

## Social services for seniors on farms: perspectives in Germany

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### Abstract

Establishing social services for the elderly on farms seems to have only benefits at first glance — an opportunity for an additional income for farmers, a lively surrounding including certain effects of horticultural or animal-assisted therapies for the elderly, and a way to close the gaps in services of general interest in rural areas. An explorative study including a literature review, an analysis of the situation in different countries, semi-structured interviews and participant observations on farms with a service for seniors gives a first overview of the possibilities and obstacles in connecting agriculture and health or care systems, with a focus on Germany. The results show that services for elderly on farms are demanded but both authorities and farmers are inexperienced with establishing and handling such services. The quality of services for the elderly depends less on the agricultural environment than on their integration in everyday life and on a feeling of appreciation as individuals.

### Keywords

Rural sociology, elderly, care farming, diversification, income combination

### Introduction

For several years, there have been increased activities in Europe to establish social services on farms (SSF). A positive effect is expected by embedding clients in the rhythm of the seasons, allowing them to see the effects of their work immediately, and— especially when dealing with animals – encouraging them to fulfil tasks. While this concept initially referred primarily to people with mental disabilities, it was later supplemented by rehabilitation and reintegration measures, which in particular addressed adolescents, addicts, mentally ill or long-term unemployed persons. For a few years now, the idea has emerged of whether old people could be a further target group that would benefit from an agricultural setting as well. This also seems interesting from the perspective of how to offer services of general interest for old people in rural areas. In the best case, (especially small) farms would have the opportunity to generate additional income. However, at least in Germany, both the social and health care system are separated from the agrarian structure in every respect, particularly education, administration, political responsibilities, and funding. The connection between these two sectors would therefore break new ground and it has to be examined to what extent this initially pragmatic idea can be implemented in reality.

This paper shows preliminary results from the research and development project VivAge (“Later life in the village. Services for the elderly on farms”; 2016-2019)<sup>1</sup>, that aims at giving advice to policy-makers, farmers, and villagers. Therefore, the national framework in Germany is compared to the situation in five other European countries. In addition, social services on farms for seniors (SSF/S) in Germany were surveyed to formulate the conditions of implementation and quality aspects.

The structure of the paper is as follows: First, it gives an account of the state of research concerning i) the needs of the elderly in rural areas, ii) the historical development of SSF, and iii) special effects of an agricultural setting for therapy. Afterwards, the research question and the methodological approach are described. The result sections presents at first the general conditions of the selected countries, as the desk research was part of VivAge. The conditions in Germany are discussed in more detail in order to understand the embedding of the examples presented afterwards. The last chapter of the result section describes the findings of the analysis on eight German farms with SSF/S. The paper finishes with the discussion of the results with regard to the research question and conclusions on which factors should be considered for further implementation of SSF/S in Germany.

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## State of research

The *needs of older people* in rural areas do not differ in essential aspects from the situation in urban centres; there is a high attachment to one's own home and a strong desire to stay there. With increasing frailty, loss of mobility, and thereby habitual everyday rituals, one's own home is also a guarantee of familiarity and stability (Berner et al. 2017, Backes 2014). The perception of the effort required for distances and the flexibility to accept innovations in everyday life changes (Amann/Kolland 2014). In rural areas, the burden on a frail person may even increase, as residential property is more common compared to urban centres (for Germany: Oettgen 2015). There is also a smaller number of medical and social services (Böger et al. 2017, Rienhoff 2015). Family members support most of the very old people in Germany, especially by informal help (Backes et al. 2014). Yet, family help decreases as labour migration has increased significantly in recent decades and fewer women stay at home to care for family members (Schlömer 2015). Beside physical help, old people as those of other ages want to be involved in a social network through a variety of informal and everyday contacts that are not artificially produced. They want to be perceived as individuals and be confirmed in the effectiveness of their actions. Thus, it is relevant to have the so-called 'third places' — meeting points that provide space for informal contacts — like cafés, grocery stores or even a bench at the playground. Especially in villages, many of these options have disappeared during the last years (Baumgärtner et al. 2013).

The number of *farms offering social services* in Europe has considerably grown during the last decade. De Krom and Dessen (2017) explain this with structural and conceptual changes in both agriculture and health or care systems. They claim that this process is strongly influenced by the general changes in agriculture from a food-producing sector to a multifunctional/postproductive agriculture with, for example, social offers (as described e.g. by Wilson 2007). With this, farmers have to create a new identity of their profession (Rizzo 2016, Seuneke et al. 2013). Di Iacovo and O'Connor (2009) perceive four chronological phases in the development of SSF, from a pioneering phase to a model of inclusion, in which offers in the agricultural sector are an established part of the social and health care system. They underline that the European states are in different stages of this development, which in turn determines their specific policies. Dell'Olio et al. (2017) add that this process also determines which organisations are responsible for social offers in agriculture and to what extent they are institutionalised. Moreover, they describe SSF as a typical example for innovations, that first emerge in niches beyond state accessibility and are distinguished by their oppositional character and a great deal of instability. According to them, learning processes and the support of social networks increase until the growth of innovations puts pressure on the regime. Subsequently, new policies are created that stabilise the new concepts but also reduce their space of freedom, e.g. funding that is connected to certification.

Steigen et al. (2015) attribute the *therapeutic effects* of an agricultural setting to the following four aspects: i) supportive natural environment and the particular non-therapeutic setting of farms; ii) exercise of meaningful, day-structuring and individualized activities in agriculture; iii) social community; and iv) contact with animals and plants. Sempik et al. (2010) see the positive effects as proof of the hypothesis of biophilia according to Wilson (1984). Therefore, interaction with animals and plants leads to a feeling of safety, relaxation and satisfaction due to the evolutionary development of humankind, while the lack of contact with nature can lead to numerous health problems. Ulrich et al. (1991) and Wood (2016) add that, according to Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), humanity in evolution is accustomed to relaxing in a natural environment and needs it to reclaim exhausted cognitive resources. Leck et al. (2015) see the particular advantages in the low hierarchical structures and appreciative social relationships on a farm.

Most *impact studies* of SSF focus on people with mental illness or substance addiction. In their review of Norwegian studies, Pedersen et al. (2015) found a significant influence on the reduction of stress and disease symptoms as well as an improvement of coping skills, attention and self-efficacy by animal-assisted interventions.

There is hardly any empirical material on SSF with regard to *older people* who do not suffer from dementia. Sanglhuber/Schneider (2015) found positive effects in an Austrian study of housing on farms that showed a rising number of social interactions, improved physical functioning and increased motivation of the elderly. They ascribe these effects to the sensory experiences through contact with plants and animals and to the integration into the social network on the farm. Hassink et al. (2017) show that dementia patients on farms have a bigger amount of outdoor movements due to contact with animals, in particular if they formerly owned a pet or had a biographical connection to agriculture. De Bruin et al. (2010) concluded that day-care centres for dementia patients on farms are more positive than comparable establishments without an agricultural background, because there is a natural involvement in the activities. In research that is not focused on SSF, the relevance of a home-like environment and the quality of social relationships to the quality of life of dementia patients were stated (Bergland/Kirkevoold 2005, Hauge/Heggen 2008).

### The project VivAge

Based on these research results, the project VivAge tries to understand whether SSF/S are a possibility to care for old villagers in Germany and if so, how their development should be supported. It describes the state of progress in Germany by comparing it to other countries and analyses the needs of farmers as well as those of senior participants. VivAge therefore consists of three parts: an analysis of the structures and paradigms in different European countries (Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland), an explorative study in Germany, and the development of models (Table 1).

Table 1: The design of the project VivAge

I. Analysis	II. Explorative study	III. Development of models
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a) Description of conditions and paradigms in six European countries                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austria</li> <li>• Germany</li> <li>• Italy</li> <li>• the Netherlands</li> <li>• Norway</li> <li>• Switzerland</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ b) Data collection of German farms with SSF/S (of any kind)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analysis of eight farms with SSF/S in Germany by semi-structured interviews with farmers or other key persons and clients as well as participant observation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Derivation of quality and success criteria</li> <li>▪ Development of four models along an increasing supply chain from daily structure to care</li> <li>▪ Transfer to practice concepts for the federal state of Lower Saxony</li> </ul>

Source: author's considerations.

The first, analytical part was done by a systematic literature review and online research. The six countries were chosen on the basis of the previous research that had been done for the project application (Wiesinger et al. 2013, Berget et al 2013, Hassink/van Dijk 2006). The aim of this part is not least to expand the creative framework for the models. In order to get an overview of the current situation, also data of German farms with SSF/S were collected. Here, the criteria were the mere existence of an agricultural enterprise and an offer of any kind for seniors as the main target group (e.g. flats, leisure opportunities, guided tours on the farm for dementia patients). The lack of any further criteria was due to the previous research that gave the impression of a very low, at most two-digit number of such institutions in Germany.

The aim of the explorative study in the second part was to analyse SSF/S in Germany from three perspectives:

- *Farmers*: How do SSF/S become economically viable? Which (bureaucratic) obstacles did the offering person(s) have to overcome and which offers of support or consultation would they have welcomed?

- *Seniors*: How can a high quality of the services be assured? Does the connection to agriculture give the services a certain quality that cannot be reached by other branches or in other places?
- *Rural development*: Do SSF/S cover the needs of older villagers?

Eight German farms were approached for further analyses. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the leading person (7 farmers and 1 therapist), and with senior clients (23). Visits to the farms were also made for participant observation. Both forms of data were analysed according to the content analysis of expert interviews (Gläser/Laudel 2010).

The third part of the project – the development of models – is still in process at the time of publication.

## Results

### *National framework conditions in six European states*

The analysed states are assigned to different models of welfare as classified by Esping-Andersen (1990): The conservative-corporatist model influenced Western European countries like Austria, Germany, and Switzerland where responsibility for care is ascribed to the family, with the government as supplementary source of support. In the Nordic states like Norway a social-democratic model of welfare can be found which aims at giving each person equal rights as an individual. A liberal welfare model sees the responsibility for care in each individual. Recent studies describe the welfare model in the Netherlands as a mixture of the social-democratic and liberal model. Italy is categorised as part of a Mediterranean model that sees family responsibility like the conservative-corporatist model but provides less protection against market fluctuations and income swaps (Castles et al. 2012).

It is likely that these different welfare models influence subsequent processes like legislation or the system of social insurances (Kammer et al. 2012). With regard to SSF/S, the handling of people in need of care is of particular interest. To date, care has not been a topic of governmental regulation in Switzerland<sup>2</sup> or Italy, except for South Tyrol. There is a compulsory long-term care insurance for employees in Germany and the Netherlands, while Austria and South Tyrol provide public support (European Commission 2017a-c, Kramer/Plantholz 2018, Deutscher Bundestag 2016, Wagner 2016, BMASGK n.d.). The situation in Norway is different. Here, a national law forces the municipalities to guarantee services for people in need of help (NMHCS 2012). Municipal day care offers are open for all elder people, whether or not in need of care, in order to ensure social participation and prevention. In remote areas, the municipalities might regulate these services through contracts with private providers or members of the family (Bode 2016, Heintze 2015). Except for the Netherlands, services for people in need of care are mainly granted as benefits in-kind, whereby their quantity and diversity as well as the individual freedom of choice vary considerably (Table 2). In the Netherlands, people in need of care may decide between in-kind and cash support. Clients who chose the cash support will receive a personal budget but have to prove a need for the services they pay for. Here, family members, friends or neighbours might be paid for help as well as professional caregivers (European Commission 2017c).

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<sup>2</sup> Status as of September 2018

Table 2: Care structures in selected countries

	<b>Welfare model*</b>	<b>Care as topic of government regulation</b>	<b>Character of services</b>
<b>Austria</b>	Conservative-corporistic	Yes	Public support of basic care by in-patient stays and mobile care services. The latter are not available in all regions with big differences among individual federal states.
<b>Germany</b>	Conservative-corporistic	Yes	A compulsory long term care insurance finances in-patient care and mobile care services as well as the technical adaption of flats, day care and leisure opportunities. As a special model, assisted living communities (German term: " <i>ambulante betreute Wohngemeinschaft</i> ") are supported. Caregiving family members can take advantage of training, exemption from work and pension contributions.
<b>Italy</b>	Mediterranean	Only in South Tyrol	Public support only in South Tyrol for caregivers or day care as well as pension contributions for caregiving family members.
<b>Netherlands</b>	Mixed	Yes	A compulsory long-term care insurance finances in-patient care and mobile care services as well as the technical adaption of flats, day care and leisure opportunities. Caregiving family members, friends or neighbours can get training and be paid for their help, but do not receive pension contributions. People in need of care might chose a personal budget.
<b>Norway</b>	Social-democratic	Yes	People in need of care have a right to in-house supply. Municipalities are in charge of offering social services like day care.
<b>Switzerland</b>	Conservative-corporistic	No	--

Source: author's compilation, based on Autonome Provinz Bozen 2018, Kramer/Plantholz 2018, European Commission 2017a-c, BMASGK 2016, Bode 2016, Deutscher Bundestag 2016, Wagner 2016. Heintze 2015, Grabner et al. 2010, BMASGK n.d.

The national frameworks also seem to influence the character of SSF/S, which is embedded in different historical processes of SSF in the analysed states as well. While SSF in Switzerland is in general exercised on a voluntary basis by placing single persons in need of care with a farm family, in Germany (especially in some *Länder*/federal states) there is an increasing interest of public corporations. Here, SSF is essentially shaped by the anthroposophical movement, where the farm is seen as an organism that also functions as a social community and integrates people with disabilities, mainly mental disabilities<sup>3</sup> (Petarca e. V. 2018, Rose 2015, van Elsen 2013). In Italy, a national framework law was passed in

<sup>3</sup> People with mental disabilities are also employed in the so-called *Grüne Werkstätten* (sheltered workshops in agriculture or gardening).

2015 that allows social, pedagogic or rehabilitative services on farms if certain conditions are met. It defines SSF as “only those practices in which the use of nature is production-oriented” (Dell’Olio et al. 2017, 66). Many of the regions have since developed their own law in succession. The origin of SSF is traced back to psychiatry reforms and the reuse of land that belonged to the mafia. Often, social cooperatives or the church as part of alternative movements in the 1970s started these projects, especially for the rehabilitation of prisoners (Dell’Olio et al. 2017, Di Iacovo et al. 2006). In Norway, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development developed a national strategy in 2012 to strengthen SSF as a form of multifunctional agriculture in order to support farms. Moreover, several counties made their own action plans. The official statistics on SSF involve pedagogic activities like teaching farms or hippo therapy, occupational training, health and care services (Ihlebaek et al. 2015). The government is also involved in Austria, where in 2012 the Chambers of Agriculture and the Ministry of Agriculture started a cooperative campaign named “Green Care”. It offers advice, public relations, insurance options, networking, conferences, and a certification system (Green Care Österreich 2018). With the current Rural Development Program (EU funding period from 2014 to 2020), funding of investment for SSF is available (EAFRD 2017). The process of institutionalising SSF has advanced most in the Netherlands, where care services are a largely distributed form of income combination for farmers. Here, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry for Social Affairs funded an institution to encourage these activities already in the 1990s. Later, a registered association took over these tasks and developed its own certification system and consulting services. In many places, there are regional coordination points where an agent handles the bureaucratic affairs concerning people in need of care or with disabilities (Hassink 2013 and 2015). Table 3 provides some more information on SSF in the six countries.

Table 3: SSF in selected countries

	<b>Number of farms with SSF</b>	<b>Most common model of SSF</b>	<b>Main national organisation of SSF</b>
<b>Austria</b>	25 (certified)	Different	<i>Green Care Österreich</i> ( <a href="http://www.greencare-oe.at">www.greencare-oe.at</a> )
<b>Germany</b>	No data	Living and working community of people with mental disabilities	<i>Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft Soziale Landwirtschaft</i> ( <a href="http://www.soziale-landwirtschaft.de">www.soziale-landwirtschaft.de</a> )
<b>Italy</b>	No data	Rehabilitation of prisoners	<i>Rete delle fattorie sociali</i> ( <a href="http://www.fattoriesociali.it">www.fattoriesociali.it</a> ) <i>Forum Nazionale Agricoltura Sociale</i> ( <a href="http://www.forumagricolturasociale.it">www.forumagricolturasociale.it</a> ) only in South Tirol: <i>Südtiroler Bäuerinnenorganisation</i> ( <a href="http://www.bauerinnen.it/soziale-landwirtschaft">www.bauerinnen.it/soziale-landwirtschaft</a> )
<b>Netherlands</b>	> 1,000 (certified)	Different	<i>Federatie Landbouw en Zorg</i> ( <a href="http://www.zorgboeren.nl">www.zorgboeren.nl</a> )
<b>Norway</b>	> 1,000	Teaching farms occupational training day-care centres	<i>Inn på tunet Norge SA</i> ( <a href="http://www.innpatunet.no">www.innpatunet.no</a> )
<b>Switzerland</b>	550 (estimated)	Placing single persons in a farm family	<i>Verein Carefarming Schweiz</i> ( <a href="http://www.carefarming.ch">www.carefarming.ch</a> ) <i>Green Care – Plattform für Akteure und Nutzende im Bereich Umwelt und Gesundheit</i> ( <a href="http://www.greencare.ch">www.greencare.ch</a> )

Sources: author’s compilation, based on Hassink et al. 2018, Petrarca e. V. 2018, Green Care Österreich 2018, Bombach et al. 2015, Haubenhofer 2015, Ihlebaek et al. 2015, Ländliches Fortbildungsinstitut 2015, Rose 2015, Wydler 2015, van Elsen 2013, Berget et al. 2012.

With regard to the elderly, the data is rather poor. There is no information on SSF/S in Italy, except for South Tyrol where the organization of farmwomen in 2014 developed a training programme to qualify the farmers' wives as in-home day-care providers for seniors in need of care. Around 30 farms provide a day-care possibility that is supported by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano (Sozialgenossenschaft 2018). In Switzerland, there is evidence of older persons being in family placement on farms (Bombach et al. 2015, Wydler 2015). In Austria, some but very few farms with SSF seem to offer a service for seniors (Green Care Österreich 2018). There is proof of some farms offering a day-care facility for people with dementia in the Netherlands which often are established by a contract with a nursing care insurance company (Nowak et al. 2015). Yet, there is no data in the official statistics. In the internet portal of all certified farms, around 350 claim to be open for seniors, mostly as one target group among others (Federatie Landbouw en Zorg 2017). In Norway, a 2009 survey of services in five counties categorized about eight percent as offers for seniors or people suffering from dementia. Usually, these are day-care centres, mandated by a municipality (Berget et al. 2012). The situation in Germany will be presented in the next chapter.

#### *A detailed glance on Germany*

Germany established a long-term care insurance in 1995, complemented by support for dementia patients in 2013. The number of mobile care services has expanded ever since as well as day-care options and small structured housing possibilities (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017). In particular there is an increasing number of assisted living communities where – by concept – a self-organized group of seniors in need of care (up to 12) employs a nursing service and a housekeeper so that someone is available in the flat 24 hours a day. The foundation of such groups as well as the renovation for age-appropriate accessibility of flats is funded to a certain amount by long-term care insurance, and a monthly subsidy of 214 Euros for non-personal nursing and organizational support is allotted to each resident. With a new law in 2017, innovative models shall also be supported. There is an earmarked discharge in the amount of 125 Euros per month, to be used as desired, if the insurance company agrees (Krahmer/Plantholz 2018, Deutscher Bundestag 2016). Above all, it aims at financing leisure offers by the hour, in Germany described as *niedrigschwellige Angebote* (low-threshold services). The individual federal states have different provisions for the qualifications that the providers of such offers must have.

Governments or public corporations in some of the federal states support SSF, with Bavaria playing a pioneering role. Here, different Departments for Agriculture mandated employees to connect the correspondent farms or give advice as part of their job (Petarca e.V. 2018, Rose 2015). The Bavarian State Institution for Agriculture compiled a manual for SSF in 2016 and another one focusing on SSF/S in September 2018. The main idea of the latter is renting offers with additional services (LfL n.d.). In Rhineland-Palatinate as well as in North Rhine-Westphalia, the Chambers of Agriculture provide an online platform for different services on farms. For a few years, SSF have been a new focus in training and consulting as well. To date, there are no farms with SSF/S represented in Rhineland-Palatinate, but some with a residential offer exist in North Rhine-Westphalia (Landwirtschaftskammer Rheinland-Pfalz n.d., Landwirtschaftskammer Nordrhein-Westfalen n.d.). Since 2015 in Schleswig-Holstein, the Chamber of Agriculture has been cooperating with an alliance for people suffering from dementia in establishing services on farms for this target group. To offer these, the farmer has to complete one hundred hours of advanced training and search for at least two volunteers to support the work with the elderly. As of May 2018, twelve farms were qualified (Kompetenzzentrum Demenz in Schleswig-Holstein n.d.). In the rest of the federal states, SSF has to date not been established by governmental institutions, but there are voluntary groups or associations which coordinate activities (Petarca e. V. 2018).

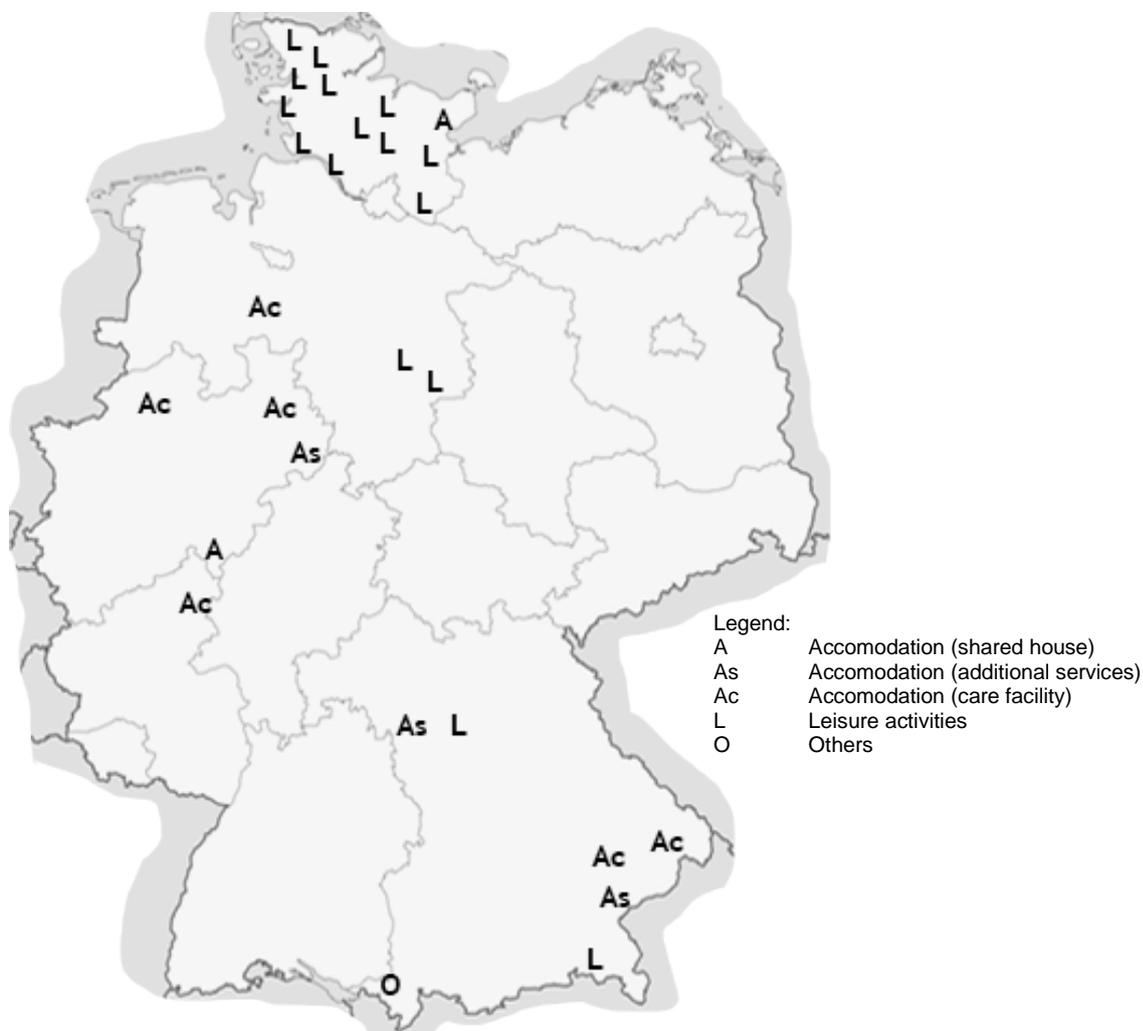
At the time that the interviews in the project VivAge started in autumn 2016, offers for seniors as (the main) target group<sup>4</sup> were found on seventeen farms in Germany, but none of them in the federal states of former East Germany, Hesse, Saarland, or Baden-Württemberg. Since

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<sup>4</sup> Farms that offer tours, a café or holiday apartments and declare seniors as one of their target groups were not considered.

then, their number has increased to twenty-eight because of the activities in Schleswig-Holstein (Figure 1). There might still be some more due to the lack of general information on SSF/S.

Figure 1: Social services on farms for seniors (SSF/S) in Germany



Source: author's compilation (as of May 2018, points are not accurate)

Before the farms in Schleswig-Holstein joined, the largest group were providers of on-site living possibilities, yet with different services (A, As, Ac, Table 4). Now the biggest group consists of farms offering leisure activities by the hour for the elderly (L) – mainly those suffering from dementia.

In the project VivAge, the on-site living possibilities on a farm are divided into three categories:

- First, there are projects for living as an independent community, with individual flats and commonly shared rooms in addition (A). Here, the elderly mostly move in at an early point in their retirement. There is no question of care at this time, which changes when the inhabitants reach the eighth or ninth decade of life.
- The second type of living opportunities involves additional services (As). The elderly rent a room but also have the possibility to order meals, cleaning, shopping assistance, chauffeur or delivery services.
- A third model of living on farms involves offers for people in need of care (Ac). On one of the surveyed farms in Germany, the (female) members of the farm family trained in

geriatric nursing and established a care facility. In other places, the farmer's role is that of a landlord, who gives room to an assisted living community.

Table 4: Categories of services for seniors on farms in Germany

Type	Description	No.	Further classification	Description	No.	Abbreviation
<b>Accommodation</b>	Renting possibilities	11	Shared house	Autonomous housing community of seniors	2	<b>A</b>
			Additional Services	Renting with bookable services	3	<b>As</b>
			People in need of care	Assisted living community; care facility	6	<b>Ac</b>
<b>Leisure activities</b>	Guided tours on farms, therapy by the hour, day care, meal offers	16				<b>L</b>
<b>Other</b>	Physiotherapy with seniors as target group	1				<b>O</b>

Source: author's compilation (as of May 2018).

### In-depth analysis of eight farms

In the following, the results of the content analysis of the interviews as well as the participant observation on eight farms are presented. They are sorted according to the three perspectives already outlined in the methodological description of the project VivAge: i) the perspective of the farmers as providers, ii) the perspective of the elderly as clients, and iii) the perspective of rural development on the chance of offering services of general interest in villages.

#### *SSF/S from the farmers' perspective*

Five of the eight farms in Germany that were part of the in-depth analysis offer accommodation options. At present, this seems the easiest and a sufficient way to break even. The other three offer activities by the hour like a common lunch, garden therapy, or tours on the farm for dementia patients. The income they generate covers material costs but only a part of their working hours, while they all have the help of volunteers. None of the farmers neglected to consider economic aspects, but these were never the main motive to establish an offer for seniors. Some of the farmers wanted to improve seniors' lives. Others expressed a wish to have all generations on the farm. All of them clearly pointed out that it is not their task to provide professional care. Their motives led most of the landlords among the farmers to spend a lot of time voluntarily with their tenants and to organize social events. Most of the interviewed farmers seem to have a certain kind of pioneering spirit and are used to searching for innovative ideas. Former entrepreneurial experiences out of the farming sector helped them to know how to cooperate, use social networks, or which strategies of marketing might fit. Skills like getting information on their own let them overcome obstacles, as nearly none of them found advisory bodies in the beginning. Only few would have

welcomed a better consulting. However, they would like to compare experiences with others who offer the same service in order to get new ideas of solutions for small problems of everyday life.

Farmers with comparable models of SSF/S experienced different rules from local authorities. The main problem seems to be the uncertainty of case officers when faced with innovative projects. The comparison of interviews suggests that personal relationships and political will are influential on the interpretation of laws and regulatory support.

#### *SSF/S from the seniors' perspective*

The participant observation and interviews with seniors of different ages and different status of health showed very clearly how their quality of life depends on a kind of individual appreciation and communication. This became particularly clear on one farm where there was less effort on the farmer's side to communicate with the seniors due to his very rare leisure time. As a consequence, the seniors perceived themselves rather as a disruptive factor – unlike on all other analysed farms. In total, it became obvious that the needs of very old people differ greatly according to their personality and biography. While some enjoy idleness in their retirement, others seek a variety of activities. The seniors particularly appreciated if the farmers gave them the choice of activities without persuading them to do anything. However, most of the seniors did not participate in agricultural activities.

Sometimes they were prevented from doing so by their physical or mental status, sometimes by a lack of possibility, and in some cases due to a lack of interest. Many of the interviewed seniors had an affinity to agriculture before, or more precisely: had liked nature, animals and plants, particularly flowers. They did not change their opinion by living on a farm, nor did the rest who had never been interested in agriculture.

It was obvious in observation that the contact with animals calmed down dementia patients who were currently in a stage of anxiety. Yet, the animal species – whether farm animal or pet – did not matter. On the other hand, a change of spaces even raised anxiety among those suffering from dementia.

#### *SSF/S from the perspective of rural development*

Some of the interviewees emphasized that there is more a lack of social interaction in age than a lack of infrastructure. Seniors participating in leisure activities – garden therapy or lunch – lauded the opportunity to get in contact with other villagers again whom they had missed due to the lack of meeting options. Nevertheless, several seniors who lived on a farm described it as a relief that trips to the doctor or shopping were offered or that hairdressers or chiropractors came to the home.

The farmers were often surprised by the high demand for housing opportunities even in small villages. Some did not have to advertise at all, as the rooms were rented only by word of mouth. While in the early years, residents mostly moved in from outside, old-aged villagers followed after a few years.

### **Discussion**

It is not the agricultural setting on which the quality of life of the very old in SSF/predominantly depends but rather social relationships. An agricultural setting can provide good chances to give people a variety of possibilities to participate in everyday life that is not produced artificially (Steigen et al. 2015). Yet, it has to be questioned whether an involvement is 'natural' (De Bruin et al. 2010, 120) and simply guaranteed by an agricultural setting, as no proof for this thesis could be found in the field studies of VivAge.

While the results show that SSF/S could be an option of diversification for farmers, especially with housing offers, good quality for the seniors can only be guaranteed if the farmers do not underestimate the effort of communication and accept their social role (Rizzo 2016, Seuneke et al. 2013). The interviewed 'pioneers' tended to act independently – which, on the one hand, is an important driving force for innovation but on the other can prevent thinking outside the box or using existing structures of support.

With regard to advice services or public authorities, it became clear that SSF/S in Germany is still in a pioneering phase, while some federal states are starting to create a corresponding policy (Di Iacovo/O'Connor 2009, Dell'Olio et al. 2017). However, the obstacles mentioned in the interviews here do not necessarily arise from a connection to agriculture. The question of what regulations should be applied to assisted living communities, for example, not only concerns such establishments on farms, but also seems to refer to the relative novelty of this model in Germany in general.

The influence of framework legislation on economic efficiency can best be seen when considering hourly services in Germany. Such concepts are based on volunteer time, even if supported by a public corporation as in Schleswig-Holstein. In countries where care responsibilities are less attributed to families – such as Norway and the Netherlands – there are more possibilities to add value to an agricultural setting with SSF/S. Yet, SSF/S offers a good chance to guarantee that old villagers can stay in their place of residence. Offers of housing with additional services seem to be a good way to guarantee informal help in everyday situations. Other residents of small villages could also benefit, if services such as hairdressing are bundled in these places. Again, a care policy that gives the individual person or a municipality the possibility to choose care or social services would help to tailor offers in order to meet local needs.

## **Conclusions**

As a seemingly simple, yet very essential résumé of the in-depth analysis, it must be said that seniors are individuals with rather different characters and experiences. People do not become the same by getting old. Subsequently, there is no prototype for a service aimed at this target group, which fits in every farm or to every client of old age. Farms allow animal and nature contacts as well as the integration into an everyday life, but the question of how to involve old people – taking into account their individual needs – seems to have been neglected in the previous research of SSF.

Farmers should consider to what extent they want to involve others in their daily work. It is advisable for them to search for contacts in the local area – whether authorities, welfare associations or nursing services – before starting a project for seniors. Many might be interested in developing ideas for old village dwellers, and a network might help by funding and dealing with points of law. Local institutions – which need not to be agricultural ones – could also be used for training, for example to help farmers develop their individual vision or to learn more about old people's needs.

It is a balancing act to ensure the quality of services without suffocating innovative ideas with bureaucracy. It would be desirable to have support by authorities that is less focused on adherence to strict rules, but rather on the recognition and validation of concepts. This would be the greatest opportunity to preserve the character of integration into a living enterprise and the goods of social relationships with the offering person. For example, it could be required that small institutions of this kind submit a transparency concept and provide for its review. The option to support models – as announced by the new Care Act in Germany – could be applied to needs-based small-scale provision in villages.

It may help, in particular related to SSF/S, if farmers were embedded in structures of advice or funding of old-age care. This would entail, however, greater transparency of this system for farmers, at least in Germany. For this reason, services for the elderly on farms should become better known among people working in geriatric welfare, too. Since the start of the VivAge project in 2016, research and activities of SSF as well as innovative concepts for old village dwellers have largely increased. There is a growing number of journal articles concerning these issues, not to mention grey literature. The results of the project VivAge can only be a snapshot in time. Nevertheless, analyses of target-group-oriented projects including different institutions in rural areas should continue to be the subject of interdisciplinary research projects, including aspects of welfare, agriculture, rural development, planning, and the national economy – not least in terms of their overall benefits.

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