INTRODUCTION

After the introduction of the key competences for lifelong learning assessment framework in 2006, growing interest has been granted in most part of the European countries to the development of students’ citizenship competencies. Recent research about this topic focuses on two major perspectives (Biesta 2007; Ten Dam et al. 2011): from the one hand, scholars identify citizenship as an outcome, defining it as a baggage that young people must learn in order to well participate in society; on the other hand, citizenship has seen as the result of socialization process taking place in every dimension of daily life (family, peer, school, community). Starting from both these interconnected points of view, our study proposes a theoretical model for the explanation of cognitive processes related to the development of 8th grade students’ civic-ness, in order to understand which kind of relational mechanism and (in)formal learning experiences underlie the acquisition of civic knowledge, skills, and, above all, the effective improvement of their civic attitudes toward community and society. The analysis will be mainly based on the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2009) data set, a internationally representative survey edited by IEA that counts 3,366 Italian participants. Thanks to a methodological approach based on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the civic-ness construct and the other fundamental latent variables part of the theoretical model (perceived civic self-efficacy, trust in society and institution legitimacy) will be operationalized and measured, while the fit and tightness of the overall model will be tested by the use of structural equation modeling technique (SEM).

SECTIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

① Defining the theoretical model
② State of the art: operationalization and measurement of the “civic-ness” latent construct

SECTION 1 / Theoretical approach

Our theoretical approach is based on the idea that a wide range of control variables related to individual, family, school, and local characteristics may be related to the development of everyone of the cognitive latent dimensions mentioned in fig. 1 (see the arrows in the left side of the scheme).

Fig. 1. Theoretical model linking potential predictors to the development of civic attitudes (civic-ness) and behaviors (civic engagement)

Generalized trust and institutions legitimacy. Subjects characterized by higher levels of interpersonal trust tend to develop greater trust in society and institutions, increasing also their predisposition to the development of civic attitudes (Putnam 1993). Despite Putnam define trust in people and institution as attitudes toward society, we decided to include them into the civic dimension: «trust is not purposive because I may have attitudes or act from my trust and my actions may give evidence of my trust; but my attitudes or actions are not themselves the trust» (Hardin 2004). Perceived civic self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy is defined as an individual cognitive resource derived by a self-evaluation of personal civic abilities (Finkel, 1985); a greater degree of perceived effectiveness would affect personal motivation, encouraging the development of civic attitudes, behavior (Wilkendield et al. 2010), and better performance in terms of learning (civic knowledge).

Civic knowledge and skills. Represent the amount of knowledge and skills that facilitate the individual involvement in civil and democratic life (Bobek et al., 2009); knowledge refers to the ability in recognizing and remember definitions, descriptions and properties of the key concepts related to citizenship, while skills refer to the ability in developing complex reasoning and reaching conclusions on specific civic topics (Schulz et al., 2008).

Civic-ness. All the above mentioned latent variables contribute to the definition of the students’ amount of civic-ness in terms of political and community oriented attitudes. Starting from the classical theory of social capital (Putnam 1993, Coleman 1994), civic attitudes can be defined as interests, beliefs and intended behaviors related to the activities in which people act in ways that will benefit not only themselves as individuals, but also the larger communities in which they are members (Snyder and Omoto 2007).

Civic engagement. The attitudes dimension contributes to the definition of civic behaviors, which in turn produce a feedback on students’ cognitive dimension. Unfortunately, some limits derived by the use of cross-sectional data file us to consider their past experiences as control variables potentially able to affect the cognitive dimension (participation to voluntary associations, political pressure groups, school activities, etc.).

SECTION 2 / State of the art: “civic-ness” concept

Following Uslaner theory (2003), active political participation and communal activities have different role in participation to the community life: «the goal of politics is to win and defeat the opposition, reinforcing in-group loyalty and denigrating opposition». For this reason Items related to intended active political participation are not considered as part of the civic attitudes construct, leaving space for electoral and informal political attitudes. Also electoral participation can be considered as a minor form of civic behavior (the simple act of voting may contribute to fostering in-group loyalties), but in this case we assume that negative effects could be partially reduced by the young age of the 8th grade students.

Table 1. Operationalization of the “civic-ness” latent construct: components and contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Contents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>IS2P21A – Interest in political issues related to the country  IS2P22B – Interest in political issues related to the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>IS2P21F – Good citizens take part in political discussions  IS2P22F – How much importance do you give to political issues in your school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended behaviors</td>
<td>IS2P23A – Adult intended vote in local elections  IS2P23B – Experience about future participation in political events or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IS2P31D – Experience about collecting signatures for a social or political cause  IS2P31E – Experience about being a volunteer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>RSMEA</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>p (Δ2)</th>
<th>Significant RDR</th>
<th>ECVI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>691 (53)</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.985</td>
<td>0.926</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>459 (62)</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>0.954</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>441 (61)</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 4</td>
<td>330 (60)</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.980</td>
<td>0.962</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2nd Order CFA Results indicate a good fit of the civic-ness model to the data, especially for Model 5 (See 2nd Model and Model 5). As mentioned in previous hypothesis, Items related to electoral participation seems to be less connected to the 1st order latent factors than the others: standardized factor loadings for the 12 manifest variables ranged from .35 through .88, indicating that the three 1st order factors accounted for 12% (vote beliefs and intended behaviors) through 69% of interest in political issue variance. Another validation hail from the identification of high error terms correlation between the vote related items.

CONCLUSIONS

References
Bobek, D., Zaff, J., Li, Y., & Lerner, R. M. (2009). Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development among European youth. International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2009) data set, a statistically representative survey edited by IEA that counts 3,366 Italian participants. Thanks to a methodological approach based on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the civic-ness construct and the other fundamental latent variables part of the theoretical model (perceived civic self-efficacy, trust in society and institution legitimacy) will be operationalized and measured, while the fit and tightness of the overall model will be tested by the use of structural equation modeling technique (SEM).
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