

PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY FRAMED IN A “CLINICAL COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY”

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The community represents a fundamental aspect of the human experience. However, contemporary communities face a range of stressors that, over time, can lead to significant transformations, engendering uncertainty and fostering the rise of distrustful and individualistic attitudes. This case study aimed to synthesize insights from clinical psychology and community psychology to promote a participatory decision-making process in a small town in Lazio. We conducted interviews with key community stakeholders (n=17) and organized focus groups (n=6). The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed using Elementary Contextual Thematic Analysis, which facilitated the identification of six thematic clusters, subsequently interpreted through Emotional Textual Analysis (ETA). The texts from the focus groups underwent inductive thematic analysis, revealing five salient themes. This research phase informed the design of an intervention aimed at revitalizing the network of relationships within the community, thereby providing individuals with opportunities to cultivate conditions conducive to collective well-being. The study underscored how the psychodynamic dimension, within a community psychology framework, enhanced the understanding of the subjective and relational dimensions of contexts, enriched capabilities for interaction within group settings, and improved predictive abilities and strategic decision-making.

Keywords: *participatory processes, decision-making processes, community development, clinical community psychology, psychoanalytic perspective*

1. Introduction

The community represents a fundamental aspect of the human experience. The perception of belonging to "a network of readily available relationships and mutual support" (Sarason, 1974, p. 1) facilitates the fulfilment of various material and psychological needs (Stewart & Townley, 2020; Sohi et al., 2018). A substantial body of literature from the past two decades has documented a consistent association between belonging, social integration, and influence, on one hand, and individual well-being and social development, on the other (Albanesi et al., 2007; Prati et al., 2016; Prezza et al., 2001; Coulombe & Krzesni, 2019). Engagement with the community engenders positive outcomes, including the cultivation of social capital (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003), the enhancement of personal responsibility (Dolan, 2012; Perkins et al., 2007), and the promotion of civic engagement behaviors (Boyd & Nowell, 2014; Boyd et al., 2018).

In the past decade, communities have encountered a plethora of adverse situations characterized as slow-onset stressors, which unfold over time and yield long-term consequences, including urbanization, globalization, migratory flows, depopulation, and youth distress (Verbena et al., 2021). These "ongoing challenges" (Rochira et al., 2023) are

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catalyzing profound transformations within contemporary communities, engendering uncertainty and cultivating distrustful, individualistic attitudes (Putnam, 2023; Talò et al., 2014) that undermine the potential resources available within these contexts. Numerous studies have documented an increasing difficulty in fostering coexistence within local communities, manifesting in issues such as anonymity and loneliness (Michalski et al., 2020), adherence to values rooted in distrust and mutual defense (Natale et al., 2016; Procentese & Gatti, 2022; Amnå & Ekman, 2014), and a continual alteration in individuals' attachment to the community (Luo et al., 2022). This deterioration of interpersonal relationships is concomitant with a reduction in civic engagement and a disinvestment in collective processes (Caughy et al., 2001; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007).

Consequently, the exploration and promotion of innovative ways of living within community contexts that strengthen the bond with the local population has emerged as an urgent issue to address (Morfoulaki et al., 2022; Capone & Petrillo, 2020; Arcidiacono et al., 2009). Over the years, research has examined the interplay among various variables influencing social participation (Zaff et al., 2010; Procentese et al., 2019) and its implications for health outcomes (Albanesi et al., 2007; Coulombe & Krzesni, 2019; Procentese et al., 2023). However, there is comparatively less documentation of initiatives that promote coexistence through the active engagement of citizens (Martini, 2020; Said et al., al., 2020), or endeavors that, through bottom-up approaches, facilitate the development of new communities, as exemplified by the Transition Towns movement, which aims to revitalize local economies, foster relationships, and enhance psychosocial well-being (Zoli et al., 2022).

The case study presented herein aimed to facilitate the activation of a participatory decision-making process (Zanbar & Ellison, 2019) within a small community in Lazio, Italy. This endeavor employed a theoretical framework that sought to integrate insights from both clinical psychology and community psychology.

2. Theory underlying the intervention

2.1 *Theoretical reference frameworks*

From a historical standpoint, community psychology emerged as a distinct discipline separate from traditional clinical psychology, driven by the necessity to address both individual and collective needs that conventional psychiatry and psychology were ill-equipped to manage. This field fundamentally sought to transcend the individualistic, biological, and intrapsychic explanations for psychological distress and intervention. Instead, it redirected attention toward the relationship between individuals and their environments, advocating for the incorporation of an ecological and cultural perspective (Rappaport, 1977; Levine & Perkins, 1987).

As an empirical and applied discipline, community psychology has emerged in response to real-world situations of social distress, which often vary across the different countries in which it has developed. This diversity has led to a range of value dimensions, theoretical perspectives, and intervention strategies (see radical and moderate wings of psychology, liberation movements, and decolonial approaches) (Martin-Baro et al., 1994; Teo, 2005; Montero, 2007; Montero et al., 2017; Adams et al., 2015; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Sloan, 2016). Despite these differences, the various strands of community psychology are united by a common emphasis on understanding individual behavior within sociocultural contexts,

actively engaging with communities to enhance their resources and influence their futures (Trickett, 2009), and bridging the divide between the personal and the social, as well as the private and the public (Orford, 1992).

In an effort to distinguish themselves from the foundational matrix, particularly that of the psychodynamic tradition (Liang et al., 2011), community psychologists have prioritized cognitive and pragmatic dimensions over emotional and symbolic aspects in community processes (Hartmann et al., 2018; Koh & Twemlow, 2016). This shift has led to a progressive rejection of the concept of the unconscious (King & Shelley, 2008; Rimé, 1993) and a neglect of the role of affect (Gibson & Swartz, 2008; Caputo & Tomai, 2020).

Conversely, psychoanalysis possesses a long-standing interest in emotion as a social phenomenon, viewing groups (or communities) as environments where individual identity and emotional experiences are constructed (Parker, 1997). This psychoanalytic perspective aligns with community psychology in positing that the "individual" is shaped by their social environment. Relationships, both past and present, are infused with emotionality that operates not only within dyadic interactions but also extends into the broader social networks in which individuals are embedded. Furthermore, contemporary dynamic psychology no longer upholds a static notion of objective reality over time; instead, it conceptualizes reality as co-constructed, relational, and multidimensional (Arcidiacono et al., 2021).

Over the years, numerous scholars have advocated for a re-evaluation and discourse surrounding the contributions of the psychodynamic perspective to the understanding of community phenomena and the implementation of interventions (Gibson & Swartz, 2008; Liang et al., 2011; Borg, 2010). The potential contributions of the psychodynamic approach to community psychology have been primarily identified in three domains: the analysis of demands, the examination of transference and countertransference between practitioners and clients, and the exploration of collective unconscious processes (Caputo & Tomai, 2020).

The theoretical framework of Community Psychology encompasses various clinical psychology paradigms, including humanistic, cognitive-behavioral, and systemic-relational approaches. The numerous synergies—both theoretical and applied—between clinical and community psychological frameworks have prompted some authors to advocate for a clinical-community dialogue aimed at fostering effective change processes within communities (Hartmann et al., 2018). This dialogue has led some authors (Caputo et al., 2020) to hypothesize a "clinical community psychology" perspective, which is understood as a new domain of knowledge.

We contend that the contributions of the psychodynamic perspective, often met with skepticism, should be reconsidered and integrated into the research and intervention processes undertaken by community psychologists. By doing so, Community Psychology affirms its role as a "linking science" (Stark, 2011), connecting constructs, models, and methodologies from diverse fields of knowledge in a synergistic and integrated manner.

In light of these considerations, we argue that coherent and effective professional responses necessitate the adoption of action-research methodologies that are as participatory as possible. Such methodologies should aim to provide localized solutions while simultaneously integrating idiographic and ecological paradigms (Francescato & Zani, 2017; Langher et al., 2019a, b; Caputo et al., 2020).

Therefore, in our study, we posit that the primary focus of inquiry is the interplay between individuals and their contextual environments. We argue that the relationship between citizens and their territory is influenced by a myriad of structural factors, including geographical characteristics, natural and architectural resources, as well as demographic and

institutional dimensions. Additionally, cognitive and relational elements—such as individual and collective attitudes, levels of social cohesion, and the openness or closure of social subgroups—play a significant role in shaping this relationship. Furthermore, we acknowledge the importance of shared, emotional, and predominantly unconscious meanings that have evolved throughout the territory's history, which govern interactions among its inhabitants and with external entities.

Consequently, an understanding of the territory in question must encompass both a rational acknowledgment of the articulated concerns and a profound exploration of the emotional underpinnings of its identity. These emotional components can be discerned through various forms of communication, language, and textual production. Models developed in this manner facilitate the examination of contexts along a spectrum that ranges from maximum objectivity to maximum subjectivity (Caputo & Tomai, 2020).

Finally, this study subscribes to an epistemological framework that views the data collected and their interpretation as products of an interactive process of meaning-making involving the researcher, participants, and the contextual environment (Kral et al., 2011; Zoli, 2014).

2.2 Participatory processes and community development

Social participation is defined as "a process in which individuals engage in decision-making within the institutions, programs, and environments that impact their lives" (Heller et al., 1984, p. 339). It has long been regarded as a crucial element for fostering mutual understanding among residents of a given area, promoting social responsibility, and facilitating transformative change. A substantial body of literature demonstrates that social participation is positively correlated with a sense of community (Obst et al., 2002), as well as with responsiveness to local issues and civic engagement (Talò et al., 2014; Speer et al., 2013; Cicognani et al., 2015).

In alignment with this premise, local community participatory processes and intervention models, such as Participatory Action Research (PAR), are widely acknowledged as effective strategies for enhancing community responsiveness to their needs and fostering their development (van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993; Lake & Wendland, 2018; Dudgeon et al., 2017). Consequently, we posit that collaborations between psychology researchers and community-based organizations are indispensable for addressing complex, real-world challenges (Skipper & Pepler, 2021).

Drawing upon the PAR model, this paper delineates a participatory decision-making process wherein a community collaboratively engages in the search for solutions. Specifically, the commissioning agency (CA) sought to initiate a participatory process that centers on the needs and aspirations of citizens, thereby facilitating the involvement of the entire community in determining the intended use of two local assets. In our study we consider as derivatives of the PAR model the interdependence between the process of producing new knowledge and the activation of change; the cyclical nature of the research and action phases; continuous collaboration with the client (in strategic choices and the execution of activities); the building of relationships with and between stakeholders; the involvement of community members in the exploration of problems, planning and implementation of actions (Baum et al., 2006; Cornish et al., 2023; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). The call for participation may occasionally raise specific ethical concerns, particularly regarding the inadequate consideration of the diverse experiences, identities, and values of community members

(Kwan & Walsh, 2018). Furthermore, it is essential to recognize the existing power dynamics and varying levels of accessibility to resources within the community (Groot & Abma, 2022).

To address these issues, we have implemented several measures aimed at promoting inclusivity. These measures include actively soliciting the participation of representatives with a wide range of opinions, values, and beliefs, as well as ensuring the inclusion of all age groups within the population. Moreover, we have placed considerable emphasis on fostering transparent communication channels, underscoring the notion that resources acquired by the Community Agency (CA) are made accessible to the community. The community is then entrusted with the responsibility of evaluating the optimal utilization of these resources.

The case study approach has been chosen for its capacity to provide in-depth analysis and contextualization (Rebolj, 2013). In contrast to quantitative methodologies, it affords enhanced conceptual validity, facilitating a thorough examination of mechanisms within specific contexts and the exploration of complex phenomena (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Moreover, this approach is frequently utilized to document psychological interventions within communities, thereby capturing the conditions of public interest and enabling the observation of phenomena that were previously inaccessible (Langher et al., 2017).

3. Methodology

3.1 Setting

Our intervention took place in a hamlet in Lazio (2,436 inhabitants), characterized by a long feudal history that continues to shape its settlement and culture. In 2017, an agency was established to manage the proceeds obtained from landowners whose properties are subject to civic rights, requiring them to compensate the community to liquidate these rights. Using these funds, the agency purchased two properties: 105 hectares of land, including a lake designated as a Natural Monument, and an ancient building called Lo Stallone, located in the town center, which it intends to repurpose for community benefit.

It is within this context that the call for advice emerged, driven by the low public participation in the decision-making process. The research group proposed a project structured around the two well-established phases of Research-Action (R-A), with a strong emphasis on fostering the active involvement of local actors, recognized as custodians of local knowledge. Accordingly, each phase of participatory decision-making process was discussed and negotiated with stakeholders to ensure a shared definition of objectives (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

This study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Clinical, Dynamic, and Health Study Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome (Prot. n. 0000149 and 04/02/2022).

3.2 Phase I: Research

The primary objective of this initial phase was to define and understand the context and the variables at play, both conscious and tangible as well as emotional and unconscious.

According to Ignacio Matte Blanco's theory (1975), the human mind operates on two levels: a rational level, which conveys a shared sense of reality, and an affective level, which unconsciously symbolizes objects with emotional significance. This duality shapes our

relationship with the world, as sensory, perceptive, and mnemonic elements are transformed into both rational and emotional meanings, often in conflict. For instance, "territory" can denote a tangible, spatially defined entity while simultaneously representing an emotionally charged concept—loved, shared, or contested.

Rational knowledge, derived from logical operations, is codified, stored, and shared, much like emotional knowledge, which involves intrapsychic and interindividual processes within a shared context. This shared emotional symbolization, termed "collusion" (Carli & Paniccia, 2003, p. 36), constitutes the "local culture" of a group. Local culture encapsulates the collective unconscious and symbolic representations tied to the community and its environment, extending beyond structural factors such as infrastructure or services.

To foster development in a territory, engaging with and understanding these shared symbolic representations is essential. This requires analyzing inhabitants' narratives and distinguishing experiences, impressions, and fantasies related to their environment. Following Fornari's double reference principle (1979), each term carries both lexical and affective meanings, necessitating a dual analysis: historical (objective) and symbolic (emotional). By employing psychoanalytic techniques such as free association (Freud, 1913), associative chains in people's expressions can reveal their symbolic and unconscious dimensions, offering insights into the territory's identity.

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the opinions and narratives of key community witnesses were gathered through narrative interviews. In the second phase, focus groups were organized with community residents of different age groups. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to each interview or focus group.

Seventeen interviews were conducted with social actors representative of the local context. The sample consisted of 13 men and 4 women, aged between 23 and 79. The key roles they held included politicians, entrepreneurs, association presidents, general practitioners, teachers, shopkeepers, and employees of local businesses in direct contact with the public (e.g., bars, restaurants). The gender imbalance in the sample reflects the fact that, in this specific context, key positions are predominantly held by men, in line with the literature on the gender gap in Italy (Francescato & Mebane, 2018).

In accordance with the study's objectives, a purposive non-probabilistic sampling method was employed (Patton, 1990). This approach focuses on selecting highly informative case studies to allow for a detailed and in-depth examination of aspects relevant to the research objectives.

Participant selection was conducted in collaboration with the CA, which facilitated recruitment and interview logistics. The selection process integrated criteria of intensity, specificity, and depth of knowledge about the community, alongside a maximum variation criterion to ensure participant heterogeneity in terms of age, gender, influence within the community, and opinions on the acquisition of civic-use properties. These individuals are referred to as key community witnesses due to their roles within the social network, representing citizens' concerns and serving as experts on local culture (Gianturco, 2005).

The semi-structured interviews followed the narrative interview model (Legewie, 2006), allowing participants to express themselves freely while remaining within specific thematic boundaries. The interview consisted of five questions addressing the past ("Could you tell me how xxx acquired the communal assets?"), the present ("We would like to learn more about xxx. Could you describe the village, its resources, and its challenges? Do you think the assets acquired by the CA of xxx meet the community's needs? If so, how? How would you utilize

these collective properties?”), and the future (“How do you envision xxxx in 10 years?”) of the hamlet and its social life.

Interview analysis guided the second phase of the research, which involved focus groups open to the general population. Five focus groups, each lasting one and a half hours, were conducted with residents who had lived in the village for at least five years. The sample was recruited using a voluntary sampling method through announcements on the client’s social media channels and public notices (Patton, 1990). This approach ensured the involvement of motivated participants interested in the topic, thereby enriching the qualitative data. While voluntary sampling may introduce self-selection bias and limit the generalizability of results, these limitations are of little concern in the context of a case study, where the primary goal is to explore specific dynamics rather than generate statistical inferences about the broader population (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Langher et al., 2017).

Each focus group was homogeneous in terms of age (25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, 65+) but heterogeneous in gender, work experience, educational background, and prior knowledge of the participants. A planned sixth focus group for youth (18–24) was canceled due to insufficient participation. The focus groups were structured around four stimulus questions exploring the present (“Exploring resources and challenges of the village”), the past (“Identifying a moment of change in the history of the village”), the future (“Imagining the village in 10 years”), and representations of the CA (“Associating CA with a forest animal”).

The questions used in the focus groups were developed based on the interview results to ensure a comprehensive and exhaustive framework from which to proceed with the intervention. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded after participants signed an informed consent form outlining the study’s characteristics and implications.

3.3. Data Analysis

All collected interviews were first transcribed verbatim by one researcher and then verified for accuracy by another. For the interview analysis, we employed T-LAB, a software suite integrating linguistic, statistical, and graphical tools for text analysis (Lancia, 2016). The most suitable tool for our purpose was the Thematic Analysis of Elementary Contexts, which enables the construction and exploration of a corpus representation through a set of significant thematic clusters, understood as cultural repertoires. Specifically, the analysis:

- Conducts a co-occurrence analysis to identify thematic clusters within context units.
- Performs a comparative analysis to examine the profiles of various clusters.
- Generates an output that visualizes significant relationships between words.

Interpreting the output involves consulting the graphs and tables produced by T-LAB, potentially customizing their format, and drawing inferences about the meaning of the relationships they represent (Lancia, 2016) in accordance with our theoretical framework.

The theoretical approach adopted for interpretation was based on Emotional Text Analysis (ETA) (Carli et al., 2016), which seeks to capture symbolic sense-making processes. In ETA, interpretation follows a psychosocial perspective rooted in constructivism and object relations theory (Caputo, 2019).

The focus group transcripts were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consistent with community psychology research, which integrates multiple methodologies, the decision to apply two different analytical approaches to the two data sources stemmed from the need to explore both the cognitive and unconscious dimensions embedded in the interviewees’ narratives.

4. Results

4.1 Interviews

The corpus of 17 interviews was divided into subsets based on gender (M or F), age (<35, 35–55, >55), opinion on the acquisition of civic-use properties by the CA (favorable or unfavorable), and interview area (Representation of the place, Acquisition of assets by the CA, Community needs, Desires and expectations for the future).

Six thematic clusters emerged, which we interpreted as Cultural Repertoires (CR), representing aspects of the local culture. These Cultural Repertoires were mapped in a three-dimensional space, as visualizing them in a five-dimensional space would not be feasible. Each Cultural Repertoire is defined by a recurring set of words with shared semantic traits, corresponding to a specific content category. To aid interpretation, selected sentences have been provided for each CR.

Table 1 lists the ten most frequent words for each repertoire, while Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the Cultural Repertoires in the three-dimensional space defined by the first three factors.

Table 1. Cultural Repertoires (CR)

CR1 (23.7%)	χ^2	CR2 (21,5%)	χ^2	CR3 (12,1%)	χ^2
CA	287.6	Earthly	126.3	People	269.1
Money	99.3	Buy	104.5	Idea	141.7
Civic	82.5	Stallone	91.4	Open	129.9
Use	77.4	Feudatory	72.4	Miss	35.0
Before	75.2	Euro	68.8	Live	30.1
Right	63.6	Pay	59.0	Together	28.7
Institution	60.9	Catch	52.2	Sunday	27.0
Citizen	59.3	Sir	48.6	Summer	27.0
Municipality	51.7	Owner	36.2	Open	25.2
Well	51.6	Take off	35.8	Local	22.3
CR4 (11.5%)	χ^2	CR5 (16%)	χ^2	CR6 (15.2%)	χ^2
Get out	116.1	Neighboring village	117.6	Work	83.0
Village	67.8	Community	100.4	Maintain	59.5
Teach	54.8	Manifestation	79.1	Generation	52.2
Father	45.6	Village	65.5	Cultivate	50.2
Leave	44.6	Ultimate	55.5	Young	49.0
Home	43.5	Traditions	54.5	Bottle	44.8
Difficulty	43.0	Be born	43.1	Olive	39.1
Talk	41.3	Cultural	40.3	Future	38.4
Abandon	40.5	Try	30.1	Today	35.1
Found	33.8	Succeed	28.3	Agriculture	34.3

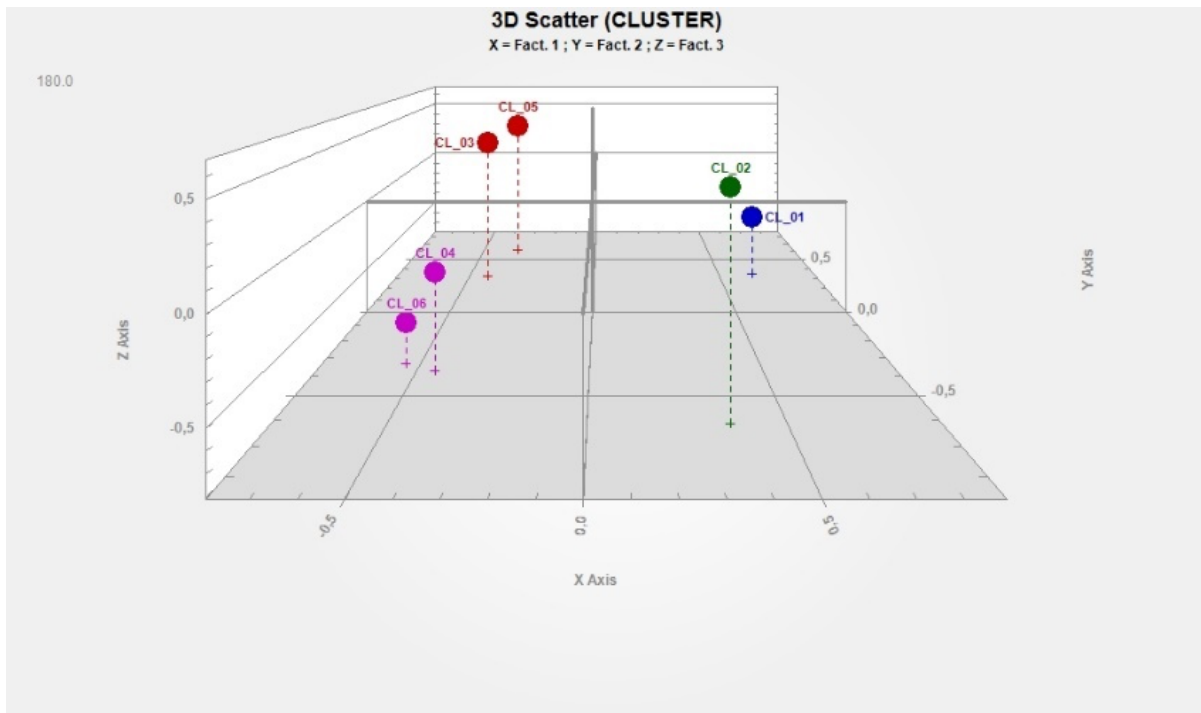


Figure 1. Cluster position in the factorial space

CR1: This Cultural Repertoire is characterized by the responses of participants who oppose the acquisition of assets by the CA. It prominently references economic, managerial, and legal aspects, evoking a normative dimension that connects both the past and present of the community. The language used emphasizes pragmatism, financial feasibility, and the growing factual and economic influence of the CA. However, references to the future and aspirational perspectives are notably scarce.

("The assets of CA belong to CA and not to the citizens, even though they are part of the community...This is contradictory because the assets are for the citizens, but they would not be able to access them.")

CR2: This Cultural Repertoire primarily includes interviews with male participants over the age of 55 who oppose the CA. The acquisition of assets (land and *Lo Stallone*) is linked to the town's feudal past, when local lords owned and controlled the land to the detriment of the resident population. Within this repertoire, the idea of having a say in the use of CA-owned assets appears inconceivable.

("The feudal lords were more knowledgeable and cunning than our parents; they took the farmers' money and appropriated the land." "...It was called the "stallone" because it was where mules and horses belonging to the overseers were kept. In the evening, it was open, and the overseer would stable his horse there.")

CR3: This Cultural Repertoire highlights variables related to the female gender, primarily those under 35. The key themes evoke conviviality, work, and community planning. The emerging image is that of a cohesive and industrious community, united in its aspiration for a climate of coexistence and community development. The presence of numerous third-sector associations further reinforces this narrative:

"[our municipality] Is starting to be populated with people who spend, and this marks the beginning of a new development project for the village...The most important thing is being together because your idea and my idea combined give rise to a greater idea."

"Many people come from outside; now there are truly a lot, on Sunday mornings or Saturdays. .. there are hundreds of cars around the lake—this is something that had never happened before."

CR4: This category reflects the perspective of individuals over 55 who support CA's initiatives. They view the municipality as a familiar place with deep roots but feel compelled to detach due to circumstantial factors. It conveys an ideal of preserving traditions and a hope for their revival.

"I always tell my son, "You'll never get anywhere; you talk to yourself and never to others because it's others who teach you, not you who teach yourself!" "We have a farming village because we live off farming. What does that mean? It means teaching people how to prune, explaining what a fungicide is, what a fertilizer is, in short, teaching people how to carry on the tradition."

CR5: This repertoire primarily represents individuals under 35, focusing on their relationship with the territory. It highlights a sense of belonging to a broader community that transcends geographical boundaries and competition with neighboring regions.

"In [our municipality], the boys play football; the girls who don't play football go to [other municipalities]".

"I move around. For me, social life in [other municipalities] is much more about sharing and community, whereas in [our municipality], it's much less so."

CR6: Representing interviewees aged 35 to 55 who support CA, this category highlights CA's forward-looking vision for the municipality. It emphasizes the development of productive activities, including those rooted in tradition, and the transfer of skills to future generations.

"Now I hope that with the establishment of CA, these goals will be relaunched and the environment will be preserved, creating job opportunities because young people need job prospects. Cooperatives could be formed."

"Among the jobs that will become increasingly popular in the future are those related to promoting a sustainable economy. Again, this could concern agriculture but also the promotion of the territory and related activities."

The factorial space illustrates the relationships between cultural repertoires (CR). We analyze the first three factors, which together explain 71.18% of the data inertia. This space is graphically represented as a three-dimensional plane (Figure 1).

The first factor accounts for 27.92% of the inertia and contrasts clusters 1 and 2 on the positive pole with clusters 3, 4, 5, and 6 on the negative pole. This dimension appears to

reflect power dynamics: the positive pole represents centralized power linked to perceived authoritarian leadership, while the negative pole corresponds to decentralized power associated with participative leadership. This polarization suggests a divide between participation on one side and a more paranoid perception of imposed, centralized power on the other.

The second factor explains 25.69% of the inertia and contrasts clusters 1, 3, and 5 on the positive pole with clusters 2, 4, and 6 on the negative pole. It addresses the transgenerational relationship within the community and its connection to tradition. On one side, development is seen as innovation and change, while on the other, it is understood as the preservation and revitalization of past traditions.

The third factor accounts for 17.56% of the inertia and contrasts clusters 2, 3, and 5 on the positive pole with clusters 1, 4, and 6 on the negative pole. This factor highlights the population's sense of empowerment, contrasting a low level—marked by passivity and unconditional delegation to leadership—with a high level, characterized by active, enterprising community members.

4.2 Focus Groups

As previously mentioned, the focus group texts were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method involves systematically coding data, identifying recurring patterns, and grouping them into themes that emerge directly from the content, without predefined categories.

The analysis of the focus groups yielded the following themes:

4.2.1 Resources

Across all age groups, participants unanimously identified the natural environment as the village's primary resource. Additionally, a strong sense of hospitality toward outsiders and a deep feeling of interconnectedness were highlighted. This shared sense of security evokes Sarason's (1974) concept of "belonging" and "help in times of need" as fundamental aspects of community.

4.2.2 Weaknesses

Interpersonal relationships within the village are often described as marked by distrust, envious rivalry, and a limited capacity for cooperation. There is little inclination to build meaningful connections beyond family ties. Young participants, in particular, emphasize the lack of cultural and territorial development initiatives targeting their age group. The absence of employment opportunities outside the agricultural and environmental sectors is also noted, contributing to the alienation of younger generations and their perceived detachment from local traditions. Furthermore, interactions with neighboring municipalities are often characterized by difficulty and emotional distance.

4.2.3 Fracture and Change

The village's history is shaped by three significant turning points:

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- The transition from latifundia to autonomy, which, while liberating the community from feudal oppression, also led to the loss of certain traditions.
 - The revival of folk traditions and festivals initiated by a prominent community figure, which later sparked collective claims for civic rights.
 - The advent of globalization and the subsequent economic crisis, which further eroded local traditions and values.

4.2.4 *The Village in Ten Years*

When asked to envision the village a decade into the future, participants express dreams, hopes, and aspirations. However, they also struggle to translate these desires into concrete development goals. This difficulty suggests challenges in aligning their vision with the tangible resources available in their local context.

4.2.5 *Representation of CA*

To explore perceptions of CA within the focus groups, each participant was asked to associate CA with a forest animal and explain their choice. CA is often likened to strong, territorial predators, yet also to fragile animals with limited real-world influence. Many view CA as a "leader" and protector of the community, to whom they entrust a significant role in the village's growth and well-being.

5. Discussion

The residents of the area articulated their attachment to the village during interviews and focus group discussions. However, this sense of belonging appears to be unaccompanied by a corresponding sense of responsibility and communal engagement. In other words, the emotional connection to one's birthplace, as articulated by Sarason, does not seem to foster a commitment to maintaining interdependence through reciprocal actions or contributions to the community. In this context, individualism predominates, leading to a pervasive reluctance to invest in communal relationships. The only connections of significance to them are those within their immediate social circles, primarily defined by familial ties. The fragility of community bonds is further evidenced by the gradual erosion of collective rituals—shared practices, language, village festivals, and local events—that are crucial for delineating the boundaries of the community and distinguishing between those who belong and those who do not.

The neighboring municipality is perceived by adults and the elderly as a powerful "rival" with a predatory disposition towards the smaller community. For these demographic groups, the civic assets acquired by the CA symbolize a sense of retribution, differentiation, and social distancing. In contrast, the younger generation envisions broader geographical and social affiliations than those articulated by adults, and they appear to regard the neighboring municipality in a less competitive light.

These observations elucidate the absence of very young individuals in both focus groups and, more broadly, in terms of their participation in community life. The youth do not align with certain symbolic representations held by adults and, overall, display (and are often characterized by) a markedly low level of sociopolitical empowerment. This lack of

empowerment inhibits their capacity to critically engage with and comprehend the social dynamics of the larger context, as well as to establish an emotional connection with "strangers" who share common objectives and responsibilities as fellow citizens (Francescato et al., 2009).

The community is experiencing a generational void that casts uncertainty over the future of the village. The absence of young people has permeated the entire decision-making process and has emerged as a significant challenge for residents, who often feel a sense of powerlessness. In terms of resources, the pristine and unspoiled natural environment remains the village's primary asset, even when contemplating potential future developments. This situation fosters an idealization that leads to a contradiction: on one hand, there is a compelling argument for the preservation of the territory, given its inherent beauty; on the other hand, there is a call for enhancement to make it more accessible to tourists. Participants propose a compromise solution, suggesting that a transformation in the "mindset" of those overseeing the territory is essential. This shift should ideally include the engagement of the younger generation, aiming to protect the locale from undesirable alterations while simultaneously rendering the proposed "enhancement" ineffective. Overall, as articulated in the fourth cultural repertoire, the village is experienced ambivalently, particularly by young people: it serves as a place to which they long to return, yet it also represents a space filled with challenges that they seek to escape.

The following considerations illuminate potential avenues for exploration during the intervention phase:

Amplifying Youth Narratives: The intervention should prioritize the articulation of narratives from younger demographics, examining ways to reconcile their aspirations for change and progress with the adults' inclination to maintain the status quo.

Attention to the Relationship Between CA and the Community: Both interviews and focus groups depict CA as closely linked to power dynamics. In the first cultural repertoire, the acquisition of civic assets is viewed as an endeavor to enhance the power and wealth of CA. Conversely, in the second cultural repertoire, land acquisition evokes memories of the village's historical context, wherein local lords wielded control over property at the expense of the resident population. Within focus groups, CA is frequently depicted through contrasting imagery—either as formidable territorial entities or as diminutive, underdeveloped creatures with minimal influence on their surroundings. This dichotomy between power and powerlessness remains pivotal, particularly in the context of interactions between the powerful and the marginalized. In this scenario, there exists a significant risk that CA's unilateral decisions to dispose of acquired assets without community consultation may be perceived as an overreach—potentially resulting in outright rejection or, at worst, backlash.

The Role of CA as a Dominant Leader: The designation of CA as a powerful leader effectively absolves the delegator of the responsibility of determining the fate of acquired assets. Simultaneously, this dynamic empowers CA to exercise judgment over the decisions made regarding those assets.

6 Phase II: Intervention

The collected data were presented to the CA in a formal report. Subsequently, in alignment with a participatory framework and with the aim of fostering community engagement (Arcidiacono et al., 2016; Francescato & Mebane, 2015), a restitution meeting was convened.

This meeting included citizens—both those who had participated in the interviews and focus groups and those who had not—as well as institutional representatives, including the mayor and several council members. Following the presentation of the results, participants were afforded the opportunity to reflect and collaboratively identify the priority objectives for the intervention. Ultimately, five working groups were established, centered around the objectives identified by the assembly, tasked with co-constructing micro-projects of shared interest.

Interestingly, during this meeting, we observed a relational dynamic that is frequently manifested within the community. A group of long-standing CA rivals began to consistently and unjustifiably oppose the group's initiatives, actively impeding the establishment of an aggregative assembly movement. In accordance with a relationship-focused model of clinical psychological intervention, it became evident that this behavior, enacted in the "here and now," reflected the issues previously encountered in the "there and then" of the community context (Carli & Paniccia, 2003; Carli et al., 2016). This occasion provided an initial opportunity to observe and address some deeply ingrained relational dynamics within the community. By managing this interaction in a constructive manner, we demonstrated strategies to circumvent collusive, conflict-oriented behaviors. The participants subsequently adopted this conflict management approach, enabling them to replicate it in future situations.

The restitution meeting formally signified the conclusion of the first phase of the intervention and established the groundwork for the beginning of the second phase, which primarily focused on supporting the efforts of the subgroups.

In the subsequent months, the small groups were facilitated through the provision of support materials, regular in-person meetings, and individualized remote supervision. Furthermore, individual supervisory meetings were conducted with both the CA and each of the group leaders. During this phase, community psychology intervention models informed the selection and implementation of activities undertaken with community members, which were conducted within subgroups or in plenary sessions. Concurrently, psychodynamic theories enhanced the understanding of relational dynamics between the community and the clients, as well as the analysis of transference and countertransference processes activated within relationships across various levels of contextual complexity, including dyads, small groups, assemblies, and the broader community.

Overall, the intervention phase adhered to three primary strategies: ongoing support and monitoring of the subgroups established during the feedback meeting, periodic assembly meetings involving all project participants, and supervision/reflection sessions with the CA. Notably, this last strategy was implemented in response to the critical position in which this project initiative appeared to have placed the CA. The community, in fact, symbolises it in an ambivalent way (a predatory and fragile animal at the same time), it invests it with an important responsibility (the growth and well-being of the community) but, at the same time, it lacks confidence in the real possibility of participating in the decision-making process on the utilization resources held by the CA.

In all areas of intervention, the cognitive and pragmatic dimensions were integrated with emotional and symbolic aspects, employing a synergistic approach.

The final project closing meeting was convened at a site that symbolically embodies the efforts of CA, specifically the agricultural enterprise established by CA on the land adjacent to the lake. The selection of this location reflects the emotional resonance and the "sense of place" (Fang & Woolrych, 2016) shared by a majority of the community, which, from the early stages of the research, identified the lake as a symbol of the town.

During this meeting, each group articulated their processes and detailed the activities they had initiated as well as those they planned to undertake in the near future. While some groups encountered challenges, others presented noteworthy and tangible outcomes. From a relational perspective, the iterative process of reflection and action (McIntyre, 2008), conducted within a "protected" environment, facilitated the exchange of ideas, mitigated prejudices, and fostered the "development of alliances" (Kagan, 2015), even among historically opposing factions.

The issue of engagement with younger generations received considerable attention. One group endeavored to involve the town's youth by organizing an initial event at a pub in the historic center, with plans for subsequent gatherings. Another group introduced the inaugural issue of the "CA Newsletter," which was distributed across various local venues, aimed at enhancing communication and transparency between the organization and the community.

Three months later, additional initiatives were implemented. A series of meetings were organized for the entire community, with a particular focus on young people and local associations, to discuss proposals for the utilization of the Stallone building. Furthermore, during the summer, CA orchestrated numerous cultural and recreational activities aimed at diverse age groups, encouraging community participation. Lastly, the communication of initiatives and progress related to the agricultural enterprise saw an increase in content and improved accessibility of information on the organization's website.

7. Concluding considerations

Contemporary communities are confronted with "ongoing challenges" (Rochira et al., 2023) that induce conditions of pervasive and profound personal and social distress (Michalski et al., 2020; Putnam, 2023; Rochira et al., 2023; Natale et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2022) that cannot be overlooked and to which conventional services are unable to respond adequately.

There exists an urgent necessity for comprehensive initiatives aimed at formulating strategies that promote conditions conducive to collective well-being, particularly within the contexts of everyday life—specifically in the environments where individuals increasingly seem to lack the resources to address issues of loneliness, fear, and conflict.

Psychosocial interventions must aim to restore the relational system by offering stimuli and opportunities that empower individuals to foster more favorable coexistence, thereby counteracting delegation, passivity, and feelings of helplessness (Foster-Fishman, 2007; Martini, 2020). Extensive research has established that affective life is profoundly interconnected with macro-social dynamics, and that the effectiveness of services provided by professionals is significantly diminished if they do not actively engage residents in processes of change (Talò et al., 2014; Cicognani et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the roles of emotions and unconscious processes within community contexts have historically received insufficient attention. In contrast, we contend that the promotion of meaningful change must encompass not only cognitive and pragmatic dimensions but also the emotional and symbolic aspects of the community.

The transition from an individual-centered paradigm to a focus on reciprocal relationships with context, alongside the growing emphasis within psychodynamic clinical psychology on contextually anchored interventions targeting not only individuals but also groups, organizations, and communities, signifies a convergence that facilitates the integration of

psychodynamic insights—such as emotional dynamics, transference, and counter-transference—into community interventions.

We contend that the synthesis of psychodynamic frameworks with community models effectively bridges the divide that has emerged between these two disciplines. This integration addresses the historical neglect of unconscious dimensions and, crucially, enriches and informs intervention models specific to community psychology. The proposal and challenge presented in this case study was to explore the possibilities inherent in this integration.

In intervention models inspired by action research, psychodynamic insights can significantly enrich and facilitate both the research and intervention phases. Our experience with inclusive decision-making processes has demonstrated that during the contextual exploration phase, psychodynamic insights offer a nuanced understanding of unconscious dimensions. During the implementation of interventions, these insights enhance our comprehension of the subjective and relational aspects inherent in the contexts involved (for instance, in supervision interventions with clients), deepened our ability to engage with individuals within group and organizational settings (in analyzing group processes). Additionally, they have permitted a more profound exploration of relational dynamics, particularly in mediation efforts among various community subgroups and in fostering a trusting relationship between community action groups and local populations. Furthermore, such insights have augmented our capacity to formulate predictions and propose effective intervention strategies.

The psychodynamic approach has significantly informed our decision to provide opportunities for dialogue within the community action group. Additionally, we proposed the establishment of a "stabilization period" during which civic resources would be made accessible to the population, thereby encouraging the emergence of spontaneous initiatives that serve the collective interest. We posited that this experimentation with resources could catalyze the development of a "desiring position" among citizens, fostering greater participation and enabling them to actively participate in shaping the future.

In response to our proposal, the CA, in collaboration with local citizens, organized a variety of cultural and recreational activities tailored to different age demographics following the conclusion of the project. This initiative marked the beginning of a phase characterized by shared ownership and communal utilization of resources.

The research-action process, designed and implemented in this manner, illustrates the potential for two distant disciplinary fields to forge an innovative and sustainable intervention model through their integration. While we recognize that the enduring success of the intervention is contingent upon its continuity, we view the CA's request for an extension of the project, made six months post-implementation, as a positive prognostic indicator.

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