

## **TRUST, HOPE, AND IDENTITY IN DISADVANTAGED URBAN AREAS. THE ROLE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE SANITÀ DISTRICT (NAPLES)**

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*This study investigated the attributions of hope, trust and identity among non-profit organisation (NPO) operators and residents living in a disadvantaged social context characterised by the lively presence of a community network of groups and associations. In particular, it examined the impact of NPO activities on the daily and future lives of the inhabitants of the Sanità district, a neighbourhood of the city of Naples. On the one hand, the district is characterised by profound social decay; on the other hand, it possesses an immense artistic-cultural heritage. Twenty-four interviews with NPO operators, users, and residents were conducted and analysed using thematic content analysis. The study's overarching aim was to investigate the role of hope, trust and social identity among members of the area under study, and more specifically to detect how the civic engagement of NPOs helps people living in disadvantaged urban areas to develop individual and collective perspectives of wellbeing and future opportunities.*

**Keywords:** civic engagement, community trust, social identity, hope, non-profit organizations

### **1. Introduction**

Despite the individualistic fragmentation of contemporary society, there is evidence of the role that moral reasoning, engagement values, and prosocial disobedience bring to a community (Fattori, Pozzi, Marzana, & Mannarini, 2015). Indeed, the civic engagement of non-profit organizations' networks and foundations aimed at prosocial development has a significant role in social life. The fact that they pursue fairness and conviviality is giving communities the opportunity to reconnect and reconstitute social bonds (Arcidiacono, 2004; 2013; Procentese, 2011; Procentese & Gatti, 2019; Bagnall et al., 2018).

In fact, civic engagement includes a variety of behaviours, encompassing volunteering, advocacy actions and helping behaviours. Some authors (Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Amerio, 2000; Lavanco & Mandalà, 2004) see civic engagement as active, shared, visible prosocial actions, which include aid and supportive behaviours toward others, requiring time and resources to benefit a person, a group or a cause. In this vein, civic engagement builds social and relational networks, promotes social values, a sense of belonging, sharing and reciprocity, and strengthens collective identification with local communities (Mannarini,

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Tartaglia, Fedi, & Greganti, 2006; Talò, Mannarini, & Rochira, 2014).

Furthermore, from an ecological perspective (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001) organisations such as non-profit associations promote civic engagement and are located at an intermediate level between the individual, the collective, and the community. Non-profit organisations (hereinafter, NPOs) are characterised by spontaneous free actions in a formal organisational context, promoting solidarity-oriented relationships, support and care for people in difficult socioeconomic conditions (Marta & Pozzi, 2004). The NPO focus on social and community programs relies on the contribution and support of volunteers to provide services to the general public (Burns, Reid, Toncar, Fawcett, & Anderson, 2006). In this regard, their actions increase social opportunities for local inhabitants, in line with the capability approach (Nussbaum, 2003). According to this approach, “development should remove those obstacles standing in the way of human thriving and, at the same time, promote positive circumstances that enable people to do what they are able to do and to be what they are able to be” (Arcidiacono & Di Martino, 2016, p. 15).

The literature broadly considers the factors that predict civic engagement and participation: individuals’ networks of relationships (Christens, 2010); community responsibility (Fernández & Langhout, 2018); sense of community (McMillan, 2011); responsible sense of community (Nowell & Boyd, 2014; Procentese, Gatti, & Falanga, 2019). The literature also provides evidence concerning how non-profit activities improve community life (Ehrlich, 2000), social capital (Putnam 1993; Pichler & Wallace, 2007), and participation in community and political life (Wilson, 2000). Moreover, participation in volunteer groups promotes not only individual wellbeing (Di Napoli, Procentese, & Arcidiacono, 2019) by increasing the perception of self-efficacy (Ohmer, 2007), but also greater engagement in community life (Christens & Speer, 2011), which is linked to an increase in individual and collective empowerment (Christens, Speer, & Peterson, 2016), and which results in enhanced social well-being (Klar & Kasser, 2009).

The paper aims to explore the role attributed to civic engagement in promoting actions for the improvement of the individual and collective well-being in disadvantaged communities. In fact, in disadvantaged urban areas civic engagement plays a fundamental role in promoting a sense of identity that counteracts apathetic and antisocial attitudes (Mason, 2011) while at the same time helping people experience themselves as full citizens that have access to resources and opportunities (Lister, 2003). Furthermore, for young adults brought up in disadvantaged families, civic engagement represents an alternative resource for connecting with opportunities and adults who could guide them in their life projects (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

As yet little research has examined how civic engagement promotes forms of trust towards the local community. An interesting recent review (Paxton & Ressler, 2018) highlighted the strong relationship between participation in some associations and generalised trust, suggesting that being part of an association can increase the generalised trust towards those who are not members of the association and towards the broader community. In this perspective, the focus is on understanding how civic engagement can promote trust in communities – especially in disadvantaged ones – turning them into places that nurture positive expectations in the present and in the future (Di Napoli, Dolce, & Arcidiacono, 2019). Recently, Corbett, and Le Dantec (2019) showed that civic engagement is needed to create trust and to support confidence in institutions. However, there are still very few studies on how the characteristics of the life contexts of individuals, and in particular of young people, promote hope (Schmid & Lopez 2011), conceptualised as a force that pushes individuals to act in successfully regulating their relationship with the context (Little, Snyder, & Wehmeyer, 2006; Schmid & Lopez, 2011). Schmid et al. (2014) have called attention to

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the influence of the family context and, in particular to the parental relationship, in the formation of hope in adolescents. In this perspective, the present study contributes to the understanding of how the participatory context accessed by citizens, parents of adolescents, and young adults, contributes to shaping their hopes.

## **2. Civic engagement and NPOs in Italy: The case of the Sanità district in Naples**

The Italian context is characterised by networks of NPOs focused on supporting people and supplementing welfare policies in order to promote social well-being (Petrillo, Caso, & Capone, 2014). Since 2015, 336,275 NPOs have been active in Italy, encompassing a wide range of sectors ranging from education to recreation and from philanthropy to environmental protection, in addition to organizations that advocate for political rights and those focused on local economic development (ISTAT, 2017). However, the distribution of NPOs is not uniform across Italy. Approximately 51% of NPOs are located in Northern Italy, while the remaining 49% are scattered across the Centre, the South and the Islands (ISTAT, 2017).

Particularly in Southern Italy, the limited spread of NPOs (estimated to number 57,615 organizations, about 17% of the total) is deeply linked to citizens' scarce involvement in public life and to a strong increase in criminality (Lasagni, 2008). In some Southern regions, such as Campania, citizens often do not receive protection and assistance from municipal and national agencies, and this institutional gap favours the development of criminal organizations that often replace the State's role in managing public affairs (Saviano, 2006; Gambetta, 1988). Despite this, in some of these areas, this institutional gap has promoted not only the rise of criminal organizations, but also of NPOs that provide a bridge between citizens and public institutions, filling the gaps in national services and programmes and supporting individuals and communities (Snyder & Omoto, 2008).

Currently, many cities are witnessing an increase in social interventions aimed at promoting the common good (Mancino & Thomas, 2005). The NPO network that has been formed and developed over the years in the Sanità district, a well-known area of the city of Naples, provides a tangible example of such actions.

The Sanità district, which is located in the heart of the Stella neighbourhood of the III Municipality of Naples, presents a complex situation, characterised on the one hand by profound social decay, and, on the other hand, by an immense artistic-cultural heritage. Undoubtedly, this contradiction makes the district one of the city's most fascinating neighbourhoods (Loffredo, 2013). In addition, the specific geographical position of this district, located in a valley, has favoured its isolation from other neighbourhoods of the city over the years. This isolation has led to the flourishing of organised crime in the area, the persistence of urban, social and economic degradation, and a widespread feeling among inhabitants of being abandoned by the city administration and state institutions.

However, the awareness of this institutional gap has promoted a movement *from below* led by the district's inhabitants, which has resulted in the birth of a secondary welfare system (Sgueglia, 2012). Specifically, in December 2014, the San Gennaro Community Foundation created a network including NPOs of various types, parishes and commercial activities, designed to promote a joint social enterprise in the area. The aims of this non-profit network are to support families in need, to provide training and education programmes for young people and children, and to enhance both the district's historical and artistic heritage and its human capital (Cooperativa la Paranza, 2016).

The experience of the district represents a clear example of how a network of NPOs can

provide concrete social support to the inhabitants of a disadvantaged urban area, furnishing an alternative to urban degradation and encouraging a revitalization of this urban territory aimed at enhancing its excellence (Arcidiacono & Esposito, 2018). Given the important role played by NPOs in providing material and psychological support to the inhabitants of the district, we decided to focus on three fundamental components of individual and collective wellbeing, namely the interplay of hope, trust and identity, that, according to Maggino and Facioni (2017), plays a role in disentangling citizens' living conditions in times of crisis. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to explore whether these three components were detectable in the discourses of the Sanità district inhabitants and NPO personnel. Specifically, the goal was to shed light on the role played by civic engagement in the development of hope, trust, and social identity.

We decided to explore this specific territorial area because the Fondazione San Gennaro action (Loffredo, 2013; Arcidiacono & Esposito, 2018) is a challenging case study that opens new perspectives for welfare strategies aimed at promoting social inclusion, wellbeing, and conviviality.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. *The original study*

In 2017 a study was conducted to explore the representation of the supportive and empowering role that NPOs play in the Sanità district (Arcidiacono & Esposito, 2018). In this study, we interviewed members belonging to a variety of NPOs, as well as users of NPO services, and members of the broader community. According to Martini and Sequi (1995), the inclusion of the general community, which also encompasses people who have no interaction with local NPOs or other community enhancement initiatives is a necessary measure needed to meet the criteria for gathering information in a situated study (Arcidiacono, Procentese, & Di Napoli, 2009). A group of twenty-four participants was interviewed (16 men and 8 women; Mean age = 37 years; SD = 9.76). Among them, twelve were operators of the NPOs in the local network coordinated by the San Gennaro Foundation that provided support to children in the neighbourhood (two operators for each association, see Table 1), eight were parents of adolescent users of the organisations' services, and four were "outsiders", that is, district residents who had no direct contact with these organisations and their activities.

**Table 1. List of NPOs in the Sanità district and their main activities (source: Arcidiacono & Esposito, 2018)**

<b>NPOs</b>	<b>Main activities</b>
<i>Sanitansamble</i>	Empowerment of children and their families through their involvement in a collective project that requires commitment, dedication and study.
<i>TuttiColori</i>	Support for young people and adolescents in study and training courses.
<i>La Casa dei Cristallini</i>	Educational and school support for children and young people (it welcomes more than 50 users every day)
<i>Nuovo Teatro Sanità</i>	Theatrical activities through which people can create beauty, art and invest in life projects.
<i>Piano Terra - Punto Luce</i>	Support for disadvantaged people aimed at the recovery of dignity and trust in one's own abilities and resources.
<i>Social Cooperative 'La Paranza'</i>	Enhancement of the artistic and cultural heritage of the neighbourhood

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A focused interview (Arcidiacono, 2012) was conducted with the participants. Respondents were asked to communicate their opinion on specific subject areas: their daily life in the district, their relationship with other inhabitants, their direct or indirect knowledge of the activities of voluntary associations, their perception of the usefulness of these activities for individual users and for the entire community, and their hopes or concerns for the future of the neighbourhood. Transcripts of the interviews were then analysed using Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The study highlighted the positive value attributed to the NPO network in the district. It was evident that, thanks to the work of these NPOs, the district's inhabitants had managed to considerably improve their living conditions and to enhance the historical and artistic heritage of the neighbourhood. The NPOs' interventions were perceived and acknowledged as a tool for social change. The NPOs' work also revitalised the district's economy through the involvement of adolescents in their projects, offering them opportunities to study, to engage in social promotion activities and to gain access to the labour market. For more detail on the results of this study, which constitutes the basis for the present research, see Arcidiacono and Esposito (2018).

### **3.2. *Aims of the current study***

The most important evidence of the previous study was the strong positive impact that the NPOs' work had on the daily life of the district's inhabitants. Subsequently the research team carried out a review of the textual materials and a reorganization of the macro-categories that were previously defined through GTM, in addition to opening new research questions, following an action-research perspective (Cunningham, 1976). In detail, the aim of the current study was to detect how the perceived civic engagement of NPOs helps people living in disadvantaged urban areas to develop individual and collective perspectives of well-being (Di Martino, Di Napoli, Esposito, Prilleltensky, & Arcidiacono, 2018) and future opportunities, with a specific focus on the components of community trust, identity and hope. Therefore, the research team focused on these three categories and engaged in a new thematic analysis guided by these concepts.

### **3.3. *Data analysis***

In order to fully answer the research question, the transcripts, codes and categories that emerged from the interviews conducted during the previous study were reorganised and re-categorised. This analysis was structured as thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). "Defining and redefining" the text, the categorisation process went "*beyond their specific content, to make sense of the data*" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94). Writing notes and transcripts and reading and rereading all of the data, codes, and materials produced was essential from the beginning of the process in order to familiarise ourselves with the contents and to increase the confidence in understanding the materials' depth and breadth.

Using thematic analysis encourages the jotting down and shaping of ideas and potential coding schemes, and is a fundamental part of the active process of searching for meanings, inputs, and patterns to discuss and review among team members. This procedure entails looking for similarities, contradictions and answers across the whole dataset. Through this operation it was possible to identify new common themes among the participants' responses. Following Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield's (2015) research, we developed a deductive and interpretative analysis that utilised a latent approach. Therefore, in our case:

“a thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data [as was done in the aforementioned preliminary study], and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data. If we imagine our data three-dimensionally as an uneven blob of jelly, the semantic approach would seek to describe the surface of the jelly, its form and meaning, while the latent approach would seek to identify the features that gave it that particular form and meaning. Thus, for latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorized” (p. 84).

The analysis process was focused on emotions, representations, and symbols attributed to the experience lived in a given context. The goal was to detect perceptions and attributions that people assigned to the NPOs’ activities. The interview transcripts were read by a team of three researchers and further discussed in a larger group session. Moreover, a participative discussion between the research team and representatives of NPOs evaluated all concerns related to the interviews, highlighting the various themes that were to be taken into consideration. In fact, the texts were analysed with the aim of categorising all transcripts according to three themes – trust, identity and hope.

## 4. Results

To understand the meanings attributed by respondents to the civic engagement of the NPOs, the research team re-encoded the texts analysed in the previous study (Arcidiacono & Esposito, 2018) according to three themes – trust, hope and identity (see Table 2.)

**Table 2. Scheme of the themes 'Trust', 'Identity' and 'Hope' with their respective codes**

Themes	Codes
TRUST	Association as a support
	Beneficial associations
	Absence of institutions
	Creation of social networks
IDENTITY	Closed district
	Artistic heritage of the district
	District rich in human values
	Cultural identification
HOPE	Unpleasant and disparaging label
	Association: growth engine
	Expand physical and mental boundaries
	Change in the district’s image
	Immutable district
	Desire for the participation of the entire district
	Desire for the cooperation between associations and the public administration

### 4.1. Trust

There are many definitions of trust, and the thematic category “trust” related to three specific meanings of the concept, encompassing social trust, institutional trust, and community trust.

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*Social trust.* Social trust is understood as a positive belief according to which most people are fair, able to provide help, and trustworthy (Flanagan, 2003). It is related to a cooperative exchange with other individuals, from whom one expects to obtain support in accordance with an interpersonal bond (Foddy & Dawes, 2008; Lee, Kang, Long, & Reisinger, 2010). In the textual materials examined, a strong sense of trust was found particularly in the relationship established between the inhabitants of the district who benefitted from the work of NPOs and their members. Based upon their statements, it was clear that the inhabitants of the district often relied on the activity of NPOs to discover new opportunities. Social trust was detectable in the code [*Familiarity*] that emphasises the attribution of friendliness and support to the NPOs that take care of local children and young people by offering them opportunities to “get off the street” and protecting them from developing bad habits. Social trust was increased by the feeling that NPOs were appreciated for providing care services for the children of working mothers and, in some cases, material aid to families facing severe economic difficulties and to abandoned children [*Beneficial Associations*]. The NPOs brought social richness to the neighbourhood.

“...especially in the case of those children who have nothing, who do not have a real family to rely on... it is surprising to see how much they can give only with their own strength” (A., 19 years old, non-profit service user).

*Trust in public institutions.* Issues regarding trust in public institutions, defined as people’s expectations concerning the capability of public institutions to meet their needs (Bachmann, 2011), were mentioned very frequently, with most residents of the district expressing negative perceptions. In fact, there were no positive expectations toward public institutions among them. Many of the residents interviewed expressed a great lack of trust in state institutions, mentioning that they experienced feelings of isolation and abandonment at the hands of the public administration [*Absence of Institutions*].

“Here the state fails to arrive. There are no services for those in need and there is no protection against criminals.” (S., 25 years old, operator of a voluntary association).

*Community trust.* The third dimension of trust examined by this study is community trust, which is defined as expectations concerning the possibility of achieving personal and collective goals in one’s local community (Di Napoli et al., 2019). Many participants claimed that the actions of the NPOs boosted opportunities in the district that had positive effects on both individual and collective life planning. Therefore, the NPOs were often perceived as catalysts of social change. An example of these opportunities was the strong commitment to the educational and professional training of children and young people, which fostered the growth and the spread of knowledge and open-mindedness, both of which were essential tools in fighting against the district’s social degradation and reducing its isolation from the rest of the city [*Expand Physical and Mental Boundaries*].

The NPOs provided further opportunities for the neighbourhood through their support to families and all of the district’s inhabitants, allowing them to regain trust in local community bonds and to believe in its potential revitalization [*Non-profit: Social Growth Engine*]. These organizations encouraged the development of links between staff, parents, parishes, schools, and the children of the district. Those who had participated in activities promoted by the NPOs in recent years referred to how the entire neighbourhood became involved in this “wave of regeneration” [*Creation of social networks*]. In the opinion of the interviewees, the

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work of the NPO network in the district acted as a bulwark of resistance against the degradation of the area. In contrast to the absence of public institutions, the NPO network implemented social and cultural actions, expressing a willingness to promote the reinvigoration of the district and to enhance trust in the possibility of healing community wounds in one of the most fascinating areas of the city. The profound impact of the NPO network in the district is exemplified by the following quote, from the mother of a child who utilizes their services:

"[The NPOs] are helping many children with parents who cannot take care of them... The association was born precisely for these most unfortunate children, to teach them something, but, above all, to keep them away from bad [life] paths. Thanks to them, I am more confident about the future of the kids of the neighbourhood" (C., 37 years old, non-profit service user's mother).

#### 4.2. *Identity*

At the individual level, the identity dimension is related to the social identity of the context to which the district's inhabitants belong. Identity contributes to their self-esteem and affects their self-representation as people of worth.

Territoriality strongly affected the interviewees' words, and they often spoke of the district as a 'closed' place [*Closed District*] that is separated from the rest of the city. In addition, district residents often underlined how this isolation, despite having undoubted negative consequences, such as cultural and social backwardness and facilitating the spread of crime, also instilled a very strong feeling of belonging in the district's inhabitants, as exemplified by the following quote:

"The San Gennaro Foundation was born in 2014... Since then, it has managed to bring together a whole series of important members and also the network of merchants... In this way, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood[have] become aware of their potential as a single large group" (A., 59 years old tailor who lives and works in the neighbourhood).

According to various authors (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Tajfel, 2010), territorial features are essential to the development of social identity because they create a subjective attachment to the territory, a feeling of love that ties their local community closely to their sense of belonging (Mannarini, 2004). Indeed, in defining their identity as belonging to the district, many residents made reference to some specific characteristics of the neighbourhood. Examples of these features include the immense historical-cultural value of the area, such as the Catacombs of San Gennaro or the Fontanelle Cemetery [*Artistic Heritage of the District*]. Residents also defined their sense of belonging according to their attachment to the district's traditions and values [*District Rich in Human Values*] and to its traditional food specialities (e.g., the pizza made by "Concettina" or a dessert called "fiocchi di neve"-snowflakes), which were a source of great pride for district inhabitants, in addition to attracting tourists [*Cultural Identification*].

The work of the Fondazione San Gennaro and of the NPO network was focused on the maintenance and dissemination of these distinct features, and making them into a source of pride for the neighbourhood residents, in addition to creating a positive label with which to identify. Indeed, interviewees often expressed their desire to be known for the worthwhile

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qualities and resources of the district, thus cultivating a positive perception, in contrast with the stereotypes of socioeconomic degradation that the media and outsiders often attribute to the area [*Unpleasant and Disparaging Label*].

One of the great benefits that research participants attributed to the NPOs' presence in their community was that, through their work, they were able to support the distinctiveness of the neighbourhood and reinforce its positive identity, contrasting with the deeply rooted image of the district as a dangerous and degraded place. Here is how a member of the *Nuovo Teatro Sanità* association summarised the impact of this type of civic engagement:

"... people have understood that the flow of people who come here to see the show, the people who go to the Catacombs, the people who, thanks to Ciro Oliva and Poppella, come here to discover the neighbourhood, the enhancement of historic buildings... There are so many little things that have made this change happen. Tourists are coming here, [while] before the area was off-limits, because, before, they only committed robberies here... And now, instead, tourists manage to come. This is not our merit, of course, but being here has meant that the police get through here... more [often] than before, and this means that people come here ..." (G., 21 years old, voluntary association worker).

#### 4.3. *Hope*

Finally, an analysis of the transcripts identified the theme of 'hope', which can be defined as the perceived possibility of reaching a desired future state (Snyder, 2000; 2002), and more specifically as "a future-directed, four-channel emotion network, constructed from biological, psychological and social resources" (Scioli & Biller, 2009, p. 30). Therefore, in the interviews, we wanted to identify what respondents expected concerning the future of the district.

Two main positions emerged on future expectations, which can be positioned along a continuum. At the positive end of this continuum were respondents who nurtured high levels of hope while at the negative end there were those who felt resigned to the current state of affairs. Among residents expressing a positive future outlook, those nurturing a strong hope regarding the potential for improving the district's quality of life over time highlighted the importance of the daily activities carried out by the NPOs to promote wellbeing.

Many activities were identified by young people as preventing them from spending their days on the streets, where they were at risk of becoming "mob muscle". In the words of respondents this led to a reduction in crime and a consequent improvement in the inhabitants' quality of life, in addition to enhancing the image of the area portrayed by the media [*Change in the district's image*].

"It's nice to go to work and see these guys with their musical instruments that go to the association to play. They are the same kids who just spent a day in the street making trouble, just a while ago. Seeing this makes you think that the district is finally changing" (G. a 41-year-old who runs a bar in the neighbourhood).

The growing publicity for the district's artistic heritage had brought an ever-greater flow of tourists, and, consequently, has boosted the development of commercial activities in the district [*Organization: Economic Growth Engine*].

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On the negative side of the future expectations continuum, which encompassed the viewpoints of residents who felt resigned, the majority of these residents held the belief that the activities of the San Gennaro Foundation and of the NPOs would not have a substantial impact on the critical issues of the district, on its sociocultural backwardness or on the high presence of criminal activities characterising it [*Immutable District*]. The words of a local vendor explain this bitter certainty very well:

“The neighbourhood does not change with these things, [and] there is not so much that can be done. [...] Here the underworld reigns, [and] it will not be an organisation like this that changes things. Discussions about this involve different topics.” (G., 47 years old, NPO worker who lives in the neighbourhood).

However, as this last quote shows, even in the words of the most resigned residents it was possible to glimpse some slight hope for future change. The resignation of these people was connected to the idea that civic engagement alone could not change the situation of the district and that external help was needed.

Their slight hope for an improved future was therefore related to the belief that the passionate commitment of NPO personnel may eventually achieve the following two main effects that could actually create change in the district. The first possible effect concerned the involvement of all the district’s inhabitants in pro-social activities, so that everyone might begin to identify themselves as part of a one big community [*Desire for the Participation of the Entire District*]. Then, above all, the possibility of directing the attention of the city’s institutions toward the value of non-profit actions would allow for a better dialogue to be established between the San Gennaro Foundation, NPOs and public institutions, with the aim of planning shared actions to promote the wellbeing of the district’s inhabitants [*Desire for the Cooperation between Associations and the Public Administration*].

## 5. Discussion

The principal aim of this study was to detect the meanings attributed by residents to hope, trust and belonging as concerns the territorial district in which they live (De Luca Picione & Freda, 2016). Indeed, the focus on meanings aligns our study with a community cultural-semiotic perspective (Mannarini & Salvatore, 2019), highlighting what the analysis of sensemaking processes can offer to the understanding of social interactions (Arcidiacono, Mannarini, & Vargas Moniz, 2019).

The purpose of this article was to provide a tangible example of the role that NPOs play in disadvantaged areas, positioning themselves as an intermediate structure between individuals and their life context (Marta & Pozzi, 2004; Pozzi, Marta, Marzana, & Gozzoli, 2014), in addition to enhancing the well-being of individuals and of the entire community (Wilson, 2000; Klar & Kasser, 2009). Specifically, the textual materials from the interviews, which were analysed utilizing the three main categories of trust, territorial identity and hope, offered specific pointers regarding the latent dimensions attributed to the action of NPOs.

The inhabitants of the Sanità district reported feeling a strong sense of trust in NPO personnel based on their ability to provide care. In almost all of the interviews, they indicated that they felt they received protection and care in their interactions with the NPOs and that these feelings increased social trust. However, the high degree of trust placed in the NPOs and in the other inhabitants of the district contrasted with the extremely low levels of trust afforded to the public administration. This difference is due to the residents’ positive

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expectations of receiving assistance and support for their daily needs from the NPOs, but not from public institutions.

The NPOs were also recognised as promoters of opportunities that offered inhabitants the necessary conditions for personal and collective growth and development (Di Napoli et al., 2019). More specifically, their actions to build connections within the community provided the inhabitants not only with the possibility of extending bonds of trust at an interpersonal level, but also of creating an active network of projects aimed at improving the general well-being in the district. As a result, in this district civic engagement played a strong role in creating a feeling of social trust, but, above all, of community trust, as the NPOs created opportunities through their interactions with local inhabitants and via their activities devoted to future personal and collective achievements focused on the district's general populace. The deep sense of belonging to the territory under study instilled a strong feeling of identity in the interviewees, which was enhanced and supported by the NPOs through their work. Indeed, the fact that the NPOs advocated for a distinctive identity of the district was recognised and highly appreciated by its inhabitants. The NPOs main actions were related to supporting the district's identity by enhancing its distinctive features, such as its artistic and cultural heritage and its social and culinary traditions.

Community research has shown that a sense of territorial identity can play a key role in motivating individuals and communities to address local problems (Mannarini, 2004), while a lack of a comprehensive collective identity can affect social cohesion, spreading feelings of fear, insecurity and xenophobia, especially at a time when feelings of socioeconomic powerlessness and decay are increasing (Roca & de Nazaré Oliveira-Roca, 2007; Salvatore et al., 2018). Therefore, through the support provided by the NPOs in valuing its artistic-cultural heritage, the district gained a strong territorial identity and a positive contemporary image, in addition to a bright outlook for its future growth and evolution.

The desire for change was an additional factor of particular interest related to the theme of hope. In fact, the interviewees were hopeful for the future, which was often expressed as the hope of improving the district's socially degraded state. The distinction that emerged between those who nurtured hope for the future of the territory and those who professed feelings of resignation toward the future, resided in having or lacking the ability to perceive the actions of the NPOs as small daily steps toward building a prosperous future for the district and its inhabitants.

As a matter of fact, the NPO network operating in the district, supported by the San Gennaro Foundation, has already begun this change, providing strong incentives to positively transform the conditions of social immobility that were dominant in the Sanità district. In the words of some interviewees, it was even possible to distinguish between the prevailing socioeconomic situation before and after the establishment of the San Gennaro Foundation. The Foundation and the associations that belong to it seemed to have given local inhabitants the opportunity to begin to rise up from their closure and backwardness by demonstrating that it is possible to have hope for the future well-being of the territory through their work in the community. It is interesting to mention that service users, NPO staff and uninvolved inhabitants did not differ in the perception of the contextual features and specifically in their opinions on the NPO network actions.

In conclusion, by positioning themselves as reference figures for the residents of the Sanità district and by basing their work on establishing relationships of trust, enhancing territorial identity and spreading hope for a better future, NPOs in the Sanità district have succeeded in promoting the social redemption of the territory and in improving the quality of life of its inhabitants.

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The role attributed to identity motives in society is currently receiving further attention at the European level (Salvatore et al., 2018), as is the role of community trust (Di Napoli & Arcidiacono, 2013; Di Napoli et al., 2019), which is described as an indicator of community well-being (Weeranakin & Promphakping, 2018). Therefore, the importance of community trust is expanded to refer not only to bonds within the community, but also to encompass the positive expectations for personal and collective projection. Special emphasis is also placed on hope, as described in the Milestones of Quality of Life Research in Canada (Michalos, 2017).

Based upon our research, we argue that hope, trust, and identity play key roles in social life through their influence on social aggregation and perspectives for social change (Maggino & Facioni, 2017). There is a need to further develop studies concerning these variables and their reciprocal and reverse effects in different contexts, in addition to developing studies regarding their value as mediators of social well-being. People's perspectives are related to their life context; therefore, understanding the specific interactions among individual feelings, such as gratitude (Alfieri et al., 2018), as well as thoughts and social features, will help researchers in addressing future interventions in other contexts.

In conclusion, our case study attested the importance of shared identity, community trust and hope to overcome helplessness and impotence arising in disadvantaged and marginalised contexts. It also showed what is needed to increase the competence of community organizations in targeting their interventions. Indeed, we found confirmation that the backbone of any social intervention is formed by creating valuable identities, trust in social commitment and hope for the future. In fact, trust and hope, along with some form of social identification, are the glue and lever for social change and the awareness of their potential is a key asset for those who want to promote social change. Among these three levers of social change, identity is the trickiest one and the most difficult to deal with. Indeed, while identity is known to strengthen cohesion and ingroup bonding, it is also known to be liable to incite exclusion and defensive responses.

By its very nature, a case study like the one we have presented offers a situated perspective of the psychosocial mechanisms underlying community life. Although no generalization of our findings can be claimed, we believe that this study provides researchers with concepts and patterns that contribute to advancing community research and that can be tested in formal models, as well as giving policy makers and practitioners pointers for planning reflexive and culturally-informed programmes.

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