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Social farming and policies in Tuscany, between social innovation and path dependency

Social farming (SF) emerged in the latest ten years in Italy and in the EU as an innovative practice able to link multifunctional agriculture and innovative social services for both urban and rural areas. SF mobilises unexpected resources from agriculture in order to meet local emerging social and economic needs and can be easily analysed under the perspective of social innovation (SI). Stakeholders with multiple competences and narratives are engaged by activating a political game that might have fragmented results at diverse levels.

The paper starting from the analysis of the Tuscany case – one of the Italian regions where the discussion aroundSF started for the first time – focuses on the triangulation among narratives, articulation in policy making, and results in terms of innovation in rural areas.

1. Introduction

Social innovation (SI) has been introduced in the EU 2020 strategy with the aim to support a societal process of change able to face emerging challenges related to economic, environmental and social dimensions. Innovation is considered as the main strategy to answer to those emerging challenges, such as climate change, the need of the communities to afford greener growth and to face growing societal demands (Davies *et al.*, 2012; Science for environment Policy, 2015). For critics, SI has been introduced to reduce the responsibility of national and European institutions along globalizing trends (Bonifacio, 2012), especially in relation to those social issues that require different responses than the ones provided within the market framework. SI is rooted on the idea that the emerging crisis, especially in welfare state at EU level, cannot be faced with ordinary paths and that new alliances in local communities are needed to face emerging constraints and sectorial barriers as those are among the main obstacles to resource mobilisation (Moulart *et al.*, 2005; Murray *et al.*, 2010). Innovation in general, and SI in particular, regards also agriculture and rural areas as pointed by the rural development policies in Europe, but not only. In rural areas, the lack of services is becoming an obstacle for the organisation of lo-

cal vibrant community and in order to ensure generational change (Di Iacovo, 2003, 2004). Differently from the past, social development is something that cannot be given for granted and it needs often to be carefully re-designed to promote a good and strong economy sector. At the crossroad between economic and welfare crisis, social farming (SF) emerges as a social innovation practice able to mobilize agricultural and rural resources and to generate new collective answers in the welfare community for conventional and emerging societal demands, both in rural and peri-urban areas (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014). Through a bottom-up process and evolving from isolate practices and experiences, new actors are progressively setting up a new policy domain in an arena where different actors, sectors and competences are meeting to support the organisation of new knowledge, rules and models (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014).

By looking at the Tuscany region, one of the first Italian regions where the discussion around SF initially started the aim of the paper is:

- to analyse the SF dynamic of innovation for better understanding SI in agriculture and the influence of path dependency from existing views and interests;
- to understand the effectiveness of new rural development policies in fostering SI in agriculture in rural areas.

The SF case can offer an insight for reflection on the role of policies and policy design in relation to general SI processes, also in connection with other sectors and policies. Starting from the lesson learnt in Tuscany, the paper offers specific methodological suggestions. Conclusions demonstrate as innovation processes within SF can be relevant for the current agenda and demands of many stakeholders in Europe and worldwide and can be extended to agriculture and rural development, at least to some aspects of them.

2. Social farming in Italy: setting the scenario

SF is a growing practice in the EU set up differently in different countries due to the specific cultures and the various characteristics of their welfare systems (Esping and Venzo, 1995; Di Iacovo, 2012). In Italy SF has also emerged according with its welfare systems and strongly influenced by the existing crisis of public expenditure. SF in Italy has catalysed together state intervention, responsible re-embedding of private farmers in the community life, a new open interaction between social/health services and community, the reorganisation of ethical and responsible markets for the interaction with local consumers. In such perspective, SF could be seen as a living lab (Edwards-Schachter *et al.*, 2012) aiming to experiment the organisation of a welfare community approach – based on deep subsidiarity among private and public

actors, and on co-producing public/private services and values – and the re-structuring of part of the private activities in the perspective of civic economy (Di Iacovo, 2014).
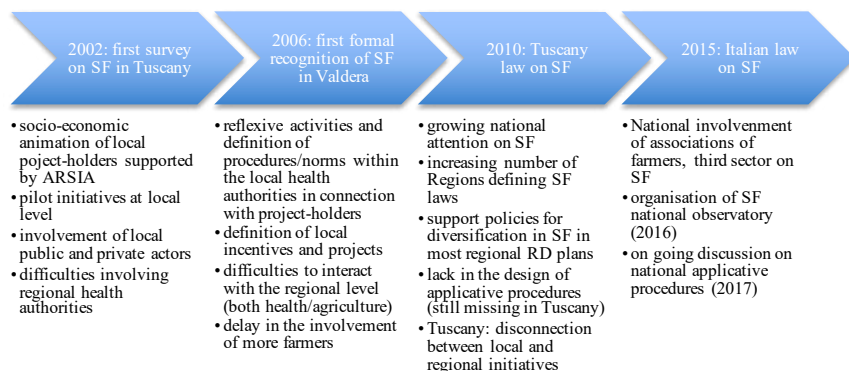
In Italy, the debate on SF started in 2002, and – with diverse dynamics in different areas (Dell'Olio, 2017) – is still on-going attracting the interest of a wider number of stakeholders at different levels, both locally, regionally and nationally. Due to its wide application, SF captures multiple private and public actors in a new policy domain, dynamically designed to consolidate practices and interests at different institutional level, although with diverse goals and contradictory results.

As research group, we started exploring SF as a tool to innovate sustainable social services in rural areas in 2002 (Di Iacovo, 2003). In 2003, a first survey on existing SF practices was organised in Tuscany (Noferi, 2007); in 2006 in Valdera (an area in the Province of Pisa in Tuscany that includes different municipalities) a public health institution recognised and formalised for the first time in Italy diverse SF initiatives in the local health plan (www.valdera.it); in 2010 the first regional law on SF was approved in Tuscany just before the arrival of the national law (Fig. 1).

As can be observed in Figure 1, the innovation process in SF can be considered as relatively fast in comparison with others. This despite SF law is not completely applied at both national and regional levels (such as in Tuscany) and the different local initiatives are not well connected with local social/health plans.

In other Regions, such as Veneto, where the normative process has been concluded, the number of registered social farms is still poor due to the dis-

Fig. 1. The timeline of social farming development in Tuscany/Italy.

2002: first survey on SF in Tuscany	2006: first formal recognition of SF in Valdera	2010: Tuscany law on SF	2015: Italian law on SF
• socio-economic animation of local poject-holders supported by ARSIA • pilot initiatives at local level • involvement of local public and private actors • difficulties involving regional health authorities	• reflexive activities and definition of procedures/norms within the local health authorities in connection with project-holders • definition of local incentives and projects • difficulties to interact with the regional level (both health/agriculture) • delay in the involvement of more farmers	• growing national attention on SF • increasing number of Regions defining SF laws • support policies for diversification in SF in most regional RD plans • lack in the design of applicative procedures (still missing in Tuscany) • Tuscany: disconnection between local and regional initiatives	• National involvement of associations of farmers, third sector on SF • organisation of SF national observatory (2016) • on going discussion on national applicative procedures (2017)

Source: our processing.

connection with local health authorities despite a rather high interest of the regional farms.

In those change processes, it is possible to observe relevant asymmetries and discontinuity that affect the entire innovation process. This can create instability, a contradictory frame and ambiguities, and finally it slows down the whole SI process in SF while minimising possible outcomes. In this frame, researchers have contributed to increase knowledge around SF: principles and criteria of SF have been shared between different actors; functional norms regulating SF activities are defined; procedures for framing social inclusion are codified; monitoring and evaluation of SF activities are developed to measure the impact of these practices.

3. Methodology

Our activity on SF is grounded on an action-research (Lewin, 1946) in Tuscany that is on-going since the first identification of SF phenomena in 2002. As researchers we were embedded in processes, meetings, focus groups, seminars, dialogues with hundreds of different public and private actors both at local, regional and national/international levels, playing an active role along the processes as well as in policy discussions and related frameworks. We organised several living labs on SF in many different areas in Tuscany, co-defining methods, paths, goals and actions with public and private actors. Qualitative interviews with stakeholders involved in the design of specific policies for rural and social development helped us to analyse links and disconnection along the policymaking process and expectation among the actors involved. In order to frame the questions of this research, we have considered three main elements of analysis: the frames affecting the entry point of the actors involved, the institutional levels where the debate on SF takes place, and the political dimensions orienting the actors in the arena.

3.1 Social farming and frames

Frames are considered as term of reference or interpretation (Goffman, 1974) able to orient visions, narratives and practices of the actors embedded in specific networks (Johnston, 1995; Bendford and Snow, 2000). Frames are socially determined by actors involved in a cultural environment, where social groups are informed and characterised by specific frames that represent a constitutive element of their culture (Goffman, 1974; Snow and Benford, 1988), orienting the way they conceive, perceive and experience the reality. When

some individuals – or groups of individuals – refer to a specific event or topic, the frame they referred to orients their understanding of the specific event or topic. A frame facilitates the common understanding of the world and the way to more easily communicate it inside a certain environment. At the same time, diverse frames, with their specific values and meanings, can differently interpret aspects of the everyday life as well as they might orient the course of action. Groups of actors are engaged in the politics (Hall, 1982) in which they negotiate/conflict sharing/opposite meanings (Gamson, 1992). The organisation of a frame is a process in which actors negotiate a specific knowledge in relation to some problematic conditions/elements (problem identification) for defining common possible solutions or innovative path for change (prognostic framing) and to motivate, engage actors around it (motivational framing) (Snow and Benford, 1988). Such a process, along the three mentioned aspects could also originate conflicts according with diverse catalyst views of alternative groups (Benford and Snow, 2000). The nature of the frame might also influence the course of actions. It depends on how broad is the domain focused, also in terms of actors and cultures involved, how flexible/inclusive or rigid/exclusive it is, how much resonance it can generate in terms of consistency (coherency between problem, solutions proposed actions taken), credibility (in terms of results and actors involved) and acceptance (also in terms of the starting points of the actors involved, their specific belief, motivation, political position) (Snow and Benford, 1988). Due to the nature of the frame its definition/affirmation – besides to what has been described above – can be linked to discursive, strategic and contested processes. The first dynamic occurs in terms of dialogue and alignment collectively defined towards an intensive process of knowledge brokerage among the actors involved (Benford and Snow, 2000). Such a dynamic might allow to define, to collect and to align both events and experiences in a process of mutual evolutionary reflection and discourse definition. In some cases a strategic attitude, to affirm a specific frame in front of possible competitors, allows to precise, to counter-define and to increase the resonance and credibility of the proposed frame (Benford and Snow, 2000). This is also the space for possible conflicts always influenced by the contest in which the debate takes place, influenced by the political dimension affecting the emerging position for counter-framing, but also in relation with a multi-organisational and multi-institutional arenas (McAdams, 1996). Diverse frames related to the same domain, might generate possible alternative paths depending from the starting situation.

Frames that are distant from the existing ones might encounter difficulties in having quick resonance in a wide audience. Adaptation of new policy domains in connection with existing claims and visions/interests (economic, political) might occur in a re-elaboration of existing frames into new ones. This

can generate a dynamic tension between innovation and path dependency at diverse institutional and organisational dimensions.

In the SF case, actors involved in the discussion from diverse organisations and at different institutional levels might differently enter in the debate (Dessein *et al.*, 2013; Hassink *et al.*, 2012, 2016; Tulla *et al.*, 2014; Hine *et al.*, 2008) within a contested process affected by political dimensions. The starting point for the actors involved in the debate around SF is always rooted within a sectorial dimension where agriculture and the social/health sectors are seen as separate worlds, differently regulated by markets and state intervention, as well as by internal rules and procedures. By the time, the debate on multifunctional agriculture, the arise of the public welfare crisis, measured in terms of public expenditure, flexibility of the services provided, and social justice (Barnes, 2007), have progressively created the space for innovative methodological approaches and solutions like SF. A first SF frame, radically innovative, has emerged at niche level thanks to the efforts of isolated projectholders who were deeply responsible of the economic processes that are key for the communities' life, thus also important in social terms. SF projects, and initiatives, offered evidences and important hints for a new debate around the use of agriculture for social needs and the interlinks with the welfare reform, new business models and resource mobilisation. At local level – where services are designed/organised – a SF frame arose due to the increasing collaboration among actors (farmers, public servants, public social/health professionals, participants of the third sector, researchers). The prognostic framing is based on the welfare crisis, the limits of a globalising economy in the phase of environmental change, the link between the reputation of the localities and the quality of their social ties. The prognostic framing incorporates innovative solutions (the use of plants, animals, nature) into a dimension of ecological welfare and regulatory communitarian principle, organised around a mix of state intervention, exchange and reciprocity next to the market, towards a mix of collaboration among sectors, blended competences and policies, community activation. Through the achievement of win-win solutions, the aim was to valorise the scope economy of multifunctional agriculture and to support opportunities for prosperity – from the economic, ecological and relational view – by reinforcing local nets, social capital and circular economy. We call this frame Community Based Social Farming (CBSF) (Fig. 2).

The mobilisation framing tries to involve a broader number of actors from diverse institutional/organisational levels, mainly sharing results and networking.

By the time, besides the CBSF, other 2 frames started to be defined once the consolidation of the SF domain mobilised broader interests and policies. The framing process started from the agricultural and the social/health sectors as described below:

Fig. 2. Emerging frames in social farming in Italy.
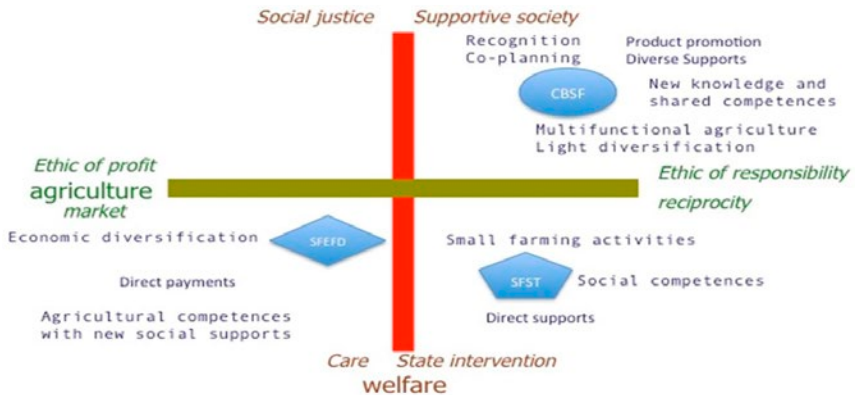
Source: our elaboration.

- SF as Economic Farm Diversification (SFEFD): it's rooted mainly in the agricultural sector and involves technical/political agricultural actors aiming at broadening the farms activities and farms economic viability by providing innovative services in the social/health field. The aim is also to reduce the gap with existing demand for services, both in peri-urban and rural areas. SFEFD prognostic is not fully compliant with the particular structure of the Italian welfare system, based on a mix of actors and on the increasing scarcity of public funds. It mainly focuses on directly supplying goods and services to rural and peri-urban families, to satisfy their specific needs (kinder-garden, elders), while do not fully consider the specific social competences needing for the services provided. In SFEFD, like in other north European countries, state and market remain the regulatory principle for the new services offered by farmers (REF). Due to the link with the existing regimes, it can be easily accepted and spread inside the agricultural sector according with existing path and policies in the rural development plans (RDP), mainly supporting economic diversification;
- SF as a Social Tool (SFST): it's rooted in the social/health sector and it looks mainly at the possibility of introducing agricultural activities/processes in the toolset used by the public/private providers in the social/health sector (public services, social coops, associations). Main aim is to offer a wider set of possibilities for targeted people (or users) with an increasing flexibility to personal needs. In addition, due to the current erosion of economic resources, another reason for the public/private providers to enter in the rural environment and policies is to attract new funds. The prognostic regards

the use of agriculture and nature as a tool. Not always the idea is to run agricultural processes that are economically viable and with technical agricultural competences. Support from public funds still remains an important focus and the mobilisation framing tries to engage it.

The three frames considered have diverse results and implications and they represent dynamics or competitive views among the actors involved in the SF arenas, who differently influence the course of innovation. Each frame has its own organisational needs and might generate diverse outcomes and adaptive answers to emerging needs. The CBSF does that by introducing a mix of subsidiarity (Vittadini, 2007), co-production of values (public-private, social-economic) (Olstrom, 1996; Alford, 2002; Parks *et al.*, 1981) and civic economy (Offer, 1997; Bruni, 2012) to generate innovative/effective results in terms of social justice, mobilisation of resources at local level. To achieve those outcomes/results there an high level of immaterial investment is required also to re-align vision, goals and working procedures among a multitude of stakeholders. SFEFD and SFST are based on direct private/public rewards and on the organisation of new codified services that use agricultural/rural resources part of sectorial logics and rooted on traditional principles (e.g. state/market divide) with lower results in terms of value creation and social justice.

3.2 Social farming and institutional levels

SF is a grass root innovation able to emerge from local contexts thanks to motivated actors aiming to define innovative solutions for strengthening social/health care by mobilising agricultural resources. It is important to clarify that there are diverse institutional levels playing a relevant role along the innovation paths. The main responsibility and dynamic at diverse institutional levels are described below:

- the local level is essential to activate SF practices. In Italy, this is also due to the specific competences in services provision rooted at local level (local health authorities and municipalities being the main actors involved). Locally, the State fiscal crisis generated a strong reduction on funds transfer, affecting especially the social services. At this level, a specific effort has to align different actors in a converging and collaborative arena, to broker knowledge and to set up a shared frame on SF. In many areas of Tuscany – and not only there – such activity was facilitated by our research group with alternative results (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). The main discussion framework focuses on CBSF, which seems being able to mediate diverse interests and competencies of the actors involved. Not always the actors involved achieved a shared vision, with segmentation and dis-alignment among

them that might stop the process of common framing and of resource mobilisation;

- the regional level has a large influence in the definition of criteria, policies in agriculture and rural development as well as in the social/health sectors and in education. This can be defined as the managing institutional level. At this level, project-holders are not always involved, public servants and representatives of diverse actors (farmers or third sector associations) take part to the discussion with few rooms for a broader discussion. The final attempt is always to adapt existing sectorial frames – in agriculture (SFEFD) or in the social/health sector (SFST);
- the national level has a greater influence in the definition of shared standard for SF (like in the case of the national law and related procedures for application) as well as for the construction of strategic alliances and coalitions among actors differently involved in SF. At this level – like in the regional one but farer away from real SF practices – the discussion is currently aligned on political dimensions and informed by the sectorial adapted frames (SFEFD and SFST).

3.3 Social farming and political dimensions

SF as a process of SI can be read by using the lens of transition and transition management theory (Geel and Schot, 2007; Loorbach and Rotmans, 2010) that offers insight regarding the main steps of innovation, and the way to rationally facilitate it (Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2014). Discontinuities in the innovation path and difficulties met spreading the expected results[1]. New approaches to integrate the politic dimensions into the dynamic are needed as already stated by VoB (VoB and Bornemann, 2011). The framing phases themselves are embedded both culturally and politically in such dimensions. According with VoB (VoB and Bornemann, 2011) the political environment where paths take place could be organised into three dimensions: policy, polity and politics. Policy regards the discussion around specific problem and solutions. In case of SF it can be linked to the diagnostic and prognostic framing phase. Pol-

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[1] In the Turin area in three years, towards a formalised collaboration among Pisa University and Turin Coldiretti association, a network of about 60 actors (farms, social cooperatives association, ASL, municipalities) was organised. It was able to mobilize agricultural resources, facilitating the inclusion at work for 38 less empowered people, generating new social services for about 120 people each year and creating a value of around 3 million € from agricultural products. All the process was organised without the use of any direct public funds. The expectation was to spread at national level the experience but such opportunity is still meeting difficulties.

ity faces the definition of rules and structure for political discussion (like arenas organisation, their internal rules, way of discussion). Politics regards the struggle for dominance/collaboration in the arena. The three dimensions can be declined into three levels: a focal interaction, a policy domain and the political system, as indicated below (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1. Political dimensions and level.

| Levels | Political dimensions | | |
	Policy	Polity	Politics
focal interaction	main focus is on the organisation of problems and goals of the local interaction and governance	rules and procedures insight the governance process	struggle for dominance/ cooperation among participants of a governance process
policy domain	problem definitions and political approaches that might be dominant are considered	institutional arrangements within it	struggle of organised political actors for *supporting*/dominate with their positions within a policy domain
political system	organisation of discourses and political values and belief are the main focus.	constitutional rules and political culture	struggle for affirmation/ dominance among broad social groups, sectors classes or regions

Source: our elaboration on VoB et al., 2011.

Ways in which actors involved take position on the three dimensions/levels affect the process of innovation in the articulation with the framing phases and the diverse institutional levels. In the next chapter, we will try to analyse these ways with regards to the SF case in Tuscany.

4. Results and discussion: Social farming in Tuscany

4.1 The rise of the social farming domain from sectorial frames at regional level

The innovative use of agricultural resource for co-producing social services in rural areas started in Tuscany at regional level thanks to a research action managed by the University of Pisa. The research action was supported by most of the relevant farmers' organisation at regional level. In 2002, a specific

survey using the snowball methodology and facilitated by ARSIA (a regional agency in agriculture) revealed about 60 projects run by family farms, agricultural cooperatives, social cooperatives and community based groups (Noferi, 2007)[2]. A socio-economic animation activity was then organised to facilitate networking and exchange of knowledge and experience. The outcomes were a first codification of SF and the organisation of a first regional SF arena. In 2003, in Volterra, a first meeting organised by the Tuscany Region – with both the social and the agricultural sectors and the EU-DGVI – presented SF cases and introduced SF as a suitable discourses to reinforce services in rural areas. Concepts like re-generational, rural and community welfare were used in connection with SF. At that moment the concept was still rough, but already during the meeting the chief of a farmer organisation strongly disagreed on the SF idea underlying the farmers' technical productive role. Besides the event, also the third sector' regional associations were meet to share the opportunity to valorise SF, but they remained sceptical, being mainly focused in traditional welfare services. At the end of this first phase a stop to the dynamic was generated by the prevalence of sectorial discourses in both the components involved: the social sectors staff of the region as well as farmers' associations and third sector' associations. This phase was characterized in terms of policy by the attempt to establish new discourses and political values in the regional arena and in the political system with the final prevalence of the sectorial ones. The prevalence of the sectorial frames at regional level influenced negatively the polity around SF, marginalising the political presence of the SF project-holders.

4.2 The organisation of local networks supporting social farming

The initial discussion around SF was interlinked with an increasing interest of newcomers. Among those, a non-governmental association (NGO) (ORISS) was working on a pilot initiative in Valdera aiming to valorise the social/health use of plants involving private farmers. The idea was to create a more inclusive system at territorial level, linking public social service, innova-

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[2] Tuscany has been a land for counter-urbanisation during the '70. There, from different backgrounds, young newcomers involved in agriculture started to re-enter into the primary sector with different views and ideas. Among the others, the opportunity to link in a diverse perspective the economic, the social and the environmental sides of agriculture. Some of those practices didn't have a long life, some others are still active in the field sometime changing their organisation and aims but still maintaining a diverse farming style including social activities for diverse target groups.

tive practices in agriculture and the collaboration of private farmers. Promoters spent a strong effort trying to receive the support form the local authorities (the voluntary Union of Municipalities in Valdera). During the period 2003-2007, the pilot initiative on SF was rooted and the good social and economic outcomes[3] convinced the Union of Municipalities in Valdera to formalize an arena for discussion in SF (called Board of Social Farming - BSF), in order to facilitate the reflection among actors with different background and competences in the area (Di Iacovo, 2008)[4]. In the BSF actors involved started to share achievements, to consolidate common views and goals, defining and codifying innovative paths and discourses. The CBSF frame took evidence during BSF. Despite a positive debate among the participants, there was no full consensus of all the actors in the BSF around the emerging frame. Some actor, such as some farmers' associations, was a silent participant. Such neutral participation had not allowed to enlarge participation to farmers that were not preventively involved by the associations themselves. This happened also for some of the participants from the social/health sector/services remained sceptical in joining the BSF. In the BSF the political dimension took a diverse direction from the regional one. In terms of policy, the focal interaction was on diagnostic and prognostic framing, looking to SF as possible answers to emerging crisis as well as an innovative tool to care people and create social justice in the area. The BSF was enabling to share cultural approaches, visions and expectations of the actors involved, to reinforce the CBSF discourse in the political system. From the polity point of view, new rules and procedures[5] to govern the system were defined within the BSF. In terms of politics the collaboration was the main outcome with no attempt to dominate the other involved actors. Participants, both institutions and actors, had not always the capacity to reframe their cultural approach and vision with the new one. As stated in both the agriculture and the social/health sectors some resistance in incorporating the new frame emerged reducing the impact in the area of the initiative. A strong consolidation of CBSF frame, able to mediate existing one, was the main outcome of the process as well as the organisation of a well defined set of rules and procedures ready to be shared with other territories and realities in the Tuscany region. Such translation happens also due to the mediating

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[3] Seven participants from the Mental Health Centre in Pontedera were included in the project. After one year and half, for 4 of them was possible to enter as employs in the farms due to their personal improvement. Farmers involved managed to increase their income due to a better reputation in the area and in the local food markets.

[4] The arena was mediated by Pisa University along its path of research action on SF.

[5] The Valdera was the first local authority that codified SF practices re-defining working procedures among services and actors.

role of actors like ARSIA and the University of Pisa, managing to spread ideas to other territories and actors (Val di Cecina, Pisa, Amiata, Grosseto, Val di Nievole, Lucca area, among the others) with diverse outcomes due to internal dynamics (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Dynamics, frames and political dimensions in social farming at local level.

Actors//frames=>	Sectorial agriculture	SFEFD	CBSF	SFST	Sectorial health/social
Farmers	from		to		
Farmers associations	from	to			
Municipalities/provinces	from		to		from
Vocational agencies	from		to		from
ASL/Health-social services			to	to	from
Social cooperatives			to		from
Voluntary associations			to		from
Research centre			to		
Third sector associations				to	from

Dominant political dimensions at local level:
Policy:
- Focal interaction on diagnostic and prognostic framing
- Policy domain to link sectors and tools into a new mix
- Political system: to define and reinforce the CBSF discourse.

Polity:
- Focal interaction; new rules and procedures to govern the CBSF frame
- Policy domain: new arenas for discussion (BSF) codified SF practices redefining working procedures among services and actors

Politics:
- Focal interaction: collaboration within the involved actors
- Policy domain : struggle to support the new frame into the emerging policy domain

Source: our processing.

4.3 Regional dynamics in social farming

The increasing attention to SF – due also to the SoFar project 2006/2009 EU VI research framework managed by Pisa University with ARSIA – offered the possibility to re-launch the discussion at regional/national level on SF[6]. At

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[6] The project was organised in several countries with national as well as EU platforms. The aim was to share similarities and differences in EU-SF, to organise SWOT analysis regarding the topic in the participating countries and at EU level, to define a strategy (at country/EU level) to reinforce SF in Europe. The platforms involved many actors (about 300 in all the participating countries) increasing the attention and the level of elaboration on the topic.

the end of the project – in September 2009 – the Tuscany region defined the first regional law on SF in February 2010. The path was speed by the emerging regional elections and by the need, in election time, to produce evidences on the activities done. In such circumstance, the president of the Agricultural Commission of Tuscany Region supported the idea to approve the first regional SF' law in Italy.

The SF network took initially part to the discussion on the law at regional level. In the politics, the rise of the SF policy domain and the coincidence with the electoral phase stimulated the struggle of organised political actors to obtain a dominant position. At national level, toward the approval of the first SF law, Tuscany region increased its reputation. The approval of a first regional law increased the attention on SF at national level. In the main-time, the erosion of public services provision was raising at national scale, as well as the evidences of SF practices in the country. At Tuscany level the discussion re-started in the different departments, mainly involving technical staff in the definition of a set of measures supporting SF initiatives. Those technical staff were not previously involved in any debate on the topic and they mainly started adapting existing sectorial frames on the new topic in agreement with regional farmers' associations. The diagnostic framing was mainly rooted in the debate on multifunctional agriculture and farming economic diversification, with small discussion on welfare reform and links with the local responsible for social/health services. The prognostic framing was based on the idea that a new market for social services in agriculture could start, although this was not the case for the Italian welfare system, besides some exception. In terms of polity, the traditional use of the command and control logic for policy implementation was applied[7] with very scarce results in terms of application, due to the logical mismatch with the emerging CBSF frame emerging at local level with the services providers. At the same time the local activities run by project-holders remained mainly frustrated (Fig. 4).

The disconnection between local and regional level, facilitated the disconnection among levels and the articulation of a diverse frame having influence in the definition of SF at regional level based on existing concepts related to conventional path of agricultural development such as economic diversification and multifunctionality (SFEFD). There the SFEFD frame becomes rele-

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[7] To support SF in the measure 312 of RDP, the economic diversification was extended to SF supporting mainly the re-organisation of buildings and structures. On the other side the re-organisation of public infrastructures for the innovation of social services in rural areas (measure 321 of RDP) was linked to SF. Again, the measure founded mainly physical structures managed by public authorities with really few possibility to link in the reality with SF.

Fig. 4. Dynamics, frames and political dimensions in social farming at regional level.

Actors//frames	Sectorial agriculture	SFEFD	CBSF	SFST	Sectorial health/social
Farmers associations	from	to			
Region Agricultural Department	from	to			from
Region Social/Health Department	from			to	from
Third sector associations				to	

Dominant political dimensions at regional level:
Policy:
- Focal interaction: prognostic dominated by existing sectorial frames and State/market divide in existing institutions
- Policy domain: direct intervention with few interactions with project-holders
- Political system: definition of SEFD and SFST frame nearer to the existing sectorial frames

Polity:
- Focal interaction: lack of open arenas for wider debate, design of non fitting policy tools (command and control), lack of interaction with services responsible
- Policy domain: law definition without procedures for application

Politics:
- Focal interaction: power game to mantein position of regime actors in both agriculture and social/health sector
- Policy domain: attempt to keep control on the SF domain by sectorial regime actors
- Political system: affirmation of parties in the elective phases, dominant positin of the region in the national contest

Source: our processing.

vant influencing, in terms of policy, both the definition of SF as possible so-
lution for increasing opportunities at farm level, and the governance, reduc-
ing it to an internal problem among diverse regional departments involved in
the discussion (agriculture and social ones). The tools applied to govern the
new policy domain were mainly re-oriented from the existing policies (in the
RDP measure 312 was applied to facilitate diversification both in tourism and
in SF). Despite controversial results, SF at regional level was also reinforced
through ad hoc initiatives focusing on funding grants for vocational training
activities for less empowered actors. Those tools were only partially able to fit
both the interest of the social farmers[8] and the social/health rules that did not
consider farmers as services providers able to receive social/health funds. By
taking no part to the evolving discussion on SF, the regional department for
social affairs continued working inside the social/health sectorial frame, giv-
ing a small interest to SF. In absence of effective discussion at regional lev-

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[8] RD policies were mainly founding the re-organisation of existing buildings in the perspec-
tive of the provision of new services financed by the social/health sector.

el was not possible to create a coherent frame on SF. In both – agricultural and social/health – areas the path dependency from existing sectorial frames did not allow the CBSF frame to increase its resonance. Also in terms of governance, the prevailing of sectorial frames (social sector as such and SFEFD) frustrated the possibility of the local SF project-holders to get voice at regional level disconnecting the regional/local discussion on SF.

4.4 National dynamics in social farming

The growing attention on the SF domain activated the politics interest at national level (Fig. 5).

A competitive dynamic to dominate the governance process and for a dominant position in the new policy domain took place among new emerging associations representing the emerging SF sector, associations representing the existing sectors (farmers and social sector), political parties, and other group of interests aiming to better positioning themselves. The organisation of a community of practices for SF at national level was contrasted by the need to struggle for domination in the domain. In such new arenas the

Fig. 5. Dynamics, frames and political dimensions in social farming at national level.

Actors//frames	Sectorial agriculture	SFEFD	CBSF	SFST	Sectorial health/social
SF associations	from		to	to	
Farmers associations	from	to		to	
Ministry for Agricultural Department	from	to			from
Third sector associations				to	from

Dominant political dimensions at national level:
Policy:
- Focal interaction: prognostic dominated by existing sectorial frames and State/market divide in existing institutions
- Policy domain: problems definition dominated by sectorial regime actors
- Political system: definition of SEFD and SFST frame nearer to the existing sectorial frames

Polity:
- Focal interaction: lack of open arenas for wider debate. Lack of interaction with services
- Policy domain: new space for the discussion on SF with few involvement for project-holders. SF national law definition

Politics:
- Focal interaction: competitive power game to increase position and influence of regime actors in both agriculture and social/health sector
- Policy domain: attempt to keep control on the SF domain by sectorial regime actors
- Political system: political support to existing dominant groups

Source: our processing.

policy dimension with its debate around problems, goals and discourses was only partially emerging being overcome by the politics dimension and the willingness to consolidate political interest of the parts engaged in the discussion. In this phase, a new frame (SFTS) started to be consolidated mainly by the third sector groups and components in the political system affecting the direction of the innovation path. The discussion around the national law was the catalyst for such political phase. The same results of the laws give evidence of the mediation between diverse existing frames and interests around SF. The law is still waiting for the application procedures and their definition is well controlled by the different actors involved at national level with little engagement of the local actors actively running SF practices. The law defined the limits of the SF field with evident outcome on the existing practices as well as at regional and local level. More recently, an increasing tension arose among representative of diverse actors, both in the organisation of the national SF observatory and in the discussion around applicative procedures. The national debate was mainly oriented by the contraposition between SFEFD and SFITS mainly in terms of politics, by struggling to dominate the new policy domain and to gain influence among social groups (mainly farmers and third sector). The definition of new rules far from the local SF experiences produced an increasing level of uncertainty for the same and related local innovation path for SF.

4.5 Social farming, local networks and policy tools

In Tuscany in 2013 about 140 project-holders applied for a grant from the Department of agriculture aiming to support less empowered people. In that framework, a specific questionnaire was organised in order to collect information on their main features (type of agricultural activities used for social purposes, target groups, services involved, participation to local/national net). The on line survey was filled by 105 project holders like indicated in the Figure 6.

The survey was done before the approval of the Italian law. As can be observed in figure 6, those associations refer to limited farming activities as in the case of some social cooperatives. Figure 6 also shows as SF in Tuscany has been capable to capture the interest of many and diversified actors, not only from the agricultural world but also from the social world despite their specific high level of dependency from the Regional grants. A high number of project-holders were embedded in local networks and were running farming activities in a professional way. After the experience in Valdera, other territories in Tuscany started working on SF by involving local health authorities, with farmers, social cooperatives and associations.
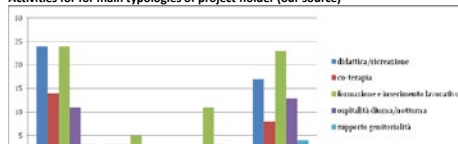
Fig. 6. Main features for projectholders in social farming in Tuscany 2014.

	Cooperative	body			
Massa			1	1	2
Prato	2				2
Livorno	1		2		3
Siena	2	1			3
Grosseto				6	6
Pistoia	4	1		1	6
Arezzo	9	2		3	14
Lucca	7	4	1	5	17
Firenze	8	4		7	1	20
Pisa	8	3	1	20		32
Totale	40	15	2	44	2	105

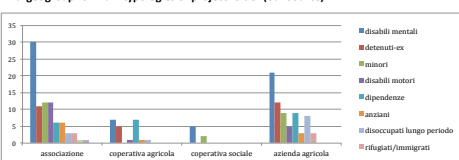Target group for main typologies of projectholder (our source)

Projectholders for farm dimension (our source)

Dimension Ha	Association	Social Cooperative	Public body	Farm	Community	Total
less then 5.00	39	11	2	14	1	67
from 5,00 to 10,00	1	0	0	12	1	14
more than 10,00	2	4	0	18		24
Total	42	15	2	44	2	105

Responsible for services provided by SF projectholders (our source)

Actors involved	%	Actors involved	%
UEPE	3%	Families	13%
Schools	9%	Municipalities	14%
Public bodies (others)	10%	Other associations	14%
Private	11%	Health Authorities	22%

Activities for for main typologies of project-holder (our source)

...ticipation to local/nati... s/ associations (our so...

	Link with national nets		
...k with ...al nets	no	yes	Tot
no	45	7	5...
yes	34	19	5...

Source: our processing.

At the same time a voluntary based networking activities among local groups arose at regional level. In terms of politics, the struggle was to organise the project-holders sharing the CBSF to increase their weight and their capacity to influence the regional policy domain. On the other side new individual project-holders started to be attracted by the topic. The organisation of diverse focus groups was mediated by Pisa University in order to better coordinate the common actions, share visions and goals, transfer solutions and co-define emerging needs.

The focus groups were always well participated with public and private actors coming from different areas in Tuscany. During the focus groups, specific points were discussed among participants and possible solution were co-planned. The focus activities were also oriented to organise the participation of the group (about 40 participants in almost all the region) to the call of European partnership for innovation at regional level. The needs discussed with the goup are presented in Table 2.

During the focus group, actors involved were mainly framed by CBSF. In the preparation of the European Innovation Partnerships (EIP) also the farmers' and third sector' associations were participating. The aim was to scale up the CBSF frame by involving actors of the regime and to affect the regional level. In Tuscany 20 topics (among them also SF) were defined in order to

Tab. 2. Emerging needs at local level from the social farming project-holders.

Activities	Tools	Outcomes
Organisation of a formalised SF partnership	Socio-animation and mediation, Exchange seminars, and study visits	SF standard definition and formalised working procedures
Common strategic plan for SF development	Training and support for farms, families, schools, etc.	More inclusive communities and new business models
Monitoring and evaluation system for SF initiatives	Promotion and marketing, organisation of a specific chain for SF agricultural products	Definition of SF good practices
Formalised contracts among participating firms	To recognize, formalize and transfer innovative practices in the regional territory	Added value to SF products and involved producers

Source: our processing.

fund 20 operational groups. Despite the regional selection, no SF' group was funded by the Region. The groups that were finally funded aimed to improve agriculture through technical solutions.

5. Social farming between social innovation and path dependency. Some reflection

The state of the art on SF in Tuscany and in Italy today registers an in-creasing political and communication attention but also evident uncertainty in mobilising actors. Currently asymmetries, dis-alignments and competitive fragmentation still emerge. The result is the slow down of the social innova-tion paths and an increasingly evident disconnection between expectations, opportunities and practicalities. By reading the evolution of the Tuscany case, it is possible to observe as regional and local level attempted intercon-necting especially in the starting phase of the innovation. The connection between ARSIA and the research centre facilitated the understanding of the topic and its consolidation at regional as well as at more local levels. The growing attention on SF has facilitated counter-reaction by some of the re-gime actors with the organisation of diverse frames closer to the sectorial expectations in agriculture and in the social sector. The discussion on the national law has reinforced such a process increasing competition more than collaboration inside the new SF domain. Competition seems to be increased by two elements:

- the lack of specific arenas at regional and national levels where sharing and co-creating knowledge on the new domain. The existing decisional space – on the law, on the participation to the national observatory, on the definition of procedures for application and, in the use of RD funds – is strongly controlled by regime actors – both in agriculture and in the social/health sectors – mainly struggling to affirm their position along different political dimensions and according with the SFEFD and SFST frames but with few outcomes in terms of innovative solutions and value creation. Associations focused on SF are engaged in the organisation of competitive alliances more than supporting the construction of a larger collaboration inside the SF domain;
- the underestimation of the relevance of the local negotiation for organising SF services where the regional level is responsible for organising agriculture and social/health services, but their responsibility mismatches with the local level needs (local health authorities and municipalities). The consequence is that the mediation organised along the SFEFD/SFST frames at regional/national levels have low impacts outside the political arena and especially in the territories. They can gain in terms of regional and national access to specific policies, funds and activities.

On the other side, at local level actors involved in the local arenas put effort in consolidating the CBSF frame, increasing the internal collaboration and generating evidences in terms of results in the medium terms. At the same times they seem not empowered enough to mobilise actors in the other institutional levels. At local level collaborations for organising practices are a protracted but relatively easy task. In these circumstances, members of farming/third sector organisations are actively involved but have limited results in influencing, culturally and politically, their own organisation.

As results of such dynamic processes social innovation in SF remain closed in a corner and path dependency on existing/adapted frame (Fig. 7).

The lack of rooms to reduce the gap between local and regional/national trends put constraints on innovation that remain trapped by the prevailing interest of empowered regime actors.

This is also evident with the innovative policy tools introduced by the new EU regulation to support social innovation, like EIP. They can be re-oriented by the regime actors – both technicians at regional level and actors involved in the decisional processes – on the traditional domains, with few manoeuvres for more radical innovations.

Fig. 7. Levels, frames and dynamics in social farming: between social innovation and path dependency.
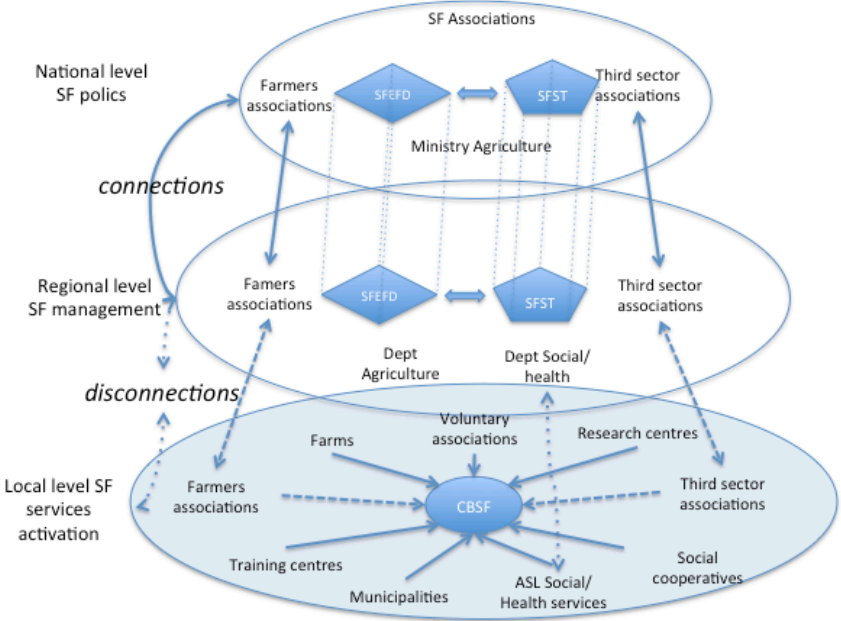
Source: our processing.

6. Conclusions

The paper proposed an analysis of SF in order to better understand the existing contrast between social innovation and path dependency. Our methodological tool was based on a frame analysis, institutional levels and political dimensions applied to the Tuscany region and related interlinks with the national level. From the analysis of the Tuscany case some lesson can be considered and lessons extended to a general approach to innovation. At the fare front of a strong need for innovation in Europe, the UE 2020 strategy introduced social innovation as a possible tool to better match existing resources with emerging needs. In this context, the definition of solutions to radically change approaches and way of operating the provision of public goods seems crucial. In a way with traditional paths, we have been unsuccessful but the organisation of innovative pathways is definitely not an easy task to achieve.

Rationalistic approaches to innovation and transition find difficult application within the Italian situation, as the SF case seems to show. The

CBSF frame was discussed and organised in the field in a collaborative effort with the public and private actors involved. The results achieved are rising more and more the attention of the international community due to the connection with key concepts such as subsidiarity and to co-production of public and private values. Unfortunately, the same values seem to be underestimated at national level. The counter organisation of alternative frames (SFEFD/SFST) closer to existing principle and paths of the state/market divide was able to cover the stage also offering very few results in terms of outcomes.

The answer to our second research question on the RD policies seems to be still problematic. Besides the efforts supported by ARSIA in the starting phase no specific policies were able to support and reinforce the process at regional level. No space was given to the establishment of a European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on SF at regional level. The applied measures for agriculture diversification inspired by the SFEFD frame didn't fit SF which locally is innovative because it is embedded in the community more than in the market and in state intervention. Also the use of SF as a tool for the social services according with the SFST is installing new competition within the social sector in more than supporting existing processes. The Tuscany region introduced SF has rewarding criteria in the selection of the applicant for farm investments. There are not yet clear evidences about how many applicants declared to be engaged in SF but the risk of an instrumental declaration without control and without clear procedures for SF at regional level might be quite high. In the Tuscany case there are no tools really supporting the voluntary activity of the actors engaged at local level.

How to fill the gap and how to reconnect needs, innovative paths, policies and resources this might be a wider question for social innovation in rural areas. The SF case offers some insights with regards to the country situation, that we would synthetize into three main points:

- agency: there is a new demand for an agency able to recognize innovation needs and give support to the innovators and work with transparency and equity. At national level this could be relevant for the rural development network but it seems to be enrolled mainly in competitive framework. In Tuscany with the abolishment of ARSIA the staff re-enters in the management of rural policies but with much less effort in supporting the change, especially out of the dominant frames;

- public mediation: at local level processes of innovation are facilitated by the active role of third actors not engaged in specific interests. This was also the experience we had during the long path of research action. However the local support is not effective without vertical connection with other institutional levels and without a clear understanding inside the in-

stitutions of the existing challenges. Both at regional and national level institutions seem not able to play that role. Radical innovations redistribute resources and power, without any mediation the regime actors do not have any interest to reorganise their interests;

• public officers and training: the two previous points open the space for a third reflection. In Italy the crisis in the public system and the stop of the turn-over has reduced the technical comprehension of challenges, solutions, working methods and outcomes. The result is that generating innovation seems to be highly problematic and new efforts in training and innovation should be done there.

Social innovation is becoming part of innovation in our contemporary society in front of emerging challenges also in agriculture and rural areas. Being a transformative concept, it is demanding in terms of re-alignment/collaboration of many public and private actors around new frames based on concept and principle able to mobilise resources in unexpected way.

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