



Social agriculture is a strategy to prevent the phenomenon of abandonment in mountain areas and areas at risk of desertification

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ABSTRACT

Mountain agriculture is characterized by several greater difficulties than lowland agriculture. In recent times, the globalization of markets has led to the marginalization of many farms. Against this backdrop, this paper has analyzed two models of value creation in mountain social farming. Social farming has social inclusion and socialization objectives. Social agriculture has different characteristics compared to traditional agriculture in that it integrates the production function for the market with the social function understood as a transfer of positive externalities that originate from agriculture and have repercussions on individuals in terms of the transfer of farming culture, production techniques and processing of agricultural products. The research results highlight the strong social connotation of the two social farms even though two substantial differences emerge: the privately managed social farm depends on public funding for these purposes; the social farm managed by charitable organizations is dedicated to self-financing and the practice of gift economy. These aspects are relevant in production scenarios where social farming is intended.

1. Introduction

Social agriculture is a generative approach that, through networking, food production, and the practice of local welfare, generates bonds and restores lifeblood to urban and rural communities [1]. It is a proactive and innovative practice, a possible response to the needs of the population, both from a social, economic, and environmental point of view, as well as for an expanded offer of services to the people and in terms of agricultural production [2]. As a current and ever-evolving phenomenon, there is a continuous search, confrontation, and collaboration between the stakeholders involved, both in the private and public sectors [3]. Indeed, social agriculture aims to reunify needs, identities, protections, and instances of freedom for all citizens, regardless of their greater or lesser abilities [4]. In this is found the value of work not only as a source of individual income but also as a founding element of a fairer, more cohesive, and sustainable society [5]. In Italy, social agriculture encompasses the set of practices carried out by farms, social cooperatives, and other organizations of the Third Sector, in cooperation with the socio-health services and the competent public bodies of the territory, which combine the use of agricultural resources and the multifunctional production process with the carrying out of social activities aimed at generating inclusive benefits, and at fostering social cohesion substantially and continuously [6]. The combination of these activities not only allows disadvantaged people to reintegrate into the productive sphere and thus regain contact with nature but also has positive effects on their health conditions and well-being by promoting

their social inclusion, improving their self-esteem and learning capacity, thus strengthening their participation in social life [7]. With this research we set out to frame the phenomenon of social agriculture, highlighting its origins and innovative charge and thus the importance of the role it plays in the construction of social cohesion contexts [8]. We then applied the theoretical model to two social farms, explaining what they are, dwelling mainly on the case of the privately-owned Social Farm, born thanks to the passion of a family that seeks to integrate young people with problems into the world of agriculture without dwelling on the diversity of each one. The other case is that of the Tagliavia Farm, which stands on Church-owned land, created thanks to the project of the Speranza e Carità Mission in Palermo. This research has therefore contributed to explaining how to create value through inclusive social agriculture that enhances farms in mountain areas that are marked by a strong agricultural and rural exodus and therefore at risk of desertification. The problems of mountain agriculture are well known. Compared to lowland agriculture, it has more difficulties both in terms of higher production costs and relations with the market. The novelty of the research lies in having investigated the two models of social agriculture: one of a “private” type and another of a more “managerial” type.

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2. Review of the economic literature

2.1. Background

By the expression social agriculture, we refer to that set of activities that employ the resources of agriculture and animal husbandry, the presence of small groups, both family and non-family, operating on farms, to promote therapeutic actions, rehabilitation, social and work inclusion, recreation and useful services for everyday life and education [9]. It is, therefore, a real operational tool through which regional and local governments - either directly or through designated associations - can apply welfare policies in the territorial sphere, involving a plurality of legal entities, bodies, farms, and citizens [10]. This form of agriculture is therefore based on collaboration between the world of agriculture and that of the third sector, thus involving different levels in both the public and private spheres [11]. The most common form of association that allows these policies to be applied is the so-called 'agri-social farm', which carries out its agricultural or livestock farming activities to sell its products on the market, but does so in an 'integrated' manner and for the benefit of weak subjects (the handicapped, drug addicts, prisoners, the elderly, etc.), residing in fragile areas (mountains or isolated centers) and collaboration with public institutions [12,13]. This type of social associationism can also be defined as 'multifunctional', as it implements therapeutic, rehabilitation and reintegration paths for the subjects concerned [14]. The production systems can be chosen from a very wide range of possibilities that include open-field and indoor activities, cultivation, and many other activities aimed at the integration of the individuals concerned. Moreover, the objective guiding the entrepreneur's choice is not only to maximize an economic parameter such as profit but to accompany it with social goals [15]. The specificity offered by social farming lies in the possibility of dealing with the rhythms and spaces of natural processes and open environments. The wide availability of settings (spaces and action scenarios) allows the adaptation of tasks and functions to the wide variability of needs and capacities [16]. The relationship with plants and animals allows for taking charge and assuming responsibility in environments where there is greater tolerance and willingness for trial and error [17]. This possibility strengthens learning, self-esteem, and participation paths for many categories of people [18]. The possibility of moving around in open spaces, interacting with groups of people, and participating in processes that have a tangible, direct, and comprehensible outcome, are elements that facilitate the acquisition of confidence and skills by weaker individuals. A further aspect that goes beyond the therapeutic-rehabilitative dimension is that which characterizes the relationship between the operator and the end product [19]. The products obtained from agricultural activities do not bear any sign of the possible difficulties of the people who contributed to the production process so the carrying out of such activities results in exclusively positive effects [20]. Social agriculture is rooted in the values of solidarity and mutual aid that have always characterized the rural world [21]. The manifestations of social agriculture are consistent and articulated both in terms of the initiatives implemented and the actors involved [22]. Social agriculture thus encompasses a plurality of experiences that cannot be ascribed to a unitary model, in terms of the type of organization, activities carried out, recipients, and sources of funding, but which are united by the characteristic of integrating farming activities of social health, educational, training and work integration, and recreational nature, aimed in particular at disadvantaged segments of the population or those at risk of marginalization [23]. These experiences are linked to an ancient attitude of agriculture - which has always been characterized by the link between the farm and the rural family and by practices of solidarity and mutual aid - that today presents itself as a further declination of the concept of multifunctionality, capable of providing answers to further societal needs, especially given the changes that affect and will affect the welfare system in the years to come [24]. Approaching social agriculture today means rediscovering a context that has always been rooted in the

community, in equal relationships, marked by solidarity and exchange [25]. It means rediscovering an approach to the person where the issues have to do with life, with the spirituality of the earth. This theme is not to be underestimated, the vital component, the vital impetus found by using the term person, found in nature, dealing with living elements, is a fundamental condition for taking a vitalistic approach. Life flows where there is life, where there are vital elements, and agriculture par excellence is the place where these things happen [26]. So if we want to move towards a regenerative process, it is there that we find the real themes of discussion and the experiential issues that make change not just a meditative, theoretical, or visionary action, but begin to have concrete elements of reworking [27]. A theme at the center of this is the person and his relations. It is an encounter between the agricultural and social worlds, which redefines the context as the starting point for the construction of the social bond [28,65]. Social agriculture thus reflects a broad, active world, based on the vital and generative impetus derived from agriculture and its tradition [29].

2.2. Significance and types

Defining social agriculture risks being limiting, given the broad scope of the subject and its dynamic nature, but it is sometimes necessary to be able to share and fix certain meanings [30]. Initial definitions saw social agriculture as that activity that employs the resources of agriculture and livestock farming, the presence of small groups, both family and non-family, operating on farms, to promote therapeutic, rehabilitation, social and labor inclusion, recreation, and useful services for everyday life and education [31]. Moreover, according to Mamiit et al. [32], social agriculture enhances multifunctional agriculture in the field of personal services and is characterized by linking the production of traditional goods and services to the creation of goods and informal networks of relations. Alongside the production of foodstuffs and traditional agricultural services, social agriculture intervenes to support the production of health rehabilitation/care, education, training, the organization of services that are useful for the daily lives of specific groups of users, as well as in the creation of employment opportunities for people with lower levels of contracting [33]. Social agriculture, in addition to enhancing the co-therapeutic potential of interaction with living beings, provides places and facilitates encounters with groups of people where individual skills and the relational life of those involved can be enhanced [34]. Social agriculture makes it possible to ensure actions to promote healthy and balanced lifestyles and, at the same time, makes available useful services to raise the local quality of life of urban and rural inhabitants [35]. Thanks to its resources and peculiarities, social agriculture makes it possible to enhance the effectiveness of the social protection network and thicken it in the most fragile and less densely populated territories [36]. The meanings encountered are therefore multiple, more or less exhaustive, and are often different depending on the areas of reference and the people targeted, which is why there can be no framing according to standardized and codified logic and there is a risk of running the risk of a limited perspective of practices [37]. The nature of social agriculture can be seen as the fruit of a process of retro-innovation based on the multifactorial socialization of practices that have traditionally been widespread in the agricultural world [38]. Traditionally, it was born spontaneously and silently in the countryside, on the initiative of people who, moved by a sense of civic duty and commitment, welcomed and accompanied individuals in difficulty towards life paths, and social inclusion [39]. Along these lines, in the nineties of the last century, with the birth of the Third Sector, real inclusive projects in the countryside and the creation of business initiatives in social cooperation came to life [40]. It has thus been recognized that through social agriculture there is the possibility of providing alternative answers to the need for social protection of people at risk of marginality, thanks to the resources that exist in nature and to the network that the social fabric can weave [41]. Through social agriculture, food and relational goods are produced, giving rise to ethical profit,

starting from the possibility of building and consolidating relationships between people with different abilities, problems, or origins, and thus contributing to the growth of human, social and territorial capital, in a pathway, between the actors, of mutual accountability for the common good [42]. For this reason, the proposed activities are included in a project that involves all the actors of the territory, to provide answers to the needs of individuals and at the same time produce well-being and social cohesion. Through this practice, there is the possibility, therefore, of promoting enterprises according to a collaborative logic, which may become, in their multifunctionality, a sort of 'sustainable laboratory' [43]. From an initial analysis, it is possible to note a multiplicity of actors, roles, and practices, which offer different keys to interpreting the theme and highlight three macro thematic areas: social inclusion, i.e. the coordination of basic labor services in favor of subjects at risk of exclusion, through agricultural processes and rural spaces; relationality, the creation of bonds starting from paths of dialogue within the community; and training, of which agricultural activity is an active part of educational processes, aimed at increasing levels of socialization [44]. These clarifications on the subject open up a glimpse of how it has spread and is affected by the capacity with which the local system can recognize, socialize and accompany in the network of services the development of the projects and initiatives that innovators bring about [45]. Furthermore, we must emphasize that social agriculture can be declined according to a specialized vision and according to a civic vision [46]. Specialized social agriculture focuses mainly on the person in contact with agricultural processes, towards a co-therapeutic-assistance type of action. It is the type of practice that tends to prevail most today, even at the level of legislative recognition. It is interpreted as a service offered by farms in collaboration with the extension of the welfare logic of personal services. This perspective is reflected in recognition through an evaluation of services and accreditation of facilities [47]. We can thus recognize here the formula of social farms. Civic social agriculture, on the other hand, takes shape outside formal structures, to reconfigure the vital systems of the community, creating the basis for paths of social justice, capable of combining life paths with the collaborative capacity of the local system, based on a win-win logic [48]. This type of process, placed on a foundation of horizontal subsidiarity, offers the possibility of building shared meaning structures by all the actors involved and innovative visions in the reorganization of services in the form of inclusive pathways and the creation of economic value, as well as relational value, through the valorization of agricultural products according to an ethical profit [49]. Social agriculture from a civic perspective creates opportunities throughout the territory, opening the door to a welcome for the whole community and becoming generative of social bonds [50]. That is, it recovers the primary nature of agriculture, that of creating bonds. We have thus far made an exploration, certainly not exhaustive given the multiplicity of social farming experiences that are underway. What we have tried to bring out is therefore the fact that agriculture is social by nature, embodies a way of life, and offers an inclusive context for all, generating relational and community goods. Agriculture is linked to the term "cultivate", from the Hebrew "Abad", which means to serve, hence "the deeper meaning of cultivating is to serve the land and the community to inhabit a place with dignity" [51]. In fact, contrary to what one is led to believe, agriculture took shape ten thousand years ago, by a group of women, to create the first settled communities in a place so as not to have to be on the move all the time. In this perspective, "agricultural work takes on the meaning of reclamation, that is, of adapting land and water to more civilized forms of human coexistence" [52]. Social farming helps to reduce losses from natural disasters, improves resource use, and educates on local food culture [68–70].

3. Farming in social farms

Social Farms are agricultural enterprises that offer cultural, educational, care, training, social, and labor inclusion services for weak

individuals or disadvantaged areas. Social agriculture has its deepest roots in the forms of solidarity and values of reciprocity, gratuitousness, and mutual aid that characterize rural areas [53]. In particular, the intertwining that takes place between the productive dimension, the relational dimension with plants, animals, and nature, and the family and community dimension, has allowed agriculture to increasingly fulfill a social function. Social Farms are intended to be a network of people, associations, and farms committed to health promotion, social inclusion, and sustainable development [54]. Solidarity and reciprocity: these are the fundamental principles and values on which social agriculture is based, a new cultivation practice through which Social Farms are born; profit and non-profit organizations, such as farms, social cooperatives, associations, consortia, and foundations, that development work and social inclusion programs, environmental and food training and education projects, as well as rehabilitation and personal care interventions, through the cultivation practice of plants and the help of animals. Social farms offer their services to people with social and relational distress and psychophysical disabilities, promoting projects aimed at improving the quality of life and the sustainable development of the territory [55]. In Sicily, this reality developed by linking up with the experiences of farms and associations that dealt with the environment and organic farming. Social agriculture is therefore closely linked to environmentalist culture and social realities that promote change, innovation, legality, and the sustainable development of the territory. The first social farms emerged in the 1990s in the Netherlands, where they were called 'social care farms' and where they multiplied rapidly thanks to particularly sensitive social policies. Similar projects had already been launched in the 1970s in Ireland, Denmark, Spain, Germany, France, and overseas with the experiences of 'community farms' to care for autistic persons [56,57]. Soon, social farms also began to be set up in Italy. After the success of educational farms, many farms thought of diversifying their offer by focusing on the social sector [58, 59]. The Sicilian experience was born in 2009, first with coordination and then transforming the latter into a Social Promotion Association. As of 2020, the Sicily Social Farm Network has 102 members: 58 farms, 2 agricultural cooperatives, 15 social cooperatives, 17 associations, 8 non-profit organizations, 1 consortium, and 1 foundation. Adding the number of Associations to the number of non-profit organizations, we arrive at 25 non-profit organizations. There is a greater presence of Social Farms in the province of Catania and, in general, in eastern Sicily [60]. Various social health structures collaborate with these Social Farms, we can mention: the mental health departments, and the health education of the ASPs. The objectives of the Social Farms Network are aimed at fostering employment, professional placement, and a development that is also in tune with the territorial identity, i.e. that does not lead to forms of exploitation of either people, soil, plants, or animals.

4. Materials and methods

To achieve the research objectives, two case studies consisting of two social farms that have been operating for several years in Sicily were analyzed. The territory under investigation is located in the mountainous area of the province of Palermo (one case study is in the mountainous area of the municipality of Monreale, while another is in the area of Corleone). Extensive farming systems (fodder and cereals) prevail in the mountainous area of Palermo, representing a form of low-income agriculture. Although the research method based on case studies may represent a limitation, it is effective with respect to the research objectives. Data were collected from July to August 2022. The two case studies were examined in the function of the research objectives, i.e. to see how the entrepreneurs apply the principles of social agriculture [61]. After choosing these farms, we visited them to gain an insight into the context in which the entrepreneurs operate and discovered that they operate in economically disadvantaged areas. An open interview was then conducted with the respective farm managers [62]. This type of interview is widely applied in qualitative research and allows us to

collect as much data as possible by letting the interviewee speak [63, 71]. The limitation is a possible deviation from the objectives, however, to avoid this situation, we processed the result of the interview after the interview and then returned to the farm to have the interview carried out and reviewed by the manager [64]. This technique eliminates possible errors concerning the research objective and makes the chosen working method effective and efficient. The open interview consisted of a discussion with the manager about the history of the enterprise, why social farming is done, what activities are practiced, and what agricultural products are produced. The data collected from the open interview was processed in the results section through a general description of the social farming projects practiced in the companies examined to highlight the differences between the two case studies. In addition, the characteristics of the farms were described (what is cultivated) what the social projects are, and how the farms relate to the competitive environment and social stakeholders.

5. Results and discussion

Our study was conducted, as mentioned above, at two Social Farms, the first of which was established on privately owned land, while the second was established on land owned by the Church. The first Social Farm is located behind Grisi, a hamlet of the municipality of Monreale, at an altitude of about 500 m overlooking the Jato Valley and Lake Poma. In our analysis we described the origin of this structure, the projects carried out, the target groups, and the results achieved so far by the social farm. The farm acquired in 1932, now in its third generation, was a typical cereal-livestock farm. Subsequently, transformations began: vineyards, some fruit trees, and around 200 olive trees were introduced, which are still standing around the farm buildings today. With the advent of the vineyards, the cellar was built, which remained in use until the mid-1990s and was then decommissioned. The old cooerage bears witness to the splendor of prosperous farming activity. In those years, a new transformation took place: most of the old vineyards, by then unproductive, were uprooted and in their place, a rich olive grove was created, consisting of 1200 trees of the Sarasota, Nocellara del Belice, and Biancolilla varieties, which produce the extra virgin olive oil obtained directly from the olives using only cold mechanical procedures: a particularly well-balanced natural blend with a pleasantly fruity flavor and a light almond aroma, creating the right conditions for the production of olives for oil and wine grapes with top-range organoleptic characteristics. Subsequently, in 2010, the production of spring-summer vegetables for fresh consumption and processing was started. But agricultural activities are not the only activities of the company, in fact, since 2010 they have been in contact with WWOOF (World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), an organization that puts organic farms in contact with those who want to travel and offers their help in exchange for board and lodging. Subsequently, in 2012, they became part of the Social Farms network, collaborating permanently with several facilities that deal with the rehabilitation and growth of young adolescents with difficulties, as well as adults. At the farm, they combine agricultural and social activities, to produce goods and services that are useful to the community. They have succeeded in carrying out activities such as Out-door Experience Paths or Agricultural-Biological Workshops, which not only broaden the physical and mental capacities of the subjects involved but also involve co-planning and co-construction to encourage young people to have a healthy socializing experience and strengthen their interpersonal skills. The friendly family is dedicated with passion and commitment to olive growing, vineyards, and fruit and vegetables with high quality and organic cultivation. In addition to their 'Val di Mazara' PDO extra virgin olive oil, they make delicious and genuine jellies, sauces, dressings, and traditional vegetable dishes such as caponata from their fruit and vegetables. A wing of the house is reserved for those who wish to stay in this serene rural setting with the use of the kitchen. In 2012, the Social Farm came into contact with a cooperative in Partinico, which asked to bring a group of

psychiatric patients to the farm, to have them interact with nature, and try out a new experience outdoors and away from the clinics. This was the start of a journey involving various daily meetings with small groups until they came into contact with a project called 'weekend of smiles', where for the first time the boys not only spent the day on the farm, but went into the fields to grow vegetables and then harvest and cook them, always making them personally involved, and after dinner they stayed overnight there. In 2014, the farm was pointed out by the manager of the area from Carini to Corleone to a voluntary association that takes care of disabled boys, who live in flat groups, houses where a few boys live, fostering in them a sense of responsibility and coexistence, trying to get them to integrate into society. From this moment on, the boys are divided into two groups, one stays in the flat groups to fix the house, and the other arrives at the company, where with the collaboration of a psychologist from the Persephone association, they start a path to engage these boys. This path consisted of entrusting each of them with a small plot of land to work and cultivate with the typical products of the season and then at harvest time, they had to check the ideal conditions and harvest the product, take it to the kitchen, and prepare food not only for them but also for the group left at home; obviously, then the cycle of work was reversed so that each of them could work. Seeing the excellent results, the farm continues to carry out various social projects with various associations, also coming into contact with immigrants and children with family difficulties, i.e. children who were abused and mistreated as children, taken away from their parental authority, and placed in foster homes. The aim of the Social Farm is therefore to reintegrate all these youngsters into society by bringing them into contact with nature and then with work and thus collaborating and sharing their lives. On the farm, an attempt has been made to combine the agricultural and solidarity aspect with respect for the environment by activating organic farming methods with a low environmental impact, drawing heavily from the agricultural practices of yesteryear that respect the environment and the health of all living beings. For most vegetable crops, the technique of mulching is used by covering the soil with a layer of material to prevent weed growth, maintain soil moisture, protect the soil from erosion, the action of driving rain, prevent the formation of the so-called surface crust, reduce compaction, maintain soil structure and raise soil temperature. The course of this collaboration lasted from 2014 to 2016 with very important results. One of the boys has stopped taking psychotropic drugs altogether; others have considerably reduced their doses; still, others have decided to go back to school, proving that an occupational therapy course has developed in them; another boy has enrolled in the reporter and filming course, as the time spent on the farm has triggered in him a passion for photography, thanks also to the support of the entrepreneur who entrusted him with the task of photographing his companions intent on working in the fields with his camera. Some of the boys have become social workers, and many others collaborate with the various farms, proving that a social farm is a tool for recovery and reintegration into society. Referring to these results, we have come to analyze the achievement of the various objectives and also to what level they have been reached. As far as social integration is concerned, a high level was found to have been achieved; most young people improved their relations with other people and managed to overcome the risk of social marginalization. The objective concerning job placement was fairly well achieved many of the young people were able to learn a trade and discovered new passions, thus acquiring professional skills that enable them to work in the agricultural sector. Another important parameter concerns work autonomy, an objective achieved sufficiently. Finally, the improvement in quality of life was analyzed, which was found to be high as a result of this project. Unfortunately, the company had to suspend its social activities for about a year and a half because they do not receive any financial support from the various cooperatives with which they collaborate. Not being able to cope with all these expenses on their own, as working with these young people takes up a lot of their time without being able to carry out their business activities with an economic income, the family has had to

suspend everything to be able to go on; although they have completed personal projects by opening an assisted therapeutic community that is temporarily blocked and unusable due to a visa of compliance with the health plan that was not issued as it had expired. Until a few years ago, the Tagliavia Solidarity Farm), which stands on Church land, looked like a dilapidated farmhouse, with barren, uncultivated land, full of weeds, stones, and brambles. This was the appearance of today's Solidarity Farm, which is part of the former Tagliavia feud, in the municipality of Corleone in the province of Palermo, adjacent to the homonymous Sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, owned by the Curia of the Archdiocese of Monreale, which has been characterized since the past not only as a place of worship and pilgrimage but also as a reference point and center of solidarity for rural populations and the needy, to whom the products obtained from the land were donated. Customs of a bygone era, yet today all this can be found in the same spaces thanks to an innovative project that has seen the birth in the area of a modern Solidarity Farm at the service of the guests of the "Missione Speranza e Carità" of Palermo, founded in 1991, which welcomes and assists about 1000 people in social, personal and professional difficulty, thanks to the work of missionaries and volunteers. There is, in fact, a new light on these lands owned by the Church of Monreale, and it is precisely that hope, which has been kindled thanks to a project based on the interaction between the non-profit organization 'Speranza e Carità', the Sicily Region's Department of Agricultural and Food Resources and private entrepreneurs in the area, particularly leading companies that spontaneously, with their knowledge and experience gained in the field, make an effective contribution to the evolution of an experience that is unique of its kind in Sicily. In this value of solidarity that creates a union, communion, unpaid commitment, and spontaneous gift, a clear difference emerges with the existing network of social farms, which are limited to welcoming disadvantaged people for a few hours a day for short periods of the year. The Solidarity Farm project is aimed at the Hope and Charity Mission community and is intended to be long-lasting and financially sustainable over the years. The structure has been carrying out social farming activities for about 10 years, that is, since November 2012. The inauguration of this first solidarity farm in Sicily took place on 27 June 2013 in the presence of political and religious authorities, on the occasion of the first wheat harvest. The solidarity farm has a field of about 17 ha, part of which (about 10 ha) has been used for the production of wheat and legumes (broad beans, chickpeas, chickling peas, beans), and the remainder (about 7 ha) for vegetables, both dry and irrigated, to increase the need for labor and to engage a significant number of project beneficiaries. Thanks to this project, the guests of the "Speranza e Carità" Mission in Palermo can independently produce aubergines, tomatoes, peppers, onions, and other varieties of vegetables, while also growing medicinal herbs (oregano, sage, thyme, lemon balm, marjoram, and rosemary), as well as celery basil and parsley. Most importantly, the guests learned how to plow the land, how to build fences thanks to the agronomists of the Region of Sicily, and also how to respect the right times for sowing and harvesting. The region committed itself to providing the seeds and also the seedlings to be used for horticulture. Small farms (farmyard animals, sheep, and cattle) have also been set up, thanks to the generosity of many people (one thousand) who have contributed to the purchase of the animals, adhering to the initiative launched by the volunteer group. Another aspect not to be underestimated is the implementation of the gift economy. The gift economy consists of donating surplus products to neighboring companies for their own needs and also surplus labor. Compared to other studies [66,67], this work has emphasized the social character of agriculture, an issue of no small importance in developed economies if one takes into account the enormous potential it may have. In conclusion, the two business models that emerge are: 1) a model we can call private enterprise where the entrepreneur has the vision of the Neoclassical theory of enterprise, in this case doing social farming is only compatible with public contribution aid and these structures host disadvantaged subjects (Fig. 1); 2) a model of social farming where the character of

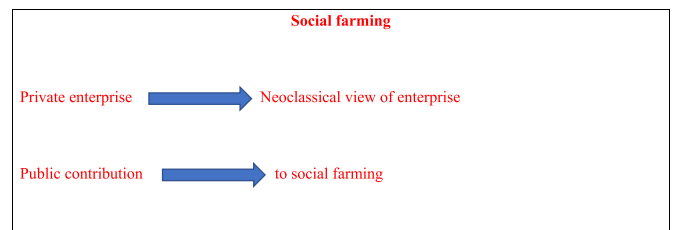


Fig. 1. Model private.

sociality is made regardless of public aid, in this case, it is not a private enterprise but organizational structures that have the direct aim of reintegrating disadvantaged subjects into society (Fig. 2).

Compared to other studies, this study [72] has highlighted this dualism that exists in social agriculture and is easy to find in many areas where agricultural activity continues to play a crucial role in growth and development. In our opinion, this dualism should be overcome as the objective of social agriculture is always the same in both models. Therefore, there should be a move towards integrated models between private and charitable institutions. The possible lack of public contribution would be compensated for by the volunteer work of charitable associations. So in terms of the lack of 'public benefit' in the case of the private model, it would be repaid by the 'unpaid' work done by the volunteers of the charities. In this case, a win-win model is created.

6. Conclusions

This study shows how social agriculture goes hand in hand with the multifunctional logic, remaining small and medium scale agriculture, focused on the relationship with the territory, with consumers, and local communities, it does not look immediately at profit, but at the realization of a role of the enterprise, as a pivot of multifunctional differentiation, of accessibility to new markets and more current tasks of agriculture for the community. The term social agriculture refers to the set of activities that employ the resources of social agriculture and animal husbandry to promote therapeutic, educational, recreational, social, and work inclusion actions and useful services for everyday life. These initiatives are carried out for the benefit of persons with a low level of contracting (persons with physical or psychic handicaps, psychiatric patients, alcohol or drug addicts, prisoners or ex-prisoners) or are aimed at segments of the population (children, the elderly) for whom there is a lack of services on offer. Social agriculture is also characterized, therefore, by the active presence of several actors who plan and manage activities; these are agreements implemented at a local level (socio-sanitary area plans, memoranda of understanding, program agreements, etc.), which respond to specific needs by pooling available skills and professionalism, the cost of which is much lower than services normally provided by public services. These are organizational innovations, strongly rooted in the territory, which make use of variable-geometry networks that are flexible and open to new collaborations. The Social Farm project in our case study could soon become a widespread reality, a model to be imitated in other parts of the world. In fact,

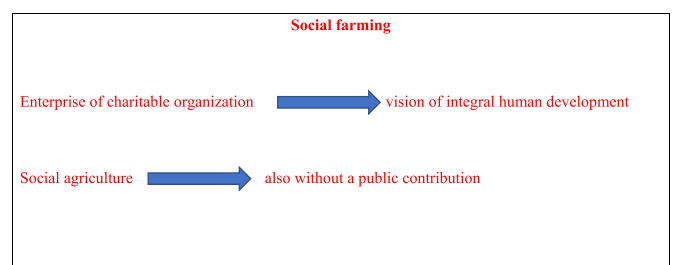


Fig. 2. Model enterprise charitable.

through social farming, we intend to promote new welfare, capable of combining the various aspects of the rural social fabric, to enhance and increase it. Furthermore, the research carried out shows the clear difference that exists between the two types of farms examined. In particular, the first farm refers to the Neoclassical economic theory of the enterprise, which performs the task of producing; where producing means transforming goods and services (input) into other goods or services (output); while the Tagliaviva Solidarity Farm refers to the principles of the Social Doctrine. Neoclassical economic theory assumes that the owner of the enterprise is also the manager of it; therefore the objective of the enterprise is to maximize profits (the difference between revenues and costs) and the benefits and burdens (both social and private) of the enterprise are fully expressed by the revenues and costs. The Social Doctrine posits quite different principles such as that of solidarity, according to which man is a social being and there is an essential link between the individual and society, in the sense that the good of one refers to the good of the other and vice versa; another principle is that of organicity or the common good, where the Christian conception of society assumes and reinforces this concept of hierarchical interdependence between the components of the social body and defines the common good not as the mere summation of the goods of the individual members but as 'added value to the good of the individual by the very fact of society, be it large or small, insofar as it contributes by its very essence and mission to ensure that individuals achieve their perfection with less difficulty. In conclusion, as seen, the social role of agriculture is always expressed in the function of production for the market and in helping others for social reintegration. In the future, it would be appropriate to investigate the real effects in terms of the well-being of individuals using social farming paths. This study highlighted how social farming can contribute to social reintegration opportunities for young people and business development. The present study could not address the two business models separately. In the future, business models with a private-charitable entity partnership could be created. This is of enormous importance as it fully meets the objectives of social farming and the entrepreneurial logic of Neoclassical business theory.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors are unable or have chosen not to specify which data has been used.

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