

## Long Abstract – Monographic Section

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

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*Eco-social work in action: the contribution of social farming for sustainable development*  
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This article presents the results of a qualitative study examining six case studies of social farming (SF) in Italy through the lens of eco-social work, a perspective that adopts a holistic view of the living environment and promotes social services oriented toward sustainability. The study is part of a broader national research project (PRIN) on ecosocial work in Italy, and it explores how social farming initiatives contribute to sustainable local development by examining three key dimensions: the role attributed to the environment, the involvement of beneficiaries, and the interplay of actors at the local level.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including social workers, cooperative managers, public officials, educators, and beneficiaries. Thematic analysis reveals that social farming constitutes a privileged arena for implementing ecosocial work practices. These initiatives foster holistic well-being by reconnecting individuals with nature, enhancing personal empowerment, and promoting ecologically sustainable agricultural practices. Beneficiaries report improved self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and increased autonomy through their involvement in farming activities. Furthermore, the projects strengthen community ties and activate local networks, often supported by innovative governance means such as collaboration pacts. The role of social workers is crucial, especially when they proactively support and connect micro-level individual care with macro-level welfare systems. However, findings also highlight challenges: bureaucratic and financial constraints, lack of inter-institutional coordination, and the need for long-term structural support often limit the continuity and the institutional embedment of these initiatives.

Despite these limitations, the social farming projects analyzed in this study demonstrate considerable potential for sustainable development by integrating social, economic, and environmental objectives. They exemplify how ecosocial work can address complex local challenges and contribute to community resilience, collective care, and transformative social innovation. The paper concludes that greater institutional recognition and support are needed to embed these practices within mainstream social policy and welfare systems, ensuring their long-term impact and replicability.

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