

Europe is experiencing a long transition phase, marked by profound socio-demographic and economic changes accompanied by fiscal crisis of states, inadequacy and difficult financial sustainability of welfare systems (Ferrera, 2007; Kazepov, Barberis, 2010; Saraceno, 2009). In this context, the concept of Social Innovation (SI) is used by most as a tool to address new social challenges and to identify solutions to emerging social needs. The dimension of the process qualifies SI (Moulaert et al., 2005) and implies changes in social relations. SI has an inherent social dimension, with goals and resources, and it is based on the idea of collaboration and hybridization among different actors (Montanari et al., 2017). SI processes evolve over time depending on the degree of support provided by a horizontal network of actors. Keystone organizations play a key role in the network (Sgaragl et al., 2016), by catalysing and multiplying the knowledge/resources on the ground.

Social farming (SF) has been seen as a SI practice capable of mobilizing agricultural/rural resources to generate community responses to conventional and emerging social demands (Di Iacovo et al., 2014). SF is a hybrid object standing at the crossroads of many sectors and disciplines, and emerges as part of a collective and collaborative process aimed at addressing social, economic and environmental crises (Di Iacovo, 2013). SF practices open to the logic of co-production in social services, whereby public action is linked to the active contribution of actors who co-design, co-deploy and co-manage innovative services (Boyle et al., 2009). The debate on SF has attracted the interest of many stakeholders at various institutional public and private actors (Genova, 2017) in a new dynamic political arena where practices and interests are consolidated, with different and sometimes contradictory objectives/results.

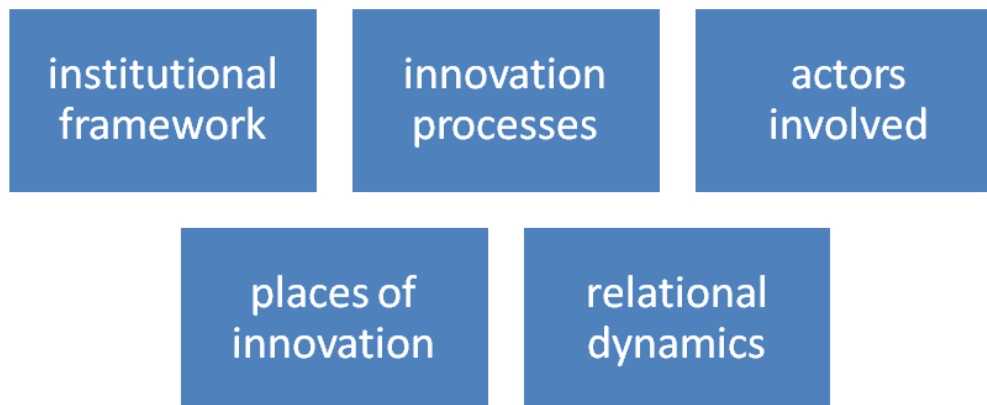
In Italy, SF practices -often rooted in the voluntary actions of farms, agricultural cooperatives and third-sector actors- have originated and followed different evolutionary geographical paths with diverse outcomes. SF develops practices and activities related to subsidiary welfare, where the value of relationships and co-production (of public/private values and social-food goods) find multiple meanings and applications (Moruzzo et al., 2022). Aim of this paper is to analyse SI processes in SF regional policy and practices investigating the design of a socially innovative governance system. Tuscany and Marche are the two case studies because they have experienced a significant increase in SF projects in recent years, with different timing and modalities, within different governance modes, outlining specific challenges and potentialities.

The theoretical framework of the paper relies on the literature of SI, i.e. on the procedure for designing a socially innovative governance system, where public/private actors and beneficiaries, collaborate closely to redesign visions, objectives, and formulas useful for generating responses to emerging needs. Although some literature on SI highlights the limitations of public actors in SI processes and assigns to Third Sector actors and intermediaries or third parties (such as universities) the leading role in generating innovative practices (Abad and Ezponda, 2021; Moulaert et al., 2005), the public role of promoting and coordinating networks of actors to achieve an effective and democratic system of accountability is essential (Campomori, Casula, 2022). The public entity has the capacity in triggering SI processes (Moulaert et al., 2013). Furthermore, in SI, the public sector also has the non-delegable role of monitoring citizens' rights/duties and the fair

distribution of opportunities, avoiding the risk of weakening the social dimension of welfare on behalf of efficiency (Saruis et al., 2019).

To compare the regional governance models of SF initiatives from an SI perspective attention has been focused on some of the crucial aspects (see Figure 1).

Figura 1: Elements of Comparison of a Socially Innovative Governance System



Source: our elaboration (Ciarini, Neri, 2019; Montanari, Mizzau, 2016; Trigilia, 2007)

The following aspects were examined: the institutional framework in regulatory references and organizational structures; the procedural paths and approaches leading to regional regulations, as well as the level of inclusion and sharing of the process and the direction of the innovation process (bottom-up or top-down); the actors involved and the role played by public and private entities in regional governance; the places of innovation, i.e., formal and/or informal spaces of cross-fertilization and collaboration, where people meet to exchange ideas and experiences; the relational dynamics triggered, assessing whether coordination mechanisms among various stakeholders have been developed.

This paper compares the two regional systems and dynamics starting from regulatory documents in SF and through secondary data. These data were then enriched by embedded previous investigations.

The analysis of SI in SF development in Tuscany and Marche (Table 1) highlights two different governance paths and different organizational models.

Focusing on modes of governance, one of the main challenges in SF innovation processes concerns the relationship and networking between diverse policy areas: mainly agriculture and RD from one side, and social/health policy from the other. In Tuscany the debate on what was then defined SF started in 2002 with a bottom-up socio-economic animation mediated by Pisa University with local project promoters, albeit in a context where involvement of regional health authorities was still challenging. In 2006, the first formal recognition of SF occurred in Valdera area, leading to an initial definition of a public arena for collective knowledge creation around the hybrid SF concept. Inside this public space, public and private actors shared and co-created common vision and co-designed

procedures/norms within the local health authorities (ASL). The organization of local pilot projects with positive results reinforcing the process towards the identification of incentives and the recognition of SF in the local health plan. Challenges persisted in interacting with the regional level (both in social/health and agriculture) and in further engaging farmers. In 2010, SF entered in the political realm and Tuscany Region approved Law No.24 that framed SF and highlighted the multifunctional potential of agricultural activity in the social sector. By following this bottom-up process starting from the ground and managing to affect the regional policies, the Region with its own resources and with the Rural Development (RD) Plan defined support in SF since 2014. Meanwhile at regional level new and voluntary based actions managed to spread and to evolve dynamically SF practices. The debate is still ongoing not without fragmentation and contradictions. In 2023, Tuscany Region approved a new SF law, proving the growing attention to SF policies and specific support for project initiatives. Due to the nature of the process SF practices emerged as differently organized and mainly based on the co-production of the food and social outcomes of the agricultural processes as well as on scope economy.

Building on the national dynamic, in Marche Region, SF has been part of the RD policy agenda a few years later, starting in 2010 with DGR 252, outlining the need to incentivize activities for the development of pilot experiences in SF. Regional Law No. 21 was approved in 2011. In the Marche Region the process started from the top, although immediately engaging local stakeholder but with a strong public agenda. The starting idea was to organize well defined practices on specific topics (kindergarten, elders), starting on the idea of a diversified agriculture able to offer new services in a quasi-market supported by regional policies. Analysis shows the challenges in the relationship between RD policy area and social policy at local level. The first experience of SF on kindergarten and active aging, funded in 2014, entered in the local social plan only after 10 years. This data is also confirmed at regional level: the theme of SF explicitly entered regional social programming only in the "2020 Social Plan". The different universities of the Marche Region played a key role as bridging institutions between different policy areas, thanks to their research and training activities on the topic.

Table 1 - Comparison between Tuscany and Marche Regions

Criteria	Tuscany	Marche
Institutional Framework	Regional Law 20/2023	Regional Law 21/2011
Innovation Processes	Bottom-up Approach	Top-down Approach
Involved Actors	Open Multi Stakeholder Approach	Collaboration with Individual Stakeholders
Innovation Spaces	Creation of Discussion Arenas (SF tables)	Technical-Scientific Committees
Relational Dynamics	Openness, Inclusion and Transparency of Processes	Prevalent Steering Role of the Region
Main outcomes	Voluntary based, multi-actors networks and diversified SF initiatives, based on co-production and multifunctional use of agricultural processes	SF as diversifying on farm activity <u>laid</u> by single farm based initiatives supported by public policies

Source: our own elaboration

Between the two regions, from the initial phases, innovations followed two different paths. In Tuscany Region, a bottom-up approach was adopted, developed through a process of animation and participation from below. On the contrary, in the Marche Region a top-down approach was followed within the leadership of the agricultural and RD sector, with marginal involvement of the third sector organizations and any participating processes. Differences are also evident regarding the actors involved. In Tuscany, the model develops from the bottom, ensuring openness to a plurality of stakeholders interested in the intersection between socio-health and RD policies. In Marche Region, an innovation model emerges from the action of a policy actor, who sought technical-scientific support, but in a very top-down way oriented towards the formulation of highly detailed models aimed at guaranteeing the quality of the experiments to be funded.

The role played by local authorities and universities in the two models is also different. In the Tuscan model, they play a key role in animating, facilitating, and coordinating processes. In the Marche model, local authorities are not involved, and universities of the region only recently became involved.

Another difference can be related to the innovation spaces, as in Tuscany, discussion working group on the topic of SF are established; they represent places of collaboration and co-decision involving public, social and private stakeholders with interests in the territory. These are open discussion arenas from which partnerships, memoranda of understanding, institutional agreements, formalization of practices, service codification, registry of participating entities, guidelines, and procedures for integration into agricultural businesses by socio-health services are initiated. In Marche, specific agreements are defined with individual stakeholders with the activation of related technical committees identified by the Region. The Region, in this case, assumes a strong steering role and aims at formulating models to be implemented. The potential for scaling up funded experiments - and therefore their full implementation - and the dissemination of other

experiences is still in progress. The total number of SF practices is still quite limited, as well as the networking with social, health, educational, and training welfare services.

The analysis of innovative processes concerning SF policies and practices highlighted different paths in the two regional contexts. Tuscany, with its multi-stakeholder approach, ensured participation in innovation processes, fostered contamination among them, leading to the emergence of a New Public Governance model (Brock, 2020). The process followed can be framed as an example of incremental innovation (Vercher et al., 2023), where needs and opportunities are well perceived and complementary to existing ones. Tuscany adopted initiatives oriented towards SI such as supporting the creation of arenas for discussion, experimentation and participation, and coordinating between public and private functions, thereby providing the support for the consolidation of a participatory and effective governance system. At the same time the SI process defined new principle in the welfare system difficult to be taken by the public regime (voluntary action, not all based on economic but community principles, networks based on autonomy and collective intelligence).

The Marche Region can be seen as an example of top-down radical innovation (Vercher et al., 2023), driven by a policy entrepreneur, supported by strong external networks although based on existing schemata of income diversification in agriculture, so transferring the agrotourism scheme into a new sector. There have been activated dynamics of innovation that have produced high-quality experiences, but they have not yet been implemented on a large scale and they are still based on public funding for the new services provided by farmers. This type of radical social innovation, while responding to the territorial needs, has not always ensured effective participation among stakeholders and is still vulnerable to public finance scarcities.

Both top-down and bottom-up experiences, however, activated and increased social capital, generating new and more appropriate responses to emerging needs. Both case are processes of institution building, i.e. organizational innovation due to new forms of participation (Pfau-Effinger, 2005). These processes lead to path deviation in institutional arrangements and open up spaces for new experiments and innovations. In both territorial contexts, public institutions, although playing different roles, have had an impact on SI outcomes (Bifulco, 2017). Universities have also played a significant role as bridging institutions (Brown, 1991; Fuglsang L., Jagd S., 2015), facilitating the socio-animation, the construction of trust in inter-organizational relationships, and contributing to the development of regional governance models. In both cases clearly emerge how at geographical level the institutional landscape and the dynamic between public institutions and social actors might drastically affect the direction and the outcomes of SI processes.