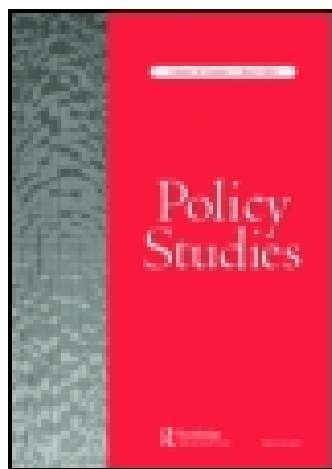


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Sharpening up research on organics: why we need to integrate sectoral policy research into mainstream policy analysis

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sharpening up research on organics: why we need to integrate sectoral policy research into mainstream policy analysis

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As a fast growing state sponsored industry, the organic food sector is likely to attract the increased attention of policy analysts who are interested in industry development. We critically review the European comparative research on growth in the organic sector, focusing on policy analysis. A common element in these accounts is that findings are by no means clear on why variation in organic growth between countries exists. The literature provides a range of possible variables explaining divergent patterns of organic sector development but solid conclusions are elusive. We suggest that future policy orientated research on organic sector apply existing theories on public policy and carefully design studies in accordance with the prescriptions of the comparative research method. This would enable policy researchers to reach more robust conclusions on policy relevant factors influencing growth of the organic sector than are currently found in the literature.

Keywords: comparative research; European Union; governance; organic food; policy analysis; policy capacity; policy instruments; policy networks; research methods

Introduction

Organic sector growth is to a considerable extent fostered by state intervention, in particular in Europe. As an example of successful state involvement in ‘green’ infant industries, it forms a new research field for policy analysts interested in studying the relationship between public policy and industrial development. Since the early 1990s, a substantive body of scholarly literature on organic farming has developed. The literature is most developed in Western Europe, mostly as a consequence of European Commission funded pan-European research projects. These projects reflect the European Union’s involvement in supporting financially organic farming. The underlying purpose of the literature has been, and still is, to reveal the factors which promote growth in the organic sector. Thus the research agenda reflects the EU policy agenda.

Much of the social science literature on the organic sector originates from within the discipline of rural sociology. The key concerns of this literature are the ‘conventionalisation’ of organic farming (e.g. Guthman 2004, Lockie and Halpin 2005), corporate engagement with organic farming (see Lawrence *et al.* 1999, Lyons 1999) and patterns of organic food consumption (and the significance thereof) (Lockie and Lyons 2002, Lockie *et al.* 2001). Several recent books attempt to capture the patterns of engagement by

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governments, market actors and civil society in the organic sector (see Holt *et al.* 2006, Lockie *et al.* 2006).

Other studies are more *market-focused*, identifying the key features of countries with good organic market development. Hamm and Gronefeld (2004, p. 127) note that in countries with well-developed organic food sectors (Denmark and Switzerland) 'high organic market share is correlated with a high organic share of total UAA [utilised agricultural area], with a high organic market share of general food shops, with low consumer price premiums for organic food and with a high recognition of a common food label.' But they come to no definitive conclusions regarding causality, noting that another country with high growth, Germany, lacks some of these key growth factors (Hamm and Gronefeld 2004, p. 127). Additional studies have inquired into the way supermarkets in Western Europe have engaged with organic product lines (see for instance Richter and Hempfling 2003). Another considerable part of the social science literature on organics is addressing state and EU policies aimed at promoting organic production and consumption. This literature can be usefully organised under the heading of 'policy analysis' and consists of contributions from the disciplines of agricultural economics and political science. It is this literature we focus upon in the balance of the article.

In terms of revealing which factors promote the organic sector, the policy analysis literature deploys different approaches which point towards different key factors affecting growth rates. This means that the literature suffers from a high level of inconclusiveness. Though many of these studies analyse several European countries, comparative research methods are not applied as prescribed in the methodological literature. Further, though there are established theories on offer which address industrial development generally, these theories are not applied in organic research. It is our contention that these weaknesses mean that convincing explanations of variation of growth rates across countries remain elusive.

Thus, it is time to take stock of the literature produced so far and suggest ways in which future research could produce more convincing findings. This is a worthwhile exercise as the organic sector is a useful context for, and would benefit from, general public policy scholarship. It is a good example of an infant-industry; and as such could be utilised as a comparator with similar industry sectors, particularly in the alternative energy sector. The varied pattern of state engagement within the organic sector across Europe, and beyond, presents unique opportunities to examine the efficacy of state strategies for industry development. In short, the organic sector is worthy of more attention from the broader public policy discipline. This review may serve as a useful entry point for future engagement of the discipline.

Approaches

Research on organic policy can be categorised into two broad types of study: policy instrument-focused and institution-focused. Some studies, which we call *policy instrument-focused*, explore the extent to which state intervention contributes to economically sustainable development of the organic sector. For the most part they provide an extensive and detailed review of organic policy instruments applied either in a single country or across countries, but offer no theoretically informed considerations regarding what mix of policy instruments contribute the most to growth of the organic sector. For instance, the study by Lampkin *et al.* (1999, p. vii) list the forms of state 'support' to organic sectors under four broad categories, payments to producers, marketing and regional development, legal definition of organic, and information provision.

Allied studies are concerned with analysing the extent to which organic farming policies have motivated farmers to convert their farms into organic production (e.g. Michelsen 2001) or affected the economic viability of such farms (Håring 2003). In one comparative study, Håring *et al.* (2004, p. 25) observe that the development stage of organic farming varies significantly across European countries and argue that ‘different design of subsidies for organic farming greatly influences the actual effect on organic farming development.’ However, precisely how these policy instruments grow the organic industry is less clear.

For instance, a review of national implementation of EU organic support schemes finds that ‘the commitment of individual countries in the EU to supporting organic farming varies considerably ...’ (Padel *et al.* 2002, p. 188). But the report is reluctant to draw firm conclusions on the extent to which this variation explains different growth rates in organic farming. It is limited to saying that, ‘This *may* be one explanation for the significant difference in the uptake of organic farming between member states’ (Padel *et al.* 2002, p. 188, authors’ italics; see also Padel *et al.* 1999, p. 314). Others are more sceptical on the importance ascribed to policy instruments, with Michelsen (2002, p. 132) saying, ‘... one should not rely too much on promoting organic farming only by means of policy instruments. They clearly had impact as signals of official recognition of organic farming, but they were far from decisive for the development.’

Nevertheless, there seems to be a belief within the policy instrument orientated literature that the promotion of organic sector is a question of careful design of policy instruments. The prescription for success is that ‘policies targeting farming must ... be carefully designed and constantly evaluated in terms of the cost-benefit ratio of addressing policy objectives’ (Håring 2003, p. 141). The same line of argument can be found in a study by Padel *et al.* (2002) which calls for, ‘A more integrated approach to policy development in support of organic farming at the European level, coordinating push and pull mechanisms ...’ (p. 190).

If the ‘right’ mix of instruments can be found, the obvious question to ask is: under which conditions can this mix be adopted and successfully implemented? Ultimately, instruments are chosen because they are able to generate the necessary political support (Daugbjerg 1999), and therefore they are a result of a complex balance of institutional, procedural, political and economic considerations (Salamon 1981, p. 265, Majone 1989, p. 143). In terms of finding the ‘right’ mix of organic policy instruments, it is noteworthy that, in discussing instrument choice, experiences in other infant industries, such as the wind turbine industry, are not considered. We believe that comparisons of instrument choices in the organic industry with instrument choices in other infant industries have significant potential for generating new insights.

The focus on the design of policy instruments obscures the more overarching debate about formulation and implementation of policy measures: the politics of organic sector development. This dimension should not be neglected as it is an important condition affecting the design and implementation of policy instruments (cf. Howlett 2005). While it is quite clear that various policy instruments do affect the growth of the organic sector, the focus on the instruments themselves ignores the importance of the institutional setting within which the instruments are designed and implemented. Institutional settings have independent and important impacts on the effectiveness of the instruments.

General public policy research tells us that if the state were to be so bold to impose a solution, there is every possibility that this would be unsuccessful (see Halpin 2002). As such, we argue, whether or not the ‘right’ tools are chosen, or whether or not they are correctly designed, is a secondary issue to that of the institutional capacity. More generally, the importance of institutions is clearly documented during the recent two decades of

policy studies; including policy instrument studies (e.g. Linder and Peters 1989, pp. 49–53). Therefore, attempts to utilise these insights are to be welcomed in organic policy research.

This is attempted in the *institutional approach* which is the most sophisticated and encompassing approach to studies of organic sector growth. In this approach it is argued that the level of conflict between organic and conventional farming within the three domains (the farming community, agricultural policy domain and the food market) is *the* key variable explaining growth (Michelsen 2001).¹ In these studies a distinction is made between three types of conflict: pure co-operation, pure competition and creative conflict. The key argument is that the more these three domains are characterised by creative conflict, the greater the organic farming sector, defined as the percentage of farms and utilised agricultural area being farmed organically (Michelsen 2002, pp. 113–114, 128, Michelsen *et al.* 2001, p. 4). Creative conflict is defined as:

... the type of interrelationship that lies in-between competition and co-operation. Here, the organic and general agriculture institutions are in continuous contact while cooperating on some issues and competing on others conflict. Hence, creative conflict may involve a climate of both competition and mutual respect under joint perception of some – but not all – common interests (Michelsen 2002, p. 113).

While it is clear that creative conflict involves a process of learning, the conditions under which it emerges are not spelled out. It is suggested that creative conflict, ‘presupposes the existence of distinct organic farming associations’ (Michelsen 2002, p. 113). However, it is not clear whether this relates only to the farming community or to all three domains. Theoretically, the argument on the role of organic interest groups is insufficiently elaborated. Is the mere presence of organic interest groups a sufficient, or necessary, factor to bring about creative conflict? The difficulties in furthering the growth of the Australian organic sector, for instance, indicates that the presence of an organic farming association is far from sufficient to bring about growth (Halpin and Daugbjerg 2008). It is not just a question of associative *presence*, but of associative *capacity*.

Though the theoretical model developed in these studies sets out to ‘explain organic farming growth by the dynamics of institutional interrelationship’ (Michelsen 2002, p. 126), it does not go beyond the definition and specification of the intermediate variable of the explanation. The notion of creative conflict has the status of an intermediate variable because it describes a distinct process which promotes organic farming sector growth, but leaves unexplained under what conditions the process emerges. Common to these accounts (instrument-focused or institution-focused) is the absence of clear-cut findings explaining why variation in organic growth exists. While the factors outlined above are deemed relevant, solid conclusions regarding how they work are elusive.

Theory and research methods

While comparative accounts of organic sector policies and market development are numerous, convincing explanations of variation across countries are few and far between. This shortcoming of the literature can be put down to two factors. Firstly, there is a clear tendency in the literature to produce atheoretical accounts or, when theory is applied, to develop theories that are specifically aimed at explaining growth in the organic sector. Pursuing a unique theoretical agenda, or aspiring to an independent organic sub-literature, surely is not the way to go. Undoubtedly, the organic sector has unique features, but it does share a policy agenda with other industries. States intervene in the economy to nurture infant industries, particularly in industries that produce public goods such as environmental

improvement. Examples include alternative energy production such a wind power, thermal energy and biofuel. There is no reason to think that the nature of this intervention is fundamentally different from the organic sector. Second, although country comparisons are frequent in the literature, there is no systematic application of comparative research methods. In our view, this explains why organic policy research has not yet reached robust conclusions regarding the driving forces behind organic sector growth.

Theory

Within the policy instrument-focused approach, there is very little theorising on the way in which various mixes of policy instruments influence organic sector growth. Applying the theoretical policy instrument literature would have enabled organic sector research to generate hypotheses on the growth effects or on why particular mixes of instruments were chosen, and thus move the research agenda beyond purely descriptive accounts. The hesitancy in applying theory is somewhat surprising because there is lot of theoretical work on policy instruments within both economics, in particularly environmental economics, and within political science.² Though the detailed design of policy instruments applied in the organic sector are sector specific, they belong to policy instrument categories applied in many other sectors.

The three basic categories of policy instruments are regulatory, economic and informative instruments (Vedung 1998). Organic sector policies apply all three types of instruments. For instance, state, or state sanctioned, organic production standards are regulatory instruments, conversion subsidies to farmers are economic instruments and marketing campaigns and the provision of extension/advisory services are informative instruments. Though the policy instrument literature is not particularly well-developed theoretically, organic research which focuses on the impact of policy instruments would benefit from linking up with the theoretical discussion within the policy instrument literature. In particular, the burgeoning work on the relationships between instrument mixes, implementation styles and governance structures (Howlett 2005) has promising potential for explaining variation across nations in instrument choices and policy effectiveness.

So far, 'the broader lesson of policy design is that the value of a particular instrument is shaped as much by the political context in which it is employed as by inherent features of the instrument' (May 2003, p. 225). Therefore, studies on the effectiveness of various designs of organic sector policies should focus on the extent to which different instruments build the capacity and commitment of intermediaries and 'signal desired courses of action' including oversight mechanisms (May 2003, p. 224). From such an analytical perspective, 'implementation difficulties can be partially ameliorated with the crafting of appropriate policy design to build commitment and capacity of intermediaries and signal policy intent to intermediaries' (May 2003, p. 223).

Though the study by Michelsen and his associates (2001) is framed theoretically within the institutional tradition in political science, the work on institutional interrelationships is specifically related to the organic farming sector. There is no indication that it would travel well across other infant industrial sectors, of which the organic sector is certainly a sub-category. As is true for the policy instrument approach to organic sector research, the institutional approach would also benefit from applying theories already on offer. Even if the organic sector does have some unique features, it does, as a policy sector, share characteristics with other policy sectors and therefore general theories ought to apply.

As a rare exception, the study by Greer (2002) demonstrates the utility of such an approach to analysing the organic sector. Although Greer's study is not focused on explaining variance in organic sector development, but looks for similarities such as the role of policy networks and government activism, it shows that the organic sector can be analysed by deploying conventional social science theories. He undertakes an orthodox network study, mapping the structure of organic policy networks in Ireland and the UK. In both countries, the state has played an important role as it has had 'the capacity to reconfigure or create [policy] networks' in the organic sector (Greer 2002, p. 471).

Clearly, the policy network concept has more potential than demonstrated by Greer. It addresses the policy consequences of different organisational arrangements and argues that certain network types tend to be associated with distinctive shapes of policy (e.g. Daugbjerg 1998). The policy network concept is essentially a comparative concept because it is concerned with variation in government-interest group relations (Daugbjerg and Pedersen 2004, p. 221) and therefore a relevant concept in studies on the relationship between the configuration of networks and organic policies.

As pointed out by Smith (1993), states can create capacity by building infra-structural power through the establishment of a tight and closed policy network (a policy community) in which a sectoral state authority engages in frequent a high quality interaction with interest groups controlling resources necessary for policy formulation and implementation. When such policy networks can be established, states are likely to achieve their policy aims. In contrast, when states are unable to establish such networks, and loose and open networks (issue networks) in which many and conflicting interest are represented, the states' policy formulation and implementation capacity would be low. Applying this theoretical hypothesis on organic sector policies, we would expect countries in which the state is able to establish policy communities would be more successful in promoting the organic sector.

In the latest comparative EU policy study, the network concept is applied as a method of mapping the structure of national networks, with the stated aim of locating the position of key advocates for organic farming in national networks (Moschitz and Stolze 2007). While the structures of such networks are said to be important in the development of organic farming policies, they are not themselves linked directly to the selection of specific policy instruments,³ nor to patterns of organic farm growth. The study rightly observes that, 'The share of organic farming in a country cannot be seen as a direct outcome of policy, as there are many other confounding factors' (Moschitz and Stolze 2007, p. 13). Instead, the study is able to draw conclusions, based on the relative centrality of organic farm associations in organic farming policy networks, on the relative 'potential of organic farming associations to influence policy outcomes' (Moschitz and Stolze 2007, p. 74). The report states that, 'In all countries analysed, organic farming associations lack reputational power with regard to general farming policy' (Moschitz and Stolze 2007, p. 35). These conclusions are unsurprising, but what about contribution to governing the sector? These observations could have yielded more analytical purchase had the study engaged with the policy network literature discussing the relationship between networks, policy and implementation, asking: what did these networks enable (or not) the state to do by way of developing the organic sector?

The governance orientated network literature with its focus on deliberative processes within policy networks may provide theoretical insights relevant for analysis of the organic sector. Deliberation in a policy network is a process in which its members engage in open-ended dialogue in an attempt to resolve conflict. Such an interactive process involves, 'discovering ends, recognizing other parties, marshalling evidence and giving reasons,

exploring the implications of various value positions and developing joint responsibility in concrete situations' (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003, p. 7). In such processes, network members may change their perception of their interests and what is best for the public (Mansbridge 1992, p. 40, Termeer and Koppenjan 1997, p. 84), and it is, 'precisely because actors are prepared to modify their perceptions of problems and interests that it becomes possible to find new solutions' (Kickert and Koppenjan 1997, p. 40).

There may be a process of 'deliberative drift' as interest representatives learn to deliberate (McLaverty and Halpin 2008). Innes and Booher (2003) emphasise while networking *per se* may be important, the qualitative nature of such networking, for instance its deliberative character (collaborative dialogue in their terminology), is crucial for explaining why networking does and does not work. They highlight a number of conditions for successful collaborative dialogue resulting in workable policies capable of achieving their objectives. In relation to revealing the factors producing successful promotion of the organic sector, the analysis should focus on whether trust exists amongst network members. This is likely to be achieved when all interests represented are conceived legitimate, the representatives speak the truth, free discussion and questioning are allowed and the network is able to decide its own rules of conduct. Finally, the networking process aimed at reaching agreement should not be disrupted by political or bureaucratic interference. Applying this theoretical frame, an analysis of organic sector policies would track successful policies back to deliberative processes characterised by the above mentioned features, while unsuccessful policies would be explained by inadequate conditions for successful deliberation.

Another, but not dissimilar, approach would be to apply theoretical approaches from the governance literature. Painter and Pierre (2005) and Peters (2005) apply the term 'governance capacity' to describe a condition in which states are able successfully to pursue their objectives. Peters (2005, pp. 82–83) argues that governance capacity is most likely to occur where *both* the state and civil society are strong. Strong states are characterised by features such as administrative capacities, analytical skills, relative autonomy from political cycles and from sectoral groups, and the possession of financial resources. Associative capacity occurs when interest groups are non-competitive, representative, able to generate systematised information on the environment in which intervention is to take place, have relative autonomy from their members and thus are able to discipline their members either through persuasion or through selective incentives (Atkinson and Coleman 1989, pp. 51–52). Such a situation, 'may be the best of all worlds, given that there can be some choice and mix of instruments to achieve policy goals' (Peters 2005, p. 83). Painter and Pierre (2005) adopt a more state centric approach to governing capacity, distinguishing between policy capacity, administrative capacity and state capacity.

Policy capacity refers to, 'the ability to marshal the necessary resources to make intelligent choices'; administrative capacity refers to, 'the ability to manage efficiently the human and physical resources required for delivering the outputs of government'; and state capacity, 'is a measure of the state's ability to mobilise social and economic support and consent for the achievement of public-regarding goals' (Painter and Pierre 2005, p. 2). Though these capacities do not necessarily have to reside exclusively within the state apparatus, the state is a key variable in accounting for governing capacity. To explain variation in the states' ability to promote the organic sector by the use of the Peters' and Painter and Pierre's framework, the analysis would focus on the capacities of the relevant state authorities and interest associations. When both parties possess resources relevant to the promotion of the organic sector, growth is likely. By applying these alternative theoretical approaches already on offer, the institutional approach in organic sector

research would, we argue, be able to overcome its idiosyncratic nature. This would make the research findings more generalisable to sectors other than the organic and enable a fruitful dialogue with other research communities and enable theoretical insights to disseminate across research fields to the mutual benefit of all parties.

Research methods

The other major area where the literature on the organic sector could be improved is the currently weak application of comparative research methods. The vast majority of policy orientated studies on organic sector growth apply qualitative data and involve cross-country analysis. To produce insights that reach beyond the particular cases analysed, comparative analyses must be carefully designed. Descriptions of one or more cases will not produce knowledge unless informed by theory and designed in accordance with the methodological conventions of comparative case study research. In order to explain organic sector growth, countries to be included in an analysis should be selected carefully. Cases can be selected on the basis of their values on, or the characteristics of, either the dependent or independent variable (Yin 2003, pp. 106–109). In both approaches, the cases selected should represent as much variance as possible (Peters 1998). When cases are selected based on their value on the dependent variable in a comparative study of organic sector growth, the cases selected should represent instances of high and low levels of growth.

The purpose of the analysis in this type of comparison is to search for variables which potentially can explain variation in growth levels. The criterion for assessing whether a variable qualifies as the explanatory (independent) variable is that it has to vary across the cases selected in a theoretically meaningful way. A ‘transmission belt’ causally connecting the values in the independent variable with the values in the dependent variable must be established through logical reasoning informed by established theory (Ragin 1987, Peters 1998).

When cases are selected on the basis of their values on the independent variable, theory is applied to inform the selection. Theory is drawn upon in order to develop a hypothesis on the variable which potentially could explain (the independent variable) variation in organic sector growth. Cases would be selected on the basis of their values in this variable and the purpose of the empirical analyses would be to examine whether the variance in the independent variable produces variance in growth as suggested by theory. The method to establish the causal link between the independent and the dependent variable is pattern matching. The scholar examines whether the causal pattern predicted by the hypothesis matches the pattern of relationships found across cases (Yin 2003). For instance, if the hypothesis predicts a high level of growth where the value in the independent variable is high and low levels of growth where the value in the independent variable is low, the empirical test of the hypothesis must find this pattern across the cases selected for analysis to qualify as an explanation. If it cannot be found, the hypothesis must be rejected.

The next step is to control for alternative explanations. As (Lijphart 1971, p. 683) puts it: ‘one cannot be sure that a relationship is a true one unless the influence of other variables is controlled.’ In other words, we should try to control extraneous variance through the selection of cases (Peters 1998, pp. 30–37). Variables which are constant across cases cannot explain variation. In comparative case study research, scholars attempt to ‘manipulate’ the independent variable, through the selection of cases, in order to measure the effects on the dependent variable. Manipulating the independent variable and keeping constant other potential independent ones are the two basic and inseparable

elements of the quasi-experimental method used in comparative case study research. However, in practice, this is not as easy as it may seem. In the social sciences, we are very rarely, if ever, able to design comparative studies which fully meet these requirements. As a result, factors which are not constant *and* which potentially could explain variation must be subject to analysis. Where the theoretically predicted relationship between an alternative independent variable and the dependent variable cannot be found empirically, the alternative explanation can be ruled out.

While these are methodological orthodoxies in comparative policy analysis, we find that they are usually absent in country comparisons of organic sector growth. This questions how generalisable the findings are.⁴ For instance, Michelsen *et al.* (2001, p. 12) argue that interrelationships between organic and general agricultural institutions which are characterised by creative conflict produce growth of the organic sector. However, since this particular interrelationship is found only in Denmark and not in Italy and Austria, which are also success cases of organic sector growth (Michelsen *et al.* 2001, p. 162), the concept of creative conflict is not likely to travel well beyond the Danish case. Indeed, the concept of creative conflict may be a reflection of a unique Danish situation in which organic farming in the initial phases of development was integrated into one of the farm unions belonging to the agricultural associative establishment (Michelsen *et al.* 2001, p. 64).

Nevertheless, the concept has remained an accepted and applied concept in studies of organic farming policy (Moschitz and Stolze 2007, p. 79). Similarly, in their review of national implementation of EU organic support schemes, Padel *et al.* (2002) do not utilise comparative research methods, and are therefore unable to draw firm conclusions on the extent to which variation in national implementation explains different growth rates. There are, however, exceptions to this general trend. For instance, Lynggaard (2001, pp. 88–90) more or less explicitly considers the design of his comparison of organic farming sector growth in Belgium and Denmark. Further, potential alternative factors which could potentially explain organic sector growth are rarely analysed systematically in the policy orientated literature. Indeed, there are a number of them out there. Food scares, such as BSE and foot and mouth disease, could be potential explanations of growth (see Greer 2002) as could GM food and pesticide residues in food or drinking water; organic sector researchers rarely undertake a systematic control for these. For instance, Padel *et al.* (2002, p. 189) suggest that factors outside the realm of agricultural policy influence growth rates. However, they do not control systematically for these factors and therefore they are unable to establish how much these factors contribute to explaining variation in growth rates. Thus, one reason for the lack of progress in explaining variation in growth in the organic sector is, can be argued, the lack of properly structured comparative analyses in which the researcher systematically controls for alternative explanations.

The way forward

As our review demonstrates, policy research on the organic sector has established its own research agenda and developed theoretical concepts which do not ‘travel’ well across industrial sectors, in particular infant ones, sharing key features with the organic sector. Therefore, organic sector research neither benefits from theoretical development within the broader discipline of policy analysis, nor contributes to it. From a policy analyst’s perspective, this is not optimal and risks the further drift of organic research away from mainstream policy analysis. Organic policy research highlights the need to root sectoral research in mainstream disciplines and to apply recognised theories and research methods.

Clearly policies directed towards developing the organic sector constitute a case of state-sponsored infant industry promotion or perhaps even a case of the broader phenomenon of industry development. Therefore, sectoral research, including research on organic sector growth, could potentially benefit from applying theoretical approaches which have already shown their currency in developing knowledge in other sectors. We urge scholars interested in the organic sector policies to apply such theoretical approaches and contribute the broader theoretical development.

Our review of the policy-orientated literature also suggests that data on policy do not speak for themselves. They need to be analysed by use of theoretical perspectives and by applying recognised research methods. Up until now, the organic policy instrument overviews provided have not been subject to theoretically guided systematic comparative analysis and accordingly this part of the literature has relied on producing descriptive accounts. Therefore, these studies have not provided answers to questions such as, 'what instrument mixes are effective in producing growth?' or 'why do only some countries introduce such mixes?' Becoming trapped in sectoral research agendas is a risk faced by all sectoral policy researchers. Therefore, for research to gain new insight, it is crucial to stay in touch with the mainstream policy analysis. We hope that this review article will serve to remind sectoral researchers of the risks, and point to ways to avoid them.

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Notes

1. See also Lynggaard 2001, Michelsen *et al.* 2001, Michelsen 2002, Moschitz *et al.* 2004.
2. See de Bruijn and Hufen 1998 and Linder and Peters 1998 for an overview of the policy instrument literature.
3. The study does, however, seek the attitudes of actors on the 'acceptability' of some organic farm policy instruments.
4. This is, in part, a reflection of the compromises necessary in conducting well-designed research under the auspices of sectoral EU framework projects.

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