



## Extending the concept of social farming: Rural development and the fight against organized crime in disadvantaged areas of southern Italy

Susanne Elsen, PhD<sup>a,\*</sup>, Luca Fazzi, PhD<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Full Professor for Sociology of Cultural Processes at the Free University of Bolzano, Bozen, Italy

<sup>b</sup> Full Professor for General Sociology at the Free University of Bolzano, Italy

### ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:**

Multifunctional agriculture  
Green care movement  
Underdevelopment  
Legality  
Rural development  
New local welfare

### ABSTRACT

The potential of social farming has always been studied from a perspective in which the combination of agricultural production with the provision of welfare services was the predominant feature. Nonetheless, social farming is a tool that can perform other different functions. The article describes the role that social farming plays within a wider strategy for local development in the rural areas of southern Italy strongly affected by the presence of organized crime and consequent widespread underdevelopment. The survey was carried out through semi-structured interviews with the presidents and executives of a sample of twenty social cooperatives and social enterprises, which are involved in farming activities with the aim of promoting local development and the regeneration of the territory. The research findings highlight how social farming can play an important role in deprived rural areas not only by creating income and jobs, but also by counteracting the cultures of illegality that hinder development. This is particularly the case when companies are driven by ideal, values and technical entrepreneurial skills, are embedded in non-local networks and redistribute part of the value produced to the local community.

### 1. Introduction

Social farming is a newly emerging concept within rural studies and is often presented through the lens of synonymous terms such as green care or social agriculture, nevertheless, it currently represents one of the new frontiers for understanding the changes experienced by the agricultural sector at the international level. Social farming is an umbrella term which encloses all the activities that use agriculture and rural resources to produce not only food but also social services (Garcia Loriente et al., 2016). It combines the economic and productive dimension with the social one, and can be seen as a classic social innovation process through which resources – from agricultural and rural areas – are mobilized in order to respond to local social needs which the state and the market are unable to meet (Elsen, 2019).

The international empirical research has highlighted a great variety of social farming experiences in different countries and a growing diffusion of the phenomenon (Fazzi, 2011; Tulla et al., 2014; Guirado et al., 2017; Hassink et al., 2016). Social farming embodies the idea of multifunctionality. Multifunctional agriculture is a model of agriculture that, beyond its primary function of food production, entails the provisioning of secondary services which the community can benefit from,

social services or job placement for disadvantaged people for instance (De Bruin et al., 2010; Haubenhofer et al., 2010).

Despite the growing interest in the topic, the potential of social farming to develop multifunctionality within the agricultural sector still remains only partially explored, especially with regard to its ability to promote local development in disadvantaged areas. The main focus of academic attention still remains limited to the ability of social farming to combine the production of foodstuffs with the provision of services aimed at improving health and well-being in particular categories of disadvantaged people or creating job opportunities for the long-term unemployed or individuals with greater difficulties in accessing the work sphere (Milligan et al., 2004; Leck et al., 2015).

Taking the Italian case as a reference, this article aims to describe the role that social farming can play as a factor in the emancipation of rural agricultural economies from the control of organized crime. Rural areas are often characterized by problems such as depopulation, lack of access to services and increasing unemployment and poverty (Bock et al., 2015). A factor that undermines rural development in many regions of southern Europe and in developing countries is the presence of organized crime. Organized crime favors underdevelopment through the corruption of local institutions, exploitation of environmental resources,

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [susanne.elsen@unibz.it](mailto:susanne.elsen@unibz.it) (S. Elsen), [luca.fazzi@unitn.it](mailto:luca.fazzi@unitn.it) (L. Fazzi).

depletion of social capital, control over the production and marketing processes of local products and discouragement of free entrepreneurial initiative (Ceccato, 2016; Gerasimova, 2008).

In southern Italy, the phenomenon of organized crime is very widespread and constitutes one of the main factors which are causing the economic and social backwardness of rural areas in the region (Pinotti, 2015). With the aim of understanding whether and how social farming may be a tool for developing marginal agricultural areas characterized by a strong presence of illegality, we have carried out some empirical research. It is built upon a sample of twenty associations and social cooperatives operating in Italy within the four larger southern regions historically afflicted by the problem of the so-called 'mafias': Campania, Sicily, Apulia and Calabria. The article starts by presenting the relationship between social farming, organized crime and local development; then it highlights the conditions and processes which now represent a tool for firstly fighting organized crime and consequently achieving local development objectives. It concludes by highlighting the real potentiality that social farming has within a local development strategy in a wider and extended way. Last but not least it draws some considerations regarding the transferability of the Italian model to other rural areas that present similar development problems.

## 2. Social farming, organized crime and local development

In recent years, we have been witnessing what can be technically called a 'rural restructuring' process which involves a shift from the traditional agricultural economy towards a multiservice model (Floysand and Jakobsen, 2007). The so-called social farming phenomenon is also part of this wider change. Social farming is a set of practices that innovate the traditional concept of agriculture by introducing a close connection with the innovation of welfare services. The idea of social farming reflects the conceptualization that multiple objectives can be pursued through agriculture: on the one hand, agricultural food production, and on the other hand, provision of social services and social inclusion (Hassink and Van Dijk, 2006). Through social farming practices – using the land – different kinds of services are activated, ergotherapy for instance, to meet the needs of a great number of disadvantaged actors. In addition, environmental and food education activities can be organized for schools and families; from this perspective, also new forms of rural social housing addressed to socially disadvantaged persons combined with forms of ecological and experiential tourism for those looking for alternative life models constitute a further step in this change. At the same time, social activities constitute an additional source of income in agriculture and an interesting factor in potential local development.

Multifunctionality is an element that makes social farming particularly relevant in times of crisis of welfare and traditional agriculture (Wilson, 2007). The debate on the multifunctionality of social farming has contributed to bringing out the 'tertiary' nature that agricultural activities can assume, namely the ability to foster, explicitly or implicitly, a wide range of interventions that complement the traditional production of agro-commodity goods in favor of a rural development approach (Knickel and Renting, 2000). However, as we have already said, the concept of multifunctionality in social farming is still only partially explored. Accordingly, here we pose the following questions: what are the functions that social farming can perform? To what extent and under what conditions can the concept be extended? Can we think of a social farming that goes beyond the production of food and the provision of social services?

A promising area for studying the extension of the concept of multifunctionality in social farming is the one which connects the strategy of fighting against organized crime with local development planning. The concept of organized crime refers to a phenomenon whose aspects are not always clear and clearly identifiable (von Lampe, 2016). Several attempts to define what organized crime is underline: the corporate nature of criminal organizations, internal hierarchy and functional

organization of work, profit logic and the use of violence for intimidation and oppression, as distinctive features of the phenomenon. Organized crime is considered a factor closely related to underdevelopment. In disadvantaged rural areas in particular, organized crime controls production processes and labor organization, discourages entrepreneurial initiative and negatively influences local institutions. Furthermore, the presence of criminal organizations can erode trust and social capital favoring low levels of social integration and a decrease in the self-regulatory mechanism of social behavior (Barnett and Mencken, 2002).

Policies aimed at contrasting this phenomenon involve the adoption of intervention measures, which develop at multiple levels: political, social and economic. Lee and Thomas (2010) identify the ability to react to organized crime in some key variables comprising mostly institutional support and economic orientation capable of enhancing the local productive capacity and social participation. The priority objective of an effective action against crime should be the strengthening of the civic sense of the local communities through the support of local entrepreneurship, the enhancement of local resources, the reconstruction of relationships of trust, social capital and legality. These characteristics generate a very fertile ground for the experimentation of social farming initiatives expressly aimed at reconstructing a culture of legality through forms of agricultural enterprises with social purposes. Social farming allows us to conceptualize the land as a relational space in which the functions of economic development are combined with those of social collective interest. Building on the adoption of business models that emphasize a productive dimension with a social utility, forms of interaction and decision-making processes of a cooperative kind involving the local community can be developed, thus activating transformative responses to complex problems (Elsen, 2019). The vocation of transforming agriculture into a socially useful production activity can promote cooperative solutions that go beyond the use of material resources only for the production of monetary outcomes but as a way to also produce new social capital, rules of reciprocity and values of solidarity and respect which constitute a radical alternative to the model of a rural economy controlled by organized crime.

## 3. Social farming as a reaction to underdevelopment in rural areas of southern Italy

The regions of southern Italy have historically constituted a classic example of underdevelopment (Holland, 1971). The prevalence of low productivity agricultural economies, inefficiency in development support measures, poorly qualified workforce and strong familyism, act as a brake on entrepreneurial initiative. As introduced above, one of the main causes of the underdevelopment which is now affecting rural areas and agricultural economies is the endemic presence of criminal organizations (Paoli, 2004). Criminal organizations make use of the networks they build in the territories between individuals and between them and institutions, instilling fear and flaunting strength and power, raising the myth of the invincibility of their institutional apparatus and of their ability to generate wealth for their members, but – simultaneously – taking resources away from the community, then impoverishing it. In the agricultural world, organized crime acts directly through the control of the harvesting and distribution processes. The control over the organization of the harvest takes place through the so-called 'caporalato' (i.e. illegal work mediation) followed by the strengthening of precariousness within employment contracts which consequently favors the economic exploitation of the workforce and also the creation of subordination ties between workers and criminal organizations. In the second instance, criminal control moves on to the distribution level by minimizing income margins for local producers who are often forced to live in conditions of mere subsistence and economic deprivation. Moreover, the power of crime is so influential that it is able to offer the community an alternative to the state system in terms of social protection and safety guarantees for those who adapt to – and do

not oppose – the culture of criminality. This boosts the consolidation of a widespread culture of the so-called “omertà” based on solidarity and unwillingness to reveal the identity of the criminals so as to ensure a peaceful life and avoid reprisals (Massari, 2019). Therefore, the socio-economic system enters into a sort of short-circuit of dependence on illegal institutions that slows down development and encourages the exodus of those who do not adapt to the existing conditions, resulting in depopulation and a growing demographic imbalance.

In the attempt to regenerate rural communities and build new production and marketing models of agricultural products based on the culture of legality in the regions of southern Italy, over the last twenty years a pioneering movement of social farming initiatives has taken shape. In the mid 1990s, after a series of very serious attacks supported by organized crime against important representatives of state institutions (e.g. the famous attacks against the anti-mafia judges Falcone and Borsellino), a political and social movement was originated in Italy coming from the impulse of different sectors of civil society. In 1995 the idea of an ‘association of associations’ started to emerge as a way to channel all the anti-crime efforts into a single entity. The association was composed of over 1500 small and large civil society organizations and was called ‘Libera’, meaning ‘free’. It promoted the collection of one million signatures at the national level for the approbation of the law 109/1996 regarding the confiscation and the consequent social reuse of assets seized from organized crime. Once approved, the law allows the seizure of assets from crime and entrust their management to civil society organizations that use them for social purposes. In addition to real estate, both agricultural and uncultivated lands may be confiscated by the state. In some of these lands, the first social farming initiatives have started to take place aiming at making the land productive, creating legal employment and promoting the culture of legality (Mosca, 2018).

The movement of social farming as a tool for local development and opposition to the economy of illegality, at first was limited to a few initiatives for the reconversion of the confiscated assets, but subsequently spread in – and through – the wake of the movement of ‘return to agriculture’ supported by young people who were looking for employment in the agricultural sector with an idea of legal, eco-friendly and eco-sustainable development. From this perspective, the cultivation area expands not only to the confiscated land but also to uncultivated or low productivity areas which are then seen as potential spaces to regenerate the territory.

These social farming initiatives have been promoted by third sector organizations: some associations and especially by social cooperatives. Social cooperatives are forms of social enterprises established in Italy by the law 381/91 and have as their principal purpose, the preservation of the collective interest through the provision of social services and job placement services for disadvantaged individuals (Fazzi, 2011). Social enterprises are organizations whose priority objectives is not the profit maximization for owners or shareholders but the positive social and environmental impact of entrepreneurial action; for this reason many scholars see in these organizations, actors with a high potential to promote a new form of economically and socially sustainable rural development (Steiner and Teasdale, 2019; Willemijn van Twijver et al., 2020). The social cooperative form chiefly emphasizes the participatory dimension of decision-making processes and the objective of satisfying the community’s interests. In practice, social cooperatives do not always correspond to the ideal theoretical model and are themselves organizations that may encounter problems of governance and distortion of purpose (Borzaga and Fazzi, 2014). However, empirical research shows that the form of social cooperatives is widely used to support a ‘generative’ idea of social farming intended as a set of practices aimed at promoting not only employment and income but also social capital, inclusion and economic development (Dall’Oglio et al., 2017). What are the results that the social farming movement is producing in the disadvantaged rural areas of southern Italy? Which abilities do these companies need in order to be effective? Are these experiences allowing us to rethink and extend the concept of multifunctionality in social

farming? And may these factors be replicated also in other rural areas characterized by similar underdevelopment problems?

#### 4. Research

To answer these empirical questions, the research was carried out on a sample of twenty organizations: two associations and eighteen social cooperatives engaged in social farming activities in rural areas with a high level of organized crime, and which pursue legality in a sphere of local development<sup>1</sup>. The selected organizations are located in the four regions of southern Italy where the problem of underdevelopment and presence of organized crime are greatest: Campania, Calabria, Sicily and Apulia. In these regions, organized crime is controlled by large illegal families: the Sicilian mafia, the Calabrian ndrangheta, Camorra in Campania and the Sacra Corona Unita in Apulia.

The sample was selected on the basis of the lists of enterprises registered in the regional social farming registers - which are present in all the regions under study – and through a discussion with the local representatives of the third sector who provided recommendations related to the various organizations engaged in social farming activities who have as a goal the regeneration and development of the areas affected by criminal control. For each organization, the president is the actor that was contacted and the actor to whom the research project was presented by describing the data collection methods and the ethical guidelines adopted for the conduction and elaboration of the interviews. In particular, guarantees were provided regarding the total anonymity and confidentiality of the data with respect to all information that could create problems for people and organizations. The interviews were carried out after acquiring the documentation concerning the history and activities of the individual organizations and following a guided field-visit through which a preliminary description of the activities was elaborated. Besides the presidents, other actors, such as the members of the management staff or service coordinators, were also interviewed. The semi-structured interviews lasted between one and a half and 3 h and were recorded and transcribed in order to allow their subsequent analysis and processing. To allow the in-depth analysis of issues that were significant for the research and which required comparisons between the various organizations, many interviews were conducted in several different stages. The period when the research took place was from September 2019 to March 2020.<sup>1</sup>

#### 5. A general picture

The interviews focused on the following topics: (i) the history and constitutive objectives of the different organizations; (ii) the characteristics and role of the promoters; (iii) the skills available; (iv) governance models; (v) business models; (vi) relations with institutions, networks and the local community; (vii) income generation and distribution capacity; (viii) social and economic results achieved. Using these criteria, four types of organizations emerge (Table 1) that constitute ideal types useful to facilitate understanding of the phenomenon:

<sup>1</sup> The organizations involved in the research are: 1. Arci Caserta; 2. Cooperativa sociale Terre di resilienza; 3. Cooperativa sociale Placido Rizzotto; 4. Cooperativa sociale Raccogliamo; 5. Cooperativa sociale un Fiore per la vita; 6. Cooperativa sociale il Segno; 7. Cooperativa Comunità san Arsenio; 8. Rete Sfruttazero; 9. Cooperativa sociale Le agricole; 10. cooperativa sociale Valle del Marro; 11. Consorzio Goel; 12. Cooperativa sociale Semi di vita; 13. Cooperativa sociale Oltretempo; 14. Cooperativa sociale al di la dei sogni; 15. Consorzio Macramè; 16. Cooperativa sociale Mani e terra e Cooperativa SOS Rosarno; 17. Cooperativa sociale Koinè; 18. Cooperativa sociale Xfarm; 19. Cooperativa sociale Libera Terra Mesagne; 20. Cooperativa sociale Karadra.

**Table 1**

A summary framework.

Age	Movementist organizations	Silent organizations	Hybrid organizations	Political-entrepreneurial organizations
	Less than 5 years of activity	More than 5 years of activity	Mostly more than 10 years of activity	Mostly more than 10 years of activity
Promoters	Political activists	Community leaders	Social workers	Extra-local networks and local leaders
Internal skills	Mainly resulting from a self-learning process	Resulting from a self-learning process and social-work knowledge	Mainly resulting from social-work knowledge	Multidisciplinary spectrum (agricultural skills, social work skills, entrepreneurial skills, etc.)
Main objectives	Fighting organized crime	Promotion of the culture of legality and social solidarity	Provision of social services	Promotion of local development trajectories by contrasting them with organized crime
Governance models	associates, volunteers	associates and volunteers	Predominantly staff members	associates, volunteers and members of other civil society organizations
Networks	Short	Short	Medium-Short	Extended
Size of cultivated land	Small	Small	Medium	Medium
Cultivation productivity and profitability	Low	Low with some certified products	Medium-high with certified and quality products	Medium-high with certified and quality products
Services related to agriculture (e.g. job placement, ergo-therapy, educational farming, environmental education, etc.)	Absent or scant	Reduced recreational and aggregation services and some job placement services	Mostly social services	Mixed
Relations with the local community	Mostly conflict-ridden	Not conflict-ridden but limited (in numbers)	Exclusively exchange and reciprocity relations.	Exchange and reciprocity relations.
Embeddedness in extra-local networks	Very weak or absent	Very weak or absent	Medium (Limited only to some initiatives)	Strong (i.e. high level of embeddedness)
Visibility (e.g. organization of farm visits, events, local and extra-local voluntary participation, etc.)	Limited to single initiatives for activists and sympathizers	Limited to single initiatives	Limited to single initiatives	Constant over time, and mostly with a local and extra-local impact
Ability to mobilize actions against damages, vandalism, threats (by means of the inclusion of voluntary service, sympathizers, associations, etc.)	Limited to small groups of activists	Locally limited	Mostly local and some extra-local	Both local and local/extra-local
Ability to offer employment in agriculture with regular or seasonal contracts	Low (1–2 employees)	Low > 10 employees	Low (10–20 employees)	Medium (20–200 employees)
Turnover (i.e. revenue)	<50000	50000–100000	200000–500000	200.000–8.000.0000
Net profit	No	no	Mostly they achieve a balanced budget (i.e. revenues = expenditures)	Mostly they produce net profit

- i) the movementist organizations animated by activists who have as their direct objective the struggle against exploitation and criminal control;
- ii) the silent organizations that choose to carry out interventions in niches of agricultural activities where they support experimental forms of agricultural and community economy different from the dominant ones, but without entering directly into collision with the local social and political context;
- iii) the hybrid organizations, building on typical social service activities who develop additional social farming projects aimed at making a contrast with the economic and social control of organized crime;

- iv) the political-entrepreneurial organizations defined by the relevance they give to economic growth which effectively perform an important political and entrepreneurial function for local development and action against organized crime.

## 6. Movementist organizations

The movementist organizations are characterized by small size and poor structure, and emerge from the initiative of individuals with previous political commitment who have gained experience in welcoming disadvantaged people and see in the uncultivated and low-cost agricultural land the opportunity of combining employment objectives (including their own) with the social reactivation of the territory. The

type of work they enact radically contests the dominant political and socio-economic system. For this reason, they encounter resistance from institutions and the local community itself, which is often really strong. This resistance is partly motivated by the fear that local actors have a taking a position in favor of initiatives that take a radical stand against organized crime which partly constitute a reaction against the status quo of which the local institutions are also an expression. This climate of poor social support for social farming initiatives increases the risk of vandalism animated by criminal bodies; we refer mostly to facts such as cutting plants, damaging the water network or stealing agricultural machinery.

The strong ideological orientation tends to favor models of governance that are not very inclusive, and area centered on the internal control of the mission. The relationship with the local community and stakeholders is therefore oriented above all towards those who share the ideology of the organization. The collaboration network is hence selected in line with the internal mission however, this limits the group of associated members and hinders the further construction of relations with the territory. Accordingly, the movementist organizations, also have problems to construct networks of social capital and collaborative relationships in the territory (Jack and Anderson, 2002).

The movementist organizations are mainly driven by ideological motivations, therefore they do not pay particular attention to issues such as productivity, the economic strength of the production activities or improvements in technical managerial skills. The result is the promotion of limited but highly symbolic initiatives such as the sale of tomato sauce cans bearing labels that openly encourage the struggle against crime or the public mobilization of activists and sympathizers for the collection of vegetables and fruit.

As a consequence, the economic and productive dimension has a marginal importance. The sale of the products is carried out with forms of self-financing actions supported by sympathizers or groups of local activists. The informal support networks, however, appear to be very volatile and not very structured: for example, the solidarity purchasing groups depend on the commitment of a few activists and on very informal relationships that make the selling process and wider economic planning difficult to achieve. Even agronomic and economic management is entrusted to non-expert staff who rely on advice from acquaintances and field-learning experiences, thus often leading to management problems and negative repercussions on the production activities.

The low attention paid to productivity is confirmed also by the small size of cultivated land – on average from one to 3 ha – obtained from uncultivated or no longer productive land, or pre-existing low productivity parcels granted under usufruct or subsidized rents by public or private owners. Only in one case a group of activists acquired a 6-ha piece of land confiscated from organized crime and granted under a loan for use agreement by a local association whose conditions, however, were so high that – requiring a substantial investment for the reactivation of the irrigation system – the works were not completed. In this context, the promoters have great difficulty in remunerating their employees who in most situations are underemployed or voluntary. The number of employees with part-time or seasonal contracts does not exceed five units and annual turnover reaches a maximum 50.000 euros, nonetheless in many cases the balance sheet at the end of the year shows a loss-making business. The revenues deriving from the sale of the products are not enough to cover the costs of the labor or machinery costs, therefore they must be integrated with alternative sources such as voluntary disbursements or work hours at zero cost.

Within this scenario, the ideological engagement represents the fundamental lever for carrying out the associations' activities. Activists are available to work underpaid or even voluntarily to pursue the organization's mission. "We work hard to earn very little - says an interviewee - what keeps us working is believing in what we do." Nonetheless, the persistence of economic and organizational difficulties, resistance and environmental pressures represent a boomerang that – in the medium-long term – may backfire on the organization. The groups of

initial promoters also have problems in expanding their numbers due to production difficulties and a reduced volume of cultivated land. So, when one of the promoters cannot participate in the activities or loses motivation, the whole association is directly affected. The difficulty in structuring trajectories of intervention or guaranteeing economic stability entails other additional problems. Due to scarce turnover, there is no possibility for accessing regional funding calls for local development or hiring new people with specific skills. The ability to diversify activities is also penalized. For example, with small dimensions and poor technical skills, it is difficult to independently start the procedures for requesting the management of a confiscated asset. From this perspective, the territory loses opportunities for regeneration. Then, under these conditions, as underlined by an interviewee, there is the risk that the association is no longer a tool for local change and development but instead a "flash in the pan", so demonstrating its inability to modify a compromised local socio-economic system.

## 7. 'Silent' organizations

The second group of organizations is characterized by work that we can define as 'silent work'. These are small organizations generally founded by a local leader who aims to use agriculture as a tool for fostering employability and community aggregation around values of solidarity and social commitment. The objective of fighting crime and supporting local development has a marked pedagogical nature. Through the cultivation of the land, organization of recreational and educational activities that revolve around new forms of economy focused on the principles of legality and the protection of a good life and food health, these organizations aim to create new micro models of social and cultural development in disadvantaged areas. Thanks to their strong commitment to the pedagogical dimension, in some cases we have noticed a good mobilization of volunteers, sympathizers and visitors attracted by the cultivated areas. The social recognition of leaders allows these organizations to have a certain initial social consensus. Working through the personal contacts/networks of the leaders, the land is rented by private citizens or local institutions on the basis of fiduciary relationships.

Although there is not a written and declared agreement, the tacit pact that underlies relations with the territory is fundamental to the philosophy of social farming projects. In this group of organizations, even if there is the willingness to promote different economic and social models as part of the mission, the activities and products of agriculture are not marked by explicit references to the fight against crime. "Do not be too exposed!" is the philosophy followed to avoid incurring episodes of damage and the risk of social isolation generated by the fear of the local community to act directly against illegality. On the contrary, what matters is the organization of activities that incorporate alternative values such as the regulation of labor contracts, education for the protection of the environment, enhancement of the importance of social relations based on principles of fairness and legality, animation and education of children and young people, etc. As a direct consequence of this approach, organized crime seems to tolerate the presence of such organizations and damage and vandalism are rare or absent.

Cultivation develops on small parcels of land (from two to 4 ha) originating in uncultivated and abandoned areas which have been mainly reclaimed through voluntary efforts. The fact that they do not ask for concessions of larger land plots is a conscious choice motivated mainly by the desire not to collide directly with local crime.

"It is not easy for a stranger to understand what the act of living here means for us. It is a land where compromises must be accepted in order to try to change things. If we didn't follow this path, we would cut all the bridges and would get nothing, we must first work on a cultural change".

We have also to consider that the social farming which develops in niches naturally has congenital problems in its growth. It is difficult to go beyond a certain production threshold, and inevitably this produces consequences on the structuring of the organizations and their

development abilities. The number of employees is limited, generally there are two or three workers or a few seasonal workers. This makes their impact minimal especially in terms of the development of the agricultural economy. The sale of the produce remains mostly limited to local-direct circuits while the small part of the production which is transferred externally for the processing of the produce is able to create only poorly structured relationships. Moreover, the management activities and the reduced number of active members of the organization take away time and energy from participation in working tables or meetings with other organizations and make it more difficult and intermittent for them to find useful collaborations to strengthen the development of their activities. Turnovers are again very limited and mere agricultural activity does not allow the maintenance of an equilibrium between revenues and expenditures therefore they must be complemented by other activities such as recreational or educational projects, etc.

Silent organization, compared to movementist organizations, are niche bodies which can count on some technical help from sympathizers or volunteers (e.g. retired farmers or farmers who are members of religious communities). However, specialized skills are lacking within the organizations due to the basic lack of economic resources for investing in their acquisition. Agricultural activities consequently remain in a secondary position, behind the achievement of aggregation and education objectives. Last but not least a further element of fragility is the strong dependence on the founding leaders. Governance is very centralized on these actors and when – due to a contingent reason – one of them is no longer active within the association, both the organizational structure and the mission are subjected to strong pressure.

## 8. Hybrid organizations

The third group of organizations can be defined as hybrid and derives from experiences of pre-existing social-service organizations that – for whatever reasons – in their trajectory of action arrive at the sphere of the reuse of confiscated assets. These are mainly social cooperatives, which are active in the field of job placement or service-provisioning for disabled or mentally ill people, that extend their operating space to some activities in the agricultural sector, either for expanding their business or finding additional sources of funding by taking the opportunity to work on confiscated land. The promoters are mainly social workers, psychologists and educators who occupy the main positions within the governance systems. The imprint of the social service culture tends to be evident in the way these organizations relate to the agricultural world. Agricultural activities are used to carry out aid activities for fragile actors (e.g. mentally ill people, autistic or disabled people, etc.) and meanwhile, the productivity and profitability goals continue to be considered as functional for the stability of these services.

Since social farming is an integral part of the activities they provide, hybrid organizations are favored by higher economic revenues deriving from the payment for different services paid by the local public welfare bodies. This allows for a certain occupational and organizational stability. The size of the organizations is larger than the two previous groups: they have up to twenty permanent employees and some seasonal workers, with a variable turnover that ranges between 200.000 and 500.000 euros per year. In contrast, within the social farming sector, the maximum number of employees remains limited and only in one case did it reach ten employees including both seasonal workers and trainees, while in other cases the number is definitely lower. Even the turnover of the social farming activities is reduced and very unstable since it depends on an agricultural production which is activated not for the market but for performing social functions (e.g. ergotherapy or job placement). An element that further distinguishes these organizations is their greater inclusion in partnership networks, although they are often minimal and include informal subjects and small businesses in the area. Some organizations integrate their production, buying directly from small agricultural producers at the local level while the processing of their produce is also managed in collaboration with local subjects.

However, in spite of the small dimensions, social farming begins to create a small offer of economic and social relations that builds on the good reputation and personal relationships of the promoters.

The involvement in activities addressed to local development and the parallel fight against crime derives mainly from collaboration with other social cooperative, associations or consortia. In this regard, we can mention the case of the “Fuori di Zucca” cooperative, which involves disabled and mentally ill people in agricultural work on lands granted by health institutions. It supplies agricultural products for the distribution of the famous ‘Pacco alla camorra’: a package of agricultural products created by the consortium of social cooperatives ‘Nuova Cooperazione’, which is sold during the Christmas holidays with the specific purpose of contrasting with a criminal culture and raising public awareness of alternative economic and production models.

At a social level, the initiatives they carry out have a high symbolic value but a limited sustainability. Owing to the fact that they focus on the support of disadvantaged people, the productivity of social farming is generally low. Considering internal skills, only in one case did the members of the hybrid organizations present a skilled profile (i.e. an agronomist) while in the remaining cases the technical skills in agriculture are very reduced or must be sourced from the outside. The entrepreneurial vocation is also affected by the presence of a social welfare culture, which characterizes the origin and functioning of these organizations. A business attitude and the ability to develop medium-term business models is absent or strongly limited while the recalcitrant attitude – that limits the third sector in assuming economic risks – tends to prevail. The fact that most of the income is guaranteed by public funding for the provision of social services tends to increase dependence on it but when such support decreases – due to decisions related to rationalization policies – the whole organization suffers.

## 9. Political-entrepreneurial organizations

In the last group, we find the political-entrepreneurial organizations. While these organizations also implement services for weak actors as we have seen before in the case of the other groups, the primary objective is focused on building economic models aimed at promoting local development through the fight against the mafia. Their origin as business development projects makes them particularly attentive to the conditions of economic success.

“Implementing social farming activities to fight mafias requires being in the market, so it is inevitable that you have to acquire the skills to be able to stay in it”.

The promoters are motivated by ideals but – from a technical and entrepreneurial point of view – they are professionally prepared, therefore also the human resource selection models must be consistent with the achievement of the organizations’ objectives. Instead of involving activists, sympathizers or social workers, these organizations rely on specific professional profiles such as agronomists, project managers, or marketing and communication developers.

The dominant model is made up of organizations that operate locally in strong connection to the supralocal level through production and distribution networks and associative networks, “Libera” for instance, which works throughout the country. The solidity of the projects facilitates the acquisition and concession of confiscated lands and alliances with some local administrations not compromised by association with the mafias. The work on confiscated lands – contrary to that carried out in uncultivated land rented by private owners – offers greater guarantees in terms of continuity and medium-term planning opportunities. The concession of a confiscated asset generally has a ten year or twenty-year duration thus offering a longer-term perspective to make more solid and structured development plans.

The importance of the bridge to the supra-local networks is crucial for several reasons. On the one hand, they can take advantage of a greater pool of skills and exchange of resources, consequently there are more opportunities to participate in – and win – public tenders. Some

national networks such as Legacoop have economic and strategic skills that no local organization could have to plan and organize, for example, the marketing and distribution processes of agricultural products on a national scale. On the other hand, agricultural products that come from activities aiming at combating crime are more easily commercialized in territories outside the areas where crime is present. All respondents affirm that the sale of agricultural products in the area meets strong resistance caused, firstly, by a poor sensibility towards organic and ethical agriculture within the local population and, secondly, by the reluctance of the locals to expose themselves – through purchase actions that manifest their aversion to the mafia publicly and to local crime's attention. In light of the above, the supra-local networks constitute a bridge that allows the transportation of the products to places where the marketing conditions are better. As one interviewee clarifies: "while for a customer in northern Italy the action of buying a pack of fruit with a label that certifies a particular position against the mafia may be a source of pride, here it still means breaking a certain type of unspoken code on which the entire social system is based". In addition, supra-local networks are important from a political point of view since they offer – and attract – media attention, which is useful to counteract vandalism and threats. Some cooperatives (e.g. Placido Rizzotto and Valle del Marro) are able – using supra-local collaboration networks – to mobilize hundreds of people rapidly and organize public mobilizations to quickly repair damage caused by vandalism. This has a positive externality in the increase in consensus about and visibility of the organizations' projects.

In order to prevent infiltration by criminal organizations attracted by their economic success, these companies also rely on external forms of control, for example through regulations governing the granting of trademarks (as in the case of organizations belonging to the Libera Terra network), or forms of governance open to civil society bodies.

The size of land holdings is much larger than that of the types of organizations analyzed before, and in some cases, it exceeds 200 ha of land cultivated with certified products typical of the local tradition. Furthermore, the great attention paid to productivity and economic sustainability targets leads to the selection of products such as traditional grains or vines that can be marketed at a much higher price than that of conventional produce. Looking at their dimensions, we can say that the organizations are not large, and, above all, the membership base remains limited. The fear that an excessive enlargement of the membership could favor criminal infiltrations justify such limitation of the structure. However, we have to consider that governance models tend to be open and strategic decisions are generally made in collaboration with national retailers and association networks that support local projects. The success of these organizations enables them to build collaboration agreements with schools and association networks for promoting guided tours and stays in the confiscated lands. The lands of cooperatives such as Placido Rizzotto or Goel consortium are visited annually by thousands of students, volunteers and members of associations (e.g. boy-scouts) who can personally experience the realization of projects for the conversion of lands controlled by the mafias into tools for employment and local development. Thanks to the larger size of the plots and the higher profitability of production, the political-entrepreneurial organizations are able to offer a job to an increasing number of workers – especially seasonal workers – many of whom are hired for the first time with a regular contract. During the harvesting period, the most important organizations employ several hundred people as seasonal workers. "This means forty regular wages for forty local families who thus see, directly in their pockets, that an economy different from that of precariousness and mafia is possible".

A further important difference is the relationship that this type of organization establishes with the local community. Several interviewees point out that the political-entrepreneurial organizations are really aware of the need to build consensus locally, therefore they try to redistribute some of the advantages deriving from the high land productivity and economic success among the local population. In this

regard, besides employing regular laborers and seasonal workers, these organizations try to develop local micro-chains of suppliers and co-producers involving local farmers. Collaborative ties are built thanks to the growing interest in quality products free from the risk of criminal infiltration. An interviewee says, "We use very strict regulations that allow us to select only partners who work consistently with our objectives".

Even in the case of the relationships with local institutions, they tend to be more constructive given the size, production skills, and vast variety of services they can count on. On some lands, social and work integration services are provided to disadvantaged people who are under the attention of municipal social intervention. This is an expression of the fact that social farming is seen – by the public sector – as a collaborative tool to deal with other wider social issues in the area.

## 10. Conclusions

At the international level, the evolution of social farming has significantly pushed the affirmation of the concept of multifunctional agriculture. Up to now, the idea of multifunctionality in social farming has mainly concerned the potential combination between agricultural production and the development of welfare services. In fact, social farming – as has emerged from the previous sections – can perform many other functions. The Italian case is emblematic in this sense and demonstrates how social farming can contribute to the reactivation of economic and social relations in regions characterized by strong underdevelopment and the predominance of criminal control over the territory and agricultural sphere. Through the implementation of social farming practices, the empirical evidence shows how the determinants of consensus used by criminal organizations are weakened, so as to break the vicious circle built between sociocultural impoverishment and the strengthening of an economic model spoiled by illegality.

In the areas under study, social farming appears as something, which is still really far from the idyllic vision of the rural world, which emerges from most of the researches on local development (Shucksmith, 2018). First of all, the conceptualization of social farming as a terrain for the promotion of cultures and economies of legality implies the development of abilities for mediating between potentially conflicting interests and values. Undoubtedly, the initiatives to combat illegality clash with the fear of a large part of the population and local institutions. In this environment, small or excessively politicized initiatives are bound to failure or marginality. Only more solid organizations with clear economic and socially sustainable business objectives have the opportunity to create jobs and benefits to be (re)distributed locally, and to slowly build consensus networks around new projects. To mediate with the local community, leaders need social credibility, but chiefly a political and economic power capable of showing a contrast with the power of the mafias. This power can hardly be generated from the bottom up from the push of small local groups; it must be supported by contact with extended networks connecting the local dimension with the outside. As Skerrat (2012) suggests, the success of rural social enterprises rests on the ability to move between local and extra-local contexts. For the organizations that deal with social farming for local development and the fight against crime, this ability is extremely strategic. Their specific localization and respective local knowledge allow them to understand how to filter, react to and interpret cultures and attitudes of the community while the vertical contact with extra-local networks allows them to obtain economic resources and social support for triggering a new development pathway. Furthermore, the research results demonstrate how the organizations which maintain a relationship with extra-local networks are more capable of developing alternative strategies to overcome the difficulties encountered during their development.

We have seen that the promotion of social farming in these particular areas of southern Italy requires a large investment in technical, organizational and entrepreneurial skills. Therefore, the real challenge for boosting local development and fighting crime implies an investment in

training and skills as a guarantee for some basic elements: agricultural productivity, production differentiation, stakeholder's coordination, and entrepreneurial management. In disadvantaged rural areas, economic development and business activities take shape in fragile and complex ecosystems (Farmer and Kilpatrick, 2009). The type of problems they have to face requires multidisciplinary – and not only specialist – skills which leads to problems concerning difficulties in recruiting and training actors able to manage the complexity of tasks needed by the organization.

This type of social farming helps to build economies and cultures of legality however, in order to be successful, it needs policies addressed to the enhancement of entrepreneurial self-organization and entrepreneurship from below. Favorable legislation such as on confiscated assets, or economic support measures for social farming start-ups can be crucial for small organizations in particular. Support policies may also be essential in allowing organizations to have enough land to guarantee adequate productivity and initial profitability. Policies that recognise the value of social farming as a tool for development and the fight against crime also have a great symbolic impact because they underline the value that institutions give to certain initiatives and especially the fact that the promoters of such initiatives are not alone. In conclusion, the promotion of – and attempts to expand – social farming within the southern Italian framework, are the result of the alignment of three different levels: (i) the level of the businesses, (ii) the level regarding the system of relationships between businesses and the local/supra-local community, and (iii) the political level made up by the implementation of policies encouraging and legitimizing collective action from below.

### Credit author statement

Susanne Elsen, Methodology, Preliminary desk research, state of the art, development of a methodological setting, Writing – original draft, preparation, discussion, first draft, Responsibility for text translation, Leadership of the research activity plan and execution, Funding of the project. Luca Fazzi, Conceptualization of the paper, ideas, overarching research goals and aims, Methodology, Preliminary desk research, state of the art, development of a methodological setting, Investigation, conducting the research and investigation, Writing the original draft, preparation, discussion, first draft, Leadership of the research activity plan and execution, Funding of the project.

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