

Green Care approaches on Social Farms in Germany

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Green Care and Social Farming

Social farming and Green Care are being developed throughout Europe: farms putting multifunctionality into practice meet the demands of policy makers to create jobs in rural areas and provide social services and therapy in a green environment. Social farming includes agricultural and horticultural enterprises which integrate people with physical, mental or psychological disabilities; farms for the socially disadvantaged, young offenders, those with learning disabilities, addicts, the long-term unemployed and active senior citizens; school and kindergarten farms and much more besides. Social farming includes elements such as provision, inclusion, rehabilitation, training and a better quality of life (van Elsen & Finuola 2013).



Farming and therapeutical work – a challenging combination

Starting a “green care in agriculture” - activity can be based upon two different starting points: either an institution that includes farming or gardening activities, for example a sheltered workshop for people with learning disabilities establishing a social farm; a hospital starting horticultural therapy or a school that builds up a small farm for children with special needs. The other starting point can be a typical food production farm that wants to widen its activities by integrating social work, i.e. by caring for individuals in specific circumstances or in need of help, or by orienting the whole farm towards a school farm, a farm caring for people with addiction or for long-term unemployed.



Therapeutic goals and farm development

The idea behind social farming and green care is more than just the opportunity to develop specialised farms into which people with special needs can be integrated. In fact, “education”, the development of people in the sense of “developing personal attributes” and “multifunctionality” are aims of social farming. Green care can be more than just a “tool to reach therapeutic goals” - it allows participation in labour processes; it allows people to achieve feelings of being productive; it invokes experiences using all the senses and it allows people to re-connect to the environment, to nature, to animals, plants and the soil. The present PROFARM project aims to implement a model that can contribute to the well-being, professional/personal growth and the social integration of VET students with disabilities in social farms.



Meaningful work on farms as therapy

The quest of industrial farming – which is how to further reduce human labour and manual work – can be reversed in relation to a social farm. The issue is no longer the provision of any work for its own sake, but offering work opportunities that makes sense, that become useful for the environment, for nature, for animals, plants and the soil. Green care can not only “use” nature for purposes of therapy, but furthermore provide services to care for nature and landscape development in a multifunctional way.

The UN convention as a driving force

There is a new impulse concerning the development of green care through the demand for “social inclusion” of people with learning disabilities. The discussion originated in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that was adopted in December 2006 and entered into force on 3rd May 2008. It takes to a new height the movement from viewing persons with disabilities as “objects” of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing persons with disabilities as “subjects” with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society.

From social inclusion towards ecological inclusion

The UN convention can be a chance to change society in terms of the “deficiency-oriented” thinking on people with special needs. Within a social farm many users have the chance to find work and activities that fit their “special abilities” - their one-sided talents. The sheltered spaces represented by many social farms can create spaces of humanity, of care and devotion - attributes that could be a future aim for society as a whole!

The term “inclusion”, as a central concern in the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, can also be applied to improve the cultural landscape and its biotopes in the sense of social and ecological inclusion.

Reference:

van Elsen, T., Finuola, R. (2013): Policies and strategies of Green Care in Europe. – In: Gallis, C. (Ed.): Green Care for Human Therapy, Social innovation, Rural Economy and Education. Nova Science Publishers: 189-213, New York

