

Oeko:global, Siegen University

**A Model for IFOAM Collaborations with Universities
to improve IFOAM's communications and marketing capability**

marketing & communication

Abstract

In 2006 IFOAM headoffice in Bonn and the nearby located University of Siegen started a collaboration aiming at the development of concepts and instruments to improve and strengthen the public awareness of and knowledge about IFOAM in the German speaking countries. The German public and even the German consumers of organic food still do not know much about IFOAM and its mission. This is because IFOAM acts in the background of other organisations, producers, traders and certifiers. And this is also true for other countries all over the world.

Therefore, the “Oeko:global - organic concepts” was kicked off as a project course by the Media and Communication Studies Department at Siegen University. The idea was to let students face this “real world” problem and come up with practicable solutions under the guidance and assistance of their teacher. Students were to bring in and additionally gather all the knowledge and competences necessary to meet that demand. At the same time they could expect that their ideas would get a chance to be put in action. Moreover, the students got the opportunity to learn about IFOAM from direct collaboration and to improve their own job skills.

So, the students produced a documentary TV-film about global organic agriculture, a TV-Talkshow, print material, and a German spoken IFOAM-website. All these productions are finding their way into IFOAM marketing and communications.

This successful collaboration may be a model for IFOAM and its members to improve their public relations and communications in other countries, too.

Project History

It was Hartmut Wöllner, organic farmer, consultant (Bureau for the Development of Organic Agriculture) and IFOAM member living and working in Lindenberg, a small village in the Altmark region of Germany, who did the first move. He was looking for partners and collaborators to realise a film about the global dimension of the organic world. He had gathered a huge amount of experiences in organic farming projects around the world. With that backing and from such an informed point of view, he was – and still is – convinced that organic agriculture actually not only has the potential to feed the world but also to bring about positive ecological, economical and political effects for farmers, traders, consumers and the environment.

Hartmut Wöllner finally presented his idea to Gebhard Rusch, a professor of media studies at the University of Siegen. And that was the moment, when the project “Oeko:global – organic concepts” smoothly materialized.

Media Studies at Siegen University

Media Studies at Siegen University offer a unique course type: the project. Such courses take five hours per week for two terms all in all. That is a full year of work dedicated to one topic. Moreover, projects have to integrate theory and practice. Projects are to put theory in action, and to learn from project experiences for the improvement of both theory and skills. Over the years the department has realised a large number of such project courses which have shown to be more successful when the topics and themes are closer to reality and the work done makes a real difference for people in real life. So the department is favouring projects which show some civil society engagement like e.g. offering support to social initiatives, civil bodies, NGOs or NPOs.

Oeko:global – organic concepts

Since April 2006 the department of Media Studies at the University of Siegen is proud to cooperate with IFOAM in the collegiate project ‘ÖKO:global – organic concepts’. From the beginning the cooperation provided remarkable results.

The first project phase saw the production of a documentary film with the German title ‘Die Welt spricht Bio’ (The World Speaks Organic). Thanks to Hartmut Wöllner’s contacts and experiences shots for the film could be taken in Costa Rica, Hungary and Germany. The film presents organic agriculture both at a local and a global level and compares the different political and economic conditions of organic agriculture in EU-countries and abroad.

Hartmut Wöllner, however, not only supported the project with his expertise but also with considerable funding. This also made possible to get all the important and influential interview partners in Costa Rica like Dr. Grethel Aguilar from UICN (Unión Mundial para la Naturaleza) and scientists from the CATIE (Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza).

In Hungary ‘Biokontroll Hungária’ was providing the project with many experts from the country’s growing sector of organic agriculture. Furthermore, ‘Biokultúra’ (Hungary) and ‘Biopark’ (Germany) also supported the shootings with their expertise. So, the film team had

the opportunity to interview influential politicians such as Bärbel Höhn (Bündnis '90/Die Grünen, German Bundestag) and Dr. Peter Paziorek (CDU, German Ministry of Agriculture). Currently, the team is working on marketing and sales of the documentary.

In December 2006 a talkshow with the German title 'ÖKO:kontrovers – Kann die globale Ökowiirtschaft die Welt ernähren?' (Can Organic Agriculture Feed the World?) was realised in the Center for Information and Media Technology at the University of Siegen. The main topics were global mindsets and their social and economical backgrounds: Which forms of global agriculture and economics have the potential to close the gap between industrial and developing countries according to the problem of hunger? Experts from agriculture, politics and science, amongst others Bernward Geier, Elke Röder (Bundesverband Naturkost Naturwaren), Prof. Dr. Bernd Müller-Röber (Geneticist) and Johannes Remmel (Green Party) defined opposite positions, which made up a lively discussion.

Another achievement is a German spoken print image campaign. Three layouts for classical print products, such as posters, advertisements, flyers and free cards, with different topics ('Sicher gut', 'Das was man nicht sieht' and 'Widerspruch') were designed as information material to be given to IFOAM members. It will be accessible for IFOAM members in pdf-format on the IFOAM intranet for free. In the course of addressing the German public, a basic German version of the IFOAM website was designed and launched at BioFach 2008.

Besides this, the team wants to support IFAOM according to its Internal Communication Management. A task force is working on an analysis with a following evaluation of the communication structures inside IFOAM. The main interest is to optimize communication among members and the IFOAM bodies.

The further scheduling mainly includes to production of an image film for IFOAM and an international print campaign. It is planned that an image video and several clips will be produced. First shots were already taken at the BioFach in Nuremberg this year. And, again, a famous politician, Renate Künast (former Minister for Agriculture and Customer Protection) was willing to give an interview to the students. Moreover, members of the IFOAM world board have already been interviewed to focus to viewers' attention to the advantages and benefits IFOAM has to offer to its membership. The image film is to shows what IFOAM actually can do for its members. A farmer, an international company and a certifying agency

are pictured to exemplify the pillars of IFOAM's mission from different angles. The video clips may be used in presentations of specific target groups. Shots will be also be taken at the 16th IFOAM Organic World Congress in Modena, Italy. This event most likely shows the international dimension of IFOAM with people coming from all angles of the world and at the same time being united by the same spirit of the organic movement. People from that crowd and – of course – even more IFOAM representatives will be interviewed there.

A new print campaign will provide posters, flyers, booklets etc. The campaign aims at new involving, convincing claims and concepts and at a visualization, which pictorially and graphically links the complex IFOAM mission with the new ecological, ethical and political consumer philosophy. This time the campaign will address international IFOAM members and the international public sphere. Therefore all the texts will be in English.

The work on the Internal Communication Management will proceed with the analysis of internal communication structures and processes. The team supports the next membership survey and brings in a bunch of questions about IFOAM's communication policy, information services and media.

Depending on the economic success of 'Die Welt spricht Bio', the team is planning to do a second documentary, this time in High Definition and a 90 minutes format. Again, BioFach and OWC are attractive events to be included. Therefore, this film should become kind of remarkable in terms of content and relevance of topics and should also have the format to stand-alone. The team is considering takes in Asia (e.g. China, Japan, India), the US, Hungary and Germany to focus on regions and some new kinds of problems, which - up to now - have not found so much attention or any coverage at all.

For further information, please visit the website: www.oeko-global.uni-siegen.de.