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Short note

## Territorial networks of social agriculture for the socio-labor inclusion of migrants: experience in the Lazio region

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**Abstract.** This article shows the results obtained under the project “AGRIFOOD: training and employment guidance for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees” and European Social Fund (ESF) for different categories of discomfort. The project had the general objective of carrying out training courses resulting in professional qualifications in two key sectors of the regional economic system. One of these sectors was the agricultural one set up to give rehabilitation and work opportunities to migrants and asylum seekers or refugees. At the end of the two-year training period the results obtained have had an impact on the employment and production context and on the social fabric of the area. In addition, synergies have been activated between public and private stakeholders and between universities and research centers.

**Keywords:** social farming, inclusion of migrants, professional training, job placement, social cohesion.

**JEL codes:** I31, O20, O35, Q1, Q18.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past thirty years agricultural labour has moved from a family workforce to an outsourced and salaried workforce. Subsequently, it has moved from a local to a foreign workforce, with a growing presence of migrants in agricultural activities. In the context of gradual exodus from the countryside, the relative percentage of migrants working in EU agriculture has increased rapidly (Natale *et al.*, 2019). This phenomenon is particularly evident in Italy, Spain and Denmark where the push towards agriculture is higher than that towards other production sectors. This increased between 2011 and 2017. The percentage of foreigners employed in agriculture increased from 11% to 17% in Italy, from 20% to 25% in Spain and from 10% to 20% in Denmark. However, the statistics used for these considerations (Labour Force Sample Survey, 2019) do under-estimate this phenomenon. They do not include seasonal workers, those who do not have residence (although regularly present), and irregulars.

In Italy, in addition to the workers in agriculture, an above-average immigrant presence is also represented by those involved in personal care,

hotels and restaurants and in the construction sector. Finally, in Italy, the growth of foreign immigrants in agriculture, despite starting from very modest levels, has more than tripled between 2008 (51 thousand) and 2019 (166 thousand). For Italy, an exhaustive picture is obtained from another source, INPS (Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale) that quarterly registers employers' declarations on the basis of the employees engaged, both for a fixed-term and for an indefinite period. These figures show a greater presence of immigrants than what pointed out by the Istat labour force survey. The year 2017 recorded 346,000 foreign workers, a third of whom from Romania, and another third from India, Albania, and Poland (De Leo, Vanino, 2019).

The programme of social inclusion for immigrants involved in productive activity enters the wide concept of social farming (SF) and welfare. It contributes to ten key societal challenges in the perspective of the 2020 EU strategy on social innovation, including rural poverty reduction (FAO, 2015). The inclusion and participation of people with disabilities, migration and demographic changes are additional challenges that Europe has to face. "Social farming" and "Green Care" are being developed throughout Europe. Farms which put into practice the "multifunctionality" demanded by the policy makers are contributing to the creation of jobs in rural areas through the creation of social services. Social farming includes agricultural enterprises and market gardens which integrate people with physical, mental or psychological disabilities. Social farming includes elements such as provision, inclusion, rehabilitation, training and a better quality of life. Through a care analysis of the literature, it emerges that the developments in social farming across European countries differ from each other (García-Llorente *et al.*, 2018). For example, in the Netherlands many existing care farms do not produce any food. Conversely, the Italian model is defined as inclusive (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014; Giarè *et al.*, 2019). In fact, the Italian national legislation on social farming (l. 141/2015 and MIPAF MD 12550/2018) and regional regulatory framework are aimed at expanding the functions of social agriculture. This regards especially social aspects in the broadest sense of the term (Giarè *et al.*, 2020a). According to the Decree of the Italian Ministry of Agricultural Policies, single or associated farms and social cooperatives, whose income from agricultural activity exceeds 30% of the total, can be recognized as subjects that provide social agriculture services. The users of these services include workers with disabilities, disadvantaged people and minors included in rehabilitation and social support projects. Social agriculture services represent also social services: they provide activi-

ties and services for local communities through the use of material and intangible resources of agriculture to promote, accompany and implement actions aimed at developing skills and abilities. They also provide social inclusion and work, recreation and useful services for daily life. Even the services that flank and support medical, psychological and rehabilitative therapies aimed at improving the health conditions and the social, emotional and cognitive functions of the subjects concerned may be considered as social farming activities. This may also include the maintenance of reared animals and the cultivation of plants. Lastly, projects aimed at environmental and food education, safeguarding biodiversity, as well as spreading knowledge of the territory through the organization of social and educational farms are recognized at the regional level. Therefore, the Italian social farming targeted to people with physical or psychic disabilities, prisoners, drug addicts, young people neither in employment nor in education or training situation and the elderly. The paths of social and working inclusion are realized using different tools and policy instruments, such as traineeships and apprenticeships.

With the increase of the migration phenomenon in the Mediterranean area (Corrado *et al.* 2018), many SF's interventions are also targeted to refugees and asylum seekers (Zumpano *et al.*, 2020). The migratory phenomenon is often accompanied by social discontent and racism in the host nation and, therefore, requires adequate social and work policy interventions. This is to avoid the increase in irregular work and stem situations of degradation and violence. Therefore, one of the ways to promote the social integration of migrants is the promotion of legal work. Rural areas represent a favourable context to the social inclusion of migrants, allowing them to have easier access to the means of primary sustenance and opportunities of work. Furthermore, the contribution of migrants can play an important role in preserving the multifunctional character of rural areas (Charalambos Kasimis *et al.*, 2010; De Rosa *et al.*, 2019). The width of proveniences, the variety of destinations throughout the Peninsula, the inclusion of a plurality of production contexts and, finally, the numerical increase, suggest that the presence of foreigners in agriculture will continue to increase. This will be in addition to or as a replacement of autochthonic workers. Social agriculture can also be an innovative solution for the cohesion of the territory. This can be pursued by both intervening on the need to meet new social needs for the protection and services of people in rural and peri-urban areas, and on the possibility to promote the development of rural networks (Giarè *et al.*, 2020b; Timpanaro *et al.*, 2018).

This work shows the results obtained as part of the

Project “AGRIFOOD: training and employment guidance for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees”. This has been funded by the European Union and the Lazio Region through the POR (Lazio Region Operational Program) 2014/2020 in the first year and with the European Social Fund (ESF) for the unemployed, employees, disabled people and migrants in the second year. The project had the general objective of carrying out training courses with professional qualifications in two key sectors of the regional economic system. One of these sectors is the agricultural one which can give rehabilitation and work opportunities to migrants, asylum seekers or refugees from social health services (public and private) and from reception systems for asylum seekers (Sprar). In addition, the foreign skilled worker will be able to enter Italian companies or municipalities productively or will be able to transfer the results obtained to his country of origin.

This study aims at a better understanding of the potential development of the model of inclusive social agriculture in Italy through the perspective of the creation of a public/private network. This will also involve secondary and higher education systems and research institutions contributing to a high educational level for migrants by improving their employment opportunities and social inclusion. This original research is the first example of a multi-actor territorial network analysis with a longitudinal approach that lasted three years from training to employment of migrants.

## 2. METHOD

During social investigations, very often the cognitive objective that drives research is to define the causal links that underlie certain phenomena in society. The study of the change in the state of specific phenomena can take place through the analysis of the trends and temporal trends: in this case we speak of longitudinal research. The present research applies the longitudinal analysis that proceeds, develops and is arranged longitudinally. The objectives of this method used in the medical, biological and social sciences are the resolution of problems and the improvement of practices obtained through the observation, analysis and description of the state along a time axis (Feinstein, 1979; Duncan, Kalton, 1987; Ruspini, 1999; Koh, Owen, 2000).

Longitudinal studies detect information regarding the same object in a repeated or prolonged time and what characterizes the work presented in this paper is the time component. It is believed that a given event that involves change (in our case, employment) is to be con-

sidered as a consequence or agent in the development of certain configurations. The link that will link the intervening factors identified to the event under survey will be defined as causal or causal-effect (the Training Plan). Through a quantitative longitudinal study, the authors studied the interaction between a territorial social agriculture network with training and occupational development. In this sense, the survey differs from other research conducted on the topic in which the qualitative comparative approach (Giarè *et al.*, 2020b), a mixed methodology involving quantitative and qualitative methods (Moruzzo *et al.*, 2020) or the SWOT analysis (Timpanaro *et al.*, 2018) have been adopted.

The longitudinal research was characterized by following four elements (Menard, 2002). Data were collected for the variable “occupation” in two or more successive time periods. In the different surveys the sample was the same, ie the group of migrants subjected to the training plan. The outcome of the analysis was a comparison between the data obtained in the different surveys over time. Finally, the identification of the causes that gave rise to the “employment” phenomenon, ie classroom training, internship in the farm, organized events and the Terra e Libertà project in which one migrant will be involved in the establishment of the Cooperative. This type of analysis, in this specific case, is called a “panel” or “prospective longitudinal study”.

The project provided for the development of a training and dissemination path in the field of setting-up and managing networks for social agriculture oriented to the social inclusion of different categories of discomfort, with particular reference to immigrants, through job placement and the creation of small businesses.

### 2.1. The establishment of the Social Agriculture Network

The project was conducted in the two-year period 2017/2018 and 2018/2019, referring to the two academic years, starting in October and concluding in July, through the establishment of a territorial network of social agriculture, located in the Lazio region. The network was set up by:

- A social training institution (Cooperative Folias of Monterotondo – Rome, IT), a social enterprise that promotes opportunities for training, work, culture and integration for those experiencing conditions of socio-economic disadvantage. Folias is an Onlus that pursues equity and social justice through the construction of inter-relationships between people and with communities in the territory of the Province of Rome. It is also a non-profit training body accredited to the Lazio Region for Continuing and

**Tab. 1.** Farms participating in the Network for their location.

Farms	Location
Fattoria Papaveri e Papere	Capena (Rome)
Mercuri	Casperia (Rieti)
Fattoria Oro della Sabina	Fara Sabina (Rieti)
Country House Erba Regina	Frascati (Rome)
Agricoltura Capodarco	Grottaferrata (Rome)
Vivaio Bio Storgato	Guidonia (Rome)
La Casa di Alice	Maccarese (Rome)
Casale di Martignano	Martignano (Rome)
Vivaio Bianchini Piante	Monterotondo (Rome)
Antiche Radici, Quercia Madre,	Poggio Catino (Rieti)
Kalilà; Verde Foglia Bio; La Casa	Poggio Mirteto (Rieti)
Nettarina;Ecofattorie Sabine	
Parsec Agri Cultura – Orto di Roma;	Rome
Humus Feroniae; Il Trattore	
OMNIA	Tivoli (Rome)
Collina Sabina del Casale Peppino	Torri in Sabina (Rieti)

Higher Education. Since 2003 it has been defining and organizing training and refresher courses aimed at achieving professional qualification and integration into the labour market of people in a position of marginality. This is carried out whit in training and work circuits (orientation and job placement) concluding in an internship in a company.

- The National Coordination of Reception Communities (CNCA), a social promotion association organized in 16 regional federations. About 260 organizations located in almost all regions of Italy adhere to it, including social cooperatives, social promotion associations, voluntary associations and religious entities. It has spread in all areas of discomfort and marginalization with the aim of promoting rights of citizenship and social well-being. One of the aims is to elaborate the technical aspects related to social policies and the various sectors of intervention for the construction of “welcoming communities”. In addition, the CNCA develops and implements projects with a high experimental content with the aim of identifying models of intervention and good practices. These have to be disseminated in its associative fabric and in the wider community of those interested in the centrality of social issues.
- Some social cooperatives engage themselves in the implementation of the principles and practices of Social Agriculture (Tab. 1). They are also committed in the promotion of integration between social activities, agricultural world and institutional subjects. This is carried out in collaboration with local

farms, trade representatives, agricultural universities, public institutions, formal and informal groups and individual citizens, in a shared perspective of social sustainability of the territory. Among, the most important cooperatives, in terms of size of their activities, are Capodarco Agriculture and Parsec Agri Cultura (Garden of Rome).

- About 20 farms and agritourisms hosting internships for training and pre-employment, located throughout the territory of the Lazio region.
- A dozen teachers, with different specializations, to guarantee a wide educational offer to trainees oriented to job insertion in all agricultural production sectors, from plant production to animal production. This includes the processing and marketing of agri-food products.
- Two demonstration sites for social agriculture: 1. The experimental farm of Council for Agricultural Research and Economics-CREA located in Tor Mancina (Monterotondo-Rome), of about 60 ha. It has a natural vegetable garden surrounded by hedges of medicinal plants, located near a walnut tree and a poplar. Laboratories are organized at the company for the first transformation of vegetables and medicinal plants (Spognardi *et al.*, 2019). 2. The Farm Antiche Radici of Poggio Catino (Rieti, IT), an agro-afforestation project, consists of 40 ha of forest with an olive grove, a natural garden of vegetables and medicinal plants and a fruitorchard. The farm includes an apiary and a breeding area for laying hens and wool goats of the Mohair breed.

## 2.2. The organization of training courses

The Folias cooperative has organized two different types of courses during the two academic years.

- The first year – qualification course: agricultural operator.
- Agrifood Project: training and job placement guidance for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

The training courses, dedicated to 15 selected trainee migrants, provided for the implementation of the following actions: orientation path (individual and group); participation in a specific training course with qualification (duration 354 hours); job placement in the company (duration 240 hours each); monitoring and support-duration 18 hours). The disciplines addressed during the course were the following: 1. cultivation of plant and fruit in the field and in a protected environment; 2. principles of zootechnical breeding; 3. the agri-food chain: production, processing, marketing and main agricultural production systems; 4. traditional, integrated, organic

farming; 5. the organization of the farm; 6. machinery and equipment for agricultural production and animal husbandry; 7. characteristics of farm animals: types, specific methods of breeding and care; 8. product and nutritional characteristics of animal feed, its treatment and storage; 9. reproductive and productive behavior of animals; 10. plant and fruit cultivation techniques; 11. storage and conservation of agricultural products and derivatives; 12. land and crop protection and care systems; 13. protection of worker safety in agricultural production and animal husbandry operations; 14. administrative requirements of the farm; 15. quality systems applied to agriculture; 16. technical English languages of the sector; 17. information technology and internet; labor contracts; 18. pension provision and insurance.

The second year:

- a. Qualification course: agricultural operator with a call for the admission of 13 students selected including four migrants. The course, funded by the ESF, was reserved for candidates primarily resident in the Lazio Region with the following requirements: unemployed young people and adults, also those with problems related to different types of addiction and people with disabilities (reserve of 20%). The course for a total duration of 629 hours, including orientation and accompaniment actions, took place at the cooperative's operational headquarters, with laboratories at the two demonstration centers and training internships on farms. The lessons in the classroom covered the same disciplines indicated for the first year, intended for four migrants.
- b. Qualification for a technician of agricultural production processes with short supply chain for 13 students selected including three migrants. The course, funded by the ESF, was reserved for candidates, primarily resident in the Lazio Region, with the following requirements: unemployed young people and adults, also those with problems related to different types of addiction and people with disabilities (reserve of 20%). Possession of a high school diploma or two-years of experience in the agricultural sector was required. The course for a total duration of 693 hours, including orientation and accompaniment actions, took place at the operational headquarters of the cooperative with a classroom on site, a laboratory at the two demonstration centers and training internships on the farm.

The subjects of training concerned job security, agronomy foundations, crop protection, product processing and marketing, business economy and balance sheets, contracts and Italian for three migrants with about 240 hours of internships on farms and agritour-

ism, some of which are also processors (honey, wool, milk, meat, oil, etc.).

### 2.3. *The organisation of popular events for territorial animation*

Each course ended with a popularity event, involving consumers, schools, local authorities, other related businesses and media. In 2019, for example, the following event was organised: ORTOLIAMOCI - THE GARDEN FESTIVAL SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 2019-POGGIO CATINO - a party in the countryside full of activities for adults and children in the name of nature, socialization and sustainable agriculture.

"Ortoliamoci" was the result of a joint project to share spaces, knowledge and experiences. It was born from the collaboration between the farm "AnticheRadici" in the municipality of Poggio Catino (RI) and the training course for "New Agricultural Operators" organized by the Folias Social Cooperative and financed by the Lazio Region with ESF funds.

The event was intended to recount the life thrust that characterized the union of these realities: field experimentation of synergistic cultivation, planning of activities auxiliary to agriculture. It was also intended as encouraging cooperation between all the operators involved in the project: students, teachers and collaborators. The event was promoted on a specially created Facebook page. During the day it was possible to buy boxes of vegetables from the demonstration garden and neighboring companies for the self-financing of the activities of the social agriculture network. In addition, beekeeping, animal feed, wool weaving, dog truffle research, tree climbing were set up.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the end of the two-year training period the results obtained had an impact on the employment and production context and on the social fabric of the area. As regards the employment results, the courses were followed by some permanent hirings or contracts lasting more than one year, while others were recruited in other EU countries and others started their own small businesses (Tab. 2).

The results described were obtained thanks to the creation of the network and, above all, to the conveyance of information between companies by the participants in the training course and during the internships in the company. The commercial competitiveness of the companies involved in the social agriculture network has

**Tab. 2.** Total amount of trainees employed after the two-years formation programs.

Years	Trainees employed					Total number of participating trainees
	Agriculture in Italy	Building sector	Agriculture in other EU countries	Micro-enterprises created	Cooperatives activated	
2017/2018	6 *	1	4			15
2018/2019	9 **			4		26
2019/2020					1 ***	

\* two after a course as a tractor driver, one in herbal medicine preparation  
 \*\* including six migrants; \*\*\* constituted by eight trainees of the previous year, including one migrant (“Terra e Libertà” Project).

increased thanks to the creation of two purchasing groups that have sprung up in the city of Monterotondo (Italy). It has also increased thanks to the implementation of services to support the marketing of companies in the network. This has involved the creation of an electronic catalogue of products and the creation of pages on social networks. The increase in the interchange of processes and products between companies has led to economies of scale.

In addition, synergies have been activated between public and private stakeholders, between universities and research centers.

The two-year experience of social activity has provided the opportunity for some public research bodies to collect data on the economic and environmental sustainability of the practices adopted, especially in the field of vegetable and medicinal plant production. In particular, some CREA Research Centers, the University of Cassino and two INAIL (Istituto nazionale Assicurazione Infortuni sul Lavoro) departments have signed framework agreements for the study of the sector aimed at the survey of experiential data, their elaboration and publication. They were also aimed at the promotion of research

projects in the context of the establishment of social agriculture networks (Fig. 1).

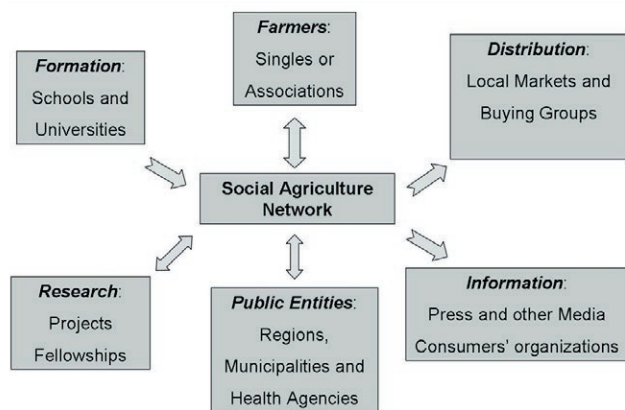
Another result obtained by the network has been the sharing of the results of environmental sustainability techniques adopted by the farms involved, all strictly organic certified and oriented to natural cultivation and the integration of activities (production of vegetables, fruit, honey, spices, wool, olive and seed oil, milk and derivatives and eggs). The trainees, who had attended several companies to carry out the training course, increased the flow of information between firms. In addition, they collaborated with the teachers of the courses to draw up guidelines of good eco-sustainable practice for farms.

Among the guidelines implemented, some concerned the increase of practices aimed at increasing production cycles. These were based on circular economy principles such as, for example, the start-up of the closed cycle in companies, through zero waste production and also through composting and energy conversion of residual biomass.

A further action aimed at the realization of economies of scale was the stimulation of the activity on behalf of third parties between the farms involved, that gave rise to the birth of a spontaneous network of companies for the transport and marketing of products (impulse also dictated by the emergency following the Covid-19 pandemic due to the growth in the demand for home deliveries during the lockdown). In this context, the purchase of a van with regional funding with no co-funding by the Farm Antiche Radici, also intended for shared refrigerated transport between companies, has had particular importance.

The processing activity on behalf of third parties has also increased. This has been possible through the sharing of laboratories (Farms Kalikà and Quercia Madre) for the extraction of seed oil and bottling of the same, the bagging and packaging of honey and for the first transformation of medicinal plants.

**Fig. 1.** Scheme of the Social Agriculture Network Relationships.



Another activity of the network was the start-up and management of social gardens and officinal gardens that, thanks to the help of numerous students, have been carried out in some public and private host structures belonging to the world of agro-zootechnical research, education and public health.

In addition, a survey was carried out by the CREA-Council for Agricultural Research and Economics and the Cassino University on the socio-economic impact of Social Urban Gardens, the results of which are being prepared for future scientific publication. Many people (98) out of 139 invited completed the questionnaire. The survey was attended by the trainees of 2018/2019, the teachers, some employees of Folias, the members of a Purchasing Group, some high school students who participated in the training activities of the social gardens and some officials of the institutions that participated in the demonstration and dissemination activities.

Four companies participating in the Network's activities, thanks to the contribution of interns, collaborated in the survey of production costs and profitability of organic farms that have adopted natural practices in the cultivation of horticultural and officinal species. This activity was born from a collaboration between CREA and the University of Cassino. The results are being published.

The network participated in the organization of a Workshop promoted by the Italy-South Africa Association on innovation in agriculture. It had a sub-topic dedicated to social agriculture in which the experiences of CREA, National Rural Network and Capodarco Agriculture were presented.

Among the activities in the process of being started it should be remembered that the Lazio Region has financed the Folias Cooperative, a project for the establishment of a social agriculture network in the territory of Sabina, in the provinces of Rome and Rieti. Here the aforementioned partners are involved to a large part, together with new partners. Among their numerous actions are included the establishment of a social cooperative consisting of eight students of the two-year period of social experience, for the production and first transformation of vegetable and aromatics ("Terra e Libertà" project). The project also includes the future construction and start-up of a mobile laboratory for honey extraction and the first transformation of the officinal, under the supervision of CREA-Research Center for Engineering and Agro-food processing. With regard to territorial animation, at the end of each academic year dissemination events were organized, attended by about 150 people. These included representatives of local authorities in the Sabina area and ASL, students and

teachers of schools in the area and members of voluntary and cultural associations, as well as members of consumer associations and some journalists. The video and photographic documentation made during the events have been published on the Folias website and on the Facebook page of the same ONLUS.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

From a long-term perspective, it is useful to reflect on the phenomenon of the depopulation of hilly and mountainous areas. This has occurred with great intensity in recent decades and has changed the settlement geography both in Italy and in other countries of the European continent. Policies of social inclusion and employment find in the agricultural sector an effective means of urban regeneration of rural areas, of enhancing a human and social heritage that would otherwise be dispersed and of economic regeneration of depressed areas. It is to be hoped that the dissemination of training and support networks for the birth of enterprises run by categories of psycho-physical distress and migrants is possible. They may have, among their objectives, the recovery of niche crops and ancient practices reviewed in an innovative key. For example, the production of mono floral honey, the cultivation of spices as food or in mixture to make cheeses, the use of hemp inflorescences as bittering elements in the production of craft beer and plants to dye fabrics, the practice of spinning/weaving goat wool. In this sense, we could think of programs for the settlement of immigrants and other people suffering from different types of psycho-physical discomfort. In depopulated areas – with public-private funding – this would be aimed at the redemption of buildings, the development of new crops or the recovery of abandoned ones and environmental maintenance. These programs should actively organise the establishment, train the necessary skills, assist them technically and financially in the development of farms, in environmental maintenance. Well-designed and conducted programs can be successful. There are many immigrants and disadvantaged people attracted by the primary sector. This is shown by the increase in the "foreign" and unemployed share of those working in agriculture in Italy, as in other regions of Mediterranean Europe. The added value of social farming opens up prospects for a potential paradigm shift and transition pathways for agriculture and social work. The approach of social farming coincides with initiatives like networks for fair trade, solidarity, human salute genesis. Many actors see themselves as part of a movement and a process of transition that

improves societal demands, not only in rural areas. In conclusion, this experience met the major objectives set by the Italian social and labor policies involved in social agriculture. This was done by combining the agricultural environment with rehabilitation and care services, promoting the education and the quality of life of disadvantaged and disabled people and their social inclusion. It was also done by promoting working inclusion and employment, providing services and social activities through the establishment of a qualified public/private network that has supported Italian and migrants students from training to job placement. The original approach of longitudinal quantitative analysis of the territorial network of social agriculture and its effects on employment levels will allow the evaluation of the future stages of project development.

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