

The influence of leisure-based community activities on neighbourhood support and the social cohesion of communities in Spain

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Abstract

To analyse the effects of leisure-based community activities in improving neighbourhood support and social cohesion, data were collected in two neighbourhoods of Barcelona (Spain) through questionnaires and interviews. The results indicate that promoting neighbourhood support requires a different strategy from promoting participation in leisure-based activities aimed at developing social cohesion within a community. The study also suggests various useful strategies to strengthen the effects of leisure-based community activities. The strategies recommended revolve around networking, use of the public space, recognition of diversity and conflict management.

Keywords

Community action, leisure-based community activities, neighbourhood support, social cohesion, social support

Introduction

In response to the problems that often emerge in today's societies, neighbourhood support is a key factor for increasing the social cohesion of communities. At times, problems of different types – economic, relational, health, ideological and so on – weaken the capacity of family and neighbourhood networks to provide support, fragmenting individual resources and polarising societies. Conventional social policies, which are often highly standardised, are seen as insufficient to resolve such situations (Gimeno-Monterde and Álamo-Candelaria, 2018), and this failure makes it necessary to develop community-based social policies to replace them. Community-based social policies are initiatives aimed at providing people with their own tools and resources, enabling them to identify shared goals (Kirk and Shutte, 2004; Smock, 2004) and implement coordinated solutions to problems (Sen, 1985). In this way, the damage and consequences that derive from crisis processes can be reduced or palliated more effectively and efficiently, as communities become spaces for solutions, not only conflict. Accordingly, implementing community social work policies and programmes enables individuals and groups

to acquire the competences and resources necessary to generate effective shared responses, strengthening neighbourhood support networks and helping to increase social cohesion in neighbourhoods and territories. We refer here to political measures aimed at enabling the construction of shared projects through collective participation. Such initiatives enable community representatives to establish a dialogue and negotiate with local authorities regarding the services and resources needed (Checkoway, 2011; Marchioni, 2004, 2006). Under this approach, community social work focuses mainly on establishing forums for expression, participation, respect for difference and individuality and conflict resolution (Acebes and Delgado, 2012; Rothman, 2007). Its goal is to contribute to the development of relational social capital and greater social cohesion. In this respect, participation in leisure-based community activities in childhood and adolescence has proven effects in generating the social support necessary for individual and collective development (Bayón Martín and Ahedo González, 2011; Gómez et al., 2016; Morata and Garreta, 2012; Novella et al., 2014; Puig, 2009). Similarly, social support is one of the main elements that can provide protection in situations of vulnerability (Cardozo and Alderete, 2009; Manciaux, 2003; Zhong et al., 2014). Moreover, leisure-based community activities contribute to developing participatory and relational competencies among the people that take part in them (Marzo et al., 2019; PACEC, 2011). Such activities also help to promote experiences of cooperation and co existence that activate social and community life in neighbourhoods and cities (Lake, 2013; Morgan, 2009; Neal and Walters, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Spaaij et al., 2014), in this way contributing to the development of social cohesion.

The purpose of this article is to study the links between participation in leisure-based community activities, neighbourhood support and social cohesion so that an understanding of these links can help to guide intervention in processes aimed at developing more protective and cohesive environments.

Theoretical framework

Social workers and professionals engaged in social intervention in general frequently analyse social support networks, whether professional, informal or mixed, that are formed by the individuals and groups they work with in order to establish lines and plans of action to respond to their needs (Gilchrist, 2019; Hardcastle et al., 2011; Rodríguez and Ferreira, 2018; Rúa, 2008). According to De Robertis (2003), one of the most important functions of social workers, from the perspective of working with the community, is that of re-establishing social bonds. By strengthening social support networks, social workers contribute to the development of social capital, both in the community and in society as a whole (Saz-Gil et al., 2016). Studies of this topic (Wellman and Wortley, 1990) show that:

- (a) Strong bonds are the greatest providers of social support for people;
- (b) The different types of support are provided by different people in a network;
- (c) Women are the greatest providers of support, both to other women and men.

Seed (1997) put forward a proposal regarding the application of social network analysis to research and intervention in social services. In this proposal, social relation networks are used to cement bonds between people, places, activities, events and so on. Similarly, Murty and Gillespie (1995) proposed ways of including social network analysis in the social work curriculum. Within the framework of social work, this type of analysis is relevant as it provides information about

the relationships both between individuals and within groups. From this perspective, it is particularly important for research to explore in greater depth how the construction of such networks helps to strengthen and activate community support and social capital in neighbourhoods and in the contexts in which social work takes place (Saravia, 2014). We are speaking, then, of the construction of networks that function as connectors and catalysts for social cohesion and where leisure-based community activities (understood as activities with educational purposes that promote social participation, organised outside the school context and times and aimed at the whole population) promote the creation of information and neighbourhood networks, contributing to strengthening and developing communities. These are networks that activate relational and support mechanisms between people, groups and associations, helping to increase social cohesion.

As regards social cohesion, the literature refers to such intangibles as the sense of belonging, membership of a group or the willingness to participate and share. There are three common elements among these intangibles (Marcús, 2011):

- (a) *A shared vision*. This includes universal values, mutual respect, common aspirations and shared identities.
- (b) *The sense of belonging to a group or community*. Groups and communities work well when they have common goals and responsibilities and individuals are willing to cooperate with each other.
- (c) *A state of process*. Social cohesion is seen not as a result, but as a continuous, constant process aimed at achieving social harmony.

An understanding of the links between participation in leisure-based community activities and the different levels of social support (Elkington and Watkins, 2014; Iglesias et al., 2019; Rojek, 2010) can provide a useful source of information for improving social cohesion processes in territories where social workers intervene. Differentiating between levels of support enables us to understand more precisely the effects that leisure-based community activities have at the ‘micro’ level – that is born of intimate relationships and trust – the ‘meso’ level – shaped by social networks, particularly networks of neighbours – and the ‘macro’ level – which is driven by a broader sense of belonging to the community or the citizenry.

At the ‘macro’ level, the scientific literature highlights the links between participation in or membership of associations and the construction of citizenship and the generation of community support (Cueto et al., 2016; Ollero, 2015). Leisure is an essential element for the socialisation of adolescents (Caballo et al., 2011) and also provides an educational, preventive and generative space for identity and citizenship (Pérez-Cosín and Uceda, 2009).

Moreover, leisure-based community activities, which create an excellent context for social interactions, are a source of growth and development that enhance the sociability of individuals by promoting learning in civic and social values and encouraging practices of participation and active involvement in collective affairs (Novella et al., 2014; Puig, 2009). These activities are, then, a form of leisure that enhances prosocial behaviour and provides a source for social support that is more community-based (López and Morata, 2015).

Various research papers (Medir and Magin, 2012; Novella et al., 2014; Ortega and Bayón, 2014; World Scout Bureau Inc., 2018) confirm that taking part in leisure-based community activities encourages the establishment of social bonds, as such activities enhance the development of self-esteem, participation in learning and the construction of the sense of belonging to the community.

Studies that focus on the impact of activities linked to art and culture can also be considered as occupying the ‘macro’ level. Sociocultural action is based on the premise that art and culture are tools for social transformation since, through cultural promotion, they contribute to articulating collaborative processes that can transform the community and generate social support. Besides research into the use of the arts in their palliative and preventive dimensions and/or as a tool for the development of individual skills (Lowe, 2000), sociocultural action is also considered an important practice for community development (Casacuberta et al., 2011) and citizen participation.

As regards the ‘micro’ level, the literature highlights the impact on health and wellbeing of more intimate social support generated within the family and in relationships of greater trust (GallardoPeralta et al., 2015; Gracia and Herrero, 2006).

Various studies of the effects of leisure-based community activities confirm their positive impact on the ability to interact and make friends (Novella et al., 2014). According to participants in these activities, they help them to develop deeper, more authentic friendships that can be established in other spaces.

Evidence exists, then, to suggest that participation in leisure-based community activities contributes to the development of social support resources linked to both the ‘micro’ level (family and friends) and the ‘macro’ level (belonging to a community in its broadest sense).

To understand the processes that generate social cohesion in a specific territory, analysis is also required of the links between participation in leisure-based community activities and social support at the ‘meso’ level, articulated by more everyday social networks, particularly those structured around neighbourly relations.

Scientific study of the mechanisms that generate this type of neighbourhood support is still emerging and is strongly influenced by cultural biases regarding conceptions of the neighbourhood and citizenry (Torres, 2002). Literature has been produced on the subject of neighbourhood organisations, identified as key players in the development of social capital, as they connect people both to each other and to organisations, with all their resources (Small, 2009). In this context, some researchers (Ruef and Kwon, 2016) have found differences between associations of home-owning residents and tenants’ associations. These differences include such aspects as trust in neighbours, willingness to cooperate and interact with them, and trust in other social minorities. When neighbourhood associations focus on improving the quality of life of community members (this focus is what generally characterises tenants’ associations), their activity has a much more significant impact on variables related to the construction of social capital among neighbours than is the case of associations devoted more to protecting the particular interests of neighbours (typically the case of owners’ associations). This is true both of bonding (relations between neighbours) and bridging (the capacity to welcome or link up with other groups).

The organisation of leisure-based community activities cannot be explained by the need to protect private property, and such activities therefore provide an excellent context in which to explore the links between participation and neighbourhood support. The relations between these two concepts can also help us to identify elements that generate more cohesive social environments.

Table 1. Participants' profiles.

| Gender | Age | | |
|--------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 18–35 years | 36–65 years | 66–95 years |
| Male | 20 | 50 | 24 |
| Female | 24 | 42 | 36 |

Seven lost cases were identified in the profile analysis.

Method

Design

The questions that guide the research are as follows: what effects does participation in leisurebased community activities have on neighbourhood support and the social cohesion of a territory? Can an understanding of these effects help to shape social policies and professional intervention towards promoting the development of more protective and cohesive environments?

To answer these questions, the authors implemented a research design based on triangulation (Bergman, 2008), in which all the information gathered was brought together to strengthen the validity of the results. To ensure a broader and higher understanding of the phenomenon, qualitative and quantitative methodologies were combined.

The data were gathered in two neighbourhoods in the city of Barcelona (Spain): Bellvitge and Prosperitat. To select the neighbourhoods, a map of social cohesion indicators was drawn up, based on validated international systems (Jenson and Canadian Policy Research Networks, 1998). Secondary sources enabled evidence to be collected that identify both Bellvitge and Prosperitat as neighbourhoods in which processes aimed at increasing social cohesion have been implemented over the last 10 years (L'Hospitalet de Llobregat City Council, 2017; Barcelona City Council, 2019a, 2019b).

Participants

For data gathering purposes, the participants were divided into two groups, differentiated according to the nature of the information to be provided:

- (a) Quantitative: neighbours selected non-randomly by quotas ($N = 203$), with a stratified sample by age and sex, proportional to census population data (see details in Table 1).
- (b) Qualitative: purposively selected key informants ($N = 20$), 10 of them residents with great experience and knowledge of the neighbourhood, and another 10 active workers at leisure and sociocultural action organisations (five social workers, two teachers, two socio-cultural educators and one sports educator).

Data gathering instruments

Two instruments were used, according to the type of data to be gathered: a questionnaire for quantitative information and interviews for qualitative information.

Table 2. Dimensions analysed in the Leisure-based Community Activities and Social Cohesion (LCSC) questionnaire.

| Dimension | Description | Items | Cronbach's alpha |
|--|---|--|-------------------------|
| Participation in leisure-based community activities | Number of leisurebased community activities taken part in over the last 3 months | 1. Community centre/summer camp 2. Religious institutions 3. Play centre 4. Sleep-away camp 5. Residents' associations 6. Social movements 7. Cultural associations 8. Scouts groups 9. Sports clubs 10. Hobby groups/clubs 11. Others | N/A |
| Neighbourhood support | Intensity of bonding interactions with neighbours | 17. Number of neighbours the person meets once a month 18. Frequency of meetings with neighbours with whom there is most contact 19. Number of neighbours with whom it is possible to talk about private matters 20. Number of nearby neighbours that you can call on when help is needed 21. Frequency with which neighbours share important decisions with you 22. Frequency that you share important decisions with neighbours | .84 |
| Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood | Perception that the neighbourhood is a safe and cohesive environment | 12. Quality of life in the neighbourhood 13. Feeling of security 14. Feeling that there are common projects and concerns in the neighbourhood 15. Knowledge about available sociocultural and leisure activities in the neighbourhood 16. Rating of the leadership of neighbourhood organisations for the common good | .78 |

The questionnaire, Leisure-based Community Activities and Social Cohesion (LCSC), was designed and reviewed in consultation with experts. The final version contained 22 items that enabled data to be gathered on the following dimensions (see details in Table 2):

- (a) Participation in leisure-based community activities was operationalised through 11 dichotomous questions on participation in different activities in the last 3 months. The data obtained were used to construct a scale variable on the number of activities in which the subject participated.

- (b) Neighbourhood support was operationalised through six items adapted from the Lubben Social Work Scale (Lubben et al., 2006). The results from these items were used to construct a scale variable on the percentage of neighbourhood support received by interviewees.
- (c) Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood was operationalised through five items initially rated using a Likert scale, which served as the basis for constructing a scale variable on the percentage of social cohesion perceived in the neighbourhood.

To measure the latter two dimensions, Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the reliability of the items selected.

Semi-structured interviews with key informants focused on the following issues:

- (a) Participants' perception of the contribution of leisure-based community activities to building neighbourly relations;
- (b) Description and characteristics of neighbourly relations;
- (c) Role of neighbourhood support in response to isolation and social conflicts.

Procedure

The information was gathered simultaneously in the two neighbourhoods, from a non-random quota sample in the case of the questionnaire and a purposive case-type sample as regards the semistructured interviews (20 people, significant for their involvement in sociocultural and educational leisure activities, were interviewed). The participants agreed voluntarily to take part, and the survey team received specific training to carry out their work.

The questionnaire was administered anonymously in different time slots, days of the week and locations in the territory. The interviews were conducted at the headquarters of the organisations to which the key informants were linked.

The ethical aspects of the study were positively evaluated by the Ramon Llull University Ethics Commission.

Data analysis

For the quantitative analysis, the relationship between the three dimensions (participation in leisure-based community activities, neighbourhood support and perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood) was established by applying a Pearson correlation. Moreover, after discarding the possibility that the results responded to a normal distribution, a non-parametric test was conducted using SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0) to determine the effect of each dimension on variations in the other two (Kruskal–Wallis).

The qualitative information was analysed using ATLAS.Ti7 software. This analysis was conducted in various stages of categorisation and recategorisation based on peer review:

- (a) Analysis based on a set of categories from existing literature;
- (b) Iterative analysis to identify possible emerging issues from the three dimensions analysed;
- (c) Identification by consensus of the final categories within the three dimensions analysed;
- (d) Inter-judge stage enabling the final categories to be determined and validated.

Results

Regarding the quantitative results, the descriptive statistics (see Table 3) indicate that mean participation in leisure-based community activities over the last 3 months is between 1 and 2 (mean of 1.36, with a standard deviation of 0.96). Mean neighbourhood support is 41 percent (with a dispersion of almost 20 percentage points), and perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood is around 65 percent on average (with a standard deviation of almost 20 percentage points).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on the three dimensions analysed.

| | N | Mean | SD | Minimum | Maximum |
|---|-----|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| Participation in leisure-based community activities | 203 | 1.355 | 0.956 | 0 | 5 |
| Neighbourhood support | 202 | 41.007 | 19.823 | 0 | 90 |
| Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood | 201 | 65.174 | 19.820 | 0 | 100 |

Table 4. Correlation between the dimensions analysed.

| | | Participation in leisure-based community activities | Neighbourhood support | Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood |
|---|---------------------|---|-----------------------|--|
| Participation in leisure-based community activities | Pearson correlation | 1 | .046 | .262** |
| | Sig. (bivariate) | | .516 | .000 |
| | N | 203 | 202 | 201 |
| Neighbourhood support | Pearson correlation | .046 | 1 | .438** |
| | Sig. (bivariate) | .516 | | .000 |
| | N | 202 | 202 | 200 |
| Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood | Pearson correlation | .262** | .438** | 1 |
| | Sig. (bivariate) | .000 | .000 | |
| | N | 201 | 200 | 201 |

**The correlation is significant at .01 level (bivariate).

Table 5. Effect of participation in leisure-based community activities on neighbourhood support and perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood^{a,b}.

| | Neighbourhood support | Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Chi-squared | 3.714 | 17.972 |
| Degrees of freedom | 5 | 5 |
| Asymptotic significance | .591 | .003 |

^aKruskal–Wallis test. ^bGrouping variable: Participation in leisure-based community activities.

The correlation between the three dimensions (see Table 4) shows that the intensity of participation in leisure-based community activities does not appear to have a significant link to expressed neighbourhood support ($r = .046$), although it does have a significant positive link to perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood ($r = .262$; $\text{sig} = .000$).

The relationship between neighbourhood support and perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood is even clearer, standing at $r = .438$ ($\text{sig} = .000$).

After verifying that none of the three variables was normally distributed (using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test), we conducted a non-parametric test (Kruskal–Wallis) to complement the analysis of the influences among the three.

Table 5 confirms the data obtained in the correlation tests. The number of activities that subjects took part in does not explain the variations that occur in relation to neighbourhood support, although it does have significant impact on perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood ($\text{sig} = .003$).

Table 6 shows that perceived social cohesion also explains the variations in levels of participation, although with a lower level of significance than the other way around ($\text{sig} = .016$). This set of results indicates that the perception of the neighbourhood as a cohesive environment facilitates social participation and that this, in turn, increases the probability of perception of the neighbourhood as a cohesive environment.

Table 6. Effect of perceived social cohesion on participation in leisure-based community activities and neighbourhood support^{a,b}.

| | Neighbourhood support | Participation in sociocultural and educational leisure activities |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Chi-squared | 54.108 | 34.570 |
| Degrees of freedom | 19 | 19 |
| Asymptotic significance | .000 | .016 |

^aKruskal–Wallis test. ^bGrouping variable: Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood.

Table 7. Effect of neighbourhood support on participation in leisure-based community activities and perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood^{a,b}.

| | Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood | Participation in leisure-based community activities |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Chi-squared | 72.340 | 17.648 |
| Degrees of freedom | 26 | 26 |
| Asymptotic significance | .000 | .888 |

^aKruskal–Wallis test. ^bGrouping variable: Neighbourhood support.

Once again (as seen in both Tables 6 and 7), the two dimensions with the greatest mutual influence are neighbourhood support and perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood, with high levels of significance (.000 in both cases).

As we can see, then, there is no clear link between the number of leisure-based community activities in which people take part and levels of neighbourhood support. It does seem, however, that levels of participation and perceived social cohesion influence each other in a positive way, and the same is true of neighbourhood support and perceived social cohesion.

Analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the interviews also enabled more in-depth study of participants' perceptions of the dimensions analysed and the links between them. The results are structured according to the dimensions and categories obtained in the various categorisation stages described above (see Table 8).

Participation in leisure-based community activities

The narratives gathered coincide in their vision of markedly socio-political participation, clearly connected with the 'macro' level of social support. Participation in leisure-based community activities is, first and foremost, a way of being socially active and encouraging other members of the community to be similarly active. Social activism, which was the first category that emerged in the analysis of this dimension, is understood as neighbours' social engagement or involvement. Social activism takes place, particularly, within the framework of the various associations.

The second category that emerged is social mobilisation in response to the needs of the neighbourhood. Participation in this type of activity helps to keep the community united in the task of fulfilling shared goals. While activism implies personal positioning, mobilisation is a collective exercise of rights which eventually generates improvements in the lives of citizens as a whole. This is how one of the people interviewed describes one of those achievements:

No, the neighbourhood wasn't like this [. . .]. The neighbourhood was built up by fighting. Look, the residents' association took 17 years to get this community centre [. . .] And ten years for that green space, the square. (Prosperitat, resident)

Finally, the narratives analysed that referred to participation contain repeated references to individual or community leadership, which is necessary to keep the processes described above alive:

Prosperitat is a neighbourhood with a rich network of well-communicated associations and centres that, when they organise activities, talk to each other. If there is a problem of femicide, then a protocol is established to combat that kind of thing. In fact a group of people at the community centre has drawn up a protocol and will present it to all the associations in the neighbourhood to be used in any situation. Any problems that come up can be resolved; there is a lot of communication, and that is good for the neighbourhood. (Prosperitat, resident)

Table 8. Categories related to the three dimensions studied.

| Dimension | Category |
|---|--|
| Participation in leisurebased community activities | Social activism Social mobilisation Leadership |
| Neighbourhood support | Neighbourly relations Friendly relations Relations of solidarity with less-advantaged people |
| Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood | Networking Use of the public space Recognition of diversity and identity of the neighbourhood Conflict management and citizen coexistence |

These three types of process (activism, mobilisation and leadership) contribute to the social cohesion of the community, as they increase the sense of belonging to a collective project. The three processes exercise influence at the level of convictions or values. These results are consistent with those found in evaluation of international service-learning experiences (Furco and Billing, 2002) which, although mostly conducted in academic contexts, nevertheless generate pedagogical principles and social motivations similar to those found in our work.

Neighbourhood support

The narratives concerning neighbourhood support included elements linked, above all, to interpersonal relationships (neighbourly relations, friendship or solidarity towards more disadvantaged people). Neighbourhood support is built up through processes that require less socio-political positioning or activity and more concrete everyday action. The contribution that these processes make to social cohesion revolves around the prevention of loneliness, mutual support between neighbours and the establishment of a social network to prevent processes of isolation and promote individuals and communities, helping them to develop.

At a personal level, it is very good to feel that you belong to a group. (Bellvitge, worker)

And these days we also have the evictions that, in Nou Barris, when it happens to someone, people turn up . . . lend a hand . . . In Prosperitat 6 or 7 [evictions] have been stopped. (Prosperitat, resident)

I feel that Bellvitge is a very friendly neighbourhood. The many associations here, many of them led by elderly people, people from around here, local people and elderly people that do things, and it is true that one breathes an air of willingness to welcome everyone and help each other. (Bellvitge, worker)

Despite the importance of mutual support between neighbours, due to its relational nature, this support is seen in many international contexts as something peculiar to the private sphere which, at best, is promoted by charity or welfare organisations that are often linked to religious organisations of different denominations. On occasion, these experiences become the germs of projects that evolve towards more transformative and scientifically and technically well-grounded initiatives. In the case of Spain, such initiatives take the form of cooperation projects between civic associations and governments. In recent decades, these projects have articulated a large proportion of the social work conducted in the neighbourhoods of large cities most affected by inequalities.

Perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood

The categories that emerged in the analysis of texts directly related to perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood raise issues of a methodological nature. These categories concern four processes that contribute to enhancing cohesion: networking; use of the public space; recognition of diversity; and conflict management.

As regards networking, different working systems are identified, including coordination, cooperation, transdisciplinarity and co-responsibility. The role of certain leisure-based community activities in generating spaces for networking that contribute to building social cohesion in the neighbourhood is also noted. Local festivities stand out among the activities that perform this role most effectively. According to one of the people interviewed,

We feel that local festivities form part of the common good because they are where we interact, where we engage in projects with others, where we socialise, where we talk about life. (Prosperitat, resident)

As regards use of the public space, the urban design of the territories and activities conducted in public spaces and facilities are factors that enhance perceptions of social cohesion in the neighbourhood. According to the people interviewed, the shared space is a key instrument for social and educational intervention:

Whenever we can, we go outside. The street is a highly educational space. We use parks, the library . . . because children have to be aware of the opportunities they have in the neighbourhood and how to benefit from them. (Bellvitge, worker)

In the territories studied, social cohesion is also generated through the recognition of the neighbourhood as a diverse whole with its own identity. This 'neighbourhood identity' is expressed in various ways, as pride in the neighbourhood and as a sense of responsibility or awareness of a shared future:

There is a feeling of belonging that goes much further than that. It is almost a kind of pride in being from Prosperitat. (Prosperitat, worker)

We all started having children at more or less the same time, which meant that, all at the same time, we needed schools, markets, the underground . . . for our children to attend university . . . a series of needs in the neighbourhood, and because we all needed these things, there was a large number of people who were active participants in all of our lives. (Bellvitge, resident)

A key factor in the construction of this collective identity is recognition of diversity by members of the community, regardless of their origin. Moreover, according to one neighbour, community centres also play an important role:

I think this is very positive [. . .] The role that these organisations play seems very important to me. At the time when many people are coming from other parts, migrating from different countries around the world, community centres play a very important role in building cohesion, something that is very important. (Bellvitge, worker)

Finally, the people interviewed noted the importance of good conflict management, which enhances the feeling of security and citizen coexistence, and that, whenever possible, the community should play a leading role in this. This is exemplified by one of the narratives gathered:

We have lived through difficult times. For instance, with some guys who were ruining the festivities, very complicated things . . . but by hard work and never calling on the police, which is important, for the neighbourhood to solve its own problems, as has been the case. (Prosperitat, worker)

These results are consistent with those reported in recent studies into processes for the inclusion of migrants in host territories. Although, understandably, migrants do not perceive that community participation directly meets their basic needs, there is a statistically significant link between participation in such activities and migrants' stated levels of satisfaction with life and perceptions of inclusion (Darretxe-Urrutxi et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to analyse the links between participation in leisure-based community activities and neighbourhood support and social cohesion so that an understanding of these links can guide the intervention of social workers in helping to develop more protective and cohesive communities. After reviewing the results obtained according to the theoretical aspects presented, we conclude that:

1. Mutual influences are observed between some of the dimensions studied. Perceived social cohesion is strengthened by increased participation in leisure-based community activities, and also by neighbourhood support. Such authors as Bayón Martín and Ahedo González (2011), Gómez et al. (2016), Morata and Garreta (2012), Novella et al. (2014) and Puig (2009), all note that participating in leisure-based community activities during childhood and adolescence has proven effects in generating the social support necessary for individual and collective development. This influence also occurs the other way around: perception of the neighbourhood as a cohesive environment seems to encourage leisure-based community activities, and also has a direct effect on increasing perceived neighbourhood support.
2. However, the level of participation in leisure-based community activities has no proven influence on perceived neighbourhood support. Although both dimensions contribute to perceptions of social cohesion in the community, they seem to respond to different levels of influence. They are not necessarily related to each other, at least if analysis of participation focuses on the number of activities taken part in.
3. Consistent with the results of the qualitative analyses and with the review of the literature, we can affirm that participation in leisure-based community activities has a high degree of influence on the 'macro' and 'micro' levels of social support. In other words, participating in

these types of activities encourages, first, the development of interest in the common good, in improving the community, and that this, in turn, activates social engagement or activism in search of advancement for the community. Such authors as Novella et al. (2014) and Puig (2009) observe that participation in this type of activity promotes learning and the practice of civic and social values, encouraging participation and active involvement in the community. Second, as we have seen in the study conducted, participation in these spheres of activity also generates spaces for interpersonal relationships that encourage more intimate social support, linked to networks of families and friends. Earlier studies (Novella et al., 2014) show that these types of activity contribute to developing deeper friendships and strengthening intimate social support networks. However, promoting neighbourhood support requires other types of community actions, probably not always conducted in contexts linked to leisure-based community activities, such as neighbourhood associations. The literature shows that neighbourhood associations, which focus on improving the quality of life of their members, have greater capacity to develop social capital and promote links, both with the community and among its members (Ruef and Kwon, 2016; Small, 2009).

4. Promoting neighbourhood support is a different strategy for encouraging participation in leisure-based community activities, aimed at developing the social cohesion of a community. Participation has an educational function that enables the generation of ideas, arguments and convictions that are essential for the social construction of the community. Moreover, participation also facilitates intimate relationship experiences that are necessary for personal wellbeing. However, the promotion of neighbourhood support also affects other socio-emotional aspects that are not so closely linked to intimate relationships, but which can contribute to enhancing the benefits generated by the sense of community identity and the friendships established in spaces for educational leisure and sociocultural action. Neighbourhood support seems to be a factor in increasing community cohesion because it acts as an antidote against isolation and as a driver of solidarity for those living in the area. This type of solidarity may carry less ideological weight compared to that generated by campaigns or general attitudes promoted by educational leisure or sociocultural action organisations, but it is crucial in many less visible, more everyday situations. Increasing direct solidarity with neighbours who are experiencing situations that place their wellbeing at risk or who have fewer opportunities to exercise their rights is, without doubt, a key strategy for promoting neighbourhood support and, through it, the social cohesion of the community. Organising collective and group actions is, therefore, a necessary element in community social work processes aimed at promoting the articulation of communities. This is a model for working both with and for the community in which the group or neighbourhood collective becomes the central core of intervention, the focus of a collective project for improvement which contributes to the construction of more democratic and cohesive societies.
5. Besides the understanding that promoting neighbourhood support is a specific need, one that cannot be met only by general strategies aimed at fostering social participation, four more concepts also emerged from the qualitative analysis. These concepts could guide responses to the second question raised, regarding strategies that can enhance social cohesion. The four concepts are as follows:
 - (a) The promotion of networking is a strategy that encourages the leadership of organisations born in the community, and this helps to strengthen the co-responsibility of all players that intervene in a territory and, also, to consolidate the bonds between people.

- (b) The planned community use of the public space and the joint development of actions and projects in these spaces also help to encourage the feeling of collective identity and promotes cooperative experiences that generate security and enhance social cohesion.
 - (c) The recognition of diversity as a defining element of the community and an opportunity for mutual enrichment (rather than as a difficulty or obstacle) is another strategy that, without doubt, helps to increase perceived social cohesion.
 - (d) Conflicts form a part of the life of any community. Responses to them and the way they are managed also appear to be crucial in increasing or decreasing perceived social cohesion. The strategies proposed entail accepting and addressing such conflicts as phenomena that illustrate not only the logical difficulties of community life, but also the diversity of possible strategies for reaching agreements and advancing collectively.
6. The practice of social work is conditioned, in its various international contexts, by political systems designed to respond to social needs. At times of health, economic or social crises such as those we face in the 21st century, these systems are put to the test particularly severely. When the logics of social policies turn people into mere individual users of services, we run the risk of weakening the protective social fabric. A weakened social fabric, in turn, increases individual isolation and fragility, and this can nullify social workers' capacity for intervention and, at the same time, turn them into the accomplices of a system that does not generate mutual support or social cohesion. In response to such models, it is necessary to strengthen the active role of citizens and organisations that emerge from the community. Accordingly, it is necessary, first, to review social policies and welfare systems and, second, to design specific strategies for professional intervention that can strengthen social cohesion. Promoting participation in leisure-based community activities, especially if these encourage mutual support among neighbours, is a strategy that can contribute to meeting this goal.

Finally, the instruments used have the limitations typical of a study that focuses on the perceptions of participants. Future research could usefully aim to measure the effects of participation in leisure-based community activities based on complementary indicators of the variables studied. Moreover, research could also be enriched by control of sociodemographic variables. This would enable us to determine how community intervention in people with diverse language, cultural or political backgrounds can modulate the effects studied on neighbourhood support and community social cohesion.

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