



Regional branding as an instrument for sustainable, environmentally-friendly development – The “Prüfzeichen” of the biosphere reserve Schorfheide-Chorin

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Key Message: The biosphere reserve benefits local producers who can use the reserve's reputation to establish a regional brand to market their products.

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Reviewer: Susanne Stoll-Kleemann

What are the aims?

A UNESCO biosphere reserve, Schorfheide-Chorin, has established a regional brand. The brand is a voluntary labeling scheme that targets local businesses and other stakeholders. Its aim is to encourage the production of local and sustainably produced goods in order to conserve the reserve's rich cultural and environmental legacy. Schorfheide-Chorin was accredited by UNESCO in 1990, creating an obligation for the region to use sustainable production methods. In order to turn obligation into opportunity, a local label, 'Prüfzeichen' was introduced in 1998.

The aim of the label is to encourage regional enterprises and stakeholders to help the public engage with the biosphere reserve in an environmentally-friendly manner while maintaining the historic, cultural landscape of the area. To meet this aim, land users, producers, processors and the service industry are identified with the region and Schorfheide-Chorin, the UNESCO reserve, is brought to the attention of consumers. The label also aims to become an instrument for increasing the income of participating enterprises.



Which approach was taken?

In order to strengthen the cycles of the regional economy, ecological agriculture and high-quality food producers (the main sectors in the region), use the certification label for marketing their produce. For rural producers and processors, minimizing the steps in the production process is preferable. This reduces the need for transportation. In this context, Berlin functions as a huge market for healthy food that is both sustainably produced and processed.

Which industries and ecosystem services are covered?

At the moment, the 'Prüfzeichen' label exists for a number of different sectors: agriculture, horticulture, bee-farming, fisheries, and for products ranging from red currant-juice to

sausages, regional meats and other forms of gastronomic products to handicrafts and other art forms. The label is also used in the hospitality industry, for nature-tourism, sustainable timber processing and by a local bookstore.

In practice, production standards require that for example honey is free of pharmaceutical ingredients, pesticides and other artificial additives. Special standards (in the process of being internationally certified) are also being prepared for forest and game management and products. These standards are expected to help maintain regional ecosystems such as the temperate broadleaved forest.

Existing certification schemes, and their regulatory mechanisms, are used to reduce both costs and workload. Enterprises that participate in other schemes can be given the 'Prüfzeichen' label (such as Demeter for organic farming, Viabono for gastronomy, or the Forest Stewardship Council for forestry and related industries).

What input was needed?

Several groups cooperate to create the regional label's standards. A committee of experts comprises marketing specialists and representatives of the biosphere reserve, certified entrepreneurs and the regional partnership association. Permanent standards are in the process of being developed. Applicants are assessed by independent institutions which include ecological agriculture associations and other industries or otherwise by the administration of the biosphere reserve. When standards are met, annual certification is issued. If standards continue to be adhered to, the annual certification can be extended. Regular monitoring is carried out annually or biannually, depending on the branch.

Financing for the development of the brand is supported by LEADER+, a European Union program designed to support rural development. Further annual fees must also be paid for certification, depending on revenues.

What are the results and policy uptake?

The regional brand has been an instrument for the production and promotion of local, environmentally-friendly goods and services. It has made possible a dynamic network between certified producers, leading to increased public awareness about the importance of the way in which resources are handled.

Currently, there are more than ninety certified enterprises – and more applications pending. A study found that between 15 and 25 jobs have been created in the region through the brand (POPP 2009). For the most part, the advantage for participating enterprises has been an improvement to their image. There has not been a substantial increase in revenues. For this reason, improving the marketing of the regional brand is considered a priority. This would increase revenues for participating enterprises and to have a positive impact on the biosphere reserve. Convincing local and regional politicians of the necessity of the label is crucial: their involvement and support is essential to success.

References

For further information: www.schorfheide-chorin.de

Popp, Dieter (2009) Abschlussbericht. Effizienzsteigerung des Prüfzeichens für das Biosphärenreservat Schorfheide-Chorin FUTOUR Regionalberatung, Haundorf.