



SOCIAL AGRICULTURE

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case study **ORTI E.T.I.C.I.**

The “Orti E.T.I.C.I.” project was born in 2008 with the aim of promoting responsible innovation and sharing in the field of quality agricultural production and social inclusion policies, where horticulture production is linked to the inclusion and wellbeing of people less empowered. The project started from the intuition of creating a collaboration platform among subjects from different sectors (private, public and third), enhancing and integrating the skills of each one in pursuing a single goal: to promote inclusion and well-being through a agriculture multifunctional approach system.

“The most important aspect of the project is that we created a dialogue among different stakeholders and found a common language to share in the experimentation of the activity.”

Alessandra Funghi, agronomist

MODEL IN A NUTSHELL

— **Website**
www.ortietici.it

— **Social channels**
facebook.com/orti.etici

— **Country**
Italy

— **Main sector**
Private and public

— **Specific sector**
Healthcare,
Agriculture,
Labour integration,
local development

— **Stage of development**
Incorporated



Our work in SDGs



FROM FEW TO MANY

Orti E.T.I.C.I. was founded in **2008** at the end of a training course on social agriculture organized by the Tuscan Regional Agency for Agricultural Development. The project involves the following key organisations:

- **Pisa University** (CIRAA and Dept. of Vet. Sciences) – provides expertise, networks, farmland and buildings for project space if required);
- **Two social cooperatives** (Arnera and Ponteverde) – providing training and the rehabilitation of beneficiaries, in accordance with the public social and health services;
- **A farm** (BioColombini) - a private organic farm responsible for the economic and technical agricultural activities.

The role and responsibility of each project partner is regulated through a formal agreement defined as the Temporary Association of Enterprise (TAE). Each partner brought their own skills to the group: the social cooperative took charge of work placements and social therapy as well as building and maintaining relationships with the social services agency; the University granted access to their property, provided machinery and technical support, and conducted research, while BioColombini supported cultivation of the land and marketing strategy.

From the social side, our project was **initially self-financed**, and then through the support of the Services Society of Pisa, a more structured relationship was developed. Initially with regional funds and then with own funding, we developed tools to support the social part. Specifically, since 2010, we have had a convention with the Health Society to fund social assistants in social inclusion activities.

From the agricultural side, after the initial support Colombini farm, the University's Avanzi Centre invested in horticulture and progressively took over the management of production. As a public entity, the Centre cannot sell to the outside and for this reason it has created a **Solidarity Purchasing Group** for all University employees.

Currently, **Orti E.T.I.C.I.** aims to address the needs of **vulnerable and homeless people, adults suffering from mental disabilities, autism, alcohol and drug dependency as well as former inmates.**

Direct beneficiaries of 'Orti E.T.I.C.I.' are identified and defined as users of the social farming initiative developed by the project. As mentioned, they are vulnerable and disadvantaged people generally within the margins of society. Although categories of vulnerability vary, at 'Orti E.T.I.C.I.' the users include those with:

- Additional learning needs;
- Physical disabilities;
- Drug & alcohol addiction;
- Ex-offenders;
- Long-term unemployed;
- The socially excluded.

FROM IDEA TO ACTION

Orti E.T.I.C.I. is the fruit of an idea that was proposed during a training course in 2008 organized by the Tuscan Regional Agency for Agricultural Development. The idea was to develop the path to social agriculture by creating an open space to build **relationships and dialogue between the social and agricultural worlds**, contaminating them with each other and finding social solutions.

From the outset, our aim was to translate, apply and follow the specific laws (regional e national) of agricultural and social scopes, with a particular attention to laws on safety in the workplace. The technical and bureaucratic obligations are a very important aspect to consider, because the social farming projects involve the social world in the farm activities, and often farms must operate on grey territory and in non-conventional situations.

Considerable effort has been devoted to monitor and evaluate, in a participatory manner, our project, our impacts on the beneficiaries, and the impacts on the development of the social service. There are issues related to measuring impacts at the individual level, related to the costs of collecting data, standardization of evaluations to make them comparable; diversity of needs addressed, and different stays. To address the needs for monitoring and evaluation on users, we developed an internal guideline to manage, monitor and evaluate inclusion projects.

As the project progressed, specific analysis were organised in order to increase knowledge about the Orti E.T.I.C.I. outcomes for the public-private parties involved. Besides the economic return of the horticultural activities, the efficacy of the horticultural practices for the people involved emerged, as well as the public effectiveness in terms of cost when compared with alternative public services.

Other important project outcomes are network building, impacts on training and impacts on policies (programme and planning). For example, one impact has been the inclusion of social agriculture in the Health and Social Services Agency's area plan. Another impact is the feedback from consumers who appreciate our good, healthy and ethical food.

FROM OLD TO NEW

The innovative aspect of our project was to create a collaboration platform for different stakeholders to integrate their skills for **promoting social integration through food production**. Initially it was very difficult to integrate social inclusion in farms because of the lack of structured projects and territorial networks.

What ensured our success was the reputational power of all involved partners, their commitment and shared vision, our ability to find a common language for dialogue, to overcome obstacles, and the creation of guidelines to monitor and evaluate the impacts of social inclusion on users and beneficiaries.

The goal today is to continue to experiment approaches, innovate, and transfer social inclusion approaches to the neighbouring farms.

FROM NOW TO THEN

Given our rate of evolution and expansion, our needs are constant and mainly include: additional dedicated human resources for management and coordination; additional resources for training and outreach; greater visibility and attention to the topic through communication and marketing.

While some of our challenges relate to these needs, the main challenges relate to the **dichotomy between national/regional policies and innovation happening locally** which often hampers productive dialogue. Orti E.T.I.C.I. relies on key relationships and the motivation of the people involved. Given that our platform is connected to the public sector, changes in local or regional multilevel governance can either speed up, or slow down how our activities are implemented or evolve. Despite these needs and challenges, we are constantly looking to the present and the future, focusing on the job at hand. In addition to recent changes and investments to improve the organization of production and storage of produce, our next steps will be a **direct sales system** with other farms in the area is going to be designed and promoted in order to enlarge the network and resources for social inclusion, but also to increase the range of agricultural products from social farming that can be provided to local consumers

We also have in the pipeline a **collaboration with CIRAA and the employment centre** of the province who will provide a training accreditation system for users to have a recognized professional training, which can more easily be spent on the territory.

Finally, a focus on networking with other farms will aim at creating additional job opportunities in the territory.

