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To evaluate the state of the art of organic certification in out-of-home catering, a survey was carried out among relevant stakeholders in several European countries. The Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 about organic production specifically excludes what is called mass catering. Hence, a range of diverging systems for certification of organic catering and restaurants have been developed. This study presents opinions about a potential EU-wide harmonisation of an organic certification scheme for mass catering from relevant stakeholders. Certification bodies and other public authorities as well as stakeholders close to the catering practice were generally positive towards the idea of a harmonisation process. Several stakeholders should be involved in such a process, and organic associations and certification bodies were considered likely to be the strongest drivers. The study demonstrates that even the experts are sometimes unsure about details in this part of organic certification. This illustrates the complexity of this field.

Response to Reviewers: Dear reviewers,

today, we are very happy to present you our new and revised paper to your journal.

We are happy that the paper fits the Aims and Scope of the Journal.
As the first reviewer had suggested, we changed all recommendations.

We had added line numbers, of course a bad mistake.

Also we switched the order of the first two paragraphs of the introduction to the more appropriate section.

Furthermore we have included more relevant literature considering the organic and catering sector and peer-reviewed papers.

Hopefully our work is able to meet your requirements, now.

Manuscript Draft for Organic Agriculture

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Certification of organic mass catering – a need for harmonization across Europe?

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Keywords

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Abstract

To evaluate the state of the art of organic certification in out-of-home catering, a survey was carried out among relevant stakeholders in several European countries. The Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 about organic production specifically excludes what is called mass catering. Hence, a range of diverging systems for certification of organic catering and restaurants have been developed. This study presents opinions about a potential EU-wide harmonisation of an organic certification scheme for mass catering from relevant stakeholders. Certification bodies and other public authorities as well as stakeholders close to the catering practice were generally positive towards the idea of a harmonisation process. Our informants proposed that several stakeholders should be involved in such a process. Organic associations and certification bodies were considered likely to be the strongest drivers. The study demonstrates that even the experts are sometimes unsure about details in this part of organic certification. This illustrates the complexity of this field.

Introduction

Consumption demands certification

The consumption of organic food is increasing, especially in Europe and US (Willer and Kilcher, 2011). Often, significant premium prices are paid for organic products. The interests of the rising amount of consumers making ethical considerations about food choices, e.g. product origin, production methods and corporate responsibilities, should be respected (Padel et al., 2010). Therefore, a valid and efficient control and certification system for organic food is required. Since 1991, the EU has provided public regulations for organic production (EU Council Regulation No 2092/91). Certification schemes and their labels should lead to more consumer confidence in the safety and quality of food products, conventional as well as organic (Albersmeier et al. 2010).

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Furthermore, certification labels deliver reliability with regard to processing systems and present transparency to consumer choice. One of the main characteristics of a certification system is the verification by an independent authority, such as regularly done by certification bodies, often named as the third-party in the audit process (Luning & Marcelis 2007). For organic production certification bodies, accreditation of the IFOAM is of special interest (IFOAM 2011).

Organic products and meals often have to compete with cheaper offers and therefore the certification process and the labelling could propose a unique feature, as labels should deliver in all market segments (Meffert et al. 2007).

The validity of labels, food quality aspects and the reliability of certification schemes for organic production were discussed by several researchers, such as Janssen & Hamm (2011), Torjusen et al. (2001) and Jahn et al. (2005). Surprisingly, few research activities have considered the organic certification of mass catering activities. This may be due to the lack of regulations for this sector; the EU regulation for organic production specifically excludes mass catering (Council Regulation No 834/2007). Still, research could be important to analyse the broad range of national certification schemes that are developed. This would support a proposal for general guidelines and certification schemes, which could contribute to increase the consumption of organic food in this growing market segment, and to facilitate transparency (Rueckert-John et al. 2010). The study presented here has made a first attempt to analyse the need for an EU harmonisation of organic mass catering certification, by mapping the opinions among certification bodies and other important stakeholders.

The Out-of-Home-Sector

The Out-of-Home market (OOH) is notoriously difficult to define and especially to quantify Strassner (2009a). This is evident alone by the variety of terms: out-of-home, foodservice, HoReCa – hotels, restaurants, catering, are all over-arching terms used somewhat interchangeably to cover the sale of food and/or beverages for immediate consumption, on or off the premises. Vending may or may not be included. This sector covers both the public sector such as education, welfare and military, and the private sector such as catering companies, chains, leisure, travel – both voluntary purchases such as take-aways and coffee shops, and less voluntary or even “captive” purchases such as at day care centres and schools, as well as subsidized (usually workplace locations, and institutions such as hospitals and care homes) and non-subsidized conditions.

The Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 of 28th June 2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products which came into effect on January 1st 2009 governs these topics in all member states. However, the national countries are allowed to adopt national rules or private standards for the OOH market, because the regulation excludes all operations in so-called mass catering. This is set out in Title I, Article 1, Aim and Scope (3) of the regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007) and not further elaborated on in the implementation rules (Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008). On account of the EU-regulation, all member states deal with the field of organic OOH catering (OOOH) and its organic certification in their own way, and several states have no

national rules or regulation for mass catering at all. A forum to exchange information and experiences in the field of OOOH certification has been developed, linked to the annual BioFach Trade Fair and Congress in Germany (Strassner et al. 2009, Strassner & Mikkelsen 2010). The iPOPY countries' solutions served as case studies in a detailed overview into OOOH certification (Strassner et al., 2010). On the one side are states such as Germany, which was the first EU member to implement a standard organic certification programme controlled by approved inspection bodies supervised by responsible agencies in their respective federal state not only for organic food production, processing and trade but also for mass catering (Roehl et al. 2008). In line with this, Norway has a private organisation named Debio, which on behalf of the public authority controls every activity of production, processing and distribution of organic food, including OOOH (Strassner et al. 2010). Both examples reflect programmes which are proven daily and have been valid for years. On the other end of the scale of variation, there are countries which have invented original solutions, such as Denmark. In the beginning of 2009 the Danish Food Authority developed a new model of OOOH-certification known as the "Bronze-Silver-Gold" model. The three categories inform the customer about the percentage of organic food (by price or by weight, this is optional for the caterers) used in restaurants and other food serving outlets (Strassner et al. 2010). Finland has chosen a model comparable to the Danish, and informs about organic food in OOH-settings with a semi-official certification scheme called "Steps to Organic" (Strassner & Lukas 2011). Italy is the European forerunner in the use of organic food in catering, especially in school meals (Spigarolo et al. 2010). However, this country has not established any OOOH certification scheme until now. More examples of national solutions for OOOH certification are described by Strassner (2009a and 2009b).

In the years from 1995 to 2004, a remarkable development was described: While the average EU-27 household expenditure for food consumption overall (inflation adjusted) developed by 15%, the spending for catering services increased by 25 % (European Commission 2008). Due to this rapid growth, the catering sector attracts increasing attention at the pan-European level, also with respect to implementation of organic food and organic certification. The EU regulation for organic food and farming (EC No 834/2007) obliges the European Commission to report to the EU Council on the scope of the regulation before the end of 2011, with a clear reference to 'organic food prepared by mass caterers'. The increasing attention on public procurement of organic food as it means e.g. to reduce negative environmental impacts, increases the importance of appropriate certification standards for the whole chain of food production, processing and consumption.

The stakeholder perspective

Standards for certification should always meet the expectations of consumers and business partners, otherwise the value of a system will decrease and deteriorate (Albersmeier et al. 2010). A certification scheme should meet and respect the interests of relevant stakeholders. The consumer is not able to verify whether a product is organic or not and hence fully dependent on a valid labelling system (Jahn et al. 2005). The process of certification is a necessary part of a transparent communication in consumer marketing. Focussing on the consumer perspective, Janssen and

Hamm (2011) carried out remarkable results: According to the study, consumers are often very little informed about the regulation schemes in organic product labelling. They often presume that the domestic standard for organic products is a very high one whereas other country standards do not have the same quality. Many participants commented that the governmental standard food control was more trustworthy than the EU regulations for organic production. The reasons are that this control is carried out by a government authority, and that it has been established for a longer time than the EU standard. In line with these results, Sønderskov & Daugbjerg (2010: 2) pointed out that in the consumer's perspective, "schemes relying on heavy governmental involvement attract more confidence than schemes with less state involvement". This is useful knowledge to consider, if a harmonized certification system for mass catering shall be developed on an EU level.

Due to the lack of a common regulation of organic mass catering, it is of interest to study how the stakeholders involved in this sector perceive the situation, and whether they see any need for a possible harmonisation. A harmonisation could be obtained by introducing EU regulations for mass catering.

The aim of the present study was to reveal if certification body officials and other professionals working in this field are satisfied with the current situation, and to describe what these experienced stakeholders think, should be emphasised in a possible future harmonisation process.

Materials and Methods

The study of innovative Public Organic food Procurement for Youth (iPOPY, 2007-2010) was one of the eight research projects conducted in the CORE Organic I programme (Coordination of European Transnational Research in Organic Food and Farming). Within a number of European countries, namely Italy, Denmark, Finland, Norway and partly Germany, strategies and instruments to increase the consumption of organic food in serving outlets for young people were studied. Supply chain management, stakeholders' perceptions and participation as well as the potential of organic food in relation to health and obesity risks were also analysed.

As a part of the studies of supply chain management, procedures for certification of organic food served in out-of-home (OOH) settings were reviewed and analysed in Denmark, Finland, Italy and Norway (Strassner et al. 2010). Germany was included as a reference country since this country has regulated this area by national law.

In order to reach all member states of the EU and also all countries in the rest of Europe in a quick and inexpensive way, a web-based questionnaire was designed. Web-based questionnaire have also a high rate of acceptance, because users need less time and also provide a high quality of data as Thielsch & Weltzin (2009) propose.

The first online survey was addressed to all certifying bodies in all European countries. The questionnaire comprised fifteen questions. Three questions were open; the rest were closed with categories provided where appropriate. The closed questions were analysed quantitatively, while the open questions provided a qualitative addition increasing our understanding of the material. The WBQ was pre-tested with three certification experts. The invitation email, which included the link to the WBQ, was sent to the certification bodies on December 6th 2009. The mailing list included 185 email addresses, received from the official EU-list of certification bodies (Official Journal of the European Union 2008) and for certification bodies from the non-EU countries, from the internet. The invitation email was addressed to the manager, but it was mentioned that he/she was welcome to delegate it to the responsible employee(s). Respondents from the certification bodies are henceforth referred to as “certifiers”. The email was followed up by two reminders, on December 13th 2009 and January 6th 2010. The survey was accessible until January 31st 2010.

To increase the number of respondents and extend the material beyond the certification bodies, a second online survey was posted in January 2010. This questionnaire was addressed to 151 persons involved in the OOH sector, in the following referred to as “professionals”. In addition to people actively working in the field as caterers, people with a close contact to these were also approached, such as consultants, scientists and even NGO officials and one journalist. The contact information was available thanks to the address lists created via the OOH forums arranged during the BioFach fairs. The second questionnaire was accessible from January 15th to 31st and comprised the same questions as in the first survey but with two additional open questions. It was followed up by one reminder email on January 25th.

To gain as much information as possible, we welcomed also partially filled-in questionnaires. Advocating one’s position(s) in this field may touch on sensitive issues. Hence in all contact with our respondents we endeavoured to be especially considerate.

As an introductory question the participants were asked about the current status of OOH certification in their country, if there is regulation under state law, under private law or no regulation. The next questions targeted the satisfaction level with the present regulation of the organic OOH-certification in Europe and in the respondents’ own country. Question four recorded the opinions about a possible harmonised organic certification scheme on the EU level for the OOH-sector, followed by an open question asking which impacts the respondent could think of, if such a certification was to be introduced. Furthermore, the participants were asked to think of strengths and weaknesses in the case of a possible harmonisation process, and also to estimate the likely duration of the time period required for the implementation of a possible harmonisation process. The next two questions assessed which stakeholders should be involved in a harmonisation process and which of them would likely be the strongest / weakest drivers in such a process, ranked on a scale from 1 to 6. Thereafter one question asked to identify the respondent’s status of knowledge about other regulation schemes implemented by other European countries. At

the end of the online survey addressed to certifiers, the respondent was asked to declare in which country his / her certification body is established. Correspondingly, the professionals were asked about the country for which they have answered the questions and how they would characterise their role in their actual working position. The survey for professionals was supplemented by two open questions about what factors would be important for bringing a possible harmonisation process forward, and possible conflicts or constraints.

The collected data were recorded in excel files and analysed by simple statistics, calculating average values where appropriate. The answers in the open questions were also recorded, analysed, and used to increase our understanding of the research field. In the results section, the number of respondents answering each question is referred as (n =...). Relevant statements have been cited in italics to exemplify and illustrate the quantitative data presented here.

Survey results and discussion

Rate of response

Of the 185 certification bodies contacted, 48 accessed the online-survey and 18 filled in the questionnaire completely; this is a response rate of 26% for survey access but only 10% for completed questionnaires. Of the 151 professionals contacted, 38 accessed the online-survey and 17 answered all questions; this is a very similar response rate of 25% for survey access but only 11% for completed questionnaires. The low response rate reflects the travelling of inspectors in this sector, that much information is circulated by email so online surveys suffer hard competition and possibly that the end and start of a year are especially busy periods. As this kind of certification is little developed, it may also be that the right person was difficult to find or that the questions were too difficult to answer. Furthermore, it is important to consider the language barrier, as the survey was only accessible in English. To achieve a higher rate of response, future surveys should be translated into the mother tongues and tested for clarity in each case. However, resources for this were not available here.

Respondents' working positions

The functions of the respondents in the certification bodies, the *certifiers*, were described as “*general manager*” (n=5), “*responsible for catering*” (n=1) and “*other position*” (n=11). The latter term comprised “*certification manager*”, “*coordinator of processing*”, “*head of section*”, “*project manager*”, “*quality manager*” and “*senior expert*”. The *professionals* characterised their current working position as “*employed in a public or governmental authority*” (n=3), “*employed in an NGO*” (n=1), “*researcher or employed in the scientific sector*” (n=3), “*employed in restaurants and catering*” (n=1) and in an “*other working position*” (n=6). The latter were described as

journalists, developers in this field or active in the event sector. The response from the professionals reflect that people active in this field as caterers have little time for work conducted by a computer. However, the information received from the other professionals still reflects the everyday situation of OOOH-actors, due to the close contact these professionals have with that sector.

Countries of participants

Statements from certifiers were gained from Albania, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden. Statements from professionals were gained from Austria, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Norway. All in all, the respondents covered a large part of Europe and altogether 15 countries with very different solutions to certification of OOOH.

National OOH-regulation

Ten certifiers stated that in their countries, organic certification in catering is regulated by state law. Four mentioned that there is a regulation by private law, and thirteen declared that there is no regulation of organic certification in mass catering in their country (Table 1). Ten professionals described that in their countries there is a regulation by state law, seven participants mentioned that there is a regulation under private law, and four mentioned that there is no regulation of organic certification in mass catering. The results are presented together (Table 1) to gain a better overview of all statements. Though some respondents did not identify their country, it was possible to link most respondents' statements with a country.

[Table 1 about here](#)

The majority of statements fit to the situation shown in the objective overview, stated by Strassner (2009a and 2009b). It may be assumed that Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Slovenia have no regulation of OOOH certification, given their population size and the developmental stage of their organic sectors. This is also likely for Greece and Portugal, even if there is evidence of some organic produce finding its way into top restaurant establishments. From the various statements of Italy and Portugal the confusion in this sector becomes apparent. The different explanations of their own country regulation may show that the certification bodies are not very well informed about the regulation of organic certification in the OOH-sector. On the other hand, it must be considered that they might have misunderstood the question or the terminology used in the WBQ.

How long would a potential harmonisation process take?

For a possible harmonisation process, the certifiers assessed that it could be carried out in relatively short time (up to one year), whereas the professionals found a period of more than one year to be required (Fig. 1). It was not specified in the WBQ if a harmonisation process will

comprise design, implementation or both. Because former regulations on organic production and processing in the EU have taken several years to develop and thereafter to implement, it was surprising to see that most certifiers assess that a period of less than a year would be required. It may be that they thought mostly of the implementation phase. The question in the survey should have been more precise.

Fig 1 about here

Familiarity with other systems

Among sixteen certifiers, only one third were familiar with other regulation schemes than the one in their own country. In contrast, nine of the answering professionals (n=15) were familiar with other systems. This reflects that certifiers are mainly engaged in national matters. It would likely be fortunate if resources were available that they could be better informed about the situation in other countries, as this would facilitate cooperation, trade and development in the organic sector in general.

Satisfaction level with the regulation in one's own country

The level of satisfaction with the present situation in OOOH-certification was much lower among the certifiers than among the professionals (Fig. 2). 11 certifiers were fully unsatisfied or unsatisfied about the current situation of regulation in their own country, whereas only 4 were satisfied or fully satisfied (Fig. 2). Among the professionals, a portion (n=6) was a little bit unsatisfied, but half of the respondents were satisfied or fully satisfied (n =7).

Fig. 2 about here

Satisfaction level in Europe

When asked about the satisfaction level with the present situation in Europe for OOOH certification, more respondents had no opinion about this, especially amongst the certification bodies. Again the professionals were somewhat more satisfied than the certifiers, but in general the level of satisfaction was low (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 about here

Respondents' satisfaction level compared to the type of regulation

The general satisfaction level of the countries own regulation systems was related to the type of regulation (state, private, no regulation) in each country (Fig. 4a and 4b). Grouping the responses into the two main categories "satisfied" (comprising "a little bit satisfied", "satisfied" and "fully

satisfied”) and “unsatisfied” (comprising the corresponding unsatisfied alternatives), and dividing them according to the type of regulation, more respondents from countries with state or private regulations in their own country were satisfied. Additionally, the degree of satisfaction was very dependent on whether the respondent was a certifier or a professional (Fig 4). In general, the professionals were much more satisfied, no matter whether the situation in the country was a regulation by state law, private law or no regulation at all, whereas the certifiers were less satisfied in general and especially when there was no regulation.

Fig. 4a about here

Fig. 4b about here

Positive or negative impacts associated with a possible harmonisation

In spite of the differences in degree of satisfaction with the country situation, both groups of respondents very much welcomed a potential harmonised certification scheme for the OOOH-sector (Fig. 5). A large majority considered that a possible EU-wide harmonisation of organic certification in mass catering would have mainly positive impacts. Only five respondents feared negative impacts. There were no remarkable differences between the two groups of respondents in the answers to this question.

Fig. 5 about here

Explaining expected positive impacts, the respondents referred to better understanding between the member states, easier procedures for international companies, and easier understanding for consumers and producers (Table 2). The negative impacts were explained as bureaucracy and that harmonisation will be difficult because of the many and large differences between the countries.

Table 2 about here

Strengths and weaknesses

Questioned about their personal opinions on strengths and weaknesses of a potential EU-wide harmonisation, a range of statements were provided (Table 3). The statements were in line with the positive and negative impacts referred to above, emphasising increased understanding, easier procedures for trade and increased trust among consumers, i.e. organic integrity as the main strengths, and increased bureaucracy and difficulties linked to the heterogeneous situation as the main weaknesses. Respondents thought mainly of strengths (n=45), a few participants (n=11) also foresaw weaknesses (Table 3).

Table 3 about here

Stakeholders and drivers

Not surprisingly, 79% of the certifiers found that certifiers are important stakeholders to involve in a discussion about harmonisation. Also organic associations (75 %), caterers (66 %), political authorities (66 %) as well as NGOs and other stakeholders were mentioned, such as the education sector, consumer organisations, municipalities or other institutions using organic services. The professionals also emphasised organic associations (60%) and certifiers, but somewhat less see the certifiers in an important role (56%). Caterers were also mentioned by the professionals (56%), as were political authorities (47%).

When considering the most important drivers for a possible harmonisation process, the two groups of respondents were close. 68% of the certifiers think that organic associations will be most important. 63% see certifiers as important drivers, 44% see caterers and 33% see political authorities. The professionals answered in a similar manner: 61% see organic associations as strongest drivers and 50% see certifiers, political authorities and caterers.

Additional statements

The professionals were asked to indicate what factors are important to further a possible harmonisation process and where they see conflict potential. The statements were very heterogeneous. One expert mentioned “*freedom of trade*”, another mentioned the importance of considering “*different needs and traditions in different countries*”. One participant had the “*the biggest conflict to establish a practical and functional scheme in countries without any scheme*” in mind. Another respondent imagines conflicts between “*sustainable and budgetary elements*”. Finally: “*I can see conflicts in the catering business. They could prefer not [to] have an obligation about the certification, but I think this has to be a must for the development of the organic sector also in this [catering] sector*”.

General discussion

One central approach of the present paper was to reach European certification bodies, the frequently-ignored target group. Even if the results only reflect a small set of opinions because of the low rate of response, many countries are represented and it is possible to see a first state of the art for certification of OOOH in Europe. Receiving answers from a diversity of countries, including recent EU member states like Estonia and Latvia and non-members like Albania and Norway, makes it possible to discuss the results in a context covering the whole of Europe.

Three key findings can be identified: Firstly, there is an overall dissatisfaction with the current situation regarding OOOH certification. Especially the certifiers are not satisfied about the different regulation systems of organic OOH-certification within Europe. For the situation in their own country, the level of satisfaction was generally higher, especially among the professionals.

Secondly, most respondents see more positive impacts than negative coming from a hypothetical harmonisation. And thirdly, both groups surveyed consider that a broad range of stakeholders should be involved in a future harmonisation process, rather than being of the opinion that only the Commission or only the certification bodies should find a solution.

In particular from the certifiers, the dissatisfaction about the current regulatory situation in their own country and also in Europe prevails. The grounds given seem to have their origins in a general confusion and lack of overview, including over own borders, as well as in a lack of knowledge on what works where. Our results compare well to those of Miran et al. (2009), whose consulted authorities and certification bodies stressed knowledge and education as extremely important to solve certification issues arising during daily business. Furthermore, the issue of credibility of the organic chain, specifically certification along a closed chain from farm to fork and consistency in standards across Europe figures strongly. Any fears linked to a potential harmonisation are mainly linked to extremes of bureaucracy, fearing either such strict measures as to result in a total lack of flexibility, or such pliability as to result in the undermining of organic integrity. The challenge for the OOH channel is similar to that explained by Giovannucci (2006, cited in Padel, 2010:64) and revolves around making sure that organic certification does not become a barrier to market development, especially where emerging markets are small and vulnerable. Similarly, Canavari & Cantore (2007) stress related factors such as transactions costs and the equivalence of organic standards in the general organic certification activities, even if not focussed on mass catering actions. The authors underline that systems will benefit from equal standards in trade and costs.

Considering the current state of affairs there are some changes foreseeable in the individual country certification regulations such as in the Czech Republic, France (Strassner & Mikkelsen, 2010) and Italy, where regulations are being developed. Especially the European countries which have not yet established an appropriate certification scheme could learn from schemes of other European countries. As we have a variety of solutions being enacted amongst the countries, sharing such experience within Europe could provide useful insight to questions concerning particular conditions. Where the schemes are proven to function well, other countries can learn good practice; where they have failed, they can learn what to avoid. In addition, newer member states or non-EU members in which foreign certifiers are operating may benefit from their concepts and experience in OOOH-certification.

However, and that is the most interesting fact that what we have learned in this study, the majority of our respondents think of mainly positive impacts for all participants if a harmonisation process was to be initiated. There is thus a remarkable openness towards the concept of a harmonisation across Europe.

80% of all participants can think of mainly positive impacts regarding a potential EU-harmonisation and as important stakeholders and drivers for a potential process, all important institutions as certifiers, organic associations, caterers and political authorities, are named by both groups to be involved in this process. The answers given as to impacts allude to concepts centred

in justice and fairness for all stakeholders, be they caterers, certifiers or national public officials. Considering the question of acceptance of any scheme possibly to be devised, a cooperative process including all major stakeholders seems prudent and weighs more strongly than the time needed to pursue such a process. This result is well in line with Roehl (2008), who detailed how such a participatory approach contributed to the successful rollout of OOOH-certification in Germany.

The results further suggest that we could assume a better satisfaction level if the country had established a state certification scheme. The study revealed that the sector of organic certification is a very complicated field, were even experts, dealing with certification all day, may be unsure about country regulations. Confusion of the certification bodies links to the existing confusion and the lack of information about organic produce in an OOH-setting which is present in a few European countries. This situation seems somewhat inefficient for the moment. This compares well with Janssen and Hamm (2011), who found that most consumers were not well informed about details of organic regulation. High competence is required from organic consumers, and even more from organic officials.

Our study revealed a significant lack of familiarity with OOH certification schemes in other European countries. From open comments it could be assumed that a lack of time and resources seem to be the reasons for the unfamiliarity, as openness and also interest was demonstrated.

Interestingly, whereas consumers seem to believe that the national organic regulations are better than EU regulations or organic regulations in other countries (Janssen & Hamm 2011), certification bodies and experts do not seem to be nationally chauvinists in this respect. However, the large variety of schemes, standards and country-own regulations results in a very complex, rapidly changing and confusing situation. Hence, the need for a clear and transparent explanation of facts for both groups exists, and is rising as more and more consumers get involved.

The professionals seem to have developed a better network across Europe than the certifiers. The low share of certifiers being familiar with alternative regulation schemes calls for more research and exchange of information in this field. Padel & Huber (2010:84) draw attention to there being only few tools to allow for exchange of information at the EU level for certifiers and public authorities. Also possibly due to their different areas of focus (i.e. certifiers more country-internal, authorities and professionals may need to have a more international application), both groups estimated a very different time needed for the process of a potential harmonisation. Given the willingness to share knowledge and experience in this field, creation of opportunities for such exchange seems indicated.

Stakeholders express a strong need for such certification to further develop the Italian organic market and consumption. Spokespeople explain that the market is growing fast but unregulated, that catering companies would like to market their services using the EU-organic logo but cannot do so and that independent control seems indicated (Strassner et al. 2010).

Conclusion

The study shows that the European Council will be welcomed in an initiative to create a compulsory OOOH-certification scheme by certification bodies as well as by other experts active in the OOOH sector. A possible harmonisation process should be conducted in close cooperation with certification bodies and organic associations, even if this will increase the length of the time period required to develop and implement the regulation and demand resources to conduct required discussions. Networking across borders is a good opportunity to create a scheme which is generally binding but with the scope for regional and country-individual conditions. Such a binding, but still flexible scheme is in accordance with other regulations recently developed such as the “Gold-Silver-Bronze medal” scheme in Denmark (Organic Denmark 2011), which was also grounded on knowledge exchange and co-ordination. Such an endeavour will especially be supportive for the positive impacts and strengths referred by our respondents, such as “*more traceability*”, “*more transparency*” or “*consumer understanding*” spread around Europe.

Further recommendations for next steps in Europe gained from this research include:

- Networking in this sector should be intensified, especially between the certifiers, even if a change of regulation for OOOH certification is not an immediate consequence
- The lack of knowledge in the field necessitates a strong support of information transfer and a creation of opportunities or platforms to do so, especially for certification bodies
- Important stakeholders such as certifiers and organic associations should be involved in any possible harmonisation process from the outset, to create a scheme which fits all individual conditions but provides more transparency than the current situation
- The establishment of a cross-European working group consisting of all important stakeholders which deals with the status quo and provides objective consultation seems appropriate.

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Table headings

Table 1) Statements about country regulations made by certifiers and professionals compared to the situation described by Strassner (2009a and 2009b)

Table 2) Positive and negative impacts mentioned by respondents answering this question (n=10 certifiers, n=12 professionals)

Table 3) Strengths and weaknesses of a potential harmonisation of OOOH certification mentioned by certifiers

Figure captions

Figure 1) Respondents' estimation about the duration of a potential harmonisation (n=23 certifiers (dark grey) n=15 professionals (light grey)).

Figure 2) Satisfaction levels about the present regulation of organic certification in the out-of-home sector in respondents' countries (n=22 certifiers (dark grey), n=19 professionals (light grey))

Figure 3) Satisfaction levels about the present regulation of organic certification in the out-of-home sector in Europe (n=19 certifiers (dark grey), n=16 professionals (light grey))

Figure 4a) Satisfaction levels of the professionals (n=19) compared to the present regulation of organic certification in the respondents' own country (satisfied=dark grey, unsatisfied= light grey)

Figure 4b)

Satisfaction levels of the certifiers (n=19) compared to the present regulation of organic certification in the respondents' own country (satisfied=dark grey, unsatisfied= light grey)

Figure 5) The respondents' opinions on a possible EU-wide harmonised organic certification scheme for mass catering (n=26 certifiers (dark grey), n=17 professionals (light grey))

Tables

Table 1

Member state	Statement according to certifiers	Statements according to professionals	Correct situation*
Albania	State law- (n=1)	-	Not described
Austria	State law (n=1)	State law- (n=1)	State law
Denmark	State law (n=1)	State law (n=2)	State law
Estonia	State law (n=2)	-	Not described
Finland	No regulation/ Semi-official regulation(n=1)	No regulation (n=1)	Semi-official regulation
Germany	State law (n=1)	State law (n=1)	State law
Greece	No regulation (n=2)	-	Not described
Italy	Private law (n=1) No regulation (n=1)	No regulation (n=1)	No official regulation
Latvia	State law (n=1)	-	Not described
The Netherlands		No regulation (n=1)	No official regulation, Creating reliable schemes is responsibility of the market parties
Norway	State law (n=1)	State law (n=1)	State law
Portugal	Private law (n=1) No regulation(n=1)	-	Not described
Sweden	Private law (n=1)	Private law (n=3)	Private law
Slovakia	No regulation (n=1)	-	Not described
Slovenia	No regulation (n=1)	-	Not described

* Correct situation described by Strassner (2009a and 2009b)

Table 2)

The major statements for positive impacts were:	The major statements for negative impacts were:
<i>Good to have consistency in organic standards throughout the EU</i>	<i>Conditions are very different across the EU</i>
<i>Easier to handle for European and international companies, for consumers, producers and inspectors</i>	<i>Flexibility of the guidelines is necessary- for national circumstances</i>
<i>Create the same possibilities for all countries</i>	<i>Regulation should not be too bureaucratic</i>
<i>Greater credibility</i>	<i>Regulation would be changed in a negative way</i>
<i>Potential expansion of the use of organic food</i>	<i>The rules may not be as strict as they are now</i>
<i>Comparability makes a discussion between countries easier</i>	<i>Greater costs</i>

Table 3)

When reflecting about possible strengths of a potential harmonisation of organic certification in mass catering in Europe, the respondents think of...
<i>... better understanding and consumer's information / growing consumer confidence/ transparency</i>
<i>... more justice among member states, better cross-national control, more comparability in different countries and cross-national understanding</i>
<i>... better traceability / better cross national control and know-how for further improvements</i>
<i>... better understanding, better guarantees about correct offers of organic catering services</i>
<i>... easier to run European projects</i>
<i>... increasing consumers' attention about organic food</i>
<i>... better commercial exchanges / easier for suppliers</i>
<i>... better cooperation between countries and larger diversity of organic products</i>
<i>... a harmonised scheme gives the restaurants a good tool how to work with organic food</i>
When reflecting about possible weaknesses of a potential harmonisation of organic certification in mass catering Europe, the respondents think of...
<i>... less flexibility could be the result for some countries (no flexible enough for regional adaptations)</i>
<i>... different situations in every country and due to this it is not possible to generalize all the rules</i>
<i>... the fact that organic sales cannot grow by making rules. The consumer will always be the starting point (awareness, attitude, knowledge, price)</i>
<i>... problems especially in public sector because food systems are so different between countries, difficulties about comparable regulations.</i>
<i>... a scheme which includes only base criteria. Details should be added by the several countries</i>
<i>... a lack of local and regional voices</i>
<i>... increased need for documentation</i>
<i>... there is no need for harmonisation , you do not move a restaurant from one country to another , like you do with goods</i>

Figures

Figures are created in Excel and are also provided in an additional excel file.

Figure 1

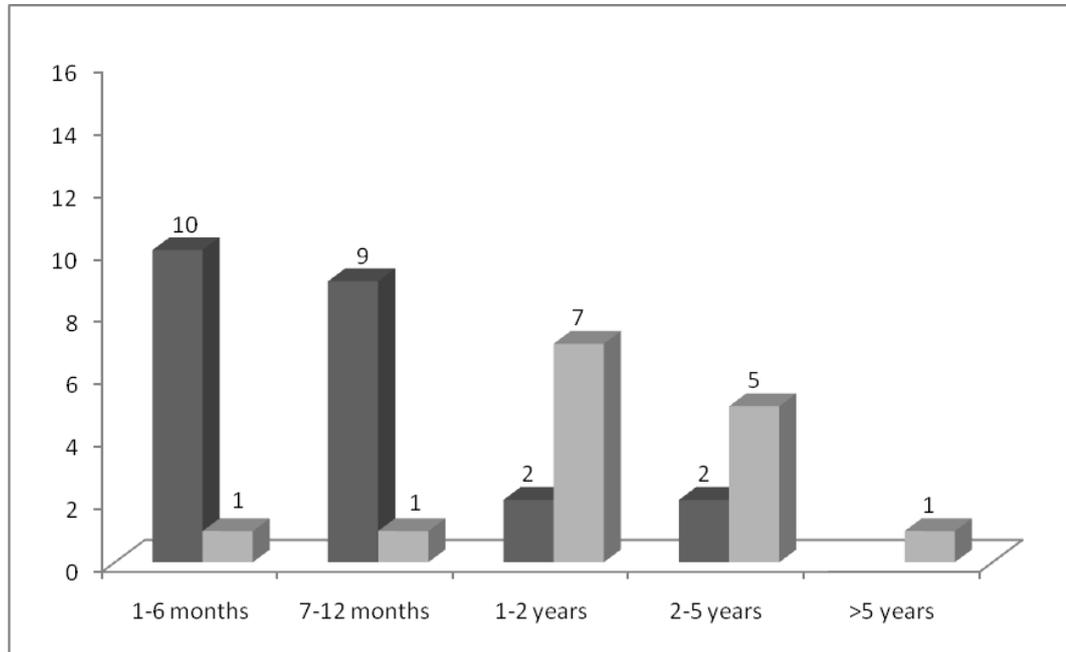


Figure 2

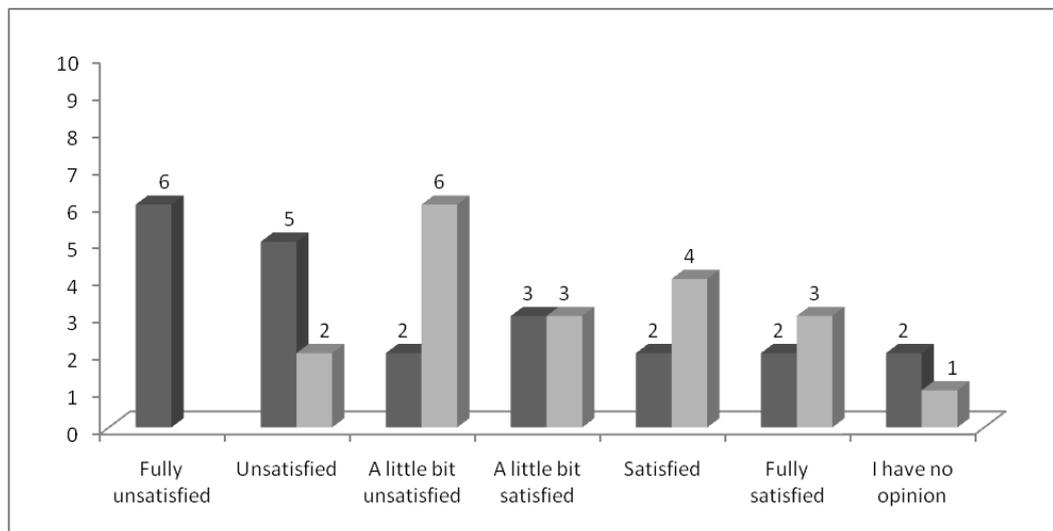


Figure 3

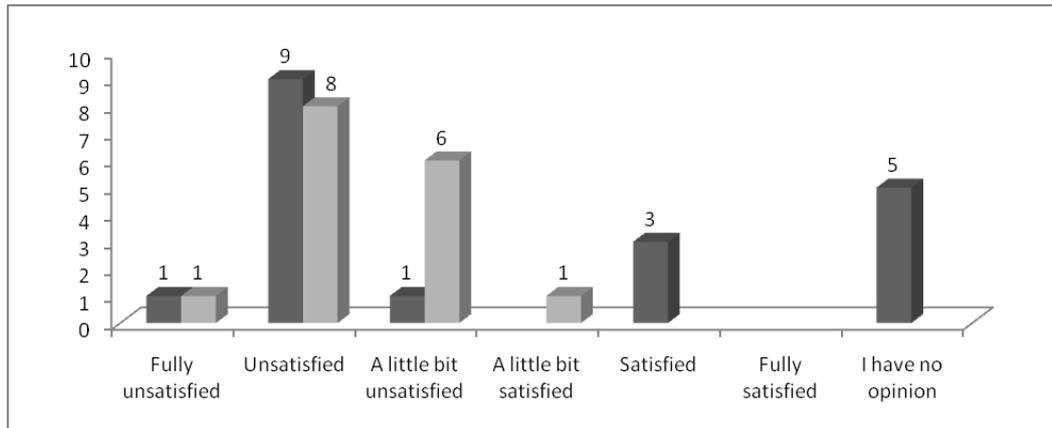


Figure 4a

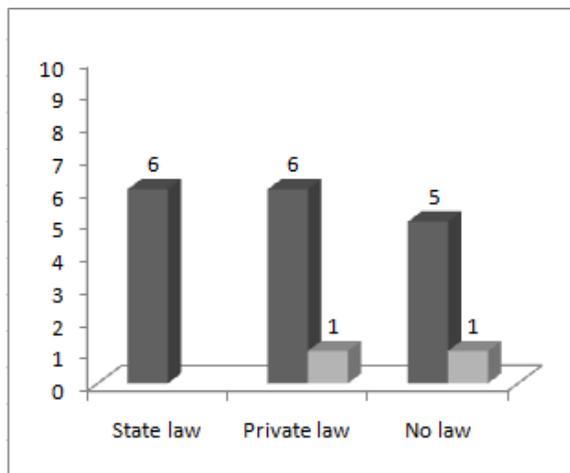


Figure 4b

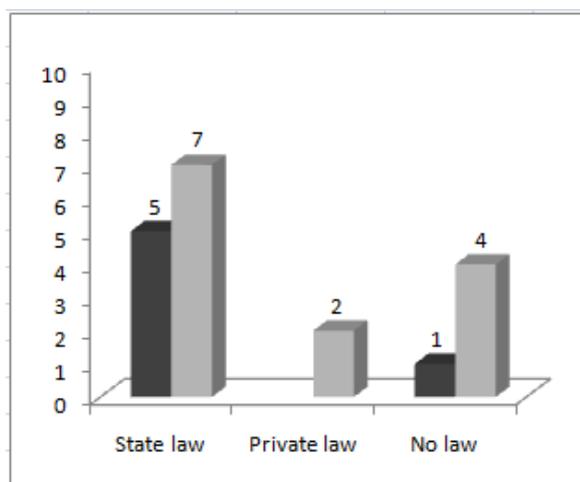
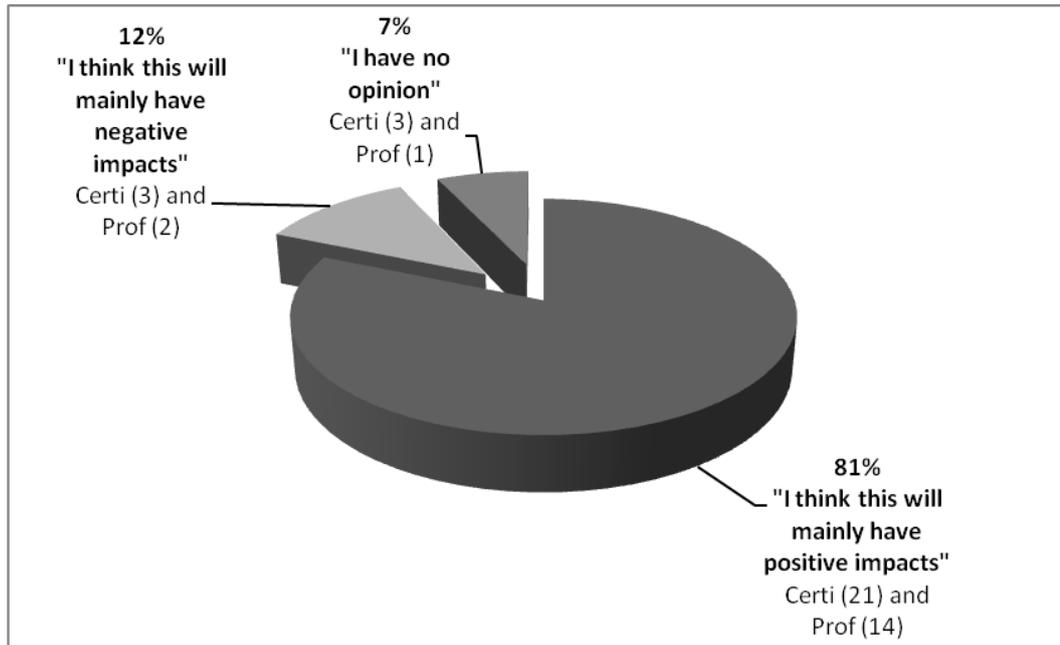


Figure 5



Data from: Certification of organic out-of-home catering – need for harmonisation across Europe

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Figure 1

	1-6 months	7-12 months	1-2 years	2-5 years	>5 years
certifiers	10	9	2	2	
	1-6 months	7-12 months	1-2 years	2-5 years	>5 years
professionals	1	1	7	5	1

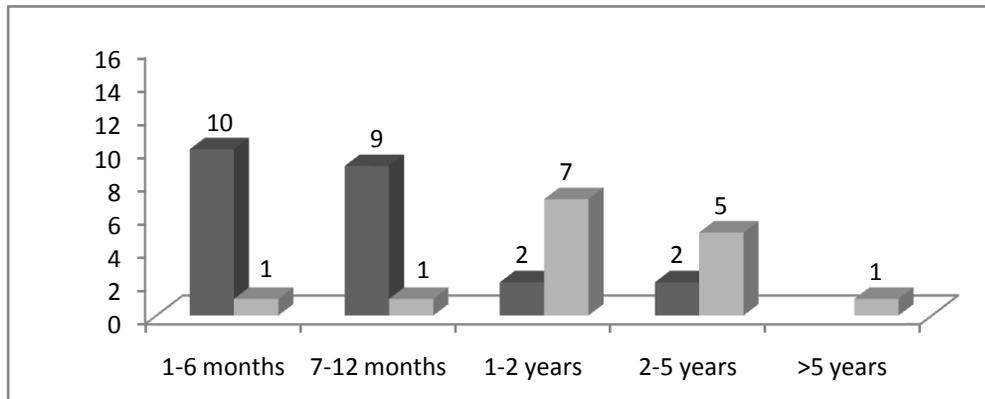


Figure 2

	Fully unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	A little bit unsatisfied	A little bit satisfied	Satisfied	Fully satisfied	I have no opinion
certifiers	6	5	2	3	2	2	2
professionals		2	6	3	4	3	1

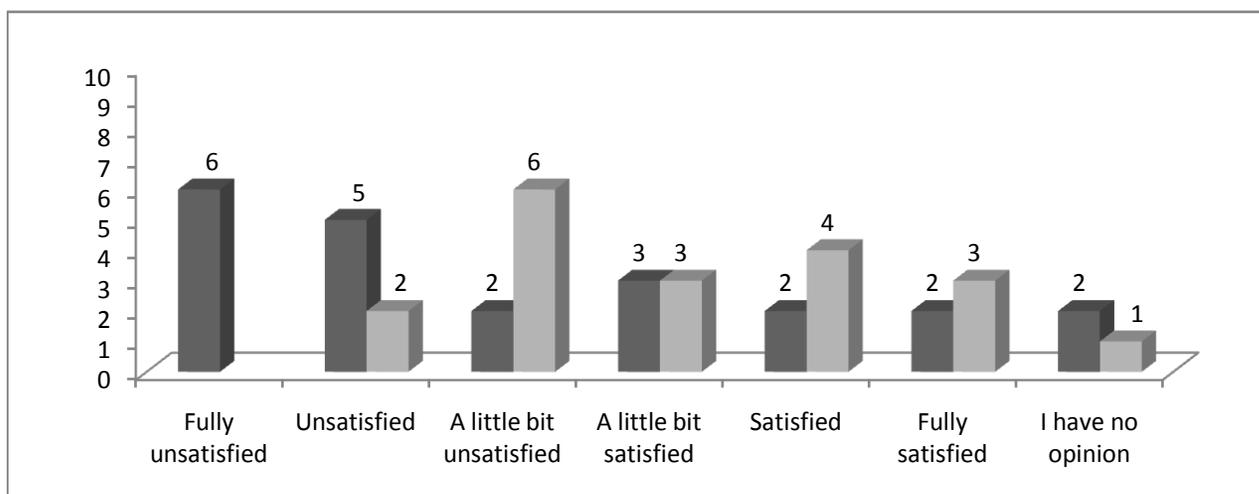


Figure 3

	Fully unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	A little bit unsatisfied	A little bit satisfied	Satisfied	Fully satisfied	I have no opinion
certifiers	1	9	1		3		5
professionals	1	8	6	1			

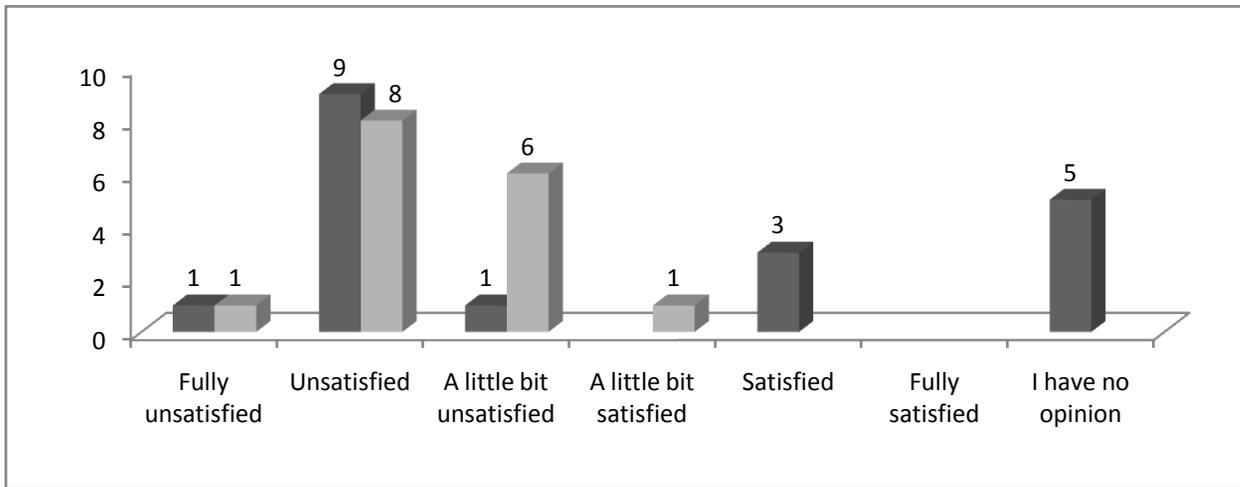


Figure 4a

Professionals	Satisfied	Unsatisfied
State law	6	
Private law	6	1
No law	5	1

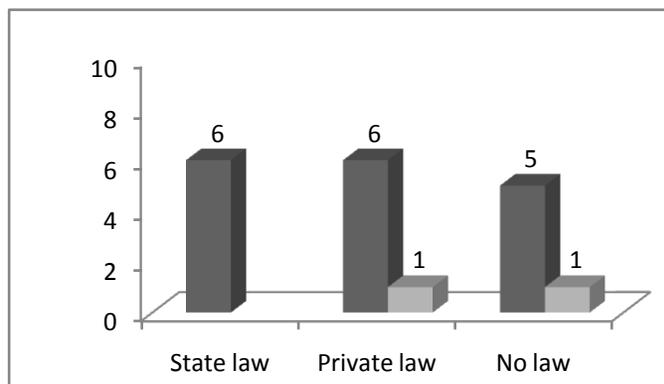


Figure 4b

Certifiers	Satisfied	Unsatisfied
State law	5	7
Private law		2
No law	1	4

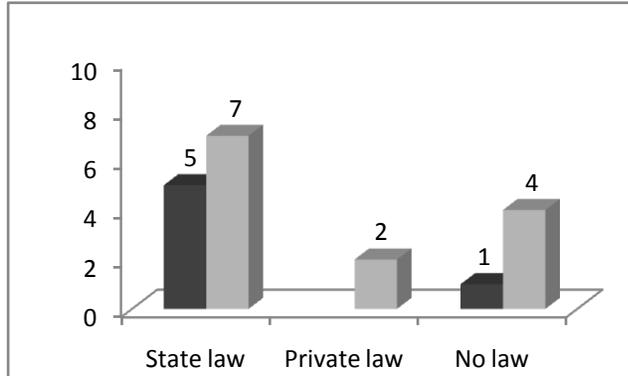


Figure 5

	certifiers	professionals
certifiers	26	
professionals		17
I think this will mainly	certifiers	professionals
I think this will mainly	21	14
I think this will mainly	3	2
I have no opinion	2	1

I think this will mainly have positive impacts		35
I think this will mainly have negative impacts		5
I have no opinion		3

