

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL AGRICULTURE IN ECONOMICS

*Абдураззаков Диёрбек*

*Иктисодиёт ёналиши 3-курс талабаси.*

*Илмий рахбар: Эгамбердиев Хумоюн*

*Иктисодиёт факултети Иктисодиёт кафедраси  
(PhD) дотсент. Алфраганус Университий*

**ABSTRACT.** Social agriculture plays a significant role in economics by integrating social and environmental considerations into agricultural practices. It focuses on creating sustainable and inclusive food systems that benefit local communities and the environment. Social agriculture is still a very little-explored and well-known concept in the Uzbek environment. Due to the novelty of the topic, and the interest in exploring the form of social agriculture, it is necessary to characterize what social agriculture is, both on the basis of available definitions and theoretical foundations and on the basis of how this concept is understood in practice by those involved in social agriculture. For this reason, the present article reveals the concept of social agriculture is understood by individual actors. Within this present article, theoretical knowledge will be presented to help characterize what social agriculture is. In addition to a brief description of what social agriculture is, this paper will also deal with the theoretical starting points from which social agriculture is based. Social agriculture refers to the combination of agricultural production with social, educational, rehabilitative, or therapeutic objectives. It involves integrating socially excluded or disadvantaged populations—such as people with disabilities, youth at risk, elderly citizens, migrants, or the long-term unemployed—into farming activities. By promoting social inclusion in rural areas, social agriculture can help reduce poverty and improve local livelihoods. It leads to the diversification of rural economies by creating new job opportunities, promoting entrepreneurship, and fostering investments in related sectors like agrotourism and food processing. In this article, we scrutinize the concepts of horticultural therapy, green care, garden therapy, occupational therapy, and multifunctional agriculture are interconnected issues that, when combined, can greatly impact economics. These approaches employ nature-based activities and environments to provide therapeutic, educational, and rehabilitative benefits. By integrating agriculture with social and therapeutic services, they contribute positively to various aspects of economics, including health, employment, rural development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion.

**Keywords:** Social agriculture, horticultural therapy, green care, garden therapy, occupational therapy, multifunctional agriculture.

**Introduction.** Social agriculture is an interdisciplinary field that includes elements of various branches, whether agriculture, social work, or psychology. Namely, in the following article, green care will be introduced, which is considered by many authors to be one of the main theoretical starting points. Furthermore, we will provide an insight into the therapeutic elements that are typical for social agriculture.

**Literature review.** The situation is gradually improving, but it cannot be said that this is a clearly specifiable topic. If we look at some of the available publications, we will find that it is very difficult to define this term more closely. This, after all, is complemented by Chovanec et al (2015), who mention that "*it is not easy to find a uniform definition for social agriculture even in foreign sources, there is no legal definition or a basic text to which it would be possible to refer and which would determine what belongs to social agriculture and what does not.*" Chovanec et al (2015) further note that it is precisely in this unlimited nature that there is a certain advantage of social agriculture.

If we want to move forward in defining social agriculture, the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee from 2012 can probably help us. When defining social agriculture, the EESC is aware of the difficulty of grasping the concept, due to the wide spectrum of activities that fall under it. When defining the term, it is therefore primarily based on two aspects that characterize social agriculture. Specifically, these are activities carried out on a farm or in an agricultural enterprise, which are intended for people with specific needs. In addition, social agriculture "*contributes to the well-being and self-realization of individuals, but also to the development of rural regions and to better urban-rural exchange.*" (EESC [website], 2012) "*Social agriculture could therefore be defined primarily as a set of activities using agricultural resources, both plant and animal, for the purpose of creating social services in rural or suburban areas (e.g. retraining, therapy, sheltered employment, lifelong learning and other activities contributing to social integration.*" (EESC [website], 2012)

**Methodology.** Social agriculture plays a significant role in economics by integrating social and environmental considerations into agricultural practices. It focuses on creating sustainable and inclusive food systems that benefit local communities and the environment. Social agriculture is still a very little-explored and well-known concept in the Uzbek environment. Namely, in the following article, green care will be introduced, which is considered by many authors to be one of the main theoretical starting points. Furthermore, we will provide an insight into the therapeutic elements that are typical for social agriculture.

Among the therapeutic approaches, garden therapy and zootherapy will be specifically presented. Both of these therapies are based on green care and are very close to social agriculture. It is related to the content of work within social agriculture,

and thus also to the focus of agriculture on plant or animal production. Furthermore, you will get to know ergotherapy, i.e. work therapy. Social agriculture is typically activated by performing meaningful work in the farm environment.

Last but not least, there will be a focus on a purely agricultural environment. The concept of multifunctional agriculture will be introduced, in which social agriculture is classified by experts.

As mentioned earlier, the basic premise of social agriculture is the concept of green care. The most common translation we can come across is literally "green care". Let's briefly explain what this term means.

Chovanec et al (2015) define green care as a comprehensive spectrum of activities that can take place in different places. An important aspect of these activities is the interaction between man and nature. Green care bases its activity on the awareness that this very interaction has a beneficial effect on a person's life. Thanks to the extensiveness of this term, we can talk about, for example, therapeutic, pedagogical, educational, relaxing, inclusive, or work activities.

Although, as already said, the concept of green care is very diverse and "covers" many areas, it is appropriate to realize that the common denominator of all these activities is the use of nature's contribution to human life, in several spheres - health, social, or educational. (Sempik et al., 2010)

Sempik and Bragg (2013) supplement this characteristic with a definition that describes green care as an intervention in which plants, animals, and nature are used in an attempt to improve health and achieve psychological and mental balance. This is not just an occasional encounter with nature.

In general, it can be said that *"the content can be elements of living nature such as animals or plants, or also non-living nature such as stones or water. Individual elements of nature can also be used, as well as collective ones in the form of a landscape, garden, forest, farm or other locations. These positive or stimulation aspects are to maintain or increase people's health, well-being and quality of life."* (Chovanec et al, 2016)

Sempik et al. (2010) consider that it is necessary to distinguish between what green care is and what it is not. There are many activities that happen in harmony with nature and can have a positive effect on people. For example, let's name hiking, cycling, canoeing, etc. However, these activities cannot generally be called green care in the full sense of the word. It is typical for green care that it fully focuses on helping and caring for various target groups of people. In all forms, they try to provide therapeutic help on a physical, mental, or social level. Sempik et al. (2010) further mention that differences can of course be found within the care provided. Sometimes it is possible to meet green care that is focused unilaterally, at other times it is multifaceted.

According to Sempik et al (2010), green care includes, for example: *"Assisted exercise in nature, social and therapeutic gardening, animal-assisted therapy, social farming or care-oriented farming, ecotherapy, wilderness therapy, nature therapy."*

Among the best-known examples is zotherapy, i.e. therapy that uses the therapeutic influence of animals, whether domestic, utility, or equestrian. Garden therapy is also common, and for the context of our work – care farming, i.e. social farms/social agriculture (Chovanec et al, 2016).

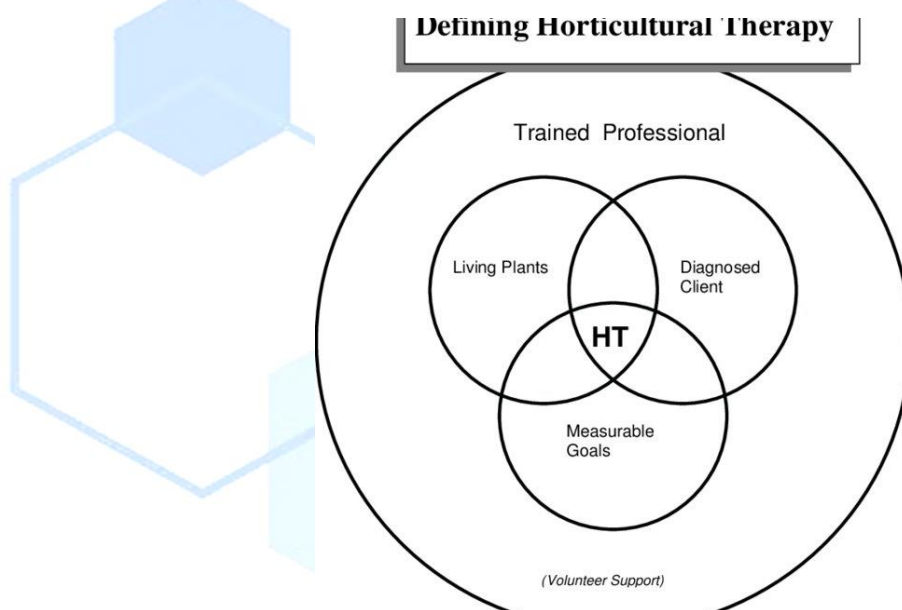
In the context of social agriculture, we would follow up on one of the disciplines that can be classified as green care, and which has a lot in common with social agriculture. At the moment, garden therapy, known in English-speaking countries as horticulture therapy, social and therapeutic horticulture, or garden therapy, is gaining space for performances.

As is clear from the name, garden therapy is also an interdisciplinary field, just like social agriculture. Specific to garden therapy is its focus on the therapeutic effect that gardening brings.

According to AHTA (American Horticultural Therapy Association), horticultural therapy is defined as a process whereby participants improve their life situation through active or passive participation in activities related to plant care. Therefore, participation in horticultural activities facilitated by a registered horticultural therapist who works with the client to achieve specific goals set within an established treatment, rehabilitation, or work plan is essential to horticultural therapy. Horticultural therapy is an active process that occurs within the context of an established treatment plan, where the process itself is viewed as a therapeutic activity rather than an end product (AHTA [website], 2017).

It is also possible to approach garden therapy, for example, with the help of the following picture No. 1, in which Relf (2006) tried to clarify garden therapy. For its characteristics, it uses key elements of this therapy, which interact with each other. According to him, garden therapy should have clearly defined treatment goals. Therapy should be administered by a trained specialist. This therapy focuses on the care of living plants and gardening work as such. As part of this therapy, work done in harmony with the plants has a beneficial effect on the individual's life. Relf's concept also includes a greater specificity of the target group. It should primarily be about clients with a clear diagnosis rather than unspecified groups of people of different ages and health conditions, etc. This model can subsequently be modified freely.

Figure No. 1 – Defining horticultural therapy



Source: Relf (2006)

Horticultural therapy techniques are used to help participants learn new skills or regain those that have been lost. Horticultural therapy helps improve memory, cognitive abilities, and communication skills and also helps with socialization. In physical rehabilitation, garden therapy can help strengthen muscles and improve coordination, balance, and endurance. In professional horticultural therapy, people learn to work independently, solve problems, and follow directions. Horticultural therapists are professionals with specific education, training, and credentials in the use of horticulture for therapy and rehabilitation (AHTA [website], undated).

Garden therapy is very close in concept to social agriculture. It can be said that social farming can contain elements of garden therapy. It was already mentioned at the beginning of this work that the definition of social agriculture is quite broad. It combines many activities that take place in an agricultural environment. It can include the already mentioned therapy associated with the care of the garden or animals. Importantly, this permeability between these concepts is not fully reciprocal. Several differences can be found here. The most striking is the environment in which the garden therapy is carried out. *"Garden therapy is not primarily tied to the garden, although it is always an added value. It also offers activities with plants that can be used indoors, and are safe and easy. In these cases, it can help bedridden people who can't get into the garden."* This means that garden therapy doesn't necessarily have to be about the garden. It can be carried out within the framework of institutional health or social care. For social agriculture, the main characteristic is the farm environment. Another difference is the focus of garden therapy primarily on the therapeutic process. Social

farming includes therapy, but it is not the main aspect (Social Farming [website], 2017).

Another therapeutic area whose elements can be found in social agriculture is zotherapy. We can also meet the concept of animotherapy. Zotherapy uses the positive therapeutic effect that animals have on human life. This positive impact on human life has been known for many centuries. The origins go back perhaps to Ancient Greece. So let's now imagine zotherapy.

*"To put it very simply, by the term zotherapy we understand the positive and even therapeutic effect of an animal on a person. Whether we are concerned with improving memory, motor skills, communication or relieving stress, the animal is always here in the role of a mediator, a so-called co-therapist."* (Velmínský et al)

Animal-assisted therapy includes intentionally planned educational, psychological, and social integration activities with animals, which are intended for children, youth, adults, and seniors with cognitive, social-emotional, and motor limitations, as well as those with behavioral problems. This therapy includes preventive, rehabilitative, and health-promoting measures (ESAAT [website], 2011)

Within zotherapy, two fundamentally different concepts of the relationship between man and animal are distinguished: animal-assisted (AA) Therapy and AA activities. We can occasionally encounter two more distinctions, namely: AA Education and AA Crisis Response (Mojžíšová, Eisertová-Bicková, 2013).

Animal-Assisted Therapy (AA Therapy, AAT) is a structured, targeted intervention in which the animal is incorporated as an integral part of the treatment process. Therapy is provided and managed by a trained professional. Animal-assisted therapy is continuously documented and evaluated as part of an individual treatment plan. Therapy sessions are usually of a fixed length (Therapy Animals [website], undated). This therapy aims to improve a person's physical, social, emotional or cognitive functioning. Animal-assisted therapy is provided in a variety of settings and can be group or individual (AVMA [website], undated).

Animal Assisted Activities (AA activities, AAA) provide motivational, educational, therapeutic, or recreational benefits to enhance the quality of life. Activities with the help of animals are implemented in different environments. Generally, these are short sessions, so-called meet-and-greet sessions. There are usually short visits to hospitals or long-term care centers when a trained expert or volunteer comes to these facilities with specially trained animals. Specific treatment goals are not planned for each visit, detailed notes and documentation are not required, and visits are spontaneous. Activities with the help of animals can also be carried out with a larger group of people (Therapy Animals [website], undated). Therapy as such is not addressed during these activities. Natural contact with an animal has a positive effect on a person's life (Freeman, 2007).

Education with the help of animals (AA Education, AAE) is a method that uses targeted contact between a person and an animal in an attempt to improve or expand the upbringing, education or skills of the client. The goals of education are defined based on the cooperation of zootherapist and pedagogue (Freeman, 2007 In Mojžíšová, Eisertová-Bicková, 2013). Education can be targeted at a group of students. In this case, it is mainly about the implementation of lectures, discussions or interest groups, etc. Education is also intended for clients with learning disabilities, educational and educational or communication problems or also for people who have specific needs to be met (Mazel, 2009).

Animal-assisted crisis intervention (AA Crisis Response, AACR) focuses on mitigating the consequences that occur in an affected person after experiencing a crisis. Specially trained dogs are mainly used for this intervention. The goal is to mitigate the consequences of the crisis situation on the individual's psyche (Tvrdá, 2005 In Mojžíšová, Eisertová-Bicková, 2013).

Zoo therapy can be further divided according to which animals are worked with as part of the therapy. According to Žáková (2013), the most well-known forms include: *"canistotherapy (with dogs), felinotherapy (with cats), hippotherapy (with horses), delphinotherapy (with dolphins), llama therapy (with llamas), ornithotherapy (with birds) or even insect therapy (with insects)*.

It is possible to notice other therapeutic elements in social agriculture. One of them is occupational therapy. The term ergotherapy originated from the combination of two Greek words, ergon, which means work, and therapy, i.e. therapy, treatment (Krivošíková, 2011).

There are many definitions of occupational therapy, for the context of this work we would use the definition of Association of Ergotherapists [website] (2008), which says that *"ergotherapy is a profession that, through meaningful employment, strives to preserve and use the individual's abilities needed to manage everyday, work, hobby and recreational activities for people of any age with different types of disability (physical, sensory, psychological, mental or social disadvantage). It supports the maximum possible participation of the individual in everyday life, while fully respecting his personality and possibilities. To support the individual's participation, it uses specific methods and techniques, training of specific skills, counseling or adaptation of the environment. Czech occupational therapists agree that it is "all the activities that a person performs during his life and are perceived as part of his identity."* The goal of occupational therapy is therefore to help the individual so that he can engage in work that is meaningful for his life and indispensable.

There are, of course, many more definitions of occupational therapy, here we used the definition of Association of Therapists. The connecting elements of the various definitions are usually prevention, education and focus on the individual. Occupational

therapy tries to create activities that have a preventive effect on the emergence or development of diseases of various types (e.g. physical, psychological, mental). It also prevents social exclusion. Occupational therapy uses elements of education. Individuals acquire new skills, gain new experiences or consolidate their existing knowledge. The spectrum of activities is wide, it covers both normal daily activities of personal life and work activities. Finally, occupational therapy is characterized by a focus on the individual, the goal of which is to achieve a positive change in his life (Krivošíková, 2011).

The goal of occupational therapy is to help individuals/clients achieve the maximum level of self-sufficiency in performing normal daily activities. (In this context, it is possible to come across the abbreviation ADL, which in English means Activities from Daily Living, i.e. activities of ordinary life.) They also strive to achieve the maximum level of self-sufficiency in other areas, mainly in work, but also in leisure. A partial goal is to maintain or expand the abilities and skills of the individual in these spheres. (Czech Association of Occupational Therapists [website], 2008).

Occupational therapy also aims to maintain or improve the individual's physical, mental or psychological well-being, using meaningful activities. *"The chosen activities take into account the personal, social, cultural and economic needs of the person, their current functional status, age, gender and also the conditions of the environment in which they are located. The choice of activities that are used as a therapeutic tool must reflect these facts and must relate to the social roles that the person holds or is expected of him.* He also wants to help people to integrate into society or the community. As part of therapy, he uses person-centered therapy. (Czech Association of Occupational Therapists [website], 2008).

If we would like to summarize the above-mentioned information, we can use the summary presented by Jelínková et al. (2009). According to them, occupational therapy is a profession that involves focusing on activities that are meaningful and useful for a particular person. Work is both the means and the goal of therapy. Occupational therapy uses a person-centered therapeutic approach. The therapy itself is based on the social roles of the given person and also focuses on the social environment from which the given person comes.

As social agriculture is an interdisciplinary field, it is appropriate to start dealing with another sphere on which social agriculture is based, i.e. multifunctional agriculture.

Multifunctional agriculture is based on the knowledge that in Europe agriculture is not only about food production, it contains many other irreplaceable functions (Šarapatka et al, 2006).

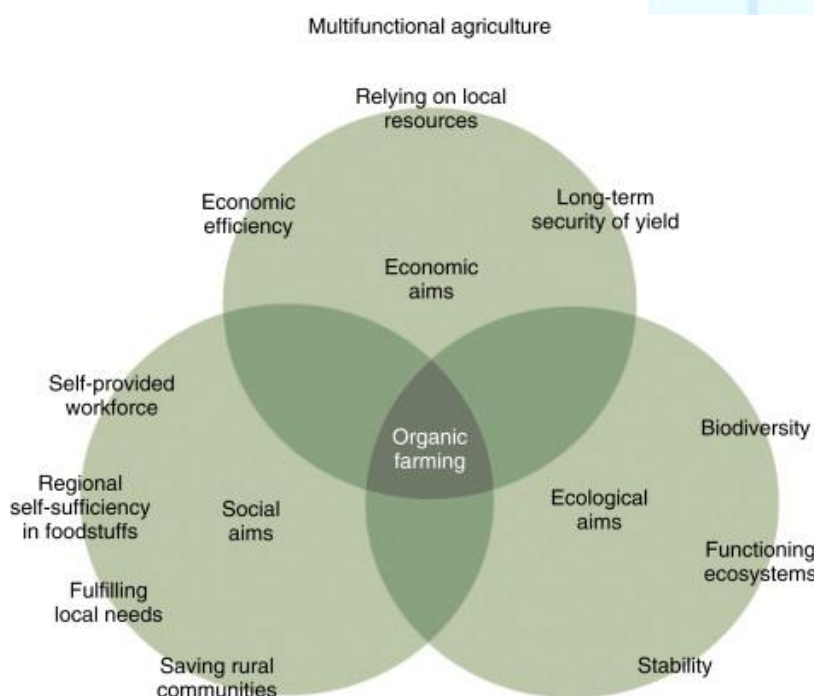
*"The key elements that refer to multifunctionality include: 1) the existence of multiple commodity and non-commodity outputs jointly produced by agriculture 2) the*



fact that some non-commodity outputs exhibit the character of externalities or public goods, such that markets for these goods do not exist or function properly (OECD [website], 2001, p. 7.)

Altieri (1994) defined multifunctional agriculture based on three objectives: economic, social and ecological. From an economic point of view, it is important to secure a certain income in the long term, which is related to the performance of the economy. In this sphere, it is also important to use local resources. Ecological goals point to the importance of agricultural sustainability. The goal is to protect biological diversity and maintain a stable and functioning ecosystem. The social goal involves the effort to preserve rural settlements, meeting local needs, for example by supplying the region with food, etc. It also includes the creation of its own labor force, etc. These goals can be clearly seen in Figure No. 2.

**Figure 2 - Objectives of multifunctional agriculture**



*Source: Altieri (1994)*

According to the WTO, multifunctional agriculture is characterized by: *supporting the viability of rural areas, food security, cultural and environmental benefits, soil protection, agrobiodiversity, etc.* (WTO [website], 2011)

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, we may mention the basic role of agriculture plays a vital role in the overall functioning of society and the economy as mentioned above. It is the primary source of food, ensuring global food security and providing sustenance to an ever-growing population. Agriculture also contributes to raw materials for a variety of industries, such as textiles, construction, and biofuels. In addition to

providing livelihoods and employment opportunities for a significant portion of the global workforce, particularly in rural areas, agriculture shapes cultural, social, and environmental landscapes and acts as a catalyst for rural development, poverty reduction, and overall economic growth. Furthermore, sustainable and responsible agricultural practices help maintain ecosystem services, preserve biodiversity, and contribute to global efforts addressing climate change.

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