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DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF EDUCATIONAL FARMS AS EXAMPLED BY THE SILESIAN VOIVODESHIP

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the developmental potential of educational farms in the Silesian Voivodeship, with particular emphasis on internal resources. The research aims to contribute to the theoretical and empirical discourse on the role of educational farms in sustainable development, social farming and social entrepreneurship.
Design/methodology/approach: The study employs a mixed-method approach combining elements of strategic self-assessment with participatory action research. The data were subjected to qualitative content analysis with categorical coding to extract dominant themes. Additionally, participatory action research approach enabled in-depth engagement with selected farms through collaborative development of business model components.
Findings: The findings reveal a diverse set of developmental potentials among educational farms in the region, particularly in ecological education, cultural heritage promotion, and social inclusion. Internal motivation among farm owners, combined with local networking and support from rural development actors, emerged as critical factors. Financial constraints, lack of institutional stability, and fragmented policy frameworks were identified as limitations.
Research limitations/implications: The study is limited to a specific geographical context and a non-random sample of educational farms. Future research should consider longitudinal studies and comparative analysis across regions or national contexts.
Practical implications: The study provides evidence-based insights into the strategic needs and capabilities of educational farms, supporting the formulation of targeted development programs and policy interventions. The participatory component offers a framework for building business competencies among farm operators.
Social implications: The research underlines integrative role of educational farms, in providing inclusive environments. The findings suggest that educational farms can serve as platforms for environmental and social awareness.
Originality/value: This study combines strategic self-assessment tools with participatory action research in the context of education, social farming and social entrepreneurship. It offers the interesting methodological contribution and delivers empirically grounded insights into the developmental trajectories of educational farms.
Keywords: strategic potential, educational farms, participatory action research, social farming, social entrepreneurship.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Educational farms play an important, though often underestimated, role in the social and environmental ecosystem. Among other things, they provide a space for social and educational interaction between urban and rural communities, especially in peri-urban areas. Through their activities, farms contribute to raising awareness among urban populations about issues such as environmental sustainability, food supply chains, and agricultural production.

Farms are an important entity in the education system for children and young people. Educational activities are often the only way to familiarize younger generations with agricultural practices, rural heritage, and the specific characteristics of ecosystems in non-urbanized areas. Educational farms play an important role in protecting the material and cultural heritage of rural areas.

Educational farms help create a space favorable to the development of social farming and social entrepreneurship in rural areas. They provide social services, including educational, therapeutic, and care services, which have a real impact on improving the quality of life of people in need. They also take an active part in the activation of local communities, including in the context of social and professional integration.

It seems that supporting and developing educational farms has profound social, environmental, and cultural significance. Popularizing scientific research and good practices in the field of creating and strengthening the development potential of educational farms may contribute to a broader discussion on real cooperation in the inter-sectoral environment.

This article is based on the author's research carried out in rural areas of the Silesian region in 2023-2025. It is worth noting that an important part of the research was participatory action research related to social involvement in the development of the potential of educational farms through the design of business model elements dedicated to individual farms. Another element that added credibility and enriched the research process was cooperation with key public policy actors in the field of educational farm development, such as the Silesian Agricultural Advisory Center in Częstochowa and the Association of Educational Farms of the Silesian Voivodeship.

2. Overview of the state of research

As noted by Zawadka, Krzyżanowska, and Gabryjończyk (2021), the issue of educational farms is rarely addressed in scientific literature. At the same time, the concept of providing education with the participation of educational farms in Poland is relatively new. Research conducted on the development of educational farm systems in countries such as Poland, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, and France confirms that “the idea of educational farms in Poland is one

of the youngest...” (Gabryjończyk et al., 2013, p. 72). However, it seems that this area of research is very important due to the need to develop innovative educational tools, ongoing civilizational changes, and the dominant role of technology in the everyday practices of younger generations. After all, the opportunity to learn through practice, participation, and experience is not without significance. Marcysiak points out that “as a report on educational farms in Poland observes, at the farm, students not only discover the origin of food but also experience true rural work” (2025, p. 96).

In an urbanized and media-commercialized society where advertisements are often the main source of information about food products, the role of farms in educating children, young people, and adults seems crucial. It could be argued that the level of knowledge in society about the sources of food is still far from sufficient. Educational farms can play an extremely important role in practical learning processes. The literature emphasizes that educational farms contribute to shaping the image of the world, especially in terms of environmental awareness (Blum, 1999). Rønningen, Renwick, and Burton (2012), in their study of the specifics of multifunctional agriculture in European countries, point to the importance of education provided by educational farms in the field of climate change. The functioning of environmental education through the use of the educational offer of educational farms serves to build environmental awareness and is in line with the concept of sustainable development in European Union countries (Kowalska et al., 2016).

An key aspect of education based on the teaching offer of educational farms is the immersive nature of the participants' experiences. At the heart of this approach is participation in learning processes through personal experience, practical action, and real engagement. It also involves activities that engage and activate children, young people, adults, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Research conducted in the Pomeranian Voivodeship confirms that people with disabilities and Third Age Universities are increasingly taking advantage of individual and group activities conducted by and on educational farms (Wiśniewska, 2021). Taking visual research in sociology as a reference point, it is worth noting the importance of visual experience in education and the multidimensionality of learning processes. “The observed behavior of students participating in activities at the educational farms revealed the complexity of the educational process itself at the farm” (Marcysiak, 2025, p. 94). This seems particularly important from the point of view of building the strategic potential of educational farms and creating a diverse range of social services based on an individual approach to the needs and capabilities of participants. This should take into account specific health, cultural, professional, and other conditions.

Another interesting aspect in the description of educational farms is the motivation of their owners to run this type of business. Referring to the results of research conducted by Zawadek et al. (2021) on a group of 79 farms, the underlying motivation is education related to building environmental awareness and preserving and maintaining the cultural heritage of rural areas. In turn, research by Antunes et al. (2017) in Portugal shows that educational farms effectively

combine the fulfillment of their educational mission with the achievement of financial benefits that are satisfactory to their owners. This approach is inresponse to the need to seek new sources of income beyond agricultural or agritourism activities. In practice, this results in the diversification of social services provided by educational farms in rural areas. In this regard, the importance of strategic planning for the diversification of activities in rural areas in the context of social and economic transformation is particularly emphasized (Forleo, Palmieri, 2019).

When identifying the factors for success and the conditions for operating such a business, it is worth paying attention to the size of the educational farm, the possibilities of obtaining financial resources, and the ability to function in a networked environment. Undoubtedly, limited financial resources are considered to be the main barrier to the development of educational farms (Markiewicz, 2020; Zawadka et al., 2021). However, more and more attention is being paid to a multidisciplinary approach. The results of research on rural transformation in the Czech Republic (Hrabák, Konečný, 2018) and educational farms in southern Italy (Forleo, Palmieri, 2019) confirm the key importance of the concept of multifunctional agriculture.

Among the main factors of success are the development of multifunctional agriculture and the managerial skills of the owners (Forleo, Palmieri, 2019). As well as the ability of educational farms to conduct innovative activities. However, as Markiewicz notes, "determinants of innovative activity of educational farms vary depending on the size of the enterprises, the level of innovation awareness of the farm's owner and on the financial possibilities..." (Markiewicz, 2020, p. 136). A multidisciplinary approach and innovative practices imply the need to develop skills in functioning within a network of inter-organizational and inter-institutional connections. Gabryjończyk, Zawadka, and Krzyżanowska (2023), in their study of the state of development of educational farms, draw attention to the importance of cooperation networks and legal and administrative solutions supporting the creation of educational farms. The authors attribute an important role to the activities of The National Network of Educational Farms (more: https://zagrodaedukacyjna.pl/).

Undoubtedly, the greatest potential for educational farms lies in the heritage of the place, associated with its natural resources, rural landscape, and rich culinary traditions (Forleo, Palmieri, 2019). The implementation of the educational mission based on the professionalism of educational services using own agricultural resources often requires an innovative and non-standard approach from farm owners. At its core is both the ability to co-create and develop social networks and to cooperate with the institutional environment. Research on entrepreneurship in rural areas confirms the importance of network structures in shaping social capital (Moyes et al., 2015). However, the internal motivation of educational farm owners still seems to be crucial for the development of rural areas and the promotion of rural cultural heritage. In addition, it can provide an impulse for the development of social agriculture based on a wide range of social services. As well as social entrepreneurship in rural areas focused on social and professional mobilization.

3. Research methodology and the study sample

For the purposes of exploring the development potential of educational farms, the following research assumption was adopted: educational farms can act as entities implementing the mission of social agriculture and social entrepreneurship in rural areas. The research problem concerned the conditions for building the development potential of farms. The research question was formulated as follows: what elements determine the development potential of educational farms? The aim of the empirical study was to understand the structure of the development potential of educational farms in the context of supporting social agriculture and social entrepreneurship in rural areas.

The study employed a complex qualitative methodological procedure using triangulation (Jick, 1979; Flick, 2018), integrating elements of self-assessment, content analysis, and participatory action research assumptions (Table 1). The research process was carried out in two stages. The first was based on the analysis of data obtained using a questionnaire survey. The second was based on the involvement and engagement of the researcher in the activities of educational farms. The real cooperation between the researcher and the participants allowed for a deeper research understanding and strengthened the development potential of educational farms through substantive support.

Table 1.
Characteristics of the research process

Identifier	Stage I of research	Stage II of research	
Participants	owners of 20 educational farms	owners of 9 educational farms	representatives of non-governmental organizations and institutions supporting rural development
Period	03.2025 – 10.2023	10.2023 – 01.2025	10.2023 – 01.2025
Scope	strategic self-analysis	designing business model components	strengthening development potential
Method	survey	participatory action research	interview
Tool	survey questionnaire	observation form, interview questionnaire	interview questionnaire

Source: the author.

The first stage of the research consisted of analyzing self-assessment questionnaires completed by the owners of twenty educational farms. The research tool used was a structured worksheet designed to identify the development potential of a given farm. The questionnaire contained open-ended and semi-open-ended questions. The questions related, among other things, to the strengths and weaknesses of the business, plans for the future, the scope of resources, and the perception of opportunities and threats to the educational farm.

The self-assessment questionnaire served as a simplified strategic self-analysis tool in a format similar to SWOT analysis (Coman, Ronen, 2009; Panagiotou, 2003; Helms, Nixon, 2010). Strategic self-analysis was the starting point for further analytical activities.

The obtained material was subjected to content analysis (Hsieh, Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2012; Krippendorff, 2019) using thematic categories identified inductively on the basis of recurring themes and semantic dominants in the respondents' statements. In the course of the in-depth analysis, the data was synthesized into dominant content categories, which made it possible to capture the characteristic features of the development potential of educational farms.

The second, complementary stage of the study was a participatory research procedure, the basic assumption of which was the direct involvement of the researcher in the practical activities of the researched entities (Reason, Bradbury, 2008; McIntyre, 2008; Chevalier, Buckles, 2019). As part of this stage, participant observations, informal conversations, and consultations with the owners of nine educational farms were conducted. These activities were aimed not only at deepening the research understanding of the development potential of educational farms.

However, above all, they consisted of providing real substantive support to the participants of the research process in the development of business model elements. Particular attention was paid to elements such as customer segmentation, communication channels, revenue structure, value propositions in the context of the educational offer, etc.

The adopted research procedure also included activities in cooperation with local and regional actors involved in the development of the educational farm sector. In the second stage of the research, parallel to the cooperation with the owners of educational farms, cooperation was carried out with representatives of non-governmental organizations and institutions supporting the development of rural areas. Representatives of the Association of Educational Farms of the Silesian Voivodeship and the Silesian Agricultural Advisory Center in Częstochowa were included in the research process.

The triangulation of methodological perspectives made it possible to contextualize the source material and draw conclusions (Table 1). The triangulation of qualitative research methodology and the size of the research sample can be considered exhaustive in terms of theoretical saturation (Guest, Bunce, Johnson, 2006). The research covered the area of the Silesian Voivodeship. A total of 20 respondents—owners of educational farms—participated in the survey (the first stage of the research, conducted between March and October 2023). In the second stage (from October 2023 to January 2025), the research was deepened by conducting the research process in the environment of educational farms and institutional support entities.

4. The results of the study

In the group of twenty farms surveyed, all of them engaged in extensive educational activities, mainly in the form of workshops, training courses, lectures, and demonstrations, using their own agricultural and non-agricultural resources. However, educational services

were most often combined with agritourism, recreation, the organization of special events, the production of goods, including handicrafts, and agricultural cultivation, as well as the sale of plants and agricultural products (e.g., vegetables and fruit). The presented characteristics of the activity show a wide range of services. In addition to education, the farms provided accommodation, catering, catering, land rental, etc. Ten farms also produced local and/or regional products. Two of them specialized in the production of handicrafts. The experience of representatives of the Silesian Agricultural Advisory Center in Częstochowa and the Association of Educational Farms of the Silesian Voivodeship shows that education and agricultural production are most often combined with processing and direct sales.

Among the key resources, owners of educational farms pointed to technical and social infrastructure. They mentioned, among other things, buildings, equipment used in agriculture and rural work, educational and health-promoting paths (e.g., sensorimotor) orchards, gardens, meadows, and forests located on or near the farm. However, they emphasized the importance of social capital first and foremost. The responses included the following characteristics: commitment, communication skills, respect for nature, tradition, and rural history, etc. In the context of skills, attention was drawn to creating, maintaining, and using interpersonal relationships, caring for the quality of emotional bonds, and building a climate conducive to learning, play, recreation, and experiencing nature.

The study participants identified the potential of the place in terms of the resources necessary for production and services. According to most owners, it is the potential of the place that constitutes the main and unique value of running a business in rural areas. Hence, they pointed to, for example, the number and type of animals on the farm, an orchard with a variety of trees and shrubs, an organic garden, or historic buildings characteristic of the region. They also emphasized the importance of maintaining long-term relationships with customers and building the image of an educational farm in a broader socio-economic environment (beyond the local community). Two out of twenty respondents considered maintaining relationships with regular customers and market recognition to be key strategic resources for an educational farm.

The conclusions from the observations, informal conversations, and substantive consultations between the researcher and the owners of nine educational farms correspond with the results of the self-assessment of resources. Tangible and intangible resources are a valuable and often unique attribute of educational farms. However, the perception of the resources possessed is not always directly reflected in operational activities. This belief is often based on the insufficient exposure of the farm's infrastructure and the landscape and tourist attractions of the location in the range of products and services on offer. In some farms, resources that are widely recognized as valuable due to their tradition, history, and culture are still not fully recognized and utilized by owners as a business attribute.

Strengthening awareness and motivating owners to discover new dimensions for the use of tangible and intangible resources can provide a significant impetus for the development of educational farms. Representatives of institutions and organizations supporting rural development emphasized the particular importance of knowledge and experience in agricultural work, as well as commitment, passion, and openness to new alternative solutions in the process of designing an attractive range of products and services. However, the available infrastructure, i.e., buildings, machinery, equipment, and technologies, was also important.

In the survey questionnaires, people were indicated as the strongest asset. The owners of as many as thirteen educational farms considered qualities such as creativity, entrepreneurship, professionalism, commitment, empathy and openness, passion for life, competence, experience, and willingness to develop to be particularly valuable.

Most respondents identified proximity to nature and accessibility of services for people with disabilities as strengths of educational farms. In addition, the responses included the following: location, land development with buildings (including historical and characteristic of the region) and equipment, diversity of services and attractiveness of the offer, flexibility in meeting the needs of individual and group customers.

A holistic view of an educational farm can complement the description of strengths identified in the self-assessment questionnaire. The researcher's experience of working with owners during the design of business model elements shows that there is a need to change the perception of educational farms. Where diversified activities, a variety of products, services, and resources, and the richness of nature, culture, and community create a unique atmosphere for work, learning, play, and rest. Each of these areas becomes complementary to the whole. At the heart of this approach is the opportunity to acquire and use knowledge, mutual learning, and experience. In turn, the prospect of involving the institutional environment in the development of educational farms encourages the addition of a willingness to cooperate in partnership and increase competence to the set of strengths.

When identifying weaknesses, the study participants mainly pointed to problems with the coordination of business activities. However, there were also references to technical and architectural barriers, especially in the context of organizing events for the wider community and the accessibility of services for people with disabilities. The context of seasonal activity, diversification of income sources, and the distance of the educational farm from urban centers as a factor hindering the acquisition of new customers was also significant. Interestingly, four educational farms reported advertising and the use of social media in promotional activities as weaknesses.

In the process of real involvement in the activities of educational farms, the issue of investment financing was the most frequently mentioned. Difficulties in accessing external sources of financing, as well as insufficient grant support, determine the possibility of wider development. This was also pointed out during informal discussions with representatives of non-governmental organizations and institutions working for rural areas.

When visualizing the future of educational farms, the vast majority of respondents focused on expanding or reorganizing their current activities and promoting their products and services. In particular, they strongly emphasized the need to strengthen activities aimed at raising environmental awareness and supporting the local ecosystem and rural heritage. The description of the farm's vision included, among other things, the production of organic products, the expansion of the educational offer to include pro-ecological topics and those related to rural culture (i.e., farming methods, traditions, etc.), creating water reservoirs using river water, developing gastronomy with a focus on regional cuisine, creating organic gardens and rural tradition rooms.

The vision of an educational farm includes the aspect of promotion in the broad sense. Improving the website, launching an online store, and using social media are the most common suggestions. According to the respondents, it seems necessary not only to change the use of new promotional tools. Above all, it is necessary to identify the target group and the specifics of the market. This, in turn, implies the need for continuous improvement of the range of services.

An important area for future activities is considered to be the design of services that respond to the current and individual needs of individuals and social groups, including those dedicated to foreigners, people with disabilities, and seniors. Particular attention was paid to expanding the offer with products and services provided in foreign languages, outside the season and outside the farm in a stationary form (e.g., field workshops) and online, but using own agricultural and non-agricultural resources. This may be a response to cultural diversity and spatial limitations (in the context of, for example, distance from urban centers, special customer needs, etc.) and time limitations (due to, for example, low customer interest in the winter).

During informal discussions and expert consultations, the owners of educational farms formulated a vision for slightly more detailed solutions for the future. They declared, for example, their intention to equip the educational area with innovative teaching aids and furniture, purchase new species and breeds of animals to diversify the offer, including the launch of therapeutic classes, modernization of buildings and facilities (e.g., expansion of parking lots), etc. During the discussion with institutional representatives, the topic of promotion and advertising also came up. The need for local authorities, education authorities, training and tourism organizations to actively participate in activities promoting educational services was recognized.

According to the vast majority of respondents (80% of survey participants), cooperation with others provides an opportunity for the development of educational farms. The importance of neighborhood, inter-organizational, and inter-institutional cooperation in a multi-sector environment was emphasized. Among the partners in joint activities, the owners of educational farms most often mentioned local action groups, municipal cultural centers, and rural housewives' clubs. In addition, they pointed to universities of the third age and clubs for retirees and pensioners, with cooperation in this area most often involving the provision of paid

services. A small number of educational farms also had experience in cooperation with the Rural Youth Association and the Polish Association of Cereal Producers. In turn, the implementation of social activities for local communities most often involved cooperation with non-governmental organizations, including foundations and associations. The educational farms surveyed appreciated the advantages of operating within a network of inter-organizational links. All of them operated within the National Network of Educational Farms and had the right to use the name "educational farm" (for more information, see: https://zagrodaedukacyjna.pl/).

Interestingly, none of the surveyed farms cooperated with the academic community. Research collaboration with the owners of nine farms during work on business models confirmed not only the possibility of implementing activities jointly with organizations from other sectors. But most importantly, according to the respondents, it significantly increased their level of knowledge and competence. This was also noted by representatives of institutions and organizations working for rural development. They particularly emphasized the importance of cooperation with universities in the context of mutual learning and improving the quality of services. In turn, with regard to the promotion of educational farms, they drew attention to the role of local governments, local action groups, non-governmental organizations, agricultural advisory centers, and municipal cultural centers.

Further identification of opportunities and threats was carried out against the background of the characteristics of the location of the educational farm. Owners of farms operating in areas with a high concentration of tourist attractions saw opportunities for business cooperation and mutual promotion of products and services among neighbors. This was also achieved through the involvement of local authorities in designing joint solutions, such as a consolidated local tourist offer, thematic educational programs, etc. On the other hand, negative experiences in cooperation with, for example, the head of the municipality or a local action group were perceived as a threat limiting the further development of the educational farm. Similarly, as in the case of locations far from urban centers or local spatial development plans that do not fully regulate issues of environmental protection and cultural heritage of the countryside.

Representatives of institutions supporting rural development recognized an opportunity in diversifying the services provided by educational farms towards tourism, recreation, and social services, including care and therapy. They emphasized the importance of multifunctional agriculture in terms of combining food and raw material production with services that respond to social needs. They also emphasized the importance of including educational farms in "historical" tourism activities with elements of learning, fun, recreation, and experiencing nature. However, it is worth noting that an excessive focus on increasing the attractiveness of the offer may result in the loss of the educational farm's identity as a provider of educational services using its own agricultural resources.

When describing their social activities, the owners of twenty farms jointly declared that they carried out unpaid activities for the benefit of the local community. Most often, they acted as co-organizers of local events, such as festivals, fairs, and harvest festivals. They were actively involved in initiating and implementing free educational activities for children, young people, and adults. They also provided neighborhood education on organic plant cultivation and animal farming, and actively supported fundraisers for the poor and people in need. It is worth noting the conscious involvement of three educational farms in activities promoting social and professional integration and activation in rural areas. Among the practices observed were the free provision of infrastructure, the preparation of free meals, and the employment of people at risk of social and professional exclusion. It is also worth noting the local support in the form of barter exchanges or the use of local raw materials in the production of goods and services.

Agriculture is increasingly evolving towards multifunctional and, most importantly, socially engaged activities. Research experience with landowners confirms a high sensitivity to the needs and problems of local communities. Social agriculture, as also pointed out by representatives of institutions and non-governmental organizations, responds to the problems of an aging society, the development of lifestyle diseases, and professional and social dysfunction.

Table 2.
Structure of the Development Potential of Educational Farms

Elements of Development Potential		
Skills	**Resources**	**Opportunities**
intergenerational communication	technical resources: buildings, machinery, equipment, and technologies	multifunctionality of agriculture
cooperation and collaboration	natural and landscape values of the location	social farming
interpersonal relationships	social capital	development of the educational services market
quality of emotional bonds	competence, experience, and motivation	environmental awareness in society
atmosphere of immersive experiences	traditions and cultural capital	development of institutional and financial support (local, regional, national, and EU)

Source: own elaboration based on empirical research.

The empirical research conducted leads to an attempt to provide a synthetic description of the development potential of educational farms. Admittedly, the first stage of the research involved strategic self-analysis based on a structured questionnaire. The scope of available resources, strengths and weaknesses, and plans for the future were identified. Particular attention was paid to the perception of opportunities and threats to the functioning of educational farms in the socio-economic environment. As well as to the owners' experiences in conducting social (non-profit) activities for the local community. In the second stage of the research, the characteristics were deepened with observations resulting from the researcher's direct involvement in the activities of nine educational farms in the design of business model elements. As well as from cooperation with entities supporting the development of educational

farms in rural areas. The conclusions from the research formed the basis for developing the structure of the development potential of educational farms (Table 2).

5. Discussion

In the academic literature, the issue of multifunctionality of farms operating in rural areas is explored through both theoretical and empirical research. As noted by Sikorska-Wolak and Zawadka (2016), "research interest in the multifunctionality of agriculture emerged alongside the growing importance of agriculture's non-productive functions" (p. 99). Within this context, an important and interdisciplinary area of research has emerged, wherein educational farms play a significant role as sources of practical knowledge and as key actors in preserving the material and cultural heritage of the countryside.

Referring to studies conducted in the Czech Republic, it is worth highlighting the concept of social farming as a form of entrepreneurship that combines the provision of social services with opportunities for socio-professional integration in rural areas (Hudcová, 2022). Interestingly, the practices and scope of activities undertaken by educational farms can also be linked to the concept of civic agriculture, which promotes local community participation and sustainable development (Lyson, 2024).

Scientific research increasingly underscores the importance of integrating educational farms within the broader systems of social farming and social entrepreneurship in rural areas. This is supported by the fact that socially oriented and entrepreneurial behaviors confirm that socially engaged agriculture-combining care and educational functions in rural settings-can play a vital role in social and professional inclusion. It may also contribute to the creation of new forms of rural entrepreneurship. As Czapiewska (2020) observes, "socially involved agriculture is an idea combining the multifunctionality of farms… with care and health services, as well as social entrepreneurship" (p. 308). Furthermore, "social farming is a valuable response to social problems not adequately addressed by existing solutions" (Wojciechowska-Solis, Martínez Cortijo, Ruiz-Canales, 2023, p. 69).

On the one hand, social farming and social entrepreneurship can be seen as mutually reinforcing phenomena-closely interconnected and, crucially, contributing to synergistic outcomes. Social farming models foster the development of social entrepreneurship practices by supporting the activation of individuals at risk of exclusion and facilitating the growth of institutional networks and informal relationships. This, in turn, is essential for the advancement of social entrepreneurship in rural areas (Wojciechowska-Solis, Martínez Cortijo, Ruiz-Canales, 2023).

On the other hand, as indicated by Bański (2015), and Wojcieszak-Zbierska and Sadowski (2024), the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas encounters barriers primarily associated with a complex support system, weak social capital, and limited cooperation among local actors. In this context, institutional conditions appear to be of critical importance in uncovering the social dimensions of agriculture, education, and sustainable development.

Equally important is cooperation within a multi-sectoral environment, including the genuine involvement of actors from various sectors in organizational, substantive, and technical support processes.

In Western European countries, the development of educational and care farms is grounded in robust institutional foundations, encompassing both legislative frameworks and organizational infrastructure. In the Netherlands, where the care farming sector includes over one thousand actively operating farms, public institutions play a key role (Hassink et al., 2020). In Italy, by contrast, the development of educational farms is based on a more decentralized model rooted in the social economy and social cooperatives. This model is less formalized than the Dutch one and more inclusive of individuals at risk of socio-professional exclusion (Moruzzo, 2022).

In Poland, the development of educational farms providing social and care services faces greater institutional barriers. Notably, scholars emphasize the lack of adequate legal regulations and the inconsistency of support systems (Wojcieszak, Wojcieszak, 2018). Additionally, there is an insufficient level of development in national quality standards and advisory-financial infrastructure, which in turn limits the scalability and sustainability of such initiatives (Zajda, 2022). As a result, these activities remain fragmented and heavily reliant on the involvement of local leaders, as well as on short-term, project-based funding systems (Łuczka, Kalinowski, 2020). It seems that many assumptions can be made for recommendations for the development of a support system for educational farms in the context of capacity building. First of all, support efforts are isolated, and individual models (institutional, financial, non-institutional) of assistance operate without synergy. It would therefore be advisable to first map the systems in order to design mutually reinforcing interventions. Furthermore, it seems that the promotion of the performance and role of farms is very limited and has an insufficient impact on the use of their potential by various social groups.

6. Conclusion

Educational farms remain a relatively unexplored area in management and quality sciences, despite their growing role in environmental and social education, especially in the context of contemporary civilizational and technological challenges. In scientific literature, the issue of how farms function in the socio-environmental ecosystem remains largely unrecognized.

It is worth noting that in an era of increasing urbanization and mediatization, educational farms can play a key role in shaping environmental and social awareness. After all, the development of educational farms fits into the broader context of rural transformation, where multifunctionality is a key element of development strategies.

Previous studies, including those presented in this paper, point to the need for an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account local natural, cultural, and social resources, recognizing them as the foundation for building the development potential of educational farms. The basis for the use of resources is the design of an attractive and innovative range of social services, including educational, therapeutic, and care services provided by educational farms.

The methodological approach used in the study allowed us to expand our knowledge about how educational farms work and how they can grow in the region, taking into account both internal conditions and external factors. Using a triangulation strategy for qualitative research, especially elements of participatory action research, also created space to bring stakeholders into the research process. The involvement of stakeholders in the process of co-creating knowledge is in line with the assumptions of the participatory research model. It is worth pointing out certain research limitations here. It seems that the area under study probably avoids quantitative research, as it concerns a sensitive social fabric and involves the analysis of attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, the necessary dominance of qualitative strategies may constitute a certain limitation.

Empirical research indicates that the development of educational farms depends in particular on the use of a set of potentials. The managerial and social competences of the owners seem to be key, including, among others, cooperation and communication skills, social sensitivity, willingness to act for the common good, etc. The ability to recognize and use local natural and landscape resources and cultural heritage is also considered important. Of course, this does not exhaust the set of factors determining the development of educational farms, including the design and implementation of solutions for social agriculture and social entrepreneurship in rural areas. It seems that further research in this area is needed, especially in the context of growing socio-environmental imbalances, biodiversity issues, and climate change. Above all, it is necessary to shape conscious pro-social and pro-ecological attitudes among the younger generations. Future research directions could take a very holistic approach to the development of educational farms as specific micro hubs of rural entrepreneurship and centers of knowledge on ecology, food production and food logistics systems, as well as micro centers for community empowerment. It seems that such research, which appears to have been rather neglected so far, could bring many practical social, ecological, and economic benefits. In addition, it is worth considering research on the importance of leadership in rural social networks, especially at a time when there is a need to build more cohesion and security.

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