

## INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY-RELATED PATHS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: A MULTIPLE MEDIATION MODEL DEEPENING THE ROLE OF SENSE OF RESPONSIBLE TOGETHERNESS, COMMUNITY TRUST, AND HOPE

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*Civic engagement behaviors (CEB) refer to the activation of citizens' resources to face community problems. However, modern local communities are characterized by lower rates of civic engagement, especially among youths. Therefore, this study deepens the role of some individual and community-related assets which could foster citizens' CEB. It specifically addresses two research questions: (a) which are the social roots of citizens' feelings of Hope, and (b) what role citizens' Sense of Responsible Togetherness (SoRT), Community Trust, and Hope play as to their CEB. An online questionnaire was administered to 486 Italian citizens aged between 18 and 30. A multiple mediation model was run with Structural Equation Modelling to test the role of Hope as a mediator in the relationships of SoRT and Community Trust with CEB. The results confirmed all the hypotheses, supporting both (a) the social roots of Hope and (b) its role as a mediator in the considered relationships between community-related assets and CEB. Overall, relying on positive representations of how to live together in one's community and how the latter is able to meet its members' needs showed a critical role as to citizens' civic engagement, both directly and via an enhanced feeling of Hope. This provides Institutions and stakeholders with hints about the dimensions of communities to be fostered and strengthened in order to counteract the pessimistic visions and the lack of civic engagement now characterizing them.*

**Keywords:** Civic Engagement; Hope; Sense of Responsible Togetherness (SoRT); Community Trust; local community

### 1. Introduction

Civic engagement refers to the activation of citizens' personal resources to solve community problems (Flanagan et al., 2007; Zaff et al., 2010), based on the acknowledgment that everyone can and should make a difference as to community development (Doolittle & Faul, 2013; Ehrlich, 1997). Concretely, this translates in civically engaged citizens volunteering in and for

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their community, collaborating with other community members for its improvement, participating in shared, organized actions, being involved with local associations and organizations, and keeping themselves updated, interested, and active with reference to community issues (Doolittle & Faul, 2013; Mahoney et al., 2009; Zaff et al., 2003).

Civic engagement behaviors (CEB) rely on civic skills, prosocial values, awareness of civic duties, and chances to implement changes in the community of belonging (Zaff et al., 2010), and are aimed at solving social problems or improving the quality of life with reference to the whole community. Over time, specific actions classified as civic engagement behaviors have referred to a variety of civic, political, and social issues (e.g., “voting, donating money to advocacy groups, contacting local representatives, and reporting issues in a community”; Gordon et al., 2013, p. 3). In this vein, civic engagement behaviors foster the sense of belonging to the community (Arcidiacono et al., 2010; Diller, 2001; Hyman, 2002; Putnam, 2000) and promote citizens’ perception of higher social power, by implying the exercise of individuals’ rights and responsibilities for the management of community-related aspects (Flanagan et al., 2007; Zaff et al., 2010). Thus, the increase in the condition of empowerment – which also represents the purpose of collective action, as Tekin and Drury (2021) point out – is equally connected to CEB.

However, in contemporary societies, a serious lack of civic engagement is increasingly spreading (Amnå & Ekman, 2014; Procentese & Gatti, 2022), with individuals becoming less and less involved in local political (Stoker, 2006) and civic (Putnam, 2000) life. As a consequence, mistrust towards institutions (Newton, 2007) and cynicism towards politicians (Stoker, 2006) have increased, while the number of citizens exercising their right to vote has decreased (Huber et al., 2007).

This decline in civic involvement mainly concerns young people, who show lower levels of civic engagement compared to past generations (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). In this vein, it is interesting to recall the living condition of young people, who are too trapped in the present (Leccardi, 2009), thus showing the difficulty of relating to the temporal dimension of the future in which to determine personal and collective actions and projects (Carbone et al., 2021). This condition is supported by the characteristics of modern societies, such as vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Levy, 2020). Consistently, a survey involving young people living in several European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) found that the passivity towards political participation (abstaining from voting) is determined by disillusion, apathy, and sometimes even alienation from political issues (Dahl et al., 2018), as well as distance, disinterest, and distrust towards social and political institutions (Henn et al., 2005; Mieriņa, 2014; Tzankova et al., 2020).

In a community psychology perspective, that adopts an ecological approach – deepening the connection of individual dimensions with contextual characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kelly, 2006) – studies endeavored to detect the community-related dimensions which could represent paths to enhance citizens’ engagement in and for their community of belonging. Indeed, citizens’ community-related behaviors – among which civic engagement ones may be included – result not only from their individual attitudes but also from their representations of the characteristics of their community of belonging and the experiences they share about its

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livability (Gatti & Procentese, 2020) – that is, these dimensions could represent predictors of civic engagement. Community trust (Di Napoli et al., 2019a) and sense of responsible togetherness (SoRT, Procentese & Gatti, 2022) were identified as relevant paths. Further, a different study deepened the role of Hope as an individual antecedent of CEB and highlighted the need to deepen the relationships between Hope and the characteristics of the context individuals are embedded into (Callina et al., 2014).

Building on this, the present study aims at (a) deepening Hope as a promotor of civic engagement while (b) considering its context-related roots – which have not been explored yet in previous studies. Overall, two main research questions will be addressed: (a) the relationships between Hope and individuals' representations of the characteristics of the community they are embedded into, under the expectation that Hope may have social roots (Scioli et al., 2011), and (b) the role of both Hope and citizens' representations of the characteristics of their community in enhancing their CEB. Specifically, moving from the results of the above-mentioned studies (Di Napoli et al., 2019a; Procentese & Gatti, 2022), two representations of community characteristics will be taken into account: community trust and SoRT.

It is of particular interest to deepen these relationships in the Italian context, where young citizens express pessimistic and hopeless viewpoints about their future (Gallup International Association, 2018) and low rates of involvement – only 30% of young people aged between 18 and 34 (ISTAT, 2020) – in their community.

## **2. Community-related assets fostering civic engagement behaviors**

### **2.1 *Sense of Responsible Togetherness***

The Sense of Responsible Togetherness (SoRT, Procentese & Gatti, 2019; Procentese et al., 2019a) refers to citizens' representation of their community as one where it is possible, and due, to take responsibilities and act for individual but also common interests and goods; where they have power and opportunities to make a difference for themselves and for others; where they feel equally treated, respected, and supported by other community members as well as by local Institutions (Procentese & Gatti, 2019; Procentese et al., 2019a, 2019b). That is, SoRT stresses the relevance of individual responsibility in acting with the aim of improving individual and community conditions (Procentese et al., 2020), which can sustain the detection of common goals and shared actions towards them (Di Maria, 2000; McMillan, 2011). It builds upon different aspects of living together within local communities: perception of equity, feeling an active part of the community, perception of support from the Institutional referents, acting for the power, respecting the rules, respect for the Others, support among community members, freedom of opinion (Procentese & Gatti, 2019; Procentese et al., 2019a).

In this vein, it recently proved to represent a critical community-related asset for the promotion of CEB, as it boosts them by allowing citizens to reckon that they can, and have to, work together and make a difference in and for their community by taking care of it (Procentese & Gatti, 2022). Indeed, responsibility-taking processes for the improvement of

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individual and community life conditions and opportunities for generative interactions among community members – which represent the basis of SoRT – play a role in enhancing citizens’ engagement in and for their community (Marta et al., 2010). Living in a community where it is possible to get involved in different kinds of shared activities allows to come in contact with fellow citizens with whom one daily shares contexts and spaces (Procentese et al., 2019a) as well as with the values, norms, meanings, and opportunities to foster changes and achieve concrete goals in and for the community (Procentese & Gatti, 2019; Procentese et al., 2020).

## **2.2 Community trust**

Broadly speaking, trust is critical to the understanding of social relationships in individuals’ life contexts. Putnam (1993, 1995) considers it a central element of social capital, which is one of the main characteristics of social organizations along with social norms and networks. It requires all those involved in the relationship to take a risk which is given by the implicit possibility that their expectations will not be met (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Thus, relationships of trust cannot be considered a form of reassurance. Luhmann (1982) indicates trust as a social lubricant of cooperative and participatory processes. It is critical to the promotion of shared actions for the achievement of common goals and more efficient social contexts. In this vein, trust promotes CEB too (Talò, 2018).

Trust can be expressed at different levels: interpersonal trust, institutional trust, political trust, community trust. In this study, we refer to community trust, that is, the feelings of trust citizens have towards their territorial context. In this regard, Di Napoli and colleagues (2019a) defined it as “individual expectations related to one’s life context and local resources and their capability to satisfy residents’ needs of personal and collective planning. We define the local level as not only a specific area, but rather a contextual feature shaped by different variables, such as employment, income, and education, while also including people’s interactions in the area and the specific effects of their reciprocal interactions” (p. 556). Specifically, community trust refers to individuals’ interactions with their immediate surroundings and neighbors (Jachimowicz et al., 2017; Wallman Lundåsen & Wollebæk, 2013). Thus, it is based upon personal experiences and elements of collective memory that are shared in a lived territorial space (Wollebæk et al., 2012). When citizens expect their life context to offer local resources and to be able to meet their needs for personal and collective planning, they are more likely to play out behaviors aimed at solving community problems and taking responsibilities for common goods (Di Napoli et al., 2019b). Conversely, when mistrust is generated, there is a strong disinvestment and a lack of participation in collective initiatives aimed at the well-being of the community (Arcidiacono et al., 2007; Di Napoli et al., 2019a; Carbone et al., 2021).

## **3. Hope and civic engagement**

Hope also plays a central role in young adults’ life, as it is strongly related to their psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Bailey et al., 2007; Bronk et al., 2009; Snyder, 2000; Snyder et al., 1991) as well as to their educational achievements (Ciarrochi et al., 2007).

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It may also represent a critical dimension to foster citizens' civic engagement and prosocial values – especially among young citizens (Callina et al., 2014). Indeed, individuals with higher rates of Hope are more prone to get involved with their proximal and distal social contexts in a goal-oriented way, aimed at contributing to the improvement of individual and common life conditions. Therefore, studies highlighted its role in the promotion of CEB. However, they only considered Hope as an individual construct not connected to the context individuals are embedded into. Scioli's definition overcame the conceptualization of highly individualistic Hope – which does not consider the role of contextual dimensions (Aspinwall & Leaf, 2002; Schmid & Lopez, 2011) – by articulating the construct of Hope as closely related to the contextual dimensions in which individuals live.

Scioli and colleagues (2011) defined Hope “as a future-directed, four- channel emotion network, constructed from biological, psychological, and social resources. The four constituent channels are the mastery, attachment, survival, and spiritual systems (or subnetworks)” (p. 79) and are organized in two basic dimensions of Hope: Non-spiritual Hope, consisting of Support/Empowerment, Liberation/Trust, and Personal Mastery dimensions, and Spiritual Hope, only consisting of the Spirituality dimension. In this vein, Scioli's theory of Hope recalls the centrality of social relationships and dimensions in the enhancement of Hope, which is considered as the result of a collective process rather than of an individual one (Di Napoli et al., 2022).

This multi-level, complex model assumes the inclusion of the biological, psychological, and social dimensions in the experiences of mastery (that is, perceived strengths and cherished ideals control), attachment (that is, trust, openness, and connectedness), survival (that is, self-regulation and liberation strategies), and spirituality (that is, transcendent relationships to bolster one or more of the underlying motive systems). “The hope network is designed to regulate these systems via both feed-forward (expansion) and feedback processes (maintenance) that generate a greater perceived probability of power and presence as well as protection and liberation” (Scioli et al., 2011, p. 79). Thus, Hope is an organizing and motivating collection of thoughts, feelings, and actions (Scioli & Biller, 2009). Consistently, the emotional dimension is central (Scioli et al., 2011), as Hope represents an “emotional syndrome” that is organized around the experiences individuals live with respect to the mastery, attachment, survival, and spirituality (Magnano et al., 2019).

In previous research, Hope was deepened as a mediator between individual dimensions – such as emotional states (Feldman et al., 2016) and dispositions (Halama, 2010) – and aspects concerning individuals' impact on their surrounding environment, such as life satisfaction (Rustøen et al., 2010) and self-efficacy (Feldman et al., 2016).

#### **4. The study: Rationale and hypotheses**

A more complex understanding of the role Hope could play in the paths towards citizens' CEB and of its connection with contextual features is still needed (Callina et al., 2014). As an endeavor to fulfill this gap and enrich the knowledge about the already-known paths supporting citizens' CEB (Di Napoli et al., 2019a; Procentese & Gatti, 2022), the present study

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takes into account the role of Hope, SoRT, and community trust. It will specifically tackle two main goals.

First, consistently with Scioli and colleagues' theory (2011) about the social roots of Hope, this study tests the framing of Hope as the result of collective processes and representations citizens share of how to live together in their community of belonging. That is, living in a community which is perceived as characterized by shared (a) trust and (b) acknowledgement that community members can and do take responsibilities to improve their individual and shared conditions can represent a valuable resource to enhance community members' Hope rates. Thus, the following set of hypotheses follows:

H1: SoRT (H1a) and Community Trust (H1b) positively associate to Hope.

Furthermore, since the role of Hope in fostering citizens' civic engagement and prosocial values clearly emerged (Callina et al., 2014) as well as the ones of SoRT (Procentese & Gatti, 2022) and Community Trust (Di Napoli et al., 2019a) did, this study also tests whether the role of SoRT and Community Trust in supporting community members' civic engagement might be explained by higher rates of Hope. That is, representing the community of belonging as one where individuals act for individual and common goals and well-being, and having positive expectations about its ability to meet its members' needs, could support higher rates of Hope and the latter may in turn associate with more civically engaged behaviors. Thus, the following mediation hypotheses are added:

H2: Hope mediates the relationships of SoRT (H2a) and Community Trust (H2b) with CEB, that is, both community-related dimensions will have a positive, indirect, relationship with CEB via Hope.

## **5. Method**

### **5.1 *Participants and procedures***

An online questionnaire was distributed through SurveyMonkey. Snowball sampling procedures were adopted: a group of 60 Bachelor's university students, enrolled in a Psychology course about research methodologies, were awarded credit course for recruiting participants for the study. They sent the online questionnaire to their acquaintances, friends, and family members through the most used social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram). Word of mouth also helped distributing the questionnaire, since respondents were invited in turn to ask their acquaintances, friends, and family members to take part in the study.

Overall, 486 young Italian citizens aged between 18 and 30 ( $M = 22.97$ ;  $SD = 2.91$ ) took part in the study. Participants' socio-demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

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**Table 1. Participants' characteristics**

Characteristics		%	<i>n</i>
Sex	Male	39.3%	191
	Female	60.7%	295
Marital Status	Single	60.1%	292
	With partner	37.7%	183
	Separated / Divorced	2.1%	10
	Widower	0.2%	1
Educational Level	Primary School	0.4%	2
	Middle School	2.1%	10
	High School	67.5%	328
	Univ. Degree	26.5%	129
	Post-graduate degree	3.5%	17
Type of employment	Manager	0.2%	1
	Salaried worker	7.2%	35
	Self-employed	3.5%	17
	Trader/Craftsman	4.5%	22
	Entrepreneur	1.4%	7
	Office worker	12.3%	60
	Teacher	2.5%	12
	Student	61.5%	299
	Unemployed	6.9%	33
	Territorial area	North	35.7%
Centre		34.8%	169
South and Islands		29.5%	143

Note. *n* = 486.

## 5.2 Measures

The questionnaire included a socio-demographic section, followed by specific measures.

### 5.2.1 Civic Engagement Behaviors (CEB)

The Civic Engagement Behaviors scale (6 items; Doolittle & Faul, 2013) was used. Participants were asked to rate their frequency of engagement in some behaviors linked to their community and its social life (e.g., “*I am involved in structured volunteer position(s) in the community*”) on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*).

### 5.2.2 Sense of Responsible Togetherness (SoRT)

The Sense of Responsible Togetherness scale was used (Procentese & Gatti, 2019; Procentese et al., 2019a). The scale is compounded by 33 items to be rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 4 = *often*), detecting respondents' representations of different aspects of living

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together in local communities such as the perception of equity, the feeling of being an active member of the community, the perceived support from the institutional referents, the acting for the power, the respect of the rules, the respect for the Others, the support among community members, the freedom of opinion with reference to one's community of belonging (e.g., "*Respect the rules of togetherness in the neighborhood*", "*Help new residents to become part of the neighborhood*"). As all these aspects represent dimensions of the overall SoRT construct, an overall latent variable was included in the model following the indications of Procentese and colleagues (Procentese & Gatti, 2019; Procentese et al., 2019a).

### **5.2.3 Community Trust**

A short version of the Community Trust scale (Di Napoli et al., 2019a) was used. To make the compilation faster without reducing its validity (Bowling, 2005), this short version includes 9 items (see table 2) instead of 32 (Di Napoli et al., 2019a). The tool provides a self-anchoring scale, that is, participants are asked to rate their agreement by placing a mark on a 10-centimeter ruler. However, due to the online administration, the scale was translated into a 11-points Cantril one, from 0 (*maximum disagreement*) to 10 (*maximum agreement*).

### **5.2.4 Hope**

The Italian version (37 items, Magnano et al., 2019) of the Comprehensive State Hope Scale (Scioli et al., 2011) was used. It evaluates respondents' Total Hope, which is compounded by Non-spiritual and Spiritual Hope (Scioli et al., 2011). Participants are asked to rate their agreement with the proposed statements using a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *none*; 4 = *extremely strong*). Specifically, the items refer to the following dimensions (Scioli et al., 2011, Magnano et al., 2019): Support/Empowerment, which includes Interpersonal Assurance, Interpersonal Bonding, and Supported Strivings subscales (e.g., "*I reduce stress with friend/family*"); Liberation/Trust, which includes Liberation Experience and Trust Experience subscales (e.g., "*I feel trapped*"); Personal Mastery, which includes Ultimate Gains and Fear Reduction subscales (e.g., "*I am hopeful about major life goal*"); Spirituality, which includes Spiritual Inspiration, Spiritual Presence, and Spiritual Assurance subscales (e.g., "*I am inspired by spiritual beliefs*"). The first three dimensions compound Non-spiritual Hope. However, consistently with the framing of Hope as a "unique foundation" (Scioli & Biller, 2009, 2010) and with the aims of the present study, an overall latent variable of Hope – on which Spiritual and Non-Spiritual Hope loaded – was included in the model.

## **5.3 Data analyses**

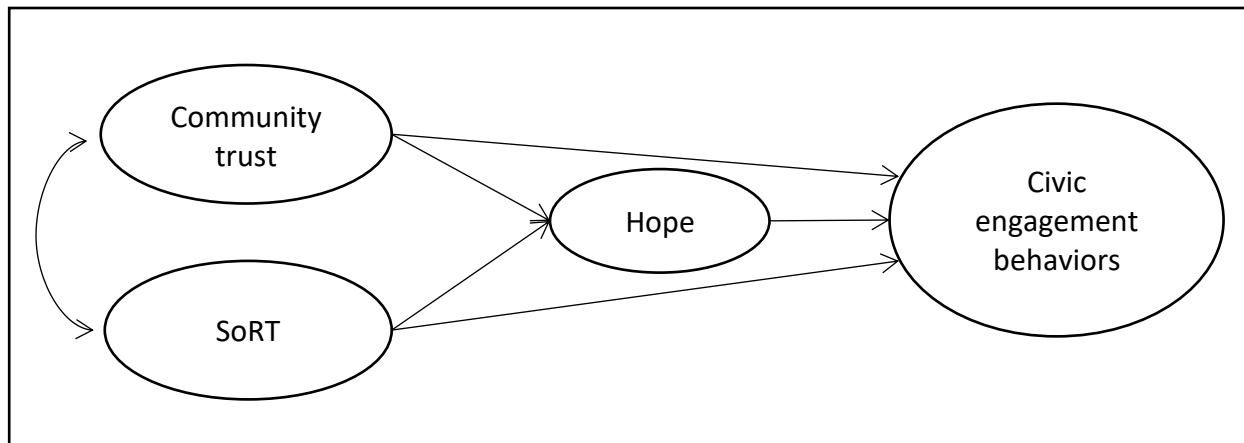
As to the 9-items version of the Community Trust scale – which was a not-yet-validated scale – an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was run with principal axis factoring and promax rotation to determine the factor structure of the scale. The sphericity was checked using Bartlett's test and the adequacy of sampling using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure.



Then, Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) were run for each scale to test the fit of the factor structures emerged from previous studies to the present data. Different indices of model fit 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). For CFI and TLI, values equal to or greater than .90 and .95 respectively indicate good or excellent fit; for RMSEA, 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 ( $\alpha$ ).

The hypotheses were tested through a multiple mediation model, using SEM. The hypothesized model (see Figure 1) included SoRT and Community Trust as the independent variables, Hope as the mediator, and CEB as the dependent variable. Given the interest in higher order constructs, a heterogeneous parceling was adopted (Coffman & MacCallum, 2005; Little et al., 2002; Little et al., 2013) to include theoretically meaningful categories in SEM. Hope was included in the model as second-order latent variable, on which the two sub-dimensions (Spiritual and Non-spiritual Hope) loaded; each sub-dimension was obtained as a latent variable on which the parcels calculated by averaging the raw scores of several items loaded. Differently, SoRT, Community Trust, and CEB were included in the model as a first-order latent variables on which the parcels calculated by averaging the raw scores of several items loaded.

**Figure 1. Hypothesized model**



*Note.* SoRT = Sense of Responsible Togetherness. The measurement model is not shown for clarity.

The absence of outliers or influential cases in the data was checked through leverage value and Cook's D (Cousineau & Chartier, 2010), which should respectively be lower than 0.2 and 1. Multicollinearity among the variables was tested through the Tolerance index – which should be higher than 0.2 to suggest the absence of multicollinearity issues (Craney & Surles, 2002). To evaluate the model fit, the above-mentioned indices of fit were observed for this model too.

Bootstrap estimation with 10,000 samples was used to test the significance of the results (Hayes, 2018), and the bias-corrected 95% CI was computed by determining the effects at the

2.5<sup>th</sup> and 97.5<sup>th</sup> percentiles; when 0 is not included in the CI, the indirect effects are significant.

## 6. Results

A one-factor structure emerged from the EFA for the short version of the Community Trust scale (see Table 2 for factor loadings). CFAs confirmed the expected factor structures for all the scales; the model fit was always good. Cronbach's alphas, fit indices, descriptive statistics, and correlations for all the study variables are shown in Table 3.

**Table 2. EFA factor loadings for the short version of the Community Trust scale.**

Item	Factor loading
Compared to the current state, in the next 10 years my community will offer me an adequate management of collective spaces.	0.849
Compared to the current state, in the next 10 years my community will offer me opportunities to acquire specific skills I'm interested in.	0.816
My town offers services and facilities that allow me to realize my life plans.	0.790
My town offers concrete possibilities to meet and match about the initiatives concerning our community.	0.761
Compared to the current state, in the next 10 years my community will offer me a higher level of security.	0.796
I want to realize my life plans in my town.	0.742
City leaders show an authentic interest for my town.	0.731
I like spending my spare time in my town.	0.722
I spend my spare time with other inhabitants of my town.	0.582
Explained variance (%)	57.32

Note.  $n = 486$ .

**Table 3. Summary of fit and reliability indices, descriptive statistics, and correlations.**

Variables	$\alpha$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSEA 90% CI	$M$	$SD$	1	2	3
1. Sense of Responsible Togetherness (SoRT)	.92	.91	.90	.07	[.07, .08]	2.74 <sup>a</sup>	0.45	-		
2. Civic Engagement Behaviours (CEB)	.90	.99	.98	.06	[.03, .09]	3.34 <sup>b</sup>	1.58	.506 <sup>***</sup>	-	
3. Community Trust	.92	.97	.96	.07	[.05, .08]	4.56 <sup>c</sup>	2	.539 <sup>***</sup>	.441 <sup>***</sup>	-
4. Hope	.89	.91	.90	.05	[.05, .06]	1.75 <sup>d</sup>	0.52	.360 <sup>***</sup>	.399 <sup>***</sup>	.364 <sup>***</sup>

Note.  $n = 486$ .

<sup>a</sup> 1-4 range scale; <sup>b</sup> 1-7 range scale; <sup>c</sup> 0-10 range scale; <sup>d</sup> 0-4 range scale.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$  (2-tailed).  $A$  = Cronbach alpha; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CI = confidence interval;  $M$  = mean;  $SD$  = standard deviation.

The data included no outliers nor influential cases that could eventually affect the analyses, as both the leverage value and Cook's D were always lower than .04; Tolerance indices varied between .68 and .83, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a problem.

The model showed excellent indices of fit, CFI = .98, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .05, RMSEA 90% CI [.04, .06], and explained 37.5% of CEB variance and 41.9% of Hope one. It confirmed all the hypotheses: SoRT and Community Trust had significant direct effects on Hope, and the latter was a mediator in their relationships with CEB, showing positive indirect effects in both cases. For all the direct, indirect, and total standardized ( $\beta$ ) and unstandardized effects (B), their Standard Errors (SE), and their 95% CI, see Table 4.

**Table 4. Model results**

Paths		$\beta$	B (SE)	BC 95% CI
Direct effects	Community Trust → CEB	.18	0.14 * (0.07)	[0.003, 0.26]
	Community Trust → Hope	.35	0.05 *** (0.01)	[0.03, 0.08]
	SoRT → CEB	.29	1.08 *** (0.31)	[0.43, 1.64]
	SoRT → Hope	.38	0.28 *** (0.07)	[0.16, 0.42]
	Hope → CEB	.25	1.22 * (0.92)	[0.01, 3.45]
Indirect effects	Community Trust → Hope → CEB	.09	0.06 * (0.05)	[0.002, 0.19]
	SoRT → Hope → CEB	.09	0.35 * (0.23)	[0.02, 0.92]
Total effects	Community Trust → CEB	.27	0.20 *** (0.05)	[0.11, 0.29]
	SoRT → CEB	.39	1.43 *** (0.21)	[1.03, 1.86]

Note.  $n = 486$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$  (2-tailed); \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

SE = standard error; BC = bias-corrected; CI = confidence interval. SoRT = Sense of Responsible Togetherness; CEB = Civic Engagement Behavior.

The correlation between SoRT and Community Trust is  $r = .46, p < .001$ .

## 7. Discussion

This study aimed at deepening Hope as a promotor of civic engagement based on two main acknowledgements: (a) Hope is supposed to be rooted in the social context where one lives (Scioli, 2011), which makes it worthwhile deepening the relationships between its relational characteristics and citizens' Hope (Callina et al., 2014); (b) Hope represents a predictor of CEB (Callina et al., 2014) as well as SoRT and Community Trust do (Di Napoli et al., 2019a; Procentese & Gatti, 2022), which makes it relevant also to address the role of Hope as a mediator in the already acknowledged relationships of SoRT and Community Trust with CEB. Therefore, the present study addressed (a) the relationships between Hope and individuals' SoRT and Community Trust, and (b) its role in enhancing CEB along with citizens' SoRT and Community Trust ones, as a mediator in the previously emerged relationships (Di Napoli et al., 2019a; Procentese & Gatti, 2022). Two main results emerged.

First, the need to consider Hope with reference to the social context in which individuals are embedded clearly emerged – consistently with Scioli and colleagues' theory (2011) about the social roots of Hope and with the hints from Callina and colleagues (2014) about the potential

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links between individuals' Hope and their context of belonging. Indeed, both SoRT and trust – that is, all the considered community-related representations – showed a significant association with Hope, highlighting the importance of contextual characteristics in enhancing citizens' rates of Hope (Morselli, 2017). Thus, Hope may represent an attitude citizens also derive from their expectations, representations, and feelings towards their community of belonging, and that is shared and strengthened through social contacts and shared activities. When individuals represent their community as one where members can make a difference by taking responsibilities and acting for individual and shared goals, and believe that their community is able to answer its members' needs, they assume a future-oriented and more hopeful attitude as to their opportunities to achieve their goals, keep their anxiety under control, and improve their life conditions – be it with the help of a spiritual entity or of significant others (e.g., family, friends, close ones). Living in a social context which is characterized by supportive relationships among community members and with Institutional referents, active involvement in community life, equity, respect of rules, others and shared spaces, responsibility-taking processes, and awareness could sustain empowerment, interpersonal bonding, supportive coping strategies, feelings of liberation and trust, and positive expectations about personal gains and achievements, as well as reduce fear among citizens.

Second, the need to consider the role of both individual and community-related dimensions when it comes to citizens' CEB clearly stems too – consistently with an ecological perspective to human behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kelly, 2006). Indeed, the present results show that both individual and community assets play a simultaneous role in fostering this kind of behaviors – that is, when Hope is included in the model as a mediator, the relationships of both SoRT and Community Trust with CEB still result significant despite the indirect effects that emerge too. Overall, this suggests that SoRT and Community Trust are able to enhance community members' Hope not only by themselves – as shown in previous studies (Di Napoli et al., 2019a; Procentese & Gatti, 2022) – but also as community-related assets supporting Hope rates – that is, providing citizens with stronger expectations about achieving their goals and improving their life conditions. Further, these results also support the framing of CEB as a situational variable, which is influenced by both individual dispositions and traits, and contextual characteristics and context-related assets. Consistently, to foster an active and engaged citizenship (Procentese & Gatti, 2022; Zaff et al., 2010) it takes to live in a community which is expected to welcome citizens' efforts to improve its conditions and to answer their needs – as recent studies already suggested – and to have a future-oriented attitude which makes individuals hopeful about the opportunities to achieve individual and common goals, get involved in weak and strong social relationships and interactions, and take part in shared actions aimed at common goods.

### **7.1 Implications**

These results provide critical hints upon which Institutions and stakeholders can rely to boost community building processes (Doolittle & Faul, 2013; Hyman, 2002). Indeed, they support the need for local Institutions and stakeholders to build shared spaces within communities, where citizens can meet and match, plan collective actions and paths to

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implement them, but also develop a sense of Hope as to the opportunities for the community to collectively meet their needs. Examples of such contexts may be detected in local associations as well as in educational realities. This appears particularly interesting when it comes to young citizens, who live their existence too stuck in the present time (Leccardi, 2009) – even more due to the recent pandemic outbreak (Procentese et al., 2021), which opens spaces for thinking about the implications of further collective emergencies. Therefore, promoting Hope among young people means not only promoting their interest in getting involved in shared actions but also enhancing their temporal perspective by including the future dimension. Indeed, creating contexts that are careful to build a positive vision of the future seems an important matter, with an impact on both individual and contextual levels. Hope can help people planning their personal life as well as getting involved in the promotion of the well-being of their whole community (Scioli, 2020).

## **7.2 *Limitations and future directions***

Some limitations of this study should be acknowledged too. First, the findings are based on self-reported data, which can be distorted by memory bias and response fatigue. Moreover, the sample is not representative, and using a snowball sampling to reach a broader pool of potential participants across all Italian Regions may have led to a self-selection bias.

Second, due to the cross-sectional design of the study, the direction of the described relationships should be carefully considered. For example, CEB may also represent an element enhancing SoRT (Procentese et al., 2019a), since the representation of community members as caring about their community rather than solely safeguarding their personal interests could be fostered through the involvement in community shared activities. Furthermore, Hope could lead people to experience greater closeness with each other thanks to a common belief, and this could support their Community Trust and SoRT too. Nevertheless, these relationships may also be circular ones, according with the notion of a virtuous circle between local assets and citizens' community-related attitudes and behaviors (Putnam, 2000). Longitudinal research would be useful to clarify the directionality of the paths between these variables.

The present study also opens more research questions. For example, future studies could deepen the role the different components of Hope play with regards to CEB as well as their community-related roots. Further, more community-related assets (e.g., the role played by community stakeholders, local institutions, and neighborhood organizations as well as their efforts to improve the community) may play a role in supporting citizens' feelings of Hope and their CEB and may deserve further attention.

## **8. Conclusion**

Overall, this study suggests that the representations of how to live together and take responsibilities in the community, and the trust among its members play a critical role as well as a future-oriented, hopeful, attitude when it comes to civically engaged activities. That is, social connections, shared norms and values, feelings of trust and hope, and responsibility-

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taking processes represent the main basis upon which an active and engaged citizenship relies (Di Napoli et al., 2019a; 2019b; Procentese & Gatti, 2022; Zaff et al., 2010).

The results also provide further evidence about the role of contextual assets in increasing Hope rates, underlining the need to deepen the contextual roots of Hope (Callina et al., 2014; Scioli et al., 2011). At the same time, this study suggests the need for local Institutions and stakeholders to rely on the representations of their community as one where citizens can take responsibilities and act for the achievement of shared goals, and as able to answer its members' needs, as critical basis for the promotion of a future-oriented and more hopeful attitude among citizens – especially when they express a pessimistic and hopeless perception of their future due to the uncertainty characterizing their daily life (Leccardi, 2005; Heinz, 2009), as it is the case for Italian ones (Gallup International Association, 2018).

Further, building on the recent and ongoing pandemic and of the actual social challenges, increasing young citizens' rates of Hope represents an even more relevant challenge for all institutions, since the pandemic has strongly influenced individuals' expectations about the opportunities for achieving their goals and for interpersonal bonding, as well as their empowerment (e.g., Di Napoli et al., 2021; Gattino et al., 2022; Procentese et al., 2021), yet it has also underlined the critical role the communities of belonging could play as assets for reorientation processes in the face of this collective and unexpected change of habits (Gatti & Procentese, 2021) and as drivers for prosocial behaviors (Compare et al., 2021).

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