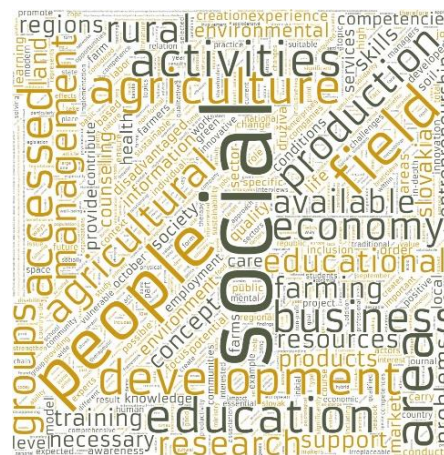


DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND COUNSELING IN SOCIAL AGRICULTURE IN SLOVAKIA: INITIAL EXPERIENCE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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Abstract: Slovakia has significantly changed the structure of its economy by switching to a market management system. There has been a shift away from agriculture, traditional farming methods and careful land management. The result is unused lands and labor force, a broken relationship of society towards the environment, the agricultural land and due to the low social status of agriculture, towards the education in this area too. There is no information on the potential of social agriculture. Educational initiatives in this area are unique and fragmented. The importance of educational activities and counseling lies mainly in education in an effort to help implementers or those interested in the implementation of social farming projects to obtain basic information about the concept of social agriculture, avoid mistakes and get the most comprehensive picture of current conditions in this area. The article outlines a view of the development of social agriculture in the area of the social economy in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, which corresponds to the changing needs of society. It draws attention to the initial steps in the development of educational activities and counseling in social agriculture. We reflect on the potential and pitfalls of education as part of a broader understanding of social agriculture. The elimination of the shortcomings would have significant effects on rural development and less developed regions. The benefits would be reflected in inclusive development and in more sustainable agriculture by influencing other sectors. Our article is based on desk review and qualitative research. We conducted 6 in-depth expert interviews. We focused on experts who were able to provide us with a specialized insight into our research.

Keywords: social economy, social entrepreneurship, social agriculture, social farming, education, competencies

Súhrn: Slovensko prechodom na trhovú systém hospodárenia výrazne zmenilo štruktúru hospodárstva. Nastal odklon od poľnohospodárstva, tradičných spôsobov hospodárenia a šetrného narábania s pôdou. Dôsledkom je nevyužívaná pôda aj pracovná sila, naštrbený vzťah spoločnosti k životnému prostrediu, poľnohospodárskej pôde a pre nízky spoločenský status poľnohospodárstva aj k vzdelávaniu v tejto oblasti. Absentujú informácie o potenciáli sociálneho poľnohospodárstva. Edukačné iniciatívy v tomto smere sú ojedinelé a rozdrobené. Význam rozvoja vzdelávacích aktivít a poradenstva pritom spočíva najmä v snahe pomôcť realizátorom alebo záujemcom o realizáciu projektov sociálneho poľnohospodárstva získať základné informácie o koncepte sociálneho poľnohospodárstva, vyhnúť sa chybám a získať čo možno najkomplexnejší obraz o súčasných podmienkach v tejto oblasti. Článok načrtáva pohľad na rozvoj sociálneho poľnohospodárstva v priestore sociálnej ekonomiky v podmienkach Slovenskej republiky, ktoré zodpovedá meniacim sa potrebám spoločnosti. Upriamuje pozornosť na začiatkové kroky rozvoja vzdelávacích aktivít a poradenstva v sociálnom poľnohospodárstve. Zamýšľame sa nad potenciálom a úskaliami vzdelávania ako súčasťou širšieho chápania sociálneho poľnohospodárstva. Odstránenie nedostatkov by prinieslo výrazné efekty pre rozvoj vidieka aj menej rozvinutých regiónov, benefity by sa prejavili v inkluzívnom rozvoji, udržateľnejšom poľnohospodárstve s presahom do iných sektorov. Náš článok vychádza z "desk review" a kvalitatívneho výskumu. Na zber údajov sme uskutočnili 6 hĺbkových expertných rozhovorov. Zamerali sme sa na odborníkov, ktorí nám vedeli poskytnúť špecializovaný náhľad v oblasti nášho výskumu.

Kľúčové slová: sociálna ekonomika, sociálne podnikanie, sociálne poľnohospodárstvo, sociálne poľnohospodárstvo, vzdelávanie, kompetencie

Highlights

- Social agriculture represents an innovative area in the social economy
 - The existence of an overarching legislative framework for social agriculture is missing
 - Information in the field of social agriculture is insufficient
 - Education should focus on the needs of social farming actors
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1. Introduction

The social economy is considered to be a part of the economy and a new area of business, which contributes to solving current problems in the field of unemployment, poverty, demographic development, social marginalization, environmental protection, etc., through its instruments. Innovative approaches have emerged to alleviate community, societal or environmental challenges or problems. Areas suitable for the development of the social economy and its entities are being searched for. Agriculture is one of the sectors in which unused potential for establishing the concept of the social economy and at the same time the concept of social agriculture is found (Lacko-Bartošová et al., 2021, p. 7).

Food production is essential for life, and agricultural production that provides a fair wage is essential for the economy, whereas, in addition to producing agricultural products, it offers jobs, protects natural resources, promotes biodiversity and prevents the displacement of people from certain regions. However, agriculture offers much more. The interconnection of the economic and social sectors is made possible in these sectors by the employment of people with different educational backgrounds, people with disabilities and people from the margins of society. Efforts to exploit commercial farms and the agricultural environment in order to promote physical and mental health through agricultural activities refer to the concept of social agriculture, also referred to as care farming, farming for health or green care in the agricultural sector (Hassink 2003; Braastad 2005; NCFI 2022; Hine, Peacock, Pretty, 2008, p. 247).

Social agriculture is based on two key concepts: multifunctional agriculture and community social and health care. It plays an increasingly important role by providing a local social support network in this context. It represents any use of agricultural activities to address specific social needs in order to contribute to social inclusion (Borgi et al. 2020, p. 208).

All age groups can benefit from the social solidarity of social agriculture. Social agriculture responds to the changing needs of society and is perceived as a good example of the socialization of care in connection with the growing demand for inclusive development in the field of social and health services. At the same time, it is an example of a more sustainable type of agriculture in reference to social values. It creates an opportunity to participate in other sectors apart from the social sector, healthcare and for example education (Di Iacovo, O'Connor, 2009, pp. 23–24).

Social agriculture is widespread throughout Europe in forms that have common features but at the same time differ significantly in terms of approach, relations with other sectors, legislation and funding (Official Journal of the European Union, 2013, p. 1). The development of social agriculture itself differs in each country due to differences in the structure of their health, social and educational services, but also differences in historical development and cultural traditions. A general definition of social agriculture is not accepted at the European level. Social agriculture is perceived as a new as well as a traditional concept, as on the one hand it originates from traditional rural self-help networks established in rural areas before the modernization of agriculture, on the other hand this concept is being substantially reformed in an innovative and evolving way (Di Iacovo, O'Connor, 2009, p. 21, 25).

The National Rural Development Network in Slovakia defines social agriculture as the sum of activities using agricultural resources, both plant and animal, in order to create an adequate environment for various health or socially disadvantaged people and the general public in order to provide them with employment, facilitate their integration into society, or contribute to their relationship with

the countryside and nature through providing education and leisure activities. In this sense, the aim is to create the conditions within the agricultural holding or activities, that enables people with special needs to be involved in normal agricultural activities in order to ensure their development and support and to improve their well-being (Národná sieť rozvoja vidieka, 2021). However, it is not just concerned with production, as the result of work in agriculture. Physical work is therapeutic and can provide mental therapy. Raising society's awareness of social farming helps the further development of social agriculture. The civic association Druživa, which deals with social agriculture in Slovakia, perceives it as follows: Social agriculture includes all activities which use agricultural resources, both plants and animals, in order to promote (or generate) therapy, rehabilitation, social inclusion, education and social services in rural areas and as a result provides a view of traditional agriculture as multifunctional. The main products, in addition to products for sale, are health and employment, education or therapy (Druživa, o. z., 2021c).

As it has already been mentioned, it is developed and applied in several forms such as social companies or cooperatives, non-profit organizations, associations and foundations, but there are also private companies run by an entrepreneur, to whom social agriculture creates a space for income diversification. Social agriculture is also developing in agricultural areas; however, it is dependent on public entities or health agencies (Lacko-Bartošová et al., 2021, p. 23).

Based on the above ideas, social agriculture can be understood as a community-oriented form of agriculture that acts for the benefit of social inclusion of people. Examples of such activities include educational activities and counseling (Di Iacovo, 2009; Kinsella et al., 2014; García-Llorente et al., 2016; Knapik, 2017, p. 19).

In the field of social farming development, it is essential to educate people in order to provide human resources of the required quality and structure for the needs of the regions. The elimination of the shortcomings would have significant effects on rural development and less developed regions. It is desirable to identify specific areas in which the management operating in social agriculture should be competent to act effectively. The aim of this article is to provide a better understanding of the potential and barriers of education in the field of social agriculture and to identify specific areas of essential management competencies in social agriculture. This article looks at the initial steps in the development of educational activities and counseling in social agriculture. In order to achieve it, we defined two research questions.

RQ1: What are the barriers and challenges to the development of educational activities and counseling in the field of social agriculture?

RQ2: What are the specific areas of essential management competencies in social agriculture?

2. Theoretical background

A social and solidarity economy lies in the concept of designating companies and organizations (in particular cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises) which carry out the production of goods, services and knowledge in a specific way, pursuing economic and social objectives and promoting solidarity (ILO, 2009). The social economy is considered to be a part of the economy and social life, focused on material maintenance and ensuring the good quality of life of individuals, families and communities, through the expression of social solidarity and social responsibility (Pongrácz, 2021). OECD understands social economy organizations with various legal forms, whose activities are based on the values of solidarity, the superiority of the people over capital, democratic and participatory governance (OECD, 2021).

Social entrepreneurship is an innovative tool for solving social problems and is considered a basic tool of the social economy. It is a hybrid business model that has a strong social mission listed first in the business objectives, which means it is willing to submit to profit maximization. This creates a unique business model by combining the principles of operation of third sector entities and companies. The goal of social company is to bring about positive social changes, to contribute to improving the quality of life of

individuals, families or communities and to contribute to the well-being of society. Possible ways of achieving positive social change can be expressed in the following ways (Pongrácz, 2021):

- job creation for disadvantaged job seekers and vulnerable people,
- the provision of products (goods and services) for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, or for people and communities living in less developed regions,
- activities that contribute to the protection of the environment (Pongrácz, 2021).

All the above options for achieving the set goal of positive social change have a suitable opportunity to be fulfilled in the area of agriculture, which creates the potential for the development of the concept of social agriculture in Slovakia. However, it must be kept in mind that business in the social economy has its own specifics, therefore the requirements for managers in this area are more demanding and the education system is expected to meet the requirements of economic practice.

Wider education in this area allows to acquaint the company with the potential in all three of the abovementioned ways. It provides information on business models that can integrate disadvantaged groups from the labor market and thus make more efficient use of the workforce, but it can also provide therapy, rehabilitation, or active rest and relaxation. The application of the knowledge of social agriculture in practice and in education enable the building of a positive attitude towards social solidarity, further education and the transfer of experience to the younger generation, which as a result contribute to the development of rural areas and local communities.

2.1 Social agriculture

In recent decades, the targeted inclusion of disadvantaged people, or those with social problems, into agriculture production has become known as social agriculture (Mammadova et al., 2021 In Elings et al., 2022, p. 441). The term social agriculture has been used frequently in professional literature since the end of the twentieth century (Jarábková, et al., 2022, p. 541).

Social agriculture is focused on two vulnerable stakeholders separately. Its direct beneficiaries are disadvantaged groups, including people with mental, physical or sensory disabilities, people with mental health problems, prisoners and ex-prisoners, but also, for example, socially disadvantaged people, elderly or ethnic groups and immigrants. It creates a more favorable space for these groups of the population to support their social inclusion. On the other hand, they are farmers and as indirect beneficiaries, they create a space for the involvement of vulnerable groups in agricultural activities, through social agriculture but it also establishes new networks with consumers and furthermore new supply and consumption chains, and last but not least, it can contribute to improving the economic position of farmers by diversifying their sources of income (Di Iacovo et al., 2014; García-Llorente et al., 2016, p. 9).

Social agriculture activities are those where the support of vulnerable people is combined with agricultural production. The settings in which social agriculture takes place, namely social farms, are innovative because they combine health care and social services with agricultural production (Mammadova et al., 2021 In Elings et al., 2022, p. 440).

Social agriculture gives society a return on public and private investment in the form of social contributions, mainly in four fields: empowerment of socially vulnerable groups; social cohesion; local development in rural settings; and an equitable balance between revenues and costs to society (Tulla, et al, 2017, p. 26).

Social agriculture can be seen in this respect as an inclusive concept, which includes various aspects, especially health care (treatment, therapy); social rehabilitation (reintegration into the community; psychosocial competencies also called life skills), education as well as job training (support for vulnerable people, agricultural management skills, job training, sheltered workplace) (Hine, Peacock, Pretty, 2008, p. 248).

In terms of the main purpose, social farms can be divided into three basic groups (Di Iacovo, O'Connor, 2009, pp. 35–37):

- Nursing social care-oriented farms represent the concept of providing a care service to meet the needs of service users. Farms are providers of care services. There is usually a payment or monetary compensation for services paid for by public authorities.
- The main goal is not integration into the labor market or employment of people. e.g., therapeutic farms in France.
- Job-oriented social farms that focus on labor market integration or the employment of marginalized groups. Training development concepts for disadvantaged groups are usually associated with this e.g., social enterprises in Slovenia.
- Social farms focused on education and pedagogy, e.g., educational farms that focus on education of primary school children. Their goal is to provide children with contact with farm life and access to nature once or several times a year (for example, didactic farms in Italy). There are also social farms that offer educational programs on the farm for children with learning disabilities or for example, those farms that have problems with social inclusion.

2.2 Education as part of a broader understanding of social agriculture

Nowadays companies are characterized by experiencing rapid changes, a large amount of information and a rapid pace of innovation (Turek, 2014, p. 203). Education and training play an irreplaceable role in addressing the socio-economic, demographic, technological and environmental challenges facing society today and in the future (Official Journal of the European Union, 2009). There is a growing need to develop life-related competences in the learning environment, that ensure preparation for life and promote the employability and social inclusion of the individual (Turek, 2014, p. 204). These competences are developed throughout life by formal education, non-formal education and informal learning. They are not just linked to specific qualifications, but go beyond them (Dudová, 2013; European Commission, 2019). Not only the institutionalized education and training of the individual, but also the ability to modify and complement one's own professional skills for the benefit of the individual allowing them to cope in a dynamically changing environment is an important competency to be applied in the labor market and in society. In adult education, the area of adaptation, socialization, communication in the social environment (i.e., social competence), as well as psychological competence (behavior towards oneself and in relation to others and the world around them, self-realization and self-knowledge) are particularly important. Thus, professional competence includes not only professional competence by itself but also social and psychological competence (Roľková, 2012, pp. 223–225). The individual is directed to the development of so-called life skills by equipping them with psychosocial, emotional, cognitive and behavioral competencies to cope with daily challenges and to engage productively in the community in a broader context (Nasheeda et al., 2019, p. 362). Life skills education is based on how the individual acquires these common components. Acquiring them through experiential learning, sharing and exchanging practical experiences is particularly important for their development (Nasheeda et al., 2019, p. 364, pp. 367–374). Life skills training proves to be crucial to be implemented in the field of education and in the field of social agriculture.

It is generally believed that agricultural education plays a major role as a supplier of the human resources needed to increase agricultural productivity and sustainability of farming systems. (Fîntîneru and Madsen, 2013, p. 175).

3. Methodology

The methodology presents a combination of both desk review and qualitative research. Due to the nature of the research, we used the qualitative research method.

Qualitative research methods tend to be used more and more in academic research. The cost for these methods is quite low and the results may be very useful for many fields of study (Zaharia, Grundey and Stancu, 2008, p. 1279).

We conducted individual in-depth interviews with selected experts. The method of expert interview was decided to be an aid for further problem explanation in order to fill the knowledge gap. The information obtained in this way from experts who are oriented in the given issue serves as a prerequisite for the further development of education in the area of social agriculture.

In-depth interviews were conducted in November 2021. They were based on intensive personal contact between the interviewer and the respondents. Respondents were carefully selected, together we conducted 6 interviews. We asked a total of 16 open-ended questions that focused on different aspects of educational activities and counseling in social agriculture. These questions were divided into three thematic blocks: (1) experiences in implementing educational activities and/or counseling in the field of social agriculture; (2) the focus of educational activities in the field of social agriculture; and (3) the implementation of the theme of social agriculture in formal and non-formal education.

The purpose of the conducted interviews was mainly to provide a better understanding of the biggest barriers and reveal possible proposals for measures to improve education and/or provided counseling in the field of social agriculture.

We have focused on experts who were able to provide us with a specialized insight into our research. There were 2 representatives of the public sector, 2 teachers/researchers from academic field and 2 experts working in the third sector and the field of social agriculture. Due to the fact that the development of social agriculture in Slovakia is in the initial phase, there are only a few professionals/experts dedicated to this area.

Through the interviews, we carried out a qualitative data collection, gathered a lot of information about the attitudes and perceptions of interviewed experts of the topic of social agriculture. Summarized findings in the form of new knowledge are presented in other parts of our article.

4. Results

Currently, social agriculture is considered to be an agricultural activity, or activity carried out mainly in a rural environment, which has two key characteristics – an impact on a wide range of at-risk social groups and the ability to carry out economic activities that contribute to local and regional development (Lacko-Bartošová et al., 2021, p. 25).

4.1 Social agriculture as an innovative model in the context of agriculture in Slovakia

Land is a basic factor of production, its position in the economy is unquestionable and it is the basis for human activities such as agriculture, forestry and others. Its quantity (in terms of country area) is given, but it decreases with the development of cities, construction activity, including transport constructions, growth of industrial production, expansion of road infrastructure and construction of halls (warehouse or production) on former green fields. The amount of land usable for agricultural purposes is declining, and its quality is reduced by careless handling of it.

The information portal of the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic points out that a permanent surplus of nutrients supplied to the land indicates a potential risk of environmental problems – endangering the quality of groundwater and surface water (Kročková, 2021).

Prolonged drought or, conversely, extreme total precipitation and torrential rain, which cause leaching of agricultural land, local floods and extensive floods cause damage to agricultural production, landslides

increasingly occurred in Slovakia due to climate change. In addition, torrential rains can cause agrochemicals to leach out. Slovakia is located in mostly mountainous terrain, a relatively small amount of good quality soil is due to the proximity of industrial companies so it is exposed to emissions with negative consequences for soil acidity and thus its creditworthiness and fertility. Agricultural companies in Slovakia operate in difficult production, social and environmental conditions. Forestry is not spared either – whether it is storms or global warming or emerging suitable conditions for the multiplication of pests (for example, various bark beetles). The damage to the destroyed forest due to the considerably long time needed to restore it is a major factor in recent times. Unexpected climatic changes in various meteorological or hydro-manifestations begin to occur with alarming regularity. Researchers from the Sustainable Agriculture and Soil Conservation (SoCo) project found in their findings in 2009 that soil degradation, soil, water and air pollution, habitat fragmentation and wildlife loss may be the result of poor agricultural practices (European Commission, 2009). Agriculture is included in the primary sphere of the economy of the country. Agriculture itself is irreplaceable and it is irreplaceable for humans as well. The importance of agriculture was emphasized by physiocracy.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic states the following facts in the Green Report 2020: In 2019, agricultural products were imported to the Slovak Republic amounting to the total value of 1,018.7 mil. € of what was inter annually an increase up to 56.6 mil. € (5.9%). Of this value, imports of substitutable agricultural products accounted for 70.2% (70.1% in 2018). In 2019, food products were imported to the Slovak Republic for a total cost of 3,709.0 mil. € (year-on-year an increase of 5.2%), of which 79.1% (79.0% in 2018) was represented by imports of substitutable food products (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, 2020, p. 64). The need for the social economy in agriculture, or in the creation of the so-called green jobs is obvious due to the large volume of imports of substitutable² agricultural and food products to Slovakia. We can thus agree with Darmo (Darmo, 2014), who states: Green jobs are an area of concern for environmental economists as well as employment policy makers and policy makers. It is the result of the horizontal principle of environmental sustainability, which is reflected in all sectors of the economy. It also supports the principle of an inclusive economy, ie social sustainability, the reduction of social inequality and it can create the preconditions for the employment of a low-skilled and disadvantaged workforce. GHK, Cambridge Econometrics and IEEP define green jobs including extractive industries and agriculture, which are de facto dependent on natural resources and natural conditions forces very broadly (GHK, 2007).

Social agriculture represents an innovative approach that is poorly mapped in Slovakia (Kováč, 2017). From this point of view, its role is not only to ensure agricultural production, but also to create and offer services, new jobs, educational activities and various therapies for disadvantaged and vulnerable people or people with special needs in order to contribute to the development of rural communities (IA MPSVR SR, 2021c).

It connects multifunctional agriculture with integrative employment and with social and educational services at the local level. Its starting point is the concept of "green care", which defines a wide range of structured and planned activities aimed at restoring work habits and achieving physical and mental health. Its essence is human contact with nature, for example, therapeutic, relaxation, social, inclusive work activities, but also educational activities belong here (Druživa, o.z., 2020a). It therefore brings several benefits to the target groups, which can include education and skills development. Training activities are an essential part of social agriculture in this regard:

- people with physical and / or mental disabilities are integrated according to the needs of the labor market , taking their individual abilities into account;
- young people with early school leaving; and
- other groups of people who need to be integrated into social and economic life (Lacko-Bartošová et al., 2021, pp. 25, 48).

² Products that can be produced in our conditions.

Slovakia is in the last position of ranking in the development of social agriculture compared to other countries. Therefore, the challenge to bring this issue closer to all potential implementers (the state farmers and farmers) and to raise awareness of the benefits of social farms not only for different kinds of farmers and farmers as a whole, but in addition how they can help improve the lives of people with barriers (Druživa, o.z., 2022).

Exchange of experience is part of the concept of social agriculture and education in the agricultural environment. The following part is based on the initial experience of addressed experts with education and counseling in the field of social agriculture in Slovakia. We focused on experts who were able to provide us with a specialized insight into our research.

4.2 Initial experiences of developing educational activities and counseling in social agriculture

The main participants in education, services and information are currently represented at the national level, mainly through non-formal education by a network of supporting Regional Social Economy Centers and non-governmental non-profit organizations.

Regional centers of social economy were established within the national project called Institute of Social Economy implemented since 2018 by the Implementing Agency of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. The main role of the eight regional centers of the social economy is to provide information about the social economy and on the establishment and functioning of social enterprises in the territorial scope of each self-governing region, free of charge.

Initial steps have been made to provide the conditions in the Slovak Republic towards the development of educational and advisory activities in the field of social agriculture at the level of the non-profit sector have been recorded since July 2020. The focus is on the effort to expand the educational and counseling services provided and for those who are interested in social entrepreneurship in the field of agriculture with the development of social agriculture in Slovakia. As the low level of education of employees and management in the field of agriculture and the need to provide qualified education and advice are pointed out by current experience (IA MPSVR SR, 2021b), it is necessary to focus on the given target group within the development of systemic educational activities. In order to subsequently provide qualified specific information and advisory services for those who are interested in the concept of social agriculture, the initiation of a series of educational activities specifically for managers of the Regional Centers of the Social Economy is associated with the year 2020 (Druživa, o.z. 2020b). The first training sessions were organized by the civic association Druživa within the project "Beginning of the development of social agriculture in Slovakia", which is also the implementer of the project (Druživa, o.z., 2020a; Druživa, o.z., 2021a).

Currently, during this year 2021, in addition to the mentioned trainings for managers within the framework of the project, the civic association Druživa also implemented educational webinars for those who were interested in several topics, e.g., How agriculture can help the disadvantaged; a webinar on examples from Norway and Northern Europe; Funding opportunities for social agriculture; Practical experience; Social farming of animals; as well as the first free educational course implemented in Slovakia focused on the field of social agriculture called Basics of social agriculture, the intention of which was to connect theory with practice (a three-day course: 16 hours of theory + 8 hours excursion) (Druživa, o.z., 2021b; IA MPSVR SR, 2021a). It is the only available course on this concept in Slovakia, which simplifies the way for those interested to implement activities falling under the concept of social agriculture. Efforts are underway to obtain course accreditation. Part of the educational and counseling activities is also the implementation of training entitled Education of counselors for social agriculture. The target group of education are persons providing counseling and information services on the concept of social agriculture. For this reason, the content of the training is more extensive, discussing the concept of social agriculture in more detail.

Previous activities have been implemented as project activities thanks to grant support. After the end of the project, they will be charged for the participants.

The importance of these activities lies mainly in education in an effort to help implementers or those interested in the implementation of social farming projects to obtain basic information about the concept of social agriculture, avoid mistakes and get the most comprehensive picture of current conditions in this area.

The concept of social agriculture has great potential to solve the situation of many socially disadvantaged groups and rural problems, and it is important how policy makers, state and public administrations, as well as other stakeholders face these problems in the future (Druživa, o.z., 2020a). At present, state support for the initiation and implementation of such activities is insufficient. There is no support for social agriculture in the legislation. The existence of an overarching legislative framework is crucial. It shapes the conditions for the creation and development of social agriculture and can also have a positive effect on the interest in this type of business. National and regional policy should be in favor of supporting and developing social agriculture, farming, education in this area. This need is reinforced by the current lack of qualified people in the field of agriculture. In high schools, fields of study are disappearing due to the lack of interest of students. It's a vicious circle. There is a lack of educated people in the field of agriculture, because they have nowhere to study. When they graduate, they work in other fields, even outside the home, because they do not find employment.

The fact is still low knowledge of the concept of social agriculture in Slovakia. The lack of information in the field of social agriculture and its dissemination is also a significant problem. The social area of work with the client is not connected with agriculture. Rather, it is the interest of people with a social feeling to be interested in the possibilities of help and occupational therapies for their clients. The interest of farmers in information from this type of business is very slowly intensifying. In this context, it seems necessary to inform as many farmers as possible who are well established in their business, so that their thinking is transformed into the social sphere as well.

Its success depends on the historical development, the level of development of civil society, the cultural, political background of the country, given the fact that the concept of social economy develops in relation to the socio-economic background of the community and society. It is extremely important to take this into account when creating educational activities for the needs of social agriculture. When creating educational syllabi, the involvement of stakeholders and local people is desirable, thus ensuring that local needs are integrated in relation to local conditions, challenges, and opportunities.

Education should focus on the needs of social farming actors, who mainly need to obtain human resources of the required quality (especially in the profession of agronomist), to provide them with further education and skills development and to strengthen social enterprise management.

From this, the requirement arises for high schools and universities to accredit and make the required study programs corresponding to the requirements of practice more attractive. There are huge regional differences in Slovakia, which results in a low level of education in some regions and an educated workforce is employed outside the region. Social entrepreneurship education should take place in all regions and at all levels of the education system.

Already for children of kindergartens and primary school students, it is necessary to build a relationship with the land and nature, e.g., in the form of education in the so-called forest nurseries or outdoor school. It is necessary to change the traditional way of teaching, which today is focused on memorization. It would be useful to introduce a "practice in relation to land" approach, e.g., through the teaching of cultivation on school grounds and cooking up something from the raw materials grown in the classroom kitchen. Primary and high schools could address the issue of social agriculture in the broader context of the benefits of the natural environment for human well-being.

Agricultural high schools are gradually disappearing because there is no interest in studying them, especially because primary school students do not have a cultivated relationship to nature and land. The solution may be to support dual education, but the field of study and the company providing internships for students must have quality technology. This will ensure that work can take place in a modern environment, on modern machinery and with modern field cultivation and livestock technologies. The result can be a support for motivating students to study in the field of agriculture.

The condition for the development of social agriculture is to carry out research at universities, organize courses for students, entrepreneurs and involve students in practice directly in agricultural enterprises. The aim is to strengthen the managerial competencies of managers in this sector in relation to the specifics that distinguish social enterprises in social agriculture from ordinary social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, it is necessary to address all three pillars of social agriculture – employment, therapy and rehabilitation, but also education.

Additional education for social farming actors and awareness significantly determine the development of this sector. It is important to focus on the target group of mayors and farmers as key local players in social farming. We must not forget the potential of volunteers, who need to be informed, organized and involved in all activities. In non-formal education, this is a topic that should appear in all possible forms that are aimed at target groups. These are the topics of local food production, soil care, landscape, job creation and employment in the regions, care for the environment with regard to reducing the carbon footprint, working with disadvantaged groups, their employability in the labor market, while providing the most suitable conditions for their healthy development. This also includes the promotion of mental health and the improvement of the quality of life of the population, the promotion of inclusion on the widest possible scale and with the connection of the widest possible groups of the population. It is necessary to talk about these topics as much as possible and bring them correctly to the general public.

The focus of education should be on the topic of responsible management or responsible management with regard to local specifics.

The management of a social company follows the classical "Hard" business factors like any other company (securing resources, mastering the basic functions of business for its prosperity and sustainability), but in relation to its main mission, the so-called "Soft factors" of enterprise are included. Soft factors are related to the specifics of social entrepreneurship, in our case entrepreneurship in the area of social agriculture. It can include: the little accepted idea of employment of people with social disadvantages, lower labor productivity of social enterprise employees, the need for an individual approach to these employees, creating suitable conditions for them in the work environment, the need for work assistance, the risk of meeting deadlines in business relations, the risk of maintaining product quality and services provided, the threat of a high level of incapacity for employees, increased production costs, social distrust of social enterprises, the risk of staying in a competitive environment, the creation of a suitable corporate culture (Korimová et al., 2008).

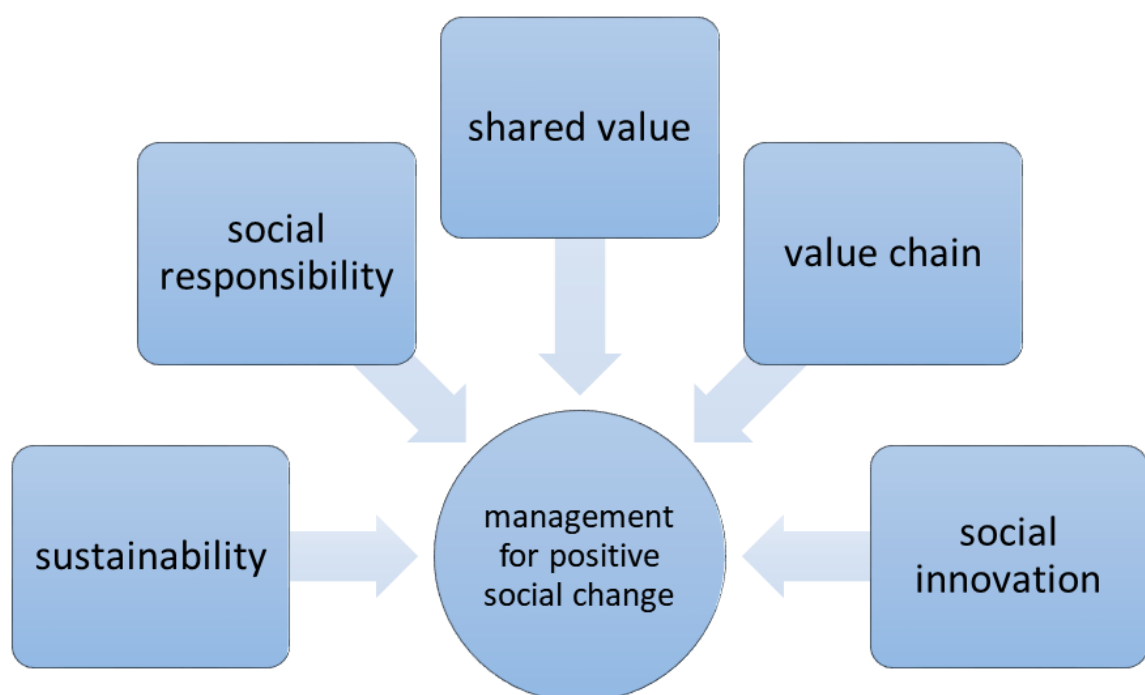


Fig 1. The specific areas of management competencies in social agriculture. Source: Own processing

Based on the findings of our research, it is desirable that the management is prepared to cope with the challenges in connection with hard but especially soft business factors and that it is armed with the corresponding competencies in relation to the specifics of business in the area of social agriculture. The following specific areas in which the management operating in social agriculture should be competent to act effectively are identified:

- the area of sustainability

Sustainable development is seen as developing the needs of the current generation without compromising the potential of future generations to meet their needs. The subject in the area of social agriculture is expected to be able to orientate in procedures respecting this principle and at the same time to incorporate and implement them in business decisions and activities.

- area of social responsibility

The precondition for acquiring competence in the area of sustainable development is the socially responsible approach that is expected of all members of society and participants in the economy. Citizens, communities, non-profit sector bodies, businesses and public administrations are required to contribute to solving social, community or environmental problems and thus to contribute to positive social change.

- the area of social innovation

Social entrepreneurship, also carried out in the area of social agriculture, is considered to be social innovation. The combination of business experience from the private sector and setting up a social mission from the non-profit sector creates an innovative, hybrid business model. The manager is expected to be the embodiment of change and to be able to think innovatively, bring ideas, focus on dissatisfied needs and be responsible for the problems people face.

These activities should result in positive social change, manifested by a change in behaviour, attitudes, social impacts and / or the improvement of social relations.

- the area of value creation and value chain

The manager of a social company should be able to be orientated in the concept of creating shared value and be able to follow the value chain of the business. The value chain is a set of values that a business entity creates, it is a whole range of activities and it is the procedures needed and used in every step of the business. The goal is to create social values – to bring a positive social impact, and at the same time minimize the negative effects of business on all stakeholders.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Agriculture is a less cyclically sensitive sector and is resilient to some types of crisis. The quality of its production has a significant impact on the health of the population and a sufficient amount of production is in turn positively reflected in the food self-sufficiency of the country. Another macroeconomic benefit is a possible positive impact on the country's trade balance. Furthermore, as production of traditional agricultural commodities grows, their national imports could fall, which in turn would help to reduce the carbon footprint. Often, traditional agricultural commodities are products for which there are suitable conditions for cultivation in Slovakia. Those products imported across half of the planet are possibly of questionable quality. Rising levels of education and public awareness of social agriculture can make a significant contribution to land use, which takes the public interest – the country's biodiversity and sustainable land use into account. It is necessary to educate people in the regions about the possibilities and needs of social entrepreneurship in agriculture and to arouse the interest of actors in the regions, e.g., in the form of advice in discovering resources in localities – in the form of environmental analysis. It is necessary to ensure motivating and inspiring educational activities and counseling by providing space for participants to acquire knowledge and skills for their lifelong professional and personal development (Stofkova, Stofkova, Stofko, 2016).

Based on the findings of our research, the adoption of a comprehensive and overarching legislative framework is a basic precondition for the development of social agriculture. From a financial point of view,

it is necessary to ensure easy access to support resources for social agriculture, to build a platform across all ministries. The introduction of the topic of social agriculture in formal and non-formal education, awareness raising, promotion of ideas and results for the needs of the development of social agriculture and organization of volunteers for the needs of this sector are required. In this context, it is necessary to build a database of information on training opportunities and counseling in the field of social agriculture. The results of our research have shown that there is also a need to network professionals and businesses in social farming, to cover them under a single platform and to ensure better networking of all education and guidance stakeholders. It is crucial in this regard to perceive the formal and non-formal system of education in the field of social agriculture as a systematic process, to ensure coordination between individual providers of education and counseling.

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