

COOPERATIVE STRATEGIES AND VALUE CREATION IN SUSTAINABLE FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

**Proceedings of the 54th
SIDEA Conference - 25th
SIEA Conference
Bisceglie/Trani,
September 13th - 16th 2017**

**a cura di
Francesco Contò
Mariantonietta Fiore
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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL AGRICULTURE IN PERIURBAN AREAS: THE CASE OF BARI

by *Rinaldo Grittani**, *Alessandro Bonifazi***
and *Arturo Casieri**

1. Introduction

The aim of the research has been to investigate and explore social agriculture (SA) (S. Senni, 2007; Di Iacovo F. et. al. 2014) in the periurban area of Bari, in order to understand whether and how far it is spreading, and whether there are the conditions for it to have a positive impact on economic development in these areas where social relations in the local communities are fragile.

In the study area, contemporary peri-urbanization needs to be framed at a wider scale than the municipal one (Grittani R. and A. Bonifazi, 2018), along the lines of the scenarios put forward by the Regional Landscape Plan (RLP), as well as of the ongoing institutional reforms. With regard to the RLP, the “City/Countryside Agreement” territorial project envisages a Multifunctional Agricultural Park for Regeneration (MAPR) as a strategy to foster environmental protection and local sustainable development around Bari. Meanwhile, the focus of spatial governance is slowly shifting towards strategic planning, following the establishment of a Metropolitan Authority – encompassing 41 municipalities, including some strongly rural areas.

The first part of the present work provides a general framework of the policies and planning tools that most affect this peri-urban context. In order to study SA, we referred to the MAPR area around the city of Bari, which includes some minor settlements in the first belt and some second belt municipalities to the north. However, our selection rule was quite flexible, because various social cooperatives and associations operate in more than one

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territorial context, even outside the study area. The second part of the work covers a specific investigation into the emergence of SA in these areas and of the role these organisations may play in local communities.

2. Materials and methods

The study was carried out using a series of semi-structured interviews and a focus group (FG).

The interviews involved SA operators, and managers of farms, social co-operatives and associations. Semi-structured interviews are characterised by open-ended questions, framed in a flexible prompt list of issues that ensure certain aspects are dealt with, and provide a common scheme of interpretation for different interviews (G. Jennings, 2001; VL. Zamunner, 1998). Four macro-issues were addressed in the interviews: business, market, policies and territory (Giarè F., F. Vanni, 2015), to which was added the crosscutting issue of networking between the interviewees.

In brief, the aim is to understand whether and how far these farmers and social workers feel that they belong to a wider and evident local development strategy or, on the contrary, to discover if they feel isolated and detached from the institutions and places where they operate.

The final FG involved Puglia's key actors in SA and was based on visual research (Margolis E. and L. Pauwels, 2011; G. Rose, 2016; Faccioli P. and G. Losacco, 2010, as it was accompanied by a "photo-essay" – a combination of 37 photographs and as many meaningful quotations taken from the interviews. Following Corrao (2000), we opted for a flexible scheme in four steps:

- a) participants were given a brief presentation of the research and asked to glance at the photo-essay,
- b) a first round of discussion revolved around what SA meant for those who practise it;
- c) participants were then prompted to reflect on the relationships between SA and the places and communities where it takes place;
- d) finally, the focus shifted to key resources and innovative practices to make SA sustainable over time.

3. Results

This preliminary study has pointed to SA in the peri-urban area of Bari being at an absolutely embryonic stage regarding the number of ventures and

their level of organisation. Most activities promoted in the municipality of Bari and in the first belt municipalities are connected with social cooperatives and associations, and only to a lesser extent to farming enterprises. However, moving further from Bari into the second belt municipalities, there are also activities derived from agriculture, mostly set up with funding provided by the measures in Axis 3 of Puglia's 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme (RDP).

In the case study of SA in Bari and in its peri-urban areas, although it involves a very small number of subjects, the importance and uniqueness of each experience is recognised, useful not only for the disadvantaged beneficiaries but also for the wider territorial context and the welfare of local communities. In the study area, the current dynamics make it possible to imagine development and potential, although these activities are still in their very early stages. Our study of these first experiences appears to confirm the role of SA in the creation of social capital that is useful for the development of sustainable economic activities (Casieri A. et al. 2009; Marotta G. and C. Nazzaro, 2012). In particular, the local community's involvement in SA activities has created relations based on trust and reciprocity, making it possible to reduce the transaction costs related to the use of agricultural areas. However, this is impeded by the cultural attitude of farmers, who have evident difficulties in adopting the SA viewpoint and perspectives.

The FG provided additional points for consideration and further understanding of the importance that social agriculture may have in peri-urban contexts and in the pursuit of landscape planning objectives.

One last consideration concerns some aspects of methodology. The innovative use of a "photo-essay" in connection with the FG should be considered useful because it brought researchers "closer" to the participants, who appreciated the effort of reading and interpreting the object of the study. The photographs and captions also aroused strong emotions and feelings, generating detailed explanations and some unexpected feelings.

The future developments of this research could be directed towards a more systematic examination of SA activity – either in the metropolitan area of Bari or under a comparative approach –, in order to look for further confirmation of the hypothesis that SA boosts economic development and community welfare in peri-urban areas.

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