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RUNNING HEAD: Social Participation and Children's Lifestyles

**Civic and Political Participation of Children and Adolescents: A Lifestyle Analysis  
for Positive Youth Developmental Programs**

September 9, 2014

## Abstract

Social participation plays a key role in predicting positive youth development (PYD). As a previous step of this link, this research examined how children and adolescents' relational lifestyles influenced their participation in political and civic activities. This research provides a multi-dimensional approach to the study of children's social participation, based on six children's lifestyles factors (i.e. family dialogue, risky behaviours, cultural activities, civic values, family supervision, and peer group relationships). Using data from an international survey that included 6130 participants (2198 Spanish, 3932 Italian, *Mage* = 13.8), this study's results show that relational lifestyles (especially family dialogue, risky behaviours and out-of-school cultural activities) are positively related to political and civic participation among children and adolescents. On the contrary, some peer group relationships decreased their social participation in those key dimensions for PYD. Limitations of the current study, implications for future policy decisions, and applications to children social programs are discussed.

Keywords: Positive Development, Civic engagement, Participation, Children, Lifestyles, Relationships

Social participation, which, also known as civic or community engagement, refers to one's degree of participation in a community or society, is . The relational developmental systems theory suggests that social participation is associated with positive and healthy youth development (PYD), which is a strength based view that focuses on positive characteristics and prevention rather than on negative and unhealthy outcomes (Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003). For instance, social participation Civic engagement plays a key role for individuals and societies in determining the level of democratic life, social capital and cohesion in a country (Hart, UNICEF, & International Child Development Centre, 1992; Putnam, 2000), influencing the resources offered by the context for personal thriving (Basarab, 2012) and increasing dialogue in the public sphere and political . Without children's social participation, public discourse is polarized, politicians ignore citizens' needs, and the system lacks legitimacy (Howard & Gilbert, 2008).

This study's main aim is to understand the factors associated with social participation among children. The work's novelty resides in its use of lifestyle theory to explore its influence on a relevant factor for PYD (i.e., social participation civic engagement). This sociological approach to researching children and adolescents' participation, which consider relational individual lifestyles to capture the phenomenon's complexity in a broader manner, have been applied to studying children's political participation and other socially complex phenomena (Faggiano, 2007; Livingstone et al., 2012; Garcia Ruiz, 2010).

### *Social Participation and Children Positive Development*

Although social participation can adopt different forms, this research focuses on two of them, which facilitate positive youth-adult relationships are recognized to provide

young people with the possibility to contribute in community development and indicate their effective social engagement: civic (e.g. charity volunteering, nongovernmental organizations, etc.) and political (e.g. political campaigns, political parties, social activism, advocating activities, etc.) participation (Lerner, 2004; Skelton, Boyte, & Leonard, 2002). The former refers to a community's problem solving behaviours, such as volunteering in a nongovernmental organization (NGO) (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli-Carpini, 2006). The latter refers to behaviours adopted with the goal of influencing the political decision-making process, such as supporting a political campaign against violence (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Engagement in social activities as an indicator of social capital and personal sociability and empowerment, has been a long-standing topic of interest in political science, sociology, and psychology (Foschi & Lauriola, 2014). Nowadays, particularly for European societies, understanding participation is important because children's average participation in and personal effort towards community wellbeing is low (Bermudez, 2012): fewer than 8 per cent participate in human rights or global development organisations, only 5 per cent are members of a political party or organization and 12 per cent reported their involvement in other non-governmental organisations (Flash Barometer 375; European Commission, 2013).

#### *Family and, Peer groups and Participation*

Previous literature has noted the importance of peer groups (Matsuba, Hart, & Atkin, 2007; Simpkins, Eccles, & Becnel, 2008) and family relationships (Hart, Atkins, Markey, & Youniss, 2004; Omoto & Snyder, 1995) in studying participation. Their importance family and friends have on social participation is illustrated extensively by inquiries demonstrating that volunteers are usually recruited in those socialisationsocialization contexts (Independent Sector, 2001). However, it is unclear

whether family is linearly related to participation or if it depends on a more complex type of relationship. For instance, Thomas (1971) found that the extent interaction in conservative families was negatively associated with male student political activism. The author argued that this negative relationship is driven by conservative families' lack of warmth, echoing other authors (e.g. Schiff, 1964). The study did not, however, offer proportionate evidence in favour of this hypothesis, since he did not measure authoritarian climate. Other authors have incorporated family as an important factor in determining civic participation in their models (e.g. Matsuba, Hart, & Atkin, 2007; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). ~~The importance family and friends have on participation is illustrated extensively by inquiries demonstrating that volunteers are usually recruited in those socialisation contexts (Independent Sector, 2001).~~

The family's impact on social participation can be analysed by dividing its internal processes into dimensions. Family supervision (i.e. control over children's behaviours and opinions) and family dialogue (i.e. the democratic interchange of opinions within a family) have been considered relevant to children's decisions (Hart, Atkins, Markey, & Youniss, 2004; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). The former, however, could be negatively related to participation, since under certain conditions it may be expressed in an excessive manner. These conditions could be cultural in the case of Spain and Italy, where authoritarian parenting styles are still common compared to other European countries (e.g. Martínez & García, 2007). An authoritarian parenting style is characterised by excessive control over children, wherein parents are highly demanding and have low responsiveness (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994), which, in turn, results in poor children's adjustment.

#### *Cultural Activities and Civic Values*

In addition to family and peer groups relationships, Besides family and peer relationships, values are relevant factors related to social participation. the access to out-of-school resources and the possibility to participate in cultural activities facilitate children to explore and develop social interests and skills (Lerner & Silbereisen, 2007). Some studies have confirmed that value systems influence political orientation in national elections. For instance Civic values are relevant factors related to social participation:., for instance, benevolence is related to cooperative behaviour and universalism in relation to the promotion of social justice and environmental preservation is strongly and positively correlated with political activism (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz, 2007). The direct impact of cultural activities and values on behaviour, however, is not completely clear. Recently, some authors have pointed out that conformity and personal security are negatively correlated with public participation (Hackett, 2014; Roets, Cornelis, & Van Hiel, 2014).

#### *Risky Behaviours and Participation*

In addition to values and family and peer group relationships, pPrevious research has shown that the study of risky behaviours might contribute towards understanding participation (Finlay & Flanagan, 2013; Vieno, Nation, Perkins, & Santinello, 2007). Some authors have found a negative main effect of risky behaviours on participation (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997), while others suggest that the relationship between the two is more complex and could lead to paradoxical outcomes (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). For instance, Vieno and colleagues (2007) found a U-shaped relationship between civic participation and behavioural problems such as alcohol and tobacco abuse, bullying, and physical fighting, but only for boys. This showed that many behavioural problems were associated to a high frequency of participation and that the contrary was true. They argued that these results might reflect

a selection bias, since those children involved in the highest levels of participation may have been required to participate, such as mandatory community service, because of past behavioural problems. Alternatively, they provided another explanation that is consistent with this research: frequent civic participation might introduce boys into a peer group, including problematic ones who are likelier to use drugs and alcohol, which may socially give them prestige among their peers.

### *Socio-demographic Characteristics*

Finally, some authors have argued that socio-demographic indicators are important in distinguishing volunteers and non-volunteers (e.g. Matsuba, Hart, & Atkin, 2007; Grube & Pivialin, 2000), whereas personality researchers have posited the contrary, that socio-demographic variables are empirically irrelevant in predicting volunteering (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Other disagreements between authors have highlighted the controversy regarding how the factors linked to participation are influenced by socio-demographic variables (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Omoto & Snyder, 2002).

In summary, there are several factors that have been proposed to affect participation while it is not yet clear the direction and the strength of the associations. This research seeks to shed some light on this controversial arena based on lifestyles theory, a multi-dimensional approach that has been used to study other complex, social phenomena. Furthermore, this study aims to provide researchers, decision makers, and practitioners, who work with and for children and adolescents, with evidence to develop effective, targeted campaigns, thereby facilitating children's empowerment, participation, and positive development.

### *Objective of the current research*



The aim of the current research was to provide, from a relational sociological perspective, a contribution to the study of a relevant factor associated with PYD: social participation. Specifically, we tested whether lifestyle dimensions (family dialogue, out-of-school activities, and peer group relationships) in two European countries (Spain and Italy) could predict participation frequency. Based on the literature review, we tested the following three hypotheses:

H<sup>1</sup>: In addition to socio-demographic variables, lifestyles factors predict political participation.

H<sup>2</sup>: In addition to socio-demographic variables, lifestyles factors predict civic participation.

H<sup>3</sup>: Political and civic participation are not equally affected by lifestyle factors.

Moreover, as suggested in previous studies (Faggiano, 2007), it is useful to detect the differences between civic (e.g. volunteering and NGOs) and political participation (e.g. political parties and ecological activism) to comprehend which lifestyle factors properly predict each type of participation. Thus, the design of interventions to tackle the lack of participation might be improved by understanding which factors are linked to lower or higher participation rates. This could also lead to segmentation designs that improve children and adolescent lifestyles through specific pro-participation campaigns.

## Method

### *Participants and Design*

The 'Safe Social Media' project is an observational, cross-sectional study of the general children and adolescent population. Six thousand one hundred and thirty (6 130) students participated anonymously (45.8 per cent male and 54.2 per cent female).

Participants were selected from schools located in the main geographical areas of Spain

(2 198) and Italy (3 932). Those countries' socio-economic structures, welfare regimes, and children and adolescents' educational achievements are similar. School authorities and parents agreed to allow students to fill in a questionnaire during school hours. Their ages ranged from 12 to 19 (*Mean* = 13.82; *SD* = 1.66). A multi-stage stratified random cluster sampling strategy was used to select three regions in each country of residence (North, Central, and South). Schools and classes were randomly selected within each of them. The actual sampling error (in the case of a simple random sample, with a confidence level of 95.5 per cent (two sigmas) and  $P=Q$ ) is  $\pm 1.3$  per cent for the final sample.

#### *Procedure*

Data was collected between 29 November 2011 and 22 May 2012. The schools (34 in Italy and 23 in Spain) were randomly selected. Once informed consent was obtained from participating educational establishments and parents, selected students filled in the questionnaire anonymously and confidentially using computer terminals. It was agreed that it would be filled in during a compulsory attendance class to avoid the probability of incurring a self-selection bias. Data was collected regarding their family relationships, peer groups, values, risky behaviours, and leisure activities. In addition, socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and socio-economic status were recorded. Surveys were completed in both Spanish and Italian, respectively. Teachers and trainers were given some basic guidelines to enable them to administer the surveys, which were duly carried out during lesson time.

#### *Predictor Variables*

##### *Socio-demographic variables*

Age was measured by asking participants 'How old are you?' Response options ranged from 12 to 18 years old. The gender variable was dummy coded. Males and

females were assigned values of one and zero respectively. Socio-economic status was inferred from the father's occupation and a five-point scale index was constructed ranging from one (Low socio-economic status) to five (High socio-economic status). Socio-cultural status was measured using a five-point scale ranging from one (Low socio-cultural status) to five (High socio-cultural status). Country of residence was also dummy coded (0 = Spain, 1 = Italy).

### *Lifestyles*

Thirty eight items measuring attitudes, behaviours, and values were used as our lifestyle variables (example of items are listed below). The response format ranged from one 'Never' to five 'Very much'. A parallel analysis was then conducted on those items to determine the number of factors that needed to be extracted. Previous investigation has shown that this method is more reliable for determining the number of factors to extract than, for example, Kaiser's rule of eigenvalues greater than one (Zwick & Velicer, 1986). This procedure indicated that six factors needed extraction. Then, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the total sample ( $N = 6\ 130$ ). Regarding the theoretical framework, we selected an oblique rotation (oblimin) because a correlation between the factors is expected. The method to estimate the factors was maximum likelihood (ML) since skewness and kurtosis did not indicate strong deviation from normality (see Table 2). The results indicated that the six factors extracted accounted for 36.08 per cent of the variance of the test (for factor loadings, see Table 1). The internal consistency of the total scale was good ( $\alpha = .83$ ). From the perspective of lifestyles, the six factors' structure is theoretically relevant and might be easily explained (Corcuera, Irala, Osorio, & Rivera, 2010; Faggiano, 2007). The first factor, called 'Family dialogue', is composed of 11 items with high reliability ( $\alpha = .91$ ). 'I have talked to my parents about the country's political and social situation' or 'I have talked

to my parents about drugs and alcohol abuse' are two examples. The second factor, called 'Risky behaviours', consists of four items with high reliability ( $\alpha = .78$ ). Item options included, 'When I hang out with my friends, I consume alcohol' or 'I smoke cigarettes'. The third factor, 'Cultural activities', has seven items with moderate reliability ( $\alpha = .52$ ). There are no specific cut-offs for reliability and even relatively low (e.g., .50) levels of reliability do not seriously attenuates validity coefficients (Schmitt, 1996). For this reason, and because these subscales are central to lifestyles theory and alpha's value is dependent on the number of items in the scale, and increasing the number of items increases the value (Cronbach, 1951), in this study we maintained the scales which alpha's value is greater than .50. Examples of items in the 'cultural activities' subscale include: 'I have attended cultural activities such as going to museums and theatres' or 'I have participated in artistic activities such as choir singing or playing an instrument'. The fourth factor, labelled 'Civic values', is composed of four items with high reliability ( $\alpha = .74$ ) that correspond to two of the ten basic values analysed by Schwartz (2007): benevolence and conformity. 'It is important for me to do things to improve my town or community' or 'It is important for me to obey authority' are factor item examples. The fifth factor, called 'Family supervision', consists of eight items with high reliability ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Item examples include: 'My parents know where I am going or what I am doing during my leisure time' or 'My parents know if I drink or smoke with my friends'. The sixth factor, named 'Peer group relationships', includes four items with moderate reliability ( $\alpha = .57$ ). Item examples include: 'In my peer group, I can give my opinion without fear because others will respect me' or 'My peer group supports me regarding many topics that I disagree with my parents on'. The mean of each factor (i.e. family dialogue, risky behaviours, social activities, character values,

family supervision, and peer groups) was retained as six different predictor variables to be employed to compute OLS regressions on two dependent variables.

### *Criterion Variables*

#### *Political Participation*

To measure political participation, participants were asked to rate the frequency of their 'participation in an ecological and political groups' and their 'participation in political activities (Annex 1) such as a student assembly or political party' using a five-point scale ranging from one 'Never' to five 'Every day or almost every day'. We considered social activism as related to political participation, in this case advocating for rights in an ecological group, because politics often implies advocating activities. These two items were significantly correlated ( $r = .479, p < .001$ ), and thus were averaged to create a composite index of political participation.

#### *Civic Participation*

To a second measure this criterion variable, was created using the same procedure. Respondents were asked to rate the frequency of their 'general participation in volunteer activities' and their 'participation in non-governmental organisations or charities (Annex 1)'. using a five-point scale ranging from one 'Never' to five 'Every day or almost every day'. These two items were also significantly correlated ( $r = .487, p < .001$ ), and thus were averaged to create a composite index of civic participation.

## Results

#### *Political Participation*

Multiple hierarchical OLS regressions, as recommended by Aiken and West (1991), were computed to test our hypotheses. In the first block, socio-demographic variables were entered as predictors. In the second block, lifestyles factors were entered (for means, SD, etc., see Table 2, and for coefficients, see Table 3). The first block

explained 3.1 per cent of the total political participation variance ( $R^2 = .031, p < .001$ ). The second block explained 24.7 per cent of the total criterion variance ( $R^2 = .247, p < .001$ ). The change in  $R^2$  between blocks was statistically significant ( $\Delta R^2 = .216, p < .001$ ). Among the first block's socio-demographic variables, the regression analyses revealed a significant main effect of socio-cultural status,  $\beta = .022, t(5083) = 3.341, p = .001$ , indicating that political participation increases as socio-cultural status grows up. Conversely, political participation decreased as socio-economic status increased,  $\beta = -.048, t(5083) = -8.594, p < .001$ . A significant main effect of gender also emerged,  $\beta = .131, t(5083) = 9.179, p < .001$ , which indicated that political participation was greater for males ( $M = 1.25, SD = .63$ ) than for females ( $M = 1.12, SD = .38$ ). Neither age ( $p = .860$ ) nor country of residence ( $p = .663$ ) had a significant effect. As predicted, both countries had a similar value in criterion variable. Among the second block's lifestyles factors, 'family dialogue' significantly affected political participation,  $\beta = .028, t(5083) = 3.012, p = .003$ . 'Risky behaviours' also emerged as having a significant effect,  $\beta = .114, t(5083) = 12.336, p < .001$ . We also found a significant main effect for Cultural activities,  $\beta = .411, t(5083) = 32.810, p < .001$ . Conversely, civic values significant decreased political participation,  $\beta = -.050, t(5083) = -5.741, p < .001$ . 'Family supervision' was also found to have a significant effect,  $\beta = -.056, t(5083) = -6.378, p < .001$ . Finally, a significant main effect of Peers group relationships also emerged,  $\beta = -.031, t(5083) = -3.665, p < .001$ .

#### *Civic Participation*

The previous procedure was applied to compute multiple hierarchical OLS regression on civic participation. In the first block, socio-demographic variables were entered as predictors. In the second block, lifestyles factors were entered (see Table 3). The first block explained 1.1 per cent of the total variance in civic participation ( $R^2 =$

.011,  $p < .001$ ). The second block explained 20.7 per cent of the criterion's total variance ( $R^2 = .207$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The change in  $R^2$  between blocks was statistically significant ( $\Delta R^2 = .196$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Among the first block of socio-demographic variables, the regression analyses revealed a significant main effect of socio-economic status,  $\beta = -.043$ ,  $t(5\ 086) = -5.324$ ,  $p = .001$ , indicating that civic participation increased as socio-economic status decreased. There was also a main effect of age,  $\beta = .034$ ,  $t(5\ 086) = 5.625$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As respondents matured, their civic participation increased. Neither gender ( $p = .072$ ) nor socio-cultural status ( $p = .739$ ) nor country of residence ( $p = .541$ ), however, significantly affected participation, since both countries are similar. Among the second block of lifestyles factors, a main effect of 'Family dialogue' was found,  $\beta = .054$ ,  $t(5\ 086) = 3.943$ ,  $p < .001$ . A significant main effect of 'Risky behaviours' also emerged,  $\beta = .096$ ,  $t(5\ 086) = 7.087$ ,  $p < .001$ . We also found a significant main effect for 'Cultural activities',  $\beta = .558$ ,  $t(5\ 086) = 30.214$ ,  $p < .001$ . We also found a main effect for 'Civic values',  $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $t(5\ 086) = 2.638$ ,  $p = .008$ . Finally, a significant main effect of Peers group relationship also emerged,  $\beta = -.046$ ,  $t(5\ 086) = -3.703$ ,  $p < .001$ . Nonetheless, we did not find a significant main effect of Family supervision ( $p = .730$ ).

## Discussion

The results tend to support our hypotheses ( $H^1$  and  $H^2$ ) that, in addition to socio-demographic variables, latent lifestyles factors predict both political and civicsocial participation and therefore should be considered in youth development programs. For instance, we found that family dialogue, risky behaviours and cultural activities were positively associated with both political and civic participation, but risky behaviours was positively associated with both political and civic participation, cultural activities was positively associated with both political and civic participation, civic

values was negatively associated with political participation but positively associated with civic participation. , fFamily supervision was only negatively associated with political participation, and peers group relationships was positively negatively associated with both political and civic participation.

According with PYD recent studies, relational lifestyle factors have been found to influence children's flourishing. Browsers et al. (2014) showed that parenting profiles such as maternal warmth, parental school involvement and parental monitoring (similar to family dialogue and supervision in our study) have a profound impact on five PYD Cs factors (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring). Moreover, we also found that both participation types are not equally affected by lifestyle factors, as suggested by the change in slope signs, the differences in slope magnitude, and the difference in signification ( $H^3$ ).

As stated in the introduction, literature has shown that the factors linked to participation are unclear both in their importance and direction. To shed some light on this controversial arena, our research was based on the theory of lifestyles, a cross-disciplinary concept used in sociology for exploring behavioural patterns embedded in social interactions and mutually-influential relations among young people and their social and cultural contexts (for a review, see Faggiano, 2007).

As previously shown by other authors (e.g. Hart, Atkins, Markey, & Youniss, 2004; Putnam, 2000), this study found that family relationships are important predictors of social participation. We have divided this lifestyle factor, however, into two important dimensions: dialogue with parents and family supervision. The former, as expected, has a significant positive impact on both political and civic participation. This might be interpreted following Faggiano (2007), who has posited that more dialogue leads to more information, and consequently more participation. Contrarily, family



supervision has a negative impact on political participation. Although speculative, but based on previous studies on related topics (Donath, Graessel, Baier, Bleich, & Hillemacher, 2014) and approaches to PYD (Lerner & Silbereisen, 2007), this latter outcome could be the result of excessive negative control (authoritarian parenting style) over children, leading to lesser creativity and freedom in the decision-making process, and consequently lower participation rates. It is therefore important to incorporate family dialogue and family supervision separately to develop proper participation promotion programs.

Risky behaviours are associated with higher rates of both political and civic participation. As noted in the introduction, other authors have found similar outcomes for this counter-intuitive relationship. For instance, Vieno and colleagues (2007) state that higher and lower levels of risky behaviours are associated with higher levels of political participation (a U-shaped relationship). A possible explanation of these results is that those who are involved in risky behaviours need to restore the balance by engaging in community service. In this way, they can maintain a positive self-image by compensating their risky activities. The correlational nature of this study does not permit to rule out neither this possibility nor the contrary: that those who are engaged in politics and charity are under high pressure and, as a result, they need to release this tension by engaging in consumption compensatory activities.

In our research, we found that taking part in cultural activities is associated with a higher rate of participation. As stated before, people who access more information are in a better position to participate (Faggiano, 2007). Following this logic, culturally active people gain more information than those who do not and as a result, participate more. Another alternative explanation is that many of cultural activities imply some kind of participation. For instance, playing an instrument or singing in the choir are

cultural activities that need that participants play an active role. Following this logic, taking part of a political party or nongovernmental association are just different kind of participative activities.

It was found that civic values, as an independent measure, produced different participation outcomes. While it led to lower levels of political participation, it increased civic participation. This confirms recent studies regarding participation in public activities that argue that volunteering in a political party in Spain or Italy, where higher levels of political corruption exist (Della Porta, 2001; Mocerri, 2013), could be seen as 'not civic', unlike other European countries, such as Belgium or Netherlands, which have lower rates of corruption (Mauro, 1995).

Finally, although peer group relationships should facilitate participation (i.e. the higher the frequency of relationships within the peer group, the higher the participation level) and participation produced a counter-intuitive result. Based on previous research (Matsuba, Hart, & Atkin, 2007; Simpkins, Eccles, & Becnel, 2008), this peer groups should have facilitated participation (i.e. the higher the frequency of relationships within the peer group, the higher the participation level). This study, however, found the opposite, confirming previous research that provided evidence that the effect of social interactions on participation depends on those social networks characteristics and activities (McClurg, 2003). . This outcome could mean that the better a children's relationships are with his/her peer group, the smaller and more individualistic are his/her free time activities. Another reason could be that Spanish and Italian teenagers' friendships are not generating social capital and are focused on consumerist activities (like drinking, going to pubs or other public spaces, etc.), rather than on socially relevant ones.

Although the present study showed the influence of relational lifestyles on social participation, some of the coefficients were small. Although this might be reflecting a potential limitation of the predictive power of some factors, the variance of both civic and political participation explained by the six lifestyles factors, however, was around 20 per cent, which represents a considerable part of the variance.

Other limitation of this study is related to the reliability of the dependent measures. We asked analyzed only two ways of social participation (civic and political) and the political one participation is limited at an early age. The interviewees were , but there are several ways of participate in communit among teenagers from non – war zones :y. More items in the dependent measure would have allowed us to test participation with a more reliable measure. there are limitations for political participation at an early age and previous research showed that exposure to war violence lead to greater political participation among young people (Blattman, 2009).

Apart from these limitations, further research should consider analyzing their impact of social participation on individual strengths, in order to clarify how specific contextual assets promote positive relationships and between young people and context. Finally, it would be interesting if, in future investigations, positive bonds with parents and friends that reflect healthy and bidirectional exchanges between the adolescents and their closed social context were also measured.

In closing, this research confirms the importance of the European Commission's recommendations ('Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage') that highlights the relevance of children's opportunities to participate and use their rights to tackle social exclusion (European Commission, 2011). Although the importance of children's participation is stated in UNCRC's 'Article 12', children and young people are still left out of public decisions (Leal, 2014);; therefore more evidence is needed for

improving social programs and enforcing UNCRC internationally (Woodhouse, 2014). .  
Simultaneously Finally, this study offers some insights on areas and dimensions (like family dialogue) that should be promoted to encourage children's participation, especially children and adolescents, who are entering a very important identity forming life stage:. This information is useful for evidence-based awareness programs, since it explains the social effects of the UNCRC's 'Article12' (European Commission, 2011). Finally, decision makers will find that this study offers important guidance towards interpreting the low social participation of children and adolescents, especially those from southern European Union countries.

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Table 1. Items' factor loadings and correlations between factors

	Family Dialogue	Risky Behaviors	Cultural activities	Civic values	Family Supervision	Peers Groups Relationships
Diapol	<b>.409</b>	.010	.034	.168	.015	.199
Diadrug	<b>.565</b>	.082	-.110	.019	.085	.167
Diaplaces	<b>.525</b>	-.064	.110	.117	.070	-.019
Dianet	<b>.598</b>	.007	.020	-.019	.176	-.136
Diafashion	<b>.497</b>	-.001	-.057	-.080	.088	.111
Diareligion	<b>.335</b>	-.045	.376	.070	.045	-.057
Diainp	<b>.563</b>	.071	.025	-.105	-.070	.017
Diasentim	<b>.646</b>	.018	-.018	-.048	.028	-.062
Diamovies	<b>.488</b>	-.102	.091	.073	.069	-.049
Diasociet	<b>.486</b>	-.041	.155	.285	-.145	-.086
Diaprof	<b>.485</b>	-.071	-.040	.131	.040	.072
Drug	-.031	<b>.801</b>	.011	.041	.088	-.121
Alcohol	.023	<b>.740</b>	-.062	.016	.021	.086
Smoke	.027	<b>.721</b>	-.081	.003	.050	.027
Sexting	-.027	<b>.513</b>	.090	.010	-.062	-.030
Stadium	.050	.131	<b>.165</b>	-.027	-.106	.110
Read	.118	-.113	<b>.204</b>	.079	.113	.017
Sport	.002	-.033	<b>.155</b>	.027	.026	.091
Church	-.095	.043	<b>.728</b>	-.014	.077	-.058
Form	-.076	.005	<b>.676</b>	-.029	.075	-.087
Culture	.141	-.022	<b>.406</b>	.005	-.032	.005
Religion	.079	.041	<b>.272</b>	.086	-.041	<b>.338</b>
Solid	-.037	-.021	-.065	<b>.508</b>	.118	.047
Peace	-.014	-.006	-.076	<b>.468</b>	.117	.176
Law	-.002	.030	.036	<b>.824</b>	-.119	-.079
Morality	-.001	.012	.059	<b>.719</b>	-.024	-.094
Sfreet	.059	-.106	-.002	.078	<b>.549</b>	-.039
Stime	-.059	-.019	.099	-.043	<b>.559</b>	.023
Sstud	.083	.017	-.098	.040	<b>.580</b>	.068
Swend	-.054	.001	-.003	-.011	<b>.695</b>	.134
Ssmoke	.066	-.005	.051	.032	<b>.432</b>	-.077
Sint	.203	-.001	-.047	.076	<b>.543</b>	.008
Smedia	.099	-.032	.153	.069	<b>.412</b>	-.155
Smediause	.217	.015	.136	.063	<b>.444</b>	-.149
Freedom	.018	-.018	-.094	.102	.203	<b>.395</b>
Disco	.094	<b>.304</b>	.011	-.090	-.160	<b>.294</b>
Infosex	.014	.067	-.041	-.082	-.072	<b>.694</b>
Infovs	.022	.004	.032	-.005	-.010	<b>.526</b>
Family Dialogue		.001	.305	.300	.335	.186
Risky Behaviors			-.034	-.266	-.342	.216

Cultural activities				.200	.073	-.012
Civic values					.367	.079
Family Supervision						-.007
Peers Groups Relationships						

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation (SD), kurtosis, skewness and standard errors (SE) for predictor variables

	Mean	SD	Kurtosis (SE)	Skewness (SE)
Socio-Cultural Status	1.52	1.14	-.74 (.06)	.21 (.03)
Socio-Economic Status	1.34	1.30	-1.24 (.06)	.41 (.03)
Age	13.82	1.66	.82 (.06)	1.04 (.03)
Family Dialogue	2.48	1.07	.36 (.06)	-.68 (.03)
Risky Behaviors	1.35	.75	8.39 (.06)	2.82 (.03)
Cultural activities	2.05	.57	1.87 (.06)	.79 (.03)
Civic values	3.69	.80	.67 (.07)	-.62 (.03)
Family Supervision	3.85	.84	.22 (.07)	-.73 (.03)
Peers Groups Relationships	2.89	.82	-.32 (.06)	-.06 (.03)

Table 3. Prediction of political and civic participation

	<b>Political Participation<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Civic Participation<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Block 1:</b>		
<b>Sociodemographics</b>		
Socio-Cultural Status	.022***	.003
Socio-Economic Status	-.048***	-.043***
Age	.001	.034***
Gender	.131***	-.037†
Country	-.006	0.13
<b>R<sup>2</sup> (%)</b>	<b>.031***</b>	<b>.011***</b>
<b>Block 2: Lifestyles factors</b>		
Family Dialogue	.028**	.054***
Risky Behaviors	.114***	.096***
Cultural activities	.411***	.558***
Civic values	-.050***	.034**
Family Supervision	-.056***	-.004
Peers Groups Relationships	-.031***	-.046***
<b>ΔR<sup>2</sup> (%)</b>	<b>.216***</b>	<b>.196***</b>
<b>Total R<sup>2</sup> (%)</b>	<b>.247***</b>	<b>.207***</b>

<sup>1</sup>N = 5083; <sup>2</sup>N = 5086. Cell entries are non-standardized beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ). † $p < .1$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Annex 1. Survey questions

	Never	Once a month or less	1 to 2 days per week	3 to 5 days per week	Almost every day
Participate in an ecological group					
Participate in political activities (students assembly, political party, etc.)					
Collaborate in an NGO or charity					
Participate in volunteering activities with friends					