



IVANA SIMIĆ

A GUIDE TO BIODISTRICTS

HOW TO ESTABLISH A BIODISTRICT IN SERBIA



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ABBREVIATIONS

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GAOD	Global Alliance for Organic Districts
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
IN.N.E.R.	International Network of Eco Regions
LAFS	Local Agri-Food Systems
SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
SECO	Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme



INTRODUCTION

Biodistricts represent an innovative model of territorial development based on organic production, environmental protection and cooperation among different stakeholders within a defined territory. Their aim is to bring together local resources, production, the economy and the community in support of sustainable territorial development. Organic production is a key driver and defining feature of the Biodistrict model, providing a foundation for the development of sustainable food systems, the conservation of nature and the creation of added value at the local level.

As an integrated approach, Biodistricts connect agriculture, food production and consumption, natural resources, tourism, the economy, culture and education, creating conditions for long-term development and improved quality of life. Unlike individual projects or sector-specific policies, they are based on cooperation among different stakeholders and collective action at the territorial level.

The first Biodistricts emerged in Italy and France in the early 2000s. Today, similar approaches are developing under different names, including Biodistricts, Organic Districts, Bioregions, Ecoregions and Ecodistricts, in many countries across Europe and beyond. The model has also gained recognition within European Union policies, further highlighting its relevance for sustainable territorial development.

Serbia has significant potential for the development of Biodistricts. High-quality agricultural land, rich biodiversity, natural and cultural heritage, local gastronomy, traditional knowledge and growing interest in organic and local products provide a strong basis for their establishment. At the same time, many of these development assets remain insufficiently connected and underutilised, pointing to the need to foster more integrated territorial approaches.



Establishing a Biodistrict requires a clearly defined yet adaptable framework for action, bringing together interested stakeholders, building partnerships, and defining and implementing shared objectives. This Guide is therefore intended for businesses, agricultural producers, civil society organisations, local action groups, local governments, development agencies, decision-makers, donors and other stakeholders interested in initiating or supporting the development of Biodistricts in Serbia.

The aim of the Guide is to present the concept, principles, potential and benefits of Biodistricts and contribute to a better understanding of the model in Serbia. It also provides practical guidance for their establishment and development, drawing on relevant international experience and adapted to the conditions and needs of local territories. At the same time, the Guide seeks to translate the initial experience of the Kolubara Biodistrict into practical knowledge and recommendations that may be useful to other territories considering the development of this model in Serbia.





CONCEPT AND MODEL OF THE BIODISTRICT

What is a Biodistrict?

According to the European Union's Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production, a Biodistrict is a geographical area where farmers, citizens, tourism operators, associations and public authorities enter into an agreement for the sustainable management of local resources, based on organic principles and practices, with the aim of generating economic, social and environmental benefits for the territory (European Commission, 2021).

In practice, a Biodistrict brings together different actors operating within the same territory, including farmers, businesses, tourism and hospitality operators, civil society organisations, educational and research institutions, local authorities, cultural institutions, citizens and consumers. Through cooperation and joint action, they contribute to the development of the territory towards a more sustainable system of production, processing and consumption.

As an innovative model of territorial development, the Biodistrict fosters cooperation among different actors with the aim of strengthening environmental sustainability, economic resilience and social cohesion in rural areas (Poponi et al., 2021).

Organic production provides a key foundation for establishing a Biodistrict, with the potential to connect existing production capacities, enhance the competitiveness of local products and contribute to the development of sustainable food systems at territorial level.

Within a Biodistrict, organic production is therefore linked with other local resources and activities through an integrated development framework.

A Biodistrict should consequently not be understood as a project or an administrative unit, but as a long-term model of cooperation and territorial development. Through joint planning and coordinated action among different stake-

holders, it enables a shift from individual and fragmented initiatives towards an integrated approach to sustainable territorial development.

Principles

Biodistricts are based on a set of principles that guide their operation and development. The development and advancement of organic production is central to this approach and provides the foundation for the broader functions of a Biodistrict.

On this basis, the following principles have been defined:

- sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity conservation;
- strengthening local and short value chains;
- application of circular economy principles;
- participatory and transparent governance;
- social inclusion and equitable distribution of benefits.

The application of these principles supports the long-term sustainability of the territory and the development of its environmental, economic and social potential.

According to the International Network of Eco Regions – IN.N.E.R., the five components of a Biodistrict – agriculture, environment, economy, culture and society – are interconnected and function as an integrated system, contributing to the development of a local, sustainable and healthy food system.

Who Makes Up a Biodistrict?

The successful functioning of a Biodistrict relies on the active cooperation of different stakeholders operating within the same geographical area.

Organic farmers and processors are at the core of Biodistrict activities, while participation also extends to:

- farmers applying sustainable agricultural practices;
- tourism and hospitality service providers;
- local authorities and public institutions;
- civil society organisations;
- educational and research institutions;

- development agencies;
- citizens and consumers.

Schools, pre-school institutions, cultural institutions and tourism organisations can play a particularly important role by creating links between production, education, culture and local development.

A Biodistrict is also open to other stakeholders that share its principles and objectives.

Objectives

According to I.N.N.E.R., the objectives of Biodistricts are:

- improving the quality of life of people living in rural areas;
- increasing the attractiveness of rural areas;
- creating new employment opportunities and improving the quality of jobs;
- encouraging the active participation of young people in the ecological transition;
- strengthening European and international cooperation among rural areas.

Potential for the Development of Biodistricts in Serbia

The potential for developing Biodistricts in Serbia stems from the need to bring together existing local resources and development potential within an integrated approach to the development of specific geographical areas. Many parts of Serbia offer opportunities to connect agricultural production, natural and cultural heritage, local gastronomy, tourism, traditional knowledge and growing interest in organic and local products. However, these resources and activities are not always sufficiently interconnected or oriented towards common development objectives.

In this context, the Biodistrict provides a model for bringing existing resources and initiatives together within an integrated sustainable development framework and enabling territorial development to be shaped through a bottom-up approach, in line with the specific characteristics and needs of local communities.

Experience gained in Serbia through the Kolubara Biodistrict demonstrates the potential for developing such initiatives and gradually extending the model to other areas, while taking into account their specific local characteristics, conditions and needs.

The application of this approach is also aligned with broader strategic frameworks, including the priorities of Serbia's Food Systems Transformation Roadmap 2025–2028, as recognised in the 2025 UN–Serbia Partnership Results Report, indicating growing support for this model.

The development of Biodistricts in Serbia should therefore be understood as the application of a flexible territorial model that can be adapted to different local contexts, ranging from predominantly rural areas to territories with well-established tourism, agricultural and gastronomic identities.

Biodistricts in Relation to Related Concepts

Biodistricts are sometimes associated with other local development models, such as the LEADER approach, Local Action Groups (LAGs), cooperatives, clusters and territorial brands. Although they share certain features, Biodistricts differ in their scope, mode of operation and underlying development logic.

The LEADER approach (“Links between actions for the development of the rural economy”) is a European Union rural development instrument based on local partnerships and programme-based funding, while **Local Action Groups** implement local development strategies within this framework. By contrast, a Biodistrict is a long-term cooperation model that is not limited to programming cycles and does not constitute a funding mechanism.

Although there have been positive examples of this type of local development in Serbia, their development has generally been constrained by institutional and financial challenges.

Cooperatives are a form of association based on cooperative principles such as voluntary membership, democratic decision-making, members' economic participation, autonomy, cooperation among cooperatives and concern for the community. They bring together members who pursue their economic, as well as social, cultural and other interests through a jointly organised structure. Unlike a Biodistrict, a cooperative is an organisational model based on membership and governance within a group, rather than a territorial, multi-sectoral system that brings together different stakeholders within a particular

area. Cooperatives can play an important role within a Biodistrict, but they do not encompass the broader framework of integrated development across the Biodistrict territory.

Clusters bring together actors within a particular sector in order to enhance competitiveness, facilitate knowledge exchange and strengthen their joint market presence. A Biodistrict, by contrast, focuses on the balanced development of the territory as a whole and follows a multisectoral approach.

Territorial brands, including geographical indications, are important tools for promoting products and territories, but represent only one element of a Biodistrict. Products and services originating from a Biodistrict may be promoted under a shared territorial brand as an expression of the territory's common identity and values and its commitment to sustainable practices. A Biodistrict therefore does not replace such instruments, but integrates them into a broader development framework for the sustainable management of a defined territory.

A Biodistrict can therefore be understood as a model that connects and builds upon some of these approaches, bringing together multiple aspects of local development within an integrated system of cooperation and territorial governance. As such models are not yet firmly established in Serbia, there is considerable scope for the further development of Biodistricts, but also a risk that their potential may remain underutilised.





II

BIODISTRICTS IN INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE

The development of Biodistricts began in Europe in the early 2000s, with initiatives such as Bio-Distretto Cilento in Italy and BioVallée in France, and subsequently spread to other countries. Today, different forms of Biodistricts, Organic Districts, Bio-regions and Eco-regions exist in a number of countries, with their structures and operating models adapted to the local context.

International research indicates that Biodistricts can represent an effective model for advancing sustainable food systems by integrating organic agriculture, local institutions and communities within a framework for the sustainable management of local resources (Zanasi et al., 2024).

The role of Biodistricts is particularly relevant in territories facing population decline, economic stagnation and weakening local capacities. Their contribution is reflected in strengthening short, local and organic supply chains, supporting local economies and promoting agroecological practices. These processes can contribute to the revitalisation of such territories by creating new sources of income and strengthening territorial resilience (Assiri et al., 2021; Barca et al., 2014; Poponi et al., 2021).

Research based on different European and international experiences shows that Biodistricts do not develop according to a single model, but are strongly shaped by their institutional, cultural and territorial contexts. Differences in legal frameworks, levels of institutionalisation, public policies and local practices result in different development pathways. What these models share, however, is the integration of the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability (Zanasi et al., 2024).

Experience from different regions also shows that Biodistricts can contribute to strengthening territorial identity and developing local brands, thereby supporting short supply chains and stronger rural–urban linkages.

At the same time, research indicates that specific socio-cultural practices can develop within Biodistricts, including food waste prevention and a stronger local culture of responsible consumption, further contributing to their social and environmental sustainability.

Recent research increasingly highlights the interrelationship between sustainability and resilience in Biodistricts. Economic sustainability, environmental protection and social responsibility are closely connected with the capacity of local food systems to respond to contemporary challenges and climate change (Kakaei et al., 2026).

International experience also shows that Local Agri-food Systems and Biodistricts can support the upscaling of sustainable agricultural practices and contribute to territorial development. A study from Argentina demonstrates that the integration of organic agriculture and agroecology, combined with stakeholder identification and active stakeholder involvement, can provide a basis for assessing local agri-food systems and identifying actions needed for their further development and upscaling (Sciarano et al., 2024).

Finally, a synthesis of different studies suggests that Biodistricts function as complex socio-ecological systems in which the natural environment, public institutions, the private sector and civil society jointly shape local development pathways. There is therefore no single Biodistrict model that can be mechanically replicated across different territories. Although individual models differ according to their institutional arrangements and local context, they share a common foundation: linking organic agriculture and agroecological principles with broader objectives of sustainable territorial development, with particular emphasis on community participation, flexible governance and adaptation to local conditions.



III BIODISTRICTS AND SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

The principles of sustainable development are put into practice through the interaction of the five key components of the model. This integrated approach generates environmental, economic and social benefits while creating the conditions for long-term resilience and sustainable development.

Particular importance is placed on:

- sustainable agriculture, based on organic production and agroecological approaches;
- conservation of natural resources and biodiversity;
- development of local value chains;
- application of circular economy principles;
- active participation of local stakeholders in planning and decision-making.

Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Sustainable agriculture provides a key foundation for territorial development under the Biodistrict model. Beyond food production, it plays an important role in conserving natural resources and biodiversity and maintaining the vitality of rural areas. Agricultural systems are therefore encouraged to combine economic viability with environmental protection and the responsible use of resources.

Organic Production as a Pillar of the Biodistrict

Based on the principles of Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care established by IF-OAM – Organics International, organic production provides the most comprehensively regulated and institutionally established framework for sustainable agriculture and represents a key pillar of the Biodistrict model.

Through clearly defined principles and established control and certification systems, organic production has for decades provided a regulated and credible framework for the production, processing and marketing of organic products, supporting traceability, system integrity and consumer confidence.

Under Serbian and European Union legislation, organic production is based on the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity, the maintenance of soil fertility, responsible use of energy, high standards of animal welfare and restrictions on the use of external inputs, veterinary medicines, antibiotics and hormones, while excluding genetically modified organisms, animal cloning and ionising radiation. In this way, organic production can contribute to the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and to the transformation of agrifood systems towards greater efficiency, inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability, in line with FAO's strategic framework.

Faced with declining soil fertility, biodiversity loss, pollution of natural resources and climate change, organic production can help reduce the environmental pressures associated with agriculture while conserving natural resources and supporting the ecological balance of agroecosystems.

In addition to its environmental benefits, organic production can also contribute to improved economic performance at farm level, although outcomes vary across different types of farms (Brutti & Freo, 2026).

It also performs an important social function. Regulation (EU) 2018/848 recognises the dual societal role of organic production: it responds to consumer demand for organically produced goods while contributing to public goods related to environmental protection, animal welfare and rural development (European Union, 2018).

At territorial level, organic production creates links between agriculture and other economic and social activities. It can support short supply chains, strengthen local brands and generate added value within local communities. Its capacity to address environmental, economic and social challenges simultaneously makes it an important instrument of sustainable territorial development.

Regenerative Practices in Organic Agriculture

Regenerative practices can provide important tools for improving soil health and conserving natural resources. They include:

- the use of compost and organic fertilisers;
- crop rotation;
- cover crops and crop diversification;
- reduced tillage;
- agroforestry;
- practices that enhance soil biological activity.

Their application can improve soil fertility and biological activity, increase soil organic matter, enhance soil structure and improve water retention capacity, thereby supporting the long-term productivity and resilience of agricultural systems.



Agroecology

Agroecology is an integrated approach to the sustainable development of food and agricultural systems, applying ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of agroecosystems. It builds on natural processes and interactions among plants, animals, microorganisms and other ecosystem components, while making use of biodiversity and ecosystem services. At the same time, it recognises local knowledge, traditions and territorial specificities and extends beyond agricultural production to the broader systems through which food is produced, processed, distributed and consumed (FAO, 2018; Migliorini & Wezel, 2017).

Within the Biodistrict model, agroecological approaches can contribute to:

- conserving soil and water resources;
- enhancing biodiversity;
- strengthening resilience to climate change;
- connecting agricultural production with the local natural and social environment.

Applying agroecological principles can therefore support more resilient and sustainable production systems capable of responding to climatic and economic challenges.

Circular Economy

An important feature of the model is the efficient use of local resources and the reduction of waste. Circular economy principles can be applied through:

- composting organic residues;
- reusing by-products from production and processing;
- reducing waste generation;
- using locally available raw materials and resources;
- promoting local production and consumption;
- developing short supply chains;
- encouraging the exchange of resources, knowledge and services among members;
- using energy and water efficiently.

These practices can reduce environmental pressures while improving resource efficiency and supporting the local economy.

Just Transition

The green transition involves not only the adoption of more sustainable practices, but also ensuring that it is fair and inclusive and that its benefits are shared across the wider community.

The Biodistrict model encourages the participation of different social groups in planning and decision-making, helping to create the conditions for a more equitable distribution of benefits, stronger local cohesion and reduced social inequalities.

The Biodistrict as a Living Lab

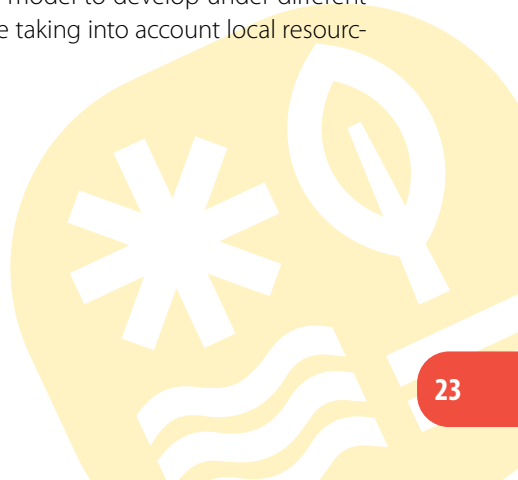
The Biodistrict can also provide a framework for applying a Living Lab approach, enabling different stakeholders to experiment, learn and co-create by jointly developing, testing and adapting innovative solutions (Cascone et al., 2025).

Such an approach provides opportunities for:

- testing and adapting sustainable practices and technologies;
- exchanging knowledge and practical experience;
- co-creating and testing new production and organisational solutions;
- applying and testing digital tools;
- developing locally driven innovations.

Adaptability of the Model

International experience shows that there is no single blueprint for establishing a Biodistrict. Its adaptability allows the model to develop under different territorial and institutional conditions, while taking into account local resources, priorities and circumstances.





IV SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

The socio-economic impacts of Biodistricts arise from stronger connections among local stakeholders, creating conditions for more efficient use of resources, new business opportunities and a stronger local economy, while fostering cooperation, knowledge exchange and community participation.

Sustainable Production and Added Value

The economic potential of the model lies in increasing the value generated from local production through processing, product diversification and access to markets that recognise quality, origin and sustainability.

Organic products can play a particularly important role. Certification, product identity and market demand can provide opportunities for generating greater added value and strengthening the economic sustainability of farms.

Developing local processing capacity enables raw materials to be transformed into higher-value products and helps retain a greater share of the value generated within the territory. This can support family farms, small and medium-sized enterprises and other forms of local entrepreneurship.

Tourism and Territorial Identity

Biodistricts can foster sustainable tourism by connecting agriculture, natural resources, cultural heritage and local gastronomy. These connections can generate additional sources of income while strengthening the identity and visibility of the territory.



Different forms of tourism can play a role in this context:

- **rural tourism**, including stays in rural households, farm visits and opportunities to experience local ways of life;
- **agritourism**, allowing visitors to engage in seasonal farming activities, workshops and educational programmes;
- **ecotourism**, centred on experiencing and conserving natural areas, promoting environmental awareness and encouraging responsible interaction with the natural environment;
- **gastronomic tourism**, connecting local and organic products with traditional cuisine and the cultural identity of the territory;
- **educational tourism**, including study visits, professional excursions, workshops and knowledge-exchange programmes related to organic agriculture, environmental protection and sustainable development. Through direct engagement with local communities, visitors can learn about good practices in production, processing and natural resource management. One example is the Grand Tour Bio initiative, promoted by the Cilento Bio-District and IN.N.E.R., which connects Biodistricts through travel experiences centred on local communities, traditions, culture and landscapes, while encouraging knowledge exchange, learning and the sharing of good practices.

Tourism can thus become an important means of preserving and promoting local values while generating additional economic benefits for the community.

Local Brands and Market Recognition

The model provides a framework for the joint promotion of local products, services and territorial values, strengthening their visibility and competitiveness.

A shared identity can help build consumer trust, particularly when it is supported by verifiable sustainable practices, local origin and product quality. This can strengthen market positioning while reducing the risk of greenwashing — environmental claims that are not supported by genuine practices or measurable results.

Social and Educational Potential

The social and educational potential of Biodistricts lies in strengthening cooperation, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and practices, and involving different social groups in local development. Joint activities and development initiatives can foster solidarity, a sense of community, mutual trust and active participation in shaping the future of the territory.

The model also creates opportunities for education, professional development and the exchange of experience. Particular attention can be given to the participation of children, young people and women, as well as cooperation with schools, universities and other educational institutions.

The inclusion of local and organic products in public food procurement, particularly for pre-schools, schools and other public institutions, can also have important social and economic benefits. It can simultaneously support local production, improve food quality, raise awareness of sustainable production and consumption, and provide more stable market opportunities for local producers.

Funding Opportunities

Biodistricts can draw on a range of funding opportunities related to agriculture, rural development, environmental protection, climate action, tourism, innovation and local entrepreneurship.

By bringing together stakeholders, resources, knowledge, ideas and initiatives, they can strengthen local capacity to develop and implement projects, attract investment and mobilise additional resources for long-term sustainable development.



*Connecting Nature and Society
Rooted in Organic Production*

V

INTERNATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND INITIATIVES

The European Green Deal provides the overarching EU policy framework for the transition towards a climate-neutral, resource-efficient and sustainable economy. Within this framework, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 are particularly relevant to the development of sustainable food systems and biodiversity protection.

The Farm to Fork Strategy aims to accelerate the transition towards a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system, while reducing the environmental and climate footprint of the EU food system and strengthening its resilience. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 complements these objectives by addressing biodiversity loss, protecting nature and promoting the restoration of degraded ecosystems.

Organic farming is recognised as an important part of this transition and contributes to the objectives of the European Green Deal and related policy frameworks. In this context, the European Union has set a target for at least 25% of EU agricultural land to be under organic farming by 2030, together with a significant increase in organic aquaculture, as part of the broader transition towards a more sustainable EU food system.

The Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production, adopted by the European Commission in 2021, explicitly recognises Bio districts as a successful model for integrating organic farming with other local activities. According to the Action Plan, their purpose is to maximise the economic and socio-cultural potential of the territory. The Action Plan also provides that, starting in 2023, the Commission will encourage Member States to support the development and implementation of Bio districts.

The importance of territorial approaches within EU organic policy is also reflected in the EU Organic Awards, launched in 2022 as a commitment under the Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production. One of the current award categories is Best organic region/bio-district. The awards recognise excellent, innovative, sustainable and inspiring projects that create added value for organic production and consumption.

European and Global Strategic and Policy Frameworks

Beyond these core EU policy frameworks, the Biodistrict model is also relevant to a broader range of European and international policies and strategies addressing sustainable development, climate action, biodiversity, rural development, circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources.

These include:

- A New Approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the EU – Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future;
- EU Action Plan: Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil;
- New European Bauhaus;
- A Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas;
- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans;
- EU Soil Strategy for 2030;
- Circular Economy Action Plan;
- A Strategic Framework for a Competitive and Sustainable EU Bioeconomy;
- European Climate Law;
- EU Adaptation Strategy;
- Rural Pact;
- Vision for Agriculture and Food;
- Carpathian Biodiversity Framework (CBF);
- United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD);
- Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

Biodistricts can also be viewed as a practical expression of the broader Organic 3.0 concept promoted by IFOAM – Organics International, which seeks to advance more sustainable and integrated food production and consumption systems.

Taken together, these frameworks establish broader policy directions that are consistent with many of the principles and objectives of the Biodistrict model. Biodistricts can contribute to their implementation at territorial level by linking sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, circular economy approaches, rural development and the sustainable management of local resources.

International Initiatives and Networks Supporting Biodistrict Development

At international level, the development and dissemination of the Biodistrict model has been supported particularly through two closely connected networks: the International Network of Eco Regions (IN.N.E.R.) and the Global Alliance for Organic Districts (GAOD).

IN.N.E.R. – International Network of Eco Regions was formally established as an international association in Italy in 2014, building on the experience of the Cilento Bio-District, where the Biodistrict model had begun to develop in 2004. The network has developed a methodological framework and practical tools for establishing, managing and developing Biodistricts.

The IN.N.E.R. methodology focuses particularly on the practical work involved in the establishment and management of Organic Districts and is supported by the IN.N.E.R. Tool Kit, including monitoring tools and instruments related to territorial identity and branding. The methodology provides a common framework while allowing adaptation to local contexts, available resources, priorities and objectives.

GAOD – Global Alliance for Organic Districts emerged in 2020 as an international alliance connecting networks and organisations involved in Organic Districts and sustainable territorial development. GAOD functions as a “network of networks”, facilitating international cooperation and the exchange of knowledge, experience, concepts and good practices.

The relationship between the two networks is based on complementary roles. GAOD contributes to the development and exchange of broader concepts and practical approaches relevant to Organic Districts. Once sufficiently developed and considered relevant, these concepts may be incorporated into the IN.N.E.R. methodology and Tool Kit for practical implementation within Organic Districts, taking into account the specific conditions of each territory.

At the same time, experience from individual Organic Districts provides feedback to GAOD on the practical application of proposed concepts and can identify new topics for further development and international exchange. Concrete examples of common work and synergies between IN.N.E.R. and GAOD include organic school meals and public procurement and sustainable tourism (IN.N.E.R., 2023).

Through this interaction, the two networks support the exchange of knowledge, experience and practical solutions across territories and contribute to the further development and international dissemination of the Biodistrict model.



VI DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIODISTRICT CONCEPT IN SERBIA

The introduction of the Biodistrict concept in Serbia was driven by the need to accelerate the development of organic production. Despite the country's significant natural resources and growing consumer interest, organic production still accounts for a very small share of total utilised agricultural land — less than 1%, including both organic and in-conversion land.

Against this background, the National Association for the Development of Organic Production Serbia Organica initiated the introduction of the Biodistrict concept, recognising it as an innovative approach to advancing organic production and supporting sustainable local economic development.

The Initiative

The first activities took place in 2022, with a study visit to the Distretto Biologico Marche (Marche Organic District) in Italy, providing first-hand insight into its organisational structure and operation in practice.

In 2023, the process of introducing the concept in Serbia entered an institutional phase. It began with an assessment of territorial resources and development potential, followed by the selection of the Kolubara District as the pilot area. The initiative was readily embraced by local organic producers, who were identified as key actors in the development of the Biodistrict.

The initiative also attracted the support of international partners at an early stage. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) supported the process by engaging an expert who contributed to its alignment with the methodology of the International Network of Eco Regions (IN.N.E.R.) and to establishing the initial conceptual and methodological foundations for Biodistrict development in Serbia.

At the same time, the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) supported the national implementation team, contributing to the operational development of the process and strengthening the capacity of the coordinating team within Serbia Organica.

The concept was also presented nationally through professional conferences held in Belgrade and Novi Sad, as well as at the International Agricultural Fair, helping to raise awareness and establish the Biodistrict model within the national context.

Formalisation, International Recognition and Networking

In 2024, several key steps were taken towards the institutionalisation and public positioning of the Biodistrict model in Serbia. A unified visual identity, including a name and logo for Biodistricts in Serbia, was developed alongside a dedicated visual identity for the Kolubara Biodistrict, with both registered and protected as intellectual property.

The Kolubara Biodistrict was formally established in May 2024 as the first Biodistrict in Serbia and Southeast Europe. In the same year, it was officially recognised by IN.N.E.R. and included on its map of Biodistricts, placing Serbia among nine European countries represented in the network, alongside two countries outside Europe. This recognition increased the international visibility of the Kolubara Biodistrict, leading to invitations to present its experience at the Second International Congress of Biodistricts in Portugal and at an international conference in Sardinia, Italy, later that year.

International cooperation was further formalised during the conference in Sardinia through the signing of a Cooperation Agreement between Serbia Organica and IN.N.E.R. The agreement established a framework for joint work on the development and promotion of Biodistricts in Serbia, as well as for the exchange of knowledge and experience.

In 2025, the development of the Biodistrict concept in Serbia and the further advancement of the Kolubara Biodistrict were supported through the joint UN programme From Seed to Sustainability: Food Systems 4 All, funded by the Joint SDG Fund and implemented by FAO, UN Women and UNEP.

An important part of this support was a study visit to the Cilento Bio-District in Italy, which provided an opportunity to exchange experience in Biodistrict governance and the practical implementation of the model. The visit also strengthened ties between the Cilento Bio-District and the Kolubara Biodistrict and fostered cooperation between the Italian municipality of Ceraso, where the Cilento Bio-District is registered, and Mionica, a municipality within the Kolubara Biodistrict territory in Serbia. This cooperation resulted in the twinning of the two municipalities, with the twinning agreement formally signed in Mionica in September 2025.

Serbia's experience in developing the Biodistrict model and the results achieved by the Kolubara Biodistrict were also presented at the Third World Congress on Bio/Organic Districts in China in 2025, further strengthening the international visibility and recognition of Serbia's experience.

The Kolubara Biodistrict subsequently underwent its first monitoring and evaluation during a visit by I.N.N.E.R. representatives. The results provided the basis for its formal membership and the award of the Silver level under the I.N.N.E.R. Organic Districts Standard, as well as its recognition as a Grand Tour Bio Destination.

A particularly significant step in the further development of the Biodistrict concept in Serbia was its recognition in three national strategies adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in the second half of 2026: the Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2026–2034, the Environmental Protection Strategy of the Republic of Serbia until 2033 – Green Agenda for Serbia, and the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2026–2030.

Overall, the experience of the Kolubara Biodistrict shows how the Biodistrict model in Serbia has evolved, within a relatively short period, from a local initiative into an approach with growing international visibility and recognition as well as recognition within national strategic frameworks. This experience has laid the foundations for the further development and expansion of the Biodistrict concept across Serbia.



VII **FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE OF BIODISTRICTS IN SERBIA**

Methodological Framework

The methodology for establishing Biodistricts in Serbia was developed by Serbia Organica, taking into account national conditions and potential and drawing on international practice and the IN.N.E.R. methodology.

The methodology has been operationalised through the Rules on the Establishment and Operation of Biodistricts in Serbia, which define procedures for the establishment, governance and monitoring of Biodistricts, as well as the use of the “Biodistrict” Quality Mark, a registered trademark used to identify and promote products and services that meet the established criteria.

The purpose of this framework is to support the development of Biodistricts as centres of sustainable production, innovation and local development. Its implementation provides:

- a clear structure and defined roles for participating actors;
- mechanisms for quality assurance and promotion;
- tools for monitoring and evaluation;
- adaptability to the specific characteristics of the national context.

The methodological framework covers the entire process, from launching an initiative and establishing a Biodistrict to monitoring, evaluation and further development.

Institutional Framework

To ensure consistent application of the methodology and effective coordination, the Biodistrict Center has been established within Serbia Organica as the

central coordinating, technical and operational body. The Centre connects local initiatives with the national Biodistrict system, provides technical and operational support for their establishment and development, and coordinates cooperation with international partners.

The institutional framework is organised at three levels, complemented by the international methodological and verification role of IN.N.E.R.:

- Serbia Organica – the umbrella organisation responsible for the overall system and for representing the model internationally;
- Biodistrict Center – the central coordinating, operational and technical body;
- Biodistricts – territorial branches of Serbia Organica.

IN.N.E.R. provides methodological support, carries out verification and issues certification confirming a Biodistrict's compliance with its methodology and standard.

Within its mandate, the Biodistrict Center is specifically responsible for: coordinating the process of establishing Biodistricts; assessing compliance with the criteria for Biodistrict establishment; monitoring, evaluation and maintaining official records; overseeing the use of the "Biodistrict" Quality Mark and promoting the model and strengthening its visibility.

To ensure consistent application of the established standards, rules and procedures, the Center is developing an internal quality assurance system. To perform its functions effectively, it establishes expert bodies and operational units, including assessment and monitoring committees, as well as mechanisms for advisory, mentoring and educational support. These mechanisms provide local stakeholders with access to technical and operational support throughout the establishment and further development of Biodistricts.



VIII PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING A BIODISTRICT IN SERBIA

The establishment of a Biodistrict follows a clearly defined process comprising several interconnected phases. The process is based on the methodology developed by Serbia Organica, drawing on the IN.N.E.R. methodology and adapted to the Serbian context. It has been further developed through Serbia Organica's methodological and organisational framework. This approach enables the systematic engagement of relevant stakeholders, the analysis of territorial resources and potential, the establishment of a governance structure, the definition of strategic directions and objectives, and the verification of the requirements for the formal establishment of a Biodistrict.

The establishment process has no predefined timeframe and progresses through different development phases and statuses, from an initial Local Stakeholder Initiative, through the status of "Biodistrict in Formation", to the status of an Established Biodistrict. As the initiative progresses through these phases, the foundations for establishing the Biodistrict are gradually put in place, from analysing the territory's resources and potential, promoting the concept and engaging local stakeholders, through establishing the organisational structure and strategic framework, to verifying the fulfilment of the requirements for its formal recognition.

Biodistrict in Formation

Following a positive assessment of the Letter of Intent, the initiative is granted the status of "Biodistrict in Formation" by the Biodistrict Center.

Established Biodistrict

Following verification that the requirements of the previous phase have been fulfilled, Serbia Organica grants the initiative the status of an "Established Biodistrict", which thereby becomes a territorial branch of Serbia Organica.

During the initial part of the process, a **Promotional Committee** is established as the initial body responsible for promoting the Biodistrict concept, engaging a broader range of local stakeholders, encouraging and mobilising local actors, and coordinating activities until the appropriate governance structure is established.

Phase I

Local Stakeholder Initiative and Pre-feasibility Check

The first phase involves launching the initiative and assessing the basic conditions and capacities of the initiative and the territory for establishing a Biodistrict.

The initiative may be launched by an organised informal or formal group of stakeholders, such as agricultural holdings, businesses, citizen groups and other interested actors from the territory seeking to establish a Biodistrict.

The main activities in this phase include:

- submission of an application to the Biodistrict Center containing basic information on the initiative, the territory and potential participants;
- a Pre-feasibility Check of the basic conditions and capacities for establishing a Biodistrict;
- identification of key local stakeholders and potential partners who will lead the local initiative in cooperation with the Biodistrict Center.

Phase II

Biodistrict in Formation

During this phase, the initiative is further developed through a more detailed analysis, promotional activities and formalisation of the intention to establish a Biodistrict, followed by the establishment of the governance structure, formalisation of partnerships and development of the strategic framework required for formal recognition.

These activities are carried out by the local initiative in cooperation with and with the support of the Biodistrict Center.

Key activities include:

- establishment of **the Promotional Committee**;
- promotion of the Biodistrict concept and engagement of local stakeholders, including the organisation of a public promotional event;

- a Detailed Analysis of the Territory, covering its natural, agricultural, human, infrastructure, educational and research, social, cultural, heritage, tourism and gastronomic resources and potential;
- preparation and submission of a Letter of Intent to the Biodistrict Center. The Letter of Intent formalises the intention to establish a Biodistrict and provides basic information on the initiative, its participants and the territory concerned, as well as information on the promotional activities carried out.
- Following a positive assessment of the Letter of Intent, the Biodistrict Center grants the initiative the status of “Biodistrict in Formation” and a temporary visual identity for promotional purposes. IN.N.E.R. is informed accordingly.
- The Biodistrict in Formation then proceeds with the establishment of its governance structure and partnership framework and the preparation of its strategic framework through the following activities:
 - Establishing the Structure and Formalising the Partnership
 - establishment of the Biodistrict bodies, including the Coordination Body, Forum and Working Groups;
 - formalisation of cooperation among the founding partners through a **Partnership Agreement**, defining their respective roles and responsibilities, common goals and framework for cooperation;
 - preparation of a strategic document, including the vision, mission, strategic objectives, priority activities, and guidelines for communication and education;
 - preparation of a report on the established structure and strategic framework and its submission to the Biodistrict Center for review and verification.

Phase III

Recognition as an Established Biodistrict

Following verification that the requirements of the previous phase have been fulfilled, Serbia Organica grants the initiative the status of an **Established Biodistrict**, which thereby becomes its territorial branch. IN.N.E.R. is informed accordingly.

Phase IV

First Performance Evaluation, Performance Improvement and IN.N.E.R. Certification

The final phase focuses on assessing the functioning and performance of the Biodistrict, identifying areas for improvement and defining measures for its further development. Following this process, the Biodistrict receives the IN.N.E.R. Certificate.

Activities in this phase include:

- conducting the First Performance Evaluation of the Biodistrict;
- assessing progress in implementing the strategic objectives and activities;
- identifying areas for improvement and defining the necessary measures;
- updating the strategic document and action plan, where necessary;
- issuing the IN.N.E.R. Certificate.

The First Performance Evaluation is conducted by the Biodistrict Center on the basis of the Biodistrict's activity report and other relevant information, and the results are communicated to IN.N.E.R. Based on the evaluation results, the Biodistrict, with the support of the Biodistrict Center and IN.N.E.R., implements the identified improvement measures and, where necessary, updates its strategic document and action plan for the following two to three years.

Further Development

Following completion of the establishment process, the Biodistrict implements activities in accordance with its strategic objectives and defined standards, promotes its products and services, and continuously monitors its development through periodic performance evaluation, with the support of Serbia Organica and IN.N.E.R.

IX BIO-DISTRICT OPERATIONS AND GOVERNANCE

The functioning of a bio-district is based on a clearly defined participation structure that enables the coordination of activities, decision-making, monitoring of implementation and continuous improvement of the bio-district's performance.

Bio-district Governance Model

According to the methodology developed by Serbia Organika, a bio-district operates as an integrated governance model based on cooperation among local stakeholders and a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities.

The bio-district governance structure comprises:

- **Coordination Body** – the operational and coordinating body of the bio-district, responsible for coordinating activities, implementing strategic objectives, monitoring the implementation of the action plan and coordinating the work of bio-district members. It ensures that the bio-district operates in accordance with the established standards and requirements for the use of the "Bio-district" label and is responsible for coordination and communication with Serbia Organika, i.e. the Biodistrict Center;
- **Bio-district Forum** – a participatory body bringing together relevant stakeholders from the territory. It reviews progress in implementing objectives and activities and provides recommendations for their improvement;
- **Working Groups** – thematic groups that support the planning and implementation of activities in specific areas of development. The IN.N.E.R. methodology proposes thematic areas covering integrated management, planning, governance and policies; tourism and gastronomy; regenerative and organic farming,

agroecology, natural resources management and energy production; food processing, distribution and consumption, including food and nutrition security, quality and health; social issues, including social agriculture, community development, gender equality and urban-rural relations; communication; and youth and organic agriculture. At the same time, the methodology allows the number and detailed scope of Working Groups to be adapted to the local context, available resources, priorities and goals of each Biodistrict. Working Groups bring together stakeholders with different knowledge, experience and interests, facilitating cooperation, exchange of knowledge and joint action.

The Biodistrict Center provides methodological and technical support, monitors the application of the established standards and rules of the model, carries out national-level oversight and verification, and provides recommendations for improving the functioning of bio-districts.

This governance model ensures a clear distribution of responsibilities, effective coordination and participatory governance based on cooperation among local stakeholders, supported by professional and institutional assistance.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are an integral part of the bio-district governance cycle and aim to improve the quality, transparency and alignment of its functioning with the defined principles of sustainable development.

The monitoring and evaluation system operates at several levels, with each level having a clearly defined role.

At the local level, the Coordination Body collects data, monitors the implementation of activities and prepares regular activity reports. Monitoring covers the implementation of strategic objectives and the action plan, participation of members, development of organic production, activities related to education, tourism and promotion, as well as progress towards defined objectives and performance indicators.

At the national level, the Biodistrict Center, through its monitoring committee, verifies the reports and conducts systematic monitoring of the functioning of bio-districts through established mechanisms, while providing recommendations for improvement.

Based on the monitoring results, the Biodistrict Center may propose corrective measures to address identified shortcomings and improve the functioning of the bio-district.

At the international level, IN.N.E.R. participates in the external evaluation of bio-districts in accordance with its methodological framework and tools.

All bio-district members, including Working Groups, are responsible, within their respective areas of competence, for providing accurate and timely data required for the monitoring and evaluation process.

This multi-level monitoring and evaluation system helps ensure that sustainability is not treated as a purely declarative commitment, but is translated into practice through measurable progress, regular review and continuous improvement.





X

CASE STUDY IN SERBIA KOLUBARA BIODISTRICT

Territorial and Development Context

The Kolubara Biodistrict, a territorial branch of Serbia Organica, was established in 2024 as the first Biodistrict in Serbia and the Western Balkans.

Covering the Kolubara Administrative District and its six municipalities, namely Valjevo, Mionica, Lajkovac, Ub, Ljig and Osečina, the area is characterised by a rich natural and cultural heritage.

The Kolubara River has historically shaped the settlement and development of this area, which, among other things, contains archaeological remains of the Illyrian and Roman civilisations.

Agriculture is one of the area's key economic sectors, supported by fertile soils and favourable climatic conditions for cereal, fruit and grape production. Viticulture has expanded significantly over the past decade, while livestock farming remains diverse and well represented.

The area also benefits from a well-established agricultural education and advisory infrastructure, including institutions with a long-standing tradition such as the agricultural advisory service and Agricultural School. It is also home to Valjevo Gymnasium and the Petnica Science Center, one of the largest and most prominent institutions for extracurricular and informal education in science, technology and the humanities in South-Eastern Europe. The Centre provides programmes for pupils, students and teachers across 15 disciplines and has a tradition spanning more than fifty years.

Numerous cultural monuments and historical landmarks add to the area's potential for development as a recognised tourist destination. Five tourism organisations operate across the district, supporting a range of tourism activities, including rural, agritourism, mountain, religious and spa tourism.

Beyond its natural, educational and economic assets, one of the area's key strengths lies in the people and organisations actively contributing to local community development. Civil society organisations are engaged in initiatives related to environmental protection, culture, and the preservation of natural and socio-historical heritage.

The integration of these natural, institutional and social resources provides a strong foundation for the further development of the Kolubara Biodistrict.

Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives

The Biodistrict was established as a model of cooperation among local stakeholders who recognised the importance of joint action for sustainable development. These include organic and multifunctional farms that, alongside primary production, develop tourism, educational and demonstration activities. Public institutions, civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders are also involved, with the network continuing to expand.

Its vision is to become a recognised regional centre for sustainable organic agriculture, rural tourism and healthy lifestyles, contributing to the conservation of natural resources, improved quality of life and the economic development of the local community.

Its mission is to promote sustainable development by advancing organic agriculture, protecting the environment, strengthening the local economy, promoting healthy lifestyles, and fostering cooperation among producers, processors, institutions and the wider community.

The Strategy is structured around four main objectives:

- promoting the development of organic agriculture and sustainable production;
- protecting natural resources and strengthening biodiversity and the circular economy;
- improving quality of life in rural areas;
- strengthening cooperation and promoting the Biodistrict.

The implementation of these objectives is expected to contribute to increased membership, stronger production capacities, improved market positioning, the development of the circular economy, environmental protection, new economic opportunities and greater visibility.

Operating Model and Sustainable Practices

The governance model is based on a collective and participatory approach, through which stakeholders jointly define priorities and development directions within the Biodistrict Forum, which brings together all participating stakeholders.

Operational coordination and strategic planning are carried out through the Coordination Body and the Biodistrict Center within Serbia Organica.

Thematic Working Groups have been established in the following areas:

- governance and strategic development;
- organic production and agroecology;
- processing and distribution;
- tourism and gastronomy;
- communication and promotion.

Members apply organic-regenerative, agroecological and permaculture practices, engage in processing and tourism activities, use sustainable energy sources and develop short supply chains.

Knowledge, experience and good practices are shared through regular meetings, educational activities and joint events. The Biodistrict Festival is particularly important and is intended to become the central annual gathering for members and the wider public.

To date, approximately 35 innovative measures have been implemented to improve the sustainability of production and conserve natural resources. These include:

- permaculture gardens and agroforestry systems;
- production diversification;
- biodiversity conservation and enhancement;
- establishment of pollinator habitats;
- waste reduction;
- conservation of traditional varieties and indigenous breeds;
- development of short supply chains;
- development of new market models;
- cooperation in agricultural activities, processing and marketing.

Model in Practice

The practical application of the model is reflected in joint activities that connect production, processing, distribution, education and community engagement.

Products from the area are marketed through an online shop, which currently provides delivery to customers in Belgrade and Valjevo. They are also available in several local shops, where they are displayed on branded Biodistrict shelves. Plans are underway to establish shared retail outlets at several locations across the territory, further improving access to local organic products and strengthening connections between producers and consumers.

Some members have also developed farm-to-door delivery services, giving customers easier access to fresh, locally produced organic products. At the same time, an online sales module is being developed as part of the website, which will further improve market access, increase product visibility and contribute to strengthening short supply chains.

A distribution centre is also in operation, enabling members to deliver their products for joint distribution. Joint processing of agricultural products is available as well, contributing to greater operational efficiency and increased added value.

As part of its social responsibility activities, the organisation also participates in humanitarian initiatives by donating and delivering products to organisations and individuals most in need of assistance.

Educational workshops are regularly organised for members and other interested participants, focusing on improving organic production and processing, conserving and enhancing biodiversity, establishing flower islands and protecting pollinators.

The workshops also cover the application of permaculture design principles in garden development, as well as the cultivation and use of medicinal, culinary and aromatic plants for preparing natural plant protection and nutrition products in accordance with organic production methods.

Particular attention is given to educating and raising awareness among younger generations. Educational programmes are organised for children from pre-schools and schools, alongside practical training for university students. Workshops are also held for women from rural associations in the area, who actively participate in organising activities, events and visits.

Initial Experience and Lessons Learned

The experience gained to date shows that establishing a Biodistrict requires a critical mass of local stakeholders, particularly organic producers, who recognise a common interest and are willing to cooperate.

Connecting different sectors, including agriculture, environmental protection, tourism, education, civil society and local government, is particularly important, as their cooperation provides the foundation for integrated territorial development.

One of the key lessons concerns the importance of existing local resources and initiatives. Well-developed agricultural production, the presence of educational and research institutions, active civil society organisations and tourism potential have proved to be important prerequisites for initiating and developing such a model.

At the same time, experience shows that development should not be measured simply by an increase in the number of members, but by bringing together stakeholders who share common values, objectives and principles of action.

Maintaining the quality of partnerships and consistently implementing agreed strategic directions are important prerequisites for long-term sustainability and credibility.

The experience also confirms the importance of establishing a clear organisational structure with defined roles and mechanisms for stakeholder participation. The Biodistrict Forum, Coordination Body and thematic Working Groups have enabled members to participate in decision-making and in defining development priorities.

The application of sustainable agricultural practices, development of short supply chains, biodiversity conservation, and the integration of production with tourism and education have emerged as areas with significant potential for further development. At the same time, promotional activities and public events have contributed to strengthening visibility and engaging new stakeholders.

Although the Biodistrict is still at an early stage of development, experience to date indicates that the model can provide an effective mechanism for connecting local resources, promoting sustainable development and strengthening territorial identity.

The experience gained can provide a basis for establishing new Biodistricts in other parts of Serbia, while taking into account local conditions, available resources, development needs and the interests of local stakeholders.



XI QUALITY MARK “BIODISTRICT”

Purpose and Ownership of the Mark

The “Biodistrict” Quality Mark is a registered individual trademark owned by Serbia Organica. Its purpose is to identify products, services and activities that meet the established criteria, confirm their connection to the territory, principles and values of a Biodistrict, and enhance their visibility and added value.

The right to use the mark is granted exclusively on the basis of defined criteria and a standardised procedure, thereby ensuring the credibility of the system and reducing the risk of misuse of the mark or greenwashing practices.

In addition to users based within a Biodistrict, entities located outside its territory may also be granted the right to use the “Biodistrict” Quality Mark when marketing products originating from the Biodistrict territory.

Visual Identity of the Mark

The mark combines graphic and verbal elements:

- Top left: Sun symbol – energy, warmth, light and life;
- Top right: Leaf – nature and the natural environment;
- Bottom left: Wavy lines – water;
- Bottom right: A geometric symbol consisting of two parallel lines – soil and agriculture.



The word “Biodistrict” is positioned to the right of the logo and displayed in Cyrillic script over two lines, with sufficient contrast to ensure legibility. The mark represents a commitment to sustainability, environmental protection, the principles of organic production and the values of the Biodistrict.

Granting the Right to Use the Mark

The general criteria and procedures governing the granting and use of the mark, the rights and obligations of its users, and the basic mechanisms for supervision, control and monitoring are set out in the Rulebook on the Establishment and Operation of Biodistricts in Serbia.

The right to use the mark is granted through a transparent three-stage process:

1. Application

Applicants from within the Biodistrict territory:

Applications are submitted to the Coordination Body of the Biodistrict.

Applicants from outside the Biodistrict territory:

Applications are submitted to the Biodistrict Center.

2. Assessment of the Application

Applicants from within the Biodistrict territory:

The Committee for the Granting and Monitoring of the Mark, within the Biodistrict Center, and the Coordination Body of the Biodistrict jointly assess the application and decide whether to grant the right to use the mark.

Applicants from outside the Biodistrict territory:

The application is assessed by the relevant committee of the Biodistrict Center.

Where necessary, site visits and additional verification may be carried out.



3. Granting the Right

Following a positive assessment, the applicant is granted the right to use the mark. The right remains subject to continued compliance with the established rules and regular monitoring.

Supervision and Monitoring of the Use of the Mark

Supervision, control and monitoring of the use of the mark are carried out through the Internal Guarantee System (IGS), which comprises:

- Preventive measures – training and guidance;
- Control measures – site visits and documentation checks;
- Corrective measures – warnings and suspension of the right to use the mark.

Levels of Oversight

- **General level:** The Biodistrict Center oversees the use of the mark, including its use outside Biodistrict territories, and ensures the standardisation of the system.
- **Local level:** The Coordination Body monitors compliance by users of the mark and regularly reports to the Biodistrict Center.

Suspension and Withdrawal of the Right to Use the Mark

In cases of non-compliance with the established rules, the right to use the mark may be suspended or withdrawn:

- Suspension of the right – temporary suspension of the right to use the mark until the identified cases of non-compliance have been remedied;
- Withdrawal of the right – termination of the right to use the mark.

Once the right has been terminated, it may be reacquired only through a new application and assessment procedure.





XII

CHALLENGES FOR BIODISTRICT DEVELOPMENT IN SERBIA

The development of Biodistricts in Serbia in practice involves a range of interconnected challenges, from governance and stakeholder cooperation to local capacities, economic and financial sustainability, performance monitoring and the long-term continuity of the model. Recognising these challenges is essential for further refining the methodology and creating the conditions for the successful development of the existing Biodistrict and the establishment of future Biodistricts in Serbia.

Stakeholder Coordination and Collaboration

A Biodistrict brings together a diverse range of stakeholders with different interests, roles and levels of engagement. One of the key challenges is to establish effective communication, build trust and create practical opportunities for collaboration. Developing strong and lasting partnerships takes time, sustained dialogue and a clear understanding of how different stakeholders can contribute to shared objectives and activities.

Consistency across Local Contexts

A Biodistrict needs a clear and consistent framework that provides a common basis for its development and helps maintain the identity and credibility of the model. At the same time, its application needs to reflect the specific characteristics, needs and opportunities of each territory.

Finding the right balance between consistency and flexibility is therefore an important challenge. Too much standardisation may limit the ability of local stakeholders to respond to their own circumstances, while too much flexibility may weaken the coherence and recognisability of the model. The methodology should therefore provide a common direction while leaving sufficient room for locally appropriate approaches and activities.

Stakeholder Capacity and Engagement

The successful functioning of a Biodistrict depends on the capacity and active engagement of producers and other local stakeholders. This requires ongoing access to education, advisory services and mentoring, as well as appropriate support for participation and long-term commitment. Maintaining active and sustained engagement over time can be particularly challenging, especially as the number and diversity of stakeholders involved increases.

Economic and Financial Sustainability

The long-term sustainability of a Biodistrict also depends on the ability of local stakeholders to develop viable economic activities, strengthen local value chains and diversify sources of income. At the same time, access to additional funding is important for supporting joint activities and strengthening the overall system. Limited human and financial resources, particularly in the early stages, can significantly constrain further development.

Performance Monitoring and Improvement

The continued development of a Biodistrict requires regular monitoring of its functioning and progress towards its strategic objectives. Clear and measurable indicators are needed to assess economic, social and environmental results. Regular monitoring and evaluation make it possible to identify what is working well, where improvements are needed, and how activities and the methodology can be further refined based on experience and lessons learned in practice.

Visibility and Long-term Commitment

The development of a Biodistrict requires continuous communication and promotion in order to strengthen its visibility and engage the wider public. At the same time, sustained commitment from participating stakeholders is essential for maintaining continuity and ensuring that activities develop beyond the initial phase. Keeping stakeholders engaged over the long term is therefore an important part of building a stable and lasting Biodistrict.

XIII SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT analysis assesses the Biodistrict model in Serbia based on experience to date and the conditions identified for its further development.

STRENGTHS

A developed and adapted methodology based on the IN.N.E.R. methodology

A framework for establishing and operating Biodistricts

A coordinated national approach to the development of the model

Engagement and networking of local stakeholders

Adaptability of the model to different territories

WEAKNESSES

Limited human and financial resources

The need for continuous capacity building among local stakeholders

Complexity of coordinating multiple stakeholders

Lack of stable, long-term sources of funding

Limited visibility and recognition of the Biodistrict model

OPPORTUNITIES

Integration of Biodistricts into national and local public policies

Further development of organic production and sustainable tourism

Access to domestic and international funding opportunities

International cooperation and networking with related initiatives

Development of value-added products and services and strengthening of local value chains

Strengthening territorial branding through the "Biodistrict" Quality Mark

Growing demand for organic, local and sustainable products

Positioning Biodistricts as a credible model of integrated territorial development

THREATS

Climate change and increasing environmental pressures

Industrial and other forms of pollution in the wider area

Lack of local leaders and initiative holders

Population outmigration from rural areas

Underdeveloped rural infrastructure

Fragmentation of initiatives and resources due to the emergence of potentially similar models



XIV

THE WAY FORWARD FOR BIODISTRICTS IN SERBIA

Experience from European countries and Serbia demonstrates the potential for the further application and expansion of the Biodistrict model. In the coming period, the key focus should be on supporting the development of the Kolubara Biodistrict, gradually extending the model to new territories and strengthening the integration of Biodistricts into public policy and development mechanisms.

Future development should be based on common principles and standards, while allowing the model to be adapted to different local conditions and development potential. At the same time, continuity of institutional and technical support should be ensured in order to make full use of existing potential and create the conditions for the long-term development of the model.

Adaptation of the Model to Local Conditions

The future development of Biodistricts in Serbia should retain common principles, criteria and a methodological framework that ensure the recognisability and credibility of the model, while allowing individual territories to follow different development pathways. The potential for Biodistrict development varies across territories and depends on natural resources, the structure of agricultural production, the local economy, institutional capacities and the interest of local stakeholders.

The expansion of the model should therefore not be understood as the simple replication of an existing example, but as the application of a common framework under different territorial conditions, while allowing future Biodistricts to develop their own priorities and approaches.

Territorial Expansion of the Model

The experience of the Kolubara Biodistrict, which has served as the pilot territory for implementing the model in Serbia, provides a basis for its gradual territorial expansion through the establishment of new initiatives in different regions and the application of the methodology in different local contexts.

Of particular importance is connecting existing and future Biodistricts into a functional network that facilitates the exchange of experience, mutual learning and the transfer of good practices.

Development of Bio-tourism Programmes

The recognition of the Kolubara Biodistrict by IN.N.E.R. as a Grand Tour Bio Destination provides an opportunity to develop thematic programmes and routes connecting organic farms, local products and gastronomy with the natural and cultural assets and other attractions of the Biodistrict territory.

The development of such programmes can provide a basis for strengthening the position of the Kolubara Biodistrict as a bio-tourism destination and for connecting it with similar initiatives in other Biodistricts.

Central Coordination and Networking

Coordination and networking of Biodistricts under the umbrella of Serbia Organica facilitate connections among local stakeholders and foster joint initiatives. This system supports access to relevant information and enhances the visibility and positioning of Biodistricts at national and international level.

Mechanisms for aligning joint activities are particularly important, as is cooperation with international networks and partners.

Education and Capacity Building

The sustainable development of Biodistricts depends on continuous investment in knowledge and capacity building among local stakeholders. This includes training, mentoring and practical learning programmes in different areas relevant to the operation of Biodistricts.

Particular importance should be given to supporting demonstration farms and developing integrated educational and demonstration centres as places for applying, testing and disseminating innovative solutions, as well as to developing incubators that support sustainable agri-food initiatives and businesses.

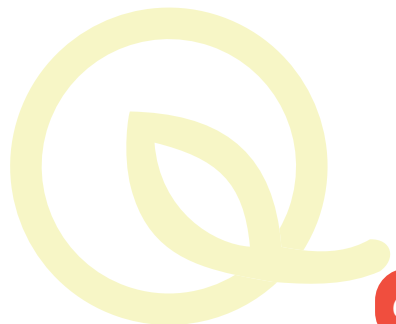
Strengthening Recognition of the “Biodistrict” Quality Mark

The future development of the model includes gradually expanding the use of the “Biodistrict” Quality Mark as an instrument for positioning value-added products and services and strengthening the identity and recognition of Biodistricts.

Further increasing recognition of the mark and building trust in the marketplace are of particular importance. Key elements of this process include clearly defined criteria and rules for its use, consistent monitoring of compliance, verification and continuous promotion.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Measurement

The long-term sustainability of the model requires systematic monitoring of the economic, social and environmental impacts of Biodistricts. This involves the use of clearly defined indicators, regular reporting and periodic evaluation, as well as continuous improvement of the methodology based on results and practical experience.





Conclusion



Experience from European countries and Serbia points to significant potential for the further development and wider application of the Biodistrict model. At the same time, it shows that its continued development depends on a coordinated approach, stronger institutional support, greater capacity among local stakeholders and effective cooperation among the different actors involved.

Although the experience of the Kolubara Biodistrict is still relatively recent, it demonstrates that the establishment and further development of Biodistricts are feasible in Serbia. It also shows that establishing a Biodistrict is not a one-off process, but an ongoing effort to build partnerships, strengthen local capacities and develop a shared vision for the territory.

The long-term sustainability of a Biodistrict depends on the ability of local stakeholders to cooperate effectively and turn shared priorities into concrete joint activities. The focus, therefore, should not only be on establishing new Biodistricts, but also on creating the conditions for their long-term development and functioning. This includes following their progress, learning from experience and sharing lessons that can support the development of Biodistricts in other parts of Serbia, while maintaining a continuous exchange with international experience.

In this context, the Kolubara Biodistrict can become more than a local initiative. It can serve as a starting point for developing a model that can be adapted to the diverse territorial contexts of Serbia and contribute to the wider transition towards sustainable territorial development.

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