

Educational Community and Adolescents: Territoriality or Nomadism?

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Abstract

Starting from a project aimed at developing a network among various social actors in order to build an “Educating Community”, this paper focuses on the evaluation process, with particular attention to one of the many target groups involved: adolescents. Participants completed a questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the project, aimed to assess residential attachment, sense of community, and psychosocial and emotional well-being ($n = 326$, 50.6% of whom belonged to the experimental group). The data collected at the end of the project did not show any increase in the dimensions investigated. Based on this unexpected result, the paper offers a reflection on the methodological and psychosocial factors that may explain this outcome.

Keywords: Sense of Community, Place Attachment, Educational Community, action research, adolescents, assessment

Riassunto. Comunità educante e adolescenti: territorialità o nomadismo?

A partire da un progetto, volto a sviluppare una rete tra i diversi attori sociali al fine di pervenire a una “Comunità Educante”, si farà qui riferimento al percorso di valutazione, focalizzato su un target tra i molti coinvolti, cioè la fascia adolescenziale. I soggetti hanno compilato un questionario, a inizio e fine progetto, volto a rilevare l’attaccamento residen-

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ziale, il senso di comunità e il benessere psicosociale ed emotivo ($n = 326$, 50.6% appartenenti al gruppo sperimentale). I dati raccolti al termine del progetto non hanno rilevato un incremento in nessuna delle dimensioni indagate. A partire da questo risultato inatteso, si propone una riflessione circa i fattori, sia di ordine metodologico sia di ordine psicosociale, che possono spiegare questo risultato.

Parole chiave: Senso di Comunità, Attaccamento al luogo, Comunità Educante, ricerca-azione, adolescenti, valutazione

1. Introduction

Under the title of Educational Community, projects and interventions aimed at contributing to community development that fosters the growth and well-being of adolescents and young people are becoming increasingly frequent. The goal is, among others, to develop a network among social actors who jointly share projects, initiatives, and strategies aimed at responding to the needs of young people living in a specific territory. The territorial location is an important issue that characterizes these initiatives, promoting forms of participation and developing relationships (Amerio, 2000). Essentially, the local community constitutes the place where interpersonal relationships are lived, thus contributing to satisfying human needs for belonging, security, and identity (Francescato, 1997). In the case of adolescents and young people, how should their relationship with the territory be interpreted?

2. Adolescents, Young People: What is their Relationship with the Local Community and the Territory?

Extensive psychosocial literature shows that place attachment and sense of community are functional for the development of a good quality of life.

A good relationship with the place of residence is important, especially during childhood and pre-adolescence; while growing up individuals need to expand their knowledge and move beyond the familiar territories where they grew up. It is known that a pre-adolescent, gradually gaining greater autonomy also in the relationship with the world outside of the family, can identify critical aspects of his/her context he/she previously did not recognize. Moreover, the need to explore and step outside of the protective territorial boundaries that characterize childhood also increase. This reduces the sense of community, precisely because there is a need to explore different territories, nevertheless maintaining an anchor to the place of residence. It

is therefore not surprising that several studies show how the sense of community and place attachment decrease with the transition from pre-adolescence to adolescence (Brownson *et al.*, 2009; Scheller *et al.*, 2024).

Place attachment and sense of community are two constructs that emphasize the relationship with one's context, but focus on different aspects of it. A brief clarification of the two constructs is therefore necessary.

2.1 Place Attachment

Place attachment refers, in general, to the emotional bond that the subjects experience towards a place significant to them: the place where they live, a place where they had an important experience, and so on (Lewicka, 2010; Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010a; 2010b). More specifically, it is called "residential attachment" when this bond concerns one's place of residence (Fried, 1982).

Place attachment is closely related both to well-being (Scannel & Gifford, 2010), and to the possibility of finding socializing opportunities there, as well as to environmental awareness (Uzzell *et al.*, 2002; Carrus *et al.*, 2014; Erdoğan, 2025). It develops through experiences lived during the course of daily life and is also consolidated through place practices (Paulsen, 2004; Raffaetà & Duff, 2013). Attachment to a place is in fact built not only by establishing an emotional relationship with the residential place and developing social ties, but also through the possibility of carrying out actions that contribute to a sense of agency and to a situated protagonism. This assumes particular importance during adolescence, a crucial phase of development in which relationships and bonds are redefined (Bartolo *et al.*, 2023), and new experiences are shared (Albanesi *et al.*, 2007; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Evans, 2007; Prati *et al.*, 2020).

2.2 Sense of Community

Sense of community is a concept that does not need an introduction. From the first reflections by Sarason (1974), to the subsequent developments proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986), up to the most recent proposals by Nowell and Boyd (2010), it is known that community is a resource: it constitutes a symbolic and a relational space that if satisfies people's fundamental needs for connection, belonging, positive experiences, is a solid basis for the development of their well-being.

Studies that have investigated the sense of community in early adolescence are scarce (Prati *et al.*, 2021), although it has been shown that the relationship that adolescents build with their territorial context constitutes a reference also for subsequent stages of development, influencing their well-being (Cicognani *et al.*, 2015; Coulombe & Krzesni, 2019; Prati *et al.*, 2018; Prezza *et al.*, 2001; Vieno *et al.*, 2007).

The relationship with a territorial context, such as the local community, tends to progressively change according to the different stages of development: childhood, pre-adolescence, adolescence, and maturity. This change reflects the path of growth towards greater autonomy, which characterizes the transition from childhood to late adolescence with a change in lifestyle, in perceiving, and inhabiting the community space.

It is undeniable that among the developmental tasks that characterize the transition from childhood to adolescence there is also a gradual search for autonomy, living and building relationships and actions that are not affected by parental norms; this is a transition from the family sphere, possibly perceived as safe and protective, or as intrusive and limiting, to public spaces that ensure that the community constitutes (or should constitute) a social and relational context (Ayllon *et al.*, 2019; Prati *et al.*, 2021).

Act with others, doing things together, contributes to broadening relational possibilities and this, in turn, helps to develop a sense of belonging and affiliation. Since one of the superordinate needs of the human being is the need to belong, expanding the opportunities that allow this important need to be satisfied is a protective factor against critical events that could lead to psychological distress and retreat into solitude. The sense of attachment and belonging to the community is built not only through strong ties, such as friendships and family relationships, but is also nurtured by the occasional interactions generated in daily life. It is precisely in the ordinary course of life – in shared places, in intermediate times, in unexpected contacts – that the foundations of the sense of community are consolidated.

Based on these assumptions, an intervention was proposed. The actions that characterized it will be briefly described hereafter, focusing on some aspects of the evaluation that was carried out.

3. Building Ties and Developing an Educational Community: a Situated Intervention

3.1 The Project: A Synthesis of the Operational Phases

The project *ComunitAttiva – Building bonds to recognize ourselves as*

an educating, inclusive, and resilient community, promoted by Gruppo Abele, in partnership with the University of Turin (Departments of Psychology and Computer Science), UISP¹ Torino, together with other public and private social institutions, and funded by Con i bambini Impresa Sociale (call: “Comunità Educante” – “Educating Community”), had the objective of “activating the resources present in the territory in order to build educational paths capable of promoting well-being, autonomy, and critical capacity in the younger generations” (Dipartimenti di Informatica e Psicologia – UNITO, Gruppo Abele, UISP Torino & Circoscrizione 3, 2023). In synthesis, the project had a dual objective: on the one hand, to consolidate or build a network among several actors who can – or could – contribute to building an Educating Community in a District of the City of Turin, thereby creating synergies both between the main educational agencies, namely schools and families, and between them and the different opportunities developed by local agencies (such as: meeting centers for adolescents and young; sports centers; centers for youth leadership, and so on); on the other hand, to propose practical initiatives and activities aimed at adolescents to foster relationships among them and to facilitate their relationship with the local context outside the school.

The first phases (from late September to December 2023) involved more than 300 students, almost 500 parents, and about 50 teachers from the four Institutes (3 lower secondary and 1 upper secondary) participating in the project². These initial contacts aimed:

- to assess perceptions, representations, and use of the local context (seen as a place and as a local community);
- to analyze the needs related to adolescents and young people, perceived both by adults and by the young people themselves.

Subsequently, meetings were proposed in the classes with the objective of deepening the understanding of the needs and desires of adolescents referred to activities to be carried out. The needs collected in the classes suggested the realization of various activities (including during the summer period), in class and outside, integrating the proposals formulated by teachers and parents through focus groups and interviews. The activities were carried out during the first *Educating Community Week – A training to be a community* in 2023 and included meetings with residential structures for the

¹ UISP: “Unione Italiana Sport Per Tutti” (Italian Union of Sports for All).

² Parents were involved through a questionnaire and through word cafés (the latter with an average of 20 parents participating in each school); teachers were involved in focus groups (one meeting per school). Project partners, local agencies, and teacher representatives from each school participated in periodic internal review meetings on the progress of the initiatives.

elderly, with the mosque, with neighborhood bookstores, and also an *Urban Walks* to walk the neighborhood streets and learn about its different places, a Treasure Hunt, sports activities in the neighborhood's pedestrian streets, and artistic-recreational activities. In addition, the classes were involved in civic education activities. 350 students and more than 80 citizens, with 35 local organizations were involved in the about 30 events organized.

Furthermore, during the summer, between the 2023/24 and 2024/25 school years, other initiatives were carried out: a civic activism workshop on urban requalification, the regeneration and decoration of 50 concrete benches placed in a public space, and a film workshop. For the year 2023/24, additional pedestrian areas were created in front of the schools and were used for recreational and sports activities dedicated to the students.

Some classes were involved during two school years as foreseen by the project; others, during the second year, participated only sporadically in some initiatives and new ones were involved. New recreational and sports activities were only implemented in the second year because collaborations between local institutions were added, expanding the network of partners

4. The Evaluation

In order to detect the perception and knowledge of the territory by young people, operationalized in terms of sense of community and place attachment, to explore their psychosocial well-being and to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions in terms of change in attitude towards the local community, a questionnaire was administered at the start and the end of the project. We therefore expect an increase in place attachment, sense of community and well-being in those who participated in the activities.

Here we refer exclusively to the data collected through the questionnaires addressed to the students, thus excluding the information collected through interviews and focus groups.

4.1 Method

The questionnaire, administered at the beginning of the project (September/October 2023) and at the end of the actions (May 2025), included the following scales:

- *Place attachment* (Bonaiuto *et al.*, 2002): a unidimensional scale of Residential Attachment (ACP; Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$), consisting of 8

items (e.g., “This neighborhood is now a part of me”), with a Likert type response where 1 = completely disagree and 7 = completely agree. A high score refers to high place attachment;

- *Sense of community for adolescents* (SOC-A; Chiessi *et al.*, 2010), consisting of 5 sub-dimensions: 4 items refer to the sense of belonging (e.g., “I think this neighborhood is a good place to live”; Cronbach’s alpha = .82); 4 to the opportunity for influence (e.g., “I believe that people here have the potential to change things that seem not to work”; Cronbach’s alpha = .73); 4 to the emotional connection with the community (e.g., “People in this neighborhood support each other”; Cronbach’s alpha = .85); 4 to the emotional connection with peers (e.g., “I like spending time with other young people in this neighborhood”; Cronbach’s alpha = .87); 4 to the satisfaction of needs (e.g., “There are situations and initiatives here that manage to involve us”). The Likert scale provides: 0 = not at all true and 5 = absolutely true (Cronbach’s alpha = .81); a high value refers to a high sense of community;
- *Psychosocial well-being*, detected through the Stirling scale, developed by the *Stirling Council Educational Psychology Service* (UK) and translated into Italian by Testoni *et al.* (2020). It includes two subscales: one referring to psychological well-being (e.g., “I think many people care about me”; Cronbach’s alpha = .73) and the other referring to emotional well-being (e.g., “I feel in a good mood”; Cronbach’s alpha = .81), to which is added a sub-dimension referring to social desirability (3 items; e.g., “I have always told the truth”). The Likert scale provides responses from 1 = never to 5 = always. A high score refers to high well-being.

Some *socio-demographic characteristics* such as: gender, year of birth, country of birth, place of residence were collected.

4.2 The Sample

Adolescents participated in the submission of the questionnaire at two different times: a first phase (T0) between October and November 2023, and a second (T1) between May and June 2025. At T0, the sample consisted of 326 respondents (50.6% belonging to the experimental group) and at T1 of 353 (57.7% belonging to the experimental group). This different number is due to the fact that some classes joined after the project started, and therefore were not contacted at T0, but were in any case considered as experimental group.

In the planning phase, it was decided to re-administer the questionnaire at T1 to the same subjects involved, but this was not possible for several

reasons: some classes did not take part in the project in its second year and other classes, which had not participated in the project during the previous year, joined instead.

Similarly, the activities of the *Educating Week* were attended not only by the classes that adhered to the project, but also by other classes that participated sporadically in the activities; some activities were proposed outside school hours (such as the Treasure Hunt) and boys and girls participated individually. Essentially, what we could define as the experimental sample is a *quasi-experimental* sample, as it was impossible to guarantee the presence of the same subjects before and after the project. In summary: the control sample consists of subjects who were not involved in any project phase; while subjects belonging to classes that participated only occasionally in the activities of the second year were also included in the experimental group (quasi-experimental group).

In both surveys, the gender distribution shows a female prevalence, increasing from 60.1% to 66.2%, compared to a male component that slightly decreases from 39.9% to 33.8%. The average age increases consistently with the temporal shift between the two surveys: from 13.1 years ($SD = 1.9$) at T0 to 15.3 years ($SD = 2.0$) at T1. In terms of the school grade attended, a progressive transition towards upper secondary school is observed, involving 28.2% of the sample at T0 and 37.1% at T1, although the presence of lower secondary school students remains prevalent (71.8% and 62.9% respectively).

5. Results

The data analysis shows an articulated picture of the perceptions and experiences of the adolescents involved, with particular attention to the psychosocial dimensions connected to the sense of community, the quality of relationships, and perceived well-being.

From the correlation analyses (Table 1), a strong internal consistency emerges among the investigated dimensions. In particular, the sense of belonging shows a very high correlation with place attachment ($r = .71, p < .001$) and a significant relationship with all other variables, particularly with the satisfaction of needs and involvement ($r = .55, p < .001$) and emotional support in the community ($r = .54, p < .001$). Emotional support and connection with peers is significantly associated particularly with the satisfaction of needs ($r = .66, p < .001$). Positive emotions and optimism are correlated with each other ($r = .65, p < .001$) and with the main dimensions related to the sense of community.

Table 1 – Correlations between psychosocial dimensions at T0

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Place Attachment	–							
2. Sense of Belonging	.71***	–						
3. Support and Emotional Connection in the Community	.44***	.54***	–					
4. Support and Emotional Connection with Peers	.47***	.43***	.45***	–				
5. Satisfaction of Needs and Involvement Opportunities	.43***	.55***	.50***	.66***	–			
6. Opportunity for Influence	.31***	.35***	.48***	.48***	.54***	–		
7. Optimism	.31***	.32***	.36***	.26***	.29***	.35***	–	
8. Positive Emotions	.26***	.32***	.31***	.22***	.28***	.23***	.65***	–

Note. *** $p < .001$.

The data (see Table 2) express a sufficient satisfaction of the subjects referred to place and sense of community: the means are positioned around the central value of the scale, thus demonstrating both scarce criticality and weak appreciation for the place and the local community. Statistically significant gender differences are observed related to some dimensions. Males report significantly higher mean values in terms of place attachment ($M = 5.5$ vs. 5.2 ; $p = .017$), sense of belonging ($M = 3.9$ vs. 3.7 ; $p = .023$), optimism ($M = 3.6$ vs. 3.4 ; $p = .018$), and positive emotions ($M = 3.5$ vs. 3.3 ; $p = .011$). No significant differences between females and males are found for the other dimensions.

Despite the impossibility, as specified above, of a methodologically rigorous comparison between the different phases of the project, it was nevertheless considered useful for the purpose of joint reflection with the working group, to proceed with an analysis that could highlight any signs of change among those who, even if in different ways, were exposed to the project activities.

Table 2 – Gender differences at T0

<i>Psychosocial dimensions</i>	<i>General Mean (T0)</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Sign.</i>
Place Attachment	$M = 5.3$	$M = 5.5$	$M = 5.2$	$t = 2.4, p = .017$
Sense of Belonging	$M = 3.8$	$M = 3.9$	$M = 3.7$	$t = 2.3, p = .023$
Support and Emotional Connection in the Community	$M = 2.7$	$M = 2.8$	$M = 2.7$	n.s.
Support and Emotional Connection with Peers	$M = 2.8$	$M = 2.9$	$M = 2.7$	n.s.
Satisfaction of Needs and Involvement Opportunities	$M = 2.8$	$M = 2.9$	$M = 2.7$	n.s.
Opportunity for Influence	$M = 3.3$	$M = 3.0$	$M = 3.4$	n.s.
Optimism	$M = 3.5$	$M = 3.6$	$M = 3.4$	$t = 2.4, p = .018$
Positive Emotions	$M = 3.4$	$M = 3.5$	$M = 3.3$	$t = 2.6, p = .011$

Given these premises, considering any changes that occurred between T0 (October-November 2023) and T1 (May-June 2025), Table 3 shows a statistically significant decrease in place attachment (from $M = 5.34$ to $M = 5.14$; $p = .004$), sense of belonging (from $M = 3.78$ to $M = 3.54$; $p < .001$), perceived emotional support in the community (from $M = 2.74$ to $M = 2.54$; $p = .008$), and opportunities for influence (from $M = 3.32$ to $M = 3.12$; $p = .003$). Conversely, no significant variation was found in relation to peer support, satisfaction of needs, optimism, and positive emotions. In some cases (e.g., peer support), a slight, although not significant, increase in mean values is observed.

Overall, these results show a greater vulnerability of some psychosocial dimensions over time, especially those linked to the relationship with the community and the sense of territorial belonging.

Furthermore, comparing the data at T1 between the quasi-experimental group and the control group, no statistically significant differences are found, thereby confirming the data illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3 – Comparison T0/T1: paired-samples *t*-test (quasi-experimental group)

<i>Psychosocial dimensions</i>	<i>T0 (2023)</i>	<i>T1 (2025)</i>	<i>Sign.</i>	<i>Total n</i>
Place Attachment	<i>M</i> = 5.33	<i>M</i> = 5.07	<i>t</i> = 3.67, <i>p</i> = .000	270
Sense of Belonging	<i>M</i> = 3.78	<i>M</i> = 3.54	<i>t</i> = 3.60, <i>p</i> = .000	268
Support and Emotional Connection in the Community	<i>M</i> = 2.74	<i>M</i> = 2.54	<i>t</i> = 2.67, <i>p</i> = .008	265
Support and Emotional Connection with Peers	<i>M</i> = 2.78	<i>M</i> = 2.82	n.s.	268
Satisfaction of Needs and Involvement Opportunities	<i>M</i> = 2.81	<i>M</i> = 2.86	n.s.	267
Opportunity for Influence	<i>M</i> = 3.33	<i>M</i> = 3.12	<i>t</i> = 3.19, <i>p</i> = .002	265
Optimism	<i>M</i> = 3.51	<i>M</i> = 3.51	n.s.	267
Positive Emotions	<i>M</i> = 3.46	<i>M</i> = 3.44	n.s.	267

6. Discussion

In general, the results demonstrate a fair attachment of adolescents to the local district, and a good level of psychosocial well-being. The urban area involved in the project does not present characteristics of particular social risk; it is characterized by a social mix, with a prevalence of private residences inhabited by a middle and upper-middle class. The foreign citizens are composed mainly of people from Central-South America, generally well-integrated into the urban context. Discussions with parents and the teaching staff did not raise any particular critical issues about the environment; some areas were commonly considered as more dangerous or less frequented than others, but there is a general consensus in considering the neighborhood positively, also thanks to the presence of green areas. Teens use green spaces as a place to meet with peers, especially during the summer closing of schools. This period is considered critical by parents, because opportunities for socialization for their children are scarce. The summer activities that were indeed carried out through the project were widely attended and appreciated, even by the young participants.

The analyses also highlight significant differences between boys and

girls both in reference to place attachment and well-being, both dimensions being higher for males. Girls express less place attachment (Dallago *et al.*, 2011) probably because they have a greater desire to push territorial boundaries, hindered by an education that tends to protect girls, forced to remain longer under the control of the family and adults. Similarly, it could be hypothesized that the same desire for greater autonomy and freedom underlies the lower psychological well-being (identified here as “optimism”) and emotional well-being that girls express compared to their male peers. On the other hand, it is known that boys and girls are educated with different rules (Bian, 2022), and the expectations towards them coming from the social world are different.

What is unexpected is the comparison between the data collected at the beginning and end of the project. We would have expected an increase in place attachment, sense of community, and psychological well-being; this is due not only to the desired results, but also in reference to the observations and communications exchanged with the young people during the project. All the proposed activities were positively evaluated, with participation both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Teachers and parents also expressed satisfaction with the proposed activities and the resulting reactions of the young people. However, the data collected at the end of the project did not show an increase in any of the investigated dimensions and even in some dimensions, an increase towards greater criticality was observed.

It seems important to elaborate on this point a reflection both on the meaning of an evaluation inspired by evidence-based principles and on the psychosocial processes underlying this result, including an analysis on how important the relationship with the place is for the adolescents.

First of all, we must consider that, since the data does not show any differences between the beginning and end of the project, for both control and experimental subjects, we cannot attribute the cause of the decrease in the sense of community to the project actions.

From a procedural point of view, it is known that a situated project has to “negotiate” the planned project with the concrete possibility of being able to realize it. In this specific case, internal issues in the school made it difficult to involve the same classes for two consecutive school years. The entire project described here was developed by agreeing with the partners on the need for changes *in itinere* due to unforeseen needs or conversely, seizing opportunities present in the territory that were either unknown or not yet existing at the time of the project drafting. The ongoing changes are due both to the impossibility of involving the same classes for two consecutive years and to the need to modify the proposed actions, maintaining the same aims: fostering place attachment and sense of community.

All of this does not constitute a problem in itself but raises methodological questions.

In case of a pre/post evaluation, based on expected objectives at time X, which are then modified on the basis of a situated approach, is it possible to certify the intervention as the best practice? A process evaluation can be carried out, but could it happen that the indicators identified at time X are not so relevant in light of the changes that occurred during the project realization? How suitable is a pre/post comparison to detect the effectiveness of a situated project, subject to changes *in itinere*? These issues highlight the need to adopt a different kind of perspective when this type of evaluation is performed, especially in regard to how the results are analyzed. It must also be considered that social projects such as the one presented in this paper often generate indirect effects, which are not always easily measurable. Despite the difficulties in continuing the planned actions in some classes, the network among the various institutions involved has been strengthened, making it possible, for example, to participate in other calls to obtain new funding and, consequently, expand the network and continue the actions, referring to the analysis of needs and the information collected in the initial phase (T0) of the project.

In the context of social policies, whose interventions have characteristics strictly linked to time, place, and subjects, the evidence-based approach is considered inappropriate by some (Pawson *et al.*, 2011), and unworkable by others (Lombi, 2008).

At a procedural level, two orders of reflection arise. The first concerns the need for more time to produce structural change: transforming individual attitudes and, even more, modifying social dynamics rooted in a local context requires long and continuous processes. See the issue of projects that last for a defined time. There is a need for structural interventions, which would also allow for a longitudinal methodological approach, thus being able to monitor the quality and extent of changes, inspired by an ecological approach to systems change (Peirson *et al.*, 2011) and integrating, in the evaluation process, the intervening variables and the intrinsic changes to the system itself, i.e., those not consequent to the realized intervention.

Participatory action research (Arcidiacono & Marta, 2008) could be an excellent reference, not only because it involves a participatory approach in all phases of planning, implementation, and evaluation, but also because, by involving partners from the outset, it can predict ongoing changes and, if necessary, adapt evaluation processes. However, as already discussed, these need time, dedicating the early phases to building participation and actively involving partners. If the usefulness of knowledge for social actors is one of the criteria that defines the validity of community psychology research

(Trickett & Espino, 2004), perhaps it is not necessary to demonstrate that a project, or intervention, is evidence-based, a criterion perhaps too much far from the systemic ecological approach. But this is an open question, requiring further exploration.

The second concerns the relation between place and adolescents. Extensive literature has demonstrated the relationship between place attachment and sense of community and well-being; our data also confirm this relationship. Perhaps not only the duration of the project and the difficulty in obtaining “pure” control classes and “pure” experimental classes can explain why the data did not show an improvement in the investigated constructs. Over the course of a year and a half, the participants have grown, and with age, perhaps their need to expand their space for movement has also grown – expressing criticism toward their usual place as a way of responding to a desire to explore other spaces, while on the one hand staying connected to their own history and on the other building new forms of belonging.

It cannot be ignored how, in recent years, socialization channels have undergone deep transformations, particularly due to the spread of social media. Online relationships have not replaced offline ones but today represent an additional space through which girls and boys initiate, develop, or maintain social bonds. The considered sample belongs to the so-called Alpha generation (i.e., young people born from 2010 to 2024), the first generation raised entirely in the digital age, for whom social media constitute a structural element of daily life and different forms of interaction and socialization.

7. Conclusions

A situated project requires capacity for adaptation, that is, the possibility of modulating the project phases in response to emerging needs, internal transformations of the community, unforeseen events and, more generally, everything that is not plannable *ex ante*. Our resulting evaluation data open up questions on a double level. On the one hand, they urge us to reflect on the limits of an evaluative framework inspired by “orthodox” research, as previously discussed. On the other hand, they impose a broader reflection on the relationship between local communities and adolescents, with a specific focus on Alpha generation. Having been born in the digital age, therefore accustomed to use, and to see using, the various devices, they do not consider these tools as innovative and original; they are approaching another way of use, integrating digital spaces with more traditional socialization spaces, ranging from online to offline. As Castiglione (2023) reminds us,

referring to research conducted in a neighborhood of Palermo, «all participants agreed on the pleasure of playing together, both with physical and virtual companions reached online. Their choices must therefore be traced back to the broader motivation to use socializing spaces» (p. 59).

Among the needs detected during the initial meetings in the classes, the need to be involved in in-person social activities clearly emerged, thus leading to significant participation during the proposed activities, even outside the school context. It is therefore important to ask how the relationship between a pervasive and familiar online universe and in-person relationships, the construction of territorial bonds, and the possibility of inhabiting offline spaces that offer opportunities and recognition are articulated for them. How to combine, in the evolutionary trajectory of these adolescents, the need for belonging and the desire to remain mobile, unanchored.

Questions that remain open and that could constitute fertile ground for future projects and new investigations, underlining the need for long-term projects, capable of embracing transformations, modifying themselves on the basis of structural changes and adapting to new needs and emerging evolutionary trajectories.

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