

## FARMS IN THE GREEN CARE CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

The concept Green Care loosely refers to the utilization of nature and farms to produce social, healthcare and education services. Green Care operations in Europe have grown from small-scale trials based on the initiatives of farmers or needs of healthcare to holistic service models. Green Care is deemed to add value to the service sector in all its sub-sectors, offering customers a low threshold to participate in functional and interactive farm work. The nature based service model combined with social and healthcare services offers completely new instruments that produce more customer-oriented wellbeing services. Green Care is especially suitable for small farms that have original native breeds of production and pet animals. It is hoped that Green Care can enhance the conservation of valuable cultural rural environments and native breeds and through the increase of services support the vitality of rural areas. Many European countries support Green Care on both government and municipality levels. In many countries farmers have networked and organize learning circles to develop Green Care operations.

**Keywords:** farms, countryside, Green Care, wellbeing, nature, rehabilitation

### INTRODUCTION

Green Care is a well-being service-model that activates individuals and utilizes animals, nature, gardens and rural environments, to enhance the quality of life of clients and their ability to function. Green Care is a concept that, on one hand, encompasses nature-based operations, and on the other hand, is also analogous to the concepts of social farming, farming for health and care farming, all which refer to those farms that, as part of their operations, utilize their environment and activities to meet the needs of their target group. (HASSINK & VAN DIJK, 2006; ELINGS & HASSINK, 2008; DI IACOVO & O'CONNOR, 2009; YLI-VIIKARI ET AL., 2009; SEMPIK ET AL., 2010; O'CONNOR ET AL, 2010; [www.farmingforhealth.org](http://www.farmingforhealth.org);). According to Hassink et al (2006), Green Care operations can be roughly divided into rural, animal and garden assisted operations, depending on the environment, nature element used, the objectives and content. What is common to the different Green Care methodologies is the use of nature and natural environments, to support the physical, psychological and social well-being of clients, as part of other social, health and education services. The contributory action of participatory and experiential revival of nature is known to increase well-being. (SEMPIK ET AL, 2010; YLI-VIIKARI ET AL, 2009)

In this paper, Green Care operations refer to a nursing farm or rural environment-assisted activities that produce social well-being. Green Care operations have grown in Europe from very small-scale experiments, based in initiatives of farmers or on health care needs, to established, comprehensive service concepts. Small experiential projects in society are often the only way to investigate how new social innovations work in practice, gather scientific information and knowledge from real, experiential environments and other sources. (TOIKKO & RANTANEN, 2009; GIBBONS ET AL., 1994; HARMAAKORPI, 2008)

Green Care is often describes as a social innovation. Social innovations are associated with complicated dependency relationships between different operating systems in society, thereby their development requires plenty of local adaptations, silent knowledge and face-to-face communication between the different actors. (HÄMÄLÄINEN & HEISKANEN, 2009). Usually the most significant innovations are borne at the interface of different scientific disciplines, thus creating the need for common integrating concepts, terms and a common language to enhance an interactive dialogue. (SEE E.G. HENRY & LECLAIR, 1987; CAWSEY, 1997)

Social innovations are often borne from the need to solve practical problems and face challenges in society (TOIKKO & RANTANEN, 2009). However, social innovations are also new ideas or operations, borne from the creative work of individuals, groups or society, that bring value-added to individual, society and well-being service operations. (HÄMÄLÄINEN, 2005)

The effectiveness of Green Care has been publicly investigated in European publications using target focus (SEE E.G. BERGET ET AL., 2008; DE BRUIN ET AL, 2010) or from the value-added it brings to the rural area and the farmer. For the future, all of Europe's common goal is to find solutions to keep scarcely inhabited rural areas dynamic and robust and find solutions to provide new activities for the youth that remain in the rural area to add onto the traditional agriculture based on wildernesses.

(<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OtaJ:C:2001:262:0153:0156:FI:P DF>)

## **GREEN CARE IN EUROPE**

Green Care activities are especially suitable for very small farms where the work is still very much based on craftsmanship. Small farms still have some original native breeds of animals, thus through Green Care the sustenance of nationally valuable traditional environments and genetically important native breeds can be supported. Municipality objectives, in regard to wellbeing services, aim at responding to individualistic demands that have emerged from the changing values, by offering new, customer-based services. Urbanisation has slowly estranged people from nature, though in recent times there has been a deeper interest in nature and the rural areas. Green Care activities build bridges between different sectors as well as between rural and urban areas (DI IACOVO, 1999; SEMPIK ET AL, 2010).

In recent decades, well-being services have diversified and customers have more choices. The development of well-being services has been affected by societal resources, values, needs, legislation and other normative directives. Green Care operations have advance quickly in those European countries where the response to new operation models is open and positive. Country comparisons are useful. KENNETT AND YEATES (2001) emphasize that comparisons are a very mundane way of thinking. Whereas tourists compare their experiences of beaches and food, researchers compare concepts and analytical methods. Comparison research is also based to practical motives. Contrasting one's own country to other countries is an important means to assess the functionality of systems or the need for change (PÖNTINEN 2004). Green Care is quite similar in different European countries, being made up of agricultural and gardening work as well taking care of animals and sceneries, on farms. Clients can come to farms at their own costs (for example on a personal budget, German, Holland) as day-clients or nursing, care and rehabilitation centres can buy Green Care services from farms. In addition to municipalities, the third sector also utilizes Green Care services. Target customers in Green Care are mostly

individuals in rehabilitation due to substance-abuse or mental health problems, the elderly and young people with special needs. Some farms offer services to only certain target groups and small groups, but in Holland and Italy, for example, the customer-base is often more diverse.

Typically farms and institutions draw up a rehabilitation plan together with the customers and Green Care customers mostly drawn from urban centres. In addition to rehabilitation, farms can also offer vocational training and provide a job placement or housing arrangement. In Norway, collaboration between schools and farms has always been active. The shaping of Green Care activities is affected by social and healthcare attitudes and values, as well as how the government or municipalities support activities. In many Green Care countries farms receive direct financial support from the government (see e.g. Norway in *på tunet*-system) or different expert centres have been formed for the activities. The activities can be also be funded through sales of farm products. In Italy, co-operative movements for Green Care have been founded, where responsible business has been conceptualized onto farm products, allowing the possibility to receive a better price than normal (HASSINK, 2007, 2008; DI LACOVO ET AL, 2010; SOINI, 2011). With corporate social responsibility (CSR) becoming more commonplace, customer buying decisions are more affected by social, cultural and economic factors (HAANPÄÄ, 2007)

In Finland, Green Care took off from a project in 2004 conducted at the Environmental Research Unit at MTT Agrifood Research Finland, where the aim was to determine whether native breeds of animals, that are friendly in nature, were suitable for nursing and rehabilitation activities. Native breed were deemed important in regard to national-level memories and the sustenance of agricultural history. The conservation of species was addressed by aiming to identify new societal tasks for species. Officially, Finland launched the concept Green Care in 2008. Unlike in other European countries, the Green Care concept was not disseminated on the initiative of actors in agriculture or social and healthcare, but on the initiative of MTT. MTT has been very active in bringing Green Care to general discourse and activities were developed through workshops whose aims were to create a framework for the activities and criteria to measure effectiveness. Green Care has been enthusiastically adopted in Finland. The Green Care Association of Finland was created in 2010, with the aim of coordinating information flows regarding activities and helping the actors network (SOINI, 2011). Several Green Care initiatives have been activated all over the country. Green Care in Finland is for the present, integrated into nursing institutions as nature-assisted activities that are utilized as part of rehabilitation operations. Co-operation with farms is still in the primary stage. Green Care activities are expanding further from the social and healthcare sector to other wellbeing services.

Encounters between the countryside, animals and people, with a wellbeing focus is not a new phenomenon. Regenerating nature, the calm of animals and day-to-day rhythms that shape the farm have, since the beginning of human history, been a part of rehabilitation and pedagogical elements in different social institutions. Nursing institutions were often established in the peaceful countryside in naturally beautiful locations and the inhabitants participated in the chores within the institution according to their own interests and strengths. Green Care emphasizes the feeling of success, achieved through work and activities, that increases the feelings of meaningfulness of life and coherence. People structure themselves according to their experiences and activities. Regular and pleasing routines also support the well-being of those in rehabilitation. Activities and participation help an individual attach themselves to the community and society. Through different activities the individual feels useful to others as well. (MULTANEN, 2007; YLI-VIIKARI, 2009; SEMPIK ET AL, 2010) Social and cognitive skills and therapeutic exchange activities integrate farm assisted activities. (SEE E.G. NORDLING, 2007) Theoretically, Green Care can

also be linked to social exchange theory where the importance of reciprocity in a two-way relationship is emphasized (BLAU, 1986), as it can also be linked to equality theory where an individual is said to face anxiety, if he receives more support than he gives. The feeling of reciprocity correlates to the feeling of wellbeing (ÄYRÄVÄINEN, 2012; WOLFF & AGREE, 2005). In Green Care, caring and nursing are viewed as dualistic- the object becomes the subject or the care-receiver becomes the care-giver. Farm animals, vegetable patches and gardens do not only support the functionality of the target group, but gives the individual a unique opportunity to step into the responsible role of care-giver. Green Care utilises the communal nature of farms and networks for peer support that are created by different clients (SEMPIK ET AL, 2010).

### **SENNI: GREEN CARE PROJECT IN NORTH SAVO**

The SENNI project started in September 2011 and is co-funded by the European Social Fund and the North Savo social sector employment and product development using Green Care methodology- project, that is co-ordinated by the Department of Biology at the University of Eastern Finland. The Savo Vocational College and Ylä-Savo Vocational College also implement the project. Projects always have a clear starting and ending point and divide into different tasks during their life-cycle. (RUUSKA 2007) The SENNI project moves from the premise of understanding the Green Care phenomena and describing the different project activities into a holistic concept. This common concept was set as multidimensional wellbeing that supports sustainable development and that is projected in this project as the common denominator connecting the customer, the provider and environment.

The SENNI project has three focus areas. The aim of the activities is to increase awareness of Green Care in the Pohjois-Savo region (north Savo), create continuous Green Care training to support incoming Green Care activities and develop and test models in real customer situations and tailor-make them into cost-efficient service wholes.

SENNI Green Care training admitted 30 Green Care entrepreneurs (or entrepreneurs working closely in the field, aspiring Green Care entrepreneurs) of whom 27 had vocation social or healthcare training. The central elements in the training were animals, plants and rural environments as well as their diverse use in multifaceted and rehabilitation in wellbeing services. The basis for training is the vocational competency of the applicants, which in turn was the basis for creating the training programme in collaboration with the vocational colleges implementing the project.

SENNI GREEN CARE animal training was split between small animals and horses, where the focus was the behavior of species and the recognition of special characteristics as well as the safe behavior of animals in producing wellbeing. The garden-assisted module aimed at creative use of the nature and gardens at different times of the year. In training using rural environments, the focus is on the use of farm animals and farms from different customer points of view. The training has also covered business and each module has included a theme on social rehabilitation, to bind animal, rural and nature based themes as part of Green Care.

The SENNI project targets 16-25 year old youth with special needs and over 65 year olds that are still able to live at home. Green Care services targeted to the elderly are divided into themes that maintain functionality, promotion of functionality and balance. Interest in nature has been the premise for acceptance into the groups. Green Care activities that maintain functionality has elderly people that have a dog. The direction has taken the perspective of life-long learning and functionality which has been diversely implemented

using subjects related to dogs. Green Care services that promote functionality tests operation models, based on nature and diverse training activities. Green Care methods for supporting balance are used to support those that suffer from memory loss to improve their quality of life and wellbeing. Using dogs, youth with special needs have been reached. Services targeted to them are still being developed in the spring. The activities utilize SENNI Green Care student services.

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