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Could Social Farming Be a Strategy to Support Food Sovereignty in Europe?

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Abstract: Food sovereignty (FS) aims to obtain value-added products in proximity agriculture (PA) in order to achieve food security in a country. Social farming (SF) can help to develop this PA as well as favoring integration of people at risk of social exclusion (RSE). The methodology includes a review of the literature, a survey of 161 SF projects in Catalonia, and ten selected in-depth interviews. "Social Return on Investment" (SROI) methodology is also applied to assess the efficiency of the projects analyzed. The results show the economic, social, and environmental viability of the majority of the SF projects which, also favored by FS and PA, allows the development of innovative experiences and sustainable forms of governance. SF has been carried out in different ways in European countries, although with the common aims of benefitting people at RSE, and using the natural environment and PA through projects basically promoted by Third Sector entities. Management of these projects is in the hands of foundations and non-profit companies making top-down decisions, and in cooperatives and associations, where decision-making is bottom-up. It can be concluded that the promotion of SF can favor PA, and therefore, FS in Europe.

Keywords: Catalonia; Europe; food sovereignty; governance; people at risk of social exclusion; proximity agriculture; social farming; social return on investment; Third Sector

1. Introduction

Food sovereignty (FS) in Europe aims to develop proximity agriculture in order to strengthen local producers, and thereby guarantee food security. However, FS has two focuses, depending on the standpoint of local producers and consumers [1] or the interests of corporations and governments [2]. For regional and local development, the goal is to obtain products of added value for consumers who are aware of the importance of food quality and proximity. By contrast, multinational corporations seek to preserve the strategic value of land ownership and cheap production as sources of profits or as a way of gaining speculative control over raw materials and food. Social farming (SF), as part of the first focus, is an activity of local agriculture generating, added value and production for consumers who value this kind of production [3]. Moreover, it has social value, since it employs people at risk of social exclusion (RSE) and favors the development of the local economy. A large number of the entities promoting SF are from the Third Sector (associations, foundations etcetera) or are non-profit enterprises, such as cooperatives.

This study aims to show that SF can favor FS, proximity farming, and a more sustainable economy. It is important to note that FS can also favor a sustainable economy incorporating the new and viable (SF) activity of proximity agriculture. The aim of SF is to offer therapy or employ people at risk of social exclusion (RSE) in a natural environment or through farming activities. There is always a promoter entity involved, acting either on its own initiative or applying public policy in the social or health domains [4]. Hence, one of the chief aims of this study is to show how SF supports FS, since

almost all these projects are ecologically oriented and located in urban or rural settings, and supply consumers of the region concerned in short distribution circuits. The next question is: are these projects viable, not only economically but also in social and environmental terms? [5]. SF is close to proximity agriculture, and can therefore strengthen the FS of a territory. It is important, nevertheless, to recover the countryside and recuperate from the agrarian transformation that Europe has been subjected to over the last seventy years. It should be understood how this has gone from being an agrarian crisis in the traditional countryside to becoming an excluding productivist kind of agriculture, and it is also necessary to ascertain what strategies excluded territories have adopted in order to find a model for sustainable local development. Finally, it is essential to explain the characteristics of SF and how it has worked to maintain agricultural activity, as well as bring about its transformation in such a way as to favor sustainable local development.

In Catalonia SF appears in two kinds of territories, the peri-urban and the rural. In the former, it is related with Third Sector (TS) activities in properties near or in Natural Protected Areas (NPA), with activities of residents' associations or the local administration taking the form of urban gardens in publicly-owned land, or projects related with TS entities [6,7]. Although recent years have seen a considerable increase in urban agriculture (UA) in Europe and North America [8], there is growing concern around making sure that it is sustainable [9]. Studies of local food growing systems in Spain [10] reveal that owing to the spatial distribution of small ventures such as peri-urban gardens, it is more difficult to ensure that they are sustainable. Nevertheless, there is growing interest in trying to guarantee that SF projects are ecologically oriented, although with food gardens and orchards, subsistence production is sometimes the overriding concern [11]. Catalonia has fewer SF projects in the rural domain, which is more conducive to agricultural production, although they are more solidly established than those in urban zones. These rural SF projects are characterized by a more specialized production (vineyards, olive trees, market gardens, and agri-food processing, etc.) with a longer tradition of ecological practices [12]. One significant feature of SF projects in the countryside is close relationships with other actors in the territory who are trying to attain sustainable rural development [13].

2. Conceptualization and Theoretical Framework

This section is a brief literature review on the recent transformation of agriculture in Europe, local agriculture, food sovereignty, the SF concept, and its development in Europe.

2.1. Transformation in Agriculture and the Countryside in Europe since the Mid-Twentieth Century

Rural and agricultural spaces have been undergoing far-reaching changes [14,15] based on productivist agricultural production and the so-called Green Revolution, the predominant features of which are mechanization, irrigation, use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, planting of hybrid varieties, and new forms of land management [16]. The sociocultural, spatial, and economic frameworks of productivism are now slowly disappearing, giving way to new paradigms and thoroughgoing changes [17,18]. Transformations in the reality of many rural zones in European and American countries are modifying the roles and functionality of these territories [19,20]. This process, known as rural restructuring, is changing the economic base of rural areas, which are going from being mainly agricultural and productive to being dominated by the service sector, or in other words, an economy based on tourism, construction, and a prevalence of permanent or holiday residences [21].

The restructuring of rural spaces has led to a process of what many authors call "commodification of the countryside", shifting, as Cloke [22] notes, from "landscapes of production to landscapes of consumption." For many centuries, the nature of rural spaces was defined by their main activity, namely agricultural production, which in many cases, has now become a residual occupation. This has meant dismantling forms of social organization, and abandonment of guidelines for territorial configuration, consequently generating a serious crisis lasting for a good part of the twentieth century [23].

Since the second half of the twentieth century, a gradual waning of the productivist model has occurred, together with the incorporation of other functions in rural areas, diversifying the economic base mainly by means of Third Sector activities in so-called post-productionism, which has paved the way for agrarian and rural multifunctionality [24,25]. Some authors have called this "rural polyvalence" [26], although the better-known expression is "rural multifunctionality" [27]. In this context one sees a revaluation, and at the same time, a mutation of the elements comprising the rural space. Michael Woods [23] considers that these transformations are responding to adaptation in the capitalist system to new market demands—"Capitalism is a dynamic force that requires constant innovation to maximize profit margins and secure the reproduction of capital". He criticizes the fact that this new stage does not entail any alternative to the development model in rural areas but that it appears instead as a new restructuring and adaptation of the system to the prevailing patterns of consumption in and of rural spaces.

Multifunctionality has facilitated redefinition of rural development programs, since agricultural activity is no longer considered to be a residual economic sector but an opportunity for constructing alternative economic models which seek to ensure that rural society and its economy will not be dependent on tourism alone [28]. This concept of revitalizing agricultural and social life has brought about a change in the role of agriculture and farmers in present-day society, making way for the emergence of a new kind of farmer with new awareness, new values, and new ways of producing [29], revaluing, and reconstructing elements of more traditional times, which are still present in social representations of rural life [30].

Meanwhile, the desire for a healthier life appears as an emerging social and consumption trend in western societies and is taking shape as an alternative to the food production model imposed by globalization and multinational companies [31]. This is based on a kind of agriculture that engenders social injustice (with the disappearance of smallholdings and low wages), besides having detrimental effects on the environment from its use of fertilizers and soil depletion [32]. In contrast, new social guidelines have influenced part of today's agri-food system, in which some consumers are calling for direct access to ecological products with minimum energy requirements and added social value, as would be the case with SF. Some studies note that these segments of the market are clearly developing in Europe and the United States. This ecological PA produced in smallholdings is organized through consumer groups and cooperatives, so that people can gain access to these kinds of products by means of direct contact with the producer and can engage in responsible consumption as a form of critical action and condemnation of the prevailing agri-food system [33,34].

2.2. Proximity Agriculture (PA) and Local Development in Rural Europe

PA and the slow food and farm-to-table (or farm-to-fork) movements are similar concepts in their relationship between better-quality food, local products, and the territorial development of a region. UA, linked with proximity consumption, has recently joined this list [35]. Local food consists of produce provided by farmers and stockbreeders from the nearby geographical and cultural setting, usually a region, where distribution and consumption also takes place [36]. Consumption of local foods, a growing trend, attempts to respond to the present model of food production and consumption. Since the "Green Revolution" in the second half of the twentieth century, a food system dominated by large agri-food corporations and based on long-distance trade with enormous retail chains has been consolidating on a worldwide scale. This global food-trade model has brought about the disappearance of traditional forms of agriculture and trade, and small or family businesses in countries of both the "North" and "South". The overall result has been that small farmers have been forced off their land, urban concentration has occurred, and the system of small-scale farming based on family work, diversified crops, and local markets has been replaced by industrial agriculture, monocrops for exportation, and more recently, by genetically modified (GM) crops, all of which is "in the hands of" the agrochemical industry [37].

Although there are some endeavors that attempt to be more sustainable [38], in general, this agro-industrial model has meant homogenization of food systems on a worldwide scale and the imposition of new nutritional patterns with deleterious effects for health (for example, obesity and diabetes), while a third of humanity faces hunger and starvation. The World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and to some extent, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the European Union itself, have comprised the institutional architecture for this new food-production focus. Foodstuffs are transported thousands of kilometers from the field to the table, with staggering energy costs (ecological footprint). Moreover, these products contain many chemicals and preservatives, which increase health risks (the mad cow crisis, hormones, dioxins, and so on) and are relatively highly priced because they take advantage of the difference in standards of life between producer and consumer countries [39]. The big agri-food corporations use the excuse of supporting poor third-world farmers to justify this long-distance trade, while deriding consumption of local products with the argument that they are more expensive. However, this criticism ignores energy costs and the dangers of chemical products, not to mention the costs involved in abandoning territory which could produce better-quality food and give work to inhabitants of these rural areas of the so-called South (Less-developed countries and regions mainly located in the world's southern continents) [40]. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind the theory of second best option, according to which each region should produce the goods best suited to it in order not to be abandoned, even if another region can produce the same goods at a lower cost [41].

Consuming local foods is a growing trend which attempts to avoid the negative effects of the present food model and its negative environmental impact [42]. Proximity agriculture aims to recover activities in rural areas, farming for example, and bring about transformation by redistributing income within the food chain, cutting back on profits for intermediaries, and increasing benefits for local farmers, in addition to promoting consumption of fresher, healthier products, and persuading residents of towns and cities to commit to local consumption [43]. This also means that economic resources stay in the community and are invested in products of local or regional markets [44]. When agricultural activities are brought into relation with other complementary endeavors, local rural development is favored. In any case, the attitude of food consumers is critical for the consolidation of local production of farm goods distributed in short chains with low energy costs. Alliances between local producers and consumers are strategic when it comes to changing the food model [45].

In urban and peri-urban agriculture in the 1960s and 1980s, experiences were developed relating to older people, migrants, and unemployed people to complete their income or to be able to survive [46]. However, the current focus is more on school education, young people, families, the poor, or groups at RSE, by ensuring a fraction of new gardens to them. The ecological function of UA becomes increasingly important, as it provides green spaces in gray built environments [47]. This can be seen from experiences in Barcelona, promoted by the local administration [34], or in Bologna [48], where the social acceptance of this new orientation of the UA related to green spaces can be seen.

2.3. Food Sovereignty (FS), Territorial Strategy, and Energy Costs

FS is the right of the populations of a region to decide on the agricultural and food policies that affect them. These include the right and access to land and natural resources, being able to eat well and enjoy healthy, GM-free food, and protecting and regulating internal agricultural production and trade so as to achieve sustainable development and guarantee food security for each region. This concept arose with support from the international peasants' movement "La Vía Campesina" in 1996, when the FAO World Food Summit was held at FAO headquarters in Rome [49]. Currently, the principles of FS have been taken up by a broad spectrum of social movements (peasants, women, consumers, immigrants, etc.) [50]. The main idea is that food is not a mere commodity but a common good for the benefit of humanity; a right rather than merchandise [51].

At the global level, the crisis has also hastened the integration of PA in post-industrial cities, where it has become an important way of facing food insecurity and achieving FS, where citizens, now

unemployed and without a salary, are investing their time and efforts in transforming vacant lots into food gardens [34]. This practice is also relevant in other geographical contexts, where food production is a form of resilience, a resort for facing crises, and a way of empowering citizens [29]. After the 2008 economic crisis, many countries, faced with the need to import basic foodstuffs, such as rice and other cereals, have seen food sovereignty as a form of self-reliance [52]. These "national food sovereignty policies" have taken different forms. One is acquiring land in other countries to produce what suits the purchasing country (China purchasing in Africa, Germany in Eastern European countries, Arab countries in Southeast Asia, for example). Another version (adopted by some countries in Europe and Asia) favors strategic production within the country, although at a higher cost, with a view to preparing for future critical situations. Food production has gradually changed from being an offer scenario to one of directed demand [53]. Furthermore, some international investment funds acquire land in other countries to speculate with the increasing value of food in the medium and long term [54,55].

The predominant model imposed by large-scale agribusiness has deliberately set out to dominate agriculture and the whole production and supply chain of the food industry. It is a model that exploits workers, concentrates economic and political power, depletes natural resources, damages the environment, and affects the health of all living beings. La Vía Campesina upholds a decentralized model, in which production, processing, distribution, and consumption are controlled, not by transnational companies, but by the communities themselves [56].

FS has been strengthened with the change from conventional agricultural techniques to agroecology, although three to five years are needed for the transformation to be complete [57]. Agroecology uses knowledge gleaned from ecological processes to improve the sustainability of systems of agricultural production. It studies and employs a wide variety of cultivation practices, intensive or extensive, and ranging from organic, integrated, or conventional methods, although tending more towards organic or integrated agriculture [14,58]. However, the outstanding feature of agroecology is the combined treatment of the four basic properties of agricultural systems: productivity, stability, sustainability, and equitability [59]. Nonetheless, this more ecological orientation in systems of agricultural production must be combined with certain forms of organization and management of production and distribution [7]. In this regard, FS entails combining PA geared to organic production, collaborative organization and management, and links with the Third Sector [4].

2.4. The Concept and Types of Social Farming (SF)

Social farming (SF) could be defined as a process of integration and empowerment of collectives at risk of social exclusion by means of agricultural activities and processing, promoted by Third Sector entities or non-profit-making initiatives [3].

Integration includes the creation of jobs and training for people in these groups, as well as therapeutic assistance if necessary. The entities concerned, their legal form, financing, and ways of working between public and private institutions depend on the health system and social policies of each country [12]. In the north of Europe (Flanders (Belgium), Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Nordic countries, etc.), the term Green Care (GC) is used, and this has the same aim of empowerment through agricultural activities but differs from SF in its priority use of curative therapies, the natural setting as a palliative, and a clientary relationship between the managing bodies and people in groups at RSE, especially those with special difficulties [60]. This more neutral term, "with special difficulties", is used to refer to groups of people with physical, mental, or psychological handicaps. SF activities also benefit the local population by facilitating the creation of social and health services, as well as generating multifunctionality and added value through the processing and sale of agri-food products [61].

The concept of SF (In Romance languages, the term "Agricultura Social (AS)" is used, this being a broad concept covering the different forms designated in English, for example by Social Farming (SF) and Green Care (GC). The English term SF is closest to the type of project described in this study) can be better explained if some of the more notable elements that identify it are specified: the object, the

subject, the activity, who promotes it, what its resources are, the legal status of each entity, and finally, the links established between public and private institutions working together in the project [4].

The main aim is to provide employment for people at risk of social exclusion, thereby offering these groups the therapeutic processes they need, educational or professional training, as well as remunerated work and recovery of social dignity (empowerment). In GC, the subject is a user who receives treatment but does not necessarily figure as an employee, which is the case for social farming.

The SF subject comes from some sort of RSE collective, including people with disabilities, mental disorders, psychological problems, those affected by poverty, in (or formerly in) some kind of prison regime, former drug addicts, long-term unemployed people and school dropouts, older people with limited resources, women affected by gender violence, and recently, immigrants and the homeless.

The activities are basically agricultural or forestry work, and sometimes gardening. Agri-food processing can also be considered as SF if traceability can be ascertained and even catering activities (at the end of the chain, restaurants, or an intermediate point, precooked products) and individual or collective distribution.

Promoters and specialist technicians are legally organized into foundations, associations, cooperatives, public or private companies like special job centers, CET (in Spanish Centro de Trabajo), companies working for integration of the socially disadvantaged (EI, in Spanish Empresa de Inserción), for example), and non-profit-making entities (Third Sector, Social, and Solidary Economies). Normally, distinction must be made between the parent entity (foundation, association, etc.) and the professionally active organization (cooperative, CET, EI, for example). The latter must be staffed with individuals or groups of specialists in production, labor insertion, psychology, social services, and management.

Available resources can include buildings and land, but it is also very important to have recourse to specialist staff, as well as capital to invest in the activity. Funding is frequently obtained through donations or from humanitarian organizations. In certain cases, help is given for housing and for each job created for people at RSE, or in the form of reduced social security quotas, and in adapting buildings and cultivable land.

Organization is constructed in networks, establishing connections between the public administrations and big non-profit foundations that support SF projects. Also noteworthy is the existence of associations and cooperatives for distribution, training, investment help, inter alia, which act as a protective umbrella for SF.

Complementary activities include working in development projects with the local administration and producers or consumer associations, promoting ecological or organic products, and combining SF with tourist activities (wine routes, local sale of products with denomination of origin status) within the bounds of a certain territory.

The stakeholders we have identified in SF projects and used in the Social Return of Investment (SROI) analysis (Table 1) are the most prominent in the ten cases where interviews were held. However, there are always other stakeholders of lesser importance, for example owners of the land being used or civil society. In the former case, the property comes under the auspices of local administration or Third Sector entities, which have been chosen for other reasons. In the latter case, associations defending the interests of RSE groups also coincide with the Third Sector or the local community.

In short, SF consists of developing projects in which agricultural activity, social care, and social policies come together to provide innovative solutions for the situation of diverse groups at RSE, and to promote local development in rural and peri-urban areas. In each country SF is organized in different ways [4].

2.5. Models of Social Farming in Europe

SF activities have a two-fold aim: carrying out a viable economic activity, and ensuring that this will have considerable influence in the form of social responsibility [62]. Yet, as SF is being introduced in Europe, it is also adapting to the variety of treatments of healthcare in the public sector, unemployment problems, social insertion policies for groups at risk, and very importantly, the capacity

for initiative of agents from public or private entities who are promoting SF in this area of problem solving (Table 2). SF is also expanding in peri-urban as well as rural areas. One example is socially oriented UA in Emilia Romagna in Italy [63].

Some countries, such as Italy or Belgium, have drafted laws specifically dealing with SF, and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has increased environmental action through "greening" programs, such as green-cheque [64]. The different models take five elements into account: (1) systems for regulating healthcare; (2) social welfare conditions; (3) financing; (4) types of actors involved; and (5) forms of SF management. Taking this approach, it is possible to distinguish four main models in Europe [61,65,66], as Table 1 shows.

Table 1. The different socio-political models in Europe.

Social-democratic model	**Corporative model**
This is based on the fundamental right of all citizens to have access to health and social services through a nation-wide public system, and is sustained by high taxation. SF has a dual aim: policies of social insertion and those promoting economic support for agricultural endeavors to complement their income. Common in the Nordic countries.	Access to public health services is also guaranteed, but there is also a private system acting under contract. There is specific interest in promoting "care farms (Green care)", with subsidy policies "for service performed" and training courses for the technicians and farmers involved. This has been introduced in countries of Central Europe.
(Neo)liberal model	**Mixed Model**
Assistance to families or persons at RSE is provided through Third Sector entities, volunteers, and charities. The actors are outside the public institutions, and the management of SF is carried out from civil society with private funding or partial support from the public sector. United Kingdom and Ireland are clear examples.	Private and public sectors coexist as service providers. There is a strong presence of the Third Sector because of tradition, but also a diminishing public sector owing to the economic crisis. SF is carried out in cooperatives or non-profit firms. It is prominent in countries of southern Europe.

Source: Adapted by author from proposals by Di Iacovo et al. [67].

In Europe, one single activity can adopt several forms in different territorial contexts, while at the same time, creating a range of concepts to shape the reality of a complex, heterogeneous phenomenon [67–70]. From this conceptual standpoint three main approaches can be singled out.

Green Care (GC) is a concept related with SF, taking in a wide range of activities that have in common the use of natural elements for promoting and maintaining physical, mental, social, and educational wellbeing [70,71]. Green Care in Agriculture (GCA) refers to practices situated in the natural setting and in relation with agricultural work, which entails the use of agricultural properties in order to promote physical and mental health among beneficiaries. This project includes the therapeutic domain, rehabilitation, health promotion, attending to social needs, and healthcare among a wide spectrum of social groups, especially focusing on the more vulnerable sectors [72].

Care Farming (CF), also associated with SF, was introduced in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the twenty-first century, echoing in its name similar projects in Holland [61]. CF is defined as the use of conventional farms and agricultural land as elements for promoting physical and mental health [69]. One distinguishing element vis-à-vis other such projects is that traditional farming, acting as the providing center for social and health services, offers general care to users who carry out farming activities, land management, and maintenance work on the property [60,70]. Users of care farms pay to gain admission to services offered by these centers. On some occasions, as Di Iacovo [73] notes, it is the public health system that finances access to these activities, or it can be paid for through private health insurance, depending on the organization of each territory.

Finally, there is the concept of Social Farming (SF), which is described above. Generically speaking, SF embraces elements such as therapeutic activities and services, projects for inclusion, rehabilitation, educational and training initiatives, and labor insertion by means of agricultural resources, with the aim of promoting health, mainly in rural and urban-fringe areas [67]. Other authors, such as Finoula and Pascale [27], have presented new elements and consider that SF embraces a set of activities combining

direct attention to socially vulnerable groups and work on agricultural properties. These groups are characterized as lacking self-esteem or non-emancipation, a consideration which is a key factor in the conceptualization of SF within the framework of agricultural work, with an emphasis on empowering individuals in situations of marginality.

Analysis of the different terms reveals some differences that make it possible to establish certain limits between them. Basically, it can be shown that, in GCA and CF practices, promotion of health appears as a core element, while in SF the chief characteristic is remuneration or the direct participation of the beneficiaries of the project. In all cases, the use of agricultural holdings is a distinguishing feature, especially with CF and SF. Another important factor, in addition to improving the participants' quality of life, is the territorial relevance of SF [13], given that the practices contribute to the creation of new strategies of local development, new alliances between agriculture and socio-health care, and new models of care and general wellbeing. Furthermore, SF is a stimulus that can make new services available to the rural population, for whom they may be much less accessible than in urban areas, as well as supporting high-quality, ecological proximity agriculture, with the added value of social justice [61]. Some of these aspects can be illustrated by discussing several cases of SF in Catalonia (see Section 4).

3. Methodology

This research is divided into five methodological steps (see Figure 1). The first is a review of the literature on food sovereignty (FS), proximity agriculture (PA), and social farming (SF), showing the characteristics and distribution of the latter in Catalonia in the European context [67].

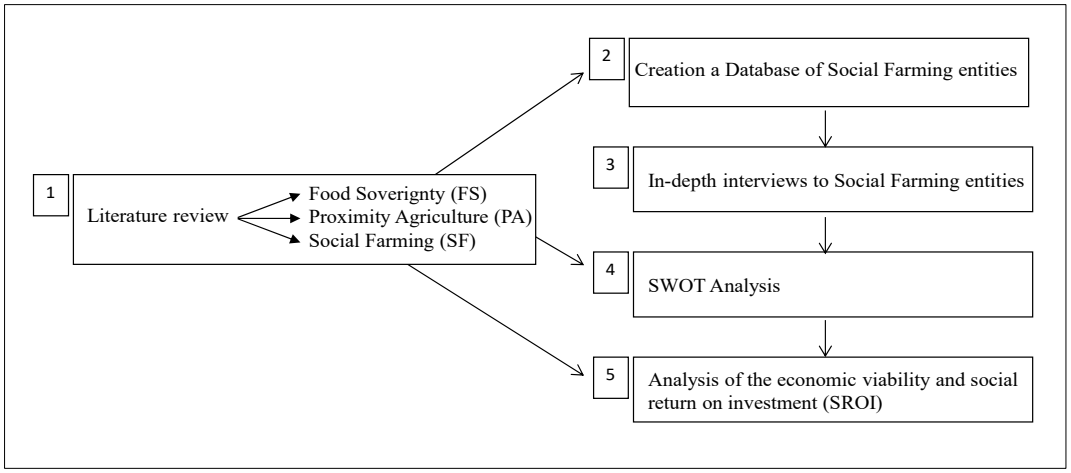

Figure 1. Methodological steps and their relation, with methods and techniques used. Source: Compiled by authors.

The second step is the creation of a database and map providing information about 161 SF projects in Catalonia [45]. Projects coming under the heading of SF or garden centers attending to RSE groups were identified in 2014. By means of online or telephone contact they were asked if they knew of other similar projects and were sent a brief questionnaire (identification and contact details, activity, groups in treatment and employees, numbers by gender, types of specialists employed, etc.). The questionnaire was also sent to new projects as they were being discovered. A "participative map" was drawn enabling the different entities to be in contact in order to exchange experiences and work on joint strategies. When analyzing the objectives of the entities of SF, together with the questions on the form of organization and the treatment of people in RSE, it has been possible to verify the priority of social justice over the economic benefit. A bibliographical review and the results of questionnaires (2015–2017) from some of the 161 SF entities in Catalonia have been employed to establish the relationship between FS, PA, and SF [3].

In the third step, in order to apply methodologies of economic assessment and social returns on investment, ten SF cases were selected in 2015. These represent three kinds of characteristics of entities according to rural or peri-urban location, and greater or lesser territorial dependence on the city. In the selection criteria, availability for answering the questionnaires in two or three sessions (2015–2017) was borne in mind, as well as the requirement of having been operative for some years. Projects included entities in peri-urban areas and those closely linked with the city, others in rural areas but geared to production for urban consumers, and still more in rural areas that worked without consolidated links with the urban sphere, although selling the greater part of their produce to town and city consumers. The questions formulated in the in-depth interviews were of three types: characteristics of the entity, economic matters, and the structure of each entity's project by phases, in order to establish the economic, social, and environmental changes from the point of view of each stakeholder. One of the most important steps, therefore, is selection of stakeholders according to their importance in the development of the project (Table 2). When analyzing the objectives of the entities of SF, together with the questions on the form of organization and the treatment of people in RSE, it has been possible to verify the priority of social justice over the economic benefit.

Fourth, using the answers of a questionnaire distributed to a hundred entities, a detailed analysis is offered of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) in the case of SF projects [74]. This has enabled us to analyze the sector from an overall standpoint. The SWOT technique has allowed analysis of SF as a whole in Catalonia, and hence the possibilities it holds for boosting FS. In-depth interviews with ten entities, selected in accordance with criteria of location and dependence, inquire in greater detail into the specific characteristics of these relationships, with particular attention to the economic, social, and environmental feasibility of the projects.

In the fifth and final step, analysis of the economic viability and social return on investment (SROI) of these ten SF projects is carried out. The SROI methodology aims to demonstrate how SF projects make a major contribution to society, bringing about changes in the individuals they work with, both in the immediate surroundings and in the broader society [75]. The SROI methodology first appeared in 1997 when the Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), a Third Sector entity that promotes social and employment inclusion of people at RSE, wanted to measure the impact of social enterprises in San Francisco (California). In 2004, a European SROI network was created with the aim of setting "standards" for measuring the value of social return through changes generated among stakeholders [75]. This methodology gauges the social impact of investing in a project with social service characteristics, focusing on three broad dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. Since we are concerned with the social returns in these three dimensions, this focus is the most appropriate for our research.

The SROI methodological process is organized into five phases:

1. Establishing the scope of the analysis and identifying stakeholders. It is essential to define who will participate. For each stakeholder selected, we identified and quantified the investment (inputs) and the contribution to the entity, and specified the result (outputs) obtained. We selected stakeholders in accordance with an agreement between the interviewees in each case studied and the interviewers of the research group. The criterion used in selection of stakeholders is a focus on those with most influence in the changes achieved in the SF activity. These stakeholders are presented in Table 2 below.
2. Preparing the impact map, the aim of which is to understand and articulate the theory of change in order to explain how the organization creates value through its use of resources. After determining the value contributed by each stakeholder, the changes (outcomes)—social, economic or environmental—resulting from the activities carried out by the SF entity are identified for each entity. The main SF objective is to improve the personal autonomy of people at RSE.
3. Providing evidence of results (outputs) and value. We established indicators for the changes (outcomes) that were identified, explained the impact achieved, and quantified the units of change

obtained, as well as their duration over time. A specific monetary estimation (financial proxy) was applied to these indicators.

4. Measuring the total impact for each of the changes. We quantified the impact of the investment in relation to the value of the results obtained, and then adjusted for changes (outcomes) that were not produced by the entity analyzed, and for changes lasting more or less than one year.
5. When calculating the SROI, we added benefits, subtracted negatives, and compared the result obtained with the investment made. The final important step is to communicate the SROI results to the previously identified stakeholders, providing them with the information needed to compare and verify the results obtained [76].

Table 2. Stakeholders, analysis, and justification—main groups used in the SROI.

Stakeholders	Description of the Stakeholders and Their Characteristics	Explanation of Reasons for Including Stakeholders
Users—people facing social exclusion	Users in the SF kentity who frequently also have a job contract.	The main subject in SF entities is groups at RSE.
Technical or professional team	Professional (agrarian production, social services) with skills, acquired before or during SF participation.	Responsible for leading and managing the project—aiming at a productive social entity supporting RSE groups.
Volunteers or interns	Voluntary hours of work, yielding satisfaction and new skills, and improving social relationships.	Essential to SF entities, supporting the technical team and improving the social capital of entities.
Family members	Closest to beneficiary-workers who experience positive changes, such as emotional and material well-being.	The entity's activity provides emotional support and relieves the burden for family members responsible for RSE people.
Clients of the entity	Entities or individuals who value the quality of the SF products offered.	Clients partly contribute to funding by purchasing products and services.
Providers	Providing inputs for SF products. These are frequently organic materials.	There are always some key providers depending on the product or service.
Support and marketing networks	Platforms of various groups for training of SF entities, and better marketing.	Xarxa Agrosocial, Coop 2747 Mans, Vogadors, etc.
Third Sector—associations, foundations, etc.	Organizations providing economic or other support to the entity. Often they are promoters.	Sponsors of the SF project, or organizations that provide funding. They could be the "parent" entity.
Public administration	Subsidies and grants to support protected workplaces and help the entity to succeed.	This stakeholder is justified by changes (outputs) received and investments (inputs) provided.
Local community and surroundings	This is the territory where the entity's activity may have an impact or generate change.	The impact in the community of the entity's activity, added value of local products, and economic development.
Local public administration	Provides social services and establishes agreements with SF entities to implement activities with RSE groups.	It uses SF entities to manage training services and social gardens. These services favor their viability.
Financing from Civil society	Ethical banking, crowdfunding, private non-profit investment groups.	Ship2B. Momentum Project, Tríodos, Fiare, Coop57, and others.

Source: Compiled by author.

4. Main Characteristics of the Ten Social Farming Cases Analyzed

These projects (Figure 2) are analyzed below, using information from the in-depth interviews.

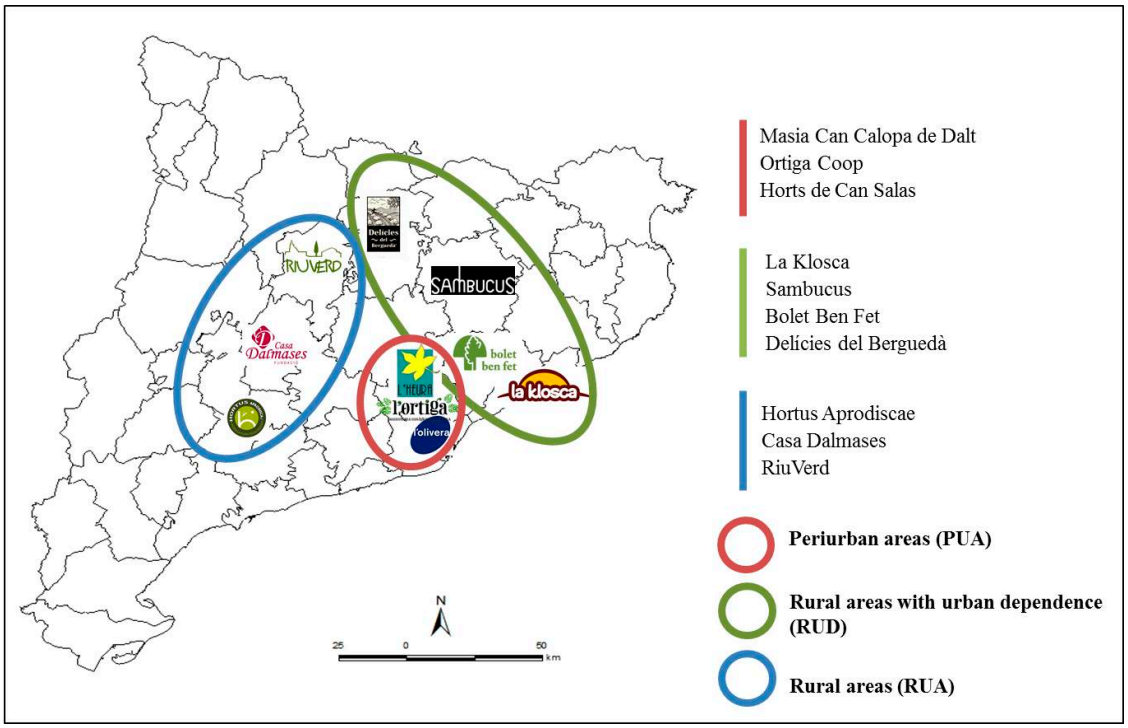

Figure 2. Location of the 10 cases analyzed. Source: Adapted by the authors

La Ortiga (http://www.lortiga.cat) is the result of a merger between a Limited Liability Company in charge of production and ecological-agrarian commercialization for a property of two hectares engaged in horticulture, and a non-profit-making social-work cooperative carrying out training activities and working with the social services of the Sant Cugat City Council, in accordance with a recent twenty-year agreement aiming at labor insertion for groups in situations of poverty. Agriculture-related activities for schools and training for adults are also carried out, and baskets of ecological products are supplied to responsible consumption initiatives. This endeavor was founded in 2014 on the property of Can Montmany (Valldoreix), on the Collserola Range near Barcelona.

Can Calopa de Dalt (Figures 3 and 4) is a cooperative working on and managing three hectares of vineyards on land belonging to the Barcelona City Council in the Collserola Natural Park. The project was founded in 2010 as a result of an agreement between L'Olivera Cooperative and the Barcelona City Council.

The aim of this initiative is rehabilitating and finding work for young city people with no prior experience of agricultural work. This is achieved by employment on the property together with training support and life in a socially oriented household in an agricultural and natural setting. Eleven young people are working here as well, as in other properties in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area. They are also refurbishing a seventeenth-century farmhouse so that it can be used for congresses and social events, for example wine tasting. The 11,000 bottles of wine produced by the project are sold by L'Olivera.

The L'Heura Gardening Centre, SLL (Limited Company; http://www.heura-cet.cat), with its head office in Terrassa, was founded in 1994 as a non-profit entity managing a garden nursery with the aim of providing a resource for social and occupational inclusion of people with mental disabilities or mental disorders. Since 2013, the project has been producing ecological vegetables and other garden produce on the property of Can Sales (Terrassa), which has four hectares of land and a farm products shop supplying consumer groups, and individual clients. Moreover, it has an educational program for schools, training workshops for families and adults, and a catering service. Also noteworthy is the fact that it has recently acquired a two-hectare municipal property for agricultural production.

Figure 3. The seventeenth-century Can Calopa de Dalt farmhouse. Source: [4]

Figure 4. Vineyards of the Can Calopa de Dalt farmhouse. Source: [4]

Sambucus (http://www.sambucus.cat) is a cooperative established in 2010 in Manlleu (Barcelona) with the aim of providing the necessary resources to empower people at RSE. The project embraces a wide range of activities, from an ecological vegetable garden, a restaurant service in the Manlleu municipal market, ecological cultivation of aromatic herbs, which are dried in the project's installations, through to kitchen management for collectives and an offer of catering services. The employees are diverse—young people with problems of social and educational inclusion, immigrant women with children, and long-term unemployed people, among others.

The Casa Dalmases Foundation (http://casadalmases.org) was founded in 2009 to manage the space of a seventeenth-century building in Cervera, with the two-fold aim of providing employment opportunities to people with disabilities through brewing beer (26,000 L per year) and producing handmade chocolate (2015), and opening up to the public the heritage of a stately home, which is now a venue for social and cultural activities. The ground floor of Casa Dalmases has its own shop, which employs people with disabilities from an occupational center and sells products from other social entities.

Bolet Ben Fet (http://www.boletbenfet.com) (Figure 5) was established in 2009 as the result of a meeting between an entrepreneur and the cooperative group TEB (In Spanish, Taller Escola Barcelona (TEB), that means Barcelona School Workshop.), which aims to provide opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. The objective is social and occupational integration for this group of people, through a special employment center (CET) and by way of cultivating ecological shiitake and maitake mushrooms at an old farm in Sant Antoni de Vilamajor (Barcelona).

Delicias del Berguedà (http://www.deliciesdelbergueda.cat) is the brand name of the labor insertion company Portal Berguedà, founded in 2011, supported by the Portal Foundation, and aiming to assist young people affected by dual pathology, as well as their families in the Berguedà district. Part of the Support Program for Social Entrepreneurship of the Generalitat (Government) of Catalonia, it belongs to the Red Agro-social group (Agri-Social Network), promoted by the Catalunya-La Pedrera Foundation (http://www.fundaciocatalunya-lapedrera.com/ca/content/xarxa-agrosocial), and is one of the founding members of the 2147 Mans Cooperative (http://www.2147mans.coop/). These groups produce jams, yoghurt, low-fat dairy items, and cottage cheese from the raw material of milk supplied by a nearby dairy farm, thus fostering local consumption and sustainable rural development.

Figure 5. Artificially grown mushrooms. Source: [4].

La Klosca (http://www.cenforpre.org/web_laklosca_10/catala/productes.html) (Figure 6) opened its doors in 2009 as a center producing ecological eggs from hens fed with organic products in the property of Sant Miquel de Mata, which was ceded by the Mataró City Council. With clear social goals of achieving social and occupational integration of the center's beneficiaries, it aims to end the social-work cycle for people with mental disabilities by preparing them to join the workforce by way of high-quality production. Also noteworthy is the fact that this entity has arisen from the conversion of a space used for growing herbs and ornamental plants.

RiuVerd (http://www.riuverd.cat) is a socially-oriented, non-profit-making cooperative founded in 2010 with the aim of training and integrating into the job market young people with problems and at RSE. It functions as a halfway house to support them before they join the regular workforce, and offers them a training program adapted to their needs and personal circumstances. They engage in a range of economic activities in agricultural production and services, including establishing a collective dining room for healthy eating, cultivating, distributing, and selling high quality, ecological horticultural

products, growing aromatic herbs, and offering a gardening service. The cooperative also provides guidance, capacity building, and work for other groups.

Aprodisca Ambientales y Ecológicos (http://www.aprodisca.org) is a labor insertion company (EI), founded in 2010 in Constantí (Tarragona) and supported by the parent company Aprodisca (CET) of Montblanc (2000), an association working for the integration of mentally handicapped people in the Conca de Barberà district. It provides food processing services on the basis of ecological products, as well as having its own agri-food project for ecological cultivation. It employs people with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses, as well as RSE groups, especially unemployed immigrants and young people from dysfunctional families. On the basis of horticulture, it engages in complementary activities initiated by the Hortus Aprodiscae project, among them preparation of batches of ecological products.

Figure 6. Free-range, organically raised chickens. Source: [4].

5. Social Agriculture in Catalonia: Some Significant Experiences

In 2017, 206 SF projects and garden centers were registered in Catalonia. Of these only 45 were engaged in gardening and the other 161 basically come under the heading of SF, with gardening included in some cases. The research described here focuses on the 161 cases that were wholly or partially SF projects. Their localization is shown in Figure 7, which reveals that they are mainly concentrated in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, especially in peri-urban areas [77].

The first SF initiatives in Catalonia, among them *L'Olivera Cooperativa* (*L'Olivera Cooperativa* is a social project that was initiated in 1974 in Vallbona de les Monges (Lleida). This rural cooperative offers employment to people with intellectual disability. The farm work includes cultivation) and *La Fageda* (La Fageda is a dairy cooperative founded in 1982 in Convent del Carme (Olot, Girona), providing occupation for individuals referred from psychiatric care. Initially, the entity had 100 dairy cows and sold milk under contract to Nestlé. In 1985, residential and occupational therapy programs were added. By 1993, there were 320 dairy cows and raw milk was being processed for yoghurt products, with weekly sales of 50,000 yoghurts directly to the general public, supermarkets, and large dining facilities. In 1997, the cooperative created a foundation. By 2015, there were 256 employees (50% with certified disability) producing more than 60 million yoghurts (5% of the market share in Catalonia). Further information: http://www.fageda.com/ca), appeared in the 1970s. The sector continued to grow

until the mid-1990s, when the number of SF projects increased significantly. This coincided with a socioeconomic context that fostered the emergence of voluntary work in Catalonia and concern for the rights of at-risk groups that lacked social visibility [24]. After the 2008 financial crisis, there was a dramatic rise in potential RSE groups. In the ensuing years, the number of SF projects increased at an unprecedented rate as numerous civic initiatives, particularly in Third Sector organizations, attempted to address the individual and collective needs of those most affected by the crisis.

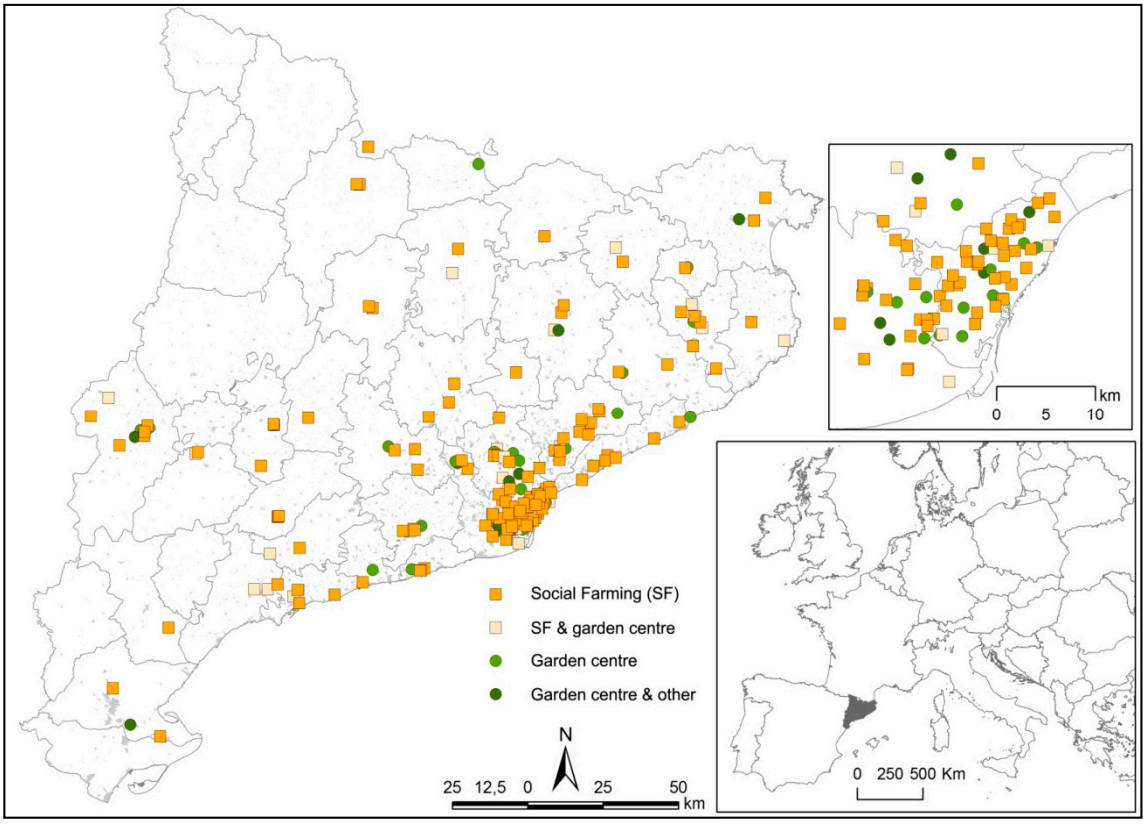

Figure 7. Territorial distribution of SF projects in Catalonia (2017). Source: Author, using the data base.

Analysis of the interviews concerning SF projects has made it possible to produce a SWOT analysis highlighting internal characteristics (strengths and weaknesses) and factors of the external setting (threats and opportunities), thus giving an overview of the sector (Table 3).

The products of SF operations in Catalonia are perfectly suited to changing consumer habits and for meeting the needs of emerging market segments as they continue to grow in importance. Consumption patterns combining quality and ethical considerations offer a clear commercial opportunity for business and economic viability [78]. The products are sold as "PA" on-site at the farm, or through cooperatives, consumer groups, and specialized establishments, thus shortening the commercial cycle and guaranteeing total traceability of the origin of the product, which adds even more value.

A large number of SF projects in Catalonia list agriculture as their main activity (77%), usually horticultural initiatives, although some cultivate olive trees, vineyards, or mushrooms. Value-added agri-food initiatives (8%) include projects producing jams and preserves, artisanal beer, or dairy products, such as yoghurt or cheese. Some projects provide work in forestry and forest management (7%) and others operate in the services sector (6%), engaged for example in short-circuit marketing of agricultural products (e.g., farm to table). Finally, some are focused on craft activities (1%) or are engaged the livestock sector (1%).

Table 3. Main characteristics of Catalan Social Farming in SWOT analysis.

Strengths	**Opportunities**
ARGICULTURE	CURRENT CONTEXT
A strategic sector in the current economic crisis	Socioeconomic scenario demands innovation and projects with social merits
Multifunctionality and crop diversification	Changes in consumption patterns (e.g., interest in ethical and just production, Fair Trade) and eating habits (preference for organic products)
Local food movement ("farm-to-table") and improved profile of agricultural practices	
Implementation of sustainable agriculture standards and social values	
TERRITORY	EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL EQUALITY
Contribution to local development and social fabric	New employment opportunities in agriculture and related sectors
Creation of services to take care of people	Need to create initiatives that provide employment and reduce the impact of the economic crisis
New relationships between producers, consumers and society in general	
SOCIAL INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP	SOCIETY
Return-on-investment for public funding	Alternative financing pathways
Initiatives with a civic origin	Use of new technologies
Strengthening of public-private cooperation	Broad network of Third Sector initiatives in Catalonia
BENEFICIARIES	INSTITUTIONS
Special-needs groups gain appropriate employment opportunities	Programmes that encourage a social economy
Individuals at risk of social exclusion gain support	Assistance for entrepreneurship and innovation
User groups (producers, consumers and society in general)	
WEAKNESSES	**THREATS**
MANAGEMENT/ORGANIZATION	CONTEXT
Dependence on public funding	Uncertainty and hesitance about entrepreneurship
Low productivity outcomes	Lack of social awareness and recognition
Delay with or non-payment of subsidies	Neoliberal model of business objectives vs. economics based on ethics and solidarity
CONTEXT	SOCIAL FARMING SITUATION
• Emerging sector with a limited track record	Limited appreciation of the social contributions of SF (e.g., at-risk groups)
• Practices are not well codified	Limited awareness of SF in Catalonia, compared with elsewhere in the EU
• Networks are not well structured	
BENEFICIARIES	POLITICS/INSTITUTIONS
Under-representation of certain groups	Cutbacks in social welfare funding
Difficulties in meeting the special needs of certain groups/individuals	Socialisation and privatisation of health care and social services
	Excessive bureaucracy and administrative limitations
	Lack of a regulatory framework and a lack of political will

Source: Author on the basis of in-depth interviews in SF projects.

As for the services offered, SF is concerned with social and occupational engagement (46%), which allows new job opportunities for RSE groups. The social gardens (45%) phenomenon is currently expanding in Catalonia (Figure 8) in response to the precariousness resulting from the economic crisis that began in 2008. This type of activity arose from the efforts of social movements or local

administrations to support individuals or families facing precarious situations. Less-frequent areas of service, often working with people who have some type of addiction, are therapy or rehabilitation (5%), and education and training (4%), usually of school dropouts, so that they can join the workforce.

Figure 8. Social gardens in the Pyrenees. Source: [4]

The largest cluster of legal entities consists of non-profit organizations in the form of either foundations (14%) or associations (23%). In addition, Third Sector private institutions with clear social and welfare functions may be structured as private companies (14%) or cooperatives (12%). A third group consists of agencies, supported by the public administration (37%), which have recently taken a more active role in implementing SF initiatives at the local level. The creation of social gardens is an evident example.

Several social inclusion models are used by SF projects. Reflecting the heterogeneity of the SF sector, the modality opted for depends on the groups benefiting from each project and the relevant legislation. The largest model (31%), Special Employment Centers (CET), provides paid work for people with disabilities, guaranteeing their integration into a protected work environment. These ad hoc entities are created for people with physical, intellectual, or sensory disabilities, and can be public or private. EI companies (In Catalan, *Empresa d'Inserció* (EI), which literally translates as Insertion Company) priorities social and workplace integration of RSE groups, thus preparing them to enter the labor market. Other models, such as Occupational Therapy Services (2%) or Occupational Centers (CO), aim to facilitate entry into the ordinary labor market for people with difficulties.

6. Evaluating the Economic, Social, and Environmental Feasibility of Social Agriculture

The aim of using SROI is to demonstrate how SF projects can make a significant social contribution, bringing about changes in the individuals they work with, as well as in the immediate surroundings and the broader society. The end result of SROI assessment is a number that reflects the multiplication factor of the investment in a given project, showing the return to society for each euro invested (more than three euros in our research). The return can be attributed to the various stakeholders (Figure 9).

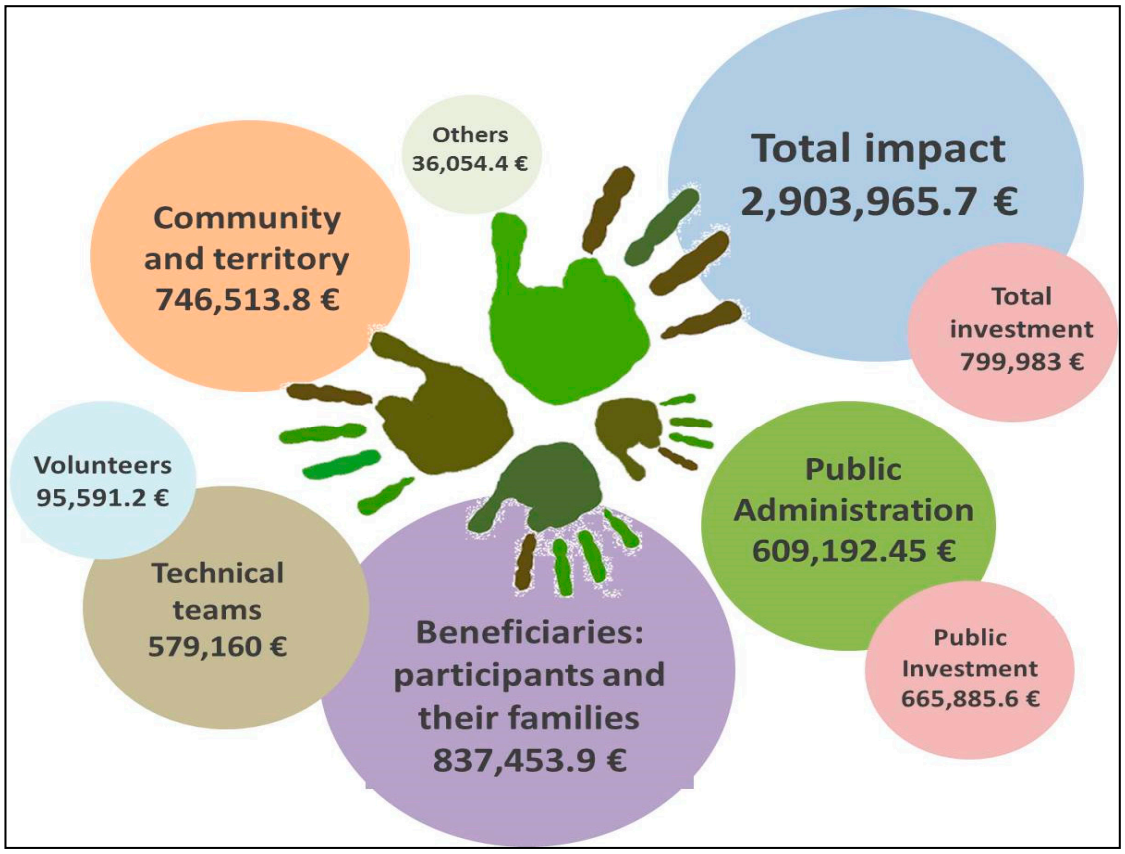

Figure 9. Distribution of total SROI impact among the stakeholders. Source: Authors, using in-depth interviews with SF projects

The total investment is €799,983, which makes it possible to calculate SROI, dividing the social impact total (€2,903,965.70) by this investment, which gives as a result €3.63 for each euro invested. The final result for the social impact of the set of ten SF projects analyzed is estimated at €2,903,065.70 for the activities of 2015 (Figure 9). It should be noted that of this amount, 28% (€837,453.90) corresponds to users and their families. Then, 22% (€609,192.50) is accounted for by the public administration, and 20% (€579,159.90) by project managers and technical staff. This latter group contributed towards job creation and acquisition of skills in a particularly innovative sector. Finally, and also noteworthy, is the local territory and community, which accounts for 25% (€746,513.80) of the impact with their contribution to local development, environmental management of the territory, and recovery of abandoned agricultural spaces, especially in peri-urban areas [3,45].

The SROI in relation to the study cases is presented in Figure 10, where in box A we have the 3 entities of the peri-urban areas, in B those of rural with urban dependence, in C those in rural areas, and in D the average of each category. The size is related to the scale, which represents thousands of euros. In the peri-urban category (category A), despite the different sizes, it is observed that the greatest return is for the families, the technical team, the public administration, and the local community and the territory. On the other hand, in category B, the return is greater for the users, the technical team, and the local community and the territory. In category C, Casa Dalmases is still in an initial phase of development and does not behave like the other entities. However, the greatest return is concentrated on the users, followed by the technical team, the public administration, and the local community and the territory.

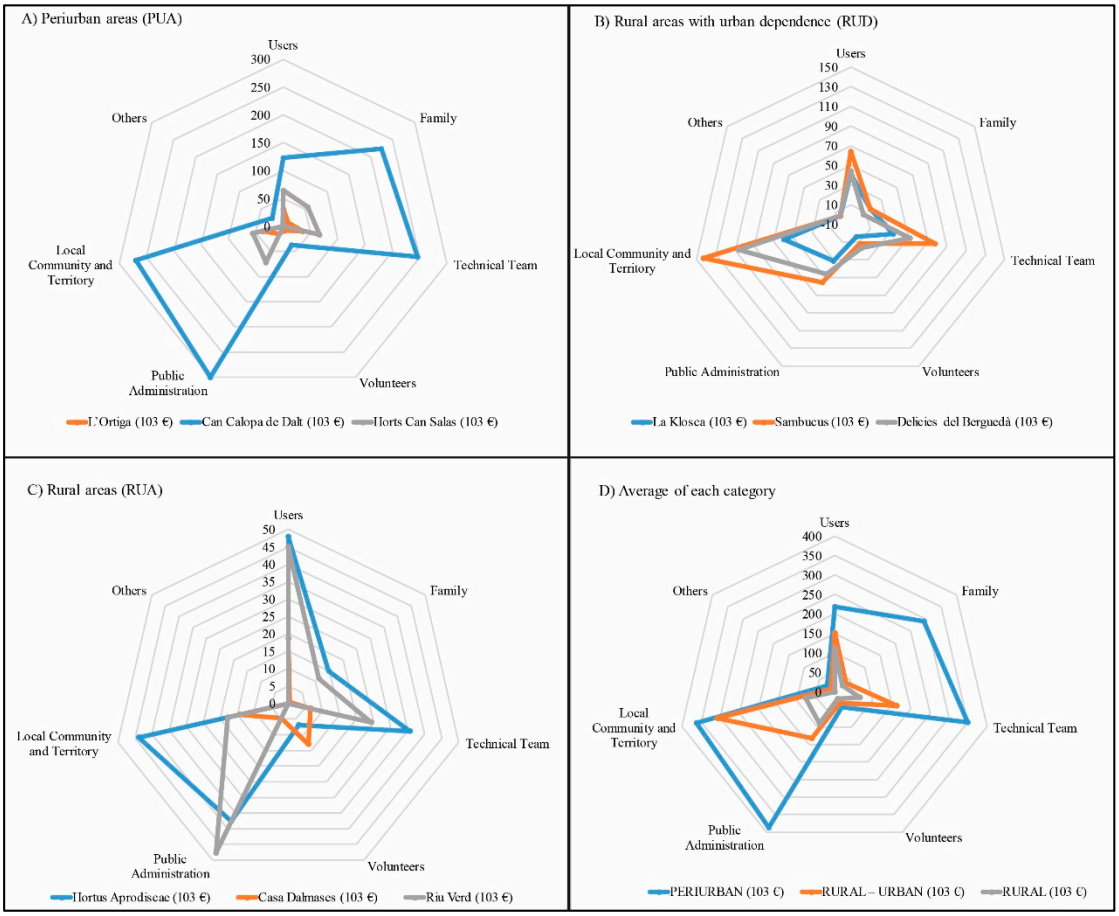

Figure 10. SROI by categories of the study entities (in thousands of €). Source: Authors, using in-depth interviews with SF projects.

The returns observed for the set of projects studied can be divided into the following categories: 35.2% social, 62.7% economic, and 2.1% environmental. Social benefits, among them occupational inclusion, access to health services, easing of family circumstances, and empowerment of RSE people, constitute the chief objective of SF. However, economic benefits, such as remunerated work for RSE groups, or reduction of administrative costs (unemployment benefits, tax collection, and housing subsidies, etc.), are the main justification for SF in the eyes of key actors in society. Finally, environmental benefits, such as recovery of arable land, reduction of fire risks, lower emission of pollutant gases, and improved biodiversity, testify to the sustainable nature of SF.

It should be recognized that evaluating environmental benefits is difficult, since this entails specific studies and financial proxies if the monetary value is to be calculated, and this means that their contribution to the overall impact is lower. It is also important to identify the direct impacts (67.9%)—namely those resulting from activity of an entity under study—in the total of projects analyzed, and also the indirect impacts (32.1%) resulting from the participation of other entities, and particularly, public and private grants or voluntary work. This information demonstrates that for the set of SF initiatives in Catalonia, two-thirds of the total impact results from the entities themselves, and only one-third can be attributed to external origins. From a general perspective, it has been shown that there is a return to society of more than three times the value (€3.63 for each euro) of the human, material, and financial resources invested.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

The concept of FS is increasingly associated with that of food justice, which guarantees access for a population of a territory to quality food [52]. This would take the form of products of proximity, since FS seeks to uphold local farming production. SF is an activity that fulfils the requirements of proximity, ecological, high-quality, and value-added agriculture, which then favors FS in the framework of sustainable local and regional development [79].

Nevertheless, there is a version of FS that is related with the interests of countries and investment societies that seek to guarantee food for the population of the country, or alternatively, speculate on food prices on an international scale. Accordingly, the prevailing trend is acquisition of land in other countries and a quest for profits by taking advantage of price differences between producing and consuming countries [52].

SF coincides with the premises of the regional market, where production is viable because it is organic and there is added value, in addition to the social benefits of employing RSE collectives. In any case, this ecological, socially-oriented agriculture of proximity needs the involvement of consumers who are informed about high-quality local, organic, socially-oriented, and environmentally friendly production, and willing to pay a somewhat higher price than what is asked for products usually sold on the general market.

Agroecology, a system of agricultural production using an ecological strategy and favoring the high quality of PA can complement SF, adding more value to FS by bringing in new techniques of organic production, which adapted to the setting, make it possible to compete with industrialized agricultural production.

The expansion of SF in Europe has been heterogeneous. Mediterranean countries (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) have a different development tradition from those of central and northern countries. Only Italy (since August 2015), Belgium, and the Netherlands have specific SF legislation, which is so far non-existent in other countries.

SROI has been applied in other research related to SF and GC, as is the case in United Kingdom [61] which obtained a ratio of 3.50 for every unit invested. This was the result of analysis of a project involving 87 care farmers and more oriented to therapy than to the employment of RSE people. SROI has also been used in the United States and the Netherlands [80]. However, most studies applying SROI are in medicine or psychiatry [81]. As far as SF is concerned, and generally speaking, it can be considered that the average relationship between the resulting impact and the investment is approximately 3 to 1.

The principles of equity and social justice are predominant among SF entities in Catalonia. They have an ethical and social vocation and give priority to people over profit, basing their work on the goals of offering the opportunity to have a decent job or curing people using therapy and health services.

SF makes five main contributions in Catalonia:

- Empowerment of socially vulnerable people (collective at RSE).
- Contribution to local development and territorial equity as a form of resilience in the territories concerned.
- Encouraging a social economy based on solidarity and a cooperative structure.
- Dissemination of socially innovative projects and strategies to promote organic agriculture and the production and trade approaches of agroecology.
- Contribution to environmental protection and recovery of arable land.

Finally, there is the social and economic viability of SF projects. By means of applying SROI methodology to the cases studied, it can be demonstrated that there is a significant social, economic, and environmental return to society, amounting to more than three euros for each euro invested. It can be affirmed that the highest return prevails for the stakeholders “technical team” and “local community and territory” in all the categories of analysis (Figure 5). This is due to the need for active

promoters in each project and the relationship with other local entities. The "users" have a higher return in categories B and C due to a certain distance from the city, while returns are higher for "public administration" in categories A and C, where there is more employment of people in CSR. Finally, "families" have the highest return in categories A and C, as there are more dependent users.

It can be concluded, then, that developing SF can feasibly promote FS in Europe. The efficacy of SF is not only economic but also social and environmental. Moreover, it tends to come together with local and regional sustainable development, which could give rise to positive synergies in other activities and services of the spaces in question. Consequently, public policies should be working with private initiatives and the Third Sector to foster initiatives of entities engaged in SF projects.

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