

Presentazione del numero.

Addressing change in digital tools and AI use by youth, families and communities

a cura di Cinzia Novara*

The growing hybridization of living environments, characterized by the widespread diffusion of digital technologies, poses unprecedented and decisive challenges to community psychology (Heinrich *et al.*, 2025). The dimensions of everyday life, traditionally rooted in physical space and in bonds of proximity, are profoundly transformed by the integration of artificial intelligence, the widespread use of mobile devices, and the emergence of new models of sociality that blur the boundaries between real and virtual (Franco & Birenboim, 2024). Within this framework, the focus of the issue we present here arises from the need to rethink not only the relationship with technology, but also the rights, responsibilities, and well-being of multiple generations. Community psychology, with its tradition of attention to participatory processes, collective reflexivity, and the empowerment of local resources, offers interpretative keys and operational tools to understand these transformations and guide them toward more equitable and sustainable trajectories (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024).

The call that guided this special issue of the Journal highlights some central themes: the relevance of emotional intelligence and soft skills, the protection of minors and their rights, the sustainability of digital contexts, and the role of institutions in the technological transition. The realization of this issue is supported by PRIN 2022 MUR (project no. 2022KAEWYF) “Children as vulnerable users of IoT and AI-based technologies: a multi-level interdisciplinary assessment (CURA)”, which focuses on the vulnerabilities of younger people in the use of emerging technologies and the need for an integrated assessment

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that brings together psychological, pedagogical, legal, and technological perspectives. With a play on words, the act of taking CURA of this issue calls attention to the responsibility of scientific research and theoretical reflection in identifying risks and potentialities, offering empirical and theoretical bases for policies of protection and inclusion of new generations, but not only them, in the digital era. The articles that follow respond to this reference framework with plural but convergent perspectives, moving across interdisciplinarity, ethics, family practices, community experiments, and digital innovations with high social impact. Within them, one can recognize the intention to overcome the logic of a mere description of the Internet of Things of the future, in order instead to explore the present conditions that make it possible to transform such “things” into instruments of participation, inclusion, and the promotion of collective well-being (Castiglione, 2024; Mèndez-Domínguez *et al.*, 2023; De Siqueira *et al.*, 2022).

In order, the first contribution, authored by Kate Fogarty and Jihee Song, opens the issue by addressing ethical questions related to the use of conversational artificial intelligence by young people. This is a theoretical reflection that highlights the promises and pitfalls of AI, focusing on the need to develop ethical systems capable of morally sustainable decisions. At the center of the discussion lies the problem of how to ensure transparency and accountability in algorithms, avoiding that the use of these technologies reproduces inequalities and risks of manipulation (Xu *et al.*, 2025; Zhang *et al.*, 2025). The article insists on the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches and responsible user communities, emphasizing that the crucial point is to promote a collective dialogue on ethics in the digital era. In this sense, the reflection also becomes an invitation not to delegate to machines the entire task of moral regulation, but rather to cultivate critical and ethical competences in young people and in the adults who accompany them (Ta *et al.*, 2020).

The article by Marco Andrea Piombo, Gaetano Di Napoli, Sabina La Grutta, and Cinzia Novara follows, exploring family dynamics in the digital environment by comparing adoptive and non-adoptive families. The study, based on a large sample and a mixed-methods approach, highlights how digital technologies and artificial intelligence have introduced new forms of concern and responsibility for parents. Although both groups show limited trust toward AI and cautious behavior, important differences emerge: adoptive families demonstrate greater digital literacy and closer supervision of their children. In their narratives, specific concerns arise related to the risk of unwanted contact with birth families and to the possibility that children may encounter emotionally sensitive content. These findings invite us to consider digital parenting as a community task, one that requires the support of educational networks, targeted interventions, and training programs to

strengthen parents' trust and competences in managing risks and opportunities (Riva & Wiederhold, 2022).

A third contribution, authored by Alessio Castiglione, takes the reader inside an experience of participant observation that employs wearable artificial intelligence technologies. In the context of the "Parole Notturne" collective in Palermo, dedicated to community reading and writing, the PLAUD device was used as a tool to document and analyze interactions. The research, which involved 42 participants, does not limit itself to describing the effectiveness of the device as a support for data collection, but opens a debate on the added value of wearable technologies for participatory qualitative research (Kozinets & Seraj-Aksitm, 2024). The reflections extend to questioning the prospects of a possible technological singularity, thus placing the discussion within a broad theoretical horizon that intertwines community, education, and the future of humanity in relation to AI (Kurzweil, 2024). The article demonstrates how technological tools, when embedded in real community contexts, can become opportunities for collective reflexivity, stimulating new methodological questions and new possibilities of empowerment.

The fourth article, by Cinzia Novara and Vincenzo Todaro, describes an experience of community digital mapping carried out with university students. Through freely available tools such as Google My Maps and QGIS, students were involved in the care and enhancement of shared spaces on campus. The initiative, rooted in the principles of bottom-up participation characteristic of community psychology, offered students a learning opportunity that concerns not only digital skills but also the ability to work together, reflect on the quality of environments, and strengthen the sense of belonging to an academic community (Galioto *et al.*, 2025). Digitalization, in this context, is not an end in itself but becomes a tool to promote active citizenship, civic responsibility, and the care of common goods. It is interesting to note how the university campus, often perceived as a neutral and functional space, is here reinterpreted as a place of community life, where student participation supported by new technologies can significantly impact collective well-being (Pedler *et al.*, 2021).

The section concludes with the article by Domenico Schillaci and Salvatore Di Dio, which presents the case of the MUV platform, a project born as a university spin-off in Palermo. Through game design, the platform promotes sustainable mobility behaviors, transforming daily commuting choices into playful and participatory experiences. The data collected from a sample of over two thousand European users highlight highly significant results, above all the creation of communities motivated toward change and sensitive to sustainability issues. The playful dimension intertwines with the promotion of social justice and empowerment, demonstrating that digital innovation, when rooted in community approaches, can have real and measurable effects

on the quality of urban life (Seaborn *et al.*, 2015). This contribution represents a concrete example of how universities can become promoters of innovations capable of uniting research, field experimentation, and social impact.

Taken together, the contributions of this issue highlight a series of significant convergences. All of them, although from different perspectives, underline the urgency of viewing technologies as a resource to be governed to place it at the service of collective well-being. The ethical, educational, and participatory dimension emerges as a transversal axis, which calls upon the responsibility of all the actors involved: young people, families, educational institutions, universities, and local communities.

The implications for community psychology are numerous. It is necessary, first of all, to strengthen the capacity to critically interpret technological phenomena by developing theoretical frameworks that integrate psychological, social, and ethical dimensions. On the operational level, it is important to design educational and training interventions that involve families, teachers, urban leaders, and young people themselves, promoting digital competences, risk awareness, and the ability to use technologies responsibly. Universities, as some contributions demonstrate, are called to take on an active role in the digital transition, not only by providing tools and knowledge but also by fostering civic participation and community planning. Finally, on the level of public policies, this issue highlights the need to protect the rights of minors in the digital era, to reduce inequalities in access to technologies, and to promote models of environmental and social sustainability.

The questions that emerge from the contributions open up future research paths: what impact will conversational AIs have on the cognitive and affective development of adolescents? How can the voice of minors be integrated as co-researchers in digital design processes? In what ways can we address the new forms of digital inequality that intersect with gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural belonging? What models of collaboration between universities, communities, and institutions can foster a digital transition that is inclusive and oriented toward well-being? These are questions that invite our discipline to strengthen its interdisciplinary and transformative vocation, positioning itself as an essential interlocutor in contemporary debates on AI-based technological innovation.

In conclusion, this special issue of the *Journal of Community Psychology* positions itself as a space for critical reflection, research, and operational intervention in the field, also providing practical examples. The articles collected here show that the encounter between technology and community is not a proposal for a possible new world, but a process already underway that must be further guided by ethics, participation, and shared design, as in the works that follow.

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