

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Co-designing green social care services: Farmers and social entrepreneurs as new social care providers for vulnerable populations

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Background: Local health and social care partnerships that stimulate community engagement of vulnerable populations are promising for health promotion. In the Netherlands, some of these partnerships include in addition to stakeholders from the health and social care sector, also stakeholders from the green, agricultural and voluntary sector. Examples are green care farms, farms that combine agricultural activities with social care and support services, e.g. day services for people with dementia and supported workplaces for vulnerable populations such as vulnerable youth and people with mental health problems or intellectual disabilities. Clients, or participants in the vocabulary of care farmers, are involved in agricultural production and farm-related activities. In addition to these initiatives in rural areas, an increasing number of green social care services is developed in urban settings. Examples are community gardens, green enterprises and urban farms. These initiatives are embraced by many municipalities because they aim to empower vulnerable populations and stimulate social participation. They are characterized by meaningful activities with plants and animals and an informal open atmosphere facilitated by a person-centred approach of the professionals and volunteers involved. Initiators of the green social care services design these services in collaboration with stakeholders such as participants, professionals and volunteers involved in the initiative and/or the community.

During the last decade, researchers, farmers, social entrepreneurs, care organizations and municipalities collaborated to get a better understanding of the experiences with and impact of these green urban and rural initiatives. Although the initiatives are promising, they face many challenges and more knowledge is needed about their reach and impact and on individuals, communities and organizations.

Aims and objectives: The aims of our workshop are to: 1. give an overview of the different types of green rural and urban initiatives, and how vulnerable citizens and communities are empowered and engaged respectively within these initiatives and 2. share the lessons learned

from the different initiatives so far, e.g. the major obstacles for collaboration, how innovative initiatives gain legitimacy and access to funding and what conventional social care providers can learn from these initiatives.

Format: During this session, we will present findings of different research projects on green care farms and green urban and initiatives offering services such as rehabilitation of different groups of vulnerable citizens and adult day services for people with dementia. Initiators of different types of initiatives will present their experiences and main challenges. After that, we will discuss the following topics with the audience: 1. What is the value of these initiatives?; 2. What is necessary to increase their impact and tackle challenges they are facing? and 3. To what extent is it feasible to implement such initiatives in other countries?

Target audience: The workshop is targeted at researchers, policy-makers and practitioners who want to know more about innovative initiatives such as green social care services.

Learnings: Participants obtain insight in green social care initiatives and their potential impact on wellbeing, participation and empowerment of different vulnerable populations. They will have learned about challenges initiators are facing and how these may be solved.

Keywords: care farms; green citizen initiatives; communities; vulnerable populations
