



Understanding Care Farming as a Swiftly Developing Sector in the Netherlands

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Summary

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Background

Care farming or social farming, a swiftly developing sector across Europe, is an innovative practice in which agricultural production is combined with health and social services. It is an innovation at the crossroads of agriculture and health care, with the agricultural sector actively involved in providing care to different client groups. This study focuses on the Netherlands, where the number of care farms has increased from 75 in 1998 to more than 1100 in 2014. Many care farms were initiated by farmers and their spouses, while a smaller number was initiated by (former) employees of the care sector who had an interest in starting their own care farm, independent of the established care organizations. Care farms are successful examples of multifunctional agriculture and societization of care. I selected the Netherlands for this study because it is one of the leading countries in terms of the absolute number of care farms and because of my involvement in this developing sector, which allowed me to obtain a good picture of its development. In comparison to other countries, care farming has developed into a sector with an extensive support structure and diversity of initiatives, making makes the Netherlands an interesting case to study.

It is surprising that the care farming sector was able to develop so quickly. Research into multifunctional agriculture shows that it is challenging for farmers to diversify and initiate new non-agricultural activities. Many farmers feel unable to establish inter-sectoral collaboration. Previous generations of farmers focused on the intensification and enlargement of agricultural production. It is a huge challenge for many farmers to take the other road of diversification and collaboration with other sectors. The first care farmers were newcomers to the care sector, pioneers and innovators who faced challenges like a lack of cognitive and socio-political legitimacy and a mismatch with financing structures in the health care sector.

The aim of this study is to understand how the care farming sector was able to develop so quickly in the Netherlands. It is an important question, because care farming initiatives can contribute significantly to the development of rural areas and farming communities. This question has a broader societal impact as, for many innovations, the issue is how to create value by combining two different sectors, as is the case for care farming. The biggest challenges in developing the new sector are bridging the gap between two worlds that have become disconnected, the development of legitimacy, setting up professional organizations and a sustainable financing structure for care farm services.

I use transition theory and the multi-level perspective (MLP) in particular as a theoretical framework to understand challenges and developments of the care farming sector. MLP is a widely used framework to understand the development and challenges of system innovations like care farming. In the MLP perspective, system innovation is conceptualized as a resultant of changes at three levels influencing each other: niche innovations, regimes and landscapes. A niche innovation, like care farming, is an innovation at the micro level that lacks support from structures and regulations within the existing regime. The regime refers to dominant practices and shared rules, resources and routines, which typically reproduce themselves. In this way, they can be an obstacle to systematic

changes. The landscape level forms a broad exogenous environment that lies beyond the immediate influence of regime and niche actors. Changing opinions in society (landscape level) can lead to pressures on existing regimes. MLP can be helpful in understanding interactions between actors and existing and new structures in the care and agricultural sectors.

While MLP has been widely and successfully used as a framework for understanding transitions, there are some aspects that are not well understood or that require more attention. It has been argued that more attention should be given to agency. In addition, it has been acknowledged that not enough attention has been paid to interactions across system boundaries and multi-regime interactions. A scientific aim of this research is to enrich MLP by increasing our understanding of the role of agency and specific challenges associated with innovations connecting different domains. I enrich agency by connecting MLP with entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship and collective action. My research question is whether these concepts are useful to better understand agency. In addition, I focus on strategies of actors to deal with challenges associated with innovations that connect different domains.

Methodology and development of the care farming sector

This is an exploratory research in which I study and analyze different types of initiatives. The exploratory character requires an interactive approach where broad theoretical notions are related to empirical findings. I chose a qualitative approach in which I focus on different types of cases. I was in the position to study the development of the sector very closely for the last 15 years. The advantage is that I have a good overview of the relevant actors and initiatives in the development of the sector. I have used information from different actors (from the agricultural and care sector) and different sources to optimize the reliability of the findings. This study is composed of different chapters.

In the first chapter, I describe the development of the care farming sector and the most important initiatives at a local, regional and national level. The support of the ministries of healthcare and agriculture was important as it led to the initiation of the National Support Centre of Agriculture and Care in 1999. The Support Centre initiated a website, database of care farms and a quality system. Their activities increased familiarity with care farming and acceptance on the part of the care sector. MLP was helpful in understanding the interactions between actors and existing structures and how changes at landscape level like the liberalization of the care sector and the increasing influence of the client movement led to changes in the care regime, which was helpful in the development of the care farming sector, which was stimulated by the introduction of personal budgets (pbg's) for clients and the possibilities for regional organizations of care farmers to obtain an AWBZ accreditation. Due to these developments, care farms became less dependent on the support of care organizations to finance the care farm services and new types of care farms developed with new types of client groups. Social movement theory was helpful in understanding how care farmers collaborated and what strategies they used to acquire support. Initially the care farm sector presented itself as a counter movement. Its legitimacy increased by different strategic actions like the development of a quality system for care farms and collaboration with conventional care organizations, Care farmers framed themselves as good examples of the desired societization of the care sector and of multifunctional agriculture.

In the second chapter, I describe and analyze the development of a successful example of three different types of initiatives: a) an individual care farm initiative, b) a regional organization of care farms and c) a collaboration between a care organization and a group of farmers at a regional level. The analysis of these initiatives resulted in a number of hypotheses: i) entrepreneurial behavior is

needed to develop a care farm successfully, ii) institutional entrepreneurship is needed to develop a regional organization of care farms successfully. Initiators combine entrepreneurial behavior with institutional tasks like the development of a professional organization and iii) implementation in the care organization is the main challenge for a successful collaboration between a group of farmers and a care organization.

In chapter three, I develop a typology for care farms. The dimensions I used are based on organizational theory: degree of collaboration with care organizations, ratio between agriculture and care and the background of the initiator (locus of entrepreneurship). Collaboration is a strategy for dealing with uncertainty. The ratio between agriculture and care is an indicator of the degree of multi-functionality. Background (agriculture, care or neither) influences strategy and the degree of multi-functionality the initiator chooses. The typology is useful to characterize different types of care farms. Most care farms were developed by farmers or their spouses.

In chapter four, I selected successful and less successful examples of different types of care farms. Among them are both pioneers who lacked cognitive and socio-political legitimacy, a mismatch with financing structures and supporting organizations, and later entrants when care farming was generally accepted. For these later entrants, financing the care farm services was less of a problem, due to the introduction of personal budgets for clients (pbg's) and the accreditation of regional organizations of care farms who supported starting care farmers. In the first period, commitment and entrepreneurial behavior were crucial to success. At later periods, farmers who did not have the ambition to organize all aspects of the care business themselves started a care farm due to the support of regional organizations of care farmers or the support of care organizations interested in collaborating with farmers. The pioneers developed to care farms with extensive care activities (strong multi-functionality). At later phases, an increasing number of care farms developed with limited care activities (weak multi-functionality). Care farm initiatives with weak multi-functionality failed more often than initiatives with strong multi-functionality, due to unrealistic expectations and a limited commitment on the part of the initiators.

In the final two chapters, I focus on regional collaboration and regional support structures for care farmers, mainly to analyze the requirements for these collaborations to be successful.

In chapter five, I focus on two different types of regional organizations of care farms, both with an AWBZ accreditation, which enabled them to organize the financing of the care farm services on care farms that were member of the organization. I describe how two different strategies designed to establish regional organizations of care farms unfold and are translated into entrepreneurial behavior, organizational identity and legitimacy, and help provide access to budgets of the care sector. In the first case, an entrepreneur took the initiative for the regional organization. He invited farmers to join his initiative. His philosophy is that farmers focus on agricultural production and providing services to the clients, while the regional organization takes care of all other tasks. He was very successful in gaining institutional and innovative legitimacy in and extracting a variety of financial resources from the care sector and municipalities, from which farmers benefited. The organization was considered innovative and trustworthy, thanks to the entrepreneurial behavior of the initiator, who continuously identified and created opportunities and transformed them into new business propositions. He set up a professional organization and hired employees with expertise of (the procedures of) the care sector and a focus on clients instead of on farmers, which was important to gain institutional legitimacy. The other regional organization encountered more challenges and problems in the starting phase. The organization started as a collaboration between existing care farmers. The philosophy was that central coordination should remain limited and that care farmers

should be stimulated to develop their own entrepreneurship. Challenges in the starting phase were a lack of entrepreneurial behavior on the part of the organization (care farmers focused on their individual farms) and limited knowledge of procedures in the care sector. In the second phase, the organization became more successful, after some dedicated care farmers decided to invest in the organization and take the lead. Entrepreneurial behavior and strategically aligning the healthcare and agricultural sectors, and building both institutional and innovative legitimacy in the care sector was crucial to the successful development of regional organizations of care farms.

In the last chapter, I focus on regional collaboration between care organizations and groups of farmers at regional level. Some initiatives were taken by employees of the care sector, others by employees of agricultural organizations. They established a collaboration between a care organization and farmers, where the farmers could start care activities without having to invest a lot of time and energy. In this collaboration process, commitment, knowledge and boundary spanning behavior (the ability to connect separated sectors) were important elements for success. Support from the top management of the care organization was a precondition for a successful collaboration and implementation of the care farm services in the care organization. Care organizations adopted different types of logics. Motivations of care organizations to collaborate with farmers were a desire for more entrepreneurship and new services that match changing demands from clients. In one case, the collaboration failed because the care organization adopted a different logic, with a focus on quality protocols. The manager was hesitant about collaboration, as she could not control the quality of the care services on farms. Moreover, she did not recognize the added value of farms to her clients.

MLP as a framework to understand the development of the care farming sector

I use MLP as a framework to understand the development of the care farming sector in the Netherlands. MLP is a useful framework for understanding why regime changes took place. It provides insight into how pressures at a landscape level and from niches on the dominant regimes resulted in regime changes, offering opportunities to the care farming sector, and how new regime elements were created. Pressures at a landscape level on the care regime were the increasing liberalization, societization of care with a focus on participation and the potential of clients. Pressures on the agricultural regime were environmental concern, food safety, animal welfare and decreasing income. All this resulted in support for the care farming sector from the ministries of healthcare and agriculture. With financial support from both ministries, the National Support Centre for Agriculture and Care was set up. Pressures on dominant regimes resulted in regime changes. The increasing pressure from client movements resulted in the introduction and broadening of the pgb's, which increased the independence of clients and enabled farmers to enter into direct contracts with clients without being dependent on accredited care organizations. The liberalization of the care sector made it possible for regional organizations of care farmers to obtain an AWBZ accreditation and enter into contracts with health insurance companies to fund the care services.

The National Support Centre, the regional organizations of care farmers and the collaboration between care organizations and groups of farmers are examples of new regime elements that stimulated the development of the care farming sector. The introduction of the quality system for care farmers and the development of regional organizations of care farmers into professional organizations increased the cognitive and socio-political legitimacy of the care farming sector, which was supported by important regime players from the care and the agricultural sector because care farming was seen as one of the ways to solve problems in the care sector and in the agricultural sector. In MLP

terminology, the development of the care farming sector is an example of how structure and agency influence each other and work in the same direction, and of how new supportive structures develop that make the environment more benign for the development of the care farming sector. The activities of the actors involved in regime changes and actors in the care farming sector connected to each other and connected to exogenous developments at a landscape level, like the societization of care and liberalization. This development can be described as a flywheel of mutual reinforcing actions at a local, regional and national level. It is a clear example of what is called “dual track governance”: the actions of different actors are related to and reinforce each other. Agents recognize the ways in which their efforts may be fruitfully related to each other as well as to exogenous developments. A new contribution of this study is that this “dual track governance” involves activities of regime actors from two distinct sectors, presenting the niche innovation of care farming as a solution for two different sectors. The care farming sector has developed from a limited number of isolated initiatives in the 1990's to a sector with professional organizations at a regional and national level, a diversity of different types of care farms and legitimacy in the care sector and in society. I expect that the investments in professionalism and diversity in client groups and types of care farms, and the support structures that have been developed provide a good starting point for meeting future challenges.

Scientific contribution: enrichment of MLP

One of the aims of this study is to enrich MLP. Although MLP appeared to be a useful framework for understanding the developments of the care farming sector, additional concepts were needed to deepen our insight. Various studies indicated that agency was not well described and understood in MLP and more insight is needed into the role of agency in MLP and the specific challenges connected to interactions across system boundaries.

Better understanding of agency

My first contribution is in better understanding agency; the role of different proactive actors and the behavior that made them successful. Entrepreneurship literature is helpful in understanding why initiators of care farms were successful, especially in the pioneering phase. The pioneers and innovators required a proactive attitude: discovering and creating opportunities and developing them into innovative care services (valuable business propositions). These services met the opportunities of care farmers and the huge demand from society for these innovative services. Especially in the pioneering phase, strategic behavior and an effective network that can be used to reach their objectives were important success factors. Insights from institutional entrepreneurship are helpful in understanding how regional organizations of care farmers could develop successfully. Initiators combined entrepreneurial behavior (leading to innovative legitimacy) with institutional tasks, like the development of a professional organization that is accepted in the care sector (leading to institutional legitimacy). Social movement theory is helpful in understanding how collective action was organized. Pioneers united themselves into an organization with a strong identity of a counterculture that was critical of mainstream agriculture and mainstream care. This movement developed into a broader organization that looked for a connection with changes in both the care and the agricultural sectors.

This study showed how niche and regime influenced each other. Niche actors made use of possibilities that occurred due to changes at a regime level and stimulated further changes at that regime level.

Insights into specific challenges of innovations across system boundaries

The specific context of this innovation, developing between and on top of two established sectors, addresses some additional challenges that need to be better understood to gain a solid understanding of the development of the care farming sector. The way actors dealt with those challenges resulted in new insights that enrich MLP.

The challenge of connecting two different sectors led to the insight that some actors were well-equipped to fulfill a 'boundary spanning' task. Many successful initiatives were taken by persons with a background in both health care and agriculture. Many farmers' spouses had an education and working experience in health care. Their hybrid identity and network was very helpful in bridging the agricultural and care sectors.

A second challenge is the lack of cognitive and socio-political legitimacy on the part of newcomers in an established sector such as the care sector. Newcomers had to be innovative and at the same time meet the requirements and expectations of the care sector.

A third challenge is becoming embedded in the care sector and finding established partners in the care sector that are open to innovation and collaboration. This study gives insight into the motivations of care organizations for collaborating with farmers.

The final challenge is dealing with conflicting logics implicit in the care regime as well as in the agricultural regime. Established organizations respond differently to pressure on the regime: some stuck to more institutional logics, like formal quality protocols and accountability, while others adopted a new and more entrepreneurial logic, like meeting the challenges of societalization of care services. In the latter case, collaboration with farmers is a logical step. In the agricultural sector, some established actors stuck to the logic that agricultural production rather than providing care services had to remain the leading activity. For niche actors, it is important to identify regime actors who adopted a logic that favors collaboration.

Concluding

I conclude that this study provides a description of the development of the care farming sector and provides insight into how this sector could develop so fast, and the role that different actors, pressures at landscape level and changes at regime level played in this process. This study provides insight into how entrepreneurial and institutional orientations of actors influenced developments in the care farming sector, reflecting the duality of challenges facing institutional entrepreneurs and the care farming sector to be innovative and trustful by meeting all the relevant requirements and expectations simultaneously. This study contributes to transition literature, and specifically the multi-level perspective, by i) developing a better understanding of agency and ii) increasing insight into specific challenges associated with innovations across system boundaries. This study is not only important to the care farming sector, but also provides valuable insights into other innovations developing between existing sectors, for instance other branches of multifunctional agriculture. Care farming is not only an example of multifunctional agriculture, but also of a new entrepreneurial model of agriculture. It is important to the development of agriculture and rural areas and connecting rural and urban areas and provides agricultural entrepreneurs with an interesting alternative to the traditional agro-industrial model of agriculture.