



Civil society organisations and community bonds in post-pandemic small-scale localities: balancing cohesion and fragmentation

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Abstract

This study examines Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in post-pandemic small-scale localities through focus groups with representatives from 15 organisations in Peccioli, Italy, a village of 4,700 inhabitants recognised for its innovative governance. We investigate how aggregative and conflictual community dynamics shape the associative landscape. Findings reveal that CSOs envision the ideal community as cohesive yet inclusive, emphasising both internal belonging and external openness rather than insularity. CSOs recognise their collective role as essential community architects, maintaining social fabric through bridging activities across organisational boundaries. Conversely, significant challenges emerged: pronounced centralisation of leadership around individual figures, territorial parochialism between hamlets, entrenched political divisions, and integration difficulties for newcomers. The pandemic intensified these tensions while simultaneously highlighting the vital function of CSOs. Small-scale proximity creates ambivalent dynamics, intensifying both conflict and face-to-face cooperation. Among the principal concerns raised by participants is the prevalence of self-centred actions by CSOs and the assertive role of individual leaders in organisational management.

Keywords Civil society organisations · Community dynamics · Local communities · Small-scale localities · Civil society

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally reshaped our understanding of community resilience and the vital role that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play in maintaining social cohesion during times of crisis. As societies across the globe grappled with unprecedented challenges, the importance of local civic infrastructure became particularly evident in smaller communities, where the density of social relationships and the immediacy of collective action often determined the capacity for effective response and recovery. This heightened awareness of local institutional resilience makes examining CSO dynamics in small-scale localities pivotal for understanding post-pandemic community reconstruction. In recent years, there has been extensive academic debate about the evolving nature of various forms of contemporary CSOs, encompassing evolving organisational structures, modes of activism, institutional relationships, welfare reforms, and social innovation processes. However, while extensive attention has been directed toward larger urban contexts, a closer examination of smaller realities can offer valuable insights into the changes occurring within the realm of civil organisations. The specific dynamics inherent in smaller territorial settings may engender unique processes of civil organisational reconfiguration. These processes, distinct from those in larger contexts, have become even more pronounced following the pandemic's differential impacts on community life.

This study addresses an underexplored dimension of post-pandemic recovery: the dynamics of civil life in small localities and how the aggregative or conflictual forces within these communities shape the associative landscape. The research is particularly significant given that small municipalities constitute a substantial portion of the European landscape. For instance, 69.9% of Italian municipalities have populations under 5,000 (TuttaItalia 2023), and over half of the European population resides in similar small communities (ESPON 2006). Yet these prevalent living conditions remain largely overlooked in academic literature on civil organisation and community resilience.

This article aims to contribute to the knowledge of non-profit entities on smaller territorial scales by presenting the main results of research carried out on the CSOs active in Peccioli¹, a small yet vibrant medieval village of approximately 4,700 inhabitants in the heart of Tuscany, Italy. The case of Peccioli represents a particularly compelling case study for investigating the relationship between local CSOs and community dynamics in a smaller territorial context characterised by a high propensity for innovation and social participation. The village's unique approach to transforming potential community challenges, such as waste management, into opportunities for collective engagement and economic development provided an illuminating backdrop for understanding how CSOs navigate the complex terrain between community cohesion and fragmentation in post-pandemic contexts.

The timing of this research, conducted in spring 2021 during ongoing pandemic restrictions, adds particular relevance to the findings. The crisis served as a natural

¹ For further information on Peccioli, please refer to the following news article published by the BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20240424-the-stunning-tuscan-town-even-italians-dont-know>.

experiment, revealing both the vulnerabilities and strengths of small-community civil life while highlighting the essential role that CSOs play in maintaining social fabric during periods of disruption. As researchers and policymakers continue to reflect on the resilience of local institutions in the wake of COVID-19, this study offers crucial insights into how small communities can harness their civic resources to navigate contemporary challenges.

The research contributes to the broader scholarly conversation about the future of civil life by examining how small communities balance the competing demands of internal cohesion and external openness, a balance that has become increasingly crucial as communities work to rebuild and reimagine themselves in the post-pandemic era.

The first section presents the theoretical framework and research questions that guide this investigation. The second section describes the context of the Peccioli municipality, detailing the innovative practices that make it an exemplary case for understanding community resilience. The third section delineates the methodology employed for the study. The fourth section presents and discusses the primary findings, which reveal both the integrative and disintegrative forces that shape civil life in small communities and their implications for post-pandemic recovery strategies.

CSOs and the small local community. Theoretical framework and research questions

The topic of CSOs and their recent transformations has been a source of vigorous academic debate among scholars. A key insight from this literature is the significant heterogeneity within the sector: non-profit, voluntary, and third-sector organisations are not a monolithic entity but vary considerably in their structure, scope, and primary purpose (Salamon and Anheier 1998; Smith 2019). They can function as essential service providers within the “second welfare” system (Maino and Ferrera 2019), act as crucial social anchors fostering local identity and belonging, or serve as expressions of civic identity and participation (Putnam 2000). In many countries, these organisations have emerged as key players, providing social services that were once the almost exclusive preserve of state institutions (Ascoli and Ranci 2002; Bode 2006), and implementing co-design practices with political institutions, especially at the local level (Hellström 2021; Pestoff et al. 2012).

This reconfiguration of CSOs, positioning them as social antennae and a linking membrane between politics and society (Albareda and Braun 2019), has driven significant innovation. However, it also entails the risk of marketisation and professionalisation, a tension powerfully articulated by Eikenberry and Kluver (2004). These processes can lead to increased centralised leadership, inward-looking focus, and competition for resources, which complicate the ability of CSOs to network and create synergies (Backman and Smith 2000; Hwang and Powell 2009; Zmerli and Newton 2007). Furthermore, motivations for participation have shifted, with a trend towards more individualistic and episodic forms of engagement compared to the collective, value-driven forces of previous decades (Beder and Fast 2008; Cnaan et al. 2017).

Much of the academic literature on these transformations, particularly in the European context, focuses on medium and large territorial scales, such as metropolitan areas or urban neighbourhoods, offering limited focus on small-scale territorial contexts. This gap is significant because the role and behaviour of CSOs are profoundly shaped by their context. In small-scale localities, the relational specificities provide unique resources and challenges for collective action. CSOs are often pivotal in processes of community-building and consolidating the social capital necessary for community development (Putnam 2000; Blackwell and Colmenar 2000; Igalla et al. 2020). The symbols, values, and places of socialisation in these contexts help construct powerful meanings for community members (Christiaanse and Haartsen 2017), where a sense of belonging serves as a primary driver for participation (Manzo and Perkins 2006; Moore 2021). At the same time, certain socially disintegrative forces may also be at play in small local communities, reflecting divisions within the community of a social, political, territorial and cultural nature. These divisions negatively affect the strength of social bonds and community members' propensity to participate for the benefit of the community. Consequently, they also impact the actions of CSOs within their social context (Spurk 2010).

To theoretically frame and understand this dynamic interaction between integrative and disintegrative forces within the community, and its impact on local CSOs, it is essential to move beyond a simple rural-urban dichotomy (Hooghe and Botterman 2012) and instead apply conceptual lenses that capture the dual nature of community bonds. In this regard, this paper will draw on Putnam's (2000) work on the various forms of social capital that can be mobilised within a community and Castells' (2004) analysis of the processes of identity formation, in order to provide a theoretical interpretation of the key findings of the research conducted on the Peccioli case study. More specifically, Putnam's distinction between *bonding social capital* (which reinforces exclusive in-group ties) and *bridging social capital* (which fosters outward-looking connections) is insightful for analysing the ambivalent interaction of integrative and disintegrative forces in the local context and their relationship with the work of CSOs in the community. Similarly, Castells' (2004) framework of identity types – namely a resistance identity (creating defensive communes against a perceived outside threat), or a project identity (seeking to redefine a new, inclusive position for the community in a changing world) – helps decipher the identity processes at stake in the local community.

Broadly, CSO organisational dynamics must be linked to the integrative and disintegrative processes of their social context. These lenses allow us to analyse the complex interplay between strong local ties and community cohesion, challenging the assumption that a strong sense of community is inherently positive or uniformly experienced (Schwinn 2023). The distinctiveness of a community is profoundly influenced by the styles in which social actors engage with and mobilise community members, and how they project the community to non-members (Hannerz 1980).

Building on the tradition of community studies, including Pizzorno's (1960) seminal work on socio-cultural transformations in small Italian communities and more recent research on Italian inner areas (Carrosio et al. 2018), this article aims to understand how local civil society organisations (CSOs) perceive integrative and disintegrative social dynamics in an Italian small community.

Recently, there has been a profusion of scientific works on the realities of non-profit, voluntary, and third sector organisations in Italy. From these studies emerge, besides some specificities that characterise the local context, important elements of convergence with some of the main transformations affecting this phenomenon at a more global level (Ambrosini 2016; Ascoli and Pavolini 2017; Barbetta et al. 2016; Biorcio and Vitale 2016; Citroni 2022; Fazzi 2013). Even in the Italian scholarly literature on non-profit organisations, there is a notable absence of attention to the inner areas and smaller territorial realities, despite their significance in the socio-demographic context of the country. An important exception is the recent work by Carrosio and colleagues (2018), which focused on active citizenship experiences in 16 Italian inner areas. Their analysis reveals specific characteristics of the small towns under study, that differentiate them from larger territorial and socio-demographic areas. These include a greater participation of young people (under 29), a focus of action predominantly centred on the municipal territory, and a greater weight of personality-driven dynamics in the articulation of inter- and intra-organisational relationships.

Based on the theoretical and conceptual framework described above, and with the aim of contributing to the current scholarly debate on the relationship between social dynamics and civil society organisations in small local communities, with a particular reference to the Italian and European contexts, the research questions that guided the study conducted on the case of Peccioli were as follows:

RQ1: What role do CSOs perceive themselves to play within the community of Peccioli?

RQ2: With respect to Peccioli's community dynamics, what are the main integrative and disintegrative forces within the local community in the CSOs' perspective? That is to say, what elements weaken and what, on the other hand, strengthen the community bond? Furthermore, how do these forces affect organisational dynamics and the actions of CSOs?

The context of the study: municipality of Peccioli

Before responding to these research questions, it is imperative to provide a concise overview of the local context to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the findings of this study. The municipality of Peccioli is situated in Valdera, within the Province of Pisa, nestled between the hills of Volterra and the Lower Valdarno. It encompasses a rural area of 92.6 km², which includes the main administrative centre as well as the hamlets of Cedri, Fabbrica, Ghizzano, Legoli, Libbiano, Montecchio, and Montelopio. Peccioli has recently attracted attention for being selected for the 17th Venice Biennale of Architecture as an example of a "resilient community". This designation is given to communities that have demonstrated remarkable capacity to respond to challenging circumstances, adopting responsible behaviour oriented toward sustainable territorial development. The curator of the Italian Pavilion, Alessandro Melis, identified Peccioli as a noteworthy case due to the progressive policies implemented by the local administration over recent decades. These policies focused on infrastructure investments, services provisions, and a plethora of cultural

and artistic initiatives (Carta et al. 2022). However, the primary reason for this recognition lies in the innovative management of the municipal solid waste treatment and disposal plant located in the hamlet of Legoli. The landfill, initially established in the late 1980s, has undergone a significant transformation into a comprehensive industrial operation, serving six municipalities in the area. Since 1997, the plant has been managed by Belvedere, a joint-stock company with a mixed public-private capital structure, initiated by the municipality of Peccioli. The company's ownership is diffuse; 64% of the shares are owned by the municipality, with the remaining 36% held by approximately 900 small shareholders, primarily residents in the province of Pisa. This unique ownership structure is designed to engage the local community and experiment with a novel political and social paradigm (Nomisma 2018; Sbrana and Gandolfo 2012).

The landfill, which has been recognised as one of the leading waste disposal systems in Tuscany, has generated substantial economic and financial returns, which have been reinvested into the local economy with the aim of fostering development (Belvedere 2021).

The success of Peccioli in waste management can largely be attributed to its adoption of an intentional PIMBY (Please In My Back Yard) stance, in contrast to the prevalent NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome observed in similar cases (Dear 1992; Kraft and Clary 1991). This approach has mitigated conflicts associated with the landfill (Caspreti 2013), transforming a traditionally undesirable facility and perceived territorial injustices into a generative mechanism that fosters energy, services, infrastructure, and culture, thus renewing the territory sustainably (Delai 2009; Pierotti et al. 2003; Pagani et al. 2023).

Leveraging the success of the landfill, Peccioli has spearheaded numerous innovative projects, which have enhanced the quality of life for its residents and improved municipal services. The municipality strategically allocates a portion of the considerable financial gains derived from Belvedere's operations to bolster various aspects of community well-being. These investments encompass enhancing public services, constructing essential infrastructure, revitalising urban and cultural heritage, and fostering social inclusion and cohesion. Furthermore, part of the financial returns is allocated to support the activities of local CSOs, which play a pivotal role in the local welfare system. These CSOs serve as vital pillars of support, offering a wide range of services and programmes that address various social, sporting, cultural, and recreational needs within the community. They provide educational opportunities, organise several cultural events and country festivals, and promote health and well-being initiatives, thereby enhancing the quality of life for residents and fostering a sense of belonging and cohesion within Peccioli. The majority of the CSOs' members are residents of the town, mainly belonging to the older generation. These members are predominantly unpaid volunteers, who generously dedicate their free time and expertise to support the initiatives and activities of the CSOs they belong to, thereby enriching the social and cultural fabric of the community.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using focus groups to investigate the role of CSOs in the Peccioli community and address the research questions outlined above. The methodological approach was designed to capture the collective perspectives and shared meaning-making processes that characterise civil life in small communities. Focus groups were selected as the primary data collection method for several strategic reasons. As a dynamic research technique that facilitates open discussion around specific topics of interest (Flick 2009), focus groups allowed participants to engage in dialogue among themselves, expressing differing viewpoints, and build upon each other's perspectives in ways that individual interviews might not capture. This approach was particularly appropriate for investigating community dynamics, where collective narratives and shared understandings often emerge through social interaction rather than individual reflection alone. The group format furthered the research objectives to understand the CSOs' perceived collective role within the community. By bringing representatives from different organisational contexts together, the methodology itself mirrored the collaborative processes that the study aimed to examine, potentially revealing insights about inter-organisational dynamics that might remain hidden in one-on-one interviews.

The study adopted a census approach, inviting all 33 non-profit CSOs operating in Peccioli to participate. Organisations were identified through the comprehensive registry maintained on the municipality's official website², which categorises CSOs into three primary sectors: sports clubs and federations ($N=12$), social and welfare-orientated organisations ($N=12$), and culture and recreation associations ($N=9$). While this categorisation system serves administrative convenience, it also provided a useful framework for ensuring diverse representation across different spheres of civic engagement.

Of the 33 organisations contacted, 15 CSOs responded positively and participated in the study, yielding a 45% response rate. The final sample comprised 6 sports clubs and federations, 5 social and welfare-orientated organisations, and 4 culture and recreation associations, closely approximating the proportional distribution of the overall CSO population in Peccioli.

This composition strengthens the study's representativeness and provided confidence that the findings reflect the broader landscape of local civic engagement. The response rate, while not universal, was substantial within this specific local context where organisational capacity is often limited and volunteer time is precious.

Three focus group sessions were conducted between 11 and 13 May 2021, at the Peccioli Multipurpose Centre. The timing of the study, occurring during the gradual easing of COVID-19 restrictions in Italy, provided a unique window into how organisations were adapting to post-lockdown conditions while still processing the impacts of the pandemic on their activities and community relationships (Table 1). Each focus group included five participants, with representatives strategically distributed across organisational types to ensure sectoral diversity within each session. This heterogeneous composition was deliberately designed to encourage cross-pollination

² <https://comune.peccioli.pi.it/su-peccioli/associazioni-e-volontariato/3916>.

Table 1 CSOs participating in the three focus groups

Focus group	Organisation	Primary focus/Activity area	Description
1	Arcieri storici di Peccioli	Sports clubs and federations	CSO involved in sporting activities (archery competitions) and in the organisation of medieval historical re-enactments
1	ASD Peccioli Calcio	Sports clubs and federations	Sports CSO that organises football courses for young people
1	Corale Valdera	Culture and recreation	Choir with over 50 years of activity in the township, boasting 34 members from across Valdera
1	Misericordia di Fabbrica	Social and welfare-orientated	Node of the Misericordie network operating in the hamlet of Fabbrica
1	Mondobimbi Toscana Onlus	Social and welfare-orientated	Non-profit organisation that provides remote assistance to impoverished children in Madagascar
2	Associazione "Il Cammino"	Social and welfare-orientated	CSO dedicated specifically to the employment of disadvantaged people, with a focus on educational recovery and social reintegration
2	Associazione Polisportiva Pecciolese	Sports clubs and federations	Running group that organises races and sporting events in the Valdera area
2	Associazione di volontariato Noi per Voi Onlus Peccioli	Social and welfare-orientated	CSO specialising in fundraising for charitable purposes
2	Motoclub Legoli	Sports clubs and federations	Sports organisation in the hamlet of Legoli, affiliated with the Italian Motorcycle Federation
2	Società Filarmonica Peccioli	Culture and recreation	Large group of 35 musicians performing instrumental music, established in 1870
3	Gruppo Giovanile Legoli	Culture and recreation	Group responsible for organising festive activities in the hamlet of Legoli
3	Misericordia di Peccioli	Social and welfare-orientated	Node of the Misericordie network active in the main town of Peccioli
3	Proloco Peccioli	Culture and recreation	Organisation in charge of organising festive events, either independently or in collaboration with other CSOs
3	Unione Ciclistica Pecciolese	Sports clubs and federations	Sports club that organises professional road cycling races
3	Volley Peccioli ASD	Sports clubs and federations	Sports club that fields teams in regional volleyball championships

of ideas and reveal potential tensions or synergies between different types of civil organisations.

The research team consisted of three members with clearly defined roles: two researchers served as co-facilitators, managing discussion flow and ensuring balanced participation, while a third acted as an observer, systematically taking notes and transcribing the discussions, in order to minimise any potential subjectivity in data interpretation. Several methodological adaptations were implemented to address the specific challenges of conducting research in a small community where participants have ongoing relationships outside the research context:

Strategic group composition: Rather than organising groups by organisational type, participants were mixed across sectors to minimise the potential for pre-existing alliances or conflicts to dominate discussions.

Active facilitation techniques: Facilitators employed specific prompts and turn-taking strategies to prevent the dominance of assertive voices, a particular concern in small communities where specific individuals often exert disproportionate influence across multiple organisations.

Reputational sensitivity management: Recognizing that participants would continue interacting after the research concluded, facilitators carefully managed discussions of potentially sensitive topics, allowing for the expression of disagreement while maintaining respectful dialogue.

All focus group sessions were audio-recorded with participant consent. Following transcription, the recordings were subjected to thematic content analysis using an inductive approach to identify the most pertinent and meaningful thematic categories (Boyatzis 1998; Ryan and Bernard 2003). Coding was conducted using NVivo independently by two coders to enhance reliability. To further strengthen coding reliability, intercoder agreement was systematically assessed, and discrepancies were resolved through iterative rounds of discussion until consensus was reached. The final coding frame was thus the result of both statistical consistency (intercoder agreement levels consistently above 80%) and interpretative refinement. Themes were derived not only from recurring terms but also from cross-case comparisons and interpretative clustering, allowing the analysis to capture latent meanings beyond surface-level frequency. This process ensured that the identified themes reflected both empirical grounding and theoretical coherence.

Findings

The role of CSOs within the community

The analysis reveals that for the CSOs participating in the focus groups, the essential characteristics that the ideal community, particularly a small one, should possess were social cohesion, unity of purpose, a strong sense of belonging, and a commitment to collaboration among the different parts that comprise it. In their view, a small community without cohesion is at risk of falling apart.

Moreover, they also believe that an ideal community should be a welcoming and inclusive one. Inclusiveness is considered a key to maintaining cohesion and promoting a sense of belonging among all members. According to them, creating an environment where all members feel accepted and valued is critical for building a solid, united community.

Thus, a complex idealised community model emerges from the discussion with the participants. In addition to the significance of robust cohesion and a sense of belonging in a smaller community, participants did not generally view the community as a homogeneous, “fortress-like” entity. Instead, the CSOs were oriented towards a more articulated and dynamic model, attentive to both the enhancement of internal differences and the permeability of the community to stimuli, contributions, and influences from the outside.

Regarding the perception of the role of CSOs within the community, two key aspects stand out. Firstly, the associative fabric is of great importance in maintaining

the vitality of a small community like Peccioli. Secondly, the initiatives and activities organised by these CSOs are perceived as playing a crucial role in enhancing the community's sense of belonging and togetherness, which, as previously discussed, is regarded as essential for the survival of the community:

In such a confined place, it is of the utmost importance that we, as a CSO, maintain its vitality. Without the active involvement of its inhabitants to sustain its vibrancy, these communities will inevitably decline. Believing in the potential of the territory and its future, is arguably the most beneficial and constructive action we can take (CSO 6).

It is of paramount importance to have an emotional attachment to the area where you live and a commitment to develop the community in both cultural and associational aspects. It is essential to cultivate a sense of belonging to the community (CSO 5).

This perception of their role is consistent with the idea that CSOs generate social capital. However, the data suggest a more nuanced understanding: their primary function is not only to create capital, but also to actively shape the type of capital produced. Their emphasis on inclusivity and welcoming new members indicates a conscious effort to foster what Putnam defines as bridging social capital (outward-looking networks that connect diverse groups) rather than merely reinforcing bonding social capital, which can strengthen exclusive in-group ties. This self-awareness is significant, as it demonstrates that the CSOs in Peccioli recognise their role as active architects of community cohesion and are actively striving to mitigate the parochial and exclusionary tendencies that can characterise small communities.

CSOs emphasise their role in facilitating social interaction and networking, which are vital for the formation and maintenance of relationships within the village. They recognise themselves as key agents in the processes of *community-building* and *community participation*. CSOs perceived themselves not only as providers of specific goods and services but also as a collective entity, regardless of the sphere in which each CSO acts. They view themselves as a fundamental cog in the collective process of production and reproduction of community ties, and thus as an essential component in maintaining the social fabric. Even CSOs that do not act directly in social welfare, such as sports and recreational and cultural CSOs, nevertheless regard themselves as an essential resource that provides a social service to the entire community:

All CSOs through their activities provide some form of social assistance or support to families. For example, our CSO supports families by looking after children for three hours and keeping them at sports facilities or conducting sports courses in schools (CSO 2).

It is vital for CSOs in the present era to redefine their scope of action, in order to overcome the difficulties that have been created over the past year by the pandemic. We must forge synergies with other CSOs or provide additional services in addition to the core activity that characterises the individual CSO (CSO 11).

This focus on individual contributions fosters an awareness of the importance of networking and building synergies between different organisational realities. This is done precisely to strengthen the ability of all the CSOs to build community and, at the same time, to open channels for participation and inclusion of the different realities that are living in the municipality territory.

The participants identified the lack of collaboration and cooperation between different CSOs in the Peccioli context as the primary challenge in the life of local civic organisations. Some of them perceived an excessive emphasis on individual prominence and highly centralised leadership within their organisation, which has undermined cooperation among the various CSOs in the area. This, in turn, has impeded the potential for collective action that could benefit the broader community:

CSOs should get to know each other more, engage in more inter-CSO activities, and forge synergies. CSOs have a great deal in common. However, it appears that they operate in isolation, despite sharing a common territory (CSO 11).

Sometimes the issue may be attributed to the fact that within each CSO, some leaders, including those in management, may require encouragement to foster cross-organisational generosity. These individuals tend to prioritise the specific interests of their CSO over the broader interests of the whole local civic activism. There are some individuals in my organisation who exhibit this behaviour, and I believe that other CSOs here may also have individuals who act similarly. (CSO 1).

One example of the difficulty in networking among the CSOs, as highlighted by several focus group participants, is the failure of the various attempts promoted by the local administration to create a unique *Pro Loco* (a grassroots organisation that seeks to promote a particular place) as an umbrella organisation to coordinate more effectively the realisation of initiatives and management of resources among different CSOs. Only a small number of organisations have joined this idea.

The challenges of networking and the prevalence of self-centred action, compounded by assertive individual leadership, are characteristic of civic activism in other Italian 'inner areas' similar to Peccioli, as emerged in recent research (Carrosio et al. 2018).

A second problematic aspect of Peccioli's civil organisational fabric, as identified by focus group participants, is the difficulty in encouraging young people to become more involved in CSO life and management:

It is challenging to keep the CSOs active also because few young people join them. Young people are not particularly inclined to become involved (CSO 1).

We were young once too, so we understand that it is common for young people not to want to get too involved in voluntary activities. However, as time passes, priorities change. When people reach a certain age, they tend to become more engaged. Unfortunately, we must face this reality (CSO 8).

The low participation of young people in CSO life, which is also partly due to the socio-demographic structure of the municipality of Peccioli, reduces the possibility of generational turnover in CSO management. This facilitates the establishment of entrenched, personality-driven leadership within the CSOs. It is noteworthy that this element differs from the findings of more recent studies on forms of active citizenship in some of Italy's inner areas (Carrosio et al. 2018), which instead emphasise greater participation of people aged under 29 years compared to larger urban areas.

Disintegrative forces: the social “solvents”

In addition to the internal and organisational issues that CSOs face, other problematic aspects in the Peccioli context emerged and negatively affected the associative fabric. Among them, the disintegrative forces within the community, weakening the societal bond and, in turn, hindering the ability of these CSOs to work together effectively for the benefit of the whole collective.

Despite the ongoing innovation and socio-economic development in recent decades, some of the most active members in the local community perceive Peccioli as a place where particularisms carry excessive weight, making it difficult for cohesion to take hold and consolidate between the different realities of the community:

In Peccioli, there needs to be more unity or willingness to pursue a common goal vigorously. I think this is a problematic issue in the community (CSO 3).

We are a community that, over time, despite our numerous accomplishments, has become somewhat divided [...] divided by deep societal contrasts that sometimes overshadow our significant achievements, especially when compared to neighbouring realities (CSO 14).

One of the primary community issues raised by participants is parochialism, which leads to an intense territorial rivalry between the various hamlets that make up the municipality. This rivalry has become deeply ingrained and is considered a challenging characteristic of Tuscan culture. The adverse effects of this rivalry are felt even in the relationships between different CSOs. Efforts to eliminate this trait are ongoing but challenging, as it has become deeply rooted in the community's social fabric:

There is a pressing need for greater collaboration among the CSOs in the municipality particularly those operating in different hamlets. Residents of Legoli do not engage with those from Ghizzano and vice versa. There is a parochialism that pits ‘Guelf against Ghibelline’, which, in my opinion, is an irrational and detrimental phenomenon that affects us all (CSO 3).

Well, we are Tuscans. Unfortunately, parochialism is deeply embedded in our DNA, in our collective identity (CSO 13).

The identities and feelings of territorial and community belonging in the Peccioli municipality are complex and highly stratified. The persistence of reliable identifica-

tion with the hamlet tends to weaken the sense of belonging to the broader Peccioli community, thus blurring the community boundaries with which local CSOs must interface.

Parochialism in Peccioli can be viewed as the persistence of strong territorial identity attachments besides the various restructuring of local government institutions. New administrative and institutional boundaries have failed to reduce the significance of identity boundaries rooted in time. Parochialism acts as a powerful disintegrative force, reinforcing bonding social capital at the hamlet level while undermining bridging social capital at the municipal level. The mechanism appears to recall a competitive identity attachment (Castells 2004). Identification with a hamlet (e.g. Legoli or Ghizzano) becomes an identity of resistance, defined in opposition to other hamlets rather than as part of a unified Peccioli community. This fragmentation directly impacts the operational capacity of CSOs, as it creates invisible boundaries that hinder collaboration, shared resource pooling and the development of a unified civic strategy. However, as we will see later when analysing CSOs' perceptions of the local community's openness towards newcomers, or lack thereof, the construction of resistant identities activated by persistent territorial parochialism must be understood as dynamic and ambivalent. Interaction with people who have arrived in the community from outside can reduce the relevance of parochialism, strengthening a broader Peccioli identity instead, albeit one that is still resistant.

CSOs have highlighted another significant factor that weakens cohesion in Peccioli: the entrenched political affiliations within the community. This polarisation, which extends beyond the strictly political sphere, has become a divisive element affecting the political environment and social relations in a small and closely-knit community like Peccioli. Over time, this has created a divide that is difficult to bridge, hindering the development of a cohesive community spirit:

We live here, so we are intimately familiar with the local dynamics, and we can assert that the lack of cohesion in Peccioli primarily stems from political divisions. The village has historically been split into two main groups, initially along the traditional divide between centre-right and centre-left. Nowadays, I don't know how to define it, but there is still a political divide impacting negatively on social cohesion. It's worth noting that, despite these political differences, there is no violence between individuals from these groups, and they exchange greetings when passing in the street. Nevertheless, this divide persists and continues to influence interpersonal relationships consequently negatively impacting our activities (CSO 3).

The problem is that here there is too much politics. Of course, politics is relevant all over Italy; this is the case in many countries; however, here in Peccioli, we discuss it too much. It is much more felt (CSO 1).

In this way, an element, political passion, which could facilitate the strengthening of interest in public affairs and, therefore, of participation by and in the community, runs the risk of becoming an obstacle that instead reduces the spaces for democratic confrontation between citizens on the management of their territory. The pervasive-

ness of political division illustrates how political identity can become embedded in daily social life, transforming the potential for engagement with formal politics into a form of resistance against political opponents. This suggests that the mechanism is not just political disagreement, but deeper social polarisation, where political affiliation becomes the main factor in determining social trust and collaboration. For civil society organisations (CSOs), this means that the potential for cooperation is preemptively limited by political litmus tests, constraining the scope of collective action to politically homogeneous groups and stifling broader, community-wide initiatives.

A third “solvent” affecting community cohesion is the difficulty experienced by newcomers, known in local parlance as “*i piovuti*” (literally, “those who dropped from the sky”), in fully integrating into Peccioli’s social reality. This is a consequence of the aforementioned factors that affect the community’s ability to welcome and integrate new elements from outside.

We must eliminate these distinctions: you are one who rained down; you aren’t one who rained down. It is a limitation. We should overcome these distinctions. I’m a rained-down one in Peccioli, and I’m still active and fully integrated into community life. I was even thinking of organising the “rained-down ones’ party” and using an umbrella as a symbol (CSO 15).

The linguistic construction of “*i piovuti*” reveals how communities create insider-outsider boundaries through seemingly innocent terminology. The meteorological metaphor frames newcomers as environmental accidents, individuals who have “descended” upon the community rather than belonging organically, implying a fundamental distinction between those territorially “rooted” and those “deposited” by circumstances. The proposed party for those who rained down, while intended inclusively, paradoxically institutionalises the distinction it seeks to overcome, creating separate celebratory space rather than dissolving the categorisation entirely. This aspect is particularly highlighted by the representatives of the CSOs who have relocated to Peccioli from other municipalities. Despite their integration into the local community, they perceive this lack of cohesion as a hindrance to the consolidation of cohesion between the various components of the local community. It is noteworthy that in this case, the dynamics of identity serve to reinforce the sense of belonging to a broader Pecciolese identity that is perceived as original and historical. This broader Pecciolese identity, as previously noted, is often subordinated to the sense of belonging to the hamlet. However, in the context of identity dynamics concerning newcomers, it gains greater relevance. The activation of bonding social capital among long-standing members of the community simultaneously weakens bridging social capital oriented toward the integration of newcomers and reduces the importance of identity attachment to the hamlets. Instead of promoting the consolidation of a new identity project in the Pecciolese community, confronting newcomers shifts resistance identities from the level of the hamlet to that of a presumed original Pecciolese community to be preserved from possible changes coming from outside.

A final element that has emerged in recent times as a potential obstacle to the strengthening of the relationship between CSOs and the local community is, paradoxically, the situation of economic well-being that characterises the municipality of

Peccioli. The CSOs maintained that the activation of significant economic resources in the municipality, as a consequence of the participatory management of the landfill and the subsequent investments made in the community, has facilitated the emergence of a less participatory attitude in some sectors of the population. The perception shared by several members of the CSOs during the focus groups was that many citizens, who were living in a situation of considerable social and economic welfare, either did not take sufficient interest in the initiatives promoted by the CSOs or were not inclined toward active participation. This resulted in a situation where they were content to passively use the goods and services provided by the municipal administration and the local CSOs. This ambivalence towards economic well-being, which has been perceived as an impediment on some of the dynamics of innovation and cooperation within the community, temporarily directly impacted the CSOs. In fact, until 2011, the municipal administration provided significant direct and non-repayable economic contributions to all the CSOs in the municipality. According to some activists, the capacity for strategic planning and the motivation to network with other CSOs declined due to this financial cushion. Having access to the economic and physical resources necessary to carry out their activities without too much sacrifice weakened the spirit of voluntarism and non-instrumental action in favour of the community within the CSOs and consequently strained relations among the CSOs and between these organisations and the public. According to some focus group participants, new CSOs were established at that time with the objective of accessing financial support from the municipality rather than addressing the community's needs for aggregation or assistance. Since 2011, the municipality has reshaped its policy of supporting the activities of CSOs. It has replaced the system of direct non-repayable subsidies with the development of infrastructure that CSOs can utilise within the municipality, in conjunction with a system of subsidies for citizens who utilise the services provided by the CSOs:

The local administration may have given us too much. By providing us with too much, the population became estranged. It became almost a question of interest. This situation made us somewhat detached from the citizens, and it also made us drift apart between CSOs (CSO 1).

Politically, the decision to cut subsidies was risky for the decision-makers; however, it proved beneficial for the CSOs. CSOs must be able to stand on their own; otherwise, they lose their spirit. If there is a financial contribution, you lose your identity, the ability to look for sponsors, and the ability to organise self-financing events. It's a real eye-opener to be independent of these subsidies. And it's also important to have an administration that listens to you. That happens here, and it's not so obvious elsewhere. Last year, when I met online with other CSOs from other parts of Italy, I learned about problematic situations, such as access to facilities essential for carrying out activities. In Peccioli, we're lucky to have a supportive administration, but as CSOs, I think we should be able to be as independent as possible from public subsidies (CSO 11).

The case of municipal funding reveals a paradoxical mechanism whereby resource abundance can erode the very social capital that CSOs aim to build. This is consistent with previous research into the potential negative effects of professionalisation and marketisation (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Maya-Jariego et al. 2020). The mechanism at play appears to be the weakening of collective urgency. When resources are readily available, the imperative for CSOs to engage in grassroots fundraising, member mobilisation and community outreach (activities that inherently build social ties and a shared sense of purpose) diminishes. The shift from subsidies to infrastructure support in 2011 was initially challenging, but it can be seen as an external shock that forced a return to a volunteer-driven approach. This inadvertently revitalised the community-building function of the associations by recreating the necessity for collective effort and mutual support.

In the light of the above, it can be suggested that while the issue of difficult access to resources, economic and otherwise, has been a pertinent and critical issue for Italian CSOs in recent years (Ascoli and Pavolini 2017), in the context of Peccioli, the increased access to these resources has been perceived as problematic for their role within the community. This issue has also been identified in other recent research on non-governmental organisations in a European context, although on a larger territorial scale than the case of Peccioli (Maya-Jariego et al. 2020). Consequently, based on experience, local CSOs in Peccioli do not currently request additional funding from political institutions, particularly the municipal administration. The CSOs are requesting that the municipality make a more substantial effort to support them in terms of communication, with the aim of increasing the visibility of their initiatives both within and beyond the municipality.

Integrative forces: the social “glues”

In the discussions, two main integrative forces within the community or elements that, in the CSOs’ perception, help to strengthen the community bond and, consequently, the actions of the associative entities, were considered relevant by the participants. The first is the greater ease of interaction made possible by the smaller size of the territory and population compared to larger urban contexts. This invites reflection on the ambivalence of community dynamics in smaller territorial realities, in apparent contradiction to what was seen earlier in the analysis of some of the “solvents” of the community. On the one hand, the small size of the village, where everyone knows everyone else, reinforces the polarisation and the more contentious dynamics within the community, as evidenced by the parochialism between hamlets or political differences. Conversely, the substantial proximity between people that characterises small communities also facilitates the development of more engaging personal interactions, thereby mitigating some of the more conflictive and disaggregating aspects.

It’s a village where everyone knows each other, a small place. Sometimes passions can be stronger than in a bigger city, generating a more divisive environment, although now to a lesser extent than when I was younger. But, at the same time, it is also easier to find a more positive drive to overcome the most contentious divisions in this context (CSO 10).

In the daily life of CSOs, what counts above all is to support and help the community. So, we look at each other's faces and recognise each other as people, not as allies or enemies, depending on our alignment. We care about our community and dedicate some of our free time to this purpose. That way, we can all move in the same direction. Is it true, though, that when it comes to politics, differences often become more of a source of division than unification (CSO 14).

The ambivalence of social proximity, being both a source of conflict and cohesion, is a defining feature of small-scale communities. The mechanism for its integrative function lies in the enforceability of trust and reciprocity. In a setting where "everyone knows everyone," reputational concerns encourage cooperation and mitigate outright conflict. Face-to-face interaction allows individuals to be recognised as whole persons ("we look at each other's faces"), which can depoliticise encounters and supersede abstract political or territorial identities in the context of daily collaboration.

Festive events represent the second and vital social "glue" identified by the CSOs. The municipality of Peccioli is characterised by a rich calendar of religious and secular events that enliven the various hamlets. These events are of great significance and emotional importance to the community, and the CSOs frequently play a pivotal role in organising or animating many of these events. The period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on holding public events have highlighted the importance of festive rituals for the community and the life of local CSOs.

Now, due to the pandemic, is a particular time. It's been about a year and a half since anything significant happened. Each CSO is doing what it can with strong limitations. Now we're in this situation, but before, when there were festive events in the village, we were all there. At these events, we are a whole community (CSO 8).

Festive events are more than just social activities; they are important integration rituals that produce the community they represent. They generate bridging social capital by creating a temporary, neutral space where local and political identities are subordinated to a shared Pecciolese identity. During these moments of collective effervescence, the community experiences itself as a unified whole, thereby reinforcing a project identity (Castells 2004), a forward-looking, inclusive sense of 'us' that can temporarily overcome the disintegrative forces of parochialism and political division. The cessation of these events during the pandemic starkly revealed their functional necessity, not just for cultural enjoyment, but also for the annual renewal of the social bonds on which the community and its CSOs depend.

Festive and cultural events are undoubtedly a critical element in the life of communities and in civic organisations activity (Citroni 2020). During festive rites, situations of collective effervescence and *communitas* (Turner 1996) are created, in which the community recognises itself, the bonds of belonging of its members are strengthened, and at the same time, the energies and resources necessary for the community to adapt to changes in the social and economic context are activated. Festive rituals serve to enhance cohesion, creativity, and innovation within communities. It is therefore unsurprising that CSOs have identified these rituals as an essential factor in com-

munity cohesion. As previously discussed, the concept of a possible “rained-down ones’ party” emerged as a means of facilitating greater integration of new residents. Furthermore, during the discussion, the proposal was made that a joint celebration of all the CSOs might be a useful tool to facilitate greater cooperation and synergy between them.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the importance of festivals to the community was made evident and the pandemic represented an additional difficulty for the CSOs and the conduct of their activities. Although not a specific focus of our research, the topic of the health crisis was discussed at length during the focus groups, which were held in spring 2021. The crisis had a significant impact on CSOs engaged in social work and health assistance. The intensity of the emergency and the uncertainty that accompanied the initial phase of the pandemic caused significant organisational challenges for these CSOs. This was not only due to a lack of adequate resources to deal with such an emergency, but also due to the fears that affected many volunteers which consequently led to a reduction in the number of people active in the field. However, other CSOs not directly involved in social or health care were also hit by the pandemic at an organisational level, particularly in terms of the economic sustainability of their projects. For instance, sporting CSOs, which were obliged to cease their activities for several months, experienced a reduction in membership fees while simultaneously incurring expenses for the management of facilities and non-volunteer staff, and cultural CSOs were unable to organise their self-financing events.

Conclusions

This study of CSOs in Peccioli revealed the complex dynamics that characterise civil life in small-scale localities, offering insights that both complement and diverge from existing scholarship on civil organisations in larger urban contexts. While Peccioli’s distinctive features (its innovative waste management model, substantial municipal resources, and proactive administration) position it as an exceptional case, several findings resonate with broader patterns identified in the literature on small communities and civil organisation.

The multifaceted understanding of community that emerged from our focus groups aligns with recent scholarship emphasising the need to move beyond simple rural-urban dichotomies (Hooghe and Botterman 2012) and recognise the complexity of identity formation in smaller localities. CSOs in Peccioli articulate a sophisticated community model that values both internal cohesion and external openness, a balance that echoes findings from Carrosio and colleagues’ (2018) study of Italian inner areas, where civil organisations similarly navigate tensions between local identity and broader connectivity. However, our findings revealed a more pronounced emphasis on inclusivity and bridging social capital than might be expected in traditional accounts of small towns.

The role CSOs perceive for themselves extends beyond simple service provision to encompass active community-building functions. This finding reinforces Putnam’s (2000) insights about the social capital-generating capacity of civil organisations while revealing how this function operates specifically in small-scale contexts.

Unlike their counterparts in larger urban areas, where CSOs might focus on specialised service delivery, Peccioli's organisations explicitly recognise their collective responsibility for maintaining community vitality and fostering belonging across organisational boundaries.

However, this study also identifies significant challenges that may be particularly acute in small communities. The prevalence of leadership centralisation and inward-looking focus, and difficulties in fostering inter-organisational collaboration echo concerns raised in recent Italian research (Carrosio et al. 2018; Citroni 2022) but appear intensified by the intimate scale and density of relationships characteristic of small localities. The identification of parochialism between hamlets as a persistent "solvent" of community cohesion while potentially specific to territorially fragmented municipalities, suggests broader implications for understanding how sub-local identities can undermine municipal-level civic coordination.

Several methodological limitations warrant careful consideration in interpreting these findings. Our reliance on focus groups, while appropriate for capturing collective perspectives, might have privileged more vocal or institutionally-aligned voices within the CSO landscape. The 45% response rate, though substantial for a small community context, raises questions about potential selection bias. Organisations that chose to participate may represent those most committed to collaboration and community engagement, potentially creating an overly optimistic picture of inter-organisational dynamics. The voluntary nature of participation may have systematically excluded more critical voices or organisations experiencing greater isolation within the local civic ecosystem.

The timing of data collection during COVID-19 restrictions likely influenced both participation patterns and thematic emphases. The pandemic context may have heightened awareness of community interdependence while temporarily suppressing discussion of pre-existing tensions. Additionally, the physical setting at a municipal facility and the research team's position as external academics may have encouraged participants to present more institutionally-aligned perspectives.

Given these limitations, our findings should be interpreted as representing the perspectives of actively engaged CSO leaders rather than a comprehensive view of all civil organisations in Peccioli. The study captured important dynamics among collaborative-oriented organisations but may not fully reflect the experiences of more isolated or critical voices within the local associative landscape.

Peccioli's unique economic model, particularly the revenue generation from waste management and its reinvestment in community infrastructure, distinguishes it from most small municipalities studied in the literature. This context allows for insights into how resource abundance affects civil life, highlighting the paradox wherein excessive municipal support erodes the volunteer ethos and the functional necessity for collaboration that typically drive CSO activity. This finding contrasts with the resource scarcity concerns typically documented in studies of small communities (Ascoli and Pavolini 2017) and suggests that the relationship between resources and civic vitality may be more complex than commonly assumed.

The study's identification of festive events as crucial "glues" for community cohesion aligns with broader anthropological literature on ritual and community (Turner 1996; Citroni 2020) but reveals how these functions operate specifically within

small-scale civic ecosystems. The pandemic's disruption of these events starkly demonstrated their functional necessity, a finding that may have broader implications for understanding community resilience in small localities facing various forms of external shock.

Comparing our findings with Carrosio et al.'s (2018) research on Italian inner areas reveals both convergences and divergences. While both studies identify personalism and leadership concentration as challenges, our findings suggest these issues may be more pronounced in economically successful communities like Peccioli, where resource abundance may reduce the imperative for collaboration that might otherwise moderate individual dominance. Conversely, the difficulty in engaging young people appears less severe in Peccioli than in more economically marginal areas, suggesting that community vitality and economic opportunity may influence generational participation patterns.

Based on the specific dynamics identified in Peccioli, several targeted interventions emerge that could address the particular challenges facing CSOs in small, economically viable communities:

- *Structured inter-organisational coordination*: Given the specific challenge of parochialism between hamlets identified in our study, establishing a rotating inter-hamlet coordination structure could address territorial fragmentation while respecting local identities. This approach, grounded in Peccioli's specific geography, could involve alternating meeting locations and joint projects that explicitly bridge hamlet boundaries.
- *Leadership succession planning*: The high concentration of authority within individual leaders documented in our findings suggests implementing formal mentorship programmes linking experienced leaders with emerging participants. Given the small scale of Peccioli's civic sector, this could involve cross-organisational mentoring to prevent the entrenchment of individual dominance within specific CSOs.
- *Strategic resource management*: Peccioli's experience with the negative effects of abundant municipal subsidies suggests implementing what could be termed "productive constraint" policies. Rather than direct funding, municipalities could provide infrastructure support and capacity-building resources that maintain volunteer motivation while enabling organisational effectiveness.
- *Integration initiatives for newcomers*: The specific challenge of integrating newcomers (the so-called 'i pivoti') identified in our study suggests developing structured orientation and integration programmes that move beyond informal socialisation. This could include newcomer advisory roles in CSO governance or dedicated integration events that formalise what is currently left to chance.
- *Political neutrality protocols*: Given the intense political polarisation documented in our findings, CSOs could develop explicit protocols for maintaining political neutrality in collaborative activities. This might involve establishing clear boundaries for discussion topics in inter-organisational meetings and creating spaces for civic engagement that explicitly transcend political affiliations.
- *Festival-based community building*: Leveraging the crucial role of festive events identified in our study, communities could develop strategic approaches to fes-

tival programming that deliberately foster inter-organisational collaboration and newcomer integration. This represents a concrete application of our finding about the community “glue” function of celebratory rituals.

The specificities of Peccioli’s economic and institutional context limit direct generalisability, but several research directions could help distinguish between locally specific findings and broader patterns in small-community civil organisations. Comparative studies across different economic contexts, including resource-scarce communities, tourist-dependent economies, and post-industrial localities, would help identify which dynamics reflect small-scale community characteristics versus specific economic conditions.

Future research would also benefit from methodological triangulation incorporating individual interviews, ethnographic observation of CSO meetings and community events, and longitudinal analysis to capture how community dynamics evolve over time. Such approaches could provide more nuanced understanding of the tensions between individual agency and collective conformity that characterise civil life in small communities.

Additionally, research examining the experiences of CSOs that chose not to participate in collaborative initiatives could provide crucial insights into the full spectrum of organisational strategies and challenges within small-community civic ecosystems.

This study demonstrates that small-scale localities present both unique opportunities and distinctive challenges for civil organisation. While the intimate scale of communities like Peccioli can intensify both collaborative potential and interpersonal conflicts, the specific economic and institutional context significantly shapes how these dynamics play out. Peccioli’s experience suggests that community success requires careful attention to maintaining the volunteer ethos and collaborative necessity that drive effective civic engagement, even in contexts of relative abundance.

The complex interplay between integrative and disintegrative forces identified in this study underscores the need for nuanced approaches to supporting civil life in small communities. Rather than assuming that resource provision or institutional support automatically strengthens associative capacity, our findings suggest that maintaining the delicate balance between support and independence may be crucial for preserving the community-building functions that make CSOs vital to small-locality social fabric.

As communities continue to navigate post-pandemic recovery and broader social and economic transformations, understanding these dynamics becomes increasingly important for both scholarly analysis and practical intervention. While Peccioli’s specific model may not be replicable elsewhere, the tensions and opportunities it reveals offer valuable insights for supporting civic vitality in small communities across diverse contexts.

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Authors contribution The authors’ contributions to the study are as follows: Manuela Farinosi conceptualized the study and managed relations with the Municipality of Peccioli. Manuela Farinosi and Adriano

Cirulli conducted the focus groups and performed data collection. Adriano Cirulli was responsible for data analysis. Both authors collaborated on writing the manuscript, reviewed the draft, and approved the final version.

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Data availability The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the NuMe Research Lab. However, restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under licence for the current study and are therefore not publicly available. Data are available from the authors upon reasonable request, subject to the approval of the NuMe Research Lab and the Municipality of Peccioli.

Declarations

Ethical approval The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants and with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. At the time the research was carried out, the University of Udine did not yet have an Institutional Review Board (IRB); therefore, no formal ethical approval was required under the regulations and institutional guidelines then in force. The IRB of the Department of Mathematics, Computer Science and Physics was established in December 2021, after the conclusion of the present study.

Consent to participate Prior to their participation, all individuals were duly informed about the aims and procedures of the study and provided their consent prior to participation. Each participant signed a written informed consent form, and all focus group sessions were audio-recorded only with explicit permission.

Competing interests The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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