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Introduction

Social farming is an emerging issue in many EU Countries due to an increasing attention devoted to different aspects of multifunctional agriculture as well as to the recent concerns for public health expenditures and efficacy of social services. Social farming is both a new and an old phenomenon in Europe. It is an example of an innovative response to the transition from old to new economic regimes. This process of change affects agriculture as well as other sectors like health, care, education, and the employment sector. Social farming seems to be at a crossroads of many converging tracks such as: multifunctional agriculture; the fiscal crises of states; concerns over the individualisation and efficacy of social services; and the reorganisation of local life under a sustainable organisation of services in both urban and rural contexts.

Social farming is a traditional as well as an innovative activity for farmers. It regards the use of resources from agriculture for rehabilitation and social inclusion. SF activities regard a large number of target groups, both in urban and rural areas (young people, older people, people with disabilities, migrants, prisoners, people recovering from alcohol or substance abuse). SF is also connected to a large number of issues related to rural development, like the organisation of local services, the evolution of farmer attitudes to the relationship with local communities and their reputation, the re-organisation of the local economy and the introduction of new element of solidarity and reciprocity.

The term SF has recently entered the scene of rural development in EU, embracing a wide constellation of different practices that are emerging in the territories; experiences that, in many cases, were born as bottom-up actions and have “grown in the shade” for a long time. All over rural Europe, there is a widespread and rich patrimony of diverse agricultural realities - inherited from the past or created more recently - which are characterised by a distinctive, sound relation between practices of farming and practices for social inclusion. In many cases these experiences were born autonomously, due to the personal, strong ethical belief and motivation of their promoters, who carried out in isolation a function of collective interest, often invisibly. As a matter of fact, the ‘invisibility’ of such reality, is represented by the lack of a defined legal/institutional framework for social farming, in most countries and at European level.

Social farming can also be seen as a process of social innovation where collective learning, bottom-up approaches and practices rooted in local experiences is producing a process of radical change which is able to affect policies at regional and national level. In this process a specific role seems to be played by the organisation of policy networks at regional, national and EU level. Their role is to act in order to improve awareness and to advocate public attention and resources, to increase knowledge and evidence, and at the same time, to organise a legal/institutional framework able to affirm a different culture of caring for less empowered people linked to a different utility of agricultural resources.

This paper focuses on some critical political issues in social farming, about the set of rules, the regulatory system and the processes of change that could accompany the future evolution of social farming. This process will be better understood in the frame of EU policies, both for rural development and social issues.

Social farming: some features

A tentative definition

In Europe, social farming (SF) is an emerging topic for farms and farmers as well as for different stakeholders. SF is an innovative use of agriculture quite often introduced at a local level by new and old farmers. SF includes all activities that use agricultural resources, both from plants and animals, in order to promote (or to generate) therapy, rehabilitation, social inclusion, education and social services in rural areas. However, it is strictly related to farm activities where (small) groups of people or individuals can stay and work together with family farmers as well as social practitioners.

As proposed during the German platform in their Manifesto, Social Farming adopts a multifunctional view of agriculture: the main products, in addition to saleable produce, are health and employment, education or therapy. Agriculture offers opportunities for people to participate in the varied rhythms of the day and the year, be it in growing food or working with domestic animals. Social farming includes agricultural enterprises and market gardens which integrate people with physical, mental or emotional disabilities; farms which offer openings for the socially disadvantaged, for young offenders or those with learning difficulties, people with drug dependencies, the long-term unemployed and active senior citizens; school and kindergarten farms and many more. Prevention of illness, inclusion and a better quality of life are features of social agriculture.

Tab. 1: Green care a classification

Relational Environment ⇒		Level of specialisation in care/agricultural activities (-/+) Relevance of an formal / un-formal care environment (-/+)	
Use of living species (plant and animals) ↓		- Health units where therapists prevail	+ Farm units, where farmers prevail
Level of specialisation of use of living species for health/green or food purposes	+ Multifunctional processes where food production play a key role	2 Green social units	4 Social Farms
	- Prevalent therapeutic use	1 Therapeutic green units	3 Therapeutic farms
AAA, animal assisted activities AAT, animal assisted therapy HT, horticultural therapy FT, farm therapy		Green care: 1, 2, 3, 4 All green units/farms Social Farming: 2, 3, 4 Green social units, Social farms, Therapeutic farms Specialised Green care: 1 Therapeutic green units	

The special added value of social farming is the possibility for disadvantaged people of being integrated in a living context, where their personal capabilities may be valued and enhanced. The presence of the farmers, the contact and relationship with other living beings - animal and vegetable ones - the assumption of specific responsibilities by the person that uses services, are some of the key features of the practices generated by social farming. In rural areas flexibility and proximity, scope economy and informality are some key words that characterise the use of agriculture and farms for providing services to local inhabitants and rural communities¹, with the attempt to counter the erosion of public health/care provision. (Di Iacovo, 2003).

The definition about social farming is not yet agreed around Europe. There are different ways to

¹ Aside services for disadvantaged people we can also consider the case of kindergarten or little services for the daily life of local older people.

indicate (farming for health, green care, social farming) using agriculture for social purposes. SF is a new as well as a traditional concept. It originates from the traditional rural self-help networks quite well established in rural areas before modernisation of agriculture and the rise of the public welfare system. Nowadays the concept has been deeply reformed in an innovative and still changing way. In order to build a *life sustaining web* (Barnes, 2007) it is important to complement the formal and more professional social services through a large network of more informal relationships. Moreover, informal networks should be able to improve the capability of the local context to include and increase the opportunities of vulnerable people in need of support.

When we try to classify different SF projects, we can distinguish them by considering two main categories, the level of specialisation in the use of living species for health/green or food purposes and the level of specialisation in care/agricultural activities (Tab, 1). In that respect, agricultural resources can have a prevalent therapeutic use or a multifunctional role where food production plays an important role. The owners of the SF processes can be more specialised in the health/care sector or in the agricultural sector.

In the matrix presented in graph n.1 four different situation can be defined:

1. **Therapeutic green units:** Specialised green care units normally established in public institutions or social cooperatives, driven only by health/care professionals (Hospitals, day centres, specialised green activities in non-productive units (botanic, gardens, parks, etc.), specialised services providers –private, third sectors and voluntary), where plants and animals are strictly devoted to therapeutic purposes without any productive purpose. The activities can be referred to **AAA, AAT, HT** (Pet therapy, gardening, horticultural therapy, horse therapy). Such activities are normally funded by the state/charity (**we can find such units in UK, IT, SL, N, IR**).
2. **Green social units:** mainly rehabilitation, job inclusion/creation with or in agriculture are carried out, normally in an institutional farm/unit, sheltered workshop, public institution, third sector/social economy, voluntary. These cases can also be referred to as **AAA, AAT, HT**, but the outcome is also productive. Projects are normally funded by public policies (European Social Fund, projects on work inclusion, etc.), but they can also evolve in a more integrated economy with agricultural activities (**we can find such units in Fr, IR, IT, D, N**).
3. **Therapeutic farms:** ordinary farms that specialise part of their resources for *rehabilitation and formalised practices of care on farm (AAA, AAT, HT)*. **The care part of the farm is not necessarily** devoted to food production, where social inclusion purposes are prevalent. The activities are mainly linked to horticulture, gardening, onotherapy, hippotherapy. Private care farms are normally recognised, incentivised by the State, they can receive direct payment from people who use the services, insurance companies, public payments (**we can find such units in Fr, NL, Ir and I**);
4. **Social Farms:** mainly devoted to inclusive/relational activities and job creation. People normally follow the farm routines and processes (**FT, AAA**), sometime without any productive purposes but, step by step, users can be also partially or fully involved in farm activities, either as a someone that uses the service or depending on capacity may progress as workers and be paid for their work. Social farms are mainly run by private farmers, farm cooperatives and the third sector. The farms can receive some public recognition, compensation, or payment for the services they provide. In the case of private farms they can be paid for service but in other cases they can also be recognised directly by the market in other ways(**we can find such units in I, B, NL, IR**).

Social farming across Europe

The phenomenon of SF is well established across Europe (Hassink, 2006). At the same time practices are quite often unknown and not yet recognised. Perhaps the situation is quite different country by country when the number, the typologies and the target addressed are considered. SF increased its relevance everywhere in EU in the '70s as the consequence of a change in social structures (like in Italy where institutes for people with intellectual disabilities were closed down or in Germany with the establishment of sheltered workshops), to the rise of innovative movements (like the antroposophic and youth movement in many EU countries), or through the continuing organisation of care services by religious communities (Ireland and the Netherlands). The process has grown to a recognizable representation of the agricultural practice in the different countries.

SF in Europe

In most Countries use of agriculture involve the health sector with public structures (sheltered workshops, geriatric hospitals, hospitals for people with mental disorders) or the third sector (in the Italian case) where agriculture represents a tool for rehabilitation and therapy. Private farmers can be directly involved in organising services. They are normally recognized by the agricultural sector that can provide compensations for the farmers' extra work (in Belgium 40€/day) and/or financial aids for specific investment (with the RDP 2007/13). In the case of the Netherlands farmers provide services directly for the health sector in agreement with the agricultural sector. In this case users (normally with mental and psychiatric disabilities, addressed as "clients") can decide to use public vouchers (60€/pd) in recognised structures, like accredited social farms. In many Countries (France, Belgium, Italy) labour sector can fund agricultural project and social economy in order to promote work inclusion of medium-long term un-employees. In Italy, inside the prisons, the Minister of justice organise farms able to involve prisoners in agriculture. Aside form the previous cases there are educational farms (in France mainly) that provide services for different target groups, like youngsters (in Norway) that has difficulties to follow school programmes.

The process of development has mainly been stimulated from the communities and individuals, not policy driven. Today in Europe, there are an increasing number of experiences and projects, with rapid growth recorded (tab.2).

Some features form common elements of SF in European countries like: the presence of animal production and or horticulture; farms are quite organically managed and labour intensive, able to offer different products; there is a high capacity to manage landscape, and interest in preserving biodiversity; farms are normally open to the public and often are organised for direct selling to the public; due to the nature of this work, people involved have a large capability to act in local and wider networks; as well as this there is a strong commitment and motivation from highly engaged persons involved in the projects.

In general, the target groups are in all countries comparable and consist of a wide range people with disabilities(intellectual, physical, sensory), people with mental health difficulties, people recovering from alcohol and drug abuse, children, youth, re-socialisation of ex-prisoners, people that are long-term un-employed, people with terminal illness, burn outs and older people. Apart from similarities, there is a large diversity between countries in terminology, users and their position (clients, employees), financing structures, sectors involved and project holders (tab. 3).

In most EU Countries social farming has, until now, been developed outside the framework of existing regulatory systems.

In some cases, norms and criteria normally used for social/health sectors have been adapted to this new field. As a result the European regulatory situation seems like a puzzle.

There are countries where specific regulations have been established, but there are other places where social farming is mainly run on an 'ad hoc' voluntary basis

Tab. 2: Social farming in Europe

Country	Number	% of total farms
Netherlands	770	0.7
Italy	600	0.01
Germany	170	0.03
Flanders	260	0.4
Ireland	113	0.08
Slovenia	20	<0.01
France	>1200	>0.02

Source:Jan Hassink SoFar project 2008

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Tab. 3: The organisation of social farming in Europe (source Sofar project)

Sector involved	Health	Health/ agriculture	Agri- culture	Labour	Justice
Public	D,SL,Ir,A, I			Ir	I, Ir
Third sector	I	Ir		Fr, B, I,Ir	
Private		NL	I, B, N		

(<http://sofar.unipi.it>). In fact, there is considerable diversity of social farming across Europe in terms of its structures (whether public, private, or third -sector), orientations (main target groups), goals (such as: rehabilitation, quality of life, social inclusion, labour integration, education, therapy, services) and regulations (payments, compensation, projects, alternative food markets). Such fragmentation also reflects the different stages that social farming has reached in different places.

The issues presented raise important questions. Is SF interesting for a new welfare system more connected to opportunity building for less empowered people? What regulatory system should accompany this growing interest in social farming? Should social farming emerge mainly as an act of charity or as a commercial service activity run by farms? Are there other models? What is the role of policies in the EU to promote SF? Is this a field for integrated approaches to policies? In the next paragraphs our discussion will address these questions.

The interaction of SF with EU' rural and social policies.

Social farming suggests a strong interaction both with rural development policies as well as a social intervention at different institutional levels. In the next two paragraphs we will try to better understand the connection between SF, rural development policies and social intervention in Europe.

SF in the EU RD context: new patterns of development in rural areas and the demand for new services

In this chapter we would reflect on the role of SF in RD policies by starting from some recent documents that summarise the current situation as well as the challenges for EU rural areas and related policies.

As indicated by the Commission (EU Commission 2008), **the heterogeneity of EU rural areas** both in terms of environmental assets and socio-economic characteristics is very high and it has considerably increased with the addition of new member states. The EU's rural areas cover 91 % of its territory and contain over 56 % of its population. As Guyomard (2008) observed, this picture hides a very diverse situation across member states as well as at regional and sub-regional level. "Some rural areas are amongst the EU's wealthiest regions in terms of GDP per capita. Others, in remote areas and in more recently acceded Member States, are among the poorest. This in turn translates into differing demographic trends: a long established "urbanization" trend drawing population and economic activity out of more remote rural areas into urban areas, and a more recent "counter-urbanization" flow out of urban areas into accessible rural areas." (EU Commission, 2008). This diversity constitutes at the same time a richness and a major challenge for the policies dealing with rural areas. Rural areas generate 45% of gross value added in EU 27 and 53% of the employment, but tend to lag behind urban areas for a number of important socio-economic indicators such as income, labour activity and access to services (EU Commission, 2008b).

The average income indicator masks huge disparities as it does not reflect the **social structure of rural areas**. Recent surveys indicate an increasing lack of opportunities in rural areas, especially in those that are more peripheral and mountainous: so young people are leaving rural

areas to find jobs in cities and towns, while rich retired people are coming from urban areas to remain to live in the countryside, cohabiting with often poor retired farmers (EU Commission, 2008). As a consequence, depopulation, ageing and emigration are critical issues in many rural areas. Conversely, in peri-urban areas the urban pressure is re-designing the identity, the society and the rural culture itself. Migration from rural areas can be disproportionately female. Here a lack of opportunities is related both to the local culture, job opportunities, as well as to services able to facilitate work time with the family. In that respect, inadequate childcare provisions create specific barriers to employment opportunities particularly for women. The situation of older people is not easy at all. Many live alone and isolated while the service provisions are not able to fit their increasing needs in an every day more scattered settlement pattern with less populated communities.

Perhaps many immigrants are used to enter in rural areas as a first step for their social mobility in the EU society. From one hand this phenomenon is increasing the social fragmentation in rural communities, on the other hand it is highly demanding in terms of new services able to promote a better inclusion of newcomers into the communities.

More and more the viability of rural areas is becoming a complex frame in which local economy, the use of the environment and the growth of local society have to find a right as well as durable balance.

Looking forward to the future of EU rural areas many questions are arising especially when a balanced territorial development is positively considered in the EU. Further insight is needed in how remote, intermediate and peri-urban rural areas fit in the economic geography and can be made part of an overall sustainable socio-economic development.

Tab. 4: Lennert 2008 Impact of different scenarios in rural areas.

	Open Market	Sustainable Rurality
Rural areas in urbanised regions	Urbanisation, sprawl	Urbanisation
Coastal and mountain areas attractive for tourism	Mass tourism, retirement economies, high pressure on the environment	Soft tourism, including specific landscapes such as 'bocages' and 'montados'
Rural areas with a variety of activities	Residential / retirement economies, experience economy	More extended, infrastructure investments, SME economy, residential economy
Rural areas where agriculture dominates	Strong dualisation: large industrial farms (FRA, POL, UKR) vs abandoned farmland (E & S.EUR)	Limited dualisation: Sustainable industrial farms (FRA, POL, UKR) vs diversified economies (E & S.EUR)
Rural areas with low accessibility	Outmigration, ageing, land abandonment	Commodification and marketing of local resources, notably large-scale landscapes; still some shrinking regions

According with Lennert (2008), two different scenarios can be seen in rural areas. A first one where policies facilitate the organisation of a more open and competitive market mostly devoted to food competition. A second one is more focused on cohesion and sustainability and it implies more strict regulations from an environmental and social side.

According with this second scenario, one point is addressed by Guyomard (2008) and it regards the increasing quantity, access and quality of public and private services and infrastructure in a context where many people are attracted by the idea of living in rural areas provided that they have access to the same quantity and quality of services (here the idea of equivalent services can be also used) and infrastructure.

In order to address these challenges rural areas, particularly those more remote from urban centres, will need to diversify their range of economic and social opportunities to reduce disparities between urban and rural areas in terms of employment potential, income levels and access to services.

On the same track, Dormal Marino by concluding the Cyprus meeting in 2008 noted that “Not only is the rural world increasingly complex, but also the demands placed on rural areas today are increasing and go beyond agriculture. We expect agriculture to serve multiple functions: to provide safe and sufficient food in more sustainable ways, to contribute to our energy needs, to safeguard our natural resources and landscape. But we also expect rural areas to contribute to economic growth and employment (the Lisbon agenda) through the diversification of economic activities and the production of amenities for visitors and modern services for its population. These multiple functions should not be considered as separate silos, one next to each other, which may be assembled and disassembled at will: in fact these different functions interact and mutually reinforce each other when implemented together (Dormal Marino L., 2008).

We can also add that the environmental economic crises are one strongly demanding of completely different patterns of development and lifestyles in the EU as well as in other developed countries. Food provision, environmental resources and relational goods are increasing their consideration in society. In that respect the role of rural areas and of their resources is increasing day by day, also with respect to urban poles.

SF seems to be strongly collaborative with a scenario where rural sustainability is prevalent. It offers at the same time, the possibility to diversify on-farm activities and to diversify family income, to better valorise human resources present on the farm, especially by enhancing the participation of women and young people, to reduce the gap between urban and rural areas regarding the health/care provision and to reinforce social capital.

For these reasons SF should be better understood in the frame of multifunctional agriculture in order to promote innovative patterns of rural development, less dependent on compensation and funding and better rooted on local resources, service provision, the definition of a proactive project of change.

For the same reasons the role of social services in rural development should be better analysed by the rural development policies due to the strong linkages and implication they have in rural development processes. The OECD has already indicated that service delivery is key to the development of rural regions. In this respect 6 key policy areas to improve service delivery in rural areas were outlined :

1. the supply of services should be designed to match the characteristics needs and assets of different rural regions;
2. equity and efficiency targets should be carefully balanced;
3. innovative rural-urban contracts should guide service delivery;
4. government should move away from a logic of spending to a logic of investment;
5. effective and inclusive governance is key to rural service delivery;
6. service delivery innovations should be encouraged.

Although SF may be an attractive option to those who may wish to avail of it, it does not represent the only solution for the organisation of suitable services in rural areas. The organisation of the welfare mix in rural areas is a complex subject that can only be solved with proper and large intervention. But it should be observed that SF is able to fit all the six points addressed by the key message of the OECD Cologne meeting on Innovative Service Delivery, and in such respect SF is able to offer more than small support in order to improve the social network of rural areas.

SF and social policies

The definition of a EU common social policy is far from being established today. This doesn't mean that the EU has no policies in the social field. Since the '60s the EU has progressively organised a common framework and specific policies regarding social inclusion, vocational training, long life learning, job creation and disparities reduction.

The Lisbon summit of the 2007 include social affairs in the frame of the policies in which the EU can act. The intervention of the EU on social matters is based on the so-called "open coordination method" that encourages cooperation and exchange among Member States by using and promoting best practices, the organisation of some minimum rules and restrictions and some intervention approved by the Council.

Member states define at EU level some common objectives to achieve related to social issues. Each Member state will act according with their national policies but they are also committed to monitor and to evaluate the results achieved by using a common grid and by following common procedures. It is the responsibility of the member states to define the needs for which basic services and infrastructure and a better support will be needed in their local context. The organisation of local services is dependent on the welfare models adopted in each country and from the internal institutional structure.

According to Esping Andersen(Year?) four different welfare models can be defined across Europe: The social democratic model: organised In northern EU Countries like Finland, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, this model ensures universal rights to all citizens and it is based on high level of taxes. The model mixes together public intervention and private insurance and it is able to cover almost all different citizens.

The corporative model: (France, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Luxembourg) here the welfare system is mostly related to workers (workfare). There are different instruments that promote vocational training and a minimum wage for people not included at work.

The liberal model: it is mainly related to the Anglophone culture. It is mostly based on different aids for families in difficulty or with specific problems (non working families, people with disability payments, child benefits..). Charity and voluntary groups are quite active alongside the state in providing services in local communities.

The mediterranean model: it is based on a welfare mix (or welfare society) where first and second sector (public and private) are integrated by the third sector and the families (fourth sector). The system is sometime fragmented in different schemes. Voluntary association are everyday more active in organising help networks. Families play a strong role, while there is no minimum wage for people that are unemployed.

The presence of different systems influences the organisation of services in rural areas, as well as the organisation of SF practices.

As regards rural services, a strong culture in diversification and adaptation to rural areas is well represented in the UK and in Northern EU countries. In some areas, like in the Netherlands there is no need for a strong diversification of the intervention in rural and in urban areas. Despite their specific characters, in most EU Countries the debate about social services in rural areas is not yet part of any public arena.

In relation to SF, it has already been observed that there is a diversity and diffusion of projects in all EU Countries. At the same time, according with the different welfare models, practices are quite differently organised and regulated in each country as analysed later. However, in every EU Country SF is promoted in order to diversify, to innovate and to improve the efficacy of social services both for urban and rural citizens and for many different target groups.

What is also clear is that in all EU Countries the organisation of the welfare system is under pressure to change. The EU intervention is acting in order to facilitate cooperation and benchmarking of different systems in order to achieve the best common result. A better

understanding of SF practices, the organisation and the discussion of best practices, could facilitate the evaluation and the diffusion of innovative tools for social and work inclusion. There is a general question here. Is social farming just a useful way to reorganise care services by involving farmers, or does it represent the result of a more radical change where new linkages are created between social and economic organisations in order to reorganise local welfare?

Significance and regulation of SF in EU

Social farming appears as an evolving, dynamic scenario, which is gaining attention from multiple stakeholders in recent times. On one hand, this results from a new, widespread positive perception of agricultural and rural resources, leading to a raised interest about the beneficial/positive effects of natural spaces and agricultural areas on the social, physical and psychic well-being of people. Health institutions are keen on finding alternative practices more embedded in the social contexts. In that respect, SF enlarges the idea of multifunctionality and reconnects farming to the locality and to some social needs of local communities, both rural and urban.

On the other hand, social farming represents a new chance for farmers to carry out alternative services, broadening and diversifying the scope of their activities and their role in society. The integration between agricultural practices and social services may also allow new sources of income for farmers, improving the image of agriculture in society at the same time, and favouring the development of new relations between rural and urban citizens.

In this respect SF has a wide impact on many aspects of agriculture as well as rural life. From an economic point of view, SF is related to a specific aspect of multifunctional agriculture where farmers can broaden their farm activities by offering social care services. It can also be indicated as a positive externality of agriculture on social capital (building new relationships among different categories of people like farmers, local communities, users, consumers). Also for the whole health sector and society as integrating of people into the environment of a farm can prevent them from becoming a criminal or becoming sick reducing the financial impact on the society. From a technical point of view, SF has the possibility to cope with nature and to use its own powerful resources. For agricultural practice, SF gives a wider view of the potential of farming, due to the opportunity to enter in other sectors (like education, health, social sector). So: It will enlarge the number and typology of stakeholders, both the younger generation of farmers and the wider society have the opportunity to change their perception about farming; farmers have the opportunity to build new networks that can be helpful to qualify what they offer to society, especially in respect of ethical consumers; farmers may develop their own entrepreneurial attitude towards the idea of corporate social responsibility. From a social point of view, SF follows a multidisciplinary approach and may offer new linkages and bridges among sectors. It has a strong political impact too. People involved in SF are often strongly motivated and active. They struggle to participate in a bottom-up process in order to build policy networks and to discuss the topic in front of a wider public. SF may have a wide impact on many aspects of agriculture and on its links with the society due to: the *benefits* for 'users'²; the opportunity to innovate activities: in agriculture, health care, education, social sector; the opportunity to strength *urban-rural relationships*; the *economic impact* on farms and rural areas toward diversification, reputation and responsibility of enterprises; the opportunity to enhance *social capital*, to improve *social services* in rural areas, to promote healthy and *vital rural communities*.

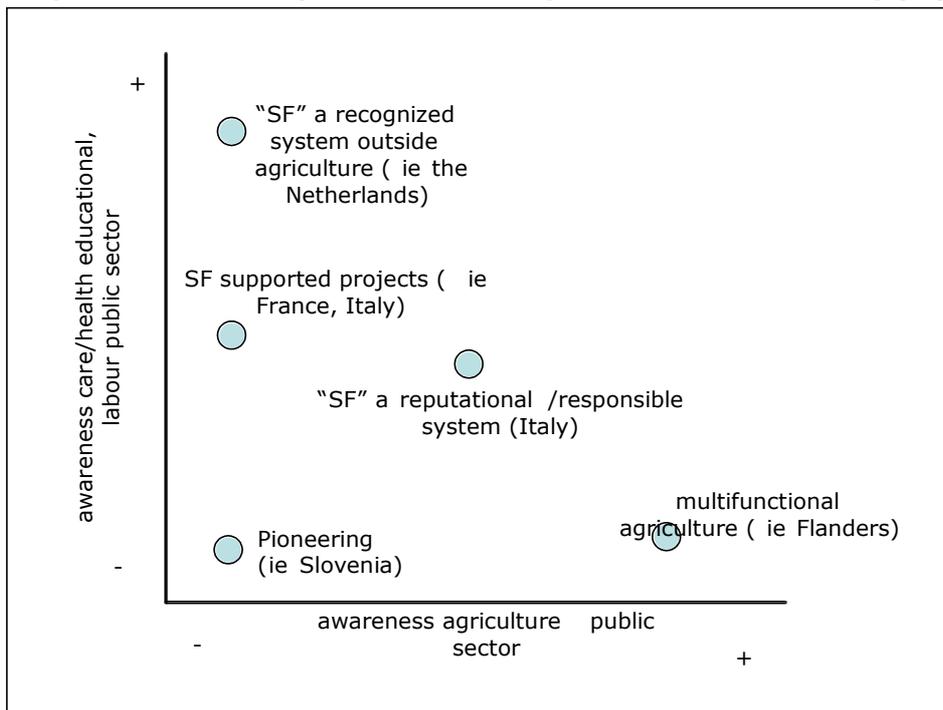
² The reported effects of SF regard: Physical effects (skills, physical health, employment, day/night rhythm); Mental effects (self-esteem, self-value, responsibility, awareness, enthusiasm); social effects (social skills, social interaction, community integration).

Cultural environment and organisation of SF

Social farming differs in each country due to local culture and the structure of health, social and education services. Concepts of human rights and social solidarity can be fundamentally different, as well as what is normally considered to be feasible and acceptable in the organisation of local services. Just to give an example, in 1980 psychiatric institutions were closed in Italy as well as in most EU Countries. The history of social farming projects may be peculiar to a country. What has been achieved may be specific, as may the way in which good practices are diffused. The organisation of facilities for the start up of new projects is likely to be different.

In each EU Country SF projects evolve inside the specific welfare model adopted. It's notable to observe that the debate about SF is started mostly in the same period in all countries despite a varying evolution. It is also true that many project that evolved under different regulatory models are sometimes organised, in practice in the same way. This means that resources and ways of using them are almost the same in every place. What should be underlined is the influence of each welfare model on the organization of SF in every Country. In the social democratic model SF is mainly formally and directly recognised by the health/care sector. In the corporative model projects are mainly devoted to work inclusion. In the liberal model they are mainly run by charity/volunteer groups who act as intermediary bodies, effectively subcontracting the provision of social care services from the State. In the Mediterranean model practices are differently shaped according with different actors involved (farmers, third sector, institutions).

Graph 1: Awareness of public actors and organisation of social farming (SF)



A key to the better understanding of the organisation and diffusion of social farming projects and practices could be the word "awareness".

Awareness about social farming practices and results affects public institutions both from agriculture and from other sectors (such as education, health, social, labour) that can facilitate, support

and make use of social farming, but also farmers and their associations, and again the local community. The different actors may have different awareness about social farming and this may affect the regulatory system that is adopted for a particular area (Graph 1).

In Flanders, for example, awareness by public agricultural institutions is now quite high and rules are mainly based on agricultural policies. The case is different in the Netherlands where the health and social sector is taking the lead with high public awareness of social farming. In other countries the awareness is very low and practices are really pioneering and isolated one from each other. There are also different situations, like Italy, where the awareness is increasing among all the actors but still it is difficult to define specific rules. Here local society

is struggling in order to recognise and to define its own way of regulation based upon the reconnection of local food market circuits.

This discussion suggests five scenarios for social farming:

A pioneering situation where there is isolated pockets of experience of social farming. Here, action may or may not be voluntary and based on very strong individual motivation or State funded charities. Care is carried out by conventional, public health and social care structures, and farms are mostly private. Farmers enter into social farming from a personal commitment, and there is no general awareness of social farming as a service per se in the local society (in Europe there are many examples of this, such as in Ireland).

Multifunctional agriculture. There is greater experience about SF, and the interest comes from agriculture. However, projects are largely local in focus (whether privately- or publicly-funded). There is a low level of awareness from the public care sector but strong commitment from farmers (an example of this is the situation in Flanders).

Supported social farming projects: projects driven by a strong commitment from farmers or by the social economy (third sector) supported by local public institutions (mainly employment-related). Projects are very funding-dependent (in France, for example, many projects are supported by labour policies for the long-term unemployed, in Ireland many social farming initiatives utilise employment training programmes as a vehicle to source resources to provide support services in the guise of work integration as there is an absence or inadequacy of dedicated core funding for continuous care programmes.).

Social farming as a recognized system: mainstream social or health public authorities recognise social farming as part of social service delivery (the situation in the Netherlands is an example of this). SF becomes attractive even for non-farmers to revitalize farms for social farming purposes. Many of such farms are no “real farms” but totally depending on “social income”.

SF as a model based on reputation-enhancement: There are many social farming projects that are well-established. There is no regulatory framework but a high level of commitment from the projects, local consumers and wider society. Consumers and social-farming service-providers share a common ethic and together are starting to build new organisational structures, both social and economic (in Italy and the UK there are increasing connections among social farms and ethical consumers). A key outcome for the farmer is his increased reputation and visibility.

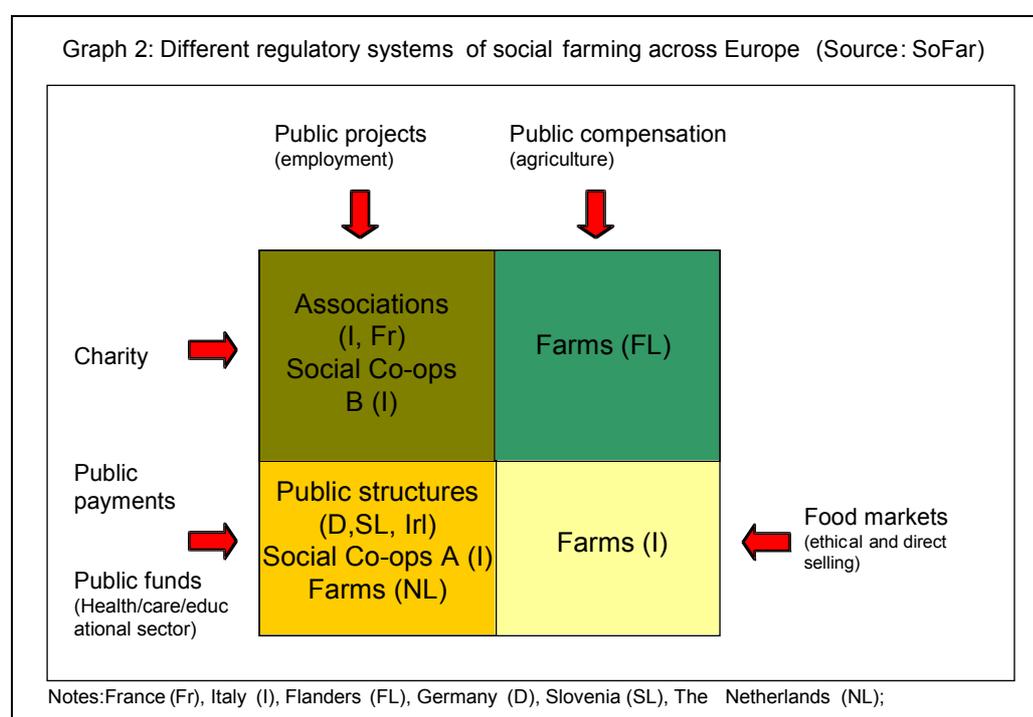
A cross-national analysis provides the opportunity to recognise different steps in the process of social innovation that it is linked to social farming practices and trends (<http://sofar.unipi.it>). But it also focuses attention on two different aspects; firstly, the actors that are willing to participate to create a facilitating environment for social farming; and, secondly, what ways they need to follow in order to work to a common purpose. When awareness, public concern and interest about social farming start to be considered as the key to promoting the sector, then it becomes clear how important it is to improve the visibility of social farming and its recognition by a wider public. Communication will increase the awareness to more public, private, individual and collective actors about social farming. Important aspects of this communication include: clearly-defined evidence of good practice, sharing of information and training activities, organisation and support to create networks to facilitate development.

Attitudes of project holders and regulatory systems

In many EU countries, regulation of social farming and the diffusion or recognition of practices differ widely (see graph 2).

Public payments from the health, care and education sectors can support and recognise services, thus providing public structures that make use of agriculture as a tool for promoting human capabilities (for example, Germany, Ireland or in Slovenia in the case of public structures, or in Italy for the so called Social-Cooperative “type A” companies (ones that are part of the social economy and which are paid by the State for the services provided).

Public authorities may also recognise privately-owned farms (as in the Netherlands). In other cases local projects are funded through largely state-funded charitable organisations acting as intermediary/sub-contracting bodies for the State (like in Ireland) or supported as *public* projects (mainly by the employment sector) with the aim to facilitate inclusive work opportunities. This happens in France, Spain, Ireland and in Italy, the so called “social cooperative type B”- (job creation schemes) and in Flanders in the case of social-economy initiatives). In Flanders, farmers are recognised by the agricultural sector and given financial compensation for the extra effort arising from hosting people from the health/care sector.



Also a different situation can occur, where the recognition doesn't come from the State but directly from local customers who recognise and appreciate the voluntary extra effort made by farmers who are involved in social farming. As a consequence, they are willing to choose their products specifically, and to buy directly

from them. In that case social farming can become also a strategy for farm diversification and a way to be better recognised in a broader market (Di Iacovo, 2003).

The organisation of different services on social farms may in some ways belong to the area of public goods. In cases where farmers are not directly paid for the services that they provide although they are generating positives externalities through the extra care dimension of their work. Therefore, questions arise regarding the best way of recognising the effort of farmers where they are involved in the provision of Green Care services/activities. This is not the case for the public sector that is clearly funded by public expenditure and where services are not paid for directly by service-users. The same situation occurs for the third sector (independent sector) when it provides services that should normally be organised by the State.

Problems may arise where inclusive work opportunities are created in which payment for the service-users' work needs to be given in order to reward and recognise what they do. One possibility for farmers is that their services could be provided without payment, where the emphasis would be on the organisation of more informal networks, such as offering the possibility to stay on a farm and to take part in the agricultural processes, or to share and to work with small groups of people. Here, where it would be considered normal for people to spend time at a health service or social services centre, they could instead spend time living at a farm. In these cases should the activity of a farmer be directly recognised by the State or not?

And in that case what would be the effect of different patterns of recognition on the organisation of the agricultural sector and on the services provided?

Ethics and economics of SF at farm level

The debate about social farming requires a deeper analysis of farmers' behaviour and the possible impact of diversification towards social farming on farm activities. In a word, relationships between *ethics* and entrepreneurship should be explored. As already discussed, social farming implies the production of positive externalities. Yet enterprises are normally considered to follow an ethic of individual profit maximisation. Therefore the services provided by farmers should be paid for, but the reality is that entrepreneurial attitudes vary a lot. A farmer may act philanthropically and choose to donate specific services to society. This is the case in many pioneering projects. But a volunteer basis for care farming cannot be considered to make economic sense if carried out on a large scale and it has been suggested that to ensure a quality social farming service that the service needs to be paid for to ensure services of good standard are offered.

Different regulatory concepts for SF

For the organisation and diffusion of social farming to succeed there is a need to define specific frameworks and some specific ways of recognition. From an economic point of view, this could vary from the recognition of positive voluntary action by farmers, through the provision of compensation (like in the Flemish situation), or a diversification of on-farm activities with specific services recognised by direct payments with the organisation of a quasi-market by the way of institutional contracts (as in the Netherlands).

As well as compensation and direct payments, a third case implies a different attitude towards enterprise, where corporate social responsibility (CSR) is based on a different ethic. This ethic would link in a positive way, the production of positive externalities, the reputation of the firm, the special features of their produce in the wider and more competitive market, and the notion of reciprocity with and from consumers who would be willing to choose products because of their ethical origin (because they were from care farms). In the last situation, farmers would be changing their attitude towards production, by considering the production of public goods, not as a cost for the farm, but more as an opportunity - to cooperate with local stakeholders and also to increase its reputation and to be better appreciated at the (mainly) local level. This could help them to join new networks and broaden, not only market opportunities, but also the possibility of starting new projects and increasing opportunities through broadened on-farm activities.

The distinction between different attitudes to care farming and the resulting farm practices and services may determine the future evolution of social farming. It may affect not only the balance in the organisation of agricultural processes but also the presence of specific social activities and the content of the services provided. In the next section we will discuss this relationship between attitudes and the nature of social farming.

The evolution of stakeholders' attitudes towards social farming

Social farming is a changing world. Its evolution not only takes time but is also linked to the changing attitudes and views of the main stakeholders involved. Figure 3 presents this process of change. By moving from the left to the right farmers can follow three different

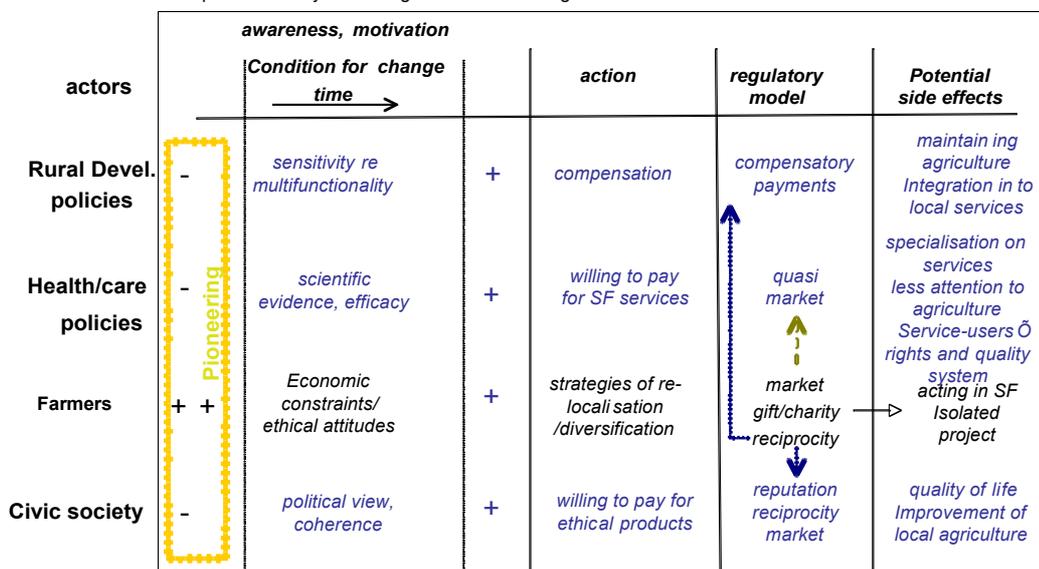
scenario, according with the evolving view of other actors involved like, rural development policies, Health/care policies, civic society.

The *pioneering* situation represents the starting point. Just a few project initiators have a high level of awareness and motivation to participate in social farming. Public stakeholders are not yet directly involved/interested. Initiatives are isolated and few in number. Project holders may act on a voluntary basis and normally have philanthropic motives, or they have a strong willingness to act for the public good. The direct impact of care farmers is on service-users (who will benefit because they will be able to have more services in the area in which they live) but the farmers will also benefit (because they can have the satisfaction of gifting their services and skills to society).

Little by little, a wider awareness of social farming will increase. For instance, the health/care sector will increase its awareness about social farming and when scientific evidence about its efficacy is produced. National, regional or local bodies can start by planning, formalising and supporting such activities. The organisation of a public “quasi-market”³ (case1) can stimulate new farmers to enter the field, especially when they have a less intensive personal motivation (see above). Of course, in order to monitor and to evaluate their actions and results, public bodies need to establish best practices, clear rules, and introduce quality and accreditation systems as deemed appropriate.

Such regulation may have lateral-effects. Farmers can be asked to have qualifications and to make significant financial investments. They may also reduce the attention they pay to agriculture itself (especially when it is not very profitable). Such regulation may also restrict the extent of engagement of both farmers and people that use the service that may be counter-productive to the non-clinical, normalisation ethos of social farming.

Graph 3: Pathways of change of social farming awareness and farmer behaviour



Let us consider as just one example of this, the organisation of a quasi-market for public services provided by farmers in countries which adopt a social democratic model. This would demand

specialisation and perhaps specific requirements (quality systems, accreditation, professional skills - see below) from farms. In cases where such requirements are high and the resulting economic gain guaranteed, there might be a shift in the farm organisation and also a decrease in the relevance of agriculture on the farm. As a result, the services offered by farmers would be better organised and more formally defined. The economic engine of the farm would become more public services dependent rather than products/market dependent. This could reduce the ability of the social farm to include users in real farm work activities. At the same time, most of the “informal power” and quality of social farming might be lost and there could be a reduction in the partnership between agriculture and social services that often exists on social farms at

³ By the way of a direct payment of a per diem quota for each user involved in social farming.

the moment.

In other contexts (case 2), the agricultural sector may increase its focus on social farming. The discourse around multifunctional agriculture in rural development policies could increase the awareness about practices that link agriculture with social services. In this respect, policies could be implemented in order to support farm investment and/or to compensate the farmer for the extra effort involved (as in Flanders). In such cases, policies might support these extra voluntary efforts of farmers other than by giving payment for a defined service. The payment of modest compensation may facilitate the entry of new farmers into social farming and give a political signal about the public view of social farming development. In this case, particular attention should be given to the level of such compensation and to the conditions required for it. Such policies would help farmers to maintain the relevance of agriculture, and local services would be reinforced with new resources coming from agriculture.

A third case may be present when farmer motivation is met by an increasing concern of society about a more responsible way of acting in agriculture. In this case farms whose product derives from a more socially-engaged process may appeal to consumers who have ethical concerns and who are willing to pay for ethically-characterised products. The regulatory rules here would be based on a mixture of market, reputation and reciprocity. At present, health/care policies and rural development policies hardly collaborate at all in the organisation and regulation of social care services. One could hope for the establishment of different and innovative linkages between social and economic local life. The last could be characterised by a greater responsibility by local firms in relation to social problems, a reconnection by firms to local needs and the organisation of a more inclusive and sustainable web of links in the community. Results and efficacy-evaluation in this third case should take into consideration how effective such a new organisation for service-users would be, as well as the impact on social capital and quality of local community life. Also, the regulatory system would need to be organised differently and based on two different levels - the first defined by the needs of people who use the services and satisfying the requirements of public bodies responsible for services, and the other directly provided by users of services as well as by civic society to ensure that people who use services are not exploited in any way.

In this corporate social responsibility (CSR) model, the provision of services could be also considered to be an indirect way of promoting farm products. Services would not replace farm production but could accompany it. The increased reputation of the farm could also generate growth in on-farm activities and an extra demand for workers that would stimulate the inclusion of service-users in work.

In this third case, more than in the second, new private resources can enter the arena. Ethical consumers can sustain the extra costs for agricultural resources used in providing services. But in a win-win solution, they would also normally receive advantages by receiving fresher, and cheaper products directly bought from the farm workers on social farms.

As indicated in Graph 3, the evolution of social farming in each of the above contexts necessarily reflects the organisation of the local (social and economic) arena and its internal dynamics.

Patterns of development for SF in EU

Social farming and social development

From a social as well as a political point of view SF can be seen as an interesting process of innovation of agriculture linked to its potential social dimension and to the local capability to build pathways of change (De Hann L. *et al.*, 2005) through a political process. Alternative ways to provide services are built upon a new recognition of the capacities of local individual actors to build innovative solutions.

Literature on rural studies quite often focuses on social exclusion (Cloke et al., 2000, Shucksmith, 2004, Shortall, 2004). The idea of SF changes this perspective. SF defines an active role for farmers in the organisation of social services and in projects of social inclusion. This radical change has to be perceived and reconstructed by the project holder through a complex social process of interaction and understanding. Perhaps this process of change can find alliances with local society and consumers. Consumers with concern for society as a whole are interested to explore new and more coherent relationships among personal beliefs and practices of consumption and to start to collaborate with processes of SF. In many cases (like in France and in Italy) this process enables at a local level the production of new relational goods and of new bridges between farmers and urban citizens. However, the success of such initiatives cannot be taken for granted. They are exposed to potential failure everyday. Perhaps also the success of this process can become problematic. It attracts new entrants with different ideas and visions and this can inspire conflict and competition with people normally engaged in delivering social services. This may demand a new regulatory burden to be defined externally. This process can lead to new constraints and to the fragmentation of a more holistic view that potentially could detract from the idea of mutual caring relationships at a local level (Barnes, 2007). Of course, the growing interest around social farming initiatives is also important in order to attract the interest of responsible public institutions acting in different sectors. This is an especially relevant topic for SF due to the interaction of different professional domains. Another issue regards the recognition of the social services provided to the community by private farmers. It's true that in many experiences the consumer concern and the attitude of farmers to produce in a more fair way can be linked to the idea of corporate social responsibility. Farmers can be recognised for their extra effort by consumers that are willing to buy ethical products.

In most of the European Countries there is a awareness about SF, as well as a growing demand from practitioners about recognition of their activities both from a social and a political point of view. This demand arises mainly from private initiatives and from those driven by associations and volunteers. They started with strong motivation, requiring a lot of effort to establish and maintain their projects and now they are seeking social appreciation of the work that they have done and that they are still doing. In many cases also associations of users are recognising the efficacy of SF activities. In their view they are able to improve care relationships and to create a more life-sustaining condition at local level. In that respect such social innovation should be stimulated, supporting knowledge/research and clear definitions, promoting networks and debate/communication with coherent actions at a national and EU level. At the same time there is a large awareness about the risks of a commoditization of services provided by social farmers and of the possibility to lose a more genuine and responsible service delivery.

On the one hand, there is a claim for formal recognition of these new practices by the project holder. On the other hand, a process of regulation can start from the public concern regarding the quality of the services at a local level defining new *regimes*. These tensions can facilitate the passage from a more pioneering situation to a more organised and/or formalised one (see later).

Policy network and social farming

SF is in transition, linked to the increasing number of practices and evidence and to stakeholders' demands. In that respect, in order to formulate strategies and political support the discussion should focus on the political instruments that can accompany this dynamic process.

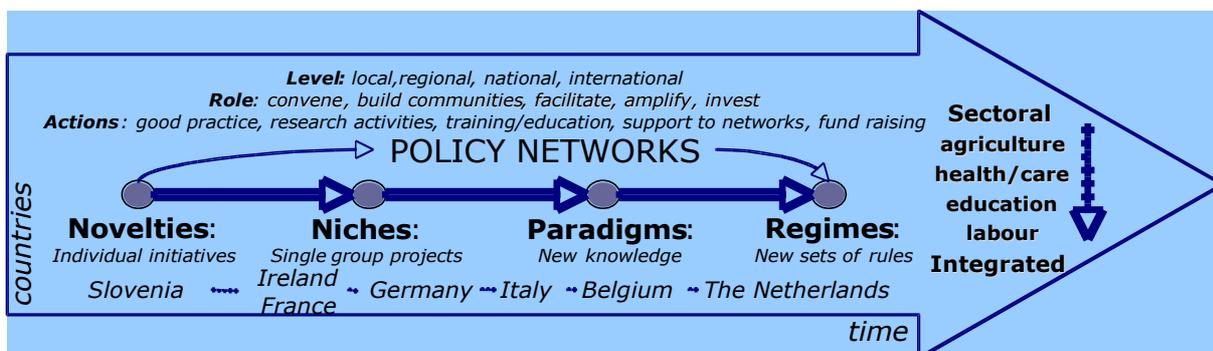
There are some clear features linked to SF initiatives. They are locally rooted. They are working in open and fragmented arenas where different sectors are facing different challenges and not in a linear way. They are following a bottom up approach in their dynamic change. In some countries the presence of isolated projects can be registered (Ireland, Slovenia, Austria). In other countries networks are evolving from local to regional and national level (Germany, Italy, France, Flanders), in other countries they are already structured at national level (Netherlands, Norway) mainly in order to achieve political results.

From a theoretical point of view, the role of policy networks focuses on different characterizing elements regarding: *the relevance of resources and bargaining power* among interdependent organisations (Rhodes, 1977; Benson 1982); the organisation of epistemic communities and *common set of ideas* (Haas, 1992) or policy advocacy of competing coalitions (Sabatier *et al.*, 1993); the organisation of lobby and *pressure groups* and institutions; the organisation of open "issue networks" vs exclusive policy communities (Rhodes, 1997); new forms of governance as a social response to political problems of coordination (trust and transaction costs) (Borzel, 1997). Policy networks are normally established with the aim of focussing around a new theme, to build communities of actors, to preserve the meaning and understanding of the topic from the interference of external actors before it can be clearly addressed, to promote the topic to a wider public (by the way of research, communication, information, training and examples of good practice), to facilitate the establishment of new relationships and activities related to the subject, and to attract funds and investments useful to achieve the identified aims. In this respect, the increasing evidence about social farming could be used to facilitate the organisation of policy networks, both at regional, country and EU level (Di Iacovo, 2007). The main task of these networks would be to reflect on experiences in order to build the change process.

In general, policy networks can act in order to support ideas and development of a subject or to play a role of agency representing the topic in wider arenas. Sometimes both these functions can be alternatively assumed. At different stages the functions can be different. The policy networks can: **filter** alternatives and ideas to arrive at policy recommendations; **amplify** and disseminate a message or an idea, through a communication process from the field to the centre; to stimulate resources for **investment**; **convene people**, bringing together groups and individuals (systematic and selected group focus); **build communities** to protect themselves from outside threats; **facilitate** the work in a more efficient and effective way.

In SF policy networks are playing such a function increasing step by step the evidence of the

Graph 4: Policy networks and pathways of change in social farming (Source: SoFar project)



topic. There is a growing debate about how to increase relevance, evidence and diffusion of projects and practices in Europe. Quite often the reflection about the use of agriculture for

social purposes starts from local experiences, isolated from each other, but it moves quite soon towards a growing network able to link and bring different and new public and private actors together. Some of the main points debated are related to the benchmarking of experiences and their efficacy, the reflection regarding the future of social farming, the relationships with policies of different sectors and the possibility to explore new and more tailored policies. This slow process increases the awareness of the people involved and, at the same time, it is able to reinforce and to improve the evidence and relevance of social farming and to promote an institutionalisation of the new practices. From this point of view, social farming is comparable to a novelty able to grow into a strategic niche. The niches are managed at local level in between different regimes (the institutional welfare system). The establishment of new practices reinforces the evidence about the use of agriculture for social purposes and attract new subjects. As a consequence it becomes easier to negotiate and to influence public institutions and to promote changes in the previous regime. This process is normally fed by the organisation of a policy network able to establish and increase relationships and actions.

The process of change in SF is strongly dependent on the local capability to build specific pathways of change able to promote the passage from a *novelty* situation (where pioneer and individual projects are mainly present⁴), to *niches* (where single projects groups are established and new local networks and communities of interests are defined). In many cases, networks are born in an informal way by producing trust, common understanding, the designing of new processes and practices and forms of collaboration (Marsden T. 2004). At the very early stages these processes are far from any institutional regulation and from any specific support. They define new arenas for debate where new actors may convene and start up a process of collective learning able to design new *paradigms* (where there is an increasing awareness by many stakeholders and the organisation of new knowledge about the phenomenon). However initiatives can also not succeed and can decline again into isolated practices. In such a situation external supports can be a useful starter. The awareness of public institutions or agencies may support the design of a process of animation, setting up new contacts and rebuilding arenas for comparison. When paradigms consolidate they can influence the organization of a new set of rules and inspire the organization of a new *regime*(Graph 4) (Wiskerke, 2004).

In Europe, the SoFar [Social Farming in multifunctional farm <http://sofar.unipi.it>] project has contributed towards identifying the different country stages of social farming. There are also several other initiatives (SoFar platforms, Community of Practice Farming for Health, COST Action 866 on Green Care) that are debating ways and actions that could facilitate the consolidation of social farming as well as of the projects themselves.

In the above respect, two more points can be made with regard to policies. As in the case of organic farming, so also in social farming, it seems to be clear that innovative approaches to farming are always organised at ground level.

They are experimented with by farmers themselves, in many cases outside any formal or institutional process of research or recognition. It takes a long time for them to be fully organised and recognised but when they are they are able to usefully address some of the real needs of society. Policies ideally would promote fertile environments that facilitate fresh thinking and the initiative of innovative enterprises.

Policies should support the establishment of policy networks that are independently able to organise new pathways of change. Such innovative behaviour is vital in order to address urgent questions and needs in society. Here, the role of existing organisations will be more effective when they are able to support a constructive reflection by the stakeholders involved, more so than when they directly support specific activities and attitudes.

⁴ Looking to the current situation SF across Europe can be read as a process of innovation and change through different stages (Wiskerke et al, 2004) Rhodes:

Novelties: when mainly individual initiatives are built it can be assimilated to the pioneering stage;

Niches: in this case relationships start to be established and a new arena start to be defined . There are single project groups collaborating inside but not connected each other

Paradigms: relationships and exchange of information are increased and new knowledge are established

Regimes: a new set of rules start to be defined, affecting institution and the legal framework

SF as a pathways of change: building new policies in EU

Due to the grass root level of the experiences and the incremental nature of the process of change, policies devoted to SF have to be carefully designed in order to promote and to reinforce the pathway of change without changing the nature of the process by the imposition of top down legal and bureaucratic frameworks. As already seen policy networks operate differently. In order to reinforce the process of change specific support should be provided to the organisation and to the management of the policy networks in order to enable them to reinforce their activities, to improve the internal debate, to communicate practices and solutions, to improve their capability to advocate on the subject and to attract resources and new actors.

The policy process is more complex and organised in circular steps: the local organisation and the communication of *good practices*; the organisation of *policy networks*; the achievement of *scientific evidence* in HT, AAT, FT; the placement of the topic in a broader political arena; the *debate among sectors* and stakeholders; the organisation of *training activities* and the definition of a *professional identity*; activities of *communication and information* devoted to the broad society to increase its attention and commitment; the negotiation of *specific measures and instruments* (national desks, technical assistance, payment schemes) able to promote innovation in social farming and, at the same time, to spread and to transfer new practices among actors from different sectors in a slow but progressive process of institutionalisation able to promote change in the previous organisational regime.

Summing up and concluding

Social farming is an emerging topic at EU level. Despite its different stages of development, SF is evident in all of Europe, sometimes with very similar features and characteristics.

SF can address social issues in an innovative way, both for urban and rural citizens. It is based on a rather innovative paradigm about how to address societal demands by mobilising new local resources.

According with (Brunori *et al.*, 2008) SF can be considered as a transformational (or second order or radical change) social innovation. Social innovation “refers to new strategies, concepts, ideas and organizations that meet social needs of all kinds and that extend and strengthen civil society”. It has a systemic nature. It is the outcome of collective action that depends on the social structure wherein innovators operate. It is the resulting pattern of interaction among people, tools and natural resources, more than a transfer of external knowledge. As a main feature SF is locally embedded, it’s able to link together public and private goods; it should operate at different -micro, meso, macro-levels.

SF asks for inter-disciplinary, inter-sector, and multi-dimensional behaviour for the large number of stakeholders involved. It also involves enterprises in care provision, introducing and valorising attitudes linked to an ethic of responsibility.

Social farming fits well with many emerging societal issues:

- in the field of rural development SF offer an opportunity to:
 - improve care provision and the quality of life in rural areas;
 - diversify on farm activities and to better involve new family members through services provision;
 - promote a wider application of multifunctionality;
 - increase farmers reputation in the society and-directly or indirectly- their income;
 - establish a new bridge between urban and rural areas;

- to reintroduce new values aside from the market, like the value of exchange and reciprocity;
- to reconnect local agriculture to local needs in a more society friendly and responsible way;
- in the field of health/care/educational services SF is able to offer some new responses to:
 - the research of new tools and innovative processes able to support professional services by valorising nature and informal relationships;
 - the increasing demand for personalisation of services to the needs of the individual using services and the efficacy of public health/care services;
 - the need of organising efficient services where scale economy cannot be applied but rather using economy of scope;
 - the demand of services based on flexibility and proximity;
 - the opportunity to move from the cure to a more caring oriented strategy into the welfare system.

What is very peculiar in SF is that it links together two sectors regulated very differently in Europe. In agriculture and rural development, the integration of national policies in the EU and vice versa is at its deepest. In social affairs, the pre-eminence of national policies are dominant inside a process of common coordination. Perhaps welfare models are very differently shaped in different countries and this conditions SF application⁵. However, SF may also be differently organised in countries which adopt the same model⁶.

Due to differentiation in the stage and in the main application/rules of SF across EU the pathways of change cannot be the same everywhere.

So we can consider five different situations:

- **understanding and recognising:** Countries where farmers are still offering services in an implicit way inside the family and or informal relationships without any regulation, here it should enhance a process of understanding about the contribution offered by local small family farms (and or large cooperative farms that are still quite important for the life of local villages in eastern Countries) to the communities life and to better integrate their efforts inside the re-organisation of a welfare system;
- **testing and improving:** Countries where SF is mainly at a novelty stage. A better evaluation and communication about existing projects could be the starting point for an enlargement of SF activities:
 - In those countries that adopt a social democratic or a corporative models difficulties in starting-up new projects and in receiving a full recognition are mainly due to the lack of attention to SF and to the recognition confined to professional actors only;
 - In other models there is a lack of recognition as well as a lack or rules able to include SF into the welfare model;
- **diversifying the scope and mainstreaming:** Countries where SF is at a niche stage, projects are quite consolidated in local/thematic networks but they are mainly focused on specific targets. In these countries there is opportunity to enlarge the scope and to better introduce SF in the local welfare system:
 - In countries that adopt a corporative model projects are mainly devoted to work inclusion by the way of projects funded by the State. Here there is the space to enlarge the use of SF to other targets and activities;
 - Also in countries like UK, where SF is mainly funded by the State and organised by volunteer and charity groups, there is the space for a better integration and wider range of activities for SF;

⁵ In France and in Germany that adopt a corporative model SF is mostly addressed to work inclusion while in the Netherlands it offers a wider range of services.

⁶ When we consider countries that adopt a social democratic model we can register that in Finland and Denmark social farming is not very well developed while it happens to the contrary in the Netherlands and in Norway.

- **Promoting and integrating:** Countries where SF is at a paradigm stage. Projects are quite diverse in the targets addressed and in the organization achieved, here there is the space for the organization of new rules to support wider development.
- **Rethinking and deepening:** here we have countries that have already organised SF activities with specific rules. They are mainly introduced in the national regulatory system but there is still the need for adapting and rethinking the model to new stimuli and needs.

Traditional SF				
Implicit SF	Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Lituania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Estonia			
Evolutionary SF				
Welfare model =>	Social democratic model	Corporative model	Liberal model	Mediterranean Model
Stage				
Novelty	Den, Sweden Fin (moving to a niche stage)	Luxembourg	Ireland	Spain, Greece, Portugal Cyprus Malta
Niche		France, Germany Austria	UK	
Paradigm		Flanders BE,		Italy (it is coming from a niche stage)
Regime	The Netherlands, (Norway)			

In all contexts, according with its diffusion, SF is already offering different kind of services to local society, sometimes without any recognition. We can reflect on this opportunity to promote SF across EU and about suitable policies able to facilitate the organization of SF.

Reflecting on policies for social farming we can observe that at an EU level:

- rural development policies as well as policies on social affairs should include SF concept into their reflections, plans and actions;
- the second pillar could include specific instruments that should be able to support SF in very different institutional contexts as regards the welfare system;
- ESF policies should promote the organization of good practices in SF, to monitor and to evaluate them from many different perspectives (like the impact on users, on rural development processes on social capital, etc) as well as activities able to exchange experiences across Europe;

When we consider the policy domain we should also consider that (Lizzi, 2008):

- Each policy is inscribed in an institutional frame with values, knowledge, goals;
- Political change may depend on policy legacy/inheritance that can filter the change, and that operate differently within national and local situations;
- Policies for SF ask for a stronger integration among sectors: agriculture, environment, health/care.

In order to facilitate this process of change it is relevant to:

- Build new arenas able to include new actors;
- stimulate the organisation of new policy networks;
- promote a vertical policy integration among different institutional levels (multilevel governance);

- stimulate a stronger public-private dialogue in order to better share resources and knowledge;

Table 5: Priority areas, main characteristics, sources and support schemes for SF

Priority areas		5 Supporting & Funding SF
		Research project Pilot project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Farm level o Territorial level Network support Training & educational projects
	Main Characteristics	Sources and support schemes
1 <i>Defining and reinforcing the idea of SF</i>	Analyse existing practices Verify common grounds and diversities at local/territorial level Precisely identify the components of social farming (social and agricultural elements) Define codex and manifestos Connect SF to main political guidelines and strategy papers for social/ educational/ health/agricultural sectors Link urban and rural implications of SF Promote ethical products	Leonardo project Other EU project (ESF) National support schemes Media
2 <i>Improving knowledge about SF (Research & Education, Knowledge transfer, Communication)</i>	Research on effectiveness, models & indicators Analyse policies and regulatory models Improve education and training Exchange ideas and good practices Establish and develop communities of interest Identify targets for focused communication activities Build communication tools (web, newsletters, focus groups, slogans)	Products from SoFar EU VII Research framework COST Action Leonardo EU project PROGRESS project CoP FFH National supports Voice EU audit system National Social reports for EU
3 <i>Building networks on SF (nationally and internationally)</i>	Share activities and needs (different and at linked levels) Mobilise resources Organize common actions (methods, guidelines) Involvement of new actors Development of user associations Collective actions and shared activities More debate with other sectors (health & social sector)	EU rural net Existing nets (LAGs) Leonardo EU project Local resources CoP FFH
4 <i>Identifying a common legal framework and sharing vision about SF</i>	Legislation (simplification and convergence) Define frameworks and rules (matching model -community, social professional, farms...- diversity transparency, flexibility roles and responsibility market/non-market, quality system) Recognise SF practices Integrate policies (Social health, rural, education)	Policy coordination in EU National policies and plans Health policies Social policies Rural policies

SF projects are strictly connected to local contexts. Moving from this point, policies should stimulate a positive environment able to mobilise local stakeholders in promoting SF in accordance with the local starting situation.

In the meantime, from the point of view of policy makers, they need to be supported in producing a set of rules and political tools to support SF.

In a way, the possibility to organise policies around the topic of SF is linked in a circular way to the organization of an increasing awareness about this topic at different, local, regional, national, and EU levels. Communication activities, diffusion of best practices, some codification about the phenomenon are relevant key points as a way to increase discussion around the topic.

Policy networks normally act in order to create the condition for political intervention in a new field. The role of policy networks and the definition of some priority areas were debated during the Sofar Platforms involving EU stakeholders.

In relation to networking activities, there is a general consensus among most participants. The organization of specific tools in the EU rural network has been considered as strongly relevant. Policy networks at country and EU level should promote the debate around five priority areas individuated (tab 5) as follows:

1. *Defining and reinforcing the idea of SF*
2. *Improving knowledge about SF (research & education, knowledge transfer and communication)*
3. *Building networks on SF (nationally and internationally)*
4. *Identifying a common legal framework and shared vision of SF*
5. *Supporting & Funding SF*

By acting on different priority areas different actors involved should be able to promote, in different context the:

- **understanding and recognition of SF;**
- **testing and improvement of SF;**
- **diversifying the scope and mainstreaming of SF;**
- **Promoting and integrating SF;**
- **Rethinking and deepening SF;**

and to promote in a comparative way SF among different EU Countries.

Rural areas need policies that are proactive in addressing diverse needs, whilst remaining flexible as these needs change. It is also clear that more and more rural development policies need to collaborate and be better integrated with cohesion policies as proposed by Matthews (2008).

In the main, while policies need to find new stimuli and solutions from the ground, that are able to better fit their aims in order to avoid failure. The complexity of the rural world is strongly demanding new experimental patterns.

As researchers, and actors ourselves, we should be in a strong position to understand the environmental conditions that could facilitate the establishment of specific policies, as well as their potential impacts of the results that are likely to be achieved. If policies for social-innovative learning are explicitly designed, and if actors are fully supported to convene discussion, then we will be in a stronger position to build communities, ideas, activities, practices and sets of rules. We will then be more able to face the transition from an old regime to a new one, as in the case of social farming in Europe.

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