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### CORSO DI DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN FORMAZIONE, PATRIMONIO CULTURALE E TERRITORI

CICLO XXXV

## SOCIAL INNOVATION AS A DRIVER FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE RURAL TOURISM: EVIDENCE FROM MARCHE REGION

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*A nonna Viola, spiraglio di luce tra i buchini di uno scialle.*

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*“We will all profit from a more diverse, inclusive society, understanding, accommodating, even celebrating our differences, while pulling together for the common good.”*

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

## PHD RESEARCH OVERVIEW

This thesis is the result of a three-year research carried on at the department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism of the University of Macerata (UniMC) in the Italian region of Le Marche. It is the result of the candidate's work with the research team coordinated by professor Alessio Cavicchi who is committed in place branding and sustainable tourism development in rural areas. This research develops in the context of an industrial PhD (*dottorato innovativo*), funded by Marche's Regional Operational Programme (ROP) on topics which are particularly relevant for the development of the territory and local communities.

To effectively conduct the studies - and according to the industrial PhD requirements - the candidate spent eight months in different national businesses for research and development purposes, as well as six months of research mobility abroad. In this specific case, the candidate spent seven months at the *San Michele Arcangelo – Soc. Coop. Agricola Onlus*, which is part of the regional agri-food businesses' Cluster Marche and provides social and working opportunities for people who mostly come from alcohol or drug-addiction paths. The candidate also spent one month at the *Federazione Strada del Vino, dell'Olio e dei Sapori di Toscana*, a well-developed agrifood-based network aimed at promoting tourism in rural territories. As for the international research, the candidate spent three months at the department of *Business Economics of the UiT – The Arctic University of Tromsø* (Norway), whose researchers are strongly committed with participatory approaches in the field of sustainable tourism. The following three months were spent at the department of Business Economics and Tourism of the *University of La Laguna in Tenerife*, a stimulating environment where research is particularly focused on community resilience in disadvantaged areas. The PhD programme involves 3 academic tutors, working in different regional universities (University of Macerata, Polytechnic University of Marche, and University of Urbino) and on different but correlated disciplinary fields (prof. Elena Viganò – University of Urbino, agri-food marketing, and tourism and prof. Adriano Mancini -Polytechnic University of Ancona, computer engineering and agricultural economics).

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BM – Business Model	SB – Social Business
DW – Decent Work	SDG – Sustainable Development Goal
IBM – Inclusive Business Model	SI – Social Innovation
ILO – International Labor Organization	ToC – Theory of Change
OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development	UN – United Nations
PAR – Participatory Action Research	UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organization
ROP – Regional Operational programme	WTTC – World Travel and Tourism Council

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## 1. Setting the scene: background context and research gaps

### 1.1. General background and identification of research gaps

#### *1.1.1. Challenges towards sustainable development: the need for social and working inclusion*

Successful sustainable development relies on the ability to create inclusive societies (United Nations, 2015). Based on the respect of fundamental human rights, an inclusive society recognizes to each individual, with his or her own rights and responsibilities, an active role to play and encourages the social inclusion of mostly marginalized groups. An inclusive society does not aim to make everyone equal, rather to guarantee everyone the same opportunities, by making of diversity an asset for a sustainable growth (United Nations, 1995; United Nations & Government of Finland, 2008; World Bank Group, 2013). Due to its complex multidimensional nature, inclusiveness results in a multi-actor networked process, requiring a strong engagement in all its phases to ensure the effectiveness and the durability of actions (United Nations & Government of Finland, 2008). In the absence of such approach there would only be the illusion of inclusion, leading to adverse effects on the societal well-being (United Nations, 1995; United Nations & Government of Finland, 2008).

Ensuring a sustainable development of communities means first and foremost to guarantee employment opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). It is recognized that working inclusion allows all citizens to be active members of society and strengthen the social security for the benefits of both individuals and the state welfare (World Bank Group, 2013). In the Sustainable Development Agenda (SDA), the United Nations (UN) identify the need for an economic inclusive growth by “achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all” (see the SDG8 in United Nations, 2015). This reflects into the European policies addressing social inclusion, from the past *Europe 2020 Strategy* “for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (European Commission, 2010) to the more recent European *Social Fund + (ESF+)* allocation for an inclusive recovery of territories (*REACT-EU*) after the Covid-19 pandemics (European Commission, n.d.).

#### *1.1.2. Social and working inclusion for all: a focus on the tourism sector in rural areas*

Tourism is a profitable resource for the world economies and has a great potential for an inclusive economic growth (United Nations, 2015). However, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), high discrimination, poor working conditions and limited social protection are yet to be solved in the tourism sector, especially after Covid-19 pandemic (ILO, 2022). Instead of empowering local communities, this creates an obstacle for their well-being (Cañada, 2018). On this purpose, scholars agree on the need to make tourism more ‘community-centered’, is to say to make of it an asset to solve local societal challenges (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). The increasing need to advance in this field, brought academic journals to address the topic. In a 2018 special issue of the journal

*Tourism Geographies* dedicated to *Inclusive Tourism Development*, it has been addressed the central questions of *who is included, on what terms, and with what significance* in tourism. Here, Scheyvens & Biddulph (2018) stress the need to make tourism more inclusive, by involving people and places generally marginalized by tourism processes in the recreational activity and in the sharing of its benefits. They provide a broad understanding of *inclusive tourism*, by defining it as “a transformative tourism in which marginalized groups are engaged in ethic production or consumption” (p.5). In doing so, they extended the meaning addressed to inclusiveness in tourism, which is often associated to a consumer side perspective (related to the accessibility of services, e.g., ‘*accessible tourism*’ or the most recent ‘*Tourism4all*’<sup>1</sup>). Their definition allows to consider inclusiveness also according to a producer-perspective, by pointing out the importance of a *decent work for all* in the tourism sector (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018) which is the starting point for an inclusive economic growth (United Nations, 2015). This inclusive approach encompasses all the possible tourism related field which have been previously explored in the literature, as accessible tourism, social tourism, community-based tourism, etc. (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Fostering social inclusion does not only benefit local communities but also creates an added value for tourists (Costa, 2020; Costa et al., 2020). As some scholars point out, consumers today prefer tourism products with a clear value for the local population (Costa, 2020). There is broad evidence of the recreational-based visits where tourists get involved with (Bertella et al., 2017) and learn from (Bertella et al., 2019) local communities, with the aim to have a meaningful and authentic experience. Therefore, social inclusion in tourism not only nurture a healthier society to embrace diversity, but also constitute a means of competitiveness for destinations (Costa, 2020; Costa et al., 2020). It is obvious that the success of such processes requires the ability to balance the interests and needs of different stakeholders, through managing models and programs allowing for accessibility and inclusiveness where the role of technology and digital tools become always more important (Costa, 2020; Costa et al., 2020).

The need for a collaborative-inclusive oriented approach is even higher in rural areas, which despite of their great recreational potential, generally keep unmet complex societal issues (Moreno de la Santa, 2020). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) itself recognizes that recreational activities become a means of public-private collaboration to integrate local populations in participating and sharing its benefits (UNWTO, 2020a). While favoring community empowerment, this approach also leads to sustainable territorial development, by advancing the infrastructure needed to make peripheral areas more accessible for people with different needs (UNWTO, 2020b).

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<sup>1</sup> Tourism for all (UNWTO, n.d.): <https://www.unwto.org/accessibility>

### *1.1.3. The role of social businesses in rural areas for social and working inclusion of marginal people*

Social businesses play a key role in make tourism more inclusive and for this must be considered in the tourism planning (Dahles et al., 2020). Many scholars report that, through their activities, rural social entrepreneurs bring marginal communities closer to tourism (Aquino et al., 2018; Biddulph, 2017; Dahles et al., 2020; Moreno de la Santa, 2020). They provide employment opportunities and professional knowledge to the most fragile groups, allowing them to develop paths for personal and professional growth (Biddulph, 2018; Dhales et al., 2020; Moreno de la Santa, 2020). While doing so, they contribute to the infrastructural development of rural territories which facilitates the transition from an agricultural to a service-based economy (Mottiar et al., 2018). Once again, it was especially Covid-19 pandemic to shield the light on social businesses. Indeed, social restrictions have been the occasion to rethink the importance of social relations, which are at the basis of social businesses' activities (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Brouder et al. 2020). However, even in this occasion it is recognized that the real challenge is to make 'circumstantial' sustainable solutions a tool for the long-term sustainability of tourism (Brouder et al., 2020).

### *1.1.4. Towards more inclusive societies: why do social innovation matter?*

In a recent presentation of the upcoming European strategy 2021-2027, the DG REGIO for *Inclusive Growth, Urban and Territorial Development* (Hagemann Arellano & Hernandez Littlewood, 2021) enhances the role of sustainable tourism in creating stable, quality employment for all, with the aim of favoring rural and less-known destinations (see specific objective 4.5). In rural policies the connections between tourism and social inclusion are defined by the necessity to foster social innovative practices able to support the agricultural diversification (European Commission, 2021). In "*A Long-term vision for rural areas*" tourism and quality products become strategic assets to develop social innovative ecosystems for quality job creation and social inclusion. To do so, resources will be invested to promote innovation in social businesses and among social economy actors, while technology and digital tools will be essential to support social innovation and connectivity in marginal territories (European Commission, 2021). Therefore, it becomes crucial to understand the needs of the social innovative ecosystem in terms of skills to be developed and actions to be undertaken to foster social innovation practices in support of the communities in rural territories.

Social innovation (SI) is a phenomenon of increasing interest among scholars. It relates to the Schumpeterian concept of innovation, which is the output of a combination of different factors of production. However, the peculiarity of social innovation lies in the 'social' rather than 'technological-oriented' aspect, which can be found in the intentions, results, and process itself (Howaldt et al., 2015; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2021). This results in an immaterial social practice encompassing a constellation of 'specific actors', forms of combining knowledge, as well as participatory and collaborative processes which, with the aim to face the current pressing challenges, and resulting in forging more inclusive societies (Howaldt et al., 2015; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2021).

To date, there is no generally agreed definition of SI. This because it covers any aspect of life. For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines it as “the design and implementation of new solutions that imply conceptual, process, product, or organizational change, which ultimately aim to improve the welfare and wellbeing of individual and communities [...]” (OECD, n.d.). In *The Open Book of Social innovation*, The Young Foundation considers the phenomenon as new solutions in terms of products, services, models, markets, processes, etc. that meet (more effectively) a social need, and lead to new or improved relationships and better use of resources, through enhancing society’s capacity to act (Murray et al., 2010). Similarly, the European Commission identifies social innovations as “*new ideas that meet social needs, create social relationships, and form new collaborations. These innovations can be products, services or models addressing unmet needs more effectively*” (European Commission, 2011). From these definitions, three aspects characterizing SIs emerge: the *societal challenges to face*; the *actor’s capacity to act*, and the *relations and collaborations* aimed at creating and implementing innovative solutions. Research by Mulgan (2007) evidence also the stages of social innovation, which displays through four phases, namely *analyzing the problem and generating ideas for possible solutions*; *developing prototyping and piloting the ideas*; *assessing, scaling up and spreading the good practices*; *learning and evolving*.

Despite the numerous definitions, SI is still a fuzzy phenomenon. For this reason, recent studies tried to unfold SI practices with the aim to understand its characteristics. Due to its transformative and change-oriented character towards a more sustainable society (Weaver et al., 2017), the European funding programs are increasingly investing in international projects allowing for contextualization and comparison between different territories. One example is the project “*TRANSIT*”- *Transformative Social Innovation Theory*<sup>2</sup>, which encourages a vision of social innovation as a tool for empowerment and change in society, through the study of the actions and relationships established by various social innovators to implement solutions needed by the pressing social needs. Following, the project “*SIMPACT*”- *Boosting the Impact of Social Innovation in Europe through Economic Underpinnings*<sup>3</sup>, which focuses on analyzing the economic foundations of social innovation targeting marginalized and vulnerable groups in society. Lastly, the project “*SIMRA*”- *Social Innovation in Marginalized Rural Areas*<sup>4</sup>, aimed at systematizing the knowledge of social innovation in marginalized areas with structural problems, with respect to the specificities of social needs, priorities and social relations or collaborations of different kinds (for further details see Terstriep & Pelka, 2016).

Results from the numerous projects highlight that SI can rise from the capacity to act of a single actor but, like any other types of innovation, it develops as in a collaborative and non-linear process, whose result is the product of a mutual learning among all participants (Terstriep et al., 2022). Such participants are

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<sup>2</sup> TRANSIT PROJECT: <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/home>

<sup>3</sup> SIMPACT PROJECT: <https://www.simpact-project.eu/>

<sup>4</sup> SIMRA: <http://www.simra-h2020.eu/>

defined as ‘social innovation ecosystem’ (Terstriep et al., 2022; Pel et al., 2020), composed by the public administration, businesses, universities, and civil society, who are generally recognized as the actors of the ‘quadruple helix’ (Terstriep et al., 2015; 2022). Focusing on the relationships created by social innovative practices allows us to understand the changing features of society (Weaver et al., 2017). Indeed, SIs not only foster the creation or evolution of relationships between different actors, but they also suffer from their impacts. It is generally recognized that SI is an evolving process, with both radical and incremental changes (Kluvankova et al., 2021; Vercher et al., 2022). However, it is in the process of change itself that tensions can arise among the different actors involved (Weaver et al., 2017). Therefore, it becomes crucial not only to understand the type and intensity of change (Kluvankova et al., 2021; Vercher et al., 2022) but also to find creative strategies to manage social tensions and facilitate the process of social transformation towards more sustainable and inclusive societies (Weaver et al., 2017).

In rural areas, social innovation practices are essential for social change and sustainable development of communities (Bock, 2012). Here, the capacity to act and the relationships between different actors make it possible to address contextual social needs (Neumeier, 2011; Dalla Torre et al., 2020; Vercher et al., 2022) and social inclusion for mostly marginalized groups (Dalla Torre et al., 2020; Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Gramm et al., 2020). In this context, agriculture is recognized as an enabler for transformative processes, bringing social and economic benefits to local marginal communities (Dalla Torre, 2020; Di Iacovo et al., 2014).

### 1.2. Tabular synopsis of the identified research gaps

The literature reviewed has revealed some research gaps upon which this dissertation will be based. For easy reading, the following table presents the identified research gaps, specifying their nature, providing a description, and highlighting the literature that emphasizes the need for such studies.

<b>SOCIAL INNOVATION</b>		
<b>TYPE OF GAP</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF THE GAP</b>	<b>MAIN REFERENCES</b>
<b>Methodological</b>	To make social innovation a driver for inclusive societies, there is the need to include relevant stakeholders in the discussion (cross-cutting sector) and to find creative way to manage possible tensions that might arise among the different actors.	Weaver et al. (2017); Pel et al. (2020); Vercher et al. (2021)
<b>Ontological</b>	There is the need to deepen knowledge about the type and the intensity of changes provided by social innovative practices and how they affect the whole social innovative ecosystem	Kluvankova et al. (2021); Vercher et al. (2022); Terstriep et al. (2015); Terstriep et al. (2020)

## **TOURISM**



<b>Methodological</b>	There is the need to build-up collaborative inclusive-oriented processes in (rural) tourism, resulting in competitive accessible unique products, able to empower/strengthen the resilience of local places and people.	Costa (2020); Costa et al. (2020); UNWTO, 2020a; b; Moreno de la Santa (2020)
	With the Covid-19 pandemic, the necessity to integrate technology into the offer of an authentic tourism experience become fundamental towards an inclusive society	Costa et al. (2020)
<b>Empirical</b>	Although their benefits for tourism are widely recognized, there still is little evidence of social entrepreneurs in the tourism discourse. Especially after covid19, there is the need to consider this kind of business for sustainable and inclusive communities	Mottiar et al. (2018); Dhales et al. (2020); Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019); Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Brouder et al., 2020

Table 1: Summary of the research gaps identified in literature

### 1.3. From research gaps to research questions

The gaps identified above allowed to define the research questions leading this study. Accordingly, the main aim of this PhD thesis is to understand the role of collaboration in allowing social innovative practices for an inclusive tourism in rural areas. In doing so, the interest is to give attention to the role played by social businesses. Therefore, the overarching research question proposed by this work is:

- (1) *How can networking help social businesses to allow social innovative practices towards an inclusive tourism in rural areas?*

To answer this question, some sub-questions have been further addressed by this research:

- (2) *How to design a collaborative-oriented approach to help social businesses develop an inclusive tourism in rural areas?*
- (3) *In which way can social businesses networking towards an inclusive tourism affect the social and economic well-being of marginal communities in rural areas?*
- (4) *How can technology and digital tools support social hospitality businesses in fostering networks and genuine relationships with guests, to provide them with authentic experiences with local communities?*

### 1.4. Case study selection

#### 1.4.1. Social businesses in tourism and hospitality: the case of Agritur-ASO

Through the implementation of innovative practices, social businesses (SBs) are able to generate strong societal changes in the tourism and hospitality sector. In particular, it is through the sustainable and community well-being values underpinning their activities that they foster innovation (Aquino et al., 2018; Legrand et al., 2020). An emblematic case in Marche region is represented by the *Agritur-ASO* association (Legrand et al., 2020), located in the region's southernmost province called '*the garden of Le Marche*' for its stunning landscape characteristics. The association was founded in 2007 by eight initial members. Today it is

a network of more than 20 rural accommodations and farms united by the aim of retrieving, preserve, and enhance the cultural heritage, traditions, and numerous typical products of the Aso valley, from which derives the name of the association (Marca Fermana, n.d.). The peculiarity of this association is to organize projects aimed at improving the community's life, sense of solidarity and collaboration (Marca Fermana, n.d.)<sup>5</sup>. In doing so, members set up activities at the heart of relational, experiential, and community-based tourism (Tomasi et al., 2022), where to enhance the area's tangible and intangible resources (Bertella & Cavicchi, 2017). Many events organized by the association (detailed in the study from Tomasi and colleagues, 2022) are aimed at enhancing the rural villages and their traditions. In this case, the members of the network become proud host of their culture and introduce visitors to the local community, of which they become part through developing step-by-step long-lasting genuine relationships (Tomasi et al., 2022). The development of such relationships not only creates the conditions for visitors to take part to an authentic and immersive experience but also provides an opportunity for the members of the association to export their own tradition abroad, hosted by visitors themselves (Bertella & Cavicchi, 2017).

#### *1.4.2. Social entrepreneurship for social and working inclusion of marginal people: the case of social farming in Marche region*

*Social farming* or social agriculture refers to the innovative use of agricultural resources (both plants or animals) to provide health, social and educational services to local communities and mostly in-need people (Di Iacovo & O'Connor, 2009). More broadly, the phenomenon is associated to the umbrella term of *Green Care*, referred to nature-based activities aimed at the physical and mental well-being (García-Llorente et al., 2018; Di Iacovo, 2020). Although the phenomenon has always existed, thanks to a sense of solidarity remarking rural territories, social farming practices have widespread (and have consequently been studied) from the new millennium, when the agricultural policies started to encourage the passage from an economy of scale (i.e., increasing the production to reduce the final costs) to an economy of scope (i.e., the allocation of farm resources towards multiple productive objectives) (Di Iacovo, 2020), with the aim to enhance the role of farms and the multi-functions of agriculture for the sustainable development of rural territories and communities (van der Ploeg et al., 2003).

Over time, the comparative studies derived from numerous international projects (e.g., EU SoFar – Social Services in Multifunctional Farms- Social Farming<sup>6</sup> or Cost Action 866 on Green Care<sup>7</sup>) revealed that, compared to the North-European contexts, Mediterranean social agriculture is mainly used for the social and labor inclusion of the most fragile groups, through the provision of work and educational activities (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; García-Llorente et al., 2018; Di Iacovo, 2020). Indeed, in Mediterranean countries social farming

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.marcafermana.it/it/Ass.\\_AGRITUR\\_ASO/](https://www.marcafermana.it/it/Ass._AGRITUR_ASO/)

<sup>6</sup> SoFar project: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/22682>

<sup>7</sup> Cost Action 866 on Green Care: <https://www.cost.eu/actions/866/>

becomes an ‘inclusive’ model (Giarè et al., 2020) not just because of participated by the civil society and family farms (core economy, as defined by Di Iacovo et al., 2014) but also because the farm itself becomes an inclusive social and working environment, welcoming people with different needs and backgrounds with the aim to let them to stay healthy and develop professional skills, according to their time and possible efforts, to be used to (re)build-up their lives (Giarè et al., 2020; Moruzzo et al., 2020; Torquati et al., 2019).

In Marche region, social farms have always played an important role for the stability of the rural society. Due to the morphological and socio-economic features of the territory, most of the inland area (98 out of 225 municipalities) has been classified among the *inner areas*<sup>8</sup> of Italy (Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale, n.d.). This national classification clusters territories difficult to manage, because of being distant from the main centers, lacking basic services (namely, education, health, and mobility) and suffering from low employment, depopulation, and ageing population (Barca et al., 2014). In addition to the conformation of the territory itself, inner areas are more sensitive to shocks caused by external events. In this case, the 2008 economic crisis and the 2016 violent earthquake that affected the regional territory. During this event, social farms proved to be of an unvaluable support and ‘relief’ for rural communities (Buatti, n.d.). Indeed, it is acknowledged that social farmers prove to have a high sense of resilience against to external shocks (Dalla Torre et al., 2020) and help local population by re-allocating farm resources according to the necessities (Di Iacovo et al., 2014).

Since 2010, the regional government officially recognized their societal value through the Council Resolution No. 252 (Giunta Regionale, 2010), which, combined with the well-established experience of “hospitality, sustainable tourism, educational activities and enhancement of eno- and gastronomy tourism” (Giunta Regionale, 2010:3) was issued to encourage the emergence of farm experiences with a greater societal impact, according to three specific objectives: 1. *“to favor farming diversification models through introducing new innovative solutions in farms”*; 2. *“to contrast social marginalization”*; 3. *“to facilitate the integration of disadvantaged people”*<sup>9</sup>. Thereafter, the regional government decided to systematize the social farming experiences developed in the region, by giving precise indications to those entrepreneurs *“with strong personal motivation”* (Giunta Regionale, 2010:3) for the development of social agricultural activities. With this aim, the regional law No.21/2011 on *“farm multifunctionality and diversification in agriculture”*<sup>10</sup> defines:

- a. the entities allowed to carry out these activities, is to say farms and social cooperatives. The latter divided into *type A* (that manage social, health and educational services), *type B* (that carry out

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<sup>8</sup> Agenzia per la coesione territoriale. Regione Marche: <https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne/regione-marche-aree-interne/>

<sup>9</sup> Regione Marche, Delibera di Giunta n. 252 del 9.02.2010: [https://www.norme.marche.it/Delibere/2010/DGR0252\\_10.pdf](https://www.norme.marche.it/Delibere/2010/DGR0252_10.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Agricoltura sociale, Regione Marche: <https://www.regione.marche.it/Regione-Utile/Agricoltura-Sviluppo-Rurale-e-Pesca/Agricoltura-sociale>

different activities among agricultural, industrial, and commercial aimed at the employment of disadvantaged groups) and *type C* (including consortia made up of at least 70% social cooperatives).

- b. the creation of a regional list of social farming operators, the *Elenco Regionale Operatori in Agricoltura Sociale- EROAS list*<sup>11</sup>, which is periodically updated after the verification of farms activities by regional authorities.
- c. The specific set of activities and targets addressed (art 27): 1. educational and didactic services, including the establishment of agri-kindergartens, agri-nurseries, children's' centers and recreational projects aimed at discovering the rural world and the agricultural productions; 2. Social and welfare services, including rehabilitation, hospitality and social integration activities for elderly, disabled and mentally traumatized people, alcohol or drug addicts and ex-convicts; 3. Animal assisted therapies, therapies with agricultural farm's productions and therapies with natural or non-conventional medicines; 4. Social agricultural activities related to the re-employment of disadvantaged people according to the international.

The regional law, which was issued far before the national one on social agriculture no. 141/2015 (Camera dei Deputati & Senato della Repubblica, 2015), assigns this area to the department of agriculture instead of the one related to social services, with the objective of making social farming activities an advantage for both users and farms themselves. Indeed, as the art.26 of the regional law 21/2011 explains, there is a "balanced connection" between the agricultural and the social activities which farms must respect. This connection puts agricultural activities over the social ones, with the objective of giving an ethic value to the time and work conducted in agriculture for social and working integration purposes (Consiglio Regionale delle Marche, 2011).

Starting from the legislative sphere, which is the premise to the experiences that have developed later, the regional government engaged in the definition of specific models of social farming, developed thanks the support of many specialized research institutes and universities. Indeed, it is recognized that social farming in Mediterranean context is a participated environment where, besides of farmers that make their resources available for the creation of social-oriented activities, governments and universities help to facilitate the social innovative process through specific actions and knowledge (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). These models, co-created from specific contextual needs, are represented by<sup>12</sup>:

- a. "Agrinido di Qualità" (literally, 'Quality Kindergarten'), which has been under experimentation since 2010. This represents an on-farm activity for children in the age group between 1 and 3 years. Thanks

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<sup>11</sup> Elenco Regionale Operatori in Agricoltura Sociale, Regione Marche:

[https://www.regione.marche.it/Portals/0/Agricoltura/AgricolturaSociale/ElencoEROAS\\_15.06.2022.pdf](https://www.regione.marche.it/Portals/0/Agricoltura/AgricolturaSociale/ElencoEROAS_15.06.2022.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> The information contained in this paragraph results from interviewing key informants from the regional board. However, general information can be also found on the Regione Marche's website section dedicated to social farming.

to the partnership of the *Chiaravalle Montessori Foundation*<sup>13</sup>, this model aims to make the farm and its natural environment an asset for the application of Montessori's educational approach.

- b. Subsequently, this educational approach has been applied to support the elderly population. Although it is not a pre-set model like '*Agrinido di Qualità*', the "*Longevità Attiva*" (literally, 'Active Longevity') represents a series of well-being activities carried out in nature. Different regional and national universities joined local actors to work on some activities under experimentation, namely '*the sensory garden for the Alzheimer*', with the intention of understanding the benefits of sensory activity in nature on individuals with Alzheimer's disease, and the '*co-housing*' activity, to understand what kind of relief can 'living together' bring to the elderly, who often suffer from loneliness.
- c. 'Orti' is another formal model, which focuses on agricultural production as a means of inclusion and learning about rurality on the part of citizens, under the appendix of '*Ortoincontro*'. A further appendix of this model is the '*social garden*', mainly carried out in prisons, as an educational (re)experience for prisoners.
- d. Lastly, the most recent experiment 'on the autism spectrum', where the intention is to understand whether and what kind of benefits activity in nature can have on individuals with autism.

#### 1.5. Methodological approach: using participatory research to support social innovation for inclusive tourism

The intangibility of social innovative processes requires an in-depth study of the reasons and the modalities at the heart of the social change. However, due to the complexity of the processes, the need for methodological approaches useful to understand the extent and modalities of the phenomenon has long been pointed out (Cajiba-Santana, 2014). Although scholars are more propense to use a qualitative approach, able to highlight the peculiarities of the events at a community level, quantitative or mixed approaches have also been implemented in the study of this phenomenon (Agostini et al., 2017). One of the most comprehensive methodologies to study *the components* (actors and resources), *the objectives* (goals and motivations for local actors to engage in social innovative processes) and *principles* (the set of values guiding the allocation of resources) underpinning the process of social innovation, has been developed as an output of the SIMPACT project. It mixes up qualitative research through tools such as narrative interviews with the network analysis, in order to build up the 'biography' innovation, by detailing its development and diffusion mechanisms (Kleverbeck & Terstriep, 2018). However, research should not only study the phenomenon to produce scientific knowledge, but also facilitate its processes and the generation of new knowledge practically useful for local actors to move forwards the social change (Biekart, 2017). As a bottom-up process, Sis cannot be planned. However, to happen they need a supportive environment, as well as a participatory

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<sup>13</sup> Fondazione Chiaravalle Montessori: <https://www.fondazionechiaravallemontessori.it/>

and empowering methodology, like open innovation, user participation, cafés, or action-research”, useful to light up the motivations and possible solutions to change (Murray, 2010).

It is acknowledged that universities have an important role in supporting social innovative practices (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015; Kumari et al., 2019; Terstriep et al., 2015; 2020). Indeed, these are increasingly identified as ‘transformative institutions’, capable of co-creating with communities some strategies and solutions useful for sustainable change (Trencher et al., 2014; Rinaldi et al., 2018), by helping in “problem identification, engaging relevant actors for co-creation, mutual learning, and knowledge exchange among the actors, which results in resource integration and change in relations, and [...] joint exploitation of knowledge by actors” (Kumari et al., 2019, p.5).

This thesis uses participatory action research (thereafter PAR), as a methodology to support social innovation. Indeed, PAR allows scholars to research *with* rather than *on* the communities (Kindon et al., 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008), where researchers join local actors and help detect, unfold, and address solutions to specific societal challenges, co-defining specific approaches depending on the context (Kindon et al., 2007). Indeed, PAR is a tool useful to create a supportive environment that empower local communities, by giving value to relationships among local actors and to the desired social change, by initiating a process of knowledge generation and continuous learning, which is realized through the cyclical steps of action, research, reflection (Kindon et al., 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

For this reason, PAR is a suitable approach to support SI processes. Indeed, in their recent studies on possible solutions to empowering marginalized communities, Sadabadi and Rahimi Rad (2021) propose a framework for understanding the interconnections between PAR and SI steps. The table below proposes an overview:

Stages of social innovation	Steps of action research
Generating ideas by understanding needs and identifying potential solutions	Problem identification and planning
Developing, prototyping, and piloting the ideas	Acting to solve the problem
Assessing, scaling up, and providing diffusion of good practices	Observing to unveil the changes made to solve the problems
Learning and evolution	Analyzing and modifying actions

Table 2: Interconnection of the steps between social innovation and action research, from Sadabadi and Rahimi Rad (2021)

The more active the researcher’s role is in the study of innovative processes involving the community, the more his or her research will require ‘action’ and inter-action with the local context (Kindon et al., 2007). Due the transformative nature of social innovation, which will change the way people act and perceive their own places, researchers are requires to master a different set of skills to assume multiple, and sometimes even overlapping, roles in participatory process (Wittimaryer & Schäpe, 2014; Mehmood et al., 2019). In particular, Wittimaryer & Schäpe (2014) identify five roles that researchers can assume, namely:

1. *Change agent*, who initiates the journey towards a societal change, stimulates the networking activities both locally and internationally, motivates participants through the process, and support policy accordingly.

2. *Process facilitator*, who facilitate the process towards the societal change, select and invite participants into the discussion and ensure a broader inclusiveness of expression.
3. *Knowledge broker*, who intersects different visions by creating spaces and occasions for collective reflection, act as a mediator between different point of view and encourages inclusion.
4. *Reflective scientist*, who collect and analyze and critically reflects on data and actions occurred during the process.
5. *Self-reflective scientist*, who perceive him/herself as part of the changing process and who changes and transforms accordingly.

1.6. Overview and outline of the thesis

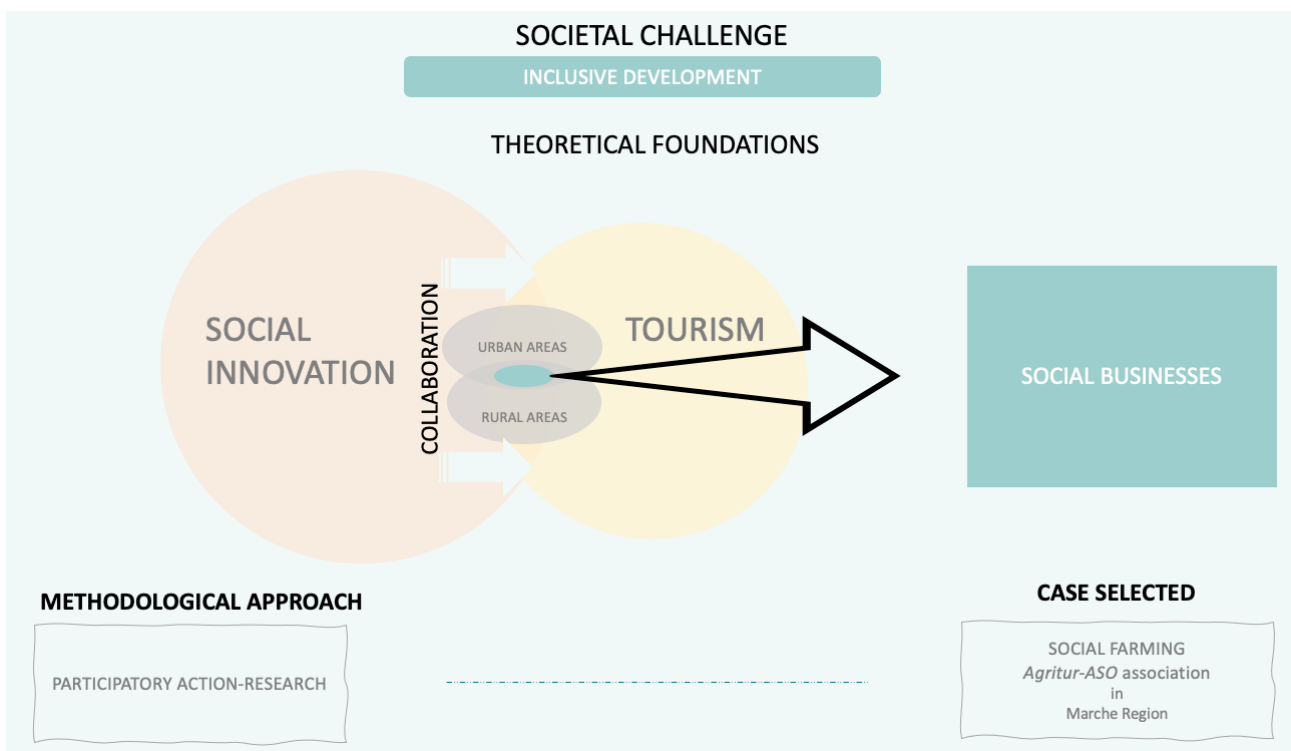


Figure 1: Thesis visual overview, theoretical points, and methods

To answer the question proposed by this work, namely: *how can networking help social businesses to allow social innovative practices towards an inclusive tourism in rural areas?* This thesis will be divided in different sections, aimed at answering the related sub-questions identified. Chapters 1,2,3 will be dedicated to the case of social farming, while chapter 4 will be dedicated to analyzing the case of the association *Agritur-ASO* in the framework of social hospitality.

- 1) The **first chapter** introduces the context of tourism in social farming. It aims to understand in which way tourism in social farming can be understood as a form of social innovation. It provides a literature review asking how social farming tourism can answer to societal challenge; how can it foster actors' capacity to act; and what kind of relations does it creates (The Young Foundation, 2012; European Union, 2011). In doing so, this introductory chapter attempts to answer to the need for more analysis

of social innovation, with respect to the changes it might take during its evolution (Kluvankova et al., 2021; Vercher et al., 2022; Terstriep et al., 2015; Terstriep et al., 2020).

The **second** and **third chapters** move from a desk to a field investigation of social farming. Research presented in these sections is part of a participatory action-research process (PAR) carried out in Marche region, which involved numerous businesses, public bodies, and agricultural/health development associations.

- 2) **Chapter two** address the question of *how to design a collaborative-oriented approach to help social businesses develop an inclusive tourism in rural areas*. This chapter respond to the needs of an inclusive collaborative process in tourism (Moreno de la Santa, 2020) and to include social businesses in the tourism planning (Dhales et al., 2020; Mottiar et al., 2018). It will present the participatory research process, by describing its steps and reasons together with the operational tools used for the purpose. The chapter will detail the participatory process, which has been organized in a way to manage possible tensions that might arise among different actors and leading social innovative processes to flow (Weaver et al., 2017; Pel et al., 2020; Vercher et al., 2021).
- 3) **Chapter three**, as part of the action-research process, reports on the results of interviews conducted with social businesses in Marche region, with the aim to understand *how can social business networking towards tourism impact on the social and economic well-being of communities*. By presenting the results, analyzed through the *decent work* indicators produced by the International Labor Organization, the chapter shows the possible impacts of social businesses on the territory, if involved in tourism networks (Dhales et al., 2020).
- 4) The **fourth chapter** addresses the question of *how can technology and digital tools support social hospitality businesses in fostering networks and genuine relationships with guests, in a way to provide them with authentic experiences with local communities*. In this case, it will be analyzed the case of *Agritur-ASO* association, in the context of a relational-based initiative organized during the pandemic. This initiative is an empirical evidence of the importance to consider technology as a tool for unity and inclusiveness in tourism, when social relations are physically limited (Costa, 2020; Costa et al., 2020)

#### *Notes for the readers*

Among the chapters presented in this PhD thesis:

A revised version of the chapter 4 has been published as Ferrara, C., Tomasi, S., Aleffi, C., Ferrara, A., Bertella, G., Paviotti, G., & Cavicchi, A. (2021). Relationships Matter. New Paths for Tourism Beyond COVID-19 Pandemic. An Exploratory Research from Italy. *COVID-19: Paving the Way for a More Sustainable World*, 349–370. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69284-1\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69284-1_18)



A revised version of the chapter three is to be presented as: Ferrara, A., Ferrara, C., Tomasi, S., Bertella, G., Paviotti, G., Cavicchi, A. (2022). Exploring the potential of social farmers' networking as a leverage for inclusive tourism. *Sustainability*.

# CHAPTER I

## Advancing studies in social farming: is tourism a form of social innovation?

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The pressing need for more inclusive and sustainable societies is rising interest on social innovation (SI) for its transformative power able to generate systemic changes (Weaver et al., 2017). This complex and ever-changing phenomenon (Kluvankova et al., 2021; Vercher et al., 2022) refers to new ideas (products, services, and models) that meet the emerging social needs, whose creation or implementation needs society's capacity to act and new social relationships among actors (European Commission, 2011; Murray, 2010). For its characteristics, social innovation becomes a fundamental means for the sustainable development of rural territories and communities, which often lack resources and human capital to face structural problems (Bock, 2016; European Commission, 2021). However, SI is a very complex context-based phenomenon, evolving and changing its characteristics according to the behavior of the various actors involved, their interactions as well as the solutions applied to the specific context (Kluvankova et al., 2021; Vercher et al., 2022). For this reason, scholars call for more studies showing the evolution of social innovative practices, with the aim to understand the type and the intensity of changes (Kluvankova et al., 2021; Vercher et al., 2022).

Social farming is considered an example of social innovative practice in rural territories (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Dall Torre et al., 2020): it refers to a set of activities in nature which use agricultural resources (both animals and plants) to address the societal needs related to health, education, social and working inclusion, with the main objective of increasing the well-being of rural local communities (Di Iacovo & O'Connor, 2009; Sempik et al., 2010). In social farming, the agency or 'capacity to act' is mainly driven by a sense of resilience (Dalla Torre et al., 2020) which brings together different actors to combine expertise and knowledge to drive the whole process (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). Among all the possible services that social farming could offer, recreation in nature is considered of particular importance for the well-being of communities (Sempik et al., 2010). However, while there was an initial interest in emphasizing their benefits on health, today recreational activities in social farming seem to have important implications for tourism too. Several empirical cases show the importance of tourism activities in social farming, for example the well-known social cooperative *L'Olivera* in Spain<sup>14</sup> uses food and wine tourism as a means for the employment of disadvantaged people in

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<sup>14</sup> Tourism in social farming. The case of L'Olivera Social Cooperative. Retrieved from Euromontana: <https://www.euromontana.org/en/rural-tourism-lolivera-cooperative/>

rural communities, while by the *National Rural Network* from the project *SoFar Ireland*<sup>15</sup> reports the example of the combination of social farming and tourism businesses for the creation of meaningful experiential tours for the well-being in nature. The interest in tourism continues to proliferate and brings together actors of different nature to investigate the topic under different lens, also related to social farming tourism in response to the need for accessibility in natural settings<sup>16</sup>. First studies on the topic have been addressed by Kmita-Dziasek (2017) who define social farming-based tourism as “a unique combination of agritourism and professional social services (which) brings new quality to agritourism and new (...) employment opportunities for farmers” (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017, p. 210). This denotes important paths for social farming to develop sustainable tourism in rural areas which, as advocated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), it should increasingly “enhance job creation, protect natural resources and cultural heritage, promote social inclusion, and empower local communities and traditionally disadvantaged groups” (UNWTO 2020b, p.5).

However, the fact that social farming tourism is still unexplored, leaves a gap in the scientific literature about the meaning and the development of such practice. It contributes, among others, to neglecting managerial and organizational aspects of social farming activities that are increasingly needed to encourage the development of such practice (García-Llorente et al., 2018; Nazzaro et al., 2021). Therefore, the aim of this study is to systematize knowledge about tourism in social farming, by using the lens of SI. In other words, assuming that social farming is a form of social innovation (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Della Torre et al., 2020), this study investigates *in which terms* tourism in social farming can be considered a form of social innovation. According to the key elements deriving from the definition of SI (European Commission, 2011; Murray 2010), three research questions lead of this study: *Which societal challenges does social farming tourism face?* (RQ1); *In which terms does it enhance society’s capacity to act?* (RQ2); *Which social relations/collaborations does it create?* (RQ3).

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<sup>15</sup> Tourism in social farming. Experiences from SoFar Ireland: <https://www.socialfarmingireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/National-Rural-Network-NRN-Social-Farming-Case-Study-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Accessible tourism in social farming. Retrieved from Care-T-Farms: <http://www.care-t-farms.eu/index.php/en/news/76-social-agriculture-and-care-farm-work-opportunity-social-partnership-and-opportunity>

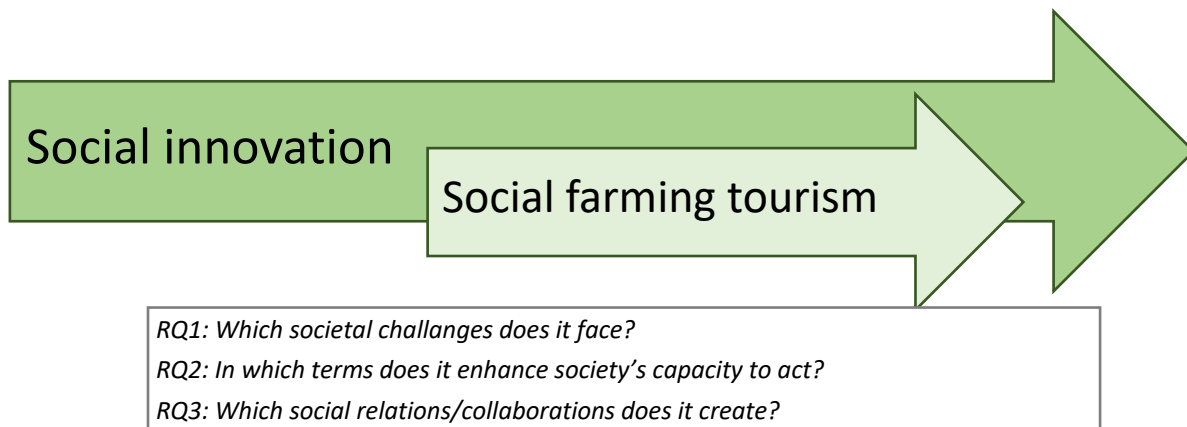


Figure 2: research questions leading the review, based on European Commission (2010) and The Young Foundation (2012)

To answer these questions, a systematic review of studies addressing tourism in social farming is conducted. To do so, the following sections will explain the methodology used to conduct the review. Results will be analyzed and discussed. Last, the main conclusions and limits of the study will be also highlighted.

### 1.7. Procedure

The present study follows Tranfield et al. (2003) methodology to conduct an effective literature review, which starts by analyzing studies on the subject and identifying possible paths for a subsequent empirical analysis of the relevant case. In particular, this systematic review aims to understand in which terms can tourism in social farming be considered a social innovation. As a starting point, scoping the literature has been necessary to reveal useful keywords to create search strings for each theme. In this phase, the most recent literature provided by García-Llorente (2018) on the topic has been used to catch the diverse terminologies associated with social farming around the world. Those words have then been addressed to relevant tourism-related terminology used in the UNWTO (2020b) report on rural tourism. An overall overview of the terms used for the research is provided in the following table:

Theme	Search string
<i>Social farming</i>	"green car*" OR "social farm*" OR "farm animal-assisted intervention" OR "therapeutic garden*" OR "therapeutic horticultur*" OR "nature-based rehabilitat*" OR "care farm*"
<i>Tourism</i>	Touris* OR travel* OR destination*

Table 3: Search string composition for the review process

Two databases, namely ISI Web of knowledge and Scopus, have been employed to get access to the articles according to their titles, abstracts or keywords containing at least one of the search terms for each string. By linking the strings with the Boolean operator (AND), the research in both platforms returned a total of n. 28 contributions (15 from Web of Science and 13 from Scopus). After removing duplicates (n. 9 studies), the research applies inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the effectiveness of the results. The following table will provide an overview:

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Research field	All	-
Date	>2000	All previous
Language	English	All others
Study type	Empirical and theoretical. All types of peer reviewed journals. Books chapters.	All others
Geography	All	-
Relevance	(i)Addresses tourism in social farming discourse	(i) Addresses tourism and social farming separately (e.g., studies referring to diversification strategies, etc.)
	(ii)Level of analysis: contribute to the understanding of social farming tourism knowledge and development?	(ii) All studies not allowing to contextualize tourism in social farming

Table 4: Inclusion-exclusion criteria for the selection of the studies considered in the review

Following García-Llorente et al. (2018), selected studies have been published since the year 2000, when social farming started to gain popularity among scholars. Moreover, while no specific criteria have been employed for the field or the geography, only peer-reviewed papers and book chapters published in English have been considered for this study. At this stage, many studies treating tourism and social farming separately emerged. Selection choice shrinks to those contribution treating tourism as key element in social farming, to allow contextualizing reasons and dynamics of the phenomenon. Due to the low number of results matching the criteria (n.7 among articles and a book chapter), backward and forward snowballing on the 6 scientific articles was also implemented. Snowballing technique is generally used in systematic reviews addressing topics of complex evidence (Greenhalgh, 2005). To do so, guidelines from Wohlin (2014) have been followed and articles have been revised in their entire content. According to the inclusion/exclusion criteria, this phase enforced the research with n.10 contributions. At the end, providing a citation analysis of contributions included in the review has been important for two reasons: first, providing transparency for the methodological process used to select studies, and second, to help in understanding the main topics relevant to social farming tourism, thus considering the interdisciplinary nature of studies selected. The following table will provide an overview on the steps, objectives, activities, tools, and methods used for this phase, and show relevant results from each step:

Step	Objective(s)	Activities	Tool(s)/ Method	Results
Identifying relevant literature	Defining the field of investigation	Review on meanings and dimensions of social farming	bibliographic research	García-Llorente et al. (2018); Di Iacovo (2020) "green car*", "social farm*", "farm animal-assisted intervention", "therapeutic garden*", "therapeutic horticultur*", "nature-based rehabilitat*", "care farm"
	Developing search strings	Selection of search terms able to encompass research topics	Boolean terms "and" and "or"	

				touris* OR travel* OR destination*	
	Identifying search methods	Electronic databases	Scopus; Web of Science	-	
	Defining inclusion and exclusion criteria	Establishing a set of exclusion criteria	Bibliographic search	García-Llorente et al. (2018)	
	<i>Data extraction, selection, and processing</i>	Initial search and screening	Search on databases according to Scopus and Web of Sciences search criterion "titles, abstracts or keywords".	Scopus; Web of Sciences	28 documents found
			Preliminary screening and selection (elimination of duplicates)	Manual	9 duplicates eliminated
			Preliminary screening and selection (application of exclusion criteria)	Manual	12 studies eliminated from the initial search
	Citation analysis	Selection of studies included in the review	Manual	Chen et al. (2020); Chin et al. (2021); Gramm et al. (2019); Lanfranchi & Giannetto (2014); Moriggi (2020); Moriggi et al. (2020); Kmita-Dziasek (2017)	
		Backward and forward snowballing across the selected studies	Manual	Chiara et al. (2019); Di Iacovo et al. (2014); Fazzi (2011); Forleo & Palmieri (2019); Knapik (2018a; b); Lanfranchi et al. (2015); Moruzzo et al. (2020); Nicolosi et al. (2021); Tulla et al. (2014)	
<i>Data analysis</i>	Clustering	Clustering of the information reported in the studies	Manual	Clustered information related to RQ1; RQ2; RQ3.	

Table 5: An overview on the selection and the analysis of the studies reviewed

## 1.8. Results

The literature included in this research encompasses sixteen scientific and one book chapter (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017). Contributions are reported from seven countries, both European and extra-European continent (the latter refers to Chen et al. 2020; Chin et al. 2020), although most of the literature originates from Italy (Gramm et al., 2019; Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014; Chiara et al., 2019; Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Fazzi, 2011; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Moruzzo et al., 2020; Nicolosi et al., 2021). Studies are distributed on a ten-year time span (from 2011 to 2021), although the largest number of publications refers to the three most recent years. Among the most recurrent journals: *Sustainability*, *Journal of Rural Studies* and *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*. No journal in the tourism field appears. This shows that while the social functions played by tourism in social farming are evident, potential implications and benefits of social farming tourism remain underestimated in the tourism discourse.

Except for Lanfranchi et al. (2015) who conduct theoretical research, the selected studies for this review have an empirical focus and report about case studies. Some authors make use of questionnaires for

their research (Gramm et al., 2019). Others use individual or group interviews and participated discussions (Chen et al., 2020; Chin et al., 2021; Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Knapik, 2018; 2020; Moriggi, 2020; Moriggi et al., 2020). Lastly, some authors use a mixed approach, by combining questionnaires and interviews (Chiara et al., 2019; Fazzi, 2011; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019; Moruzzo et al., 2020; Nicolosi et al., 2021; Tulla et al., 2014).

Most of the literature investigates the provider's perspective (businesses), while to a lesser extent the consumer or community side has also been treated (Chen et al., 2020; Chiara et al., 2019; Knapik, 2020). Interestingly, part of surveys also explores the perspective of experts on the subject, who helped the creation or development of social projects (Chen et al., 2020; Moruzzo et al., 2020; Tulla et al., 2014). With the aim to provide the reader with a clear overview on the information analyzed from the studies considered, the following table will report a detail of the studies selected, the approach that authors' use in their them, and the importance assumed by tourism in the research (if it is the main topic discussed or a topic of a secondary importance). Moreover, the table will report whether the studies openly provide information about the key elements of social innovation (namely, societal needs addressed, society's capacity to act, relations/networks created).

N.	Authors & year	Title	Source	Type	Country	Approach	Perspective	Focus on tourism	Social innovation elements		
									Societal need	Capacity to act	Relations
1	(Chen et al., 2021)	Feasibility assessment and implementation strategies of green care in rural Taiwan	Landscape and Ecological Engineering	Article	Taiwan	Participatory research: interviews, on-site investigations, forum discussions, etc.	Experts, providers, and communities	primary	stated	stated	stated
2	(Chiara et al., 2019)	Functional foods for elderly people: new paths for multi "functional" agriculture	Open Agriculture	Article	Italy	Questionnaire, interviews	Providers, consumers	primary	stated	stated	stated
3	(Chin et al., 2021)	Agritourism resilience against Covid-19: Impacts and management strategies	Cogent Social Sciences	Article	Brunei	Interviews	providers	primary	stated	stated	stated
4	(Di Iacovo et al., 2014)	Transition management and social innovation in rural areas: Lessons from social farming	The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension	Article	Italy	Action-research	Providers, communities	secondary	stated	stated	not stated
5	(Fazzi, 2011)	Social co-operatives and social farming in Italy	Sociologia Ruralis	Article	Italy	Questionnaire, interviews	Providers	secondary	stated	not stated	stated
6	(Forleo & Palmieri, 2019)	The potential for developing educational farms: a SWOT analysis from a case study	The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension	Article	Italy	Questionnaire, interviews	Providers	primary	stated	stated	stated
7	(Gramm et al., 2019)	Transmitting and Transforming (Agri)-Cultural Values of Mountain Farming: Farm-Based Educational Services in South Tyrol	Mountain Research and Development	Article	Italy	Online questionnaire	Providers	secondary	stated	stated	Stated
8	(Kmita-Dziasek, 2017)	Social farming-based tourism from the perspective of metropolitan areas	Metropolitan commuter belt tourism	Book chapter	Poland	-	Providers	primary	stated	stated	stated
9	(Knapik, 2018)	The innovative model of Community-based Social Farming	Journal of Rural Studies	Article	Poland	Participant observation, interviews	Providers	secondary	stated	Not stated	Not stated
10	(Knapik, 2020)	Stimulators and inhibitors of the development of social	Journal of Rural Studies	Article	Poland	Focus group interview	Providers, consumers	secondary	stated	stated	stated



		care and support for the elderly in Poland									
11	(Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014)	Sustainable development in rural areas: The new model of social farming	Quality-Access to Success	Article	Italy	Not stated	Providers	secondary	Not stated	Not stated	stated
12	(Lanfranchi et al., 2015)	Agriculture and the social farm: expression of the multifunctional model of agriculture as a solution to the economic crisis in rural areas	Bulgarian Journal of Agricultural Science	Article	Italy, Bulgaria	Not stated	Providers	primary	stated	stated	stated
13	(Moriggi, 2020)	Exploring enabling resources for place-based social entrepreneurship: a participatory study of green care practices in Finland	Sustainability	Article	Finland	Participatory action-research	Providers	primary	stated	stated	Not stated
14	(Moriggi et al., 2020)	Caring in, for, and with nature: An integrative framework to understand Green Care practices	Sustainability	Article	Finland	Participatory action-research	Providers	primary	stated	stated	stated
15	(Moruzzo et al., 2020)	Italian Social Farming: The Network of Coldiretti and Campagna Amica	Sustainability	Article	Italy	Online questionnaire, interviews	Providers, experts	secondary	stated	Not stated	Not stated
16	(Nicolosi et al., 2021)	Social Farming in the Virtuous System of the Circular Economy. An exploratory Research	Sustainability	Article	Italy	Questionnaire, interviews	Providers	primary	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated
17	(Tulla et al., 2014)	Rural and regional development policies in Europe: Social farming in the common strategic framework (Horizon 2020)	Journal of urban and regional analysis	Article	Spain	Questionnaires, interviews	Providers, experts	primary	stated	stated	stated

Table 6: List of contributions included in the systematic review. Detailed information about the studies, the relevance of tourism (primary or secondary ) in them and key elements of social innovation emerging

Using snowballing as technique to find the studies in this research (Greenhalgh, 2005; Wohlin, 2014) allowed to easily elaborate a citation analysis, with the aim to understand the influence of certain studies and their approach on the scientific literature. Citation analysis is a technique rooted in network science which highlight the connections between different research and documents (Price, 1965). Results from the analysis can be visually displayed through a graph. To conduct the analysis, it has been used Cytoscape software (version 3.9.0), being particularly suitable for interdisciplinary research (Trujillo & Long, 2018). Results are displayed in the following figure:

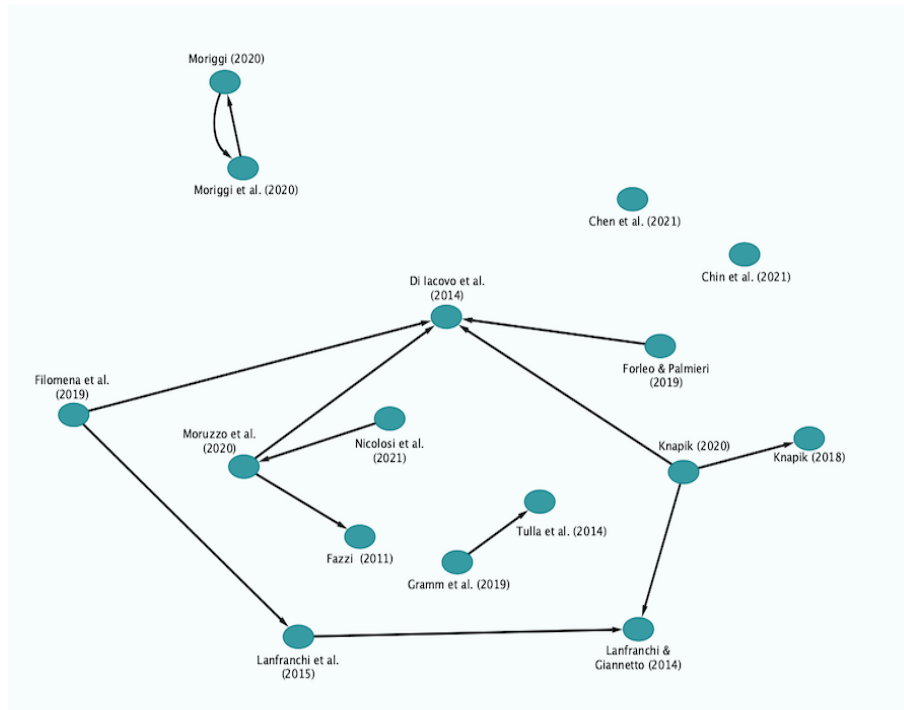


Figure 3: Citation analysis among considered studies. Author's elaboration through Cytoscape 3.9.0.

The analysis reveals the major influence of the study by Di Iacovo et al. (2014). This research directly or indirectly influences nine other studies considered in this review, related to both the Italian and the international contexts (Knapik, 2018; 2020). Next, there is the group of studies by Moriggi et al. (2020) and Moriggi (2020) focused on Northern European Green care experiences and, in a detached way, the studies from the non-European context by Chen et al. (2021) and Chin et al. (2020). It is interesting to note that both Di Iacovo et al. (2014) as well as Knapik (2020) and Chen et al. (2021), when describing the emergence of experiences in social agriculture, emphasize the supporting role of the university in this process through a participatory approach to research. While the approach of Di Iacovo et al. (2014) might have a direct influence on the studies of Knapik (2020), the same cannot be said with the study of Chen et al. (2021) who use this approach purely for the definition of a tourism system or destination.

### 1.9. Conceptualizing social farming tourism

Literature on social farming addresses tourism through different terminologies, both generic (e.g., *alternative*, or *rural tourism* as in Chiara et al. 2019), and specific. This latter allowing for word cross-combination (e.g., social-agritourism as in Tulla et al. 2014, social farming-based tourism (Kmita-Dsizie, 2017), social conscious agritourism (Tulla et al. 2014), ethical-social tourism (Nicolosi et al., 2021), highlighting a specific tourism function (e.g., educational tourism, in the case of Forleo and Palmieri, 2019) or referring to the resources involved, e.g., nature tourism (Moriggi, 2020) or food and wine-based tourism (Lanfranchi and Giannetto, 2014). The figure below provides an overview on the terms associated to tourism in social farming contexts.



Figure 4: Wordcloud reporting tourism-related terminology addressed by social farming literature

Interestingly, the word *social* allows for the highest number of word cross-combinations. A useful key interpretation can be given by Lanfranchi et al. (2015) who explain that the social aspect is related to the direct involvement of the most fragile people in social farming activities. Therefore, contextualizing the ethical or social consciousness that tourism activity might assume. Wordcloud terminology analysis identified *agritourism* as the most recurrent term across studies. This has a twofold explanation: firstly, there is a prevalence of Italian studies in this review. In Italy, leisure activities have a key role in social farming. Nicolosi et al. (2021) and Moruzzo et al. (2020) explain that the most recent 141/2015 national law on social farming fosters tourism and recreational activities among the sustainable farm initiatives. Secondly, the literature considered in this review addresses to agritourism according to two perspectives. One is provided by Chiara et al. (2019) who refers to agritourism as the act of making tourism, is to say to “any agriculturally-based activities that involve visitors to a farm” (p.533). The other is provided by Di Iacovo et al. (2014) and Knapik (2020) who rather refer to agritourism as a resource for the viability of social farming itself. Di Iacovo et al. (2014) consider that all “the farm resources that are partially unused (by agritourism) during the year, can be

made available to support the weaker and isolated (...) people of the community” (p. 330). A better use of the infrastructural resources allows, in turn, agritourist farmers to catch a new niche market and to diversify activities (Knapik, 2020). In their experience, Gramm et al. (2019); Knapik (2018; 2020) and Kmita-Dziasek (2017) highlight that this would allow for additional income generation.

Integrating social services into tourism facilities becomes even more interesting if seen in the light of studies from Chin et al. (2021). These authors identified the major role played by agritourism during the Covid-19 pandemic in providing safe outdoor services. This perspective shows that, when related to nature tourism, the concept of social farming, intended as the provision of services for mostly in-need people (Lanfranchi et al., 2015) rather extends to everyone. Indeed, in the broader perspective of *green care*, Moriggi (2020) and Moriggi et al. (2020) report about nature-based experiences from the northern European countries, which are set up for the broader civil society. Nevertheless, while in the experience of Moriggi (2020) nature tourism companies can design activities to fit any environment also thanks to the predominance of natural resources, in other experiences, explicit emphasis is rather put to on-farm tourism (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017; Gramm et al., 2019; Knapik, 2018; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019).

Despite all the differences, there is no doubt on the fact that nature constitutes a perfect learning environment for tourism purposes: not only it is intended as depositary of culture and tradition (Moriggi et al., 2020) but also as the means to transmit cultural and societal values (Gramm et al., 2019). Education is a key aspect in social farming tourism and might take different forms to allow individual care and personal growth (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017). Additional experience from Poland is highlighted by Knapik (2018) who seeks in nature a favorable environment to encourage the development of an *‘Educational social farm’* system, which they base on the UNESCO’s principles of teaching and knowledge assimilation (discovery learning, problem-based learning, interdisciplinary learning, etc.). In this regard, the Italian experience reported by Forleo & Palmieri (2019) stresses the ability of *educational* or *didactic farms* in supporting a sustainable development of rural territories, by linking agriculture to a specific educational tourism offer. Indeed, the educational nature of these farms allows to catch a specific tourism demand that an agritourism alone could not do. In this light, Kmita-Dziasek (2017) places social farming tourism as an activity both transversal and supportive of the labour, educational and health sectors which helps, in the framework of multifunctional agriculture, to strengthen the human well-being by mitigating the urban-rural relations. In the perspective of Tulla et al. (2014) social and recreational activities are among the main empirical experiences registered across Europe: they become a key element in the so-called *‘inclusive farming sites’*, which associate work inclusion for disadvantaged people to agrarian and rural transformative activities.

Lastly, the *community-based* aspect of initiatives seems to be a red thread among the different experiences reported, although it might be open to different interpretations according to the specific relations with tourism. It might be useful to compare studies from Knapik (2018) and Chen et al. (2021), which are both

focused on explaining the process for constituting an integrated social farming model. While Knapik (2018) involves tourism and leisure activities in a model designed for the community, Chen et al. (2021) make the tourism activity itself the reason to constitute a community-based model, defining different forms of tourism experiences (long-stay tourism, and agricultural working holiday) according to the diverse social needs and local resources.

## 2. Discussion

The results show that social farming tourism can be defined as a way of providing human well-being which, in the aim of not excluding anyone, includes everybody. The examined literature shows that the recreational and leisure activities form an integral part of social farming services. But also, that tourism activity can also strengthen the development of social farming services. In social farming tourism, tourism and social services overlap, and the process can start from either side and can involve either aspect to various extents, according to the specific goals to pursue. Indeed, as any other form of social innovation, social farming tourism strictly depends on the context and on the perceived social challenges. While practices always need to be contextualized, the literature shows a range of elements that, even to a different extent, are common to the diverse experiences: *a better use of the resources*; diversification of activities; education and personal growth; and community-based purposes, intended as both a service *from* and *for* the community.

The following paragraphs discuss how social farming tourism potentially answers to social challenges; on how and to what extent it enhances the society's capacity to act, with a focus on the specificity of each of the actors mentioned; and on the kind of social relations/collaborations it can create.

### 2.1. Social farming tourism in response to societal challenges

From the studies considered in this review, it is possible to detect several social needs that social farming tourism can give a response to. First and foremost, *the need to recreation*. But also, some challenges strictly related to the 'rural', as the *migration and the absence of services in the most remote areas*; *population aging*; *social work inclusion*; and *urban-rural balance*. As the reader might guess, there is quite often a combination and mixture of these topics.

#### 2.1.1. *The need to recreation*

Studies provided by Lanfranchi et al. (2015) who, describing the Italian and Bulgarian experiences, point out the importance of holiday centers for rural tourism, which offer activities related to agricultural leisure and recreation. Additional studies from Finland (Moriggi, 2020; Moriggi et al., 2020) explain that green care tourism has the main goal to let people have access to recreational benefits from nature. Similarly, Kmita-Dziasek (2017) describes the agricultural and rural landscape as a space allowing for relaxation and re-integration, among others (p.210). While some authors report about experiences specifically directed

to the most fragile people (Lanfranchi et al., 2015), some others address them to everyone, regardless of their age or individual needs (Tulla et al., 2014; Moriggi, 2020; Moriggi et al., 2020, Kmita-Dziasek, 2017). This last point is sustained by Chin et al. (2021) who show the importance of agritourism in ensuring the access to leisure and recreation for the broader civil society, even in a dramatic moment where border closure and social distancing impeded travel.

### *2.1.2. Outmigration and depopulation*

When related to rural areas, it is obvious to associate problems related to depopulation and lack of basic services, succeeding each other in a vicious cycle. This is mostly evident in areas that have suffered intensive exploitation or that, for their nature, have always been more isolated (Knapik, 2018; Di Iacovo et al., 2014). In this context, the creation of events for leisure, fun, recreation, and sport might help in strengthening ties with the surrounding environment, thus reinforcing rural areas' stability (Knapik, 2018; Lanfranchi et al., 2015). Social farming tourism becomes particularly relevant in those territories that in Italy are defined as 'inner areas', especially comprising mountainous landscapes, where very few survival conditions exist besides of agriculture and animal breeding. In the studies provided by Forleo & Palmieri (2019) and Gramm et al. (2019), educational farms become an accelerator for the development of these areas, since they avoid migration flows by creating new employment opportunities for local people. As a consequence, this positively influences the familiar cohesion: agritourism itself becomes a means to transform the *(agri-)culture*, whose identity in mountainous territories is still linked to patriarchal principles. Therefore, service provision allows women to redeem employment on-farm (Gramm et al., 2019). The contribution from Di Iacovo et al. (2014) also highlights the capacity of social farming activities to make an area more attractive for tourism purposes, in a sustainable perspective of well-being of the territory and its inhabitants.

### *2.1.3. Population ageing*

In addition to migration flows and the demographic fall experienced in rural areas, population aging is another serious issue affecting the global context. In the European experience, Knapik (2020) describes the "European orphanhood 70+" as the condition of isolation faced by elders in rural areas, which she considers to be the result of the depopulation process. Thus, both Knapik (2020) and Chiara et al. (2019) point out the need to provide them with the basic assistance services that are often missing in remote territories, by employing agritourist infrastructures, as Di Iacovo et al. (2014) also suggest. From one side, this would ensure to the elders the possibility to "rediscover the old values and the happiness of (...) joining a community (...) in a natural landscape" (Filomena, 2019, p.534). From the other side, ensuring professional caring to elders would guarantee a valid support to the other family members (Knapik, 2020). Evidently, these studies implicitly look at tourism as an alternative offer to balance the lack of welfare systems in providing social services. Conversely, studies from Chen et al. (2021) point out the need to face

the opposite phenomenon: though the concept of 'rural retreat epidemic', they describe the newest Taiwanese trend of travelling to rural areas. To moderate the effects of a massive and unbalanced displacement, they face the necessity of defining a tourism offer aimed at 'rural community-based prevention in primary care', also to ensure all the assistance services in the destination.

#### *2.1.4. Social work inclusion*

Social farming tourism can help to improve the quality of life of the most fragile people in two different ways (Tulla et al., 2014): the first one is through designing for them leisure services, according to the single needs, aimed at providing *the need to recreation*, as described in the previous paragraph. The second one is to improve their work and social integration (Moruzzo et al., 2020; Fazzi, 2011; Tulla et al., 2014), by looking at social farming tourism as an activity able to create additional jobs. The latter case is mostly evident in Mediterranean countries where working and social inclusion of the most fragile people are among the major societal challenges (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Di Iacovo, 2020). Fazzi (2011) explains that, in the act of providing work integration for disadvantaged people, the Italian cooperatives contribute to human enhancement and social inclusion. Additional work by Moruzzo et al. (2020) showed the ability of the highly diffused agritourism in Italy to employ different in-need people (among which especially people with intellectual or physical disabilities and relational problems). Tulla et al. (2014) also stress the capacity of rural tourism "to be readily combined with agrarian projects (for) diverse functions, (among which) to provide jobs for individuals with disabilities (and) at risk of social exclusion". By providing an insightful case study from a social cooperative in Catalonia, Tulla et al. (2014) highlight that the cooperative's work also becomes significant for the whole rural community, since it increases tourism visits and stays.

#### *2.1.5. Urban-rural balance and environmental sustainability*

In social farming tourism, natural resources and places are key elements to ensure the human well-being. Therefore, urban-rural relations assume a relevant importance both for the provision of leisure services (Nicolosi et al. 2021) and for the maintenance of natural landscapes (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017). Emphasis on urban surroundings is given by works from Moriggi (2020) and Kmita-Dziasek (2017): in the Finnish study of Moriggi (2020) the act of providing activities in the city surroundings would ensure "people's accessibility and recreational use of urban forests and lakes" (2020). Kmita-Dziasek (2017) also stresses the importance of urban surroundings in improving the urban inhabitant's quality of life in Poland. Kmita-Dziasek (2017) points out an additional societal challenge: in her experience, social farming-based tourism becomes a means to protect the natural environment from the persistent expansion of metropolitan areas (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017). Guaranteeing a "easily accessible (and) high quality social service functions" (p.210) is therefore essential to ensure that "the metropolitan centre do not develop at the expense of its surroundings" (p.210). The necessity of a feasible and coordinated tourism plan is also highlighted by

studies from Chen et al. (2021) who, in the experience of the Taiwanese “retreat epidemic” must face the severe impacts on rural areas that a massive and intense stay would cause.

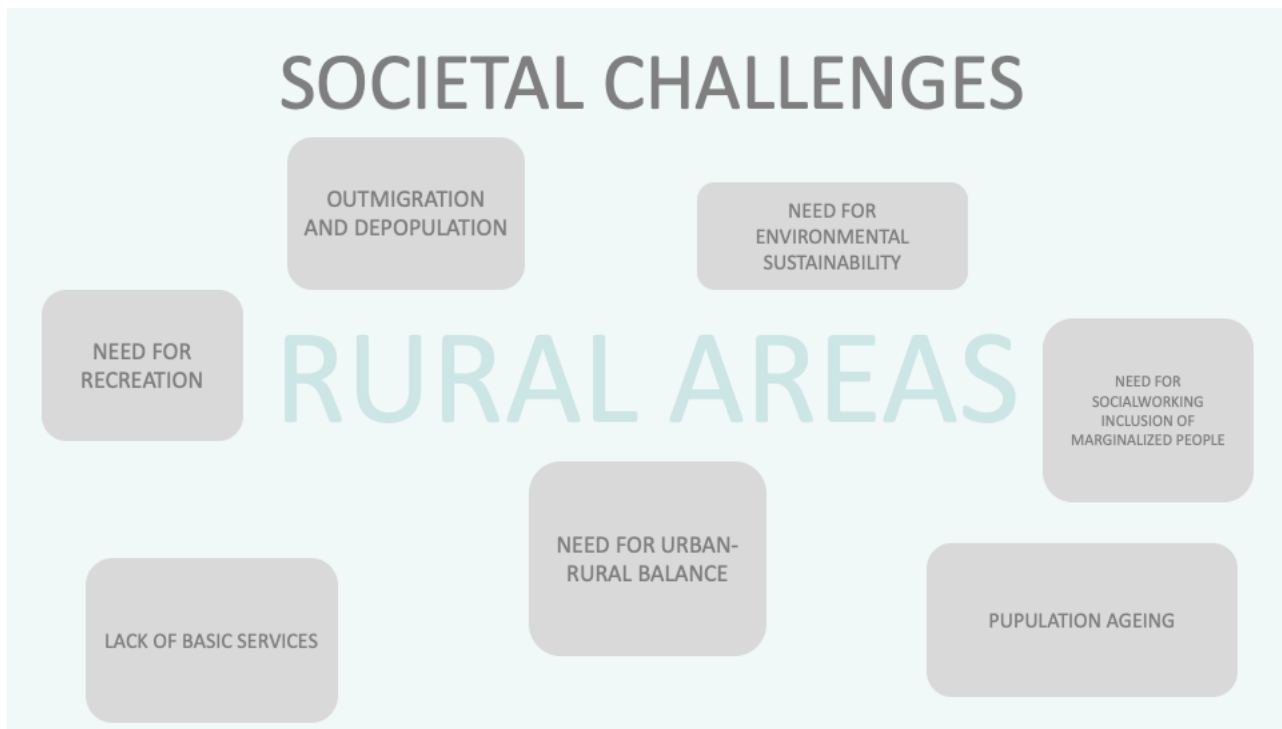


Figure 5 – The role of tourism in response to the challenges affecting rural areas. Author’s elaboration on the studies examined

## 2.2. Social farming tourism enhancing society’s capacity to act

Successful social farming activities are developed in supportive environments born from the collaboration among different societal actors (Knapik, 2020). The literature considered in this review identifies social farming tourism as playing a key role to enhance the action from the governmental (Lanfranchi et al., 2015; Moruzzo et al., 2021; Nicolosi et al., 2021; Moriggi et al., 2020; Kmita-Dziasek, 2017; Chen et al., 2021; Chin et al., 2021) the entrepreneurial (Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014; Lanfranchi et al., 2015; Moriggi et al., 2020; Fazzi, 2011; Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019), the civil society (Tulla et al., 2014; Gramm et al., 2019), and academic actors (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Knapik 2018; 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Chiara et al., 2019).

### 2.2.1. Governmental capacity to act

According to Knapik (2020), a legislative framework is essential to ensure the diffusion of social farming activities: by providing an overview on the European experiences, she finds the ‘lack of regulation’ the main reason to justify the underdevelopment of the phenomenon in the European post-socialist countries. Studies considered in this review show that in Italy, social farming tourism counts on a favorable legislative tradition. In fact, the Italian jurisprudence has always supported farmers in practicing a range of multi-functional agricultural activities including “travel, educational and cultural services” (Lanfranchi et al., 2015, p.712). This reflects in the national social farming law 141/2015, which is aimed at promoting working inclusion and



employment, social activities, therapeutic services, and educational projects (Moruzzo et al., 2021). Therefore, the main trait differentiating social farming from green care services is the intention to encourage farm innovation and sustainable service provision (Moruzzo et al., 2021; Nicolosi et al., 2021). Conversely, for the broader green care framework, the experience provided by Moriggi et al. (2020) identifies the basis for the development of nature tourism activities in the Finnish law institutionalizing the universal right to the nature. In the absence of a legal framework, the Polish experience reported by Kmita-Dziasek (2017) draws the attention on the importance of governmental support to local initiatives: through the case of the *National Educational Farm Network*, she describes the development of a systemic tourism model in social farms, which is primarily encouraged and certified by the national government. Also, the extra-European cases (emerging in the social farming discourse) assume a major role in this context: in the Brunei's experience, Chen et al. (2021) demonstrate that a governmental temporary stand (as it is in the case of travel restrictions imposed by Covid-19 pandemic) can have a key role in favoring inclusive tourism activities in rural territories. Similarly, in the Taiwanese experience, Chin et al. (2021) explain that the engagement of the university for the design of senior long-stay tourism and agricultural working holidays is essentially rooted into a *Long-term Care plan* adopted by the local government to face the increasing 'population aging'.

### 2.2.2. Entrepreneurial capacity to act

Although governmental support is essential for the development of social farming activities, social capital remains the key element for activating processes aimed at increasing social welfare (Lanfranchi & Giannetto, 2014). This is particularly evident in Mediterranean contexts, where transition processes are often characterized by explorative innovative experiences, which only need to be encouraged (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). Contributions considered in this review highlight the capacity of social farming tourism to generate single or collective actions. The first one concerns entrepreneurial motivations and decisions, while the second one refers to experiences born from the civil society.

The rapid socio-economic changes of our societies lead farmers to dress as 'social workers' and to use their activities to improve the quality of life and social well-being of local communities (Lanfranchi & Giannetto; 2014; Lanfranchi et al. 2015; Nicolosi et al. 2021). Nicolosi and colleagues explain that "the combination of innovation and rural development has acquired more and more importance for supporting the identification of business models with diversified production activities oriented towards the needs of quality services for rural areas and connections with urban areas, such as didactic services, social, rural well-being services (...)". In the Nord-European experience (Moriggi et al., 2020), the entrepreneurial actions are driven by a strong commitment in guaranteeing a continuous and universal access to nature. In Italy, Fazzi (2011) identifies social tourism as one of the main activities provided by *rural cooperatives for local development* with the aim to approach the broader local community besides addressing activities for the social and working inclusion of disadvantaged people.

In the context of Italian didactic farms, Forleo & Palmieri (2019) identify the entrepreneurial capacity to act in the willingness to spread knowledge of nature and to transmit its values (p.434). This is fairly similar to the joy of sharing an experience in the nature reported by the Finnish study from Moriggi et al. (2020). Nevertheless, in the Mediterranean case, Forleo & Palmieri, (2019) commit this motivation to an economic profitability, which, as highlighted by Di Iacovo et al. (2014), is essential for the survival of the farm itself. To conclude, a strong entrepreneurial capacity to act emerges from the Brunei's experience during the most recent pandemic: within the temporary closure of tourism activities, agri-tourist farmers' investments in inclusive tourism resources (among professional training, infrastructure, etc.) turned out to be a successful strategy for the provision of rural activities in more favorable times to travel.

### *2.2.3. Civil society's capacity to act*

Although inferior in number, studies considered in this review shed light on the capacity of social farming tourism to foster civil society's actions. Civil society is intended as the association of physical persons with aims other than governmental or economic. Research of such movements come from Mediterranean contexts, including Spain and Italy. In the first case, it is about a single case study, while is the second reports on a systemic model.

In the Italian experience, Gramm et al. (2019) contextualize the phenomenon in the educational initiative named '*School on the Farm*', born in the South Tyrol territory from a women farmer association. This contribution highlights the willingness of farmers to provide educational and cultural services in farm settings, through their skills and knowledge. While in the Spanish experience, Tulla et al. (2014) report about the case study of a Catalan social cooperative born by young people who decided to move to a rural area at a time when the local population was moving to the city. Together with the main agricultural production, rural tourism activity allows the social integration of disadvantaged people and the multifunctionality of the initiative, which is described as "economically viable, socially just and environmentally sustainable" (p. 48).

### *2.2.4. University capacity to act*

Social farming tourism enhances the active engagement of the university towards a social and territorial development, in collaboration with different local actors. Knapik (2020) makes clear that in social farming experiences "creating appropriate social conditions (for users) demands a wide range of actions and the engagement (...) of institutions, organizations and (...) economic entities". Earliest studies from Di Iacovo et al. (2014) on social farming demonstrate how, in the absence of specific regulations, universities can act as 'accelerators' in the rural transition process, favoring social innovation experiences, which, in Italy, mainly proceed from agritourism contexts. Further evidence from Italy (Chiara et al., 2019), Poland (Knapik 2018; 2020) and Taiwan (Chen et al., 2021) recognize universities have an important role in the creation of social farming experiences. Knapik (2018) describes the *Community-based Social Farming* model as an experience born by joining the efforts from the university and a first pilot social farm. Other contributions from Knapik

(2020) and Chen et al. (2021) also suggest university engagement is important for the creation of systemic models facing *population aging*, with the addition of specific agritourism activities aimed at senior well-being, as in the case of Chiara et al. (2019). It stands to reason that in those studies, the methodology adopted is mainly qualitative to display a comprehensive overview on the characteristics of the service to design. According to Knapik (2020) it is important to clarify “the expectations of beneficiaries towards the type, form, and range of care services (which should) be juxtaposed with the opinions of potential service providers” (p.9). Chiara et al. (2019) and Chen et al., (2021) provide a practical example of this: in the Italian case, the senior agritourism experience has the aim to counteract isolation, therefore activities are designed as a moment for relaxing and enjoying nature and agricultural tradition. While, in the Taiwanese case, activities are based on the principles of *active aging*, therefore they are designed on agricultural labor purposes, as in the case of agricultural working holidays. A summary of the results emerged from this analysis is provided in the following figure:

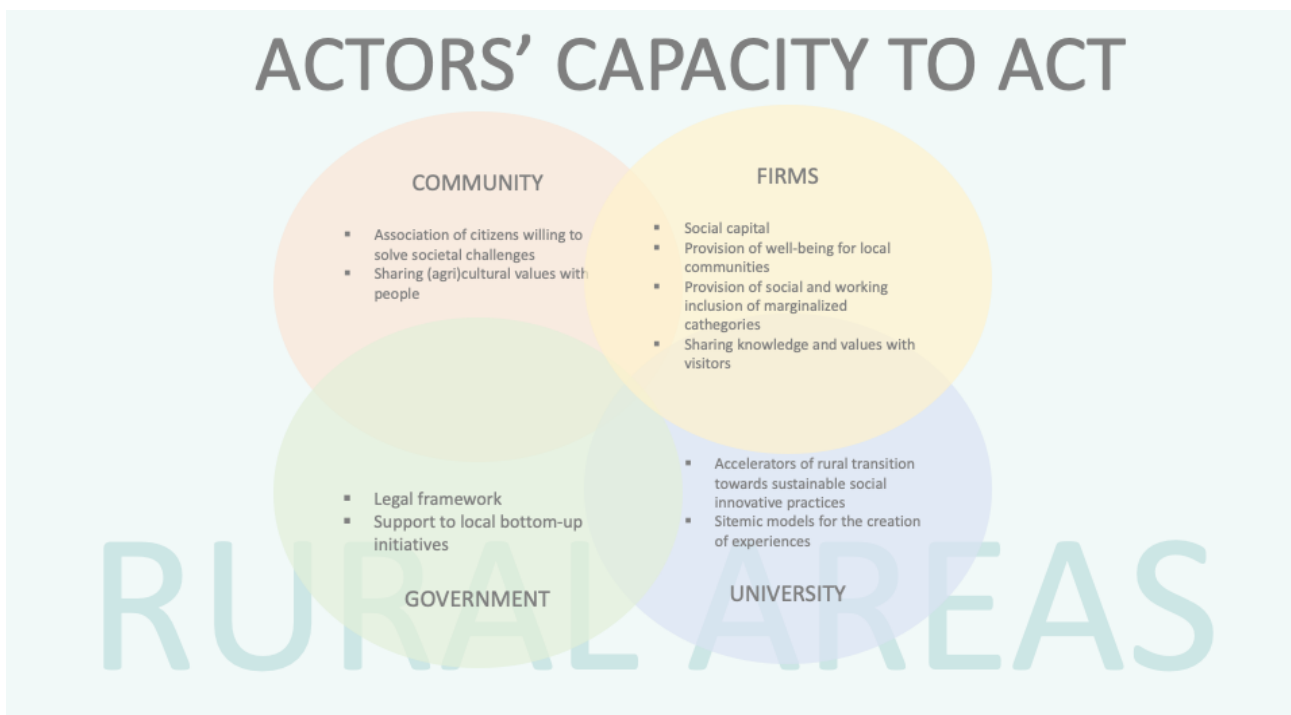


Figure 6 – Actors’ capacity to act through tourism in social farming. Author’s elaboration on the studies examined

### 2.3. Social farming tourism fostering relations and collaborations

The following figure will give an overview of the relations and collaborations fostered by the tourism activity in social farming:

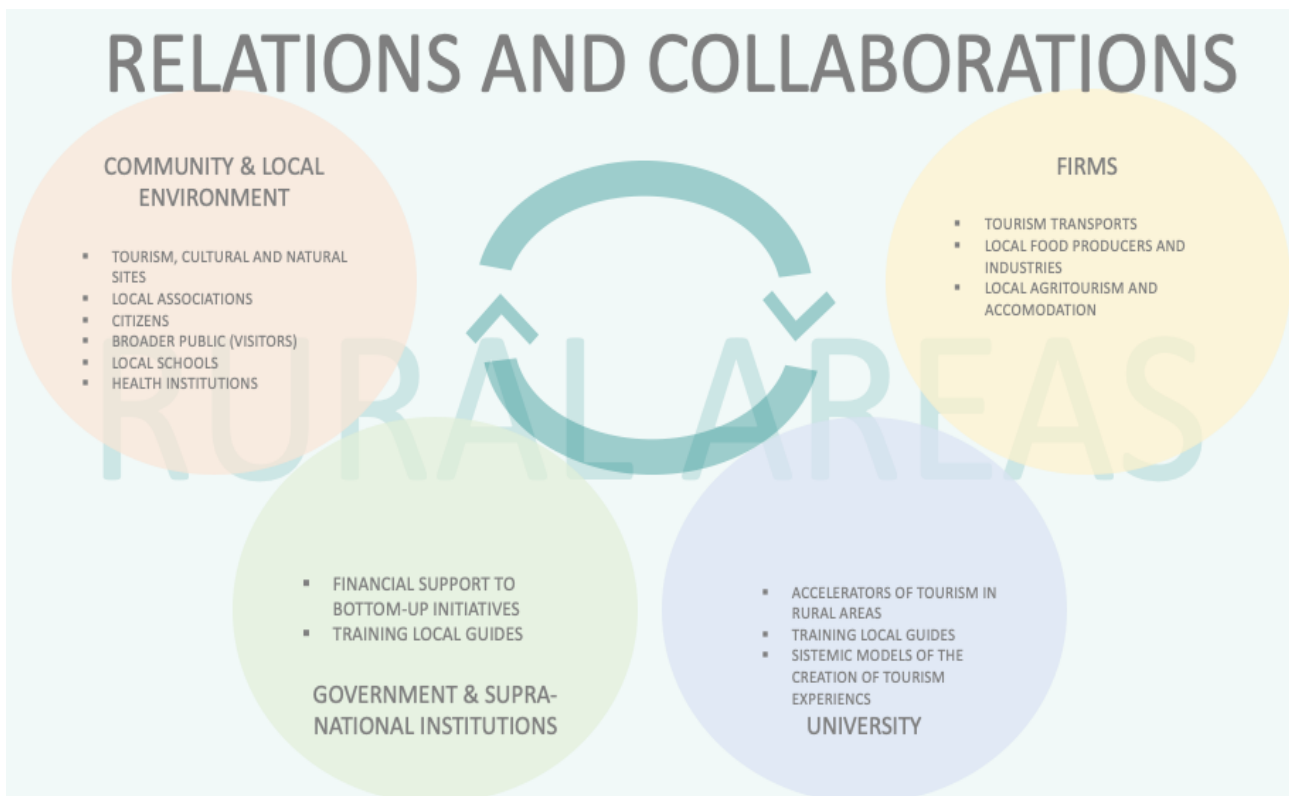


Figure 7: Relations and collaborations fostered by tourism in social farming. Author's elaboration based on the studies considered in the review

The literature reviewed shows that among the activities conducted in social agriculture, tourism contributes to stimulating collaboration between the various actors (highlighted in the previous section), creating, or modifying their relationships. Especially in Mediterranean contexts where there is a strong involvement of agricultural enterprises, the relationships they establish with the territory are functional to the recognition and functioning (social and economic) of the activities conducted (Di Iacovo et al. 2014). The first studies on social enterprises by Fazzi (2011) show that activities aimed at enhancing the territory allow for the creation of additional relationships with other farmers (social and non-social cooperatives), public administrations, citizens, and local producers. In turn, the most recent studies by Nicolosi and colleagues (2021), show that the more relationships established in the territory, the greater the diversification of the portfolio of activities for the companies. A practical example of this is reported by Tulla et al. (2014) who, in explaining the activities carried out by the social cooperative *L'Olivera* in Spain, point out that the activity of oil and wine production, which allowed for the work integration of some people with disabilities, not only stimulated joint networking and marketing initiatives but also stimulated tourism in the company and in the surrounding area“(it has been) complemented with wine tourism activities and visits to the bodega, which brings visitors to the area who combine their stay in the village with visits to the Cistercian convent (...)”.

In general, the organization of services in social agriculture has brought together different actors and at different level (Kmita-Dziasek, 2017), which Lanfranchi et al. (2015) summaries in five categories, including therapists, instructors, educators, consultants, and farmers. However, depending on the service offered by

individual farms, the literature points to further elements of connection with the territory: for services dedicated to the elderly, Chen et al. (2020) suggest several actors related to the health sector and surrounding hospitals. Chiara et al. (2019) also suggest the greater involvement of nutritionists and agronomists in order to present a culinary offer adapted to specific needs, as well as the involvement of local associations (e.g., Caritas), as pointed out by Knapik (2020) and Chen et al. (2020). When the tourism service is organised in the context of educational farms, collaborative needs may change, integrating, for instance, the need to network with schools and local governmental structures, as well as possible associations of other local farmers, to enable farm visits for children (Gramm et al. 2019; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019). For generic tourist visits, moreover, Forleo and Palmieri (2019) also identify the need to extend collaborations with accommodation businesses and other food industries. Both Knapik (2020) and Gramm et al. (2019) emphasise that the organisation of tourism and recreation services requires further connection with public bodies in order to be able to finance the activities when aimed at the citizens themselves. In addition to cultural and environmental attractions that can be included in the organisational space of the recreational service (Tulla et al. 2014; Forleo & Palmieri, 2019), Chin et al. (2019) suggest more connection with public institutions and universities for the training of personnel. Conversely, better networking with transport agencies is generally suggested (Chen et al. 2020; Knapik, 2020; Moriggi et al. 2021).

## 2.4. A Comprehensive framework to understand tourism in social farming as a social innovative practice

Aiming at answering the research question proposed by this study related to understanding in which terms can tourism in social farming be considered a form of social innovation, the following figure presents a framework to understand the phenomenon, according to the results from the literature investigated:

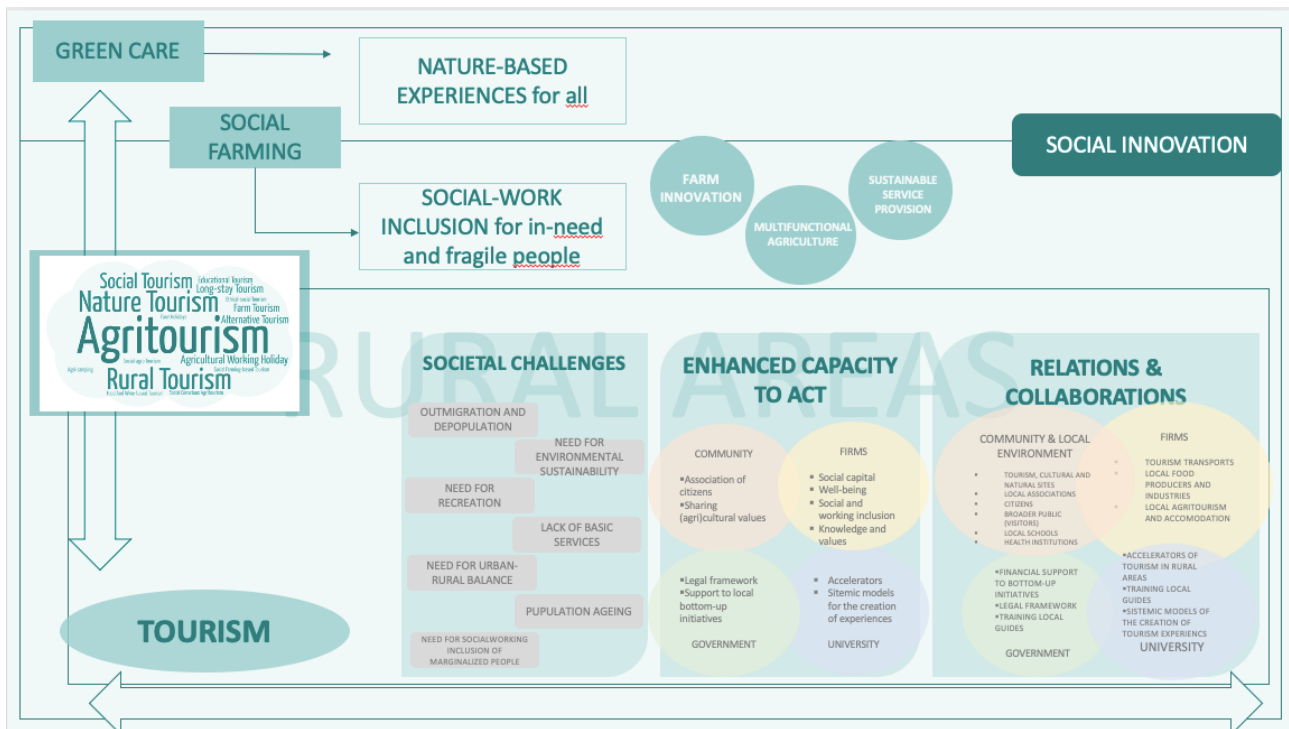


Figure 8: A comprehensive framework to understand tourism in social farming as social innovative practice

The framework proposes an initial distinction between *Green Care* and *Social Farming* practices (mainly detailed by Di Iacovo et al., 2014). Among these two, the first refers to nature-based experiences, where nature has its dominant presence and there outdoor well-being activities become a hallmark of the experiences developed in northern Europe (Moriggi et al., 2020; Moriggi, 2020). The second, focuses on the social and working inclusion of the most fragile people and has a more ‘on-farm’ dimension in the development of the activities. In the latter case, agricultural multifunctionality is used to create community services which, at the same time, also contribute to business innovation (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). Tourism activities, depending on the context in which they take place, can assume different functions and meanings, going from being a form of agri-tourism, especially in contexts where it is more developed such as Italy (Nicolosi et al., 2021; Moruzzo et al., 2020; Chiara et al., 2019), to nature tourism, especially in northern Europe (Moriggi et al., 2020; Moriggi, 2020), to agricultural working holidays, as a new form of systemic service organized with the aim of creating well-being holidays through working activities in nature (Chen et al., 2021). Zooming on social farming, the framework allows to understand, in which ways tourism activities constitute social innovative practices in social farming. The first section related to the *societal challenges* reveals that social farming tourism can particularly meet the growing need for recreation in nature, while contributing to better balancing between urban and rural areas and encouraging environmentally sustainable

activities. Concerning the other two sections, related to the *enhanced capacity to act* and the *relations and collaborations* established between various actors, it emerges that recreational and tourism activities arise from the desire to share local culture and values, by creating close connections with the local community, including local tourist and cultural attraction, farms and accommodation, and strengthening connections with the schools and health centers. In this process, the university plays an important role in co-creating models for carrying out specific activities. This role, emphasized by Di Iacovo et al. (2014), is particularly evident in the study by Chen et al. (2021) where the different forms of tourism activities emerge. Finally, the role of government is crucial not only for providing a legislative framework that supports nature-based recreation, but also to provide specific funding to enable the development of such activities, comprising the training of human resources, together with universities.

### **3. Conclusions**

This study was aimed to understand in which way tourism in social farming can be considered a social innovative practice. Starting from the assumption that social agriculture has been identified as a social innovation in rural areas in response to a very strong sense of resilience (Di Iacovo et al. 2014; Della Torre et al. 2020), this study asks whether and in what terms tourism in social agriculture can be considered itself as an evolution of social innovation. Therefore, starting from definitions of social innovation provided by the European Commission (2011) and the Murray (2010), the study attempts to answer three questions, i.e., which types of challenges tourism in social farming responds to (RQ1); in what terms it contributes to the capacity for action of the actors of the quadruple helix (RQ2); and which relationships and collaborations it fosters (RQ3). Through a systematic literature review that starts from the terminologies related to social agriculture previously identified by scholars (García-Llorente et al. 2018), it highlights several European and non-European studies that clearly highlight the role of tourism for social purposes.

The results from the literature review, as an initial step in exploring the reality (Tranfield et al. 2003), show that tourism in social agriculture contributes to combating some of the most pressing challenges of our times, i.e. the need for recreation and wellbeing that allows for a greater balance between rural and urban areas and the ever-increasing need for environmentally sustainable services; the need to increase basic services that rural areas are lacking and that also contribute, as in a vicious circle, to forms of abandonment and depopulation of marginal areas and population ageing; but also supports the creation of opportunities for social and work inclusion for fragile people.

In relation to the 'capacity to act' of the various actors, social enterprises use tourism as a means of wellbeing for communities, sharing values and knowledge with visitors (together with the civil community) and creating new employment opportunities for fragile groups. The local government supports the initiatives mainly through a legal framework, while the university acquires both the role of accelerator of sustainable practices and co-creator of systemic development models.

With regard to the relationships established, new relationships emerge with tourist transport companies, local producers and agritourisms in the area. In the case of the local community, relationships emerge with tourist and cultural sites but also with local schools for educational tourism opportunities. With regard to collaboration with universities and government, the need for training for local guides also emerges.

This study is not without limitations. First, there were few studies that were eligible for this research. Much has been written in terms of social farming and tourism but, as this review shows us, there are still few studies that treat the two topics synergistically. Considering that there are so many cases on an empirical level, further studies on the topic are called for to advance knowledge of this practice that fosters the possibility of an inclusive and sustainable future. Specifically, studies of concrete experiences could prove useful in testing how actors have mobilized themselves for the creation, development, and sustenance of such activities, as well as which collaborations have particularly proved indispensable to this objective. Among other things, this would make it possible to identify important elements at managerial level for practitioners.



# CHAPTER II

## Developing a collaborative model for helping social businesses to foster inclusive tourism in rural areas

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The development of tourism in rural areas needs a collaborative inclusive-oriented approach (Moreno de la Santa, 2020). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism can foster the social and economic inclusion of rural territories, by integrating marginal populations in the participation and sharing of tourism benefits (UNWTO, 2020a). While favoring the community empowerment, this approach also leads to sustainable territorial development, by advancing the infrastructure needed to make rural areas more accessible for people with different needs (UNWTO, 2020b). However, creating new accessible products and services is not sufficient to empower rural populations. To effectively address the contextual needs and make tourism a sustainable activity, scholars argue for new collaborative models for the development of rural tourism, having inclusion as their core mission (Moreno de la Santa, 2020).

The major issue for inclusion is not that rural communities lack in tourism, rather they lack consideration in the tourism planning (Moreno de la Santa, 2020). Indeed, marginal areas, with an abundant and diversified cultural heritage, are places of growing interest among tourists (Matos Silva et al., 2022), but the fact that tourism remains rooted in its traditional approach, leaves little space to new actors to intervene (Mottiar et al., 2018; Dhales et al., 2020). This limits the flourishing of any kind of accessible service from socially inclusive businesses (Dhales et al., 2020), thus hampering the process of social inclusion in the tourism sector (Dhales et al., 2020).

The most insightful theories on inclusive tourism remark the pragmatic need to ask ‘*who*’ and ‘*how*’ is included in tourism processes (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018), thus helping to “evaluate current tourism practices [and] detect where changes are needed [to] guide new tourism development” (p. 587). In rural areas, scholars argue for new social innovative practices able to address this topic in a systematic and participated way (Matos Silva et al., 2022). Here inclusion should be ensured by fostering community participation in decision making, allowing for the creation of accessible tourism products, while promoting rural development through inclusive business models (Matos Silva et al., 2022).

However, the unsolved question is how to create an inclusive-oriented collaboration (Moreno de la Santa, 2020) in a way to help social businesses to foster inclusive tourism services (Dhales et al., 2020). By embracing these gaps, the present study aims at designing a collaborative model for the development of inclusive tourism in rural areas, in a way to align visions and interests of actors for a meaningful participated environment. The following research questions are leading this study: *how to design a collaborative approach*

*to help social businesses develop an inclusive tourism in rural areas? In which way can collaboration lead to an inclusive tourism development?*

This study is built on the principles of participatory action-research (PAR), which is a useful approach to engage different stakeholders in a collective discussion (Kindon et al., 2007). It is operationally supported by theories on *Community Business Model Canvas (CBM)* helping the strategic visioning of collaboration, and the *Theory of Change (ToC)* as for the strategic planning of actions, needed to make an inclusive collaborative pathway feasible. The model has been applied in the context of social farming, an innovative way to deal with rural context deficits (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). In this context, different actors collaborate to allow social entrepreneurs to provide rural communities' well-being through the implementation of agricultural resources to develop health, educational and employment opportunities for the social inclusion of mostly vulnerable people (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Tulla et al., 2017).

## **1. Theoretical background**

### 1.1. Inclusive Business Model Canvas for an inclusive rural tourism

Business models (BMs) are organizational tools used in the business field. A BM describe the way an organization creates, delivers, and captures value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). To help the strategic business planning, Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010b) developed a visual template helping the strategic visioning: the *Business Model Canva* (BMC) appears in the form of a visual chart designed according to a customer-oriented approach (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). It is formed by nine different blocks, concerning the *value proposition*, which sets the need addressed by the business activity; the *key activities* carried out by the business; the *key resources* needed to do so; the *customer segments* and *customer relationship*; the *channels* through which reaching and interact with customers, the *key partners* selected for the management of the activities; the *cost structure*; and the *revenue streams*.

BMCs have been applied to different contexts and for different purposes. Starting from the model created by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010b), Scaramuzzi et al. (2020) define a community business model in rural areas. The authors use it as a useful tool for planning the multi-diversification of agricultural enterprises for the creation of an agri-tourism chain. Another application comes from Weiss (2017), who developed a 'communitarian version' of it, useful to communities to work together towards more sustainable objectives (Weiss, 2017; Bertella et al., 2021). In this case, some sections have been added or substitute the ones proposed from Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) for businesses. A comparison is provided in the following figure:

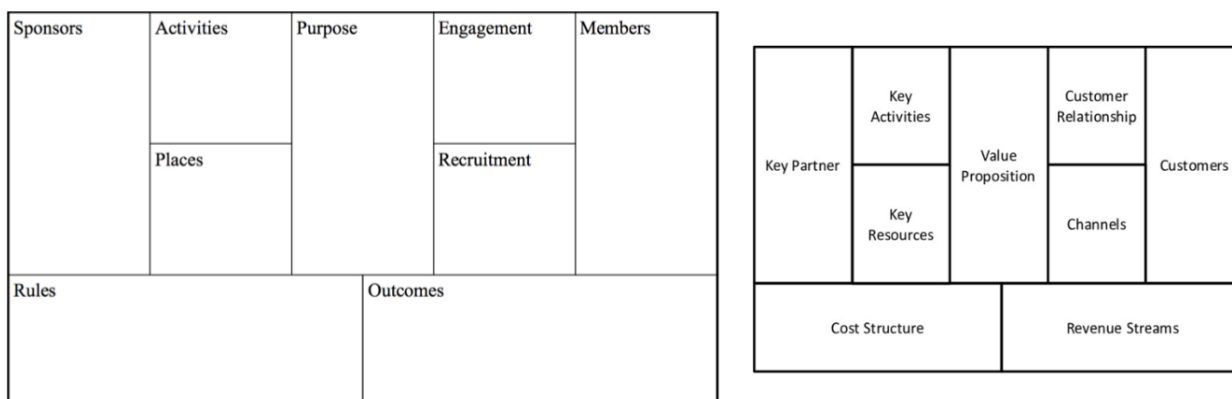


Figure 9: Comparison between Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) on the right, and Community Design Canvas (Weiss, 2017) on the left

One of the evolutions of the concept of BM relies in the *Inclusive Business Model (IBM)*. Contrarily to the well-known concept of *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)* where businesses engage in external projects for societal problems, IBMs are deeply rooted in an inclusive growth perspective (Schoneveld, 2020). The United Nations refers to IBM as a type of business model that seeks to create value for low-income communities by integrating them into a company’s value chain as clients or consumers in the demand side, or as producers, entrepreneurs, or employee in the supply side (United Development Plan, 2016). IBMs can be applied individually by social businesses or organizations to find solutions to social and working exclusion of marginalized people (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2013; Dhales et al., 2020). But there is evidence of their application among different actors to develop an inclusive social ecosystem, where the value proposition results in the mutual dependency and co-evolution of participants (Zhu & Li Sun, 2020).

### 1.2. Theory of Change for an inclusive rural tourism

The *Theory of Change (ToC)* is an operational tool used for strategic planning of actions towards a desired change (Stame, 2004). It provides a clear picture of why and how change happens, by working on “the space between the actual input and the expected output of a program” (Stame, 2004; p.58). ToC is a qualitative collaborative process where is possible to engage different stakeholders into a deep reflection about a social challenge (Vogel et al., 2012). Being a practical operational tool, ToC become easy-to-use for practitioners, who can employ it to detect problems and design useful pathways towards a sustainable change. This is the reason why it is suggested as an operational tool for governments and civil society<sup>17</sup>. In the pursuit of change towards more sustainable societies, the United Nations Development Program (2016)

<sup>17</sup> URBACT -Urban Development Network Program: <https://urbact.eu/>

considers ToC a meaningful vehicle towards a society 'which leaves no one behind', by creating more democratic solutions to address inequalities and discrimination, with the aim to benefit the mostly vulnerable societal groups.

Despite these enlightening premises, ToC still finds little application in the tourism field (Twining-Ward et al., 2021). The World Bank (Twining-Ward et al., 2018) promotes it internationally as a tool helping both developers and planners to improve tourism projects in all its phases, from designing, to execution, and evaluation (Twining-Ward et al., 2018; 2021). Few evidence from literature shows its use to find collaborative innovation-oriented actions to improve the sustainability of the tourism sector (Bertella et al., 2021) or to find possible paths towards more inclusive activities (Phi et al., 2018). ToC is often used during workshops, to bring together and discuss about different perspective and identified needs (Bertella et al., 2021). However, in the case of social inclusion, it is recommended to pay attention to possible tensions that may arise between participants, blocking or diverting the process (United Nations Development Program, 2016). Therefore, when related to the specific topic of inclusiveness, Phi et al. (2018) suggest to gathering data through interviews and individual approaches, allowing for a greater freedom of the actors involved.

## **2. Methodology**

The tourism literature on inclusion suggests the need for scholars to play a more active role in engaging in a participated discussion among actors of different backgrounds with the aim to come up with innovative inclusive solutions (Nyanjom et al., 2018; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). Participatory action-research (PAR) is a methodology that allows scholars to research *with* more than *on* communities (Kindon et al., Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This methodology allows researchers to join local communities in detect, unfold, and address solutions for social challenges (Kindon et al., 2007).

The use of participatory research presupposes that researcher know that there is no 'fixed' research methods or strategies, but that the use of one method highly depends on the circumstances. PAR allows for the use of (and combination of) numerous research methodologies, from the most common to the most creative, including participant observation, surveys, interviewing, mapping, community art and media, shared analysis, writing and presentations, and learning by doing (Kindon et al., 2007:17). Especially in rural areas, where stakeholders generally have a more limited approach to collaboration, PAR can be an excellent tool to foster discussions about a common objective and to overcome obstacles to collaboration that might arise (Perkins et al., 2021).

When related to make tourism more sustainable, PAR results to be a useful approach to overcome the sustainability challenges of destinations (Grant, 2004; Goebel et al., 2020; Sisto et al., 2022; Bertella et al., 2021). This by allowing local communities to get involved in the decision-making processes of their own territories (Goebel et al., 2020), or co-creating long-term sustainable plans (Grant, 2004; Bertella et al., 2021) and designing more inclusive tourism products (Nyanjom et al., 2018; Sisto et al., 2022). In the research

process, participatory approaches should be employed from the preparation to the implementation of specific actions (Grant, 2004) and inclusion should be guaranteed by ensuring the involvement of mostly fragile groups (or their representative institutions) into the discussion process, which would also guarantee the effectiveness of accessible tourism products (Sisto et al., 2022; Nyanjom et al., 2018). Some scholars also address the topic of inclusion to the way the researcher fits into participatory research. Indeed, although the participation of multiple actors, and diverse in nature, would ensure a comprehensive perspective on the topic under investigation, some unbalanced powers might occur. Therefore, the role of the researcher becomes important not only to collect and process data, but also to report them (Sisto et al., 2022).

The figure below presents an overview of the steps and aims of the research, according to the literature explored. The details of the figure will be explained throughout the description of the following phases:

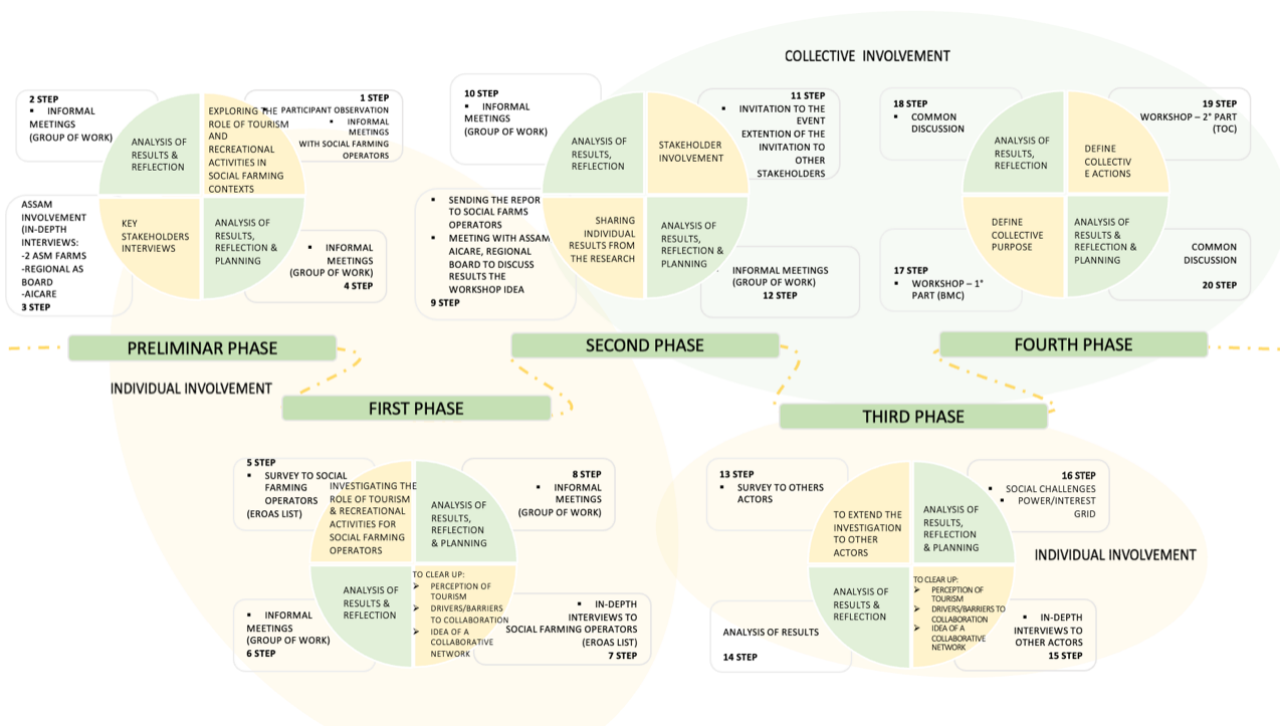


Figure 10: Steps and aims of the research. Author's elaboration on Perkins et al. (2021), Sisto et al. (2022) and Bertella et al. (2021)

### 2.1. Defining the target community

The first step in participatory research is to define the target community with whom to get involved in the research process. In this research, the target community is composed by different actors among social farms and social cooperatives engaged in social farming activities (27); representatives from the regional government board dedicated to agriculture and social farming (3); 2 representative of a local association for rural development which is involved in different projects with local businesses, named ASSAM- *Associazione Servizi Settore Agroalimentare Marche*<sup>18</sup>, 1 representative of the national association AICARE – *Agenzia*

<sup>18</sup> Assam Marche: <http://www.assam.marche.it>

*Italiana per la Campagna e l'Agricoltura Responsabile e Etica*<sup>19</sup>, 2 trade associations, 1 member of a social hospitality association- *Agritur-ASO*, 1 representative of social, educational and welfare services working with social farming entrepreneurs. Some of these actors participated in the research from the very beginning, while others joined later, since it was allowed the principle of *snowballing* to involve interested actors in the research (Phi et al., 2018). Generally, researchers could ask support and guidance from public sector and regional experts to gather participants in the research process (Perkins et al., 2021). However, when it comes to accessibility, stakeholders should be numerous and from different sectors, to have a broad perspective on inclusiveness (United Development Program, 2016) and of the possible development dynamics (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; Nyanjom et al., 2018). When related to the design of inclusive tourism products and services, scholars generally agree on the need to involve marginal groups into the discussion-decision process, because influencing and, in turn, being affected by the results (Nyanjom et al., 2018; Sisto et al., 2022). However, stakeholders are often identified based on existing contacts. Therefore, to ensure inclusion in the process of investigation, *snowballing technique* might be considered to effectively involve relevant stakeholders interested in the research. In this case, it suggested that stakeholders involved might involve, in turn, other participants (Phi et al., 2018).

## 2.2. Collecting data

The research has been conducted from the end of 2019 to the end of 2022, through several phases. The first step carried out in this research is a *desk research*, with the purpose of exploring the role of tourism in social agriculture. Indeed, when related to inclusion and accessibility it might be useful to explore the meaning of the topic and how local actors deal with it, thus reviewing both theories and practices through exploratory *desk and field research* (Sisto et al., 2022). To do so, laws on social farming were investigated to understand the limitations and possibilities for social enterprises to carry out recreational activities in social agriculture. In particular, the review of regional law R.L. 21/2011 and the subsequent national law N.L. 141/2015 showed that recreational activities, although conducted for social purposes by different



<sup>19</sup> AICARE: <https://www.aicare.it/>

companies, are largely carried out by educational farms. The latter, having educational purposes related to the enhancement of the territory and environment, address their tourism activities to a wide audience. To explore the topic at the empirical level, the desk research also comprised several searches of local businesses through websites or through word of mouth with people who directly knew some of them. At the same time, researchers also carried out desk research with the aim to explore international cases of social farming tourism, both related to single farms and possible networked activities. This last research showed potential international cases of benchmark. At this stage, it was also conducted *field research*, through visiting in person some of the identified local experiences in occasion of on-farm events, where the characteristics assumed by recreational activities in social settings could particularly emerge.

In this case, through the technique of *participant observation*. Musante et al. (2010) describe participant observation as a method in which the researcher takes part in the everyday activities and interactions of a group of people, with the aim of grasping tacit and explicit aspects of a given cultural set and the everyday life that is generated. In January 2021, after several months of social interactions interrupted due to Covid-19, it was possible to conduct the internship period in the company (as per the requirements of the innovative PhD described above) at the social cooperative San Michele Arcangelo – Soc. Coop. Agricola ONLUS. The participant observation, in both cases, generated numerous notes on the type of relations of the company with the local area and customers, the main activities that attract visitors to the company, as well as the impact that this activity has on the company's social projects.

During 2021, *narrative interviews* were conducted with the two companies described above, and a further five with key informants (business associations, representative of the regional offices dedicated to social agriculture, the ASSAM and AICARE). Unlike semi-structured interviews, which aim to investigate specific aspects of reality from given theories, the narrative interview is an open interview in which the use of key questions serves to stimulate the storytelling about anecdotes that led to the present state. Therefore, rather than interviewee and interviewer, this creates a narrator-listener dynamic (Kartch, 2017). The aim was to understand perceptions as well as aspects related to the organization and management of tourism in social farming. The questions that guided the narrative interviews were as follows: 1) *In what terms can we talk about tourism in social farming and why is tourism important for social farming?* 2) *How much have educational and recreational activities contributed to the development of social farming?* 3) *What kind of activities can be carried out? By whom and to whom can they be primarily directed?*

In the next phase, relating to the year 2021, a survey was prepared that was useful to learn about the history of the company and the respondent, as well as to understand the type of relationships that social farmers have established within and outside their territory for the development of their activities. This survey was sent to all the companies whose contacts could be found online among those included in the EROAS list. A total of 24 social enterprises participated in the survey. Of these, 22 continued with an interview, together with two others added at a later stage. The triangulation of data at the end of this phase made it possible to

develop an ego-network analysis, capable of mapping the actors involved in social innovation processes in agriculture (Triestep et al., 2018). To detail the categories of actors with which companies can be linked to carry out their activities, Fazzi's (2011) study on social cooperatives in Italy was considered. The table below proposes a set of questions asked during semi-structured interviews:

Questions to understand the features of networking	Questions to understand the challenges towards networking
How do you envision a collaborative network to develop tourism in your region?	Why do you think that tourism can be important for your company and the community?
What could it be the aim of a collaboration in tourism?	What are the motivations and obstacles that you might face toward a collaborative/networked approach for the development of tourism?
Which are the partners necessary to engage in the collaboration?	Which kind of resources are necessary to do so?
Which activities to carry out? And where?	
Who would be people interested in this kind of service?	

Table 7: Questions leading the interview process with stakeholders. Author's elaboration on Phi et al. (2018) on the right, and Weiss (2017) on the left

The last research phase consists of the definition of a research report that includes the entire study conducted. This report was defined with the aim of sharing it with all the participants in the survey, in order to stimulate a common vision of what emerged. The last step of the research consists in the definition of a workshop titled *'social innovation and inclusive tourism in the rural world: perspective on the development of collaborative actions in social farming'*, which took place at the social farm Montepacini, located in Fermo area. The aim was to outline a common vision with respect to the path to be taken for the integrated development of tourism in social agriculture. In this initiative, which provided for a mixed modality, between online and in-presence, purely visual tools were prepared through Power Point presentations. The initiative, which was held at one of the area's social farms, was attended by around thirty people, including those who had participated in the survey and new participants, invited at a later date.

Being the first occasion of bringing participants together, at the beginning it was useful to leave the floor to participants for an initial presentation of each company's activities, with a focus on tourism activities to encourage an exchange of best practices. Thereafter, we showed the results of the research and invited people to discuss together. The two main sections of the event were organized with the aim of working together on the common vision and actions needed to overcome obstacles to collaboration. Therefore, the 'social', 'networking' and activity-related 'tourism' elements were discussed with participants, during the event. Indeed, although the BMC refers to a number of complementary value propositions, a common vision is stimulated by working together.





Figure 11: A picture from the event organized at the social farm 'Montepacini', in Fermo province.

The following table presents all the research steps that characterized this study:

Time frame	PAR activity	Research approach
November 2019	Literature review on the phenomenon on the (inter)national context	Desk research
March 2020	Visit to a regional didactic farm (activities: tasting and storytelling)	Field visit / participant observation
Jan 2020 – Jul 2020	Review of the main laws in the national context (N.L. 141/2015 and R.L.21/2011)	Desk research
April 2020	Exploratory interview with a didactic farm	Open-ended interview
Jun 2020 – Jan 2021	National and international cases (individual and networked)	Desk research
Jan 2021 – Jul 2021	Internship in a social business addressing services to people coming from rehabilitation paths from drugs	Participant observation
June 2021	Interview with key stakeholder (regional association for rural development)	Open-ended interview
August 2021	Sharing research and methods with key stakeholder and regional government	-
September 2021	Pilot interviews with two suggested farms (online and in presence)	Open-ended interviews and farm visit
September 2021	Data elaboration / planning steps	-
October 2021	Sending questionnaires to social farms (EROAS list suggested)	Questionnaires
October 2021	Interviews with 2 key stakeholders, from: - the regional board related to agriculture and social farming development; -the national association AICARE Interview with 2 other stakeholders from local trade associations	Open-ended interviews

Nov 2021 – Feb 2022	Interviews with social farms interested in the research topic and available to participate in the investigation	Semi-structured interviews
Feb 2022- Jun 2022	Data elaboration and report preparation	IBMC ToC Preparation of a report
June 2022	Sharing results with social farmers and key stakeholders	-
September 2022	Meeting key stakeholders to set the following steps	-
September 2022	Sending invitations for the event (and welcoming to new stakeholders involved into the research)	-
October 2022	Organization of a workshop, divided into 2 main phases: 1.strategic visioning (Inclusive BMC) 2.Strategic planning (ToC)	Workshop

Table 8: Synthesis of the participatory action-research process in the context of social agriculture in Marche Region (IT)

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. The inclusive-oriented business model for tourism in rural areas

The results emerging from these phases were elaborated by the researcher. The questions that were proposed to the respondents, allowed to define a draft of collaborative inclusive-oriented BMC (Osterwalder & Pigneur; United Nations Development Programme, 2016) in rural areas. Given the social-oriented characteristics of the interviewed enterprises (Dhales et al., 2020), elements related to tourism as a source of social inclusion emerge (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). A first elaboration of BMC is proposed in the figure below, with a description of the different sections:

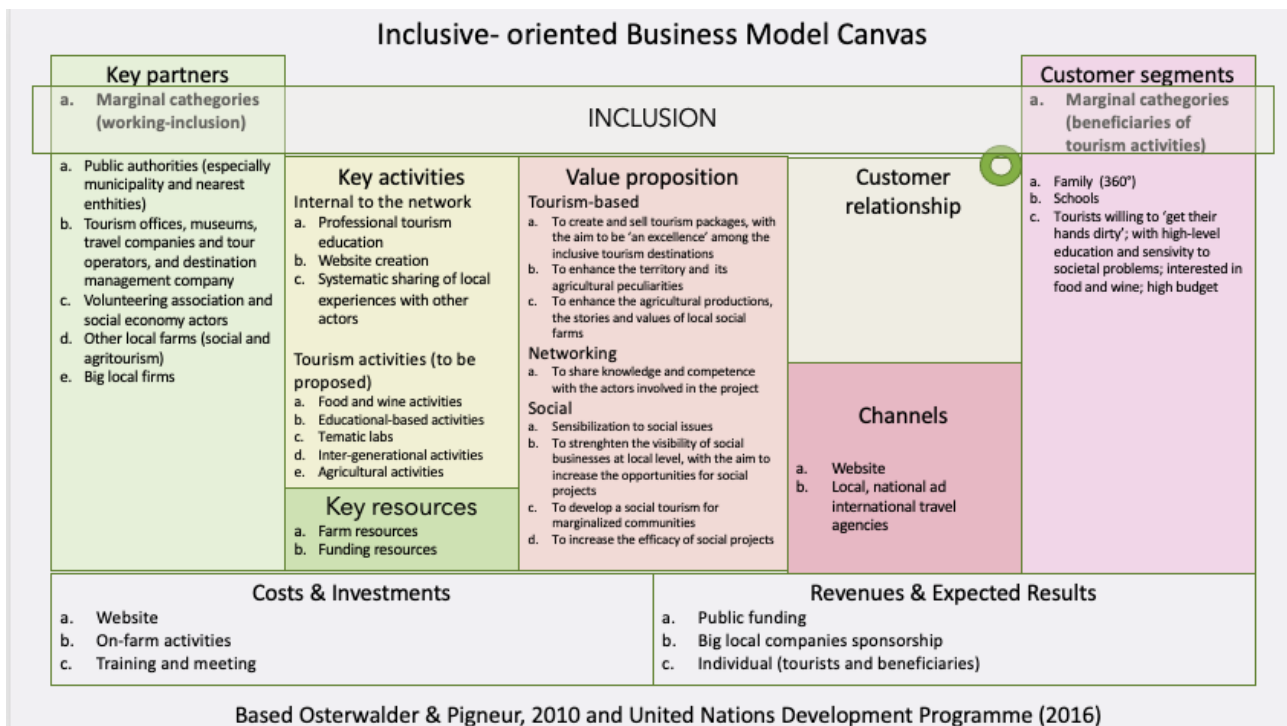


Figure 12: Inclusive-oriented Business Model Canvas. Author's elaboration on Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) and United Nations Development Programme (2016), and integrating results from the interviews with social farmers

Before giving an overview of the different sections that make up the inclusive business model for tourism, it is important to emphasize the characteristic elements of inclusion. According to the interviews, collaboration would generate inclusion from the perspective of both the production of the tourism service and its

consumption (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). This is evident when looking at the 'key partners' and 'customer segments' sections. In fact, the need to integrate those involved in social farming work paths into a tourism network (at company level) was highlighted by the interviewees. On the other hand, due to the specialisation of services carried out by individual companies in the area, tourism activities could also be aimed at involving the most marginalised categories in tourism activities. Going into the details of the model:

- a. *Value proposition*: the value proposition displays elements related to three different spheres. First and foremost, there are elements concerning tourism. Interviewees showed interest in collaboration with the aim to design and sell tourism packages which could combine the resources and expertise from each business. The main objective is to use tourism to enhance the territory and its cultural and agricultural peculiarities but also the agricultural products, the stories and values underpinning the different social businesses of the area. According to local farms, the heterogeneity of services provided in Marche region would allow to create a final “product of quality” or “excellence”. For other business, the value of networking with other local farms relies in the possibility to exchange experience and professional knowledge as an asset for problem solving in the daily activities. Lastly, a social dimension of the value proposition also emerged, related to making of social farming tourism a vehicle of sensibilization for the broad community towards social problems; but also, to develop a social tourism for the most marginalized categories. This is important for social businesses addressing their activities to elderly people, which recognize the importance of developing farm-stays inspired to the *co-housing* model. For other businesses, the importance of cooperation also relies on the possibility gain more visibility at local level and to increase the opportunities to develop more social services for people in need. Lastly, according to some social businesses, increasing the relations with other farms providing similar services would benefits the local marginal communities involved social farming working activities projects, since it would allow to change working activities more often.
- b. *Key activities*: the key activities in a collaborative inclusive-tourism development are intended both as the services to provide to tourists and the activities to carried out for the functioning of the network itself. The former comprises activities of food and wine tourism (e.g., farm visits and tasting or thematic labs) with the aim to enhance the agricultural peculiarity of the territory and the farm’s productions; but also, educational activities, related to the topic of food education, environmental sustainability and resource management in rural areas; some farms stress the importance of providing field experience in agriculture. In this case, it has been mentioned the phenomenon of *Woofing- World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms*, for being a tourism experience with which mostly young people are engaging to learn about agricultural organic productions and farm management. Lastly, social businesses addressing activities to elderly people or children (rural kindergarten) stress the need to create joint inter-generational recreational activities which would benefit both targets.

- c. *Key partners*: the key partners of a collaborative network would be first and foremost the local authorities. Together with volunteering associations and other actors of the social economy, local authorities are fundamental for the planning and management of services addressed to marginalized groups. For practical reasons related to the organization of the activities, it has been stressed the importance of involving first the municipalities and the local public actors surrounding the farms. Certainly, tourism and cultural bodies should also be partner of the network. In this case, the attention is towards other social-oriented businesses, like social restaurants which could complement an inclusive tourism offer and be an opportunity to create new employment opportunities for marginal people involved in working paths in social farms. The importance to connect also with local hospitality businesses and agritourism was mentioned; together with local museums, mainly related to agriculture and agricultural life; as well as travel agencies and tour operators for future promotion (nationally and internationally) of the territory.
- d. *Customer segments*: With regard to customer segments, several targets were identified. First of all 'the family', understood as the close or extended family unit, or as the individual member (from child to elderly person). Educational farms and enterprises with a certain vocation for educational topics expressed interest in addressing joint tourism offers for local, national and international schools. In this context, it is specified that due to the specific peculiarities of the territory, the educational experience for children might significantly differ from one farm to another. With regard to tourists in general, different targets have been identified depending on the resources and experiences that each social business can offer. First, a tourist was identified who travels for reasons related to the experience of food and local products. Next, with reference to the agricultural (and Woofing) experience, a type of tourist willing 'to get his/her hands dirty' was identified. With regard to the ethics of social experiences, the importance was emphasized of targeting a tourist who is open to having an experience 'different from the ordinary', who is sensitive to social issues and who approaches the visit to the area not with the presumption of demanding a standard service but to become part of the 'sense of community' those social enterprises offer.
- e. *Channels*: With regard to the channels for connecting with the consumer, there emerges a desire to create a special website that can enhance the inclusive experiences involved in the network; but also the possibility of a promotion of the area through travel agencies and tour operators that are sensitive to inclusive tourist destinations.
- f. The section on '*customer relationship*' still appear incomplete, due to the exploratory nature in which the research is embedded.

### 3.2. The Theory of Change for tourism in rural areas

The following figure presents an overview of the theory of change coming from the information acquired during the individual phase of interview and discussed during the workshop:

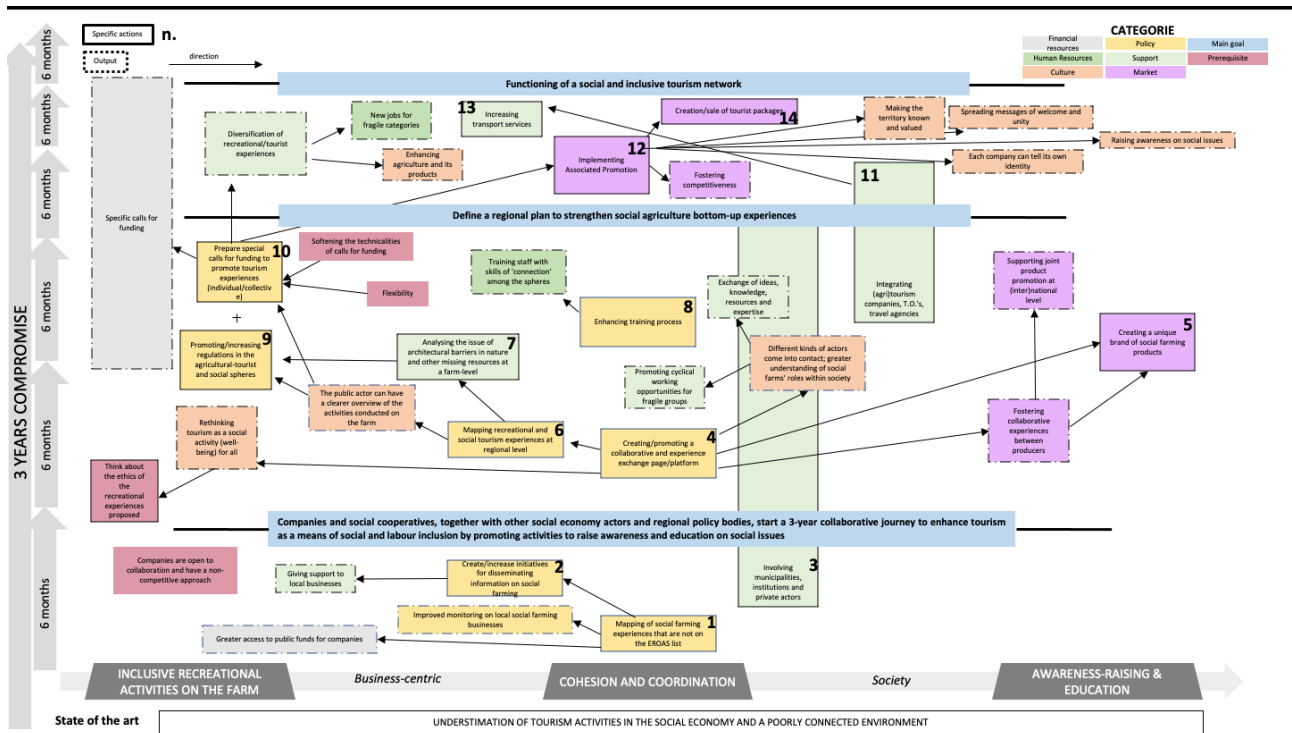


Figure 13: Theory of change (Phi et al. 2018) applied to social farming to allow a broader diffusion of tourism among social businesses

Results reveal a number of useful changes to make tourism in social farming possible, ranging from the business sphere towards a society level.

One of the critical issues towards this framework is that, although the activities were generally accepted during the event, they remained little discussed. Specifically, there was little discussion of the connection between the various activities, especially when related to the longer term. In fact, given the early nature of the discussion, the focus of the debate was mainly on the activities in the very short term. The conversation mainly focused on the need to shed the light on the fact that there are many social businesses which are not registered in the official EROAS list. This not only generates a lack of knowledge on the part of the public actor, but also constitutes a limitation for the businesses themselves to inspire and share knowledge for tourism development.

During the event, the importance of the first step of collecting all key players for tourism development was emphasised. Specifically, these actors should not only refer to the tourism sphere. On the contrary, they should start with the social and transport services surrounding the companies in order to be able to better organise initiatives. This step becomes crucial in order to understand the extension of activities, not only geographically but also thematically, depending on the type of connection that is created between the various companies, which may combine similar activities or refer to the same target. One of the fundamental

characteristics a collaborative project should have is continuity and emphasis on engagement and motivation to participate in activities, until the network becomes strong enough to continue independently.

# CHAPTER III

## Exploring the potential of social farmers' networking as a leverage for inclusive tourism

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Tourism would never be a sustainable activity without considering the well-being of local communities. Even though tourism has a great impact on world economies, this does not automatically make it a driver for local development (Cañada, 2018): for the latter to happen, the United Nations embrace the principles of *decent work* promoted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) (<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>), to encourage policies for creating quality jobs for all (United Nations, 2015). Although not impossible to achieve, such a goal is still very ambitious since strong discrimination, poor working conditions and limited social protection are issues yet to be solved in the tourism industry (International Labour Organization, 2022). This would be hard to change unless a more community-centered approach is adopted, allowing to also consider the needs of people and places typically marginalized or excluded from tourism (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

This practical necessity has to be combined with more theoretical insights. If it is true that tourism is inclusive when it creates the conditions for everyone to be included, it is of the utmost importance to consider how inclusive working conditions are (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018). But this topic still finds little attention in the tourism literature (Baum et al., 2016a) which focuses more on standard hospitality, leaving out alternative businesses such as social enterprises in rural places (Baum et al., 2016b), which, instead, turned out to be an asset to generate social and economic inclusion (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). Needless to say, the more neglected the topic is, the more difficult it is to orient decent working policies towards the tourism sector (Baum et al., 2016a).

Although social enterprises have generally been underestimated in tourism planning, they play a key role in making tourism a sustainable activity (Mottiar et al., 2018). In rural areas, whose development is particularly hampered by structural characteristics, social enterprises are not only able to develop tourism activities but also make them more inclusive, by creating employment opportunities for mostly marginalized communities (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018; Aquino et al., 2018). It is recognized that their work is strongly influenced by their ability to network, which allows them to secure human, technical and knowledge resources (Aquino et al., 2018) while contributing to a collaborative promotion of the territory (Mottiar et al., 2018).

Taking into consideration both the theoretical need to advance knowledge on tourism workforce (Baum et al., 2016 a,b) and practical need to improve it (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018), this study focuses on the context of social entrepreneurship. The questions investigated are: *how can the propensity of social*

*entrepreneurs to networking promote decent work in rural tourism? And in which way can barriers towards collaboration negatively affect it?* These research questions are addressed to the context of social farming, a social entrepreneurial activity that uses agricultural resources to provide social and working opportunities to disadvantaged people (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). Literature on social farming tourism only recently emerged, but not without highlighting the impact of tourism activities for a fair, sustainable, and inclusive rural growth (Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2020).

The case study methodology has been adopted (Yin, 2003a) and in-depth interviews with social farmers were carried out in the Italian region of Le Marche, a pioneer in developing experiences of social and working inclusion for marginal communities (Genova et al., 2020). Data were analyzed using a thematic approach (Gibbs, 2007; Saldaña, 2013) that revealed how social farmers contribute to the decent working pillars promoted by the ILO. The study has the following structure: a literature review exploring the topic of social entrepreneurship in rural inclusive tourism will introduce the research, with a focus the social entrepreneurs' drivers and barriers to collaboration; then, the case of social farming will be presented. Following, the methodology will be detailed and the insights on the investigated area will be provided. Findings are reported and discussed, and conclusions are drawn by detailing practical implications, while leaving room for reflection on future research.

## **1. Literature review**

### **1.1. Social entrepreneurs: why they matter for inclusive tourism in rural areas**

Why social entrepreneurship is important for the sustainable development of rural tourism is a question that scholars are increasingly addressing. Social entrepreneurs have always been underestimated by tourism practitioners (Mottiar et al., 2018), although they can use tourism to provide innovative solutions to contextual problems (Sheldon et al., 2017:7): it is by addressing challenges from their roots that they make tourism a more conscious activity for both visitors and residents (Pollock, 2015). Their impact is even stronger in rural areas, where resources, good transport connections, and employment opportunities are generally lacking (Peng & Lin, 2016; Mottiar et al., 2018). They use tourism to create new economic opportunities for local people (Lin Peng & Lin, 2016; Kline et al., 2014; Mottiar & Boluk, 2017), thus contributing to reduce the abandonment of rural places (Lin Peng & Lin, 2016). This creates not only an advantage to multiple local stakeholders (Naderi et al., 2019, Lin Peng & Lin, 2016; Mottiar & Boluk, 2017; Lang & Fink, 2019), but also brings the attention of a broader audience on the needs of most isolated areas (Mottiar et al., 2018; Lang & Fink, 2019). Indeed, social entrepreneurs adopt an educational approach towards tourism, allowing to share sustainable principles inside and outside the destination (Kline et al. 2014).

Besides many other sustainable purposes, rural social entrepreneurs can use tourism to generate inclusion. According to some scholars, social businesses are often created with the aim to protect the dignity of mostly marginalized communities (Biddulph, 2017; Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020; Moreno de la Santa, 2020; Dahles et



al., 2020). As Aquino et al. (2018) explain, they “might increase the likelihood for marginalized communities to have a meaningful participation into tourism, and for their needs and aspirations to be heard and actioned” (p.15). Inclusion might be promoted in different ways that may be more or less effective, from selling artistic products made by rural communities (Biddulph, 2017; Moreno de la Santa, 2020) to supporting employment opportunities for all, through business models adopting inclusive recruitment policies and flexible schedules and tasks (Lin Peng & Lin, 2016; Biddulph, 2018; Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020).

Nevertheless, in order to generate an inclusive economic growth in rural areas, there is the need to both develop and foster local skills and knowledge (ILO, 2017). Social entrepreneurship can do it in different ways: by creating activities to enhance local culture and heritage (Biddulph, 2017; Dahles et al., 2020) or by providing rural communities with the knowledge and skills related to hospitality and tourism managerial aspects (Lin Peng & Lin, 2016; Biddulph, 2017; Dahles, 2020; Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020). The latter does not always imply a direct economic return for the social enterprise (Biddulph, 2017) but can generate benefits in the long term for rural populations, by allowing them to develop their career pathways (Lin Peng & Lin, 2016; Biddulph, 2017; Dahles, 2020; Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020), and further entrepreneurial opportunities (Biddulph, 2018; Dahles et al., 2020; Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020). This is how the inclusion generated within the social enterprise has a much wider relevance.

As a matter of fact, the opportunity for social entrepreneurs to fulfill their mission will depend on their ability to manage the interest of different social groups (Naderi et al., 2019; Lang & Fink, 2019). Therefore, collaboration is an essential element for them to legitimize their business activities (Lang & Fink, 2019) as well as to build trust and social cohesion (Naderi et al., 2019). As a result, they will benefit from the structure of the networks established as well as the entire territorial context will do, by stimulating innovation (Naderi et al., 2019; Mottiar & Boluk, 2017) and a closer social dialogue with other companies and national and supranational public bodies, thus enabling greater coordination with reference to inclusive tourism activities that ensure decent work (Moreno de la Santa, 2020).

#### *1.1.1. Drivers towards collaboration*

One of the main reasons for social entrepreneurs to develop collaborations is to access resources and knowledge useful for their activities (Mottiar et al., 2018; Naderi et al., 2019; Lin & Peng, 2016; Kline et al., 2014; Lang & Fink, 2019). It must be considered that social businesses widely depend on public resources (Lang & Fink, 2019). Therefore, creating a coordinated environment with public actors is crucial for the feasibility of their social projects (Naderi et al., 2019; Kline et al., 2014; Lang & Fink, 2019; Dahles et al., 2020). At the same time, collaboration allows them to gather useful knowledge they might lack for their activities (Dahles et al., 2020). Moreover, with the aim of attracting visitors to rural areas, the non-competitive spirit of social entrepreneurship allows for partnerships with other local businesses to be established (Kline et al., 2014; Mottiar et al., 2018). This might serve both to strengthen the market, by creating competitive cost

advantages for consumers, and provide coordination to the activities of the entire destination (Kline et al., 2014). As a result, a collaborative approach turns out to be a valuable asset to disseminate the values of places, people, and products generally underestimated in rural areas (Mottiar et al., 2018; Kline et al., 2014).

Besides of being functional to the creation of effective tourism activities (Aquino et al., 2018), collaboration is a key asset for social entrepreneurs to foster inclusion (Biddulph, 2017; Aquino et al., 2018; Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020; Dahles et al., 2020). Partnering with local actors is essential to identify the nature of local challenges and set long-term goals for their social activities (Aquino et al., 2018), besides gaining emphasis on social causes and acceding to governmental aid programs and funding (Biddulph, 2017; Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020; Dhales et al., 2020). At the same time, horizontal collaborations with local organizations sharing similar goals allow a greater emphasis to be placed on social causes and projects useful for sustaining inclusiveness through tourism activities to be promoted (Biddulph, 2017). Furthermore, commercial collaborations are also essential to ensure decent work in rural tourism. Partnerships with local businesses make it possible to control production prices and foster work stability for employees (Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020). More in general, networking in rural context is a tool useful to social entrepreneurs to gather major visibility, thus calling the attention of public policies on their work as to develop policies to protect the dignity of the most vulnerable people (Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020; Dhales et al., 2020).

#### *1.1.2. Barriers towards collaboration*

It is recognized that territorial distance is a major factor affecting collaborations. Actors operating in the same territory find it easier to networking, since short distances can encourage the sense of belonging to a group united by the same objectives (Mottiar et al., 2018). However, it is also true that social entrepreneurs have a predisposition to work with like-minded people (Mottiar et al., 2018; Lang & Fink, 2016) who, going beyond the physical distance, show similar social goals and "a tone of transparency, collaboration, positivity and fun" for activities of common interest aimed at promoting local community's sustainability (Mottiar et al., 2018:85). Those factors become crucial to avoid competitive circumstances. As stated by Lang & Fink (2016), social enterprises often compete for the same public funds, that are essential to create and provide activities to tourists, but complicated to access for the huge bureaucracy. Therefore, when social enterprises see themselves as competing against each other rather than collaborating, the possibilities for collaboration would be reduced (Lang & Fink, 2016) as well as the exchange of mutual aid, knowledge, and ideas useful to the organization of their social-oriented activities (Mottiar et al., 2018; Dhales et al., 2020).

However, as demonstrated by Vazquez Maguirre(2020), the presence of policies facilitating the access to resources is crucial for companies to have greater stability in the provision of labor: "social enterprises paying decent wages often compete with disadvantage against profit-maximizing entities, as the latter can reduce cost by paying the minimum wages the market will bear [...]. This compromises the financial viability of social enterprises" (Vazquez- Maguirre, 2020:15). This has consequences both on the short-life

expectancy of social enterprises and on the inability to promote employment activities for marginalized communities, based on the respect for human rights and social security, as initially planned (Dahles et al., 2020).

## 1.2. Framing social farming in inclusive tourism

Social farming is an entrepreneurial activity involving agricultural resources to provide health, social and working opportunities to disadvantaged people (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Guirado et al., 2017). “Built on the principles of equal human, social and working dignity”, social farming developed in Mediterranean contexts is “an inclusive model” (Giaré et al., 2020), receiving support by farms and the whole the civil society (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). In this context, farms become a laboratory for personal growth, connecting the disadvantaged groups with the surrounding society through the development of sectorial working skills for their social and work integration (Pavoncello, 2018; Giaré et al., 2020).

Tourism is an important resource for the viability of social farming projects and an innovative response to an inclusive market demand. As a matter of fact, tourism has always been a resource for the economic sustainability of rural Southern European areas (Tulla et al., 2018; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2020) and a key asset for small family-run farms (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). Although literature on tourism is still in its infancy, recent contributions explore the numerous recreational services that social farming can generate, from the well-known agritourism, to sport and educational activities promoting a new responsible tourism approach known as ‘*Woofing*’ (Giannetto and Lanfranchi, 2020). As highlighted by Uvarova and Vitola (2019), while providing a practical support to societal challenges, small farms dealing with specific needs are also more likely to find new pathways to meet new market demands, which makes social farming a resource for the development of an inclusive tourism offer in rural areas (Calabrò et al., 2022).

Combined with agrarian projects, tourism can serve to develop social activities for local communities. It can promote the employment of people who cannot easily access the job market by providing them with specific and sectorial-related training (Tulla et al., 2018). A recent contribution by Moruzzo et al. (2020) details the employment opportunities offered in agritourism contexts to numerous people with intellectual, relational, and physical disabilities, which generate “positive externalities on the individual (through) improving skills of expression and participating in social life”, as underlined by Giannetto & Lanfranchi (2020). At the same time, while working in the interest of disadvantaged people, tourism becomes an opportunity for social farmers to engage with communities (Fazzi, 2011) by proposing a set of activities able to extend the tourism season, attract new clients, improve quality standards, and gain a stable source of income for themselves (Kmita-Dsieszek, 2017). Besides providing support to the same social farming projects, benefits deriving from social farming tourism activities include, among the others, the maintenance and promotion of rural landscape (Tulla et al., 2018; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2020).

Collaboration is therefore an essential precondition to develop inclusive tourism activities in social farming contexts. First and foremost, networks are vital for the viability of social farming itself. Since their sectorial specialization is joint by an open co-production, social farmers collaborate with both public and private actors to ensure the effectiveness of social activities for rural communities (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). Moreover, in his studies on social cooperatives, Fazzi (2011) reports that networks are more extensive for businesses engaging with agrarian and rural projects like tourism, which allow for a multitude of diversified activities generating social and work integration opportunities for users. In a consumption-based perspective, recent studies from Calabrò et al. (2022) point out that networking enables the creation of multiple ad-hoc services allowing visitors to base their decisions “on their personal wishes and choices” rather than having to choose among very few options.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Background context

Marche region is a fertile territory for the development of inclusive forms of tourism in social farming contexts. Being among the most predominantly rural regions in Italy, the need for health, educational and social services in the most depopulated areas prompted the regional government to support the emergence of pioneering social farming businesses (Genova et al., 2020). Compared to other Mediterranean contexts, the peculiarity of Marche region lies on the promotion of specific models, which promote specific activities for diverse social groups: the *'Agrinido di Qualità'* (quality nursery service) model targets children and provides kindergarten services, by applying Montessori principles of experiential learning in rural settings. On the other hand, the *'Longevità attiva'* (active elders) model targets elderly people. Being one of the regions with the highest rates of aging populations, the model aims at creating activities to support elderlys' food education, physical and mental well-being in a natural environment. The *'Inclusione Sociale'* (social inclusion) model is aimed at re-educating prisoners through activities in the agricultural sector as outlined by regional agreements with prisons and similar institutions. *'OrtoIncontro'* model (the kitchen garden) aims to reduce the gap between cities and rural areas bringing citizens to farms to participate in environmental and food education activities, by promoting the products grown by social farms. Only recently, the regional government in collaboration with local companies started to experiment a new model dedicated to people with disabilities, with the aim to understand the benefits of social farming on people affected by different disabilities. An overview on the initiatives: <https://www.regione.marche.it/Regione-Utile/Agricoltura-Sviluppo-Rurale-e-Pesca/Agricoltura-sociale>

However, the increasing number of experiences actually showed the need to systematize the topic of social agriculture through the Regional Law n.21/2011 on “Agricultural multifunctionality and farm diversification”, which complements the Italian National Law n.141/2015 dedicated to social agricultural projects. The regional law leaves room for the development of experiences both on farms and in social

cooperatives. Therefore, it allows for a wide range of experiences to be carried out but requires social enterprises to maintain a connection with agricultural activities, whose revenues should be higher than social projects. This is not only to ensure the financial sustainability of enterprises themselves but also to guarantee that social projects are actually designed and carried out in agricultural contexts.

Concerning the recreational aspect, the regional law, in line with the national regulation on educational projects, addresses both agritourism and social farming as services relying to the multifunctional aspect of farms. Two dedicated lists have been compiled to identify the companies providing the activities. For farms, being registered in these lists means to formalize the activities and the quality of their services, as a guarantee for the final consumer, but also to easily access specific funding calls:

- The *Elenco regionale degli operatori in agricoltura sociale* (EROAS list), currently listing around 70 social businesses, whose activities relate to educational and teaching services; social and health services; social and care services; job placement.
- The *Elenco regionale degli operatori agrituristici* (EROA list), listing more than one thousand businesses integrating activities related to hospitality; farm products supply; as well as the promotion of several cultural and sport events and well-being activities.

## 2.2. Case study

To understand how collaboration can help social entrepreneurs to foster decent work in rural tourism, and how obstacles to collaboration can hinder this process, the present study draws on case study strategy to conduct the empirical research (Yin, 2003a). Case study is described as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2003a, p.13). Specifically, the research adopts an embedded single case study, in order to examine several units of analysis located in a single context (Yin, 2003a, p.40). In this case, the study investigates the phenomenon of social agriculture in Marche region, by analyzing the peculiarities of some tourism farms and social cooperatives.

The first step consisted in crossing-reference the two (EROAS and EROA) regional lists and limiting the investigation to the organizations belonging to both. From this selection, only organizations dealing with social and care services and job provision were considered. The attention was focused only on hospitality-oriented social farms. The selection therefore excluded educational services for children and therapeutic services for care-dependent individuals, which are of lesser relevance to the central theme of marginalized people as tourism producers (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

At the end, twelve social businesses were included in the study. The Table below provides an overview of the companies examined. They were classified according to their legal form, to which a code was assigned for each unit of analysis, where F stands for *farm* and SC stands for *social cooperative*. The table shows their field of intervention, details of the social and tourist services promoted, as well as the target group to which these activities are addressed:

Type	Code	Field of intervention	Targeted groups	Services provided
Farm	F1	Social and care services	People with mental and physical disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Didactic farm</li> <li>- Experiential labs for children and elderly people</li> <li>- English language learning in nature for children</li> <li>- Nature tours at different levels</li> <li>- Educational and sustainability-related events about the use of alternative energies, environmental and food education.</li> <li>- Training activities for third companies and/or organizations</li> </ul>
Farm	F2	Social and care services	Elderly people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational and didactic activities for schools</li> <li>- Production of agricultural and processed products</li> </ul>
Farm	F3	Social and care services	Elderly people;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Musical experiences in nature for children.</li> <li>- Wellness activities in nature for adults</li> <li>- Sale of farm produce</li> </ul>
Farm	F4	Social and care services; job placement	People with mental and physical disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sale of farm produce</li> <li>- Cultural activities</li> </ul>
Farm	F5	Social and care services	People with mental and physical disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- B&amp;B</li> <li>- Sale of farm produce</li> </ul>
Social cooperative	SC1	Social and care services; job placement	People with physical disabilities; refugees and asylum seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Field and laboratory work</li> <li>- Agritourism (mostly residential)</li> <li>- Cultural and educational activities for schools</li> <li>- Summer camps for children and youth</li> <li>- Sale of farm produce</li> </ul>
Social cooperative	SC2	Job placement	People with drug addiction and legal impediments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Field and laboratory work</li> <li>- Sale of farm produce</li> <li>- Cultural events</li> </ul>
Farm	F6	Social and care services; social and healthcare services	People with physical disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural and private events</li> <li>- Didactic farm</li> <li>- Agricamping</li> </ul>
Farm	F7	Social and care services	Elderly people; children; adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agritourism</li> <li>- Nature-based wellbeing activities</li> <li>- Didactic farm</li> <li>- Cultural and educational activities for schools</li> <li>- On-farm visits</li> </ul>
Farm	F8	Social and care services	Elderly people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agritourism</li> <li>- Didactic farm</li> <li>- Farm visits for infancy and primary schools</li> <li>- Educational labs</li> </ul>
Farm	F9	Social and care services	People with mental, and relational, and economic problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational activities</li> </ul>
Social cooperative	SC3	Social and care services; health services; job placement	People with relational problems; elderly people; children; people with economic difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural and educational agricultural activities for children and elderly</li> <li>- Agritourism</li> <li>- Tourism itineraries</li> <li>- Spaces for accessible tourism in nature</li> </ul>

Table 9: Case selection. Overview on social farms and their activities

### 2.2.1. Data collection

From the selection above, the authors tracked down the contacts of companies to be involved in the study, which were collected either from their web pages or forwarded by third parties under previous authorization. A form was sent to the companies with the aim to explain them the intent of the research and formalizing their consent to participate in it. Data were collected from September 2021 to February 2022 through in-depth interviews with open questions about their motivation to networking and the aims of

collaboration, as well as about the reasons that might hinder their networking propension. Except for one case, the interviews were conducted online and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on the willingness to give frank answers by the interviewee. Because of the different size of companies, the research included the participation of founders, managers, and others from managerial boards. The interviews, conducted by two authors, were audio-recorded with permission of the participants.

### 2.2.2. Data analysis

To proceed with the data analysis, the interviews were digitally transcribed by one of the authors and then shared with the other researchers. The data collected through the interviews were subsequently analyzed using a qualitative approach to understand how collaboration can foster decent work in tourism in the context of social entrepreneurship in rural areas. To do so, the answers were first matched with decent working pillars. A thematic approach to data analysis (Gibbs, 2007; Saldana, 2013) was therefore adopted to clarify how collaboration can support the pillars. The analysis was then carried out using a triangulation process, which assumes that the data analysis is performed by each researcher separately and agreed upon afterwards (Denzin, 2017). Accordingly, the data analysis involved three different but consecutive steps, whose details are provided below:

1. After familiarizing with the transcription of the interviews, the authors traced the answers back to the decent work pillars. A framework was therefore set up combining the decent work pillars proposed by the ILO (namely, *employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue*) with ten useful indicators defined by an ILO group meeting in 2008 (ILO, 2013). A detail of the framework is reported in the table below:

International Labor Office's Decent Working Pillars			
Pillars	Area of intervention	Description	
<b>(1) Promote fundamental human rights at work</b>	Respect fundamental principles and rights at work	Freedom of association and the right to engage in collective bargaining are fundamental human rights to be safeguard along with dignity and social justice when speaking of decent work, together with the elimination of forced or compulsory labor, child labor and discrimination in employment or occupation.	
<b>(2) Employment creation</b>	Promoting jobs and creating enterprise	Employment creation allows for decent work when raising living standards and widening access to incomes	
<b>(3) Social protection</b>	Promoting security in the workplace and security of livelihood	Social security serves to make people feel secure and able to take advantage of new changing opportunities. It serves to meet people's urgent subsistence needs and to provide protection against contingencies, and as such is an important aspect of decent work.	
<b>(4) Promote social dialogue</b>	Promoting social dialogue at multiple levels	Decent work should foster dialogue among workers', employers' and government's representatives, with the aim to design and implement critical economic and social policies.	
Tripartite Meeting Decent Work Indicators			
N.	Indicator	Description	Referred pillar(s)

1	<b>Employment opportunities</b>	It provides insights regarding the quantity of labor demand and supply in a country. It covers concepts mainly related to the (un)employment	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 2
2	<b>Adequate earnings and productive work</b>	Work has to be productive and provide workers with adequate earnings. It also contains working poverty rate to monitor working poverty levels.	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 3
3	<b>Decent working time</b>	It is related to employment and working time, that is, the time associated with activities within the production boundary of the System of National Accounts and the arrangement of this time.	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 3
4	<b>Combining work, family, and personal life</b>	It is related to standards and fundamental principles and rights at work and social protection.	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 3
5	<b>Work that should be abolished</b>	It stresses out that certain types of work, such as child and forced labor, should be abolished. Measurement can inform action and monitor progress towards its elimination.	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 3
6	<b>Stability and security of work</b>	Indicators show a share of employment related to a specific unstable or insecure worker category.	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 2 PILLAR 3
7	<b>Equal opportunity and treatment in employment</b>	It refers to equal opportunities and working conditions for all people who may suffer discrimination by sex, race, ethnicity, indigenous groups, rural workers, migrant workers, and people with disabilities	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 2 PILLAR 3
8	<b>Safe work environment</b>	It refers to workers protection from work-related hazards and risks. It includes measures related to occupational injury (fatal or not), time lost for injury or labor inspection.	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 3
9	<b>Social security</b>	It provides all benefits to secure protection, lack of work-related income by sickness, injury, old-age social security benefits and general poverty and social exclusion.	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 3
10	<b>Social dialogue, workers', and employers' representation</b>	It covers all types of negotiation, consultation, and exchange of information between representatives of governments, employers, and workers on issues of common interest.	→	PILLAR 1 PILLAR 4

Table 10: Decent work pillars and indicators. Author's elaboration from ILO's website (<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>) and ILO (2013)

2. At the same time, three of the authors separately conducted an initial coding phase to understand how drivers to collaboration could facilitate the provision of decent work, while one of them carried out the same analysis on the barriers. In this phase, group meetings were organized to verify the data correspondence to decent work indicators, as well as any correspondence or divergence in the identified codes extracted from the interviewees' answers. To facilitate the understanding of this process, ANNEX A and B (related to the drivers and barriers respectively) provide an overview of the conducted steps.

### 3. Results and discussion

The analysis of the results reveals five crucial themes on how collaboration could support decent work provision, as well as how obstacles can hinder the process for rural tourism. With reference to the drivers that motivate social farmers to do networking, the emerging themes are related to the *feasibility of collaboration*, which is expressed through *creating new employment opportunities for social entrepreneurs* and *double benefits*: the collaborative aspect is taken into account as it allows additional employment opportunities to be created in the farm and the benefits to be extended to the social sphere, thus leading to a win-win situation also for the several people interested or directly involved in its activities. The second theme, related to *social and working inclusion*, is expressed through *orality stimulation*, *self-representation*,



*sensibilization, comfort/pain alleviation, work adaptation, social dialogue, skills development* and refers to the possibility of creating new opportunities for marginalized categories to find wider societal and working integration, through tourism. The last theme to emerge is *personal growth*, which is expressed according to the sub-categories of *growth of self-esteem, growth of sense of responsibility, sense of gratification* and, finally, *self-placing in society*, thus highlighting how collaboration can facilitate opportunities for the inner and personal growth of socially excluded groups through tourism activities in social agriculture. When considering how barriers could affect the provision of decent work in social tourism contexts, two main topics emerge: the *low embeddedness*, influenced by *poor cooperation, unclarity of roles, isolation, and closeness*, together with the theme of *lack of resources*, which refers to *economic, infrastructural, human, and legislative* ones. Compared to *low embeddedness* which characterizes a systemic perspective, this last topic is related to the household dimension.

This section presents and discusses the results according to the literature provided in the previous paragraph. Starting with drivers and following with barriers, the discussion is organized following the pillars. Because of the exploratory nature of the research, authors made a wide use of quotes from the answers given to provide a clear picture about social farming networking, as described by social farmers. Quotes are reported in brackets and detailed according to the code assigned to each unit of analysis (as in the Table 1). Decent working pillars and indicators resulting from the analysis were highlighted in bold, while the sub-categories of themes were underlined.

### 3.1. The influence of collaboration drivers on decent work provision

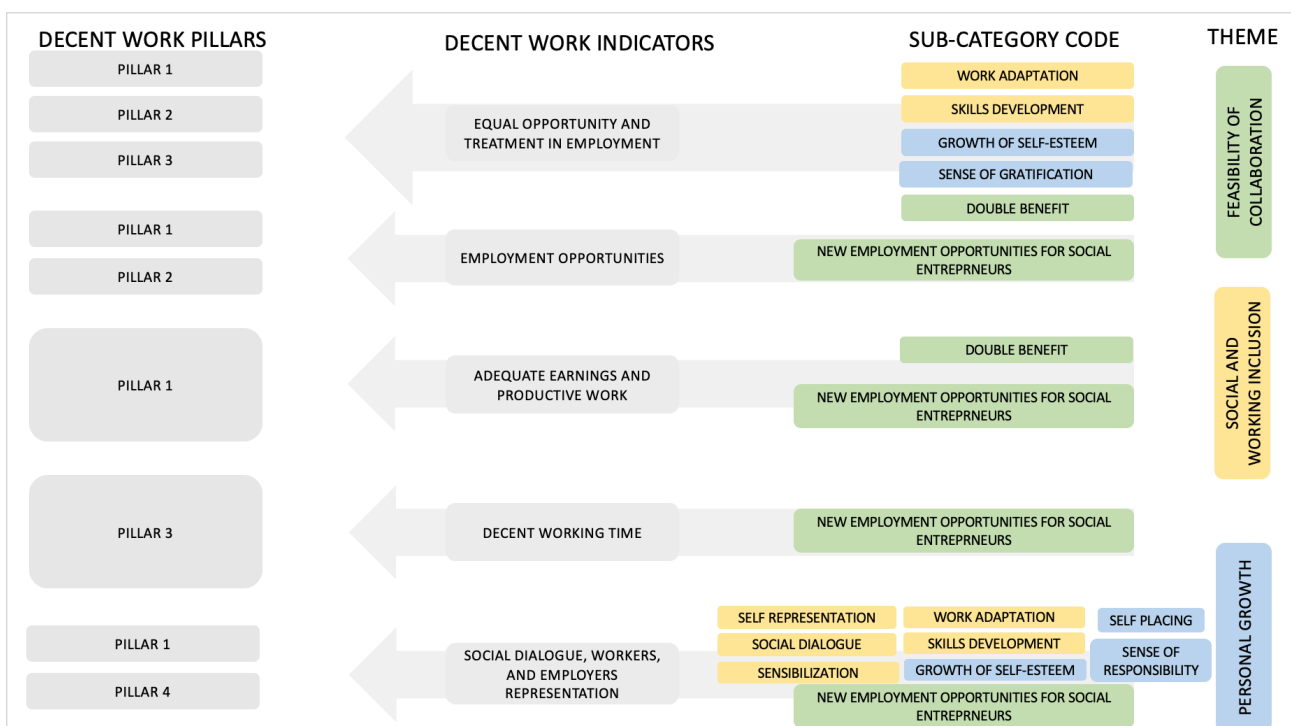


Figure 14: Drivers to collaboration. Topics and sub-categories influencing decent working opportunities.

### PILLARS 1, 2 e 3

First, a response to **pillars 1 and 2** is given by the possibility to provide **new employment opportunities** for social entrepreneurs. Given the heterogeneous nature of social farming experiences (Moruzzo et al., 2020; Giaré et al., 2020), the respondents could benefit from networking in different ways. For agritourism farms, networking might provide opportunities to create new off-season jobs and work all year round, thanks to the implementation of social projects (F7). Conversely, when related to organizations created for specific social purposes, it is emphasized that economic revenues are often scarce (F2, F9). Promoting tourism in the systemic way would therefore help to create opportunities for companies to increase on-farm activities. According to an interviewee, tourism activities *“becomes an enrichment (for farms). Perhaps less binding or less demanding (than social projects) but still fundamental for the company”* (F1). This proves the complementary nature of agricultural, social, and recreational activities from which small organizations can benefit for their sustainability (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Tulla et al., 2018; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2020). In line with Kline et al. (2014) and Mottiar et al. (2018), a non-competitive approach among companies can also help to create market ventures. Collaboration can actually foster new opportunities to organize joint project-packages (F3) or joint sales of social farming products (F3, SC2).

Given the labor-inclusive focus of social farming experiences in Mediterranean areas (Guirado et al., 2014; Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Moruzzo et al., 2020; Giaré et al., 2020), collaboration could increase **equal opportunities and treatment in the employment** of marginalized people. In line with Dahles et al. (2020), one of the common elements emerged from the research is that the feasibility of collaboration is related to the creation of a double benefit for farms and marginalized people, by increasing the number of activities that can boost employment for both (F1, F9). For social entrepreneurs, it means to identify works that can be adapted to the targeted group, with the aim to develop skills according to everyone's abilities and times: *“small jobs should be exhaustive and well presented. They should be functional to people's difficulties. Only in this way a result can be achieved: they (referring to people involved in therapeutic and socio and work activities) could take care of the animals (or) help with the accommodation. They could also be a tour guide for visitors and teach them little things about plant and animal life”* (F1). Promoting equal employment opportunities for marginalized people also supports **the pillar 3**, by increasing **social protection** measures. According to one interviewee, stimulating collaboration in the tourism field would allow social enterprises to extend *“suitable, rewarding and useful”* employment for people, also outside the social farming setting. An example is provided: *“thanks to our external collaborations, people with mental disabilities found a job in restaurants (...). At the end, they felt gratified for their work (...). This would foster a growth in self-esteem and, therefore, (people) they can achieve more and more things”* (F1). This proves that, for social entrepreneurs, tourism is not the end, rather the means to achieve societal goals (Mottiar et al., 2018; Naderi et al., 2019). As Biddulph (2018) also reports, companies willing to promote working inclusion do not directly

aim at an economic return for their activities. They rather focus on ways of working that can stimulate skill learning, thus creating benefits, albeit slowly, but with long-term outlook.

### **PILLARS 1 e 3**

A social farming tourism network could create new opportunities to support **pillars 1 and 3** of decent work by promoting both **adequate earnings and productive work** and **decent working time** in social agriculture. Indeed, social entrepreneurs generally consider tourism as an opportunity for new business revenues. This is more evident for farms *“that give ethical value to their products”* (F9), which can be more attractive for tourists, thus contributing to create again a double benefit, by supporting social projects and the same farm activities (F2,F9). In line with Kline et al. (2014) and Mottiar et al. (2018), results show that social entrepreneurs find ways to disseminate educational values through culinary products from marginalized areas that would otherwise be underestimated. According to many scholars (Mottiar et al., 2018; Naderi et al., 2019; Lin & Peng, 2016; Kline et al., 2014; Lang & Fink, 2019; Aquino et al., 2018; Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020; Dahles et al., 2020), new earning opportunities are crucial for the sustainability of social businesses. In particular, one of the interviewees believes that the knowledge of alternative earning possibilities is a crucial element to avoid young people to be discouraged when approaching those activities in agricultural settings: *“we must think that today the farmer is young, has different needs and also needs a different income. It is always an economic matter: organizing a tourist offer would allow the farm to have extra income to support its costs.”* (F1). As Lin Peng & Lin (2016) report, this would help rural areas to reverse the abandonment trend they are suffering from. At the same time, the possibility of working in a network could favor **decent working time** as it could make it easier to carry out tourist activities, along with agricultural and social activities (L.R.21/2011), which require a great amount of time (F4). A social farming tourism-based network could lead to a joint promotion of tourism *“by sharing activities and projects”* (F9). This becomes a means to provide a collective response to the need for well-being which is very much felt, as recently reported by several authors (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Brouder et al., 2020) especially after the COVID-19 pandemic period as the aim now is to integrate more services and activities for local communities (F10). Therefore, in addition to welcoming people particularly interested in agricultural tourism, as in the case of *Woofing* that is gaining popularity in social farming settings (Giannetto and Lanfranchi, 2020), a tourism network in social farming could also *“develop tourism for people who are not normally tourists, it is to say people who would not travel otherwise”* (SC1).

### **PILLARS 1 e 4**

A social farming tourism network could respond to **pillars 1 and 4 of decent work**, through increasing **social dialogue, workers’, and employers’ representation**. First and foremost, as Di Iacovo et al. (2014) and Fazzi (2011) report, relations are a prerequisite in social farming, since they characterize the identity of social businesses. As a consequence,, networking is very important for them (SC1). This is in line with a study by Fazzi (2011) stating that the more project activities are carried out by companies, the more networking opportunities they will find with local actors. It is by increasing social dialogue and fostering collaborations

with their peers that social businesses could create more development opportunities, both for their targeted groups and for themselves. For the former, this would increase the opportunity to find jobs fitting their needs. In particular, when referring to mentally disabled people, it must be considered that *“after a while, all these people need to change their work. It is not useful for them to keep doing the same thing for very long time”* (F9). For social business, fostering collaborations among social farmers allows them to create a sense of community by sharing experiences, as reported by Mottiar et al. (2018), thus helping them also to acquire the sectorial skills required for the activities (Mottiar et al., 2018; Dhales et al., 2020): *“a common experience is important to share and listen what the others are living (...). In a network participated by skilled people, each of us can draw on them to fulfil our role as best as possible. It is important to (...) improve ones’ knowledge and skills”* (F7). Social dialogue would also allow to strengthen relations with public institutions. This can be done not only through a greater representation of social farmers needs as a group rather than as individual experiences (F8), but also by increasing the possibilities for project private-public co-design, as reported by one interviewee: *“we do not want to manage money, rather to manage activities. We want to invest with the public body because it is our first interlocutor”* (F10). This confirms studies from Vazquez-Maguirre (2020) who reports that networking helps to gain affirmation and easily access funds from third parties, to be channeled towards social projects (Naderi et al., 2019; Kline et al., 2014; Lang & Fink, 2019).

Following on the same theme, several answers show the importance of broadening social dialogue to the whole community. According to respondents, a tourism network could foster social inclusion, while educating and raising awareness about social themes among visitors (SC1), thus contributing to their personal growth. Among the others, this is in line with studies from Kline et al. (2014), Dhales et al. (2020) and, more broadly, with social entrepreneurship’s role in making tourism a more educational and sustainable activity (Pollok, 2015). For social farmers, networking could increase the opportunities for self-representation thanks a deeper dialogue with society, as they would represent their territory and traditions (F1) as well as the benefits of their businesses, which go beyond simple productive activities: by putting people and relations at the center (F6), they can tell society more about the memories and difficulties they face daily to provide the community with well-being activities (F6). Moreover, this would increase the possibility for marginalized people to represent themselves (Aquino et al., 2018; Biddulph, 2018; Vazquez-Maguirre, 2020; Moreno de la Santa, 2020; Dahles et al., 2020). As one interviewee stated, people with mental disabilities could act as basic tour guides for visitors. *“This would enable them to recognize what is important to communicate to others who might not know”* (F1). Social entrepreneurs’ intention is to build an inclusive community, which translates into the desire to turn the network into a tool to unite people *“where it should be clear that (we are) open to everybody, as animals do: they manage to stay together, even though they are so different”* (F6). The comparison with animals helps to convey messages of tolerance and respect as it allows people to *“understand the importance of each person’s role in the society”* (F1), fostering the growth of responsibility (F1) as well as of self-esteem (F1). As one of the interviews notes, *“taking people to these places is very*

important. At the end, they will go back home feeling that something in them has changed” (SC2). These statements give a practical response to the concept of inclusive tourism proposed by Scheyvens & Biddulph (2018), in which the self-representation of more marginalized territories and people is encouraged, contributing to make visitors participate and increasingly more aware about the reality of each context.

3.1.1. The influence of collaborative barriers on decent work provision

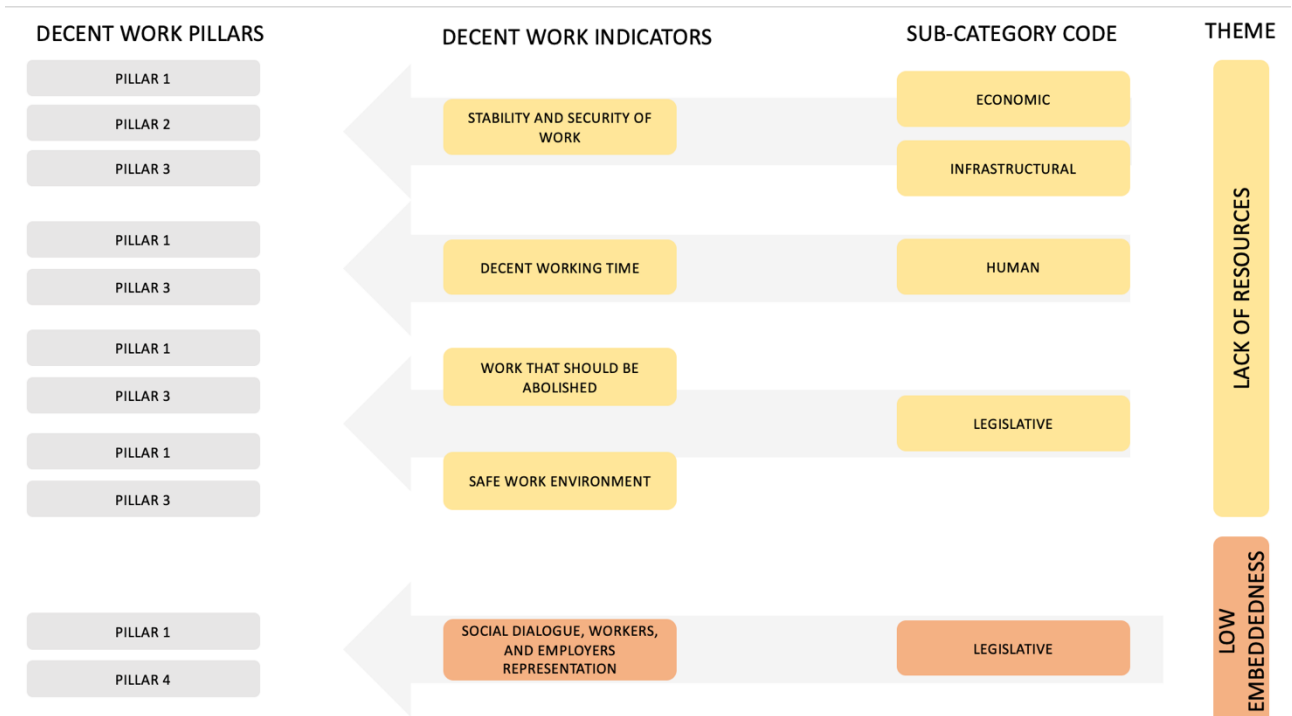


Figure 15: Obstacles to collaboration. Topics and sub-categories influencing decent working opportunities.

**PILLARS 1,2,3**

When looking at the dimension of each social enterprise, the clear lack of resources might seem to have a negative impact on **pillars 1,2 and 3**. Within this context, barriers to collaboration particularly related to the lack of economic and infrastructural resources and aggravated by connected administrative and bureaucratic obstacles (Lang & Fink, 2016) may affect **the stability and security of work**. More in general, economic resources are highlighted as a critical point in social farming experiences (SC3; F5), as also Di Iacovo et al. (2014) and Fazzi (2011) report. Furthermore, from the perspective of inclusive destination, one interviewee points out that “creating a social and disability-friendly agritourism is difficult due to the architectural barriers in agriculture, which are difficult to overcome” (F4). Similarly, it has to be considered that in more peripheral areas, both the lack of stable internet connection (F7) as well as public transport (F8) should be considered. While for the former, an improvement of the service is suggested (F7), for the latter a solution might be private-run transportation services whose high costs, however, could not be afforded by social entrepreneurs only (F8).

**PILLARS 1 e 3**

According to the findings, **pillars 1 and 3** might be affected by obstacles related to more than one indicator. First of all, the lack of human resources dedicated to tourism activities (F4; F6) might affect **decent working time**, as reported by one farmer: *“some companies could find it difficult to take care of the tourism activities, due to the small number of people working there, as they also have other things to take care of to support their agricultural production, F6*). This obstacle explicitly refers to the fact that social farming in Marche region strictly depends on agricultural activities, whose turnover should be higher than the one provided by all the social activities (L.R./2011). At the same time, the lack of adequate legislative resources could make it difficult for companies to provide a **safe work environment**. Referring to *Woofing* activities mentioned by Lanfranchi & Giannetto (2020), one of the farmers pointed out that the lack of laws protecting the farmers in the event of accident to visitors might be an obstacle to the development of tourism activities in agriculture (F4). In a network perspective, the need for regulations in this field becomes crucial to allow social entrepreneurs to diversify their experiences from each other, and to guarantee nature-based tourism activities according to each farm’s resources (F4).

Lastly, it has been reported a lack of laws regulating the sale of social farming products derived as output of the working/rehabilitation services provided to marginal people. This is evident for companies dealing with the elderly, which often organize manual laboratories related to the preparation of agricultural products. For those companies, the possibility of being able to sell these products is essential to gain the economic resources needed to support their own social projects (Dahles et al. 2020), as the following statement proves: *“the goal in our kitchen [is to] allow the elderly to work free of charge [...]. Any work should be compensated with a pay packet. The point is that the elderly do it for free. This has to be solved [and] the solution could be an agreement with the municipality, [with the aim to] identifying these activities as part of a social project. We are discussing it with the experts who could help us.”* (F2). This shows that a lack of regulations could jeopardize the **social protection** of marginal groups and increase forms of **work that should be abolished**.

#### **PILLARS 1 e 4**

The barriers that might hinder collaboration for social entrepreneurs can be referred to **social dialogue, workers, and employers’ representation**, which can be an obstacle for **pillars 1 and 4 of decent work**. The research shows a low embeddedness of social farms, which make it difficult for them to network with other actors in the area. Among these factors, the first is poor cooperation. While one respondent reports this lack in the specific context of social cooperatives (SC2), another respondent pointed out that cooperation is generally lacking among all the companies in the area (F1). On the other hand, another interviewee highlights that a barrier to cooperation might be related to the difficulty, albeit initial, for farms to clarify the reasons for them to carry out social activities, which have always been to social cooperatives: *“social cooperatives did not really understand why farms have started to do their work (...).(…) the farm should actually be a tool for cooperatives (...) to manage activities together. (This) to provide a better-quality service (...). Carrying out*

*nature-based activities would help to achieve better results*" (F2). Somehow, this is in line with studies from Mottiar et al. (2018), which show that diversity in business goals, linked to an unclear common vision of the collaborative activity, strongly affects networking capabilities. Some farms, among the youngest in the field of social agriculture, also highlighted a problem of isolation and, consequently, a difficulty in connecting with others (F3). Therefore, it is not because of the territorial distance (Mottiar et al., 2018), rather the recent company's incorporation into social farming that causes a certain isolation. Lastly, from the interviews emerged that the condition of being open to networking is an a-priori criterion for collaboration (F7), according to what argued by Mottiar et al. (2018) and Lang & Fink (2016) According to some respondents, a close mind by farmers may not only have consequences on the tourist image (e.g., low flexibility in timetables, in the management of visits) but may, in general, discourage the development of tourism activities aimed at raising awareness on social issues, thus making those topics still be a taboo for society (F9).

#### **4. Conclusions**

This qualitative study explores the potential of social entrepreneurship's networking for the provision of quality employment in rural tourism. To do so, it proposes the following research questions: *how can the propensity of social entrepreneurs to networking promote decent work in rural tourism? And in which way can barriers towards collaboration negatively affect it?* These questions were explored in the context of agricultural social entrepreneurship in the Marche region, which, due to the heterogeneity of experiences, provided a wide and diverse range of answers. As for the methodological perspective, the use of the decent working indicators to frame the findings served as a connecting point to understand how drivers and barriers to collaboration may influence the ILO's decent working pillars (Moreno de la Santa, 2020).

The results reveal that the propensity to networking match to the different pillars of decent work according to three main themes related to the sustainability of collaboration (i.e., the reasons that make collaboration feasible), social and working inclusion and personal growth. The findings showed that Networking can first and foremost boost the creation of new employment opportunities for both social entrepreneurs and marginalized people included in work programmes and this therefore proves the complementarity of agricultural, social and tourism activities in the rural contexts of Mediterranean areas (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Tulla et al., 2018; Giannetto & Lanfranchi, 2020). For social entrepreneurs, the propensity to networking would contribute to broadening the range of opportunities for adequate earnings and productive work for them, increasing on-farm tourism activities, as well as opportunities to promote products in social agriculture. It would also increase the opportunities for social dialogue with other local farms, public administration, and society in general. This not only facilitates the acquisition and exchange of resources, but also contributes to raising awareness and fostering education on social issues.

On the contrary, the obstacles to collaboration experienced by social entrepreneurship reveal that lack of resources and low embeddedness could negatively affect the provision of decent work. For the first one, more related to the household dimension, The lack of economic and infrastructural resources could undermine the stability and security of work in social enterprises, while the lack of human resources could create working conditions that go beyond decent working time. In this perspective, the tourism network is seen as an opportunity to employ new human capital to manage tourism activities in a more coordinated way. On the other hand, the lack of adequate legislative resources for recreational activities can undermine the social protection of those involved in such activities. For the former, the lack of insurance regulations protecting the entrepreneur would hinder new tourism experiences in agriculture such as Woofing which, as reported by Lanfranchi & Giannetto (2020), are growing strongly in social agriculture.

This study reveals important implications from both a theoretical and managerial perspective. Investigating social entrepreneurship in the context of inclusive tourism (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Biddulph, 2018; Moreno de la Santa, 2020) actually constituted a first attempt to respond to the lack of studies on tourism workforce in non-mainstreamed contexts (Baum, 2016a; b). By examining the sphere of collaboration, we had a clear and more punctual overview on the embeddedness of social entrepreneurs' action in the territory (Aquino et al. 2018). Furthermore, the use of decent working pillars as a tool to analyze results made it possible to understand in which terms social entrepreneurs make tourism an inclusive economic activity (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018), i.e. in which terms their tourism activities are capable of generating decent work (Biddulph, 2018).

There are also many managerial implications. First, this study largely showed that social entrepreneurship has an important and strong influence on the possibility of sustainable tourism development in rural areas. Therefore, it further highlighted the need to consider those experiences in tourism planning activities (Mottiar et al., 2018). This study investigated how the propensity to networking and obstacles to collaboration can affect the possibility of providing decent work. The study details the limits and opportunities for joint development, from the state of the art including individual or collective dimensions identified by the respondents. Focusing mainly on the obstacles to collaboration, the need for greater economic and infrastructural support emerges. As emphasized by Vazquez-Maguirre (2020), social enterprises that promote labor inclusion need more support from policies, compared to standard businesses. The legislative aspect is therefore of the utmost importance as its support is particularly required to allow recreational activities to be managed while allowing the social security of both the social entrepreneur and the marginalized groups participating in farm activities. Greater legal awareness of tourism issues could be crucial for the development of collaboration as a first step towards an inclusive tourist destination.

Nonetheless, this study is not without limitations. First of all, it is an exploratory study that deals with collaboration from a potential rather than an actual perspective. Therefore, similar studies in already established networks are recommended, also to include the specific viewpoint of marginalized groups



involved in work activities. Among other things, this makes it possible to investigate specific measures of each decent work indicator, which, due to the exploratory nature of the research, could not be used. Despite its exploratory nature, looking at the case of social farming has revealed a heterogeneity of responses that could largely be found in other contexts.

# CHAPTER IV

## Relationship matter. New paths for tourism beyond Covid-19 pandemic.

### Exploratory research from Italy

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In the last decade, the tourism demand for more sustainable experience-based authentic interactions with locals (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Pine & Gilmore, 2007; Paulauskaite et al. 2017) has increased. Recent tourism trends show that tourists and travelers, when visiting a destination, are increasingly looking for unique and once-in-a-lifetime experiences and choosing to become more immersed in the daily local life (Booking.com, 2019; Mittiga et al., 2019). In this perspective, relational tourism, which puts the emphasis on personal relationships, exchanges, individualized and unique experiences has become popular as a research topic (Purpura et al. 2007; Bertella et al. 2018; Kastenholz et al. 2020; Lin and Fu, 2020; Marques and Gondim Matos, 2020). The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic brought the tourism industry to a standstill (ILO, 2020; UNWTO 2020c; WTTC, 2020), changing tourists' behaviours and habits (Del Chiappa, 2020) and compromising the social and relational nature of tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Qiu et al. 2020). This situation stimulated scholars and researchers to investigate how this industry will recover after COVID-19 and how can be sustainable in a dramatically changed world (Chang et al. 2020; Jamal and Budke, 2020; Lapointe, 2020; Zenker and Kock, 2020). In this context, technology and the relations created by web resources (Gretzel et al. 2020; Marques and Gondim Matos, 2020), played a central role in building or maintaining relationships in tourism.

This study aims to understand if relational tourism can be pursued in the post-COVID-19 tourism recovery and how and to what extent new technologies can contribute to promoting authentic tourism experiences during and after a crisis. To this aim, an exploratory case study from Italy presents the experience of the *Staffetta della Cucina Ciocheciò*, ideated during the COVID-19 lockdown and consisting in an online "relay race" in which participants were asked to post, in a private Facebook group, easy-to-make recipes. This research analyses the role played by technology within the *Staffetta* in maintaining existing relations, creating new ones, and promoting a relational tourism destination, through local food and traditions. These aspects have been analysed through qualitative and quantitative methods: a semi-structured interview has been conducted with the 5 organisers, and 71 online questionnaires addressed to participants were collected.

The chapter is structured as follows: after a literature review on relational tourism, the role of gastronomy and local food for place branding and tourism is stressed, considering the opportunities related to web and technologies in supporting relationality in the post-COVID-19 scenario; then the methodology

is presented, and results are discussed, by paying attention to the potential integration between the relational tourism model and the network relationality framework. Conclusions highlight that relationality in tourism can play a relevant role also in the context of a crisis thanks to the technology that, far from being a substitute for reality, can facilitate face-to-face interactions and stimulate the visit to places known only virtually.

## **1. Literature review**

### **1.1. Relational tourism**

The tourism sector has changed over the years, by producing new forms of tourism and hospitality (Purpura et al. 2007): tourists are increasingly looking for immersive experiences in the culture and traditions of places (Richards 2013b). Travel is perceived as a source of knowledge; tourists want to live like locals (Richards, 2013a; Paulauskaite et al. 2017) and discover the territory, by also preferring less known destinations and inland areas with rich folklore and local culture. In this perspective, the generation of relationships with the place becomes relevant: exchanges and personal relationships characterise the uniqueness and individuality of the tourist's experience (Kastenholz et al. 2020; Lin and Fu, 2020; Marques and Gondim Matos, 2020). Repeated visits are strongly influenced by the tourist's satisfaction with relationality during the tourism experience (Valls et al. 2004).

The concept of relational tourism refers to a relationship established between those who spend time in a destination as tourists and those who live there, as locals. This relationship is perceived as a value and an element of differentiation which takes place spontaneously (Purpura et al. 2007; Bertella et al. 2018; Kastenholz et al. 2020). As argued by Ruggieri (2007, p.54), relational tourism requires the subsistence of at least four conditions:

1. a territory with relational characteristics, such as attractions related to the territory characterised by reduced size, if compared to mass tourism destinations (e.g. small villages, farms, local handicraft companies, etc.);
2. a supply system with elements and conditions facilitating these forms of tourism and hospitality (e.g. agritourism's, historical residences, historical houses, etc.);
3. a type of traveller inclined to interactions and exchanges with the main players in the relational tourism supply chain (e.g., services providers', local community, etc.);
4. interaction, represented by that set of relationships and exchanges that take place between the main players in the relational tourism supply chain (e.g. entrepreneurs, local community, tourist information offices staff, other tourists, etc.).

The author provided a multidimensional model (figure below) to define relational tourism. He describes it as a combination of relationships in which hosts approach tourists in a friendly way, in order to let them discover the beauty and the peculiarity of their own historical, artistic, folkloristic, culinary and

human heritage. The tourist becomes a protagonist, a generator of value, completing the tourism offer itself (Ruisi, 2004). The productive tissue is also integrated into this system (Purpura et al. 2007).

Advantages related to this relational approach are many. First, this type of tourism can represent a mechanism able to avoid a serial reproduction and to focus instead on the authenticity and uniqueness of the place (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Secondly, relational tourism represents a stimulus for the local economy, especially for small and medium enterprises starting from the agri-food, productive-craft and historical-cultural sectors (Naselli, 2005). Thirdly, this kind of approach, encouraging community engagement (Okazaki, 2008) and involving the daily lifestyle of the local community (Purpura et al. 2007), can increase residents' awareness about local culture and promote positive relationships between tourists and locals (Sherlock, 2001; Teye and Sirakaya, 2002; Bimonte and Punzo, 2016; Lee and Jan 2019).

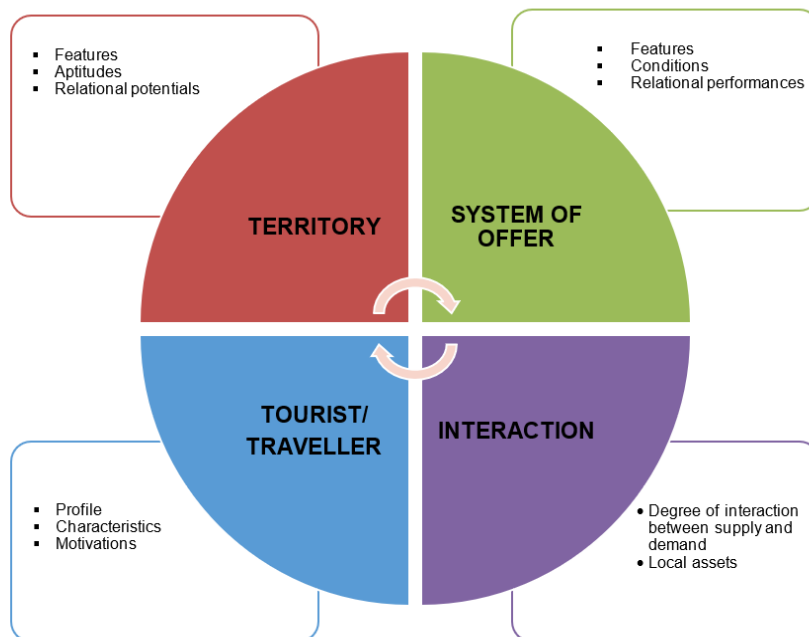


Figure 16: A multidimensional model for relational tourism (source: our elaboration on Ruggieri, 2007).

### 1.2. The role of gastronomy and local food for place branding and tourism

Gastronomy and local food play an important role in the development of relationships within the tourism sector. Being an expression of local culture and reflecting regional identities and values (Hjalager and Richards, 2003; Gyimóthy et al. 2009; Rinaldi, 2017), they can differentiate a place from another, thus increasing its attractiveness and competitiveness. This differentiation builds on the idea of an identity-based sense of place, also represented by the bundle of products and services that make up a tourist experience (Harrington et al. 2010, p. 17). In this sense, the UNWTO *Global Report on Food Tourism* (2012), emphasises the need for food tourism for its potential to convert food and gastronomy, as heritage, into elements of tourism attraction.

According to Richards (2012, p. 19), food can provide the development of tourism experiences in many ways:

- linking culture and tourism: local food could act as a bridge to bring tourists and locals together in a shared cultural experience;
- developing the meal experience: meals based on local food represent a central part of the tourism experience, which can be memorable and meaningful;
- producing distinctive foods: local foods can act as distinctive elements for place branding and in the marketplace;
- developing the critical infrastructure for food production and consumption: local food can stimulate networking among many actors (e.g. producers, chefs, critics, other culinary trendsetters, journalists, bloggers, etc.);
- supporting local culture: food experiences can provide the cultural capital necessary to sustain the development of local culture.

In this context, consumers progressively ask to be involved in the production and preparation of food during their tourism experiences. This approach embraces the concept of creative tourism, which includes participation in food experiences and knowledge of food and gastronomy (Richards, 2011). Tourism networks can stimulate the establishment of relationships between food producers and tourists, thus giving value to regional products (Rinaldi, 2017). It can happen by transmitting the local know-how to tourists and sharing it with them (Bessi re, 1998): strategic tools can make link quality, diversity and uniqueness of local food products and dishes emerge and link it to the place to support both the image and the brand of a destination (Rinaldi, 2017, p. 14).

### 1.3. The role of the web (network) to support relationality in tourism: network relationality

Recently, the reduced spatial distance, the increased physical mobility and virtual contacts due to the extensive use of the internet have strongly influenced the provision of tourism services (Marques and Gondim Matos, 2020) and especially the way relationships take place. Here, the concept of hospitality is relevant and characterised by a feeling of empathy between hosts and guests (Bialski, 2012). In this relationship, technology is a bridge to interactions (Bawens, 2010) and a facilitator of new forms of sociality (Marques and Gondim Matos, 2020).

To explain social changes related to technological advancements Wittel (2001) used the term network sociality, considering five key elements: (1) the level of integration/disintegration with the community; (2) the intensity of social relations (3) the contents of relations; (4) the boundaries between work and leisure; (5) the integration of technology. Molz (2014) adapted this framework to the hospitality sector, employing the concept of network hospitality, who is based on five aspects: (1) the sharing of private places with strangers; (2) the transformation of strangers into guests; (3) the random nature of guest's choices; (4) the availability of different types of temporary spaces; (5) the fact that guests behave as if they are at home.

Since the relational tourism experience, of which hospitality is an essential part, emphasises relational elements, according to Vázquez and Ruggieri (2011), in order to evoke relationality, the sense of physical encounter and personalised contact with the host community is fundamental. According to Porter (2004), in fact, the distinction between online and offline interactions does not exist, as they are only different means of interaction; moreover, considering the increasing importance of tourist's embeddedness in the local culture (Gordon, 2008; Richards, 2013a), both sociality and relationality are strongly connected to locality (Wittel, 2001; Molz, 2013; 2014). For these reasons, building on network sociality and network hospitality frameworks, Marques and Gondim Matos (2020) elaborated the network relationality model, which focuses on the relationship between host and guest and, particularly, on how the host influences the tourism experience in a local setting. This model is based on four key principles (figure below):

1. temporary belongingness: temporary attachment to a place, providing the conditions to recreate a community and stimulating a sense of places, usually missing in virtual communities;
2. a priori empathy: virtual empathy between hosts and guests that starts before the direct encounter. From the hosts' perspective, it is the basis for first positive contact, and it marks the beginning of an effective two-sided relationship (both online and offline);
3. relational spaces: both geographical and virtual spaces, corresponding to different moments of the host-guest relationship and representing a central node to the tourist experience;
4. technology as a bridge to face-to-face interactions: a set of tools from which relationships begin and take shape, but not central to the relational experience, as the emphasis is on face-to-face interactions.

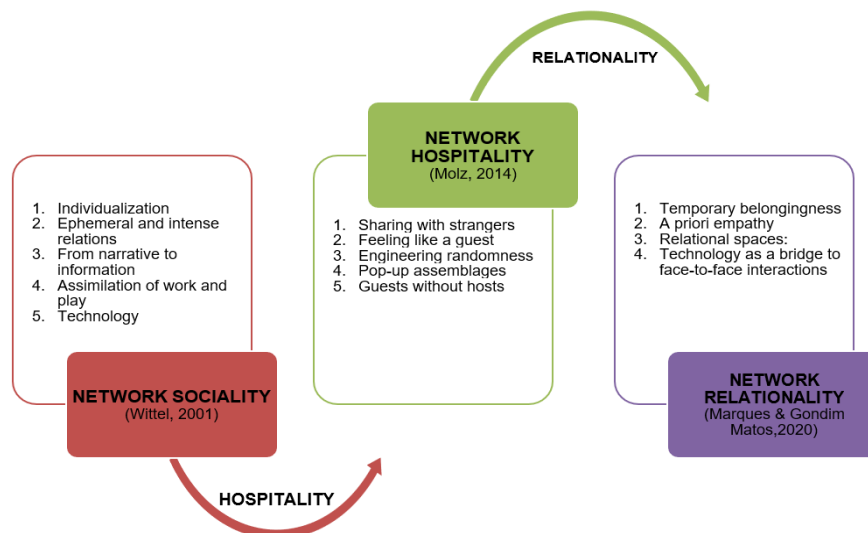


Figure 17: Hospitality and relationality implications in network sociality (source: our elaboration on Wittel, 2001; Molz 2014; Marques & Gondim Matos, 2020).

#### 1.4. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic: the role of technology in the tourism sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused economic, social and political damages, still not precisely identifiable. Tourism, hospitality and events sectors have been paralysed by governments efforts to control the pandemic, thus causing a collapse of the whole sector (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

The crisis has raised new questions, especially about the strategies for the tourism industry recovery and its evolution. There are no answers to these questions yet, but technology certainly plays a central role in all this. During this pandemic, ICT *“has been widely used, adapted and developed to address some of the pressing problems in people daily life, including work, travel, leisure, business as well as governance”* (Gretzel et al. 2020, p.2). Technology has become a major factor in addressing specific problems (e.g. traveller screening, case and contact monitoring, online education and entertainment during isolation, to name but a few) and in fostering resilience in tourism (Gretzel et al. 2020; Hall et al. 2020).

In this perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis may offer *“a rare and invaluable opportunity to rethink and reset tourism toward a better pathway for the future”* (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020, p.11).

#### 1.5. COVID-19 challenges: tourism trends, global and local changes

One of the most immediate economic effects of the crisis associated with COVID-19 has been the blocking of tourist flows. In response to the generalised measures of social distancing, all tourism activities, at the beginning of March, were reduced to zero (Gössling et al. 2020). At the end of March 2020, UNWTO (2020b), estimated the pandemic would have caused international tourist arrivals to decline 20-30% (compared to 2019). Data from the hospitality sector confirm this estimation: for the week of the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, in comparison to the same week in 2019, in all countries, guest numbers have declined significantly, by 50% or more (STR, 2020).

In Italy, travel restrictions have reset to zero an activity that in the quarter of March-May is used to live a seasonal relaunch (ISTAT, 2020). Indeed, in the same period in 2019, the expenditure of foreign travellers amounted to 9.4 billion euros (Bank of Italy, 2020). COVID-19 also impacted on travel behaviours and perception. A recent survey carried out by the University of Sassari, administered to 5.556 persons, investigated the changes in the way Italians would have travelled during and after the pandemic (Del Chiappa, 2020). A good level of cleanliness and sanitisation of public spaces (e.g.: streets, beaches, etc.) (85%); outdoor activities (85,9%) and attractions (e.g.: archaeological sites) (74,3%) are the most important aspects considered by respondents to feel safe during their vacations. The survey also highlighted a relevant propensity to give up some relational aspects of the holiday, such as conviviality during the meals: to avoid overcrowding, 56.5% of respondents would prefer having room-serviced lunch and dinner or meals served in prearranged shifts (73,4%) The research also revealed a higher predisposition to proximity tourism: 67.8% of respondents would travel within the residence region and only the 22.5% would probably travel abroad in the next 12 months.

## 2. Methodology

In this chapter an exploratory case study from Italy, focused on the experience of the *Staffetta della Cucina Ciocheciò* is presented. The selected case study is relevant as researchers have long investigated the face-to-face relational approach applied to the experiential and relational tourism offer by rural local networks promoted by some of the organizers of the *Staffetta* (Bertella and Cavicchi, 2015; 2017; Bertella et al. 2018; . From the authors' perspective, it was interesting to understand whether this approach has changed, due to the COVID-19 and to which extent technology has helped in maintaining it during the pandemic. An already existing relationship of trust and openness facilitated the data collection and helped in shedding light on the investigated phenomenon.

The research examined the multidimensional model for relational tourism (Ruggieri, 2007) and the role that food can play for the development of tourism experiences (Richards 2012), by also considering the elements of the network relationality framework (Marques and Gondim Matos, 2020). The latter was applied with the scope to explore the role played by technology, locality and gastronomic traditions in maintaining existing relations and creating new ones within a relational tourism system of offer.

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been chosen for the investigation of the *Staffetta* case (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003b): semi-structured interviews were conducted to all *Staffetta*'s organizers (5) and a survey was administered to participants (July 2020). Interviews were performed online due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and lasted approximately 1 hour each. As regards the questionnaire, a multilanguage online form (Italian, English and French) was prepared and posted on the Facebook group of the *Staffetta*. Among the 229 members of this Facebook page, 71 answered, of which 52 actively participated to the initiative; 19 only acted as audience. Both the questionnaire and the interview were organized into four main clusters of questions aimed at investigating issues showed in the table below:

	Interview (organizers)	Questionnaire (participants)
<b>Cluster 1</b> (Richards, 2012; Ruggier, 2007)	<b>Relational tourism</b>	<b>The idea of the <i>Staffetta</i></b>
	Knowledge and perception of the relational tourism model	Perception about the initiative; motivations for participation
	Role of gastronomy and locality to support relational tourism	
	The impact of COVID-19 on relational tourism	
<b>Cluster 2</b> (Ruggieri, 2007)	<b>Premises to the Organization</b>	<b>Premises to the participation</b>
	Nature of relationships between organizers	Previous experiences
	Nature of relationships between organizers and participants before the <i>Staffetta</i>	
<b>Cluster 3</b>	<b>The <i>Staffetta</i> Experience</b>	



(Marques and Gondim Matos 2020; Richards 2012; Ruggieri 2007)	Level of engagement, nature of relationships, interactions and information exchanged during the initiative
	Network relationality: temporary belongingness, a priori empathy, technology, relational spaces
<b>Cluster 4</b> (exploratory)	Tourism implications
	The role of the <i>Staffetta</i> for post-COVID-19 recovery
	The role of the <i>Staffetta</i> in promoting destinations

Table 11: Structure of the interview and questionnaire

The data analysis was performed by three members of the research team: two of them, separately, operated the interviews' coding according to a common approach. A third member operated the calculations on the questionnaires' data. These were then checked by the other members.

An interviewer and a rapporteur conducted semi-structured interviews which have been recorded, transcribed and analyzed by highlighting similarities and differences in the five organizers' answers. The emerging aspects were first identified, then categorized on the basis of similarities and synthesized in sentences summarizing the main points. Then, a comparison between the analysis performed by the two was made and the data organized in themes mostly according to the research question. These have been reported in the findings. A phase of interpretation and integration, then followed (Mayan, 2009).

Data resulting from the survey have been analyzed by another author to outline the main descriptive statistics. Elaborated data has been reported in the findings.

Both the information emerging from the interviews and from the survey have been reported in the findings, following the initial structure in clusters. In this way, it has been possible to make a comparison between the organizers and participants' perceptions, by reconducting them to the same themes considered through the lens of the models chosen for the analysis. The main themes emerged are the following: relevance of the relational component; the role played by locality and gastronomy within the *Staffetta*; the importance given to the network relationality dimensions; virtual versus real social contacts in a long-term perspective.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. A "relational" answer to COVID-19 crisis: the *Staffetta della Cucina Ciocheciò*

The *Staffetta della Cucina Ciocheciò* (literally "The relay race of the *Ciocheciò* cooking style") is an initiative promoted during the COVID-19 lockdown (1<sup>st</sup> May – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020), using a private Facebook group. Its scope was to face the difficulties provoked by the social distancing during the lockdown, by bringing together people from several countries, in order to improve and maintain existing relationships virtually and to create new ones.

The *Staffetta* was ideated and organised by three rural hospitality facilities' owners, a journalist, and an extra-virgin olive oil taster. Two of them come from Marche Region (Roberto Ferretti and Anna Maria

Monaldi), one from Liguria (Claudio Porchia), one from Veneto (Marisa Saggiotto) and one from Japan (Yoko Moriyama). Each organiser invited participants to enter the Facebook group and eventually present a recipe and had a specific role within the organization. All the organisers are related to each other by a long-lasting friendship and by exchanges (sometimes only virtual) based on three main network experiences, who represented important conditions for the development and organization of the *Staffetta*: the *Ciocheciò* philosophy, the use of spontaneous herbs in the kitchen and relational tourism.

The *Ciocheciò* philosophy (the word is invented and stands for “what is actually available”) promotes a form of hospitality in which spending time, sharing and preparing meals together is very important for creating spontaneous, positive relationships between hosts and guests visiting a territory. According to *Ciocheciò* philosophy, cooking means cooking simple and easy-to-make recipes with seasonal, 0km, healthy, typical products that also sometimes spontaneously grow in a territory. Local knowledge in the use of these ingredients is also relevant. The *Ciocheciò* concept was invented in 2008 by some of the organisers of the *Staffetta* during a conference about the use of spontaneous herbs in the kitchen, organised by the World *Wigwam* Circuit. In that occasion, the name *Ciocheciò* was first used to talk about a dinner prepared by using the available ingredients. The idea of writing a blog to tell about other similar experiences was born, and the *Circuit of the Cucina Ciocheciò* was then created.

The use of spontaneous herbs in the kitchen has been inspired by the figure of Libereso Guglielmi – botanist, and expert in recognising and using spontaneous herbs, who worked as a gardener for the family of the Italian writer Italo Calvino<sup>20</sup> - and by the values of the World *Wigwam* Circuit, joined by one of the organizers through her local association. The *Wigwam* Circuit is a social Promotional Association, which has its headquarter in northern Italy and manages a network of more than 300 clubs in 15 countries. *Wigwam* clubs aim at re-discovering, protecting and promoting local resources through tourism, leisure and didactic-educational activities (Bertella and Cavicchi, 2017).

The *Staffetta* also has to do with the concept of relational tourism. Three of the five organisers are active in promoting relational tourism through their own hospitality facilities. Two of them are also engaged in a relational tourism network composed by 22 members, among which rural hospitality facilities: the *Agritur-Aso association*, established in 2007 in Marche Region (Italy), is aimed at promoting experiential, relational and community-based tourism (Bertella *et al.*, 2018; 2019) for revitalising rural areas and guaranteeing a better quality of life for local communities. Since 2009, the association has also been organising *Le Marche in Valigia* (literally: *Le Marche* in your suitcase), aimed at promoting Marche Region abroad through cultural events and dinners, by re-creating a friendly atmosphere (Bertella and Cavicchi, 2017). Due to the COVID-19 restrictions and to national hospitality policies, after the end of the lockdown

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<sup>20</sup> Italo Calvino (1923-1985) was an Italian journalist and novelist considered one of the most important Italian fiction writers. His best known works include the *Our Ancestors* trilogy (1952–1959), and the novels *Invisible Cities* (1972) and *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979). (Mondello,1990).

not all the members of the association re-opened: the ones whose primary income depends from tourism opened their facilities to the public; two of them ideated and organised the *Staffetta*; some others took part to the initiative.

The *Staffetta* involved 229 people (the number of users registered to the Facebook group), coming from several countries. Every participant had to post the recipe according to a weekly schedule. The recipe had to follow the *Ciocheciò* principles. After presenting its recipe in the post, with a combination of text and pictures, the participant had to “pass the baton” to another participant. 77 members actively took part in the initiative by presenting a recipe (47 recipes come from 14 regions of Italy; 30 recipes from 17 different countries in the world). At the end of the *Staffetta*, all the recipes were supposed to be collected and published in the *Ciocheciò* blog.

### 3.2. The experience of Staffetta according to the organisers

#### 3.2.1. Relational tourism

For all the organisers, the added value of relational tourism consists in an opportunity to live an *immersive experience* in a place through direct *involvement* and active participation in an informal and friendly atmosphere (*doing together*). The emotional component plays a decisive role: sensations and feelings contribute to strengthen the experience, generate reciprocal personal enrichment and wellbeing and, thus, create an ongoing relationship (*loyalty*). The host is a crucial figure (*active and proactive role*), whose task is to put guests at ease (*hospitality*) and to act as the first point of contact with the destination, by sharing personal contacts, information and knowledge about local culture (*pivot and territorial information point*). On the other hand, the relational tourist has an *aptitude for relationships* and direct experiences in the territory.

The time shared by host and guests is essential in the construction of the relationships (“*It is the use of the time that strengthens the relationship*” - R.F.; “*Relational tourism means dedicating time; a time that cannot be monetised*” - A.M.). Hosts dedicate time to guide guests in the discovery of the territory and of the people, acting as *facilitators* (“*The community is a testimony of the local culture, so the relational experience can be conceived within a territorial relationship*” - A.M.; *If a guest, visiting a village, meets friendly and hospitable people, he feels at home and perceives that he is living a story in a welcoming and not hostile territory*” - R.F.). Food and wine traditions support the tale about the identity of a territory (*linking culture and tourism; supporting local culture*), stimulate conviviality and experiential aspect of doing together (*developing the meal experience*) and also create a sensory link with the territory, and the experiences lived (“*In relational tourism the 5 senses are important: taste and smell are important to memorise the place where one has travelled*” - Y.M.). All these relationships can be maintained over time, also with the distance and beyond the tourism experience itself.

About the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, respondents agreed that it had some negative consequences as it led to the impossibility to travel and to the need to maintain distances thus compromising the direct human contact, which is a pivotal aspect of relational tourism. On the other hand, it seems to have created new stimuli for domestic tourism and enhanced the search for authentic, hands-on, and outdoor experiences.

### *3.2.2. Premises to the organization*

Before the *Staffetta*, the organisers were linked by a long-lasting friendship, based on shared interests: the *Staffetta* was conceived as a way to keep alive these relationships, share contacts and spread the values of *Ciocheciò*. Organizers invited people with whom they share common values. Indeed, especially the ones who run rural hospitality facilities (3 out of 5 organisers) declared that they met most of the participants they involved, thanks to their relational tourism activity.

### *3.2.3. The Staffetta experience*

All the interviewees affirmed that, concerning the involved participants, this experience enriched (not changed) the nature of the existing relationships: the shared information increased personal knowledge (*sharing common values and visions*) and supported the creation of new contacts, with opportunities, in some cases, for future exchanges and real encounters (*relationships repeated in time, both offline and online relationships*).

In terms of contents, as defined in the *Staffetta's* rules, most of the exchanges concerned information related to the recipes presented (*knowledge, traditions, and habits*). Still, there were also moments of sharing private aspects (*intimate and personal stories and moments*), when describing a recipe, participants also decided to share anecdotal details related to their stories. In some cases, some of the participants re-proposed their version of a recipe posted by others, sometimes by re-adapting it with ingredients found locally.

The virtual *temporary belongingness* to the places was stimulated by elements of locality, communicated using products and food and wine traditions in the presented recipes (*locality as identity*). The *Staffetta* also contributed to the definition of a good level of a *priori empathy*. In particular, the choice of a closed group helped to create a pleasant atmosphere of enthusiasm and reciprocal encouragement (*"This empathy emerged from the typology of comments: they were mainly messages of appreciation for the recipes presented and expressions of curiosity for the places visited"* – C.P.). However, the interviewees pointed out that it was a virtual form of empathy: real empathy can also be created by actual human contact. Technology (social media) played a fundamental role both in maintaining existing relationships (*bridge to promote human interactions at a distance*) and in building new relationships (*facilitator of new forms of sociality*). However, all the interviewees reiterated that, although the technology was an essential tool, without previous interpersonal relationships the initiative would not have taken place (*"The Staffetta would not have been possible if there had not been a deep knowledge between us organisers"* – C.P.). All the

interviewees agreed that, in the context of the *Staffetta*, physical space and co-presence were not necessary elements, because the conditions imposed by COVID-19 did not allow otherwise. Nevertheless, online space is perceived by all respondents as an additional element, but not as a substitute for physical space (*“Online and physical space are two complementary spaces. When this is not possible, only one space may be sufficient. But for a complete experience both spaces are needed”* - R.F.).

#### 3.2.4. Tourism implications

Most of the interviewees consider this initiative as a long-term solution for post-COVID-19 recovery. They are planning a second winter edition and working on a book for collecting the recipes presented in the first edition. Some interviewees, however, expressed their hope for transforming the online relationships into real ones through a live edition (*going from virtual to real*).

Concerning the role of the *Staffetta* for tourism promotion, even if the objective of the initiative was not clearly related to tourism, the organisers recognised that sharing elements of one's own culture arises interest and curiosity (*Staffetta as knowledge and sharing of mutual identities starting from the gastronomic vehicle*), encourages the creation of new contacts and friendships (*Staffetta as a creator of plots*) and stimulates the desire to deepen this knowledge through real meetings on the respective territories of the participants (*Staffetta as a bridge to face-to-face interactions; Staffetta as an attractor*). This already happened to one of the organisers, which was invited by one of the participants, a new acquaintance, and travelled after the lockdown to visit her region and make direct experience of the local gastronomy. Some of the other participants were also invited to visit other regions and countries.

### 3.3. The experience of Staffetta according to participants

#### 3.3.1. The idea of the Staffetta

A total of 71 questionnaires was collected, of which 52 actively participated in the initiative by presenting a recipe and 19 just acted as an audience.

All participants showed enthusiasm for the *Staffetta* (*“I like the topic; original and very useful”*). Among the motivations for participation, the initiative was perceived to practice a personal interest for cooking (*“I am a fan of cooking”; “I love both regional cuisine and cuisines from all over the world”*). It was also felt like an occasion for *sharing* and *conviviality* (*“I participated to enhance the value of relationships and for the pleasure of sharing how amazing it is to make food together”; “It seemed an amazing example of conviviality”*), and as a way (*facilitator*) to tell the territory (*locality*) and the local traditions (*“I wanted to introduce to the others my place of origin”*). Some respondents also referred to the *Staffetta* as an opportunity to experience different places and cultures (*“Since it is a good way to get to know different traditions”; “...far different from yours”*). Thus, *hospitality* turned into *hosting* since the participants themselves became the hosts of their territory. Moreover, for some of the respondents, it was also a way to

promote a sustainable lifestyle (“it teaches people to live with simplicity and the importance of connecting with nature...”; “it promotes a healthy and sustainable way of cooking”; «it encourages de-consumption”).

The impact of COVID-19 became a recurrent element within the answers, being perceived as a restriction to human relationships. As a result, the *Staffetta* was experienced as an occasion to bring back social contacts (“As a reaction to the unpleasant moments of the lockdown”; “it was a wonderful way to connect with others, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown when none of us could meet in person”). The element acquaintance or *friendship* was of primary importance for participants to know about the *Staffetta*: 52% claimed they got to know the event through their acquaintances, while 27% through *Agritur-Aso /Le Marche in Valigia* network (figure below):

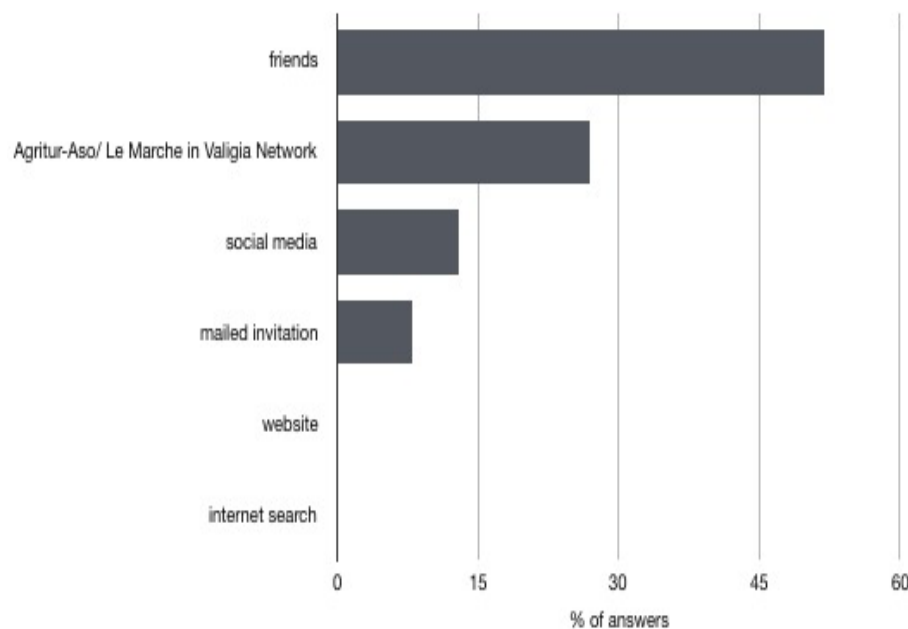


Figure 18: Q1: How did you learn about the *Staffetta* experience?

### 3.3.2.Premises to participation

61% of respondents had already visited the areas and the facilities involved in the initiative before the *Staffetta* and established a *friendly* (41%), and *long-lasting* (17%) *relationship*, where the main reciprocally shared information was about knowledge, traditions and habits. Mutual trust and reciprocity have been shared as well (“I know the organisers and the quality of their work”; “I know who promoted the initiative and his philosophy of relational tourism”), but also a feeling of solidarity emerged to support the cause (“I believe in the project”; “I share this way of life”; “I agreed with the idea of *Ciocheciò* cuisine from the very beginning”).

### 3.3.3.The *Staffetta* experience

Thanks to the *Staffetta*, 73% of respondents who actively participated by sharing a recipe, declared to have had the chance to build up new relationships (72%), mostly friendships (58%). Once again, the most shared information concerns knowledge, traditions, and habits besides tips about local lifestyle, reciprocity and

mutual trust. 83% of respondents developed a *sense of belonging* to the group especially by *developing a family feeling with participants* and by *feeling part of a virtual community* where sharing tales about their territory and some daily habits.

The online format helped in consolidating *a-priori empathy* with other participants (83%) who already knew each other and further enhancing the relationships mainly through the virtual community. Technology (figure below) was primarily conceived as *a bridge to promote long-distance human interactions*, tool to *promote a territory and its culture* and also as *a tool to encourage gastronomic tradition*.

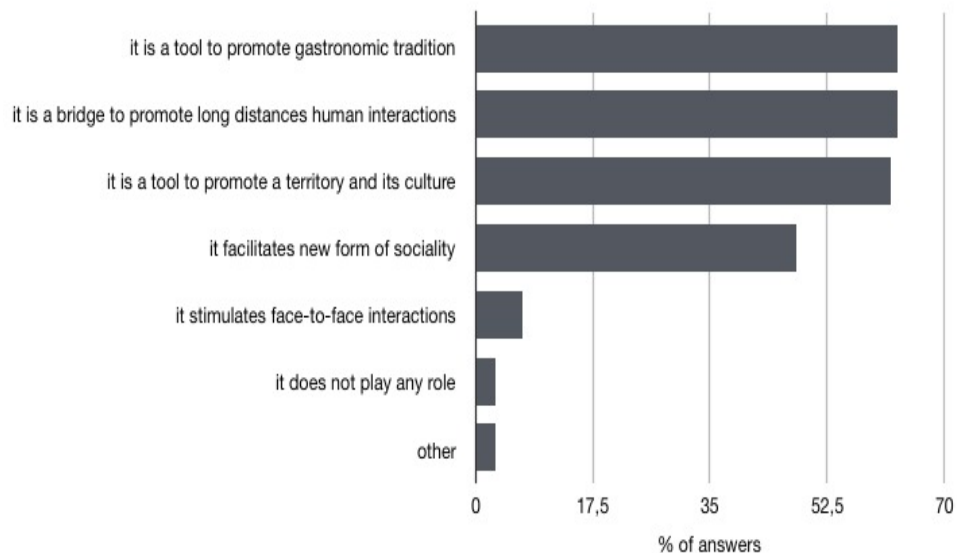


Figure 19: Q.9: Which role did technology play in nurturing relationships in the context of Staffetta?

### 3.3.4. Tourism implications

Considering the *Staffetta's* implications, the online relational dimension of the initiative has been seen by participants as a long-term solution for the post-COVID-19 recovery (79%), since it let participants know about new places and traditions (90%). However, it might not completely replace the physical space for interactions. Indeed, as a complementary tool, it can be a way to promote it (24%) and to invite people to visit physical places in the first place (56%). As a matter of fact, after the event, 82% (58 respondents) would like to visit (or come back) to the areas virtually acquainted through the experience of food traditions.

## 4. Discussion

This research has shown that the relational component can play a decisive role in the knowledge of a place and its territorial and cultural peculiarities (Rifkin, 2000), even in the contest of a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even if the *Staffetta* is not strictly a tourist experience, the first element that contributed to its success lies in the previous relationships among the organisers and between organisers and participants. This aspect is confirmed by the fact that more than half of the participants became aware of the initiative through their acquaintances, or through *Agritur-Aso/Le Marche in Valigia* network. The data about the 61% of the

respondents declaring to have already visited a place or facility related to the *Agritur-Aso* network reveals the centrality of the network as an instrument, associated to the relational approach, for bringing together people sharing common values (interest in cooking; sharing with others upon values related to the *Ciocheciò* principles and the concept of relational tourism; promotion of a sustainable and healthy lifestyle). In this regard, it is relevant that the nature of the relations established before the *Staffetta* between organisers and participants is perceived by the organisers and by the 41% of respondents as a friendship relationship, which for 17% of the respondents is considered to be long-lasting. The other two elements that played an essential role within the *Staffetta* were the territorial roots of the initiative (*locality*) and the role of food and gastronomic traditions (*gastronomy*). The *Staffetta* was perceived, both by the organisers and the participants, as a vehicle through which narrating a territory and its traditions (Wittel, 2001; Molz, 2013;2014). Within the *Staffetta*, gastronomy acted as a bridge able to link local communities to non-local people (*linking culture and tourism*) and also a tool to live memorable and meaningful experiences (*developing the meal experience*) of cultural exchange (e.g. participants reproduce their own version of other participants' recipes) (Richards, 2012, p.19).

The connecting element among these three factors was the online format of the *Staffetta*. According to the network relationality dimensions (Marques and Gondim Matos, 2020), both in the organisers and participants' perspective, the *Staffetta* favoured a good level of *temporary belongingness*, stimulating a sense of places especially by developing a family feeling with participants and by feeling part of a virtual community; the online format also helped in creating or consolidating *a-priori empathy* with organisers and other participants, marking the beginning of a two-sided relationship. Despite the positive role recognised to the online format of the *Staffetta* for the creation of new relationships or strengthen existing ones, technology played an instrumental role (Bawens, 2010; Porter, 2004): in the absence of the other three elements (relationality, locality and gastronomy) the online format would have been an end in itself. This is confirmed by the fact that technology was mainly conceived by respondents as a tool to promote long-distance human interactions, a territory and its culture and gastronomic traditions. Moreover, the online relational space of the *Staffetta* has been perceived as a way to invite people to visit the physical space (56%).

In terms of implications, the *Staffetta* was an opportunity to create new relationships and/or to strengthen existing ones and to stimulate the desire to deepening knowledge to real meetings on the respective territories of the participants. In this sense, the *Staffetta* can be conceived as a bridge to stimulate face-to-face interactions and a potential tourism attractor. This latter aspect emerged from the organisers' wish to go from virtual to real and to meet each other in a second on-site edition; in the case of the participants, to travel the places known virtually (online) and indirectly (through the recipes) during the *Staffetta*. This aspect is confirmed by the fact that places of origin of the organisers are the ones that participants would most likely visit in the future (Marche: 34%; Japan: 28%; Veneto: 12%; Liguria: 7%). This element could somehow be linked to the role played by previous relationships established between



organisers and participants but also to the natural friendly attitude of the organisers in establishing new relationships.

## 5. Conclusions

Starting from the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in tourism sector in terms of travel restrictions, decrease in the demand and changes in the tourists' behaviour, this contribution has analysed the opportunities given by relational tourism in the post-pandemic scenario with a focus on how and to what extent technologies can contribute to promoting authentic tourism experiences during and after a crisis.

The case of the *Staffetta della Cucina Ciocheciò* has been presented. This initiative, proposed during the lockdown, aimed at maintaining existing relationships and create new ones, by involving organisers and participants in an immersive virtual cooking experience based on *Ciocheciò* shared values and the benefits of relationality in terms of engagement and wellbeing.

Results showed that, even if virtually, elements of relational tourism are included in this experience. Thus, relational tourism can be pursued in the post-COVID-19 tourism recovery, when connected with locality and gastronomy, as in this case. The role played by technology is relevant: far from being a substitute of reality, it can act as a bridge to facilitate face-to-face interactions and stimulate real visits to places known only virtually. In the investigated case, it is the interplay of real and virtual social interactions that has emerged as the key factor for a kind of tourism that can face challenges and crisis such as the COVID-19.

As far as lessons learnt from the *Staffetta's* experience and this exploratory research, some suggestions and recommendations emerged. These, taking into account the charter for tourism, travel, and hospitality after COVID-19 proposed by Chang et al. (2020), could benefit practitioners at local, regional and global level, in managing relationships with tourists. On the one hand, this study suggests that social direct interactions are essential elements for the creation of authentic tourism experiences. On the other hand, online interactions can play a decisive role in maintaining stable and long-lasting relationships and in creating new ones that from virtual can turn to real. This is possible during and also after a crisis.

Considering future perspectives, practitioners willing to maintain existing relationships and/or to create new ones could:

- consider the territory and the local communities as *key elements* of the bond they would like to create through their online and offline interactions with guests.
- consider food and immersive experiences, virtual or real, as *supporting elements* to enhance the level of engagement of tourists and improve the relationship itself.

This study presents some limitations. Further research could focus on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the evolution of the demand for relational tourism after the lockdown and the *Staffetta* experience, based on data on the tourism flows to the destinations and facilities involved in the initiative, to understand if it somehow had an impact in terms of tourism promotio

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THIS THESIS

This study aimed to understand how can collaboration lead to social innovative practices for an inclusive tourism in rural areas. An initial analysis of the recent development policies highlighted the theoretical foundations of this study, which can be found in *social innovation* (European Commission, 2011; The Young Foundation, 2012) and *inclusive tourism* (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018), having social businesses as *trait d'union* for an inclusive development of rural areas (European Commission, 2021). The study proposes the following question: *how can networking help social businesses to allow social innovative practices towards an inclusive tourism in rural areas?* This question has been investigated by examining two types of social businesses in Marche region, related to social farming and relational-based hospitality. The former develops to allow the socio-laboral inclusion of marginalized people (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; Genova et al., 2020), while the latter aims to develop genuine relations among hosts, guests, and rural local communities (Bertella & Cavicchi, 2017; Legrand et al., 2020). To address the overarching aim of this thesis, some sub-questions are proposed: *how to design a collaborative-oriented approach to help social businesses develop an inclusive tourism in rural areas?* (**chapter 2**); *what are the impacts of tourism networking that social businesses can have on the social and working well-being of local communities?* (**chapter 3**). Due to the increasing interest of international policies on technology and digital tools for the development of rural Europe (European Commission, 2021), this study additionally addresses this question: *how can technology and digital tools support social hospitality businesses to foster networks and genuine social relations with guests, to provide an authentic experience with local communities?* (**chapter 4**). The case studies proposed helped to answer the questions above. Chapters **1, 2 and 3** are dedicated to investigating the topic in social farming, while **chapter 4** addresses the topic to the social hospitality sector.

The **chapter 1**, which is an introductory study on social farming tourism, proposes a literature review to unfold tourism in social farming settings. The chapter attempts to answer to the question posed by different scholars (Kluvankova et al., 2021; Vercher et al., 2022; Terstriep et al., 2015; Terstriep et al., 2020) about the entity of changes that social innovation might suffer during its evolutionary development. By using the three main elements of social innovation namely *response to social challenges*, *actors' capacity to act*, and *networking & collaborations* (European Commission, 2011; The Young Foundation, 2012), it has been possible to detect important areas for both scholars and practitioners to consider for the development of social farming. Social farming tourism results in addressing several challenges among which the recent *growing need for recreation in nature*, and *a better interconnection between urban and rural areas*. The review reveals that approaching social farming from a tourism perspective, allows to extend the benefits of recreation in nature from the local community to the broader society (as in Chen et al., 2021). To do so, *accommodation and agritourism facilities*, together with the nearby *cultural and tourist sites* are integrated

in the provision of services. While new relationships between actors are created, there is also a reconfiguration of the existing ones, especially in response to the business needs. In particular, universities due to their function of knowledge generation and dissemination, are assigned the important role of co-creating systemic tourism models in which recreational activities can be carried out according to the societal needs. In this process, governmental support is crucial, not only to finance tourism activities and the training of operators, but above all to provide a legislative support for these activities to develop. From the literature review it clearly emerges the difference in the intentions towards tourism activities in green care and social farming contexts. While the first one is more related to the provision of well-being activities in nature, the second uses tourism to create occasions of socio-working inclusion for the most fragile people. However, the research highlights a gap on how the tourism collaboration can benefit disadvantaged groups. Attempts to compensate to this gap have been made throughout **chapters 2 and 3**. The aim of chapter 2 is to develop a collaborative and inclusive-oriented model for the development of tourism in rural areas. This chapter aims to answer to methodological (Moreno de la Santa, 2020) gap related to find ways and processes to make tourism more inclusive, as well as ontological one (Dhales et al., 2020) to consider social entrepreneurs in the tourism planning. It draws on participatory action-research (PAR) and integrates the theories of Business Models (BMs) and Theory of Change (ToC) for strategic visioning and planning of actions needed to allow social businesses to deliver inclusive rural tourism services. Based on consensus building, the process allowed to create a democratic and inclusive environment, able to manage possible tensions arising from the different actors involved. Following on the topic of social farming, **chapter 3** aims at providing a model for measuring the effects that tourism networking has on social businesses for the provision of working and social well-being for local communities. From one side, this allow to address the need to provide evidence of tourism workforce (the worker considered in his working environment) in non-mainstreamed hospitality (Baum, 2016a, b), from the other, it wants to be an attempt to measure the effects of social innovation on the community. Lastly, the **chapter 4**, addresses the role of technology in social hospitality sector, showing the role of digital tools and technologies during the period of the outbreak of the pandemic (Costa, 2020; Costa et al., 2020). The experience of the *Staffetta di Cucina Ciocheciò* represents an example of how technologies can support the maintenance of relationships or the establishment of new ones through tourism. In this specific experience, technology supported activities of strong identity and cultural value for all, while at the same time encouraged online visitors to take part in future in-person visits in the territories involved in the initiative. However, from this study emerges the impossibility for technology to entirely replace human relations. Future studies could therefore be aimed at understanding whether (and to what extent) technology can support socially innovative practices in the post-crisis period.

The work of this thesis is not without limitations, first of all related to the exploratory nature of the field investigated. Aiming at developing a coordinated vision between the actors of the quadruple helix, the work of this research was mainly aimed at creating a space for networking and dialogue between different local

actors. On the one hand, this made possible to explore a broad perspective on the topic of sustainable and inclusive tourism and to identify possible paths for its development. On the other hand, this inevitably left out the perspective of the individual company on the organizational and managerial issues related to the tourism activity. Some social businesses more than others have exploited the potential of recreational and tourism activities for the provision of social-laboral services. It would be useful in the future to zoom in on the household perspective to understand which characteristics and circumstances have been particularly favorable to the development of tourism activities. In particular, this could be set in the literature on on-farm pluri-activity, considering that both social farming and tourism are two on-farm diversification activities (Van der Ploeg & Roep, 2003; Vik & McElwee, 2011) that require specific skills, time and resources. Such studies could complement the research presented by this PhD thesis and foster further knowledge in view of the new rural policies and resource mobilization towards rural areas.

Another limitation of this thesis concerns the impossibility to provide the results of the network analysis mentioned in the chapter 2. Although data have been carefully collected through questionnaires and interview with local social businesses, due to time constraints it has been not possible to process and describe the results in this work. Future studies should therefore envisage the possibility to use these data to understand how social innovation towards an inclusive rural tourism can spread among the territorial and extra-territorial actors involved in social farming experiences.

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URBACT -Urban Development Network Program: <https://urbact.eu/>

Assam Marche: <http://www.assam.marche.it>

AICARE: <https://www.aicare.it/>

## Annex

### Annex 3

Decent work pillars	Decent work indicator	Sub-category code	Selected examples of coded text and interviewed organization code
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 2</b> Employment creation <b>PILLAR 3</b> 3= Social protection	← Equal opportunity and treatment in employment ←	Work adaptation	<i>(A network of work placement companies makes it possible to create) "small jobs that are comprehensive and well presented, trying to adapt each job to the difficulties of the young person (...)"</i> . Jobs that allow him to recognise what it is important to communicate; what the other person does not know but it is important that he knows". <b>F1</b>
		Skills development	
		Growth of self-esteem	
		Sense of gratification	
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 2</b> Employment creation	← Employment opportunities ←	<b>New employment opportunities for social entrepreneurship</b>	<i>Collaborative networks, to open shops together and sell their products together.</i> <b>F3</b>  <i>Opportunities to deseasonalise and expand the tourism offer</i> <b>F8</b>
		<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 3</b> 3= Social protection	← Social security ←

					not to be alone during the winter, which is a hard time for them. <b>F2</b>
				Sense of responsibility	(In cohousing one tries to) maintain one's independence and experience the company as a whole and feel like family <b>F8</b>
				Double benefit	"With tourism a world opens up: the first thing is the economic part. I, as a company, producing many products, aspire to attract tourists'. <b>F9</b>
				New employment opportunities for social entrepreneurship	A network shares above all planning (...) and activities <b>F10</b> Today the farmer is young (...) and needs a different income. <b>F1</b>
				Self-representation	Create a network of farms, where each one has something to tell about its past, difficulties, etc. <b>F6</b>
				Social dialogue	"a common experience is important because it is important to listen to the experiences of others and give one's own". <b>F7</b> The relationship with other companies could also be one of patient exchange. <b>F9</b>
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights	← Social dialogue, workers, and employers' representation ←			Sensibilization	It must be made clear, in a social tourism network, that we are open to all (...) to take up the concept and practices of animals that, so different, can be together <b>F6</b>
<b>PILLAR 4</b> Increase social dialogue				Work adaptation	All these people also need to change over time. Everything ends when they always do the same thing. Certain people cannot do the same thing for longer <b>F9</b>
				Skills development	with a network of companies with the participation of skilled people, one can draw on (...) to exchange experiences, (...) information and improve one's knowledge and skills <b>F7</b>
				Growth of self-esteem	We try, especially in children, to convey positive messages in their growth:
				Sense of responsibility	tolerance and respect for all animals, so
				Self-placing in the society	

			that through the study of animals, they can also understand the importance of each person's role in society. The goal is growth and self-esteem, and growth and responsibility <b>F1</b>
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 3</b> Social protection	← Decent working times	← New employment opportunities for social entrepreneurship	<i>If I am a farmer as my first job, I have to work in that field. So, I have to hire someone to manage the social and tourist aspect. <b>F4</b></i>

**MAIN THEMES EMERGED**

PERSONAL GROWTH	SOCIAL AND WORKING INCLUSION	COLLABORATION FEASIBILITY
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Decent work pillars	Decent work indicator	Sub-category code	Selected examples of coded text and interviewed organization code
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 2</b> Employment creation <b>PILLAR 3</b> 3= Social protection	← Stability and security of work	← Economic	<i>Social farming is always lacking economic resources. F5</i> <i>The administrative and bureaucratic obstacles are so high that nobody took the money (...). Managing a RDP project, who can do it if not a professional? (...). Access to funding must be more flexible SC3</i>
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 3</b> Social protection	← Decent working time	← Infrastructural	<i>We always struggle with the internet F7</i> <i>Transport is also a big obstacle: there are different disabilities (...) and we are in the countryside (...). Transport does not reach our area. But we are not supposed to provide a disability-friendly bus neither since they are very expensive (...). F8</i>
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 3</b> Social protection	← Work that should be abolished	← Human	<i>Some other farms, having other duties in agriculture might find it difficult to manage the tourism activity, due to the small number of people working there F6</i>
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 3</b> Social protection	← Safe work environment	← Legislative	<i>Our kitchen has been set to provide hand-made labs for elderly people (...). We would like to sell the products coming from this activity. (...) The problem is always how to manage these issues (...) F2</i>
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 3</b> Social protection	← Social dialogue, workers, and employers' representation	← Poor cooperation	<i>Woofing sounds very social tourism. But this activity has some bureaucratic gaps. Why do I, as a farmer, to risk a penalty for ethics? If there was ethical sensitivity to the topic, everything would work better and easier. F4</i>
<b>PILLAR 1</b> Promote fundamental human rights <b>PILLAR 4</b>	← Social dialogue, workers, and employers' representation	← Unclearity roles	<i>Often there is not a sharing attitude among companies. F1</i> <i>Social cooperatives don't help each other SC2</i> <i>In the past few years, we realized that social economy's actors did not understand why farms are</i>



Increase social dialogue			<i>doing their job. Actually, we are not. (...) We are an instrument for social cooperatives to carry out activities for fragile people</i> <b>F2</b>
	←	← Isolation	<i>I do like networking. (...)I did not join networks because nobody asked me to. Right now, I am very isolated</i> <b>F3</b>
	←	← Narrow-minded	<i>The condition is that everyone is open-minded: we are very narrow-minded</i> <b>F7</b>

**MAIN THEMES EMERGING**

LOW EMBEDDEDNESS	LACK OF RESOURCES
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