



Picture:
Adamah Biohof

Students project about organic box schemes in different countries of the world



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Introduction into the topic

Box schemes have gained importance in organic markets especially across Europe and North America. They provide an opportunity to scale up direct marketing strategies by aggregating products from multiple producers and delivering them to a large number of consumers. While it is positive that these systems can supply more interested consumer with local organic products, critical issues may emerge: the food in the boxes may become less local and less seasonal, and communication and exchange between the involved actors may diminish. In this students' project, we investigated how such box scheme systems can manage growth in a way that goals and values like local production, social justice and communication between producers and consumers are supported.

Methods

In the first meeting, the course facilitator introduced the predefined project topic and the guiding research question. The 14 students then formed teams of 2 to 4 persons, each with a particular focus in a region (Table 1). In the course of the project, nine meetings took place (Table 2). After introduction and team formation, students performed an individual literature study. Student teams then investigated and contacted box schemes in the respective region and asked them to fulfil an online survey and, when possible, to realize a more in-depth interview via Skype or email. Additionally, a literature group which focused on literature review about alternative food networks was created to complement the project results.

For the development of the survey, each group made a suggestion about possible important questions relating box schemes. These suggestions were discussed in class with all teams and a final questionnaire of 35 questions for the survey was established. After the first half of the project, we visited *Adamah Biohof* as one example for an organic box scheme in Austria, and we reflected on our insights afterwards.

After completion of the online survey, students analysed data with support of the course facilitator, and discussed their results within the different teams. Each team then compiled a written report that was assembled into one joint document. In the final meeting, each team presented the final results as posters or ppt, we discussed the results together and celebrated the project with an organic buffet.

Table 1: Sampling strategy and response rates of the regions under investigation

Team	Regions	Sampling based on	Nr. of box schemes contacted	Nr. of responses (response rate)
Austria	Austria	List of Umweltberatung and Bio Austria, additional internet search	43	15 (35%)
Western Europe	France	Members of AMAP organisation	192	17 (9%)
	UK	Internet search, list at vegbox-recipes.co.uk	147	18 (12%)
	Belgium	Internet search, members of GASAP	21	5 (24%)
South Europe & Russia	Croatia, Serbia, Italy, Russia	Internet search	77	14 (18%)
North America & Australia	USA, Canada, Australia	Internet search	56	9 (16%)
Sum			536	78 (15%)

Table 2: Project meetings and their content

Meeting (date)	Content
Meeting 1 (24 Feb)	Introduction into the course and topic of the project
Meeting 2 (2 March)	Presentation of individual investigation on box schemes Introduction into project management tools Form groups, share responsibilities Definition of research questions
Meeting 3 (9 March)	Literature discussion Report on team progress, discuss responsibilities and work plan Prepare empirical work (questionnaire, literature search)
Meeting 4 (13 Apr)	Report on team progress, discuss survey data Prepare data analysis
Meeting 5 (27 Apr)	Excursion to Adamah Biohof
Meeting 6 (11 May)	Reflection on excursion Report on team progress Data analysis
Meeting 7 (18 May)	Joint discussion on empirical results Prepare final report
Meeting 8 (8 June)	Discuss team progress Prepare final presentations
Meeting 9 (22 June)	Final presentation and discussion of project results Feedback on project report, evaluation of the project/course Celebrate project with organic buffet

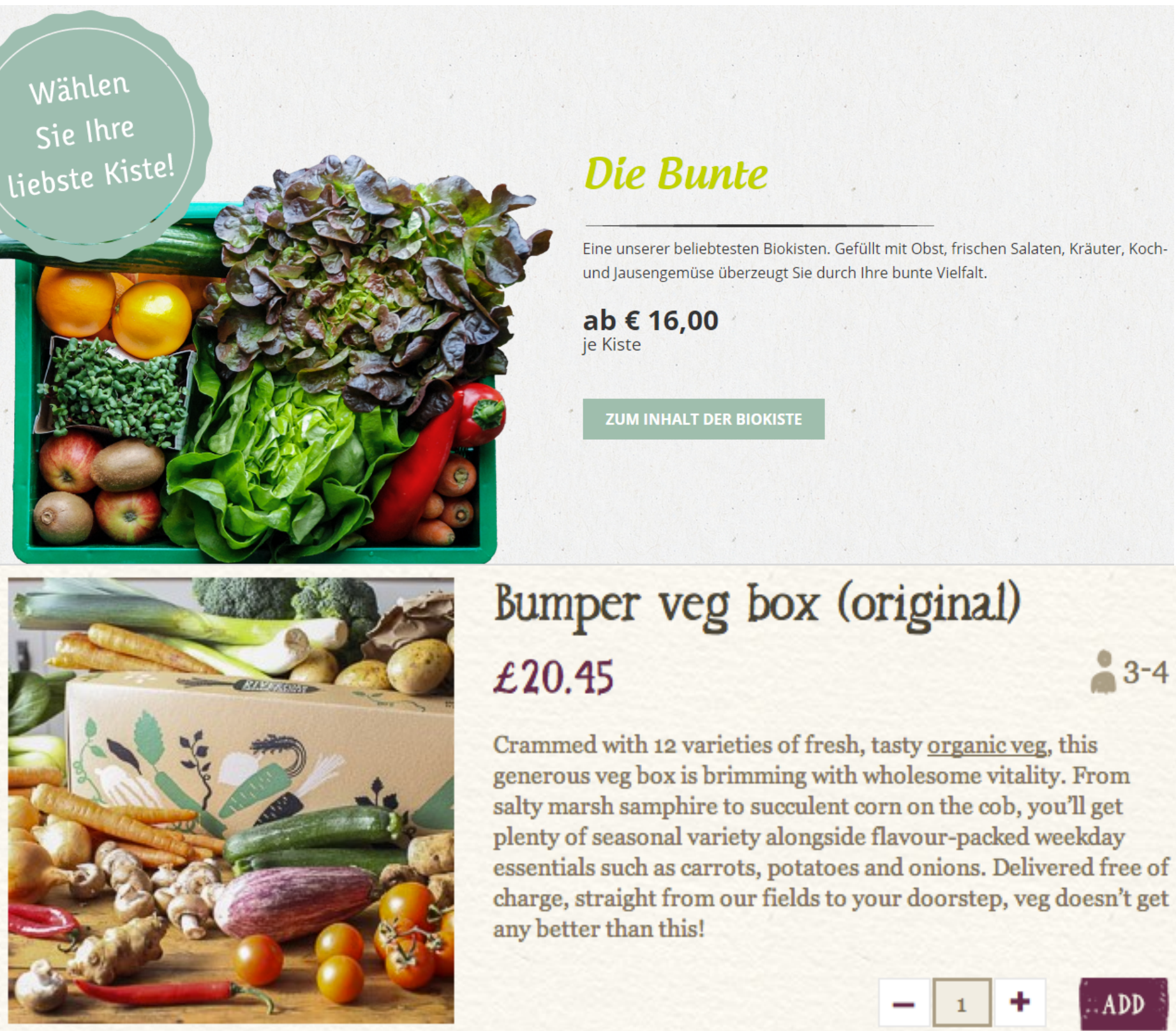
Results and discussion

The topic of the project was of high interest for participating students, but previous knowledge on organic food systems differed greatly. Consequently, although enthusiasm for the topic was high, quality and depth of the work and of classroom discussions varied individually. Language (English) was a hindering factor for some of the students.

The teams formed based on origin of the students, language skills (for the realization of the survey) and personal interest. Teams' performances were quite different, but interestingly all students were satisfied with the work within their team. Reflection on the progress of the teams and trouble shooting was an important part of each meeting. One major challenge was the low response rate of organic box schemes in the online survey. Some teams had to re-adjust their strategy various times. Support by the facilitator but also by colleagues from other teams was important to find possible solutions and continue.

The excursion was an important experience for the students. Some of them had no previous knowledge on box schemes, and theoretical input in the classroom would never have given them such a clear picture of the functioning of such a food system.

Room for improvement: The project was still quite focussed on the requirements and advice of the course facilitator. For subsequent student projects, more interaction between teams and a more active participation and performance of students should be encouraged.



Figures: Screenshots of organic boxes in webshops
(Sources: biohof.at, riverford.co.uk)



Picture: Student teams present their results to colleagues
(Foto: S. Kummer, 2013)