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DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL FOR SOCIAL FRIENDSHIP AS A PROMOTING ELEMENT OF WELL-BEING

(Paper derived from the author's meritorious postgraduate thesis in Positive Psychology, THE CONSTRUCT OF FRIENDSHIP AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROMOTION OF WELL-BEING: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH (Lindner, 2024))

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Abstract

This article presents an exhaustive documentary analysis focused on the Civic-Institutional Dimension, the fifth of the five analytical-practical dimensions that comprise the author's original research (Lindner, 2024). The fundamental objective is to demonstrate how the construct of social civic friendship acts as the indispensable engine for collective well-being and human flourishing, resolving the classical rupture between the private and public spheres. Methodologically, an analytical mapping is carried out that cross-references the three essential learning dimensions of the UNESCO Guide (2015)—cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral—with the individual character strengths of positive psychology and the civic-moral virtues of the philosophy of education. The results reveal a break with the classical assumption of linearity between private affection and public coexistence, demonstrating the need for regulatory integration. The study concludes by resolving the central hypothesis: individualized, selective, and preferential love within the intimate sphere can become a universalizable bond capable of sustaining the well-being of a citizenry of strangers through a process of intentional institutional reorientation. Through this pedagogical design, private psychological strengths are not nullified; rather, they are educated and elevated toward public virtues (such as civic benevolence and epistemic justice), positioning social civic friendship as the only theoretically and practically viable alternative for mitigating social polarization.

Keywords: social civic friendship, collective well-being, character strengths, civic-moral virtues, global citizenship education.

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1. Introduction

The core of classical moral and political philosophy has extensively debated how affective ties of a private and personal nature can be projected into the public sphere, becoming genuine social concord or civic friendship. Aristotle (350 BC/2014), in the Nicomachean Ethics, defines high-quality friendships as those founded on virtue, in which the members of the relationship reciprocally seek the good of the other. However, when this concept is extrapolated to the political community (politike philia), a fundamental conceptual and historical tension emerges: how can individualized, selective, and preferential love within the intimate sphere become a universalizable bond capable of sustaining the well-being of a citizenry composed largely of strangers?

In contrast to traditional approaches that have tended to fragment the public sphere from the private one, or that mistakenly assume that civic virtues are automatically derived by osmosis from particular affection, contemporary Positive Psychology and applied philosophy of education open new paths toward resolution. Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman (2004) revolutionized the study of optimal human functioning by introducing the Values in Action (VIA) classification, demonstrating that virtues are not theoretical abstractions but positive personality traits expressed through cognitive, socio-emotional, wisdom, and justice character strengths that can be observed, measured, and, fundamentally, cultivated through deliberate practice and that, according to the model, become moral virtues, recalling Aristotle's model of virtuous friendship (350 BC/2014).

Nevertheless, to resolve the dilemma of the transition toward public life, it is essential to draw a precise conceptual boundary between the psychology of universal virtues and the philosophy of democratic civic life, represented by Ryan Niemiec, Peterson, and Seligman (2021) and Randall Curren (2023), respectively. The Seligman, Peterson, and Niemiec (VIA) framework operates predominantly at a universal and individual level, focused on personal

flourishing, resilience, and relational well-being in the direct private sphere (through strengths such as love or gratitude).

The PERMA model created by Seligman (2011) is an acronym formed from the five pillars of positive psychology: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships (the dimension in which this study is situated), meaning in life, and accomplishment. These five principles are transversally crossed by the 24 moral character strengths that are a constitutive part of personality, together with temperament. Seligman (2011) established that these strengths derive from six universal virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. They were named in this way after studies conducted across different cultures and countries.

For its part, within Curren's (2023) Philosophy of Education framework and the neo-traditional character tradition, these traits are operationalized under the category of civic and moral virtues necessary for human flourishing (eudaimonia) and democratic deliberation. The point of comparison in the present work is formed from the designation of virtues that define character within civic friendship. Curren explicitly names justice, tolerance, civic respect, and concern for the common good (service/citizenship) as the moral and civic virtues that transform simple interpersonal relationships into genuine responsible citizenship.

In the author's original main research preceding this study (Lindner, 2024), entitled "The Construct of Friendship as a Contribution to the Promotion of Well-Being: A Comprehensive Approach," friendship was structured through five dimensions for the historical study and understanding of the construct. These were found to be, in order of study: the ancient philosophical perspective; religiosity, faith, and spirituality; the intentional compilation of universal literature in which friendship relationships are recognized; the life cycle together with psychological attachments; and, finally, the civic-institutional dimension, in which the state of the concept of social or social civic friendship was compiled and analyzed.

This research argues that personal friendship and civic friendship do not represent chronologically exclusive stages or antithetical poles in conflict, but rather coexist simultaneously within the unified construct of social civic friendship. For such coexistence to materialize, universal psychological strengths (Seligman et al., 2021) must be integrated and educated within the regulatory framework of public virtues (Curren, 2023); in this way, kindness in the private sphere matures into institutional respect in the public square, the polis.

The ideal pedagogical vehicle for operationalizing this broad theoretical synthesis in the school environment is provided by the UNESCO Guide (2015) on Global Citizenship Education (GCED), which offers a structured humanistic framework that serves as an educational container for teaching and practicing the strengths of civic friendship without invading students' privacy. Through its three essential learning dimensions—the Cognitive, focused on critical thinking and a pluralistic understanding of interdependence; the Socio-emotional, aimed at developing political affection, active empathy, and a sense of belonging to a common humanity;

and the Behavioral, which promotes deliberation in practice, peaceful conflict resolution, and responsible action—the UNESCO Guide (2015) makes it possible to pedagogically sequence character development.

Ultimately, this study examines how the operationalization of strengths and virtues as stable practical habits constitutes the indispensable bridge toward collective human flourishing. Through critical exegesis (the extraction of deep meaning) and hermeneutic triangulation (crossing proposals in order to generate an integrated one, in this case) among the philosophy of education (Curren, 2023), UNESCO's international education policy guidelines (2015), and the psychology of character strengths (Seligman; Niemiec, 2021), it is shown that it is ontologically unviable to promote genuine social well-being or mitigate contemporary polarization unless school and public spaces are intentionally designed as laboratories of coexistence. By establishing that public and institutional strengths require structured environments that model and demand them in order for them to be embodied, this theoretical integration reveals that the intentional design of public space is an ontological condition for character development and the flourishing of genuine social civic friendship, as well as for the development of a universal culture of lasting peace.

2. Method

The present study is configured as strictly documentary and integrated research (Arias, 2012). Rather than relying on the primary deployment of experimental models or descriptive statistical analyses of particular samples, the rigor and scientific validity of this work lie in systematic analysis, critical exegesis, hermeneutic triangulation, and the conceptual integration of consolidated theoretical and institutional corpora (AI, 2026). The methodological purpose is to establish horizontal logical connections that demonstrate the pedagogical viability and institutional necessity of the construct of social civic friendship as an engine of collective human flourishing and well-being.

2.1 Criteria for selecting the Theoretical Corpus

To guarantee the representativeness and relevance of the information, the documentary corpus was selected on the basis of four complementary epistemic axes, assessing their relevance to civic education and the psychology of virtues: Classical Moral and Political Philosophy, Contemporary Positive Psychology, Philosophy of Citizenship Education, and International Educational Frameworks. The initial foundation lies in the description adopted in the first part of this research, where five constitutive dimensions of the friendship construct were defined. This research work emphasizes the fifth dimension, which addresses research in the civic-institutional sphere.

2.2 Analysis procedure: Critical Exegesis and Hermeneutic Triangulation

The research procedure was structured into three sequential phases:

Phase 1: Critical Exegesis and Conceptual Extraction. An in-depth interpretive reading of the primary sources was conducted to specify the ontological scope of the terms. At this stage, the psychological approach to individual universal strengths (Seligman, 2011) was contrasted with the ethical-political approach to publicly oriented virtues (Curren, 2023), extracting the essential differences in terms of their developmental purpose and relational nature.

Phase 2: Hermeneutic Triangulation. A reflective, cross-cutting dialogue was established among the three major conceptual dimensions (Positive Psychology, Philosophy of Civic Life, and UNESCO Guidelines). Through this triangulation, points of convergence and theoretical gaps were contrasted in order to dissolve the rupture of the classical assumption (the notion that the private is mechanically transferred to the public), constructing an integrative matrix in which psychological character strengths act as the operational scaffolding of civic virtues.

Phase 3: Pedagogical Operationalization. The autonomous strengths of civic friendship were mapped and aligned within the three learning dimensions defined by the UNESCO Guide (2015): cognitive (pluralistic mind), socio-emotional (political affection), and behavioral (deliberation in practice), validating the viability of designing public school spaces as inclusive laboratories of coexistence.

2.3 Dimensions as Research Findings

In the present study, the findings have made an important contribution to consolidating the study of friendship, since the aim is to define the coexistence of two concepts that do not appear to be inclusive. An expanded definition is presented below that brings together the virtuous definitions of Seligman (2011) and Curren (2023) and constitutes the basis of the proposal presented in the results.

Philosophical dimension: It focuses on re-signifying the classical debate around philia and politike philia. The main finding demonstrates that the mediation of virtues as practical habits dissolves the traditional conflict. The strengths of wisdom and moral courage (Peterson, 2004) transform private benevolence into mature distributive and deliberative justice in the public forum (Curren, 2023). Social civic friendship is observed to require autonomous reflective capacities for judging the common good (Aristotle, 350 BC/2014).

Religion, faith, and spirituality dimension: This dimension draws directly on the ecumenical and inclusive proposition of Pope Francis's Fratelli tutti (2020) and on the virtue of Transcendence in the VIA model (Niemiec, 2019), including strengths such as spirituality,

gratitude, and hope. The finding is that spirituality and a sense of transcendence provide the ontological substrate and intrinsic motivation for regarding fellow citizens—even strangers or political rivals—as equals endowed with dignity, thereby promoting relational well-being.

Literature dimension: The interpretive analysis of literary texts and ethical narratives reveals how human dilemmas reflect the historical tension between domestic affections and civic duties. The documentary finding shows that literature operates as a moral laboratory in which strengths such as perspective, empathy, and intellectual honesty are modeled through stories, allowing individuals to understand the psychological complexity of community bonds, positive attachments, and well-being; it is considered to provide evidence of the coexistence of personal and civic friendship (Lindner, 2024).

Personal relationships, attachments, and developmental life-cycle dimension: Friendship and the capacity for social bonding are not static; they transform across the stages of human development. The analysis considers how early secure attachment in childhood provides the socio-emotional foundation (strengths of love and kindness) that, during adolescence and adulthood, matures into civic-mindedness and teamwork. The developmental cycle shows that social civic friendship requires continuous scaffolding through which self-regulation and social intelligence skills are refined with age (Baltes, 1987).

Civic-Institutional Dimension: This represents the macro-social crystallization of social friendship in the sphere of the polis. The main finding establishes that democratic institutions and public space cannot be sustained solely on bureaucratic foundations or cold norms. They require the social capital derived from social civic friendship, supported by specific civic character strengths such as justice, fairness, responsible leadership, and active citizenship (Curren, 2023; Seligman, 2011).

3. Results and discussion

This article is formally constituted as an exhaustive documentary deepening focused on the fifth dimension (Civic-Institutional) of the five analytical-practical dimensions that make up the author's original research (Lindner, 2024). The central objective is to demonstrate how the unified construct of social civic friendship acts as the indispensable engine for collective well-being, well-being, and human flourishing, resolving the classical rupture between the private and public spheres. The analysis is based on the dimensions of the UNESCO Guide (2015) versus character strengths (Seligman, 2011) and civic strengths (Curren, 2023).

To pedagogically operationalize this deepening of the civic dimension, the proposal is grounded in the UNESCO Guide (2015) on Global Citizenship Education and its three essential learning dimensions (Cognitive, Socio-emotional, and Behavioral).

Table 1. Conceptual Articulation Matrix for social Civil Friendship

Learning dimensions (UNESCO, 2015)	Psycological character strengths (VIA Frmework) Seligman et al (2021)	Civic-moral virtues and practical habits (Curren, 2023)
Cognitive dimension (Critical thinking, analysis of interdependence, and openness to pluralism).	• Judgment and critical thinking • Perspective	• Epistemic justice • Deliberative prudence
Socio-emocional dimension (Political affection, active empathy, and a sense of common belonging)	• Love • Kindness / Generosity	• Civic care and benevolence
Behavioral dimension (Responsible civic action, practical deliberation, and conflict resolution).	• Honesty • Even-handedness / Fairness • Bravery	• Distributive justice • Active civic-mindedness

Author's own elaboration based on UNESCO (2015), Curren (2023), and Seligman et al. (2021).

Note: Discussion of this analytical matrix reveals that social civic friendship is an ontological condition for genuine community well-being, resolving the hypothesis concerning the affective transition from private friendship to public social civic friendship through institutional integration.

3.3 The Relationship Between Social Civic Friendship and Well-Being

Discussion of this analytical matrix reveals that social civic friendship is an ontological condition for genuine community well-being. This makes it possible to respond directly to the study's central hypothesis: how can individualized, selective, and preferential love within the intimate sphere become a universalizable bond capable of sustaining the well-being of a citizenry composed largely of strangers?

The resolution of this question is based on breaking with the classical assumption. Private affection (intimate philia) and the public bond do not operate in an automatic linear progression. Intimate love is by nature exclusive and selective, based on elective affinity, whereas citizenship requires an inclusive virtue toward the stranger and the political rival. Therefore, the transition from the intimate sphere to the universal is achieved through a process of intentional reorientation and character education within an institutionalized public space (Arendt, 1958/2005).

An examination of the conceptual literature shows that relational well-being has a robust psychological substrate founded on character strengths such as love, kindness, and honesty, which sustain the quality of primary interpersonal bonds. However, the finding arising from this deeper analysis of the Civic-Institutional Dimension demonstrates that these individual psychological forces affect collective well-being only when the institutional environment—structured according to the three learning dimensions of the UNESCO Guide—co-opts or integrates and guides these strengths under the regulatory ordering of Randall Curren's (2023) civic-moral virtues.

Thus, through the intentional pedagogical design of the school environment, kindness in the private sphere matures into civic care and public benevolence (a genuine concern for the well-being of unknown citizens), while judgment and critical thinking are elevated toward epistemic justice (the validation of the political rival as a legitimate interlocutor). Citizens do not relinquish their capacity to love preferentially in their private lives; rather, they project and translate these positive character traits into stable habits applied to macro-social structures. Social civic friendship unifies both levels, transforming individual psychological potential into the institutional order indispensable for mitigating polarization and building optimal social functioning (AI Model, 2026).

3.4 Pedagogical Application Proposal: How Can the Cultivation and Conscious Use of Character Strengths Be Fostered?

The central contribution of this research lies in the practical intervention proposal to intentionally sow and incorporate character strengths into the three fundamental pillars of human socialization, based on Curren (2023), Peterson, Seligman, and Niemiec (2021), and UNESCO (2015). It is proposed that interventions be channeled through three environments: the home, the school, and civic spaces. Proposals are presented for development in the home, school, and public spaces. Put differently, the main actors are parents, teachers, friends, classmates, and neighbors. Since the ancient Greeks, personal friendship has been proposed as the source of civic friendship, the foundation of the polis. In our time, Pope Francis (2020), in the Encyclical Fratelli Tutti ("brothers and sisters all"), again proposed the importance of friendship for the development of well-being, on the one hand, and of civic friendship as a foundation for developing a culture of peace, tolerance, and respect, among other values.

The proposal is therefore based on the following settings (UNESCO, 2015):

In the home (AI Model, 2026).

The family nucleus constitutes the first relational environment and the primary space for the development of secure attachment and the initial strengths of the virtue of Humanity, belonging to Dimension 4 (Lindner, 2024).

- Care and recognition practices: Establish daily routines of emotional validation and explicit expressions of affection to strengthen Love and Social Intelligence.
- Modeling kindness and gratitude: Implement shared habits such as a "family gratitude journal" or joint participation in neighborhood collaboration activities, teaching that personal well-being is linked to the well-being of the immediate environment.
- Establishing democratic boundaries: Promote self-regulation through dialogic parenting guidelines, in which rules are explained and fairness is the guiding principle within the home.

At school (Baltes, 1987).

The school institution is the ideal transitional setting in which private family affection expands toward interaction with peers and authorities, laying the foundations for global citizenship.

- Cross-curricular integration: Design teaching units based on the analysis of literature and historical ethical dilemmas to exercise perspective, open-mindedness, and critical thinking (Cognitive Dimension).
- Cooperative learning and community projects: Replace competitive schemes with structured group-work dynamics that require Civic-Mindedness, Teamwork, and Distributed Leadership, enabling students to experience the complementarity of individual strengths (Behavioral Dimension).
- Emotional education and school mediation: Create stable conflict-mediation programs led by students themselves, providing practical training in emotional intelligence, active tolerance, and equitable justice (Socio-emotional Dimension).

In public spaces (Arendt, 1958/2005).

The community and urban forum represents the space in which social civic friendship is fully exercised, bringing together strangers and diverse perspectives on life.

- Local assemblies and participatory budgeting: Institutionalize neighborhood deliberation forums in which citizens exercise deliberative disposition and intellectual honesty, guided by the strength of logical argument and mutual respect.
- Organized volunteering initiatives: Promote community support networks aimed at vulnerable sectors, activating organic solidarity and the political compassion of citizens through direct cooperation.
- Cultural appropriation and care for the urban environment: Develop programs for restoring public spaces (parks, squares, community libraries) through shared work, strengthening Civic Co-responsibility and appreciation of beauty and excellence (AI Model, 2026).

Final reflections

The following considerations are presented as final reflections derived from the theoretical exercise of developing a conceptual and pedagogical proposal for social civic friendship based on the virtues described by UNESCO (2015), Curren (2023), and Seligman et al. (2021).

The idea is consolidated that personal friendship is not sufficient for the development of a society oriented toward a culture of peace and well-being. However, given that strengths and virtues, according to positive psychology, can be modeled and developed, once the strengths of friendship have been defined through the authors, it is feasible to propose the development of civic virtues for the consolidation of social civic friendship and thereby contribute to social well-being and the development of well-being ecosystems (Lindner, 2024).

The findings demonstrate that the individual character strengths within the PERMA Model framework constitute a sound reference framework for a pedagogical proposal that considers their identification and conscious use for the development of civic friendship, to be integrated through school pedagogical design and guided under the normative ordering proposed by Randall Curren (2023).

Ontological viability. Selective love within the intimate sphere can indeed become a universalizable bond capable of sustaining a citizenry of strangers thanks to the educational institution's capacity to act as a space of regulatory integration, educating private psychological strengths and elevating them toward civic-moral virtues. In fact, it can be observed that some character strengths in positive psychology involve the social sphere, such as leadership, teamwork, and social intelligence itself (empathy).

Universalization of affection through institutional structures: Social civic friendship is consolidated as the meeting point where private strengths mature into stable habits of

public life. Its practice becomes viable as a means of mitigating polarization and building optimal social relational well-being.

In conclusion, this research conceptually proposes that full human development will be favored if we move beyond the isolated cultivation of intellectual faculties alone and instead pursue a deliberate articulation between individual character strengths and collective civic virtues. On the one hand, the individual strengths of Wisdom (as an engine of discernment), Honesty (as the basis of personal coherence), Love and Kindness (as the affective pillars of secure attachment and benevolence/honesty), and Social Intelligence (as the relational compass in friendship) constitute the psychological and ethical infrastructure of the individual. These strengths enable individuals to understand themselves, validate others, and weave healthy and meaningful interpersonal bonds within their immediate environment. We have already seen that, beyond friendship between peers (Aristotle, 350 BC/2014), it has been proposed since antiquity that friendship can serve as the basis for the creation of philia polis, or civic friendship; however, according to the analysis of the five dimensions of the original work, friendship can occur among more than two people, with friendships observed across different religions, cultures, sexes, and ages. Friendship is multicultural, which would make it possible to approach the universality of the proposal.

However, for this human potential to transcend the personal sphere and translate into social transformation, it requires the conceptual framework of civic character strengths proposed by Randall Curren (2023). It is at the intersection of both worlds that individual ethics becomes community action. By framing personal strengths within Curren's theory of Global Civic Friendship, virtues such as love and social intelligence mature and expand into the public sphere in the forms of deliberative disposition, organic solidarity, political compassion, and civic co-responsibility.

In this way, the character strengths proposed by positive psychology act as the root and intimate substrate of being, while Curren's civic strengths operate as the branches that reach and influence the public forum. Together, and operationalized through the three pillars of socialization analyzed—the home, the school, and urban space—these pedagogical dimensions cease to be mere theoretical abstractions and become a living roadmap, complemented by the three dimensions of the UNESCO Guide (2015): cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral. This is an original proposal that seeks not only to educate technically competent citizens, but ethically upright human beings capable of overcoming contemporary divisions and co-constructing a society founded on justice, mutual respect, and genuine civic friendship.

Recommendations

For curricular and pedagogical design: It is recommended to move toward intentional character-education curricular designs (Lindner, 2024), in which private psychological strengths are guided through civic dilemmas and community projects. It is recommended that Social Civic Friendship be included as a course in schools and universities and that the character-strength intervention guides by Niemiec (2019) and Polly & Britton (2015) be used.

For teacher education: It is essential to implement training programs that integrate applied positive psychology with the philosophy of civic education. Positive psychology should be included in the curricular content for all educators, professors, and teachers (Sellés, 2008).

For expansion of the theoretical framework: It is recommended that the analysis be enriched by integrating doctrinal corpora and international resolutions such as Pope Francis's Encyclical Fratelli Tutti (2020) on "social friendship," and the principles declared by the United Nations for the International Day of Friendship.

For future lines of empirical research: It is suggested that this theoretical deepening be complemented with empirical field studies and mixed methodologies to measure the effectiveness of social civic friendship.

It is suggested that this work be continued through the proposed model integrating the areas to be impacted, such as the school, the home, and the polis (City).

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