

Social Mindedness in Learning Community

Concepts, Fieldwork
and Exploratory Results

edited by Grzegorz J. Kaczyński
and Augusto Gamuzza



Sociologia



FrancoAngeli

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The present volume is based upon the SMILEY project (Project Number: 510320-LLP-1-2010-1-IT-COMENIUS-CMP). The SMILEY project was carried out by the following partners: University of Catania – Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione – Italy (lead partner), PMF S.r.l. – Italy, 4system Polska sp. z o.o – Poland, Kocaeli Provincial Directorate of National Education – Turkey, ENIGMA Interactive – UK, Gimnazjum nr. 2 im. Adama Asnyka – Poland, Colegiul National Mihai Eminescu Iasi – Romania. For further information visit the website: www.smileyschool.eu

Linguistic supervision of this volume by Ruth Halstead



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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Contents

Introduction	p.	5
Acknowledgments	»	10
1. Social Mindedness. A New Concept for an Old Problem	»	11
1.1. The SMILEY Background	»	11
1.2. Membership in Social Groups and Contexts	»	15
1.3. Recognition of the Interdependence Between Social Actors	»	26
1.4. Interactive Dynamics and Social Capital	»	37
1.5. Cooperation	»	41
1.6. Family Habits	»	45
2. From the Concept to Research Tools	»	56
2.1. The Operationalization of a Complex Concept	»	56
2.2. Serious Games: Meanings and Potentialities	»	57
2.3. The Inner Logic of the Analytical Tools Development	»	59
2.4. The Operationalization of Social Mindedness: the Questionnaire and the Game Missions	»	64
2.5. The YourTown Game Incidents	»	68
2.6. The Leading Role of the Teacher of Reference	»	73
2.7. The Dialogic Re-Contextualisation and the Final Variables	»	77
3. The Exploratory Analysis	»	82
3.1. The Analytical Route	»	82
3.2. The Socio-Demographic Data	»	83
3.3. Sense of Holistic Membership to a Definite Context	»	85
3.4. Recognition of the Interdependence Between Social Actors	»	90
3.5. Interactive Dynamics and Cooperation	»	93
3.6. Family Habits	»	98
3.7. Conclusions and Further Developments	»	101

4. Social Mindedness in a Wider Context	p.	104
4.1. Brokering Knowledge. Teaching Under Way From Encyclopaedia to Wikipedia	»	104
4.2. The Alice Salomon University Berlin and the Question of Social Diversity	»	115
4.3. Trust in the School Culture in the World of Web 2.0	»	118
4.3.1 <i>Cultural Context of Education. Digital Revolution</i>	»	118
4.3.2 <i>School Culture</i>	»	119
4.3.3 <i>Values as Core of Culture</i>	»	120
4.3.4 <i>Value of Trust</i>	»	120
4.3.5 <i>Deficit of Trust</i>	»	121
4.3.6 <i>Culture of Trust in a School for Those Who Are Always Online</i>	»	122
4.4. Being a Foreign Student in Italian Schools: Can That Be a Problem?	»	125
4.4.1 <i>Between Peer Violence and Bullying</i>	»	125
4.4.2 <i>Contextual Background and Methodology of Research</i>	»	126
4.4.3 <i>The Victim and the Torturer: Some Empirical Evidences</i>	»	128
4.4.4 <i>Attitude Toward Diversities</i>	»	134
4.4.5 <i>School: Is It a Safe Place To Be?</i>	»	137
4.4.6 <i>Suggestions From «Children's Voices»</i>	»	141
4.5. Cyber Threats and Opposing Them From the Theoretical and Practical Approach at the University of Szczecin	»	143
4.5.1 <i>Threats in Cyberspace</i>	»	144
4.5.2 <i>Cyberviolence</i>	»	146
4.5.3 <i>Cybercrimes</i>	»	148
4.5.4 <i>Cyberdisease</i>	»	149
4.5.5 <i>Education for the Safe Use of the Internet Resources</i>	»	149
4.5.6 <i>Fighting Cyber Threats From the Perspective of the University of Szczecin</i>	»	151
4.6. Implementation of the SMILEY Methodology Into the Activities of Schools and Socio-Therapeutic Communities in Poland	»	151
Authors and Contributors	»	160

Introduction

Nowadays, the global economic recession and the perceived collapse of social cohesion within the European Union urgently call for innovative and creative solutions. In fact, the crisis is not only financial, but must also be considered as cultural and social. The fragmentation of the European ideal into national, regional, and local ideologies seems to be a sign of the possible dissolution of the European Union. These concerns were already at the centre of the debate when Jacques Delors said: «the future conflicts will break out because of cultural factors rather than economic or ideological ones»¹. This statement read in retrospect sounds like a baleful prophecy.

Delors was, however, a staunch optimist, and he was not alone. François Mitterrand during his last appearance at the European Parliament on January 17 1995 declared: «Europe needs a soul, to express its culture, its way of thinking, the result of hundreds of years of civilization of which we are the inheritors»². These sentiments are similar to those of the founding fathers of Europe. For example, Robert Schumann stated, back in 1963, «a reference to European ideas, the spirit of solidarity and its roots» would be «a force that would destroy all obstacles in the unification of Europe»³. Denis de Rougemont indicated culture as the true source of European power, arguing that any attempt to save Europe that goes beyond the culture would be «absurd and meaningless»⁴. In this light, the cultural roots provide criteria and values in order to choose goals for the next generations: «Europe must not draw its forces only in the economic, ideological, political, military field. The decisive bet will be the quality of culture at the level of European consciousness»⁵ said John Paul II, urging people not to ignore

¹ J. Delors, *Questions Concerning European Security*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Bruxelles, 10th September 1993.

² «NRC Handelsblad», Rotterdam, 18-1-1995.

³ R. Schumann, *Pour l'Europe*, Les Editions Nagel, Paris 1963, p. 14.

⁴ *Oeuvres complètes de Denis de Rougemont*, ed. Chr. Calame, Editions de la Différence, Chateaufort les Forges 1994, t. III, vol. I, p. 338 (*La méthode culturelle*).

⁵ See Giovanni Paolo II, *Europa. Un magistero tra storia e profezia*, a cura di M. Spezibottiani, PIEMME, Casale Monferrato 1991, p. 240.

the Christian heritage of Europe. All of these, despite their different *Weltanschauung*, express an ever present Kantian idea - *allgemeine Vereinigung der Menschheit* (a general union of the human race).

If the European Union holds up, despite the systemic difficulties, it will be thanks to repeated calls for shared cultural values and social solidarity. These values have been established under several programmes such as Erasmus, Leonardo, Marie Curie, Grundtvig, Jean Monnet, and Comenius. Thanks to these research and educational programs, many generations of new citizens have been brought up with a sense of Europe as a source of identity that does not contrast with their national, ethnic and religious identities. These programs gave a great contribution to the development of a strong nucleus of European civil society. Therefore, European society is less and less characterised by negative stereotypes and prejudices, xenophobia and ethnocentrism, nationalism and regional chauvinism, violence and other types of coercion. It is no coincidence that many of these programs bear the names of historical and outstanding figures in the cultural heritage of Europe: *Europeans ante litteram*. Their lives, divided into different countries and cultures, show that Europe is not an invention but a necessity condensed into deep historical and cultural roots; the European Union's treasure lies in human capital, in particular the youth. In fact, it is mainly young people who must be trained in the spirit of unity, both for their learning skills and for their natural ability; the future Europe will be in their hands. «It is not possible to join armies or machinery, nor equations or doctrines, but the people and their groups», wrote de Rougemont in 1953, thinking about the future United Europe⁶.

Taking into consideration this awareness, the European Commission and the Council recently underlined the importance of creativity and culture⁷ as a tool for successfully overcoming this phase of economic and social impasse. It is interesting to note that this document is aimed specifically at the young generation. This particular attention to the active link between culture, innovation and the young generation is a unique element of the ideological and intellectual tradition of the European Union. This idea was definitely clear for the founding fathers of the first fundamental nucleus of the European Union: in deciding to engender the *idea* of Europe, from a common economic interest, they constantly stimulated the development of a community founded upon shared values. In fact, this was already demonstrated by the Congress of Europe at The Hague in 1948 when the foundations were laid for the European Idea that would be developed in the years to come. In its resolutions there is the declaration - as a proposal of

⁶ Ibidem, (*Situation de l'Europe en avril 1953*), p. 172.

⁷ European Commission, *Draft 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018)*, COM document number 495 of 2012, final version.

the Cultural Commission - regarding the need to undertake international collaboration in the field of education and instruction, and to create an exchange of experiences on the cultural and artistic level⁸. Even today, the research agenda for Europe encourages scholars to find an efficient composition of different perspectives, a shared platform for cultural development.

* * *

Starting from these core issues, the SMILEY (Social Mindedness In LEarning Community) project was funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme-Comenius, and it was carried out over a two-year period from January 2011 to December 2012.

The fundamental aim of the project was to transform the differences that exist between pupils into a resource rather than a barrier to integration. This was achieved through an e-learning platform that hosts an ERPG (Educational Role-Playing Game), connecting students and teachers from the partner countries: Italy, Turkey, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom. In this sense, the main aims of the project were:

a) to promote the use of ICT in order to test an effective conflict-resolution approach preventing exclusion practices in different educational contexts. According to this aim, SMILEY was designed with the aim of enabling teachers to gain new skills on how to deal with social problems and violent attitudes of students through a new methodology of evaluation of social awareness rooted in *edutainment* (education and entertainment) strategy;

b) to encourage students' understanding of social rules. In this context, the students enjoy themselves while being involved in a learning experience that fosters social and cross-cultural awareness at school and in daily life.

Starting from these points, the SMILEY project research design was structured around the concept of social mindedness, the essential definition of which can be summed up in these words: *the individual attitude oriented to guarantee, in daily-life interactions, the benefits for individuals involved in social relationships and, on a wide scale, the improvement of the global context.*

This definition denotes a concept that links the dynamics of cohesion and social inclusion. Social Mindedness translates the individual capacity to develop a system of values and a positive code of *societal-oriented* behaviour. As outlined, Social Mindedness is an example of pro-social behaviour creating harmonious relationships among group members. It appears as an *umbrella concept* composed of five dimensions that, in a sociological

⁸ *European Movement and The Council of Europe*, Hutchinson & Co. London 1949, p. 35 onwards.

perspective, nurture and facilitate integration processes: the sense of belonging to a holistic context; recognition of the interdependence between social actors; interactive dynamics of the structure of relational networks (social capital); dynamics of cooperation, in order to reach common goals; and family habits.

Taking into consideration the fact that the project needed different fields of expertise the consortium was composed of five *types* of partners: a) scientific-academic, b) technological, c) dissemination experts, d) evaluators and e) educational institutions.

a) The Department of Educational Sciences of the University of Catania, in Italy, was the leading coordinator of the project through the administrative and financial management and workflow monitoring. The research team developed the theoretical framework of reference of the whole project.

b) Enigma Interactive, in UK, is a software house responsible for the development of the SMILEY educational game, named “YourTown”, in close collaboration with the other technological partner 4System, from Poland, that was in charge for the creation of LCMS (Learning Content Management System) and the technological management of the associated school community.

c) PMF, from Italy, is specialized in the planning, creation and distribution of professional and vocational education services. The company, thanks to its internal engineers team and associated tutors and teachers, is specialised in e-learning educational services. PMF was in charge of the coordination of dissemination activities and exploitation strategy development.

d) Kocaeli Provincial Directorate of National Education is a governmental organization in charge with the planning and coordination of all kinds of educational and training activities from pre-school, to secondary and adult education in Kocaeli Province in Turkey. Kocaeli was the leading partner of evaluation and helped the consortium gaining data needed to fulfil project's objectives and evaluate the whole SMILEY project.

e) Mihai Eminescu National College, from Romania, and Gimnazjum nr. 2 im. Adama Asnyka, from Poland, are two public schools. Their main role was the monitoring and coordination of associated schools activities, which comprehend training of teachers and students. Moreover, both schools were responsible to manage and constantly update the SMILEY website.

* * *

This book presents the most significant contents and research results of the SMILEY project, clarifying the organization and development of the project itself.

The first chapter deals with the analytical definition of the theoretical framework starting with the concept of social mindedness. The issues developed in this part of the book aim to give an innovative and alternative perspective in observing and interpreting a social problem concerning social cohesion and integration. A different approach to the theoretical dimension is needed, as well as an innovative proposal for putting into practice the concept of social mindedness. Chapter two presents the process leading to the development of research tools and their implementation in the different phases of the project.

The third chapter focuses on the analytical data and their interpretation, exploring the inner meanings and coherence of the developed research tools.

Finally, the fourth chapter focuses on the contributions of scholars and researcher presented during the SMILEY final conference virtual roundtable. The main aim of this section is to propose to the reader a wider perspective based on the theoretical and empirical studies about the main themes beneath the SMILEY project.

* * *

After the end of the project activities the consortium waited for the final assessment made by EACEA (Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency). The final evaluation was provided at the end of May 2013 with the very high score of 9/10. We think that it is necessary to tribute to all our partners a brief citation of the main parts of the assessment sheet regarding the final outputs and partnership.

«SMILEYproject's results were finalized with quality and in accordance with the original aims. The outcomes are available as planned in 5 languages for free use or/and download on the website <http://smileyschool.eu/>. The core output, “Your Town” educational game, can contribute to preventing conflict bullying in schools and promoting positive social behaviour. Key results were achieved as foreseen through concrete collaboration with end-users». [...] «The project's partners contributed to the final achievements with a real participation and collaboration in the seven work-packages. An example of good practice is evidenced in the partners' collaboration and relationships built with the end-users e.g. schools, teachers, parents, communities, to develop, test, improve and use and exploit the project's resources and the Edu Role Game».

Grzegorz J. Kaczyński and Augusto Gamuzza

Acknowledgments

The present volume represents an updated version of the deliverable 5.5 of SMILEY project (Social Mindedness in LEarning Community - Project Number: 510320-LLP-1-2010-1-IT-COMENIUS-CMP). The project falls within the Lifelong Learning Programme “Comenius” co-financed by the DG Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency.

Although every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this study, the responsibility for factual errors or omissions falls entirely on the SMILEY research partnership.

The SMILEY project was carried out by the following partners:

- University of Catania – Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione – Italy;
- PMF S.r.l. – Italy;
- 4system Polska sp. z o.o. – Poland;
- Kocaeli Provincial Directorate of National Education – Turkey;
- ENIGMA Interactive – UK;
- Gimnazjum nr. 2 im. Adama Asnyka – Poland;
- Colegiul National Mihai Eminescu Iasi – Romania.

This work was based on the integrated results of the research activities carried out by the partners and their contribution, as follows:

Chapter 1: 1. A. M. Leonora; 2. L. M. Daher; 3. G. J. Kaczyński; 4. A. M. Leonora; 5. A. M. Leonora; 6. G. J. Kaczyński.

Chapter 2: 1. G. J. Kaczyński; 2. A. Gamuzza; 3. A. Gamuzza; 4. A. Gamuzza; 5. A. Gamuzza; 6. A. M. Leonora; 7. A. M. Leonora.

Chapter 3: 1. G. J. Kaczyński; 2. A. Gamuzza; 3. A. Gamuzza; 4. A. Gamuzza; 5. A. Gamuzza; 6. A. Gamuzza; 7. A. Gamuzza and G. J. Kaczyński;

Chapter 4: 1. S. Magala; 2. C. Labonté-Roset; 3. A. Murawska; 4. D. Greco and C. Zanetti ; 5. P. Dudek and A. Karyń; 6. Ł. Wojtacha.

1. Social Mindedness.

A New Concept for an Old Problem

1.1 The SMILEY Background

It is becoming increasingly clear that the theoretical and empirical analysis concerning European society refers to a crucial issue that shapes both scientific reflection and the contemporary public and political debate. Considering this, the recognition of the role of the global crisis for the European socio-economic systems prompted the European Commission, as early as 2010, to present and propose an official communication called “*EUROPE 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*”. In this communication the point is clear: the EU economic system is affected by the medium-term effects of the global crisis. It underlines the interdependent character of the European socio-economic contexts, but at the same time, the European Union is called on to respond promptly to the challenges posed by the progressive inter-linked European social change. In order to succeed in these challenges, the proposed strategy is well-defined:

We can count on the talent and creativity of our people, a strong industrial base, a vibrant services sector, a thriving, high quality agricultural sector, strong maritime tradition, our single market and common currency, our position as the world's biggest trading bloc and leading destination for foreign direct investment. But we can also count on our strong values, democratic institutions, our consideration for economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity, our respect for the environment, our cultural diversity, respect for gender equality – just to name a few. Many of our Member States are amongst the most innovative and developed economies in the world. But the best chance for Europe to succeed is if it acts collectively – as a Union¹.

¹ European Commission, *EUROPE 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, Bruxelles, 3 march 2010, (COM(2010) 2020 final) in: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>, p. 7.

promoting student mobility and trainees' mobility, and improve the employment situation of young people².

This flagship initiative can be considered as an emblematic example, at EU level, of the relevance given to the educational system in European society. This relevance underlines the connection between the social climate and the dynamics of cohesion in the European context in order to guarantee a sustainable social development.

To this regard, many studies³ have shown that there is a high correlation between safety at school and daily life. Considering this, the current debate imposes, on the one hand, the need to create a framework of reference for a peaceful interaction between different parties and, on the other hand, to transform differences between pupils into a resource instead of a barrier to integration. The heated debate on bullying and exclusion practices in schools all over Europe stresses the need for a peaceful interaction between non-homogeneous social groups. In fact, the increasing amount of data and research that focuses on the dynamics of integration and peaceful coexistence within the European educational context has revealed a problematic image of European Union educational systems. This seems to imply that the new generation does not have the basis for social awareness and civic mindedness. Many articles and studies find the major causes of these violent attitudes in relationships with parents, peer pressure, rejection and popularity, school failure, a system of dominating values⁴ etc. We believe that classrooms are good places to tackle the problem of exclusion practices as a human right issue. This image is directly linked to the new meaning of the socialization process in postmodern societies. This trend is placed in the centre of the European *milieu*, which in recent years has shown the progressive intensification of bullying episodes. Moreover, this phenomenon – a social problem in Wright Mills⁵ words – underlines a transnational resonance that involves different roles and social actors. Following this interpretive line, bullying and all exclusion practices need to be addressed and managed through multidimensional strategies of action, creating «pathways» to prevention starting from individual resources.

² *Idem*, p.11.

³ Cf. K. Layous et alii, *Kindness Counts: Prompting Prosocial Behavior in Preadolescents Boosts Peer Acceptance and Well-Being*, in «PLoS ONE» 7, 2012, in <http://www.plosone.org/article/fetchObject.action?uri=info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0051380&representation=PDF>.

⁴ Cf. B. K. Weinhold, *Bullying and school violence: The tip of the iceberg*, «The Teacher Educator» 3, 2000, p. 28-33.

⁵ C. W. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford University Press 2000.

In this sense, the school represents a privileged *locus* to experience positive relationships with alterity, or *otherness*, transforming the differences between students into a useful resource in order to understand and develop the necessary social skills to achieve a positive balance between affirmation of individuality and compliance with the rules governing civil coexistence.

The aim of SMILEY project is to reach the fundamental target introduced above – to transform differences between pupils into a resource instead of a barrier to integration – through an integrated e-learning experience that connects the students and teachers from five participating countries: Italy, Poland, Romania, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The project proposes the educational use of ICT, guided by a sociological epistemology, in order to implement an *effective* approach to conflict-resolution strategies. In this sense, the SMILEY experience wants to foster best practices to avoid social exclusion in different contexts inside and outside the school.

Moreover, the innovation of SMILEY is based upon its approach in which the theoretical definition of the concept of social mindedness was shaped, in its operative frame, thanks to a very accurate pre-testing phase. During this phase a target group of students permitted to refine the definition of the concept proposed by the academic research team. Considering these elements, the core of SMILEY was to improve the social mindedness competences of the students involved into the project with an horizontal bottom-up approach using ICT at school promoting a common European feeling about peaceful coexistence in the learning environment.

SMILEY was designed to encourage students' understanding of rules in social life. In this scenario, the students enjoyed themselves while being involved in a learning experience.

Starting from these points, the SMILEY project research design was structured around the concept of social mindedness, the essential definition of which can be summed up in these words: *the individual attitude oriented to guarantee, in daily-life interactions, the benefits for individuals involved in social relationships and, widely, the improvement of the global context.*

This definition denotes a concept that links the dynamics of cohesion and social inclusion. Social mindedness translates the individual capacity to develop a system of values and a positive code of *societal-oriented* behavior. Starting from this general assumption, the concept of social mindedness can be framed into the field of reference of classic sociological concepts like integration and social cohesion. Moreover, from a clear sociological point of view, the concept of social mindedness refers to the ability of an individual (or a group of individuals) to achieve a positive convergence between particular interests. Such convergence reassembles, in a holistic perspective, the organizational development processes of human sociality. More in detail, the concept of social mindedness conveys a complex conceptual content that crosses the main structural aspects of the social reality

of daily-life: socialization, the family and the educational institution, organizations and groups, membership and social stratification. This content is strategically aimed at emphasizing those conditions of individual actions that ensure the synergic composition of social interests. Therefore, social mindedness appears to be as *the opposite* of tensions and social dysfunctions. As briefly outlined, social mindedness is an example of pro-social behavior creating harmonious relationships among group members. It appears as an *umbrella concept* (see Fig. 2) composed by five dimensions that nurture and facilitate integration processes: a) the sense of belonging to a holistic context; b) recognition of the interdependence between social actors; c) interactive dynamics of the structure of relational networks (social capital); d) dynamics of cooperation, in order to reach common goals; e) family habits.

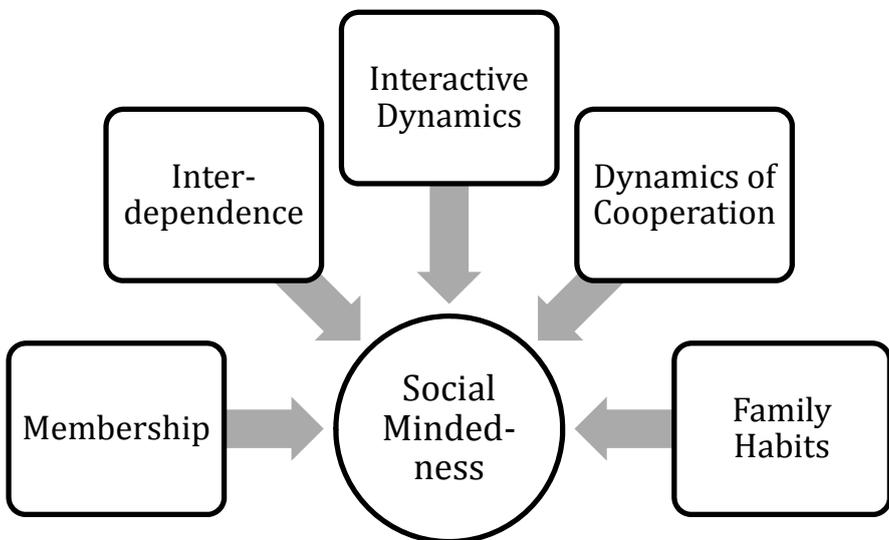


Fig. 2 – The theoretical segmentation of the concept of social mindedness

1.2 Membership in Social Groups and Contexts

I. The need to belong is a basic aspect of being human, although the ways in which we satisfy this need have changed significantly over time. The development of the industrial society raised fears that we were losing our sense of community, that the faceless, anonymous sprawl of the global village was depriving us of the basic need to feel as though we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

In terms of identity, this translates into a prevalence of “I” rather than “we,” but also into a complexity that is very difficult to resolve. The fluidity and multiplicity of social roles is in fact ideally integrated into a singular identity. In this identity, the self as achieved experience is emerging. This is the central phenomenon of modern everyday life: «self-identity is a new experience of reality; it is reality transformed *into* experience,» but it is played through and among increasingly fragmented relationships marked by individualistic demand⁶.

Therefore, the analysis of forms of belonging has become fundamental to understanding how people give meaning to their lives.

In this radically changed context, typical of postmodern and globalized society, group membership has become the central hub in the life of an individual, the “fundamental experience;” moreover, the social groups to which s/he feels they belong to may become the essential reference of his/her everyday life, influencing his/her choices of action.

Social relationships are, in fact, very important in the development of the person. Multiple relationships help individuals to experience their group memberships in a right balance between independence and belonging. The sense of identity is founded on social interactions, testifying an individual’s membership to particular communities through shared beliefs, values, or practices.

Moreover, the importance of belonging changes over time. Every time a person joins and leaves different social networks and groups, s/he personally and socially repositions him/herself in relation to others, developing new connections and discarding others in a continuous process of social interaction and integration.

Developing membership is an ongoing process that involves inclusion in, or exclusion from, a wide variety of different groups during the course of our lives. The relative importance that we place on our membership within particular groups says a lot about our personal and social identity. The choices that we make, the friends that we acquire, and the products that we buy serve to position us as part of the groups, networks and communities that make up human society.

Today, the principal contexts of affiliation in which people most frequently anchor their sense of belonging are family, friendship, lifestyle choices, nationality, work or education (professional identity), social class, ethnic background, religion, team spirit, and shared interests, i.e. participation/affiliation to a sports team, political party, etc.⁷. Some of these acquire more significance because they are also socialization agencies and funda-

⁶ H. Ferguson, *Self-Identity and Everyday Life*, Routledge, London and New York 2009, p. 65-67.

⁷ See “Belonging”, Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC), 2007. Available on: <http://www.sirc.org/publik/belonging.shtml> (last access June 28th, 2012).

mental social institutions in modern society, others because they are important markers of diversity.

First of all, the family remains the main focus of belonging and category of human social organization, despite public debate about its decline. Family relationships focus on the construction of the social identity of the child, while educational institutions play a fundamental role in learning and practicing civic rights and duties⁸.

However, the development of the globalized society has partially changed the above balanced division of roles. Due to the great transformation of the family from the patriarchal to the nuclear model, also friendship has become a key context of belonging. While the close proximity of a large extended family provided a structure for social support in the past, this function is now filled, at least in part, by an increasingly various and multilayered network of friendships. In particular, friendship groups have become a central focus of identity for people who have not started families of their own. Moreover, choices of friendships are influenced by our position in social categories, such as race, gender, and social class, by our profession, and by the place where we live.

Race/ethnicity must be considered one of the most important markers of diversity as well as a fundamental space of belonging, point of reference of individual and group identity, and the cultural attributes associated with them.

In a multicultural society where people of different races, cultures and religions live, work and communicate with each other, the different cultural representations may clash on the grounds of the increasing disorientation of everyday life⁹.

Finally, new fundamental contexts of affiliation are represented by social networks; today the old ones, such as religion are in decline.

The great development of online technology and mass media have created large communities of people, who share ideas and opinions as well as sometimes values and lifestyles¹⁰, distributed across countries and continents. Through such platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Second Life, etc.) people are able to create identities. The online identity may faithfully represent the true one or markedly diverge from it. Moreover, these new means of

⁸ See F. Crespi, *Introduzione alla sociologia*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2002, p. 92-94.

⁹ Different cultural representations could also belong to the same ethnic identity but, at the same time, express a different representation of culture.

¹⁰ Especially in contemporary society, patterns of membership are also identified by consumer products or services that outline our style of life. See M. Savage, G. Bagnall, B. J. Longhurst, *Globalization and Belonging*, Sage, London 2004.

communication and interaction may be considered as a new way of engaging with members of society¹¹.

The latter kind of affiliation is increasing in leaps and bounds in Western Europe, while religious membership is rapidly declining. Religious affiliation has, in fact, gradually shifted from strong, regular faith-based participation in church to “believing without belonging¹².” However, particularly in Italy, membership to a religious movement is widespread, and people who are actively involved in religious activities link their identity to the label of religion. Moreover, this membership is increasingly often expressed on the Internet¹³.

Therefore, memberships satisfy the human need of interaction as well as contributing to the construction of personal and social identities, but the above forms of belonging could at the same time mark the boundaries of these identities, building barriers based on physical or cultural diversities.

II. Boundaries could originate from the above memberships, stressing the belonging and identification of the individual in the group as opposed to the diversity of other groups.

Boundaries stress the problem of demarcation between social groups, i.e. the social and relational consequences of being a member of one group rather than another. This can be explained using Simmel’s idea of “intersection of social circles¹⁴.” In a modern society, and even more in a multicultural and globalized one, a person belongs to different social circles at various degrees, and every membership contributes to the construction of

¹¹ Examples of these communities are explored in different social contexts. See A. Axelsson, T. Regan, *How Belonging to an Online Group Affects Social Behavior – a Case Study of Asheron’s Call*, Technical Report, 2002. Available on: <http://research.microsoft.com/pubs/69910/tr-2002-07.pdf> (last access December 15, 2012); L. La Pointe, M. Reisetter, *Belonging Online: Students’ Perceptions of the Value and Efficacy of an Online Learning Community*, in «*International Journal on E-Learning*», 7 (2008), p. 641-665; D. Rosen, , B. Hendrickson, *CouchSurfing: Belonging and trust in a globally cooperative online social network*, in «*New Media & Society*», 13 (2011), p. 981-998.

¹² See G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945. Believing without Belonging*, Blackwell, Oxford 1994; “Il “credere senza appartenere” e la rilevanza del pluralismo”, in M. Introvigne, P. Zoccatelli, *Le religioni in Italia*. Available on: http://www.cesnur.org/religioni_italia/introduzione_04.htm (last access December 18, 2012).

¹³ See *Special Issue: Religion and the Internet: Considering the online-offline connection* Information, in «*Communication & Society*», 14 (2011) p. 1083-1235, particularly K. Lundby, *Patterns Of Belonging In Online/Offline Interfaces of Religion*, p. 1219-1235; A. Gamuzza, “Giovani musulmani online. Una proposta epistemologica”, in L.M. Daher (ed.), *“Migranti” di seconda generazione. Nuovi cittadini in cerca di un’identità*, Aracne, Roma 2012, p. 251-272.

¹⁴ See G. Simmel, *Die Kreuzung Sozialer Kreise*, in G. Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1908.

his/her personal and social identity. However, his/her sense of belonging to a circle could sometimes exclude his/her membership to another, setting the boundaries between “us” and “them.” This boundary might be a symptom of conflict between the groups.

Boundaries are marked by language, clothing, and rituals, indicating who belongs and who does not. Lifestyle choices and social capital – the social status, shared values, and cultural practices – underline every membership. Thus, behavior, consumption and habits show the borders of our belongings.

Moreover, cultural consumption and rituals could fit with ethnic belongings and nationalities. Advocates of cultural globalization point to the fact that national identity is in decline. As the world becomes more connected, it is increasingly common for people to pass through the borders of individual countries, both physically and virtually. While there is certainly a greater awareness of the flexibility of national identities, and the possibility of shedding one in exchange for another, there still remains a strong tie between individuals and the nationalities in which they are born. In fact, borders often appear between natives and migrants, and this involves also their children at school¹⁵.

Consequently, usually in social relationships we want to know immediately whether the other is a friend or not, and whether s/he is capable of enacting their respective friendliness or enmity¹⁶. The legitimate needs of group members for boundaries to protect their intimate social connections have often been overlooked¹⁷.

Finally, it is fundamental to be in a group, to feel part of a team, i.e. the we-feeling. Members of the group perceive the group in a holistic dimension. The desire of every person to satisfy his/her own needs in the group, and the satisfaction of the needs of the group have to be concurrent and interrelated.

In this way, being a member of a group means:

- being similar to the other member of the same group;
- being different from the other groups;
- being identified as a group by “others.”

¹⁵ See L.M. Daher, *Costruire nuove forme di cittadinanza a scuola. Alunni italiani e stranieri a confronto*, in L.M. Daher (ed.), op. cit., p. 61-74.

¹⁶ See S.T. Fiske, M. Yamamoto, *Coping with Rejection: Core Social Motives, across Cultures*, in K.D. Williams, J. P. Forgas, and W. von Hippel (eds.), *The Social Outcast: Ostracism, Social Exclusion, Rejection, and Bullying*, Psychology Press, New York 2005, p. 185-198.

¹⁷ See D.W. McMillan, D.M. Chavis, *Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory*, in «Journal of Community Psychology», 14 (1986), p. 6-23.