



Wild shoot branching of KBE: Alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs)

The knowledge based economy: a critical perspective

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FAAN



Facilitating Alternative Agro-Food Networks: Stakeholder Perspectives on Research Needs

5 Academic and 5 Civil Society Partners from 5 Countries

www.faanweb.eu

1. **IFZ** Inter-University Research Centre for Technology, Work and Culture, Graz, Austria
2. **VCA** Via Campesina Austria
3. **OU** Open University United Kingdom
4. **GW** GeneWatch United Kingdom
5. **SZIU** Szent István University, Hungary
6. **VPFH** Vedegylet -Protect the Future, Hungary
7. **AR** Agrocampus Rennes - Rural Economy and Public Policy Department
8. **FRCIVAM** Fédération Régionale de Bretagne des Centres d'Initiatives pour Valoriser l'Agriculture et le Milieu Rural, France
9. **NCU** Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland
10. **PRP** Polish Rural Forum, Poland



Project duration: 2008-2010



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Case studies to explore:



- how AAFNs are defined by social, political, commercial and cultural frameworks involving motives beyond direct material interests in practice,
- how current policies facilitate or impede the development of AAFNs,
- how alternatives may be complementary or oppositional to conventional agro-food networks,
- how AAFNs contribute to regional development,
- how AAFNs link different types of innovation as a basis to broaden EU research policies on the “knowledge-based bio-economy”.

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History of alternative agriculture in Austria



- Small scale agriculture, large remote areas
- 1970s: serious problems: growing overproduction => decline of prices
- new strategies to foster farming needed
- end of 1970s: projects emphasize on short supply chains
- 1979: Campaign for the Encouragement of Endogenous Regional Development
- 1995: national LEADER programmes

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What is “alternative”?



AAFNs in different aspects “alternative”.
The initiatives aim at:

- principle of fairness in the production and trading chain
- high degree of self-governance
- re-localising the food system: “place matters” (territorial, technical & social meanings; cf. Marsden 2002)
- strengthening the relationships between producers and consumers; proximity between producers and consumers leading to social and cultural proximity (cf. Renting et al. 2003)
- environmental-friendly production

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Recent trends in alternative agriculture in Austria:



- **Increase in organic farming**

- 14% of the farmers
- 16% of the cultivated area
- Consumption increased from 2003 to 2006 for 35% (4,8% of the food trade market)
- 65% trade, 14% organic shops, 10% export, 6% gastronomy, 5% direct selling

- **Decline in direct selling**

| Decline of direct sale from 2006 compared to 2002 | |
|---|----------|
| | Quantity |
| On farm sale | -25,7 |
| Farmers' markets | -31,7 |
| Delivery services | -2,8 |

Source: RollAMA, AMA Marketing (2007)

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Case studies in Austria



- **Direct sale and on-farm sale initiatives** ('Almenland Bauernspezialitäten')
- **Consumer-producer cooperatives** ('BERSTA', 'EVI' in their early years – later professionalisation: turned into companies)
- **Collective consumer groups** ('BioParadeis')
- **Farmers-business cooperations** ('ALMO', 'MANTURO')

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ALMO Exploring the initiative



Source picture: Kleine Zeitung

- Semi structured interviews with farmers, business partners, a farmers' consultant, people from the agricultural chamber and the official veterinary: 10 male, 2 female interview partners.
- Participatory observation in the scope of the 20 years meeting.
- Reading material: ALMO meeting protocols, personal correspondences of ALMO members, press releases, marketing folders.
- Alp oxen initiative mainly located in the Almenland Teichalm-Sommeralm region (approx. 25 km north-eastern of Graz)
- Network of 510 farmers (most of them from the region => 'identity' through this specific region => linkage to regional development)
- Farmers-business-cooperation (2 small butchers, 1 larger business partner – cooperation with high quality gastronomy)
- Located in alpine area in the north east of Graz (approx. 25km distance)

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ALMO Why 'alternative' What innovations?



Source picture: www.almenland.at

- **Bottom-up initiative initiated by the farmers**
- **Specific co-operation with business partners** (very close personal/social relationship, guaranteed purchase and stable price: 15% more than via direct selling, high transparency)
- **Value added high quality product** (GM-free, regional, specific feeding and maturation process/storage for high quality meat, animal welfare: alpine pastures in the summer, large, open stables in the winter – developed/adopted by a farmer from this area)
- **Collaboration with animal welfare** ('Vier Pfoten': higher animal welfare index than organic farming) **and environmental NGOs** (Greenpeace: GM free)
- attractive for **part-time farmers, women** and the **young generation** (relatively low and flexible time investment)

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ALMO –Why ‘alternative’? What innovations?



Source picture: www.almenland.at

- economically successful **without specific subsidies** (1988: 5 oxen, 2008: 4.100 oxen; price per kilo has raised continuously)
- **GM-free** feeding (innovative quality assurance system)
- **food scandals** (BSE crisis) were facilitating the initiative: 2000 – 1.391 animals sold => 2001 – 2.186 animals sold (trust/traceability)
- **relation to consumers via intermediaries**: tourism, high quality gastronomy, veterinary (using networks)
- **slaughter house** owned by farmers (co-operative of ALMO-, sheep-, and pig farmers)
- **castration** based on traditional knowledge/skills („Stierschneider“)

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We analyse the main innovations according to :



Source picture: www.almenland.at

- What has been the starting point/obstacle?
- What has been the strategy dealing with it?
- What kind of innovation has been resulted thereof?
- Who have been the drivers for innovation?
- Which kinds of knowledge have been combined for innovation?
- Which were the mechanisms of knowledge transfer?
- (How) did the national/regional/local government foster the innovation? (providing financial support, adopting regulations, providing specific expertise.)

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ALMO – Innovations and knowledge



Preliminary findings:

- Innovations have **not been explicitly planned**, but resulted often from searching for a strategy to overcome obstacles. (e.g. oxen for high quality meat) – The term “innovation” has been hardly use by interview partners, and in the reading material.
- Many of the innovations (and their maintenance) are **based on social relations**.
- Most innovations **resulted from the new form of cooperation**: different actors brought in different knowledge and different expertise.
- **Drivers for innovations** have always been members of the initiatives and the network it is embedded in.
- Innovations have been **nurtured by different knowledge types**.
- **Knowledge transfer formally** in courses or via intermediary (e.g. consultant), but more often **informally** via social contacts.
- **Boundary work in knowledge transfer**: reluctance in passing over knowledge to actors external to the network (*“we have worked for it”*).

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