

Social Competence as a Formative Process: from Psychological Aptitudes to Relational Performance

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Abstract

Social competence is analyzed as a formative, dynamic process that involves the interaction between psychological predispositions, educational conditioning, and variable relational contexts. Far from being an innate trait, it is gradually shaped through formal and informal learning mechanisms, reflecting the individual's ability to act effectively in the social environment. This approach emphasizes the need to reconceptualize the notion in procedural terms, not merely as a set of skills, but as a coherent expression of adaptation and self-regulation within diverse interpersonal contexts. Our inquiry highlights the differentiation between pre-existing psychological aptitudes and behavioral acquisitions gained through education. It focuses on the relationship between intrinsic motivation, emotional self-regulation, and communication styles as essential factors in the development of social competence. At the same time, the theoretical analysis proposes an interpretative framework in which social competences are not automatically transferable from one context to another, but require reconfigurations based on the expectations and norms specific to each interaction. Against this background, relational performance becomes an indicator of the degree to which these competences are integrated into everyday behavior. The emphasis is placed on the pragmatic dimension of social competence, highlighting its manifestation in educational, professional, and community contexts. Thus, a functional profile of the socially competent individual takes shape, characterized by the ability to manage conflicts, establish authentic relationships, and adapt to group dynamics. Social competence therefore emerges as a process with major formative significance in both personal and societal development.

Keywords: *social competence, psychological aptitudes, interpersonal relationships, personal development, emotional self-regulation, relational performance.*

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Social competence represents a fundamental concept within the socio-human sciences, with significant implications for the individual's relational functioning and their integration into the community. It is not merely a communication skill, but a complex set of dispositions, attitudes, and adaptive behaviors that enable effective and responsible participation in various social contexts (Chelcea, 1998). The critical analysis of this dimension involves a deconstruction of the stereotypes associated with interpersonal success and a shift toward a deeper understanding of the formative-transformative mechanisms involved in social development (Opre et al., 2021). Essentially, social competence cannot be reduced to rules of conduct or behavioral schemes, but must be approached as a process of personal construction and authentic engagement in relationships with others.

This formative process is influenced by numerous internal and external factors, among which social intelligence, emotional self-regulation, and the capacity to adopt the perspective of others occupy a central role (Goleman, 2018). The development of social competence involves not only adaptation to norms and contexts but also the conscious cultivation of relational practices oriented toward cohesion, empathy, and responsibility. Within this dynamic, the role of education becomes crucial: not only as a vehicle for social knowledge but as a space where functional social connections are cultivated and where diverse perspectives and identities are accepted. For this reason, social competence must be viewed beyond the boundaries of formal education, encompassing the non-formal and informal dimensions of socialization.

Another relevant aspect concerns the differentiated and contextual nature of social competence. It does not manifest uniformly in all situations and does not guarantee success in every relationship. On the contrary, it is conditioned by the specifics of the interaction, the individual's personality structure, and their level of cognitive and emotional flexibility (Constantinescu, 2004). Moreover, the manifestation of social competence entails the assumption of certain risks: negotiating conflict, expressing one's own opinion, or defending personal interests without violating the rights of others. In this regard, being socially competent means coping with ambiguity, complexity, and social diversity through a mature and balanced attitude.

It is necessary for scientific inquiry to approach social competence not as a fixed trait, but as a skill subject to both the process of formation and evaluation, integrated within a coherent educational trajectory. This involves constructing theoretical models

and practical applications that reflect both the psychological constraints and the contextual valences of social behavior (Birkenbihl, 1998). Exploring the formative dimension of social competence thus provides a means to understand how individuals develop in relation to others and actively contribute to shaping functional and ethical social spaces.

The Foundations of Social Competence: Definitions, Frameworks, and Components

Clarifying the Concept of Social Competence

The concept of social competence requires a rigorous delimitation from related terms that operate at distinct conceptual levels. Social competence denotes a functional organization of knowledge, values, behaviors, and affective dispositions that enables a person to interact effectively and appropriately in various social contexts (Constantinescu, 2004). This integration entails both the ability to understand the implicit rules of interaction and to adapt one's own reactions in accordance with relational dynamics. From this perspective, social competence is not reducible to mere behavioral manifestations or personality traits, but implies a functional coherence between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements.

The term "skill" is often used ambiguously in the specialized literature, being perceived as synonymous with "competence." However, skills designate an innate or acquired capacity to perform a specific action efficiently (Chelcea, 1998). In the social sphere, skills may include the ability to engage in active listening, to interpret facial expressions, or to formulate requests in an assertive manner. These are components of competence but do not exhaust it. In the absence of a value framework, adaptive intentionality, and criteria of contextual appropriateness, skills remain partial expressions of an undefined social potential. Therefore, the distinction lies in the level of functional integration and the purpose pursued through the manifested behaviors.

Aptitudes, in contrast, represent psychological or physical predispositions that facilitate learning and performance in a specific domain (Golu, 1981). In the case of social competence, one may speak of the existence of general social aptitudes, such as empathy or cognitive flexibility. These may positively influence the development of competence but do not automatically determine it. A person may possess a high aptitude for interpersonal interaction and yet exhibit deficient social behavior due to a lack of learning or the presence of dysfunctional beliefs. Thus, competence entails a conscious

actualization, guided by social rules and cultural norms, while aptitudes remain at the level of latent potential.

Furthermore, a distinction must be made between social competence and social attitudes. Attitudes reflect a relatively stable evaluative structure, expressing favorable or unfavorable predispositions toward individuals, groups, or situations (Moscovici, 1998). They may support or inhibit social behaviors but do not, in themselves, constitute competence. A positive attitude toward cooperation does not guarantee cooperative behavior if the person lacks the necessary skills and does not understand the contextual requirements. In contrast, social competence implies the capacity to mobilize the cognitive and affective resources required to transform attitudes into adaptive behaviors, adjusted to the demands of the social environment in which the person operates.

Explanatory Models and Theoretical Framework

The psychological approach to social competence centers on personality structure and the cognitive processes involved in human interactions. From this perspective, social competence is understood as a combination of higher psychological functions, such as empathy, social perception, and emotional regulation capacity, which enable the individual to anticipate, interpret, and respond appropriately to the behaviors of others. Within this framework, special emphasis is placed on the development of these mechanisms from early childhood, considering that they can be shaped through experience and formal education. Specialized studies underline that the effectiveness of social relationships is influenced by the integrated functioning of these internal processes (Golu, 1981). In this paradigm, the assessment of social competence involves the identification and measurement of these psychological components, with emphasis on the coherence between intention, perception, and reaction.

In the educational sphere, social competence is analyzed as an outcome of the training and socialization process, structured around the acquisition of adaptive behaviors in institutionalized contexts. Education is not viewed merely as a means of transmitting knowledge, but as a systematic space for modeling social behaviors through curricular and extracurricular regulated activities. In this regard, emphasis is placed on learning cooperation, respect for rules, and the reasoned expression of opinions, all framed within a formal pedagogical framework (Marcus, 1999). Here, social competence is regarded as a progressively acquired ability, developed through interaction among educational actors and through the internalization of

collective values, with the expectation that the school will act as a socialization agent complementary to the family.

The psychosociological paradigm offers a synthesis between individual and group determinations, emphasizing the relational nature of social competence. From this perspective, competence is not merely a set of internalized skills but the result of a dynamic social construction influenced by norms, roles, and specific contexts. Interpersonal relationships are treated as settings for the symbolic negotiation of status and social identity, in which individuals adjust their behaviors according to received feedback and mutual expectations (Chelcea, 1998). This model emphasizes the contextual and flexible dimension of social competence, rejecting the idea of stable and universal traits. Furthermore, psychosociological research privileges qualitative methods, which allow for in-depth analysis of the processes of mutual influence between individuals.

From an integrative perspective, particularly useful in applied educational research, the three paradigms can be correlated for a complex understanding of social competence. This approach involves linking internal psychological aspects with behavioral and contextual ones in order to develop coherent formative interventions. Thus, the development of social competence involves both the formation of psychological abilities necessary for emotional regulation and the acquisition of appropriate behavioral strategies and the understanding of the social role assumed in various interaction contexts (Boda, 2020). The integrative model contributes to the construction of educational programs centered on the person and social relationships, allowing for a nuanced assessment of social competence that accounts for its multidimensional and dynamic nature.

Structural components of social competence

Communication represents the foundation of any form of social interaction and one of the essential components of social competence. It entails not only the effective transmission of a message, but also the capacity to understand and respond appropriately to the messages received from interlocutors. The efficiency of communication is conditioned by a series of cognitive, affective, and contextual factors that influence both the content and the form of discourse (Dumitru, 1998). Within social competence, communication acquires formative value, as it facilitates the individual's integration into social groups, the development of social identity, and the prevention of isolation. In this sense, the mastery of verbal and nonverbal communication skills, appropriate to various

interpersonal contexts, is considered a prerequisite for cooperation, negotiation, and mediation. Communication thus becomes an expression of social maturity, and difficulties in this area can lead to dysfunctions in relationships with others, limiting active and constructive participation in community life (Opre et al., 2021).

Empathy constitutes another structural dimension of social competence, being defined by the ability to perceive and understand the emotions, perspectives, and intentions of others. This ability involves both a cognitive level, represented by perspective-taking, and an affective level, reflected in emotional resonance with the states of other persons (Goleman, 2018). Empathy facilitates the adjustment of one's own behavior according to the needs and emotions of the interlocutor, thus contributing to the prevention of conflicts and the consolidation of interpersonal relationships. In the absence of empathy, social interactions tend to become rigid, egocentric, and often sources of tension. Furthermore, empathy plays a decisive role in the manifestation of prosocial behaviors, especially in educational and organizational contexts where cohesion and solidarity are essential. The cultivation of empathy therefore becomes a priority component in the development of social competence, particularly within professional training focused on relational capacities.

Assertiveness, within the framework of social competence, refers to a person's ability to express opinions, needs, and feelings in a direct, honest, and respectful manner, without violating the rights of others. This form of expression implies a balance between passivity and aggression, providing the optimal framework for negotiating personal boundaries and managing relationships autonomously (Gavril, 2000). Assertiveness is not innate, but is formed through learning and practice, being influenced by attachment style, social models, and previous communication experiences. In educational or professional environments, an assertive attitude fosters role clarity, collaboration efficiency, and the prevention of tension escalation. Additionally, assertive behavior contributes to increased self-confidence and the maintenance of a positive self-image. Consequently, assertiveness not only optimizes social dynamics, but also becomes an indicator of psychosocial maturity.

Conflict resolution and **cooperation** are the final two essential elements in the construction of social competence. The capacity to manage conflicts in a constructive manner presupposes understanding the underlying causes of divergences, identifying common interests, and applying negotiation and mediation techniques (Cornelius & Faire, 1996). An unresolved conflict not only deteriorates

relationships, but also generates psychological stress and organizational dysfunctions. In contrast, cooperation involves the willingness to work together to achieve common objectives, valuing complementarity and mutual respect (Deutsch, 1998). It requires flexibility, adaptability, and a strong capacity for interpersonal coordination. Although apparently opposed, cooperation and conflict management are based on the same premises: understanding the other's perspective, respect for differences, and solution-oriented thinking. In the absence of these abilities, social interactions risk being marked by suspicion, rigidity, and relational failure.

Social competence in the context of personal development: formative processes and educational influences

The role of educational processes

Social competence is not a natural given, but the result of learning mediated by multiple educational contexts, within which the family holds a primary position. In the early years of life, the child learns to interpret and respond to others' signals through modeling, imitation, and social reinforcement, in an emotionally secure environment. The family provides the initial framework for the formation of attachment, the internalization of behavioral rules, and the development of empathy, all of which are indispensable conditions for functional social interactions. Parental models, attitudes toward social norms, and educational styles directly influence the quality of the social skills developed during this stage (Caluschi, n.d.). The absence of such mediation or affective distortions within the family can lead to delays or deficits in early social development.

As the child enters the education system, the school becomes the central space for practicing socially regulated interactions. The relational climate in the classroom, the teaching style of educators, as well as the explicit or implicit behavioral norms influence the acquisition of appropriate social behaviors. Social competence is not developed solely through direct instruction, but also through active participation in group activities, conflict resolution, and involvement in collaborative tasks. The teacher thus plays a complex formative role, not only by transmitting knowledge but also by facilitating interaction and social regulation (Marcus, 1999). This institutional framework is also the place where children learn to assume roles, respect rules, and negotiate differences of opinion.

Beyond the family and school environments, the community contributes to the diversification of contexts in which social

competencies can be practiced and validated. Participation in extracurricular activities, membership in informal groups, or involvement in civic initiatives offer opportunities to engage with various relational norms and styles. The community environment becomes a space of extended socialization, where tolerance of diversity, relational autonomy, and adaptability to diverse contexts are developed (Neculau, 1989). In the absence of such contexts, previously formed competencies may remain rigid or inadequate in more complex social environments. Ideally, the interaction between the three environments - family, school, and community - should be synergistic, generating coherence in the individual's social development.

The process of developing social competencies is not linear, but influenced by numerous individual and contextual factors. Attachment style, temperament, emotional intelligence, or level of self-esteem are personal factors that shape the ability to internalize the social models provided by different educational environments (Goleman, 2018). In parallel, characteristics such as family structure, the educational resources of the school, or the social capital of the community determine the degree of access to formative opportunities. Therefore, the development of social competencies requires an integrated approach that considers the interaction between personal predispositions and environmental influences. A coherent intervention in this respect presupposes the articulation of these levels into a formative process that facilitates long-term social adaptation and performance (Boda, 2020).

Social learning and relational development

Social learning constitutes an essential process through which the individual internalizes norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors by means of interaction with others. This form of learning does not involve mere passive observation, but presupposes active participation in recurring social contexts, in which feedback, imitation, and mutual correction contribute to the consolidation of adaptive behaviors. The social context, especially when characterized by stability and coherence, facilitates the internalization of social roles and of effective relational strategies (Mureșan, 1980). Each repeated interaction, whether in the family environment, in peer groups, or in educational institutions, becomes an opportunity for exercising and refining social skills, supporting the development of competence in accordance with environmental demands.

Long-term interpersonal relationships, characterized by regularity and predictability, offer a favorable framework for relational development. Recurrent interactions generate stable mutual expectations, and these expectations foster behavioral consistency and expressive adequacy. Thus, the individual learns to regulate their responses based on the reactions of social partners, developing empathy, tolerance, and negotiation skills (Goleman, 2018). These acquisitions, although apparently spontaneous, are the result of constant exposure to social situations in which differences in perspective and interests are mediated through communication and mutual adjustment. In the absence of such repetitive contexts, relational competence risks remaining theoretical, not being consolidated through practice.

The repetitive dimension of social experiences contributes not only to the consolidation of functional behaviors but also to the identification and correction of dysfunctional ones. Through repetition, the individual comes to recognize the consistent consequences of certain actions and to distinguish efficient interaction patterns from inadequate ones (Caluschi, n.d.). For example, an aggressive behavior may be diminished over time if it is consistently followed by rejection or social sanctions, while cooperative behaviors are encouraged and validated through acceptance. This implicit regulation, supported by the regularity of social contexts, has a profound impact on the structuring of social competence, transforming everyday interaction into a mechanism of self-regulation and continuous learning.

Finally, social learning entails a high degree of contextualization, in the sense that relational acquisitions cannot be automatically transferred from one environment to another without processes of adaptation. Therefore, the diversity of social contexts in which the individual is involved plays an essential role in the generalization of social competences. Participation in various interactions - within the family, school, formal and informal environments - enables the individual to test and adapt relational strategies in accordance with the implicit rules and specific dynamics of each environment (Birkenbihl, 1998). This relational flexibility, acquired through repeated exposure to diverse settings, constitutes a defining component of an authentic social competence, which transcends situational stereotypes and enables effective adaptation to new contexts.

Individual and contextual determinants of social competence development

Individual psychological traits represent an essential factor in the process of constructing and consolidating social competence, significantly influencing the person's ability to initiate, maintain, and adapt interpersonal relationships in various contexts. Characteristics such as empathy, openness to new experiences, emotional stability, and the level of self-control influence both the perception of one's role in interactions and the way of relating to others (Goleman, 2018). A person with a high empathic disposition will exhibit a deeper understanding of the needs and emotions of interlocutors, which facilitates the formation of balanced relationships. At the same time, personality traits marked by cognitive rigidity, impulsivity, or social anxiety may generate difficulties in establishing authentic relationships, negatively affecting cooperation skills and the ability to adapt to the dynamics of social groups (Neculau, 1989).

The interaction between psychological traits and the relational climate in which the person develops has a cumulative impact on social competence, as the environment provides both learning stimuli and relevant behavioral models. In a relational climate characterized by emotional support, mutual recognition, and appreciation, the individual is stimulated to develop self-confidence and the willingness to engage in constructive relationships (Boda, 2020). Conversely, repeated exposure to hostile, conflictual, or emotionally indifferent environments leads to the adoption of social withdrawal or oppositional strategies, hindering the formation of functional interaction skills. The effects of the relational climate are particularly evident during the period of primary socialization but remain active in later stages of development, influencing the availability for social learning through modeling and internalization (Mureşan, 1980).

Communication styles represent another fundamental pillar in shaping social competence, as they enable the negotiation of relationships and the expression of social identity. Individuals who employ an assertive communication style are better equipped to manage divergences, formulate requests, and express opinions without damaging interpersonal relationships (Gavrila, 2000). In contrast, passive or aggressive styles often lead to relational imbalances, marked either by avoidance and inhibition or by conflict and social rejection. From this perspective, the education of effective communication must become a central objective of psychosocial interventions, as its positive influence on the development of

cooperation and self-regulation skills in interpersonal contexts has been demonstrated (Birkenbihl, 1998).

Finally, the development of social competence requires a coherent articulation between the internal dimensions of the person and the external environment, in a dynamic process of adaptation, learning, and reflection. A relevant component is the individual's capacity to integrate social feedback and adjust behaviors according to the context without compromising authenticity (Constantinescu, 2004). This capacity is supported by well-functioning metacognitive processes and a realistic self-representation in relation to others. Therefore, the development of social competence cannot be reduced to the mere accumulation of interaction techniques but presupposes a profound formative process, involving the continuous engagement of the psychological, relational, and communicative dimensions of the person. Only through an integrative approach can those personal resources be consolidated that transform social interactions into meaningful and generative experiences.

From Personal Development to Relational Performance

Social competence as a transversal resource

Social competence constitutes a fundamental dimension of personal development, transcending the rigid frameworks of specialized training to become a transversal resource, indispensable in multiple contexts of social, educational, and professional life. It is not merely a functional aptitude for interpersonal interaction, but a set of skills, attitudes, and knowledge that facilitates harmonious integration into various environments, adaptation to social demands, and the construction of effective, balanced, and ethical relationships (Constantinescu, 2004). Therefore, the formative value of this competence is not limited to the sphere of formal education but extends to all forms of learning, from non-formal education to informal, everyday processes. In this way, social competence becomes a catalyst for lifelong learning and integrated personal development.

One of the most relevant aspects of the transversal nature of social competence is its applicability in seemingly divergent fields, such as education, social work, human resource management, or even the technological sphere. Whether it concerns effective communication within a teaching team, negotiation in social crisis contexts, or collaboration within a software development team, the success of these activities essentially depends on the level of social competence demonstrated by the participants (Boda, 2020). This transferability

attests to the fact that we are not dealing with an isolated ability, but with a set of psychosocial mechanisms deeply rooted in human dynamics. To disregard this aspect in professional training would mean to undermine the effectiveness of the educational act and to limit personal development.

Particularly, professional environments subjected to rapid changes and intense interactions highlight with acuity the importance of this competence. The ability to correctly interpret social cues, to regulate emotions in tense interactions, and to build functional alliances in complex organizational contexts constitutes manifestations of well-developed social competence (Goleman, 2018). These traits are not innate, but formed through practice, reflection, and exposure to relevant situations, which confers social competence a modifiable and educable character. Thus, its formative value lies in its potential to support professional performance and efficient adaptation to the demands of the multiple social roles assumed by the individual.

Approaching social competence as a transversal resource implies a reconfiguration of educational and professional training strategies. The focus must be placed not only on the transmission of knowledge, but also on the development of the capacity for relationship-building, conflict management, empathy, and collaboration. In this way, training becomes a holistic process, combining cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, preparing individuals not only for a profession but for life in society (Cornelius & Faire, 1996). Integrating this perspective into educational and organizational policies is essential for building a functional and equitable social climate, in which performance is not measured exclusively in technical terms, but also in the capacity to build and maintain high-quality human relationships.

Evaluation and Self-Regulation of Social Behaviors

The self-regulation of social behaviors entails the individual's ability to monitor, assess, and adjust their conduct in accordance with social norms, the reactions of interlocutors, and the objectives of the interaction. This process involves a high level of self-awareness and sensitivity to context, both of which are essential for social integration and functional relationality. Self-regulation is not a spontaneous act, but the result of a learning and development process that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The capacity for self-regulation is closely linked to social feedback mechanisms, which provide external benchmarks for adjusting conduct in real time or following an interaction (Albrecht, 2006). The absence of this capacity

can lead to maladaptive behaviors, difficulties in group integration, and the disruption of interpersonal relationships. Thus, behavioral self-regulation becomes an indicator of social maturity and a predictive factor for success in social and professional relationships.

Social feedback plays a fundamental role in the evaluation of one's own behaviors, providing information on the impact of individual actions on others and on the degree of contextual appropriateness. It may be explicit, in the form of observations or suggestions, or implicit, through nonverbal reactions, withdrawal of cooperation, or changes in the interlocutors' attitudes. Receptiveness to feedback is not a constant nor an intrinsic, indivisible trait, but the result of a cognitive and emotional openness cultivated through education and practice. In the absence of a correct interpretation of social cues, feedback becomes ineffective, and self-regulation is compromised (Chelcea, 1998). It is important for the individual to discern between constructive feedback and manipulative or invalidating responses, in order to make use of relevant information in the behavioral adjustment process. Moreover, the ability to actively solicit feedback, not merely receive it passively, denotes a high level of autonomy in social learning and a genuine concern for effective relational engagement.

Behavioral adaptability is a direct consequence of effective self-regulation and refers to the individual's ability to modify interaction strategies in response to relational dynamics and contextual changes. This flexibility implies not only knowledge of alternative behavioral options but also the ability to apply them appropriately in specific situations. Rigid individuals who persist in dysfunctional behavioral patterns often encounter difficulties in maintaining harmonious social relationships or in adapting to collective demands. In contrast, those who succeed in modulating their conduct based on context demonstrate mature social competence and developed relational intelligence (Boda, 2020). Adaptability does not imply conformism but rather strategic adjustment, intended to optimize interaction without compromising authenticity. This capacity becomes essential in complex and dynamic social environments, where behavioral rigidity is penalized by the group and leads to exclusion or isolation.

The process of evaluating and adjusting social behaviors is supported by a set of metacognitive and affective skills (such as the ability to reflect on one's own thoughts and emotions, and conscious control of reactions), which can be systematically developed through experience and training. Among these are empathy, introspective capacity, critical thinking regarding one's own conduct, and impulse control. Formal and non-formal education plays a decisive role in the

development of these competencies, by creating learning contexts based on reflection, dialogue, and responsible engagement. Moreover, self-regulation should not be understood as a form of suppressing expressivity, but as a conscious manner of directing behaviors toward constructive social goals (Moscovici, 1998). In this respect, educational interventions aimed at developing social competence must include sequences dedicated to the critical evaluation of one's own behavior and practice in adapting to relational demands. These processes contribute to the formation of a responsible individual, capable of managing the complexity of human relationships through flexible and reasonable conduct.

The Ethical Dimension of Social Competence

Integrating the ethical dimension within social competence entails the coherent articulation of interpersonal interactions with fundamental principles such as respect for otherness, fairness in social relationships, and support for group cohesion. Social competence cannot be reduced to a mere ability to communicate effectively or to achieve results in a relational context. It involves a set of normatively regulated behaviors that reflect the responsible recognition of the other as a subject of rights and value. This approach requires the internalization of stable axiological benchmarks capable of guiding behavior in a variety of social situations marked by divergent perspectives and interests. Relational success, in the absence of an ethical foundation, risks degenerating into manipulation, conformism, or instrumental efficiency - elements that undermine the authentic nature of social cooperation (Goleman, 2018).

Respect for otherness constitutes a fundamental criterion of social maturity and of authentic relational competence. Mere formal acceptance of diversity and difference is insufficient; what is needed is an active attitude of valuing divergent opinions, identity traits, or personal choices. Such an attitude is formed through the development of cognitive and affective empathy, alongside the ability to suspend one's own prejudices in order to understand the mental and emotional universe of the other (Caluschi, n.d.). In this context, otherness is not perceived as a threat but as an essential resource for social evolution. In the absence of such openness, interactions risk becoming conflictual, rigid, or exclusionary, which significantly limits relational performance and the individual's contribution to the proper functioning of the group or community to which they belong.

Fairness, as an ethical principle applied in the social domain, implies not only equal treatment of persons involved in an interaction

but also a just consideration of contextual differences, status, or possibilities. Social competence entails the capacity to calibrate one's own behaviors in relation to these differences, without resorting to discrimination, favoritism, or the unilateral imposition of personal interests. In this sense, a socially competent person acts as an agent of relational balance, cultivating a climate based on trust and mutual recognition. Such behavior is the outcome of sustained ethical education, which integrates critical reflection on personal conduct and the internalization of prosocial norms (Boda, 2020). Fairness thus becomes an indicator of social maturity and of the degree of responsibility toward others.

Social cohesion, as both an effect and a condition of ethical interactions, reflects the level of solidarity, trust, and mutual commitment within a group. The socially competent person contributes to the consolidation of this cohesion through supportive behaviors, active listening, and engagement in conflict resolution. More than a mere result of interaction, cohesion is cultivated through the willingness to build bridges among group members, to reduce tensions, and to facilitate inclusion (Deutsch, 1998). This dimension is not expressed through conformism, but through active commitment to a perceived and shared common good. In the absence of such orientation, social competence risks fragmenting into isolated abilities, lacking moral relevance and unable to sustain durable and balanced interactions in the social sphere.

Conclusions

Social competence is not limited to a set of skills or to an innate personal endowment, but expresses a dynamic capacity, capable of being shaped and profoundly influenced by the environments in which the individual evolves. This competence entails the coherent integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions within a process of active adaptation to the relational demands of various life contexts. The relevance of social competence in personal and professional development derives from its potential to facilitate cooperation, effective communication, and cohesion within groups, particularly in societies characterized by diversity, mobility, and increased uncertainty. This capacity is not the result of passive exposure to interpersonal interactions, but is formed through repeated experiences, reflection, and conscious learning, supported by educational, social, and cultural factors.

The importance of social competence transcends the sphere of everyday interactions, having structural implications for identity

formation, community integration, and the assumption of social responsibilities. It enables the individual to manage conflicts, to express opinions in an assertive manner, and to value differences without compromising relational harmony. In this regard, social competence becomes not only an individual resource, but also a form of social capital that contributes to building a balanced and inclusive society. In its absence, the risks of marginalization, isolation, and the escalation of social tensions increase significantly, and community functioning becomes precarious. Therefore, the development of this competence is not optional, but a prerequisite for functional coexistence, being directly associated with quality of life and psychosocial well-being.

Formative perspectives on social competence emphasize its transversal and contextualized character. There is no universal formula or standard sequence for acquiring this competence, but rather a diversity of pathways shaped by educational, familial, and community experiences. The role of education does not consist solely in theoretical instruction, but also in facilitating relational learning contexts, in which empathy, cooperation, reflection, and the assumption of responsibility can be practiced. This process entails the active involvement of all educational actors, as well as the valorization of non-formal and informal components of the formative process. From this perspective, social competence becomes a strategic objective of comprehensive education, alongside cognitive and moral development, without which adaptation to the complexity of contemporary social life would be impossible.

Finally, the findings of this article support the integration of social competence at all levels and in all forms of education and lifelong learning, as an essential investment in the development of a democratic and equitable society. A paradigm shift is needed, whereby social formation is no longer treated as a secondary element, but as an educational priority with structural effects on social functioning. This approach must aim not only at the transmission of norms and rules, but also at the development of a critical and ethical sense of interaction, accompanied by the capacity for self-regulation and adaptation to social diversity. In a world marked by rapid transformations and intense relational pressures, social competence is no longer merely a component of personal success, but an essential indicator of the social maturity and responsibility of every individual.

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