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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Neighbours' Conviviality Without Gatherings. Social Streets in Times of Lockdown

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**ABSTRACT:** The lockdown period imposed by Italian institutions to their citizens from March to May 2020 to contrast the Coronavirus diffusion had a very deep impact on people's sociality and their daily practices. However, informal groups and associations tried to keep them alive with the help of digital communication technologies, used to enhance conviviality and to support and organize forms of mutual help. This article aims to analyse how Social Streets promoted sociality and mutual help among neighbours in time of lockdown, and how Streeters, here defined as people who are at least inscribed at the Facebook group of their Social Street, have profited from the possibility to have at their disposal an online social place where to interact and be informed about the possibility of giving and receiving help. This article draws from data gathered through two online surveys, administered, respectively, during lockdown phase in the second half of April (838 respondents) and in June 2020, after its end (371 respondents). Our results show that, after seven years since their foundation in 2013, Social Streets still play a pivotal role in the neighbourhood. During lockdown, they gave a contribution in keeping neighbours informed about what was going on in the neighbourhood, in sustaining and producing convivial ties, in organizing mutual help services. In the hard time of lockdown, when most of the usual habits and practices were forcefully suspended, Social Streets proved very important in setting a cognitive, emotional, and organizational framework inside which conviviality and collaboration among neighbours could find greater plausibility.

**KEYWORDS:** Conviviality, Lockdown, Mutual Help, Social Streets, Urban Ties.

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## 1. Introduction

Major research strands in the last decades revealed a weakness of community bonds, especially in modern Western cities and in relation with physical space, as neighbourhoods (Scheepers, Schmeets and Pelzer 2013). Digital ties have “re-placed” this sense of belonging to a community, gathering people more by virtue of their shared interests than by a shared attachment to a place (Boyd and Ellison 2007).

However, several researches have contributed to cast a different light on the way social ties are produced and maintained in contemporary society, so that the supposed and incontrovertible vanishing of physical places and their capability to support and give sense to social relations is just one side of the story. Digital connections have reshaped and innovated the way people connect with each other, but not at the expenses of close relations in the physical space (Crang, Crosbie and Graham 2007; Kleinhans, Van Ham and Evans-Cowley 2015). Even studies on the increased mobility of Western European middle-upper classes revealed that the sense of belonging to a neighbourhood of frequent travellers has not diminished (Andreotti, Le Galès and Moreno-Fuentes 2015).

Social Streets are a successful example of how, mainly in urban contexts, the digital and the physical domains, with their networks of relations, could support and enhance each other giving way to a “virtuous” circularity with beneficial effects for both people and the place where they dwell. Social Streets, in fact, aim to connect neighbours who do not know each other, firstly on Facebook groups, and after at the physical level of street life and sociality (Pasqualini 2018) through practices of conviviality (Morelli 2019) and mutual help.

The spread of the pandemic of Sars-Cov 2 entered suddenly and widely in the urban life of Italian cities. Italy was the second country in the world to adopt total lockdown to cope to virus spread. This choice has created bewilderment and fears among citizens that found themselves in the need to suddenly change their routines, starting from those entrenched in the physical places. Even if experiencing turbulent times, a general wave of civic enthusiasm and a positive attitude to cooperate has positively pervaded urban neighbourhoods (Springer 2020) with the organisation of convivial balconies and several initiatives of mutual help. However, little has been said about the role played by already existing urban ties among neighbourhoods in organising those events. Raising such a question, from a sociological point of view, opens the possibility to understand if belonging to a neighbourhood can make a difference when it comes to cope with severe difficulties.

In other terms, we aim to understand how neighbourhood groups as Social Streets can be considered, after a seven-year life, an effective resource for community resilience (Rippon et al. 2020), considering lockdown as a powerful stress test. Our hypotheses are that Social Streets are still central in the everyday life of the neighbourhood and that during lockdown this centrality has become much clearer with the organisation of conviviality events and mutual help.

The contribution this paper aims to give is manifold. The theoretical background provides a review of the literature on Social Streets and proposes a conceptual set to catch Social Streets and the peculiar kind of social ties they can produce inside urban contexts. At the same time, thanks to the analysis and discussion of data gathered through two ad hoc surveys – the first one completed during the lockdown and the second one in June 2020, one month after the lockdown – this article gives a contribution to the sociological debate on city life during lockdown and on the different forms of solidarity emerging during that period. Data presented show how Social Streets engaged in conviviality and mutual help before, during and after lockdown, while their Facebook groups played a pivotal role in informing inhabitants about what is going on in the neighbourhood. At the same time, Streeters highly enjoyed conviviality events proposed or enhanced by their Social Streets and appreciated the Social Streets commitment towards people in need.

The most enthusiastic were those people who had already participated in convivial events and who, thanks to the Social Street, had offline relations with neighbours. Moreover, our search documented how, for the first time in Social Streets history, Streeters with children were among the most interested in taking part in conviviality initiatives, plausibly in reason of the high burn out suffered by parents in times of home schooling. Results also show an increased sense of belonging to the Social Street by Streeters who participated in conviviality events both during and after the lockdown.

Finally, the article assesses how lockdown has been a successful stress test for Social Streets; its deep impact on both habitual conviviality and mutual help led social streets to find alternative ways to offer such services in a time when their need was greater. Having won such a challenge proves and makes perceptible the pivotal role such urban collectives play in tying people among each other.

## 2. Theoretical background

A big strand of research in the last decades has pointed out the lack of commitment to creating or recreating ties in the neighbourhood (Hampton and Wellman 2003), following the theoretical assumption of a networked individualism (Castells 2002), where we are all digitally connected to multiple groups trying to satisfy multiple needs of various nature, but we are losing adherence and belonging to our places and placed communities. However, especially among urban researchers, this assumption seems a little bit pretentious as, even in times of pervasive digital connections, traces of urban community or, to be more precise, urban ties, are observed and studied everywhere (Blokland 2017). Moreover, research on links between ICTs and urban places have showed that these technologies have loosened connections with the urban physical dimensions and that this is not contradictory with the idea of networked participation and interests (Goodspeed 2017). In other words, it is true that today we have a multiple affiliation (Biorcio and Vitale 2016), thanks to, among other factors, a more flexible way of participating to associations, but this does not mean a less vital importance of the urban and physical dimension of the neighbourhood (Foth and Hearn 2007).

Digital connections have entered widely also in urban life, but not to destroy close relations in favour of far connections, but also enabling connections among neighbours as already well-established groups (Lane 2018), or to help creating new social urban bonds (Pasqualini and Introini 2020; Castrignanò and Morelli 2019; Pasqualini 2018a). Moreover, even if it is true that, until the present pandemic, Western societies have experienced an unprecedented level of mobility (Favell 2001; Favell and Recchi 2011), citizens engage and develop a sense of belonging in urban neighbourhoods even if they spend little time in that area (Andreotti et al. 2015). In this sense, ICT's have permitted a more mobile generation to remain connected both with their place of origin and their place of arrival, enhancing a double and multi sense of belonging (Inagami, Cohen and Finch 2007).

Among experiences that have successfully connected digital and neighbourhood dimension – a trend as old as the Internet and the World Wide Web history (Hampton 2007; Introini 2018) – there is the Social Streets phenomenon, aiming to create or recreate social relations in the neighbourhood (Augè and Pasqualini 2016; Pasqualini 2016, 2017b, 2018b) through conviviality as an effective tool to create virtuous bonds (Morelli 2019), thanks to inclusive bonds that are able to produce a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood (Blokland and Nast 2014), to fight isolation and loneliness and to foster civic engagement. Conviviality involves practices of sharing, creating connections, (Neal et al. 2019) activities with the aim of enabling trust and mutual recognition between people that didn't know each other. Conviviality seems an effective concept to better understand practices of sociality among neighbours, avoiding the tricky and heavy concept of community

(Tönnies 1887). Making reference to the idea of conviviality is a promising approach to better understand which kind of collective actors' social streets are; hence to better assess their contribution to urban sociality.

Social Streets were launched in Bologna in 2013, in 'via Fondazza' and in the following years this phenomenon spread widely, reaching over 400 Social Streets around the world, even if predominantly concentrated in Italy across middle-large cities (Pasqualini 2017a). Social Streets start as Facebook groups with the ambition to create connections and connectivity even in the physical side of the street (Introini and Pasqualini 2017). The identity and the effectiveness of this phenomenon has been studied by many researchers and led also to an Observatory on Social Streets. Social Streets spread in middle-class neighbourhoods, involve people with a high level of socio-economic capital, not originating from the city and neighbourhood where they live and with a high commitment in associations and civic engagement. Moreover, Streeters are predominantly females. Through conviviality, Social Streets enhanced a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood and the necessity of caring for the urban goods. Main research on Social Streets outlined the effectiveness of sharing and conviviality practices and were curious about the possibility to this bottom-up phenomenon to last and to engage also in mutual help, that was a character present in Social Streets practices, but less evident.

Conviviality can be considered as one dimension of a similar but broader concept used by some scholars to better capture the innovative sense of emerging urban ties (Groffman et al. 2017). We are referring to the concepts of urban friendship and community of convenience (Kathiravelu and Bunnell 2018). Since their origin in 2013, it was immediately clear to the "founders" that Social Streets would have represented a peculiar kind of social tie. Founders created a (meta) narrative frame in which every single, local social street could imagine and implement in its own way – that is contingently in relation to contextual and boundary conditions – the "core" idea of the social streets as a bundle of practices founded on non-economic, non-political aims but devoted to the idea of gift and gratuitous action among its "members". At the same time founders were well-conscious that Social Streets would have represented a different, innovative kind of collective among other actors present in the public domain: on one side there was the intentional and well stressed necessity to avoid institutionalization; on the other side there was the consciousness Social Streets would have distanced from the old and less effective ideas of community and belonging, to embrace a plastic, if not fluid, identity in order to support a kind of "intermittent commitment", congruent with the more recent transformations inside the collective sphere (Alteri, Leccardi and Raffini 2016), which is "a continuous product at the centre of which there are individuals who choose to participate through a contingent, provisional and negotiable act" (Pirni and Raffini 2016: 807).

This plastic nature of Social Streets made them a hybrid and variable domain, but not devoid of pro-sociality and of the capability to support participation, mainly driven through conviviality and self-mutual-help. Thanks to these practices, Social Streets can be fully intended as a form of urban friendship because they put into question all those dichotomic categories that forecast a zero-sum game between opposites, such as public versus private, community versus society, individual versus collective, altruism versus instrumentality. And, with reference to social capital, between bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2000) and the underlying distinction, made by Granovetter (1973), between strong and weak ties (see also Buchanan 2002). Hence, Social Streets: 1) find their place and meaning in the wide process of reinvention of the collective sphere speeded by globalization and its effects on social ties and the social organizations inside and outside the political institutional system as established in the first modernity (Introini 2007; Pirni and Raffini 2016, 2019; Gozzo and Sampugnaro 2016); 2) their place and their "brand" can be caught through the concepts of urban friendship and community of convenience. Let us start from the first instance. Inside the complex, post-national landscape, the sense, meaning and the practices of participation have significantly changed, challenging the old categories. Digital media played a pivotal role in this process, leading to complexification, both at the

theoretical and the practical level, of the same concept of citizenship (Ohme 2019). First of all, it is now misleading to assume strong and continuous belonging to a group/organization as an indicator of participation (ibidem; Theocharis and Van Deth 2018). Participation can be effective even in an intermittent fashion, according to the dynamics of connected individualism. Even if a big strand of research underlines that in contemporary society participation is not led by old collectives and the attachment to a physical space seems less important (Hampton and Wellman 2003), we must underline that Social Streets try to give way to a connected neighbourhood. In other words, they are trying to upgrade neighbourhood to a new mode of existence, much congruent to the new dynamics of participation inside urban contexts that is open to newcomers and to people that “physically” spend less time in the neighbourhood, but still have their roots in it (Andreotti et al. 2015; Blokland 2017). As regard the second instance, we have already stated Social Streets differ from the töenniesian community, founded on primary, strong and dense-knit ties. They can be described, more properly, as a “community of convenience”. In this kind of collective, instrumentality plays a pivotal role in the construction of relationships, but this does not imply that they are devoid of cordiality, empathy and commitment towards the others. Communities of convenience are the “place” inside which opportunity, pragmatic scopes link to an atmosphere of conviviality, giving birth to a peculiar form of togetherness. To catch and define the original kind of social ties emerging inside these communities the authors turn to the idea of friendship or, better, to a particular declination of friendship which they define as specifically “urban” because it emerges from urban ecology, that is a milieu where distance and propinquity – both at the physical and social level – but also differences and identity give birth to complex, nonlinear dynamics. “Urban friendship” can be considered as the attempt to instill some features of primary, informal bonds inside secondary, formal bonds, creating a network of people who “appreciate living with and in diversity” (Kathiravelu 2012). In this framework, friendship becomes synonym of “convivial urban sociality” (ibi:15) or “a mode of convivial co-existence” (ibi: 17), a form of life which has as its foundation the pleasantness of being together among different.

To accept this theoretical proposal requires adhering to a different declination of friendship concept: the authors specify their definition leaves behind utopist or romantic ideas about it. To agree with such a definition means to take friendship beyond stable, trustworthy, and intimate ties to make room to its pragmatic and less deep dimension but also to its public significance or, better, to its capability of describing and explaining novel forms of collectives and collective actions inside the contemporary public domain. At this regards it is worth noticing that for the authors (urban) friendship allows for an alternative mode of interrogating the social” (Kathiravelu and Bunnell 2018: 492) giving social sciences a new lens to observe all those social phenomena which cannot be caught by the traditional, dichotomic categories such as formal/informal, private/public, primary bonds/secondary bonds, mechanic/organic solidarity. Hence, drawing on the works of Foucault, Derrida and Guattari, Kathiravelu and Bunnell can conclude that, according to their definition, friendship has a public dimension which can be translated, for example, in its capability to transcend kinship or primary relations to build new collectives, able to support “a functioning, yet a convivial society of diverse strangers” (ibi: 497). At the same time, they underline how the focus on urban friendships can introduce an analytical perspective which goes beyond the frame of social capital, which is mainly focused on the strategic value of being in a web of relations<sup>1</sup>. Urban friendship, with its emphasis on pleasure of being together, brings inside

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense, an approach founded on the idea of urban friendship takes distance from the perspective according to which future solidarities will be found just on “strategic” premises because of the high level of social differentiation which gives way to an overreach of heterogeneity inside contemporary collectives, as stated by Baldassarri and Abascal: “As homogeneous communities become less prevalent and more people experience life in diverse contexts, we need to move beyond traditional understandings of prosociality [...] The type of prosociality that helps heterogeneous communities function is different from

the analytic gaze the emotional and the affective dimension. To sum up, urban friendship as a kind of emergent, hybrid form of social tie brings together just enough of “old friendship” – in terms of personal relations filled with emotion, and pleasure of togetherness – with utility to explain that peculiar social tie generated by the urban dimension; a social tie which dwells the space in-between the old idea of community and urban loneliness, familiarity and strangeness as a consequence of contemporary individualization processes which reaches, in current cities, a higher degree because of the intensity of people’s spatial mobility. It is just because these processes inside the city have transformed neighbours into “strangers” that we need the concept of urban friendship in relation to Social Streets. Even if, from the point of view of relevant social differences such as Socio-Economic Status (SES) or ethnicity some physical streets or districts upon which Social Streets insist can be considered as quite homogeneous, Social Streets can play an important role in the process of domestication of personal differences and interests which otherwise risk to act as centrifugal forces which tear apart the neighbourhood as a meaningful domain of belonging. In doing that, Social Streets must pay attention to other risks, starting from those depending on the use of Social Networks – in particular Facebook close groups. As shown by other research aimed at studying the way in which Social Networks have been used to enhance neighbourhood belonging, people are worried about the exclusion dynamics they can produce among neighbours. For example, creating divides based on age (to the detriment of the elderly) or on the possess of digital skills and the technological devices indispensable to get access to the Internet (Johnson, Halegoua 2014, 2015). At the same time, it seems it is worth investing, for a neighbourhood, in the online sphere because when appropriately used it can extend the number of people involved inside the district life and who should not be involved otherwise (Gibbons 2020). Moreover, Gibbons’ empirical study shows that social network participation is positively related to people belonging to their neighbourhood independently from the neighbourhood characteristics, “even in neighbourhoods that have characteristics which typically undermine community connection, such as socio-economic disadvantage” (Gibbons 2020: 1272). The best practice to avoid new divides and exclusion is to promote a “communicative mix” among different channels, starting from offline interaction (Johnson, Halegoua 2014, 2015). Social Streets, which care very much to their inclusiveness, have always crossed and merged the online and offline spheres of action and communication and, in some cases, they have also organized free classes on digital literacy and skills to improve Streeters competences. At the same time Social Streets usually spread in contexts – mainly urban – where connection to the Internet is not problematic.

In the end, by referring to this conceptual set, we can account for Social Streets as a form of emergent social tie, strictly linked with the urban milieu. A milieu characterised by the concentrated and paradoxical proximity of multifarious social distances or, differently put, a huge number of differences and heterogeneities asking for a way to pacifically co-exist. With the concept of community of convenience and urban friendship we can also account for the hybridization of convenience and conviviality.

### 3. Object and Research questions

In the following part of this paper, we will try to understand, driving on data collected through two different surveys, if and how Social Streets had success in fostering, during the lockdown period imposed by the Italian Government to cope with Covid-19 pandemic, their urban friendship.

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the in-group solidarity that glues homogeneous communities together (2020: pp. 1184 and 1186). According to these scholars, “Prosocial behavior in complex societies likely derives from positive experiences in the context of strategic interactions, such as those in the workplace, rather than empathic identification” (ibi: 1186).

The pandemic which has hit Italy and the rest of the world starting since 2020 spring created new paths of research on this phenomenon and more in general on the importance of bonds among neighbours. The spread of Sars Covid-19 has obliged many governments to massive use of lockdown measures around the globe. Italy has been the second Country to adopt these measures and every aspect of social and economic life has been touched in a disruptive way that shocked the world and made evident the unpreparedness to this new tragic situation. Governments and local institutions had faced troubles and slowness that left abandoned citizens confined in their homes. However, from the very first days of lockdown, new forms of social ties among neighbours have flourished in Italian cities and have been easily exported elsewhere. Social balconies, music events, moments of solidarity and encouragement towards health personnel have animated neighbourhoods in a unprecedented magnitude, going beyond the circles of care of family and friends. Moreover, mutual help emerged as a way of solidarity towards elderly and fragile people who were scared to go out for shopping. Even if yet to be studied with empirical data, first research on mutual help during the pandemic are pointing out how these practices have prevented a social catastrophe (Springer 2020) that could have been even worse than the sanitary catastrophe. However, there are still different questions still waiting for an answer: has this solidaristic wave been something completely bottom up or has there been a pivotal role of local formal or informal groups of neighbours? Did Social Streets play a relevant role in such process?

How conviviality has been enjoyed and by who? What has been the consequences for Social Streets? Can Social Streets be considered an effective tool for community resilience (Rippon et al. 2020) through conviviality and mutual help? Our hypotheses are that Social Streets are still very followed by Streeters and play a pivotal role in informing inhabitants and fostering conviviality among neighbours during and after the lockdown thanks to pre-existing ties. We also believe that Social Streets have been a powerful engine to mutual help in the neighbourhood, becoming a crucial dimension in the Social Streets' activities during lockdown.

If our hypotheses are correct, we will finally assess that Social Streets are not only an effective tool to create conviviality among neighbours, but that this phenomenon successfully produce a frame and a marker of belonging robust enough to become salient and harden under certain conditions, as those implied by lockdown; and this may happen because Social Streets can allow trust, values and shared expectations, in other words, collective efficacy (Sampson 2012). This would imply that there are successfully bottom-up approaches to rebuild social ties in the neighbourhoods that can help the everyday life of the urban community, especially in times of trouble.

#### **4. Data and Methods**

The results we are going to present are based on data collected through two different surveys led by the Osservatorio sulle Social Street. Both questionnaires used were created and administered with Google Forms, with the aim to reach as many Streeters as possible. For these reasons, the questionnaires were posted in all – that is a number of 440 – Social Streets' Facebook Groups currently active in the Italian context. The time span for data collection was a period of two weeks for both the surveys. The first questionnaire had been online from 16th of April to the 3rd of May, that is during and just before the end of total lockdown in the whole Italy. The second one was implemented after the reopening of cities and national borders, that is from the 16th of June to the 3rd of July. 838 Streeters, defined as people registered to the Facebook of a Social Street active in Italy, took part in the first survey whereas the participants in the second one were 371. We do not have data on the amount of Streeters who filled the two questionnaires, but we can assume from previous research that Streeters who responded at our surveys are the most active in Social Streets everyday life as they, at least, keep an eye frequently to the Facebook pages (Pasqualini 2018; Morelli 2019). Presumably, there is a certain overlap

between the two groups of respondents, and this is corroborated also by similar socio-demographic data of respondents, which will be presented in the next paragraph. The second questionnaire was very similar to the first one and it also was administered in a period of progressive re-opening of cities; hence a drop in respondent rates was quite predictable. To answer our research questions, we will use data from the two surveys regarding socio-demographic information of Streeters, including their presence in the neighbourhood and their civic engagement, their activities in the Social Street group and their sense of belonging to their Social Street. Moreover, we will use data regarding the Social Streets activities organised – before, during and after the lockdown – and Streeters participation, focusing on conviviality and mutual help.

## 5. Results

Coherently with other empirical research on Social Streets (Pasqualini 2018a; Morelli 2019; Pasqualini and Introini 2020) respondents in both surveys were mainly females, middle-aged, living with their partner, equally divided between those who have children and those who do not, with high education, and a high working position. They are mostly not originally from the city or neighbourhood where they currently live, but partially rooted as they declare to have arrived in that neighbourhood at least five years ago; they own the apartment where they live, even if the rate of owners is lower than the national average. Milan can be still considered as the capital of Social Streets, both for the presence of them, and for people inscribed at Social Street Facebook Groups. Among our respondents, 66% live in Milan, 22% in Bologna and 5% in Rome<sup>2</sup>. Streeters are quite interested in politics and engaged in associations, twice as the national average (Istat 2016; Biorcio and Vitale 2016).

On a socio-demographic side, the two surveys seem consistent with the previous ones<sup>3</sup>, but this still doesn't tell anything about current efficacy and activity of Social Streets. Our data revealed that before the lockdown, 74% of respondents looked at the Facebook group of their Social Street at least one time per week and 30% of the respondents used to propose some activities or discussions. However, only 9% of the Streeters affirmed that they used to post something frequently (at least one time per week) and 15% used to comment on published posts. Streeters used to look and found very useful info on health (73%) (i.e., where to find a general practitioner, an open pharmacy) info on local stores and commercial activities (84%) and hobby and leisure activities (88%). Streeters also found useful information on security about the neighbourhood (78%) and in situations of emergencies such as floods, rupture of water or gas pipes (82%). Less useful, but still a high percentage, Streeters found effective info about the possibility of assistance services for elders (59%) and children (50%). From these data emerges the relevant role that the Facebook group plays in the everyday life of the street and for the Streeters as they usually look at it to stay updated with what was going on in the neighbourhood. The online group is recognised as a helpful digital place where to find important information about the neighbourhood. This is an important acknowledgment for a phenomenon that has now more than 7 years of activities: the group works and speaks to a wider public rather than only to their inner activists. However, the percentage of people that used to interact frequently online is quite low: hence we can argue that Facebook groups had functioned mainly as “windows on the street” but did not reveal as an effective tool of participation and everyday discussion. With lockdown, that in Italy has been particularly long-lasting and restrictive as it was allowed to go out only for health reasons, work, or documented necessities the perception of usefulness for the Streeters became clearer.

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<sup>2</sup> These cities are where Social Streets are more spread in Italy.

<sup>3</sup> For a complete review we suggest the reading of (Castrignanò and Morelli 2019; Morelli 2019; Pasqualini 2018a).



**Table 1 – Comparison between respondents of the two surveys**

	During Lockdown Survey	After Lockdown Survey
Respondents	838	371
Gender		
Female	82%	80%
Male	17%	19%
Prefer Not to Answer	1%	1%
Age		
18-29	6%	8%
30-49	53%	53%
50-69	38%	34%
>70	3%	5%
Level of education		
Low (at least 8 years of education)	3%	2%
Middle (at least 13 years of education)	29%	31%
High (at least 16 years of education)	68%	66%
Marital Status		
Unmarried	28%	28%
Living with partner (but not married)	38%	37%
Married	20%	19%
Divorced/separated	11%	14%
Widower	3%	2%
With Child		
Yes	49%	48%
No	51%	52%
Working status		
Worker	79%	78%
Student	3%	2%
Unemployed	5%	8%
Retired	9%	8%
Stay-at-home	4%	4%
Socio-professional qualification		
High	50%	49%
Middle	47%	50%
Low	3%	1%
Housing condition		
Property	73%	68%
Rented	24%	28%
Other condition	3%	4%
Living in the neighbourhood		
< than 1 year	6%	3%
Between 1 and 5 years	29%	19%
More than 5 years	59%	58%
Always	6%	20%
Interest in politics		
Quite/A lot	65%	62%
Nothing/ A little	35%	38%
Belonging to an association		
Yes	35%	32%

**Source:** Online surveys on Italian Social Streets Facebook Groups 2020, Osservatorio Social Street.

During the lockdown, Streeters who looked at the Facebook group at least once in a week raised to 82%. It also slightly increased the percentage of active users of the Facebook group with 12% of Streeters posting at least once in a week and 21% making a comment. Moreover, Streeters found particularly interesting info about health (+6), local commercial activities (+5) and services for elders (+5).

After the lockdown, even if less evident, the utility of this info remained high and especially higher than before the lockdown. On the opposite side, the usefulness of info about leisure activities, even online, plunged during the lockdown (-25), as did security in the neighbourhood (-5) emergencies (-9) and info for services to children (-4). These trends reveal some unpredictable aspects of lockdown. As expected, the attention to health and services in the neighbourhood increased as the concern for health became central in everyday life but, at the same time, people also felt the necessity to be better informed about commercial opportunities in the neighbourhood, because of the impossibility to go elsewhere for buying food and staple goods. It is worth noticing that even if during lockdown a certain narrative about alternative and new forms of leisure spread, Streeters seemed less interested than in the past, but also the dimension of security and other emergencies were felt as less important.

From these data emerges clearly that the Covid-19 had been a powerful topic that captured all the fears about insecurity and the neighbourhood safety; all the other emergencies have been relocated in the background. This is something that was captured also in previous surveys, albeit with a lower magnitude: even in troubled neighbourhoods, the interest of Social Streets has always been more oriented to a positive narrative of the neighbourhood, trying to discourage hate speech, blaming and controversy, while promoting inclusive solutions (Pasqualini 2018a). Finally, the care for others showed opposite trends. While elders, as particularly fragile towards the virus and especially exposed to loneliness, have been particularly at the centre of Streeters' attention, children, who were confined in their houses, seemed more neglected, as few opportunities, even online, were dedicated to them.

As, Social Streets, according to our data, played an important role as an information provider, we were interested in understanding if and how Streeters' attitude towards their Social Street changed in the period which immediately followed lockdown (the so-called "second phase). First, the percentage of Streeters who continued to look at the Facebook groups remained considerable (80%) while interactions decreased at least for posting (8%) and comments (18%). Streeters also found more interesting than before the lockdown info about health –still a central issue also in the "second phase" – local commercial opportunities, services for elders or children and emergencies in the neighbourhood. Usefulness of hobby and leisure activities returned to be a central issue (81%), but less than before the lockdown whereas security in the neighbourhood has never been so central in the attention of Streeters (80%). This is probably due to a kind of prolonged state of collective anxiety which, in the very moment Covid-19 lessened its worrying force, directed itself to another "critical issue" such as urban security. At the same time, it is likely that the "communicative inertia" generated during lockdown in the Facebook groups had to find another topic of collective discussion, being vanished that of pandemic.

Synthesizing the results of this part of the survey dedicated to online activities, it emerges clearly the central role that the Facebook group of the Social Street plays in the neighbourhood, and that centrality has been particularly recognised by Streeters during the lockdown and even after. In the impossibility of physically exploring the neighbourhood and in the difficulty of finding reliable information at neighbourhood level by means of conventional information sources, more focused on a city-level, Social Streets represent the possibility to easily get informed at neighbourhood scale. However, even if during and after the lockdown interactions on Facebook groups have increased, the percentage of Streeters that interact and post frequently remains, in absolute terms, quite low. But if interactions on Facebook groups among Streeters are not so frequent, what happens to physical interactions among neighbours, and how did lockdown change them?

First of all, it is worth noticing that regardless of the stage before/during/after the lockdown, one Streeter out of two usually interacts offline with neighbours. However, before the lockdown 87% used to interact in the street with neighbours, 40% frequently (at least one time per week). There were already some sort of digital interactions among neighbours before the lockdown (67%), but only 15% used to have frequent internet conversations with neighbours. One Streeter out of two recognised that thanks to the Social Street made new acquaintances among neighbours and used to participate in Social Street activities before the lockdown. During lockdown, Streeters who spoke frequently with neighbours through digital tools raised to 25%, but dropped to 16% at the re-opening of towns, as before the lockdown, while Streeters who frequently interacted physically remained quite the same (40%) as before lockdown. This could sound bizarre, but even with many limitations, during lockdown it was possible to go out to shop next to home and, especially in the first month of lockdown, in many neighbourhoods' moments of "balcony conviviality" were organised so Streeters could interact with each other without the use of a computer.

The maintenance of conviviality ties among neighbours is something that has been fostered during lockdown by Social Streets but also on the edge of a viral "conviviality wave" that especially in the first month of lockdown spread all over Italy with different initiatives organised in the balconies. Indeed, 28% of our respondents affirmed that their Social Streets organised convivial activities during the lockdown, but over 58% participated in convivial activities. This shows an important feature of the Social Street movement: these groups are something different from traditional structured neighbourhood groups. Single inhabitants organise themselves to gather, to socialize, so that in Social Street life is normal to have sub-groups that join according to personal interests. In the end, we can say that Streeters and Social Streets have been able to produce conviviality physically or digitally during the lockdown, and this had a positive outcome also after the lockdown, showing (as previously mentioned) that interactions among neighbours increased and are part of the everyday experience of the Street. Going back to our research question that aims to understand who have benefitted of conviviality during lockdown, we tried to analyse possible relationships with crucial dimensions: socio-demographic variables, including the presence in the neighbourhood, public familiarity in the neighbourhood, dimensions of participation to past Social Streets activities and duration of inscription to the Facebook group and civic participation outside Social Streets. Among socio-demographic variables, professional condition has been used as a proxy of income level as we did not include a variable on income which in Italy represents a significant barrier for respondents. The presence and the public familiarity in the neighbourhood are well acknowledged dimensions in enabling ties and social participation to a neighbourhood and a community of neighbours (Blokland and Nast 2014). The public familiarity variable has been built summing the results of the two questions related to previous online or offline knowledge of neighbours from 1(Never) to 5(Everyday) and creating a new dichotomous variable of public familiarity (low/high). Moreover, a certain commitment to civic and political engagement has been proved in previous research to be effective in the participation to Social Streets groups and it has been suggested that it could play a role in attending conviviality events (Morelli 2019). Furthermore, previous studies on civic commitment of middle-upper classes have shown that these people usually tend to develop a higher sense of attachment and interest in neighbourhood participation and community building (Andreotti et al. 2015) that could be a powerful dimension for conviviality events. Finally, variables on participation and time of registration to the Social Street have been added to the model as previous research on Social Street phenomenon suggested as active and enduring participation in Social Street life increases the participation to conviviality events, as many people take time to look at the relations created in the Social Street before joining it (Augé and Pasqualini 2016; Castrignanò and Morelli 2019). It must be highlighted that we are not able to establish causal effects, but we think that theoretically, eventual correlations will be significant and should give us the opportunity to make a deeper reflection on Social Streets effectiveness.

Having participated during lockdown, or even after conviviality events is influenced by patterns of previous participation to Social Streets activities, previous public familiarity with the neighbours, and pro-active participation to the Social Street.

**Table. 2. Logistic regression on attendance of conviviality events**

Variables	Lockdown questionnaire	Post-Lockdown questionnaire
Gender (ref=female)	0.07+	-0.03
Age	-0.01	-0.02
Professional condition (ref=high level)	-0.02	-0.03
Level of education (ref=high level of education, at least 16 years of school attendance)	-0.02	-0.03
Children (ref=yes)	0,10*	-0,03
Living in the neighbourhood (ref=>5 years)	0,02	0,01
Interest in politics (ref=Quite/very much)	0,09	0,02
Participation in associationism (ref=yes)	0,05	0,11+
Propose activities on the Facebook group of the Social Street (ref=yes)	0,07+	0,30***
Participation to Social Street activities before the lockdown (ref=yes)	0,15***	0,20***
Social Street registration time (ref=>1 year)	-0,04	0,04
Public familiarity (ref->yes)	0,16***	0,10*
N	838	371
R2	0,17	0,21

Source: Online surveys on Italian Social Streets Facebook Groups 2020, Osservatorio Social Street.

Notes: +p<.1, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

In these years, Social Streets have fostered social relations through conviviality among neighbours that even in times of pandemics give the Streeters the chance to keep in touch and a sense of belonging to the Social Street. However, what is interesting and new is that having children is relevant in the participation to conviviality moments during the lockdown. This seems quite important since families with children have experienced a period of severe stress during the lockdown as parents had to care for their children all day long in the impossibility to ask for any help from grandparents, but also with the necessity to continue to work remotely. Not by chance, after lockdown this dimension was no longer significant, as parents had more possibilities to spend time outside and also to leave their children to grandparents or involve them in other activities. As previously shown, after lockdown Streeters started looking at services and possibilities for their children on the Facebook pages. Finally, the dimension of civic engagement, both from the side of interest in politics and participation in associationism seems to be relevant, even in different periods. People participating in associationism participated more after the lockdown. This dimension is comprehensible because during the lockdown many associations were involved in mutual help for neighbours and for the most fragile population: the elders, the poor, the homeless; while after the lockdown many emergency services were stopped so people had more time to invest in conviviality. But those events, organised by the Social Street or single neighbours, had an impact on the belonging to the Social Street? The answer is clearly affirmative. Among those who during lockdown have experienced conviviality among neighbours, 36% increased their sense of belonging to the Social Street, 63% of them did not change their sense of belonging and only 1% diminished. If we look only at those who have frequently participated in those events, the percentage of Streeters who positively changed their sense of belonging rose to 44%, while 55% did not change their mind. It must be noted that

among Streeters, both used to conviviality or not, the sense of belonging to a Social Street is high, with 64% of them who declare a high appreciation for the Social Street (at least 5 on a 7-level scale).

Summarizing the results on conviviality, it seems that during lockdown and even after, conviviality events increased and were more participated than before. Streeters felt the need to find a moment of relief and spend some time with neighbours, escaping from bad news given by the media and from children's care duties. This empirical emergence is worth to be highlighted: in current cities and society it is not taken for granted that people find in their neighbours an effective solution to their need of relief in a very unprecedented stressful time; hence it is well founded to argue about the importance that the Social Street has for its Streeters. However, conviviality is still something that has to be spread among neighbours: Social Streets are certainly recognised as an effective point of reference for all necessary information about what is going on in the neighbourhood, but convivial ties among Streeters are still something to work on as one Streeter out of two participate to convivial ties but only one out of four participate frequently. Moreover, patterns of participation to convivial ties are correlated with a successful previous participation or, using Blokland's words, to have previous roots in the neighbourhood. Hence Social Streets still can work better to be more effective in fostering convivial participation of "new" inhabitants. However, during lockdown, the dimension of conviviality proved to be particularly important for parents who faced a very hard period, so it has been a successful proposal, even for a very constrained period. This positively affected the opinion on Social Streets by the Streeters. Those who have participated, and especially who participated frequently in conviviality events, during or after the lockdown, have experienced an enhanced sense of belonging to the Social Street, which was already high.

Finally, a last but very important function emerged during the lockdown. Previous research underlined how there is a third function of Social Street after those of information and convivial ties, that was minoritarian but still very important: mutual help. Looking at the questionnaires, during lockdown over 73% of our respondents affirmed that their Social Street was organising mutual help services as solidarity shop or home delivery of food for elders and people in quarantine. This percentage decreased to 58% after lockdown but still, is a considerable percentage. Other research showed how this dimension was present in Social Streets but more episodically and for specific issues (a broken washing machine, the necessity of a drill or a hammer), or for a particular and sudden emergency such as a gas leak. It has never happened that so many Social Streets engaged for a long-lasting period and in mutual help. However, it is interesting that only 28% of Streeters used these services of mutual help during lockdown and 23% after. This is probably related to the low presence of fragile people (elders in particular) among Streeters, but this also shows how Social Streets have immediately reacted to their street in troubled times. Compared to the past, it seems that the dimension of mutual help has become increasingly central in the Social Streets activities. This teaches us an important and critical thing: Social Street, as a crucial point of reference for the neighbourhood, assumed the importance to immediately deploy help for their inhabitants, even if it was something unusual and very far from activities of information and conviviality that they are more used to. In this sense, it is not surprising that after lockdown the level of engagement of Social Streets for mutual help decreased; anyway, during the hard phase of lockdown, the dimension of mutual help seems to have overtaken the dimension of conviviality.

## 6. Conclusions

During the lockdown, Italian people were forced to spend most of their time inside their home. For this reason, digital media became more relevant than before from different points of views: computer and digital divides proved a basic resource to carry on own work activity and classes attendance (for school and university students), but also to shop for food and e-shop in general, using the digital platform of large-scale distribution

store. Even for sociality and leisure media played a pivotal role; for example, it has been observed, with reference to young people, an increase in the use of social network sites to get informed about pandemic and its consequences (Iivari, Sharma and Ventä-Olkkonen 2020), but also to give and receive concrete help. For one young Italian out of two, staying on SNS was perceived as a meaningful and very concrete experience, capable of giving a tangible benefit (Bichi, Introini and Pasqualini 2020). In a period in which sociality had to retire from its ordinary physical places, it found on the Internet an immediate resource to be lived and practiced by people. However, such “digital relocation of sociality” did not involve so much Social Streets’ Facebook groups. In other words, they did not become a place for digital sociality but proved very helpful – more than usual – as small-scale media, acting as local information providers, that is an instrumental “function”. However Social Streets are not per se media so that all the information it was possible to find in the Facebook groups was available thanks to the commitment of the Streeters themselves. In other words, it was a practical resource whose existence had been possible thanks to Streeters’ altruism, sense of commitment and belonging towards their Social Street, built and accumulated in years of Social Streets’ activities. Hence generosity and empathy for neighbours mixed very well with the practical, instrumental dimension, in full accordance with the spirit of a community of convenience. The same could be said for mutual help that, during lockdown, without consideration of its effective need for the Streeters, spread widely inside Social Streets. This kind of generosity, through which people make gifts to other people or become available in helping them without knowing a priori who the beneficiary will concretely be – if not the general awareness it would be a person inside the neighbourhood – can be considered as an indicator of social capital ties and their strength<sup>4</sup>. It shows how in this case prosociality transcends the strict borders of family and kinship relations to affect the whole neighbourhood.

If those dynamics have become evident in Social Streets it is also because belonging to the neighbourhood could trace – at least at the cognitive level – a “meso” dimension in-between private and public sphere, own house, and the overall city. Inside this meso-frame, people find a meaningful place of interaction they otherwise could not have. According to Smith and Smith and their study of “participant spaces” (2019), in interactions dynamics, being them online, offline or both, stressing and marking a physical space or a virtual one – that not by chance is often thought and defined through spatial metaphors – is of pivotal importance. It becomes, in fact, a safety guarantee for interactions, because it helps in reducing and domesticating the complexity of the overall potential interactions with unknown people. As they write: “in shared participation spaces, the perceived boundaries of the space help to identify the space’s inhabitants” (ibi: 1865), reassuring participants about other people who plausibly will be part of the same place. At the empirical level, the importance of belonging was evidenced by our data which showed how people more respondent to Social Street conviviality during lockdown are people with previous experience of participation to the same kind of initiatives.

Informative use of Facebook Groups and mutual help also show how Social Streets, during lockdown, can function as a collective or, better, connective intelligence, making processes of self-organization possible. Being endowed with self-organization means to have a high capability of re-organization, that is, the capability to be resilient, according to the principles of complexity sciences (Introini 2017; Gandolfi 2008). Going along with mental and cognitive metaphors, Social Streets revealed to embody that kind of collective that the anthropologist La Cecla (2011) calls “mente locale”, literally “local mind”, that is the capacity of a settlement to be a “learning subject” (ibi: 39).

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<sup>4</sup> In a similar way, the Italian politologist Cartocci (2007, cit. in Tronca 2008: 42) assumed as an indicator to measure social capital in the different Provinces of Italy, the number of blood donations, in which the donor does not know who the beneficiary of her/his action will be.

All these benefits in terms of practical support are not the only one gift Streeters made to themselves during lockdown. Social Streets played an important role even concerning conviviality. As regards conviviality among neighbours, our data outline the efforts by Social Streets in keeping sociality alive. In a period during which the range of physical mobility and the chance to gather with other people were severely reduced, Social Streets felt endowed with the mission of revitalizing their district. Here again, lockdown can be interpreted as a sudden, strong change in the boundary conditions that sorted the effect to make salient the small urban scale of the neighbours, giving worth and plausibility to the social interactions occurring at this level. At the same time, Social Streets have also functioned as a repeater in relation to the wave of sociality promoted at the national level via the mainstream media during the first weeks of lockdown. The “light” organization typical of Social Streets was enough to make more credible – hence even more “funny” – events such as balcony flash mobs, because it is more gratifying singing loud from own terrace or window when you know there is a relationship – at least cognitive or symbolic – between you and other people hearing your voice; a relationship which may be soft, but anyhow stronger than the one which connect persons living far apart and associated just by the fact of being reached by the same mainstream media messages.

The sense of belonging to Social Streets appears as mainly a mix of cognitive and emotional elements which, however ephemeral if compared to more structured and organized participation domains, is enough to become, in people’s “hearts & minds” a source of social identity inside the overall portfolio of identities available for the individual. This social identity, tied to neighbourhood, lays quite silent during ordinary time, but can become relevant and more meaningful than others when something changes in the boundary conditions of the environment, increasing its gradient of salience. In other words, being part of a Social Street and feeling to belong to it is not, for most of ordinary time, a sufficient condition to enhance active, actual participation or, differently said, to pass to action. But is a necessary one, as combustible is necessary for combustion to be started.

. A “community of convenience” to which it is convenient to belong. It is possible to conclude that most of their strength lies in their latency, or the capacity of building networks of ties which are not visible during ordinary times, but which can give way to different kinds of solidarity and social cohesion. Hence, if we put the focus of our gaze on latency, the fact that after lockdown some levels of manifest activity decrease among Streeters can be obviously read as an indicator of the diminished salience of Social Streets in their perception but (necessarily) not as a signal of their decreased importance for the Streeters overall well-being.

The decision to implement our search through the technique of survey well fitted, according to the authors, the logic of a “quasi” pre/post research design, which was compatible with the aim of assessing the role of lockdown in terms of “stress test”. At the same time, the online administration of the two questionnaires complies both to the impossibility to do face to face interviews in a time of lockdown and to the possibility to reach all the Italian Social Streets via their Facebook groups. The significant difference in the number of respondents between the first and the second survey is of course another limitation of this search. During the period of administration of both questionnaires the authors spent a huge amount of time in moral suasion to invite Streeters to answer, with a frequent posting activity on Facebook groups. Probably answering two questionnaires in the very short time span of a few weeks was perceived as a too heavy task, considering the hardship of the lockdown period. A qualitative search with in-depth interviews could have offered a much-detailed analysis of lockdown. It would have brought in the centre of the stage Streeters’s emotions. As M. Archer states (2000), emotions express human beings’ main concerns and reveal where people place things which they care much about. Even if during lockdown people were synchronized by similar collective emotions, delving into the individual sphere could have put into evidence a wider range of moods elicited by this unprecedented crisis. On the other hand, delving into private, individual emotions could have provoked further stress in people already exhausted by lockdown and its harsh consequences. Finally, our research does

not offer a comparison between Social Streets and other forms of urban collectives, innovative or traditional. This would have helped in better assessing the specific resilience gradient of Social Streets and their peculiar way to embody the collective sphere.

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