not because of new settlements and new citizens. The future of these regions is extremely dependent on the creation of new jobs and this is often linked to the development of an adequate infrastructure.

As a sector doing better than others in eastern Germany, agriculture is therefore regarded as a sector which can generate new jobs. This is especially true for the food industry and the building up of eastern-based supply chains for agribusiness.

A multitude of controversial political propositions arise from all this. We cannot present them in detail. Most experts, however, agree that innovative solutions must be found for all these problems. Our problem is how to find them and how to study them, even in their infancy. But if the central question is the stimulation of innovation it might be helpful to look for examples for innovation strategies which flourish.

Options for a new agricultural policy and regional strategies

Those observing the development of agricultural policy and rural area policy in Germany will, regardless of their political orientation, make two undeniable observations. First that these political arenas have begun to become active again and that this topic has become more important in public discussion. Topics of interest only to specialists and lobbyists just a few years ago are now of interest to a broad public.

The BSE crisis which broke out at the end of the year 2000 in Germany can and must be made responsible for this development. The crisis was also a direct push for a change at the top of the Ministry of Agriculture and for a new range of tasks for the ministry also at the end of the year 2000.²

The BSE crisis was also the departure point for a range of government initiatives to improve the food supply and above all for a new determination of goals for agricultural policy. This can be most clearly expressed in the slogan “Klasse statt Masse” (“Class” (Quality) instead of “Mass” (Quantity)). A broad spectrum of individual political initiatives are bundled into these words, which basically focus at thinking about agriculture from the perspective of consumer interests, who are more concerned about the quality of their food now, and at the same time to develop a new economic leitmotif for German agriculture. The same is true for political programs which target rural areas overall.

² K. H. Funke (SPD) was replaced by R. Künast (Green Party). The ministry was reorganized as a consumer ministry.

But no matter how much the political movements of the past two years, and public interest on agricultural themes and questions of rural areas, can be seen as a direct reaction to the crisis, it would be wrong to overlook the structural roots of the crisis and the pressure of long term existing basic problems which have contributed to this problem. In Germany an agricultural change and new concepts for rural areas are being discussed. If one wanted to be cynical, one could even say that the BSE crisis came at the right point in time to tackle blockades in these political arenas, and even those individuals who are not in accord with the policies of the present German government can see that a return to the status quo ante is no longer possible. We will provide a short overview of the basic problems.

The structural change in agriculture has forced about three percent of the farms to close down every year since the 1990s. In the next years the trend will continue. It is much more likely that the number of farms closing down will increase because the margin between the farm structures which the experts say need to be met for survival and the current structures is too large.³

Structural change will probably intensify more due to social factors. The number of farms without a guaranteed successor is large. In the former German states the number of apprentices in the field of agriculture in the year 2001 was for the first time under 5 000 (4,725 apprentices)⁴ and all available empirical studies on the topic show that this “vote with the feet” shows the uncertain or difficult economic development perspectives as well as the social stress which affects family farms including the long working times, low acceptance of farming in society – even in rural areas – and especially the stress that is felt by farm wives (Kleine 1999).

If one looks at the perspectives of farms from the view of regional land area use, then there is the additional factor that in Germany waves of suburbanisation in rural areas continue. At the present, an additional 130 ha are lost every day for development purposes, for transportation projects and for other forms of construction and settlement. Although not only agriculture is affected by this trend, it is the primary victim, and this suburban sprawl prevents farm growth and development trends at many locations.⁵

As a consequence of this development, but also as a consequence of the economic concentration processes in the area of food processing, the structures of food economy in the area have been greatly reduced. The concentration in mills and sugar factories has long

³ In 2002 there were 410 000 farms in Germany with more than 2 hectares of agriculturally used land of these farms, only 26 000 worked an area of more than 100 ha. Since 100 ha is seen as the orientation value to be strived for in the mid-term with family farms, one can calculate how strong the development pressure is for the approximately 100 000 farms which currently use between 20 and 50 ha and which provide the carrying framework for family farm agriculture (compare Ararbericht 2002, p. 27)

⁴ (compare BMVEL Report from 3.5.2002)

⁵ One can observe three stages of problem intensity. In the vicinity of large cities and industrial centres, the problem is very serious. In other rural areas this problem is not a main problem for the farmers, but rather a second stage development hypothesis. In thinly settled parts of eastern Germany this does not present any problem at all.

been high. In the area of dairies and cheese factories and in meat processing the concentration movement is very active. This is also true for the feed supply sector, meaning that we are dealing with a structural change of the most important pre and post agricultural product storage areas. This makes the value creation potential of these areas disappear to a large extent from rural areas. Moments of an agrarian de-industrialisation can be seen through the structural change in agriculture; and simultaneously structural change is being forced in the pre and post agricultural product storage areas.

This form of structural change, as the political consequences of this development can be grouped, cannot be reasonably expected to occur without an expansion of the political instruments which one uses to brake such effects, or even better, without alternative paths opened to affect change. This also touches a circle of problems which are included under the main heading of ecological problems. At this point it must suffice to summarily mention the ecological deficits of modern intensive agriculture and to point to available literature on the topic (German Environmental Agency 1997).

New Communication goals and communication tasks in rural areas – rights to the theme „rural communication“

The determination of new or expanded goals from changed problems is one thing. The identification of actors who should fulfil these goals and want to fulfil these goals is a totally different thing. Who takes on these problems, how he can relate the general goals to his concrete business conditions and which action radii can be drawn through these business conditions is the central research question for all those who are occupied with the theme of “rural development policy.”

That is why in the current state of the goal and enactment discussion in Germany the most important thing is to study how regional actors react to the above-mentioned problems. This is because the practical implementation and reactions of various actors take place at the regional level in the course of legal changes and expected general reactions of the citizens or consumers.

Agriculture is an important and sometimes even dominant topic of our study. The agricultural sector and its role for the development of rural areas are either at the forefront of our observations, or the development of agriculture is directly related to the development of new economic, social and political structures and relationships.

The reasons for this are not nostalgic. We don't claim that rural perspectives are always and only bound to agriculture and we don't look back to the time when the two terms rural and agricultural were nearly identical in their meaning. We are conscious that over the past two or three decades, the social structures, as well as the formative lifestyles and social traditions in rural areas, have been strongly “de-agriculturalised.”

For this reason we share the interpretation of new social science research, which shows that village social life (and thus also the social life in rural areas) is no longer a counter

model for urban-industrial social structures and communication (Becker 1997, Becker & Hainz 2002, Herrmann 2002). Seen from this perspective, villages are a “part of and not an exception to social development“ (Herrmann, *ibid*, p. 90) and this development has led to social structures and life conditions in the countryside which have nothing to do with the traditional “forming over” of social structures and lifestyles of all non-agricultural (i.e., rural) actors by agricultural structures and traditions.

Nevertheless, the challenges rural areas are confronted with have much to do with the changes the agricultural sector is living out today. But these changes can no longer be treated as mere agrarian problems because they are significant for the development of the society as a whole.

This is often contained under the heading “new agrarian question” (Van der Ploeg 1993). The notion refers to the “traditional” agrarian question which at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century emerged and contained two demands: the demand for modernising agriculture for the sake of the whole society and the demand that farmers had to devote to modernity in order to find ways out of their proper economic and social crisis.

We therefore will use the term “agrarian question” in order to characterize strategic needs for fundamental changes in the relations between agriculture and society but which refer not only to agriculture but also to rural people in general, to rural landscapes and to rurality as a specific way of living.

We don’t have clear strategies or detailed political objectives in mind. What we have in mind are economic, social and political movements in which some of the macro challenges of social modernisation are bound to micro developments and social changes in the countryside and where both are linked to the modernisation of agriculture in the perspective of sustainability. This sounds rather flue. But some general characteristics of this sort of problems and relations can however be identified.

Seen from a functional perspective, the new agrarian question focuses largely on ecological requirements and demands and must reflect the economic and social concerns of farmers, other rural inhabitants, consumers and so forth.

But the conceptive settings for sustainable development are in many regards not definable when stakeholders refer only to the classic definition for sustainability which says to us that ecological, economic and social needs, concerns and prospects have to be taken into account when we rethink the future of modern societies. Only very broad functional considerations can be deduced from this setting of things.

One of the most important analytical gaps in such considerations is related to the specific function of rural areas and of agriculture in modern societies. Rural areas are vital for modern societies because of their complimentary ecological functions (see Bauer 2002, p. 29). But to ensure these functions (i.e., to secure ecological stability) types of agricultural production and types of landscape use are needed which form a counterweight to the “overuse” (*ibid*) of natural resources and landscapes by industrial production centres, by urban centres and by the attitudes of consumers to consume goods and services with

damaging ecological effects in large quantities. From this perspective the complimentary function of rural areas must be seen as an essential reproduction requirement for the society as a whole (see *ibid*)⁶.

On the other hand, modern agriculture has its proper ecological problems (RSU 1985, RSU 1994, RSU 1996, Frede & Dabbert 1999). An environmentally friendly agriculture must be restored, and despite some progress in the last years, much practical and conceptual work still has to be done. This is a very recent experience for modern societies. Industrial societies and traditional agriculture previously practiced a “decades long symbiosis” (Lutz 1986, p. 125). The industrial system and the urban centres could “count on the performance of the traditional segment to preserve its essential inventory and reproduction requirements” (see *ibid*, p. 130), because agriculture worked in a resource conserving and resource regenerating manner. Thus, a regeneration pool in an ecological sense (guarantee of clean water, healthy soil, clean air etc.) made agricultural areas to pollution-reducing and cleaning spaces and to conservation areas of diverse cultural landscapes.

Concepts for a multifunctional agriculture which are regarded as a solution for these problems, underscore that agriculture must take over different ecological tasks but it does not make clear that a completely new mode of integration of agriculture and its economic and social perspectives into the general system of labour division and into the balance of social interests in modern societies must be worked out (Rahmann 2000).

We presume, that what we are facing today is not only a lack of concrete ideas for sustainable concepts. We argue that the problem of how to encourage actors to make the first steps in a very complicated and long lasting social process of striving for better solutions and learning from mistakes, errors, half solutions today must be regarded as the key for rural transformation.

In addition, when we look for a multifunctional founding of agricultural practices and of their economic and social interests, we have to organise a very complex process of experiments and social bargaining for which we have neither real theories nor enough practical experiences.

Especially if one doesn't believe that these problems can be solved by centralised concepts and that a master state plan, strongly based on legal instruments and political planning must falter, very concrete economic, social and political bargaining processes on the bottom of the society must be analysed and understood, because we want to know how an integration of interests and perspectives of stakeholders actors in rural areas can be established and how good such forms of cooperation are really working.

Therefore, processes of social learning are concerned., The questions of how the affected stakeholders interpret these difficulties and what steps they can take in order to participate

⁶ Bauer expounds „Even if partial overuse (i.e., through intensive farming) takes place, as a model basis for principal contexts is that urban areas systemically overuse their natural resources or rather must import them. Rural areas, in contrast, have unused natural potential and can use this to compensate for deficits in organic functions in the highly populated areas” (*Ibid*) In my own work these links are expressed with the term “organic regeneration functions” (Oppermann 2001).

in processes of learning are located at the core of the analysis of rural problems and rural development strategies.

Dimensions of Communicative Rationality

The problems sketched above show the difficulties of future-oriented social bargaining processes in rural areas. Developments must be introduced and initiatives for rural actors must be organized which are integrative in concept and take into consideration the major economic and social interests and traditions as well. This can best be achieved with a cooperative network and ultimately, with designs for participative forms of interaction between actors. Our basic assumption is: cooperative networks and forms of interaction which are strongly participative are the cornerstones of progressive rural communication.

Development concepts for rural areas which include ecological, economic and social sustainability requirements, for instance, must be designed in a manner which draws together different action and design levels and problem areas. They must also include various interest groups, experience horizons as well as different social and political traditions.

The first dimension of communicative rationality therefore implies the integration of interests and standpoints. Above all, there is a need to clarify what rural development strategies tell us about the integration of problematic and disputed issues and of conflicting situations. How these issues are regarded and how they are treated indicates how sustainability is defined. There is a great need to evaluate where and how this is reflected in concrete areas of action and objectives of change because these subjects are highly underexposed.

Finally, there is a need to analyse what conclusions the actors draw from their experiences with regard to the focussing of joint experiences and the working out of strategies for the change in rural areas.

Agricultural traditions, for example, have either become minor or they limit the formulation of action goals to the traditional concepts of agricultural lobbies, which means that they ignore the social shifts in rural areas and the plurality of interests. On the other hand, a design strategy based upon the integration of different interests, experiences and models of non agricultural populations can also not be discerned. A lack of knowledge and understanding of the constraints of modern farming must also be taken in account. The conservative motif of maintaining an undisturbed residential and living environment is perhaps not sufficient to initiate a positive integration concept. The ongoing individualization of life perspectives in modern societies and the plurality of lifestyles also limits the power and effectiveness of common concepts of living in the countryside.

Another limit for the potentials of integration is the vagueness of some ecological principles. Although ecological deficits in the use of landscape and soil can be analyzed very exactly, they do not lead automatically to concrete design concepts which have to be followed, but rather to a general setting of frameworks, including different design alternatives which must be tested.

If we take the lack of biodiversity as an example, it is obvious that we cannot say which minimum number of a given endangered species must be reached to speak of a healthy development. And it is also clear, that we have a great variety of natural conditions which have to be transformed in specific regional or even local solutions and implementation strategies. All in all, we can identify a situation, where neither a hegemonic design concept nor a hegemonic political power structure is in charge (Rahmann & Tawfik 2001).

What emerges most clearly from these conditions is the need to build bridges between different concepts and positions. It can also be deduced from the above-mentioned setting of things that the search for a new balance of interest and the conviction to cooperation ultimately brings one further than confrontation.

Based on these considerations, we use the hypothesis that integration can be defined as the search for a framework through which common standpoints for the activity of stakeholders and for their thinking can be established. The success of integration cannot, however, be predetermined through the calculation of lobby cross points, but rather can only crystallize out of experiences in social testing processes.

This leads us to a second consideration: the meaning of cooperative structures and actor networks. The linking of interests and standpoints can be seen as a closing of the gap of divisive positions. Linking means that actors and positions must be brought more into line with each other. It does not necessarily mean that a compromise or a common standpoint has to be found at once. What we have in mind at this level of thinking is a reconciliation which favors common acting and can be regarded as a first step to more extensive agreements between different actors, but which must clearly be distinguished from harmonization and homogeneity.

In this respect compromises are the more advanced forms of linkages, because they are based on practical reconciliation and have concrete results for the freedom of action. But compromises normally touch only partial areas of action or thinking. Other areas of action and thinking can remain untouched.

Ultimately a real synthesis of interests and standpoints can be achieved. Emerging from a dialectical process of interaction, a new context for action and thinking has been developed through which opposing interests have been overcome and very different contexts of experience and thinking are drawn together.

The three levels of drawing interests and standpoints together can be understood hierarchically. Ideally, the path leads from a drawing-together-concept to a real synthesis. In practice the different types are not so strictly separated. But in any case, practical cooperative experiences are required. This means that coming closer, finding a compromise and achieving synthesis do not develop on the basis of abstract equations, but rather through practical social contacts and the experiences which the different actors draw from this. We use the term "social learning" to underscore this meaning of cooperation in the different fields we have studied.

Thus the specific quality of cooperative structures with regard to social learning also plays a decisive role in our case studies. It must be empirically established which cooperative structures are developing (or can be developed), which themes and constraints bring actors together, which problems are burning enough to mobilize actors and lead them to new horizons of cooperative acting and thinking and which do not. But most of all, it must be clarified how and what people learn in cooperative structures and communication processes.

Within this framework, the quality of communication forms is the third axle in the development of new design strategies for rural areas. We call the quality of communication forms we are striving for a “participative” form. With this notion we want to express that a way of political change must be found, which on one hand is in accordance with the basic principles of democracy and of democratic constitutions, but which on the other hand interprets democratic principles in a way that takes into account the fundamental changes in the relations between citizens and the state, or between citizens and the political class.

Our central consideration is that modern democracy requires an extension of civil rights and an increased inclusion of citizens in the public goal-setting and decision processes.

It can be established that the high complexity of modern societies, on the one hand, and the loss of importance of traditional parties and associations, of organized social groups and established milieus, on the other hand, have left a deep hole in the institutional and political setting of modern societies. Well established governance structures have lost weight and public approval.

In rural areas this is especially true where traditional organizations of agriculture – but also churches, political parties, hitherto prevalent associations, sport and leisure organizations – have lost much of their influence and no new culture of organization has yet taken shape.

The general impression that the suburbanization of villages and the countryside have led to the complete decline of rural traditions up to now has not been proved by empirical investigation. However, the opposite cannot be stated either. In reality, the question of where in a modern village the coming together of people is being brought about and where a spirit of community is being articulated and organized, has not yet been answered.

Theoretically, the question of how to close the gap which has been sketched out above can be answered in two very different ways.

This hole can either be closed by an expansion of authoritative concepts, an increase in bureaucracy, or through the revitalization of activation processes and participation forms by grass root initiatives.

From our perspective, it is doubtful that the first path is functional. A state which tries to overcome the complexity of problems by further expansion of its administrative power is constantly running after the reforms of its administrative apparatus and kills the willingness of citizens to engage on behalf of their common interests.

This applies too, to the problems of rural areas in a specific way. The question of how to reconcile economic, social, and political objectives can be put differently for each region.

Conditions created by natural landscapes, social and cultural traditions, the level of integration into global markets, the quality of infrastructure, and much more, make up the difference between rural areas and render obsolete the search for an obligatory ideal way suited to all.

Basically, there is only one way to approach complex problems: with civic involvement and through organizational processes which are based on smaller, more flexible and open decisions of the citizens, and which are characterized by decentralized negotiation levels. Here the shape of such participative forms must solve a whole range of very difficult problems. They must define levels of activity where state, economic and interest groups work together and where it appears possible that state requirements can be taken over through civic social responsibility.

Secondly it must be considered that it is hardly possible to find an appropriate mixture of continued authority of the state and expanded zones for civic involvement without extensive experimentation. As long as the success of such experiments is unclear, the legitimization basis for participative experiments is weak.

Experimental action, however, requires that actors consciously claim their freedom to experiment and at the same time are aware of the fact that their freedom to experiment can only be sustained when each participant refrains from rashly ascribing mistakes and problems to other participants.

This not only increases the demand to deal with each other in a tolerant manner. More important is the fact that experimental situations require stages (i.e., rooms) on which the actors can open to new ideas and be willing to put the question of how measurable their success is on a back burner, as well as institutions in which priority is given to reviewing of their achievements.

In evaluating participative concepts, an important issue is whether such interchange can be consciously organized. In dealing with structures of communication in rural areas, this issue carries special weight when new sectors of action are being introduced and when the actors want to move in constellations of cooperation which are in breach with traditional patterns of policy.

A further problem is the discussion of the social selectivity of such innovations. It must be taken in account that weak social groups normally strive for a strong state and for central political strategies because they fear that decentralization favors actors which are strong on micro levels.

For this reason, political strategies the orientation of which is geared towards groundwork and which build on the willingness of local actors, are very often characterized by a proportionally higher involvement of actors from middle classes. Flexibility, self-organization, and the ability to articulate play an important role in strategies relying on groundwork. Such strategies certainly fit in well with the mentality of modern middle class.

Perhaps it is exaggerated to draw a direct connection between responsible and active citizens and the cultural values of the middle class. Without any doubt, a great affinity does exist, so that there is a pressing need to investigate the question of whether modern concepts of participation contain a strong element of exclusion of social groups whose organizational and communicative skills are weak.

In rural areas this especially applies to groups of smallholdings and employees with a low level of education and social status. Whether the concepts of participation mentioned above will appeal to and be able to mobilize these groups therefore constitutes an essential dimension in evaluating new concepts of cooperation and communication.

Case study 1: The Regional Partnership Lübeck Bay

The case study refers to 15 interviews with different actors in the region. Thirteen of them belong to the Partnership Lübeck Bay. In addition, we have studied the publications and documents of the Partnership as well as the proceedings of the steering committee of the partnership and the proceedings of the board. Most of all, however, our personal experiences from direct participation in the Partnerships activities and from close contact with its actors have been inserted into the following survey.

The Regional Partnership Lübeck Bay was founded in January 2002 in Lübeck. It is organized as an association. The Partnership must be seen as a result of the competition "Active Regions." Without the competition, there would most probably be no Partnership today. As the competition was the catalyst in the founding of the partnership and played an important role in its shaping, the description of the competition and of its goals must precede the story of the development of the partnership.

Before we deal with the Partnership itself, however, a few basic facts have to be stated about the region to be looked at. To understand the shape of the region one must know that the Partnership has defined „its“ region for itself. Why this is so will be explained. To the understand the brief look we take at the region, it is, however, important to know that in the case of the Partnership Lübeck Bay, a space for regional activities has been constituted which is not staked out by the borders drawn by the states and the territorial authorities.

The Regional Partnership is active in a region which, as a natural area, is well defined, but exists in many respects only on paper as far as economics, social interaction, and politics are concerned.

The shape of the region was drawn up on the basis of planning considerations by a number of towns, administrative districts, and communities surrounding the city of Lübeck. These considerations had been worked out in the years 2000 and 2001 by a planning committee representing the above mentioned institutions. The foundations worked out by this committee are a mixture of the analysis of what is in the region, and of ideas for the future. The region thus defined, must be understood on the one hand as an area sharing a long common history, though interrupted between 1945 and 1989. On the other hand, it is an area with different problems and structures.

The region the Partnership has chosen for its activities comprises 1,900 square kilometers. It stretches from the little town of Neustadt in the north to Reinfeld in the south and Grevesmühlen in the east. The region spreads 46 km from north to south and 48 km from east to west. In the centre of the region we find the Hanse City Lübeck with its 210 000 inhabitants. All in all, 104 communities are located in the region, and in addition, great parts of the territory of four counties form the region (Ostholstein, Herzogtum Lauenburg, Stormarn und Nordwestmecklenburg).

The diversity of the region is amplified by the historic rupture between West Germany and East Germany after World War II. The region stretches across two states (Schleswig-

Holstein in the west and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in the east). After World War II, the western part was, at first, British occupied territory and, after 1949, part of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The eastern part belonged at first to the Soviet Zone, and after the founding of another German state, the eastern part belonged to the German Democratic Republic (GDR). It is obvious that a separation which had lasted for more than one generation must have left many deep traces. The importance of the time of separation cannot be overestimated when the problems of modern Germany are discussed.

Historically, we are dealing with a region that, since the Middle Ages, had its undisputed centre in the city of Lübeck. The development of the Hanse City Lübeck has left its marks on the region for several centuries. This continued, but to a lesser degree, into the 19th and 20th centuries, when the importance of the City of Lübeck as a leading trade centre declined, but when the city was able to develop into an industrial centre on the Baltic coast. The break after 1945 had put an end to this development. Lübeck was cut off from its eastern hinterland, and on the other side of the border, these regions were cut off from Lübeck.

The part of the region belonging to Schleswig-Holstein has since then developed autonomously. For this part of the region, the following long-term trends had been crucial: the de-industrialization of the City of Lübeck and the increased importance of tourism for the whole region, the urbanization of rural areas, and finally the increased importance of Hamburg as the dominant centre in northern Germany.

After the founding of the GDR in the eastern part of the region, industrial backwardness was attacked by the state. State owned companies were built up and a region which previously had relied heavily on agriculture, thus established a more industrial face. Most of the state owned companies faltered, however, after reunification or lost many jobs. The most striking example is a big textile factory with 7000 workers. The factory produced uniforms for the army in the GDR and for many other armies in eastern European states. The Red Army was its biggest customer. After 1990 this factory lost its markets to nearly 100 percent and therefore had to close down completely. Another example is the decline of the shipyard industry in eastern Germany. The shipyard in Wismar, for example, could be saved, but its production capacities had to be lowered substantially so that the region had to suffer a severe loss in jobs.

Although a high degree of deindustrialization can also be found in Schleswig-Holstein, one can rather compare the development in Schleswig-Holstein and in Mecklenburg. In the case of Mecklenburg, deindustrialization was radical and occurred in not more than five years.

In western Germany, deindustrialization was combined with a strong growth of service related jobs. In eastern Germany, these mechanisms only worked to a very small degree. Tourism, which flourished in some parts of Mecklenburg, was not able to compensate such severe job losses. In addition, tourism in the eastern part of the region is only concentrated on the coast of the Baltic Sea.

For this reason unemployment rates are on average twice as high in Mecklenburg as they are in Schleswig-Holstein. A high rate of commuters from east to west can therefore be observed, and at the moment nothing indicates that this trend will slow down in the near future. Under these conditions, it is quite understandable that in the eastern part of the region, national policy, but also regional policy, are regarded and judged on behalf of their capacity to create jobs.

A second difference between structures and developments in the eastern part of the region and its western parts regards the average structures in agriculture. Farms in Mecklenburg have entered upon the inheritance of the former cooperative farm system (agricultural producers' cooperatives). These cooperatives have mostly been transformed either into big family farms, double or triple the size of average family farms in western Germany, or have been transformed into cooperatives, now based on different forms of private ownership. In addition, property prices are much lower than in western regions and competition for real estate is not so strong.

While competitive struggles on land ownership are fierce in the areas surrounding Lübeck, and while every new attempt to use land, for example for nature conservation purposes or for road construction, intensifies the competition, it is easier to create a land use system which relies on spatial compromises in the eastern region..

Without any doubt, even 15 years after reunification, a lot of political and cultural differences between "Westerners" and Easterners" remain. Forty years of separation have left their economic, their social and their cultural traces. It is certainly doubtful to put the differences between "Westerners" and "Easterners" in terms of differing mentalities, but different ways of thinking, especially among the elderly, must be taken in account. Spiritual traditions and thought patterns which see administrations and governmental institutions as major driving forces of economic and social change still play a central role and strongly influence the course of regional politics.

The Competition „Active Regions“ - Catalyst for the Regional Partnership Lübeck Bay

The competition "Active Regions – States shaping a future" was officially launched on September 10, 2001. The competition was sponsored by the German Ministry for Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture – known as the BMVEL. The goal of the competition was "to give actors in rural areas an impetus to work out new regional development concepts and to implement them in the region." (BMVEL 2001, p.3). The regions should serve as "engines of change" (see *ibid*). The concepts chosen in the competition had to serve as models so that positive experiences from the competing regions "could be implemented everywhere people want them" (*ibid*).

The competition was divided into three phases. The first and second phase dealt with the implementation of the concepts. The competition runs until the end of 2005. During this time regional partnerships and the actors working in them are accompanied and advised by the Nova-Institute, an institute which is specialised in process management for regional planning and development strategies.

In the first phase of the competition, the participants had to develop a regional vision of the future of their region and submit it to the BMVEL by November 14, 2001. In this phase, the “regional groups of actors” should organise themselves (ibid, p. 8) and, on the basis of their “particular regional conditions” (ibid, p. 7), design a concept for the future of their region. The BMVEL goals were targeted at supporting “quality oriented, sustainable, multifunctional agriculture” and concepts for “strengthening rural areas” (ibid).

As the competition began, the BMVEL planned to choose 30 regions for the second phase of the competition. Finally 33 regions were accepted for the second round.

The second phase of the competition served to develop an “integrated regional development concept” (ibid, p. 9). The 33 groups of actors entering the second phase of the competition should develop their proper Regional Development Concept (RDC) which should make the vision of the future formulated in Phase 1 more concrete. Their RDC should contain clear statements on the following topics:

- Goals and fields of activities for sustainable regional development in the region
- Clarification of the support for the entire implementation process
- Statements on monitoring the implementation process

Description of the first model projects which were to be implemented in the framework of the (RDC). The RDC was to serve as a motor to shift the visionary impetus of the first phase into a realisable development concept (see ibid).

As important benchmarks for the presentation and grounding of the RDC, the BMVEL explicitly mentions the following structures in the brochure for the competition: regional analysis, regional models, regional development strategies, introduction of fields of action and first pilot projects as well as estimates of effectiveness of pilot projects (see ibid, p. 13). In addition, participants were to describe how the cooperation between actors in the regional partnership should function, and which financing concepts should promote the work of the regional partnership (see ibid, p. 14).

The development of new strategies of communication between regional actors should have been incorporated in the RDC. Important parts of the basic ideas for the competition could also have been formulated in terms of progressive rural communication. Most activities envisaged by the Partnership and promulgated by the competition would only be crowned by success if communicative practices are developed which are useful for social and political integration and for the deepening of participative practices for citizens, customers and so forth.

The rules for content and organisation for the implementation of these points were kept fairly general so that a lot of space was left to fill the requirements on the basis of specific regional structures and organisations, on the basis of specific social and political traditions in the region, and on behalf of the specific composition of actors.

Just as in LEADER+, it was required that in the decision-making bodies for the regional partnership, not more than 50 percent of the membership could comprise governmental representatives or representatives from semi-state organizations (see *ibid*).

Since the deadline for the RDC was February 28, 2002, those participants making it into the second round were put under serious time pressure. The RDC was written in a relatively short time. Three core groups of actors, who showed an interest in the competition and who can be qualified as the first ring of actors can be identified in the Lübeck region.

In the administrative district of North West Mecklenburg (NWM), a group of employees of the district's administration joined other actors from the region in an informal circle. In turn, this circle was supported by a planning group from the region (tgp in Lübeck) which had a lot of experience in the sectors of area- and landscape planning as well as in the coordination of interests during the process of the shaping of regional concerns and objectives.

This group's starting point consisted of project ideas in the area of environmental protection, landscape conservation and the promotion of agriculture and the food industry. Participation in the competition was intended to attract the allocation of public funds for these ideas into the district. The creation of jobs was a prime objective here.

The association „Verein der Förderer und Freunde des Instituts für ökologischen Landbau“ [Association of Supporters and Friends of the Institute of Organic Farming] can be identified as the second core group. Here too, the main interest in the competition was initially to use it to translate project ideas in the area of organic farming and the organic food industry, as well as for the translation of relatively general ideas on the integration of sustainable agriculture and food industry into regional development processes. Here, the Association of Supporters did not assume a rigid definition of the borders of the project region. In essence, the region was to be defined by the fields of experience and activity of the groups and individuals involved. Judging by the composition of people who came to the first meetings in which the participation in the competition was prepared, a regional definition emerged which applied to a radius of about 20 – 40 km surrounding the city of Lübeck. Because these meetings were joined by only a few actors from NWM, the eastern part of what later became the region of the competition remained underrepresented.

Finally, a group of conventional farmers from the south of Lübeck can be identified as the third core group. This group came into being as an “Affiliation of Participants” in connection with a process of consolidation of fragmented holdings, made necessary by the construction of the Federal Motorway 20.

It was the aim of the Affiliation of Participants to use the reorganization of space due to the construction of the motorway in the south of Lübeck for a fundamental restructuring of the landscape. Under discussion at that time was a „mini region“ of about 3 000 hectares of acreage. Structuring concepts with the potential to eliminate points of conflict between agriculture, environmental protection, residential use, and leisure interest were to be developed. The Affiliation of Participants had also secured professional support for the

formulation of its proper objectives. Their ideas about objectives and activities were very strongly influenced by the work of an Italian landscape architect who had developed a detailed plan for the reshaping of the landscape south of Lübeck. Since the plan was not adopted by the City of Lübeck, as had originally been hoped for, the conceptual structure remained to be used by others.

During the early phase of the competition (October and November 2001), individuals as well as representatives of organized groups joined these three core groups of actors in a more or less informal manner. All three core groups first got involved in the competition independently of each other. However, after only a few weeks of preparing activities they had to recognize the other core groups' presence.

What followed till the Regional Partnership had been founded in January 2002 was a complicated process, organizationally and politically not always stringent and effective, of getting to know each other's aims and potentials. The involved stakeholders were largely looking for:

- shared fields of action for a common regional development concept
- leading political ideas for working together
- compromises in areas where objectives and concepts differed widely
- a definition capable of consensus of the area to form a region as it was demanded by the competition
- a joint organization and clear internal organizational structures

In order to explain the conditions under which the Partnership was begun, it is also important to point out the micro-political framework.

First of all, there did not exist a tradition of cooperation between different interest groups and political camps. From interviews with board members of what later became the Regional Partnership, and with other individual actors in the region, it became very clear that the majority of those who later became members of the Partnership, either knew very little about each other beforehand or even were locked in confrontation with each other.

This is especially true for relationships between conventional farmers and actors striving for environmental protection as well as for activities and actors who try to form a link between landscape transformation strategies in the eastern part of the Region and those in the western part.

Secondly, no concrete subject specific to the region came to the fore which could have become the focal point of collaboration among actors. The controversy surrounding the construction of the Federal Motorway 20 had finished by the Autumn of 2001 - except for a few minor skirmishes in the aftermath. More broadly formulated subjects for shaping the region did exist, but at that time only on the level of very general, not yet very concrete, topics and objectives - as for example sustainable development of the region, utilization of endogenous potentials or the strengthening of regional economic cycles. All in all, there

was no convincing political formula deducible from the political development of recent years which was understood and supported by different stakeholders.

Third, the founding process of the Partnership, and this is true even today, had to be accomplished without the help of generally recognized promoters. During the founding process, there were no actors with undisputed charismatic qualities involved. Furthermore, there were neither institutions, nor groups, nor individuals, that might have lent their support for the founding process as recognized authorities for specific fields of activities.

The Association of Supporters for the Institute of Organic Farming claims for itself to have been a centre of organization and compromise-seeking during the founding stage. The association underscores that it has made intensive efforts for the integration of themes and interests in the common "vision," which had to be written for the first stage of the competition, and later into the RDC, which had to be prepared for the second stage.

This is not disputed by the other actors. However, the „Förderverein“ itself was only founded in the year 2001, so that its authority as an integrating force with a good deal of moral and political authority must not be overestimated.

Fourth, the Regional Partnership has been built up by people who, although the majority belong to other political parties, professional associations and political initiatives, have seen their engagement as an experiment with an organisation which is independent. Hence, when founding the Partnership, a strong element of independence and personal responsibility was present in most of the actors involved, which on the other hand led to a lot of merely organisational problems because there was no apparatus on which the actors could rely on strongly.

Furthermore, no direct influence and pressure was exerted on the founding process by either political parties or by administrations. In the end, this also applies to the founding group from NWM, because its members did not try to force the founding process under the dominance of the district's administration.

It is not entirely clear how the Partnership managed to develop without any demands made on it by the established political system. In Germany, the involvement of established political parties and institutions in the founding of new regional structures and institutions is normally very high.

Possibly, the chances of success were not thought to be very good. So perhaps the established groups and institutions had no greater interest in the competition. Another assumption, which can be underscored by preparatory talks which were held with administrative officers in the region is a widespread scepticism of regional and local administrations toward central programs. From their point of view, the involvement of local and regional administrations leads to a bulk of more administrative work with only few positive effects for the regions on the other side .

For the assessment of the micro-political framework, the relatively large distance to the established business of politics, however, is a crucial factor and must be underscored. In

this way, a Partnership could slowly emerge which, at least in the founding months, wasn't disturbed by the traditional political rivalries and power struggles in the region.

Nevertheless, the actors succeeded in developing their contribution to Stage 1 of the competition (vision), to work out their RDC within a period of approximately five months, and to found the association itself in January 2002. These achievements, however, cannot solely be attributed to the willpower of actors in the region. The national organizers of the competition gave concrete help, mostly by conferences and good information politics, on one side, but also exerted pressure on actors to work out their ideas and concepts in a straightforward and concise manner.

Pressure from the national organizers was exerted mainly in two directions. On the one hand, it was made very clear to all participants that a situation in which two contributions come out of the same region would not be tolerated. In such cases, both contributions would have no chance of succeeding. Actors within a region, therefore, either had the option of meeting each other half way, or of dropping out of the competition.

According to the activities affected in the Lübeck region, this pressure had the positive effect of „bringing about unity“ in the following manner. First, concepts embracing a very narrow spectrum of subjects and actors did not have any chance of success. So it was clear to everyone that they had to look for allies and to underscore their own willingness to cooperate with other stakeholders. Second, the pressure exerted in this way by the organizers of the competition forced the actors to define the region with a larger expanse of area than was originally envisaged by the majority of participating groups and individuals.

On the other hand, the BMVEL requirements concerning content (the working out of an integrated perspective for the region, and an emphasis on the idea of networking) have contributed equally to the fact that the concepts worked out in the Lübeck region were oriented towards cooperation.

Perhaps both of these two framework conditions would not have been sufficient to cause a real cooperative concept and to concentrate on integration of activities and concepts in the papers which later became the RDC, if during the months of December and January (2001/2002) there had not been an exceptionally strong interest by newly arrived actors which led to a substantial enlargement of themes and fields of activities. Four fields of action had been named in the „Vision“ handed in November. These were:

- Environmentally friendly and regional products from agriculture and forestry
- The use of raw- and rest materials from agriculture and forestry for the purpose of energy production
- Development of tourism packages on the basis of the holiday slogan „Create your own experience of nature and landscape“
- Establishing regionally-defined management of environment and nature

On the one hand, this catalogue of issues was broadened in December and January, since the subject areas „Environmental Education and Culture,“ as well as „Consumer Protection and Consumer Education,“ had been added in the RDC. Furthermore, the subject area „Communication and Networking“ was established as a cross-section task with specific responsibility vested in the association board.

But even in the subject areas already consolidated, the understanding with respect to content was broadened. This happened, for example, when the much more narrowly conceived objective to turn the experiencing of nature into a starting point for the development of new tourism packages, was substituted by the broader issue of „soft tourism. “ Ultimately, the RDC names seven central fields of action. These are:

- Environmentally friendly and regional products from across the whole food sector
- Renewable energies
- Concepts for the utilization of environment and landscape
- Soft tourism
- Environmental education and cultural programs with strong ties to environmental issues
- Consumer protection and consumer education
- Communication and networking for the purpose of internal communication processes and to present regional subjects and activities to the public.

The Challenge of Creating own Organisational Structures

From the beginning, a significant characteristic of the “Active Region” competition was the freedom for its actors to create their own organizational structures and to experiment with organization fields and forms of communication. This is still a major characteristic of all activities and structures within the Partnership.

The Lübeck Bay Regional Partnership is organized as a club. The requirements of founding a club are clearly described in German law. Highly demanding requirements are not made. In general, the club is a very flexible legal body. It gives also a lot of room for experiments in the field of new participative practices.

According to German club law, two organizational levels are urgently required and therefore precisely defined by law. Each club must incorporate in its structures a decision-making level open to all club members, using democratic principles and meeting at regular intervals. In the Partnership, this level of organization is represented by the membership meeting. The membership meeting decides about fundamental subjects like requests by members related to the purpose of the club, the constitution, implementation of measures, and the election and ousting of club officers. The membership meeting is the political “sovereignty” in the club. All fundamental political decisions of the regional partnership must ultimately be agreed to or refused by the membership meeting.

The board of the club and its officers are the second, legally required organizational level. In the case of the regional partnership, the officers committee consists of nine members (a president, two vice presidents, a treasurer, a secretary and four observers). All positions are voluntary. The officers are elected by the membership for a two-year term. The purpose of the officers is to direct the daily political business of the club.

It is clear that in a phase of organization building, the officers are of particular importance because a large number of practical decisions must be made very quickly. Most of the political echo an association faces depends from the activities of the officers and their specific communication style, especially when an organization is newly founded.

The board membership was intended to be pluralistic. In fact, this is only so to a limited degree. Compared to the objectives of the Partnership, actors from Mecklenburg are not represented sufficiently. Of nine board members, only one member is currently active exclusively in the East. Another member lives in Mecklenburg, but works in Lübeck and also comes originally from this city.

During the foundation stage of the Partnership, a colleague from Mecklenburg was elected vice president, but had to give up her office for professional reasons which could not be anticipated. When new elections took place, a colleague from Lübeck took her office.

Secondly, farmers are disproportionately represented on the board. Five board members come from the agrarian sector and own farms (four members from the West, one member from the East, who is working his own small holding, but who moreover has strong ties to the farmers' association in NWM). They all represent conventional agriculture and its interests, and are working in professional organizations which can be attributed to conventional agriculture.

In the constitution of the Lübeck Bay Regional Partnership, the possibility of forming additional working groups is left open. Originally seven working groups were planned to cover the seven work areas of the RDC. A thematically oriented work and information level was to be created with the working groups. But only one of the seven working groups worked continually. Thus an important action level of the regional partnership was missing and is still missing today.

The organic building of the regional partnership has some other special features that must be elucidated. On the one hand, the regional partnership hired a regional manager with the funding from the competition. Part of his responsibility is to direct the office of the regional partnership – today de facto the main point of contact for the public for political groups and for all institutions related to the partnership. The office should also help the officers in terms of organization. Thus many practical organizational tasks are fulfilled by the regional manager requiring good cooperation with the officers.

The main purpose of the regional manager is, however, quite different. He should coordinate the overall process of project development, project selection and project accompaniment and assist the actors as a qualified consultant throughout the whole process of project activities.

This holds true for all levels of the partnership and extends also to the selection, formulation and choice of approaches for single projects and to the technical problems linked to the application for funding and the related legal problems. In the competition rules, the Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture explicitly mentioned the possibility of hiring a regional manager, and placed the maximum funds available for salaries and office space at 20 percent of the funding, which can be considered as very generous.

In the RDC, the central role of the regional manager has already been emphasized (see RDC 2001, p. 33-35, 40). The tasks assigned to the manager are, however, kept fairly general. The key concept is “intensive consultation” (see RDC 2001, p. 34) of the applicant for a project by regional management. Since the position of the regional manager had to be applied for in the form of a project of the partnership, a thorough application had to be made to the Ministry in October 2002. In this application, the emphasis of the tasks for regional management was shifted from organizational information to processes of consulting and assisting. The (relatively) independent role of the regional manager was emphasized even more in the application.

The manager has to fulfill his responsibilities according to the general instructions of the officers. But he has the big advantage of being an expert of his subjects in contrast to the voluntary laypersons serving as officers. He should also cover a broad terrain of communication and management tasks to accompany the partnership actors and should initiate new activities. The relative independence the regional manager has in the Partnership and the high demands for securing dealings must be highlighted.

Thus, the Partnership tries to find a good balance between the association’s need for free discussions and clear political responsibility, and the integration of professional knowledge and the formalistic aspects of application systems.

The second organizational particularity of the regional partnership is the so-called steering committee. In the RDC it is stated that the selection of projects should take place by an independent group and not by the board of the association (see RDC 2001, p. 33, 38). This body evaluates the content of the project and pronounces a judgment of whether a project should be carried out and receive financial assistance or not. Its independence is related, on the one hand, to the process of the evaluation and on the other hand, to the decision process itself. A project application which is not positively decided upon by the steering committee can only be approved through an exceptional decision of the officers. This case has not yet come up and should also be a rare exception in the future.

The steering committee is defined as the third organizational level of the partnership. The constitution of the club has established that the members of the steering committee are elected by the officers of the club, but that there should be no other direct mechanism of influencing or controlling the steering committee.

The steering committee played a large role in the founding phase of the club because the political contents of its constitution weren’t reflected adequately in the founding documents (see RDC 2001, club constitution). From our own knowledge of the subject,

and from interviews with club members, it can be stated that there were three main reasons for launching the steering committee. The founders of the partnership were searching for a way to eliminate conflict over the acceptance of projects from the daily work of the officers. Secondly, the steering committee was formed to mobilize additional professional competence for the work of the regional partnership and ultimately, it has been established in order to broaden the social and political basis for the regional partnership.

Especially the last two points became important in practice, because there is a relatively broad spectrum of professional groups and representatives of institutions in the steering committee. Furthermore, persons with varied skills and competences are working in the steering committee so that the work of the committee has strengthened professionalism in the Partnership and has helped to establish judgment strategies which incorporate a great variety of professional backgrounds.

The steering committee includes 24 members (12 members and 12 deputies). The election process was debated among the officers for a long time. The process showed that all participants were very clear about the level of decision making and power held by the steering committee. In the beginning some attempts to place people on the committee who represented the voters' own interests or who the voters thought would do it have been tried. In practice it had no effect.

Although the relevance of the steering committee looked flew shaky?? at the beginning, the steering committee turned out to be a solid organizational pillar of the partnership. It has proven its efficiency as an independent decision body and its role is widely accepted.

A look at the organizational structure of the regional partnership must also consider the partners involved and their organizational relationship to the regional partnership. In the "Active Region" competition, it was planned that an already established, legal administration or public office such as a county government or a state agency should administer the funds and give the final approval for project financing. In the language of the competition, this institution is called "implementation agency". It had to monitor the project budget and also had to check the adherence to rules.

Theoretically, especially the last point can lead to permanent conflicts with the association. In the information booklet on the competition it is stated that the chosen public office is "tied to the choice of projects through the regional partnership insofar as the financing and the maintenance of legal guidelines is certain." (see BMVEL 2001, p. 17)

Thus seen, the implementation partner has no influence on the content of projects. Practically, things are more complicated. On the one hand, the authority about content, the carrying out of the project and the financing cannot be clearly separated from each other. Secondly, it makes no political sense for the applicants of projects and the regional partnership to accept projects which will always be rejected by the implementation agency.

Thus, it is important to work in close cooperation with the implementation agency, and this pushes the group closer to the organizational level of the regional partnership. In practice, the partnership assumes the responsibility to the regional manager to maintain regular

contact to the implementation agency. In addition there is regular contact between the officers and the implementation agency.

Experiences with the Organizational Structures

Naturally, a presentation of experiences with organizational structures which have only been in existence for a short time and which have not withstood any really difficult tests is debatable. The following evaluations are thus to be understood as preliminary. Some stable looking trends can however be identified. Positive developments seem apparent particularly for the drafting and acceptance of projects.

In two projects (Project Regional Manager, Internet Portal of the Partnership) the officers of the club were the applicants because the projects dealt with the organizational and communicational infrastructure of the total partnership. The other projects have been submitted by individual actors or groups of actors. It is also obvious from the projects that half of them belong to the spectrum of projects which could be sketched as model projects in RDC. The other half of the projects began later and come from actors who were not among the founding members of the partnership. In the project sketches, the portions of projects which do not appear in the RDC are much higher, about 75 percent.

This development can only be tied to active communication in the regional partnership. A brochure was sent to members and interested persons in August 2002 explaining the requirements for the projects. There were also three public meetings on the topic "From the project idea to project approval" for interested persons and groups. The events were organized jointly by the club officers, the regional manager and the implementation partner. The same was true for further informational activities (press releases, introduction of the regional partnerships in clubs, associations and political institutions), which were for the most part organized jointly by the regional manager and the club officers.

In the area of projects, according to the first experiences of the partnership, the special strengths of the regional management can be seen in the intensity of individual consulting and the professional quality of its recommendations. For the future of project consultancy, a further advantage would be the factor of continuity in the consultancy. One of the pluses is that the work of the regional manager is supported through the development of official decision-making principles.

Although it took a while before a clear and generally accepted process was in place, it became evident which information principles the regional manager made available for his consultancy to the steering committee.

In the meantime a system of commented evaluation principles has been implemented that gives the members of the steering committee targeted decision making helps so that they can ask very exact questions at their meetings.

For this evaluation of the organizational structures of the regional partnership, the evaluation of the steering committee is of special significance, because a real innovation is being dealt with in this body.

Apart from slight initiation difficulties, the establishment of this body has paid off. Not only does the number of applications considered by the body, some of which had to be resubmitted twice, attest to this. Also the fact that 80 percent of the evaluations of the steering committee were unanimous shows the effectiveness of the group. There was not a single case in which the steering committee decided by a small majority. It is clearly apparent that the unequivocal nature of the votes also holds true for the rejected projects.

All worries about the one-sidedness of the steering committee and its decision-making have proven unfounded. The consultancies have shown that professional arguments and criticism are at the center of the decision-making process, while the diverse composition of the steering committee is a large advantage in terms of professional competence.

Since a good portion of the members of the steering committee stem from associations and institutions that are related to rural regional development and work in government funding programs, the techniques for carrying out the project are most important.

On the whole, the steering committee has been restrictive in its use of funding. Most projects had to accept reductions in funding and in the consultancy the steering committee always saw to it that an appropriate portion of self-financing was included. The solidity of the financing plan was a central factor in determining the acceptance or rejection of a project. In economic projects, the question of whether planned activities would have a life beyond the project financing played a key role.

At the founding of the committee it was unclear in how far the autonomy for the steering committee from the other participants (officers, implementation agency, applicant) could be respected. The construction can only be carried if the steering committee is accepted as an autonomous decision-making body. If a structure were to be developed which countered the authority of the steering committee, the body would be placed into question. In the first moments of the work of the steering committee there were attempts to influence individual members. But ultimately, none of these attempts were successful.

The autonomy of the steering committee was never challenged by the officers. The same is true of the implementation agency and the steering committee.

It is too early to supply any final judgement on the work of the steering committee. The steering committee's work, however, has objectified very much the process of making decisions on projects. As a result of refusing to be instrumentalized in favour of individual interests, the steering committee's authority has grown. In addition, its work has contributed to the plurality being accepted of project approaches and interests within the Partnership. Through the help of the steering committee the requirement for integration has become a good deal more feasible and concrete.

The work of the steering committee has up till now shown that it can be fruitful to distribute state funding via an acceptance system which can only be partially controlled by the government. The concern that in such systems, public funds will be spent wildly has not been supported by the experience of the steering committee of the regional partnership.

It can thus be concluded, in our opinion, that regional political initiatives, especially when they take a very liberal non-governmental and non-institutional form, can profit through

the inclusion of an organizational level with pseudo bureaucratic assignments. In cases where unresolved conflicts of interest and political ideology clashes (often hidden) have a further impact, the positive effects of such structures are even stronger.

Whether these effects impact the carrying out of the projects particularly in the evaluation of the project conclusions and results, remains to be seen. One can be optimistic about one point: If the position of the regional manager and the implementation agency solidify in the sense described above, then significant organizational prerequisites for a differentiated and professional evaluation process are given.

Interim Balance of the Development of Projects

At first, the Partnership did not find it easy to establish the organizational side of the project. Establishing an office, the election of a steering committee, the working out of guidelines for the development and selection of projects, and finally, election and appointment of the Regional Manager, in principle, were all supposed to have been completed within a few weeks. Originally, it was planned to establish the organizational basis by the summer of 2002. In fact, it took until November 2002 until the foundations had been laid.

One year on, however, the Partnership was able to refer to a considerable spectrum of projects. By the end of November 2003, the steering committee had already approved 22 projects. Of these 22 projects, seven had not yet received notification of funding from their relevant administrative partner. According to the partner, however, this is still to happen within the year 2003 since, in principle, no obstacles to approval can be seen.

Up to the end of November 2003, about a dozen applications had been turned down. Some of these had been turned down only temporarily because, in accordance with the guidelines of the Partnership, each applicant has the right to hand in his or her project a second time (in revised form). Thus, among the projects that have meanwhile been approved, there are several, which had been accepted only after a second attempt. In so far, the Partnership cannot be accused of functioning as an „approval machine“ indiscriminately handing out tax payers' money in the region.

The fact that those projects approved after a second application had each been thoroughly advised by the regional management during revision, shows the necessity for, as much as the quality of, the project advice.

By the end of November, there were, alongside the approved projects, an application not yet discussed and seven projects only sketched out roughly. According to the Regional Manager, it is apparent for the first half of 2004 that some of the sketched out project ideas could become ready projects within the next months. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the number of approved projects will increase in 2004 by some degree.

This number of projects can also be substantiated by the funds allocated so far. By November 2003, slightly more than 60 percent of the project funds had been committed by approvals, so that some scope still remains for financial funding in the years 2004 and

2005. In addition, the costs for the regional management and for the project of a communication network, all come under the costs of the projects approved so far. Both are expensive projects, and, concerning their fields of activity, both count as cross-border projects. There is, therefore, still enough financial scope for individual projects with a medium financing volume of about 50 000 Euros.

Distribution of Projects among Fields of Activity

An important element of the interim balance is, on one hand, the distribution of projects to the seven fields of activity, and on the other hand, the comparison of the project ideas sketched out in the RDC with the achieved level of success. Both shine a strong light onto the project work and also uncover some of the weaknesses of the Partnership.

The approved projects are not distributed evenly among all of the seven fields of activity. On the occasion of a first balance in May 2003 on the basis of 13 approved projects, it was already shown, that there were fields of activity more heavily occupied and those with a lower degree of occupation. This polarization has become even more evident in the months following. There is an obvious focus in the area of production, processing, and marketing of environmentally friendly and regional produced products.

In contrast the field of renewable resources?? is not yet occupied very well. No project has thus far been approved in the field of nature and landscape conservation, even though this subject is one of the most important fields of action in the Partnership, and although the determination of objectives in the RDC is very strongly influenced by the problem analysis in this area.

Looking at the number of projects applied for, and those already approved, and comparing them with the lead projects introduced in the RDC, it is noticeable that a number of lead projects introduced in the RDC are missing or come under the heading of „ideas.“ On the other hand, some projects were approved in the year 2003 which were not mentioned in the RDC. These are projects which have been developed only after a concept for the competition had been handed in. They stem mostly from the first phase of the Partnership’s public relations work in the Spring and Summer of 2002, when the Partnership was made known in the region, and visits were made for this purpose in important institutions of regional politics.

The projects developed from this, without exception, fit into the Partnership’s fields of activity. They can easily be integrated within the framework staked out by the RDC. On the other hand, the fact that soon a „second wave“ of project ideas did materialize, also shows that in its founding stage the Partnership could only exploit a part of the potential of ideas and actors present in the region.

Yet, the question must be asked, of why some of the projects introduced in the RDC have, so far, not come to fruition. The reply also contributes to answering the question, why the distribution of projects among the fields of activity is uneven.

In summarizing the views and explanations on the subject by regional management officers, and individual actors, one finds, there is no single main reason. Overall, however, three reasons play an important role. It is the case that:

It was turned down by the steering committee because of shortcomings in the content of the subsequent project application. This is true for two project ideas / applications. In both cases, however, not the actors' concern had been turned down, but the translation into a project concept.

Actors were lost to the region because they had to move, or professional changes took place which were contrary to the shaping of the project. In two cases they had to deal with an issue of emigration, and because in both cases it was the promoters of project ideas who left the region, the projects did not develop either. On the one hand, this is part of the normality of the labour market. On the other hand, it proves how thin the Partnership's staffing capacity is in some places. In another case, a professional reorientation is concerned.

The obstacles and difficulties which emerge when translating a project idea into a viable application have been underestimated. This is the most important issue for the critical analysis of work carried out by the Partnership. This issue shows that a number of project ideas presented in the RDC did not stand the test of practical translation into action because the ideas and concept proposals were obviously not precise enough. Problem situations and the possibilities for action had definitely not been assessed correctly.

This case is the most frequent one among the list of project ideas that did not succeed. But here, too, a differentiation is useful.

On the one hand, there are cases where political resistance against certain project ideas had been miscalculated, i.e., very much underestimated. This is true, in particular, for two biogas projects introduced in the RDC. In both cases biogas plants were to be built in rural areas, that were to be fuelled with rest materials from farming. In both cases, a cooperative solution had been envisaged which would have required a larger group of farmers in order to be put into action. Background to the inclusion of these projects into the RDC, on the one hand, was the evaluation that the establishing of biogas plants would be an economic success for the operators, and that in this way it would be possible to provide a second leg for farmers to stand on as „energy producers“. On the other hand, biogas plants offer a variety of ecological advantages, so that it was expected that the building of such plants would meet with public support.

In the first of the two cases, the project was never applied for with „Regionen Aktiv“ because the farmer who wanted to build such a plant on his own farm met with strong resistance from his village. The issue of the biogas plant even played an important role in this village in the local elections 2002. Criticism of the plant was mainly voiced because it was feared the smells and the increased traffic would become a nuisance.

The project has currently been shelved, because the new district council also rejects it vehemently, and, according to the actors' opinion, is supported by a hardened antagonistic

mood. Today, it has even been called into question whether the farmer responsible for the project will be able to continue to pursue it, since he has lost a lot of strength and money in this conflict.

In the second case, the project idea formulated in the RDC was also aimed at building a biogas plant in a rural area. Those responsible for the project were also to come from the agricultural sector. Also in this case, the protest of citizens from the village proposed as site for the plant was the decisive factor in not pursuing the project any further. In contrast to the other case, however, this conflict took place on a different level, which can be described as a preliminary stage of the planning for the project. Public protest was directed against a venture that, up to that point, had become known only in very rough contours. This makes the harsh reactions by the public even more surprising, which have led the initiators to distance themselves from the realization of the project for the time being.

Overall, in both cases we have to deal with a situation where a project idea that was found to be conclusive and convincing by the Regional Partnership, has met with unexpectedly strong resistance.

In both cases the Partnership has so far not taken a public stand in the described local conflicts. According to the actors, the reasons for this are to be found on two levels. One of them is of a purely practical nature. In the opinion of the officers, the Partnership's strength is not sufficient to deal with a field of action which unexpectedly has turned into a field of conflict, and therefore would have to be dealt with in an intensive and time consuming manner. Secondly, however, the Partnership has visibly shied back from becoming party to a local political conflict.

This, however, makes plain that partnerships, such as the ones we have found in Lübeck, reach the limits of their acting capacities when they become involved in issues that have turned into conflicts or have become emotionally charged. This, in turn, shows that the Partnership is not capable of covering up the existing power constellations of local politics. Were it to do so, and were it to become involved in the above conflicts as a political force, its pluralistic approach and its concepts of integration would be put in direct danger.

The question presents itself slightly differently when long-term educational work is considered. The two described cases lead us to assume that in this area there is an important and fertile field for the Partnership to become involved in.

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We have found different form of underestimating the obstacles in project ideas that have not progressed, because to translate them into action has so far turned out to be too complex and too difficult. The miscalculation in these cases is due to the fact that the approach to the shaping of the project was not well-thought out enough.

In particular, this applies to three project ideas. On the one hand, it was announced in the RDC that a farmers' market for suppliers of regional produce would be established in a central location in the town of Lübeck. This idea was introduced in a prominent place in the RDC. On the other hand, two larger projects in the field of landscape conservation and the marketing of local products had been contemplated which would have fallen into the category of utilization concepts for nature and landscape. One project would have come from the conventional sector, the other one from the organic sector.

Both projects would have tried out on several hundred hectares of agricultural land each, if and how under the label of regional quality production, larger groups of actors from the areas of agriculture, environmental protection, landscape planning, processing of food, and marketing of food, could have been brought together for joint action.

All three projects, however, refer to a fundamental problem of the Regional Partnership. So far, the Partnership has neither won the influence nor gained the competence to tackle more complex concepts. In all of the named cases, the difficulties can be evaluated as being to a large extent the consequence of normal delays. Furthermore, it proves no shortcomings on behalf of the Partnership, when after two years of work, larger organizational, conceptional, and political deficits still exist.

The real problems are on a different level. The projects named require a very high degree of fine tuning with many individual actors on many individual issues, as well as conceptual integration of several levels of action and structuring (e.g., the level of production, the level of processing, the level of marketing, the level of delivering environmental protection achievements, the level of considering land owners' interests, the levels of local political planning, etc.). This requires a highly developed network of cooperation, which, the Partnership does not have at its disposal to that extent. It requires more specific knowledge about problems which will have to be solved during the course of the project (e.g., on economical ways of marketing, on infrastructures, etc.). This knowledge only exists partly among the members of the Partnership, and, even on this level, is not yet focussed and adapted to the relevant concrete problem situations. This also requires the establishing of a better culture of communication and of paths??? of communication geared to the specific requirements of more extensive and complex projects.

So, the Partnership's deficits in these areas are neither accidental nor can they be eliminated quickly by a number of practical improvements. They refer to the fact that the Partnership can only do justice to the requirements of the RDC formulated by itself, if within the coming years, it starts to work in a fundamentally more integrated manner, sets the closing of the cooperation and communication gaps sketched out above as a priority.

Thus, these problems must not be taken lightly. They present the most important test case of whether its integration and cooperation concepts formulated in the RDC can be permanently established for the Partnership.

Successes of Networking

On the other hand, the Partnership did not need to reinvent the subject of networking. There are some good examples on the level of the projects as far as the extent of the networks and their quality is concerned. The Partnership has the opportunity to learn from these experiences.

The development of a (meanwhile) well-established working relationship between two projects, which originally wanted to operate independently of each other, may serve as the best example. The projects concerned are the so-called „Schaalsee project“ („A good country, a good people“) and the marketing project of a delicatessen supplier. The Schaalsee project has been built up by organic farmers from the region around the Schaalsee. Its objectives are the expansion of the spectrum of goods produced locally and the focussing and professionalization of marketing activities. It is intended to develop a complete assortment of organic products. The application for funds, however, only refers to individual measures of support in the area of marketing and in the area of public relations work.

The objective of the project by the delicatessen supplier is the marketing of quality produce to gastronomy. For some time the company has run a medium-sized delicatessen business . The core of the project is the establishing of logistical competence, concerning organic produce.

Between these two initiatives there have been several joint appearances in the region, after a number of practical points of contact had been established. The most important joint appearance was a three day specialist fair for organic products, which had been planned and carried out jointly, and during which the network of contacts could be significantly expanded. Here, seeds are evident of a possibly even larger cooperation affiliation in the region, which could neutralize the current fragmentation of the suppliers of organic products, and could be an impulse for the opening up of new markets.

Quantifiable success (turnover, investment inspired by the project, market shares, impact on employment) cannot yet be talked about. But it is evident that the cooperation is able to set standards. There is a clear arrangement over the relevant market and marketing focus. There are joint market appearances, wherever this is possible today. All information on market structures, consumer needs, marketing concepts, and the logistical business are being exchanged and evaluated together. In addition, a joint communication-technical infrastructure has been established and is being shaped and maintained by both sides. Finally, there are joint plans in the area of maintaining contacts and acquisition of customers.

Above all, however, the description of activities so far carried out gives the impression that the actors have succeeded, within a relatively short period of time, in taking up contact

with very many potential partners in the region, and in demonstrating to them the possibilities of integration into the cooperation network.

Even today, new value-creating potential has been developed by active networking, and synergy effects have resulted in the logistical and technical areas. According to the actors, new employment has not yet been created. The activities described above, however, have contributed to the maintenance of employment, and finally, this presents an important contribution to the East – West integration, because actors come from Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg. Even the activities carried out so far can no longer be attributed to the East or the West, but present themselves as an integrated offering. In addition, the economic planning horizon is designed to cover an area comprised of larger parts of Holstein, Mecklenburg, and the city of Hamburg.

However, in evaluating this case, the critical question cannot remain ignored of whether the Partnership was really needed in order to bring about the described cooperation structures. There is no question that the Partnership has been helpful. On the other hand, the cooperation structure which has developed is just as unplanned as were the political difficulties in building the biogas plants.

This example is significant, however, as proof for the innovations and development opportunities that can come about through rather accidental contacts when actors approach other actors without fear of contact.

The second case of cooperation with a stronger capacity to influence is the „virtual market place“ being built up by the Partnership.

These are 100 internet portals which may be used by groups or individual actors free of charge for one year.

Commercial offers are to take centre stage. The offers are tailored to the products and producers from the region. As in the case of a real market place, however, not only the selling of products is concerned but, equally, the promotion of the region, of regional offers, as well as information on regional politics. The project includes a comprehensive schooling offer for the „shopkeepers, “since one of the aims is to reduce the initial inhibition of using the Internet, and to provide actors with the basic knowledge needed to maintain their Internet pages in future..

At the end of the project, the intention is to have a marketplace in the Internet, which is financed by the suppliers, maintained by them, and which can be further expanded. Herein, the Partnership sees itself merely in the role of someone providing an impulse and, financially and organizationally, moving things ahead. In the medium term, the project will have to continue to exist as an independent economic enterprise, or it will have to join an already established business.

In its current form, the project has been developed by the Partnership's so-called EDP-work group. Moreover, some other examples for successfully working cooperations between projects can be mentioned. The self evaluation of the Partnership gives good indications for this. Because cooperative aspects had to be taken in consideration by the

projects from the outset, it is not surprising that most projects which have been evaluated have fulfilled the cooperative demands.

What is more astonishing are surplus demands on cooperation and surplus elements of cooperation in practical work. The mobilising effect of cooperative aspects for actors outside the Partnership is cited as one important aspect and the spontaneous transformation of successful working experiences from one project to the other is a second most-often aspect mentioned.

Unfortunately the Partnership as an organisation has not made enough efforts to disseminate these experiences. The interviews with people from the Partnership, but also some official documents, clearly point out that the Partnership was too ineffective and too hesitant in this sphere.

Basic Democracy and the Expansion of the Circle of Actors: two unsolved Problems

It sounds paradoxical, but is in accordance with the previous organizational experience in the partnership that the largest deficits in the partnership occur where one could assume that a freely founded club would be especially active and innovative: in the building of basic democratic structures and in attracting new members.

In the evaluation of these deficits, it must be considered that many actors were overloaded and are still overloaded. But the question still emerges why the working groups, with one exception, did not work and why the circle of actors could not be expanded.

The Partnership, however, will not be able to work out a long term strategy and win more members and more support from the public if it doesn't cope with the political questions arising from this situation.

More effective organization processes would be helpful to solve this problem, but are surely not the main answer, because it can be assumed from the activities of some projects and the interviews that the main barrier is the unsolved problem of bringing actors who are divided and united together.. In some extreme cases, this lesson can be taken most of all from our interviews, actors in the partnership are not prepared to build up basic democratic working groups, because these groups must exceed established political and ideological frontiers.

A concrete example makes the situation clear. The Partnership has approved projects dealing with topics and questions which are very similar in content but which are separately run.

For example, the Partnership approved a consumer education project which is focused on schools and which works with pupils, teachers and parents. The project is carried out by a farm woman with strong ties to the professional representation of conventional farmers. This woman is strongly convinced that conventional farming and the products produced by conventional farmers are healthy and secure and that critics to the quality of conventional products are generally unfounded.

From her point of view, conventional farming cannot be blamed for environmental problems either. She does not accept what she sees as unfounded, and often ideologically driven accusations by critics of husbandry who rely heavily on animal welfare arguments regarding accepted.

Her educational program for schools therefore concentrates on other points. Because pupils are often uninformed about farming, she wants to give basic information about work and life on farms. As the relationship between farming and the agricultural products we eat are unfamiliar for many children and because many parents don't give to their children even basic knowledge about food quality, schools are regarded as the right place for disseminating the needed information.

Because food is different in so many ways, because quality must be explained, and because in many families nobody really cooks, children often don't have concrete experiences with food preparation and its possibilities. An education in basic cooking is a central part of the educational program. Finally, because advertising often gives children a false picture of the reality of agriculture, for example TV commercials showing purple cows grazing on a mountainside, leading to an false understanding food, education must assume a corrective function. All in all, the complete ignorance of the world of food and farming by modern consumers must be countered with educational work.

On the other hand, the Partnership has approved a project in the field of consumer education which is not primarily focused on children and on educational work in schools, but which shares some of the above cited general convictions. But this project is definitely concentrated on organic products and on organic farming. So a lot of similarities exist, but there are also substantial differences in farming and the quality of goods.

It is certainly wise in a political sense, and it makes practical sense, not to mix such educational programs from the beginning.

Another problem emerges in the Partnership when concepts which are in some ways parallel yet different and even conflicting in other points are put forth.

Conclusions for Cooperative Strategies

How can the developments described in the previous paragraphs be evaluated? What are the conclusions to be drawn from the development of the Partnership in terms of cooperation and of communication?

Given the time frame set by the competition, the Partnership is now at the conclusion. Thus, the evaluation will have to take into account that the actors need time to try things out and to experiment until they have learned how to handle the possibilities offered by the Partnership. The same is true for the Partnership's integration into already existing regional political structures and into the discourses of regional political actors. It is evident from the description of the development, that from Spring to Autumn 2002, the Partnership lost a lot of time and political clout due to organizational teething troubles. Nevertheless, some clear answers can be given in reply to the questions above.

First, the Partnership has developed internal cooperative structures which in their present state cannot be regarded as sufficient for a longstanding political project. The term partnership refers to cooperative social structures and implies forms of understanding between actors which must be distinguished from the simple coordination of different and differing activities in two regards.

On the one hand, the actors, as we have already stated, have to regard their daily practice not only from the perspective of their own interests and ideas but also from the perspective and ideas of other actors. They must look for integration and compromise in order to establish innovative products and new forms of marketing or in order to form clusters of actors, which help to bring up new ideas for regional action.

The Partnership so far hasn't reached this level of acting and thinking in all domains of activity, especially in the board. Practical interests and perspectives of activity are not focussed and geared towards a mutual regional perspective. The establishment of networks functions in some fields of activity, but in other fields it is more than two or three steps away from the guidelines for cooperation developed in the RDC. Up to now, intensive and successful cooperation within the Partnership does take place on two levels. Also, most of the supporters of the projects are cooperating. The Regional Partnership can be given credit for all of this. Furthermore, it is emerging that some of the projects wish to take additional cooperation partners on board in the near future, and thus will be able to extend the horizon of their activities.

On the other hand, cooperative structures can be attributed to the work of the steering committee, to the work of the regional manager and for the communication lines between steering committee, regional manager and the implementation agency. The structures include the winning of new actors and thus enlarging the field of activities, expanding the meaning of actor-empowerment by combining knowledge and skills potentials for effective organisation, and in the forging of compromises and ideas of mutual understanding..

But when the term „network“ is used in the RDC, and when the image is employed that “nets are to be tied” in the area of Lübeck Bay, this has a broader sense. It means that an integration of standpoints and activities must stand at the end of a strategy which begins with practical cooperative processes and the willingness of all actors to look for chances for more cooperation.

Another important factor where the Partnership hasn't fulfilled its own political promises is the Partnership's bid to be a place of communication for discussions on aims and methods of regional politics.

Here, the term “communication“ means actors finding a common language so that blockages in regional development can be removed. The ability to speak a common language has an impact on changes in the political climate in the Partnership because it provides a good example to the Region. This also affects the development of communication between the actors which have heretofore been isolated or stuck in the trench battles of regional politics.

The question has to be raised of what future could await the Partnership after the end of the competition. To keep activities at the level they are at today, the Partnership has to replace the money guaranteed by the competition with other sorts of funding. This perspective on deficits of the Partnership and from which to evaluate its future is of central importance, because 99 percent of the financial foundation of the Partnership comes from funds granted by the competition. When the competition is completed, the Partnership will have to find a new financial basis or it will have to give up.

The importance of sufficient funding cannot be expressed in terms of an amount of money, but rather, always must be expressed in terms of political legitimacy, because the funds used provide the possibility to convince with projects and to form regional realities. Funding coming from the competition also supports the management of infrastructures (regional manager and his office) and as both staff and organizational abilities are important factors for programmatic improvements, the question of financing is directly related to the quality of activities. Finally, the framework financed by the competition is of vital importance for the communication of information and experiences well beyond the borders of the regions taking part in the competition.

According to interviews, and referring to many other conversations conducted with actors and institutions, it can be stated that most actors in the Partnership are quite aware of these problems. On the other hand, only few efforts can be registered in building up structures which could replace the strength which is lent by the competition for a certain period.

Theoretically, the Partnership can choose between three alternatives, respectively it can also look for combinations between them. First, a market solution is possible which means that regional management and the capacities of organization are offered on markets and are remunerated by customers who need professional help and pay for it.

Second, the Partnership can look for strong public partners and lean upon them. In this case, public funding by the Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture should be replaced by another system of public funding relying on regional institutions (such as, for example, districts and town administrations).

Third, the Partnership could survive as a free association relying on voluntary engagement and free membership. Under these conditions, the number of persons and institutions working in the Partnership should at least be tripled in the near future and the diversity of actors should be broadened substantially to accumulate enough political power.

In reality, the first alternative must be regarded as utopic at the moment because the demand from companies is nearly non-existent and no growth scenario is in sight for the next years. What could be realistic in the next years is a mixture of public funding and market driven solutions, but even in this case, a clear predominance of public funding should be calculated in advance.

The second alternative would only work if most of the districts and towns in the Lübeck Region are prepared for an integrated approach on regional activities and are convinced that it should be better to carry out such programs with independent actors and institutions.

To put it in other words: Political understanding between district and town parliaments and local or regional administrations are not the only fundamental prerequisites for such solutions. Additionally, public funds with ample financial capacities must already exist, which is not the case here and which must be regarded as unlikely for the near future if we take in account the financial crisis communities are suffering from at the moment.

Although such possibilities should not be neglected, funding from local and regional administrations also seems to be a partial solution for the problems the Partnership is facing. Besides, we have already mentioned that the attention the Partnership is receiving from local and regional administrations is not very high. So it would be wise not to expect too much from strategies which rely on rapprochements to the public sector.

Under these conditions, the third axis is the only one with convincing perspectives. But any development of the Partnership along this axis must be grounded on the already exposed principles of integration, cooperation and participation. This, however, means that there is no future for the Partnership without a dramatic change in its logistics of cooperation. As untied unlinked working fields sabotage integrated perspectives, as all attempts for political or ideological dominance must be considered counterproductive in regard to the mobilizing different interests, and as purpose-oriented solutions seeking only restricted or partial goals have no perspective in terms of the needed feelings of solidarity, the way out is not easy.

Thus, deficits in cooperation encumber the Partnership with a heavy burden and it would be misleading to count on the two years left for necessary corrections.

This is also true with regard to the integration of the Partnership into the established system of regional policy. The Partnership is not a political organization according to standard concepts. In the description of the stages of development, the phrase „semi-political“ has been used occasionally. The concept is not applied in a depreciatory manner, but rather to make plain that the Partnership is only partly willing and able to be a “full” player in politics.

The Partnership does want to be engaged in regional politics, but it does so with a stance of non-committance to any political party or political association. The Partnership acts with strong affinities to loose forms of political engagement, with the idea of involving actors with a civic background into political activities.

Seen in this way, it offers room for the engagement of people who, on a very general level, wish to become involved in the field of regional development politics, but do not wish to take the step of joining a political organization. Because the Partnership stresses that it does not wish to replace either political parties or established interest groups, and does not wish to become a competitor in the established landscape of politics, it is necessary to make its position clear. Strong requests for meaningful political communication can be deduced from this.

But the difficulties are not limited to the hybrid structure of the Partnership. In view of the multitude of participating public corporations and in view of the East-West-problems

described above, it is clear that it is particularly difficult to come to political arrangements with so many institutions.

It is probably too early to ask for definite solutions to this problem. It can, however, be safely maintained that by the year 2005 the Regional Partnership will have become an acknowledged partner of the established political parties, associations, and existing administrative structures on the level of federal states and of administrative districts and communities. This, in turn, cannot be achieved if the Partnership does not succeed in integrating itself into the existing field of regional politics.

From our point of view, these problems and difficulties are not the consequence of objective external adverse factors and negative influences. The Partnership itself it to be blamed and solutions therefore must be found by the Partnership itself.

If the Partnership does not succeed in building up a clear dominance of cooperative acting and thinking, but resigns to the standpoint of viewing the Partnership more as an alliance with the purpose of earning public funds, the Partnership will have no future.

Particularly the following tasks lie ahead:

1.) In the RDC, the objective was formulated that the Partnership should bring about a balance of interests through comprehensive projects. Within the region this is especially important in the areas of agriculture, the food producing economy, and the utilization of land, in all of which the first point of approach must be the intensification of communication between actors. For this reason more common events, conferences and work groups which bring actors and interests together must be created.

Because board members and regional management have concentrated very much on the building up of project structures, the establishment of common activities has been neglected. Some exceptions prove the rule. Therefore the discussions within the association did not reach beyond the development of projects and the process of running the projects.

2.) The external activities of the Partnership have concentrated on motivating individuals and groups who wanted to develop projects, and on supplying them with the necessary information on how to put together a project application. All aspects of advertising for the Partnership's general ideas in the region must therefore be improved.

Part of this problem can certainly be traced back to the fact that there are too few communication specialists within the Partnership and even fewer genuine communication talents. In addition, the organizational overburdening has had a part in the neglecting of communication responsibilities. Yet, the main deficit is not to be found on the level of organization of communication processes. The main deficit lies in the Partnership's lack of will to find a common language for the formulation of objectives and methods.

The Partnership thus cuts itself off from concepts which involve cross-border solutions, and thus from a large portion of development potential described in the RDC. Creative ideas remain restricted to one-off-cases one-time projects?? and individual experiences.

Processes of mutual learning and the mobilization of new and creative ideas through dialogue among actors are ruled out. An essential innovation factor is thus blocked. Above all, however, the actors' stagnation in their antiquated traditions of communication will surely contribute substantially to the possibility of the Regional Partnership quickly disintegrating after the end of the competition.

3.) In addition, some of the actors who, during the founding stage of the Partnership, did stand up for comprehensive projects have withdrawn their engagement from the Partnership because they have not been able to agree to the shifting of political emphasis within the board. This is especially true for the involvement of some of the environmental activists. It is obvious that initiatives in regional politics, especially at the outset, have to bear in mind that the pluralism of interests and motives for action must very carefully be translated into a well-balanced system. If this is neglected, the groups of actors will stay away and the opportunities for cooperative projects to together different interests together will become slim.

This has contributed substantially to the fact that the Partnership has not won new members, that inadequate notice is taken of the Partnership within the region, and that there is no open culture of talking about and discussing issues within the group.

All in all, the danger exists that the Partnership will nurture a structure which is orientated to the optimal exploitation of the support programme and thus prepares the ground for a selection of actors who will remove the Partnership ever further from its objectives in regional politics.

Should these conditions not change in future, the Partnership would probably face an implosion of the structures that have been established. This would lessen not only the chances of survival for projects and other activities, it would also remove any opportunity to gain a broader basis of support by organized regional politics from the Partnership.

Case study 2: Empowerment by Quality Production? - Experiences of Organic Dairy Farmers

The second case refers to organic milk production and the marketing of organic milk products. We describe the situation of two groups of organic dairy farmers working in northern Germany.

The two groups are confronted with an extremely difficult choice. They have to choose whether they will continue to follow a quality oriented strategy of organic farming or whether they will favour mass production concepts – based on the principles for organic production, of course.

Those interested in organic farming might be frightened by the term “mass production.” In the past few years it has, however, become apparent that organic farmers are facing constraints which cause them to re-think their traditional models of production as well as their social styles of farming.

One of the problems they have to bear in mind, and one of the harshest consequences to be taken in account when we talk about the future of organic dairy farming is the re-definition of their function as producers and vendors of goods without relying on wishful thinking.

Dairy farmers, especially organic dairy farmers, are mostly affected by the challenges related to this situation, because ailing milk markets help to dramatize the to think about production systems and styles of farming. The sharp drop in the payout prices farmers get for their milk is the most obvious signal for markets which are changing dramatically and have largely become buyers markets. The question on which attitude organic farmers should adopt in facing changing markets isn't however specific to organic dairy farms.⁷

All these problems must be understood as integral parts of changing economic and social realities in today's countryside, and these problems also have much to do with rural communication issues. The meanings the organic farmers accord their experiences with changing markets – meanings they actually discuss with regard to the development of their farms and with regard to the economic and social profile of the entire organic sector – is one important factor for the explanation of opportunities and risks in rural development. Of particular importance are the lessons farmers draw from their experiences about the planned activities of other actors in rural areas and the establishment of broader social networks in the countryside.

⁷ The following description is concentrating on organic dairy farming and organic milk markets (Rahmann, Oppermann & Barth 2002). But some general aspects of the entire milk market have to be taken in account. Production and processing of milk represents the most important pillar of agricultural and food economy in the Federal Republic. With the exception of some specialities (e.g., in cheese production), dairy products are typically standard products and are produced industrially. Today the marketing of these goods is carried out almost 100 percent by supermarkets, consumer markets and discounters. The “price war” at these markets is extremely harsh at the moment. Low price concepts are clearly dominating the marketing strategies of nearly all retailers.

Not only patterns of profitability and economic success are at stake when organic farmers rethink their future and communicate their hopes and fears to the public.

Most of the partisans of organic production (farmers as well as customers) have initially chosen the “organic path,” not only with regard to the outstanding ecological benefits of organic production, but also as a genuine social path as well (Oppermann 2001).

They have favoured organic farming because they saw a chance that the organic sector could establish social relations which give more development chances to small economic and social units. “Small is beautiful” has become a well known slogan and the slogan was very much related to organic farming, because organic production could at the beginning be regarded as a highly decentralized system of production and marketing - mostly relying on small and medium-sized farms and a more handicraft-oriented food industry. It could be regarded as well as a transformation of general ideas of personal relations between farmers (producer) and customers and of regional markets and marketing circles into concrete economic and social structures. Finally, all the small-is-beautiful-aspirations were seen as starting-points for differentiated bottom-up dynamics for rural areas and grassroot driven innovations.

Seen from this perspective, and using afflicted social terms, the organic farming sector was regarded as a sector which can really claim to be suitable for the empowerment of local and regional actors. These hopes have vanished to a great extent and must be partially reformulated on a more realistic basis. The experiences we are reporting in the following show two things.

First, the organic dairy farmers we have met need of a clear understanding of where social hopes for empowerment of small actors are realistic, and where they are not, and they must understand the reasons of changes. Here, communication concentrate on the process of adaption to unpleasant prospects and the process of separation between realistic and unrealistic topics. In addition, it has much to do with the question of how actors leave utopian perspectives behind them without resigning.

According to our experiences, this is easy to proclaim but much more difficult to put it in practice. The communication difficulties of organic farmers can to a large extent be explained by these factors. Secondly, whoever wants to reformulate his economic and social profile and wants to establish promising marketing strategies for organic dairy markets must be sure that his partners in the food processing sector and retailing share the same options. A lot of difficulties and problems we heard in our interviews result from diverging options between farmers, dairies and retailers. And a lot of problems organic dairy farmers are facing today derive from unspoken or unresolved communication problems between farmers, their dairies, and the retail sector.

Both groups of organic farmers presented in our case are commercially associated to conventional dairies, a constellation which is rather typical for organic dairy farmers in Germany. Today about 40 dairies are counted in Germany which process organic milk. Most of them are conventionally run but they have created an organic section in last few years in order to diversify and to test new market prospects.

The dairies of our two groups of organic farmers are also located in the North (one in Holstein and the other in neighbouring Mecklenburg). Although the concrete situation of the two dairies is different, the dairies, as well as our two groups of organic farmers, face a common problem. They have to choose whether they will turn to mass production or stay on the side of specific quality requirements.

For farmers and dairies it is not only the question whether a quality based segment of markets has to be chosen or not. Actually the cooperation between organic dairy farmers and their conventionally run dairies has worsened because of the general downward trend of milk markets in and its impact on organic milk markets. Because milk markets and the markets for organic milk are characterized by a sharp decline in prices, organic dairy farmers are confronted with the alternative of either following price cutting strategies or looking for alternative concepts of milk processing and milk marketing.⁸ In general, recent downward trends in milk markets have led to increased concerns for rationalization on the part of milk producers and the flourishing of cost cutting strategies.

Yet, what has to be done to cope with these problems is unclear for the actors concerned in many respects. A lot of uncertainties prevail in the discourse of actors. For this reason, it cannot be surprising that cautious and sometimes even tentative efforts to redefine the future of organic dairy farming and the marketing of dairy products play an important role in the presentation of the case.

Starting Points of the Case Study

Organic milk production, as well as the processing and marketing of organic milk, represents only a small part of the organic food sector (Rahmann, Oppermann & Barth 2002). For many experts, the organic milk market still has to be regarded as one of the problem children of organic food markets. In contrast to the growth of organic markets in neighbouring Austria and Denmark, where organic milk markets have grown fast, the growth of the German organic milk market was only moderate. The organic milk market therefore still has to be regarded as a niche market. Only 1.5 percent of the milk which is produced on German farms today comes from organic farms (see *top agrar*, 3/2003, p. 138).

To characterize the current situation on organic milk markets it is often underscored that an important share of organic milk still has to be sold for conventional prices. It is estimated that large quantities of organic milk, in a range between 25 percent and 30 percent, cannot be sold organically, which means that they have to be sold for conventional prices (see Walter 2004, p. 6 and ZMP 2004 b, p. 203). Some years ago the percentage of organic milk which could not be sold organically was estimated for 50 percent of the market. That

⁸ Payout prices for milk had fallen sharply and the payout prices for organic milk had followed the trend when we began with the field work. All hopes that price levels in the organic milk sector could be decoupled from the decline of prices in the conventional sector had vanished (see ZMP 2004 b, p. 206). The situation even got worse after we had finished our field work. In the presentation of our case we do not take in account the price drops which markets saw in the second half of 2003 (see *ibid*). But as ongoing price declines have only led to a sharpening of the general problems we describe we see no reason to revise our general inventory of issues.

means that half of organic milk farmers had no remuneration for the specific extra costs of organic milk production which are estimated near 20 percent.

From this point of view, the market situation has certainly improved in the past years. In strict terms of market balance, a range between 20 and 30 percent of organic milk sold for conventional prices, gives however a clear signal: Organic dairy farmers are still facing overproduction. They are confronted with the uncomfortable economic perspective of succeeding in markets which, due to overproduction, can be characterized as buyer's markets. With production outstripping consumption, constant pressure on prices and a structural weakness of the offering side is typical.

It is significant for the growth dynamics of markets in the organic milk sector, that even in the remarkable good year of 2001, when demand for organic milk grew fast in Germany, production always was higher than demand. At that time the inflexibility of contracts between farmers and dairies, some regional disparities, and most of all a rush of new retailers in organic markets were responsible for short-term shortages in organic milk markets which caused sharp upward movements of prices for organic milk.

Beginning in 2000, and even more dynamically in 2001, food retailers were in many cases desperately searching for organic milk, because they had completely ignored organic milk products before. Even though the business-wide organic boom of 2001 was not so impressive in the dairy sector as the trend was in other sectors of organic production, retailers began to enlarge their range of organic products, which boosted organic milk production and led to favourable prices. A large retailer told us that the demand for standardized organic consumer milk rose significantly in this year, a statement which can be confirmed by official figures (see ZMP 2004a and 2004b).

As organic farmers could not meet rising demand on behalf of existing contracts with their dairies, and as it takes at least two years to convert to organic farming, a bottleneck emerged on the supply side and forced retailers to look for organic products in other regions and countries. Due to the geographic situation in northern Germany, retailers even began to import organic milk from Denmark.

Although prospects of organic milk markets are looking unsatisfactory at the moment, our interlocutors are convinced that organic milk markets will continue to grow in the future. They are not pessimistic with regard to the general development of the demand side and see no tendencies for a real stagnation.

According to their estimations, however, no spectacular, double digit growth rates can be awaited in coming years. The extension of production capacities on the side of already producing organic milk farmers and the conversion of conventional farmers to organic farming can meet rising demand without problems, so that it may take some years to reach fully balanced organic milk markets.

Like all the other cases, our case study is located in Schleswig-Holstein. The reasons for this choice are not the consequence of the laziness on the side of the research team, but are connected with the above described situation.

From the beginning of organic milk production in Schleswig-Holstein, the quantities of organic milk production as well as the number of organic dairy farms and organic milk markets fell well behind the potential which could have been presumed if one takes in account the traditional agrarian structures and potentials in this state.

With regard to milk production in general and the marketing tradition for milk produce Schleswig-Holstein still can be called a “milk state”. Along with Bayern, Lower Saxony and Mecklenburg, farmers in Schleswig-Holstein have a long tradition of specialised milk production, and the same is true for milk processing in dairies or in cheese factories. We were convinced that it would be of special interest to look for the development of organic dairy farming and of organic dairies in this state with regard to the question whether the organic sector would be able to take up old traditions of dairy farming.

The volume of organic milk produced in Schleswig-Holstein, however, is estimated near 15 million kg, which means that the current production level is very low – even for a state with an underdeveloped organic farming tradition in general. A quite similar situation can be found in most parts of northern Germany – all with a strong milk state tradition. Although conventional milk producing farms and the dairy industry form a strong pillar of agribusiness, the organic milk sector has remained weak.

Several reasons can be blamed for this. First, farms in the North in average are better structured than they are in other parts of Germany, so that there is less economic and structural pressure for conventional farmers to look for alternatives as for example organic farming.

Second, the network of dairies processing organic milk is very thinly woven in the whole North. Long distances to bring organic milk from farms to dairies are typical and the costs arising from transport are an additional economic handicap for organic dairy farmers in the North.

In the state of Schleswig-Holstein itself we only find one dairy which processes organic milk (the dairy in Trittau). Another dairy in neighbouring regions in Mecklenburg (the dairy in Upahl) can be regarded as de facto also belonging to Schleswig-Holstein. The Upahl dairy processes organic milk and is mostly supplied by organic dairy farmers from Schleswig-Holstein.

Taking the Federal States of Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Western Pommerania together, we find only four dairies which process organic milk – two of them have started to process organic milk only recently (one dairy in Lower Saxony and another one more in the centre of Mecklenburg-Western Pommerania).

In Germany, organic milk production and milk processing is concentrated in the South. In 2001, according to ZMP figures approximately 410 mio. kg of organic milk were produced (ZMP 2002, p. 17). Nearly the same figure is indicated for 2003 (see Walter 2004, p. 6 and ZMP 2004 b, p. 203). Most of the organic milk comes from southern Germany and is processed in the South. The organic dairy with the by far biggest volume of milk processing capacities is, for instance, located in Bavaria. A second largerr dairy is located

in Western Germany.⁹ In addition, all other dairies in the leading group of organic dairies are located in Bavaria or Baden-Württemberg.

This also sheds light upon the third problem organic milk producers in Schleswig-Holstein are confronted with. The high concentration of production and processing is accompanied by an overwhelming dominance of organic milk products coming from the south of Germany at markets via retail chains and organic food stores. Whoever wants to buy organic milk products in Schleswig-Holstein can find that organic milk products coming from the North are rare. Instead, organic milk products coming from Bavaria and other southern or western dairies top the marketing lists.

What has made the situation completely paradoxical until recently, is the paradox that Italian consumers could at the same time buy organic milk coming from Schleswig-Holstein. Meanwhile the contracts with the Italian supermarket chain have fallen through. But when we visited the dairy, which had exported organic milk to Italy, the manager was just negotiating a contract to export organic milk to Greece.

Exploring the situation of organic milk farmers in Schleswig-Holstein and studying their experiences with the development of markets means therefore, that unlike other organic markets, we are looking for a market and economic developments which were difficult in the past. So the question arises, if this constellation will endure and what organic farmers can do to improve their situation and change the course of things.

Without any doubt, whether there are good opportunities for economic empowerment or not is of special interest for afflicted actors under these circumstances.

Empirical Backgrounds

The study is based on interviews with leading actors. In addition a guided visit of some of the farms was undertaken.

Our main interlocutors are four organic dairy farmers, three of them belong to the already mentioned groups of organic farmers. The two groups represent roughly 90 percent of organic milk production in Schleswig-Holstein. An additional interview was conducted with representatives of the conventional co-operative milk association in Schleswig-Holstein in order to become more familiar with basic structures and constraints in milk markets.

Two other interviews were conducted with the manager of one of the affected dairies and with the sales manager of a big German retailer group with a turnover of roughly 2 billion Euros in 2002 and approximately 120 supermarkets and multiples in the North.

Experiences which have been gained by the case study on the Regional Partnership Lübeck Bay (Case study 1) also have found their way into the following presentation, because

⁹ The Bavarian dairy is processing a volume of 63 Mio. kg (2002) of organic milk and the dairy in Western Germany processes a volume of 35 Mio. kg of organic milk (see Walter, *ibid*, p. 7). Taken together these two dairies account for a quarter of the organic milk produced in Germany, which underlines their strong position on markets.

regional production and marketing of organic milk is an important part of the program of the Partnership in the field of activities named “Production, Processing, and Marketing of Organic and Regional Products“.

Most of the members of the two groups of farmers which we have studied more closely are farming in Schleswig-Holstein. Some farms, however, are located in the bordering parts of Mecklenburg, Hamburg and Lower Saxony.

Apart from the two groups of farmers visited by us, only small circles of individual producers can be identified in Schleswig-Holstein. Those farmers are marketing milk and milk products directly to consumers or they are producing cheese on their farms and market it directly from their farms.

In general, the sector of direct marketing can be regarded as a more profitable sector for organic farmers. In Germany this sector today represents 18 percent of organic markets. In the organic milk sector, this segment is regarded as less promising. First, the quantities of organic milk which can be marketed directly in many cases are so small that a specialised organic dairy farmer who produces 400 000 kg of organic milk or so has difficulties selling this volume completely to consumers. Thus, even farmers with established concepts of direct marketing must look for traditional market channels via dairies.

Organic dairy farmers with already working concepts of direct marketing additionally point out that they must take a position at markets and have to foster a profile which is very close to customers and their demands. Much time and good knowledge about living conditions and consumer preferences is afforded. Farmers also must be ready to sharpen their profile as service agents. For this, additional qualifications as well as a specific mentality are required – something many farmers are not used to. Farmers which build up their own direct marketing channel are also forced to invest heavily in hygiene systems and have to develop a highly professional, sophisticated way of quality control to convince their customers.

Markets for certified milk (T.T. milk), which often is sold directly by dairy farmers as well as markets for organic farm cheese have been nevertheless qualified as promising niche markets by our interlocutors. On the other hand they are convinced that in many regions there is not enough demand to guarantee enough sales volume for more than two or three organic farmers per region.

Some experts even claim that the share (not the volume) of directly marketed organic products will continue to shrink in the future because the mass of consumers prefer retail shops and supermarkets. Given this situation it is quite logical for organic dairy farmers to give their milk to dairies.

Our interlocutors, including one who can look back to a good deal of personal experience with direct marketing, are convinced that direct marketing doesn't present enough chances for a real breakthrough for organic milk producers. For this reason, direct marketing is regarded as a restricted perspective. Our interlocutors suppose that only a minority of

organic dairy farmers will achieve convincing marketing solutions and ongoing economic success in this, all in all small, part of the market.

In addition, our interlocutors underline that economic success and market chances are not the only things which matter. Direct marketing is widely regarded as a question of personal talents and of individual character. It is seen as a good solution for persons which are in principle more extroverted and interested in intense processes of communication with consumers. But many farmers in the organic sector don't see themselves as born communicators.

The “Northern Lights”

The first group we would like to introduce in our presentation is a group of organic farmers, who call themselves „Northern Lights“. Their full name is „We – the Northern Lights“, “but we will only speak of Northern Lights in the following.

The name itself is an ironic allusion to people of the northernmost parts of Germany. Among those are to be counted, at any rate, people in Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein, and after reunification also people in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. This is also the spatial horizon of milk markets the group wants to conquer. Approximately 5 million people live in this region.

The Northern Lights group already was founded in the mid 1990s. At that time, only six organic farmers had joined the group. From the beginning they had set up the group as a stock corporation. The business of selling organic milk has been organized by a subsidiary which operates as a limited company owned 100 percent by the stock corporation. The construction is qualified as useful by our interlocutors because it facilitates the integration of organic milk coming from other organic farmers. The spokesman of the group told us that within a limited company the group is not forced to integrate other suppliers as full members of the stock corporation.

The group, i.e., the stock corporation, counted 16 shareholders by the end of 2002. Together, all shareholders hold a milk quota of 3.6 Mio kg. On average, this is slightly more than 300 000 kg per farm. It follows from this, that the dominant structures of the Northern Lights group are those of medium sized family farms. This classification is confirmed by our interlocutors. According to the group's spokesman, the size of farms does not vary widely.

The group acts as its own marketer (see below). It sells its milk under its own label. The name of it is „Weidemilch“ (“Pasture Milk”). The milk is mainly sold by conventional food retailers. The main customers are two conventional supermarket chains which have integrated a limited spectre of organic products in their standard offer for a couple of years.

The milk sold by the group can be classified as organic drinking milk. Currently, other milk products are not offered, so that the economic success of the Northern Lights depends exclusively on one product. Given the situation that the markets for drinking milk are typically mass markets, offering little chances for actors to communicate a quality profile, economic success depends from expansions in volume.

The founding of the group in the mid 1990s was the consequence of a number of difficulties with which organic dairy farmers were confronted at that time. The biggest problem was then to find a dairy which was willing to accept organic milk and to sell it at markets. For that period, no reliable figures on the size of organic milk market do exist. ZMP estimations for 1991 speak about 60 mio. kg of organic milk sold in Germany (see ZMP 2002, p. 157). At the end of the 1990s, the market share of organic milk was estimated at 0.5 per cent of the entire milk market, so that a much lower market share must be estimated for the mid 1990s for organic milk. As we have already mentioned, about 50 percent of organic milk – and that, too, is only an estimate – was marketed conventionally at that time.¹⁰

Under these conditions, to find a dairy which was willing to process and market organic milk certainly could be seen as a progress for the group of farmers which later formed the Northern Lights. Alternatives were not sought at that time. Especially the purchase of an own dairy seemed too risky for them – particularly for financial reasons.

The second problem for organic dairy farmers at that time was the price paid for organic milk. Production costs for organic milk are higher than those for conventional milk, something to be traced back essentially to the higher costs for labour and for concentrates (Heissenhuber & Hoffmann 2001). Organic milk farmers therefore need a substantial surcharge in order to come up to the level of profitability and income achieved by their conventional colleagues.

In a previous study we have carried out (Oppermann 2001), agrarian experts named surcharges of 5 to 7.5 cents which were needed to cover higher production costs of organic dairy production (Rahmann, Oppermann and Barth 2001). Surcharges in a range between 5 and 7.5 cents, however, had been rarely achieved at markets.¹¹ Moreover, our previous study showed that organic farmers normally had to accept surcharges equalling only half of the desired extra charge, and sometimes even less. The experiences of the Northern Lights fell without any question into the latter category. A more differentiated calculation published recently by the ZMP (see Ökomarkt Forum, 13/2002, p.10) comes to the conclusion that conventional farms which want to convert to organic farming face an higher amount of production costs between 6,76 Cents and 9,80 Cents.

Looking back to what things were like when the Northern Lights were founded, one of the interviewed farmers describes the bargaining on prices in the following terms: *„While the dairy in H. was willing to guarantee that it would buy my organic milk for 5 years, they only wanted to pay 24.5 cents per kg. This was at the bottom end of the price range for organic milk and it meant that the dairy was not willing to pay any surcharge. The only alternative I had at this time, was an offer by a newly founded “Bioland” cheese dairy. This dairy was prepared to pay a surcharge in the range of 0.4 – 1.5 cents for organic*

¹⁰ In the agrarian press examples are cited that in other regions even 70 percent of organic milk had to be sold for conventional prices at that time (see top agrar 3/2003, p. 144).

¹¹ In their calculations, Heissenhuber & Hoffmann (2001) assume an organic surcharge of 5 cents per kg. In our research, without exception, we came across slightly lower surcharges (Rahmann, Oppermann and Barth 2002).

milk, but their contracts would have run for a much shorter period. In addition, the surcharge paid, would have depended on the fat and protein content. As I use a high percentage of basic ration and because the quality of my basic ration varies considerably, especially that of greenstuff - for instance hay and grass silage - I calculated that on average I would have ended up during the following years with probably very close to 0.4 cents of surcharge. For me, that wouldn't have been worth it financially.

In principle, I didn't even know whether the Bioland cheese dairy would be financially viable over a longer time. With the conventional dairy in H. I knew quite well where I was and therefore finally I accepted their offer. As other alternatives didn't exist for me, I had really no other choice. Then, we all hoped that organic milk markets would grow very fast in the future and that pushed by higher demand margin for a real surcharge would emerge."

So, the Northern lights started with a rather gloomy economic perspective. It was clear from the beginning on that the group could win a sound economic future only with sufficient growth rates.

In other interviews with Northern Lights representatives similar statements were made on the market situation in the nineties and the choice which had to be made between low payout prices and security. The lowest surcharge offer we have heard from other interlocutors in this period was at 0.25 cent. It seems quite logical that organic farmers strived to bundle their offer at that time in order to obtain a better starting position for higher price levels in future negotiations with their dairies.

Although organic milk markets expanded in the following years, economic success remained limited for the Northern Lights. While it was possible to push through an organic surcharge, the prices which were obtained varied considerably and the average level of surcharge remained problematic. Between 1 and 7 cents surcharge was paid in the following years. To achieve 7 cents, however, was a great exception and was only possible in the boom year 2001.

On average, surcharge prices for organic milk were 3 to 4 cents above the conventional price level, which means that payout prices were slightly below the economically needed surcharge level in most years. When we visited the Northern Lights in winter 2002 / 2003 organic milk markets already had slumped down and the payout prices had fallen to 32 cents. According to some private contacts which we had with organic dairy farmers in the second half of 2003 the payout prices had fallen to 30 cents in some cases.

The figures which are presented by the ZMP indicate that the price level obtained by the Northern Lights in 2002 and at the beginning of 2003 was lower than the average payout price for organic milk paid in Germany. The latter stood around 35,8 cents in 2002 (Schoch 2003, p. a). The figures presented in the ZMP overview show that the Northern Lights were, all the same, not the big exception. Some other dairies also did not pay more than 33 cents and the figures also show that at that time most dairies already had reduced payout prices in a range between 2 and 4 cents compared to the price peak in 2001 (see also top agrar 9/2003, p. 82).

The third problem with which the founding group of the Northern Lights was faced in the mid 90s was the establishment of their own marketing concept.

Here too, theoretically two alternatives were on offer. On the one hand, the founding of an own dairy would have lead to a situation which would have given the group the full control over the entire chain of value creation, and thus would have lead to an independent marketing strategy.

There are some other organic milk producers who chose this course in the 90s (see Oppermann 2001). But the situation of these groups cannot be compared with the situation of the Northern Lights. First, the number of participants was much greater. Second, those groups relied strongly on public help - also financial help. The financial risks were shared between state programs, organic farmers and private persons which became engaged in organic dairy farming.

The Northern lights group didn't work under such conditions. Although it is necessary to underscore the financial risks and the limitations created by an undeveloped market, some individual and political constraints must be appreciated. It seems that the leading persons of the group were driven by traditional farmer mentalities to concentrate on the production side and to ignore marketing. In addition, strong family traditions – some persons in the founding group of the Northern Lights look back to traditions of cooperation with the regional cooperative dairy which once was founded by their grandfathers.

Moreover, at that time political support with respect to favourable credit programs and with respect to all forms of moral and political backing was not on the agenda in the North. Therefore the Northern Lights decided to enter into a long-term commitment with the dairy in H. which was based on the following arrangement. The dairy H. took full responsibility for the processing of milk and additionally gave some support in the establishment of commercial relationships with the larger buyer groups in the food retail sector. On the other hand it became not directly involved in the trade business.

With a processing quantity of 500 mio kg milk (2003), the dairy in H. is one of the major dairies in northern Germany. It belongs to the group of dairies with sound structures concentrating itself on rationalisation and modern technologies. The proportion of organic milk in relation to the entire volume of milk processed by the dairy is very low, but this is typical for many dairies in Germany which have just begun to process organic milk in recent years. A survey on this issue indicates that the 20 dairies regarded are processing 364 Mio. kg of conventional milk on average and only 7,5 mio. kg of organic milk. So, the proportions between organic and conventional milk we have found in the H. dairy are not unusual. But the figures also show that in the case of the H. dairy the organic producers are in a even more inferior position than we can find in comparable dairies.

The H. dairy primarily produces drinking milk (fresh milk and long-life milk). It is supplied by 850 farmers from Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. These farmers, in turn, are affiliated in a supply co-operative consisting of roughly 1000 members. In recent years the dairy in H. has developed an intense cooperation with the second biggest dairy group in Germany. The dairy in H. argues that the cooperation has

specific benefits. Particularly sales guarantees for large quantities of milk and a better standing when confronting big retail chains are cited.

Within this framework, the Northern Lights present themselves at markets on the one hand as a regional producer and on the other hand, as the name „Weidemilch“ [Pasture Milk] is intended to express, as a producer of organic milk unequivocally following the tradition of pasture keeping.

“We want consumers to know that we get our milk straight from north German pastures. We want that the consumer is able to know exactly what the organic farmer feeds his animals with and that the farmer himself stand up for fodder quality. When hearing ‘Weidemilch’ we want the consumer to associate with it that the fodder has not been imported from Brazil, and that farmers have used their experiences and their professional know-how to produce good animal feed and to eliminate all risks. This, more or less, is the guiding theme in our advertising“.

In comparison, the catchment areas of two other of the supplied food retailers are somewhat smaller. These are food retailers carrying out the majority of their trade in Schleswig-Holstein, and which have established themselves only partly in Hamburg, Mecklenburg, and in northern Lower Saxony.

The “Hamfeld Group”

The second group we visited borrows its name from the farm still run by the group’s original initiator. It is a group with most of its members working and living in the southern parts of Schleswig-Holstein. Furthermore, some farms in Mecklenburg (3 farms), in northern Lower Saxony (4 farms), and a farm in the city of Hamburg belong to this group. In principle, there is no greater spatial overlapping with the Northern Lights region.

In early 2004, the Hamfeld group consisted of 13 farms. With an acreage of 150 ha each, the size of the farms is much above the average size in Schleswig-Holstein. The quota of the milk produced varies considerably. The smallest producer supplies 60 000 kg of organic milk, and the largest 1.2 million kg. Another large producer supplies 900 000 kg. Thereafter, a number of farms follow with 600 000 and 500 000 kg. These farms can be qualified as big family farms which, with respect to structural requirements, are fit for the future.

Because of the size and the structure of farms, the transportation costs are relatively low. They are stated with 0.7 cent per kg of milk. In 2002, the payout price for organic milk was 37.5 cents. So the Hamfeld group is a good example for organic farmers which enjoyed high prices for organic milk in last years. Some producers even have reached prices of 43 cents - all extra charges included.

The group’s starting point were sales difficulties of the group’s initiator in his attempts with direct marketing concepts for his organic milk. Customers, scared by press reports on E. coli (EHEC) in milk which had not been pasteurised in 1994 did not want to take any more unpasteurized organic milk directly from the farm. As an alternative, initially there were considerations to build up a farm dairy and to pasteurize their own milk.

At the same time, a management change took place in the neighbouring conventional dairy in T. In the face of the merry-go-round of take-overs within the dairy industry, the new manager was looking for further opportunities to maintain the independence of his only small to medium sized dairy.

The manager in T. looked for other quality offers and specialized production concepts in order to find a niche for his dairy. He was convinced that an organic range of products could be useful for him, while continuing to emphasize on conventional products.

Thus a cooperation was established between Hamfeld farm and the dairy in T. and in the end all concepts for a farm dairy were given up by the Hamfeld farm. The Hamfeld farm began to gather a group of organic farmers ready to deliver organic milk to the dairy in T. and the dairy in T. began to establish an organic range of market milk.

The dairy which works with the Hamfeld group is a co-operative dairy processing approximately 60 mio. kg of milk. The dairy was founded at the end of the 19th century as a village dairy, and from 1910 onwards was managed as a co-operative dairy. In every respect, it has been established on the market as a producer of specialities. In the first half of the twentieth century the dairy had been specialised in cheese production. From 1949 to 1989 it was an ice cream producer which produced ice cream under its own label and was very successful in this market for nearly 30 years.

However, when the ice cream market was flooded with standardized products in the late 1980s, the dairy was facing the question of where a new market for specialities could be built up. The dairy's management was clear about the fact that *„a small dairy offering standard products could not be viable, because the larger dairies are more cost effective by miles“*. If a decision in favour of serving the mass market for standard consumer milk would have been taken at this time, a radical downsizing would have become unavoidable. According to the management, this would have meant laying off at least 50 of the 75 employees.

The remedy came in the form of introducing a longer lasting consumer milk. With the help of a so-called draught procedure, the milk is heated up gently, whereby the nutritional values remain unchanged. The procedure is based on a Dutch patent and was introduced by the dairy in T. to Germany in the 1990s. The milk processed in this way will last for 15 days.

Most of the organic market milk of the dairy in T. is also processed to a longer lasting organic milk. The dairy in T. initially introduced the *„longer lasting organic milk“* into its product range in order to supplement its conventional line.

First of all this step turned out to be very successful. Sales quickly overtook supply, so that the group was soon able to expand in the organic sector. Furthermore, prices obtained for the milk were very high. The Hamfeld group therefore achieved *„the best organic milk price which you could find in the North at that time“*. This is not an abstract statement but can be underpinned by facts. An overview over market trends in the organic milk sector

which has been published by an organic journal only recently shows that the payout prices of the dairy in T. rank in the upper quarter.

The marketing of milk products takes place on two levels. There is a „home label“ of the Hamfeld group with its own logo for milk, butter, and – still in the process of being established – for cheese. This label is marketed through health-food shops and wholefood stores.¹² About 2 million kg of milk flow into this marketing channel. In total 7-8 million kg of organic milk are produced.

Most of the milk, however, flows into the „longer lasting organic milk“ range and is marketed nationally by the dairy and in some cases even Europe-wide. The national marketing also involves the organic wholesalers. Since the group maintains good relationships with a big organic wholesaler (denree) operating nationally, this marketing link cannot be described as regional either.

Compared to the Northern Lights, the market prospects have always looked better for the Hamfeld group in past years. The first years are described as a period of constant growth, and even for the weak year 2002, a growth rate of 10 percent was expected by our interlocutors. One reason was the opening of new national marketing channels for the group. Thus, in comparison with the Northern Lights, the Hamfeld-group has worked under much better economic conditions since the beginning.

In addition, economic weights between conventional products and the organic product line are much better balanced in the T. dairy. Conventional milk is not as predominant as it is for the H. dairy. Nevertheless the dairy in T. will stay a conventionally-run dairy – at least for a very long time. According to our interlocutors there are no signs that relevant factions of the conventional farmers will shift to organic dairy farming in the near future.

Another advantage for the Hamfeld-group is, however, the marketing strategy of the T. dairy. All in all, the marketing strategy can be characterized as a more quality oriented strategy. Convincing the markets with quality products and working in niche markets is therefore not uncommon for the dairies management because its own dairy tradition has been marked by niche marketing with stronger quality requirements deriving from this.

Problems of Cooperation between Organic Dairy Farmers and Dairies

According to our interlocutors, communication between farmers and dairies has become more difficult in the last years. The climate of communication between dairies and farmers has changed for which the already mentioned downturn of the milk markets and particularly of organic milk market has to be blamed first.

The most serious consequence of sluggish milk markets can be characterized very simply: bargaining on prices and on other conditions of milk delivery has become harder - a fact which is underlined by both sides.

¹² In Germany health food shops sell only organic produce. On the other side, the so-called Reformhäuser also can be found in food markets. Approximately 70 percent of the produce sold is organic.

Nevertheless, the organic farmers are more concerned by these changes than the two dairies are. Members of Northern Lights as well as of the Hamfeld group report constant pressures by their dairies in order to bring down payout prices for organic milk.

For the Northern Lights, who were already better accustomed to price pressures in the years before 2000, recent price cutbacks lived up their expectations. But as recent price cuts have led to a situation where the loss of profitability for organic milk production has become an acute problem, it is reported that the atmosphere of communication between farmers and their dairy is charged with more tensions.

In addition, a growing dissatisfaction among the members of the Northern Lights group can be noticed. When we met the spokesman of the group he even didn't exclude the possibility that some members of the Northern Lights could be tempted to reconvert their farms to conventional dairy farming. Especially some newcomers in the group who were attracted by more comfortable payout prices and fast growing markets in 2000 and 2001 could do so, our interlocutor said.

On the other hand the existing structural similarities between depressed conventional markets and ailing organic markets are seen as a stabilizing factor for organic dairy production by the Northern Lights spokesman because a switch to conventional farming wouldn't ease the economic situation for concerned farmers. So the reported reflections should be seen more as general indicator for uncertainties prevailing at the moment.

With regard to the next years the Northern Lights are convinced that pressures on payout prices will last. But it is not a too restricted growth which is made responsible for this outlook. From the point of view of the Northern Lights, most consumers of organic produce are more attracted by low prices than by quality products so that low-price-retailers and low-price food in general will considerably extend their market-share in organic markets. As a result, organic farmers will be confronted with pressures on payout prices for organic milk despite growing markets. One of the Northern Lights members has put his conviction into remarkably clear and open words:

"The consumer attitude towards organic produce is not as friendly, as it is often maintained. In conventional marketing channels, cost effectiveness counts most and in consequence we find a situation that 20 per cent of consumer milk is sold by ALDI. On top of this, there are all the other discounters as for example the LIDL group, the PLUS group and so on. Taken together discounters account for more than 50 percent of the milk market and no end of the expansion of discounters is actually in sight." ... "On the other hand, even in average supermarkets you will find a lot of "white label goods" today, which means goods which are sold under a genuine low-price-label of the respective supermarket chain and not under the label of the dairy which has processed the milk. These goods have been created in last years in order to compete directly with the product range offered by discounters. What we have generally seen in recent years is a strong growth in the segment of cheap milk products. This leads me to draw the conclusion that most of the consumers are interested in low prices and not so much in quality. And as far as I can see it, this is

especially true for organic milk markets, because we have seen growing price competition in this markets last years “.

A recent report about the success of organic milk in discounter shops shows that in a very short time the discount marketing channel has reached a market share of 12 percent (see Bio-Handel, Januar 2004, p. 9). Being confronted with such experiences, the considerations of the Northern Lights seem to express a lot of realism.

According to the Northern Lights' spokesman, the attitudes of organic consumers will lead to high growth rates of white label products in organic markets. He supposes that the great number of organic white labels which have been created by retailers in last years are an unambiguous proof of these changes.

Furthermore, he expects that sooner or later the discounters chains will become a permanent feature in organic milk markets. Several test runs have already taken place and experts indicate that the reactions of consumers were friendly.

The most discussed example in Germany was the integration of organic milk in the organic BioBio-range of the PLUS discounter chain in 2002. If this example were to be followed by other discounters, pressures on prices for organic milk would certainly increase.¹³ In consequence, a further reduction in the organic surcharge by one or two cents is considered as a realistic scenario for the future by our interlocutors.

On the other hand we know from our interview with a big retailer group that there is no rule that prices in mass markets can only go down. Particularly in 2001, when the BSE crisis reached its peak in Germany, food became a matter of public concern and, supported by a changing public climate, some large retailers managed to bring up milk prices because even standardized produce like consumer milk became produce of a higher esteem. In this period, prices rose by nearly 5 cent per kg milk and milk selling became a very profitable segment for retailers.

This period, however, ended very quickly. According to our interlocutors, in 2002 concerns over food quality became weaker and the general economic crisis with high unemployment rates and consumers looking for cheap products brought the upswing period to an end.

The Northern Lights, for their part, are sure that they cannot escape from the logics of downward going prices. As they are strongly committed to the food retail trade business in their commercial relations, they either have to follow suit or withdraw into smaller marketing niches. One of the farmers we have seen explains:

“I am not convinced by the general condemnation of the discounters which you can hear very often in the organic scene. We will have to face reality and try out what can be really achieved in markets ruled by discounters by us. We cannot ignore that even organic

¹³ The ZMP statistics have begun to compare the prices for organic products for different sales channels. It is obvious that discounter prices are much lower. Organic milk (3.5 percent fat) was sold on average for 0.97 Cents in December 2003. The discount price for organic milk, however, stood at 0.80 Cents at this moment. The same can be seen in the yoghurt market where average prices for organic yoghurt stood at around 0.43 Cent while organic yoghurt sales in discount shops stood around 0.30 Cents.

consumers are attracted by discount-lines. I think, that when we are facing a situation that the discounters are fully implemented in organic milk markets, we must play an active part in this development“.

This also means that everybody who strives for a positive arrangement with discount channels and other low-price marketing concepts must be aware of the consequences for his standing on markets for organic milk produce. It would be misleading to ignore that harsh consequences for internal communication, communication to customers and marketing strategies for the public as well as for cooperation strategies with all involved dairies have to be taken in account.

For these questions we didn't find clear strategies and convictions, but rather a more or less shy flirt with new options and ways of thinking about the future. What we have heard from farmers are some general reflections, but no practical consequences and tactical reflections at all.

A Shy Flirt with Organic Mass Production

Some general reflections can be summarized as well. Although they are not made concrete by our interlocutors they show that traditional meanings with regard to the general the economic and social function of organic farming have been put under the microscope by some of our actors.

First, getting involved in organic mass production is no longer seen as an act of treason of the holy principles of organic production. In consequence, organic farmers have to revise their concepts of communication. To communicate to consumers in a effective way certainly means that organic farmers will continue to underline the environmental benefits of organic production and they will continue to underpin the relevance of animal welfare for organic dairy farming.

But it looks neither convincing nor does it really help organic farmers to create progressive social meanings with regard to the role and function of organic farming if they continue to portray themselves as stewards of small economic and social units and decentralized marketing strategies. The economic and social dynamics they experience cannot discussed in categories of an idyllic “small is beautiful world”.

In addition, whoever takes the assumptions of a growing low-price/mass production segment in organic markets seriously must be prepared to form a longstanding “cartel of rationalization” with his partners in the domain of processing and marketing. If it becomes necessary for organic farmers to make their own cost structures „winter tight“, as one Northern Lights farmer has called it, first organic farms must constantly strive for economies of scale and the farmers themselves must become ardent pioneers of rationalization and cost effective organization.

But second, a systemic dimension appears and must be taken in account. It is the question of synergies in the whole food chain which has to be taken seriously and which implies a constant dialogue about economic prospects and strategies of marketing.

What we have found on the side of the farmers and of the side of the dairies in this respect is neither fish nor fowl. A shy flirt with the perspectives of organic mass production has begun on the side of some farmers. The above cited positions about the relevance of discounter channels and low-price concepts are testimony to the relevance of this problems.

What we have seen on the side of the dairies and the retailers is even less, because there are no signs for common discussions with organic farmers about this subject.

This is an astonishing fact if we regard to the situation of the Hamfeld Group. In contrast to the experiences of the Northern Lights, the price pressure executed on the Hamfeld group in 2002 to bring down payout prices was a completely new experience for this group.

The cutback of prices provoked anxieties among the members of the group. But as other groups of organic farmers had to resign to deeper price cuts, and as the payout prices even after the price cut of 2002 stayed relatively high for the Hamfeld group, the downswing of prices was not regarded as a cause of conflict but rather as for a new basis of cooperation between organic farmers and their dairy.

In the months following the decline of the milk markets, the attitude to marketing strategies which bind together organic farmers and conventional dairies began to change. For the first time general doubts were expressed on the side of the Hamfeld group.

“We are now aware that we don’t have the same way of thinking. We have learned that our dairy doesn’t share our ideas with regard to strategic options. We try to grow smoothly and are convinced that growth always must be based on the quality of our products. Although organic farming is also a business we have quality aspirations which have to do with animal welfare, nature protection and trustful relationships to consumers based on trust in good products”.

On the side of the dairy the aspirations of organic farmers were not taken up. The position of the management can be resumed in the following words.

“Organic is a business. You will make profits and if you cannot make money in the business you have to give it up”.

What has become questionable for the Hamfeld group is the division of functions between organic farmers and their conventional dairy. Under ideal circumstances organic farmers had to look for an outstanding quality of the produce while the dairy had look for an outstanding quality of procession and a marketing strategy focused on quality marketing.

For the Hamfeld group this kind of functional division of responsibilities has become become doubtful. In the interviews examples are cited by organic farmers in which they had been presented by their dairy with accomplished facts and simply had to swallow them.

Further doubts formulated by Hamfeld members concern the balance of risks. From their point of view, the dairy has improved its quality image on milk markets by integrating an organic milk line. New groups of customers have been won, so that as an appropriate service in return an offensive marketing strategy for organic products had been expected by the Hamfeld group. But that didn’t happen at all. Doubts of the Hamfeld group

therefore are also based on the abilities of their dairy to foster a marketing strategy which highlights the specific qualities of organic production. Finally, the Hamfeld group argues that the building up of full line program of organic produce was not pushed ahead by the dairy in T. The Hamfeld group wishes a long term engagement of their dairy in organic markets which on the other side would lead to a certain disregard of short term profitability.

At the moment the internal discourse of the Hamfeld group points in a completely different direction as the discourse of the Northern Lights is pointing.

The members of the Hamfeld group are discussing whether their “commercial marriage” with an conventional run dairy hasn’t to be qualified an anachronism. When we visited the Hamfeld group the discussion on whether it would be appropriate to change the partner was just beginning. From all what we have heard about, this has to be qualified as a very prudent consideration.

We have heard in the interviews that some efforts in this direction had been undertaken in the past. But these efforts faltered because in practice the only short term working alternative would be the dairy in H. with its much lower price level, so that this alternative soon turned out to be fruitless.

The representatives of the Hamfeld group are convinced that it would be the best solution to have a dairy of their own. But for the Hamfeld group the strategic hurdle remains the question whether the full control of processing and marketing is really worth a big and risky financial engagement.

At the moment the members of the Hamfeld group don’t see a real chance for building up an own organic dairy, but they also make clear that they would take a higher financial risk if any public aid could be mobilized for such a project.

Poor Chances for Intensified Cooperation between the two Groups of Organic Dairy Farmers

Today, a second factor makes the position of both groups of organic farmers extremely vulnerable. Under the conditions described above it would be extremely helpful to unite the two groups of farmers or to form cooperations in marketing. As success on markets depends heavily from a powerful position with regard to their dairies and as additionally a broader range of organic milk products could help to improve their standing on markets the forces of the two groups should be combined or marketing perspectives will stay bleak. In theory this position is confirmed by all actors to whom we have spoken. In one of the interviews for example the following was stated:

“If all organic dairy farmers in Schleswig-Holstein would cooperate with each other, a broad north German organic milk range could be built up. We would have much more clout against the competition from the South and West. And of course, we’d be able to advertise in a much more offensive way than we do it today“.

In our interviews, both groups referred to this issue. But both described examples of cooperation which had been tried out in the past, but had failed each time because of the other group's mistakes. Basically, the actors of each of the other groups are blamed for not being able and willing to cooperate.

In one interview, it is stated that one could not cooperate with the other group because the representative of that group would „*only think of his own interests*“. Furthermore, a lack of understanding for long-term strategies is blamed. The other group would not be prepared to think beyond the „*confines of the day-to-day business*“. All these statements are being fed with single examples such as the example that the respective other group allowed a joint butter business to fall through, when „*from one day to the other*“ a firmly promised butter supply was canceled because, at that time, the other group was able to sell the milk to another dairy at a better price.

This, in turn, is countered by the other group with the accusation, that this butter business was an attempt at „*price dumping*“, which would have led to a destruction of the price level at market. It is even being recorded that the butter price would have fallen below the price for conventional non-blended butter. Since some financial investment had already been carried out in expectation of the planned cooperation (wrapping paper and packaging materials for butter), not only future market opportunities had been destroyed, but a real financial loss was also incurred.

The question of whether organic dairy farmers can foster a common perspective for their activities at markets should be solved very quickly. It is a large handicap that they are separately facing dairies. Our experiences however show that a radical solution seems unrealistic. After we had finished our field work, some experts reported that the idea of forming a common round table of organic dairy farmers in the North has gained acceptance. We cannot make a fair judgement on this information. Referring to the intense quarrels we have heard of, we are, however, sceptical that the climate will change soon. On the other hand, the ongoing deterioration of the milk markets leaves no alternatives to affected organic farmers.

The Missing Regional Perspective

As we have already indicated, a very specific problem of organic milk producers in the north of Germany is the competition from organic produce coming from south German organic dairies, as well as coming from a big organic dairy in North Rhine-Westphalia. This problem had already existed for a number of years. During the boom years of 2000 and 2001 it was not noticed very much by organic farmers, because the strong growth of organic milk markets seemed to offer room for the expansion of all competitors.

Since 2002 the competition with goods coming from other parts of Germany, however, is regarded again as a major problem for organic farmers in the North. In this context our interlocutors outline two topics.

First, fierce competition in organic milk markets with good from “outsiders” puts more pressure on prices and is restricting the chances to establish a better payout price in the

North. In addition, our interlocutors accuse southern dairies of price dumping. For example, it is being reported that the Northern Lights lost its deliveries to a cross-regional food retailer because a south German competitor had offered its organic milk products 10 cents cheaper. Our interlocutor told us:

“The dairies in p. and A. are market leaders on the organic milk market. They act nationwide and at the moment they are waging a real price war against us in order to safeguard their market share. We did have solid business relations with the food retail trade chain E. and regularly delivered our milk to this retailer. But some months ago we were dumped from this business because the organic dairy A. from Bavaria undercut us by an entire 10 cents. How they are going to be able to cope with these prices, I don’t really know. But what I know very well is that when pressure on prices assumes such proportions, we are no longer able to withstand it“.

The Hamfelder-group also describe the already cited companies in p. and A. as “troublemakers” in the market and as their main competitors. Here too, relevant pressures on prices and the same price dumping practices which are reported by Northern Lights are mentioned.

“We all know the methods of p. He pays less and less to organic farmers. Recently, Bioland organized a meeting in the region where all organic dairy farmers and our dairies agreed to fixed prices for organic milk we were going to offer on the market. Immediately afterwards, p. undercut our common arrangement by 4 cents. With such prices farmers are no longer able to work and to cover their costs. The farmers who produce for p., however, don’t dare to fight back against these methods. They probably don’t have an alternative for the sale of their milk“.

The problem with competitors coming from other regions, however, isn’t only a problem of price. Under the already cited conditions, one can hardly imagine how organic dairies which are located in northern Germany can conquer a greater share of the organic milk market. The two groups of organic farmers are delivering milk for consumer milk production and they observe that it is risky to expand their production if big dairies from outside occupy the market and are using dumping practices.

But with regard to the entire milk and cheese business another problem will soon emerge. If northern organic dairies and organic farmers try to build up new lines of products - for example in the markets of cheese, whey cheese, yogurt or cream they are facing competitors which have already put these products on the markets and have won the confidence of consumers.

Consequences for the Future: Chances and Challenges for Reasonable Discourses on Growth and Empowerment

The experiences presented above show how difficult it is for organic farmers in the dairy sector to build up a long standing economic perspective for their own farms and by doing this to offer a promising example for conventional farmers who are flirting with the idea of becoming organic.

The most important problem organic dairy farmers are facing, a problem directly related to the question of empowerment of regional actors, is the question, whether the conquest of markets and the development of appropriate concepts for marketing can be put forward by favouring clear preferences for mass production or for quality production.

What has to be stated first is the fact, that the development of markets indicates that a clear choice has to be made but that the discussion among organic dairy farmers is just beginning. Today, this discussion is in its infancy at best. This is not only a question of time-lag for farmers and other actors in the countryside. It is also a question whether organic farmers can act in an offensive manner or are only reacting in a defensive style to deteriorating market conditions.

Especially the members of the Northern Lights, which have worked under uncomfortable economic conditions for a long time, are aware that something has to be done and are beginning to reflect the advantages and disadvantages of organic mass production. Nevertheless a clear concept and a clear decision has not yet been worked out. What we have seen are more tentative efforts than strategic considerations or an elaborated plan to cope with their problems.

But up to now neither the Hamfeld-group nor the Northern Lights have begun to reflect on whether an alliance between medium sized farms and much bigger dairies following the logics of industrialized production and of a market dominated by big retailers and low-price strategies can really work on a basis of equality, of confidence and mutual understanding or if farmers.

The critics about dairies and retailers we have heard are reconstructable. But they are not accompanied by concrete measures so that we cannot be sure that they will be productive and lead to a break with former traditions of cooperation.

The question whether it is possible to build up an own organic dairy must be put on the agenda. Both groups have raised the question and have ruled out the creation of an own dairy because the amount of investments would stretch the actors' financial possibilities too much.

Under these circumstances the question must be raised if a combined initiative would be more successful and as this issue is not only relevant for organic dairy farmers but for the entire organic sector as well as for organic friendly consumers and institutions the chances for a broader based initiative should be evaluated.

Perhaps a mixed solution would be more realistic. Given the situation of medium sized dairies in northern Germany which is characterized by fierce competition and pressure on their prices it would be possible to find a solution which gives organic dairy farmers better chances to bring more different products to markets.

In principle, organic dairy farmers who opt for quality strategies have a lot of problems to solve. They must broaden the range of organic products. They must create regional labels. They must play the card of regional identity in order to compete with dairies from the South and the West. Communication of regional values and regionally based quality images to the public is still underdeveloped. A strategy grounded on regional aspirations

has not been developed yet, despite some single attempts which have been undertaken in the past.

Last but not least, the question how organic dairy farmers can be led to more sector internal cooperation must be raised. Because organic markets are not balanced and because organic milk production and its products must defend its profile in typical mass markets, whoever raises the question whether it is possible for organic farmers to free themselves from the constraints of mass markets must show how to do this in practice and therefore must test new concepts and ways out. When we met the two groups of farmers we didn't find a clear discourse about internal changes, alternatives in business organisations and concrete measures as well as of financial, institutional and personal "costs" of ways out but a more or less backward looking discourse was dominating.

It is not appropriate to give good advice from outside, and additionally we have no idea who is really guilty of uncooperative practices and who is not. Our general impression is, however, that there are no objective constraints to overcome. Neither the structures between the two groups of farmers are incompatible nor do we see deep-going problems in marketing access and in marketing power

The already mentioned, personal rivalries are a clear signal for backward-oriented discourses for us, because this discourse concentrates on bad experiences in the past and not on the challenges of the future. This means that all narrow-minded ways of thinking about cooperation among organic dairy farmers must be brought to an end. Most of all farmers must become aware of the catastrophic consequences of their sectarian distance-keeping from another. A radical improvement of their situation only can be achieved if the speechlessness among the two groups of farmers will be finished. As long as we objectively have a *divide et impera* (*divide and conquer*) situation, the chances of rebalancing the power structures in markets and of conquering new markets remain poor.

Second, for the examination of the future for organic farming it is crucial to clarify, if organic farmers can escape from objective inferiority as mere producers of raw materials by forming alliances with conventional dairies and retailers which are concentrating on quality management, quality control and the development of new marketing channels with proper communication concepts in the domain of advertising and public information.

To cope with these problems, a big leap forward in the creation of adequate structures of internal cooperation is needed. Perhaps this is the most important lesson which can be drawn from our field experiences. If organic dairy farmers would handle the problem of quality control in an offensive manner and if consumer aspirations on transparent lines of production and marketing are taken seriously, not only a new field of communication must be built up but fundamental organisational prerequisites (common structures of business representation) have to be established.

Case study 3: Water and Nature Protection Activities in the Eutin Region

The third case refers to nature conservation projects. The projects and the communication strategies related to them are interpreted as important aspects of rural development. We argue that in rural areas sustainability on a large scale depends on the ability of actors and institutions to combine long standing concepts of nature conservation with other economic and social development concepts.

The case illustrates why and how different actors have become engaged in nature protection activities what meanings they give to their specific activities. In addition, the case makes clear that cooperation between actors with different social and cultural backgrounds is needed to create convincing perspectives for nature protection. On the other side deficits in cooperation turn out to be one of the most retardant factors for progressive rural communication.

Just as the two previous cases the third case is located in Schleswig-Holstein, namely in the administrative district of East-Holstein (Landkreis Ostholstein). Today this district has 205 000 inhabitants. We have only looked at a part of the administrative district.

The area we have studied more intensely is the so-called Holstein Lake or Swiss District. The name is an allusion to the many lakes of the region and to the hilly landscape. The region is noted for many still water and running water resources. Moreover it is a very intersected country. The region is attractive for tourists and in fact tourism forms a strong pillar of the regional economy.

Currently about 40 000 to 50 000 people live in this part of the district. The district town of Eutin (17 000 inhabitants) is located in the centre of the region, so that in the following we use the term „Eutin-case“.

All interlocutors to whom we have spoken live and work in Eutin or in neighbouring communities. Their professional as well as their political fields of activity, however, sometimes are spread out somewhat wider. They include other parts of the administrative district of East-Holstein or reach into the neighbouring district of Plön.

While the projects and activities our interlocutors are taking part in are of local and regional nature, some parts of the concepts and strategies are also integrated in activities of nature protection and landscape planning with a much wider scope. The activities for some projects reach as far as Denmark in the north and Poland in the east. With the new framework guidelines on water, decided by the EU and the various Baltic Sea programs, this orientation will even become stronger.

The landscape of the Eutin region is also characterized by wide open fields. The lakes are connected by little rivers. The most important ones are the Schwentine and the Schwartau. The protection of water and the re-naturalization of these two rivers as well as some neighbouring brooks is an important matter of concern for environmentalists and also for the regional administration, because in this way the transportation of polluting substances

into the Baltic could be substantially reduced. Above all, nitrogen and phosphorus mostly coming from agriculture are concerned.

Grassland valleys, natural and artificial ponds as well as swamp holes (locally known as “Kuhlen” or “Sölle”) across the open fields and meadows frequently occur in the landscape. On one side they are typical for the topography of the landscape and on the other side they represent an important ecological potential. So ecological aspects and the conservation of a cultivated landscape must be seen together.

In former times open fields and meadows were divided by small copses and hedgerows. Today the number of copses and hedgerows has been reduced significantly. Therefore, the protection of the remaining hedgerows has become a main issue for nature protection in the region, too. In this regard the ecological problems of the Eutin region resemble much to the ecological problems of other regions in Schleswig-Holstein.

However, the region is also characterized by intensive agriculture. Roughly 1000 square kilometres of land are used for agricultural purposes, which means that more than two thirds of the region are used for agrarian purposes. The agricultural structures (size of the farms, technical equipment, profits) are among the most healthy ones in West Germany. Economic results in the farming sector are clearly above national average. Intensive agriculture has a long tradition in this region, reaching back for more than 50 years. Intensive agriculture and intensive remodelling of agricultural used land historically however went hand in hand with significant losses of biotopes in this area (see Kreis Ostholstein 2000 and Ministerium für ländliche Räume, Landesplanung, Landwirtschaft und Tourismus des Landes Schleswig-Holstein 2002).

In previous years tourism has become an important growth sector. Conflicts related to contradictions between tourism and concepts of landscape conservation have become more familiar in last years. Only very recently some efforts have been undertaken to carve out a softer tourism for the future. By doing so, the region which competes with tourist resorts located directly at the Baltic Sea, intends to achieve a competitive advantage.

Finally, the region is characterized by strong and steadily ongoing urbanization. As a region which still has to be classified as a rural region it is marked by a high population density (about 140 inhabitants per square kilometre). Furthermore, it lies within the suburban fringe of the towns of Lübeck and Kiel. Holiday homes for people from across the Federal Republic but particularly from Hamburg are widespread and a growing demand for this type of settlements can be stated.

This has a large impact on residential development and the utilization of land. As villages and small towns continue to expand land becomes more scarce. In addition, growing mobility in professional life has led to rising demands for roads and infrastructures for modern traffic. For these reasons the topic of space consumption for residential and infrastructure purposes has become a burning economic and political issue in the region.

The social structures of the villages in the region have also changed drastically in last decades. The role of agriculture as an economic factor and the importance of the agrarian population with regard to social and cultural traditions have decreased considerably. The

diagnostic that the farmer has largely been removed from rural social relations and cultural structures applies also to this region. And for this region, too, it can be stated that the differences in the social composition of the population between town and country have shrunk to a minimum.

On the other hand a comprehensive use of land and the protection of landscape together were guaranteed by traditional farming systems. For economic reasons it is not possible to restore traditional farming systems so that a modern answer (or modern answers) for the problems has (have) to be found. Going back to wilderness only makes sense for restricted areas and to split up landscapes into areas under intensive use and areas under extensive use also leads to limited ecological results.

All in all the question whether it is possible to find a “historical compromise” between modern agriculture and social groups and political institutions stimulating nature protection concepts is the key for the understanding of a lot of unsolved conflicts in the Eutin region. This however implies that the interest of farmers have to be integrated in landscape protection strategies and that farmers on the other side must open their minds for new arrangements of concepts and interests.

The starting point for the analysis of regional development concepts and for regional policy thus can be defined as an rectangle of interests. It consists of four corner-stones: environmental protection and the protection of natural landscapes, the development of agriculture (and forestry), tourism as a landscape related business and also the residential and mobility interests of the population. In areas close to the lakes fishery must be added as a further position of interest. How these demands can be balanced and how conflicts over landscape utilization can be managed, therefore has become an important issue in regional politics.

An integrated concept of policy didn't exist till recently. Agriculture has managed to concentrate on the improvement of high yield strategies. Environmental protection and the conservation of nature focused only on special issues and restricted areas. The fragmentation of landscapes by urbanization processes and by land use for touristic purposes was more or less seen as a minor factor.

The subject of the protection of lakes and running waters has a high priority in this. Whereby in practical terms, not only aquatic biotopes are concerned, but a large part of the landscape along river embankments, brooks and biotopes in the vicinity of lakes have to be integrated into political concepts. The case study therefore focuses on the issue of the protection of lakes and running waters.

It takes up this subject in order to show how interests and social positions in this field can be categorized, which concepts and developments are creating dynamics of change, both positively or negatively, and what opportunities for intensified cooperation and communication may grow from them.

Environmental Policy and Cooperative Structures – Organizations and Stakeholders

In the Eutin region the major political forces of the German spectre of political parties (CDU, SPD, FDP, Green Party) and the most important business groups and groups which represent diverse social interest (unions, economic syndicates, business associations, representatives of large professional affiliations) are present. Similar to other rural districts in Schleswig-Holstein the national association of farmers still is a strong political factor with great influence.

Nevertheless a widely fanned out spectrum of green associations, citizens initiatives, and action groups working on subjects of nature protection are to be found in the region. These groups cannot look back to a long political tradition. They mostly have sprung up in the 80s, some of them even later. But the spectre of “green” groups has gained much audience in the public in recent years. Today they can be regarded as well established organizations, forming an integral and with regard to the public largely accepted part of the political spectre in the Eutin region.

According to our own experience, some of the members of environmental protection groups are also organized in political parties. Most of the actors whom we have spoken also show special preferences for one of the four parties represented in the national parliament or are members of professional associations. On the other hand all actors interviewed by us are strongly convinced that in the field of nature protection an extra engagement and the building up of a separate field of activities for environmental purposes is necessary.

This is also true with regard to the Green party. The great majority of environmental groups and associations working in the region don’t have special political relations with the Green Party. The engagement for natural conservation objectives we have found in the region, especially the founding of new “green” organizational structures and distinguished lines of communication with the public cannot be interpreted as a sign of deep going mistrust in existing political parties and institutions neither as an element of separation from political traditions in the region.

The necessity to independent organization however is underlined by most of the actors we have met during the fieldwork. These actors bring up the argument against established political parties that political parties are not aware enough of nature protection. They criticize the lack of knowledge and competences and they additionally argue that nature protection demands hard and continuous field work on a very practical level. For them engagement in nature protection has nothing to do with the power driven conflicts of the party machines, the always changing trends in political climate and poll oriented communication styles. Furthermore, political communication which culminate more or less in election campaigns is regarded as too far away from the idealistic approach of most people engaged in nature conservation.

We have looked to the different fields of environmental action and the motives of actors more closely in the our case study in the Eutin region. After first contacts had been prepared in spring 2003, in summer and autumn 2003 in total eight long interviews were

carried out with representatives of different groups and institutions active in the field of nature protection.

Taken together, the activities and experiences described by our interlocutors cover the period of the last ten years. However, the majority of activities and experiences described reach back only two to three years, so that we are presenting recent experiences and are showing a picture of the current political efforts and affairs in the region.

In three of the interviews conducted, two persons took part, but no controversies between these persons could be observed. Four of the interviews were conducted with only one person each. All in all the following institutions, organizations and associations were covered:

- public law institutions and semi-governmental organizations (2 interviews)
- organizations directly engaged in environmental protection and private actors working in the area of environmental protection (4 interviews)
- farmers from the Eutin region with a personal affiliation to environmental issues (2 interviews)

In detail, we met the following organizations and persons working in organisations engaged in nature protection. They do not represent all stakeholders involved in water protection issues and nature conservation strategies in the region but they give a rather complete picture of the main focuses of activities, political interests and strategies as well as of organizational practices and communicative efforts.

Department for the Environment of the Administrative District of East-Holstein (located in Eutin)

In Germany districts form the lowest administrative authority in environmental politics, which means that they are the lowest administrative level on which to carry out state and federal politics in the regions. Thus, it looks after sovereign duties in representation of the Federation and of the state of Schleswig-Holstein. Most of the work the Department has to carry out is linked to such substitutional functions.

A typical example is the implementation of the state's environmental protection legislation in the region, especially in the areas of land protection, of the protection of species, and the conservation of landscape.

Duties of this kind constitute the major part of the activities of the department. Additionally, there are the appraisals of plans concerning environmental issues in the regional administrative area, as well as reports on proceedings of approval in cases when environmental questions are concerned.

As an administrative body carrying out the resolutions of the district assembly as well as the political instructions by the head of the administrative district, the Department also serves as the instrument for carrying out purely regional measures, produced within the framework of municipal self-government.

This is especially true for all environmental protection tasks with which the district and the parties activists in the district intend to promote their own regional projects and matters of concern. In many cases, this refers to the co-financing of EU-programs. Currently, the main topics can be summarized as follows: conservation of hedgerows, introduction of minor waters in open field meadows and the restoration of former wetland areas. The re-naturalization of rivers and lakes is being worked on in close cooperation with the Wasser- und Bodenverband [water and soil association] (see below).

Beyond this, the Department for the Environment in its function as a lower environmental protection authority, is the favourite partner for citizens and local initiatives to approach on matters of environment and on environmental protection. On this level, contacts between environmental groups and associations engaged in environmental protection regularly take place. In this field of activities, though bound to legislation and administrative functions, the employees of the Department of Environment can act as genuine stakeholders.

According to our interviews the Department sees itself in this fields “less an bureaucratic institution but more as a partner for associations and nature protection groups”. The cooperation in general is described as fruitful. Some of the voluntary groups however are seen as not always able and willing to take over responsibilities for concrete nature protection projects. Some organizations additionally are criticized for their preference of unfounded polemics against polluters and environmental sinners. In this cases the Department tries to calm the spirits and orient the debate to realistic topics.

Moreover, the Department is described by many other stakeholders as an important communicant and therefore is seen largely as an active rather than only an reactive partner in regional environmental policy. The activities of the Department in general are graded positive and although there are some tensions between the more radical faction of environmentalist movement and the officers of the Department, all environmentalists we have spoken agree that the Department shows a lot of good will to come to acceptable solutions for all stakeholders and is run in a very professional style.

Environmentalists and other stakeholders also agree that the Department is very experienced in the field of nature conservation and environmental protection and that the officers skills and knowledges are helpful to find concrete solutions for difficult problems, particularly for political arrangements with a high degree of complexity. All in all, the Department is not seen as a mere bureaucratic body but as semi-political body which plays a positive role in bringing actors together and which actively takes part in regional communication processes.

In the domain of communication the Department is publishing its own papers, flyers and even booklets. It is very active in informing citizens as well as organized groups by special meetings on environmental problems and environmental projects run by the Department.

Seen from the point of view how the Department activities can be classified in terms of governance it must be stated that the Department has enlarged its administrative functions and has without any doubts integrated a dose of non governmental functions in its activities, so that it can be regarded as an administrative institution with some enlargements of its horizon to governance practices. The Department therefore sees itself as a “modern” administrative body, as an institution which is open in regard of new external requirements and the building up of networks with different partners in all fields of landscape protection and nature conservation.

The Wasser- und Bodenverband Ostholstein [water and soil association East-Holstein] (located in Eutin)

The association is a purpose serving association for the maintaining of diverse waters in the region. It currently looks after 8070 members. All land owners with pieces of land with direct contact to running water and lakes (including field ditches) must be members of the association and are paying charges for the maintenance of rivers, brooks, ditches and so forth. The association’s catchment area covers 18.430 ha at the moment. Some lakes belong to the catchment area, such as the Dieksee, the Kellersee, the Kleiner Eutiner See, and the Großer Eutiner See. In particular, there are 223 km of open waters (mostly little rivers, brooks and water channels) and 60 km of piped waters to be looked after. The maintenance of running waters is the field of activities in which conflicts between nature protection and other interests - as for example the interest of farmers to use their land very intensively - were widespread in the past.

Purpose serving associations of this kind in Germany exist in order to solve problems of common interest but where concrete solutions interfere with private property rights. On the other hand such associations are regarded as less bureaucratic and thus more efficient in integrating a multitude of interests and stakeholders, very often stakeholders which own only small pieces of land or announcing only very specific needs. The conciliation of interests and the transformation of many isolated cases into a common protection strategy is characteristic for such associations. In Germany, organizations of this kind, however, are subject to strict jurisdictional supervision and usually cooperate very closely with government organizations, so that they can be graded as semi-governmental. Self government however is guaranteed and the board of the association is chosen by the associations’ members.

The water and soil association has opened up to nature protection objectives only recently. For many years the association worked on the maintenance of waters mostly in order to protect citizens (particularly farmers) from floods and in order to free wet landscapes from water (drainage). Traditionally the interests of intensive farming and the interests of other citizens to be protected against floods and water-damages led to technological concepts to bring water out of the landscape as fast as possible. Such concepts didn’t took into consideration any ecological dimensions or dimensions of landscape and nature protection.

In the 90s the association however lived a sort of “greening” of its objectives and technical concepts. It began to look for compromises between traditional hydraulic engineering concepts and plans to renaturalize waters and by this it began to offer its organizational, planning, and technical capacities for stakeholders who were interested in re-naturalization concepts for lakes and running waters.

According to our interlocutor in the water and soil association the main reason for reorientation and the reshaping of water protection concepts was the change in public opinion. Ecological ideas and “green” aspirations became more familiar and popular in the region and put pressure on traditional concepts of water protection. The association became aware that it had to integrate ecological dimensions in its concepts of water maintenance in order to avoid conflicts and to be protected against declining credit.

Today, the association is engaged in the process of building up a system for the monitoring of positive and negative effects of hydraulic engineering. Environmental achievements have become a guideline for its daily practice. Currently, two main methods are employed: Annual inspections of the waters on foot are carried out by a voluntary „watch-keeping commission“. This underscores that the association tries to get its members directly involved in water protection activities. Secondly, an internal eco-audit (EC-environmental-audit-procedure) is being employed in the administrative catchment area of the association which results are regularly published.

The association is seen by other stakeholders as a powerful body which has to be mobilized for environmental purposes in the domain of water protection. The opening for environmental issues was largely welcomed by other actors in the field of nature protection and as the association represents many citizens in the region it is seen as an important transmission shaft between activists in environmental organizations and a broader public. Although some internal critics concerning the shift of objectives had to be stated in the past years the members of the water and soil association in general support the new course.

Similar to the Department of the district the water and soil association is held in high esteem as a competent communicant and therefore is widely accepted by other activists in nature conservation groups. Demands for support are not only placed in the domain of technical help but also apply to its recently gained ecological competences.

The water and soil association regularly uses regional medias to inform the public about its projects and measures. In addition, it is publishing flyers and brochures and is informing its members also by meetings. It has been also very active in organizing conferences which have brought together different actors and institutions in the region and which were focused to the discussion of longstanding objectives.

With regard to its structures the association is able to incorporate more governance principles than an administrative body can do it. In this regard it has conquered more new spaces of activities than the Department for the Environment had done it and has even more opened to new actors. In recent years the association also has experimented with networks which enlarge the activities of the association towards concrete projects of nature protection. The following one is the most prominent example for this development.

The Initiative Wasser Otter Mensch e.V. (WOM) [Water Otter Humans, Registered Society] (located in Eutin)

The Water-Otter-Humans registered association (WOM e.V.) was founded in 1999. It includes 22 groups and associations from the region as well as some voluntary working persons. The major objective of the society is the re-introduction of the fish otter into the region but also into the whole of Schleswig-Holstein (vgl. www.fischotter-schleswig-holstein.de). Different measures are being taken to protect the otter directly and to increase the population of the fish otter in the long run.

The most important measure is the ecological improvement of fish otter habitats. This applies most of all to open waters but also to all neighbouring habitats. A „close-to-nature development of the water systems“ is understood to be the best approach to the protection of otters. For this reason otter protection measures have to be regarded as an integral part of general water protection strategies.

A catalogue of concrete measures from the years 2000 and 2001 developed for the Schwentine river, the main river of the region, stipulates individual measures (e.g., removal of obstacles in their migration paths) and adjusts the objectives of otter protection to other interests and aims.

The initiative has come into being with the help and support of the Wasser- und Bodenverband. Today, the manager of the water and soil association is one of the most active persons in the otter protection group. The involvement of the water and soil association and its manager can be regarded as a concrete proof for the willingness to engage directly in nature protection fields and to overcome a view on water protection which is restricted to hydraulic engineering.

On from the beginning representatives of agriculture and hunting associations have been involved in the founding of the society and they still play a very active role. The otter protection group is aiming at building up a cooperative network around the issue of otter protection with the intention to integrate the associations of water management, the farmers and other land owners, leisure and professional fishermen, hunters and foresters, as well as organizations for the protection of the environment into common protection concepts. According to our interlocutors the society is the best example in the region for an association being able to bring together a multiple set of actors and associations and to integrate different interests. Especially the capacity of the society to work together with farmers in the region are underlined, because otter protection in landscapes near waters has much to do with extensive farming practices, so that concrete protection schemes cannot be worked out without the support of farmers.

For the future this network is intended to reach far beyond the studied region, in order to connect the otter population in Schleswig-Holstein with the otter population in Mecklenburg. As a next step, an expansion of activities into the area of the Schwartau river and the region of the Trave river is planned. In this part of the district the activities of the otter protection group and the activities of the Partnership Lübeck Bay are overlapping. At

the moment no common projects have been developed but both organizations are in contact.

In contrast to restricted species protection concepts or concepts with broader environmental horizons, the otter protection concepts also takes into consideration the future of people living in the natural habitats needed by the otter and their specific living conditions. The otter group propagates a reorientation of production in the food sector and of general objectives in agriculture. First of all it wishes to contribute to developments which lead to „new products and objectives“ and to regional circles of production and consuming in farming and in the food sector.

Propagating this the otter group will create spiritual as well as practical ties in daily social life between animal and nature protection issues and the economic and social interests of producers and customers in the region. Regional produce and the support of regional food chains are seen as key elements for the mobilization of endogenous potential which is able to build a bridge between the economic interests of farmers and fishers, the consumer interests of a broader public and nature protection activists.

In the eyes of the otter project, an important method of binding environmental protection targets to agricultural production interests, is environmental protection by contract. This offers the advantage of not infringing on the interests of land owners, and of being based on voluntarily negotiated contributions both by owners and environmentalists.

By this, the society has already developed from a single issue initiative to an actor in environmental politics with a much broader program. The society is seen by other actors in the region, to whom we have spoken, primarily as an actor in the field of nature protection respectively of animal protection. On the other hand the society has formed an alliance between different stakeholders which had not existed before in the region.

Although we have heard some critics, mostly because the daily practice falls behind the program, our interlocutors in general admit, that a sympathetic and effective way of bringing actors together has been explored by the society and actors in the region have told us, that the society can be taken as a model for bringing stakeholders together which are coming from different social and ideological traditions.

The group communicates its activities and objectives by regional medias and also by own meetings and excursions. Because cooperation with already existing organisations in the fields of hunting, farming and water protection is intense the group constitutes a promising knot for the extension of cooperative activities and for their deepening. As the group today is still in an very early stage of its development it is however hard to tell, how the development of the group will continue in the future. The activists whom we have spoken however are rather optimistic.

The Malenter Au [Malente Meadows] Project (no specific location)

The Malenter Au is a brook in the Eutin region. In former times the brook meandered down to the next lake but it was canalized later. Today the re-naturalization of the brook is regarded as an important starting point for a much more complex re-naturalization program

in the region. In last years some concrete re-naturalization measures have been started. All in all a stretch of 4 kilometres is covered by these measures. Thus the project can not be interpreted as a turning point of water protection but only as a starting point.

The project runs under the heading „farmers are shaping their environment“ because the active contribution by farmers is a special feature of the project. The farmers in the area of the brook Malenter Au are organized as an affiliation of active participants. It is the objective to combine less intensive forms of agriculture with concrete measures of water protection. In discussion are projects to return meadows and sections of wet woodlands to natural wetland areas. Old (partly piped) water connections shall be reconstructed and a lot of measures for the renaturalization of the brook and its embankments are planned.

Agriculture can support these aims, above all, by an extensive management of particularly sensitive grassland areas. Farmers who are participating in this programs are remunerated for their activities so that nature conservation has also become a source of income for them.

The project is described by our interlocutors as a successful attempt of bringing together different stakeholders and to win their approval for creating a new landscape. A balance must be struck between the protection of landscape and economic interests of landuser.

On the other hand only a very little part of the region is regarded. Critics in the region underscore that a much greater area should be covered by protection measures and they also underline that much more money is needed to re-naturalize bigger stretches along brooks and rivers. From this perspective they characterize the achievements of the project as a mere drop in the bucket.

In addition the area covered by re-naturalization measures is an area where agrarian user interests are not so strong. Critics therefore argue that it would be misleading to apply the positive experiences of the Malenter Au project directly to wider parts of the landscape in the Eutin region because in this case land user interests and nature protection strategies would turn out as much more antagonistic as they are in a very small area with restricted concepts of re-naturalization.

The Project Group Kingfisher (located in Malente)

Kingfishers belong to the endangered species in Germany and so it is in Schleswig-Holstein (see Jedicke 1997, p. 252). Kingfishers live in river and lake habitats. Their number has increased in recent years, but without any doubt the bird will remain on red lists for a long time, because successful protection schemes have been build up only in restricted areas.

The Kingfisher project has come into being as a joint project by ProNatur Schleswig-Holstein (a hunter organisation), the district's association of hunters, several local circles of custodians, and other groups (vgl. www.ljv-sh.de). General control, however, is exercised by a small circle of activists. About a dozen individuals regularly contribute to the work of the project group. As far as very intensive collaboration is concerned there are

only two people who can really named activists. Both are retired people and can thus can afford to invest much time for the project.

The kingfisher project has set itself the target to protect the kingfisher by the conservation of its habitats, and to promote the protection of the species by observation, by mapping, by constructing nesting aids, by caring for injured birds and by establishing feeding ponds for kingfisher, especially for winter times. By passing on observation data and by the publication of field experiences in scientific journals the project wishes to contribute also to the scientific treatment of the subject.

Additionally, informative events on the subject of the kingfisher in the public as well as excursions for those interested are being organized. In many aspects the group can be compared with the otter initiative. The most striking difference is the smaller number of activists and the self chosen one single issue profile of the group.

Because the kingfisher's habitat requires near-natural, ecologically intact still and running waters, for the members of the project the protection of the kingfisher has become synonymous with the protection of running waters and lakes. In so far the issue of „water ecology“ in general is awarded great significance. Connections with other ecological problems and fields of activities however are not being taken into consideration. Particularly relations between landscape use for agrarian purposes and landscape protection concepts are not taken up. The profile of the group is one of not interfering directly into political processes. The group is not interested in integrating ideas and concepts for rural transformation in its political horizon.

In addition, political conflict strategies to push through environmental demands are strictly rejected. The group's motto is: „No nursing of any profile neuroses“. This means that only concrete nature protection projects which don't lead to conflicts with other actors and interests are favoured. Groups which only „stir things up and are always opposed, as a matter of principle“ are strongly refused and political reform ambitions and political engagements in a more strictly sense are not to be found in the kingfisher circle.

In its proper field of activity, the kingfisher project nevertheless reaches beyond regional boundaries. The mapping of kingfisher populations is being coordinated for large parts of northern Germany, and through integration of the main activists into a supra-national network for the protection of the kingfisher, international experience can be exploited for the benefit of local work.

The group is seen by other interlocutors as one to be taken seriously in terms of competences in kingfisher protection and the protection of near natural habitats along rivers and brooks. Some of out interlocutors criticizes the group as too much inward looking. In addition, we have heard the argument that the activities of the group are dominated by a too small group of persons. The accusation that the group nourishes the personal ambitions of its leading persons can also be heard in the region.

On the other hand the group has established networks with other ornithologists in Schleswig-Holstein and engages actively for better cooperation among bird protectionists.

The group communicates by using regional medias, flyers and also brochures. It accepts critics that it hasn't build up extensive communication programs up to now. The group insists on the other side that communicative efforts in the circle of ornithologists must come first and that their program on this level of communication is in fact very intense. Referring to the small number of activists the group therefore doesn't plan substantial changes in its communication strategy for the near future.

The NABU (Naturschutzbund Deutschland e.V.), (section located in Eutin)

The Naturschutzbund [association for environmental protection], the so called NABU, is organized nation wide, and had 385.000 members at the beginning of 2003. Even a youth organization with 80 000 members (NAJU) is existing. NABU members take part in the protection of landscapes all over Germany an are actively engaged in the protection of some thousand sites with high ecological sensivity.

The NABU has a long history reaching back to the beginning of nature protection movements in the late nineteenth century and the early decades of last century. The association was founded officially in 1899 by Lina Hähnle.

In the last ten to fifteen years the association has developed from an organization purely engaged in the protection of birds – its original name having been Bund für Vogelschutz (later it was named Deutscher Bund für Vogelschutz) [association for the protection of birds respectively German association for the protection of birds] – into an association with a comprehensive ecological range of issues and a clear “green” political profile. Issues of agricultural reform and of the reform of the food system for instance have become an integral part of the groups political profile an activities.

Nevertheless, issues directly concerning environmental protection and landscape conservation still have priority. Environmental protection activities on a very practical level still play a central role in the life of the association an in its publications.

On the other hand the association interferences actively in nation wide controversies about environmental politics and the association is also very active in political lobbying. It is publishing a special periodical for members (Naturschutz heute) and it has established a broad communication concept by publishing surveys and booklets on environmental issues and by using the internet (<http://www.nabu.de>).

In NABU Eutin (www.nabu-eutin.de) more than 300 people are organized. Most of them, however, are passive members. The active core is composed of about 10 people, who work in Eutin and its vicinity. The core of activists regards itself as a political organization. They engage themselves regularly in public debates. Different publications and lobbying on environmental protection issues take place regularly in the whole area.

NABU Eutin strives to address ecological issues and objectives of a great variety, and to integrate them into its practical work. In addition, the participation in events on single issues of environmental protection are offered regularly to members and to the public. There are also opportunities for members and those interested, to become engaged in

concrete protection projects with a longer perspective (among other things, counting of water fowl, measures for the protection of amphibians, etc.). Regular publications in specialist journals present another level of activities. Finally a program of nature observation is offered to all citizens in the region.

NABU Eutin has good political relations with the BUND association in the district of East-Holstein, which is the regional group of another environmental protection organization working nation-wide. Both organizations, according to their own estimates, represent the „more radical wing“ of the environmental movement in the region.

This self-evaluation, on the one hand, refers to the integration of arguments of social criticism into the development of ecological targets and of practical concepts for political engagement. On the other hand, it is an expression of choosing a clear profile within the regional tapestry of politics and finally this sort of self classification must be interpreted as a result of communicative experiences NABU has made in Eutin with the above mentioned moderate associations.

It is therefore not astonishing that the NABU group is seen by the moderate actors we have visited as a trouble maker in the region. They refer to the more radical political positions of the group and they argue that NABUs activities often deter people with moderate political positions from practical engagement for nature protection issues.

The Bird Protection Group (located in Eutin / Malente)

This is a more loosely organized group of bird protectors, not an association in an juridical sense, because registration with the local courts has never been applied for. Their sphere of activities is also limited to Eutin and its closer vicinity.

Their named objective is simply the protection of birds, whereby the actors are also interested in meaningful connections between leisure activities and bird protection. Hiking and nature observation therefore are the most important fields of activities.

Additionally, there are membership meetings (group of regulars) and individual tasks for activists such as looking after a breeding colony of seagulls. Even in the area of environmental protection the group does not pursue any far-reaching objective. Doing so, the groups political position is just the opposite of NABUs position. On one side it can be regarded as a single issue group. On the other side it is group with loose structures and a low activity profile.

According to their own records, the group has 170 members today. The core of activists, however, is also limited to a very small number of people. In the majority, these are older people. The groups president stresses that the group belongs to the „moderate political spectrum“. Regarding the ecological problems created by intensive farming, we were told in our interview that the group's orientation was that of „a friendly attitude towards agriculture and hunting“. Environmentalism had to be *„more appreciative of the advantages offered by agriculture and hunting“*.

The group is seen by other interlocutors as a group which works on a too restricted base and which is too overly aged. Finding new and more younger members is seen as an

unsolved problem by the groups activists themselves. Furthermore, the speaker of the group is accused to be a solitary person and that its personal ambitions hamper the reorganization of the group on a broader base.

Further Experiences with other Persons and Groups

Furthermore, there are the two interviews with farmers from the region. In both cases, these were slightly older people, who still help out on the farm, but where the managing of the farms had already been transferred to their sons. Both farmers are engaged in a lot of voluntary work. One of them works as affiliation representative in the area of the associations of machine leasing circles. The second farmer is active in some of the sections of the environmental protection organizations described above.

Both farmers are reputed for their activities in political fields which are not directly related to traditional profession politics. They are seen as bridge builders between agriculture and other issues and fields of activities, especially ecological ones. They are also regarded as persons honestly working for more integrated concepts of regional development. At least one of the two farmers is a highly charismatic person who is able to mobilize and encourage people. The farm which is run by his son embraces a high proportion of touristic offers (see www.timmdorf.de/schumacher.html, see also: www.hochseilgarten-malente.de).

Through membership of our interlocutors in other organizations, positions and experiences from almost a dozen other initiatives from the region have flown indirectly into our research. In particular, this applies to the hunting associations within the region, to the professional organizations of farmers and to touristic organisations.

By means of their specific membership structure especially the hunting associations, occupy the role of a political hinge connecting agriculture and environmental protection. In such associations farmers are represented above proportion. Furthermore, farmers are feeling more acclimatized in hunting associations because they regard them in sociological and cultural aspects as an integral part of the traditional farmer oriented political landscape in the countryside.

We did not record separately the problems and aspects of tourism. However, some of our interview partners are engaged in this area, and have been interviewed on this subject. Generally, however, it can be stated that the groups and associations described above consciously address tourists and the problems of tourism in their public relations work.

Different Views on Nature Protection Concepts

The portrait of organizations engaged in the field of nature protection in the region around Eutin illustrates that there is no lack of actors and organizations in this field. An ample spectre of organizations has to be noticed. We cannot give a complete overview of organisations and institutions which are active in the field of nature protection in the region. Even the Department for environment is not sure that it has contact to all initiatives working in this field. Nevertheless it can be estimated that at least two dozens of

organizations and initiatives are working in the field of nature protection in the region. Some of them however are working only partly in the domain of nature protection and additionally a lot of double memberships must be taken in account.

Membership figures quoted in the interviews nevertheless must be qualified as very high. This underlines the importance of the associative sector and the spectre of green initiatives for the political structures in the region and for the public opinion. A ring of organisations and activities has emerged in the region which occupies a field which has been either abandoned by political parties and party politics has not yet been conquered by them.

All associations and initiatives are engaged in informing the public in one way or another about their objectives and activities. Although different levels of communication have to be registered and although more inward looking profiles are typical for some of the groups and initiatives it must be stated that we have discovered a rather active field of communication using all classical forms of communication (meetings, flyers, brochures) as well as modern ones (communication via Internet).

Who ever strives for a political engagement in the field of nature protection and landscape conservation can choose between different forms of engagement, political standpoints and profiles of engagement and who ever wants to be informed over environmental issues can use plenty of information and can recur to a plenitude of medias.

According to our interlocutors nature protection themes belong to a set of basic information which is regularly communicated to the public by the regional press. We have found no examples that environmental news and reports had been refused for whatever reasons. The only critics we have heard refer to the preference of spectacular events by the medias which has forced actors to mix simple information with spectacular events.

Moreover, the Eutin region can be regarded as a good example for the diversity of stakeholders which are engaged in the field of environmental protection in Germany today. It is noteworthy that the spectre of initiatives which we have found in the region goes far beyond the spectre that can be regarded as the classical environmental spectre.

The Eutin case demonstrates that ecological issues can be regarded from different standpoints. Even common themes and issues – as for example bird protection - do not lead to common standpoints or forms of engagement.

On the one side we find initiatives which are focused on single and very concrete issues and on the other side associations wide spectre of themes and engagement are to be found. The protection of king fishers, for example, in the eyes of the actors we have spoken to is not related to a somehow enlarged comprehension of ecological problems or to a more general concept of ecological reform while the protection of otters has led to a more comprehensive and integrated concept.

More radical and more moderate political positions can be observed in the region and third, we find associations which in daily practice behave like political parties or like pressure groups (for example the NABU) while others are not interfering (or are doing it only in a very smooth way) into the political struggles and the political debates in the region.

What is certainly of special interest for governance issues is the ability of administrative and semi-administrative institutions to work together with free groups and associations and to act as well accepted local or regional players in the spectre of voluntary initiatives.

Two Discourse Circles with Fears of Contact

Nevertheless the political landscape is clearly structured by ideological camps. Two different ways of thinking can be identified and the differences also stretch to the communication of goals and activities.

The differences are separating actors practically and lead to a political trench although they are largely motivated by ideological rather than by political differences. With regard to ideological concepts we can even speak about two different discourse circles and ideological differences which by far are outbalancing the already existing common positions in the field of nature protection.

What separates the discourse circles most are different meanings which are given to achievements in nature protection and the question if a more or less “moderate” political approach is appropriate to the problems of the region or if a more radical stand has to be adopted.

In consequence the different places which are taken up by groups and stakeholders lead to blockades in practical cooperation which materializes in “fears” about stakeholders who belong to the “wrong side” and restricted perspectives of communicating with another. Under these circumstances a certain ideological stigmatisation of the respective opponents from the “other side” is current practice which deepens the differences artificially. In so far ideological differences have a strong practical and especially communicative impact.

We would describe this situation as a communication trap caused by ideologies and not by interests or completely divergent standpoints. Although the two circles don’t vary very much in their practical attitude towards concrete aims in nature protection they have build up a wall of non-communication around them and this wall makes fears and misunderstandings flourishing.

In the first circle of ideological standpoints we find the farmers we have spoken to, the administrative authorities and all environmentalist who understand themselves as „moderate“ actors or as members of a moderate group. On the one hand these actors emphasize the achievements of environmental policy in the past. On the other hand they refuse to dramatise problems which are still remaining for nature protection as well as for other environmental issues.

The progress made in nature protection is regarded as convincing. Neither new political fundaments for successful nature or environmental protection will have to be laid nor does it seem necessary to develop new strategies and new political attitudes for the already existing institutions and their legal framework. In principle, current practices of nature protection only need to be perfected and further expanded. The president of the bird protection group told us:

“The idea of environmental protection is now deeply anchored in public consciousness. Nature protection is progressing and we can already see good results in spheres which once had to be regarded as very problematic ones. For instance, the population of sea eagles, peregrine falcons, and cranes is increasing. These are indicators of a better environment. Today, there are in Schleswig-Holstein also much more nature reserves than there used to be in the past. Numerous lakes have even been newly created. Of course, there are still some problems remaining. Decreases in the population of skylarks in the open cultivated landscapes worry us. Thus, also in future there will be things to do by environmental protection groups and our engagement as volunteers is still needed in the future.”

For a self-proclaimed supporter of a moderate political and ideological stand in the public it is just as much a matter of course that, therefore, nature protection work has to be continued. If possible, the engaging in it ought to be increased, but the general course of things must not be changed and should only be influenced by positive and constructive suggestions.

Because from his point of view ‘fundamentalist criticism’ is not constructive, he is convinced that environmental activists and nature protection groups with a moderate profile are much more successful and have a promising future. Cases in which a reasonable solution of joint agreements cannot be reached, and environmental concerns competing with other concerns draw the shorter straw, are being described as rare exceptions to the rule.

The ideological standpoint also has to be seen as a consequence of differences in the measurement of success and defeat. As successes are defined as working solutions for a concrete environmental problem (for instance the protection of particular endangered species), the communication of success in this field is bound to proofs given for rising numbers of species or improvements in the ecological stability of its habitats.

In this regard the growing numbers of fish otters as well as the promising figures about rising kingfisher populations are regarded as proofs for success. The fish otter who had once disappeared in the region has made the region its home again. In the case of the kingfisher, the achievements look even better. Though formerly extremely rare, meanwhile its numbers have soared so high that our interview partners have asked themselves whether the kingfisher still needs to be on the „Red Lists“ of very endangered species. For the region visited, this is put in doubt by them. Beyond this, the observation has been made that the kingfisher’s food sources have clearly improved in the region, especially because species of fish with higher demands on the purity of water are occurring more frequently.

From the increase in numbers of species living in or near water, conclusions are drawn on what the quality of habitats is like. Through a variety of protective measures along the water edges a whole series of natural or near-natural biotopes have been rescued or reinstated. This, in turn, is confirmed by the department for the environment, and this also corresponds to the experiences made by the Wasser- und Bodenverband within its own area of responsibilities.

Concerning this, the „moderates“ see a special responsibility for reinforcing regional politics on a practical level and of bringing actors and concepts together. They trust in improved political framework conditions on a regional base and fervently reject more pressure on „polluters“. Changes in the framework are necessary in order to encourage volunteers and in order to establish more voluntary agreements between stakeholders. For this more financial help is expected from the government.

All in all, in the field of nature protection moderate has a double meaning. On a concrete level moderate actors argue that protection programs focused on single issues and translated into consecutive change steps lead to undisputed success.

Because such strategies are renouncing to aggressive accusations and the sharpening of conflicts they rely on communication strategies without sharp conflicts. The second meaning of moderate strategies therefore implies that things are not driven to far.

In the second discourse circle, we find actors who see themselves belonging to the more „radical“ fringe of environmentalists movement and its associations. These actors do not ignore that some progresses have been achieved in environmental protection. The “radicals” however are convinced that the achievements are only of partial character and that fundamental problems have not been solved yet. To prove this they point out that undeniable progresses are contrasted by considerable deteriorations in other areas of conflict.

For actors belonging to the second circle, ecological crisis in rural areas has not yet been solved. In addition, politicising partial conflicts is deemed necessary. For these actors, their specific standpoint is resulting from a cross-border view on ecological problems and a more holistic approach.

They refer to official figures and statistics, for example the ministry report for the Baltic catchment area.

On one hand the chemical components (nitrogen and phosphorus) in water have been tested by the Ministry regularly since 1975. The test data show that nitrogen in water has been reduced slightly (from an peak of 9.56 mg in 1980 nitrogen test data have fallen to a level around, 5.5 mg in the late nineties. The decline of phosphorus test data have been much sharper during the same period. Test data in the late nineties are a quarter of the test data registered in the seventies. On the other hand test data for organic carbon substances haven't changed in the last fifteen years and remain on a very high level (www.umwelt.schleswig-holstein.de/servlet/is/24487/Fliessgewaesser.pdf). The test data however refer to a catchment area which is only partly identical with our region, so that it is not possible to make a direct comparison. But the registered test data must be taken as a well documented tendency.

In addition, for them the positive results of water protection in the Eutin region as well as in other regions in Schleswig-Holstein have to be qualified in two respects. First, all environmentally friendly changes in landscape use and nature protection which are to be registered in the region belong to areas with extensive agricultural production concepts.

Regions in which the intensive agriculture regime has been changed and an environmentally friendly regime of land only has been established are very rare so that ecological problems in regions with intensive farming systems have not changed at all and an ecological improvement is out of sight.

The point out, that the project Malenter Au for example has carried out re-naturalization measures only along a small part of the brook and that this is also true for other sketches on the water front of lakes and rivers. When we speak about successful re-naturalization, they say, we are not allowed to ignore that we are not speaking about huge areas but only of small and selected parts of the region. From their point of view the rising kingfisher population or the reintroduction of otters as well as many other successes don't allow us to qualify the related developments as all-clear signals. Moreover, many improvements have been introduced only selectively. The danger of eutrophication in the shallow lakes of the region has not been banned up to now. Successes the protection of some of the endangered species must be set against unsolved problems with other species. The decline of many so-called common species has continued to accelerate in last years. Especially the species of open fields are regarded by this development (e.g., yellowhammer and skylark).

A report for the ministry of environment in Schleswig-Holstein indicates that the ecological situation of rivers and lakes in Schleswig-Holstein cannot be regarded as sufficient. Federal and EC legislations on water quality, most of all the Water Framework Directive 2000/60, require that rivers and lakes shall be in a good chemical as in a good ecological situation as well. And the data show that intensive agricultural use of land and landscapes is still making the biggest trouble. Referring to the data of the Ministry only one percent of the rivers and only four of 65 lakes can be regarded as ecologically sound in the sense of the Water Framework Directive. According to the ministry till 2015 nearly 700 Mio. Euro must be additionally spent in Schleswig-Holstein to overcome the present deficits. Therefore it must be stated that pressure on the environment caused by modern farming systems still is a major issue in the region.

From this experiences the "radicals" draw the conclusion that deep going changes are still needed. On the other hand radical actors are also convinced that deep going changes only become possible, if much more political pressure is exerted. They therefore underscore the importance of political struggles, of fierce engagements and they are convinced that differences must be sharpened sometimes and brought in the arena of open political confrontation to allow progress. On this subject, a representative of NABU, was very clear and expressed his convictions as follows:

"I define most of the other organizations (i.e. organizations with a lower and moderate profile) as user orientated and interest restricted. They are striving for environmental protection, but in this, they are interested in very concrete things and have a restricted point of view, because they also follow other interests. Hunters, e.g., have their eye on their hunting interests, and do not look at things as comprehensively as we do. In contrast, we have a holistic approach. Overall, we take a more critical stance and, thus, are considered by the others as eternal fault-finders and fundamentalists." ... "You will notice the difference, in the case of ecological wrong developments which have nothing to do directly with the protection objectives of the other organizations. Currently, an industrial estate in E. of about 70 ha is planned. If this goes ahead, the world of amphibians in the

area will be flattened and destroyed. Anyhow, you can ask yourself whether we really need estates of such dimensions. We are against it and therefore got engaged. We publicly denounce the project. The others keep quiet because the industrial estate project is not a direct danger for their objectives in nature protection for instance the protection of kingfishers. (Question: Are you the radical wing of the environmental protection movement?) Yes. That's what we are. Not ourselves only, because there are also other groups in the region working in similar ways. Especially the BUND in principle takes the same stand as we do. But compared to groups with very limited objectives, that's what we definitely are“.

The NABU in Eutin argues that more than 90 per cent of agrarian used land are not concerned by protection measures, so that the critics of modern farming by environmental protection groups continue to be justified. On the issue of hedgerow maintenance NABU representatives even told us:

“The hedgerows are still being cut down by farmers, and if you take a look at the ones that are still there, you can see, that they are in a very deplorable state. No maintenance at all ! In time, they will have disappeared of their own accord. If nothing happens, the landscape will become structurally poorer each year“.

In regard of water protection measures the same interlocutor pointed out:

“As far as water pollution is concerned, there are certainly some improvements. This cannot be denied. But after the bad flood of last year, we now suffer a veritable draining fury. Everywhere, surfaces are being drained. The motto is, much cures much. No thought is given to the consequences for flora and fauna.“

In the context we have studied, the partisans of such positions leave no doubt that they intend to use their publicity campaigns in order to express the wrongs and deficits without any euphemism. From their point of view, styles of political propaganda which are offensive rather than defensive are the essence of effective political work. Attacking the position of their opponents therefore is an important part of their political communication and is seen as a trademark of an effective environmental protection strategy.

In the eyes of many of the more moderate actors, this marks them however as „*fault finders*“ and „*profile neurotics*“. And this is one of the main reasons, why communication cords between the two discourse circles are very thin in the Eutin region and why the relations are described as strained.

On the other hand, offensive and even aggressive communication supplies the „radicals“ with a distinct profile which, according to them, creates a lot of response in the region.

As in the Eutin Case, the demarcation line between moderates and radicals is also one between generations, the “radicals”, as the representatives of the younger generation feel that they have an biographical advantage. They claim for themselves, that they are able to become engaged more intensively in comparison to the elder persons in other organizations and they underscore that they can act with a lot more pressure. This is connected with the hope that a generation change in other organizations will lead to a relaxation of the situation between them and these organizations.

Despite Existing Differences: Outstanding Similarities between the Two Camps Exist

Nevertheless, despite the striking differences what should be qualified as a longstanding solution for ecological problems radical actors share two important points of view with their moderate colleagues and vice versa. On the one hand, radicals do not oppose to a policy of small steps and the moderate do not ignore that further improvements are necessary.

The so called radicals are intensely engaged in a lot of small projects in order to achieve small improvements. A substantial part of the cooperative offers made to NABU members for is set in the field of very concrete protection measures for species and biotopes, so that holism and radicalism is watered-down to some extent by daily practice in small sized engagements. NABU offers possibilities in the Eutin region for low-level engagements as well as for smooth and not offensive communication styles.

The „radicals“ to whom we haven spoken are also aware that fundamental changes need a long time and that radicalism has not be confused with meaningless polemics and aggressive attitudes. Even cutbacks on their own position are no taboo for NABU activists, provided a process of practical change is started in this way.

“Taking up contacts with farmers is particularly difficult. You got to be very careful. Wrong fronts can be build up with speed of lightning, and then it takes for a long time to dissolve them. In my experience, you have to be able to persevere. You also have to be able to listen. You even have to be able to turn a blind eye. If I want something from a farmer, I cannot get on his nerves by telling him he doesn’t look after his hedgerow properly“.

The radical environmentalist associations also claim for specific reforms on behalf of the government and the political authorities in the region. According to our experiences they do not look for new institutions neither for new parties and most of all they opt fervently for the political fundamentals described in the German constitution.

Practically they concentrate on the improvement of the framework conditions for concrete protection strategies and their daily political work doesn’t ignore the necessities for intense cooperation with district and county administrations.

So, the position of the more radical groups is not against little reforms. They insist, however, that the reforms will have to be measured against the objective problem pressure of the ecological crisis. The demand for making funds more widely available, plays an important role in this. But a tightened public order policy is also regarded as an important option.

On the other hand the inherent logic of preservation concepts can push moderates to extent their field of activities too.

The kingfisher project has realized that it makes no sense to develop concepts for nature protection which ignore the protection of habitats and this automatically will lead to a more critical view on other land use interests in the region and by this to a more political interpretation of objectives and tools for acting. In this regard the otter project already has

left mere single issue logics and has started cooperative strategies which can lead to positions which were regarded as too holistic and too political only recently.

Even the activists of the bird protection group are convinced that the positive attitude to agriculture cannot prevent them from criticising the abusive use of pesticides and fertilizers.

Other things in common which have to be discovered are concerning flexible and more citizen oriented solutions. In the future the willingness of the environmental authorities of the district and of the water and soil association, not to approach the landscape of actors with authoritative officialdom, or to be willing, also to move beyond the legally defined spheres of activity, should be favourable for experiments with communication crossing the traditional boundaries.

In the environmental authority of the district, for example, great importance is given to the statement that one has moved away from playing „mainly the environmental police“, and instead, today promotes dialogue with citizens and interest groups, as well as voluntary measures in the area of environmental protection.

Also the manageress of the Wasser- und Bodenverband draws a clear line of demarcation between the former position of her association within the region and its position today.

“Since 1997, I am the manageress of the Wasser- und Bodenverband. I have made an effort to bring the Wasser- und Bodenverband out of its isolation and to give it a better image. Previously, there used to prevail a water management of the old school. There was a legal requirement. This was adhered to, and not a stroke more was done. In case of conflicts they were carried out before the courts.” ... “Among the public we had the image of a mere destroyer of the environment. We were isolated from public mood and had a bad press. This has changed. Today we approach all of the actors. We have made our work transparent and are engaged in environmental protection. Hence, in 1999 we took part in the otter project. And we had an eco-audit of our organization carried out.”

As far as the function of these institutions is concerned, it could be further accentuated in the direction of integrated approaches and of integrating actors who are not working together. The bridge building capacity of these institutions and association also offers better possibilities for an enlargement of the circles of actors and an enlargement of political issues. In the portrait of the association the willingness for political enlargement has been already shown and can be demonstrated by programmatic documents. Unfortunately, the financial means for this are available less and less.

In addition it can be stated, that the political relationships between environmental protection and agriculture, however, have become more relaxed in the past. This is especially true in areas which are not so well suited for intensive farming, or, where farmers no longer own the land, because, through sales in the past, it has passed into the hands of the state or in the hand of foundations. According to our interlocutors and it is noteworthy that all interlocutors agree on this, very „meaningful custodian contracts“ are being agreed on between farmers with more extensive utilization rights and the new owners. This applies also to all custodian contracts between agricultural owners and local government, offering enough financial rewards for custodial measures.

In this context, time and again, the name of Mr. p. is mentioned, to whom we have also talked. p. is a farmer well known in the region, who is actively engaged in a lot of environmental protection issues. By now, his farm is managed by his son. p. is a member, board member, or president of more than a dozen of associations and initiatives in the region. According to himself, he „used to adore“ intensive agriculture with a high input of chemicals in his youth. Today, he is engaged in establishing links between agriculture and environmental protection and strives for agreements between both sides. On his farm, his son practices a system of 'integrated agriculture'. He mainly understands this to be the employment of techniques of cultivation which use resources sparingly, as well as managing extensively, ecologically sensitive land.

Mr. p., however, is still an outsider of his profession. He is acknowledged for his engagement and he is often quoted as a living example for good understanding between environmentalists and farmers, but we interpret the way his credits are described by other actors that he does not enjoy the backing of an established agricultural organization or an established group of farmers jointly pursuing environment-political objectives.

On the other hand, all other interview partners agree, that he is a man who is listened to, who is a trustworthy discussion partner for farmers on environmental problems and who operates as coordinator of interests and in this way also influences public opinion in the region.

He is described as a very active person who opens doors into the most diverse areas, who has charisma, and produces new ideas again and again. Or, as one of the other interlocutors has put it to us, half jokingly, half seriously:

“You cannot leave p. alone on his tractor for several hours without being punished. He would have had the time to think over some things and than he would have come back with a sack full of new ideas. And without any doubt, he will give you hell, to implement his ideas today rather than tomorrow“.

Concrete landscape shaping projects such as the Malenter Au project came into being with the help of a network of relationships between farmers, hunters, fisher men, forest wardens, environmentalists, science, as well as local and relevant regional authorities. There has been a decisive contribution by Mr. p. to set this network of relationships rolling and his role as a promoter of such networks can rarely be overestimated.

However, we also have heard voices which say that other problems have come to the forefront during recent years and this can be regarded as a chance for overcoming traditional trenches. This view is taken by, e.g., the relevant department officer of the administrative district. During the interview it was maintained that:

“Farmers are no longer our biggest headache, at all. That’s history. Our biggest problems today, are the communities, who with their residential projects, industrial estates, and opening-up of new infrastructure, show much less consideration for the environment. When I first started in the UNB (in the Concil Department of Environment) in the 1980s, about 90 per cent of my activities had to do with what I used to call ‘annoying the farmers’. This meant pushing through political public-order measures against the

agricultural sector in a way a policemen is acting. Today the percentage of such duties is almost nil. Of course, there are still some awkward customers among the farmers, and, of course, in such cases you have to resort to public order measures. All in all, however, we have a much more relaxed situation than we used to have formerly“.

Some of the interviewed environmentalists also regard the ecological problems caused by new or expanding industrial estates or by the expansion of residential areas, meanwhile, as often more threatening than the problems caused by farming. In our interviews, as a current example, an „over-sized“ planned industrial estate was named, by which a valuable biotope of amphibians would be „flattened and destroyed“.

Some of these problems have also to do with booming tourism in the region. Our interview partners point out, that a sound balance between natural protection schemes and schemes for tourist purposes has not been found yet. On one hand tourism is seen as a chance for economic growth and most interlocutors underline that the development of tourist activities must be supported. On the other hand tourist activities put more pressure on landscapes and devastating effects for flora and fauna cannot be ignored.

Which seems to be more important, however, is the ability of persons to hold together networks in times of crises. Networks cannot be saved if fundamental differences are arising among stakeholders. What we however have learnt from the Eutin case is the fact that the engagement of strong persons is able to overcome disagreements of a smaller scale.

The Importance of a Sufficient Financials Base for Ecopolitical Measures

In general, our research has shown that the question of how environmental protection can be financed, is very important. It not only plays a significant role with regard to conceptions. In this area, it can be stated, that actors wait for the changes in the CAP, agreed upon in 2003, to take effect financially, and that the programmes for rural areas will become more precise as far as environmental objectives are concerned. On this subject, for example, the district's environmental department stated:

“In part, we have had a very poor experience with EC-funding programmes. Money has been thrown around without any sense or reason. Here, some towns with mainly tourist interests on the Baltic have used such funds simply to revamp their promenades, and of all things, it was environmental protection that got ploughed under. Because, you know, when EC-funds are available a huge pressure is created to spend the money quickly. If you then raise any objections, that this or that measure from the point of view of environmental protection is dubious, you stand no chance of being heard.“

It was our impression that it is much more difficult to cope with the consequences of the restrictive fiscal policies by the government, the states, districts, and communities in the future. Also the funds for environmental protection and landscape conservation have been cut back dramatically, so that, above all, funds are lacking for programmes which were used to pay concrete environmental protection achievements as well as landscape

conservation measures. This has, however, affected the actors visited in very different ways.

The Bird Protection Group Eutin/Malente is the least affected group, because their programme does not include maintenance services covering an extensive area and being very cost intensive. The things done by this group are organized voluntarily to 100 per cent, and therefore are not affected by cutbacks of government subsidies.

The Kingfisher Protection Programme can also, in essence, continue its practical work. ProNatur is regarded as a „rich“ association, so that the integration of the Kingfisher Project into this association has proved to be an advantage. But wherever its work is directed towards publically financed and publically supported renaturalization projects along the embankments of the rivers and lakes, the Kingfisher Project has to cut back too. When no money or less money is spent on this, the specific protection programme for the kingfisher will aim into a void. This is true, furthermore, for the planned networking of protection activities.

Also the work of NABU is hardly affected by the cutbacks. The association finances itself through its members' contributions. Restrictions must, however, be expected where the association takes part in landscape conservation activities.

The largest cutbacks will be experienced by the environmental authority, the Wasser- und Bodenverband, as well as by the projects of fish-otter protection and the Malente Au. Here, the involvement is tied directly to land owners being compensated through financial payments for abandoning the use of their property, and furthermore, to additional funds being available for near-natural ways of management of landscapes.

Financial restrictions in such cases, however, not only lead to a reduction of activities. Especially in the authority for environmental protection, one is extremely worried that financial shortages will lead to enormous changes in the political relationships among the actors, and that long standing relationships of cooperation will be destroyed by this.

In the authority for the environment (UNB) a relatively minor sum of € 40 000 per year is concerned. With this money, voluntary contributions in the area of green-wetland-area protection and low-land-moor protection are being financed. Through the fact, that the money is directly available to the authority, one could have proceeded in a very unbureaucratic manner when spending the money. To proceed in this way, according to the authority, is the alpha and omega in establishing relationships of mutual trust with the land owners, especially the farmers.

Secondly, the authority regards the translation into action of voluntary programmes as the main prerequisite in order to come away from the image of a police authority in the eyes of the land owners. *„If these funds are now withdrawn, this image will collapse. The political damage would be immense. Because then we are again perceived only as a public-order authority carrying out its 'out-with-the-bat policies' when a farmer has happened to dig out ditches too deeply. It has been important to us that land owners should also have experience of us as someone who helps to create, and who occupies the role of a cooperation partner. Everything that has been built up in the way of identification with*

environmental protection projects on the side of the farmers and land owners, will thus go to hell. The damage caused by this is much larger than expressed by the sum of money lacking in future“.

The cutting back of custody contracts would also have an impact on the Wasser-und Bodenverband. Its hands are tied, anyway, by its constitution to invest the funds received from membership contributions into environmental protection.

The Wasser- und Bodenverband is financed through a system of splitting the costs among the land owners, and thus does not have at its disposal any independent basis of financing. The money must not be spent on anything other than tasks in relation to its constitutional duties.

The described involvement in the area of environmental protection is based, on the one hand, on an ecologically motivated new definition of its duty task of water maintenance. This part of its environment-political involvement is not affected by the cutbacks of public funds. Also the utilization of the technical and administrative apparatus of the association does not suffer any restrictions.

The restriction debated here, is the expansion of its involvement into the area of biotopes along water edges, because for this, public funds would have to be found. Larger projects aimed at entire habitats and parts of landscape are in danger of being lost, and with them a contract culture on a voluntary basis. At the same time, the opportunities would deteriorate for winning new actors and opening-up landscape custody services as economic fields of activity – especially in farming.

In so far, even if it does not affect directly all of the actors, the change in the fiscal situation leads to considerable restrictions in regional cooperation structures.

Solutions for Offensive Cooperation

At the end of each interview we always raised the same question. We asked our interlocutors what they would like to achieve through their professional, political and personal involvement within the next ten years, and what they consider to be realistic objectives in this time.

Ignoring the fact that such statements always contain a more or less prevailing optimistic or pessimistic tone, due to the interviewer's personality and his actual experiences, two rough lines can be made out.

Some interlocutors have painted a picture of cooperation which can be assumed still on a low level but making constant progresses so that cooperation would be expanded in a more or less smooth and organic way.

These descriptions of future developments, however, only take in account activities and actors which, with regard to political contents and the political profile of concerned actors, are already somehow synchronized. The portraits of the future are assuming that the existing political families stay together and that there will be no integration of other standpoints and ideological profiles. All in all, a sensible integration perspective is lacking

and this doesn't only affect conflicts between radicals and moderates, but is also true with regard to the integration of new problems and innovative strategic reflections.

The main *raison d'être* for this type of vision for future regional engagements seems to be an understanding of communication which we would like to classify as non reflexive because future cooperation is only seen as mere prolongation of the past. Any changes in the quality of social and political relations are ignored.

A second line of description for future developments is relying on a more sceptical view on already existing cooperation. Reality therefore should be improved. The second group of stakeholders is quite aware of the dangers of "splitted" cooperative realities because they hinder actors to formulate really integrated perspectives.

But as this group doesn't see cooperation dynamics that are transgressing political boundaries, unite different social actors, and bridge old disagreements they are prolonging these experiences into the future. Future social and political realities remain characterized by many separated, group related activities which basically stay unconnected. Personal rivalries would also continue to play an important role within this framework.

Both perspectives indicate that in the Eutin region, the question of cooperation has not been solved by any means, and that it remains the key question for the strengthening of regional development potential for the future.

There are many factors, supporting the view, that the cooperation issue can win in strength. The variety of actors involved in the issue of environmental and water protection is large. All actors agree that the local landscape of media is open minded. There is some measurable success through cooperation across the boundaries of individual associations, and some organizational focal points do exist.

On the other hand, it is obvious that most of the interviewed actors are lacking a willingness to accept cooperation on a broad thematic and political level. Whether this situation can be resolved by the generation change, as some in the region hope, remains to be seen.

This opens up a question we have not dealt with in the case study. It is the question of whether the described cooperation obstacles can be overcome by impulses from outside. In the Lübeck Region, the competition „Active Regions“ has provided these impulses and has made it possible that cooperation within the Partnership could be established on an level which has been unseen in the region before. Even if the level of cooperation in the Lübeck region has to be qualified as sometimes full of conflict situations the cooperation in Lübeck has led to significant progresses.

In principle the overall conditions in the Lübeck region appear as less favourable than the conditions we have described Eutin region. The Lübeck Case show that impulses from outside can be very helpful under the condition that they are marked by a strong spirit of cooperation and by funding arrangements which favour all sorts of cooperations.

Conclusions

Against this background, several general results can be drawn from our study. A general impression links our three cases. The process which we characterize as “transforming rural communication” is actually underway in rural areas. The consciousness of problems and tasks related to the development of rural areas has become stronger. Moreover, actors who want to dedicate themselves to these tasks are joining together. In Germany, significantly more regional initiatives can be found today than several years ago, whereby certain political promotion programs play a large role.

It is particularly apparent that a broad range of reasons exist for the founding of regional initiatives, and thus that the topics and goals of such initiatives have also become much broader. It is noteworthy that the number of initiatives with complex goals and programs has expanded in the last few years. Such projects link very different horizons of experience and positions of interest.

The spatial areas included have also become larger. Groups of actors which are engaged in larger regions with hundreds of thousands of people occur more often. The Lübeck Bay regional partnership is very instructive in this respect. It can be stated that the spatial dimensions found in our cases reflect social realities that are beyond the size where it makes sense to talk about local structures or where regions only are of small size.

According to our experience, the concepts “integration,” “cooperation” and “participation” are good working terms to qualify concepts and political goals. Using these terms, fundamental differences concerning strategies and new forms of social reality can be stated.

However, none of the three cases we examined encounters a development dynamic which points to a quick change. The innovations we found, whether product lines and concepts to open new markets, whether open and participative organizational forms or whether the inclusion of new stakeholders in regional settings today only attract restricted public attention.

A quick expansion of the experiences we have found is not taking place. All three cases show us structures and processes which at this time cannot be hooked into the experiences, needs, models and preferences of the majority of citizens in rural areas.

In addition, the degree of integration in the observed groups of actors remains significantly below the integration requirements resulting from the basis of the objective problem situations. In some cases, integration has progressed, in real terms, far less than the objectives and requirements for conduct formulated by the actors themselves lead us to believe.

According to our experiences, two factors can be held responsible for this. One is that the level of dissatisfaction with the existing structures and exchange relationships in rural areas is by no means so extensive that one could build a well-seeded need and opinion field in the sense of new demands and goals. This is also true for regional products and regional

marketing paths. These facts, however, are not surprising, because only very optimistic people would assume that a new orientation of regional politics which started small could very quickly grow into a mega-trend.

For our survey, and for the search for new development paths of rural areas, other limitations are evident. All in all, in practical behavior and in their ideological positions, many of the stakeholders we observed show much more structural conservatism and social and political inertia (and at some points also much more “Sektierertum”) than the quality of the paper concepts shows. This significantly limits the dynamics of innovation. It blocks the communication of positive action approaches and experiences outwardly.

This can largely be traced back to the historical role of transformation processes. Most of the regional actors we asked are fully inexperienced in terms of new forms cooperation. Up to now, they have primarily worked in institutions which are hierarchically organized and which bundled together equals with similar interests. Conventional farmers cooperated with conventional farmers. Organic farmers cooperated with organic farmers. Natural protection people worked with other natural protection people and if different interests met, then they would be solved in a bargaining process marked by a strong interference by the state and of large associations with centralistic strategies.

For the type of regional development processes that we have in mind, the negotiation processes between different interests are either oriented on basics or constituted on a basis of joy for experimentation. For most actors these are new requirements. The dealings with these demands is unpracticed and there are no models on which one can orient him or herself. Thus it is not surprising when actors report many difficulties and hurdles in their experiences.

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