



Fostering social cohesion at the neighbourhood scale: the role of two Social Streets in Ferrara and Verona

Giulia Ganugi^{1,2}  · Riccardo Prandini¹

Received: 10 November 2022 / Accepted: 31 May 2023
© The Author(s) 2023

Abstract

Social cohesion is often regarded as a remedy for many societal problems, among which the increasing isolation and the crisis of public space in urban contexts. Focusing on the Social Street phenomenon as an alternative urbanity, this paper reflects on social cohesion at the neighbourhood scale, by analysing its cultural and political perspectives and taking into consideration the role of individuals, communities and institutions in fostering it. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups are applied to two cases of Social Street. Besides highlighting the enabling conditions for social cohesion, the results show the intertwining between the individual, community and institutional levels. These links are defined as reflexive interfaces, which are organized moments and places where different actors can meet, dialogue and negotiate, accepting the other participants' interests, values and aims.

Keywords Social cohesion · Neighbourhood · Social street · Governance · Qualitative methodology

Introduction

In the last 30 years, the issue of social cohesion has caught great interest because it is often regarded as a remedy for many societal problems such as individualism, marginalisation, exclusion, and inequalities. In particular, two factors strongly impacting the life quality of urban communities are the increasing isolation and the crisis of public space as support to public and collective life in the city. Strong

✉ Giulia Ganugi
giulia.ganugi2@unibo.it

Riccardo Prandini
riccardo.prandini@unibo.it

¹ Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna, Strada Maggiore 45, 40125 Bologna, Italy

² Department of Economics, University of Bologna, Piazza Scaravilli 2, 40126 Bologna, Italy

urbanization, increased mobility, and the development of information and communication technology have gradually been producing a social order in which the traditional ties of the community have been replaced by anonymity, individualism, indifference and distance (Jacobs 1961; Forrest and Kearns 2001). The city is the place where the residual bonds of spatial proximity and kinship are eroding (Forrest and Kearns 2001; Castells et al. 2006).

Along with the reduction of togetherness (Amin and Thrift 2002), public spaces lose their socialising function. The crisis of public spaces is mainly determined by the gradual loss of citizens' interest and attention to the urban public spaces, perceiving them as nobody's or local authority's places, rather than everybody's places or common spaces (Foster 2013; Iaione 2015). The privatization of public spaces is becoming a widespread phenomenon, which can be traced in various patterns, from entirely gated communities to gated parks, or private consumer spaces like shopping malls and entertainment centres (Blokland 2017). Moreover, the privatization of cities is not only a matter of ownership, but it is strongly linked with the depoliticisation of public spaces as arenas for participation, contestation, and negotiation (Giddens 1990; Mitchell 2003; Rosanvallon 2008; Somers 2008; Harvey 2012).

Within this context, social cohesion is not only the focus of top-down and institutional policies at macro territorial scales but it is also seen by scholars as the objective of participation forms and informal social actions emerging at micro territorial scales: (Moulaert 2010; Jessen 2019; Egholm et al. 2020). Indeed, the positive role of non-profit organizations in society has been widely documented, suggesting that non-profit organizations often encourage community involvement to support social cohesion (Shier et al. 2022). In the frame of these actions, streets have become spaces where new social and political forms can be shaped, rather than spaces for enacting ritualised routines (Sassen 2011), and democracy and democratic aspects of citizen initiatives are discussed (Igalla et al. 2019). The micro-spatial urban practices explore alternative urbanities within the existing city, occupying urban spaces, injecting them with new functions and meanings, and challenging the existing governance structures of public spaces (Eizaguirre and Pares 2018; Harvey 2012; Iveson 2013; Moulaert 2010; Moulaert et al. 2013; Rutland 2013).

Therefore, this contribution investigates two cases of the Social Street Italian phenomenon because it proposes an alternative form of urbanity, which develops alternative ways of living and managing the public urban space, by impacting the governance of neighbourhood commons and public life too. Indeed, while Social Streets were born to answer sociality needs among neighbours, they also negotiate responsibilities for the governance of public spaces. Our question is whether Social Streets contribute to increasing social cohesion at the neighbourhood scale. Since the concept is broad and variously defined, we build on two recent frameworks developed to study urban social cohesion as a *problématique* (Novy et al. 2012) and consider the interdependencies between individuals, communities and institutions in fostering social cohesion (Fonseca et al. 2019).

The article starts with an analysis of how social cohesion has been defined and operationalised, highlighting why the concept needs to be problematized at the neighbourhood scale while taking into consideration different dimensions. It then focuses on Social Streets, describing the evolution of the two specific analysed

cases, based on qualitative data. The results show that Social Streets foster the cultural and political perspective of social cohesion at the individual and community levels. However, the interdependencies—between these two levels and the institutional one—are also evident, underlining the importance of reflexive interfaces to favour the formation of bottom-linked approaches.

Diversity, conflict and negotiation for the production of social cohesion

Finding a unique definition of social cohesion is arduous: since it represents the internal bonding of a social system, whatever form this may take—a family, an organisation, a university, a city, a state, or a society—social cohesion assumes also many different dimensions.

Fonseca and colleagues (2019) organize the existing literature on social cohesion, by dividing the institutional, community, and individual levels.¹ For institutions, social cohesion is defined as the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding marginalization (Council of Europe 2008) with the following characteristics: (1) reciprocal loyalty and solidarity, (2) strength of social relations and shared values, (3) sense of belonging, (4) trust among individuals of society, and (5) reduction of inequalities and exclusion. Similarly, the OECD (2011) definition bases social cohesion on social inclusion, social capital and social mobility. Other theoretical and empirical research identifies impartial law enforcement (Durkheim 1897), civic society, and responsive democracy (Lockwood 1999) as relevant factors to promote social cohesion.

At the individual and community levels, social cohesion involves shared values of reciprocity, loyalty, trust and solidarity (Maxwell 1996; Kearns and Forrest 2000; Berger-Schmitt 2002; Jeannotte 2003; Dekker and Van Kempen 2009). It is accompanied by the desire to belong to a group and maintain affiliation with it (Festinger et al. 1950; Braaten 1991; Jenson 2010) and entails a bond with the local community and the territory, which are conceptualised as a sense of belonging² and place attachment. People experience a sense of belonging when they feel connected to their co-residents (Forrest and Kearns 2001). The sense of belonging is not simply a feeling and not a stable stage, but it is a socially constructed and embedded process in which people reflexively judge the suitability of a specific place as appropriate given their social trajectory (Blokland 2017). Instead, place attachment refers to people's feelings of being linked to a specific territorial area (Bacon 2013). It is related to the feeling of security, the construction of self-esteem and self-image, the

¹ Another possible simplification of the concept foresees the division between the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of social cohesion. The former refers to the cohesion within civil society, i.e. the relationships among different individuals and groups within society. The latter focuses on the state-citizen cohesion, i.e. the relationship between the state and civil society (Van Puyvelde and Brown 2016).

² The concept derives from the studies on the sense of community in the field of Community Psychology (among others: Sarason 1974; McMillan and Chavis 1986; Chavis and Wandersman 1990; Perkins and Long 2002; Kim and Kaplan 2004; Völker et al. 2007; Jason et al. 2015) and it was then investigated by sociologists too.

bond with people's cultures and experiences, and the maintenance of group identity (Altman and Low 1992; Kim and Kaplan 2004; Dekker and Van Kempen 2009). The attachment may derive from people factors and/or place factors (Kearns and Forrest 2000). Further, it is not only those who are physically present locally who feel attachment and responsibility towards a place but also those linked to the place for other reasons—e.g. job, hobbies, relatives, etc.

Most of the studies on social cohesion miss covering the three levels at once, while mainly focusing on the individual and the community. There is a lack of studies on the role of governance and formal institutions in fostering social cohesion (Fonseca et al. 2019). Moreover, all the definitions mentioning “shared values” do not stress the diversified nature these can have, regardless of the background of the individuals and the communities (Bulmer and Solomos 2017; Fonseca et al. 2019). For this reason, Fonseca and colleagues propose a revisited definition of social cohesion as «the ongoing process of developing well-being, sense of belonging, and voluntary social participation of the members of society, while developing communities that tolerate and promote a multiplicity of values and cultures and granting at the same time equal rights and opportunities in society» (2019, 16).

The scientific debate about diversity's impact on urban social cohesion is open and composed of two main positions. On the one hand, studies of Community Psychology highlight that diversity is often opposed to the sense of community since the former may create more difficulty for communities members to share common values and therefore shaping a cohesive community (Dekker and Van Kempen 2009; Townley et al. 2011; Neal and Neal 2014; Neal 2017). On the other hand, sociological and political studies underline that diversity is constitutive of local communities and cities are places of encounter, formed by networks of interaction between people with different backgrounds (Miciukiewicz et al. 2012). This second perspective thus points out the necessity to mix cultural and ethnic, but also land-use, diversity to guarantee the respect and acceptance of diversity among neighbours (Novy et al. 2012). In particular, both in urban literature about mixed-used neighbourhoods (see Jacobs 1961; Nasar and Julian 1995; Kim and Kaplan 2004) and in sociological literature about commons and commoning practices (see Stavrides 2016; Dellenbaugh et al. 2020), it is theorized that too much cohesion and homogeneity among members of local communities may cause dynamics of exclusion towards other communities or singular individuals, while mixed communities are more capable to remain open and inclusive.³ Given the multiplicity of situations in each social, political and territorial context, investigating whether diversity impacts negatively or positively on social cohesion may still offer interesting insights to contribute to the debate.

Another stream of literature that criticizes the lack of consideration for diversity, but also for conflict and negotiation, relates to the scholars researching social innovation, meant as both the product as solutions to specific needs and the socio-political processes that influence and are influenced by these same solutions, with a particular concern for social inclusion and social justice (Moulaert et al. 2013; Moulaert and MacCallum 2019). The authors develop a conceptualization of

³ Using Putnam (2000) and Granovetter (1973) words we could refer to bridging and weak tie social capital respectively.

social cohesion at the urban scale which considers social cohesion as «the capacity to acknowledge the existence of different social and territorial groups present in the city, their diverse and sometimes contradictory interests as well as the capacity for these groups to organise themselves and for the city to create institutions in which these groups can confront each other and decide about the city's future» (Cassiers and Kesteloot 2012, 1910).

Here the city is envisioned as a political arena of conflict, where groups and institutions negotiate their own identities and roles, along with shared ways to live together (Novy et al. 2012). In this context, urban social cohesion is «a plural, scale-sensitive, and multidimensional yet structured *problématique*» (Miciukiewicz et al. 2012, 1858), because it is not a single issue addressing a specific problem, but it is a set of issues, embracing a variety of dimensions. The *problématique* can be elaborated in four different perspectives: (1) socioeconomic: stressing the disintegrative effects of social inequality and exclusionary dynamics on access to resources and markets; (2) culture: focusing on identity, common culture, and place attachment as key dimensions of belonging to a group; (3) ecology: linking social exclusion in the city with issues of ecological justice; (4) politics: emphasizing political action as participation in public affairs, as being a full member of the local community (Novy et al. 2012).

The increasing isolation caused by individualism and lack of spatial proximity, along with the crisis of public spaces, collectively cared for and managed by citizens and public administrations, which this paper focuses on, relate to the cultural and political perspectives of social cohesion. Therefore, the contribution aims to focus on the cultural and political perspectives of social cohesion (Novy et al. 2012), defined as the capacity to acknowledge the existence of different social and territorial groups, the capacity for these groups to organise themselves and for the city to create institutions, places, moments of dialogue, confrontation and decision-making (Cassiers and Kesteloot 2012). In addition, the attention to the interdependencies between individual, community and institutional levels (Fonseca et al. 2019) and the consideration of diversity not only permit shedding light on the practices which produce social cohesion but also analyse the actors and practices which play the role of mediators between groups of citizens, civil organizations and institutions, favouring the maintenance of social cohesion.

The resulting framework is then applied to Social Streets, informal groups of neighbours, which were born exactly to answer the needs of isolation and neglect of public spaces in cities. How the Social Streets develop more social cohesion, in terms of cultural and political perspectives, at the neighbourhood scale implies more specific questions:

- How do the Social Streets produce collective identity, shared culture, and a strong attachment to the territory, which contribute to hindering feelings of isolation (cultural perspective)?
- How do the Social Streets favour the formation of citizens' political roles, motivating people to carry on daily life actions to manage and care collectively public spaces (political perspective)?

Both questions are addressed by looking at (a) the individual self-motivation, perceptions, norms, and values; (b) the community's relationships and process of goal attainment; (c) the institutional environment and decision-making (Fonseca et al. 2019). Since the analysis focuses on the neighbourhood scale, the institutional level is only analysed as concerns the Municipality and the District institutions. Maintaining this micro-perspective permits to bring everyday ambiguous illustrations of agency into focus, by looking at the «efforts of individual and collective actors to cope with, keep up with, store up, tear down, tinker with, transform, or create anew the institutional structures within which they live, work, and play» (Waardenburg 2021, 550).

Analysing Social Streets: cases and methods

The Social Street is an Italian form of neighbourhood community, which was born in 2013 in Bologna and reached up to 408 groups in Italy and 11 in other European countries. The groups were born as a reaction to the isolation and the lack of socialization experienced in cities by locals and newcomers. The main goal is to socialise, share needs with neighbours, carry out collective projects of common interest and gain benefits deriving from greater social interaction.⁴ In response to the pandemic environment, characterized by uncertainty, and isolation, the most urgent need expressed by Social Street members was psychological support, which evolved into exchanging mutual attention and care (Prandini and Ganugi 2022). Indeed, the Social Streets gave contribution to keeping neighbours informed about what was going on in the neighbourhood, sustaining and producing convivial ties, and organizing mutual help services (Introini et al. 2021).

Sociality, gratuitousness, and inclusion are Social Streets' three main values. Access to the Social Streets is open to everyone, regardless of any ethnic, political, or religious differences. Social Streets are considered forms of urban sociality capable of creating mechanisms of social regeneration of the public space (Stanica 2014; Gamberoni 2015; Augè and Pasqualini 2016; Introini and Pasqualini 2017; Pasqualini 2018), strategies of re-embedding social and economic practices (Akhavan et al. 2019; Nuvolati 2014; Pais and Provasi 2015; Castrignanò and Morelli 2019), and practices of civic engagement activation in response to collective needs (Macchioni et al. 2017). Social Streets produce conviviality and attachment to the neighbourhood and the street (Morelli 2019). Since the interaction among members of each Social Street is supported by Facebook, Social Streets have also been analysed as network communities of place (Cabitza et al. 2016; Mosconi et al. 2017; Pasqualini 2019).

The Social Streets are rather very diverse in geographical positions, collocation within cities, structural and economic features of the urban areas, type of activities, and relational network established with other socio-political subjects of the territory, such as the local administrative institutions and civil society actors.

⁴ www.socialstreet.it.

For this contribution, two Social Streets having different relationships with the respective city public administrations were considered to investigate the connections between the institutional, community and individual levels influencing urban social cohesion⁵:

1. The *Residents in Pitteri Street and surroundings*, in Ferrara, signed an official regulation for the governance of green public areas and it participated in the definition of new public regulations together with other civic groups of the city.
2. The *Residents in Twenty September Street*, in Verona, refused any formal collaboration with the City, preferring to maintain the group's activities completely autonomously.

Ferrara and Verona are located on the North-East side of Italy and are small to medium-sized cities, counting respectively 132.009 and 257.353. Ferrara was governed by left-wing coalitions since 1945. The left government had its first loss in 2019 when it was overcome by a right-wing party. From 1951 to 1994, Verona was guided by the Christian Democracy, while from 1994 to 2019 the city was governed by right-wing coalitions, apart from a 5-year interval (2002–2007) of a centrist party. In Italy, left-wing municipalities have historically a more participatory style of governance, while right-wing municipalities are more based on communication to citizens by interest groups.

The period of observation lasted 2 years, from Spring 2016 to Spring 2018. In the beginning, the authors just contacted and interviewed the administrators of the two Social Streets and participated sporadically in a couple of events just to get to know the groups and their environment. In 2018, one of the authors spent 1 month in each Social Street, living with the groups and participating in all the meetings and activities. Besides the online and offline participatory observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with various actors attending the two Social Streets or their territorial areas (Table 1) served to detect the discourses and attitudes towards the activities undertaken, the relationship with other urban actors, between members, and with the neighbourhood area and public spaces. The Social Street members were recruited through announcements on the Social Streets groups on Facebook or during the participant observation. The other interviewees were sampled through the snowball approach considering whether they had a stake in the Social Streets (Table 1).

Using the chosen definition and problematization of social cohesion, the cultural and political perspectives of the concept were operationalised to observe the individual, the community, and institutions' perceptions, norms and values impacting social cohesion at the neighbourhood level. The cultural perspective is composed of a sense of belonging to the group, shared identity with its members, place attachment and intertwining of people's identities with places. The political perspective entails participation in public life, everyday actions in taking care of public space,

⁵ The material reported is part of a broader research which analysed 20 preliminary semi-structured interviews to Social Streets' administrators. The interviews were conducted from March to July 2016, both in Italy and abroad.

Table 1 The research participants

Technique	Participants	Ferrara's social street	Verona's social street	Recruitment
Interview	Social street members	4	5	Social street Fb group
	Third sector actors	5	15	Snowball sample + email/phone call
	Local government representatives	4	5	
	Local food producer	1	/	
Focus group	Social street members	1×5	1×8	Social street Fb group
		1×6	2×5	
			1×4	
Informal conversation	Social street members	11	21	Social street meetings/activities or events in the neighbourhood
	Third sector actors	/	5	
	Local government representatives	2	/	
	Local food producer	1	/	
	Neighbourhood residents, not social street members	3	2	Distribution of a request in the mailbox

commoning practices⁶ involving both the Social Streets and other urban actors, and formal or informal collaborations for the well-being of the neighbourhood community, through various forms of subsidiarity.

The negotiation for the care of public spaces in Pitteri Social Street

The Social Street of Pitteri Street and surroundings⁷ (SSf) in Ferrara is located in a strongly residential neighbourhood, dotted with small single houses and buildings of medium size not higher than five floors. The area has many green areas which influenced its name “green lung” given by the residents. The neighbourhood is located

⁶ Commoning practices are constituted by the collective actions and the social processes which create and reproduce the commons (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015; Huron 2017; Dellenbaugh et al. 2020). Generally, the commons are some kind of public resource, accessible to all members of a community and often constructed by them. The notion of the commons is based on altruistic cooperation, collaboration, and communication and it involves people operating on a collective rather than merely individualistic level (Hardt and Negri 2009). In addition, common spaces are those spaces produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community they participate in (Stavrides 2016).

⁷ The group was born in November 2013 within the neighbourhood “Bologna”. In September 2016, at the moment of the cases’ selection, 347 members were registered in the Facebook group. Counting the number of active and non-active members, though, is not possible, since this is fluid and it depends on the type of meetings organized, the personal needs and priorities changing during the year, the season (during summer people are more likely to participate in outdoor activities), the type of interaction for a specific activity (online interaction, offline meeting). Moreover, the “surroundings” indicates exactly the indefinite Social Street borders, which change when people living in contiguous streets ask to enter the group.

about two km from the city centre and can be reached on foot or by bike or with local public transport. Inside it is equipped with services (kindergartens and schools, public swimming pool, an elderly care house, the scout group, the bowling club, the Church and the parish recreational club, dentists', doctors', veterinarians' consulting rooms, building surveyors' offices) and shops (newsagent, greengrocer, hardware store, laundry, bar, tobacconist, hairdresser, delicatessen, ice cream parlour, etc.). The local population is mainly originally of Ferrara or close cities and is composed mostly of family units.

The SSf evolved around the public green areas of the neighbourhood when the citizens started to feel the necessity to bond more with the territory of residence.

«We are on social [networks], but we are not on the street» (Piero,⁸ SSf member).

Although most of the SSf members had lived in the neighbourhood for more than 15 years, they signed up in the group because of the need to socialise with their neighbours, not having strong social networks in the local area. Among the members who participated in the focus group, only one of them moved to the area from South Italy and lived in the street for only 1 year. All the other participants either live in the area for a long time or arrived there a few years before, though living already in Ferrara (Table 2).

Since the beginning, they set weekly meetings which included multiple activities, from having dinner outdoors and watching movies together to cooking classes, table games, and video game tournaments for children. Withal, the activity which triggered the engagement of the members most was the installation of a bookcrossing point.

«The bookcrossing idea perfectly represents the concept of sharing in a public space, a place in the neighbourhood accessible to all» (Giuliana, SSf member).

The group contacted the Municipal Office which dealt with the public green areas of the city. The bureaucratic process to obtain permission to install the library was long, because of the absence of existing regulations and the problematic node of the responsibility division between the Municipality and citizens in case of damage to the physical resource and/or the people. Eventually, the Green Office agreed to draw up a new agreement that enabled the citizens of Pitteri Street to use the public space safely, in the general interest of the community residing in the neighbourhood.

«That moment has been a recognition of work, an artefact that could serve the neighbourhood. On that day the Mayor said: 'You have done a beautiful thing; I give you two benches'» (Giuliana, SSf member).

⁸ In order to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewees, the real names were changed into fictitious names. All the interviews in Ferrara have been collected in April 2018, besides the quotes where another date is indicated.

Table 2 Socio-demographic data of the social street's members who participated in the focus group

Participant	M/F	Age	Nationality	Education grade	Job	City of birth	Living in SSf area	Housing nucleus
Giuliana	F	54	Italian	High school	Employee	Ferrara	From 1994	3
Noemi	F	52	Italian	High school	Housewife	Ferrara	Until 2017	4
Giuseppe	M	53	Italian	High school	Agent	Ferrara	Until 2017	4
Simone	M	44	Italian	Ph.D.	Professor	Ferrara	From 2003	4
Piero	M	72	Italian	Junior high school	Retired	Bologna	From 1998	1
Laura	F	52	Italian	High school	Nurse	Ferrara	From 2015	4
Silvano	M	55	Italian	High school	Employee	Ferrara	From 2015	4
Raffaele	M	24	Italian	High school	Employee	Taranto	From 2017	3
Palmina	F	21	Italian	High school	Student	Ferrara	From 1996	3
Oscar	M	56	Italian	High school	Technician	Ferrara	From 1994	3

For each of them, we indicate personal data (gender, age, nationality, educational grade, job) and place-related data (the city of birth, when they move to Pitteri Street or when they move out, how many people they live with)

Afterwards, the area began to host also an aromatic herbs garden, a box for suggestions and criticisms addressed to the SSf, and a notice board for the residents who had no access to the virtual Facebook wall.

During the negotiation with the municipal office to obtain permission, an important mediating role was played by the Urban Centre.⁹ Since 2012, the Urban Centre had been developing participatory projects with Ferrara's citizens about various issues. In 2014, it was focused on a project for the collective care of the city and wanted to contact citizens' groups who were interested or already engaged in the concept of commons but not yet collaborating with the City.

«Working on this project, we began to think about the concept of commons, given that throughout Italy issues of commons were spreading. For us, [commons] was the community, the collectivity when they were developing collective civic initiatives. So, the question was: in Ferrara who is developing initiatives that aim in some way to improve places and communities, for passion or personal interest? The Office for the public green areas had already been contacted by people, who wanted...ehm...to put their hands to some little parks near home, or to plant trees or other things...so we began knowing these people» (Caterina, Public Administration representative).

After receiving the Urban Centre's proposal to cooperate, the SSf discussed it internally and considered whether its own participation might disadvantage the group in any way. Eventually, along with other groups of citizens, the SSf stepped in

⁹ The first UCs were born in the United States in the 60 s, arriving in Europe twenty years later. The Ferrara Urban Centre was born in 2010 as a Municipality public service aimed to support local initiatives of civic participation for the improvement of communities and places. Its objective is to create conditions, so that the local decisional processes, particularly the urban and territorial policies, are actually more open towards the civic communities living in Ferrara.

and participated in the co-creation of a shared definition of commons for the City of Ferrara.

«Before the slowness of the public administration, all over Italy there are a lot of citizens who have decided to “do” something for themselves and the rest of the community. If the Municipality indirectly gains from it, well, this is not a problem. I also gain, because I live in a better place» (Carolina, RMf).

By 2017, the sixteen “communities of practice” (i.e. citizens’ groups, in the phrasing of Urban Centre) signed an agreement recognising that participation in public decisions meant first of all participating concretely in the social, economic and therefore political life of the city. The participatory process between these communities, including the SSf, and the Urban Centre led to the modification of existing municipal regulations (e.g. Regulation for participatory governance of green public areas), the implementation of new regulations (e.g. Regulation for participation in governance and care of commons) and the adoption of new manifestoes (Italian Manifesto of Participation, Manifesto of Commons).

In virtue of these regulations, the SSf signed a collaborative pact for the care of the green areas of Pitteri Street, which conceived a precise negotiation of actions and responsibilities of the SSf and the Municipality. The SSf was in charge of the cleaning and maintenance of the playground and the installed facilities (benches, library, etc.). The group always preferred an informal and horizontal organization to do it.

«The first of us who passes by and notices something to be repaired or fixed: “Guys, we should mow the grass, put in order the plants, settle the little library”. We ring us up, choose a day and do it» (Oscar, SSf member).

Nevertheless, this form of citizenship applied only to those few active members engaged in the common care of the neighbourhood’s resources. The latter believed that, by paying public taxes, citizens became partially co-owner of the city, thus entitled to use and transform the public space for the well-being of the collectivity. Instead, other SSf members disagreed with this view, expecting to receive all necessary services from the City exactly because they pay public taxes.

«I think that cleaning is incorrect in this case. There is a problem, and someone must solve it. It’s not the citizens» (SSf member, from a post on the Facebook group of 15/09/17);

«One may say: “As a citizen I pay taxes, therefore I expect the Municipality to give me services”, or: “As a citizen, I pay taxes and, since I pay taxes, this portion of the road also belongs to me, therefore I have the right to put hands to it and to renew something”. in the beginning, I agreed more with the first point of view, but today, after the experience of the Social Street, I agree more with the second one» (Simone, SSf member).

This disagreement, together with another argument concerning the sale of fresh fruits and vegetables by a local producer in the street, caused a decrease in the number of members who engaged in public space care and collaboration with

the Urban Centre. So, only a few members remained involved in the neighbourhood's commoning process and the community of practices network set by the Urban Centre, besides still meeting each other and valuing the group membership as precious.

«We keep coming here because even though we no longer live here, it was a beautiful way of getting to know our neighbours since it is now almost impossible to know who lives near you, at least in these areas [...] we love knowing people and staying together» (Giuseppe, SSf member).

«It was useful to us to create a larger group of friends» (Giuliana, SSf member);

«We created a gang, like when we were little!» (Simone, SSf member);

After the end of the field research in June 2018, the SSf continued to organise convivial activities, which also included the informal care of the common spaces and cleaning of the street. However, participation remains very low. When Covid-19 hit and the collective encountering moments stopped, these few members managed to keep one-to-one relationships, losing the group dimension. On the administrative side of the City, between 2018 and 2019, the Urban Center completed a new public regulation for urban participation and signed other nine collaborative pacts with groups of citizens. Afterwards, the local government of Ferrara shifted to a right-wing political faction, raising doubts about the continuation of the Urban Center's participatory activities, which was supported by a left-wing government so far. Today, the Urban Center of Ferrara does not exist anymore and there are no traces of its work online.

From place attachment to commoning practices in Twenty September Social Street

The Social Street Residents in Twenty September Street¹⁰ (SSv) in Verona is located in the central neighbourhood of the city, even if its area is divided by the latter from the river. The zone is historical, strewn with ancient alleys, churches and Catholic missions, monuments, old military buildings and abandoned barracks. However, it is also the first housing unit in the city and it hosts the headquarters of the university campus, which makes the district particularly frequented by young students. The inhabitants live in houses of few floors (three, on average) and the ground floors of the neighbourhood are mainly bars, restaurants, shops of traders and artisans, and eventually associations. There are no free green areas, which serve as meeting places, for play and leisure, while one can find private or public gardens, open only in certain time slots. The neighbourhood has always been both a destination and a passage of migratory flows. Besides Italians, the most common ethnic groups are

¹⁰ The group was born in March 2014 within the neighbourhood "Veronetta". In September 2016, at the moment of the cases' selection, 132 members were registered in the Facebook group. As in Ferrara's Social Street, counting the number of active and non-active member is not possible. In this case "surroundings" is not explicit, but people living in contiguous streets can enter the group anyway.

Africans, Sinhalese, Indians, Sri Lankans, Filipinos, and Indians; women from Eastern Europe are also present. Due to these flows, but also to those of university students and missionaries, the area is characterized by strong demographic change and low permanence.

Since the foundation of the SSv, its members shared a very strong place attachment towards the neighbourhood, despite initially not having local social networks due to the high mobility of many residents. Indeed, compared to the previous case, more members of SSv arrived in the area less than 4 years ago and, in general, they come from different cities of Veneto Region or other regions and even countries (Table 3).

«It was born precisely from this widespread feeling of those who chose to live in Veronetta: it's beautiful as a neighbourhood, I just don't know my neighbours because there is such a mobility» (Giacomo, SSv member and Third Sector representative¹¹).

Soon after the group activation, its members set one weekly appointment. However, since the neighbourhood lacked a gathering public space, the participants met in NGOs' venues or cafés, choosing those involved in ethical, sustainable and social activities for the territory and the local population.

«There are bars that help the neighbourhood. The Bar Buongiorno has opened in the place previously occupied by drug pushing, keeping itself aloof from this activity. In this way, the people suspected of drug pushing gave up doing it there. What we have promised ourselves as citizens is to have ethical behaviour, to take care to meet where people are and share what we do or need support» (Serena).

In the meantime, the NGO D-Hub, which was led by one of the SSv administrators, decided to take over the management of the Nani garden¹² in Twenty September Street, to promote it as a common resource in the neighbourhood.

«We decided to apply for the management of the former Nani Garden because we believe it is a common good that must be enjoyed together» (Serena, from a post on the Facebook group, 28/12/15).

After a few months, considering the willingness of the SSv members to also meet indoors without having to spend their own money, and being confident of the already established relationship between the NGO D-Hub and the District, the SSv administrator asked the District the permission to use the rooms of the former porter's lodge

¹¹ In the case of SSv members who were also employees of Third Sector organisations, located either in Veronetta or in other Verona's neighbourhoods, we interviewed them for both their roles. In the case of members who were engaged in voluntary activities, instead, we did not attribute them the double affiliation. All the interviews in Verona have been collected in May 2018, besides the quotes where another date is indicated.

¹² The garden belonged to the ancient Bocca Trezza Palace (sixteenth century), which went to ruins for decades and it was abandoned. In 2018, the Municipality of Verona defined a requalification project both for the Palace and for the garden.

Table 3 Socio-demographic data of the social street's members who participated in the focus group

Participant	M/F	Age	National	Education	Job	City of birth	Living in SSV area	Housing nucleus
Filippo	M	36	Italian	Postgraduate	Social worker	Venice	From 2016	2
Aurora	F	35	Italian	Degree	Nursery school teacher	Rovigo	From 2016	2
Patrizia	F	55	Italian	High School	Nanny	Verona	From 1992	3
Emma	F	38	Italian	High School	Un-employee	Verona	From 2014	1
Flavia	F	52	Italian	High School	Un-employee	S. Paolo	From 2010	1
Aldina	F	54	Italian	Degree	High school teacher	Brasile		2
Luce	F	28	Spanish	Professional training	Social health workers	Verona	From 1992	2
Raffaella	F	60	Italian	Degree	Doctor, bookseller	Madrid	From 2018	2
Silvia	F	23	Italian	Degree	Secretary	Verona	From 1976	4
Giorgio	M	33	Italian	Degree	Self-employee	Verona	Friends	3
Fulvia	F	28	Italian	Degree	Un-employee	Torino	From 2018	1
Federico	M	33	Italian	Postgraduate	High school professor	Verona	Friends	2
Piera	F	68	Italian	High school	Retired	Varese	From 2016	2
Catia	F	65	Italian	High school	Retired	Verona	From 1992	1
Giorgia	F	63	Italian	Degree	Teacher	Vicenza	1980	1
Cristina	F	44	Ukrainian	Ph.D.	Tourist guide	Treviso	1995	4
Vincenzo	M	49	Italian	High school	Educator	Kharkiv	2008	2
Marcello	M	54	Italian	Degree	Legal office manager	Verona	Job	2
Gabriele	M	53	Italian	Degree	Self-employee	Vicenza	2004	1
Giovanni	M	50	Italian	Degree	Teacher	Trento	2003	3
Sofia	F	30	Italian	Degree	Musician	Verona	Job	3
Maura	F	68	Italian	Degree	Retired	Bari	2015	2
						Brindisi	2012	1

For each of them, we indicate personal data (gender, age, nationality, educational grade, job) and place-related data (the city of birth, when they move to Twenty September Street or when they move out, how many people they live with)

in the Garden. The request was rejected by the local government, not deeming the SSv meetings suitable for the room and not understanding the values of the SSv. The latter's informal and self-managed governance was considered a factor not to be shown up in the projects promoted by D-hub, which was, instead, already appreciated by the Municipality.

The year after, once the District had acknowledged the simple aim of the SSv to socialize and take care commonly of the neighbourhood's public space and after a constant mediation between the SSv and the District acted by the NGO D-Hub, the permission arrived. From then on, the Nani Garden became the SSv headquarters and the neighbourhood hub, which different individuals and groups referred to, united by sharing the same space and the ability to collaborate for its use and maintenance. Besides the collaboration with D-Hub, the majority of SSv members always remarked the willingness to maintain the values of sociality and informal collaboration as primary, to the detriment of more formal and institutional projects.

«The priority is to get to know each other and share common reflections, with advice, ideas, and requests. The social street is not an association or a committee, but it has the purpose of favouring full participation of whom live in an area, through a spontaneous and flexible organisation. I would, therefore, give priority to the desire of seeing and confronting each other as “curious” citizens rather than to the more demanding projects involving political associations or institutions» (Patrizio, SSv member).

Although the Nani Garden had been reopened and governed by the SSv, D-Hub, and other NGOs of the neighbourhood, the redevelopment project of Bocca Trezza Palace was designed quite exclusively by the municipal offices. The attempt made by the Adult and Elderly Office of the Social Services of Verona Municipality resulted in a quick consultation of the SSv administrator, actually for its role in D-Hub more than for the SSv one.

«The social and the architectural part of the project was very fast and did not allow the possibility of making a participatory process and, therefore, to involve a whole series of subjects present in the neighbourhood. Of course, we have heard the social workers and those who work in the neighbourhood» (Veronica, Public Administration representative).

Consequently, the final project did not conceive of the Palace and the Garden as a common resource for the local neighbourhood community, designing them only to be used by citizens as a “multipurpose” space for parties and various meetings. The informal nature of the SSv seemed to hinder again the full consideration of the same as an urban actor to involve in the decision-making by the city institutions. However, the SSv legitimation depended also on the roles played by the public officers. The administrative staff often tried to open spaces of dialogue and collaboration with informal groups, such as the SSv, despite facing the opposite attitude of politicians, who were in line with Verona prevailing political tradition.

«It was a way to bring citizens closer but also to work on active citizenship, on feasible, concrete collaborative relationships...then we need to understand concretely if it is possible to put them into practice, inside an administration that I don't know how much awareness it has of what we are doing at the territorial level» (Nicoletta, Public Administration representative).

Another similar episode was the design process of the Regulation for Subsidiarity, developed entirely online. Thus, only the citizens having the possibility to use computers and the internet were involved.

In all these cases, an open and constant dialogue between the local administration and the citizens did not develop, impeding the development of shared responsibilities for the care of public places. The interactions between the City and the SSv members were occasional and not structured in real involvement in the decision-making process. On their side, the SSv members felt completely detached from the local government. The responsibility of public services and spaces was seen as centralised in the hands of political decision-makers and organised hierarchically.

«At the top, there is the institutional part, very conservative, at the bottom instead there are the citizens, with their social movements and social entrepreneurial realities that make “resistance”, carry on the concept of community, are more innovative» (Filippo, SSv member);

However, within the neighbourhood, Serena's aspiration to make the Nani Garden a «common space in which to live, to exchange ideas, and to stay together» (from a Facebook post, 14/11/16) was achieved. SSv members and residents of the area continued to use it, experiencing the garden as an extension of their houses and perceiving the other members as similar.

«What happened is that within the Social Street we have recognized ourselves as similar people, who had similar interests, starting from not being subjected to the territory, but actively experiencing it to make and change the social context» (Giacomo, local newspaper, January 2019).

«In the end, it is really like being at home» (Patrizia, SSv member).

After the end of the field research in June 2018, besides the usual socialising activities, the SSv members developed other two commoning projects: Ri-Ciak, to requalify an old and abandoned cinema in the neighbourhood and to transform it into a cinema of the community, which could be a place of aggregation, sociality and cultural offer; and Recup, to recover and redistribute food that is thrown away at the market because it is unsold even though it is still edible. Then, in 2019, the Regulation for Subsidiarity also became more widespread, reaching twenty-two signed pacts. Among these, the collaboration between the NGO D-Hub and the municipality for the management of the Nani Garden formalises all the activities that the NGO—together with the SSv—was already organising, while also giving greater recognition to the role of citizens in the management of the Garden. Moreover, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the SSv remained an important reference for the neighbourhood's citizens, playing an expressive function (Bales and Talcot 1956)

and guaranteeing strong psychological support (Prandini and Ganugi 2022). To do so, the SSv members organized also online lunches and meetings to substitute the previous offline moments of encounter.

Social cohesion and reflexive interfaces

The contribution aims to investigate how alternative practices of public life address social isolation and disregard towards the public space, by fostering social cohesion from cultural and political perspectives. The definition of social cohesion leading the reflection brings in diversity, conflict, and negotiation as integral elements for the production of social cohesion (Novy et al. 2012; Fonseca et al. 2019). Thus, we analysed two Social Streets, taking into consideration the production of collective identity, shared culture, and strong attachment to the territory (cultural perspective), on the one hand, and the formation of citizens' political role in managing and caring collectively the public space (political perspective), on the other hand, by looking at individuals, community and institutions at the neighbourhood scale (Table 4).

Both Social Streets gathered people who shared the place of residence and a widespread place attachment, without having local social networks with their neighbours. However, the two groups have different territorial and socio-demographic characteristics. The Social Street in Ferrara was born in a highly residential area with many green and free-access spaces, mainly inhabited by Italian families, whose members are also the most active participants in the Social Street activities. The Social Street in Verona, instead, was born in a mixed-used territorial area, attended by local residents, Italian migrants, university students, foreign people, missionaries and members of civil organizations. The area has no free-access green spaces. Moreover, in Verona, the majority of the most active participants of the Social Street are single persons or, eventually, couples and they shared, on the one hand, a similar background of high territorial mobility and, on the other hand, the engagement in Third Sector organisations and voluntary activities in the field of social and economic inclusion, migration, and gender equality, being therefore engaged in the well-being of the community.

Participation in the two Social Streets helped the citizens to develop a sense of belonging to the local community, share ideas and interests, and detect common values among them. The latter resulted in the diffusion of an alternative way of experiencing the public space, socialising outdoors, organising collective activities and implementing commoning practices to manage the neighbourhood's commons. In Verona, the Social Street's members collaborated with each other, with the NGO D-Hub and other organisations of the neighbourhood to take care of the public garden and use it as headquarters of the local public life. In Ferrara, a smaller group of residents participated in the commoning practices due to the conflictual episodes about citizens' role in managing the public space and collaborating with the local institutions. Overall, the intertwining between people's and place's identities increased both in Ferrara's and Verona's neighbourhoods. Therefore, the two Social Streets tackled the cultural and political perspectives of social cohesion within the

Table 4 The main constitutive elements of the two analysed case studies

	Social street of Pitteri street and surroundings (Ferrara)	Social street residents in twenty september street (Verona)
Diversity within the Social Streets	Low socio-demographic diversity (mainly families and originally from Ferrara)	High socio-demographic diversity (mainly individuals or couples; local residents, Italian migrants, university students, foreign people)
Cultural perspective of social cohesion	Low territorial diversity (mainly residential, many green and green free-access spaces) The members developed a sense of belonging to the local community and participated in socialising activities in the public spaces Over time, a few members maintained their personal relationships with others; during Covid-19, only in the form of one-to-one relationships, losing the group dimension	High territorial diversity (mixed-used with no green free-access spaces) The members developed a sense of belonging to the local community and a shared place attachment, participating in socialising activities in the public spaces Over time, the group guaranteed strong psychological support during Covid-19, when the members organized online substitutive meetings
Political perspective of social cohesion	Only a small group of members participated in the commoning practices due to internal conflictual episodes about citizens' role in managing public spaces and collaborating with local institutions	The members collaborated with the NGO D-Hub and other organisations to take care of the public garden, also developing over time two commoning projects
Reflexive interfaces	Participation of the group in the participatory processes organized by the Urban Center Urban Center Internal to the public institution Nine years of participatory processes Dismantled when the local government changed	Over time, the group signed a Subsidiarity Pact to formalise its public activities and collaboration with the municipality NGO D-Hub External to the public institution Intertwined with the Social Street and civil organizations Constantly playing a mediator role between informal groups of citizens and public institutions

two groups, at the individual and community levels. However, merging the collected data with the additional information collected after the fieldwork and observing the groups in a longer time perspective, it seems that the similarities of life trajectories and family type between the Social Street members in Ferrara did not contribute to favour social cohesion in the neighbourhood. Indeed, only a few members of the Social Street maintain their personal relationships with others. In Verona, instead, the shared place attachment towards the neighbourhood, even though based on personal and culturally different backgrounds for each member of the Social Street, represented a strong positive factor for the cohesion of the group, which remains dense and active with the development of further common projects and initiatives, both offline and online during the pandemic.

Looking at the Social Streets-local governments relationship and the institutional level, both Social Streets were composed of citizens who were not previously in contact with the public administration of Ferrara and Verona and were not involved in the decision-making for the governance of public spaces. The alternative practices of public life encouraged the two Social Streets to open the dialogue with their local governments. That is where differences between the two cases emerged.

In Ferrara, the behaviour of the Urban Centre to search for informal groups of citizens who are taking care of their local areas facilitated the negotiations of responsibilities among diverse actors in the city. The Urban Centre, indeed, opened a space for dialogue and contestation to confront institutional governance arrangements of the public space with new solutions proposed by citizens. Within this space of dialogue, the citizens, including the Social Street, negotiated the rights and responsibilities of their being public and, consequently, political actors. They had the possibility to shape public regulations which contribute to managing the urban space of the whole city and establish their role in the use and maintenance of the space itself. However, after 9 years of participatory processes with the citizens, the City of Ferrara—with a change of the local party in power—stopped to fund the Urban Center which was dismantled.

In Verona, instead, the power of decision-making processes for the governance and care of public spaces remained in the hands of the local government and civil society groups which are already included in the urban governance. Indeed, the redevelopment process of the abandoned building and the subsidiarity regulation resulted from a dialogue between the City and these groups, missing to include counter-hegemonic groups, which may have different perceptions of citizenship and political actions. Also, the District's initial refusal to allow the Social Street to use the garden depicted the reticence of local institutions in listening to and accepting alternative groups, interests and values. Thus, the increased political dimension of social cohesion within the Social Street did not coincide with the increase of the same dimension within Verona's local institutions, at least not concerning the cohesion of the specific neighbourhood of Veronetta. Notwithstanding, the NGO D-Hub played constantly the role of mediator between the Social Street as an informal group of citizens and the District as representative of the City. Thanks to this mediation, the District finally recognised the importance of the Social Street activities for the local population. This recognition was slow

as was the dissemination of the Subsidiarity Regulation, which, later became an instrument of collaboration between the Social Street and the Municipality.

In the space for dialogue and contestation accessed by Ferrara's Social Street, Municipality and other civil actors and in the mediating role acted by the NGO D-Hub in Verona, we recognise the arrangement of reflexive interfaces, which are organized moments and places where different actors can actually meet, dialogue and eventually negotiate, accepting the other participants' interests, values and aims. Reflexivity is represented by the ability to reflect on negotiations and communications, evaluate how to modify the negotiation process itself and change one's behaviour or approach to achieve one's goal and favour that of other groups (Archer 2012; Prandini 2013). The reflexive interfaces recall the mediating structures, conceptualised by Berger and Neuhaus (1977) to define the institutions standing between the individual in his private life and the large institutions of public life. The difference is that reflexive interfaces mediate public roles in the public realm (Lofland 1989; 1998) between collective actors. On the opposite, the similarity is that reflexive interfaces—as the mediating structures—need to be institutionalized in structures, or at least become legitimised collectively. If they are sporadic and occasional, they might be able to favour social cohesion in its political perspective, but temporarily and at a territorial micro-scale.

In the case of local governments, they are consultation and decision-making devices used to collect and listen to the needs and proposals of civil society and transform them into decisions: the Urban Centre in Ferrara is a reflexive interface. In the case of civil society groups, reflexive interfaces are representative roles of formal and informal organizations set up to deal with the local government, as already pointed out by other studies on the role of non-profit organizations in encouraging community involvement to support social cohesion (see Shier et al. 2022): the NGO D-Hub in Verona is a reflexive interface.

Following the evolution of the Social Streets show the development of the two reflexive interfaces in both cities. When the Urban Center in Ferrara was dismantled, the Social Street lost the link with the municipality's offices and the direct channel for communication with the institutions. The permanence of the mediating role of the NGO D-Hub allows the Social Street to seize the opportunity of collaborating with the City when the latter is finally ready. In this case, besides keeping constant over time, the reflexive interface is external from the public institutions of the city, so as to be independent of the power transformation between parties, and it is strictly intertwined, or internal, with the informal group of citizens and the organization of civil society. Thus, on a long-time perspective, the role played by a reflexive interface such as the NGO D-hub seems more efficient in terms of favouring both the cultural and political perspectives of social cohesion at three levels: individual, community and institutions, even if local.

Open conclusions for future research

Besides the evidence presented in the discussion, further considerations about the characteristics of this study are appropriate to reason out the contribution of this work. Research like this one should evolve for long period of time to investigate all the changing social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental dimensions which impact on social cohesion. The analysis conducted takes into consideration only the cultural and political perspective of social cohesion, according to the problematization of the concept (Novy et al. 2012) and in reference to the two urban issues tackled here: social isolation and the crisis of public spaces. However, research about the four perspectives of social cohesion (socioeconomic, culture, ecology, and politics) would be necessary to address the complexity of all the dynamics which underpin inclusion and exclusion in political and social participation.

Moreover, the analysis focused on the Social Street phenomenon as one of the various citizens' actions impacting isolation and the use of public space. Nevertheless, European cities represent the stage for many other similar experiences, which are either informally triggered by groups of citizens or activated by funded European or municipal projects (e.g. the Living Street¹³ and the Future Street¹⁴ in Belgium (Ganugi 2018) or the Play Street¹⁵ in UK). The study, therefore, may be useful to understand better those cases too or to investigate the enabling conditions for the development of reflexive interfaces in different contexts.

Indeed, building on the previous studies, this contribution focuses on the interdependencies between individuals, communities, and institutions (Fonseca et al. 2019). Urban communities—such as Social Streets—can be enablers of alternative and innovative practices of participation in public life and socialisation activities (Harvey 2012; Moulaert et al. 2013; Eizaguirre and Pares 2018), by fostering a sense of belonging, place attachment, commoning practices and political action in the form of participation in public affairs. They can be a booster of social cohesion culturally and politically (Miciukiewicz et al. 2012) at the individual and community levels. However, to foster social cohesion in a long-term perspective at the institutional level and challenge mainstream cultural discourses and institutional arrangements of public spaces governance, local alternative initiatives need to enter bottom-linked governance models thanks to the mediation of reflexive interfaces. The bottom-linked approach recognises the centrality of initiatives taken by those immediately concerned but stresses the necessity of institutions that would enable, gear, or sustain such initiatives through sound, regulated and lasting practices (Moulaert 2010; Eizaguirre et al. 2012; Moulaert et al. 2017).

Social cohesion is thus produced and increased when the links—that are the reflexive interfaces—between different territorial scales and actors are arranged, resulting eventually in urban capabilities (Sassen 2012), which are the ability to transform conflicts into new power structures precisely for those citizens who

¹³ <https://www.leefstraat.be/the-ghent-pioneering/>; <https://stad.gent/en/city-governance-organisation/featured-projects/living-streets>.

¹⁴ <http://www.toekomststraat.be/>.

¹⁵ <https://playingout.net/>; <https://londonplaystreets.org.uk/>; <https://laplaystreets.com/>.

were previously excluded, and in the formation of innovative and alternative urban solutions.

Acknowledgements The authors would like to thank all the participants in the research, belonging to the Social Streets, other civil society organizations and the municipalities of Ferrara and Verona for being available and collaborative during the whole period of the research. Giulia Ganugi thanks, in particular, the Social Streets' members who welcomed and included her as part of the two groups.

Author contributions All authors contributed to the study's conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by GG, during her Ph.D. research. The first draft of the manuscript was written by GG and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding Open access funding provided by Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna within the CRUI-CARE Agreement. All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Giulia Ganugi, during her Ph.D. research which was financed by the University of Bologna between October 2015 and September 2018.

Data availability The datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Ethical approval According to the Department of Sociology and Business Law of the University of Bologna, which was the main institution of Giulia Ganugi's Ph.D. program, Ph.D. students do not have to require ethics approval, but they are asked to perform their research in accordance with relevant guidelines. Giulia Ganugi confirms she performed her research in accordance with "The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity", Published in Berlin by ALLEA—All European Academies, in 2017.

Human and animal rights The research involved humans. For all the interviews and the focus groups that include the collection of personal data, the first author collected informed consent from each participant. This is the case for Social Street members, while the interviews with public administration representatives and Third Sector actors did not collect any personal data.

Informed consent For all the interviews and the focus groups that include the collection of personal data, the first author collected informed consent from each participant. The collected personal data include: (1) Age, (2) Genre, (3) Nationality, (4) City of birth, (5) Year of arrival in the neighbourhood, (6) Education, (7) Occupation and (8) Household composition. This is the case for Social Street members, while the interviews with public administration representatives and Third Sector actors did not collect any personal data.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Akhavan M, Mariotti I, Astolfi L, Canevari A (2019) Coworking spaces and new social relations: a focus on the social streets in Italy. *Urban Sci* 3(2):1–11
- Altman I, Low S (1992) *Place attachment*. Plenum Press, New York
- Amin A, Thrift N (2002) *Cities: reimagining the urban*. Polity, Cambridge
- Archer M (2012) *The reflexive imperative in late modernity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Augè M, Pasqualini C (2016) Habiter les Villes-Monde (Non/Virtuels/Nouveaux) Lieux et relations sociales. *Stud Sociol* 4:303–313
- Bacon N (2013) *Plugging the gap: turning strangers into neighbours*. RSA - Action and Research Centre, London
- Bales RF, Talcot P (1956) *Family: socialization and interaction process*. Routledge, London
- Berger PL, Neuhaus RJ (1977) *To empower people: the role of mediating structures in public policy*. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, D.C
- Berger-Schmitt R (2002) Considering social cohesion in quality of life assessments: concepts and measurements. *Soc Indic Res* 58:403–428
- Blokland T (2017) *Community as urban practice*. Polity Press, Cambridge
- Braaten LJ (1991) Group cohesion: a new multidimensional model. *Group* 15:39–55
- Bulmer M, Solomos J (2017) *Multiculturalism, social cohesion and immigration: shifting conceptions in the UK, ethnic and racial studies*. Taylor & Francis, New York
- Cabitza F, Scramaglia R, Cornetta D, Simone C (2016) When the web supports communities of place: the “Social Street” case in Italy. *Int J Web Based Commun* 12(3):216–237
- Cassiers T, Kesteloot C (2012) Socio-spatial inequalities and social cohesion in European cities. *Urban Stud* 49(9):1909–1924
- Castells M, Fernández-Ardèvol M, Qiu JL, Sey A (2006) *Mobile communication and society. A global perspective*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge
- Castrignanò M, Morelli N (2019) Le Social Street come forme di ordinaria azione civica: prospettive di ricerca. *Stud Sociol* 4:397–412
- Chavis DM, Wandersman A (1990) Sense of community in the urban environment: a catalyst for participation and community development. *Am J Commun Psychol* 18(1):55–81
- Council of Europe (2008) *Report of high-level task force on social cohesion: towards an active fair and socially cohesive Europe*.
- Dekker K, Van Kempen R (2009) Participation, social cohesion and the challenges in the governance process: an analysis of a post-world war II neighbourhood in The Netherlands. *Eur Plan Stud* 17(1):109–130
- Dellenbaugh M, Kip M, Bieniok M, Muller AK, Schwegmann M (eds) (2015) *Urban commons. Moving beyond state and market*. Birkhäuser, Basel
- Dellenbaugh M, Zimmermann NE, de Vries N (2020) *The urban commons cookbook: strategies and insights for creating and maintaining urban commons*. Available at <https://www.urbancommons-cookbook.com> with a CC-BY-SA license
- Durkheim É (1897) *Le suicide: étude de sociologie*. F. Alcan, New York
- Egholm L, Heyse L, Mourey D (2020) Civil society organizations: the site of legitimizing the common good—a literature review. *Voluntas Int J Volunt Nonprofit Organ* 31:1–18
- Eizaguirre S, Parès M (2018) Communities making social change from below. Social innovation and democratic leadership in two disenfranchised neighbourhoods in Barcelona. *Urban Res Pract* 12(2):173–191
- Eizaguirre S, Pradel M, Terrones A, Martínez-Celorrío X, García M (2012) Multilevel governance and social cohesion: bringing back conflict in citizenship practices. *Urban Stud* 49(9):1999–2016
- Festinger L, Back KW, Schachter S (1950) *Social pressures in informal groups: a study of human factors in housing*. Stanford University Press, Lincoln
- Fonseca X, Lukosch S, Brazier FMT (2019) Social cohesion revisited: a new definition and how to characterize it. *Innov Eur J Soc Sci Res* 32(2):231–253
- Forrest R, Kearns A (2001) Social cohesion, social capital and the neighbourhood. *Urban Stud* 38(12):2125–2143
- Foster SR (2013) Collective action and the urban commons. *Notre Dam Law Rev* 87(1):57–133
- Gamberoni E (2015) Quando la street è social: Una suggestione per la geografia sociale? *Bollettino Della Società Geografica Italiana* 8(2):306–309

- Ganugi G (2018) The role of commoning and mutually shaped citizenship in developing bottom-linked governance. The projects Living Street and Future Street in Belgium. *Sociologia e Politiche Sociali* 21:51–70
- Giddens A (1990) *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford University Press, Stanford
- Granovetter MS (1973) The strength of weak ties. *Am J Sociol* 78(6):1360–1380
- Hardt M, Negri A (2009) *Commonwealth*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge
- Harvey D (2012) *Rebel cities: from the right to the city to the urban revolution*. Verso, London
- Huron A (2017) Theorising the urban commons: new thought, tensions and path forward. *Urban Stud* 54(4):1–8
- Iaione C (2015) Governing the urban commons. *Italian J Public Law* 7(1):170–221
- Igalla M, Edelenbos J, van Meerkerk I (2019) Citizens in action, What do they accomplish? A systematic literature review of citizen initiatives, their main characteristics, outcomes, and factors. *Voluntas Int J Volunt Nonprofit Organ* 30:176–1194
- Introini F, Pasqualini C (2017) Connected proximity. «Social Streets» between social life and new forms of activism. In: Antonelli F (ed) *NET-ACTIVISM how digital technologies have been changing individual and collective actions*. RomaTre Press, Roma, pp 117–126
- Introini F, Morelli N, Pasqualini C (2021) Neighbours' conviviality without gatherings. *Social streets in times of lockdown*. *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 14:302–320
- Iveson K (2013) Cities within the city: do-it-yourself urbanism and the right to the city. *Int J Urban Reg Res* 37(3):941–956
- Jacobs J (1961) *The death and life of great American cities*. Random House, New York
- Jason LA, Stevens E, Ram D (2015) Development of a three-factor psychological sense of community scale. *J Community Psychol* 43(8):973–985
- Jeannotte MS (2003) Singing alone? The contribution of cultural capital to social cohesion and sustainable communities. *Int J Cult Policy* 9:35–49
- Jenson J (2010) *defining and measuring social cohesion*. The Commonwealth Secretariat and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, London
- Jessen MH (2019) Rescuing welfare society: political strategies for mobilizing civil society in Denmark, 2010–2018. *Voluntas Int J Volunt Nonprofit Organ* 30:369–380
- Kearns A, Forrest R (2000) Social cohesion and multilevel urban governance. *Urban Stud* 37(5–6):995–1017
- Kim J, Kaplan R (2004) Physical and psychological factors in sense of community. *New urbanist kentlands and nearby orchard village*. *Environ Behav* 36(3):313–340
- Lockwood D (1999) Civic integration and social cohesion. In: Gough I, Olofsson G (eds) *Capitalism and social cohesion*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp 63–84
- Lofland LH (1989) Social life in the public realm. A review. *J Contemp Ethnogr* 17(4):453–482
- Lofland LH (1998) *The public realm: exploring the city's quintessential social territory*. Aldine de Gruyter, Hawthorne
- Macchioni E, Gianluca M, Ganugi G (2017) Innovazione sociale e sviluppo territoriale. Quando la strada si fa comunità. *Sociologia Urbana e Rurale* 114:130–147
- Maxwell J (1996) *Social dimensions of economic growth*. Department of Economics, University of Alberta, London
- McMillan DW, Chavis DM (1986) Sense of community: a definition and theory. *J Commun Psychol* 14(1):6–23
- Miciukiewicz K, Moulart F, Novy A, Musterd S, Hillier J (2012) Introduction. Problematising urban social cohesion: a transdisciplinary endeavour. *Urban Stud* 49(9):1855–1872
- Mitchell D (2003) *The right to the city. Social justice and the fight for public space*. The Guilford Press, New York
- Morelli N (2019) Creating urban sociality in middle-class neighbourhoods in milan and bologna: a study on the social streets phenomenon. *City Commun* 18(3):834–852
- Mosconi G, Korn M, Reuter C, Tolmie P, Teli M, Pipek V (2017) From facebook to the neighbourhood: infrastructuring of hybrid community engagement. *Comput Support Coop Work* 26(4–6):959–1003
- Moulart F (2010) Social innovation and community development. Concepts, theories and challenges. In: Moulart F, Martinelli F, Swyngedouw E, Gonzalez S (eds) *Can neighbourhoods save the city? Community development and social innovation*. Routledge, London, pp 4–16
- Moulart F, MacCallum D (2019) *Advanced introduction to social innovation*. Edward Edgar Publisher, London

- Moulaert F, MacCallum D, Mehmood A, Hamdouch A (eds) (2013) The international handbook on social innovation. Collective action, social learning and transdisciplinary research. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham
- Moulaert F, Mehmood A, MacCallum D, Leubolt B (2017) Social innovation as a trigger of transformations. The role of research. European Union, Luxembourg
- Nasar JL, Julian DA (1995) The psychological sense of community in the neighborhood. *J Am Plann Assoc* 61(2):178–184
- Neal ZP (2017) Taking stock of the diversity and sense of community debate. *Am J Commun Psychol* 59(3–4):255–260
- Neal ZP, Neal JW (2014) The(in)compatibility of diversity and sense of community. *Am J Commun Psychol* 53:1–12
- Novy A, Swiatek DC, Moulaert F (2012) Social cohesion: a conceptual and political elucidation. *Urban Stud* 49(9):1873–1889
- Nuvolati G (2014) Innovazione sociale, partecipazione e social street. *EyesReg Giornale Di Scienze Regionali* 4(5):130–134
- OECD (2011) Perspectives on global development 2012, perspectives on global development. OECD Publishing, London
- Pais I, Provasi G (2015) Sharing economy: A step towards the re-embeddedness of the economy? *Stato e Mercato* 105(3):347–377
- Pasqualini C (2019) Social street: il vicinato al tempo di Internet. *Aggiornamenti Social* 2019:46–54
- Pasqualini C (2018) Vicini e connessi. Rapporto sulle Social Street a Milano, Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milano
- Perkins DD, Long AD (2002) Neighbourhood sense of community and social capital. A multi-level analysis. In: Fisher A, Sonn C, Bishop B (eds) *Psychological sense of community: research, application, and implications*. Plenum, New York, pp 291–318
- Prandini R (2013) Reflexive social subjectivities. In: Archer M, Maccarini A (eds) *Engaging with the world. Agency, institutions, historical formations*. Routledge, Abingdon, pp 57–84
- Prandini R, Ganugi G (2022) Citizens' networks and civic responsibility chains for a communitarian response to the post-pandemic vulnerabilities. *Stud Sociol* 1:51–63
- Putnam RB (2000) *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster, New York
- Rosanvallon P (2008) *Counter-democracy. Politics in an age of distrust*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Rutland T (2013) Activists in the making: urban movements, political processes and the creation of political subjects. *Int J Urban Reg Res* 37(3):989–1011
- Sarason SB (1974) *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco
- Sassen S (2011) The global street: making the political. *Globalizations* 8(5):573–579
- Sassen S (2012) Urban capabilities: an essay on our challenges and differences. *J Int Aff* 65(2):85–95
- Shier ML, Hand F, Turpin A (2022) Measuring a nonprofit's civic footprint. *Voluntas*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-022-00456-9>
- Somers MR (2008) *Genealogies of citizenship. Markets, statelessness, and the right to have rights*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Stanica AE (2014) *Strada sociale. Il fenomeno Social Street, nascita ed evoluzione nel contesto Bolognese*. Interwideo
- Stavrides S (2016) *Common space. The city as commons*. Zed Books, London
- Townley G, Kloos B, Green EP, Franco MM (2011) Reconcilable differences? Human diversity, cultural relativity, and sense of community. *Am J Community Psychol* 47:69–85
- Van Puyvelde S, Brown WA (2016) Determinants of nonprofit sector density: a stakeholder approach. *Voluntas Int J Volunt Nonprofit Organ* 27:1045–1063
- Völker B, Flap H, Lindenberg S (2007) When are neighbourhoods communities? Community in dutch neighbourhoods. *Eur Sociol Rev* 23(1):99–114
- Waardenburg M (2021) Understanding the microfoundations of government—civil society relations. *Voluntas Int J Volunt Nonprofit Organ* 32:548–560