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# Sense of responsible togetherness, sense of community, and civic engagement behaviours: Disentangling an active and engaged citizenship

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## Abstract

Local communities should represent entities where individuals get answers to their affiliation needs and for which they feel responsible, but in modern ones, increasingly complex ways of living together are fostering citizens' civic and social disengagement. The present study addresses the relationships between the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components of an active and engaged citizenship. Five hundred and fifty-five Italian citizens answered an online questionnaire about their Sense of Responsible Togetherness, Sense of Community, and Civic Engagement Behaviours. The results support Sense of Community as a mediator in the relationship between Sense of Responsible Togetherness and civic engagement behaviours, suggesting that the representations about community members being active and responsible, and having opportunities to meet and match, could at the same time strengthen their tie to that community and foster their civic engagement for it. This could set up a cycle of enhancement and empowerment for individuals and communities through increasing the opportunities for local generative interactions and civic engagement.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Local communities (i.e., neighbourhoods or cities) have always been meant as entities both where individuals can answer their affiliation and belonging needs and towards which they should feel responsible in producing social changes through their engagement (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Nowell & Boyd, 2010; Procentese, Scotto di Luzio, & Natale, 2011). Nevertheless, in modern times, everyone focuses on their own problems as they were solely private, tries to solve them with their own resources (Doolittle & Faul, 2013; Hyman, 2002), is always less interested in collective actions and social debates, and delegates others to administer commons (Arcidiacono, Procentese, & Di Napoli, 2007; Procentese, 2011; Putnam, 2000). That is, local communities are no longer perceived as relational spaces of which their members have to take care, and increasing levels of reciprocal indifference and mistrust (Gatti & Procentese, 2020a, 2020b; Natale, Di Martino, Procentese, & Arcidiacono, 2016; Procentese et al., 2011; Procentese & Gatti, 2019a, 2019b, 2020) foster the disinvestment towards common actions within them (Arcidiacono et al., 2007; Procentese, 2011; Procentese, Di Napoli, & Iuliano, 2007). What emerges is a serious lack of civic engagement among citizens.

Civic engagement has been defined as those actions aimed at solving social problems or improving the quality of life with reference to the whole community, based on the acknowledgment that everyone can and should make a difference as to community development (Doolittle & Faul, 2013; Ehrlich, 1997). These behaviours are linked to prosocial values and to the activation of personal resources in managing community issues (Flanagan, Syvertsen, & Stout, 2007; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). This kind of engagement represents a core element of individual and community positive development (Boffi, Riva, Rainisio, & Inghilleri, 2016; Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009; Marta, Pozzi, & Marzana, 2010; Procentese, De Carlo, & Gatti, 2019; Sherrod, 2007; Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009). Consistently, Zaff et al. (2010) defined an active and engaged citizenship as characterized by the acknowledgment about one's responsibility towards others and the overall community, relationships and active involvement within the latter, and respect for everyone's freedom as well as for shared rules and values. That is, this kind of citizenship implies civic skills and the awareness about civic duties and about one's ability to produce changes as well as social connections, in addition to actual civically engaged behaviours (Zaff et al., 2010).

Building on this, the present study aimed at deepening the associations that represent the core of an active and engaged citizenship, that is the ones between civic engagement behaviours and the ties individuals can develop towards their local communities of belonging as relational entities they feel tied to but also responsible for. The rationale of study builds upon the acknowledgment that affective (i.e., the tie to the community of belonging), cognitive (i.e., the representation about how to act, and take responsibilities for, and live together in the community of belonging), and behavioural (i.e., civic engagement behaviours) dimensions are strictly interconnected (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006).

As to the affective bond that ties individuals to their communities of belonging, studies have broadly deepened the role of Sense of Community (SoC, McMillan & Chavis, 1986) with reference to different kinds of communities (e.g., Peterson et al., 2008; Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001; Prezza, Pacilli, Barbaranelli, & Zampatti, 2009; Scotto di Luzio, Guillet-Descas, Procentese, & Martinent, 2017), and proved its role in fostering citizens' participation and civic engagement within the latter (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Flanagan, 2003; Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019; Rollero, Tartaglia, De Piccoli, & Ceccarini, 2009; Talò, Mannarini, & Rochira, 2014; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Conversely, the feelings of responsibility towards one's community and the representations about how to live together and act for improvements within it – which represent a more cognitive dimension (Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019; Zaff et al., 2010) – have received less and more recent attention (Nowell & Boyd, 2010, 2014; Procentese et al., 2011; Procentese, De Carlo, & Gatti, 2019; Procentese & Gatti, 2019b; Procentese, Gatti, &

Falanga, 2019). Nevertheless, these dimensions were recently conceptualized as Sense of Responsible Togetherness (SoRT) by Procentese et al. (2011); Procentese and Gatti (2019b); Procentese, De Carlo, and Gatti (2019); Procentese, Gatti, and Falanga (2019). SoRT refers to individuals' representations about how to live together in their community, act and take responsibilities to improve it, and manage social relationships within it (Procentese, De Carlo, & Gatti, 2019; Procentese & Gatti, 2019b); it 'is based on collaboration, acknowledgment of shared norms and belonging, attention to others' needs and respect for reciprocal freedoms, active involvement in community life' (Procentese & Gatti, 2019b, p. 411).

Thus, SoC and SoRT will respectively be deepened as the affective and cognitive dimensions of what Zaff et al. (2010) defined as active and engaged citizenship, building upon the already emerged connections linking these constructs to civic engagement behaviours (e.g., Flanagan, 2003; Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019; Rollero et al., 2009; Watts & Flanagan, 2007) – which could represent the behavioural component.

## 2 | SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

SoC includes different core elements – namely, membership, reciprocal influence between the community and its members, fulfilment of individual needs by the community, and shared emotional connection – which refer to individuals' identity as community members and belonging to that community, but also go beyond these (McMillan, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Indeed, these dimensions make community members aware they belong to the same community (Sarason, 1974), will help each other when in need (Kusenbach, 2006), and share common values, meanings, and resources (McMillan, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Through this, SoC fosters community members' involvement in and engagement for common issues in order to improve community conditions (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Davidson & Cotter, 1986; Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, & Chavis, 1990). That is, SoC 'can also serve as a catalyst for community change' (Hyde & Chavis, 2007, p. 179), as it makes people aware they can access community shared resources (Sarason, 1974), bonded to their community, interested in it, and engaged in improving it, with beneficial effects at both individual and community levels (e.g., Mannarini, Talò, Mezzi, & Procentese, 2018; Omoto & Snyder, 1990; Omoto, Snyder, & Berghuis, 1993; Prezza et al., 2001; Scotto di Luzio et al., 2017; Scotto di Luzio, Procentese, & Guillet-Descas, 2019). Consistently, SoC is a valuable resource to rely on to foster civic engagement and participation: people feeling part of their community self-categorize as members of it, and such feeling can foster their involvement in prosocial actions towards their community as well as the assumption of civic values to lead their actions (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Flanagan, 2003; Rollero et al., 2009; Talò et al., 2014; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Nevertheless, SoC only refers to the affective bond that ties individuals to their communities, yet it does not take into account other dimensions which could play a relevant role when it comes to an active and engaged citizenship, such as the representations about the role and the responsibility everyone has in improving the community (Procentese et al., 2011; Procentese & Gatti, 2019b; Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019).

## 3 | THE ROLE OF THE SENSE OF RESPONSIBLE TOGETHERNESS

SoRT (Procentese et al., 2011; Procentese & Gatti, 2019b) has been conceptualized as the representation individuals have about how to relate to others in their community, actively behave within it, and take responsibilities for and towards it and its members. It is composed by the representations about some specific aspects of local community experience, namely equity and support among community members, the feeling of being an active member of the community, the perceived support from institutional referents, the acting for the power, the respect of rules and for Others, the perception of freedom of opinion (Procentese & Gatti, 2019b). Thus, SoRT emphasizes the relevance of the responsibility, which is an element that can foster the settlement of common goals among community members, and their engagement in pursuing them (Di Maria, 2000; McMillan, 2011) and in promoting changes in and for the

community (Procentese, 2011). Nevertheless, along with the representations about individual responsibilities for the community, SoRT also includes the other above-mentioned dimensions about living together in it (Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019). In this vein, it associates with the already existing Sense of Community Responsibility (Prati et al., 2020) – which has been defined as 'a feeling of personal responsibility for the individual and collective well-being of a community of people not directly rooted in an expectation of personal gain' (Nowell & Boyd, 2014, p. 231) – yet represents a different and broader construct.

Overall, SoRT depends on collaboration, shared norms and goals, care for everyone's needs and freedom, and active involvement in and for the community (Procentese et al., 2011; Procentese & Gatti, 2019b). It relies on individual perceptions, structural opportunities, and shared norms about the community and the relationships within it, which can contribute to an active involvement in and engagement for it (Procentese, De Carlo, & Gatti, 2019; Procentese & Gatti, 2019b). These interdependent aspects may promote individuals' responsibility in planning and acting for the implementation of changes in the community and to meet individual and community needs at last (Procentese & Gatti, 2019b). Indeed, SoRT lays at the intersection between individual and collective dimensions, fostering reciprocal trust, identification and pursue of common goals, and shared actions aimed at achieving the latter by increasing community members' awareness about their ability to produce changes through responsibility-taking processes and active involvement in and for their community (Procentese, 2011).

Consistently, SoRT could represent a key component of an active and engaged citizenship, as it could enhance citizens' responsibility-taking and civically engaged behaviours (Procentese, Gargiulo, & Gatti, 2020). In the same vein, responsibility-taking processes aimed at fostering changes and better life conditions at both individual and community levels as well as opportunities for generative interactions among community members – which are the core of SoRT – already proved their role in enhancing citizens' engagement in their community (Marta et al., 2010). Thus, as intrinsic motivations and common goals to achieve represent the bases of civic engagement (Larson, 2000), the following hypothesis is suggested:

**H1.** *SoRT positively associates to Civic Engagement Behaviours.*

Besides promoting citizens' engagement for their community, the representations compounding what has been defined as SoRT may also play a role in enhancing their affective bond towards it (Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019). Indeed, the core components of SoRT represent paths through which symbolic and physical spaces and opportunities to establish and manage meaningful relationships and generative interactions among community members can be created (Procentese & Gatti, 2019b). That is, they have a role in determining how people share their local context meant both physically and socially, feel bonded to it, and represent their being-in-relationships with other community members and the opportunities to meet and match about individual and common issues, producing valuable relationships and answers at both individual and community levels (Procentese et al., 2011; Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019). In line with this, SoRT already emerged as a predictor of SoC (Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019). Building on this and on the acknowledgment that the affective dimension plays a role in fostering individuals' commitment for (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Marta et al., 2010) and involvement in (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Davidson & Cotter, 1986; Perkins et al., 1990) the community of belonging too, the following hypothesis is added to the previous one:

**H2.** *SoC mediates the relationship between SoRT and Civic Engagement Behaviours.*

## 4 | METHOD

### 4.1 | Participants and procedures

Five hundred and fifty-five Italian citizens were recruited via snowball sampling to achieve a non-college sample; they received no compensation for participating in the study. The questionnaire was spread online (via social

networks, e.g., Facebook); no IP address or identifying data were retained when administering it. It was introduced by an explanation about confidentiality and anonymity issues (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), conforming with the International applicable law (EU Reg. 2016/679). At the end of this explanation, participants had to express their online informed consent to take part in the study.

Participants were aged between 18 and 60 ($M = 23.50$; $SD = 5.06$). Of them, 55.3% was female. Consistently with the age range, 1.8% had a Secondary School Diploma, 72.4% had a High School Diploma, 23.5% a degree, and only 2.3% a post degree title. Most of the participants were unmarried (92.3%), while only 6.3% said to be married or cohabitant, 0.7% separated or divorced, and 0.7% widower.

## 4.2 | Measures

The questionnaire included a socio-demographic section, followed by some specific measures according to the aims of the study.

### 4.2.1 | Civic engagement behaviours

The Italian version (Procentese, De Carlo, & Gatti, 2019) of the Civic Engagement Scale (CES, Doolittle & Faul, 2013) was used. This scale includes a sub-scale about Civic Engagement Attitudes (CEA) and one about Civic Engagement Behaviours (CEB), but only the latter ($\alpha = .89$, 6 items, e.g., 'I am involved in structured volunteer position(s) in the community', 'I participate in discussions that raise issues of social responsibility') was used in the present study according to its aims. For this sub-scale, participants were asked to rate the frequency with which they played out the behaviours described by each item on a 7-point Likert scale ($1 = never$, $7 = always$), with reference to their neighbourhood.

### 4.2.2 | Sense of responsible togetherness

The Sense of Responsible Togetherness (SoRT) scale was used ($\alpha = .92$, Procentese, De Carlo, & Gatti, 2019; Procentese & Gatti, 2019b). It comprises 33 items (e.g., '*Respect the rules of togetherness in the neighbourhood*', '*Get equal attention from the Institutional referents*', '*Help new residents to become part of the neighbourhood*') to be rated on a 4-point Likert scale ($1 = never$, $4 = often$), and respondents are asked about how often each sentence is true referring to their neighbourhood. Overall, the items refer to perception of equity, feeling of being an active member, perceived support from institutional referents, acting for the power, respect of rules and for Others, reciprocal support, freedom of opinion. However, as all these aspects represent the different yet intertwined dimensions underlying SoRT as it was conceptualized by Procentese et al. (2011); Procentese, De Carlo, and Gatti (2019); Procentese, Gatti, and Falanga (2019), the overall score was used for the study following their suggestion (Procentese & Gatti, 2019b; Procentese, De Carlo, & Gatti, 2019).

### 4.2.3 | Sense of community

The Italian Scale of Sense of Community (SoC) ($\alpha = .80$, 18 items, Prezza, Costantini, Chiarolanza, & Di Marco, 1999; Prezza et al., 2001) was used. Respondents were asked to express their agreement with each item (e.g., '*Many people in this neighborhood are available to provide help when someone needs it*', '*I feel like I belong here*') on a 4-point Likert scale ($1 = strongly\ disagree$, $4 = strongly\ agree$) with reference to their neighbourhood.

## 4.3 | Data analyses

Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) were run using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to test the factor structure for each scale. To evaluate the model fit, different indices were observed (MacCallum & Austin, 2000): the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and its 90% confidence interval (CI), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). For CFI and TLI, values equal to or greater than .90 and .95 respectively indicate good or excellent fit; for RMSEA and SRMR, values equal to or smaller than .06 and .08 respectively indicate good or reasonable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The reliability was checked using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha$).

A mediation model was run using SEM in order to test the hypotheses. SoRT was entered as the independent variable, CEB as the dependent one; SoC was entered as a mediator. Age and gender (0 = *male*; 1 = *female*) were included as control variables in the model. The presence of outliers and/or influential cases was checked through the leverage value and Cook's D, to verify whether significant values in the data could affect the analyses (Cousineau & Chartier, 2010); multicollinearity was checked through the Tolerance index – which is comprised between 0 and 1 and should be higher than 20 in order to suggest the absence of multicollinearity issues (Craney & Surles, 2002). Given the interest in higher order constructs, a heterogeneous parcelling was adopted (Coffman & MacCallum, 2005), as it reproduces smaller but more reliable coefficients than the homogeneous one (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002; Little, Rhemtulla, Gibson, & Schoemann, 2013) and allows to avoid generating a flawed measurement model, including theoretically meaningful categories in SEM. To evaluate the model fit, the above-mentioned indices of fit were observed again. Bootstrap estimation was used to test the significance of the results (Hayes, 2018; Preacher & Hayes, 2008) with 10,000 samples, and the bias-corrected 95% CI was computed by determining the effects at 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles; the indirect effects are significant when 0 is not included in the CI.

## 5 | RESULTS

CFAs confirmed the expected factor structure for all the measures. Cronbach's alpha, fit indices, descriptive statistics, and correlations for all the measures are in Table 1.

The data included no outliers and/or influential cases affecting the analyses, as the leverage value was always lower than .04 and Cook's D always lower than .03; variables had a Tolerance index of .70, suggesting multicollinearity was not an issue.

**TABLE 1** Summary of fit and reliability indices, descriptive statistics and correlations

| Variables | CFI | TLI | RMSEA | RMSEA 90% CI | SRMR | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | M | SD | 1 | 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Sense of responsible togetherness (SoRT) | .91 | .90 | .06 | [.05, .06] | .08 | .92 | 2.50[a] | 0.45 | - | |
| 2. Civic engagement Behaviours (CEB) | .99 | .99 | .03 | [.001, .07] | .02 | .89 | 2.93[b] | 1.41 | .276 *** | - |
| 3. Sense of community (SoC) | .92 | .90 | .07 | [.06, .07] | .05 | .80 | 2.50 [a] | 0.41 | .545 *** | .226 *** |

*Note*: n = 555.
Abbreviations: CFI, comparative fit index; CI, confidence interval; *M*, mean; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; *SD*, standard deviation; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index; α, Cronbach alpha.
***p < .001 (2-tailed).
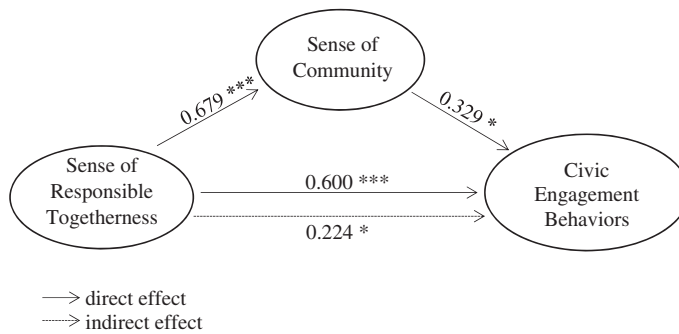[a]1–4 range scale.
[b]1–7 range scale.

**FIGURE 1** Mediation model results. $n = 555$. * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$. Unstandardized coefficients (B) are shown. Age and gender were included as control variables in the model

The model (see Figure 1) confirmed the hypotheses, as SoRT emerged as a significant predictor of SoC, $B = 0.679$, SE = 0.05, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.58, 0.78], which in turn was a significant predictor of CEB, $B = 0.329$, SE = 0.14, $p = .02$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.63]. Furthermore, SoRT also showed a significant direct effect on CEB, $B = 0.60$, SE = 0.18, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.98]. Its unstandardized indirect (i.e., via SoC) effect was 0.224, SE = 0.10, $p = .02$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.43]; its unstandardized total effect was 0.824, SE = 0.15, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.54, 1.12]. Age showed no significant effect on both SoC, $B = 0.004$, SE = 0.004, $p = .22$, 95% CI [−0.003, 0.01], and CEB, $B = 0.004$, SE = 0.01, $p = .727$, 95% CI [−0.02, 0.03], while gender showed no significant association with CEB, $B = −0.01$, SE = 0.10, $p = .884$, 95% CI [−0.21, 0.18], but a significant one with SoC, $B = 0.08$, SE = 0.04, $p = .02$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.16]. The model showed an excellent fit, CFI = .996, TLI = 994, RMSEA = .028, 90% CI [.008, .044], SRMR = .026.

## 6 | DISCUSSION

Since affective, cognitive, and behavioural components of human actions are supposed to be tightly interconnected and to relate to each other (Baltes et al., 2006), this study aimed at deepening the relationships among them with reference to what Zaff et al. (2010) defined as active and engaged citizenship. Specifically, SoC was taken into account as the affective component, SoRT as the cognitive one, and civic engagement behaviours as the behavioural one. Building on previous research evidence, it was hypothesized that SoRT would have positively associated with civic engagement behaviours, and that this relationship would have been mediated by SoC.

The results support both hypotheses, suggesting that acknowledging one's ability to make a difference in the community of belonging by taking responsibilities and getting actively involved in local relationships and common activities may enhance the feeling of being part of that community – and the affective tie to it and to its members – which in tun could foster the civically engaged behaviours citizens concretely play out for it. Overall, this may represent the core of an active and engaged citizenship (Zaff et al., 2010). That is, citizens' feeling of being part of and tied to a community where people responsibly live together could be a critical element to rely on to foster their civic engagement within it (Marta et al., 2010; Procentese et al., 2011; Procentese & Gatti, 2019b), in order to implement a more active and engaged citizenship – as Zaff et al. (2010) defined it – and changes at community level at last. Indeed, attending shared spaces, getting involved into collective actions and activities, and sharing common views and aims can increase individuals' feeling of being part of something bigger – that is, their community – fostering a more effective engagement in producing changes and improving the current conditions at both individual and community level in the end (Hyde & Chavis, 2007; Zaff et al., 2010). This seems also consistent with the acknowledgment that the relationships and the support among community members and with its leaders, the acknowledgment of common values and rules, and the shared generative spaces where collective actions and a community agenda can

be organized and local social capital can be built represent critical components in Hyman's (2002) Community Building framework, which is aimed at enhancing the use of community capacities and resources to face up troubles and concerns, and promote community welfare.

What emerged sheds further light on the relationships between the affective, cognitive, and behavioural components (Baltes et al., 2006) of an active and engaged citizenship, in line with the acknowledgment that 'civic engagement is expressed as a connection to one's community, a commitment to improving that community, and the act of helping one's community, consistent with the ideas of connection, duty, and behavior, respectively' (Zaff et al., 2010, p. 737). Accordingly, this study suggests some hints about new feasible paths that may foster citizens' tie to their community and engagement for it at the same time. Such path seems to build upon citizens' representations about how to live together in the community and work together to improve it through responsibility-taking processes, respect of the rules, reciprocal support, and reciprocal respect among citizens and with Institutional referents, which are all elements compounding of what has been defined as Sense of Responsible Togetherness (Procentese, 2011; Procentese et al., 2011; Procentese & Gatti, 2019b; Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019).

Promoting a style of togetherness based upon community members being active and responsible for their community, taking advantage of opportunities and spaces to meet and match with their community fellows, and engaging in respectful and equitable relationships with them could foster the tie to the community as well as a stronger engagement to improve its conditions, as these elements would produce more opportunities for generative interactions and motivational processes – which have been acknowledged as elements fostering civic engagement (Marta et al., 2010). Indeed, opportunities to discuss community-related issues could enhance individual and community attention and answers to everyone's needs, foster stronger connections among community members, and broaden local social capital by offering more spaces and activities having social meanings and functions (Hyman, 2002; Putnam, 2000), sustaining citizens' SoC at last (Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019). At the same time, such spaces and opportunities could be fertile soil for community members to share viewpoints and problems, perspectives and doubts about their community and its commons (Flanagan et al., 2007). This could set up further possibilities to define shared goals and set the paths to achieve them by relying on the resources every community member and the community as a whole have and are able to offer.

In a broader socio-cultural context, which seems focused on an individualistic rather than collective perspective (Arcidiacono et al., 2007; Doolittle & Faul, 2013; Hyman, 2002; Procentese, 2011; Putnam, 2000), the present results suggest the need to promote a different attitude towards the community of belonging, which should be compounded by positive values and beliefs and a stronger tie to the community, but also by active engagement and involvement in social actions aimed at pursuing common goods (Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019). Such attitude may be fostered through interventions aimed at producing synergies among local associations and between associations and Institutions. Indeed, having opportunities to meet and match, get involved in common actions, and take responsibilities for individual and common goods could give birth to a positive cycle of satisfaction, self- and community-enhancement, responsibility-taking processes, and individual and collective empowerment, which could keep citizens' engagement for their community high (Boffi et al., 2016; Hughey, Speer, & Peterson, 1999; Hyman, 2002; Lerner, 2004; Lerner et al., 2009; Marta et al., 2010; Procentese et al., 2020; Procentese, De Carlo, & Gatti, 2019; Sherrod, 2007; Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009). These opportunities could provide citizens with further chances to meet their fellow citizens, feel active and involved in their community, and co-create and share new – and maybe different – representations about how to live together, relate to each other, and take care of the community and its commons. Overall, this could make the neighbourhood more liveable and the community more cohesive. Thus, referents of Institutions and associations should engage in the promotion of activities and interventions aimed at implementing more responsible and involved ways of living local communities in order to answer citizens' relational, growth, and affiliation needs. Such a different positioning within and towards the community of belonging would produce benefits and better conditions in emergency circumstances too, as a stronger involvement and engagement could foster the implementation of responsible and collaborative behaviours aimed at helping others and the community as a whole. Indeed, the role that citizens and local associations can play as to prosocial behaviours and

reorientation processes under emergency circumstances was recently remarked (Aresi et al., *in press*; Gatti & Procentese, 2021).

## 6.1 | Limitations and future directions

It is also important to acknowledge some limitations of this study. The findings are based on self-report data, which can be distorted by memory bias and response fatigue. Moreover, distributing the questionnaire through Facebook and using snowball sampling procedures to reach a broad range of potential participants may have led to self-selection bias.

Further, due to the cross-sectional design of the study, the described relationships should be considered carefully. Indeed, civic engaged behaviours may also promote SoRT and contribute to overcoming the ongoing individualist tendencies (Procentese, De Carlo, & Gatti, 2019): through playing out community activities and civically engaged behaviours, the idea of caring about the collective well-being of the community of belonging rather than safeguarding one's personal interests could be fostered too. Similarly, the relationship between civic engagement and SoC could be considered in the opposite direction too, as being actively involved in community issues also creates opportunities to broaden one's local social network and feel connected and belonging to that community (Hughey et al., 1999). Thus, circular relationships could be hypothesized too and should be deepened in future studies with longitudinal research designs.

Last, trust-related aspects could be considered in addition to affective and cognitive ones, to achieve a deeper understanding of a complex phenomenon such as civic engagement is (Di Napoli, Dolce, & Arcidiacono, 2019). Thus, further studies would be useful to clarify the role of community-related trust too.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

### ETHICS STATEMENT
The authors of this manuscript have complied with APA ethical principles in their treatment of individuals participating in the research, program, or policy described in the manuscript. The research has been approved by the Ethical Committee of Psychological Research of the Department of Humanities of the University of Naples Federico II.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request, as well as the materials used for the study.

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