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Family resources and needs in the post-pandemic era

During the months of lockdown imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, mental health (CIS, 2021), domestic violence (UN, 2020) and divorce (AEAFA, 2021) rates sky-rocketed. But we also saw small acts of kindness (López, 2020), micro-favours between strangers, as well as novel neighbourly experiences, socially responsible attitudes from businesses, and individual re-examinations of one's own personal, family and professional trajectory. In a world working from home under intensive conditions, limited by the walls of that home, we have "learned" how valuable and necessary our families are when it comes to facing tough situations, and although storms sometimes raged, strengthening family dynamics have also helped us to survive this crisis.

1. The networks that sustain us

If we dig a big deeper than social organisation and the system's efficiency, we see that the pandemic has unearthed an invisible force: that of the family. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the economy and health, death and hospital admissions, families have been able to maintain a stronger sense of normality than those who lived through this time alone (Informe España, 2020). Having a family not only made the extraordinary circumstances bearable, but it also made it possible to maintain some kind of normality in day-to-day life.

This is a notion that had already been endorsed by sociologists and thinkers. Levi-Strauss (1985) defines the family as a wholly social relationship among people whose bonds transcends biology, creating a meaningful sociocultural order in the world. Donati (2014) calls the family a solution to the most fundamental needs not only of the individual, but also of society. "Being a family" during lockdown helped us continue as "social beings". In the web of mutual expectations that families are built upon, communication and exchange agreements for goods and services are made that are later replicated in society.

One real example of this was the generosity of so many frontline workers – healthcare professionals, carers, cleaning staff, retailers etc. – who, through their anonymous efforts, exposed a new kind of social leadership and re-established care as a social value.

What's more, social distancing does not determine the creation or quality of relationships. According to Leornado Polo (2001), human beings are able to build relationships that are not determined by our species' needs, but which are formed for reasons that transcend the individual's particular and immediate interests. As such, the family is a space of solidarity, learned among parents and children, where true social capital is generated in the form of collaboration.

Social capital measures the "sociability" of a human group, its ability to collaborate and for that collaboration to flourish, by assessing the actual active relationships between people (Cohen & Prusak, 2001) and institutions; relationships that bind and sustain society as a whole (World Bank, 1999).

Societies, especially one under lockdown and in isolation, need to have strong social capital capable of shaping "civic virtue", i.e., a meaningful network

of reciprocal social relationships, which is much more than the sum of its competent and/or virtuous but isolated individuals (Putnam, 2000). In this regard, the quality of social capital enables civic virtue and helps solve collective problems.

Various authors have noted how this social capital, in essence collaborative and linked to cultural capital and social well-being, is based on kindness, mutual trust, effective norms and social networks (Portes, 2000; O'Connor, 1979; Loury, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; and Putnam, 1995). Strong social capital increases the quality and flow of information, the improvement and coordination of collective activities and leads to improved collective decision-making and sanctions (Rodrigo et al, 2006).

2 The family as a school of competences

Our personal identity is constructed from the experiences we have lived through. Our family roots and independent choices shape our biography (Donati, 2003). The family roots underlying bonds of connection, attachment and dependency form the basis of interdependence (MacIntyre, 2001) and of the relational and normative structure of our society.

Virtues and professional and civic skills, so useful to us during the pandemic, are forged from the interdependence of family life. Families are constantly exercising their negotiation, teamwork, delegation and communication skills, as well as time management and equitable distribution of goods. The mutual services performed within families lay the foundations for altruistic and gratuitous actions, as well as cooperation and intergenerational solidarity.

The relationship between what the family "does" and what the family "is", is determined by the close link between the external aspects of family functioning and its inner workings, perhaps less "measurable" from the outside, but just as real as the aforementioned skills and competencies. These inner workings are rooted in care, kindness and education, the three main internal functions of the family that have a direct social impact on social capital:

· Care constitutes an essential learning process for developing intergenerational solidarity (Etzioni, 1999).

· Kindness helps children to overcome the individualistic nature of their actions and to develop altruism towards other people and society (Donati, 2003).

· Family education, based on trust, establishes clear reference points that help build personal identity and foster self-determination and integration into society (Edwards et al, 2003).

These three functions foster the development of adequate emotional management skills in children and a high level of resilience, helping to shape mature personalities capable of facing all kinds of difficulties – health, financial, emotional or professional – such as those experienced during the pandemic. According to the stakeholder theory (Rosicky & Northcott, 2016), the family is an essential stakeholder as a developer of non-cognitive, intrapersonal skills that facilitate personal and social self-control.

This focus on individuality in the family fosters civic virtues and generates commitment, resulting in effective and democratic citizenship (Naval, 2000), which is not satisfied with minimalist approaches based on codes and laws, nor with purely "formal" citizen behaviour that respects the rules. On the contrary, an idea of maximums, supported by agents capable of making it possible, is the one that would lead society towards excellence, beyond compliance with strict social regulations. This attitude has been evidenced by the sacrificial work of healthcare professionals, but also of many others, citizens who have actively resisted the pull and who have had faith in the future. Therefore, a solid education for citizens, which seeks the development and quality of social capital from one generation to the next, requires policies that support families, giving them the tools and training necessary to maximise their educational role and potential. Granting the family a socially significant position as a sphere where common good can be found, allows us to discover what is good for individuals. This requires a co-biographical history where it is possible to gain experiences from co-existence (Polo, 2010). This author believes that a single or isolated individual would not be co-existential and, therefore, not human.

3. Family ties

The true gift of family and its dynamics are born of conjugal love. Therein lies the relevance of family identity and personal discovery of the other as a valuable being by the mere fact of existing; born out of love and for love. The value of the individual thus becomes the founding value and the recipient of all other values learned and experienced in the family.

The family – the institution from whose bonds society as a whole learns and benefits – can be defined as a fully-fledged social relationship whose identity is underpinned by four cornerstones: 'an intentionality (generativity), means (a couple's sexuality), normativity (reciprocity), a modal value (the gift)' (Donati, 2014). Its intergenerational contribution is therefore based on the unity and the giving of two people: the spouses.

In the family, individuals are always seen as an end and never as a means. Without this value – the individual's dignity by virtue of the fact that they exist – all values and their meaning would change. The value of individuals and their dignity, beyond their results and contribution – intelligence, efficiency – is such an important social insurance that no social policy would be able to invent and develop an equal system of personal protection. The family, therefore, is not a becoming, but an affirmation. It is not a result but an action, and necessarily implies acceptance, total affirmation; characteristic of personal love and of the dynamic, creative, open, personal and social realities that arise during the becoming of a real-world relationship (De Garay, 1995).

4. Child protection

According to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the family is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly of children, who should receive the necessary protection and assistance to enable them to assume their future responsibilities within the community to the fullest, growing up in a happy, loving and understanding family setting, necessary for the full and harmonious development of their personality. Therefore, it is a child's right to be cared for by their parents; the family's protection and support for them to be able to fulfil their responsibilities should be a priority for every country[1].

However, we are currently experiencing a collapse of the family as a "social relationship" (Donati, 2003) due to the attempt to reduce the family to a mere sphere of cohabitation, and to equate family dynamics with certain functions fostered, or not, by the environment, culture and socio-political context. Creating healthy societies involves fostering spaces of freedom and self-
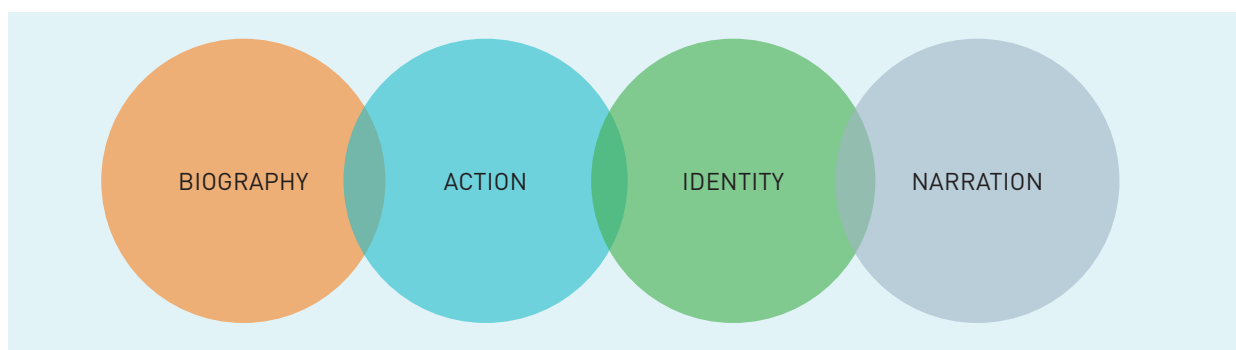
determination. We understand self-determination as volitional behaviour that leads a person to act as the principal causal agent in their life and make choices and decisions regarding their quality of life, without unnecessary external influences or interferences (Wehmeyer, 2006). As such, a healthy society seeks citizens who are capable of being driven by their own personal goals, people with their own generator.

Authors such as Naval (2000), quoting Macintyre, relate personal identity to biography, developing an action sequence, identity and narration as the unfolding of one's own biography.

Action (praxis) helps us to understand ourselves as well as the reality that surrounds us. Human beings win or lose from their independent actions (Arregui & Choza, 2002) and become co-responsible for human history, as through their actions, they end up becoming co-authors of many other histories, mainly those of their relatives and closest friends. This argument supports the importance of individual education

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[1] *The United Nations 2030 Agenda sets out 17 goals and 169 targets covering aspects related to the economy, society and the environment. Five of these goals appear to be most connected to family policies: poverty, hunger, health, education and equality.*

BIOGRAPHY — ACTION — IDENTITY — NARRATION

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

ACCEPTANCE

ATTACHMENT

EMOTIONAL MATURITY

PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

SELF DETERMINATION

GIVING

SELF-POSSESSION

in the family setting. It is the only starting point that allows people to become who they are and project this wealth outwards, impacting business and society as a whole.
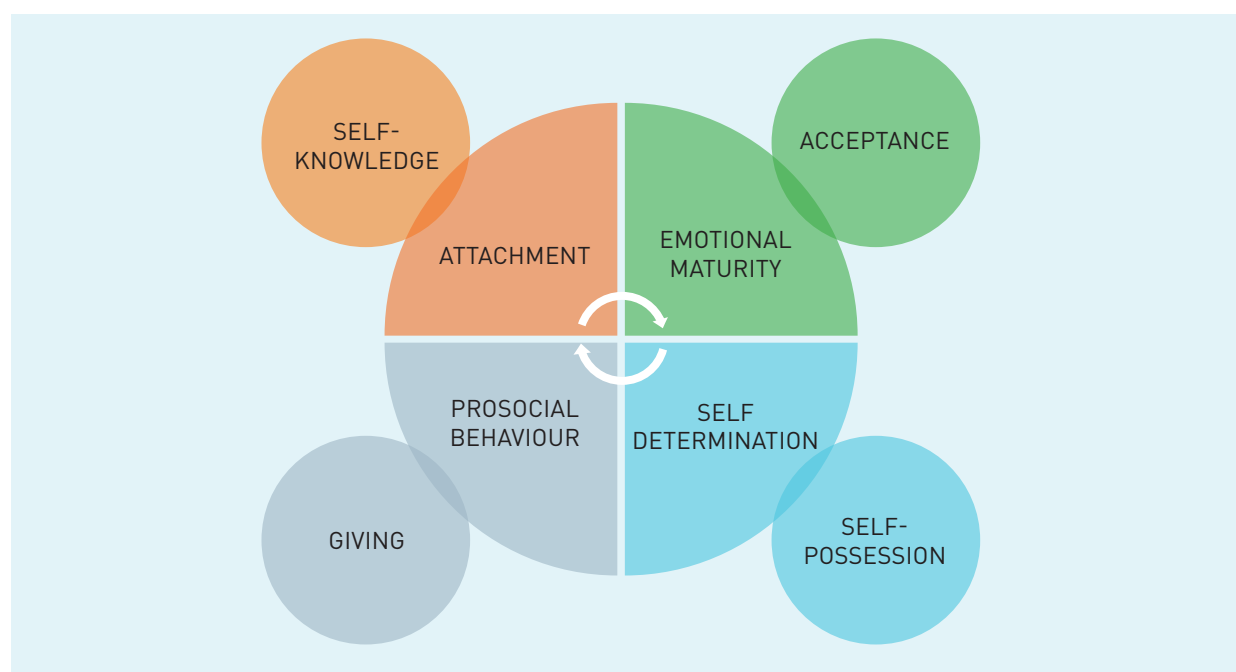
5. Social development, human capital and family

The nurturing and enhancement of human capital has today become a central concern for governments around the world, who see its development as a universal policy (Becker 1992, Mincer 1984, Psacharopoulos, 1989) with direct repercussions on individual productivity, income distribution and national economic growth (Hanushek and Luque, 2003). In macroeconomics, there is also a positive relationship between educationalquality, human capital and economic development (Ahmed, 2013).

However, we cannot lose sight of recent social and employment challenges that are putting social capital to the test: new forms of flexible work, the robotisation of jobs and the reduction of the in-house workforce, the precariousness of contracts, etc. Faced with these dilemmas, which particularly affect younger generations, we must ask ourselves the following questions: Can the quality and cohesion of social capital, its commitments and loyalties be maintained in a continuously changing context?

Flexible jobs that had heralded the death of office-based work and bureaucracy and promised

us greater freedom, often mask an even greater control imposed by the intensive use of technology that seems to force us to be available 24 hours a day. How should governments and companies respond to this situation? What family policies will need to be created?

In addition, our world has been characterised, until very recently, by over-development and perhaps the excessive availability of material goods, leading to the so-called consumer society, where "waste" and "rubbish" created a single-use, throw-away mentality. An object once owned, now replaced by another more perfect one, has been discarded. Add to this the competitiveness of the market and its consequent law of survival of the fittest, and it is easy to end up with a "throw-away" culture that also discards people, transferring new forms of colonialism and dependence onto relationships.

This idea, favouring short-term use and neglecting integral human development, can greatly hinder the progress and development of social capital, impeding justice and intergenerational solidarity, leaving behind the weakest and promoting only the isolated success of the fittest.

As such, today it is more important than ever to re-establish the idea of "integral ecology" as part of the "social ecology" (Benedict XVI, 2007); the true framework for the responsibility of leaders of nations and companies. Any notion of sustainable development that does not take this idea into account, that only focuses on protecting or properly managing the environment without prioritising the good of people and the requirements of justice, could prove to be insufficient. It is important to remember that the words 'economy' and 'ecology' derive from the same Latin term oikos, which means 'house', or 'family home'. As such, and to be consistent with the true roots and origin of the economy, it is important to incorporate domestic production, human reproduction and caregiving duties into all areas of social and economic development. It is time for that invisible economy (Durán, 2012) to surface on government balance sheets.

6. Training to support families

As we have seen, there are many social challenges that families face today in order to preserve their identity and carry out their irreplaceable internal and external functions, the social repercussions of which are evident. For this reason, it is necessary for different bodies such as governments, companies, schools and family associations to create support networks. There is also a need for trained professionals who know what the family is and what its functions are in order to be able to help it flourish and to prevent and treat family-related issues, not only crises, but also those sparked by the different stages of its evolution. Families experience ordinary situations and dilemmas that require support, such as children's education, managing the home, interspouse communication, and many other issues. Professionals trained in support can help each family face these situations using their own resources and tools.

The Institute of Advanced Family Studies (IESF) has worked – through research and education – for 20 years in the field of family support and education, as well as analysing and developing family policies for governments, public administrations and companies. Its work takes into account the importance of family ties and the need to accompany families throughout their evolution. The need for education in this area, as well as the need to update methodologies, resources, materials and tools, makes it necessary to set up specific programmes run by experts. The IESF, a research and teaching centre of the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC Barcelona), is home to professionals who do just this, as well as a wide community of alumni that is implementing this knowledge in its numerous spheres of influence (schools, organisations, companies, etc.). Since opening its doors, it has also developed several online, hybrid and on-site teaching programmes directed at professionals who work with families (teachers, psychologists, social workers, lawyers, etc.) in different spheres of social life. The first programme it launched was the Postgraduate Degree in Marriage, Education and Family that has been running for fifteen years and is taught in Spanish, English and Russian. The programme is aimed at a wide variety of candidates and teaches its students how family ties are created and their importance

in educating new generations. Mothers and fathers study the programme alongside other students who wish to understand the family, its strengths and educational dynamics from a scientific standpoint.

Other programmes like the Postgraduate Degree in Family Policies have also been launched, aimed at agents of social change who design, implement and evaluate family policies: company directors, governments and public administrations, as well as organisations that provide social support to families. The Institute's work in educational innovation has recently culminated in a new programme to support and accompany families. What does this mean? Until a few years ago, we believed that it was enough to help families by offering them "education", that is to say, ideas about what families should be like and how things should be done, in a style that we could call "directive". Perhaps we were forgetting that education is not just about giving or receiving information. It also requires, to a large extent, boosting people's freedom, proposing models that they are familiar with and that are realistic.

But what does accompany really mean? In etymological terms, "to accompany" means "to share space and time with others" so they can discover their own resources and learn to resolve the challenges that all personal relationships entail. As such, "accompanying" families involves being where they are, meaning that accompaniment is an action that must be carried out in the spaces where families meet, act and are. "Accompanying" families also means establishing a personal relationship based on trust. Finally, "accompanying" families is not the same as managing them, nor is it a substitute for decision-making by solving other people's problems. "Accompanying" others means revealing the beauty of being a family; showing them how to do it and also helping them discover resources that each one can use to work through challenges. The Postgraduate Degree in Family Coaching and Guidance, taught both in class and online, aims to educate students on the attitudes and methodologies they need to activate the internal and external resources of family dynamics, so that families can prevent and overcome the challenges and conflicts they come up against throughout their life cycle. The programme combines both theoretical study and practical work through classes taught via an online platform and one week of in-person lessons and practical sessions in Barcelona. Family support is not a single action, but rather a broad-spectrum change of perspective that can be applied in many different ways and in many different settings. As there is no such thing as the "ideal family" or "perfect family", in reality we all need support. We can all, in some way, be families who support other families. For that reason, it is important to learn to look at family life in a different way, to learn and share with others, so, in a way, everyone involved in helping families has a place on this postgraduate degree. The Institute also offers several custom or in-company programmes such as the Tutorial Training Programme, designed to respond to the need to improve channels of communication between families and schools. One way to achieve this is to strengthen the strategic role of tutors who could become true agents of change in the family-school relationship.

7. Final considerations

Supporting families today requires aptitude (knowledge) as well as attitude. It requires knowledge of the cultural context we live in and of the strengths and difficulties that families face today. It is also essential to understand and learn how to use – depending on the circumstances – specific tools for dealing with family conflict, for example, communication and emotion management skills, or mediation, listening and interaction techniques to enhance family strengths. All this should be done whilst respecting the family's relationships, which are very different to other types of human relationships. Finally, it is also important to cultivate and shape one's own attitude: to foster a relationship of trust with those people one wishes to support; to abandon pessimistic attitudes or views that tend towards catastrophism. We are all aware of the complicated context we live in, full of very real hurdles. While remaining realistic, we must cultivate an optimistic and hopeful attitude based on the belief in the great cohesive force of family relationships.

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