

Special Issue
Engineering the Future Sociologically:
a Call to Delve into Environmental
Education Enhanced by
Technological Innovations

FUORI LUOGO

**Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology**

Guest Editors
Norberto Albano
Sandro Brignone
Carmine Urciuoli



Editor in Chief: Fabio Corbisiero
Managing Editor: Carmine Urciuoli

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Summary

9. Editorial

Smart technologies and social knowledge. Where are we now?

Fabio Corbisiero

11. Engineering the Future Sociologically: Environmental Education and Advanced Technologies in the Age of Planetary Crisis

Norberto Albano, Sandro Brignone, Carmine Urciuoli

23. Mapping Technology Usage in Environmental Education

Caterina Ambrosio, Dario Chianese

35. Learning Cities and Urban Ecosystems. Digital Technologies Fostering Informal Lifelong Environmental Education in Cities and Urban Participation

Marco Ingrassia

49. ChatGPT and the Social Appropriation of AI on Discord

Vincenzo Laezza, Arianna Petrosino, Vincenzo Luise

65. AI, Big Data, and IoT for Social and Environmental Sustainability in a Digital Transformation Course

Antonio Opronolla

81. Ecoliteracy and Artificial Intelligence: Two Opposites for a Common Goal in Education

Gianfranco Rubino

3T SECTION - 3T READINGS

101. Sissa, G. (2024), *Le emissioni segrete. L'impatto ambientale dell'universo digitale*, il Mulino
Mariella Berra reads

105. Castells, M. (2024). *Digital Society*, Edward Elgar.

Giorgio Osti reads

107. Badino, M., D'Asaro F. A., Pedrazzoli, F., (2024) *Educare all'IA.*

La sfida didattica dell'Intelligenza Artificiale: ChatGPT e Gemini. Sanoma.

Emanuela Ricciardi reads

INTERVIEW

113. Beyond Dichotomies: Subjectivity, Ethics, and Ontology in David J. Gunkel's Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence

Norberto Albano, Sandro Brignone, Carmine Urciuoli

FUORI LUOGO SECTION

123. Chatbots for Customer Service: the Case Study of ANAS

Giuseppina Anatriello, Massimo Carlini, Fabio Corbisiero, Maurizio Lauro, Salvatore Monaco

137. Masculinities and Caring Professions. The Case Study of Students Enrolled in University Courses in Educational Disciplines

Marianna Coppola, Giuseppe Masullo

149. Festive Expressions in Contexts of Depopulation: Carnival in the "Sicani Area" in Sicily

Alejandro Gana-Núñez

165. Italo Calvino and the Invisible Cities: Between Literature and Urban Sociology

Marxiano Melotti

183. Pandemic, culture and well-being.

A community study on the impacts of Covid-19 with respect to individual psychological well-being
Giorgio Tavano Blessi, Enzo Grossi, Matteo Colleoni

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Pandemic, culture and well-being.

A community study on the impacts of Covid-19 with respect to individual psychological well-being²

Introduction

The role that well-being plays is of fundamental importance when put in relation with 'functioning', both in individual and collectivity terms, encompassing one's physical and psychological health, which is the outcome of subjective perceptions relating to one's health placed within the context in which one individual lives and acts, and the relations and connections with other community entities. The impact of external agents, such as disruptive factors causing a sudden change of the aforementioned dimensions, can trigger a stressed state of being in both the individual and the local social system, with deep alterations to their efficiency and functioning skills. Analyzing their results is therefore necessary in order to build up strategies and actions aimed at relieving the pressure, leading to the additional step of restoring the potential well-being conditions for the subject and the collectivity.

The pandemic that struck the globe from 2020 contributed to the alteration of the socio-economic fabric of the territory, affecting the well-being sphere of people. The containment measures against the spread of Covid-19 led to a limitation of people and social actors' freedom, majorly impacting personal and communal lifestyles. Community life, and social and cultural activities and initiatives connected to it, has been deeply affected by such limitations. Community life is the amalgam of a multitude of factors, among which we can name the relational dimension and affectivity (Di Nicola, 2013), and space and time elements (Nuvolati, 2003).

The coming of the pandemic and the activation of mitigation actions, such as interpersonal distancing, restriction of movement, cancellation of gatherings and the lockdown of social and recreational spaces, has therefore potentially caused a profound effect on the very social fabric of communities, with a predictable impact on the individual psychological well-being³.

This paper focuses on verifying two hypotheses:

- If the psychological well-being is the outcome of the aforementioned community life conditions, what effect was triggered by their pandemic-induced interruption?
- What is the role of the social and cultural dimension in the definition of the individual psychological well-being?

This exploratory study aims to verify how psychological well-being, a dependent variable, has been affected by the decrease and/or cancellation of the opportunities linked to communal life, such as the participation to social and cultural events, which are independent variables.

This study is inspired by a February 2020 survey, which was also repeated the following year, in February 2021, on a sample of the population of a municipality in the metropolitan area of Milan, Branzate. The research falls within the scope of community studies, and by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach aims to highlight the possible alterations triggered by the pandemic, com-

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2 Received: 27/05/2024. Revised: 24/01/2025. Accepted: 12/02/2025. Published: 28/02/2025..

3 It is important to highlight the ongoing debate regarding the scope of policies implemented by public decision-makers in relation to the configuration of pandemic mitigation actions. For example, this includes the effects of a lack of informational pluralism (Lello & Bertuzzi, 2022), leading to a limitation in the dialogue among social actors, as well as the hegemony of mathematical and predictive tools over elements such as human reasoning and social practices (Campo et al., 2021). The purpose of this contribution is not to delve into this perspective, but simply to point out its presence.

pared to the main determinants composing the individual psychological well-being. The comparison between the two samples, pre and post pandemic, shows how some individual features trend toward a change on their impact on well-being. Additionally, the study underlines people's perceptions in relation to the loss of recreational and socio-cultural opportunities. When their actualization and participation is limited, they take on a preeminent role within the spectrum of elements that constitute individual well-being, clarifying the potential connection with the interpretative theoretical model related to individual psychological well-being and community life.

1. Well-being and community.

The dimension of individual well-being is an important scientific interest area, even in socio-logical studies, and has engaged several disciplines through a perspective that has aimed to provide a possible representation of the phenomenology in a theoretical-interpretative key. An exhaustive review of every and single sector goes beyond the scope of this study, but a summary of its main approaches could prove useful to comprehend the perimeter in which individual well-being is analyzed, and to identify the basic elements influencing its trend.

Economic sciences have long promoted observations related to the well-being levels of individuals, see Faik (Faik, 2015). The common data in the parameterization model is identifiable in the economic growth framework, the mean through which the betterment of people's standard of living is possible, thus promoting more well-being. The most commonly used tool for the measurement of economic variable and well-being is GDP or generated income. Originally, this index's goal was to verify the economic status of a territory and the ensuing access individuals have to goods and services, all elements contributing to the improvement of people's lives. As time went by, GDP functions broadened, and today it is an element used to define the well-being of a community. Many researches, such as Canoy and Lerais (Canoy & Lerais, 2007), provide a demonstration of the asymmetry between the concepts of utility and well-being, highlighting an analytically structured critique between a well-being generated by an individual's earning capacity, related to the access level to goods and services of the market through which one can satisfy one's needs and wishes, and a well-being model related to an holistic personal development (Hirschauer *et al.*, 2015). As underlined by Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (Stiglitz *et al.*, 2009), while the well-being perimeter is surely built around material living conditions, which are a consequence of an individual's economic skill, other elements can participate in its definition, such as health, education, environment, social links and personal activities. Sociological disciplines have examined well-being through various lens, considering both territorial and non-territorial variables. The theoretical-interpretative model of this study utilizes as its foundation territorial-based variables, where the location features turn into the space aimed at defining the social ecosystem – relational and communal – whose value is reflected upon the perception of individual psychological well-being.

Starting from the set of elements implemented in planning physical space, it is highlighted how said process profoundly impacts individual well-being (Bellaviti, 2008). Other studies have highlighted the impact of, for example, the availability of natural areas (Burns, 2005), urban density (Guite, 2006), living quality (Albouy, 2008), the difference between urban and rural areas (Requena, 2016). An in-depth analysis of the living quality concept, in its anthropized environment sense, led to a general consensus: urban areas are more likely to provide a higher level of individual well-being compared to rural areas (Vigano *et al.*, 2018). This result is due to the proximity of individuals to services, production areas, employment and income, welfare-related opportunities and educational system; therefore, anthropized areas possess more local efficiency, both in an economic and social sense, compared to rural ones. Several scholars (for a general overview see Hudson 2008) also highlight the conspicuous negative externalities present in ur-

ban areas which influence individual well-being, generated, for example, by bad environmental quality, which impacts one's physical and psychological health (Bellaviti, 2008). Furthermore, Bergamaschi (Bergamaschi, 2016) points out how urban areas have been subjected to a steady impoverishment of social dimension elements, with repercussions on the well-being of people. In these territorial frameworks, the action of factors such as privatization and the worsening of public space quality affects the quality of the urban social fabric, which is ultimately less stable, restricting the individual development not only in the tangible areas but also intangible ones, as is the case of psychological well-being.

Sociological analysis has been focusing its gaze on social fabric and relational contexts, the immaterial dimension of territory, on the matter of individual and well-being development. Research strived to understand how social value within a community is created, and its effects on individual and collective well-being. As highlighted by Bergamaschi & Castrignanò (2017), the well-being of a community is influenced both by its own material development conditions, such as the environmental quality of the location and the economic development level of the territory and its people, and by the presence of intangible elements which contribute to constitute its 'self', the place's very own identity. The identity of the space in which an individual lives and acts is a fundamental factor in building social well-being, and it is the result of the relationships among the individuals belonging to a specific territory, behaviors and habits that promote the creation of groups and community with social subsidiarity as their own foundational principle (Monteduro, 2017).

Sociology also showed an interest in territorial governance ways, and how they affect the conditions of individual well-being. As outlined by Mazzette (2017), the possible approaches, top-down or bottom-up, create several effects on the way the location is experienced and social practices. The author postulates how a governance that involves citizens in knowledge-related processes and needs, which are involved in decision-making, has beneficial outcomes for strengthening relationships, especially in neighborhoods.

Community studies have long sought to understand the elements that can drive socio-economical development. The focus has been on verifying the role of communities and local systems as parameters for generating social capital, the foundation for building elements such as solidarity, trust, relations, culture, which can support development. In this sense, the concept of community has been the subject of analysis that, through time, came to a definition of its main features. The first analysis level focused on the socio-cultural sense. Mela (2016) postulated the possible key principles. Said elements pertain to the presence of a homogeneous social group and the presence of organic features: distinctive socio-cultural peculiarities, accepted among their members, which can promote a bond permeated by solidarity, belonging, trust and identification.

A second analysis level takes on a different path than the socio-territorial one. According to this interpretation, a community is considered as the relation between a group of individuals and the territory, and its fundamental traits are determined by its spatial features and the quality of the social bond (Castrignanò, 2009).

A third analysis pinpoints the relation between time and space as the *deus ex machina*. This approach underlines how the nature of a community is the result of relationships, which are not solely the result of functional relations, but are linked to time and space wherever they are created. In this sense, time and space are the building blocks of the interactions between the actors, and they take on a specific role in the structuring of the core elements of a community, such as, for example, trust and commonality, with potential positive outcomes on individual well-being (Nuvolati, 2019).

All the approaches indicated share one element: the ways with which the concept of community is represented. They pertain to the possibility that individuals, through relations and/or thanks to the physical spaces, are able to build up a system of relations and connections which, as indicated by Donati (Donati, 2020), promote the creation of 'relational goods'. These assets, intan-

gible in nature, are the result of the sharing of places, experiences, and various opportunities conducted in the absence of excludability, rivalry and positioning elements. As such, relations become the foundation for the creation of a wide range of elements, such as trust and cooperative norms, which, if properly implemented and nurtured, can trigger a virtuous cycle of new relational goods. This dynamic can turn into a platform for positive outcomes on the growth of local social capital and the constitution of community life, influencing both individual and collective well-being. The study of Cardamone and Zorzetto (Cardamone & Zorzetto, 2000) underlines how territorial culture, i.e., the context of community, social practices and individual relationships, is one of the key elements for individual well-being, since it can nourish the feeling of identity and social cohesion. Tavano Blessi and Padua (Tavano Blessi & Padua, 2016) also highlight how spaces with a socio-cultural vocation are the ideal drivers for community development. The presence of places dedicated to events of social and cultural nature can become an agent for creating gatherings, relationships, intangible elements correlated to social capital, which act as drivers for individual and community well-being.

As summarized by Colleoni (Colleoni, 2019), mobility and interconnection are turning into the fundamental traits for social participation and the constitution of individual and collective well-being. During the most acute stage of the pandemic, and for a very long time afterwards, said elements were restricted. While the territorial mobility of individuals has been precluded for 71 days between February and May 2020, it is also true that almost every single gathering activity, including those of social, recreational and cultural nature, has been severely limited, if not erased, up until the spring of 2021, resulting in the conditions for promoting a deprivation of social and relational chances in individuals. In this perspective Jacobs (Jacobs, 2012) indicates that if said deprivation status is replicated throughout time, it can potentially generate negative externalities on a social and well-being scale. Restraining the activities and opportunities aforementioned can then trigger a progressive impoverishment of the socio-relational fabric present in the space, threatening both the generative pillars of a community and the foundational traits related to physical and relational proximity in a place, affecting the perceived well-being of individuals.

The goal of this study is aimed at verifying how the coming of the pandemic and the containment policies implemented and repeated through time have affected community lifestyles and, consequently, individual psychological well-being. Subsequently, the impact of the social and cultural dimension on the composition of psychological well-being will be examined, as well as how the variation in opportunities and interactions caused by the applied restrictions has affected said elements.

2. Methods and case study.

A computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) survey was conducted in the community of Baranzate, a town located 7 km from Milan, which presents a population of 11,700 inhabitants (ISTAT 2021). The questionnaire was administered by Doxa, the Italian pollster company, on individuals aged between 18 and 34 years old (universe of 2297 persons as for the 2021 Baranzate municipality census bureau) and >64 years old (universe of 2155 persons as for the 2021 Baranzate municipality census bureau) at two different times: in January 2020 and then February 2021. If the second survey was conducted to assess the effects of the pandemic on the population of the municipality, the first one was carried out just before the onset of the pandemic period and was originally conceived in 2019 as a preliminary exploration for the development of a strategy and community development actions in Baranzate through investments in socio-cultural spaces and initiatives.

The municipality experiences socio-economic and cultural marginalization compared to other centers in the province of Milan, as exemplified by a high percentage of immigrant population

(Baranzate: 34%, Milan province: 12.4%, 2021 data) and a low economic level (individual income in Baranzate: 19,232; Milan province: 27,396, 2019 data). Moreover, there is a limited presence of cultural and community-oriented places and events, as well as fewer socialization opportunities. While the described socio-economic traits could introduce potential biases in the research, they actually provide an opportunity for further investigation. This study aims to explore the impact of a sudden and disruptive event, such as the pandemic, on a disadvantaged area. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the comparative methodology between two samples from the same area - thus sharing similar characteristics - it is possible to assume that the previously described territorial profile does not influence the study's results in relation to its objectives.

A potential factor that could introduce bias into the results is that the initial data collection took place in early February 2020, perhaps being affected by an additional bias linked to the presence of individuals infected with COVID-19 in the region. However, this possibility is considered remote. While the first confirmed cases reported by the media date back to January 30, 2020 - two foreign tourists in Rome - the first officially diagnosed case involving Italian citizens was recorded on February 21, 2020, several weeks after the sampling was conducted. Therefore, this factor can also be excluded as a determining influence on the study's conclusions.

Individual well-being status has been assumed as the dependent variable, and was registered thanks to the PGWBI. This instrument allows us to measure the state of possible subjective well-being or distress, in other words to measure elements related to what we could call the potential perception of individual well-being. The PGWBI has been adopted since the 1990s (Dupuy 2002) and psychometric / sociometric properties have been evidenced and validated for clinical and research aims. The PGWB it is based on 22 self-administered queries distributed in six HRQoL domains: vitality, state of depression, anxiety, self-control, positive well-being, and general health. Each item is rated on a 6-point scale (from 0 to 5) and the subject is asked to report his emotional, physical and health conditions in relation to their life over the previous eight weeks. For this study we have adopted a short version of the PGWBI in all 6 questions, which explains more than 92% of the variability of the full version, already validated in previous clinical and research projects (Grossi et al 2006), showing a Cronbach's Alpha from 0.80 to 0.92 in respect to 0.90 / 0.94 as recorded in previous studies.

The administered questionnaire included two additional areas of investigation:

- a. Questions aimed at defining the socio-demographic profile of each respondent, including gender, age, educational background, and profession;
- b. Questions regarding the participation in social and cultural facilities and activities, which could potentially foster a sense of community in the Baranzate area.

The rationale behind collecting data on the latter aspect is linked to the hypothesis regarding the correlation between socio-relational activities, their role in building a community dimension within a territory, and their potential impact on both individual and collective well-being.

The methodology involved gathering information about participation levels in four specific dimensions and related activities, following the approach outlined by Tavano Blessi (Tavano Blessi, 2014). These factors pertain to:

Cultural dimension: Participation in cultural activities and events, such as attending a concert, going to the theater, or visiting an exhibition.

Social dimension: Engagement in social activities, volunteer work, community service, and social services.

Leisure events dimension: Activities such as going to a nightclub, taking a walk, or spending time with friends.

Sports activities dimension: Practicing a sport, going to the gym, or attending a sports event.⁴

⁴ The activities mentioned are derived from a study conducted on 110 participants at the 2008 ESA – European Sociological Association Conference. This study examined the potential selection and role of a set of socio-cultural activities in relation to their degree of social orientation. For the complete methodology, please refer to: Tavano Blessi, G., Grossi, E., Sacco, P. L., Pieretti, G., & Ferilli, G. (2014). *Cultural participation, relational goods and individual subjective well-being: some empirical evidence*. Review of Economics & Finance, 4(3), 33-46.

The intensity of individual participation has been measured on a quantitative scale through a composite sum of frequencies, expressing in this way the number of days in a year of at least one activity, making up a specific index called Cultural Index, which has been correlated to the PGWBI in order to assess possible effects.

The individual psychological well-being (PGWBI) may range from 0, the maximum distress level, to 110, where the total score <60, displays severe distress; from 60 to 70, moderate distress; between 71-90, no distress; >90 to 110, well-being.

As previously underlined, the study has an exploratory profile, and in light of the general objective, the analysis techniques adopted were limited to a descriptive level. No intersectional analysis was conducted to detect, for example, differences in perceived well-being among women based on job position or educational level. For the analysis of the relationship between the Cultural Index and PGWBI, Pearson's linear correlation was used. This technique is admissible since the variables involved are continuous rather than ordinal.

| <i>Dimensions investigated</i> | <i>Index</i> |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Well-being | PGWBI |
| Cultural-Social Participation | IC Cultural Index |

Table 1. Dimensions investigated and related index

The sample characteristics are shown in Table 2. These present some differences, which can be attributed to the sample composition method as previously illustrated. Since they are of modest or minimal significance and affect only certain subcategories of the analyzed variables, in light of the exploratory nature, such differences do not influence the possible final result.

| VARIABLES | 2020 % | 2021% |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------|
| GENDER | | |
| Male | 60,8 | 60,4 |
| Female | 39,2 | 39,6 |
| AGE | | |
| . 18-24 | 9,7 | 14,9 |
| . 25-34 | 16,2 | 16,9 |
| . 35-44 | 18,2 | 14,1 |
| . 45-54 | 14,5 | 12,4 |
| . 55-64 | 16,7 | 14,4 |
| . 65-74 | 13,5 | 13,7 |
| . > 74 | 11,2 | 13,6 |
| EDUCATION | | |
| Primary School | 11,1 | 9,2 |
| Secondary School | 32,9 | 40,8 |
| High School | 52,8 | 42,6 |
| University degree | 5,2 | 7,4 |
| EMPLOYMENT | | |
| Retired | 25,2 | 26,2 |
| Housewife | 11,2 | 8,7 |
| Unemployed | 12,2 | 7,5 |
| Workman / Blue collar | 12,2 | 11,2 |
| Manager / Professional | 7,2 | 4,0 |
| Tradesman / Artisan | 7,7 | 5,5 |
| Teachers, Clerk / White collar | 22,2 | 21,7 |
| Student | 6,7 | 10,5 |

Table 2. Samples characteristics (n=401)

3. Results

The results of the study are shown starting from the well-being dimension, and table 3 highlights the positioning of the Baranzate population in the two surveys. The data reflect how, in 2020, the PGWBI was 65.8, a value which, in the following twelve months (2021) reached 63.12. The discrepancy is of minor entity, highlighting a modest impact during the pandemic period, which didn't affect in any substantial way the condition of individual psychological well-being. It should be noted how the psychological well-being recorded in Baranzate in 2020, before the pandemic hit, is lower than the national average of 77.14 (Grossi, 2019), and this difference is potentially attributable to the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the territory described beforehand.

| | 2020 | 2021 | P value |
|---------|------|----------------|---------|
| average | | 65,76 63,12 | 0.03 |
| delta | 2.64 | | |

Table 3. PGWBI level 2020 - 2021 samples (n = 401)

As for the main individual variables, the ratio between age and psychological well-being shows some interesting data. The youngest bracket – 18 to 34 years old – shows a higher well-being in 2021 compared to 2020. The subjects between 35 and 64 years of age show a stability in the perceived well-being level, while the group of people of a more advanced age (>64) manifests a decline in the values. Data, therefore, show a progressive decrease of the psychological well-being as age increases, so that the behavior of the subjects over 35 is in line with other studies. For the subjects between 18 and 34 years of age the results are partially unaligned with research carried out during the pandemic period (Kauhanen, 2023), recording a growth in perceived well-being. The motives which might be at the basis of this discrepancy were not a part of the scope of this study, although a counter-intuitive element was registered: the forced condition of permanence within one's home and the limitation of external activities allowed for an improvement of the perceived well-being conditions in young people.

| | 2020 | 2021 | P value |
|---------|-------|-------|---------|
| 18- 24 | 70,29 | 82,96 | 0.0025 |
| 25- 34 | 66,44 | 71,96 | 0.0765 |
| 35 – 44 | 63,62 | 64,14 | 0.0878 |
| 45 - 54 | 65,18 | 64,19 | 0.7823 |
| 55 - 64 | 57,74 | 58,30 | 0.7824 |
| 65 – 74 | 61,94 | 57,82 | 0.0989 |
| > 74 | 58,07 | 56,16 | 0.4101 |

Table 4. Correlation between age and PGWBI 2020 – 2021 samples (n = 401).

The evaluation of the professional status in relation to psychological well-being presents several analogies with what came to light for the previous variable. Table 5 illustrates how certain categories benefitted from the forced limitation of spaces of individual freedom, and the subsequent impossibility of going to one's workplace or education site. For students, teachers, public servants and retailers, perceived well-being improved, while for the other professions it remained stable or it worsened slightly. The dynamic shown has some similarities to what other research revealed about the impacts of the pandemic in relation to employment type (Lovreglio, 2022),

wherever there is a linear correlation between working condition and psychological well-being. The impact of the pandemic and the restrictive policies employed seemed to influence students and unemployed people the most, but even in this case providing a clear interpretation is not possible, since the study did not gather data related to the motivations. What was revealed for these two categories is in line with the results of other research (Sousa-Uva, 2021), and shows the hypothesis that the possibility of remote work, for example from one's own home, increased the well-being of both students and white collar workers, such as public servants, teachers. This dynamic is reflected even on professions with higher responsibilities, such as managers and entrepreneurs, while the well-being level decreased in those who could not perform their jobs remotely, like construction workers, retailers, retired people and homemakers.

| | 2020 | 2021 | P value |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|---------|
| Student | 70,76 | 77,29 | 0.1858 |
| Unemployed | 58,56 | 73,57 | 0.0009 |
| Teachers, Clerk / White collar | 65,82 | 69,7 | 0.1394 |
| Tradesman / Artisan | 69,25 | 65,71 | 0.3026 |
| Manager / Professional | 68,24 | 64,27 | 0.7084 |
| Workman / Blue collar | 65,9 | 63,96 | 0.5840 |
| Housewife | 61,21 | 59,18 | 0.5800 |
| Retired | 60,71 | 57,44 | 0.0732 |

Table 5. Correlation between employment and PGWBI 2020 – 2021samples (n = 401).

Table 6 contains gender-related data. The findings show how the male gender reacted more positively to the pandemic compared to the female gender. While men's well-being increased, it decreased for the women. On a general level, the results match the findings of literature which reported how, overall, the female gender registers a lower psychological well-being when compared to the male one. There are multiple reasons for this, which can be traced back to, for example, the biological difference between women and men, as the former is more affected by distress phenomena (Waldrön, 1998), and the social role of women, which changed during the last decades. As highlighted by several studies (see, for example, Matud, 2019), the female gender takes on different and tendentially increasing tasks (for example work, family care, free time and more), which might have caused a lower psychological well-being level. It is therefore plausible that the worsening condition registered in this research for the female gender could be in accordance with the increase in the number of household activities, due to the combination of factors such as pandemic restrictions and the forced presence of other members of the family. Another element that could explain the gender gap can be found in the increase of domestic abuse during the lockdown. A revision of the literature based on the analysis of 32 studies carried out from 2021 to 2023 by Kourti (Kourti *et al.*, 2023) highlights how, especially during the first lockdown, domestic abuse episodes increased, and the victims were mostly women. This could also be factored in when explaining the results of table 6.

Concluding the in-depth analysis of the well-being trend for the female gender, and supporting the hypothesis previously described, we have the job market analysis for the Baranzate residents. It shows how the employment rate is higher for men than it is for women, and how this category is mainly employed in homemaking activities (such as housewife or maid). This is further evidence supporting what has been reported insofar, and a possible reason for the lower psychological well-being level registered in the study.

| | 2020 | 2021 | P value |
|--------|-------|-------|---------|
| Female | 62,98 | 61,35 | 0.8174 |
| Male | 63,33 | 69,43 | 0.0328 |

Table 6. Correlation between gender and PGWBI campioni 2020 – 2021 samples (n = 401).

The pandemic triggered different events in relation to one's level of education (table 7). The data revealed that those with a higher academic credentials, such as a university degree, reported an increase in the individual well-being perception, while those with a low level of education saw a decrease. Said modification could be due to two conditions. The first one is related to the dynamics listed beforehand for the various professions, specifically the low-effort conversion toward remote work for white collar workers, such as teachers, public servants, managers, compared to the other categories, which usually have achieved more advanced education titles compared to the so-called blue collars. The second condition draws from what emerged in other studies about the weight of one's level of education on one's individual psychological well-being (Liu, 2023), which highlights how those possessing a high educational level have a higher propensity to keep, or even improve, their well-being level during adversities, compared to people with lower educational levels. A possible explanation of this dynamic, which is not supported by the information emerged by this survey, but can be helpful to understand the casual relation mentioned before, is provided by Antoci (Antoci *et al.*, 2007). The author presents a behavioral and cognitive model which highlights how, as the educational level of an individual increases, the same happens for adaptability, along with reading and interpreting environmental reality and its possible mutations. In other words, the more extensive the body of information an individual has developed and assimilated in terms of knowledge and experiences, the more sophisticated their mental models will potentially be, meaning their cognitive relational skills with the surrounding reality and therefore the adaptability to a new situation. Those who possess these skills are bound to have a high predisposition and propension to modify their perceptive and behavioral patterns, acting in a way more befitting to the constitution of a new subjective well-being status. The data gleaned from the survey highlight what has been described especially for people with a university degree, but, compared to other research (Liu, 2023) there is no linear growing trend of well-being in relation to one's title. Due to the sample size, any further insights – the concurrence of the job position, for example – do not lead to significant results.

| | 2020 | 2021 | P value |
|-------------------|-------|-------|---------|
| Primary School | 56,64 | 54,40 | 0.4126 |
| Secondary School | 60,36 | 61,31 | 0.0132 |
| High School | 65,76 | 65,98 | 0.9069 |
| University degree | 65,67 | 80,88 | 0.0012 |

Table 7. Correlation between education and PGWBI 2020 – 2021 samples (n = 401).

The last analysis layer concerns the Cultural Index and the individual psychological well-being (PGWBI). As shown beforehand, the research is inspired by the hypothesis which postulates that the socio-cultural offer level of a territory and participation are the fundamental layers for generating well-being. By participating to these kinds of events, in fact, individuals can strengthen exchanges and interactions, building up social fabric and community spirit, which themselves are drivers for individual well-being.

The research examined, therefore, the weight of social, leisure, sport and cultural activities, following the model provided in section 2 of this study. Table 8 shows the results of the correlation between PGWBI and the Cultural Index. In order to further underline the importance of the latter

dimension within the basket of elements considered in this study, we present the ranking of the first six variables according to the positive and negative correlation degree in relation to the individual psychological well-being before and after the pandemic (table 9).

| | 2020 | | 2021 | |
|---------------------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| | Average | PGWBI (r) | Average | PGWBI (r) |
| Cultural Index - CI | 60,39 | 0.186 | 36,43 | 0.235 |

Table 8: Variation in intensity Cultural Index and correlation with the PGWBI, 2020 – 2021 samples (n = 401).
P-value < 0.00001

| 2020 | | 2021 | |
|--------|-------------------------|--------|--------------------------|
| r | Variabile | r | Variabile |
| 0.202 | <i>HIGH SCHOOL</i> | 0.375 | <i>AGE 18-24</i> |
| 0.186 | <i>CULTURAL INDEX</i> | 0.235 | <i>CULTURAL INDEX</i> |
| 0.145 | <i>AGE 18-24</i> | 0.224 | <i>UNIVERSITY DEGREE</i> |
| 0.127 | <i>STUDENT</i> | 0.205 | <i>STUDENT</i> |
| 0.090 | <i>AGE 25-34</i> | 0.154 | <i>MALE</i> |
| 0.072 | <i>TEACHERS, CLERK</i> | 0.146 | <i>AGE 25-34</i> |
| | | | |
| -0.076 | <i>UNEMPLOYED</i> | -0.154 | <i>FEMALE</i> |
| -0.084 | <i>RETIRED</i> | -0.159 | <i>AGE 55-64</i> |
| -0.106 | <i>SECONDARY SCHOOL</i> | -0.165 | <i>AGE 65-74</i> |
| -0.111 | <i>AGE >74</i> | -0.188 | <i>PRIMARY SCHOOL</i> |
| -0.137 | <i>PRIMARY SCHOOL</i> | -0.199 | <i>AGE >74</i> |
| -0.149 | <i>AGE 55-64</i> | -0.258 | <i>RETIRED</i> |

Table 9: Ranking of variables according to the correlation index with the PGWBI, 2020 – 2021 samples (n = 401).

The two tables indicate the ranking of the social and cultural dimension within the perimeter of the factors derived from this research, and the results allow us to underline two key elements. The first concerns the incidence of the socio-cultural dimension on the PGWBI. Although the values present a statistically weak or modest relation, in both samples the social and cultural dimension always ranked second among the elements which affect individual well-being. Even though – because of the pandemic – social gatherings were severely reduced, the correlation with well-being has increased. The beginning of the pandemic, then, created the chance to verify how the incidence of said initiatives and the ensuing presence of spaces to hold them is important for people's psychological well-being, becoming even more impactful whenever the chance to experience them is reduced or lacking, as it happened during 2021. The data provides an explanation of the weight of the social and cultural dimension for the individual psychological well-being. As highlighted by Brown (2015), the benefits for the individual during social and cultural activities do not stem from the intensity of the participation but from two elements, apparently separated, but significantly intertwined. From the one hand, almost every socio-cultural initiative is structured as collective activities which can stimulate relationship opportunities and the definition of a shared experience. The possibility of sharing an experience with other people triggers within the subject a connection formula with a social group, which can generate acknowledgement and belonging of the individual toward collectivity, with important effects on

well-being, as shown in section 2 of this study. On the other hand, when social and cultural activities become scarce, they create an increased value in terms of psychological well-being, showing a scenario where the correlation between the intensity of participation and individual benefits is reversed. The elements shown highlight how said actions play a fundamental part in relieving an individual from the lack of social and relational activities, which the pandemic triggered, due to their nature as drivers for sharing events and participation. While the research carried out insofar allow us to verify that the connection among social, cultural activities and psychological well-being is always a positive one, no matter the participation intensity, the following study confirms what was proposed in the theoretical model by Brown: should these activities be quantitatively limited, they promote a higher well-being level per attended unit compared to systems where the offer is richer.

The second element is related to Baranzate's context, but it can be applied also to territorial environments with different features than the case study examined herein. The studies on the matter measure how social and cultural activities are the most relevant opportunities to achieve individual well-being. Their contribution is even higher in contexts where such initiatives and infrastructures for them are scarce, such as Baranzate's case. If social and economic issues are present, these initiatives can promote beneficial effects that can go further beyond the mere entertainment aspect. By drawing from their ability to trigger relationships and sharing through participation, in fact, they can improve the well-being of individuals, becoming potential tools at the disposal of the social and community network of a territory. In territories with social issues, said activities play a structural function for an individual's functioning, nourishing the need for relationships and communication, along with the knowledge and exposition to new experiences, outlining a possible solution to what Antoci (Antoci, 2002) describes as the social and cognitive impoverishment risk in advanced societies, which can deteriorate an individual's well-being.

Conclusions: Community well-being, well-being community.

As claimed by Nuvolati (2010), the well-being of an individual is not the result of the hoarding process of resources and/or goods, nor the simplistic correlation to material lifestyle conditions. Well-being is born from what we are, our being, and from what we do and know how to do, our skills, rather than what we own, our possessions. As the author points out, the paradigm shift related to the well-being concept in post-industrial societies sets a new perspective where the key role is not played by resources but by actions, the activities carried out by an individual.

It is in this direction that Donati (2013) shows how relations are a structural element in constituting an individual, and how it is through interactions among individuals that a person can build their own identity. The model defines how the social relation is only partly born from the context within which it configures itself – place and chance – but it is majorly influenced by how individuals interact with each other – their relationships – and this is the element at the heart of a person's identity. Relational activities, like social and cultural ones, are therefore potentially at the base of that individual well-being, because it is through those very elements that the fundamental structure of an individual configures itself, along with their position within the local social fabric.

Given these premises, therefore, it is capital to verify the circumstances that lead a subject to the definition of their well-being; chances related to the opportunities that territory and society, in their various structuring dimensions, are able to provide.

In this exploratory article, the authors' focus was on understanding the effects of the pandemic on the individual psychological well-being of the citizens of the municipality of Baranzate (MI), setting up the analysis on a theoretical-interpretative model related to the community lifestyle dimension, specifically in its function as a social and cultural opportunity driver for the consti-

tution of individual psychological well-being. As shown in section 2, the participation to said occasions can create the composition platform for relational goods, and through them, it can promote the conditions for meetings and relationships between individuals, in a non-exclusive, non-utilitarian context; an inclusive context, which can generate a community fabric and well-being among the individuals who are part of it, as put in the thorough empirical analysis by Becchetti (*Becchetti et al.*, 2008). As such, the study promoted an analysis of the incidence of social and cultural initiatives, which are potentially part of the community social fabric, on psychological well-being, and the disruptive event of the pandemic set forth the stage for experimental research.

While, for data collection, almost every comparative study in the literature aimed at evaluating the effects of the pandemic opted for the web method (CAWI), this study chose the CAPI method. As verified by Agans (2024) the web methodology (CAWI), widely employed in social sciences, has a high percentage of fake participations, meaning subjects not pertaining to the sample on which the research is aimed to, which can impact the reliability of the results, an absent or very weak adulteration for random statistic samples. Additionally, the reliability and soundness of the survey is reflected in the Crombach alpha value, which amounts to 0.91 in 2020 and 0.89 in 2021.

To summarize, the results of the survey provide the following possible interpretations:

- a. in a municipality such as Baranzate, already affected by severe socio-economic and cultural issues, the pandemic has apparently not caused a decline in the perception of the well-being of citizens;
- b. for some subject categories – young people, white-collar workers, highly educated people and men – the pandemic has even represented an opportunity for improving the conditions of the perceived well-being;
- c. the activities and the presence of socio-cultural spaces deeply affect well-being and, although limited, as in during the pandemic timeframe, while on a general level the consequences in terms of a decline of well-being are more pronounced, on a punctual level the value of these activities increased, highlighting how these opportunities are structurally linked to the well-being status of individuals.

In conclusion, social and cultural occasions in the territory are a constitutive dimension for personal well-being, due to their nature as relational experiences that can induce growth processes within individual identity. Nonetheless, these activities become important tools for community development, both for their fruition/participation and the places where these are carried out. In the first case, fruition/participation, the findings of the survey highlight how, for the whole sample, the social and cultural dimension plays a fundamental role in well-being perception, and, by connecting this element to what has been presented by Brown (2015), they become occasions for building up local socio-cultural peculiarities, which can promote the concept of community as postulated by Mela (2016). Even the places where the fruition/participation happens – the dedicated areas – are potential tools for the configuration of individual well-being and, parallelly, for community building. As shown in section 1 of this contribution, these areas are containers acting as platforms for structuring occasions for meetings and relations among the participants to the initiatives they promote, core elements for the social capital of a territory. It is through these lens that these spaces contribute to shaping community life and thus become a means for generating both individual and communal well-being, precisely due to their own temporal and spatial vocation, as underlined by Nuvolati (2019). Planning development actions through a social and cultural leverage can play a relevant role in the composition of the local communal fabric, especially in areas with socio-economic issues. The investment is within the community and for the community, a community which, if given the chance and with people's participation, can create collective and individual well-being, by promoting occasions aimed at compensating exceptional events such as the pandemic, as illustrated in the present study.

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