

Long Abstract – Monographic Section

SOCIAL AGRICULTURE BETWEEN NEW AND OLD SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES, THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND POLICY INNOVATIONS.

edited by Angela Genova and Tiziana Tarsia

Community-based territorial regeneration and social agriculture: the experiences of social gardens

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This article analyses the role of social gardens as tools for territorial regeneration and social innovation, with particular attention to rural, urban and peri-urban contexts. In an era marked by growing social inequalities, environmental crises, and the erosion of community cohesion, gardens emerge as multifunctional spaces capable of generating shared value.

They promote social inclusion, community cohesion, environmental education, active citizenship, and care for the territory, positioning themselves as true laboratories of proximity and participation.

This contribution provides both a theoretical and empirical reflection on the transformative potential of social agriculture, grounded in the paradigms of civil economy and integral ecology. In this framework, social gardens are not merely green areas or food production sites, but relational and civic spaces where practices of inclusion, solidarity, and innovation are cultivated. The theoretical model adopted—the relational ecosystem—interprets the complexity of interactions among public institutions, third-sector organisations, and citizens, highlighting the generative capacity of collaborative governance and shared administration.

Through the analysis of four Italian case studies—OrtiAlti in Turin, Le Serre dei Giardini in Bologna, San Miniato Urban Gardens in Siena, and the Social Garden of Ponticelli in Naples—the article demonstrates how these cultivated spaces function as civic infrastructures capable of triggering bottom-up transformative processes.

Despite their contextual and operational differences, these experiences share a common vision: that of a social agriculture capable of regenerating not only physical spaces but also social bonds, collective identities, and participatory governance models.

These practices contribute to the construction of a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable territorial welfare, responding to local needs through place-based approaches and co-design processes. Moreover, they foster a culture of sustainability, strengthen the sense of belonging, and generate new forms of relational and solidarity-based economies.

However, the analysis also reveals critical issues, such as the fragmentation of public policies, the lack of systemic vision, and the difficulty in fully recognizing the transformative value of these practices.

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The article concludes with a critical reflection on the need to rethink regeneration and local development policies, recognizing social gardens as strategic civic infrastructures. In an integrated and multidimensional perspective, they represent a concrete opportunity to promote a development model grounded in environmental sustainability, social justice, democratic participation, and the shared care of common goods.

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