

Sharing Economy in Social Farming Projects

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Abstract: The aim of the contribution is to provide an explanation of the mechanism of the functioning of the shared economy in social agriculture projects through an interdisciplinary approach of interested social sciences (economics, economic and social policy theory, sociology, etc.). Orientation to the issue of creating shared work to support employees with the stated needs in rural and suburban areas is considered the main priority. In essence, it is about supporting families in raising children, caring for close people with disabilities, etc. The importance of employing seniors and people in pre-retirement age as a result of the phenomenon of population aging is also not negligible.

Keywords: sharing economy, shared jobs, social farming, family support

JEL Classification: A14; B41; Q01

1 Introduction

The Human labor, as a factor of production, represents a certain type of commodity that is affected by the forces of supply and demand. On the one hand, the employee stands as the seller of his labor force, on the other hand, the employer represents the buyer, who, through the given contract, tries to increase his profit and achieve his business plan. The whole process is also determined and directed by the state institution and its employment policy (Mankiw, 1999). Based on these three categories, it is possible to determine the specifics on the part of the employee, the employer and institutional factors of employment regulation. The creation of shared jobs is currently one of the priority employment issues in the Czech economy, especially for supporting families with specific needs (raising a child, caring for a close person, etc.). These are intended to ensure greater flexibility in shorter working hours with the same second part. In Czech labor law, the term “shared job” was introduced at the beginning of 2021.

Social farming projects in rural areas can significantly contribute to the development of shared jobs, especially for supporting families with the aforementioned needs, but also for employing people with specific disabilities and seniors (Gaugler, 2023). In this sense, the aim is to create conditions within social farms for the integration of people with specific needs to carry out regular agricultural activities in order to ensure their development and support and improve their well-being (Hassink et al., 2007). In this context, these social farms can contribute to the fulfillment of the desired economic, social and environmental goals in the context of sustainable development.

2 Background, methodology and data for processing

Social farming has been in practice in the Czech Republic for many years, although it has only been formally defined in recent years. Historically, the concept of social farming has been implemented in previous centuries. In the absence or limited range of other options for including and providing for people with difficulties in the labour market, agriculture, as the most widespread anthropogenic activity with a very variable range of activities, created one of the largest spaces in which these people could find employment, whether directly within the family or within the community around the agricultural holding. Thus, people who, for example, age, health or mental disabilities, did not allow them to work normally found employment on the farm. However, along with the intensification of agriculture, most of the space for less effective activities disappeared, and part of the social function of agriculture, consisting in including people with difficulties in the labour market and offering activities to disadvantaged and marginalized people, was largely suppressed and transferred from agriculture to other sectors. Only with the development of alternative agricultural systems, aimed at the extensification of agricultural management and its sustainability towards the end of the twentieth century, did this component of the social function of agriculture begin to develop again. After partial practical activities and theoretical projects in the years 1990 to 2010, the current wave aimed at the definition and conceptual development of social agriculture was launched in 2013. The concept of social agriculture in its current form reached the Czech Republic on the basis of the Multifunctional Agriculture in Europe project, which ran in the years 2011 – 2014, and the Czech Republic

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participated in it as a partner. Relatively quickly, several farms and actors identified with the concept and initiated its further promotion. In 2014, an interdepartmental Working Committee on Social Agriculture was established under the Ministry of Agriculture, consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, representatives of the academic, profit-making and non-profit sectors, which deals with the concept at multiple levels.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in 2022 only 6.2% of employees in the Czech Republic were employed part-time, the European Union average is 19%, with the Netherlands dominating with 47%. Switzerland also has a high share of such employees with 37.6% and Austria with 29.5% (Czech Statistical Office, 2023). In general, developed Western European countries have a share of part-time work in the range of 18-28%. The Czech Republic is thus significantly behind most of the "27" countries in this area, followed by only a few countries - Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia and Croatia (Czech Statistical Office, 2023).

Based on the above-mentioned contexts, the analytical comparative method prevails in the processing, which subsequently enables the determination of special or general laws by induction. At the same time, an interdisciplinary approach of social sciences dealing with the above-mentioned issues is applied, such as economics, economic and social policy theory, sociology, environmental studies, regional studies, etc..

3 Research results

3.1 Initial philosophy to the issue

The aim of social farming is to provide a wide range of people with health, social and educational activities based on agricultural activities. It is flexible, i.e. it actively responds to the current state of the community and its needs. In this way, it can also support employment in rural areas, because it can offer more people meaningful activities in its operations, and also offers services that are inaccessible to many people. This is especially the case for extensive farming farms, where heavy machinery is not used, the work is more diversified and the overall share of human labor in farm operations is higher (Donéčová et al., 2024). It creates new jobs in its operations and can thus become a social integration enterprise and a tool for social inclusion in general. In this sense, it fits the ideological trends of contemporary social entrepreneurship, where the emphasis is on entrepreneurs who are understood as creators of change in society and come up with new combinations in the following areas: "they provide new services, come up with new quality of services, come up with new methods of production, with new primary production factors, with new forms of organization, discover new markets". Social farmers focus on social innovations for the benefit of the community and society and their development. In this way, social agriculture limits the outflow of population from the rural environment (Hassink et al., 2014). It pays attention to regionality, gives preference to its own products over the globalized market and fully fits into the existing Rural Development Program in the Czech Republic. This type of agriculture is ultimately supported within the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds for Rural Development. Social agriculture can also be an additional source of income for farmers.

The European model considers agriculture as a multifunctional discipline, the strategy of which is based on sustainable development and stabilization of rural areas. The term "social agriculture" was first mentioned in Europe at the end of the last century, and in the Czech Republic it appeared around 2010. The definition of social agriculture is not yet uniform in Europe and varies according to the method and extent of using agriculture for social purposes. In the Czech Republic, social agriculture is still in its infancy and, as a social enterprise, it depends primarily on willing actors from the civil society sphere and from among social innovators. European structural funds also significantly contribute to the development of social entrepreneurship. Most implementers of social agriculture in the Czech Republic learned about this concept from international projects and use foreign experience and examples. Previous experience in creating sheltered jobs in agriculture and using national employment policy is also used.

One of the forms of atypical forms of employment is the shared job, which was a novelty in the Czech economy until recently. Greater use of alternative forms of work can lead to a better redistribution of unemployment or even a reduction in long-term unemployment, which in this case mainly affects people unable to work full-time, such as carers, the disabled or people of pre-retirement age. Similarly, for companies, flexibilisation means gaining new groups of employees or maintaining a qualified workforce. Flexible working hours also enable a smooth transition from economic inactivity to the active phase and vice versa, i.e. retirement or return from parental leave. It also provides space for further education and development of employees.

3.2 Shared places within work-life balance in social farming projects

In the emerging era of Industry 4.0, the concentration of capital and technological development have become the "vanguard" of the accelerating dynamics of modern societies and have given it an appropriate qualitative direction. Economics, with its knowledge, has most significantly participated in this "construction of a new world" among the social sciences. The idea of decentralization in society towards the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity is a subject of interest for the social sciences, which, as interested disciplines with different paradigms of implicit anthropological and value ideas, are based on different contexts of social and worldview dimensions (Begg, 2008). When assessing the relevance of the principle of subsidiarity in its practical application, they will therefore not be completely identical. However, the principle of subsidiarity can help the social sciences, as a distinct social science discipline striving for at least partial independence from specific historically, contextually and politically conditioned social policies, to better formulate relationships with as little dependence as possible between the state and comprehensive care for the quality of life of all members of society. The formation of social interaction not on general philosophical and moral principles (freedom, equality, justice, solidarity, subsidiarity), but on specific doctrines of social justice or human rights formulated in political processes can lead to a loss of autonomy in favor of serving the person in the framework of caring for the quality of life and a growing dependence on specific historically, socially and ideologically formulated doctrines and policies. Many newly defined human rights, especially of a social and economic nature, contained in documents to which the social sciences refer, are essentially relative in nature, based on consensus in society and its economic possibilities, so they cannot be understood in the so-called strict sense of the word as temporally or regionally universal (Dumont, & Teller, 2007).

In the Czech Republic, the concept of work-life balance is becoming increasingly popular. The reason is that individual employers often entice applicants with a variety of benefits, often with the addition of "for a better work-life balance". In essence, it is a concept of corporate culture, the purpose of which is to ensure a balance between work and personal life. However, historical approaches primarily followed the interest in reconciling work and family life. It was only in the 1990s that the policy of reconciling work and family life began to develop terminologically towards the concept of work-life balance in the sense of reconciling work with personal life (Wepfer et al., 2015). The current concept of this concept does not focus only on the family, but also on other aspects of life, which can include studies, leisure activities, social life or mental health care. However, it is not just the effort to combine work and personal life that leads to a higher use of more flexible forms of employment. This trend is also facilitated by the overall digitalization and globalization of work. It is also necessary to take into account the fact that such forms of employment respond to the interests of individual employees and employers (Shukla & Srivastava, 2016).

Czech labor relations legislation regulates a wide range of institutes, the existence of which fulfills the concept of work-life balance. Employers themselves also contribute to a better balance between work and personal life by offering these institutes to employees or coming up with other forms of employee benefits. Tools fulfilling the concept of work-life balance include working from home, flexible working hours, vacation exceeding the legal minimum, sick days, reduced working hours through job sharing or enabling paid or unpaid leave. Shared jobs can be perceived as one of the most important institutes that aim to fulfill the meaning of work-life balance. As the key legislative instruments leading to the combination of work and family life, they must also meet the basic prerequisites (Šetek et al., 2022). These are the creation of suitable working conditions, appropriate financial security for the performance of gainful activity, and the existence of legislative regulation that will not hinder the performance of employment and will sufficiently guarantee the care of a family member. It can therefore be argued that the implementation of legislative regulation of individual institutes in the Czech legal order, which will contribute more to the combination of work and personal life, will lead to greater respect for these institutes and, above all, to their wider application in real practice.

3.3 Multifunctional agriculture and its reflection

Agriculture is an activity that is specific in that it is tied to agricultural land and is influenced by natural conditions. Land is the most important, basic and irreplaceable production factor for growing crops that serve as food for humans or for feeding livestock. Agricultural production is therefore divided in terms of focus into plant production, the production of cultivated crops, and animal production, the breeding of livestock. The production of agricultural commodities is the main function of agriculture. Especially in the case of small organizations, it can represent the possibility of a new influx of funds needed for their continuation, development and economic stability, both from production and from the services provided or educational activities.

Social agriculture is usually operated on smaller family-type farms, which often produce in an organic farming regime, but this is not a condition. Thanks to this, it is able to support the landscape-forming elements of the given location more and tries to think more broadly about the impacts of its work on the landscape and the environment. It has a positive effect on the biodiversity of rural areas and at the same time reduces the negative impacts of intensive agricultural production. The concept of social agriculture would ultimately be unthinkable if the one-sided view of agriculture as a producer of food and fiber and the maximization of yields and agricultural commodities had not been transformed, regardless of the broader impacts of such thinking on agricultural activity. This awareness gives rise to the concept of so-called multifunctional agriculture, which, in addition to ensuring a sufficient amount of food and agricultural commodities for the population (production function), also takes into account the protection and maintenance of natural resources (environmental function), maintaining the cultural character of the landscape (landscape-forming function), developing the recreational potential of the environment (recreational and tourist function), maintaining and developing local traditions (cultural function), maintaining the rural settlement structure (settlement-forming function). Furthermore, through the production of biomass, agriculture is becoming an important player in the field of renewable energy sources (energy function). Last but not least, agriculture helps to create new jobs, opportunities for social inclusion and new tools for care and social and educational activities, which represents the social function of agriculture.

3.4 The position of agriculture in economic, social, regional and rural policy

At first glance, the agricultural sector seems completely incompatible with the field of social economy and social work. Especially in recent decades, agriculture can evoke the image of parched or, conversely, waterlogged fields with heavy machinery, monolithic and damaged landscapes, spruce monocultures, forces disfiguring rural panoramas, etc. and the negative economic and sometimes political connotations associated with it. This is how a stereotypical view of agriculture has become entrenched in our imagination, which has grown into this form due to the need to "feed" as many people as possible cheaply and quickly after World War II, but also in connection with subsidy policies. However, it has gradually perverted with the help of large financial injections into the global business system, often without scruples. Social agriculture and other agricultural alternatives may appear in this prejudiced perspective as a flaw in the system. Yet these alternatives grow out of a certain ideological mycelium that has been emerging in the agricultural field since the 1980s, and academics have even begun to talk about a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of agriculture. It pits against each other the previously experienced and internalized intensive methods of production agriculture on the one hand, and multifunctional agriculture or post-productive agriculture with an emphasis on its environmental and local dimensions on the other (Wilson, 2008).

With the changes in the experienced ideas about agriculture, expectations from the countryside, which is logically linked to agriculture, also change. In this context, there is talk of the so-called commodified countryside, which builds its image on representations of the countryside as a tourist destination, an idyll based on nostalgia, a fiction of rural landscapes and life, or a place of adrenaline experiences. In the sense of commodification, it is the conversion of symbolic and aesthetically valuable images of the countryside into a market, exchangeable and tradable unit in which industrial agriculture does not find its application (Pospěch et al., 2014). In the line of dichotomous thinking about agriculture, there are also changed consumer preferences for agricultural production. In the conceptual distinction, the agro-industrial and integrated territorial paradigms are opposed, which are primarily related to the methods of "production" and distribution of food (Renting et al., 2008). The agro-industrial paradigm system is based on the original concept of the Common Agricultural Policy and was set up in the 1950s in the language of social geographers as a hypermodern geography of food (Spilková & Vágner, 2016). Agriculture was narrowed down to its food and production function, characterised by the following processes: 1. modernisation and industrialisation of food supply systems (production, processing, distribution, sales); 2. standardisation of production and practices and procedures in the processing of production; 3. globalised food markets (Renting et al., 2003). In this concept, agriculture is reduced to a possibly unified global system that pays little attention to regional needs and specificities of people and the environment. The integrated territorial paradigm, on the other hand, is directly linked to a specific location, in which it takes advantage of socio-economic relations of proximity. At the same time, it takes into account the impacts of its management on the landscape and nature and social relations. It supports the educational aspect, is aware of the landscape's face influenced by agricultural production and takes into account health and care. In these points it finds agreement with multifunctional, post-productive and social agriculture (Bock, & Oosting, 2010), but places increased emphasis on a shortened consumption and distribution chain, i.e. simplification of the producer-consumer relationship, and also on the proximity and cultural embeddedness of these players (Renting et al., 2003). As some authors add, these distribution mechanisms are placed outside the mainstream agricultural policy, which is ultimately the goal of their participants (Norberg-Hodge et al., 2002).

In these exchanges, they depend on hybrid organizational models, informal exchange, cooperation between the public, private and civil spheres (Spilková & Vágner, 2016). Alternative approaches to agriculture have gradually begun to be taken into account in conventional agriculture after the negative consequences of the central common agricultural policy on countries in the global south (Norberg-Hodge et al., 2002), or with regard to the health aspects or diseases of farm animals, such as foot-and-mouth disease, mad cow disease, or swine and bird flu (Spilková & Vágner, 2016). The setting of quality control standards for agricultural production and processing and the impacts of agriculture on the environment are developing (Wiskerke, 2010), the conversion of conventional to organic agriculture is receiving more significant support and awareness (e.g., in the Czech Republic, the Act on Ekological Agriculture came into force in 2000, which regulates the conditions of farming and is associated with a certificate of labeling of organic products and organic food), regional labeling and certification have received greater support (Pospěch, 2014; Spilková & Vágner, 2016,) and in general, more attention is paid to the quality of products, animal welfare, and also to helping farmers maintain the required quality standards set by the European Union (Krutílek, 2014). In the period 2014 - 2020, the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union met the needs of farmers with an effort to have a positive impact on the environment and natural resources. In decision-making on agricultural policy, equal and balanced roles of the market, the state and civil society organizations are increasingly taken into account, and regional and local structures are involved. In terms of content, it is no longer the responsibility of agricultural experts, economists or rural development specialists alone, but is also shared with the sectors of public health, education, ecology, sustainable development, climate change and also urban representatives (Haubenhofer et al., 2010).

The concept of multifunctional agriculture itself gained importance after the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The conclusions of the summit indicate that agriculture should produce more than just food and fiber, but should also fulfill other functions, such as caring for renewable resources, landscapes, and biodiversity, and should contribute to the socio-economic viability of rural areas (Renting, et al., 2008). This rhetoric of multifunctional agriculture has also been used by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development since 2001, primarily in connection with the economic aspects of agriculture and the legitimacy of agricultural support policies, the liberalization of commodity markets, and the adaptation of the neoclassical liberal economic approach. The neoliberal discourse is unable to include markets in its economy in which goods with positive or negative externalities are valued. It is difficult to quantify in monetary terms the outputs of agriculture, such as healthy landscapes and biodiversity, functional water management, food security, employment and socio-economic viability of rural areas (Renting et al., 2008). Multifunctional agriculture also appears to be a tool for enhancing the aesthetics of the landscape, which includes the natural heritage and visual value of the landscape, the historical context, the environmental quality of the site and the demand for recreation by residents (Renting, et al., 2008; Maruani, Amit-Cohen; 2007).

3.5 Benefits of social farming for farmers and the countryside

Working on a farm helps to increase or maintain overall physical fitness. People who work here can acquire or improve their skills, especially in the fields of agriculture, gardening, animal care and other similar skills. Working in a peaceful environment can calm the actors, it can contribute to a better lifestyle, whether in the area of sleep or eating. There are also benefits affecting mental health. Actors of social farming can experience feelings of well-being or peace, they can increase their self-esteem or begin to perceive their importance in the whole process. Last but not least, there is a social benefit, when actors come into contact with farmers, other employees, the general public. They can meet new people here, create new friendly relationships. The purpose is to fight social exclusion with the aim of integrating these people. Their independence, autonomy and personal responsibility are also developed here.

The benefits for employees can be pointed out primarily in six areas: physiology, cognition, emotions, pedagogical, social and self-knowledge. Physiological changes lead, for example, to training fine or gross motor skills, better coordination of movement or balance. Cognitive abilities are also developed here, i.e. the ability to process and understand received information, remember it, concentrate on the message, orientate in space and speech, the ability to express oneself, etc. (Šetek, 2019). It also has an impact on the emotional side, where it can evoke positive experiences in those involved. Those involved often experience joy in connection with nature. Furthermore, there is a connection to the pedagogical sphere, where individual actors acquire new skills, gain new knowledge, and learn by imitation. The social area works with integration, involvement of people in society, communication with the environment and with each other. The last level is the area of self-knowledge, where interested individuals can get to know themselves, work with their own value, and thus feel their importance, etc.

4 Conclusion

Social farming is the most comprehensive component of the green care concept. It is generally used for everything that concerns nature and its therapeutic effect on humans and has a predetermined plan and defined goals. Its purpose is to improve the health and psychological state of the individual and support their pedagogical development based on the interaction of humans and natural elements (Davison et al., 2022). As an important player, social farming also participates in the concept of community-led local development, where the social farm can be an active partner in solving problems and strengthening the individual and the community. Social farming supports social integration as an effort to mitigate or eliminate inequalities of marginalized groups of the rural population by integrating them into activities on the agricultural farm, whether in the form of employment, social and therapeutic services, or educational activities. It can also be seen as a tool of the social economy, which is profiled as a part of the national economy alongside the market and the public sector, and its aim is to actively respond to specific problems and needs of citizens in a given location (Leitmanová et al., 2023).

The implementation of shared jobs within social farming projects thus represents an opportunity to reconcile the family (personal) and working lives of employees, which is intended to facilitate the employment of people for shorter working hours, both on the part of the employer (farm) and on the part of the employees. They thus have the opportunity to take turns after a certain period of time, to share one job so that they can together fill the working hours scheduled at this location and at the same time reconcile the time spent working with personal matters. From the point of view of social policy theory, this is the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity and participation (Begg, 2008). The aforementioned implementation also means fulfilling all set goals in the context of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) within the rural area and region. The principle of subsidiarity thus established essentially also means the right of the interested party to help the surrounding community and the right of a smaller community to help the larger community; this help should be focused on self-help (McKinlay, 1999). This principle also respects the fact that people do not live in isolation. Through the aforementioned principle, the importance and necessity of the activities of certain communities to ensure social security and interest can be emphasized. Fulfilling the principle of subsidiarity presupposes a certain education of the population to be responsible for themselves, including the real social situation, i.e. the space for their own social action.

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