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WELL-BEING AND RESPECT FOR SENIORS.
EXPLORING THE MEANING OF CARE FARMS

ABSTRACT: This article presents the process of establishing care farms in the Lubuskie Province of Poland, a model rarely implemented in the country until now. The study focuses on two key aspects: the mutual learning process of the team responsible for developing the operational principles of these care farms and the initial outcomes observed after a year of their operation. The research aims to understand how the self-learning process unfolded and to assess the impact of care farms on the well-being and respect of seniors, both in terms of self-respect and respect received from others. The study is guided by the theoretical frameworks of inclusive education and green care, with a focus on three core issues: respect and agency, social inclusion, and quality of life. Using a combination of document analysis and qualitative interviews with process implementers (team for developing a model of the operation of care farms in the Lubuskie Province) and participants of care farms, the findings reveal that the collaborative learning environment, enriched by direct exposure to green care practices and interactions with seniors during their daily activities, fostered a shared understanding and commitment to the project. This experience motivated the participants to adapt these practices to meet local needs, promoting respect and agency among seniors. The results suggest that seniors' involvement in meaningful activities enhanced their self-esteem, sense of agency, and motivation, contributing to their overall well-being. The study concludes that care farms offer a promising model for elder care by enhancing both the external respect accorded to seniors and their internal self-respect, thereby supporting broader social inclusion goals and quality of life.

KEYWORDS: care farms, senior well-being, mutual learning process, inclusive education, study visits, social inclusion.

Introduction

As Europe faces a profound demographic transformation, characterized by an increasingly aging population, the need for innovative and effective senior care policies has never been more urgent. The field of senior policy, an interdisciplinary domain dedicated to fostering dignified and active aging, is central to addressing these challenges. However, despite its importance, many countries grapple with significant barriers to providing adequate services for their elderly citizens. These barriers often stem from a range of issues, including health-related problems, financial constraints, and difficulties in building and maintaining social connections.

The exclusion from essential care services not only impedes the ability of older adults to engage in meaningful social activities and fulfill their personal needs but also undermines their overall quality of life. This exclusion can manifest in various ways,

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from diminished emotional and psychological well-being to decreased psychophysical activity (Vrugt & Koenis, 2002; Lavoie & Rose, 2012). In extreme cases, the lack of support leads to the institutionalization of seniors in 24-hour care facilities. Such environments often strip individuals of their independence and privacy, imposing a uniform and formal lifestyle that can be both disempowering and isolating (Morgan et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2021; Frątczak-Müller, 2022).

Even with existing frameworks aimed at mitigating these issues, the current methods of senior care frequently fall short of bringing about the necessary positive changes. For older adults at risk of social exclusion – particularly those with limited social competencies due to age or health issues – the challenge of maintaining well-being independently becomes even more pronounced (Trafiałek, 2016; Kaye & Singer, 2018). This issue is further exacerbated in rural areas, where access to public institutions and social services is often limited (Hemingway, Ellis-Hill & Norton, 2016; Hussain et al., 2023).

In light of these challenges, this article explores the concept of green care and its exemplification in the form of care farms as a potential solution to enhance senior well-being and respect. Specifically, it examines the development and implementation of a care farm model in Lubuskie Province, Poland, which integrates green care principles into senior support services. Care farms, which combine agricultural activities with therapeutic practices, offer a unique approach to improving the quality of life for older adults, especially in settings with limited access to traditional care services.

The article will delve into the assumptions underlying this model, the learning process experienced by the organizers of these care farms, and the impacts observed after one year of implementation. It will also analyze the role of mutual learning in the development of this solution and its effects on fostering respect for seniors, both from others and within themselves. By employing the concept of inclusive education and its mobile form of study visits and social inclusion, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how care farms can contribute to a more effective and respectful approach to senior care. Through this exploration, the article seeks to highlight the potential benefits of integrating green care into senior services and offer insights into the broader implications for social service programs.

Green Care and Its Impact on Well-being and Social Inclusion

Green care encompasses therapeutic activities that utilize natural resources and rural settings to benefit specific groups, such as seniors, individuals with disabilities, and those facing social exclusion. Unlike general recreational activities in nature, which primarily aim to enhance overall well-being, green care focuses on achieving targeted therapeutic outcomes (Sempik, Hine & Wilcox eds., 2010). It includes practices such as

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care farming, agricultural therapy, and garden therapy and is increasingly recognized in several European countries, including Norway, the Netherlands, and Great Britain.

Among these practices, care farms stand out as the most widespread and well-established. These farms integrate agricultural activities with structured care services, offering therapeutic, educational, and social opportunities to individuals in need of support. Care farms employ a structured approach to deliver nature-based services that are both goal-oriented and tailored to address the needs of vulnerable groups (Murray, et al., 2019). Some activities are highly organized therapy programs with clear, patient-centered goals, while others aim to foster broader benefits such as social inclusion, mental well-being, and personal agency (Sempik, Hine & Wilcox eds., 2010). Furthermore, care farms provide a range of farming activities that users can engage with (Hine, 2008).

Key concepts underpinning green care include agency, social inclusion, and quality of life (QOL). Care farm activities are designed to enhance individuals' self-efficacy – the belief in one's ability to execute necessary actions (agency) (Bandura, 1997). High self-efficacy often correlates with increased motivation, higher aspirations, and improved coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety (Bandura, 2011). Engaging with nature through farm work and animal care further bolsters this sense of capability and self-worth.

Marginalized individuals, who often face limited control over their lives and resources, benefit from green care's focus on reducing stigmatization and promoting social participation. This approach helps counteract the negative effects of marginalization, such as low self-esteem and limited social opportunities. Social exclusion, which extends beyond material deprivation to include barriers to participation in economic, social, and political life, is directly addressed by green care practices (Mowat, 2015). Care farms create opportunities for social interaction, self-expression, and engagement in meaningful activities, fostering broader social integration (Leck, Upton & Evans, 2013).

The impact of green care on participants' quality of life (QOL) is particularly significant. By aligning individuals' expectations and aspirations with their actual experiences, green care enhances well-being, providing a sense of accomplishment and comfort. This, in turn, improves overall life satisfaction (Sempik, Hine & Wilcox eds., 2010; Sirgy, 2021). Green care thus integrates nature-based therapeutic practices to address multiple dimensions of well-being, striving to improve self-efficacy, social inclusion, and overall quality of life for vulnerable populations (Hassink & van Dijk, 2006).

Green Care and the Role of Inclusive Education

The educational processes employed in care farms draw heavily from the principles of inclusive education. Inclusive education is a systemic approach that emphasizes

respect for human rights and active participation in learning processes, particularly for vulnerable and socially excluded groups (Sapon-Shevin, Ayres & Duncan, 1994; Kaufmann et al., 2016). While often associated with integrating students with special needs into mainstream settings, its scope extends beyond physical inclusion to encompass systemic transformations that accommodate and empower all learners (De Boer, Pijl & Minnaret, 2010; Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011).

Green care and inclusive education share a common philosophy centered on promoting well-being, empowerment, and social inclusion. Both approaches prioritize the creation of supportive environments that respect human dignity, foster agency, and encourage active participation in meaningful activities. Care farms adopt these principles by providing nature-based interventions that address therapeutic and social needs, integrating participants into a holistic framework of social inclusion and mutual learning. This dynamic process not only enhances personal growth but also builds cohesive and sustainable communities, reinforcing the interconnected goals of both green care and inclusive education.

Traditionally, inclusion focused on integrating students with disabilities into general education programs (Bossaert et al., 2013). However, modern interpretations, including those promoted by UNESCO and by advocates of culturally responsive teaching, broaden the scope to include marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, immigrants, and those facing socio-economic challenges (UNESCO, 2009; Gay, 2010; Tomlinson, 2016). Expanding education to include representatives of local communities and their leaders, institutions, and organizations turns it into education for social change. Its supporters argue that such education benefits all participants because it builds a caring community where everyone's experience and skills are valued (Kaufmann et al., 2016; Blackford, 2018).

Inclusive education can be extended through a dynamic approach known as education in motion, exemplified by study visits (Frątczak-Müller, 2023). This method involves participants traveling to different institutions or organizations to gain insights and experience in addressing current challenges and developing innovative solutions. These visits, which can range from one day to several months, enhance networking and understanding of diverse needs. A key feature of study visits is the active involvement of vulnerable groups, both as participants who travel and as hosts, highlighting the application of inclusive education principles. This approach facilitates immersion in real-world environments where projects and initiatives are actively underway. It enhances participants' understanding of diverse needs and potential responses, fostering a deeper appreciation for the purpose and outcomes of their work (Frątczak-Müller & Mielczarek-Żejmo, 2023). By shifting the perception of individual vulnerability from a disadvantage to a challenge to be addressed collaboratively, study visits align with

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the principles of inclusive education (Tomlinson, 2016). Mutual learning plays a special role in them. In a mutual learning relationship (Witkowska-Tomaszewska, 2019), both sides take turns to act as the teacher and the student. It is a good way of learning new things, at the point of their creation, not only because it enables people to learn a new skill or discover new solutions, but because it can use the knowledge and skills of participants in the learning process and build trust between them. In the literature, study visits are recognized as a significant tool for mobile education, contributing to knowledge transfer and the implementation of innovative social solutions.

Methods and Materials

The analysis presented is based on research conducted at the Regional Centre for Social Policy (RCSP) in the Lubuskie Voivodeship in 2023. This study employed document analysis and unstructured interviews to explore the implementation and impact of study visits related to care farms.

Document analysis

The primary research method employed in this study was a detailed document analysis focusing on study visits organized by the RCSP's Department of Coordination of Social Economy. These visits, conducted between 2019 and 2020, encompassed three trips to care farms, one in the Netherlands and two in Poland. The study utilized a classic document analysis approach, emphasizing qualitative description and interpretation of the selected materials.

Three categories of documents were analyzed:
1. Study visit plans – outlining the intended goals and structure of the visits;
2. Recruitment regulations and participant lists – providing details of the participants and descriptions of the host institutions;
3. Visit reports and outcome descriptions – documenting the results achieved during the visits.

The content analysis aimed to characterize the principles and practices underpinning the study visits. This involved examining data related to the composition of the partnerships hosting the participants, the primary beneficiaries, and the thematic scope and objectives of each visit. By doing so, the study sought to uncover the operational and educational frameworks of these initiatives and evaluate their contributions to advancing green care practices in the Lubuskie Province.

Interviews

Complementing the document analysis, unstructured interviews were conducted to gain qualitative insights into the study visits. Five interviews were held with women

aged 30–45 who were involved in the organization and implementation of these visits and worked at the RCSP. The interviews gathered information on: (1) the principles of cooperation with visit organizers, (2) participant selection processes, and (3) the goals and outcomes of the educational activities associated with the visits. This part of the study also examined the establishment of cooperation with socially excluded individuals and those requiring inclusive education, from both perspectives: the institutions commissioning and preparing the visits, and the host institutions. The analysis focused on the approaches and strategies each institution used to foster engagement and inclusion.

Additionally, 25 interviews were conducted with all seniors participating in care farms. This included eight individuals from a care farm in Jasieniec and six individuals each from the farms in Nowe Żabno and Jordanowo. Among these participants, three interviews were conducted with men. This gender distribution reflects the demographic reality that women, who tend to live longer, are more likely to experience social isolation in their senior years and thus seek out social activities, such as those offered by care farms.

In addition to the seniors, their caregivers also participated in the interviews. This group included two farm managers, two representatives of care farm staff, and one representative of social policy centers – four women and one man aged between 35 and 55. These interviews aimed to capture the experiences, perceptions, and impacts of the care farms on both the seniors and their caregivers during the first year of the farms' operation. The research data were collected as part of the RCSP's project on social economy coordination. All interviews were recorded, and full transcriptions were prepared for analysis. The analytical process included data reduction, data display, and the derivation or confirmation of conclusions. Significant concepts and critical events were identified within the participants' responses. The analysis also involved reconstructing the text to uncover connections between the topics selected for examination (Patton, 2014; Silverman ed., 2016).

Audio recordings of the interviews are archived at the University of Zielona Góra. In the text, interviews are identified as 'IE' for expert interviews (RCSP employees involved in organizing the visits) and 'IS' for senior interviews or ISC for seniors' caregivers, followed by a number (*e.g.*, IE1, IE2; IS1, ISC2) to facilitate reference to specific sources of information. This methodological approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the implementation and impact of study visits on both the organizational processes and the experiences of the participants.

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Results

The research results are presented in two stages. The first stage analyzes the organization and implementation of the study visits, with particular emphasis on the learning processes employed during them. The second stage examines the outcomes achieved, specifically the effects of the first year of operation of three care farms established in the Lubuskie Voivodeship, which are a direct result of the knowledge transfer facilitated by the study visits.

Study Visits: A Tool for Inclusive Learning

2 st. General principles of organizing study visits

The study visits were organized as two-day events to explore the operational methods of care farms and to transfer effective practices to the Lubuskie Province. The study visits were organized with both general and specific objectives in mind. The general aims were to familiarize participants with the social economy sector, increase their knowledge of reintegration services, and promote the development of care services. Specific objectives included learning about best practices in managing care farms and collaboratively developing a model for implementing these services in the Lubuskie Voivodeship. The trips were intense meetings during which participants learned good practices in running care farms and worked on a model for implementing such services in the Lubuskie Voivodeship (IE1; IE2). Participants also had the opportunity to observe the tangible impact of such initiatives, including the work of social organizations, the engagement of care farm participants, and the outcomes of their efforts (IE4). The main goal was to develop a comprehensive organizational and financial model for care farms in the province and to establish three such farms (IE1-5). Each visit was hosted by a combination of public institutions, such as Agricultural Advisory Centres, Social Welfare Centres, and Occupational Therapy Workshops, and social organizations like the Association of Caring Farms, individual care farms, and foundations providing services to farms (including meals, rehabilitation, educational activities for seniors, and leisure activities). This collaboration between different sectors was a consistent principle in both the hosting organizations and the composition of the visiting participants.

A total of 40 participants took part in the study visits, representing a broad range of entities across the public, private, and social sectors. These included representatives from local government units, government administration, labor market and social integration institutions, social welfare units, social economy entities, academia, and business. The organization of these visits and ensuring participant welfare (the fulfillment

of orders from the Regional Social Policy Centre) was entrusted to social organizations. In Poland, these organizations actively seek contracts from public institutions and frequently participate in public tenders for such opportunities.

Principles of participant recruitment

The recruitment of participants for the study visits was based on two main approaches: open promotion and targeted invitations.

1. Open promotion approach – this approach aimed at broadly promoting the visits among local government employees and social entrepreneurs. Information about the visits was disseminated through letters sent to public institutions engaged in social policy, inviting all interested parties to apply. This method facilitated a wide-reaching recruitment effort, ensuring a diverse pool of participants from various fields relevant to social policy;

2. Targeted invitation approach – this approach was more strategic, focusing on forming specialized teams aligned with the goals of the visits. Specific agencies, departments, institutions, and organizations were contacted with requests to nominate participants whose expertise matched the study visit topics. In this context, invitations were extended to those involved in developing a model for care farms in the Lubuskie Province. During this period, a list of necessary experts was compiled, and these experts were invited to participate in the visits.

   This targeted approach involved appointing a team dedicated to creating care farms, which first acquired knowledge about the operation of such entities and then applied their expertise in fields such as agriculture, green care, social entrepreneurship, social inclusion, social care and services, finance, and law. Their goal was to develop a concept for the operation of care farms in the Lubuskie Province and implement it in compliance with local laws. Due to the personalized nature of these invitations, which specified particular needs or identified suitable individuals, this form of recruitment was more effective and easier to execute (IE2-4).

   Additionally, the visits were designed to be inclusive, ensuring that people with disabilities could participate. However, few individuals with disabilities applied, possibly due to their low representation among the employees of relevant institutions. Nevertheless, representatives from vulnerable groups within the host organizations took part in the study visits (IE1-4).

Educational activities undertaken

The educational activities during the study visits utilized a variety of techniques, including presentations, workshops, group work, interviews with representatives of vulnerable groups and practitioners in senior care, and guided walks (IE1-3). A key

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element of the education was the movement of participants from one organization to another, allowing them to experience different environments and practices. An important aspect of inclusive education was the open communication between participants and host representatives, facilitating question-asking, interactions during breaks, and shared time. This dynamic approach enabled participants to observe and understand how good practices functioned, who developed them, and the challenges involved.

The educational activities evolved throughout the study visits phase. Initially, the focus was on transporting participants to various locations, engaging with creators, and conducting interviews. By the final visit, in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, the activities included more interactive methods such as group work, role-playing, and creative exercises, meetings with seniors and people with disabilities (IE1). These methods aimed to develop and refine ideas for implementing in the Lubuskie Voivodeship the solutions learned in the visits. The inclusive nature of the education also allowed participants to gain insights into the challenges faced by people from socially excluded groups, broadening their understanding and providing practical solutions for everyday challenges related to aging and disability.

The mutual learning process among study visits members unfolded in three phases:

1. Initiation and concept creation – this phase involved discovering the purpose and significance of care farms. Participants explored the fundamental idea, understanding the benefits and objectives of creating such farms. They also learned about the diverse competences of team members and learned to use them;

2. Growth and development – in this phase, the team experienced substantial growth in both understanding and collaboration. They gained clarity about their tasks, defined their roles, and identified specific outcomes to be achieved in the Lubuskie Province. The focus was on developing a deeper understanding of the concept and refining their approach;

3. Consolidation – this final phase involved developing financial frameworks, establishing recruitment processes for seniors, and defining cooperation rules with social welfare centers. The team also worked on commissioning and implementing the required social services.

The visits to locations where green care ideas were developed, combined with interactions with host organization representatives (including observing seniors during their daily activities), enabled participants to experience these solutions firsthand, discuss their applicability, and build a shared understanding (IE2; IE4; IE5). This exposure increased their confidence that these practices could be successfully adapted to their province, enhancing motivation and sparking ideas for tailoring these practices to the needs of Lubuskie seniors.

The study visits resulted in the establishment of a team tasked with developing a model for the operation of care farms in the Lubuskie Voivodeship (IE4; IE5). The team comprised 23 members: officials, legal experts, local authorities, social entrepreneurs, and farmers. After a year of collaborative effort, the team produced a set of guidelines for the establishment and operation of care farms in the region named Green Care Model for the Lubuskie Voivodeship.

Care Farms: A Source of Well-being and Self-Esteem for Seniors

The Green Care Model for the Lubuskie Voivodeship was approved by both the voivodeship's board and the European Commission's Department of Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion. Based on this model, three test care farms were established, which, after a year of operation in 2023, have shown positive effects in enhancing the well-being of seniors. These were farms in the communes of Jasieniec, Nowy Żabno and Jordanów.

These care farms, located in rural areas, function as a blend of agricultural activity and care services, known as "green care". These farms are a form of social agriculture, utilizing the farm's natural and agricultural resources to improve the quality of life for their participants. The primary goal of care farms is to provide health benefits, facilitate learning, and help seniors acquire or enhance social competences. Seniors voluntarily engage in daily farm tasks, promoting psychophysical development and improving their resourcefulness in everyday activities. The scale and difficulty of tasks are tailored to each participant's functional abilities and health conditions, ensuring a balanced approach to their involvement.

Based on interviews with farm care providers, it can be concluded that participants engage in a variety of activities, from individual tasks like caring for animals, maintaining gardens and orchards, preparing meals, and making preserves, to structured, work-related tasks with schedules that promote physical activity and a sense of belonging to the local community. A key principle is that while participants are encouraged to perform activities that contribute to the farm, these tasks are not obligatory, ensuring that the focus remains on personal growth, well-being, and enjoyment (ISC1-3). Through this model, care farms have proven to be an effective means of improving seniors' well-being by offering meaningful engagement, fostering independence, and providing a supportive environment that enhances both physical and mental health (ISC2-3).

In Lubuskie, the care farms operate through a structured collaboration with social welfare centers, which manage participant recruitment (ISC1-5). These centers have detailed knowledge of the needs of lonely seniors and other vulnerable individuals in the community, making them ideal for identifying those who would benefit most from

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green care services (ISC5). The care farms offer a supervised and structured program that includes therapy, healthcare, social care, and specialized educational activities.

The farms provide three key categories of services:

1. Care and nursing – this includes assistance with basic needs such as hygiene, meals, and transportation, ensuring that seniors receive the daily support they require;
2. Activation and improvement – through individual and group therapeutic activities, participants are engaged in tasks that promote physical and mental well-being. These activities make use of the farm's resources, including working with animals, cultivating plants, and artistic endeavors, fostering inclusion and personal development;
3. Support – the farms offer informational, educational, and counseling services to assist participants with their daily challenges. This includes helping with contacts to medical services, institutions, and other organizations, as well as offering emotional and social support (ISC1-5).

In addition to these core services, the farms also organize free-time activities such as walks, handicraft workshops, and other events that preserve and promote local traditions. Participation in these green care activities occurs in small groups of up to eight people, allowing for personalized attention and fostering a sense of community among participants (IS18-20).

According to the caregivers, the operation of care farms in Lubuskie has significantly improved the well-being and self-esteem of participating seniors. As active participants, seniors have embraced the role of hosts on the farms, engaging in meaningful tasks such as welcoming guests, giving tours on the farm, and preparing meals. Their involvement extends beyond the farm, as they have established partnerships with local institutions like forestry services, where they plant trees, and educational centers, where they collaborate with children in activities like reading, baking, and creating art (ISC3; ISC4-5).

Seniors also work with a nursing home for long-term care patients, leading workshops for residents, and participate in various enriching activities, such as dance and rehabilitation classes, and educational sessions with doctors, lawyers, and police officers (ISC1; ISC2). They have learned to use the Internet, broadening their engagement with the modern world. Structured work-related tasks with set schedules help them feel a sense of purpose and belonging within the local community. However, the emphasis remains on providing seniors with activities that are meaningful and manageable, allowing them to contribute without overwhelming them with necessary tasks.

Interviews with seniors revealed that participating in these activities has significantly transformed their lives, helping them move from feelings of loneliness and a lack of purpose to active engagement. This shift has contributed to noticeable improvements in both their physical and mental well-being. This is what the respondents say about it: "We spend time very pleasantly. The days have sped up. We walk a little with the animals,

but we spend most of the day at home. Time flies here very quickly. I like activities, and I come here willingly. Here I start talking again and talking more willingly" (IS5). "A lot has changed for me. I used to be withdrawn. I would leave the house, walk around and come back. Now, I don't cry at all, but I cried a lot every day. These people here brought a lot of warmth and love to my heart. I feel good. I have never been to many places, but thanks to this farm I have been (theatre, more often hairdresser, beautician, live concert)" (IS8). They also emphasize improving health and building strong social relationships: "I am more active now. I know and can do more. I don't think about the illness; it is easier for me. I am constantly among people. Neither a book, TV, nor crossword puzzle can replace a person. I even walk better now, and it used to be difficult for me to get to the door of the farm" (IS16). Seniors constantly contact each other, after meetings and on weekends. They are support groups for each other. They call, text and meet in the afternoons. "If I don't attend a meeting, they call me right away. They also call me if I don't attend church in the afternoon and ask: what happened that you're not here? Will you be here tomorrow? They take me for walks in the evenings. Now we all know a lot about each other, and we take care of each other" (IS25).

Discussion

This article examines the potential of green care, specifically care farms, as a solution to enhance senior well-being and dignity. Focusing on the development and implementation of a care farm model in Lubuskie Province, Poland, it explores how agricultural activities combined with therapeutic practices can improve the quality of life for older adults, particularly in areas with limited traditional care options.

The study revealed that the visits effectively achieved their intended goals, primarily by raising participants' awareness of aging-related challenges and potential remedies through the use of social services. These visits not only deepened participants' understanding of seniors' needs and challenges but also provided concrete examples of how innovative care models could be applied in practice. They fostered teamwork and networking – crucial for developing care models tailored to the unique needs of rural areas in the Lubuskie Province, where traditional care options are often scarce.

A key role in this result was played by the inclusive education approach, which emphasizes the value of diversity as a strength. This approach empowered participants to constructively engage with differences, fostering an environment of mutual learning and collaboration (Tomlinson, 2016; Kaufmann et al., 2016). The study visits also provided opportunities for participants to explore diverse perspectives and engage with real-world challenges in ways that traditional classroom-based education cannot replicate (Frątczak-Müller & Mielczarek-Żejmo, 2023). By immersing participants in

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real-life contexts, the visits encouraged them to critically reflect on their own practices and assumptions, inspiring innovative solutions and fostering a greater sense of empathy and respect for diversity.

Furthermore, the hands-on nature of these visits allowed participants to actively engage with the complexities of implementing care services, including navigating logistical challenges, building relationships with stakeholders, and addressing the specific needs of seniors. This experiential learning process not only enhanced their understanding but also equipped them with practical skills to apply in their own professional contexts. As a result, the study visits emerged as a powerful tool for bridging the gap between theory and practice, offering valuable insights into the development of effective and inclusive care models (Montero, 2017; Frątczak-Müller, Krzaczkowska & Jedynak, 2021).

Moreover, the results highlighted the importance of collaboration between different sectors in organizing these visits, both for participants and host organizations. This interdisciplinary cooperation improved the educational outcomes by fostering knowledge sharing and allowing participants to reinterpret and enhance the information they gathered (Folke, Colding & Berkes, 2003; Granados & Knoke, 2005). These visits enabled the development of more appropriate solutions for the Lubuskie Province by incorporating diverse perspectives. Additionally, the study showed that intersectoral collaboration improved the flexibility of organizational methods as organizations shared knowledge and experiences.

The findings also underscored the effectiveness of study visits as a dynamic educational tool. Participants highlighted the value of learning directly from the creators of solutions, observing firsthand where and how these were developed. They also pointed out the efficiency of adopting proven solutions, which saved resources and made this form of education highly effective (Glaser et al., 2021). Thus, these study visits demonstrated their potential as a transformative educational tool, capable of inspiring systemic improvements in rural care services.

The results also indicate that after a year of operation, care farms in Lubuskie Province serve as an effective "social inclusion" strategy, which centers on engaging seniors in meaningful, manageable activities that enhance their self-perception and well-being (Sempik, Hine & Wilcox eds., 2010). The key elements of this strategy include:

1. Involvement in everyday work – seniors are actively engaged in simple, farm-related tasks and everyday responsibilities, from gardening and cooking to caring for animals;
2. Autonomy in decision-making – seniors have the freedom to decide what activities they will participate in, at what time, and to what extent. This flexibility allows them to work within their own physical and emotional capacities;

3. Focus on simple activities – tasks are designed to be straightforward, fostering a sense of accomplishment without overwhelming the participants.

The aim of this approach is to foster a positive self-image among seniors. By performing simple, everyday tasks successfully, seniors gain confidence in their abilities, which enhances their overall sense of agency (Danna & Griffin, 1999). This increased self-efficacy has significant implications. Seniors who believe in their capabilities are more likely to set higher aspirations and take on more challenging tasks, which in turn further boosts their self-esteem, self-respect, and motivation (Balibar, 2005). The cyclical nature of this process acts like a feedback loop: as seniors become more engaged and confident, they continue to seek out new challenges, which further reinforces their sense of capability and reduces stress. This creates a positive cycle of growth in both personal and social spheres (Leck, Upton & Evans, 2013).

The general effects observed so far as a result of farm activity include increased self-esteem and engagement. Seniors have developed a more positive self-perception, leading to changes in behavior through greater engagement and openness (Murray et al., 2019). They are more proactive and take initiative in their communities. Additionally, shifting community attitudes are noticeable in their statements. The environment's attitude towards seniors has shifted. They are no longer seen as passive recipients of care but are recognized as active, contributing members of the local community. This fosters greater respect and inclusivity. Thus, the study provides evidence that the principles of green care have helped these individuals regain self-esteem and a sense of value through their contributions, fostering a new sense of purpose and connection (Hemingway, Ellis-Hill & Norton, 2016; Murray et al., 2019). Examples of this change can be seen in cooperation with care centers for the terminally ill, or social welfare centers that care for children from dysfunctional families. The role of seniors in establishing intergenerational relationships was assessed as really significant.

However, limitations of the study should be acknowledged. The research focused exclusively on three care farms during their first year of operation. This limited scope may not capture the full range of potential outcomes or challenges associated with care farms in other regions or at different stages of development. Additionally, the findings are based on a relatively small sample size, which may limit their generalizability. Further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of care farms and their applicability across diverse contexts. Expanding the study to include a broader range of farms and more varied participant groups would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and adaptability of care farms as a social inclusion strategy.

Conclusions

The study analyzed the principles behind RCSP's implementation of study visits to develop care farms in the Lubuskie Voivodeship. Using content analysis and unstructured interviews, the study explored the goals, organization, educational methods, and outcomes of these visits. It emphasized the role of mobile education and inclusive learning in creating a respectful and practical approach to elderly care.

The findings indicate that study visits influence the development of solutions to social problems, encouraging participants to engage with local communities and implement changes. Additionally, integrating green care with senior services has proven beneficial, helping seniors regain confidence and purpose while fostering a more inclusive, community-centered care model. These results from care farms highlight the potential for further advances in senior care, blending social and therapeutic dimensions.

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