VOLUNTEERING LEADERSHIP AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY: A STUDY WITHIN A SCOUTING ASSOCIATION

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The sense of community is one of the fundamental concepts of community psychology. According to Sarason (1974), it is defined as the perception of belonging, interdependence, and mutual commitment, gathering all individuals within a community. The model that has been defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) comprises four dimensions: membership status, integration and satisfaction of needs, influence, and shared emotional relationships. The study hereby presented has been developed through a multimethod approach and has aimed to understand in which way the sense of community emerges in volunteers (adult leaders) of *corpo nacional de escutas* (CNE; faith-based scouting movement of Catholic inspiration), in its four dimensions. Seven semistructured interviews, to key informants of the association, were conducted, and the Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2; Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008) administered to 811 participants of the above-mentioned Association. The aim of the study was to understand the dynamic relations among the different elements of the sense of community, and to contribute to the conceptual development of "sense of community." The results have revealed that the factorial structure of the sense of community is in accordance with the proposed model by the authors, presenting a multidimensional structure. The key informants have identified diversified elements of the sense of community. It has also been demonstrated that the sense of community of the participants is positive in all dimensions and in an overall perspective.

Key words: Psychological sense of community; Volunteering; Leadership; Scouting; SCI-2.

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There are numerous initiatives regarding volunteerism that can be found around the world (Grolund, 2011). According to Omoto and Packard (2016), "volunteerism is an active and intentional process … These actions, intended to be helpful, are undertaken by choice … in the service of personal values, needs, and motives" (p. 272).

Commonly, the idea of community evokes images related to a town, village, or neighbourhood. Its inhabitants know each other and some even live in the same locations for several generations, providing support with small services involving emotional exchanges. The aforementioned is an idealization of belonging to a place and time where each one of its members is relevant.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed sense of community's first model with four dimensions: membership, influence, integration and satisfaction of needs, and shared emotional connection. In 1996,

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McMillan assigned different designations to the dimensions already referred to: spirit (membership), confidence (influence), exchanges (integration and satisfaction of needs), and art (shared emotional connection). In addition of the four main elements already mentioned, there are also the subelements and the dynamics involved between them. McMillan (1996, 2011) proposed an evolution from the previous model (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), incorporating new subelements and extending the scope of the previous ones (see Figure 1).
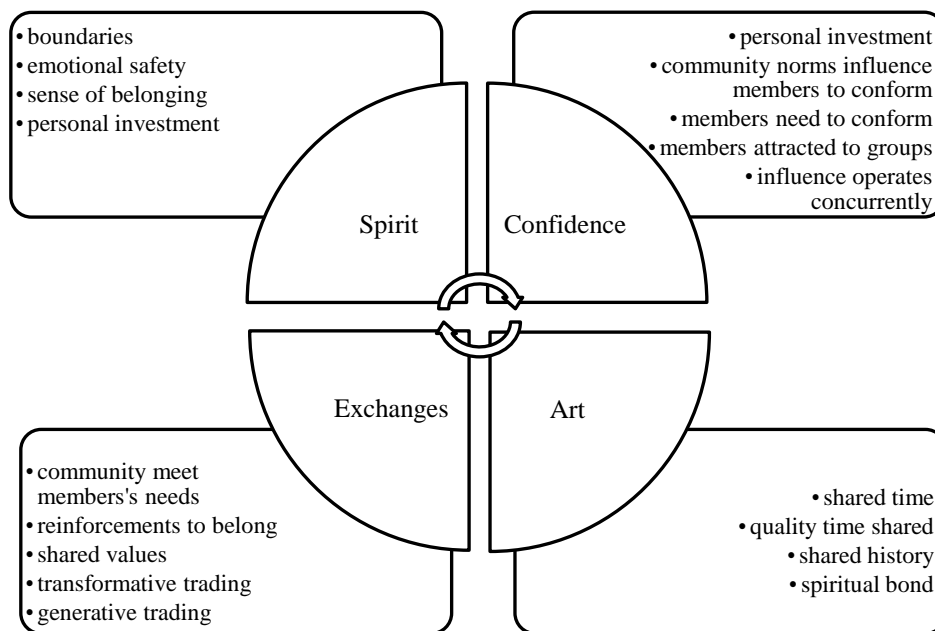

FIGURE 1
McMillan's model structure and dimensions (1996, 2011).

Studies have shown that the psychological sense of community is an important component in community initiatives, is positively related to higher levels of well-being, and associated with prosocial behaviors, civic participation, and promotion of social capital (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Hughey, Speer, & Peterson, 1999; Ornelas, 2008, 2011; Prezza & Constantini, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Roussi, Rapti, & Kiosseoglou, 2006).

Both Sarason (1974) and, later on, Sanchez-Vidal (2001, 2007) argue that the sense of community has an important nucleus around social interaction between members of a group and that it is complemented with the perception of territorial roots and a general feeling of mutuality and interdependence. The idea of community assumes not only an idealization of belonging to a place, but also a conception linked to the relation members have with each other (Chavis & Newbrough, 1986; Hawe, 1994).

Community-based organizations are configurations in which individuals share their concerns and through which the sense of community can develop (Hughey et al., 1999). Within these organizations, individuals develop bonds among them, while also developing activities in order to improve the backgrounds and institutions in their communities. These organizations are crucial for research on the sense of community, because they represent important contexts through which the transformation of individuals and communities can occur (Evans, Hanlin, & Prilleltensky, 2007). The sense of community can be considered as a characteristic of organizational culture, an indicator of interdependent relationships between people within

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organizations, and relationships between organizations within communities (Bryan, Klein, & Elias, 2007; Peterson et al., 2008).

Similarly, the sense of community has been identified as a predictor of sociopolitical control in community organizations, and it is possible that it is a mediator between community participation and empowerment (Christens & Lin, 2014; Hughey et al., 1999). The sociopolitical control is defined as a construct which encompasses the perceptions of self-efficacy, motivation, skills, and perceived control, and as a component of psychological empowerment of young people (Christens & Peterson, 2012).

Christens and Lin (2014) report that social support and sense of community, as conveyed by the individuals within the organizations in which they participate more often, mediate the relationship between participation and psychological empowerment. Other studies have focused on the role played by age regarding motivations for volunteering (Herzog, Kahn, Morgan, Jackson, & Antonucci, 1989) showing that there is an inverted relationship between age and volunteering. As young adults grow older, their motivations are more about working in the community over career. Regarding geographical area, rural environments are generally characterized as having fewer public services which is one of the reasons for an increased need for volunteer activities in smaller towns and/or villages (Prouteau & Wolf, 2008; Vitner, Shalom, & Yodfat (2005).

Obst and White (2005, 2007), reported that concerning the four dimensions introduced by McMillan and Chavis's model (1986), the increase of the choice to become a member of the group also increased significantly the levels of the other dimensions in relation to membership status. In the shared emotional relationships, the bonds developed through interaction with other community members also increase with the choice of becoming a member. In integration and satisfaction of needs, the highest averages occurred in the group in which the choice of belonging falls on oneself.

These interest groups, where the participants represent an ideology (e.g., religious groups, environmental groups, civic groups), or an interest (internet or sports), are focused on a goal, so that the members are more likely to have common goals, beliefs, and values with other members other than with their neighbours. The extent of influence also showed a higher average in the level of choice of the community members. On the other hand, respondents reported lower levels in the four dimensions with their neighbourhood communities when compared to the interest groups they belonged to. Consequently, these results demonstrate the change in the nature of the community.

The sense of community has also been studied in the context of organizations as one of the relationship's strengths between an individual and the organization, in the sense that the organization influences the community, allowing members to maintain a broader contact within the community and strengthen the bond between the individuals and the community (Christens & Lin, 2014; Hughey et al., 1999). The associative context selected for the empirical investigation has as main criteria the fact that scouting is nationwide, with representation in large and small scale geographic and demographic communities; it is a context with specific and structured guidelines, procedures, and rituals; it is an example context where the processes, dimensions, and elements resulting from the concept of sense of community may be observed. Considering the limited theoretical approaches in this perspective in Portugal, the need to contribute with an original perspective was justified. In fact, the available literature about the associative movements has focused mainly on the impact that they can have on communities and society in general, as a promoters of participation and social transformation (Albuquerque, Rocha-Trindade, & Carmo, 2008, Menezes, 2010; Menezes, Ribeiro, Fernandes-Jesus, Malafaia, & Ferreira, 2012).

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METHOD

The research question focused on how sense of community manifests itself in the members within the Portuguese National Scouting, namely in its four dimensions — membership status, influence, integration and satisfaction of needs, shared emotional relationships — with the following objectives: to propose a model of sense of community for the specific context; to understand the subelements dynamics of the sense of community; to contribute to the development of the conceptualization of sense of community; and to validate the Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2; Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008).

The choice of the quantitative and qualitative methods in parallel, in a mixed methodology, allowed us to deepen the characteristics of the phenomenon (Archibald, Radil, Zhang, & Hanson, 2015) and to contribute to understanding the feelings of community members, constituting itself as an essential value of community psychology. The paradigms underlying mixed methodologies have above all a transformative perspective (Coutinho, 2014).

Participants

In the qualitative study, a total of seven key informants participated: all male volunteers from the association with management positions at regional (six participants) and national (one participant) levels; in the quantitative study 811 volunteers participated. Concerning the first group of participants, we can summarize their characteristics as presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Age and number of years in the current position of the key informants

Key informant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Age	62	58	55	42	54	53	47
Number of years in current position	6	12	3	3	21	9	6

The average age is 53 years and the average number of years in the current position is 8.57 years. A noteworthy notion is that of the six key regional informants, two originated from the North, two from the Centre, and two from the South and Autonomous regions. Concerning the quantitative study, the participants' characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Instruments

The SCI-2 and the script for the interview were constructed in their original version by the same authors (Chavis et al., 2008), thus constituting an advantage since both have a very similar structure and refer to the dimensions underlying the theoretical model by McMillan and Chavis (1986).

Referring to the chosen quantitative instrument, the SCI-2 (Chavis et. al., 2008) consists of 24 items (α = .94), participants indicate their agreement on a four-point Likert scale (0 = *not at all*, 1 = *somewhat*, 2 = *mostly*, 3 = *completely*). In the various studies that were conducted for its validation, the

TABLE 2

Number of participants and percentage in terms of gender, age, education, marital status, area of origin,
and number of years in the association

	Gender		Age		Education			Marital status		Area of origin			Years in association	
	M	F	13-35	36-77	12th grade	BA	MA/PhD	Single	Married	N	C	S and AR	< 19	≥ 19
N	281	520	404	392	263	353	107	392	419	278	263	263	412	387
%	34.6	64.2	49.8	48.4	32.4	43.5	13.2	48.3	51.7	34.3	32.4	32.4	50.8	47.7

Note. M = male; F = female; BA = bachelor's degree; MA/PhD = master's degree/doctorate; N = North; C = Centre; S & AR = South and Autonomous Regions; < 19 = less than 19 years in the association; ≥19 = 19 or more years in the association. Some participants opted out of answering some of these variables (i.e., 1.2% chose not to identify their gender; 1.8% chose not to identify their age; 10.9% chose not to identify their education; 0.9% chose not to identify their area of origin; 1.5% chose not to identify their number of years in association).

scale showed consistency in various cultures and highlighted relationships with behaviors, community conditions, and psychological well-being (Chavis et. al., 2008).

These 24 items are divided into four subscales: integration and satisfaction of needs (Items 1-6), membership status (Items 7-12), influence (Items 13-18), and shared emotional relationships (Items 19-24). The global sense of community is the sum of the 24 items. It also has an initial question about the importance of the community to the respondent. As an example of some of the items we can identify the following: Item 2 "CNE[1] members and I value the same things" in integration and satisfaction of needs; Item 7 "I can trust people in the CNE community" in membership status; Item 16 "I have influence over what the CNE community is like" in influence; and Item 24 "Members of the CNE community care about each other" in shared emotional relationships.

Regarding the interview, it was based on a script by the same authors, built specifically for the organizational assessment of the construction of the sense of community. This script consists of 21 questions and has been translated and adapted to the context under study. As an example of some constituent issues of the script we can cite: "Do CNE leaders feel that their needs are satisfied by the CNE community through the services it provides?" (integration and satisfaction of needs); "Does the CNE community promote symbols or expressions of affiliation in the region/nation that the leaders recognize (e.g., logos, flags)?" (membership status); "Does the CNE community involve and support group directors (local community leaders) in improving the association with their leaders?" (influence); "Does the CNE community celebrate the success and other results/achievements with the leaders of the association?" (shared emotional relationships).

Procedure

The SCI-2 was translated into Portuguese by three translators, who agreed on a version, which was then translated into English by a native English teacher who works as a professional translator in Portugal (Roussi et. al., 2006; Wombacher, Tagg, Burgi, & MacBryde, 2010).

The data were collected during the course of some association events, particularly during the national camp that was held in August 2012, in paper format. The objectives of the present study were explained to all participants and the informed consent was given. We distributed approximately 1,000 questionnaires and received 846 completed ones (corresponding to 84.6% of the questionnaires distributed), of

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which we had to eliminate 35 due to the existence of unfilled items in the various subscales. We thus had a final number of 811 questionnaires, corresponding to 81.1%, a higher number than the records found in other works. It is our understanding that the high rate of return of the questionnaires was due to the fact that they were delivered and collected by hand and with face-to-face contact.

Regarding the interview script, it was subject to the same methodological assumptions as concerning the translation. The key informants were, for convenience purposes, the national and regional leaders available in the association. The choice was mainly due to their availability at the time the interviews had taken place, since all of them, without exception, are unpaid employees in the association and have an active professional life outside the latter. Obtaining an interview from a female member was not feasible, since, at the time of the study, there was only one female regional leader, and for personal schedule reasons.

The questions included in the script were addressed to the national leader in charge at the time and to six regional leaders, coming from six regions that comprise the CNE community. For its administration, we previously sent the informed consent and individually scheduled the interview, briefly explaining the objectives of the investigation.

All of the interviews were recorded with the authorization of the interviewees, the duration of which varied between 50 and 102 minutes. The complete transcription was performed. The confidentiality of the interviewees was an issue addressed since the nature of their position (nominal) would be easily identified. We have therefore chosen to encode the interviews in order to protect their confidentiality.

The interviews were carried out at their respective regional headquarters or at the national headquarters in Lisboa, or even in environments where the association's activities take place, since familiar and comfortable environments are important for the execution of the interviews (Coutinho, 2014; Padget, 2012).

RESULTS

After the transcription of interviews with the key informants, we first analysed them using predefined categories (Ghiglione & Matalon, 1997), associated with the already defined theoretical framework (McMillan & Chavis, 1986): membership status, shared emotional relationships, influence, integration and satisfaction of needs, and we obtained specific elements within the predefined categories (Figure 1).

The interviews conducted with the key informants have indirectly revealed the existence of a global sense of community, since their discourses refer directly to the four dimensions and elements evidenced. The sense of community in the CNE can be defined as a sense of belonging enjoyed by its members, and there is a mutual concern not only among its members, but also to the organization and vice-versa. There is also an experience of a shared faith that the needs of the members will be fulfilled through their commitment to being together (in person or at a distance).

As an example of what we refer to, in the dimension integration and satisfaction of needs, we can mention that being a leader was defined as "*someone willing to give what one has received, who feels the need to reciprocate, and someone who believes in the movement. Someone with shared values such as support, solidarity, sharing, help in building a future, citizenship, and Christian values*" (Key informant 2). Regarding the membership status, when talking about symbols, all but one of the key informants spoke about them, clearly identifying some symbols used by CNE members as a national community. The best example identified is the handshake with the left hand whose symbolism goes back to the founder of Scouting, "*the left hand is the one closest to the heart*" (Key informant 4), and the daily "*good deed*" (Key in-

formant 1). As far as influence is concerned, it has been mentioned by all key informants and some of the opinions are linked to participation. When asked if members of the CNE had a direct influence on the association, opinions diverged and five participants said yes. An example of this was when the members influenced the central board of decision-making particularly about large projects, considering it essential for maintaining a sense of community.

Finally, in the dimension of shared emotional relationships, history appears to be a determining factor in the discourse of the key informants. All mentioned the importance of history in the CNE, both in terms of national collective history (for example, books and news in national newspapers) and at regional level, with local stories that are shared by its members, considering that *"this is very important and that this is what keeps us going"* (Key informant 7).

During the analysis of the syntheses obtained previously, we found within the predefined categories the following elements, stated in the Figure 2.
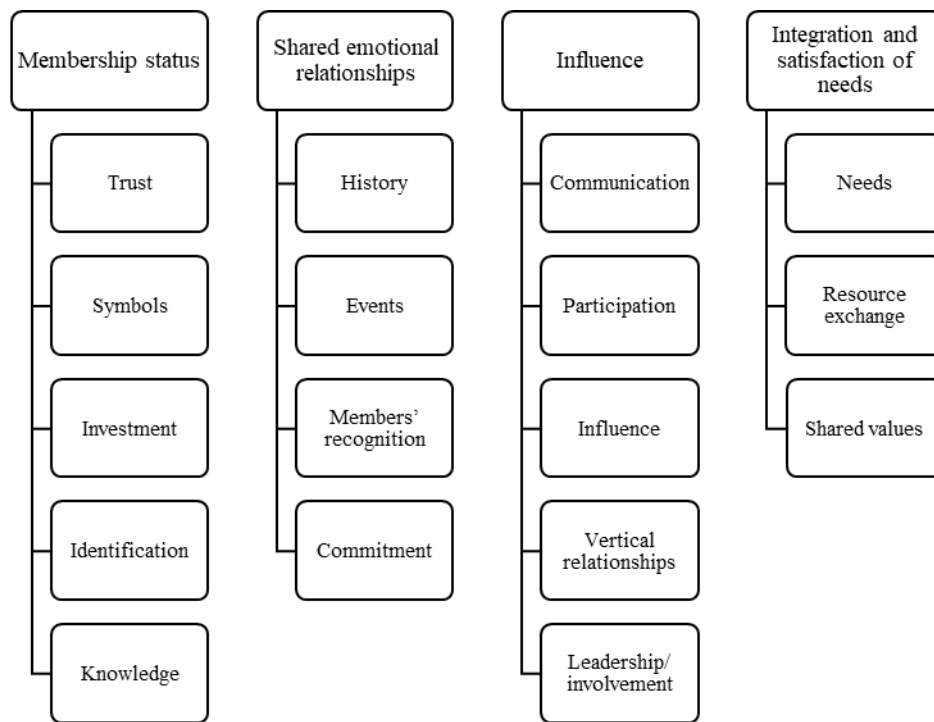

FIGURE 2
Elements found in the interviews using the categories of the McMillan and Chavis model (1986).

Regarding the results of the SCI-2 as a whole, and when referring to age, we observed that the "nonyoung" group showed a higher value ($M = 47.89$) and the lowest standard deviation ($SD = 9.36$; see Table 3). As for the value of Student's *t*-test, and since it is statistically almost significant, $t(794) = -1.94$, $p = .053$, this leads us to consider that there is a difference between the "young" and "nonyoung," the latter being the ones with the highest "global sense of community."

TABLE 3
Total SCI-2 by age (categorized)

Total SCI-2	Categorized age	
	Young (18-35)	Nonyoung (36-77)
M	46.56	47.89
SD	9.91	9.36
N	404	392

Regarding the marital status, the difference between the averages of the "married" and "single" groups shows that the highest average ($M = 47.99$) and the lowest standard deviation ($SD = 9.59$) belong to the "married" group (see Table 4). This difference is close to statistical significance, $t(809) = -1.88$, $p = .056$, showing that the "married" group has the highest "global sense of community."

TABLE 4
Total SCI-2 by marital status

Total SCI-2	Marital status	
	Single	Married
M	46.60	47.99
SD	9.67	9.59
N	392	419

Regarding the geographical area, the "Centre" is the one with the highest "global sense of community," and in contrast the "South and Autonomous Regions" reveal the lowest value of the scale. The "North" shows an intermediate value between the Centre and South and Autonomous Regions, with its average value being closer to the first. All average values of the global sense of community are positive in the three geographical areas identified (see Figure 3).
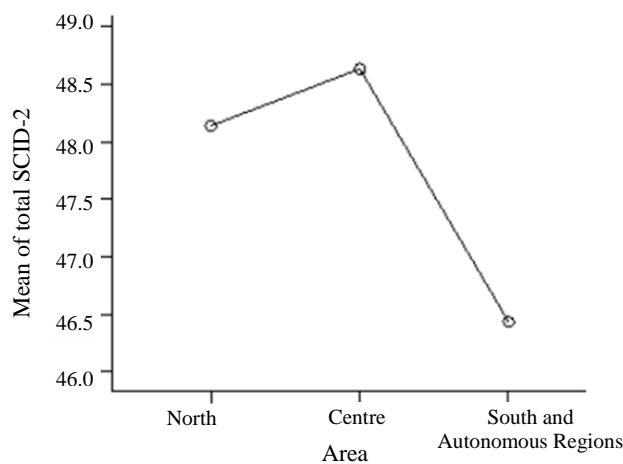

FIGURE 3
Total SCI-2 averages by geographical area.

However, the significance associated with the ANOVA test reveals the existence of differences in at least two areas, $F (2, 788) = 4.41$, $p < .05$. The comparison of the averages between the areas considered shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the "Centre" and the "South and Autonomous Regions" (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
Post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test (differences in averages)

	North	Centre	South and Autonomous Regions	Unknown
North	1	–0.35	1.94	–5.85
Centre		1	2.29*	–5.50
South and Autonomous Regions			1	–7.79
Unknown				1

*$p < .05$.

On the topic of the length of stay in the community, it is the "19 or more years" group which indicates the highest average ($M = 47.35$) and the highest standard deviation ($SD = 9.97$) (see Table 6). However, the Student's t-test for this effect did not indicate significant differences between the two groups, $t(797) = –25$, $p = .80$.

TABLE 6
Total SCI-2 by length of stay in the community

Total SCI-2	Length of stay in the community	
	19 or fewer years	19 or more years
M	47.18	47.35
SD	9.37	9.97
N	412	387

Finally, the global sense of community seems to be different amid the position of "leader" and "other role," as it is the first that exhibits the highest average ($M = 47.46$), but also the highest standard deviation ($SD = 9.69$) (see Table 7). However, the Student's t-test did not indicate significant differences between the two groups, $t(803) = .47$, $p = .64$.

Taking into account the results obtained for the sense of community, we can affirm that the variables do not present statistically significant differences except in the geographical area, where once again it is the South and Autonomous Regions that presents a lower average value. The variables nonyoung, married, more time spent in the association, and the role of leader of unit/group have higher average values of sense of community compared to the categories young, single, less years spent in the association, and another position/role.

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TABLE 7
Total SCI-2 by role in the community

Total SCI-2	Role in the community	
	Leader of unit/group	Other role
M	47.46	47.14
SD	9.69	9.43
N	379	405

The results also demonstrate the multidimensionality of the concept as previously found by other authors although they differ in the number of factors (Abdelkader & Bouslama, 2014; Hrast & Dolnicar, 2011; Hughey et al, 1999; Obst & White, 2005). The Portuguese model for the context under study revealed the existence of four factors as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) and by McMillan (1996, 2011), and found in the studies by Peterson et al. (2008) and Mannarini, Rochira, and Talò (2012).

We also verified that the members of this community have multiple identities and multiple roles associated with multiple communities, as mentioned by Kloos et al. (2012), considering these aspects as an integral and natural part of their members' lives (Townley, Kloos, Green, & Franco, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that the McMillan and Chavis (1986) model is no longer sufficient to define the sense of community today, given the complexity and the emergence of new elements and dynamics between them (Mannino & Snyder, 2012). McMillan's model (2011) responds more to the definition of sense of community given its comprehensiveness and deepening of the relationships and dynamics between the various elements, and their connection to the ecological principles underlying the communities.

These results are in line with the most recent studies that investigated the model already mentioned in different contexts with very different characteristics. It seems more interesting to adopt the McMillan's sense of community model (1996, 2011), considering that it is more than a renewal of names of the dimensions in question. This is a model with a broader perspective of the concept, with a transformative character, and revised to fit current perceptions, and that is not bound to a dichotomous thinking.

Some of the limitations of the study are related to the fact that we cannot validate the measure used (SCI-2) beyond the context in question or generalize the results obtained. One of the aspects mentioned are the motivations implicit in the adhesion and maintenance of the volunteer that have an impact on the sense of community. This aspect should be developed in future studies.

The interview script used has proved to be a starting point, but in our opinion, it should be developed in future studies, taking into account this more updated model to cover aspects that we could not address. Another limitation that we found is that we interviewed each of the key informants only once; in fact, after transcribing the interviews, we would have liked to answer to other issues and aspects, for example the actions that could promote leadership beyond the local level or how the bidirectional influence in the member-community dyad operates

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Loomis, Docket, and Brodsky (2004) stated that to determine changes in the sense of community it is necessary to measure/make two evaluations. This idea can inspire new research regarding sense of community wuthin the same organizational context.

Another proposal could be the extension of this study to other associative contexts or Scouts associations, national and international, in which other contextual variables could be studied. A third proposal would be to study the sense of community also with children and young people. Finally, it would be interesting to investigate if this sense of community of the members of the association is maintained and in what form, beyond the administrative membership of the association, given that it was one of the aspects addressed in the interviews of the key informants, not yet considered and explored.

In conclusion, and responding to McMillan's challenge (2011), it is important that, as community psychologists, we challenge ourselves to rethink how we conceptualize, measure, and promote the sense of community. In doing so, we may take into account the implementation of multicultural theories, understand the importance of multiples groups we belong to, encourage the construction of bridges, and promote the social capital of our communities.

NOTE

1. CNE = corpo nacional de escutas (faith-based scouting movement of Catholic inspiration).

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