

Community participation and subjective wellbeing among the immigrant population in Northern Italy: An analysis of mediators

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Abstract

Community participation can be a potential strategy to increase the degree of the subjective wellbeing of immigrants within receiving societies. This study aims to analyze the relationship between immigrants' community participation and their subjective wellbeing, testing the two dimensions of sense of mattering (feeling valued and adding value) and psychological sense of community as potential mediators of this relationship. A total of 308 first-generation immigrants living in Northern Italy filled out a questionnaire (45.1% were members of a migrant community-based organization). We found that immigrants who are members show a higher level of subjective wellbeing, sense of mattering, and psychological sense of community than those who are not. We also found that the sense of adding value and the psychological sense of community serve as mediators of the relationship between community participation and subjective wellbeing. The findings suggest that active participation is positively related to immigrants' feeling useful and capable of contributing to society and their feeling of belonging, which, in turn, are positively related to their subjective wellbeing. Practical implications are presented, focusing on the need for generative social policies to move beyond the welfarist perspective where immigrants only "receive" to embrace an active perspective where immigrants can also "give."

Keywords: community participation, immigrants, psychological sense of community, sense of mattering, subjective wellbeing.

Community Participation and Subjective Wellbeing among the Immigrant Population in Northern Italy: An Analysis of Mediators

Research conducted in Europe and North America found that immigrants usually experience lower subjective wellbeing levels than locals (Hendriks, 2015). Other studies found similar results and stressed that the gap in subjective wellbeing between immigrants and locals often does not disappear in later immigrant generations or with a more extended stay (Arpino & Valk, 2018; Safi, 2010). In this paper, we define subjective wellbeing as the satisfaction of needs across different domains, namely the personal sphere, relationships with relevant people in one's life as well as relationships with the community of residence, main occupation, overall health, emotional life, and financial situation (Prilleltensky et al., 2015). We decided to follow this definition, as it recognizes how subjective wellbeing depends on dimensions considered at different ecological levels as well as its multidimensional nature (Paloma et al., 2016). Research is needed to identify key variables and paths toward enhancing subjective wellbeing among the immigration population settled in host societies. In fact, the International Organization of Migration states in its Migration Health Report that “the lack of reliable evidence and data to guide decision-making [in migrant mental health] remains a major challenge” (IOM, 2021, p. 31).

From a liberation psychology approach (García-Ramírez et al., 2011; Paloma et al., 2016), immigrants can build niches and generate spaces to protect themselves from the social exclusion of oppressive host societies. This theoretical framework stresses the importance of returning the power to silenced immigrant groups so that they can gain a new vision of themselves, practice their citizenship through collective action, and achieve social transformation. Community participation can be a potential strategy to increase the

degree of the subjective wellbeing of immigrants within receiving societies, and this is why we focus on immigrants' community participation as the primary independent variable of our study. Research has found that community participation is related to subjective wellbeing in the general population (Ding et al., 2015; Lawton et al., 2021; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Moreover, it "is particularly beneficial for younger and lower-income groups" (Lawton et al., 2021, p. 615) and for those who are not so well integrated (Piliavin & Siegl, 2007), suggesting that immigrants may benefit more from community participation than non-immigrants (Morrow-Howell et al., 2009). In this paper, we defined community participation as all the activities that individuals perform together with others to improve their conditions by impacting their communities (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Community participation can take several forms (e.g., volunteering, community engagement, activism, political participation). Community participation among immigrants often takes place within Migrant Community-Based Organizations (MCBOs; Marzana, Martinez-Damia et al., 2020; Paloma et al., 2010), which can be defined as nonprofit organizations "founded by immigrants at all stages of immigration with the purpose of serving mainly the immigrant group itself" (Babis, 2016, p. 359). In this paper, we are interested in the community participation carried out by immigrants in these community settings. Although research recognizes the role of community participation in promoting immigrant subjective wellbeing (e.g., Paloma et al., 2021), the positive mental health outcomes of community participation for the immigrant population have been understudied in the literature. However, they can provide new insights to ensure equity in subjective wellbeing among immigrants and nationals in receiving societies. This study aims to analyze the relationship between immigrants' community participation and their subjective wellbeing, testing some potential mediators of this relationship.

Community Participation and Subjective Wellbeing among the Immigrant Population

Research on the linkages between community participation and wellbeing among the general population has been carried out worldwide, finding a positive relationship between these two variables (e.g., Lawton et al., 2021; Klar & Kasser, 2009; Mellor et al., 2009). In the case of the immigrant population, research on community participation has been related to integration rather than subjective wellbeing. Handy and Greespan (2009), when investigating the participation of immigrants in ethnic-religious congregations in Canada, reported enhanced social, cultural, ethnic, and human capital as the main benefit of participation. Subsequently, Marzana, Alfieri, Marta, and Paloma (2020) found that young immigrants who participate in the community through political, civic, recreational, or social activities had higher levels of national and ethnic identity (i.e., bicultural identity, an indicator of integration) compared to those who did not participate. According to some qualitative works, community participation improves social relationships with hosting communities and compatriots while building the ability to resist unjust social conditions (Aceros et al., 2021; Marzana, Martinez-Damia et al., 2020; Paloma et al., 2010; Taurini et al., 2017).

To our knowledge, only one study has explicitly focused on the relationship between community participation and subjective wellbeing among immigrants. Alfieri et al. (2019) reported that immigrants settled in Italy who participated in community-based organizations have higher levels of subjective wellbeing than those who did not. In this study, the authors measured community participation as a dichotomous variable. However, some authors, such as Paloma et al. (2018), suggested the relevance of considering not only whether or not immigrants participated, but also the level or degree

of immigrant participation within community organizations and its influence on subjective wellbeing. This study aims to overcome this gap in the literature. While current research has grasped some connections between community participation and subjective wellbeing, empirical evidence about this relationship and its potential explanatory mediators is still very scarce within the immigration population settled in host societies.

Mediators between Community Participation and Subjective Wellbeing

Although many authors have supported the idea that community participation may benefit subjective wellbeing, the mechanisms remain unclear, also in the general population's case. The literature proposes a sense of mattering and the psychological sense of community as two key potential mediators of this relationship (Cicognani et al., 2008; Mazzoni et al., 2014; Piliavin & Siegl, 2007).

Sense of mattering can be defined as the feeling of considering oneself as an important, worthy, and appreciated person (Prilleltensky, 2020; Schlossberg, 1989). Prilleltensky (2014) identified two main dimensions within the sense of mattering construct. The first refers to *feeling valued* by others, while the second refers to the sense of *adding value* meaning “our sense of agency [and] that what we do makes a difference in the world” (Prilleltensky, 2014, p. 151). Regarding the first dimension of sense of mattering, Piliavin and Siegl (2007) found that volunteering—which is a form of community participation—increases subjective wellbeing “in part because it leads people to feel that they have an important role in society and that their existence is important” (p. 460). Moreover, feeling valued has been empirically correlated to the wellbeing of underprivileged groups such as adults with HIV or disabilities (Matera et al., 2021) and rural or Black adolescents (Jones, 2018; Schmidt et al., 2020). Regarding the second dimension of sense of mattering, adding value, we follow the connection established by

other scholars (e.g., Adams & Marshall, 1996; Costin & Vignoles, 2020) between sense of adding value and social generativity. Social generativity refers to social responsibility and the desire to transmit to future generations whatever is considered to have value (Dollahite et al., 1998; McAdams & de St Aubin, 1992). It is the direct expression of the sense of adding-value dimension in the community because it is about the perception of acting in the world (Prillentsky, 2020; Scarpa et al., 2021). In the case of immigrants, some qualitative studies reported that immigrants who participate feel they are giving something back and are helpful to others, suggesting that community participation may enhance this generative dimension of sense of mattering (Kosic, 2007; Marzana, Martinez-Damia et al., 2020). In addition, studies have found that feelings of contributing to society predict subjective wellbeing in the general population (Ackerman et al., 2000).

Psychological sense of community has been defined as a feeling that members belong to a community where they influence one another, integrate and fulfill their needs, and share an emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Gray and Stevenson (2020) reported that volunteers in social organizations share group identity, feelings of belonging, and reciprocity—all aspects related to the psychological sense of community. In the case of immigrants, community participation fosters the creation of safe settings where immigrants feel they belong (Guo, 2014) and are accepted and considered human beings (Sonn & Fisher, 1996). In such settings, they create extended families where reciprocity is practiced (Marzana, Martinez-Damia et al., 2020). As a result, immigrants who participate report higher levels of psychological sense of community than those who do not (Alfieri et al., 2021). Specifically, MCBOs are settings where immigrants can resist injustice (Buckingham et al., 2021), share oppressive experiences, bolster collective dignity, and take action to transform their realities (Aceros et al., 2021; Paloma et al.,

2010). Although research has found a bidirectional relationship between psychological sense of community and community participation (Chavis & Wandersman, 2002; Talò et al., 2014), in this study—following our liberation psychology theoretical approach—we are interested in analyzing community participation as a catalyzer of psychological sense of community among immigrants (Marzana, Alfieri & Marta, 2020; Ramos et al., 2017; 2020; Sonn, 2002). We also relied on the literature on the general population that reported that psychological sense of community could serve as both a partial and a total mediator between community participation and subjective wellbeing (Cicognani et al., 2008; Mazzoni et al., 2014) and similar results that were found for immigrants (Liu, 2020).

While significant progress has been made in explaining how community participation promotes subjective wellbeing (see Piliavin & Siegl, 2015), further studies are still required, namely on immigrants and the overlooked role of sense of mattering. Based on the insights above, the present cross-sectional study aims to test three hypotheses: (1) the levels of sense of mattering, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing will be higher for immigrants who are members of an MCBO in comparison to those who are not; (2) the levels of sense of mattering, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing will be higher for members of an MCBO with a high degree of community participation in comparison to members with lower degrees; and (3) sense of mattering and psychological sense of community will act as mediators in the relationship between community participation and subjective wellbeing among those who are members of an MCBO.

Method

Context of the Study

This study was conducted in Italy, where immigrants represent 8.5% of the total population, and 58.6% live in the north (Istat, 2021). Italian migration policies have excluded immigrants on multiple levels through laws based on flow regulation and emergency (Caneva, 2014), especially in the country's north (Ambrosini, 2013). Indeed, some studies reported higher psychological stress and lower subjective wellbeing of immigrants living in Italy compared to Italians (Arpino & de Valk, 2018; Safi, 2010).

In Italy, there are 1149 MCBOs (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, 2021), and 59.9% of them are located in the northern regions that include Liguria, Lombardia, Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige, and Veneto. The present study is part of a larger project [website hidden for reviewers] that aims to understand how community participation of immigrants within MCBOs can influence their subjective wellbeing and empowerment. This article focuses on presenting the results related to the proposed hypotheses.

Participants

To reach participants, we identified 65 MCBOs based in the Milan Metropolitan area and Italian nonprofit entities that provide immigrants with assistance in work, health, legal documentation, and language. Among these, we could not locate 35 MCBOs, or they declined the invitation, whereas 30 MCBOs collaborated in the study. To reach members, MCBOs' leaders helped their associates to complete the questionnaire by reading and explaining the questions when necessary and provided contacts of potential participants to the researchers. To reach non-MCBO members, the Italian nonprofit entities helped some of their assisted immigrants to fill out the questionnaires. We also used the snowball sampling technique as a complementary selection strategy, asking each participant to forward the questionnaire to a person who met the inclusion criteria (i.e.,

being first-generation immigrants, coming from developing countries, and living in the north of Italy).

Of the 363 participants who consented to participate in the project, 308 completed the measures used for this article. Among them, 45.1% were members of an MCBO, and 54.9% were not. The average age of the whole sample was 43.5 years ($SD = 13.07$), ranging from 19 to 77 years, and 55.2 % were women. All participants came from developing countries and were first-generation immigrants residing in Italy at the time of the study. Regarding the geographical area of origin, the majority of the participants came from Latin America (39.9%), followed by those coming from Sub-Saharan Africa (24.7%), Eastern Europe (14.9%), Maghreb and Middle East (10.7%), and Asia (5.2%). In terms of participants' achieved level of education, most of the participants had attended secondary (39.3%) or higher education (30.8%). A minority of the sample had no education (7.5%) or primary education (2.6%). Most participants (74.3%) had been residing in Italy for more than 5 years. As regards legal status, the majority had Italian citizenship (28.2%), a long-term residence permit (18.2%), or a work residence permit (14.3%). A minority had a family reunion permit (6.5%), an international protection permit (7.7%), no valid documentation (3.9%), or a study/tourism permit (2.9%). A description of the sample by MCBO membership can be found in Table 1. The two groups (members vs. non-members) were homogeneous according to sex ($\chi^2 = .29, p > .05$). However, homogeneity between age groups could not be ensured, as there were significant differences between the percentage of young adulthood members (11.5%) and non-members (33.7%).

Please, insert Table 1 about here

Ethical approval for the research was previously obtained from the Ethics Committee of the [University hidden for reviewers]. All participants agreed to participate in the study voluntarily, and they received no incentive for their participation.

Procedure

The study was conducted in northern Italy between February and June 2021. The study was computer-based and used the Qualtrics surveys manager due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete. First, participants were requested to sign the informed consent form. Next, they provided some sociodemographic data and characteristics of their community participation. Next, sense of mattering, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing measures were obtained. Multilingual versions were provided, and the questionnaires were completed in Italian (67.9%), English (12.4%), Spanish (11%), and French (3.1%). Valid scales were searched in each language, and a back-translation was conducted with bilingual experts in cases where no adapted version was found.

Instruments

Membership. In order to determine whether the sample belonged to an MCBO, we asked an ad hoc question, “Do you belong to a migrant organization?” (*Yes/No*). Following Babis’ (2016) conceptualization, this question was accompanied by a definition of an MCBO as “an organization that has been founded by immigrant citizens and that carries out activities that can involve either other immigrant citizens or also Italians.”

Community participation. For those participants who stated they were members of an MCBO, we administered 5 closed ad hoc items based on previous literature that highlighted the importance of considering duration, subjective perception of being active,

and personal commitment to the organization (Huang, 2019; Lawton et al., 2021). The questions were: (a) How long have you been part of the organization? (*Less than one year to two years/More than two years*); (b) Do you consider yourself an active member of the organization? (*Yes/No*); (c) Did you contribute to starting this organization? (*Yes/No*); (d) In the last 12 months, have you been a member of the organization's board of directors? (*Yes/No*); and (e) What is your level of active engagement in the organization? (*Low to medium/High*). The score of this indicator ranges from 0 to 5 points, obtained by the proportional sum of the five items (score per item: 0 to 1). It has acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .71$).

Sense of mattering: Feeling valued. The first dimension of sense of mattering was measured through the Italian version of the Mattering to Others Questionnaire (Matera et al., 2017), an adaptation of the original scale of Marshall (2001). This unidimensional scale contains 11 items rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not so much*) to 5 (*very much*) (e.g., "I am needed by other people"; "Other people give me credit when I do well"). The scale has two versions for application: family and friends. For this study, we used only one version referring to close others to reduce the assessment duration. The overall scale score is the sum of the scores (1-5) obtained in each item and has high reliability ($\alpha = .90$).

Sense of mattering: Adding value. The second dimension of sense of mattering was measured through the Social Generativity Scale (Morselli & Passini, 2015). Following Reece and colleagues (2021), we used social generativity as the action-oriented view of sense of adding value, which refers to the perception of an intentional impact of one's actions that benefit the community. The Social Generativity Scale is a unidimensional scale composed of 6 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly*

disagree) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The total score is obtained by the sum of the scores obtained in the items. The scale assesses concerns for future generations and the perception of the contribution of current actions to the community's future (e.g., "I carry out activities to ensure a better world for future generations"; "I think that I am responsible for ensuring a state of wellbeing for future generations"). It has high reliability ($\alpha = .85$).

Psychological Sense of Community. The Multidimensional Territorial Sense of Community Scale (MTSOCS; Prezza et al., 2009) was used. This scale comprises 19 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale has 5 first-order factors: Membership (e.g., "I feel like I belong here"), Shared Influence (e.g., "If there is a serious problem in this community, the people who live here can get it solved"), Help in case of need (e.g., "Many people in this community are available to give help if somebody needs it"), Social Climate (e.g., "I have good friends in this community") and Bonds and Needs Fulfillment (e.g., "If I need help, this community has many excellent services to meet my needs"). The overall scale score is the sum of the scores obtained in each item (1-5) and has high reliability ($\alpha = .90$).

Subjective Wellbeing. To measure subjective wellbeing, we used the Italian version of the ICOPPE scale (Di Martino et al., 2018). It assesses overall wellbeing and wellbeing in six life domains (interpersonal, community, occupational, physical, psychological, and economic wellbeing) with three items for each domain: present, past, and future. In this study, only the 7 items of the present were used to optimize assessment duration and reduce participant fatigue. Respondents rated their wellbeing on a scale between 0 (*worst*) and 10 (*best*) for each domain. For instance, overall wellbeing was measured through the item: "When it comes to the best possible life for you, as which

number do you stand now?” The same stem question was posed for each of the six life domains. The overall scale score is the sum of the scores obtained in each item (0-10) and has high reliability ($\alpha = .88$).

Data Analysis

We used SPSS Statistics (version 26) and AMOS Graphics (version 25) for the analyses. To obtain the study's preliminary results, descriptive statistics, internal consistency, and bivariate correlations were calculated and evaluated according to Tavakol and Dennick's (2011) and Evans's (1996) guidelines.

To verify the first hypothesis, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed to determine possible differences in the sense of mattering, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing according to membership in an MCBO. Next, to test the second and third hypotheses of the study, only the members who belonged to an MCBO were considered, as the degree of community participation was evaluated only for this group.

To test the second hypothesis, the scores obtained on the community participation scale were used to form three groups according to the terciles obtained in the total score: low participation (first tercile), medium participation (second tercile), and high participation (third tercile). This division allowed us to analyze the scores obtained in the sense of mattering, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing for each group. We created a graph with the normalized scores of these variables to detect patterns of change in the three participation groups. In addition, one-way ANOVAs were performed to determine the differences between groups.

To verify the third hypothesis, a path analysis was carried out with AMOS software, using different mediation models, with the community participation variable as

a predictor and subjective wellbeing as a criterion in each model. In order to explore the model with the best fit, the sense of community was kept constant as a mediator, as it was the most strongly supported from a theoretical point of view. In the first model, the two dimensions of sense of mattering (feeling valued and adding value) and psychological sense of community were included as mediators. In the second model, feeling valued and psychological sense of community were included as mediators. In the third model, adding value and psychological sense of community were included as mediators. Model fit was examined using the following indicators: (a) Normed Fit Index (NFI); (b) Tucker Lewis Index (TLI); (c) Comparative Fit Index (CFI); (d) Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR); and (e) Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

Results

Preliminary Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables evaluated.

Please, insert Table 2 about here

Bivariate correlations among variables showed that community participation had the highest correlation with adding value ($r = .40, p < .01$), followed by psychological sense of community ($r = .32, p < .01$), and subjective wellbeing ($r = .24, p < .01$). However, community participation did not correlate with feeling valued. Finally, adding value, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing were found to be positively related to each other ($p < .01$; see Table 3).

Please, insert Table 3 about here

First Hypothesis: Difference between Groups according to MCBO Membership

As shown in Table 4, one-way ANOVAs confirmed that the means of the two dimensions of sense of mattering (feeling valued and adding value), psychological sense

of community, and subjective wellbeing were significantly higher for members, at a 99% confidence level ($p < .01$). That is, immigrants who belonged to an MCBO showed higher levels of sense of mattering, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing than those who did not belong to an MCBO.

Please, insert Table 4 about here

Second Hypothesis: Group Difference according to the Degree of Community Participation

As shown in Figure 1, we analyzed the trend of the normalized scores of feeling valued, adding value, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing according to the degree of community participation carried out by the participants (i.e., low, medium, high). The results showed a moderately positive trend in adding value, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing as the level of community participation increased. However, a different pattern was found for feeling valued, where the scores were more constant from one group to another.

Please, insert Figure 1 about here

In a complementary view, the scores on the four variables analyzed according to the degree of community participation were compared in multiple post hoc analyses, as shown in Table 5. The results revealed significant differences between different degrees of community participation for adding value, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing. However, no significant difference was found between participation groups in the variable feeling valued.

Please, insert Table 5 about here

Among the variables in which significant differences were found, the post-hoc Bonferroni analyses for each pair of groups yielded significant results. Adding value

scores of the *low* participation group ($M = 23.79$, $SD = 4.36$) were shown to be significantly smaller when compared to the *medium* ($M = 26.16$, $SD = 3.82$, $p < .05$) and *high* ($M = 27.65$, $SD = 2.35$, $p < .05$) groups. Psychological sense of community scores of the *high* participation group ($M = 76.73$, $SD = 11.29$) were shown to be significantly greater than the *low* participation group ($M = 66.46$, $SD = 11.83$, $p < .01$). Likewise, subjective wellbeing of the *high* group ($M = 55.85$, $SD = 7.95$) was significantly greater in comparison to the *low* group ($M = 48.39$, $SD = 10.99$, $p < .05$).

Third Hypothesis: Mediators of the Relationship between Community Participation and Subjective Wellbeing

When analyzing the three mediation models, the starting point was Model 1, composed of three mediators: feeling valued, adding value, and psychological sense of community. The results showed that community participation was not associated with feeling valued, and that adding value was not associated with subjective wellbeing. Next, Model 2 was tested, consisting of two mediators: feeling valued and psychological sense of community. Again, community participation was not associated with feeling valued.

Finally, in Model 3, feeling valued was dropped as a mediator and replaced by adding value. This model, which considered two mediators (adding value and psychological sense of community), was the only one whose coefficients were all significant (see Figure 2). The two indirect effects showed, on the one hand, that community participation was associated with adding value ($\beta = .40$, $p < .01$), and that adding value was associated with subjective wellbeing ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, the other indirect effect showed that community participation was associated with psychological sense of community ($\beta = .32$, $p < .01$), and that psychological sense of community was associated with subjective wellbeing ($\beta = .41$, $p < .01$).

Please, insert Figure 2 about here

Table 6 shows that Model 3 was again the only one with a good fit to the data. The model explained 23.3% of the variance of subjective wellbeing. This model showed an indirect effect of community participation on subjective wellbeing through the mediators adding value and sense of community, with a 95% CI [0.10, 0.32] but showed no direct effect of community participation on subjective wellbeing, with a 95% CI [-0.19, 1.79]. Hence, an indirect-only mediation model was assumed (Zhao et al., 2010).

Please, insert Table 6 about here

Discussion

This study focuses on immigrants' community participation as an important practice of acquiring voice, power, citizenship, and wellbeing in host societies, as suggested by the liberation psychology approach (Garcia-Ramirez et al., 2011). Specifically, we analyzed the relationship between community participation and subjective wellbeing, focusing on the sense of mattering (feeling valued and sense of adding value) and the psychological sense of community as mediators.

Our first hypothesis was supported, as we found higher levels of subjective wellbeing, sense of mattering, and psychological sense of community among immigrants who were members of an MCBO than in those who were not. The finding regarding subjective wellbeing and psychological sense of community supports the results of previous studies (Alfieri et al., 2019; 2021) and highlights the potential role of MCBOs in reducing the existing gap between immigrants' and locals' wellbeing. Our results indicate that membership in an MCBO is linked to improving all the domains of subjective wellbeing in immigrants' lives (interpersonal, psychological, physical, communitarian, occupational, and economic). Thus, we can consider that MCBOs work

as multiservice spaces where immigrants can be welcomed as “whole” persons and where their diverse needs can be met. The finding regarding the sense of mattering is a novelty in the literature, and we can argue that MCBOs are spaces where people can feel important and enact their social responsibility. Regarding feeling valued, becoming members of an MCBO allows immigrants to be appreciated and recognized. Regarding the sense of adding value, immigrants’ community participation provides the opportunity for and perception of contributing something to the world.

Our second hypothesis was partially supported. We found that a higher degree of community participation among immigrants who are members of an MCBO is associated with higher levels of adding value, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing, but no significant differences were found for feeling valued. Regarding the sense of adding value, the more immigrants engage in their MCBO, the more they perceive they impact the world. Indeed, we can deduce that immigrants can play a positive role not only for other immigrants but also for the broader community in which they operate. Regarding psychological sense of community, the more immigrants participate, the more their social connectedness in the host country is enhanced. This result dismisses the risk that this kind of association might marginalize people and create parallel societies (Papadopoulos et al., 2013). On the contrary, through culturally safe environments, such as MCBOs, immigrants can gradually feel they belong in the new society while maintaining and honoring their cultural heritage. Our findings support significant differences among immigrants who participate at different intensity levels within an MCBO in terms of subjective wellbeing. This positive trend is in line with previous research. Indeed, in the literature, active volunteering appears to have a more significant effect on wellbeing than inactive volunteering (Huang, 2019), and the more continuous

and frequent the volunteering, the better (Appau et al., 2019; Morrow-Howell et al., 2009; Piliavin & Siegl, 2007). Finally, feeling valued does not increase consistently with the degree of community participation; that is, participating a little or a lot does not impact the degree of feeling valued. We can argue that MCBOs are spaces where people can feel important and appreciated by the very fact of belonging to them, especially in an outside host society that is often less inclined to recognize the value of immigrants.

Regarding our third hypothesis, we found that the sense of adding value and the psychological sense of community act as mediators of the relationship between community participation and subjective wellbeing. This model indicates that active participation is positively associated with immigrants' sense of adding value and psychological sense of community which, in turn, are positively associated with their subjective wellbeing. It is noteworthy that only the sense of adding value (measured through social generativity and referring to the perception of contributing to the world)—but not feeling valued—mediate the relationship between community participation and subjective wellbeing. This highlights the idea that immigrants feel more rewarded if they think they are useful and have an impact on their new society than if they are only being helped. It suggests that we need to advance towards innovative practices and policies of social generativity based on giving (vs. receiving), as discussed below in the practical implications section. Results also explain how participation allows immigrants to develop a sense of belonging to the new society. In summary, our results from the mediation model suggest that MCBOs can provide immigrants with an “operative” way of perceiving their contribution to the local community and helping them feel like they are part of it. This enhances the subjective wellbeing of immigrants who actively participate in host societies.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. First, as we adopted a correlational design, we cannot make causal inferences. Therefore, community participation might also be promoted by sense of mattering and psychological sense of community, as others have found (Deng et al. 2022; Ramos et al., 2017). However, the path analysis performed in this study is a suitable alternative for formulating causal hypotheses in the social sciences, where not meeting experimental laboratory conditions is common (Cheong & MacKinnon, 2012). Second, the model sample was limited to the north of Italy and was not chosen randomly. Although we expect our results to be generalizable to other countries with similar conditions for immigrants as Italy, future research should study this issue. Maya-Jariego (2001) said that problems of representativeness with migrant samples primarily derive from concentrating on subgroups of the population that are most accessible to researchers. To overcome this problem and ensure sample diversification, we followed his suggestions to build trust with the community (MCBOs and Italian nonprofit entities) before sampling, using some community members to present the research. Third, we lack data on Italians' subjective wellbeing to understand whether immigrants' participation reduces the gap between the wellbeing of these two groups (immigrants vs. local-born Italians). Moreover, the lack of a significant relationship between community participation and feeling valued might be due to measurement issues. Future research could investigate the sense of mattering with alternative measurements, such as the very recent one of Scarpa et al. (2022). A fourth limitation is that we tested only two possible mediators of the relationship between community participation and subjective wellbeing. In contrast, research on the general population also identified perceived control and optimism (Mellor et al., 2009), service self-efficacy, and meaning

in life (Fenn et al., 2021) as possible mediators. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic affected immigrants' subjective wellbeing negatively (Garrido et al., 2022), so the data collected in this study may be distorted.

Practical Implications

Despite these limitations, our research provides, for the first time, evidence that community participation is positively related to immigrant subjective wellbeing through two paths: sense of adding value and psychological sense of community. Our results strengthen the empirical base for focusing on community participation as a key variable for the liberation psychology approach and have practical implications for enhancing immigrant subjective wellbeing. Indeed, social policies should promote the community participation of immigrants to support their positive mental health, thus bridging the gap between immigrants and locals in terms of subjective wellbeing. In particular, our results concerning the relevance of immigrants' sense of adding value highlight the need for a new approach that replaces the traditional or dominant view of helping immigrants only through the coverage of their basic needs, feeding passive roles among them, and promoting dependent relationships with the community resources of host societies. Instead, we suggest a new approach rooted in social generativity that moves beyond the welfarist perspective where immigrants only "receive" to embrace an active perspective where immigrants can "give." One example is the peer support and peer mentoring program developed by Paloma et al. (2020), where immigrants become mentors of newly arrived immigrants. The program reveals its usefulness in promoting immigrant wellbeing through their meaningful engagement as agents of change within their communities. Indeed, as Schmidt and colleagues (2020) stated, when people "are treated as autonomous individuals and are involved in decision-making processes and civic

activities in their community, they are more likely to believe that their thoughts and actions are important to society and that they have an impact on society” (p. 15).

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Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample according to Membership in an MCBO

		Membership (n=308)	
		Non-Member (n=169)	Member (n=139)
Sex	Male	39.6 %	41.7%
	Female	56.2 %	54.0%
	Not specified	4.1 %	4.3%
Age	Young adulthood (18-34)	33.7%	11.5%
	Adulthood (35-54)	33.7%	46.8%
	Midlife (55-64)	13.0%	18.0%
	Old age (over 65)	1.8%	3.6%
	Not specified	17.8%	20.1%
Geographical area	Asia	7.1%	2.9%
	Eastern Europe	18.3%	10.8%
	Latin America	41.4%	38.1%
	Maghreb and Middle East	12.4%	8.6%
	Sub-Saharan Africa	16.6%	34.5%
	Not specified	4.1%	5.0%
Time in the country	Less than 1 year	1.8%	0.7%
	Between 1 to 3 years	11.2%	5.8%
	Between 3 to 5 years	14.2%	7.9%
	More than 5 years	68.6%	81.3%
	Not specified	4.1%	4.3%
Level of education achieved*	None	9.5%	5.0%
	Primary education	4.1%	0.7%
	Secondary education	34.9%	44.6%
	Higher education	33.7%	27.3%
	Not specified	17.8%	22.3%
Legal status	No valid documentation	4.1%	3.6%
	International protection permit	9.4%	5.8%
	Family reunion permit	6.5%	6.5%
	Study or tourism permit	4.1%	1.4%
	Work residence permit	16.0%	12.2%
	Long-term residence permit	17.2%	19.4%
	Italian citizenship	25.4%	31.7%
	Not specified	17.2%	19.4%

Note. *Categories adapted from the International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Variables Membership, Community Participation, Feeling Valued, Adding Value, Psychological Sense of Community, and Subjective Wellbeing

Variable	Scale range	<i>n</i>	Mean or %	<i>SD</i>
Membership	Yes / No	308	45.1% ^a	-
CP	0 - 5	129	3.37	1.46
FV	11 - 55	261	36.08	7.59
AV	6 - 30	251	23.90	4.90
PSOC	19 - 95	240	67.55	13.22
SWB	0 - 70	259	48.84	12.05

Note. ^a: Percentage of members of an MCBO; CP: Community participation; FV: Feeling valued; AD: Adding value; PSOC: Psychological sense of community; SWB: Subjective wellbeing.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of Community Participation, Feeling Valued, Adding Value, Psychological Sense of Community, and Subjective Wellbeing among Participants who are Members of an MCBO

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. CP	129	3.37	1.46	-	-	-	-
2. FV	110	38.60	6.38	.05	-	-	-
3. AV	110	25.76	3.97	.40**	.32**	-	-
4. PSOC	110	71.19	11.40	.32**	.29**	.25**	-
5. SWB	110	51.29	11.67	.24**	.39**	.31**	.46**

Note. CP: Community participation; FV: Feeling valued; AD: Adding value; PSOC: Psychological sense of community; SWB: Subjective wellbeing.

** $p < .01$.

Table 4

One-way ANOVA of Feeling Valued, Adding Value, Psychological Sense of Community, and Subjective Wellbeing according to MCBO Membership

	Non-member			Member			<i>F</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
FV	151	34.24	7.88	110	38.62	5.93	22.82**
AV	141	22.45	5.07	110	25.76	3.97	31.75**
PSOC	130	64.47	13.90	110	71.19	11.40	16.37**
SWB	149	47.03	12.05	110	51.29	11.67	8.10**

Note. FV: Feeling valued; AD: Adding value; PSOC: Psychological sense of community; SWB: Subjective wellbeing.

** $p < .01$.

Table 5

One-way ANOVA of Feeling Valued, Adding Value, Psychological Sense of Community, and Subjective Wellbeing according to Degree of Community Participation

	Degree of Community Participation (<i>n</i> = 129)			<i>ANOVA</i>
	Low (<i>n</i> = 55)	Medium (<i>n</i> = 38)	High (<i>n</i> = 46)	
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
FV	37.88 (6.27)	38.58 (6.83)	39.51 (5.98)	$F(2, 107) = 0.55$
AV	23.79 (4.36)	26.16 (3.82)	27.65 (2.35)	$F(2, 107) = 9.75^{**}$
PSOC	66.46 (11.83)	71.37 (9.16)	76.73 (11.29)	$F(2, 107) = 7.81^{**}$
SWB	48.39 (10.99)	50.52 (13.69)	55.85 (7.95)	$F(2, 107) = 3.81^*$

Note. FV: Feeling valued; AD: Adding value; PSOC: Psychological sense of community; SWB: Subjective wellbeing.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

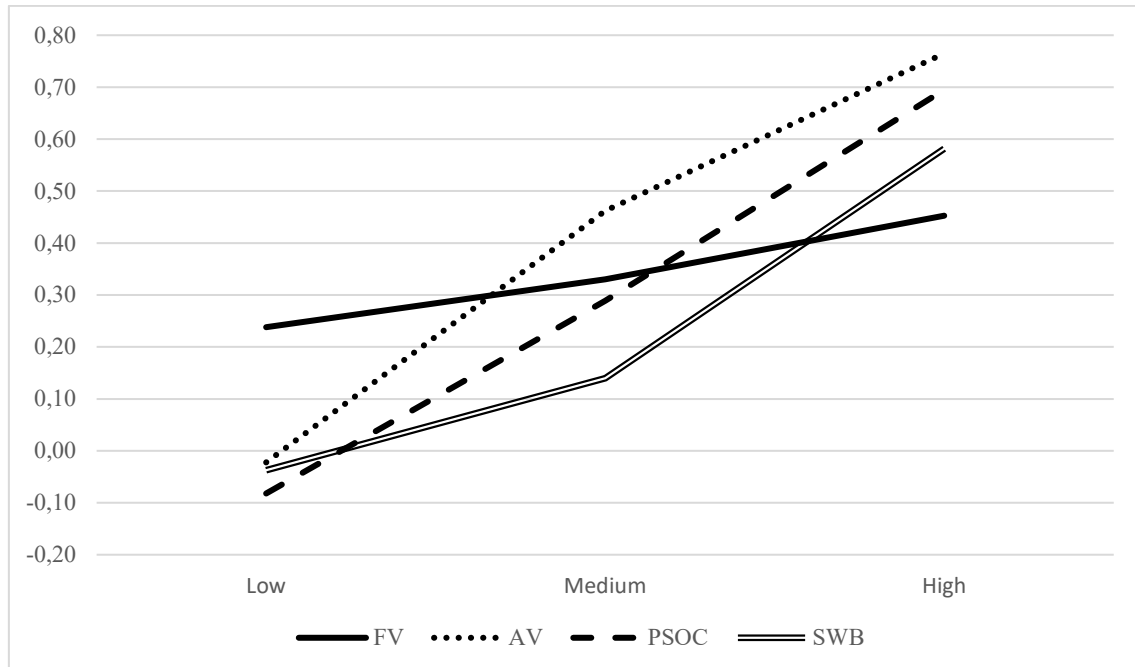
Table 6

Fit Statistics for Proposed Regression Mediation Models

	<i>Model Fit Indexes</i>									<i>R²</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>df</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>	NFI	TLI	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA	
Model 1: FV, AV and PSOC	110	4	22.5	.000	.76	.48	.78	.119	.21	.239
Model 2: FV and PSOC	110	2	11.33	.003	.81	.47	.82	.099	.21	.237
Model 3: AV and PSOC	110	2	2.42	.298	.96	.98	.99	.044	.04	.233

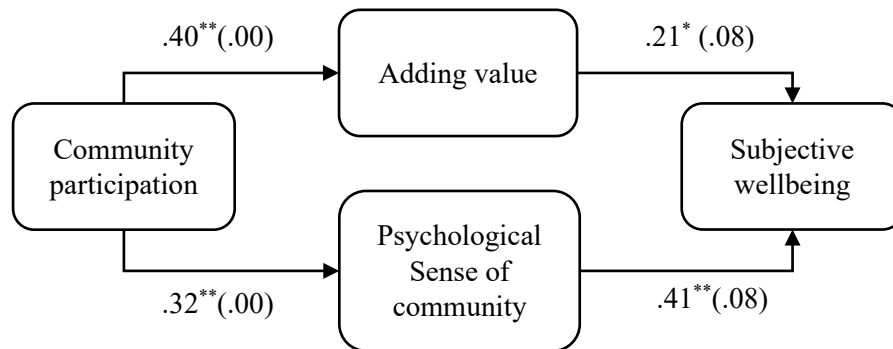
Note. NFI: Normed Fit Index; TLI: Tucker-Lewis Index; CFI: Comparative Fit Index; SRMR: Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual; RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; FV: Feeling valued; AD: Adding value; PSOC: Psychological sense of community.

Figure 1. Trend graph of feeling valued, adding value, psychological sense of community, and subjective wellbeing with normalized scores by degree of community participation ($n = 129$).



Note. FV: Feeling valued; AD: Adding value; PSOC: Psychological sense of community; SWB: Subjective wellbeing.

Figure 2. Standardized estimates for Model 3: Adding value and psychological sense of community as mediators of the relationship between community participation and subjective wellbeing.



Note. The model included a sample of 110 participants.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.