

# Quaderni di Comunità

Persone, Educazione e Welfare  
nella società 5.0

## Community Notebook

People, Education, and Welfare in society 5.0

n. 3/2024

HUMAN FLOURISHING FOR WELLBEING  
IN SOCIETY, COMMUNITIES  
AND ORGANIZATIONS

*edited by*

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# INDICE

## EDITORIALE

*Cecilia Costa, Andrea Velardi* 11

## RUBRICA EDUCATION 17

1. Benessere e partecipazione dei giovani leader nelle  
aree rurali dell'Europa sud-occidentale. Il progetto  
YouLeaders  
*Maria Chiara De Angelis, Valentina Volpi* 19

2. Il BEN-ESSERE nell'era delle innovazioni digitali:  
come affrontare i cambiamenti in campo educativo  
bilanciando rischi ed opportunità  
*Ezia Palmeri* 35

## RUBRICA EMPOWERMENT 49

1. CENSIS, OCSE e una lezione dal passato per  
contrastare la disinformazione e promuovere il  
benessere della democrazia  
*Monica Constantin, Oscar Fulvio Benussi* 51

2. L'associazionismo familiare, luogo di promozione  
dell'umano  
*Pinella Crimi* 59

## SAGGI 67

1. Il potere dell'esperienza emotiva. Riflessioni sociolo-  
giche sulle emozioni come strumenti per il benessere  
bio-psico-sociale  
*Mariangela D'Ambrosio* 69

2. Flourishing, relationships and Self <i>Sara Pellegrini</i>	95
3. La felicità tra apparenze e insidie <i>Michela Luzi</i>	123
4. Flourishing per il benessere: l'esperienza dei counselor <i>Andrea Casavecchia, Alba Francesca Canta, Maria Alessandra Molè, Benedetta Turco</i>	145
5. Human flourishing for wellbeing in society, communities and organizations: A case study in Bangladesh <i>Kamrunnahar Koli</i>	173
6. ChatGPT in ambito educativo universitario: una prospettiva integrata per il benessere della persona <i>Edvige Danna</i>	233
APPROFONDIMENTI	267
1. "Aggiustare il mondo" con Paul Farmer, l'avvocato degli ultimi della Terra <i>Jean-Gabriel Bela</i>	269

## 2. FLOURISHING, RELATIONSHIPS AND SELF

by Sara Pellegrini\*

**Abstract:** In the knowledge society, the question of self-determination is attentive to the interacting and educational dynamics and through the terms of self, relationship and thriving new opportunities with connections can be generated, promoting pro-sociality. Rahe and Jansen (2023) noted how everyone aspires to happiness and personal well-being in relation to self-love, pro-sociality and nature.

**Keywords:** humanization process, self, well-being.

**Abstract:** Nella società della conoscenza, la questione dell'autodeterminazione è attenta alle dinamiche interagenti ed educative e attraverso i termini di sé, relazione e prosperità si possono generare nuove opportunità con connessioni, promuovendo la pro-socialità. Rahe e Jansen (2023) hanno notato come tutti aspirino alla felicità e al benessere personale in relazione all'amor proprio, alla pro-socialità e alla natura.

**Parole chiave:** processo di umanizzazione, sé, benessere.

### *Introduction*

In contemporary society, characterized by the prevalence of knowledge as the main driver of development, the theme of self-determination is central and deserves an in-depth analysis (Gagnè *et al.*, 2022), since it is closely linked to the interacting dynamics

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between 'I have to' and 'I want to' (Martela *et al.*, 2023). This approach is evolutionary in nature and considers "have to" as a construct based on partial significance (Guay, 2022), as actions performed out of obligation tend to be less significant and less sustained over time. On the contrary, 'I want to' is based on positive stimuli, which derive from a strong intrinsic motivation (O'Donoghue and van der Werff, 2021). This type of motivation is characterized by greater durability both in space and time, favoring a more active and involved participation in the activities undertaken (Musiani, 2022). Numerous studies in the field of positive psychology and human motivation (Vansteenkiste, 2020) underline how the satisfaction of the fundamental psychological needs of autonomy, competence and social relationship are essential for well-being and personal growth (Bradshaw, 2023).

There are further research that aim to offer a multiplicity of scenarios (Wehmeyer and Shogren, 2020), which are intertwined in a complex of dynamic forces, emerging from the interactions between environmental influences and personal attractions, as outlined by Rheinberg (2002) first and then by Chiu (2022). The interacting dynamics in the system (Slemp *et al.*, 2020) can lead to personal conflicts that lead to staticity in the subject. This condition can only be overcome through the introduction of disequilibrium and disturbance, which has the power to set the human system in motion, stimulating its growth and change. This concept is supported by further reflections by authors such as:

- Festinger (1957) that through cognitive dissonance, or the conflict between plural cognitions, can generate significant changes in the person's behavior and attitudes.
- Piaget (1977) who instead places cognitive conflict at the basis of the equilibrium-imbalance dynamics as a push towards development and learning, highlighting how situations of imbalance can stimulate intellectual growth.

- Morin (2021) who believes in metamorphosis. The latter would imply the activation of the humanization process, as well as the conjunction of various emerging and binding elements that in any case manifest themselves as obstacles, errors and illusions and are an integral part of the path of life, pushing man to review his beliefs and develop authentic thinking.

Barriers therefore become the lever and fulcrum of change, where difficulties no longer represent unpleasant asperities, but tasks necessary for humanization, characterizing themselves as an essential life path for learning and personal growth. Here the individual can implement actions in which to proactively spend their knowledge, skills and competencies (Shogren *et al.*, 2022).

Humanity and the process of humanization undoubtedly represent today the main innovation that summarizes the entire technological package of man himself, influencing his well-being, productivity and operations (Srivastava *et al.*, 2022): mere profit is not enough, it is above all necessary to cultivate hope and all the values that exercise it through universal connection and the values that underlie it (Liu *et al.* 2022). The spread of the state of prosperity through education, implies not only the achievement of happiness and confidence in the future, but also the ability (DeHaan *et al.*, 2016) to be proactive and to operate efficiently through resilience, innovation and connection (Kellerman and Seligman, 2023).

Deci *et al.* (2017) support this move through their self-determination theory, which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in promoting human well-being.

The terms self, relationship and prosperity therefore open new perspectives capable of generating new opportunities that the community, be it practical or educational, must seize to develop solutions increasingly in line with the needs of contemporary

society. Our society demonstrates a growing attention to the care of individuals especially through civic engagement that has promoted autopoietic human connections, supported by a solid regime of subsidiarity, difficult to undermine.

Communities can orient the emerging paradigms of self, relationship and prosperity to contextualize both collective and individual well-being, developing solutions sensitive to the interception of the frequencies of social changes, including challenges and gaps. Here the institution of subsidiarity stands as a pillar of humanity, as it represents the humus to articulate the ways and tones of community resilience, through plural connections and a rooted civic engagement that foster cohesion and solidarity. This regime of proximity, characterized by autopoietic human interactions, proves fundamental to the sustainability and adaptability of social structures, ensuring an integrated care of individuals that goes beyond the simple application of rules. Relationships that generate connections promote prosperity by encouraging pro-social behaviors.

Recent studies by Rahe and Jansen (2023) have shown that the pursuit of human happiness and personal well-being is strongly linked to self-love, pro-sociality and respect for nature: their miscellany highlights the need to develop a fundamental and unconditional trust in oneself, in others and a deep gratitude and respect for nature and the environment in which we live, as this is consubstantial to the construction of societies that live according to authentic connections that cultivate collective well-being to vectorially promote individual and social well-being.

In particular, the concept of pro-sociality implies altruistic and cooperative behaviors that strengthen social bonds and create a sense of belonging and mutual trust (Deci *et al.*, 2017). Unconditional trust in others and respect for nature are essential components to build a sustainable and harmonious community,

capable of generating social capital and their combination also contributes to creating a more balanced and prosperous social and natural environment. This transdisciplinary approach that integrates psychological, social and environmental dimensions represents a path close to achieving sustainable and shared happiness, because it equips all members to participate in an equal and active way, that is, in an inclusive way. This favors the flow of expected relationships and therefore a promotional feeling of being and belonging to grow both personally and professionally.

In this context, flourishing can be seen as an indicator of successful social practices, suggesting that a truly participatory society is one in which individuals thrive. However, not all people adequately engage in flourishing and therefore their education should draw on a plural and transdisciplinary approach that integrates knowledge from psychology, social sciences, information technology and ethics, in order to develop a sustainable and responsible society for happiness, personal fulfillment, meaningful social relationships and purpose in life (Vander Weele *et al.*, 2019).

The recent study by Rahe and Jansen (2023) examined the link between flourishing and three forms of connection: with oneself (self-love), with others (pro-sociality), and with nature. The results showed significant positive correlations between self-love and flourishing, as well as between pro-sociality and flourishing, while connection with nature was not found to be a significant predictor. This suggests that self-love and pro-sociality may be key factors in promoting flourishing, while connection with nature may play a less immediate role (Rahe and Jansen, 2023). The study by Otto *et al.* (2021) explores how prosocial propensity, expressed through altruism and honesty-humility, can be mediated by nature connection to promote pro-environmental behaviors (Yang *et al.*, 2022): the results demonstrate that nature connection is a key factor mediating the relationship between prosocial propensity and

green behaviors. Individuals with a higher prosocial propensity, such as members of environmental organizations, tend to show higher levels of sustainable behavior than non-members. This suggests that sustainability may derive from a more general inclination towards behaviors for the common good, motivated by a deep connection with the environment (Otto *et al.*, 2021). The study by Pirchio *et al.* (2021) explores the impact of contact with nature during outdoor environmental education interventions on students' psychophysical well-being, nature connection, and prosocial behavior. The results show that students who participated in outdoor environmental education programs reported significant improvements in their well-being, connection to nature, and prosocial behaviors compared to the control group. These results highlight the effectiveness of outdoor education in promoting green lifestyles and overall student well-being (Pirchio *et al.*, 2021).

Goldstein *et al.* (2020) study explores the influence of family resilience in mediating the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and children's flourishing, with a focus on differences in race, ethnicity, and income. Findings show that although economically advantaged White families are more likely to maintain family resilience, their children appear to suffer more from the negative effects of adversity than Black and Hispanic children. This highlights the importance of prevention and intervention strategies that are culturally sensitive and targeted to reduce inequalities based on race and income (Goldstein *et al.*, 2020). Torres- Soto *et al.* (2022) study highlights how self-care is an integral part of sustainable behavior that contributes to maintaining a positive family environment and human well-being. Findings show that a positive family environment not only promotes individual well-being but is also influenced by sustainable behaviors that include self-care, caring for others, and protecting the natural environment. This

suggests that taking care of oneself can promote a more harmonious environment and a higher quality of life (Torres-Soto *et al.*, 2022).

### *Human flourishing and formation*

Man can live both in prose and poetry. When «the individual is forced to live in the prose made of small and fleeting happiness» (Pellegrini, 2023) then flourishing is a concept that struggles to gain that significant attention in the regionalities of humanity and human formation. The construct of flourishing goes beyond the simple absence of disease, including aspects of emotional, psychological and social well-being, overflowing intensely in the spheres of desires, aspirations and hopes. Starting from the man who always carries with him an unlimited, conscious and unconscious series of interactive narratives, this article explores how human education can promote flourishing, analyzing the intersections between education, personal development and global well-being.

It is therefore necessary to share a first idea of flourishing since, being a complex conceptual institution, it has been defined in various ways. One of the most accepted conceptions is that of Seligman, who describes it as a set of positive emotions, involvement, positive relationships, meaning and satisfaction (Seligman, 2011) to live a meaningful and productive life. Education should work so that men can lead their lives in the richness of experience and with intense satisfaction. We can take as an example the implementation of socio-emotional learning programs. This, if applied in schools, has been shown to positively influence not only academic performance, but also the mental well-being of students (Durlak *et al.*, 2011), since this amplifies skills, such as managing emotions, conflict resolution and building positive relationships,

positively influencing the training process. In fact, those who are in the process of flourishing tend to be more motivated, creative and resilient. This state catalyzes characteristics that favor continuous learning and active involvement in educational processes (Fredrickson, 2001), generating a virtuous circle in which well-being and training mutually reinforce each other.

There are many benefits to flourishing as well as challenges that synergistically implement flourishing through education such as the need to train teachers who can intervene through holistic programs to reframe the difficulty, then measure the success of flourishing in a quantifiable way to act on it. This presents challenges as well as opportunities to innovate and improve educational systems, making them more adaptable and person-centered. Starting from the assumption that flourishing and human formation are closely interconnected, a complex approach to education is desirable, which can promote socio-emotional skills and adaptive relationships, promoting in individuals the ability to lead meaningful and satisfying lives, since in an increasingly complex and interconnected context, it is desirable that educational systems work to improve the proactive role of flourishing in the human formation process.

The importance of sociability, such as participation in social activities like volunteering, religious attendance, and mutual help among friends and neighbours have been shown to have a positive and significant impact on life satisfaction. This positive effect varies according to individual motivations, confirming the role of contingent goods such as sociability and altruism in enhancing personal well-being (Becchetti *et al.*, 2017). Human flourishing is a complex concept that encompasses multiple aspects of well-being. A longitudinal study by Chen *et al.* (2022) examined how different domains of well-being, including emotional health, social connections, and financial security, interact over time to influence

overall flourishing. The results showed that meaning in life, social connections, and financial security were the factors most strongly correlated with greater overall well-being, demonstrating that well-being in one domain can positively influence others in the long term (Chen *et al.*, 2022).

Sustainability is not only about pro-social and pro-environmental actions, but also includes taking care of oneself, as highlighted in the study by Corral-Verdugo *et al.* (2021). The study by Jansen *et al.* (2023) explores the link between connectedness, pro-sociality, and nature connection and sustainable behaviors in athletes. The results indicate that nature connection and pro-sociality are significant predictors of sustainable attitudes and behaviors. Outdoor athletes show greater nature connection than those who practice indoor sports, with outdoor individual sports athletes reporting the highest values of sustainable attitude and behavior. These results suggest the importance of further investigation into the underlying mechanisms that influence these differences (Jansen *et al.*, 2023).

The research findings confirm that sustainable behavior has a three-dimensional structure, which integrates care for oneself, others and the environment. This suggests that sustainability is a cycle of interdependencies, in which taking care of oneself is the first step towards a positive impact on society and nature, thus creating a more sustainable environment for the individual (Corral-Verdugo *et al.*, 2021). The study conducted by Perminas *et al.* (2020) explores the relationship between cognitive schemas related to nature and psychological flourishing. The results show that specific cognitive schemas, such as experiential or eco-protectionist ones, are positively related to psychological well-being and positive emotions related to the natural environment. This suggests that the connection with nature not only influences sustainable behavior,

but also contributes to personal growth and flourishing, outlining a broader picture of human well-being (Perminas *et al.*, 2020).

### *The framework, the new frequencies and the strategies*

Understanding the self-determination perspective (Ryan and Deci, 2017) implies believing that individuals have innate psychological needs, autonomy, competence and relatedness, which drive their motivation and commitment, which can be nurtured through Seligman (2011) PERMA model to help individuals and organizations create the conditions to thrive. To be meaningful, the uninterrupted flow of positivity must encounter disturbances to be strengthened. Cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and the human ecology paradigm (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) offer us aspects of connection with the various environmental systems (e.g., family, school, community) in human development, emphasizing the role of relational and contextual factors in promoting well-being especially in the two fundamental spheres of every society, such as education and training. Education plays a crucial role in promoting well-being by developing socio-emotional skills, promoting resilience and encouraging lifelong learning. Programs that integrate social-emotional learning have shown significant benefits in academic and psychological outcomes (Durlak *et al.*, 2011). The declinations of humanity are revealed in community and ways of weaving social support. Social connections and community engagement are essential to well-being. Positive relationships provide support, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being (Reis and Gable, 2003), working toward personal growth and resilience to overcome challenges and adapt to new situations are essential aspects of well-being. Recent studies continue to explore various dimensions of thriving. For example, the PERMA-Profilier developed by Butler and

Kern (2016) is a comprehensive instrument that measures multiple aspects of well-being based on Seligman 's five pillars. Similarly, the framework of Vander Weele (2017) highlights the importance of financial stability alongside traditional aspects of thriving.

However, recent world events have shaken humanity, influencing the torrent of the century and reshaping the meaning and occurrence of thriving. New awarenesses and different explorations lead the scientific and professional landscape to reconsider thriving in inter-retroaction with vulnerability, generating an ineffable complexity.

In addition to awareness of one's vulnerability, there are studies such as that of Rahe and Jansen (2023) which examines relational connectivity with oneself, with others and with nature, and finally flourishing, showing significant correlations between flourishing and self-love, as well as between flourishing and prosocial behavior.

Optimizing the state of well-being involves the integration of a plurality of emotional, psychological and social aspects and for this reason it is necessary to take into consideration strategies to promote its development, based on scientific evidence and consolidated approaches.

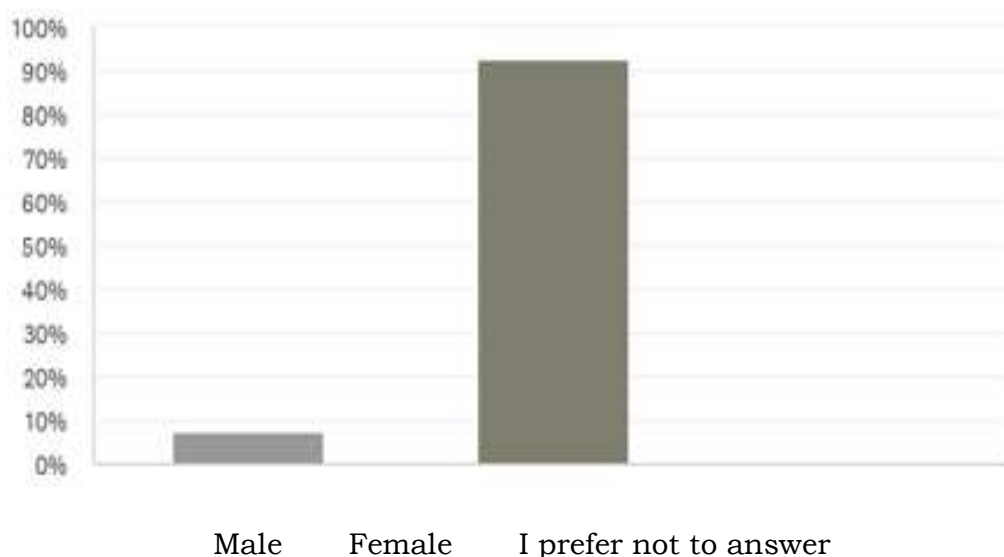
Thriving is a goal that can be achieved through well-structured, scientifically supported strategies. Integrating these strategies into your daily life can lead to significant improvements. negative impacts on well-being and quality of life. The key is to adopt a complex approach that considers all dimensions of human well-being.

### *Methods and tools*

The study, as an investigative survey, through a research based on the data matrix, aims to explore the perceptions of

university students regarding their personal development, adopting a qualitative approach. The survey was conducted through a self-produced questionnaire using Survey Monkey involved 56 students enrolled in primary education science courses at an Italian university in the faculty of Università degli Studi “Link” in Città di Castello, near Perugia. The survey I present aims to explore aspects of the development of third-year students, of whom 50 are female and 6 are male, aged between 24 and 49, highlighting the heterogeneity of the sample and who plan to graduate in 2026 (Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Sample distribution*



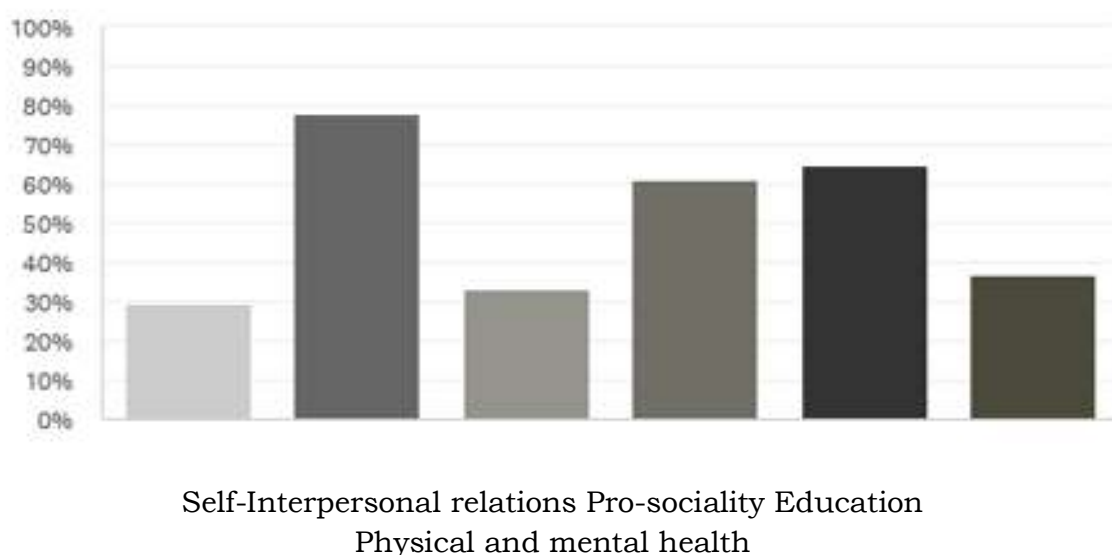
Data was collected through an online survey administered to students. The data collected was analysed using thematic coding, allowing me to identify patterns and recurring themes in the responses to provide a detailed understanding of student perceptions.

## Results

The collection and interpretation of data starts from this graph which is particularly significant because it is an expression of one's awareness (Figure 2).

The answers clearly show the importance given to education in achieving personal fulfillment. All interviewees stated that the educational process is fundamental in making people aware of the need to engage and reflect on their lives (Q1: 100% "yes").

*Figure 2: Answers for the question "In what areas do you feel you have opportunities for personal growth?"*



Interpersonal relationships are considered very influential in the sense of personal fulfillment for most students. In particular, 70% of participants believe that relationships have a significant impact between very and very to which semantic categories respond as in the Figure 3.

Students identified several areas with potential opportunities for personal development. Interpersonal relationships and career were the most frequently mentioned, followed by

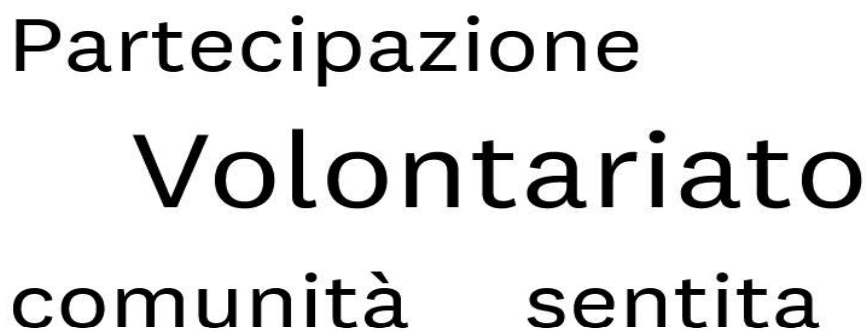
education and physical and mental well-being that come through highly participatory experiences such as volunteering because it is a felt community (Figure 4).

The answers to the definition of “thriving” show a variety of interpretations, often linked to the concepts of personal growth and resilience.

*Figure 3: Semantic categories and their salience*



*Figure 4: Semantic categories and their salience*



However, many participants skipped this question, perhaps indicating a difficulty in clearly defining and narrating this aspect that in any case materializes in undefined concepts such as growth, relationships and well-being (Figure 5).

Perceptions of community activity in promoting well-being vary among students.

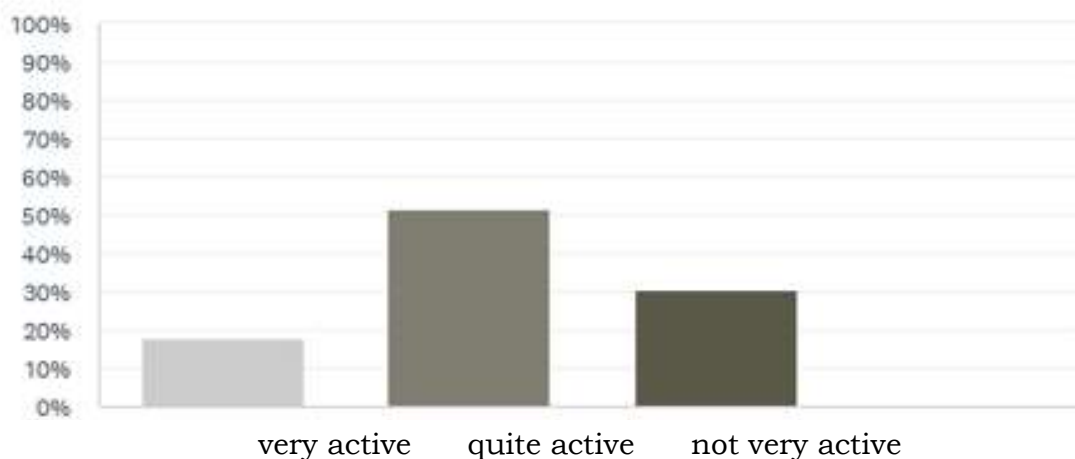
While the majority perceive their community to be active or fairly active, there are still a significant number of people who perceive community activity to be low (Figure 6).

Civic engagement was considered very important for individual well-being by most participants.

*Figure 5: Semantic categories and their salience*

crescita  
relazioni      benessere

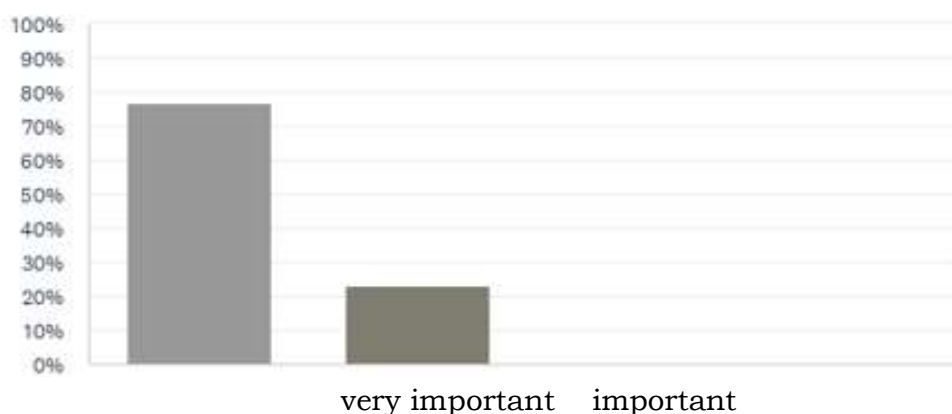
*Figure 6: Answers for the question “Do you think your community is active in promoting the well-being of its members?”*



However, many students did not share personal experiences in which they perceived an improvement in well-being through civic

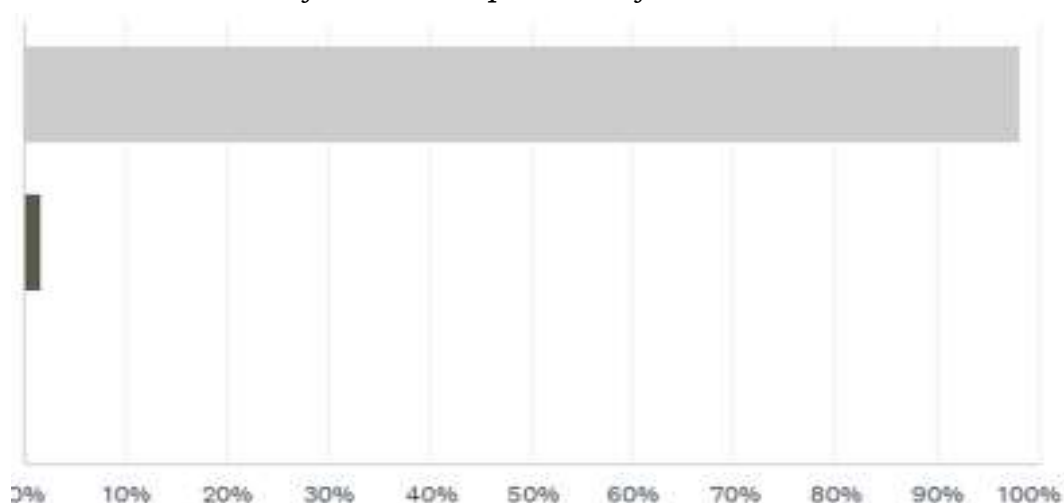
engagement, which suggests a potential area for development (Figure 7).

*Figure 7: Answers for the question “In your opinion, how important is civic engagement for individual well-being?”*



100% of the interviewees stated that the educational process is fundamental to make people aware of the need to engage and reflect on their personal lives (Graph 5).

*Figure 8: Answers for the question “Do you think the educational process is important to make people aware that in order to fulfill themselves they need to commit themselves and also to reflect on their personal life?”*



Then there are other data and indicators that tell us that interpersonal relationships were recognized as a determining factor for the sense of personal fulfillment by the majority of participants. In fact, 70% said that these relationships significantly influence their well-being. The area most often identified as opportunities for personal growth include interpersonal relationships (mentioned by 51 of 56 participants), career (50 of 56), and education (35 of 56). Physical and mental health were also frequently mentioned (33 of 56). These results indicate that students perceive multiple areas of their lives as potential fields of improvement and development.

## *Discussion*

The discussion of this study focuses on the analysis of university students' perceptions regarding their personal development and growth. The investigation revealed several central themes, such as the importance of education, the weight of interpersonal relationships, and the plurality of meanings attributed to the concept of flourishing. However, what emerges is that, although participants recognize the importance of flourishing, they seem to fail to translate it into practice in their professional daily lives.

Many of the student teachers involved in the study recognize the importance of flourishing but appear to lack the tools needed to convey this concept to their future students. This discrepancy between theory and practice highlights a significant training gap: those who should be the primary promoters of well-being in the classroom appear to lack the skills needed to do so.

When asked to define what it means to thrive, their responses were often vague, focusing on generic concepts such as personal growth, resilience, and productivity. This suggests that

many of them have a limited and unstructured understanding of the concept, perhaps reflecting a difficulty in translating into words and actions what they theoretically recognize as important.

Another critical issue that emerged from the study is the perception of community activity. While over half of the students believe that their community is active or fairly active in promoting well-being, a significant portion (37.5%) perceive a low level of involvement. This data is particularly worrying, as it indicates that there are still large areas of the community that need a greater effort to promote inclusion and collective well-being.

Also, regarding civic engagement, a high number of participants (78.57%) recognize its importance for personal well-being. However, a high percentage of answers to the question on civic engagement were left blank, suggesting a lack of concrete experiences or awareness of the importance of this dimension.

Despite the relevance of the results obtained, the study presents some limitations that serve as a suggestion for future developments. The sample is composed of a limited number of participants (56) and is mainly based on future teachers, thus limiting the generalizability of the results to other educational or professional contexts. Furthermore, the absence of longitudinal data does not allow to understand how well-being and flourishing evolve over time, thus preventing conclusions on possible long-term personal growth dynamics.

Another critical issue concerns the definition of the concept of flourishing, because many participants showed difficulties in clarifying its meaning, which can compromise the accuracy of the results. Finally, the qualitative approach, although offering rich and detailed insights, does not allow an objective and precise measurement of the phenomenon, limiting the possibility of making large-scale comparisons.

## *Conclusion*

The exploration has highlighted that education, interpersonal relationships, civic engagement and participation in community life are essential cornerstones for individual well-being. These findings offer a solid basis for the development of educational and social policies aimed at promoting flourishing, or the full realization of human potential, within a more aware and interconnected society.

The central role of education and social relations emerges strongly from the surveys, underlining how personal and social development is not a static process, but a dynamic one, which embraces multiple dimensions of life. The students themselves highlight the need for a holistic approach, in which civic engagement and a sense of belonging are not perceived as acquired data, but rather as processes in constant evolution and improvement. This approach reflects the need for a systemic intervention that supports not only individual growth, but also the development of a cohesive and supportive community.

In the presence of a community engagement that may be moderate, it is crucial to adopt strategies based on scientific evidence to actively stimulate collective activities. This includes the creation of meeting spaces, the involvement of key actors, the promotion of volunteer initiatives, the organization of stable events and the promotion of effective communication. These actions, integrated with constant feedback and evaluation of the results, can foster greater cohesion and the general well-being of the community.

The concept of flourishing, then, goes well beyond well-being, implying a state of balance between personal growth, resilience, and productivity. In particular, those who find themselves in a situation of distress or disconnection may have difficulty reaching a state of flourishing on their own. This is where theoretical

models such as Seligman's (2011) become essential to provide structure and guidance towards well-being.

One of the critical issues identified in the study concerns the discrepancy between the theoretical value attributed to the concept of flourishing and its actual application in daily practice. The participants, mainly future teachers, do not seem to possess the adequate tools to concretely implement this concept in their work, suggesting the presence of a training gap. Furthermore, the sample, largely made up of future teachers, could introduce a bias in the responses. These individuals could in fact tend to give a more optimistic or idealized vision of the issues related to education and interpersonal relationships, compared to what could emerge from other professional groups also because they are all already inserted in a stable socio-economic fabric.

Future research interests are hoped to focus on exploring how education and interpersonal relationships influence personal growth. It would be very interesting to understand how thriving can be a collective and intergenerational experience, considering broadening the discussion to include how thriving can be transmitted through family values, culture, and long-term community engagement. This would highlight the intergenerational transmission of well-being, which could be supported by research on family resilience and collective community efforts, touched upon here through the studies of Goldstein *et al.* (2020).

Another angle to explore is the influence of modern technologies, especially digital communication, on human thriving. Social media, for example, can either enhance or hinder well-being, depending on its use. Broadening the way in which technology contributes to or detracts from self-determination and thriving could offer a timely angle, particularly in today's context of increasing digital presence.

While I briefly touch on the connection between nature and

pro-environmental behaviors, a deeper focus on environmental prosperity could provide a rich addition. This would involve discussing how human well-being is linked to ecosystem health and how promoting ecological resilience. Examples include sustainable development practices to contribute to individual and community prosperity, including examples from indigenous communities where a deep connection to nature directly influences their well-being.

Then there are the cultural dimensions of prosperity starting with this article mentioning how well-being can vary by race and income, but further insights could be made from cross-cultural studies of prosperity. For example, in collectivist cultures, the emphasis on community and group well-being may provide different paths to prosperity than in more individualistic societies, adding depth to the discussion of how diverse societies achieve collective and personal growth.

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