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## **Theoretical conception of the qualitative analysis about care farming in Austria and the Netherlands**

**Abstract:** *The aim of this paper is to describe the conception of the research especially the theoretical conception. Furthermore, the research focus will be exemplified through the description of first empirical results. Care farming can be named innovation because taking on social duties is “relatively” new for farmers. Before industrialisation people with special needs were often integrated at farms. At the present time care farming starts to become important again as a part of multifunctional agriculture. Care farming offers rehabilitation, therapy, care or pedagogic for people with special needs by working in an agricultural surrounding. The target group can be manifold; it ranges from children to elderly, from long-term unemployed to mentally or physically disabled people. This article focuses on current social developments, especially in rural regions. Through the comparison between Austria and the Netherlands it will be possible to gain a new insight into the development of innovative practices because both countries are in different development stages regarding this innovation. There will be a special focus on the process of innovation and on influencing social networks. Social networks mean relations between actors. Furthermore, the existence of relations allow the exchange of information or the transaction of practical, emotional or financial support which could influence the development of the innovation. Based on the idea that social networks highly influence the process of innovation, I will focus on these by using qualitative network analysis. The research focus is quite complex because micro and macro perspective will be combined by using the theory of structuration by Giddens. The micro level will be investigated empirically by focusing on single care farming projects while the macro perspective will be taken into account by applying a comparative approach and by interviewing care-farming experts. Combined with literature review this will help to understand why the surroundings for the development of innovative practice are diverse in different countries and how they influence the behaviour of care farmers.*

*To sum up, the main focus of this paper is on the description of the care farming sector in Austria and the Netherlands and on the explanation of the research focus in this project. Furthermore, there will be an illustration of the theoretical*

*framework which will be used in this research, how different theories are connected and why the theoretical focus will be helpful to understand the development of innovative practice.*

**Keywords:** *care farming, social innovation, social networks*

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## Introduction

Agricultural society has to cope with big challenges because of technical progress and the increasing competition through globalisation of markets as well as the restructured agricultural policy (cf. Wiesinger 2005). Organisational and contentual restructuration of agriculture is a result of decreasing financial support for agriculture in Europe from national governments and the European Union. A lot of current scientific work shows the increasing importance of multifunctional agriculture (cf. Knickel and Renting 2000; Randall 2002; cf. Van Huylensbroeck and Durand 2003). Multifunctional agriculture can be seen as an answer to the above-mentioned changes of farming society. In this conceptual paper I will focus on care farming which is a part of multifunctional agriculture. Care farming means that care, rehabilitation or integration of socially disadvantaged or people with special needs is provided in an agricultural surrounding. The target group is physically and/or mentally disabled, long-term-unemployed, immigrants, former drug addicts, former delinquents, adolescents with difficulties to integrate in social life, elderly and children (cf. Hassink 2007, 88).

This special offer from agriculture meets the current need for calm places, which are distinguished by a close touch with nature and simplicity. Furthermore, through the individualization in our globalizing world, choices and pressure to perform are increasing. The Western world has to cope with a lot of new diseases, for instance the burn-out-syndrome. The rehabilitation of people with burn-out-syndrome often demands a decrease of the speed of life; rehabilitation can be supported by going back to nature. Additionally, we are facing a superannuation of the population and a migration of young people from the countryside. This leads to new problems, for instance a need of places to care for the elderly, the loss of working places because shops, post offices, pubs and taverns in the countryside are closed. Moreover, the maintenance of landscape is not guaranteed because of a decreasing agricultural society. Care farming seems to be the right answer to contemporary problems in society, because it offers a revitalization of agriculture and the rural region as well new forms of reintegration for people with special needs. But it is necessary to scrutinize this topic critically, too. It has to be proved that clients are adequately provided for and that farmers profit economically and also emotionally and/or socially. Agriculture can offer society a special surrounding and new forms to relax, to live or to rehabilitate. The connection of agricultural duties and social duties could increase the social status of farmers and positively influence farmer's identification with their profession. Moreover, it could increase the number of

people interested in working at a farm. However, the short description of current developments shows the importance of supporting innovative forces to make sure that society will be able to overcome these new challenges. Among other projects, care farming can be an auspicious practice to answer to outcomes of social change.

## Development and Definition of Care Farming

The SoFar research group has been trying to investigate strengths and weaknesses as well as possibilities to develop institutional surroundings for supporting care farming (cf. SoFar-research-group 2007). Through Cost Action, researchers from Europe try to exchange their knowledge about care farming and to coordinate new research projects in this field. Initial results from the “Report Farming for Health” and the exposé of the Cost Action show that France (>1200) and the Netherlands (>700) are the leading countries in care farming in Europe (cf. Hassink 2007, 47). Slovenia and Ireland are the tail-lights and Austria seems to be around average with about 250 Care Farming projects (cf. SoFar-research-group 2007, 46 et seq.). An expert (Wiesinger 2008) argues that the data is still nothing more than estimation for some countries. The situation is unclear in most of the countries as projects are not numbered or centrally registered.

A comparison of European countries and the United States of America shows that the term “Farming for Health” is understood diversely. Hassink and van Dijk categorize projects as “Green Care Farms” that “represent a working environment where a diversity of target groups is performing meaningful activities“. Green Care projects mainly exist in the Netherlands, Norway, Italy, Belgium, Slovenia and Switzerland. A second category is „Horticultural therapy, therapeutic horticulture, healing gardens and healing landscapes“. „Plants, horticulture, gardens and landscapes are used in therapy or in a recreative setting in order to improve well-being or to reach predefined goals“. Horticultural therapy is predominantly practised in Great Britain and Sweden. In Finland the third category “Animal – assisted therapy, education and activities” is common practice. “Animals are used in therapy or in a recreational or educational setting in order to improve well-being or to reach pre-defined goals”. American projects are positioned between horticultural and animal assisted therapy while Germany and Austria practices care farming projects from all categories (cf. Hassink and van Dijk 2006, 347 et seq.).

## Differences in Care Farming between Austria and the Netherlands and Research Questions

### Organisations involved in care farming

The development of care farming has been governmentally supported in the Netherlands since the 1990ies. Different ministries are working together to

professionalize and to support the development of care farming. Due to this political support the innovative cooperation between the social/care and the agricultural sector increased (cf. Roest and Hassink 2007). According to Elings and Hassink around 80% of care farmers in the Netherlands are members of the „Association of Green Care Farmers“. This club was established in 1999 to support and to represent interests of this special group of farmers. Furthermore, the Netherlands has many local green care groups that offer a strong support for farmers in some regions. The total number of members of these local groups is unknown but the groups are aimed at supporting the exchange of knowledge, making sure care farmers get a fair income and ensuring the quality of projects. The „National Support Centre“ is a non-profit organisation financially supported by the Ministry for Agriculture, the Ministry for Social Affairs and the Ministry for Health. The organisations' aim is to facilitate people from the social and agricultural sector as well as supply clients with information about supply and demand in care farming. Omslag is an organization responsible for education in the care farming field and for organizing conferences as well as stimulating public debates about care farming (cf. Elings and Hassink 2006, 170 et seqq.).

In Austria there are only a few existing organisations which support social farming. The College for Agriculture- and Environmental Pedagogic offers training in garden therapy and is cooperating with a geriatric hospital to do garden therapy in practice. Furthermore, there has been a club for garden therapy for around three years. The Austrian Council for Agricultural Engineering and Rural Development (Österreichisches Kuratorium für Landtechnik und Landentwicklung) offers a course in animal assisted therapy and pedagogic. They have also been doing research in health effects of care farming and developed guidelines for animal assisted therapy. Besides, they accompanied the course “elderly care at the farm”. The club “Animal as Therapy” (TAT) also offers education in animal assisted therapy. The Federal Institute for Less Favoured and Mountain Areas (Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen) has been doing research in care farming. Altogether, there are only a few experts, research projects and practical projects related to care farming existent in Austria. Moreover, there are only a few institutions that support the professionalization of care farming. We do not have a Green Care Association or local clubs that represent the interest of care farmers. The terms “Care Farming” or “Green Care” are still widely unknown in Austrian society; neither care farmers themselves nor potential clients understand care farming as a profession.

## The structural organisation of care farming

In the Netherlands care farms can be a part of a health or social institute or a part of an activity or day centre. Furthermore, green care farms can get an accreditation through which they reach the status of a health centre. They are either in an official cooperation with a health or social centres or work independently. Independent care farms and their clients have direct contact and are privately financed in the Netherlands (cf. Elings and Hassink 2006, 173).

They often started at different points in time and do have different aims and programmes (cf. Elings, Hassink and Ketelaars 2003). Some regions support quality rather than quantity by offering education in care farming. Financial support is decreasing and there is a trend to liberalization. Some forms of support will be stopped in the near future, for instance the National Support Centre will be closed (cf. Elings and Hassink 2006, 173).

Wiesinger (2006) classifies the Austrian care farming sector into subareas: 1) Traditional house care at farms (about 100). In this case clients are mainly close or distant relatives. 2) Sheltered workstations at farms (about 10). The government subsidizes these jobs if clients get officially reported as employees. 3) Farming training centres (about 10) are aimed at reintegrating clients in the second or third labour market. 4) There are places for care and extra occupational therapy. The target group for the fourth category are people who are not able to integrate in sheltered workstations. Conventional care and therapy places are financed through health insurances while sheltered workstations are financed by the federal government (cf. Wiesinger, Neuhauser and Putz 2006, 234 et seqq.). The development of care farming in Austria is still in a pioneer phase. Care farming projects are poorly connected and insufficiently supported as the following statement of an Austrian care farmer shows.

Interviewer: 'Did you have people to consult in difficult or uncertain situations?'

Care Farmer: '(shaking head), no.'

Interviewer: 'And are there people who ask to consult you because of your long experience in the business?'

Care Farmer: 'Neither, there is no one in the region who practises care farming.' Austrian Care Farmer (2008, September). Personal Interview.

Summarized, neither Austria nor the Netherlands has a department that is responsible for care farming only. It will be a challenge to clear up the juridical organisation but also the political responsibility in care farming. The sector has been increasing in the Netherlands since government started to support care farming while in Austria the sector seems to be in a pioneer stage.

## Research Question and Research Objective

Care farming is one form of innovation in the agricultural sector that seems to be more structured and developed in the Netherlands than in Austria. This leads to the assumption that a network focus could be very interesting to understand the development of innovative practices. Furthermore, a comparative research between those diverse countries could shed new light on this research field. I developed the following research questions having the latest state of the art in mind.



The main research question is: “How do social networks influence the innovation process by the case of care farming?”

The assumption is that the change of traditional duties within the farming sector is connected to the influence of farmer’s social networks; or rather their social networks influence the process of innovation causally. Furthermore, it is a premise of this work that new practices demand an infrastructure; they need to be cognitively, emotionally and technically embedded. It is of much interest what kind of resources are provided by social networks. Resources can be factual, financial, emotional or cognitive efforts for instance.

The underlying thesis of this research is:

Social networks are important to better understand and explain innovative practises.

Which social networks do influence the innovation process?

What kind of functions and efforts do they contribute to the innovation process?

In qualitative research, action is understood as meaningfully structured. The goal is to understand action in its context of meaning. This would be impossible by applying the structural perspective only. The qualitative network approach will be used to understand the innovation process, the meaning behind it and to comprehend the involved actors. The network approach and theory of social capital will help to zero in on the function of networks. In the following sections important terms for this research, for instance “social innovation” or “social network”, will be explained. Furthermore, the theoretical approach which will be used to investigate the topic care farming will be explained.

## Care Farming – A Social Innovation

As a premise, care farming is understood as social innovation in this research. Innovation can be novelty as well as novation. Innovation is always connected to the old but includes new aspects as a basic prerequisite (cf. Bechmann and Grunwald 1998). Innovation is a social process because there are decision processes and action processes (cf. Blättel-Mink 2006, 30). Social innovation means a subjective or relative novelty. This includes new practices which spread and stabilize for a longer time and which influence social development (cf. Gillwald 2000, 10). The main focus does not lie on technical innovation but on changing social action (cf. Gillwald 2000, 41). A technical innovation is termed as innovation after its market entrance while social innovation is termed thus after its diffusion. Furthermore, technical innovation is positively honoured by society and easily implementable because politically and economically strong groups develop it. In fact, quite the reverse is true for social innovation. It is seldom socially positively accepted and difficult to implement because economically and politically weak groups try to develop it to advance their own situation (cf. Gillwald 2000, 37).

Care farming is only relatively new because it already existed before industrialisation. In the 15th century European agricultural care stations existed. People with psychological diseases were employed, for instance, at a farm in the hospital Sargossa/ Spain (cf. Foucault 1969, 344). Intellectually disabled were employed in the farming sector over centuries. In the time of industrialization, requirements on society changed drastically. Agriculture became more technical and intense. Maids and menials were not needed at farms anymore and the migration into cities increased. Subsequently, healthy and ill people were separated in society because institutions for (mentally) ill people developed (cf. Wiesinger 1991a). In the meantime, the intensive agriculture is not recognized positively by society anymore (cf. Commissie Wijffels, 2001 in Elings and Hassink 2006, 164). Agriculture struggles with its decreasing image and with a loss of people willing to work at farms. Farmers try to increase their income but also try to find something to identify with. Beside a variety of new duties in agriculture, the therapeutic function of farms is rediscovered (cf. Wiesinger 1991b, 34). A diffusion of this innovation has already started in the Netherlands, but not in Austria.

It is significant for contemporary Western society that it values innovation as positive. Consequently we are in danger of ignoring the fact that technical or social innovation can have unintended side effects (cf. Groys 1997, 18). In this work the term “innovation” is used neutrally. It is important to note that care farming cannot be the ideal solution for social problems, especially rural problems. We have to take into account that farmers are probably more psychologically and at the beginning also financially burdened by doing care farming. Furthermore, it is of much importance to make sure that clients get the most ideal support. For that reason this research will focus on the definition of success of a care farming project from different perspectives.

- 1.) Firstly, experts from the care farming sector were interviewed to find criteria that affect the success of a care farming project. Four criteria were extracted from those interviews: The objective categories of “economy”, “therapy” and “social recognition” and the subjective category of “personal aims”. Briefly explained, the category of “economy” focuses on economical benefits for farmers by doing care farming, while the category of “therapy” focuses on health effects or positive influences of therapy or care on clients achieved by visiting the care farm. The category about “social recognition” focuses on the importance of reactions by the social surrounding. The question is how and if family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and agricultural associations do honour care farmers’ innovative practice. Finally, the category “personal aims” focuses on farmer’s personal goals that are related to the decision of practicing care farming on his/hers own farm. The following quote exemplifies a personal aim of a farmer: ‘Our aim is to earn the same amount of money by doing social farming as my wife has earned by doing farm-external work’. Austrian Care Farmer (2008, March). Personal Interview.



- 2.) In further interviews with a.) care farming experts the categories of economy, therapy and social recognition will be investigated. The results will be an objective definition of the success of a care farming project. Subsequently, in interviews with b.) care farmers those objective categories and the subjective category of personal aims will be investigated.

The definition of success will be investigated by a qualitative methodological approach. This means that the result of this investigation will be a definition in words or stories. It will be a question of interpretation when comparing different care farming projects by focusing on the influence of networks and on the criteria of success. However, it will be possible to discuss more or less successful projects and to find out structures and efforts of social networks related to the success of the project.

## **Theoretical Framework of this Research**

### **Benefit of Using the Theory of Structuration**

The research field is considered from the following perspectives: The theory of structuration by Giddens (1988a) will be used as a background theory. By using this theoretical approach the action-oriented and the structure-oriented perspective will be taken into account. It is aimed to explain social reproduction and social change closer to reality. This metaparadigmatic perspective connects the objective and subjective perspective or, in other words, functionalism and interpretativism (cf. Gioia and Pitre 1990). By using Giddens' theory it will be possible to focus on social change and the development of social innovation in a broader view, and not to reduce it to personal motives or characteristics of innovators on the one side or on the influence of structure on the other. This research is not aimed at using the theory of structuration empirically but as a background theory to emphasize the importance of the duality of structure to investigate innovative practise.

The central idea of the theory of structuration is that of the duality of structure. Structure enables and constrains action. Furthermore, structure is a product of social action (cf. Miebach 2006, 376). Giddens emphasizes the importance of focusing on the interdependency of individual action and structure. He adopts this idea from Berger and Luckmann (1980) who only mentioned the idea of the duality of structure. Different to these theorists, Giddens put this idea in the centre of his theory. Structures are aspects of social practice and consist of rules and resources which reproduce the social system and social action. Giddens differentiates between normative rules and constitutive rules. Normative or social rules have the function to regulate; social action is sanctioned by these rules. Social rules are, for instance, traffic regulations or the instructions for Muslim culture to not eat pork. Constitutive rules are cultural rules which are concerned with a constitution of meaning (cf. Giddens 1988b, 70). Cultural rules focus on public discourses and how this practice is embedded in society. Public awareness and the legitimization of the practice are important.

How does the public interpret the innovative practice of care farming? Are such social therapeutic practices recognized and legitimated by society? Is it understood as a playground for some fantasists or is it important for society and an accepted duty for farmers? The assumption is that there are differences between the awareness and the legitimization of the innovative practice of care farming in the societies of Austria and the Netherlands.

The second part of structure is authoritative and allocative resources. Authoritative resources coordinate human action; for instance the political system. As described above, Austria and the Netherlands are completely different states regarding to political arrangements to regulate care farming. Those political arrangements influence the behaviour of actors because different options are generated through it. Allocative resources, like the economic system of a society, controls parts of the material world. To start a care farm the availability of financial resources is a precondition because many investments in education or in redevelopments at the farm are necessary. The “obligation of rules” and the “availability of resources” are socially ascertained (cf. Miebach 2006, 377). Following examples exemplify the importance of allocative resources by implementing an innovative practice:

‘...we have invested incredibly much in the redevelopment of the farm. Three years ago it was improvised compared to today. The premises were not optimal but today ...we have a disability-friendly toilet, we have a training room where clients can be on rainy days and which is heatable during the wintertime...and we have been rebuilding the stable again...actually it grows’. Austrian Care Farmer (2008, March). Personal Interview.

‘...because such a module [education in animal assisted therapy] costs something and that’s a lot...but if you do the whole course you will be financially supported [by the government]. They take over about 80% of the costs and that’s great...’. Austrian Care Farmer (2008, March). Personal Interview.

The above explained theory is used as a background theory to mark the importance of being aware of the duality of structure. Beside that it will be necessary to explain the process of innovation theoretically, too.

## Concepts of the Process of Innovation

Innovation can be understood as an individual (Rogers 1983; Schumpeter 1928) or a collective (van de Ven 1999) effort. Mc Grath’s (1985) idea is a combination of the above mentioned perspectives. He emphasizes the importance of the forces of an individual innovator but supports the idea that an innovation is a collective effort. In earlier assumptions, innovation was seen as a linear process, but in later research it was proved as a non-linear course which can be recursive and disrupted (cf. Braun-Thürmann 2005, 30). Rogers, as a delegate of linear innovation models, takes on an actor perspective and focuses on individual abi-

lities of innovators. Only when he tries to explain the diffusion of innovation he adopts a network perspective. There are four phases ideal typically in a linear model: 1.) the discovery-, 2.) the invention-, 3.) the development- and the 4.) distribution-phase. The chronological course and the premise of “distinct phases” is strongly criticized in non-linear models (cf. Braun-Thürmann 2005, 37). Van de Ven, being a delegate of the non-linear model, emphasizes the unpredictability of the development of an innovation. This is caused by the complex interplay of actors involved (vgl. Braun-Thürmann 2005, 58). Contrary to Schumpeter and Rogers, he focuses on social relations (cf. Braun-Thürmann 2005, 59). Following his theory, it will be possible to focus on the collective effort and on a circular course of the innovation process.

‘We were lucky because we went to the centre for disabled people in our district and told the director our idea about animal assisted therapy with farming animals. The director was interested and wanted to see our project and he visited us to see how we worked. Subsequently, his centre has been cooperating with us...’. Austrian Care Farmer (2008, March). Personal Interview.

‘We were lucky because we live near Vienna. The experts from the animal assisted therapy course were able to visit us very often because we have been living near the city. Furthermore, it was possible to not only teach us through the theoretical course but also practically on our own farm’. Austrian Care Farmer (2008, March). Personal Interview.

The examples above illustrate the importance of other actors by developing an innovative practice. Van de Ven describes three periods of the process of innovation. Relevant preconditions develop for a long time before an innovation is developed intentionally. Neither a single moment nor a single actor achieves the development of an innovation. This gestation process, which can last many years, disemboques in the “initiation”(van de Ven 1999, 25) of the innovation. “Shocks”(van de Ven 1999, 28) are important to activate the development of an innovation, even though there is no single reason for it. Individuals interpret shock differently, but the awareness of the need or the opportunity of the development of an innovation and the dissatisfaction with present circumstances are often the initiators of innovative behaviour. These shocks can happen within an organisation or external of it.

‘There was the first BSE case in Austria in the ‘Waldviertel’ and the price for meat decreased. As we had to sell our bulls we didn’t get a lot of money...there was no financial benefit at all. We were really angry and stopped working with animals on our farm. At that time we became arable farmers. After a while we started to miss something and got an identity crisis...subsequently, I read an article about education in animal assisted therapy and it interested me...I called them and said I want to attend the course’. Austrian Care Farmer (2008, March). Personal Interview.

The “initiation period” starts from the gestation process and ends at the time at which actors start to plan the budget and further steps for the development of the innovation. At the stage of planning further steps, the transition to the “developmental period” is marked. The initiating idea starts to unfold in many new ideas “like a firework” (van de Ven 1999, 34). Many different ways are tested, setbacks happen and unexpected problems appear. A lot of new relationships are made and it is a highly instable period for all members involved.

Interviewer: ‘Did you have setbacks while you were implementing Care Farming?’

Care Farmer: ‘Yes currently I am in such a phase. I should get more income...I have already been working on the development of this practice for ten years and it should get started now...’. Austrian Care Farmer (2008, September). Personal Interview.

In the case of an “implementation period” (van de Ven 1999, 53) new and old practices are connected. After this connection the innovation process is finished. In the case of a “termination period” (van de Ven 1999, 53) it is not possible to link new and old practices and the innovation will be stopped. Access to resources and institutional rules affect the development of an innovation. The following case description exemplifies a successful implementation of the innovative practice.

#### Case description:

The family has a large conventional farm (around 140 ha) close to Vienna which is the capital city of Austria. The farmer’s wife worked farm extern. When the prices for their products started to decrease, the family started to get an identity crisis as farmers. The family was looking for income alternatives and for something to identify with. The goal for the farming family was to find a specialization to get enough income and to be able to identify with their profession. They wanted to earn the same amount of money by doing social farming as the farmer’s wife earned by doing farm external work. Presently, the farmer and his wife identify highly as social farmers and they have enough clients to get the wished income. The farmer’s wife doesn’t work farm extern anymore and is mostly responsible for their new social duties. Both of them think that they improved their life quality because of a higher identification with the job and because of working together at the farm. Austrian Care Farm, March 2008, Personal Interview.

The periods from the initiation to the implementation of an innovation are illustrated by the above mentioned examples. By using van de Ven’s theory it will be possible to investigate the stages of an innovation empirically. Furthermore, the theory will be applied in a way in which it will be possible to stay open for potential existing differences between the theory and reality.

To sum up, non-linear models are more close to reality than linear models. Accordingly social innovation can be investigated best by using the earlier-mentioned theoretical approach. Furthermore, an innovation process ends

when innovation is institutionalized or routinized (cf. Rogers 2003, 175). The different innovation periods by Van de Ven are useful to investigate care farming projects empirically because it allows focusing on networks influencing the process. Network theoretical approaches are often used to investigate innovation processes but the qualitative network analysis is a new approach which has been used infrequently.

### Contribution to the Understanding of Innovative Practice by Using Network Theory and the Concept of Social Capital

In the time of individualization and multi-optionality traditional structures and norms have been disappearing (cf. Giddens 1991). This means that new networks will play an enabling role if innovative practice develops in some parts of the agricultural field. Care farmers will reach information, mutual recognition and emotional support through networks. In this research it is assumed that there is an increase of the importance of social networks. The implementation of an innovative practice demands reorganisation of resources in societies as well as on a legal basis. Social networks have a constituent function which leads to the assumption that network theoretical approaches could help to understand and to investigate innovative practises in the agricultural sector.

A special characteristic of the sociological network concept is that it enables researchers to focus on social processes from the perspective of the interplay of action and structure (cf. Weyer 2000, 13). Furthermore, it allows taking into account the contextuality of human behaviour. In quantitative network analysis not the actors themselves, but the relations of actors are the centre of investigation (cf. Wellman 1988). The qualitative network analysis is aimed at focusing on the structure and on the meaning behind the action. In this research the qualitative ego-centred network approach will be applied. This means focusing on care farmers' social networks and comparing the characteristic of a network with the development of the innovative practice.

A network is formally a "specific amount of relations between actors" (cf. Mitchell 1969, 2) or a well-defined set of edges. Knots are actors within a network and edges are their relations to each other. The same actors can build different networks because networks are relational (cf. Jansen 2006, 58); the same people can build a network of friendship and a network of work. The relation between and the position of actors within a network specify the characteristic of the network's structure.

The characteristic of the structure of a network can be investigated by using the theory of the "strength of weak ties" by Granovetter (1973). He emphasises the importance of weak networks to reach new information. Strong and weak ties fulfil different tasks regarding the development of innovation. Strong ties facilitate solidarity and trust and are the base for social influence, but can also result in social closure. For an individual it is only possible to realize a few strong ties because they bound temporal and emotional resources. A network

with strong ties can only miss modernization because of non-existing weak ties that transfer the information about a change of norms in society. Weak ties are less redundant and can reach actors over larger distances. Weakly connected actors get more diverse and new information that enables innovative practices. Results from inter-organisational research display quite the contrary: Close collaboration allows actors to concentrate on their competences and to develop and implement innovation (cf. Elzen, Enserink and Smit 1996; Kowol 1998; Rammert 1997; Rammert and Bechmann 1997). These results are apparently contradictory, but when organisations work together and interact, they enable the flow of new information (cf. Weyer 2000, 22). It is of interest, which strong and weak ties of farmers contribute to the development of care farming. The idea of strong and weak ties is adopted from the concept of social capital.

*Social Capital* is another theoretical concept to explain and to investigate the characteristic of social networks. This concept was used and interpreted heterogeneously by different theorists (Bourdieu 1983; Coleman 1988; Putnam 1995). In the following paragraphs I want to explain the advantage by using this theoretical approach to investigate innovative practices: Jansen summarizes that social capital demonstrates the “relation between structure and action of individuals”. It determines possibilities of action and cannot easily be passed on to others. Furthermore, it is possible to exchange social capital for other forms of capital, for instance economical capital. It can always be influenced by others and is mainly unconsciously produced. It can be analysed on a collective or individual level (cf. Jansen 2000, 37). The most important theorists of social capital (Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman und Robert Putnam) focus on this theory in diverse ways:

From Bourdieu’s point of view capital is “social energy” through which options of action are enabled (cf. Bourdieu 1999, 194). “Social capital” means social relations through whom it is possible to exchange help, advice and information, for instance. Moreover, it defines the membership of a person to a group. All kinds of relations are ensured only if people constantly work on them (“Beziehungsarbeit”) (cf. Fuchs-Heinritz and König 2005, 162 et seq.). In Bourdieu’s view social reproduction can be explained through social capital. The higher the capital of an individual, the higher the chance to improve their own position in society (Bourdieu 1983; Bourdieu 1998). Coleman on the other hand views social capital as functional and that it develops only through embedding of social actors in a social network. Human and social capital complement each other (Coleman 1987). Social capital “is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors - whether persons or corporate actors - within the structure” (Coleman 1988, 98). Resources are produced by connecting social actors. Furthermore, these resources influence social action. Resources can be channels of information, of norms and of mutual engagement and trust (cf. Coleman 1988, 102). Close to Granovetter’s idea of the strength of



weak ties, Putnam emphasizes the importance of the connection of a society. Collective problems are solved more easily when a society is well connected (cf. Putnam 1994, 167) because “cooperation” and “coordination” of a society increases with its connectivity” (cf. Putnam 1995, 69). Putnam focuses on traditional networks; he neither focuses on social innovation as a result of networking nor on the relevance of novel networks for the development of innovative practice.

To sum up, Bourdieu defines social capital as a medium to reproduce class distinctions, while Coleman understands social capital in a functional way. Putnam emphasizes the importance of networking because it produces social capital and this again increases the effectiveness of a society. The outcome of social capital as concluded by Jansen: „group solidarity“, „trust“, „information“, „structural autonomy“ and “social influence”. The outcome of strong ties is group solidarity and trust. Both refer to the collective effort of social capital. Weak ties have the advantage of transferring new information which enables the development of innovation. If an actor is highly informed his/her position in a network will increase. The higher the centrality of an actor the higher his/her social influence. Furthermore, the collective identity increases with the degree of connection (cf. Jansen 2000, 37f).

In this research it is of much importance to find out which effort is produced and function is taken over by social networks regarding the development of an innovative practice. Therefore it is helpful to use some ideas of the different concepts of social capital and of Granovetter's conception of strong and weak ties. A special focus will be on communication which includes information networks and norms. The transfer of norms is related to the theory of structuration because they are part of social rules. The transfer of information is connected to the theory by Granovetter. Furthermore, there will be a focus on transactions, for instance emotional, practical or financial support, to develop the innovative practice. Therefore, it will be useful to focus on parts of the three different concepts of social capital. By applying Coleman's concept, the focus will lie on the function of the network while using Putnam's concept will help to investigate the importance of connectivity altogether. Bourdieu's concept is less helpful because there will not be an application of a positional network analysis. But the idea of social reproduction might help to understand why some farmers struggle in implementing the innovative practice and others do not.

## **Summary of the Research Focus and of the Interlink of the Theoretical Framework**

First of all, this research is based on two levels. There will be a focus on the micro and macro level regarding to the development of innovative practice by the case of care farming. To conduct this research the theory of structuration is used as a background theory. It will help to connect the macro and micro level because its central idea is the duality of structure.

The theory of structuration will be narrowed down thematically by focusing on the aspect of social innovation using the theory of the innovation process by Van de Ven (1999). This “innovation journey” (van de Ven 1999) will be used as a heuristic frame to analyze the innovation process empirically on a micro level. It is of interest, which cycles of innovation exist and which role social networks play. Furthermore, the relevance of networks will be investigated using the theory of social capital and the network. In all periods of an innovation process social networks are of much importance because innovation is a network effort (cf. van de Ven 1999, 13). In addition to that, the innovation process will be described in detail (“dichte Beschreibung”) (Geertz 2002). Moreover, the background theory will be narrowed down methodologically through the qualitative network approach. Farmers will be interviewed using the ego-centred network approach.

The macro level will be investigated by a comparative research approach. Using Giddens’ idea, the conditions of cultural rules, authoritative and allocative resources seem to be quite different in Austria and the Netherlands. This leads to the assumption that a comparison of these two countries could shed new light on the topic. At the back of an administration culture there is always the relation between individual and social responsibility of a society. It will be important to point out the differences between the social policy and the administration culture of both countries to explain the obvious difference between the institutionalization of care farming in these two countries. This will be possible through literature review and expert interviews.

Finally there will be a discussion of results of the empirical micro investigation and the macro analysis that will be mainly conducted by doing literature review. Both results in mind, the development of innovative practice will be interpreted. New insights and results are expected because of the broad theoretical approach and the use of an innovative methodological approach.

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## Personal Interview

Wiesinger G., 2008, Personal Expert Interview, Federal Institute for Less Favoured and Mountainous Areas, Austria.

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