

3.4 Building networks and partnerships



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Lesson structure

- Why
- What form of cooperation
- Network: definition, form, limits, example
- Partnership: definition, form, limits, example
- Comparison and conclusion





"Agenda 2030 invites businesses, institutions, and citizens to create shared value by generating positive environmental, social, and economic impacts that go beyond individual profit."



In a context like agriculture, where the social and community dimension is increasingly central, collaboration is essential



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What form of cooperation?



Multiple companies commit to structured collaboration in order to enhance their innovation capacity, competitiveness, and access to new markets, by pursuing one or more common objectives



Multiple actors – public, private, or from the third sector – who combine resources, expertise, and responsibilities to achieve shared goals, often within complex, social, or territorial projects



Network

It is a tool capable of connecting different entities and their specific competencies to create synergies and cooperation opportunities to strengthen their competitiveness.



It becomes a powerful development tool for businesses when it includes activities:

- **cost reduction**
- **increased market positioning**
- **sharing a growth path**

The companies in the network maintain their operational autonomy, continuing their activities, but cooperate when the market demands a product from the network



How to create a network?

Network - Contract



- This is the simplest form: companies collaborate based on a contract, without creating a new legal entity.
- It does not have its own legal personality.
- The companies maintain full autonomy and jointly manage only the shared aspects.

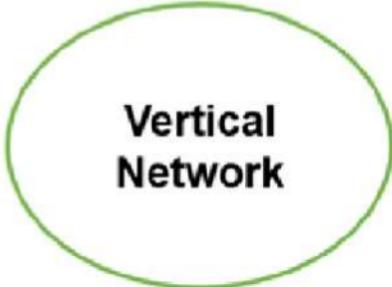
Network - Entity



- Involves the creation of an autonomous legal entity, with its own tax code and assets.
- It can sign contracts, open a bank account, and hire employees.
- The member companies delegate part of the shared management to this entity.



How to create a network?



**Vertical
Network**



- Involve companies operating at different stages of the same production chain.
- The aim is to integrate production, improve overall quality, ensure traceability, and reduce costs.



**Horizontal
Network**



- Involve companies from the same sector or performing similar activities.
- The main goal is to strengthen market position, share resources, make collective purchases, engage in joint promotion, and foster innovation.



Key elements of the network contract

1. **Shared Strategic Objectives:** companies must define what they aim to achieve together (e.g., innovation, internationalization, sustainability...).
2. **Network Program (Action Plan):** the specific activities the companies will carry out to reach the shared goals, including roles and operational methods.
3. **Rights and Obligations of the Participants:** what each company commits to do and respect within the network.
4. **Contract Duration:** the period during which the network agreement will be valid.



Key elements of the network contract

4. Rules for Admitting New Participants: the procedures and conditions under which new members can join the network.

5. Governance and Decision-Making Structure: how the network is managed, including leadership roles, decision-making bodies, or a lead company.

6. Common Financial Fund (Optional): a shared fund that companies can create to finance common activities.

7. Responsibility: each company is generally responsible for its own actions, unless otherwise agreed.



Limitation

- **Registration in the business register:** neither public entities nor foreign companies are allowed to participate.
- **Challenges in accessing public or private funding:** Without legal personality, some grants or funding programs may not recognize the network as an eligible applicant.
- **Risk of internal competition:** Member companies may still be in competition with each other in other markets or product lines.
- **Risk of weak participation:** Without strong coordination or clear benefits, some members may contribute little, which can weaken the effectiveness of the network.



Limitation

- **Lack of legal personality (in the contract-based model):** In its simplest form, the network contract does not create a separate legal entity, which may limit operations (e.g., difficulties in opening bank accounts, hiring staff, or signing contracts on behalf of the network).
- **Individual liability:** Each company is responsible only for its own obligations, and not for those of the network or other members—unless otherwise agreed.
- **Complex management:** Coordinating multiple companies, with different cultures and goals, requires time and resources, especially during the startup phase.



A Network for the Social Farming



The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the website 'Coltiviamo Agricoltura Sociale'. The URL in the address bar is 'https://www.coltiviamoagricolturasociale.it/progetti-2018/volta-terra-societa-agricola-sol-care/'. The website has a green header with the logo 'Coltiviamo Agricoltura Sociale' and navigation links: 'Bandi', 'Progetti', 'Faq', 'Privacy Policy', 'Comunicati Stampa', and 'Edizioni Precedenti'. The main content area features a large photo of a group of people working in a field, followed by the title 'Volta la Terra Società Agricola srl SolCare - SOIL and SOCIAL CARE'. Below the title are social media sharing buttons for Facebook and Twitter. The 'Descrizione' section contains the following text:

Un modello di Agricoltura Sostenibile, che mette al centro il Lavoro e la Cura verso chi fa più fatica a trovare la sua autonomia e verso l'Ambiente, al fine di generare Relazioni costruttive tra persone, organizzazioni e istituzioni, in vista del bene comune.

I valori che caratterizzano la nostra presenza sul territorio come aziende agricole sono la multifunzionalità, l'alta qualità, il rispetto e la cura dell'ambiente, l'innovazione, la responsabilità sociale e l'attenzione al benessere delle persone. Il progetto SolCare vuole scommettere anche sulla cooperazione, per fare agricoltura sociale "insieme" e costruire una solida rete e collaborazioni stabili con i servizi locali, i consumatori, giovani e anziani.



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Partnership

A **partnership** is a form of collaboration between multiple entities, public, private, third sector, or mixed, that pool resources, expertise, responsibilities, and objectives to carry out **shared projects**, often of a social, cultural, territorial, or environmental nature.



Purpose of the Partnership

- Maximize the impact of actions through cooperation between different actors.
- Combine complementary expertise to tackle complex challenges.
- Promote effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability in projects.
- Respond to public or private funding calls that require collaborative forms.



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How to create a partnership?

Public-Private (PPP)



- Involves public entities and private actors.
- Goal: to implement public works or services with private resources and know-how.

Local or Territorial Partnership



- Involves stakeholders operating in the same area (e.g., municipalities, schools, cooperatives...).
- Goal: local development, social inclusion, urban regeneration, social farming.



Limitation

- **Complexity in management:** requires coordination, communication, and shared tools.
- **Cultural and organizational differences between partners:** may slow down decision-making processes.
- **Asymmetry between partners:** risks of imbalances between stronger and weaker entities.
- **Lack of continuity:** if the partnership is created only for a specific call, it may be unsustainable over time.
- **Divergent objectives:** not all partners always have the same level of interest or motivation.





A Partnership for the Social Farming



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Comparison and Conclusion

	Network (Business Network Contract)	Partnership
Legal status	Formal contract; creates a legal entity without autonomy	May be formal or informal; often non-autonomous cooperation
Objective	Improve competitiveness, innovation, and coordination	Achieve common goals for a specific project or program
Duration	Typically long-term and strategic	Often project-based or temporary
Structure	Defined roles, shared governance possible	May have a lead partner, but roles vary
Flexibility	Moderate: structured agreements and rules	High: adaptable depending on project needs
Decision-making	Based on collective governance or appointed body	Often depends on a lead organization
Stakeholder type	Usually private entities (businesses, farms)	Can include public, private, and third sector actors
Funding access	Eligible for specific funding (e.g. RDP measures)	Often required in EU-funded projects (e.g. Erasmus+, Horizon)
Example in social farming	A network of farms sharing tools, knowledge, and training	A partnership between a farm, a coop, and a municipality



Thank you for the attention

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