Article

Social business, artificial intelligence, and sustainability: An integrated approach for the future

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Abstract: The paper scrutinizes the social business model in light of current and impending challenges within the capitalist system. It emphasizes the integration of this model into a civil economy oriented toward public well-being, illustrating how it effectively addresses environmental, social, and economic issues while ensuring economic sustainability. The strategic utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to optimize resources and enhance production efficiency is explored as a pivotal element in achieving sustainable development goals. The article then presents a case study—Madri Leone, a winery in Puglia, Italy—run by two sisters. This case study serves as a concrete example of success, combining family tradition, social commitment, and sustainable practices. In summary, the primary objective of this contribution is to demonstrate the compatibility of the social business model with the current and future socio-economic context. It highlights the model’s potential to contribute significantly to the resolution of social and environmental challenges while maintaining economic sustainability.

Keywords: social business; Artificial Intelligence; sustainable development; smart agriculture; small and medium enterprises

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of escalating concerns within the capitalist system, some authors have raised questions about organizations and their operational methods, suggesting potential responsibility for the myriad challenges afflicting society [1]. Ongoing debates surround the role of organizations in addressing environmental, social, and economic issues, giving rise to a novel strategy for value creation aimed at benefiting both companies and society as a whole. This approach seeks to address societal issues and needs while simultaneously pursuing economic, social, and cultural value—a departure from conventional profit-maximization logic. Organizations adopting a social business model [2] contribute to solving social and environmental issues while covering costs and generating profits [1].

The central question is to demonstrate the compatibility of the social business model with the current and future socio-economic context, employing a case study for exploration (RQ). The United Nations’ Agenda 2030 prioritizes the fight against poverty as its first goal (Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere), a fundamental objective for sustainable progress. However, it is crucial to ensure that innovation and development initiatives do not exacerbate inequalities or create additional poverty. Transformative resilience becomes pivotal in this context, indicating the ability to confront challenges and adapt to avoid negative outcomes.
Exploring how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can become a powerful tool for promoting a sustainable and social economy is essential to addressing these challenges [3].

AI offers the opportunity to address numerous challenges facing modern society, significantly contributing to people’s quality of life and environmental protection. For instance, AI can optimize resource use, reduce waste, and improve the efficiency of production processes [4]. In the agricultural sector, AI can be employed to manage irrigation and fertilizer use more efficiently, thereby reducing the environmental impact of agricultural activities. These applications of AI exemplify the opportunities available to promote a sustainable and social economy through technological innovation. The strategic adoption of AI can significantly contribute to achieving sustainable development goals and improving the lives of local communities and society as a whole.

This analysis focuses on the potential compatibility of the social business model [2] with the current and future socio-economic context, considering a period marked by significant uncertainties, challenges, and profound social and economic changes. The study aims to assess the feasibility of integrating this model within a civil economy oriented towards public well-being. It is noteworthy that this model has its roots in a much older tradition dating back to 1765, underscoring the enduring importance of the principles of human sociality, creativity, and innovation that have consistently characterized civil economy throughout history [5].

Amid current socio-economic challenges, the example of Madri Leone, an agricultural company in Puglia, Italy, specializing in wine production, stands out. Run by two sisters, this company symbolizes audacity and a strong commitment to social causes—an exemplary blend of the social business model and the empowerment of women. Madri Leone’s mission goes beyond producing high-quality wines; it includes the promotion of women’s empowerment. An intriguing aspect is the company’s homage to extraordinary women in history, naming each wine after a woman who has made a difference. Madri Leone embodies family continuity, with over four generations involved in management, demonstrating how it is possible to combine family tradition and social commitment. It represents a tangible example of how a business model can promote both social change and the empowerment of women in contemporary society—a blend of tradition and innovation that inspires the future.

In summary, the paper introduces the topic of social business and examines the literature (section 2). Section 3 reviews the study and applications of Smart Agriculture, focusing on Artificial Intelligence, Social Business, and Sustainable Development in Italy. Section 4 presents a case study, that of the mentioned company Madri Leone, launched in a highly competitive sector during the pandemic period, to demonstrate how a small to medium-sized winery can benefit from more competitive business approaches that incorporate artificial intelligence and social business. Finally, in section 5, conclusions and possible avenues for future research are presented.

2. Social businesses

In the context of the study and practice of social entrepreneurship, there has been significant progress in addressing the theme of social business [2]. This growing interest is closely tied to the United Nations’ Agenda 2030 goal of eradicating extreme
poverty. Despite the considerable progress made, it remains a fact that in many developing areas, one in five people lives on less than $1.25 per day. Additionally, millions of individuals earn just slightly above this critical threshold. Furthermore, there is a constant risk of falling back into poverty [6].

It should be emphasized that poverty is not merely the absence of income but encompasses a range of aspects, including hunger, malnutrition, limited access to education and basic services, discrimination, social exclusion, and a lack of participation in decision-making processes. Therefore, it is essential for economic growth to be inclusive, with the objective of creating sustainable jobs and promoting equality [7]. Poverty is a complex phenomenon that involves multiple dimensions of individual life and requires a holistic approach. The increasing interest in social business is inherently linked to the need to address this critical challenge and contribute to the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030, particularly its first goal: the eradication of extreme poverty.

The literature on this topic is extensive, with Gregory Dees, one of the recognized pioneers of social entrepreneurship as an academic discipline, having authored the seminal article “The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship” [8]. He has contributed to both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors [9–12].

In practice, an illustrious example of social entrepreneurship is Muhammad Yunus, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his efforts in the field of microfinance. The Grameen Bank, founded by him, has been acknowledged as an exemplary model of a social enterprise addressing poverty in Bangladesh [2,13]. The concept of “Social Business” [2] was originally coined in the 1970s; this term defines a new category of businesses that focus on social objectives rather than pursuing the traditional principle of profit maximization. These businesses aim to address the environmental, economic, and social challenges that afflict society. While they can generate profits, the investors in such enterprises are not entitled to dividends, except for the recovery of their initially invested capital.

Recently, Porter and Kramer [14,15] have highlighted an interdependent relationship between businesses and society itself. This perspective implies that corporate decisions and social policies should converge toward the principle of creating shared value, benefiting both parties. The authors argue that “successful businesses need a healthy society, and at the same time, a healthy society needs successful businesses” [14]. Social enterprises combine creativity and entrepreneurial skills to contribute to societal improvement. While profit is relevant, it is not the primary objective. Yunus, in fact, distinguishes between two categories of social enterprises: one aims to maintain financial equilibrium, reinvesting profits for social purposes, while the other, although profit-oriented, is directly or indirectly owned by disadvantaged individuals, with the goal of addressing specific social issues.

Undoubtedly, the concept of “Social Enterprise” or “Social Business” has deep historical roots. An eloquent example of this perspective dates back to 1765 when Genovesi, in his “Lectures on Civil Economy”, recognized the “spirit of commerce” as a means to promote the common welfare and public happiness. This ancient precursor illustrates how the idea of an enterprise aimed at generating social value, beyond mere financial profit, has been a crucial consideration even in remote times, foreshadowing the current interest in social entrepreneurship [5].
Considering that the concept of “Social Business” represents an absolute novelty, Muhammad Yunus has dedicated himself to formulating a set of principles that outline the fundamental characteristics of a Type 1 company to be classified as a “Social Business” [2]: 1. The company’s primary objective is to overcome poverty or address one or more relevant social challenges, such as education, healthcare, access to technology, and environmental sustainability, rather than profit maximization. 2. The company must be capable of achieving and maintaining absolute economic and financial self-sufficiency. 3. Investors are entitled solely to the return of their initially invested capital, with no distribution of dividends. 4. Profits resulting from the return of capital remain the property of the company, which reinvests them in expanding and optimizing its activities. 5. The company commits to following a rigorous environmentally sustainable course of action. 6. The company’s employees receive salaries aligned with the market average and enjoy working conditions above the norm. 7. Crucially, all these activities must be undertaken with a deep sense of joy and dedication.

Social businesses are distinguished from other social-purpose organizations by the seven key principles outlined by Yunus [2]. These principles emphasize the importance of joy and passion in entrepreneurial action for the well-being of others. A distinctive feature of social businesses is their ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency, operating like traditional companies in the production and marketing of goods and services. Moreover, they can focus on facilitating access to opportunities for disadvantaged people, promoting their well-being and social inclusion.

An analysis conducted by Yunus et al. [16] identified three key elements in the business models of social businesses: the products/services offered to customers, the organizational structure for delivering these products/services, and the revenue generation model. The business model of a social enterprise comprises three fundamental components: the Value Proposition, the Value Constellation, and the Positive Profit Equation. The Value Proposition involves understanding the target audience and defining what to offer to meet their needs. The Value Constellation relates to the strategy for distributing products/services, involving suppliers and business partners. The Positive Profit Equation translates the first two components financially, considering the value generated by the Value Proposition, costs, and the allocation of capital within the Value Constellation.

Social businesses must innovate in their business models, creating new Value Propositions and Value Constellations to generate different Positive Profit Equations. In other words, they need to develop unique approaches to achieve their social and economic objectives. An example of this transition from a traditional to a social business model was analyzed in the case of the Grameen Group, considered the first example of a social enterprise [16].

This transition process was divided into five crucial phases:
The first phase is “Challenging conventional wisdom”: this initial phase in creating a social business model is indeed challenging conventional thinking, which requires the development of new strategies by breaking with established practices. This is highlighted by the story of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which innovated in the traditional banking sector. The bank provided small loans for entrepreneurial activities to disadvantaged individuals, challenging the idea that loans required tangible collateral. The bank’s “value constellation” involved forming groups of five clients and promoting mutual support to maintain high repayment rates.

This model demonstrated how it is possible to challenge conventions and succeed in a social business. Challenging conventional wisdom is evident in the innovative approach of Grameen Bank, which focused on women as the key to addressing poverty. This vision led to the creation of a social business model that revolutionized the traditional banking sector. Grameen Bank offered small loans to women, giving them the freedom to manage money and the power to make financial decisions for their families. This approach proved effective as women, once funded, demonstrated greater determination in seeking pathways out of poverty, ensuring that every increase in income benefited their children, especially in terms of education. Hunger and poverty have a greater impact on women, so investing in them has a positive effect on the entire family.

Grameen Bank challenged social conventions and resistance by primarily directing loans to mothers. This choice led to remarkable results, demonstrating that women were more skilled in managing investments and more prudent in managing earnings, using them for the family’s well-being. In conclusion, the women-centered approach of Grameen Bank has shown that investing in women and providing them with financial tools can be an effective strategy to combat poverty and improve living conditions, especially in contexts where women are disadvantaged.

In the second stage of defining a social business model, known as “Finding complementary partners”, a company should focus on establishing strategic partnerships aimed at enhancing available skills and resources. From a theoretical standpoint, cooperation, as opposed to competition, provides organizations with the opportunity to access new resources that would otherwise be costly to develop or acquire independently. The primary advantage of collaborations lies in the sharing of resources and knowledge among partners, which can lead to the creation of a broader portfolio of resources for all businesses involved in the network.

As previously highlighted, cooperation often represents a key element in the success of Corporate Social Innovation policies, which commonly rely on long-term agreements between businesses. In the context of analyzing the Grameen Group in Bangladesh, operating in the telecommunications sector, the group established a strategic partnership with Telenor. Grameen had no experience in creating a wireless telephone network, while Telenor, an organization with years of experience in the telecommunications sector, had never operated in large markets. Through this collaboration, Telenor was able to leverage Grameen Bank’s established network presence and the deep country knowledge developed over the years by the group.
This synergy created significant entry barriers for potential competitors interested in entering the sector and the geographic market. The combination of resources and expertise from the two partners allowed them to offer an advantageous value proposition to the target audience while simultaneously reducing the poverty rate in the country. In summary, partnerships established between different organizations, especially when they involve collaborations between for-profit and non-profit organizations, can be highly productive with a low level of risk, provided that these organizations are not in direct competition with each other.

- In the third step of implementing a social business model, known as “Undertaking continuous experimentation”, the company engages in an initial phase of strategic experimentation. If executed correctly, this phase allows the company to acquire new and essential knowledge and skills. In the context of a company adopting a social business model, it’s important to consider that it often operates in a previously unknown market.

As a result, the company must conceive and test new types of business that, for an existing company, may represent a significant deviation from established operating methods. Traditional market analyses and research on potential customers are often insufficient and not very useful when it comes to radical innovation. Therefore, experimenting with new strategies can be crucial for addressing the challenges and uncertainties typical of situations where key information is lacking. Additionally, the three authors have highlighted that companies that have conducted a series of strategic experiments have been successful in minimizing risks and maximizing learning, allowing them to more effectively identify a successful strategy. It should be noted that experimentation is not based on intuition but rather requires the ability and intention to adapt the strategy if it proves ineffective.

- In the fourth step, known as “Favoring social profit-oriented shareholders”, an increasing number of companies are adopting Corporate Social Innovation activities with the aim of improving the situation of disadvantaged populations. These companies seek to transform social challenges into business opportunities. However, to successfully implement such initiatives, organizations must have the necessary financial resources. Consequently, it is essential to convince their shareholders (and potential investors) of the initiative’s ability to generate positive cash flows in the medium to long term. In this context, investors who choose to finance these initiatives shift from a logic oriented solely toward profit maximization to one focused on creating both economic and social value.

A concrete example is represented by Grameen Danone, a company that is part of the Grameen Group and operates in Bangladesh. To raise the necessary funds to support its innovative business, Grameen Danone established a dedicated common investment fund. This fund was associated with the promise to create both social and financial benefits for investors, rather than exclusively aiming for profit maximization. In total, 675 million euros were raised, with 20 million coming directly from Danone shareholders who had the opportunity to participate in the initiative. 90% of this fund will be invested in money market securities, presumably generating a high financial return; meanwhile, the remaining 10% will be used for social purposes, without expecting a capital gain. This way, Grameen Danone is able to create economic value for investors while simultaneously providing social benefits to a population in dire
need in Bangladesh. In summary, when defining a social business model, it is essential to consider not only customers, suppliers, and other partners but also shareholders, involving them in the social mission of the innovative venture.

- In the fifth step, known as “Specifying social profit objectives clearly”, it is crucial to address the social profit objectives clearly when defining a social business model. Often, cooperation agreements among partners may hide potential conflicts that could emerge over time.

A tangible example is the Grameen Group strategy, aimed to transform Grameen Phone into an organization entirely focused on social benefit by allocating the majority of the company’s shares to the poorest class in Bangladesh. However, to avoid problems, the Grameen Group opted for a clear definition of Grameen Danone’s mission, one of the companies within the group, from the early stages of the project.

When a company develops a social business model, the primary goal is to create social value, which can lead to economic benefits. This is achievable by involving shareholders who share the goal of generating social value rather than focusing solely on profit maximization. Defining a social business model is more complex than that of a traditional business model because it focuses on creating value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders. Also in this case, a solid example is the mission of Grameen Danone: “to bring healthy nutrition to low-income populations in Bangladesh and alleviate poverty through a proximity-based business model.” The company has managed to limit the environmental impact of its operations while recovering the costs incurred for implementation. Grameen Danone’s yogurt product has had a significant impact on children’s nutrition, created employment opportunities, and strictly adhered to environmental policies. This example demonstrates how it is possible to pursue social, environmental, and economic goals in the long term, but it is important to recognize that challenges can arise that question the achievement of one of these objectives. This represents one of the main differences between the social business model and the traditional one.

Polak [17] outlined the reasons behind the current growing interest and spread of the social business model. This trend is rooted in the innate human instinct to improve the quality of life for others. The increasing and urgent environmental and social challenges drive individuals and organizations to donate significant sums of money each year, establish non-profit organizations, and engage in volunteer work. This same philosophy fuels the proliferation of businesses adopting the social business model, with the primary goal of generating both economic and social value. Furthermore, unlike traditional business models, social business models are not rigidly tied to specific contexts but are inherently adaptable and capable of influencing each other, thus promoting the spread of best practices in the social realm.

Yunus [13] outlined the concept of “social business” as an approach that allows innovative businesses to address the needs of disadvantaged populations while competing in the market and maintaining the financial sustainability of the company. Yunus distinguishes two types of social businesses: “non-loss, non-dividend” and “non-loss, with dividends for the poor”.

The “non-loss, non-dividend” social business refers to for-profit corporations that strategically collaborate with local non-profit organizations to create new business initiatives related to the company’s traditional activities. These initiatives generate
social value for the community through the products or services offered by the company. The profits generated are primarily aimed at ensuring the financial sustainability of the company itself, with any surpluses reinvested in the company or returned to investors. The “non-loss, with dividends for the poor” social business involves for-profit corporations that are owned and controlled by economically disadvantaged individuals. In this case, dividends and profit increases resulting from the expansion of activities are directly distributed to the poorest people, contributing to improving their living conditions. These two forms of social business represent innovative models that combine profit objectives with social purposes, thus contributing to improving the lives of disadvantaged communities.

In conclusion, social business represents a fundamental evolution in the entrepreneurial landscape, where profit harmoniously combines with the mission of addressing social and environmental challenges. This model demonstrates that capitalism can be made more humane, sustainable, and socially responsible without profit motivation dominating the entrepreneurial scene completely. It emphasizes essential values such as poverty alleviation, the promotion of cultural capital, and the goal of a better world as guiding principles for business actions [18].

Social business is more than just a vision; it is a tangible reality that has demonstrated its ability to generate economic and social value sustainably. This model shows that economic success can align with the well-being of communities and the environment, encouraging collaboration among various stakeholders to create beneficial synergies for all [15]. In the current context of global challenges that demand innovative and cooperative solutions, social business represents a beacon of hope. It embodies the vision of a more humane capitalism, where businesses play an active role in building a better world, contributing to the implementation of the United Nations’ Agenda 2030 for the eradication of extreme poverty and the promotion of equality.

In summary, social business teaches us that profit can be a tool for the common good, and entrepreneurial success can be defined not only in terms of financial wealth but also in terms of a positive impact on society and the environment. In the next paragraph, we will explore how artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as a powerful tool to promote a sustainable and social economy, addressing many of the challenges that modern society faces.

3. Artificial Intelligence, social business, and sustainable development in Italy: AI at the heart of the agricultural revolution (smart agriculture)

The history of humanity is deeply intertwined with agriculture, an age-old activity that has profoundly shaped the landscape and culture of various communities over the centuries.

Today, agriculture faces inevitable challenges related to the growing demand for agricultural products, resource optimization, and climate change [4]. However, the adoption of traditional technological solutions has often come at a high environmental cost without adequately addressing social and economic challenges, especially for
small-scale farmers. These challenges are particularly acute in Italy, where the majority of agricultural enterprises consist of small and medium-sized businesses.

Small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises are a fundamental pillar of Italian agriculture and play a crucial role in the country’s economy and culture. However, these businesses often grapple with significant challenges, including the difficulty of adopting advanced technologies due to limited resources and inadequate infrastructure.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing the agricultural sector through the concept of Smart Agriculture or Precision Agriculture. This new era of agriculture relies on the use of advanced digital technologies and predictive models powered by AI to monitor and optimize agricultural production processes [19]. The primary goal of Smart Agriculture is to provide solutions that are applicable to all farmers, regardless of the size of their enterprise, the region they operate in, or the sector they belong to, while keeping technology costs low.

In the context of modern agriculture, the increasing demand for agricultural products, climate change, and the need to optimize resource use pose significant challenges [20]. Furthermore, in countries like Italy, where small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises make up the majority of businesses, it is essential to develop solutions that are accessible and affordable for farmers of all sizes.

AI offers several key advantages for precision agriculture: 1. Detailed Monitoring: Thanks to the use of sensors, drones, and connected weather stations, it is possible to collect detailed data on the agricultural environment, including parameters such as temperature, humidity, soil fertility levels, and much more. These data provide farmers with a comprehensive view of their crop conditions. 2. Predictive Analysis: AI can analyze large amounts of real-time data to identify trends and patterns. This enables farmers to make informed decisions about crop management, including optimizing planting, irrigation, and harvesting times. 3. Input Reduction: AI can help optimize the use of precious resources like water and fertilizers. By accurately identifying when and how much to apply these resources, waste can be reduced, and environmental impact minimized. 4. Large Scale Precision Agriculture: With the help of AI, precision agriculture concepts can be applied to extensive agricultural areas. This not only improves efficiency but also contributes to preserving natural resources and reducing the use of chemicals. 5. Accessibility and Affordability: One of the main challenges of adopting advanced technologies in agriculture is cost. However, due to the increasing accessibility of digital technologies and the use of AI, these solutions are becoming more cost-effective and accessible to farmers of all sizes.

To ensure the successful adoption of AI in agriculture, further steps are required: 1. Digital Infrastructure: Investments in digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet coverage in rural areas, are crucial to ensure that farmers can fully leverage digital technologies. 2. Training and Awareness: Training programs and awareness campaigns can help farmers understand the benefits of AI and how to use it effectively in their operations. 3. Collaborations and Partnerships: Collaboration among farmers, government institutions, technology companies, and research institutes is essential to develop tailored solutions and ensure system interoperability.

AI is driving a revolution in agriculture, enabling the transition to more efficient, sustainable, and cost-effective agricultural production. Smart Agriculture, based on AI,
is opening up new opportunities for farmers worldwide, contributing to environmental preservation, improving the quality of agricultural products, and meeting the growing global food demand. The application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in agriculture is generating increasing interest in Italy, country rich in agricultural traditions and home to numerous small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises. One of the most significant aspects of this evolution is the social and economic impact that AI can have, especially in southern regions where agriculture plays a crucial role in the economy and local communities.

In the wine industry, for example, the adoption of AI has demonstrated its ability to bring significant benefits. Let’s consider a vineyard in Southern Italy, where chemicals have traditionally been used extensively to protect the vines from pests and diseases. AI now enables grape growers to conduct detailed microclimate analyses and accurately identify critical areas and periods requiring intervention. This targeted approach not only reduces the use of chemicals but also preserves crop quality, enhancing the sustainability of agricultural operations.

One notable Italian project is the initiative by Engineering, which has developed ecosystemic platforms based on Engineering Digital Enabler. This patented platform allows real-time aggregation of heterogeneous data from various sources, including IoT sensors, public or private archives, and open data. Furthermore, the platform automatically recognizes data quality and authenticity, providing structured and organized data models usable by institutions, businesses, and technologies. It is crucial to note that this platform complies with data security and protection standards, ensuring privacy and regulatory compliance.

The crucial aspect is that AI can serve as the engine of a social business that sends important messages in Italy and around the world. Firstly, it promotes environmental sustainability by helping reduce the excessive use of chemicals and the overall environmental impact of agriculture. This is a fundamental message in an era where environmental awareness is gaining increasing importance.

Moreover, the adoption of AI in agriculture offers opportunities for specialized employment in automation. This is particularly relevant in Southern regions of Italy, where unemployment is often a critical issue. Training individuals to manage AI technologies in agriculture not only improves career prospects but also helps combat youth unemployment [4].

Finally, the effective use of AI in agriculture contributes to preserving Italian agricultural traditions, which represent a significant cultural heritage. AI assists growers in enhancing their practices without having to abandon traditional methods that have been passed down for generations.

In conclusion, Artificial Intelligence is bringing tangible benefits to agriculture in Italy, especially in Southern regions. These benefits go beyond crop optimization and include a positive social impact, promoting sustainability, creating job opportunities, and preserving traditions. AI is not only an engine of economic growth but also a vehicle for conveying important messages of social and environmental change.
4. Case study—Madri Leone: A social business model in the Apulian wine industry

In a context where the social business model gains ground as an alternative to profit as the sole objective, the inspiring story of Madri Leone, an Apulian winery boldly managed by two sisters, stands out. This enterprise represents a symbol of determination and strong social commitment in an industry traditionally dominated by men. Founded by their grandfather and managed by men for four generations, Madri Leone underwent a profound revolution when the two sisters took the reins, marking a significant change in the company.

One of the distinctive features of Madri Leone is the constant tribute to extraordinary women in history. Every wine produced bears the name of a woman who has made a difference throughout history, blending family tradition and social commitment in a unique combination. This choice not only celebrates women in contemporary society but also serves as a testament to family continuity, with over four generations involved in the management of the company.

The Madri Leone winery has made an extraordinary gesture in honoring exceptional women through the names of its wines. Each bottle produced carries the name of a woman who has left a significant mark in history, celebrating their achievements and contributions. This choice reflects the company’s deep commitment to promoting women’s empowerment and elevating the role of women in contemporary society.

1) Delia: This wine is named after Delia, one of the first mothers in the history of humanity, whose skeleton was discovered in Ostuni, Puglia. Delia’s significance lies in the fact that her skeleton tells the story of a prehistoric woman who was carrying a fetus, a fascinating testament to the antiquity of the maternal institution.

2) Valla 1936: This wine is dedicated to Ondina Valla, an extraordinary Italian sprinter who won the gold medal at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Her name symbolizes dedication and success in sports, demonstrating that women can excel in any field.

3) Busa: Paolina Busa is the inspiration behind this wine. She was the first Red Cross nurse in history, and during the Battle of Cannae, she transformed her home into a hospital, displaying courage and determination. The Busa wine celebrates her altruistic spirit and contribution to the community.

4) Sanna Sulis: Francesca Sanna Sulis, an 18th-century entrepreneur from Sardinia, produced fabrics and silks and promoted ideas of emancipation at a time when opportunities for women were limited. The wine dedicated to her recognizes her boldness in facing the challenges of her time.

The association of these female names with Madri Leone’s wines not only adds a touch of history and culture to each bottle but also underscores the company’s strong commitment to inspiring women to achieve great things. Madri Leone demonstrates that family tradition and innovation can go hand in hand and that feminist values can be successfully promoted through a social business model. This story of extraordinary women is a tribute to the past and a source of inspiration for the future.

The company has also demonstrated an extraordinary ability to adapt, starting its business during the pandemic. Using exclusively Artificial Intelligence, i.e. virtual...
tours and leveraging social channels for sales, Madri Leone challenged the conventions of the wine industry. This bold move allowed the company to thrive in challenging times, to the extent that it received numerous awards, with four world-class awards standing out as evidence of the excellence of its products.

These awards are further recognition of the commitment and dedication of the Leone sisters in creating high-quality wines. 1. Gold Medal at the Sakura Japan Women’s Wine Awards - This prestigious award was presented to Madri Leone for their exceptional Busa wine, paying homage to motherhood and history. 2. Gold Medal at the Mundus Vini The Grand International Wine Award—the Valla 1936 wine received this prestigious medal, demonstrating the excellence of the creations of the Leone sisters. 3. Grand Prize at the Radice del Sud Wine Competition—the Busa wine received the Grand Prize in recognition of its unique character and Paolina Busa’s contribution to society. 4. Silver Medal at the Mundus Vini—This award was given to the Delia wine.

Another aspect that makes Madri Leone a unique case is the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based technology to improve efficiency and reduce environmental impact. The company is developing a talking label for its bottles to eliminate the use of paper. This commitment to sustainability demonstrates how Madri Leone, in addition to promoting women’s empowerment and family tradition, is also at the forefront of technology.

However, despite these successes, challenges remain. It will be interesting to learn the opinions of the Leone sisters on issues such as gender discrimination in the agricultural sector, whether the promotion of feminist values has posed any limits to their work, whether AI has aided them during the pandemic, and whether virtual tours have produced significant results.

The story of Madri Leone represents a tangible example of how a business model, according to the mentioned logic of social business, can promote social change, women’s empowerment, and the continuity of family traditions. A blend of tradition, innovation, and values that inspires the future.

Within the study’s framework, a questionnaire (in August 2023) was administered to the owners of Madri Leone and two female employee mothers to obtain a detailed assessment of their experience and dynamics in the agricultural sector. The responses were collected through the Google Form platform, ensuring the possibility of independent responses without mutual influence.

Here are the questionnaire questions:

1) Discrimination in the agricultural field: On a scale from 1 to 5, how much have you experienced discrimination in the agricultural field nearby? 1 (No discrimination) 2 3 4 5 (Significant discrimination).

2) Influence of female themes: On the same scale from 1 to 5, how much has addressing female themes influenced your work in the agricultural sector? 1 (No influence) 2 3 4 5 (Significant influence).

3) Persistent sexism: Again on the scale from 1 to 5, do you believe that despite Puglia being one of the more developed southern regions, there is still a shadow of sexism in agriculture? 1 (No shadow of sexism) 2 3 4 5 (Significant presence of sexism).
Contribution of technology to the company during the pandemic: On the scale from 1 to 5, do you believe that the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools and virtual tours has contributed to the success of the company during the pandemic? 1 (No contribution) 2 3 4 5 (Significant contribution).

Impact of sustainability initiatives: Do you believe that the company’s sustainability initiatives, including recyclable cardboard, have had a positive impact on your operations? 1 (No positive impact) 2 3 4 5 (Significant positive impact).

Challenges related to work-life balance: As mothers, have you experienced particular challenges in balancing work and family life in the agricultural environment? 1 (No particular challenges) 2 3 4 5 (Significant challenges).

Strategies to promote female empowerment: Based on your experience, which company strategies do you believe have most contributed to promoting female empowerment? 1 (No effective strategy) 2 3 4 5 (Highly effective strategy).

Role of the social business model: Do you think that Madri Leone, through its social business model, can continue to promote social change and gender equality in the agricultural industry? 1 (Unlikely) 2 3 4 5 (Very likely).

Questionnaire data analysis

After carefully analyzing the responses to the questionnaire administered to the owners and employees of Madri Leone, a significant picture emerges of the dynamics within the company and the agricultural sector in general.

1) Discrimination in the agricultural sector: The responses indicate that all participants (owners and employees) have experienced significant discrimination in the agricultural sector. This result suggests that gender discrimination is still a prevalent challenge in the industry.

2) Influence of women-related themes: The rating scale reveals that the introduction of women-related themes has had a significant influence on the participants’ work. This suggests that Madri Leone is actively promoting feminist values, but there are still challenges to be addressed.

3) Persistent sexism: The responses indicate that, despite Puglia being one of the more developed regions in the South, there is still a shadow of sexism in agriculture. This suggests that the agricultural sector could benefit from greater inclusion and gender equality.

4) Contribution of technology to the company during the pandemic: The use of AI-based tools and virtual tours has been evaluated as a significant contribution to the success of the company during the pandemic. This indicates that the adoption of innovative technologies has helped Madri Leone thrive in challenging times.

5) Impact of sustainability initiatives: Participants agree that sustainability initiatives, including the use of recyclable cardboard and lightweight glass bottles, have had a positive impact on company operations. This demonstrates the importance of promoting sustainability in the wine industry.

6) Challenges related to work-life balance: All participants, being mothers, have experienced significant challenges in balancing work and family life in the
agricultural environment. This underscores the need for support initiatives for working mothers in the sector.

7) Strategies to promote women’s empowerment: Participants believe that effective strategies are necessary to promote women’s empowerment. This suggests that Madri Leone could continue to develop and implement strategies that support women in the company.

8) Role of the social business model: Finally, all participants consider it very likely that Madri Leone, through its social business model, can continue to promote social change and gender equality in the agricultural industry. This confirms the importance of a business model that integrates social objectives.

In conclusion, the analysis of the questionnaire data reflects a situation in which gender discrimination and sexism are still significant challenges in the agricultural sector. However, Madri Leone is making significant progress in promoting women’s empowerment, sustainability, and social change through its social business model. There are opportunities for further improvements and future initiatives that can continue to drive positive change in the agricultural industry.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the social business model proposed by Yunus in 2010 highlights the importance of the right to happiness as a key principle. In the United States, this principle was emphasized in the Declaration of Independence of 1776, which states that “All men are created equal, they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” This principle underscores the pursuit of happiness as one of the fundamental rights of individuals, recognizing the individual’s freedom to pursue this goal.

Yunus has demonstrated how it is possible to uplift an impoverished country like Bangladesh through a social business model. The creation of a bank for the poor and financial support for women, recognized as agents of change and generators of prosperity within families, has contributed to collective well-being. This aligns with the first Goal of the United Nations’ Agenda 2030, whose primary aim is the fight against poverty.

The concept of balancing individual interest and social solidarity, as illustrated in Genovesi’s “Lessons in Civil Economy” in 1765, is still highly relevant. Yunus embodies this balance, demonstrating that the common good can coexist with profit through social business. The conclusions, therefore, emphasize the importance of considering the right to happiness as a central goal, both through fundamental principles and through social enterprise [21].

Yunus and other social entrepreneurs show that the pursuit of happiness can be intertwined with social enterprise, contributing to improving people’s lives and addressing social and economic challenges.

Furthermore, the case of Madri Leone, a company founded in Puglia during the pandemic, represents a tangible example of how social business, artificial intelligence, and innovation can promote social change and gender equality. The company has demonstrated that commercial success can be achieved while actively promoting
women’s empowerment and adopting sustainable practices, such as the use of recyclable materials.

Research shows how even small and medium-sized enterprises, which represent the beating heart of many communities, can follow development models in harmony with the principles of the social economy.

The case study, although limited in scope, demonstrates how it is possible to combine profit-seeking with new technologies, social responsibility, attention to values, and tradition. These enterprises not only create jobs and promote economic development but often embody values of solidarity, sustainability, and social cohesion. They serve as an example of how a nation’s economic fabric can be rich and diversified, contributing to a fairer and more resilient society.

Although the case study is limited, as it investigates only one small to medium-sized enterprise, it provides a solid foundation for future research to understand how this model can be applied or suggested to other entrepreneurial contexts.

The conclusions highlight the importance of social business, artificial intelligence, and innovation in promoting a sustainable economy and a future where the pursuit of happiness is a reality for all. Challenges persist, but with commitment and determination, we can contribute to creating a better world for future generations, in line with the United Nations’ Goal 1 of 2030.

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